

Oklahoma HUMANITIES

WINTER 2011

MICROPROCESSOR

MARS PROBE NASDAQ

POCKET CALCULATOR BOB DYLAN

BAN ON CIGARETTE ADS CHARLES MANSON

NUCLEAR TESTING PING PONG DIPLOMACY

Oklahoma
Humanities
Council

FRAZIER DEFEATS ALI

MARCH FOR EQUALITY

VOTING AGE 18 RICHARD NIXON

JOHN & YOKO
ALCATRAZ

Enters the

ARCHIE BUNKER

APOLLO 14

Conversation

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MASTERPIECE THEATRE

CAT SCAN

VIETNAM

1971

LCD

DISNEY WORLD OPENS

"THE FRENCH CONNECTION"

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BUSING

PENTAGON PAPERS

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SEX DISCRIMINATION

CHINA & THE U.N.

BREZHNEV

GREENPEACE PARTRIDGE FAMILY

ATTICA RIOT "LOVE STORY"

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Oklahoma HUMANITIES

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WINTER 2011

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The opinions expressed in *Oklahoma* HUMANITIES are those of the authors. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in the magazine do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Oklahoma Humanities Council, its Board of Trustees, or staff.

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ON THE COVER

OHC began in 1971. Our cover pays tribute to the graphic design of the period—a time when art and design rejected modernist rules and began to experiment, mixing genres to reflect the turbulent issues and events that had Americans questioning everything, from political beliefs to social norms. It was a time of upheaval, a time of initiative, and the perfect time for OHC to join the conversation.

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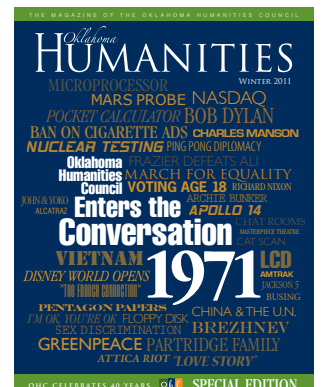


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Many thanks to photographer Nathan Brown, who is also a talented singer-songwriter and award-winning poet.

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From the Executive Director
ANN THOMPSON

In a recent airing of the radio show *Being*, host Krista Tippett addressed a subject which is central to the core of our work at the Oklahoma Humanities Council, namely that understanding others is critical to the furtherance of the highest of human virtues: compassion, altruism, empathy, and forgiveness. Citing her many conversations with scientists, Ms. Tippett stated that it is “when we are able to see the other, to see the welfare of the other as somehow linked to our own, that we are able to rise to these moral ideals.”

The wealth of knowledge and wisdom that is found in the scholarship of the humanities disciplines promotes the understanding of others. Our Board of Trustees identified the importance of understanding others in our strategic plan: “The humanities help people to forge strong connections, recognize commonalities, promote justice and tolerance, and engage in civic life.”

How important have these values become in our society today? NEH Chairman Jim Leach has written that they have never been more important. Through his “Bridging Cultures” initiative, he hopes that American citizens become more informed about other cultures because the lack of that knowledge can lead to dire consequences. “Citizenship is hard. It takes a commitment to listen, watch, read, and think in ways that allow the imagination to put one person in the shoes of another.”

We are in peril when we lose sight of “otherness.” Our quality of life is diminished when we lose sight of our place in the world in relation to others. The lost library of ancient Alexandria comes to mind. That ancient archive of the entire world’s knowledge—though initiated in part by the realization that to rule over other cultures one must understand them—provided scholars the opportunity to learn, to understand, and to empathize. When it was destroyed, generations of human experience were lost. Let’s continue the quest for understanding, empathy, and civility through learning.

LETTERS

RETROSPECTIVE

I was thrilled with every page of the Fall 2010 issue of *Oklahoma HUMANITIES*. The immigration article, the focus on Dana Gioia and Natasha Trethewey with poems so brilliantly illustrated, and the splendid discussions of historic landmarks resulted in a keepsake I felt was designed especially for me.

Shortly after my mother and I stepped off the White Star liner *Britannic* and processed through Ellis Island, we continued our journey from Grand Central Station, simultaneously intimidated and overwhelmed by its beautiful enormity. “Where are you bound?” asked a fellow traveler in the ticket line. “First to Chicago, then to Oklahoma,” responded my mother. “Say, you’re *really* going out West, then!” was the reply. I visualized our train surrounded by bandits, with eventual rescue by Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy, or Tom Mix, whichever hero might be on duty during our trip. Cowboy films were popular in postwar Britain, and I never missed one.

In New York, reality was frightening, for just as my mother placed me on a subway car, the doors slammed shut before she could pick up our suitcase and climb aboard herself. I heard her frantic screams on the platform as we sped away, an 8-year-old kid among a subway car of strangers. Fortunately, the station master got us back together at the next stop. Every time I ride the Skytrain at DFW, I remember those NYC trains in December 1949 and my adventures as a thunderstruck young immigrant in a new and vast homeland.

Thank you for an issue that remarkably synergized so many elements in my own retrospective landscape. This one stays in my treasure box.

Sandra Soli, Poet and Editor, Edmond

IMPORTANT WORK

Katie Friddle’s article in the Fall issue was excellent. Using examples as different from each other as Grand Central Terminal in New York and the Chilocco Indian School was striking. The final paragraph, while pointing out problems, leaves no doubt about the importance of historical preservation work.

Carol Welsh, Edmond

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For detailed information on our privacy policy, call us at
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ANOTHER VIEW

The article in your Fall 2010 issue about immigration law left out the right we extend to all immigrants, legal or not, which is the right of citizenship for their children who are born here. That should seem to be at the top of any list of rights extended to immigrants. I don't think many developed nations continue to extend this right and in fact the United States may be unique in giving birthright citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants. It may also have been worth mentioning that although the Federal Government makes the rules, the states for the most part foot the bill.

Bill Woodard, Bartlesville

TIMELY ISSUES

I wanted to thank you for sending the handsome Fall issue of *Oklahoma* HUMANITIES with Katie Friddle's article, among many fascinating stories. What a good-looking publication. We look forward to future issues.

Susan Owen Atkinson, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Norman

I just received my copy of *Oklahoma* HUMANITIES. I wanted to compliment you on the layout and content. The article on immigration law was particularly timely and well written.

Brenna Daugherty, Executive Director, North Dakota Humanities Council

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Want the latest news on OHC events? Join our e-news mailing list and receive information as it happens. Go to our website, look under "News" on the left side of the home page, and click on "Join Our Mailing List." We appreciate the opportunity to provide you with up-to-the-minute news and event information from the humanities community.

SEND US YOUR FEEDBACK

Send your letters and opinions to the Editor at: carla@okhumanitiescouncil.org. Include "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line of your message. We look forward to hearing from you.



From the OHC Board of Trustees
ANN NEAL, CHAIR

As incoming Chair of the OHC Board of Trustees, I am excited about the prospect of new beginnings, working with "old" and "new" board members as well as the OHC staff. Change is energizing. We are certainly experiencing change on the state and national political scene, so the relevance of OHC programs is greater than ever.

Along with OHC staff and a fellow board member, I recently attended the national conference of the Federation of State Humanities Councils in Albuquerque. This annual meeting allows staff and board members from across the country to collaborate, be inspired by the work of sister councils, and plan for the future. It was truly a time to reflect on the changes occurring in our home states and the country. Meeting people from across the U.S. who are committed to the humanities was certainly motivating.

The conference highlight, in many ways, is the Walter H. Capps Lecture, delivered this year by renowned author and scholar Azar Nafisi. She inspired those of us in the audience to meet today's changing landscape by "cultivating fresh and new eyes to see the world." She believes that the humanities can help solve global challenges, what she calls "a crisis of vision, thought, and imagination." Her lecture inspired me to help re-emphasize the humanities, to bridge cultural divides, and to appreciate the luxury of free thought we have in the United States.

During my term as Chair, I look forward to working with an active and engaged Board of Trustees. Our goals will be to continue to gain new partners in programming, to develop additional funding sources, and to bring OHC programs and therefore "meaningful public engagement" to communities we have not worked with before. I'm reminded of a quote by Anne Frank: "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." Let's get to work.

KIRKPATRICK FAMILY FUND

By the late 1960s, John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick were well established philanthropists known for their love for their community. Natives of Oklahoma City, they were generous supporters of many charitable projects as well as the founding benefactors for organizations such as the Oklahoma City Museum of Art.

Recognizing the need to encourage others to support charitable organizations, Mr. Kirkpatrick worked with attorney Don Ellison to establish the Oklahoma City Community Foundation in 1969. The couple provided leadership and support through their contributions that helped to establish the Foundation in its first key years of operation. In 1989, they established the Kirkpatrick Family Fund, the single largest endowment at the Oklahoma City Community Foundation.

Mrs. Kirkpatrick died in 1997. Mr. Kirkpatrick remained active and interested in the Kirkpatrick Family Fund and the community until shortly before his death at age 98 in 2006.

Today, their grandson Christian K. Keesee provides leadership for the fund's Trustees, ensuring that his grandparents' legacy continues to enrich the overall community. The Trustees look for certain core values and qualities in the organizations they support. These include passion for and commitment to mission; strength in leadership with responsible governance by board and staff; planning for the future; self evaluation; effective partnerships; and transparency in financial accounting and fundraising.

"The Oklahoma Humanities Council embodies these attributes," says Liz Eickman, director of the Kirkpatrick Family Fund. "We are proud to support the efforts of OHC as they expand humanities education throughout our state."



Liz Eickman

MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

OHC is governed by a 24-member Board of Trustees comprised of private citizens, academic scholars, and governor's appointees. We welcome the following new members.

Susan Savage was appointed Secretary of State by Governor Brad Henry in 2003. She served as the Mayor of Tulsa from 1992 to 2002. Her awards include the Oklahoma Human Rights Award and the 2009 Peace and Dialogue Award for Government Service from Oklahoma City University and the Institute of Interfaith Dialogue. She has been inducted into the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame and the Oklahoma Municipal League Hall of Fame for City and Town Officials. Savage has served on the executive and advisory boards for many organizations, including: Southern Regional Education Board, Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, Oklahoma City United Way, Oklahoma Nature Conservancy, Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, and Creative Oklahoma.

Dr. Jerry Vannatta is John Flack Burton Professor of Humanities in Medicine, Professor of Internal Medicine, and former Executive Dean of the College of Medicine at the University of Oklahoma. His teaching awards include five Aesculapian Awards from medical students, the Edgar W. Young Lifetime Achievement Award, the Stanton L. Young Master Teacher Award, and the Humanism in Medicine Award from the Association of American Medical Colleges. He serves on the board of trustees for Presbyterian Health Foundation and Oklahoma City University.

Dr. Mary Brodnax is Professor of Humanities at the University of Central Oklahoma. She earned her B.A. from Vanderbilt and M.A. and Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University. Her honors and awards include a Provost's Outstanding Junior Faculty Teaching Award and a Purple Chalk Award from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has served on the College of Liberal Arts Outstanding Teaching Award Committee, as President of the UCO Faculty Senate, and President of the DaVinci Institute.

Dr. William Bryans is Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of History at Oklahoma State University. He received his B.A. and M.A. from Colorado State University and a Ph.D. from the University of Wyoming. Dr. Bryans serves on the boards of Preservation Oklahoma and the Oklahoma Museums Association. His professional memberships include the Organization of American Historians, American Association for State and Local History, National Council on Public History, Western History Association, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Mountain-Plains Museum Association.



KEEP YOUR
SUBSCRIPTION
COMING!

A NEW FACE AT OHC

Welcome to Manda Overturf, our new Program Officer. Manda will be working with teachers and librarians to coordinate our classroom programs and reading and discussion groups. In the short month since she came to us, we've sent her to Albuquerque to attend the national conference of state humanities councils and to Washington, D.C., for a conference on literature and medicine—a subject we're developing as new programming at OHC.



“I look forward to working with and serving communities throughout the state,” says Manda. “Programs such as *Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma!* and the upcoming *Literature in Medicine* give Oklahomans a space for meaningful conversation about the human experience. I believe these conversations provide individuals with an understanding of how to better relate and communicate with other members of society. Overall, I am excited about the opportunity to work for an organization whose mission is to help educate the public and to create a better quality of life for Oklahomans.”

Manda received a B.A. in U.S. History from Oklahoma State University. She also holds a Masters in Library and Information Studies from the University of Oklahoma and an M.A. in American History from the University of Kansas. During her graduate career, she worked at CareerTech Centers developing curriculum and teaching technology-based courses across the state. Manda currently volunteers for Whiz Kids, a faith-based nonprofit organization that provides one-on-one tutoring and mentoring to at-risk Oklahoma City students. She's a terrific addition to our staff.

ARE YOU AN OHC DONOR?

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DO IT TODAY!

WHY I GIVE TO OHC

I support the Oklahoma Humanities Council because I share its key values—in particular, the following statement from the “About OHC” section of the Council website:

OHC recognizes that engagement with the humanities offers people inspiration and hope and can tell true and powerful stories about what life and human behavior mean. The humanities help people to forge strong connections, recognize commonalities, promote justice and tolerance, and engage in civic life.

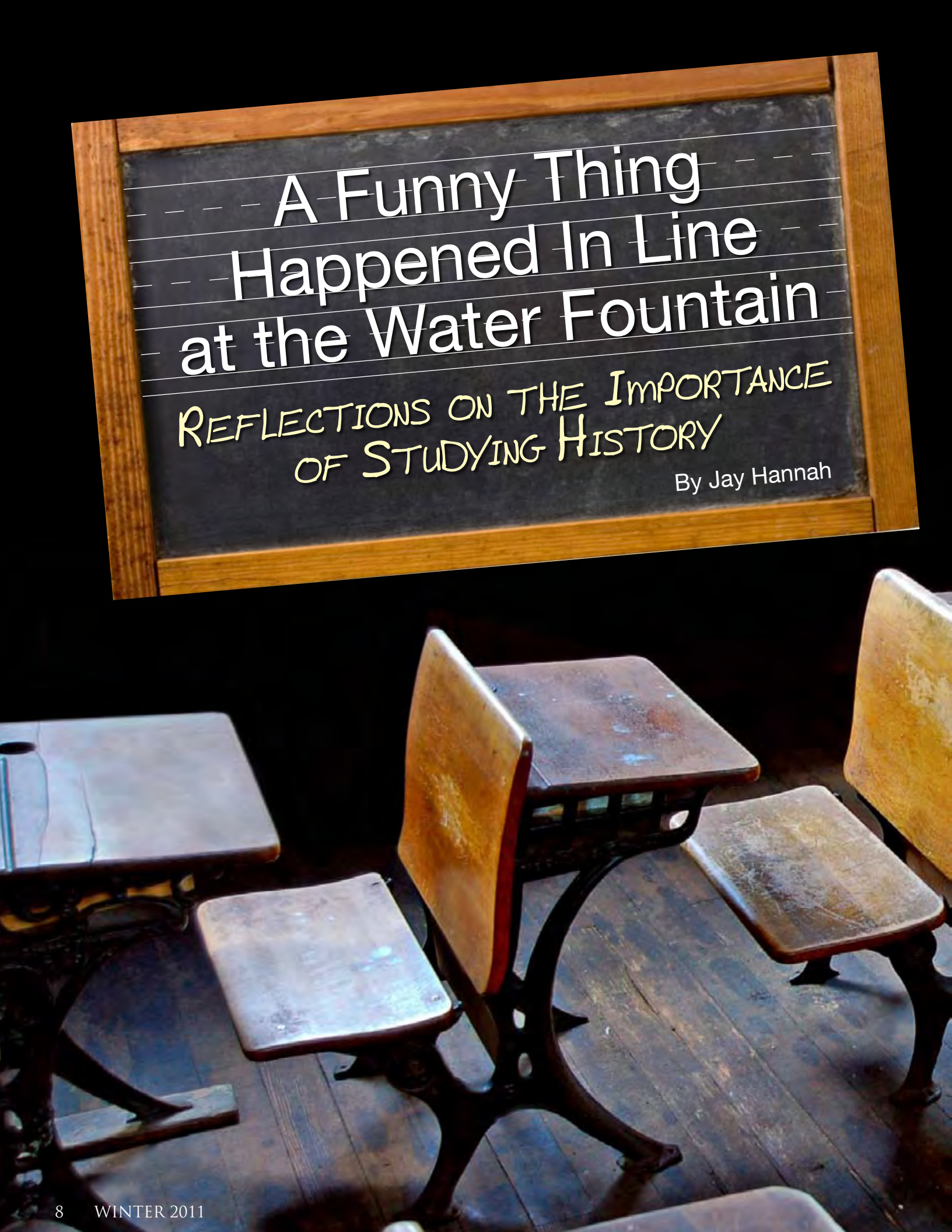
As the first person in my family to graduate from college, I know the power of inspiration and hope that the humanities brings. The humanities bring us the powerful stories of others and we come to understand ourselves. Through such understanding, we forge stronger connections with others whose experience differs from our own. As we begin to recognize commonalities, our desire to promote justice and to be more tolerant increases. We are then better able to engage in civic life.

Although we live in an era where we are increasingly interconnected through technology, we ironically grow more disconnected and isolated. We need the powerful stories of life and human behavior to connect in a more personal way with others and to understand our complex society. The humanities help us gain that understanding.

I encourage you to invest in the work of the Oklahoma Humanities Council. Your tax-deductible gift can fund teacher institutes, traveling exhibits, lectures, living history programs, and much more. To make a secured gift online visit www.okhumanitiescouncil.org/donate or contact the Council at (405) 235-0280.



Martin Wing, Attorney at Law, Tulsa



A Funny Thing Happened In Line at the Water Fountain

REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPORTANCE
OF STUDYING HISTORY

By Jay Hannah

Growing up in Oklahoma's Adair County during the 1960s, touted at that time as one of the most poverty-stricken counties in the United States, oddly enough provided indelible advantages. It was there that a deep and abiding interest in the study of history was sparked and inextricably embedded into my life. It did not emanate from the usual student's introduction to history through rote memorization of dates and events; rather, in an innocent moment of connection to the past through the faces of people.

I attended all twelve grades in one school building in Watts, Oklahoma. As a town, Watts was an entrepreneurial brainstorm. Developers of the Kansas City Southern Railroad (KCSRR) realized they had a surplus of land going to waste in, what must have seemed to them, "the middle of nowhere." As the midpoint on the KCSRR line between Kansas City and Shreveport, the town of Watts was born out of necessity. Steam ruled the rails in 1912, and Watts dispensed water, coal, and repairs to locomotives pulling freight and passengers bound for the Crescent City of New Orleans.

Jay Hannah is Executive Vice President, Financial Services, for BancFirst and is a former member of the OHC Board.





School days were filled with ritual. Classrooms were essentially the same as when my mother attended Watts School during the war years, with furnishings that would win preservation awards today: wood floors, lath stucco walls, verdigris blackboards with carved wooden chalk trays, alphabet charts in both block characters and D'Nealian cursive. Big Chief tablets were in abundance and, while unacceptable as a sports mascot today, we were comforted by the reassuring eyes of “The Chief” adorning each pad.

At the front of my first grade classroom, portraits of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln flanked an American Flag with 48 stars—even though the year was 1961. I have yet to determine if that flag was retained after the admission of Alaska and Hawaii because of the school’s meager budget or because administrators were waiting to see if statehood would “stick” for these newcomers.

Our teacher, Miss Phillips (all female teachers were referred to as “Miss,” without regard to marital status), sat at a wooden desk the size of an Egyptian chariot, from which she dispensed absolute authority. Just as Osirian stone effigies of pharaohs with arms crossed held the regal staffs of the kingdoms of the upper and lower Nile, she at times crossed her arms, a paddle in

one hand and a grade book in the other, symbols of her charge and power. Miss Phillips’ demeanor was serious, stoic, at parity with the portraits of George and Abe; together they exuded a power trifecta eclipsed only by the Big Three at Yalta.

Students sat at ancient desks, a concatenated echelon of folding wooden seats supported by an odd clash of utilitarian and ornamental cast iron, nailed to the floor in linear formation like a Spartan phalanx, immovable. Desk tops had a small pencil trough and a cylindrical hole in the upper corner. Years later I learned that the hole was a receptacle for an ink well; for my generation, that was about as functional as a lapel buttonhole on a suit coat. But there was intrigue and history at each desk.

Carved into the desktops—as deeply as pioneer names on sandstone along the Oregon Trail—were the hieroglyphics of generations: hearts and arrows, initials, dates, “Billy loves Sandra.” My desk had “Sixkiller, Class of '39” carved deep into the wood. The name Sixkiller wasn’t ominous; after all, I was surrounded by killers: Dennis Pathkiller sat in front of me and Billy Joe Hogshooter just behind. To these names of noted Cherokee families we were well accustomed. Often their names were the same as those carried by chiefs and headmen, powerful people from two centuries earlier. Former Principal



Dennis C. Hannah



Bill Jones (U.S Navy, WWII) & Sister Bobbye (author's mother)



Chief Wilma Mankiller, a native of the Rocky Mountain community southwest of Watts, took great pride in explaining that her family name was more a military title than a character in a true crime novel.

Our entire class was mostly Cherokee. Historical satirist Sarah Vowell, also of Cherokee descent, once wrote, “Being at least a little Cherokee in eastern Oklahoma where I was born is about as rare and remarkable as being a Michael Jordan fan in Chicago.” Adair County was carved from the very heart of the Cherokee Nation at the time of Oklahoma’s statehood. Indeed, the entire area was punctuated with historical remnants of the Cherokees’ 1830s arrival in the West, an arduous journey forced along the “*trail where they cried.*” These sites were all within a few miles of our school’s playground. From Bushyhead Mountain (a terminus point on the Trail of Tears) to Fort Wayne (established in 1837 by Captain Nathan Boone, son of Daniel), we were surrounded by our past. Even though the coming of Oklahoma’s statehood in 1907 meant the diminishment of Cherokee Nation sovereignty, Cherokees were yet in abundance.

After recess and the sounding of the afternoon bell, we lined up, two abreast at the east entrance and, upon Miss Phillips’ command, marched into the building to take our place in line at

the school’s only water fountain, a porcelain trough with four nickel silver spouts. Midway down the long hallway, this was the demarcation that separated grade from high school. Over the water fountain hung long picture frames with photographs of young men, and even a few women, not much older than the upper classmen whose domain was the west end of the building. These young men and women wore military uniforms: some with peaked caps, some with helmets. They stood ramrod stiff in dress uniforms decorated with medals, wings, and shoulder patches. There was plenty of time to study the faces of those young soldiers, sailors, and airmen while waiting in line for a drink of cool water. It was a study in detail.

Accompanying the photographs were neatly typed names and ranks, along with place names like Normandy, Iwo Jima, and Incheon. Some of the pictures had small gold stars affixed to them, much like the ones Miss Phillips attached to homework as recognition for having done a “good job.” Next to some of the stars were dates like July 1944. The significance of the stars was lost on me. Miss Phillips must have observed me in rapt study of the photos. Gesturing with an extended forefinger, she told me, “You are sitting at his desk.” There was a star on his photo. She explained that everyone in the photographs had been students at Watts School, just like me. They



R.J. Mueller, 82nd Airborne, WWII



*Dennis C. Hannah (author’s father)
82nd Airborne, WWII*



Oklahoma Historical Society



*Si Jones, WWI
(author’s maternal grandfather)*



Oklahoma Historical Society

had learned to read and write and do long division in the third grade. They had progressed to graduation by studying literature, algebra, and science. They had studied history and, in many ways, had become part of it. She went on to say that the stars on the photos meant that they had died during a war. I understood “died”; I had been to my grandfather’s funeral only the year before. While the full concept of death was still somewhat of a mystery, I knew it was a long-term proposition.

Like me, these students had labored at penmanship as first graders. They too must have begun each day with the Pledge of Allegiance and heard the third graders singing “America the Beautiful” in the next room. They might have even played baseball on the same diamond and stood in the same line after recess to drink from the water fountain. The connection struck me. To me, those people were famous. As I moved from grade to grade over the years, the photos served as a reminder that I walked, thought, played, and grew up where these esteemed people had once done those things—just like me.

In his recent bestseller, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, business author Malcolm Gladwell writes, “People don’t rise from nothing. We do owe something to parentage and patronage. But in fact [successful people] are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot.”

So, why study history? What is the importance of pursuing knowledge framed in historical context? There is one simple yet durable truth: identity.

The seminal value in embracing history is the discovery of *us*. History is the microscope in the laboratory of human experience. It helps us understand people and societies and how we as individuals fit into the broad scope of time and place. Beyond the amassed collection of facts and dates, it traces the arc of humanity across the sky of time.



When we bring history into our daily lives, we come closer to mastering the forces that affect our lives. We strengthen our grasp on identity and engage our ability to learn and work hard and make sense of the world. Walt Whitman was correct in his answer to the question of life:

That you are here—that life exists, and identity; / That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse (“O Me! O Life!” *Leaves of Grass*).

As I grew older, my questions of teachers about the soldier photos grew deeper. Often their answers were couched in assignments: “I believe there is a book in the library that recounts that battle, that country, that time.” The individual stories behind the faces were epics in my readings of their battles and their generation’s contributions. By the time I was a senior in the early

’70s, a new frame had been added; added to those in sepia or black and white were now color images of upper classmen I knew by name, not just as names carved on a wooden desk. I had watched them play football and basketball, put on senior plays, lead special assemblies. They were “the older kids” we looked up to and admired. After graduation, some of their pictures were added to the frame over the water fountain. And, yes, some



had small gold stars neatly pasted at the bottom.

With each history class, I discovered a rising readiness to learn. More than just dates, places, and events, I found that history is about people. People just like my Cherokee ancestors who endured and overcame the hardships of forced removal from their native homelands on the Trail of Tears in 1838 and 1839. People like my Granny's grandfather, who fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War in places like Shiloh and Chickamauga. People like my grandfather who served in France in 1918 during the "War to End All Wars." People like my dad who spoke in low, halting tones of serving with the 82nd Airborne during World War II. He parachuted into occupied France in Normandy, June 1944, and led young men in desperate struggles. He was just a Cherokee boy from Adair County who knew little of the geography of France.

And I doubt that Lt. Bill Sixkiller, whose desk I had been honored to occupy, had any idea where the Mariana Islands were prior to wading ashore under heavy enemy fire at Saipan. He was killed during the invasion of Saipan in July 1944 and won the Silver Star for his heroism. Sitting in a hero's seat doesn't make you one, but it sure gives you a role model to follow.

These were my people, my generation's connection to the past, our tribal stories steeped in history. When history is passed down in first-person accounts, like my Granny told her stories to me, the distance of the past is erased, the dots connected.

The lens of history magnifies the present. Cultural legacy framed by the study of history allows life in the present to be viewed from a vantage that prepares us for the repeating of history. At this juncture, the awareness of identity and the embrace of contributory responsibility converge. Among the humanities, the study of history takes on the role of both journeyman and steward.

Today, with the ever increasing speed of communications, the accessibility of information, the blurring of cultural and global boundaries, some might say the study of history is passé. I would advance that history and its lessons are touchstones that ground our present and preface our future. The look back, with a discerning eye focused beyond singular events or dates, brings us to the recognition of our interconnectedness as people.

It has been said that "when it comes to history and beliefs and values, we turn our future on the lathe of the past." By examining the past—our forefathers' times, decision processes, ideas, and mistakes—we are offered a deeper understanding of our own lives, an understanding that is as poignant and clear as photos over a water fountain.

Drink deeply I say. ■



W.T. Hannah (grandfather; Citizen of the Cherokee Nation), 90th Division, WWI



1971 CELEBRATING 40 YEARS 2011

In this essay, Jay Hannah speaks to the value of studying history, an important foundation that provides context and relevance for other humanities disciplines. Examining history (to equip us for our future) has been at the heart of hundreds of OHC programs and grants in our 40-year history: museum exhibits, digitization projects, websites, book and film festivals, teacher institutes, Oklahoma Chautauqua . . . The list goes on and on. We're continuing that tradition through new ventures, including Museum on Main Street, our partnership with the Smithsonian Institution to bring traveling exhibits to small communities. Watch for our next exhibit, "Key Ingredients," which arrives in October.

The Grand Endeavor

OHC Celebrates 40 Years

By David Pettyjohn, OHC Assistant Director

We wish you success in this endeavor, and look forward to the significant contribution the project can make to the humanities.—*Wallace B. Edgerton, Acting Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities, March 12, 1971*

The date was March 12, 1971. Gas was 40 cents a gallon and the Dow Jones Industrial Average was under 900. A letter delivered to the Mercantile Building in downtown Oklahoma City—a building which no longer stands—carried the auspicious news announcing that Oklahoma was one of only six states selected to participate in an experiment to bring humanities programs to the local level. After 40 years, we'd call the experiment a rousing success—but first a little backstory . . .

The story of the Council actually begins six years prior. On June 23, 1965, Governor Henry Bellmon signed into law a bill that created the Oklahoma Arts and Humanities Council. Designed to “bring culture to deprived areas,” the council allowed the state to apply for federal funds. When President Lyndon Johnson signed the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act later that year—which established the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) as separate, independent agencies—Oklahoma was one of the few states with an arts *and* humanities council. This distinction played a very important role as the NEH explored how “state-based humanities could be established.”

Mercantile Building, OHC's first home. Courtesy Oklahoma Historical Society

June 23, 1965



Governor Henry Bellmon signs into law a bill creating an Oklahoma arts and humanities council designed to “bring culture to deprived areas.”

September 29, 1965



President Lyndon Johnson signs into law the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965, which establishes the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

November 1970

Oklahoma Humanities Task Force is established with nine members: Allie Beth Martin, Tulsa City-County Library; John Dunn, OETA; Dr. Edward Katzenbach, Oklahoma University; Dr. Donald W. Dillon, Oklahoma Arts & Humanities Council; Mrs. James Gille, Bartlesville; W.A. McGalliard, Oklahoma Department of Libraries Board; James N. Miles, Institute of the Great Plains; Dr. James Smurl, Oklahoma State University; and Peter King, Oklahoma Arts & Humanities Council.



One of the options explored by NEH was to authorize state arts councils to double as humanities councils. Since our state had some humanities disciplines included in its authorization language, Oklahoma was selected, along with Maine, to implement this model. In the fall of 1970, representatives from Oklahoma met with NEH staff to discuss a state-based effort in humanities programming. As a result of that meeting, a task force was formed and a proposal requesting grant support to fund the Oklahoma Humanities Task Force was submitted in January 1971. The formal announcement of Oklahoma's selection arrived two months later.

Jim Vore, a native of Dacoma, Oklahoma, was hired as program director to guide Oklahoma's humanities programming. After only two days on the job, *The Daily Oklahoman* attempted to describe Vore's role:

Unlike the physicist, the end product of whose work often is readily recognizable by the public—a rocket, for instance—the scholar is working toward more intangible ends in the forms of “awareness” and “understanding” that are not so easily grasped. Vore hopes to interpret the scholars by making what they say relevant to what is happening in the world today (June 3, 1971).

Throughout that first year, the Oklahoma Humanities Task Force funded programs to “bridge the gap between the scholars and the public.” At the end of FY 1971, the task force had funded 31 grants totaling \$55,271. These grants supported programming in 55 communities and reached an audience of 286,251 people. Funded projects included the Altus Humanities Series, the Tulsa City-County Library Series, and a Bartlesville program on “Duty and Responsibility: Two Forms of Justice.”

After 40 years, OHC is still funding grants in local communities. It would be easy to call to mind that old adage: “The more things change, the more they stay the same,” but that wouldn't be accurate. The work of the Oklahoma Humanities Council reaches far beyond its original “adult constituency” and scholar-led discussions of public policy. In four decades OHC has established a vast humanities network, serving small towns and bustling cities with programs that reach beyond academia into the heartland of our state.

Today, a gallon of gas is \$2.50; the Dow is over 11,000 [*at press time*]. In our most recent annual report, we noted that OHC funded a total of \$250,839 in grants across the state. Through those grants and our own council-led programs, we supported 797 projects, reaching an audience of 486,277 individuals—young and old—in classrooms, libraries, museums, and community centers: for book fairs and Smithsonian exhibits, bus tours and heritage festivals, school essay contests and poet laureate readings. In short, we strive to bring the best of the humanities to all 77 Oklahoma counties.

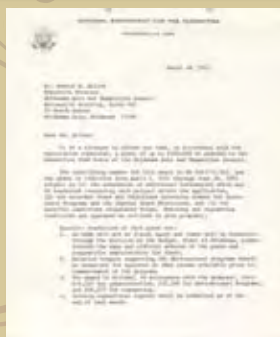
The people served in the first 40 years of our endeavor have glimpsed the value and the power of the humanities. Yes, issues change; but one thing remains constant: OHC will continue to address a wide range of cultural needs and to foster a better understanding of the human experience—through the humanities.

We hope you enjoy these few pages as we pause to look back at all we've accomplished—better yet, join us under the tent or in your local library or museum for one of our many programs across the state. Come be a part of our next 40 years! ■



McAlpine Center, OHC's current home

March 12, 1971



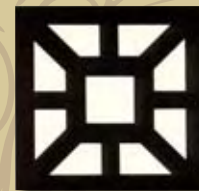
NEH awards \$100,000 grant to the Oklahoma Arts & Humanities Council to establish a state-based humanities program: \$20,000 for administration, \$35,000 for the development of motivational programs, and \$45,000 for regnants.

June 1, 1973



To indicate a more permanent entity, the Oklahoma Humanities Task Force is renamed the Oklahoma Humanities Committee.

July 1, 1983



Oklahoma Humanities Committee is renamed Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities to confirm “the stability and commitment to continue statewide support for the humanities.”

In 1965 Congress enacted the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act, establishing the National Endowment for the Humanities as an independent grant-making agency of the federal government to support scholarship, education, and public programs in the humanities. In 1971, the NEH established the first six state humanities councils in Oklahoma, Maine, Georgia, Missouri, Oregon, and Wyoming. The founding members of the original council (known as the Oklahoma Humanities Task Force) were Jim Smurl, Professor of Humanities at Oklahoma State University; Jim Miles, Director of the Museum of the Great Plains; Allie Beth Martin, Director of the Tulsa City-County Library and President of the American Library Association; and John Dunn, Director of the Oklahoma Educational Television Authority (OETA). In the spring of 1971, I had just finished my master's degree at Oklahoma State University and was selected to be the council's first executive director.

Since there were no previous models for a statewide program in the humanities, the initial work of the council was to establish a firm foundation for such a program. We expanded its membership, established a review process for making grant awards to organizations, institutions, and community groups throughout the state, and developed grant guidelines.

The original NEH program required that the humanities be central to all aspects of the council's program: humanities scholars were to be involved centrally in each project; all grants were to support projects dealing

with public policy issues and had to focus on a statewide theme, and all projects had to involve the adult, out-of-school public. These original program requirements certainly created a challenge to the early work of the council.

Essentially, the state program was an experiment to test the premise that the humanities could contribute to an understanding of public policy concerns. The program assumed that scholars in the humanities could have a useful and fruitful discussion with the general public on issues that affect all Americans. In those initial years, the council funded numerous reading and discussion programs, lecture series, conferences, seminars, institutes, and media programs where citizens and scholars came together to explore a variety of issues related to the environment, the criminal justice system, religious diversity, civil rights, education, taxation, health care, rural and urban economic development, and many other issues of public interest.

During my five year tenure with the council, it was truly an honor and privilege to work with an incredible array of remarkable, dedicated volunteer members. I traveled to all corners of the state to encourage humanities scholars and members of the public to engage in informed, reasoned, dispassionate debates and discussion of

issues of public concern, and I remain convinced that this initial focus of the state program was a worthy endeavor indeed. ■



1971 CELEBRATING 40 YEARS 2011



Laying the Foundation: 1971-1976

By Jim Vore, Former Executive Director

September 1983



The newsletter publication *Humanities INTERVIEW* premieres, featuring an interview with University of Oklahoma Professor Paul Ruggiers, University of Oklahoma President William Banowsky, and Oklahoma State University's Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Smith L. Holt. The three examine the state of the humanities in Oklahoma higher education.

1985



The Council provides funding for TRACKS, a traveling exhibit service administered by the Oklahoma Museums Association.

1986

Let's Talk About It, a reading and discussion program developed by the American Library Association, premieres with 14 programs in Oklahoma libraries. Renamed *Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma!* in 1989, the program now serves rural and urban communities with more than 40 programs annually.



When I joined the staff of the Oklahoma Humanities Council, there was an aura of mission: everyone involved had an intense belief that humanities disciplines could bring perspective to public policy issues and improve discourse in the heated political atmosphere created by debates over the Equal Rights Amendment, the Vietnam War, and Civil Rights issues. At the time the Council began its work, no one really knew the most effective way to produce public programs in the humanities. Our first program formats were lectures and panel discussions addressing public policy. We soon realized that these formats were not going to reach a broad audience.

We also faced the challenge that some Christian denominations confused the humanities with secular humanism. In one dramatic incident, a protest forced a town's library to refuse a grant to work with a historian who was also an ordained minister. We came to realize that an exhibition format would diffuse tension and reduce confusion. We first funded a traveling exhibit on Will Rogers during the seventy-fifth anniversary of Oklahoma statehood. The very historian whose appearance had been cancelled originated the idea, prepared the exhibit, and proposed to drive it across the state in a trailer truck. The exhibit was so popular that, on an occasion when the truck broke down between scheduled appearances, people insisted on viewing it parked on the roadside.

That experience led us to make grants to museums interested in sponsoring "blockbuster" type exhibitions and to those who wanted to develop smaller exhibits that would travel across the state. These traveling exhibits reached

many towns and audiences that had previously seemed unattainable. Our next new format was the Chautauqua program, which colleagues in other Great Plains states had developed. Each summer, scholars traveled to portray historical figures "under the big tent" in two cities in each state. Oklahoma joined the group in the early 1990s and also developed a locally-based Chautauqua with the Arts and Humanities Council of Tulsa. These programs were effective in engaging audiences that would never have been enticed to a lecture or public forum.

During the Reagan administration and again during the 1990s, the early commitment of Congress to provide federal funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities (which in turn funds state humanities councils) began to be challenged. In the early '80s, the Council had just become an important source of funding for Oklahoma organizations. We were told to seek other sources of funding to perpetuate our work, so we reached out to our state's business community, which could see the impact Council programming had on their local communities. By the '90s, we were experienced in private fundraising but also saw the need to interest our state government in funding the programs that had become so much a part of the fabric of community life in Oklahoma.



1971 **CELEBRATING 40 YEARS** 2011

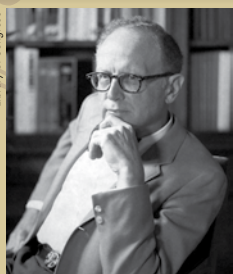


A Look Back: 1976-2006

By Dr. Anita R. May, Former Executive Director

Throughout my thirty years of working with the Council, we never backed away from challenges, whether programmatic or monetary. This determination is rooted in our firm belief that the humanities are vital to fulfilling Thomas Jefferson's admonition that "democracy demands wisdom and vision of its citizens." The Council continues this focus and I am proud to watch it grow and thrive. ■

February 28, 1986



Daniel J. Boorstin delivers the inaugural Oklahoma Lecture in the Humanities in the Chapman Auditorium of the Tulsa Performing Arts Center.

June 29, 1990

Chautauqua arrives in Oklahoma as Frederick hosts the Great Plains Chautauqua. Characters include Thomas Paine, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Abigail Adams, Alexander Hamilton, and Henry Adams. In the next 21 years, Chautauqua makes 77 appearances in 23 communities.



February 1998

Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities is renamed the Oklahoma Humanities Council to make the organization and its projects more recognizable and attractive to larger audiences.



What would happen if our organization ceased to exist? As we contemplate the last forty years of our work we can readily answer that thousands of people would not have access to cultural programming that enriches their lives, that promotes civic pride and sense of community, and that encourages them to be more informed citizens.

When I came to the Council as executive director, I saw immediately that OHC has a unique status in our state. As the affiliate for the National Endowment for the Humanities, we partner with and expand the potential of other nonprofit organizations by offering grant support for their programming. Often these programs would not take place if it were not for the funds we grant.

Museum exhibits, film festivals, lectures, gallery talks, websites, digitization projects, and book discussions all benefit from our grant program. Because we ask our grantees to match the funds we grant through cash or in-kind expenses, we know that local communities are committed to cultural programming and receive both economic as well as intellectual benefits.

We are also unique as an organization in that we recognize the work of other organizations and individuals in a statewide awards program. The



Staying Relevant

By Ann Thompson
OHC Executive Director

Oklahoma Humanities Awards draw attention to the commitment necessary to share knowledge with the public. These award recipients understand the importance of lifelong learning and thoughtful discussion. We have initiated the annual awards because our Council applauds the dedication required for this kind of public service.

The mission of the Oklahoma Humanities Council has remained constant throughout its history: to engage the general public with the value of the humanities, to bridge the divide between academia and citizens at large. Over time we have devised programs to facilitate that mission and have touched many lives. A new program to our Council is *Literature and Medicine*, a book discussion group for medical professionals that assists them in building empathy for their patients. Another is Museum on Main Street, a partnership we have with the Smithsonian Institution to bring traveling exhibits to smaller communities.

Whatever the vehicle, the Oklahoma Humanities Council will continue to strive to make humanities disciplines relevant to the citizens of Oklahoma. We are poised for success, through new programs and grants to other organizations, and we rededicate our efforts to serving Oklahoma for the next forty years. ■

Fall 1999

OHC launches its website:
www.okhumanitiescouncil.org.

**Humanities
Network**

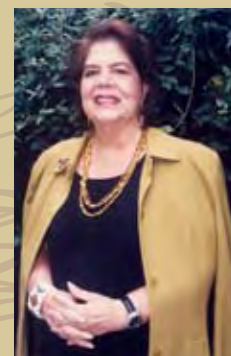
November 1999



University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma hosts a planning seminar on the Clemente Course. Established by Earl Shorris, the course demonstrates how the humanities can empower and change people's lives. The meeting results in the implementation and OHC funding of Clemente Courses for the Kiowa and Cherokee tribes. OHC ultimately funds additional Clemente Courses for the Chickasaw and Wichita tribes, as well as Oklahoma City's Hispanic community.

February 22, 2007

Wilma Mankiller receives the inaugural Oklahoma Humanities Award. Later recipients include N. Scott Momaday, Charles Banks Wilson, H.E. "Gene" Rainbolt, and Dr. Peter C. Rollins. In 2009, the awards are expanded with six categories to more fully recognize contributions to the understanding of the humanities in Oklahoma.



Assignment: Define “The Humanities”

By David Pettyjohn, OHC Assistant Director

The name Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities can conjure up fears of humanism, atheism, hedonism and other names for Godlessness and sin.—
The Daily Oklahoman, July 29, 1984

From the inception of the National Endowment for the Humanities and creation of individual state humanities councils, and throughout the 40-year history of the Oklahoma Humanities Council, no facet of our work has been more challenging than to address that inevitable question: “What are the humanities?” The answer is not a simple one and is far more than the list of disciplines that make up the humanities: history, literature, film studies, comparative religion, art criticism, ethics, philosophy . . .



In September 1971—four months into Oklahoma’s humanities program—director Jim Vore stated, “Humanities seems to be a big word with intangible meanings . . . But when you go to Western Oklahoma and discuss the impact of the Dust Bowl on people’s lives, you’re talking about the humanities.” In their review of that experimental first year, the Oklahoma Humanities Task Force stated:

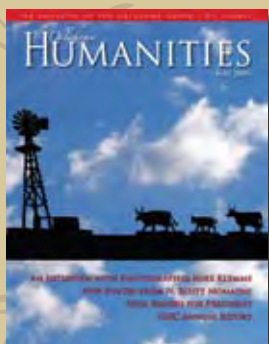
“The term ‘public activities in the humanities’ is not understood easily by either the academic humanist or the general adult public. Special efforts must be made to . . . develop an articulate adult constituency who recognizes the merits of the program, regardless of their philosophy of state based programs.”

At times, the challenge has been not only to define what the humanities *are* but also to distinguish what they *are not*. The following anecdote has often been recounted (and no doubt embellished over 40 years of re-telling) and is a favorite at orientations for new OHC board members: In the late 1970s, the Oklahoma Humanities Committee launched a series of scholar-in-residence programs. Referred to as “humanists,” these scholars were charged with developing humanities-based programs tailored to specific participating communities. One day, a concerned citizen visited the Committee’s office to ask, “Just what do you think you’re doing sending those anti-religion humanists into our good community?” Once she had vented her frustrations and paused to look around the office, she noticed a poster of King Tut. This prompted a series of questions and, after hearing the

director’s explanation of the humanities—that they were not ‘anti-religion’—and details on the Committee’s mission, the woman concluded that all was well, that she “was certainly in favor of *culture*.”

Continued on page 24

May 13, 2008



Oklahoma HUMANITIES magazine debuts, featuring an interview with photographer Mike Klemme and new poetry from Oklahoma State Poet Laureate N. Scott Momaday.

October 11, 2008

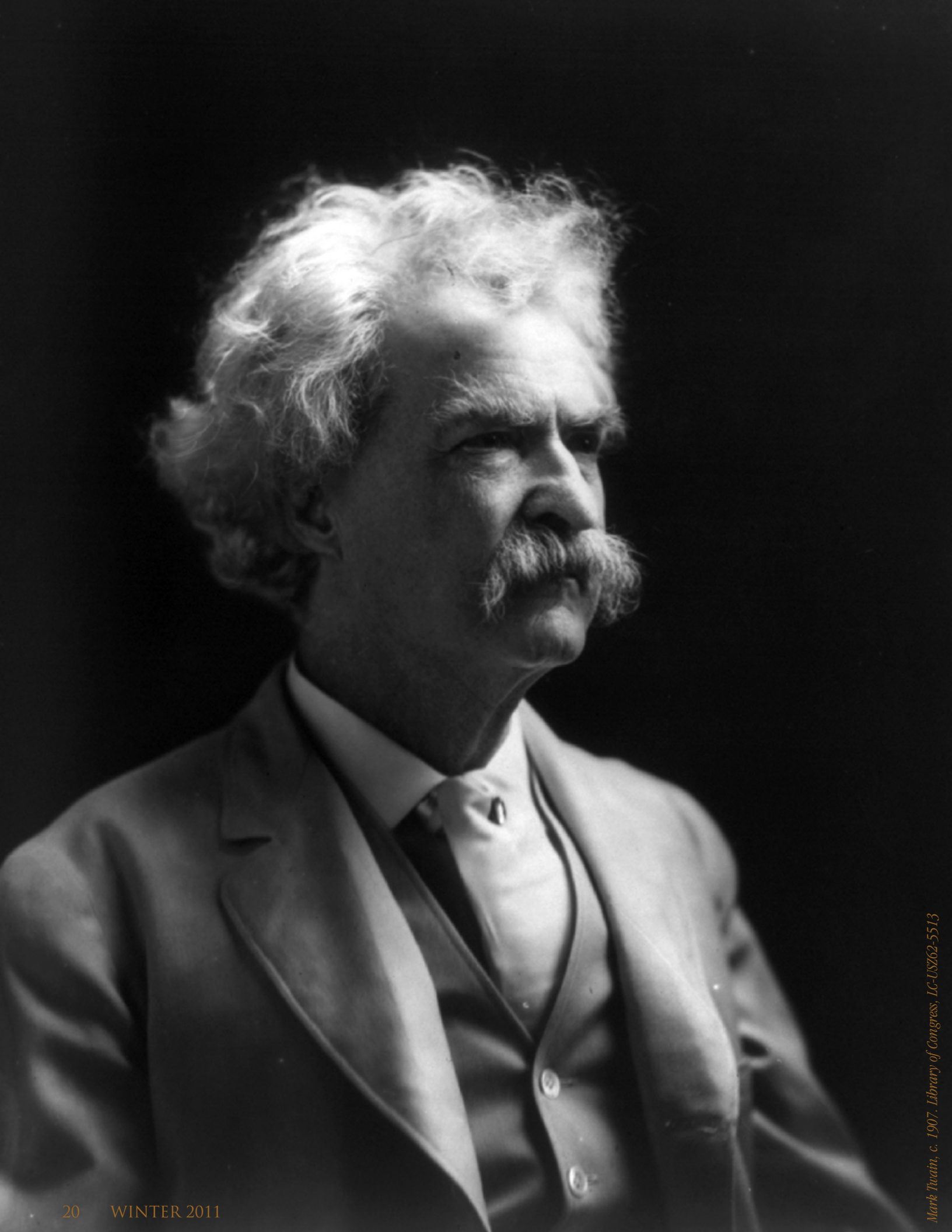


Sara Paretsky delivers the inaugural Oklahoma Conversation in the Humanities.

June 27, 2009

Museum on Main Street, a project of the Smithsonian Institution, arrives in Oklahoma with the launch of *Journey Stories* at the Creek Council House Museum in Okmulgee.





The Enduring Popularity of

Mark Twain

By David W. Levy

David W. Levy is David Ross Boyd Professor of American History, Emeritus, at the University of Oklahoma. He is a former Chair of the OHC Board. This article is drawn from his recent book, Mark Twain: The Divided Mind of America's Best-Loved Writer (Prentice Hall, 2010).

Last year marked the hundredth anniversary of Mark Twain's death and, everywhere in the world where books are known, historians, critics, and thoughtful readers paused to consider his legacy. The extraordinary attention given to the anniversary underscores the astonishing persistence of Twain's popularity, the extent to which readers around the world—and especially in America—continue to regard him with admiration and affection.

Though his work has been read by young and old for decades, Twain himself was uncertain whether his fame would endure. At times he was capable of a boisterous, if jocular, confidence. In 1906, for example, he published some chapters from his autobiography in the *North American Review*. He told readers, "I intend that this autobiography shall become a model for all future autobiographies . . . and I also intend that it shall be read and admired a good many centuries because of its form and method." To a friend he predicted that the autobiography "would live a couple of thousand years without any effort and would then take a fresh start and live the rest of the time."

More often, however, he was not so sure. "Fame is a vapor; popularity an accident," he confided to his notebook, "the only earthly certainty is oblivion." In another unpublished fragment he wrote: "We struggle, we rise, we tower in the zenith a brief and gorgeous moment, with the adoring eyes of the nations upon us, then the lights go out, oblivion closes around us, our glory fades and vanishes, a few generations drift by, and naught remains but a mystery and a name."

If he was worried about "oblivion closing in" and his "glory fading and vanishing," the worry was misplaced. While other famous writers of his generation have drifted into deepening obscurity, Twain still manages to keep his hold on the imaginations and affections of readers. This fact is particularly noteworthy because, for a full century now, he has not been that visible and lively presence whose daily activities and pointed comments on current events attracted and enthralled and amused his contemporaries.

In the last decade there have been at least fifty books published with his name in their titles; they have ranged from superb full-length biographies to narrow studies of some aspect of his work or life. There are more than

half a dozen sizable "encyclopedias," "companions," or "handbooks" devoted entirely to Twain. In the last ten years, Twain's writing has inspired hundreds of articles, theses, and dissertations, and three scholarly journals are devoted exclusively to studies related to him. But it is not only scholars that exhibit continuing interest. There are in print, at this moment, around 250 separate editions of his works, a certain indication that there remains a lively market for his writing among everyday readers.

Entering "Mark Twain" on YouTube produces literally thousands of entries: audiobooks, radio features, television broadcasts. From the earliest days of silent film, his books and stories have appeared regularly on the screen: musical adaptations of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Connecticut Yankee*, animated cartoons, an operetta based on the "Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." And there is as much fascination with the man as with his writing. His distinctive personality has offered ample material for impersonators, most notably Hal Holbrook, whose "Mark Twain Tonight" has delighted audiences for fifty years. In 2001, millions watched filmmaker Ken Burns' four-hour documentary on the life and influence of this great American author. In short, there seems to be little danger of Mark Twain's fame fading in the foreseeable future.

If it is relatively easy to document Twain's continuing popularity, it is somewhat more difficult to account for it. How much weight, for example, should be given to his striking physical appearance—that moustache, that wild hair, those bushy eyebrows and famous white suits? Does the fact that he is more readily recognized than other writers, more recognized even than most American presidents, bestow upon him a permanent presence, an illusion of acquaintanceship, a familiarity that contributes to his lasting place in the American psyche?

Surely part of Twain's continuing durability is due to the fact that he appeals to different sorts of readers. For a century he has commanded the regard of at least three groups of devotees—three communities of readers who love him for different reasons and may not have much in common besides their affection for him. One group consists of those who respond to his portrayals of a youthful and more innocent America. Many of them, one supposes, were introduced to Tom and Huck as children. They see Twain as the chief chronicler not only of the antics of boys but also of a simpler, happier, more congenial nation—a nation of rural settings, neighborly villages, and a closeness to nature. He brings to mind an America before big cities and factories and wretched tenements and lets us recall the spaciousness of the country, the freedom of rafting down the great river. To some extent, such readers are able to preserve the nostalgia only by minimizing—by

regarding as somehow alien to the “real” America—the violence, feuding, chicanery and villainy, the hypocritical religion and human slavery that Twain also included in his portrayals of that time.

A second group of admirers see Twain as one of America’s greatest humorists, a man who, by virtue of his flashing wit, regaled generations around the globe. He was the comic genius who produced priceless sketches of jumping frogs, tourists pillaging the Holy Land, knights in armor riding to the rescue on bicycles. He told stories about sitting on the clothes of bathing Hawaiian maidens to guard against theft and about his military service in an outfit that specialized in retreating. He showed how a couple of con men befuddled the Arkansas yokels and how a sly youngster got a fence whitewashed.

He skewered James Fenimore Cooper and John D. Rockefeller and Mary Baker Eddy and Michelangelo and romantic novels and sentimental poetry and recitation day at school and the German language. He was forever firing off those hilarious one-liners that put the nation into uproarious laughter: “Golf is a good walk spoiled”; “The report of my death was an exaggeration”; “We

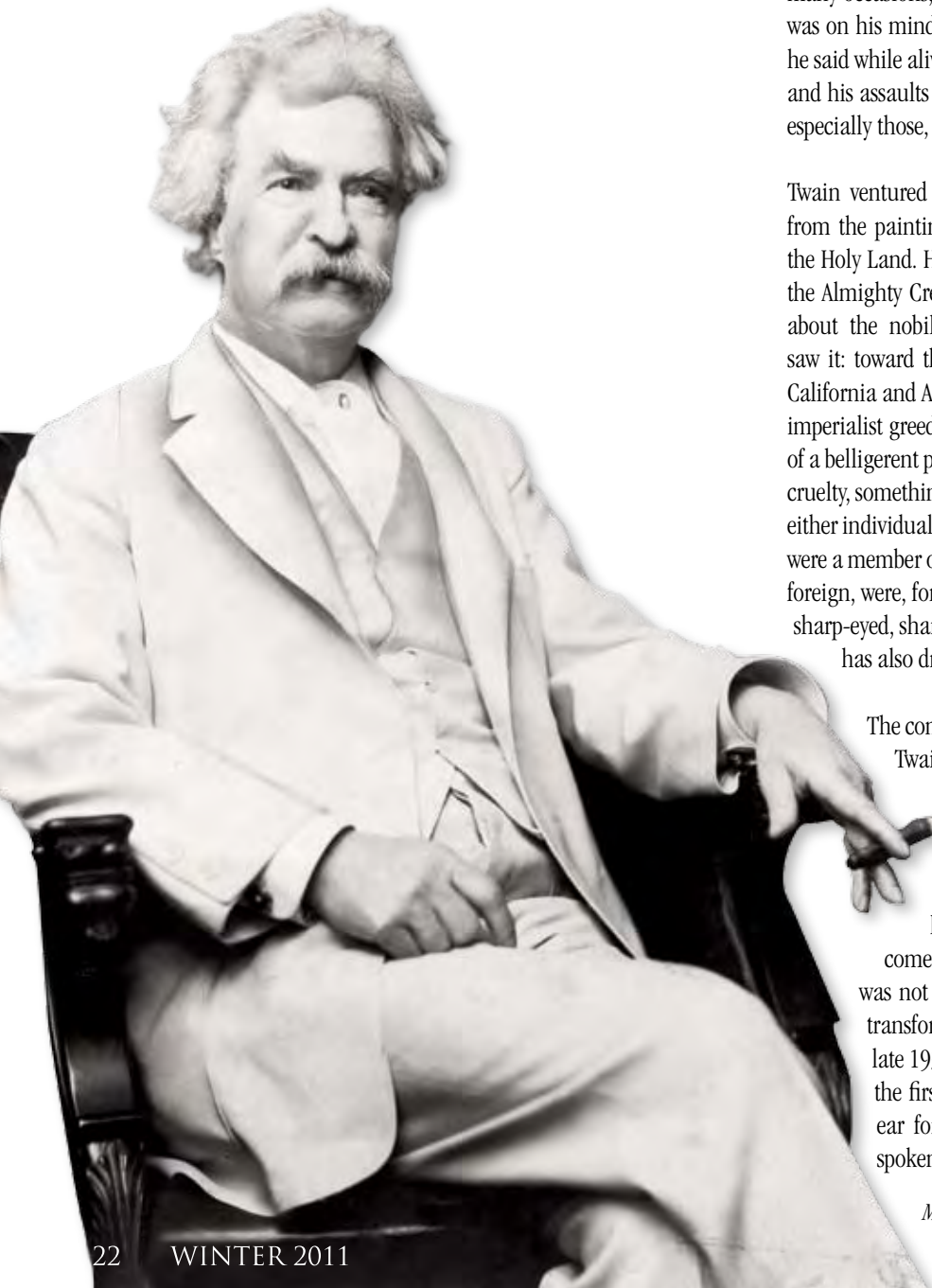
all grumble about the weather, but nothing is done about it”; “France has neither winter nor summer nor morals”; “It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them.” Nothing was out of bounds—the ignorance of the rube, the pretensions of the sophisticate, the foibles of the author himself. For some of his admirers, it is this irrepressible humor that is Mark Twain’s most precious trait and the chief reason for their devotion to him.

He has also gathered a following among those who admire the boldness and honesty of his social philosophy, his aesthetic judgments, his political and religious views. Worry over book sales or the inhibitions of his wife sometimes led him to hold his tongue and, as his views grew more radical and cynical with advancing years, he increasingly postponed publication of some outrageous piece of social commentary until he was safely dead. “I speak from the grave rather than with my living tongue for a good reason,” he began his *Autobiography*. “I can speak thence freely.” But it was not his prudence that was particularly remarkable; it was his willingness, on so many occasions, to defy public opinion and give fearless expression to what was on his mind. In any case, as time passed the distinction between what he said while alive and what was revealed after his death largely evaporated, and his assaults on conventional opinion have endeared him to readers—especially those, one suspects, who tend to agree with his views.

Twain ventured where many were too timid to go. He withheld his awe from the paintings of the Old Masters and scorned the pious pilgrims to the Holy Land. He did not hesitate to lampoon the Holy Bible or to criticize the Almighty Creator or to belittle organized religion. He had no illusions about the nobility of the human race. He assailed injustice when he saw it: toward the poor, toward the working class, toward the Chinese in California and African Americans in the South, toward the native victims of imperialist greed around the world. To Mark Twain, the aroused patriotism of a belligerent populace was an instrument of moral blindness and reckless cruelty, something to be feared. Politicians could expect no mercy from him, either individually or as a class: “Suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.” Their policies, domestic or foreign, were, for him, just so many ready targets. And this irreverence, this sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued criticism, this merciless ridicule of human folly, has also drawn to him a community of loyal followers.

The common denominator for all these devotees, of course, is Mark Twain’s masterful way with words. Whether attracted to him for his capacity to stir nostalgia or out of a love of his wit or a sympathy with his unorthodoxy, they are drawn by his incomparable talent for expression. He had a knack for striking precisely the right tone—whether in lyrical descriptions of nature, suspenseful fiction, raucous comedy, or vitriolic polemic. He knew exactly the right word and was not shy about inventing a new one if he had to; he fearlessly transformed adjectives into adverbs and nouns into verbs. In the late 1930s, two scholars found around 4,000 words that Twain was the first to introduce in print. He was endowed with an uncanny ear for the English language, especially as that language was spoken and heard by Americans.

*Mark Twain, c. 1907, NY World-Telegraph & Sun Coll.
Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-112065*





*There was always something in him that fondly remembered
small town life and longed for the simplicity of Hannibal.*

For someone whose formal education ended at age twelve, this is the great unexplainable miracle of his genius, no doubt partly attributable to his intelligence, his endless curiosity and voracious reading, the legendary memory he honed as a young pilot on the Mississippi. Some of it, probably, is attributable to his long career as a journalist: the habits of close observation, the constant need to convert observations and ideas into writing, the daily practice of composition required by that profession. But even after the possible causes for his literary wizardry are duly proposed and enumerated, so unique and monumental a gift remains essentially mysterious, never entirely explicable.

Finally, there is something about Mark Twain's humanity that has touched his countrymen and gained their affection. And it is *not* his certitude, the unfailing usefulness of his teaching, any sort of reputation he has as a moral guide to American society; rather, it is his loveable fallibility, his uncertainty, his inconsistency and ambivalence. In common with thousands of his contemporaries, there were crucial questions he could never quite decide. Like them, he loved the natural world, but spent large parts of his mature life in big cities. Like them, he was fascinated by the potential for science and technology to bestow conveniences and enhance life, but he had his doubts—serious ones—about what the rush to machinery implied for valued, traditional ways of life. He indulged himself in his luxuries (good cigars, expensive clothes, big houses and up-to-date gadgets, elaborate vacations and endless travel), and at the same time there was always something in him that fondly remembered small town life and longed for the simplicity of Hannibal.

He loved the crowds and wanted his privacy. He ridiculed religion and hung around with clergymen; he ridiculed businessmen and liked to spend time with some of them. He was inexorably drawn to business ventures, but knew that such ventures were filled with peril. He was hypnotized by money and went to extraordinary lengths to get it, and he always understood the dangers that its pursuit posed to individuals and to civilizations. In short, he could never quite make up his mind about the modern world, never quite resolve whether the “advances” in civilization were really advances, whether “progress” was really progress.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that his work was relevant only to Americans of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Are those of us alive today any less troubled by the things that troubled him? Are we, too, not torn by our addiction to modern technologies and anxious about what those technologies mean to the world of nature, to the

future of our planet? Are we any less devoted than Twain and his Gilded Age contemporaries to the pursuit of private wealth? Are we any less nervous about how that single-minded quest shapes our characters, stunts our feelings of community, affects our national politics and policies?

To whatever extent Mark Twain navigated these enduring tensions and put these difficult questions into lasting words, he will remain one of America's most treasured writers. It was, therefore, fitting that the anniversary of his death got so much attention and inspired so much discussion. In his life and in his writing, he revealed important truths about his age—and about ours. ■



David Levy is a former OHC board member, appointed early in the Council's formative days in 1972, and again in 1994, when he served two 3-year terms, including a stint as Board Chair. David is among an illustrious crew of more than 250 people who have served on our Board during the last 40 years. These hard-working dedicated people represent every sector of our state and include scholars, business executives, community leaders, and governor's appointees. It is thanks to their service that OHC is a strong, vibrant organization and an essential part of celebrating and preserving the culture of our great state.

Assignment: Define “The Humanities” (*Continued from page 19*)

Sixteen years and a couple of name changes into our history, the Oklahoma Foundation for the Humanities was still struggling with misperceptions of the word and the mission. Note the following from the Fall 1987 issue of its publication, *Humanities INTERVIEW*:

From time to time, the Foundation office will get a call from someone wanting assistance in handling an injured pet, or from someone down on their luck and needing financial aid. Such situations need attention, certainly, but a commitment to humane concern and an understanding and appreciation of the humanities are quite different human interests.

In the inaugural issue of *Oklahoma HUMANITIES* in May 2008, scholar Lewis Parkhill stated that defining the humanities “is a question I’ve enjoyed exploring for over 30 years in conversations with students and colleagues . . . and with readers in many Oklahoma communities. It’s a question well worth asking and a challenging one to answer.” Indeed, the common refrain at annual conferences of state humanities councils is the ongoing challenge

to explain who we are and what we do—to define the humanities.

Perhaps the best explanation is also the simplest—the humanities help us understand the human experience. Comprehension lies not in the definition of the word, but in life-changing encounters with the humanities: discussing a film, viewing an exhibit, reading poetry in a classroom for the very first time. Our constituents say it best:

I learned that books bring people together.

I can now look at someone else's view with more tolerance.

We learned a lot about our state, our region, and ourselves.

My life is richer because of programs funded by OHC.

The work to define the humanities is a continuous challenge; but it is also rewarding. The opportunity to explain the importance of the humanities is a great honor. The humanities change lives—and we have four decades of success as evidence. ■



OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES AWARDS

HONORING EXCELLENCE IN THE HUMANITIES

2007



Chief Wilma Mankiller

2008



N. Scott Momaday

2009



Charles Banks Wilson

2010



H.E. "Gene" Rainbolt

2011



Dr. Peter C. Rollins

2011 AWARDEES:

Oklahoma Humanities Award
Dr. Peter C. Rollins
Emeritus Professor of English &
American/Film Studies
Oklahoma State University

Community Support Award
Inasmuch Foundation

Humanities in Education Award
American Indian Resource Center
Tulsa City-County Library

Community Leadership Award
Cindy Hulsey & Laura Raphael
Tulsa City-County Library

Outstanding OHC Project
Newkirk *Journey Stories*

Public Humanities Award
Dr. Sara Jane Richter
Dean, School of Liberal Arts
Oklahoma Panhandle State University

Trustees Award
Dr. Anita R. May
Former OHC Executive Director

TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW!

2011 Oklahoma Humanities Awards
February 24th, 6:30 p.m., Tickets \$75
Phone Reservations: (405) 235-0280
Purchase Online: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org
Event Location: Oklahoma History Center, OKC
RESERVATION DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 11TH



Bottom Shelf

By Jean Thompson

Blues



It's a luxury to be in the company of those who believe that fiction matters and is worth doing well.— *Jean Thompson*

STEPHEN KING edited the 2007 edition of *The Best American Short Stories (B.A.S.S.)*, and his introduction was printed in *The New York Times Book Review* as “What Ails the Short Story” (September 30, 2007). You should read it for yourself, but to summarize: Mr. King speaks with enthusiasm of the wonderful stories he read in his editor’s role, and with dismay about those he judged less wonderful. He describes a trip to a chain bookstore in search of literary magazines, finding them at last on an inglorious bottom shelf. He suggests that the regrettably small audience for short stories has led to stories mainly written for other writers (or editors or teachers), stories that are “airless, somehow, and self-referring” . . . “show-offy” . . . “self-important” . . . “guarded and self-conscious rather than gloriously open.”

The next day, 164 comments were posted on the *NYTimes* blog in response. The American short story’s reading audience is indeed tiny, and it was nice of the entire 164 of them to weigh in.

The comments fell into several camps. One faction dismissed Mr. King as a bad writer, a hack writer, and his criticism along with it. Some stuck up for the short story, its practitioners, and its supporting enterprise. Others pointed fingers at the culture itself for the short story’s presumed decline.

Are short stories on that bottom shelf because they deserve to be, having become too rarefied and precious? Have we failed to deliver the goods? If we’re so smart, why ain’t we rich?

Round up the usual suspects: capitalism, commercialism, crass marketing pressures, the rise of video amusements, the general dumbing down of American life. Still others, a considerable group, cheered Mr. King on. Many of these seemed personally offended and wounded by the existence of bad stories, and their language was notably harsher than Mr. King’s. Writers today are “artistically in-bred” . . . “pretentious.” Too many are products of “elitist” M.F.A. programs, where they lead “insular” lives, they “imitate the mediocrity in journals and classrooms,” spewing “ego-motivated dreck.” There was more, but that’s a fair sampling.

Any art form that can generate this much discussion and diatribe can’t be on life support yet. I find that heartening, even though I also feel somewhat implicated. I’ve published my stories in magazines large and small, but mostly small. In addition, I graduated from one of those elitist M.F.A. programs. “Elitist” is a killer insult, since just about the worst thing you can do in America is act like you’re smarter than somebody else. (For proof of this I refer you to the 2000 presidential election.) As a long-time teacher of creative writing, I’m part of the powerful cabal of professors, literary magazine editors, and critics dedicated to sucking the marrow out of the contemporary short story and celebrating its pallid, narcissistic shadow.

I’ve made two appearances in the *B.A.S.S.*, over gaps of many years, and I’ve been in the bridesmaid’s section, the list of Distinguished Stories in the

back of the book, a few times more. My last appearance in the anthology was about a decade ago. I offer this account of the story’s provenance as an instructive tale. It was first published in a little magazine (after being rejected by some larger ones), which paid me ten dollars for it. There was some testy correspondence back and forth about what constituted payment and what was insult, but in the end I cashed the check. Hey, ten bucks is ten bucks. In due course the story appeared in the *B.A.S.S.*, a happy thing. A couple of years passed before I met the guest editor who had chosen it. In fact, I’d been told, the editor had actually selected two of my stories (reading them blind, without the author’s name attached) and was told to pick one of these. But when I introduced myself and thanked him, he looked at me blankly, not remembering either me or my stories. Anyone still in awe of this sort of literary success may approach and touch the hem of my garment.

The short story has been declared dead more times than a horror movie villain and, in similar fashion, the corpse always rises to attack one more time. Two of the finalists for the 2007 National Book Awards are short story collections—one by Lydia Davis, another by Jim Shepherd, one of Mr. King’s *B.A.S.S.* picks. Bonnie Jo Campbell’s story collection *American Salvage* was a 2009 finalist. The creature lives! Before addressing Mr. King’s bottom shelf observations, let us stipulate that bad stories of the sort he describes

do walk the earth, are even published and praised. Literature can exhibit all the sins of human character—pride, anger, sloth, etc.—plus a number of its own: sloppy, tired, inexact or overblown language, unoriginality, lack of verisimilitude, manipulation, sketchiness, glibness—I’m on a roll here—dullness, confusion, disorganization, inauthentic feeling. And more. I recognize the type of story that Mr. King describes as “show-offy,” in which the writer seems desperate to get our attention like the loud talker at a party. Or the loud talker juggling dinner plates while riding a unicycle. Such cleverness fatigues me, although I do admire the artful cleverness of Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections* (a novel, yes, but with some of its chapters published as stories), which manages to keep all those plates aloft and whirling throughout.

Back now to the central question. Are short stories on that bottom shelf because they deserve to be, having become too rarefied and precious? Have we failed to deliver the goods? If we’re so smart, why ain’t we rich? Who among us wouldn’t like the widest possible readership, bushels of money, universal critical reverence? (Any two out of the three wouldn’t be bad.) Some of the audience problem really is a matter of faulty distribution. Several *NYTimes* bloggers wrote in to direct people to the Internet, where so much of news, commerce, and now art has migrated, to websites and literary blogs dedicated to the promotion of short fiction.

But beyond that, what to do? These days, editors who reject a book or a story, and I have reason to know this, often fall back on the formulation that they didn't "love" the work, another complaint that's difficult to answer. Why do you not love us? Do we make too many demands, challenge people in ways that other, flabbier entertainments do not? Should we give our readers (or non-readers) a good scolding? One recoils from the notion of writing that is championed as being good for you, like cough syrup.

When readers complain that short stories leave them unsatisfied, confused, that they lack drama or closure, the writer must acknowledge this response. The great imperative of fiction, as Mr. King correctly notes, is making the reader care passionately about what comes next. But it's also true that the world is complex, ambiguous, difficult; it often makes us feel lost and fearful. Any fiction that attempts to do justice to those complexities can seem disquieting in turn if what one really wants is a clear prompt—how to react, how to feel—like a television newscaster's intoning about a tragic vehicle accident. For the same experience rendered new and strange, read Denis Johnson's story "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" (another National Book Award nominee for his novel *Tree of Smoke*).

Mr. King laments the era when stories filled *The Saturday Evening Post*, as opposed to their current shrunken estate. I'm old enough to remember *The Saturday Evening Post* (I was a kid who read everything), and none of its stories remain in my mind, although the Dickens, Chekhov, Ray Bradbury, Willa Cather, and Hawthorne I read at the same time have done so. (Okay, I was a weird kid.) *The Post* stories were for the most part sturdy and comfortable, like those Norman Rockwell covers, but I can't say I mourn their passing. The relationship between excellence and audience is not necessarily an inverse one—we need art that entertains and entertainment that partakes of artistry—but evaluating fiction as product or commodity, like tubes of toothpaste sold, is not helpful. Mainstream, jetstream, stream of consciousness—you pay your money and you take your choice, and some of us out there are real bargains.

Many *NYTimes* bloggers offered their own lists of good short story writers as rebuttal to the notion that the story is a minor art form. Some number of them mentioned Flannery O'Connor as an exemplar, often with the regret that they don't write them like that any more. I'd like to imagine that some of these were former students of mine, to whom I fed heavy doses of "A Good Man Is Hard To Find," "Greenleaf," "Everything That Rises Must Converge," and others of her stories. Her first published story, "The Geranium," appeared in 1946 in a small literary magazine, *Accent*, edited and published by a group of creative writing teachers at the University of Illinois. I have a copy of that issue, which also contains a story by Katherine Anne Porter and a poem by Richard Wilbur. It's the drabest of little brown books, about 6" x 9", thinner than the Dean and Deluca catalogue I got in the mail the other day, and without any hint of graphic embellishment. On its back cover New Directions advertises "7 Unusual Books," one of them Nathanael West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*, available for \$1.50.


Most art is failed art when you think about it. It misses by inches or by miles, it grasps at an ideal, falls short, and rallies to try again. Flannery O'Connor revised "The Geranium" as a better story, "Judgement Day." We should not be sorry that the lesser version saw the light or that short stories

and their readerships carry on, despite all the forces arrayed against them. Publishers greet short story collections without much enthusiasm, and this too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. I've published five books of them by now, and I've had my share of favorable notice. Still, I'm only "popular in certain circles," like Aunt Rose in Grace Paley's "Goodbye and Good Luck." Short story writers are used to swimming upstream against the odds. Heap scorn upon us for our fusty, stubborn ways. We are so flattered that you noticed.

As for Mr. King's wish for stories that have the impact of "a big hot meteor screaming down from the Kansas sky," I lived in Kansas for a little while, in Wichita, and though I never saw a meteor, the sky was busy with all manner of other things. Jets from McConnell Air Force Base deafened us, tornadoes approached and retreated, cold air funnel sightings sent us down to the basement precincts for anti-climactic waits. Even on days when the sky was largely vacant, a baked blue or grim gray, there was always plenty going on, more than enough for stories. There were hearts aflame and hearts broken, alcoholic crises, marital crises, alcoholic/marital crises. The life nourishes the art, and for the artist, life resonates in ways oblique, mysterious, unexpected, so that our best work is a revelation even to ourselves.

Those of us who love the short story love its capacity for such surprise, as well as its elegant compression, its craft, its many shapes and modes, as various as types of birds: hunting hawk or meadowlark, fancy chicken, migratory seabird, Woody Woodpecker cartoon, stylized origami crane. Imagine a whole flock of great stories set loose at once to trill or squawk or soar. Now that's a sky I'd like to see. ■

Look for Jean Thompson's new novel, *The Year We Left Home* (Simon & Schuster), available in May. Thompson's short story collection *Who Do You Love* (Simon & Schuster, 2000) was a National Book Award finalist. She has taught creative writing at colleges and universities, including the University Of Illinois, Reed College, and Northwestern University. This essay is revised and excerpted from Thompson's October 12, 2007, post on the Maud Newton literary blog (<http://maudnewton.com/blog/>).



1971 CELEBRATING 40 YEARS 2011

Literature and discussion are a mainstay of OHC programming. *Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma!* has been one of the Council's most popular programs since its introduction in 1985. On average, OHC funds 40 LTAIO series a year. At five sessions (and books discussed) per series, that's 200 discussion programs per year and almost four per week! We're adding to that great tradition with a new program, *Literature and Medicine*, targeted to healthcare professionals. The idea is to increase empathy through reading and conversation.

CALENDAR

Don't miss these outstanding events supported by OHC grants. You can find hundreds of cultural activities and free public events on our website: www.okhumanitiescouncil.org/calendar.

SYMPOSIUM

Technology & the Humanities Symposium

February 23

UCO College of Liberal Arts
100 N. University Dr., Edmond
Information: 405/974-5614



How does technology, particularly the Internet, change the way we communicate? How does this proliferation change our understanding of the humanities? Dr. Richard Miller, international expert on the digital age and the humanities in the 21st century, will be the featured speaker at the University of Central Oklahoma's interdisciplinary symposium.

NATIVE CULTURE ACTIVITIES



*Weaving Traditions:
For the Community &
Its Native Population*
February-July
Jacobson House Native Art Center
609 Chautauqua Ave., Norman
Information: 405/366-1667
www.jacobsonhouse.com

This series of public programs relates to Oklahoma Native American tribes and culture, including Kiowa language classes, powwow songs and traditions, basket weaving classes, and beadwork classes. Participants will be guided toward a deeper understanding of cultural practices and issues related to Native identity, community etiquette, gender roles, and the impact of historical conflict and geographic place. Activities for all age groups. Contact the Center for dates and times.

EXHIBIT

OKLAHOMA CITY! *Sooner or Later*

Opens March 1
Municipal Bldg., 2nd Floor Lobby
200 N. Walker Ave., OKC
Information: 405/297-2391



Through photos, documents, maps, and text, this exhibit explores important stories behind the development of The City of Oklahoma City, its form of government, and maturation of City services. History and folklore will be represented from the city's first settlement in 1889 through the present.

The exhibit will open at a special ceremony on March 1 to celebrate the 74th Anniversary of the Municipal Building opening. Dr. Bob Blackburn, historian, author, and Executive Director of the Oklahoma Historical Society will be the speaker. The building and exhibit are open to the public free of charge from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

EXHIBIT

Allen True's West
February 4-May 15
National Cowboy &
Western Heritage Museum
1700 NE 63rd St., OKC
Information: 405/478-2250
www.nationalcowboymuseum.org



The Mountain Pony Has the Climbing Ability of the Goat, 1908, periodical article and illustration by Allen Tupper True. Courtesy Julie Parella Anderies.

Allen True is regarded as Colorado's premier native-born artist of the early 20th century. This exhibit showcases 42 works from the three phases of True's career: illustrator, easel painter, and muralist. Several works on loan from the True family will be exhibited for the first time.

“Look both ways.”

Remember that one? It’s one of those admonitions you hear from your parents and inevitably find yourself repeating with your own kids—along with “Be careful,” “Wipe your feet,” and “Don’t slam the door!”

Look both ways. On the surface it implies looking side-to-side, like watching for oncoming traffic. But we can get caught up in that side-to-side watchfulness (or paranoia) with work, the neighbors, with family, too: “*What’s he doing to get ahead?*” “*Are my cookies as yummy as hers?*” “*Have I done enough?*” Sometimes looking side-to-side is the best we can do when life is too hectic to venture beyond our own nose.

But history and, yes, “the humanities” tell us there’s another, more fruitful option for looking both ways: backward and forward. Taking a look back, at our own experience and that of others, helps us make informed decisions. Tolerance, justice, and imagination—those things are essential for looking and planning ahead, and they’re developed through exploration of the world’s knowledge, literature, and history.

We’ve dedicated this issue to a look back at our past 40 years: the programming successes, the lives enriched as a result, and the people who have helped us along the way. Now it’s time to look ahead.

So what’s in store for our little publication? At the very least we can promise you topics that are sure to prompt conversation—like “politics and the pulpit”: where does one end and the other begin? Or “the downside of math-and-science”: how the emphasis on technology and industry in the classroom (at the expense of the humanities) is narrowing, not expanding, opportunities for students. Or “the wisdom of Native culture”: how discovery and interpretation of the journals of one Choctaw elder hold the secrets of tribal law and a dying language.

And that’s just what we have planned for our next issue! Beyond that, “the future’s so bright . . .” Somebody pass me some shades. ■



End Notes From the Editor
~Carla Walker



428 W. California Avenue, Suite 270
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