



The Muse Messenger

The Newsletter of the Alabama State Poetry Society

February, 2016

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Musings from the Editors

Thank you for your patience as we have been trying to establish a system to get you the *Muse Messenger* on a monthly basis and to include timely, useful articles and information that will benefit ASPS members. We appreciate the kind words and encouragement we've received from so many of you.

Remember that, starting this month, only current members of ASPS will receive the *Muse Messenger* or be able to access the archives. The login and passwords you need are in this month's *Muse Messenger*.

This issue of the *Muse Messenger* has several nuggets of information for you. Jeanette Willert's article, "Why Poetry is Important," is one such nugget. So is Grady Sue Saxton's article on the National League of American Pen Women.

In "Tips of the Trade," you'll find some hints on how to find your muse when she seems to be on vacation, and there is a long list of accomplishments to read in "Member News." There's also the winning poem from last month and a new contest challenge for this month.

The "It Takes a Village" article tells you what you need to do to hone your skills and our "What's Happening" feature tells you how and where to do it. There are many wonderful opportunities for you this month, and they vary in cost from free to very reasonably priced.

The Gifts of a Wordsmith workshop at the Birmingham Public Library is led by qualified poets and is available to you at no charge. That's also true about the Birmingham Library Authors Expo.

There's also a flyer attached for the 2016 Mid-Winter Writers Conference, and I can't recommend it enough. The Pell City Public Library and Writers Anonymous host this conference each year, and they volunteer hundreds of man-hours to make the best presenters and workshops available to you at a reasonable price.

Add to that the lists contests you can enter, and you're sure to find something in this issue that you'll like. If you have comments or suggestions or would like to write an article, email us at editors@musemessenger.com. We'd love to hear from you.

Why is Poetry Important?

~ Jeanette Willert

"Poetry is the most important thing that is taught in school." This stark assertion was made by Donald Graves at a national conference for English teachers, a receptive audience. Nonetheless, I was taken aback. These were Graves' opening words in a keynote address. I very much admired Graves—he was a co-founder of the National Writing Project and an esteemed professor of composition at the University of New Hampshire. He had written many books on the teaching of writing and was a fine poet himself. So, I wondered, how is he going to convince us that poetry deserves such an elevated position in our curricula?

For him, it was easy. Graves asked us, "What subject, other than English, asks us to explore the meaning and the nuances of our human condition?" "Where else are we presented with human misgivings, failures, aspirations, and fears; with human struggles with pride, love, grief, hatred, desire for power, recrimination, loss, etc."

History provides the outside story; literature and poetry go within to the heart, mind and guts of that story. And, within literature, it is poetry that consistently elicits our emotions and challenges our preconceptions. Granted, our emotional terrain is talked about in psychology class, but it is *entered into* in reading and discussing poetry in an English class or in a writing group.

At the conference, Graves read a poem he had written about the reversal of the child/parent relationship he was experiencing with his invalid father. Most of us in the audience were middle-aged or past and were very aware of the impending demise of our parents, if they had not passed already. He was emotional in his reading; we were emotional listening. The moment was powerful. Graves had shown us a universal truth about life and loss; we had experienced it.

Louise Rosenblatt, writer of *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, emphasized that the power is in experiencing life through literature. **Experiencing** was the reason for reading literature, she concluded. And, I would add, experiencing is also why we watch a movie over and over again. We know what is going to happen; we understand it. However, we want to experience that particular situation again. Experiencing the moment is important for human beings. From our earliest time on earth, we have been story tellers and story listeners. And remember, our earliest literature was in the form of poetry. Why would that be?

Why, today, do we fork over \$6 for a Hallmark card for Valentine's Day for a loved one? Why pay \$15 for a music CD and listen over and over again to the same lyrics? At least part of the answer lies in our need for a special kind of language to express or to reach our emotional needs. Much of life deals with meeting the mundane necessities, and much of our every day language deals with commerce and practicalities. But part of us needs more. Deep human relationships matter to us. An understanding of the varying and, at times, troubling nature of our relationships are made clearer for us through literature, especially through poetry.

Jeanette is an Emerita Professor of English Education at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York. She is also a gifted artist, writer and poet, who has taught creative writing and other English courses. She is a member of ASPS and serves on the Board of Writers Anonymous.

It Takes a Village.

~ Rita Aiken Moritz

You may or may not agree that it "takes a village to raise a child," but there is absolutely no doubt that successful poets and writers don't succeed or prosper alone. In this digital age of technology, we need all the help we can get.

If you've tried to submit your work anywhere, you know exactly what I mean. Trying to get through the process of getting an editor or publisher to even look at your work is a jungle. And that's before the rejection slips start coming in. What's a writer to do? A few things come to mind.

- **Love your work but edit without mercy.**

Assuming your work is the best it can be is silly, but how many rewrites you'll need is anyone's guess. Hemingway wrote the ending of *Farewell to Arms* 39 times before he was satisfied with it. Cutting and editing your work can be painful, but it's necessary. We need to adopt the attitude of James Mitchner, who said, "I'm not a very good writer, but I'm an excellent rewriter."

- **Join a writers' group.** If you don't already belong to a writing group, find one or start one yourself. Writers Anonymous meets monthly, the Leeds Poetry Group meets every other month, and Pensters and other groups meet at various times. Find a group and commit to being there every time they meet.

- **Sharpen your skills with workshops.** There are several ways to do that. The Birmingham Public Library has a free monthly poetry workshop. ASPS, the Alabama Writers Conclave, and the Mid-Winter Writers Conference all offer the opportunity for you to acquire new skills and sharpen the ones you already have. Cost varies from free to minor amounts, and the benefits are priceless.

● **Come out of the stone age.**

If "**submittable.com**" sounds like a foreign language, it's time for you to enter the 21st century. Very few publishers or editors will accept hard copies of your work; most of them require online submission through a submission service like **submittal.com**. If you don't have the computer "know-how" to prepare a document and submit online, get the skills you need.

● **Find and use a mentor.** Another poet or writer who is more advanced than you can offer a wealth of advice and information. Whether you have an informal or a professional mentor, being open to listening to and learning from them can't help but improve your writing.

● **Network, Network, Network.** I can't stress this enough. Without some kind of connection, it is virtually impossible to get your work looked at by an editor or publisher. Their time is so limited that without an "in," your work will never find its way to their desk. And many or most of them require that you have an agent. Sound impossible? It's not. Having an established writer recommend you will get you through the red tape, but there are other ways.

When you attend workshops and/or conferences, the presenters are qualified writers, editors, publishers, and even agents. Some will invite you to submit directly to them because you attended their workshop. Connecting with other writers in your genre can only profit you as well.

The Mid-Winter Writers Conference, which is taking place in Pell City on February 27, is a good place to start. There will be 18 qualified presenters doing workshops on every topic you can think of. Attendees will be encouraged by two keynote speakers and will be able to choose six workshops to attend. Cost is minimal and includes your breakfast and lunch. For more information about the 2016 Mid-Winter Writers Conference, go to **www.mwwconference.com**.

Regardless of whether writing is a hobby, a passion, or a vocation, you and I need to put some effort into becoming the best we can be. And we can't do that alone.

National League of American Pen Women

~ Grady Sue Saxon

The National League of American Pen Women (NLAPW) is a 501(c)(3) corporation formed to "encourage the production of creative work of professional standard in Art, Letters, and Music...and to provide education, creative, and professional support to members and nonmembers....in these disciplines."

The Birmingham Branch of the NLAPW meets seven times yearly and sponsors an annual art exhibit currently held at the Soon-Bok Gallery in Bluff Park. Programs are varied. They include outside speakers who provide new ideas and instruction as well as demonstrations and discussions by members who share their talents and ideas. Members also provide invaluable support and encouragement for each other.

Membership categories are:

● **Art** - open to professional visual artists including painters, photographers, sculptors, crafters, and graphic artists.

● **Letters** - open to professional writers including authors, co-authors, compilers, editors, poets, and dramatists.

● **Musicians** - open to composers or choreographers.

Potential members complete an application for submission to the local branch. This is available at **www.nlapw.org**. The packet of credentials is then submitted to national. Copies of the applicant's work and proof of having sold work and/or having been published or performed, depending on the category, must be included in the application.

ASPS members interested in joining NLAPW may contact Grady Sue Saxon at 205-699-2440. She will provide upcoming meeting dates and will assist in completing forms.

"The road to hell is paved with adverbs."

~ Stephen King

Member News for February

Faye Adams has joined an online poetry community called PoetrySoup. She has several poems posted and enjoys reading and commenting on poems posted by other members and receiving feedback on her own. Faye is also currently sponsoring a Cento contest for the Galaxy of Verse spring/summer contest. For more information, go to www.barbara-blanks.com.

Jodi Adamson reports that her poem, "Burned," was published online in Volume 7, Issue 26 of *Diverse Voices Quarterly*.

Allen Berry shared that his latest chapbook manuscript, *Sitting Up with the Dead*, has been accepted for publication by Writing Knights Press.

Bettye Cannizzo has recent articles in *Reminisce* and *Reader's Digest* ("Humor in Uniform"). Her poem, "Morning Glow," won first place in the League of Minnesota Poets contest. She has also won third place and an HM in other recent contests. Bettye's most recent book, *One Woman's Mosaic: A Family Memoir*, can be ordered directly from her.

Ramey Channell is one of the local authors to be featured at the 2016 Birmingham Public Library Local Authors Expo, where she will sign and sell copies of her southern novel, *Sweet Music on Moonlight Ridge*, and her poetry chapbook *Tokens*.

Claire T. Feild has had three more poems accepted for print publication in *The Horror Zine Magazine*. A chapbook, *The Mississippi Delta: Creative Nonfiction Stories*, is forthcoming.

Faye Gaston has had her poems published weekly in *The Union Springs Herald*. These include poems from her three books as well as poems that have won in an ASPS contest.

Lori Lassiter will have a table at the 2016 Birmingham Public Library Local Authors Expo, where she will have copies of her second poetry chapbook, *Sawdust, Soap, Soil, & Stars*, available for \$5.

Susan Luther reports that Bettye Cannizzo, who is a long-time member of ASPS, would really appreciate hearing from other members. You may

write to Bettye at 1109 Sparkman Street NW, Hartselle, AL 35640-4531 or call 256-822-6211.

Harry Moritz reports that online registration for the 2016 Mid-Winter Writers Conference is up and working, and there is a discount for members of ASPS, WA, and the AWC. See more at www.mwwconference.com.

Rita Aiken Moritz reports that the Open Mic Event at Antebellum Anne's was highly successful with about 20 people attending.

Jean Marie Purcell won an award for her "ChopChop" poem (a form invented by Wanda Sue Parrot).

James Miller Robinson's chapbook, *The Caterpillars at Saint Bernard*, was nicely reviewed by Dr. Harry Moore on the Alabama Writers Forum website in the book reviews section. Also, Finishing Line Press just released Robinson's chapbook, *Boca del Rio in the Afternoon*, a finalist in their annual open chapbook competition.

Grady Sue Saxon recently presented a program, "If I Can, You Can," for the National League of American Pen Women. She discussed why she started writing poetry and how she began publishing and illustrating collections of her work.

Henry Spottswood reports that his poem, "It Matters," appeared in the on-line literary publication, *Dark Matter Journal*.

Alina Stefanescu won the 2015 Ryan R. Gibbs Flash Fiction Prize for her story, "White Tennis Shoes." You can read it online at <http://tinyurl.com/zs9pw9s>. Her short fiction, "Carpool," also received Honorable Mention in the Glimmer Train Short Story Award for New Writers. Alina also said people can pre-order her chapbook at <http://bit.ly/1NJpKG0>.

Sue Brannan Walker had an article on Marge Piercy — "Being-in-the-World: The Presenting of Marge Piercy" published in *The Arava Review of Contemporary Art and Poetry* (Aravareview.com) in their January 2016 issue.

The Editors of the *Muse Messenger* report that several features in the *Muse Messenger* are open for submissions.

Call for Submissions

What Can I Submit to the *Muse Messenger*?

Our goal as the new Editors of the *Muse Messenger* is to make it a "real" member newsletter. That means we want the content to be focused on, of interest to, and even written by you...the members of ASPS. Here are some of the features that would welcome your submissions:

- **The Monthly Contest.** It's easy to enter, has no entry fee, and is open to ASPS members only. The only requirements are that the poem be unpublished and not have won a prize in any ASPS contest. While there is no monetary prize, winning poems will be published in the next month's *Muse Messenger*.

- **Member News.** If you've won a contest, had something accepted for publication, hosted a party or done anything else you want other members to know about, let us know. We love hearing about your success and letting others know about it.

- **What's Happening.** Do you have an event planned? A workshop? A conference? If it has value, share it so other members will know about it.

- **Tips & Tools of the Trade.** What writing prompts work for you? What are some common errors to avoid? Put together three or four tips and send them to us. If we can use them, we'll credit you.

- **Articles.** We're always looking for well-written articles about poetry and writing. Articles should be between 300-600 words and should also be crisp, clean copy. Write it, edit it carefully and send it to us.

- **Fillers.** Fillers should be 100-200 words. They can be interesting, informative, or (like the one by Bev Gattis in the January issue) just fun.

Submissions for the monthly contest should go in the body of an email or be attached as an MS Word document and sent to contest@musemessenger.org. Put the month and Contest in the subject line. All other submissions should be attached as a Word document and sent

by email to editor@musemessenger.org. Put the feature you are submitting to in the Subject line (i.e. Article, Tips and Tools, etc).

Muse Messenger Archives

Starting this month (February), the *Muse Messenger* will only be sent to active members of ASPS. Archived copies of every 2016 *Muse Messenger* will be found at

www.musemessenger.com. However, you will need a password in order to access that archive. When you go to the site, you will be asked to submit both a user name and a password. They are as follows, and "Case" matters:

User Name = aspsmember
Password = 1Banana2016

This User Name and Password combination will be used by all paid ASPS members during 2016. The User Name and Password combination will change in January, 2017, and will be sent to members when that change is in place.

Tips and Tools of the Trade

~ Rita Aiken Moritz

Do you ever sit down to write and discover that your muse seems to be on vacation in the Bahamas? It happens to all of us at one time or another. Below are some of the things poets have told me they use to "tap into their muse."

- Keep notebooks in various places in your house. When you have a thought about a poem or an image or even a specific line, write it down while you're thinking about it.
- Open a dictionary to a random page and choose three words from that page. Write a poem using those three words.
- Choose a color, look up every synonym for that color. Then write a poem using one or some of them.
- Write the poem you think your Mom would have written.

- Join other poets in setting a "challenge" poem, then read together and compare the outcomes.
- Take a picture or find one online, put it where you can see it, and write about it.
- Choose a poet whose work you like and write a poem that imitates his or her style.
- Write a six-word short story. Then expand it to tell more of the story in a poem.
- Go to **poets.org** and find a form you aren't familiar with. Read about it, learn how to do it, and write a poem using that form.

Give one or two of these a try and let us know what you think. You might also share how **you** find your vacationing muse so we can share your suggestions in another *Muse Messenger*.

What's Happening?

February 2: Gifts of a Wordsmith, a poetry workshop for adults, meets on the first Tuesday of each month from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the downtown Birmingham Public Library. Email Haruyo Miyagawa at **hm@bham.lib.al.us** for more information.

NOTE: This workshop has been changed to February 16 due to the threat of bad weather.

February 4: Writers' Anonymous meets the first Thursday of every month from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. at the Pell City Recreation Hall, 411 19th Street South in Pell City. Their next meeting will be Thursday, February 4. For more information, go to: **www.writersanonymous.us**.

February 18: The Birmingham Arts Journal will be holding a free reading and reception at Homewood Cumberland Presbyterian, 513 Columbiana Road, Homewood at 6:30 p.m. in honor of the latest great issue of *Birmingham Arts Journal*. For more information, go to **http://birminghamartsjournal.com/**

February 19: Bamaslam Montevallo Poetry Slam is on Friday, February 19th. Sign up at 8:00 p.m., and the slam begins at 9:00 p.m. at Eclipse Coffee and Books, 1032 Main Street in

Montevallo. Email Jerri Hardesty at **WytRabbit1@aol.com** for more information.

February 20: Birmingham Public Library Local Authors Expo and Book Fair at the Central Library, 2100 Park Place, Birmingham. Booths for authors are \$5, but the event is free and open to the public, and no registration is required. For more information, contact David Blake at (205) 226-3686 or **dblake@bham.lib.al.us**.

February 26: Meet & Greet and Round Robin at the Pell City Library, 1923 1st Avenue N from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. Meet the presenters for the Mid-Winter Writers Conference and stay for an informal "Round Robin." Refreshments provided by the Pell City Library. Admission is free.

February 27: Mid-Winter Writers Conference on the campus of Seddon Baptist Church, 4205 Cogswell Avenue, Pell City. For more information and to register, go to **www.mwwconference.com**.

February 29: The Leeds Area Open Circle Poets Group meets every other month at 7:00 p.m. on the last Monday of the month at Leeds Arts Center in Downtown Leeds, 8140 Parkway Drive. Their next meeting will be on February 29th. Email Joan Dawson at **jdawson@uab.edu** for more information.

March 1: Gifts of a Wordsmith, a poetry workshop for adults, meets on the first Tuesday of each month from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the downtown Birmingham Public Library. Email Haruyo Miyagawa at **hm@bham.lib.al.us** for more information.

March 3: Writers' Anonymous meets the first Thursday of every month from 6:30 – 8:30 p.m. at the Pell City Recreation Hall, 411 19th Street South in Pell City. For more information, go to: **www.writersanonymous.us**.

Monthly Poetry Contest:

Congratulations to **Bev Gattis**, who was the winner of the January *Muse Messenger* Poetry

Contest. Her poem, "Progressive New Beginnings," appears below. Thank you to all who entered.

Progressive New Beginnings

Slowly, she traversed the soft, lengthy path
across her living room floor
Barely ten months then, her gait wasn't sure
and each step began as a chore

A courtship—exciting, as two interfaced
and learned how to give and to take
A start, then a halt—a yes and a no—
while feeling pure truth was at stake

Life is so like that, a start and a stop,
a hesitant "begin or quit"
And progress comes only with courage to try,
beginning anew, as is fit

So, now that she's older (and wiser in years),
she finds new beginnings are few
And, relishes steps that still falter somehow--
and, cherishes memories that grew.

Information for the February contest is as follows:

Topic: **Poet's Choice**

Form: **Villanelle**

Line Limit: **19**

You can enter this contest by emailing your poem to contest@musemessenger.org by February 21st. Either attach it as a MS Word document or put it in the body of the email. Your poem must not have been published or have won in any ASPS contest. The winning poem will appear in the March *Muse Messenger*.

Contest judges are qualified poets who are not a part of or associated in any way with ASPS. The complete guidelines are online at:

<http://bit.ly/10FF2PE>

Highlights on State Poetry Societies:

In order for a State Poetry Society to be featured, it must have a web presence and allow both out-of-state membership and non-member entries in their contests. Keep in mind that contest deadlines may change. Some may also accept outside submissions to their journals.

	<i>State:</i>	<i>Dues</i>	<i>Contest Deadlines</i>
Georgia:	Individual:	\$30	11/15
	Family:	\$40	

Inet: <http://georgiapoetrysociety.org/>

Facebook: <http://on.fb.me/1YUG2VU>

Indiana: Individual: \$18 9/01

Inet: <http://www.isfpc.org/>

Kentucky: Individual: \$25 6/30

Seniors: \$20

Inet: <http://kystatepoetrysociety.org>

Contests, Contests, Contests!

(February/March Contests with Deadlines)

2/1—Utah State Poetry Society

<http://bit.ly/1mw9nqs>

2/5—Porter Fleming Literary Competition

<http://bit.ly/1kFMcZx>

2/15—Missouri State Poetry Society Winter Contest

<http://bit.ly/1mspZHH>

2/15—Poetry Society of South Carolina

<http://bit.ly/10vzjM6>

2/15—Poetry Society of TX Chapbook Contest

<http://bit.ly/1n00kyx>

2/15—Work Stew "Memorable Bosses" Contest
No Entry Fee

<http://bit.ly/1Pj35S1>

2/20—Poetry Society of TN (Members Only)

Submit by Feb 20th for March

<http://bit.ly/1M6wZrf>

2/25—Saturday Evening Post Limerick Laughs

Contest. <http://bit.ly/1p3VXfh>

2/28—Utmost Christian Writers Annual Poetry Contest

<http://bit.ly/1VDIYCB>

2/29—California: Topic by month and submitted during each month

<http://bit.ly/1LEi3zR>

2/29—Spirit First Meditation Poetry Contest

<http://bit.ly/1QZiRI0>

3/1—Oregon Poetry Association Spring Contest

<http://bit.ly/1KSBTs8>

3/1—Carriage House Poetry Prize

Must be Received by 3/1

<http://bit.ly/1UGhrjY>

3/11—B'ham Public Library Haiku Contest

(Do not submit before FEB 21)

<http://bit.ly/1PMH7ac>

3/15—National Fed of State Poetry Societies

http://www.nfsps.com/poetry_contests.htm

3/20—Poetry Society of TN (Members Only)

Submit by March 20th for April

<http://bit.ly/1M6wZrf>

3/26—ASPS Spring Contest

www.alabampoets.org

3/31—California: Topic by month and submitted during each month

<http://bit.ly/1LEi3zR>

5/31—ASPS Annual John and Miriam Morris

Memorial Chapbook Competition

www.alabampoets.org

Publishers and Journals Accepting Submissions:

The following publishers and journals are open for submissions. Be sure to read and follow the submission guidelines provided on each site. Only your very best work should be submitted.

The Birmingham Arts Journal:

<http://www.birminghamartsjournal.com>

Kudzu House Quarterly:

<http://kudzuhouse.org>

Negative Capability Press:

<http://www.negativecapabilitypress.org>

Penny Magazine:

<http://www.youfoundpenny.com>

The Poetry Foundation:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org>

Be sure to check the website for submission guidelines before submitting to any of these.

If you know of publishers or journals that are accepting submissions, please let us know so they can be included in the March *Muse Messenger*.

The End.



2016 Mid-Winter Writer Conference

**Writers Anonymous and the Pell City Public Library
are proud to present the 2016 Mid-Winter Writers Conference
on Saturday, February 27, 2016.**

- There will be a free public "**Meet and Greet**" at the **Pell City Public Library** at **6:30 p.m. on Friday, February 26th**. The public is invited.
- The Conference itself will be held on the campus of **Seddon Baptist Church** located at **4205 Cogswell Avenue, Pell City, AL 35125**.
- Early Registration is just \$60 per person (\$25 for students).
- Check In & Registration start at **7:30 a.m.** Coffee and danish will be served for early arrivals. Welcome & Opening statements at 8:15 a.m. The Keynote starts at 8:30 a.m. The Conference will end at 5:30 p.m.
- The agenda is robust, and our presenters have a proven track record in their areas of expertise.
- Presenters include publishers, editors, published authors and poets, professors and other technical experts.
- Whether your genre is poetry, fiction, science fiction, non-fiction, devotional / inspirational, or blogging, there will be something here for you.
- If you write now or ever wanted to write, you'll find value in this Conference.
- For more information, we urge you to visit the Conference online at:

Facebook = **MidWinter Writers Conference**

Website = **www.mwwconference.com**

Agenda and Presenters Page = **http://bit.ly/1JGBxcQ** (Case Matters!)

Registration Page = **http://bit.ly/1NPpHJs** (Case Matters!)

The Alabama State Poetry Society — Our Officers:

President:	Jerri Hardesty 1830 Marvel Rd. Brierfield, AL 35035	205-665-7904 wytRabbit1@aol.com
First Vice President:	Emily Grimes-Henderson 5815 Cheryl Dr. Pinson, AL 35126	205-587-7696 janelulu@aol.com
Second Vice President:	Kirk Hardesty 1830 Marvel Rd Brierfield, AL 35035	205-665-7904 niteglider11@gmail.com
Recording Secretary:	Kimberly Wright 203 Camellia Dr. Prattville, AL 36067	334-669-6263 wrightkimberlylou@gmail.com
Treasurer & Membership:	Jodi Adamson 361 Rives Mill Loop Deatsville, AL 36022	adamsjo75@hotmail.com
Contests:	Kirk Hardesty 1830 Marvel Rd Brierfield, AL 35035	205-665-7904 niteglider11@gmail.com
Historian:	Cleveland Brown 2535 County Rd 93 Evergreen, AL 36401	251-300-0141 ccbrown45@gmail.com
Parliamentarian:	Evelyn Hurley P.O. Box 145 Gaylesville, AL 35973	256-422-3323 hur1L@tds.net
Immediate Past President:	Barry Marks P.O. Box 11386 Birmingham, AL 35202	205-251-8303 barry@leaselawyer.com
Newsletter:	Harry & Rita Moritz P.O. Box 763 Pell City, AL 35125	editors@musemessenger.org