



NHC Alumni News



Nebraska Humanities Council

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NHC Executive Director Hood to retire by year's end

Virginia Knoll served on the Nebraska Humanities Council (then called Nebraska Committee for the Humanities) from 1984 to 1987 and on the Nebraska Foundation for the Humanities from 1985 to 1994. In addition to chairing the council, she also chaired the search committee that hired Jane Hood as executive director in 1987. In late June, Virginia interviewed Jane about her years as director. The entire interview is at www.nebraskahumanities.org.

VK: You have been with us for 23 years, almost a quarter of a century. You were particularly well suited to become executive director because you were a Nebraskan to start with. Tell us about that.

JH: I grew up in Crete, Nebraska, and had gone to Doane College for my undergraduate work and then had done my Master's and PhD in history at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. So, I had spent most of my life in Nebraska.

VK: But then you left Nebraska.

JH: We moved to Chicago in 1977 and I worked with the Illinois Humanities Council.

VK: How did you happen to do that?

JH: I had been a scholar on a couple of projects that the Nebraska Committee for the Humanities had funded and just loved it. I thought it was wonderful to use what I had studied in history to help citizens better understand current issues. So I applied for a job with the Illinois Humanities Council.

VK: When you first came, can you remember how you decided to begin?

JH: One of the reasons I was interested in being the director was that the Nebraska Humanities Council had a very good reputation among the other state humanities councils. For example, one of the IHC's program officers came out here to see how Nebraska did Chautauqua because the Illinois council thought that it



Jane Renner Hood and Virginia Knoll

was a very interesting project. And you had begun a Humanities Resource Center. Also, of course, I was moving home to a state I thought I knew well. Working with a state humanities council has to be one of the best ways to learn about a state.

VK: In what sense?

JH: Obviously its history, but more than that, its distinct culture: what makes Illinois, Illinois; Nebraska, Nebraska. In moving back to Nebraska, I was seeing the state in different ways than I had seen it growing up here.

VK: You were sort of getting a new definition of the place. Of course, you were working across the social sphere because you were going to little towns and the cities, talking to people at the universities and talking to the high school teachers and citizens of the community.

JH: My years in college and graduate school were very valuable for broaden-

ing and deepening my understanding of the humanities, but I hadn't had much opportunity to work on the local level. With the humanities council, I began to work with libraries, local historical societies, and with people engaged in their communities. I got a much clearer sense of Nebraska as well as the value of these organizations to local communities and their sense of place.

VK: I remember when I was invited to be on the council in 1984, I was told that it was a delightful volunteer job and that you read all of these grants and gave away money that was given to you by the federal government. But by the time we were hiring you in 1987, it turns out there was going to be a little fundraising and we were beginning to set up a foundation. Did you understand that when you came?

JH: Yes, I did. The Nebraska council simply couldn't do everything that needed to be done in public humanities programming if we were just relying on funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. I think it's made us a stronger council by giving Nebraskans an opportunity to be part of what we're doing—to invest in their state humanities council. One of the things that helped us in our private fundraising was our state appropriation. When we got our first state appropriation in 1989, it was on a matching basis. We had to raise \$1 for every \$2 that the state appropriated to us. And the Legislature did the same thing later on in 1998 with the Nebraska Cultural Endowment. For every \$1 that the \$5 million trust earned, we had to raise \$1 in private funds.

VK: Yes, that was quite a coup. Tell us how that happened.

JH: One of the things I liked most about Nebraska is that I think its Legislature takes quite seriously George Norris' commitment to openness in government

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so that the citizen can be watchful. It was so easy here to call up a legislator's office and say, "I'm Jane Hood with the Nebraska Humanities Council and I'd like to talk with senator so-and-so about the council and what it does in his or her district," and get an appointment with the senator. Our Legislature, all of our elected officials in Nebraska, and that includes our Congressional delegation, are so accessible. We also became more sophisticated about our advocacy and learned to take a board member who was a constituent of the Legislator or congressman on those calls.

VK: In the same way, you had to call on individuals and businesses that could give the council money or do other things for you.

JH: This is why we have to have good board members. They are so important in opening doors for us. This is one of the real strengths of the Nebraska Humanities Council and Foundation. We have board members who are committed to our mission. They are willing to go on calls with me or with Chris Sommerich, our development director.

VK: So with Congressional lobbying and the NEH, you've also had to work at the national level as a liaison. You're working on so many different levels. Do you have a favorite part?

JH: The favorite part brings us back around to program. I'll share a story that just happened during our "Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties" Chautauqua in North Platte because it's like experiences I've had so many times over the years at our programs. As the scholar who portrayed Zora Neale Hurston was answering audience questions, a man stood up and said, "I didn't know what Chautauqua was—I'd just come into town to pick up my daughter and thought I'd come in and try it. I didn't know who Zora was, but I really enjoyed your presentation, and I'm coming back tomorrow night." And the next night he was back under the Chautauqua tent to hear Huey Long!

VK: While I have no official position with the council anymore, I will assume the authority to thank you for your wonderful service to the council and Nebraska. Thank you, Jane.

JH: And thank you for hiring me for the best job in Nebraska!

NHC progress under Jane Renner Hood

During the 23 years of Jane's leadership, the NHC has:

- Awarded more than \$3.8 million in grants to Nebraska organizations in support of 1,926 humanities-related projects;
- Funded 8,900 Humanities Resource Center programs statewide for more than \$2 million;
- Brought 48 Chautauquas to 36 different Nebraska communities;
- Toured six Museum on Main Street exhibitions from the Smithsonian Institution to 31 different

communities;

- Brought 14 national speakers to Nebraska for the Governor's Lecture in the Humanities;
- Enabled 263 Nebraska high school teachers and classes from 82 different schools to explore global issues through Capitol Forum on America's Future; and
- Reached more than 3,500 children and parents in 13 different communities with the *Prime Time* reading and discussion program.

Core programs and funding over the years

NHC core programs in 1987:

Grants (1974)
HRC & Speakers Bureau (1983)
Chautauqua (1984)

Capitol Forum on America's Future (1998)

Prime Time Family Reading Time (2002)

NHC core programs in 2010:

Grants
HRC & Speakers Bureau
Chautauqua
Nebraska Book/Literature Festival (1991)
Nebraska Humanities magazine (1991)
Humanities Desk/Connections (1991)
Museum on Main Street (1996)
Governor's Lecture (1996)

NHC funding in 1987:

89% NEH (federal)
11% private donations

NHC funding in 2010:

38% NEH regular grant
23% private donations
12% state appropriation
12% endowment (NCE)
12% other competitive NEH grants
3% earned income/other

Make a gift to the NHC in Jane's honor

What do you get a retiring executive director who says she doesn't need anything?

If you are interested in making a special contribution to the Nebraska Humanities Council in Jane's honor as she nears retirement, we are setting up a fund for such a purpose. Jane has requested that any gifts in her honor go to support one of our new initiatives that she feels is critical for the well-being of our state: fostering locally-based civil discussions.

The council's strategic plan for 2009-2013 identifies "encouraging Nebraskans to use the humanities in ex-

ploring and discussing public policy issues" as one of our strategies for making high-quality programming available to all Nebraskans.

This year, a planning group made up of board members, staff, and outside experts is working on possible strategies for civil engagement programming with pilot programs to begin in 2011. The council's role will be to encourage community discussions on local issues and provide a framework for productive civic discourse.

Contact Chris Sommerich, NHC development director, with any questions about making a gift in Jane's honor.

NHC alumni are recognized for accomplishments

Miguel Carranza, professor of sociology and ethnic studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, was appointed to the National Children's Health Insurance Program working group by the U.S. secretaries of health and human services and labor.



Miguel Carranza

Peter Longo, professor of political science at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, co-authored the second edition of "The Nebraska State Constitution: A Reference Guide." Longo also was appointed to the Nebraska State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Harold Rock was awarded the Omaha Bar Association's Lifetime Achievement Award for "exemplary service to the profession, support and ser-

vice to the Omaha Bar Association, innovative contributions to improving justice, and long-standing commitment to mentoring in the law."

John Wunder, professor of history and journalism at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, authored the foreword for the recently published "I Do Not Apologize for the Length of This Letter: The Mari Sandoz Letters on Native American Rights, 1940-1965."



Peter and Diane Longo

Cindy Bay was honored by the Omaha YWCA at its 23rd Annual Tribute to Women on June 8, as was **Sharon Marvin Griffin's** daughter, Melissa Marvin, a current board mem-

ber of the Nebraska Foundation for the Humanities.

The Hastings Symphony Orchestra recognized Hal and **Gretchen Lainson** as outstanding patrons of the arts on Feb. 28, the first time such an award has been made. They were inducted into the Hastings Symphony Orchestra's Hall of Fame in 1993.



The Lainsons

Brian and **Carey Hamilton's** company, Beardmore Chevrolet-Subaru, received the Golden Spike Award from the Omaha Chamber of Commerce on May 11 at its Omaha 25 Luncheon.

Three NHC alumni have died in 2010

Three humanities council and foundation alumni have passed away in 2010:

Kathryn Thomas, Russ Rasmussen, and George Watson.

Katie lost her battle with cancer on March 10 after a distinguished career as a classicist at Creighton



Kathryn Thomas

University and long service to the council and foundation. She had served on the program committee and the executive committee. After retiring from the council in 1990, Katie offered programs statewide on "The Survival of the Ancient Public Libraries" as a speaker in the NHC's Humanities Resource Center.

Cancer also claimed Russ Rasmussen on June 5. A true Renaissance man, Russ bridged C.P. Snow's divide between the two cultures of science and the hu-



Russ Rasmussen

manities. A much-honored professor of chemistry at Wayne State College, Russ was also an ardent champion of the humanities. As a tireless evaluator of NHC programs, Russ served on the program committee and helped shape the council's program emphasis on Nebraska's changing demographics.

George Watson died on June 26 of pancreatic cancer. He had served on the council during its early years from 1978 to 1981. Fascinated by the western culture of our state and a proponent of the humanities in Nebraska's Panhandle, George was an attorney and a member of the faculty at Chadron State College. He served as chair of the criminal justice department for most of his 34 years at CSC and was a long-time member of the board of the Museum of the Fur Trade.



George Watson

We mourn their loss to Nebraska's humanities community.

Bring Chautauqua to your community

The Nebraska Humanities Council invites community applicants to host Chautauqua in the summer of 2011.

After the great success of the "Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the 1930s" Chautauqua, the Nebraska Humanities Council has decided to reprise this theme in one Nebraska community next year.

The preferred dates for the 2011 Chautauqua are June 22-26. The deadline for applications is Oct. 1.

If you want to bring President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Louisiana Gov. and U.S. Sen. Huey Long, Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston, evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, and humorist Will Rogers to your community in 2011, contact NHC Program Officer Kristi Hayek at (402) 474-2131 or kristi@nebraskahumanities.org for an application.

The host community must be able to provide a number of items including a steering committee and sub-committees to assist project coordinators; a grassy, well-protected site for the tent; and electricity and sufficient power near the tent.



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"Bright Dreams, Hard Times" Chautauqua scholars

Brodkey gift funds Chautauqua

The Nebraska Humanities Council is grateful for a recent gift from the Brodkey Family Trust as part of Bess Brodkey's estate plan. As reported in the last alumni newsletter, Bess, who served on the Nebraska Foundation for the Humanities from 1993 to 1995, passed away last November at the age of 99. We used this gift to support Chautauqua, one of Bess's favorite programs.

Make a secure online donation at
www.nebraskahumanities.org

If you want to give online to the Nebraska Humanities Council, you can make a secure gift at www.nebraskahumanities.org.

Just click on "Ways to Give." For more information, call Development Director Chris Sommerich at (402) 474-2131 ext. 105 or e-mail him at chris@nebraskahumanities.org.

Generous alums Nov. 1-May 31

We appreciate the recent generosity of the following alumni and their families who provided financial gifts between Nov. 1 and May 31 in support of Nebraska Humanities Council programs. Private donations account for nearly 30 percent of our total budget, and those of you who have served on the Council and/or Foundation truly understand how important charitable giving has become to our programs. Thank you.

Dr. George & Colleen Adam	Gretchen & Hal Lainson
Robert & Edwardene Armstrong	Jack & Carol Maddux
Keith & Mary Ann Blackledge	Dr. & Mrs. William T. Griffin
Kent & Cathy Blaser	Gay E. & James R. McClymont
Brodkey Family Trust, in memory of Bess Brodkey	Jane & Randy Moody
Jack & Sally Campbell	Francis Moul
Clay & Dale Capek	Helen M. Nichols
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Erick & Harriet Egertson	Clay & Beth Smith
Mimi Ernst	Helen Stauffer
Molly Fisher	Megan Terry
Shirley Flack	Pat Thompson
Wanda & Michael Gottschalk	Anne & Charles Trimble
Linda Hillegass & Jim McKee	Harriet S. Turner
Jessica Coope & Stephen Hilliard	Judy & Clarence Ueda
Thomas & Carol Holyoke	Ross & Judy Wilcox
Mr. & Mrs. Andrew C. Hove Jr.	John & Susan Wunder
Jim & Elaine Johnson	Joachim & Laura Wunderlich
Peter & Jane Kotsiopulos	Dale L. & Mary Young