

## OF PLACE . . .

Athens, as with all places, exists as a sum of multiple parts. Nature and humans have laid down many layers in the vicinity of 39° 21'N, 82° 23'W. Such sedimentary activity is not unique to Athens, but the process, nevertheless, seems to have infused the city and its environs with something different not found in every place of habitation.

The singularity of Athens and its environs is keenly felt but hard to pinpoint. “There’s something about this place” is a common expression of an ethos that many residents feel. While some local entities, sensing a motivation for tourism, have attempted to sell the “aura” as a manifestation of various legends and ghost stories that have been popularized through websites, this characterization trivializes the sense of uncommonness that pervades our surroundings. The well-known American historian John Lewis Gaddis, who was on the Ohio University faculty from 1969-1997, tried to capture the essence of Athens and its environs before departing to accept an endowed professorship at Yale. He wrote: “The time has come, at last, to move on; but I cannot do so without at least trying to express how I feel about this rare, humane, and still slightly secret place whose influence will accompany me for as long as I live.”

This series of short essays written by Ohio University faculty and staff examines some of the aspects “of place” both seen and unseen of the city and the county of Athens. The essays may not be able to explain fully the deep draw of our surroundings, but in bringing their expertise and insights to the subject of Athens and its environs the authors can give us an enriched understanding of the place that colors our daily lives. Awareness of place, as many--such as Henry David Thoreau--have reminded us, also leads to awareness of self--a worthwhile pursuit for any institution of higher education.

Suggestions for future essays are welcome at [provost@ohio.edu](mailto:provost@ohio.edu).

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Executive Vice President and Provost

Authors, Topics, Dates of Appearance:

Elliot Abrams, Professor of Anthropology, “The Prehistoric Past in Athens,” October 15

Phil Cantino, Professor of Environmental and Plant Biology, “Forest Stewardship in Athens,” October 19

Geoffrey Buckley, Associate Professor of Geography, “Into the Woods,” October 22

Sam Crowl, Trustee Professor of English, “Ghosts on the Green,” October 26

Richard Greenlee, Associate Provost for Appalachian Access and Enrichment Programs, “Traditional Appalachian Music in Southeastern Ohio,” October 29

Scott Miller, Director for Energy and Environmental Programs at the Voinovich School, “King Coal,” November 2

Joe Shields, Professor of Physics and Astronomy, “Dark Sky at Night: Athens Delight,” November 5

Pam Callahan, University Planner, “Seduction of an Architect,” November 9