



JOHN D. MORRIS named 2020 NEA National Heritage Fellow



Accclaimed fiddler, banjo player, guitarist, and songwriter John Morris of Ivydale has been named one of nine 2020 National Endowment for the Arts National Heritage Fellows, the nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts. These lifetime honor awards of \$25,000 are given in recognition of both artistic excellence and efforts to sustain cultural traditions for future generations. Emily Hilliard, State Folklorist at the West Virginia Humanities Council, nominated Morris for the award.

A lifelong resident of Clay County, John Morris is the living carrier of the fiddle and banjo tradition particular to his rural home county and the surrounding area. John has dedicated his life to sustaining, promoting, and supporting the musical tradition of his Clay County community through the founding and hosting of community-based festivals, as well as his labor activism, regular performances, and ongoing commitment to teaching younger practitioners.

John Morris is West Virginia's first National Heritage Fellow in 20 years, the last being Appalachian weaver B. Dorothy Thompson in 2000, following Trinidadian steel pan drum builder and performer Elliott "Ellie"

Mannette's 1999 award, and fiddler Melvin Wine's in 1991. (Appalachian singer-songwriter and West Virginia native Hazel Dickens was also awarded the honor in 2001, but was living in Washington, D.C. at the time.)

Morris grew up just outside Ivydale, in an area once known as "Kidtown," into a musical family of farmers and teachers. He first started playing music around age seven, learning clawhammer banjo from his grandfather Amos Morris, and guitar from his mother Anna Hill Morris. When Morris was ten years old, esteemed Clay County fiddler French Carpenter gave him his start on the fiddle. Morris also studied with Clay County fiddlers Wilson Douglas, Ira Mullins, Lee Triplett, and Doc White, among others. In 1965, John and his brother David (singer, songwriter, and guitarist) formed their band, the Morris Brothers.

In 1968, the Morris Brothers became interested in labor rights, leading them to offer their music to Joseph A. "Jock" Yablonski's campaign for President of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). As they traveled across the region and country with the UMWA into the next decade, they shared their original and traditional songs performed in the Clay

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The West Virginia Humanities Council

is a nonprofit institution governed by its Board of Directors. The next Board meeting is October 23, 2020, in Charleston, and is open to the public.

Billy Joe Peyton, President
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Lisa Rose
Independence

Ray Smock
Martinsburg

Tom Sopher
Beckley

Timothy Sweet
Morgantown

Megan Tarbett
Hurricane

John Unger
Martinsburg

Bryson VanNostrand
Buckhannon

From the Executive Director

In this issue of *People & Mountains* we celebrate West Virginia's tradition bearers, lift up the work of our colleagues in the state's cultural community, and share news of our own current and forthcoming in-house projects, which are many.

As we gathered material for this issue, it struck me once more how vibrant and alive the culture of the Mountain State is, and always has been. Music, history, foodways, community preservation, literature—all of these and more are, in addition to worthy pursuits in themselves, acts of great faith. The creation, documentation, and sharing of culture attests to our capacity to build not only a body of knowledge, but also a culture of mutual respect—to find greater meaning, in other words, in that which unites us rather than divides us.

This is, to be sure, no easy thing to accomplish. On some days it can even be difficult to believe. Conflict is clearly a feature of the human experience, not a bug. And yet to teach an old song, to share a method of creating food, to tell the story of how we arrived here to young people who've barely begun their own journeys, is to send a clear message:

This has meaning. We have meaning. What we are is worth studying and investing in. And it's also worth improving.

Speaking as someone who thinks a great deal about why the humanities matter at all, that message seems to be the common thread that runs through all of its iterations. It may sound lofty. But I believe that message represents what Abraham Lincoln once famously called the "better angels of our nature." And I believe that even in the most fractious and perilous days—perhaps especially in those days—the humanities can help bridge distances, rather than widen them, as so many of our obsessions seem to do.

Again, this is no easy thing. Neither is it without risk. That's why the work and the people you'll read about in this issue make me consider faith, optimism, and our common and shared humanity. In these days I can think of no impact more vital, or worth celebrating.

— Eric Waggoner

People & Mountains is published three times a year by the West Virginia Humanities Council.

The West Virginia Humanities Council, an independent nonpartisan nonprofit, is the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

We welcome letters, comments, and financial contributions. Please address correspondence to West Virginia Humanities Council, 1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston WV 25301 or email wvhuman@wvhumanities.org.

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The West Virginia Humanities Council welcomes nominations for its **Program Committee** citizen members, who are elected from the general public. The Program Committee recommends funding and program decisions to the Council's Board of Directors.

We also welcome nominations for our **Board of Directors**. Board members are chosen from all parts of West Virginia and serve without compensation, although expenses are reimbursed.

Please send recommendations with brief biographical information to riebe@wvhumanities.org. The deadline for nominations is December 18, 2020.

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County style. John and David saw traditional mountain culture as a source of empowerment for Appalachian people. That connection was recognized by Barbara Kopple, who featured the Morris Brothers' music in her Academy Award-winning documentary *Harlan County, USA*. In the late '60s and early '70s, John and David hosted old-time music festivals across the state and region, including the Morris Family Old-Time Music Festival at their family homeplace. That model for festivals located in rural areas where the music tradition and its practitioners lived encouraged sharing between locals and outsiders, young and old, and became the gold standard for community-based traditional music festivals in Appalachia.

Morris has taught fiddle and banjo at the traditional music camp Allegheny Echoes, the Augusta Heritage Center, Dwight Diller's Yew Pine Mountain Retreats, and the 4-H Mountain Heritage Weekends. He has been recognized by the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame (as the Morris Brothers, following

David's passing in 2016) and at countless fiddler's conventions. In 2015, he received the West Virginia Heritage Fiddler Award.

In 2018, Morris was a master artist in the West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program, leading an apprenticeship in old-time fiddle and Clay County storytelling with Jen Iskow. He regularly invites young people to his home to play, learn, and share stories. Morris continues to play a crucial role in sustaining and promoting West Virginia traditional music and is one of the few fiddlers to continue an older regional style, infusing his playing with the sounds of Clay County—its environment, its history, and its people. The Humanities Council joins in congratulating John Morris in recognition of his life's work as an important West Virginia tradition bearer.

The annual celebration of the new class of National Heritage Fellows will take place virtually this year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For more information about this event and to view the full list of recipients, visit the National Endowment for the Arts website at www.arts.gov.

The West Virginia Humanities Council's **2020 McCreight Lecture in the Humanities** has been canceled due to public health concerns surrounding COVID-19. Traditionally presented each October, the McCreight Lecture affords West Virginians the opportunity to hear internationally respected scholars and public intellectuals speak on a variety of humanities topics.

"The appeal of an event like McCreight is very much rooted in being 'in the room' with renowned speakers such as past lecturers Denise Kiernan, Joyce Carol Oates, and Ken Burns. We don't feel a virtual alternative would bear the prestige or enjoyment the McCreight name deserves," says Program Officer Kyle Warmack.

The Board of Directors of the West Virginia Humanities Council established the annual McCreight Lecture in the Humanities to honor the leadership of Betsy Keadle McCreight, who died in 1985. Betsy was a founding Board member, serving the Council as treasurer, vice president, and president. She believed that the humanities were at the heart of a democratic society, a necessary source of wisdom and vision.

"We're confident that the McCreight Lecture will return next year to an enthusiastic crowd," states Council Executive Director Eric Waggoner. "It's one of the finest events of its kind in the entire state, and we see this precautionary measure as a temporary, but necessary, postponement."



2012 McCreight Lecturer Edmund Morris.

Michael Keller

Remembering Elaine Purkey (1949-2020): The West Virginia Humanities Council mourns the loss of labor songwriter, musician, activist, radio host, teacher, and devoted mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother Elaine Purkey of Lincoln County, WV. Purkey was a commanding advocate for the state's working people through her resonant original labor songs and interpretations of traditional and gospel tunes that enhanced her grassroots organizing. In addition, Purkey was a dynamic music educator of the next generation in her home community. Speaking of her role in Appalachian labor music, Pete Seeger said, "Elaine Purkey's songs carry on the great tradition of Ella May Wiggins of Gastonia, North Carolina, and Aunt Molly Jackson of Harlan County, Kentucky." Read our full tribute at www.wvfolklife.org.



The popular *History Alive!* program of the West Virginia Humanities Council added six characters to its current roster, bringing the total number to fifteen. The new characters are:

- **Abigail Adams**, wife of America's founding father and 2nd president John Adams, portrayed by JoAnn Peterson (below) of Kingwood.
- **Colonel Ruby Bradley**, trailblazing U.S. Army nurse and veteran of World War II and Korea, portrayed by Becky Park of Charleston.
- **Pearl S. Buck**, Nobel Prize winner and West Virginia-born author of *The Good Earth* and over 100 other books, portrayed by Missy McCollam of Beverly.
- **Walt Disney**, animation pioneer and famed creator of Mickey Mouse, portrayed by James Froemel of Maidsville.
- **Francis Pierpont**, considered the "founding father" of West Virginia, portrayed by Travis Henline of Wheeling.
- **Bessie Smith**, the "Empress of the Blues," and highest paid African American musical artist of the 1920s and 1930s, portrayed by Doris Fields of Beckley.



Cathy Williams, Studio C Photography

This impressive slate of new characters provides a significant boost to the *History Alive!* ranks, bringing to life several important West Virginia figures (Bradley, Buck, and Pierpont) along with characters of national notoriety (Adams, Disney, and Smith). These additions also welcome to the program three *History Alive!* newcomers: Doris Fields, Travis Henline, and Missy McCollam. James Froemel and JoAnn Peterson, who currently portray Charles Schulz and Nellie Bly, respectively, now add Walt Disney and Abigail Adams to their repertoires. Becky Park returns to the roster presenting West Virginia's distinguished Colonel Ruby Bradley after a hiatus of several years.

At the end of August, the Humanities Council published guidelines and procedures for organizations wishing to host virtual *History Alive!* presentations. These guidelines provide information to hosts whose capacity to hold an in-person performance is limited by current COVID-19 restrictions. As ever, the Council continues to search for new and exciting ways to make its programs more accessible to the public.

The *History Alive!* program brings historical figures to life through first-person portrayals by presenters who have conducted scholarly research on their character. The programs provide entertaining and educational experiences by allowing audiences to explore history through interaction with important people from the past. Additional information on *History Alive!*, including how to schedule a presentation, is available at www.wvhumanities.org, or by contacting Program Officer Kyle Warmack at 304-346-8500 or warmack@wvhumanities.org.

The 2020 West Virginia Music Hall of Fame induction ceremony will be filmed in advance with no live audience. The television special will premiere on West Virginia Public Broadcasting at 7 p.m. on November 14. Funds from a Humanities Council Media Grant helped support the creation of short biographical films for each inductee. This year's inductees include the Hammons Family (right), gospel performer Ethel Caffie-Austin, Mountain Stage co-founder and host Larry Groce, singer/songwriter and Rockabilly Hall of Fame honoree Mayf Nutter, and brother-sister duo The Davis Twins. For more information, visit www.wvmhof.com.



New Legends & Lore Markers were recently installed across the state, commemorating the legend of John Henry (Talcott, Summers County), rock 'n' roll legend Johnnie Johnson and pepperoni rolls (Fairmont, Marion County), miners' hero Sid Hatfield (Matewan, Mingo County), and the legend of "Wizard Clip" (Middleway, Jefferson County).

The West Virginia Folklife Program at the Humanities Council works in partnership with The William G. Pomeroy Foundation to bring the national Legends & Lore Roadside Marker Program to the state of West Virginia. The program was created to help promote cultural tourism and commemorate legends and folklore as an important part of every community's cultural heritage.

West Virginia nonprofit organizations, municipalities, and nonprofit educational institutions are all eligible to apply for a roadside marker commemorating

an important tradition or story in their communities. Applications for the next round are due October 2, 2020. Learn more at www.wvfolklife.org.



South Carolina-born Dorothy Allison, author of numerous acclaimed books, including *Bastard Out Of Carolina* (1992), *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (1995), and *Cavedweller* (1998), will serve as the **2020 Appalachian Heritage Writer in Residence** at Shepherd University. The program, which began in 1998, honors the work of contemporary Appalachian writers whose writing has evinced a commitment to the understanding of the region's culture, language, history, and traditions. Past Writers in Residence have included Nikki Giovanni, Denise Giardina, Crystal Wilkinson, Charles Frazier, and Henry Louis Gates. The program is supported again this year by a Humanities Council grant.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many events will be streamed live and made available to the public. For information and links to select virtual public events, visit www.shepherd.edu/ahwirweb/allison/schedule.



Stuck at home?

The West Virginia Encyclopedia continues to add new articles to the e-WV website. Read about Elizabeth Harden Gilmore, a Black funeral director and civil rights activist in Charleston; boxer



The crew of the B-17 bomber "Ye Olde Pub."

Tunney Hunsaker, who fought Muhammad Ali in Ali's first professional bout; and how a German fighter pilot saved a stricken B-17 piloted by West Virginian Charlie Brown. There's also a profile of musician and 2020 National Heritage Fellow John Morris. Students and teachers alike will find the West Virginia Classroom a useful resource at www.wvencyclopedia.org.

Briefs

The **West Virginia Mine Wars Museum** reopened Labor Day weekend in its new Matewan facility with expanded and newly developed exhibits. The museum is open to the public Fridays and Saturdays (11 a.m.-6 p.m.) throughout the end of the year. For more information call 304-923-4027 or visit www.wvminewars.com.

The Humanities Council is sponsoring a state tour of the new Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibit **Crossroads: Change in Rural America** beginning August 2021. The exhibit examines the present-day turning point at which many rural American towns find themselves. The following venues have been chosen to host **Crossroads** while it tours West Virginia: The Jack Caffrey Arts and Culture Center in Welch; the new Coal Heritage Discovery Center in Mount Hope; the Museum of American Glass in Weston; Arthurdale Heritage in Arthurdale, Preston County; the Wetzel County Museum in New Martinsville; the Weirton Area Museum and Cultural Center; and Moorefield High School, sponsored by the Hardy County Convention and Visitors Bureau. Each venue will display **Crossroads** for approximately five weeks. The final schedule will be announced later this fall. For more information visit www.wvhumanities.org.

Grant Categories

The Humanities Council welcomes applications in the following grant categories.

Major Grants support humanities events such as symposiums, conferences, exhibits and lectures. Maximum award: \$20,000. Due: Feb. 1, Sept. 1

Minigrants have a budget of \$1,500 or less and support small projects, single events, or planning/consultation. Due: **Oct. 1**, Feb. 1, April 1, June 1

Fellowships of \$3,000 support research and writing projects for humanities faculty and independent scholars. Due: Feb. 1

Media Grants support the production of electronic or film materials, or a newspaper series. Maximum award: \$20,000. Due: Sept. 1

Publication Grants are available to recognized nonprofit and academic presses and support **only** the production phase of a completed manuscript. Maximum award: \$20,000. Due: Sept. 1

Teacher Institute Grants are available to colleges and universities and the state Department of Education, and support summer seminars for secondary and elementary teachers. Maximum award: \$25,000. Due: Sept. 1

For more information visit www.wvhumanities.org for applications and guidelines, email riebe@wvhumanities.org or call 304-346-8500.

2020-2021 Folklife Apprenticeship Pairs Announced



The Humanities Council is very excited to announce our 2020-2021 class of master artist and apprentice pairs in the **West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program**. In this second year of the program, seven apprentice pairs from across the Mountain State are studying traditions including old-time banjo of central West Virginia, seed saving, and midwifery.

The Apprenticeship Program offers up to a \$3,000 stipend to West Virginia master traditional artists or tradition bearers working with qualified apprentices on a year-long in-depth apprenticeship in their cultural expression or traditional art form. These apprenticeships aim to facilitate the transmission of techniques and artistry of the forms, as well as their histories and traditions. Due to COVID-19, apprenticeship pairs are adhering to social distancing protocol, meeting virtually, and in some cases, postponing study.

The 2020-2021 West Virginia Folklife master artists and apprentices are as follows:

Ed Daniels of Mill Creek in Randolph County is leading an apprenticeship in agroforestry/forest farming with **Clara Haizlett** of Wellsburg.

Kathy Evans of Bruceton Mills in Preston County is teaching an apprenticeship titled "Sheep to Shawl: The Art of Raising Sheep and Creating Fiber Arts" with apprentice **Margaret Bruning** of Elkins.

Joe Herrman of Paw Paw in Hampshire County is leading an apprenticeship in old-time fiddle with **Dakota Karper** of Capon Bridge.

Leenie Hobbie of Rio in Hampshire County is teaching an apprenticeship in traditional Appalachian herbalism with **Jon Falcone** of Lost River in Hardy County.

Kim Johnson of Dunbar in Kanawha County is leading an apprenticeship in old-time banjo of Central West Virginia with apprentice **Cody Jordan** of Charleston.

Angelita Nixon of Scott Depot in Putnam County is teaching an apprenticeship in home birth midwifery with **Christine Weirick** of Fayetteville.

Mehmet Oztan of Reedsville in Preston County is leading an apprenticeship in seed saving and related storytelling with **Lafayette Dexter** of Fayetteville.

The Apprenticeship Program grants are administered by the West Virginia Folklife Program, and are supported in part by an Art Works grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. West Virginia Folklife is dedicated to the documentation, preservation, presentation, and support of West Virginia's vibrant cultural heritage and living traditions.

Through regular and predictable donations, our ♦ GEM (give-every-month) donors are providing a steady and cost-effective source of income to the Humanities Council. A monthly gift in any amount will qualify you as a Council GEM. For more information on this and other donation options please contact Victoria Paul at v.paul@wvhumanities.org or call 304-346-8500.

Donations April 1 – July 31, 2020

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The final **Little Lecture** of the season premiered on Sunday, September 20. In case you missed it or any of the recent lectures, the entire 2020 series is still available for viewing online at YouTube, Facebook, and the Council's website, www.wvhumanities.org.

2020 Little Lecture Series

- Nancy Bruns** – *"The History of Salt in the Kanawha Valley"*
Dr. Billy Joe Peyton – *"East Enders: Architectural Heirlooms in Charleston's Oldest Neighborhood"*
Kenzie New Walker – *"Reclaiming History: The West Virginia Mine Wars and Memory"*
Aaron Carey – *"The Role of Ancestry, Heritage, and Nature in Appalachian Black Metal Music"*
Dr. Cicero Fain III – *"Black Huntington and the Rise of the African American Middle Class"*

"We've enjoyed the great response to our virtual Little Lectures," says Council Program Officer Kyle Warmack. "While we miss holding these events in person, and definitely look forward to returning to the traditional format, this has been such a great opportunity to bring this beloved speaker series to folks in every county of the state, and beyond. We plan to continue online distribution even after we return to live audiences next year."



Nancy Bruns

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The West Virginia Humanities Council gratefully acknowledges support from the National Endowment for the Humanities; the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History; and foundations, corporations, and individuals throughout the Mountain State and beyond.

Notes from the Field

Over the past months the Humanities Council has been honored to help sustain West Virginia's cultural institutions during closures and cancellations brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the process, we've learned a lot about the creative solutions being developed around the state in response to unprecedented logistical challenges.

That cooperative approach has, in many cases, considerably increased the reach of organizations of every size. A recent *History Alive!* event presented through the Morgantown Public Library brought James Froemel's portrayal of *Peanuts* comic strip creator Charles Schulz to a much wider audience—650 views on Facebook—than a single in-person performance would ordinarily be able to reach. More globally, the annual Contemporary American Theater Festival

at Shepherd University expanded its virtual digital platforms in order to convert in-person events to livestream format, and also offered an alternative season's worth of digital theater and humanities content to ensure continued engagement with audiences and constituents around the world.

The Oil, Gas and Industrial Historical Association directed a CARES Act Emergency Relief Grant to operating costs resulting from the temporary closure

of its museum (Parkersburg) and Henderson Hall (Williamstown) sites due to the pandemic. Voices From The Earth, a Thomas-based theater arts organization, directed its own grant to developing "In the Voice of Our Ancestors," a free online "living

history" mentoring and training program for the general public. Here at the Council's home office, as noted elsewhere, our all-digital Little Lectures 2020 season allowed us to share this popular speaker series with audiences statewide for the very first time, an expansion many of our friends and supporters have long requested, and one we'll surely repeat for future, dual-format seasons.

We work hard to deliver the irreplaceably intimate feel of the in-person humanities experience, in every format and setting

we can. That mandate will always be the heart of our mission. Our e-WV and Folklife programs already deliver excellent digital content to audiences in and out of state. We believe applying that strategy to both traditional and new in-house programs will allow us to serve even more West Virginians, wherever they live.

We look forward to seeing all of you—around the state, in your home communities, online, and, yes, face to face—as soon as possible.



Henderson Hall, Williamstown, WV.

Oil, Gas and Industrial Historical Association, Inc.

The West Virginia Humanities Council will join other state councils and humanities-related organizations at the first-ever virtual **National Humanities Conference** in November. The conference allows the opportunity to explore our collective work to deepen the public's engagement with the humanities worldwide.