

## The 'A' in Athens Stands for Art

—taken from an article published in *The Post* about art opportunities in Athens August 26, 2021

For the Athens Municipal Arts Commission

Everyone in this town has stories tucked in our pockets.

We share bits of them over cheese curd samples at the market, scribble more with sidewalk chalk within a chorus of kids.

Everyone here knows that gray space is a canvas—we splash ourselves onto traffic boxes and sides of diners.

Everyone in this town wants to see their neighbor's story rainbowed on a building, celebrated in swaths of color, savored, piece by piece at community dinners—even the salty parts—*especially the salty parts.*

After we finish, full on history, new jokes and great-grandparents bread recipes, we have their stories tucked in our pockets too, waiting for a paintbrush and a blank wall.

—Stephanie Kendrick

*The mission of the Athens Municipal Arts Commission (AMAC) is to make recommendations to the Mayor, City Council, and the community in order to enhance the existing cultural resources of the area; to encourage new opportunities for the creation, performance, and exhibition of all the arts; and to promote policies and activities that preserve the beauty, history, and culture of the region.*

To be added to their agenda, please email AMAC: [amac@ci.athens.oh.us](mailto:amac@ci.athens.oh.us) Meetings are the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month at 5:30pm at Arts West.

### Submit to Periodical Poetry!

Send 1-3 Poems and a 50-word bio to [athenspoetlaureate4@gmail.com](mailto:athenspoetlaureate4@gmail.com)



Join us for a celebration of thanks for Wendy McVicker, our 2020-2022 Poet Laureate, and meet the 2023/24 Poet Laureate. Let's kick off 2023 with an open mic to showcase Athens's phenomenally talented community. Refreshments will be available.

## Everyone in This Town Has a Story...

Happy New Year, Athens County! I am entering 2023 with gratitude as your newly appointed Poet Laureate. You might be wondering, *what exactly is a Poet Laureate?* That's a pretty good question considering the answer is fairly dependent on the laureate. At minimum, the role is an honorary title— an acknowledgement from the community that the honoree is a respected poet. Often, poet laureates are tasked to write poems for special occasions. At most, poet laureates should try to connect their community to poetry in a way that enhances the local culture, and the quality of life for those served.

I'm most excited to use this role to merge my passion for poetry and social service. Throughout the pandemic, we saw an explosion of social service efforts in our community. Whether it was the National Guard bringing in truckloads of food and toiletries, or Avalanche Pizza handing out their special sourdough starter and daily lunches, service expanded in a way no one predicted. It was beautiful, and worth celebrating.

My main goal as your Poet Laureate is to celebrate and express appreciation for that sense of service by honoring agencies or efforts that serve our community by dedicating a poem to them. This will happen bi-monthly. In each issue of *Periodical Poetry.*, you will find a poem like the one to the left. After the poem, you will find their mission, and how to help them/get involved. Throughout the year, I will gift the recipient a broadside of the poem that was written for them.

This won't be my only project, but it is one that is dear to my heart. In each newsletter, I will feature local (and possibly regional) poets. You'll find submission information in this issue. I invite EVERYONE of all ages and backgrounds to submit their work. Like the Poets Laureate before me, I am intent on continuing to build and connect the poetry community within Athens County. I want this newsletter to be a space where you can share your stories.

Thank you for being here.

### Poetry Party at Arts West January 27th

5:30-7:00 pm

Calling all poets, musicians and storytellers! Come share your work with the community and hear about upcoming poetry projects in Athens County.

### A Trio of Poets: Appalachian Women of Southeast Ohio January 28th

2:00-4:00 pm

Join Kari Gunter-Seymour, Bonnie Proudfoot & Stephanie Kendrick as they share work from their recent collections at Little Professor Book Center.

### Women of Appalachia Project: Women Speak February 9th

7:00-9:00 pm

Hosted by Sheila-Na-Gig editions, join the 2022/2023 Women of Appalachia authors and musicians virtually. Register at: [www.womenofappalachia.com](http://www.womenofappalachia.com)

## Book Review

**Hero's Journey: *Swan Wife* by Sara Moore Wagner**

Bonnie Proudfoot

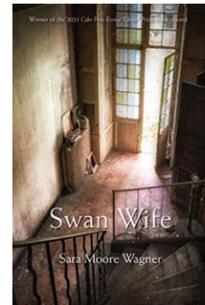
Imagine a young bride-to-be, she is ready to flee her home, ease into the fullness of her own life. Picture her flush with sensuality, crossing the threshold into marriage. Imagine the sudden weight of each new role, first maidenhood, then wifery, then motherhood, then house-wifery. How do women sense all the resonances of all these roles? Stories and legends circle through the poet's imagination as she grapples with her own potential, her own power: Psyche, Isis, Circe, Venus, Beatrice, the tale of Rumpelstiltskin, the story of the Peony Lantern, of Donkey Skin: "I try each skin like a dress. . . stables in the heart open."

*Swan Wife*, the powerful 2022 collection of poems (Cider House Press) by West Chester Ohio's Sara Moore Wagner, examines her own journey through often told, centuries-old legends, many of which still resonate with cultural programming: myths of transition, myths of reconciliation, myths of sacrifice, myths with lessons about sexual power and psychic power, and myths that govern images of the body, from maidenhood

to motherhood. Think of Psyche, only able to fully see her lover Eros in the dark, "What if our love is an invisible house?" asks Wagner. Think of Penelope, wife of Odysseus, weaving then unweaving, claiming her own life: "I am / undoing it all, as a tapestry, I am/ not waiting/any longer."

Some poems in *Swan Wife* are directly named after mythological figures (in the series "Mentors"), or in "Housewife as Eve" or "Venus Figure" and others reference female historical figures: Anne Askew, a poet and preacher burned at the stake in 1546, Annie Von Behren, shot in the head onstage during a sharp-shooting performance in Cincinnati in 1882, or Anastasia Romanov, youngest daughter of Czar Nicholas II. Wagner states: "When I approach a fairy tale, I don't want to retell it . . . I want to tell you what it means to me, a woman who lives in a body and who, from time to time, is made to discard my skin for new ones." The leverage this allows the poet is one that not only examines myths of female power and loss, but makes it both

personal and feminist, in the tradition of *Transformations* by Anne Sexton, or *The Well Speaks of its own Poison* by Maggie Smith.



Sara Moore Wagner teaches Creative Writing at Northern Kentucky University. She is a 2022 Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award recipient, and the winner of numerous awards including the Cider Press Review Editors Prize for *Swan Wife*, and the 2022 Driftwood Press Manuscript Prize for her newest collection, *Hillbilly Madonna*, also released in 2022. Poet Maggie Smith states that in *Swan Wife*, Wagner explores, "what it is to be a woman, here and now, and to shapeshift into a wife and mother... it's no wonder that a book so much about transformation would be transformative."



Beginning in March 2023, join us on every 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday for a new local open mic in partnership with Athens Uncorked.

**A Busy Winter for Poetry**

Starting March 8<sup>th</sup>, Athens Uncorked will be the site of a new monthly open mic hosted by yours truly. All are welcome to participate: poets, musicians, storytellers, etc. For those of you who just want to hang out in the audience and savor the sounds, there is plenty of room for you too! I'd like to extend a huge thank you to Ellie and her staff as we get this event off the ground.

On January 13<sup>th</sup>, the Women of Appalachia Project will be at the Dairy Barn for the opening of their Fine Art Exhibition. The event kicks off at 6pm and is open to the public.

And don't forget about Poetry Out Loud, an annual contest for students across the nation. Its purpose is to encourage students to learn poetry through memorization and performance. This year, the event will be held on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 5:00pm at Stuart's Opera House.

*If you'd like to advertise a local or regional poetry event, please reach out to me at [athenspoetlaureate4@gmail.com](mailto:athenspoetlaureate4@gmail.com).*

**Local Poet Spotlight****Surprise Snow**

By Wendy McVicker

The best snows  
come in the night  
to surprise you

with a purified  
world, and the sound  
of deep silence

ringing, like bells  
across the fields  
long ago, when you

turned to the other  
in your bed and together  
you dove into the cave

of your own warm  
bodies, broken open –  
surfacing later

to the distant ringing  
of bells, and the fall  
of almond blossoms

like snow in summer

*Wendy McVicker recently ended her term as Athens Poet Laureate. Her latest chapbook is *Zero, A Door*, and her collaborative collection, *Stronger When We Touch*, with Cathy Cultice Lentes, is forthcoming. Watch for her poems and John McVicker's images on the Story Trail in Southside Park, this spring.*

*You can listen to River of Words interviews with area poets here:*  
<https://soundcloud.com/woubdigital/sets/river-of-words-hosted-by-wendy>