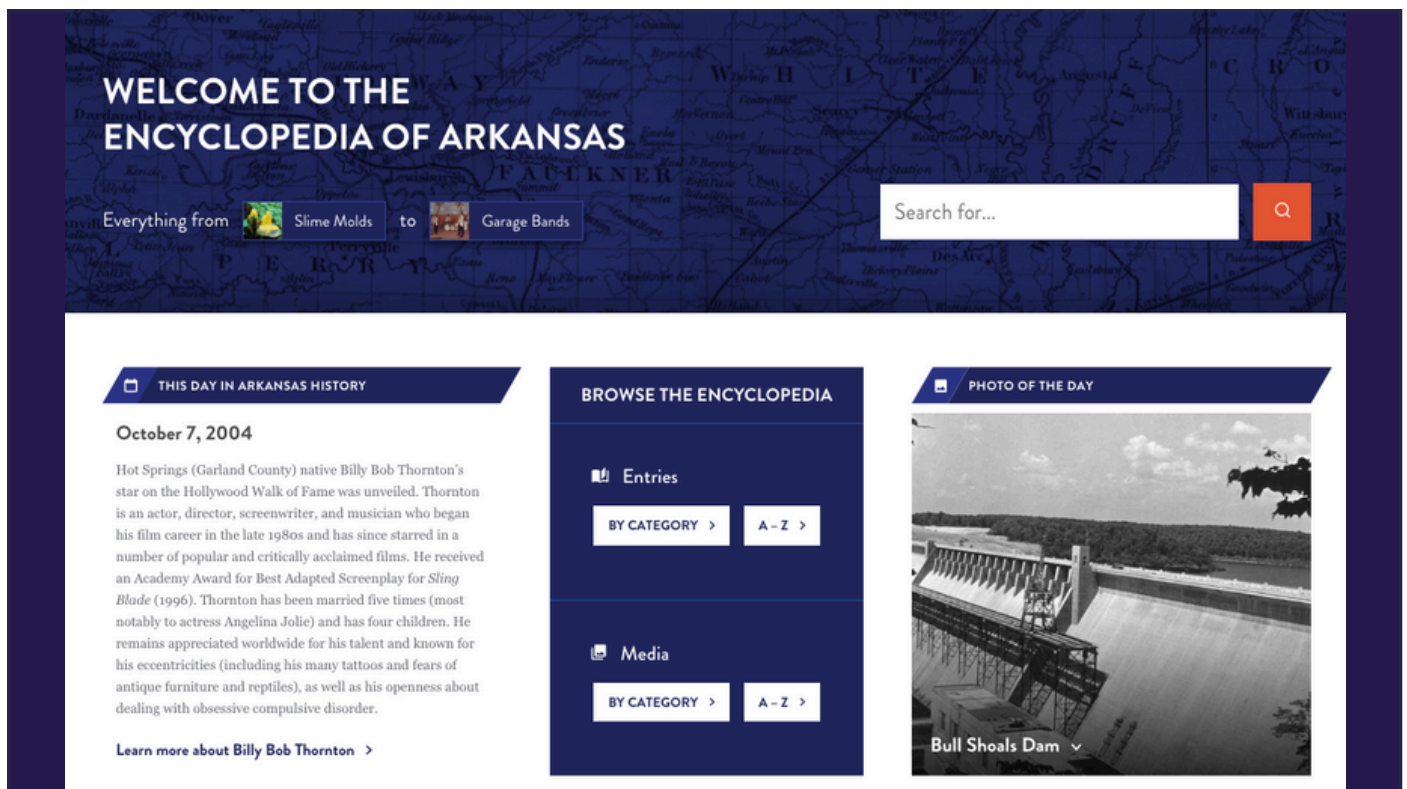


10 ARKANSAN WOMEN IN THE ARTS

Whether you're a born and raised Arkansan, lived here for 30 plus years, or recently arrived to the Natural State, this place we call home has a rich, diverse, and unique history.

Since the website was launched in the mid-2000s, the staff of the Encyclopedia of Arkansas has tried to make sure that the story of this place is documented in an accessible digital format.

This free resource has almost everything you might want to know about the 25th state. And the EOA staff are in the habit of finding the most fascinating of those stories to tell.



The CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas launched in 2006 with 700 entries and 900 pieces of media.

In 2019 we switched platforms from the original proprietary website to a newly designed WordPress site.

In August 2022 we undertook a further redesign of the home page, search function, and user experience features.

You can stop by the EOA for tidbits like THIS DAY IN ARKANSAS HISTORY and PHOTO OF THE DAY...

As well as trending entries and what's been newly updated. (And here's a hint, we are updating all the time!)

[ALL ENTRIES](#)
[FLOOD OF 1927](#)

≈7,600 entries

Flood of 1927

AKA: Great Flood of 1927
AKA: Mississippi River Flood of 1927
AKA: 1927 Flood

The Flood of 1927 was the most destructive and costly flood in Arkansas history and one of the worst in the history of the nation. It afflicted Arkansas with a greater amount of devastation, both human and monetary, than the other affected states in the **Mississippi River** Valley. It had social and political ramifications which changed the way Arkansas, as well as the nation, viewed relief from natural disasters and the responsibility of government in aiding the victims, echoing the **Hurricane Katrina** disaster in the present day.

In largely agrarian Arkansas, the Flood of 1927 covered about 6,600 square miles, with thirty-six out of seventy-five Arkansas counties under water up to thirty feet deep in places. In Arkansas, more people were affected by the floodwaters (over 350,000), more farmland inundated (over two million acres), more Red Cross camps were needed (eighty of the 154 total), and more families received relief than any other state (41,243). In Arkansas, almost 100 people died, more than any state except Mississippi. In monetary terms, the losses in Arkansas (totaling over \$1 million in 1927 dollars for relief and recovery) surpassed any other affected state.

The Flood of 1927 had its origins both in nature and in man. In the late 1920s, technological advances kept pace with the growing economy. Heavy machinery enabled the construction of a vast system of **levees** to hold back rivers that tended to overrun their banks. Drainage projects opened up new, low-lying lands that had once been forests but had been left bare by the **timber industry**.

ENTRY Flood of 1927

TIME PERIOD
Early Twentieth Century (1901 - 1940)

CATEGORY
Environment / Land and Resources / Natural Disasters

TYPE
Event

LESSON PLANS
1927 Flood (Grades 5-8)
Arkansas's Top Ten Events (Grades 6-12)
Hard Times (Grades 7-12)
Mucket Mania (Grades 6-12)
Rollin' on the River (Grades 5-12)
Southern Flood Blues (Grades 9-12)

We currently have about 7,600 entries online.

We are often compared to Wikipedia but we are not crowd-edited.

All our content is peer-reviewed and staff edited. That means you can use the CALS EOA knowing it has the same accuracy and legitimacy as a published book or article.

Anyone can write for the EOA but all entries are reviewed by other scholars, fact checked, and edited for grammar and spelling.

- 
- **EVERY** incorporated community
 - **Government officials**
 - **Civil rights organizations from NAACP to CLOB**
 - **EVERY** military action including the smallest skirmishes
 - **Wildlife, flowers, plants**

WE HAVE ENTRIES ON ...

Every incorporated community, hundreds of unincorporated ones and always seeking more

ENTRIES ON

Government officials from those who served in Congress, to Arkansas constitutional officers, to individual state legislators, even significant sheriffs, mayors, and county judges

Civil rights organizations from the national level, such as the NAACP, to the local level, such as CLOB (Council for Liberation of Blacks)

Military events from the Civil War, ranging from major battles (Pea Ridge) down to small local skirmishes; if someone in blue and someone in gray met in the woods between 1861 and 1865 we probably have an entry documenting it.

AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT - birds, fish, mammals but also fungi, lichens, ferns, jellyfishes

AND WE ARE ALWAYS DEVELOPING MORE...

Developing entries on every film set or filmed in Arkansas, as well as every book, television show, and even individual episodes set in the state (Search: X-Files)



Produced by a public library

230 countries

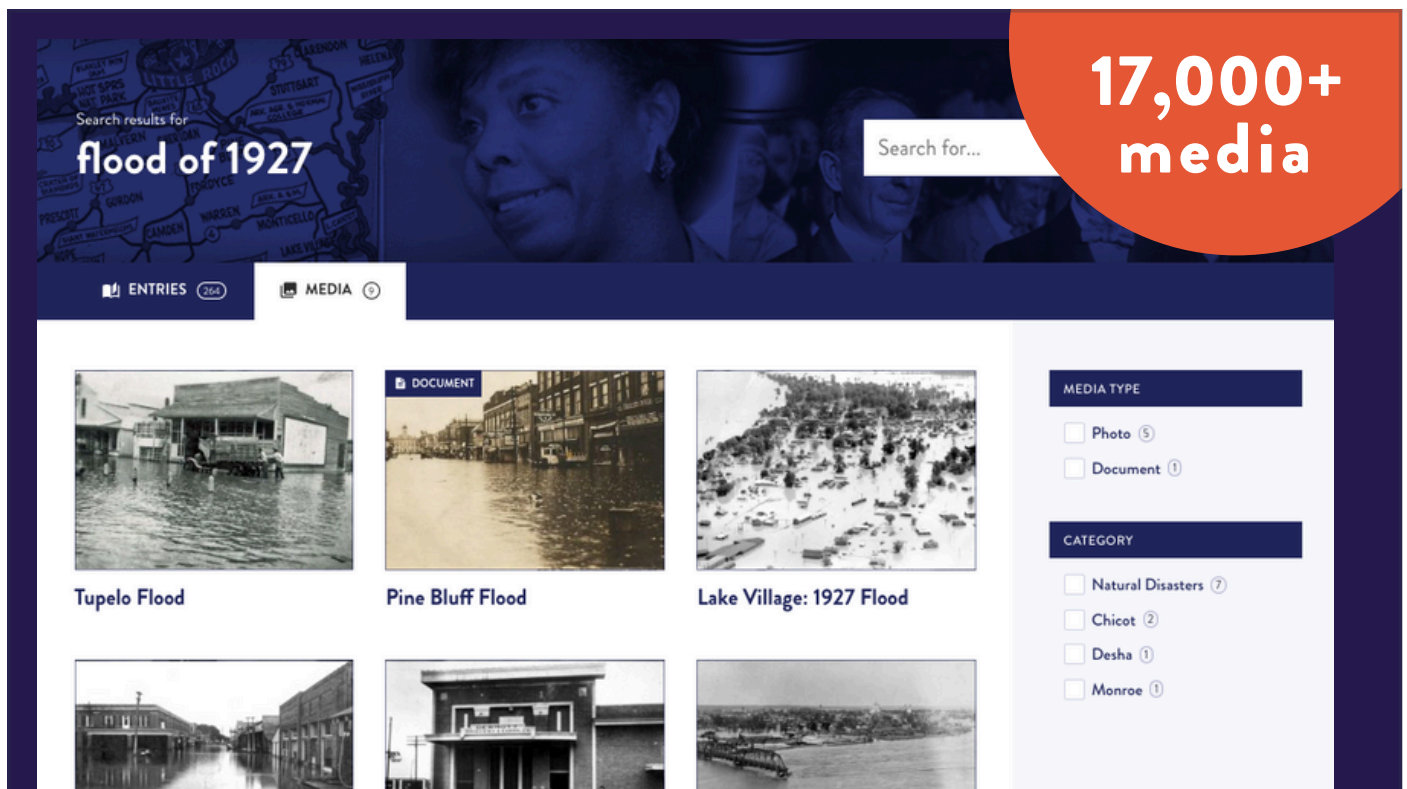
EVERY continent

We are unique in that we are produced by a public library.

Our site is used by government agencies and officials, students, media, genealogists, journalists, historians (local and national).

Users have come from every continent (including Antarctica) and more than 230 countries.

This year so far we've averaged approximately 194,000 users per month.



AND DO WE HAVE MEDIA...

We currently have about 17,000 piece of media published on the site.

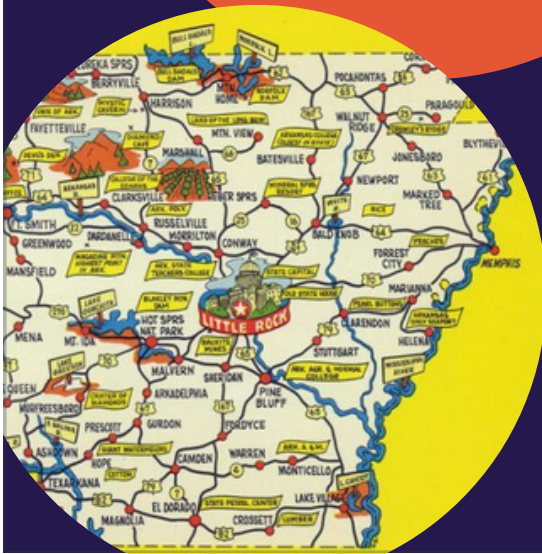
We have worked with archives, libraries, museums, and universities around the state and the country to make sure that the EOA has visual images to illustrate our entries.

BUT THERE IS ALWAYS MORE TO FIND...

We accept submissions from everyday citizens of any photos you've taken we can pair with an entry. For example we love photos of water towers from small towns.

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THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ARKANSAS



10 ARKANSAN WOMEN IN THE ARTS



Jenny Eakin Delony Rice (1866–1949) was the first woman artist from Arkansas to rise to national and international prominence as a painter and was the founder of collegiate art education in Arkansas.

Jenny Delony was born in Washington (Hempstead County) in 1866. In 1885, her family moved to Nashville (Howard County) and in 1890, they moved to Little Rock (Pulaski County).

Delony studied art in Virginia, Ohio, Missouri, France, and Italy. In 1896, women were admitted to the École des Beaux Arts in Paris for the first time and she matriculated. She was also one of the first women to study artistic anatomy at the École de Médecine.

Delony married twice. Her first husband died but she kept the surname Rice. Her second marriage lasted 1910 to the early 1920s. Rice established her first professional art studio in Little Rock. Her second studio occupied suites twenty-eight and twenty-nine of the Masonic Temple on Main Street.

During the 1880s and 1890s, she painted portraits of many distinguished citizens. She represented the state regionally and nationally at various exhibitions. She won premiums for many works exhibited. Rice taught art in Virginia, after which she was the first Director of Art at the University of Arkansas (UA) in Fayetteville (Washington County). She founded the art department and the first baccalaureate art program in the state.

Rice left Fayetteville to set up a studio in New York in 1900. She was chosen to exhibit in Berlin in

1904. In 1905, her portrait of the “richest woman in America,” Hetty Green, was featured in the New York Times, granting Rice instant celebrity.

Around 1935, Rice retired from the New York art scene and returned to Little Rock. She had a studio in her home and continued to paint. She died of cancer in 1949.

Examples of Rice’s work can be viewed at: the Historic Arkansas Museum, the Arkansas State Archives, the Arkansas State Capitol, Historic Washington State Park, and Trinity Episcopal Church in Little Rock.



Ruth Asawa (1926–2013), an internationally acclaimed artist and advocate for arts education, gained renown for her distinctive biomorphic looped-wire sculptures and public commissions. A second-generation Japanese American, she was interned with her family during World War II at the Rohwer Relocation Center in Rohwer (Desha County).

Ruth Aiko Asawa was born in California in 1926. Her parents were immigrants from Japan. In 1942 the Asawa family was forced to go first to a temporary camp in California, where they lived for six months in two horse stalls, and then to the Rohwer internment camp in Arkansas. During her time at the Santa Anita racetrack, she received art lessons from Disney animators who were also being interned there.

Asawa won a scholarship to the Milwaukee State Teachers College and studied to be an art teacher but racism made it impossible for her to secure the teaching assignment necessary to graduate, and she was denied her bachelor's and teaching certificate.

She left to study art at the experimental Black Mountain College in NC. There Asawa met her future husband, Albert Lanier. The interracial couple married against the wishes of their parents and moved to CA.

While raising her children, Asawa would wake up early and stay up late developing her art style. Early shows included an exhibition at the MoMA in NYC.

During the 1960s, Asawa focused on public art commissions and creating public programs. After producing several large-scale works—including her bronze mermaid fountain in San Francisco's Ghirardelli Square—she was appointed to the arts commission. After serving 8 years she was appointed to the president's Arts Committee and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) task force.

Asawa founded the San Francisco School of the Arts in 1982, which was officially renamed in her honor in 2010. The Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville (Benton County) has three Asawa works. Asawa died in 2013. The USPS released stamps of her sculptures in 2020.



Ceramist, sculptor, and teacher Helen Ann Evans Phillips (1938–2013) played a major role in the development of contemporary crafts in Arkansas. Phillips' work included sculptural forms as well as functional objects such as cups, bowls, and platters.

Helen Evans was born in 1938 in Ohio. She grew up in Tennessee. In 1958, she married Joe Phillips and they had one daughter. Phillips taught art in the Memphis public school system and studied ceramics at the Memphis Academy of Art before receiving her BS in painting and art education at Memphis State University.

The family moved to Okinawa where Phillips learned Japanese ceramic techniques and taught art at the Kubasaki High School. Phillips and her family relocated many times, and she taught in several different locations: Germany; Hawaii; California; and Alabama. In HI she also attended the University of Hawaii for graduate studies in Asian ceramics. In AL she attended a workshop given by a British potter and a Nigerian potter. Phillips attended the University of Florida at Gainesville and earned an MFA in ceramics and drawing.

In 1976, the family moved to Arkansas, where Phillips joined the art faculty at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) in Conway (Faulkner County). For 25 years, she headed the ceramics department at UCA while residing in Little Rock (Pulaski County). Phillips revisited Okinawa with her daughter. In recognition of her work, Phillips was awarded a fellowship by the Arkansas Arts Council. She began to study Jungian dream interpretation.

In 1989, Phillips and her husband divorced. Her work moved away from functional objects. In 1992, she traveled to the Ivory Coast of west Africa to work with village women potters. Phillips's

sojourns in Okinawa and Africa had a profound effect on her art.

After a distinguished career as an artist and teacher, Phillips retired in 2001. In 2005, Phillips and a friend converted a building of the “Old Bruno School” complex in Bruno (Marion County) into a home, studio, and workshop. Phillips died in 2013.



Sheila Holland Cotton (1947–) is an artist noted for her richly painted oils embracing the visual experience of Arkansas. Her scenes of agricultural and rural landscapes give a sense of isolation. mysticism in Cotton’s art links her to the modern school of Magic Realism and the legacy of artists Carroll Cloar and Al Allen Jr. of 20th century Arkansas.

Sheila Holland was born in 1947 in Morrilton (Conway County). In 1950, her family moved to North Little Rock (Pulaski County). Her parents’ interest in travel and art exposed her to important public art collections and museums in the US. Summer schools in France and Mexico enriched her artistic thinking. Cotton attended the University of Arkansas (UA) in Fayetteville (Washington County). In 1969, she married Roger Cotton and they moved to Canada. There, the Cottons bought a small island farm. The marriage ended in divorce in 1983 but Cotton kept her first husband’s name.

Cotton worked briefly as an editor before she started painting. She showed her initial pieces to the curator of the New Brunswick Museum. In 1976, they sponsored a tour of twenty of her paintings. The success of her traveling exhibition resulted in representation in galleries in Toronto, Montreal, and Atlantic Canada.

In 1984, Cotton relocated to Florida where her parents had retired. In 1985, she married Oliver Bardes. During this period she painted Florida scenes. In 2005, she moved to Little Rock (Pulaski County). From 2007 she concentrated on southern agrarian environments—scarecrows, small churches, cotton fields—to elevate the ordinary. Early attention was drawn to her work by art journalist Ellis Widner, who, in 2007, featured Cotton in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette’s High

Profile section, describing Cotton as “one of our state’s best painters.”

Canada and Florida museums and galleries still feature her work. In Arkansas, her paintings are in many hospitals and private collections. Her work is displayed in the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts Foundation Collection and the South Arkansas Arts Center in El Dorado (Union County).



Maya Angelou (1928–2014) was an internationally renowned bestselling author, poet, actor, performer, and a pioneering activist for the rights of African Americans and of women. Her first published book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1970), was an autobiographical account of her childhood, including the ten years she lived in Stamps (Lafayette County). She was among the first inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in 1993. She held over fifty honorary university degrees and many other awards recognizing her accomplishments in the arts and her service to human rights.

Angelou acted, directed, wrote screenplays, and performed opera. She put out a musical album; wrote for newspapers in Egypt and Ghana; and published autobiographies, poetry collections, a book of essays, plays, a screenplay, and a cookbook. She studied modern dance with Alvin Ailey. A collection of her poems was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. She was nominated for an Emmy Award. She appeared on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Good Morning America*. She started a Hallmark greeting cards line. She won a Grammy for Best Spoken Word Album. Angelou was awarded the National Medal of Arts. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama. She received the Literarian Award from the National Book Foundation and the Mailer Prize for Lifetime Achievement.

Angelou was born Marguerite Annie Johnson in 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri. She had one sibling, an older brother who called her “Maya.” She and her brother lived with family in Arkansas for much of their childhood. It was discovered that Marguerite had been sexually molested by her mother’s boyfriend, who was later found dead. The eight-year-old girl felt guilty, believing her voice had caused the death of the rapist, so she became mute and remained so for several years.

Three weeks after graduating high school, Marguerite gave birth to her son. From age 16, in order to support herself and her son, she worked in many capacities: cocktail waitress, dancer, cook, and sex worker—all before the age of 25.

She married a Greek sailor, Tosh Angelos. Before they divorced she created her professional name combining a variation of his surname with her brother's nickname for her: Maya Angelou.

She was familiar with Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and South African freedom fighter and civil rights advocate Vusumzi Make, a leader of the Pan Africanist Congress, with whom she moved to Egypt. When she and her son left Egypt for Ghana, she met Malcolm X. While residing in Africa, she studied several languages: Fanti (a West African language), French, Italian, Spanish, and Arabic. Upon returning to the US, Angelou rejoined the civil rights movement. In response to the assassinations of MLK Jr and Malcolm X, Angelou began writing her life story.

Angelou read poems at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton; the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations; and the Million Man March in 1995. A park and a post office have been named in her honor; her likeness has been featured on a USPS stamp, a US quarter, and a Barbie doll.



Kathryne Bess Hail Travis (1894–1972) was an artist and teacher who was especially known for her still-life paintings of flowers. She worked in pastels, watercolors, and oils. When on location, she typically made quick sketches or took photographs and then worked her best ideas into fully realized paintings in oil. Known for her expertise in flowers and plants, Travis had performed extensive research on the symbolism and lore associated with various flora. Many of her still-life paintings featured wildflowers from the locales where she worked. Travis was also known for her collection of quilts that she acquired during her many trips to Arkansas to visit family and paint. She was interested in the patterns and the history and symbolism associated with quilts.

Kathryne Bess Hail was born in Ozark (Franklin County) in 1894. She attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC). Hail briefly opened a studio in Fort Smith (Sebastian County). In 1916, she married artist Olin Herman Travis, a former instructor of AIC. The Travises worked in the Chicago area before relocating to Dallas where they established the Dallas Art Institute (DAI). In the summer of 1927, the Travises established the Travis Ozark Summer Art School at an abandoned sawmill near Cass (Franklin County), not far from where Kathryn was born. Classes were open to residents of Arkansas and surrounding states.

In 1930 and 1936, Travis' paintings of wisteria and of roses were featured on the cover of Holland magazine. In 1934, the Travises divorced. Travis worked in CA, WA, OR, CO, and AK. During this period, she returned to paint periodically in AR, TX, and LA.

Travis moved back to Dallas, opened an art gallery, and took a position as the head of the art department at the Arts Center Studio School. She also offered art instruction at her own studio.

Later she opened the Kathryne Hail Travis Summer School of Painting in NM. She died there in 1972 and was cremated; her ashes were scattered in Ozark.



Elsie Mari Bates Freund (1912–2001) was a studio art jeweler, watercolorist, and textile artist. In 1941, she and her husband, Louis Freund, established an art school in Eureka Springs (Carroll County) and were major players in preserving and making that town a haven for writers and artists. She was a member of the National Watercolor Society but is most remembered as a pioneer: her unique jewelry remains her most important work and is represented in more than a dozen prestigious museums in the US, as well as a half dozen national and international museums in the UK and Europe. She was awarded the State of Arkansas Certificate of Recognition.

Elsie Bates was born in 1912 in Missouri. Her father was of Irish and Cherokee descent and Bates was proud of her Cherokee heritage. Bates graduated in 1929. In 1936, she met H. Louis Freund, a dashing mural painter who courted her for three years while serving as artist in residence at Hendrix College in Conway (Faulkner County). In 1939, he bought Hatchet Hall in Eureka Springs, saving it from destruction, and they married there. Then they moved in and turned it into the summer Art School of the Ozarks. Her husband taught painting and drawing while she taught weaving and design. Their influence helped create the art community for which Eureka Springs is still known.

Since the Freund school operated only during summers, Elsie was able to take ceramics classes where she began to develop her unique jewelry-making process that combined clay, glass, and silver. In 1957, the national craft outlet America House in NYC accepted Freund's jewelry, which was advertised in the New York Times and the New Yorker. After seven years Freund grew weary of filling repeat orders and discontinued the line. She and her husband went on a five-month

Mediterranean tour using the proceeds from her jewelry sales.

In 1995, the Freunds moved to Parkway Village, a retirement community in Little Rock (Pulaski County). He died in 1999; she died in 2001. Richard Earl Grimes, chief of the Cherokee Nation, conducted her service.



Caroline Shawk Brooks (1840–1913) was the first American sculptor known to have worked in and mastered the medium of butter. She became known as the “Butter Woman.”

Caroline Shawk was born in 1840 in Ohio. She married Samuel H. Brooks in 1862, and the couple moved to Helena (Phillips County) in 1866, where Samuel owned a cotton farm. In 1867, the cotton crop failed. To supplement the family income, Brooks created her first butter sculpture.

In 1873, Brooks was inspired by the verse drama "King Rene's Daughter" by Danish playwright and poet Henrik Hertz. The story revolves around the king's blind daughter, Princess Iolanthe. Brooks made a butter sculpture depicting the princess. Dreaming Iolanthe exhibited in a Cincinnati gallery in 1874 and quickly became a success, with 2,000 people paying to see it during the show's two-week run.

Following her Cincinnati debut, Brooks created many versions of Iolanthe, including a nine-pound bas-relief for the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. There she was invited into the main exhibition space to demonstrate her butter sculpting abilities. Though the invitation was considered an honor, it was probably partially motivated by skepticism. To prove she was the artist behind the butter princess, Brooks formed another head from butter in about ninety minutes. This public performance took place in front of exhibition officials and members of the press, leaving no room to doubt her prowess as a sculptor.

Brooks toured the country giving lectures and demonstrations. Her artistry eventually took her to Europe, where she traveled and worked in various studios, showcasing in Paris in 1878 and

1889. In 1893, her butter-work debuted in Chicago at the World's Columbian Exposition. Brooks stated in an interview, "I am an Arkansas artist, and proud of it." Her acclaim opened the doors for future female sculptors, which was noted by many publications during the last ten years of the artist's life. Brooks died in 1913.



Fatima Robinson (1971–)

was described in the New York Times as “one of the most sought-after hip-hop and popular music choreographers in the world” and was once named by Entertainment Weekly as one of the 100 most creative people in the entertainment world. Her dance choreography has been featured in countless music videos, movies, and television shows. She was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in 2004.

Fatima Robinson was born in 1971 in Little Rock (Pulaski County). She grew up in Los Angeles, CA. As a teen Robinson won a competition to be a dancer in a music video and followed this with additional contest wins and performances. Robinson quickly made the transition to choreography, becoming known for her ability to blend modern hip-hop styles with more classical dance moves.

In 1992, director John Singleton, who had just released the hit movie *Boyz n the Hood* the previous year, recruited Robinson to do the choreography for a Michael Jackson music video he was filming, “Remember the Time.” The video, which is nine minutes long, featured not only Jackson but also actor Eddie Murphy, model Iman, and basketball legend Magic Johnson, among others.

Working on such a high-level project launched Robinson into the upper echelons of choreography. She worked with renowned director Michael Mann on three of his movies; on the 2005 television movie *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, produced by Oprah Winfrey; TV specials such as the NAACP Image Awards and the VH1 Hip-Hop Honors; and the Oscar-nominated 2006 movie *Dreamgirls*. She has continued to choreograph music videos, being nominated several times for

the MTV Video Music Award for Best Choreography in a Music Video and winning in 2004 for the Black Eyed Peas video “Hey Mama.”

Robinson has also choreographed network television commercials for Pepsi, Gap, and Verizon. As of 2016, she was one of only two women of color to have choreographed the Academy Awards. She also choreographed *The Wiz Live!*, a live performance of *The Wiz*, which is a modern reinterpretation of *The Wizard of Oz*. It featured Arkansan Ne-Yo as the Tin Man and the production was nominated for several awards.

Robinson choreographed the 2022 Super Bowl half-time show featuring Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Mary J. Blige, Eminem, Kendrick Lamar, and 50 Cent. She also choreographed the critically acclaimed 2023 film *The Color Purple*, an adaptation of the Broadway musical based upon the bestselling Alice Walker novel.



Les Christensen (1960–) is director of the Bradbury Art Museum at Arkansas State University (ASU) in Jonesboro (Craighead County). She is best known as a sculptor who works in mixed media using everyday objects. Her artwork has been exhibited in solo and group shows throughout the United States and in Europe.

Les Christensen was born in 1960, in Omaha, Nebraska. She attended the University of Iowa, where she received a BFA in sculpture in 1982. She spent a year of graduate school in the Netherlands and then received an MA in sculpture from Arkansas State University in 1993. She taught various classes in the ASU Department of Art in the 1990s before being named director of the Bradbury Art Museum at ASU in 2001.

Many of Christensen's sculptures are composed of hundreds and sometimes thousands of virtually identical objects—nails, plates, mirrors, silverware, shoes, and eggshells—the result of a seemingly obsessive accumulation. Through their sheer size, remarkable craft, and striking beauty, Christensen's works have an immediate visual impact.

One particularly poignant work, *The Happiest Day of My Life*, is a sculpture of an exquisite wedding dress that appears to be made of glimmering lace; the entire dress, however, is intricately constructed from shards of broken china plates. Another of Christensen's works, *Flight From Servitude*, consists of thousands of spoons fashioned into a pair of wings. In *World View*, an enormous oval map of the earth is constructed of mirror fragments.

Christensen's work has been recognized with numerous awards and grants, including a National

Endowment for the Arts Fellowship Award in Sculpture and an Arkansas Arts Council Fellowship Award in Sculpture. Christensen's artwork has been included in exhibitions in Washington DC; California; Florida; Illinois; the Netherlands; Louisiana; Virginia; Tennessee; Italy; Colorado; and Connecticut.

Christensen resides in Jonesboro with her husband and fellow artist, John Salvest.

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QUESTIONS



This is just the tip of the iceberg. The CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas is a rabbit hole I encourage you to jump down. No matter what you are interested in, Arkansas has it—and the EOA is where you can start looking.