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Spring 2025
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Kentucky

Spring 2025

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Let's Work Together to Share the Humanities Throughout Kentucky

My name is Jennifer Cramer, and I was recently elected as chair of the board of directors for Kentucky Humanities. I am professor of linguistics and Chellgren Endowed Professor at the University of Kentucky (UK). I am also a native Kentucky girl; I was born and raised in Louisville, received my undergraduate degrees from UK, and, after a few years in Indiana and Illinois for graduate school, I returned to my alma mater as a faculty member. I live in Lexington with my husband and four children. I am simply thrilled to lead this wonderful group of people who truly care about telling Kentucky's story. While I have Dr. Brian Clardy's big chair shoes to fill, I am honored for the opportunity to serve my Commonwealth in this way.

I have had the pleasure of serving on the Board since 2020. Indeed, my board orientation was one of the last in-person meetings I had before the Covid-19 shutdown. I remember thinking that it would be difficult to reach our audiences during that time. I was (and still am) a member of the Speakers Bureau. I was able to do a few virtual presentations. Our amazing staff at Kentucky Humanities, led by Executive Director Bill Goodman, managed to put on several programs—they hosted virtual Kentucky Reads book discussions, recorded a few of our Kentucky Chautauqua® performers for virtual viewings (with performers joining a live virtual Q&A session after the viewing), hosted the Kentucky Book Festival® online, and continued to produce *Think History* for public radio stations in Kentucky. The Covid-19 shutdown disrupted economies, education, and social connections, leading to financial hardship, learning loss, and increased isolation, but Kentucky Humanities provided opportunities for connection, learning, and solidarity for everyone in the Commonwealth.

Those programs continue today. If you have not had a chance to check them out, I encourage you to do so. If you are reading this magazine, I know you are familiar with at least one of our programs. This magazine is a treat! We have many more activities to look forward to in the coming year. I am most excited to experience *Americans*, a traveling exhibit developed by the Smithsonian Institution's Museum on Main Street program that explores the pervasive presence of Native American images, names, and stories in U.S. history and contemporary life. Traveling across the state, beginning in Paducah in August, this exhibit will invite guests to reflect on the ways in which Native Americans have been embedded in the nation's identity since well before its start and share local Native American histories. Although the origin of the name "Kentucky" is still debated, we are certain it comes from a Native American language. Whether it means "meadow land," "land of tomorrow," or something else, today's Kentuckians have native peoples to celebrate and honor, so it is only fitting that this exhibit should start here.

This kind of celebration is what Kentucky Humanities is designed to do. We highlight that which makes us human—which is my definition of the humanities. That's what Mary P. Sheridan says too, in her article on page 10. Dr. Sheridan notes that the humanities are alive and well in our Commonwealth. She also showcases how vibrant the humanities are in Kentucky institutions of higher education, countering the claims that the humanities are dead. I completely agree, and I would further add that this kind of vibrancy is necessary for true education. Our institutions are meant to educate the whole person. By offering a wide array of opportunities to engage in humanistic inquiry to those who choose our colleges and universities, they enrich our students' lives, preparing them for futures that will rely on their understanding of humanity. Kentucky Humanities applauds those humanists like Dr. Sheridan for encouraging humanities for all, and, as Chair, I hope to explore more ways for Kentucky Humanities to engage with those involved in these endeavors.

I am confident in Kentucky Humanities' future. I am enthusiastic about this chance to help advance our mission. I hope you will read the articles in this magazine and be inspired to engage with Kentucky Humanities more. Book a Kentucky Chautauqua performer. Start a Kentucky Reads book club. Come to the Kentucky Book Festival. No matter how you get involved, we want you to stay involved, so tell your friends, neighbors, and co-workers, too. Give them this magazine when you've finished reading it. I can't wait to see what we can do together this year!



Jennifer Cramer, Ph.D.
Chair of the Board of Directors
Kentucky Humanities

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Cramer".

Looking Forward

Spring is a time of renewal, discovery, and reflection. *Kentucky Humanities* allows us to embrace all three through stories that celebrate the rich cultural landscape of our beloved Commonwealth. I hope you enjoy this issue of *Kentucky Humanities* and share it with your friends.

Book reviewer Linda LaPinta dives into the near future with Silas House's most recent novel, *Lark Ascending*. In a dystopian world fraught with turmoil, *Lark Ascending* is a story of friendship, love, loyalty, and humanity. Read more about the winner of the 2023 Southern Book Prize and the 2023 Nautilus Book Award on page 8.

Over the last several years we have often heard tales of the demise of the humanities as STEM has taken centerstage. Beginning on page 10, Mary P. Sheridan tells us how the humanities are alive and thriving in the Commonwealth. She reveals the establishment of a new consortium, Humanities are the Common Wealth of Kentucky, and how universities throughout the state are participating. Her article is an exciting look at the impact the humanities can have in our Commonwealth.

Poet Roberta Shultz shares her poem "Documentation" on page 16. A nostalgic reflection on the speaker's grandfather, Clifford Stephens, and his claim to having delivered the first barrel of Wiedemann's Fine beer after Prohibition paints a portrait of a hardworking man whose presence loomed large in the poet's childhood.

Jean Bell Thomas was a woman ahead of her time and remains an important part of the history of Appalachian music. The Ashland, Kentucky, native was a renaissance woman who achieved fame as the author of eight books, a photographer, lecturer, folklorist, and the founder and promoter of the American Folk Song Festival. Learn more about Jeanette Mary Francis de Assisi Aloysius Narcissus Garfield Bell on page 18.

More than a century after her great-great-grandmother, Amy Jane Montgomery Thompson, journeyed to New Mexico, author Rita S. Spalding and her cousin, Samantha, retraced her path uncovering letters, legal documents, and personal accounts that revealed Jane's resilience, adventures, and tragic demise. With unexpected turns and a harrowing encounter with quicksand, Spalding's story is one of perseverance, family legacy, and historical connection. Read more beginning on page 24.

Continuing on the theme of family stories, on page 30 Georgia Green Stamper shares the amusing, and maybe a bit nauseating, story of Aunt Sis and her infamous Pink Potato Salad. I have no doubt the story will make you laugh and perhaps remind you of some of your own entertaining family stories.

As we embrace the warmth and promise of spring, we invite you to explore the stories within this issue and join us in celebrating the people, history, and culture that define Kentucky. Thank you for your continued support of Kentucky Humanities. Your engagement fuels our mission to share the narratives that shape our past, present, and future.



Bill Goodman
Executive Director
Kentucky Humanities

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Goodman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.



Three new members join Kentucky Humanities Board

Aaron Asbury, Teri Carter, and Philip Lynch have joined the Kentucky Humanities board of directors. As members of the 23-person volunteer board of directors, Asbury, Carter, and Lynch will help set council policies, award project grants to community organizations, and participate in fund-raising to help Kentucky Humanities meet the growing demand for its programs.



Aaron Asbury

Aaron Asbury currently serves as the films program manager and vice-chair of the board of directors at Appalshop. He joined Appalshop in September 2021 as the program coordinator for the Appalachian Media Institute. During his time in that role his interns received many awards and recognitions from film festivals across the country. After two years, he was promoted to Appalshop's visual communication manager.

Asbury has more than a decade of film and television production experience, previously acting as channel manager for Pike TV, a lead organizer of the University of Pikeville Film and Media Arts Festival, and working in local news. He graduated from the University of Pikeville in 2018 with dual majors in film & media arts and communication.



Teri Carter

Governor Andy Beshear appointed Teri Carter to the Kentucky Humanities board of directors in February 2025.

Carter is a rural Kentucky writer who has written extensively about racism, sexism, immigration, firearm policy, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, mass shootings, Covid-19 policy, book bans, the ills of social media, and Kentucky's

General Assembly. You can find

her most recent work at the *Kentucky Lantern*, MSNBC, and *The Washington Post*.

Carter regularly speaks to women's groups throughout Kentucky about how they can get more involved in local and state government.

She earned a bachelor of arts in English from the University of Minnesota and an MFA in creative writing from San Jose State University.

In 2023, following the mass shooting at Old National Bank in

Louisville, Carter volunteered for two years as communications leader with KY Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America. She is on the board of the Society of Professional Journalists—Bluegrass Region.



Philip Lynch

Philip Lynch spent 29 years at Brown-Forman, serving as the company's global spokesperson for corporate and financial activities, while advising company executives on issues related to alcohol policy, corporate responsibility, and crisis management. He led a strong team of professionals performing the functions of corporate communications, public relations, internal communications, and strategic meetings

and events. He joined Brown-Forman in May 1989 after serving as press secretary to Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson during his first term as mayor of the City of Louisville, and to Abramson's predecessor, Harvey Sloane.

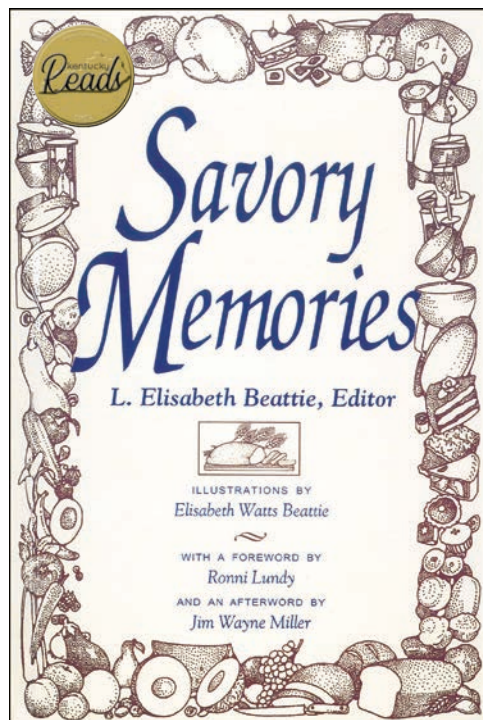
After earning a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Kentucky in 1975, he began his career as a broadcast journalist, working at radio stations in Lexington and Louisville, before leaving broadcasting for politics and government service.

Lynch was named the 2017 James C. Bowling Executive-in-Residence for the University of Kentucky's College of Communication and Information's Department of Integrated Strategic Communication. He was inducted into the PRSA/IABC Landmarks of Excellence Communicators Hall of Fame in 2005.

Lynch has served on several civic boards, including 12 years on the Louisville Regional Airport Authority board of directors, where he served as chairman from 2009 to 2014. He served as chair of Kentucky Performing Arts Foundation Board from 2017 to 2021 and currently serves on the Kentucky Performing Arts Operating Board, appointed by Governor Andy Beshear. He is a former chairman of the Louisville Regional Development Board of the Commonwealth Fund for KET and previously served on the boards of Maryhurst and the Kentucky Science Center.



Kentucky Humanities Selects *Savory Memories* for 2025 Kentucky Reads



Kentucky Humanities has selected *Savory Memories* for the 2025 Kentucky Reads book.

In previous years, a novel by a single author has been chosen including Wendell Berry's *Hannah Coulter*, Crystal Wilkinson's *The Birds of Opulence*, Bobbie Ann Mason's *Dear Ann*, and, last year, Fenton Johnson's *Scissors, Paper, Rock*. In a shift from that trend, *Savory Memories* is an anthology of highly personal recollections about food and family from more than 20 Kentuckians, past and present. Published by the University Press of Kentucky and edited by L. Elisabeth Beattie (now Linda Elisabeth LaPinta), this collection is a veritable smorgasbord of delights. Featuring recipes and memories from writers such as Joy Bale Boone, George Ella Lyon, Ronni Ludy, Ed McClanahan, Sena Jeter Naslund, and Richard Taylor, this is both a cookbook and a compendium of sentiments. This warm and enjoyable blending of essays, illustrations, and recipes is leavened with humor and laden with nostalgia. As much as the food, these writers celebrate the personalities who lovingly prepared and provided their favorite dishes, sustaining life and helping to shape the personas of the authors themselves.

Savory Memories will serve as a focal point for local book discussions across the Commonwealth that promote a shared literary experience and celebrate the voices and stories that shape Kentucky's rich cultural landscape. By visiting kyhumanities.org, qualifying organizations may apply to host a conversation in their community. Any

nonprofit organization in Kentucky can host this program, including libraries, historical societies, churches, prisons, veterans' groups, museums, and book clubs. For a \$50 booking fee and a completed application, selected host organizations will receive copies of *Savory Memories* to share among participating members, a list of scholars to lead their discussion, a discussion guide with questions to help generate conversations, and publicity materials to promote the discussion.

Kentucky Humanities supplements the costs of the program including honorariums to scholars from across Kentucky enlisted to help lead the discussions. In another twist for this year, organizations may opt for a discussion leader who can not only drive the group conversation but also can offer a writing prompt and direction for individuals who may want to share their own memories of food and family. Watch for more information and event announcements through social media (Facebook and Instagram @KYHumanities) and at kyhumanities.org.



Tune in Each Weekday

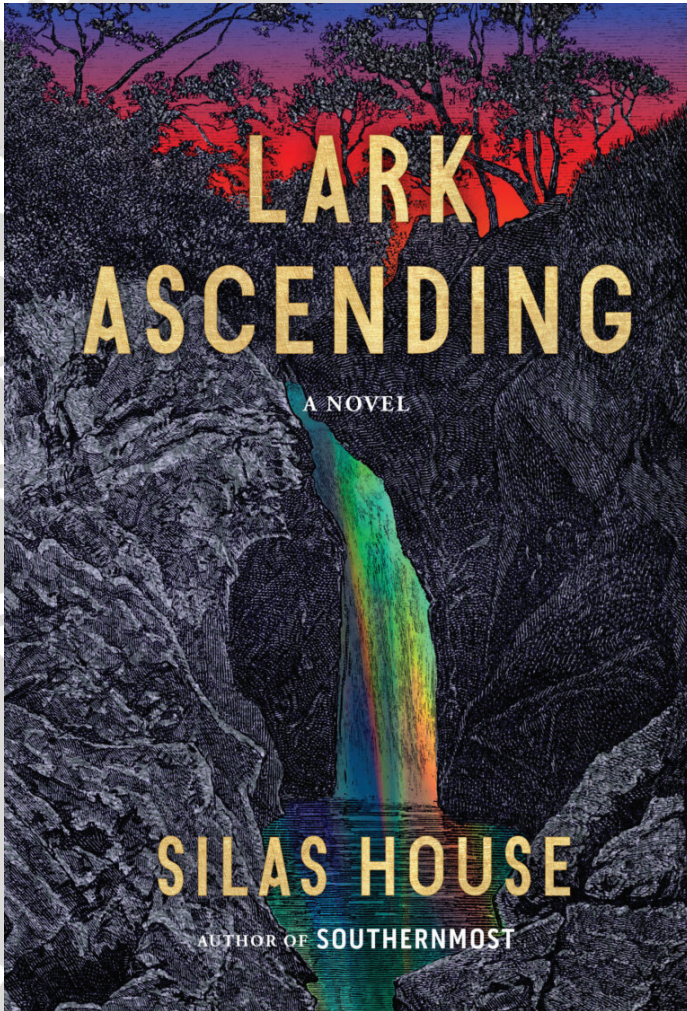
Think History airs on four public radio stations in Kentucky! Tune in to 88.9 WEKU-FM, 91.3 WKMS-FM, 88.7 WMMT-FM, or 88.9 WKYU-FM each weekday for a trip back in time to relive a moment in Kentucky's history!

88.9 weku
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Reviewed by
Linda Elisabeth LaPinta

Silas House knows the significance of titles. This Kentucky poet laureate who hails from the eastern end of the Commonwealth and has set so many of his *New York Times* best-selling novels, plays, and creative nonfiction in Appalachia, has situated his most recent narrative, a cautionary tale of darkly plotted prose punctuated by imagery made vivid by its breathtaking humanity, in an uncomfortably too-near future. Yet as dire as his warning is, House borrows Victorian author George Meredith's auspicious title, *Lark Ascending*, which is also the name of a song that “conjure[s] up grief” in his protagonist’s childhood, to stress his faith that the other-worldly brilliance of the natural world—and the best of human nature—can conquer the consequences of carnage.

Lark is the tale’s 90-year-old, first-person narrator. His bleak story, a coming-of-age tale told by a being miraculously spared, begins with his recollections of his younger self raised by loving parents who school him in survival skills essential to his remaining alive in a treacherous world. The enemies are the Fundamentalists (the Fundies), and the Nays, “who say no to everything. Immigrants in particular, especially black and brown ones.” The groups’ missions are to eradicate those whose beliefs differ from their own, hunt humans by burning their lands and homes, capture those who

survive their killing sprees, and take their prisoners to camps with no water, electricity, or food. No place is safe, so those who hope to live must hone such fundamental skills as taking shelter in caves, foraging for food, and hoarding seeds more precious than gold.

Soon Maryland grows too dangerous, so the family of three move on, taking Lark’s mother’s best friend, her son, and her daughter, with them. In several years, as Lark and that son, Arlo, transition from teenagers to young men, they fall in love. By this time these refugees are residing in Maine, but nowhere in the States can the three adults and their offspring remain safe. Lark recalls, “All I know is that the fires and the famine happened and that the Fundamentalists took control. And I know the refugees were pouring into Ireland, claiming sanctuary.” He adds, “We were a homeless people who made a home with each other the best way we could.”

So it happens that Lark and his biological and adopted family set out for Ireland, a country, they soon learn, that no longer welcomes immigrants. The distressing account of that voyage should not be recounted by a reviewer but rather read in the writer’s clear, pitch-perfect prose. For when Lark arrives on the other side of the pond, he is too soon alone in a world fraught with the self-same dangers he had hoped to escape. He states, “[M]ore than three-quarters of the population died in the famine [N]ow a few [are] hiding out

in the countryside and everyone else in the walled cities They were told they were being taken there to be protected, but they're prisoners."

Yet Lark makes an improbable friend in a beagle, unlikely because in the famine all dogs have been ordered killed lest they consume the meager food scraps fought over by humans. Seamus the beagle and Lark grow inseparable. They advance across the land stealthily as must two beings attempting to survive on a perilous skeleton of a planet burned by global warning and angry mobs. Yet Lark and Seamus alike (the reader knows this due to House's articulating and thereby honoring Seamus's perspective via Lark's comments) seek and soak in every goodness they spot. Amidst the dangers and ugliness of their cowardly new world's ethos, Lark pauses to take in occasional extraordinary scenery, for which he thirsts, and his older self describes in awe-inspired metaphors created to chronicle such beauty as the grace that can be garnered from paintings and prayers. At one point he recalls, "Before long, dusk began to spread its quilts out over the land. The time when shadows fall, and stillness yawns and stretches its shoulders. A quiet." Looking back on his youthful experience, the older Lark notes, "[T]he two best things I learned about survival were Keep Moving and Be Still."

Although Lark's mother is no longer with him, he is headed for the place she had wanted to take her family, a site she had visited many years before the current Troubles started. That town, Glendalough, Lark describes as "a thin place. A place protected by positive energy, where the veins of good that ran all throughout the earth intersected."

Lark and Seamus soon encounter a woman who becomes a mysterious ally. The three travel on foot together, forming another forged family. And then more—and more—occurs. Again, the

reader must turn to the author's words, not a reviewer's summary, to discern not only the intricacy of the plot but the certainty with which House has his narrator recognize and describe the glimmer of goodness that can be mined in the midst of evil.

As a nonagenarian recollecting his experiences, Lark recalls, "I felt suffocated by community, even while I longed for it." He also states, "We had seen what happened when people lived together in too big a clump. The better choice was to live with a handful. There is strength in numbers, but there is danger in it as well. Danger of one desiring to rise to power. Danger of many being blinded by one and doing their bidding."

"I am ninety years old, and I still don't know a whole lot," he concludes. "But I do know that the worst thing in the world is the intolerance that leads to so much violence."

What will rattle the reader is the frightening familiarity of House's fictional future. But the author also reminds his reader that the remedy for fanaticism is to rail against authoritarianism and injustice in all their myriad forms. And he emphasizes, love always has been and always will be transcendent, as well as ascendent—like a lark.

About the Reviewer

Dr. Linda Elisabeth LaPinta has authored hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles, journal articles, and book reviews, as well as five books published by the University Press of Kentucky. Her most recent book, *Kentucky Quilts and Quiltmakers: Three Centuries of Creativity, Community, and Commerce*, is the recipient of the Popular Culture Association's 2024 Emily Toth Award for best single work in women's studies, and her 1998 essay collection, *Savory Memories* (published under L. Elisabeth Beattie), is Kentucky Humanities' 2025 Kentucky Reads selection.

AMERICANS

Touring Kentucky

Date

August 23–September 27, 2025
 October 4–November 15, 2025
 November 22, 2025–January 3, 2026
 January 10–February 21, 2026
 February 28–April 11, 2026
 April 18–May 23, 2026
 May 30–July 5, 2026

Site

River Discovery Center
 Muhlenberg County Public Library
 Hickman County Memorial Library
 Henderson County Public Library
 Carroll County Public Library
 Woodford County Library
 Highlands Museum & Discovery Center

City

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ALIVE AND WELL



HUMANITIES ARE THE COMMON WEALTH OF KENTUCKY

By Mary P. Sheridan

Once again, calls about the death of the humanities seem on the rise. Despite very real concerns, I do not see the humanities' demise. Instead, I am impressed by vibrancy of the humanities in communities all around us.

That vibrancy is evident in a newly minted consortium, Humanities are the Common Wealth of Kentucky (HCWK), open to public universities across the Commonwealth. The consortium was awarded a grant from the International Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes to jump start our work. As we share best teaching, research, and engagement practices, we have been struck by the richness of Kentucky's humanities projects and are eager to collaborate on future joint ventures. One such venture is debunking myths that distort and diminish the humanities. After describing what the humanities are, I challenge these myths that devalue the humanities, and counter with examples of vital humanities programming.

WHAT ARE HUMANITIES?

Humanities projects question what it means to be human, focusing on culture, history, and connection. Schools may designate certain disciplines, such as history, philosophy, language, cultural studies, and religious studies, but what unites humanities projects are their commitments to analyze commonplaces; think creatively; understand ourselves and others; and build relationships that facilitate problem solving and empathy. Throughout this process, the humanities craft and investigate stories we tell about ourselves and others so that we can engage with the possibilities of shaping our worlds. The critical thinking across these activities prepares us for a better future by asking us to examine who we are, why we think and value what we do, and what might we do to enrich a good life for ourselves and our broader communities.

Despite their importance, the humanities seem under attack in ways that feel misguided. Below I challenge some of these attacks by showing how they seem based more in myth than reality.



Busting Myth #1: Contrary to the charge that humanities are elitist or out of touch, humanities projects shape our everyday lives. The importance of the humanities may be particularly notable when disasters strike. During these times, people need not just food and shelter. They need stories to commemorate and persevere. They need empathy and compassion. They need frameworks to process profound questions about who they are and why bad things happen. They need imagination to envision better futures.

Humanities folks meet these needs. Sometimes that work is obvious. For example, when the historic 2022 flood devastated Eastern Kentucky, Kentucky Humanities was there to offer relief funds to places like the Knott County Public Library and the Wayland Community/Center Historical Center to recover. Among those helping clean up were historians, librarians, and archivists who rolled up their sleeves to join local communities save their documents, instruments, and art. These artifacts matter for they shape the stories people tell about themselves and their local culture. They remind us of our history and values, and help us find language to imagine ourselves within uncertain futures.

Humanities are also present in less visible, everyday ways. For example, humanities trained medical ethicists work in hospitals

to help families navigate choices they never thought they might face, guiding people as they wrestle with profound decisions. Humanities-trained researchers work with community organizations to translate technical reports into accessible resources for local citizens to design better outcomes for their neighborhoods. Humanities methodologies help researchers listen to the stories of nurses and teachers during Covid-19 so that practitioners can develop policies that mitigate trauma in frontline workers, a move that may help these workers process past pain and help future workers prepare for the next emergency.

Far from being out of touch, humanities-trained professionals are embedded in businesses and communities across our Commonwealth, helping us pursue core questions about how we can make informed decisions to better our lives.

Busting Myth #2: Contrary to viewing humanities courses as primarily for pre-teaching and pre-law majors, humanities thinking is crucial for a range of careers, especially in today's time of transition. The myth that people can't get a job with a humanities major is often made by politicians, who have gone so far as to suggest states should not fund humanities degrees. And yet, one of the strongest proponents of this idea, former

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

Humanities centers, like the University of Louisville's Commonwealth Center for Humanities and Society (CCHS), may be housed within universities, but their reach extends into the lives of everyday people across the Kentucky. In UL's Bingham Faculty Fellows program, faculty work on transdisciplinary projects that tackle real-world problems in local communities. In one cohort, a technical writer and a scholar working with unhoused youth shared resources for how to partner with underserved groups, while in another cohort, a medical ethicist and a medical translator discussed strategies for engaging people in emotionally charged hospital settings.

Humanities centers also collaborate with community and cultural partners to provide programming for the larger community. This fall, CCHS Advisory Board member Hilaria Cruz co-presented a pre-concert talk with the Louisville Orchestra composer-in-residence, inviting the audience to notice the tonal connections between language and music. Similarly, CCHS internships connects students with local arts and culture organizations, providing hands-on opportunities for students to learn podcast production, digital storytelling, and archival research. These internships help spread Kentucky's stories at the Portland Museum, Louisville Story Project, and the Filson Historical Society.

Connecting to arts and cultural organizations as well as local communities, humanities centers are on the front lines of addressing issues that affect people from all walks of life.



UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

“Humanities in Action (HMN 303)” is a hands-on, high-impact laboratory course that immerses students in various careers within the humanities, taking them beyond the classroom and into the community. Developed by the Gaines Center for the Humanities at the University of Kentucky, this team-taught seminar rotates through three distinct units, all centered on the pressing need for trained humanists in today’s society. Spring 2025 will see the second iteration of HMN 303 after last year’s successful pilot. In this cycle, Elena Sesma from UK Anthropology will invite students into the growing field of Urban Archaeology by leading an archaeological dig on campus; Matthew Strandmark from UK Special Collections will introduce the field of rare book acquisition and preservation while exploring campus and community libraries with students; and Jim Seaver from the Kentucky Historical Society will expose students to monument markers—how they are decided, designed, built, and corrected—by visiting markers throughout the city and the region. In the previous cycle, students digitally unwrapped previously buried sea scrolls in the Educe Lab; trained in the circus arts while investigating philosophical topics in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics; and explored how memorial markers are proposed, developed, and placed. In the words of one student, “What I like about this course is that for a total of three months I got to learn three different topics from three different professors with different teaching styles that I was able to find a variety of different things that really intrigue me.” This exposure demonstrates the real-world applications of Humanities skills and allows students to explore varied careers in Humanities disciplines. “Humanities in Action” meets the growing demand for career readiness in Humanities fields not only by introducing career pathways and internships for Humanities degrees but also by demonstrating more broadly that Humanities training is indispensable to the social, economic, and civic developments of the 21st century.



Governor Bevin, was an East Asian Studies major. Clearly, humanities’ attention to critical thinking and problem solving can provide fertile preparation for both career and life.

This ability to think broadly is even more important today because current 20-year-olds will have over a dozen jobs in their lifetime. The requirements of these jobs will change, but employers in evolving professional settings will want employees practiced in thinking, analyzing, and questioning social and cultural complexities; in communicating effectively; and, in offering informed and ethically sound paths through challenging circumstances. Humanities programs prepare students for such careers. Indeed, humanistic thinking is important for all career and community concerns. It keeps people centered in a fast-changing world that often places power and profits ahead of people, the environment, and the common good.

We see detailed attention to that preparation in how Kentucky’s public universities are using humanities courses to prepare students for today’s workforce. For example, Kentucky’s rich cultural heritage draws people to the Commonwealth, whether to explore Civil War history or celebrate Kentucky’s lively arts scene. Students from the University of Kentucky’s Humanities in Action seminar have engaged in this cultural, economic, and historical work through hands-on coursework with Kentucky’s memorials, asking who we commemorate and how does this align with our values.

Similarly, the Appalachian Studies program at Eastern Kentucky University focuses on their region’s cultural wealth, including Appalachian literature, history, traditional music, and documentary films. Grounded in stories of the place, students are better prepared to tap community strengths as well as craft solutions to community problems. Students can draw upon their humanities training to pursue jobs in arts and culture production, criminal justice, environmental sustainability, public policy, or public health. Exploring currently unimagined needs will be a hallmark of jobs a few decades from now, as

EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

As an interdisciplinary field, Appalachian Studies seeks to understand the place and the people of Appalachia from multiple angles. Humanities are at the heart of ECU's Appalachian Studies program as our Introduction to Appalachia course focuses on the rich cultural history of the region, including the study of Appalachian literature, history, traditional music, and documentary films. The course also teaches students to communicate the significance of their findings as they consider diverse perspectives of the people who have called this region home. As the only required course in our program of study, Introduction to Appalachia prepares students to engage with complex issues affecting the area across disciplines including criminal justice, environmental sustainability, history, literary studies, political science, public health, and sociology. ECU's 22-county service region includes 21 Appalachian counties (according to the Appalachian Regional Commission), and emphasizing the humanities in Appalachian Studies prepares these students to be informed change agents who not only understand the history and traditions of Appalachia but are also ready to identify and articulate solutions to improve the quality of life in their communities.



innovation is disrupting so many current ways of life. Humanities degrees provide a host of skills to meet those needs: critical thinking about tracing unacknowledged and/or unanticipated patterns; persuasive skills to communicate novel thoughts; human discernment to make sense of chaotic possibilities. In short, humanities degrees are essential in times of such rapid change if we are to prepare people to grapple with complexity, to ask what is for the good and not just for the expedient, to forward the lessons that history and/or other cultures can teach us.

Busting Myth #3: Contrary to a zero-sum framing, we need both technology and humanities disciplines. For years, we have been bombarded by messages that technology will take over. People disagree on whether technology is a panacea for all problems or a boogeyman leading to a dystopic world. We can agree, however, that recent technological trends from automation to generative AI make two things clear. First, technological advancements will continue and will be taken up widely. Second, we need the humanities to help us navigate what this might mean. (See WKU insert on page 14.)

Evidence for the value of humanities degrees in today's technologically saturated times comes not just from humanists

but also from a host of tech giants. Many of today's innovators drew upon their humanities training to find ways to connect, such as LinkedIn's co-founder Reid Hoffman (combined computer science and applied philosophy degree) and Flickr's co-founder Caterina Fake (English degree). Slack's co-founder Stewart Butterfield claims his philosophy degrees helped him communicate and navigate complex arguments. Steve Jobs went so far as to credit his calligraphy course for shaping Apple's emphasis on design. For those in top tech echelons, humanities thinking—about the enhanced value of living connected lives, the importance of communication, the cultivated interest in complex thinking, community, and beauty—has proven central to the creation of our technologically mediated worlds.

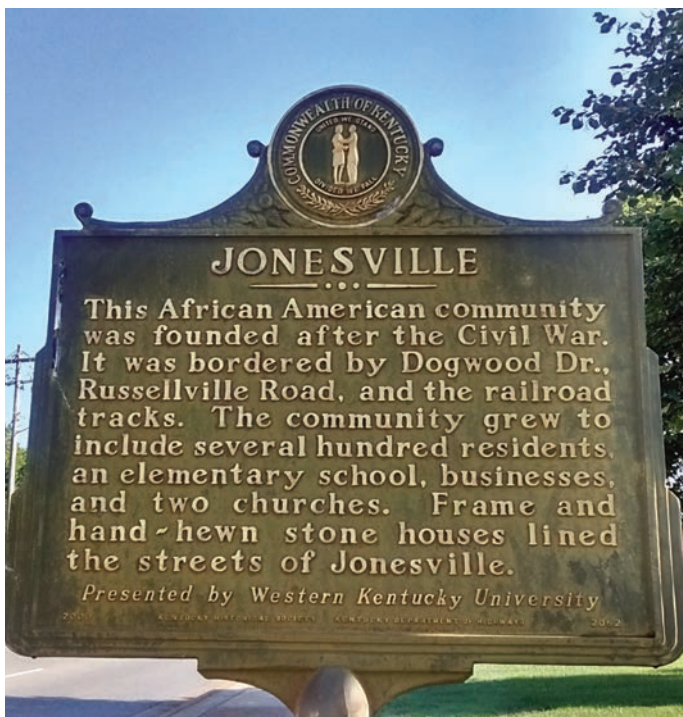
In addition to enriching technological possibilities, humanities training can blunt the dangers of pursuing technology without attending to the human consequences. Authors often introduce crucial concepts before such ideas become widely accepted, such as Wendell Berry highlighting the importance of preserving small scale, sustainable agriculture. Historians and ethicists can point to cautionary examples of when new technologies result in dire consequences, such as coal mining disasters when decision makers chose profit over people. Clearly, we need to tap both

technological and humanities frameworks infused across society if we are to make the most of technologies' emerging possibilities.

Humanities programming across Kentucky shares that insight. For example, Northern Kentucky University is infusing humanistic inquiry into general education courses, particularly professional and STEM programs. Their goal is to foster "a broader intellectual and social project..., which ties the pressing concerns of our current moment to a living past embodied by enduring works of literature, history and philosophy."

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

The humanities and technology are not at odds with one another. On the contrary, in the digital humanities, the use of new technologies such as text mining, digital maps, online archives and databases, as well as other computational tools can help to discover new and existing patterns in human interactions and communication. Digital humanities projects often have a public facing component, and therefore offer more accessibility to those outside of academia. For example, history students at Western Kentucky University are engaged in an ongoing project documenting monuments to slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow, Civil Rights and post-Civil Rights Movements, on their campus. Their contribution is part of an inter-collegiate digital humanities effort to create a public database cataloging similar monuments on college campuses across the United States.



By combining technology and the humanities, we can see that while innovation helps us reimagine what may be possible, we need ethical reasoners to guide us about what may be desirable. When AI provides incomplete, biased, and/or inaccurate answers, we need critical thinkers to sort through the difference. In short, the rise of technological possibility does not replace the humanities but rather calls for humanists' perspectives as we explore what it means to be human within the complex systems shaping our world.

HUMANITIES ARE FLOURISHING

The vibrancy of the humanities across the Commonwealth makes clear the need for and benefits of humanities programming. In uncertain times, from natural disasters to workplace disruption to technological innovation, it helps to have practice in navigating knotty concerns that have profound effects on individual lives and community well-being. The humanities provide such practice.

Many of the things that we enjoy—that enrich our lives and that make for a more humane and ethical society—are seemingly under attack. Yet, the humanities persist, in library reading groups; in cultural preservation and creation; in academic coursework; in community, medical, and industry innovation. We in the Consortium can see the fruits of humanities work all around. We hope you will join us in spreading the word and in building a robust, humanities filled future.

Learn more about the Humanities are the Commonwealth of Kentucky Consortium online at www.humanitiescommonwealth.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary P. Sheridan is professor of English and director the Commonwealth Center for Humanities and Society at the University of Louisville. Sheridan teaches and investigates questions related to community engagement, public writing, and educational leadership. Sheridan has (co)-written or -edited six books, scores of academic articles/chapters, and multiple publications for more generalist audiences. Recently, she's been paying attention to the widening gap between public discourses and the everyday practices of higher education. In her role with the Consortium, she's examining how the consequences of this gap may play out, such as in current discussions about eliminating the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Department of Education.

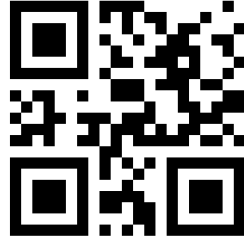
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Documentation

By Roberta Schultz



Lined up next to the livery,
a chorus line of beer wagons

set to deliver the first Wiedemann's Fine
after Prohibition.

My grandpa, Clifford Stephens,
remembered this event as historical,

told me he delivered the first
barrel on that momentous day.

All I could call up for image
was his barrel chest,

his suspended work pants
tugged way past his natural waist,

glasses fogged with pride when
my sister and I played "Tom Dooley" after supper,

his scraped elbows wrapped in plastic,
deepening the infection that landed him

on his back, small and silent, at Speers Hospital.
His half-German warbling "ach de lieber"

as he poured me a juice glass
of bohemian lager.

Not one of us thought beer was anything
but nourishing liquid bread.

One day I googled first beer
after Prohibition in Northern Kentucky

to find black and white witness
for my grandpa's claim to fame:

4th wagon from the left, a driver in suspenders,
horses ready, gold rims sliding down his nose.

About the Author

Roberta Schultz of Wilder, Kentucky, is the author of six poetry volumes. Three of her chapbooks were published by Finishing Line Press while her latest chapbook, *Asking Price*, was chosen by Workhorse Writers for their 2022 series. *Underscore*, her first full-length collection, was published by Dos Madres Press in 2022. *Deep Ends*, another full-length collection, was released in January 2025 from Finishing Line Press. Both song writer and poet, Schultz's work appears in *Women Speak*, Vol.7 and 8, *Persimmon Tree*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Panoplyzine*, *Riparian*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Kakalak*, *Let Me Say This* (a poetry anthology with Dolly Parton as the main theme) and other anthologies. She leads drum circles and serves as an Arts in Healing musician.

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Jean Bell Thomas

A Woman Ahead of Her Time and the American Folk Song Festival

By Dr. James M. Gifford

Jean Bell Thomas was a significant yet nearly forgotten figure in the dramatically interesting history of Appalachian music. Born Jeanette Mary Francis de Assisi Aloysius Narcissus Garfield Bell in Ashland, Kentucky, in 1881, she graduated from Holy Family School of Business in 1899 and later achieved fame as an author of eight books by national publishing houses, and as a photographer, lecturer, folklorist, and founder and promoter of the American Folk Song Festival.

As a young, unmarried woman, she defied many of the conservative conventions of her culture by attending business school and learning stenography. After becoming a court reporter, she traveled by jolt wagon with a circuit judge to courts in the county seat towns in the mountains of eastern Kentucky and earned the sobriquet, “The Traipsin Woman.” Thomas said her family had opposed her taking the job, because they “thought it was shocking for a young girl to go traipsin’ around the country with a passel of law-men.” But she had to have a job and her “heart was set on it.”

Thomas saved her court reporter wages and moved to New York, where she spent a decade living a bohemian life in Greenwich Village. In New York, she took writing classes and continued to work as a stenographer. A feminist long before the term was coined, she then held a variety of unconventional jobs, including work as a script girl for Cecil B. de Mille’s film *The Ten Commandments*, as secretary to the owner of a professional baseball team, and as press agent for socialite Gloria Gould Bishop and later for Ruby “Texas” Guinan, a notorious entertainer and owner of prohibition-era speakeasies.

During her early travels in eastern Kentucky, and on subsequent visits, Thomas often carried her camera and photographed musicians and other mountain people she encountered. With her portable typewriter, she documented lyrics and tunes to ballads. In 1926, Jean Thomas heard James William Day, a blind fiddler, playing and singing in front of the Rowan County Courthouse in Morehead, Kentucky. Thomas signed him to a management contract, changed his name to Jilson Setters, secured a recording contract for Day in 1928 with RCA Victor, and booked him as the “Singin’ Fiddler from Lost Hope Hollow” in theaters in America and Europe. Setters eventually played at the Festival of the English Folk Song and Dance Society in London’s Royal Albert Hall.

Thomas’ most enduring contribution to Appalachian music was the American Folk Song Festival, which she established in 1930. With the exception of the war years, 1943-1947, Thomas’ old-fashioned Singin’ Gatherin’ was held at various sites in and around her hometown of Ashland until ill health forced her resignation in 1972. During those four decades, Thomas was the moving force behind the annual music festival. She planned, publicized, and financed it. She collected costumes and musical instruments, and booked participants. She even painted directions on roadside boulders to guide motorists to the event that became the primary passion of her life.

In accordance with long-established mountain traditions, Thomas’ festival was held the second Sunday of June under an open sky on a homemade platform. The event attracted tens of thousands



Born Jeanette Mary Francis de Assisi Aloysius Narcissus Garfield Bell, Jean Thomas would later be known as “The Traipsin Woman.”

of spectators who sat on fences, the tops of automobiles, and in buggies to hear the old mountain songs and see the old dances. Thomas wanted to showcase traditional music that had originated in the British Isles and crystalized over more than a century of Appalachian influences into her notion of mountain music.

Part concert and part stage drama, the American Folk Song Festival followed a similar script each year. A fox horn that had once belonged to Devil Anse Hatfield announced the beginning of the performance. Then a mountain couple with two children arrived on stage in a covered wagon where they were greeted by a Cherokee woman singing the “Cherokee Song of Welcome.” Dialog conveying the settlement of Appalachia was followed by children performing an English country dance. Old songs like “Barbara Allen” were followed by “Old Sally Gooden” played on the mouth harp and “Billy in the Low Ground” played on the fiddle.

Musical performances featuring home-made dulcimer, banjo, fiddle, guitar, accordion, harmonica, and recorder were interspersed with more dramatic action like an enactment of an olden marriage ceremony or an interpretation of an 18th century murder legend, often featuring Thomas as the narrator. Characters dressed in mountain garb with a historical backdrop that included cultural props like churns, egg baskets, brooms, drinking gourds and other manifestations of practical Appalachian art presented thousands of visitors with Thomas’ view of Appalachian history

and culture. The American Folk Song Festival went through five distinct phases of development.

Phase one began in September of 1930 when Miss Thomas staged a private musical presentation at her home featuring the blind fiddler, Jilson Setters. Special guests included future radio personality Dorothy Gordon, Mrs. Susan Steele Sampson, the first lady of Kentucky, and the editor of the *Ashland Daily Independent*.

In August of 1931, nearly a year later, Thomas formally presented her plan to the governor's wife. Mrs. Sampson enthusiastically approved it, and the American Folk Song Society was incorporated by Susan Steele Sampson, Helen C. Sampson, and Jean Thomas. The second American Folk Song Festival, open to the public at large, took place on June 12, 1932. The Festival was repeated on June 11, 1933. The local newspaper provided little coverage and expressed doubts in Thomas' claim that Governor Laffoon would attend. However, the governor came and "stayed to the very end."

In 1934, Thomas' landlord refused "to permit the festival to be held on his ground" and she had to find a site somewhere on Mayo Trail. Fortunately, a local farmer offered a large meadow. But she needed immediate financing to move the trademark windowless log cabin and the heavy stage properties and sound equipment to the new site and build a new outdoor theatre. Then came a saving answer to one of her urgent telegrams: "Find the site, and if there isn't a windowless log cabin on the place, get one and put it there." Thus, the 1934 Festival was rescued in the nick

The event attracted tens of thousands of spectators who sat on fences, the tops of automobiles, and in buggies to hear the old mountain songs and see the old dances.

of time by Captain B. Franklin Cross. The 1935 Festival, held on June 9, and all the succeeding festivals through 1949, took place on this site, about 18 miles south of Ashland, just off Route 23 then called the Mayo Trail.

Those first few years, from 1930 to 1935, represent the first of five phases in the history of the festival. The main accomplishment of this first period was the acquisition of a festival site off the Mayo Trail. There was little overhead, since the artists performed for free, and the physical setup was handled by Miss Thomas and a number of volunteers. Financial support came from private donations and from Thomas' publication royalties.

The second phase, from 1936 to 1942, saw the festival gain prominence through national press coverage. The festival's success was even more remarkable in light of the fact that America was mired in the Great Depression. Among the folk music programs recognized by the New Deal's Federal Music Project was Thomas' American Folk Song Festival. This federal program provided employment for people to assist in setting up the festival and striking the set. But the national recognition was more important than the assistance provided by New Deal workers. A grant from the Rockefeller Foundation financed the recording of some of the early festivals. This material now resides in the Library of Congress along with six scrapbooks of clippings and memorabilia pertaining to the festivals.

Jean Thomas at her typewriter, with three of her publications The Singin' Fiddler of Lost Hope Hollow, Devil's Ditties, and The Traipsin' Woman displayed. The room appears to be a rustic cabin, with a rag rug underfoot and a butter churn near the wash basin. She was being filmed by Jack Jacumski of Georgetown, Ohio.





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By 1940, Thomas' success prompted community leaders to seek a closer affiliation with the music festival. On January 5, 1941, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* carried a major article noting that Ashland had "never taken the Singin' Gatherin' to its bosom and has joined only grudgingly in annual big doin's out in the hills." The same article reported that Thomas had rejected a proposal from the editor of the *Ashland Daily Independent* to transform the festival into a two-day event sponsored by local merchants. Thomas' leadership and artistic vision were the strengths of the festival, but they also proved to be the major weaknesses. I will "carry on alone, as long as I live" had been Thomas' reply. On June 15, 1942, she presided over the last festival to take place for six years. The inactivity brought about by World War II created this third phase.

The years 1948-52 constituted the fourth phase of the festival. Five years of inactivity had caused the festival to lose its pre-war national prominence.

Finally, in 1950, Thomas agreed to move the festival to Ashland. At this point, local newspaper coverage increased in the *Ashland Daily Independent* and in the West Virginia newspapers, particularly the *Huntington Herald Dispatch*. The new site for the festival was the lot adjoining Thomas' residence at 3201 Cogan Street in Ashland. The attractive site featured a stage in front of a one-room school and an elevated platform for television equipment. In 1952, the festival was professionally recorded for the first time.

The fifth and final phase in the history of the festival lasted from 1955 to 1972 and was often promoted in national travel magazines. The June/July 1959 issue of *Buick Magazine* observed the American Folk Song Festival was "easily reached on U.S. 52, 60, and 23" and noted the availability of several local motels "with accommodations costing \$7.00 and up for a single." During these years, the names of the performers changed, as many of the "old-timers" who had participated since the thirties had died or become too old or sick to continue performing. Because of her advancing age, Jean Thomas often talked of finding a successor, but no one was ever chosen. In 1966, the festival was moved from the woodland adjoining Thomas' Ashland home to Carter Caves State Resort Park, where it became the Sunday afternoon segment of a much broader arts and crafts weekend.

Thomas and her festival were the subjects of both local and national scrutiny for many years. Some scholars, including her eastern Kentucky contemporary Cratis D. Williams, questioned the authenticity of her productions. Although Thomas had a national support base that included some of the leading literary talents of the mid-20th century, she did not cultivate local support for her music festival. "She cared little for local opinion," observed



Jean Thomas' sister, Trixy Bell (left), Jean Thomas (second from right), and an unidentified man and girl sit on the porch steps of Thomas' cabin on the Mayo Trail near Ashland, Kentucky.

her hometown newspaper, "but sought the light of a distant star." Her egocentric approach to promoting her singing gatherings included the creation of a China doll wearing a black dress which had been designed for her by a professional costume design company. She called it "The Traipsin' Woman-Jean Thomas."

According to noted folklore scholar Lynwood Montell, many of the leaders of her hometown of Ashland opposed her efforts because they felt her emphasis on the old mountain culture was inconsistent with the progressive ambitions of a community that boasted major corporate headquarters and significant business enterprises. "Jean saw roads, radio, and industry as destructive," Montell observed during a public lecture in Ashland in 1980. "In my subjective evaluation, she was not in favor of Ashland's rapid growth." The publisher of the local newspaper, Col. B. F. Forgy, was a particularly vocal detractor of Thomas's efforts. Not surprisingly she received little local publicity until 1958 when James T. Norris became the editor and publisher of the *Ashland Daily Independent*. Norris, who had a farsighted vision of cultural tourism, recognized the economic potential in Thomas' music festivals.

Thomas died on December 7, 1982, at age 101, and was buried in her hometown. She had outlived her fame and died, not as a local heroine, but as an unpopular eccentric. George Wolfford, a highly-respected local journalist, observed that some of the

negative opinions about Jean Thomas “were so deep-seated they live on in the second and third generation.”

Today, Thomas is an obscure footnote on the pages of history, known to few people outside the scholarly community yet memorialized in several significant ways. Her accomplishments merited detailed recognition by the great scholar Charles K. Wolfe in his book *Kentucky Country*. A fascinating exhibit in Ashland’s Kentucky Highlands Museum & Discovery Center includes photographs and memorabilia that relate to Thomas’s life and accomplishments. The University of Louisville’s Dwight Anderson Memorial Music Library maintains about 60 boxes of material on Jean Thomas which includes thousands of letters, newspaper clippings, programs, diaries, manuscripts, notes and photographs. Several years ago, archivist James Procell reported that the Jean Thomas collection is currently being digitized, with the “hope that it can be made available online within the next couple of years.”

Thomas’ amazingly full, and often controversial, life truly merits a new biography, but her life merits examination on other levels, too. Her broad range of efforts to preserve the music, dance, and culture of the people of eastern Kentucky and central Appalachia was a precursor to popular regional outdoor dramas in southern Appalachia and an informal jump-start to the Appalachian Studies Movement that began in the 1970s. Thomas’ life also cries out to be examined within the context of feminist scholarship. In rhetoric, Thomas did not serve as a spokesperson for women’s rights and opportunities. Although she didn’t overtly talk the talk, she clearly walked the walk. Her life was a testament to seizing opportunities that were normally not available to her female contemporaries. Although Thomas normally stopped short of advocating equal rights and opportunities for the women of Appalachia, she often articulated the problems that Appalachian women regularly encountered.

“We have a saying down there that’s mighty true,” Thomas told a New York reporter, “The mountain’s all right for men and horses, but Hell on women and mules.” Thomas observed that the women of Appalachia often “do most of the work and look old at thirty,” because their problems and responsibilities were overwhelming. They had large families in the days before the pill and their duties included childcare, home care, gardening, caring

The attractive site featured a stage in front of a one-room school and an elevated platform for television equipment. In 1952, the festival was professionally recorded for the first time.

for the cow, and carrying water from a nearby body of water.

In a verse in one of her songs, Thomas sang:

*“Don’t never let your woman have her way
Kase (because) if you do bad luck’ll come to stay.”*

Another song that seemed to encourage mountain women to accept their traditional roles intoned:

*“Geese in the pond and fish in the ocean,
Devils in the women
When they take a notion.”*

None of those songs affected or defined Thomas whose life followed another traditional Appalachian verse:

*“If hard times don’t kill me,
I’ll live till I die.”*

About the Author

James M. Gifford is a widely-published author who has served as the CEO and senior editor of the Jesse Stuart Foundation, a regional publishing house, for the last 40 years.

Sources

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My Great-Great-Grandmother's New Mexico Quest and How I Followed Her 102 Years Later

By Rita S. Spalding

I first heard about my great-great-grandmother, Amy Jane Montgomery Thompson, when I was a young child. At family reunions, older relatives praised her courage and determination and her love for her husband, John Thompson. As a testament to him, she had a large monument erected in Washington County's Pleasant Grove Cemetery to honor his service in the Civil War.

It was not until 2015, when I was visiting my Logsdon cousins, that I discovered there was much more to her story. For the first time, I heard about her adventurous trip to New Mexico and learned that she died far away from her Kentucky home. My cousin, Samantha Norgren, and I talked for hours about her fascinating adventure. It was not enough just to hear about her. We decided that we wanted to walk the same earth she walked and see the place where she died. After two years of research, we mapped our plans. One hundred and two years after Jane's 1915 death, Samantha and I retraced her journey. Along the way, we created our own adventure in New Mexico.

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Amy Jane Montgomery was born in Washington County, Kentucky, in September of 1844. She married John Thompson on October 3, 1865, following his military service in the Civil War. After the war, the federal government awarded John 10 acres of land in New Mexico. He died on February 7, 1888, never living on or improving the land.

By 1914, my great-grandmother, Mary Catherine Thompson Logsdon (aka Mollie), Jane's daughter, was 45 years old, with 10 children. Her youngest was still a baby when her husband, Silas Green Logsdon, suffered a brain aneurysm from a farming accident. Although he lived for several more years, the accident left him paralyzed from the neck down, unable to speak coherently. Silas lived his final years at Central State Hospital in Anchorage, outside of Louisville, Kentucky. At this time, the hospital was an "insane asylum." Although he was not insane, there were no long-term healthcare facilities available, and Central State was the only place that could adequately care for him. Mollie took the train from Springfield, Kentucky, to Anchorage once a week to visit her paralyzed husband.

With a large commercial tobacco farm and 10 children, Mollie's life was difficult, and her financial future was uncertain. Jane had maternal concerns about her daughter's predicament and saw a possible solution. She decided to sell their ten acres in New Mexico and divide the money among her four children.

Mollie could use her portion to keep the family's farm running as a commercial business. So, in the fall of 1914, at a time when women had limited legal rights and couldn't vote, she boarded a train in Springfield, Kentucky and traveled by herself to Clovis, New Mexico. She passed Chicago, St. Louis, Kansas City, Topeka, and part of Oklahoma before arriving in Albuquerque, New Mexico and then continued to Clovis, the closest city. Her property was located in the small town of Broadview, at the top northeast corner of New Mexico bordering Texas.

I was able to research and confirm her trip through family letters and legal documents. During that research, I found letters between Mollie and a man named Robert Sheehan who wanted to buy Jane's land. He had already purchased the land adjacent to their ten acres. Jane got off the train in Clovis where Robert picked her up and drove her to the property. There she found an abandoned squatter's shack where she decided to stay while she prepared to sell the land. Letters from her sister Kate tell how Jane fell in love with New Mexico and wanted to stay there, but the true task at hand was to sell the land to help her daughter maintain the Logsdon farm in central Kentucky.

Eventually she sold the land but, during the process, Jane contracted tuberculosis. In early 1915, Robert Sheehan found her body in the shack. She had been dead for three weeks. Robert wrote to Mollie asking what she wanted to do with her



Silas Green Logsdon, his wife Mary Catherine Thompson Logsdon, and their great-granddaughter (and author of this article) Rita S. Spalding.



At the age of 45, Mary Catherine Thompson Logsdon (aka Mollie) was the mother of 10 children. Her youngest was still a baby when her husband, Silas Green Logsdon, suffered a brain aneurysm from a farming accident.

mother's body. The cost to ship her home to Washington County in a casket would be one hundred dollars. Mollie didn't have the money to ship her mother's body home, so Jane was buried in New Mexico in an unmarked grave. In a letter to Mollie, Kate tells her that she paid to have a willow tree planted on the grave, located near a windmill.

Jane's New Mexico adventures in 1914 were unique. From the first moment I heard her story I wanted to find her bones, bring them home, and have her buried next to the beautiful large monument she had erected for her husband. Samantha and I drove to Kansas City, Missouri and boarded a train bound for Albuquerque. Amtrak's train stations had changed over the years, but our trip retraced the bulk of Jane's travels. We booked a sleeper cabin on Amtrak's Southwest Chief and watched the sun set and then rise again as we traveled from Kansas City to Albuquerque. We observed the change in topography and the emergence of mountains and adobe houses; all the while we wondered what

went through Jane's mind as she made her trip alone so long ago.

Although we took the same path as Jane, our New Mexico trip twisted into an adventure of its own. It started with our first night in Albuquerque at the historic Spy House Bed and Breakfast, where in 1945, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg gave the atomic bomb secret to a Russian spy in exchange for five hundred dollars. For the rest of our visit, we stayed at a dude ranch in Clovis. The owner wore a gun belt on her waist and carried a revolver used to shoot rattlesnakes on the property. There was a beautiful mountain view outside our door and a can of scorpion pest spray under the kitchen sink. After the owner greeted us and offered to sell us steaks from her cattle ranch, she walked back to her private ranch house. We could hear her shooting as she walked down the dirt road that led from our bunkhouse.

We spent most of the next morning at the Clovis County courthouse looking over deed transfers and plat maps and getting directions to the obscure location of Jane's unmarked grave. The





land was now being rented to the government as greenspace so that pasture lands could be rotated regularly. We planned on stopping at the Clovis Public Library where a woman who was both a genealogist and historian, was on staff. She could provide more information on lands that had been awarded post-Civil War. Samantha suffered from fibromyalgia that sometimes gripped her unexpectedly. As we were leaving the courthouse, she was suddenly exhausted. We decided to drive to the land, see it for ourselves and possibly walk part of it. Because she wasn't feeling full strength, the trip to the library would have to wait until we finished our excursion. She rested while I drove our rented SUV thirty miles to Jane's burial site.

On Curry Road 41, we saw the remains of an old willow tree next to a windmill, exactly as described in Aunt Kate's letter. We knew this was Jane's land. As I drove forward there was a small puddle in the middle of the dirt road ahead of us. My decision to drive through it, rather than around it, almost led to disaster.

As the SUV edged forward, the road suddenly grabbed us like a vacuum. What seemed to be a small mud puddle turned out to be quicksand. As I drove forward thinking we would push through it, the SUV stopped abruptly. We started to sink slowly and were surrounded by at least two feet of tall grass. We saw movement in the grass that told us rattlers were waiting outside our doors. We could not get out of the SUV, nor could we drive through the quicksand.

Using my cellphone, we called 911 for help but at this tense moment none was available. All emergency help was at the Clovis Library, where a shooter had entered shortly after we left the courthouse. The library is located directly across from the courthouse. The 911 operator told us that two elderly women and a young adult had been shot to death. It could've been us! As the sun set and we processed thoughts of our close call, the tow truck arrived and slowly winched us out. Because of the quicksand, we never got to stand on Jane's land, but we captured a photograph of the old willow tree and windmill where our heroine is buried.

The plan to retrace our great-great-grandmother's trip turned out to be an unpredictable adventure. The return train trip gave us time to reflect on Jane's importance to our family. As a result of Jane's adventure and land sale, Mollie received her \$1500 quarter share, enough to keep the farm running. For nearly another half century family memories continued to fill the farmhouse walls. During the early 1960s, the farm was finally sold out of the family and the road is now known as Logsdon Lane. An Amish community came from Ohio and bought it to operate an onsite sawmill and lumber yard. Smaller houses were built surrounding the old manor house and the Amish lived there until it was sold again. Eventually the Logsdon farmhouse was torn down with no remaining evidence that it ever existed. Since our adventure Samantha has passed away. I am grateful for

our trip together. I would like to believe that Jane's fearless tenacity is the genetic needle that threads our family together.

About the Author

Rita S. Spalding is an award-winning Kentucky author and published poet, appearing in national anthologies and magazines. Her first book, *Abstract Ribbons* was published in 1992 and her second book, *The Eighth*, is currently being published by Hydra Publishing, Pennington Press Division. She thanks Dr. Jim Gifford, CEO of the Jesse Stuart Foundation, for his encouragement and support in expanding her writings to include family stories that are a part of Kentucky history. She also thanks Jim and Jane Logsdon and Donna Jean Logsdon Clark for opening the door to family history.



"Mollie," Mary Catherine Thompson Logsdon, is buried in an unmarked grave in Broadview, New Mexico, on the site of the John Thompson awarded land.



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Pink Potato Salad

By Georgia Green Stamper

The summer I was six, my maybe-crazy aunt from Chicago, separated from husband three or four, descended on our farm for an extended “stay” in the country. She was the older of my grandfather’s two children—my mother’s only sibling—and in the way of Kentucky kin, knowing she had no place else to go, we made room for her. Now, the small house where my parents and I lived with my grandfather was already pretty crowded, and for reasons I have forgotten a couple of cousins were also living with us that summer. So, when Aunt Sis, who was neither small nor quiet, arrived with two months’ worth of luggage, we had to be squeezed in with a shoehorn.

Nevertheless, I was excited by my aunt’s visit because she brought gifts from the city and she was full of fun ideas like camping outside in the front yard on hot, summer nights. Boy, was it ever hot that summer! Temperatures hovered near 100 degrees for days on end, and no one could remember when it last rained.

The grass turned brown and crunched under our make-shift sleeping bags, and the ground separated from itself and formed cracks that were an inch wide. Aunt Sis insisted that if I didn’t “eat up” I might slip through one of those cracks and fall all the way to China.

“Eating up” was a big deal for Aunt Sis who had a hefty appetite and weighed in at about 200 pounds. She had sized me up as a picky eater right away and was confident that her cooking would get me to clean my plate and thus save all the orphans in Korea from starving.

Aunt Sis always whirled into our quiet world of country cooking touting citified trends. On one visit, for example, she had insisted that all the adults drink their coffee from soup bowls, which was, she said, all the rage in Chicago. Of course, she was 50 years ahead of the times, anticipating the gigantic coffee cups that would one day dominate coffee houses all over the country. But in the 1950s, on a Kentucky farm, drinking coffee from a soup bowl looked goofy.

The summer I was six, however, she was fixated on pink potato salad. Yes. Pink. Her recipe, mercifully, has been lost, but I assume she mixed red food coloring with vegetable oil to come up with a slimy dressing that turned the mess of potatoes—pink.

Never given to moderation in anything she did in life, Aunt Sis served pink potato salad at noon to the work hands who came to help us with the hay and tobacco. She

took it to the Methodist potluck. And she made it for us nearly every night for supper.

My family—still scarred by their memories of hunger in The Great Depression—was one to make do and not complain about what they had to eat. And so, they dutifully ate pink potato salad throughout the hot July and into the sweltering days of August. One evening, my grandfather was reaching for a second helping—he was in a big way finishing up the telling of a good story—when my father politely interrupted him to ask, “Does anyone else think the potato salad tastes a little different tonight?”

After it was called to our attention, we all agreed, that yes, it did taste different, sort of whangy and bitter. It definitely had a back taste. My aunt insisted that we were all crazy. She’d prepared the recipe just the way she always did. To prove her point, she reached under the sink and pulled out the bottle of vegetable oil that she’d used. (I should mention here that I suspect Aunt Sis suffered from the early onset of cataracts that plagues my family.)

Mother gasped. “You used that? But that’s degreaser that I bought at the Stanley Party to clean the oven with!”

Daddy gagged. One of the cousins began to sob. My grandfather choked and then shouted, “You’ve poisoned us! You’ve killed us!” And he stumbled to the back porch to throw up.

Afterwards, we were never sure how long Aunt Sis had mistakenly substituted degreaser for vegetable oil. Someone thought that the potato salad had tasted a little odd on Monday. Another said it had tasted odd from the outset.

If there’s a moral to this story, I am not sure what it is. However, it would be my aunt’s last long “stay” with us. Ditto for the cousins. My mother refused to attend a Stanley Party ever again. And the drought ended with a monsoon in early September when we were trying to cut tobacco and get it into the barn.

But now you know why I don’t eat potato salad if I can help it.

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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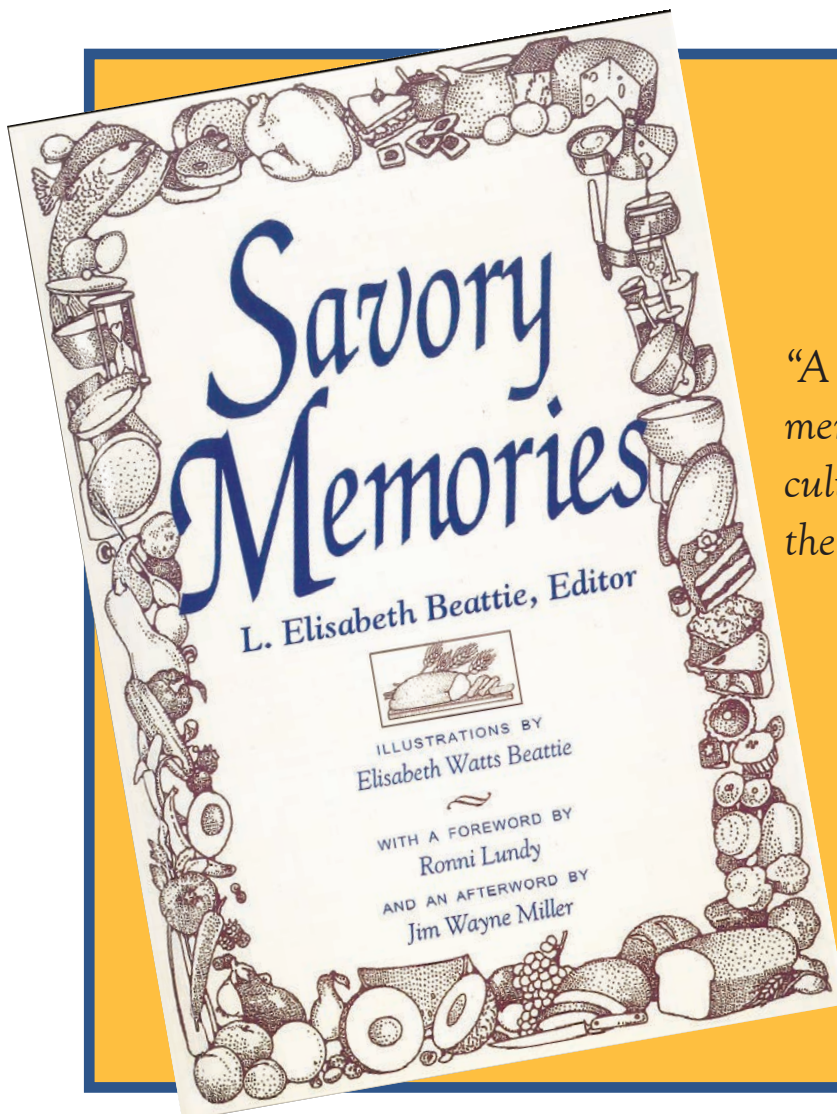
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