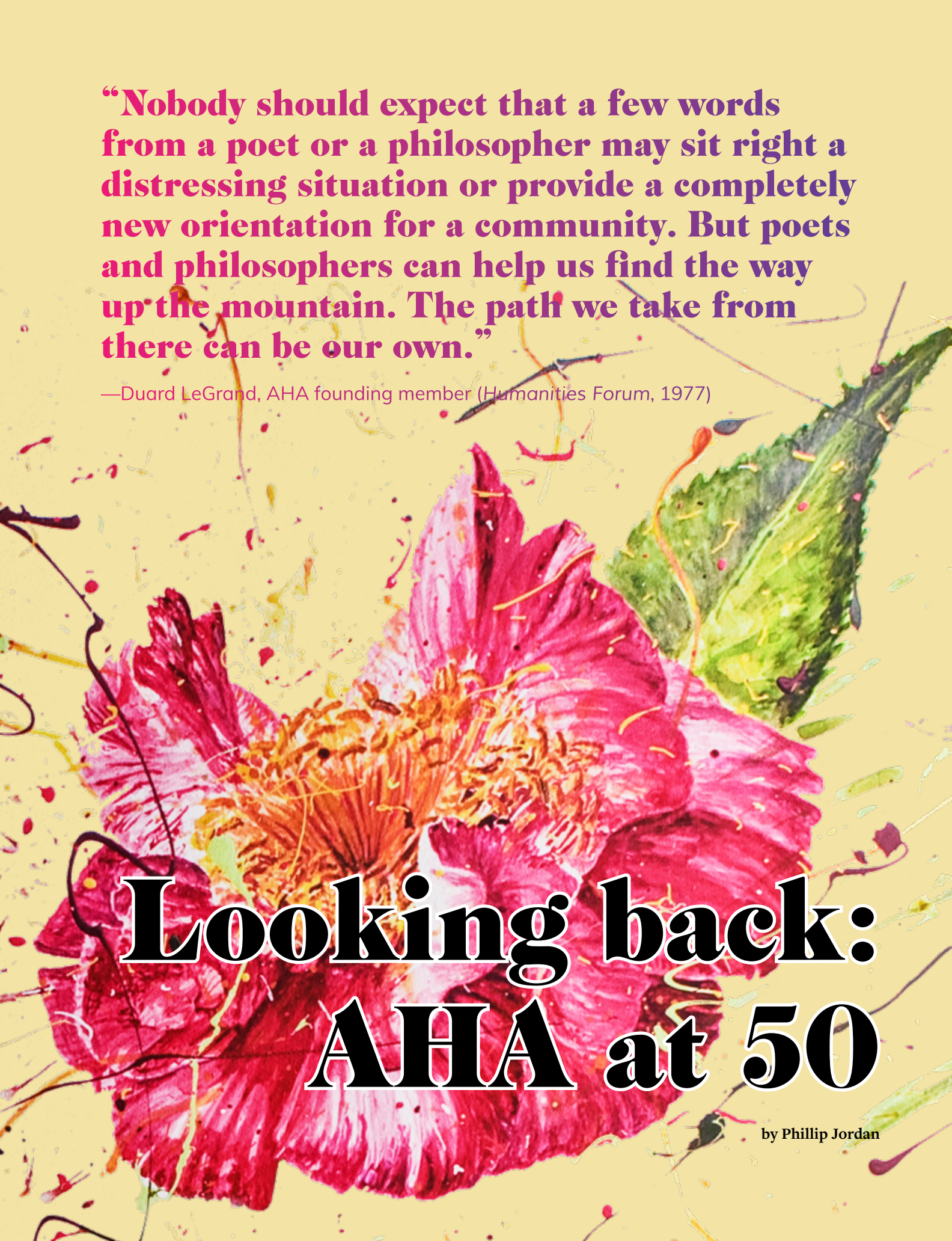
"Nobody should expect that a few words from a poet or a philosopher may sit right a distressing situation or provide a completely new orientation for a community. But poets and philosophers can help us find the way up the mountain. The path we take from there can be our own."

—Duard LeGrand, AHA founding member (*Humanities Forum*, 1977)



Looking back: AHA at 50

by Phillip Jordan

As 1974 dawned, Jack Geren found himself preparing for a new semester at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. The 29-year-old Geren was an assistant to the dean in UAH's School of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences — not much older than the students around him. But he had already held a few positions, inside and outside of academia, since graduating from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

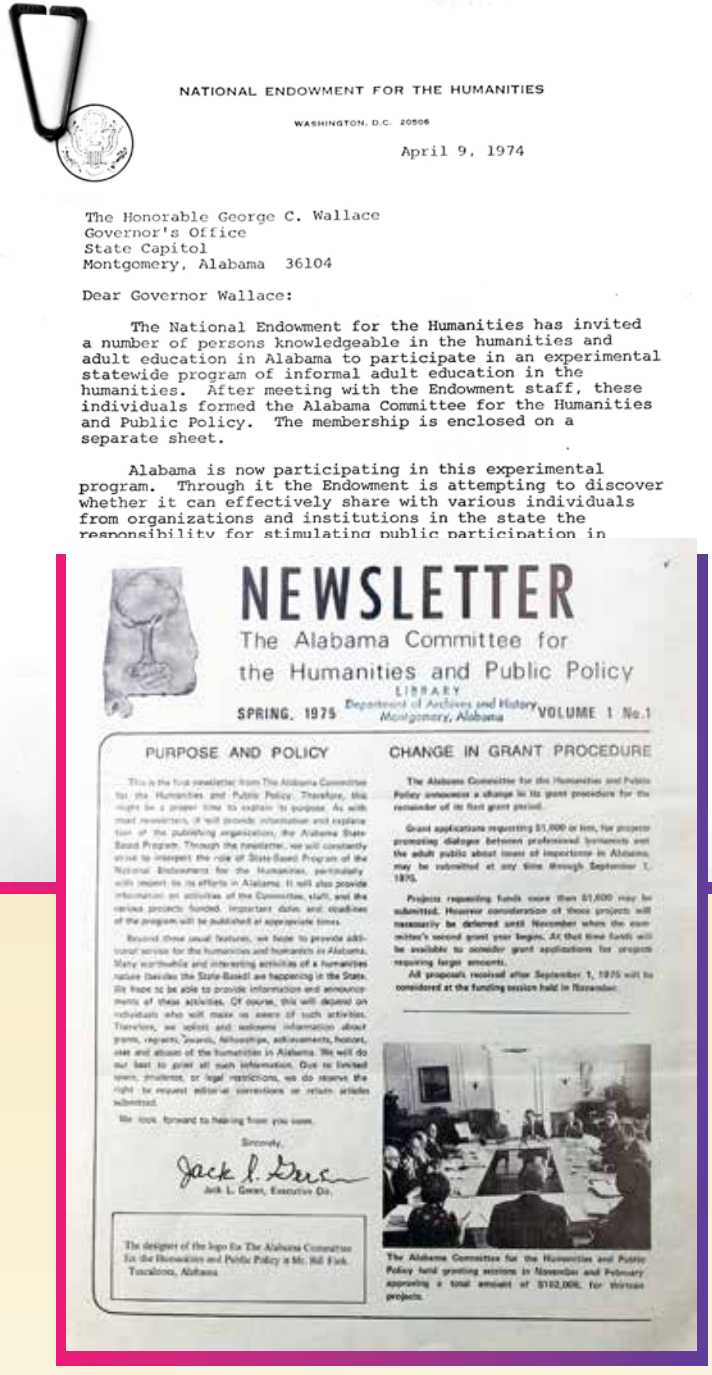
One day, a colleague mentioned to Geren that some sort of new humanities organization was being formed in the state. And it needed an executive director.

Geren looked into it. He learned this wasn't just another humanities program bound to college campuses. Far from it, in fact. This new group was intent on making the humanities relevant to the lives of everyday Alabamians and the communities where they lived. It would partner with the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to secure funding that could support humanities-rich projects around the state.

Geren was intrigued. He applied, but never expected to land an interview, much less the job. As it turns out, though, he was the man for the job. By February of 1974, letters of congratulations began arriving in Geren's mailbox.

One came from an old history professor of his, David Mathews, Ph.D., who had just taken on a new job of his own — as president of the University of Alabama: "I think it is a venture that you will find is just your thing," he wrote Geren, "and I wish you every success."

David Wigdor, a program officer at the NEH, closed his note with this: "Good luck as the Alabama program zooms out of the Rodeway into high gear."



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

April 9, 1974

The Honorable George C. Wallace
Governor's Office
State Capitol
Montgomery, Alabama 36104

Dear Governor Wallace:

The National Endowment for the Humanities has invited a number of persons knowledgeable in the humanities and adult education in Alabama to participate in an experimental statewide program of informal adult education in the humanities. After meeting with the Endowment staff, these individuals formed the Alabama Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy. The membership is enclosed on a separate sheet.

Alabama is now participating in this experimental program. Through it the Endowment is attempting to discover whether it can effectively share with various individuals from organizations and institutions in the state the responsibility for stimulating public participation in

NEWSLETTER

The Alabama Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy

LIBRARY Department of Archives and History Montgomery, Alabama

SPRING, 1975 VOLUME 1 No.1

PURPOSE AND POLICY

CHANGE IN GRANT PROCEDURE

1974

Alabama Humanities Alliance is born... as the Alabama Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy.

1975

AHA funds 13 initial grantees statewide. Five decades on, we've awarded $12.5 million to 2,182 public humanities projects — and counting.

1976

Celebration of U.S. Bicentennial with resources and exhibits statewide.

1977

First name change as the Committee for the Humanities in Alabama broadens its focus. Programs in history, literature, religious studies, and art history become more popular.

1978

First oral history project, featuring interviews with Tuscaloosa County senior citizens.

1970s

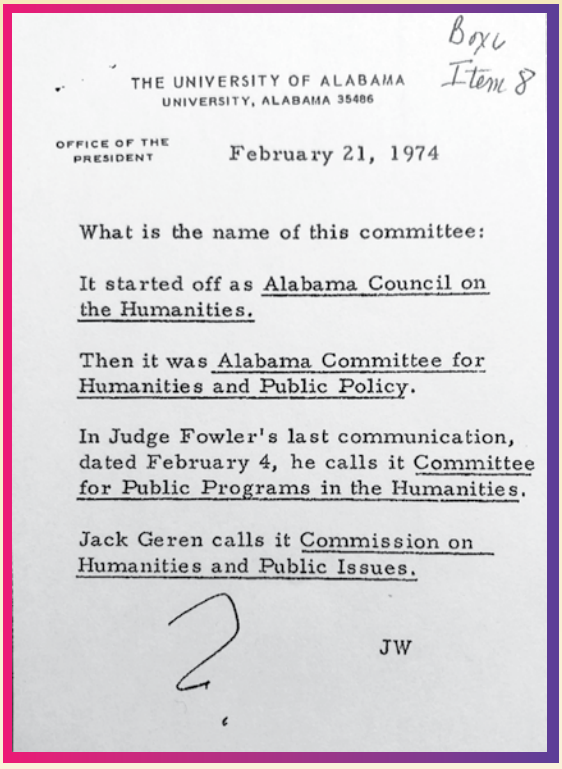
ALABAMA HUMANITIES ALLIANCE

Our evolving logo, through the decades.

Geren was indeed soon on the road himself, heading south for Birmingham. His first task: Finding a home for this new enterprise, one that would initially be called the Alabama Committee for the Humanities and Public Policy.

"Apprehension, excitement, I felt both of those things," Geren recalls now, sitting in his small home on the edge of Huntsville's Old Town Historic District. "Certainly, excitement because the purpose was something very important to me. Apprehension because I wasn't sure exactly how to start and sustain this idea."

His anxiety was understandable. This was 1974. The nation's mood was cynical, at best. The Vietnam War was ending, badly. Watergate was the word, soon to take Nixon down (and, incidentally, to propel UA's Mathews, a founding board member of Alabama Humanities, to a cabinet position in Gerald Ford's administration). Here in Alabama, George Wallace was governor, again. Integration remained a loaded term. And a super outbreak of tornadoes carved a path of destruction across north Alabama, not long after Geren headed to Birmingham.



Box Item 8

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
UNIVERSITY, ALABAMA 35486

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

February 21, 1974

What is the name of this committee:

It started off as Alabama Council on the Humanities.

Then it was Alabama Committee for Humanities and Public Policy.

In Judge Fowler's last communication, dated February 4, he calls it Committee for Public Programs in the Humanities.

Jack Geren calls it Commission on Humanities and Public Issues.

2

JW

What's in a name? That was the question in 1974.

But Geren carried something else south with him that early spring day, something that sustains the Alabama Humanities Alliance's work fifty years later: A belief in the power of telling, and sharing, our stories with each other — a power that can help us, collectively, take on any challenges we might face in Alabama. And help us better understand each other, as well as the vibrant and complex communities we each call home.

"This was something brand new that really was intended to have a positive influence on life in every county in the state," Geren says. "We were trying to get people to think and talk about their communities, together, with support from professors and humanities professionals around the state. It was an exciting idea and an exciting time."

***

On April 9, 1974 — one year after a committee of Alabamians had first begun conversations with

1980s

1979 — Alabama Humanities Resource Center opens, with the Alabama Public Library System. A free Blockbuster Video of sorts, it's filled with documentaries, recordings, photos, and more.

1979 — Rural Humanities Program opens, providing resources for local history projects, festivals on rural life, and community discussions on local topics of concern.

1980 — *Images 1980: An Exhibition of Alabama Women Artists*, curated by Montevallo art historian Patricia A. Johnston, is one of AHA's earliest arts + humanities grant projects.

1983 — Theatre in the Mind begins with our first NEH Exemplary Award. TIM supports pre-show programs, artist talks, and more to enhance Alabama Shakespeare Festival productions.

the National Endowment for the Humanities about starting a program in Alabama — the NEH sent a letter to Governor Wallace, officially announcing this new "experimental statewide program." The letter shared, in part, that this new Alabama-based program would "offer the public something always vitally needed in a democratic society — namely, the thoughts, ideas, and insights of philosophers, historians, and other humanists."

From there, our predecessors hit the ground running. Geren, with his new staff and board members, crisscrossed the state, meeting citizens from all walks of life to introduce this new concept in the humanities. We dedicated most of our outreach to connecting with community cornerstones such as libraries, museums, colleges, cultural festivals, historical societies, literary groups, and more — establishing vital relationships that last to this day.

We had some headwinds to surmount. Not the least of which was defining just what the heck the humanities are. Then, as now, we're sometimes confused with humanitarians, philanthropists, or social-service providers. Case in point: In those first few years, we received calls from folks asking to give blood, requesting help with stray dogs, and offering to donate their body to medical science.

Philip Shirley, an early staff member, remembers teaching at least 100 grant-writing workshops as part of his travels to every county in the state — and likely every public library, too. He also distinctly remembers a very early Betamax video that he and others on staff (including his future wife, Virginia Shirley) would tote to speaking engagements. Of course, that meant they also had to haul a near-industrial-grade projector along for the ride.

Top: Harper Lee signs copies of *To Kill A Mockingbird* in Eufaula, part of our 1983 Alabama History and Heritage Festival. Courtesy Alabama Department of Archives and History. At right: One Alabama Humanities Fellow, Odessa Woolfolk (right), welcomes a new Fellow, Imani Perry, in 2023.

1983 — Alabama History and Heritage Festival features storytelling, lectures, conferences, film screenings, music, and exhibits statewide, with a closing festival at the state capitol.

1985 — Religion in the South conference at Birmingham-Southern College brings theologians, historians, authors together to explore religion's impact on Southern culture.

1985 — Second name change to Alabama Humanities Foundation.

1986 — Utopia in American Life and Literature (U'ALL) explores the utopian impulse in America and the Single Tax Colony in Fairhope. The statewide project earns an NEH Exemplary Award.

1987 — *Eyes on the Prize* debuts on PBS, the first of many AHA-funded films to make a national impact. It wins a Peabody Award, six Emmys, and a Best Documentary nom at the Academy Awards.

A sampling of award-winning films and series that AHA has helped fund through the years.

"The thing I was happiest about was that our reach was extensive," Shirley recalls. "We were able to get to all of these little communities across the state. We were on the road all the time. We would meet with mayors, librarians, community college leaders, whoever we could, just to introduce ourselves. I was proud that we were able to, pretty quickly, create widespread awareness for our grants and our humanities programs that would be useful locally."

Odessa Woolfolk was one of the Alabama Humanities' "early adopters." In the mid-1970s, the revered educator — who would later become the founding president of the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute — was the recently appointed director of UAB's Center for Urban Affairs. And she was thrilled by AHA's arrival on the scene.

"I recall the founding of the organization shortly after I began my career at UAB," Woolfolk notes. "I was so excited that this old industrial place, my hometown, had discovered the humanities and cultural arts."

She soon became one of AHA's early project scholars. Through the years Woolfolk has spoken at some of our biggest events, including when we've honored Alabama Humanities Fellows such as Harper Lee (in 2002) and Imani Perry (in 2023), and when we hosted the acclaimed author Toni Morrison at our 1999 silver anniversary celebration.

Meanwhile, back in 1974, Jack Geren had succeeded in finding an initial headquarters for Alabama Humanities, on Birmingham-Southern College's campus. The school provided our office rent-free as we established ourselves, and BSC would remain AHA's home for the next three-plus decades. Its closing this year brings to mind bittersweet memories, especially for those who were there in those early years.

1987 — AHA debuts the Humanities Speakers Bureau (aka Road Scholars) as part of commemorations for the U.S. Constitution bicentennial. Today, the program remains as vibrant as ever.

1989 — *In View of Home* collaboration with Huntsville Museum of Art — and museums and libraries statewide — sparks a yearlong examination of Alabamians' connection with the land.

1989 — Alabama Humanities Awards debut. Winton "Red" Blount is the first of 55 honorees so far, including the likes of Harper Lee, Fred Gray, Wayne Flynt, Bryan Stevenson, and E.O. Wilson.

1990s

1990 — *Mosaic* debuts as AHA's new newsletter, eventually evolving into the full-fledged storytelling magazine you're holding now.

Images from Frances O. Robb's *In View of Home*. The book, created in partnership with the Huntsville Museum of Art, led to a year-long series of programming. The project won AHA its first-ever Schwartz Prize, a prestigious award from the Federation of State Humanities Councils. Middle image: *The Clown Wagon* (1987), by Chip Cooper. Courtesy Huntsville Museum of Art.

Of course, our own success — and lasting presence today — also was far from guaranteed. In fact, if you read that initial letter to Governor Wallace announcing our creation, you wonder if its author would have bet on a fiftieth anniversary ever arriving for our fledgling organization. The word "experiment" or "experimental" was used seven times to describe us...in a six-paragraph letter.

Still, by the summer of '74, we had officially hung our shingle, printed the requisite brochures, and hosted a "listening tour" of public meetings in Florence, Huntsville, Anniston, Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Selma, Montgomery, Dothan, and Mobile. Thankfully, the public responded. By that fall, according to our first newsletter, we sent out our first call for grant proposals, for "projects promoting dialogue between professional humanists and the adult public about issues of importance in Alabama."

***

Then, as now, all AHA grant funding comes from our affiliation with the National Endowment for the Humanities. And in those early years, we put out a theme for organizations to use in crafting their proposals. Our first theme, in 1974, was called "Priorities and Human Values in a Changing Alabama: At City Hall, Courthouse, and Statehouse."

That theme reveals a key difference between the Alabama Humanities of 1974 and today. As our initial name implied, a major goal was to bring the humanities to bear on public policy. It was a fairly remarkable purpose at the time. In practice, that looked like providing resources, forums, and humanities professionals (historians, scholars, writers, artists, and more) to help citizens better understand the issues affecting their towns — and why folks might see the same issues differently. In the end, we hoped, Alabamians might gain new perspective on how to approach pressing public policy issues of the day.

We funded 13 projects in that first round of grants, supporting a diverse array of projects — in places from Mobile and Huntsville to Butler and Sand Mountain. Among them, a statewide series of public forums designed to help Alabamians learn about "the policies and practices which govern the jails and prisons in the state." We also funded "The Quiet Dignity of Choice," a photography exhibit and narrative survey of the people

1991

Rebuilding Alabama's Front Porch, a year long effort for our 20th anniversary. It culminates in a televised conversation about reconnecting with our neighbors and communities.

'95-'96

Partnership begins with Museum on Main Street, bringing **Smithsonian traveling exhibits** to 60-plus Alabama town, so far, and inspiring discussions about our past, present, and future.

1999

SUPER Teacher program begins, signaling AHA's commitment to serve Alabama's educators with trainings and resources that enhance teaching and professional development.

1994

Glimpses of Community photography project enlists Alabamians to document everyday life in their communities. More than 1,400 photos come in for exhibitions across the state.

1997

Silver Anniversary Gala in Birmingham celebrates AHA's first 25 years. The event features legendary author Toni Morrison and Alabama Humanities Fellow Odessa Woolfolk.

Sir Jonathan Miller, the renowned British stage director, spoke at the first event in an innovative, decades-long series produced by Alabama Humanities and the Alabama Shakespeare Festival.

and places of the Tennessee Valley, highlighting the region's folk art, architecture, and cultural traditions.

And who received our first-ever grant? According to the paperwork, it appears that honor goes to Spring Hill College's Human Relations Center, which received $9,000 for a "Colloquium on Human Values and Rights."

To give an idea of just how different the focus was those first few years — using the humanities to provide a new lens through which to view policy issues — here's the short description of that Spring Hill project: "A series of five presentations and discussions dealing with issues of capital punishment, environmental deterioration, abortion, and voter registration."

Pulling no punches, we were.

While you can still hear echoes of that original mission from time to time, the emphasis on directly affecting public policy faded rather quickly. By the late '70s, the organization's focus had shifted more to what you'd recognize today — the funding and promotion of impactful storytelling and lifelong learning that bring Alabamians together through the exploration of our shared history, our rich culture, our literature, art, and so much more.

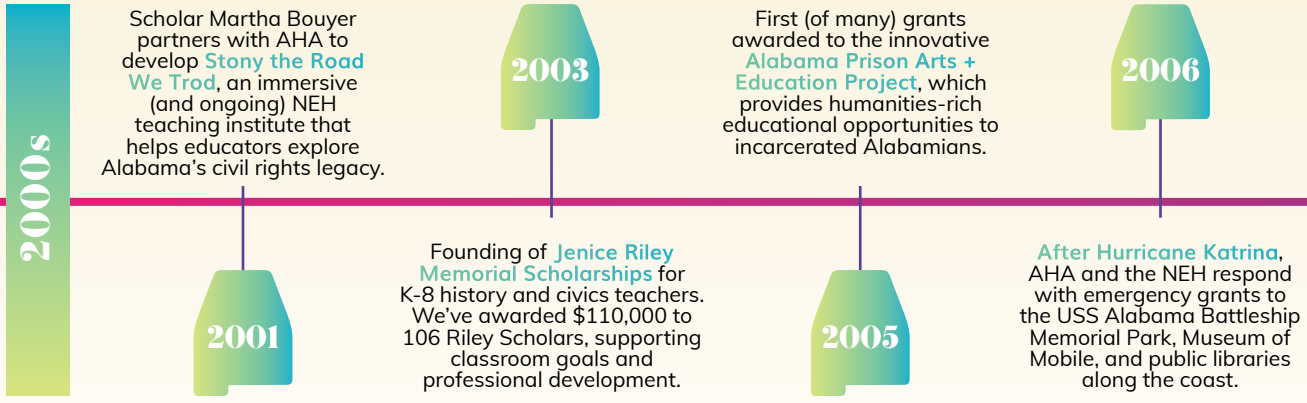
One thing that hasn't changed: We remain the primary source of funding for public humanities programming in Alabama. Since 1974, we've awarded more than $12.5 million in support of at least 2,182 public, humanities-rich projects statewide — and counting.

Margaret Norman, of the Birmingham Jewish Federation, knows the impact of an Alabama Humanities Alliance grant. In 2023, she helped Temple Beth El earn an AHA grant for "In Solidarity," a video and immersive civil rights experience at the temple exploring Birmingham's civil rights movement through the lens of the city's Jewish community.

Since then, "In Solidarity" has opened up new conversations among, and well beyond, Birmingham's Jewish community. It has also received national attention from outlets like *The New York Times* for its approach to storytelling that asks visitors to "think about how these stories inform the way you make sense of the past, present, and future. What does it mean to be in solidarity with our neighbors?"

"AHA was probably the first organization to give us a grant for this," Norman says. "And it did feel like a really big step in terms of conferring legitimacy to what we were doing. Even the process of receiving that grant opened us up to other opportunities because it helped us establish, 'we're here, we're doing this project. This is a real thing.'"

Martha Bouyer, Ph.D., executive director of Historic Bethel Baptist Church Foundation, has served as a



A sampling of AHA publications and marketing materials, from the 1970s through the 2010s.

community partner for Temple Beth El's project. She's also an AHA project scholar, past grant recipient, and director of the AHA-funded teacher-education experience, "Stony the Road We Trod: Exploring Alabama's Civil Rights Legacy."

"It's important that other organizations like the Alabama Humanities Alliance will stand up and take a chance on someone," Bouyer says, "on someone who maybe nobody knows, no one who's done anything, but who has an idea that might, just might, make a difference, if we empower them."

Hitting our stride

As the 1970s turned to the '80s, we began dipping our toes into the land of original programming — going beyond grant-making alone.

In 1978, we responded to the national energy crisis with "Energy and the Way We Live." As we noted in announcing the project: "The energy crisis affects us all. It threatens our way of living together, but it also offers us the chance to look at our past, and plan for the future." In partnership with the Alabama Public Library Service and community colleges around the state, we presented public forums addressing the roots and

2008 — **Encyclopedia of Alabama** launches with plaudits from Gov. Bob Riley and Sen. Richard Shelby. Now 2,500 articles deep, the EOA's 15.2 million visitors learn about all things Alabama.

2009 — AHA sponsors the **Southern Literary Trail**, highlighting Albert Murray's Mobile, Lilian Hellman's Demopolis, Ralph Ellison's Tuskegee, F. Scott & Zelda Fitzgerald's Montgomery, and more.

2010 — **To Kill a Mockingbird: Awakening America's Conscience** honors the enduring significance of Harper Lee's novel; the series ends with a screening of the AHA-funded film *Our Mockingbird*.

2011 — With support from the NEH and Books-A-Million, AHA provides grants and donates 2,000 books to help schools and public libraries **recover from the devastating tornadoes** of April 2011.

2010s

Ramona Hyman, AHA Road Scholar, gives a talk on Rosa Parks, at Huntsville's Oakwood College in 1992. Courtesy Alabama Department of Archives and History, donated by Alabama Media Group. Photo by Dave Dieter, *Huntsville Times*.

impacts of the crisis on Alabama's communities.

Then, in 1979, we launched our first AHA-directed effort, the Rural Humanities Program, providing ongoing resources to support rural Alabama communities. The program spawned discussion groups, oral history projects, and community festivals.

Both of these early efforts helped us dive into ever more ambitious projects.

First up, in 1983, was the Alabama History and Heritage Festival, which had been two years in the making. A massive, three-month "jubilee of the spirit of Alabama and its people," the festival featured 50-plus events — storytelling, lectures, conferences, film screenings, music, exhibits — all focused on the local communities hosting the events. Locales included Auburn, Demopolis, Eufaula, Anniston, Mobile, Birmingham, Huntsville, and a concluding festival at the state capitol. The festival not only drew out the famously private Harper Lee to speak but it also resulted result in a book, *Clearings in the Thicket: An Alabama Humanities Reader*, that was published the following year, and shared talks and papers by festival participants with a wider audience across the state.

Then, in 1984, we launched Theatre in the Mind, thanks to our first Exemplary Award from the National Endowment for the Humanities. What began as a one-off project would soon turn into a decades-long partnership with the Alabama Shakespeare Festival. It remains one of the best-known programs we've ever produced, and it had a profound impact on both organizations. For AHA, it was pivotal in two ways: It demonstrated how effectively the arts and humanities can enhance each other, and it established a model for collaborative programming that we follow to this day.

Former Alabama Humanities staff member Christine Reilly was tasked with shepherding Theatre in the Mind into existence. She remembers well its ambitious and auspicious opening, with a seminar led by Sir Jonathan Miller, the world-renowned British stage director.

"As he ascended the podium to launch the Theatre in the Mind project, all of us collectively held our breath," Reilly recalls. "This was the first major event of [Alabama Humanities'] first directed project! But we soon exhaled as the brilliant and funny Miller captivated the standing-room-only audience."

From there, the program was off and running. The concept for Theatre in the Mind was as straightforward as it was inventive: help people better appreciate, understand, and relate to the theatre. In practice, that took the shape of seminars led by well-known directors; a lecture series about each play produced by the Alabama Shakespeare Festival; workshops for drama teachers; printed publications; and a travel program that took theatre scholars and actors to schools, churches, and community centers across the state.

But the staple of Theatre in the Mind was the 15-minute "BardTalk" that would occur before each and every ASF performance — sparking curiosity and providing context for the play the audience was about to watch. And for 30 years, Susan Willis, Ph.D., delivered just about every

2011 — AHA's **Black and White Masked Ball** in Mobile, on 45th anniversary of Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, raises funds for Alabama Humanities programming in South Alabama.

2012 — **Literature and Healthcare** initiative helps healthcare professionals view their work through the humanities and gain greater empathy for their patients and each other.

2013 — **Prime Time Family Reading Time** debuts, aimed at increasing literacy among Alabama families. The program eventually transitions to a grants approach, supporting existing literacy groups.

2015 — Championed by executive director and Gulf War veteran Armand DeKeyser, **Literature & The Veteran Experience** helps U.S. veterans discuss how works of literature relate to their own war experiences.

2016 — ***First Lady of the Revolution*** premieres, telling the story of Birmingham's Henrietta Boggs, who married a future president of Costa Rica — and became a key figure in the country's 1948 revolution.

BardTalk there was. Patrons, in fact, often referred to her as the "Bard gal." It was a term of endearment and one she embraced; for a time, it even graced her license plate.

"The plays didn't need me to do their work for them, of course," Willis says, "but I tried to give audiences permission to open up and listen, to greet and enjoy the ideas and issues, the human experiences and artistry they were about to meet."

As the ASF's resident dramaturg — and a longtime professor of English — Willis ran the Theatre in the Mind program for 30-plus years. And she has seen its lasting impact in the Alabama Shakespeare Festival's educational programming to this day.

"Planning Theatre in the Mind meant weaving aspects of the humanities and the arts into each season's pattern of plays — always different, always challenging," she recalls. "It offered ASF a joyous and stimulating opportunity, and the many talented academics, speakers, and artists who shared their expertise made it rewarding for thousands of theatergoers, who went away with far more than their theatre stubs."

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A decade in, the "experiment" had proven a success: The humanities had secured a place in the everyday life of Alabamians. By 1985, we'd brought more than $1 million in federal funding to Alabama for communities and nonprofits to put on their own culturally rich events. And our original programming would only continue to grow. In fact, we were so busy, it appears our tenth anniversary might have snuck up on us; it passed without fanfare. Instead, we celebrated our eleventh year with a grand reception and dinner that coincided with an Oktoberfest celebration at Birmingham's historic Sloss Furnaces. (The only disappointment that night? The Pete Seeger concert had to be canceled, reasons unknown.)

Historian Wayne Flynt has been part of AHA's work from the very beginning. Photo by Jonathon Kelso.

AHA has often been called upon to commemorate Alabama's history. For the state's bicentennial, in 2019, our *Making Alabama* exhibit toured all 67 counties. It offered more than 100,000 visitors the chance to learn about our shared past — and consider our shared future.

In 1987, Robert C. Stewart took the reins as Alabama Humanities' third executive director. He would remain in that role for 25 years. Over the course of that quarter-century, Stewart would oversee a steady expansion of our work, helping us reach more Alabamians than ever before, including some of AHA's most well-known programs that are still offered today.

'17-'18 — AHA's *Making Alabama* bicentennial exhibit celebrates the state's 200th birthday. It travels to all 67 counties over a three-year period, sharing Alabama's rich and complex story.

'17-'19 — With the Alabama Peace Officers Standards & Training Commission, AHA offers Humanities & Law Enforcement; officers learn about the "Scottsboro Boys" case and its relevance to their work.

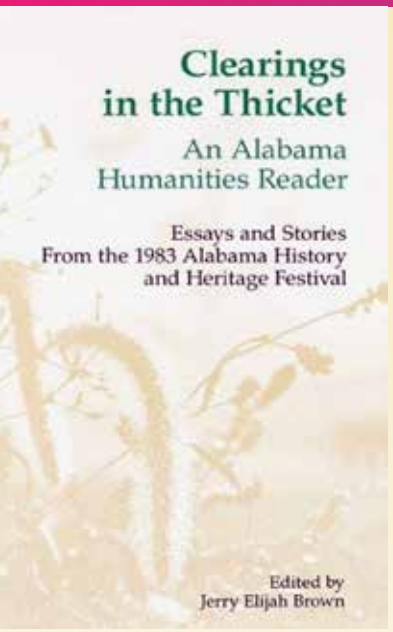
2018 — AHA takes on Alabama History Day, empowering students to research topics of interest and creatively present their findings. Teachers use AHD as a dynamic, project-based learning tool.

2020s

'20-'21 — AHA awards $1.3 million in federal COVID-19 relief and recovery grants to community cornerstones like libraries, museums, and more — helping to save or create 559 jobs statewide.

"TO BE HUMAN means to have both a sense of the tragic and a sense of humor. It means to be willing to live between tears and laughter, often flinching at the profundity of evil and suffering in the midst of life, yet never allowing such pain to eradicate the joyous grin that comes also from the very heart of things…To wit, to be human means to be able to live with our feet on the ground and our heads in the heavens. It means to live as creatures who know at once the grit and the grandeur of life, and see both as part of a pattern that we can ultimately neither control nor comprehend. It means to see in the lives and works of others, and in our own life and work, glimpses of truth…that illuminate the rest of the way."

—John Kuykendall, former AHA scholar and Auburn University professor of religion, speaking at AHA's 1983 Alabama History and Heritage Festival



In 1987, for instance, we started what's now known as the Road Scholars Speakers Bureau — a beloved storytelling program that's most often utilized in libraries in every county of the state. In 1989, it was the Alabama Humanities Awards that took flight. Known today as the Alabama Colloquium, the annual event honors those Alabamians who most significantly use the humanities to impact our state, nation, and world.

Our teacher workshop series, begun in 1991, has impacted countless thousands of Alabama's teachers and students. Meanwhile, AHA's partnership with the Smithsonian Institution, which harkens to 1997, still brings national traveling exhibits to the state — affording Alabamians the chance to consider how their communities connect to America's broader, ever evolving, story. And in 2008, in collaboration with Auburn University and many other groups statewide, we went live with the digital Encyclopedia of Alabama.

Historian Wayne Flynt, Ph.D., who has been a scholarly collaborator and cherished friend for the entirety of AHA's existence, served as the site's founding editor-in-chief. Upon its launch, he called the EOA "the most expansive and ambitious intellectual collaboration in state history."

"For the first time in the state's history," Flynt asserted, "we [are writing] the major narrative of who we are, what we believe, how we have lived, and what we

2021

Final (maybe!) name change to Alabama Humanities Alliance, affirming AHA's commitment to cultivate allies and reflecting our diverse range of programs.

2022

AHA's first "post-pandemic" public event brings out nearly 700 people in Montgomery to honor our newest Alabama Humanities Fellows, Bryan Stevenson and the late John Lewis.

2023

Healing History launches with a new approach for Alabamians to talk, and listen, to each other. The goal is to use conversations about our past to build a better future for all, today.

2024

AHA celebrates its 50th anniversary — and looks toward its next half-century of nurturing a smarter, kinder, ever more vibrant Alabama.

have accomplished. We tell the story, warts and all. But we depict the beauty as well as the pollution, the dreams as well as the failures, the triumphs as well as the disasters."

Thicket clearers

In 1985, when we published *Clearings in the Thicket*, the title choice was deliberate. It comes from Alabama historian Malcolm C. McMillan. In his 1975 text, *The Land Called Alabama*, McMillan writes: "Alabama is named for the great river which drains its center. The river in turn received its name from the Alabamas, an early tribe which once lived on its banks at or near the present site of Montgomery. The name Alabama is of Choctaw origin and means 'thicket clearers.'"

Thicket clearers.

When we're doing this thing right, that description can apply to the humanities, too. A past version of our mission statement, from 2004, expressed the humanities' thicket-clearing potential this way: "The study of the humanities — of history, literature, philosophy, languages, and the like — does not solve life's mysteries but does offer ways of interpreting the world in which we live. By exploring the history of our community and nation, we discover a sense of place. By reading and discussing literature, we recognize characters who remind us of people in our own lives. By asking questions about how society ought to treat its members, we deepen our own understanding of social justice."

Clearing the thickets.

Fifty years on, that's what the Alabama Humanities Alliance remains committed to doing — helping us all better understand the world around us, our neighbors, ourselves, a little bit better. All through the simple yet profound act of sharing our stories.

Dive deeper into AHA's history.

Check out a package of online extras that look back on additional moments from our past that have had a lasting impact.

ALABAMA HUMANITIES ALLIANCE 50 1974-2024