



From the executive director

Charles W. (Chuck) Holmes

“We cannot afford to drift physically, morally, or aesthetically in a world in which the current moves so rapidly, perhaps toward an abyss. Science and technology are providing us with the means to travel swiftly. But what course do we take? This is the question that no computer can answer.”

—Glenn Seaborg

Do you relate? You’re not alone.

I suspect that these words connect with just about anyone who is distracted too often by a smartphone and wary of what the age of AI will bring. To this anxiety stew, let’s add social media, social isolation, declining literacy rates, and the decline of civic engagement.

Here’s the twist. The quote above is pre-Internet, uttered some 60 years ago in testimony to a U.S. Senate committee. The speaker was Glenn Seaborg and his life’s work earned him a Nobel Prize in chemistry.

This renowned nuclear scientist was speaking in favor of the humanities and the arts. He viewed them as antidotes to threats posed then by rapid technological and social transformation during the Cold War. By engaging in literature, art, languages, history, and philosophy, Americans can more smartly cope and make better, humane decisions.

“But what course do we take?”

For 50 years, the Alabama Humanities Alliance has been charting that course. We help Alabamians tell their stories, explore their past and present, and connect with each other — human to human. This year, AHA celebrates a half-century of uplifting the humanities in Alabama.

In 1965, following the testimony of Seaborg and many others, Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill passed legislation to create the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

In turn, that led to the founding of the Alabama Humanities Alliance in 1974. (And humanities councils like ours in all 50 states.)

Since then, AHA has enriched the lives of countless Alabamians. As an NEH affiliate, we distribute federal grants to support storytelling projects, explorations of history,

documentary films and podcasts, and community gatherings. We operate public programs like Alabama History Day. We bring traveling Smithsonian exhibitions to the state. We help educators be better educators with training and resources.

This issue of *Mosaic* chronicles AHA and its history. Among many achievements over 50 years, AHA co-created the online Encyclopedia of Alabama, led Alabama’s bicentennial touring exhibitions, and supported early efforts to bring literacy and lifelong learning programs to underserved rural areas.

“This is the question that no computer can answer.”

Looking back is important. More relevant is imagining the next 50 years. You’ll find that in these pages, too.

One example — in seeking to address the divides in our state, we’ve launched the Healing History Initiative. It is a sustained, multiyear effort to create opportunities for Alabamians to talk, listen, and find humanity across their differences.

Our effort uses history and facilitated group conversations to explore what we have in common while acknowledging — with civility — what divides us.

In all that we do at AHA, there is plenty of work to be done. We cannot afford to drift.

Our ability to thrive as a state relies on our willingness to keep learning for a lifetime and to nurture a shared vision of a better Alabama — today, tomorrow, and 50 years from now.

Mosaic

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