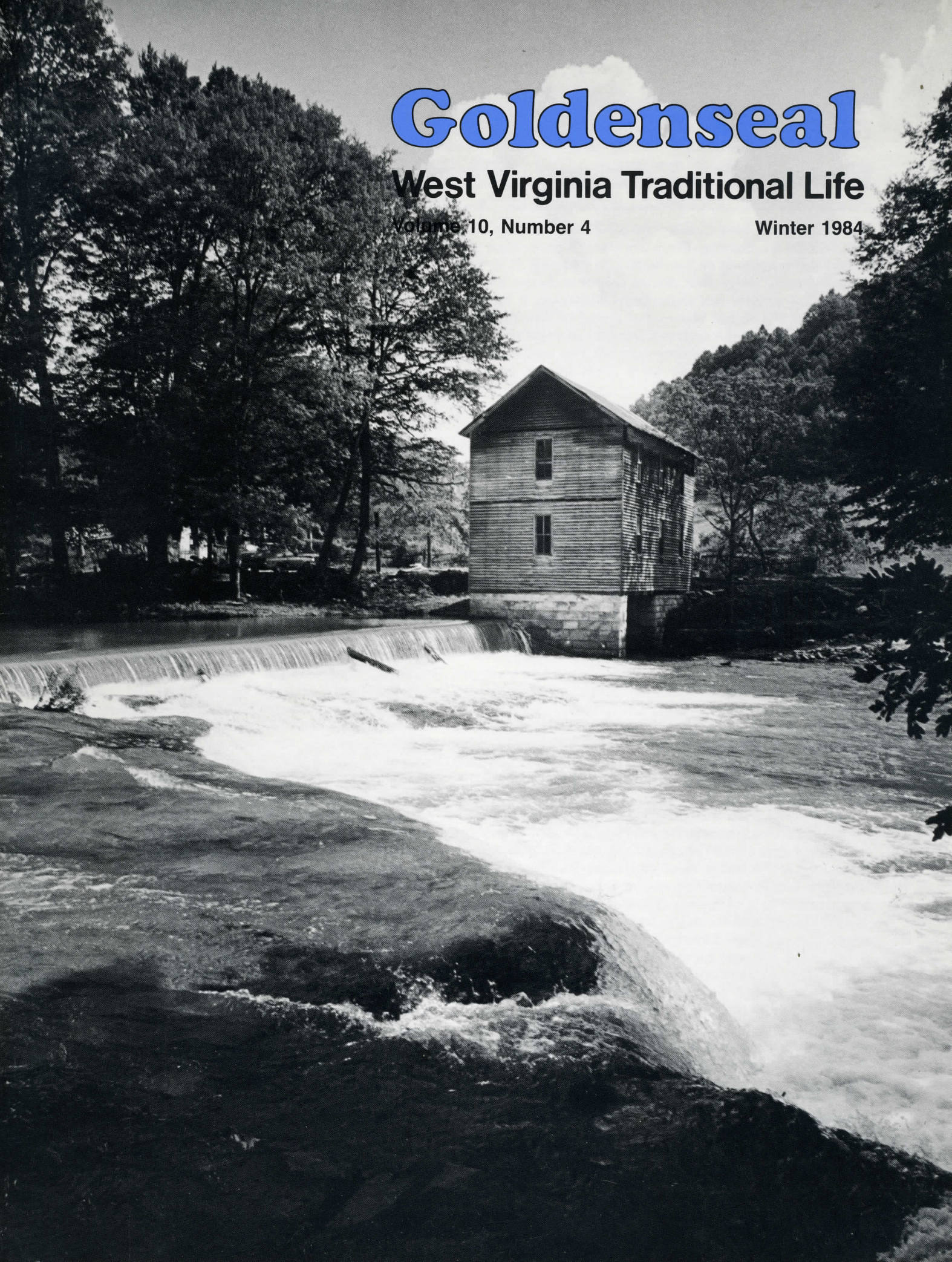

Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Volume 10, Number 4 Winter 1984

From the Editor: Thank You

The good news here is that you evidently want to keep GOLDENSEAL coming. While we are still processing voluntary subscriptions as I write this in October, it is clear from the early surge that reader response to our annual fundraising appeal has again been generous. It appears that the total will run somewhat ahead of that for 1983, and with any luck the financial troubles of a few years ago will not be repeated this time around. The wolf has been beaten back from the door for a while longer, in other words.

That's good news, indeed. It means that we will be able to go on serving old readers while still adding interested newcomers to the mailing list. Those new readers continue to find us, by the way, at the rate of a half-dozen or so a day. Since we have never aggressively promoted the magazine, they apparently hear about GOLDENSEAL through word-of-mouth recommendations from other readers. That's supposed to be the best kind of advertising and we do appreciate it, especially when it's being backed up by solid financial support. Thanks.

Voluntary subscription money will also allow us to continue to find the best stories for you. We rely on freelancers for almost all our writing and most of our photography, as you've probably noticed, and of course those people have to be paid. Without them we wouldn't have a magazine, for everything done by the rest of us — editorial staff, designers, printers and all — simply provides a vehicle for the manuscripts and pictures they send in from all over the state. Thanks, then, to our hardworking writers and photographers while we're passing the compliments around. And thanks to our readers for supporting their work, both financially and through the many article ideas you send in.

Incidentally, your ideas and support are especially critical as we continue to expand coverage in outlying parts of the state. I don't mean to offend anyone with that "outlying," for I know many West Virginians consider Charleston to be plenty out-of-the-way. But the fact remains that our office *is* in Charleston and that, generally speaking, stories simply cost more the farther we have to reach for them. New contacts have to be developed, travel is sometimes called for, and we get beyond the range of Culture and History photographers already on the payroll. We're committed to full coverage of West Virginia, however, and have finally reached the point where we can proudly display our geographic spread on a map on the back cover. It is no coincidence that the map appeared there after we got the voluntary subscription program off and rolling.

Where else is your subscription money going? Well, I mentioned the "rest of us" earlier, the behind-the-scenes people who put GOLDENSEAL together for you. Printers, editorial staff, and designers all have to be paid. Fortunately, the average per-magazine cost levels off as circulation goes up, but overall expenses naturally increase as we produce more copies. Your contribution helps pay those bills.

At least as important, though we can't put a dollar price on it, is the morale boost your support gives us. Like anyone else, we work harder when we know our friends are behind us. We continually try to improve GOLDENSEAL and your backing and encouragement helps us to succeed.

So — a big thanks from all of us to everyone who has sent in a voluntary subscription check. And a gentle nudge to those who haven't. We need your help, if you can afford to help us. We also need your comments, suggestions, and criticism if you are dissatisfied. If we are not yet up to your standards, tell us. Otherwise, we'll never know.

And do, please, let us know if you simply no longer want to receive the magazine. We emphasize that subscriptions are voluntary and we intend to keep everyone on our mailing list who genuinely wants to be there, whether or not they can contribute at present. But we know that some people are not interested in the sort of material published in these pages. GOLDENSEAL is not for everyone and we won't be offended if you tell us that that is the case with you. Each magazine saved can go to another reader, and that savings is the next best thing to an actual contribution.

Some readers also take advantage of the voluntary subscription coupon to correct mailing addresses. We appreciate that, and have come to regard subscription time as a good opportunity to clean up the mailing list. And, of course, we're willing to make those changes anytime, year-round. As always, however, we hope that you will tolerate minor errors in your name or address. If it's good enough for the post office, it's probably best to leave it alone. Any changes involves at least two fallible humans and one totally insensitive computer, so there is always the chance for a bigger mistake to creep in while we're taking care of the small one. But if you have a problem affecting the regular delivery of your magazine, by all means let us hear from you — and please notify us well in advance if you plan to move.

Finally, our thanks for the many notes and letters that came in with the voluntary subscriptions. It is impossible to answer all of them personally, but you can be sure that each one was read carefully and that they all were appreciated. We know that we have to earn your support, now that we're asking for your money, so each comment is given serious consideration on the end.

I see that my thank-you note is in danger of running away with me, as it seems to do each year. Let me stop it here, then, leaving you only with our sincere gratitude. Our annual fund-raising is off to a good beginning, and we look forward to the year of magazine work ahead of us. With your support, we'll get started now.

—Ken Sullivan

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Goldenseal

Volume 10, Number 4 Winter 1984

COVER: The 1894 Mollohan Mill, on the Left Fork of Holly River in Webster County, is being restored to working order by present-day Mollohans. Our story begins on page 9. Photo by Michael Keller.

PHOTOS: Norman Julian, Michael Keller, Gary Simmons, Deanna Smith, Andy Yale

Letters from Readers

GOLDENSEAL welcomes letters of general interest from readers. Our address is Department of Culture and History, The Cultural Center, State Capitol, Charleston, WV 25305.

W. Melbourne, Florida
October 12, 1984
Editor:
As a former West Virginian I look forward to receiving my GOLDENSEAL magazine very much. It is the nearest thing to going home that I have found yet.

My parents, William and Esther Yocum, moved to Kanawha County, on Cabin Creek at Kayford, in the early 1900's and raised seven children there. Dad worked in the coal mines as an electrician and Mom always raised a garden. I was born there in 1917. I still remember when the union was started by John L. and the hardships people went through. My favorite thing to do, as a young girl, was to go down to "Ma" Blizzard's at Eskdale for her famous hot dogs. Dad used to take us to Charleston once in a while, which we considered a big event. Precious memories!

So, again, I thank you for your excellent magazine. Keep them coming.
Mrs. Virginia C. Brown

Tequesta, Florida
August 24, 1984
Editor:
Speaking as a native Mountaineer whose son is a present justice of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals and whose father was governor of West Virginia and its United States Senator for more than thirty years, I'm mortified to confess that I only recently learned about GOLDENSEAL magazine. A relative in Fairmont sent me a half-dozen old issues which I have been devouring ever since they were received a few weeks ago.

It strikes me that GOLDENSEAL contains articles that very skillfully relate important historical events; the magazine surely has great appeal, even for readers without roots in West Virginia. The less significant subject matter is, I think, equally interesting because the articles so clearly describe the activities and character of each principal and thereby project a true portrait of the strength, warmth and (in many instances) the pioneer spirit of the folks who contributed so much over the years to the West Virgina way of life.

I think is is a credit to our State Administration that a vehicle has been provided which gives recognition to those wonderful West Virginia folks whose lives enriched the Mountain State. Moreover, you and your staff deserve kudos a-plenty for the high quality publication with its distinctive style and tremendous appeal.

I am enclosing a check to help pay postage fees and publication costs and ask that you kindly place my name on your mailing list to receive GOLDENSEAL on a regular basis.
Most sincerely yours,
John C. Neely

Morgantown, WV
October 1, 1984
Editor:
Enclosed is my contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

The mailman doesn't deliver a more welcome piece of mail to my door. It's an interesting and informative magazine. Many of the scenes and people pictured in GOLDENSEAL I find familiar and they bring back bittersweet memories. I've heard so many of my friends say how much they enjoy GOLDENSEAL. It's down to earth, real West Virginia life.

Keep up the good work. My receiving it is like a visit from dear friends. I especially enjoy the letters.
Sincerely,
Lucy S. Pyles

Hatfields and McCoys

Claysville, Pennsylvania
October 2, 1984
Editor:
Enclosed is a check to pay for another year of GOLDENSEAL. I really enjoy reading it.

I was born and raised on Big Creek in Pike County, Kentucky, close to where the Hatfields and McCoys did all that fighting. I have been to where that Hatfield boy was killed on Blackberry Creek and I know where the McCoys are buried at. I also know where Devil Anse lived on Island Creek and where he was buried. I saw it. I worked for a lumber company on Island Creek and helped cut timber there.

I am 84 years old and I wasn't around when all that fighting went on. All my timber work and coal mining were done in West Virginia, and I did a lot of it. Big Creek runs into Tug River on the Kentucky side across from Nolan, West Virginia. I lived eight miles up Big Creek. I've been over a lot of West Virginia and had a lot of relatives living there. I now live 20 miles from Wheeling, close to the West Virginia-Pennsylvania line.

I will be looking forward to my next copy of GOLDENSEAL.
Sincerely,
John B. Fraley

St. Albans, WV
September 29, 1984
Editor:
One of the nicest things that ever happened to us was the gift subscription to GOLDENSEAL, from our son, David Hale of Burke, Virginia. We didn't know that such a book existed. We have enjoyed every issue and read them from "kiver to kiver!"

I was born in Fayette County and the articles and stories about that part of our beautiful state remind me of my early days there. I remember things my parents told us children about happenings in the mountains and the wild life there. But most, I remember walking through the mountain paths and looking up at the tall evergreen trees. I was sure they touched the sky!

The fall issue which I received recently took me back in time to Logan County and the many friends during my school and teaching years. Also it

was there that I met my husband. Happy years!

The article about Devil Anse Hatfield was very familiar to us. His granddaughter was one of my very best friends. We knew Uncle Dyke Garrett and Scott McDonald. I remember going to an all-day meeting at the Crooked Creek cemetary one Memorial Day where Uncle Dyke did the preaching.

I am enclosing a check for our renewal and also for a gift subscription to a special friend in Logan County. I know she would really enjoy reading about her relatives.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs. Frank K. Hale

Arthurdale

Morgantown, WV
September 27, 1984
Editor:

I read the article in your latest issue about the 50th anniversary celebration at Arthurdale with great interest. It is unfortunate, however, that the reporter covering the story did not mention that the celebration was funded, in large part, by a grant from the Humanities Foundation of West Virginia, Inc. The foundation provided funding for students in our public history option to prepare the photograph display, write the walking tour/driving tour brochure of Arthurdale and research and write a series of nine newspaper articles that appeared in the Morgantown and Preston County newspapers through June, July, and August. Also, the grant provided much of the funding to run the Saturday afternoon symposium at which Elliott Roosevelt and other appeared. While the celebration was a huge success due to the hard work of all the people of Arthurdale, the cash they needed to produce many of the items directly related to the history of Arthurdale came from the Humanities Foundation of West Virginia, and the Arthurdale Commemorative Committee was very careful to use this credit line and the foundation logo throughout the celebration.

Sincerely,
Barb Howe
Assistant Professor of History, W.V.U.

Opal Minor

New Martinsville, WV
October 1, 1984
Editor:

The Pinkey Avoth, the Mishna tractate on ethics and morals, has a short passage which reads in part as follows: ". . . for so we find with David, King of Israel, who learned only two things from Achithophel, and yet regarded him as his master, his guide, and as his familiar friend."

I thought of this when I read "46 Years Was Enough: Wetzel Schoolteacher Opal Minor." Miss Minor taught me in the third and fourth grades at the Reader school. The railroad track was only a short distance from the school. I had a seat in the back row, and, loving trains then as now, I would stand up beside my desk and watch the long lines of coal cars roll down the valley. One day Miss Minor said to me, "Herbie, I want you to get up very early next Saturday morning and go over and stand by the railroad and just watch the trains all day long." The other children laughed and I remember telling them at recess that that was precisely what I was going to do. After all, she did not tell me that I couldn't watch the trains in her room. But I didn't go over that Saturday and the child's mind slowly grasped the principle that if I was not prepared to watch trains when I had the full freedom to do so, then I ought not to do it while her class was in session. A small realization, but I thought of it years later when I read Jean Piaget's *The Moral Development of the Child*.

The other lesson was a bit simpler. Halloween night was a big event in Reader, but my age group thought ourselves too mature to put on costumes, so we followed behind the little children and got our candies the easy way. A few of us were talking one night in late October, and the subject of Halloween came up. Since Reader, then as now, had no constituted civil authority, trick-or-treating would go on for two or three days. One of the older boys said that some people bought their candy well in advance and we could just go around by ourselves without the "cover" of the small children. It was a thrilling prospect. I was the one that knocked on the doors, while my friends

waited on the street, but it was only Miss Minor who gave us the candy. Sensing that I had a good thing going — after all she was my teacher — I went back a couple nights later by myself and got some more candy. The third night, I was there right after supper and she said, "Herbie, you're not supposed to come *every* night." It was in this manner that I learned about going to the well too often.

In retrospect, I think that I can see that one of the basic qualities of a good teacher is the manner by which she imparts the substantive knowledge she has to offer. It is almost a cliché to say, but it is not what people teach but rather *how* they teach it that is important. Proper timing and dealing with a person on his or her level of awareness are artistic matters, nearly unlearnable gifts of the first magnitude. It would have been very easy for Miss Minor to tell the little boy to sit down or have turned him

(continued on page 66)

A Gift of the Past
Writing Family History

By Ellen Henson Brinkley

I don't know that I'll recall a whole lot." With her usual modesty, those were the apologetic first words of my 90-year-old Great-aunt Helen Henson, as we settled into chairs on her Charleston front porch. I had asked her to try to remember some family history, so that I could tape record and thus preserve the stories and events she alone now remembered. As it turned out, she *did* recall a whole lot — enough to fill three afternoons, in fact.

What a truly enriching experience the project became for both of us. She remembered stories her mother had told her, handed down from the Mason County area of the 1700's. She remembered stories about Malden in the late 1800's, when it was more of a bustling town than Charleston.

Most of her stories were intensely personal, family recollections. "Mom said the creek ran up," she told me in one of these. "Once when they had driven down with Sis and Lou in the back of the buggy, and she had Carson on her lap. I think they were down for a special church meeting. They were crossing George's Creek and there came a quick rise in the water. Mom said that the horse made kind of a lunge back because the creek was so high, and she grabbed Carson by his long dress or he would have gone into the river. She said if it had been a short dress she couldn't have saved him."

She went on, later telling of a time when natural gas practically bubbled from the ground of West Virginia. "I heard Sis say that when she and Lou were growing up, starting school, and the kids would put those stickweeds down in the ground. They were hollow, and the gas would come up. They would light it at the top and each one tried to have the biggest fire. She said it was a wonder they hadn't burned themselves up! But on cold mornings they would stop and warm their hands from their stickweed fires."

Maybe such stories just flow naturally from Aunt Helen, but I had taken the precaution of making preparations for our interviews. I began my

The Hensons were a robust West Virginia family, as this early photo shows. Walter and Mattie Henson sit in the midst of their children, with Helen standing to her father's right. Photographer unknown, about 1910.

Baby portrait of Helen Henson, born in 1893. Photo by Gates Studio, Charleston.

planning well ahead of time. I knew such a project would work only if my aunt were a willing and eager participant. Consequently, I wrote to her about a month early, explaining that I wanted to hear about the family history. I wanted names and dates, but more importantly wanted to capture descriptions of events and people so that I could get some sense of unique individuals, the lives they led, and the world they lived in. Her reply was swift and enthusiastic.

I then began a list of questions to ask, trying to start with what might be easiest for her to remember. A description of her parents (my great-grandparents) seemed the logical place to begin. I jotted down things I wanted to know, starting with her mother:

— What are your earliest memories of her?

— Did she seem to have had a happy childhood?

— How did she meet her husband?

— What did she feel strongly about?

My list went on to include questions about Great-grandmother's personality, special interests, joys and fears, and her physical appearance.

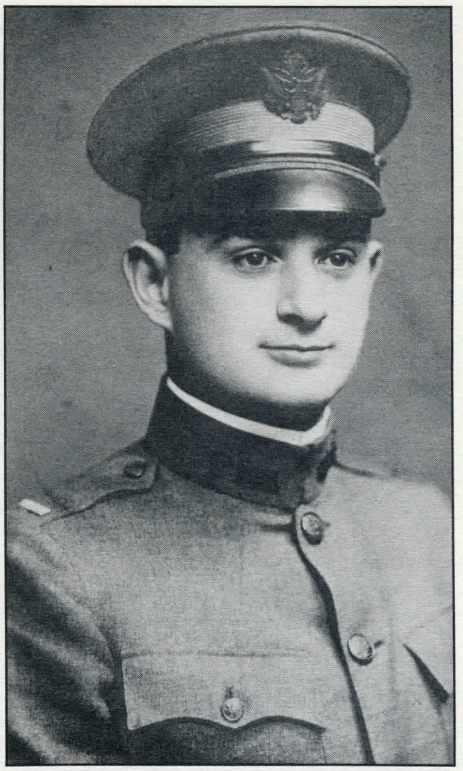
My questioning bore fruit, although Aunt Helen didn't need much prodding. She knew a lot of her mother's story, from an early age up. "When she was only 14 and a half years old," she said, "her father took her on the back of him on a horse. Took her to the three school trustees, and each one of them examined her in one or two subjects. She got high grades in all, and they gave her a school to teach when she was only 14 and a half years old!"

I had questions to ask Aunt Helen about herself, as well. Since she was one of eight children who survived to adulthood, for example, I was especially intrigued by what it had been like to grow up in a large family. How did each child manage to achieve his or her own sense of identity?

Like any budding oral historian, I worried about the effect of my equipment on my subject's willingness to talk. But as we got into our first conversation, Aunt Helen quickly forgot about the tape recorder on her lap. The recorder allowed me to concentrate on our conversation rather than take notes, and I was charmed to see her talking her oldtime recollections into the modern electronic machine. I heard stories of everyday routine and of memorable events.

"After Grandfather Henson died," she told me at one point, "Grandmother lived in a little cottage on an elevation right across a little ravine from my parents. Momma would look out across the ravine and see her going back and forth. She would milk her cow and feed her chickens and always got up early. Momma said every morning she would do up her work, then bring some piecework — sewing or mending or knitting or crocheting or something — and come over and sit and watch the two children while Mom did *her* work. About three o'clock in the afternoon she would gather up her work and go over home to feed and milk her cow, feed her chickens. But she was always there to eat lunch with Poppa and visit with him."

Things continued in this peaceful way for the rest of my great-great-grandmother's life. When the routine abruptly changed one day, it was noticed right away. "The morning Grandmother died Momma hadn't seen her like she usually did, so she



Dr. Bennett Henson in World War I uniform. Sister Helen today recalls that he received specialized medical training while in the service. Date and photographer unknown.

told Pop to go over," Aunt Helen continued. "He said, 'I'm just ready to start to town. I'll have one of the men ride by and see. She may want to send into town for something, anyway.'

"Well, the man came galloping back and said he found her lying on the floor. Momma got behind Pop and they rode over there, and they figured she lived about 20 minutes after they got there. She had milked her cow, strained the milk out, and made a glass of blackberry jelly. It was still warm." Aunt Helen's memories were still warm, too, and she had no trouble carrying me back across five generations.

From time to time during our conversations I referred to my questions, but tried not to be bound by them. Her thoughts went in many directions as she mentally reached back 70 or 80 years. We let the talk wander, with just occasional need to get back to the written questions.

I was delighted that my aunt had stored up so much information, both of her own experiences and of what she'd been told about earlier generations. Clearly she was the right person to ask, because she valued the

Left: Bennett with other men of the family. He holds nephew Carle II, while brother Nyde stands behind and brother Carle to the right. Photographer unknown, 1918.

Above: Helen as a young teenager, with older sister Nannie (right). Photographer unknown, about 1906.

Below: This house on Charleston's Truslow Street was home to the Hensons from 1909 to 1969. The site was later taken by Town Center Mall. Date and photographer unknown.

family name, traditions, and history. She could recall momentous events of the nation's past, as well, and her memories were sometimes graphic, indeed.

"I remember up at Winifrede Junction when McKinley was assassinated," she told me. "The fast train went by and there was a man sitting on the observation section, and he saw me out there in the yard by the steps and threw the newspaper. I ran out and grabbed it and could see 'McKinley Assassinated!' Lou and Carson struck out for the depot and watched it come in on the telegraph." Americans of a much younger generation are already passing on their equally vivid recollections of what they were doing at the time of the Kennedy assassination, and this bringing of grand affairs down to a comprehensible human scale is something that oral history does well. Aunt Helen put the 1901 tragedy into the context of family life, thus making it easier for me to understand its meaning for ordinary people.

I hadn't expected to hear of the McKinley assassination, but the story was indicative of the discoveries we made as we went along. Actually there was little coherence to our conversations, and in the end not all my questions were answered thoroughly. Sometimes there seemed to be no answer, and sometimes whatever answer came seemed insignificant. Then, too, it seemed important to be flexible and sensitive to what *she* wanted to share. If a question didn't feel right, I simply didn't ask.

After the first and second sessions, I listened to the tapes and jotted down new questions that presented themselves and items that needed clarification. The third visit came several weeks later and was meant primarily to fill in gaps that had appeared once I tried to put the information in order. By the end of that afternoon it was clear that the interviewing task was essentially complete, for by that time I began to hear some of the same stories I'd heard before.

The recorded tapes represented a whole new challenge — what to do with them and how to share the stories. I considered trying to type as the tapes played just to get down the essential information, but decided I wanted a verbatim record in order to maintain as much authenticity as possible and to capture speech patterns and colorful, old-fashioned expressions. In the end I used a very time-consuming transcribing process, taking down in shorthand what was on the tapes and then typing from my notes. Using a transcribing machine probably would have been more efficient.

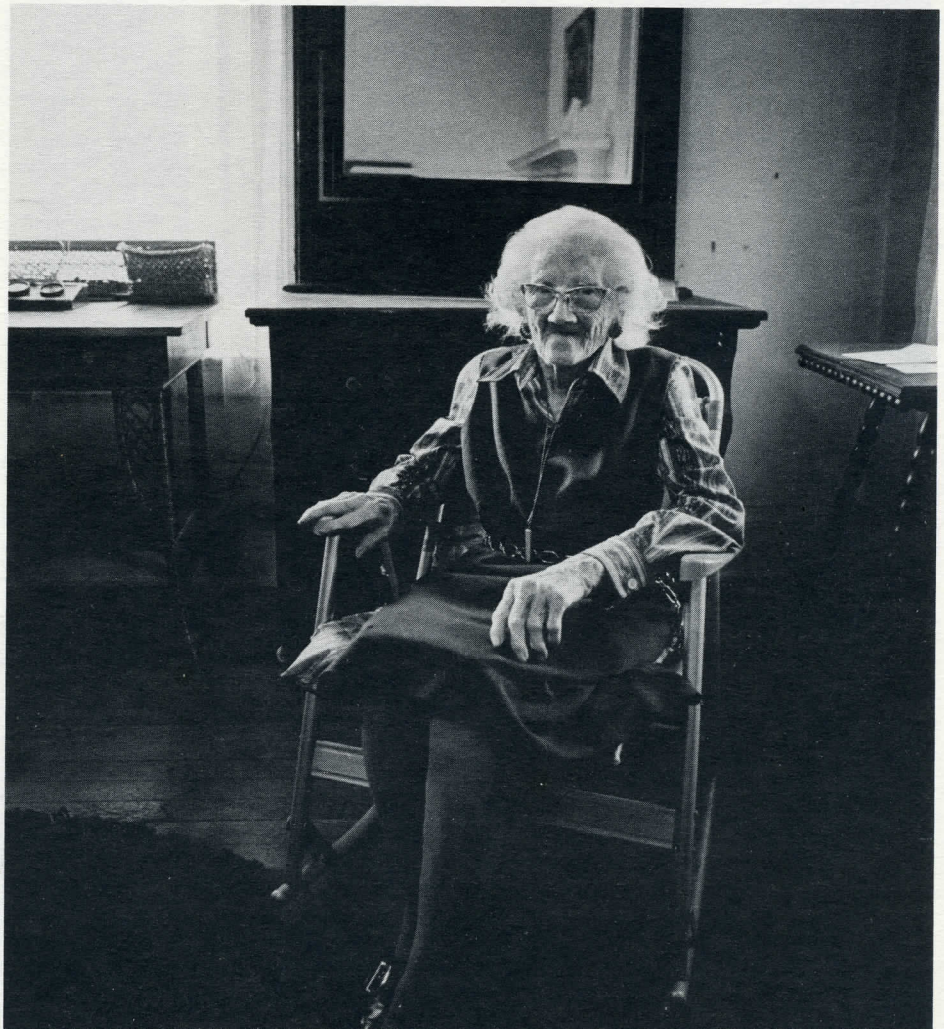
Once the transcribing was completed, I turned my attention to the much more interesting job of excerpting and piecing together bits of conversation, trying to turn them into a coherent and readable, chronological story. During this time I made one quick but fruitful trip to the State Archives to check records of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Meanwhile, another aunt, Mrs. Leslie Price, volunteered an old handwritten document which traced some of the early lineage. Both records added names, dates, and a bit of authenticity to the final narrative. After considerable rearranging and revision, what eventually emerged were 14 pages of typed excerpts about the family from the late 1700's to the 1900's.

Names I had heard mentioned on rare occasions now became people I felt I knew. "Carson could cut hair," I learned of my great-uncle, Helen's brother, for example. "He would hear of somebody that was going to get married and ask, 'Well, do you want a haircut?' " Evidently he was interested in keeping the community well-groomed, and maybe soliciting a little work for himself as well.

Uncle Carson could also drum up business for my great-grandfather's store, according to Aunt Helen. "If Pop had clothing at the store that wasn't moving, Carson would put on a new pair of shoes and fancy shirt, collar, and so forth, and go over and sit around the depot," she reported. "In a little while somebody would come along and Carson would say, 'How do you like my duds?'

"The response might be, 'They look pretty snappy. Where'd you get them? How much are they?' He could sell anything!"

Helen Henson at home in Charleston. Photo by Michael Keller.



I learned of other relatives as well. "Bennett went to Louisville to medical school, then came back to Charleston General as a resident," Aunt Helen recalled of World War I days. "When the war came up, he enlisted and they put him on the examining board to examine the recruits. He especially examined their feet and their legs, to see whether they could stand the pressure of marching and all that.

"Some way I think the army saw that he was especially interested in that, so they assigned him to an orthopedic unit. Then later on, one of the doctors there recommended him and the army sent him to Harvard to specialize in orthopedics. When he came back home, the other doctors knew he had special orthopedic training and they referred their patients to him." Great-uncle Bennett later founded the Marmet Hospital for Crippled Children.

Such a family history is, I believe, a worthwhile effort which can produce a treasured gift to family members. It is, in fact, a gift of our past, something so many of us lack as we move around the country and miss the frequent family get-togethers of an earlier day. I mailed copies of my history instead of Christmas cards that year, to family as far away as California, Florida, and Texas.

What is more, I believe my aunt thoroughly enjoyed this chance to relive the special events and milestones of long ago. Toward the end of our two- and three-hour recording sessions I kept suggesting that we quit for the day, only to have to turn on the recorder again as she recalled one more fascinating anecdote. Certainly working together strengthened the bond between my aunt and me, and between our generations. My only regret is that I didn't do something similar with other members of the family whose stories now will never be told.

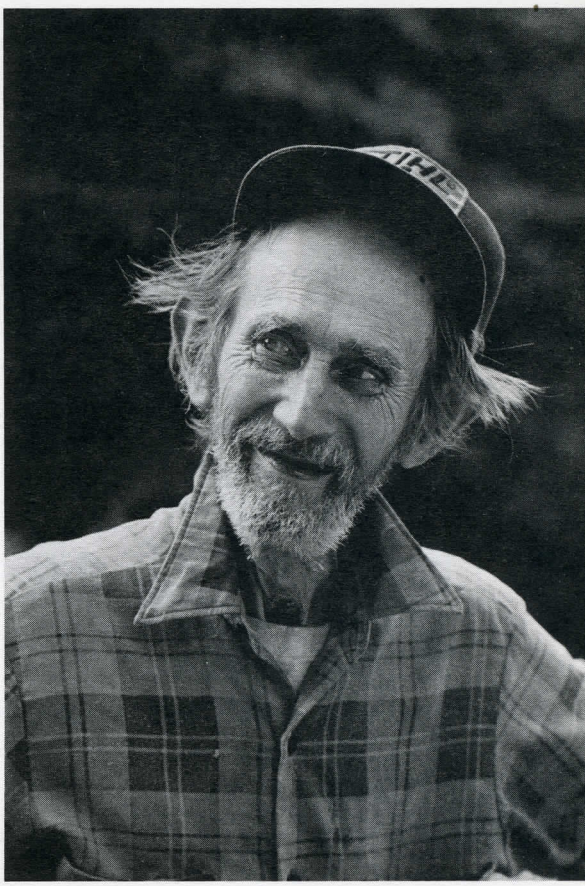
Helen Henson is an active 90-year-old. Here she clears her front yard on a warm November day. Photo by Michael Keller.

Further Reading

Those wanting to record their own family histories may be interested in purchasing two excellent and inexpensive guides to the subject. *An Oral History Primer* ($1.75), by Gary L. Shumway and William G. Hartley, explains the basics of oral history, from taping interviews to processing the finished product. *Preparing A Personal History* ($1.95), a companion booklet by Hartley alone, offers ideas on how to build from the resulting transcripts. While aimed primarily at people constructing their own life histories, Hartley's book is helpful to those writing histories of others as well. His step-by-step checklist of life's stages, from early childhood right through old age, is especially useful.

Both books may be ordered from Primer Publications, P.O. Box 11894, Salt Lake City, Utah 84147. A postage and handling fee of 35¢ should be included for each book ordered.

Elmer Mollohan, a hardy mountaineer in his 81st year, still has the twinkle in his eye.



Whatever It Takes

Elmer Mollohan of Webster County

By Jim Bloemker

Photographs by Michael Keller

You'd think that after more than seven decades of working, Elmer Mollohan would be tired of it. But that's not the case. To see this spry, 81 year old man in action, just take a trip to the Mollohan Mill restoration project currently underway in the northern corner of Webster County. Elmer is directing his son, Clark, and grandson, with help from various other Mollohans, in the renovation of the family mill. As a young boy, Elmer helped to run the original mill and has vivid memories about its operation. Along with his memories, Elmer has accumulated a number of skills learned over a lifetime of working at various jobs which have contributed to the success of the current undertaking.

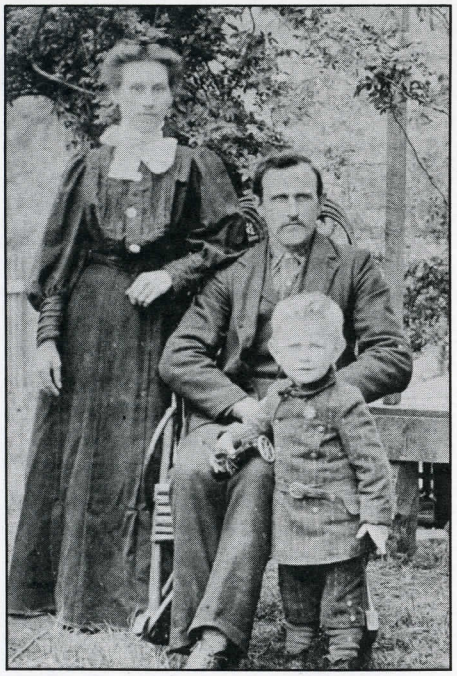
With state and federal assistance, the Mollohans are restoring the mill which has been in their family for three generations. Since the mill is now on the National Register of Historic Places, certain guidelines set by the National Park Service must be followed in the work. These guidelines basically call for as authentic a restoration as possible. Meeting these stipulations is no problem for the Mollohans. They have the detailed recollections of Elmer to go on, as well as some of the original plans and even the actual tools used in the original construction. Additionally, the old mill and its workings are in excellent condition, with the exception of the parts exposed to the water.

The structure under renovation was built in 1894 by Elmer's grandfather, Bernard Mollohan. It is situated on the south bank of the Left Fork of Holly River, about a mile south of Replete. The present mill location was the site of an even earlier log mill, built prior to the Civil War. That one was also the work of a Mollohan, James, who had purchased two land patents on the Holly River in what was then Braxton County, Virginia.

Elmer Mollohan is a descendant of James, and is able to recount a few details about the man and how his land passed to Elmer's side of the family. According to him, James Mollohan was a shoemaker by trade and a crippled man. One story which has been handed down concerns his death. "The old man kept getting worse and knew he was going to die, so he had them take him on a sled to pick out the place to bury him," Elmer relates. "Before he was back they had already cut the lumber for the casket. They buried him in whipsawed lumber." Soon after James died, the farm came into the hands of Bernard Mollohan, who purchased the roughly 850 acres.

Like his grandson, Elmer, Bernard Mollohan was an industrious and versatile man. Not only did Bernard build the mill on his own farm, but several other local mills as well. They included the Levenworth mill and Ben Conard mill, and others which Elmer no longer remembers exactly.

Bernard's construction reputation was so well known that he was commissioned to build Webster County's first courthouse in 1866. He received $1700 for the job. His work stood for a little more than two decades, until 1888, when the courthouse burned with all the records. Fortunately, the county was able to hire Bernard to recopy the original surveyor's records, which he had kept a personal copy of, "So the first three volumes of the surveyor's records are in my grandfather's handwriting," Elmer proudly notes. "You'll find one thing in that handwriting. He used the old



English writing style, in which an *s* looks like a *p*. You'll find that same style in the Declaration of Independence."

Besides construction work and looking after the farm, Bernard Mollohan took on various civic duties as he had time for them. From 1867 to 1877 he served as Webster Springs postmaster. For a time, teaching school was one of his occupations. In fact, according to Elmer, that's how he came to be in Webster in the first place. "Grandfather came to Webster County to teach school," he explains. "You didn't have to have a lot of education to teach school then."

The one position for which Bernard Mollohan is best remembered locally, however, is his service as Webster County's first land surveyor. Then as now, county surveyor was an elective office, and the job was an absolutely critical one in the first years of a county's history. Bernard was elected on May 24, 1860. Work commenced on surveying the boundaries of the new county (the last Virginia county created before West Virginia statehood) on October 2, 1860, and was completed by November 23 of that same year. Mollohan was assisted in the work by surveyors from the neighboring counties. In 1882 a portion of the new boundary line which was common to the counties of Nicholas and Greenbrier was resurveyed by Mollohan to settle a controversy over the annexation of 30 square miles to Webster County.

Elmer traces his own skills back two generations to this accomplished ancestor. Commonly in the 19th century, fathers passed their own knowledge on to their sons in what we today might call on-the-job training.

Above: Elmer with father George and mother Bertha, at home in Webster County. Photographer unknown, about 1905.

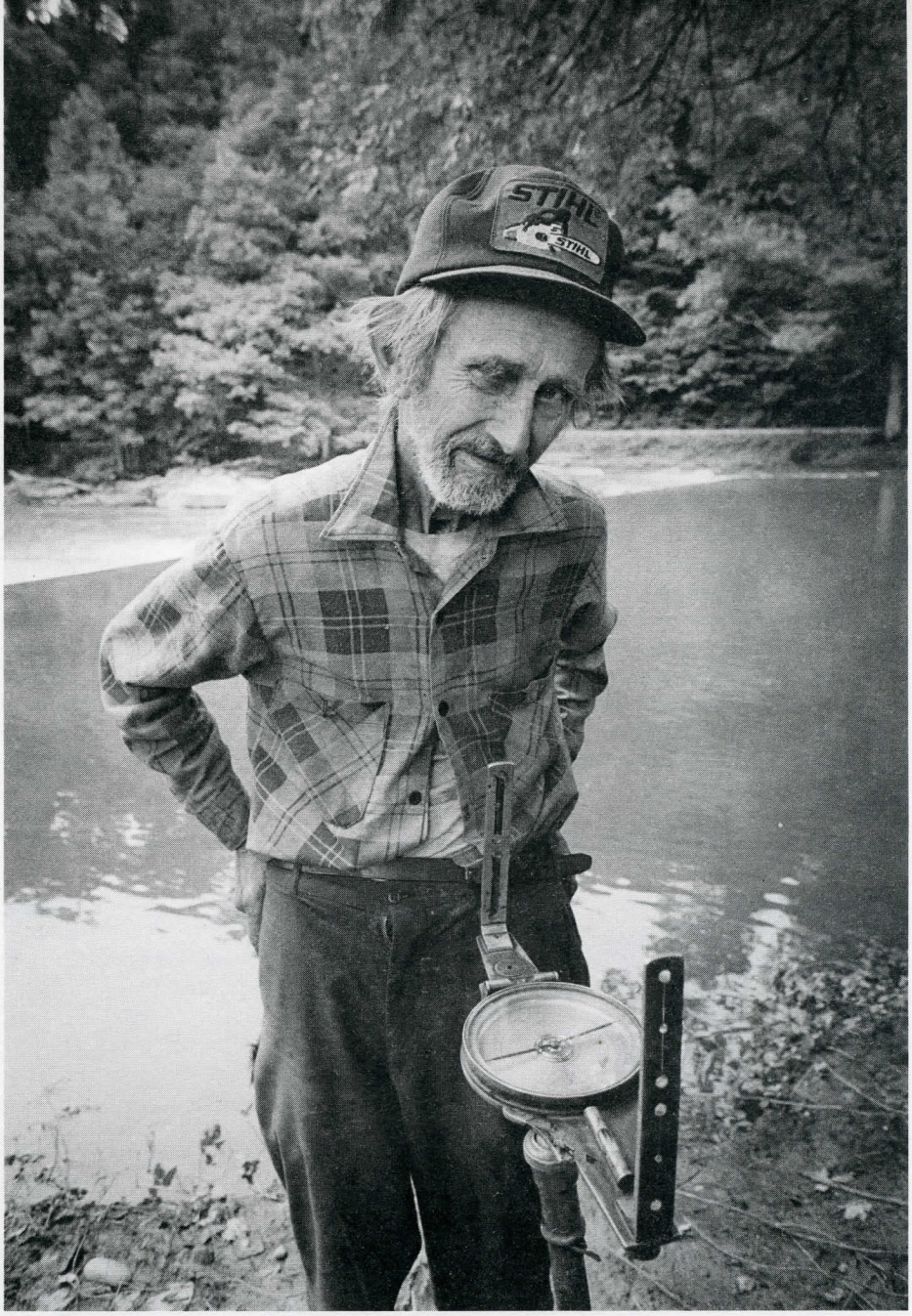
Below: The Mollohans today live in the same house that grandfather Bernard Mollohan built in the last century.

Such was the case with Bernard and his son George Bernard Mollohan. Grandson Elmer recalled how his father was taught to "run a line, read deeds, and hunt up plats." He also remembered that his father never became too experienced with surveying in the woods. Elmer in his turn learned surveying by assisting his father, George Bernard, on local jobs. He says that he "grew up with a history of running lines and knew surveying in the way that you know where your bed is." At the age of 14 or 16, Elmer had thus begun to master one of the professions by which he has earned his living.

All three generations of Mollohans have used the same basic instrument to do their work. The brass surveyor's compass rests on top of a wooden rod called a Jacob staff. Similar compasses have been used by such noteworthy surveyors as George Washington. Brass surveyor's compasses have since been replaced by transits and theodolites, but Elmer intends to hold on to his. The heirloom instrument was ordered by grandfather Bernard around 1870, from W. and S. E. Gurley of Troy, New York.

It was while living on the farm that Elmer learned to like hard work. As on most farms the work load was divided among the members of the family. Elmer can remember helping customers unload their corn to the ground at his grandfather's mill. Besides an occasional milling job, the daily tasks of farming had to be performed. The Mollohans raised chickens, ducks, and hogs, all of which had to be cared for. They had a team of horses to assist in the farm work. In Elmer's words, "back at that time most families kept a pair of horses and a wagon. We didn't have a wagon until after I was grown up, but we had plows and sleds. I learned to use a mower, hayrake, and whatever was common at that time." The horses were also used for harvesting timber on the farm, which has been logged on four different occasions since Elmer has been there. The chores increased when Elmer's mother died and he had to "learn to cook and do whatever it took" to help keep things going on the farm.

Elmer took over the farm after his father died and his brother, Clive, moved to Ohio. A sister had died at an early age, which left Elmer as sole owner when he purchased Clive's share of the farm. Elmer now owns 250 acres, much of it from the original tract purchased by Bernard. Elmer, with his wife, Winnie, and youngest daughter, Bertha, resides in the house that his grandfather built, which was constructed at the same time as the mill. Although the horses are no longer harnessed for work, the timber has grown back, and the livestock has been built up to 21 head, the farm today retains much of its late 19th century flavor.



Elmer keeps Bernard's brass surveyor's compass in good order. More modern instruments are available now, but this one has worked fine since 1870.

Elmer Mollohan was never able to rely soley on income from farming and milling to support his family of six children. His training in surveying was particularly useful in helping to bring in additional money. Perhaps his proudest moment as a surveyor was when he became Webster County surveyor in 1948, a position his grandfather had held 88 years ago. Elmer recalls with a chuckle how he landed the job. Webster County, then as now, was largely Democratic, but the Mollohans were primarily Republicans. Elmer switched parties for this election and ran Democratic. He ran against Nick Morton, the county engineer who switched from the Democratic Party to the Republican in order to run against Mollohan. The

switch favored Elmer. He did not do as well in the next election, when he and Morton both ran as Democrats.

After leaving office, Elmer surveyed for private enterprises, mainly lumber companies. For a number of years he worked for the Sun Lumber Company laying out timber sales. During his fieldwork Elmer had occasion to run over some of the same lines that his grandfather surveyed. He was thrilled to distinguish his grandfather's method of marking a line. It consisted of making three hatchet marks on the side of a tree that was to the left or right of the surveyed line and two marks and a blaze on the center of a tree exactly on line. This method of marking trees dates back to the way early settlers identified their land claims by establishing what were known as "tomahawk rights." Elmer was also able to identify his grandfather's initials, as well as his assistant's, which were carved into some trees. Elmer knew the hatchet markings to be those of his grandfather's because of their proximity to the survey line and their notation in the original survey notes which he still had.

Occasionally, Elmer is still called upon to help settle a dispute among land owners over a boundary. More than likely, at one time or another a Mollohan has surveyed the line in question or one nearby which Elmer has first hand knowledge of and can help to retrace. Although he is not a licensed surveyor and cannot officially resurvey a line with his compass, more often than not he can retrace it with his memory. Webster County will lose a valuable resource when Elmer Mollohan is no longer around to help settle its boundary squabbles.

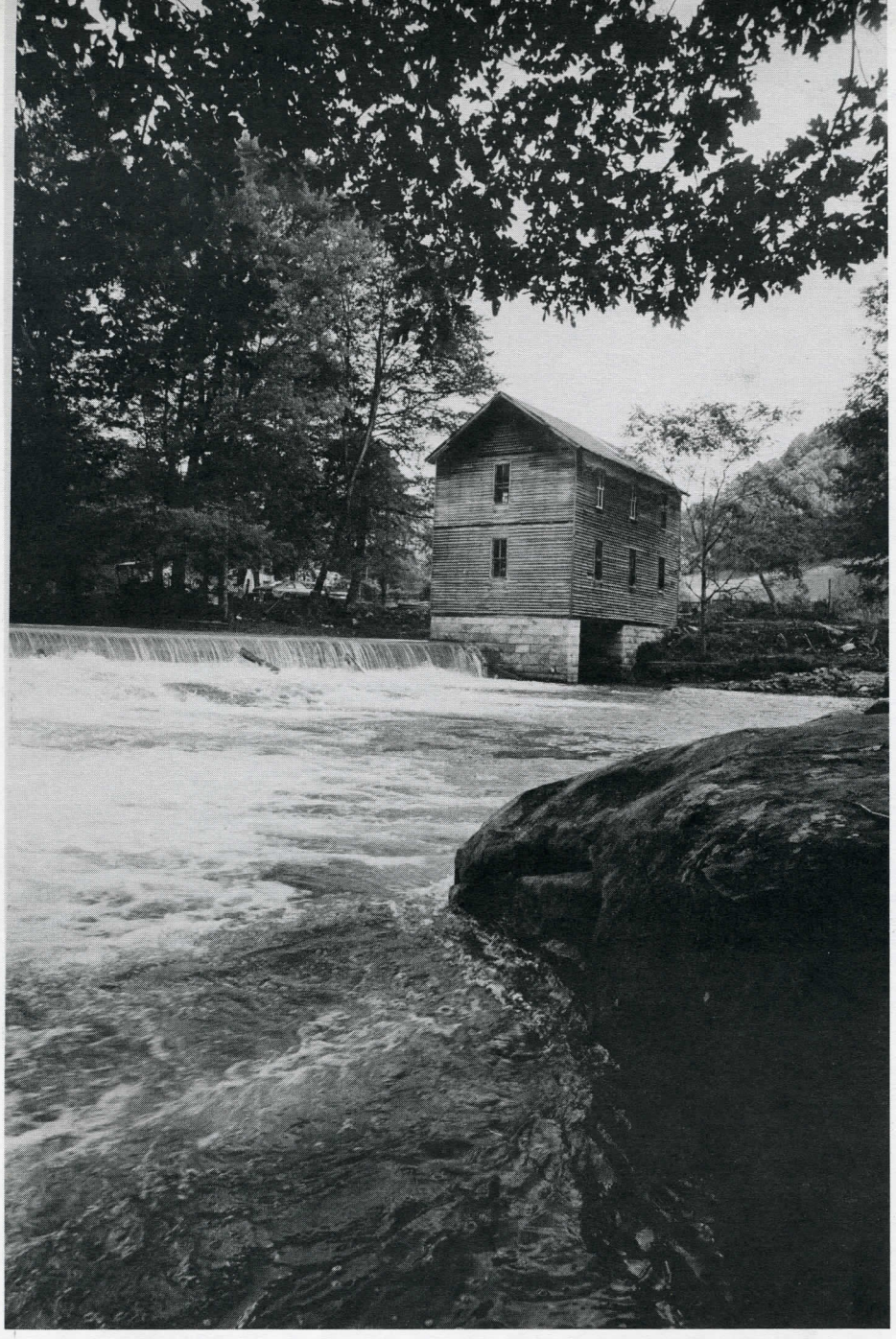
Elmer and his dog lead historian Michael Pauley on an inspection of the Mollohan farm and grist mill property.

Although surveying has been a major occupation in his life, Elmer has had a variety of other jobs. During the Depression years he worked for the WPA on road construction. He helped to build a few of the county roads, including the one on the hill above his place. One of the positions he held on the road crew was known as a "swamper." A swamper, according to Elmer, was the man who cleaned brush and timber off of the path to be used for the road. His experience for this job was gained during the years he had spent working for the Curtin Lumber Company. Elmer even went into the logging business for himself when he cut timber on his farm and skidded it for his neighbors and other people. At another point Elmer worked for the Soil Conservation Service, performing a variety of tasks that were related to his skills as a surveyor.

All in all, Elmer Mollohan has led a varied life. "I've grown up doing just about everything you can do back here," in his words. "When you're living in this country you've got to be able to do any job you can to make a living."

Elmer is not working to make a living now, however, as he goes about the restoration of the old grist mill. This job is mainly a labor of love, the important work of a man looking after his family's history and expecting to share it with others. For the Mollohans have plans for their project, hoping to create a tourist attraction once the mill is restored. A cabin and other ancillary buildings will be placed nearby, recreating the atmosphere of a late 19th century milling operation. The family also plans to demonstrate the process of milling, as Elmer learned it and passed it down to them.

Times have changed, and tourism, government grants and Park Service renovation guidelines are all alien to the old ways on the farm. But the practical streak still runs strong in Elmer Mollohan and he'll accept the new ways when they offer the chance to convey the legacy and pride of a West Virginia family to visitors who lack the direct links to the past that he and his people are themselves fortunate enough to have.



The mill dam again spans the Left Fork of Holly River as Mollohan Mill is restored to working condition.

Grinding Grist

The Inner Workings of Mollohan Mill

By Michael Joseph Pauley

Photographs by Michael Keller

Standing tall on the banks of the Left Fork of the Holly River as it has since its construction in 1894, the Mollohan Mill is a surviving example of an institution that once was the economic heart of every rural West Virginia community. The grist mill was a necessity in an agricultural land. Farmers grew the raw materials, the corn, wheat and buckwheat, but to be useful these crops had to be turned into meal and flour to feed large families. The Mollohan Mill performed this important service for generations of Webster Countians, and its current restoration allows us to examine the ingenious way the work was done.

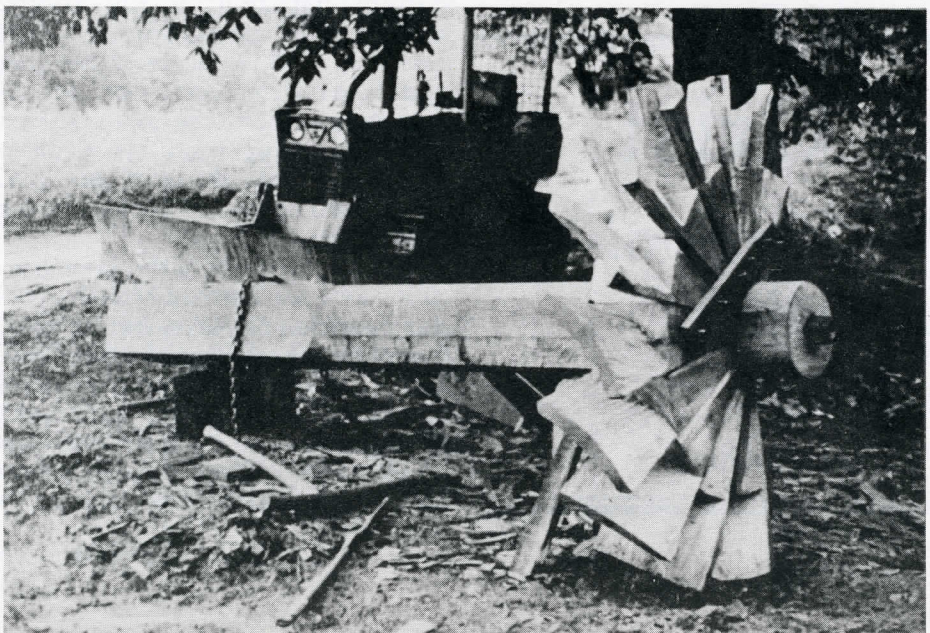
The mill is still owned by the Mollohan family and they expect to have it in operation again soon. Elmer Mollohan, the 81 year old grandson of the mill's founder and current patriarch of the family, worked at the mill off and on until it closed in 1953, a victim of flooding and the modern grocery store. My information on how the mill operated comes primarily from his recollections and from those of his son, Clark, who has taken the lead in the restoration.

The mill is in nearly the same condition as when Bernard Mollohan began operation on November 23, 1894, except for the addition of a metal roof in 1912 to replace the original wood shingles. The mill was prominent enough locally to catch the attention of the WPA Writer's Project, whose members noted in 1940 that it "is

When the gates are opened, the twin turbines capture power from water rushing under the mill. The turbine under construction (below) was photographed last spring.

among the most prosperous enterprises in the valley." It stands on a raised stone foundation that was laid by the Brown brothers, local stone masons who were responsible for many building and house foundations and chimneys in 19th and early 20th century Webster County.

The Mollohan Mill has two basic milling operations, both of them located on the first floor. One was used to grind wheat and buckwheat, and the other corn. The mills are powered by two large wooden turbine wheels, outfitted with "scooped out" paddles, that lay horizontally side by side in the water. They turn when the sluice gate is opened, allowing the dammed-up water of the Left Fork of the Holly to race over them. The dam that provides this water power has been restored to its original 1894 condition and majestically spans the river almost to its northern bank, allowing the water to flow through a single channel. The dam is anchored in solid rock on the river bottom, and consists, on the upstream side, of slanting vertical boards, with horizontal beams on the downstream side. The dam will not suffer deterioration, the Mollohans say, as long as the water level remains reasonably constant.



The impressive wooden turbines were designed by Bernard Mollohan. In fact, his design was still hanging on an interior wall of the mill where he had left it, and was used in the recent restoration. The remains of one of the original turbines was also available to serve as a model. (The old dam and one of the turbines had

been washed away in the great flood of 1953). Ben Criss, a locally prominent artist and stone mason and the grandson of Webster County woodchopping champion Paul Criss, carved the paddles for the new turbines from yellow linden wood. They were then scooped out by hand by members of the Mollohan family.

These horizontal turbines were rather unusual for grist mills in West Virginia, the most common type being the familiar large overshot "side wheel" seen in so many paintings of rural mills. Undershot wheels were also common, while in the late 19th and early 20th century many grist mills abandoned water power all together to convert to steam or gasoline.

The turbines separately operate the two milling operations above, turning opposite to one another. There is no fundamental law governing this arrangement, but it was necessary since the gears of the wheat mill were set up in such a fashion as to require its turbine to run counter to the other turbine. This is because the wheat mill, installed later than the corn mill, runs with a flat belt. The turbines are attached to large wooden shafts that run up into the mill. The square shafts, made of mulberry wood, project up through the floor and are attached to two "tundrel heads," which are large, almost cylindrical wooden gears. Each of these turns a large horizontal gear, with projecting teeth to catch the spokes of the tundrel head as it turns. This gear is attached to another shaft going up through holes in the center of the two burr stones. These are the actual mill stones with the shaft turning the upper to grind the grist against the stationary lower stone.

The grist is the grain to be ground. It was poured directly from above into a large hopper, a roughly rectangular wooden mouth bigger at the top than at the bottom. The grist then dropped through the "stirrup" to the burr stones beneath the hopper. Large wooden paddles were used by the miller to adjust the rate that the grist dropped through the hopper. An iron mill screw, about four feet long and forked into two handles at the top, was used to raise or lower the top stone to control the coarseness of the grind. The distance between the upper and lower stones had to be carefully monitored by the miller to insure that the two did not actually come together, which would cause them to lock and be ruined.

The ground meal flowed out of a wooden tongue, resembling a large water spout, beneath the mill stones. The miller would use the "whip cord" to tie the filled mill sacks in a unique "miller's knot." The customer was then ready to depart, or he could stop at the store which occupied an adjacent building. There the miller and his family sold produce from

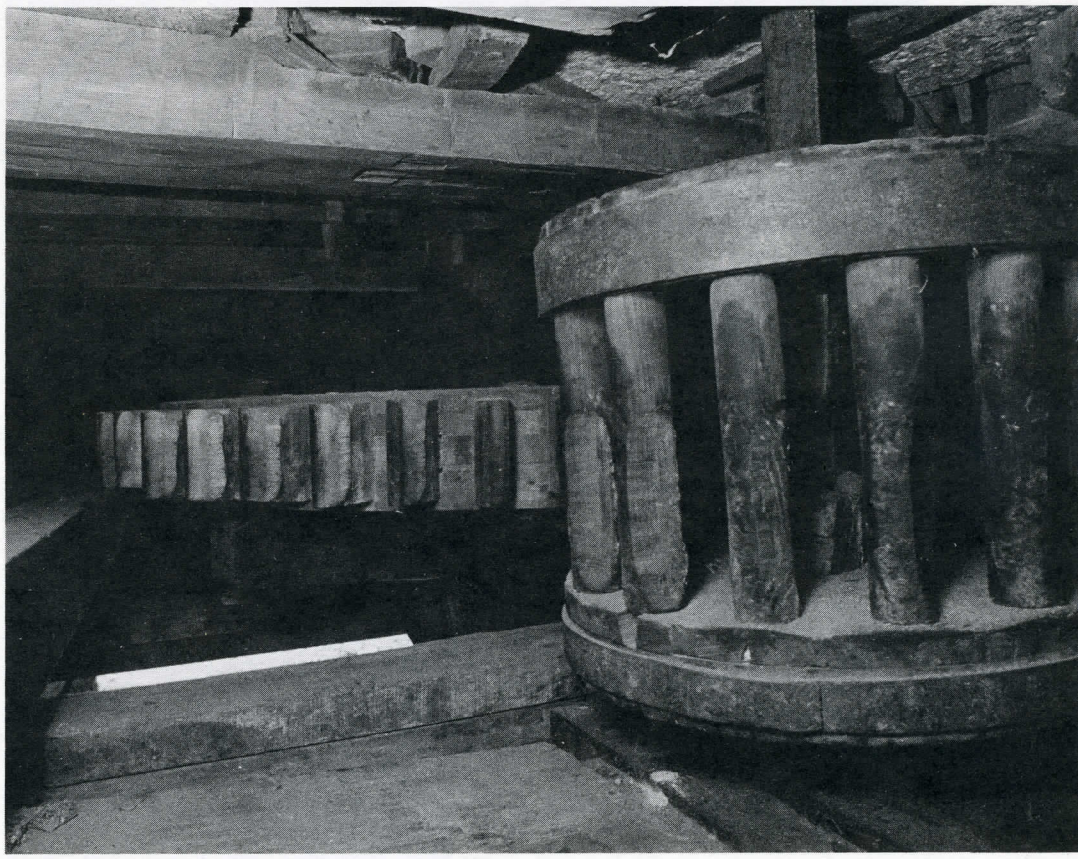
Mollohan Mill on Historic Register

According to the Historic Preservation Unit of the West Virginia Department of Culture and History, the Mollohan Mill is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is significant as one of the few remaining grist mills of its type in central West Virginia, and is currently the only site in Webster County to be included on the National Register.

The mill was the recipient in 1984 of a $5,000 matching grant for restoration and rehabilitation. The grant, allocated through the Historic Preservation Unit, is part of funds originating with the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The restoration work, done largely by members of the Mollohan family, is now substantially complete.

The National Register of Historic Places is kept by the National Park Service. Entry on the Register certifies that the Webster County mill is a site of historic significance and provides the property a degree of protection from federally funded or federally licensed projects. Nomination to the Register was prepared by the Historic Preservation Unit and approved by the West Virginia Archives and History Commission.

Power from one of the turbines is transmitted through the cylindrical tundrel head gear, at right, and the large horizontal tooth gear.



their farm and milling operations, as well as other goods brought back from regular Saturday journeys to Sutton and Webster Springs.

Some time after the original construction, Bernard Mollohan purchased elaborate auxiliary machinery to install on the second floor of his mill. It operated by gears and belts and connected to one of the turbines by a large shaft through the floor, and was designed to clean the chaff from the meal. Mollohan purchased this operation from the Minneapolis-Mollin Company of Illinois. Apparently the new service was but little called for, and the equipment, though still intact, has not been used since the 1920's.

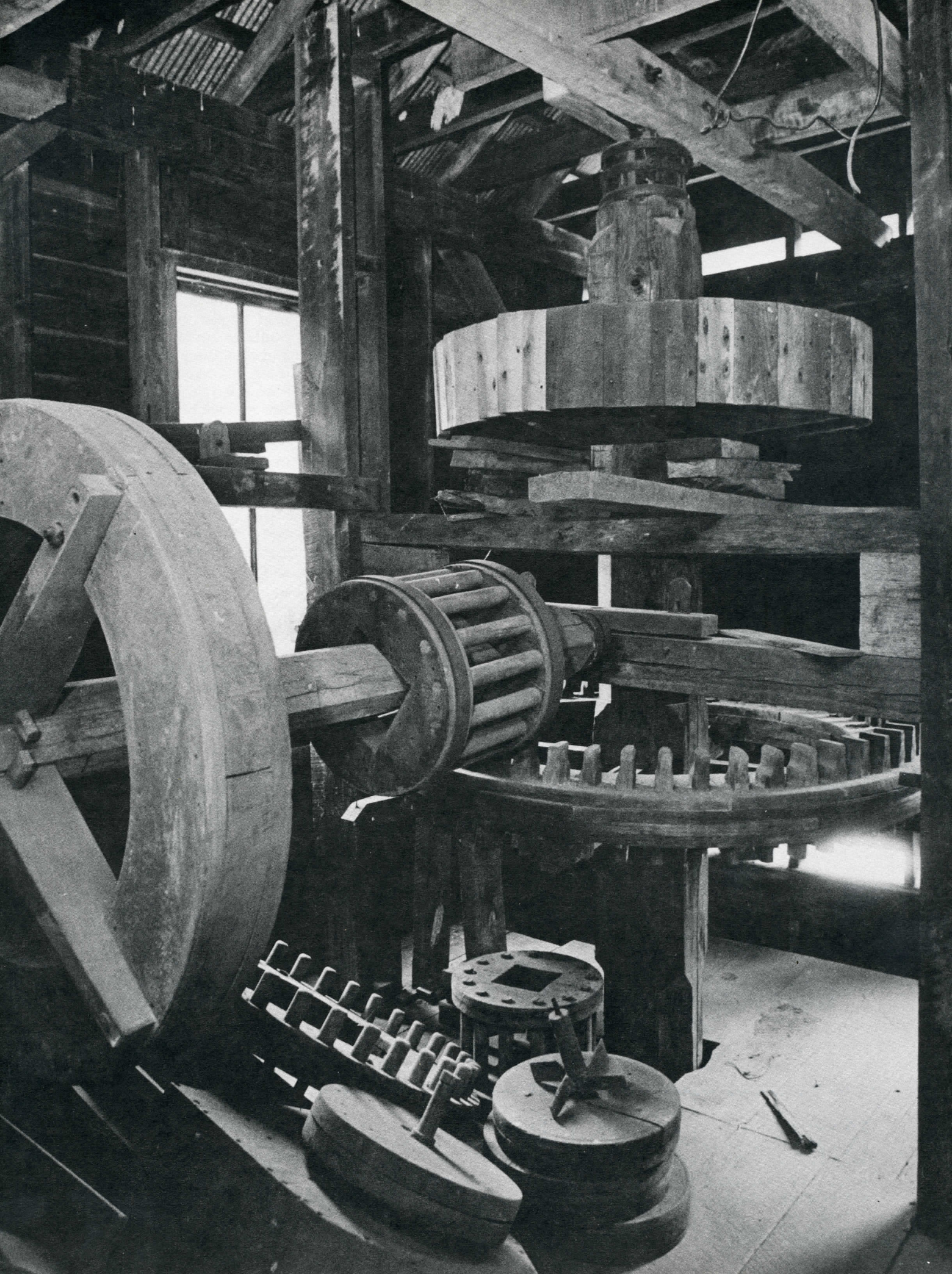
From its beginnings in 1894 until its closing in 1953, the Mollohan Mill was open for business six days a week. Customers from the Holly River valley, the Elk River valley, and from as far away as Tygart River, would come by horseback, and sometimes in wagons, to deposit their grain at the front entrance door. Wagon loads of 25 bushels at a time were not uncommon. Regular customers kept mill sacks that held between a bushel and a bushel and a half, to bring their produce to the mill. The first item on the milling agenda (after, of course, the exchanging of local news, and weather and crop prospects) was to weigh the grist on iron scales next to the hopper. Like many rural West Virginia mills, Mollohan's operated on a barter system rather than cash. In the case of corn, the going rate was one gallon of fresh corn per bushel of corn milled. This gallon, taken by the miller as soon as the corn was weighed, was referred to as the toll.

The Mollohan family no longer takes their toll from grist mill customers, and haven't since the 1953 flood. However, the mill has been restored to its original condition and the family continues to do minor repair and maintenance. Since its restoration, tourists have begun to travel the dirt roads of Webster County to see this example of a vanishing way of life. The Mollohans are pleased at that and hope to maintain their mill as a sort of museum dedicated to the heritage of grist milling on the Holly River.

Above: Grain to be ground was poured into the square hopper and passed to the mill stones below. The miller carefully regulated hopper flow as well as the coarseness of his grind.

Right: Auxiliary cleaning machinery was later installed by Bernard Mollohan on an upper floor, but according to the family was never in much demand.

Opposite Page: The intricacies of early technology are apparent in this photo of gearing at the mill. Here, power is transmitted perpendicularly from the upright teeth of the horizontal gear to the spokes of the small tundrel above. The wheel at left is for a belt drive.



Lefty Shafer enjoys sharing his talent at contests and festivals throughout several states. Here he is at Vandalia Gathering.

"A Lot of Good Music"

Lefty Shafer Talks Fiddling

Interview by Robert Spence

Photographs by Michael Keller

Robert Spence. Let's start out talking about how you first got interested in music. Did you pick it up working on your own, or was there someone who taught you?

Lefty Shafer. My dad was a fiddler and I started playing on his fiddle, but nobody actually taught me. Dad never did any teaching, but I learned two or three tunes that he played and I learned strictly by ear. See, I started playing the fiddle before I learned to read music, which was maybe two or three years after I started playing the fiddle. Then I decided that I wanted to sing and my dad taught a little vocal music. But I never undertook to play the fiddle by note. It's handy, the fact that I do understand how to read music. It helps in playing the fiddle to know what key you're in and something about chords and one thing and another.

I started with the fiddle because it was just what was available. My dad had a fiddle ever since I could remember and my sister still has the fiddle I learned on. When I was 15 years old, I remember, I picked up the fiddle and started sawing on it. I would only play on it when my dad was gone. The first piece that I learned to play was "The Preacher and the Bear."

A preacher went out a-huntin'
upon one Sunday morn.
It was against his religion, but he
took his gun along.
Killed for himself two very fine
quail and one little measly hare.
And on his way returning home
met a great big grizzly bear.

But anyway, I had been learning that piece and I worked on it two or three weeks before my dad even knew I was doing anything. So one night I played it for him and he was just real pleased. I don't remember what the second piece I learned was, or the third piece or the fourth piece. I do remember that one of the early pieces I learned was "The Flop-Eared Mule" and another was "Soldier's Joy." And fairly early I learned to play "The Arkansas Traveller."

RS And almost everybody seems to pick up "Walking in the Parlor" pretty soon.

LS Not me. I don't know "Walking in the Parlor." It seems there's been gaps in my fiddling education because there are some pieces that every fiddler has played for years and years that I don't even know. Like I just learned a year or two ago to play "Bile Them Cabbage Down." Most every fiddler played that, you know.

RS Do you prefer the fiddle alone,

Lefty, as a very young farmer, oversees a flock of ducks. Photographer unknown, about 1917.

or do you like it better with other instruments?

LS Oh, by all means, you want something. I think if I were to choose what I like to play with it would be perhaps a guitar and a bass. It can be an electric base or an upright bass, but if I have a preference, I like the upright bass the best. I'm not averse to having a banjo or a mandolin, for I like to play with anything. It doesn't make any difference how many instruments there are.

RS Have you ever played anything besides the fiddle?

LS I can get a few tunes out of a mountain dulcimer. In fact, I have one here. It is a genuine Epler. You know — Raymond Epler in South Charleston. He lives down on Country Club Boulevard and he makes probably the best lap dulcimers or plucked dulcimers that there are. I've had it for several years. Of course, the strings are rusty on it now 'cause I hardly ever play it anymore. I started playing it a year or so before I started back on the fiddle, and then once I got back to the fiddle and got interested in it once again I sort of neglected the dulcimer.

RS I notice you have a pair of real beautiful fiddles here. Are they handmade?

LS Oh yes. This one, the one I play almost all the time, was made about 1850. I took it to an appraiser in Philadelphia once to see if it was valuable. It didn't have any classical value whatsoever. But it is a real good fiddle. I bought it and another one for $150 and sold the other one for $150. And I turned down an offer of $2,000 for this one a couple of years ago in Tennessee. Everywhere I go, somebody wants to buy it or trade for it or something.

This other one says on the inside that it was made by Alexander Gagliano in 1725, which is not the case. In the early 1800's the Germans copied about all of the old masters and put labels in them stating that they were genuine in many cases. That's what this one says. But I took this one to the appraiser at the same time I took the other one to see if it was genuine and he said it was not. He told me the name of the town it was made in, the maker, and the year — made in 1810. It is a real good instrument. It has a good tone. I suppose the reason I play the other one more is because I had it first and have gotten accustomed to it. It is a little more powerful.

RS Can you tell me who you bought them from?

LS The fiddle I use more often is one I bought from a man named McQueen in Gassaway in Braxton County. The other I bought from a fiddler named Rollie Hommon in Newark, Ohio. He's about 79 years old now and still fiddling.

RS All right. Now before we start talking about the contests and festivals you've been in, I'd like to talk a little about your family background and your career. Where exactly were you born?

LS I was born in Roane County. Do you know where Frame is? Well, that was our post office address. The post office is in Kanawha County but we lived in Roane County at the head of Little Sandy. Except for about three years in the late '20's, I lived there until I was past 21. Then I went to Dunbar and got a job down there. That was in 1936. I was born in 1915, so if I live to the 27th of next March, I'll be 70 years old.

RS Had your folks — your parents and all — lived around Frame for generations?

LS My father and mother and all four of my grandparents had Frame as their post office at one time. My grandfathers migrated there. My paternal grandfather came in from Rock Creek, out in Roane County next to

Walton. My maternal grandfather came from Virginia and he also lived over around Walton or Gandeeville in Roane County until about 1900 when he moved up there on the creek where I grew up. He stayed there until he died in '43. My grandfather Shafer died in '33, the 17th of February, at the age of 82.

RS Let's be sure we get everybody's name down here who we've talked about.

LS All right. My father's name was Von B. Shafer and my mother was Lula Myrtle Goans. Then my father's parents: his father, my grandfather, was Madison D. Shafer and his wife was Sarah Elizabeth Hively. My mother's father was Emmett Goans and his wife was Mary Eliza Noble. So I was named for my two grandfathers, Emmett Goans and Madison Shafer.

Some members of my family have been delving into our family tree somewhat, and my great-grandfather, they have found, was David Shafer. I learned recently that his father was named Jacob, the first Shafer that came into Roane County in the mid-1800's or maybe before then. He came in from Fairfax County, Virginia.

With a few of his awards behind him, Lefty discusses his favorite fiddle. He says the instrument was made about 1850.

RS Was your father's side the only side inclined toward music?

LS Oh, no. My mother was a good singer. She could sing soprano or alto, either one. Didn't make much difference. And she had a good voice. My father was a bass singer and they both read some music. My dad even taught a singing school or two out in the country — you know, the old shape-note singing.

RS Was that church singing?

LS Yes, the singing schools were almost always in the churches. They were held in churches or schoolhouses, one or the other. The way they usually operated was, whoever was going to hold the singing school would contact the church or school, or somebody would contact him, and they would decide what songbook they wanted to use for that school. And they'd order enough books for everybody to have one. You had to buy your own book. Usually the singing school would go on anywhere from two weeks to eight. I went to many of them by different teachers back in the mid-'30's and along in there. I went to some music teachers who were real good. And later, I did some singing in quartets.

RS When was that or who was it with?

LS Well, I can tell you the names of some of the quartets. The first I ever sang in was called the Ugly Four. That was my father and I and another man and his wife. He's now deceased but she still lives down in Putnam County somewhere. And then I sang in one called the Big Foot Quartet. That was four first-cousins. No two of us were brothers. Then I sang for two or three months with the Little Sandy Quartet up around Frame.

After I moved to Dunbar, I hadn't been down there very long until I started singing with the Faithful Quartet in Charleston, and I sang with them for seven years until I went to the Navy in '44. Then, after I came out of the Navy, I sang in the Clendenin Quartet for two or three years. Then there was a while when I didn't sing much, but I sang with the Crystal Quartet here in Charleston in the mid-'50's and that was about the end of my quartet singing.

RS What style of music was that? Barbershop or Gospel?

LS Gospel. We sang practically all gospel. I might mention that at different times I sang all four parts in quartets, from first tenor all the way to bass. I never was really a bass. I never was low enough to sing that part. But I did sing it in one quartet — that Big Foot Quartet. There were four cousins and there wasn't one who could sing a real good bass. I could go lower than any of them, thought I couldn't go very low.

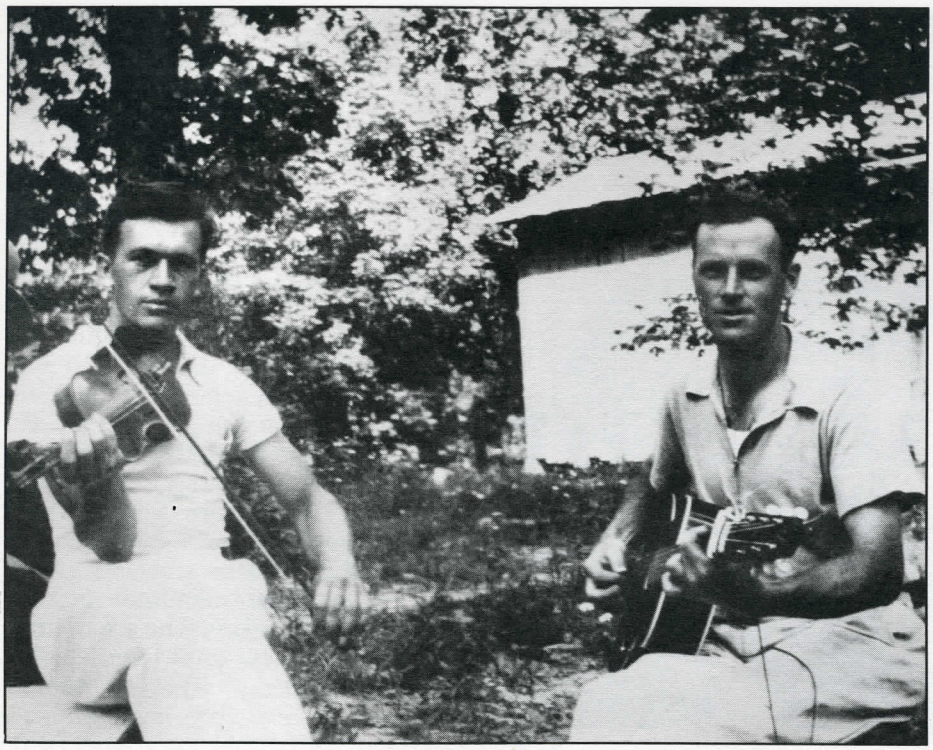
RS Now when you moved to Dunbar in '36, what kind of job did you take?

LS I was working at Fletcher Enamel Plant there, doing enamel work. Do you know what that is? I was a dipper. Worked there five years.

After I worked at Fletcher Enamel, I quit there in '41 and went in the insurance business with the Equitable Insurance Company, working in Washington, D.C. I worked with them for eight years, until '49, except for two years out in the Navy during World War II.

Then, in 1949, I decided to go to college while I could go on the GI Bill of Rights. I went to Morris Harvey College and worked out a bachelor's degree over there in about two and a half years. Then I started teaching and had enough time left on GI rights for the first 12 hours on my master's. I went to Marshall to work on that, though after the first 12 hours I had to pay for it myself and piece it out as I could. I finished it in January of '56, I believe.

Now, I worked to get a principal's certificate at the same time. When I had it about four years, in the spring of '60, I went down to Charleston High and took the promotional exam they were giving at the time. It consisted of an IQ test and the National Teacher's Exam. That fall they offered me a principalship. I had three in 16 years. I was at Bigley, over on the west side, for four years, from '60 to '64. Then I was at Oakridge from '64 to '70, and then I was at Midway on Campbells Creek from '70 to '76 when I retired.



Above: Lefty Shafer and Ray Epler have been playing buddies for a long time. Epler, at right, is now a noted dulcimer maker. Photographer and date unknown.
Right: In Navy uniform, on board ship. Lefty served for two years during World War II.

RS Was that when you again got interested in music? How did that happen?

LS It seems to me one has to have an interest. Fiddling was my interest from 1930 up close to 1940. Then I got interested in quartet singing and did that to the mid-'50's or a little past. Then I took up bowling and I bowled a lot. One year I even bowled in five leagues. I quit bowling in the spring of '72 when I developed an allergy to tobacco smoke and had to get out of bowling alleys. So I suppose that is one of the reasons I started playing a fiddle again. I've played in the Vandalia Fiddlers' Contest every year they've had it because it was open to all West Virginia fiddlers. But the first time, I believe, I was asked to entertain at Vandalia was in '81. If you remember, Lee Triplett in Clay County had died. Jenes Cottrell in Clay County had died. Sloan Staggs in Hampshire County had died — all within the preceding year. They had sort of a memorial service for them at the Festival on Friday night. Robert Shafer and I were invited to take part in the memorial service for the three, which we did.

I never have won the contest itself. I've played in it six years and had second place twice and third place four times. I'm not a real good fiddler, but I do a lot of fiddling. In the last six years I've played in 110 fiddle contests in eight different states, but I've never won a big contest like a state contest or something like that. But I've won some. In six years I've won 18 contests and placed second in 27 and third in 15 and fourth in 14. Then there's been some fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth places.

RS I think I'd argue with you about not being a good fiddler but I would like for you to give me a comment or two about what "good fiddling" is. What makes it good?

LS Well, good fiddling is when you take a tune and play it and maybe put a few variations in to make it your own. There's a lot of schools of thought about fiddling.

There are the purists who maintain it has to be played just one way to be right. I don't know how they determine what "right" is, but it has to be right. They are at the extreme conservative side, I suppose you'd say.

Then, way over here on the other side, are the extreme radicals of fiddling. They want to put everything — *everything* — into it. They'll start out and play it the way the tune goes and then they'll put all their own versions in it, all the way through. And this particular type of fiddling is called progressive fiddling. The purists look with great disfavor on the progressive fiddlers and vice versa. The progressive fiddlers don't have much shift for the purists.

I can live with both sides pretty well. I maintain there must be a middle ground somewhere, where everybody can meet and be fairly happy. I think what I'm trying to say is I try to get along with the purists and I try to get along with the progressives. Maybe they say you can't carry water on both shoulders and get along, but I seem to have a lot of friends everywhere I go. I've heard a lot of good music, made a lot of good friends, and that may be the two biggest reasons why I got started playing music again.

RS Would you also say that's the reason you enjoy being able to make good music and go to the festivals?

LS That's a question that I've tried

He is seen less in a suit and tie these days, but Lefty looks back on his years as a school principal with satisfaction. Here he is at Kanawha County's Midway Elementary in 1975. Photographer unknown.

to answer myself. It's not for the money I make, I know that. I kept good books on my music last year and found I won quite a bit of money. But I only ended up $4.50 to the good. I think it's perhaps recognition. That's one thing. It's quite an ego boost to go through a crowd and have maybe five or six people say, "Hi, Lefty, how are you?" Then there's the fact that I have friends among the fiddlers and the guitar players and the mandolin pickers and the banjo pickers who are friends that I never knew until I started out on the contest trail. They are people that I think really are my friends. I

Lefty Shafer's Album

Lefty Shafer jokes that his new record album by itself might not be worth too much, but the cover is valuable because the jacket photo of him "will keep crows out of the garden, mice out of the basement, and roaches out of the bathroom."

Actually, "Lefty Shafer Fiddles, Sings, and Whistles" is a nice blend of traditional music, including the old standards which have remained popular for generations for the simple reason that people love to hear them. In fact, the cover photo turns out to be pretty nice, too, showing Lefty as a mature musician with an honest face, a smile, and a fiddle.

There are 12 tunes on the record, which is available either directly from Shafer or from the Shop in the Cultural Center in Charleston. The numbers include "Red Bird," "Roxanna Waltz," "Blackberry Blossoms," "Lonesome Fiddle Blues," "Bill Cheatem," "Danny Boy," "Gold Rush," "Rocking Alone in an Old Rocking Chair," "Hollow Poplar," "Midnight on the Water," "Billy in the Low Ground," and "Listen to the Mockingbird." Lefty is accompanied by young guitarist Robert Shafer, a frequent playing buddy but no relation, and Paul Selan on bass.

Most of the songs are special to Lefty, because they are associated with old friends or relatives, because there is an interesting story connected with them, or because they are among the songs people most often ask him to play. He says that the album was produced, in part, because so many acquaintances wanted to hear the music over and over again.

"Red Bird," Lefty notes, is a tune that passed through the hands of three of his friends. "I learned that one from Bobby Taylor and he learned it from Clark Kessinger," he says. "Clark Kessinger learned it from French Mitchell, and French told me himself that he learned it from a fiddler who just had one finger on his noting hand. I've had a lot of success with 'Red Bird' in concerts."

"Billy in the Low Ground" is a traditional piece that Lefty believes came from England. He likes it because of its alleged connection with English politics of the 1680's. "When William of Orange became king of England in 1688, someone remembered the time when he was fighting the French in the Netherlands and wrote a song about it," he says, with maybe a little of the old schoolteacher coming out. "Now whether this is true or not, I couldn't say, but it's a good story anyway."

"Rocking Alone in an Old Rocking Chair" is special to Lefty because it means a lot to his own family. "That piece," he says, "has that special significance for me because even at my age — I'm almost 70 — and with an older sister, our mother is still living. She was 91 years old on the 12th of February." It's easy to picture an aged loved one while listening to the beautiful tune, and to imagine the meaning it must have for the musician himself.

"Blackberry Blossoms," "Bill Cheatem," and "Hollow Poplar" round out the traditional selections on the album, with "Danny Boy" a crowd pleaser from Lefty's live performances. "Lonesome Fiddle Blues" is a bluegrass piece that Lefty adapted to his own style.

"A few years ago," he adds of another tune, "I got started whistling 'Listen to the Mockingbird' and it was an instant success. Now everywhere I go, somebody who has heard

Lefty feels fortunate as a city dweller to have an acre and a half at his Charleston home. He raised a fine tomato crop last summer.

think they like me and I know I like them. Then third, some of these musicians can play so good that I just love to hear it. I suspect you've heard music that sends shivers up and down your spine.

RS You bet.

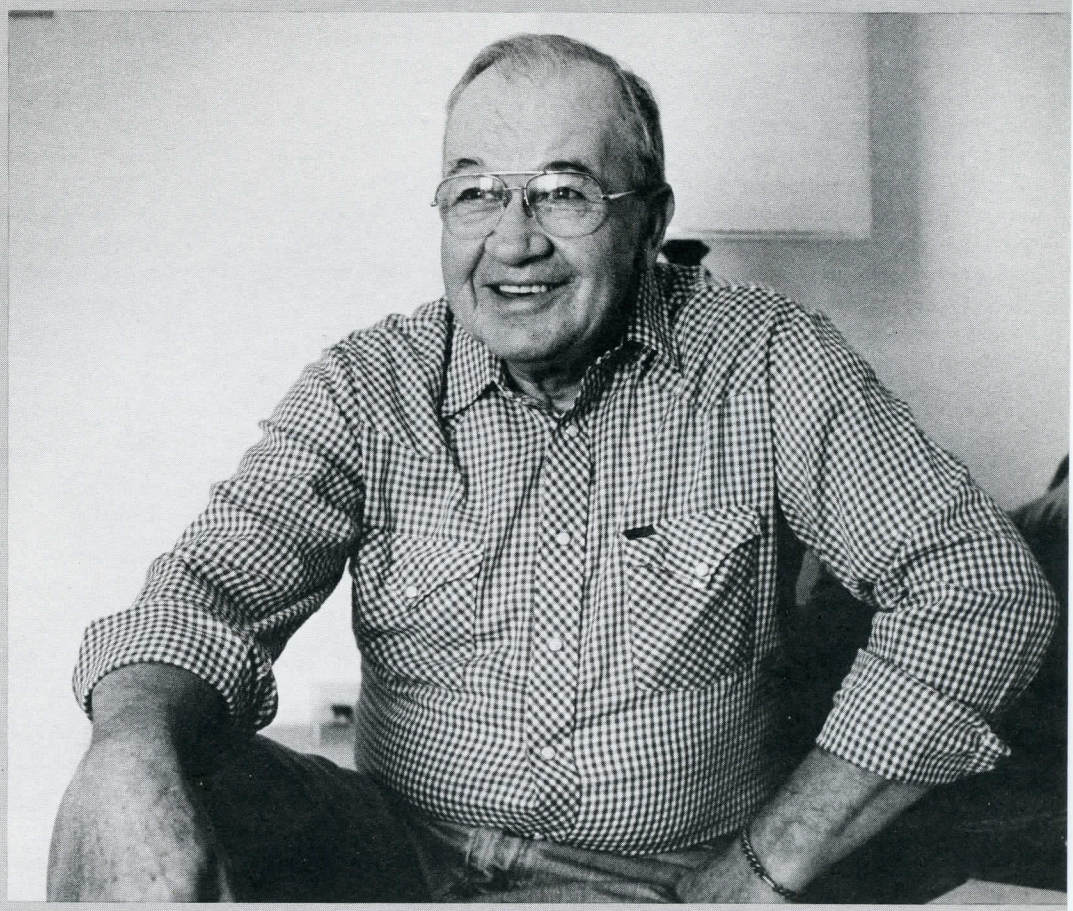
LS Well, that's the way it is with me. When you go to a contest, you hear every fiddler do what he thinks is the best fiddling he can do. So I think perhaps the reason I go and the greatest pleasure I get out of it comes from those three things: the recognition that you get, and the friends that you make, and the music that you hear.

it before asks me to play it for them. At the Art and Craft Fair at Cedar Lakes, there wasn't a session when I was on stage that somebody didn't ask to hear it. It really goes over."

Lefty Shafer made music a long time before he ever recorded an album. When asked why and how he finally got around to cutting a record, he has a characteristically modest and philosophical answer ready. "Wherever you go," he says, "someone is going to like your music as well or better than anyone's. That's true of any musician. And when you're not there to play it for them, they'll want something to remember it by because it was their favorite." That sounds like a good enough reason to record, and an excellent reason for the rest of us to buy this fine album.

— Robert Spence

"Lefty Shafer Fiddles, Sings, and Whistles" may be ordered from Emmett "Lefty" Shafer, at 2140 Breezy Drive, Charleston 25311, or from The Shop, The Cultural Center, Capitol Complex, Charleston 25305. Orders to the Shop should include $2 postage and handling and 38¢ sales tax from West Virginia residents, as well as the $7.50 purchase price.



As he approaches his 70th birthday, Lefty reports that contest fiddling is a major interest. "I hear a lot of good music and make a lot of good friends," he says. He has now put his music on record for those unable to catch his live performances.

Initial Chapters

By Alta Durst Miller with Kitty B. Frazier

Photographs by Michael Keller

Alta Durst Miller has been writing her life story. The book is not finished. It is handwritten, a manuscript in pencil in a six-by-nine stenographer's notebook.

It's the story of an idyllic childhood and its rather abrupt end. It's the saga of many Appalachian families who have followed the dollar, who left the homeplace for the industrial city outside the region and then returned to start over in another mine or factory in the mountains. It's about sunshine and rain in a young girl's life. But more than anything, it's a story told with love.

Alta Durst Miller, of Cross Lanes in Kanawha County, is 83 years old at the time this slightly edited version of her work appears here. She has many more chapters to tell. But this is her beginning. Mrs. Miller hopes you will enjoy her story.

Alta Durst Miller looks back from the perspective of 83 years.

Way back in the 1800's, down among the Jackson County hills of West Virginia on two farms three miles back of Cottageville on Cow Run, lived two families. One was the household of Ruben Durst and his wife Ellen Hyet Durst. They were married in 1860. Hezikiah H. Durst was their first child. There were 12 children in the family. On the other farm lived Peter Hurdman and his wife Nancy Sue Flowers Hurdman. They were the parents of 11 children. Roena Clementine Hurdman was their youngest.

Hezikiah Durst and Roena Hurdman were married March 1, 1886, at Ripley, Jackson County. Dad was wearing his first "boughten" suit, and Mother had paid for the form-fitting dress she was wearing. (She had worked milking two cows, scrubbed floors, washed on a board, and cooked for a large family and boarders.) My mother weighed 90 pounds, was five foot five inches in height and wore a size three and a half shoe. Dad weighed 170 pounds and was six foot three inches. They set up housekeeping in neighboring Mason County when Mother was 22 and Dad 24.

Daddy was a coal miner. Mother knew how they treated my dad at the mines way up in the hills when companies used to have that yellow dog contract years ago before there were unions in the area. She knew that if anyone came to stay all night in our company house, they had to go to the office and tell the company. It was just that confining. Although Dad paid his rent, the company wanted to make a slave out of him.

They were the parents of nine children, eight daughters and one son. As our birthplaces indicate, Dad moved the family around in search of work. Flora Jane was born November 7, 1886, in Mason County. Bessie (Elizabeth) was also born in Mason County on October 4, 1888. On August 24, 1890, Jennie was born in Nicholas County. Maggie (Margaret) was born May 18, 1892, in Putnam County, in a two-story coal company house in the lower end of a little mining town called Midway up the railroad track from Raymond City.

Hattie was born in a log house on February 14, 1894, in a place called Muddy Gut in Putnam County. Then Dad moved the family up Manila Creek, also in Putnam County. Sister Minnie Macel was born there on March 24, 1896, up where they call the old house place. So was sister Ina Ethel, on September 28, 1898. Then I, Alta Mae, was born there, too, at Black Betsy Number 2 on Manila Creek on March 11, 1901.

When I was a few months old, a June flood came along and went through our house. Dad took some quilts and me in his arms, and Mother and the other children followed. We sat on the hillside with quilts over us. Dad's garden, rabbits and chickens all washed away. When the water went down, they had a time shoveling mud and scrubbing.

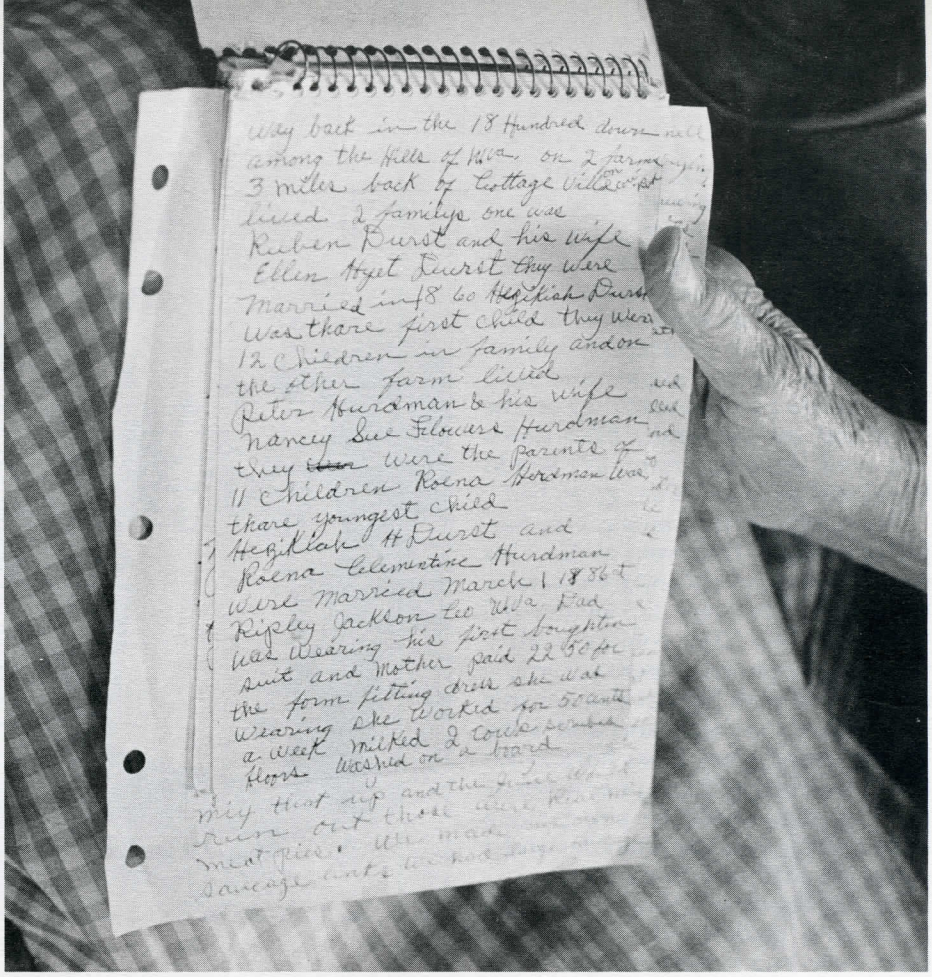
Then further down in that Manila Creek hollow at Sulphur Spring, Black Betsy Coal Company set up a sawmill. We moved on down the hollow. My brother, Walter Alton, was born June 29, 1903, there in Sulphur Spring. My dad dug and loaded coal in the mines and tended the stable. The coal company sawed lumber and built two four-room houses. One was for the mine foreman, Bob Santrock, and his wife, Stella. The other was for the stable boss, my dad.

We had lots in those days. We had six buildings on the Sulphur Spring place: the house we lived in, the ice house, the wash house to wash clothes in and for the boarders to wash in, the apple house, the cellar house, and the meat house.

My dad was proud of his ice house. He took lumber and made inside and outside walls for it, with about 18 inches space between them. The walls were filled with sawdust. He sawed ice out of the river in the winter. Then he put layers of ice in the ice house and tamped those layers with layers of sawdust.

Dad kept milk cows and over 100 head of chickens, several hogs, and two or three cows for beef. Mother kept boarders. She canned, dried, sulphured and pickled vegetables, meats and fruits, and made hominy.

Dad had 18 honeybee hives. He fed his bees, and there were linden trees for them to work on. When he would rob those bees, he would have dish pans, stone jars and almost everything on the place full of honey. To people who were able to buy, he sold the honey for 10¢ a pound. But he would give people with large families honey.


Mrs. Miller's recollections published in this GOLDENSEAL story were carefully written down in her stenographer's pad. She is still working on a complete autobiography.

Mother had an old-fashioned rock flower garden back of the house with a big white picket fence around it. Almost every kind of flower there was back then was in that flower garden. A huge mulberry tree stood back of the house, full of mulberries. A two-story barn stood below the house, and a peach orchard grew out on the hill. Below the end of the barn there were hops growing up on vines. Mother would gather them and let them dry and make yeast to put in her homemade light bread.

Pop bought his flour by the barrel, and his sugar and salt by the hundred pounds from Sears, Roebuck. They would write back to Dad and want to know if he was in the store business. Hattie, Minnie, Ina, Walter and I used to take the hundred pound bags and burlap coffee sacks, and gather leaves out of the woods to put in our cows' beds of a winter. A lot of cows were covered with manure scabs, but our cows were curried and brushed.

Our own beds were ticks stuffed with new straw or corn shucks, and duck feathers on top. It was good to wake up in those beds and smell homemade sausage frying and good old Arbuckle coffee brewing. It was good to eat breakfasts of ham, bacon, eggs, hot biscuits and country butter. It was good to see the big stemmed dish full of strained honey.

My mother made cottage cheese of clabber milk. She put it in cheese cloth and tied it on the clothes line to drain. Then she put salt, pepper and sour cream on it.

And talk about mincemeat pies! Dad would grind pork and beef and put raisins, chopped apples, cinnamon, spices and peach brandy in and mix that up and the juice would run out. Those were *real* mincemeat pies. We made our own sausage links. We had a large sausage grinder, a sausage stuffer, and a lard press.

When I was a little girl, about six years of age, my dad bought us a golden oak organ from Sears. The boarders and Dad and us girls would

play the organ at night and sing. My dad's favorite song was "The Pearly White City." When we got through playing and singing, we children would go in Mother and Dad's bedroom. Some of us would go to the apple house to get a bucket of apples. We would eat our apples and talk. Then Mother would reach up on the shelf and get the family Bible down and read some Scripture. We would kneel and pray and then go to bed.

We surely did love music. One Saturday evening, Dad went to draw his pay. Mother and we children went to meet him. We were top of the hill when we saw Dad coming with a new Graphophone under one arm, a split basket with big flat disc records in it under the other arm and a big blue morning glory brass horn in his hand. Dad brought us music whereas a lot of men would be going along with a strop over the shoulder and a stone jug of liquor on each end.

He also bought a three-piece bedroom suit, golden oak, from Sears; three new iron bedsteads with brass knobs; and a tan, all-wool, wall-to-wall carpet with pink roses and green leaves. Then my mother and sisters stripped old carpet rags and sewed them, and Mother hired Mrs. Rachel Wolfe, who owned and ran a store in Bancroft, to weave the strips of carpet on her huge loom. When we whipped them together, that made a carpet for Mom and Dad's bedroom.

We were indeed fortunate. We had an old-fashioned pie safe in one corner of the kitchen, and a wooden safe with glass in the top two doors and a drawer and two wooden doors at the bottom. We had a big round table with wooden chairs and a bench behind the table. And we had a smaller kitchen table to set the water buckets on.

But we also did chores and took care of what we had. We would get down and scrub with a scrubbing brush.

One time, I wished we didn't have any furniture. Of a morning Dad would come to the bedroom door and call, "Jenny." She would say, "Huh." Then he would say, "Margaret," and she would say, "Huh." One morning he called them twice and said, "Get up!" They just lay still. Well, he got a big stool-bottom chair and gave it a sling. I saw it coming, and I scrunched down between them so I wouldn't get hit. When it hit, they came out of there.

The family Mrs. Miller recalls were happy and hard-working. In this 1904 photo she sits between her father and mother, Hezekiah and Roena Durst. Photographer unknown.

But those *were* the good old days. We used to have apple peelings, bean stringings, and corn shuckings. We made sorghum molasses and played games. We went to church and to socials.

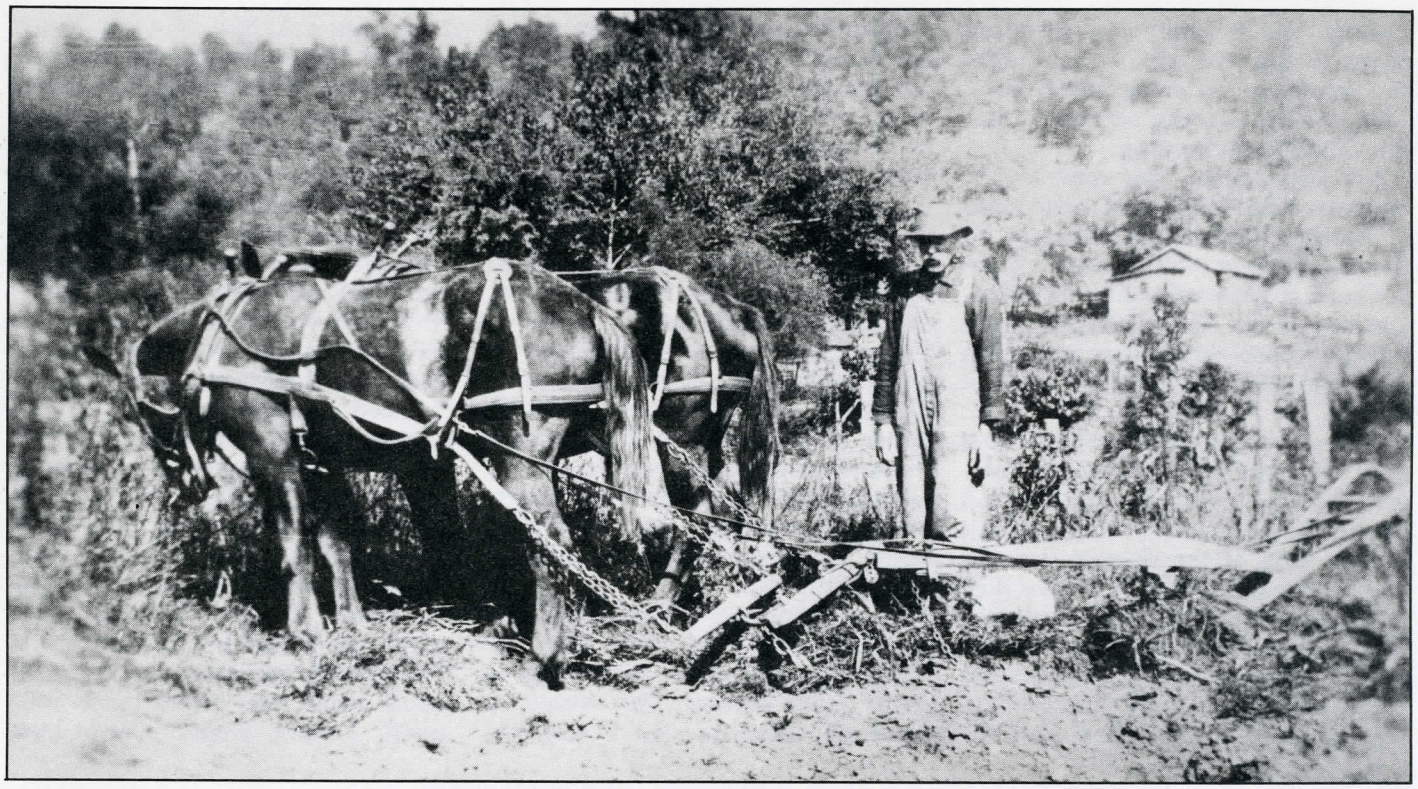
I was very fortunate myself, for I never had to wear hand-me-down clothes. I had seven older sisters, and their clothes were worn out before they got to me. My brother never either, because he was the only boy.

Mother would order our dresses from Sears, Roebuck ready-made to wear to Sunday school and on special occasions. She bought material by the bolt to make our school clothing. Mother dressed sister Ina and me alike. She bought us middy suits with sailor collars on the blouse and embroidered stars in each corner of the collars. Once sister Ina put my dress on and busted it under the arms and I had a jiminy fit. Another time, Dad bought Ina and me pink voile dresses with ruffles on them and a hat to match. The hats had wire frames with big blousie crowns.

My dad was active with the community school. He, Sam Goodwin and Billie Null were the trustees of the school. They had to agree on the teachers hired. Miss Mary Purnell, Miss May Gatens and Miss Violet Blake were just about 19 years old when they were hired. Of course, they taught at different times as we just had a one-room schoolhouse. The teachers boarded with us. The school is still standing on Manila Creek in Putnam County. They call it Martin School now, but originally the name was Pleasant Grove School.

We liked our school. We Durst children and the Goodwin and Null girls and others always had good entertainment worked up for the last day of school. I can still recite two of the poems I said when I was a child seven years old. I have a book, *Alice in Wonderland,* that I won for getting most "head marks" in a spelling bee.

We had big suppers at the little Pleasant Grove or Martin schoolhouse to help raise money to build a church. We built it over in the bottom across from the schoolhouse. Our church bought a pump organ and a good bell. That was the little church of my childhood that I wrote a song about.



Hezekiah Durst was an ambitious man, working at mining, farming, and whatever else came to hand. Here he's plowing the family plot on coal company land at Black Betsy in Putnam County. Photographer and date unknown.

We rode in a car to church box suppers or pie socials. Or, Dad would walk to Sunday school with us children. We girls would put on our white embroidery dresses and patent leather shoes, for these occasions. When we would see a pile of what we called horse "shavens," we would start running because brother Walter would snowball us with them. Mother would stay home to make dinner. Dad would ask the pastor and his wife and a lot of others home with us to eat. I wish you could have eaten at that table. But all those dishes I had to wash!

Sometimes Mom and Dad and my sisters, brother and I would go through the coal mines. We would sit on powder kegs. Once in a while my dad took us children in the mines with him when he went to work of an evening. He would drill a hole in the coal face with an auger, tamp it with powder and fasten a long fuse to it. He'd fix a squib on the business end of his fuse, next to his powder. (A squib is a little igniter that looks like a firecracker.) He would have us run way down the tunnel. Then he would light the fuse and run. By the time he got to where we were, it would go off. The hill would shake, powder smoke would smell like raw chemicals, and a lot of coal came down.

In 1911 our lives changed. Daddy sold most of our household goods and his livestock. He bought us new coats and other clothing. We got on the train at Raymond City early in the morning when the sun was shining.

We went through big tunnels on that train. Somewhere along the line, we had to transfer and rode from one railroad station to the other in a stagecoach. There were 11 of us to get in that stagecoach. My brother rode with the driver on the big seat up front. The rest of us were packed in like sardines in a can.

When we got off the train at Akron, Ohio, the wind was blowing and it was snowing. There was thick ice on the sidewalks with snow on top, and we were kicking up our heels and falling down as we walked.

Dad paid down $500 on a brand new two-story house in Akron, at 222 Bellow Street. I went from a one-room school to a large brick building called Miller School. It was all so strange to me, for I wasn't in the same room with my brother and sisters. One day there was a fire alarm. I ran to get my new coat that Dad had bought for me. Teacher said, "No, you don't need that; this is just a drill." I was lost in that school.

Dad went in search of work. He went to Goodrich Rubber factory where he was told, "We're sorry to tell you we can't hire you; you're too old." Dad had alway worn a mustache, but he came home, went in the bathroom and shaved. Mother asked, "Hezi, what are you doing?" "Well," he answered, "won't you be surprised to find out." When he came out, the mustache was gone. "Goodness, what'd you do that for?" Mother wanted to know. He said, "Well, I'm going back and get me a job." He went back to Goodrich plant and they didn't recognize him. They put him to running the elevator in the spring of 1912. Dad got the awfullest chuckle out of that.

We stayed in Akron one year. Mother didn't like it out there. So we moved back to West Virginia, down to Manila Creek on Billie Null's place and raised a crop.

Then, in 1913, Dad bought a new house in Chesapeake, in Kanawha

County. He brought our furniture down to the river at Raymond City and loaded it on a big steam boat. Along in the evening we pulled into the Chesapeake landing.

Not long after, we rented that house to a Ball family and moved into a boarding house that belonged to the coal camp at Wake Forest on Cabin Creek. Daddy held down two jobs, and one of my sisters worked in the powder house, where they kept great big kegs of black powder for the mines.

We had moved up Cabin Creek just after the labor war between the miners and the company thugs. Dad bought furniture out of the boarding house. One of the dresser drawers had a hole shot out of it, where they had shot into the house. Dad himself was a union man in the mines. He would go down to Cheapeake from where we lived in Wake Forest to buy his groceries, rather than use the company store. The company would fuss about it, but he'd just cuss them out and go right on. He'd say, "Now look, if I've got sense enough to make my money, I've got sense enough to know where to spend it to better myself, and that is what I'm going to do."

We lived at Ohley on Cabin Creek, too. We didn't keep boarders there. My dad never did own a home up Cabin Creek but we had plenty of good food, good clothes and good furniture. Dad always bought wallpaper for the walls. A lot of people that owned their homes put newspapers on their walls, and the papers would turn yellow. We had a good home; Dad didn't drink and Mother was a Christian.

We moved away from Cabin Creek just before a flood came and run them all out of there. We moved so many times because Dad would always go where he could make the most money. At that time, we moved to West Charleston on 3rd Avenue. Dad got on at Kelly Axe, the largest axe manufacturer in the world. I started to work at Kelly's when I was 14. My brother started when he was 11. Two of my sisters and my cousin also worked there.

In Charleston we used to go to Luna Park and skate in the evenings. When we would come home from Kelly's, Mamma would have supper ready. We would eat and wash dishes. Then we would go to skate. One evening Ina and I went to Luna Park and there were some boys skating. They asked to skate with us. We skated until we got tired and went out to sit in the big lawn swings with the canopy tops on them. We swung and talked awhile. Then we went home, but on our way we stopped at the red brick ice cream parlor and ordered some ice cream and soda drinks. I made googoo eyes at Ina's

Mrs. Miller takes time to compare notes with a younger woman, GOLDENSEAL freelancer Kitty Frazier.

Mrs. Miller on her front porch in Cross Lanes, Kanawha County.

and the others' boyfriends and the girls had a fit.

Not long after, we moved again, over to Frame Street on the corner by Jessie Wolfe's store. We would go up what used to be called Beechwood Avenue, which was paved with bricks, but our neighborhood streets were red clay mud, and our sidewalks were big long boards turned up at each end by the train and sunshine.

As we said, Alta Durst Miller hasn't finished her life story, and we've made no attempt to impose a polished conclusion on this excerpt. There are no neat stopping places in her life, any more than in any of ours. The years went on, with more moves and different jobs, one episode slipping into another. She has brought herself to an important turning point in the preceding paragraphs, when she went to work at age 14 to begin earning her own way. More changes followed as she passed into full womanhood, eventually leaving home to start a family of her own.

Mrs. Miller saw plenty of sunshine and rain herself during all those years. But she's tougher than the plank sidewalks mentioned above, and she hasn't warped. Rather, she has been strengthened and seasoned by her experiences. She has the time for reflection now and she'll go on putting her story down on paper, for her own benefit and for the benefit of those wise enough to learn from her. ♣

Emmett Heaster demonstrates the correct use of a cant hook. The logs were bigger in the old days, he says.

"We Liked Big Wood"

Recollections of a Wood Hick

Interview and Photographs by Norman Julian

Emmett Heaster, 87, is a native of Greenbrier County who now lives on a rural route near Morgantown. He soldiered during World War I, has owned farms in three states, taught school in a federal prison and in West Virginia public schools, carried mail, and built houses. But it is his work as a lumberman that he remembers best. Those years as a "wood hick," he says, were "the most colorful and exciting of my life."

Wood hick is the West Virginia term for what folks in other parts of the country call a lumberjack. It's rough work, and like many others Mr. Heaster pursued it only in his younger years. He worked in the woods while attending a one-room school, when he became a high school teacher without ever entering high school himself (he was accredited by exam), and intermittently to help pay for the furthering of his education at West Virginia University.

"I did every job in the woods there was

except teamstering," he told me and then went on for more than two hours to recall times and experiences gone by. He said he enjoyed recounting those days so much "because I like to talk about them and I don't know of anybody alive who remembers those times who I could talk to. There might be some old enough but they never worked in the woods." Heaster, the author of a book of poetry and several articles, is a natural storyteller. While relating his experiences, he rarely had to strain for a name or a place and often broke into profound laughter when recalling a person or event.

"It's been more than 60 years since I worked in the woods," he began, and then he was off and running:

I started working when I was seven or eight, in the first decade of this century. My first job for a lumber company was when I was 17. We, my family and I, lived on a little farm of six or seven acres — a hillside farm that was just big enough to make a living. My mom and dad had eight children. We used to raise the meat and all our vegetables and fruit on the farm. My mother made our bread and canned hundreds and hundreds of cans of stuff. All we had to buy from the grocery store was sugar and salt and coffee and things like that.

But it was hard to get hold of any money in those days. My dad worked all day for years as a lumberman for a dollar a day. He worked on sawmills — on other people's sawmills — for years. Then he bought a portable sawmill of his own and set it up on our place.

I helped him on that sawmill and did just about every job, except sawyer itself. I was offbearer. That's a man who takes the sawed wood and stacks it. He also takes the waste slabs, the rounded outside part of the log that won't make a board, and throws that on a pile. This pile is then fed into the steam boiler of the engine which runs the saw, so nothing is thrown away. There was little waste in those early sawmills.

I was also ratchet man. He rolls the logs down into the circular saw carriage. The carriage, with pulleys and cables, pulls the logs into the saw blade. That's how the boards are cut. The ratchet man sets the width of a cut. He has a mechanism that works sort of like a bumper jack. He figures how wide the board is supposed to be and goes the right number of notches. Most of the time we cut one-inch boards. You had to do that if you were going to clean them up — run them through a mill. But sometimes we only cut three-quarters of an inch for rough-cut work. I did all those jobs but I never became a sawyer like my dad. That took real skill.

Most of our land was in timber — it was rough and hilly. We cut our own timber before we started cutting for the lumber companies. We had virgin timber on our place. Some trees were five feet through. We had mostly chestnut oak. The bark was used for tan bark. In those days they had tanneries — the one at Marlinton in Pocohontas County was closest to our site and there was another at Richwood. They could make the dye out of hemlock, too.

We'd peel the bark off and cut the log down into lengths for saw logs. We'd cut it in the spring when the sap was up — you couldn't peel it in the wintertime. Then we'd take a good double-bited axe and a tool called a spud. We cut a ring around the log — chopped right through the bark. Then we would take the spud and just ram the bark off, like a cylinder, all the way around the log. Sometimes we split the cylinder in two so we could stack the bark better and haul it on a sled. We hauled it off the mountains that way. We'd get it to where a wagon could get it — teamsters they were — and they would haul it to the tanners. There they ground up the bark up for the dye.

We lived adjoining a big former slave plantation called Glencoe, named after a place in Scotland. The slaves were free at that time but I knew some who had been in slavery. Glencoe was an enormously big farm — I don't know how many thousands of acres belonged to it. Anyway, we adjoined that. My dad sawed our timber and then he sawed the timber for the man who owned Glencoe at that time, Dr. Jim McClung — the first one. There were three Dr. Jim McClungs. Well, helping my dad do that is how I learned most of the skills for working in the woods.

I learned from the time I was a boy of seven or eight years old how to use an axe — I could cut as good as a man when I was 10. I learned how to use a six-foot crosscut saw with my dad when I was just a kid. Those were the main tools. And we used a cant hook for getting hold of logs and the spud for the bark. Just about all the wood hicks wore high top shoes with "corks," which were sharp pieces of metal sticking out on the bottom of the shoe so you could climb on a log and not lose your footing. One time I saw a hick jump on an old log that was down and rotten enough so the bark would slip and he just got stuck in the bark when it came off and fell and almost broke his back. In the summertime we wore overalls with bibs up to your neck. We didn't call them jeans. In the wintertime, we wore mackinaws and big wool britches.

So by the time I got to working for the lumber camps I could do any kind of job they needed done. I didn't work steadily in the camps. I went to school in a little one-room school six months and then I'd go to work six months. Part of that time I worked at home on the farm and the rest in the woods — my dad and I and a little bit later my brother, Elbert, who was four years younger than I was.

My first job in a lumber camp was for the Cherry River Boom and Lumber Company. And then the Curtin Lumber Company. I walked from Crawley — where I lived in Greenbrier County — with another fellow who had been a log hick all his life to Richwood, about 30 miles or more through the woods, with mountains all the way. We went out there looking for a job with my first cousin by the name of Bernie Walcup. He worked in the woods all his life, too. When he got to be 30 years old he got to be a contractor and ran the camp for the company. So we went out there to get a job from him. We didn't work very long because he wasn't cutting timber, he was cutting pulp wood. We didn't have much liking for that. We liked to cut big wood. For pulpwood they cut the small stuff that wouldn't make saw logs and the tops of the saw logs, to make paper out of that. They had a big pulp mill at Richwood.

I worked near Richwood on Hominy Creek. They had built a camp there. To make a camp they would

Bib overalls were the wood hick's uniform, especially in the cold winter months, Mr. Heaster says. He keeps his in good working order.

saw up rough lumber into boards. Then they would put up one great big building, 75 feet long or more. They'd use it for a mess hall, and then they built a number of smaller buildings called bunkhouses for people to sleep in. Incidentally, I had learned the carpenter trade pretty well because my dad was a carpenter as well as a lumberman so I built one or two bunkhouses for the Cherry River company by myself.

When the woods would be worked out, they would take those buildings apart and put them back up in a new camp where the work was. My last year in the woods this had changed. They built the buildings on railroads, sort of boxcars for people. This was much better. The bunks were better to sleep on and you didn't get overtired from walking a long way to and from your work site, sometimes a couple of miles one way. Instead, you just took the train.

Anyway, there at Hominy Creek they had an old camp boss — "captain" they called the bosses sometimes. His name was Golden Jones and he was a fair man. They had one building they called the lobby where they had a big stove with lots of seats around it so in the wintertime when it was too cold to work people would gather in there and tell tall tales. A man there who took care of the lobby was called the "lobbyhog."

The first lobbyhog I had was a man named Dutch Sol. He was the funniest man I ever saw. He was always telling something funny. One day he came into the lobby and said there was a big hog in there. The farmers used to keep hogs and let them run free in the woods and live on chestnuts and mast. Bear and deer were about extinct but most farmers would keep 20 or 30 hogs and just feed them some corn once in a while to keep them coming in so they wouldn't go completely wild.

Anyway, this hog got in the lobby and Dutch Sol asked it, "What are you doin' in there, lobbyhoggin'?" Of course, that's what *he* did. He had lots of other stories he told but most of them were pornographic and not printable.

There were all kinds of characters in those camps. Those old fellows, 50 or 60, some of them then, were hardened men and they were kind of wicked, always telling pornographic stories. But the fellows who were my age weren't so rough and they hadn't picked up those camp ways yet.

In those camps they had one cook and a "cookee" always. The cooks wore aprons and sometimes dresses. They cooked the finest eats I ever had in my life. I never had food that good in my life. They had everything. For every meal they had about the same thing. They always had roast beef, pork chops, fried sausage — three or four kinds of meat all the time — sometimes fried chicken, sometimes fish, every kind of meat going. They had potatoes — fried, boiled, scalloped. Then they had beans — baked beans, green beans, every variety you could think of. They had corn and tomatoes, cabbage, cauliflower and so on. They had big pots of strawberry jam and honey sitting on the table so you could help yourself as you wanted. Then for dessert they had all kinds of pies — apple pies and cherry pies and all kinds. They had cake — plenty of it always cooked up. The cooks did nothing but cook all the time.

When the loggers sat down to eat — they just had big benches and tables made out of rough lumber — the men would go at it like hogs. The only time you'd hear somebody talk would be when they'd say, "Pass the catheads." Those were great big biscuits that would just melt in your mouth. They ate so many that the plates would be going all the time. When they got through every fellow just jumped out and nobody stood on ceremony at all for anything.

There was a place way up above Richwood called Dogway where my cousin had his camp and that was not far from the Cranberry River, and from the Cherry River, too. It was on a branch of the Cherry River. I'd work a few months at a time there sometimes and I'd go back and teach school. I taught school when I was 17 and I had never been in a high school even. But I took a state teacher's examination. In those days, anybody who could pass it could become a teacher. They had three examinations a year so I took it the year I was 17. I studied at home and educated myself and I knew more than the average high school could teach me. When I started teaching I got $35 a month.

But my education paid off in the woods, too. By then most hicks were making about $4 a day. But they paid me $5 because I kept the time and wrote the checks for the boss at night. He couldn't write, except for his name. When I told him I was going to leave to go to the university he told me he'd pay me straight time to keep me. That meant that even if I got laid off or went home for the weekend I'd get paid for those days. So I realized the value of education and he did, too.

I went to the university in the winter usually and then worked in the logging camps in the summertime. One year I dropped out after the first

semester and went to work that winter. Back then in Greenbrier and Nicholas Counties the snow got waist deep and it was hard to travel from Morgantown back home.

By the time I got into college my brother was big enough to cut timber, so we had a crew — sometimes a crew had two men and sometimes three. If you had a two-man crew each man had to do his own swamping but if you had three men, one man did the swamping and the bumping and nosing.* You had to nose every log, especially the big logs.

They had Italians who did a lot of the rough work. They did the swamping for the main roads and for the railroads, when they came. They dug a lot of the right-of-way, too. The Italians didn't mix — most of them couldn't speak English. They camped on one side of the railroad tracks and we camped on the other. Had separate places to eat and everything. We'd take a lunch pail with us into the woods — sometimes it would hold a gallon and we'd fill it up with beef and pork and everything. But those Italians — all they had at noon was one loaf of bread apiece and water. I don't know how they worked that hard when that's all they ate.

They liked to build with stone. They built bridges, beautiful bridges out of stone for even those old log roads. I never got acquainted with but one of them, a boy by the name of Rocco, and I liked him very much. So I asked, "Rocco, why is it that every Italian is a stonemason?" and he answered that in Italy they built everything out of stone because that's what they had. So everybody had to learn to be a stonemason.

One big job I worked on was for the Meadow River Lumber Company — they had their mill at Rainelle. At that time the largest hardwood mill in the world. My brother and I cut for them. We were cutting virgin timber in Greenbrier County back on Little Clear Creek. We worked by contract, my brother and I did. We got paid $1.50 for each thousand board feet we cut. We were a team and worked by contract, not by the day. We had some trees, some big yellow virgin poplar trees, to cut that were six feet in diameter. We only had a six-foot crosscut saw so we had to chop notches in the tree before we could get room to work the saw.

It took probably about half an hour to cut down a tree that size but then it took longer to saw it up into the 16-foot lengths for saw logs. My brother learned to file saws and he kept that saw in such a shape that you could just see the tree going down. We cut almost as fast as a chain saw. We didn't have many of those big yellow poplars, though. We went through the poplar in a hurry. It was soft and easy to saw — it was like going through hot butter. I think one of those trees had 5,000 feet in it — one tree!

I was always a chopper — I

We were surprised at Mr. Heaster's statement that camp cooks sometimes wore dresses, until this Webster County picture turned up at the West Virginia University archives. Photographer unknown, about 1910, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

*"Swamping" refers to the clearing of undergrowth, fallen trees, and other obstructions in preparation for skidding logs; "bumping" is knocking off knots and small limbs; and "nosing" means to round off the end of a log enough that it will skid without digging into the ground.

Mr. and Mrs. Heaster at home. Unlike many of his fellow wood hicks, Emmett got out of the woods and settled down at a fairly young age.

notched a tree, and then sawed it the way it should be sawed. I liked working with an axe better than any other job in the woods. I could make a tree fall within a foot of where I wanted, or less than that. I could make a tree hit an iron pin. It was incredible.

We had seven timber crews that worked there that year that I took off from college. My brother and I cut more than any other crew in the bunch and they had cutters who had been cutting all their lives. I was five-eight and weighed about 160 pounds, although they had a lot of 200-pounders. Most of them were bigger than I was. So was my brother.

They had what they called a scaler, who went around with a Doyle Scale — a long thing like a meter stick with a hook on one end. You just hooked it over one side of the log and pulled it back and it measured the length of the log all the way. When you measured the width across and squared it, the calibrations told you how much wood was in a 16-foot log.

I knew how to scale my own. I carried a folding rule in my pocket and when my brother and I got done — or while I was still cutting — I measured every log we took. The scaler we had was a big man. That was also Golden Jones, who I mentioned before. He was a great big man, six feet or more. I always got along with him and never had any trouble, but some people said he'd cheat you. To measure a log you knocked off four inches for slab across the top and that left you in a position to figure it in your head in no time at all. I kept figuring my logs the same way he did and finally he said, "You're exactly right. How'd you do that?" He said "I'm not going to scale you any more." From then on he just took my count for it.

We wouldn't average 8,000 or 9,000 feet per day but one day we did get more than 10,000 and that was the most that anyone had cut in one day in that whole outfit. That made $15 for the two of us and we thought that was enormous wages at that time.

It was common to have fights in those camps. They were vicious, some of them were. I'll never forget the guy at Hominy Creek. He got into a fight with a wood hick and got his nose bit off. George Payne who lived to be over 100 and died a while ago worked with him and saw it happen.

My gosh, sometimes they killed each other. I wasn't ever present when that happened but my cousin Bernie Walcup was. He saw a man jump over a log with a knife and cut a man up. The two men were sawing together. One man was older and much more experienced than the other and he accused the young man of riding the saw. That's when you put your weight down on the saw and let the other man pull you along. So the older man accused the younger man two or three or four times and finally that young fellow cut him to pieces. Killed him right there. He went to jail.

I saw another fellow with his nose mashed all over his face and he was beat all to pieces. Most of the fights were about one guy not thinking the other was doing his job.

There were fights on the weekends, too. Once in a while I'd go into town with those log hicks and they would just get dead drunk. Then when they had Prohibition and they couldn't buy whiskey they'd buy all kinds of extracts of vanilla and the like and a thing called Wine of Cardui, a woman's medicine, about 80 or 90 percent alcohol. Well, they would buy it and buy it until the guy wouldn't sell it to them anymore. So one time this guy I was with said, "Here, Emmett," handing me some money, "go in there and buy me some of the Wine of Cardui." I didn't want to do it but I was afraid he'd do

something to me in the woods if I didn't, so I bought him a couple of bottles and he got so drunk he just layed around. The boss wouldn't allow any liquor in the woods so they had to be sober by Monday morning. It was dangerous enough in the woods as it was.

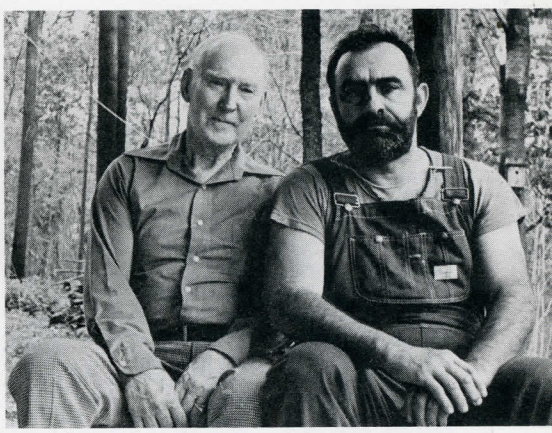
I never had a fight in the woods myself but one time a guy named Jeff Kettle threw a double-bited axe at me. I don't think he tried to hit me because he probably could have if he wanted to, but he threw it down through the woods where I was working. I gathered up the axe and took it up to him and told him if he ever threw an axe at me again I was going to kill him. So I asked the boss to work somewhere else. It was easy enough to get hurt in the woods without a guy throwing axes at you, I'll tell you.

Some of the life in the woods I liked better than anything I ever did. I liked the fresh air. It made me sleep, boy oh boy. We slept on a straw tick. It wasn't very comfortable compared to what we have today, but when I hit the sack after a day in the woods I went to sleep immediately and slept until they clanged the steel the next morning.

Some of the things I didn't like — the fighting, the cussing and the rough life. And other things, too. We had one fellow who was always having nightmares. He'd wake up in the middle of the night and jump around and holler. He kept dreaming that trees were falling on him. I didn't like that very much.

I've read what others have written about those times. I found Roy Clarkson, who wrote *Tumult on the Mountains*, pretty accurate. I met him here at the university. He teaches here. I also met W. E. Blackhurst several times.* I've been at his home at Durbin. He was for years the narrator for the tours on the Cass Scenic Railroad.

*Blackhurst was a fine West Virginia novelist whose best-known books are *Riders of the Flood*, *Sawdust in my Eyes*, and *Of Men and a Mighty Mountain*. They were all published by McClain Printing Company of Parsons in 1954, 1963, and 1965, respectively. *Tumult on the Mountains*, by Roy Clarkson, was published by McClain in 1964.



Mr. Heaster is pleased to share the lore of the woods with GOLDENSEAL freelancer Norm Julian, right. They've been friends for 16 years.

Going up to Bald Knob you would hear him telling stories as you went along. I think he exaggerated some. He died a few years ago. Everybody I ever knew who worked in the woods in those old times is dead.

I only left because I got my education and that was better for me. By then they were just getting started, they were just beginning to work in the woods like the dickens.

Logging and Loggers

Background on Lumbering in West Virginia

By Norman Julian

Nature blessed the land that became West Virginia with abundant forests, and logging has been carried on to one degree or another since white people first arrived here. Those original settlers found almost all of our 24,000 square miles covered with lush woodlands. Oak-chestnut forests dominated in the ridges and valleys east of the Allegheny Front, while yellow pine and scrub pine, northern hardwoods and red spruce were prevalent in the uplands through present Preston, Tucker, Randolph, Webster, Nicholas, Greenbrier and neighboring counties. Hemlock intermingled with the hardwoods in the higher elevations. The western hill sections which descend to the Ohio River were populated by oak and chestnut, with pitch pine as well as hickory, ash, maple, yellow poplar, birch and other hardwoods displacing them in certain areas.

Some of West Virginia's individual trees were among the most magnificent on the planet. White oak, the largest timber tree in the original forest, often attained a height of 100 feet and a diameter of over six. The famous Mingo Oak on Trace Mountain in Mingo County measured nine feet, 10 inches across the stump and stood 145 feet tall. The largest tree ever cut in the state is believed to be a white oak near Lead Mine in Tucker County. It was 13 feet in diameter and at a height of 16 feet was still 10 feet across. This forest giant was notched with axes, then cut with a regular crosscut saw. The huge log was split by dynamite.

Whip saws — crude, hand-operated tools from five to seven and a half feet long, with hooked teeth — were first used to make planks. These two-man saws required much hard labor to produce 100 feet of boards, the average daily output. The water powered up-and-down sawmill, introduced as early as 1776 near the town of St. George in Tucker County, increased our ancestors' ability to lumber. With it two good men could produce up to 500 linear feet per day. Hundreds of water mills operated in our mountains during the 19th centu-

Above: This Tucker County timber crew demonstrates many of the tools of their trade, including the crosscut saw at right. The second and third men from the left are stripping bark with spud bars. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

Below: Some of the stumps were big enough for a nap, if the wood hick had had time for resting. This white oak was felled by the Pardee-Curtin lumber company. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

Unknown wood hick shows off his work. Note the company brand stamped into the wood to identify the log after it left the forest. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

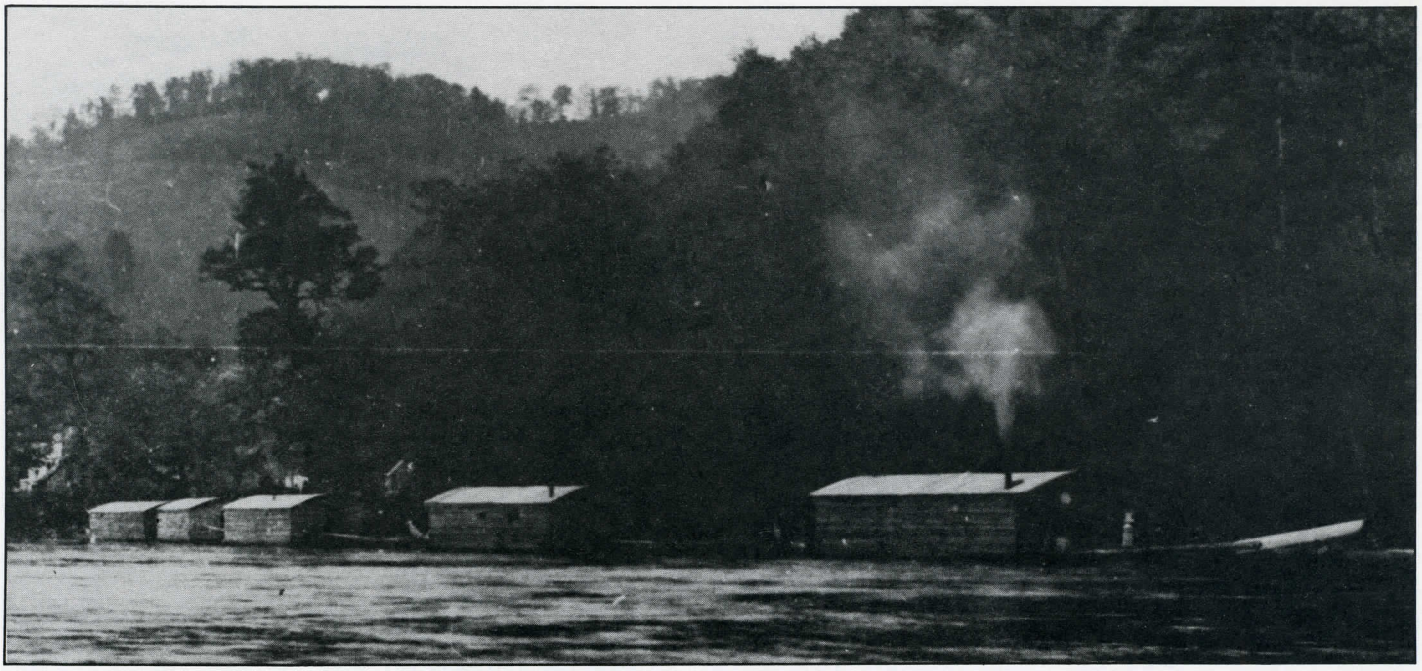
ry, and as late as the Civil War nearly 90 percent of all lumber was sawed by water power.

The circular sawmill, an often portable device invented in 1777, was to revolutionize West Virginia lumbering because it allowed sawing to be done in all but the most inaccessible hollows. By 1880 there were nearly 500 lumber establishments in the state, most of them circular steam mills. That year, more than 180 million board feet were produced, ranking the young state 24th in national output. Circular saws consumed billions of feet of timber in years to come and contributed mightily to the harvesting of the primeval forest in West Virginia.

But the band sawmill was to be the ultimate reaper. The saw, an endless belt of flexible steel with teeth on one or both edges, moves rapidly around an upper and lower pulley. A piston powers the log carriage past the whirling teeth.

The band mill is a large, nonportable operation that often was powered by a steam engine burning sawdust from its own cuttings. These enormous engines produced as much as 1,000 horsepower. According to Roy B. Clarkson's history of West Virginia logging, *Tumult on the Mountains*, the first band saw was introduced in either 1875 or 1881. It required 17 acres of forest per day to keep one of these saws busy, and lumbering peaked in the late 19th and early 20th century as the amazing appetite of the band mills took its toll on the state's standing timber.

Logs were transported to the big mills mainly by water in the early days. The Greenbrier was West Virginia's most famous timber river, but all our major waterways were used at one time or another to float logs. The "timber drives" came in late winter or early spring, when rivers were swollen with seasonal rain and melt-



These Greenbrier River "arks" followed timber drives downstream, providing cooking and sleeping facilities for the workers. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

ing snow. "Arks" — huge rafts as much as 100 feet long and 18 feet wide, made of logs and rough lumber — trailed the loose logs downriver. A long house was built on top of each ark, with bunks and cooking facilities for the sometimes dozens of men who drove the logs to the mill.

Earlier in the year, the logs had been brought overland to the river. Skids and slides were used wherever possible, to let gravity help move the heavy logs to water. Deep winter was the time for this work, when icing kept the logs moving rapidly.

Areas remote from rivers had to await the coming of the railroad to accommodate the log harvest. The steel rails systematically penetrated all such places, with thousands of miles of track eventually being laid. Spunky Shay engines, small steam locomotives employing gears instead of side rods, readily negotiated rough, hilly and sharply curved track where more cumbersome engines could not go. Once an area had been worked out the Shay picked up its track behind itself, with the rails sent for use elsewhere. The roadbeds remained and today they can be identified in second-growth forests in many parts of the state.

During the peak year of West Virginia timbering, 1909, there were 83 band mills and 1,441 other sawmills. Nearly one and a half billion feet of lumber were cut in those 12 months alone. It has been estimated that from 1879 to 1912 the total cut exceeded 20 billion board feet. That equals 8,500,000 acres of virgin forest, or more than three-quarters of the total timbered area. Between 1870 and 1920, more than 30 billion board feet were taken from West Virginia woodlands.

For so prodigious an effort, a large and efficient work force was required. The need was supplied by

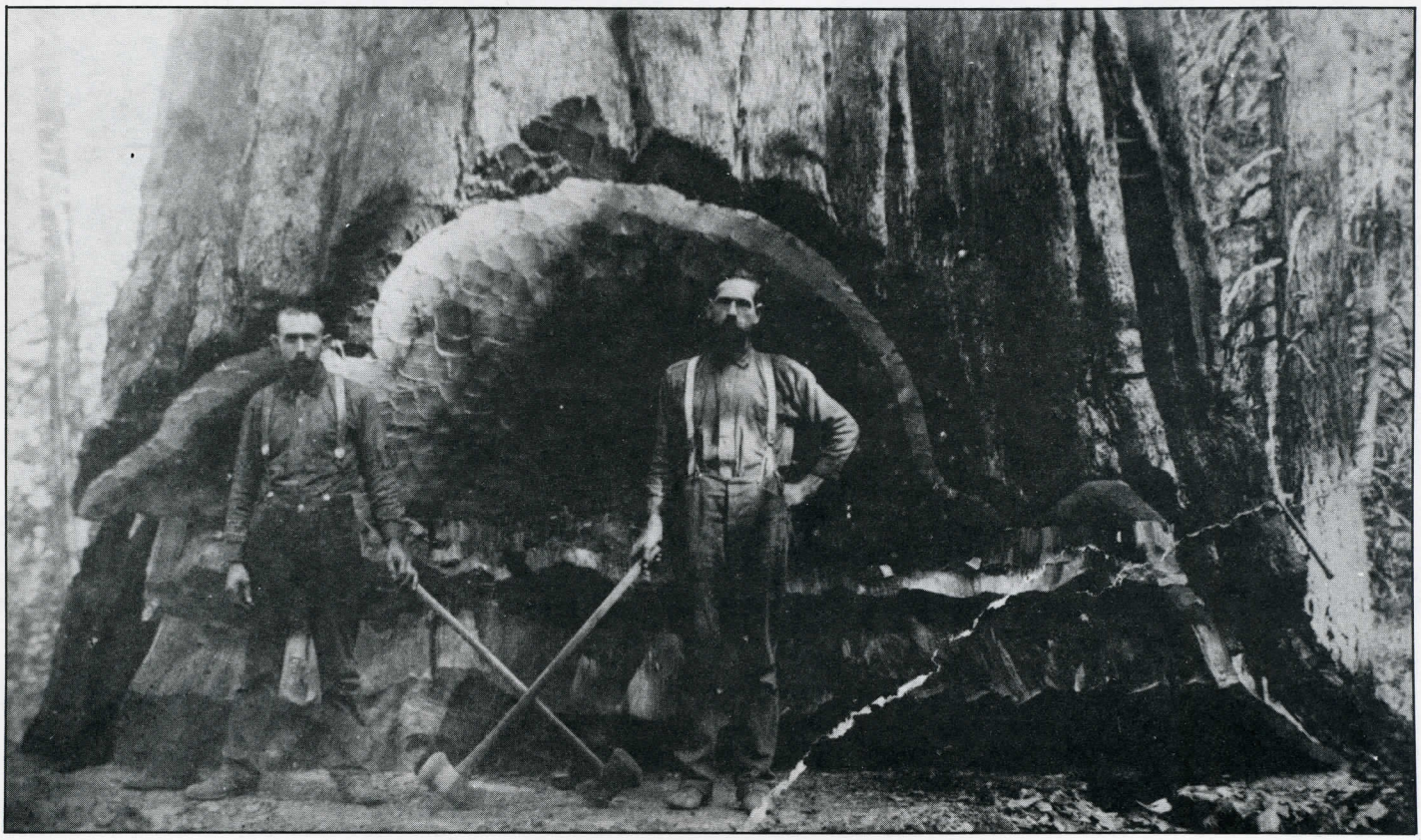
Teamstering at Seebert in Pocahontas County. This 10-foot saw log made a good load by itself. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

the lumberjacks, or "wood hicks" as they were commonly called in West Virginia. The work of these men is detailed in Clarkson's book and in the popular novels of W. E. Blackhurst, including *Sawdust in Your Eyes, Riders of the Flood,* and *Of Men and a Mighty Mountain.*

The wood hicks immortalized by Blackhurst and Clarkson were rugged men who thrived on hard work, bumper, grab driver, skipper, stake maker, and even road monkey. Each man was an expert in his own work and many mastered other skills as well.

Prior to 1910, most wood hicks worked six 11-hour days, with the work week gradually decreasing in later years. Wages of $2 to $3 a day were typical. Men who worked near home returned there Saturday night, Shays at work there, now hauling tourists instead of logs. Davis and Hambleton in Tucker County, Horton in Randolph County, and Burner in Pocahontas were other notable timber towns.

Lumbering continues as a major industry in West Virginia, but the early days of reckless glory are long behind us. Environmental concerns and increased attention to scientific forestry



The true giants of the forest took notching as well as sawing before being brought down. These men are standing in the notch they're working on. Photographer unknown, 1920, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

a simple life, and the freedom to move from place to place as logging opportunities allowed. Morale was high and the mood boisterous in their logging camps. The companies housed them free in rough bunk houses and feet them as much solid food as they cared to consumer. The men took fierce pride in their ability although competition was friendly, with some notable and violet exceptions. Many of their duties, like breaking log jams on the river, required both skill and daring. Specialization divided woodsmen into different occupations, including foreman, cook, blacksmith, saw filer, sawyer, and teamster. Some jobs carried colorful names, such as swamper, while others frequented nearby towns with their saloons and brothels. Living away from cities and the refined offerings of civilization, many loggers never married and seemed content with their lives in the woods and the camaraderie of their rough companions.

Lumber towns sprang up to serve the needs of the industry and the wood hicks. As in coal and oil, the boom towns flourished for a few decades and then dwindled in size or disappeared altogether. Cass was the most famous of these, attaining a population of around 2,000 by 1918. The Pocahontas County town is down to a few hundred people at present, but you can still see the provide powerful restraints nowadays. The changes are for the better, ensuring that our state will have a self-perpetuating timber stand for responsible harvesting into the indefinite future. But we may be forgiven a sentimental look backwards to the time when West Virginia wood hicks confronted the virgin forest. The battle was fought in the woods, as well as in the mills and on the rivers, and of course the loggers eventually triumphed over nature. It was a victory for neither, however, for ironically the wood ticks disappeared with the big trees they prized. There was no need for one without the other, and their passing closed a colorful chapter in our history.

With guide dog Hertha, Kelton Roten crosses a rain-drenched Romney intersection. Photograph by Clark Alexander, about 1955.

Kelton Roten

"The Word Handicap Never Bothered Me"

Interview by Michael Kline

Michael Kline. I always wanted to sit you down like this, and ask you some questions about growing up in West Virginia. Tell me first a little bit about your people.

Kelton Roten. I was born in Wayne County, out in the country without a doctor, and unfortunately I think that's why I can't see, because we didn't have drops to use in my eyes. And consequently they got all messed up. I didn't get to a doctor for about six weeks, which meant there was nothing you could do. Later we moved to Huntington. My dad, my stepdad really, Roten, was a bricklayer at first, then went to the Chesapeake & Ohio shops as a boiler maker, and was there for 51 years.

I think the biggest memory I have as a kid must have been when I was five. I got typhoid fever and we had a young doctor just come into town. In fact, I think I was maybe his first patient. The guy was only 22 years old. I guess that's when you didn't have to go to medical school for too long. He grew a beard and a mustache because he wanted to make people think he was older. And I remember he came, and the medicine was terrible, and he said, "What would you like for Christmas?" Well, I said "I'll take the medicine if you get me an air rifle." Now, what I wanted with an air rifle I don't know. But, anyway, I got up Christmas morning and I was sure he hadn't done it. I started to go out on the front porch and fell over an air rifle — it was there. But I don't think I ever used it. I guess the only reason I wanted it was because the other kids in the neighborhood had one.

Oh, I remember a few little things

when I was three or four. I was living in a place where the porch must've been, oh I guess four feet high, and I remember falling off the darn thing. I swore I'd never go back to Barboursville again as long as I live, and I've kept my word. I can also remember that my granddad had a horse named Prince, the gentlest old horse that I ever saw in my life. Granddaddy would put me on his back, and he'd take me around and this is an actual fact, that if we came to a clothes line he'd stop — just stay dead still. If I'd put my hand out, I'd touch the clothes, or the line, bow my head and the horse would go on. He'd fool with me a little while. Finally, when he'd get tired he'd take me to the porch and give a great big whinney, so someone would come get me off. I can remember that so very well.

MK Do you think the horse knew you couldn't see?

KR I don't know. Animals know a lot more than we think they do. It's like these guide dogs, we sell animals short. I've never made up my mind whether it's all intelligence or whether it's all instinct. The horse knew something, 'cause he didn't stop for anybody else. But he'd always stop for me, stand there and make noises until Granddad or someone would come and get me. Then he'd trot off.

MK Which grandfather was that?

KR That was my maternal granddad. I never knew anything at all about my father. My stepdad adopted me. We lived in a place called the C & O Patch. It's a pretty rough spot. On Saturdays especially, the boys would get in fights and so forth. But the kids were always nice to me. If they were going someplace, they'd take me along with them. I remember one kid in particular, had a paper route, every afternoon. And I remember one afternoon he decided he was going to have a little fun so he ran off and left me. One of the women came out and she gave him blazes for that kind of thing, but he didn't pay attention to her and I didn't either. We just went on about our business.

MK Where was the C & O Patch?

KR That was up on 28th Street and 8th Avenue, in Huntington. The C & O shops was all along the area, down by the Ohio River. Had a huge working shop there, they used that as a repair station, and how it ever got its name the C & O Patch I'll never know. It was supposed to be a pretty rough spot, but I never found anything rough about it.

I can remember World War I very well. I remember when I was a kid, I must have been about seven or eight, I was always interested in words and had so little to read. We didn't have Braille in those days, we had another system. I'd get any book that I could get ahold of and sit there and read the thing. I remember we rented from a guy who had a small grocery store. His wife was a staunch Republican, and, poor old soul, she read the paper every day. But I don't think she ever knew what she read. I heard her over at the house one day yelling and screaming to her husband, "You know what the World War is all about? They're fighting the World War to save the Democrats!" The point was they fought the World War to save Democracy. I don't think I'll every forget that. That's just one of those things that sticks in my mind constantly.

MK What was that other reading system? Did it precede Braille?

KR It was called "New York Point." It was invented by a designer guy out of the New York School for the Blind in New York City. It was a dot system, which could be written or read, but it was bulky. Braille finally took its place, about 1917-1918. I grew up with New York Point but I left it as soon as Braille came in.

I guess one of the first systems they had was what they called Line Type, and that was nothing more than the print raised, so that you could feel the letters, but you couldn't write them. And this guy, Hoyt, in New York got the idea that it was fine that you could read it, but you ought to be able to write it! So he developed the dot system. Braille had been invented long years before that, but it had not been accepted very much. Invented by a blind guy, and I guess they figured he didn't know what he was doing. But, finally after his death, now it's a worldwide system. There isn't a country that doesn't have a form of Braille. Not that I know about, at least. Braille is used for music, math, it's used all over.

I guess I was about eight when I started to the School for the Blind in Romney. We didn't know too much about it, and I don't remember now who came around and told us about it. Huntington was a pretty far piece from Romney, 300 miles. In those days the only way to get there was by train. You took a train at 3:00 in the afternoon, and if you were lucky, you landed in Romney at 4:00 the next afternoon. You laid over somewhere, in a little town that didn't have any hotels, so you had to stay in houses. But, normally, it was at least a 24-hour deal before you got there. And school, of course, went from September until June with a day and a half holiday at Christmas time.

I never cared too much for it, for a residential school. I felt that too many blind people were together in such places. That's the wrong attitude and I've changed my mind on that now. I guess I was a kid trying to be sophisticated. I went there until I was in the sixth grade, and then I decided I wanted to go to public school. I went back to Huntington, and had a devil of a time getting them to accept me in a public school. I had learned my Braille, and how to work math —

Young Kelton with Rover, about 1912 in Huntington. Photographer unknown.

Left: Mother Eva Mae Owens Roten. Date and photographer unknown.

Above: Kelton with lady friends. This snapshot was made in Huntington, about 1928.

they had a special "math slate," they called it, for the blind, but we won't go into that because it's pretty technical. I had learned to use the typewriter, so I argued that if I had a reader, why in the heck couldn't I go to public school? Finally they decided to try me out, and they started me out on two subjects. It took me a whole year to finish those darn things. But after that year I had no problems, through ninth grade and high school.

College presented a problem. I was the first blind guy to go to Marshall College, the first blind guy to graduate from Marshall. At that time, we had no recorders, everything had to be read to me, and very few books, the only book I think I ever had in my life in Braille was a French book that was transcribed by a gal in the Red Cross volunteer service, somewhere in Texas. But I think that's the only text I had in Braille. The rest of the stuff had to be read. It was the same way when I got my Master's. Recorders were beginning to make their debut a little bit, but nobody wanted to fool with them. So it still was a reading process, from junior high clear on up to the Master's program and so forth.

MK So, who read to you?

KR Well, that was a nice thing. In junior high and high school, the kids that had class with me kept me up in my lessons, they read to me. When I went to college I got a student in my class to read to me. The second semester my grades were good enough to get a $250 scholarship from the American Foundation for the Blind, to pay for readers. The rehabilitation program hadn't got very active then, so most of the books and stuff I had to pay for. Of course, paying for books and tuition was nothing in those days. I remember the first semester at Marshall I think my tuition was $7.50. I mean seven dollars and a half, not seven hundred and fifty. Books were next to nothing, too, for that matter.

MK And that was what year?

KR That was 1928. And I finished my AB degree in 1932. Then after that I went to work, the first job I ever had was with the WPA and their adult education system. I taught two or three Greek people English, enough for them to get their citizenship. That was fun, I had good times with them. They had a delicatessen and I got all kinds of apples and fruits, and all that kind of good stuff.

Finally, 1935 I think it was, I got a job with the School for the Blind in Romney. That was a kind of a ticklish situation because every school for the blind that I'd write to would tell me that my qualifications were OK but that they had to employ the blind in their own state. Well, the West Virginia school was pretty much the same way, except they had all the blind people that they needed. Finally somebody said, "Well, Kelton, if you want a job up there, why don't you speak to the president of the Board of Control — you know him, why don't you go down and tell him you want a job?" I said that I didn't like to get a job that way. They said, "If you don't toot your own horn nobody's gonna toot it for you." So I went down and had a little talk with him, and he said OK. That was one week, and the next week I got an application to fill out, so that's how politics played in my favor in getting a job. Otherwise I don't know how long I'd have set around and waited for it. They hired blind people but at first they said their quota was full.

When I went up there there was about half sighted people and half blind people. They needed some blind people on the staff — not for beginners, I think it's a mistake to have blind teachers teaching little kids. A kid can develop so many habits that a blind guy just can't catch. We call them "blindisms." I hate that word. I think we should say "mannerisms," and we probably develop them more than anybody else. We don't think anyone is looking at us, but they are. So, I think in starting the educational process the sighted are needed too, for the daily living skills and that kind of thing. A blind guy has a good opportunity to teach, in junior high and high school and even in college. There's several blind guys teaching at state universities and colleges now. So the field has begun to widen, I think, considerably.

And now, of course, it's a little bit easier for a student who is blind to go to high school and go to college, with all the various media that's available. You can have it all right there for you. It's a lot easier to use a recorder than it is to try to make a date with a reader to read to you at a certain time. And, by the way, I always found this

out, girls were far more reliable than boys, when it came to reading. You make a date with a gal reader and she was there. You make a date with a boy and he was there half the time, and half the time he wasn't. So I found that out when I first began, girls were the better readers. There's other reasons, too, but we won't go into that.

MK So, you were a real pioneer in this whole business.

KR I really was!

MK You were the first blind person to graduate from Marshall . . .

KR I was the first blind guy to graduate from Huntington High School and the first blind guy that graduated from Marshall.

MK And you were unwilling to accept the situation at Romney as a child. You were impatient with that. You wanted to "mainstream" yourself into the regular public schools.

KR I'm not sure that I would now, but the thing of it was that in Romney then the curriculum was so limited. I always wanted to study foreign languages, but the only thing they had was Latin. I know that's very important, but I didn't want to bother with that, I wanted French or Spanish or something like that, and they didn't have it. I think that was probably one of the main reasons I wanted to go to public schools, because I knew I could pick up languages there. Then another reason was, of course, I wanted to get back to the old gang, the kids I hung around with. That made a difference. I guess I was sort of homesick.

I was in Romney, by the way, during the time of the first epidemic of the flu back in 1918. We did an awful lot of walking on the campus, that's all we had to do anyway was walk, we'd get three or four arm in arm and take off. But anyway, one night I began to get, well, I was homesick, and the guy said that he'd take me upstairs — "You've got the flu." Sure enough, I did have it. Let's see, we must have had about 120 students in the school for the blind, I forget how many deaf, but everybody in the school for the blind had the flu except one student and one teacher. We were all in dormitories, and in our dorm there must have been about 25 people with that stupid flu. The funny thing was, the kid that didn't have the flu and the teacher that didn't have it had class everyday. Well, they read.

We had two doctors — one old guy that must have been in about his 70's and then a younger fellow. And they had to import two nurses from the B & O Hospital in Cumberland to come over and help, because there just wasn't enough people to go around. I remember Mom came up, she'd heard that I had the flu (and she had just got over it) so she told her doctor she was going to Romney to see if she'd be any help. Mom's educational background was around the sixth grade. So, she came over and the superintendent asked if she'd work in the laundry, and she said she'd work anywhere. So she helped in the laundry. A couple of other parents came up and that's what kept the laundry going.

I think we only had one death in that whole situation and that was a deaf kid. Some of the "blind" kids, of course, had partial vision, and there was a little court down below our dormitory. We knew something had happened but we weren't sure what it was. So this one kid saw a big box down there in the courtyard and he came up to one of the house mothers and said, "What's that box down there?" And she said, "That's a set of dishes that we've ordered." What it was was that corpse, ready to be shipped home on that little train that ran from Romney to Green Springs, and then over to Cumberland. It was just pouring the rain, and by golly, when they started to take that corpse down to the depot the rain stopped, just like that. It never started anymore until we heard that whistle blowing and the train starting. Call it coincidence, call it whatever you want to, but it was the strangest feeling about how in the world that could happen. But it did.

I never had too much trouble in college with teachers. I had a few that were very reluctant. I needed a course in Western History, and I didn't want to take it because I knew the guy was as dry as old sawdust. But I went in and he said, "Well, I've never had a blind guy in class before and I'm not too interested in having one now, we do a lot of map work and a lot of board work." But I had to have the course, so I went down and talked to the dean about it and he said, "Well, if you're willing to work like the devil, go in there. I know his attitude, and I'll send him a note." He did, and the teacher said, "Well, all right, I'll try you out." At the end of the semester I got a B in the darn course and he said, "Well, you know if you could've seen I'd have given you an A because you could draw maps for me." So, that kind of made me blister a little bit, but I got a B anyway.

Then I had a course in Statistics and Measurements. The guy was a pretty nice guy that taught the class. I went to him and said "Now you realize I can't write that stuff out, don't you?" And he said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, the only thing I can do is learn the formulas and dictate the stuff to my reader." He said that'd be alright. So, when it came grade time and I handed in my workbook, this gal called me and said, "Kelton, you better get down here." And I said why, and she said, "Your formulas are right, I could've told you that, but he thinks that I helped you do it. I know I didn't but I can't convince him." So, I went down there and said, "The only thing I can tell you, Doctor, is this: Give me a formula right out of the air, and maybe I can't work it, and that still doesn't prove I couldn't work the ones on the test, but I'll do my darndest. I'll work it out orally for you. He gave me one, and fortunately it was one I could do very easily. No problem at all. I got through with it and all he said was "I'll be damned." That ended that.

Another interesting experience I had in my Master's, I had this guy in English who was a marvelous Shakespeare student, he was absolutely out of this world. He could get kids to read without even trying. He came in one day and said "I told you people that you were going to read every play of Shakespeare. But we're not going to read *Troilus and Cressida* because Cressida wasn't a thing in the world but a two-bit whore." Boy, you should've heard those pages turning!

MK So, you had all the Shakespeare plays in Braille?

KR Yeah, I had them all in Braille. Then when I got my Master's I knew I was going to have my English oral examination, and I was dreading it! I

knew my professor was really bright, and I went in just shaking and trembling all over. He said he only had one question: "I want you to take any play or sonnet or any kind of thing from Shakespeare — his tragedy or comedy, just select one — and prove by the play 'genius or artist?' " Well, I don't know, the Lord must've been with me. I sat there and I thought and thought and I said, "May I ask you a question?" And he said, "Yes, of course." I said, "If you're a real genius how can you possibly keep from being a real artist, or if you're a real artist how can you keep from being a real genius?"

"My God, I've been waiting for that all day!" he said. "I wish you could've heard some of the answers!" He said, "Goodbye, you're finished."

MK That was the extent of your oral examination?

KR That was the extent of it, I don't know why he didn't have more. He had a terrific written exam, and I guess he got from that what he wanted because the other kids, when they came out, they were talking about how difficult it was. I thought the answer was simple.

MK So your MA was in . . .

KR Was in English and Social Studies. My AB was in Foreign Language and History.

MK Were you glad to get back to Romney?

KR Well, things had changed pretty much, it'd begun to get a little bit modern. When I was a student there, boys and girls weren't allowed to speak to each other, except at what they called their parties. And they were pretty well supervised. I can remember one time there was a gal there that, oh she must have been in her 30's — we had students 30 and 35 years old. Times were kind of hard then and I guess a lot of people just sent them up there to get them fed, maybe not. This gal knew Mom and Dad, and was 10 years older than me, maybe more than that, but I was going upstairs and she was coming down and said she'd had a letter from my mom, and naturally I wanted to know what she said and so forth, and by golly somebody told that we were talking on the steps and we were kept away from the Halloween party.

It's hard to know where to draw the line. I think their whole thought back in the days of strictness was the fear of two blind people marrying. That may be alright and maybe it isn't, I have no philosophy on that at all. If they can take care of themselves that's their business. Also, the school was responsible for all those kids and if something should happen, for example pregnancy, they're liable. I think they were trying to do the best that they knew how in those days, so I'm not being critical at all.

My feeling is that a blind kid ought to go to a residential school for the blind until he is equipped with Braille, until he knows typing, and until he has the materials he uses in public schools. He could be ready for public school by the time he's seven years old if he has any brightness at all.

The residential schools have gymnastic activities, track teams, wrestling and that kind of thing, and I don't see how mainstreaming can possibly handle all that. And if the kid is at all musical, they have instruments, they have a band, a chorus, and all that. Now, unfortunately, not all blind people are musical. I had a guy say to me just the other day that every time you meet a blind guy he's musical, but I told him that he'd not met many blind guys. Some couldn't sing "Country Jesus" in whole notes. But if you are musically inclined at all, the kid gets the opportunity in residential school. Then if he comes to public school and they have a band or chorus he is equipped to go into it, because he knows his Braille, his Braille music, and he's all fixed up.

That's my feeling. I know there's a lot of people that don't agree with my philosophy, but I think the blind have to learn to associate with sighted people. It has to do with the individual, whether he's willing to accept sighted people or not, and where he is willing to, you've got to reach out two-thirds of the way in order to get sighted friends. They're not coming to you. You've got to do something that merits their attention. A blind guy told me one day that he and his wife go to work every morning and people always speak to his sighted wife but they never speak to him. I asked him how he knew they weren't speaking to both of them, and why didn't he say hi? And he said he

Red Ogden, Jack Vorback and Kelton play for a Westvaco retirement dinner in 1973. Photo Arts Studio, Cumberland, Maryland.

couldn't do that, and I said "Boy, I can!" A lot of blind people have the feeling that you've got to call them by name or they're not being spoken to, but I say to heck with that idea. I may be too outgoing, but I'm a lot happier being that way than I am trying to restrain myself. I can pretty well tell when people don't want my babbling, you can feel it, and I just calm down, that's all.

I started teaching at Romney in 1935 in the second and third grade, and the interesting point of that was the opening. I wanted so badly to get going in language because at that time I was pretty good in Spanish and French. But they didn't teach language at Romney because nobody would use it, and it wasn't until the last two years that I taught that the principal asked me to start a Spanish class. I said, "My Lord, I haven't taught Spanish since 1932!" Fortunately, at Potomac State they were giving a beginner's course in Spanish and it began to come back to me after I'd gone over there. I taught the second and third grade, then went to the sixth. Then finally I got into high school teaching. One of the kids that started with me in the second grade was graduated in the 12th grade when I was promoted to the 12th grade teaching. We made it together.

MK Did you meet your wife along about this time?

KR Joan came down as a Home Ec teacher in 1948. We had a little stand down at the New Century Hotel, they were training the students to operate vending stands. So Joan came down one day and we were talking and she said, "I knew you had an umbrella, what time do you get off duty?" And I told her about 10 minutes, and she said she wanted me to walk down to the drugstore with her, and I said that if that's all she wanted forget it! But, anyway, I walked down to the drugstore with her. So we became quite — that was in January — friendly, friendly enough that in September we were married.

MK Was Romney a pretty nice place to raise a family?

KR I thought it was a very nice place because you had very little crime. It's pretty much a family town.

MK What did Joan tell me about you singing on the radio?

KR In 1929 I met a guy who was director of the American Foundation of the Blind. He came down and we got to be very friendly so he wanted me to go to New York with him. I was taking voice lessons at the time, and I think I had a fairly decent voice, so while in New York he got me an audition at WEAF, and I sang a couple of numbers. The next year I went back I had a paid job which I think was $50 for 15 minutes on WJZ. There was a station then in Huntington, WSAZ. They put me on every week for 15 minutes for the "Golden Green Coffee Hour," that's old time stuff. I was billed as the "Golden Green Baritone." Had a lot of fun with that, I think I worked with that for about a year and a half. It was $5 a week and that helped out. Bought my meals and what-nots at college. So that's about my biggest connection, in fact, my only connection with radio. But I had a year and a half of it and that was good. That was a lot of fun.

Kelton and wife Joan Roten make music together at home. Photo by Brad Nettles.

MK What were some of your songs back then?

KR Oh gee, I'm trying to think. "Until" was one, "No Rose In All The World, Until You Came," "Lonely Tonight," and I can't even remember the words to that thing. "The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi," of course that was very popular in those days, and we had a lot of requests for that. Occasionally a sacred number, if someone requested it, right out of the hymn book. "I Need Thee Every Hour," or whatever the case might be. Just ordinary middle of the road kind of stuff I guess you'd call it, lyric ballads. The studio pianist who played for me unfortunately wasn't very good, so I couldn't get into anything very difficult. She was nice, but one of these low-paid gals. They

Kelton Roten is officially retired now, but has never quite got teaching out of his system. Here he is with music student Scott Killen, earlier this year. Photo by Brad Nettles.

wouldn't pay enough to get a good one. That didn't last but about a year and a half, somebody else got the job.

MK Well, tell me all about your fiddle playing.

KR That's a long story. Every time I started taking fiddle lessons the teacher would say, "You might as well give it up, you're too stiff." And I guess three or four told me the same thing. I got that fiddle in 1928, and of course I'd pick it up every once in a while and try to saw on it but I was so discouraged I had no interest in trying to keep it up.

Then in 1973 I busted a leg, fell on the ice in Romney, and got a 10-inch steel rod in there. I was in bed so much I told Joan I ought to start practicing my fiddle. That's what got me interested in the Augusta Heritage Workshop in Elkins, and I really date my fiddling time to Dwight Dillard's fiddle class there in 1975. Before that I wasn't playing worth a darn, didn't know what I was doing half the time. I've got to the place now where I feel fairly comfortable with it, and that's all due to Dwight Dillard, nobody else. He was so patient, so kind, so helpful, that it just gave me a new lease on life. And on fiddle playing.

I've fooled around with the piano a good bit, too. I use the Bible system on that: Seek and ye shall find. I'm too lazy to read Braille music. You have to read with one hand and play with the other, and that's just too much trouble.

MK You were interested primarily in a classical education, literary classics and so on, but later you've got this interest in old-time fiddle music?

KR Well, I think that comes with being interested in old-time ballads. You run into a lot of that in your literature courses and so forth, English ballads and so-called American ballads. You begin to wonder about it and you get interested in it. Later I audited a class from Patrick Gainer at West Virginia University. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I think he gave me a good background and he spurred my interest in traditional music a bit. I had read a lot of stuff before then on my own, every time I could find something about ballads, and it was always interesting hearing about old-time fiddlers.

But I think one of the things that really got me going on that was when I was a kid, about 18 or 19 years old, there were some people across the street from us and all they had was what they called "country music." It was more or less traditional. I was trying to be really sophisticated, and I said to my teacher, "Well, those people across the street, about all they do is listen to that stuff." He said, "Wait a minute, Kelton, don't you ever make a statement like that again. Whenever a guy plays and plays well, he's an artist. Leave him alone if you can't say anything kinder than what you said." Well, that kind of threw me and I thought about that a long time. It's true. Even if you're good at rock, you're good. Not that I like it, but that doesn't mean a guy isn't good.

And just knowing the Welch Brothers has helped a lot.* I met John Welch when World War II was going on. I played back-up piano for him. I was the pianist at the Moose Club for dances. John was a fiddler. John played fairly well, but nothing like Israel or Tom Welch. John kept telling me about Izzy when he was coming home from the army, "Now there's a fiddle player." Well, Izzy came and I guess the first Saturday night that he was home he came over and played the fiddle. Lord, I really threw a fit, I really got interested.

Then, I heard Tom later on, and I'm sure that they've given me more interest in that kind of music than anybody I know. Especially Israel, he's always been so good to share the things that he knows. And he's a very harsh critic, which is what I need. You have to do something pretty well to get a compliment. I'll tell you a compliment I got from him. He wanted me to send him a bunch of my fiddle tunes, and I did. So I talked to him on the phone and he said, "Kelton, you were pretty good, in fact you were good. You don't play like anybody else, but you're good." And I asked him what kind of compliment that was, but I appreciated it anyway.

I played piano with those two boys from 1942 until 1950 or '52, $5 every

*For more on the Welch Brothers, see Bill Wellington's "Always Come Home After the Dance: The Welch Brothers Band" in the Summer 1984 issue of GOLDENSEAL.

Saturday night for three hours. Pounded the darn piano with a bunch of drunks wanting you to play this, and another bunch of drunks wanting you to play something else. I finally got tired of it, but I think the Welch boys kept on doing it for a while after I quit. That's the last real performing I've done, except just to have fun. Play like you and I did the other night. That kind of stuff I find a lot more entertaining than trying to perform. I enjoy sitting around the house like we did the other night. Just letting your hair down and play.

MK One of the things I've noticed in conversing with blind people, and it holds true to you too, is the constant references to images and colors, and the reference to being able to see.

KR You hear colors mentioned and it sticks in there — it's a red door, it's a green door, whatever — but if you've never seen it; there's no way in the world you can know what a color looks like. It's like a blank film, the film is there until you press the camera button and get the picture. I have no optic nerve, none at all. I think I could see light when I was about eight years old, something like that, but I've never seen a blind guy yet, who has never seen, that really knows what a color is. You hear it so you just imitate it. Now a person who's seen, that's a different story. Trying to explain colors to a blind guy is just nearly impossible. It's like Helen Keller's description of colors. She may have seen something of color, but she could make you believe she was seeing colors because her vocabulary was absolutely out of this world. Mostly she had a very good teacher and secretary. I was with Helen for about a month and watched her pretty closely. I was very fascinated with her.

MK But your experience as a blind person doesn't seem to have left any visible marks of bitterness.

KR No, I've never felt bitter about it. The only time I feel mad is if I drop something and reach down and have to paw around to find the stupid thing. What makes me mad is when people say that blindness is no handicap. Like heck it's not. You drop this pipe on the floor and *you* can find it. If I listen carefully I might know where it falls, but if I don't listen carefully I'm going to have to look around until somebody comes along and picks it up for me. You could call it a nuisance if you wanted to, it's a better word than handicap. A lot of people don't like to use the word handicap. It doesn't bother me in the least, because I know that's what it is.

Kelton Roten has spent a lifetime opening doors, despite his blindness. "I've never felt bitter about it," he says.

Rhonda Thorne arrives on horseback while Cecil Anderson, proprietor Hertzel George, and Almanza Nitz look on from the porch of Boulder Mercantile store.

"What a Community Is All About"

Friday Nights in Boulder

By Barbara A. Smith

Photographs by Deanna Smith

You can go out any Friday night, and they will be there, the families and friends and neighbors of Boulder. They gather in the old Simpson store, on this side of the church and the railroad tracks, on the other side of the bright blue bridge. Just head north from Buckhannon or south from Philippi on Route 119. Turn at Volga in lower Barbour County, and head toward Audra State Park. Halfway there is the bridge, built in 1907-08, and on the left immediately across the bridge is the store.

You will be welcome, for the weekly gatherings are open to the public. Within 15 minutes, though, you will no longer be "public." They will have you playing Rook or reciting your family tree or listening to tales of the past, the glory days of their little community.

No one knows exactly when the Rook games began at Boulder, though they positively predate the present owners and operators of the store and the owners and operators before them. The present schedule — Friday nights beginning any time toward dark and including a covered dish feast at 9:30 — has been in effect for some three years. That was when Hertsel George, the present manager, took over operations. "We picked up on the Rook playing that goes way back," he says. "We started the games up again, and then one night Pat, my wife, plugged in the coffee urn, and Alta Shaffer brought a cake or something — I can't remember just what — and we were off and running."

How long will the gatherings continue? "Just as long as a single one of us is able. The way I look at it," Mr. George says, "this is what a community is all about — getting to know each other really well and having a good time together and caring about what happens to each person. That's what a family is, and that's what a community is, and that's what we are."

The whole process began when the store was built in 1904 by Sam Simpson and French Townsend. The community was called Hannan (or "Hanna") then, and it was thriving. It actually boasted two stores, the other built by Jacob Thorne and kept in operation until 1937. It also had a flourishing grist mill, built in 1800 by John Bozarth to process the corn being raised there and in nearby Burners-

ville, now called Volga. Right next door was a lumber mill. Those enterprises plus the railroad and four active coal mines made Hannan a hub of activity for many years.

The first settlers had come on horseback from old Virginia in 1790 to live on land granted by the governor. It was these people who named their town Hannan. It was the advent of the railroad with its freight trains, its coal cars, its passenger service, and its modern ways that brought the name Boulder. It seems that there was another Hannan somewhere in the state. Another problem developed, however, when mail was misrouted to Boulder, Colorado. This brought another change, the choice of a post office name that would surely cause no confusion — Rangoon. The community, though, has continued to call itself Boulder.

Another business that made Boulder boom was coal mining. There were four small mines handy to the railroad. All of them were worked with pick and shovel. They have long since been abandoned, including the Haller mine and the Graymont mine. So has the oil well which caught the interest and the industry of the community for a few years. That well was fully equipped, with a derrick and pumps and ox-drawn freight wagons.

There was also a picture studio in Boulder, the probable source of most of the old photographs still owned by various residents. This studio specialized in portraits, as did most of the day, but the photographer did a very nice business in photographic postcards, too. The postcards are of such high quality that many of them are still around and still look virtually new.

A community church was built in 1911. Services are still held there, the congregation made up of local residents ministered to by the Reverend Ken Grosenbacher. The church is a part of the Volga Charge of the United Methodist Church.

In 1881 a school was added, but in 1904 it had to be moved up the hill, away from the dangerous railroad tracks. Many present Boulder-area residents remember climbing the hill behind the store and the church to recite their lessons in the two-room schoolhouse that stayed open until

Above: While potluck dinner warms on the stove, Hertzel and Billy George, pipesmoking Mike Freeman, and Pat George hold down one table.

Below: Rook is a fine game, but not for everyone. Tracy Shaffer and Mike Freeman, Jr., prefer checkers.

1952. Then the building was closed and local students transported to the seemingly enormous schoolhouse in Volga.

Most of these structures are gone — the dam that used to be under the bridge, the school, the mills, the oil well, the mines, and, of course, the picture gallery. Both the lumber mill and the dam, it seems, washed out in the flood of 1912. The grist mill, built in 1800 by John Bozarth and rebuilt in 1858 by John House and then sold and passed down through the Teter and Cool families, was finally torn down in 1950. Only the bridge and the church and the store remain, plus several of the beautiful old homes, and a fine sense of community spirit.

Almanza Nitz, niece of former owner W.H. Simpson and one of the owner-operators of the present store, will be glad to pull out her pictures to show to outsiders. And if it's a Friday night when the outsider is visiting, the neighbors and families and friends will gather around to look through "Manzie's" magnifying glass to identify people and places and things. The memories flow freely.

On a good night in Boulder there will be as many as 40 people at the store social. Two or more games of Rook will be in progress, one or two outside on the porch. The main game, though, is played in the store. A special platform is pulled out and laid down behind the grocery counter. Folding chairs hold the players who have walked through the abandoned Rangoon Post Office, once part of the store, to sit on the platform. Players on the other side of the counter, those sitting in the open middle of the store, perch on pillows that protect the perchers from the sharp edges of carbide kegs.

The cards are gone as a late dinner brings a close to the evening's socializing.

The stocked shelves around them are a contradiction and a paradox, freely mixing the old and the new. Above the Pampers and the shiny jars full of bubblegum are grimey old boxes of "grub dust" and Sevin. Across from the Fritos and the tins full of Band-Aids are bottles of sheep dip and boxes of hog worm powder. Hidden between the children's aspirin and the tincture of methylate are tiny boxes of an old remedy called "Save-the-Baby." Its label reads, "Since 1874," and it also says, "For children and adults. May be used internally and externally. The name 'Save-the-Baby' is not intended to imply that the product will 'save babies,' but rather that it is efficacious in those conditions for which it is recommended." It turns out it's recommended for "relief of certain symptoms of Spasmodic Croup, Coughs, Nasal Irritation and Congestion, Throat Irritation, Bronchial Irritation and Muscular soreness of the chest, all when due to Colds." This is a cure-all, and every person in the room has a tale to tell about this home medication and many others, like August Flower for headaches and stomach problems. Many, many more are mentioned, and laughter comes as the tales are told. "Remember the swamp root you took for your kidneys? Remember how Granddaddy swore on the moon signs? Remember the thunder mug? Remember? Remember?"

Alda Shaffer takes a corner at what otherwise appears to be a gentlemen's game. Cecil Anderson is beside her with Joe Miller at the back corner. Jake Anderson and Gary and Dick Shaffer are at right.

Does the store make a profit? "Well," says Hertsel George, "it doesn't make me a living, but as long as I clear at least four dollars a day to cover insurance and that kind of stuff, I can cover the overhead. Some days are real good, like today. I took in over a hundred dollars. As long as I can do anywhere near that well, I sure will keep the store open."

Some of the other men in the room are miners. Some work for the railroad and some for the gas com-

panies. Some do farming and several are retired. Some of the women work, too. Several, like Pat George, are schoolteachers. Some are clerks, some are secretaries. Several are retired. One, Glenna Propst, Hertsel George's sister, is Clerk of Barbour County Commission.

Those not playing cards sit around the store on folding chairs or out on the steps or on more chairs or benches on the porch. Once in awhile someone reaches for a cup of coffee. Someone else may reach for a bottle of pop or a bag of peanuts. Most of the group, which ranges in size depending upon the weather and what's going on in the rest of the county, will save their appetites for the climactic moment.

"Come on, you-all," someone then says. "Finish your game. It's 9:30!"

"Fifty more points! We need only 50 more points to win."

"O.K.," comes the answer, "but if you ain't finished in two more hands we're gonna make you quit anyhow. We're hungry!"

The card players do quit, and the counter is cleared. The platform is pushed back under the counter. The coffee urn is pulled up front, and out come the covered dishes. Each donor uncovers his or her own offering, and the containers are set out in order — meats, vegetables, salads, desserts, with the empty spaces filled in with breads and relishes.

There's too much to choose from — sausage or chicken or meatloaf or lunch meat, boiled beans or baked beans or green beans with bacon, tossed salad or macaroni salad or fruit salad or sliced tomatoes, banana cake or blackberry pie or brownies or spice loaf. Plus the coffee or iced tea or lemonade or pop.

Before eating, prayer is offered by Hertsel George. Among the long-term attendees is Bob Casto, who boasts almost perfect attendance. He has missed only one or two Friday nights since they started three years ago. He reports that the group has skipped only two weeks that he knows of, one for a funeral and one for a revival that was held at the church.

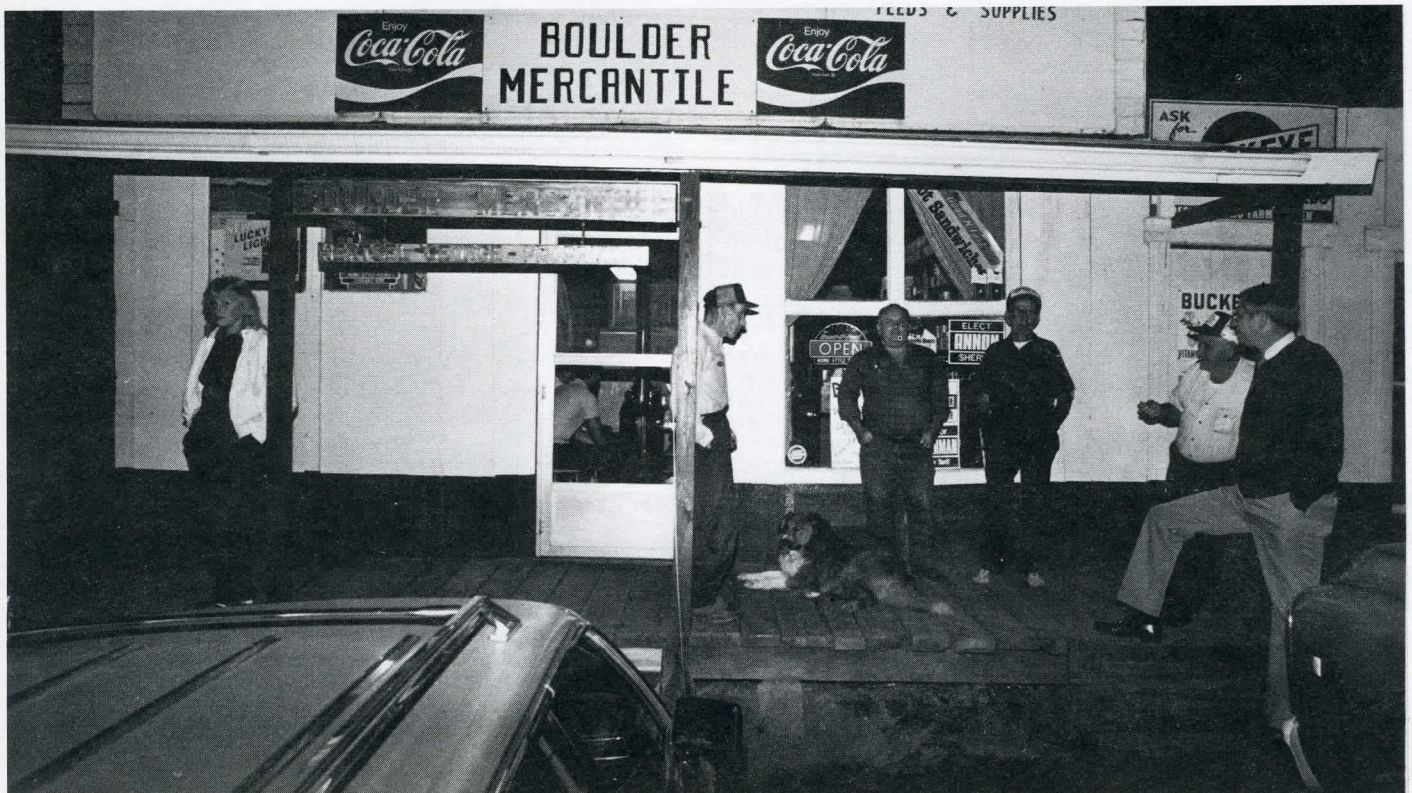
The talk continues and the eating begins. Family news and neighborhood news are one and the same, and those who haven't heard all of the tidbits are quickly caught up. The name George is heard again and again. So is Casto. So are Shaffer and Anderson and Teter and Bennett and Thorne. There are something over a hundred people in the community, and if an outsider asks about a relationship, he is likely to get an answer like, "Oh, him? He's double-kin to me — my uncle and my cousin. He's my uncle on my husband's side and my cousin on both my mommy and my daddy's sides. And my husband and I are cousins, too — distant, of course."

Some people go back for second helpings of the counter-bending food, and some just sit and hold sleepy children in their laps. The dogs finally stop chasing and curl up near the feet of their owners on the cool, dark porch. Sometime after 10 o'clock a few people begin to stir, and someone begins to clean up the counter. The plastic forks are piled onto a plate so that they can be washed and used again. Leftover cake and cookies are swapped or donated for a sister's or a neighbor's Saturday night supper. The Rook cards are sorted and put away. One by one the families head out the door and off the porch, out into the blue-white of the arc light that floods the small parking lot. Car doors open and creak and then slam. Children giggle or whimper or mutter in their sleep. Voices carry across the clearing and over the bridge. "Y'all come back now, you hear? See you next Friday if not before. Tell Mary howdy and tell Charlie to take care of his foot. Take care. Take care. We'll see you soon!"

The rule of the house is that the first time you come, you bring only yourself and your family. After that you bring a covered dish, too.

You can go out any Friday night. You'll be welcome.

Our photographer says the men are discussing politics, while Vicky Thorne stands to the side. It's a good bet they'll all be back next week.



"Respect That River"

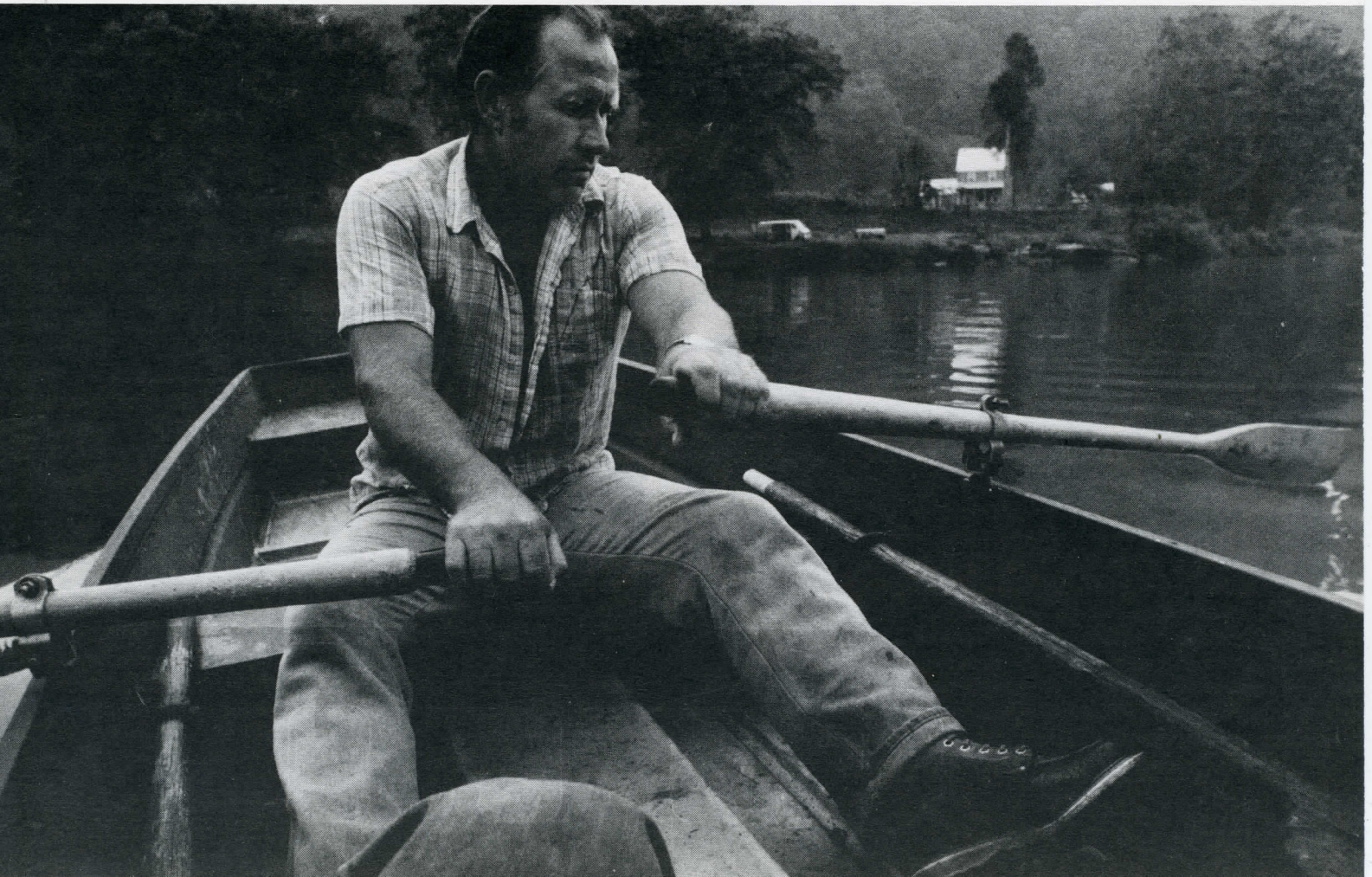
William Richmond and the Richmond Ferry

Photographs and Text by Andy Yale

In the summer of 1984, the huge steel bridge across the New River at Sandstone was complete, but the Interstate it had been built to service was stalled in the rough country near Dawson. Three shifts of men worked heavy equipment around the clock and the eerie glare of their vapor lights pushed back the night as they struggled to inch I-64 across the hills to the New River crossing. While they labored, the twin spans across the river remained untravelled, seeming in their temporary uselessness like monuments to some vanished empire, their white concrete pillars glowing in the gray river water.

On a Sunday evening that summer, just about dusk, a man standing in the middle of the new bridge would be shrouded in quiet, with only the small words the river spoke to the wind to trouble him. Away to the west, the roadbed of the new Interstate stretched into the hills, two gray lines of gravel extending empty to

A rowboat has replaced the flatboat of earlier days, but you can still cross New River at Richmond Ferry for a dime. Brother Jim Richmond takes a turn at the oars in this picture.



the horizon. To the east, rows of heavy equipment sat silent, earthmovers and graders and huge Euclid dumps taking their rest after a six-day week. And in the quiet, the man could hear what those crossing the bridge at 65 miles per hour, bound for Beckley and Charleston and the smokey plains of Ohio will never get the chance to hear. In the peace of that summer evening, a faint "hello" echoed from up the river, and an answering shout, blurred by distance into a single, meaningless sound, floated back.

If he was born and bred in that vicinity, the listener would know the meaning of those shouts, and could travel in his imagination half a mile up the river, around the two big bends, to a point at the mouth of Laurel Creek, where a figure stood expectantly on the gravel shore. From the opposite bank, a boat put out, a heavy wooden rowboat, quartering upstream and then floating down with the current to run up the bank almost at the feet of a waiting traveller. The boatman steadies his craft, and when his passenger is safely seated, pulls away into the current with long, powerful strokes, bound for the Raleigh County side of the river in the last light of evening.

The man at the oars is a Richmond, born and raised at Richmonds Ferry and the sixth generation of his line to ferry the river. Stepping ashore on the far bank, he stands on land that has been in his family for almost 200 years. The history books differ as to just when the Englishman, William Richmond, first settled on the New River, some maintaining the late 1780's, others 1812. All accounts agree, however, that the Richmond Ferry has been operating continuously since the early 1800's. And the bottomland cleared by William Richmond is still inhabited by his descendants today.

Old accounts picture the Richmonds as a family of great local importance. Judges, doctors, postmasters and merchants, all bore the Richmond name throughout the 1800's. The family was considered to be weathy and was especially noted for fine horses and livestock. The Richmonds also had a reputation for great physical strength and were looked on as leaders in local society. The town of Sandstone was formerly called New Richmond and Sandstone Falls were known as Richmond Falls. But when the C&O was extended from Huntington to Cincinnati, it passed through another New Richmond, this one in Wyoming County. To avoid confusion, the name of Summers County hamlet was changed to Sandstone Depot.

Today, Hobart and Jim Richmond live in the house their great-great-grandfather, William, built. They farm their 110 acres of bottomland with a 1964 tractor and a spanking team of spotted Belgian horses. Everything on the place looks well cared for and neat — the animals are fat, the crops healthy, and the 20 year old tractor looks like it just rolled off the showroom floor. On all sides, one sees the evidence of hard work — the barn filled with hay, the carefully kept outbuildings, the land responding with great abundance. A strong feeling of continuity and order, of commitments fulfilled and things done right, suffuses the entire farm with an aura of peace.

A mile up the river road from their homeplace, perched on a bench above Sandstone Falls, lives William Richmond, Jim and Hobart's brother. Spectators at the Pioneer Days in Marlinton and parade goers throughout the state would recognize William — but only in his dress. Disguised as "Granny" and with the help of his partner, Dall Gill, and his team of work oxen, he has won prizes at parades and fairs all over the area.

Extremely mild mannered when he's in everyday clothes, William keeps to a rigorous schedule. Working six days a week in a deep mine near Beckley, William still manages to raise a garden, do his own canning and cooking, and "batch along" by himself. As if this weren't enough to fill the day, he also logs with his yoke of oxen, pulling timber off the hill for various projects he has going. During a rare break from this steady diet of hard work, William Richmond told me about boats, oxen, and growing up at the last of the New River ferries.

William Richmond. I was born at Sandstone Falls. The home place is a two-story log house. There were 10 of us in the family. Old man didn't get married til he was 51, and had 10 of us then.

My great-great-grandfather built the house. I got my name, William, from him. The old deed is wrote out on sheepskin down there. It's that old. They owned 3,000 and some acres when they first settled here but they sold it off down to 110 acres.

I ain't that old, but I can remember it all. I tell you, when we were growing up kids, you didn't have no new shoes, you fixed them at home. Got the old shoe last and nailed them and sewed them at home. And when you came home from school you took your good clothes off and put your work clothes on. Work shoes and stuff, a pair of old bib overalls. You tore a hole in them you patched it, you didn't get no new ones.

It was rough then. You raised your food, you canned it and all. Had to can it, had no other way of getting it. Pickled your corn in stone jars, canned pickles and stuff. Made seven or eight batches of apple butter a year. We used to make cane molasses, too. That was hard work — grinding it up, you'd take a mule and run that cane mill all day long. Take them sorghum and boil them off — take four or five panfuls and boil them off, next day make another run. Spend about eight or nine days at it before you'd get it all made up.

That's when we were kids and had to walk about a mile to school, wearing them old bibbed overalls. Didn't have no light bread for lunch then, biscuits was all they made. Didn't know what a store was, hardly. Anything you got out of a store, you took your eggs and traded for it, got a little bit of groceries and that was all you needed. Raise your own chickens, butcher about eight or nine hogs a year, salt them down. Butcher maybe two beeves. Flour and sugar and salt was all we bought — the rest of the stuff we raised at home.

I can remember when we didn't have no electricity, had to carry an oil lamp from one room to the other one down there. You dropped it, you broke it, you got the house on fire.

William's ox team helps with work on the farm and in the woods. The oxen have won the Marlinton pulling contest two years in a row.
Opposite, Above: Brothers Hobart and Jim Richmond live at the original homeplace established by great-great-grandfather William. This is Hobart.
Opposite, Below: There's always time for sitting on the front porch after a day's work. William made the ox yoke shown above him here.

Didn't have a bit of electricity til I was about 10 years old, just had to do the best you could.

And by the time you worked from daylight to dark, you didn't have time to fool with nothing. We had an old tube radio, didn't work half the time. We had a Victrola, played them old records back years ago. You worked daylight to dark, or got your chores done that evening after you come in from school — it was hard work and no pleasure back in those times.

Back then, there used to be about 30-some houses around through this neighborhood. All out through here and up on the mountain. Eighty or 90 people would cross the river a month at the homeplace. We still run a ferry down there yet, 10¢ each way, that's what we still charge. We been running it for six generations now.

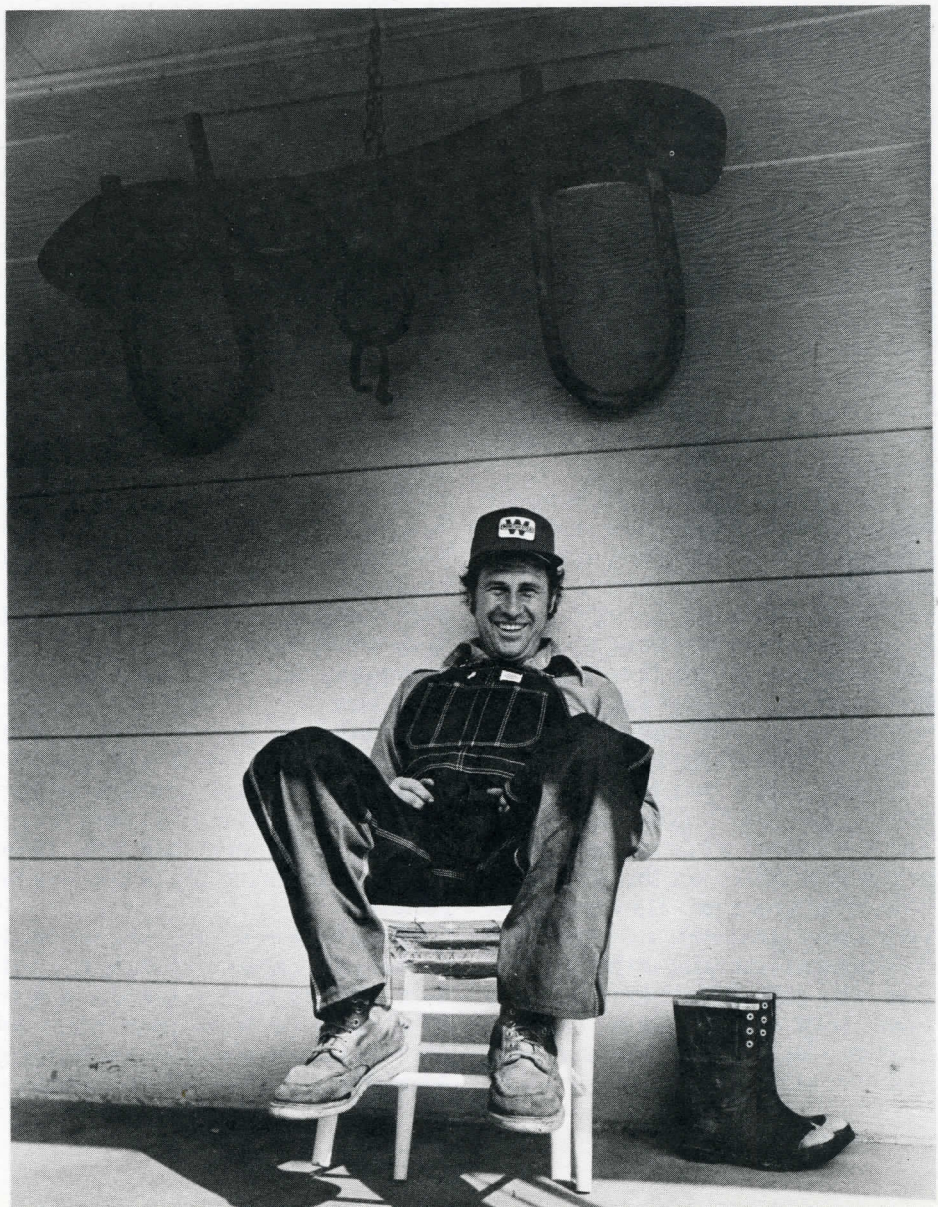
We used to have a big flatboat before the flood took it away. Hauled cars and wagons up on there. Hauled railroad ties across the river, my dad and them did. In 1940, I believe it was, the flood took it away. We'd take A-Model Ford cars up on there, horses with a load of ties. People would come off the mountain with ties and stuff, and instead of unloading them they used to pull wagon, horses and all up on the boat, pull it over to Sandstone Depot, load it on freight cars, and haul it away. Charge 50¢ for that — poling across there. The old man used to help them do it — my dad did. Pole it across the river. They used to make tan bark, put it on wagons and take it across the river too.

Used to load cattle — put the sideboards up on the side of the boat. People years ago went from house to house to get cattle, didn't have no trucks running then. Brought them down here, put them in our barn til they were ready to load up that big flatboat, put sides on it, run them up on there. We used to swim many a horse across there. Lost one, one time, he drowned, as dead as old age. They dragged him down lower in the holler up there and buried him, I remember that. When a cow would be swimming behind the boat there, a lot of times she'd just turn up on her side and quit swimming. Just loose that rope on her, and let her head go under, she'll come up then and she'll *start* swimming. It's a job to pull them when they're turned up on their side. A horse, he ain't too bad,

he'll just hold his head up and he'll swim.

We were the only ones that had a boat. Everyone that lived on this mountain depended on us to cross the river. The old man used to be out in the field plowing and somebody would come along. He'd hook up the horse to the fence post there, and go on off. If they were across on the other side, they'd holler and he'd come across. There was always somebody there all the time. He had some brothers stay with him, and they did that ferrying a little. And they took a boy in and raised him — Ralph Shuck — and he ferried the river for years til he went to the army. I had an aunt there, she could pull a boat just like any man. People used to take their hands and stick them in the water, make it harder to pull. She would make them get their hands out of there, hard enough to pull the boat the way it is. We did that through the year round.

Lots of time, in the wintertime, the river would be froze over. You'd know the river was going to freeze up real hard that night and pull your boat up on the bank. That ice will crush and mash that tiny boat. And if it freezes real thick that night, you can walk way out there. Just drag your boat, put it up on the ice, and slide it out 'bout half across the river. It won't be froze out there. Get on the other side over there, put her up on the ice and go on again. Make sure you cross in the morning, because late in the day, the ice would start running, so thick you couldn't get through it. You get caught in that stuff, it would grind your boat, just eat it up. You have to cross early in the morning, before that ice from the Greenbrier comes in.



The old man never would let us out in the river to play with that boat. If nobody was going to cross the river, you don't get out and play in it. You need to respect that river. He wouldn't let you stand up in the boat or nothing like that. And if it was one passenger, you made him sit in the middle, didn't let him sit on the side of the boat, couldn't pull it if he sat on the side. We'd take as many as five people across at one time.

We make our boats ourselves, out of yellow poplar or pine or something like that. Usually get about eight or

William dresses as "Granny" when he and his buddy, Dall Gill, take the team to fairs and parades. "We make a good combination," William says.

10 years out of a boat if you take good care of it. Build one in about two days, cut the wood and everything. Make the ribs, make you a set of oars. Get a blacksmith to beat your oar locks out — because them little ones that come out of the factory won't stand the pressure. Cut you an ash tree and start chopping on it, make you a set of oars. It takes a wooden boat. You can use it out there in that high water, where those aluminum boats rock too much.

After the flatboat washed away, we kept a rowboat all the time, just carrying people across. Every now and then they'd take a motorcycle across in it — it was a job, though, somebody had to hold that thing up. Cross the river, no matter how high, go way up the river there and come out where you want to. Had to use some common sense about it.

Mostly, when you took someone across, he wasn't gone very long. You just waited while he went down to the post office, got the mail and a little bit of groceries. They didn't get very many groceries, just got what they needed and came on back home. And they called Sandstone going to town. They very seldom ever went to Hinton. Jess Honaker had that sawmill over at Sandstone, and when he put a bus on they started going to Hinton a little bit. Most of the groceries you got over at Sandstone and you got the mail there.

And if you needed the doctor, had a baby or something, call Old Stokes who used to be up there at Hinton. Go over to Sandstone to the telephone over there. Cross the river and call the doctor, and he had an A-Model Ford, Stokes did. He'd come down yonder side, cross the river there. My old man used to have three or four riding horses, and we'd put him on a horse over here. He'd ride a horse to the top of the mountain, do his doctoring, deliver a baby or whatever it was, and come on back. Had to do it that way, didn't have no other transportation. That ferry was all there was.

As long as there's anyone that wants to cross, we'll still run it. There's two or three families on the mountain up there who come down across and get their mail over there yet. It still beats driving all the way to Hinton.

When we was young kids, we used to fool with calves and stuff. My old man used to have a threshing machine, and he went from place to place to thrash wheat — up through Abraham and so on. Only transportation they had to pull the thresher was with horses and cattle. They kept a yoke of cattle behind it all the time, to pull it with if they got in a real rough place. Took the horses out, put them on the other side of that mud hole, put the cattle in the mud. Mud would be two feet deep. Cattle would just get down and pull on through that mud. That's where I got the idea to keep oxen.

After I got older, I got interested and I listened to the old man and he told me how to break cattle. And Dall Gill taught me a lot how to break them, too. I got one broke to ride — took him out in the river, put a saddle on him, and broke him Indian-style. Put the other one in the river, but I couldn't break him. You can break your lead steer, but you can't break your off steer hardly. Put them in the river. That way they can't hurt you so bad, can't buck so bad. I walked him from here on down to the homeplace and put him out in the river and broke him. I seen bubbles for awhile! But I rode him back home, though — I led him down and rode him back.

This team I have now, when I first got them, I put a yoke on them and kept it on. Left a yoke on them for a whole week. I put them out in the field, when I took the yoke off, and they stayed together, they slept together and everything. They thought they were born together. Right now, you find one, you find the other one. Won't be but six or eight feet apart. One goes to the barn, the other goes with him.

I do my plowing with these cattle, haul my wood in too. Before I had my four-wheel drive, I had to haul my groceries in here, couldn't get a car up. I'd leave the car down at the bottom of the hill, come up and put a saddle on the steer, put sacks on and haul my groceries up here.

I use them to log with, too. I'm going to start next week cutting logs for a log house. Take me about two weeks to cut and drag them out — drag them about a quarter-mile, now. The steers are the only transportation I got to get them out of there. I bring out seven logs at a time, about 14 feet long and a foot through at the end. Just trail them up, one behind the other. And get your trail grabs in and come on off the mountain. Peel your two front logs, to make it easier slid-

ing. I had a log up there two foot through on one end, 18 inches on the other, and 14 foot long. Hooked it to the steers and they couldn't shake it. Pulled it about six foot there, that was it. They'd give it all they got. I just rolled it over and peeled it a little bit, about eight inches on the bottom of it. Backed them up and hooked them to it, and come on out of there. If you peel a log, you can do wonders with it. You learn a lot in the woods.

I plowed last year with that yoke of cattle, first time I plowed with them. Down there at the homeplace, made about 10 rows as pretty as you please. Then we hit a big rock, threw the clevis out in front. We tied a chain around the plow beam and went on through there, did about 20 more rows. Went onto another big rock, jerked the whole beam out of it. Hit that plow handle in my brother's ribs, bruised them up quite a bit. He said, "Just take them and go on home with them. You tore up everything I've got." They wasn't a bit slow at the plow. When we hit that rock, that beam just went on out, and my brother went across the top of the plow.

I started taking these steers to parades about four years ago. I carried Dall with me from the start. We been neighbors for a long time, shucked corn and broke a lot of horses together. Last year we went to Marlinton. We stayed in a barn up there, stayed with the cattle all night, and watched the horses pull down there. Then we got our cattle and hooked a plow behind, went down the main street and plowed it up. We won first place there. Went back this year, won first place again.

Dall looked like a mountain man, so he had to have a woman looked like a mountain woman. I just couldn't talk no one else into it, so I done it myself. So we go to parades and make everybody laugh. Yeah, they say, "here comes that mountain woman, with that dress on, here comes Granny." We have a time with that dress, that's the best part about it. Me and Dall make a good combination.

I like the old ways. Food tastes better cooked on a wood stove. And a Warm Morning stove, that's the only way to heat a house. A man gets used to this modern stuff, it's pretty good, lights and running water, like that. But this electric heat — you turn it up, and you're still freezing to death. All you get from that is the bill.

When I was growing up, all they had was horses and mules. Had one team of horses and a team of mules. Plowed corn all day with them — that's what they done their farming with, horses and mules. Cut our corn shocks and shocked the corn, cradled oats with a cradle, baled them up and everything — done it all the hard way. Yeah, but it was a good time, though.

Richmond Ferry from the Summers County side. The Richmonds have lived by New River for nearly 200 years and William says they've learned a profound respect for it.

"The Best Therapy"

Making Music at the O'Dell Farm

By Jo Calendine Silman

Photographs by Gary Simmons

About four miles out of Spencer on Route 14, you will find the beautiful Roane County farm of Jim and Mary O'Dell, where the O'Dell gathering of traditional Appalachian music and dance was held on a Sunday last June.

About midmorning the cars pulled one by one up to the O'Dell farm. Musical instruments, folding chairs, covered dishes of food to be shared and enjoyed, and thermos bottles of lemonade and iced tea, were removed from the cars and the occupants greeted by warm smiles of welcome from the O'Dells. One or two musicians had already started to play under the shade of the large maple tree, but after the car ride most everyone just wanted to stroll around the farm, enjoy the scent of new mown hay and take in the panoramic view. One star attraction was the beautiful Belgian horses Jim breeds, and the mare and their colts in the barnyard seemed to appreciate the admiration.

Beyond the barn, whose hayloft is at times used for square dancing, there is another building that houses Jim O'Dell's farm equipment including a mower, rake, baler, sled and honey wagon. Everything is operated by genuine 'horsepower' on this farm.

Mary reminds everyone it is time to enjoy the appetizing food. It soon became apparent that old-time music lovers are also great cooks who like good food. After lunch came the music and dance. When the fiddlers raised their bows and the sounds of "Sally Goodin" made the hills alive with music, we all knew we were among the privileged.

To capture the essence of this gathering, you must realize these musicians and their music are inseparable. There is a great pride in their playing and a genuine enjoyment playing with each other, "just having a good time." Even though they like having an audience to appreciate their music, one gets the feeling that the players play as much for themselves as for others. Clay County fiddler Wilson Douglas, expresses this sentiment about mountain music, "It is a heartfelt thing, it's not something you just hear and walk off."

In talking with the different musicians you clearly understand their special feeling for this music. Those over 50 came from families who passed the tunes from one generation to the next. I asked one of the Braxton County fiddle players, Ernie Carpenter, to tell me about his family's musical background.

"As far as I know my people played back to my great-great-grandfather and have played down through the years," Ernie told me. "My grandfather William Carpenter was an exceptionally good fiddle player. They called him 'Squirrely Bill' because he was such a great squirrel hunter, a great all-around hunter. My father also played the fiddle and then down to me. But after me that is the end. I have some nieces and nephews but they don't seem to be interested. I was more fortunate than a lot of musicians, I grew up with it and there was someone to show me. I've got my father's old fiddle, it is about 150 years old, but I don't take it out. It is too valuable to the family."

Carl Davis, another Braxton County musician, plays an unusual eight-string banjo-mandolin combination that has, as he says, "an awful good sound." "It's a cross between a banjo and mandolin, a mandolin neck and a banjo head. There are very few of them around," he said. A friend of Carl's brought it back from Italy. Carl also plays a violin, a four-string lap dulcimer, and enjoys making dulcimers out of walnut or hard sugar maple. I asked him how long he had been playing.

"I started playing dulcimer when I was eight or nine years old," Carl said. "Since I was big enough to hold it on my lap, my mother would sit me up on the bed and let me play it. My brother plays the five-string banjo and a sister played the violin. My favorite is my banjo-mandolin, nicknamed by friends a 'jo-head,' and then the violin. I know a whole lot of tunes. One of my favorites is 'Flat Foot in the Ashes' that I learned from an old fiddler, also 'Black Mountain Rag.' I believe you have to have some talent and an ear for music. If you can't tell one instrument from another it's pretty hard."

Mountain music has been the object of scholarly interest long enough now that there's no doubt that the tunes will be saved through recordings already made, even if no mountaineer ever again picks up a stringed instrument. There is no comparison between the "canned" music and the real live performance, however, as anyone present at the O'Dell farm will tell you right away. I talked with Frank George, a fiddler now living in Roane County, about the preservation of traditional music and especially its prospects for survival through live performances.

"I don't know if it is being preserved, some say it is and some don't agree," Frank said, in his usual straightforward way. "There are a lot of young people playing it, but they don't sound quite the same. If there are two old-time bands playing, I can tell you who are the natives and who has learned it, regardless who they have learned it from.

"I grew up in Monroe, Greenbrier, and Mercer counties. We had kind of a sound, in southeastern West Vir-

ginia. Then when I came up here and after going to the Glenville festival, I heard the Calhoun County musicians, Clay County musicians, a little bit of Roane and Gilmer, and I noticed a little different style. There were tunes I had not heard before and tunes from my region they had not heard before, differences in the bowing and shuffling, and I can hear the difference. Individual styles were apparent, such as Wilson Douglas of Clay County. He was influenced by French Carpenter. Melvin Wine of Braxton, Ernie Carpenter of Braxton, and the Hammons of Pocahontas County, they have a sound, almost a blend between central and southeast West Virginia. West Virginia was isolated longer than any other state around us and that is the only reason we have anything in the way of traditional music."

Frank George traces our music back to the British Isles and there was plenty of evidence for that argument on the farm that day. I listened to the strains of a mournful contemplative Scottish tune, immediately followed by vigorous Irish music.

The musicians go from tune to tune without even discussing what they will play. They pass the lead around and the mystery of their "jamming" is solved when you realize they know the music so well that the instrument becomes an extension of the musician and their playing together is automatic. Wilson Douglas elaborated on what this music means to him.

"My grandmother was a top fiddler, a top hoedown fiddler but she was sort of like I was, the only fiddler around. She wouldn't teach me a lot. She said, 'Well, I can't teach you, you have to learn it yourself.'" Wilson did manage to learn for himself, as his grandmother probably knew he would, but like a lot of other old-time musicians he got away from it for awhile.

"I didn't play for about 10 years," he continued. "Then French Carpenter, one of the top old-time fiddlers, insisted I take the fiddle up again. He taught me a lot. He lived by me about five years, so I got back into it and became interested again. Music is the best therapy I know of, it's good for your mental and physical condition. If you have a lot of troubles or burdens it gets you away from them. I can work hard two weeks and not touch a fiddle, then comes a session like this today and I feel like a new man for two or three days. Music has no end, nobody ever learns, they just improve. And it's one of the greatest things in the world for loneliness."

It seems almost incredible, but there was a time when the fiddle was considered the "devil's instrument," and mountain music as a whole was condemned by many church-going people. Some would not permit it to be heard in their homes. In the 1800's there was a great religious revival that swept the South and West Virginia was in the fringes of this area. The sometimes rowdy behavior of

It's a serious jam session when you can count at least four fiddles, two guitars, and two banjos. The fiddlers are Gerry Milnes, Loa Martin, Wilson Douglas and Ernie Carpenter, with Kim Johnson picking banjo at right.

some musicians, perhaps fiddlers especially, unfairly became assigned to the music as a whole. Dulcimer maker and musician Ray Epler of Kanawha County told me of his introduction to something other than religious music.

"I was brought up in a strictly religious environment in Wood County. The only music we heard was in church and Sunday school. The music instrument was the organ and we were fortunate to have a parlor organ in our home. We knew about instruments such as the violin and banjo but they were considered — especially the fiddle — as the devil's instrument. It was considered a sin to listen to them, let alone play them. Consequently we heard very little music other than what we heard on the organ.

"My first introduction to anything resembling British Isles music was when one of the organists was visiting my family one Sunday afternoon, following the custom of visiting after morning services before going back to evening services. My parents left the house to go milk the cows and she asked us kids if we would like to hear some real pretty music. We thought hymns were real pretty music. We did not know exactly what she had in mind but we wanted to hear it anyhow, so she played 'The Devil's Dream' on the organ and it was certainly different from any hymn I'd ever heard. That rocking lilt sounded really different and really beautiful.

"I play a lot of variety now," Ray concluded. "I do better with the hymns because those are the melodies that are fixed in my memory but I don't feel I'm bound for hell 'cause I like a fiddle tune."

Epler, Douglas, and Carpenter are people who grew up with the music — the native players Frank George speaks of. Another important group was represented at the O'Dell farm. They are preservationist or revivalist musicians who seek out the older authentic musicians and are often from other states whose heritage may not include traditional mountain music. One such transplant is Webster County fiddler Gerry Milnes, who plays West Virginia music at home and in other parts of the country.

"I've been playing a lot of music with Mike Kline from Elkins," Gerry told me. "Recently we played at a festival in Pittsburgh. A month ago we played at the Smithsonian in their American History Museum. We did a performance of the music of West Virginia. Mike and I are always collecting music when we can, running around digging up fiddle tunes, songs and stories that are all old-time. We worked with Ohio University on a film that should be shown this fall on National Public TV. The name

Below: It's not always music and dance at the O'Dell place, which is a working farm. Jim breeds registered Belgians, such as the ones shown here.

Opposite: Music get-togethers are where young musicians learn from older ones. This is David O'Dell with Ernie Carpenter.

of the film is 'Cold Frosty Morning. Mike and I did the research on it and various people are in the film including Sarah Singleton who is here today, Maribel Workman from Clay County, Phylis Marks from Glenville, and several others from Webster County. This film was done in Webster, Braxton, and Clay.

"I'm still playing the old-time style," Gerry continued. "Learning as much as I can from the older fiddlers like people here today, Wilson Douglas, Ernie Carpenter, Frank George, Sarah Singleton, people like that, trying to spend as much time as I can with them. It seems like there is a never-ending supply of tunes and music to work on."

Female musicians have been underrepresented in traditional music, but several were at the O'Dell farm. There didn't seem to be any discrimination from the gentlemen present. In earlier times, the traditional role of mountain women often simply did not leave much time for the playing of music. But there were three well-known Braxton County women at the farm who have always found the time. The strong smooth sounds of fiddler Sarah Singleton and guitarists Marion Long and Zita McQuain make the ladies welcome wherever they play.

According to Carl Davis, "Sarah can really saw that fiddle," and I've found no one who disagrees. She is the fourth from the bottom of 16 children, and she says they all played mountain music. "My daddy played the fiddle, mandolin, banjo, guitar and dulcimer. When I was about 11 I learned to play the fiddle. I grew up with it. It wasn't hard to learn. We played in the evening after all the work was done. My dad could sit and play all night on the fiddle and never play the same tune. I have forgot a lot of the tunes, since I play for square dances so much and you have to play the same tunes mostly. When I was a little girl, I didn't have no style at all. I would just stand there and saw, but then when you start feeling the music, you get your own style."

Zita McQuain has been playing the guitar since she was 10 years old. She too plays by ear, saying she does read music "but not fast enough to play."

"My mother's family all played," Zita says. "I like old-time tunes like 'Soldier's Joy' and 'Rag-Time Annie.' When I was a little girl we had a big farm and lots of work hands. Two of them, Tom and Doy Allen would bring their fiddle and guitar with them. After the evening meal they would sit on the front porch and play old-time music. They had never gone to school past the third grade, yet they could play several different musical instruments very well and knew hundreds of tunes and I was just fascinated with that. I finally got a guitar and they began to show me how to play the tunes. I learned to play 'Wildwood Flower' first and 'Jimmy Brown the Newsboy' was the second tune."

The third member of the "ladies of Braxton County" is Marion Long who not only plays the guitar but sings as well. "I have played the guitar all my life," she told me. "My sisters play too. I like to play square dance music, waltzes, and sing old-time ballads. I learned music in church and started to play with Sarah and Zita about two years ago. I have square danced since I was young. I like to play the music because it gives me a chance to get out and mix with other people. I really enjoy the music and people."

For some of the younger musicians, there seems to be a consensus of opinion that to have a real feeling

These Braxton County ladies can make music for anybody's dancing pleasure. Marian Long and Zita McQuain are the guitarists, with Sarah Singleton on fiddle.

for the soul of traditional Appalachian music, you have to grow up with it. I talked with Larry Rader, banjo player from Wirt County, guitarist Darrell McCumbers of Wood County, Roane guitarist Richard Cottrell, and the O'Dells' son David on this subject. While it's clear that these men respect musical excellence wherever they find it, they are all concerned that the heart of the musical culture must remain in the hands of natives. In fact, they don't think it can be any other way.

Larry Rader spoke his feelings plainly. "A lot of out-of-staters have moved in here," he said, adding that "they probably will preserve the music in its purest form because they don't seem to be able to put their own feelings into it. They play it note for note the way they learn it from somebody. There is a feeling in the musicians of Appalachia and it's a feeling that the new kids don't have. They are technically perfect but they lack the feeling and that is what we do the best. I'm not technically perfect, but I've got the upbringing for the music."

Larry didn't always hold to his musical heritage so strongly, and that's perhaps why he values it so much now. "My dad loved old-time music but I hated it with a passion up until 10 years ago," he admits. "I liked blues music, black blues, anything except old-time. People of my generation grew up watching TV and you always heard some Yankee reporter telling how depressed and deprived we were in Appalachia. That made a big impression on a kid in high school and I didn't want to be identified with that image."

The others seem to agree that there is more respect for old-time music now than when it was associated with poverty and backwardness. They sometimes draw unflattering comparisons to bluegrass and country music, more popular forms which are descended at least partly from mountain music. Darrell McCumbers has no doubt where his musical allegiance belongs.

"I was born and raised in Calhoun County," he said. "The old-time they played was the mountain music of Henry Bailey and that group. I played with them when I was a kid. I've never gone the country music route but I've played bluegrass, which is a little different from mountain music even though you are using all the strings. Twenty-two years ago, I wouldn't have pulled out a banjo to play on the streets of Parkersburg and now we get asked to play there

all the time. The public will accept bluegrass and they take country above all. I think the country music is way out — there's no music there at all. I don't know if our music will ever get in the spotlight, but I'm sure it will continue to be enjoyed by a lot of people. And here in West Virginia, our musicians and music will always survive."

McCumbers concluded by coming back around to Larry Rader's point. "I agree with Larry," he said. "You have to be born and raised with the music to get some soul into it, some 'mountain' into it."

At 19, Richard Cottrell, self-taught guitarist, has not been playing many years compared to some of the players at the O'Dell farm, but he knows what he likes and that is old-time mountain music.

"My dad used to play the guitar, but he really didn't teach me. You just learn, you play by ear and you hear it so much you just know what they are going to play. You learn off somebody else whenever you can. I like the old-time traditional Appalachian music because I grew up hearing it and the people who play it. I will keep on playing it. I won't ever quit."

David O'Dell's introduction to traditional music was as a student of Frank George, and in the 1984 Glenville Folk Festival banjo competition David won first place. As a freshman at Berea College in Kentucky, he ended up playing some bluegrass last year. He says he never expected to do that, but he still feels the future for old-time mountain music is good.

"I'd say at the rate it's going it will still be strong," David says. "A lot of people are taking it up in their 20's, switching over from bluegrass to old-time. I started to play at age 15. I went through about a six-month stage of just picking out the tune and after that I got into a regular frailing style, nothing fancy. I can tell to an extent someone's style by where they learned from. A lot of people come in here from the northern part of the United States and they listen to some fiddler and try to copy him. You can hear who influenced them by their style. You can tell a difference in their style and traditional mountain style because they come from somewhere else to copy the music and they don't have the feeling that goes with it."

The O'Dell gathering also brought together square dancers, cloggers and flatfoot dancers. The front yard musicians under the trees were playing "Soldier's Joy" and as they paused to relax, I was aware of more music coming from the side yard and was drawn to what was happening there. There were groups of two to three musicians playing lively tunes, handed down from generation to generation. A group was dancing the oldest style of square dancing, the "Appalachia Big Circle." Off to the side, host Jim O'Dell had put a piece of four-by-eight plywood on the ground so he could dance. His specialty is rhythmic flatfoot dancing. Katie Ashley of Spencer later gracefully clogged and treated us to a solo Irish Hornpipe. Someone in the group says that "a good clean square dance is a very fine thing," and Katie Ashley says "I can dance the night away."

"I feel wonderful when I dance," she continues. "I would rather clog than eat when I'm hungry, especially when there is good fiddle music like there is here today. Anytime you hear that Frank George, David O'Dell or the Braxton County group will be playing, you know there will be good music."

Jane George of Roane County is quite knowledgeable on the subject of Appalachian music and dance. She says some dancers "feel it in their bones, like Katie Ashley who can dance without thinking about it. Jim O'Dell can too. It's in his bones, like it's in my husband Frank's to play the fiddle." But Jane says she herself has to learn the dances. I asked her to talk about flatfoot dancing and clogging.

"Clogging is a controversial term," Jane began. "It is hard to define. The older people and middle-aged people who can do it so well call it flatfoot dancing, a simple style. But if you look at 'Hee Haw' or go to any of the Appalachian festivals, you will see them doing patterns or squares. They're always the highly costumed groups and they do what they call clogging, which is very vigorous.

"Some time ago I started to do some research on this and the best definition I've ever heard of the mountain people's solo-type dancing is simply this, it is a combination of Irish style with black plantation rhythms. When we go to fairs and festivals someone from the crowd

Larry Rader says he "hated old-time music with a passion" in younger days. He's changed his mind now.

will emerge and do a real good step dance or solo foot dance and they keep their feet close to the ground. They don't do all this vigorous knee lifting and flailing of their arms, for that was not in the old style. The old style was more what the people still do in Ireland where the traditional dancing is done from the waist down, from the knees down. Yet today you saw them combine it in a circle out on the lawn known as Appalachian Big Circle dancing, and some of them put real fancy steps in and some didn't. That is the way square dancing started, you see. It was an undetermined number of couples and they just did patterns and would go on to the next and keep on going and put in whatever footwork they could.

"If you come down to it, flatfoot dancing is the old traditional style that has stayed with the people all these years. It is trying to beat out as many notes as you can with your feet. If a fiddler plays a lot of notes, then a real good dancer hits every one of them. Now, that is about as good as I can define it," Jane concluded. I think she has done a pretty good job of it, as everyone else here today has done with their own specialties.

And they've done it strictly for their own enjoyment, for the O'Dell get-together is a private affair, organized and supported by the participants. In that sense, it echoes the gatherings that were traditional in the West Virginia mountains in an earlier era and thus may be closer to the genuine folk culture than the more formal modern festivals are. Certainly, the day's events reflected a true appreciation and deep love of our mountain heritage, as well as concern for its survival in changing times. The musicians and dancers may have felt this most deeply, but they had no trouble playing and dancing their way into the heart of spectators such as myself. As I said, we felt ourselves to be among the privileged on that fine day in Roane County and it's safe to say that everyone leaving the farm was already looking forward to the O'Dell's hospitality next year.

Jane George and Homer Fleming dance in the side yard. The plywood sheet is reserved for solo cloggers.

David, Mary and Jim O'Dell, a Roane County farm family.

Meeting the O'Dells

On the front porch at the end of the day, I finally had a chance to talk with Jim and Mary O'Dell. Most everyone had left as we quietly discussed the experiences of the day and talked about next year's gathering and the O'Dell family itself. Their son, David, friend Richard Cottrell, and my husband sat over in the side yard also reflecting on the day's events. We were all enjoying the fine feeling of good spirits and well-being that music leaves behind.

I learned from Jim and Mary that the O'Dell farm has been in the family since 1927. Jim's father was born in Roane County and had always lived there, but Jim's grandfather came to Roane from New York right after the Civil War. Our conversation turned to the beautiful Belgian horses, which Mary smilingly says "come first, then David and me." Jim raised both red and blond sorrels and bought his first registered mare in 1975. I asked him what made him decide to raise Belgians.

"I always liked the horses and raised a few and then decided to get into the registered business," he told me. "I bought my first Belgian at Sugar Creek, Ohio, Amish country. I have sold a few in West Virginia, most I sell to Ohio. They weigh from 1700 pounds to a ton, and I train them at two to three years old. They can be bred from two to 21 years, depending on the horse. I've got a mare that is 12 and she has got more life in her than anything on the farm. It just depends on how hard they are worked and how they are taken care of. They do all the work on the farm. Right now I have 10 head."

Next I wanted to hear about Jim's dancing. As Jane George says, it's in his bones and he doesn't even have to think about it. The rhythm and music captured by the inner ear just naturally inspire him to dance in the style he loves.

"I have a lot of fun at it," Jim said. "I call it flatfoot; at least that is what Wilson Douglas calls it. I didn't know what it was. I've done it for years. I started as a teenager going to square dances and then I quit and didn't do any of it for about 25 years. Got married, and there weren't any square dances around here. Then we started to have a few, some here, some around different places, but we couldn't get it built up. We started going to Braxton County where they did square dance, then it all come back to me. I didn't get it from anybody, I just started doing it. Everybody has their own steps. If you watch, they are all a little different.

"There is a difference in dancing," Jim continued. "There is what they call clogging, flatfoot, back step, tap dancing, and to me they are all different steps. Where I went there were always tap dancers. I really enjoy square dancing and drive 120 miles a week to Sutton in Braxton County, also every third Saturday at Glenville. At the 1983 Black Walnut Festival contest I won an award, $50.00. I didn't even sign up, a couple of fellows said we're going to sign you up. They called out my name and I said to my son Dave, grab your banjo and come out here. Lefty Shafer was fiddling, so Dave joined in with Lefty. I asked him to play 'Cripple Creek.' Carl Davis is an awful good hoedown fiddler. He also plays a jo-head and the harder you dance, the harder he will play."

The O'Dell family is definitely not shy of talent. Mary holds down a full-time job and plays the dulcimer, weaves, and does beautiful needlework. I mentioned to

her that I remembered throughout the day brief glimpses of her seeing to the needs of her guests, never in the same place twice. Now I finally had the opportunity to ask her about how this musical gathering came about.

"It really just seemed to fall into place," she said. "We had so much fun when we would go other places for music festivals, it seemed a good way to try to pull everybody we can into this music and dance. We didn't have enough music here with just David playing, and we kept wanting to hear more music because we enjoyed it. Last summer, 1983, was our first gathering. This year we had 72 people here and the weather was perfect."

Jim and Mary also recalled earlier get-togethers at the farm. Three or four years ago, an exchange 4-H group from Michigan square danced to the music of fiddler Danny Kessinger, guitarist Robin Kessinger, and David O'Dell on the banjo. Then the year before last the O'Dell's held two barn loft dances before the loft was filled with hay.

As far as old-time mountain music is concerned, they give Frank George full credit for bringing it back to Roane County. Jim says it was the music he heard when he was growing up but it had "died down," in his words. "There was none around until Frank came to Roane County about five years ago. Then when Dave got into it with Frank, we started going to festivals such as Vandalia and Glenville."

They may be too modest to say so, but it was clear to me that the O'Dell's themselves have also been a factor in bringing the music back. It was likewise clear that they intend to continue doing whatever they can. Before most of their guests had gotten home that night the host family was already thinking of next year's gathering, laying plans and fretting a little. "If it rains I don't know where we will put everybody," Mary mused. "We will have to use the barn loft again, I guess."

— Jo Calendine Silman

(continued from page 3)

down on his first pre-Halloween visit, but there would have been no teaching in that, no lesson learned.

Many years have passed and the Reader school is no more than a memory. In the intervening years, at various times I have sat in classrooms in Morgantown, New York, Cambridge and a few other places. I find it hard to recall another teacher who taught me two things.

Very truly yours,
H. John Rogers

Head, Heart, Hands and Health

Martinsburg, WV
Editor:

I received the summer GOLDENSEAL and the story about Jacksons Mill, 4-H, and "Teepi" Kendrick really gave me a thrill.

I was raised in Wetzel County and belonged to the Boys Corn Club, which was the beginning of 4-H in Wetzel. I was State Champion of 4-H in 1914 and the prize was an all-expense-paid trip to the short course in Agriculture in W.V.U. The first of January, 1915, I went to Morgantown and lived with Teepi Kendrick for three months and went to school. He was not called Teepi at that time. He got that name at Jacksons Mill, which he talked about getting started when I was with him. He was a wonderful man.

I attended the Prize Winners' Week in Morgantown from 1913 to 1920, except for 1918 when I was in the U.S. Army. Prize Winners' Week was for the 4-H members that were winners in their counties. They also had Farmer's Week at the same time. My father went to that all the time.

I moved to Berkeley County in 1925 and farmed for 16 years. I enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1942 and served three years. I came out of the Navy in 1945 and went to work for the Army in the hospital here at Martinsburg. In 1946 the V.A. took over the hospital and I stayed with them 20 years. I am 84 years old and still active in fraternal and civic organizations. I got the name "Pop" when I was in the Navy. I was 42 and most of the boys were in their teens.

I am enclosing my check for $10 for the GOLDENSEAL. I don't want to miss one issue. I love about every place in West Virginia and I love to read about it.

O. H. "Pop" Francis

Seed Saving

Winchester, Virginia
Editor:

I am sending a check for $10 to help pay for the GOLDENSEAL magazines. I read them and really do enjoy your fine work. I also pass them along to my friends.

I especially liked the article on the lady and the bean seeds. She truly has the American spirit. My mother always saved the seeds of her beans.

I remember the Kentucky Wonders — they were pale beans — and others, like the Lazy Wife and the Red Valentine beans. My mother saved the seed of all her vegetables, except cabbage. She bought cabbage seeds and always had enough plants to give to her neighbors and friends.

I love the country life. I am getting up in years now, but thank God I am still able to have a garden and some pets. I thank you nice, fine folks for doing such good work. Keep it up.

Sincerely,
Mary V. Barr

Current Programs • Events • Publications

Appalachian Slide/Tape Programs

The latest addition to the series of slide/tape programs produced by the Appalachian Museum of Berea College is "Learning Through Living: Pine Mountain Settlement School." The 25-minute program details the history of the famous settlement school in old and new photographs, with an accompanying recorded narration. Pine Mountain Settlement School was established in the Kentucky mountains in 1913, founded in part on the philosophy of the great educator John Dewey. Pine Mountain was an important component of the early "settlement school" movement in the southern mountains, and Appalachian Museum officials believe the story of the experimental school's successes and failures is relevant to the current debate on excellence in American education.

"Learning Through Living," a 158-slide presentation suitable for group meetings or classroom use, may be purchased for $90 or rented for $15 a week. The Appalachian Museum offers several other slide/tape programs as well, with traditional rural skills and crafts especially emphasized. Programs on chairmaking, quilting, wool spinning, basketmaking, and hog butchering are included, among others. They range in length from 11 to 36 minutes, and in price from $50 to $90. All are available for the $15 weekly rental fee.

A brochure and order form may be requested from the Director, Berea College Appalachian Museum, CPO Box 2298, Berea, KY 40404; phone (606) 986-9341. The programs are available in different tape formats and in either sequential or dissolve-order slide arrangement. A script indicating slide changes is supplied with each.

Industrial Harpers Ferry

Harpers Ferry, today known mainly for John Brown's raid and as a strategic site in the Civil War, was for a time also important as a 19th-century center of industrial production. GOLDENSEAL readers desiring to learn more of this part of its past will want to read *Where Industry Failed: Water-Powered Mills at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia*. The new book by Dave Gilbert was recently published by Pictorial Histories Publishing Company of Charleston.

The author outlines the amazing variety of industrial enterprizes located in and around the bustling river town on the eve of the Civil War. In 1859 there were a cotton factory, iron foundry, annealing furnaces, machine shops and mills of many kinds, in addition to the munitions complex that attracted Brown's disastrous invasion. This was still the age of water power in American industry, and many of the operations were driven by water supplied by a Shenandoah River dam and a complicated river diversion system.

Visitors today see only industrial ruins to remind them of this booming period. Gilbert says the reasons for industrial decline were many, including Civil War destruction, periodic high and low water, fire, and the eventual replacement of water power by steam. "Clearly," he concludes, "there were several ingredients that combined to bring ruin to water-powered industry at Harpers Ferry."

Where Industry Failed is illustrated with dozens of old and new photographs, many outstanding mechanical drawings from the period, and several detailed maps for the tourist and armchair historian. The attractive 86-page paperbound book may be purchased in bookstores for $6.95, or ordered from Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 4103 Virginia Ave., S. E., Charleston 25304. Mail orders should include $1.50 extra, for postage, handling, and sales tax.

Mountain Books by Mail

Serious readers and collectors of Appalachian books will be interested to learn of the services of George Brosi, Bookseller. Brosi learned his trade while working for the Council of the Southern Mountains bookstore and now sells books by mail from his shop in Kentucky, and from a van traveling throughout the mountain region.

Several times a year, Brosi issues a mail order catalog to all those on his mailing list. Used and rare books, the bookseller's specialty, account for most of the listings, along with some new titles and bargains on publishers' overstocks. GOLDENSEAL readers may be especially interested in West Virginia books offered by Brosi. His recent Catalog Eleven, for example, included a 1947 edition of Ruth Woods Dayton's *Pioneers and their Homes on Upper Kanawha*, and the 1905 *Progressive West Virginians* by Robert E. Murphy.

A very rare 1831 edition of Alexander S. Withers' *Chronicles of Border Warfare* is also offered, for those who can afford the $175 asking price. Readers with less money to spend may be interested in a 1918 edition of *Uncle Abner: Master of Mysteries*, by Harrison County's outstanding Melville Davisson Post, available from Brosi for $18. The condition of each book is described in the catalog and dissatisfied customers may return volumes for refund.

Copies of the current catalog may be obtained at no charge by writing to George Brosi, Bookseller, 123 Walnut Street, Berea, KY 40403. Brosi also notes that his mobile book exhibit may be scheduled for fairs, festivals or other events anywhere in West Virginia.

Cheat River Novel

The Morgantown reporter and occasional GOLDENSEAL freelancer, Norman Julian, has written a thrilling adventure story set in the upper Cheat River country. The new novel, *Cheat*, was published earlier this year by Back Fork Books of Webster Springs.

Cheat is the story of a clifftop plane crash and the profound changes the tragedy brought to the three men involved. Their light plane went down

during the first blizzard of West Virginia's harsh winter of 1976, and in the ensuing days the men confront the meaning of life as they struggle to preserve it. They enter the frozen wilderness with a six-pack of beer and pocketful of Chunkie candy bars and the survivors come out with considerably less than that.

The nearest comparison to *Cheat* is James Dickey's book and movie, *Deliverance,* and Julian offers a far more sympathetic portrayal of mountain life. *Cheat's* strongest character is the grizzled mountaineer, Clifford P. Snodgrass, a resourceful but contrary soul many steps above the native degenerates' found in the Georgia hills by the *Deliverance* canoists.

Cheat is available for $7 in West Virginia bookstores. The fine novel may also be ordered directly from Back Fork Books, Inc., Drawer 752, Webster Springs 26288. Mail orders should include a dollar extra for sales tax, postage, and handling.

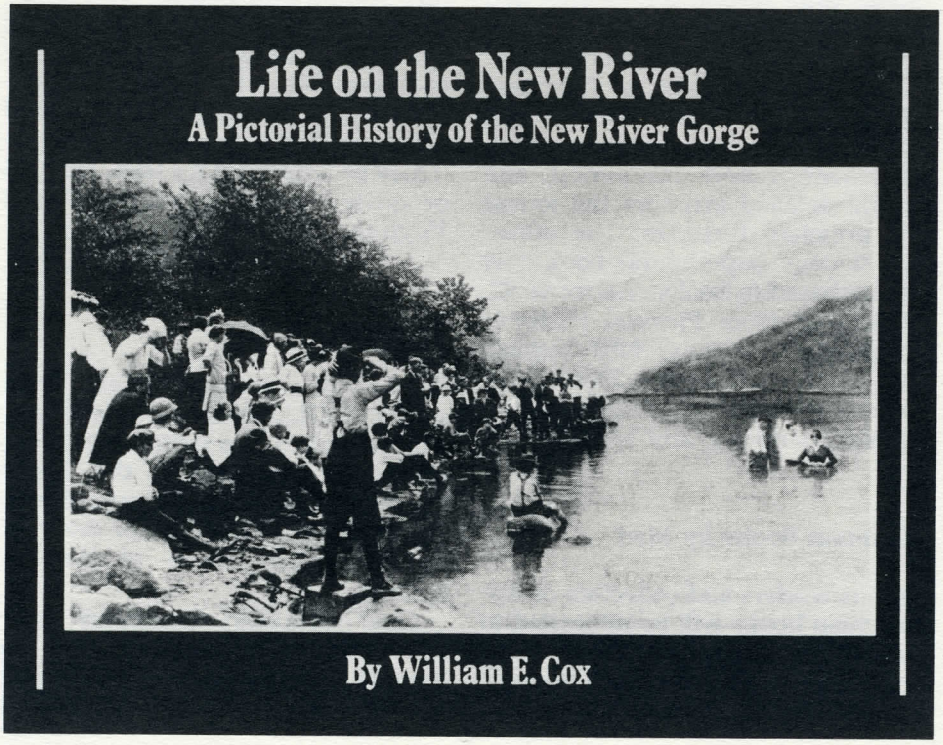
Historical Life on New River

The New River Gorge National River recently announced publication of a new book on the history of the famous gorge. *Life on the New River: A Pictorial History of the New River Gorge* went on sale in mid-October.

The new book includes over 80 historical photographs, as well as a detailed text by William E. Cox of the National Park Service. Cox, Chief of Visitor Services at the National River, collected the pictures and research information as part of his work with the Park Service. His book also includes two detailed maps, one on historic New River and the other on the area as currently administered by the Park Service.

Life on the New River features coal mining, lumbering, railroading and the people who once occupied the gorge. Many of the photographs are from private collections and have never before been in circulation, according to historian Cox. He notes that the cover photo of a baptism at Thayer, and several pictures of coal miners, depots and company stores, are among the recent discoveries published here for the first time.

Life on the New River was published in cooperation with the Eastern National Parks and Monuments Association. The paperbound book may be purchased for $6.95 at the New River visitor centers at Hinton and at the New River Bridge, or at other retail outlets. It may be ordered by mail from the National Park Service, P.O. Drawer V, Oak Hill 25901. The mail order cost, including sales tax, postage and handling, is $8.70.



More Mountain Memories

Friends and fans of writer Dennis Deitz will be pleased to note the recent appearance of his new book, *Mountain Memories III.* The latest of the Deitz family's *Memories* series was published last fall by Jalamap Publications of Charleston.

Mountain Memories III, like its predecessors by Mr. Deitz and his late brother, is chock-full of assorted bits of West Virginia history, family recollections, and general observations and anecdotes. Deitz, although now a Kanawha Countian, was born and raised in the Meadow River end of Greenbrier County. He's never quite gotten over that beautiful part of the state, and much of his published material is drawn from that area. Thus, the new *Mountain Memories* may be of particular interest to people in western Greenbrier, and adjacent Fayette and Nicholas counties.

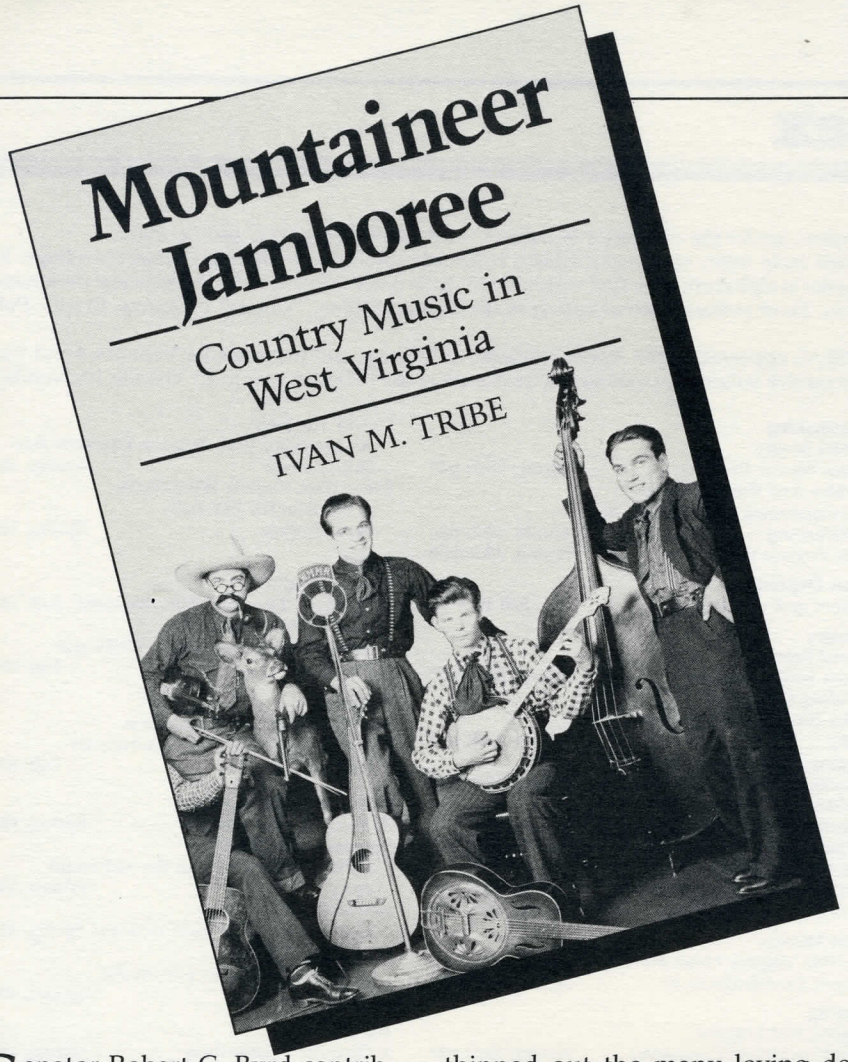
Mountain Memories III is a 180-page paperback, illustrated with historic and recent photographs. The book may be purchased for $5 at bookstores throughout West Virginia, or ordered directly from Jalamap Publications, 833 Scenic Drive, Charleston 25311. Mail orders should include $1.87 shipping cost, with West Virginia residents adding 25¢ sales tax.

Hinton Historical Poster

A new poster commemorating historic Hinton has been published by the Summers County Chamber of Commerce, in cooperation with the National Park Service. The poster, featuring a turn-of-the-century view of the C & O Railway passenger depot as a symbol of the newly created Hinton Historical District, includes a 1985 calendar as part of the design.

Emily Briers, president of the Chamber of Commerce, said, "It was appropriate that the passenger station be placed on the poster. Hinton was developed as a railroad town." She added that both the station and the larger Historical District went on the National Register of Historic Places early in 1984.

The poster-calendar has been on sale in Hinton since October, and may also be purchased at the New River Gorge National River visitor center at the New River Bridge. The price is $2.00.



Senator Robert C. Byrd contributes the "Foreword" to *Mountaineer Jamboree: Country Music in West Virginia,* the new book by Ivan M. Tribe. The senator, himself a fine fiddler, characterizes it as "a history not simply of famous personages but of those who have worked and shared and contributed their creative spirit to give musical expression to West Virginia's values and heritage." Overall, Byrd calls Tribe's book a "meticulous study" and he recommends it to all who share his interest in mountain music.

Those who have read Tribe's many articles in GOLDENSEAL, *Bluegrass Unlimited,* and other publications, won't be surprised by the senator's endorsement. Nor will the countless musicians Tribe has interviewed during his years of travel across the state. Meticulous is the word for Tribe's research and writing.

In fact, I'll have to confess that at times I found him a bit too meticulous for magazine purposes, and thinned out the many loving details of names, songs, and performance dates. That occasionally seemed necessary to keep articles moving along for a general readership. It seems a little less regrettable now, for those who want the pure, undiluted scholarship may turn to the pages of *Mountaineer Jamboree.* There they will find the whole saga of country music in the Mountain State, from early beginnings to the recent past. The story is a powerful one, detailed in its rich variety by a writer who knows it well.

Live radio was an important medium in the early history of country music, and Tribe devotes much of his book to the subject. There is a full chapter on WWVA and the "Jamboree" in Wheeling, beginning with the station's first sign-on in 1926. Subsequent chapters discuss radio before and after the watershed year of 1942, a turning point when World War II was calling many musicians away and bringing unprecedented prosperity to others. A short following chapter details the impact of television, which initially provided opportunities before local performers were edged out by syndicated shows.

Mountaineer Jamboree goes on to discuss the bluegrass and folk music revival, and finally to place West Virginia's contribution in the larger context of the history of American country music. The author is a college professor and his book is the product of exhaustive research, assembling facts and details into a work of careful scholarship.

Ivan Tribe is also a genuine fan, and the reader of *Mountaineer Jamboree* senses the music lover elbowing the professor aside whenever the opportunity offers. At heart, the book is a treasury of the personal stories of dozens of West Virginia musicians — of Doc Williams, Slim Clere, the Bailes Brothers, and many others. Tribe's accomplishment is in bringing them all together and assessing their contributions individually and in relation to one another.

Tribe says that his interest in West Virginia country music was born in 1950, when he first heard Cherokee Sue on WPDX in Clarksburg. We're honored that he traces the origins of *Mountaineer Jamboree* itself back to a more recent event, the 1977 publication of his GOLDENSEAL article, "West Virginia Country Music During the Golden Age of Radio." That and "a little prodding" by founding editor Tom Screven got him started on his way, he says. As an old freelancer myself I can testify that Tom was a champion prodder, and he can be proud that his nagging bore fruit in this fine book on the music of West Virginia.

—Ken Sullivan

Mountaineer Jamboree *is a 256-page hardback book, illustrated with photographs. It may be purchased for $23 in bookstores, or by ordering from the University Press of Kentucky, 102 Lafferty Hall, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506. Mail orders should include $1.50 for postage and handling.*

Goldenseal Index

Volume 10, 1984

Articles which appeared in Volume 10 are indexed below, under the categories of Subject, Author, Photographer, and Location.

In the Subject category, articles are listed under their main topic, with many articles cross-referenced under alternate Subject headings. When more than one article appears under a heading, the order is alphabetical by first word of title. Each entry is followed by the seasonal designation of the issue, issue volume and number, and page number. Short notices, such as appear in the regular column, "Current Programs, Events, Publications," are not included in the index.

The index for the first three volumes of GOLDENSEAL appeared in the April-September 1978 issue, and the index for Volumes 4 and 5 in the January-March 1980 magazine. The index for each successive volume appears in the final issue of the calendar year (e.g., Volume 10, Number 4).

Subject

Author

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Photographer

Location

In This Issue

JIM BLOEMKER is an archaeologist for the Historic Preservation Unit of the Department of Culture and History.

ELLEN HENSON BRINKLEY grew up in Charleston and was graduated from Morris Harvey College and Western Michigan University. She taught English at Ohio Wesleyan, Xavier, and Purdue universities, and now teaches high school near Cincinnati. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

KITTY B. FRAZIER, a Wheeling native, holds a B.A. and M.A. from West Virginia University. She teaches at West Virginia State College and frequently works on projects for the Humanities Foundation of West Virginia and the Women's Commission.

NORMAN JULIAN, a Clarksburg native, is a WVU graduate. He was founding editor of *Panorama,* the Sunday magazine of the *Morgantown Dominion Post,* and has been editorial page editor of that paper. Norman's most recent work for GOLDENSEAL was the Winter 1982 story about George Blue, and his novel *Cheat* was published earlier this year by Back Fork Books.

MICHAEL KELLER is a staff photographer for the Department of Culture and History.

MICHAEL KLINE is a Washington, D.C. native who spent childhood summers in Hampshire County. After receiving his B.A. in anthropology from George Washington University in 1964, he moved to Appalachia full time, working in various poverty programs in Kentucky and West Virginia. Michael served as assistant to the editor of GOLDENSEAL in 1978, and now lives in Elkins where he is associated with the Augusta Heritage Arts Workshop. He is a regular contributor to GOLDENSEAL.

MICHAEL J. PAULEY, a sixth generation West Virginian, grew up in Kanawha and Lincoln counties, and is an alumnus of Morris Harvey College. He is past treasurer of Mountain State Press and past president of West Virginia Writers. Pauley is a former historian with the Historic Preservation Unit of the Department of Culture and History, and is now a partner in Hurt and Pauley, a historic preservation survey firm.

JO CALENDINE SILMAN, a Wood County native, has worked extensively the last five years in promoting West Virginia arts and crafts, hosting the TV program "Lively Arts" and serving as media and public relations chairperson for the West Virginia Artists and Craftsmens Guild. She also does crafts programming for West Virginia Public Radio. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

BARBARA A. SMITH chairs the Division of the Humanities and is an associate professor of literature and writing at Alderson-Broaddus College in Philippi. She is the author of numerous published works, including poems, short stories, journal articles, and the novel *Six Miles Out,* published by Mountain State Press. She is also editor of the literary quarterly *Grab-a-Nickel* and has edited two anthologies for West Virginia Writers, Inc.

DEANNA SMITH lives at Rock Cave in Upshur County. Her photographs have appeared in the National Geographic Society's educational filmstrips, *Country* magazine, *Outdoor Life* and *World* magazine. This is her first appearance in GOLDENSEAL.

BOB SPENCE was born and raised in Logan, and his people have lived there since 1790. He graduated from Marshall University in 1974 with a B.A. in journalism. He worked for the *Logan News* for 11 years, and for newspapers in Weirton and Welch, and now makes his living as a freelance writer. In 1976 Bob wrote *The Land of the Guyandotte,* a 600-page history of Logan County, and has contributed several articles to GOLDENSEAL over the years.

ANDY YALE is a New York writer and photographer, with a special interest in southeast West Virginia and folklife subjects generally. He has published articles and photos in *The Village Voice, Memphis* magazine, and other publications. This is his second appearance in GOLDENSEAL.

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