

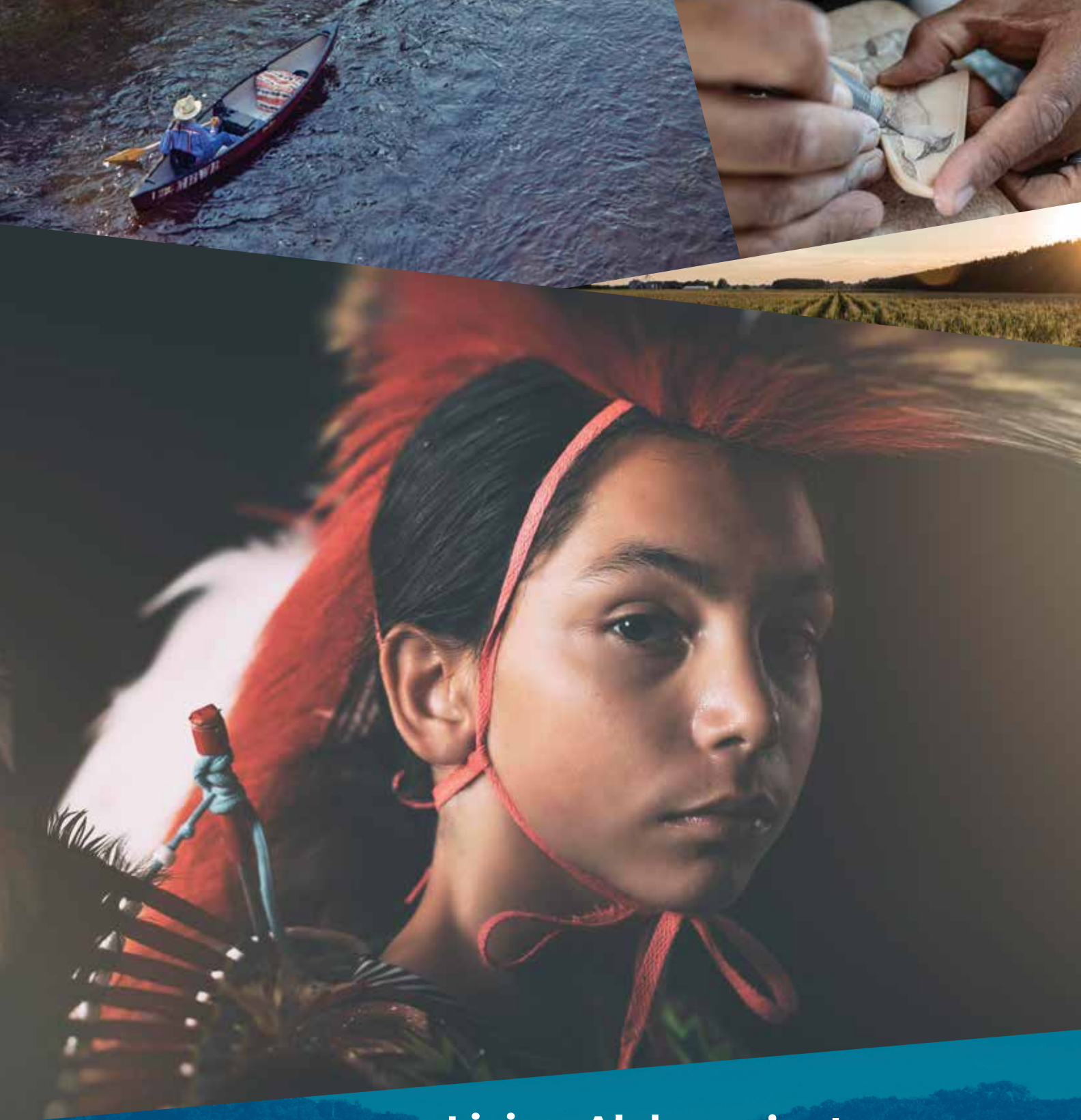
MOSAIC

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ALABAMA HUMANITIES ALLIANCE

2023

The Rural Issue

ALABAMA HUMANITIES ALLIANCE



Living Alabama's story, one success at a time.

The perseverance of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians is interwoven with that of our neighbors across the state and across history. From our earliest days as guides to Alabama territory, our Tribe has taken pride in sharing the best of our state—its people, places and traditions.



Alabama Natives. **Alabama Neighbors.**

Explore our stories at pci-nsn.gov



From the executive director

Charles W. (Chuck) Holmes

My mother was raised on a small family farm near the Tennessee River in Limestone County. It was well before anyone in those cotton fields could imagine an interstate highway, an aerospace tech boom, or the sort of affluence that has pushed metro Huntsville onto lists of America's best places to live.

Her family, the Pitts, were solid farmers, and apparently prosperous enough in the 1930s. How do we know? According to family lore, they were among the first in the county to acquire an indoor flush toilet.

As an adult, my mother would vividly recall that day in her childhood that the toilet was installed, and the line of curious neighbors who came to the house to marvel, gawk, and flush. On the playground, she was asked if the rumors were true — that there were no more visits to the outhouse at the Pitts farm.

My dear mom passed away several years ago, and it had been decades since I thought of the famous toilet story. I was reminded of it as we were preparing this edition of *Mosaic*, examining rural Alabama in all its contemporary complexities.

Whatever you think of when you think “rural Alabama,” prepare to reconsider as we contemplate what exactly rural is — and isn't. Not as it exists in stereotype or monochrome or even in my family's tales of long ago.

In this issue, we examine the healing power of Black-owned farms. The links between our state's biodiversity and its human diversity. The race to preserve a synagogue's story before its members are gone forever. And why sometimes a biscuit is so much more than just a biscuit.

This issue coincides with a traveling exhibit we're bringing to five communities in Alabama in 2023 and 2024, part of our partnership with the Smithsonian's

Museum on Main Street program. *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* explores how rural life has evolved over the past century or so. Our Alabama *Crossroads* project scholar Julia Brock says the exhibit “offers an opportunity to connect past and present, and to consider the central place of rural Alabama in our future.”

That is what our host sites for *Crossroads* aim to do, too, with their own local programs that complement the exhibit's national scope. Intrigued? You'll find an insert in these pages of *Mosaic* that explains more. We hope you'll visit the exhibit when it comes to a town near you.

And we hope you enjoy this issue of *Mosaic* wherever you do your best reading. In a comfortable chair. Reclining in bed. Even on the ... Well, never mind. There I go again, thinking back to my mother's childhood story.

Mosaic

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About us

Founded in 1974, the nonprofit Alabama Humanities Alliance serves as a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Through our grantmaking and public programming, we connect Alabamians to impactful storytelling, lifelong learning, and civic engagement. We believe the humanities can bring our communities together and help us all see each other as fully human.

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On the cover: *The Road Home*, Hale County. Photo by April Dobbins. Above: *Hank & TeeTot: Wait for the Light to Shine*, mural by Stacey Edwards in Greenville, Alabama. Courtesy Alabama Mural Trail.

AUTHORS



Emily Blejwas is the executive director of the Alabama Folklife Association and co-producer of AFA's podcast, *Alabama Folk*. She is the author of *The Story of Alabama in Fourteen Foods* (UA Press) and two middle-grade novels, and has written for the *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, *Alabama Heritage*, *The Alabama Review*, and *Mobile Bay Magazine*. She lives in Mobile with her husband and four children.



Tina Mozelle Braziel, winner of the Philip Levine Prize and the Alabama Library Association Award for Poetry for *Known by Salt* (Anhinga Press), grew up on the Coosa River. She and her husband, writer James Braziel, are publishing a book with Pulley

Press in 2024 about how they live and write in a glass cabin they are building by hand in Blount County.



Melissa Brown grew up on her dad's fish farm in Moundville, a one-stoplight Alabama town, and then moved on to Birmingham-Southern College, where she majored in English and almost minored in psychology. She has written for local magazines, project edited at

Oxmoor House Books, and worked in development at Jones Valley Teaching Farm.



Charles Buchanan is an award-winning magazine editor and writer who has authored three history books, including one illuminating the vintage painted ads dotting walls across Birmingham, where he lives. He also is an artist whose mixed-

media artwork and block prints have been featured by HGTV and the Alabama Tourism Department.



Deidra Suwanee Dees, Ed.D., is a descendant of the Hotvlkvlke (Wind Clan) following the Mvskoke stompdance traditions. She is the author of *Vision Lines: Native American Decolonizing Literature*. She serves as director/tribal

archivist at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. A University of South Alabama (USA), Cornell, and Harvard graduate, she teaches Native American studies at USA.



April Dobbins is a writer and filmmaker based in Reykjavik, Iceland, and Hale County, Alabama. She received her master's in arts in education from Harvard University in 2022.

Dobbins has written about arts and culture for outlets including *Miami New Times* and MIT's *Immerse*. Her films have been supported by Sundance, ITVS, International Documentary Association, and Firelight Media, among others.



Bill Finch is a writer and naturalist who acts as if the world revolves around plants. He has been involved in Alabama conservation for more than 30 years, including as founding director of Paint Rock Forest Research Center. He's the

author of *Longleaf, Far As the Eye Can See*, and has written for publications such as the *Mobile Press-Register* and *Smithsonian Magazine*.



Salaam Green is artist in residence at UAB Arts in Medicine and founder of Literary Healing Arts, which helps individuals use writing, poetry, and storytelling to reclaim their voices and transform their lives. She is an AHA Road Scholar

and a trainer for the Kellogg Foundation's Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation process.



Amy K. Milligan, Ph.D., is the Batten Endowed Associate Professor of Jewish Studies and Women's and Gender Studies at Old Dominion University, where she is also the director of the Institute for Jewish Studies and Interfaith

Understanding. She is an ethnographer and folklorist who specializes in the study of Jewish Alabama, with a special focus on Selma and the Black Belt.



Tania De'Shawn Russell is AHA's outreach and social media coordinator. She's also a poet, storyteller, and teaching artist. She is the author of *be gentle with black girls*, the 2023 Magic City Poetry Festival Eco-Poetry Fellow,

and co-chair of the National Hook-Up of Black Women's Literacy Committee.

Artists: Scott Baker, Jennifer Causey, Sonya Clemons, Armando Colunga, Mark Dauber, April Dobbins, Stacey Edwards, Beth Maynor Finch, Scott Fisk, Wes Hardin, Sundi Hawkins, Roslyn Jones, Jessie LaVon, Jennifer McCohnell, Ainsley McNeely, Jahni Moore, Dale Robinson, RaMell Ross, Catherine Shelton, Jerry Siegel, Sakora Smeby, Wayne Spradley, Dan Townsend.

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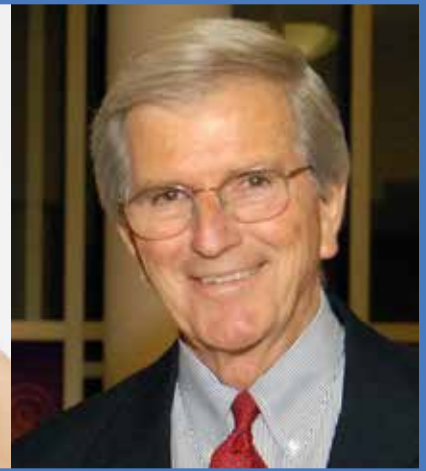
Alabama Colloquium 2023: New honorees, Healing History



Imani Perry



Kaitlan Collins



David Mathews



In *South to America*, 2022's National Book Award for Nonfiction winner, Birmingham native **Imani Perry** grapples with her homeland's past — and how closely that past remains intertwined with its present. She interrogates her family history and experiences in a Magic City that has often felt far less so for generations of Black residents.

And yet.

"I love my people without apology," she writes. "[Birmingham] is the place I call home. I bristle whenever people use the word for me elsewhere: Cambridge, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, all places I've spent a whole lot of time. 'Home' is one word for me. It is not a physical architecture, though 2345, our house number, and yellow, our house color, matter. Home for the Southerner eases into the cracked places like Alaga, thick and dark sugarcane syrup."

This year, Perry is one of two Alabamians returning home to be honored as AHA's 2023 Alabama Humanities Fellows. Her fellow honoree is **David Mathews**, another scholar and author well versed in the hard work of examining our democracy and building community.

On October 23, Perry and Mathews will join CNN's Kaitlan Collins — a Prattville native and UA alumna — for a special conversation as they're honored at the Alabama Colloquium in Birmingham.

Tickets and sponsorships are available at alabamahumanities.swell.gives.

About our 2023 Fellows

Imani Perry won the 2022 National Book Award for Nonfiction for *South to America: A Journey Below the Mason-Dixon to Understand the Soul of a Nation*. She has written five other books, including *Looking for Lorraine: The Radiant and Radical Life of Lorraine Hansberry*, which won the 2019 PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography, and *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem*, winner of the 2019 Hurston/Wright Legacy Award for Nonfiction.

Perry writes for *The Atlantic*, where she pens a weekly newsletter that often reckons with the past, "Unsettled Territory." She's also a professor in Harvard University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and at the Harvard Radcliffe Institute, one of the world's leading centers for interdisciplinary exploration. She teaches and writes about history, women, gender, African American studies, and more. Perry has a bachelor's degree in literature, as well as a Ph.D. and a J.D. from Harvard.



Black and White descendants of the Wallace House plantation are coming together to reckon with their shared past.

F. David Mathews, a Grove Hill native, earned an undergraduate degree in history from the University of Alabama and a Ph.D. in history from Columbia University. Returning to UA, Mathews both taught history and made it. He served as a history professor from 1965-1980, became the youngest president of a major university at age 33, and presided over the integration of the Crimson Tide's football program under Coach Paul "Bear" Bryant.

Mathews also served as U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in President Gerald Ford's administration, where he worked on restoring public confidence in government. And he spent four decades as president and CEO of the Kettering Foundation, focusing the nonprofit's work on engaging citizens in the democratic process. Today, Mathews is president of the Center for Citizenship, Community, and Democracy. His legacy is evidenced in Alabama at the David Mathews Center for Civic Life, which seeks to strengthen civic engagement statewide.

Healing History

The Alabama Colloquium will also unveil AHA's newest collaboration, **Healing History**. This initiative is designed to strengthen our communities and state by helping neighbor better know neighbor — across race, religion, political affiliation, and other frequent dividing lines that shouldn't keep us apart.

Alabamians will have the chance to share, and listen to, different perspectives on the past, and learn how our history shapes our laws, communities, and relationships

today. The goal is to create conversations that lead to tangible, unifying outcomes — from community history projects and increased civic engagement to more empathetic, inclusive workforces.

AHA has already built several partnerships to pilot this effort, including with the historic, 1841-era Wallace House in Harpersville. There, descendants of the plantation's White landowners and enslaved Black population are working together to understand their shared history. AHA and the Wallace House will offer a limited-capacity experience immediately following the Alabama Colloquium on October 23 to learn more about this work.

To learn how you can engage with Healing History, visit alabamahumanities.org/healing-history.

50 Years of AHA Moments!

In 2024, the Alabama Humanities Alliance will celebrate 50 years of impactful storytelling and humanities-rich programming statewide. Stay tuned for ways you can join in the celebration, and — more importantly — help us envision our next 50 years!





Learning history. Making history.

The triumphant in-person return of Alabama History Day

After three virtual competitions due to the pandemic and school travel restrictions, Alabama History Day's state contest returned with gusto in 2023. On March 3, nearly 200 students from across Alabama gathered at this year's host venue, Auburn University at Montgomery, to compete, share ideas, and celebrate each other's research.

This annual competition enables students in grades 6-12 to conduct high-level research on a topic of their choice and present their studies in creative ways. Students can earn prizes and scholarships, and select winning entries at Alabama History Day qualify for National History Day, held each summer in Baltimore and Washington, D.C.

This summer, 27 Alabama students and educators traveled to National History Day to present their work and meet fellow competitors from across the country. Students also toured the nation's capital and met with some of Alabama's elected officials.

Several Alabama students scored big honors:

Ddwayne Lockett-James, a junior at Murphy High School in Mobile, had his documentary, *How Did Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company Help Shape the Future of Mobile, Alabama?*, screened as part of a world premiere at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture. It was also a selected work of the 400 Years of African American History Commission.

Zamorie Gipson, ZoRiyah Ray, and Sha'Hollene Smith, seniors at Stanhope Elmore High School in Millbrook, had their exhibit, "Little Rock Nine: Frontier in History," featured in a live showcase at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History on Flag Day, June 14, 2023. Even better, the trio got to meet a true history-maker while in D.C.: Carlotta Walls Lanier, the youngest of the Little Rock Nine.

"What inspired me to do this project was my grandfather," Smith said. "He often mentioned stories of his experiences with slavery and segregation. He passed away when I was thirteen. One of the last memories I have with him is watching a documentary on the Little Rock Nine. That stuck with me."

Join in History Day

More than a single day, AHA's History Day program offers year-long benefits. The program provides teachers and schools with a dynamic, project-based learning tool that slots into their history curriculum. AHA offers training workshops for schools and teachers, too.

"Research helps you better connect to the world and your community," says Idrissa Snider, Ph.D., program coordinator for Alabama History Day. "And it helps you learn more about yourself. When our students have these 'aha moments,' they're building their confidence as learners, too."

Now is the time to learn about Alabama History Day 2024. Visit alabamahumanities.org/alabama-history-day or email isnider@alabamahumanities.org.

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Learn More: go.uab.edu/history-ma

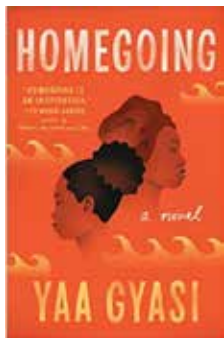
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- Specialize in areas including global, ancient, and contemporary art history
- Prestigious paid curatorial fellowship at the Birmingham Museum of Art
- Excellent placement record with Ph.D. programs and other career paths

Learn More: go.uab.edu/daah-ma

Humanities highlights

New teacher workshops



AHA's SUPER Teacher program has a new slate of workshops for Alabama educators. These professional development offerings feature fascinating, Alabama-based topics, taught by scholars steeped in each subject. Participants receive peer-to-peer learning and new curriculum ideas for the classroom — along with stipends, meals, and

continuing education credits.

Of note for 2023-2024: Workshops on “Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*, and the Power of Knowing Our Roots,” produced in partnership with Alabama Public Television. This series will travel the state and is open to the general public, not just teachers. It's designed to encourage Alabamians to see themselves as connected to, and separated from, one another in ways that go back further than most of us imagine. The sort of ways that Yaa Gyasi — a Ghana native who grew up in Huntsville — researched and imagined to craft her award-winning debut novel, *Homegoing*.

September 7, 2023:

“African American Folklife in Alabama,” presented with the Alabama Folklife Association (Montgomery)

September 22, 2023:

“*Crossroads*: Change in Rural Alabama” (Cleveland)

September 30, 2023:

“Birmingham’s Early Middle Eastern Community” (Birmingham)

November 2023-April 2024:

“Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*, and the Power of Knowing Our Roots,” with Alabama Public Television (November 18, Huntsville | January 27, Birmingham | February 24, Columbiana | April 6, Livingston | April 27, Mobile)

Previewing *Crossroads*

Over the past 25 years, the Alabama Humanities Alliance has teamed up with the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum on Main Street program to bring 11 Smithsonian traveling exhibits to 57 small towns across Alabama. In 2023-2024, five rural communities will host the latest: *Crossroads: Change in Rural America*, an exploration of how rural life has evolved over the past

century. Our host sites will supplement the national exhibit with local programming that considers the past and future of rural Alabama.

Crossroads tours the state from September 2023 to June 2024, with stops in Cleveland, White Hall, Roanoke, Triana, and Ozark. Learn more in our “Considering *Crossroads*” insert in this copy of Mosaic.

New grant reviewers

This spring, AHA created its first-ever *external* review panel to consider Major and Media Grant proposals. The AHA Grants Review Panel is an independent team of humanities scholars and other public practitioners of the humanities who bring a diversity of perspectives, geography, and expertise to the role.

This year’s reviewers are: Matthew L. Downs, Ph.D.; Eric Kirkman, Ed.D; Alisha M. Linam; Rev. Joseph Scrivner, Ph.D.; Shari L. Williams, Ph.D. Learn more at alabamahumanities.org/grants.

Riley Scholars



Since 2003, AHA has awarded more than \$100,000 to Alabama educators through our Jenice Riley Memorial Scholarship. This competitive scholarship helps K-8 teachers build creative projects for the classroom, and beyond, that bring history and civics to life.

Last year, AHA recognized four educators as Riley Scholars (above, l-r): Adriana Shirley, Blossomwood Elementary (Huntsville); Sharon Neal, Prince of Peace Catholic (Hoover); Melissa Motes, Barton Academy for Advanced World Studies (Mobile); Willie Davis III, Charles F. Hard Elementary (Bessemer). Each received a \$1,000 scholarship, named in memory of Jenice Riley, a passionate teacher and daughter of former Governor Bob Riley and First Lady Patsy Riley.

The 2023 deadline for Riley Scholarship applications is September 20. Apply at alabamahumanities.org/jenice-riley-memorial-scholarship.

In fall 2014, Dr. Mary-Claire King, the scientist who discovered the BRCA1 gene associated with inherited breast cancer risk, made an impassioned plea that genetic testing for cancer risk be more widely available. The HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology in Huntsville, Alabama answered that challenge and developed a community-wide screening program, **Information is Power**. Launched in 2015, it initially provided individuals in North Alabama increased access to information about their hereditary risk for breast, ovarian, colon, and pancreatic cancers. The initiative now reaches far beyond North Alabama using partnerships with healthcare providers around the state.

A critical part of our efforts over the last three years has been to make this initiative available in under-served communities. "African Americans are the least likely to be offered and receive genetic testing that we know can help facilitate early detection critical for patient outcomes," says Sara Cooper, PhD, HudsonAlpha faculty investigator and faculty lead for the **Information is Power** initiative.

A new partnership with Rural Health Medical Program Inc. based in Selma, AL offers FREE genetic cancer screenings to patients at nine locations across the Black Belt (Dallas County, Demopolis, Marion, Monroeville, Pine Apple, Thomaston, Thomasville, Uniontown, and Yellow-Bluff). The initiative has also brought educational programs about cancer screening and prevention to Alabama's historically Black Colleges and Universities including Alabama State University in Montgomery, Miles College in Birmingham, and A&M University in Huntsville. Students and faculty have participated to help break down the testing barrier in minority communities.

During the last eight years, the **Information is Power** initiative has successfully provided more than 6,200 individuals with information about their genetic risk for cancer as well as provide genetic counseling for those with positive results. Through those efforts the initiative has identified more than 200 individuals with increased genetic cancer risk who received genetic counseling and referrals to appropriate cancer screening services that lead to early diagnosis critical to saving patient lives. Importantly, you share your genetics with your family and what you potentially learn can impact your parents, siblings, children, and cousins, impacting lives far beyond those of our participants.

This simple test only requires a simple cheek swab that can be done at home or in a physician's office. All testing is done in collaboration with a participant's healthcare providers. HudsonAlpha is proud of these accomplishments but we recognize that we still have work to do. Please reach out if you would like to participate and help by spreading the word about **Information is Power**.

WANT TO KNOW YOUR CANCER RISK?

In Alabama, 12 women every day are diagnosed with breast cancer making it the most commonly diagnosed cancer according to the American Cancer Society.

Our simple cheek swab can empower you to make important healthcare decisions for you and your family.

**It is easy.
Follow these steps:**

- Talk to your doctor about the test
- Arrange a time to take the test at the office if available in your area.
- Await to be empowered with the results to learn your cancer risk for breast, ovarian, pancreatic, and colon cancers



INFORMATION IS POWER



Call for more information at

256-327-9597

email informationispower@hudsonalpha.org
or visit information-is-power.org



More
than
'what
is
left'



A rumination on the myths, realities, and surprises of rural Alabama

By April Dobbins

I spent much of my childhood hung up on where I lived, or rather, trying to explain to others exactly where I resided. My house was situated in an undefined gray area between tiny Alabama towns. The roads that I lived on didn't have formal names; they were known by their postal route codes, all designated "Rural Routes" followed by a number. There was not an option for cable television because companies didn't run cables out that far from town. For years, my parents had to drive me miles to where a school bus would pick me up because public buses also did not come out to where we lived.

Country living was rife with these inconveniences. I grew up thinking about home as an isolated, liminal space. I wasn't going to run into anyone I knew because our house was its own castle, nestled between grand oaks and pines. Home was the equivalent of falling from the map, disappearing off the radar, like some strange science fiction thriller. It was Bermuda Triangle geography.

But my seclusion taught me the beauty of taking my time and listening to the world around me, and it distinctly shapes how I approach filmmaking and writing today. I spent my formative years taking in the beauty of birdsong, communing with nature, and being alone with my own thoughts. Alabama made me a patient person, and that translates to my work as an artist. I am an

advocate of slow and thoughtful storytelling. I delight in meandering trajectories and narrative threads.

As an adult, my curiosity has taken me all over the world. For decades of my life, I thought that my going out in the world was going away from Alabama. But years ago, as I was taking in the towering, otherworldly orange dunes of southern Africa's Namib Desert, I realized that I am always seeking rural spaces akin to home.

At the time, I was on a nature walk with a Namibian guide. You might think there wasn't much to see in the desert, a place I always assumed was barren by definition. However, scratch that sandy surface and you find all sorts of elusive wildlife. Beetles emerge from the dunes at dusk and dawn and stand on their front legs in a sort of handstand, letting the moisture from the fog collect on their bodies and trickle down into their mouths. Water is scarce, so this is how they survive. I told my guide about my family farm in Alabama and my grandfather's intimate knowledge of southern fauna and flora. I told him about catfish farming and Black farmers making a way in spite of decades of oppressive government tactics. Instantly, we started speaking a common language, one of people who were raised on the land.



The author, as a child on her family farm, Hale County.

Opposite page: *Closing the Gate*, by April Dobbins. Below: *Family in Pickup*, by Roslyn Jones, Dobbins' cousin.





DeAndrea Nichols, 2011, from the project *Live Feed*. By RaMell Ross.

“We are not so different,” he says. “You know what it is like to not have everything within reach. That is country living, but we make a way.”

“Yes,” I said. “We always do.”

For years, I thought my upbringing was a disadvantage — a descriptor I needed to work beyond. As a writer and filmmaker, I often attempted to overcompensate for my rural origins. In my youthful naivete, I believed that rural Alabama was void of true artistic refinement because that’s what the world taught me.

As a kid, I watched everything: westerns like *Rawhide* and *Gunsmoke*; science fiction like *Star Trek* and *The Twilight Zone*; and various comedies and dramas. Television was escapism, in a sense, but I was always confronted with distortions of the rural and Southern. Even then, I understood that the people writing and playing me on television were not from the rural South. But I could see myself as they saw me, and it was rarely a flattering portrayal. Seemingly harmless television shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies* reinforced this idea that rural folks only had streaks of ingenuity or inspiration

by mistake, and even then, the end result was often tragic. We could only be brilliant by accident because our isolated upbringings meant we were backwards and limited by definition.

My artistic journey has demanded that I shake the shame of growing up in the backwoods. I am not the first artist to reckon with my connections to home in my work. For many artists, it takes a lifetime to come to resolution with the places that molded us. I will admit to years of struggling to uncover my own love for the rural South. Many of my formative experiences were tainted by slights directly linked to the color of my skin. I cannot write about the rural without writing about how it almost smothered me to death. It’s a difficult thing to be an artist in spaces that thrive on conformity, familiarity, and insularity.

It was only after extensive travel through Africa, Europe, and the United States that I could return to the South with new eyes. Leaving home freed me up so that I could truly see home. Immersing myself in the work of rural artists and writers further enlightened me. I will never forget how I felt the first time I saw William

Christenberry's photography. His work took the wind out of me because I could immediately see that he was one of us. He captured country spaces with care. Not only did he cast the rural with an insider's gaze, but he immortalized spaces that were mere minutes from my house. It was Christenberry who helped me see that I didn't grow up "nowhere" as I had always imagined. Rather, I grew up in a place rich with beauty and tradition, and people were eager to see my world. Writers like Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston filled in what was missing from my school's required reading list — stories that reflected the rural experience from Black women's perspectives. There are traces of them all in everything that I do.

...

In a brief titled "Defining Rural at the U.S. Census Bureau," the Census Bureau notes that it "defines rural as what is not urban — that is, after defining individual urban areas, rural is what is left." Defining vastly different cultures, people, and topographies by "what is left" seems like a disservice, but I understand the quandary. In fumbling through attempts to explain what rural is, I often note all the city services and cultural amenities that we do not have, or I speak about all of the wild natural spaces that we do have. My rural world is one of paradoxes. At times utopian with its wild fauna and flora — the sweet breezes of spring, rife with promising notes of honeysuckle — this world is simultaneously dystopian for marginalized people. Rural means so many different things to so many different people, and it means different things to me at different times. My definition constantly evolves based on my perspective and, often, my location.

Now, as an adult, I can say that my work is deeply rooted in the rural South. I make photographs and films, and I write stories and articles. Everything I create is motivated by truth, honesty, seeing, and listening. In many ways, Alabama made me a good observer. And once I stopped trying to shake its soil from my shoes, I became a better storyteller, too.

The art, books, and films that I consumed in my formative years distorted my initial vision of the rural American South. The world often grapples with the rural through these channels. These mediums influence how we are seen and treated in the world. For these reasons, it is critical that we advocate for and support artists who are native to the communities that they are documenting. Investing in local artists and writers is the way to counter false and harmful narratives.

My life and career are testaments to the influential nature of the humanities. I am writing this article from my apartment in Reykjavik, Iceland, a sort of second home and another place that puts Alabama in perspective for me. Ironically, this will be the place where I finish my documentary film *Alabamaland*. Being here in Iceland has helped me better define my relationship with rural Alabama. Outside of the city, Iceland is one of the most rural places I have ever lived. It feels like home but is away. Here, I feel safe grappling with rural American art.

Being an artist is all about making connections, often between seemingly disparate places, people, and themes. It is a sort of gathering, and it's this connective work that makes me who I am.

April Dobbins is a photographer, writer, and filmmaker from Hale County. Her documentary film project, Alabamaland, is an ongoing exploration of Black family farms.



Photos from the Jones family farm in Hale County, long owned by April Dobbins' maternal grandfather, Herbert Jones. L-R: *Field on the Jones Farm*, by Dobbins; *Jones family reunion, 1982*, with April standing in front of her mother (who's wearing a black, floral dress); *Uncle Ruben and Horse*, by Roslyn Jones.

Trash

My neighbor burns his beside his trailer.
A garbage truck picks up ours,
but we have no plumbing.
I can't say who is poorer.

But his stinks,
a singed outlet smell that makes me worry
that some base, electrical fire hides in our walls.

It brings back my grandparents' pile burning
beside the scrawny tomatoes mom forbid me to eat,
the sprawling squash Dad backed over
because it grew so close to the rutted drive,

and the roses Ma-Maw bedded and moated
with long stretches of lawn.
One vine grew over the bay window
of her double-wide as if netting a big catch of pretty.

"Lipstick on a pig," is what my friend said once
pointing out red geraniums hanging from a trailer's porch.
A hedge-fund banker, she had no idea where I come from.

That stunk too.

I don't know if it was her or me.
The trailer park chip on my shoulder,
the one my teacher said I should knock off,
smolders.

I do know what people say,
that others treasure what you throw out.
But I'm afraid I'm like my neighbor
unwilling to give another man mine.

Some treasures are just for me
to burn.

—Tina Mozelle Braziel
First published in *Known by Salt* (Anhinga Press)

LEADING BY EXAMPLE IN RURAL ALABAMA



Edward Billings, Jr., DMD ('94)
Luverne, AL

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For generations, we treated the state's natural and cultural diversity as if it were a liability, or something only to exploit. In reality, it's always been our greatest asset. And if we finally take the time to appreciate it, Alabama's diversity could become the cornerstone of our livelihood — and the foundation of eastern North America's future.

By Bill Finch
Photos by Beth Maynor Finch

We are still strangers to Alabama.

This land of ours is home to more plant and animal species than any state east of the Mississippi. But how many Alabamians are aware of that?

What kindly elementary teacher taught us that the nation's center of native tree diversity is Alabama? That the national center of oak and magnolia diversity is Alabama? That the global center of hickory diversity is in Alabama?

Surely your parents took you fishing and said, you're in the center of fish diversity in North America. You see that river? There are more kinds of fish in a mile of that river than in the entire state of California.

They must have told you while you collected shells that there are more shellfish species in Alabama than in all of South America. When a turtle slipped off a log, maybe they mentioned that the center of turtle diversity in the Western Hemisphere isn't in the Amazon. It's here in Alabama.

Alabama's extreme diversity shows up in ways you'd never expect. Alabama is likely the global center of sunflower diversity. Alabama's pine savannas support more grass species than the Midwestern prairies. Louisiana knows how to mass-market crawfish, but Alabama is the global center of crawfish diversity, with 100 species and counting.

Maybe it's only natural that a state so packed with biodiversity is also one of the nation's centers for human and cultural diversity.

The two largest cities north of Mexico in 1250 A.D. — economic powerhouses that controlled trade over vast areas — were in Alabama, in North America's most biologically rich watersheds, on the banks of the Black Warrior and in the middle of the Mobile-Tensaw Delta.

It's no accident that the largest contingent of U.S. Colored Troops ever assembled marched through Alabama's longleaf pine grasslands, overran Confederates in the ancient oak and magnolia bluff forests overlooking the Mobile Delta, and put an end to the Civil War.

arden. portunity.

It's no accident that Martin Luther King Jr. led the nation from Selma to Montgomery along the Alabama River, where bison once grazed in the wildflower-rich Black Belt Prairie. It's no accident that civil rights workers founded the Black Panther Party there, along the same trails where Alabama's Red Stick warriors made a last stand to revive Eastern tribal culture and communities.

Alabama and the nation suffer when we neglect the importance of that diversity.

Those two impressive pre-Columbian cities, at Moundville and Bottle Creek, collapsed suddenly, seemingly under their own weight, as they devoured the landscape much as the Cotton Kingdom did centuries later. The nation's oppressive Native American policies, still being fought in the courts, were mandated by Andrew Jackson after he beat down the Red Stick revival at Horseshoe Bend.

Alabama is haunted by a long history of human oppression that runs parallel with degradation and

disregard for the land. Alabama's great extinction crisis — we've suffered more extinctions than any other state on the continent — exploded in tandem with the rise of slavery, Jim Crow, and cries of "segregation forever." Many parts of Alabama are trapped in a cycle of impoverished people and land, though we rarely recognize the connection between the two.



E.O. Wilson and Bill Finch at Paint Rock Forest Research Center.



Splinter Hill Bog, Bay Minette.

The question for us today is this: Can we at last benefit from honoring and celebrating our diversity, rather than suffering because we ignored it, exploited it, feared it, trampled it under our feet?

Ed Wilson loved fishing in Alabama. Even after he became “E.O. Wilson” — Harvard professor, Pulitzer-winning author, Alabama’s most globally recognized scientist — he often talked about wanting to sit on the bank with a cane pole, as he did growing up here, probing the waters to see what’s there.

But Wilson became the internationally recognized “father of biodiversity” because his experience here inspired a leap in thought: It’s not the fishing that makes Alabama great; it’s the fish. It’s not the timbering that makes us rich; it’s the forests. It’s not workforce productivity that will determine our fortune, but our ability to understand the diversity that surrounds us.

Before his death, Wilson asked the world to embrace the idea that Alabama represented North America’s Amazon.

Wilson was proud to be tied to such a biologically diverse state and proud of his fellow Alabamians. But Wilson understood that Alabama’s diversity wasn’t simply a point of state pride. Wilson knew that Alabama’s diversity is valuable to Alabamians because our diversity is so valuable to North America.

We can, Wilson believed, make an asset of Alabama’s biodiversity. But it helps if we first understand how it came to be a great center of diversity.

There are many explanations, though one far outweighs the others. The forests, prairies, savannas, and stream habitats of Alabama and surrounding states are millions of years older than similar habitats in much of the rest of North America. Glaciers repeatedly wiped out most life north of Washington, D.C. Carolina mountaintops were tundra.

But through multiple changes in climate, the center of eastern forest diversity remained where it has persisted for millions of years, in the deep South. Alabama sat in the heart of it, warmed and moistened by the Gulf of Mexico, with its unusual variety of streams and landforms, mountains to flatwoods, making a home for most of eastern North America’s biodiversity. It is the nation’s ancient storehouse of diversity, and portions of it were repeatedly shared with the rest of the country as glaciers retreated and climate changed.

Climate, you may have heard, is changing again. As that happens, our recognition of the importance of Alabama’s diversity will determine the future of all of eastern North America’s ecosystems.

Just as E.O. Wilson’s vision of biodiversity was one of Alabama’s greatest exports, our diversity has always been, and always will be, our most valuable commodity. These are the reserves America will need to survive and prosper in the future. These are the Alabama goods the nation will increasingly clamor for.

How do we at last make the best use of diversity? It starts with rediscovering our natural diversity and learning to live well by it.

There are already innovative models. Stream species that remain only in Alabama are being propagated at the Alabama Aquatic Biodiversity Center and shipped to states where these species have been lost. American elm trees, which have died out over much of North America, are still healthy and abundant in Alabama: The genetic keys for resurrecting American elm across the eastern U.S are being discovered here.

But we won’t succeed unless we also learn to see this diversity through the eyes of diversity. For too long, careers in natural history and scientific discovery were open only to a fraction of Americans. Alabama produced a handful of the world’s most recognized biologists, like E.O. Wilson, Patty Gowaty, and George Washington Carver. The doors were shut for many more.

One of the reasons we have a hard time appreciating our own diversity is that we have done such a poor job of ensuring that a diverse group of Alabamians has the chance to see and study it.

That's why Wilson joined with grassroots partners, the National Parks Conservation Association, the University of West Alabama, and others to create the Alabama River Diversity Network. Last fall, after more than a decade of work, that coalition helped land a National Park Service designation, the Black Belt National Heritage Area. The Heritage Area fosters a new landscape-based identity for the nation to rally around and offers federal assistance to 19 Alabama counties in central and south Alabama. Recognition of both natural and cultural diversity of the Black Belt won that national attention.

Fully appreciating and making use of our natural and human diversity in Alabama is going to require a new model of research, education, and restoration. A group of scientists, institutions, and conservationists — including Wilson, UCLA's Stephen Hubbell, the Smithsonian Institution, The Nature Conservancy, Alabama A&M, and other Alabama universities — are helping develop that model at the Paint Rock Forest Research Center here in northeast Alabama.

Paint Rock is another one of those surprisingly rich Alabama ecosystems, the center of North America's deciduous forest and cave diversity, and one of Alabama's two national centers of aquatic diversity. The research center and campus are designed to attract international scientists to explore Alabama's biodiversity and its significance to the nation and the world, even as we train a new generation of Alabamians to see and appreciate it.

The forest dynamics plot being developed here is already the most diverse in the nation. We've identified, measured, tagged, and mapped some 100 species of trees, and we'll be following the fate of some 100,000 trees over the next 50 years. This kind of analysis has already proved itself in the tropics, helping us



Sakora Smeby, an Alabama A&M student, identifying and tagging a tree for Paint Rock's 100,000-tree forest census.



understand, for example, the role of diversity in forest survival and the impacts of forests on climate change. But nowhere else in North America is this work being done at such a scale or in such an extraordinarily diverse forest.

We're attracting scientists from across the nation to make use of this massive research infrastructure. They're building their own research on top of it, and they're interacting with our research interns, a diverse group of young scientists mostly from Alabama who have a world of new opportunities opened to them.

What we're finding is already changing the way the world sees Alabama. We're bringing recognition to Alabama species no one has ever described before — a new oak, new maples, new violets. We're uncovering the hidden genetic diversity within Alabama species, genetics that may be crucial to ensuring the future of iconic species like American elm, ash, butternut, shortleaf pine, and many others. We're collecting and propagating the basic ingredients of major forest types that are now almost lost, but which will likely be critical as climate continues to change.

If we were operating in most any state but Alabama, this work might seem less urgent. But the diversity of Alabama is so unusual and so significant to the future of all North American ecosystems, we feel we must lead the charge.

It's our ancient burden. It's our greatest opportunity.

Tensaw Delta Morning, Mobile-Tensaw River Delta.



Creek survivance

“Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of Native stories ... Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry.”

—Anishinaabe cultural theorist Gerald Vizenor,
in *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*

On the preservation of memory and the stories we tell about ourselves

By Deidra Suwanee Dees, Ed.D.

Of Mvskoke (Creek) and Scottish heritage, I grew up in rural Alabama learning to suppress my Mvskoke heritage from outsiders. My family comes from the small town of Uriah — only one traffic light — situated on ancestral Mvskoke land. Coming from a low-income family, I learned survivance as I picked cotton on our motherland, something I have written about often, including in “I. Childhood Work: Sweat.”

In the poem, I document the injustice of my Creek family working the cotton fields while those around us would “sit in the shade of the house.” The piece demonstrates how the inequity of poverty can turn a person against one’s own self.

*I feel sweat watering my forehead
and dripping below my brows in the middle of
acres and acres of tall cotton stalks,*

*I feel smothered bending over searching for
cotton near the ground
as gnats and sweat blur my vision,*

*dirty sweat runs down my legs making me
vulnerable to mosquitoes hiding
in the shade of the cotton leaves,*

*the scorching hot sun is pressing the back of
my head like a heavy mountain of granite;*

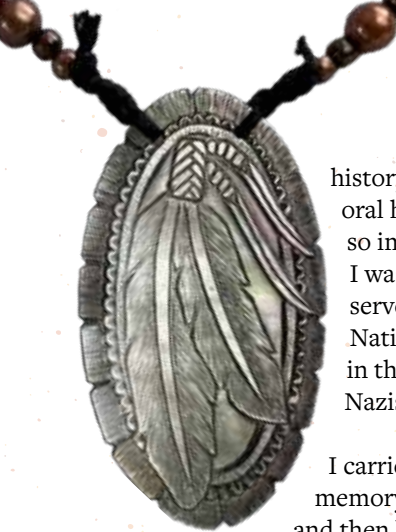
*the repulsive smell of my own body odor
crowds my nostrils as I squat
between the rows gasping in the heat;*

*seeing a sea of brown-skinned faces
dotting the white cotton field
while other kids sit in the shade of the house
makes me hate my body—I hate myself.*

In this poetic verse, one of those “brown-skinned faces dotting the white cotton field” is my father, Otis Dees (1917-1984), a farmer, who helped me rise above internal hatred by teaching me the stories of survivance in our family history — how Mvskokes survived stolen land and generational oppression. Daddy instilled in me the importance of preserving and documenting our family



Tall Trees, by Sundi Hawkins.



history that was passed down through oral history. Surviving oppression was so important to him that — long before I was born — he had volunteered to serve in World War II, like many other Native Americans, to help make a way in the world for justice to prevail over Nazism.

I carried Daddy's stories in my childhood memory from as early as I can remember, and then began documenting them at age twelve when my grandmother gave me a diary for my birthday. I did not even know what the word "diary" meant or how a diary was used. "You write about your daily experiences and family history," my grandmother told me.

I found this newly learned concept so compelling that I jumped into writing in my diary and voraciously documented my family stories. I found a deep satisfaction in documenting daddy's word-of-mouth history, one that had never been written down before. I loved writing so much that I have kept a journal from that day until this.

I brought this love of preservation to my job as director and tribal archivist at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, where I have worked for the past twelve years. Here, I work with a team of "Records Warriors" who have this same passion. We work together to document tribal history through our records management program. One record that our team brought to the forefront is a documentary film, *Trail of Tears*, that was reenacted by Creeks in our tribal community in 1978. Our tribal council had developed a partnership with Alabama A&M University, a historically Black college in Huntsville, to bring this film to Alabama Public Television. It documents not only the tragic, forced displacement of Indigenous peoples from the American southeast to present-day Oklahoma in the 1830s, but also the resilience of Indigenous people.

Unfortunately, the film became lost before it ever aired.

Yet, through the years, it has remained the most-requested item in our Archives. About a decade ago, our Records Warriors again partnered with Alabama A&M, working with Ms. Veronica Henderson, head of the university's archives, and Mr. Elvin Jenkins, director of electronic media communications. Together, we conducted painstaking research to locate this important film. In 2020, more than forty years after it was lost, the *Trail of Tears* film was finally rediscovered!

With great pride and gratification, the Records Warriors had the film digitized and provided three virtual film screenings in 2020 and 2021 during the height of the pandemic. The tribal community and viewers everywhere were able to safely access the *Trail of Tears* for the first time, and share in this unique moment of restoration.

The rediscovery of the *Trail of Tears* film was analogous to Daddy helping me rise above self-hatred in those cotton fields by teaching me the stories of our family history. Because he helped me see the value of my history, I contributed to the preservation of my family stories through writing and contributed to the preservation of the *Trail of Tears* film through rediscovery, both of which tell the extraordinary story of Creek survivance.

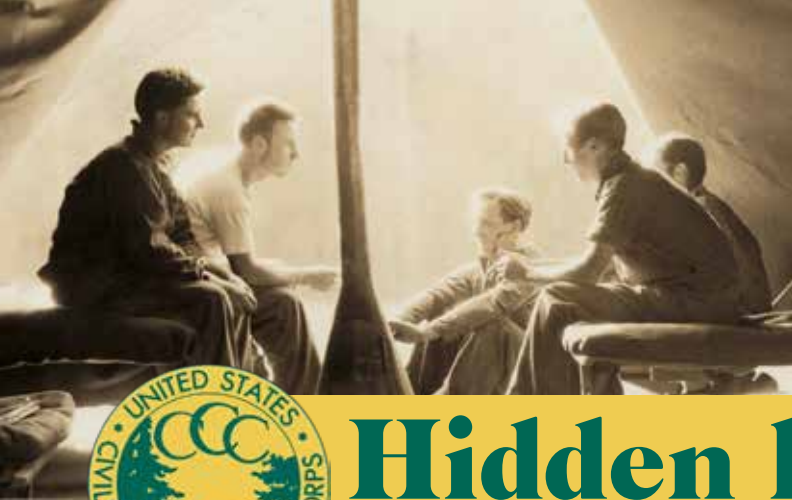


Above: Creek Seamstress, by Ainsley McNeely.
Left: Shell carving by Dan Townsend.

To watch *Trail of Tears*, read the digital version of this story at alabamahumanities.org/mosaic. Dees' poem originally appeared in the 2023 anthology *On Work* and is reprinted here courtesy of Unleash Press. Dees was named a 2023 Editor's Choice Winner by Unleash Press for "I. Childhood Work: Sweat."



Chair, by Jennifer McCConnell. From the series, "Homeward Bound: Finding Place and Identity in the Postmodern South."



Hidden histories

Five CCC sites and five country cemeteries with stories to tell

Ninety years ago, the Civilian Conservation Corps sprang to New Deal life. From 1933-1942, the CCC created a long-lasting impact on Alabama. Around 66,000 young men (White and Black, working in separate companies) built 1,800 miles of roads, nearly 500 bridges, improved hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland, and helped create 12 state parks, including some of the state's most iconic park architecture. Think of Bunker Tower atop Cheaha Mountain, Jones Archeological Museum at Moundville, and the Open Pond Fire Tower in Conecuh National Forest.

Below, we asked several Alabamians to share about some of their favorite CCC spots. To learn about other CCC sites in the state, visit the Encyclopedia of Alabama and watch the AHA-funded documentary, Rural Revival: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama.



While growing up in Anniston, Alabama, my bedroom on the top of 10th Street Mountain Road looked out at Cheaha Mountain. At first, my imagination created its own story of the Mountain. What better place on earth to encounter God's majesty than at Alabama's oldest state park, its highest natural point, its most mesmerizing vista of the southern-most Appalachian Mountains? Alabama's earliest inhabitants, the Muscogee Creeks, gave the mountain its name; in the Mvskoke language, Cheaha means "high" or "high place."

—Wayne Flynt, Ph.D., historian, author, and Alabama Humanities Fellow (1991)



The Triana Health Clinic, a stone-clad, Craftsman structure, was originally built in 1941 by the CCC as a game warden's residence within the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge. But it most notably operated as a public health clinic for over four decades in the quiet river town of Triana. The clinic was instrumental in providing healthcare to rural, low-income Black families in north Alabama,

thanks to the direction of two medical pioneers, Harold Fanning Drake, M.D., and Nurse Johnnie Loujean Dent.

—Betty Williams, president, Triana Historical Society



In Spanish, Monte Sano means "mountain of health," an apt description for Monte Sano State Park, in northeast Alabama. Here, there are 11 original CCC stone cabins with working fireplaces and screened-in porches, which were handcrafted in the 1930s. Cabins sit along a bluff line with a breathtaking view of the valleys surrounding Monte Sano Mountain. A CCC Museum and a Memorial Garden sit on the park's summit, dedicated to the young boys who created the structures.

—Tommy Vincent Wier, filmmaker, 'Rural Revival: The Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama'



Beneath towering oaks, the sandstone gateway into DeSoto State Park is a standing testament of the hard work of the CCC boys. Visitors can touch the chisel marks in each giant stone, walk to an unfinished mystical stone bridge, or hike to the park's sandstone quarry where the CCC sourced stone for these beautiful "parkitecture" structures.

—Renee S. Raney, chief of interpretation and education, Alabama State Parks



The former Fort McClellan in Anniston once served as a multi-state headquarters and supply district for the CCC. Closed in 1999, McClellan is now home to a vibrant civilian community that retains much of its rich history, including the Fort's historic cemeteries, Monteith Amphitheater, and former Officers' Club — a deteriorating relic in need of repair, whose lounge is filled with massive, breathtaking murals painted by two German prisoners of war held there during World War II.

—W. Pete Conroy, conservationist, director of JSU's Environmental Policy and Information Center



Country cemeteries have as many stories to tell as souls at rest. Below, Alabama scholars share a mere sampling. To learn more about historic cemeteries statewide, connect with the Alabama Cemetery Preservation Alliance.



Brown Cemetery | Sumter County

In 1848, the John E. Brown family built The Cedars, a large home on former Choctaw land in Sumter County. The people they enslaved, and their descendants, occupy nearby Brown Cemetery, noteworthy for its handmade headstones. Fashioned in a wooden mold from cement, they are hand-lettered or stamped and many bear at the top a stamped flower, cross, or other design. These folk markers can be found across Sumter and surrounding counties, their similarity suggesting a limited number of makers.

—Ashley A. Dumas, Ph.D., associate professor of anthropology, University of West Alabama



Camden Cemetery | Wilcox County

Camden Cemetery is the final resting place of the victims of the Orline St. John steamboat tragedy. The sidewheeler caught fire on March 5, 1850, while traveling north on the Alabama River. Over 40 people, mostly women and children, perished. The ship's captain was the Mobilian Tim Meaher; presumably the same Tim Meaher who, a decade later, would infamously and illegally traffic the last enslaved Africans into the U.S. aboard the *Clotilda*.

—Mollie Smith Waters, AHA Road Scholar and professor at Lurleen B. Wallace Community College



Claiborne Cemetery | Monroe County

In the woods by a cow pasture in what used to be Claiborne is a surprising find — a 19th-century Jewish cemetery. What used to be a bustling river town in the 1850s had a small Jewish community, working as peddlers and rural merchants. Though newcomers, many fought for the Confederacy. Union looting during the war, yellow fever, and a railroad snub led to the town's demise in the early 1870s, and most remaining Jews headed to Mobile or Selma. Teens from a Jewish summer camp in Mississippi helped restore the cemetery in 2000.

—Larry Brook, editor, *Southern Jewish Life*



Key Underwood Coon Dog Memorial Graveyard | Colbert County

Alabama's famed "Coon Dog Cemetery" was founded, unwittingly, in 1937, when Key Underwood buried his dog and longtime hunting companion Troop here. The pine bluff, known as Sugar Creek, had been the duo's favorite hunting ground. Several years later, Underwood's brother buried one of his own coon dogs at the same spot. A tradition took hold. Today, the cemetery is the final resting place for more than 300 coonhounds, and nearly 7,000 people visit each year.

—Karren Pell, contributing author, *Encyclopedia of Alabama*

Many people avoid talking about death, but it never bothered me.

—Kathryn Tucker Windham



Pioneer Cemetery | Butler County

Greenville's oldest cemetery showcases two types of classic Southern cemetery architecture. One is evident on the 1864 grave of a 21-year-old Anna Catherine Reid, covered in cockleshells, one of the most popular Southern grave-decorating traditions of centuries past. The other example is Elizabeth Bragg's 1870 grave, graced with an elaborate metal cover crafted by local inventor Joseph R. Abrams. His Greenville grave covers would become popular the South over in the late 1800s.

—Annabel N. Markle, *Pioneer Cemetery Preservation Association*

Photo credits: Opposite page, at left: After the day's work, Sept. 1933; at right: An African American CCC unit in Alabama, circa 1940. Both photos courtesy National Archives. This page: Examples of grave cover architecture in Butler County's Pioneer Cemetery. Courtesy Alabama Cemetery Preservation Alliance.



Top: Avondale Mill, circa 1941. Above: Museum of Pell City. Background: Avondale Mills by Wayne Spradley.

Local history on display

A decade in the making, the new Museum of Pell City traces its roots to an AHA collaboration.

By Melissa Brown

In 2014, the Alabama Humanities Alliance selected Pell City to host a Smithsonian Institution traveling exhibit, *The Way We Worked*, which came to Alabama through the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street program. Carol Pappas, Deanna Lawley, Pam Foote, and many other volunteers created a hometown exhibit to complement the Smithsonian exhibit's national perspective. More than 7,000 people toured it that summer, and the experience sparked an idea: Why not create a permanent history museum in town?

From that seed — and nearly a decade of fundraising, artifact-gathering, and site work — now stands a 4,000-square-foot Museum of Pell City that tells the town's story.

Inside, visitors are greeted by portions of AHA's *Making Alabama* bicentennial exhibit alongside *The Story Begins in the Land*, a video narrated by the late John Hall, Ph.D., an award-winning writer and museum curator. Touch-screen tablets offer interactive historical timelines. Inviting displays showcase everything from Native American arrowheads to a Logan Martin Dam replica. Live-edge benches, made from University of Alabama cherry trees, provide places to rest and reflect.

For her part, Pappas, who is now the museum's president, takes pride in finding the "story behind the story" that people may not know, like when Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King Jr.'s two sons stayed in Pell City as the Poor People's March passed through in 1968. The museum also spotlights Avondale Mills, the town's founding industry, and the mill village that sprang up around it. It's a story in need of preserving

as the 1902-era mill has largely disappeared due to fire, demolition, and redevelopment since it closed in 2006. The museum is a true community effort, with many artifacts supplied by local residents like Kate DeGaris, whose ancestors founded the town.

"If it weren't for her, we wouldn't have half the museum," says Pappas, referring to a trove of photos and artifacts with DeGaris' meticulous notes and an oral history provided by her family. The museum's Living History Studio will capture more residents' stories, especially veterans'. "We've lost so many people already," Pappas says, "so the studio was paramount for us."

Laura Anderson, AHA's director of partnerships and outcomes, notes that Pell City astutely approached their Museum on Main Street participation as a community development opportunity — one that "they really knocked out of the park."

As the Smithsonian's next traveling exhibit, *Crossroads: Change in Rural America*, comes to Alabama this fall, five more host communities will have the chance to envision new possibilities for their own towns after experiencing the national exhibit. And if they need some inspiration, they can look to Pell City.

From its temporary beginnings, the Museum of Pell City illustrates how dedicated people working together can create something special. "The most gratifying thing," says Pappas, "is when people say they're coming back because they couldn't read everything in one visit."

An Alabama bibliography

The best of rural Alabama on page and screen

As a companion to *Crossroads: Change in Rural America* — the Smithsonian exhibit touring Alabama in 2023-2024 — scholar Julia Brock, Ph.D., has curated a bibliography of insightful writing, photography, films, and resources about rural Alabama.

While far from exhaustive, the list highlights sources from the well-known to the overlooked, from literature to history, from past to present. There's Mark D. Hersey's *Environmental Biography of George Washington Carver* next to Rick Bragg's *All Over But the Shoutin'*. Documentaries include RaMell Ross' artful examination of Black rural life in *Hale County This Morning, This Evening*, and *Jasper Mall*, a film by Bradford Thomason and Brett Whitcomb on the slow decline of a community gathering spot.

Read Our Recs



The bibliography also includes digital resources, including the vast Encyclopedia of Alabama; Photogrammer, a project mapping New Deal-era photography nationwide; and the Library of Congress' Prints and Photographs Division. Read the bibliography at alabamahumanities.org/mosaic or use the QR code at left.



Wizard of Tuskegee, red clay art of George Washington Carver, by Jahni Moore.

Rural Alabama in living color

Of course, the best way to experience rural Alabama today is to, well, experience it. And there are many pathways to get started.



Union Springs town mural featuring Hank Williams, by Wes Hardin. Alabama Mural Trail.

Alabama Mural Trail

This trail gets Alabamians off the beaten path to learn about local histories and culture. alabamamuraltrail.org

Alabama State Parks

Explore Alabama's forests, waterways, and more across 450 miles of trails at 21 state parks. alapark.com

Barn Quilt Trail

A public art project of 200 quilts and counting, posted on barns across Alabama's countryside. alabamabarnquilttrail.org

Post Office Artwork Trail

As part of FDR's New Deal, the U.S. Treasury recruited artists to paint "art accessible to all" in U.S. Post Offices. wpamurals.org/alabama

U.S. Civil Rights Trail

Featuring sites in rural Alabama, including Scottsboro, Tuskegee, and the Selma-to-Montgomery March. civilrightstrail.com



Continuous hope

How the remaining Jews of Selma reckon with a complicated past and prepare for an uncertain future

By Amy K. Milligan
Photos by Jerry Siegel

Driving through downtown Selma, Alabama, it is impossible to miss the imposing and majestic presence of Temple Mishkan Israel. Standing on Broad Street, the two-story, 1899 Romanesque Revival building has a brick exterior and a multiangled slate roof. The front has three brick arches with elaborate wrought-iron railings flanked by two towering turrets. Stunning stained-glass windows frame the structure, including a large circular window above the entrance featuring a Star of David, the center of which says, in Hebrew, *Adonai Echad* (“The Lord is One,” a line from the Shema, the central declaration of Jewish faith).

Unfortunately, only three congregants remain to tell the sacred site’s story. Once numbering more than 300 strong, Temple Mishkan Israel’s three, potentially final, members now serve as stewards, interpreting and preserving their community’s rich history for future generations. Together, they bravely confront a painful reality: How do you ensure a community’s story lives when it exists only in memory?

History to preserve, truths to tell

Today, there are approximately 10,500 Jews living in Alabama, 85 percent of whom live in Birmingham, Mobile, and Montgomery. There are other Jewish congregations throughout the state, but 325 Jews live in towns without congregations or with extremely small Jewish populations, including the three members of Selma’s Mishkan Israel. And while the temple has predominantly served those who live in the city, it has also historically welcomed members from surrounding rural Black Belt communities.

Difficult as it may be to imagine now, the Jewish population of Selma once thrived. Jews were among the earliest settlers of the city, making their way to Selma first from Southern seaports and later from up and down the East Coast. They arrived in Selma as peddlers, many of whom eventually settled in the city and opened downtown storefronts. Their early presence in the city was unlike other White Selmians: They did not own plantations, nor did they work the land.

Early Jewish Selmians existed in a space between the Black and White populations, serving both plantation owners and enslaved individuals. Later, as the cotton industry boomed, Selma's Jews engaged in cotton brokerage and exports, selling the cotton sold to them by rural White enslavers from nearby towns. Their businesses eventually evolved into local dry goods, general merchandise, department, retail, and grocery stores, all of which lined the streets of downtown Selma.

Unlike the city's early White Christian population, which quickly erected church buildings on the land provided to them by city planners, Selma's Jews initially worshipped in private homes. The first congregational gatherings were in 1867 in the home of Joseph Meyer and Adolph Elkan, local merchants who shared a boarding-home residence with several of Selma's other early Jewish merchants, most of whom later established separate residences in the city.

Selma's Jewish congregation soon grew large enough that they began worshipping at Harmony Hall — the heart and hub of the Jewish social scene when Jews were largely banned from other cultural, fraternal, and social organizations — and, later, in space that they rented from St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Temple Mishkan Israel was built in 1899 and has been the congregational home ever since. B'nai Abraham, a much smaller, Orthodox temple, also existed in Selma for nearly fifty years until the two congregations merged in 1944.

At its peak, Selma's Jewish community had 104 households (about 325 individuals). Selma's Jews served their city in numerous civic roles from the water commission to the school board, and, most notably, Selma also had three Jewish mayors. The history of the city is so intertwined with its Jewish history that the two cannot be separated. Still, as the city faced economic and population declines, Selma's Jewish community decreased, too. Younger generations left the city to pursue education or employment and did not return; moreover, after the closure of Craig Air Force Base in 1977, there was little new industry bringing new citizens to the city. By 1980, the temple had 200 aging members. Today, only three remain.

Still, those who grew up in Selma or have familial ties to the congregation remain invested in the city and temple. The "Selma family," as they call themselves, gathered in 1997 and 1999 for "Home for the Holidays," reuniting more than 300 Jews from across the nation with ties to Temple Mishkan Israel. Their efforts have continued, with a temple board and a fundraising campaign to preserve the temple and its legacy.

In 2021, the group rebranded itself as The Selma Temple, an international organization that honors the Jewish heritage of Selma and seeks to demonstrate an ongoing investment in the city by promoting racial reconciliation and healing. The group is committed to sharing and exploring the stories of Jews in Selma. Perhaps more importantly, they also seek to aid and amplify work being done in the Selma community that serves the needs of the city, particularly supporting the work of Black Selmians. They actively engage with the local arts community, as well as in city improvement efforts. Most recently, after a devastating tornado destroyed much of the city in January 2023, The Selma Temple made generous contributions to help rebuild homes and support the needs of several Black, Christian families — with donations coming from the temple's restoration funds, members' own money, and additional support raised in other cities.



Interior of Selma's 1899-built Temple Mishkan Israel.





Temple members: Ronnie Leet, Hanna Berger, Joanie Gibian Looney (who passed away in 2021).

As tours and school groups pass through Selma, brought there by their interest in civil rights history, they often stop at the temple to hear about the legacy and impact of the Jewish community. Temple members recount an honest story, engaging in truth-telling about both the good and the difficult parts of their city's history and their temple's navigation of the civil rights movement. They discuss how Jewish Selmians, like other White southerners, were divided in their opinions about civil rights. They educate students and visitors about the power of standing on the right side of history, the pain of denying others their full humanity, and, perhaps most importantly, the dangers of inaction born out of fear. Their story sits in their city's ever-present tension of looking forward while simultaneously holding oneself accountable for, and interrogating, the past. There is a keen awareness that the story must continue to be told, even if the day comes when there are no longer active members of the congregation living in the city.

'We have hope'

The reality of their small membership is not a story of failure or of sadness, although it is about the inevitability of aging and of the struggles of a small congregation in the Deep South. It is, more importantly, a portrait of a dream fulfilled: the tale of Jews fleeing persecution and settling in Alabama, of pursuing and achieving the American dream for themselves and for their children, and of establishing a deeply rooted community — creating a home that their children and grandchildren want to come back to time and time again, a place that even strangers come to and feel like family.

Yes, it's true that there are few Jews left in Selma, but their legacy lives on in the larger "Selma family" dispersed across the U.S. that still sees their Jewishness, their families, and their identities tied to a small town in the Black Belt of Alabama.

In a personal interview shortly before her death in 2021, Joanie Gibian Looney described how the temple was not a relic of another era but rather an indelible mark on the landscape of a changing city. "I just don't think there's going to be anybody left soon," she said. "I don't see anybody else coming to take our places. But we have hope, a collective hope, that there will always at least be a Jewish presence. We're not going to be here, we know that. I don't know how it is going to play out. Even a hundred years from now, will the temple still be here? Will anybody care? But at least we have hope. And we can only hope that we are remembered for our continuous hope."

So often the focus of American Jewish history is on the stories of large Jewish temples in northern or urban areas, but one of the best lessons we can learn is from a small congregation in Alabama's Black Belt. Indeed, in a world plagued by hate and indifference, Temple Mishkan Israel is cultivating a legacy of sustained civic investment, truth-telling, and hope. The Jews of Selma teach us that no matter our size or location, we all have the power to impact change, to give back to our communities, and to continue doing the hard work of interfaith understanding and racial reconciliation.

To learn more about the past, present, and future of Temple Mishkan Israel, visit selmatemple.org.

54 Miles to Home highlights rural campsites of the Selma-to-Montgomery march

By Tania De'Shawn Russell

Nearly 60 years after Selma to Montgomery, the land between the two cities still nestles memories of the march that spurred the Voting Rights Act of 1965: The modest homes and farmlands of three Black farming families — the Steeles, Gardners, and Halls. The ashes from Rosie Steele's home and store burned to the ground, now mingling with the soil where soft, yellow-green grass grows. Sacred spaces that offered respite and protection to countless foot soldiers, now in need of repair. Surrounding farmlands resist decay by bearing fruit, a landscape humming softly, "see me and the future I have provided."

54 Miles to Home is an Alabama Humanities Alliance-funded documentary centered around three ordinary families of Lowndes County who turned their homes into campsites for thousands of protestors during the march from Selma to Montgomery. The documentary — directed by Claire Haughey and produced by Phillip Howard and Michele Forman — depicts a journey that feels like a 54-mile exodus toward a promise of equality that America had yet to make good on. Each protestor a David, each country plot of land a stone, we are reminded that even the most unlikely of us can make giants fall.

Howard, a U.S. Marines veteran and current project manager for The Conservation Fund's Civil Rights People and Places Program, immersed himself in historical research from the 1950s and 1960s to prepare for this film. "During my reading, it became obvious that the maids, janitors, teachers, pastors, craftsmen, mechanics, and stay-at-home moms were the soldiers of the civil rights movement," Howard says. "Dr. King and the leadership were critically important. But if not for these poor, rural people, they would have no army. If it were not for the actions of poor people in the Black Belt, we would not experience the progress that we have today."

He recounts the story of Rosie Steele, a mother of six and grandmother to many more, widowed in her 20s, owner of a convenience



Rosie Steele's descendants visit family farmland. From *54 Miles to Home*.

store. When asked to house and feed hundreds of marchers, Steele instantly agreed, "I am not afraid because I have lived my three score and 10." She knew retaliation was inevitable but still chose the side of courage. After sheltering the protestors, her store and home were destroyed by fire in a suspected act of arson.

Today, the homesites of the Steeles, Gardners, and Halls are history on the brink of erasure. In 2021, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named the campsites along the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail as one of the nation's most endangered historic sites. In the film, descendants talk about how these lands can be preserved to highlight the rural roots of the civil rights movement. The Steeles aspire to rebuild replicas of their home and store in memory of Rosie Steele's bravery. The Gardners aim to repair their family home. The Halls hope to build an agricultural education program in honor of the legacy of farming that gave agency and provision to so many Lowndes County residents.

54 Miles to Home humbles us. It also gives us an opportunity to cherish the history surrounding us. "A lot of those who marched didn't get the chance to vote, but they wanted their children to have the opportunity," Howard says. "Education level, socioeconomic status, and titles are invalid in the gravity of this story. When you enter the campsites, you become small. I am six-foot-three; I have become small here. No one is bigger than these rural Alabamians' story or their contributions."

To watch the film and learn more, visit filmfreeway.com/54_Miles_To_Home.

Disrupting the narrative

A farm in Alabama's
River Region is ushering
in a land justice revival.



“What a gift land truly is, and what a gift the Motherland has to offer us.”

—Jasmyn Elise Story

By Salaam Green

Dazzling shades of blue tile inhabit a small building on the property of Freedom Farm Azul in rural Autauga County, welcoming guests into the land's beauty. The farm sits on 15 acres of land in a region best known for cotton mills and fertile soil befitting a county whose name, Autauga, can be translated as “land of plenty.” Today, the soil here yields a lush bounty of watermelon, collard greens, squash, okra, and an array of fresh herbs and flowering plants.

But this farm doesn't just grow crops; it cultivates knowledge, too.

Freedom Farm Azul's mission is three-pronged: to nourish, to educate, and to heal. Everything here works to center the experiences of Black, queer, and other marginalized persons, and to recognize the importance of farming, Indigenous farmers, and Alabama's rural landscape. It's a local take on the concept of land justice — considering ecological, social, and racial justice to make informed decisions about how to use, nurture, and share this 15-acre patch of rural Alabama.

The farm's landowner, Jasmyn Elise Story, is a restorative justice facilitator, trained to create a safe space for honest, open, and respectful conversations between people who have been in conflict. She's Black, queer, and pursuing her Ph.D. as a third-generation Tuskegee University student — an HBCU that made its reputation teaching effective agricultural practices. Story's background is an appropriate one for someone who aims to reimagine how land can be used and shared.

Originally from Pennsylvania, Story found her roots in the South through her maternal and paternal grandparents, who are descendants of enslaved people who worked the land in rural Greene and Calhoun counties in Alabama. She grew up hearing stories about the

plantation where her ancestors toiled both before and after emancipation. The stories helped develop her connection to Alabama and farming, and to consider how to create a more restorative affiliation with the landscape so prominent in her family history.

The origin of Freedom Farm Azul came from her early experiences when she fell in love with nature, walking hand in hand with her grandfather in Arkansas during summers as a young child. Story found unity in the earth and, eventually, a vision for Freedom Farm Azul as a space for awakening, for understanding, and for love.

Reclaiming rural spaces and reimagining rural land

“I can't say I have ever seen collard greens as big as the ones that grew out of the ground here until Farmer Greer handed me a leaf the size of my arm,” Story says.



Opposite page: Photo by Jerry Siegel, Black Belt Color series. Above: Farmer Alfonza Greer leads a children's gardening workshop at Freedom Farm Azul. Courtesy Sub Urban Creative.



Freedom Farm Azul founder Jasmyn Story (left), and Donovan Lindo, identifying commonly spotted Alabama snakes during a community celebration on the farm. Photos courtesy Sub Urban Creative.

Farmer Alfonza Greer and “Mama” Callie Greer, a husband-and-wife team, run the farm. The couple avoids agricultural pesticides and uses soil fertilization methods that Greer happily shares with guests to teach best farming practices to new generations. The practice of “farming for freedom” at Freedom Farm Azul makes it possible to farm, forage, and hunt even without a much-needed tractor for tilling the land and easing the workload. The Greers’ shared goal is to grow crops that nourish and return the land to everyone to enjoy.

In the process, they are also turning Story’s vision of land justice into a reality. Historically, Blacks have had limited access to land ownership due to systemic racism — from slavery and inequitable sharecropping systems to land seizures and discriminatory farming and housing policies. But African American culture has been tied to the land for centuries, and Freedom Farm Azul aims to help more Black Alabamians reconnect.

The farm houses quaint cabins for reflection; hiking trails; poetry, arts, and education classes; and organic gardens farmed with a focus on land stewardship and healthy food. Future offerings will include storytelling healing circles, ancestral history, hobby farming for the elderly, and spaces for intergenerational art and conversation. The result of all this is a safe and welcoming space that inspires empathy, and where all

feel ownership. People who are sometimes marginalized in other settings can do their work, find rest, and linger without fear.

Story says her favorite example of this transformation happens when formerly incarcerated individuals visit the farm to heal and reacclimate with the outside world.

“Watching them walk around with pecans in their hand or cut into a watermelon grown from the ground here is why I bought these 15 acres,” Story says. “I want this land to create a groundswell for an ecosystem of land justice.”

Freedom Farm Azul aims to form additional, ongoing partnerships with youth and adult justice organizations to help other returning citizens heal through field trips and retreats. As a landowner, Story endeavors to pave pathways for others to find a revolution of joy with the land, to experience belonging and renewal.

“The revolution of land justice is accomplished on land that is ours, with land that is ours,” Story says.

The future of Black women and land ownership

Allison Upshaw, Ph.D., understands well what Story is attempting at Freedom Farm Azul. As an assistant professor at Stillman College and a Road Scholar for



the Alabama Humanities Alliance, Upshaw speaks often on Black women and land ownership in the Black Belt. For 113 years, Upshaw's family has owned the same house and land in rural Butler County. Upshaw and her mother inherited the roughly 2.5 acres of land.

"I have a house, I have land, I have always known I can go home," Upshaw says. "I aim to reframe the narrative of Black women landowners in the Black Belt."

To that end, Upshaw has received a National Historical Publications and Records Commission grant this year. The funding, which is awarded to encourage the use of public records for research on African American history, culture, and family, will help Upshaw

level up her work chronicling Alabama's Black, female landowners.

In her public talks, Upshaw speaks about the importance of understanding the entire history of land ownership. She uses women's stories from the past to answer questions. How did African American women come to be landowners, for example? How did they hold onto their land when laws were not supportive of their rights? Upshaw's family history also reveals the present-

day importance of knowing one's property rights and understanding who owns specific property spaces on family land.

Most women landowners in Upshaw's lineage were deeded land after their husbands or fathers passed away. Upshaw envisions greater land ownership for Black women in the rural South as more women become more familiar with Alabama property laws and how the land can become spaces for family heritage and even farming for well-being and liberation — such as what's happening at Freedom Farm Azul.

Plowing new ground

Each summer, Freedom Farm Azul hosts Black August, a national celebration commemorating people who fought for liberation as political prisoners and recognizing the Black freedom struggle.

Black August is a monthlong celebration on the farm, with music, poetry, storytelling, art — and, of course, nourishing food. But it's not just one month of liberation; everything that happens at Freedom Farm Azul is freedom work. Farming is freedom work, digging into the soil of land justice is freedom work, resting and being nourished from Black-owned land is freedom work, and reclaiming spaces to be used for racial healing is freedom work.

Freedom Farm Azul is planting seeds for a new inheritance of repair in the rural South, a reclamation to America as a path forward for healing our land.

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The Many Layers of Marion

Biscuiting in the Black Belt with Scott Peacock

By Emily Blejwas

Photos by Jennifer Causey

The following is an excerpt from “Invitation to Notice,” a profile on Scott Peacock, the James Beard Award-winning chef who hails from the Wiregrass and now lives in Alabama’s Black Belt, in Marion. There, he offers the Biscuit Experience, which engages people in the nuances of rural Alabama, the practice of slowing down, and the art of “making biscuit.”

The Reverie House in Marion, Alabama, where Scott Peacock crafts a matchless biscuit-making experience for guests, once served as a headquarters for Union troops. The street holds its own stories: a ravine where Nathan Bedford Forrest allegedly hid for two days on horseback, the sewing of the first Confederate flag, and the first printing of *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper. Beyond it sits the site where Jimmie Lee Jackson was fatally shot in 1965 by a White state trooper. Jackson’s death prompted a call among activists to carry his body to the steps of the capitol in Montgomery, transforming into the voting rights march from Selma.

So, understandably, “it’s the complexity of this place” that Peacock finds riveting: “How all these things could take place in such a small spot in the world.” And it’s all mixed up together on the same streets, like threads tangled in a tiny sewing box: voting rights and the stars and bars and wealthy plantation owners and enslaved persons.

These are quiet and sometimes hidden histories that take a careful, attentive eye and plenty of time to discover. Peacock, who wields an expansive understanding of Marion’s past at every era, learned all of this “very slowly,” and when I ask what he’d like people to understand about rural Alabama, he answers, “Which rural Alabama?” Because the complexity and nuance carry forward to today. Marion (pop. 3,100) boasts two local newspapers with distinct editorial tones. An imposing courthouse sits at the center of town, flanked by a mix of Greek Revival estates, Black-owned businesses, and country churches.



Marion, Alabama.

Likewise, Peacock not only digs into Marion’s past, he sinks roots in its present. Shortly after arriving, he met Ethel Waite, a Marion native who spent decades away before moving back. Waite is a leader and force in the Black community who, on Juneteenth several years ago, discovered she had just purchased the antebellum house of the man who enslaved her ancestor. She and Peacock first got to know each other at a “transformational tea” held on Waite’s front lawn, and the two enjoy exchanging seasonal foods and comparing food traditions. It’s these kind of friendships, between seemingly disparate people in small spaces, that rural Alabama regularly births, but rarely gets credit for.

As Peacock’s connection to Marion deepened, so did the urge to share the intrigue of this place with others. “I understood that I could do things here that I couldn’t do anywhere else,” he says. “I didn’t know what they were exactly but I also knew I didn’t need to know that. I had enough behind me to see how that drive had served me so well. I knew what was true about that feeling, that I could trust it. And I loved the idea of introducing people to this area and celebrating it. Quietly.”

Peacock does not intend to make sense of rural Alabama. He doesn’t deal in simplifications; nor does his home state. Rather, he sees his role as sitting with Marion, to learn *about* it and *from* it. “It’s a gift to be able to share something that fascinates you,” he says. “And I’m certain that much of all this is me trying to understand it myself.”

As a chef, Peacock seeks this understanding through the lens that comes most naturally — cooking — and in particular, making biscuit, which mimics the multiplicity of Marion and of the South as a whole. “Biscuit is an iconic food,” he says. “It’s a symbol. It’s emblematic, and it’s infinitely complex. It’s a simple thing that most of us think we have an understanding of, or grasp on, but it’s not just one thing. There are so many iterations; there’s no such thing as the one true biscuit. It is so expressive of the maker, of the culture, of place.”

Thus, in his biscuit, Peacock blends “two different flours from two different antique wheat varieties that most people have never tasted.”



Opposite page:
Scott Peacock’s
hands in the
biscuit dough.
Right: Peacock
in his Reverie
House kitchen.



The wheats are heirloom and organic, milled using historic processes. Peacock reflects on these distinctive flours during the Biscuit Experience, and on Marion, his personal story and childhood in Hartford, Alabama, the history of biscuits and of the South; it's a jumble of memory and culture and experience.

"I do like to think sometimes when I'm in the act of making biscuit that I'm connected in some way to that tradition of people who were making something for their families," Peacock says. "Often under the gun, often with complicated circumstances. And that feels like a real privilege. I'm drawn to that. That's meaningful to me. It's one of those foods that over centuries in the South meant an awful lot to a lot of people."

And, so, the Biscuit Experience is "very much about emotion for me," Peacock says. "And it's very much about giving attention. The act of cooking is very grounding, especially if you're not having to rush. If you can really be mindful. It is a meditation. I find it to be a very connective experience and connecting. Even though I'm trying to demonstrate certain details, even though I'm acting outside the bowl as much as I am in it, in that process, what is happening in that bowl and myself is very calming and grounding and affirming."

Being present, Peacock adds, is "a practice. The more you notice, the more you notice. It is a discipline of a sort. You have to make time for it."

The act of noticing can also reach beyond the present, into the realms of memory and the past. For Peacock,

making biscuit enabled him to see his father's mother, Grandmaw Peacock, anew. As a child, he was embarrassed by her poverty and eccentricity. "She was a real character," Peacock says, "always playing jokes, always keeping people off balance." Now, he sees her as "this really tender-hearted person who was born into circumstances that didn't allow her to lead a tender existence."

"She was surviving," Peacock says. "As husbands were dying and children were being killed in war or by disease, the burden fell on her to hold it together. And I think that outrageousness, playing jokes, keeping things off-kilter was a way that she coped." And yet, "when she was cooking was really the only time she wasn't frazzled. She was calm and focused and seemed connected to something bigger. She is a heroic figure to me now," Peacock says. "So, in that way, making biscuit is also an act of reconciliation for me."

All of this runs in the current of the Biscuit Experience, which evolves and ebbs and flows each time Peacock guides people through what's both a simple and intricate endeavor. "The biscuit, it's just one thing," he says. "It's so much more than a biscuit and it's also just a biscuit."

An extended version of this piece is available at alabamahumanities.org/mosaic. Learn more about the Biscuit Experience at chefscottpeacock.com.

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A Walk (or Ride)

A 200-mile trail, 27 towns, and one 'green ribbon' to link north Alabama's past with a bright future.

By Charles Buchanan

A stroll through picturesque Mooresville might make you forget what century this is. The beautifully preserved, tree-shaded village was incorporated in 1818, a year before statehood. Its residents included future United States president Andrew Johnson, and another president-to-be, James Garfield, preached there. There are sheep and a tavern and a tiny post office that opened around 1840 and remains in operation.

Few motorists visit this idyllic spot, however. Most zip past Mooresville on I-565, less than a mile away, headed to big, booming Huntsville.

That's the sort of missed connection the Singing River Trail can fix, says John Kvach, Ph.D., its executive director. The trail is a recreational greenway project

with an epic reach — a pedestrian and bicycling path winding more than 200 miles across the top of Alabama that will showcase the historical and natural heritage of Mooresville and 26 other towns and cities along the route.

This “green ribbon,” as Kvach calls the Singing River Trail, will tie north Alabama together, forging physical and personal links among communities that will boost business growth, health and wellness, quality of life — and our understanding of one another. “It will ensure that we do not forget about each other,” he says.

Memory lane

A surefire way to connect with the soul of a place is to learn about its past. And the Singing River Trail will lead visitors on a journey through time, beginning with the region's first residents. The trail's name, in fact, comes from the local Yuchi Indian tribe's description of the “river that sings” — the Tennessee River. The Singing River Trail was identified as a Native American heritage trail early on because the route roughly parallels a portion of the Trail of Tears, the tragic 1830s-1840s expulsion of Southeastern tribes from their ancestral homelands to Oklahoma. But Kvach emphasizes that the Singing River Trail won't focus only on the Trail of Tears because that's just one facet of the Native story. Instead, the trail will highlight the richness of Native American culture and history in the region. There's also a broader “story of the human condition” to share that touches on all eras of the state's past, says Kvach, who was previously a history professor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville and serves on the Alabama Humanities Alliance board of directors.



A portion of the Singing River Trail in Athens. Courtesy Red Sage.



e) to Remember

“By highlighting our unique histories and our combined history,” Kvach notes, “we can help people see culture through different lenses.”

That will make the Singing River Trail a prime example of “public history” — the presentation of history outside the classroom, which is how most people receive their historical education, explains Brian Dempsey, Ph.D., director of the University of North Alabama Public History Center. Public history encompasses everything from museums and living history centers to documentary films and podcasts. But projects like the Singing River Trail are especially effective because they place people within the landscapes where important events happened.

“If you’re physically standing in the location, then you can identify with the story better,” Dempsey says. “What was it like for, say, a Cherokee family to have to march across this land in the winter? You gain a more personal perspective. There’s an opportunity for empathy.”

Roots of prosperity

Interpreting the past in the present can also spark future growth.

“There’s a distinct return on investment from leveraging heritage,” Dempsey says, with public history projects attracting tourism dollars to local economies. (Once completed, the Singing River Trail will have an estimated economic impact of \$26 million annually, creating 100 permanent jobs and producing \$866,000 in transportation benefits and \$1.4 million in health

benefits, according to an analysis conducted for the trail.) Many cities have discovered that marketing their history appeals to visitors, businesses, and potential residents. For proof, look to Muscle Shoals, synonymous with its music legacy, and Huntsville, the Rocket City.



John Kvach, historian and executive director of the Singing River Trail.

The Singing River Trail will create opportunities for sustainable economic development along its route, with small towns potentially feeling the biggest impact, says Carolyn Barske Crawford, Ph.D., director of the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area (MSNHA). Funded by the National Park Service and headquartered at the University of North Alabama, the MSNHA supports cultural heritage initiatives in six northwest Alabama counties, including planning the Singing River Trail’s path from Decatur to the Shoals. She explains that rural towns will serve as trailheads and key stopping points on the Singing River Trail’s longest stretches, which will entice restaurants, accommodations, bike repair shops, and other businesses to open their doors. And that



Mooresville Stagecoach Inn (left, circa 1820). Courtesy Red Sage. Mooresville Post Office (right, circa 1840). Photo by Sakora Smeby.

interaction with travelers will give those communities a chance to share their own stories.

Dempsey notes that when “people in small towns tell you what they value beyond the beautiful homes and famous names, you see a rich tapestry of history” that reflects a diversity of people and experiences. Both he and Crawford are eager to see how the towns will present their pasts beyond the traditional interpretive sign — through public art, perhaps, or programming such as walking tours.

“And they shouldn’t shy away from the stuff that makes our history complicated,” Crawford says. “People appreciate authentic storytelling.”

The path ahead

Kvach compares the process of building a state-spanning greenway to assembling a giant, complicated jigsaw puzzle. Working with local governments, he must determine where newly built sections will join existing trails and identify the public easements, city parks, and state and federal land — such as Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge — that can host potential paths. Small towns have been eager partners, with some jumping in to construct portions of the route or revamp their trailside main streets.

Ultimately, the Singing River Trail’s completion will depend upon voluntary participation from private landowners who can close crucial gaps. “On average, the value of a property with a long trail goes up about 7 to 10 percent,” Kvach says. “Once they hear that, usually they ask how soon we can get the trail on their land.”

By the end of 2023, 15 total miles of the Singing River Trail should be open to the public, and Kvach estimates that more than half of the trail will be accessible or under construction within 10 to 15 years. He celebrates every new addition, looking forward to the time when visitors will hop off their bikes to explore Mooresville’s

lovely lanes, play hopscotch in Courtland’s classic town square, savor soul food in Leighton, and get to know other communities along the route. He believes that kindling those genuine, personal connections will help the trail’s towns remain relevant — and preserve a unique sense of place — amid north Alabama’s rapid economic and population growth.

“It’s important for communities to hold on to what makes them different — and to the stories that got them where they are today,” Crawford adds. “Those are the places people want to visit.”

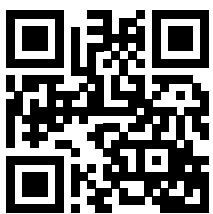


Alabama’s first “internationally sanctioned” hopscotch court, painted by artist Sonya Clemons in Courtland. Photo by Dan Busey. Courtesy TimesDaily.

The perfect getaway can feel more distant than it really is.

The Preserves are lakeside lands in more than 70 locations across the state that Alabama Power has preserved, protected and made free for you to enjoy. With hiking trails, picnic areas, fishing piers, playgrounds and boat launches, we've got your need for a quick escape covered.

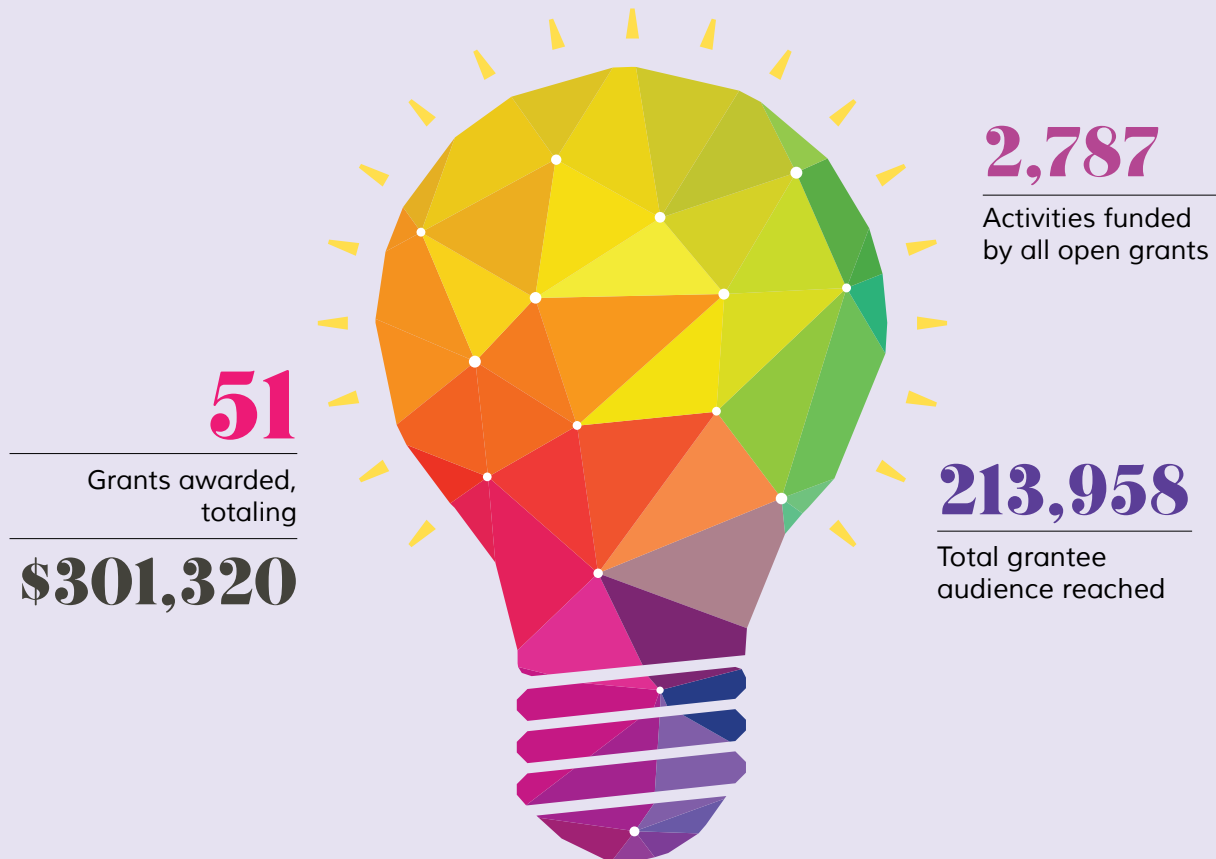
apcpreserves.com



2022 in Review

Investment for Impact

Public humanities grants from the Alabama Humanities Alliance helped communities spotlight their stories and illuminate the bonds we all share. Find descriptions of each project in the following pages.



AHA also engaged **18,999 participants** and **353 scholars** through **42 public programs** of its own.

To highlight just a few...



Stony the Road We Trod:
AHA's National Endowment for the Humanities summer institute immersed 27 teachers from 17 states in an exploration of Alabama's civil rights legacy.



Healing History: Pilot projects began fostering conversations about our shared past — and present and future — with a goal of creating trust and empathy where dividing lines once stood.



Democracy and the Informed Citizen podcast:
This new series showcases the power of community journalism to bring rural Alabamians together — and sustain our very democracy.



Jenice Riley Memorial Scholarships: AHA awarded its 101st Riley Scholarship. Since 2003, AHA has awarded more than \$100,000 to support K-8 educators creatively teaching history and civics.

Grants Roundup

The Alabama Humanities Alliance is the primary source of grants for public humanities projects statewide. We offer monthly Mini Grants (up to \$2,500), quarterly Major Grants (up to \$10,000), and annual Media Grants for documentaries, podcasts, and other digital projects (up to \$15,000).

In 2022, the Alabama Humanities Alliance awarded **51 grants** with more than **\$300,000** in funding to support humanities-rich programming across the state. Discover how our 2022 grantees brought Alabamians together through public projects steeped in history, literature, civics, culture, and more. Learn more and apply for your own grant at alabamahumanities.org/grants.

MINI GRANTS

Belle Mont Celtic Fest Colbert County Historical Landmarks Foundation, Inc. | Tusculumbia

The Belle Mont Celtic Fest, held at historic Belle Mont Mansion, features nationally and internationally recognized musicians and historical scholars who showcase the traditional cultures of Scotland and Ireland. Performances, period life-skill demonstrations, lectures, and interactive panel discussions explain the historical influence of Scots and Irish people on the settlement of Alabama.

Magic City Memories: An Interactive Timeline of Birmingham's LGBTQ History | Space One Eleven Birmingham

Space One Eleven collaborates with the Invisible Histories Project (IHP) for an exhibition of LGBTQ life in Birmingham using information and ephemera from IHP's collections. The interactive timeline invites community members to add their stories, and a panel discussion featuring members of the LGBTQ community helps to educate the public and encourage dialogue.

Past Faith: Archiving the Religious Communities of Alabama

University of Alabama Department of Political Science | Tuscaloosa

A series of public symposia lays the foundation for a statewide community archive for small, rural Jewish communities. This project forges a network of collaborators and interested stakeholders — including academics, lay and religious leaders, and community members and their descendants — to form an initial assessment of the disposition of Jewish archives statewide and to identify and prioritize steps for future projects.

Traditions of Southern Storytelling Sand Mountain Cooperative Education Center | Arab

An interdisciplinary panel discussion on Southern traditions of oral history and storytelling features three Southern humanities scholars with distinct yet overlapping approaches to storytelling, featuring representatives from the fields of literary criticism, American studies and government, and civics-oriented journalism.

The New Alabama Seal of Biliteracy: Language Study Rising Workshop American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese | Birmingham With the Alabama Seal of



A story quilt on display at Pope's Tavern Museum in Florence, part of Project Threadways' AHA-funded "Placemaking Through Textiles" special exhibition.

Biliteracy now law, teachers of world languages are eager to learn what it means. How does it validate a student's proficiency in English and one or more other languages? How does proficiency serve the humanities? Why does the Seal of Biliteracy increase language study? The association's workshop for K-12 language teachers statewide explores these topics through presentations and dialogue between scholars and teachers.

Micah Mattix Poetry Lectures Faulkner University — Center for Great Books

and Human Flourishing | Montgomery

Faulkner University brings Micah Mattix (Regent University) to its campus and to Troy University to deliver lectures on poetics and the continuing relevance of poetry.

Radio Moments Friends of the Alabama Archives | Montgomery

The Alabama Department of Archives and History presents an exhibit on the history of radio programs about radio's influence on the culture, politics, and lives of Alabamians.

MOTHS: The Markers of Titusville's Historic Sites Project

Titusville Development Corporation Inc. | Birmingham
Titusville Development Corporation launches a web-based digital platform for learning about and sharing the history of the predominately African American community of Titusville, whose proximity to Alabama's largest employer puts it at risk for gentrification and the loss of valued cultural resources. Principles and methods from community, public, and oral history engage Titusville residents in preserving their cultural heritage.

A Round Table Discussion of Justice Deferred: Race and the Supreme Court **Harper Council Trenholm Branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History | Montgomery**

A panel discussion of the book *Justice Deferred: Race and the Supreme Court* at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History features book authors, scholars of civil rights and legal history, and a principal legal architect of the civil rights movement. Participants gain awareness of the Supreme Court's race-related jurisprudence through multiple humanities perspectives and become better-informed citizens.

Planning Grant for Huntsville's Voting Rights Vanguard Documentary **Historic Huntsville Foundation | Huntsville**

Historic Huntsville Foundation plans a documentary film showing

how a cadre of Black leaders emerged during the 1890s and waged a multigenerational fight to reclaim their civil and voting rights denied by Jim Crow and Alabama's 1901 Constitution. Planning includes time-sensitive interviews with people who knew these leaders, have direct knowledge of key events, and whose recollections are critical to the historical record.

Bluebeard's Castle: Podcasts Contextualizing Literature and Libretto **Opera Huntsville | Huntsville**

Opera Huntsville creates audience engagement materials for its production of Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* that explore the fairy tale's source material; the opera's libretto; and discussions of interpretive elements, psychological components, and more. These media assets are designed for web distribution, creating lasting collateral accessible both locally and globally.

The Mexican Husband Panel **Vinegar | Birmingham**

Vinegar presents a panel discussion anchored by *The Mexican Husband*, a play and exhibition by Fabiola Carranza that address the intersection of art, families, and immigration. The panel features scholar-artist Fabiola Carranza, scholar Jason De León, and scholar Christoph Rodrigo De la Torre, moderated by Vinegar and the Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama.

Learning and Teaching Difficult History in Our Community **Auburn University Department of Curriculum and Teaching | Auburn**

Auburn University pre-

service teachers, Lee County educators, and related community organizations encounter the difficult histories of enslavement and Native American removal at Pebble Hill, a former plantation cottage. An Indigenous history scholar facilitates two events with primary source examination, learning stations, and exploration of hard history, which provide frameworks for lesson plans focused on the historic site.

Laws of Life Essay Competition **Better Business Bureau Educational Foundation Inc. | Birmingham**

The Laws of Life Essay Competition encourages dialogue among high school students, teachers, humanities scholars, and business leaders to advance positive, ethical principles such as transparency, humility, honesty, equity, and proactivity in the workplace. These values are life affirming, support positive citizenship, and are standard across all cultures. Students learn what ethics and ethical behavior are and their relationship to successful business environments.

Food for Thought: Exploring Food in Alabama's History and Culture **Newbern Library Inc. | Newbern**

A Newbern Library event explores the role of food in Alabama culture, past and present. Topics include traditional foods in the state's history, the impact of food in today's culture, the influence of West African and Egyptian cuisine on Southern cooking, and local food options and resources. Participants taste traditional, familiar foods as well as food prepared in unfamiliar ways.

Rosa Parks Museum Book Talks

Troy University — Rosa Parks Museum | Montgomery
The Rosa Parks Museum hosts three author talks: two focused on Rosa Parks, her long life of activism, and the Montgomery Bus Boycott (by authors H.H. Leonards and Sheila McCauley-Keys); and one focused on the civil rights movement itself (from author Ernie Suggs and Ambassador Andrew Young). Books are given to event participants.

Mark Sloan and Jerry Siegel on the History of Photographing the South **Shelby County Arts Council | Columbiana**

Independent curator Mark Sloan and photographer Jerry Siegel discuss the history of photographs of the South and their influence on Siegel's work in his exhibition *The Promise of Living/The Tender Land*. The talk streams live online, and a recording is available for future reference. Siegel's exhibition takes its name from an Aaron Copland opera inspired by the book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, by James Agee and Walker Evans.

The Figh Pickett Barnes School House 1996 Relocation Reunion Roundtable **Montgomery County Historical Society | Montgomery**

The Relocation Reunion Roundtable brings together the principals who coordinated the 1996 relocation of Figh Pickett Barnes School House from its Clayton/Molton location to South Court and Mildred streets. The event publicizes the community cooperation involved in the house's relocation.

**Curator Richard McCabe
in Conversation with
Photographer
Jerry Siegel**

**Troy University
International Arts Center
| Troy**

Richard McCabe, Ogden Museum of Southern Art curator of photography, leads a hybrid live/virtual public conversation with Jerry Siegel during his exhibition, *The Promise of Living/The Tender Land* at Troy University's International Arts Center. The program focuses on Siegel's photography of Southern artists and his street and landscape photography through a Southern Gothic lens.

**Oral History of Anniston
Public Library of Anniston-
Calhoun County | Anniston**

This project identifies lifelong and long-term residents of Anniston and records their stories, memories, and the city's history as it has developed over the years.

**Writer Wednesdays
University Charter School |
Livingston**

Writer Wednesdays provide opportunities for middle and high school students to study place-based literature and meet writers and humanities scholars specializing in Alabama's literature and cultural aspects. The University Charter School series hosts Alabama authors Rick Bragg and Emily Blejwas.

**Screening of African
Redemption: The Life
and Legacy of Marcus
Garvey**

**Central Alabama Caribbean
American Organization |
Birmingham**

In recognition of Black History Month, the Central Alabama Caribbean American Organization presents the documentary *African Redemption: The*

Life and Legacy of Marcus Garvey, paired with a public conversation and Q&A with a Marcus Garvey scholar. Garvey, a much-revered but lesser-known civil rights leader, championed Black empowerment and the "back to Africa" movement.

**Beauty and the Mind
Troy University
Department of Journalism
| Troy**

Beauty and the Mind invites participants to think critically about mental health and perceptions of beauty. The International Arts Center at Troy University also hosted a lunchtime discussion about the globalization of beauty.

**McPherson-Mitchell
Lecture in Southern
History**

**Troy University
Department of History |
Troy**

The Troy University Department of History hosts a roundtable discussion and film screening about the Africatown community of Mobile and the discovery of the Clotilda slave ship that illegally brought their ancestors to America. Filmmakers, journalists, community members, and other participants discuss

the unique significance of Africatown, its origins, and its place in American history and society.

MAJOR GRANTS

**Telling Our 1963
Stories to Improve
Local Knowledge of
Birmingham's Key Role
in Civil Rights**

**Kids in Birmingham 1963 |
Birmingham**

Kids in Birmingham 1963 are witnesses to Birmingham's civil rights history. This project recruits more Kids storytellers to expand public presentations of their lived history and to improve access to those stories through website revisions and media interviews. This grant promotes efforts to launch a coalition of educators to develop place-based lesson ideas that use Kids stories and classroom visits.

**Old Federal Road
Storytelling Festival
2022**

**The Ridge Macon County
Archaeology Project |
Warrior Stand**

A public program at the Creekwood mansion foregrounds Creekwood and the Federal Road as sites where people experienced

complex interactions and events differently and often painfully. Topics include the Creek Nation, migration and settlement on the Alabama frontier, plantation life of enslavers and the enslaved, Black land possession and dispossession, and descendants of formerly enslaved African Americans.

**Thornton Dial: I, Too,
Am Alabama
University of Alabama at
Birmingham Abroms-Engel
Institute for the Visual Arts
| Birmingham**

The Abroms-Engel Institute for the Visual Arts presents the first solo museum exhibition of Thornton Dial's works in his home state. Drawing on many never-before-exhibited artworks, the exhibition showcases Dial's artistry, humor, and dedication to his community and social justice. Presentation and panel topics include the influence of Jim Crow and the Civil Rights era on African American vernacular artists, the African American artist community that developed in Alabama and their contributions to art history, and the collection and preservation of Dial's work.



Still frame from a new video tour at Historic Blakeley State Park. AHA Media Grant recipient.

Lecture Series on Liberty, Equality, and American Government

Jacksonville State University Department of Sociology and Political Science | Jacksonville

The Tocqueville Lecture Series is a public, free lecture series that invites social science scholars with a humanities approach to present on the ideas of liberty and/or equality in relation to other important concepts in the founding and continuation of American government. These hybrid in-person/virtual lectures are accessible to the entire state

Southern Jewish Voices

Levite Jewish Community Center | Birmingham

Southern Jewish Voices celebrates, records, and shares stories of being Jewish in Birmingham. Hosted in an intimate setting, the series provides intelligent, insightful conversations in an effort to build bridges within the pluralistic Jewish community, with the broader non-Jewish community, and across generations.

“Funding provided by AHA is immensely critical to the Black Belt Museum being able to accomplish its mission. Without it, our programming would be less than half of what it is now.”

—The University of West Alabama Black Belt Museum

Statewide American Character Program

Liberty Learning Foundation | Huntsville
The Liberty Learning Foundation (LLF) brings strong lessons of civic character and civic

responsibility to students throughout Alabama school systems. LLF plans to maintain and grow its American Character program, designed for seventh graders, which provides a deep dive into historical figures and their associated ethics, values, reason, and creative expression.

TLC Author Series — Advancing the Study of Humanities through Literature

The Literacy Council of Central Alabama | Birmingham

Fifty-eight percent of adults in Central Alabama need improved literacy skills. Among other challenges, illiteracy limits people's exposure to the humanities. The Literacy Council presents a new book series through lectures and panel discussions designed to encourage dialogue and critical thinking regarding humanities disciplines.

Cherry Street AME Church: A Beacon of Inspiration 145 Years and Beyond

Cherry Street AME Church | Dothan

The church proposes a historical interpretation

workshop and symposium to showcase its history, construction, architecture, and legacy as a haven for free cultural, religious, and civic expression. A major session is led by historian James Morgan III, whose great-great grandfather, the Rev. William Hightower, was Cherry Street's second full-time pastor and architect of the current building.

Food for Thought Friends of the Alabama Archives | Montgomery

Food for Thought is a monthly history lecture series at the Alabama Department of Archives and History that features humanities scholars discussing a wide variety of topics relating to the state. Food for Thought is accompanied by a quarterly Book Talk series focusing on publications about Alabama history, culture, or archival work and the premiere of an annual program to commemorate Juneteenth.

War and Remembrance: A Living History Series

Museum of Pell City | Pell City

Partnering with the Col. Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home, Pell City Schools, Pell City Library, and volunteers, the museum is interviewing 19 veterans of World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars, bringing history to life. Interviews are transcribed for public access, with videos available through the museum and library and for classroom use. Initially, the project will involve at least five students in hands-on learning.

The Women of the Negro Leagues

Birmingham Negro Southern League Museum | Birmingham

The Women of the Negro Leagues is an interactive,

youth-oriented program highlighting the roles of women who played professional baseball as a part of the Negro Leagues. While the project provides children with a hands-on historical experience through a traveling exhibit, the Negro Southern League Museum educates a broader audience through book discussions and workshops.

Middle Eastern Exhibit

Vulcan Park Foundation | Birmingham

Vulcan Park and Museum's exhibit is titled *Birmingham's Early Middle Eastern Community: Celebrating Life and Liturgy since 1910*. Created in collaboration with the St. Elias and St. George congregations, the exhibit features personal and liturgical artifacts highlighting the religious, economic, and social lives of the community.

Alabama Folk Podcast, Season Two

Alabama Folklife Association | Mobile

Season Two of the Alabama Folk podcast elevates underdocumented cultures and traditions, engages audiences statewide in Alabama folklife, and highlights emerging Alabama makers. The podcast features interviews with artists who carry on traditions passed across generations. Diverse in background, community, and art form, these artists represent rural and urban experiences and Indigenous and immigrant voices.

Magic City Poetry Festival Programming

Magic City Poetry Festival | Birmingham

The Magic City Poetry Festival is an annual celebration of poetry and community in Birmingham and across Alabama. The

grant supports three events: “Poetry and History: A Conversation with Laura Secord and Kwoya Maples,” “Black Formalisms: Where Aesthetics and Southern Sensibilities Collide” (a virtual conversation with Marilyn Nelson and Harryette Mullen), and “Be Gentle with Black Girls: A Conversation and Workshop with Tania De’Shawn and Alabama Poet Laureate Ashley M. Jones.”

The Hard Truth: Representation and the Arts Lecture Series
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts Association | *Montgomery*

This four-part series hosted by the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts weaves together art, history, literature, psychology, diversity, representation, and museum studies to better serve underrepresented groups in the community. Each lecture tackles a different topic related to diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion, with each program supported by an exhibition from the museum’s collection.

Placemaking Through Textiles
Project Threadways | *Florence*

The Placemaking Through Textiles project invites the Muscle Shoals community and beyond to reckon with the region’s history of cotton production and manufacturing and to tell a collective story. Through presentations and an interactive exhibition at Florence’s historic Pope’s Tavern, Project Threadways explores, interprets, and (re)makes place through an inclusive process.

The Two Testaments Podcast: A Guided Journey through Jewish and Christian Scriptures

with Leading Scholars in the Humanities
Samford University
Department of Biblical and Religious Studies | *Birmingham*

Each episode of The Two Testaments podcast features a leading humanities scholar who guides listeners through a passage of the Hebrew Bible or New Testament. The hosts work through books from both collections each season, alternating between the books each week. The podcast gives listeners expert guidance in these ancient texts and educates them about the variety of scholarly and religious interpretations that they have inspired.

Our Story: An Alabama Writers’ Symposium
University of North Alabama College of Education and Human Sciences | *Florence*

The University of North Alabama hosts a workshop in Birmingham to explore the spaces and faces of the American South through the literature, poetry, and historical fiction written here. *New York Times* best-selling authors and North Carolina’s poet laureate guide the audience as they explore the various contexts in which Southern voices are heard.

2023 Wiregrass Blues Honoree Program
Wiregrass Blues Society | *Dothan*

This Wiregrass Blues Society event highlights influential local musicians and musical figures. It includes public presentations, discussions, and a short documentary, each exploring how cultural history, social climate, and geographical conditions affect the honoree’s life and career. 2023 honorees are Jackie Mills, David Adkins, and Gil Anthony.

MEDIA GRANTS

The Torch — Stories of the Holocaust Shared by Alabama Families
Alabama Holocaust Education Center | *Birmingham*

In the Alabama Holocaust Education Center’s film project, four or five Alabamians describe the different ways in which they experienced the Holocaust, with their family members listening and joining in the discussion. The film preserves the stories of these survivors of unspeakable terror and tragedy, who made their way to Alabama and thrived, so that they may be retold and never forgotten.

The New Iron Age Episode 1
Sloss Furnaces Foundation | *Birmingham*

Forging craft and philosophy through portraits of metal artists around the world, Sloss Furnaces Foundation’s documentary series follows an Alabama blacksmith’s journey to improve his skill and cast new light upon an ancient tradition and what it means today. The first episode, set in Birmingham, addresses the tradition of ironwork through social history, its significance through art, and the insight it provides into everyday lives.

Bringing the Past to Life: Video for Blakeley’s Touring App
Historic Blakeley State Park | *Spanish Fort*

Historic Blakeley State Park creates videos for the park’s mobile-based touring app, which enhances understanding of key educational themes. The sights, sounds, and realities of battle; duty during a prolonged siege; and camp life become more tangible through these videos, which

build on existing interpretive content in panels, printed materials, and an audio guide.

Prattville’s Civil Rights History Short Film
Documentary
Hiztorical Vision

Productions | Opelika
Prattville has an untold but inspiring history of social advocacy toward civil and human rights among African Americans. Hiztorical Vision Productions creates a short documentary film highlighting Prattville’s African American history, including efforts to pursue basic human rights during the Jim Crow era.

Beth El Civil Rights Experience Project
Temple Beth-El | *Birmingham*

The Beth El Civil Rights Experience is a multimedia project exploring Birmingham’s Jewish and civil rights histories. The project includes an audio tour, public programming, and the development of an exhibit and documentary film. The film, drawing upon archival material and original interviews, is part of the exhibit and available for use beyond the physical space.

The Ground Crew Film Project, Phase 2
The David and Channie Hall Foundation | *Birmingham*

This project focuses on the field coordinators, known as the “Ground Crew,” who shaped history during the 1960s voting rights movement. The film captures the importance of the movement campsites; explores the consequences of the movement; and confronts the failures of movement leadership to care for participants who suffered the most after voting rights were won.

Donor Honor Roll | 2022

Thank you to all who joined us in 2022 to make Alabama an ever smarter, kinder, more vibrant place to live. Help us bring more Alabamians together through the humanities in 2023! Support our efforts to provide impactful storytelling, lifelong learning, and civic engagement statewide: alabamahumanities.org/support.

Individuals

Joseph Aistrup
Nancy G. Anderson
Bob Barnett
Carole Birchfield
Zanice Bond
Margaret and Milton Brown
Julian D. Butler
Charles A. Collat Sr.
Robert J. Collins
Judy Collier
James Conely
Judith Cox
Richard Crews
Armand DeKeyser
David Donaldson
W. Howard Donovan III
Wayne Flynt
Jack Geren
Robert Girardeau
R. David Glasgow
Leela Bilmes Goldstein
Sally Greenhaw
Reginald T. Hamner
Judith Hayes Hand
Charles Hart
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Organizations

Alabama Historical Association
Alabama Power
Alabama Public Television
Alabama Tourism Department
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation
Aldridge Borden and Co.
Blue Cross and Blue Shield
of Alabama
The Caring Foundation
Coca-Cola UNITED
Daniel Foundation of Alabama
Federation of State
Humanities Councils
Friends of the Alabama Archives
Intermark Group

Interstate Character Council
Jackson Thornton
Luckie & Co.
Medical Properties Trust
Mobile County Commission
Montgomery County Commission
National Maritime
Historical Society
Nan H. Altmayer Charitable Trust
National Endowment for
the Humanities
Poarch Band of Creek Indians
Protective Life Foundation
Regions Bank
Southern Poverty Law Center
Troy University
UAB College of Arts and Sciences
UBS Financial Services,
Montgomery
Vulcan Materials Company

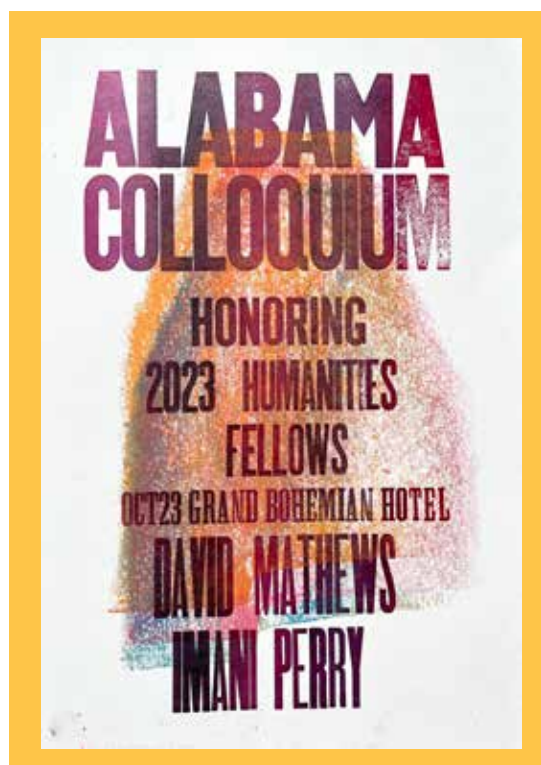
Sustain the humanities:

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Program Partners

Alabama A&M University
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Auburn University at Montgomery
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Communication and Journalism
Autauga Prattville Public Library
Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center
Blount County Memorial Museum
Caroline Marshall Draughon Center for
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City of Gulf Shores Library
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Dale County Council on Arts & Humanities
David Mathews Center for Civic Life
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Elba Chamber of Commerce
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PACERS, Inc.
Pell City Public Library
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Presbyterian Oaks, Talladega
Public Library of Anniston-Calhoun County
Spanish Fort Public Library
Triana Historical Society
UA College of Communication and
Information Sciences
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Shoals
White Smith Memorial Library, Jackson
Wilcox Area Chamber of Commerce
Wilcox ArtWorks



Letterpress poster by Scott Fisk.

Upcoming Events

For complete details on these events — and many more AHA offerings on the horizon — visit alabamahumanities.org/events.

September 14, 2023: *Crossroads: Change in Rural America*, grand opening of the Smithsonian traveling exhibit's 2023-2024 Alabama tour. Blount County Schools Professional Development Center, Cleveland.

October 12-15, 2023: FOOD+Culture Fest, reveling in Birmingham's culinary and cultural vibrancy. AHA is a founding partner of this event, and we're presenting a storytelling session featuring writers, chefs, and growers. Pepper Place Market, Birmingham.

October 23, 2023: The Alabama Colloquium, celebrating the humanities' positive impact on our state and honoring our 2023 Alabama Humanities Fellows: Imani Perry, Ph.D., and David Mathews, Ph.D. Grand Bohemian Hotel, Birmingham.

November 18, 2023: Yaa Gyasi, *Homegoing*, and the Power of Knowing Our Roots. A daylong exploration of how we are connected to, and separated from, each other in ways most of us can't imagine. North Huntsville Public Library, Huntsville. (Note: This workshop will also visit Birmingham, Columbiana, Livingston, and Mobile in 2024.)

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in Alabama Humanities Alliance



Market Day by Jessie LaVon.