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# Kentucky

Fall 2021

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**8** **Our Rightful Place**  
*Reviewed by Linda Elisabeth LaPinta*

**10** **Lessons for Today from  
“The Great Rejected”**  
*By James C. Klotter*

**12** **Our Kentucky Foods and Customs**  
*By Bobbie Smith Bryant*

**15** **Wealth**  
*By Evelyn B. Christensen*

**16** **From Indentured Servitude to  
Landed Wealth**  
*By Glen Edward Taul*

**20** **Celebrating the Centennial of a  
Commonwealth Entrepreneur and  
a Legacy’s Landmark Anniversary**  
*By Linda Elisabeth LaPinta*

**23** **Kentucky Book Women:  
Fact and Fiction**  
*By Judith Gibbons*

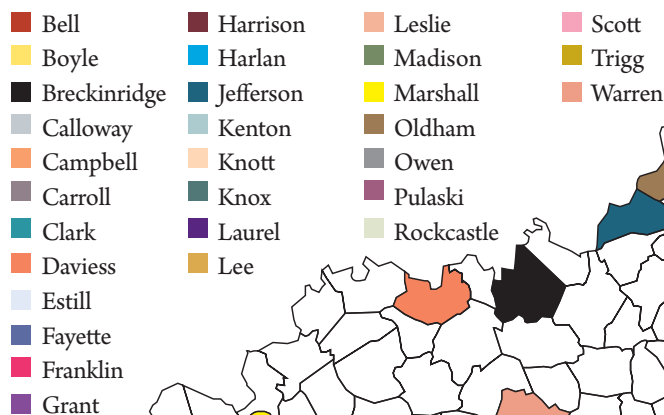
**27** **Kentucky’s Dark History of Lynching**  
*By Dr. Marshall Myers*

**30** **Maryat Lee**  
*By David T. Miller*

**34** **Kentucky’s Underappreciated  
Artists: Playwrights**  
*By William H. McCann, Jr.*

**39** **A Tobacco Kind of Christmas**  
*By Georgia Green Stamper*

### In this issue:



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# Sharing the Stories of our Commonwealth

**D**uring these ever-changing and unusual times, we find comfort in the constants—the aspects of our lives that have remained constant and reliable. Being in touch with you each spring and fall, sharing the stories of our Commonwealth’s culture, history, and people through *Kentucky Humanities* magazine is among those comforts for me.

This issue includes a wide array of articles about prominent Kentucky figures, literature, food traditions, and history. I hope you enjoy it.

This summer, the University Press of Kentucky released *Our Rightful Place: A History of Women at the University of Kentucky, 1880-1945* by Terry L. Birdwhistell and Deirdre A. Scaggs. Linda Elisabeth LaPinta shares a glimpse into the new release on page 8.

On page 10, Kentucky State Historian James C. Klotter provides us with insight into the accomplishments and character of Kentucky’s Great Statesman Henry Clay in “Lessons for Today from ‘The Great Rejected.’”

Many family traditions and customs are built around food. Author Bobbie Smith Bryant shares some of her family’s food and heritage on page 12. You may find many similarities with your own family traditions.

Visit page 15 to enjoy Kentucky poet Evelyn B. Christensen’s poem, “Wealth.”

Glen Edward Taul shares the story about his research into his family’s history and arrival in America. Did Mary Taul contract as an indentured servant to pay her passage to America? Or did she come as a convict? Find out more beginning on page 16.

Quilts are a unique part of Kentucky’s history and heritage. Passed down for generations, handmade quilts are artistic and elegant works of art. On page 20, Linda Elisabeth LaPinta tells the story of Eleanor Beard Hedgelands, an entrepreneur who sought to become a household name throughout the nation by producing Kentucky’s most elegant and exquisite bedcoverings.

The Pack Horse Library program instituted in eastern Kentucky as a part of the Works Progress Administration during the term of President Franklin D. Roosevelt has long fascinated people. Judith Gibbons tells us more about the women who delivered books and other reading materials to isolated areas of the Appalachian Mountains on horseback beginning on page 23.

Dr. Marshall Myers delves into some of the darkest times of the Commonwealth’s history by looking at some of the horrific lynchings in Kentucky. His article is on page 27.

You may not be familiar with Covington native, Maryat Lee, but her work allowed people whose voices were previously unheard to see their lives and stories play out on the stage. David T. Miller tells the intriguing story of Maryat Lee on page 30.

Kentucky has a long history of successful playwrights. Beginning on page 34, William H. McCann, Jr. gives us a look into Kentucky’s role in the theatre.

And lastly, Georgia Green Stamper shares her Christmastime memories on a tobacco farm in Owen County. Her delightful essay is on page 39.

I am thrilled to share this issue of *Kentucky Humanities* magazine with you. We want to hear your Kentucky stories! If you have a story to share, please contact our editor, Marianne Stoess at [mari-anne.stoess@uky.edu](mailto:mari-anne.stoess@uky.edu).



**Bill Goodman**  
*Executive Director*  
*Kentucky Humanities*

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Goodman".





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The **Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation** is committed to supporting the Kentucky Humanities to keep the history and heritage of Kentucky alive in the hearts and minds of today's youth.

Through her parents' examples and encouragement, Elsa developed lifelong passions for theater, education and the arts. She loved to tell a good story and developed her own radio program called "Elsa's Street."

The **Kentucky Humanities** embodies many of the passions that motivated Elsa. Her Foundation continues her legacy and is proud to support the outreach programs of the Humanities by offering grants for the Chautauqua program for school children, in eight of Kentucky's northern counties. In addition, Elsa supports the Kentucky Book Fair School Days that helps bring authors and books to Northern Kentucky schools.



## Voices and Votes: Democracy in America

The Smithsonian traveling exhibit *Voices and Votes: Democracy in America* is in the Commonwealth! The exhibit arrived in March and will visit six Kentucky communities through December.



**Top Left:** *Voices and Votes: Democracy in America* made its first stop in Kentucky at the Wrather West Kentucky Museum at Murray State University.



**Top Right:** Congressman John Yarmuth visited the exhibit at the Portland Museum.



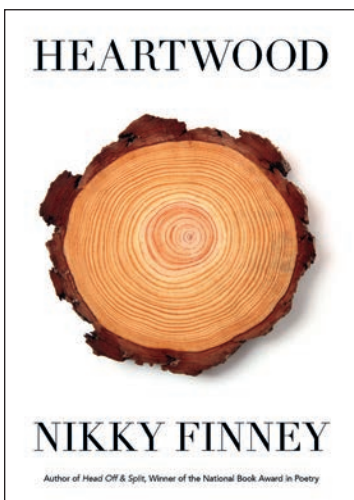
**Bottom Left:** The Center for Rural Development in Somerset hosted *Voices and Votes* from June 19-July 24.



**Bottom Right:** The exhibit opened at the Oldham County History Center in La Grange on July 31.

The exhibit will also be visiting the Glema Mahr Center for the Arts at Madisonville Community College from September 18-October 23 and will make its final stop in Jessamine County at the Wilmore Community Development Board from October 30-December 11.

## 25th Anniversary of *Heartwood*



Nikky Finney's *Heartwood*, the "tiny little book about the human heart and what it can do," was first released by the University Press of Kentucky 25 years ago as part of Kentucky Humanities' New Books for New Readers, a series designed for adult literacy students. In this expanded anniversary edition, with a new preface by Finney, readers will find lessons about life and understanding, and the encouragement to live audaciously while acknowledging the goodness that is all around us—if we only strive to recognize and embrace it.

Nikky Finney is a founding member of the Affrilachian Poets and the John H. Bennett, Jr., Chair in Creative Writing and Southern Letters at the University of South Carolina. She edited *Black Poets Lean South* and authored *On Wings Made of Gauze, Rice, The World Is Round, Head Off & Split* (winner of the 2011 National Book Award for Poetry), and *Love Child's Hotbed of Occasional Poetry*. Finney's work, including her now legendary National Book Award acceptance speech, is on display in the inaugural exhibition of the African American Museum of History and Culture in Washington, D.C.

You can purchase *Heartwood* at [kentuckypress.com](http://kentuckypress.com).





## Hopeful for In-Person Kentucky Book Festival® this Fall

After hosting a virtual event in 2020, Kentucky Humanities' staff remains hopeful for the opportunity to bring an in-person Kentucky Book Festival back to Lexington this year.

This November marks the 40th anniversary of the Kentucky Book Festival (formerly Kentucky Book Fair). Though the festival may evolve over the coming months due to the ongoing pandemic, the current plan is to offer a mix of virtual and in-person weekday events November 1-5, culminating in a daylong celebration at Joseph-Beth Booksellers on Saturday, November 6. On Saturday, we'll feature more than 140 authors who'll sign books, with many authors participating in panel discussions or conducting writing workshops and craft discussions. This year, many of Saturday's scheduled activities will also be made available to view virtually, so you can choose to join the fun in-person or from home.

Weekday events include: An Evening with Jason Reynolds; Literary Luncheon with Chef Ouita Michel; Cocktails & Conversation with Margaret Verble and Kim Edwards; Literary Trivia; and a Commerce Lexington SPOTLIGHT Breakfast with James Hardymon and Terry L. Birdwhistell.



**Jason Reynolds**



**Margaret Verble**



**Vashti Harrison**



**Brian Kilmeade**



**Crystal Wilkinson**

Saturday's festivities at Joseph-Beth begin at 10 a.m. EST, featuring author/illustrator Vashti Harrison (virtual only); Kentucky Poet Laureate Crystal Wilkinson; bestselling novelists Elin Hilderbrand and W. Bruce Cameron; historian H. W. Brands; journalist Brian Kilmeade; Kentucky writers Silas House Frank X Walker, Gwenda Bond; and more. The lineup, schedule, and additional information can be found at [kybookfestival.org](http://kybookfestival.org).

We're grateful to the sponsors and partners who make the Kentucky Book Festival possible, including Joseph-Beth Booksellers; Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation; Kosair Charities' Face It® Movement; a gift on behalf of Spalding University and Lindsey Wilson College; Hardscuffle, Inc.; First Southern National Bank; University of Kentucky; PNC Bank; Campbellsville University; Central Bank; UK HealthCare; Kentucky Tourism, Arts & Heritage Cabinet; Kim Edwards Charitable Foundation; Baird Private Wealth Management; Wildcat Moving; Transylvania University; Berea College; Traditional Bank; UK College of Arts and Sciences Department of History; Community Trust® and Investment Company; Studio46 Media; WEKU; Commerce Lexington; *Kentucky Monthly*; WUKY; Goodwood Lexington; and Centre College.

Always check our website, [kybookfestival.org](http://kybookfestival.org), for information including the latest updates. We hope you'll join us in celebrating 40 years of all things bookish in the Bluegrass!

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# Our Rightful Place:

A HISTORY OF WOMEN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY,  
1880-1945

Reviewed by

Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

Senior oral historian and Founding Director of the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Terry L. Birdwhistell and Associate Dean of the University of Kentucky Libraries Special Collections Research Center and Director of the Wendell H. Ford Public Policy Research Center Deirdre A. Scaggs have written a first-rate account of the indomitable women who for the initial seven decades of co-education at the University of Kentucky (UK) endured, yet overcame, astonishing indignities to earn a post-secondary education. The authors of *Our Rightful Place: A History of Women at the University of Kentucky, 1880-1945*, offer their readers a wealth of always discomfiting and often astounding quotations and anecdotes that in effect recreate, rather than merely relate, these women's exasperating experiences.

For example, take Sophonisba Breckinridge, one of the initial group of women admitted to a department other than UK's Normal School for Teachers (the first of the university's program of study for women) in 1880. The university's president, James K. Patterson, told Breckinridge and two other women students that their admission to an otherwise male-dominated discipline would be contingent on a 30-day "trial," a test to which no male student was subjected. The authors write, "Even though she was in the top three students in her class, Breckinridge recalled that she 'encountered professors who did not want girls in their classes, including one who she claimed tried to humiliate her by giving her a problem he thought she could not solve in front of the school trustees.'"

Misogynistic behavior, while certainly not cultivated exclusively at or by UK, mirrored the chauvinistic culture rampant in previously all-male enclaves of the era, including in most institutions of higher education. The absence of dormitories for female students until the early 1900s forced those without family homes in Lexington to lodge in boarding houses, and President Patterson, no fan of co-education, invited the sole woman undergraduate in 1888, Belle Gunn, into his office to inquire, "I suppose you will not want to sit up on the platform with the young men on Commencement Day, will you, Miss Gunn?" She replied, "I've been through four years of classes with them, and I don't see why I shouldn't sit on the platform with them now."

The authors indicate that three years later a reporter described Callie Warner, one of five female students at commencement, as appearing "very sweet and modest in her soft, fine India silk



gown, made at the neck with a baby frill exposing the white throat. Her brown hair was simply arranged in a loose coil with natural rings clustering on her brow. Suede gloves of stone color, same tone to the dress."

Such compliments of yesteryear offered as culturally accepted condescension cloaked as accolades resonate today as sexist. Starkly disparate descriptions of two 1898 graduates, William Thomas Carpenter and Jennie Willmott, both of whom spoke at their graduation ceremony in 1898, underscore the journalistic treatment of Warner. The UK Alumni Association Annual Report cited Carpenter for "his manly bearing, his familiarity with his subject and its appropriateness to the times," but described Willmott as having "read her essay with a girlish grace and a distinctiveness of expression."

As Birdwhistell and Scaggs point out, "Even taking into account the accepted language of the late nineteenth century, women's academic successes were often placed in a gendered context." In addition, in 1900 university policy adopted the aptly characterized mandate that men assume the role of valedictorian and salutatorian at commencement after UK's "all-male faculty agreed that it was 'not fair' for male students in disciplines like engineering and physics to have to compete with women students in education and such disciplines as English where 'it was perhaps easier to attain a high average.'"

The writers stress that although in the first decade of the twentieth century UK did not divide male and female

students into separate learning spheres as did such educational institutions as Stanford and the University of Chicago, women were “systematically diminished and compartmentalized” by strictures limiting their representation and speech.

Nonetheless, determined women students and, eventually, women faculty and the slow-but-deliberate social and political changes engendered by multiple factors and influences, including the insistent voices of such UK suffragettes as Laura Clay, resulted in modest-but-steady advances as the twentieth century progressed. In addition to women students demanding educational opportunities on par with those provided their male counterparts, pioneering women with advanced degrees began to receive faculty and administrative appointments, and increasing numbers of women enrolled in graduate, as well as in undergraduate, programs. However, as Birdwhistell and Scaggs also attest, educational and social equity occurred at a one-step-forward, two-steps-back pace that for decades proved the norm. To exemplify this phenomenon, the authors offer the experience of Mary Beall, a 1919 graduate in mathematics, whom the student newspaper described as “one of those rare co-eds who has a positively masculine intelligence in math and kindred subjects. During her years at the university, she has certainly upset the tradition that these subjects could be really managed only by the superior sex.” Even in 1919, Mary Beall must have blanched at the sting of such bigoted, begrudging praise.

*Our Rightful Place* details the ground UK women gained

during the Second World War, turf that eroded in the years immediately thereafter. The authors conclude, “The changes that took place in the first half of the 1940s could have set the stage for fundamental shifts; instead, they existed only ‘for the duration.’ The steps toward equality that occurred during World War II would need to be fought again and again.”

This reviewer hopes that the same superb research that shapes this volume will lay the groundwork for a second volume that will follow the fate of UK women from 1945 to the present. After all, the more than seven decades that have passed since 1945 have cast women’s circumstances at UK, as well as at most other institutions of higher education, in more equitable, if also more complex, positions. Readers should be eager for responsible researchers and writers such as Birdwhistell and Scaggs to relate the rest of the story.

## About the Author

Linda Elisabeth LaPinta directs Spalding University’s doctoral program in leadership. In addition to publishing numerous book reviews and magazine articles in regional and national newspapers, magazines, and journals, she has published three books related to Kentucky writers, and one book focused on intimate partner abuse. Her fifth book that concerns three centuries of Kentucky quilts and quiltmakers is to be published by the University Press of Kentucky.

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# Lessons for Today from “The Great Rejected”

By James C. Klotter

Henry Clay has been described as being like a political rock star. In his era, that certainly seemed the case. When in public, adoring fans flocked to him. Women showered him with requests for kisses and he usually responded favorably. (As one contemporary noted, his mouth was so large that he could rest one side “while the other side was doing active duty.”) His personality and charisma charmed many voters, with one saying that when Clay smiled, “He smiled all over.” Another noted that “neither in public nor private did he know how to be dull.” That said it all.

But more than anything, people remarked on Clay’s oratory. Crowds as large as 100,000 gathered to hear the great man and simply to savor excellence. When he spoke, it seemed that the soft, soothing tones were directed at each individual listening, but then his words might boom out like an organ filling a great cathedral. And his passion enthralled, convinced, and seduced his listeners, causing his emotions to be their emotions, his heart, their heart, his will, their will. Clay the orator was unsurpassed.

Henry Clay, though, was more than sound and fury, words, and charm. He had an economic plan—his American System—that he touted as a way to tie the various sections closer, so they needed each other. It would thus provide the final link to national economic unity. And Clay had achievements—as Speaker of the U.S. House, where he redefined that office, as a diplomat who

helped end the War of 1812, as Secretary of State, as leader of his Whig Party, and as a political model to millions.

But his greatest achievements came as “the Great Pacificator,” a man whose compromises kept the nation united and helped forestall a civil war for a generation or more.

Historians have noted that the delay allowed the North to grow stronger, while allowing a leader like Abraham Lincoln to come to the forefront and lead the Union to victory. In the Missouri Compromises of 1819-20, the Nullification Crisis of 1832-33, and the Compromise of 1850, Clay proved to be the dominant figure in each and won applause from both parties for his efforts.

Yet “the Great Compromiser” was also “the Great Rejected,” for three times voters selected someone else when he ran for president and twice more his party made him the runner-up for the nomination. Still, for a quarter century, in almost every presidential election from 1824 to 1848, Clay was a major player in the game. Given that one major defeat is usually the kiss of death for a political leader, Clay’s lasting power shows the appeal he had in his era—and later ones. In fact, when voting in the 1950s on the greatest members of the U.S. senate, that body recognized Clay as one of the five greatest, and *The Atlantic* in 2006 placed him in the top third of the most influential Americans throughout the nation’s history. Quite an achievement for a “loser.”

What questions, then, should we ask about this man, and what can we learn from Henry Clay, even now?





First of all, how did he do it? Like today, an increasing polarization was taking place, with North versus South, proslavery versus antislavery, Democrat versus Whig. But Clay often transcended those divisions. He once said, “I know no North, no South, no East, no West.” When the nation faced the very real threat of disunion or secession, he was a union man above all else, a politician above state, section, or party: “This Union is my country; the thirty States are my country.”

Political leaders recognized that part of Clay and responded in kind. In fact, the Compromise of 1850 was passed by a combination of northern Democratic and southern Whig votes. And a member of the opposition party, Stephen A. Douglas, wrote, “Let it always be said of old Hal that he fought a glorious & a patriotic battle. No man was ever governed by higher & purer motives.”

That all did not come easy. In describing how he crafted one compromise, Clay wrote that “I coaxed, soothed, scorned, defied them, by turns as I thought the best effect to be produced.” A congressman reported, “He begs, entreats, adjures, supplicates, & beseeches us.” In short, Clay would not give up and would use whatever tactics were needed to achieve results.

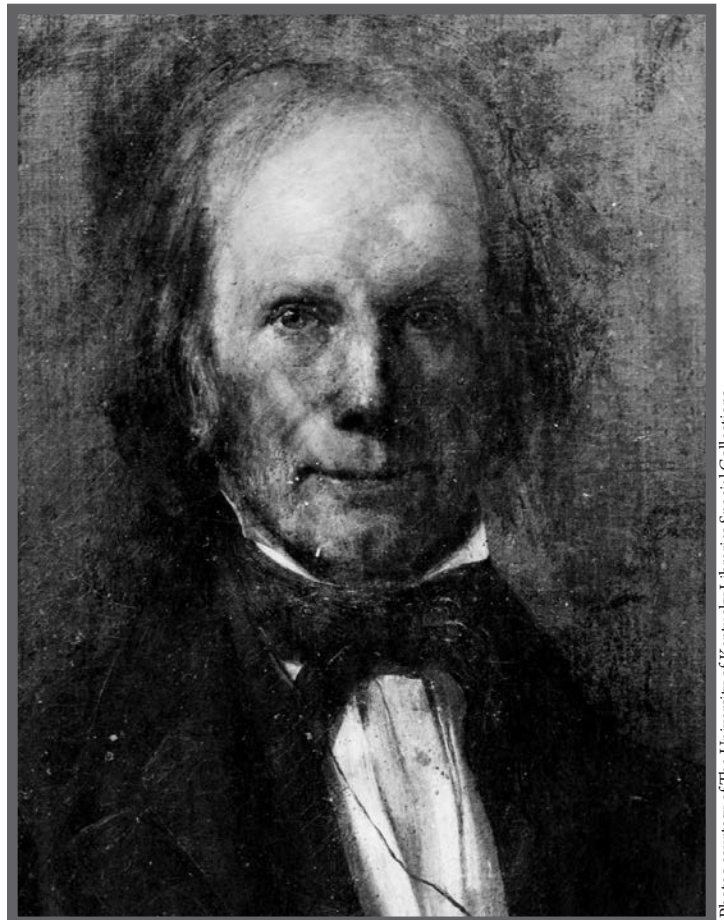
For Clay knew that if his era failed, if he failed, the results might be disastrous. Decades before the Brother’s War, he warned of a civil war, one that would produce “desolated fields, conflagrated cities, murdered inhabitants, and the overthrow ... of human governments.” No one would win such a fratricidal war. It would be “a suicidal conquest—a conquest of brothers over brothers.”

Through hard work, an unrelenting will, nonpartisan actions, and a sense of patriotism, Clay overcame the polarizing demons in his America.

But that came at a cost. Clay could forge acts that recognized the legitimacy of each interest and allowed each side to claim some victories, while not being dishonored by their defeats. Yet he often lost as much as he gained from the compromises, for he angered the extremes. As one sign explained more recently, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they catch hell from both sides.”

Like many politicians then and since, he faced the difficult choice: Do you remain firm to your beliefs and perhaps produce stalemate, or do you compromise your principles and possibly create productive results? No satisfactory answer exists. Politicians are expected to be consistent and to compromise; not surprisingly, they may be pilloried for whatever action they take. Perhaps the English leader Edmund Burke expressed it best in 1775: “All government ... is founded on compromise and barter,” he explained, but no one should barter away “the jewel of his soul.” What if then, one of the extremes holds the moral high ground? Is compromise always desirable? When do you stop compromising and follow the dictates of your soul?

That was the difference between Clay and Lincoln. “The Great Pacificator” would compromise on the moral issue of slavery and keep millions in bondage in order to still southern dissent



Photos courtesy of The University of Kentucky Libraries Special Collections

*The one name and title that always eluded Henry Clay was President of the United States. Yet, he was one of the most widely known and respected public servants of his day.*

and keep the union intact. Though “the Great Emancipator” called Clay, “my beau ideal of a statesman,” he recognized that he could not ethically compromise on the expansion of slavery. On occasion there is an evil so great—slavery, a Hitler—that one should not compromise.

But most often compromise represented the best political answer. Henry Clay once said, “I would rather be right than be president.” And the actions he took were often the right thing to do for the survival of the American union, even if it cost him much—perhaps even the presidency.

But that did not matter: “What are we—what is any man worth who is not ready to sacrifice himself for the benefit of his country when it is necessary?” he asked. Henry Clay acted for the nation’s good, as he saw it, and, most of all, he was a leader. His words, his spirit, and his actions speak to us, still yet.

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## *About the Author*

James C. Klotter is the state historian of Kentucky, emeritus professor of history at Georgetown College, and author of *Henry Clay: The Man Who Would Be President* (Oxford University Press, 2018).





# Our Kentucky Foods and Customs

By **Bobbie Smith Bryant**

**C**ornbread is crunchier when made in my papaw's cast iron skillet. Sweet, iced tea is colder when poured from my granny's Blue Willow pitcher. When I became interested in my heritage, I discovered that the foods we eat, the customs we have, the traditions we celebrate, all came from our ancestors who migrated to Kentucky.

From our earliest settlement, Kentucky was a crossroads of travel and trade routes, linking east and west, north and south, because of our geographic position. That cross-pollination of regional fare gave us a menu that includes barbecued mutton, burgoo, dill pickles, slaw, baked beans, potato salad, corn bread, corn on the cob, fried catfish, watermelon, fried fruit pies, and hoe cakes.

The early Native Americans had their own ways of preparing foods, and the new settlers brought their methods with them. Each had their own ideas of which plants and animals were edible, how they should be procured, prepared, and preserved. Early pioneers were excellent marksmen and fishermen who knew how to kill, clean, and prepare their food.

The Shawnee, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Creek tribes were the first people to use foods such as bear, deer, elk, turkey, buffalo, nuts, fruits, and greens. They also used wild plants that

were domesticated over thousands of years such as pumpkin, corn, beans, and squashes.

Many of our current preservation techniques are borrowed from the Native American culture, such as drying corn, apples, and pumpkins. Other foods such as burgoo, sassafras tea, and poke sallet are from Native Americans.

With all the magnificent provisions of meat, fish, poultry, plants, vegetables, fruits, and nuts that nature provided, it should be no surprise that it didn't take long after the pioneers got settled in Kentucky that a woman would publish a cookbook. The first Kentucky cookbook was published in 1839. It was titled *Kentucky Housewife* and was written by Boyle County native Lettice Bryan.

The Germans, English, Irish, and Scotch-Irish came in droves to Kentucky and each had their own native customs and traditions. Among the treasured items my German ancestors brought with them when they left North Carolina and moved to Kentucky, were their tobacco seeds and farm practices. They also brought the foods they loved like sausage, cabbage, and potatoes. And then there were the traditions they cherished such as the Easter Bunny and St. Nicholas.

Another sect of immigrants that contributed greatly to the Kentucky foodways are the Scotch-Irish. More than 250,000 of



these Scotsmen immigrated to America from Presbyterian Colonies in Ulster. Many landed in Pennsylvania, then trekked southwestward into the hollows of the Cumberlands where they settled in Kentucky, meshing their traditions with those of the Native Americans to create their own foodways.

It was the Scotch-Irish that mastered corn in a variety of ways such as porridge, pancakes, and hot breads. Corn was their staple of life, both for humans and for animal feed. In both Scotland and Ireland, farmers perfected home distillation processes with grain, making it into whiskey. It was easy to transport and very marketable.

Another culture that impacted the foodways of Kentucky were the English. They were familiar with farming grains, meat, dairy, fruits, and vegetables, and knew how to preserve foods, taking them from plenty during summer and fall, through the time of need, winter to spring.

Smaller in numbers, the French, Italian, Greek, Chinese, and the multitude of enslaved people that were brought to America, also contributed greatly to the variety of foods we have today: okra, shrimp creole, crème brûlée, and rice, to name a few.

Early farm families had a tough time preserving foods. Many would store fresh milk or meat either near a cool spring, down in a well, or in a cellar dug into the ground. Families living near a town may have had manufactured ice to purchase and put into an icehouse and later, an ice box. That method, and the icebox itself, were thrown out once electricity brought in refrigeration.

Water was a laborious commodity until modern technology made it more convenient. It's difficult to imagine having to take buckets to the creek or the well every time you wanted to make a pot of coffee or boil a pot of beans.

Cisterns were used to collect rainwater and while measures were taken to purify water with charcoal and sulfur, typhoid was a real health problem created from contaminated well and spring water sources.

Then as now, gardens were a staple of farm families. Planting was governed by the changing of the seasons as we considered positions of the moon and stars, animal behavior, and the changing phases of the weather.

Beef and pork as well as wild game were also part of the farm family table. Venison, squirrel, rabbit, and turkey each provided tasty additions to standard livestock fare.

Many farms had fruit trees of apple, peach, and pear that generated abundant crops each year. Apples, cherries, peaches, pears, plums, blackberries, and strawberries were canned, preserved, or dried for winter use.



Photo courtesy of Bobbie Smith Bryant

**Cooking has always been a family affair in author Bobbie Smith Bryant's family. Her great-aunts prepared dinner on the grounds at the family reunion picnic.**

Women often contributed to the family's income by raising chickens to sell eggs. Country stores and city businesses would take eggs or chickens in exchange for payment for items or services, even newspaper subscriptions.

For many farm families, hog killings were a form of entertainment when cold weather began, an occasion for gathering neighbors together to process the pork. Other uses besides the meat for food included the fat which was used for frying, baking, and soap making.

Canning food began as an effort to feed the army during the Civil War. After the war, the Cooperative Extension Service of the federal Department of Agriculture helped accelerate and improve home canning practices until freezing was made possible in the 1940s.

Pickling was another way to preserve foods like cucumbers, green tomatoes, green and hot peppers, as well as chow chow relish. Corn, green beans, and cabbage are also typical foods to be pickled and served as a Kentucky side dish.

Early selections of spices or herbs on the farm were limited to salt and pepper, cinnamon, red pepper, sage, and dill. Herbs were used for medicine rather than food preparation. When my family talked about seasoning food, we were generally referring to the use of cured pork or lard rather than a spice for flavoring.

On our family farm, the noon day meal was called dinner and was a large meal consisting of meat, vegetables, bread, and fruit. Supper was usually a little lighter fare. Sunday dinner was always a big deal when the whole family gathered at one house and the generations all ate together.





Photo courtesy of Bobbie Smith Bryant

## From the Fourth of July to Christmas, family food traditions are in abundance at the holidays.

While recipes are important to cooking, exact measurement is not. The cooks in our family did not learn to cook by measuring ingredients, we learned by sight. This happened in the early days because there weren't accurate or consistent ways to measure ingredients.

When it comes to bread, everyone has their favorites. Whether beaten, made with sour or sweet milk biscuits are most often served with something else, from freshly churned butter to homemade fruit jams, jellies, or preserves.

Any discussion of food must include the holidays and family traditions. In my parents' generation, they felt privileged to get an orange in their Christmas sock, along with pecans and Brazil nuts, a rare treat for farm children. Easter consisted of colored eggs for hunting and deviled or dressed eggs for eating.

Celebrating holidays, such as the 4th of July, Memorial or Labor Day, provided a short break for farmers. Families prepared fried fish or barbecue mutton for these summer picnic opportunities.

In addition to a cake, favorite birthday foods often included a meal of fried chicken or chicken and dumplings. Frequently favored desserts included fried pies, jam and coconut cakes, cream pies in all varieties, brown sugar cookies, and brownies.

Other traditions of the past tied to food were cake walks, ice cream socials, and pie or box suppers. Often sponsored by religious groups or schools, these events were held to raise much needed money for school supplies. Local musicians such as fiddlers and juice harp players joined singing groups that provided harmony for these festive occasions like a moonlight party or barn dance.

My great-grandmother used the old iron dinner bell to call

Papa in from the field at dinner time, the midday meal. Another food practice of farm families was to feed the hands in the field. If there were more than a couple of men working in the field, the farmers' wife would take food to all of them at dinner time.

From fishing or frog gigging in a nearby pond to picking blackberries or making snow cream, many fun outdoor activities revolved around food made by nature. We continue to celebrate our food culture in events like Tater Day in Benton and the Ham Festival in Cadiz, the Beer Cheese Festival in Winchester, the GoettaFest in Newport, and the World Chicken Festival in London.

While trends come and go and technology changes our methods and ways, food is an ever-present part of our daily routines. In researching my family's history, I discovered some simple truths. Food nurtures us physically and there is an emotional bond that somehow grabs us and remains with us throughout our lives.

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## About the Author

Bobbie Smith Bryant recently retired from her 24-year career with the Kentucky League of Cities. She is the author of four books including *Passions of the Black Patch: Cooking and Quilting in Western Kentucky*, a cookbook featuring more than 200 regional recipes and stories about her family's 10-generation tobacco farm in Calloway County.

This article is edited from a previous publication titled, "Cooking the Kentucky Way," *Jackson Purchase Historical Society Journal*, 2020.



# WEALTH



By Evelyn B. Christensen

Money does not grow on trees?  
Well, perhaps not money  
                                but certainly gold!

For I saw it today  
Brilliant in the autumn sun  
A tree just weighted with the stuff  
So full  
      its branches could not hold it  
And on the ground it lay—in piles  
A gift  
      offered to those who passed that way  
But strange  
      no one seemed to notice  
No one rushed to gather up this wealth  
                                to treasure or to share it  
No one gave a shout of glad surprise  
      or even turned to look  
On they walked  
                                as if they did not see  
As if they were unaware of the miracle.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Evelyn B. Christensen is a native of Hazard and has lived most of her adult life in Lexington. A teacher with a doctorate in education, Christensen has published more than 40 educational puzzle books as well as a picture book, *The Twelve Days of Christmas in Kentucky*. Many of her stories and poems have been published in children’s magazines.



# From Indentured Servitude to Landed Wealth: In Search of a Kentucky Family's Roots

At the Delivery of the Gaol of our Lord the King of the County aforesaid. of the prisoners therein being held at the Castle of Winchester in & for the said County on Tuesday the Thirteenth day of April in the fiftenth year of the Reigne aforesaid. Before the said Thomas Burnet & Thomas Dawson Esqrs. Justices &c.

was Mary Tall, Richard Brown, Joseph Simon, Nathaniel Lovelock, James Burden <sup>and John Grace</sup> were at this session of Gaol Delivery convicted of several felonies & intitled to the benefit of Clergy and were ordered & adjudged to be Transported to some of his Majesties Colonies & plantations in America for the term of Seven Years according to an Act of Parliament made in the fourth Year of the Reigne of his late Majesty King George intituled an act for the further preventing Robbery Burglary and other felonies and for the more effectual Transportation of felons & lawfull Exporters of Wool & for declaring the Law upon some points relating to pirates and whereas Thomas Siquell was at former session of Gaol Delivery held in & for the said County convicted of felony for which he was excluded the benefit of the Clergy and to whom his Majesty has been graciously pleased to extend his Royal Mercy on condition of Transportation to some part of America, for the term of fourteen Years and such Intention of Mercy hath been signified by the Right Honourable William Lord Harrington one of his Majesties principal Secretaries of State. Pursuant to the directions of the said Act

Photo courtesy of Glen Edward Taul

## By Glen Edward Taul

**T** carried the timeworn court record to my seat expectantly. Would this confirm the story I'd heard a lifetime ago? The mother of Arthur Thomas Taul had arrived in America as an indentured servant. I had heard that he became an orphan at a young age, his father having died. It was assumed that he inherited his name from his father. That was the usual practice, even for people in the lower orders of society.

But this was a gaol book in my hands, the gaol book for the Assize Court of the Western Circuit. As I walked through the research room of The National Archives at Kew, I thought: If Mary Tall's name is in this book, it meant that she had not contracted as an indentured servant as a way to pay passage to America. No, she came as a convict.

Arthur Thomas Taul was significant for the future generations of Tauls. Because of his hard work and initiative, he established the basis from which his five surviving sons, their children, and descendants following could build prosperous lives. His progeny spread westward from the Appalachian mountains across the Mississippi River and beyond.

*Above: The order authorizing the "transportation" of Mary Tall to America after being delivered to the jail (or gaol). Transcription: "At the Delivery of the gaol of our Lord the King of the County aforesaid (aforesaid) of the prisoners therein being held at the Castle of Winchester in & for the said [Hampshire] County on Tuesday the Thirteenth day of April in the fiftenth year of the Reigne [George II] aforesaid before the said Thomas Burnet & Thomas Dawson Esqrs [Esquires] Justices, Mary Tall [and others] . . . were of this session of gaol Delivery convicted of several offenses & to the benefit of clergy and were ordered and adjudged to be Transported to Some of his Majesties Colonies & Plantations in America for the term of Seven Years . . ."*



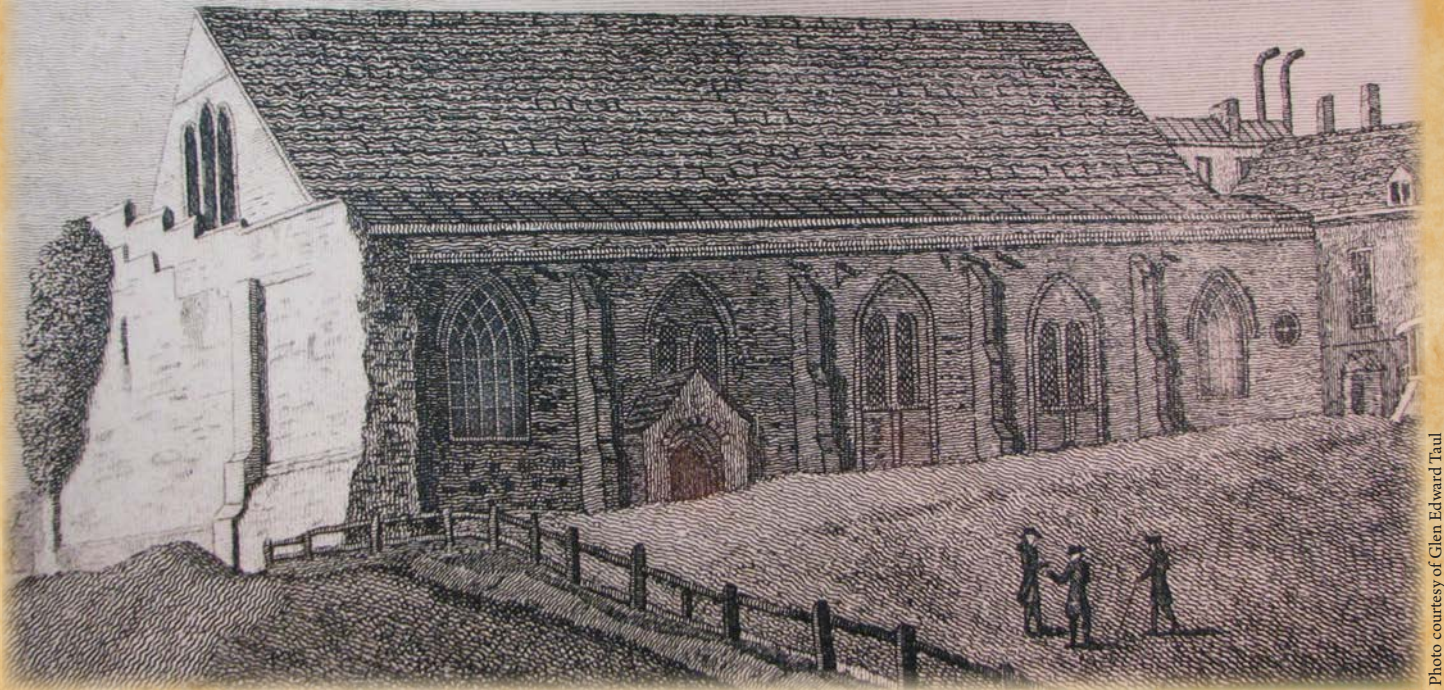


Photo courtesy of Glen Edward Taul

*Eighteenth century view of the exterior of the Great Hall of Winchester Castle where Mary Tall was tried and convicted in 1742 for felony theft.*

I placed the large, frail book carefully on the gray, foam book rest. Standing at my assigned desk, hands gloved, I gently turned the unnumbered tinged brown pages, each one emitting a slight crackle as though objecting to this disturbance. With each new page turn, my anticipation grew.

Knowing 1742 as the year of her conviction and the place, Hampshire, or Southton for short, I soon found the section where the notation might be. My anticipation grew more. And then I glimpsed her name—"Mary Tall."

Among many convicts listed, Mary was the first noted, in the record for 13 April having been committed to the gaol at Winchester Castle. In the left-hand margin by her name, the clerk noted: "To be transported for 7 years." The clerk recorded that she had been convicted "for breaking & entering the dwelling house of James Scotsell Sen'r during the day time & stealing thereout one Woollen gown val. 7s & other goods." She had pleaded guilty to stealing, but not to breaking into the house. A capital offense, her sentence was commuted. She and several other convicted felons were granted "benefit of clergy," which authorized the Hampshire justices of the peace to contract with private shippers to transport them to "some of his Majesties colonies and plantations in America."<sup>1</sup>

"I don't have any connecting proof yet, but I have a strong sense that this is the mother of my five times great grandfather. Some details suggest that it is likely her."

"And what would those be?" asked Lynn, a Fellow at Regent's

Park College, Oxford. I was sharing my exciting discovery with her and others in the Senior Common Room.

"Well, I've never thought that Arthur was an orphan, but was born illegitimate. Else why would he have been named in his step-father's as well as his mother's will as Arthur Tall, not Fisher, the name of his step-father? His step-father never adopted him. So, when Mary married Samuel Fisher, Tall was her unmarried name, not the name from a previous marriage. Given that premise, the timeline fits. Arthur was born in 1747. She was convicted in 1742 and sentenced to seven years indentured servitude in America. Say she arrives in Maryland that year or the next, she would have been freed in 1749 or 1750. It is very plausible that she gave birth to Arthur before she was emancipated. Finally, no other woman named Mary Tall appears in a master index of immigrants to America before 1750.

After sharing the remaining details, Lynn says, "In an earlier time, being given benefit of clergy meant that she could read. If a defendant, charged with a capital crime, could read the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm aloud in court then the sentence was commuted to imprisonment. In your grandmother's time, however, it was routinely declared without the reading requirement. By that time, the British government had been transporting felons to America. Benefit of clergy was the legal fiction that the JPs used to sanction it."

Lynn was attempting to explain Mary's actions from the viewpoint that women, especially poor women, in eighteenth century England had little agency in their own lives. Her expertise

<sup>1</sup> Gaol Books, Western Circuit, Minutes of the Bristol summer assizes of 1753, 1729 summer-1753, The National Archives, Kew, London, UK, ASSI 23/6; Transportation Orders, March 1743, Hants, Wilts, Dors. only, 1726-1743 Mar., Ibid., ASSI 24/24.



in pamphlets, written by women convicted of murder, of the early modern period gave an interesting perspective.

“She probably stole the gown because she was desperately cold,” Sheila, a librarian at Regent’s observed, thinking that I would be feeling ashamed of having a seminal ancestor commit such a crime. Regardless, both Sheila and Lynn were giving my ancestor Mary a pass. When I considered the circumstances of how she started life in America and then how her son, Arthur, was able to establish him and his family successfully, Mary’s life was assuming a heroic quality.

Now how would I find her in Maryland? I wondered. She’s poor, so she will not have owned any land. She was purchased by a planter. How would I find that out? If I found her in the public record it was going to be providential, it seemed. Where to start?

“You’d look in the county court records,” Christopher, a Maryland State archivist, said.

I soon found her in one of the indexes, but I was surprised and a little dismayed when I read the record.

I had become fascinated with the trajectory Mary’s life was taking. A theft, a commutation saving her from capital punishment, being transported to America, and knowing eventually of her son, all of which seemed to offer the possibility of a new life. But the record spoke differently.

There it was: two indictments for felony theft in 1746. The spots had not changed. The same as four years prior. “The “spinster”, Mary Tall, stole articles of clothing worth 920 “pounds of tobacco” from Joseph Jenings, Rector of All Saints Parish in Prince Georges County, and his wife, Katherine, the year before.” (At least I knew she had arrived before 1745.) Though pleading her innocence, the jurors of the county’s elite citizens found her guilty. Her sin would be atoned when lashed 15 times, pilloried for 15 minutes in public, and restitution made of the absconded items, or their worth repaid.<sup>2</sup> Such an ordeal of humiliation and physical pain.

But it continued. In 1748, she was indicted for having a “base born child.” She was identified as the servant of Thomas Cramphin, a wealthy tobacco planter near present day Washington, D.C. I wondered if the child was Arthur Thomas. He was born near Bladensburg, Maryland, five miles north of Washington. Two years later she was again indicted for the same offense.<sup>3</sup> It seemed ironic, I thought, if Mary had not continued to be charged with offenses, I may never have found anything else about her life.



Photo courtesy of Glen Edward Taul

*Interior of the Great Hall of Winchester Castle where Mary Tall was tried and convicted for felony theft in 1742. She was incarcerated in a cell below until her trial. Displayed is the 13th century imitation of King Arthur’s legendary Round Table.*

I wondered if Mary ever hoped for stability in her life in the midst of just trying to survive each day. None would there be, however, until she completed her sentence, and even then, a struggle it would be. In that day, marriage, to a compassionate man, would be the only release from such drudgery.

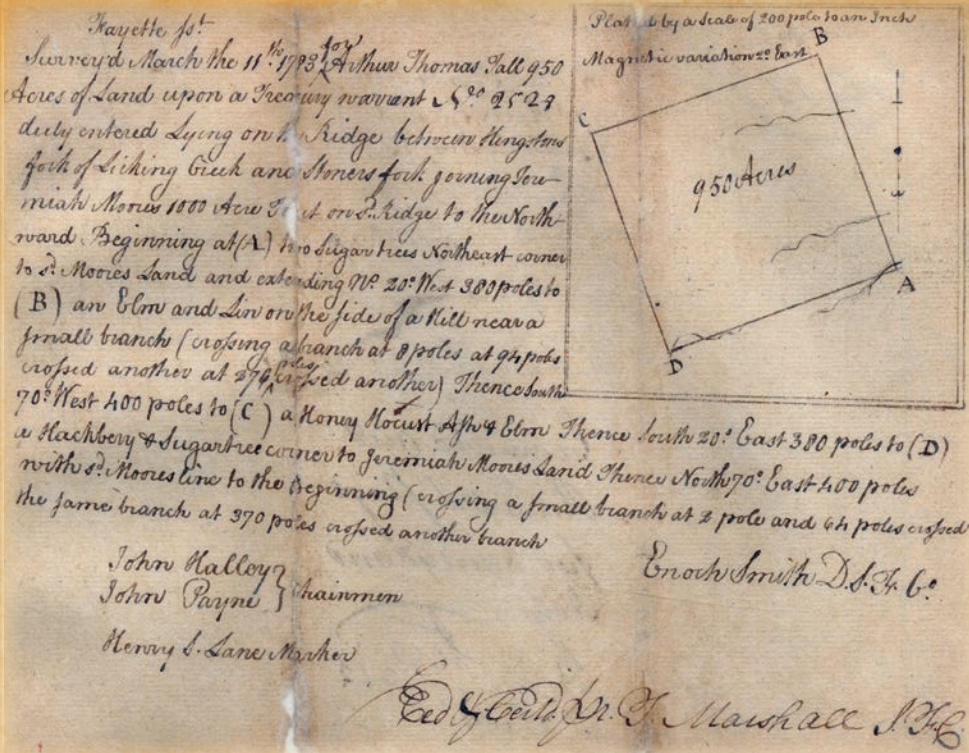
Mary gained her freedom eventually, although I don’t know the circumstances. Hopefully, I will. She did marry, Samuel Fisher, a Quaker, according to Arthur’s youngest son, Micah, and a widower. I know this from his will. He dies in 1785, and names, in addition to his one daughter, three of Mary’s grandchildren, two with the name of “Tall,” who are also named later in her will. The inventory of his estate suggests that he was prosperous enough. He was a farmer that grew tobacco and raised cattle and hogs. The estate’s value amounted to £117. She made a peculiar decision, I thought. She declined to accept the bequest made to her and chose instead to claim her “dower or one third” of her husband’s estate.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Lord Proprietary vs. Mary Tall, June Court 1746, Prince Georges County/Court/Court Record/Film Reel CR 34715-2/MSA CM 780-21 16 Liber D D, Court Record, Nov. 1744-June 1746, pp. 523-524. Maryland State Archives, Rowe Blvd, Annapolis, MD.

<sup>3</sup> Prince Georges County Court, Maryland, August Court 1748, 19 Liber HH Court Record March 1747-48—Aug. 1748, p. 331. 3/1748-8/1748, Location Number: 1/20/8/37, MSA Coll. # C1191-23; Micah Taul, “Memoirs of Micah Taul,” 1848-1850, image 3, Jane Sharp Collection, SC1896\_FF1\_009, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort, KY, <https://kyhistory.com/digital/collection/MS/id/13132>; Prince Georges County Court, Maryland, November Court 1750, November 27, 1750, 21 Liber LL Court Record August 1749-November 1750, Prince Georges County, MD/Court (Court Record) 1696-1788, p. 235/CM780-26/Film Reel CR34718-1.

<sup>4</sup> Taul, “Memoirs of Micah Taul,” 1848-1850, image 9; Will of Samuel Fisher, Wills, Register of Wills, Prince Georges County, Maryland, Liber T. No. 1, 1698-1770, Folio 223. Maryland State Archives, Bowie Street, Annapolis, MD. MSA CR34681.





*It is the survey of the 950 acres that Arthur Thomas Taul bought in 1783 on a Treasury Warrant. The property was located in what is now Clark, Montgomery, and Bourbon counties. He divided that property amongst four of his sons—Jonathan, Benjamin Johnson, Levi, and Micah.*

There is this nagging feeling that the relationship between Mary and Arthur was strained. A clue comes from her will. “My will and desier is that all my Estate of what kind soever excepting my warring apprel to be sold by publick Sail and the money arising by the Sail afor said to be equally divid between my Son Steven Tall my Son Artha Tall my Daughter Jane Muffett my granddaughter Anne Shares . . .”. Although he and his siblings have designated bequests, none of Arthur’s children are mentioned like Stephen’s and Jane’s. Mary’s other bequests favors granddaughters. Arthur, who marries in 1770, fathers six sons. In addition to designated bequests made to two granddaughters, four are to share their grandmother’s wearing apparel.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of his step-father’s death, Arthur was already making arrangements to emigrate west. In 1783 he had bought 950 acres in the region of Virginia that would become the state of Kentucky. Two years before Mary’s death in 1789, Arthur had moved his family. He uses the land to launch his children’s prosperity. He made his home on a smaller tract of prime farmland south of

Lexington. The huge acreage is divided among four of his sons. His fourth son, Samuel, inherits the estate he lives on.<sup>6</sup>

I have this strong impression, I cannot shake, that Arthur Thomas left Maryland because, yes, to seek a better life, but also to leave a past fraught with pain. My impression from reading Micah Taul’s memoir is that his father didn’t talk about his childhood. He knew very little about his father’s family back in Maryland. He remembers as a young boy seeing “an uncle whose name was Stephen Taul,” on a visit from Maryland. He had a vague recollection that his father “was an orphan at a very tender age.” But the fact that Arthur was mentioned in both his step-father’s and mother’s wills suggests a lifelong relationship between mother and son. I question whether he was an orphan at all. And I wonder if Mary’s insecurities were transferred to her children.<sup>7</sup>

It is the problematic relationship between Mary and Arthur that intrigues me. Her legacy passed on, through her children, to us fascinates me. I see Mary’s determination and resilience to survive and succeed present in two other Marys, my grandmother Taul and mother.

### About the Author

Glen Taul is a retired librarian, international studies coordinator, archivist, historian, public relations professional, and journalist who resides in Georgetown, Kentucky. He holds a doctorate in American history from the University of Kentucky. His research interests include family, pre-Civil War Kentucky, British, and Appalachian history. In addition to working on a tri-biography of his mother, grandmother Taul, and six times great grandmother Tall, he is editing Micah Taul’s (1785-1850) memoir and preparing articles on the medical education of Ephraim McDowell in Edinburgh and on the slave bequeathed to Georgetown College.

<sup>5</sup> Will of Mary Fisher, Montgomery County, Register of Wills (Wills, Original) Mrs. Mary Fisher, Box 505, 6/9/1789, [MSA T418-1: 00/53/09/020], Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, Maryland.

<sup>6</sup> Treasury Warrant of Arthur Thomas Tall, No. 2528, 950 Acres, Survey No. 1011, March 11, 1783, Fayette County, VA [now KY], Survey Book 1, p. 515, Land Office, Virginia Treasury Warrants, Secretary of State, Commonwealth of Kentucky, Frankfort, KY; Old Survey Book C, Fayette County, Lexington, KY, 82; Deed of John McDaniel to Arthur Thomas Taul, 1783, Ten Acres along Marble Creek, Fayette County Deed Book B, pp. 101-02, Fayette County Court Clerk, Lexington, KY; Deed of William Brook to Arthur Thomas Taul, 207 Acres along Marble Creek, Fayette County Deed Book B, pp. 99-100, August 27, 1788, Fayette County Court Clerk, Lexington, KY; Deed of William and Loah Stafford to Arthur T. Taul, 180 Acres along Marble Creek, November 6, 1798, Fayette County Deed Book B, 1798-99, sp. 404, Fayette County District Court Clerk, Lexington, KY; Will of Arthur Thomas Taul, Clark County Court Clerk, Winchester, KY, Book 3, p. 144.

<sup>7</sup> Taul, “Memoirs of Micah Taul,” 1848-1850, image 8.



# *Celebrating the Centennial of a Commonwealth Entrepreneur and a Legacy's Landmark Anniversary*

By Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

**A**lthough for several centuries Kentuckians have created a wide array of elegant and artistic quilts, in the second decade of the twentieth century a masterful woman entrepreneur made it her mission to produce some of the state's most exquisite bedcoverings and promote them nationwide. In 1921, Kentuckian Eleanor Beard founded the Eleanor Beard Hedgeland's Studio of Hardinsburg in the heart of Breckinridge County, and for much of the twentieth century Beard's business flourished as, arguably, the most prestigious luxury quilt brand in the nation. In 1996, another native Kentuckian, Jane Scott Hodges, launched what would become a comparable premier textile concern, Leontine Linens. Six years later, Hodges purchased the Eleanor Beard brand, as well as Beard's Hardinsburg studio. That 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of Beard's business and the 25th anniversary of Hodges' enterprise warrants a glimpse at the ways in which these Commonwealth-centered companies launched by astute entrepreneurial women have showcased and continue to promote Kentucky's premier needlework artistry.

As a child, Covington-born and Cincinnati-raised Eleanor Robertson moved with her family to Louisville, and in 1917 married Marvin Beard, the proprietor of a general store in Hardinsburg. On occasion, Marvin allowed local, cash-strapped farmers to barter for goods, which is how he acquired and accumulated the sheep's wool from which Eleanor decided to create batting for what would become her signature whole cloth, trapunto-style (an Italian quilting technique that creates a puffed, raised-surface effect by adding padding between a quilt's first and second layers) satin, sateen, and satin-like quilts. At first devoid of patchwork or applique, Eleanor's original solid-color, double-bed-size, handstitched quilts with their trademark scalloped edges sold for \$17.50 in 1923, which would be about \$300 today. Two decades later, the businesswoman would design a mid-century chintz appliqued album-style quilt and modernized appliqued quilts to order. An outstanding example of an Eleanor Beard album quilt constructed from quilt blocks



Photo courtesy of Eleanor Beard Studio

*In 1921, Eleanor Beard founded the Eleanor Beard Hedgeland's Studio of Hardinsburg.*

applied with floral motifs, some cut from antique chintz and some from new, 1940 fabric, the year in which she or, more probably, her most expert employees made the quilt, is a 92-inch by 79½-inch beauty acquired in 1971 for the American Wing of New York's Metropolitan Museum.

Beard's appreciation of painstaking, elaborate hand quilting of elegant fabric became legend. At the height of her company's success, she employed as many as a thousand central Kentucky women master quilters to produce the bed and chaise lounge coverings she designed for such well-heeled clients as Mary Pickford, Henry Fonda, Mrs. Hugh Auchincloss, Mrs. T. M. Carnegie, Mrs. Henry duPont, Mrs. T. A. Mellon, and Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor. Whether Beard herself quilted as well as designed quilts, as some quilt historians suggest, remains in question, as her granddaughter Susan

Castleman Clare insists that although Beard was a brilliant businesswoman, “she could no more quilt than thread a needle” (*Interview with Linda LaPinta 3/31/2021*).

In addition to advertising her upscale bedcoverings and related merchandise, such as sophisticated pajamas, robes, and bed jackets for women, Beard’s establishment sent sales representatives to the country’s premier department stores even as she also opened her own boutiques in high-end retail markets nationwide. To build her brand, Beard encouraged her posh urban and resort boutiques across the country to regard the Beard aura as more than bed coverings and boudoir loungewear—indeed, to regard Beard sales venues as lifestyle coterie in which elite shoppers could mingle with like-minded arbiters of taste.

Although Beard and her husband moved from Hardinsburg to Louisville just before their only child, Barbara, started school, Beard’s central Kentucky workforce continued to grow as her vision and business expanded. In addition to her sales via brick-and-mortar venues, she accumulated more profit by outfitting staterooms of cruise ships and selling couture quilts, as well as loungewear and sleepwear, via her high-end catalogs. Her most adept quilters also continued to produce her most prestigious bed clothes for her most famous and prosperous customers. Yet, even as Beard cultivated job opportunities for so many women, as did similar quilt cottage industries who employed women who worked from their “cottages” or homes, in 1942 the United States Department of Labor began to scrutinize Beard’s business model. Ultimately, the Department of Labor sued Eleanor and Marvin Beard, as well as the owners of similar companies, for taking advantage of their cottage industry workers, identified in the suit as homeworkers, by failing to grant the quilters raises. However, the plaintiff lost its case in a ruling that declared homeworkers to be independent contractors rather than employees, and stated that those independent contractors were, as such, not protected by the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Acts. In 1943, the United States Department of Labor again lost its case on appeal.

Certainly, and especially in retrospect, one may easily identify the irony inherent in a successful woman entrepreneur’s creating job opportunities for other women yet paying them low wages for their sewing skills still regarded as “women’s work.” The brief filed against Beard and her corporation by the United States Department of Labor indicates that although few homeworkers recorded the total number of hours they spent on the sewing for which they were paid by the piece, in 1942 they earned, on average, the equivalent of what would amount to between eight and nine dollars per day in 2021. Clearly, successful entrepreneurs may be more often—or at least more traditionally—motivated by financial profit than by social justice concerns. However, it remains important to note that Beard provided singular employment opportunities for significant numbers of extraordinarily talented Kentucky women to earn incomes to better themselves and their families, as well as to showcase their artistry. Seventy years since her death in 1951, Beard continues to

be recognized for marketing first-class quilts and for pioneering her eponymous brand as a luxury lifestyle and thereby leading the way for such late twentieth- and early twenty-first century designers and entrepreneurs as Ralph Lauren and Martha Stewart to do the same.

Several decades later, as Jane Scott Offutt was growing up in Georgetown and Lexington, her fascination with family lore and admiration of household antiques galvanized her appreciation for history and fine workmanship. “However,” she says, “I think my love for beautiful linens derived from a convergence of events that sent me on a certain trajectory” (*Interview with Linda LaPinta 5/3/2021*).

Her reference is to attending Newcomb College, the women’s college at Tulane University, in the 1990s; getting to know her paternal grandmother, a Newcomb alumna who resided in New Orleans; becoming engaged to Philip Hodges of New Orleans; and observing her parents restore a 1780 stone house in Georgetown. She comments, “When I returned home to Kentucky to plan my wedding, I experienced a moment of understanding that all the antiques and portraiture and textiles my mother had collected through the years combined with the textiles I came across when I was planning my wedding, coupled with the rich history of New Orleans, caused me to connect with a part of myself that I didn’t really know but realized was important” (*Interview with Linda LaPinta 5/3/2021*).

Thus in 1995, when Hodges commenced the hunt for her trousseau, her mother, another Jane, accompanied Hodges to Hardinsburg to introduce her daughter to the quilting artistry of the Eleanor Beard Studio. Although Beard had passed away



Photo courtesy of Eleanor Beard Studio

*Eleanor Beard was known for satin, sateen, and satin-like quilts like this Woodland Chaise Throw and Pillow.*





*Jane Scott Hodges founded Leontine Linens in 1996 and began selling Eleanor Beard merchandise.*

years before, her company continued to produce hand-stitched quilts, loungewear, and linens in Beard's designs. Awed by the exquisite workmanship of the women who produced the company's quilts and garments, Hodges not only purchased much of her honeymoon wardrobe but, after her marriage, began to wonder whether she might be able to sell Eleanor Beard handmade-in-Kentucky merchandise in New Orleans.

Indeed, in 1996 Hodges, acting on instinct coupled with her newfound passion for artisanal linens and quilts, founded Leontine Linens (named after the New Orleans street where she and her husband, Philip, first lived) and began selling Eleanor Beard merchandise under the Leontine Linens label. Yet Hodge's marketing savvy, reminiscent of Beard's, caused her to realize that to whet a customer's appetite, even the finest merchandise must capture a buyer's imagination. So, to distinguish her upscale linens from textiles produced by competing manufacturers, she focused on designing merchandise to reflect each buyer's personal style. "For example, instead of creating traditional white-on-white or small monograms," she says, "I suggested we blow them up to be twelve inches in diameter on a Euro sham," adding that the intent behind her marketing focus has been to "change people's minds about treating linens as an afterthought" (*Interview with Linda LaPinta 5/3/2021*) and to bring to her customers' attention the quality workmanship of the Hardinsburg-area women who still produce the textiles Leontine Linens sells.

In January 2002, Nancy Mingus, the then-manager of what had become the Eleanor Beard Studio in Hardinsburg, called Hodges to let her know that the Studio would be closing that June. While home in Kentucky for Derby in May, Hodges and her husband paid a farewell visit to Mingus and the Studio. However, when the Hodges arrived, Mingus asked Jane Scott and her partner, Philip, who had joined the Leontine Linens business the year before, whether they would be interested in buying the company. They said yes.

The Eleanor Beard Studio employees, thrilled to know they would retain their jobs, as well as the sisterhood they had formed while working together in the Studio (the cottage industry business model having ended before Hodges' time), remained with Leontine Linens. But the business relocated within Hardinsburg, as the original Studio had already sold. Along with the Beard Studio employees, Hodges acquired Beard's intellectual property, merchandise, and materials, including Beard's quilt patterns, which Beard had kept in a bank vault. Today, the handstitched satin quilts Leontine Linens creates from Beard's original patterns constitute the company's largest sales.

Hodges notes, "Eleanor Beard was a lifestyle brand and, I think, in some ways, I came along three generations later and identified and appreciated the art she so valued. But I have also put a modern spin on her brand so that the same quality merchandise appeals to my clientele. All our merchandise is made to order, which is a unique marketplace. We are still making things the hard way, the old-fashioned way, which is one piece at a time, but we are making things that will last forever" (*Interview with Linda LaPinta 5/3/2021*).

When Hodges founded Leontine Linens, she worked out of the couple's back bedroom on Leontine Street and then set up her business at the rear of a friend's flower shop. In 2001, she rented her first office space on Webster Street. After purchasing Eleanor Beard Studio in 2002, Hodges received a call from Martha Stewart, an Eleanor Beard brand aficionado who wanted to feature Leontine Linens on her television show. Hodges states, "As a result of that invitation, the ladies who worked in our Hardinsburg studio all caravanned with their husbands to New Orleans to quilt on *The Martha Stewart Show* and produce [superb] Kentucky crafts on camera" (*Interview with Linda LaPinta 5/3/2021*).

In the summer of 2005, Leontine Linens opened its flagship store on Magazine Street. The shop with no inventory offers, instead, a kaleidoscope of colorful, monogrammed samples to assist buyers in visualizing their customized purchases. Since its inception, Leontine Linens, like Eleanor Beard's Studio, has thrived. For some years, Leontine Linens wholesaled Kentucky-made merchandise to Bergdorf Goodman in Manhattan, close to where Beard once sold her quilts and clothing on New York's Park Avenue. "Eleanor was doing what I am doing, which is selling high-end, bespoke, made-to-order items created by Kentuckians," Hodges said. Like her predecessor Eleanor Beard, Hodges has fashioned more than a business by launching a brand.

## *About the Author*

Linda Elisabeth LaPinta directs Spalding University's doctoral program in leadership. In addition to dozens of magazine and newspaper articles and book reviews, LaPinta has published four books under her maiden name, Beattie, with the University Press of Kentucky. Her fifth book, now in production with the same publisher, focuses on three centuries of Kentucky quilts and quiltmakers. Portions of this article are excerpted from that manuscript.





# Kentucky Book Women: Fact and Fiction

By Judith Gibbons

“I do not care one hoot for what that Book Woman has carried ‘round, and it would not bother me at all if she forgot the way back to our door. But here she comes right through the rain and fog and cold.”

— Heather Henson, *That Book Woman*

**D**uring the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Pack Horse Library program was instituted in eastern Kentucky as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to deliver books and other reading materials to isolated areas of the Appalachian Mountains.

This program lasted from 1936 until 1943 and reached about 100,000 Kentuckians in approximately a 10,000 square mile region. “The area was inaccessible and crippled, disconnected from the outside world economically, culturally, socially, and educationally.”

Up to one-third of adults in this mountainous area were illiterate and the unemployment rate hovered around 40 percent. Public libraries were nonexistent for 63 percent of the state’s population.

Librarian Jeanne Cannella Schmitzer said the program was “One of the most innovative, yet primitive approaches to library

service, the pack horse delivery method made library service a feasible reality.”

Libraries were housed in a variety of buildings including community centers, homes, stores, churches, and post offices. Most Pack Horse Libraries had one supervisor and four or five employees delivering materials along far-flung routes. Horse or mule and rider traveled about 100 miles per week and did a bi-weekly circuit.

Salaries for the Book Women (and a few men) were \$28 a month and from that each rider had to pay for feed and care for their horse or mule. There were almost 1,000 of these librarians at the height of the program.

Most of the reading materials were donations from more affluent areas, primarily discards from individuals or library collections. Children’s literature, poetry, and the Bible were popular reads along with pamphlets, magazines, and practical

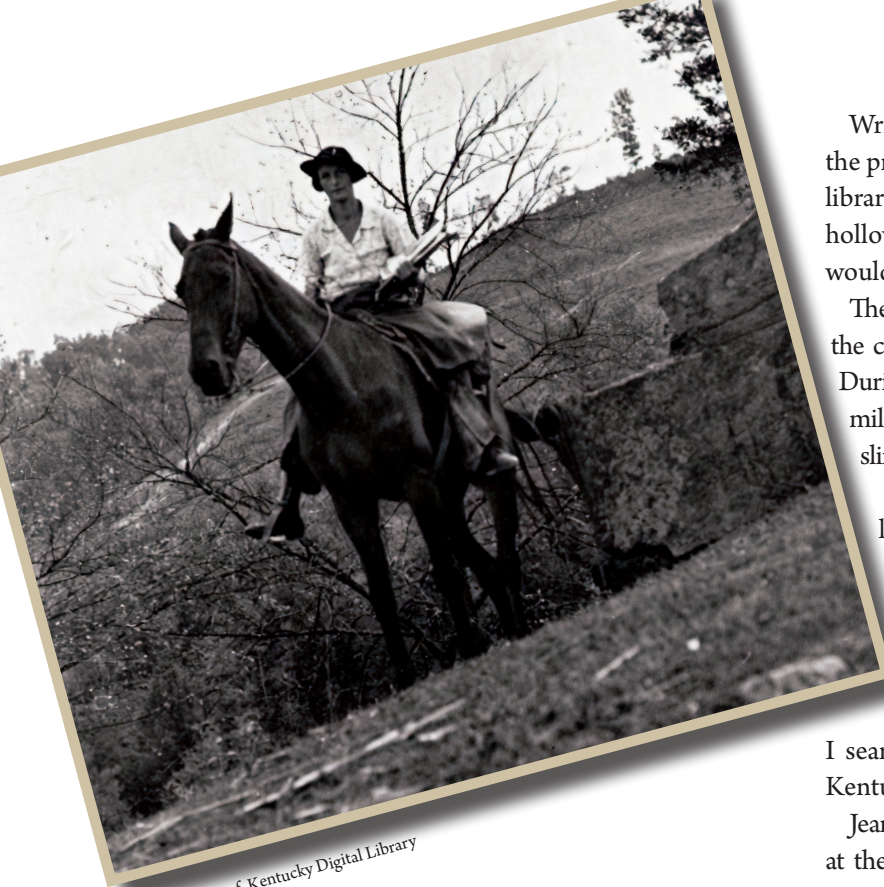


Photo courtesy of Kentucky Digital Library

Writing in 1940, “Tallu Fish of Whitley County described the project as one of the most far reaching of the entire [WPA library] program. ‘It has taken books up these creeks and hollows where they are needed and given us libraries that would have otherwise been impossible.’”

The Pack Horse Library Project ended mid-World War II with the conclusion of the WPA. America was going back to work. During its eight years, the program reached an aggregate 1.5 million individuals. After the closure, library service was again slim or non-existent for most of eastern Kentucky.

Over time, interest in the subject ebbed and flowed. The librarians were revered in the Kentucky library community as a part of public library heritage. Occasionally, a book or article was written about the program.

In 2019, two novels were released telling the fictionalized story of these book women, sparking renewed interest in the 1930s program. Intrigued, I searched for facts and fiction about the Book Women of Kentucky.

Jeanne Cannella Schmitzer wrote an informative master’s thesis at the University of Tennessee that detailed the history of the program and included interviews with two of the then-surviving Pack Horse Librarians, Grace Lucas and Carrie Lynch. Schmitzer also reviewed Kentucky Oral History Commission interviews with two participants, Lena Nofcier and author, James Still, who as a teacher did his own variation of library delivery services in Knott County. This thesis, available online, is a source for much of the contemporary knowledge of the Pack Horse Libraries.

In 2001, McGraw Hill released *Down Cut Skin Creek: The Pack Horse Librarians of Eastern Kentucky* by Kathi Appelt and Jeanne Canella Schmitzer, a preteen non-fiction book. This joint project wed the work of a children’s book author, Appelt, and a librarian, Schmitzer. Both loved books, reading, and horses. Their unique collaboration built on Schmitzer’s thesis, and her website dedicated to the Pack Horse Librarians.

Kentuckian Heather Henson released a children’s book, *That Book Woman*, in 2008. The illustrations were by Caldecott Medal winner, David Small. Written in free verse, the book featured watercolor and ink illustrations that captured the spirit of the hardscrabble mountain existence. *Booklist* said, “This tribute to the Pack Horse Librarians of Appalachia has a lyric, simple style that lends itself to reading aloud.”

Christian fiction author, Lynn Austin penned *Wonderland Creek* in 2011 when her editor introduced the Cut Shin Creek book to the prolific writer. The multiple Christy Award winner for inspirational fiction began the story in her home state of Illinois where young librarian, Alice Ripley, conducted a book drive for Pack Horse Librarians. Correspondence with a Kentucky librarian led her to visit the fictional town of Acorn. There she had numerous adventures, experienced hardship and romance as she matured, and her faith was strengthened.

non-fiction titles on topics like healthcare, cooking, hunting, and mechanics. Librarians censored their collections. Murder, detective, and risqué stories were not considered suitable.

Aside from the salaries, funding was non-existent. The program relied primarily on the generosity of donors from outside Appalachia. A tremendous supporter and fundraiser was Kentuckian Lena Nofcier. She coordinated a program for the state’s Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) that publicized the venture as well as seeking financial assistance and in-kind donations from the membership and others.

A successful campaign asked groups to contribute at least one cent. “Let’s send our pennies, books, and magazines traveling through Pack Horse Libraries.” Between October and December 1936, \$101.70 was raised from individual contributors. Nofcier reported that additional donations were received from 19 different states.

“In her 1937 report Nofcier noted that circulation had reached 60,000 per month, serving more than 26,000 families and 155 public schools.” Two years later, Pack Horse Libraries were in 48 of Kentucky’s 120 counties.

The library collections were often in less than pristine condition. After being jostled in delivery, read, and handled by multiple families and classrooms, they were quickly worn. Castoffs were made into scrapbooks. With ingenuity, pages from discarded books and magazines were combined with quilt patterns, recipes, illustrations, and local contributions to extend the volume of materials. Bookmarks were made from old Christmas and greeting cards. These were often a rare treat for the mountain children and helped preserve the fragile collections.



An easily reachable source was a June 2017 article in *Smithsonian* also available on the internet. Eliza McGraw authored “Horse-Riding Librarians Were the Great Depression’s Bookmobiles.” She offered a brief overview of how book women carried literacy to a 10,000-square-mile area of eastern Kentucky, an area where “...food, education, and economic opportunity were even scarcer for Appalachians.” This article was noted by both *American Libraries* and *Publisher’s Weekly*. It also caught the attention of romance writer, Jojo Moyes. As of August 2020, more than 239,00 individuals viewed the article on Facebook.

In February 2018, George Takei’s Oh Myyy! Facebook page featured a Pack Horse Library photo compilation entitled “The Heroic Horseback Librarians of the Great Depression.” This three-minute glimpse into 1930s America and the Pack Horse journey was viewed more than 8.1 billion times.

*The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* was released in May 2019. Historical fiction author Kim Michele Richardson wove together two elements from Kentucky history: The Pack Horse Librarians and the Blue People of eastern Kentucky.

Heroine Cussy Mary Carter was not only cursed to live in poverty—she was tagged by her blue-hued skin that set her apart from the others in Troublesome Creek, Kentucky. Cussy Mary faced innumerable tribulations as she strove to maintain her dignity and to earn her livelihood as a traveling librarian. In an authentic Appalachian voice, Richardson transports the reader to the 1930s where pain and prejudice, hunger and disease, superstition and innuendo permeated the hollers.

Richardson noted, “Kentucky is both a beautiful and brutal place full of fascinating history, varied landscapes, complex people and culture, and I am fortunate to live in a region that I can draw on from the heart. I grew up under the grinding heels of poverty, spending my first decade in a rural Kentucky orphanage, moving on to foster care and then finding myself homeless at age fourteen.”

In reviewing the book for Charleston, South Carolina’s *The Courier and Post*, Jonathan Haupt wrote: “In combining the stories of the fierce pack horse librarians with the ostracized Blue People, Richardson crafts an important novel of one woman’s compelling quest to forge an identity of her own through sheer resoluteness of will against the prejudices of a society determined to revile, restrict and persecute her for the differences she is born into and the good work she chooses to perform in the service of her community.”

October 2019 brought a third heroine to this trio. British author, Jojo Moyes released *The Giver of Stars*, which introduced us to Alice Wright Van Cleve, a naïve young woman from Surrey, England, captivated by a dashing, handsome, and single Kentuckian on European tour. Heading to Kentucky, she imagined her life would be a “year-long Derby Day.” Rather than living the imagined life of privilege on a horse farm in Lexington, the new Mrs. Van Cleve found herself in the remote coal town of Baileyville. After realizing that her “...marriage had been the

culmination of a series of random events”, Alice was at wits’ end. The opportunity to become a Pack Horse Librarian gave her purpose. Both Alice and the reader are introduced to her four strong compatriots who struggle to bring education, equality, and enlightenment to this coal mining town.

Karin Tanabe, writing in *The Washington Post* says, “*The Giver of Stars* is a celebration of love, but also of reading, of knowledge, of female friendship, of the beauty of our most rural corners and our enduring American grit: the kind of true grit that can be found in the hills of Kentucky and on the pages of this inspiring book.”

All three fictitious heroines were outsiders. Alice Grace Ripley was from out of state, Alice Wright Van Cleve was from another country, and Cussy Mary Carter was an outcast in her community.

The trio of authors did extensive field work. Austin traveled from Lexington to Cut Shin Creek and explored rural eastern Kentucky.

Richardson is a Kentucky native. She noted, “...during this remarkable and sometimes crazy and dangerous journey of living full time in Appalachia for research, I clumsily fell off a mountain and received seven breaks to my arm, and my husband caught Lyme disease.”

Moyes set up her workshop three times at Snug Hollow Inn in Irvine, Kentucky. She rode horses from Whisper Valley Trails in Beattyville, Kentucky, along the Pottsville Escarpment in the Daniel Boone National Forest to simulate the journeys of the Pack Horse Librarians.

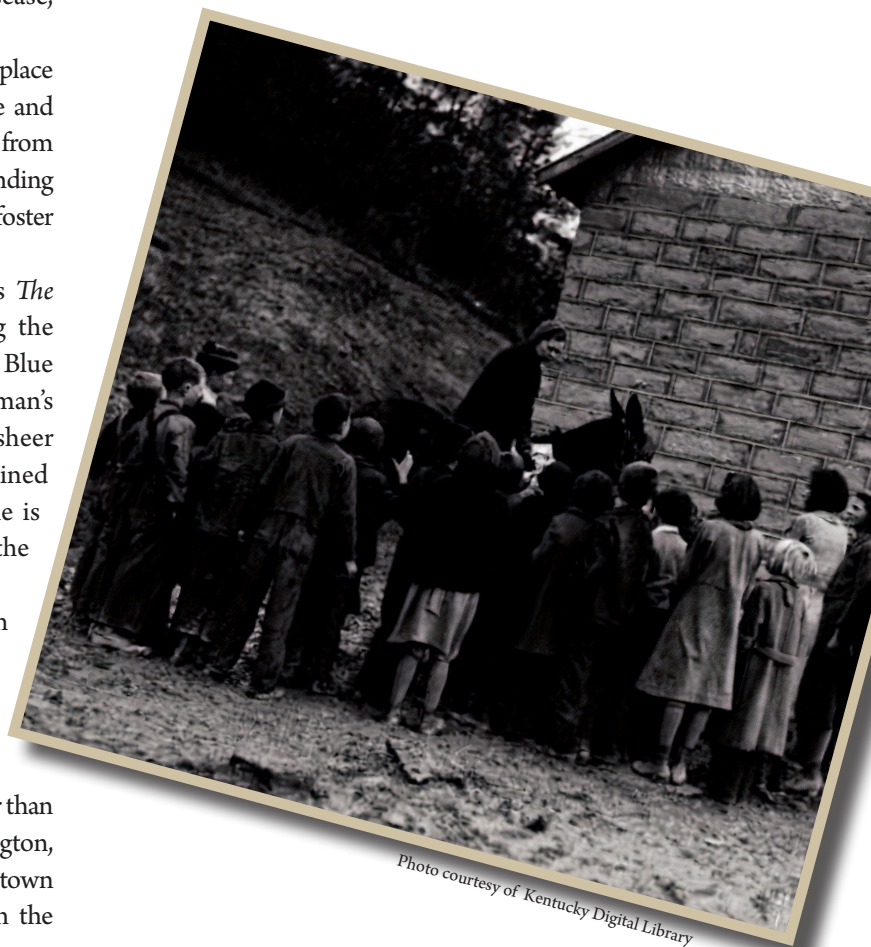


Photo courtesy of Kentucky Digital Library

With the close publication dates of *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* and *The Giver of Stars*, there were some cries of plagiarism. Numerous similarities occur in both books including violence, feisty librarians, strong African American female characters, choices in readings, gifts, folklore, and obviously locale.

Richardson and Moyes did research on the time period and the area. Both authors endeavored to bring life to historical fiction using commonly recognized themes, knowledge of the era, and non-fiction readings about the Pack Horse Librarians. Additionally, they were both experienced published authors.

Although eastern Kentucky was isolated, they still garnered knowledge of the outside world. The writers used historical data and events to strengthen and enrich their story line. Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932. It is read and discussed in both books. Cussy Mary receives a gift of collected poems by William Butler Yeats. Mrs. Van Cleve receives "The Giver of Stars" by Amy Lowell.

Like many women in the 1930s, patrons requested deliveries of the Women's Home Companion in both books. They also used and discussed folk remedies and sought up-to-date medical information from the service.

In my opinion, the similarities were happenstance and many of these elements were commonly discussed topics or experiences during the time period and/or mentioned in Schmitzer's thesis.

I invite you to read about the Pack Horse Librarians to see the resolve, strength, and dedication of these Depression Book Women striving to bring light and literature to Appalachia.

Let's close with the words of Kim Michele Richardson, "It was

always my belief that there's room for more than one story about the Pack Horse Librarians in this world. And these fierce and little-known women deserved to be celebrated globally after 80 years of being nothing more than a blip in history."

## About the Author

Judith Gibbons is retired from the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, where she coordinated the public library program. She was a long-term member of the Kentucky Book Fair Board and founding chair of the Kentucky Library Association's Scholarship Committee. Gibbons is an adjunct faculty member at the University of Kentucky School of Information Science and a columnist for *Marketing Library Services*. She received the Lifetime Achievement Award from Kentucky Library Association and the Mary Utopia Rothrock Award from the Southeastern Library Association.

## Postscript

The contemporary bookmobile is a descent of the Packhorse Libraries which served as an important foundation for public library development in the Commonwealth.

Kentucky has the largest bookmobile program in the country serving as mobile libraries and internet hot spots in both urban and rural areas. Funding for this project was started in 1956 by Kentucky Congressman Carl D. Perkins. The Library Services Act (LSA) was the first federally funded program for libraries and today's Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) is a descendant of this outreach.

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# Kentucky's Dark History of Lynching

By Dr. Marshall Myers

**T**hey are difficult and horrific to look back on. The stories of lynchings are reminders that there was a time in Kentucky history when a group of people were convinced, without a jury trial, that an individual was guilty of a “crime,” and the same group unlawfully hanged him.

The prisoner was usually lodged in the county jail, where he awaited a trial by a 12-person jury. A group of local citizens would “convince” the jailer that it was in his best interest to unlock the prisoner’s cell.

The unauthorized mob then dragged the prisoner out of jail cell and took him to a large tree, usually outside of town. With a rope on one end tied in a hangman’s knot, the mob put that end over the prisoner’s head as he sat upon a horse. The other end of the rope was thrown up over a low limb and tied securely.

Next, someone slapped the prisoner’s horse on the flank and the horse ran riderless out from under the tree.

That left the prisoner dangling from the rope a few feet off the ground. If lucky, the fall off the horse broke the prisoner’s neck; if not he strangled to death, emitting gags and guttural sounds.

The executioners then let the prisoner wiggle and jump until he was dead and ceased all motion.

The prisoner had paid the ultimate price for a crime that the community believes that he “committed,” all without a formal, legal trial that could declare that he was either innocent or guilty and then legally impose a sentence.

Such lawless acts were outside the law and were called lynchings. Rarely were any of the mob punished.

Kentucky, like its Southern neighbors, was a hotbed of lynching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when a

person, who oftentimes was African American, could be lynched for a number of “crimes”: lack of “respect” of white people, murder, the rape of a white woman, flirting with a white woman, not knowing his place in society, or even general mischief.

Almost any crime was grounds for a lynching. Whatever the lynchers saw as a “crime,” the lynchers imposed their own punishment in the form of “rough justice.”

Granted, if a posse, duly formed and authorized, “accidentally” killed an escaped prisoner, that was not technically “lynching,” yet it also was a form of “rough justice.”

Lynching reached its height in Kentucky between 1891 and 1895, a five-year span when 64 people were lynched, much like the rest of the South at the same time.

According to George Wright’s study of racial violence in the Commonwealth, including lynchings, Wright puts the figures for lynching in Kentucky between 1860 and 1939, by races as 100 African Americans, 89 whites, and six people identified only as an “unknown” race. The newspaper, the *Courier-Journal*, however, disputes some of those figures and says that 186 African Americans were lynched in Kentucky between 1877 and 1934.

## What Did Local Papers Say About These Lynchings?

While many county and local newspapers recognized that the mob’s actions were outside the law, a number of papers were generally supportive of the lynchings. In Bowling Green, for instance, an editor said that “there can be no question as to [the prisoner’s] guilt, and though his punishment was not brought about according to the form of the law, all will admit that it

# LYNCHING!

## Ernest Bewley Taken From the Jail and Hanged.

Mob Broke Open the Jail and Soon Had Him Dangling From a Limb.

### SHOT HARVEY DOWELL.

Ernest Bewley, colored, paid with his life for his lawlessness Wednesday morning. At 2 o'clock a mob of sixty men took him from the jail, where he was confined for having shot Harvey Dowell, at Gaston, Tuesday evening. They carried him to a spot a half-mile from town, where they swung him to a roadside tree.

Bewley lived at Gaston. The negroes of the place have not been as law-abiding as they should. Recently Ess Broadway, in a jealous rage, killed his sweetheart with a butcher knife, fearfully mutilating her. He had to be sent to Louisville for safe-keeping. Tuesday when Bewley was guilty of a wanton offense, the white people of the town decided to make an object lesson of him. Hence the lynching.

Bewley had borne a bad reputation for a long time, being particularly quarrelsome and dangerous when drunk. Tuesday he had been causing considerable trouble and quarreling with every body he came in contact with and was ordered out of Cal Pickerell's saloon several times during the day by the bartender, Mr. Pickerell being in this city attending court. About 4 o'clock Mr. Pickerell returned to Gaston and Bewley went into the saloon again and created a disturbance. Mr. Pickerell put him out.

Bewley left, but determined to have revenge. He hid behind the depot and waited his opportunity. Mr. Pickerell went out of his saloon to see Jerome Newton, and as he was returning with his back to the depot, the negro stepped from his hiding place and without any warning, he raised a revolver and opened fire, aiming at Pickerell. He fired three shots, but his aim was bad and he missed Pickerell. Harvey Dowell, the son of Dan Dowell, who was setting in a chair in front of the saloon was not so fortunate, for one of the bullets struck him in the leg inflicting a painful wound.

After the shooting Bewley fled to the woods about half a mile from town. He was captured by Press Richardson and Eugene Ashcraft. They found him hid in a big sink-hole. Sheriff Baskett arrived on the scene about this time and took charge of the prisoner and brought him to Brandenburg, as fast as horses could travel knowing it was too dangerous to attempt to keep him at Gaston for a minute.

The people of that neighborhood were not to be balked, however. A lynching party was quietly formed. At midnight it set out and proceeded to Brandenburg.

Without any noise it entered the town and proceeded at once to the jail. At 2 o'clock Jailer Thornberry was aroused by a knocking at the door. They broke open the door to the jail. With little parley he turned the keys over to the leaders, who unlocked the cell where the terrified negro was crouched, and dragged him out.

As quietly as they had come the mob took Bewley out of town, until a convenient tree was reached. The negro begged and pleaded, but realized that he could not hope for mercy.

Death by strangulation was too slow for the impatient regulators and after the negro had hung struggling for a time one of the members of the mob either fired a bullet or put a stab into the black body and mercifully put an end to the victim's sufferings.

Having completed its work, the mob quickly and quietly disappeared.

The next morning the body was viewed by hundreds of men, women and children as it dangled from the tree. Judge Hagan went to the scene of the lynching, had the body cut down and held an inquest, returning a finding that death had resulted at the hands of a mob made up of persons unknown.

The body of Bewley was turned over to relatives and was taken to Gaston for burial.

was not a righteous one." Similarly, the *Kentucky Gazette* while acknowledging, too, that lynching broke the law, the community must be "punished and repressed by the legal process, [but they are not men] to sit quietly down and see their neighbors murdered in cold blood!"

Witnesses to the lynching were not just confined to those doing the lynching. Teenage boys with no shirts, babes in their mother's arms, and children too young to understand the actions were frequent observers. Some were there out of curiosity, and some were there in support of their husbands.

Some form of corpse mutilation usually followed assurances the prisoner was dead. Often the corpse was soaked in coal oil or some other flammable, set afire, and allowed to burn until the corpse was a charcoal black.

Souvenir hunters then descended to cut off fingers, genitals, toes, and other parts of the body as "mementos" of the lynching. Photographers shot daguerreotypes of the corpse which were made into postage cards and bought and sold. It was, in a word, a "festive" occasion, a kind of carnival atmosphere.

### What Drove Mobs to Lynching?

One contributing factor for the large number of African Americans being lynched was traceable to white attitudes before and after Reconstruction, the short period after the Civil War when newly freed slaves exercised their constitutional rights. But white often denied those rights, and African Americans who exercised them were labeled "uppity." Lynching then became a way of whites reasserting their white dominance in Southern society.

Many Southern legislatures also quickly passed so-called "black laws" that severely limited the rights of blacks to vote and perform other duties as citizens. Blacks who violated those "laws" were seen as "not knowing their place" and those "violators" were often lynched.

While Kentucky was never a member of the Confederacy, the Commonwealth was deeply enslaved, believing that citizens had a right to keep their slaves after the war. As a result, the state turned distinctly "Southern."

Years later, another theory emerged to explain lynching. Lynchings, some said, were the result of a lack of faith in the legal system, a system that took too long to mete out justice. If a murderer was found guilty in a legal trial, the length of time before he was punished was way too long, years sometimes. Justice should not have to wait, advocates said.

A number of past and current scholars, however, have noted still another theory. They anecdotally began to see a correlation between the rise in states using capital punishment and the decline in the number of lynchings. According to these scholars, as more and more states practice capital punishment, the number of lynchings will go down dramatically.

A local newspaper reported on the 1902 lynching of Ernest Bewley, who was dragged from his jail cell by a mob of 60 people during the night.



But strict statistical correlation, as Margaret Vandiver says, that “little quantitative evidence exists for a relationship between lynching and [legal] execution.” In other words, where there were state-sponsored executions, the number of lynchings did not go down. The two (executions by the state and lynchings) are not related.

However, looking at one particular lynching provides not only a good summary of what lynching was like, but it also serves as a way to make lynching real.

The victim, an African American male from a small community, was named Ernest Bewley. Bewley, already lodged in jail charged with shooting Harvey Dowell when he intended to shoot Cal Pickerel, a saloon owner in town. Apparently intoxicated, Bewley “had a bad reputation” in the community and sought revenge for Pickerel’s throwing him out of his saloon.

After the shooting, Bewley then fled the scene, hiding in a “big sink hole,” but he was apprehended by two local citizens who turned him over to the county sheriff who lodged Bewley in the county jail.

At midnight, a mob of 60 people from Bewley’s hometown organized and made their way to the county jail.

When the mob arrived, they demanded that the jailer turn over Bewley, breaking down the jailer’s door. The jailer responded by relinquishing his keys to the mob, fearing their swift retribution. Bewley was “dragged” from his cell and taken to a tree “out of town.”

Bewley “begged” that he be spared his fate, but the mob was intent upon their mission. He was then hanged with the rope over a large limb of a tree, but he did not die immediately.

For “death by strangulation was too slow for the impatient regulators.” Someone in the mob either stabbed or shot Bewley until he was indeed dead. The mob then dispersed.

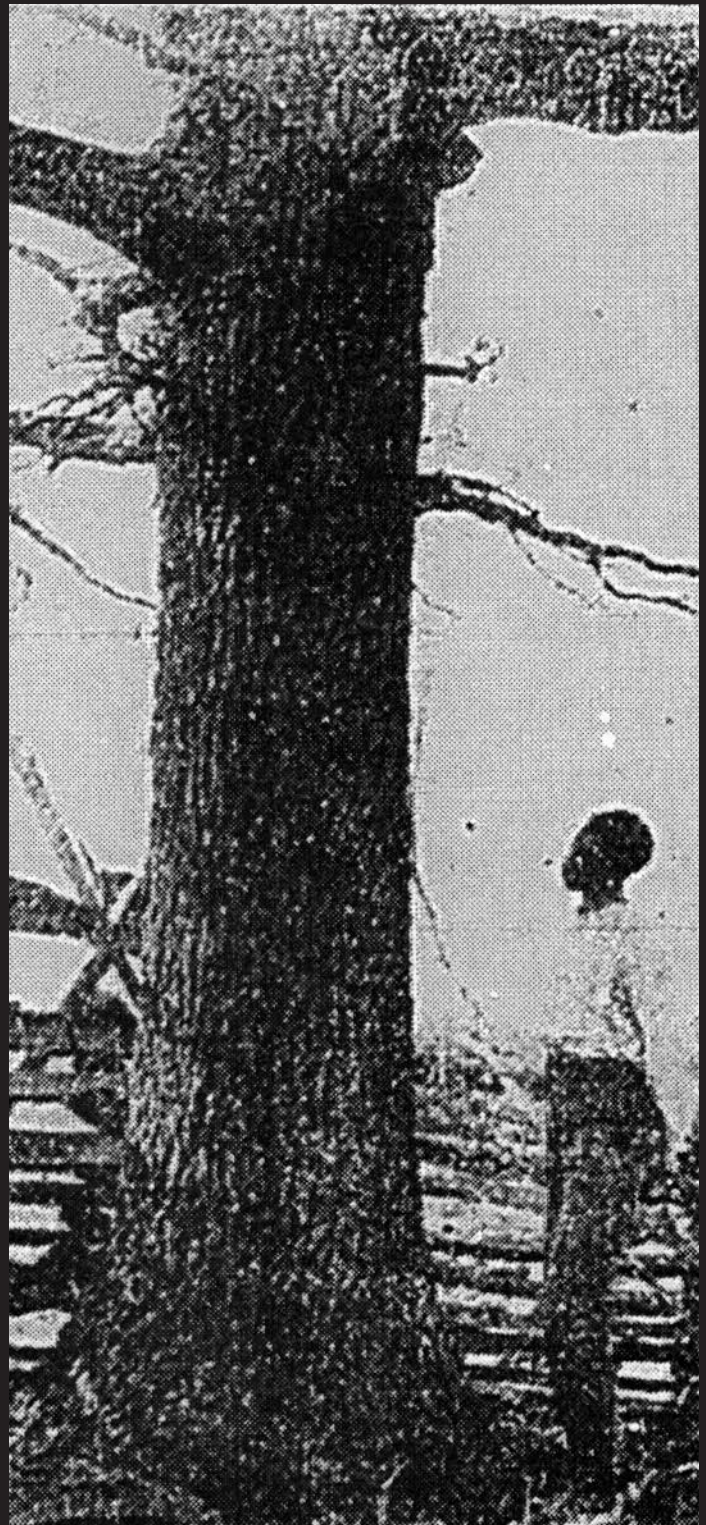
Bewley’s body was left “to dangle from a limb” overnight so that “hundreds of men, women, and children viewed it,” as it swayed from the tree.

Later the county judge held an inquest that declared Bewley’s death “had resulted at the hands of a mob made up of persons unknown.” The body was then turned over to the family for burial.

The newspaper article that described the lynching said that Bewley was lynched because of his “lawlessness” and general demeanor. The small town then used Bewley’s lynching as “an object lesson” to other African Americans in the community.

Lynchings now are a thing of the past. We no longer allow groups of men no matter how righteous they consider themselves to ignore the law and put men accused, but not yet convicted of crimes, to be unlawfully hanged. We leave that job to the judicial system to try the accused, determine his guilt or innocence, and if appropriate, to impose the penalty.

We now generally respect the law in ways that were not true in the past. History reminds us of what can happen.



**This photo accompanied the newspaper article about the lynching of Ernest Bewley, who was hanged with a rope over a large limb.**

### **About the Author**

Dr. Marshall Myers is the retired Coordinator of Writing at Eastern Kentucky University. He spends his time researching and writing articles like the above. He thanks Laura Hall of the University of Kentucky Library and his wife for their unbounded patience.



# Maryat Lee

By David T. Miller

**N**ew York City. 1951. Beside a busy Harlem street on a small portable stage, non-actors—residents of the neighborhood—put on a play drawn from their everyday lives. In the beginning they have to shout to be heard over catcalls and dodge water balloons from fire escapes above. But as the play goes on the audience quiets, mesmerized by something they’ve never seen before: their own lives, their own words reflected back to them. Their own stories of heroin abuse, bad schools, gay teenagers, bad cops, and racial conflict. The tall young woman behind the plays watches from the side, in the company of Jackie Robinson and other luminaries.



Photos courtesy of David T. Miller

**Above:** Lee’s “street theater” in Harlem was an instant success.

**Middle:** Kentucky native Maryat Lee sought to tell the stories of the everyday people she met on the stage.

**Above:** After moving from New York to West Virginia, Lee established the EcoTheater, recruiting local teenagers to make costumes, build a stage, and seek out stories to be told on a stage.



Covington, Kentucky, native Maryat Lee, the daughter of a prominent attorney father and a musician and painter mother, had recently graduated from Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary and had worked with both theologian Paul Tillich and anthropologist Margaret Mead. Lee was drawn to make theater but hated the artificiality of the New York stage. She wondered what she could make of the intense and sometimes horrific stories she heard every day in her Harlem neighborhood. That's where the real drama was. She wondered how she could harness the energy and truth of those stories without dressing them up in pretense. Her solution was to recall the "mystery plays" put on by medieval Christians. There were no "actors" in them, just everyday people reenacting Bible stories, dressing up as Noah or Eve or Mary, to keep those stories alive in their communal memory.

Maryat's "street theater" was an overnight sensation, written up in *Life*, *Variety*, and *The New York Times*, and some scenes were adapted for television. She went on to create a mixed-race troupe, the Soul and Latin Theater (SALT), and continued to work in New York street theater through the 1960s.

In the late 1950s Maryat had met and begun a lengthy correspondence with the novelist and short story master Flannery O'Connor. They were opposites in most ways—Maryat the New York liberal with a broadly Protestant worldview, O'Connor the deeply Catholic Georgia traditionalist. But they instantly became close friends, writing to each other frequently and intimately about their work and arguing with and teasing each other, until O'Connor's death in 1964. It would be an important and influential

relationship for both. The many letters between them that have been published evidence a fascinating conversation between very different but very simpatico women.

Lee kept up a strong connection to Kentucky throughout her life. Her more traditional play *Four Men and a Monster* debuted in Cincinnati in 1968 and another play, *The Tightrope Walker*, was performed at Centre College in Danville, which many members of her family attended. But she felt most at home in New York City, until city life became overwhelming. In 1975 she and her then-partner decided to relocate to the country, buying a small farm in southern West Virginia. She started over, wondering if the same processes that had worked in the city would work there. The cultures could not have been more different. After her years in the multicultural hubbub of the city, now she was set down firmly in the Bible Belt, which was still de facto segregated in many areas.

She formed a new company, EcoTheater ("eco" from the Greek meaning "home"), ("eco" from the Greek meaning "home") and recruited local teenagers, both Black and white, through a state summer jobs program. They would otherwise be picking up roadside trash but now found themselves making costumes, building a rough stage, and asking their families and neighbors for stories that could be molded into scenes by Lee. These non-actor actors presented their shows wherever their flatbed truck could take their little stage—city parks, town squares, flea markets, even a prison yard. Lee dramatized the local legend of John Henry and found a place for each of them in the play. She saw that these kids, paradoxically, became more honest, more themselves, once they settled into who they were "supposed"

**VARIETY**

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**VOL. 182, No. 7**      **NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25, 1951**      **PRICE 25 CENTS**

**HARLEM'S THEATRE-IN-THE-LOT**

**Touring Pacific Fetes First Anni With Record SRO \$3,300,000 Take**

**ANTI-DOPE DRAMA IN STREET PITCH**

**Carnegie Hall B.O. Snafu Stuns Trade; \$60,000 Reported Due Govt., Artists**

**Par Gives Up On Chevalier Visa**

**It's Bank Nite 'On TV Set Sales, Too**

**1st Com'n TV Show To Be Aired in London**

**Went it not for the road, or national, company of "South Pacific" the Chicago Theatre scene would be at its lowest ebb since the turn of the century. With the exception of a few plays, most of which have not run past a month, the Rodgers & Hammerstein musical, which opened here Nov. 15, has been the mainstay of the Windy City legit business.**

**Chicago, April 24.** Since its start in Cleveland April 24 the national company of "SP" has garnered \$3,300,000, a record in a year's time. In the relatively low-capacity Shubert house (3,100 seats) the musical has brought in \$1,175,000 in 23 weeks. Every week, even in the midst of a stuporous blizzard with 15 below zero weather, the show has hit \$21,200, or within a few dollars one way or another. Only weak point is the Wednesday matinee, which has a light advance, but always manages to fill up at the last moment. Seats are selling now through July and it seems that "SP" won't leave till November. Then the national company of "Guys and Dolls" is slated to take over.

**Comedy Pic for Fete**

**1st Com'n TV Show To Be Aired in London**

**London, April 24.** Britain's first commercial television show will be transmitted tonight (Tues.) from a London studio via closed circuit to the House of Commons. Every member of Parliament has been invited to attend the show, sponsored as an all-party basis by the Parliamentary scientific committee to give the M.P.'s background material for the forthcoming debate on the Beveridge report, which has turned thumbs-down on sponsored radio or TV entertainment for England.

**Trial show is to be produced by Henry Caldwell, with a cast topped by Kay Thompson, now playing in London.**

**With television set sales continuing**

**Political, church, show biz and sports figures have teamed up in a unique dramatic project to spotlight the sarcoptic evil to Harlem residents. With an empty lot as a stage amid the area's squalid tenements, the group of public leaders premiered on Monday night (23), the first of a series of productions of a documentary play "Dope." Play is set for a week's tour through East Harlem, an area where drug addiction—from reefer to heroin—has been found by officials to be alarmingly widespread.**

**Presented by a mixed cast of show amateurs and visiting artists, the arena-style production puts over its message with clarity and punch, if without flame. Fully packed streets, with some viewers perched on over-hanging fire-escapes of adjacent buildings, received the play's message with mixed reactions. The youngsters hooted and jeered while the parents in the audience listened attentively to the sad truth revealed in the drama. An information booth, which was set up near the stage by Narcotics Anonymous to advise**

**(Continued on page 93)**

**Film Overtures Made To Margaret Truman**

**Hollywood, April 24.** Possibility of a film about Margaret Truman late this summer was raised by her manager, Jim Davidson, who reported that a deal may be finalized before the President's daughter returns east after making her radio drama debut Thursday (26) night in "Jackpot" on NBC's "Screen Directors Playhouse."

**Miss Truman said she had never seen "Jackpot" on the screen and probably wouldn't see it before the weekend, indicating she'd rather do her own version of the part opposite James Stewart, rather than be accused of copying Barbara Hale's film portrayal.**

**Par Gives Up On Chevalier Visa**

**Paris, April 24.** Paramount is understood to have

**Monica due Vladimir Horowitz, Arthur Schnitzler, Sol Hurok, the N. Y. Philharmonic - Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra and other artists and organizations, have been tied up indefinitely as result of a business handle at Carnegie Hall, N. Y., in an affair that's rocking the N. Y. concert scene.**

**These monies have been impounded by the U. S. Government while the Internal Revenue Bureau is auditing the business books to determine what Federal submission tax funds are due it. Amount of costs due the U. S. Treasury and the various artists has been variously estimated, with the sum claimed to be as much as \$60,000. Of this, \$40,000 is reported due the Government from the 20% admission taxes, and \$20,000 is owed to artists and groups.**

**About \$2,000 is due Horowitz, who gave a piano recital at Carnegie Hall Monday night (23). Around \$2,500 is reported due to Hurok, whose new Shubert soprano, Victoria de los Angeles, sang at the hall Sunday night (22). Hurok is also owed money for another of his artists, pianist Arthur**

to be on stage. The youth troupe would continue for seven years, playing hundreds of shows.

In time, as Maryat gained the trust of the community, she expanded her work to include senior citizens, creating a series of scenes they would write and perform themselves, with her help, based around the decline of their small town once diesel trains replaced steam engines. Many described the experience of working with Lee as one of the most satisfying of their lives, and some of the teenagers in her troupe later said that their time with her gave them more confidence in themselves and more empathy for their families and town. (It also gave them \$50 a week, a boon to their families in that very poor area.)

Lee drew upon her own Kentucky roots in navigating rural Appalachia but found fewer opportunities there for the kind of transgressive decisions she'd made in New York, where her plays featured an actual junkie shooting up on stage and a proudly "out" young man, long before Stonewall. In Appalachia, Lee continued to find voices that aren't usually heard, creating a comedy featuring an eccentric and plain-spoken mountain woman, among other works. But her most radical act may have been to create a situation where the mixed-race troupe could work so closely, certainly unusual in that time and place. She insisted that everyone be treated equally, and her casting decisions were based on a deep insight into the young person's unique skills, regardless of gender or race. For example, she cast a thin young Black woman as John Henry and her presence was so powerful audience members said the play was half over before they realized the odd casting. (The young woman, a

mother at 14 and barely able to read, became Maryat's assistant and took over EcoTheater training workshops after Maryat's death.)

This was a new type of theater, "as indigenous as it's possible to be in Appalachia" as one academic writer put it, and it was broadly successful even though completely removed from what's normally considered "theater." For Lee, it was proof that the context of city versus country didn't matter, that she was right that her method of working could bring out something universal in every person, if they could only step outside themselves for the moment they're on stage. For those few moments they could be Noah, or Adam, and a thin young woman could beat a steam drill.

In the early 1980s Lee began creating a structure by which her methods could be used elsewhere, through a series of training workshops and "seed companies" in a dozen other states, including eastern Kentucky. After her untimely death at age 66 in 1989 the company continued her work for another decade, and a few offshoots still exist. But Lee's career, which integrated her visionary ideas about religion and race, informed by her Kentucky childhood and a unique education at both grand universities and on rough city streets, has largely been forgotten.

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## About the Author

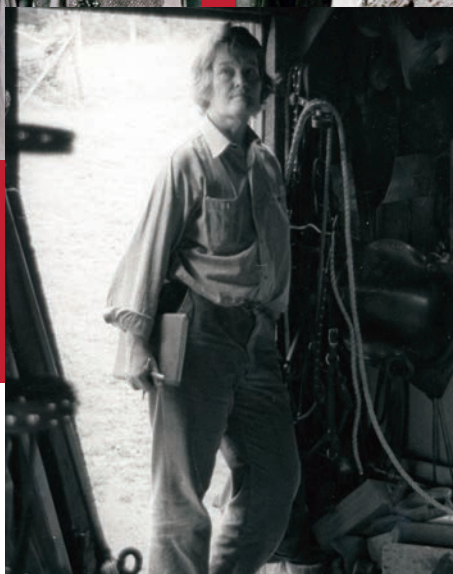
David T. Miller is a writer and editor based in Lexington. He was an intern, actor, and music director at Maryat Lee's theater and later served on its board of directors. His compilation *Maryat Lee: The Appalachian Plays* is published by Bacchante Books.



Photos courtesy of David T. Miller

**Above:** EcoTheater plays were performed in city parks, town squares, flea markets, and even a prison yard.

**Middle:** Maryat Lee died in 1989 at the age of 66.



**Above:** In New York, Lee created a mixed-race troupe, the Soul and Latin Theater (SALT).





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Pioneer Playhouse, Danville, Kentucky, Photo by Kirk Shlea

# Kentucky's Unappreciated Artists: Playwrights

By William H. McCann, Jr.

**A**cross the Commonwealth, as theatres struggle to stay relevant after having to close due to the pandemic, playwrights are working hard at their craft even as most write plays as an adjunct to their “real” jobs. Though not all are members of the Dramatists Guild, today there are more than 50 professional playwrights, actively writing and pursuing production opportunities in towns across Kentucky as are expat playwrights across the country. Yet, beyond our professional playwrights there are many more “amateurs” drawn to the challenge of telling stories primarily through dialogue.<sup>1</sup>

In 2005, the University Press of Kentucky published *The Kentucky Anthology* in which the editor, Wade Hall (himself a playwright), wrote in the chapter titled “The Dramatic Tradition in Kentucky” that “[t]his is a short chapter because Kentucky has produced relatively few good dramatists.” The book, 880 pages in

length, devotes 17 pages to the subject of our “Dramatic Tradition,” though the final four pages are an excerpt of the autobiography of the actress Mary Anderson.<sup>2</sup> It seems Dr. Hall felt that there were not enough good playwrights to even fill 17 pages.

It might be true that “even well into the twentieth century” local theatres and colleges were reluctant to produce plays by “homegrown talent.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, if that was true, it is no longer the case as many Kentucky community theatres produce new works, at least on an occasional basis: Antagonist Productions (Lexington), Bard Theatre (Louisville), Flashback Theater (Somerset), Leeds Center for the Arts (Winchester), Public Theatre (Bowling Green), Studio Players (Lexington), Teatro Tercera Llamada (Louisville), Theatre on the River (Frankfort), Theatre Workshop Owensboro, Village Players (Ft. Thomas)—have all produced new plays.<sup>4</sup> In many cases they produced new 10-minute plays as part of a festival; in some cases they produced full-length plays.

<sup>1</sup> Brian Walker, Dramatist Guild Regional Representative, via email Sept 21, 2020 to author.

<sup>2</sup> Wade Hall, ed. *Kentucky Anthology: 200 years of Writing in the Bluegrass State*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky pages 567-584.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 567.

<sup>4</sup> Community theatres do not always produce new works every year. Listings of new works produced by Kentucky theatres were listed in Bill McCann, Jr., ed. *Kentucky Theatre Yearbook*. Cynthiana: JW Books an annual publication 2016-2019. This listing is not comprehensive of any single year but are examples taken from the 2018 and 2019 publications.



Colleges and universities across the Commonwealth produce new works. In many instances these are productions of student plays, of 10-minute ones. However, Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Kentucky Wesleyan College, Northern Kentucky University, Union College, and the University of Kentucky have all premiered full-length plays on their stages by Kentucky playwrights.<sup>5</sup>

Kentucky's professional playwrights have been successful with three named winners of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama: John Patrick (*Tea House of the August Moon*, 1954); Marsha Norman (*Night Mother*, 1984); Suzan-Lori Parks (*Topdog/Underdog*, 2002).<sup>6</sup> Others have had their plays produced on Broadway or Off-Broadway to the acclaim of awards and long runs. Still others have had their plays turned into screenplays. Such achievements make our playwrights worth more than "modest mention."<sup>7</sup>

In *The Kentucky Anthology*, Dr. Hall discusses several playwrights worth a second look: Charles T. Dazey, Anne Crawford Flexner, Thompson Buchanan, Cleves Kincaid, John Patrick, and Marsha Norman. Let's begin by recognizing that all of these were (and Norman is) talented.

Charles T. Dazey is the author of the novel *In Old Kentucky*, which he later rewrote as a play. Dr. Hall mocks and belittles the play as "popular melodrama."<sup>8</sup> However, melodramas were once all the rage on both stage and screen. In fact, the play was made into a film on three occasions: in 1919, 1927, and 1935.<sup>9</sup> Additionally the book has been in print nearly continuously since it was first published in 1892. It must be admitted that though Mr. Dazey had nine plays produced on Broadway, none were a success; however, he is also credited with a best-selling novel and 31 screen credits.<sup>10</sup>

According to Dr. Hall, Anne Crawford Flexner was "a step up in talent and achievement."<sup>11</sup> Her eight Broadway productions

shared 498 performances between them. In its review of *Miranda of the Balcony*, *The New York Times* review stated, "Mrs. Flexner has written a strong emotional drama of modern style and the audience of last night was quick to recognize its value." This strong review may well have helped Ms. Flexner secure the rights to adapt *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, her most popular play. Other successes were *A Lucky Star* (1910), 95 performances; and *The Marriage Game* (1913), 78 performances.<sup>12</sup> Three of her plays were turned into films. *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was filmed four times (in 1914, 1919, 1934, and 1942); the 1934 version starred Pauline Lord and W. C. Fields and featured Zasu Pitts. The others that were filmed were *The Blue Pearl* (1920) and *All Souls Eve* (1921).<sup>13</sup>

Cleves Kincaid's best-known play was *Common Clay*, which ran on Broadway for an astounding 316 performances in 1915-16 and was filmed in both 1919 (a silent film) and again in 1930. In 1936, *Common Clay* was filmed under the name *Private Number* starring Loretta Young and Robert Taylor.<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, one of the writers of *Private Number* was the film's producer, Gene Markey, whose fourth wife was Lucille Parker Wright, owner of Calumet Farm.<sup>15</sup>

Thompson Buchanan had 12 plays produced on Broadway for runs totaling 750 performances. His biggest hits were *A Woman's Way* (1909), 112 performances; *Life* (1914), 161; *Civilian Clothes* (1919), 150 performances; and *Sinner* (1927), 128.<sup>16</sup> Of his 12 Broadway plays four were made into films on one or more occasions; he had nine more screenwriting credits.<sup>17</sup>

Playwrights have long inhabited an odd space in our society that perhaps explains why they go unnoticed: they typically find success outside Kentucky's borders. Further, their names often go flying by in a moment's screen time or are lost in the glare of the star of the play. Marsha Norman, George C. Wolfe, and others have found success in New York, Hollywood, or both, but likely would not have

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<sup>5</sup> BCTC has produced new works of varying lengths including both full-length and one act plays by, among others, Bo List, Charles Edward Pogue, Jeremy Gillett, and Emma Grace Immes. Kentucky Wesleyan has produced Kentucky Wesleyan College produced Beth Demunbrun's three-person version of *Hamlet: Abridged and Unafraid* in the Spring of 2017 (Malek Harris. "Hamlet Abridged and Unafraid" in *The Panogram*: Owensboro: KWC student newspaper accessed Sept 14, 2020.) Northern Kentucky University offers the state's only BFA in playwriting; it produces student plays and during their senior year major students premiere a full-length play. More information at <https://www.nku.edu/academics/sota/theatre/prospective/playwritingbfa.html>. Additionally, NKU sponsors the Y.E.S. Festival of new plays. Scripts are accepted in even years and the plays are produced in odd years. More information is at [www.nku.edu/yesfestival](http://www.nku.edu/yesfestival). Union College's Department of Theatre has produced C.R. Honce's *The Legend of Denny Carnes* (Mayla McKeenan via Facebook Messenger Sept 7, 2020) The University of Kentucky Department of Theatre and Dance regularly produces 10-minute plays written by students. In UK's Studio Season students can produce their own longer works, limited to one hour. The UK Main Stage season has boasted of plays such as the 'polishing' of *Gorey Stories* by Stephen Currens before it left town for Off-Broadway and later Broadway, at least one play by Silas House, and several by faculty. The University of Louisville productions include Nefertiti Burton's *The Magic Tree*.

<sup>6</sup> The Pulitzer Prizes for Drama <https://www.pulitzer.org/prize-winners-by-category/218>. Accessed Sept 2, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, 568.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 567.

<sup>9</sup> IBDB (Internet Broadway Database), <https://www.ibdb.com/>. Accessed Sept 1, 2020; IMDb (Internet Movie Database) accessed Sept 1, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>11</sup> Hall, 567.

<sup>12</sup> IBDB, <https://www.ibdb.com/>. Accessed Sept 1, 2020; IMDb accessed Sept 1, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> IMDb accessed Sept 1, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> IMDb accessed Sept 1, 2020 (Cleves Kincaid) and accessed Sept 14, 2020 (Gene Markey).

<sup>16</sup> IBDB, <https://www.ibdb.com/>. Accessed Sept 1, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Films, based on his Broadway plays were: *The Cub* (1915, 1926); *A Woman's Way* (1916); *Civilian Clothes* (1920); *Life* (1920). Information from IMDb accessed Sept 14, 2020.



*Left: Charles T. Dazey had nine plays produced on Broadway, wrote a best-selling novel, and has 31 screen credits. Middle: Columbia University President George Rupp presented Suzan-Lori Parks with the 2002 Pulitzer Prize in Drama. Right: John Patrick's Tea House of the August Moon won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1954.*

been successful in their hometowns. Indeed, this is the case for our state's most performed playwright, Maurine Dallas Watkins, whose stage play comedy, after her death, became the musical *Chicago: The Musical*, a play that has been performed 10,652 times in two Broadway productions over nearly three decades.<sup>18</sup>

Born in Louisville and raised in Indiana, Watkins attended Butler University, and Hamilton College (which was part of Transylvania University) before heading off to study journalism at Columbia University and playwriting at Yale. She worked for the *Chicago Tribune* as a reporter before eventually writing two Broadway plays—*Chicago* (1926), which was the comedy that ran for 172 performances, and *Revelry* (1927) which ran 48—and was credited with 24 screen credits.<sup>19,20</sup>

Among her screenwriting credits was *Libeled Lady* (1936), a screwball comedy that starred Myrna Loy, William Powell, and Spencer Tracy, that was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Picture. The movie was remade in 1946 as *Easy to Wed* starring Van Johnson, Lucille Ball, and Esther Williams. Other credits, besides *Chicago: The Musical* (2002), were a silent era version of her play, *Chicago* (1927) and *Roxie Hart* (1942), which starred Ginger Rogers and Adolphe Jean Menjou with George Montgomery and Phil Silvers.<sup>21</sup>

Other playwrights who have had plays produced in New York, on Broadway and off, include Marsha Norman, Naomi Wallace, George C. Wolfe, Sallie Bingham, Suzan-Lori Parks, who have written plays, screenplays, and teleplays.

George C. Wolfe, raised in Frankfort, is probably Kentucky's most accomplished thespian: he has experience as an actor, director, playwright, and producer in theatre, film, and television. He has won many awards, including Tony, Obie, and Drama Desk, awards for his theatrical works in New York, and nominations and awards for his work in both television and film. He has had four plays produced on Broadway including *Jelly's Last Jam* (1992), *Bring in Da Noise, Bring in Da Funk* (1996), *The Wild Party* (2000), and *Shuffle Along, or, the Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed* (2016). Those four productions were performed 1,986 times and *Jelly's Last Jam*, won the Drama Desk Award for best book of a musical. Additionally, he has had mixed success Off-Broadway with the musical *Paradise* (1985) and his play *The Colored Museum* (1986). But in 1990 he won an Obie Award for direction of his adaptation of three Zora Neale Hurston short stories as the play, *Spunk*.<sup>22</sup> There is much to like about Wolfe's own plays, but it is his direction of works for stage, screen, and television which have gained him most of his awards and recognition.

It may well be that Kentucky's resident theatres in the past "have sporadically encouraged playwrights."<sup>23</sup> Whether that was true is hard to assess; but since 2005, that has not been the case. Actors Theatre of Louisville's annual rite of spring, the Humana Festival of New Plays, in recent years have premiered works by Kentucky playwrights Basil Kreimendahl (2017),

<sup>18</sup> According to IBDB (accessed Sept 14, 2020) Maurine Dallas Watkins is credited with four productions: her original *Chicago*, *Revelry*, and two productions of *Chicago: The Musical*. The original musical ran on Broadway from Jun 3, 1925–Aug 27, 1927 (936 performances and 24 previews); The revival ran from Nov 14, 1996 to Mar 15, 2020 (9,692 performances and 24 previews). Altogether, the musical has had 10,652 Broadway performances.

<sup>19</sup> A good source of information about Ms. Watkins is the book *Chicago: With the Chicago Tribune Articles That Inspired It* by Maurine Watkins. Edited and with an Introduction by Thomas H. Pauly. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 1997. 158 pps.

<sup>20</sup> IBDB.

<sup>21</sup> IMDb.

<sup>22</sup> IOBDB (Internet Off-Broadway Database), IBDB, IMDb.

<sup>23</sup> Hall, 568.



Naomi Wallace (2018), Leah Nanako Winkler (2018), and Idris Goodwin (2019).<sup>24</sup> The Pioneer Playhouse in Danville has produced new works by a variety of playwrights with ties to the state including Charles Edward Pogue, Holly Hepp-Galvan, Robby Henson, and Elizabeth Orndorff.<sup>25</sup> Kentucky Repertory Theatre (previously named Horse Cave Theatre) produced 17 world premieres, by 13 different playwrights over 20 years including Sallie Bingham, Jim Peyton, Jim Wayne Miller, Nancy Gall-Clayton, Warren Hammack, and Liz Bussey Fentress.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, organizations such as the Kentucky Theatre Association, Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, Inc., and Derby City Playwrights have promoted playwrights through contests, readings, commissioning of new works, and productions. Since 2009, KTA Roots of the Bluegrass New Play Contests have recognized outstanding full-length plays, several of which have received full productions.<sup>27</sup> KPW's Kentucky New Play Series, which began in 2012, first produced the winning plays at the Kentucky State Fair. More recently KPW has encouraged productions by theatres across the state with mixed success, although, the organization also has commissioned seven new works.<sup>28</sup> The newest of these organizations, Derby City Playwrights, works with limited numbers of Louisville playwrights annually to develop a script to the point of readiness for production.<sup>29</sup>

Beyond those three state or regional organizations, approximately one-third of the state's 155 theatres in 61 counties produce new plays.<sup>30</sup> Most of these theatres produce 10-minute plays as part of a festival for which the playwrights do not receive royalties, though sometimes the "critic's choice" or a "festival favorite" award may come with a cash prize. A few of the community theatres produce full-length plays either as part of a festival or as part of their season.

Spotlight Theatre in Berea produces a festival of short plays in the spring of each year. Some of those plays are five to 30 minutes in length. Occasionally as part of that event a full-length play is included. During the year, Spotlight's season sometimes includes a new work.<sup>31</sup>

The Bard Theatre in Louisville, year in and year out, probably produces more new plays (often by local playwrights) than any theatre except Actors Theatre of Louisville. Their season includes the Ten-Tucky, a festival of 10-minute plays by Kentucky playwrights; Solo Shots, a festival of plays featuring single-actor plays, often written by the performer; and a variety of new works, often full-length, by outside presenting groups, including Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, Derby City Playwrights, and Kentucky Black Repertory Theatre.<sup>32</sup>

A number of theatres rely upon new works to exist. For example, Adventure Theatre and Bluegrass Mystery Theatre (both in Lexington) and Whodunnit Murder Mystery Theatre (Louisville) are mystery dinner theatres with new productions, generally every month, written by members of the organization.<sup>33</sup>

Devised theatre, written by members of the cast or, in some instances based in oral histories from the community or region, has become popular in Louisville, in some parts of rural Kentucky, and at some universities.<sup>34</sup> Louisville's Looking for Lilith Theatre Company specializes in doing devised theatre productions based on women's history and events.<sup>35</sup> However, there are some other theaters around the state that use devised theatre to tell local stories. Recent devised works in the Lexington area include BCTC's fall of 2020 *Covid Monologues*, a work devised by the cast, and ongoing Woodford Theatre productions of *The Girl Project*. The state's best known devised productions are of *Higher Ground*, in which Robert Gipe directed local citizens, faculty, staff, and students of Southeast

<sup>24</sup> Confirmed by email by Elizabeth Greenfield, Actors Theatre of Louisville Sept 15, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Pioneer Playhouse's website is frequently updated about its current Kentucky Voices offerings at <http://pioneerplayhouse.com>.

<sup>26</sup> All of the published plays are contained in *World Premieres from Horse Cave Theatre: Plays by Kentucky Writers* edited by Liz Bussey Fentress and Warren Hammack. Louisville, KY: Motes Books. 2009. 619 pps. A listing of all of the plays premiered, by year, playwright, and name was compiled by Liz Bussey Fentress and published as "Horse Cave World Premieres," pages 314-315, in *Kentucky Theatre Yearbook 2018*, Bill McCann, Jr., editor. Cynthiana: JW Books. 2018. 330 pps.

<sup>27</sup> [www.kentuckytheatreassociation.com](http://www.kentuckytheatreassociation.com).

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.kyplays.org>.

<sup>29</sup> Private Message via Facebook (from Brian Walker to Bill McCann Wednesday Sept 2, 2020); "Hi Bill! David Clark and I founded DCP in 2015. We work with 8 playwrights a season, meet once a month to discuss pages in progress and then we present the 8 plays as readings at the end of the season. Two seasons we did do full productions but have decided to forgo being a producing entity so that we can focus on development."

<sup>30</sup> Bill McCann, Jr. *Kentucky Theatre Yearbook*, 2019 lists Kentucky theatres on pages 205-249 and indicates those that do new plays by Kentucky playwrights with a (K). The 2020 issue of the book was not published due to the pandemic.

<sup>31</sup> Personal conversations with Chad Hembree, Artistic Director. Additional information on their website: <https://www.thespottlightplayhouse.com> and on the website of the Spotlight Acting School: <https://www.spottlightactingschool.com/>.

<sup>32</sup> According to the Bard's website (accessed Sept 16, 2020) the theatre since 2011 has produced "19 world premiere plays, produced 72 10-minute plays by 46 Kentucky playwrights and mounted 32 full-length plays by Kentucky playwrights. For current information about Bard Theatre visit: <http://www.thebardstowntheatre.org/index.html>. Kentucky Black Repertory Theatre on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/kyblackrep/>.

<sup>33</sup> Information available through their websites: Adventure Theatre: [www.adventuretheatreky.com](http://www.adventuretheatreky.com); Bluegrass Mystery Theatre: <http://bluegrassmysterytheatre.com/>; Whodunnit Murder Mystery Theatre <http://www.whodunnitky.com>.

<sup>34</sup> The one-act play *Monkey King: Havoc in Heaven* a devised work credited to Dr. Jennifer Goodlander and William McCann was produced at the University of Kentucky in the fall of 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Looking for Lilith Theatre Company: <http://lookingforlilith.org/>.



Community and Technical College, has developed scripts based on oral history and community stories that are relevant to the Harlan County community.<sup>36</sup> Finally, Clear Creek Creative in Rockcastle County actively produces community-created theatre locally even as its leaders work with other community groups to create their own devised works.<sup>37</sup>

In Somerset, Flashback Theater works with playwrights on the development of new works in ways other theatres do not. Playwrights are invited to submit plays for consideration. The theater offers a single playwright a summer workshop opportunity and afterwards, if the workshop has been successful, a full production. The workshop process is an intensive five days devoted to reading the play, putting scenes on their feet with actors carrying scripts, and afterwards a discussion of the day's portion of the play. In the evenings the playwright revises and brings in the next day revisions or new pages to be worked on. It's an intensive process which culminates on the last day with a read-through in the morning and walk-through that afternoon. This is a full-year process where the workshop is one summer, and the premiere performance is up to a year later with the playwright working with staff of the theatre during the interval.<sup>38</sup>

Dr. Hall makes mention of four outdoor dramas—*Wilderness Road*, *The Legend of Daniel Boone*, *The Jenny Wiley Story*, and *The Stephen Foster Story*.<sup>39</sup> Each of those plays ran for many years in Kentucky and all were written by Kentucky playwrights. Today, only Paul Green's *The Stephen Foster Story* is being produced in Bardstown.

Lastly, one of the most important groups of playwrights are the playwright-actors are who write the Kentucky Chautauqua® scripts that bring the state's heritage to life for Kentucky Humanities. Currently, there are 26 historical characters, portrayed by 19 actors, that are part of Kentucky Humanities' Kentucky Chautauqua program.<sup>40</sup> Typically, Chautauqua performances occur in schools, churches, museums, and libraries, though during the pandemic virtual and in-person performances are offered.<sup>41</sup>

Still, becoming a produced playwright can be a long, difficult process. For instance, Middlesboro Little Theatre director and actor Jim Appleby, now 86, expressed well the frustrations of striving toward that goal. "Well...I am still trying to become a playwright. I have done standup comedy, acted in several plays, directed some fantastic plays and in that time, I've become OLD. I have written several short plays and given them to community theater groups...for free, just to see them performed...I'm too old to act any more so before the last curtain comes down, I want to write one that becomes published. ...You asked, 'Why did you become a playwright?' I'm too old to do anything else and I thought that all of my experience in theatre and on stage would be a good basis for writing. I have a saying that I have followed all of my life: 'The man who wants to finds a way; the other man finds an excuse!' So, I'm not giving up. And, as another saying goes, 'even a blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while.'"<sup>42</sup>

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## About the Author

William H. McCann, Jr. has an MA in Theatre from the University of Kentucky and is a member of the Dramatists Guild. He is a co-founder and past president of Kentucky Playwrights Workshop, Inc. He has also served as a board member of the Kentucky Theatre Association where he chaired the Roots of the Bluegrass New Play Contest. From 2012 to 2016 he produced the Kentucky New Play Series at the Kentucky State Fair. From 2016-2019 Mr. McCann edited and published the *Kentucky Theatre Yearbook* annually. He has edited two anthologies of plays by Kentucky playwrights and served as plays editor of the literary journal *Snapdragon*. Mr. McCann has had plays produced and published in Kentucky. Among his produced works are a full-length play *Boats Against the Current* (2019) and the one-act play *Monkey King: Havoc in Heaven* (2011). Since 2019 he has been the Arts columnist of the *Winchester Sun*. For more information, visit [whmccann.com](http://whmccann.com).

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<sup>36</sup> Higher Ground is an ongoing community theater program associated with Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College and headed up by Robert Gipe. For more information visit the SKCTC press release about 2020 at <https://southeast.kctcs.edu/news/2020/0210-southeast-announces-new-hires-for-higher-ground-community-performance-pr> and the TED Talk by Robert Gipe Finding Higher Ground Through Art [https://www.ted.com/talks/robert\\_gipe\\_finding\\_higher\\_ground\\_through\\_art](https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_gipe_finding_higher_ground_through_art) oject.aspx.

<sup>37</sup> For more information visit the website: <https://www.clearcreekcreative.net/>.

<sup>38</sup> Sommer Schoch, founding Producing Artistic Director, via email, Sept 2, 2020, provided this list of plays that have been workshopped by Flashback Theater: 2016-Stephanie Porter's *Dancing in the Dark*; 2017-Amber Frangos' *Rosies: The Women Who Riveted the Nation*; 2018-William H. McCann's *Boats Against the Current*; 2019-Amber Frangos' *Mary: Her Story* (book and story); 2020-James Colgan's *Waiting for Home*; expected Oct 2020-Amber Frangos' and Maria McNeil's *Mary: Her Story* (music).

<sup>39</sup> Hall, page 569. *Wilderness Road* by Paul Green was performed from 1955-1958 and from 1972-1980 (According to the "Abstract," Wilderness Road Drama Collection: Berea Special Collections & Archives Catalog. Berea College. Accessed Sept 16, 2020, <https://berea.libraryhost.com/?p=collections/findingaid&id=259&q=&rootcontentid=30750>).

<sup>40</sup> In most instances the actors are the playwrights of their pieces. However, Bo List wrote "Daniel Boone: The First Kentuckian" and "Henry Clay: Divided We Stand" for Kevin Hardesty, plus "Nancy Green: Being Aunt Jemima, the Pancake Queen" for Debra Faulk; he co-wrote the Mary Carson Breckinridge script with Janet Scott.

<sup>41</sup> More about the characters and the program at <https://www.kyhumanities.org/programs/chautauqua>.

<sup>42</sup> Personal email from Jim Appleby to Bill McCann Tuesday April 14, 2020.



# A Tobacco Kind of Christmas

By Georgia Green Stamper

**F**or 100 years, maybe 200, my Owen County family relied on growing tobacco to sustain them economically. Of course, they did not know how unhealthy smoking was, but even understanding that as I do now, I am stunned that within a handful of years, six-bent barns have come to stand empty. Fertile fields lie fallow. And the mammoth tobacco auction warehouses that once dominated towns like Carrollton, Cynthiana, and Lexington have become, like dinosaurs, extinct overnight.

My childhood memories of Christmastime intertwine with the tobacco market like conjoined twins, making it difficult for me to separate one from the other. The *Sears Wish Book* would arrive the week before Thanksgiving. I would sit studying its colored pictures in a corner of the tobacco stripping-room while my parents worked 12-hour days to make my wishes come true. Preparing the tobacco for market was next to the final step in a process that had begun in the early spring.

The final step, of course, was selling the tobacco. We took our crop to Lexington, which claimed to be the largest burley tobacco market in the world. Gigantic auction warehouses came right up to the edge of busy thoroughfares like South Broadway and Fourth Street, a visual statement of the economic impact tobacco held for Lexington businessmen as well as the region's farmers.

Now, the old warehouses have been torn down or gentrified into loft apartments. Tobacco has become a villain, and few mourn the demise of the auction and government price support system that sustained it. The tobacco warehouses and auctions linger only in footnotes.

The burley tobacco market opened in early December on a date calculated to be the coldest of the year. The cavernous buildings were walled with cheap sheets of tin that did little more than infuriate the wind, and a damp chill oozed up through the concrete floors. Despite the frigid temperatures, excitement electrified us when we heard the auctioneer's rapid-fire chant echo off the high rafters.

He moved up and down the mile-long aisles stacked with dry, brown tobacco, pausing only a few moments at each person's crop. We held our breath when he finally came to ours. A year's work hung in the balance of that single minute. Our hearts beat so loud we couldn't be sure of the agreed-upon price as the auctioneer, speaking in his rapid, foreign-sounding language moved on to sell another family's sweat and tears to the highest bidder.

Only then could we rush forward to see the sale price the buyer had written on the tag.

Only then could we leave the rank smelling place.

The odor of the dried tobacco leaves was so intense in those warehouses that it cannot be described in olfactory terms. It was something more than smell, a strident presence that seemed to take on three-dimensional shape like a beam holding up the roof. Or it could have been a living thing, an aggressive virus that invaded our nostrils, settling deep into our lungs. We ran from it as we left the warehouse, and drank in the crisp outdoors to purge ourselves, as thirsty for clean cold air as we had been for ice water in the August fields.

Euphoria welled within us as we drove downtown where the fine stores lined up along Main Street. We would spend freely for one time during the year, on Christmas gifts and small luxuries, a new electric Mixmaster for my mother, or maybe a transistor radio for me. We would eat at Walgreen's Drugstore—the "all you can eat" fried fish in a basket was always my choice—or at Purcell's Department Store's more genteel cafeteria with its fancy fruit salads.

Years later I would learn that the Woolworth's I thought was so wonderful really was wonderful, a magnificent example of art deco architecture. I would learn that the Phoenix Hotel with its canopy that stretched from door to street, its uniformed doormen, and its thick-carpeted lobby was a pretty good version of a first-class hotel anywhere. Embury's vestibule with its scent of expensive perfume was as elegant as shops I'd later see in larger cities.

But the burley warehouses that dominated the city's streetscape were unique to Kentucky, even as the tobacco fields that defined the countryside were unique. Drafty temples of commerce, the warehouses anchored an economic system that was nigh-on a religion, sustaining a tribe of people and the land they loved.

Now Lexington's old warehouses are gone, and the fields on our Owen County farm no longer grow tobacco. Little girls don't sit and dream with the *Sears Wish Book* watching their parents prepare the crop for market. A tobacco kind of Christmas lingers only in the memories of people like me.

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## About the Author

Georgia Green Stamper is a Kentucky writer whose published works include *Butter in the Morning* and *You Can Go Anywhere*. She is a graduate of Transylvania University.



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