Kansas 1972 Podcast
Episode 1: From a Seed Ideas Grow

SERIES INTRO
This series was made possible by the Friends of Humanities Kansas.

Kara Heitz:
Welcome to *Kansas 1972*. A lot happened during that pivotal year, including the founding of Humanities Kansas. So, in celebration of our 50th anniversary, we'll be telling stories from that era of Kansas history. So tune in, chill out, and get the lowdown on 1972.

EPISODE INTRODUCTION
Kara Heitz: Hey there. I'm Kara Heitz, and welcome to the first episode of *Kansas 1972*, a podcast produced by Humanities Kansas to explore its 50th anniversary.

Press Coverage of LBJ signing National Endowment for the Humanities Legislation, September 29, 1965, LBJ Library
"The President today signed a bill to establish a national council on the arts and humanities, to encourage, with federal interest and federal money – about $20 million a year – all sorts of cultural efforts."

Kara Heitz: On Sept. 29, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed legislation creating the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts, organizations invested in bringing art and culture to all Americans. Just seven years later, Humanities Kansas, originally known as the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, was born.

In this episode, we're telling the story of the founding and early history of Humanities Kansas.

[Music]

You'll hear about the historical moment that created Humanities Kansas as part of efforts to strengthen the newly formed National Endowment for the Humanities.

Jamil Zainaldin: "…having won a war against fascism, having assumed the position as the leader of the free world, the question was raised, what's so special about this free world?"

Kara Heitz: Why funding the humanities was seen as critical at that time
Elizabeth Lynn: "…I think this fear of technology is is really one of losing autonomy and and and losing a capacity for independent thought."

Kara Heitz: What made the Kansas Committee for the Humanities work in its early years

Deanell Tacha: "…we had newspaper people. We had doctors. We had, oh, you name it, local, certainly local historians, authors."

"people in the community could begin to see the historical context or the ethical dimensions behind an issue that they were discussing."

Kara Heitz: And the continued importance of the work of organizations like Humanities Kansas.

Julie Mulvihill: "We want to use the tools of the humanities to talk about sense of place, identity, to grapple with some bigger topics to to really think about those big ideas."

Kara Heitz: But before we tell this story, I am sure some of you have been wondering – what exactly are the humanities?

[Music ends]

The dictionary definition of the humanities are academic disciplines that study human culture and values, such as literature, history, and philosophy. The humanities are not typically focused on arriving at some objective "truth" using the scientific method. Rather the humanities are about critically exploring questions on the human condition.

I asked Julie Mulvihill, the executive director of Humanities Kansas, about how their organization defines this concept of "The Humanities"

Julie Mulvihill: NEH in their founding legislation clearly defined what disciplines fell within the humanities, and they're exactly what you would expect, right? History, literature, ethics, jurisprudence, philosophy, so on and son on. But describing that for the public – humanities – can often feel a little bit clunky. So, we think about sometimes just using terms like it's the connection between people and place. It's the connection between people and place over time and across generations.

And that, I think really gets to the heart of what we're trying to accomplish with this movement of ideas that you know, stories carry, stories carry our culture, stories carry our culture and ideas, change the world. That is grounded and rooted in the foundation of humanities work.

Kara Heitz: We'll be hearing more from Julie Mulvihill later on.

So, what is the origin of organizations in the US like Humanities Kansas, dedicated to this kind of work?

SEGMENT 1: FOUNDING OF THE NEH AND THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

FOUNDING OF NEH

[Rose Garden Sound Effects, Bird Chirping]

Kara Heitz: On the afternoon of Sept. 29th, 1965, around 300 people filled the White House Rose Garden in order to witness President Lyndon Johnson sign the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act. In attendance were not just the usual politicians, but also famous creative professionals, such as landscape photographer Ansel Adams, author Ralph Ellison, architect Walter Gropius, historian Duman Malone, and actor Gregory Peck. All were there to show their enthusiastic support for national investment in art, literature, history, philosophy, and performance.

[End Rose Garden SFX]

And while this idea of federal financial support of the arts and humanities was a relatively new one in American society, it was one that had been percolating in the 1960s.

Two years earlier, a group of educational organizations put together a commission to investigate how to better support the arts and humanities. In 1964, this commission released a report, recommending the establishment of a national humanities and arts foundation. And in 1965, the law signed by President Johnson created two separate federal organizations – the National Endowment for the Arts (often referred to as the NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (often called the NEH). And it was a popular bill with both parties, as this piece of legislation enjoyed more co-sponsors than any other bill in that session of Congress.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT - COLD WAR

Kara Heitz: So why did this happen at that historical moment? Why exactly was support strong in the 1960s for the establishment of the NEA and NEH? And how did we get state humanities organizations like Humanities Kansas?

In order to better understand this history, I spoke with Elizabeth Lynn. Dr. Lynn's research focuses on philanthropy and the humanities in American life, and she has founded several university-based programs on civic leadership and civic reflection.

Elizabeth Lynn: In 1950, the federal government founds the National Science Foundation, NSF, and federal funds began to flow into and support research in the sciences. Well, the humanists are noticing this, and they're saying, Huh, how come we're not getting any funding? So that's certainly part of the backdrop. There are other things going on as well. We're in the midst of a Cold War with the USSR, and there is a natural concern that our cultural status internationally is part of that Cold War and that we need to invest in the arts and humanities as part of the ongoing effort to show that we are, a, you know, a better place to live in this world.

Kara Heitz: So, because of the Cold War and competition with the Soviet Union, the US government is investing heavily in the sciences in the 1950s and 1960s.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT - IDEA OF FREE WORLD

But the Cold War was not just a battle of technological superiority. It was also a battle of ideas.

Audio: The Challenge of Ideas, US Army (1961)
"The entire globe, even as it trembles in passion with the birth of new nations, and shrinks in the hand of a dispassionate science, is today the site of a momentous conflict. As each side attempts to prove to the world the superiority of its position, the conflict is fraught with the words

of diplomats, with gestures of friendship and help to uncommitted countries, even with cultural demonstrations. It is fought indeed on every level of man's experience for the stakes are high."

Kara Heitz: To explore this history in more detail, I also talked with Jamil Zainaldin [Zen-el-deen], the director emeritus of Georgia Humanities, and formerly the president of the Federation of State Humanities Councils.

Jamil Zainaldin: So, it was this twinning up, if you will, of the arts and humanities together that seemed to put a sharp light on something that is really kind of unique when you think about it.

And that is the idea of what it means to be an American. What is unique about about the arts and the humanities here in a nation that can claim to be the first democracy that is a nation state. And so, because of the victory of World War Two, the defeat of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. But we were the United States was not only a world power but was talked about and thought of itself as the leader of the free world.

And I think and I think President Kennedy visualized and literally presented this as the idea is that America was special, that it was unique, that freedom was deep, that the concept of freedom was worldly and that it had a national role as the leader of the free world to promote liberty, to promote freedom.

…But I think we have to say that having won a war against fascism, having assumed the position as the leader of the free world, the question was raised: What's so special about this free world?

CONTRADICTIONS IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Kara Heitz: And part of this questioning of the idea of the "free world" is recognizing both its triumphs and its failings.

Throughout much of American history, including at the time of the founding of the NEH, there are some pretty gigantic gaps between ideals such as liberty and equality and the reality of how they were practiced.

Jamil Zainaldin: What we also know, of course, is that there are contradictions in this is the period of the women's movement because it turns out they weren't as free as we as we asserted that they were. But this is in the middle of the movement for racial equality, civil rights. Dr. King is very active at this time. So, what we have is, is we have, on the one hand, a belief in the greatness of this country having just won a war over as far as the Americans were concerned, and, you know, evil societies. And now what were we going to do? And but we're also very aware of the fact that, well, maybe we've got some room to grow in as well. So how do we build on this to become the shining example that we're supposed to be?

And so, we found we might say in the idea of the arts and the humanities, a new voice that could talk a little bit about what it means to be part of the free world. And the way of doing that is to listen and also to read. And I think those ideas kind of got merged in the idea of the arts and humanities.

HUMANITIES & STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY

[Music starts]

Kara Heitz: So, creating government agencies that promote reading, listening, watching, and critically thinking about the arts and humanities were very much a part of this post-WWII, Cold War moment in the 1960s, when the US saw itself as a leader of the free world but when many of its own citizens were passionately pointing out the serious inconsistencies in American democracy.

But how specifically can the arts and humanities help navigate us these conflicts? What could agencies like the NEA and NEH cultivate in individuals to help strengthen democracy?

[Music starts]

Elizabeth Lynn explains.

There are really three arguments for allocating federal funds towards the arts and humanities. One of them is to assure America's cultural status in in the ongoing Cold War. That's definitely important. Another is to balance funding between arts and humanities and the sciences. But the third and the really interesting one, in my view, is to to cultivate wisdom and vision in American citizens.

So, this is actually this shows up in the declaration of the 1965 legislation, and it gets read regularly and as one former Federation of State Humanities Council's presidents says most of us feel like standing up and putting our hands over our hearts when it's read because it's acquired that kind of status. *Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens. It must therefore foster and support a form of education and access to the arts and the humanities designed to make people of all backgrounds and wherever located masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants.*

Kara Heitz: Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens. It does sound pretty profound. But what does it actually mean?

Elizabeth Lynn sees two arguments at work in this statement. The first is that all Americans, no matter where they are located, from the largest city center to the smallest town, should have access to the arts and humanities.

However, the second argument is a lot more ominous.

Elizabeth Lynn: But the other argument is really that democracy needs what the arts and humanities have to offer in a very crucial way. And it seems to be set against what is described as a kind of dangerous lack of thought that is allowed by a life of leisure. And that is sort of personified by the looming threat of technology and automation.

There's a shared concern across the aisle in Congress and elsewhere that citizens are losing their capacity for independent thought and they need to be supported in developing that capacity and becoming fully autonomous individuals in the age of automation.

Audio: CBS Radio Workshop production of "Brave New World" (1956), Aldous Huxley introduction

"…man has been subordinated to his own inventions. Science, technology, social organization – these things have ceased to serve man. They have become his masters…The price of liberty and even of common humanity is eternal vigilance."

Kara Heitz: Remember the end of that statement from the 1965 legislation – We need wisdom and vision so that people are, quote "masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants." Yikes. That seems contemporary. But it's a concern that also is very much a part of the historical moment when the NEH is established.

Elizabeth Lynn: In the 1950s and 1960s, I think this fear of technology is really one of losing autonomy and losing a capacity for independent thought. And I wonder today how we would phrase that, you know, it might be a little bit different, but in some ways it's very related.

There's this extraordinary statement in the 1964 report: "the humanities are the memorial answer to man's questioning and to his need for self-expression, they are uniquely equipped to fill the abyss of leisure."

Audio: The Humanities: A Bridge to Ourselves (1974)
"Are there bridges which will help us escape from the labyrinth from a mechanical frightening world to a more humane one? In our interconnected super technological world, there is still something in us that forces us to search for the meaning of life. In an unheroic, machine worshipping age, something in us forces us to search for real heroes. The humanities are the record of this search. Our search, the search of all of us on earth. A never-ending search and questioning."

Kara Heitz: A never-ending search and questioning. I like that. But I'm a historian and a humanist so of course I would! I also really like the super 70s electronic music.

But back to our story. So how exactly were the NEA and NEH supposed do all these things – critically question the ideas and practice of democracy in order to make it better, help Americans interrogate as well as live up to the concept of leader of the free world, and don't forget cultivating "wisdom and vision" in citizens?

That is quite a tall order for these new organizations!

And they were not given much guidance by Congress or the President on how to actually spend their budgets. But that was not necessarily a bad thing, because early on, these organizations hit on the idea that would be central to most NEH and state humanities agencies programming from 1965 up until the present day.

Again, **Jamil Zainaldin:** The arts endowment was not given an agenda of what it was supposed to do. The National Endowment for the Humanities was not given an agenda of what it was supposed to do. And so, if you're the first chair of NEH and the first chair of NEA, you're going to say, "What am I supposed to do?" Right? That's the first thing you're going to say and what they said was, "Let's have a conversation with the American people about the value of the arts and humanities. Well, why don't we just send professors out and have them talk about it?" Well. How do you how do you pick them? What are you talking about? And I think very quickly, as the two agencies began to think about what they could do to serve the United States was to invite the conversation to take place among the American people themselves. And that

encouragement of that was through grant programs. And so, these two agencies, we might say were an encouragement to the American people to create art and talk about art. And on the humanities side, to create more humanities and talk about that humanities.

[Music Starts]

Kara Heitz: Talking about the arts and humanities. Creating conversations. Not a humanities scholar talking at people about their research. But rather facilitating discussions among regular, ordinary, non-academic Americans about history, literature, culture, values. That is how you cultivate "wisdom and vision." But within a few years after the establishment of the NEH, some concern is growing that a federal agency might not be the best avenue to carry out this entire mission.

[Music Ends]

Again, here's **Elizabeth Lynn:**

STATE-LEVEL HUMANITIES COUNCILS

Well, so in 1965, you have a groundswell of bipartisan support for the founding of these two endowments, one for the arts and one for the humanities. And and it's set up with an every five years there's going to be an accreditation. Right. So, the 1970 accreditation is coming and Congress has to vote to re-accredit NEH, and this begins to make the representatives in Congress nervous because they know if their constituents are asked to support this, they may scratch their heads and say, "What are the humanities?" The National Endowment for the Arts doesn't have this problem because there are artists in every community, right? But humanists are increasingly tucked away in colleges and universities, and it's the humanities is not a term that is in common circulation in everyday life. So, advocates in Congress begin to say to NEH, "We need something that's on the ground that's a little closer to people's lives that will help them understand and appreciate what the humanities are."

Kara Heitz: So how do we get the humanities to create more conversations at the level of local communities? How do we create programming that connects with the daily lives of Americans? Out of this questioning, an experiment is born.

Elizabeth Lynn: NEH decides to start a series of experiments organized around three different models because they haven't decided yet how you help the public come to understand and appreciate the humanities.

Kara Heitz: The first model is from the arts world, where you have arts agencies that were part of state governments. So, they embed humanities programming into these state agencies. The second model is based on the idea of continuing education and established state humanities programming as a kind of university extension program.

Elizabeth Lynn: And then the third is kind of a new thing, and it's call a volunteer committee and the volunteer committees bring together on their boards people who do the humanities professionally, rather as scholars or leaders of libraries or museums and public citizens, public members, folks who live in the community and who care about the community and who are willing to spend some time trying to figure out what the humanities can do for the community.

Kara Heitz: So, which one works and why? The first model, embedding the humanities in state arts agencies, didn't work well because the arts agencies pretty much put the humanities money towards more arts programs. The second model of a kind of university extension program, didn't really engage a broader public. But the third model, the non-governmental voluntary committee, was, as Goldilocks would say, just right.

Elizabeth Lynn: It seemed to have the right formula for bringing together the humanities and the public. And, in fact, it was kind of an astounding recipe in combination and NEH noticed that in these volunteer committees of professional humanists and public citizens, there was an enthusiasm and excitement about the mission, a kind of energy, in the words of some of the leaders at that time, it was being released.

Kara Heitz: So, we get as the model non-profit committees with volunteer boards. These are not state agencies (unlike many of the state arts agencies under the NEA). Although they do get part of their funding from the NEH, they are not government entities. They are independent.

SEGMENT 2: HISTORY OF HUMANITIES KANSAS

Founding of the Kansas Committee for the Humanities

And once the NEH and Congress realize the volunteer committee is the best model, they start to proliferate.

[Music Starts]

In 1972 an additional 8 states beyond the original 5 experimental programs created state humanities organizations, including Kansas. By 1976, 56 US states and territories had established their own humanities councils. This was definitely a formula that caught on quickly.

So, to take a closer look at the founding and early years of the Kansas Council for the Humanities, the precursor to Humanities Kansas, I spoke with Marion Cott. Cott was the first executive director of the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, from 1972 - 2006.

When the Kansas Committee for the Humanities was forming, Marion Cott had just moved to Topeka when her husband, Ken, started a job at Washburn University. Both Marion and Ken did their graduate training in Mexican and Latin American history. So as Marion tells it, because the school did not need two professors in the same field, she was not offered a job at the school.

But this made possible her involvement in the Kansas Committee for the Humanities. Marion tells the story of how she was hired.

[End Music]

Marion Cott: The committee was first organized by a group of five men who were somehow selected by the National Endowment for the Humanities to participate and help organize in Kansas a new experimental program that was being promoted by the NEH. One of them was named Arthur Zook, Dr. Arthur Zook, and he at that time the president of Kansas Independent Colleges Association. But he had been the former president of Kansas Wesleyan University.

Someone at NEH knew Arthur Zook from some past experience, called him and asked if he would help select people who would come to Washington, hear about this program and see if they wanted to participate. So, he selected four other people. But they went to Washington and said, “OK, well, we’ll see if we can do what you’re asking us to do.” But they needed a staff person would write a proposal to, if approved, would give the initial funding for the programs to get underway. So, Dr. Zook knew the dean of liberal arts at Washburn University, whose name was Robert Haywood. Dr. Zook said to Dr. Haywood, “Do you know anybody who would be willing to work part-time and could write and had some academic training?” And I always laugh and say, “Who better to fill that job than an overeducated, underemployed faculty wife?”

Kara Heitz: And in the first year, the Kansas Committee for the Humanities was given $125,000 which they distributed to 14 programs across the entire state. I asked Marion Cott how they made those grant decisions and what kind of guidance they received from NEH?

Marion Cott: It’s always struck me that – and particularly as the program grew and developed over the years – how little guidance NEH provided for organizing the state, what became the state-based humanities programs. All we were told was this to be a program that would bring together academic humanists, as they called humanities scholars at that time, with a general public to talk about issues of public policy so that people in the community could begin to see the historical context or the ethical dimensions behind an issue that they were discussing. And it was supposed to be a public issue that they could actually vote on. In those early days, it was really a highly experimental thing that we were involved in.

Kara Heitz: Kind of sounds similar to how the NEH received so little direction in its early years from Congress. But like the NEH, that hands off approach ultimately was a positive thing.

Marion Cott: I chuckle when I say this, but I think one key to our success is that we were also exceedingly naïve that…at the beginning, we didn’t have any idea of what we were doing. So, we we too experimented a lot. And, um, that that leaves you open to new ideas and to not being in a little tunnel vision because you don’t know exactly what the problems are are going to be.

VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE MODEL

Kara Heitz: Part of the experimental nature of early state humanities organizations like KCH was the volunteer committee itself. In fact, the committee composition was one of the reasons that the model worked so well. So what was so magical about these volunteer committees?

Elizabeth Lynn explains:

So, I think the committees brought together people who didn’t know each other, who really enjoyed the diversity of this new this new board they found themselves on. A second part of it was that these were both “and” people, these were people who both had a passion for ideas and a love of the pragmatic of the programmatic of the operational of thinking about how do you bring an idea into life and into conversation in the community? So, they shared that pragmatic and that intellectual quality. And the third was that they they cared were generally deeply committed citizens across the the scholar citizen divide. They cared about their communities. They have that in common and they were excited by the mission.

Kara Heitz: So how did the volunteer committee idea work in the Kansas context? To learn more about the board in these early years of the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, I spoke

with Deanell Tacha, a board member in the 1970s. She is also the former Dean of the Pepperdine University School of Law and a retired United States Courts of Appeals judge. A Kansas native, she was on the faculty at the University of Kansas Law School in the 1970s and 1980s.

Deanell Tacha: I was asked to go on the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, as it was then known, shortly after I came to Lawrence, and I know it was because I had been involved. I was an American Studies major, and though I was by then a law professor, I was still deeply interested in how the humanities could speak to the issues that were confronting us then, still confront us, and how we could use those stories of history and of other civilizations to help us talk about the issues that we confront. And I saw the Kansas Committee for the Humanities as a wonderful lens or a vehicle through which to do that. And over the years, there've been some really magnificent Kansans on that committee and now Humanities Kansas.

Kara Heitz: I asked Deanell Tacha about the diversity of the board when she was on it.

Deanell Tacha: …Now I was an academic. But we had newspaper people. We had doctors. We had, oh, you name it, certainly local historians, authors. Over time, there have been all kinds of folk, as some politicians and good ones did a great job. So, I totally agree that the diversity and commitment of those boards. No one got paid, that's for sure. And yet we worked and worked, and my memory is you just never missed a meeting. And then you studied those grants and you it was a hard job, but but enjoyable, enjoyable and a lot of that give credit where it's due. The staff expected it of you and you were kind of proud your state was involved in it and you were kind of proud to have this vehicle to work on such important issues that sort of go through the fabric of society, no matter where you are.

Kara Heitz: So what was being created in Kansas and in other states through these volunteer committees was a network of engaged citizens from a range of professions and backgrounds, that all shared a passion for their state and communities, and also shared a commitment to the humanities.

This is a big part of the recipe for the early success of the Kansas Committee for the Humanities.

And it's a recipe that continues into the present day. **Julie Mulvihill** elaborates:

Having an incredibly committed and strong and knowledgeable and curious group of Kansans leading an organization like Humanities Kansas makes all the difference in the world. I think we've had something like 225 board members to date over the last 50 years, and they have come from all across the state – farmers, ranchers, journalists, teachers librarians – I mean they've all been part of those, historians, of course, and faculty members of all kinds. This, I think, is really important to this idea of being responsive to the moment being responsive to the needs of our communities as well.

EARLY PUBLIC POLICY MANDATE

Kara Heitz: So the board has always been important to the success of Humanities Kansas. And another aspect of that success is the more "hands-off" approach that the NEH took to the state humanities councils, which allowed them to develop programming that was the best fit for their communities.

However, there was one mandate in the early years that Marion Cott mentioned previously – programming had to initially connect to issues of public policy. Remember, the NEH is trying to cultivate "wisdom and vision" in the American citizenry. So perhaps that necessitated some guidance?

Elizabeth Lynn calls this era "The great public policy experiment."

So early on, NEH recognized, the volunteer committees were the way to go, but they were also a little unsure that just putting together the humanities and public life was enough. They felt like there needed to be something else in the mix to really engage citizens. And so, they included public policy in the recipe. So, they said you can have a volunteer committee. But you need to focus your programs on public policy issues, they thought that was more likely to engage the public. But these public policy experiments really focused on the humanist scholar as an expert in whatever the public policy area was and sought to bring that expertise into the public policy arena.

Kara Heitz: So how did the great public policy experiment play out in Kansas? Even though the 1970s were turbulent times in America, the NEH thought that it was in places like Kansas that these kinds of conversations might actually work.

Marion Cott describes in more detail what the NEH was thinking.

It was a very divided and tense time in the country, lots of other divisions and disappointments and angers on people's part. And interestingly, when you look at those early 13 states, we were mainly small population states. States out in the middle of the country: Oklahoma, Kansas, South Dakota, I could go one like that. But places where, as NEH told me later, places where they still felt conversation was possible, because they were. If you went to the coast or to the big diverse population states, then the issues, just like now, become harder to talk about it. So, they were looking for places where they thought public issues were still could be talked about in public.

Kara Heitz: And the kinds of conversations that the Kansas Committee for the Humanities was facilitating in the 1970s were on some pretty heavy issues.

Marion Cott: So, when you look back at that early list, I mean, my goodness. We had various projects about prison reform, about use of the death penalty, for example. Water was we did project projects on the water and whose water is it many times and land use issues, what role corporate farming might have in the state versus the future of the family farm. All women's issues. Oh, my goodness. Yes, we did a whole bunch of programs about women's issues.

And I personally loved this direct connection to public policy and public issues. I thought it made the committee relevant. We had a role to play. It wasn't just we were talking, you know, ivory tower stuff. We were up there on the ground trying to help people understand an important issue in their community. But I don't know whether we could do that these days.

Kara Heitz: The NEH did drop this mandate after a few years. And state humanities councils have continued to use the humanities to encourage discussion on critical issues, but with more freedom to experiment with how to best navigate these discussions in their communities.

Elizabeth Lynn makes this point.

The Great Public Policy Experiment was interesting and and laid the groundwork for some very important later programs. But in the moment, the requirement that every program had to in some way address a public policy issue proved just a little bit burdensome, and those public policy titled programs and councils in some cases didn't necessarily attract the public.

So, after a couple of years, NEH lifted that requirement. Once NEH lifts its public policy mandate in the mid-1970s, these newly formed state humanities councils are freer to interpret their mission of bringing the humanities to the American public. But that still requires some interpretation of that mission, some some reading of the community's needs and imagination about how the humanities can speak to those needs and address them.

Kara Heitz: One of my favorite Kansas Committee for the Humanities programs from the 1970s is a great example of how to imaginatively use the humanities to address "hot-button" issues.

So just to set this up – one of the key public policy issues in the 1970s was the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, banning discrimination based on sex. (Side note: check out episode 3 of this podcast for an in-depth exploration of the fight over the ERA in Kansas.) So many programs funded by Kansas Committee for the Humanities in the early to mid-1970s connected directly with issues of equal rights for women and changing cultural ideas about gender roles.

So how do you get Kansas communities to engage with what was a very contentious and divisive issue at the time?

Deanell Tacha tells the story.

FREE TO BE YOU AND ME

My principal example of that is what is now famously the road trip that we took. I believe it was 13 communities. We gave a grant and then I became very much a part of it, I assume it was to KU because Emily Taylor, who was the dean of women here and I, and some of Emily's assistants, along with some KU and I think they were drama students, did snippets from it was called "Free to Be You and Me."

Music: Clip from "Free to Be You and Me" song
"There's a land that I see where the children are free; And I say it ain't far to this land from where we are; Take my hand, come with me, where the children are free; Come with me, take my hand, and we'll live…"

Deanell Tacha: And it was a very cute and that's the right word, cute vehicle for it because they would do a little vignette. And then I and whoever the other moderator was and some local people, we always involved, oh, the local mayor or a local city council person or the head of the chamber or all of the above in these panel discussions that followed the vignettes. So that you'd get the local committee community involved in discussing whatever the issues were.

Voiceover: The Salina Journal, March 25, 1972
"The Salina Journal, March, 25th, 1972. The evolving roles of men and women in Kansas were discussed Monday night …

The program, co-sponsored by the Salina branch of the American Association of University Women and the Kansas Committee for the Humanities, was designed to 'shed light, not heat' on current public policies and issues regarding the rights of men and women and their roles.
A drama troupe from the University of Kansas opened the show with a production, 'Free To Be You and Me,' which set the tone for the panel discussion …
The play dealt with the stereotyped roles society had saddled upon men and women … Some questions asked were: Why shouldn't a girl be allowed to be a tomboy? Why shouldn't a boy play with dolls if he desires?
'It was a discussion,' said Mrs. Emet Stewart, coordinator of Salina AAUW. 'No conclusions were drawn. It wasn't for that purpose. It was just to bring light on the subject.'"

Deanell Tacha: It was a very, in my view, effective way to raise in kind of humble ways, what we mean by thinking through gender roles. And that was the whole purpose of "Free to Be You and Me" was to get us to think that I think we could use a little of that now, a little humor in it because it was partly funny. It was partly it was very entertaining. And then you'd always get in the local community, a local twist on it. You get somebody's story about something and then you could talk it in terms of this little play or vignette.

Music: Clip from "Free to Be You and Me" song
"Every boy in this land grows to be his own man; In this land, every girl grows to be her own woman; Take my hand, come with me where the children are free…"

Deanell Tacha: And that was fully funded by the Kansas Committee for the Humanities. And that has always been, for me, a kind of a bellwether example of how you take a kind of humble program, pull the local community in and get them talking about the issue that is really a humanities issue. It is an issue of expectations of the people in your community. It is how we accommodate very great differences among us. And so that was that was my sort of poster child for programming.

Kara Heitz: Ok first, can I just say – that this is the most 70s thing ever! In case you don't know, "Free To Be You and Me," was an album released in 1972, and then a play and a TV special, which were all tremendously popular in the 1970s.

It was produced by actress Marlo Thomas, and used music, poetry, and sketch comedy to teach children they could be anything they wanted to, regardless of things like race or gender. It celebrated the potential of all individuals.

Marlo Thomas got a bunch of different celebrities to perform on the project, including Roberta Flack, Carol Channing, Alan Alda, Diana Ross, Michael Jackson, and my dad's all-time-favorite performer, Mel Brooks. I had the album when I was a kid in the early 80s, and I played it all the time.

But not only is driving around to towns in Kansas, with theater students performing the show, in order to discuss changing gender roles, a very 70s thing to do, this is a great example of how the Kansas Committee for the Humanities creatively used the humanities to foster community discussions about the pressing issues of the day. And the point was not to come to a conclusion, it was to create a conversation.

Music: Clip from "Free to Be You and Me" song
"And you and me are free to be; And you and me are free to be; And you and me are free to be you and me"

Kara Heitz: This work of "shedding light, not heat" through telling our stories, expressing our identities, discussing our values … this is the work that Humanities Kansas has engaged in for five decades strong.

SEGMENT 3 / CONCLUSION: Humanities Kansas Today and Into the Future

Kara Heitz: Julie Mulvihill, the executive director of Humanities Kansas, discusses this continuity between 1972 and 2022.

HUMANITIES KANSAS TODAY AND ITS FUTURE

Julie Mulvihill: I was doing a little research before this interview, and I was captured by this story that in June of 1972, the then-Kansas Committee for the Humanities put out a press release, basically saying, for the first time ever, we have money available for grants, and we're interested in proposals that have something to do with public policy and the humanities. And they had 62 proposals roll in that first year from an organization that no one had ever heard of ever before. I think the requests total something like $325,00.

Kara Heitz [listing the programs that got funded]: "The Farmer Doesn't Live Here Anymore, The Empty Prairie, Rural to Urban, Equal Rights for Women, Ethnic Awareness in Southwest Kansas, Family Values in a Changing Kansas, The Community Forum of Kansas, Human Resources for Economic Development …"

Julie Mulvihill: At that moment in time, I'm sure it became crystal clear to the board of directors and to the staff, Marion Cott, the executive director at the time, that this work was needed, it was important and it was urgent. And I feel the same way today – that this work is meaningful. It's urgent, it's needed, it's important. The people in 1972 who applied for those grants represented concerned citizens, library directors, community colleges, universities. It's the exact same people who are still invested in this idea that our communities matter. We want to use the tools of the humanities to talk about sense of place, identity, to grapple with some bigger topics, to to really think about those big ideas.

Kara Heitz: So, if you go to Humanities Kansas' website today, you'll see a lot of references to joining quote "the movement of ideas." I talked with Tracy Quillin, the associate director of Humanities Kansas, about this tagline. What exactly is the movement of ideas and how does it connect to the humanities?

Tracy Quillin: The movement of ideas is about sparking conversations, sharing stories to spark conversations and generate insights and ideas. And for me, that's what the humanities do and the humanities are built on stories, stories that we share and we share those stories, we get conversations going and then we exchange our ideas.

But one of the things we wanted to do with our website and with our messaging was to show that the humanities were not limited to the college classroom or the museum lecture hall, but that the humanities are part of our everyday and they happen over coffee with a friend. They happen at the dinner table. They happen when you're reading a story to a child – that those

discussions around culture, literature, history, the humanities are an important part of our everyday life.

Kara Heitz: I asked Tracy Quillin to elaborate more on some examples of how Humanities Kansas does this kind of work.

Tracy Quillin: When I think about what's fulfilling about our work, I think about when we get reports back, evaluations back, from our partners across the states and the stories that they share about the impact in their community. And it might be something like, "We went to a book discussion. It was a cold night, but a lot of people came out. We had the best discussion about this book. Some people like it. Some people didn't like it, but we all agreed that it was good to talk about it, and the people that didn't like it are going to go back and read it again." It's those moments – and they're not isolated to one community – it happens time and time again. We get this feedback

Or when we host the Smithsonian exhibition tour across the state. We know that people want to come see the Smithsonian, but what people end up talking about is the local exhibitions that each library and museum puts together to tell their community story that relates to the Smithsonian exhibit. So, it's those moments of impact knowing that being able to have those discussions about literature or present your history, talk about your history, having those shared moments really changes people's and enriches people's lives, and I think that's the reason that I get out of bed in the morning. That's the reason why I come to work, because it's continuing to make those opportunities possible.

[Music Starts]

Kara Heitz: The United States is quite unusual in having both a national humanities agency and a plethora of independent state humanities agencies fully devoted to bringing these opportunities to communities across the country.

The historical context of the founding of these organizations – fighting an ideological war with a foreign enemy, the contradictions of American democracy, fears of new technologies – is a complex set of circumstances that, in many ways, still resonates with us today. Perhaps even more so in contemporary times.

But central to the mission of these organizations – to Humanities Kansas – is the idea of wisdom and vision. And while that phrase may not explicitly be used as much now as it was in the 1960s and 1970s, I think it's still at the root of why we should be telling each other our stories, sparking conversations, and creating a movement of ideas.

Julie Mulvihill reflects on this phrase and what it means for the present and future of Humanities Kansas.

[Music Ends]

Going back to this question of wisdom and vision. It's such a beautiful phrase, right? Because we're really thinking about how do we look back to project forward? Right? You know, I think about growing up in a rural community, in a farming family when you are out in the field and this may not be appropriate or even essential in the same way today as it was when I was growing up, but this whole idea is that when you were getting ready to prepare your fields or plant your

fields right, the idea was is that you get in your tractor and you start heading off towards the horizon, right? Because you want to plant in a straight line, but you can't plant in a straight line if you're only facing forward, you check back, right? You know, how am I doing? What did I learn from this past thing that I plowed or tilled or whatever it might be? And this is the idea of looking back to project forward, right? You know, you can't plant a field without looking back or projecting forward. And it's that whole thing is that you have to pull from history to plan ahead for your for your future. It's that wisdom and vision piece. That's how I really see that our decisions that we make today in our jobs, in the voting booth, in the grocery store, in our conversations are based on who we are, where we came from, what we know, and that informs everything we do. That's our history. How do we connect that to our sense of place? How do we connect that to our pride of place? How do we think about that in terms of what does that mean in terms of our self as a community? This is what I want for me and my family? What do we need to survive and thrive in our community? And those actions that we make then help us think about this whole idea of American democracy. What is American democracy? Well, it's people making decisions that make sense for our communities, right? It's all intertwined. And I know I'm oversimplifying it, but there is something, really, I think, poignant. It's a really wonderful call of action for all of us that our own democracy for our nation demands this of us, this sense of who we are, where we've come from, what we've valued over time and across generations, and how we're going to use that knowledge to prepare for the generations to come.

Kara Heitz: And especially now, at a time in our history when it feels like we can't talk across divides, and our democracy is suffering for it, the work of the public humanities is more critical than ever. I think we all need to join the movement of ideas, share our stories, and listen.

Thank you for listening to this first episode of *Kansas 1972*, a podcast celebrating Humanities Kansas' 50th anniversary by telling stories from Kansas history from five decades ago.

Next episode, we'll explore stories of Kansans who advocated for change in the early 1970s. You'll hear about a group of women who occupied a building on KU campus to demand childcare and fight against gender inequality; student walk-outs and lettuce boycotts organized by the Chicano movement in Topeka; and a pioneer in disability rights who used the courts to make Lawrence more accessible to all its residents.

Catch you on the flip side!

SERIES OUTRO

Humanities Kansas is an independent nonprofit leading a movement of ideas to strengthen Kansas communities and our democracy. Since 1972, HK's pioneering programs, grants, and partnerships have documented and shared stories to spark conversations and generate insights. Together with statewide partners and supporters, HK inspires all Kansans to draw on history, literature, and culture to enrich their lives and to serve the communities and state we all proudly call home. Join the movement of ideas at humanitieskansas.org.

END