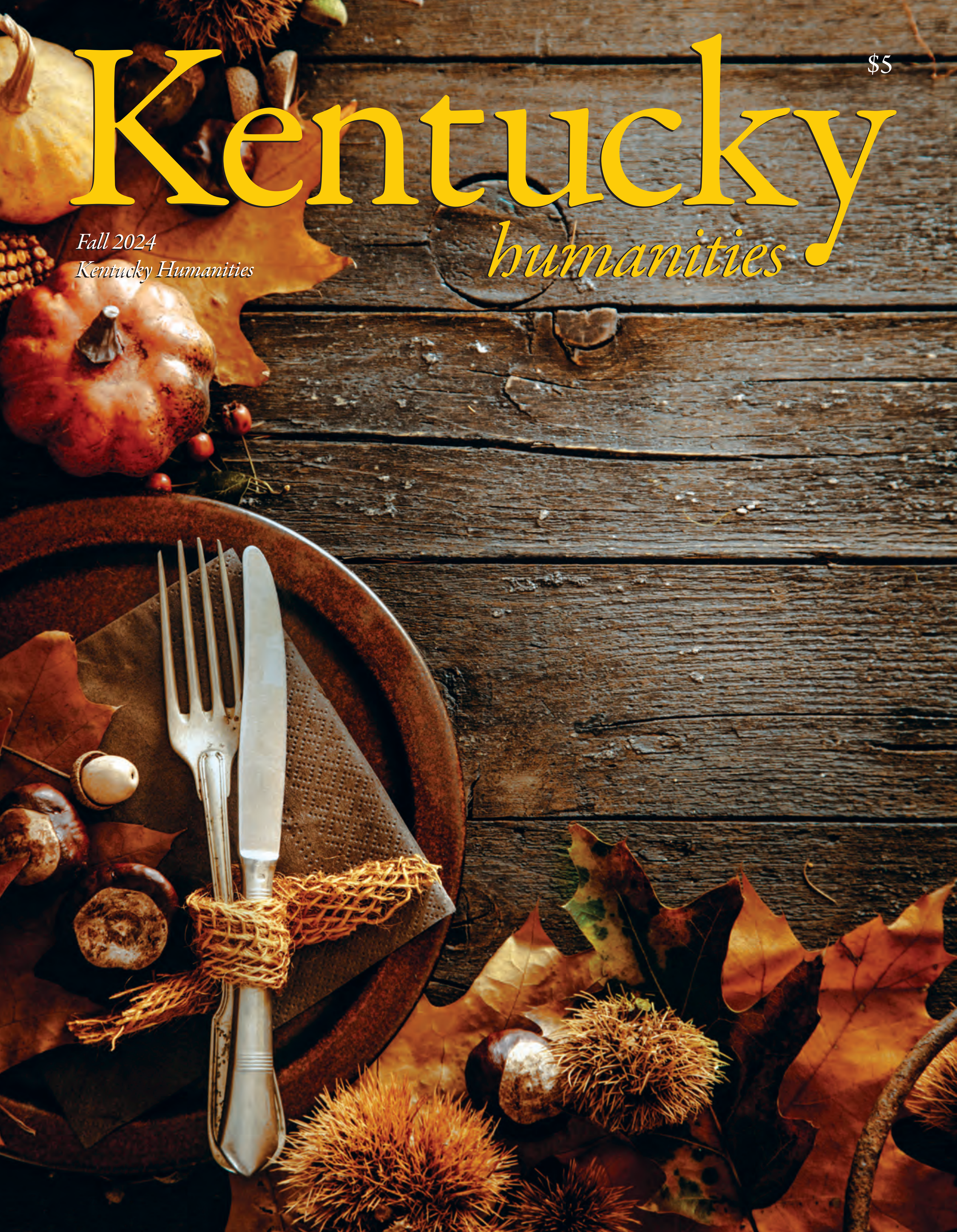

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Honoring Our Past

In this issue of *Kentucky Humanities* magazine, I invite you on a journey through Kentucky's past and present, as we continue to honor the voices that have shaped our understanding of who we are and glance into the future.

Crystal Wilkinson is an acclaimed poet, novelist, short-story writer, and essayist, making her among the most multitalented writers from the Commonwealth. Her newest work, *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts,* tackles a new genre, the culinary memoir. *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts* is a national bestseller. Linda LaPinta tells us more about the former Kentucky Poet Laureate's new endeavor on page 8.

Kentucky Humanities is passionate about Telling Kentucky's Story—all of Kentucky's stories. It is a great pleasure to include a piece by Ann Kingsolver in which she shares her experience of lessons learned from her family members. Her article on page 10 is a reminder to all of the importance of asking questions, listening to, and learning from those who came before us.

Richard Allen built a church that became known as the Republican Meeting House. In the 1950s, the Unitarian-Universalists used the Republican Meeting House as their gathering place, embracing Allen's belief of religious independence and the right to freedom of conscience. In recent years, Allen's commitment to freedom and liberty has come under fire as it became known that he enslaved African Americans. Read more from Joseph Anthony on page 14.

The Kentucky Book Festival is an annual tradition celebrating reading and writing throughout the Commonwealth. This year's event—the 43rd edition—will be held on Saturday, November 2nd at Joseph-Beth Booksellers in Lexington. Beginning on page 20, Kevin Nance provides us with details including some of the authors attending. We hope you will join us. It truly is one of my favorite days of the year!

Thanksgiving is quickly approaching, when we gather with family and friends in gratitude and thanks. Kick off the Thanksgiving season with Kevin Lane Dearinger's poem "Thanksgiving Afternoon 1981" on page 18.

In the mood for more poetry? Head to page 25 where Lexington resident Chelsie Kreitzman shares her poem "Same Old Thing."

The Ohio River Way is a not-for-profit organization with an interest in pursuing an Ohio River Valley renowned for its vibrant communities, opportunities for exploration and recreation, and high quality of life. Linda LaPinta looks at the Ohio River's storied past, its importance in Kentucky's history, and the Ohio River Way's plans for the area to flourish. Find out more on page 26.

Sugar chests were popular in both Tennessee and Kentucky and conveyed wealth and status before the American Civil War. Learn more about Mrs. Ledford-Manning's Kentucky Sugar Chest on page 32. Author Roger Futrell tells us about the antique and how it was used in homes before the war.

Lastly, on page 34, Georgia Green Stamper tells a charming story of Halloween traditions that she experienced growing up in Owen County. It might inspire a new Halloween tradition for your family or community.

As always, it is a privilege to share these Kentucky stories with you. If you enjoy this issue of *Kentucky Humanities,* share it with your friends. We want to hear your Kentucky stories as well. If you have a story, please contact our editor, Marianne Stoess, Marianne.Stoess@uky.edu.

Bill Goodman
Executive Director
Kentucky Humanities

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Chris Hartman Appointed to Kentucky Humanities Board

Photo by Jon Cherry

Chris Hartman

Governor Andy Beshear has appointed Louisville's Chris Hartman to the Kentucky Humanities Board of Directors. As a member of the 23-person volunteer board of directors, Hartman will help set council policies, award project grants to community organizations, and participate in fundraising to help Kentucky Humanities meet the growing demand for its programs.

Chris Hartman is the first executive director of Kentucky's Fairness Campaign, Kentucky's LGBTQ civil rights organization, founded in 1991. His work includes educating thousands of Kentuckians on diversity and LGBTQ inclusion through hundreds of workshops for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Louisville Metro Police Department, UPS, Churchill Downs, Muhammad Ali International Airport, Metropolitan Sewer District, and many more organizations.

Prior to his time with the Fairness Campaign, Chris served as Congressman John Yarmuth's campaign press secretary, an AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteer In Service To America) in St. Louis, and Philadelphia director of the Democratic National Committee's open-air Grassroots Campaigns in the 2004 presidential election.

Hartman holds an M.A. in drama from Washington University in St. Louis. He previously served on the board of the national Equality Federation and as Chair of the Louisville Metro Landmarks Commission, was named the Louisville Convention and Visitors Bureau's "Partner of the Year," and is a former Community Foundation of Louisville Alden Fellow and LGBTQ Fellow of the Rockwood Leadership Institute.

HOST A DISCUSSION

Scissors, Paper, Rock

A NOVEL

BY FENTON JOHNSON

2024 Kentucky Book Festival®

We hope you will join us for the 43rd edition of the Kentucky Book Festival on Saturday, November 2nd at Joseph-Beth Booksellers in Lexington. This year we are pleased to announce that in addition to more than 150 authors, there will be more stages with a variety of programming for every reader's taste, and we will be giving away hundreds of free books to children aged 14 and under.

Browse through the Author's Galley, visit the Children's Tent with lots of fun activities—clowns, a magician, arts and crafts, and more—and take in diverse programming and panels including headlining authors like Al Roker, American's Favorite Weatherman and cookbook author; Jonathan Eigg, Pulitzer Prize winner; Nic Stone, YA author and activist; Kentucky's own, Crystal Wilkinson; Chef Ed Lee, restaurateur and foodie extraordinaire, and Yolanda King, granddaughter of Martin Luther King Jr. and up and coming writer; plus many, many more!

Of course, the Kentucky Book Festival would not be possible without the generous support of our partners, sponsors, organizations and individuals who realize the importance and impact of the written word.

The Kentucky Book Festival, where every lover of literature can find a book to enjoy and shake the hand that wrote it.

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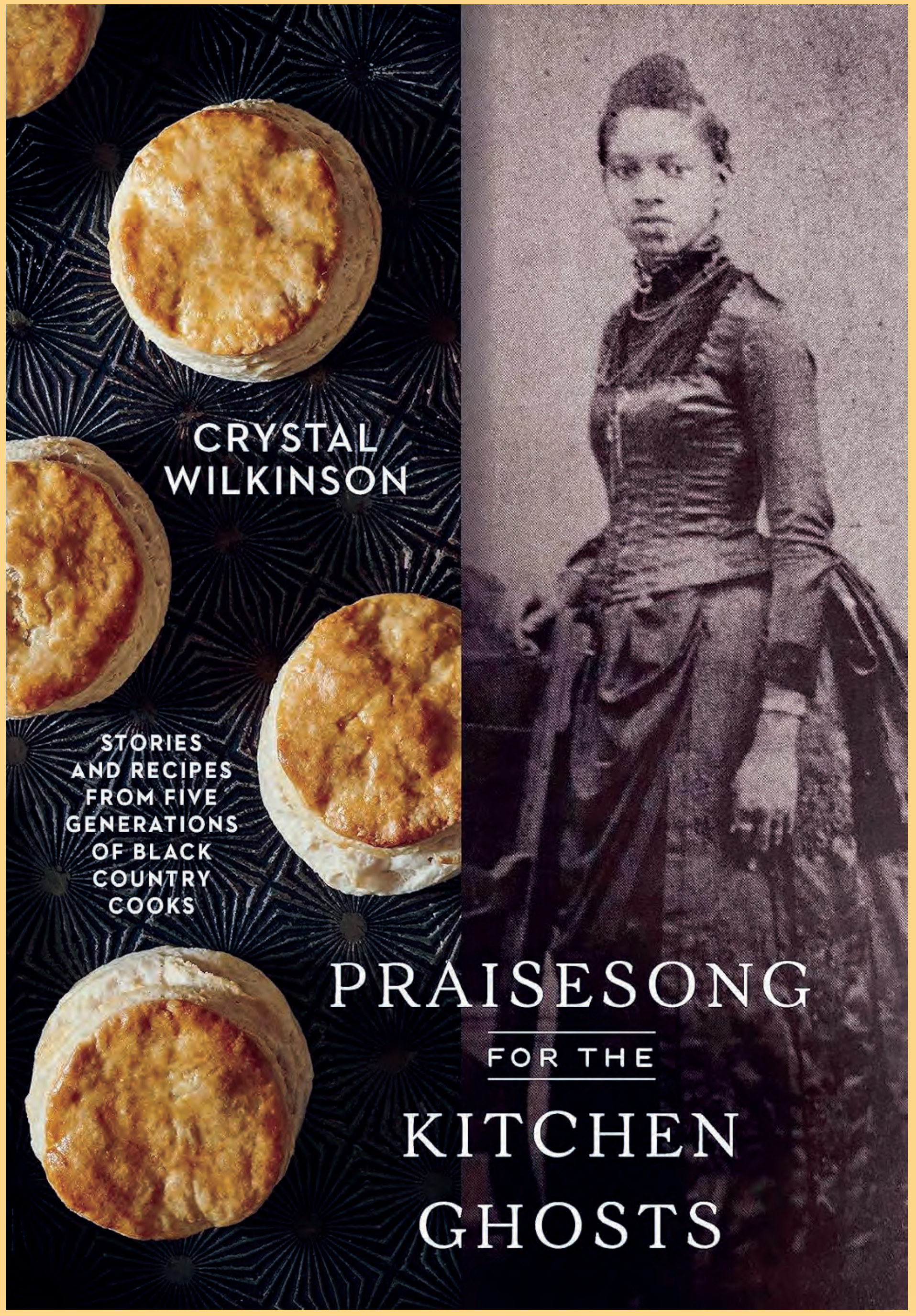

Reviewed by Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

The first line of former Kentucky Poet Laureate Crystal Wilkinson's acknowledgements in her latest book, *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts*, reads, "This is not a book of the head; it is a book of the heart." Wilkinson's cookbook, a love letter of a memoir about the ancestors who shaped her, the family that raised her, and the food that has and continues to sustain her is as rich and tender in its recipes for celebrating kinship as it is compelling in its culinary commands.

Wilkinson is a Black woman who hails from eastern Kentucky's Appalachian region, a locale few White folks realized, until recently, has boasted racial diversity for centuries. Since *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts* offers the history behind its author's passion for her people and their daily and holiday meal preparations, it is important that the reader knows, in Wilkinson's words, "My family has lived for five generations in the hills of Casey County, Kentucky, in a little hamlet called Indian Creek .... Casey County was formed in 1806, two years before Aggy of Color, my fourth great-grandmother, was likely brought from Virginia to the new territory as an enslaved child. This book is about my foremothers, my kitchen ghosts, about the ways in which the foodways of the hills were passed primarily down through the women in my family, to me, and how I will pass them on to my generations."

Wilkinson goes on to explain that her forebears, "some of them dead for two hundred years," affect how she approaches food and its preparation. She refers to her female ancestors as her "kitchen ghosts" and her spirited inspirations. She writes, "I've spent my entire life striving to be a competent cook, to show my love and care through food."

It does not take a reader long to realize that Wilkinson must be more than a competent cook—must even excel in the culinary kingdom—even though she fails to extend to herself the praise songs she heaps on her predecessors. She admits to developing the endurance to prepare holiday meals for hours, if not days; to experimenting with ingredients to please each relative's palate; and to being a keen observer who, as a child, scribbled in her notebook all her grandmother taught her about knowing how to identify edible plants surrounding her home and knowing how to negotiate the creation of complicated concoctions. The stories in *Praisesong* practically sing.

It would be easy enough to read Wilkinson's book to sift through the ingredients in her life alone. Reading *Praisesong* for that purpose would be worth the price of the book. But her treasured recipes show up and show off in each chapter. Anyone who appreciates edibles from down-home cooking to fine food needs to make time to sample Wilkinson's own favorite Hot Milk Cake, her go-to Chess Pie, and her grandmother's Blackberry Cobbler (not to mention Granny Christine's Jam Cake). That's but a sampling starting backwards from dessert; earlier-in-the-day

Former Kentucky Poet Laureate Crystal Wilkinson is the author of *Perfect Black*, *The Birds of Opulence*, *Water Street*, and *Blackberries, Blackberries*. Her latest work, *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts*, is a national-bestselling culinary memoir.

recipes feature Creamy Tomato Soup, Hearty Sandwich Bread, Pimento Cheese with a Kick, and Indian Creek Chili, among other comfort-food concoctions. The recipes' clear instructions counterbalance the sometimes-complex stories that accompany them, tales delineating the ways in which Wilkinson's ancestors hunted the animals, raised the vegetables, and prepared each dish prior to having access to bountiful provisions and contemporary kitchens. As Wilkinson points out, "Our food speaks of abundance while always keeping an eye toward preservation and survival."

The author is a professor of writing in the University of Kentucky's MFA program, as well as an award-winning poet, fiction writer, essayist, and journalist. Her teaching in *Praisesong* constitutes a calming-yet-authoritative voice that causes her reader to reflect on what she writes, as well as on what she leaves unsaid. On the first page of her chapter "Birthdays Must Be Celebrated" she states, "Black people where we're from didn't celebrate birthdays much. We weren't a time-conscious people back then. We kept time by the sun and the moon and when work needed doing, even after the Industrial Revolution brought watches and clocks to nearly every home. It has been only a few generations since our enslaved ancestors weren't allowed to know their birthdays or even keep track of their ages to perpetuate the idea that they were property, not people, so maybe this birthday celebration idea needed time to catch on."

National Book Award-winning author Imani Perry calls Wilkinson "a writer of stunning prose and deep spirit who teaches us that cooking is essential to caring."

Ada Limón, a former poet laureate of the United States and a Lexingtonian, cites *Praisesong* as "an ode to food … but also a brilliant ode to ancestors, to history, to survival."

Both Perry and Limón are correct. Wilkinson's unabashed declaration of love as sustenance, and food gathering and preparation as love, serves as a perfect recipe for sustaining one's soul while feeding one's family and friends.

About the Reviewer

Linda Elisabeth LaPinta, a Louisville-based former professor of English, journalism, and leadership, is the author of five books and numerous magazine, journal, and newspaper articles and book reviews. Her most recent book, *Kentucky Quilts and Quiltmakers: Three Centuries of Creativity, Community, and Commerce*, is the 2024 recipient of the Popular Culture Association's Emily Toth Award for the best full-length book in women's studies.

Learning From Two 95-Year-Old Nicholas Countians

By Ann E. Kingsolver

I grew up the youngest in a family of storytellers. My father was an only child, but his parents had well over a dozen siblings between them. They all grew up in Nicholas County, Kentucky, as I did, and then they scattered. So there were cherished gatherings of three or four generations with favorite family dishes like corn pudding served as funeral food or at Decoration Day picnics or holiday potlucks, and lots of storytelling and laughter. I was always drawn to the elders' stories. Their childhood adventures—like Pappaw taking his little sister to school in a cart pulled by a goat named Blue, or Mammaw's older sister accidentally burning her hair off by wrapping it around a hot poker to curl it—were as vivid to me as my own childhood experiences.

Left: My father with his mother, my Mammaw, in the early 1930s. Middle: Dad and Mammaw and Pappaw visiting in the 1980s. Right: Living into her 90s, one of Mammaw's main contacts as she aged was the bookmobile driver, who knew her tastes in large-print books and always delivered.

Photos courtesy of Ann E. Kingsolver

In the late 1980s, I moved from Massachusetts (where I was in graduate school) back to Nicholas County for two years to listen to people's stories about how they were making sense of the way global shifts in tobacco, textiles, and automobile production were changing local jobs and community identity.

Dad and Mammaw and Pappaw visited me in my apartment in Carlisle, which seemed strange to them since we all lived in the same county and they had perfectly good spare rooms. But I was trying to get to know them, and everyone else in my hometown, from an adult vantage point. The stories they told me during that time were different from those I had heard in childhood. For example, I drove Mammaw to the gynecologist in Lexington (the same doctor I see today—she's a grandmother herself now), and on those trips I learned about her physical experiences of childbirth and womanhood. A decade later, on one of my visits back home from South Carolina with my toddler son, Mammaw (now a widow) told me something I've thought about for the rest of my life.

She said, "Annie, no one teaches you how to be old," and went on to explain that an old person had to learn new things every day, all by themselves, in order to navigate daily life in a body and mind that were constantly changing. She told me that while there was early education at the beginning of life to help children learn so many things about being people together, that just didn't happen at the other end of life. This was particularly true in rural areas beyond the full reach of senior centers or Meals on Wheels. In her 90s, one of Mammaw's main contacts was the bookmobile driver, who knew her tastes in large-print books and always delivered.

When my dad was 95 himself, I shared his mother's words with him about being that age and asked what he had learned that helped him in day-to-day life. He said, "Well, the main thing I've learned is that you'll never make 95 until you're through with 94." His approach, like Mammaw's, was to take on the challenge of figuring it out. They both always liked working puzzles and making and fixing things from whatever was on hand, so I think they applied that approach to being extremely old. They also both had an impish curiosity about the world that always looked more to what would happen next than what was past. As 95-year-olds, Mammaw looked forward to what flowers would come from the seeds she planted, and Dad wondered what bird might land at the feeder next. In keeping with his only having a forward gear (no reverse), when he and I were talking about aging, Dad turned the table and asked what I planned to do in the future, after I eventually retire from being a professor at the University of Kentucky. I told him I'd like to spend time with children because I love learning from what they have to say about the world.

One of the things I have learned with Dad in his 96th year is the importance of a listener: not just any listener, but one who recognizes the threads he introduces and—together with him—can weave them into a recognizable shared conversational landscape. Threads and stories go together for me, because Mammaw and I were often sewing or mending clothes or crocheting washcloths or doing crazy quilting from scraps as she told me stories in childhood and adulthood.

This rare opportunity (privileged, in so many ways) for intergenerational storyweaving has been, I recognize, one denied to so many because of violent displacements and disruptions; economic, environmental, social and health injustices; and untimely losses in families. Some stories are intentionally not passed along for others' safety, as in identities and languages and livelihoods tied

Left: Mammaw's crazy quilting stitches–cushions were a favorite. Right: Dad at 95, this past February.

Photos courtesy of Ann E. Kingsolver

to persecution. Among those who have so much for all to learn from about the understanding and practice of passing the embers of stories across generations are Indigenous communities—some of the most violently displaced people in the world. Sandra Jasmin Gutiérrez de Jesús draws on Sweeney Windchief and Timothy San Pedro's work on "'yarning' methodology" to talk about this. "Yarning" involves, as she cites, "storytelling, re-storying, and remembering [as] crucial threads that center the telling and receiving of stories to develop meaning and relations with others. Yarning is a method rooted in conversation that allows for participation that is dialogic and relational" (Gutiérrez de Jesús 2022: xvii). Gutiérrez de Jesús (2022: 19) writes about that technique of yarning resonating with her work in her own P'urhépecha community, where "people's stories and memories constitute all the different threads of a historical and cultural mosaic. If woven together, just as the threads of a rebozo are, we can see a complete picture of how those stories are connected—better to understand our collective history as an Indigenous community."

Often in a dominant U.S. context, memory work can look very different—disjointed, not communal, and devalued or discounted in favor of decontextualized and individualized narratives. The technological ability to store stories, while advancing to the level of interacting with holographic projections to preserve eyewitness narratives of historic events (important work in this time of erasures and manipulations of such narratives), can nonetheless be disenchanting in terms of the storyteller and the listener. Even if a museum-goer can have questions answered by a sophisticated shuffling of recordings of a person whose experiences they respect and want to learn about, what is absent is what Barbara Myerhoff (1992) wrote about as the third voice. If we think of culture as shared meanings, for the very old—she wrote—there are few to share. My great-grandfather said once to my mother that he was so lonely, living in a house full of people, because everyone who knew what he was talking about was dead. Myerhoff, who worked with very elderly survivors of the Holocaust but died young herself, wrote that there were not enough rituals to mark the losses of old age (like the end of driving, or cooking for oneself) bookending those for childhood and early adulthood milestones.

A close friend of mine who died last winter of aggressive ovarian cancer decided to create her own ritual: a party to say goodbye. She said if people were going to talk about her at her funeral, she wanted to hear what they had to say since it was her life, after all. One of the waitresses in the bar where that waking wake was held said she had never felt so much love in one room. Acknowledging loss beforehand, together, was a gift of healing my friend gave to her family and friends.

When Pappaw talked at the end of his life about wanting to go to a little white house on a hill, I knew which house he meant of the many he had lived in as a child while his family was tenant farming. When Dad had a memory float by, I was able—sometimes, anyway—to weave it into a context because I was listening to his own elders and could share that world of his early life with him, at least with some semblance of recognition. Myerhoff (1992: 240) spoke of this conversational act as "re-membering"—"the reaggregation of members, the figures who belong to one's life story, one's own prior selves, as well as significant others who are part of the story."

Willie T. Carver, the author of *Gay Poems for Red States*, has talked about the importance of being the context for each other's stories. That's what I feel like my storygathering in childhood has been useful for in finding a third space of conversational co-recognition with Dad—because his 95-year-old mother's presence remains so vibrant in my life.

My profession is to listen to and record people's stories and perspectives. In learning from these two 95-year-old Nicholas Countians, though, I have been thinking about the disenchantment of just having those narratives recorded technologically—literally a sound bite out of time. Much more vital is the context of the telling and retelling and processing of experiences and recognition between people of different ages over time as we all experience the different relational perspectives of childhood and old age.

I have recordings of my father's parents telling stories, just as I have recorded some of his stories for his great-grandchildren. I have learned over many decades of this work that some people find hearing the voices of the dead comforting—like those who keep a deceased partner's voice on the answering machine for many years—and some find it disturbing. I think now the reason that experience can be so hollow is the inability to connect in real time—the recognition is there on only one side; it's not mutual.

We really just have this moment, each moment, to work within. And there are so many broken threads—especially as displacement and genocides continue to grow across the world, along with repression and manipulation of shared memories to reduce accountability for injustice and violence. Vast and stellar work has been done for centuries within the African Diaspora to find histories of connection through storytelling and material culture in the face of generations of people having been wrenched from homeplaces, family, and rights to citizenship, literacy, reproductive autonomy, and humanity through chattel slavery. And so many stories of white responsibility for, and benefit from, that violent history are silenced or not passed along in families and communities, including my own. I was taught in my integrated public elementary school that there was no slavery in our hilly county even though a major route for forced marches of enslaved Africans to be sold in Lexington, now Route 68, ran through our county from Maysville, on the Ohio River. Many residents of Nicholas County from the time of its founding to Emancipation were enslaved on small farms and their knowledge and labor shaped its agriculture, hemp rope factory, tanneries, and mills. That history, along with records of property ownership and community leadership continued to be passed down outside of school in local African American families.

As Mammaw taught me to stitch together scraps of Pappaw's pajamas, her aprons, and memories, neither of us knew that quilting came to our region largely through Affrilachians. (Frank X Walker first planted that term which has grown into a collective and flourishing tree of work centering Black Appalachian identity and experience, including Walker's *Affrilachia* and Crystal Wilkinson's *Perfect Black*). A decade before Mammaw was teaching me to quilt, bell hooks watched her grandmother quilt on a Kentucky porch and later wrote, "Baba was patient but she was not quiet. Creating beauty she found a way to speak, a way that moved beyond words" (hooks 2009: 162). There are many ways to share relatedness and build community through quiltmaking. Alana Butler (2019: 590) writes about African American quilters forming bonds "through 'othermothering' that support sisterhood, solidarity, and resistance." Quilting, as storyweaving, brings together diverse experiences and voices that can generate larger changes, just as the arpilleras (powerful patchwork story squares) made by the Mothers of the Disappeared brought international attention to the human rights violations against their children by the Chilean dictatorship and the AIDS quilt brought conversation and human connection out of silence and fear in the U.S.

In the current political context, much storytelling has to go underground as it has in places and times before. But in the context of so many broken threads, sometimes this work has to be jumpstarted. There are so many wonderful examples of intergenerational projects connecting young people with elders in learning collaboratives—swapping their knowledge about cell phones and vinyl records, for example, or sharing meals and music together and making new friends. It is rare to be able to be in one place and keep story sparks kindled across generations, and I really appreciate all the ways that families of connection can be created and can be even stronger than kin.

About six months ago, as Dad realized his memory was slipping, he said to me one day: "If you have anything to ask me, ask me now." The only question I could think of that mattered was, "Do you know that we love you?" He nodded yes, and smiled. I said, "That's all I need to ask."

This article was written in March, and Dr. W.R. Kingsolver passed away in May 2024. This is what I shared at his funeral:

> *One summer day when I was about five, we were driving up to see Dad's Aunt Diddy (Mammaw's sister Lillian) in Jenkins, and we stopped as we usually did along the way beside a creek to have a picnic and cool off in the shallow water.*
>
> *After he ate lunch, Dad lay down on the sun-dappled grass under a tree to take a nap. I was playing close by, and he opened his eyes between dozes wearing his radiant smile. Speaking with the honesty he always had with children, he said, "Annie, when I die, I want you to remember me just like this."*

So I am.

About the Author

Dr. Ann E. Kingsolver is professor of Anthropology and director of the Appalachian Studies Program at the University of Kentucky. She has been studying interpretations and experiences of globalization in rural communities across nations for 40 years. Some of her authored, edited and co-edited books include *NAFTA Stories: Fears and Hopes in Mexico and the United States* (2001), *Tobacco Town Futures: Global Encounters in Rural Kentucky* (2011), and *Global Mountain Regions: Conversations Toward the Future* (2018).

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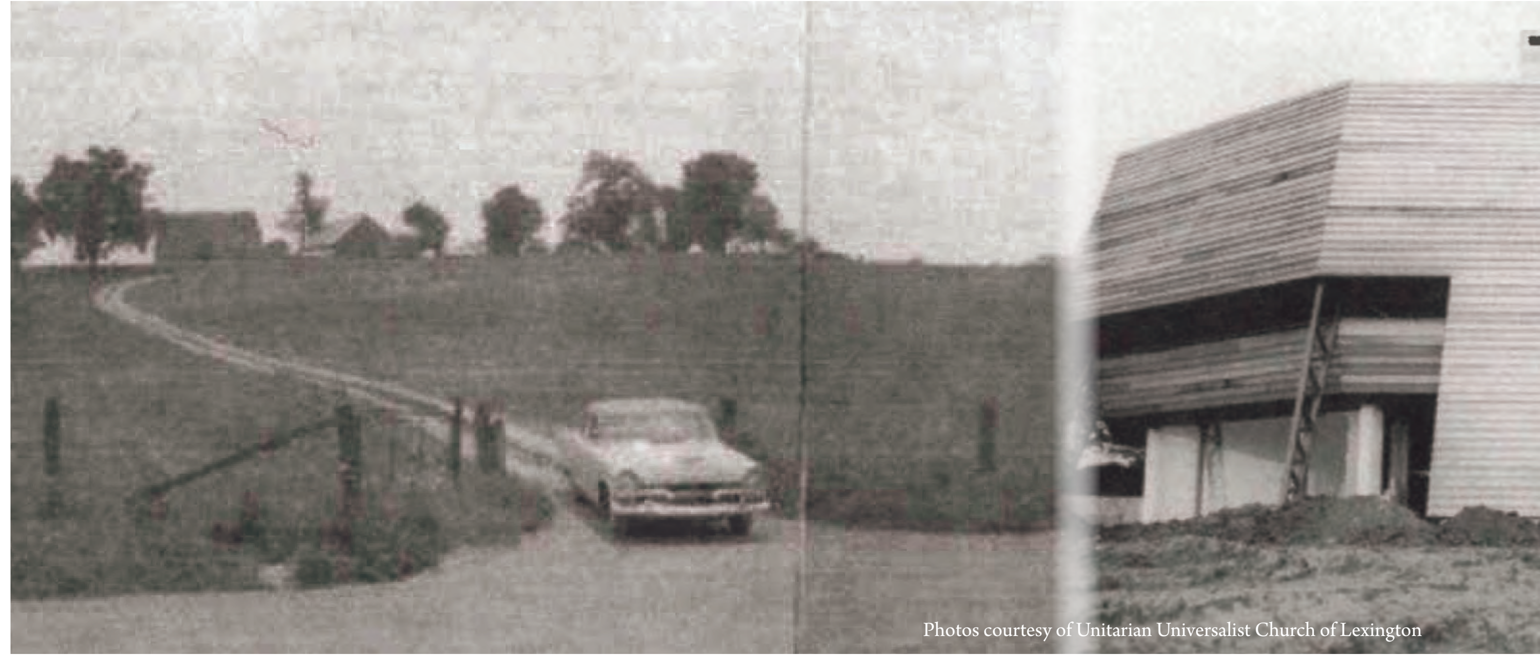
Living the Lie


Photos courtesy of Unitarian Universalist Church of Lexington

By Joseph G. Anthony

The seven-and-a-half acres that surround the Unitarian-Universalist (UU) church on the southern edge of Clays Mill Road in Lexington was farmland, devoid of trees, in 1959 when the congregation first bought the land. Other than the barn, there was only one substantial structure: Richard Allen's house, built circa 1795. The UU's have paid many thousands of dollars to shore up the aging structure, part of the price they willingly pay to honor their sense of Richard Allen's heritage: a heritage of religious independence, of the right to freedom of conscience.

Richard Allen preached throughout the Bluegrass advocating the right to conscience in a time of increasing Baptist and Presbyterian orthodox strictness. Richard Allen was a minority voice, a small island of tolerance in an area dominated by Calvinists. The UU's thought of him as one of their own for they too, felt like an island of religious liberals. Richard Allen was their beacon of liberty, a Founding Father advocating freedom.

The writer James Lane Allen quotes his great-grandfather's declaration on leaving the South Elkhorn Baptist Church (moments before he was going to be expelled). We fled Virginia 20 years ago, Richard Allen told the congregation "to escape intolerable tyranny…and be free to worship God according to our conscience…By the Almighty, I will build a church of my own, free to all Christian believers."

The church he built became known as the Republican Meeting House. The Unitarians were proud to claim him as one of their own. For several years during the late 1950s while their own church was being planned and built, they used the Republican Meeting House as their gathering place. Although they broadened his idea of freedom to include non-Christian thought, they still cherished his commitment to freedom. The money they spent on the house was money due to their heritage of freedom.

Only lately, in the last few years, has there grown the need to amend the idea of Allen being a cherished father and beacon to liberty. For though he encouraged his own enslaved persons and other African Americans to attend his church, and though he recognized them as fellow souls in Christ, he was also a man who owned, sold, and disposed of human beings. Richard Allen was an owner of enslaved African Americans.

How did he do that? How did he reconcile the contradiction of freedom of religion and the bondage of the body? People will say it was simply the tenor of the times, that people simply did not see the contradictions. However, that reasoning would ignore another very prominent group in the Kentucky of his day: the Freedom Baptists who not only condemned slavery but sometimes forbade

Photo courtesy of University of Kentucky Library Archives

Left: The property purchased by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Lexington in 1959.
Middle: The Unitarian Universalist Church of Lexington pictured in 1965.
Right: The church built by Richard Allen became known as the Republican Meeting House.

membership to slaveholders. Other Baptist churches denied leadership roles to people holding other people in bondage. Abolitionist thought was a prominent movement in late 18th century Kentucky. Richard Allen would have been aware of it.

This contradiction leaps out at us now. The UU's and others might ask themselves: why did it take so long to note the contradiction? And having acknowledged it, do they still honor him as a hero of liberty?

Enslavement in the United States was an immensely complicated lie. This lie took enormous energy to muster even the minimum acceptance that the public demands when the lie is one of the foundation stones upholding the order of the day. Our own American foundation lies are ones like equality for all before the law. Or that we are a meritocracy where all can rise. We argue for our lies. "There," we sigh when a major leak has been stemmed. "The dike, the lie, still holds."

But the lie of enslavement sprang leaks everywhere. The dike itself was mud and saturated, ready to burst at any time. For those whose homes and livelihood, whose very idea of their own identity, depended on the lie, it was terrifying. It led them not to the truth, away from the lie, but deeper and deeper into it. The lie shaped everything. The lie was the life they lived.

What was the lie? That the enslaved people were not full human beings; it became slavocracy orthodoxy. To doubt the lie was to crumble the foundation stone of enslavement. Everything would tumble. One would go from being honorable and civilized to being tyrannical and barbaric in an instant. Any orthodoxy is threatened by the outside world. Science mocks it with competing facts; logic undermines it with argument. Even the human spirit is always questioning.

A true believer almost always has to deny in order to continue not to doubt. But enslavement's believers had everything against them, not least the tendency among human beings to respond to other human beings as human beings. This might have been Richard Allen's dilemma.

The believers tried to keep things in place. Many states forbade enslaved people the right to learn to read. They did so because they feared the effects of literacy on enslaved people. It helped that they could then call Blacks animal-like in their ignorance, cut off from written ideas and history. But the very edict forbidding literacy reminded them of the enslaved people's humanity. They did not think to make a law forbidding their horses to read; they did not think their horses might make a conspiracy to toss them off their backs. But the fear of the humans they enslaved doing that pervaded the atmosphere everywhere the enslaved lived.

Richard Allen was a religious liberal, especially for his day and

time. He believed in the right of conscience to decide what to believe in. Of course he had limits: most of us have limits. But those limits were liberal ones: basic Christian values that had not fallen into the Calvinistic pit of hell and damnation that so many denominations and congregations fell into, especially in the period of the Great Awakening that Allen lived in, the late 18th and early 19th century. He recognized that his truth might not be the only truth. In that he was more like the Unitarian-Universalists. Their eight principles are broad and encompassing. Allen preached this liberality all over our part of Kentucky. He even preached it to Blacks congregated in their own churches.

But Richard Allen enslaved people. He preached religious liberty, but he held men, women, and children in bondage. He passed them on to his descendants as if they were , indeed, horses. But he gave them names. He talked about them individually as if they were human beings, but he treated them as property.

His will details the transactions: to his son John Allen, the Negro girl called Viney, plus Philip, Adam, Sally (Adam's wife) Lety, Bob, Achilles, Moses, Scott, Darky, Hanna, Handy Judy, and her two children, Caroline and Sally.

The names spell out some of the tension: the Negro girl called Viney. Is that her name or just what she is called? Is there a distinction among those enslaved? Philip, Adam, Sally etc. are regular names, but Achilles stands out. A Greek hero for an enslaved person? Was it a master's joke? A horse's name? And then we come to Darky—little more than a dog's name, a name for a physical trait. And even the appellation Handy Judy indicates a casualness towards identity missing in formal descriptions of other human beings.

But then we swing back: "I leave my negro, Relles, ten dollars which my son, John Allen, is to pay." Ten dollars in 1827 was a considerable amount. Relles, of course, merits, no last name, has no last name, but he is a full human being in the bequest. Horses are not left $10.

And there are other places where Richard Allen attempts to recognize the humanity of those he enslaved: "Five of the old Negroes left my wife during her lifetime: Phil, Bob, Adam, Sarah, and Letty, go to live with such of my children as they may choose, and it is my further desire that my executors see that they are well treated and not suffer as long as they may live for which purpose my executors are to keep in their bonds, if they think proper, the sum of five hundred dollars out of the money arriving from my estate."

Why not freedom for the five old enslaved people? Well, that's tricky. Some states, Maryland among them, forbade

Photo courtesy of University of Kentucky Library Archives

The children of the church members attended the Republican School.

manumission after the age of 50—Maryland later amended it to the age 45. Slave owners were dumping old enslaved people upon the community. Fifty was old age for most Blacks—some whites, too. Most didn't make it to that age and if they did, they had no market value. Allen was at least making a gesture of support although his will allows his executors to escape the obligation if they chose. And $500 was an immense amount in 1827. I do not know if they avoided it. I hope not.

In any case, most abled-bodied enslaved people were divided among his descendants: Ben, Tom, Spenser, George, Rachael, Maria—their labor and the profit from their hiring out, "to be applied to the support of Madison and Richard Allen," minor grandchildren at the time of his death. Old enslaved people, like old horses, might be put to pasture if it were feasible. No one got outright manumission in Richard Allen's will though "Gerry, Penny, Alexander and Mary," were to be emancipated "on condition of them paying a certain sum each, and having each paid, it is my desire so soon as this remainder is paid that my executors do emancipate them according to law."

In other words, if they paid off the mortgage of their lives, they would be free. Or so Richard Allen says is his desire. Whether that "desire" was enforceable, a lawyer would have to answer.

So here we have this large, multifaceted lie muddled together: property provided for at times, property sometimes given property. Other times just property. Property is directed to act in a certain way, to make decisions only a human being can make. But just property in the end. The lie of slavery was so confusing, especially in a country whose foundation lie was "that all men are created equal." One lie struggled against the other. One lie, perhaps, that all men are born equal, could be called aspirational and hope-filled, a call to the struggle to make it so. The other lie was imprisoning, shutting off all paths to freedom.

Thomas Jefferson lived a tortured convoluted life with the contradictions of his great thought and the many Hemmings in his life—not only Sally, but his children and his Hemming uncles. Richard Allen preached the liberty of the spirit, but his life made a mockery of that "belief." The proof is in the pudding. The pudding of Richard Allen's slave-owning, slave-dispatching life said that liberty was not what really mattered. The truth did not set anyone free. The lie hung on until the Civil War burst the dam. Richard Allen never freed himself from the lie of slavery.

But the question that haunts me, us, is the contradiction between his dream of freedom for religion and his acceptance, his embrace of slavery. It makes no sense to us. Of course, we contradict ourselves and sometimes our contradictions make us human, keep us from being boxed into an ideology. But how could such a contradiction like slavery allow people to live moral lives? If it were simple hypocrisy, it would be easier to understand. I decry global warming but find carpooling inconvenient. But liberty and human enslavement? It goes beyond the mere dross of hypocrisy. I think of our own sins, our own lie of racial superiority, how the muddy dam of that lie still holds to this day. When will we free ourselves, I wonder? Was it white supremacy that allowed us to remain ignorant of Allen's slaveholding for so long, for surely two seconds thought would have made us wonder about a landowner in the antebellum South? Or worse: did we know and just dismiss it as unimportant?

Still, we recognize the feeling of racial superiority to be a sin though one we still commit. Like a Baptist with lust in his heart, we acknowledge it but despise it, too. Jefferson came close to despising it but took no action. Allen's thoughts on the enslavement of people are hidden to us. Allen and Jefferson embody so much that is good. We're tempted to look only at the good and shrug our shoulders at the evil. Different times, we say. Different ideas.

Only they weren't different ideas. Freedom of conscience. Equality of people are the ideas we carry with us. From them. We honor them for these ideas, for these beliefs. We condemn them for their failures. Their achievements blend into our heritage. What do we do with their failures? Are they also ours?

James Lane Allen in his Reign of Law lightly fictionalizes his great-grandfather: "By the Almighty, I will build a church of my own.... I will cut off a parcel of my farm.... I will build a schoolhouse and meeting house, where any child may be free to learn and any man or woman free to worship."

Free to learn. Free to worship. Any child. Any man or woman. And Richard Allen did welcome all into his church if not his schoolhouse. And then he bequeathed some of those "free" souls to his children and to his grandchildren. The Unitarian-Universalist Church of Lexington owns seven-and-a-half acres of Richard Allen's original 300, plus his house. More preciously, they claim ownership of his cherished belief in religious liberty. They honor him by actively espousing the same cause.

But as they honor, they have begun the process of condemning his failure to extend that freedom fully to those souls whose lives he controlled. And they question their own failure to take note of that fatal contradiction for so long. The truth is that we have all participated in the lie, the truth that will begin to set us free.

Richard Allen knew that. So did another great man, Thomas Jefferson.

We knew it, too.

About the Author

Joseph G. Anthony, author, came to Kentucky from Manhattan in 1980. An English professor for 35 years, his most recent novel, *A Wounded Snake*, set in 1900 Lexington, centers around race and suffragettes and the sometimes violent politics surrounding them. A new collection of stories and Anthony's first volume of poetry will appear this fall. Anthony lives in Lexington with his wife of 46 years. They have three grown children and a one-year-old grandson.

Thanksgiving Afternoon 1981

By Kevin Lane Dearinger

There are memories that are memories
Even as they happen, playing out
Along a horizon of nostalgia

For there I am in time
With my foolish red jacket
Offering no protection from the chill
Other than its color's combustion
Thrust, synthetic, into nature,
Fierce against the far November sky
Blue and cold and dry
Autumnal gusts sighing
Through grey-white planks rattling
Around rusted wire and sagging posts
Down across the mud-brown pastures
Where the imperious white-faced cattle
Watch unimpressed as we make our way
To—yes, really—to grandmother's house
Determined to walk not out on the narrow road
Too obvious for a trio of wry contrarians
But across the farm backs
Fearing neither bull nor buckshot
To see the old ones, tidily at home,
Cheery and warm by their stove.

You are not yet sixty
Out with your boys
Hopping up and over the fences
With an agility that will fade
And a spirit that will not
But in that moment of adventure
Sons at your side, daughter in your heart,
You are Father Father Father
So intensely and softly
With pastoral care
Shepherding your small flock
(Surely no wee lambs, we)
Across the land we love
Towards those we love
With one we love.

About the Author

Retired actor and teacher, Kevin Lane Dearinger is the author of four theatre histories, including several biographies of Kentucky theatrical personalities, five volumes of poetry, plays, including *Regarding Mrs. Carter* and *Naked on Request*, and two memoirs, *On Stage with Bette Davis* and *Bad Sex in Kentucky*.

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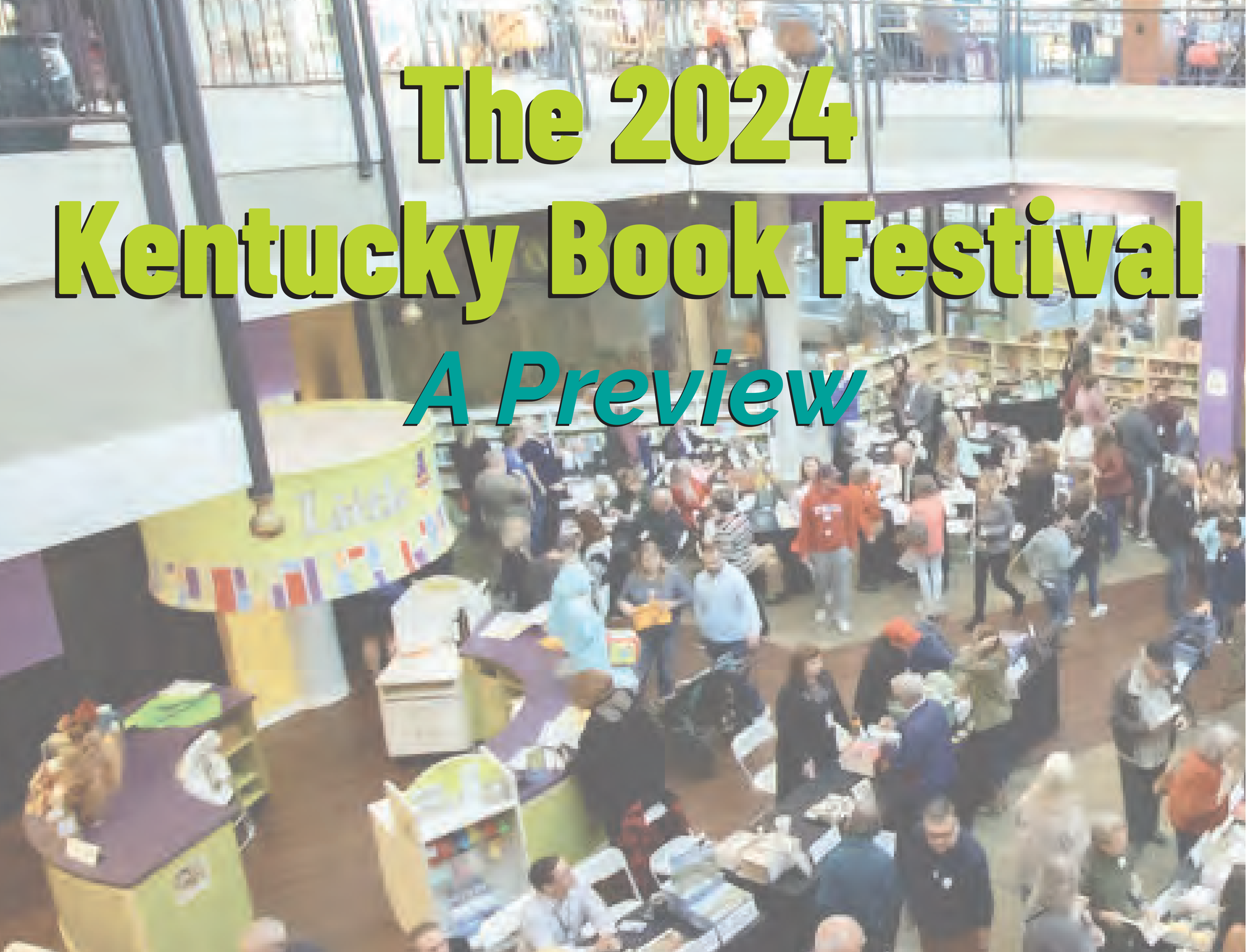

The 2024 Kentucky Book Festival

A Preview

By Kevin Nance

Well before his *King: A Life* won this year's Pulitzer Prize for Biography, Jonathan Eig knew he had written something unique and noteworthy. Readers and critics were responding to his book about the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in ways that set it apart from his past biographies of Muhammad Ali, Al Capone and Lou Gehrig. "From the minute the book came out, it was getting a special reaction," Eig said. "People were connecting with it emotionally and spiritually, so I could tell I had touched a nerve."

Eig is among more than 150 authors looking to connect with readers at the Kentucky Book Festival on November 2, 2024, at Lexington's Joseph-Beth Booksellers. Other big names at this year's festival, a program of Kentucky Humanities, include TV personality Al Roker, young adult author Nic Stone, Louisville chef Edward Lee and two prominent Lexington writers, novelist Gwenda Bond and former Kentucky Poet Laureate Crystal Wilkinson. (Wilkinson, author of the culinary memoir *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts*, will also be featured in this year's Literary Luncheon at Fasig-Tipton in conversation with award-winning food writer Ronni Lundy on October 31, 2024.) Also making an appearance is newcomer Yolanda Renee King, the only granddaughter of MLK and his wife, Coretta Scott King, who celebrates her grandparents' legacy in a new children's book, *We Dream a World*.

Eig always expected that *King: A Life*—a page-turning, deeply human portrait of the great man that relies in part on newly released FBI files and new interviews with scores of people who knew the slain civil rights leader personally—would require unusual sensitivity, especially when revealing details about his personal life including infidelity and struggles with mental health. "The bar was always higher on this book because he matters so much to people—there are plenty of people who have pictures of

Jesus and MLK on their walls," Eig said in an interview from his home in Chicago. "I had to be careful to write a book that dealt with his greatness and his flaws. If I balanced it right and didn't overemphasize those negative things, I felt that readers would give me a fair shake."

The decision to use information from the FBI files, including transcripts of wiretapped conversations and other electronic surveillance over many years, was particularly fraught. "The files had to be handled delicately and with the overriding goal of showing how the Bureau and its director, J. Edgar Hoover, were out to destroy King," Eig said. "You could argue that the files don't belong in the book because they come from a corrupt source, but they also help us understand him better as a person. They show how vulnerable, how distraught he is, how he's suffering." The book also reveals for the first time the existence of a shocking note anonymously mailed to King by the FBI in 1964 suggesting that he should avoid the exposure of his extramarital activities by killing himself. "When I do public readings from the book," Eig said, "that draws audible gasps from the audience, every time."

Martin Luther King also figures in the work of another KBF guest, Nic Stone, author of the bestselling young adult debut novel *Dear Martin* (2017) about a Black teenager who begins writing letters to King after a frightening run-in with a racist policeman. Since then, Stone has written several books that, unlike a great many young adult novels that keep the mood light, delve into surprisingly dark themes.

In her most recent novel *Chaos Theory*, for example, Stone once again writes about Black high school students dealing with heavy issues—including mental illness and alcohol abuse. The story follows Shelbi, a physics genius with bipolar depression

and a history of self-harm, and Andy, an excellent student-athlete who deals with grief and the stress of his troubled family life by drinking too much (much of it generated by his mother, an ambitious conservative congresswoman running for the U.S. Senate).

Andy and Shelbi find themselves falling in love, but can their relationship withstand the pressure of their respective "brain stuff," as Shelbi calls it? The answer is moving, complicated and, for the author, deeply personal. In an author's note, Stone revealed to her readers that much of the story is inspired by her own experiences.

"I needed to validate my own reality," she said in an interview from her home in the Atlanta area. "For me growing up, my father was an alcoholic, and he never hid his drinking from me, including the fact that he was actively working to mitigate it. He used to take me with him to his AA meetings, and just recently hit his 30-years-sober mark." She used that life experience as inspiration for Andy's story, while Shelbi's neurodivergent condition is informed by the author's own struggle with bipolar depression and generalized anxiety disorder. She hopes to help reduce the stigma around mental illness by reminding affected young people that a) they're not alone and b) it's ok to talk about it. "As human beings, we're not designed to exist in isolation, so it's important that we not hide from each other," Stone said. "Books like mine can serve as mirrors, and can help young people realize that there's nothing wrong with them. It's only dark because we keep it out of the light."

In another neck of the fictional woods, bestselling author Gwenda Bond is once again doing what she does best, which is mixing genres. In *The Frame-Up*, a feisty former con artist named Dani must reassemble her estranged mother's old crew of art thieves with magical abilities to pull off a new job: stealing a painting that might or might not have supernatural properties. Bond delivers a fast-paced mashup of an old-fashioned heist caper and fantasy, with big dollops of action, screwball comedy and romance thrown in for good measure—not to mention that the book is set mostly in Lexington and Louisville.

"It's *Ocean's Eleven* meets *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in Kentucky," Bond said in an interview. "Weird combinations of things are my rubric." As research before she began writing, she watched about

50 heist movies, focusing on ones that "put a lot of time into building the team," including the *Ocean's* series (including *Ocean's Eight*, which she says is unfairly unappreciated), both versions of *The Thomas Crown Affair* and *To Catch a Thief*.

In the end, Bond said, "It's really about how everyone's going to work together with competing motives, about second chances and found family."

There's also a strong Bluegrassy flavor in the newest book by Korean American chef and author Edward Lee, *Bourbon Land: A Spirited Love Letter to My Old Kentucky Whiskey*. A collection of short essays on the history of bourbon, profiles of industry luminaries and 50 recipes featuring the Commonwealth's famous libation, *Bourbon Land* is a delicious concoction for bourbon lovers and adventurous home cooks alike.

"When I was thinking of what my next book would be about, I asked myself whether I had something to say that's not already out there," says Lee, chef/owner of 610 Magnolia and Nami in Louisville, whose earlier books include *Buttermilk Graffiti: A Chef's Journey to Discover America's New Melting-Pot Cuisine*, winner of the 2019 James Beard Award. "There were a lot of barbecue cookbooks that featured bourbon, but there are a lot more uses of bourbon in cooking than that."

Turns out he had plenty to say. In *Bourbon Land*, Lee explains how to use what he calls "the one true American spirit" in a dazzling array of delectable-sounding dishes featuring bourbon marinades, bourbon vinaigrettes, bourbon sauces, bourbon gravy; bourbon for poaching, basting and braising; and a multitude of ways to combine bourbon with gochujang, miso and other Asian ingredients, not to mention old standbys like honey, maple syrup, and sorghum, to infuse, enhance and otherwise glorify meats, fish, vegetables and desserts.

"In the beginning of America's culinary journey, we were mostly fascinated by European cuisines, but now American cuisine is fast becoming a melding of cultures: Mexico, the Far East, the American South," Lee explained. "Now you need something stronger than wine to stand up to all those chiles and ginger, all that turmeric, all that smoke. You need bourbon."

Much of Brother Paul Quenon's half-century of monastic life at the Abbey of Gethsemani in New Haven, Kentucky, has been spent nurturing the legacy of his former novice master, Thomas Merton (*The Seven Story Mountain*), in various forums. But in the just-published *A Matter of the Heart: A Monk's Journal*—a followup to his 2018 memoir *In Praise of the Useless Life* and several earlier poetry collections—Quenon both consolidates his reputation as Merton's literary heir and continues to emerge as a gifted writer in his own right.

2024 Literary Luncheon

Join Crystal Wilkinson and Ronni Lundy for a discussion of Crystal's culinary memoir, *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts: Stories and Recipes from Five Generations of Black Country Cooks.*

Thursday, October 31, 2024
12 - 2 p.m.
Fasig-Tipton
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Based on excerpts from his journals from the 1970s to the 2000s, *A Matter of the Heart* barely mentions Brother Louis, as Quenon called Merton. Instead, it oscillates between spiritual reflections and elegantly observed, sometimes gently comic slices of daily life at the monastery: the routines of worship; insightful encounters with nature, including animals, on the Gethsemani grounds; conversations (sometimes in sign language) with other monks; and occasional reactions to world events such as the wars in Vietnam and Iraq.

"Brother Louis didn't like imitators," said Quenon, who will participate in a KBF panel discussion about spiritual writing with Fenton Johnson and Jon Sweeney. "He wanted people to be themselves, the way God made them, and I suppose I've tried to do that as a writer and poet. I can't be compared with him, really, but I admit that he inspired me to develop that part of my life. There's something about monastic life that allows for writers, and inspires them. You're given the gift of the contemplative life, and having these moments, so why not share them? It's about having something to give and to give it freely to others."

About the Author

Kevin Nance is a writer and photographer in Lexington, Kentucky. His most recent book is a hardcover coffee table book, *Geneva's Garden: Four Seasons of Beauty in Lexington's Gratz Park*. Kevin is also the author of two collections of photographs and haiku, and his poetry collection, *Smoke*, is forthcoming in 2025. He has worked as an arts journalist for the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Poets & Writers*, and many other publications.

2024 Kentucky Book Festival

Saturday, November 2, 2024 • 9:30 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Joseph-Beth Booksellers
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Same Old Thing

By Chelsie Kreitzman

Pallid under unblinking fluorescent lights,
screen-stoned dull by monotony,

colors worn threadbare, endless obligation,
I unravel.

I long for soft earth, pine needles
to pad footsteps, syrup-thick summer

air pungent with thistle and wildflower.
Steeped in sweat, I hike to the overlook,

sit on a jagged slab of limestone
among arthritic trees with gnarled roots,

heed how their branches still reach
gladly for sun. While butterflies

wing over bits of detritus,
unhampered, I watch the crawl

of the miry ochre river, notice once again
how it never loses its way.

About the Author

Chelsie Kreitzman is a native of Michigan who now resides in Lexington, Kentucky, with her husband and two sons. Along with all things literary, she enjoys exploring the great outdoors and spending time around animals. She completed the year-long Poetry Gauntlet through The Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning in 2023, and her poetry has appeared in a variety of publications, including *Pegasus*, *Yearling*, and *The Heartland Review*.

Photo courtesy of Brewster Rhoads

Navigating the Ohio River Way

By Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

In his riveting social history, *Life on the Mississippi: An Epic American Adventure*, author Rinker Buck writes, "In the 1820s and 1830s, the raucous, turbulent lives of the Ohio and Mississippi rivermen were celebrated with the popular moniker 'alligator horse.' The term, reprised in wildly popular plays, paintings, and humorists' newspaper sketches, described the hybrid melding of frontier woodsmen, American Indian fighters, and Continental army deserters who took to the water from Ohio and Kentucky to expand the empire southward. The boatsmen were also called 'Kaintucks,' .... This amphibious new man became a folk hero of the early 19th century."

Buck proceeds to paint a colorful picture of the flatboat era played out on the Ohio River in the roughly hundred years that spanned the conclusion of the American Revolution and the onset of the Civil War. According to the author, by the 18th century's end, this "jaunty new vessel of western movement" brought as many as 900 pioneers annually from western Pennsylvania to the Kentucky frontier on "colorful" 50- or 60-foot vessels laden "bow to stern with everything a family, or several families, needed to carve a homestead out of the Kentucky forests."

Beginning in the first half of the 19th century, newly invented steamboats replete with musicians and divertissements of every ilk, including the occasional floating circus, conducted performances on the river, and store or "glass" boats (vessels loaded with merchandise, such as glassware, from noted factories in Pennsylvania and West Virginia) docked in river towns to entice and entertain river travelers. However, in the same era and on the same river that channeled hope for enhanced lives for many travelers, steamboats also trafficked enslaved people down the Ohio to the Deep South where they usually faced

desperate, irreversible fates. At the same time, the Ohio served as a significant conduit of freedom for fewer numbers of enslaved men, women, and children who managed to cross the river from Kentucky to Ohio where they sought emancipation in non-slaveholding northern states. And then there were the Indigenous peoples, who had for centuries navigated the Ohio in concert with its downhill flow. They were forced by the Indian Removal Act of 1830 to leave their home territories to travel via river and foot to agriculturally starker western land.

Certainly, the Ohio River claims a storied past and is currently being recognized not only for its historical significance as a waterway that helped shape a nation, but as a contemporary environmental, recreational, and cultural treasure. The Ohio River commands a mighty presence not only in Kentucky, but also in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Indiana, and Illinois, the states in which local and regional organizations and individuals have partnered to form the not-for-profit Ohio River Way, a coalition united by the goal of creating and providing opportunities for enhancing the river and enriching the communities that line its banks with increased economic, recreational, and cultural assets.

Ohio River Way Executive Director Mark Noll states, "None of the work we do—whether it be building a water trail and achieving designation as a National Water Trail; developing a connected network of land trails; restoring the healthy ecology of the Ohio River and its tributaries; or creating vibrant, attractive communities—is possible without the work and collaboration of our river town constituents. The work of the Ohio River Way Coalition helps identify common issues and opportunities across multiple communities and facilitates a network to better enable river town leaders to tackle those challenges." He adds, "To help make these goals a reality, we've partnered with the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, & Conservation Assistance Program to offer free River Town Reviews."

Noll points to Lawrenceburg and Aurora in Dearborn County, Indiana, as river towns that "have embraced their connection to the Ohio River and have fantastic projects underway that position the river as an asset and focal point for their community." He refers to the Lawrenceburg Riverwalk as "a multi-million-dollar investment in that city's riverfront," and he adds that Lawrenceburg and Aurora are also leveraging their relationship with the Ohio River to pursue additional capital project funding from the state's READI Program, which is designed to encourage collaboration between communities to promote data-driven planning and attract talented teachers regionally. "Our biggest assets," Noll says, "are our river cities and towns, as well as the history and culture of the Ohio River." He notes, "There are somewhere between 40 and 50 communities in this 300-mile

The Ohio River Way is pursuing an Ohio River Valley renowned for its vibrant communities, opportunities for exploration and recreation, and high quality of life.

Photo by Susan Griffen Ward

stretch of the river, and each has its own story to tell."

When asked what he thinks is the most misunderstood aspect of the Ohio River, Noll says that he, like most people, was surprised to learn that "the Ohio is far cleaner now than it was 40 or 50 years ago." He notes, "The number of native species found in the Ohio River have doubled in that time, but there is still plenty of work to do to ensure that the river is seen as a critical resource."

His fall 2023 appointment as Ohio River Way executive director resulted from a new partnership between Ohio River Way and the University of Louisville's Christina Lee Brown Envirome Institute. "This association," Noll says, "provides Ohio River Way with access to researchers, student interns, and the wealth of knowledge within the university." He adds that the collaboration "also offers us better standing as we approach other universities in the region to identify additional resources and expertise. "In return," he continues, "our grassroots network of partners and community leaders along the Ohio provides opportunities for researchers at the Envirome Institute to employ the river as a 'living laboratory' to explore all aspects of individual, community, and environmental health and well-being. Together," he states, "this vast network of community partners, along with aligned organizations such as Kentucky Waterways Alliance, continue to build support for the Ohio Basin Restoration Plan."

Thomas More University Professor of Biological Sciences Chris Lorentz, who also directs Thomas More's Center for Ohio River Research & Education, exemplifies the type of academic partner to whom Noll refers. In his article "One of America's Great Rivers," published in the Fall 2023 *Cincy Magazine* supplement *Guide to the Ohio River Way*, Lorentz refers to the Ohio River as "one of the most vibrant, resilient ecosystems in the country. He writes, "At the Center for Ohio River Research & Education .... we've been conducting research on the biodiversity and ecology of the Ohio River watershed for over 50 years." His text, filled with good news concerning rare species thriving in water able to dilute many toxins, also warns, "There is still much work to be done," referring to the effects of climate change. He references the Ohio River as "a bellwether for our nation's commitment to conservation, environmental protection, and environmental justice," and he views Ohio River Way and the Ohio River Basin Alliance as organizations equipped to lead that charge.

Indeed, the Ohio Basin Restoration Plan has developed a strategic scheme to promote abundant clean water, healthy and productive ecosystems, nature-based recreation, efficient river

Held in August, Paddlefest is recognized as the nation's largest paddling celebration with 2,000 participants traveling up to nine miles through downtown Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky in canoes, kayaks, and other human-powered craft.

Photo courtesy of the Ohio River Way

Photo by Susan Griffen Ward

transportation and commerce, reliable flood risk management, and knowledge and education to inform decisions. From this plan, the National Wildlife Federation has taken the lead in developing and building support for the Ohio River Basin Restoration Plan. Noll says, "As one of the few major watersheds that does not currently receive Federal restoration funding from either the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), this work is critically important to restoring the ecological health and well-being of the Ohio River and our region. The Restoration Plan will soon be complete, he adds. "Representative Morgan McGarvey, a Plan champion and co-chair of the Ohio River Congressional Caucus, will be integral in writing and passing federal legislation and achieving a significant appropriation to fulfill the Plan's recommendations."

Community Engagement Director for the Kentucky Riverway Alliance Susan Griffin Ward, also writing in *Guide to the Ohio River Way*, adds "This spring [2023], the Ohio River was named America's second-most endangered river [after the Colorado River]," further stating, "[T]he report cited industrial, municipal, and agricultural pollution from the Ohio River's watershed as major issues, despite marked improvements since the enactment of the Clean Water Act of 1972. This pollution is dangerous not only because of its effects on the Ohio River's diverse ecosystems, but because the Ohio is the source of drinking water for more than five million people." Ward continues by discussing the urgency of addressing economic opportunities for people living in river towns that have "transitioned away from resource extraction and manufacturing" and now need "sustainable foundation[s] for their economies." Like Rhoads, she recognizes Ohio River Way's calling on Congress to fund a basin-wide restoration plan as crucial to achieving these goals.

In *Life on the Mississippi*, Rinker Buck refers to Harlan and Anna Hubbard, a couple who built and lived on a shanty boat and then in an austere-yet-artistic home on the banks of the Ohio in northern Kentucky for decades starting in the 1940s, as "the most iconic of … river wanderers." Their lifestyle of growing fruits and vegetables and catching fish for their meals, reading literature aloud to one another, playing music (Anna and Harlan), painting pictures (Harlan), and drifting down river to live for as long as they liked still strikes admirers as idyllic. One Ohio River Way project, led by Vice Chair David Wicks, who also serves as chair of the Payne Hollow on the Ohio board of directors, is restoring the Hubbards' former abode,

Payne Hollow, for educational and creative use, an ambition the Hubbards would have surely approved.

Wicks is also the founder of River City Paddle Sports, a nonprofit headquartered in the Louisville Community Boathouse in Waterfront Park on the river. The organization's mission "to expand community access to all paddle sports in the Greater Louisville area through education, outreach, and competition" has held enormous appeal for River City Paddlers' Board Members Joe Kinman and Tracy Barnes, who echo each other's perspective of river paddling as, in Kinman's words, an activity that is "calming and therapeutic" while simultaneously encouraging "awareness of environmental challenges," a sense of purpose he embraces.

Barnes points out that what paddlers do in a canoe is focus downstream as they paddle, unlike rowers positioned in the opposite direction as they progress upstream with oars. She thinks embracing the river from all perspectives is important, but she emphasizes that the Ohio is "a unique place to help those suffering from anxiety, depression, and other maladies with which Mother Nature can assist." She adds, "Being on the water brings me peace and joy."

Occasionally, being on the river has brought Barnes and the folks with whom she paddles a bit of hilarity too, as was the case on the first day of her first challenge trip in a boat with 10 other people. She recalls that during that trip she realized she was paddling with "some really smart folks." She says, "They were pointing out birds of all sorts, naming them and sharing information about their habitats and colors. One after the other they pointed out this bird and that. Wanting to be part of the cool crowd, I gazed across the river and was certain I spotted a white egret. 'Egret!' I exclaimed and pointed, proudly assuming my place among those in the know until a wise, binocular-sporting paddler looking to confirm my find corrected me by remarking, 'No, that's a plastic trash bag hanging in the tree.' For the next nine days I pointed out trash bags I swore were egrets. Then on the last day as we paddled into Louisville, I spotted an undeniable white egret flying with outstretched wings so close to our boat I could almost touch it. I yelled 'Egret!' and everyone cheered."

Kinman, too, participates in the group's annual 10-day challenge trips from Portsmouth to Louisville. "Sharing a bench seat with people while paddling 20-plus miles a day has gained me friends for life," he says. "After traveling those many miles, I always feel more inspired to work harder for the river's common good." Kinman, Barnes, and Barnes's husband, Don Speer, another River City Paddler, also participate in the Paddlers' annual 10-day, 250-mile Ohio River Challenge that takes them to many Ohio River towns where local dignitaries greet them and discuss how they are developing their waterfronts. "All the towns are different," comments Kinman. "Each one reflects the decisions they have made regarding how to live with the ever-changing river. Many have large murals that tell the history of the town painted on flood walls. Others have nice boat ramps with a fair amount of traffic on them. Initially, Ohio River Way's focus was encouraging towns to improve their facilities and signage for people coming off the water. We participated in River Town Reviews conducted by the National Park Service. Each town received a report concerning its current offerings with suggestions for improvements. Now the focus has shifted to encouraging the towns to unify in their efforts to attract more financial aid to the entire Ohio River Way corridor to improve their economies, expand development, and protect the river.

Brewster Rhoads, board chair of the Ohio River Way, cites House Bill 712, passed by the Commonwealth's General Assembly and signed by Governor Andy Beshear in spring 2024, as a critical milestone in rendering Ohio River Way goals a reality. By establishing the Kentucky Ohio River Regional Recreation Authority (KORRRA), this legislation green lights the creation of land and water trails to promote Ohio River economic development, tourism, and outdoor recreation" if, after the bill becomes law, 11 of the state's 25 counties that boast Ohio River shorelines pass resolutions to join KORRRA by adopting the legislation and communicating their action to the Department for Local Government.

Louisville-based filmmaker Morgan C. Atkinson's 2024 documentary, *This is the Ohio* (shown at Ohio River Way informational meetings and aired on Kentucky Educational Television), offers a comprehensive look at the river's history, the waterway's current challenges, and the Ohio River Way's multi-faceted approach to improving one of the nation's most significant conduits and water sources. Atkinson says, "For me, the biggest surprise of this project was seeing how neglected the Ohio River has been in terms of EPA funding. However, I think Ohio River Way's most powerful impact is in raising people's awareness of the many possibilities of recreating on the Ohio. Not only does the organization raise awareness, but it provides opportunities and tools to get people out on the water. I realize it is ridiculous for me to think I can tell the story of a very complex organism such as the Ohio River in just one hour. However, what you will find in *This is the Ohio* is engaging stories of people who have embraced the Ohio for the wonder that it is."

About the Author

Dr. Linda Elisabeth LaPinta, a former tenured professor at three Kentucky institutions of higher education, is the author of hundreds of newspaper, magazine, and journal articles and reviews. She is also the author of five books published by the University Press of Kentucky, the most recent of which, *Kentucky Quilts and Quiltmakers: Three Centuries of Creativity, Community, and Commerce*, received the Popular Culture Association's 2024 Emily Toth Award for best single work in women's studies.

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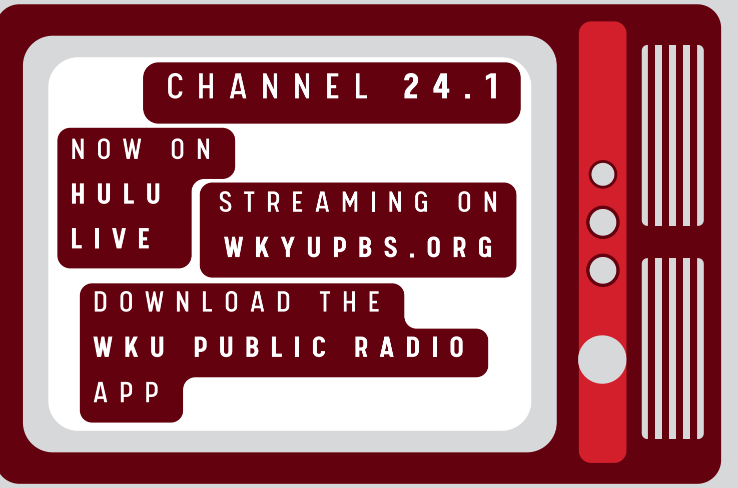

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Mrs. Ledford-Manning's Kentucky Sugar Chest

By Roger Futrell

The illustrated Kentucky Sugar Chest, dating between 1820 and 1840,[1] was rescued in the spring of 1963 from Mr. Payton T. Ledford's front yard at 1402 East 19th Street in Hopkinsville, Kentucky.[2] Mr. Ledford, a Hopkinsville businessman and master plumber, used it as a toolbox.[3] He kept the piece under a large shade tree, covered with linoleum, to protect the tools of his trade. He indicated the chest belonged to his mother, Mrs. Utha Ledford-Manning.[4] But, he had no idea where she obtained it.[5] The writer swapped a metal storage cabinet for the classic case.

The cherry and poplar chest-on-frame, with a single drawer, was structurally sound, but severely weather-beaten. A local antiques dealer suggested it was worth $75 in the rough.[6] The orphaned piece featured pegged construction, dovetailed corners, a breadboard top, a divider, and short ring-turned legs. It stood approximately 27 inches tall, 31 inches wide, and 18 inches deep. The original hinges were intact, but the lock, escutcheon, drawer pulls, and much of the light-colored beading around the drawer front were missing. It was promptly restored. The chest was included in the Speed Art Museum's *Kentucky Online Arts Resource (KOAR) Project* database in 2008.

Before the American Civil War, sugar chests conveyed status and wealth. They were popular in both Kentucky and Tennessee.[7] Such pieces were used by upper-class families to keep sugar under lock-and-key.[8] Lower-income households used honey, maple syrup, or molasses rather than sugar.[9] Cane sugar was sold in hard cone-shaped loaves before a granular form was perfected in the mid-19th century.[10] Scissor-like clippers called "sugar nippers"

were used to break the large loaves into small lumps for the dining table.[11] Typically, sugar chests had a divider which allowed light and brown cones to be stored separately.[12]

Payton Ledford said he and his family lived in the Pee Dee community of South Christian County, Kentucky, near Herndon, before moving into Hopkinsville during the Great Depression where his mother worked as a laundress.[13]

Mrs. Utha Ledford-Manning, the first known keeper of the chest, was the daughter of Thomas "Tom" Tandy (1846-1927) and Serilda Greenwade.[14] Utha, like her father, was mixed race.[15] Tom Tandy was born enslaved.[16] When he enlisted in Co. K, 15th. Regiment, United States Colored Infantry at Nashville, on 11 March 1864, he enrolled under the alias Thomas "Staunton."[17] He rose to the rank of corporal,[18] did guard duty in the Military District of Middle Tennessee,[19] and mustered out-of-service on April 7, 1866.[20] After the Civil War, he returned to Christian County and took back his birth name, Thomas Tandy.[21]

Culturally, Hopkinsville and South Christian were reminiscent of the "Old South" well into the 20th century. Before emancipation, the area was home to several working plantations supported by enslaved African American labor. Estate inventories indicated many of those plantations held sugar chests. Mrs. Ledford-Manning's chest was likely crafted in a local cabinet shop. It is impossible to determine when and where she acquired it. Perhaps, she inherited it, bought it, or, as was local custom, may have been gifted it by a white family she worked for during Jim Crow days.

About the Author

Roger Futrell is an amateur historian, skilled historical researcher, genealogist, writer, and lecturer. He has worked as a professional researcher for the past 20 years. Futrell's published works include *Zachariah Riney: Lincoln's First Schoolmaster* and *Peach Orchard Road: The Documentary of a Double Kidnap-Murder*, among many others. He often speaks to historical groups including the Kentucky Historical Society, the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, county historical societies, and lineage organizations.

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Halloween Soup

By Georgia Green Stamper

"Double, double toil and trouble/Fire burn and cauldron bubble," chant the witches in *Macbeth*. For the life of me, the only image I can ever conjure up when I read this passage is the huge black kettle used to make our Halloween vegetable soup at New Columbus Grade School. Let me hasten to say that there was nothing haunted about our soup. It's just that the PTA ladies only made it at Halloween.

Which is ***not*** to say that the PTA moms resembled witches, but they did have to make the soup in a giant kettle over an open fire out in the schoolyard. This was because we didn't have a lunchroom at our little country schoolhouse. Heck, we didn't have running water or restrooms either.

But come Halloween, our moms would rally and cook up the biggest kettle of soup you've ever seen. No wimpy homeroom parties with cupcakes and plastic spider rings for them! I don't know where they found a soup recipe that would provide unlimited servings to several hundred people. It probably had been passed down to them by Daniel Boone or somebody. I mean—how could you know how much salt to put in a kettle that large?

Whatever the origin of the recipe, the result was incredible. The vegetables had been grown on our families' farms, canned and preserved with care for an October day such as this. Some were fresh, like the potatoes and onions, and chopped only minutes before being tossed into the gigantic stew. And the added liquid—oh, that would have been rainwater hand-carried from the cistern.

The pot, itself, was ancient, and had formerly been used to heat vats of water on washdays (probably by Daniel Boone's wife, Rebecca.) It had four solid feet—maybe these were called short legs—that allowed it to perch in the hot embers of the bonfire. It's possible that the pot sat on a raised grate above the flames, but it looked to me like it was sitting in the fire itself. This was a remarkable image to a child steeped in violent fairy tales and culturally insensitive cartoons, and I half expected to be snatched and dropped into the soup kettle.

An arcing, metal cylinder called a bale spanned the open circumference of the kettle, and was used for lifting it. I can't imagine how those women managed to move such a heavy, boiling pot, but they did. I'm pretty sure they did. Of course, the cast iron cauldron was black. Whether it started out that way, I don't know, but lifetimes of simmering had smudged it forever ebony.

I think the original purpose of the soup supper may have been to raise funds for classroom chalk and toilet paper for the wooden, four-holed outhouse since the county schoolboard didn't provide any. But over time, the soup had become essential to the masquerade party held in the evening for the entire community, children and adults alike.

This is the way my memories of Halloween differ from those of my children and grandchildren. It was not really a holiday for kids. In earlier generations, it had been an excuse for roughnecks to terrorize the neighborhood by cutting trees to block a road or pushing an outhouse over a hill. Mischievous youths had smeared the windows of unsuspecting folk with bars of soap. I think some of that orneriness still went on when I was growing up, but by then, mostly folks just enjoyed gathering at the schoolhouse, our unofficial community center, and eating soup together.

Most everyone, from old to young, dressed up in some sort of costume. The old people were always the funniest and most interesting because they were the hardest to identify. Who would think the tiny woman who had a 40-year perfect attendance record in Sunday School would come dressed as a man? Or that the most argumentative village benchwarmer would disguise himself as a clown?

Some years, a fortune teller would set up shop. She was a big hit though we all professed that we didn't "believe a word she said." Once, the adults rigged up a homemade funhouse in the third-fourth-fifth grade classroom, replete with wet ghostly hands and fake cobwebs. It was hard to tell who enjoyed it more, the grown-ups or the children.

This is the way it was, the generations moving together easily within the life of the community. Just as we went with our parents to work on the farm. Just as we followed them as they went about the business of home and church.

I've considered offering Halloween soup to the hundred or so trick-or-treaters who come to my door each October asking for candy. Some years, when the weather is cold, I think they might appreciate it, or at least their nameless parents shivering on the sidewalk would. But I don't have Daniel Boone's cauldron, or Rebecca Boone's recipe, and bonfires are prohibited in my city subdivision.

And I'm guessing it wouldn't taste the same anyway. You just had to be there, I guess, to appreciate Halloween soup circa 1952.

About the Author

Georgia Green Stamper is a Kentucky writer whose published works include *Butter in the Morning* and *You Can Go Anywhere*. Her newest book, *Small Acreages*, available from Shadelandhouse Modern Press, was Longlisted for the 2023 PENAmerica Art of the Essay Award.

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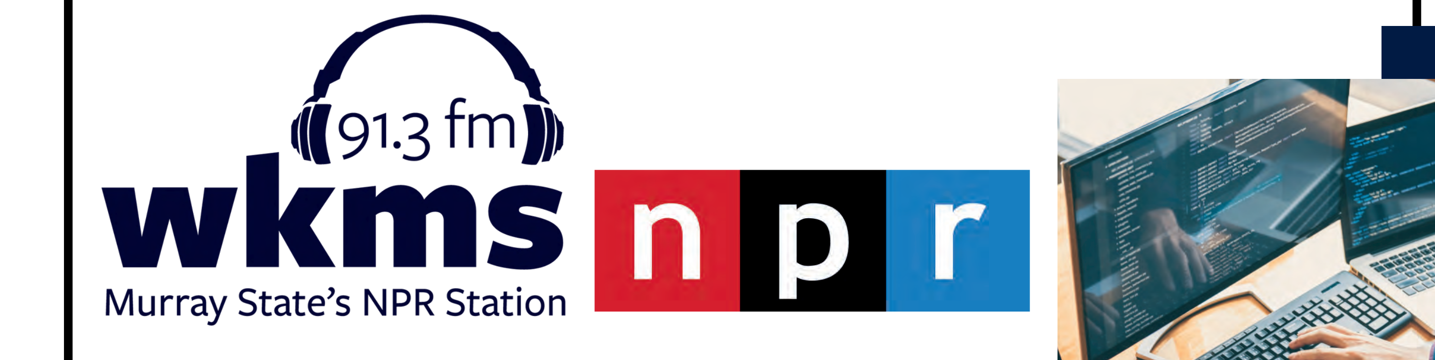

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