

40
YEARS

People & Mountains

Winter
2014-2015

1
History
Alive!

2
What's New

Annual
Report
2014

Annual Report Inside

A Publication of the West Virginia Humanities Council

Fans of novelist Denise Giardina now have the opportunity to experience another — and maybe surprising — side of the award-winning writer. The author of *Storming Heaven*, *The Unquiet Earth*, and other books is portraying country entertainment legend Minnie Pearl, the comedic creation of Sarah Ophelia Colley, as one of six new characters available through the Humanities Council's popular *History Alive!* program.

Colley aspired to be a serious actress. After studying theater and dance in college she was working in the late 1930s as an itinerant community theater director. Traveling to small towns throughout the southland she recruited townsfolk with no acting experience and staged plays owned by the production company that employed her. Colley hatched the idea of Minnie Pearl to help promote these performances when speaking to local civic groups. Over time she continued to develop the character, create fictional figures from Minnie's imaginary hometown of Grinder's Switch, and breathe life into her new persona.

Ultimately an opportunity arose to audition Minnie Pearl for a coveted slot on the Grand Ole Opry broadcast over radio station WSM in Nashville. There was some initial concern on the part of WSM management that the satire of rural ways might be seen as ridiculing the audience. But her first appearance in 1940 resulted in so much fan mail that it was clear that listeners believed "cousin" Minnie was a friend, laughing with them and not at them. Over the next 50 years she became one of the most important female comedians of the 20th century.

Minnie Pearl is just one of 15 characters available for programs across West Virginia. Over the past four years an average of 175 *History Alive!* presentations have been delivered annually

throughout the state. Programs are presented for schools, libraries, state parks, colleges, churches, museums, historical societies, and a wide array of civic events and organizations.

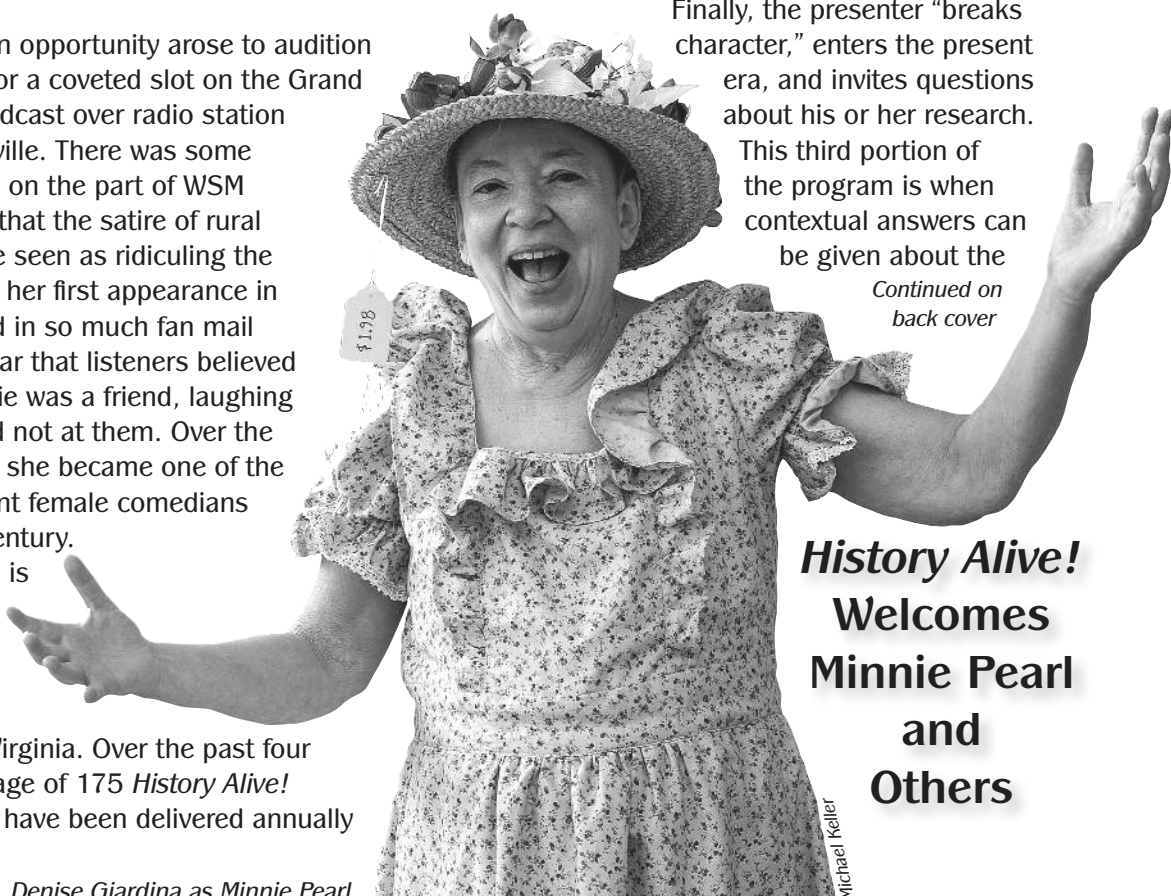
There are three parts to every *History Alive!* presentation.

Each begins with a first-person monologue with the character speaking from the standpoint of the past about the issues that influenced his or her life as well as biographical facts, important achievements, and experiences.

At the conclusion of the monologue, the audience is engaged in a question-and-answer session with the historical character. It is a quite an experience to be able to ask Mark Twain about his writing, Harriet Tubman about the Underground Railroad, or Cornstalk about his preparation for the Battle of Point Pleasant. People learn in different ways, whether they are elementary students or older adults. Our presenters customize their answers to match their audiences.

Finally, the presenter "breaks character," enters the present era, and invites questions about his or her research. This third portion of the program is when contextual answers can be given about the

*Continued on
back cover*



Denise Giardina as Minnie Pearl.

History Alive!
Welcomes
Minnie Pearl
and
Others

How-DEEE!

Grant Categories

The Humanities Council welcomes applications in the following grant categories.

Major Grants (\$20,000 maximum) support major humanities projects, symposiums, conferences, exhibits, lectures.

Due: *Feb. 1, Sept. 1

Minigrants (\$1,500 maximum) support small projects, single events, or planning and consultation.

Due: *Feb. 1, April 1, June 1, Oct. 1

Fellowships (\$2,500) support research and writing projects for humanities faculty and independent scholars.

Due: *Feb. 1

Media Grants (\$20,000 maximum) support projects intended to produce audio or video products, websites, or a newspaper series.

Due: Sept. 1

Publication Grants (\$20,000 maximum) are available to nonprofit presses and recognized academic presses, and support only the production phase of a completed manuscript.

Due: Sept. 1

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

* Approaching Deadlines!

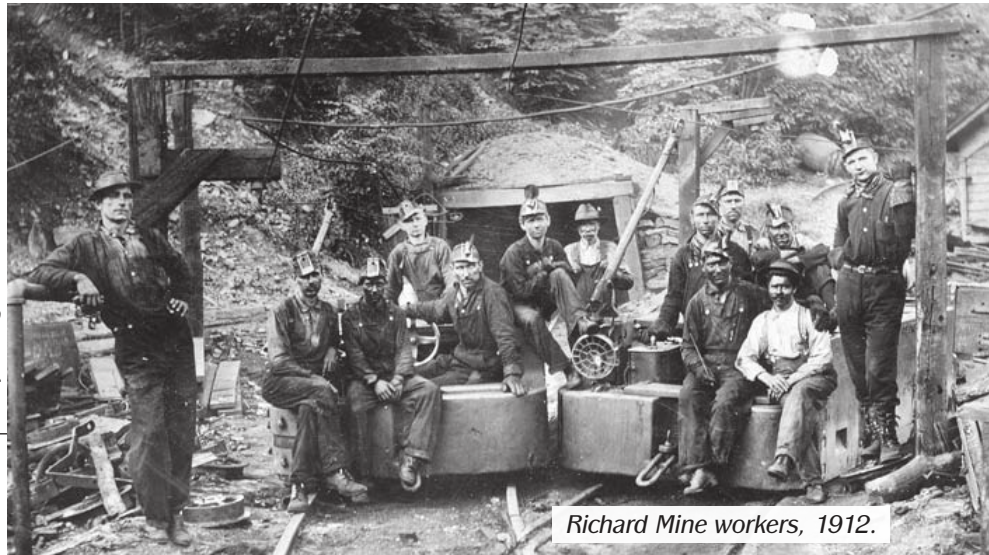
Visit www.wvhumanities.org for applications and guidelines, or call (304)346-8500.



The Little Lectures will resume this spring at the MacFarland-Hubbard House in Charleston, with lectures on March 22, April 26, May 31, and June 28. Lectures are presented Sunday afternoons at 2:00 p.m. with refreshments following the program. Contact Mark Payne at (304)346-8500 for reservations. Ron Lewis (left) spoke during the 2014 series, sponsored by Robinson & McElwee.

Us and Them:

West Virginia Public Broadcasting is set to begin "Us and Them," a new podcast series by journalist Trey Kay, in mid-February. Kay, whose previous radio documentary on the 1970s Kanawha County textbook controversy won the Peabody Award, will continue in his new series to explore divisive issues and search for common ground. Both the textbook documentary and the podcast series received major grants from the Humanities Council. You may download "Us and Them" at wvpubcast.org.



Library of Congress

Richard Mine workers, 1912.

Richard Mine Exhibit

A new exhibit about the historic Richard Mine in Monongalia County recently opened at the Morgantown History Museum and will run through mid-March. Richard Mine was established by the West Virginia Coal Company in 1903 to supply 75 nearby beehive coke ovens. It soon became part of U.S. Senator Stephen B. Elkins's Elkins Coal and Coke Company, and was later sold to a subsidiary of Bethlehem Steel Corporation. Richard Mine was most active during World War II, when it employed more than 500 men and produced 600,000 tons of coal annually. It closed in 1952. Supported by a Humanities Council grant, the exhibit presents the proud heritage of Richard Mine as a major place of employment, with an eye toward its continuing environmental legacy in contaminating Deckers Creek.

Reminder: The deadline to apply for Humanities Council fellowships is February 1, 2015. College faculty and independent scholars are invited to apply for the \$2,500 grants, unique in West Virginia, that support research and writing in the humanities. Visit www.wvhumanities.org.

Putnam-Mason Wayside Project Continues

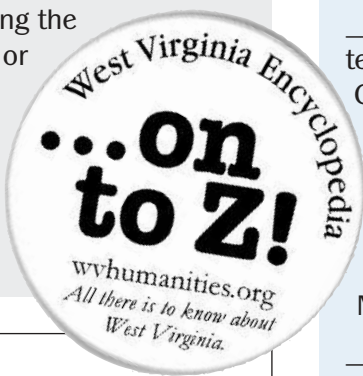
Installation of interpretive wayside exhibits at Kanawha Valley historic sites will continue in 2015 under a major grant from the Humanities Council to the Rivers to Ridges Heritage Trail. This scenic byway runs through the heart of Putnam and Mason counties, from Nitro to Point Pleasant on both sides of the Kanawha River. Wayside history exhibits were previously installed with Humanities Council support at the Winfield Locks and Dam, the town of Buffalo, and the Hometown Roadside Park. The new locations include the Virgil Lewis Memorial Park in Mason, Fort Randolph at Point Pleasant, and the town of Leon.



Grants administrator Amy Postalwait at the Hometown wayside dedication with Scott Williamson (left) and Lowell Wilks.

We were recently pleased to hear that an Eastern Panhandle friend is reading straight through the *West Virginia Encyclopedia*. We sent him one of our vintage “on to Z!” buttons by way of encouragement, and will be glad to send one to anyone you may know who is doing the same. Contact sonis@wvhumanities.org or call (304)346-8500.

Encyclopedia staff issued these playful buttons back when we were all hustling to finish the big book. It is organized alphabetically, and sometimes Z seemed a long way off!



Watching the Weather

A Humanities Council grant will fund the planning phase for a climate history research project at the Natural History Museum at West Virginia University. Researchers will collect the historic dates of climate-related events such as the flowering of plants and the emergence of particular birds and animals. Such data is routinely collected by scientists, and the new project aims to enrich the scientific record by the use of information from historical sources including diaries, newspapers, photographs and old correspondence. The research will contribute to the museum’s outreach and education program.

The Blackwater River in winter.



David Fattalch

Program Committee Election

Please help us choose citizen members for the Humanities Council program committee. Your vote gives the public a voice in our grants and program decisions. Vote for five of the candidates below:

__**Leslie Gray Baker**, Raleigh County, is director of parks and recreation for the city of Beckley. She has more than 20 years’ experience in marketing and program development. Leslie is a member of the board of New River Community and Technical College.

__**Bob Bonar**, Calhoun County, a retired social studies teacher and principal, taught in Calhoun County Schools for 41 years. He also served on state committees for social studies curriculum revision and school accreditation. Bob is president of the Calhoun County Historical and Genealogical Society.

__**Patricia Dillon**, Mingo County, retired social studies assessment coordinator at the West Virginia Department of Education and a former classroom teacher, is a reading specialist with Mingo County Schools. Patricia now serves on the program committee and is eligible for reelection.

__**Chuck Keeney**, Kanawha County, teaches history at Southern West Virginia Community and Technical College. Chuck worked on the *West Virginia Encyclopedia* editorial staff, and was project scholar for two of the Council’s Smithsonian traveling exhibits. He serves on the board of the Mine Wars Museum Association.

__**Amy Nicholas**, Calhoun County, earned a B.A. from Berea College. She has taught for Calhoun County Schools for 10 years and is board president for Heartwood in the Hills, a school for the arts. She now serves on the program committee and is eligible for reelection.

__**Timothy Sweet**, Monongalia County, is Eberly Family Distinguished Professor of American Literature at West Virginia University. He serves on the editorial committee for the West Virginia Classics, a collaborative project between WVU Press and the Humanities Council.

Return your ballot by mail to the West Virginia Humanities Council or email your choices to postalwait@wvhumanities.org by February 27th.

West Virginia Humanities Council
1310 Kanawha Blvd., East
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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.

Continued from front cover

historic figure, the circumstances of his or her death revealed, reading suggestions offered, and recent scholarship discussed.

History Alive! presentations allow audiences to explore history in a unique way. These are not one-person plays, and scripts are not used. A solid research foundation equips each presenter to answer questions as they believe their character might have. Audience members who don't bother to read history in books have the chance to connect with the past in ways they may relate to more easily. Helping people better appreciate history while encouraging further exploration is the point of the program.

Presenters are selected with care. The process begins with a written proposal by the prospective presenter. The proposal includes biographical information detailing the significance of the character, a research plan, and the presenter's public speaking references. Applicants showing potential move to the audition phase.

Auditions take place a few months later, to give presenters time to develop their characters. Auditions are held in front of a panel that includes professionals with expertise in theater, public presentations, and history. Applicants who survive the audition then join the *History Alive!* roster.

The program is wide ranging. Many characters have some historical connection to West Virginia, but not all. Generally we try to offer names that

have broad recognition and appeal, but when the opportunity arises we make room for lesser-known figures who nevertheless made significant contributions.

In addition to Giardina's Minnie Pearl, other new characters now ready for booking are Julia Child, portrayed by Karen Vuranch of Fayetteville; Benjamin Franklin, portrayed by Leon Alexander of Charleston; Abraham Lincoln's bodyguard, Ward Hill Lamon, portrayed by Robert O'Connor of Charles Town; Theodore Roosevelt, portrayed by Gene Worthington of Fayetteville; and the lone female member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, Sacagawea, portrayed by Mary Dailey of Ronceverte. These characters join nine returning veterans to make up our full complement of *History Alive!* offerings.

Those wanting to book a *History Alive!* program pay a \$125 booking fee and lodging costs if

necessary. Both nonprofit and for-profit organizations may book programs, and there is no limit to the number of programs any one organization may request. Complete information on available characters, how to book a program, presenter contact information, and the booking request form are available on the *History Alive!* web page at www.wvhumanities.org or by contacting program officer Mark Payne at (304)346-8500 or payne@wvhumanities.org.



Michael Keller

Karen Vuranch as Julia Child.

People & Mountains is published three times a year by the West Virginia Humanities Council. We welcome letters, comments, and financial contributions. Please address correspondence to West Virginia Humanities Council, 1310 Kanawha Boulevard, East, Charleston, WV 25301 or sonis@wvhumanities.org.