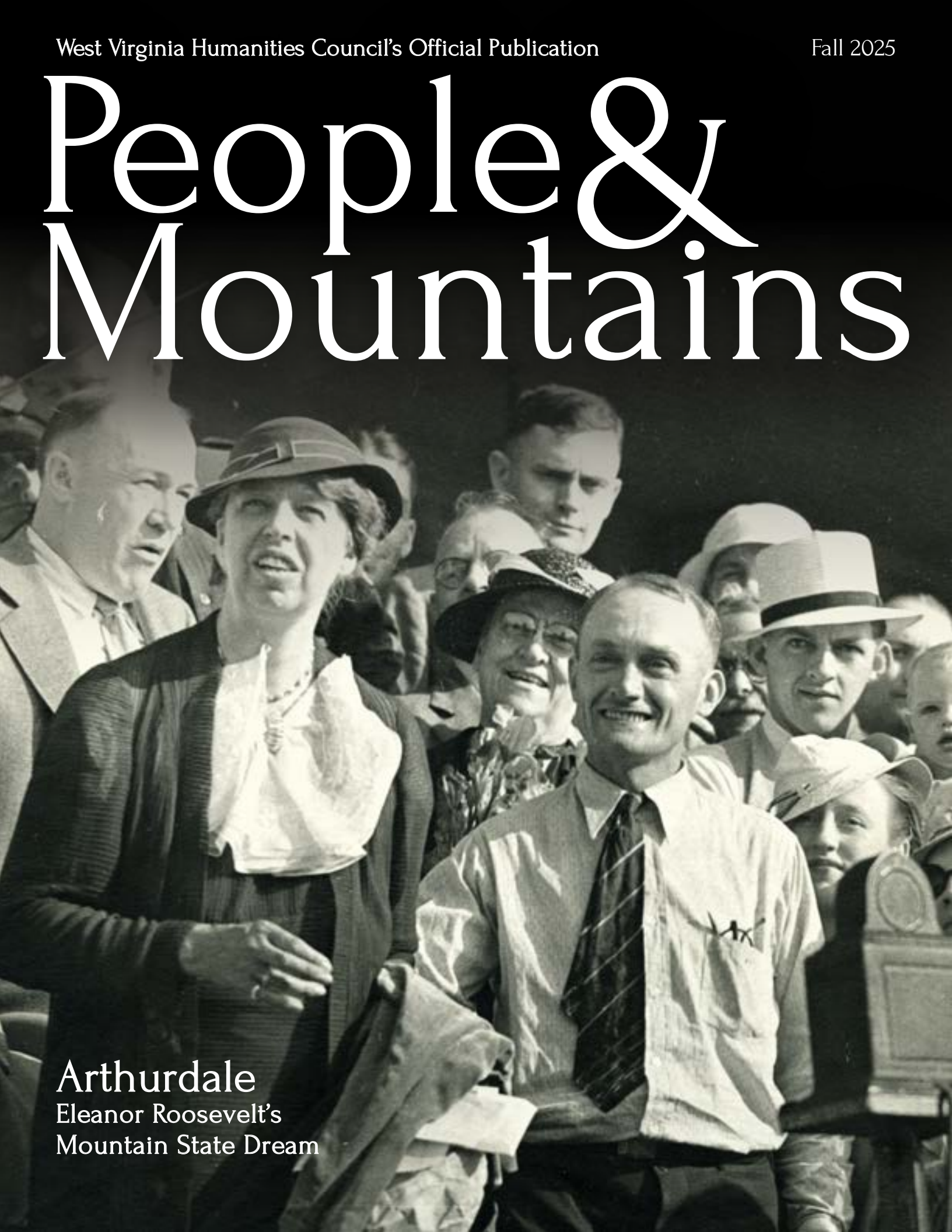
West Virginia Humanities Council's Official Publication

Fall 2025

People & Mountains



Arthurdale

Eleanor Roosevelt's Mountain State Dream

WEST VIRGINIA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

From the Executive Director

Every issue of *People & Mountains* requires me to set aside time and review our ongoing work—what we've accomplished so far, what's left to be done, and how we're measuring up to our annual goals. In a normal year, our grantmaking would be in full swing. This has been far from a normal year. We know from our history that West Virginians always meet resistance with resilience. And thanks to you, the Humanities Council is doing the same.

As the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), we bring federal support directly into West Virginia communities. We were founded in 1974 to be the NEH's partner in delivering and supporting outstanding historical and cultural programs throughout the Mountain State. Our grants and programs are locally developed and delivered, and represent the individual needs of communities statewide. And we meet that commitment by raising a minimum dollar-for-dollar match for every federal dollar given to our work, immediately doubling its impact here at home.

In April, DOGE canceled $450,000, representing half of our congressionally appropriated funds for FY2025. This efficient, effective funding model had sustained our work for 50 years. Our Council's modest reserves gave us a short-term window to adapt to the immediate conditions, while the Federation of State Humanities Councils, with help from the Mellon Foundation, provided us with emergency stabilization funds to help navigate the near term. But in the first four months of this situation alone, you and hundreds of other donors rallied to contribute nearly $120,000 to our work, greatly extending our runway and ensuring program delivery for months to come.

To be sure, we aren't the only organization to face this disruption. But today, several months on, I can say with gratitude and humility that we are one of the more fortunate ones. And so, in this issue, all I want to say—to our donors, program partners, grantees, and collaborators in West Virginia and beyond—is this: Thank you.

Your support has given us the necessary breathing room to outlast what we hope, looking back, will have been a significant but temporary interruption. Your investment has ensured that educational programs in history, culture, the arts, and West Virginia's living traditions continue to thrive. Every contribution, large and small, has been a testament to your belief in the power of the humanities to improve not only our individual lives, but the collective health of our public and civic life.

Although new grantmaking continues to be suspended—unless and until congressionally approved federal funding is restored to us—we've been able to honor every outstanding grant award to which we had committed prior to April of this year. Together, we've already made good on our annual commitment to reach every county in West Virginia with grants or programs, from rural towns to population centers.

"West Virginians always meet resistance with resilience."

The West Virginia Humanities Council's Historic Headquarters

Wonderful to say, your faith in our work has also allowed us to continue delivering original programming. As of this writing, Council legacy programs—including *History Alive!*, *e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia Online*, the West Virginia Folklife Program, Little Lectures, and the McCreight Lecture in the Humanities—remain active and running at full steam.

These accomplishments are as much yours as they are ours—more so, since your investment, as always, allows us to leverage additional support for our work. Present circumstances have also allowed us to spread our story to new partners and boosters.

Any organization with our longevity eventually endures periods of crisis. We are certainly enduring one now; the path to restoring and repairing our federal support is long and complex. But we're mobilized and in it for the duration. In the meantime, we're as well-positioned as we might hope to weather this storm. West Virginians don't back down. We adapt, create, and find solutions. This comprehensive resilience and capacity for sustaining our work would not have been possible without your belief in our mission.

When you're in the middle of a difficult time, it's easy to lose sight of progress. It's easy to say, "Wait, let's not celebrate too quickly, there's more to be done. Let's not take our eyes off the prize." But it's important to recognize the small wins that set us up for greater success, and the milestones we reach on the way to that goal. It's important to communicate that gratitude and joy. Hard work gets us part of the way there, but so does a little luck. And no organization can claim to be luckier than ours, thanks to the friends and supporters we've gained through the years.

To return to the main point: Thank you for standing with us, and for making this transformative work possible. There is a long path ahead, to be sure. But let's not let pass the chance to celebrate how far we've come, or to recognize the positive impact we've had, working together, on behalf of West Virginia's cultural life. It is our greatest privilege to partner with you all.

With profound appreciation,

—Dr. Eric Waggoner

WEST VIRGINIA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

Board of Directors

The West Virginia Humanities Council is a nonprofit institution governed by its Board of Directors. The next Board meeting is October 24 in Charleston and is open to the public.

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Paul Papadopoulos, Vice President, *Hurricane*
Elliot Hicks, Treasurer, *Charleston*
Leslie Baker, Secretary, *Beckley*
Bob Bastress, *Morgantown*
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Rita Hedrick-Helmick, *Glenville*
Charles Ledbetter, *Charleston*
Paula Jo Meyer-Stout, *Morgantown*
Susan Mills, *Shepherdstown*
Michele Moure-Reeves, *Mathias*
Amy Pancake, *Romney*
Jane Peters, *Charles Town*
Katrena Ramsey, *Ravenswood*
Lisa Rose, *Morgantown*
Tom Sopher, *Beckley*
Pam Tarr, *Charleston*
Bryson VanNostrand, *Buckhannon*
Lydia Warren, *Fairmont*
Jill Wilson, *Charleston*

The Board of Directors welcomes four new members who were elected at the April 18 board meeting in Elkins: **Bob Bastress**, **Susan Mills**, **Paula Jo Meyer-Stout**, and **Jill Wilson**. In addition, **Jane Peters** was elected as a new member at the July 11 Board meeting in Parkersburg.

Matt Bond, **Cicero Fain III**, and **Rita Hedrick-Helmick** were elected to additional terms. We would like to thank departing Board members **Laurie Erickson**, **J. Dan McCarthy**, **Megan Tarbett**, and **John Unger** for their dedication and years of service.

We welcome two new citizen members to the Council's Program Committee. **Beth See Bean** of Hardy County is a retired educator and former heritage outreach coordinator. **Hannah Hedrick** of Ohio County manages print shop operations at the Mother Jones Center for Resilient Community. These committee elections were held by public ballot presented in the winter issue of *People & Mountains*.

The Council welcomes nominations for the **Board of Directors**. Board members are chosen from all parts of West Virginia and serve without compensation, although expenses are reimbursed. We also welcome nominations for **Program Committee** citizen members, who are elected by the readers of this magazine. The Program Committee oversees Humanities Council programs and recommends grants for approval by the Board of Directors.

Please send recommendations with brief biographical information to Erin Riebe at riebe@wvhumanities.org. The deadline for nominations is **December 19, 2025**.

national arts & humanities month

Every October, National Arts and Humanities Month provides us the opportunity to celebrate the profound importance of arts and humanities in shaping our lives, communities, and country. Consider joining us at an event or making a donation to celebrate!

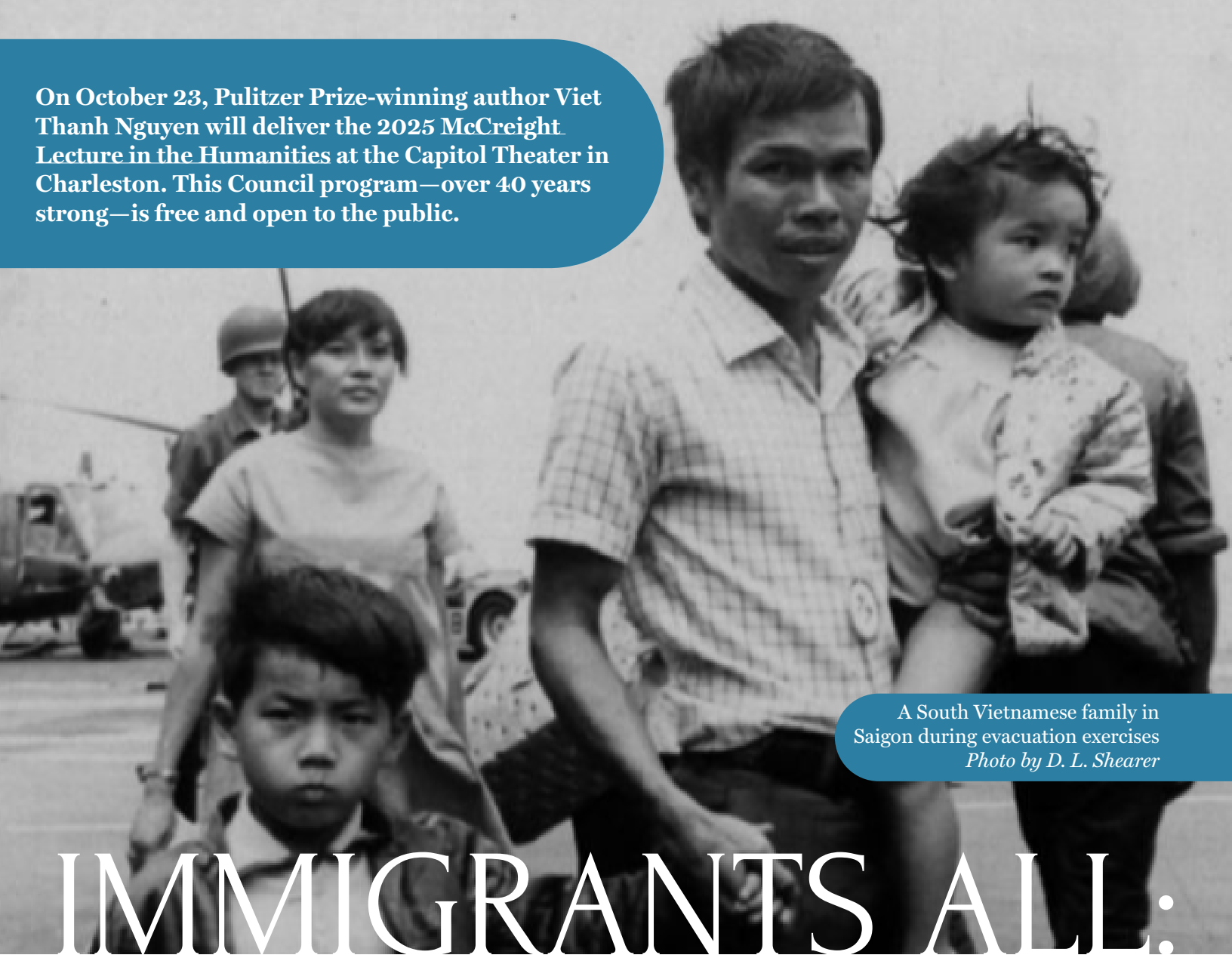
On Cover: Eleanor Roosevelt makes a "talkie" newsreel, at Arthurdale, 1934
Photo by H. B. Allen, courtesy of WVU Libraries, West Virginia & Regional History Center

History Alive! is taking new bookings!

The popular program, which has been around for 35 years, was paused from April through June due to the NEH funding freeze. Thanks to your donations and the Federation of State Humanities Councils, with help from the Mellon Foundation, *History Alive!* returned to full capacity in July.

Interested organizations may visit wvhumanities.org/programs, email warmack@wvhumanities.org, or call 304-346-8500 for booking information.

On October 23, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Viet Thanh Nguyen will deliver the 2025 McCreight Lecture in the Humanities at the Capitol Theater in Charleston. This Council program—over 40 years strong—is free and open to the public.



A South Vietnamese family in Saigon during evacuation exercises
Photo by D. L. Shearer

IMMIGRANTS ALL:

Viet Thanh Nguyen and the Voices of American "Others"

By Kyle Warmack

> *"Without these origins, without my double who is and always will be a refugee, I would not be a writer."*
>
> –Viet Thanh Nguyen, *To Save and To Destroy*

Fifty years ago, in April 1975, the United States suffered a blow to its collective pride and international prestige when communist North Vietnamese forces and Viet Cong irregulars marched into the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon and collapsed the U.S.-backed Republic of Vietnam. Four presidential administrations—two Democrats, two Republicans—had poured countless lives and money into the Vietnam War for more than a decade. Now it was over.

Photographs and news footage of the desperate evacuations during Saigon's fall are seared into American memory, especially for the generation that fought and died overseas to prevent such an outcome. Photos depicting lines of South Vietnamese refugees on rooftops, captured with high-shutter clarity, sprinting for helicopters whose rotors carved black arcs in the skies overhead, rank among

the war's most traumatic images. Not until the long War in Afghanistan came to a similarly ignominious conclusion in 2021 did the U.S. again encounter hubris-shattering images of American troops and equipment in headlong flight ahead of a victorious enemy—pulling out with civilians literally clinging on for their lives.

The centrality of Americans in these indelible images is the point, however. The war killed, maimed, or displaced millions of Vietnamese, yet these people are only a small part of our national imagery's background landscape. American movies and literature focus almost exclusively on the American soldier's experience—whether through the lens of the soldier himself, or the journalist embedded alongside. *The Deer Hunter, Coming Home, Apocalypse Now, Platoon, Born on the Fourth of July, Forrest Gump,* Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, and the musical *Miss Saigon*: these and a handful of other titles generally encompass the average American's cultural understanding of a conflict that has shaped far more than the decades in which they are set. And in all of these, most Vietnamese "characters," if the term can be applied, are faceless and nameless.

> *"I am simply able to see any issue from both sides. Sometimes I flatter myself that this is a talent."*
>
> –Viet Thanh Nguyen,
> *The Sympathizer*

A South Vietnamese woman & her child during the evacuation
Photo by D. L. Shearer

> *"The tendency to separate war stories from immigrant stories means that most Americans don't understand how many of the immigrants and refugees in the United States have fled from wars—many of which this country has had a hand in."*
>
> –Viet Thanh Nguyen,
> *Our War Never Ended*

This effacement is ironic, given that the fall of Saigon laid the foundation for a new American community of Vietnamese refugees. Some 130,000 Vietnamese escaped during President Gerald Ford's initial evacuations. Subsequent waves dramatically expanded these numbers in the years to follow as more people fled communist reeducation camps and the 1979 Chinese invasion. Through the mid-1980s, perhaps as many as two million Vietnamese fled their homeland, prompting international involvement and the formation of the U.S.'s Orderly Departure Program, which provided legal means for such refugees to gain residence in the United States.

Since the late 1990s, the Vietnamese American population has hovered between 1 million and 1.5 million. Their communities, big and small, exist in most U.S. states (California and Texas have the most; West Virginia currently has about 1,300 residents of Vietnamese descent). And not until recently has that presence been felt in a wider literary sense. Vietnamese American authors have been writing all along, of course—their voices were just not broadly heard outside their immediate communities. That has been changing over the past decade. As author Eric Nguyen writes in May 2025, "Now, 50 years after the end of the war and the start of a mass movement of refugees, it seems like we are in a Vietnamese diasporic renaissance."

Enter this year's McCreight Lecture in the Humanities, to be delivered in October by novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen.

Despite being his first published novel, *The Sympathizer* catapulted Viet Thanh Nguyen to literary prominence a decade ago with a Pulitzer Prize. It has been compared favorably to the works of Joseph Conrad and John Le Carré for its spy thriller elements and warped mirrors-within-mirrors psychological twists. Nguyen knows something of the refugee community in which most of the narrative originates; when he was four years old, his family fled to the United States during the fall of Saigon, and he was briefly separated from them after a tenure in a government refugee camp near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He was eventually reunited with them in San Jose, California.

Pulitzer Prize-winner Viet Thanh Nguyen

> *"We are a nation of refugees. Most of us can trace our presence here to the turmoil or oppression of another time and another place."*
>
> –Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1979

For a first novel—indeed any novel—it covers an incredible amount of territory, gliding from expat Los Angeles communities of South Vietnamese yearning to reconquer their country from the communists to action movie sets in the Philippines; from panic-stricken military compounds on the eve of Saigon's fall to interrogation rooms in reeducation camps at the war's end.

For such a wide-ranging and tragicomically absurd text, it's also deeply grounded in research and experience. Nguyen calls out many of his references in the novel's acknowledgments; his depth of research is further borne out in his other works of fiction (*The Committed, The Refugees*) and nonfiction (*A Man of Two Faces, To Save and To Destroy*). More than any other book, *The Sympathizer* is reminiscent of Joseph Heller's seminal classic *Catch-22*: the protagonists of both are caught within a pinball machine-like

> *"I think that when the* New York Times Book Review *says* The Sympathizer *gives voice to the voiceless, it is inaccurate. There is, by now, a significant body of Vietnamese American and Vietnamese literature translated into English. The Vietnamese people and Vietnamese Americans have voices. It's simply that Americans as a whole tend not to hear them."*
>
> –Viet Thanh Nguyen, 2015 interview with poet Paul Tran

maelstrom of events and institutions, ricocheting between ideological holes, flippers, and bumpers that propel the characters too unpredictably for agency—and too violently to keep hold of their humanity.

It's important to hear what Nguyen has to say in 2025. The 10th anniversary of his first definitive work will no doubt bring new insights from the author, who has continued to elaborate on *The Sympathizer's* themes in the intervening decade (the title of Nguyen's autobiography, *A Man of Two Faces*, feels like an intentional nod to the work that made him famous). Just as important is the aforementioned 50th anniversary of the war's traumatic conclusion, with which America continues to reckon after all these years—whether through ongoing conversations about how we treat veterans returning home, or how we accommodate refugees from the countries in which the United States has waged war.

This latter point is a particularly urgent part of the American cultural dialogue. Questions of who is eligible for residence, citizenship, and due process are once again central to our national debates, as they have so often been throughout our history. They form the core of recent court decisions impacting millions. Elected officials in our towns and in Washington weigh support for, or against, actions by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other federal bureaus involved in deportations.

Questions of "who belongs" are hardly new to our nation. After the Civil War, a Republican U.S. Congress created the 14th Amendment to make citizens of millions of Black Americans recently freed from bondage. When the Vietnam War ended over a century later, the United States extended support and citizenship paths to many Vietnamese who had resisted communism and were subsequently forced to flee their homeland. Such constitutional amendments, immigration statutes, and even executive branch actions expanded or restricted the movement of new people into the country based on world events and the political zeitgeist of the age—and in turn affected when and by what means our ancestors arrived.

Nguyen's body of work speaks directly to this experience—and to the phenomenon of still being regarded as an "other" long after he arrived on America's shores. "As some refugees have noted," he writes in his most recent nonfictional work, *To Save and To Destroy*, "determining when one ceases feeling like a refugee can be difficult, even if one is no longer a refugee in fact and by law, as in my case." The humanities, at their best, highlight these connections between people and ideas, experiences, and concepts.

The siren's call to oversimplify, to tune out, to streamline is often present. The humanities remind us to engage in the betterment of active thought, to reject the deception of the easy solution. Perhaps most of all, they remind us that each of us contains multitudes, both as societies and individuals. Complex creatures all, none of us can be summarized by a hyphen or a capitalized label. If we're doing it right, we're all Others in America. Or none of us are.

Kyle Warmack is the program officer for the West Virginia Humanities Council.

To support our programs, you can donate online at bit.ly/donatewvhc or by mail at 1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston, WV 25301.

2025 West Virginia Book Festival

The McCreight Lecture is a preliminary event to the West Virginia Book Festival, which takes place this year on October 25 at the Charleston Coliseum and Convention Center. Celebrate reading, meet amazing authors, and stop by the Humanities Council's booth to say hello!

Visit wvbookfestival.org for more details.

ARTHURDALE:

Eleanor Roosevelt's New Deal Experiment in West Virginia

Text and Color Photos by
Stan Bumgardner

West Virginia—a state of firsts: Chuck Yeager breaking the sound barrier, Pearl Buck becoming the first American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, and so many more. And in 1933, the Mountain State was home to the first of some 100 experimental New Deal communities in the nation.

Unidentified man escorts Eleanor Roosevelt at Arthurdale, 1938
Courtesy of WVU Libraries, West Virginia & Regional History Center

For years, though, Arthurdale was left out of most textbooks—even though the undertaking marked a major shift in both American policy and the role of the nation's first lady.

Eleanor Roosevelt's New Role

Before Eleanor Roosevelt, most first ladies stayed more or less behind the scenes. But there had never been one like Eleanor Roosevelt. Five months after husband Franklin D. Roosevelt vowed that "we have nothing to fear but fear itself," Eleanor drove herself from the White House to Scotts Run, a string of mining communities near Morgantown. She was moved by journalist and friend Lorena Hickock's description of the poverty there, but nothing would prepare her for what she would see: mass hunger, closed mines, and families living in squalor.

Due to overproduction, West Virginia's coal economy had crashed early in the 1920s, before the Great Depression technically reached the Mountain State. When the national economy collapsed, its rippling effects were felt even harder in West Virginia's more coal-dependent places, such as Scotts Run. Eleanor Roosevelt, who had studied social reform in England, was motivated to action, and not in the mostly symbolic efforts of her predecessors. She wanted to change everything she saw along the Run.

Building Arthurdale

Eleanor persuaded FDR to back an idea she'd believed in for a long time: planned communities

that give struggling families a fresh start. The government bought a 1,200-acre farm near Reedsville, Preston County. The plan was simple but ambitious: build homes, create jobs, and give people a better life—and just as importantly, hope.

Between 1934 and 1937, 165 homes were built at Arthurdale. Eleanor insisted they have electricity, indoor plumbing, and space for gardens and livestock. Families paid rent and utilities and could eventually own their places. While Eleanor wanted Arthurdale opened up to Black and immigrant families, the federal government restricted applications to White, native-born Americans—one of many bureaucratic disappointments to plague her efforts. She expressed her frustrations to Hickock over "hand pick[ing] the tenants because again I feel that it must be an experiment in ordinary life[,] and ordinary community contains people of every type and ability and character."

Arthurdale's homesteaders worked in cooperatives—farming, furniture making, weaving, craft making. Children learned the three Rs as well as practical skills. Each year from 1935 to 1944, the first lady personally handed out the school's high school diplomas. In 1938, she even brought along FDR—the first time a sitting president had ever given a high school graduation speech.

Soon, two additional experimental towns were built in West Virginia. Red House in Putnam County was transformed into Eleanor, and the Tygart Valley Homesteads were built in Randolph County's Dailey-Valley Bend area.

Life in Arthurdale

The experiment had its ups and downs. Businesses struggled to survive both Arthurdale's isolated location and low customer demand during the Depression. Some thrived temporarily during World War II. But after the war, federal support faded. In 1947, the government sold the homes, and the experiment officially ended.

For many, though, the experience was inspirational. Dorothy Mayor (Thompson) was a gifted teenage weaver whose family had escaped the Run's abject poverty to discover modern homes and a cottage weaving industry

President and First Lady Roosevelt attend the Arthurdale High School commencement, 1938
Courtesy of WVU Libraries, West Virginia & Regional History Center

in Arthurdale. Eleanor Roosevelt recognized her talents and arranged for her to be mentored by a master textile artist in northern Kentucky.

Decades later, in 2000, Thompson was named a National Heritage Fellow—one of six in our state's history—for perpetuating an important traditional craft and for having a lot of fun while doing it. She proudly remembered her teenage days in Arthurdale: "We had a beautiful, brand-new, four-bedroom house . . . and a cow who came along!"

For 80 years, cherished old-time musician Elmer Rich would regale anyone who'd listen about the night he played for the first lady of the United States at a community square dance. Arthurdale may have failed as a planned community, but it succeeded in inspiring young people.

Preserving the Legacy

Though the businesses closed, some of the buildings endured. In 1984, Arthurdale Heritage, Inc., was formed to preserve the community's history. Led by WVU professors and students—including another of those lifelong-learning former Arthurdale teens, Glenna Williams—they recorded oral histories, collected photos, restored buildings, and opened a museum in 1991. In 1999, they restored one of the original homes to its 1930s look and opened it to the public.

Arthurdale Heritage continues today, funding its work with private money and grants, including the West Virginia Humanities Council's support for a series of exhibits. Today, Executive Director Kenneth Kidd, Education Director Elizabeth Satterfield, and Appalachian Programs Coordinator Mary Linscheid carry on the missions of those who built the place in the 1930s and those who brought it back to life in the 1990s. Arthurdale regularly hosts concerts, craft classes, and exhibits that explore both the hopes and the hard truths of its past—including the racism and exclusion of the original plan.

Why Visit Arthurdale?

Arthurdale may seem remote, but it's just a half-hour drive from Morgantown or Fairmont. Visitors often include history buffs, Eleanor Roosevelt fans, tourists lost on backroads, and families retracing their roots. For some, a tour brings emotional moments—spotting a familiar photo or piece of furniture that revives childhood memories.

An original house at Arthurdale Heritage

Loom Room at Arthurdale Heritage

The site offers walking and driving tours, hands-on activities, and a growing calendar of events, such as the New Deal Festival (see page 14) and Eleanor Roosevelt's Birthday Celebration. A loom room and heritage craft shop are also part of the experience. Most importantly, Arthurdale sparks conversation. Guides often ask visitors questions such as, "Would this experiment work today?" Their answers lead to deeper discussions about housing, poverty, and the government's role in helping people. As Satterfield says, "It's a great place to learn something new—about history, about the country, and even about yourself." Linscheid adds, "Arthurdale Heritage makes history relevant to today and to everyday life." Arthurdale is more than a place—it's a platform for understanding the past, how it applies to the present, and what its hopes and aspirations should mean for the future.

Stan Bumgardner is the e-WV media editor for the West Virginia Humanities Council.

Katie McCoy (apprentice to the late Richard Eddy) with her tools and fiddles she has repaired

Apprenticeship Pairs at New Deal Fest 2025

Text and Photos by Dr. Jennie S. Williams

On July 12, I attended the 28th annual New Deal Festival at Arthurdale Heritage in Preston County. By the time I arrived in the early afternoon, parked cars filled the adjacent fields, and over a hundred people were gathered outside listening to live music, eating lunch from food trucks, and exploring the historic grounds of the nation's first New Deal homestead project.

Arthurdale held its first music festival on July 7, 1935, to celebrate the region's traditional music, including a fiddle contest, with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt handing out ribbons to the winners.

Now, 90 years later, the New Deal Festival featured a full schedule, with a Rich Family Memorial Old-Time Fiddle Contest named in honor of Harry Rich and his sons Elmer and Sanford, who played for Arthurdale square dances in the 1930s and 1940s.

The staff at Arthurdale Heritage have been expanding their programs to include traditional art forms and creative practices from West Virginia and Appalachia. As the organization's Appalachian Programs Coordinator, Morgantown-based musician and poet Mary Linscheid has facilitated several square dances, craft workshops,

Judy Van Gundy (left) & Andrea Brandon-Hennig demonstrate white oak basket making

and author events. The West Virginia Humanities Council has supported Arthurdale Heritage in several of these wonderful programs.

At the New Deal Festival, I volunteered to help with the indoor artist demonstrations. Many of the artists are participants in the West Virginia Humanities Council's West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship program.

Elkins-based white oak basket makers Judy Van Gundy and her apprentice Andrea Brandon-Hennig demonstrated how they source and prepare their materials before getting started. Judy first learned how to make white oak baskets from reading the very first *Foxfire Book* published in 1971. In short, the process involves splitting white oak into sections and pulling apart the wood into strips, called splits, until they are thin and flexible enough to be woven into baskets. Judy and Andrea showed this physically laborious process using nothing but their hands and a sharp knife to start the split. Some audience members gave it a try. One by one, people were impressed at the refined skills and strength needed to produce the splits.

Later, Katie McCoy set up a table filled with tools, wood pieces, and broken fiddle parts to reveal how she repairs fiddles. She learned from her mentor, the late Richard Eddy, who sadly passed away the following day. Using the skills and techniques she gained from Richard, Katie captivated her audience as she stripped away a broken rib from a fiddle and then fabricated and attached a new one—all in one hour! One child was so curious he stood right up front at the table to get a closer look as Katie bent and shaped the wood.

Chef Kenneth "KD" Jones showed how he makes chocolate-covered peanut butter candies. KD has been apprenticing with his aunt Nancy Nelson to learn old family candy recipes. Based in Campbells Creek in Kanawha County, his mom, aunt, and grandmother would regularly make candy for their church community for Easter and other holidays. A professional chef, KD has begun making and selling his family's candy under his new project, Shoogerwell. KD let several children dip their own peanut butter balls into the melted chocolate. He then set their tray of candies aside so the chocolate could harden while he shared stories about his family and the confectionary creations they have made together.

A few musicians from our Folklife Apprenticeship program performed at the outdoor stage, including the "Appalachian soul man" Aristotle Jones and fiddlers Mary Linscheid and Bodhi Gibbons-Guinn, who participated in the fiddle contest before joining in on the old-time music jam.

This captures only a snapshot of the variety of activities the New Deal Fest offered its guests and participants. The event also included weaving and spinning in the loom room, an artisan market, a book-signing table for local authors, and blacksmithing. The event was a wonderful gathering of artists and community members celebrating traditional knowledge and creativity in West Virginia while acknowledging Arthurdale's historic legacy and bright future.

Dr. Jennie S. Williams is the state folklorist with the West Virginia Humanities Council.

West Virginia Folklife is a program of the West Virginia Humanities Council. It's supported with financial assistance from the West Virginia Department of Tourism and the National Endowment for the Arts, with approval of the West Virginia Commission on the Arts.

To support Folklife you can donate online at bit.ly/donatewvhc or by mail at 1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston, WV 25301



From Left: Judy Van Gundy & Andrea Brandon-Hennig, Aristotle Jones & Bill Hairston, and Tim Bing & Edwin McCoy
Photos by Jennie S. Williams

Folklife Apprenticeship Fall Showcases

Please join us to celebrate the achievements of our 2024-25 West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship program participants!

The West Virginia Folklife Program is hosting two fall showcases featuring demonstrations from the 10 participating pairs. Meet the artists, ask questions, and learn about traditional art forms in West Virginia. These events are free and open to the public, with refreshments provided.

Saturday, November 1, 1 p.m.

West Virginia Humanities Council's historic MacFarland-Hubbard House
1310 Kanawha Blvd E, Charleston, WV 25301

Featuring:
– Bill Hairston & Aristotle Jones
Appalachian Storytelling
– Tim Bing & Edwin McCoy
Old-Time Banjo
– Judy Van Gundy & Andrea Brandon-Hennig
White Oak Basketry
– Dural Miller & Linesha Frith
Urban Farming/Gardening
– Nancy Nelson & Chef KD Jones
Appalachian Candy Making

Sunday, November 9, 3 p.m.

Arthurdale Heritage Inc.
18 Q Rd, Arthurdale, WV 26520
In memory of Richard Eddy

Featuring:
– Ginny Hawker & Mary Linscheid
Primitive Baptist Hymn Singing
– Margaret Bruning & Nevada Tribble
Fiber Arts/Weaving
– Katie McCoy
Fiddle Repair
– Ben Townsend & Bodhi Gibbons-Guinn
Old-Time Fiddle
– Taylor Runner & Annick Odom
Square Dance Calling

This program is made possible with funding support from the National Endowment for the Arts, The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, Mid Atlantic Arts' Central Appalachia Living Traditions program, and private donations. Please consider donating to the West Virginia Humanities Council to support the West Virginia Folklife Program.

Taylor Runner calls a square dance at The Culture Center in Charleston, WV, during the 2025 Vandalia Gathering
Photo by Jennie S. Williams

West Virginia Folklife Mentor Artists—In Memoriam

Richard Eddy, April 14, 1943 - July 13, 2025

Richard Eddy (left) was a beloved musician and teacher. He'd been teaching fiddle repair techniques to Katie McCoy (right) through our West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship program. Our deepest condolences go out to his family, his friends in the old-time music community, and his apprentice, Katie. We're thankful to have worked with Richard and for his help in passing on his knowledge and stories. See his obituary here.

Susan Ray Brown, October 3, 1953 - July 18, 2025

Susan Ray Brown (right) was a kind and generous person who carried on the Appalachian tradition of making salt rising bread. She and Jenny Bardwell (middle) collected recipes, studied the history and science behind this unique bread, and published this research in *Salt Rising Bread: Recipes and Heartfelt Stories of a Nearly Lost Appalachian Tradition* (2016). She and Jenny participated in the West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship program's first year, passing on this traditional knowledge to Amy Dawson (left) of Lost Creek Farm. Our condolences go out to her family and friends, and to her apprentice, Amy.
Read her obituary here.

THE BROAD SIDE

HOMER JACK DEAN SMILES AFTER BEING GRANTED A NEW TRIAL

MURKY WATERS

Unraveling the Life of Homer Jackson Dean

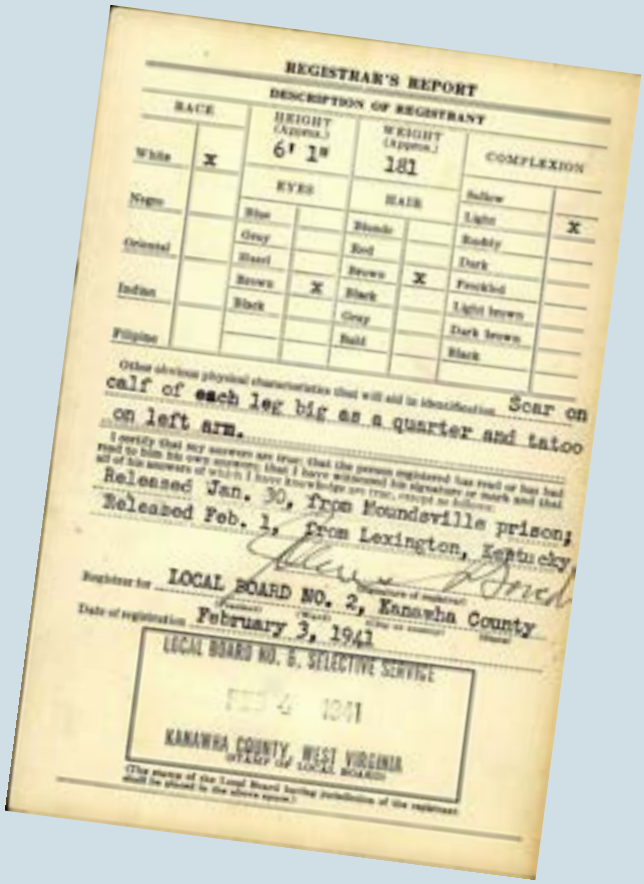
By Kyle Warmack

The Council is now in it its fifth year of the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project. One of the most common questions continues to be, "How do you choose the veterans the students write about?" While there is a longer, more procedural response based on the availability of information on each veteran (see April 2023 *The Broad Side*), the basic answer is, "If a veteran's service qualified them for interment in a national cemetery, that's good enough for us."

No veteran's life and times have tested the boundaries of this statement quite so rigorously as Homer Jackson Dean, whose complicated personal history resulted in the project's longest, most complex biography to date. Dean—and his story's many twists and turns—posed a significant challenge to our students and research team, but he exemplifies precisely the historical acumen, critical thinking, and close examination of factual nuance to which the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project strives to adhere.

It wasn't easy to get there, though. For months, Dean's record raised questions as to how he ended up in the West Virginia National Cemetery in the first place. You see, Homer Jackson Dean was a criminal—and at one point, a convicted murderer.

Dean was born in 1910 to a respectable middle-class family. His father sold school supplies—desks, chairs, and the like—for a Huntington-



REGISTRAR'S REPORT

DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRANT

RACE		HEIGHT (Approx.)		WEIGHT (Approx.)		COMPLEXION	
White	x	6' 1"		181		Sallow	
Negro		EYES		HAIR		Light	x
Oriental		Blue		Blonde		Ruddy	
Indian		Gray		Red		Dark	
Filipino		Hazel		Brown	x	Freckled	
		Brown	x	Black		Light brown	
		Black		Gray		Dark brown	
				Bald		Black	

Other obvious physical characteristics that will aid in identification: Scar on calf of each leg big as a quarter and tatoo on left arm.

I certify that my answers are true; that the person registered has read or has had read to him his own answers; that I have witnessed his signature or mark and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

Released Jan. 30, from Moundsville prison;
Released Feb. 1, from Lexington, Kentucky

Registrar's signature or mark

Registrar for LOCAL BOARD NO. 2, Kanawha County

Date of registration February 3, 1941

LOCAL BOARD NO. 2, SELECTIVE SERVICE
FEB 4 1941
KANAWHA COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF LOCAL BOARD

(The stamp of the Local Board having jurisdiction of the registrant should be placed in the above space.)

based firm he later partially owned (after the family relocated in the 1920s to the Spring Hill neighborhood of present-day South Charleston). As Homer took a similar school supply job during the early days of the Great Depression, it seemed the young man was bound to follow, quietly and clerkishly, in his father's footsteps. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Homer's first prison stint began in 1933, when he was convicted for cashing bad checks in his father's name. More forgery charges followed, and Dean spent most of the 1930s in Moundsville's West Virginia State Penitentiary. In 1937, during a break in his time behind bars, the state police brought in 27-year-old Dean to be questioned concerning the murder of a known Charleston character Beauty Matthew Reese. Dean was the last person to see him alive. The evidence proved insufficient to charge Dean, but more forgery charges landed him back in Moundsville until he was paroled in January 1941.

According to Dean, he was so eager to get into the action of World War II that he then moved northward and joined a medical unit of the Royal Canadian Army, which was then feeding men into the desperate fight to save Great Britain from the Nazi menace. When the United States was brought into the conflict after Pearl Harbor, however, Dean found out his American citizenship could be revoked for joining the military of a foreign nation. He quietly gave up his Canadian uniform and slipped back to West Virginia.

The veracity of Dean's Canadian service is the first of many claims that cannot be readily verified. Our researchers could not place Dean's medical unit in the location where he purported to serve and ran out of time to make detailed inquiries with Library and Archives Canada (its National Archives). So, too, with Dean's assertion that he subsequently tried to join the U.S. Navy but was rejected for his criminal record. This could have occurred by way of an unrecorded conversation with a recruiter—or it might not have happened at all. It's difficult to tell with Dean, as you'll see.

The U.S. Merchant Marine (USMM), however, was willing to take men like Homer Dean. By September 1942, he was trained and aboard his first ship, the SS *Fairisle*. From here, Dean's service took him on a wild ride across the Atlantic, Caribbean, Mediterranean, and even into the Pacific. Perhaps this was the life of excitement and danger for which this devil-may-care West Virginian had always yearned because he moved up the enlisted ranks and earned praise from his superiors. In late 1943, near Naples, Dean even saved the life of his captain during a German air attack on their ship, an act for which he received a recommendation to the U.S. Maritime Service Officers School.

For the full account of Dean's adventures, please read the excellent biography (via the Programs tab at wvhumanities.org). Our students and their supporting researchers, however, had to navigate a factual minefield and limit themselves primarily to what they could *confirm* about Dean's Merchant Marine exploits. The man himself appears to have significantly embellished his record.

In his West Virginia Department of Corrections file, Dean claimed to have been wounded during "the invasion of France." Phrased thusly, most

readers (and probably anyone to whom Dean was recounting the tale) would reasonably assume he was speaking about D-Day and the Normandy Invasion. Yet, the only vessel with Dean aboard that could have helped invade France was the SS *Fitzhugh Lee*, which only participated in Operation Dragoon—the invasion of *southern* France along its Mediterranean coast, which took place later in the year and under far less dangerous conditions. We examined this through available ship logs and convoy summaries, cross-checked with the narrative Dean presented during one of his latter incarcerations.

Stranger still is Dean's claim (also in the Corrections file) to have been wounded in the chest by shrapnel during the same invasion. Strange because, with the right forms in hand, it can be easily verified or discounted. When he completed his service at sea in 1945 and took his chance at the aforementioned Officers School (dropping out after two months), Dean underwent the customary physical exam. A medical form that lists identifying marks all the way down to vaccination scars makes no mention of anything on his chest—rendering Dean's tale of receiving a serious wound mere months before highly dubious.

Contradictions such as these caused much hand-wringing for our students, who were frustrated by their inability to reconcile Dean's heroic, globetrotting tale with the facts on hand. We had to remind them frequently of the offense for which Dean was most often locked up: forgery. To be a successful forger—especially when most transactions took place face to face (credit cards hadn't been invented yet)—one had to be very good at presenting an alternative version of reality that seemed true. His success and freedom depended on it.

To profile a person like Homer Jackson Dean, therefore, is to commit to taking no fact at face value. His fabrications were simply too numerous. Dean claimed to be aboard the SS *Birmingham* when it was torpedoed in the Caribbean—unlikely, since he was getting married for the second time in West Virginia that day. He supposedly braved the dangerous North Atlantic supply run from Great Britain to the Soviet Union, but convoy records located by our team indicate his ship had ***completed*** that run weeks before he came aboard, and never went again.

It's ironic that Dean felt the need to fabricate so much of his own record since he served more than two very real years in an extremely dangerous line of work. Merchant Mariners suffered an incredibly high casualty rate during World War II—second only to the U.S. Marine Corps—since merchant and cargo ships were the primary targets of German U-boats. Between the Merchant Marines and a brief second stint with the Coast Guard in 1946, no one could claim that Homer Jackson Dean had shrunk from his duty. Pay records from his National Archives files do corroborate his employment on the vessels he identified. Final confirmation of the postwar Coast Guard tenure came from none other than the National Cemetery Administration staff in Pruntytown, which provided us with a copy of his discharge.

Dean's plot only thickens after the war when several governors become involved in his twisting tale of forgery, grand larceny, and murder. Members of our project team, most notably researcher Abbi Smithmyer and administrator Kristen Bailey, poured countless hours into straightening the crooked paths of the story and assisting Morgantown's University High School student authors Molly Cook, Derrick Kosinski, and Max Vitale. Digging into Dean's story as it spans West Virginia and the globe is a journey worth taking—as it is with all of our veterans.

Kyle Warmack, the West Virginia Humanities Council's program officer, directs the West Virginia National Cemeteries Project (WVNCP). Since 2021, the WVNCP has been funded through the Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Legacy Program, allowing high school students—assisted by graduate-level researchers—to write biographies of individual veterans interred in our national cemeteries at Grafton and Pruntytown.

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