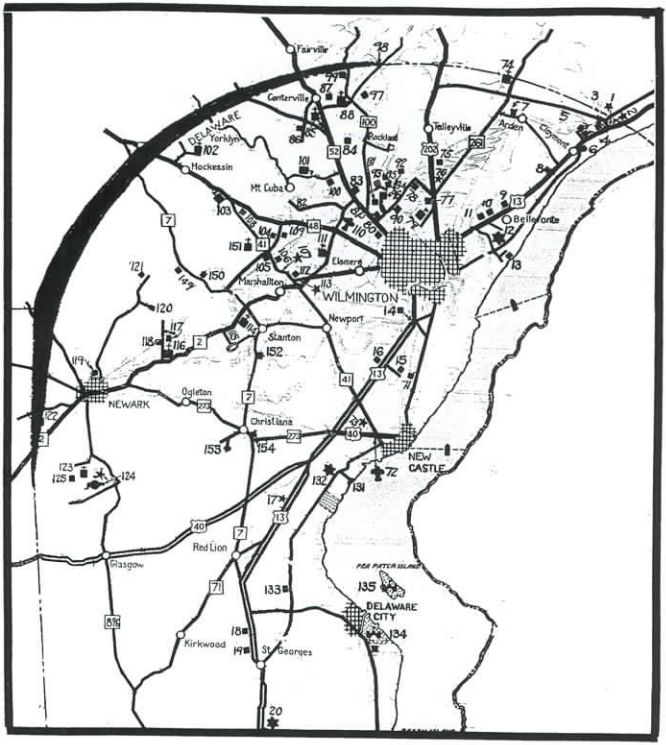
Wedgehorn Manifesto

A Cultural Treatise from the Underground



Steven Leech

WEDGEHORN MANIFESTO

Steven Leech

PINHEAD #5

Dedicated to the memory of my mother and father, who met as two local artists and who never had a fighting chance.

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What others have said about *The Wedgehorn Manifesto . . .*

The *Wedgehorn Manifesto* by Steven Leech is not just a highly interesting and informative read, though it is certainly that, it is much more. The *Wedgehorn Manifesto* is a call to action, a demand, an impassioned plea for the recognition, respect, and support of Delaware's artistic cultural past, present and future. All Delawareans who have any interest in our culture would do themselves great benefit picking up Mr. Leech's guide.

The *Wedgehorn Manifesto* should be required reading for students, educators, legislators, artists, musicians, writers, the uninspired, and those of an ambition to contribute, which should consist of the citizenry at large.

— Pat Gibbs, columnist, ***The Wilmington SPECTATOR***

Reading the *Wedgehorn Manifesto* has left me wishing for the first time, that I'd been able to get back and live awhile again in Delaware, after leaving home. I wish I'd had my eyes opened to the cultural landscape of New Castle County during the 16 years I spent growing up there. Steven Leech's writing has deepened the meaning of my memories of street corners and road names and city views, but especially of the diverse kinds of people and the neighborhoods they lived in that puzzled me as a

child as I passed through them. Better a retroactive acquaintance, though, than none at all. Leech's writer's voice is from the heart, carrying lots of knowledge without pretension. He has a poet's feel for the way words work, and a journalist's sense of the significant. *Wedgehorn Manifesto* marks, I hope, a turning point in the effort to preserve from destruction the habitat in our collective memory of the many talented story tellers, poets, picture makers, and musicians, who helped make life bearable for innumerable ordinary folk, and in fact made possible the fine culture of the luckier few. Looked at another way, Leech is working like a good therapist, reconnecting names and places and levels of society, restoring memory, celebration, and the possibility for any (ex)Delaware reader to make amends for his or her ignorance.

— Jonathan Bragdon, Wilmington born artist
now living in Amsterdam, Netherlands

About the Cover

On the cover is a map that accompanied the 1938 publication, *A Guide to the First State.* Produced by the Federal Writers' Project, the map does not show I-95. You can almost see all the old roads on which flowed life in this part of Delaware in the late 1930s. Later, after World War II, came what we would call — in some neighborhoods — "Dupont Driveways," those roads and highways that seemed only to lead to the various Dupont plants, laboratories, and offices that dotted the area. Even later, the great wealth of our post 1950s world flowed through Delaware on I-95 which resulted in the great suburban sprawl that began to cover northern New Castle County.

The addition I've made to this map is to illustrate the portion of land that was held in dispute because of the inexact science of geography and cartography in the 18th and 19th centuries. Mason may have made a chronometer that in Delaware literature is still ticking, but he wasn't able to get Delaware's unique border exact.

That piece of inexactness on the Maryland side of that border is called the Wedge. As an author I have exploited the Wedge's potential for telling a story — a story which has included elements of Delaware's literature. That sliver along Delaware's arcing border with Pennsylvania has not inspired me. Much of it runs through "Chateau country." A few remember it as the Horn.

What inspires me is that I'm always conscious that I'm walking the same streets in Wilmington as those that F. Scott Fitzgerald, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Clifford Brown and Nikki Giovanni once walked, to name but a few of the illustrious. I still see the rooms they once occupied even though the buildings are gone. In some cases the rooms are still there. Dunbar-Nelson left a living legacy in Wilmington. I see in the same kind of way an artist would, but the paintings are in books, like Biggs' *Seven Days Whipping*, where I see a unique vision from a part of my own neighborhood just south of Wilmington. In two of Charles Wertenbaker's novels I see familiar scenes where stories have provided me a different perspective from those which I've been led to

believe. Now I know where all those "Dupont Driveways" really lead. Some essential parts of Wilmington from the turn of the last century in novels by Henry Seidel Canby, Christopher Ward, and in one important story from Alice Dunbar-Nelson are saved in the annals of American literature. All of this, including the story of Wilmington's artists and musicians and the sounds and sights from them that are still around us, inspires me. A little like Paul Herbert Fricke from Christopher Ward's *One Little Man*, I see through this world into other worlds that are depicted from so near by through our local literature. I also remember how, in the 1950s, I had been entranced by the cultural presence in Arden and wondered why the community in which I lived, Richardson Park, where Delaware artist J. D. Chalfant once lived and worked, couldn't be more like what I perceived Arden to be.

I am inspired by the history and existence of these locations under the unique crown of the Wedge and the Horn. In concert with the towns of

Newark and New Castle, there are greater stories to be told from these places, and stories help us to see.

* * *

A nation cannot have any future stability unless its national spirit is expressed in art.

— Norman Lindsay,
one of my father's favorite artists

On a recent visit to Boston to see my sister, Nina, I was again subjected to the query of why I insisted on staying in Delaware. Along with the stock answer I always give, that our family ancestors have lived here since colonial times on our father's side and since the mid to late 19th century on our mother's side, I added another.

"Wilmington is my Dublin," I blurted pointing to my role as an author, "my Yoknapatawpha County."

"But you could do better in Boston, or somewhere other than Delaware," she responded, meaning that I'd do better in a place where I could make a better living by having better opportunities as a writer and certainly getting paid better; even as

a cultural worker, for example, in radio or television, or maybe as a cultural critic in any number of small publications that abound throughout metropolitan Boston. Any of that would be better than languishing in a cultural backwater like Wilmington Delaware, where even traveling to nearby Philadelphia can be daunting, especially if one is using public transportation.

Exasperated, while not wanting to get into some kind of cultural polemic on that cold winter street in Cambridge, I did not say what my next thought would have been, "But this is where I choose to make my stand."

I often think about those writers from Delaware's past whose initial success occurred when they lived in the state. One thing I've realized about those from the early 20th century is that the literary careers of those who chose to remain in Delaware, i.e., Christopher Ward, John Biggs, Jr., and James Whaler ended early while those like Henry Seidel Canby, Ann Parrish and the Wertenbakers, continued to be successful once they had fled to New York City. Delaware's most successful author

from the 19th century, Robert Montgomery Bird, lived most of his working career in Philadelphia. George Alfred Townsend never returned to Delaware after he became an adult, and even John Lofland's literary career didn't really take off until he moved to Baltimore. However, he did return to Wilmington and became the city's most notable literary figure in the early 19th century. His was a fame that never translated into a much deserved place on the national literary stage. Moving to Wilmington was a step down for Lofland, in spite of the assertion that his best and most relevant work was produced during his last days in Wilmington.

"What a burg," Nina once said during a recent extended period when she had to live here for reasons owing to some family responsibilities. Once those responsibilities resolved themselves, she moved back to Boston, fleeing from what anyone who hungers for a richer cultural environment might do, fleeing from a city like Wilmington that seems so culturally barren.

So why have I decided to make my stand in the greater metropolitan Wilmington area, which

includes nearby cultural sites in Newark, Arden and New Castle? It is because I see a cultural presence here that has been driven underground – so far underground that it often doesn't recognize itself. It is a presence that is the true outgrowth, product and result of its own cultural past. It is a past that I can almost remember, but a huge social and political gash that spans the post World War II era has severed us, until only recently, from that which defines us as cultural community.

I was born into a Wilmington that was much more culturally rich than at any time in the immediate period after World War II. Both my mother and father lived and met one another in that world of cultural activity before the War. My mother, for a short time, was a student of Frank Schoonover, and my father actually made a living wage writing for the Federal Writers' Project. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Wilmington had novelists who were published by the most well known publishing houses in the country. Some of America's most well known artists lived and worked in Wilmington. Accomplished local artists painted

public art, much of which still graces our public buildings, as murals and portraits. They filled the city with their arts. Delaware's greatest living artist, Edward Loper, comes from this tradition.

Wilmington was also a hotbed of that kind of American music called jazz, a tradition that would nourish and inspire a post World War II American music phenomenon. Wilmington was once a toddlin' cultural town. Then World War II came along. The war effort sapped us of our cultural initiatives. After the war ended came the stultifying 1950s with all its HUAC, McCarthyite, Cold War hysteria and paranoia. I remember realizing, even as an adolescent who was thankful of my awareness of the previous cultural richness from the prewar era, how drab and boring the 1950s were, and how much the atmosphere of apathy and conformity was being imposed upon society. Television and consumerism were overtaking and smothering our deeper cultural potential.

* * *

The Untold Fame of Wilmington Jazz

There are three cities jazz came from: New Orleans, Kansas City and Wilmington, Delaware. New York and Chicago are where jazz went.

— Maurice Sims, Wilmington raconteur

When Clifford Brown's star rose for four short years in the early 1950s, it had shone over a long legacy of jazz from Wilmington that stretched back to the time when bandleader Paul Whiteman took jazz out of the saloons and speakeasies and into the concert hall. Yet Wilmington's jazz past is shadowy and nearly unknown. It lives on as mostly the talk of reminiscing old-timers. But on Wilmington's first and only radio station it was alive and vibrant during the Jazz Age in the late 1920s and it grew and matured in the 1950s and early 1960s when it slipped into America's jazz mainstream.

Wilmington arrived late with its own radio station. When WDEL went on the air in 1928 it hit the ground running. It played the music of Wilmington's jazz artists. On Thursday nights in 1931, Daisy Winchester and Crash Peyton had back-

to-back shows. Crash was Wilmington's answer to Bing Crosby and Daisy was one of those singers who sang in the city's speakeasies. In fact Daisy operated one of Wilmington's hottest secret locations down on Klund Street. Another of Wilmington radio's jazz singers was Sarah Dean with jazz piano virtuoso Marita Gordon.

Real history was made in both Wilmington jazz and radio when Henry "Peck" Morris' Radio Boys brought the sound of local horns and drums to the local air waves. The cats were out of the bag and, as it turned out, they were all over the city.

The early 1930s was a time of rapid and drastic social change. Prohibition was over by 1933 but the jitterbugs found they had no jobs. The Depression brought unemployment to musicians and singers. Often the only gigs where those private affairs called rent parties, raising only money enough to keep some poor soul from being evicted. When FDR's New Deal began to kick-in in the late 1930s, people could go out again and those little out-of-the-way clubs started coming back. Wilmington's numerous jazz artists literally burst upon the scene

by the late 1930s. Best among them was the Claude and Artie Wells Band with their star on sax, Coleman Allen. Others were Queen Belle and her Mood Mixers with Crack Johnson on sax. The Chick Smith Band was also a hot ticket. Individual musicians began to shine as well, like keyboardist Dean Jenkins and Ralph Morris, who like his older brother Peck, excelled on trumpet, as well as violin.

Wilmington's first notable jazz success originally grew up on Wilmington's East 12th Street. Her name was Betty Roché and she was born in Wilmington in 1919. When she was a teenager her parents moved to Atlantic City. It wasn't long after that Betty joined the Savoy Sultans who played regularly at the Savoy Ballroom in New York City. When singer Ivie Anderson left Duke Ellington's band in the early 1940s, Duke was on the lookout for a good singer. He found her at the Savoy Ballroom.

Betty's bad luck was that she sang with Ellington during World War II when there was a shortage of shellac to make records and when the musicians' union held a long strike against the recording industry. Even though she sang for

Ellington's Black, Brown and Beige Concert at Carnegie Hall in 1943 and in the movie *Reveille with Beverly*, there are no commercial recordings of her and the Ellington band from this period. After a short recording stint with Earl Hines in 1944, Betty finally recorded "Take the A-Train" with Ellington in 1951.

Before World War II came along and depleted the ranks of local jazz musicians, Wilmington was roiling with the sound of jazz. Clubs from all over the Eastside were pouring their sound into the streets where youngsters would sprinkle sand on the sidewalks to do some soft shoe steps they called The Sand. Among these clubs were Bill's Café at 312 E. 8th Street where Dr. Laddie Springs and his Deuces of Rhythm featured torch singer Madeleine Johnson, drummer and comedian Hot Papa Johnson, and Little Cab, their Jive King M.C. At George's Café, 406 Pine Street, the Felix Brown Orky was a regular. The Spot in the Royal Hotel at 7th and French streets featured singers Blanche Saunders and Lidia White. The Spot was the place where singer Larry Darnell hung out before having a string of national Top Ten

hits in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Larry lived upstairs in the hotel.

The most exciting and lasting of the clubs on the Eastside was the Club Harlem at 9th & Poplar streets. The hottest of Wilmington's jazz bands played the Club Harlem, like Jimmy Hinsley and his Maniacs, featuring singer Daisy Winchester. On another night you'd find Battell Curry and his Swingsters, featuring Sarah Dean and Bernice Burns, with a "Red Hot Floor Show." Battell Curry was evidently very accommodating. Among his entourage of entertainers was the intrepid Daisy Winchester, with Sis Brooks, Stella Young, Joe Bailey and Diz and Dizzier.

One high point of these heady times in Wilmington's prewar jazz scene was a recording that Daisy Winchester made with an up and coming band called the Tympani Five led by future superstar Louis Jordan. That March 1940 recording was "You've Got To Go When the Wagon Comes."

While World War was threatening to engulf the United States in October 1941, the American Federation of Music conducted a "Battle of Swing" at

one of Wilmington's largest venues, the Odd Fellows Hall at 101 West 12th Street. Among the local bands competing were Artie Wells' Band, Battell Curry's Swingsters, Wilbur Seals' Royal Flush Orchestra, and the Deuces of Rhythm. On December 6, 1941, Count Basie came to town on a Saturday night and did a gig at the Wilmington Armory at 10th & duPont Street. The next day would be the day that would live in infamy when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

When Wilmington's service men and women returned from World War II, the jazz scene was back in full swing. But there were some changes, most of which were minor. Shortly before V-E Day, the Club Harlem reopened under new management and became the Club Baby Grand. Regularly featured at the new Club Baby Grand was a new local band called the Aces of Rhythm. Daisy Winchester was back on the bandstand as singer for the Aces. The band was formed by brothers Willie and Robert "Boysie" Lowery, and included musicians Mr. Horse Collar, Billy Jackson, Bud Lowery, Jimmy Turner and Robert Townsend.

Along with two music teachers from Howard High School, Harry Andrews and Sam Wooding, Boysie began to influence and teach a new crop of jazz musicians from Wilmington, chief among them was a young Clifford Brown. Even in high school "Brownie" began to show talent enough to form his own jazz trio consisting of himself, Donald Criss, now known as Rashid Yahya, and Bobby Burton, who later had a short stint with Lionel Hampton's band. Boysie influenced and taught many local youngsters the fine art of jazz music. Some of them later found success in the jazz mainstream, like vibraphonist Lem Winchester, and pianists Gerald Price and Matthew Shipp.

Much like those earliest days of Wilmington's jazz history, local radio played a part in promoting Wilmington's post war jazz scene. Mitch Thomas began playing jazz records on WTUX (now WTTX) in 1949. When Mitch went to serve in the war in Korea, his spot was taken by Maurice Sims in what was known as The Morrie Sims Show. It was on Maurice's show that the first commercial recording by Clifford Brown, as a member of Chris Powell's

Blue Flames, was played on local radio in 1952. The song, about a Wilmington woman, was entitled "Ida Red." When Mitch Thomas returned from the Korean War he began playing jazz records on radio station WILM in Wilmington. Not only were Maurice and Mitch playing jazz on the radio in the early 1950s but they acted as MCs at the Club Baby Grand. There is a recording, on the Blue Note label, of a live 1956 Jimmy Smith gig from the Club Baby Grand on which Mitch Thomas is acting as MC.

The Club Baby Grand began to attract nationally known jazz artists. Among those who had engagements there was Lester Young, Dinah Washington, Horace Silver, Stan Getz and Jimmy Scott. But it was a gig at the famed Odd Fellows Hall at 12th & Orange streets that would make history. On a date in 1949, Dizzy Gillespie was performing. When one of his trumpeters, Benny Harris, was a no-show, Dizzy's old friend Boysie Lowery suggested that a young Clifford Brown fill in. When Dizzy heard Brownie play was he astounded. After that the word began to spread, and the rest became jazz history.

Clifford Brown's short but meteoric jazz career ended tragically on June 26, 1956 on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Brownie had taken the jazz world by storm, helping to revitalize modern post war jazz. He had recorded with a veritable who's who of jazz over a span of four short years, and contributed to a new sub genre of bebop called "hard bop." After Clifford Brown died, Wilmington continued to produce great jazz talent. Lem Winchester and Gerald Price began performing and recording with many of jazz's greatest artists.

Tragedy continued to stalk Wilmington's jazz scene. In January 1961 Lem Winchester died in a bizarre shooting accident during his first professional gig. Only a week later Betty Roché recorded her final solo album on the Prestige label before succumbing to ill health. About a year later, Wilmington's Poplar Street A urban renewal project began to tear down the Eastside, decimating a vital community from which Wilmington's jazz scene had sprung. All of the clubs from the early 1930s were destroyed. The Club Baby Grand hung on for a little while longer. Its location at 9th & Poplar was right at

the edge of the Poplar Street A Project, but by the mid 1960s it was forced to close its doors and, ultimately, the building was torn down. When riots and martial law racked the city following the assassination of Martin Luther King in 1968, the death knell of Wilmington's jazz world was sounded. But no death had occurred. Only a long retreat.

By 1968, Wilmington had been dealt a triple hit after the 1950s ended. The first hit was the highway, which tore a path through Wilmington's west side. On the heels of what we now call I-95, came the "urban renewal" fiasco called Poplar Street A Project. Both projects had been met with public uproar before one project tore the heart out of the west side and the other tore the heart out of the east side of Wilmington. In 1968 urban rioting in a racially charged atmosphere in Wilmington led Delaware's Governor Charles Terry to order martial law for nine months in Wilmington. That place from which had sprung so much of our past culture, from Daisy Winchester and Alice Dunbar-Nelson to Betty Roché, Clifford Brown and Lem Winchester, lay

devastated, with soldiers patrolling the street as if it had been a war zone.

Flirting with Fame: History of Rock n' Roll in Delaware

If the story of jazz from Wilmington can be characterized as one of bad luck and misfortune, then the local history of rock n' roll could be characterized as one of close calls and near misses. Nevertheless the local history of rock n' roll begins at the beginning . . . with Bill Haley and his Comets.

Bill Haley lived in nearby Chester Pennsylvania where most of his early 1950s recordings were made. Early in 1954 he signed with Decca records. His first hit record with them was "Rock Around the Clock. " It was a record that almost didn't get made.

The Chester ferry ran aground and the Comets showed up late for their recording date in New York City. "Rock Around the Clock" was recorded in only two takes.

History was made when "Rock Around the Clock" was used as the theme for the movie

Blackboard Jungle in 1955. Rock n' Roll burst upon the American cultural scene like gangbusters. Haley provided some of his first explanations of this new kind of music to alarmed parents of teenagers live on Cousin Lee's Show on local radio station WDEL. He said rock n' roll was a combination of rhythm & blues and country music.

Almost immediately rock n' roll fever caught on in the Wilmington area. Nationally, much of the new music was proliferated by a plethora of independent music labels, like Sun Records where Elvis got his start, Specialty which recorded Little Richard, and Chess which recorded Chuck Berry. According to local rock n' roll record collector Michael Ace, in Wilmington at least two new labels were founded. One was ABS Records, which recorded a couple 45 rpm's that are highly valued by collectors today. One of those was "Little Boy Bop" by Ralph Prescott, and "Miss Mary" by Bobby Lee. Another local independent label was Dandy, which a little later in the 50s recorded a couple of Buddy Holly cover tunes by Pat Patterson, who later went on to be a popular disc jockey on Wilmington radio

station WAMS. Vinnie Rago founded another local label, Ritchie, in 1959. It's earliest recording was with a band called Frankie and the C-Notes. Ritchie Records would have a number of close calls and near misses with national notoriety in the 1960s.

Only one recording artist from Delaware had a nationally charted hit in the 1950s, and that was Billy Graves with a tune called "The Shag (is Totally Cool)."

It was a hit in early 1959 on the Monument label. Other than having once appeared on Jimmy Dean's television show, Billy Graves' whereabouts is unknown.

Wilmington teenage fans also contributed to rock n' roll history. The new music's first group dance, the Stroll, was invented in Wilmington by the kids who danced on local radio and television personality Mitch Thomas's Saturday afternoon dance show on WVUE channel 12.

According to Lonnie T. Edwards, who was among the show's original participants, the Stroll was actually invented during the Friday night dances

called “the center” at Wilmington’s St. Matthew’s church at 7th & Walnut streets.

“A bus would come pick us up at the Walnut Street Y,” Lonnie commented about Mitch’s Saturday afternoon show, “and take us to the television studios.”

The Stroll was first danced to Bill Doggett’s “Honky Tonk.” Later Chuck Willis’ “C. C. Rider” provided the music. After the kids on American Bandstand started doing the Stroll on national television, the Diamonds had a big hit with the song, “The Stroll,” and Dick Clark did the right thing by publicly crediting the kids on Mitch Thomas’ dance show in Wilmington for coming up with the dance.

Another local connection to American Bandstand was Bob Clayton, then a student at P.S. duPont High School. Every day, right after classes, he’d hop in his car and high tail it to Philadelphia to dance with regular Justine Carrelli. The couple was a big hit with national fans, got write-ups in national teen magazines, and even had a national fan club. But when Bob & Justine recorded their own record in the late 50s, “Drive In Movie,” they got kicked off

Bandstand. Except for some spins on local radio, the record failed and both eventually left to lead separate lives.

By the 1960s local rock n' roll enthusiasts were building a little momentum, thanks largely to success from Vinnie Rago's Ritchie label and its companion, Universal. Ritchie mainly accommodated the doo-wop side of the rock n' roll sub-genre, while Universal recorded flat-out rock n' roll or rockabilly, like the Recorders' "Rock Around the Rosie," which was written by Rago. Another Universal recordings was "Office Girl" by Ronnie Worth, whose day job was as an accountant in Wilmington. Andy & the Gigolos recorded a song for a new dance called "The Bug" on Ritchie. Rago's greatest success was with a doo wop group called Teddy and the Continentals, who had a national hit — on the Bubbling Under chart — with "Ev'rybody Pony," which hit #101 in September 1961.

Teddy Henry, the lead singer of the Continentals, was a student at Conrad High School at the time, and recorded two more records with the Continentals, but by 1964 the Continentals broke up

and he recorded a final solo record on Ritchie in 1965 as Teddy Continental. Like a number of other local recording artists to follow, his records are still valued by collectors and have garnered cult status in unlikely places.

Another near national success was a band called the Adapters with lead singer and songwriter Ed Sterling. In 1965 they recorded a tune on the Ritchie label, "Believe Me," which charted high on the local WAMS list of hits. The Adapters achieved some national fame. According to local rock n' roll historian Hangnail Phillips in the recent book, *Histories of Newark, 1758 - 2008,* the Adapters toured the east coast concert circuit with such known acts as Mitch Ryder & the Detroit Wheels, Gary Lewis & the Playboys, Freddie & the Dreamers and the Soul Survivors. Also, according to the same Hangnail Phillips article, another local band flirted with national notoriety. The band was the Fabulous Pharaohs and they got good enough to make a national appearance on the Pat Boone Show.

The most tantalizing story to come out of the 60s may have been a near miss of epic proportions, or

it could have actually happened as some contend. The story involves reggae great Bob Marley. In 1965 Bob Marley lived in Wilmington because his mother was working and living in Wilmington near 23rd and Tatnall streets. While Marley lived in Delaware he worked at Newark's Chrysler Assembly Plant, which inspired his song "Night Shift." The year 1965 was also the year that Bob Dylan got married.

Bob Dylan married a Wilmington woman whose name was Shirley Noznisky when she lived here and later attended the University of Delaware. After her short stint at the University, Shirley ventured to New York City where she was a Playboy bunny then a photographers' model. Her first husband was Hans Lowndes, who asked her to change her first name to Sara. After the Lowndes' had a daughter, Sara met Bob Dylan, became the inspiration for his song "Sad Eyed Lady of the Lowlands," and the rest is history. The tantalizing part of the story is the possibility that in 1965, while in Wilmington meeting his new in-laws, Bob Dylan may have visited with Bob Marley, especially considering that Marley's mother and Bob Dylan's

new in-laws lived in the same general section of Wilmington. It could have happened and in spite of the nagging persistence of the story, no one's talking.

Rock artists from Delaware were boosted by the reinvigorating musical strides made within the genre in the late 1960s. This was largely reflected in the founding of the local band, Snakegrinder and the Shredded Field Mice. Formed in an almost ad hoc fashion in 1969 from a couple of smaller bands — notably Primordial Slime and the Joint Chiefs — the band didn't get around to recording its first and only album until 1977. According to Steve Roberts, one of Snakegrinder's founding members, even bootlegged copies of the album can fetch more than $200 from almost any corner of the world. A recent reviewer on Lysergia.com said the band's sound " . . . is rich and n-dimensional with an impressive group-mind synchronization going, creating a vintage Bay area vibe pretty much any time they zoom off into jams." The band was the first to perform at Newark's famous Stone Balloon. Their implicit message to local musicians to follow was that local artists were quite

capable of producing music that could rival the best around.

A number of local recording artists who made a national name for themselves in the 1970s and beyond, actually learned their chops in the 1960s. One whose beginnings actually go back to the late 1950s was "Papa" Dee Allen. Papa Dee was originally a member of local jazz great Lem Winchester's Modernists. After Winchester died prematurely in 1961, the Modernist tried to continue, but without their stellar front man they soon fell apart. Papa Dee continued for a while performing at Wilmington's early 60s folk music clubs playing bongos and other assorted percussion instruments, but when that proved fruitless he gravitated to the west coast and joined the rock fusion band WAR. He remained with them and was the percussionist on all their recordings including the ones with ex-Animals singer Eric Burdon.

Another local artist to find national success is Johnny Neel. Neel cut his first records in Wilmington on Vinnie Rago's Ritchie label in 1966 with his band Internal Calm. Two of his earliest recordings, "The

Truth" and "Where Will We Go From Here?" were co-written with Rago. After his initial local success, Neel became a bit of a journeyman artist which took him to recording sessions with a number of top stars like John Mayall, Irma Thomas, Ann Peebles, Marie Osmond and the Oak Ridge Boys. From 1989 to 1990 he toured and cut an album with the Allman Brothers Band and co-wrote their 1990 hit "Good Clean Fun." He also wrote the hit, "Rock Bottom" for Allman Brothers band member Dickie Betts.

A major local contribution to national rock history in the mid to late 1970s came from a number of youngsters who attended local high schools in the late 60s. One was Richard Meyers, who went to Sanford Academy, another was Tom Miller who attended McKean High School and a third was Billy Ficca who went to A.I. duPont. As Richard Hell, Tom Verlaine, they and Billy Ficca took off to New York City and became pioneers in the New York punk rock music scene. Performing at CBGBs in lower Manhattan with bands like the Ramones, Blondie and artists like Iggy Pop and Patti Smith, their band Television helped forged a new genre of American

rock n' roll music. Other punk bands with which the three would perform were the Neon Boys and the Voidoids. Richard Hell also appeared in motion pictures, most notably *Desperately Seeking Susan*, which stared Madonna.

The biggest success story for a local rock musician is George Thorogood. Thorogood attended Brandywine High School and began his career locally doing gigs at local nightspots. For a while, in the mid 1970s he performed at a regular New Year's Eve bash at Newark's Deer Park Tavern. In 1978 he signed with Rounder Records, which produced his first hit album, *Move It On Over* in 1978, and in late 1979 MCA Records released an album of songs Thorogood recorded in 1974 entitled *Better Than The Rest*. In 1982 he recorded *Bad To The Bone* on EMI America vinyl. Super Stardom was next!

By the mid 1970s Snakegrinder spawned a couple of spin-offs. One of the new bands was Amazing Space. Aiming to explore the reggae sound, the band was staffed by George Wolkind, Snakegrinder's lead singer, along with John DiGiovanni, the band's drummer, and new mates

John Southard on piano and Dan Toomey on bass. At the time of Amazing Space's formation, Bob and Rita Marley were avoiding a dangerous political situation in Jamaica and living in Wilmington. George Wolkind, who knew the Marleys, asked Rita to join Amazing Space. Even though Rita agreed to join the band, Bob vetoed the idea, which created an awkward position for him with George.

Another Snakegrinder spin-off was Dick Uranus, which went off into a more arty and punkish direction. Made up of Snakegrinder bassist Steve Roberts, keyboard player Dave Bennett, the band included newcomers Dana Smith, George Christie, Joe Pinzarone and drummer Jim Ficca, whose brother Billy played drums for Television.

Dick Uranus' most successful tune was "Vice Squad Dick," which in 1994 was covered by J. G. Thirlwell. Thirlwell is a post punk music producer, whose hardcore 1984 album *Hole* is a post punk masterpiece. Recording under the name "Foetus," Thirlwell did not only record "Vice Squad Dick" for his 1994 album of the same name, but the tune,

"Little Johnny Jewel," penned by Tom Verlaine and previously recorded by Television.

Most recently, Tom Verlaine took on a good chunk of the music production for the recent Bob Dylan "bio-pic" motion picture, *I'm Not There*.

Delaware rockers continue to probe the soft underbelly of our national rock n' roll paradigm. In spite of the close calls, near misses and a few genuine success stories the beat does goes on!

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During the course of the 20th century there were many African American newspapers in Wilmington. In 1900 there was a newspaper in Wilmington called *Advance,* edited by P.H. Murray and was "Republican in politics, Christian in religion and devoted to the moral and industrial advancement of the Negro."

In the early years of the 1920s, Alice Dunbar and her husband, Robert Nelson, published *The Wilmington Advocate.* The newspaper didn't survive past 1922. In the late 1930s a magazine, looking like *Life* or *Collier's,* was published in Wilmington.

Printing numerous photographs of local events, *Candid* published articles by Pauline Young, who was Alice Dunbar-Nelson's niece. *Candid*, like *The Wilmington Advocate*, lasted only a few years. For a short period of time after the untimely death of Clifford Brown, a little magazine called *Brown's Town* was published in the city.

Unlike the established local dailies, no single local African American periodical remained for very long. Educational disadvantage and poverty often meant that the local Black press had to operate on a shoestring, depending on cash flow and a relentless pace to make all the ends — including production and circulation — meet. There has never been a daily Black newspaper, nor even a twice weekly one, in Wilmington. For two or three years *The Delaware Valley Star* hit the streets weekly in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Wilmington's final African American weekly newspaper.

In the early 1940s Wilmington had three Black newspapers that came out every week. The first of these was *The Delaware Reporter,* which began publishing on Friday, July 12, 1940. The newspaper

was published and edited by J. Alexis DuBois, who was an insurance agent. Much of the newspaper's business was shared with DuBois' insurance business in his office in the Delaware Trust Building. *The Delaware Reporter* harbored Republican Party bias, sold for a nickel a copy, and displayed ads from Bell's Funeral Home, The Royal Hotel & The Spot at 7th & French streets, the National Theater at 810 French Street, Wilmington Dry Goods, Delaware Power & Light Company and Fraim's Dairies.

DuBois' asserted, regarding his newspaper, that, "We shall simply report the news, but only the news that is helpful to the community and the persons making the news. We shall endeavor to better the relationship between the white and colored people." Apparently *The Delaware Reporter* did not survive beyond its December 13, 1940 issue.

One year later, on Saturday, September 6, 1941, *The Wilmington Times Herald* published its first edition. Unlike the *Reporter,* the *Times Herald* had a Democratic Party bias, and like the *Reporter*, it hit the streets every week, but unlike the *Reporter, The Wilmington Times Herald* was a broadsheet, not a

tabloid. The *Times Herald* had a sports page, which covered the old Negro Baseball League, comics, local gossip, social and cultural listings and classifieds. Its offices were on the second floor of the National Theater at 810 French Street and its executive editor was Eustace Gay. Martha M. Brown was city editor and Thomas Todd was advertising manager. The same advertisers as those found in *The Delaware Reporter* were also found in the *Times Herald,* with the addition of ads from many of Wilmington's hot jazz venues like The Spot, and the Club Harlem Café at 9th & Poplar streets. *The Wilmington Times Herald* was eventually absorbed into *The Philadelphia Tribune* before the War ended. After the War the Club Harlem Café became the Club Baby Grand.

Sometime in late 1944, after the *Times Herald* had become part of the *Philadelphia Tribune,* a new Black newspaper emerged in Wilmington called *Front Page.* The paper was a tabloid and had offices at 1301 Walnut Street. Its editor-in-chief was Eugene R. Ross. Millard H. Brister was treasurer. General manager was Reginald Fosque and Mills Coursey was advertising director. *Front Page* came out every

Thursday. Among its regular columnist was Fletcher Wilson, who continued his journalistic career as curmudgeonly columnist for both the *Delaware Spectator* and *Delaware Star* during the early 1970s through the early 1980s. One of Fletcher's barbs was to accuse some unfortunate public figure of committing " . . . a supreme act of jackassary!"

In the *Front Pages'* April 8, 1945 issue was the announcement that the Club Harlem Café would become the Club Baby Grand. Front Page also serialized two short stories by H. Bundy, who happens to have been the projectionist in the National Theater at 810 French Street. The first of these stories was called "Vulture of Society" and the second was called "Blood Thirst."

There's no evidence that *Front Page* lasted into the late 1940s, and there's no evidence of a Wilmington Black periodical until *Brown's Town* in the late 1950s.

In the late 1960s, in the crucible of martial law and occupation by local National Guard soldiers, Wilmington's *People Pulse* thrived. The driving force behind the newspaper was Ralph Morris. On July 26,

1972, *The Delaware Spectator* was first published in Wilmington. The newspaper's editor was Ralph Morris. The *Spectator* became a groundbreaking paper for Wilmington's growing Black community, and included items for the city's growing Latino community. One of those items was a regular column from Frank Rivera. *The Delaware Spectator* hit the streets every other week and finally became victim to a combination of forces in late 1976.

However, on the very heels of the Spectator a new Wilmington Black newspaper was founded by Herman Holloway, Jr., Ralph Morris and myself. I gave the newspaper its name by taking the "S", "T", "A", and "R" out of *Spectator*. For a brief period of time in the early 1980s the, then, *Delaware Valley Star* became Wilmington's longest running weekly Black newspaper under the courageous leadership of publisher Felix Stickney.

In 1968, Andrew Smithman also published a Wilmington Black newspaper called *The Observer* and in the late 1970s he also published a competitor to the *Star* that he called *The Wilmington North Star*, which lasted for only a short time. *The Delaware*

Valley became the victim of subterfuge in 1984. It was followed by a variety of local newspapers like *Drumbeat*, published by Hanif and Hanifa Shabazz. Ralph Morris and his son Von continued to publish Wilmington Black newspapers like *The Gazette* and *The Wilmington Spectator* until the latter ceased publication in 2006.

Underneath our feet there is a deep history of cultural workers contributing to who we are. Some are more well known than others and others would inspire generations yet to come. Time had been good to our visual artists. Our musical artists were already there and waiting to be rediscovered.

A Note on the Local Counter Culture/AlternativePress

The late 1960s ushered in a new era across America of an alternative to the mainstream press, also referred to as the "counter-culture press." The Wilmington/Newark community also joined this movement when *The Heterodoxical Voice* began publication in 1967. This monthly periodical carried

views critical to the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War, issues of importance to the Civil Rights movement as well article about music, the arts, cartoons and occasional poetry. The *Voice's* editorship changed hands a couple of times and moved its editorial location from Newark to Wilmington, reflecting subtle change in tone and approach to many of the burning issues of the day. The paper's final issue was published in January 1970.

The counter culture, as it grew into the 1970s, began to develop greater emphasis on separate issues that sprung from the beginnings of the movement. Chief among these issues were the Feminist, Environmental and Gay Movements. Local alternative periodicals that emerged after *The Heterodoxical Voice* had stopped publishing recognized these developments. The first of these was actually a monthly sponsored by the University of Delaware's Cosmopolitan Club and began publishing in 1972. Even though this newspaper, *Viewpoint,* rarely circulated beyond the campus into the city of Newark it did touch on issues important

to the growing Feminist, Environmental and Gay movements, and sought to find ways to racially integrate the community. *Viewpoint* continued to present examples of art and literature from local artists, writers and poets. The University of Delaware terminated *Viewpoint* in 1976.

Publishing concurrently with *Viewpoint* were two other alternative newspapers. One of these was *New Directions for Women,* which took a harder look at issues surrounding the local burgeoning Feminist movement. The other newspaper was *Emergency Illustrated*, which addressed the more developed ideas that stemmed from the art and literary community. It was the first of this genre of counter-culture periodical to extensively use color, and became a launching pad for the new approaches in local art that emerged and which are discussed later in The *Wedgehorn Manifesto.*

Like *Viewpoint, New Direction for Women* and *Emergency Illustrated* did not survive into the late 1970s. However, in 1979, one of two alternative periodicals began publishing. The first of these, *The Delaware Alternative Press* grew out of the local

chapter of *The Peoples' Bicentennial Commission*. In the spirit of its predecessors, especially *The Heterodoxical Voice*, *The Delaware Alternative Press* addressed the burning issues of its day when the local mainstream press could not, would not and did not. In 1981, after some internecine differences over style developed among staff members of *The Delaware Alternative Press*, a new periodical entitled *TANGENT* began publication and dealt with many of the same issues as the former. For a short period of time *TANGENT* was inserted in the centerfold of *The Delaware Valley Star*, bringing to a greater number of readers a broader range of issues. However, in the growing atmosphere of Reagan inspired reactionary politics permeating into nearly all arenas of American culture, both *The Delaware Alternative Press* and *TANGENT* found it difficult to continue to publish after 1982.

Examples of all the periodicals mentioned in this segment can be found in Special Collections at the University of Delaware library.

* * *

The mediocrity of the French bourgeois was not different from that of the Quaker. The duPonts had given Delaware schools and roads, but to Wilmington's traditional virtues they added nothing. To its vices their presence there had added two: sycophancy and stealth. By means of them you rose in Wilmington, but you never rose above mediocrity.

— Charles Wertenbaker,
To My Father

On the surface it might seem that there are more Delaware visual artists than literary artists both living and dead who are known by their works. Most of us have heard of N.C Wyeth and Howard Pyle, or Gayle Hoskins, Frank Schoonover and Edward Loper. Yet, our past literary community seems to be missing. Certainly, these literary artists must have existed beyond those hazy stories that have come to us from the periphery. Somewhere we've heard that Howard Pyle wrote stories. After spending several years of researching the subject of past literary art from Delaware what I found was a little surprising, and delightfully so.

Going back almost to the American Revolution I found a slew of Delaware authors and poets who made significant contributions to American literature, and who have made some small, though significant, contributions to the American literary canon. I found authors from Delaware who had interacted with and even influenced such American literary luminaries as Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Paul Laurence Dunbar, H. L. Mencken, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, among others.

About five years ago, while writing an article on John Lofland, Delaware's first notable literary figure, for the Wilmington magazine *Out & About*, my editor asked me to quote someone from the University of Delaware. I could find no one in the University's English Department who knew anything about Lofland. The best I could come up with was some one who was an expert on Delaware folklore. However, poet, playwright and University of Delaware English professor Jeanne Walker did say for my article, "Looking at the life and work of a minor writer can give you information that provides

a context for the writers we know better." Her quote provided me with a valuable perspective about how I ought to view my future research.

I later learned, and related in my article in *Out & About,* how Lofland, while living in Baltimore between the mid 1830s and mid 1840s, had bested Edgar Allan Poe in a poetry writing contest held in the Seven Stars tavern. According to one Poe biographer, Mary E. Phillips in her 1926 book, *Edgar Allan Poe, The Man,* Lofland may have had an influence on Poe with his story "Berenice." Later on, it dawned on me that Lofland, who studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania before being expelled after a dispute with one of the University's professors, may have even been the person in mind, and was thus the model for, "Mr. L––l," a medical student in Poe's story "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." It was a tantalizing prospect that fueled my curiosity.

Lofland was not the only Delaware literary artist to have influenced Poe. The work of Delaware's first novelist, Robert Montgomery Bird, was much admired by Poe. Bird's 1836 novel,

Sheppard Lee, which uses the concept of metempsychosis to propel the plot, contains themes and plot routines that are similar to those in many of Poe's tales. Poe even invited Bird to submit some fiction to *The Southern Literary Messenger.* Bird, who was something of a cynic, evidently did not respond to Poe's solicitation.

Another 19th century writer from Delaware, George Alfred Townsend, who was a journalist popularly known as "GATH" and whose reputation rivaled his early contemporary Horace Greeley, evidently knew and interacted with Mark Twain. There exists a photograph, taken by Mathew Brady on February 7, 1871, of Townsend and Twain sitting together. Mark Twain considered Townsend a friend and colleague. In fact, the two shared a house in Washington D. C. during the winter of 1867 -8, while Townsend acted as correspondent for the *Chicago Tribune* and *Cincinnati Enquirer.* There are some curious parallels in the literary careers of both authors. Townsend's first novel *Lost Abroad,* published in 1870, echoes much of the literary intent found in Twain's 1869 novel *Innocents Abroad.* Only a

few months before Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* was published in 1885, Townsend published his best known novel, *The Entailed Hat* (Harper & Brothers, 1884). The novel is still in print from Nanticoke Books in Vienna, Maryland. Both Twain's and Townsend's novels grapple with the question of slavery and, in their own way, its relationship to white society. In Townsend's novel, he relates the true story of the infamous Delaware serial murderer Patty Cannon who made a living kidnapping Black people and selling them into slavery. One must wonder whether the two had influenced each other in the writing of their respective novels, especially considering the assertion that Twain purportedly developed his antislavery theme over the course of writing *Huckleberry Finn.*

The crosscurrents among works by Twain, Bird and Townsend show up in some tantalizing ways throughout the 19th century.

So the story goes, after Patty Cannon was captured and she cheated the hangman by poisoning herself, her head was severed and sent to a phrenologist in Philadelphia to discern her criminal

motivation from the bumps and characteristics of her skull. Bird, who also studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, had earned his medical degree two years before Patty Cannon's demise in 1829. Bird, then a physician in Philadelphia, had developed a keen interest in phrenology and may have had some hand in the macabre inspection of Cannon's severed head. In Bird's novel *Sheppard Lee*, the severed head of a woman who fits the description of Patty Cannon makes a brief appearance. Another of Bird's novels from 1835, *The Hawks of Hawk Hollow,* actually delves a little deeper into the fine art of phrenology. Incidentally, for anyone wanting to make their own phrenologic inspection of Patty Cannon's skull, it now resides in the public library in Dover.

Mark Twain evidently was also familiar with Bird's novels. Twain makes passing reference to Bird's most popular novel *Nick of the Woods* from 1837 in *Life on the Mississippi,* published in 1883, when he charges an old acquaintance with plagiarizing Bird's work.

Probably the best and most recent example of a literary figure, who had lived in Delaware, having had an influence on a major American literary artist can be found in Eleanor Alexander's 2002 book *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow,* about the stormy relationship of Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore. After Alice Dunbar's marriage to Paul Laurence ended, she moved to Wilmington where she had family. Her own literary career did not end there. Her literary work showed up, both before and after her marriage to Dunbar, in places like George Jean Nathan's and H. L. Mencken's *Smart Set* as well as in *Crisis* when it was edited by W. E. B. duBois. In Wilmington she married Robert Nelson and is better known today as Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Her literary and journalistic works inspired many who participated in the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s.

The Works of Alice Dunbar-Nelson was published in 1988 by Oxford University Press and, like *The Entailed Hat* by George Alfred Townsend, is among the few Delaware literary artists still in print.

In the 1920s Wilmington was, during the time Alice Dunbar-Nelson and her husband Robert published the African American newspapers *The Wilmington Advocate*, a hot bed of literary activity. Much of this literary excitement was generated by the on-and-off residency of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. The reason behind the Fitzgeralds' stay in the suburbs just outside the city was F. Scott's roommate from his college days at Princeton. Fitzgerald's roommate, John Biggs Jr., was also a novelist and two of the four novels he wrote and published received critical acclaim; *Demigods* (Scribner, 1926) and *Seven Days Whipping* (Scribner, 1929). Later, Biggs turned in his literary career for one in the legal field. President Franklin D. Roosevelt later appointed him to the Federal bench. Biggs' legal standing enabled him to become the executor of Fitzgerald's estate and to be Zelda's legal guardian during her final years of protracted illness.

It might be also interesting to note that John Biggs' younger sister, Mary Biggs, wrote a truly sublime novel, *Lily-Iron,* published by McBride in 1927. Her promising literary career was cut short

when she died of complications resulting from childbirth.

Also part of Wilmington's literary life during the 1920s was the Wertenbaker brothers, Charles and Peyton.

Better known of the two was Charles, who spent a considerable part of his career as a journalist for *TIME* magazine. As a novelist he tackled subjects that could be considered controversial today. For example, the arch villain of his final novel, *The Death of Kings,* (Random House, 1954) is modeled after Whittaker Chambers, and his 1950 novel, *The Barons,* also published by Random House, is a thinly disguised, and somewhat scandalous, account of the rise of the DuPont Corporation just after the turn of the 20th century.

Wertenbaker lived in Delaware from the time he was 14 years old until the mid 1930s when his marriage to his first wife, the Wilmington artist Henrietta Hoopes, failed.

A fictional account of his first marriage, but more importantly, the influence the State of Delaware had on Wertenbaker was made pretty

clear in his 1936 roman á clef, *To My Father,* published by Farrer & Rinehart. Wertenbaker may have turned his back on Delaware, but the weight of the state's influence dogged him to the end, an end depicted in the Garson Kanin Broadway play from 1962, *A Gift of Time,* based on the account that Wertenbaker's widow, Lael Wertenbaker, made in her gripping 1957 book, *Death of a Man,* published by Random House.

Charles Wertenbaker's younger brother Peyton was also a talented writer. His only two novels, *Black Cabin,* published in 1933 and *Rain on the Mountain* from 1934, were both published by Little, Brown & Company, and written under the name "Green Peyton." Both garnered good reviews. The younger Wertenbaker also wrote fiction using his actual name. Early in his career Peyton wrote science fiction which was published in the earliest issues of the ground breaking journal *Amazing Stories.* In these stories, dating from the late 1920s to early 1930s, he utilized subjects familiar to us today, ranging from Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity to parallel universes, time travel, and virtual reality.

It is difficult to be brief concerning writers and poets from Delaware. There's so much I've left unsaid. The works of Delaware's most prolific and seriously literary novelist, Anne Parrish, have all but been forgotten. It's hard to find work still in print from Delaware's only Pulitzer Prize winning novelist, John P. Marquand, who, incidentally, once declared that he should have been born in Boston.

Barely known is the lifelong correspondence between Arden, Delaware writer Victor Thaddeus and H. L. Mencken. Thaddeus received widespread success with his 1928 biography, *Voltaire, Genius of Mockery,* published by Brentano's. Speaking of Arden, there is Upton Sinclair's residence in that "Utopian" village during his bohemian, pre-World War I days and his exploits there, especially with the American poet Harry Kemp who made off with Sinclair's wife Meta in a true life adventure in "free love." Kemp's novel, *Tramping On Life,* published in 1922 by Boni & Liveright, in which his exploits in Arden with Sinclair are recounted, is long out of print and nearly forgotten.

Totally forgotten are two books of narrative poetry by Wilmington poet James Whaler. Whaler's 1927 book, *Hale's Pond, and Other Poems,* published by Harold Vinal, Ltd., was praised for its "coiled vigor" by Louis Untermeyer in the 1942 edition of *Modern American Poetry.* Whaler's *Green River — a poem for Rafinesque,* published by Harcourt, Brace in 1931 garnered a glowing review by the American poet Hart Crane in the April 1932 issue of *Poetry.* There is strong evidence that Whaler and Crane knew one another.

In a somewhat similar fashion to the way the city of Wilmington influenced Charles Wertenbaker, the same might be said of Henry Seidel Canby's only novel *Our House* (1919, Macmillan). Some critics of Canby's novel considered Wilmington, depicted as "Millington," to be one of the main characters in the novel because of the influence it exerted over the novel's protagonist, Robert Roberts. *Our House* most likely recounts the true-life romance with another Wilmington literary figure, the poet Marion Gause, who later became Canby's wife. Canby is most

remembered as the founder of *The Saturday Review of Literature.*

Except for Townsend's *The Entailed Hat,* the anthology of works Alice Dunbar-Nelson, a couple of titles by Robert Montgomery Bird and Thaddeus' *Voltaire* issued in expensive editions by Kessinger Publishing, and some editions of children's' novel by illustrator Howard Pyle, nothing is still in print by Delaware's past authors. The good news is that between the Morris Library at the University of Delaware and the Wilmington Institute Free Library, nearly all books so far mentioned are available. The bad news is that most do not circulate, so reading them will be difficult. The University's library has some circulating editions by Bird, Lofland, Townsend, Canby, Ward, Parrish, Biggs and Wertenbaker, but borrowing privileges cost $25.00 a year. Only Dreamstreets Press has published small samples in their limited edition chapbooks and magazine.

Delaware's literary canon, if you will, is good enough to stand up to literary criticism and scholarship. The subject, in whole or in parts, would

be a worthy subject for a doctoral thesis. This would certainly help to create awareness. Finding greater publication, or republications, of new editions would create new readers of works by Delaware authors, and lectures and courses in the community would generate greater interest in this fascinating part of our local culture. There is still some catching up to do.

Literary Works for Republication:

John Lofland — ***Collected Prose Works of John Lofland***: Written mostly during the last three years of his life in Wilmington while Literary Editor for the *Blue Hen's Chicken.* His prose is lucid, still relevant and even entertaining.

Robert Montgomery Bird — ***Sheppard Lee:*** This innovative novel is as close to having a novel that takes place nearby. (republished in 2008 by *New York Review of Books*)

George Alfred Townsend — ***The Entailed Hat:*** Still in print. It ought to stay that way.

Elizabeth M. Chandler — *poetry:* ante-bellum, abolitionist inspired poems.

Stanford Davis — *poetry:* Delaware first poet of note in the early 20th century

Alice Dunbar-Nelson — Her work is still in print and needs to remain so.

Henry Seidel Canby — ***Our House****:* Canby's only novel, which transforms Wilmington into a breathing city.

— ***The Age of Confidence****:* Though non fiction, it is a good companion for understanding and appreciating ***Our House****.*

Christopher Ward — ***One Little Man****:* His first Wilmington novel about a naïf looking for romance and culture.

— ***Starling:*** About a middle class Wilmington working girl who marries into the big money.

John Biggs, Jr. — ***Demigods:*** About a religious fanatic who makes it to Wilmington to run a newspaper and runs for Governor.
— ***Seven Days Whipping:*** About a Wilmington Judge and a local Native American boy.

Mary Biggs — ***Lily-Iron:*** A sublime and imagist novel written by John Biggs' sister.

James Whaler — ***Hale's Pond*** and ***Green River:*** The best poet ever to have come from Wilmington.

Anne Parrish — ***Perennial Bachelor:*** A prize-winning novel about obsessive insularity set in Claymont.
— ***A Clouded Star:*** About Harriet Tubman's final trek north to Canada. Some of the story takes place in Wilmington.

Charles Wertenbaker — ***To My Father:*** Life in Wilmington, and other places, in the early part of the 20th century.

— ***The Barons:*** Thinly disguised novel about an industrial family at the beginning of the 20th century in a place that sounds like Wilmington.

G. Peyton Wertenbaker — ***First Crash:*** Peyton's collected science fiction, which he wrote in Wilmington in the 1920s and 1930s.

Victor Thaddeus — ***Leo Rex:*** His unpublished Depression era novel.

— ***Voltaire: Genius of Mockery:*** His best non-fiction book.

* * *

The commercial prosperity of a people depends on the vitality of that people's culture.

— Norman Lindsay,
artist

There are those rare examples of cinema that provoke ideas that break out into the social arena, from the theatre to the streets that surround it. A good film will stay with us soaking into the social and cultural fabric of our lives. At the time of this writing there is only one theatre devoted to screening cinema for the public in the city of Wilmington, and this single so-called theatre was last used as a Dupont Company auditorium upstairs on the second floor in an abandoned office building. I've been there twice to see a movie.

The first time I was there was with a couple of friends. The theatre was so packed that the three of us had to sit in distant and separate seats. The second time I went to this same theatre was with only one friend. When we got there we found a line. Lines at movie theatres are not rare, so we got in line. Soon we realized that everyone in line had already bought his or her tickets on the internet. I

suppose that's the way it works in a theatre with no marquee and no ticket booth. We didn't get as far as the folding table where our tickets would have been collected. I've never returned to this theatre nearly hidden away in Wilmington.

With one exception, every theatre designed for cinema in Wilmington has been torn down. The one exception, the Queen Theatre, which could sit 2000 people, stands idle. This formally magnificent movie palace has stood idle and nearly forgotten for several decades. As related above, judging from those who jammed that only so-called movie theatre which screens quality cinema in Wilmington, the city could use another movie theatre. In addition, judging from the fact that the majority of people in Wilmington who are African and Latino American have nowhere to go to view what might be called "third world" cinema — cinema that addresses issues, sensibilities and politics with which Wilmington's new majority may readily identify. Wilmington simply needs more movie theatres. Beyond cinema, judging from the fact that there is almost nowhere to see musical acts or theatrical

productions at a price most residents of Wilmington can regularly afford, the city could use more downtown theatres. The Queen has a large stage that can easily accommodate these kinds of venues.

As of this writing, plans have been announced to refurbish the Queen Theatre, not only the site of one of the city's last remaining movie theatres, but also the site, on the building's second floor, of Rob Jones' successful and groundbreaking 5th Street Gallery from the early 1970s.

These announcements have been made before regarding the Queen Theatre, only to evaporate for financial or political reasons. Yet in these plans there are those who have finally recognized the potential for the Queen Theatre building as a performing arts center, which could mean facilities, for example, for a film and media school. Maybe someone could even reopen the 5th Street Gallery for ol' time sake. Such full cultural use of the Queen has a further potential for transforming surrounding real estate into a district of cafés and coffee shops, bookstores, smaller galleries, music stores and newsstands that stock quality periodicals.

The Queen is crucial for the revitalization of Wilmington's cultural environment.

* * *

We had one real artist, Howard Pyle, and he, by some irony of circumstance, happened to be the first illustrator of his time in the English-speaking world, and the author of one of the few books of authentic romance published in America in his day; yet it was not for these reasons that he ranked with local bankers, but because he belonged to a respectable Quaker family, held ultra-conservative Republican opinions, and was known to earn an income which was considered fantastic in our town, considering what he did for a living.

— Henry Seidel Canby,
The Age of Confidence

Up until the early to mid 1970s, and shortly after Wilmington was decimated by the martial law of 1968, the prominent artistic expression and identity in the area stemmed from The Brandywine Tradition's artistic monopoly. The Brandywine Tradition was founded through the art works of

Howard Pyle and the Wyeth clan, made up of artists like N.C., Andrew, Henrietta, Carolyn and James Wyeth, along with artists Peter Hurd, John W. McCoy and George Weymouth, along with a number of lesser knowns. The Brandywine Tradition is still an active school and style of art today, one that has gained an international reputation. And while there are a number of currently accomplished artists associated with this tradition, the work that is produced by current Brandywine Tradition artists tend to produce, or perhaps has degenerated into, decorative art for very wealthy local people.

A few years ago, my sister and I went to a showing of art work by a latter day Brandywine Tradition artists by the name of Phillip Wikoff up in that bastion for Brandywine Tradition art, Chadds Ford, which is actually in Pennsylvania near where the Brandywine Creek begins. It was near the end of the show and many of the paintings had been sold. Many of them were rural snow scenes from surrounding Chadds Ford landscapes. Most were rustic in their tone. All were very well crafted and one could see the Pyle and Wyeth influence. There

were paintings of this or that springhouse or barn, all of which seemed familiar to anyone who has spend any time in the surrounding Brandywine Valley. I could imagine that most paintings had been sold to those with money who lived near this or that springhouse or barn. Some were paintings of someone's 40 acres back yard under a favorite sky during a favorite season.

There was one painting by Wikoff in the show that was unsold. In my low-life, proletarian view, it was the best painting in the show. The painting depicted an apple orchard. The paint was applied thickly so that the impression it gave was one of heaviness. Then I got the point. The heaviness conveyed the quality of the air. You can always paint trees and baskets and buildings, but you can't always depict the air. The heaviness of the paint depicted the heaviness of the air. The painting was suddenly placed in time, which was late summer when the air is hot, humid and stickily oppressive. It was at that point that I could smell the rotting, fermenting apples on the ground and hear the hornets flying around and lighting on the fallen

fruit. Good art does that. It takes you away and gets inside you at the same time. If I was rich and had the wall space deserving of a good piece of art, I might have bought that painting. But I am a poor pariah proletarian who is supposed to be ignorant, having no social or cultural value except the interest I could generate from my credit cards to provide wealth to the rich classes by, instead, going shopping in some garish mall or shopping center. What am I supposed to know about art?

Wikoff certainly knew why he was doing art, which was why he seemed to be painting for the wealthy who would buy his art for, I suspect, superficial reasons. There are some advantages in becoming a Brandywine Tradition artist. For those who are not Brandywine Tradition artists the reward is relative poverty, scrambling after meager grant money and keeping that day job that saps your energy and leaves you with the worse time of the day to do your art.

The Brandywine Tradition held an artistic monopoly up until the mid 1970s. An artist was either a Brandywine Tradition artist, or at least

declared him or herself to be such, or she or he was nobody. After the devastation wrought during the 1960s from the building of I-95 in the early part of the decade through the martial law at the end of it, anyone left was driven away, scattered and disconnected from that social and cultural network that had engendered and nourished them. However, by the late 1970s a few cultural workers returned — sometimes heroically — to Wilmington. One was Rob Jones with his 5th Street Gallery in the second floor of the old Queen Theater, and another was Tom Watkins and his comic art emporium and upstairs gallery at nearby 5th and Shipley streets. It was out of the efforts by Jones and Watkins that urban arts organizations like the Delaware Center for the Creative Arts and the Christina Cultural Arts Center gained breathing space against the hot breath of The Brandywine Tradition and gained a toe hold. Rob Jones and Tom Watkins came along and broke that Brandywine Tradition monopoly. Soon the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts and the Christina Cultural Arts Center began to attract greater attention. As time moved on, more and more

art galleries opened in Wilmington. Two notable examples were the Shooples Gallery, originally in the Hedgeville neighborhood and Susan Isaacs' Gallery on Tatnall Street. Many others joined these two and many have survived to this day. The first Friday of every month has become a traditional time to tour many of the existing galleries. As a result, the Brandywine Tradition has been brought into a new perspective. Artists could finally choose not to hitch their wagon to the Brandywine Tradition star or subscribe to the Brandywine Tradition's philosophy. As a result we now have schools like the Cab Calloway School for the Arts, Delaware College of Art & Design and the Kuumba School where local artists can develop their skills and talents.

In urban Delaware — mainly northern New Castle Country where cities and towns like Wilmington, Newark, Arden and New Castle are located — remnants of the Brandywine Tradition have survived up through the post World War II era. Through the work of Frank Schoonover and Gayle Hoskins the Brandywine Tradition flows through Wilmington as well as through Chadds Ford and

"chateau country." However, in that flow through Wilmington, other currents have entered into the mix and added to Delaware's unique history of art. The two main currents have come from the Arts & Craft movement practiced in Arden from the early part of the 20th century, and the Pre-Raphaelite influence surrounding the accumulated collection of Samuel Bancroft and the founding of the Delaware Art Museum. A thread links the latter two in the name of William Morris, the 19th century English poet, artist, craftsman and "Utopian" socialist who not only contributed ideas behind the Pre-Raphaelite movement but to the philosophy that contributed to the founding of Arden north of Wilmington in the early 20th century. The Delaware Art Museum has done a fine job in tying these strands together into a portrait of a developed history and legacy of local artistic accomplishment and appreciation.

However, there is another ingredient that enters this history and legacy, which may constitute a divergence from the current that flows from the source of the Brandywine Tradition. This new

ingredient could just as well be called "The Christina Tradition."

In the late 1930s the Federal Government gave a good reason for artists to paint, as well as for writers to write and thespians and musicians to produce. That reason was the Works Progress Administration (WPA) founded by the Presidential Administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt that paid artists, writers, thespians and musicians to make cultural contributions to our community. Among the notable local artists to have emerged from that project were Edward Grant, William D. White and Delaware's most notable living artist, Edward Loper, among a number of others. Loper's impact upon the local art community has been enormous, in his influence upon other emerging artists who have either been his students or who have been influenced by his art.

All these strands, currents and elements have contributed to a conducive atmosphere for visual art in Delaware. It's time to go the extra mile on behalf of Delaware's visual artist, past and present. The Delaware Art Museum is not enough to enable

public access to the work of Delaware artists. We ought to be able to view, on a permanent basis, the art of Edward Loper and preeminent artists from the recent past, like Frank Schoonover and Gayle Hoskins. We ought to make a better effort to preserve, as well as to increase public awareness of, the public art created by WPA artists like Edward Grant, William D. White and others. We ought to be creating permanent public collections for Delaware's women, African and Latino American artists. The 2002-3 exhibit entitled "Almost Forgotten: Delaware Women Artists 1900 – 1950" ought to have been made into a permanent exhibit. The stunning work of another Delaware artist, Roldan West, who is of Latino descent and is quickly becoming among the best of Delaware's current artists, is a good example of how we ought to be making a greater effort to recognize artists currently living and working in Delaware. As a further example, we have already missed the boat when it comes to past Delaware artist William D. White. A permanent retrospective of his art has been made unlikely thanks to the fact that the Hercules Powder Company, which had

owned a large body of his work, reportedly sold off their holdings in an effort to help the company out of its financial woes. A mural White painted during his work for the WPA has just been barely rediscovered in a building in Dover, becoming one of the very few paintings by this notable past Delaware artist still on public display. If we could succeed in creating permanent collections of the works of area artists, while the opportunity still presents itself, then artists and art lovers might come to Wilmington to work while enriching our cultural environment.

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A Perfumed City

In conversations I have had with friends over the years, we have often wondered whether there are more artists, particularly literary artists, than those we've encountered over the years. Something tells us that there are and judging by those who have shown up at various readings and then have then disappeared, we assure ourselves they are there and

invisible most of the time. For literary artists, not only is the production of their art done in private, but so often is the consumption of their art work insofar as reading is an act performed in the privacy of one's own space and thoughts.

We also know there are more visual artists who live in the area and who work in obscurity who, like their literary counterparts, run the risk of never having any exposure to an appreciative public. Organizations like the Christina Cultural Arts Center, the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts and the Newark Arts Alliance, to name but a few, have made great strides in assisting local artists to find a place in our cultural environment. However, in order to serve the interests of local artists, these organizations are dependent on patronage from those who are able and willing to grant it.

The State of Delaware does make appropriations from public coffers, but the administration of these moneys is often controlled by those very same private entities that provide patronage. Private sources of funds are often

combined with insufficient public funding. Arts organizations often must spend precious time scrambling for grants and donations instead of promoting local artistic endeavors. This process reminds me of Charles Wertenbaker's claim that to get ahead in Delaware, one must become a sycophant, and beyond that, to have no content in one's art that might be considered too critical or deemed threatening to the existing political, economic, social and/or cultural order. One's creations, therefore, should be very good at being mediocre, that is, an artwork's form, which is rewarded for its excellence, must often outpace — if not trounce — its content.

For any number of artists, but particularly for many poets, authors and jazz musicians, what they feel is a great compulsion to say is otherwise stifled. Because opportunities for many poets, authors and jazz musicians, in particular, are so limited; because there is a great paucity of venues for jazz musicians to provide for themselves, and because there is a great paucity of publication opportunities for local authors and poets, and because there has been a

total disregard for the preservation of past recordings of local jazz artists and of the works of past authors and poets, these literary and musical contributors to our cultural environment have been forced into a kind of imposed cultural secession from the social and cultural fabric of our community. The manner in which moneys is appropriated, in the forms of grants and commissions, serves to control and then to distort the real character of our local cultural environment.

The wealth of a society can be measured against its poverty. One day we may discover that the measure of wealth is exactly proportional to the amount of poverty, and its invisible cousin debt, that exists across our entire planet. If this is true, judging by the amount of poverty and debt that exists in the world, the amount of existing wealth in the same world is stupendous — and that might be a gross understatement. We may discover — or rather rediscover — that great poverty is the direct consequence of great wealth, and that the two are proportional. We may also discover that wealth does not disappear, but merely changes hands in an orgy

of exchange, which is an exchange designed to produce power over the mass behavior of humanity and the character and definition of our planet in all of its natural dimensions. In this orgy of exchange and power, the future stability of our national spirit which is expressed in our art, to paraphrase the artist Norman Lindsay's quote from earlier in this essay, is in jeopardy. The capitalists and fascists who are now in total control and are now producing widespread poverty while overseeing the environmental destruction of our planet understand the value, maybe better than most artists of all types, of art and culture in society. Like Karl Marx's understanding of the value of labor, which is embraced in the notion that the simplest way to exploit labor is to pay workers just enough to get them to come to work the next day, the same can be expressed in the way the capitalists and fascists view the value of art and culture. They support the arts just enough to make us think and feel as though the arts are not neglected and missing from our lives. Beyond this, the capitalists and fascists will use the arts to advance their own agendas, filling popular

culture with a crafty mix of violence, salaciousness and fear mongering. They will support the finer arts, in which content is obscured or otherwise considered historically obsolete or non threatening in its context, only in order to make some claim to their own cultural superiority and to use it as a weapon of cultural class warfare.

The result in Delaware is an invisible cultural presence that has been driven underground. The underlying intent of those who control funding is to cause artwork, particularly literary art and jazz, to be, at best, marginalized on the way to being totally forgotten. In other cultural arenas, art is turned into a competitor sport that contributes to producing cultural losers and the consequential impoverishment of artists, poets, authors, musicians, and thespians; a process that serves to discourage them unless they want to become sycophants of the ruling classes of patronage and to produce unthreatening and uncritical works of art.

My own vision for Wilmington, as a city perfumed by our rich culture, goes like this:

I see a city with affordable, efficient, clean running public transportation, preferably light rail, powered by electricity which operates on a 24 hour, seven days a week schedule. I see a city with numerous book stores that have books in all the languages we speak and on all subjects ranging from the fine arts, non-mainstream and historical literature, radical and left wing politics in friendly competition with libertarianism. There's room enough in our political discourse for Ayn Rand as well as Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, and many others. Only through discourse might we solve intellectual problems.

I see a city with newsstands where I can find *The Amsterdam News, The Philadelphia Tribune, The Village Voice* as well as *Kunstforum,* for example. I see a city with enough movie theaters so that I could catch a matinee showing of the latest avant-garde film, or classic films on any day of the week. I see a city that has theatres that produce affordable stage productions. I see live bands performing from spring through autumn in the Sugar Bowl. I see a city that has music stores where a wide range of current and

historic recorded music, including music produced locally, is constantly in stock. I see a city with real cafés and not some plastic lawn chairs and tables set out on the grimy sidewalk. I see local publications that review our cultural environment in all its various dimensions. I see works by our past successful poets and authors constantly in print. I see galleries and museums in which works of our most notable artists, of all cultural backgrounds and genders, are permanently exhibited. I see clubs and cafés where our jazz musicians can make a living playing their music for us. I see a city with real community based radio and television stations.

The obvious means toward realizing this vision is to provide greater funding for the arts, from both public and private sources. The amounts of funding from public sources, both state and national, is not enough in a world where the priorities are to bolster the military/industrial complex, to provide corporate welfare to billionaires, and to run up a national debt based on the phony assertion that government is a separate entity from the people and

should not receive revenues sufficient enough to serve all the needs of the people.

Private sources of funding can begin to be realized in a number of ways. Landlords should implement discounts on rents, coupled perhaps by public rent subsidies, to help many of those kinds of enterprises mentioned above to get started and maintain their existence. Private owners of works of local art should donate them for permanent public exhibition. Local publishers with the capacity to publish books by local authors and poets, past as well as contemporary, ought to make those books affordable as well as to replenish the supply of them in perpetuity.

Those who argue that art, which might have some sort of perceived political agenda, should not receive public funding and certainly receive no private support should reconsider this position. The implication is that a lot of art, and especially literature, is, at least, not in the interest and, at most, critical to the established order of our capitalist society. But also by implication is the suggestion that art created in the interest of capitalist society is

unable to compete with art that embodies some perspective on the truth regarding the world in which we live. Such is the reason why most right wing ideologues view art that has any substantial content with suspicion, or as a threat to the prevailing order. Establishment critics too often serve the interest of capitalist rule. Let criticism be within community peers, that is, with other artists, authors, poets, musicians and thespians, and an egalitarian community of honest arts critics. A good forum for this would be a suitable role for local publications that review our cultural environment in all its various dimensions. Both public and private funding for all the arts should nurture and provide for artists, authors, poets, musicians and thespians of whatever political stripe; to provide for a wider array of opportunities within the community of well trained, skilled and gifted creative people. If all well trained, skilled and gifted creative people are treated equally at the source of their livelihoods then the tendency to feel threatened by their messages will be supplanted by a public dialogue regarding the

ultimate truths conveyed through works of art, theatre, cinema, music and literature.

There will be those who assert that just because these kinds of policies aren't practiced anywhere else, that there is no need to make the effort in Wilmington, in particular, and in Delaware, generally, to do things any differently. This is no excuse! Considering the great disservice to past, present and future artists in our state of Delaware, as well as to the public which they serve and influence, there is a need to choose art over greed, art over exploitation, art over warmongering, and art over racism. If all states in the United States acted as proposed here, might we rediscover the full extent of the connectedness of our national culture from the grassroots to a dynamic and growing academic canon of American literature? If Poe, Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald played some small role in Delaware's literature, might not the same be true for other parts of our country? Think of how much more rich our whole national literature might be if those in every state and region made a better effort to connect their local literatures to our national canon.

Might we discover how much more deeper and expansive our national literature is? Might our vision of ourselves be renewed? Might we better understand the way we look to ourselves, as well as the way the rest of the world looks at us?

We can change our priorities for the better if we have the will to do so. It's past time to demand of all large stockholders, banks, petroleum and cocaine cartels, landlords of property owned in absentia, real estate developers, neocolonialists and nicotine pushers, robber barons and merchants of death, legal confidence men, scam artists and finance swindlers that they must give back to the people all the wealth which has made our society and our culture so impoverished.

There will be those who will say what is proposed here is but an impossible dream, but so, also, was the American Revolution of 1776. Delaware was the first state in a new nation forged by that American Revolution. We, in Delaware, could begin a new America by beginning an American Cultural Revolution, in this place where, I suspect, like many other places in the United States,

there is a local culture that's been plowed under by powerful manipulators of our cultural past, marginalized by powerful manipulators of our cultural present, demoralized by smug establishment critics and crass games of petty competition promoted among artists of all types, and underfunded by those who provide patronage and public funds.

Artists of all kinds are the caretakers for the conscience of the people who populate the community in which they are members. Artists also possess the capacity to raise the consciousness of those same members of society. If artists, of all kinds, are prevented from performing their social and culture duties, artists of all kinds should and must act to begin the process of changing their communities to one that is fundamentally more humane.

A good way to begin is to know our cultural community in all its aspects and dimensions, both its present as well as its past, in order to understand from where we've come and who we are; to accept each other's artwork as the first step toward

understanding its relevancy in our community. From that point the course should be clear to us. We have only the future to loose.

Addendum

What follows was originally published, in a slightly edited form, in the October/November 2006, and next to final issue of the Wilmington SPECTATOR *before it was snuffed out by the "powers-that-are," as had been the case for so many previous local African American newspapers throughout the decades, by a combination of subterfuge, intrigue and dirty tricks. This article addresses many of the same issues as addressed above, but adds some different prospectives, especially with regard to the recent influx in our community of Mexicans and others from South and Central America. It also offers additional suggestions as a means for a call to action.*

The Mystery of Our Culture

I've begun to strike up a conversation with a Mexican woman a few mornings each week while

waiting for a bus to go to work. She doesn't speak a lot of English and I don't speak a lot of Spanish, but we know enough of each other's language to talk about our jobs, about sports, music and art, albeit on a very superficial level because of our language limitations. One question she asked me that surprised me a little was about the history of Delaware. I certainly couldn't go into the subject in the kind of detail that I have in the pages of the *Spectator*. I boiled it down by telling her that the history of Delaware basically regards the duPonts and the Quakers.

As time wore on I began to understand why she asked the question. In Mexico people are constantly surrounded by their history and culture. Mexicans haven't torn down their old Aztec and Mayan ruins to make room for housing developments. Cities in Mexico are filled with old architecture. Old customs are still cherished and are embedded in the culture. Major buildings in Mexico City are decorated with the art of their greatest artists like Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Afaro Siqueiros. Unlike many cities in the

United States, the Mexican people are constantly surrounded by their history and culture. It's understandable that while an American tourist in Mexico cannot avoid learning about Mexican history and culture simply by being there, that a Mexican in this country can easily be mystified about the American past and the American culture. Our own history and culture is not as obvious because on the one hand it is constantly being replaced by a new modern, consumer oriented environment of buildings, shopping malls, housing tracts, highways and sports stadiums. Also, the most poignant aspects of our own culture are almost never reinforced or fully promoted. In many ways the greatest achievements of our culture are downplayed or sometimes completely trashed so that a kind of crass consumer culture can hold sway. For example, try asking some young person about the latest playstation game, then ask him or her who Edward Loper is.

In my own way, for the past several years, I've been trying to retell the story of Delaware's rich cultural past, which if it hadn't existed could not

have contributed to Delaware's current cultural environment; and as this Mexican woman inadvertently pointed out to me is not readily apparent.

In the course of trying to promote the history of music and literature in Delaware, I think I may have stumbled upon one reason this particular aspect of the history of our culture has been obscured. The first premise is that it is culture that serves as the main ingredient, the very basis for the fabric that holds our society together and gives it its identity. Without it we have no identity; we do not really know who we really are as a community. Regarding specifics, consider this: the greatest achievements in music in Delaware have been made by local Afro Americans, by people like Clifford Brown and Lem Winchester and those who have preceded them who also produced jazz in Wilmington. Yet, where on local radio, for example, is their music heard? How many music stores keep a constant supply of all their available music? Can you find their music in local libraries? And, as I declared in previous issues of the Spectator, how has their

musical legacy enhanced the culture in Wilmington and the rest of Delaware? Regarding literature, I have found that most of the nationally acclaimed past literary artists, our poets and writers, had been progressive in their stance on social issues.

We may already know about Alice Dunbar-Nelson, though—again—many young people may know more about Ludacris. Dunbar-Nelson was certainly a progressive, but so was John Lofland, who was a staunch Abolitionist in the 19th century, as would have been George Alfred Townsend had not the Civil War ended slavery by the time of his own writing career in the late 19th century. Delaware's best known poet from the 19th century, Elizabeth Chandler, was also a staunch Abolitionist. In the early 20th century Charles Wertenbaker wrote about the evil that stalked and walked the streets of Wilmington wearing respectable suits. Anne Parrish wrote sympathetically about Harriet Tubman. All these poets and authors, with the exception of Alice Dunbar-Nelson, were white, and now they are nearly forgotten when they should be known, along

with Clifford Brown, Lem Winchester and others, to every thinking, feeling, and educated Delawarean!

Especially since the end of World War II, there has been an effort to "dummy-down" our awareness of these aspects of our culture. As a result, because those aspects of our culture that serve to unite us, to realize our common interests and aspirations are lacking, we become more divided as members of a single community called greater Wilmington. This is convenient for those who seek to use those divisions to exploit us and prevent us from building a better society where we could ALL live together in peace and friendship.

There is a solution, but it is only a beginning. We ought to be demanding of our elected officials that the history of local music and literature, along with the visual and performing arts, be taught in all our public school—in addition to what is taught already, for example, at the Cab Calloway School for the Arts and Kuumba Academy—from the lowest grades through the college and university levels. Our Representatives and State Senators can make it happen by mandating it through legislation in

Delaware's General Assembly. As for the costs for instructors and materials, the funds can be found in the coffers of the rich who still influence the board rooms of local (and maybe not so local) corporations and banks who have already shortchanged several generations of our real and genuine cultural heritage.