A Publication of the West Virginia Humanities Council

Once again this spring the Humanities Council will partner with the Smithsonian Institution in bringing a bit of the big Washington museum home to West Virginia. This time, it is New Harmonies, the Smithsonian's traveling exhibit celebrating American traditional or "roots" music, which will open in Berkeley Springs on April 10 and later travel to other locations across the Mountain State.

Buddy Griffin of Glenville, himself a fine traditional musician, is project scholar for the New Harmonies tour. We excerpted the following from reflections he provided on the meaning of roots music in a West Virginia context:

et's step back in time to see how our roots music has been passed on. Clearly, we must go back to when there were no recordings, no mechanical musical devices and none of today's communication conveniences.

That's because homogenization began to occur when it became possible for many people to acquire music from a single, identical source. As a result of musicians emulating that one source as the "right" way to do a song or tune, the innumerable strands of local tradition — the roots, if you will — were gradually stripped away. Musicians came to sound more like Fiddlin' Arthur Smith, Uncle Dave Macon (or maybe Earl Scruggs a generation later) and other stars of radio and record, and less like the unique local masters who individually contributed to a region's musical tapestry.

True roots music generally was passed on in an oral (and of course, aural) tradition, firsthand and person-to-person. Recording and broadcasting devices disrupted this natural and evolutionary flow. The disruptive process is a gradual one, and possible to overstate. Good people work to preserve the many pockets of traditional music that remain, but few will

Celebrating old traditions "New Harmonies"



The late Melvin Wine of Braxton County, winner of the prestigious National Heritage Fellowship, took care to pass the music on.

question the standardizing impact of modern media. Depending on one's point of view, Thomas Edison may be thanked or blamed for his phonograph.

The late Patrick Gainer, founder of the West Virginia State Folk Festival at Glenville and among West Virginia's very best folklorists, referred to the "radio hillbilly singer" as the beginning of the end for true American folk music. He had in mind the likes of the Carter Family, and – as sweet as their music is – no serious student of the genre is likely to disagree. By the time we started seriously collecting folk music, many sources had already been contaminated by the homogenization process. And ironically, the very recording devices (including music notation) used to document roots music actually contributed to its deterioration.

Some of the musically inclined pioneers who settled our part of America were singers,

Bus With Us

2009

Old Traditions

The West Virginia Humanities Council

is a nonprofit organization governed by its board of directors.

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> **Board Meeting:** April 3, 2009 Beckley Open to the public.

Bringing good things home

The short notice in our recent Annual Report regarding donations to the MacFarland-Hubbard House prompted questions about a very special category of gifts. I'm talking of items that formerly were in the house and have since been returned through the thoughtful consideration of later owners. We have received several such gifts, and we cherish them.

First a little background: The house that now serves as Humanities Council headquarters was built in 1836 and used continuously as a domestic residence until we acquired the place in the late 1990's. The four families here before us occupied the house for decades each, on average, and to judge by the last of them they definitely valued nice things.

Elizabeth Hubbard, the last of the residential owners, died here in 1997. She left her house and its trove of furnishings to Charleston's First Presbyterian Church. The church hired an antiques appraiser to conduct a threeday estate sale, the biggest in Charleston's recent memory. I've heard that the value of the house's contents approached the sales price of the house itself.

We lacked the foresight – not to say the cash – to set items aside at the time of the big sale, but fortunately things started finding their way home. The first was the iconic cannonball, fired into our roof by Confederate artillery in 1862 and a house-warming gift from First Presby itself. Then came a portrait of Colonel Charles Lewis that now hangs just where it was before we came here. The painting had passed to Charles Stacey, Miss Hubbard's kinsman and executor, and later was given to us by Stacey's son, a New York surgeon.

Other gifts have followed, recently including a set of straight-back chairs from the Hubbard household. These came from Norman "Trip" Shumate, a member of the Council board, and his wife Susan. The chairs were reupholstered through a donation by Elizabeth Chilton, Susan's mother and herself a former member of our board of directors.

As old friends, the Shumates and Betty Chilton were attuned to the needs of our organization. Others acted from a variety of motives. Dr. Stacey felt that the painting of Lewis, a hero of the Battle of Point Pleasant, was better here, in historic context, than hanging in his Manhattan apartment.

Whatever the reason - and they are all good reasons to us - we appreciate these givers and encourage others to follow suit.

Ken Sullivan

People & Mountains is published quarterly by the West Virginia Humanities Council.

A state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the West Virginia Humanities Council serves West Virginia through grants and direct programs in the humanities.

We welcome reader letters, freelance manuscripts, and financial contributions. Please address all correspondence to West Virginia Humanities Council 1310 Kanawha Boulevard, East Charleston, WV 25301 or email sonis@wvhumanities.org. Ken Sullivan *Executive Director* Krystle Farman *Staff Assistant* Cheryl Marsh *Operations Manager* Carol Nutter *Secretary* Mark Payne *Program Officer* Amy Saunders *Grants Administrator* Debby Sonis *Administrator* Sue Vasale *Fiscal Officer* Michelle Walker *Director of Development*

A.C. Designs Publication Design

Approaching deadline: April 1 is the next minigrant deadline. Humanities projects with budgets of \$1,500 or less are invited to submit grant applications. Contact saunders@wvhumanities.org or call (304) 346-8500.

Continued from page 1

carrying with them wonderful oral musical traditions. They readily passed those traditions along, as naturally as singing a song for an eager listener. Transmitting knowledge of instrumental techniques was yet another matter. The instruments were likely to be limited to those that could easily be carried while migrating along (often on foot), including fiddles, dulcimers, flutes, whistles, and other small musical items.

Fortunately, our region also provided abundant materials for making instruments, and someone not bringing an instrument might nonetheless bring the know-how to make one. West Virginia maple and spruce made some of the best stringed instruments available anywhere, and have continued to do so. Fiddles made by the late Abe Keiffer of Summersville look simple to the untrained eye, but his genius is unmistakable in the tone. The late Woody Simmons, fiddle virtuoso of Mill Creek, West Virginia, owned and played one of Mr. Keiffer's instruments for more than 35 years. The stringed instruments made in recent times by Harold Hayslett of South Charleston are world-renowned, though as likely to brighten the playing of a classical chamber group as an old-time band.

That the songs and tunes of Ireland, Scotland and England, as well as Germany and other parts of continental Europe, make up the greater part of our Appalachian roots music is an undisputed fact. Although there were influences from other directions (even our own Native Americans to some degree), most of the musical traditions of the central Appalachians were of white European origin. The major exception involves the banjo. That instrument came from Africa via the slave trade, as did some of

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the music and playing styles still associated with it.

Once here, the banjo readily found its place. By the end of the Reconstruction period following the Civil War, two-man banjo and fiddle bands were common at dances and other social gatherings in the mountains and rural south. Performers traveled to remote logging and mining camps here in central West Virginia. A common duo in Roane County at the turn of the 20th century was fiddler Enoch Camp and banjoist Joe Griffin.

Other parts of the state championed their own "stars." Clay County is best known for its inexhaustible supply of great fiddlers, such as Doc White, Lee Tripplett and Ira Mullens, all of whom played music within the memory of people living today. The elusive Johnny Johnson of neighboring Nicholas County was without question one of the best fiddlers to come from the state of West Virginia. All these musicians learned from someone older, and none of them, with the exception of the previously mentioned Woody Simmons, could read music.

Today, as we move from mechanical recording to computer downloads and electronic file swapping, it becomes increasingly difficult to trace the true roots of our mountain music. Massive amounts of popular music come to us from a variety of sources, much of it claiming to be roots music of one kind or another. While we welcome the diversity and the ease of acquiring and enjoying the world's music, we can only hope that we are doing justice to our own heritage.

Buddy Griffin, who has often performed on the Grand Ole Opry, is director of cultural events and head of the bluegrass music program at Glenville State College.



New Harmonies tours West Virginia

New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music visits six West Virginia communities in 2009-10. The exhibit will be at the Ice House in Berkeley Springs from April 10 to May 22 before traveling to the B&O Railroad Heritage Museum in Grafton for a May 29 - July 5 stay. The Randolph County Community Arts Center in Elkins hosts the exhibit from July 11 to August 21; the Brass Tree Community Room in Williamson from August 28 to October 9; and the Youth Museum of Southern West Virginia in Beckley from October 16 to November 30. New Harmonies enters the new year at the Grant County Library Performing Arts Center in Petersburg with a December 4 – January 24 exhibition.

New Harmonies features a variety of musical genres, including blues, gospel, Appalachian, bluegrass, Zydeco, Klezmer, American Indian and the folk revival of the 1960s. Each of the West Virginia communities hosting *New Harmonies* will honor its own local music in conjunction with the exhibit.

New Harmonies is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and the West Virginia Humanities Council.



The West Virginia Encyclopedia was praised in the February issue of the *Journal of Southern History,* which described the Encyclopedia as "userfriendly and scholarly at the same time" and called it a "model for future work." The Journal, one of the country's leading academic quarterlies, is published by the Southern Historical Association.

Briefs

Steel Driver's Schedule. The

Humanities Council traveling exhibit, *John Henry: The Steel Drivin' Man*, continues its tour with stops at the Ice House in Berkeley Springs, March 15 – April 5; at Logan's Museum in the Park, June 20 – August 15; and at the Princeton Railroad Museum, October 1–31. *John Henry* is available for display dates in May, late August and September.

Nominations Sought. The Humanities Council seeks nominations for its 2009 Charles H. Daugherty Award in the Humanities. The award recognizes those who have significantly contributed to the humanities in West Virginia. Candidates may be nominated by individuals or organizations, or candidates may nominate themselves. Past winners include historian Otis Rice, Senator Robert Byrd, country editor Jim Comstock, poet Louise McNeill, and educator James W. Rowley. Contact wvhuman@wvhumanities.org or (304) 346-8500 for information.

The Harvard Club of West Virginia

is partnering with the Humanities Council to bring Professor David Mitten to Charleston. Mitten will share his experiences from 17 summers in the field as associate director at the Harvard-Cornell Archaeological Exploration of Sardis, Turkey. The April 17 lecture titled "Sardis, the Home of King Croesus" is free and open to the public, at 7:30 p.m. at WVU's Health Sciences Center on the grounds of CAMC Memorial Hospital. Professor Mitten spoke in Charleston several years ago to standing-room-only crowds about Alexander the Great.



Smock Joins National History Commission

Humanities Council board member Raymond Smock was recently appointed to the National Historical Publications and Records

Commission of the National Archives and Records Administration. Smock, a noted documentary editor and the former historian of the U.S. House of Representatives, is director of the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies at Shepherd University. The 15-member commission, an affiliate of the National Archives, administers an annual \$5 million grant program relating to the history of the United States. Its mission is to preserve, publish, and encourage the use of documentary sources "created in every medium ranging from quill pen to computer."

Lincoln Lectures Continue

The Humanities Council is a leader in West Virginia's observance of the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth, with programs in both 2008 and 2009. Presidential historian Richard Norton Smith kicked off our series this past October in Charleston. In February, historian Matthew Pinsker of Dickinson

College spoke at West Virginia Independence Hall in Wheeling. The final Lincoln lecture will be presented by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, professor of history, emeritus, at the University of Florida and a visiting scholar at Johns Hopkins University. His talk, "Lincoln's Assassination Revisited," will



Matthew Pinsker speaks at West Virginia Independence Hall in Wheeling.

be in the courtroom of the old Hampshire County Courthouse in Romney at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 19.

Professor Wyatt-Brown has received fellowships from both the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Guggenheim Foundation, and has served as president of the Southern Historical Association. He was a finalist for the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1983. He appears in Romney through the Distinguished Lectureship Program of the Organization of American Historians.

Little Lectures schedule

The Humanities Council 2009 Little Lecture series offers an excellent lineup of interesting topics and knowledgeable speakers. The March 29 program will be presented indoors but the April, May and June programs are all scheduled for the new pergola at the Council's historic headquarters in Charleston. In the event of inclement weather the lectures will move indoors.

Little Lectures start at 2:00 p.m. Admission is \$10 and includes a wine reception. Send payment to WVHC, 1310 Kanawha Blvd., E., Charleston, WV, 25301 or call (304) 346-8500 and pay at the door. Seating is limited. Sunday, March 29

Nature's New Deal: The Monongahela National Forest and the Great Depression by Robert C. Whetsell

Sunday, April 26 John Brown and his Secret Alliance by Hannah Geffert

Sunday, May 31 The Places of Edgar Allen Poe by Paul C. Jones

Sunday, June 28 Appalachian Food by Mark Sohn



West Virginia civil rights pioneer J. R. Clifford was honored by the U.S. Postal Service on a commemorative stamp unveiled at a Charleston ceremony in February. The

story of West Virginia's



first black attorney has been preserved through the work of the J. R. Clifford Project, funded by Humanities Council grants since 2004. Former West Virginia Supreme Court Justice Larry Starcher, the Charleston Branch of the NAACP, Friends of Blackwater, the West Virginia Department of Education and the Arts, and WVU Professor Connie Park Rice have joined others in the ongoing project. For more information call (304) 345-7663 or email jrcliffordproject@saveblackwater.org.

The Humanities Council will sponsor the exhibit Coal Miners, Coal Camps, and Molasses Making, which will be on display at the Robert C. Byrd Federal Courthouse in Charleston from May 4 to June 30. It features work by New Deal photographers Ben Shahn and Marion Post

Wolcott who visited West Virginia under the auspices of the U.S. Farm Security Administration to document life in the Depression-era coalfields. The photo by Ben Shahn was made in 1935 in Williamson.



Program Committee Election

Please help us choose citizen members to serve on the Humanities Council program committee. Your vote gives the public a voice in our grants and programs decisions.

Please vote for three of the candidates below:

_____ Jean Dressler Beasley, Mercer County, has volunteered with numerous civic and community organizations and is a founding board member of Mercer County Hospice. She is a graduate of the WVU School of Law and summa cum laude in Latin and English from Marshall University.

____Elizabeth Campbell, Kanawha County, is a folklorist, writer, and educator. She has taught for the Marshall University graduate humanities program and is working on a Ph.D. in English from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

<u>Shirley Lycan</u>, Kanawha County, teaches AP English, Philosophy, and Appalachian Studies at Charleston Catholic High School and is working on a Masters degree in Theology through Wheeling Jesuit University.

____ David Millard, Monongalia County, is assistant to the president at Glenville State College and served previously on the board of the South Carolina Humanities Council. He earned a Ph.D. in theater literature from the University of Washington in Seattle.

> Return your ballot to the West Virginia Humanities Council at 1310 Kanawha Blvd. E., Charleston, WV 25301; or e-mail saunders@wvhumanities. org by April 15, 2009.

Donations and Pledges

November 1, 2008 – January 31, 2009

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Hundreds of West Virginians and friends of West Virginia support the statewide work of the Humanities Council through regular, tax-deductible contributions. Their generosity is essential to our success, and it is much appreciated.

Some of these good people have arranged to extend their support beyond their own lifetimes through wills, a revocable trust or other means. Such planned giving allows the designation of larger gifts than may be possible in life, and offers the opportunity to make a truly lasting mark. We encourage other friends of the humanities to consider doing the same.

It is easy. Just direct your attorney to include a gift provision in whatever amount you may choose to the West Virginia Humanities Council in your will or other suitable legal instrument. Or contact us, and we will gladly advise in the process.

We will appreciate it if you let us know of your decision, as that allows us to thank you and assists in long-term planning for the Council's future. All notifications are treated in confidence. Contact Michelle Walker at (304) 346-8500 or walker@wvhumanities.org.

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Deluxe Shepherdstown Bus Tour

with the West Virginia Humanities Council

July 16 -17, 2009 - Theater, History & Fine Food

Our trip departs Charleston Thursday morning, * July 16, when we head out to the Eastern Panhandle with a

lunch stop, dinner, and an evening at the Contemporary American Theater Festival. After an overnight stay at Shepherdstown's Bavarian Inn, we'll take in historic downtown Shepherdstown and travel via the Potomac Highlands to dinner at the Victorian mansion



A scene from last summer's trip.

the Victorian mansion Graceland in Elkins.

Cost includes transportation, lodging, meals, entertainment, & gratuities.

Cost per person for double occupancy \$340 Cost per person for single occupancy \$370

* Morgantown passengers will depart Thursday at lunch

Full Payment Must Be Received By June 1, 2009.

Reservation Coupon

Send \$100 deposit per person or full payment, payable to: West Virginia Humanities Council,

1310 Kanawha Blvd. E. Charleston, WV 25301 Contact (304)346-8500 or walker@wvhumanities.org

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CANCELLATIONS MUST BE MADE 30 DAYS PRIOR TO DEPARTURE.

West Virginia Humanities Council assumes no responsibility for damage, injury, loss, accident, delay or inconvenience from whatever cause during this trip. We reserve the right to change the tour itinerary if necessary, or to cancel the trip due to conditions beyond our control (including insufficient participation), with full refund in the case of cancellation.

Humanities Goes High Tech

The I-79 Technology Park Research Center (at right) is a far cry from the historic preservation projects commonly touted in these pages, but the Humanities Council is pleased to take up an association with another of our state's iconic architectural creations.

The Research Center, completed in 2005, has quickly become a landmark to those traveling to Fairmont, Morgantown, and nearby places. It is the home of Information Research Corporation, among other high-tech firms, and IRC is the software contractor working to create *e-WV*, the online version of the *West Virginia Encyclopedia*.

Normally the IRC people are good enough to come see us, but occasionally we find an excuse to visit their fancy digs. Either way, the contrast between their place and our 19th-century headquarters is a dramatic indicator of the scope of the West Virginia story which *e-WV* is dedicated to covering.

And the striking Research Center building is a welcome reminder that the humanities concern the broad range of human creativity, not only our history and heritage.



The *West Virginia Encyclopedia* continues to be a thriving success, with most of the second printing now sold out. Order yours today for \$44.95, plus tax and shipping, at wvhumanities.org or at (304) 346-8500.

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