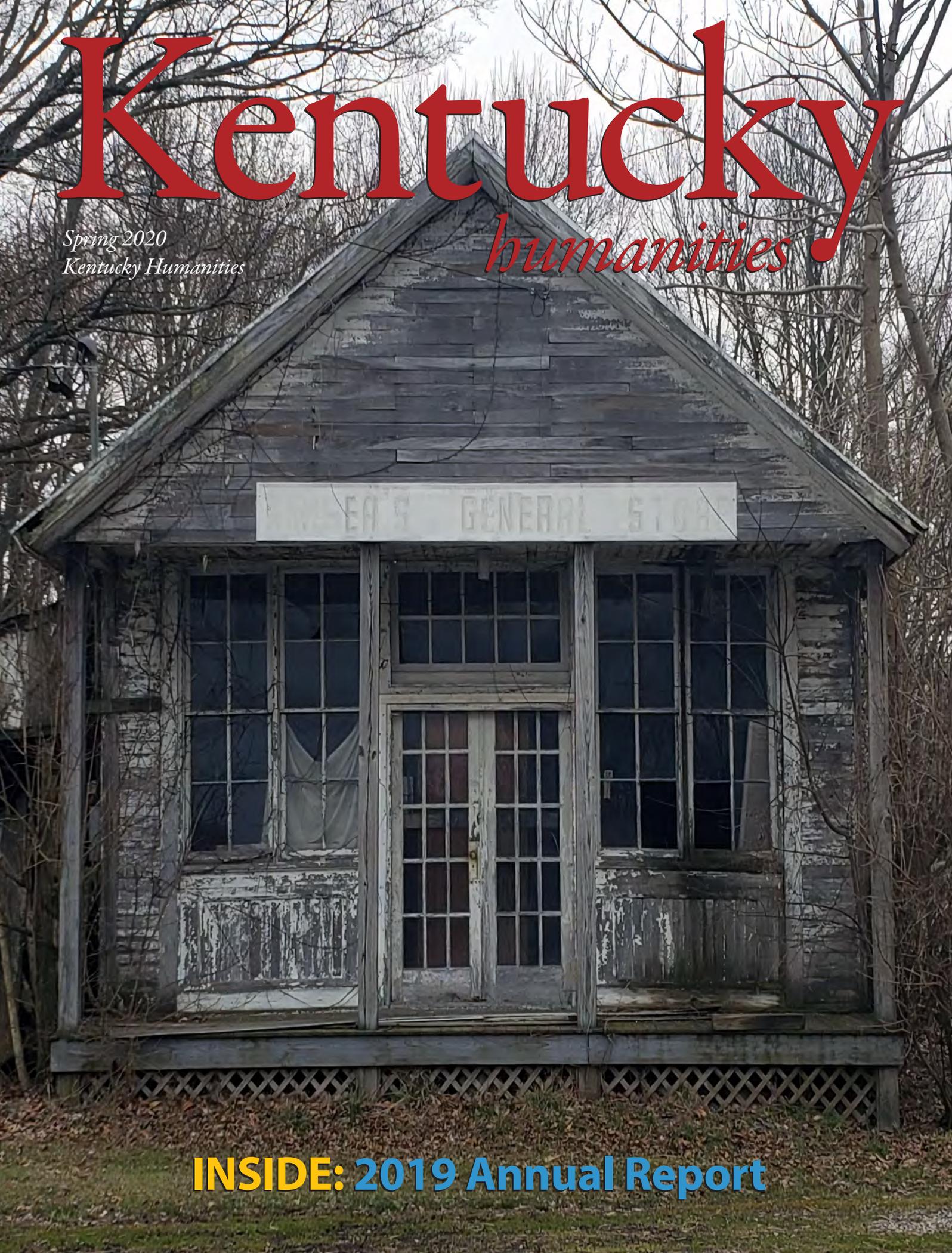


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INSIDE: 2019 Annual Report

88.9

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10

The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek

Reviewed by Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

12

The Art of Loading Brush

An Excerpt

By Wendell Berry

18

Larkspur and Ironweed

By Mary Ann Taylor Hall

22

Elsie

By Sandra A. Shackelford

26

Miss Myrtle and the Razzle Dazzle Bluegrass Band

By Theo Edmonds

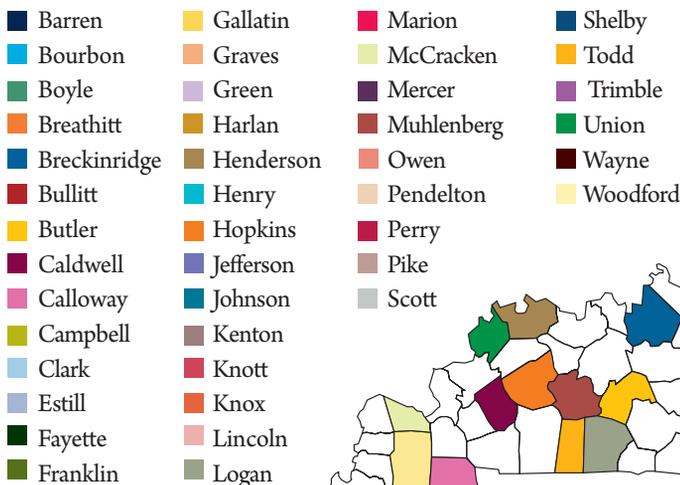
31

Nat Lee

By Georgia Green Stamper

On the cover: Smiser's General Store in Skylight, Kentucky. Photo by Chris Hampton.

In this issue:



Staff

- Bill Goodman
Executive Director
- Kathleen Pool
Associate Director
- Marianne Stoess
Assistant Director
- Sara Volpi
Kentucky Book Festival Director
- Gladys Thompson
Fiscal Officer
- Zoe Kaylor
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Celebrating Our Rural Communities

While these are uncertain and unprecedented times, there is one thing you can count on — Kentucky Humanities connecting with you. As our staff shelters in place, I hope you and your loved ones are healthy and safe during this global pandemic. Our thoughts and greatest appreciation go out to all the front line, first responders including medical workers, public officials, grocery store employees, food service workers, and all those working tirelessly and selflessly to ease the burden our world is facing. As Governor Beshear reminds us, we will get through this *together*.

We are busy rescheduling our spring events and looking forward to a full slate of humanities programs across the Commonwealth this fall. Among the highlights of our fall schedule is the arrival of the Smithsonian traveling exhibit *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* in Kentucky in September. The exhibit will visit seven rural Kentucky communities, and a full schedule of the exhibit's tour can be found on page 25. We want to kickstart the arrival of the Crossroads exhibit in our state with this issue of Kentucky Humanities.

The *Crossroads* exhibit, along with our Kentucky Reads book discussions of Wendell Berry's *Hannah Coulter* taking place across the state, will encourage vital community conversations about the importance of rural communities, the changes they have experienced over the years, and what the future holds for rural towns across Kentucky and the nation.

The love of books and literature has been alive in Kentucky for generations. Linda LaPinta gets things underway with her review of the much-discussed novel *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek* by Kim Michele Richardson on page 10. Hear about the first mobile library in our state and the incredibly brave women who served as packhorse librarians, making their way through the hills and hollers to deliver books to homes in eastern Kentucky.

On page 12, Wendell Berry takes us to Port William, Kentucky, in an excerpt from his book *The Art of Loading Brush*. In October of last year, we were thrilled to present Mr. Berry with the inaugural Kentucky Humanities Carl West Literary Award. You can read more about the wonderful evening at the Paul Sawyer Public Library in Frankfort on page 8.

Have you ever visited Larkspur Press? Author and poet Mary Ann Taylor-Hall takes us on a trip to Monterey, Kentucky, which is somewhat like a trip back in time. A true Kentucky treasure, Larkspur isn't your typical publishing house. All works are handset in metal type, printed on a non-electric, hand-fed press, and hand bound. Take a trip with Taylor-Hall on page 18.

Next, Sandra A. Shackelford takes us to Barnes Mountains, outside of Irvine, Kentucky, where she introduces us to Elsie Osborne. You can read the charming story of their time together beginning on page 22.

On page 26, Theo Edmonds celebrates rural Kentucky and bluegrass music with a delightful poem about the power of collaborating to make music together.

And finally, Georgia Green Stamper takes us to Natlee, Kentucky, and introduces us to its founder, Nat Lee.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Kentucky Humanities*. As always, we want to hear your Kentucky stories. If you have a story to share, please contact our editor, Marianne Stoess, Marianne.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.



Nine new members elected to Kentucky Humanities Board



Chelsea Brislin

Chelsea Brislin, Brian Clardy, Jennifer Cramer, Clarence Glover, Lois Mateus, Thomas Owen, Penelope Peavler, Judy Rhoads, and Maddie Shepard have joined the Kentucky Humanities Board of Directors.

Since 2018, Dr. Chelsea Brislin has been the associate director for the Gaines Center for the Humanities at the University of Kentucky. Prior to working with the Gaines Center, Brislin was the Honors Pathway program director and served as the director of recruitment for UK's Lewis Honors College. She serves as affiliate faculty for the Appalachian Center and has also taught dozens of courses at UK.



Brian Clardy

Dr. Brian Clardy began his career as a graduate teaching and research assistant at Murray State University. He moved on to teach at the University of Tennessee at Martin, John A. Logan College, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and Triton College, before returning to Murray State as an associate professor in 2006.



Jennifer Cramer

Dr. Jennifer Cramer began teaching at the University of Kentucky in 2010, working as a lecturer for the linguistics program. She is currently an associate professor in UK's department of linguistics, serving as the department's chair. She has authored or co-authored four books and has contributed to many others. She has also presented at regional, national, and international conferences.



Clarence Glover

Clarence Glover attended Western Kentucky University earning a Bachelor of Science degree and helped lead WKU to the NCAA Final Four. He was selected in the first round of the 1971 NBA draft by the Boston Celtics. Following his tenure with the Celtics, Glover was a teacher, coach, and administrator in Boston. Additionally, Glover was Assistant to the Superintendent



Lois Mateus



Thomas Owen

for Fayette County Schools, and principal for Jefferson County Schools in Louisville.

Lois Mateus is a retired Brown-Forman senior executive. For 26 years she oversaw the company's public relations, corporate communications, community relations, and contributions activities. Prior to joining Brown-Forman as a corporate vice president, Mateus served in the economic development arm of the administration of Governor John Y. Brown as state commissioner of the departments of Public Information, Tourism, and the Arts.



Penelope Peavler

Dr. Tom Owen, has been Archivist for Regional History at the University of Louisville since 1975. For 23 years, he served as an elected member of the Louisville Board of Aldermen and the Louisville Metro Council. Owen leads popular historical walking, bus, boat, and bicycle tours throughout the Louisville area and has produced numerous radio and television features for local stations.



Judy Rhoads

Penelope Peavler is a project manager at Cultural Tourism Consultants. She has been a champion for the arts and cultural scene in Louisville for many years. She previously served as president and CEO of the Frazier History Museum. Peavler is also a participating in the Imagine Greater Louisville 2020 initiative.



Maddie Shepard

Dr. Judy Rhoads is the former president of Madisonville Community College. She has more than 30 years of administrative and faculty leadership and 17 years of teaching experience. Dr. Rhoads has

served the Madisonville community for more than 30 years through organizations and business initiatives.

Maddie Shepard began her career in Shelby County, working as a fifth-grade teacher. She went on to work in Jefferson County Public Schools as a deeper learning resource teacher. In 2018, Shepard was elected president of the Kentucky Council for the Social Studies. She leads the organization to advocate for social studies and civic engagement across the Commonwealth.



2019 Kentucky Book Festival®

After successful expansion to a six-day event in 2018, the Kentucky Book Festival continued in an upward trajectory, working with various partners to offer exciting events throughout the year in 2019.

In February, we joined Joseph-Beth Booksellers to host Delia Owens' visit to Lexington. Owens has broken records with her debut novel, *Where the Crawdads Sing*, selling more than four and a half million copies since its August 2018 release. We also co-hosted the paperback launch of Silas House's novel *Southernmost* and Ann Patchett's arrival in Lexington, promoting her novel *The Dutch House*.

In June, we celebrated three culinary stars: award-winning author and chef Edward Lee; TV personality and author Tim Laird; and David Danielson, executive chef at Churchill Downs and owner of the Old Stone Inn and Tavern. Attendees enjoyed an evening of Kentucky cuisine while learning about Chef Lee's memoir, *Buttermilk Graffiti*.

With the Berry Center, we coordinated our first gallery exhibit, featuring 16 photos from Tanya Berry's first book, *For the Hog Killing, 1979*, at the Pam Miller Downtown Arts Center in Lexington in October.

The Kentucky Book Festival began on November 10 with a family-focused kickoff featuring eight authors participating in panel discussions, workshops, and kid-centered activities including storytime with LEX18's Jill Szwed. Mayor Linda Gorton started things off, and the Newport Aquarium's WAVE on Wheels Outreach Program added to the fun.

Authors Gurney Norman, Bobbie Ann Mason, Mary Ann Taylor-Hall, and Ed McClanahan discussed their latest projects with award-winning poet, memoirist, and novelist Crystal Wilkinson at the Literary Luncheon. We hosted a special screening of *Look & See: A Portrait of Wendell Berry* at the Kentucky Theatre, with director Laura Dunn, who discussed the making of the film with Tanya Berry.

Thursday's Cocktails & Conversation featured KET's Renee Shaw and Jessica Chiccehitto Hindman, author of *Sounds Like Titanic: A Memoir*. Afterwards, a spirited book-themed trivia night took place at West Sixth Brewery. Friday's Commerce Lexington Spotlight Breakfast included three authors discussing their bourbon-focused books and bourbon's ties to tourism and economy with Gathan Borden of VisitLex.

School Days occurred throughout the week across the state. With support from the Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation, Raymond B. Preston Family Foundation, The Honorable Order of Kentucky Colonels, and Kosair Charities, eight authors participated in 23 in-person school visits, with more than 2,900 books given to students. Our Master Class program sent award-winning author/illustrator Jarrett J. Krosoczka to two schools, visiting more than 300 students.

The week culminated in the 38th annual Kentucky Book Fair, featuring more than 200 authors and illustrators. Featured guests included journalists Scott Pelley and Jim Acosta along with Wendell Berry, Tanya Berry, Coach Joe. B Hall, Adrian Matejka, and Rosemary Wells.

Join us for the 39th annual Kentucky Book Fair on November 14, 2020, with additional festival events to be announced.

Thanks to Our Sponsors

Thank you to our sponsors and the many, many volunteers it takes to bring the Kentucky Book Festival to all Kentuckians!





Inaugural Kentucky Humanities Carl West Literary Award



Photo courtesy of The State Journal

Kentucky author Wendell Berry received the inaugural Kentucky Humanities Carl West Literary Award presented in a ceremony Thursday, October 24th, at the Paul Sawyer Public Library in Frankfort.

Presented by Kentucky Humanities, the literary award recognizes an individual who has made a significant impact on the literary culture of the Commonwealth.

The award is named in honor of Kentucky journalist Carl West, who established the Kentucky Book Fair and was the driving force behind Kentucky's premier literary event for more than 30 years.

As editor of Frankfort's *State Journal*, West became recognized in Frankfort and Washington, D.C. as an aggressive and intelligent reporter. A native of Campbell County, he studied journalism at the University of Kentucky. West spent time as a Frankfort correspondent for the *Kentucky Post* and covered the White House and Pentagon for the Scripps Howard News Service. His work in Washington, D.C. and a visit to the National Book Festival inspired West to establish a similar event in Frankfort, and in 1981, the first Kentucky Book Fair was held.

"The Kentucky Book Fair is among the longest-running events of its kind in the country," said Kentucky Humanities Executive Director Bill Goodman. "Much of the credit for the success of the event belongs to Carl West. He believed such an event was

important to Kentucky, and we want to continue to honor the contributions Carl made to Kentucky's literary heritage.

"Wendell Berry has made enormous contributions to the Commonwealth's literary legacy, making him an obvious choice to receive the inaugural Kentucky Humanities Carl West Literary Award," Goodman continued.

Born in New Castle, Kentucky, in 1934, Wendell Berry is a poet, essayist, novelist, and farmer. He attended the University of Kentucky, earning a B.A. and an M.A. in English. Berry has taught at Stanford University, Georgetown College, New York University, the University of Cincinnati, Bucknell University, and the University of Kentucky. He is the author of more than 40 books.

Wendell Berry has received numerous honors and awards, including a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, membership in the Fellowship of Southern Writers, the Ingersoll Foundation's T. S. Eliot Award, the National Humanities Medal, and the 2012 Jefferson Lecturer, to name a few.

Berry and his wife, Tanya Amyx Berry, live on their farm in Port Royal, Kentucky.

Upon receiving the inaugural Kentucky Humanities Carl West Literary Award, Berry made the following remarks:

This award, as it was announced to me in a letter from Bill Goodman to Tanya, is to recognize my "achievement in promoting Kentucky's rich literary heritage." Which presented to my mind a fairly pressing question: Have I done anything to promote Kentucky's rich literary heritage? And that set me to stumbling around some possible answers. Depending on what is meant by "promote," maybe so. But then surely not enough to justify an award. But then I have here and there written appreciations of and publicly acknowledged my respect for various contributors to that truly rich heritage. And then, if "promotion" includes conversation, I'm sure that for the last 65 years my conversation has often concerned, and often been directed at, a number of said contributors. And then maybe my own writing has promoted that heritage by conscious and unconscious display throughout of that heritage's influence and of my great indebtedness to it.

By speaking of my indebtedness, I feel I have solved my dilemma, and am now free to promote this heritage, which I most want to do. I will do so mainly by calling some names that belong to my own lifetime and memory and ongoing education.

*I will mention first Elizabeth Maddox Roberts whose novel, *The Great Meadow*, my mother gave me to read when I was still a boy.*

Then I must name the eminent exiles or absentees—Harriette Arnow, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon—whom



I began to know by their reputation and work and influence in my college years.

In 1963 and '64, when Tanya and I were in New York, making up our minds to return to Kentucky, I was repeatedly advised by people I respected that I was going to a literary and cultural desert to pass the rest of my life as Li'l Abner. For the sheer pleasure of it I will repeat, again, the names of the writers at work here when I came home, all of whom I varyingly knew, and to all of whom I am indebted: Harlan Hubbard, Harry Caudill, James Still, Guy Davenport, Thomas Merton. If literary influences are to be counted, I should add Ralph Eugene Meatyard. If history counts as literature, as it ought, I should add my teacher Thomas Dionysius Clark.

To further enlarge my good fortune, my college years gave me for friendship, conversation, literary influence, and no end of amusement, James Baker Hall, Gurney Norman, and, as a fellow bibliographer, Ed McClanahan.

I'm tempted to elasticize my college experience to include Bobbie Ann Mason and Mary Ann Taylor-Hall. I regret that I didn't meet

Bobbie Ann until (I think) 1963 in New York, and Mary Ann some more years later in (I think) a hallway of the Patterson Office Tower.

I regret also that I had to wait more years to know Frank X Walker and Crystal Wilkinson, and their work.

And there I must end the naming of names, for I'm supposed to be "saying a few words." There are several Kentucky writers who were my juniors some decades ago, who seem now to be gaining on me, and coming behind them a good many more. As I have named these names here in my few words and named in my thoughts several more also dear to me, I have become more and more impressed, and more and more grateful. We have here, in our in-many-ways-suffering state a literary heritage that is in fact rich, and an in-fact-deserving company of inheritors. Having them so immediately in my thoughts, I can't accept this award for myself, but only on behalf of the whole bunch.

Details of the nomination process for future Kentucky Humanities Carl West Literary Awards can be found at kyhumanities.org.

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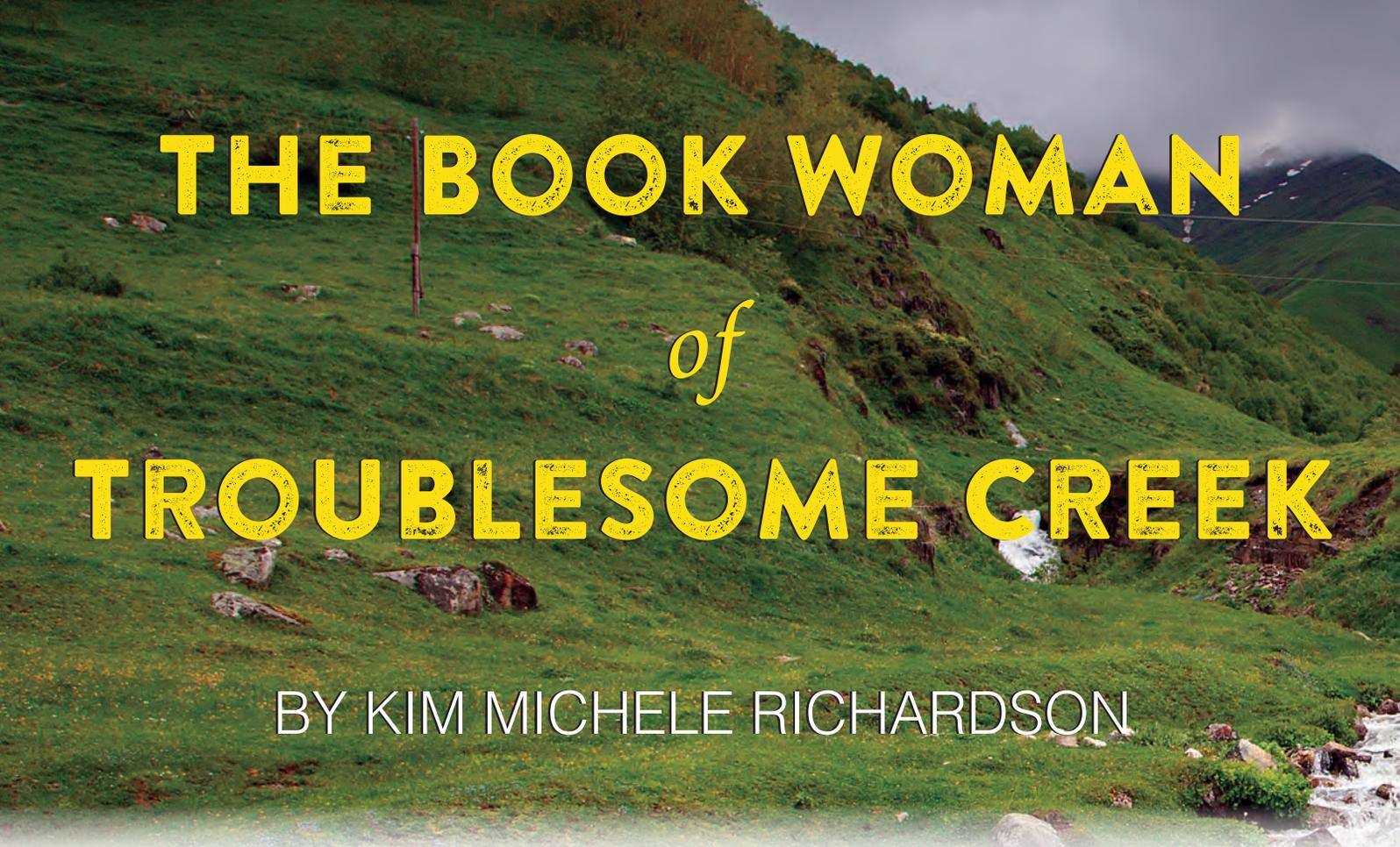
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THE BOOK WOMAN *of* TROUBLESOME CREEK

BY KIM MICHELE RICHARDSON

Reviewed by Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

Amidst eastern Kentucky's august landscape comprised of cavernous hollers and resplendent high ground—across its thickly wooded mountains and sundry creeks—an assembly of stalwart women each traveling alone on horseback once delivered much-coveted reading material to isolated Appalachian citizens. This service, launched in the 1930s as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project, brought in the form of scrapbooks, magazines, and literature news of the wider world to mountain people leading isolated, hard-scrabble lives.

The facts surrounding this significant New Deal program inspired Kentucky writer Kim Michele Richardson to write *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*, a powerful novel published by Sourcebooks Landmark that marries the story of a courageous Pack Horse librarian with her status as one of the state's little-known blue-skinned residents. Methemoglobinemia, the medical term for the rare condition that causes skin to turn blue, surfaced in the United States among members of the French-descended Fugate family of Troublesome Creek in the 1820s. Usually a symptom of heart disease that blocks airways or of taking specific drugs in excess, methemoglobinemia can be terminal or congenital, as it proved to be with the Fugates, who lived long lives despite their high levels of a type of hemoglobin that reduced the amount of oxygen in their blood. As is almost always the case with individuals whose appearance varies from

that of the culturally dominant population, eastern Kentucky's blue-skinned people were shunned as second-class citizens.

And so, based on the true blue people of Troublesome Creek and on the dedicated Pack Horse librarians who traveled Appalachia just shy of a century ago, Richardson has created in her protagonist, 19-year-old Cussy Mary Carter, as real and as relatable a fictional character as any. What's more, the author's compelling characterizations, robust plot, and innovative prose parallel her ability to highlight such social injustices as racial and gender inequality and prejudice, domestic partner and child abuse, and coal companies' inhumane treatment of mid-century miners so effectively that her illustrations mirror, rather than merely rail against, these realities.

Cussy, considered beautiful but for her blue skin, lives with her coal-miner father. Her mother has died and Cussy, an only child, seeks solace and inspiration in the reading matter she and her stubborn mule, Junia, deliver to the myriad recipients that constitute the kind-hearted, strong-willed woman's mission. Like most of her clients, Cussy grapples with acute poverty and hunger, but even more important to Cussy than her \$28-per-month librarian's pay is her realization that in addition to delivering to her clients life-enhancing reading material, her visits provide life-sustaining (and on occasion life-saving) human connections.

Cussy's many challenges, aimed to crush her, make her stronger. The librarians who hire her, like most folks, mock and



discount her for her color. Defeated by the fact that an unwed “blue” woman would likely not survive on her own, Cussy’s father forces her to marry a man who abuses her, and the cousin of Cussy’s short-lived spouse, the territory’s preacher, strives to sexually molest and kill her. Yet other folks’ goodness, coupled with her own hopeful and forgiving nature, sustain her so she can ultimately triumph over such haughty and ignorant ill-wishers as the woman Richardson describes as regarding Cussy with “small eyes hugging her sky-saluting nose.”

There is Cussy’s father, Elijah, a conscientious worker and parent suffering with black lung disease while volunteering for the most dangerous mining tasks to spare his co-workers and while advocating for miners’ rights. There is also Doc, the sole physician for miles, whose determination to discover the cause of blue skin renders him Cussy’s nemesis and sometime savior. As Cussy recalls, “Doc took a seat at the table, piano’d his long fingers across the scarred wood, and snatched more peeks at me. ‘We have us a problem, Elijah,’ Doc said, concern shrouding his voice. ‘A problem that needs fixing.’”

But there is also Jackson Lovett, who respects and loves Cussy as she is, marries her, and remains with her even as the Commonwealth’s anti-miscegenation laws, in effect from 1866 until 1967, drive the couple to a neighboring state.

In *The Book Woman of Troublesome Creek*, Richardson has written a riveting novel. By grounding her tale in historical

fact about which little has heretofore been widely known or celebrated, she brings to readers’ attention the “more than one thousand women [who] served in the Pack Horse Library Project” and the “nearly 600,000 residents in thirty eastern Kentucky counties considered ‘pauper counties’ [who] were served by them.”

As the writer stresses in her Author’s Note, “Despite the financial obstacles, the harshness of the land, and the sometimes fierce mistrust of the people during the most violent era of eastern Kentucky’s history, the Pack Horse service was accepted and became dearly embraced. These clever librarians turned their traveling library program into a tremendous success.”

So, too, is Richardson’s fact-based fiction a literary achievement that illuminates significant aspects of the Commonwealth’s cultural past through an unsentimental but compassionate lens.

About the Author

Linda Elisabeth LaPinta directs Spalding University’s doctoral program in leadership. Under her maiden name, Beattie, she published three books related to Kentucky writers and a fourth book about intimate partner abuse. In addition, she has published numerous book reviews and magazine articles in regional and national newspapers, magazines, and journals.

THE ART OF LOADING BRUSH

By Wendell Berry

An excerpt reprinted with permission from Counterpoint Press

At last full of the knowledge of the wonder it is to be a man walking upon the earth, Andy Catlett is past eighty now, still at work in the fashion of a one-handed old man. He has done without his right hand, given away to a cornpicker, for more than forty years, and he does not miss it much. But he has been old, it seems to him, for only three or four years, and he misses pretty freshly what was once his strength. His farming now is reduced to caring for his livestock and small tasks of upkeep on what he is apt still to think of as the Riley Harford place, its name long before he attached his own to it. As a farm perhaps never better than marginal, the place in its time has known abuse, neglect, and then, in Andy's own tenure and care, as he is proud to think, it has known also healing and health and ever-increasing beauty.

He has supposed, he has pretty well known, that some of his neighbors in Port William and the country around had thought, when he and Flora bought the place and settled in it, that they would not last there very long, for it was too inconvenient, too far from the midst of things, too poor. And so Andy has delighted a little in numbering, as disproof and as proof, the decades of their inhabitation: the 1960s, the '70s, the '80s, the '90s. And now they have lived there more than half a century, long past the doubts and the doubters that they would last. Now it has become beyond doubt or question their place, and they have become its people. They have given their lives into it, and it has lived in their lives.

Of all his kindred Andy has become the oldest. He is one of the last who remembers Old Port William, as he now calls it, as it was when it and the country around it were still intact, at one with its own memory and knowledge of itself, in the years before V-J Day and the industrializing of land and people that followed. He is one of the last of the still-living who was born directly into the influence of the best men of his grandfather Catlett's generation, who confidently, despite their struggles, assigned paramount value to the good-tending of their fields, to a good day's work with the fundamental handtools, to the stance and character of



a good mule—the inheritance that has made Andy so far out of place in the present world.

Surprised to find that he has grown as old as his grandfathers, who once seemed to him to have been old forever, he sometimes mistakes his shadow on the ground for that of Marce Catlett, his grandfather, whom he was born barely in time to know, or that of Wheeler Catlett, his father, whom he knew first as a man still young in middle age and finally as a man incoherent and old. Their grandson and son, he has come at last into brotherhood with them.

Of all the old crew of friends and neighbors with whom he traded work and shared life, who accompanied him and eased his way, Andy is the last of the older ones still living. Of that about-gone association, the only younger ones still at hand are his and Flora's children and Lyda and Danny Branch's.

Danny was the last, so far, to go. In the absence of the others, and not so often needed by the younger ones, he and Andy had been often at work together in their old age. "Pidling" they called it, for they never hurried and when they got tired they quit, but also it was work and they did it well. They had worked together since they were young. They knew what to expect from each other. They knew, as Danny said, where to get, and that was where they got. Danny knew, for instance, and maybe before Andy knew, when Andy was going



that made them neighbors and friends, and of the rules of that love that they knew and obeyed so freely, that were so nearly inborn in them, as never to need to be spoken. Andy spoke the rules: “When your neighbor needs help, go help. When neighbors work together, nobody’s done until everybody’s done.” Looking at the younger ones, his and Danny’s, who now were looking back at him, he spoke the names of the old membership, dead and living, into whose company the younger ones had been born. He spoke of their enduring, their sweat, and their laughter. “This is your history,” he said. “This is who you are, as long as you are here and willing. If you are willing, this is yours to inherit and carry on.”

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About the Author

Wendell Berry is an essayist, novelist, and poet. In 2010, he was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama, and in 2016, he was the recipient of the Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Book Critics Circle. Berry lives with his wife, Tanya Berry, on their farm in Henry County, Kentucky.



to need a second hand. They worked sometimes, Andy thought, as a single creature with one mind, three hands, and four legs.

Danny was sick a while. And then at breakfast time one morning, answering a somewhat deferential knocking on the front door, Andy was surprised to see Fount and Coulter Branch standing somewhat back from the door in the middle of the porch, formal and uncomfortable. They had never before in their lives come to his front door. Always all of them had followed the old usage: The familiars of a household went to the back door. But now the world had changed. It would have to be begun again. Fount and Coulter had come for that.

As Andy stood in the open door, the brothers looked at him and did not say anything—because, as Andy saw, they were not able to say anything.

And so he spoke for them. “Well, boys. Has he made it safe away?”

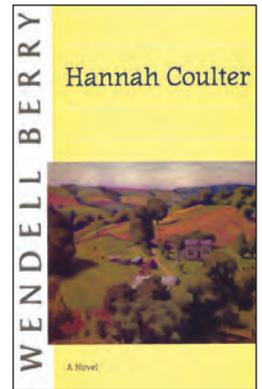
And then Fount cleared his throat, and swallowed, and cleared his throat again. “Andy, we was wondering, if maybe you wouldn’t mind, if you wouldn’t mind saying a few words for him.”

They reached for his hand and shook it and went away.

And so Andy stood behind the lectern at the funeral home and spoke of Danny, of the history and company that they both had belonged to, of the work that they had done together, of the love



Join us for Kentucky Reads!



Book discussions will be taking place throughout the state.
Learn more about discussions taking place near you:

CITY	VENUE	COORDINATOR	CONTACT INFO.
Bedford	Trimble County Public Library	Sarah Karns	sarah@trimblelibrary.org
Danville	Boyle County Public Library	Caleb Conover	cconover@boylepublib.org
Georgetown	Scott County Public Library	Mike Key	mike@scottpublib.org
Glasgow	Mary Wood Weldon Memorial Public Library	Amy Tollison	atollison@weldonpubliclibrary.org
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FOR NORTHERN KENTUCKY

Larkspur and Ironweed

By Mary Ann Taylor-Hall



Photo by Tom Eblen/Lexington Herald-Leader

Gray Zeitz is the founder and operator of Larkspur Press, located in Monterey, Kentucky.

If you believe at all in magic—and in magicians—you will feel soon enough, on your way to Larkspur Press, that you're on a ritual journey toward a place where the forces converge, where things operate in an energy field you don't know a whole lot about. I'm not sure I'd even call it energy. It's calmer than that, more like going along, doing mainly what you want to do. And, come to think about it, I wouldn't call it a *field*, either. It's more like a creek—always new, but running down the inevitable course it's made for itself. The way to get there, anyway, is by following creeks—out of Stamping Ground, you take the road that runs for its whole length beside the beautiful Cedar Creek, until you cross a bridge and then you make a right turn onto the busy highway that follows Morgadore Creek. You pass two places devoted to rescue, the church and the fire station, on opposite sides of the road, and these are signs that you're getting close. And then, there it will be, if you're paying attention to the rather obscure road signs—Sawdridge Creek Road. You go just a little way up that road to the pale blue mailbox on the left, turn onto the narrow gravel road, and cross the perilous bridge, if the creek is not up over it. (If it is, you will just have to turn back and try again another day.) And you come then to a meadow backed by a garden of echinacea and hollyhocks and day lilies.

And so you've arrived. You step over the dog and enter an orderly, light-filled, work-filled, tall, airy space where, without a ripple of the air, the magician manifests himself by looking up from the worktable over which Gray Zeitz is bent, straightening



All books published by Larkspur are bound by hand. Leslie Shane sews, folds, and glues stacks of pages, turning them into a completed book.

to come greet you, half-Buddha, in his openness and simplicity. half-Santa, in his geniality and kindness. If he's smiling and wearing suspenders, that will be the man you've come to see. He'll look very young and a little old at the same time—a hardy teen-aged boy with a gray beard.

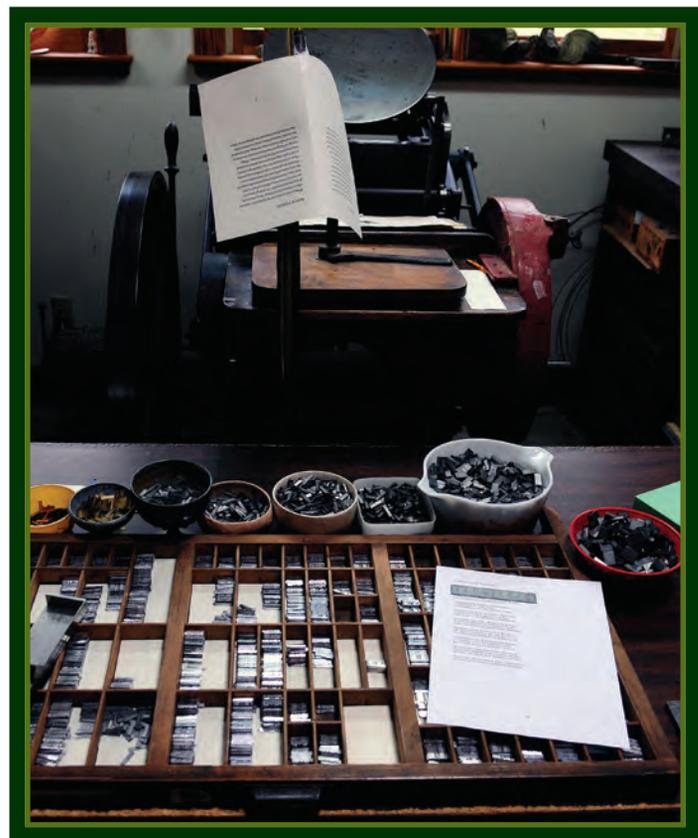
In the whole place, there is nothing electronic. Or even, for that matter, electric, except the lights. Maybe a radio. There are tools, there are presses. There are books. There are hands.

You will be required to state your wishes, for he has told you the book is yours, not his. And you have come, as you believe, prepared: "I'm thinking I'd like the binding to be sort of dark blue and the contrast ink on the title page to be the color of ironweed."

"The color of ironweed," he says. Always alert, never dismissive. Just waiting for things to clarify. Just *there*.

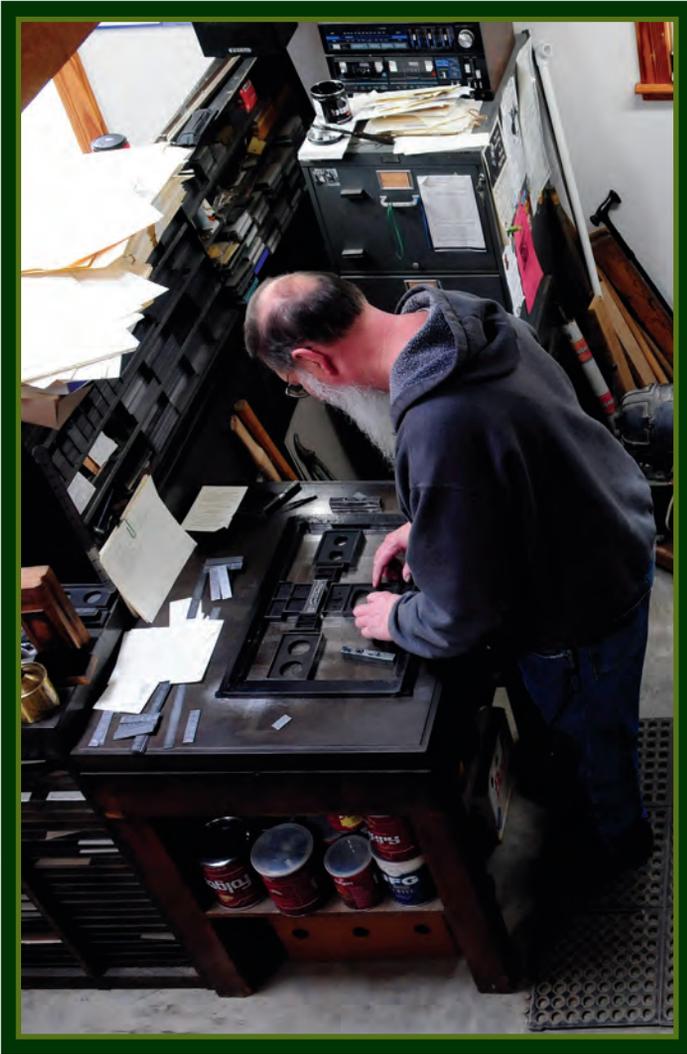
"You know what I mean?" It is only June. There is no ironweed to offer him. "A kind of purple. But reddish, too." I can't think what to call it. "Magenta?"

Leslie Shane, Gray's indispensable assistant, has been upstairs binding books, but has come down to try to help me. "No, not magenta," she says decisively. She has magic powers, too, but hers are a little more earthbound. "It's kind of a crimsony purple," she tells Gray. "Crimson on the way to purple. But bright."



Zeitz sets every letter by hand, one at a time, with metal type.

Photos by Tom Eblen/Lexington Herald-Leader



Zeitz has designed, printed, and published books since 1974, focusing specifically on Kentucky authors and poets. He was a recipient of the 2012 Governor’s Awards in the Arts.

“Yes!” I say, gratefully,

“I don’t think we have the ink we need. I’ll have to see,” Gray says. He wanders away, and comes back with two eye droppers and two small bottles, one of red and one of blue ink. He prepares his workplace, squeezes out six drops of red, one of blue.

“Way too red,” Leslie tells him.

He nods, adds a little more blue, makes a note of the proportions. I’m hypnotized by the precision and patience and single-mindedness with which he works, the absorption—even, if I’m not mistaken, the enjoyment. He gets something that looks promising, inks the press, runs a sample, cleans the ink off the press, shakes his head, begins again.

Time passes. I’m not the only one who notices. Leslie has gone back to what she was doing before. I’m not hypnotized anymore. My neck hurts. I don’t have an opinion. I’m prepared to settle for a tiny bit too red. I’m beginning to be sorry I ever mentioned ironweed. I’m getting an education in what makes

magic magic: this man is not going to stop. He’s not going to settle for crimson purple. He’s going to get it right. Myself, I’m ready to say, “What about green?” Finally he brings a sheet off the press and sets it down on the table: I think that’s it. “Does that look about right to you?” he asks.

“Yes!” I say. I would have said *yes* to any color he’d offered, but this is exactly the color of ironweed.

“Yes!” even Leslie says—she has come downstairs again for the final viewing.

“Are you sure that’s what you had in mind?” he asks. I’m sure. It is, in fact exactly what I had in mind.

I still don’t know the name of that color.

But I love my book.

And that’s all Gray wanted—for me to love my book.

About the Author

Mary Ann Taylor-Hall has published two novels: *Come and Go*, *Molly Snow* and *At The Breakers*, and a collection of stories, *How She Knows What She Knows About Yo-Yos*. In the past 10 years, she has returned to poetry and has published *Dividing Ridge*, *Joy Dogs*, and *Out of Nowhere*. Born in Chicago, Taylor-Hall moved with her family to Central Florida when she was seven. After receiving her M.A. degree from Columbia University, she spent two migratory decades before settling on a farm in Harrison County, Kentucky, with, until his death several years ago, her husband, the poet James Baker Hall.



Mary Ann Taylor-Hall began writing fiction at the University of Florida, where she studied under Andrew Lytle.



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Photo by Sandra A. Shackelford

Elsie

By Sandra A. Shackelford

Author Barbara Kingsolver has a place in rural Virginia. I became aware of her log cabin hideaway after reading her essay, “Knowing Our Place” in her book, *Small Wonders*. I’ll never forget the image she painted, her words depicting her looking out the window and seeing that adolescent bobcat, its “brown colored bobcat eyes” staring back at her. Because of her vivid description, Kingsolver took me along with her that day down into a hollow, or “holler” as my Kentucky-born father used to say, the landscape reminiscent of a Rousseau painting come alive, content in her own peaceable kingdom.

Reflecting on that lovely piece of literature brought back my own memories of a place I once visited, Barnes Mountains outside of Irvine, Kentucky. But it wasn’t just the landscape that impacted me, it was the woman I met there. Her name was Elsie. Elsie Osborn.

I met Elsie during the summer of 1997 when a group of teenagers and I went on a home repair project. Crowded into two SUVs, we ground our way up a rutted path, pulling over and parking in a thick outcropping of weeds. There was a gap in the trees and a path leading to the blunt dropping-off point. I descended carefully, the soles of my tennis shoes slipping over

the dirt steps dug into the sides of the hill. I slid most of the way, reaching out often to catch hold of a branch or twig to slow myself down. I finally stopped when I came to the bottom of a natural bowl, “a holler.”

In the distance I saw Elsie. She stood in the doorway of her house leaning against the jamb, looking out, waiting. Walking toward her was like stepping back in time, being led to a life-enhancing encounter with a presence straight out of a Walker Evans photograph. The only difference was that Elsie was real, very, very real, not just an image printed on paper. I suspect she was in her sixties at the time but held fast to the coy charm of a girl. Her eyes were wily, her smile ever so sweet. At night she did her hair up in rags. In the morning when she undid those frayed knots, a mixture of brown and gray curls cascaded down, coming to rest on the shoulders of her simple house dress.

Poverty, the look of it, its reality, did not cling to Elsie. It did, however, define the conditions in which she lived, alone, her



Elsie's husband, Harley, developed Alzheimer's and passed away. After sitting unused for years, Harley's truck was backed into the woods and served as a trellis for vines and morning glories.

Photos by Sandra A. Shackelford

sole companion a blind dog who quivered at her ankle. A hoe rested against the side of her unpainted house. It was both a tool and a weapon used against rattlesnakes and water moccasins and other venomous creatures who lived in the encroaching weeds. Pity the poor reptile that crossed Elsie's path as she walked to her outhouse.



Elsie's home is filled with bits and pieces of her house, including Harley's rocking chair, which hangs upside down from a wire attached to a roof support.

“Chopped one in half the other day,” she said. “He got one of my dogs.”

Pity other varmints, the two-legged kind who meant her harm. Elsie kept a weapon for self-defense. “Around here,” she explained, “they’ll steal anything even if it is nailed down. I got my gun and I know how to use it. I’ll shoot ‘em, surely I will.”

Elsie's yard was a flea market of broken-down appliances and old plumbing fixtures. Off by a pond buried in the underbrush was her long-deceased husband, Barley's, truck. It had been their means of transportation off the mountain. Twenty years



After the death of her husband, Harley, Elsie lived alone, her sole companion was a blind dog.

earlier Harley developed Alzheimer's. A spark reignited in Elsie's eyes when she described his eyes, saying they were "as black as pumpkin seeds." But the light of recognition finally burned out. Eventually someone backed Harley's old truck into the weeds and there it stayed, serving as a trellis for vines and morning glories, a lawn ornament consumed and reclaimed by nature.

Inside Elsie's house bits and pieces of the past surrounded her. There was Harley's old rocking chair hanging upside down from a wire attached to a roof support. In her kitchen, a room not yet fully enclosed against natural elements, jars of decades old preserves tumbled from disintegrating cardboard boxes, each one covered in dust a quarter-of-an-inch thick. Besides her dog, these were Elsie's companions.

She got her water by dropping a bucket down through a hole in the floor. I watched and listened, heard when the bucket hit the water's surface, watched the ballet of her aging body sway as she pulled it up hand over hand.

When I returned home after this adventure, I went to a department store and bought Elsie the frilliest slip I could find. In one of our previous conversations she'd complained about her stomach. It wasn't flat as it had been before "The Operation." What aging fox wants to lose her

youthful figure, after all? I added another purchase, a white girdle, size 10, with fancy embroidery on the elasticized front panel. I also enclosed several Zane Grey novels to the package. Since the nearest post office was down the mountain in Irvine, Elsie would have to find her way to get down there and pick them up.

I heard from her by phone once shortly after that. Her high-pitched voice was all sweet and sugar-coated, crackling through our bad connection. A gentleman, she confided, had come to call recently, a fellow she'd known before Harley won her heart. I pictured Elsie standing in her doorway all dressed up waiting for him to arrive, her veined hands smoothing the fabric of her house dress, the silk slip underneath cool against her skin.

Yes, I know the landscape Barbara Kingsolver writes about. Decades ago I, too, stood fresh from sleep inhaling the warm breath of a Kentucky day's beginning. Today, I hunger to find a place for myself, tucked in a landscape like Barbara's and Elsie's. And when I do, my mind will become like Harley's truck, overtaken by the wonders of the natural world, becoming one with it.

About the Author

Sandra A. Shackelford is a professional artist, oral historian, and writing instructor. She conducts creative nonfiction Writing Circles in Green Bay, Wisconsin. During the 1950s and '60s she worked for civil and human rights at St. Francis Information Center in Greenwood, Mississippi. While there, she co-edited the center's weekly newspaper. One night Klansmen arrived in a truck and hurled a firebomb at the office, leaving a scar still etched in her memory. Ms. Shackelford is currently working on her memoir, *Prodigal Daughter*, chronicling the 11 years she spent in Mississippi "sowing love."



The road to Elsie Osborn's home, located in Barnes Mountains, just outside of Irvine, Kentucky.

Photos by Sandra A. Shackelford



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Miss Myrtle and the Razzle Dazzle Belle Bang Bluegrass Band

A story about the power of people who make music... together.

By Theo Edmonds

Bedazzled, befuddled or haloed,
The world holds so many different kinds of people
You pass by so many, each day on the street.
There are all kinds of people,
Who in your life you will meet

But of all the people you've ever met
Of all the folks I bet you can name
There is not a one quite like Miss Myrtle
The singing saint of the town of Belle Bang

Belle Bang is a fine mountain town
With miles of smiles and a swell Bluegrass band
And every day at noon
Myrtle's up there singing on stage
Always wearing blue flowers in an old worn-out hat
Smiling and singing and waving big hands
Miss Myrtle is the Razzle Dazzle
In our Belle Bang Bluegrass Band

Myrtle is the champion of Belle's Everyday People
The keeper of songs that rise up from our land
Myrtle's music whispers to giants, asleep in mountains
Our town was even saved one time, by Miss Myrtle and the Belle band.

The story begins just over Mongerdoodle Mountain,
Beyond the edge of Belle
In a big place called Slick City.
Where some people known as Falootans live
It's where the Slick City Falootans do dwell

The Slick City Falootans ... that is the name by which they are known
And when our story begins,
Slick City was growing too fast.
Slick City was nearly outgrown.

Senator Shriek, their slick ole leader had decided
That he would take over Belle Bang
He'd replace the town with factories,
To support his Falootan gang.

The Falootans wanted more business for business sake.
They wanted more money
They wanted more and more of all that greed-driven stuff.
But for those Falootans you see, such a sad strange thing,
Enough was never enough.

They thought the most valuable things, were what money could buy
High Falootan desire, driven by High Falootan greed.
That's what Falootans thought everyone should want,
That's what they thought everyone should need.

So led by Senator Shriek and Governor Greed
The Slick City Falootans, began setting their trap
Belle Bang soon would be just one more pinpoint
On the growing Slick City map

Belle's teachers and schools were the first thing that,
Slick City promptly shut down
Governor Greed said, "The only learning that's needed is to teach kids to work –
They must earn their way in this town!"

But even to the workers of Belle,
The Governor gave stern warning
"You're only as good as your contribution today
You're only as good as the place you are earning."

"We have Slick City goals, we must always keep growing
Value is measured in money. It is the best way of knowing
Knowing who is valuable, and truly worth keeping
We need less goats, and more people who're sheepling. "

The Falootans stormed the Belle Tower. Destroyed Belle Town Hall.
And, though they had been there for a thousand years,
They cut and buzzed them right down to the ground —
The lovely and green, town square Belle Oaks
Everywhere they turned, Falootans shouted and yelled
They snorted and snarled at all the Belle Bang sweet folks

"Get out of this place, you should no longer be here!"
"We claim the town of Belle for Slick City!"
Grumbled Senator Shriek, the Highest-Falootan leader.

“And those of you who do stay “ he grimaced and frowned.
“Those of you who don’t have any where else to move your homes to,
Those of you too... who just choose not to go,
You will be put to work in our factories. You’ll do just as we say.
You’ll produce Slick City Steam, more and more every day
That’s what we need to make Slick City grow!”

The Belle folks began to feel defeated,
Slick City seemed just too strong
Even Myrtle and the band had started to think
That hope was all nearly gone.

Music and Happiness would soon, it seemed
Be a forgotten thing of the past
Belle Bang had nearly stopped dreaming
Belle Dreams were fading fast.

Then Senator Shriek said something that made Miss Myrtle remember
The power of song and rhyme,
Shriek declared: “Music makers are foolish and useless!
Making music is just a waste, of MY PRECIOUS money-making time!”

Well right then, Miss Myrtle decided.
That enough was more than enough!
Myrtle began singing real loud to remind Belle’s Everyday People
That nice folks could also be tough.

“Papaws reach back in your memory,” Myrtle sang,
“To those times where we stood proud and strong
Grannies reach up to the ancestors
They’ve been here all along

Young folks know that within you
Flickers the flame of centuries and dreams.
Let people and music become your guide
It aint as hard as it seems

Those who are hurting take hope
Liberation is within our reach
We are worthy, each and every
This is the message we’ll preach

Let us sing real loud and speak our truth
To push out Shriek and Greed
Us mountain folks stand
On the shoulders of giants
WE are the answer we need.”

The young folks were first, to join in singing
Miss Myrtle’s sweet song of hope

Then seeing this, the older folks too
Began to get fully woke.

Then all of a sudden it happened,
Just over the mountain from Belle
The Everyday People who lived in Slick City, heard Myrtle's song of freedom
And started singing their own! They were songs of freedom as well!

From both sides of Mongerdoodle Mountain
ALL the Everyday People joined in singing
A song to push out Shriek and Greed.
All the Everyday People sang together
"Each other is what we need."

As sunrise came up over the mountain
The Falootans found themselves trapped
Shriek and Greed had forgotten that
Everyday People... need people... everyday.
People are more than a map

The victory theirs, Myrtle and the kids, climbed the top of Mongerdoodle mountain,
To sing and to dance and rejoice!
Their music had brought together people from everywhere!
ALL singing in one Everyday People voice.

Yes when Everyday People, together all sang, "Truth to Power!"
All the Everyday People of BOTH Slick City and Belle,
All discovered that working together
Caused Everyday Hope to swell.

As their togetherness grew, "United We Stand!"
Became their way of living each day.
Everyday People, everywhere, learned to lean on each other
In that special everyday way.

But had it not been for Myrtle
The keeper of our hopes in a song
The stories of everyday folks today, might have turned out real different,
Hallelujah! The arc of justice bends long.

As the years went by, the legend grew
Myrtle's name was often spoke, always with great love and caring
Myrtle became a legend for bringing
Everyday hope, in a everyday song, meant for everyday sharing.

Then one day, as all folks do, Myrtle did pass away.
Everyday People from both sides of the mountain sang to remember,
The one whose music flowed like honey, all throughout the land
They told the stories of Razzle Dazzle
When Myrtle took to the stage with the Band

If Miss Myrtle were still here today,
I'm sure we would be reminded,
To move on through every day of our lives,
And to one thing—never forget or be blinded ...

... Some folks are here, to teach us all lessons
Some are here to help save our lives
There are bullies and meanies, who live up in green, pampered places
And secret angels living down in hollers and dives

Secret angels are all around us
If we just look to see them there
They don't usually have wings ...
They don't need lots of money just to buy things
They are wonderful secret angels, pretending to be music-making people
Teaching us all how to be kind and show love
Things every one of us, need every day,
Like a cold hand needs a glove.

So next time you pass by, someone on street
Be sure you see them for who they are
Someone who needs you, like you need them
That's the way Everyday People are.

Some folks may start as a stranger, somewhere over a mountain
Only to become a trusted, everyday friend
And that is why you, should be a friend too
Because when a story begins, you never really know
How things will turn out in the end.

About the Author

Theo "Alan" Edmonds, is from Breathitt County and is currently a faculty member at the University of Louisville School of Public Health & Information Sciences' Center for Creative Placehealing. He is co-founder of IDEAS xLab, an arts-based nonprofit.

***This poem is dedicated to ALL the
children of Kentucky, our greatest
hope for the future.***

Nat Lee

By Georgia Green Stamper

Daddy used to say that tiny Natlee, Kentucky, hunkered on Eagle Creek where two country roads intersect, was the crossroads of the world. Because, he said, you could start from there and go anywhere.

I loved that joke when I was a kid. By then, Natlee was mostly a memory. All that remained of the gristmill that had called it into existence were thick, limestone foundation walls near the edge of Eagle Creek. My friend, Mable-Dean, and I braved thickets of blackberry briars and grass chiggers to scale the mill's ruins. We couldn't have been more excited if we had stumbled upon the lost tomb of Montezuma, and given the denseness of the undergrowth, I wouldn't bet money that he isn't buried in there.

Natlee had also been the site of a post office for scattered stretches in the 19th century, but no one I knew could recall getting mail addressed to Natlee. Its single church, Pleasant View Baptist, an historic congregation with tendrils of connections to the storied 18th Century Traveling Church, was defunct. Even the building, hand-built by Nat Lee himself, had been torn down and the lumber used to build a barn on Orlie Hale's farm. Only an overgrown cemetery edged by a dry-stacked fieldstone wall left any clue that people had ever worshipped together at Natlee.

In the early 1950s, a dramatic, nighttime fire had destroyed the magnificent wooden covered bridge that had once distinguished this crossroads at the creek, and Natlee's last remaining business, a small grocery store, closed a few years later. There were only about four or five houses that could rightly be claimed within the informal city limits of the village. Like us, most folks in the area lived on surrounding farms that might best be described as "near Natlee."

As I grew older, however, I began to understand that Daddy wasn't joking. He was encouraging me, in the way parents will, to believe in myself. About this time, he began to tell me the story of Nat Lee, the founder of Natlee.

Nat Lee, a large man who tipped the scales at near 400 pounds, also thought big. Born on the Fourth of July in 1825, he married three times and fathered 20 children. Some say he was kin to General Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee. I'm not certain about that, but for sure, one of his grandchildren, Vice Admiral Willis A. Lee, Jr. (born at Natlee—another story for another day) became an Olympic gold medal marksman and a celebrated naval hero of World War II.

Nat, however, gained his fame in a way unique to 19th century rural Kentucky. Down the road from his prosperous grist mill, and across the pike from his Natlee house, he set up a modest, wooden distillery not unlike those found in numerous other communities across the state in that era. Working by hand, he then set out to develop the finest sour mash whiskey recipe in America.

He succeeded. In 1893, his whiskey was placed in competition against five thousand other entries at the Chicago World's Fair. His competitors were backed by millions of dollars from companies all over the globe, but Lee's whiskey went to the big show in a local stone jug displayed under a simple signboard that said only, "Old fashioned hand-made sour mash Kentucky whiskey." It won the gold medal. It was declared the best whiskey on earth—or at least the best that traveled to the World's Fair.

For the next decade, Lee's whiskey was promoted in advertisements all over America. It was described as "the finest tonic for the old and decrepit" and "ambrosia of the gods, pleasing alike to the sight, taste, and smell, and is recommended by physicians for medicinal purposes." Though production never exceeded 52 gallons a day ("not quantity but quality being desired") the Natlee distillery prospered.

In the early years of the 20th century, however, the Owen County distillery was destroyed by fire, and production never resumed. But by then, Nat Lee had been dead for a good long while, and laid to rest between his first two wives under a huge stone monument sculpted to look like the trunk of a tree. I don't know what the symbolism of the monument was intended to be. But for me it is a reminder that when you start at the crossroads of the world, you can go anywhere.

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About the Author

Georgia Green Stamper is a seventh-generation Kentuckian. A graduate of Transylvania University, Stamper is a former high school English and theater teacher and speech team coach. Her published works include *Butter in the Morning* and *You Can Go Anywhere*. She also writes a bi-weekly column, "Georgia: On My Mind," for *The Owenton News-Herald*. She has been a regular commentator for NPR member station WUKY affiliated with the University of Kentucky.



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