



In Memoriam: Stetson Kennedy 1916 - 2011

Stetson Kennedy died at 9:25 a.m., August 27, 2011. He was 94. A friend to labor, folkore and to the oral history movement, Stetson will truly be missed. His memory lives on in the Stetson Kennedy Vox Populi Annual Award dedicated to promoting social justice work among oral historians.

A pioneering folklorist, oral historian, and environmentalist, Kennedy went on to write *Palmetto Country*, *Southern Exposure*, *The Jim Crow Guide*, *The Klan Unmasked*, *After Appomattox*, and *Grits & Grunts: Folkloric Key West*. *The Jim Crow Guide* was published in Paris by Jean Paul Sartre after Kennedy could not find any interested American publisher. After World War II, Kennedy infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan and while undercover provided information, including secret code words and details of Klan rituals to writers of the *Superman* radio program, resulting in a series of four episodes in which Superman battles the KKK. Woody Guthrie composed his campaign song when Stetson ran for Governor of Florida in 1952. Kennedy was a recipient of the Florida Folk Heritage Award, the Florida Governor's Heartland Award, an honorary doctorate from the University of North Florida, and the NAACP Freedom Award. He is featured in the recent Smithsonian HD documentary film, *Soul of a People*, about the WPA Federal Writers' Project. Kennedy's Klan-busting exploits were also featured in the book *Freakonomics* and on NPR's "This American Life" with Ira Glass.

Stetson presented the first Vox Populi Award at the 2010 OHA Annual Meeting in Atlanta, where he was the honored speaker at the opening event, a panel on *Soul of a People*. He was also a featured speaker in the plenary session on the Federal Writers' Project at Pittsburgh (2008), and on the OHA Anniversary Program at Little Rock (2006) presenting on the Florida Writers' Project as he knew it, with Dr. Peggy Bulger, Director of the American Folkife Center.

A service is planned to honor and celebrate his life at his beloved *Beluthahatchee* Park and home in St. Johns County, Florida on October 1, 2011. The Stetson Kennedy residence is a National Literary Landmark, as recognized by the Friends of the US Library. For further information see:

<http://bartramscenichighway.com/experiences/recreational/parks/beluthahatchee-park/>

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In honor of Stetson Kennedy, the following essay is posted on the Facing South/Southern Exposure blog. <http://www.southernstudies.org/2011/08/voices-stetson-kennedy-and-the-pursuit-of-truth.html>