

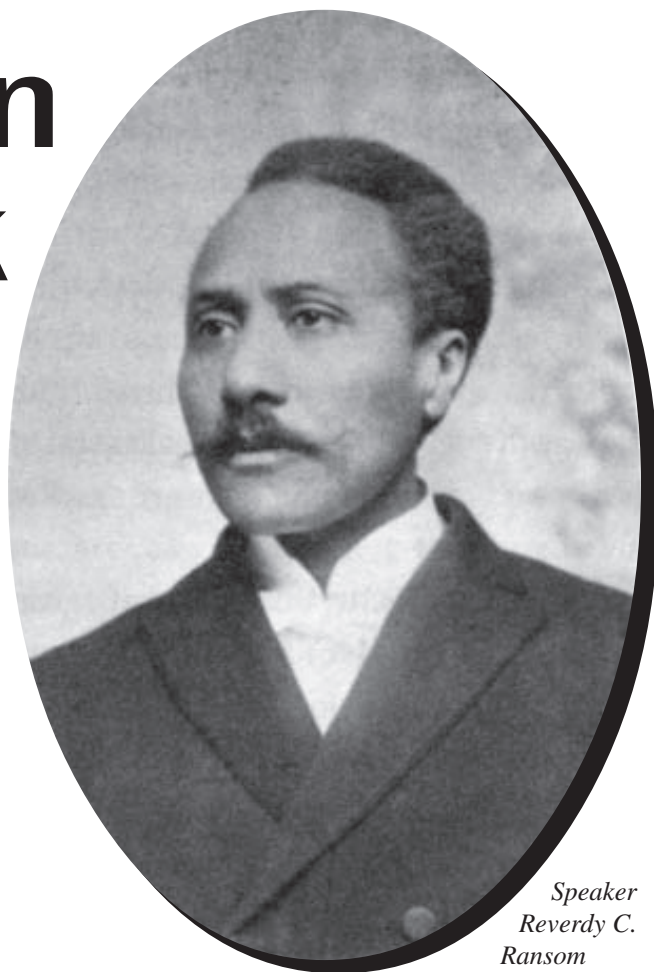
People & Mountains

A Publication of the West Virginia Humanities Council

Spring 2006

Remembering John Brown at Harpers Ferry:

“When God’s clock struck, he acted”



Speaker
Reverdy C.
Ransom

John Brown is a controversial figure in American history. Opinions differ as to whether the righteousness of his crusade against slavery justified the bloodshed he engaged in at Harpers Ferry in 1859 and in Kansas a few years before, when five who disagreed with him were pulled from their beds and killed. Brown considered himself the literal instrument of an angry God, and for that reason some questioned his sanity.

No questions were raised about the goodness of John Brown’s course when the Niagara Movement met at Harpers Ferry in 1906, however. The group, named for its meeting the previous year at Niagara Falls, helped to found the modern Civil Rights movement and is a predecessor to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It met at Harpers Ferry precisely because of the John Brown associations, and a key speech by Reverdy C. Ransom, excerpted here, extolled Brown’s actions.

The West Virginia Humanities Council has helped to support the Centennial of the Niagara Movement, which will be observed at Harpers Ferry this summer.

Great epochs in the world’s history are hinged upon some spot of land or sea, which become historic and sacred forever more. There are Mt. Sinai and Mt. Calvary, the Jordan, the Euphrates, the Nile and Rubicon, Thermopolye, Runnymede, Waterloo, Gettysburg, Appomattox, Port Arthur and Manila Bay; while John Brown has made Harpers Ferry as classic as Bunker Hill.

The leonine soul of this old hero saint and martyr proves how impotent and defenseless are tyranny, injustice and wrong, even when upheld by the sanction

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Mysteries Unfold

An old house is like an aging matriarch, they say, who gathers her dignity about her and keeps her secrets to herself.

But that doesn't mean we don't get a little peek every now and then.

We had such an opportunity during recent renovations at the MacFarland-Hubbard House, which serves as Humanities Council headquarters. The place was built in 1836, and at age 170 has more secrets than we'll ever know.

We uncovered a couple of them during our 1999 restoration of the property, including two hidden compartments — both as roomy as large closets — in the attic. One had been used for storage of alcohol during Prohibition, to judge by debris left behind.

Our latest finds are no less interesting, though one of them is not mysterious at all — in fact, just the opposite, since it clarifies matters. It consists of a West Virginia automobile license plate, which had been cut up and used as shims in an earlier remodeling. (Shims, for those of you fortunate enough to have no remodeling experience, are thin spacers.) When we pieced the tag back together, it read "Exp. 6/30/50."

We had assumed the earlier work had been done when the Hubbard family moved here in 1941, but plainly they put it off a few years.

The other find is more baffling. It is another secret compartment, believe it or not, this one behind a downstairs closet. It is smaller than the upstairs compartments, and about the right size for an adult to sit upright.

And just maybe someone did, for — and here the mystery deepens — *the door latches from the inside*. Think of that. The only way to lock it is from the inside, leaving us to conclude it was someone's hiding place.

Naturally, our first thoughts had to do with the Underground Railroad, and the house is certainly old enough for that. But from an examination of the materials I think this hideaway dates from about the same time as the upstairs compartments. But why someone might need a lockable hideaway in a peaceful place like Charleston, West Virginia, circa 1920s, is anybody's guess.

Our current renovations will create the Jefferds Library, named for the late Joe Jefferds, a leader in our acquisition of the house. Joe dearly loved a mystery, and I wish he were here to relish this one.

— Ken Sullivan

People & Mountains is published quarterly by the West Virginia Humanities Council.

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We welcome reader letters, freelance manuscripts, and financial contributions. Please address all correspondence to Beth Chiparo West Virginia Humanities Council 1310 Kanawha Blvd., E. Charleston, WV 25301 or e-mail to chiparo@wvhumanities.org.

The West Virginia Humanities Council, a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, serves West Virginia through grants and direct programs in the humanities.

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of the law, supported by the power of money and defended by the sword.

If modern history furnishes a solitary example of the appearance of a man who possessed the spirit of the prophets of ancient Israel, it is John Brown. The sublime courage, with which he met the Goliath of slavery in mortal combat, was not surpassed by that of David, who went forth to meet the Philistine who had defied the armies of the living God. He was commissioned by the same authority, and bore the same credentials as did Moses, who left his flocks in the Midian Desert to go and stand before Pharaoh and demand...that he should free his slaves....

This old Puritan, whose steel grey eyes gleamed with the spirit of courage that possessed Cromwell at the battle of Dunbar, took literally "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon" as both battle cry and watchword. Men like John Brown appear only once or twice in a thousand years. Like Mt. Blanc, the king of the mountains, he towers high above the loftiest figure of his time....

Like Moses, Joshua, Cromwell and Touissant L'Overture, he defies classification. He belonged to no party, was a disciple of no school; he was swayed neither by precedent nor convention. He was a man of achievement, of action. Garrison may write and Beecher may preach, while the silver-toned voice of Phillips pleads; this man will perform the doing of it. He could not choose his course, the hand of the almighty was upon him. He felt the breath of God upon his soul and was strangely moved. He was imbued with the spirit of the Declaration of Independence, and clearly saw that slavery was incompatible with a free republic. He could not reconcile the creed of the slaveholder with the word of God. While dealing with the border ruffians of Kansas he had seen the slave power seek to justify itself and extend its way by the murder of peaceful citizens; he had seen the prairies illuminated at night by the flames of their burning homes, their crops destroyed, and their cattle and valuables stolen.

The government was cognizant of this and also acquiescent. Statesmen and politicians were making concessions and compromises to quiet the demands of the South in behalf of its cherished institution. The nation found itself bound to a body of death whose

soul decay was spreading its influence to the highest sources of its life. No time then for Missouri compromises and Kansas and Nebraska acts; what was needed was an act of Almighty God. Slavery leaning upon the arm of law was defiant; it could only be attacked by appealing to "the higher law." John Brown appealed....

It has been fifty years since Osawatomie [Kansas], and fifty years less three since an old man, whose austere manner and flowing beard gave him prophetic mien, introduced Harpers Ferry to history. Since then the armies of the North and South have marched across the country in a robe of fire and blood, to fall upon the field of battle locked in the embrace of a death of lead and iron.

The true value and merit of a man lie embalmed and treasured up in the life he lived, and the character of the service he rendered to mankind. The whole life of John Brown was serious and purposeful. He was a descendant of one of the company who landed from the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock, and from ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War. He had all of the moral uprightness and strict religious character of the Puritan, as well as his love of liberty and hatred of oppression and tyranny.

From a child he loved to dwell beneath the open sky. The many voices of the woods, and fields, and mountains, spoke to him a familiar language. He understood the habit of plants and animals, of birds, and trees and flowers, and dwelt with them upon terms of familiarity and friendship. His heredity and environment were just such a school as was needed to shape his character and prepare him for his God-appointed task. For he believed himself to be sent upon a mission under the authority of Heaven. When he wrought like a mighty man of valor, whether in Kansas or at Harpers Ferry, he believed with all the modesty of his truly great and heroic soul, that he was only doing his duty. He proved the sincerity of his motives, the unselfishness of his purpose, and his entire devotion, by sacrificing upon the altar of human freedom his money, goods, wife and children. When God's clock struck the hour, he acted.

—Excerpted from a speech, "The Spirit of John Brown," delivered by Reverdy C. Ransom (1861-1959), a clergyman, at the second annual meeting of the Niagara Movement, Harpers Ferry, August 16, 1906.

Image: John Brown



For information on the NIAGARA MOVEMENT CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATION, August 18-20, 2006, visit www.nps.gov/hafe/niagara/ and www.harpersferryhistory.org/ or call (304) 535-6223.

What's New in the Humanities

2006 Little Lectures

The 2006 Little Lecture Series began on February 26 with Emmy Award winning journalist Ed Rabel. Three programs remain in the series.

On March 26, poet and children's book author Marc Harshman will present "A Life with Children's

Books." He will share his thoughts on children's literature, notable authors, and the importance of books in the lives of young people.



Ed Rabel presents "Whither Journalism in a Jaundiced Age."

Rare book conservator Jill Deiss will give a slide lecture "Books with a History" on April 30. Her work includes treatment of John Wilkes Booth's diary for Ford's Theater Museum and bound account records of Abraham Lincoln for Riggs Bank. Her lecture involves descriptions of work on books including a first edition King James Bible (1611) and a Shakespeare First Folio (1623).

On May 21, former historian for the U.S. House of Representatives, Raymond W. Smock, will present "History on the Hill," delving into the many historic events and people associated with Congress. Smock is director of the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies at Shepherd University.

Lectures are Sundays at 2:00 p.m. at the MacFarland-Hubbard House in Charleston, and include a reception with the speaker. For more information or to make reservations call (304) 346-8500.

Produce for Victory

The West Virginia tour of the Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibit *Produce for Victory: Posters on the American Home Front, 1941-1945* opens at Bluefield State College March 15-April 21. This exhibit, consisting of twenty-six replica vintage posters from the Museum of American History, examines how posters circulated by the government and private organizations used patriotism to increase industrial production. Call (304) 327-4186 for information on local activities.

The exhibit moves to Musselman-South Berkeley Community Library in Inwood, April 28-June 9. Activities include a discussion by community members who lived in the Eastern Panhandle during the war, a live radio show produced by Musselman High School drama students, and an outreach program

to senior centers in Morgan, Jefferson, and Berkeley counties called *BiFolkals: The Home Front*. The grand opening on April 29 includes big band music and a war-era canteen. Call (304) 229-2220 for information.

Those with a taste for classic luncheon loaf will want

to stop by the New Deal Homestead Museum in Arthurdale on April 8 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. for their Spam-O-Rama dinner and bake-off. The event is a "teaser" for the *Produce for Victory* exhibit that will be at the museum June 16-July 28. The dinner features recipes using the popular canned meat. To enter your favorite Spam dish call (304) 864-3959.

Produce for Victory is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and the Federation of State Humanities Councils.



National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

BRIEFS

Arthurdale Heritage Award

The West Virginia Humanities Council is pleased when its programs help encourage community based initiatives. One example is the recent \$5,000 award by The Hazel Ruby McQuain Charitable Trust to Arthurdale Heritage, Inc. (AHI), a non-profit dedicated to preserving the nation's first New Deal Homestead Subsistence Community. AHI operates the New Deal Homestead Museum. The museum is one of the hosts of the Humanities Council's traveling Smithsonian Institution exhibit, *Produce for Victory: Posters on the American Home Front, 1941-1945*. The grant will fund supplies for the museum's *Produce for Victory* companion displays.

Film named to National Registry

The 1975 film "The Buffalo Creek Flood: An Act of Man," supported by the West Virginia Humanities Council, has been named to the Library of Congress National Film Registry. The film was directed by award winning filmmaker Mimi Pickering and produced by the nationally renowned media arts center, Appalshop. It is described by the Library of Congress as a "powerful documentary" that "represents the finest in regional filmmaking, providing important understanding of the environmental and cultural history of the Appalachian region."

West Virginia History Day

The Council once again participated in West Virginia History Day held February 16, at the State Capitol rotunda. This year marked the tenth annual event, which is officially designated by the Archives and History Commission as a day to recognize the state's history. The all-day event includes state history exhibits and attracts historians, preservationists, reenactors, and genealogists, among others.



James Lowery displays historic embalming artifacts and photographs.

Council of History Organizations

The Council of History Organizations (COHO) met at the MacFarland-Hubbard House in January. James Lowery, an embalmer, talked to the group about the history of embalming. Presenting historic photographs, artifacts and caskets, Lowery stressed that embalming flourished during the Civil War. Prior to the war, mortuary science was still in its infancy. With the war came the need to treat the bodies of soldiers with preservatives so that family members of those killed could have their loved ones' bodies sent home for burial.

COHO is made up of public and private organizations dedicated to promoting and preserving historic resources in the Kanawha Valley and beyond.

Born of Rebellion Update

Born of Rebellion: West Virginia Statehood, on the road since August 2005, has been in Morgantown, Kingwood, Williamson, Gilbert, Parkersburg, and Grafton. The traveling exhibit about the creation of the state of West Virginia is scheduled through the end of 2006.

The exhibit will be on display at the Robert C. Byrd Center for Legislative Studies at Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, March 13-April 20. It travels to City National Bank in Lewisburg from May 1-21 for the annual Battle of Lewisburg reenactment activities. From May 24-June 12 the exhibit will display in the community meeting room of the Hardee's restaurant in Princeton.

Visit the exhibit on the web at www.wvhumanities.org or call (304) 346-8500 for information.

Students view the exhibit with (l-r) John White, mayor of Gilbert; Ken Sullivan, Humanities Council executive director; Delmer Blankenship, Gilbert Elementary principal; and Brenda Skibo, Mingo County Schools superintendent.



Library Construction Under Way

The sound of hammers has been heard in the MacFarland-Hubbard House since early January. Historic reconstruction is underway of the room to be used as the Jefferds Library, in memory of the late Joseph C. Jefferds, Jr. The project involves the expansion of the library nook to the original full-size room it replaced in a remodeling of the house prior to Council ownership. The Jefferds Library will house the Council's growing collection of West Virginia books.



Mr. Jefferds, a historian and book lover, was a former board president and a leader in the acquisition of the house. The Council will dedicate the room in 2006. Until then, stop by to see the construction!

The Council gratefully acknowledges funding for this project from the West Virginia Division of Culture and History and the West Virginia Commission on the Arts.

Program Committee Members Elected

Thank you for voting! Your vote gives the public a voice in grants and program decisions. The Council's program committee welcomes four new members.

HIGHER EDUCATION REPRESENTATIVES:

Harold Forbes (Monongalia County) is associate curator of the West Virginia and Regional History Collection, WVU Libraries. He has been responsible for WVU Libraries' West Virginia books and newspapers since 1973 and the curator of rare books since 1994.

Fran Simone (Kanawha County) is a professor and director of the Central West Virginia Writing Project at Marshall University Graduate College, a statewide affiliate of the National Writing Project at the University of California at Berkeley.

PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES:

Gerald "Jerry" Sutphin (Cabell County) is the principal author of *Sternwheelers on the Great Kanawha River* and has produced a video history of the Delta Queen for the Delta Queen Steamboat Company. His area of expertise is the history of the western rivers and steamboats.

Julie Palas (Kanawha County) is special projects counsel for the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. She also provides legal and support services for special projects such as Council-funded statewide programs honoring J. R. Clifford, the state's first black attorney.

Grant Guidelines

The West Virginia Humanities Council awards grants in the following categories:

Major Grants support humanities events: symposiums, conferences, exhibits, lectures. Maximum award: \$20,000. **Due:** Feb. 1, Sept. 1

Minigrants have a budget of \$1,500 or less and support small projects, single events, or planning/consultation. **Due:** *April 1, *June 1, Aug. 1, Oct. 1, Dec. 1

Fellowships of \$2,500 support research and writing projects for humanities faculty and independent scholars. **Due:** Feb. 1

Media Grants support the production of electronic or film materials, or a newspaper series. Maximum award: \$20,000. **Due:** Sept. 1

Publication Grants are available to nonprofit presses and recognized academic presses, and support *only* the production phase of a completed manuscript. Maximum award: \$20,000. **Due:** Sept. 1

Teacher Institute Grants are available to colleges and universities and support summer seminars for secondary teachers. Maximum award: \$20,000. **Due:** Sept. 1

**Upcoming Minigrant Deadlines!*

For full guidelines and forms:
call (304) 346-8500, or email
lerose@wvhumanities.org, or
download from our website
www.wvhumanities.org

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This list represents new and renewed memberships and other donations received November 1, 2005 through February 10, 2006. A complete list of members and donors is published each year in the Humanities Council's annual report.

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The West Virginia Encyclopedia goes to press!

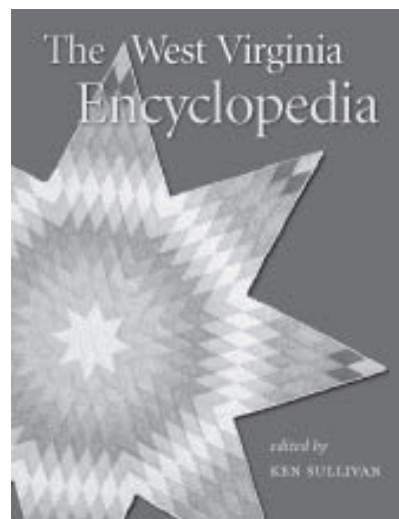
March is a milestone month for the *West Virginia Encyclopedia* project, as the big reference book goes to press. Nearly a decade in the making, the one-volume encyclopedia represents a million-dollar investment by its publisher, the West Virginia Humanities Council. “We are eager for the public to see the fruits of our efforts,” said editor Ken Sullivan, who is also the Humanities Council executive director.

The West Virginia Encyclopedia will be published on West Virginia Day, June 20, with premiere events in Wheeling, Beckley, and Charleston.

The oversized hardbound volume includes nearly 1,000 pages and 2,200 articles on all aspects of the state’s history, literature, folklore, flora and fauna, education, geology and geography, and culture. The book includes hundreds of biographies and also histories of the 55 counties and all major towns and cities. Nearly 600 writers contributed.

The new encyclopedia is the first comprehensive West Virginia reference in many years. In addition to the articles, the book includes more than 350 illustrations, maps, a list of common and scientific names for West Virginia plants and animals, a bibliography, and an index.

The West Virginia Encyclopedia, encased in a full-color dust jacket, will sell in bookstores for \$44.95. The book will be offered at a mail-order discount prior to publication. Contact wvencyclopedia@juno.com or (304) 346-8500.



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