

# OHIOANA

## Looking Back Over Eighty Years

By Barbara Meister and David E. Weaver

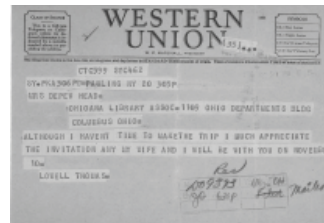
Anniversaries are a natural time for reflecting on the past and looking to the future. As Ohioana marks its eightieth anniversary this October, it seems an opportune time to look at the organization then and now.

The idea to amass a collection of books written by Ohioans came to Martha Kinney Cooper shortly after becoming Ohio's First Lady in 1929. As she and her husband settled into the governor's mansion, she was dismayed to find the otherwise lovely old home completely lacking in suitable reading material. An avid reader and active member of several art and music clubs, Cooper knew the difficulty writers and artists had getting the attention they deserved, and soon realized that the home of Ohio's governor was the perfect place to both honor Ohio's creative sons and daughters and also to acquaint the public with the state's literary culture.

Financial times being what they were in 1929 (the year of the devastating stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression), using state funds for the new library was out of the question. That proved no obstacle to Cooper. She was willing to use her own money if necessary and thought others would help as they could.

A diverse group of distinguished Ohio leaders from various fields of activity were enlisted to ensure that building a collection representing Ohio authors was feasible. Dozens of charitable, talented individuals stepped up to do everything from serve on the executive committee to solicit book donations.

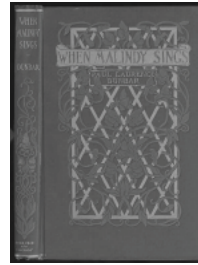
One of the better ideas, ingenious in its simplicity, was the committee's initiative to solicit



Telegram from Lowell Thomas to former Ohioana Director Mrs. Depew Head September 20, 1951

authors and publishers for the donation of appropriate books. The first book received was from Harriet Taylor Upton, who sent an autographed copy of her *History of the Western Reserve*. The second was Brand Whitlock's *La Fayette*, donated by Appleton and Company. From that moment on, a continual stream of publishers' ink has flowed our way.

Today, Ohioana's collection is comprised of more than 75,000 items – including 45,000 books, 10,000 pieces of published sheet music, more than 20,000 biographical files, and other memorabilia. Among the rare and irreplaceable treasures in the collection: Pulitzer Prize winner Louis Bromfield's telegram from France announcing his permanent return to Ohio; a letter from children's author Lois Lenski explaining that her drawing of a parsonage in *Skipping Village* is based on the one she lived in as a child in Anna, Ohio; a Christmas card from Langston Hughes; and an original 1903 edition of Paul Laurence Dunbar's *When Malindy Sings*.

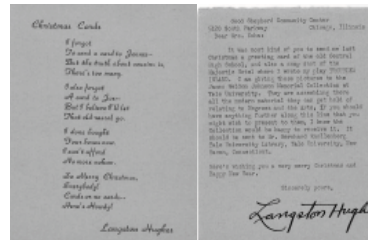


*When Malindy Sings*  
(1903)

It didn't take long for Ohioana's collection to outgrow the governor's mansion. In 1935, the library moved to the new State Office Building (later renamed the Ohio Departments Building). That lovely old art deco structure served Ohioana well for more than sixty years, yet eventually needed full renovation. Happily, as many readers will know, it was restored to its original glory and is now occupied by the Ohio Supreme Court. Ohioana fared well in the process, too. Opening its doors in January 2001, the library is now housed in the Jeffrey Mining Center, a renovated climate-controlled facility configured specifically for our needs.

With the collection as the foundation, Ohioana's programming has expanded through the years. In 1942, the Ohioana Awards were first presented to recognize outstanding achievement in literature, music, arts, and the humanities. More than 900 awards have been bestowed. The Career Award is the library's most exalted honor, which acknowledges an outstanding career in the arts and humanities, and is the organization's

only award reserved for native Ohioans. But Ohioana does not only give out awards for past achievement. The Walter Rumsey Marvin Grant carries with it a \$1,000 cash prize and is given to a writer under the age of thirty who has not yet published a book. The Robert Fox Award for Young Writers is a competition in prose and poetry open to any Ohio high school student. Through the Marvin Grant and the Fox Awards, Ohioana is recognizing and nurturing those talented individuals who may well become the great writers of tomorrow.

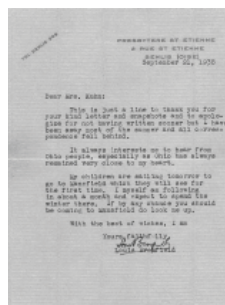


Christmas Card from Langston Hughes to Ohioana County Chair Marie Kuhn

In 1958, Ohioana began publishing the *Ohioana Quarterly*, which was created to support Ohio authors by getting the word out about their books. In its fifty-plus year history, more than 10,000 books have been reviewed in the pages of the *Quarterly*, which also includes special features and articles about literary and cultural arts in the state.

One of Ohioana's popular and innovative programs was the 2005 radio series *Ohioana Authors*. Produced in cooperation with WOSU, the series featured at least one author each week for an entire year. In 2006, *Ohioana Authors* won the Ohio Public Broadcasting Award for Program of the Year.

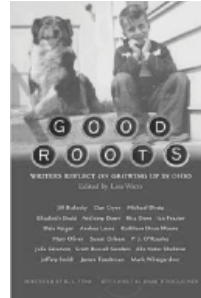
Our most recent program is the Ohioana Book Festival, chaired by Ohio First Lady Frances Strickland. The first event, in September 2007, was built around a single book: *Good Roots: Ohio Writers Reflect on Growing Up in Ohio*, edited by Lisa Watts and published by Ohio University Press. Ten writers who con-



Letter from Loius Bromfield to Ohioana County Chair Marie Kuhn September 21, 1938

tributed to *Good Roots* came to Ohioana for the one-day event. It was a great success. The third Ohioana Book Festival, in May 2009, was the biggest and best to date: more than seventy authors and nearly 3,000 readers participated in the main event. Outreach and broadcast programming brought the total audience to almost 15,000. The Ohioana Book Festival is free and open to the public, with programs and activities to engage and delight readers of all ages. The fourth Ohioana Book Festival has been set for May 8, 2010.

It's been a momentous eighty years. Ohioana, like our state and our nation, has undergone both good times and bad. We have grown and changed and expanded. Yet, we have remained true to our purpose. As our founder Martha Kinney Cooper said not long before her death at age ninety in 1964:



*Good Roots: Writers Reflect on Growing Up in Ohio*

*As long as we have authors, poets and musicians, I trust that we shall be able to supply a suitable home for their splendid works, providing also a means to give them the publicity and thanks they so justly deserve.*

This is a noble vision – one that we acknowledge will keep Ohioana busy for at least another eighty years.

*With special thanks to Barbara Meister, who served as Ohioana's Librarian from 1999 to 2009.*

To view any of the items featured in this article, please visit [www.Ohioana.org](http://www.Ohioana.org).

## OHIOANA

### An Historic Timeline

- 1929** The Ohioana Library Association is established by First Lady Martha Kinney Cooper in the governor's mansion. Florence Robert Head becomes first director.
- 1935** The Ohioana Library moves to the new Ohio Departments building on Front Street in Columbus.
- 1942** The Ohioana Awards are established. The first Ohioana Career Award winner is future Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist James "Scotty" Reston.
- 1953** In honor of Ohio's 150th anniversary, Ohioana presents James Thurber with the Ohioana Sesquicentennial Medal.
- 1954** Walter Rumsey Marvin appointed second director of Ohioana.
- 1958** The library begins publishing the *Ohioana Quarterly* under Marvin's editorship.
- 1963** Ellen Bromfield Geld receives the first Florence Roberts Head Book Award.
- 1966** Bernice Foley Williams appointed the third Ohioana director and second editor of the *Ohioana Quarterly*.
- 1977** James P. Barrey appointed Ohioana director and editor of the *Ohioana Quarterly*.
- 1982** The Walter Rumsey Marvin Grant is established to encourage talented writers under the age of thirty.
- 1986** Ohioana's records first become available on OCLC's electronic catalogue.
- 1988** Linda R. Hengst appointed Ohioana's director; Barbara Maslekoff becomes librarian and editor of *Ohioana Quarterly*.
- 1999** Kate Templeton Fox becomes editor of *Ohioana Quarterly*; Barbara Meister becomes librarian.
- 2001** The Ohioana Library moves to the Jeffrey Mining Center at 274 East First Avenue in Columbus.
- 2005** Ohioana and WOSU collaborate to produce the award-winning Ohioana Authors radio series.
- 2006** The Robert Fox Young Writers Awards competition for students in high school is established.
- 2007** The inaugural Ohioana Book Festival – *A Good Roots Celebration* – is presented.
- 2009** Ohioana's retrospective cataloging project is completed.