

The Filson

A publication of The Filson Historical Society, a privately-supported historical society dedicated to preserving the history of Kentucky and the Ohio Valley Region.



Recent Acquisitions	Browsing in our Archives	Filson Volunteers	Annual Fund	The Gertrude Polk Brown Lecture Series	Drama and Design	Mary Ann Currier	Planned Giving	Exhibit Updates	Board Member Profile	The Filsonians
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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Filsonians,

For much of the past year, representatives of the Filson's board and staff have been engaged in a strategic planning process that will take us through 2024. By the time you receive this message, our full staff and board will have reviewed the proposed plan and provided input. The final result will be approved by the board at its annual meeting in December.

Providing specific goals at this point would be premature. I can tell you, however, that we will adhere to our 137-year **mission**: To collect, preserve, and share the significant stories of Kentucky and Ohio Valley history and culture. I know that our institutional **values** are sound: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Excellence, Service, and Integrity; and Preservation, Scholarship, and Education. Our **vision** is clear: To be widely recognized as one of the preeminent historical societies in the United States in terms of collections, programs, exhibits, and scholarship, and to build a stronger present and future by learning from the past.

The Filson's **strengths** are formidable. We have a dedicated, talented and highly professional staff; an exceptionally strong financial position and the accompanying capability to plan for the future; a broad diversity of activities: archive, museum, publications, programs and special events; breadth and depth of collections; quantity and quality of programs and special events; an outstanding facility, both historical and new; the capability to deliver materials and programs digitally; and excellence in marketing and institutional advancement.

Our **opportunities** are boundless. These include: continued and increased income from targeted grants to fund new ventures; an increasingly inclusive and talented board; increased support from all of you—our loyal constituents; an increased national reputation as a research organization; the ability to expand if and when needed; a focus on bequests and estate planning through the Thruston Legacy Circle; the opportunity to increase involvement and collaboration with the African American community; the opportunity to utilize off-site locations across the Louisville Metro area, the Commonwealth and the Ohio Valley region for exhibits of our collection; and the vital opportunity to enable leaders to avoid repeating past mistakes by sharing our resources and scholarship.

Can you feel our excitement? Thank you for your steadfast and enduring support.

Sincerely,



Richard H.C. Clay

President/CEO, The Filson Historical Society

FROM THE CHAIR

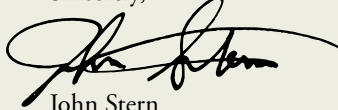
Over the course of this past year during which Covid has “provided” an opportunity for increased reading, the word HISTORY has seemed to have more relevance and importance than ever before. Please allow me this medium to relate some of what has drawn my attention.

One of our previous Gertrude Polk Brown speakers, Tony Horwitz, wrote that past history bleeds into the present, and the present informs our understanding of the past. Former Senator George Mitchell wrote that to reach a deal between Israelis and Palestinians, proposals for the future, intended to help solve the problems of the present, could not be fairly evaluated without some intricate knowledge of past history. Along these same lines, someone wrote how can you know where you're going if you don't know where you've been? Santayana wrote that those ignorant of history are condemned to repeat it. Winston Churchill modified this by saying those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Someone said that history teaches about the past so we do not repeat the mistakes of the past and learn to form a better future. Still another said that we can learn from, relate to and be entertained by history. Another said that one learns from history and by knowing history well, one starts preparing for the present and the future. Historian Barbara Tuchman said it perfectly in two words—“Tell Stories”—which is what the Filson says in its Mission Statement. Our esteemed Kentucky representative, John Yarmuth, said that our history is everyone's history, and to the extent it explains how we interact to create a society, the last thing we should be doing is ignoring that history.

Indeed HISTORY ROCKS!

In closing, I would be remiss if I didn't congratulate Dick Clay, his leadership team and indeed the entire staff for their hard work in making three past special events the outstanding successes which they were. First, August's Music Under the Trees had an excellent turnout with a good time being had by all. Second, September's 27th Annual House Tour of the Ferguson Mansion had all sorts of bells and whistles for the attendees. Third, October's Filson Sporting Clay Classic was sold out before it was even officially announced and was a huge success in its second edition. Congrats to the Filson staff for these three special events extremely well-done!

Sincerely,



John Stern

Board Chair

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The Filson

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OUR MISSION:

To collect, preserve, and
share the significant stories
of Kentucky and Ohio
Valley history and culture.

Recent Acquisitions

Having reopened to the public beginning in September, the Collections staff now meet monthly to review new potential acquisitions and donations! Here a just a few of the interesting new materials we are collecting and preserving to tell the rich stories of the Ohio Valley.



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1. The Dorr-Raith Collection documents the life of Samuel F. Dorr and his husband Charles Raith, both long-time activists for LGBTQ+ rights in Louisville. This collection contains family photographs, papers, and objects documenting their careers in banking and architecture. Of specific interest includes materials detailing their activism during the AIDS Crisis and their involvement in the Episcopal Church. (Donated by Charles Raith and Sam Dorr)

2. Portrait of artist Mary Gardner Johnston (1872–1966) of Pewee Valley, Kentucky, by Martha Beggs Elliott (1892–1987), painted in 1943, oil on canvas, 37x45 inches. (Donated by V. Elliott Smith, grandson of artist)

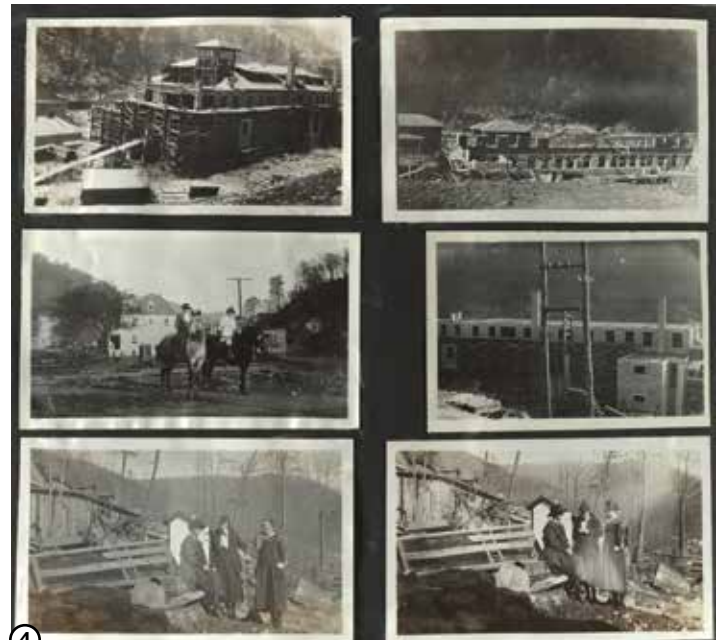
3. Speed family photographs documenting the Speed, Condon, Wathen, Perrin, Hendron, and Adams families, ca. 1860–1940s. This rich collection of photographs documenting these intermarried families helps us build upon our already strong Speed family collections and adds several images of individuals that were not previously represented in our collections. (Donated by Helen Powell)

4. U.S. Coal and Coke Company mining photograph album, 1917–1920, documents the construction of the mining town of Lynch in Harlan County, Kentucky. (Historic Acquisitions Fund)

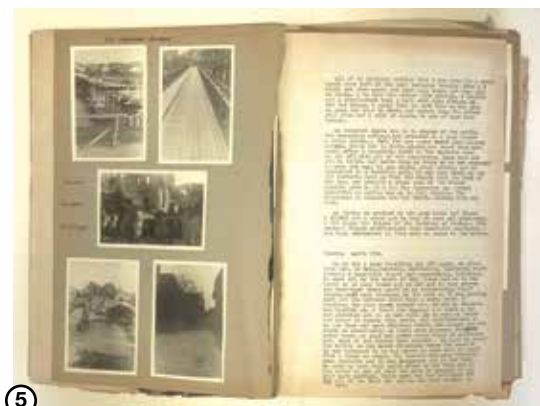
5. Captain Martin Shallenberger's journal-photo scrapbook documenting his experiences with the U. S. Mapping Agency during the last months of World War II in France, Belgium, and Germany. (Donated by Christy Brown)



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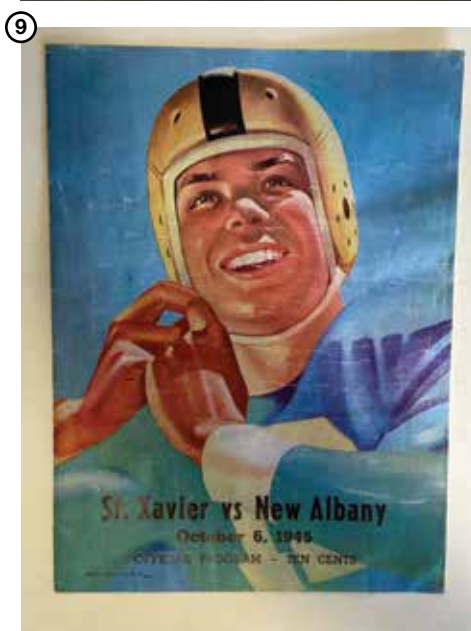


6. Clark-Strater-Hill family photographs.

The photographs accompany a new donation of Clark-Strater-Watson papers, and together they document the activities, lifestyle, friends, and family of an affluent socially active Scottish immigrant family that settled in Louisville, Ky. (Donated by Barrie Lewis, Eleanor Hahn, and James Hill)

7. Library acquisitions and purchases include:

Helen LaFrance: *Folk Art Memories*, by Kathy Moses and Bruce Shelton; *Always There: The African-American Presence in American Quilts*, by Cuesta Benberry; *Way Up North in Louisville: African American Migration in the Urban South, 1930-1970*, by Luther Adams; *Down Cut Shin Creek: The Pack Horse Librarians of Kentucky*, by Kathi Appelt and Jeanne Cannella Schmitzer (all Historic Acquisitions Fund); *Our American Roots Discovered: Dickson C. Topp and Mary Winfield Meredith and Their Descendants*, by Bruce Dixon Topp (donated by the author); *Jobson's Journal* published in Louisville in the early 20th century (donated by Jean Marie Massie); and *The Agricultural Reader Designed for the Use of Schools* by Daniel Adams, 1824 (donated by Gill Holland)



8. Henrietta Helm's autographed portrait photograph ca. 1900 and school record book.

Born into slavery, Henrietta Helm (ca. 1863-1942) was one of the first African American students to attend public school in Louisville. She became a teacher at age 17, going on to have a long and influential career as an educator, and serving as the Principal of the Portland Colored Evening School. (Gift of Phillip Cherry Sr.)



9. Program for the St. Xavier vs. New Albany football game, October 6, 1945. (Donated by Charles "Chip" Arbegust)

10. John Philip Clements letters to his wife Mai Luten Clements while serving in Europe during World War II. (Donated by Sue Clements May)

11. Topcik family papers, photographs, and artifacts document the activities of several Louisville Jewish families across multiple generations. Featured within are materials illuminating accountant Charles Topcik's decades-long career as "Chuckles" the Clown with the Kosair Shrine Funsters and other area fraternal and charitable organizations. (Gift of Evelyn (Evie) Lou Topcik and her daughters Jeanne Aronoff, Carolyn Bleicher, and Deborah Topcik)

Old, New, Borrowed, Blue

Examining Wedding Dresses and Bridal Traditions

BY BROOKS VESSELS | MUSEUM COLLECTIONS ASSISTANT



Melville Otter Briney on her wedding day, April 17, 1926. [Filson Photograph Collection. Melville Otter Briney, Individual Photograph Collection, 8x10]

For years, brides have been pursuing the same four lucky items in preparation for their wedding ceremonies: something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue. The popular rhyme was first printed in an 1871 issue of *St. James Magazine*, but what are these objects meant to represent, and why has the tradition persisted? According to historian Edward Westermarck, couples preparing for marriage were once thought to be in danger of interference or attack by evil spirits as they began the transition from single to married life. For reasons both practical and symbolic, these carefully chosen items were thought to ward off such misfortune. Through the structure of this famous superstition, we will examine wedding dresses in the Filson's collection and explore some of

the social, cultural, and economic factors that shaped American wedding culture in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Something Old

Like most other superstitions, the reasoning behind the line, "something old" varies depending on who you ask. Some believe that carrying something old, particularly something that belonged to another woman in the bride's family, was meant to ward off the Evil Eye. It was also believed that a bride's "something old" should represent the best parts of a woman's life before marriage, with the intention of bringing those happy memories and positive experiences with her in this transition.



Wedding dress, veil, fan, and shoes worn by Mary Elinor Braden at her wedding on March 1, 1816. [Filson Museum Collection 1978.12.1-4, 18]

The oldest known garment in the Filson's Clothing Collection is a wedding dress worn by Mary Elinor Braden at her wedding to Zachariah Dulaney on March 1, 1816. The wedding was held at Mary's family's estate in Waterford, Virginia. Getting married at a bride's family home was very common, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, as weddings at this time were considered private, family affairs.

While this dress fulfills contemporary expectations of the white wedding dress, that may be more by coincidence than intent. Fashion in the Regency or Federalist period (ca. 1811-1820) was heavily influenced by Greco Roman Culture. Simple, empire-style gowns made of thin, gauzy fabrics in pale colors were fashionable at this time for everyday wear. Even the classic bridal veil we know today was a popular accessory for evening wear in the Federalist period. In addition to Mary's wedding dress, her wedding veil, slippers, fan, and nightgown are also in the Filson's collection.

Something New

A bride's "something new" was thought to symbolize the new chapter of life the couple was about to enter. For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, couples did not live together before marriage, and they were responsible for making or purchasing a variety of items to establish their household. In addition to her wedding dress, a bride and her family



Wedding dress worn by Lizzie Elinor Dulaney, married December 2, 1886. [Filson Museum Collection 1978.12.10, 13-15]



Trousseau dress with matching muff and petticoat. [Filson Museum Collection 1978.12.10, 13-15]

had to assemble her wedding trousseau in preparation for the marriage. Derived from the French verb *trouser*, meaning “to truss” or “to bundle,” a trousseau was made up of all the soft goods needed to furnish a home. A traditional trousseau would include all linens, bedding, towels, handkerchiefs, other household textiles, and a complete wardrobe that would sustain the bride through at least the first year of her marriage.

This was a task that was carried out in varying degrees depending on the economic status of the couple. Many brides were able to make the garments and textiles in their trousseaus by hand, but by the latter half of the nineteenth century, local dressmakers and department stores began specializing in the creation of custom wedding dresses and wedding trousseaus. Department stores offered reasonably priced options for brides, and the novelty of purchasing a wedding dress and accompanying trousseaus became a status symbol and an indication that the bride was a member of the growing American middle class. However, what was considered a “reasonably priced” trousseau for a middle-class bride in the 1880s would cost about \$5,000 today.

“Something borrowed” usually referred to a token or garment borrowed from a woman in the bride’s family who was happily married. Like “something old,” this object was thought to bring good luck and happiness to the marriage. The women of the Nelson family took this element of the rhyme to heart. This modern-looking, sleeveless dress in the Filson’s collection was worn by at least four different women over the course of 70 years.



Wedding dress worn by Theodosia George Nelson and descendants. [Filson Museum Collection 1980.21]

The dress was made by Madame Glover, a well-respected Louisville dressmaker, for the wedding of Theodosia George Nelson on March 9, 1910. The dress was worn again by Theodosia’s descendants in 1934, 1953, and 1979. The dress was allegedly worn by two other women in the family between 1953 and 1979, but their names were not recorded in existing documents in the collection. The dress also narrowly escaped destruction in 1974, when a tornado ripped the roof off the attic where the dress was stored.

As it was handed down through the family, each bride modified the dress to fit her own taste. Lace collars were added and removed, and by 1979 the sleeves had been taken off completely. Although the dress is no longer a valuable example of early 20th-century clothing, its evolution is a testament to the symbolism and sentimental nature of the garment.

Something Blue

In the final line of the rhyme, the bride is instructed to find “something blue” to complete her wedding ensemble. The color was thought to symbolize true love and fidelity and ward off the evil eye. Blue was also a very popular color in men’s wedding attire.

Wilhelmina Schuckman wore a blue silk brocade dress with bright blue fringe at her wedding to John Schunicht on October 25, 1857. While superstition may have played some role in her choosing a blue wedding



Wedding dress worn by Wilhelmina Schuckman at her wedding on October 25th, 1857. [Filson Museum Collection 1999.4.1]

dress, she likely picked the garment for more practical reasons. Wilhelmina and John were both first-generation immigrants to the United States, traveling from Germany and Prussia respectively. John was a master cabinetmaker, and both parties were likely members of the working middle class. Many lower, middle, and working-class women could not afford the expense of purchasing a traditional white satin wedding dress.

White dresses were notoriously difficult to keep clean, and any imperfections in the construction of the dress were easily visible on white fabric. Instead, women would either purchase a new dress that could be worn to church and other social gatherings after the ceremony and would be easier to maintain, or simply wear the nicest dress they had in their wardrobe, adding a bit of lace or wax orange blossom trimmings for the occasion.

Throughout history, becoming a wife was one of the few acceptable roles a woman could fulfill. Whether rich or poor, girls were raised with the expectation that one day they would find a husband, run a household, and raise children. Wedding ceremonies marked the transition from girlhood to womanhood, and the details of these rituals reveal much about the preoccupations and superstitions of contemporary society. For these reasons, wedding dresses provide insight into not only fashion trends throughout history but also into the evolving societal expectations of performed femininity and domesticity.

The Filson's Volunteer Program

In order for the Filson to fulfill our mission to collect, preserve, and share the history of Kentucky and the Ohio Valley, volunteers are integral to the work that we do. We rely heavily on the generous donation of time, energy, creativity, and passion from our volunteer base. Throughout this year, the Filson has benefitted from the work of 24 volunteers who have worked over 400 collective hours on a variety of projects. These volunteer hours impact the Filson throughout nearly every facet of our organization's function, including but not limited to:

Collections: Our volunteers work with our collections team to organize storage and assist with the inventory, research, transcription, accessioning, cataloguing, and digitization of collections. Our collections volunteers also assist with exhibit preparation for both in-person and virtual exhibits.

Visitor Services: Filson volunteers work directly with the public on our Front Desk to welcome and assist visitors. Our volunteers serve as tour guides and docents for daily campus tours and gallery viewing and share the history of our organization and campus through these tours.

Programming, Outreach, and Development: Volunteers assist our programming and outreach staff to welcome guests to our programs, work at outreach events and festivals to share information about the Filson's mission and resources and stay in contact with our supporters to share new and important information about the Filson.

In addition to the day-to-day work and operations, Filson volunteers contribute immeasurably to our institutional, historical knowledge, keep us connected with important vendors, such as contacts for conservation needs, and help to create a community of individuals brought together by a shared interest in the history of the region.

The Filson extends abundant appreciation to each of our volunteers!

Interested in learning more about the Filson's volunteer program?

Contact Community Engagement Specialist, Emma Bryan:

(502) 635-5083 or emmabryan@filsonhistorical.org



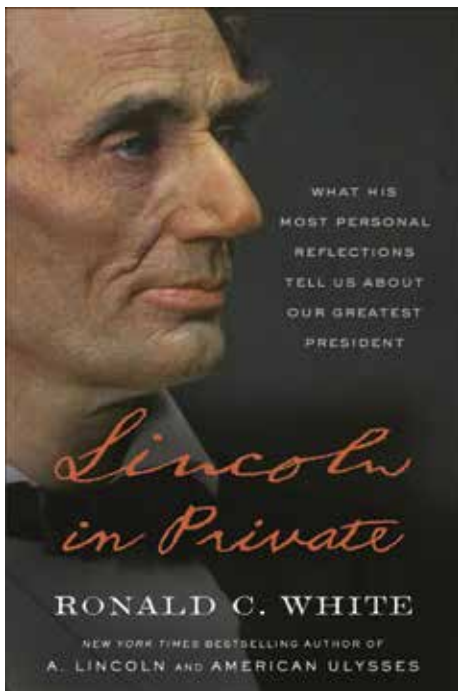
Volunteer Joan Brennan in the Filson's Library, Photo Credit: Jennie Cole



Librarian Cassie Bratcher (left) and Volunteer Chip Arbegust (right) work in collections triage, Photo Credit: Emma Bryan



Volunteer Steve Zollner at the Filson's Front Desk, Photo Credit: Emma Bryan



HISTORY

RESEARCH & PROGRAMS



GIVE TO THE ANNUAL FUND TODAY!

The Filson Historical Society collects, preserves, and shares Louisville and Ohio Valley history for present and future generations. Your contribution to the annual fund allows us to continue to promote historical awareness and dialogue. Thank you!

*The Filson
Historical Society*

THE GERTRUDE POLK BROWN LECTURE SERIES

Lincoln in Private

*What His Most Personal Reflections Tell Us
About our Greatest President*

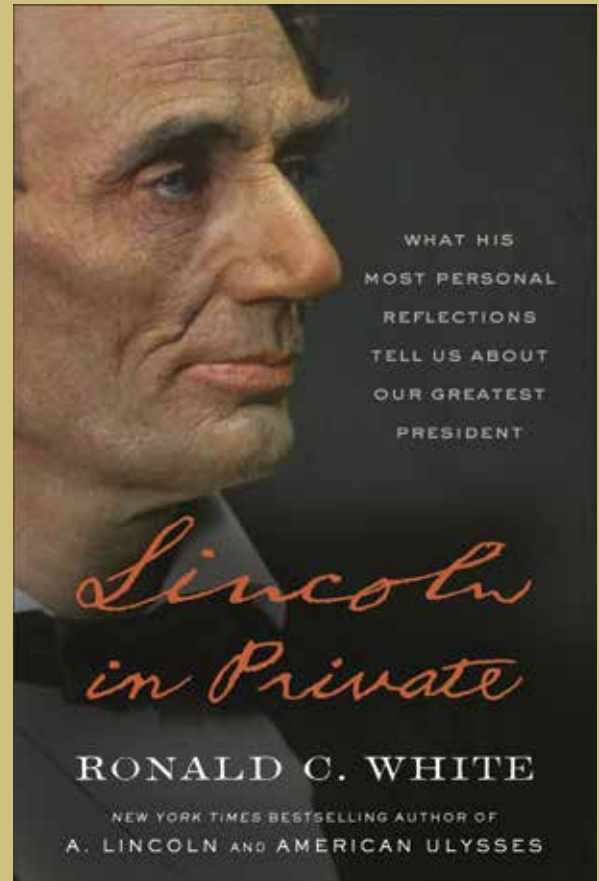
Ronald C. White

A deeply private man, shut off even to those who worked closely with him, Abraham Lincoln often captured “his best thoughts,” as he called them, in short notes to himself. He would work out his personal stances on the biggest issues of the day, never expecting anyone to see these frank, unpolished pieces of writing, which he’d then keep close at hand, in desk drawers and even in his top hat. The profound importance of these notes has been overlooked, because the originals are scattered across several different archives and have never before been brought together and examined as a coherent whole.

Now, renowned Lincoln historian Ronald C. White walks readers through twelve of Lincoln’s most important private notes, showcasing our greatest president’s brilliance and empathy, but also his very human anxieties and ambitions. We look over Lincoln’s shoulder as he grapples with the problem of slavery, attempting to find convincing rebuttals to those who supported the evil institution (“As I would not be a *slave*, so I would not be a *master*. This expresses my idea of democracy.”); prepares for his historic debates with Stephen Douglas; expresses his private feelings after a defeated bid for a Senate seat (“With *me*, the race of ambition has been a failure—a flat failure”); voices his concerns about the new Republican Party’s long-term prospects; develops an argument for national unity amidst a secession crisis that would ultimately rend the nation in two; and, for a president many have viewed as not religious, develops a sophisticated theological reflection in the midst of the Civil War (“it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party”). Additionally, in a historic first, all 111 Lincoln notes are transcribed in the appendix, a gift to scholars and Lincoln buffs alike.

These are notes Lincoln never expected anyone to read, put into context by a writer who has spent his career studying Lincoln’s life and words. The result is a rare glimpse into the mind and soul of one of our nation’s most important figures.

Ronald C. White is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *American Ulysses* and three books on Abraham Lincoln, most recently *A. Lincoln*. White earned his PhD at Princeton and has taught at UCLA, Colorado College, Whitworth University, and



Princeton Theological Seminary. He has lectured at the White House, been interviewed on PBS NewsHour, and spoken about Lincoln in England, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, and New Zealand. He is a reader at the Huntington Library and a senior fellow of the Trinity Forum in Washington, D.C.

Praise for
Lincoln in Private
***What His Most Personal Reflections Tell Us
About our Greatest President***

“An intimate character portrait and fascinating inquiry into the basis of Lincoln’s energetic, curious mind.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

TICKETS

Tickets for this event must be purchased from The Kentucky Center Ticket Service. Please call (502) 584-7777 or visit kentuckyperformingarts.org for tickets. Processing fees are not included in the ticket price.

Drama and Design

Louisville's Historic Theater Architecture

JANA MEYER, DONA DAUGHERTY, AND ABIGAIL STEPHENS

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, architects were busy at the drafting table designing a plethora of new buildings for downtown Louisville. The city center was becoming less residential as the suburbs expanded, but was still bustling with all the premier shopping, dining, and entertainment options. The arts scene was thriving and many of the new buildings under construction were theaters. Fourth Avenue, between Chestnut and Broadway, soon became known as the theater district.

Louisvillians on their way to the theater were often going to MaCauleys, the city's premier entertainment venue for several decades. MaCauley's was designed by the McElfatricks, John B. and his son John Morgan, and opened in 1873. John Morgan also supervised the theater's construction, although, according to owner Barney MaCauley, his role was limited, and MaCauley himself did most of the work: "That was [McElfatrick's] first theater, and I had had considerable experience."¹ Apparently, this continued to be a point of contention: several years later, MaCauley was arrested on a warrant sworn out by McElfatrick, who demanded \$1,250 owed for his services. The pair must have eventually settled their differences, as the McElfatricks later did additional work on the theater, completing a major renovation in 1883. The Italianate building near Walnut and Fourth was four stories high, with three bays and banding courses that supported porches and pediments. The lavish exterior details inspired movie theater design in the coming decades.

Another live theater venue, the New Buckingham, originally opened as the Grand Opera House on September 3, 1894, at 223-227 West Jefferson Street. The theater was designed by Louisville architect D. X. Murphy for its



Exterior of MaCauley's Theatre [Subject Photograph Collection, THE-5]



The crowd at the final performance at MaCauley's, still a popular venue when it closed in 1925 [Subject Photograph Collection, THE-21].

owners Cols. John H. and James P. Whallen. It was praised on its opening night for its bright, roomy entrance, complete with a marble floor, a multitude of mirrors, and several chandeliers. The Whallens intended the Grand Opera House to be a cleaner alternative to the Buckingham Theater, the Whallens' burlesque and vaudeville house. After three years, however, the Whallens found that their new venture was less profitable than the old. They closed both theaters and reopened the Grand Opera House as the New Buckingham Theater in 1897. Reviewers praised the quality of its performances, while cautioning that "Sunday-school picnic managers and Young Men's Christian Associations are advised not to engage the company as an extra attraction," due to its coarse humor.² Murphy had to redesign the theater when the building was "completely gutted" by fire in early 1899. He altered the venue to accommodate 1,290 seats. The balcony, with 488 seats, included semicircular boxes with two private boxes on each side. Years later, Murphy

also designed alterations to the theater's front office, which was left untouched by the flames.

In the early 20th century, live theater gained a new competitor in the form of motion pictures. This new format necessitated the construction of a specialized building: the movie palace. Architects and brothers Alfred S. and Oscar G. Joseph founded a firm which capitalized on the demand for movie houses. One of their earliest projects was the Royal (circa 1911), likely their earliest venture into the movie palace market. The building at 1809 W. Broadway still stands, but over the years has endured unfortunate cosmetic modifications, including the removal of the second-story balcony, large arched window, bas-reliefs, and exterior detailing. Joseph & Joseph went on to design the Kentucky (1921) and completed renovations on one of Louisville's first movie houses, the Majestic (circa 1922).

Joseph & Joseph constructed their most lavish movie palace, the Rialto, in 1921. The million-dollar theater at 616 S. Fourth Street

¹ Barney MaCauley: His Arrest at Indianapolis on a Writ Sworn out by Architect McElfatrick." *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1880.

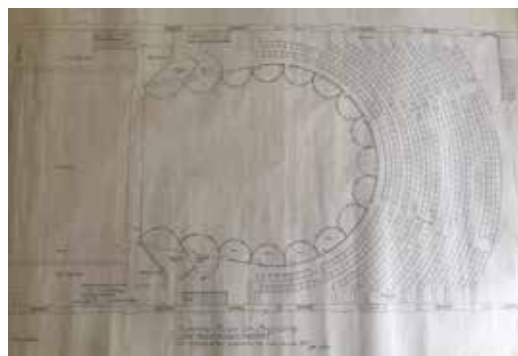
² "Theatrical Year Begins: Opening of the Season at the New Buckingham With a Good Performance," *Courier-Journal*, August 16, 1897.



Samuel Plato, architect of the Grand Theatre [Samuel Plato Photograph Collection, 999PC35.681]



Proposed auditorium for the Grand by Plato. Perhaps those who attended movies at the Grand will recall how closely this sketch matches Plato's final design [Samuel Plato Photograph Collection, 999PC35.599]



Seating plan for the balcony in New Buckingham Theater, redesigned by architect D. X. Murphy in 1899 following a ruinous fire [D. X. Murphy & Bro. Records, Mss. BB M978 443-444]



An imported Japanese urn, one of the final decorative touches added to the Rialto before its opening night in 1921. [Filson Museum Collection, 2016.24]



Location of Grand Theatre at 607-611A West Walnut Street on the 1940 Sanborn map. Note the brick construction and reference to "Movies." [Courtesy Library of Congress]



The redesigned semi-circular balcony boxes were decorated with a scroll design [D. X. Murphy & Bro. Records, Mss. BB M978 443-444]

was described as "palatial" and "extremely artistic." Named after the Rialto Bridge in Venice, Italy, the theater was envisioned to "bridge for humanity at large innumerable pathways to romance, beauty, poetry, knowledge, art, literature and drama."³ The theater was famous for its colossal grand balcony, a 110-foot span without supporting columns, that in its day was an engineering feat surpassed only by the Capitol Theater in New York. The Rialto's white-glazed terra-cotta façade originated in the Rookwood Pottery in Cincinnati, making the theater stand out from the older buildings that lined Fourth Street. Inside, intricate plasterwork and hand-painted murals decorated the walls and ceilings. Theatergoers ascended a triple branching marble staircase to view movies such as "The Sound of Music", which played to over 300,000 patrons in 1965-66.

However, in a city divided by segregation, not everyone was welcome to attend these theaters. On nearby Walnut Street—the soul of Louisville's African American community—Black residents constructed their own popular entertainment venues. From everyday needs to top notch entertainment, Walnut Street "had it all," including two motion

picture theaters, one being the Grand Theatre.⁴ Opening its doors on February 11th, 1924, the Grand Theatre was designed by Samuel Plato, a prominent African American architect in Louisville. The impressive three-story building stood at the Northwest corner of Sixth and Walnut Street (607-611 W. Walnut St.), and, in addition to the theater, housed the offices of the Domestic Life Insurance Company and The First Standard Bank. Plato chose Classical features for the building, noted in its arched windows, paired pilasters, quoins, faux roof-line balustrade along a small section of the east elevation, and accentuated cornice lines with dentils.

Fully owned and operated by members of Louisville's African American community, the Grand Theatre was promoted as having the "finest and most modern" picture machines and screen and the "most attractive" auditorium, with elegant hangings and beautifully painted walls.⁵ Theatergoers were also greeted with comfortable air circulation and the "first class music by Brown's Grand Theatre Orchestra."⁶ The Grand Theatre was truly a work of art and source of pride for the community. In 1965, the theater became known

as the Hollywood Follies Burlesque Theater, which remained in operation until 1970, when the property was purchased by the state Economic Security Department. Like many other businesses along Walnut Street, the former theater was demolished in the late 1970s, and today, the property is a parking lot.

Unfortunately, the fate of the Grand was a common one. In the mid-20th century, large cities across the U.S. witnessed the decline of their urban cores. Louisville's city center emptied due to suburban growth, transportation changes, and commercial development on the outskirts. In the 1950s, new suburban cinemas lured crowds away from the old downtown venues. Historic buildings fell into disuse and became the targets of urban renewal redevelopment plans. Of the many theaters that once lined Fourth Avenue, only the Palace remains in its original form. Old Walnut Street was targeted even more vigorously; the business district was almost completely leveled, and the Grand Theatre is only one of the many historic buildings lost. Revisit these theaters and some of downtown's other historic buildings in the Filson's upcoming *Forgotten Foundations* exhibit, opening February 18, 2022.

3 "Meeting Place of People Here: Million Dollar Playhouse will Bridge the Gap of Romance." *Courier-Journal*, May 15, 1921.

4 Jean Porter, "Strolling Down Memory Street," *The Courier-Journal*, August 12, 1987.

5 "New Grand Theatre to Open Doors," *The Louisville Leader*, February 2, 1924.

6 "The New Grand Theatre, Truly Grand," *The Louisville Leader*, March 1, 1924.

Mary Ann Currier

by Maureen Lane

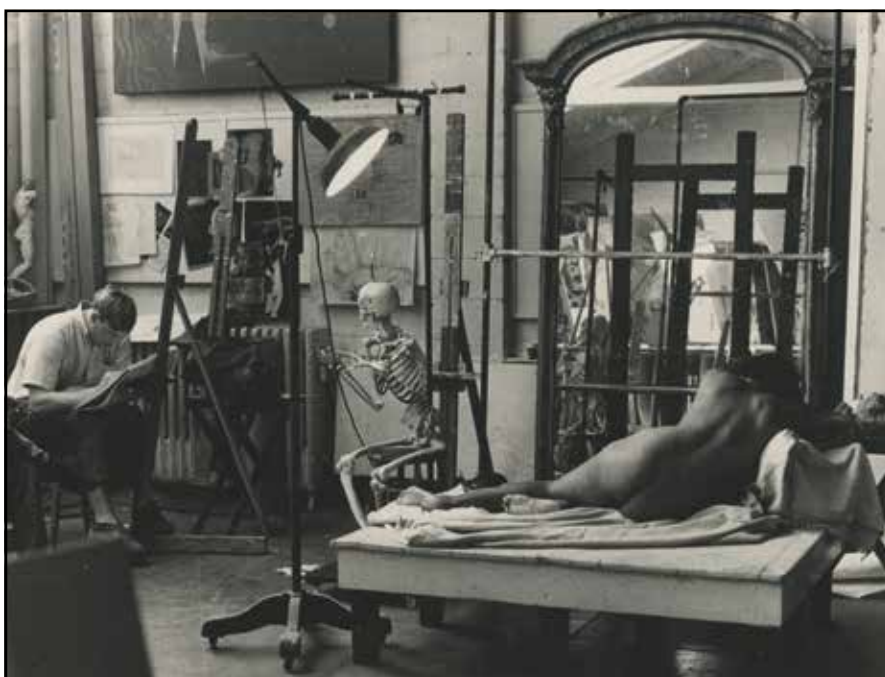
For more than 135 years, the Filson has collected art that represents the people, places, and history of the Ohio River Valley region, acquiring more than 600 paintings on canvas and more than 1,500 works on paper. Over 500 works are portraits of the people who lived and worked in the region. While the Filson is known for its significant collection of antebellum portraits, the collection also contains a large body of works by modern and contemporary artists. Journals, letters, sketches, exhibition catalogs, newspaper clippings, and other archival and library material provide insight into their artistic processes as well as the thriving community of artists who supported, mentored, and influenced one another.

This year the Filson received a significant gift celebrating the prodigious career of artist Mary Ann Currier (1927–2017), one of the country's best contemporary still-life artists and an extraordinary portrait painter. This donation from her daughter, Anne Currier, includes paintings, sketches, exhibition catalogs, photographs taken by the artist, and years of correspondence with fellow artist Madison Cawein IV.

This collection is a testament to Currier's tenacity as a woman artist in what was a mostly male-dominated profession in the middle of the 20th century. She was the daughter of German immigrants Adolph and Gertrude Ebert who instilled a strong work ethic and supported Currier's development as an artist. In 1944, Currier won a scholarship to the Chicago Academy of Fine Art where she attended school alongside returning World War II GIs. At times, Currier was the only woman in her class. In 1947, her



Portrait of Mary Ann Currier, undated



Interior view of the art studio at the Louisville School of Art, ca. 1970s. Photograph taken by Mary Ann Currier.

mother called her back to Louisville, telling her she needed to find a job. Determined to earn a wage through art, Currier secured a job at Stewart's Department Store producing illustrations of home furnishings. A collection of these illustrations was donated in a separate gift from her daughters Frances Currier Lewis, Nancy Currier, and Anne Currier.

After her marriage to Lionel Currier in 1949, Mary Ann continued to make art at home while rearing her three daughters. She took night classes at the Art Center School (later called the Louisville School of Art) and was asked to teach portraiture. Currier was the only woman teaching full-time at the school. The bulk of the donated collection is from the 1960s–70s, the peak period of Currier's time at the Louisville School of Art. It features life drawings, photographs, and paintings of the school's models and students. These portraits are captivating and introspective. In a 2008 KET documentary film, Currier described what it was like working as an artist and teacher during that era: "It was a new and different time. It wasn't just music and the Vietnamese War, and the assassination of Kennedy, all of those things went together and the fact there was a draft, and it created a kind of student that was questioning and questioning a lot, wanting to know, why? --- It was the 60s, it was stimulating, and something was in the air and that creative life was appealing."

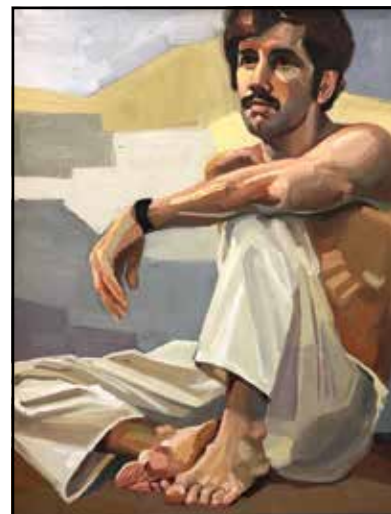
Although Currier went on to paint monumental-sized still life paintings, which earned national recognition for her work, portraiture and quick-study life drawings sharpened her ability to observe the world around her and transform the corporeal into private contemplative spaces. It didn't matter what was being depicted—the human body, an onion, or a paper bag, it was the process of observation and the craft of drawing and painting that was at the center of her art. Even in her 80s, with more than 60 years of drawing and painting experience in her oeuvre, she was continuously dissecting not only the technical processes of art but also the



Untitled ca. 1960s–70s



Untitled ca. 1960s–70s



Untitled ca. 1960s–70s



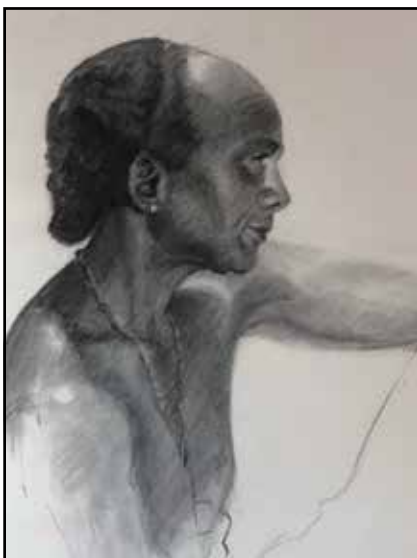
Onion with Knife, ca. 1980s



Melodie, ca. 1979



Paul Hassfurder ca. 1960s–70s



Untitled ca. 1960s–70s



Untitled ca. 1960s–70s



Untitled, 1967



Evelyn Simon, sketching, ca. 1960s–70s

visual reading of works of art, analyzing how works made her feel, revisiting works to see if they still made her feel, and continuously honing her own craft.

The correspondence between Currier and Madison Cawein provides deep insight into Currier's life-long quest not only to understand but to articulate with specificity technical processes, abstruse concepts such as beauty, how works made her feel, and why they made her feel. Her knowledge of art history was unmatched, and it informed her own work. She was continuously thinking and learning about art. "Art is a way of being alive in the world." In one letter, Currier reflected that art could be "giving not asking" and not "pushing for attention" which was a "viewing perspective" that interested her. Currier's own works always give and never demand. They invite the viewer to look, stay awhile, and contemplate the world as Currier saw it.



Join The Thruston Legacy Circle, Make A Planned Gift to The Filson

The Thruston Legacy Circle is an honorary society established in 2015 to recognize those who have followed the example of R.C. Ballard Thruston by including the Filson Historical Society in their estate plans. Circle members are recognized in Filson publications, including *The Filson* news magazine. The Circle currently has 27 members.

Since our founding in 1884, the Filson has been privately supported, and our success is due almost entirely to the strong support by generation after generation of individuals who recognized the importance of the Filson's unique mission to collect, preserve, and share the significant stories of Kentucky, Southern Indiana, and the Ohio Valley. Much of that support has come through planned giving. Planned giving provides long-term resources for the Filson, safeguarding the Filson's future.

We invite you to join the Thruston Legacy Circle!

Below are a few ways you can make a planned gift.

- **Bequests Under Wills.** Donors can provide for a bequest to the Filson under their will.
- **Gifts From Retirement Plans.** Donors can name the Filson a beneficiary of a retirement plan, such as an IRA or 401(k).
- **Gifts of Life Insurance Policy proceeds.** Donors can make the Filson a full or partial beneficiary under an existing or new life insurance policy.

If you have made provisions in your estate plans for the Filson, we would be delighted to welcome you to the Thruston Legacy Circle. You can do so by calling Brenna Cundiff, Director of Development, at (502) 634-7108 or by emailing her at brenna@filsonhistorical.org. If you are interested in making a planned gift to the Filson, please talk to your estate planning professional and then call our Development Office. We would love to welcome you to the Circle.

Forgotten Foundations

Louisville's Lost Architecture

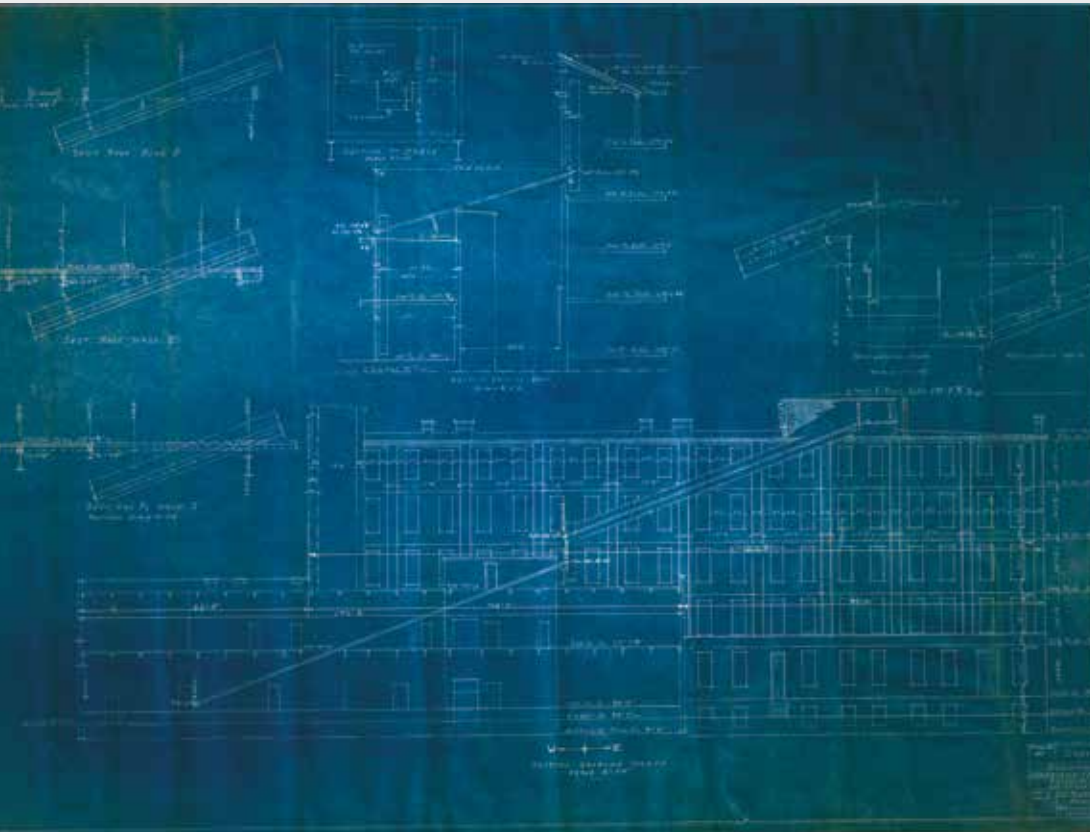
Curated by
Jana Meyer and Danielle Spalenka

Feb. 18–Sept. 23, 2022

Bingham Gallery

Downtown Louisville is the foundation and heart of the city, central to daily life for its citizens for much of its history. The legacy of downtown as a hub of trade, manufacturing, shopping, and entertainment continues in many ways. But in recent years many of its historic structures and architectural marvels that served as the foundation for downtown have been lost through urban renewal and revitalization efforts. How can downtown remain a viable hub and historic buildings preserved to meet the needs of a changing city?

The Filson Historical Society will explore the rise, fall, and revitalization of urban Louisville through its architectural structures in our upcoming exhibit, *Forgotten Foundations: Louisville's Lost Architecture*, opening February 2022. The rise in downtown as a hub for so many businesses mirrored a building boom after the Civil War. Grand buildings with intricate architectural details served as a visual symbol for the rise of Louisville as a major economic location with a thriving and growing city. But as transportation needs and expansion drove people and businesses to the suburbs, downtown Louisville saw a major decline. Buildings once seen as architectural gems were now seen as old and outdated. Urban renewal and the expansion of expressways through downtown meant that many buildings were bulldozed and torn down. Much was lost in these “forgotten foundations,” but this exhibit plans to explore and remember what was lost through the architectural and photographic records left behind. Louisville now once again asks itself about what happens to downtown, as the pandemic emptied downtown of many of its workers and will explore and celebrate how revitalization efforts have meant that downtown has the potential to thrive and become the hub and heart of the city. We hope you will join us in early 2022 to explore this exhibit.



Blueprint of the American Tobacco Co. Warehouse at Broadway & 17th Streets, Louisville, KY, 1947. From the William G. O'Toole (1898–1956) Architectural Drawings Collection, 1909–1956. Mss AR O88. Filson Historical Society Special Collections.

Interview with
John Stern
Board Chair

Jamie Evans: John, why don't you tell us what brought you to the Filson's Board?

John Stern: Many years ago, past president Henry Ormsby was a good friend of mine, and he said, "John, why don't you join the board of the Filson?" And I said, "Henry, I'm not a deep-pockets guy like some of your associates." He said to me, "John, you don't have to ever pay anything. I just want you on the board." Unfortunately, I didn't get that in writing. I have been on the board for many, many moons. That was my first introduction to the Filson. I always liked history, even though I had an engineering undergraduate degree. I enjoyed reading history and learning from history but really didn't know too much about the Filson until Henry introduced me. That's when I found a deep appreciation for what the Filson is and what it does.

JE: You've become a real champion for the Filson.

JS: Well, thank you. It's a great, great organization.

JE: What is your favorite part of history for Kentucky or even the Ohio Valley? What's your interest?

JS: I'd say my interest is broad. It's not just Kentucky, the Ohio Valley, and the United States. It's world history. I particularly have an interest in World War II, but there is no particular aspect or geographical location of history in which I'm interested. It's diverse.

JE: Can you elaborate on your experience at the Filson?

JS: I've been on the board for a number of years and have enjoyed quite a bit of committee work. My initial committee was personnel, and then eventually I migrated to collections, which is the most fun committee of the Filson. So I've been involved with committees for quite some time. And then, of course, 2021 was my first of two years as board chair.

JE: This next question is going to be two parts. The first part is: if you were talking to someone and telling them about the Filson, what would you tell them as a reason why they should join?

JS: There are two reasons or two groups of reasons. One is for what it can do for them. There's so much—so many programs, so many activities, special events, and access to collections—whereby they can learn a lot about the past that could better prepare them for the present and for the future. And then the other way of looking at it, the Filson is a nonprofit, and it needs the support of all the citizens of this area, because it does a tremendous amount of good for the public, and being a nonprofit, it certainly needs the financial support as well as when people are thinking about disposing of historical artifacts. It's a natural receptacle for many things which people might not know where to place because of their importance. They need to go to the Filson, which is the preeminent and logical repository for history of this region.

JE: The second part of that question is this: if you were approaching someone to join the board, what would you tell them?

JS: If you're going to be involved with a nonprofit, it certainly is a whole lot more pleasant and enjoyable to be involved with an organization that is a successful organization. One that is well endowed financially, has a phenomenal staff, already has an outstanding and diverse board, has great facilities, and just something with which it is enjoyable to be associated with a winner.

JE: When we're looking at the future of the organization, what are you most excited about?

JS: The continued opportunity for growth. There's so much that the Filson, especially through the staff, has been able to accomplish, but there's so much more opportunity out there in terms of expansion of programs, collections, and special events. And there are so many opportunities for participation, not just as members, but on our six committees. If there's a special interest that you have, you can jump right in. And if you don't know quite how to do that, you should certainly get in touch with the appropriate people at the Filson by going to their website.

JE: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell the members of the public?

JS: The Filson is vital to the present and future well-being of Kentucky and the Ohio Valley. And it's worthy of your involvement. We're always glad to welcome new members. And there are just a phenomenal number of outstanding programs which are free to members. If you're already a member – Thanks! If not, you should be!

The Filsonians

August 2021–October 2021



The Thruston Legacy Circle is an honorary society established in 2015 to recognize those who have followed the example of R. C. Ballard Thruston by including the Filson in their estate plans. Since our founding in 1884, the Filson has been privately supported and planned giving is an ideal way to continue that tradition of private support.

If you have made a planned gift to the Filson and have not so advised us, we thank you and ask that you let us know so we can welcome you to the TLC. If you have not made a planned gift but would like more information about doing so, please call our Development Department at (502) 634-7108 or email Brenna Cundiff at brenna@filsonhistorical.org.

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