FORTY YEARS, FORTY STORIES

The Battle of Winchester
Backstage at BackStory
Watermen of the Chesapeake
A Community Confronts its Past
In 1974, I traveled the length and breadth of the Commonwealth—from Norfolk to Abingdon, from Northern Virginia to Farmville—to conduct community forums about the humanities and public life. I asked people what they thought of the humanities, what issues they thought were most pressing in Virginia, and what sorts of humanities programs they might like to see.

I certainly did not know that by posing such questions, I was engaging in what was to be my life’s work.

These gatherings came as part of the creation of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, and I’ve spent the last forty years shaping VFH into an organization that responds to the needs and ideas of Virginians by exploring the state’s extraordinary histories, cultures, and stories. Our efforts take many different forms now—websites, radio productions, digital editing and publication, festivals, conferences, institutes for teachers—but our purpose has remained the same: through scholarship and dialogue, we explore the past to discover our future.

In 2014–2015, we presented the history of VFH in the online series “Forty Years, Forty Stories.” Our hope was to give a sense of the various ways Virginians and VFH programs continue to pose important questions and foster appreciation and understanding of the value of the humanities. If you’ve followed along, we hope you’ve enjoyed the series and learned more about our work, and Virginia.

The imperative to tell “untold” stories has been a driving force for VFH. In the beginning, we focused on the history and cultural contributions of women and African Americans in Virginia. Our focus on African Americans has only deepened over the decades, with more than 150 VFH programs in the last year and a half alone illuminating aspects of the African American experience in Virginia. In 1987 we made a commitment to telling the stories of Virginia Indians, which led to a VFH grant that supported the first meeting of the then eight state-recognized Indian tribes since the 1600s. Our attention to these stories has been unwavering. Now in the twenty-first century, we are widening our lens to keep pace with a rapidly diversifying Commonwealth, with nearly 1 million foreign-born Virginians among our vast constituency.

Our way of learning about and telling these stories is also unique. Encyclopedia Virginia and programs by the Virginia Center for the Book, for example, take great care in connecting with K–12 student and teacher audiences. We are the only U.S. humanities council that produces radio programs, which are an especially effective tool for bringing the work of scholars to the general public. The relevance of radio in the digital age is unquestionable—BackStory with the American History Guys alone has registered more than 9 million downloads.

Our grant program, meanwhile, has helped to fund projects ranging from the film Down in the Old Belt: Voices from the Tobacco South (2005) to the book Lost Communities of Virginia (2011). It has helped make possible oral histories about segregation-era Virginia and the establishment of the Nottoway Tribe of Virginia Community House and Interpretive Center, in Southampton County. Through such grants, VFH often finds creative ways to bring scholars and communities together—always asking questions, finding ways to use the humanities.

As we look to the next forty years of VFH, our work seeks to illustrate the great importance of the humanities at a time when many say they are under attack. As one of our Virginia Arts of the Book Center broadsides powerfully states, the humanities are our human ties. The “Forty Years, Forty Stories” series has shown that this is true in myriad ways. We hope you agree—and join us in a commitment to the humanities, a critical tool for shaping a more promising future in Virginia and beyond.

Robert C. Vaughan III
President
EXPLORE THE PAST, DISCOVER THE FUTURE

Virginia Foundation for the Humanities connects people and ideas to explore the human experience and inspire cultural engagement.
Virginia 22204: “This is What Peace Looks Like”

The Columbia Pike community symbolizes what America has become and is becoming … and perhaps the face of the world too.

One for the Books: A Vision and its Legacy

In two decades, the Virginia Festival of the Book has gone from a booklover’s vision to a mainstay of the Charlottesville literary scene.

Inside Story

A collaboration between Encyclopedia Virginia and Google allows the public to tour Virginia historic sites without leaving home.
Flory Jagoda’s Accordion

A very special instrument, a seventy-five-year-old Hohner Student III accordion, got new life as a result of the Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program.

Backstage at BackStory

You’ve heard the American History Guys. Now meet the fresh and funny team behind their award-winning radio show.
ABOVE Raleigh Seamster, program manager of Google Earth Outreach, photographs the exterior of Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest in Lynchburg in collaboration with Encyclopedia Virginia. Photo by Peter Hedlund.
Driving South through the early morning fog on Route 29—it was the autumn of 2013—Matthew Gibson yawned and took a sip of coffee. “They want us in and out before the first tour starts,” he said, referring to the staff of Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest, the former president’s retreat near present-day Lynchburg. Gibson is the editor of Encyclopedia Virginia (EV), an online project of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. As part of a collaboration with Google, the EV team was on its way to train on the company’s Street View technology, learning how to capture the interiors of historic sites in Virginia.

“The encyclopedia launched at the end of 2008,” Gibson said, “and the idea was to provide an authoritative resource on the history and culture of the Commonwealth.” It has gone a long way toward accomplishing that in the years since, publishing just under 1,000 entries and nearly 600 primary documents, as of autumn 2015. Topics covered so far include Virginia Indians, colonial Virginia, slavery, the Civil War and Reconstruction, twentieth-century history, and literature.

Encyclopedia Virginia is a work-in-progress, but if you visit the site you’ll find entries on everyone from John Smith and Pocahontas to Robert E. Lee and Elizabeth Van Lew, from the fugitive slave Henry Box Brown to the civil rights attorney Oliver W. Hill. You’ll find broad subject entries, such as ones on the Civil War in Virginia and colonial Virginia, and entries that really drill down. For instance, you can read about Confederate morale, the experience of women during the Civil War, and so-called black Confederates. You’ll also find fascinating entries on the Starving Time (did hungry English colonists really feast on one another?) and gift-exchange practices among Virginia Indians (did ignorance on the subject forever end Spain’s claim on Virginia?).

According to Gibson, the entries are written and vetted by scholars and fact-checked in order to ensure they are accurate and reflect up-to-date scholarship. “What’s really important, though, is that they’re accessible,” Gibson said. “These entries are not about historians talking to each other. They’re about historians talking to the public. We want this resource to be useful to as broad an audience as possible.”

Many of EV’s entries are complemented by primary documents. The encyclopedia’s entry on Sally Hemings, for example, contains links to nearly all of the critical documents—letters, newspaper reports, memoirs, wills, even a DNA report—related to her life and her alleged relationship with Thomas Jefferson. “This is what history should be,” Gibson said. “Looking at the sources for yourself and seeing where the facts actually come from.”

And, of course, the encyclopedia features thousands of media objects. In addition to audio clips and newsreel footage, there are high-resolution images like the one of a piece of Civil War-era hardtack. This is the rock-hard, digestively unfriendly biscuit that Union and Confederate soldiers carried with them to eat, and readers who zoom in on this particular image will find a 200-year-old bug curled up in the top right-hand corner. “Oh man, teachers love this one!” Gibson said. “I mean, they love the documents, too, and all that stuff. But there’s nothing like a bug to get your kids into what you’re doing.”

The trip to Poplar Forest was the result of a number of initiatives at the encyclopedia all coming together at once. The project’s programmer, Peter Hedlund, explained that one of EV’s top priorities has always been to stay on the cutting edge of Internet technology. “We want to give users a really cool experience when using our site,” he said. “It’s more
Encyclopedia Virginia staff have published more than a dozen virtual tours of historical sites in Virginia, including:

Anne Spencer House and Garden Museum, Lynchburg
Bacon’s Castle, Surry
Virginia State Capitol, Richmond
Edgar Allan Poe Museum, Richmond
Francis Lightfoot Lee’s Menokin, Warsaw
Governor’s Mansion, Richmond
Gunston Hall, Lorton
Historic Christ Church, Lancaster County
James Madison’s Montpelier, Orange
James Monroe’s Ash Lawn-Highland, Charlottesville
John Marshall House, Richmond
L’Hermione, Lafayette’s reconstructed frigate, Port of Alexandria
Mary Washington House, Fredericksburg
Patrick Henry National Memorial, Brookneal
Patrick Henry’s Scotchtown, Beaverdam
Slave Dwelling, Cedar Run
Slave Dwelling at Clemont Farm, Berryville
Slave Dwelling, Stafford County
Smith’s Fort Plantation, Surry
St. John’s Church, Richmond
Thomas Jefferson’s Poplar Forest, Lynchburg
Woodrow Wilson’s Birthplace and Museum, Staunton

In August 2015, EV and Google hosted a conference at VFH, Mapping the Humanities, that instructed participants in how to use Google mapping technology to advance the missions of their nonprofits.
than just having fact-checked content. It’s about how that content can be presented in dynamic and innovative ways.” He pointed to the way in which the dates and locations mentioned in an entry can, with the click of a link, be plotted on a map. In 2011, Hedlund traveled to Google’s campus in Mountain View, California, to learn more about mapping, and from there a collaboration began.

“They were starting to use their Street View feature to photograph indoors,” Hedlund said. “People can take virtual tours of historic sites, and we thought that would be perfect for the encyclopedia.”

“We were already doing a section of content on Thomas Jefferson,” Gibson interjected, “and we had a great entry on Poplar Forest. Once we get these photographs today, we can embed them in the entry so that our readers can take a virtual tour of the home. I mean, how cool is that?”

“We’re learning the equipment today,” Hedlund said, “but once we’ve got the hang of it, we’ll be able to go out and find those lesser-known sites, the ones where Google hasn’t already collected Street View images.”

Gibson and Hedlund emphasized that initiatives like these are what set Encyclopedia Virginia apart. “We really try to bring the whole Commonwealth together into this resource,” Gibson said, taking another gulp of coffee. “I just wish we didn’t have to get up so early to do it!”

“... They’re about historians talking to the public. We want this resource to be useful to as broad an audience as possible.”

READ the full version of this article, by Brendan Wolfe, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To EXPLORE the encyclopedia, visit EncyclopediaVirginia.org.
IF YOU WANT TO EXPERIENCE the highest concentration of ethnic and cultural diversity in Virginia, walk the 3.5-mile stretch of State Route 244 that runs through Arlington from the Fairfax line east to the Pentagon. This road, known today as Columbia Pike and before that as the Washington Gravel Turnpike, was conceived by an act of Congress in 1810 and later built on top of an existing cow path. The first section was paved in 1928.

Over the past dozen years, Lloyd Wolf, Paula Endo, Mimi Xang Ho, Duy Tran, Aleksandra Lagkueva, and the other photographers in the Columbia Pike Documentary Project have walked this road for thousands of hours, observing and photographing it.

Wolf says this part of Virginia shows “what America has become and is becoming … and perhaps the face of the world too … this is what Peace looks like.”

VFH began engaging with the Columbia Pike Documentary Project in 2002 with a grant to support publication of a book called Portraits from the Pike. It continued through two additional grants, made between 2007 and 2009 to the Urban Alternatives Foundation and the Columbia Pike Revitalization Organization.

These grants supported hundreds of hours of photo-documentation and scores of interviews with Pike residents, leading to an exhibit and community forum on the Pike’s future, held in 2010. They also helped lay the groundwork for the 2015 publication of Living Diversity, a book that records a community once again on the cusp of profound change.

As late as the 1960s, the Pike and the chain of neighborhoods that borders it were still a largely white, middle-class enclave. It has since attracted new immigrants from every part of the world. This shift began in the mid-1970s with the end of the war in Southeast Asia and the influx of refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Latinos began arriving in large numbers in the 1980s, followed in the ’90s by refugees and immigrants from East Asia and the Middle East. Today, the communities of the Pike include people from Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Pakistan, Mongolia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Ukraine, Egypt, Azerbaijan, and many other nations.

What happened along Columbia Pike is a harbinger, some say, a window into the future of America. But another change is coming too. The end has not yet been written, but the forces of redevelopment—gentrification, as it’s sometimes called—are swiftly transforming, once again, the cultural landscape of this place.

For now, and for perhaps a little longer, the Pike remains one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse places on the planet, and much of the built landscape there still looks much the way it did in 1959 or 1972. But you can also sense the fragility of these visual connections to the past and of the “living diversity” that has defined the soul of Columbia Pike for more than forty years. You can see it in the new apartment buildings, the upscale restaurants, and shopping complexes that are springing up everywhere.

It may not be long, in other words, before one of the most immigrant-rich places in the country—The World in a Zip Code, according to a 2001 report by the Brookings Institution—can’t sustain this level of diversity anymore, or any longer be like the fertile delta in a vast river system of migration, a place where all the cultures of the world flow together and where—in Wolf’s words again—“the diversity kinda works.”

In the summer of 2014, VFH began a multiyear, statewide effort to explore the nature of community, tradition, family, and personal identity through the lens of food. The Food & Community project was launched in Arlington, not far from the Pike, and more than half the participants in the launch event were themselves first-generation immigrants. Several had been involved in documenting the Pike community since the days of Portraits from the Pike.

This focus on Food & Community was inspired in part by Columbia Pike and by the diversity of cultures concentrated there. The same is true of another VFH-sponsored effort—a partnership with Arlington County Public Schools—to engage local teachers and the Arlington community in a focused exploration of Latino immigration in the United States. And the same is also true of the book Living Diversity, which is being distributed by the University of Virginia Press and used by communities throughout Virginia as they too experience changes brought about by immigration and migration.

Change has been a constant in the story of Columbia Pike since the 1970s, and a different kind of change is coming. But for now, the Pike still throbs with life, showing Virginia and the rest of the world how the challenges of diversity in the twenty-first century can be met.

READ the full version of this article, by David Bearinger, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.
“THIS IS WHAT PEACE LOOKS LIKE”

FOR MORE THAN A CENTURY, beginning in the mid-1800s, millions of pounds of some of the highest-grade cigarette tobacco in the world was grown by farmers in the Old Belt region of Virginia.

This strain of tobacco, known as “Bright Leaf,” was sold through an auction system that supported a thriving local economy, scores of farming families, and a distinctive fabric of local traditions and ways of life.

But by the 1990s, this fabric was beginning to unravel. Demand for tobacco in the United States was in steep decline, global markets were changing, and tobacco farming was being sustained by a federal system of price-supports and acreage allotments that had been in place since the Great Depression.
Beginning in 1999, VFH awarded a series of grants to support a documentary film by the Roanoke-based cultural geographer Jim Crawford, who sought to capture this way of life as it was disappearing. The film would eventually reach millions of viewers.

Down in the Old Belt: Voices from the Tobacco South gives a Virginia face to the changes that have been taking place in agriculture and in farming communities throughout the United States since the 1980s. It was broadcast on more than 150 PBS stations in 2006.

That same year, it was awarded Best Documentary Film at the Appalachian Film Festival and commended in a Joint Resolution by the Senate of Virginia. It has since been screened at the Library of Congress and in dozens of communities across Virginia, including the city of Franklin, where it inspired a group of local citizens to begin work on a similar film about the history of peanut agriculture in the Western Tidewater region.

Gold tobacco leaves above the entrance to the State Capitol in Richmond speak to the deep connection between tobacco and the economy and political life of Virginia. In recent years, health concerns have tarnished tobacco’s image, but Down in the Old Belt is neither an indictment nor a defense.

Instead, it is an objective and compassionate look at the history of tobacco in Virginia, and at the strong links between tobacco farming and local culture. Hometown tobacco festivals and sharecropping, family ties to the land and migrant labor, curing barns and globalization are all part of the story.

At the film’s premiere at Danville Community College, the auditorium was overflowing with tobacco farmers, local civic leaders, and longtime residents: men and women, old and young, black and white. People spoke about how much it meant to them to hear their stories told.

In the end, Crawford says he came to see his work as a kind of “sacred connection” to people and their lives in the present, and through them to the deep roots of the past, the traditions that hold a community to its moorings.

One unforeseen consequence of VFH’s support for the film was the introduction it gave us to Bob Cage, a native of the Old Belt region and a world-champion tobacco auctioneer, who died in 2014. In 2007, Cage was named as a master artist in VFH’s Folklife Apprenticeship Program. Jim Crawford was his apprentice.

The film closes with original music, also by Crawford, blending Cage’s auction chant with the sound of marimbas. Just a few minutes earlier, the essence of what has happened in the Old Belt is captured in footage of a modern tobacco auction.

There is no auctioneer, no chant; the room is quiet except for the sound of footsteps, as buyers walk the rows of bales, placing their bids on handheld electronic devices.

“I’m a dinosaur now,” Cage says. “Bones.”

At the film’s premiere at Danville Community College, the auditorium was overflowing with tobacco farmers, local civic leaders, and longtime residents: men and women, old and young, black and white. People spoke about how much it meant to them to hear their stories told.

In this day and time, when a farm is sold … that land is broken up … So you change your landscape and the beauty that people talk about when they drive through Southside … Well, you’d better look while you can because I don’t know how much longer it will be here … I don’t foresee anyone else will come in behind me and farm this land. — C. D. Bryant, tobacco farmer
how religious freedom emerged as one of the pillars of our democratic republic, and how its meaning continues to be defined and redefined, even today.”

Much of Polegreen’s meaning in this respect seems to be embedded in its visual design.

So striking is Polegreen that couples choose to marry there. In the summer, Polegreen hosts live music events and barbecues. Every Easter, a congregation of Presbyterians, some standing, some seated in lawn chairs, huddle together and worship within the structure. And tourists amble through it, turning their heads this way and that, taking in its curious form.
“It calls you to look up,” says Chris Peace, executive director of the Historic Polegreen Foundation. “When you are in the structure itself, you want to see what these points of the roofline are. You don’t look horizontally. You look vertically.”

In this way, the Polegreen site, which marks the foundations of an original colonial meetinghouse, helps tell the story of religious freedom and civil liberties in America. The people who built that early meetinghouse must have felt a calling, too, says Peace, when they began challenging the establishment by worshiping “according to the dictates of their own conscience.” Calling themselves the Hanover dissenters, they recruited a Presbyterian minister named Samuel Davies, who became the first non-Anglican minister in Virginia. With his help, the dissenters formed the Hanover Presbytery at Polegreen in 1755 at a time when deviating from the state-sanctioned Anglican church could result in severe penalties, including jail time and conscription.

“You know, taking a major risk of imprisonment, of fines, of social ostracization, they had to have been called to something higher,” says Peace, of the Hanover dissenters. “There was a higher purpose, whether it was based on their own faith experience or just simply a desire for greater civil liberty and freedom.”

Peace says the structure symbolizes that successful struggle. And it is that struggle for religious freedom that VFH has sought to recognize through its funding.

The Historic Polegreen Church site is open from sunrise to sunset, year-round.

READ the full version of this article and WATCH a video about the Historic Polegreen Church, produced by Pat Jarrett and Kelley Libby, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.
ABOVE  Author Kaleela Thompson at the 2011 Virginia Festival of the Book Authors Reception. Photo by Ashley Twiggs.
THE VIRGINIA FESTIVAL OF THE BOOK—the annual five-day hurrah for books, authors, and reading—is such a landmark in Virginia’s cultural landscape that it’s easy to forget it began with a few booklovers with a dream.

VFH president Rob Vaughan had envisioned such an event for decades. His model was a successful 1980 VFH conference called “The Poet in Society,” organized by the poet Gregory Orr and featuring nationally known authors in conversation at a range of venues throughout Charlottesville.

In 1994, VFH began making plans for a small festival. A community-led team—including the paper-manufacturer-turned-book-collector Calvin P. Otto, the bookstore owner Paul Collinge, and the University of Virginia’s director of program development Tom Dowd—laid the groundwork. Collinge remembers it with pleasure. “We thought it would be fun,” he told us. “Cal had just come back from an outdoor street book fair in NYC and we got to talking. I knew most of the ‘name’ local authors because of my business and I had good community contacts because of serving as a board member for local community theater Act One.”

VFH hired a part-time director to organize the event, which the host committee imagined would be composed of a dozen panels and a few dozen authors in March 1995. Once a group of local authors, volunteers, bookstores, and educational organizations put Charlottesville’s many literary connections to work, the first festival offered fifty-five events and 100 authors.

The audience followed, as did donors who helped expand festival offerings. Within five years (and with additional festival staff) more than 10,000 people began coming to festival programs each year. Within ten years, the audience grew above 20,000—an annual attendance mark in place for more than a decade. On average, attendees come from forty states and ten countries.

What makes it work? Ask twenty-one-year veteran volunteer committee chair Evette Lamka what motivates the volunteers and, to her, it’s the same reason that any attendee pays a visit. “Booklovers can’t resist meeting and hearing so many authors,” she told us. “The concentration and diversity of authors [and] books within a few days draws many people back year after year, while it attracts new people by offering a particular type of program.”

More and more people come to the Virginia Festival of the Book, buzzing about the lineup, which routinely includes a blend of prizewinners, best-sellers, and emerging voices.

At the heart of this literary March madness, as any of its supporters recognize, is a gift made possible by generous people working together. Lamka sees this as the legacy of the Virginia Festival of the Book: “I consider the Festival a gift to the community whose legacy includes young people who discover a love of reading, adult readers whose lives expand, and older readers whose retirement is enriched through Festival of the Book programs.”

The festival is a gift from many booklovers who have made it happen to more and more readers who attend each year.

READ the full version of this article, by Kevin McFadden, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To LEARN MORE about the Virginia Festival of the Book, which occurs annually in March, visit VaBook.org.
ABOVE: A fan holds copies of Kim Harrison’s books at a standing-room-only Science Fiction and Fantasy panel discussion on March 22, 2013, at the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library in Charlottesville. Photo by Pat Jarrett.

OPPOSITE TOP: The civil rights leader Rep. John Lewis (left), D-Ga., and John Carlos (center), whose Black Power salute on the podium at the 1968 Summer Olympics made him an icon, spoke with VFH president Rob Vaughan at The Paramount Theater on March 23, 2013. Photo by Pat Jarrett.

OPPOSITE BELOW: Festival audiences enjoy the program “Lives, Loves, and Literature,” featuring authors Terrence Holt, Lucinda Franks, and Carol Wall, whose husband, Dick Wall, presented on her behalf on March 19, 2015. Photo by Pat Jarrett.
IN 2004, the Fellowship Program at VFH named William M. Kelso a resident fellow. An archaeologist at Preservation Virginia, Kelso was working on his book *Jamestown, the Buried Truth*, which was published two years later by the University of Virginia Press and which for the first time brought to a wide audience critically important discoveries about colonial Virginia.

It had all begun for Kelso a decade earlier, standing alone at an unexplored Jamestown site he had frequented often in the years since he was a graduate student at the College of William and Mary. With him, he had his spade and a determination to challenge the received wisdom concerning America’s first permanent English settlement.

Had the starving colonists’ forted community been flooded over time and finally washed away by the James River, as archaeologists had long accepted? Were human remains and artifacts, therefore, lost to posterity? Kelso just didn’t believe so, and he dug.

First, he turned up fragments of early seventeenth-century ceramics. Later his team uncovered the footprint of the fort’s southern palisade, and soon began unearthing one of America’s most significant archaeological treasures—the original James Fort, completed on June 15, 1607.

Kelso and the staff of Jamestown Rediscovery continued to excavate more than 1 million artifacts connected with life at James Fort, including remains of the original fort, burial sites, and cellars. They also uncovered interior buildings, including the chapel, built in 1608, where historians believe John Rolfe married Pocahontas—a daughter of Powhatan, the paramount chief of a political alliance of Algonquian-speaking Virginia Indians.

These and other discoveries created pressure on Kelso to publish a scholarly account and analysis of the excavations. With VFH’s help, he was able to remove himself from fieldwork for the first time in many years and just write. In 2007 *Jamestown, the Buried Truth* won the Library of Virginia’s People’s Choice Award for nonfiction.

In subsequent years Kelso’s team, in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution and Colonial Williamsburg, has used forensic anthropology and archaeology to investigate the occurrence of cannibalism at Jamestown during the winter of 1609–1610, popularly known as the Starving Time. Their work—which found some evidence of the practice—was named a top-ten archaeological discovery of 2013 by *Archaeology* magazine.

READ the full version of this article, by Ann White Spencer, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.
Archaeologist Bill Kelso poses with artifacts excavated in the 1990s from the original Jamestown settlement. Photo by Paula Neely. Courtesy of Preservation Virginia.
SUE PERDUE is the director of Documents Compass at VFH. She is also one of the brains, along with Holly Shulman, behind People of the Founding Era (PFE), a remarkable online biographical database (funded by grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation) that engages what Perdue calls a prosopographical approach.

“What do you mean you’re taking them from the papers?”

“Oh, man,” she groaned. “I would say that it’s the study of whole groups of people in a time and place. In our case, these are people born between 1713 and 1815, mostly in America. We take them from the papers of the Founding Fathers, enter them into a database, and more than 25,000 entries later—well, 25,000 entries and growing, really—we’ve got a whole demographic that we can study.”

“Which is what?” we asked. “Give us your elevator pitch.”
“I mean like this,” Perdue said, and a few purposeful clicks of the keyboard later she produced a 1778 letter from George Washington’s cousin, Lund Washington, to the general, who was away fighting the British. (One can find the letter in the online edition of the Papers of George Washington, published by Rotunda, the digital imprint of the University of Virginia Press.) “We have some of our people sick,” the cousin reports from Mount Vernon, including “Ariana a child of Alice’s who I believe must Die.”

“So all the people mentioned in this letter will eventually go into the prosopography,” Perdue said, “from the general to Lund to Alice, whom we believe was enslaved. Alice is already there, in fact.”

A few more keyboard strokes: “Here we go. Lame Alice. She was listed as one of two house slaves named Alice at Mount Vernon—the other was Little Alice. There appear to be no records for a slave named Ariana, although the editors of the Washington Papers suggest that maybe this is a reference to Little Alice’s daughter Anna. We don’t know, so we guess. And the more information we put into the database, the more we can begin to clarify these identities and, more importantly, their relationships to one another.”

“You’re basically the NSA of history,” we said.

“Sorry?”

“From what we’ve read, the National Security Agency uses data not simply to track what people say but to put together whole networks of relationships. Who knows who, who talks to who. That kind of thing.”

“That’s it exactly,” Perdue said. “We’re interested in metadata. It’s easy for us to produce a short biographical sketch of Lund Washington, but what about Lame Alice? What about all the other enslaved people? We comb the historical record for references and try to obtain birth year, death year, names of children, and years of their births. With that we can begin to identify people and make connections between them. This Alice mentioned here is the same as that Alice mentioned over there. That kind of thing.”

“You’re not chasing terrorists, though.”

“No, but we’re making life a lot easier for scholars of this era.” And with that Perdue put us on the line with Gwendolyn K. White, a doctoral candidate in history at George Mason University. A former fellow at Mount Vernon, White is writing a dissertation on the people of Washington’s plantation.

“You mean a prosopography?” we asked and she laughed.

“Yes, as a matter of fact. Rather than focus on slavery or George Washington or Mount Vernon, I want to consider the whole community together in terms of how they are interacting with each other. And I want to think about Mount Vernon not just as a self-contained place but one that is connected to a larger neighborhood, to Alexandria and the tenants around them. It was part of a thriving local community.”

White saw Perdue deliver a presentation on the PFE project at a conference and asked if she could help. Beginning in 2014, she helped Perdue comb the Washington Papers for more names, more relationships, more metadata.

“I’ll be helping out, it’s true,” White told us. “But what’s more important, I think, is that I’m the kind of scholar who would use PFE. It’s going to be just a fantastic resource.”

READ the full version of this article, by Brendan Wolfe, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To LEARN MORE about Documents Compass and People of the Founding Era, visit DocumentsCompass.org.
Flory Jagoda’s ACCORDION

THERE’S A VERY SPECIAL INSTRUMENT—a seventy-five-year-old Hohner Student III accordion—that received new life as a result of VFH’s Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program. Every year, the program pairs masters and apprentices in traditional arts and crafts for a one-on-one, nine-month learning experience. In 2014, the work of two master artists intersected. Accordion maker/repairer Dale Wise took on the task of restoring a storied instrument belonging to renowned Sephardic ballad singer Flory Jagoda.

VIEW the audio-slideshow of Flory Jagoda’s story, by Kelley Libby, and other audio-visual features online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To LEARN MORE about the Virginia Folklife Program, visit VirginiaFolklife.org.
Sephardic Jewish ballad singer Flory Jagoda (right), spent days with her apprentice Aviva Chernick in her Alexandria apartment sharing stories and teaching songs. Flory’s apprenticeship with Aviva was her second; her first was with Susan Gaeta. Photo by Pat Jarrett.

Flory Jagoda escaped Bosnia with her accordion, or “harmonica” as she calls it, when the Jews were forced out at the beginning of World War II. She credits this instrument for her escape, having avoided scrutiny of her documents as she played and sang songs with fellow passengers during the train trip to Italy. Photo by Pat Jarrett.
The Battle of Winchester
VFH

Even before the official start of the sesquicentennial in 2009, VFH programs had already examined the war and its impact on Virginia in many ways. For example, in an interview with the VFH radio program With Good Reason, Jonathan A. Noyalas, professor of history and director of the Center for Civil War History at Lord Fairfax Community College, told the surprising story of how the North and South put aside many of their differences in reunions like the one at Winchester in 1883.

Because of its strategic location as a major railroad and transportation center in the northern part of the Shenandoah Valley, Winchester was considered the “gateway to the North” by both sides. Thus Winchester became the scene of several bloody battles during the war, with as many as 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers dying in or near the city. The devastation was not limited to those in uniform; Union soldiers destroyed crops, barns, and homes, thereby depriving many white and even some black Virginians of their livelihoods. “Union General [Robert] Milroy had this attitude that he needed to be extremely harsh towards the Confederate population, especially the females, because he thought the women of the South were responsible for keeping this war going,” Noyalas said. Milroy exiled more than 200 women from Winchester before he was relieved from command in Virginia in 1863.

Later in 1864, Union general Philip H. Sheridan, knowing the Valley helped supply Robert E. Lee’s armies with food and supplies, happily complied with standing orders from General Ulysses S. Grant to “eat out Virginia clear and clean.” “Sheridan is still one of those names that is still very much despised in the Shenandoah Valley,” Noyalas noted, adding that it took some families as many as twenty years to recover from the damage Union armies inflicted.

Such devastation and harsh treatment by Union occupiers understandably left many white Virginians bitter toward the North well after the conflict ended. Indeed, when Milroy returned to Winchester in 1868 to campaign on behalf of Grant, then running for president, he was jeered out of town, with locals throwing rocks and tomatoes at him. It was not until after 1876, when the military occupation of the South ended, that white Virginians’ attitudes began to soften.

(Military occupation of Virginia ended in 1870.) By the 1880s, they had “come to the realization that they had to put the painful memories of the past behind them,” Noyalas said.

At the same time, Union veterans started returning to the South for reunions and to dedicate monuments on old battlefields. There was “initially a lot of anxiety” about how they would be received in the South, especially in the Valley, Noyalas said. To their great surprise, however, they were not only treated well but welcomed back in Winchester.

On September 19, 1883—the nineteenth anniversary of the Third Battle of Winchester—Union veterans returned to pay homage to their fallen comrades. They were greeted by between 3,000 and 4,000 people at the Winchester train station. Confederate veterans and civilians alike greeted them with banners, band music, and cheers. Union veterans returned the favor. After honoring their own dead in the national cemetery, the northerners also crossed the street to lay flowers and pray over the Confederate dead.

Noyalas noted that this remarkable event in Winchester and others like it across the former Confederacy were important for national reconciliation between northern and southern whites. According to some historians, such reunions were part of a larger social and political phenomenon that emphasized white reconciliation over black empowerment, often even obstructing black empowerment.

Still, Noyalas notes that while Union soldiers did “important work militarily” in defeating Confederate general Jubal A. Early in 1864, “their most significant work, I feel, was in the 1880s. They were reuniting the nation by their actions.”

READ the full version of this article, by Will Kurtz, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To HEAR the With Good Reason interview with Noyalas, visit WithGoodReasonRadio.org/episode/civil-war-reconciliation.

OPPOSITE Sheridan’s Final Charge at Winchester by Thure de Thulstrup (ca. 1886). Courtesy of Library of Congress.
1 Introducing the “Forty Years, Forty Stories” Series
2 Inside Story
3 Virginia 22204: “This Is What Peace Looks Like”
4 The Old Belt Enters the New Era
5 The Ghost Church at Polegreen
6 One for the Books
7 VFH Fellowship Program Helps Archaeologist Dig Deeper
8 Relationship Mapping
9 Flory Jagoda’s Accordion
10 Winchester’s Civil War
11 Backstage at BackStory
12 A Conversation with Karenne Wood
13 Watermen of the Chesapeake
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15 Shakespeare’s American Home
16 Letters About Literature: Finding Ourselves in Books
17 A Conversation with Laura Ortiz
18 Steamboat Era Museum
19 The Dry Rub of History
20 The Music of Coal
21 Crooked Road Recordings
22 Kickstarting a Passion for Books
23 A Conversation with Edwin B. Henderson
24 Charlottesville
25 Forest
26 Columbia Pike
27 South Boston
28 Mechanicsville
29 Charlottesville
30 Jamestown
31 Mount Vernon
32 Charlottesville
33 Winchester
34 Dumfries
35 Williamsburg
36 Newport News
37 Norfolk
38 Staunton
39 Chantilly
40 Arlington
41 Irvington
42 Farmville
43 Big Stone Gap
44 Abingdon
45 Sweet Briar
46 Falls Church

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A Flower Flourishes in Harrisonburg
HARRISONBURG
In an effort to promote a multicultural American literary canon, VFH was an early underwriter of the dynamic Furious Flower Poetry Conference.

Virginia Rhythms: National Treasures Among Us
FAIRFAX STATION
Few states have yielded as many National Heritage Fellows as Virginia. The Virginia Folklife Program plays an increasing role in seeing that many Virginians receive the NEA’s highest honor.

Viva Voce Voting in Alexandria
ALEXANDRIA
VFH Fellow Don DeHats examines nineteenth-century voting records in this remarkable digital humanities project, which seeks to unlock the social logic of past politics.

Discovering New Spaces: The Creation of the Slavery Images Database
CHARLOTTESVILLE
The only Fellow to hold the position of Senior Scholar at VFH, historical anthropologist Jerome Handler demonstrates how an individual passion can create new spaces for viewing and interacting with the humanities.

Invisible Thread: The Story of Peanuts in Western Tidewater
SOUTHERN TIDEWATER
A series of VFH grants has supported the development of a documentary film exploring the history of peanuts in Virginia.

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A series of VFH grants has supported the development of a documentary film exploring the history of peanuts in Virginia.
The conversation was fast and furious and veered from mastodons roaming the American West in the eighteenth century (or so Thomas Jefferson mistakenly thought) to the Beverly Hillbillies’ oil fortune. We were backstage, so to speak, at BackStory with the American History Guys, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities’ engaging weekly radio show and podcast that, as of December 2015, is broadcast on public radio in thirty-two states. A group of young, vibrant producers sat around a horseshoe-shaped table for their weekly pitch meeting. They began by critiquing their previous show on extinction (“I wish we could have retained the caterpillar,” one producer lamented, while another waxed poetic about the segment on the snail darter), and then they batted around ideas for future shows (the May 2015 show about oil is where the TV hillbillies came in).

Listening to the show one might think, what’s the big deal? You take three distinguished, erudite “history guys” who can cover the territory—professors Peter Onuf, a scholar of the eighteenth century; Ed Ayers, an expert on the nineteenth century; and Brian Balogh, a historian of the twentieth century—put them in a recording studio together, and just let them riff on any given subject.

Not exactly.

The shows have to be carefully thought out, researched, and structured before any of the hosts even enter the recording booth. That’s where the talented staff comes in. They suggest possible topics—a current list includes everything from “boredom” to “magic and superstition”—discuss the ideas with the hosts, and then start from the ground up. In-depth research is done on each idea: So how did boredom in the eighteenth century differ from boredom in the nineteenth century? Did the notion even exist back then? Staff members then track down experts to be interviewed on-air. The hope is that the interviewee will be a “good talker,” that is, not pedantic, or, worse yet, boring—even if he or she has to talk about boredom. Potential guests are pre-interviewed to make certain they can convey complicated ideas in a comprehensible way. Because that is the point: this is a show designed for the public, so it must be accessible.
ABOVE BackStory’s twentieth-century History Guy, Brian Balogh, in the VFH Radio studios in Charlottesville to record a show on the history of meat in America. Photo by Pat Jarrett.
ABOVE History Guys Brian Balogh (left), Ed Ayers (right), and Peter Onuf (video chatting in) record the show. Photo by Pat Jarrett.

BELOW BackStory senior producer Andrew Parsons (right) and technical director Jamal Millner in the control room. Photo by Pat Jarrett.
Each show consists of roughly half a dozen segments, covering different aspects of a single topic, and all of them have to be woven together with a narrative thread. Transitions have to be seamless. Sometimes that means a producer must reel in a host who inadvertently wanders off topic in the recording studio, or cut an extraneous pun or two. The guys are hilarious, and the joking among them is completely unrehearsed. There is an easy camaraderie and energy among the three scholars that is an important ingredient in the show’s success. The listener is entertained, even while being fed dollops of fascinating information.

Tony Field, the savvy founding senior producer of BackStory, came to VFH in 2008 from On the Media, an award-winning NPR radio show based in New York City. Interviewed before he departed in 2015 to seek out new challenges, Field marveled at how BackStory manages to merge various production techniques into a single hour as the hosts interact with one another and with guests, as well as handling on-air questions from the audience. The public is encouraged to be part of the creative process by suggesting show topics and asking on-air questions. Field referred to the questions as “raw material for us to historicize.” The goal, he said, is to “give people new ways of thinking about the world.” When the show moved from monthly to weekly broadcasts in 2013, the staff grew as well.

Andrew Parsons, the program’s new senior producer, worked with a variety of public radio outlets, including Marketplace and NPR's newscast division, before coming to BackStory. The Syracuse University alum, who attended Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, says that “right now is a really exciting time at BackStory. We’re maintaining our core audience but also gaining so many new listeners from the rising popularity of podcasts.” Backing Parsons up are senior editor Brigid McCarthy; associate producers Nina Earnest, Kelly Jones, and Emily Gadek; and technical director Jamal Millner.

BackStory's creator is Andrew Wyndham, who served as executive producer of the show and director of media programs until December 2015. He retired after forty years with VFH and remains involved in BackStory as an advisor. Beginning with his dream of showcasing the intellectual dynamism of the three scholars “in a way that would win hearts and minds,” Wyndham worked with them for two years, creating pilot shows, raising funds, and then hiring a full-time staff. The producers experimented for four months before releasing a program that was broadcast on one lone station—WVTF public radio in Roanoke—in June 2008. BackStory has taken off since then, moving into major radio markets across the nation, with the staff now measuring podcast downloads against each new milestone of millions. (The show hit the 9 million mark in December 2015.) The show is costly, but Wyndham has proved especially adept at raising funds from various sources, such as the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation, the University of Virginia, the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, the Tomato Fund of the Community Foundation of Richmond, History Channel, and a number of private donors. The latter include one extremely generous Anonymous Donor, who is always referred to with capital letters.

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The “American History Guys” are the stars of the show, but as Wyndham points out, “without someone who can put it together we don’t have anything.” Pulling back the curtain, we were able to get a glimpse of the weekly marathon of work—the countless hours of pre-show preparation, the eight to twelve hours spent recording each show, and then the painstaking process of editing it down to a crisp hour. Wyndham praises the staff for its “incredible energy, commitment, and creative ability.”

He might also have mentioned their stamina.

READ the original version of this article, by Donna Lucey, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To LEARN MORE about BackStory, visit BackStoryRadio.org.
A CONVERSATION WITH

KARENNE WOOD

“I GREW UP KNOWING I WAS INDIAN, AND THAT WAS A PRETTY NEBULOUS IDENTITY,” says Karenne Wood, a member of the Monacan Indian Nation and director of the Virginia Indian Programs at VFH. “I think by and large we have neglected the Native peoples’ stories and the more recent story of immigration to the United States by people who are often indigenous.” As a poet and linguistic anthropologist, Wood recognizes the nuances of and implicit messages in everyday language and the inextricable ties between historical narrative and cultural identity. She spoke to us about the important work she does for VFH, her systemic approach to revising the flawed histories of Virginia Indian cultures, and her vision for the future of the program.

VFH: How did you become involved with VFH? What was the impetus for developing the Virginia Indian Programs?

WOOD: I became involved with VFH first as a grantee, when I worked with the Monacan Nation as a grant writer and tribal historian. VFH was the first organization to ask us to tell our stories as experts on our own community. The Virginia Indian Programs developed out of an earlier project, the Virginia Indian Heritage Trail. Native people perceived a need to correct misperceptions and stereotypes and had a desire to send tourists and others to sites with accurate interpretive programs and exhibits. We developed that project over several years and published our guidebook. The funds for the Virginia Indian Programs came from the General Assembly the first year as a legacy of the 2007 commemoration of Jamestown.

VFH: How are Virginia Indians characterized by mainstream culture today?

WOOD: They are characterized as people of the past. If you see an Indian they have to be wearing a leather outfit, and we don’t expect that of any other group of people anymore. Virginia was a leader in the enactment of policy at the state level, like the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 and the Sterilization Act of 1924. During that era, the Smithsonian contacted Walter Plecker [the head of the Virginia Bureau of Vital Statistics and a eugenicist] and said, “Tell us about your tribes.” He said, “There aren’t any real Indians in Virginia.” It is still typical for people to say, “Oh, I had no idea there were Indians living in Virginia.”

VFH: What are some important revisions you have made to state public-school curricula to help dispel these stereotypes?

WOOD: I worked with two textbook publishers, including the publisher of one that was adopted by almost every county in Virginia. What we found was a language that was characterized by the past tense. Everything goes back to that moment of contact, Native people as sort of wild animals who interacted with the land without human genius or agency. So we changed that, and we made Powhatan a more important figure than Pocahontas, who was the only named person who was doing anything—saving John Smith. We made a real point of saying, there is a past-to-present story, and the past goes back 18,000 years. It does not begin in 1607, and there is no vanishing into the mist after that.

VFH: Do you have resources for teachers?

WOOD: We spend a lot of time developing resources that are accessible to teachers. We also work with the Virginia Department of Education, which has a really extensive website called Virginia’s First People. We’ve been through all of that language and developed our own guide for teachers, which is available on our website. We also organize VINSHE, the Virginia Indian Nations Summit on Higher Education, which brings tribal representatives together to talk about issues of shared concern, curriculum development, and how to increase student enrollment.

VFH: In 2013, in collaboration with Encyclopedia Virginia, you launched the Virginia Indian Archive, a digital collection
of images, documents, and audiovisual resources representing the history and cultural experiences of Virginia Indians. How does that archive allow people to access information about indigenous cultures in a new way? Do you find that Virginia Indian families are sometimes reluctant to share their personal cultural artifacts?

WOOD: The archive allows Virginia Indians and others to access historic photos and documents that are publicly available but not always easy to find, gathered in one place and searchable using various keywords. It allows people to view primary source materials and collections that were previously available only in library or other institutional collections. Virginia Indians feel, justifiably, that many researchers and other professionals have come into their communities to take, and they’ve given back very little. Often the results of their work have been used in ways the Native people never envisioned. Sometimes that work has resulted in negative experiences for the Native people. They are therefore sometimes hesitant to share personal artifacts with strangers or the general public.

VFH: What do you see as the future of the Virginia Indian Programs?

WOOD: The Virginia Indian Programs will continue to help redress the historical omission of Native peoples from the story of Virginia and our nation in general, continually adding to our shared understanding of who we are, and it will ultimately reach into new communities of indigenous people as well, illuminating the experiences of immigrants as well as those whose ancestors first shaped the land we now call Virginia.

READ the full version of this article, by Anna Kariel, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories. To EXPLORE the Virginia Indian Archive, visit VirginiaIndianArchive.org.
Hobie Gibbs learned net mending from his father. Gregory Lee went to sea with his dad, a trawler captain, when he was six years old. Carol Hogge harvests oysters out of Deep Creek Wharf in Newport News, working alongside her husband on a boat named for her.

These men and women and hundreds of others like them are part of a long line of Virginians who draw their livelihoods from the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries. They are part of a story that reaches back to the earliest days of the Virginia colony and beyond.

In 2008, the photographer Glen McClure set out to create an intimate, composite portrait of the watermen and women of the Chesapeake. He visited nineteen bay communities, most of them in Virginia, photographing scores of working watermen in many sectors of Virginia’s seafood industry.

In June 2010, the VFH Grants Program awarded funding to the Mariners’ Museum, in Newport News, to support an exhibit based on McClure’s photographs. The exhibit and an accompanying book publication were titled *Endangered Species: Watermen of the Chesapeake*.

The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in North America, with seemingly inexhaustible harvests of rockfish, clams, scallops, blue crabs, and the iconic Chesapeake Bay oyster. This bounty sustained families and bay communities for generation after generation, but for the past fifty years, the bay has been in trouble.

It’s a region of intense human activity—farming, shipping, manufacturing, sprawling land development, and a rapidly growing human population. Pollution from farms and cities, waves of new development, overharvesting, disease, and other factors, including climate change and sea-level rise, have diminished the bay’s health and placed enormous pressure on its resources.

These changes have served Virginia’s watermen a bitter cocktail of declining fin and shellfish stocks, increasing state and federal regulation, strict quotas, and low market prices—partly as a consequence of globalization—that threatens the livelihoods and traditions that define the Chesapeake Bay region.

Some watermen whose families have worked on the bay for generations are getting out of the business altogether; others are taking jobs on the mainland and working the water part-time. Those who remain are hanging on as best they can. Fewer and fewer young people are choosing the hard work, long hours, and uncertainty that come with life on the water.

But there’s another side to the story too. It’s the side that keeps the men and women in McClure’s photographs, and many others like them, coming back to the water and to the wharves year after year.

Some say it’s the independence that comes from self-reliance. Some say it’s the beauty of a sunrise or a rainsquall moving across the water, or an overflowing crab-pot. Most can’t explain the reasons and wouldn’t bother to try: it’s just what they know.

The story of the Chesapeake Bay watermen is as complex as the ecosystem of the bay itself, and McClure’s portraits of Virginia’s watermen reflect this complexity. There’s nothing nostalgic or romanticized about the lives pictured in these photographs. But they do convey a deep respect for the work they depict and the dignity and individuality of those who do it.

In the book’s preface, McClure says it this way: “I try to be straightforward, honest, and observant, looking for details that might offer insight about the subject, things that perhaps most folks would not notice.”

Thanks to his work and to the Mariners’ Museum, which was instrumental in bringing this work to a broad public audience, we can all see the faces of this essential Virginia story, a story that reaches far back into our collective history and is still unfolding before our eyes.

READ the full version of this article, by David Bearinger, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.
IN 1982, THE VFH GRANTS PROGRAM awarded funding to the Virginia Women’s Cultural History Project. The initiative—led by Lynda Johnson Robb, then the First Lady of Virginia, and Helen Bradshaw Byrd—was determined to recognize the unsung heroines of the Old Dominion.

Robb traveled the state in support of the project. “I began by asking audiences to name ten famous Virginia women,” she said in an interview. What she found was that most people could name only two or three—Martha Washington, Dolley Madison, Pocahontas. The silence that followed made clear that Virginia’s foremothers had been forgotten.

It wasn’t for a lack of historical significance, either. Women have been essential to Virginia from the beginning. Virginia Indian women foraged, cooked, farmed, and sometimes served as chiefs. The English colony, meanwhile was named for a woman: Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen. Enslaved, indentured, and free women bore and raised children, nursed the sick, and performed life-sustaining labor in often grueling conditions. They helped lay the foundations of Virginia as we know it today. As evidence of this, project historian Dr. Suzanne Lebsock cites a “moment of insight” from the proceedings of the General Assembly in 1619: “In a newe plantation, it is not known whether man or woman be the most necessary.”

In 1984, the project mounted an exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, in Richmond: “A Share of Honour”: Virginia Women 1600–1945. It drew more than 65,000 visitors before moving on to the Chrysler Museum, in Norfolk, and the Roanoke Museum of Fine Arts. Curated by Kym S. Rice, the exhibit included a groundbreaking interpretive catalog by Lebsock.

The exhibit told the story of Virginia women by examining the lives of ordinary people. Rice was particularly proud of the inclusion of African-American material culture. While slave manacles and a fugitive slave advertisement served as grim reminders of slavery’s brutal past, the exhibit also highlighted women such as Maggie Lena Walker, the country’s first female bank president.

“It was a great thing to work on a project that so many people warmed to in different ways,” Rice said, “including people who would never describe themselves as feminists but yet were very proud of their female ancestors and what they had done.”

After the exhibit closed in 1985, VFH established an endowment to award competitive grants for research and public programs on women in Virginia.

READ the full version of this article, by Anna Kariel, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.
OPPOSITE LEFT Maternity Dress. Blue satin, 1804. Valentine Richmond History Center. Photo by Katherine Wetzel. This fashionable maternity dress belonged to a female member of the Holliday family, Winchester.  

OPPOSITE RIGHT Money Belt. Cotton, Virginia, ca. 1860–1865. Valentine Richmond History Center. Photo by Katherine Wetzel. These belts, worn by women underneath their clothing, were used for smuggling currency.  

ABOVE Teacher Lucy Simms (1835–1934), standing at left, poses with her students in 1905. Her teaching career spanned a fifty-six-year period. Photo by H. Morrison, collection of Wendell Temple and Carlotta Harris.
ABOVE  Little Academe participants from Indiana Wesleyan University learn Elizabethan dance at the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton. Photo by Pat Jarrett.
SHAKESPEARE’S AMERICAN HOME

RALPH ALAN COHEN is cofounder and director of mission at the American Shakespeare Center (ASC), in Staunton, and Gonder Professor of Shakespeare and Performance and founder of the Master of Letters and Fine Arts program at Mary Baldwin College. He is the author of Shakespeare and How to Cure It: A Handbook for Teaching Shakespeare.

Cohen was project director for the building of the Blackfriars Playhouse, and he has directed thirty productions of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. He has also been director of a project funded by theVFH Grants Program. In an email interview we asked Cohen about the early days of the American Shakespeare Center and its connection to VFH.

COHEN: Our company formed in 1988, and in 1990 we were approved as a nonprofit, so we began to search for appropriate grants. As a traveling theater company, we naturally applied to arts funders and particularly to the NEA [National Endowment for the Arts] and VCA [Virginia Commission for the Arts]. No luck.

Jim [Warren, the center’s cofounder] and I were driving back from Richmond after a discouraging meeting with a potential funder, and as we were passing the first of the Charlottesville exits, I suddenly said to Jim, “I know who might give us a grant.” A few years before I had, with Brian Delaney, received a small VFH grant for a program called Film and the Political Process, and I remembered how much I enjoyed our dealings with Rob Vaughan. Two exits later we were finding our way to your offices, where we were pretty much immediately ushered in to Rob.

Rob was not the least put off by the fact that we were a theater company looking for humanities funding. He understood without the spiel that as an English professor I was all about making Shakespeare accessible beyond the stage. By the time we left his office we had conceived of a two-week seminar for high school teachers on using performance to teach Shakespeare called “Bringing Shakespeare Home.” Your office guided us through the application process, and the result was our first grant ever.

What that grant meant to us was an acknowledgment of the worth of our work for the four years previous and a new confidence and belief in our future that led to the American Shakespeare Center’s Blackfriars Playhouse. It fueled our dreams and helped us define our mission. It also gave twenty Virginia teachers, some of whom are still in touch with me, the tools to spark more interest in Shakespeare among their students. That was twenty-five years ago. I often think that, if those twenty teachers each taught just fifty students in that quarter century, that in some way the VFH through “Bringing Shakespeare Home” reached 25,000 young minds.

VFH: How important are teachers and educators to providing that critical link to Shakespeare?

COHEN: I teach a Shakespeare pedagogy class to our graduate students at Mary Baldwin. I think in the day-to-day hurly-burly of preparing classes and grading papers and dealing with one or two problem kids in a class of thirty, teachers lose sight of how much they mean to their students’ lives. So I begin the pedagogy course by having them each name the most important teacher in their lives. Then I make them write that teacher a thank-you note. For more than half of them that most important teacher is the one who introduced them to Shakespeare.
When it comes to Shakespeare, the correlation is almost one to one between how students feel about the subject and the teachers they have had. In many ways, what we are trying to do at the American Shakespeare Center is help teachers at all levels be the ones that help inspire a love of his works.

VFH: How has the vision of ASC grown over its nearly three decades?

COHEN: In 2005 we changed our name from the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express to the American Shakespeare Center. Having built the only recreation of Shakespeare’s indoor theater and established the only graduate program for the performance and teaching of Shakespeare, you could say that our vision grew from regional to national. But I think the most important change in our name is the word “Center.” We want to be more than a “theater” or a “company” or a “festival.” We want to be a center for ideas—ours and others’—about Shakespeare and theater, a center for professional development for teachers like those who came to that first VFH workshop, but also for other professionals interested in what Shakespeare can teach us about leadership and law and ethics. We want to be the place where actors want to come to experience the joy of performing these plays before audiences they can see and where their skill is the most prominent thing on display.

VFH: What do you hear most from audiences about ASC productions?

COHEN: That Shakespeare is easy and Shakespeare is fun. When I eavesdrop in our lobby I hear people say, “I understood every word” or “they must have translated it into modern English.” Of course we don’t change any words; we just have great actors perform them in a way that helps audiences get past their “ShakesFear.” They are surprised we sell wine from the stage. They are surprised that the actors talk to them and even more surprised that the script makes that seem appropriate.

VFH: Shakespeare is celebrated and produced around the world, but why is Shakespeare a particularly good fit for Virginia?

COHEN: Shakespeare has become American. At last count there are more than 200 Shakespeare companies in America devoted to Shakespeare. There aren’t twenty in England. Virginia is where Shakespeare landed in America. The people behind the founding of Jamestown were the people who went to the Blackfriars playhouse in London, while the people who founded Plymouth were the people who wanted to tear down that playhouse. Well, we’ve rebuilt that playhouse in Staunton, and a graduate program to go along with it, and a traveling troupe that takes Shakespeare from here all over the country. So as far as I can tell, Staunton is Shakespeare’s American home.

READ the full version of this article, by Kevin McFadden, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To LEARN about the Virginia Shakespeare Initiative—a 400th anniversary celebration of William Shakespeare launched by VFH, the American Shakespeare Center, Virginia Commission for the Arts, and Washington and Lee University—visit VASHakespeare.org.
LETTERS ABOUT LITERATURE IS A national reading and writing competition organized in Virginia by the Virginia Center for the Book at VFH. Students from middle through high school are asked to write a letter to any author, living or dead, about how the author’s book or poem affected them.

An affiliate of the Library of Congress, the Virginia Center for the Book works with teachers, librarians, and parents across Virginia to encourage students to participate. Winning letters in three grade levels are submitted to the national competition, and Virginia winners are invited to read at the Opening Ceremony of the Virginia Festival of the Book each March.

In 2012, eighth-grader Christine Wang, of Rocky Run Middle School, in Chantilly, wrote to Gene Luen Yang, author of the graphic novel American Born Chinese, a finalist for the 2006 National Book Award for Young People’s Literature. In the book, characters such as a Chinese American student, his Chinese cousin, and the legendary Monkey King all struggle to find their place in the world.

Wang’s letter was selected as the top Virginia entry for the seventh- and eighth-grade level.

“I am Chinese and I was born in America, but China was all I knew since the age of four,” Wang’s letter begins. “When I was ten, my family moved back to the States. The skies were blue here, and there were trees everywhere, but my life would change drastically. After those few moments of excitement, I was jolted back to reality.”

At times Wang had difficulty fitting in with her classmates and praises Yang’s book as “my handbook in my journey.” It gave “me hints and helping hands,” she wrote. “It showed me the end, where I wanted to go.”

“’I was once a girl who ran away from who she was,” Wang continued, “tripping over her feet while attempting the impossible. But I had depended too much on what others thought, not who I want to be. Thank you so much for showing me I can be whatever I want, even if I am Chinese born in America.”

Wang read her letter at the Virginia Festival of the Book in 2013. And at the 2014 National Book Festival in Washington, D.C., she even met Yang.

READ the full version of this article, by Jane Kulow, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.
ABOVE: Traditional Mexican folk dancer Laura Ortiz. Photo by Morgan Miller.
VFH: How would you describe Mexican folk dance?

ORTIZ: It’s where I came from and what my children also came from. In Mexico we dance at social events, such as religious celebrations for the state or the patron of the town, baptisms, weddings, graduations, political celebrations, or federal holidays. Mexican culture is a fusion of indigenous as well as French, Austrian, African, Spanish, even Arab cultures. The style of the dance reflects the environment that they came from. For instance, the skirts might reflect the movements of the ocean, the waves, or the palm trees, the desert, or the mountains.

VFH: How is folk dance different in Mexico than it is in Virginia?

ORTIZ: Dance is part of the curriculum in the schools in Mexico and most universities have a professional dance company. These traditions are alive and passed on from generation to generation. A lot of musicians learn through apprenticeships in the family, their relatives playing outside their home after a long day’s work. They just sit down on the porch and take their guitars out. That’s how they relax. The children learn these dances because they are breathing it and watching it.

When we do our productions in Virginia we try to recreate the environment of Mexico so people can remember what it was like, but we don’t have many of the same resources so we have to work a little bit harder. I try to talk to my daughter and my students about where these dances come from so that they can relate and have some point of reference.

READ the full version of this article, by Anna Kariel, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To LEARN MORE about the Virginia Folklife Program, visit VirginiaFolklife.org.
ABOVE: The steamboat Potomac was built in 1894 and sailed between Baltimore and Norfolk. Courtesy of the Steamboat Era Museum.

ith Good Reason
is a weekly, award-winning interview program produced by VFH Radio since 1999 and designed to draw on the expertise of faculty at colleges and universities across Virginia. Less well known, perhaps, is the way in which it also draws on the resources of VFH itself.

When VFH puts on an event, hosts a scholar, helps to fund a publication, With Good Reason is there—capturing audio, conducting interviews, and otherwise serving as VFH’s eyes and ears. Especially its ears.

In 2005, for instance, a VFH grant to the Steamboat Era Museum, in Irvington, led to an audio postcard that told the story of the economic and cultural legacy of steamboat transport and commerce on the Chesapeake Bay. A collaboration with the Virginia Folklife Program produced “Folklife Fieldnotes,” five three-minute radio segments that aired statewide in 2009 and featured folk artists from across Virginia.

In 2011, another VFH grant helped to fund the book Lost Communities of Virginia. Through photographs and interviews with residents, coauthors Kirsten Sparenborg and Terri Fisher beautifully documented the remnants of once-thriving, now bypassed towns. And with their own audio-visual expertise, the producers at With Good Reason focused on one town in particular—Pocahontas, in Southwest Virginia—and published a haunting slide show accompanied by an audio interview with Fisher.

It’s a good sign at VFH’s popular Virginia Festival of the Book when the With Good Reason producers start setting up microphones. The audio they capture is published on the festival’s website and allows book fans to enjoy more of the festival than might otherwise be possible. In addition, the show’s producers travel to conferences across Virginia, and have established a partnership since 2009 with the Furious Flower Poetry Center at James Madison University. Audio recordings of important African American women writers—the likes of Maya Angelou, Lucille Clifton, Rita Dove, Nikki Giovanni, and Toni Morrison—are now available in the With Good Reason online archive.

Not only does With Good Reason extend the reach of these events across Virginia and the world, it extends them across time by archiving them on the program’s website. And to help raise the standards of such preservation efforts, VFH is pursuing the creation of Discovery Virginia, an online archive of all of VFH’s audio-visual activities. We are now seeking financial support to professionally preserve crucial work such as that done by With Good Reason—audio postcards of the Commonwealth, of VFH, and of our times.

EXPLORE audio, visual, and written content about the Steamboat Era Museum, Lost Communities of Virginia, and the Furious Flower Poetry Center at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

To LEARN MORE about With Good Reason, visit WithGoodReasonRadio.org.
The Robert Russa Moton Museum, in Farmville, tells a difficult and complicated story. With funding and longstanding support from the VFH Grants Program, its exhibits detail the 1951 Moton High School strike, in which African American students, led by Barbara Johns, demanded better learning conditions; the subsequent lawsuit; and the Supreme Court decision three years later that required the integration of all public schools. The exhibits also explain how, through a policy dubbed Massive Resistance, white politicians in Virginia opted to shut down some public schools, such as those in Farmville and Prince Edward County, rather than desegregate them.

The Moton Museum was established in 2008 in the former high school, now designated a National Historic Landmark. Its mission is to demonstrate how all members of the community were adversely affected by these events. After all, both black and white students were denied access to public schools. Private tuition was out of reach for the majority of them, and a financial strain for others, while local businesses suffered. And this went on for five years.

In creating the museum, Lacy Ward—its director until 2014 and a former member of the VFH Board—understood that listening was key. He wanted all points of view represented, which required him to convey the same message to both the NAACP and the local Rotary Club. In fact, it was at the Rotary Club where Ward had a revelation about the myriad ways in which the community was affected. A white insurance executive spoke of the emotional impact the school closings had on him. As a young athlete, he always envied his older brother’s high school letterman’s jacket, but never received one of his own because the school was closed during his senior year. That loss still rankled him after all these years.

According to Ward, most people in the county were so ashamed at what had happened that they refused to speak about it for decades. Now there is a place where that once-buried history can be openly discussed. Ward spoke with pride about how local people were bringing their grandchildren to the museum and becoming tour guides of their own pasts. As Ward said, they want “to make sure that their history doesn’t die.”

READ the full version of this article, by Donna Lucey, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.

"Now there is a place where that once-buried history can be openly discussed."
OPPOSITE LEFT & ABOVE  The auditorium of R. R. Moton High School, in 1951 (left) and in the twenty-first century (right).  Courtesy of the National Archives Mid Atlantic Region. Photo by Taylor Dabney.  
BELOW  The interior of the museum. Courtesy of the Moton Museum.
The history of Appalachian Virginia and the lives of its people have been shaped by coal. Coal created its own culture, its own web of life and self-expression. It runs through the music of the Appalachians like a wide, dark seam.

In 2006, VFH was asked to support an ambitious effort to distill the “Music of Coal” into two CDs—forty-eight tracks with accompanying liner notes that would tell the story of coal in all its variations and complexity.

A series of grants supported research, production, and free distribution of the publication to schools and libraries, and the result shows how deeply coal and the music it inspired have penetrated into American culture.

Under the direction of coproducers Paul Kuczko and Jack Wright, an initial list of several hundred songs was narrowed down to a short list of 160, and then, through an agonizing process, to the final 48.

They cover the range. From the earliest known American recording of a mining song—recorded on cylinder in 1908—to Natalie Merchant’s 2003 performance of Florence Reece’s “Which Side Are You On?”

“Fountain Filled with Blood” blends the a cappella style of Old Regular Baptist hymn singing with the voices of the oldest Black Appalachian gospel group in Southwest Virginia, the Evangelistic Choralaires.

The Carter Family’s “Coal Miner’s Blues” is here. So are “Dark as a Dungeon,” sung by Merle Travis, who wrote it; “Coal Miner’s Boogie,” by George Davis; the Reverend Joe Freeman’s “There Will Be No Black Lung (Up in Heaven);” and Darrell Scott’s “You’ll Never Leave Harlan Alive.”

Songs by Jean Ritchie (“Black Waters,” about the effects of mechanized strip mining) and Dock Boggs (“Prayer of a Miner’s Child”) seem to rise up out of ancient ground. Others—like A. K. Mullins’ “Dyin’ to Make a Livin’,” sung by W. V. Hill and Foddershock—put a fresh twist on the irony that runs through many of these recordings, old and new.

Dale Jett, the grandson of A. P. and Sara Carter, leans into a haunting version of Billy Edd Wheeler’s “Coal Tattoo.” In “Miner’s Prayer,” the voices of Ralph Stanley and Dwight Yoakam weave together like threads of fine-spun bluegrass in a song dedicated to Yoakam’s grandfather.

Storytelling is every bit as native to the Appalachian Mountains as coal, and each of the songs in this collection tells a story. Some are dark and stained with sorrow or regret. Others sing with joy, pride, and deep attachment to the mining life.

For better and for worse, coal has left an indelible mark, a tattoo on the American psyche, and you can hear it in these songs. Their source is in the Appalachian hills, but their impact reaches far beyond.

Read the full version of this article, by David Bearinger, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories.
From the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge to the coalfields region, Southwest Virginia has always been blessed with great riches in traditional music. The Crooked Road, Virginia’s Music Heritage Trail, was formed in 2004 to help promote, support, and share the music and culture of the region. Winding through the beautiful Appalachian Mountains, the Crooked Road connects with many important historic and still-thriving sites for the creation and passing down of old time, bluegrass, and mountain gospel music.

With the generous support of the Appalachian Regional Commission, VFH’s Folklife Program produced a series of recordings featuring musicians all along the Crooked Road in 2005. The music ran the gamut from old time to bluegrass, from blues to gospel, and featured musicians making their first forays into recording as well as seasoned artists.

The fiddler Montana Young, of Bassett, then eleven years old and a participant in the VFH Folklife Apprenticeship Program, recorded with her mentor Buddy Pendleton and other prominent musicians from throughout the region. A keen ear can hear Pendleton’s unique stylings on Young’s rendition of “Florida Blues,” a tune that won Pendleton multiple fiddle championships. Young’s CD is aptly titled Fiddling Up a Storm, as a bolt of lightning blew out the power in the studio during a particularly intense number. Now in her early twenties, Young is still fiddling up a storm and credits this first recording as seminal to her fledgling career.

Pendleton, a veteran bluegrass fiddler who once toured with Bill Monroe and Joan Baez, contributed his own recording to the series, accompanied by the likes of renowned banjoist Sammy Shelor. Pendleton’s playing is legendary, as is his own personal story. Once a member of Monroe’s Blue Grass Boys, he missed his home in tiny Woolwine, and returned to begin a long career of delivering the mail and playing at local fiddlers’ conventions.

The Crooked Road CD series features artists from both ends of the Crooked Road, with healthy representation from the coalfields region. Elder Frank Newsome, a preacher at Little David Old Regular Baptist Church in Buchanan County, recorded his hair-raising a cappella hymns, sung in the Old Regular Baptist tradition. Recorded in his church on a stormy evening, with the occasional sound of a coal truck passing by, Gone Away with a Friend was instrumental in his receiving the National Heritage Fellowship, the highest honor the United States bestows upon a traditional artist.

The series includes thirteen releases in all, available to sample or purchase through our website: http://virginiafolklife.org/recording_tags/crooked-road/

Although the Crooked Road series is complete, the Virginia Folklife program has continued to produce recordings, including the 2013 Independent Music Awards Gospel Album of the Year, Maggie Ingram and the Ingramettes: Live in Richmond. A decade since the Crooked Road recordings were produced, VFH’s presence in the region continues to thrive, with Virginia Folklife field documentation, apprenticeships, and festival productions sparking connections and discoveries around Southwest Virginia’s rich music culture.

READ the full version of this article, by Jon Lohman, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories. To LEARN MORE about the Virginia Folklife Program, visit VirginiaFolklife.org.
At a time of day when many undergraduates are sleeping off an all-night study session or battling a hangover, the staff of Sweet Briar College’s Red Clay literary magazine are more than an hour’s drive from the Amherst campus, in the unassuming basement of an art supply store in Charlottesville. Wooden cases filled with heavy, lead type dominate the space, while an industrial Vandercook printing press stands in the corner. The scent of letterpress ink—somewhere between house paint and turpentine—perfumes the air. This is the Virginia Arts of the Book Center (VABC), a VFH studio and print shop where community members can study the slow arts of printmaking and bookmaking.
It might surprise you to learn that college students would voluntarily surrender their Saturday mornings to learn the centuries-old technique of letterpress printing. But the VABC internship, a semester-long series of classes taught by Charlottesville artist Josef Beery starting in 2012, soon became a regular part of Red Clay’s activities—while the young women became an integral part of the VABC community, lending their twenty-first-century savvy to help the organization secure a crowdfunding coup.

“I put it at an awkward time for them,” Beery admits with a knowing smile, but that didn’t deter students like Sally Toms. A 2013 Sweet Briar graduate who was among the first Red Clay staff members to work at the VABC, Toms was drawn in by what she calls “the magic of the VABC.” “For a lot of us, that was our first real encounter with grown-up artists who weren’t just visiting [Sweet Briar],” she said. “They were living and working just down the road from where we were. It was great to share that environment and learn from being in their presence, seeing them work and having access to the same tools that they did.” With Beery’s guidance, she and her classmates printed broadsides of poems by Sweet Briar alumni and writers at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, an artists’ retreat in Amherst.

To satisfy an arts management requirement, Toms and another student, Kaitlyn Holloway, interned with the VABC program director, Garrett Queen. They quickly became experienced in one of the most crucial components of managing a nonprofit: fund-raising. The center needed more equipment in order to serve its growing community of artists, and its workhorse, the Vandercook, was in need of repairs. So Toms, Holloway, Queen, and others submitted a project proposal to Kickstarter, a website that allows its users to discover and fund creative projects—in this case, a series of miniature books.

When the campaign ended on September 5, 2013, Kickstarter users had pledged $10,293 to the VABC—exceeding the VABC’s $6,000 goal by more than 70 percent.

Emboldened by success, in 2015 the VABC launched another Kickstarter that raised $15,086 to help tell the story of its most valuable asset—the more than 325 cases of moveable type. The VABC houses the largest collection of moveable type in the Commonwealth, and is now creating the first comprehensive specimen book—Speaking in Faces—to showcase the wealth of typefaces available for artists and interested book lovers.

Enthusiasts and artists continue to gather around the VABC, attracted not just to the lore of the book, but to a sense of community that learning how to use these printing methods provides. “What we’re doing here is maintaining a tradition,” says Queen. “The line from Gutenberg to now is absolutely clear.”

READ the full version of this article, by Caitlin Newman, online at VirginiaHumanities.org/40-Stories. To LEARN MORE about the VABC, visit VirginiaBookArts.org.
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ABOVE: The Church Crown Fashion Show drew a near-capacity crowd to the Virginia Folklife Program stage at the tenth Richmond Folk Festival on October 11, 2014. Photo by Pat Jarrett.

FRONT COVER: Fry-Jefferson map of Virginia, drawn in 1751 by surveyors and cartographers Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson (father of Thomas Jefferson); this edition published in 1755. Courtesy of Library of Virginia.
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