

A special edition of
Lunch With Books
at the
Ohio County
Public Library
Wheeling, WV

HOSTED BY
WEST VIRGINIA
POET LAUREATE
MARC HARSHMAN

JULY 27,
2021



*Wheeling
Poetry
Series*

PRESENTS

CARRIE CONNERS &
JACOB STRAUTMANN

Wheeling Poetry Series

Launched in September 2015, the “**Wheeling Poetry Series**” features readings by some of the finest poets from our Appalachian region and beyond.

When he is available, **Marc Harshman**, the poet laureate of West Virginia, serves as host.

The series came about as a result of an ongoing conversation with Harshman, who felt that there was a need for a dependable venue in which to present major American poets reading and talking about their work here in West Virginia and more specifically here in Wheeling. Harshman had long lamented the loss of the **James Wright** Festival which had been held for many years in Wright’s home town of Martins Ferry, Ohio. “That annual event was a towering success,” Harshman explained, “lauded by poets across the U.S., and I see no reason why such a success cannot be replicated here in Wheeling. And some will remember that frequently some of the programming for the Wright festival was, in fact, held at various locations in Wheeling.”



George Ella Lyon, poet laureate of Kentucky, & **Marc Harshman**, poet laureate of West Virginia, at the inaugural **Wheeling Poetry Series** at Lunch With Books, September 29, 2015.

Wheeling
Poetry
Series

FEATURED GUEST . . . JULY 27, 2021

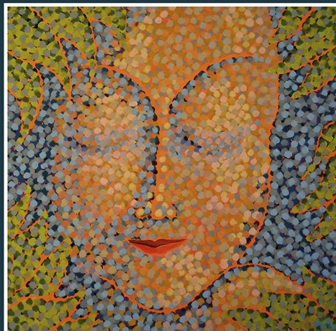
CARRIE CONNERS

Carrie Connors is a poet and a scholar of poetry. Originally from West Virginia, she lives in Queens, NY and is a Professor of English at LaGuardia Community College-CUNY. Her first poetry collection, *Luscious Struggle* (BrickHouse Books, 2019), was selected as a 2020 Paterson Poetry Prize Finalist. Her second collection, *Species of Least Concern* (Main Street Rag, Winter 2021-22), was a finalist of the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award and will be published in the winter of 2021-22. Her poetry has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and has appeared in *Bodega*, *Kestrel*, *Split Rock Review*, *RHINO*, and *The Monarch Review*, among other publications. She is also

the author of the forthcoming book, *Laugh Lines: Humor, Genre, and Political Critique in Late 20th Century American Poetry* (University Press of Mississippi, 2022).



LUSCIOUS STRUGGLE



Carrie Connors

Visit twitter.com/connerscarrie to learn more.

Man Suffocates Under Newspaper Collection

He spent hours reorganizing his stacks by day of the week, morning or evening, alphabetized frontpage headlines. Some days, when he had an exciting reshuffling planned like sorting by number of obituaries, his fingers would itch for the thin paper until the irritation forced him to fake sick and duck out of the office after lunch. He loved the rustling pages, the soft slap as he dropped one edition onto another, soothing as the first drop of salve sinking into tender skin. Late at night he'd pace the maze between the piled walls, his eyes closed, humming himself into a shuffling sleep with dreams of children chanting the Fibonacci sequence like a prayer. One night dozing in front of a stack reorganized by number of typos, he was awakened by the smack of paper against hardwood floor, quickly followed by a shower of papers thumping his body. Struggling against the weight of disorder, he took his last breath calculating the time it would take to rearrange the fallen stacks.

— *Carrie Connors*

(Published online at [Cordite Poetry Review](#), Nov. 1, 2017)

The Basking Shark

roams the ocean, jaw unhinged, trolling for tiny plankton to filter through its gills and fuel its bulk. It looks silly really, bordering on foolish, its endless pelagic migration guided by a mouth embarrassingly large even for its enormous body. But, its shameless display of desire is admirable in its honesty. Think of the time we'd save if we accepted our cravings and pursued them so unabashedly. Dating, for instance, would be a much simpler process. No more agonizing, no more "he loves me, he loves me not." If his mouth doesn't fall open at the sight of you brushing your hair, cut ties and recommence roving the earth in search of what feeds your heart.

— *Carrie Connors*

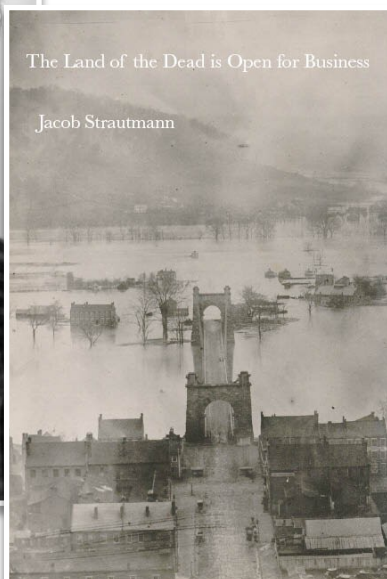
(Published online at [Split Rock Review](#))

FEATURED GUEST... JULY 27, 2021

JACOB STRAUTMANN

Raised in Marshall County, WV, Jacob Strautmann is the Department Manager of Economics at Boston University, where he also teaches playwriting. His poems have appeared in the *Boston Globe*, *Agni Magazine*, *Salamander Magazine*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Blackbird*, *Appalachian Journal*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Forklift*, and others. He is a recipient of the 2018 Massachusetts Poetry Fellowship from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and recipient of the Quiddity International Editor's Prize for Poetry. Strautmann's debut book of poems *The Land of the Dead Is Open for Business* — an extended elegy for his home

state and its generations of inhabitants sold out by the false promise of the American Dream — is available from Four Way Books.



Visit jacobstrautmann.com to learn more.

I Dream I Meet Irene McKinney at the Ruined House of the Photographer

Step inside, the air is heavy wet
newsprint or scent of vinegar, walls
graffitied and barely lit. It's time to go.
I tell her what she means to me, or try.
Quick as spit she pulls us up the stairs,
carpeted in the casings of beetles age-soft.
Birds cry, sweep through smother of twig and leaf.
Whole floors heave, her foot is past the landing;
some treads hold nestlings, some snakeslick.
At any moment I might falter, fall through,
hide my face, manage to bark, "no more,"
as she hauls us, winded, into a room
of portraits. She doesn't blink or look aside:
she's like their subjects, like the open bureau,
a room hidden in a house, called on at last,
windows thrown wide for years to catch this light.

— *Jacob Strautmann*

(Published online at [Blackbird Journal](#), Spring 2019, Vol. 18, No.1)

The Volunteers

The farmhouse leans in light
the landscape holds exquisitely.
In a crescent men watch the scorchwind,
eyes as dry as gravel spades.

Clapboards curl. The frame pops
its locks and birds abandon; out
the cellar door mice twist and bolt.
A black tree sings from the center

of total loss. Years, years pass.
The landlords rent a dozer
their nephew throttles to cover
the ditch: a piano's charred lip,

ivory teeth pressed to the clay,
mess of wire and flashing,
and skulls of marsh ducks coddled
in luxuriant fronds, rusted tub.

He buries the mason jars. A porcelain
cracks, spits frogs, collapses.
The dirt tamps, the diesel buckets
heave a last good turn.

Jacob Strautmann

*(From "The Land of the Dead Is Open for Business,"
published by [Four Way Books](#), March 2020)*

Wheeling Poetry Series

"I have a great faith in poetry to refocus in us what it means to be human, and with every passing year I feel an ever greater need to be reminded about what it is that we hold in common as men and women who value beauty and the kind of meaning revealed in artistic expression. I am not embarrassed to continue to quote as immensely relevant **William Carlos Williams'** adage that :

***' It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.'***

In a political season that seems more sad and pathetic than ever before, perhaps the news that may be found in poetry will hold a brightness, a freshness more useful than the sound-bites from talking heads reporting on the doings of the millionaires and corporate figure heads dominating what currently passes for news here in America."

-Marc Harshman, West Virginia Poet Laureate

PREVIOUS GUESTS

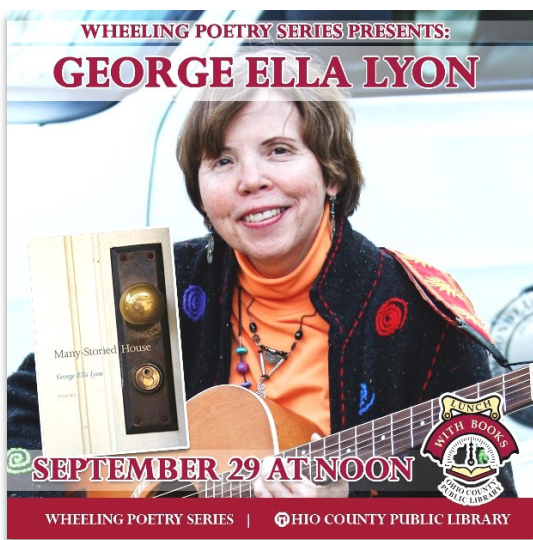
Wheeling Poetry Series

GEORGE ELLA LYON

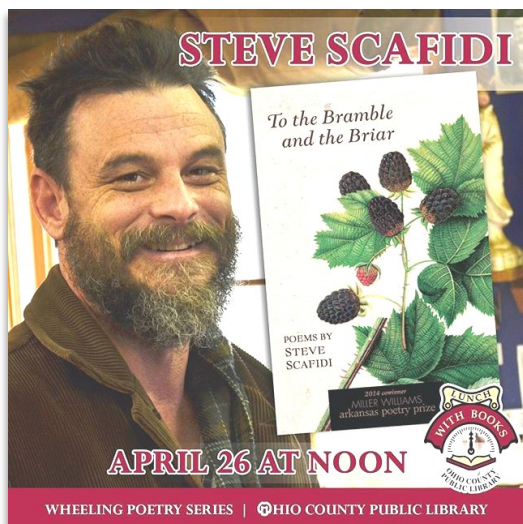
The **Wheeling Poetry Series** opener featured the poet laureate of Kentucky, **George Ella Lyon**, who appeared at Lunch With Books at the Ohio County Public Library on **September 29, 2015**.

The author of four books of poetry, a novel, a memoir, a short story collection, and thirty-seven books for young readers, Lyon read from her collection, ***Many-Storyed House***.

Originally from the mountains of Kentucky, George Ella holds a PhD in English from Indiana University, where she studied with poet Ruth Stone. She has taught writing on many campuses and spoken at hundreds of schools, libraries, and conferences throughout the country.



STEVE SCAFIDI



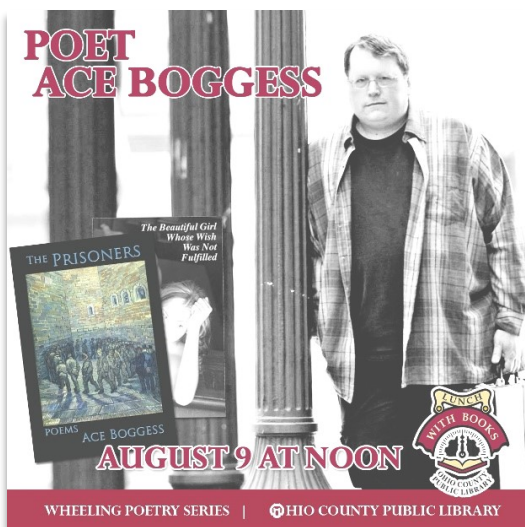
Steve Scafidi, the featured guest at the second **Wheeling Poetry Series** program on **April 26, 2016**, read *Autumn Begins in Martins Ferry Ohio* by his favorite poet, James Wright. "Wright wrote poems that endure," Scafidi said. "His poems move me—they helped me live when I was younger and they still do." From his own poems, Scafidi read ***This Page***, written for his late grandmother, ***The Coin***, a poem in which he imagines Abraham Lincoln's son Robert carrying the first Lincoln penny in his pocket, and ***Song for Sunday Morning***, a poem he dedicated to fathers everywhere.

Scafidi, who earned his MFA in creative writing at Arizona State University, lives in Summit Point, WV.

ACE BOGGESS

Our featured guest on **August 9, 2016**, Charleston native **Ace Boggress** read from his book of poetry, **The Prisoners** (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2014). Ace has also published **The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled** (Highwire Press, 2003). His novel, **A Song Without a Melody**, was published in December 2016 by Hyperborea Publishing.

His writing has appeared in **Harvard Review**, **Mid-American Review**, **RATTLE**, **River Styx**, **North Dakota Quarterly** and many other journals. He earned his law degree from the West Virginia University College of Law, received a fellowship from the West Virginia Commission on the Arts, and spent five years in West Virginia prison system (the basis for his latest book of poems).



POET
ACE BOGGESS

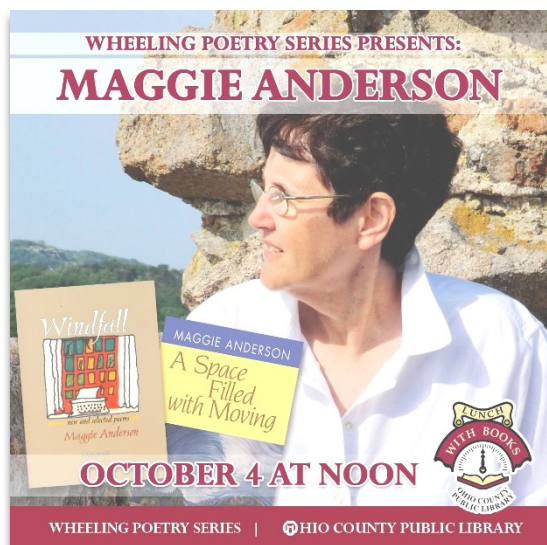
The Beautiful Girl Whose Wish Was Not Fulfilled
THE PRISONERS
POEMS
ACE BOGGESS

AUGUST 9 AT NOON

WHEELING POETRY SERIES | @HIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

WITH BOOKS
OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

MAGGIE ANDERSON



WHEELING POETRY SERIES PRESENTS:
MAGGIE ANDERSON

Windfall
new and selected poems
Maggie Anderson

MAGGIE ANDERSON
A Space Filled with Moving

OCTOBER 4 AT NOON

WHEELING POETRY SERIES | @HIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

WITH BOOKS
OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Maggie Anderson, the featured **Wheeling Poetry Series** guest **October 4, 2016**, is the author of four books of poetry, including **Windfall: New and Selected Poems**, **A Space Filled with Moving**, and **Cold Comfort**.

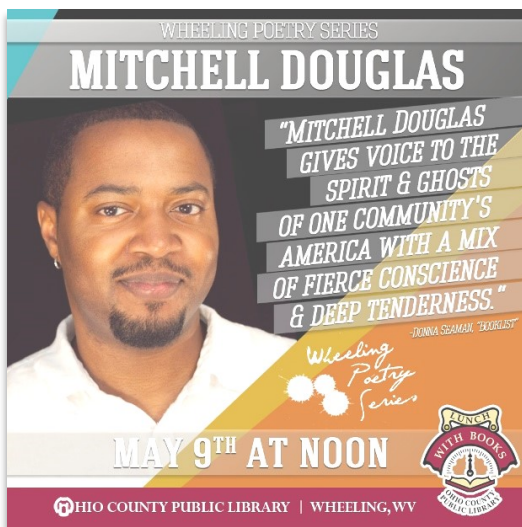
Her awards include two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, fellowships from the Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania Councils on the Arts, and the Ohioana Library Award for contributions to the literary arts in Ohio.

The founding director of the Wick Poetry Center and of the Wick Poetry Series of the Kent State University Press, Anderson

is Professor Emerita of English at Kent State University and lives in Asheville, NC. Her new collection of poems, **Dear All**, was released September 2017, by Four Way Books in New York.

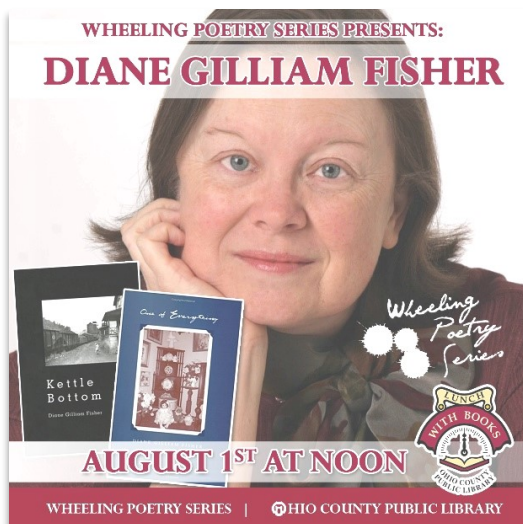
MITCHELL DOUGLAS

Our featured guest on **May 9, 2017**, **Mitchell Douglas** read from his poetry collection **\blak\ \al-fə bet** (Persea Books, 2013). Mitchell Douglas is a founding member of the Affrilachian Poets, a Cave Canem fellow, and Poetry Editor for **PLUCK!: the Journal of Affrilachian Arts & Culture**. A professor of English at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), his second poetry collection **\blak\ \al-fə bet**, was winner of the 2011 Lexi Rudnitsky/Editor's Choice Award. His debut collection, **Cooling Board: A Long-Playing Poem**, was a runner-up for the 2007 Stan and Tom Wick Poetry Prize. In 2010, **Cooling Board** was nominated for an NAACP Image Award in the Outstanding Literary Work-Poetry.



DIANE GILLIAM

Diane Gilliam grew up in Columbus, Ohio, daughter of parents who were part of the post-war Appalachian outmigration, from Mingo County W. Va. and Johnson County Kentucky. Gilliam's first book, **One of Everything** (2003), tells the stories of four generations of women in her family, beginning on Stepp Mountain in eastern Kentucky and ending in a shopping mall in Akron, Ohio.



Her second book, **Kettle Bottom** (2004), a Pushcart Prize winner and Ohioana Library Association Book of the Year in Poetry, showcases the voices of people living in the coal camps at the time of the 1920-21 West Virginia Mine Wars. Gilliam was awarded the 2008 Chaffin Award for Appalachian Writing. She earned a PhD from Ohio State and MFA from Warren Wilson University.

Diane Gilliam was the featured **Wheeling Poetry Series** guest **August 1, 2017**.

JAMES HARMS

James Harms, was our featured guest on **October 3, 2017**. The founding director of the MFA Program in Creative Writing at WVU, Harms the author of the poetry collections *Rowing with Wings*, *Comet Scar*, *After West*, *Freeways and Aqueducts*, *Quarters*, *The Joy Addict and Modern Ocean*, and *What to Borrow*, *What to Steal*, a limited fine press edition, East of Avalon, as well as several poetry chapbooks. He has received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, three Pushcart Prizes, the PEN/Revson Fellowship, and fellowships from the WV and PA Arts Commissions, as well as residencies at Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony. His work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Oxford American*, and many other journals.



MARY B. MOORE

An astounding writer and teacher, **Mary B. Moore** has published three major collections and won four poetry contests in just the past two years. Her life's work has been hailed by some of the finest poets in America.

The featured **Wheeling Poetry Series** guest **April 10, 2018**, Moore's latest poetry book, *Amanda and the Man Soul*, was selected by Dorianne Laux for the 2017 EMRYS award. Other recently published poetry books include her second full-length collection *Flicker* (Broadkill River Press, 2016), winner of the 2016 Dogfish Head Poetry Award judged by Carol Frost, Baron Wormser, and Jan Beatty; and *Eating the Light* (Sable Books, 2016) chosen by Allison Joseph for the 2016 chapbook contest. *The Book of Snow*, a full-length collection, came out in 1998 from Cleveland State University Press. She won the Second Place Award, in 2017, in Nimrod's Pablo Neruda Poetry Contest.



RON HOUCHIN AND A. E. STRINGER

On **July 17th, 2018**, the Wheeling Poetry Series hosted an astounding writer and teacher, **Ron Houchin**. In the past two years alone, Houchin has published three major collections and won four poetry contests. His life's work has been hailed by some of the finest poets in America. He was awarded the Appalachian book of the year in poetry in 2004 and the Weatherford Award in poetry in 2013 for his collection, *The Man Who Saws Us In Half*, LSU Press.

As a special bonus, the distinguished author and poet, **A.E. Stringer**, joined Houchin. Stringer taught writing and literature at Marshall University for nearly twenty-five years. The A.E. Stringer Visiting Writers Series at Marshall is named in his honor. He has published three major collections of poetry including *Channel Markers* from the legendary Wesleyan Poetry Series and most recently, *Late Breaking*, 2013, Salmon Poetry Publishing.

Wheeling Poetry Series

RON HOUCHIN

WITH SPECIAL GUEST
A. E. STRINGER

JULY 17TH AT NOON

WHEELING POETRY SERIES | @HIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

ED OCHESTER AND JUDITH VOLLMER

Wheeling Poetry Series

ED OCHESTER & JUDITH VOLLMER

OCTOBER 9TH AT NOON

WHEELING POETRY SERIES | @HIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

One of America's most distinguished poets, **Ed Ochester**, along with the award-winning and prolific poet, **Judith Vollmer**, kicked off the fourth season of the Wheeling Poetry Series on **October 9th, 2019**.

Ochester's book, *Sugar Run Road*, was published by Autumn House Press. He is the editor of the University of Pittsburgh Press Poetry Series and for many years was a member of the core faculty of the Bennington MFA Writing Seminars. He was formerly director of the Writing Program at the University of Pittsburgh.

Vollmer is the author of five full-length books of poetry, including most recently, *The Apollonia Poems*, awarded the Four Lakes Poetry Prize of the University of Wisconsin Press. She teaches in the Drew University MFA Program in Poetry & Poetry in Translation.

JOHN HODGEN

John Hodgen is the Writer-in-Residence at Assumption College in Worcester, MA. Hodgen won the AWP Donald Hall Prize in Poetry for Grace (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005). His fourth book of poetry, **Heaven & Earth Holding Company**, is out from University of Pittsburgh Press, and his first book **In My Father's House**, has just been reprinted from Lynx House/University of Washington Press.

A recent poem was selected for Scribner's Best American Poetry 2017. Hodgen's latest book, **The Lord of Everywhere**, was released in early September 2019, also from the University of Washington.

Hodgen was the featured author at the Wheeling Poetry Series **April 23, 2019**.

JOHN HOPPENTHALER

John Hoppenthaler was the featured guest at the Wheeling Poetry Series, **August 13, 2019**.

Hoppenthaler is the author of three books of poetry, **Lives of Water**, **Anticipate the Coming Reservoir**, and **Domestic Garden**, all with Carnegie Mellon University Press. His poetry has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *McSweeney's*, *Blackbird*, and *The Literary Review*, as well as in several anthologies, including *Eyes Glowing at the Edge of the Woods: Fiction and Poetry From West Virginia* (WVUP, 2017).

For nine years he served as Personal Assistant to American novelist, essayist, book editor, and college professor, Toni Morrison. He received his MFA in Poetry Writing from Virginia Commonwealth University and is an English professor at East Carolina University.

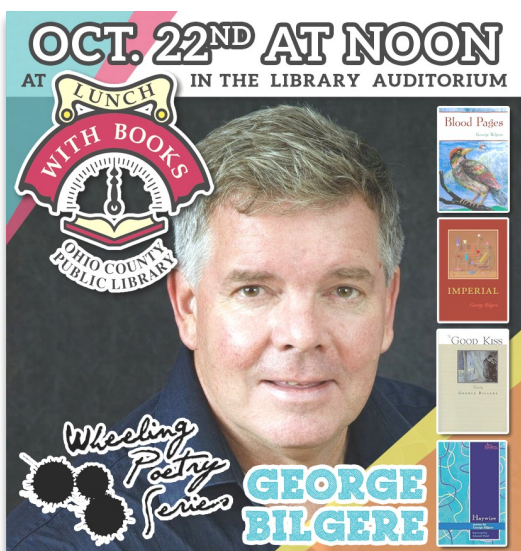
The poster features a portrait of John Hodgen, a man with a mustache wearing a green jacket over a plaid shirt. The background is a brick wall. Text on the poster includes "LUNCH WITH BOOKS" in a circular logo, "OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY", "Wheeling Poetry Series" in a stylized font, "JOHN HODGEN" in large blue letters, "In My Father's House" by John Hodgen, "Heaven & Earth Holding Company" by John Hodgen, "APRIL 23RD AT NOON", "IN THE LIBRARY AUDITORIUM", and "WHEELING POETRY SERIES | OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY".

The poster features a portrait of John Hoppenthaler, a man with a grey beard wearing a black shirt. The background is a light blue wall. Text on the poster includes "LUNCH WITH BOOKS" in a circular logo, "OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY", "Wheeling Poetry Series" in a stylized font, "JOHN HOPPENTHALER" in large white letters, "domestic garden" by John Hoppenthaler, "LIVES OF WATER" by John Hoppenthaler, "ANTICIPATE THE COMING RESERVOIR" by John Hoppenthaler, "AUGUST 13TH AT NOON", "AT LUNCH WITH BOOKS IN THE LIBRARY AUDITORIUM", and "WHEELING POETRY SERIES | OHIO COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY".

GEORGE BILGERE

Hailed by Michael Heaton, features reporter for *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* as "America's Greatest Living Poet," **George Bilgere** can count among his other admirers Garrison Keillor and former poet laureate Billy Collins, who has described him as "a welcome breath of fresh American air."

A professor of English at John Carroll University, Bilgere has published six collections of poetry, including **Imperial** (2014); **The White Museum** (2010), which was awarded the Autumn House Poetry Prize; **Haywire** (2006), which won the May Swenson Poetry Award; and **The Good Kiss** (2002), which was selected by Collins to win the University of Akron Poetry Award. Other awards include the Midland Authors Award and a Pushcart Prize. Bilgere was the featured author at the Wheeling Poetry Series **October 22, 2019**.



ALLISON PITINII DAVIS

Allison Pitinii Davis, the author of *Line Study of a Motel Clerk* (Baobab Press, 2017), a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award and the Ohioana Book Award, and *Poppy Seeds* (Kent State UP, 2013), winner of the Wick Poetry Chapbook Prize, marked our return to the Wheeling Poetry Series via Lunch With Books Livestream, **October 10, 2020**. Her work has appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *The New Republic*, *The Academy of American Poets* website, and elsewhere.

She holds fellowships from Stanford University's Wallace Stegner program, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, and the Severinghaus Beck Fund for Study at Vilnius Yiddish Institute. Originally from Youngstown, Ohio, she is a PhD candidate in English and Creative Writing at The University of Tennessee, where she served as an editor of *Grist: A Journal of the Literary Arts* and writes about the intersection of labor, diaspora, and gender in the Rust Belt.



ERIN MURPHY

Our guest for the **November 11, 2020** Lunch With Books Livestream Wheeling Poetry Series, **Erin Murphy** is the author of eight collections of poetry, including **Human Resources** (forthcoming from Salmon Poetry in 2021) and **Too Much of This World** (Mammoth Books, 2008), winner of the Anthony Piccione Poetry Prize, and *Science of Desire* (Word Poetry, 2004), a finalist for the Paterson Poetry Prize for the best poetry book of 2004. Her awards include the Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize and the Foley Poetry Award, among others. Her work has been featured on Garrison Keillor's *The Writer's Almanac*, and has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. Murphy is Professor of English and creative writing at Penn State Altoona.



CAMERON BARNETT

Cameron Barnett's poetry explores the complexity of race and the body for a black man in today's America. His work has been nominated for a 2016 Pushcart Prize, the 82nd Annual Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards, and the Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt Prize. He is the recipient of a 2019 Investing in Professional Artists Grant Program, a partnership of The Pittsburgh Foundation and The Heinz Endowments; he is also the 2019 Emerging Artist Awardee for the Carol R. Brown Creative Achievement Awards, co-sponsored by The Pittsburgh Foundation and The Heinz Endowments. He is the author of **The Drowning Boy's Guide to Water**, winner of the Autumn House Press 2017 Rising Writer Contest, and finalist for the 49th NAACP Image Awards for Outstanding Literary Work in Poetry. Cameron joins us for the sixteenth program in the Wheeling Poetry series via Lunch With Books Livestream, March 9, 2021.



ANNA EGAN SMUCKER & BILL KING

West Virginia-based poets Anna Egan Smucker and Bill King will be our guests for our seventeenth program in the Wheeling Poetry Series, June 8, 2021. We are pleased to welcome back veteran LWB presenter, Anna, author of the children's books *No Star Nights*, *Golden Delicious: A Cinderella Apple Story*, and *Brother Giovanni's Little Reward: How the Pretzel Was Born*, and most recently, a chapbook of poetry, *Rowing Home* published by Finishing Line Press in 2019. And we are excited to welcome LWB newcomer, Bill King, Professor of English at Davis & Elkins and Pushcart Prize nominee. King's first chapbook of poetry, *The Letting Go*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2018.



CARRIE CONNERS & JACOB STRAUTMANN

West Virginia natives Carrie Connors & Jacob Strautmann are our guests for our eighteenth program in the Wheeling Poetry Series, July 27, 2021. Originally from West Virginia, Carrie Connors lives in Queens, NY and is a Professor of English at LaGuardia Community College-CUNY. Her first poetry collection, *Luscious Struggle* (BrickHouse Books, 2019), was selected as a 2020 Paterson Poetry Prize Finalist. Her second collection, *Species of Least Concern* (Main Street Rag, Winter 2021-22), was a finalist of the Main Street Rag Poetry Book Award. Marshall County native Jacob Strautmann's debut book of poems *The Land of the Dead Is Open for Business* is available from Four Way Books. Awarded a 2018 Massachusetts Poetry Fellowship by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, Jacob's poems have appeared in *The Boston Globe*, *The Appalachian Journal*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, and others.



NOTES

Wheeling Poetry Series



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