The Many Values of the Humanities

BY KEVIN MCFADDEN

Value. What does it mean? At first glance, it is an amount of something considered to be a suitable trade for something else, a measure that can fluctuate in a trade economy. But value can also be a fixed mark, as an assigned numeric value in math, music, or color optics. When we speak of cultural values we mean social principles or standards; a value is any shared belief considered desirable. Interestingly, this last set of values is the one most beyond precise measure.

That passage of meaning from the measurable in the first senses of value, as in the price of coal or the duration of a musical tone, to the last sense, as in the value of education or civic responsibility, is a considerable leap. We leave the conventional benchmarks and metrics and move into the realm where counting and cost, as set against the power of a world-changing idea or the dignity of a human life, lose their meaning.

It is precisely here that the humanities—the disciplines that use language, reason, and imagination to interpret the world—bridge an otherwise unbridgeable gap. The narrative, philosophical, and religious traditions of all cultures created the discourse of value, asking questions like What is good? What is true? What is useful? Such basic questions escape our notice on most days, but all other scientific or economic values we seek lead us back to these ultimate questions.

The values of Virginia Foundation for the Humanities programs are seen and felt in the ways they inform our outlook, challenge our thinking, and delight us with discovery. Their ripple effects move through websites used in classrooms of teachers and into the minds of students. They are carried on radio waves to listeners throughout the nation and world. They are considered in private moments as work that VFH has sponsored or

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Whether it's author Ashley Bryan or singer Frank Newsome, VFH audiences tune in to a message that resonates.
The Many Values of the Humanities

Promoted is read and shared. At heart, VFH values that moment when ideas move people to action.

When VFH program participants put shared stories and ideas to work, we recognize the extended values of our work. One of our programs helped win a national grant for a local school library. Another helped designate a national treasure from a singing tradition kept alive in Haysi, Virginia. Another brings well-presented scholarship statewide for pennies per listener. Still another will put more than 30 people to work for the next two years, getting the correspondence and papers of the Founders online.

$10,000 for North Branch School Library

The VFH Center for the Book helps support the Letters About Literature program in Virginia, with the help of national sponsors at the Library of Congress and Target Stores. The contest asks students each year to write to their favorite author, dead or living, about what that book meant to them. This year’s Virginia state winner, Audrey Wood, went on to become a national winner, reading her piece at the National Book Festival in Washington, D.C.

Audrey was pleased to win that $500 Target gift card, and her school library was elated to receive a Reading Promotional Grant of $10,000 because of Audrey’s exceptional letter—a gift that will continue to give to North Branch School students for generations to come. Since the Center for the Book’s purpose is to share the joy of reading and consider its impact on the lives of students all over the Commonwealth, the 1,500 entries are their own success story. We congratulate Audrey and North Branch School and hope the ripple of this achievement keeps spreading.

A National Treasure in Haysi, Virginia

Elder Frank Newsome preaches at the Little David Church in Buchanan County, Virginia, where he has lived for more than 45 years. In 2007, the Virginia Folklife Program at VFH first recorded Frank’s unique singing style on a CD from the Crooked Road Series entitled Gone Away with a Friend. This year, Folklife Director Jon Lohman nominated Frank for a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. In September, Frank was honored in Washington, D.C. with the award, the highest honor the United States bestows upon a traditional artist.

Frank and his congregation are a sub-division of the Baptist Church known as Old Regular Baptists, who maintain the tradition of lined-out hymnody, where a preacher sings a line of hymn, and the congregation repeats the same line in a mournful blend of voices. Because of the comparatively small geographic area where Old Regular Baptist churches still remain, the sound of this American musical treasure is not well known.

But value has a way of announcing itself. Bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley grew up and still resides in the middle of Old Regular Baptist country, and its influence can be clearly heard in his singing. In fact, Frank Newsome and Ralph Stanley have been good friends for more than 30 years, sometimes worshipping and singing together.

And what will Frank do with the $25,000 award that accompanies the National Heritage Fellowship? The Little David Church will get a new roof this year.

Two Virginia Broadcasters Awards

With Good Reason, the only statewide public radio show produced in Virginia, was honored this June with two Virginia Association of Broadcasters awards. “Will There Ever Be Peace on Earth?” won 1st place for Best Documentary or Public Affairs Program, and “Finding Health Care in Appalachia” won 2nd place for Outstanding Feature Reporting.

The quality of With Good Reason shows has been consistently strong, but did you know that this radio show reaches more than 5.5 million listeners who are tuned in to its half-hour shows and three-minute spindowns? And what does it cost to bring this show to its audience annually? VFH spends about 4 cents per listener. That’s quality and efficiency.

Founders’ Words, Humanities Jobs

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the grant-making arm of the National Archives, signed a cooperative agreement in September with the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities to provide pre-publication access...
to 68,000 historical papers of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington that have not yet been published in authoritative documentary editions.

The cooperative agreement provides up to $2,500,000 for the three-year project, to be carried out by the VFH program Documents Compass. This level of online access for the general public is invaluable; of considerable local value are the two full-time and 29 part-time positions for scholars assisting with the transcription process.

The project team will update and improve existing transcriptions of the papers of the Founders of the Nation and expedite the availability of the unpublished papers, giving scholars and the general public access to these primary source materials before they appear in the official print editions.

David S. Ferriero, Archivist of the United States, said, “These documentary editions provide a treasure trove of information about the founding of our nation. The historical documents contain fascinating details about the thoughts, deeds, and lives of these seminal figures. This agreement ensures that we leverage the latest technology and processes to ensure that all Americans can access and use these papers.” VFH will lead with a 21st century approach to our 18th century heritage.

Values Beget Values

The work we do at VFH is inspired by our common belief in the inherent values of the humanities. We are a Board and Staff committed to the benefits that literature, folk traditions, history, and studies of culture add to our lives. VFH Grants recently awarded (see list below) are another testament to the projects we value, where our investment is typically matched by the grantee organization and private resources at a ratio of 4 to 1.

What becomes increasingly apparent is that the VFH approach is not only making the lives of Virginians better in the ways we would never be able to measure, but it is already measurably helping our schools, libraries, congregations, organizations, and workplaces keep informed, stay connected, and accomplish their work in difficult times. The humanities are Virginia’s hopeful and growing enterprise. We hope you’ll join us with your continued support and advocacy.

VFH Grants, 2010–11

June 2010

Randolph College, Ancient Drama in Performance: Theory and Practice, a conference at Randolph College
Southern Memorial Association, Tinbridge Hill Neighborhood History Book
Junior Appalachian Musicians, Inc., Appalachian Music Module, curriculum development
The Mariners’ Museum, Watermen of the Chesapeake, a photographic exhibit
Laurel Grove School Association, Laurel Grove School: A Story for All Virginians, curriculum development
American Shakespeare Center, Teacher Seminar—Clues for Classroom Performance
Tinner Hill Heritage Foundation, Red, Black and Blues; the Shared Blues Musical Traditions of Native and African Americans, a panel discussion
Blackwater-Nottoway River Keeper, Mills along the Blackwater and Nottoway Rivers, a research and oral history project

July 2010

AcomacRoots/CCA, African American Cemeteries of Chincoteague Island, research and an interpretive exhibit
Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, Medicine in Virginia: Past and Present, Film Screening and Discussion
Handley Regional Library, To Kill a Mockingbird: 2010 One Book, One Community Activities

December 2010

The Museum of the Confederacy, Teachers Institute 2011—Broken Ties and Brass Bands: From Secession to War
Center for Independent Documentary, Inc., The Mystery of Edgar Allan Poe, a film
Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Foundation, 2011 Signature Conference: Military Strategy in the American Civil War, a documentary video
Galax Volunteer Fire Department, HoustonFest “A Celebration of Song & Service”, a festival
Blue Ridge PBS, Virginia State Parks: 75 Years and Still Growing, a documentary video

FrancisEmma, Inc., Legacy and Landscape: African Americans at Belmead, an oral history project
The Monticello Foundation, Enhancing Monticello’s Visitor Experience: James Madison and the Creation of the Constitution, interpretive exhibit design
Virginia Commonwealth University, Halley School Histories, an oral history project
Virginia Intermont College, Convocation Series, lectures and discussions

January 2011

Gunston Hall, Seeds of Independence, documentary film
Eastern Shore of Virginia Barrier Islands Center, Barrier Islands Center Presents: Islands From the Sky, an exhibit and lectures
Virginia Tech Foundation, The Barbara Johns Equality in Education Project, an oral history project and publication
Pamunkey Indian Tribe, Pamunkey Indian Museum, exhibit planning
College of William & Mary, Guide to Pilgrimage Studies and movie “The Way”, University of Virginia, Virginia Food and Agriculture Heritage Project, a community research project

February 2011

Arlington Cultural Affairs, Hamtdaa/Together, an interpretive brochure on Mongolian traditional culture
American Frontier Culture Foundation, 2011 Winter Lecture Series

March 2011

Prince William County Schools, Virginia Indians: Reclaiming Our Heritage, a documentary film
Taubman Museum of Art, Conversations, a public discussion series
Carver-Price Alumni Association, Inc., Carver-Price Master Exhibit Plan
Eastern Shore of Virginia Historical Society, Eastern Shore of Virginia Civil War, a brochure

June 2011

Newport News Public Library System (Peninsula-Literary Consortium), Annual Author Talk, a book signing
Harrisonburg-Rockingham Historical Society, Bernhart & Company - Shenandoah Valley Folk Art Fraktur (1774-1958), an exhibit
Laura Browder is a scholar who moves easily across disciplinary boundaries. Her wide-ranging creativity, her willingness to tackle complex and difficult topics, and her commitment to reaching out to audiences beyond the academic world exemplify the best of what we call the “public humanities.”

Over the past fifteen years or more, Laura’s work has touched the VFH—and we have supported that work—in multiple ways. She has been a research Fellow (twice), a Book Festival guest, a Book Festival participant, and the project director for at least a half-dozen of our most successful grants. The “Carver Living Newspapers” project was a model of local engagement and of community/university partnership. “When Janey Comes Marching Home: Portraits of Women Combat Veterans” began as an oral history and exhibit project, focusing on women soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan and has since become a book, a film (in progress) and a play.

Her documentary film, “The Resurrection of Asa Carter,” recently released and now being screened at film festivals throughout the U.S. (including the Virginia Film Festival this November), explores the dual identity of Asa Carter, a white-supremacist and former speech-writer for George Wallace who later recast himself as a Cherokee Indian using the name Forrest Carter and wrote the best-selling novel *The Education of Little Tree*, one of the greatest literary hoaxes in American literature.

Laura’s books include *Rousing the Nation: Radical Culture in Depression America; Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America; Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities* and *When Janey Comes Marching Home*. She taught for many years at Virginia Commonwealth University and is currently Professor of American Studies at the University of Richmond.

I spoke with Laura recently about her work and the public humanities.

DB: When you started out in academic life, were you looking beyond teaching and research? Did you foresee what your career would become?

LB: In the mid-1990s, I was a graduate student at Brandeis, and I wrote a play that was produced in Boston. It was about the Blacklist period and the McCarthy era, set in Mexico City. The Massachusetts Humanities Council funded a series of post-performance panel discussions, led by scholars and people who had been blacklisted, with audience members sharing their own memories of the period. It was my first contact with the public humanities—and I was hooked, you might say (laughs).

DB: So these conversations were important to the experience of the play?

LB: Yes, absolutely. They made the experience so much richer. I had grown up in a family that had its own issues during the Blacklist era. But hearing these conversations, I learned things I never knew.

DB: What was your first connection to the VFH?

LB: I received a VFH fellowship in 1996, to finish writing my book *Slippery Characters*. It’s about people who for often complex reasons assume a different racial or ethnic identity—which happens more often than you might think, actually.…

DB: And Asa Carter was one of the “impersonators” you were researching back then?

LB: One of several; but definitely the most interesting. I guess you could say that the roots of the film were in that Fellowship fifteen years ago. Being at VFH for that semester, I realized how many possibilities there were for doing interesting work in the public humanities. I wanted to attach myself like a barnacle to this work.

DB: About that time, you were also involved in a project VFH supported with a grant—in Richmond’s “Carver” neighborhood. Tell me about that.

LB: Carver is an African American neighborhood in Richmond that was being encroached on by V.C.U. I was becoming interested in oral histories, and Cathy Howard who was in charge of community engagement at V.C.U. at the time asked if I wanted to be involved in a project where students were going out into the neighborhood, trying to document the community’s history. They were having mixed results. I said yes, absolutely, and the first person I contacted was Dr. Francis Foster, a leader in Richmond’s black community. He offered to arrange—and then host—a meeting in the neighborhood. Current and former residents came, and they helped us develop a better list of questions. From there, we launched a new round of interviews, pairing each V.C.U. student with a neighborhood resident. The results were much better this time, and we used these interviews to create a script for a play in the “Living Newspapers” style.

DB: What exactly is “Living Newspapers”?

LB: The form was used with great success by the Federal Theatre Project in the 1930s. The “Living Newspapers” used documentary sources and interviews to create, in effect, non-fiction plays about the issues of the day. They were extremely powerful and also very popular.

DB: I remember it (the Carver Living Newspapers) as one of the most successful community-based projects VFH had ever funded up to that point. It was a model oral history project, among other things. What made it so successful?

LB: We didn’t have an agenda of our own, coming in. We were really there to hear their stories. You have to spend the time. It’s about being there; becoming part of things; showing that you’re in it for the long haul.…

DB: Many of the projects you’ve done—the Carver project, “Janey,” the Asa Carter film—have depended on gaining acceptance, trust, in communities that are not yours.…
LB: It’s not that hard really. But you have to be able to just sit quietly with someone and listen without judgment or prejudice to what they have to say; without taking up too much space in the room; and not deciding in advance what you’re really there to learn because you don’t necessarily know that, even if, sometimes, you think you do. There are always surprises.

DB: Janey started out as an oral history project and a portrait exhibit, and later it became a book, a documentary film, and now—soon—a play. Is this what you mean by the “long haul?”

LB: Partly. When you work on a project for years, in different media, you build relationships that deepen over time. People know you’re serious. They open up more and more….

DB: What about the Asa Carter film?

LB: Now that it’s finished, one of the great things, for me, is watching the audiences react. For example, recently we screened the film in Oxford, Alabama, and Asa’s son and grandchildren were in the audience, along with dozens of people who had known him before he published Little Tree.

DB: What was their reaction? After all, he was a white supremacist and also, seemingly, a traitor to the white-supremacist cause.

LB: Well, there were some pretty wide-ranging political leanings within the family and in the audience, left to right. But either way, whatever their politics were, the family members were all proud of Asa in the end; and they all had mixed feelings about him.

DB: Is this what you were trying to achieve?

LB: All the members of the team that produced this film shared essentially the same goal. We wanted to create a film that was both nuanced and fair to its subject. Asa Carter was a very complex human being. I wanted to create a fair portrayal of someone whose politics were repugnant.

DB: This takes a certain kind of agility….

LB: That’s one way to think about it. Look, as you just said, all of these projects have given me an opportunity to enter communities I might never have entered otherwise. For me, this is what the humanities do. They get you to move beyond two-dimensional portrayals, beyond simplistic binary thinking. They open up new parts of the world. When you sit down to talk with people, really listen to them, you find out that their lives and their outlooks and their personal motivations are more complex than you ever imagined. Every project I’ve done has been humbling in that way.

DB: So is it still OK to read the Education of Little Tree, knowing that it was a fraud?

LB: Yes, absolutely, if you read it in its proper context. Many people find it to be a very moving story, and no one should feel embarrassed if they’re moved by it. The power of the book is real. The mystery is how it could have been written by the man who wrote it. And that’s also part of the story; the true story. But finding out the truth about the book’s authorship also makes us question our assumptions.

DB: Why should we question our assumptions? What good does it do?

LB: Let me answer it this way. I’m teaching a class this semester in American autobiography. One of the books is (supposedly) the autobiography of a female marine in the War of 1812, who escaped a life of prostitution by cross-dressing and becoming a soldier. Students are devastated when they find out it isn’t true; that the book is a hoax. They think they’re learning about women in the 19th century, and what they’re really learning about is their own relationship to the truth. This is what Little Tree can teach us too. Not about authentic Native American experience, but about why we want so badly to believe the book is true.

DB: What about Janey?

LB: When the Janey exhibit first opened, I wanted to have peace activists, artists, and military people all together in the same space, sharing the experience of what these women combat veterans had to say. This is what the “public humanities” can do in our increasingly fragmented public sphere. It’s easy to be only with the people who think and believe the way we do. It’s harder to be with people whose core experience in life is from a different realm. But this is what actually happened. It was a human experience that created a bond between people who held very different points of view.

DB: When we talk about our work at VFH, we sometimes describe it as creating a more complex, nuanced portrait of Virginia. Does that apply to your work too?

LB: Complexity is a good word, I think. Because if you’re serious about this work, every time you think you know something, and you talk to someone else about it, you realize you didn’t know enough; that there’s more to the story; or another perspective that you hadn’t considered. It’s never really “finished” in that sense. All of these projects we’ve been talking about are porous, in the sense that I have my own view, starting out, of what the project or the story means, and then the person I’m interviewing or filming, or the audience who’s seeing the finished product shows me that it also means something else.

DB: So why are the public humanities important? What has this work really meant to you?

LB: I came to what we call the public humanities because, for me, university life was too confining. In the public humanities, everyone contributes; there are many voices out there complicating the story, if we’re willing to listen. But in a way, things have also come full-circle for me. Through the work I’ve done with VFH, I’ve learned to take a different approach, one that’s changed the way I teach; the way I approach my academic work.

DB: How would you summarize your work with VFH over the past 15 years?

LB: The relationship with VFH has changed my life. The VFH showed me how to be agile in reaching different audiences, in moving from one medium to another, and it has supported me in the attempt. VFH takes the humanities in so many different directions. I guess you could say that VFH has encouraged or allowed me to complicate the story, and I’m grateful for that.
Fall 2011 VFH Fellows


The document, dated Aug. 8, 1295, is a concession of royal privileges signed by King Fernando IV granting freedom and liberties to the citizens of Alcalá during the Spanish Reconquista. According to Greenia, it’s also the fourth oldest document to mention the city, which lies about 20 miles east of Madrid.

The single sheet of sheepskin parchment, measuring 24 by 18 inches, is in immaculate condition considering its age, said Greenia. What it provides scholars is an invaluable piece of history into medieval democracy, he added.

“The emerging town council of Alcalá is flexing its muscles and asking for all the bishops and cardinals present at the royal parliament to be expelled,” said Greenia. “And so the King did—for a few days—and then they came back.”

The document also tells us that the town council did have some influence over the king, who was trying to stabilize the frontier of the Reconquista, said Greenia.

“The citizens of Alcalá wanted to negotiate for what the city was going to get in terms of concessions, privileges, and the freedom to exercise their own laws,” he said. “They also wanted their representatives—not just the nobility and bishops—as traveling counselors to the court to speak up on their behalf.”

In his essay, Greenia describes how rare it is to find medieval documents. He estimates that for every volume that survived during the Middle Ages, nine more were lost. Archivists have documented the disappearance of parchments from the 13th and 14th centuries, “some perhaps rolled into tubes to make fireworks.”

During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the contents of city archives were sometimes stuffed into the barricades. Since they didn’t have sandbags, said Greenia, books were used instead.

And before the municipal archives were transferred to Madrid in the late 1970s, they “were still being kept in a top floor space subject to damp air and, when it rained, dripping water.”

How the charter came to America remains unknown. In 1972, the University of Virginia purchased the document from Bernard Rosenthal, a famed manuscript dealer. It’s been missing from Spain for perhaps a century, said Greenia, and there are no plans of repatriation.

Greenia, a specialist in medieval studies, is a well-known visitor to Spain through his scholarly work with the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage. In 2007, Greenia was awarded the Cross of Isabel the Catholic, Spain’s highest cultural achievement distinction for foreign nationals.

W&M professor chronicles history of 700-year-old missing Spanish document

BY MEGAN SHEARIN • OCTOBER 4, 2011

It’s been a decade and a half since manuscript hunter George Greenia discovered a missing medieval Spanish document in the archives at the University of Virginia’s Alderman Library.

Now Greenia, who serves as professor of Hispanic studies at the College of William and Mary, has chronicled his discovery and the historic contents of the 700-year-old manuscript in “The Lost Privilegio de Alcalá de Henares de 1295.” His essay is one of several pieces written by a group of medievalists in the anthology, *La pluma es la lengua del alma: Ensayos en honor de E. Michael Gerli*, published in September 2011.

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VFH Celebrates Eighteen Years of Virginia Festival of the Book

BY SUSAN COLEMAN

This spring, the 18th annual Virginia Festival of the Book once again will bring together writers in all genres and readers of all ages.

The March 21-25 events will be held throughout Charlottesville, Albemarle County, the University of Virginia, and at Piedmont Virginia Community College. Lead sponsors are the Charlottesville Daily Progress, City of Charlottesville, County of Albemarle, Dominion Resources, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the University of Virginia.

As always, most events are free and open to the public. After the new year, author and schedule information will be updated frequently on the VAbook.org website, so keep returning to see what’s new.

In the midst of approximately 150 events, a few ticketed events are planned (see below for ticket information). The March 21 Leadership Breakfast, sponsored by SNL Financial Services and Miller Financial Group, features basketball legend Jerry West, author of West by West: My Charmed, Tormented Life, co-written by Jonathan Coleman. On March 22 at the Festival Luncheon sponsored by SunTrust Bank, noted Civil War historian, author and president of the University of Richmond Dr. Edward L. Ayers will speak. The speaker for the March 24 Crime Wave Luncheon is Jeffery Deaver, who was authorized by the Ian Fleming Estate to write the newest James Bond book, Carte Blanche.

The historic Paramount Theater is the venue for a special event, “Southern Refrains: An Evening with Lee Smith, Jill McCorkle, Marshall Chapman, and Matraca Berg” on Saturday evening, March 24, at 8 p.m. Proceeds benefit the Virginia Festival of the Book.

Among the “early signers” for the Festival are poets Nikki Giovanni, Nikky Finney, Kwame Alexander, Frank X. Walker, and Virginia Poet Laureate Kelly Cherry; mystery and thriller authors Steve Berry, Lisa Gardiner, and David Morrell; National Book Award recipients John Casey and Kathryn Erskine; novelists Homero Aridjis, Margot Livesey, and Thomas Mallon; biographers Charles Shields and Jean W. Cash; National Geographic cookbook author Barton Seaver; and syndicated “relationship cartoonist” Nick Galifianakis.

To get the inside scoop on the schedule and other news, subscribe to the Festival’s electronic newsletter by clicking on “About VAbook” on the website. Or become Facebook friend of the Festival (just search for “Virginia Festival of the Book) and follow us on Twitter under “va_ctr_book.”

**Ticketed Events**

**Leadership Breakfast with Jerry West**
Wednesday March 21, 7:30 a.m. – Omni
$500/table of 10 reserved seats
$40 individual seats, no reserved seats
Sponsored by SNL Financial Services and Miller Financial Group

**Festival Luncheon with Dr. Edward L. Ayers**
Thursday March 22, 11:45 a.m. – Omni
$60 individual tickets only
Sponsored by the SunTrust Bank

**Crime Wave Luncheon with Jeffery Deaver**
Saturday March 24, 12 Noon
$50 individual tickets only – Omni

**Southern Refrains: An Evening with Lee Smith, Jill McCorkle, Marshall Chapman, and Matraca Berg**
Saturday, March 24, 8:00 p.m.
$32 and $48 reserved seating – Paramount
Folklorist Jon Lohman and the Virginia Folklife Program were pleased to introduce the ninth class of master artists and apprentices to an estimated crowd of several hundred who gathered under blue skies and a white tent on a Sunday afternoon, September 11, at the VFH in Charlottesville.

By recognizing the new members of the Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program as well as congratulating the graduating class of master artists and their apprentices, audience members were treated to a series of outdoor music and dance performances as well as indoor exhibits and demonstrations ranging from cobblers and violin makers to Mardi Gras costume designers. In an adjacent parking lot, graduating master artist Jason Rutledge showcased his draft horses and explained how the animals have been used in traditional forestry work in Virginia.

This year marked the eighth time the VFH had hosted the free festival featuring music, food, and crafts of the Commonwealth; it also saw the return of former masters Frances Davis, the “Fried Apple Pie Lady,” and the Brunswick Stewmasters. In addition to offering free samples, the stew masters produced some 300 quarts of the traditional Brunswick stew on site for purchase, with all proceeds benefiting the Folklife Program. Stew and CD sales, plus outright donations, raised more than $1,200.

The Folklife Apprenticeship Program, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, creates one-on-one, nine-month learning experiences that help ensure that a particular art form is passed on in ways that are conscious of history and faithful to tradition.

During the apprenticeship period, the master artist and apprentice enter into a mutually enriching relationship, both cultural and personal. More than simply attending “workshops” or “lessons,” the apprentices learn their chosen craft in its traditional context, gaining a deeper appreciation for the ways the traditional art form operates within a larger cultural landscape.

The list of master artists reads as a veritable “Who’s Who” in Virginia traditional arts, from National Heritage Fellowship winner Flory Jagoda and Steve Martin award-winning banjo player Sammy Shelor to legendary Eastern Shore decoy carver Grayson Chesser. The eager apprentices, talented and accomplished in their own right, represent the future of Virginia’s treasured folkways.

Applications for the next class, the 2012-2013 cycle, must be postmarked by June 30, 2012, though submissions before the deadline are encouraged. Complete details can be found by downloading the Guidelines & Application from the program’s web site.

To view an online slide-show of this year’s event, visit the Virginia Folklife Program web archives, or virginiafolklife.org/2011/09/apprenticeshipslideshow

Showcase visitors were treated to craft and musical demonstrations by the likes of banjo master Sammy Shelor (LEFT), oyster farmer Dudley Biddlecomb (CENTER), and the cobblers team of Dave and Yvonne Young (RIGHT).
This native of Lancaster County, Virginia, found himself on stage recently at the annual Virginia Folklife Program Showcase, as the leader of the Northern Neck Sea Chantey Singers, one of six men preserving the traditional fishing chants of menhaden fishermen.

The Chantey singers are members of the 2010-2011 class of masters in the VFH’s Folklife Apprenticeship Program, teaching newcomer Lewis R. Blackwell the traditional Chanteys once sung by fishing crews to help ease the work of hauling in heavy nets full of menhaden. Like other masters of traditional folk arts, Smith’s group was offered support to work with apprentices for the continuation of Virginia’s traditional folkways.

But Elton Smith knew something about the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities even before Folklife Director Jon Lohman recommended the Chantey singers for the year-long Apprentice program. He was a member of the first VFH Board of Directors, and served his term more than 40 years ago, beginning in 1974.

The VFH Board of Directors consists of up to 23 men and women, with five possible appointments by the Governor’s office. Says Smith, “There were fifteen of us in the beginning. Those were the early years, when the organization was still feeling its way.”

Then as now, Rob Vaughan was the head of the VFH, but in 1974 Vaughan was barely out of his 20s. He relied—then as now—on the experiences of his Board members. Smith would have been able to offer the new director a perspective on the state’s public education programs, having become Virginia’s first African American school superintendent the previous year when he was appointed to that post in the King and Queen County school system.

“I was in education for 38 and a half years. I retired in 1992 as the principal of a large elementary school in Chesterfield,” said the long-time educator, now 85.

Being a member of the Sea Chantey Singers gives Smith the opportunity to talk about the role of the humanities, and “helps to preserve the history of the music,” he explained.

“There used to be [menhaden] factories all over the Northern Neck. Now there’s only the one in Reedville,” he said, adding, “which I understand is doing exceptionally well.” Smith’s group was featured on a National Public Radio show in December 2006. Using the NPR web site listeners can hear several samples of chantey singing, as well as watch them in action via VFH Virginia Folklife web links.

All but one of the Chantey singers have worked at commercial fisheries in their past, “though my span of fishing was short,” Smith said, noting how he worked summers before he was drafted into the Army, straight out of his senior year in high school. After the war, he earned an undergraduate degree in sociology from Virginia Union University and a master’s in education from Hampton University.

“You see, Daddy drowned on a fishing boat, and my mother wanted me to do anything other than fishing,” said Smith. There are no fishermen or fisherwomen among Smith’s children or grandchildren. Graduate degrees abound though, and, not surprisingly, many with a touch of the humanities.

Elder and preacher Frank Newsome was honored this summer by the National Endowment for the Arts with a National Heritage Fellowship for his mastery of Old Regular Baptist Hymn singing, one of the oldest musical traditions of Virginia. VFH Folklife Director Jon Lohman and singer-songwriter Jim Lauderdale together assisted with one of the few recordings ever produced of Old Regular Baptist singing, and the only CD of Newsome’s a capella singing. “Gone Away with a Friend” was produced by the VFH on its Crooked Road Series in 2007. Born in 1942, son of a coal miner and one of 22 children, Newsome worked in the coal mines for more than 17 years before contracting black lung disease and turning instead to preaching and leading the congregation of Little David Church in Buchanan County in the call and response style singing of traditional hymns. For more information, see virginiafolklife.org.

Pictured are Jon Lohman, Geraldine Newsome, Frank Newsome, and Jim Lauderdale.

Elton Smith, Jr. (FAR RIGHT) joined other members of the Northern Neck Sea Chantey Singers on stage during the Virginia Folklife’s September Showcase in Charlottesville.
VFH Welcomes New Board Members

Robert M. ‘Bob’ Blue is senior vice president—Law, Public Policy & Environment of Dominion Resources, Inc. Bob joined Dominion in 2005. From 2002 to 2005, he served as counselor and director of policy for former Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner and was a partner with the law firm of Hogan & Hartson prior to that. A native of Charlottesville, Bob graduated from the University of Virginia and Yale Law School, and earned his master’s degree in business administration from the University of Virginia’s Darden School of Business.

Barbara Fried chairs Fried Companies, Inc., a real estate development and management firm. She has also served as Chairman of the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership, Vice Chairman of the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, and on the Virginia Port Authority Board. She is a member of the board of the University of Virginia Foundation and an emeritus member of the Board of Trustees of George Mason University Foundation, Inc. Barbara also serves as Chairman of the Board for Innisfree Village in Albemarle County, a voluntary community for adults with mental disabilities that is dedicated to providing a life sharing home and work environment. Barbara received a B.A. from the University of Chicago, a J.D. from the University of Chicago Law School, and earned an M.A. in History from the University of Virginia (2004).

Cynthia Kerr Fralin joined the VFH board in 2010. Cynthia is a civic leader in Roanoke and Virginia. In addition to the VFH Board, she also serves on the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts’ Board of Trustees, chairing the Art Acquisition Committee; the Citizens Advisory Council working with Virginia’s First Lady; and the Roanoke Women’s Foundation, which encourages women in philanthropy in the Roanoke Valley. She is a graduate of the University of Tennessee and a retired interior designer. She completed her master’s from Hollins University, where she focused on leadership and decision-making in the modern Middle East. Cynthia and her husband collect late-19th century and early-20th century American Art and love to travel the world when their eight grandchildren are not keeping them busy.

Barbara Fried

New VFH Staff Members

Sarah Pickell joined VFH in August 2011 as the Assistant to the President. In this role, she manages the affairs of the President’s office, coordinates the Board of Directors, and oversees government and public affairs for VFH. Previously, Sarah worked for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, a Princeton, N.J.-based national philanthropy committed to improving health and health care. There, her work focused on research, evaluation and assessment, organizational effectiveness and impact, intra-foundation relations, and external communications. Originally from Minnesota, Sarah graduated with a degree in history from the College of William and Mary.

Kate Turnbull Rullman joined VFH as an Associate Director of Development in October 2011. A Charlottesville native, she received a B.A. in English from Furman University in 2005. Upon graduation, she began her career in development at Washington & Lee University in Lexington, VA. After four years focused on annual fund and major gift work, Kate and her husband, Nate, moved to Charlottesville in October 2009 when she began a new role in the Reunion Giving Office at the University of Virginia. When she’s not fundraising for the humanities, Kate enjoys cooking, reading, and working in her garden.

Leondra Burchall, a native of Youngstown, Ohio, has lived and worked in Bermuda as a public historian for the past ten years. She began her professional career as an oral historian with the Bermuda Maritime Museum and moved into the field of heritage education in 2005 as an education officer/director of education with The St. George’s Foundation. More recently, Leondra worked as a consultant and researcher with the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. In her spare time she enjoys teaching Spinning® classes at Gold’s gym with her husband John-Anthony and spending time with her three children, Terin, Zindzi and Zenani, family and friends.
As a board member of numerous organizations, and a loyal supporter of VFH’s annual fund since 1994, former VFH Board chair Anna Lawson understands the crucial role of unrestricted support for a nonprofit organization. “Unrestricted giving keeps the lights on, the bills paid,” she says. “Many donors seem to find new buildings, professorships, threatened wetlands compelling—and they are; but we must have those annual dollars for operations.”

Additionally, in September, Anna and her husband, Tom, committed to supporting the With Good Reason radio program with a multi-year pledge. “WGR connects audiences with research and innovation going on right here on our Virginia campuses,” she explains. She emphasizes that radio, specifically NPR, is a constant in her life and “my solid source for information and entertainment.” With the growing options from satellite and Internet radio, she sees the medium becoming increasingly important in our society.

Anna notes the three-pronged attraction of VFH for her as a Board member and supporter.

★ Community Programs: “To my knowledge, a decade ago, nobody was doing Virginia Indian, African American history, or Virginia folklife like VFH, particularly for broad dissemination,” Anna says. She believes having these programs, and many others under the umbrella of the humanities, is crucial.

★ Grants: The social and economic impacts that VFH funds make to projects and organizations across Virginia is remarkable. Anna believes “such grants are seed money for a program at a tiny rural library, or the restoration of a long-abandoned, but historically important, school.”

★ Staff: And essential to the above, is the VFH staff who “seem to live and breathe the humanities, whether it’s a part of their daily job duties or not,” according to Anna.

Anna Lawson’s affection for the humanities stems from growing up in Salem where she lived in a house full of books, reading, and music.

“My brothers and I were expected to get liberal arts degrees,” she says, citing her late mother, a Hollins philosophy major who studied the violin and went on to teach English, as a huge influence. She remembers picking up the volume Gods, Graves, and Scholars at about age 11, a selection of her mother’s book club. “It was about classical archaeology and explored different cultures as discovered from excavations,” she recalls. “Maybe the seed was planted then that led to my Hollins senior thesis on Joseph Campbell and, many years later, to an anthropology doctorate at UVA.”

Anna joined the VFH Board in 1998, served seven years, and was chair during 2004-2005, taking a leadership role, as she had on the boards of Hollins University, Family Service of Roanoke Valley, and Total Action Against Poverty (TAP). She is currently a trustee of the Virginia Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, which she chaired from 2005-2009, and serves on the boards of the Virginia Historical Society, the Virginia Environmental Endowment, and the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation.

Although dedicated to conservation, education, and social justice, Anna is quick to point out that competing with her community involvement is her role as grandmother of five, two of whom live in Charlottesville and three in New York. “The stimulation of these young minds can be as powerful as those interviews on With Good Reason!” Anna emphasizes.

DONOR PROFILE

Anna Lawson

BY ELIZABETH PIPER

VFH Board Says Farewell to Three Stalwart Members

Robert H. Brink (Arlington), B. Miles Barnes (Onancock), and Peter Blake (Richmond) joined the VFH Board in 2005. Their commitment and leadership improved VFH as an organization. They served as VFH Board chair, Grants Committee chair, and Finance Committee chair, respectively. We thank them for their service to VFH and will miss their enthusiasm and leadership.
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VFH public radio program and podcast, BackStory with the American History Guys, co-hosted by U.S. historians Brian Balogh, Ed Ayers, and Peter Onuf, will be going from monthly to weekly broadcasts with the help of a production grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Tune in for more details in Spring 2012.