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2020: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

After an exciting year in 2019 celebrating Ohioana’s 90th anniversary, 2020 proved to be a year of unexpected challenges. In the face of a pandemic, we had to shift gears, serving the public while keeping everyone safe. We found new ways to connect readers and writers, going virtual with our two biggest events of the year and introducing a new program that drew statewide attention. It turned out to be a busy and productive year, as you’ll see from the highlights below.

Winter

- Ohioana paid tribute to Toni Morrison, who passed away in August 2019, in the winter issue of the *Ohioana Quarterly*. Also featured in the winter issue is an interview with Oge Mora, whose *Thank You, Omu!* was named as the recipient of the 5th annual Floyd’s Pick by the State Library of Ohio and Ohioana.
- In February, the official poster of the 2020 Ohioana Book Festival was unveiled, designed by Worthington-based writer, illustrator, and storyboard artist Rafael Rosado.
- On February 19, we held what turned out to be our last live event before the pandemic when the Ohioana Book Club hosted Karen Harper for a discussion of her book, *American Duchess*. It was Karen’s final public appearance before she died in April after a long bout with cancer. A prolific and popular author, Karen had appeared at every Ohioana Book Festival since 2008.
- The Ohioana Library staff began serving the public remotely, after the library was closed on March 17 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and in response to directives from Governor Mike DeWine. We announced that the Ohioana Book Festival, originally scheduled for April 25, would be postponed to the end of August.

The Director’s Chair

Dear Friends,

Another year is winding down, and as we do in every December’s newsletter, our cover story is a look back. There’s been one word we’ve all heard repeatedly to describe 2020: unprecedented. And indeed it was. The toll of this pandemic, the worst in over a hundred years, has been devastating. I know we’re all grateful for the selfless caregivers everywhere who have been on the front lines through it all.

The end of the year is also a time to reflect and express our gratitude to everyone for their patience, encouragement, and understanding. Your support has sustained the Ohioana Library during this extended period of uncertainty and constant change, and helped realize what was actually a year of considerable achievement. Our special thanks goes to:

- Governor Mike DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine, for their enthusiastic support as champions of reading and books, and to Governor DeWine for his leadership during the pandemic on behalf of all Ohioans.



Ohioana's first virtual book club featured Olivia Matthews in conversation with Courtney Brown.

Spring

- Ohioana introduced a new virtual evening book club in April, with novelist Olivia Matthews as the featured author. Our next three programs featured 2020 Ohioana Book Award finalists: Jess Montgomery in May, Mindy McGinnis in June, and Karen Abbott in July.
- Choose to Read Ohio was the cover story in the spring issue of the *Ohioana Quarterly*, announcing the list of 2021 and 2022 CTRO titles. Encouraging people to “Read Together, Read Ohio, Read for Life,” Choose to Read Ohio is a joint project of the State Library of Ohio and the Ohioana Library.
- The 2020 Ohioana Book Award finalists were announced, including the fifth annual Readers’ Choice Award, inviting members and the general public to choose their favorite book of the year from among thirty award finalists.
- In June, Ohioana presented its first-ever writing workshop, “Starting, Writing, and Completing Your Novel” with 2019 Ohioana Award winner Moriel Rothman-Zecher. The workshop proved so popular that it was repeated in October.

Summer

- Salvatore Scibona, Jeannie Vanasco, David McCullough, Hanif Abdurraqib, Oge Mora, and Jasmine Warga were announced as the juried winners of the 2020 Ohioana Book Awards. Kenn Kaufman won the fifth annual Readers’ Choice Award, selected by fans in an online poll.
- Brendan Curtinrich of Geauga County was announced as the 2020 recipient of the Walter Rumsey Marvin Grant, awarded to an Ohio writer age 30 or younger who has not yet published a book.
- The Ohio Literary Trail, a new online program created to spotlight Ohio’s unique role in shaping culture and literature worldwide, was introduced in the summer *Ohioana Quarterly*. Ohioana compiled the trail map with more than 70 sites across the Buckeye state.

- The Ohio General Assembly, which even in this challenging time has provided the core operating support that maintains the library and makes our programming possible.
- Ohioana’s Board of Trustees, comprised of dedicated members from throughout the state, especially for supporting the staff as it became necessary for them to work remotely after the library closed due to the pandemic.
- Ohioana’s staff, which this year more than ever before proved to be a “small but mighty” band, whose creativity and flexibility made it possible to present all of Ohioana’s normal programming in a virtual format, fulfilling our commitment to connect readers and Ohio writers—but doing so safely.
- Ohio’s talented authors, both from here and living here, whose novels, stories, poems, and picture books enthrall millions of readers each year . . . celebrating your work is why Ohioana was founded.
- And especially our contributors—individuals, foundations, corporations, organizations—for hanging in there with us during this difficult year.

To each and every one of you . . . our most heartfelt THANKS!

It is still a time of uncertainty. I know we’re all encouraged by the positive news about the vaccines that may soon help to turn the corner. We hope you are able to enjoy the holidays safely, and wish you a happy, healthy New Year. We look forward to seeing you in 2021, in whatever way possible!

David E. Weaver
Executive Director



Cartoonist Steve Harpster did two special "Drawing with Steve" programs for kids at the virtual Ohioana Book Festival.

- The first virtual Ohioana Book Festival was presented August 28, 29, and 30. Nearly 140 Ohio authors took part in more than 30 live and recorded programs, reaching 5,000 viewers. A special preview night featured a video greeting from Governor Mike DeWine and First Lady Fran DeWine. The entire festival was recorded and can now be viewed on Ohioana's YouTube Channel.

Autumn

- On October 15, Ohioana held its first-ever virtual annual meeting. The highlight of the 91st gathering was the election of new trustees Flo Cunningham, Dionne Custer Edwards, Negesti Kaudo, Helen Kirk, Craig Rapp, and Chris Santagate. After four years as President, Dan Shuey was succeeded by John Sullivan. Also elected as officers were Katie Brandt (Vice-President), Bryan Loar (Secretary), and Jay Yurkiw (Treasurer).
- On October 21, the Ohioana Awards were presented virtually for the first time. Our media partner, The Ohio Channel, streamed the event to an audience of nearly 10,000 people. The program can now be viewed on The Ohio Channel's YouTube Channel.
- Ohioana continued its series of book clubs, with a special Halloween-themed program with John Kachuba in October; and a post-election conversation with David Giffels in November regarding his book, *Barnstorming Ohio to Understand America*.
- The fall issue of the *Ohioana Quarterly* profiled the winners of the 2020 Ohioana Awards and featured two stories by Marvin Grant winner Brendan Curtinrich.

While our library space may have been closed since March and our events went virtual, we also connected with readers via our blog and social media: spotlighting Cincinnati-born entertainer Doris Day and celebrating the 90th birthday of teen sleuth Nancy Drew, created by Toledo's Mildred Wirt Benson (the original "Carolyn Keene"). We reviewed Hulu's wildly popular *Little Fires Everywhere*, based on Celeste Ng's Ohioana Award-winning novel; and revisited the iconic *Twilight Zone* television series, created by Rod Serling, who began his writing career as a student at Antioch College. We shared "must read" titles by Ohio LGBTQ authors for Pride Month and Black Ohio authors for Juneteenth. For this year's historic election, we pulled rare items from our collection related to the eight Ohioans who have served as President. And we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the publication of *The Bluest Eye*, the book that introduced a then-unknown author named Toni Morrison to the world. These posts are available to read at <http://www.ohioana.org/blog/>

We hope that you had the opportunity to enjoy some of the many programs we offered during 2020, and that we have, in some way, helped provide some bright moments in what has been a difficult year for all. We don't know what lies ahead for 2021, but we'll be ready. We've already scheduled the 15th annual Ohioana Book Festival for April 24 and the 80th anniversary Ohioana Awards for October 14. The winter *Ohioana Quarterly* will feature a look at recent movies adapted from best-selling books by Ohio authors like Celeste Ng, Donald Ray Pollock, and Wil Haygood. We'll also have an interview with Ernest Cline, whose long-awaited *Ready Player Two* was recently released. Whether our events are live or virtual, we will be here, continuing to celebrate Ohio authors and books with you. Thank you!



The 2020 Ohioana Book Award plaques. The award ceremony itself was presented virtually for the first time.

REMEMBERING JIM HUGHES

Ohioana lost one of its staunchest friends and supporters on November 7 when Jim Hughes passed away, eight days shy of his 82nd birthday. A native of Washington, DC, with degrees from Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, Jim was one of the founding faculty members of Wright State University, where he taught English for more than three decades. A poet and an avid bibliophile, it was natural that Jim and his wife Betsy, who shared his passion for literature, would connect with the Ohioana Library. Jim joined the Ohioana Board of Trustees in 1992, holding several offices during his tenure. But his favorite role was chairing the Ohioana Book Awards. When Jim retired from the board after 20 years in 2012, he was named a Trustee Emeritus. His son, Brad, who grew up with Ohioana, joined the board, continuing the Hughes connection. Shortly before Jim's passing, Betsy Hughes wrote to David Weaver, "The other day I was thinking about all the meaningful times Jim and I had with the Ohioana Library over many decades, and more recently our son Brad's, too! Jim's active service on the Board was so important to



Former Ohioana Director Linda Hengst, Trustee Emeritus Jim Hughes, and Ohioana trustee Brad Hughes at the 2011 Ohioana Awards. (Photo: Ohioana Library)

him, followed by his prideful designation of Trustee Emeritus. Jim always thought the world of the Ohioana Library—a truly essential ingredient in his life." Our thanks to Jim Hughes for being an essential ingredient of Ohioana's life for more than thirty years.

COMING SOON

Writing Children's Books: Where Do I Begin? January 9, 2021, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., virtual.

If you've got a draft or even simply an idea for a children's book and wonder "What next?" this workshop with award-winning author Michelle Houts is for you. For more information and to register, visit <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/writing-childrens-books-where-do-i-begin-with-michelle-houts-tickets-131055664019>

Ohio Literary Trail January 14, 2021, 2:00 – 3:00 p.m., virtual.

Join Ohioana for a special program in partnership with Euclid Public Library about the Ohio Literary Trail. Discover the state's rich literary landscape through landmark destinations, historical markers that recognize literary achievements, and book festivals dedicated to readers and writers, with a special focus on Northeast Ohio. Registration is required; after registering, you will receive a specific Zoom link to join in the event. Here is the link to register: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwpde-srjIqGt0Jk5oa8s1XobJp-wnlE90E>

Ohioana Virtual Book Club January 29, 2021, Time TBD, virtual.

Join us via Zoom for our evening book club with NF Johnson and Chera Thompson, authors of "A Time to Wander." Follow our social media or e-mail ohioana@ohioana.org for details.

Ohioana Walter Rumsey Marvin Grant application deadline is January 31, 2021. This annual competition awards \$1,000 to an Ohio writer, age 30 or younger, who has not yet published a book. For more information and an application, click on the Marvin link at the bottom of this page: <http://www.ohioana.org/programs/ohioana-book-awards/>

Do you have a literary event you'd like to list in the next newsletter or the next edition of the *Ohioana Quarterly*? Contact us at ohioana@ohioana.org.