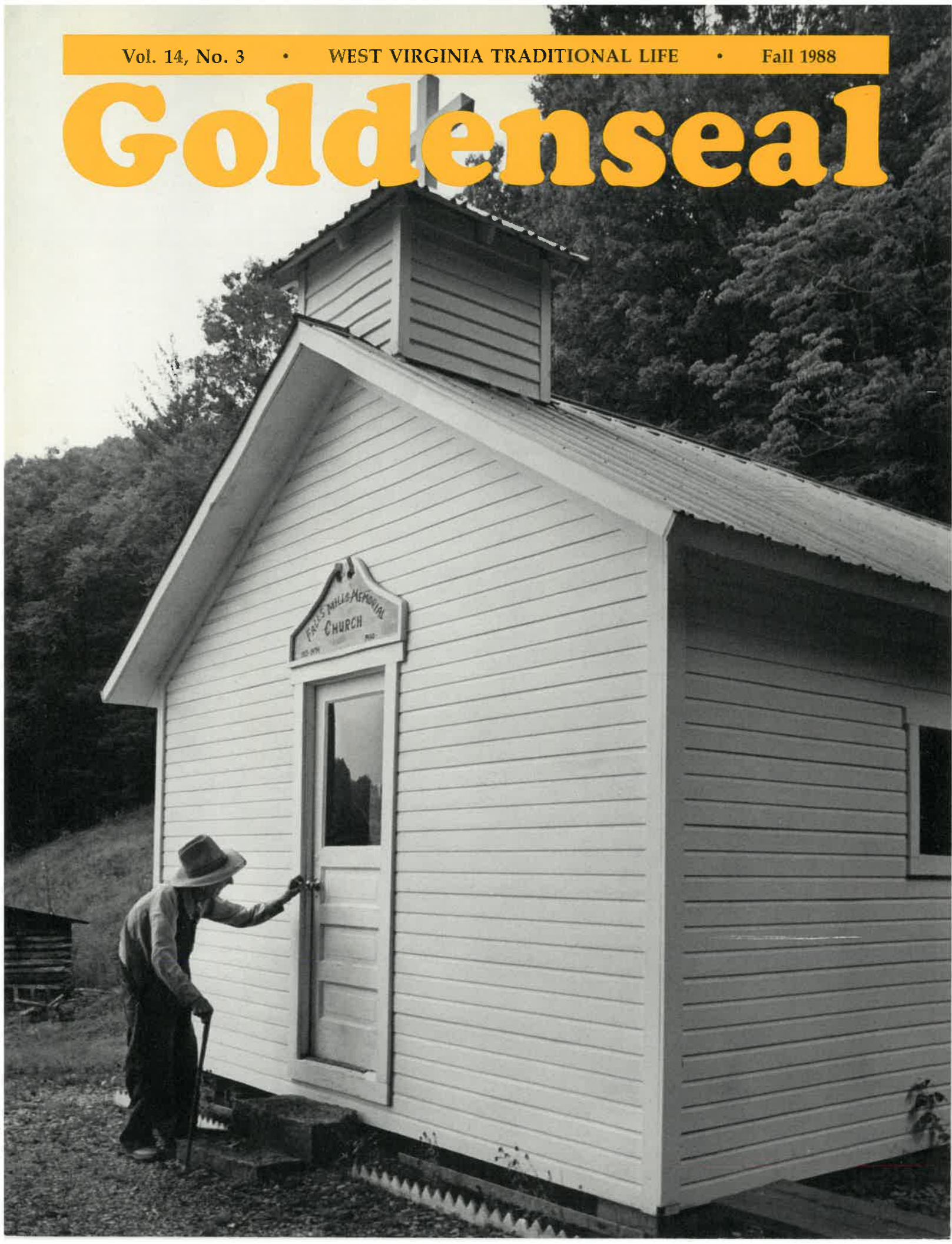


Vol. 14, No. 3

• WEST VIRGINIA TRADITIONAL LIFE

• Fall 1988

Goldenseal



From the Editor: Renewal Time

We got hit by the double whammy this year. Postage costs, which previously had been paid centrally for all units of state government, were transferred to the individual agencies for the first time ever. For GOLDENSEAL, that meant a new bill in the \$7,500 range *per issue*.

That was plenty bad, and it got worse. Remember the postal increase of last spring? It raised the price of a first-class stamp to 25 cents — and it raised our quarterly bulk rate mailing bill by about \$2,500. Specifically, it cost us better than \$10,000 to mail the summer GOLDENSEAL.

Counting four magazines a year and the annual subscription mailing we send out each fall, you're looking at the equivalent of a \$50,000 per year postage bill.

You can bet that numbers like that will put a lot of publications out of business. I'm asking your help to make sure that GOLDENSEAL is not one of them.

Let me tell you what we are doing to help ourselves, and then what you can do. First, we have acquired a new, nonprofit publisher, the Mountain Arts Foundation, thus qualifying for a lower postal category. This change will not affect the quality of your magazine. It should, however, save us several thousand dollars a year in postage.

We will also continue to tighten up the general management of the magazine, including the all-important mailing list. Cornelia Alexander works on that daily, adding subscribers, changing addresses as instructed by readers, and purging bad entries. She's got the big 1,300 page computer printout in tip-top shape and will make one further refinement this fall: Beginning with this issue, we will no longer make address corrections from post office returns. This means that if you move and wish to receive GOLDENSEAL at your new address, you must let us know. Otherwise we must drop your name as soon as the post office tells us the old address is no longer good. This change should likewise save several thousand dollars yearly.

Printing remains our single biggest expense, much higher than mailing even at the frightening new postal rates. We can't reduce the overall cost of printing as our number of readers continues to rise, but we can hold down the per-copy cost. Our printer has agreed to renew our contract at the old rates for one more year, so we are protected in that regard until mid-1989.

Otherwise, our big item is salaries. There will be no increase there, for GOLDENSEAL staff will go without a pay raise for the second year in a row.

That's about all we can do on this end. Now we're asking you to do your part. It's time to renew your support by sending \$12.50 for another year of GOLDENSEAL.

As you probably know, GOLDENSEAL operates on a voluntary subscription system. Rather than keeping track of more than 30,000 individual subscriptions, we ask each reader to contribute to the magazine once each year. Renewal time comes in September, just after the fall issue is published.

In a few days, I will write to you, giving further details on our financial situation and enclosing a subscription coupon and postpaid return envelope. Put your \$12.50 check in the mail right away and help us beat the wolf back from the door once again.

While I wait to hear from you, we will go ahead with business as usual. That means doing our best to produce a great magazine. We have to work a couple of issues ahead to get each GOLDENSEAL into your mailbox on time. We will be knee-deep in the winter issue by the time you read this, and scheduling stories for spring and summer of 1989.

We will get those stories the same as always, by working hard for them. GOLDENSEAL staff and freelancers are out every week, investigating ideas sent in by readers. The photo you see here is of one such foray, as assistant editor Debby Jackson visits with Wilbur Veith of Braxton County to help prepare the cover story for this issue. Our writers and photographers make dozens of trips like this over the course of a year.



Our reward comes when everything finally comes together between the covers of the magazine. We try to include a good variety in each issue. There is some nice southern coalfields material in this one, for example, which also features central West Virginia and the Ohio Valley counties. GOLDENSEAL has traveled to most of the rest of the state within the past 12 months, from Shepherdstown to Wellsburg and on down to Bluefield.

We'll work on the places we missed in coming issues. I've spent a lot of time in the Greenbrier Valley lately, breaking in the new stretch of I-64, and am trying to make it on up to the Eastern Panhandle more often. I think this will pay off in better coverage of both regions, and already know of a couple of good Pocahontas County stories we should have ready for you soon. In other areas, veteran freelancer Mike Kline has another big Elkins story underway, and Tim Massey is working on a Huntington feature. We haven't spotlighted either town lately, so we're looking forward to those.

There's plenty more where this came from, in other words. The West Virginia story is a big one, and we've barely scratched the surface in nearly 15 years of publishing GOLDENSEAL. We'll do our best to find the best of it, just as long as you're willing to stand behind us and help pay the bills.

— Ken Sullivan

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Ken Sullivan
Editor

Debby Sonis Jackson
Assistant Editor

Cornelia Crews Alexander
Editorial Assistant

Colleen Anderson
Nancy Balow
Graphic Design

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Goldenseal

Volume 14, Number 3

Fall 1988

COVER: Wilbur Veith visits the Falls Mill church near his home in Braxton County. Our story of Mr. Veith, his family and community begins on page 9. Photo by Michael Keller.

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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. Published letters may be edited for brevity or clarity.

Ames, Iowa
June 21, 1988

Editor:

I was delighted to find copies of GOLDENSEAL in our library magazine exchange. It is new to me. I enjoyed so much reading about the real folks "back home."

My grandfather, Wiley C. Gentry, ran a pin mill near Marlinton until about 1960. The pins, made of locust wood, fitted into the cross arm of a utility pole to hold the glass insulator, which screwed onto the threaded end. A shoulder kept the pin from going on down. The culls and waste wood were burned in the boiler of the steam engine which powered the mill. We kept a few samples. The power companies use steel pins now.

It was great fun to visit the mill and shop in Marlinton, and go to the Pocahontas County fair, when we were kids!

Thanks for the memories,
Leli Gentry Scott

Lakeland, Florida
May 1, 1988

Editor:

You know what? I really wait for the GOLDENSEAL magazine because I love reading about my beloved home state.

Having had to leave it in my early '20's (I'm now 70) to get employment, I never learned much about it. Now that I can afford it, I love to read GOLDENSEAL and go back to see lots of the beautiful sights back there.

Boy, our state is loaded with great things. The nicest travel trailer parks, the cleanest and best for the money are in West Virginia — and we have trailered since 1965. As long as I live and am able, I'll go back to Barbour County up on the mountain to our annual Jones reunion.

Wow, it's the greatest! Don't you dare quit publishing GOLDENSEAL. It's my friend.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Goldia Shaffer

Covered Bridges Tour

Morgantown, West Virginia
July 13, 1988

Editor:

After reading the article, "Spanning Time" in GOLDENSEAL for the summer of 1988, my wife and I decided to take an automobile holiday and tour the covered bridges in West Virginia.

Since our home is in Morgantown we reversed the tour that Ms. Bolling and Watson had taken last July. Except for the extreme heat and the drought conditions in the state of West Virginia, we found this a most enjoyable experience. As the authors of the article had done we also had a picnic, on the 4th of July, at Hokes Mill Covered Bridge — what a delight.

We hope Bolling and Watson have taken another tour this summer. When that's published, we will be able to share with them a deeper appreciation of our rich heritage in West Virginia.

Thanks for this informative article with the precise directions for locating these relics of history.

Yours truly,
Harry Martin

Hugh McPherson

Wheeling, West Virginia
June 27, 1988

Editor:

My husband and I wish to add our voice to the long list of admirers of Hugh McPherson's radio jazz.

For at least three or four years, hardly a 3:00 p.m. would tick into being that we didn't turn our radio to "Rehearsin' with McPherson," sit back and know we would hear the best jazz presented in the best way! He was truly a unique broadcaster and a gentleman in all his interviews, considerate of opposing musical viewpoints and thorough in the scope of his presentation. When his program was concluded (a polite word for "fired"), public radio lost credibility in our estimation.



We had an occasion to ask Mr. McPherson's help in locating my husband's uncle's friend, who, with our uncle Ivan, was in the first band to make a Vitaphone "short." Although Mr. McPherson didn't know the answer, he did all he could to put us in touch with a party he thought could help us. We received several letters from him concerning our search — such was his kindness.

Our best to you, Mr. McPherson, and thank you for the many hours of pleasure you spun our way. Thank you, GOLDENSEAL, for honoring a man who truly deserves every accolade given him.

Jim and Gloria Morris

Railroading

Morgantown, West Virginia
May 4, 1988

Editor:

I appreciated Cody A. Burdette's article on railroading in the GOLDENSEAL Spring 1988 issue. The part about the kind engineer who told him to "forget railroad rules" reminded me of my experience in 1938 when I quit school to go to work as a Railway Express messenger.

One of my first assignments was to take three carloads of U.S. Army horses on the B&O from Parkersburg to Washington, D.C. My value book was signed, giving me responsibility for the horses, at 6:00 p.m.

The horses were in stalls, three

abreast facing forward, in cars on the end of a passenger train. The rows of horses in the cars alternated from one side of the car to the other to balance the load. I zigged-zagged through the rows to check on them. Ordinarily I would have had to stay with the horses, but this conductor invited me, against the rules, to sit with him in the first passenger car. At each stop I walked through the horse cars to see that they were all right and that none had fallen. They had been fed

and watered before loading and would require no more for 12 hours.

We stopped at Clarksburg, Grafton, Oakland, Maryland, and Mountain Lake, Maryland — where the train took on five-gallon glass jugs of Deer Park springwater, which supplied all the dining cars on the B&O. At Newburg, West Virginia, steam boosters were added to push the diesel engine over the mountain. The boosters were removed at Keyser. There were 22 bridges and 21 tunnels

on that road, which is now being torn up by CSX.

We arrived in Washington at 2:00 a.m. After reaching Union Station, I could not get off as I expected, but had to stay with the train until it backed out of the station to an Army depot at Silver Spring. When we reached the Army depot, an Army officer checked the horses, found everything all right and signed my value book, releasing me from further responsibility. A truck then picked me

More on the Richmond Rifle

Our recent story on Elmer Richmond (Summer 1988, pp. 27-31) caught the eye of reader James A. Lilly, Sr., of Pinole, California. Lilly was especially interested in Mr. Richmond's antique rifle, handed down through his family since before the Civil War. Mr. Richmond had told writer Andy Yale that his people believe their heirloom gun was made by "a man named Miller."

Mr. Lilly wrote to Elmer Richmond in early July, concerning a cap lock rifle he owns and gunsmiths named Miller. He sent us a copy of the letter:

Dear Sir:

I recently read the story about you in the Summer 1988 issue of GOLDENSEAL, written by Andy Yale. It brought back many memories of my younger years in Raleigh County.

I was born in Beaver in 1925. I attended Shady Spring High School. My wife's aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor Meadows, had a farm at Pluto. I believe they also had a store there.

My father was Everett Lilly, who lived in Beaver until 1971, when he moved to California to live with

me. His father was John Meadows of Hinton, a conductor on the C&O Railroad for many years. John Meadows was from the Madam's Creek area of Summers County, a few miles upstream from where it emptied into New River. My father's mother was Victoria Lilly Meadows who died when Dad was born. Dad was adopted by his aunt and uncle, Salome Allen Lilly and W. R. Lilly, of Creamery in Monroe County. Salome Lilly was from the Allen family that settled at the mouth of Madam's Creek. The descendants of that family, the Jim Helms family, operated a store at the north end of the toll bridge that crossed New River into Hinton.

I was particularly interested in the mountain rifle that you own. I own one very similar to yours. The history on the one I have is as follows: The gun was made in 1844. The date is cut into the barrel with a chisel between the rear sight and the breech. It is initialed by G.C.M. This was George Miller, my mother's father's great uncle. He was also known as "Plunket"

Miller, and lived in the area of Assurance, a settlement which no longer exists, a few miles from Greenville in Monroe County. Plunket cut four zeroes (0000) into the barrel for his hex marks, to ward off evil spirits. This was also his personal identification mark. (We here in the West would call it his branding mark.) The gun is a cap lock with the inscription "Conestoga Rifle Works" on the side plate. The bore is .44 caliber and the barrel is octagon, 46 inches long.

Recently I visited Jacksonville, Oregon, one of the earlier settlements on the West Coast north of here. In a museum there I saw several mountain rifles made by John Miller who came to Maryland from Germany in 1850. He settled in Maryland for about ten years and practiced the trade of gun-maker there. He came to Oregon in 1861 and operated a hardware store and gun shop in Jacksonville until his death.

Perhaps some of this may be of use in identifying your gun.

Yours truly,
James A. Lilly, Sr.

When Lillys and Richmonds get to comparing notes about southern West Virginia, we figure we'd better pay attention. We called Mr. Richmond after he heard from James Lilly, and he tells us the two guns share some similarities. However, his rifle differs in the specific identifying marks: It carries the initials "T. R." rather than "G.C.M.," and lacks the four-zero hex mark. His gun is a .32 caliber, rather than .44, and is a flint lock, as may be seen in the accompanying Andy Yale photograph. — ed.



up and took me to a railroad YMCA, where I got a bed for 50 cents. They had a caller who woke me at six the next morning for my next assignment.

Sincerely yours,
J. Z. Ellison

Buckhannon, West Virginia
May 18, 1988

Editor:

The story about Shay engines written by Cody A. Burdette was very interesting to me because my dad was an engineer on a Shay engine. There was a spur line that ran from Shaw to Nethkin on which my dad would take empty steel hoppers up and bring the loaded ones back for the Western Maryland Railroad to connect to eastbound freights.

Later on when the mines closed, the Western Maryland Railroad took over the spur line and engine and I sometimes wonder what they might have done with the engine. I wonder if it might be one of the Shays that the Cass line now has. If I recall right, the number on it was 2563; however, the number may have been changed later. There was also a spur line that ran from Chaffee to Vindex, Maryland, taken over by the railroad company. That also had a Shay engine.

My dad became a hostler for the Western Maryland and was instrumental in getting my older brother on as a fireman. He later became an engineer for the Western Maryland. Shaw no longer exists as the lake on the Potomac River now covers it.

Shay engines were not much for speed but they had a lot of power. The one my dad ran was a standard gauge. I would like to see more interesting writings about railroading in West Virginia.

Thanking you,
Paul E. Murray

Mountain Dulcimer Woman

Jumping Branch, West Virginia
June 1, 1988

Editor:

I always enjoy my GOLDENSEAL magazine and leaf through it from front to back the moment it arrives.

The Spring issue was no exception, and as I turned a page I thought I saw my mother's name. I hurriedly turned

back a page and sure enough there was a couple of paragraphs on her family and her playing of the dulcimer (in "The Mountain Dulcimer in West Virginia").

I would like to correct some of the writer's information as my mother was Dulcie McComas Crotty Meadows. Her mother was Olieva Honaker McComas, daughter of James A. Honaker who made dulcimers, but was best known for the Honaker rifle. Olieva married Rufus McComas.

The writer stated that my mother had a unique way of playing the dulcimer by laying it over the back of a chair. My mother also kept a rattlesnake rattle inside the dulcimer. This was said to improve the sound. She used turkey quills to cord and pick the dulcimer.

Dulcie McComas Crotty Meadows passed away in January 1987 at the age of 95. Our family misses her playing the old favorites "Old Joe Clark," "West Virginia Hills," and "Sourwood Mountain."

My daughter, Mary Meadows Newsome, now has the dulcimer and we hope the younger generations will continue to play the dulcimer.

Respectfully,
Mrs. Beecher (Erma) Meadows

More on Pickens

Green Bank, West Virginia
May 9, 1988

Editor:

I was delighted with the article on Pickens, West Virginia, and would like to share with the readers my experience there.

The spring and summer of 1922, after graduating from the Sweeny Mechanical Auto School, I went to

work for the Ford Motor garage in Elkins. They sold Model T Fords and tractors, with service. The cars came by rail in parts and were assembled on the ground. Another mechanic and I were sent to Pickens to unload and assemble cars for customers there.

At that time, Pickens had a sawmill in operation. The mill was shut down in order to get help in assembling the cars. No one could get their car until all were ready to go, as we had to get the night train back to Elkins.

Sincerely,
Clarence A. Sheets

Agriculture Experiment Station

Morgantown, West Virginia
June 27, 1988

Editor:

Professor Emory L. Kemp has pointed out that the building on the cover of Volume 14, No. 1, Spring 1988, is Martin Hall instead of Chitwood Hall. It might also be noted that the picture of the Agriculture Experiment Station on page 48 shows the building as it appeared in 1911 or after — not during the 1890's as indicated in the description. Pictures taken after 1892, when the second addition and porches were added, show ornamentation on the porch roof lines. This had been removed by the time the picture on page 48 was taken. The other "dating" feature in the photograph is the clock in the tower of Woodburn Hall in the background. The clock was not placed in the tower until 1911.

I thoroughly enjoy GOLDENSEAL and find it to be an excellent publication.

Sincerely,
Gordon R. Thorn



Current Programs • Events • Publications

GOLDENSEAL announcements are published as a service, as space permits. They are not paid advertisements and items are screened according to the likely interests of our readers. We welcome events announcements and review copies of books and records, but cannot guarantee publication.

34th Black Walnut Festival

In November 1955 the first West Virginia Black Walnut Festival took place in the Roane County town of Spencer. It's estimated that 15,000 people attended. Thirty-three years later, more than 60,000 people are expected for the 1988 festival. The Black Walnut Festival honors one of our state's specialty crops. Many West Virginia recipes use the nut meats, and the lumber is treasured for fine wood-work.

The 1988 Black Walnut Festival runs October 11 through 16, Tuesday through Sunday. The week is filled with performances, exhibits, competitions, parades and lots of entertainment. Highlights include a fireworks show, the Black Walnut Bowl football game, carnival rides, a 4-H and FFA livestock show and sale, a flea market, golf tournament, and an antique car, street rod and motorcycle show.

Concession stands and a black walnut bake off will keep festival-goers from going hungry. The traditional bake off produces tasty dishes from the festival's namesake. Other contests include the black powder shoot, turkey calling, canoe buoy races, and the popular school band competition.

Crafts, quilts, art and photography are exhibited annually, and commercial and educational booths feature handicrafts, canned goods, horticultural and agricultural products.

For more information, contact the West Virginia Black Walnut Festival, P.O. Box 27, Spencer, WV 25276; (304) 927-3708.

New State Parks Book

West Virginia's state parks are among the Mountain State's crown jewels, constituting one of the finest systems in the East. The half-century history of the parks, from their Depression birth to the creation of modern resorts in recent years, is documented in a new book on the subject.

Where People and Nature Meet: A History of the West Virginia State Parks was published by Pictorial Histories of Charleston. The book is the product of a State Parks History Committee, chaired by Kermit McKeever, father of the modern park system. Individual experts on the various parks contribute most of the writing. The work was coordinated by Stan Cohen of Pictorial Histories.

People and Nature tackles the subject systematically, beginning with Audra State Park and continuing through to Watters Smith. The 31 other parks are covered in between, with the book allocating more space to the more important parks than to the less-known. Additional chapters cover auxiliary subjects, including an historical overview of the park system as a whole. One essay notes the critical contributions of the 1930's Civilian Conservation Corps, whose early history in West Virginia overlaps the history of the state park system at many points.

Where People and Nature Meet is a 184-page oversized paperback, in the same sturdy format familiar to fans of the Pictorial Histories series. The book sells for \$9.95 in bookstores and at state parks throughout West Virginia. It may be purchased by mail from Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 4103 Virginia Avenue SE, Charleston, WV 25304. Mail orders must include \$2 postage and handling.

New River Train on Tape

For more than 20 years, the Collis P. Huntington Railroad Historical Society has sponsored an annual fall train trip from Huntington to Hinton. SoundTracs Recording Studio of South Charleston announces its production of a 60-minute cassette, recording the sounds of the journey of the historic New River Train.

The new cassette is titled #765 *Pulling the New River Train* and was

edited from 14 hours of taping time. SoundTracs technicians worked from the crew car, recording highlights of the trip through the New River Gorge and back.

You can hear the train whistle echoing off the walls of the New River Canyon and the sounds of the fireman shoveling coal while water is taken on at a Montgomery service stop. As you listen to the quiet chugging of the train gliding back through the night from Hawks Nest State Park to Charleston, it brings to mind earlier times when New River railroading was in its heyday.

SoundTracs says #765 *Pulling the New River Train* is a must for railroad buffs. The cassette costs \$8.95 and is available from SoundTracs, P.O. Box 8679, South Charleston, WV 25303, (304) 744-5164. There are substantial discounts for bulk orders.

The Old-Time Herald

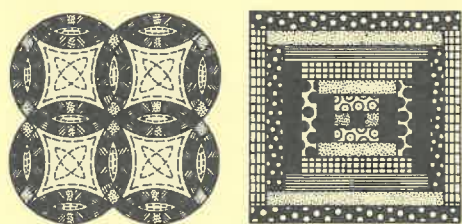
Old-time music lovers have a new magazine dedicated to their music and the people who make it. *The Old-Time Herald* is published quarterly in August, November, February, and May by the Old-Time Music Group in Galax, Virginia.

The new publication prints feature articles, a question-and-answer column, photographs, letters, classified ads, and reviews of records, cassettes, and books. You'll read about major old-time and bluegrass festivals, sources for musical instruments and recordings, and what's happening with old-time music fans and performers.

The May 1988 issue included an article of particular interest to West Virginians. In "West Virginia's Old-Time Music Scene," Margo Blevin pays tribute to the Mountain State's genuine old-timers as well as its up-and-coming younger performers. She promotes our major music events such as Vandalia Gathering, the Augusta Heritage Festival, the Glenville State Folk Festival, and the Stonewall

Jackson Jubilee. West Virginia Public Radio's "Mountain Stage" program, as well as FOOTMAD and other traditional dance and music groups, are spotlighted in the Blevin article.

A one-year subscription to *The Old-Time Herald* is \$12. Rates are payable in advance by check or money order. For further information, write to *The Old-Time Herald*, P.O. Box 1362, Galax, VA 24333, or call (703) 236-7808.



Guide to Quilt Collections

Quilt Collections: A Directory for the United States and Canada is a new 255-page illustrated guide from the Library of Congress. The publication lists quilt collections of museums, archives and other public institutions. The directory, published in cooperation with Acropolis Books, is based on a survey by the Library's American Folklife Center.

Quilt Collections is organized by country, state, and alphabetically by institution. There is detailed information on 747 collections. There is also a section on quilt conservation, a list of state and regional quilt documentation projects, and a directory of leading quilt organizations. Sixteen color plates and many historic black-and-white photographs from the Library's collections depict fine quilt examples. The publication also offers an index of participating institutions, a selected bibliography, the questionnaire used in the survey and a glossary.

The American Folklife Center is involved in the preservation and presentation of American folk traditions. It was established in 1976 by Congress.

Quilt Collections: A Directory for the United States and Canada is available from the American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20540. It costs \$18.95 in softcover and \$24.95 in hardcover, plus \$2 for postage and handling. Make checks payable to the American Folklife Center.

New Lefty Shafer Cassette

Kanawha County fiddler Lefty Shafer has a new recording out on cassette. *LEFTY SHAFER, W. Va. State Fiddle Champion 1987* was made "in answer to all the friends who have a copy of my first effort and have been asking for another," the musician says. Shafer's first album is titled *Lefty Shafer Fiddles, Sings and Whistles* and is still available in a limited quantity.

Shafer is one of West Virginia's leading oldtime fiddlers. He learned the music strictly by ear. A former school principal, he retired in 1976 and got into fiddling full time. Shafer has entered literally hundreds of fiddle contests and has won a fair share of them. There isn't room in his house to keep all of the ribbons and trophies. He earned his 1987 state fiddle champion title at the West Virginia State Forest Festival in Elkins, and was named senior fiddle champion at the Vandalia Gathering this year.

Shafer's latest release was recorded at Sweetsong Productions in Parkersburg. All of the tunes on the cassette are instrumentals. Backup musicians are flat-picking champ Robert Shafer on guitar, Alan Freeman on dulcimer, and John Preston on bass.

LEFTY SHAFER, W. Va. State Fiddle Champion 1987 may be purchased in The Shop at the Cultural Center or ordered from Lefty Shafer, 2140 Breezy Drive, Charleston, WV 25311; (304) 346-6200. The cost is \$8, plus \$1 postage and handling. West Virginia residents must add 6% sales tax.

Hickory & Lady Slippers

Clay students take pride in their county and its people. They recently completed the 20th volume of *Hickory & Lady Slippers: Life and Legend of Clay County People*, a project of Clay County High School's art department.

The *Hickory & Lady Slippers* project was conceived in 1977 under the direction of art instructor Jerry D. Stover, after discussing with his students what Clay Countians were losing with the passing of grandparents and other old people. The students decided to preserve what they had, by passing on stories of day-to-day happenings as told and writ-

ten down by the people of the county. "We are not saving the past, but we are saving the future," one commented.

Stover notes that the project helps to educate the students, providing experience in writing, photography and publishing, as well as knowledge of local history. They spend many hours interviewing and writing down Clay County memories.

Hickory & Lady Slippers tells of county pioneers and gives family genealogies and histories of local people. The books include reprints of early newspaper accounts from the area, poetry, and Clay County recipes. Various subjects are covered, from the Buffalo Creek & Gauley Railroad at Widen to county churches and post offices. There are volumes on Ivydale and vicinity, including the notorious Booger Hole, and county ghost tales, superstitions, home remedies and old wives' tales.

Volume 20 focuses on the work of the West Virginia University Extension Service in Clay County. The students have compiled accounts of agriculture and community activities from 1914 to 1986. Homemakers clubs and 4-H work are among the subjects discussed in the new volume.

Hickory & Lady Slippers: Life and Legend of Clay County People, Volume 20, may be purchased for \$6.50. Most of the first 19 volumes are also available, at \$5 each. Include \$1 per volume postage and handling. Orders should be directed to Art Department, Clay County High School, Clay, WV 25043.

New Autoharp Magazine

A new publication for Autoharp fans makes its debut this October. *Autoharp Quarterly*, published by Limberjack Productions in Pennsylvania, is written by, for and about Autoharp enthusiasts. The quarterly magazine has been in the planning stages for two years.

Each 32-page issue will include information on festivals, competitions and clubs, Autoharp products and accessories, old-time stringed instruments, electronic and sound tips, and performer profiles and schedules. Special features such as a luthier's column and festival reports will be presented, and the magazine will

include a classified section.

Special interactive lessons are available through the magazine for the serious Autoharpist. Each issue will include a lesson from an expert player. Readers are invited to send a cassette of their interpretation of the lesson. The instructor will critique it and return the tape with comments for a \$10 charge. Other *Autoharp Quarterly* contributors include recording artists, music educators, an electronics specialist, and an instrument historian.

The subscription rate is \$13.50 before August 1, and \$15 after that. Charter subscribers who keep their subscriptions active will always pay 10% less than the regular rate.

Autoharp Quarterly will be sent by first class mail. To receive the magazine, send a check payable to Limberjack Productions to *Autoharp Quarterly*, P.O. Box A, Newport, PA 17074, or call (717) 567-9469.

Appalachian Children's Book

The Appalachian Consortium Press announces the publication of its first children's book, *Appalachian Scrapbook: An A, B, C of Growing Up in the Mountains*. The book, by Pauline Cheek, is the result of an oral history project the author began with her three children.

Appalachian Scrapbook introduces the young reader to the culture, history and traditions of the Appalachian region. Cheek's original drawings accompany the letters of the alphabet. The A-to-Z approach explores many unique aspects of living in the mountains. The letter G stands for ginseng, Q is for quilt and quail, J is for Jack Tales, H for horse-swapping and hymn sing. Landmarks and historical figures appear in B for Blue Ridge Parkway, C for Cumberland Gap where Daniel Boone blazed a trail in 15 days, N for national forests, and U for Unaka Mountains.

Teachers are invited to adapt the *Appalachian Scrapbook* for regional studies courses at the elementary school level. The book encourages self-discovery and it challenges children to make a family heritage scrapbook of their own.

Appalachian Scrapbook: An A, B, C of Growing Up in the Mountains, a large-

format, 161-page paperback, sells for \$9.95. It may be ordered from Appalachian Consortium Press, Boone, N.C. 28608; (704) 262-2064. The Appalachian Consortium is a nonprofit educational organization with a membership of colleges and other institutions in the southern mountain region.

New Literary Publication

The Appalachian Literary League features works by regional and national writers in its new publication, *Venue*. The book offers poetry and short prose by 28 authors, most of them established or emerging West Virginia writers.

They are joined by national figures such as Allen Ginsberg, and "beat" poets Michael McClure and Gary Snyder. Ginsberg contributes a previously unpublished poem to the book. Regional authors include GOLDENSEAL contributor Barbara Smith, Boyd Carr, Joe Ferrell, Ric MacDowell, West Virginia Writers president Michael Joseph Pauley, and Bob Henry Baber, Kirk Judd and Colleen Anderson.

The Appalachian Literary League is planning a series of the *Venue* anthologies. Writers interested in submitting to *Venue 2* should send their material and a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Appalachian Literary League, Inc., 4651 Victoria Road, Big Tyler Mountain, Charleston, WV 25313.

Venue is a 92-page softcover book and includes a section of book reviews as well as brief biographical sketches of the contributors. Copies may be ordered from the above address for \$6, plus 50 cents for postage and handling. West Virginia residents must add 6% sales tax. A 10% discount is allowed for orders of more than three copies. Pre-orders of *Venue 2* will receive a 15% discount.

Historic Floods Recounted

A new book, *The Flood and The Blood*, gives a dramatic account of flash floods at Paint and Cabin creeks during the early 1900's. It is written by Dennis Deitz of South Charleston, who is also the author of the popular four-book "Mountain Memories" series.

The text is taken from personal recollections of flood survivors, recalling the horror and devastation of tragedies which occurred when they were children.

Deitz became interested in the floods when he heard of two children who rode seven and a half miles to safety on Paint Creek flood waters. In the interviews that followed, Deitz also heard stories of floods along adjoining streams. He finally decided to present historic accounts of the floods of four parallel creeks in Kanawha and Fayette counties.

Along the way, Deitz also discovered some interesting stories of the local mine wars of 1912-13 and West Virginia mine disasters. Two sections of the book are devoted to those subjects.

The Flood and The Blood is a 245-page hardbound volume, illustrated with maps, drawings and photographs. It is available for \$20 in area bookstores and in The Shop at the Cultural Center. Mail orders may be sent to Mountain Memory Books, 216 Sutherland Drive, South Charleston, WV 25303. Postage and handling is \$1.50. For orders of more than one book, add 75 cents per volume. West Virginia residents must also add 6% sales tax for mail orders.



Ho-Ho GOLDENSEAL

With fall upon us, it's time to start thinking about the holiday season and how to remember those close to you.

A GOLDENSEAL gift subscription is a great way to go. If you're enjoying the magazine you have in your hands, why not make it a gift to someone you care about? For \$12.50 you can give a year's worth of West Virginia heritage, history and folklife. Each gift subscription will be acknowledged with a personalized card sent to the recipient.

To order a gift subscription send the coupon on page 72 to GOLDENSEAL, Department of Culture and History, The Cultural Center, Capitol Complex, Charleston, WV 25305. Enclose your check for \$12.50 and we'll take it from there.



Ira Mullins. Photograph by Steve Payne.

Vandalia Record

The Vandalia Gathering is West Virginia's statewide folklife festival, an annual celebration of the best of the Mountain State. Hundreds of thousands of people have attended the Charleston event since its inception in 1977, bringing their talents and carrying away memories.

Now another souvenir is available. Late this summer an official Vandalia record album was released by Elderberry Records, the record label of the West Virginia Department of Culture and History. "The Music Never Dies: A Vandalia Sampler, 1977-87," a big double album, includes 41 selections from Vandalia's first 11 years. That makes it by far the broadest cross section of West Virginia music ever recorded.

"The Music Never Dies" originated from the archival recordings kept of every Vandalia. All major concerts, contests, and other performances are recorded each year. The Vandalia tapes now total over a hundred hours and it was from this material that the album was drawn.

The late Ira Mullins of Clay introduces the record. The old fiddler kicks off the first side with the feisty chatter typical of his stage appearances, before settling down to a solid rendition of "Shortenin' in the

Bread," his favorite. Ira's performance, backed by Charlie Winter on guitar, was recorded at the first Vandalia Gathering in 1977.

Ira Mullins is followed on the two LP discs by the great names currently playing West Virginia traditional music: Melvin Wine, Sylvia O'Brien, Lefty Shafer, John Johnson, Elmer Bird, Phoebe Parsons, Ernie Carpenter, John and Marvine Loving, Glen Smith, Blackie Cool, Nat Reese, Harvey Sampson, Ruth Lyons, Woody Simmons, Frank George, Aunt Jennie Wilson, Andy Boarman, Wilson Douglas, Bonnie Collins, and Tom and Israel Welch, among others.

Reaching back more than a decade, "The Music Never Dies" also includes many musicians no longer with us. Jenes Cottrell contributes a rollicking 1980 "Devil and the Farmer's Wife" to side one, followed by Sloan Staggs (backed by Joe Dobbs and Mack Samples) on a mellow "Home, Sweet Home" from 1978. Other now-departed performers include Basil Blake, Bill Iman, Delbert Hughes, and Lee Triplett. Mike Humphreys, the 1985 Vandalia Award winner, is represented by some powerful fiddling from 1980.

The title, taken from a line in the closing song by the Morris Brothers,

signifies that the music itself continues despite the sad passing of individual musicians. The Morris Brothers are joined on the record by other outstanding young musicians, including Robert Shafer, the Bing Brothers, Greg Bentle, Ron Mullenex, the Green Meadow String Band, Robin and Danny Kessinger and Ethel Caffie-Austin. Younger performers also back up the old-timers on many cuts, including Roger Bryant, Mark Payne, Jim Costa, Tom King, Larry Rader, David O'Dell and Kim Johnson.

"The Music Never Dies" is a documentary recording with a light touch, and each performance is identified as to year and backup musicians. Liner notes, by GOLDENSEAL editor Ken Sullivan, provide further information on individual tunes. The album cover features photographs of the musicians, by Michael Keller and other Culture and History and independent photographers.

The album was recorded live at 11 Vandalia Gatherings. The selections were made by a group of archival and musical experts, including Dick Fauss of the State Archives and fiddle champion Bob Taylor. The music was brought together into a uniform whole at SoundTracs Studio in South Charleston, under the direction of record producer Ron Sowell.

"The Music Never Dies" offers the old standards by the old masters, from "Bonaparte's Retreat" by John Johnson to Basil Blake's deft dulcimer stylings on "Flop-Eared Mule." The generations join hands on other tunes, as when Gerald Milnes's banjo respectfully underlines Ernie Carpenter's fiddle on "Shelvin' Rock." The performers are allowed a voice in introducing their tunes or telling an occasional joke, but mostly the music speaks for itself. The tunes speak of the full range of human emotions, and together they make the resounding statement that it will be a very long time before the music of the mountain people dies. ♣

"The Music Never Dies: A Vandalia Sampler, 1977-87" may be ordered from The Shop, Department of Culture and History, Capitol Complex, Charleston, WV 25305. The price is \$12.50, plus \$3 postage and handling and 6% sales tax from West Virginia residents.

On a bright June day, my brother Bill and I drove down to see our friend Wilbur Veith, who lives at Falls Mill in rural Braxton County. His grandfather John Veith, a German immigrant, had come to the community in 1858 and established the grist mill that gave the town its name. The falls are on the Little Kanawha River, making this point on the river perfect for turning a mill wheel. The Veith mill stood near the falls adjacent to the old highway until 1925.

With the advent of the Model T, better roads became a necessity, and a two-lane concrete highway eventually replaced what had once been a cow path. Local farmers used this road, hauling produce and livestock to outside markets, for the next 50 years. This highway, U.S. Route 19, became the major north-south artery through West Virginia.

Big changes came when the Burnsville Dam was constructed in the mid-1970's. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had to relocate four miles of the highway because of backwater from the lake. The Corps bought the Falls Mill post office, a restaurant, a filling station-grocery store, several private homes, and the Methodist Church. Life-changing decisions had to be made by citizens in the path of progress. Wilbur, his sister Pearl, and brother Eagon lived in the old Veith family home, which was tagged for demolition. They were faced with hard choices.

The government offered them \$12,800 for their property, but that amount would not pay for construction of a new house and outbuildings. And Wilbur knew it. He also realized they could be evicted if they did not settle and that he was the last holdout in the land acquisition. Pearl found a home in adjoining Lewis County but she only lived a few weeks after moving there. She had asked her brothers to come live with her, but Wilbur told her, "I can't leave my home."

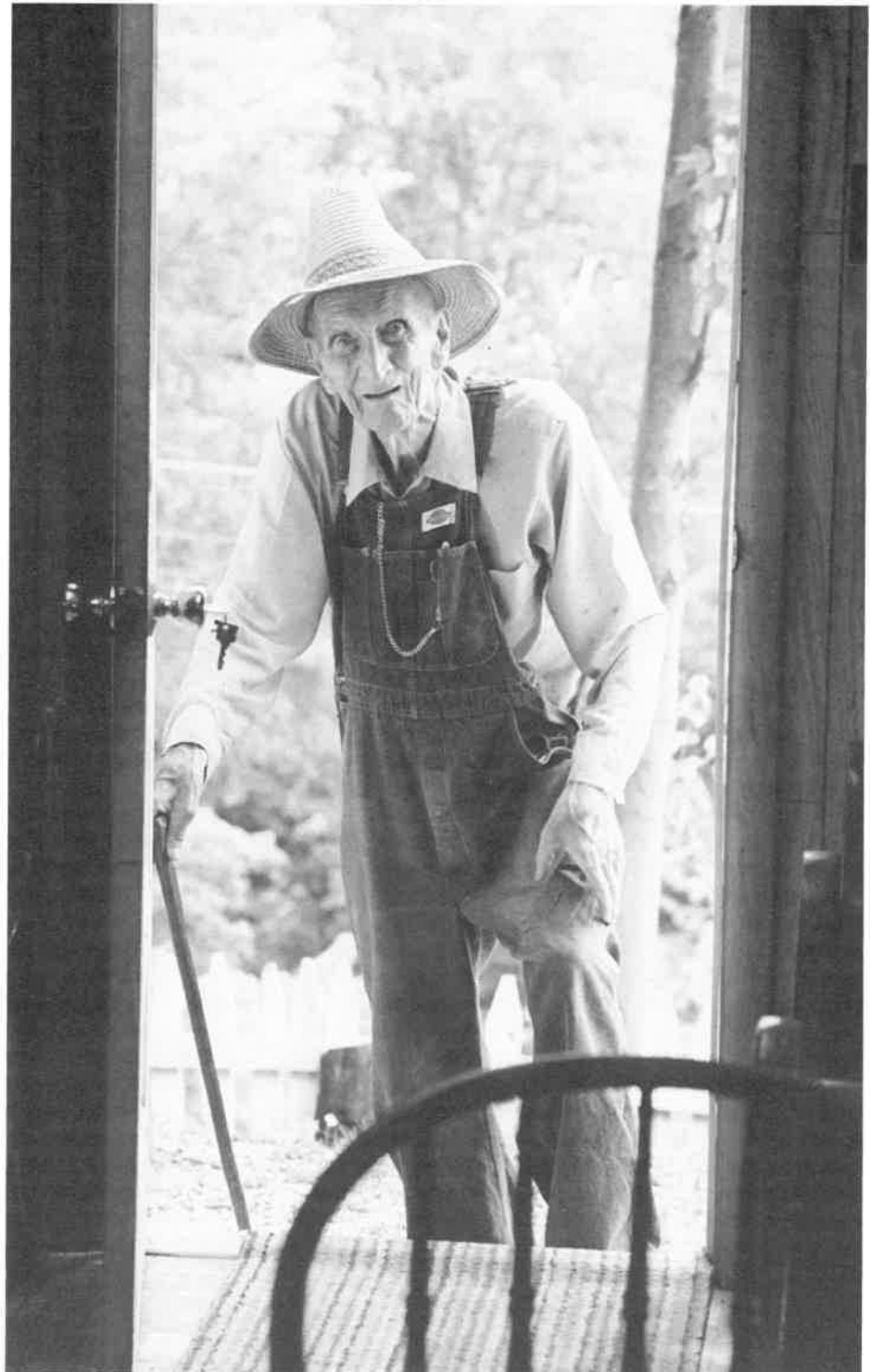
During Eagon's married life, he had lived away from home. After his wife died, leaving no children, he moved back into the family home with Pearl and Wilbur. Neither Wilbur nor Pearl had ever married and had always lived at home caring for their parents. After Eagon's return,

Wilbur Veith

A Good Man

By Mary Thrash
Photographs by Michael Keller

Wilbur Veith enters the chapel at Falls Mill. He made it his business to rebuild a place of worship following the displacement caused by the construction of Burnsville Dam.



he joined in the evening devotions of prayer and Bible reading, a custom dating back to their early childhood days.

Eagon, blind from unsuccessful cataract surgery, relied on his younger brother's judgment, so the land battle became Wilbur's. A court action ensued. "One good thing about the fight was that I got my first look at the State Capitol in Charleston during a trip for a court hearing," Wilbur recalled.

The Veith brothers were awarded \$26,000 at the conclusion of the court action in 1978. The Corps of Engineers also returned four acres located above the new road from their original 12-acre homestead, and gave the brothers continued use of their vegetable gardens on the old plot of land. A road was graded up to a natural flat which was enlarged to accommodate the Veiths' new house and out-buildings.

Pearl's death and the death of Ea-

gon in 1980 coming on the heels of the adjustment to new living conditions were difficult for Wilbur. He was a survivor, though, and looked toward the future. He still does. As my brother and I approached his cottage at an early morning hour, he was already "up and at 'em," sharpening a sickle on a whetstone. A straw hat shaded his blue eyes, bib overalls covered his slim body, and he was seated astride a sawhorse. After exchanging greetings and inquiring about mutual friends, Wilbur invited us into his rustic log cabin.

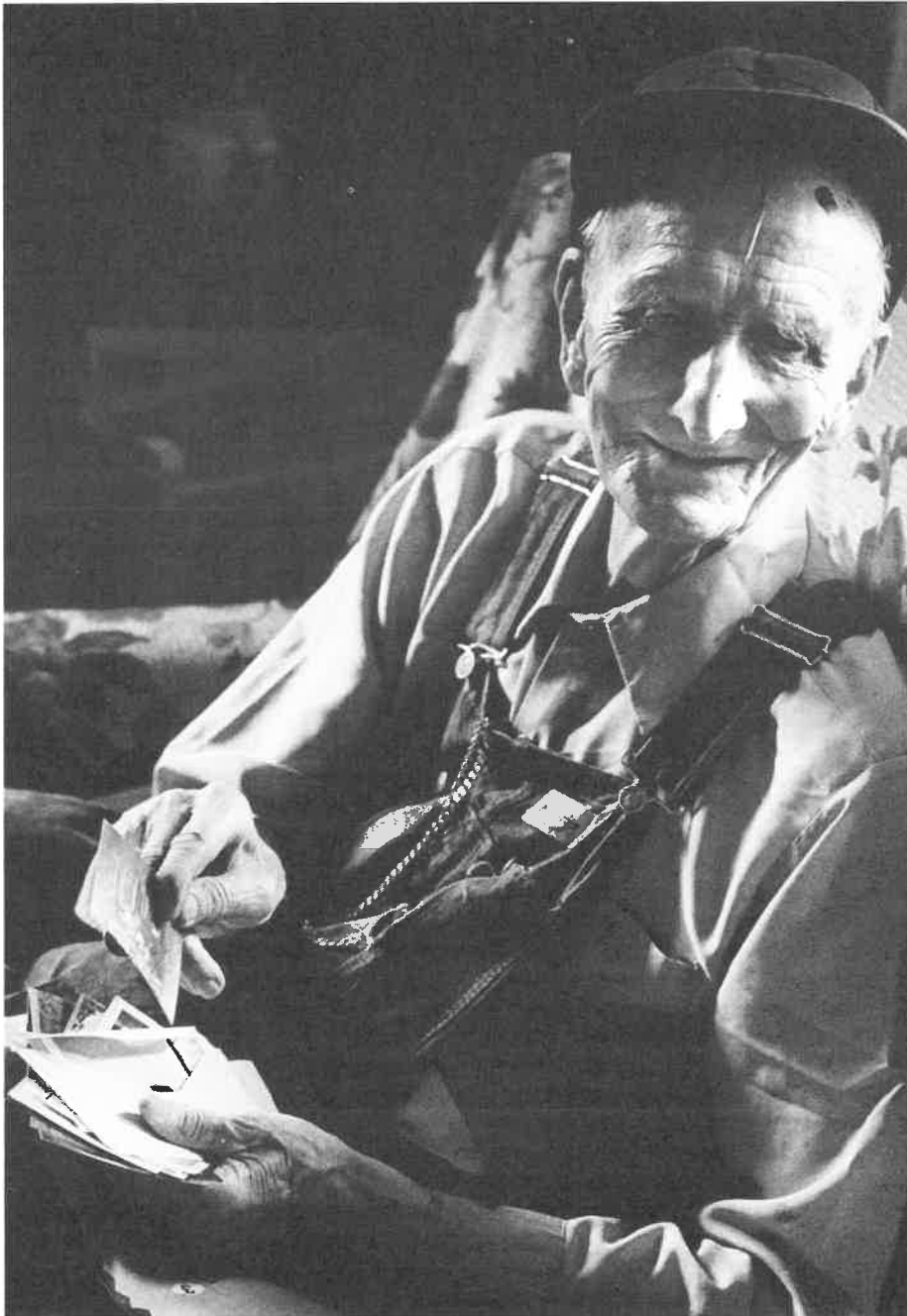
The large projecting overhang of the roof on the red-brown exterior gave Wilbur's house the appearance of a Swiss chalet. To the left of the front door he has placed a long church bench, where visitors may chat with him. The interior, similar to a multi-purpose A-frame with partial divides, forms a large front room, two bedrooms and a bath. The indoor plumbing was a first for Wilbur. He is happy with the convenience of running water but commented, in reminiscing about the old homeplace, "Our well water was so cold and clear. As you can see, the water here leaves a dark brown stain on everything it touches."

Samuel Veith, Wilbur's father, was known throughout Braxton County for his church leadership, his political involvement, and his work as a mortician. Samuel built coffins and sold them for \$15 from 1880 to the 1920's. Baby coffins sold for only \$2. The \$15 figure for an adult included an outside wooden box constructed with an arched top that diverted water away from the coffin. Such homemade wooden boxes were forerunners of our modern-day burial vaults.

Wilbur often helped his father collect the lumber, usually oak, chestnut or walnut, and construct the coffins and the accompanying rough boxes. When we asked Wilbur if an extra casket was kept on hand, he answered, "No, we could always make one in a day's time." The coffins were covered with black cloth on the outside and white satin for the interior. A plate was placed on the lid with the words "At Rest" engraved thereon. This plate, along with metal handles, had to be ordered ahead and kept in stock.

Many former residents will also

Family and friends are important to Wilbur. Here he discusses mementos with visitors.



remember Samuel Veith as an angel of mercy. When there was sickness in the valley, Sam nursed his friends and neighbors back to health with his homemade medications. Wilbur learned much about herbal medicines and care of the sick from his father. He also inherited a compassionate disposition, and recalls that he has "set up with numerous sick individuals at night." This was always done without pay. In appreciation for Wilbur's kindness in such cases, two families gave him gifts at Christmas for several years.

Wilbur's mother, Alice Cobb, was one of three sisters who married three Veith brothers. She was a quiet and easygoing woman, always admonishing her children to do the right thing. If trouble appeared, they were told to avoid it. Alice was known as a cook and baker. Other ladies were offended at church dinners when so many people asked specifically for Alice Veith's apple pies. Having a beautiful singing voice, Mrs. Veith often sang at revival services and funerals with two of her sisters.

Born third in a family with five siblings, Wilbur had many playmates in his own family. The children played fox and geese, marbles, hide and seek, tag, dominoes, and ante over, games common early in the century. All children during this era had chores to be performed before any playing was done. Wilbur played volleyball and baseball as a teenager. His farm duties included caring for the horses, working in the gardens, and helping with butchering hogs.

Farm families invented their own fun, according to Wilbur. For example, he recalls, the "Yankee jumper" which was enjoyed during a winter spell of deep snow. A Yankee jumper consisted of two long poles with a seat built across the back end, which was large enough to accommodate two people. The front of the poles were attached to the horse's harness. Thus, the Yankee jumper was actually a small, homemade sleigh. Wilbur said it was lots of fun.

During his young adult days Wilbur plowed gardens with a one-horse shovel plow or a one-horse turn plow for 50 cents, or, if lucky, for a dollar. He did not charge widows. It was understood that disking and furrowing were included in the job. Because



Most of the original Veith farm was lost to the dam project. This 1929 picture (above) shows Wilbur's father, Sam Veith, brother Eagon, mother Alice, and sister Carrie Krafft with daughter Audrey. Photographer unknown.

Wilbur is the third boy from the left in the 1912-13 Falls Mill school portrait. Brother Donald stands at right front and Eagon at right rear. Photographer unknown.



of his straight and perfect rows, Wilbur was in great demand. He received ten cents for digging a bushel of coal from a coal bank.

Nurtured in a religious family with strong role models and close community ties, Wilbur developed into

the sensitive, caring person he is today. After the community church had been razed by the dam builders, he dreamed of building a new meeting house for Bible study and hymn singing on his own property. Almost single-handedly, he made that dream



Old and new photographs and greetings from friends far and near decorate the place Wilbur lives.

a reality. Others helped from time to time with the construction of the little church, but Wilbur, then 77, did most of the work, including roofing the structure. He named it the "Falls Mill Memorial Church." The white chapel is located a short distance from Wilbur's house on the knoll overlooking the falls. It is easily seen by travelers going north on Route 19.

Wilbur's hobbies are constructing birdhouses, putting new seats in split-bottom chairs, and whittling walking sticks. He has fashioned many sets of stilts for the children who visit him.

He has not forgotten his father's work of caring for the dead. Poor inhabitants of the community had been buried without grave markers and Wilbur thought they should not be forgotten. He took it upon himself

to make some 25 to 30 grave markers from concrete. These markers measured approximately two feet long, 20 inches wide, and four inches thick. Before the cement hardened, he engraved the person's name, date of birth, and date of death. The markers were then transported to various nearby cemeteries. At the grave sites Wilbur dug out footers, filling them with crushed rock and sand before placing the markers at the proper graves.

This mountaineer has maintained a sincere interest in others, a dry sense of humor, and an enthusiastic outlook on life. Through the years he has treasured his friends and he is delighted to receive their notes and telephone calls. The perimeter of his front room is circled with Christmas cards, which numbered 186 last year

with one day's delivery totaling 25. Mail time is special. While we were visiting, the rural carrier left his mail in the mailbox at the road. We sensed that Wilbur looked forward to this touch from the outside world. A Clarksburg daily newspaper and a Braxton County weekly arrived that day.

Ancestors' photographs, as well as pictures of present-day relatives and friends, keep him company during the winter months as he rocks near the Burnside stove. All visitors are asked to sign a guest register which includes a place for their name, address, and the date. Family ties are especially cherished by Wilbur. A homecoming is held each year, with morning services in the memorial church. These gatherings of the clan are joyful occasions for all who at-

tend, with a picnic on the grounds after church.

Our conversation continued in a more personal vein. Wilbur admitted he was very shy as a young boy. He believes that was due to his speech impediment. He said shyness may be one reason he has remained single. With a twinkle in his eye, he added, "I was afraid to get married. After all, I was related to everyone in the community."

Then we decided to drive to nearby points of interest with Wilbur as our guide. Our first stop was Bulltown, the site of a Civil War skirmish. The Corps of Engineers has restored several buildings at the historical village, and trenches dug by Union soldiers are still visible. He pointed out a "cat-and-clay" chimney on one of the log cabins. This unusual architectural feature was fabricated of wooden slats daubed with mud.

A park has now replaced the former

crossroad of the Falls Mill community and that was the second stop on our mini-tour. A highway sign on Route 19 indicated a separate road which leads down to the park area. Rest facilities and parking are available. Swimmers, sunbathers, fishermen and foot splashers were enjoying the sun and water on the day we were there.

Our threesome then bounced along four miles over a country lane which paralleled the Little Kanawha River. At what seemed to be the end of the road, we found a large swinging bridge in excellent condition. Our leader, Wilbur, called it a wire bridge, and it is the access from the rock road to his friend's house across the water. Wire ropes are strung along each side of the high suspended walkway, which spans the Little Kanawha. Vertical support wires stretch to the wooden bridge floor from these shoulder-high cables. Wilbur, at age

84, walked fearlessly across the rolling deck.

As we headed back, Wilbur told us he enjoys traveling as long as he does not have to stay away from home overnight. He has only left the state once, and that was a round trip in one day to visit in Virginia.

When Sam Krafft, a nephew, was 15 years old he wrote the following words about his uncle. Wilbur keeps the description inside the front cover of a special book. He proudly displayed the paper to us: "Butcher / Carpenter / Farmer / Mechanic / Sportsman / Miner / Shoe Mender / Timber Cutter / A good man in all ways."

We returned Wilbur Veith to his home, said our good-byes at his doorstep, and promised to get together soon. As we drove away, we silently prayed that this good man may have many more years of joy, peace, and contentment in his mountain cabin.✱

Wilbur gets along well by himself, but is glad to receive people when they come to see him. Here he shows a recent visitor the chapel near his home.





Marie Boette sings and plays for visitors. She has been making music since about 1901.

At West Virginia's folk festivals, mountaineers share the music of their heritage with throngs of visiting music buffs. Melodies lively as a mountain brook are played by fingers supple as birds' wings. Songs of joyful clarity break suddenly into harsh ridges of minor note, the "lonesome voice" that makes mountain music seem to come from lost times and places.

In years past, songs were not shared as widely. Some were known only in isolated parts of the state, and handed down within a family circle or among neighbors. They became known when researchers began collecting tunes and publishing them in books. Some eventually made their way onto the new medium of radio. By the 1950's and '60's, there was heightened popular interest in saving traditional songs. Younger people began rediscovering the beauty of the old ballads and instrumental music.

Among those who knew the value of the folk song revival was Marie Boette of Parkersburg. Beginning in the mid-1930's, Miss Boette traveled through the hills many times, listening to the old songs preserved by West Virginia families for generations. She took down the words and music for presentation to a larger audience. A musician and music teacher, she often accompanied herself on the autoharp as she later sang the songs and ballads she had collected for appreciative listeners in college classrooms and at folk festivals.

Now in her 93rd year, Miss Boette has snow-white hair, twinkling blue eyes not hidden by glasses, and a ready smile on her tan and lightly creased face as she reminisces. Her interest in music began as a child at the turn of the century and has continued undiminished to the present.

"Getting Down the Originals"

Folk Song Collector Marie Boette

By Joseph Platania
Photographs by Michael Keller

She has dedicated herself to teaching others the value of music in their lives.

Marie Boette lives in the large house that her father built on Avery Street near downtown Parkersburg. She was born there on July 27, 1895, the only daughter and second youngest of the five children of Henry Philip and Dorothea Buehler Boette. Mr. Boette was a merchant tailor who made wool broadcloth suits lined with silk for Parkersburg's businessmen. He was the singer in the family and belonged to Parkersburg's Germania Society, which had its own singing group.

Marie began music lessons at age six with Dr. Louise Harnish, who lived around the corner from the Boette home. She graduated from Parkersburg High School in 1913 and started taking college courses in music. By the time of World War I she was teaching music in the Parkersburg public schools. She later became the first supervisor of music for Wood County schools. She received her B.S. in music from New York University in 1934.

In 1936 Miss Boette accepted a position in the Department of Music at West Virginia Wesleyan College, as teacher of voice, organ, and director of choral music. The president of the college, Dr. Roy McCuskey, whom she had known as a Methodist minister in Parkersburg, asked her to come to Buckhannon to teach. She recalls that she looked forward to the opportunity to work with older students.

Miss Boette continued graduate work in music during the summers. It was this that led to her lifelong interest in mountain ballads. "I was going on to get a master's degree and I needed a subject for my research," she recalled in a recent interview. Friends in Buckhannon introduced her to people in the nearby French Creek area of Upshur County who knew the old songs. Once she heard the music of French Creek, she knew that she had found the subject for her research. From that time on, Marie Boette's interest in West Virginia's folk song heritage never waned.

The culmination of Boette's research came in 1971 with the publication of her book, *Singa Hipsy Doodle and Other Folk Songs of West Virginia*. It

includes the words and music of nearly 100 folk songs and ballads, more than 60 of which were collected by Boette, along with informative notes on the West Virginians from whom she collected them. The songs had been collected from the mid-1930's to as late as 1969. In the book's foreword, Dr. McCuskey notes that some of the songs are published here for the first time.

Miss Boette remembered the people of French Creek who were the first sources for her folk song collecting. "Many families were originally from New England and from eastern states and they saw the value of music in their lives," she says. "They were living on plots and in homes which their forebears had founded. They came to me with songs they had known."

In her book, Boette states that French Creek was the first settlement in the central part of West Virginia, then western Virginia. The first settlers, the Morgans, came from New England in 1808. From 1815 to 1820 other families joined them. The original settlers came from northern Massachusetts and Vermont. "They were an educated people," she writes.

Some of the early ministers who came to the area "brought instruments — the viola, the violin, and the bass viol — which were used to accompany psalm singing in the church."

She reports that the people of French Creek made "the forty-eight string dulcimer, hammering out the tunes with corset staves wrapped in homespun woolen yarn. Another instrument was patterned after the ancient rebec, which is now called the three-stringed mountain dulcimer. Strings resting on a fret of wild deer horn were plucked with quills from wild turkey. A small smooth stick, of chestnut or walnut, played the melody on the first string, the other two strings provided a droning accompaniment."

Since the early pioneers were in an isolated area with few ways to leave the French Creek settlement, they retained much of the style of Scottish and English music which they had inherited from their ancestors. The music was important to them. "All 'gatherins' started with music," Miss Boette explained. "Songs were lined out by a leader — some happy, some sad, some sacred, some bad — and reflected the moods of the people."

Miss Boette at ease in Parkersburg. The Wood County town has been her home for most of her life.





Above: The Boette family consisted of four brothers and Marie. Henry, Walter, Edgar and Charles flank her in this portrait. Photographer and date unknown.

Below: Father Henry Philip Boette built the family house on Avery Street. Marie was born there and it remains her home today.



For the dancers there were fiddle tunes requiring quick steps. The forests resounded with laughter."

Road conditions in this part of the state in the last century made travel slow and difficult; Boette considered it a section apart. She found that within the memory of persons then in their 80's, the 26-mile wagon trip from Buckhannon to Clarksburg had taken all day. However, Boette recalls that the roads were much better when she began collecting in the region. "I could get anywhere I wanted to go. I drove all my life and had my own car. I drove until two or three years ago."

The story of one French Creek song sung for her in 1939 is typical of the songs Boette found. The copied words of the love song "The Rose That All Are Praising" were found in the bottom of an old bureau drawer. "It had been sung a number of years before the Civil War and had been handed down from one generation to another," writes Boette.

"There were not to be found printed copies of either the words or music to these old songs. They were used by neighbors who met for social 'sings' in the schoolhouses and around the great fireplaces of the early cabin homes." She considered it a privilege to be the first one to bring some of the tunes into print.

Several old religious songs came to Boette by way of Wesleyan President Roy McCuskey. In 1939 he introduced her to an Upshur County man who was a singer and the director of music for a country church. He had been born in June 1863 and was from "a family of singers," according to Boette. This man, Granville Sayre, and his family had befriended Dr. McCuskey when he was an itinerant student preacher. From him Boette collected several old church songs. Mr. Sayre's natural timidity "fell away as he became 'lost in the song,'" writes Boette.

Before tape recorders were widely available, songs were recorded by collectors on "staff," or lined music paper, as they were being sung. Looking back more than 40 years Boette said, "I took the songs down on paper as they were sung. Some had the words or lyrics already written down and I would write down the music or melody as it was sung. Sometimes I had to write down both



The music educator in the prime of her career. This publicity photo is from the 1950's, when Miss Boette had reestablished herself in Parkersburg, after leaving professional positions in Buckhannon and Huntington.

words and music and, in this case, I would take down the words first and then write down the melody." Boette recalls that she has even taken down songs over the telephone.

Some songs had two or more versions, with one better known or in print. In these instances, Boette would take down other versions as she heard them.

A lullaby collected by Boette in Cabell County in 1969 dated back 100 years. Another old song, "Naomi Wise," was sung by an Upshur County woman in 1941 and recorded on a glass record which later was broken. A "quaint New England song called 'Fame'" was sung for Boette in 1939 by a French Creek woman who was then 79 years old. From certain musical clues, Boette believed that the latter song dated back to the Revolutionary War.

In her book Boette notes that our folk song heritage is always changing. "In collecting folk songs there are increasing changes — old stanzas dropped, new ones added, rhymes altered, names of places and characters changed, and catastrophes transformed until there is barely enough of the original song left to identify it.

Folk Song Collections

GOLDENSEAL readers interested in further information on West Virginia folk songs may choose from a variety of good reading material. In addition to Marie Boette's book, *Singa Hipsy Doodle and Other Folk Songs of West Virginia*, there are many other published works by folk music collectors and researchers.

A generation ago, folklorist John Harrington Cox authored several books on the subject, particularly *Folk-Songs Mainly from West Virginia*, *Traditional Ballads Mainly from West Virginia*, and *Folk-Songs of the South*. West Virginia Hillbilly Editor Jim Comstock published *West Virginia Songbag* in 1974. *Ballads, Folk Songs & Folk Tales from West Virginia* was written by Professor Ruth Ann Musick. Patrick Gainer, West Virginia University folklorist and founder of the State Folk Festival at Glenville, gave us *Folk Songs from the West Virginia Hills* and the *West Virginia Centennial Book of 100 Songs*. These publications provide the reader with original words and music, and in most cases accompanying text.

A more recent book is the 1982 *West Virginia Folk Music*, by West Virginia University librarian John A. Cuthbert. This descriptive guide catalogs the field recordings held in the sound archives at WVU's West Virginia and Regional History Collection. These recordings were made by traveling scholars from the 1930's through the 1970's.

Cuthbert's book cover shows the late Edden Hammons, among the most legendary of all West Virginia fiddlers. The West Virginia Collection holds the only known recordings of Hammons and an album of his music was produced from these archival recordings. "The Edden Hammons Collection" includes an LP record and an informative documentary booklet. It may be ordered directly from West Virginia University Press for

\$10.95, plus \$1.25 postage and handling. *West Virginia Folk Music* may also be ordered for \$10 postpaid. West Virginia residents add 6% sales tax. Orders may be sent to the WVU Press at West Virginia University Library, Morgantown, WV 26506.

Folk Songs of Central West Virginia is another important folk music resource, highly recommended by Dr. Cuthbert. This five-volume collection presents original words and music and was compiled by Michael E. "Jim" Bush over a period of 11 years, beginning in 1969. An early collection of songs from the mountain region generally is the classic *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*, by Olive Dame Campbell and Cecil J. Sharp. It was published in 1917 and has the words and music to 122 songs and ballads, mostly from the mountains south of West Virginia.

Other books provide a lighter look at the music of the Appalachian region. Michael Murphy's *The Appalachian Dulcimer Book* is a 102-page softcover book with photos, illustrations and words and music to 20 songs for the dulcimer. *Singing Family of the Cumberlands*, by dulcimer player Jean Ritchie, tells the story of her Kentucky childhood with text, illustration and song. Herbert Shellans's *Folk Songs of the Blue Ridge Mountains* is nicely done with words, music and photos.

Folk music enthusiasts may check reference libraries or the West Virginia sections of local bookstores for these publications. All of the above books can be found in the State Archives library in Charleston, and the Cultural Center Shop carries the Edden Hammons album and several folk music publications. You can write to either at the Cultural Center, Capitol Complex, Charleston, WV 25305.



Sing a Hipsy Doodle, the book Miss Boette holds here, represents a lifetime of folk music collecting. It was published in 1971 and includes research begun as early as the mid-1930's.

Moments of forgetfulness cause many variations. Occasional variations in a song may have been conscious, others unconscious; but all in all they amount to a re-creation of a song on the part of the people who sing it."

These changes and the reticence of some sources complicated the collector's work. "Many of the old folk singers are gone and others have a sense of timidity which makes an approach difficult. There seems to be a sense of embarrassment that their music is being termed 'hill-billy.'"

Boette found sincere interest the best door-opener. "When a contributor is told that the material he is furnishing will become part of the heritage of future generations, he usually acquiesces," she wrote.

"A collector knows that he must record a song just as it was handed down," she added. "His ears must take up sounds, and imagination must be utilized only for spelling phonetically, not for reconstructing some puzzling word until he finds its apparent original form. If he hears,

for example, 'sov'rel' instead of what he knows may have been 'several,' he must so write it, spelling it as it is pronounced."

Boette received her master's degree from Ohio University in 1942. Her interest in traditional music continued and she was state chairman for folk music for the West Virginia Federation of Music Clubs from 1946 to 1956 and in 1961.

In 1947 Marie Boette left the faculty of West Virginia Wesleyan and came to Huntington, where a brother lived, and found work as an organist and director of music at the First Methodist Church. Three years later she returned to her hometown of Parkersburg. She assumed duties as organist and music director at the First Presbyterian Church, working there until 1962. She also was director of the Parkersburg Women's Club chorus from 1951 to 1955 and from 1975 to 1983.

In 1954 she founded Parkersburg's Blennerhassett Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. That same year she received an honorary Doctor of Music degree from Davis and Elkins College in recognition of her achievements as a musician and music teacher.

Boette was not alone in her pursuit of West Virginia folk songs. She writes that as early as 1915, a folklore society was formed in the state. In 1939 John Harrington Cox, a professor at West Virginia University, published his classic works, *Folk-Songs Mainly from West Virginia* and *Traditional Ballads Mainly from West Virginia*. Dr. Cox was an officer of the West Virginia Folklore Society and Boette credits him as "the first scholar of the state's folk songs." His books were published under the auspices of the federal Works Progress Administration.

Dr. Cox was followed at WVU by Patrick Ward Gainer, a professor of English and a scholar of the state's folk music and folklore. Dr. Gainer, now deceased, was one of the foremost authorities on collecting and preserving West Virginia's native music. He taught standing-room-only classes in Morgantown and gave courses in balladry to extension students throughout the state. Gainer was chairman of the Centennial Committee on Folklore, which published

the *West Virginia Centennial Book of 100 Songs* in 1963.

Boette knew Gainer as a fellow collector and recalls his "beautiful tenor voice." She says that "some of the songs were sung for Gainer by his great-aunt, Aunt Mary Wilson. Dr. Gainer was a native of Gilmer County and relatives sang the Irish-Scottish ballads which had been handed down through the family." Boette included almost a dozen songs that Gainer had collected in her book. "Dr. Gainer was a fine scholar who did a lot to pave the way for folk music collectors and others interested in the subject," she said.

Gainer founded the West Virginia State Folk Festival in Glenville in 1950, a forerunner of our many festivals today. Boette recalls that she sang folk songs there on several occasions, accompanying herself on the autoharp. "I have a three-string dulcimer, but I'm not adept on it: The autoharp is easier to play, just push a button and there is a chord.

"I have friends all over the state and they would introduce me to people who sang the old songs," she continues. "Also, as a teacher and director of music for Wood County schools I had friends in other school systems who would tell me about singers. My students in college were good sources for folk songs since they came from all over the state."

Boette has also taught summer classes in West Virginia folk music at Marshall University and at Davis and Elkins College. In 1962 she started a home studio in Parkersburg, where she gave private lessons until 1975. "I have been close to music all my life. I have taught music in the public schools, in college, and given private lessons," she notes.

As part of the state's centennial in 1963, Boette was asked to compose a special song for the year-long celebration. The result was the "West Virginia Centennial Song," with words and music by Marie Boette, which she completed in March 1962.

Miss Boette is proud of her years of teaching, stating that many of her former private and school students have become directors of music in public schools and music teachers in college. She made sure that her students and colleagues alike got a dose of mountain music. She recalled that

"in some of the music teachers' associations I played and sang West Virginia traditional songs for their meetings.

"Not all the songs are the same. I like to point out differences between songs in their style and mode. That's the teacher in me."

Besides her book, Boette's writing about folk songs has included articles in various education publications. She also compiled and edited *Sing, West Virginia!* She says, "*Sing, West Virginia!* was a handbook of the words of some of the West Virginia songs with perhaps a few lines of music. I wrote the handbook after publication of *Singa Hipsy Doodle*. It was for a course in folk music for a leadership training conference at Jackson's Mill."

She looks back on a life of service. "Where the need was, there I was — for music for women's clubs or church choruses, wherever. I'm still helping — directing the Parkersburg Women's Club chorus, singing in the choir at the First Presbyterian Church, and serving as assistant organist. I play the pipe organ."

Young Marie Boette was named Parkersburg's "Woman of 1920." Six decades later she was again honored by her native city. In 1981 the Park-

ersburg Choral Society presented "A Festival of American Heritage Music In Honor of Marie Boette." That same year the Parkersburg High School A Cappella Choir's Christmas program was dedicated to Miss Boette, in recognition of her founding of the state's first such choir at Parkersburg High in 1931.

In 1982 a continuing endowment fund for pipe organ students was established at West Virginia Wesleyan in Marie Boette's name. She also was awarded her second honorary degree, a Doctor of Humane Letters from West Virginia Wesleyan in 1982.

As a dedicated music teacher, Marie Boette counts as her greatest contribution the thousands of West Virginia students she taught and influenced. But her other legacy is the collection of folk songs she assembled over a lifetime and edited into a book when she was 75 years old. She sums that up in a few words. "My intent was in getting the words and music as they were sung, getting down the originals," she reports. Because of that, many of West Virginia's folk songs, and knowledge of the people who sang them, will endure. ♣

Musical hands at work. Marie Boette continues to play regularly at age 93.





Gene Townsend is a Clarksburg barber who has made a serious hobby of restoring antique internal combustion engines. Here he lubricates one owned by friend Bob Fultz.

The West Virginia Oil and Gas Festival seems out of place among such celebrations of fruitfulness as the Black Walnut, Apple Harvest and Buckwheat festivals. Fall festivals in West Virginia generally have pastoral names that evoke images of natural abundance, and petroleum somehow seems too unappetizing to merit its own jubilee.

Yet, Sistersville's annual tribute to the riches that have oozed from the state's prolific earth is fitting, and not only for the millions of dollars reaped in the oil and gas harvest. For it isn't the wealth oil brought to a few, nor even the jobs brought to many, that give the September festival its theme. Memories are celebrated here. Those who were part of the early 1900's oil fever, many of them former oilfield employees now in their 70's and 80's, meet in the small Tyler County town to exchange stories and review the labor of their earlier years.

They bring the keepsakes they have gathered to remind them of those days — models of oil wells, an old gas pump, tools used in the oilfields — and they bring marvelous antique gas engines. These engines are important not only because they use petroleum fuels but also because their history is woven into the fabric of the oil and gas industry.

West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Ohio occupy a region particularly suited for gas engines because of plentiful crude oil and natural gas deposits. These are "gas" engines in both modern senses of the word, operating equally well on gasoline or natural gas. They were used by farmers who had an abundant and usually free supply of natural gas on

Power from the Past

Engines of the Oil and Gas Festival

By Tim Terman
Photographs by Michael Keller

Bob Fultz is a regular at the Oil and Gas Festival and a leader among engine collectors. Here he poses by his big well engine at home.

their land. They were also the power that for many years, and even today in some areas, ran the oil rigs that pepper the oilfields that once dominated the economy of many country towns.

Sistersville was one of those towns. A farming community on the banks of the Ohio River, it became an oil boom town at the end of the last century. Between 1888 and 1898, the town's population exploded from 600 to 7,000 souls, while oil production climbed to 20,152 barrels a day.

In what was called the Sistersville Field, oil rigs popped up like weeds, many of them in the backyards and public areas of town. The citizens didn't seem to mind the noise of the steam and gas engines which sucked black wealth from the earth, according to Eugene D. Thoenen's 1964 *History of the Oil and Gas Industry in West Virginia*. Although the boom caused considerable disruption and an influx of strangers, townsfolk could point to the \$5,000 paved streets and a new opera house as improvements that wouldn't have materialized from only a farming economy. From 1893 to 1901, periods of increasing oil production, the resources of the Tyler County Bank in Sistersville rose from \$42,000 to \$800,000.

Among Sistersville's prized possessions were two big Otto gas engines that powered electric lights throughout the town, something of a rarity in West Virginia at the time. These engines would be coveted exhibits today at the festival, and many of the gas engine collectors who come to the Sistersville gathering would likely give a right arm to have one.

The 110-horsepower Ottos, and an additional 125-horsepower Westinghouse gas engine, provided electricity to about 6,000 lights in 1902, according to that year's *West Virginia Daily Oil Review* (a local paper established as the *Tyler Democrat* but renamed when the oil boom came). Residents paid a minimum electric bill of \$1 each month.

Gems such as these Otto engines aren't likely to be seen at the Oil and Gas Festival, but others, many of them rare and in all shapes and sizes,



are the focus of interest during the three-day affair, which begins this year on September 15. Organizers expect to see hundreds of the old engines there this year. When it's late enough in the morning for the proud owners to consider it decent to crank up their favorites, first one and then another will be heard sputtering out the characteristic, hit-and-miss "pumph....pumph....pumph," like giant popcorn beginning to pop. By

noon the commotion will make it difficult to have a conversation.

Merle Eddy, 78, of Fairview, sat among the 1987 festival's popping, thumping engines listening to the ruckus. The familiar sound reminded him of when he was a 14-year-old boy, he said.

"I moved these kinds of engines all over half of West Virginia and half of Pennsylvania," Eddy remembered. He and his father worked for oil and



The West Virginia Oil and Gas Festival is a good place to see the old gas engines. Collectors gather at the Sistersville event to swap parts and show off their favorites. Photo by Gerald Ratliff, courtesy West Virginia Department of Commerce.

The Oil and Gas Festival

The West Virginia Oil and Gas Festival at Sistersville honors the oil and gas industry in our state, particularly the oil boom of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The industry began in 1860 with the discovery of an oil well near Wirt County's Burning Springs, and resumed following the Civil War. The boom engulfed counties in central West Virginia and the Ohio Valley, sweeping local citizens into oil production and related activities. Eight to ten cooper shops opened in St. Marys, downstream from Sistersville, and residents there spent the 1870's making staves for oil barrels.

In 1900, West Virginia's oil production peaked at 16 million barrels. As new fields opened in the West, the local drilling excitement died down and the more ambitious wildcatters moved on. But Mountain State wells continued to pump and there were people who stayed and drilled. Many individuals alive today well remember the oil and gas business during this more stable period of the 1920's and '30's.

Sistersville celebrates that time in West Virginia's history and the people involved in it with its annual Oil and Gas Festival. The dates for the 1988 event are September 15-18, Thursday through Sunday. A full schedule of activities is planned for festival-goers.

This marks the 20th year for the West Virginia Oil and Gas Festival. It is promoted as "a festival with something for all ages" and this year's program proves that with amateur talent contests, an antique auto show, arm wrestling championships, a liars' contest, marble shooting championships, an old-time camp fire sing, canoe races and children's games. There will be food booths, craft demonstrations, oil and gas history exhibits, and a variety of entertainment throughout the four days.

As indicated in the adjoining story, antique gas engines receive a lot of attention at the Oil and Gas Festival. Those involved in the planning say there are usually 300 or more of the engines on display.

Admission to the West Virginia Oil and Gas Festival is \$2 for adults, with children under 12 admitted free. Opening day has been designated as "Senior Citizen's Day," with older people to be admitted free. A four-day pass is available for \$5. For further information write to the West Virginia Oil and Gas Festival, P.O. Box 25, Sistersville, WV 26175 or call Barbara Vincent at (304) 652-3671.

gas companies driving teams of horses pulling oilfield equipment in the 1920's. "We had good horses," he said. "They'd do what you asked them to do, or they'd try. We'd take these big engines — the 20-horsepower ones — up a hill, and if one team of horses couldn't pull 'em, we'd put on two, and if they couldn't, we'd use three."

Bob Fultz, an antique engine collector, found his first one in the ashes of a burnt-down barn where it had probably lain neglected for 20 or 30 years before fire reduced the barn to soot. A neighbor brought it to Fultz's attention, rather skeptically, since the engine looked to him like so much junk.

But collectors know that these aren't ordinary engines. Built of cast iron, some with as few as eight moving parts, these durable turn-of-the-century machines were built to last even through fires. The ruggedness and solidity built into the old engines are among the reasons people like Fultz admire them and go to great lengths to find and restore them.

Still, salvaging that first seven-horsepower "Economy" engine, sold around 1908 by Sears and Roebuck, nearly drove Bob Fultz to despair. "I found it in the fall and worked all winter during my spare time," said Fultz, an automobile mechanic who lives in Clarksburg. "Several times I thought about taking it out in the front yard and planting flowers in it."

Like Fultz, collectors and tinkerers from across the state and all over America are drawn to these relics from before the time of the second industrial revolution of the early 1900's. It was an era when the Model T was a new idea, when President Woodrow Wilson might yet have averted war with Germany, and when oil wells in places like Sistersville were bringing forth fortunes.

"A lot of the engines were used for scrap metal during World War II," said Gerald Lestz, editor and publisher of *Gas Engine Magazine*. "But after the war people started collecting them. Now there are a tremendous number of people restoring old engines, and they are still being found in barns, out in fields or at auctions."

It's probably safe to say that most people wouldn't know an antique gas

engine if they slept with one. The hefty motors have been mistaken for everything from water pumps to generators, but one thing is certain: They don't look like modern engines.

Perhaps the most obvious difference is their size. A 1.5-horsepower Sears "Little Wonder" weighs 480 pounds — and that's one of the smallest. Ten-horsepower engines may weigh over a ton. Comparable modern engines of one or two horsepower weigh as little as 25 pounds.

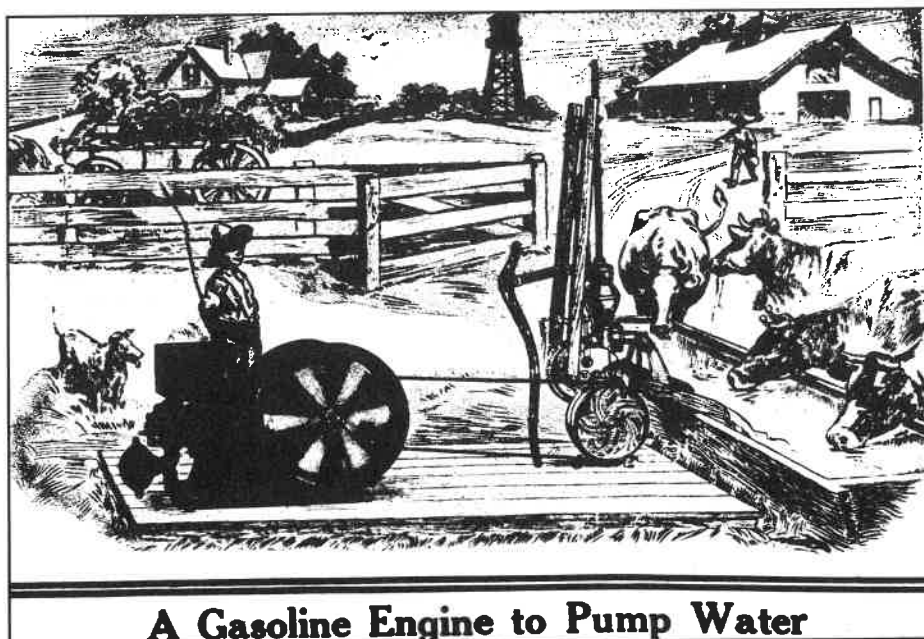
Much of the antique engine's ponderousness is in the massive flywheel linked through a crankshaft and connecting rod to a piston. The huge wheel uses the piston's horizontal force to make a spinning motion that was used to run a variety of farm and industrial implements from about 1880 through the late 1930's. The weight of the flywheel gave the engine its momentum, regulating the relatively infrequent bursts of power from the cylinder into a steady rotation of the drive shaft.

The engines' lineage is a history of internal combustion, meandering from the 18th-century steam technology of Newcomen and Watt to the four-stroke compression engine designed by German innkeeper's son Nikolaus August Otto in 1876.

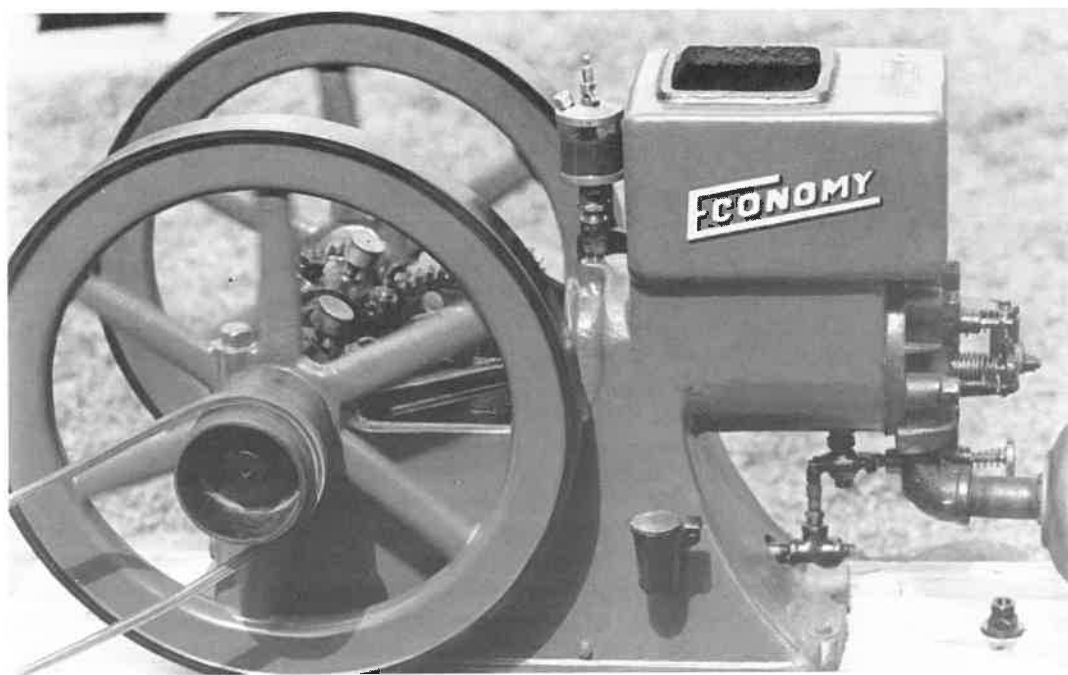
They're stout, uncomplicated, and unadorned with exterior design. Like many early machines, they display their mechanics rather than hiding them. The piston pops in and out of the cylinder, while the centrifugal governor on the flywheel spins in or out, depending on the engine's speed. If the big wheel loses speed, the governor gives the engine more gas. To save fuel, the piston only fires when the speed drops; hence, these are sometimes called "hit-and-miss" engines.

The introduction of gas engines was a welcome technology. Steam power, a common force of agricultural and industrial production to the late 1800's, required much bulky fuel and water and a minimum of an hour to start the fire and get up steam. The gas engines put power where it was needed and were a lot less trouble to operate.

An early Sears catalog made this appeal: "The Economy Gasoline Engine has been called the 'farmer's



Sears, Roebuck promised to lighten the farm boy's task with its line of Economy engines. As may be seen below, the Sears engine was a simple workhorse, cooled by water from the open iron hopper. Photo by Gerald Ratliff.



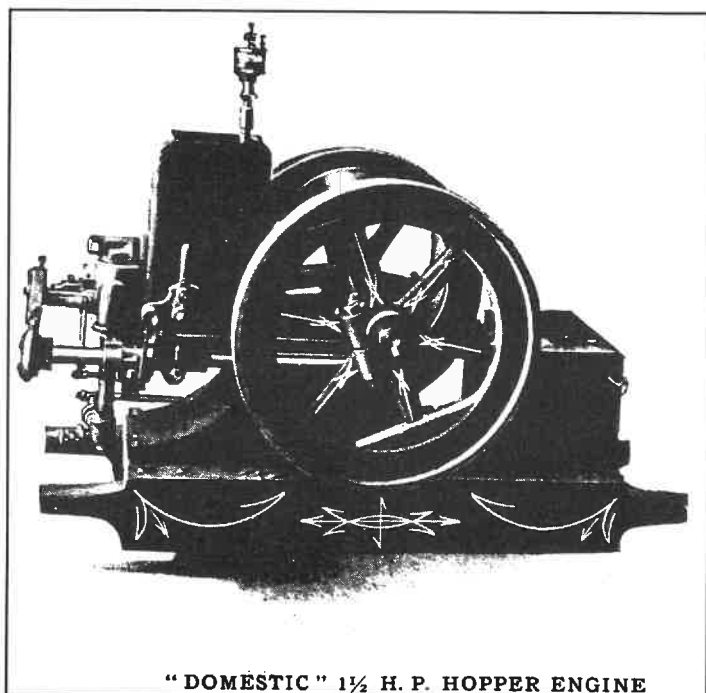
friend.' It is his friend. It will lighten his labors and make life more pleasant for his wife and family. It will run the separator, churn, feed grinder and grindstone, as well as pump water, saw wood, and do a dozen other things economically and well."

Advertisements like this must have been effective, for millions of the engines were sold. During the height of their popularity, before the ascen-

dancy of the even more convenient electric motor, there were as many as 2,000 manufacturers of gas engines, selling them from about \$30 to \$300. The engines served America as a now largely forgotten power source linking the steam age to the era of electricity. They were marketed under a legion of brand names, like Reid, Hercules, Fairbanks-Morris, Jaeger, and Stover.



A man and his motor: Restoring the old engines is one job and keeping them running is another. Here Gene Townsend tinkers with his 1.5-horsepower Domestic, as shown in the company's advertisement below. This was Domestic's smallest model, intended for "pumping water, running cream separators, churns or any other light work."



Thrifty operation is a hallowed, almost legendary, characteristic of the early gas engines. It is a topic sure to be discussed at the Sistersville festival and other West Virginia gatherings where collectors find opportunity to meet and display their treasures.

John Collins, a Pennsylvania excavator who attended last fall's Oil and Gas Festival, found his first five-horsepower Hercules in the loft of a building he was ready to demolish. "I asked the building's owners what I should do with the engine, and they said I could have it," he said. "So, I guess that's when I started collecting them."

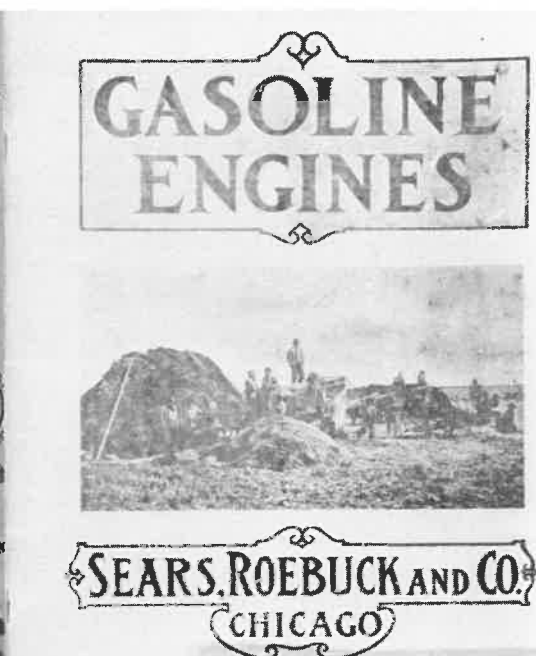
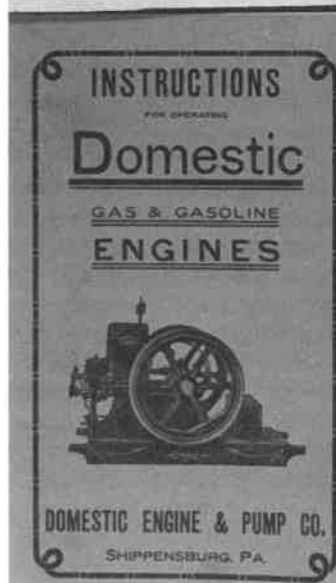
Collins now owns several engines and praises their ability to run on minuscule amounts of fuel. "You can hook one of these engines up to the exhaust pipe of an average car," he explained, "and it will run off of the gas that those engines waste. I know, because I've done it."

Bob Fultz remembers when he caught the gas engine bug. "I watched an engine at the Taylor County Fair huffing and puffing all day long on a little pint can of gas," he recalled. "That's when I knew I wanted one."

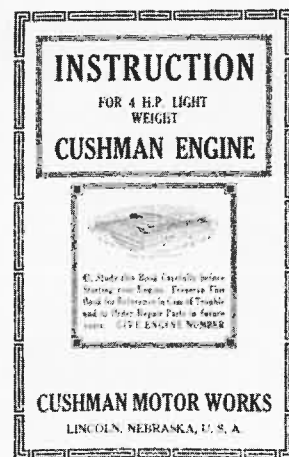
Starting the engines ranges anywhere between easy and deadly, depending on whom you ask. Gene Townsend of Clarksburg said his engines, some nearly 80 years old, usually start easily, but he remembers the time he learned to start them without a crank. "We prefer to start our engines with batteries or magnetos," he said. "Once, when I used a crank, the last thing I remembered was the crank flying off. I woke up on the ground with my dog licking my face."

Gas engine collectors aren't speculators, hoarding engines because prices are rising with the passage of time as well as increasing collector interest. They don't seem to care that an engine they may have bought for less than \$100 is worth more than \$1,000 after restoration and is certain to appreciate further. Many of these people won't even talk about selling their engines, but they're always interested in buying.

Chester Bills of St. Marys has more restored engines than most collectors. He crowds them onto a flatbed



DOMESTIC
ENGINE



Sears was one of many firms selling gas engines at the turn of the century. Others included International Harvester, Domestic, and Cushman.

trailer he takes to shows and always reports "several I left at home, including some that aren't running." He also has a conglomeration of engine parts to display at shows. Bills arranges into ranks a host of carburetors, valves, lubricators, all made of brass or of glass and with wooden knobs, no modern materials like plastic anywhere. He puts them out just for people to look at, rather like a proud art collector with a row of paintings.

Although continually asked to sell one item or another, since one reason collectors go to shows is to find components for restoring their en-

gines, Bills won't part with his parts. "They're simply too hard to come by," he explained.

He likes the look of these mechanical fragments from the past, the apparatus of a bygone America. He thinks they're worth holding onto, that just looking at them is good for the mind and soul. "I like anything that was before my time," he commented. "I want to preserve them, to save things from a time that the ones growing up now have never seen, things they wouldn't even recognize."

Touching a past that they respect, that somehow seems superior to the



Chester Bills of St. Marys is a major collector of engines and parts. Here he holds a carburetor at the 1987 Oil and Gas Festival. Photo by Tim Terman.

American present, is a strong sentiment among collectors of gas engines. They respect the designers and builders of machines that are uncomplicated and lean, machines built rugged and immutable with an in-wrought strength that could survive for decades while the world changed around them.

Somehow resembling archaeologists, engine collectors search farmyards and barns, back-40's and backwoods for the leavings of an epoch. Collins found a Reid engine while on a hunting trip. A tree had grown through the flywheel, and it took him two days to bulldoze a road through the woods to get the engine out. But

the effort was worth it, he said.

"My father was a blacksmith, and I played around with iron when I was a kid, so things built of cast iron hold an attraction for me," he said. "I hate to say things aren't made like this anymore, but they're not. Now, good designs are rejected because production costs are too high, and the ma-

New Antique Engine Club

While putting this story together, we learned of a newly-formed antique oil and gas engine club. The North Central West Virginia Antique Power Association was formed in October 1987 in Clarksburg. The group picked up the charter of a Wirt County engine club, established in 1982, and decided to breath new life into the organization.

Bob Fultz is the secretary/treasurer and Bob Townsend is the club's self-described "instigator." Together with President Danny Marshall, the men work to keep interest going in the antique engines and stay in touch with similar clubs.

The North Central West Virginia Antique Power Association plans to put together one big show annually. This year's show, the Antique Power Show, was held September 2 through 5, at Jackson's Mill as part of the Stonewall Jackson Heritage Arts and Crafts Jubilee.

The group's membership, now around 30, comes from the Clarksburg area as well as Grafton, Buckhannon, New Martinsville and Elizabeth. Townsend's advice to anyone interested in joining the club is, "You've got to hunt an engine — for starters." That first step can be a big challenge, as the antique engines have been located in such unlikely places as creek beds, burned-out buildings and junkyards.

If you are interested in the North Central West Virginia Antique Power Association, write to P.O. Box 1754, Clarksburg, WV 25301, or phone Gene Townsend at (304) 622-4358.

chines that are built are simply junk."

For John Collins, preserving an abandoned gas engine built around 1905 pays tribute to a robust and inventive generation of Americans in a country fertile for creation and practical ideas. He fears that our nation has now lost that vitality. "We're going to have to realize that we're not number one anymore. When these engines were built," he said, motioning to a rare Jaeger engine once used to run a cement mixer, "we could make the claim of being the greatest industrial nation in the world, but not today."

The Oil and Gas Festival offers a chance to remember the time in 1902 when newspaperman L. E. Morning-

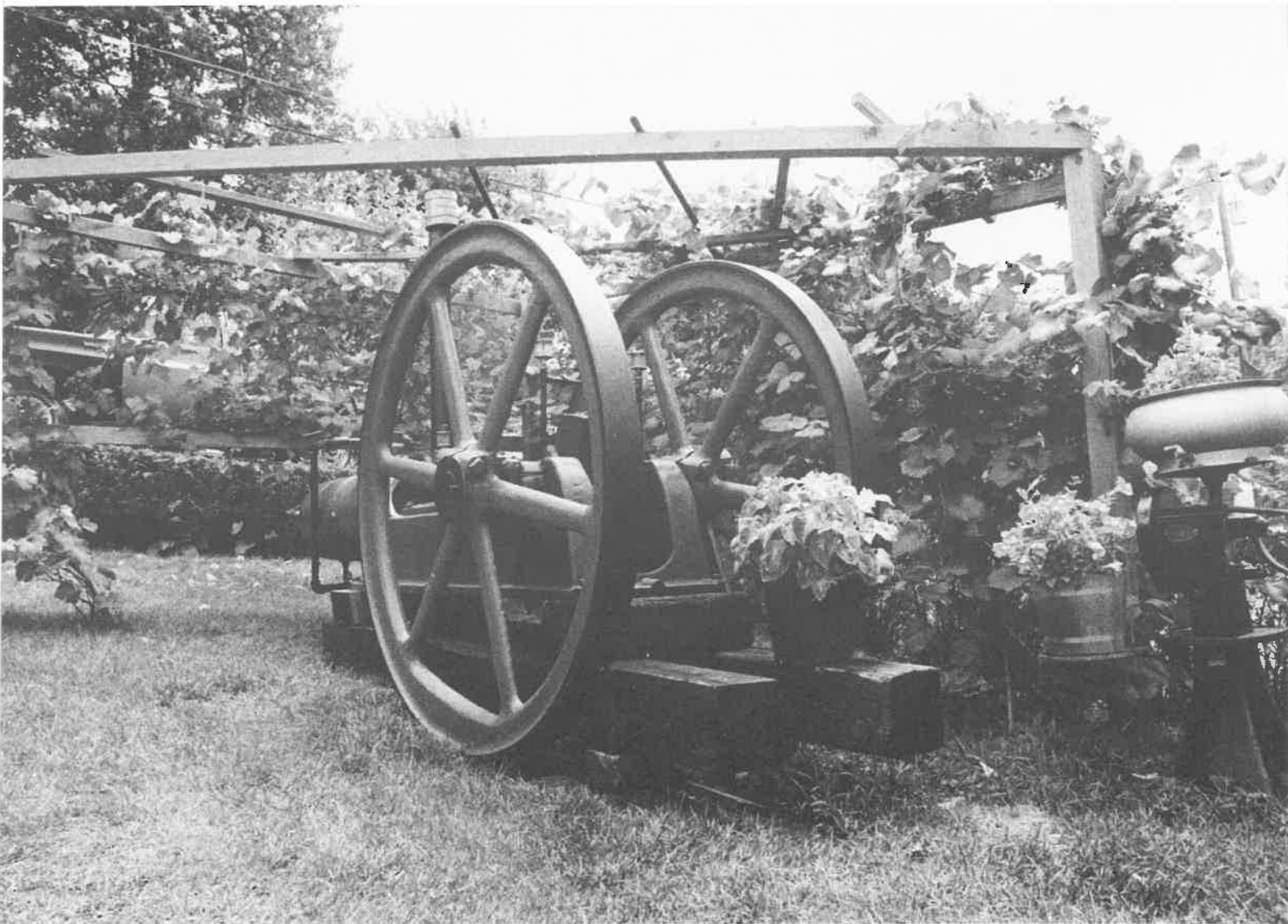
star, a booster if ever there was one, dubbed his town the "Queen of Oil." Morningstar hailed the beginning of the local boom. "It was like the discovery of a gold mine, when in the spring of 1892 Ludwig and Walter, the lucky prospectors, opened the Polecat oil well and money, frantic for investment, flocked into the then unpretentious village." Now Sistersville's future seemed so grand that Morningstar found it "difficult to prophesy."

Someone cranks up one of the big iron relics of those days, a huge Reid down by the riverfront that pumps greasy brown water into a 55-gallon drum. The puffing explosion is a reminder of an exuberant time when

steamboats lined the riverfront from one end of Sistersville to the other and the dollars created from beneath the soil fired the town with excitement. That heyday is gone now, and Sistersville has reverted back to something closer to Morningstar's "unpretentious village." Today, the town has a population of a little more than 2,000.

But at the West Virginia Oil and Gas Festival, when collectors of gas engines from three states have their assorted mechanical wonders all spinning and puffing, something of Sistersville, "Queen of Oil," returns. Then, the echoes of oil fever and gushers can be heard in the conversation of men who remember. ♣

Collectors joke that they are sometimes tempted to turn their engines into planters rather than try to restore them to running order. Bob Fultz did both with his big 20-horsepower oil well engine.



The financial maneuvering of I. T. Mann opened the way for the building of the Gary complex. Mann, a Greenbrier farm boy who made it big, is shown here in his prime. Photographer and date unknown; all photos courtesy Eastern Regional Coal Archives.

Gary

A First-Class Operation

By Stuart McGehee



Highway 103 winds south from Welch into Gary Hollow through some of the most rugged and beautiful land in all the mountains. The narrow road clings to a ledge carved from the ridges. Thick growth chokes both sides, but ruins of what appear to be some vast ancient civilization peer through the brush. Only the most intrepid driver can afford to lift his eyes from the blacktop to examine the bare bones, granite foundations, and rusting carcasses of mining machinery, railroad and company facilities, and dilapidated homes which jut abruptly from the undergrowth. Clearly, something of substance happened here.

"Gary was a first-class mining operation," remembered Jim Shanklin, a retired Bluefield physician whose father was the first company doctor at the McDowell County company town. "It was the best-constructed," and a "lovely place to live," he added enthusiastically. Others whose roots lie in the remote valley agree. "The place was just booming in my day," Ann Kish told a coalfield journalist recently. "In some ways, people used to live better than they do now, even with all our modern conveniences," says Martha Chapman. Her mother raised 14 children at Gary.

They are not merely waxing nostalgic. Their town was a sprawling model community, whose 1902 construction marked the entry of big money — specifically J. P. Morgan's United States Steel Company — into the southern West Virginia coalfields along the Tug River and Sandlick Creek. I. T. Mann of the Bank of Bramwell, Morgan's man in the coalfields, managed to wrench several million dollars and a lease for over 50,000 acres of prime coal-bearing land from the Pennsylvania capitalists who owned the Norfolk & Western Railway. Thereafter, the Gary developers spared no expense. They constructed a huge complex designed to supply coke and high-quality smokeless coal to Morgan's blast furnaces in the Midwest. The town was named for Judge Elbert H. Gary, a Chicago securities attorney who negotiated the 1901 merger between Morgan and steel entrepreneur Andrew Carnegie, and subsequently became the first chairman of the board of the resulting U.S. Steel Company.

The oft-told tale of Gary's genesis bears retelling. In 1900, the region known as the Pocahontas Coalfield was largely owned by the Flat Top

Land Association, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the same Philadelphia investment firm which owned the N&W. The attorneys who controlled the vast lands were one day approached by Isaac T. Mann, a young West Virginia banker who brashly offered to purchase 225,000 acres of prime coalfield for 10 million dollars. The Flat Top lawyers laughed audibly, then facetiously offered an option on the land for \$50,000. The attorneys were shocked when Mann promptly put the \$50,000 cash deposit down, and promised to return with the balance.

The Flat Top associates were even more astonished when he came back with the rest of the money and exercised his option to buy the big tract of land. Ike Mann was as shrewd a businessman as West Virginia has ever produced, and one of the few to stand on nearly an equal footing with the outside investors pouring money into the state. Born in Greenbrier County in 1863, he became by 1889 the first teller of the Bank of Bramwell. His career mirrors the rise and fall of the coal barons who inhabited the fabled "Millionaire's Town" on the Bluestone River in southern Mercer County.

When Mann left the Flat Top offices in 1900 after paying the option deposit, he hurried to the plush New York offices of John Pierpont Morgan. A brief, and for Mann a momentous, seven-minute audience produced a Morgan promise to support the coalfield banker in his bold venture. This gave I. T. Mann the necessary capital to play financial hardball with the Philadelphia investors.

The outmaneuvered Flat Top Land Association was forced to buy back its own lands four months later, as Mann had planned, and its officers were flabbergasted when he announced that the price had doubled to 20 million dollars. The Pennsylvania concern ultimately reacquired its own acreage and in the process was forced to deliver a lease for over 50,000 acres to J. P. Morgan's newly-formed United States Coal & Coke Company, a U.S. Steel affiliate chartered in West Virginia on January 14, 1902.

The princely profit from this neat deal enabled Mann to become a powerful and influential Republican financier in Gilded Age America. President of the Pocahontas Fuel Company and the Bank of Bramwell, his fortune was reputed to be some 20 million dollars, and he purchased stock in banks, mines, and real estate as far afield as Chicago and Washington. In 1918, the Pocahontas Fuel Company named its own model community "Itmann" in his honor. Like many of his ilk, Mann was crushed by the Great Crash in 1929, and died soon after that. His palatial home in Bramwell is a major tourist attraction in this, Bramwell's centennial year.

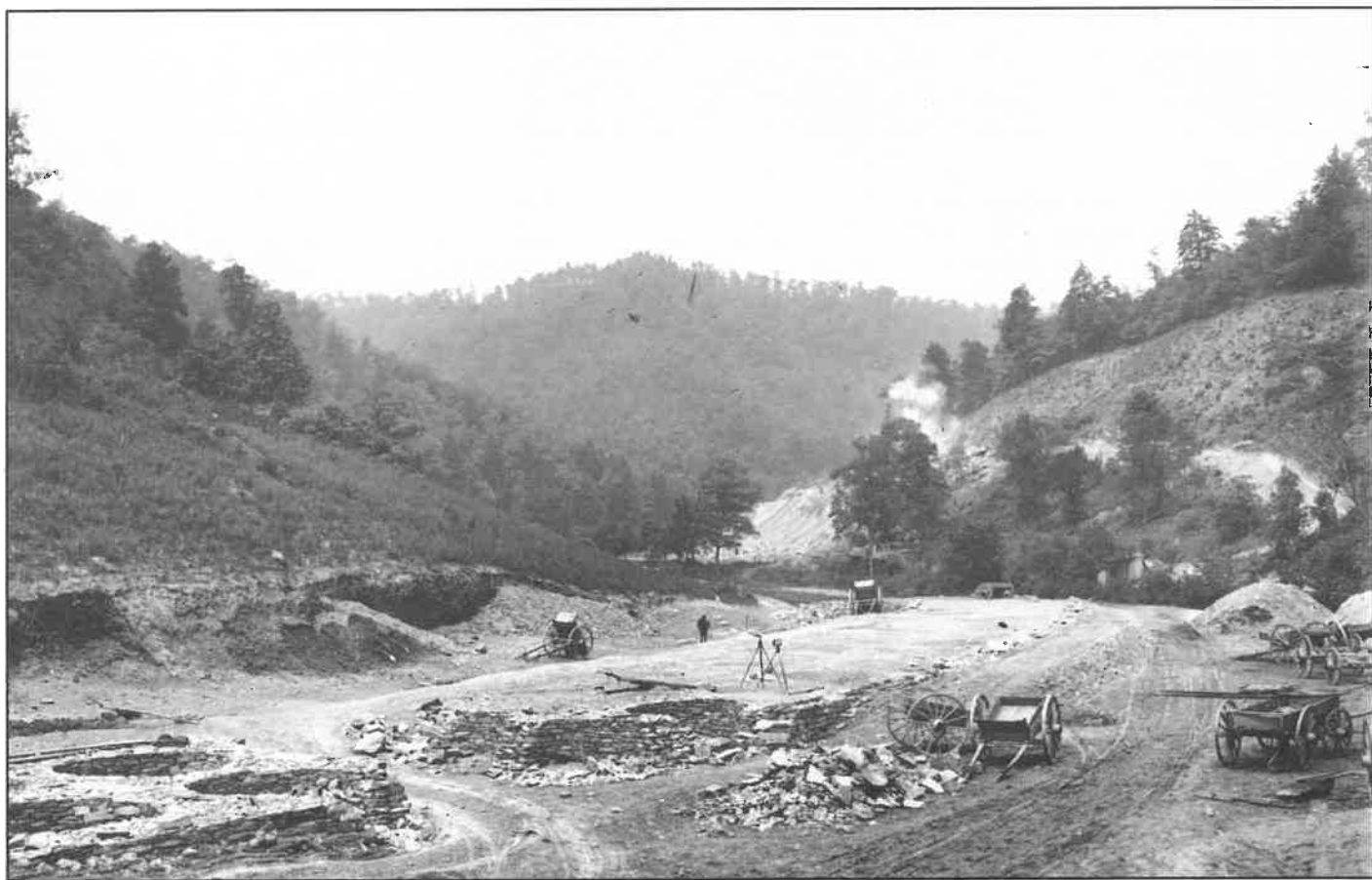
The leaseholding which Mann's wizardry had garnered for the new U.S. Coal & Coke Company was not without its problems. "When Dad first went in," recalled Shanklin of the heavily-forested wilds along the Tug, "it was either you rode the horse up the creekbed, or you rode the train up." Howard Ross says that

when his parents came north from Pulaski, Virginia, "the only house in Gary at the time was a log cabin that sat on the hill where the Main Office sits now. Bears, panthers, bobcats, deer and wolves were still plentiful."

D. R. Beeson was a member of one of the first survey teams to penetrate the thicketed valley. "They asked for good men down there who were single and liked a little adventure, to go to Gary and start in with U.S. Coal," recalled the Pennsylvania-born survey engineer and draftsman. "It looked good to me." Beeson's first accommodations in Gary was a tent beside a stone quarry. "Muleback was the popular transportation in 1902," he laughed. "I had my own private mule in a stable." In June 1904, the N&W completed construction of the 15-mile Tug River Branch south from Welch into the wilderness. By then, Gary was already alive with miners and their families.

The big coal company recruited its

Gary was built from the ground up, in an area formerly devoted to subsistence agriculture. This shows beehive coke oven construction at Number Two works, near the present Alpheus coal preparation plant. Photographer unknown, June 1902.





Colonel Edward O'Toole commanded the Gary operation from 1904 to 1931. He executed the company's paternalistic policies with rigor and discipline. Photographer unknown, March 1925.

labor from two primary sources: Eastern Europe, where the late 19th century witnessed a mass emigration from political instability and religious persecution; and the Deep South, where thousands of black Southerners fled the Jim Crow segregation, disfranchisement, and resulting poverty. The miners' first camps were thrown together of tarpaper shacks, or even huts and tents with thatched roofs and outdoor communal ovens. Some families lived in boxcars on railroad sidings.

Slovak coal loaders, Italian stonemasons, Syrian back peddlers, Alabama coke-drawers, and their dependents poured into the bustling new development. "There were Hungarians, Slavish, and Polish people," recalled Mrs. Kish, "and we all got along pretty good." The first church

in Gary was a plain company house, outfitted with crude benches, where the diverse denominations signed up for alternate hours on worship days. Soon, recalls Gary historian Mike Hornick, Southern blacks who could talk enough Polish to get by were not uncommon along the dirt paths along the Tug, and mules accustomed to Italian commands refused to follow orders from irate English-speaking drivers.

Conditions for this coalfields melting pot were predictably rustic. "We lived in a little three-room frame house, with front and back porches, and toilet facilities in a separate little edifice up on a hill," laughed Howard Ross of Thorpe. "As the tippie boss's family, we enjoyed a certain amount of affluence. It always withstood the elements very well."

Gary did not long remain so rural. Ultimately the company constructed a vast urban center in the wilds of the coalfields. Under the capable supervision of Colonel Edward O'Toole, who ran the operation from 1904 to 1931, and Harry Moses, who directed the company until shortly before World War II, a gigantic coal society sprang up. By 1910, 12 separate "works" — completely self-contained company towns — were linked by hard-surfaced roads and railroad tracks. Each possessed a separate identity and name: Wilcoe, Alpheus, Gary, Thorpe, Leslie, Ream, Elbert, Filbert, Venus, and Anawalt.

"It was a large undertaking," verified Dr. Shanklin. Three thousand beehive coke ovens squatted along the tracks. Tonnage skyrocketed from the four and a half million tons mined between 1904 and 1916, to the incredible 28 million tons shipped during World War II. The Number Three and Number Four Pocahontas seams, which stood a solid and pure five to eight feet high at Gary, provided superior steelmaking fuel for wartime munitions. By 1958, the Gary operation had produced an amazing 200 million tons of coal in 54 years of production.

The company managed its operations with care. First among the "Gary Principles," the official guiding philosophy of U.S. Coal & Coke was, "When a thing is done right, it will ultimately and permanently succeed." In 1923, when the United States Coal Commission examined every coal camp in America to report on conditions, an inspector visited the works at Gary, where 1,800 families then made their homes. "There are good fences in front of most of the houses," he noted, adding, "the paint is nice and fresh." The sanitary arrangements also met the approval of the thorough inspector. "No odors," he reported of the outdoor privies, "the company furnishes lime, and has report on conditions every month; cleaned as often as needed." Supposedly the first indoor plumbing in coal mining towns in America was installed at Gary.

The government inspector glowed with pleasure over Gary's weekly garbage collection, electric street lights, and company dentists, nurses, and doctors like Shanklin's father,



Above: Like many companies, U.S. Coal & Coke offered prizes for the best-kept houses and lots. Italian coal loader F. Ferdinando of Number 10 works won second place for gardening in 1915. Photographer unknown.

Below: Another lush Gary landscape. The woman, presumably the gardener, remains unidentified. Photographer and date unknown.

who regularly made house calls up and down the line. For years Gary's safety record was among the best in the coalfields, reflecting another of the Principles: "Safety, the first consideration." In his final report, on file at the National Archives in Washington, the Coal Commission examiner gave nearly 90 out of a possible 100 points, far and away the highest total for any company town in the southern West Virginia coalfields.

By the 1940's, close to 15,000 people inhabited the busy world of Gary. "There were houses and shanties up every hollow and clinging to every hillside," recalled Howard Ross. Residents enjoyed 27 churches, 10 company and three independent stores, three restaurants, nine elementary and two high schools, clubhouses and athletic fields, a bowling alley, tennis courts, skating rink, barber-shop, pool hall, country club, bakery, and movie theatre. U.S. Coal & Coke maintained a complete dairy in nearby Tazewell County, Virginia, to supply fresh eggs, butter, cheese, and milk to the miners and their families.

Much of the construction in Gary was of the highest possible quality, built by skilled Italian stonemasons with native West Virginia hardrock. Upkeep was a prime goal. The com-

pany sponsored annual contests and prizes for the best-kept houses and most productive gardens, bringing in judges from WVU and Ohio State University. "The company was real proud of its homes, and it wanted the miners to be proud, too," recollected one former employee. "Practically every family had a garden near the house in summertime," said Ross, "and a field of hilltop corn back up in one of the hollows."

U.S. Coal offered its workers shares of stock as part of their wages, and

many miners took advantage of the opportunity. The company reasoned that workers with a stake in the system would work more diligently. Such paternalism paid off in morale, pride, and community spirit. Gary residents rarely recall hostility toward their employer. Another of the Gary Principles stated: "No industry can permanently succeed that does not treat its employees equitably and humanely."

The ethnic mix in Gary produced a unique society. The diverse immi-





Deterioration set in with the decline of mining in Gary Hollow. This recent photograph shows the former clubhouse at Elbert. Photo by William Archer.

grant groups each naturally strove to maintain as much of their native culture as they could, and the remote isolation of the works created a perfect environment for foreign miners to practice their ancestral folk culture. Churches taught the language of the Old Country to children, and ethnic assistance societies — the popular lodges — bred close-knit neighborhoods bound by ties of language, family, religion, and national origin.

Company foremen learned to curse fluently in as many as five tongues, while exasperated scrip clerks, faced with baffling strings of consonants, often Americanized the names of immigrant mining families. Hornick recalls that his father's name was really "Hornyack," and "Drosytch" became "Drosick" for the ease of the company paymaster. Others, willing or not, found themselves listed as merely "Smith" or "Jones" on company records. The lovely cemeteries throughout Gary are sprinkled with tombstones bearing Greek Orthodox prayers and unpronounceable names of long-passed coal miners. Some residents still understand spoken Slavish, and the church at Number Three works proudly carries an Orthodox onion dome instead of a steeple, symbolic of the persistent pride of generations of Gary families.

Recreational opportunities in Gary

surpassed those of any town in the coalfields. Beeson remembered dances in the schoolhouse with a band imported from Columbus, Ohio, and girls brought in from Bluefield on the N&W. Colonel O'Toole was proud of his baseball club, and not above slipping in a big-league

pitcher from New York for a high-stakes series with a neighboring camp. Often, entire communities rode the train down the main line for a Sunday afternoon picnic and doubleheader with a rival town's nine, such as L. E. Tierney's perennially tough Powhatan team. The strictly segregated black community may have seen the best baseball, however, as Negro League superstars Satchel Paige and Josh Gibson barnstormed into the coalfields.

"Winter and summer I loved to ramble in the woods that surrounded our house," mused Ross of his youth in Gary. Shanklin concurred, citing Sunday hikes, mountain climbing, and swimming as youthful pastimes. "Next to Christmas, the Fourth of July was one of the biggest days at our house, and this held true for all the other people," said Ross.

Martha Chapman summed up perfectly the memories of many. "Even though we may have not had anything fancy, what we had to eat was a lot better for us than the food we eat now. You did your work, but you weren't wearing out your nerves chasing that big money the way everybody is today." Jim Shanklin agreed wistfully, "Gary was a nice place to live." ♦

Generations of Gary people lived their entire lives there. These youngsters are headed to school at Number Three works, near the present IGA store. Photographer and date unknown.





Survey and engineering crews were first on the scene at what became Gary. The U.S. Coal & Coke Company was chartered in January 1902, and the field camp shown here was well-established by June. "They asked for good men who were single and liked a little adventure," one of the early surveyors recalled. Photographer unknown; all photos courtesy Eastern Regional Coal Archives.

Portraits of Gary

Photographs from the Mike Hornick Collection

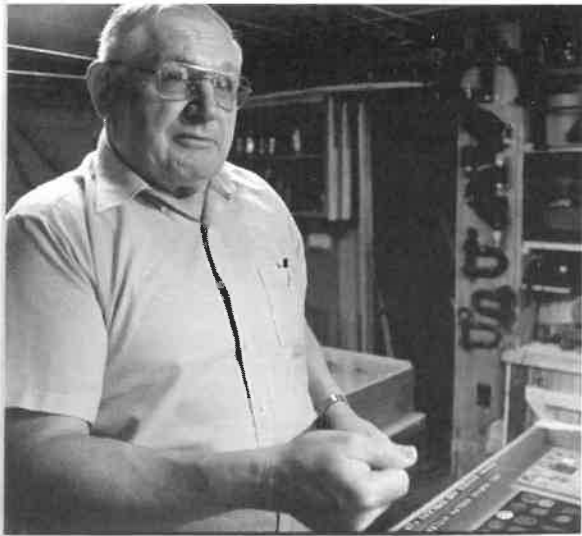
In 1950, McDowell County boasted 20,000 full-time coal miners; by 1985 there were fewer than 3,000. U.S. Steel pulled out of Gary in 1986, after first overseeing the 1971 incorporation of the town and the sale of its houses. With fewer than 2,000 residents today, Gary is but a shadow of its former glory, although ruins nearly as stark and beautiful as those of the Mediterranean dot its abandoned hollows.

Fortunately, the company kept meticulous records, and even more fortuitously, a former Gary electrical engineer named Mike Hornick has accumulated an enormous store of Gary's rich and colorful heritage. "I've always been interested in history," recalls Hornick, who first started at Number Seven in Elbert in 1940. Hornick's father was a Russian immigrant who mined coal at Elkhorn, and kept a cramped diary in a

language no one today can easily decipher. After a three-year stint in the Army during World War II, Hornick returned to Gary Hollow, ultimately taking an engineering degree from VPI. At his retirement the senior electrical engineer at Gary, Hornick has spent a lifetime seeking to preserve and collect his town's unique history.

The photographs on these pages come from over 2,000 glass plate negatives taken by the company during the construction of the Gary complex. Hornick recently loaned them for duplication to the Eastern Regional Coal Archives in the public library in Bluefield. Through his generosity and foresight, generations of West Virginians will know the colossal coal camp for what it once was. Perhaps they can also gain a better appreciation of the remarkable history of coal mining in West Virginia.

— Stuart McGehee



Mike Hornick (above left), an engineer by training and an historian by choice, made sure that the very extensive photographic record of Gary survived. Through his efforts, more than 2,000 glass plate negatives of early U.S. Coal & Coke operations are preserved at the Eastern Regional Coal Archives at Bluefield's Craft Memorial Library.

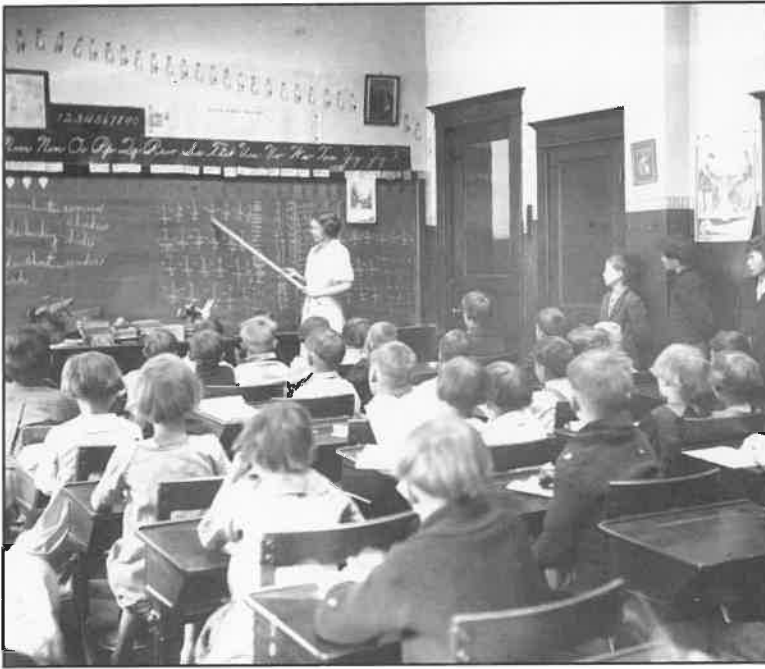


Construction at the various Gary works was better than that at other coal company towns, but most houses were still built in the same

A wide variety of industrial structures was built by U.S. Coal & Coke. The photo at left shows the construction of the tippie at Number Six works, March 1906. Coal would enter across the top, to be cleaned and graded as it passed through to railroad cars which would enter the two bays below. Photographer unknown.

Work was hard, above ground or below. The men at bottom left are drawing coke from a huge experimental oven at Number Eight works. Coke, the nearly pure carbon left after burning coal in the absence of oxygen, is a critical ingredient in steel making. Photographer and date unknown.

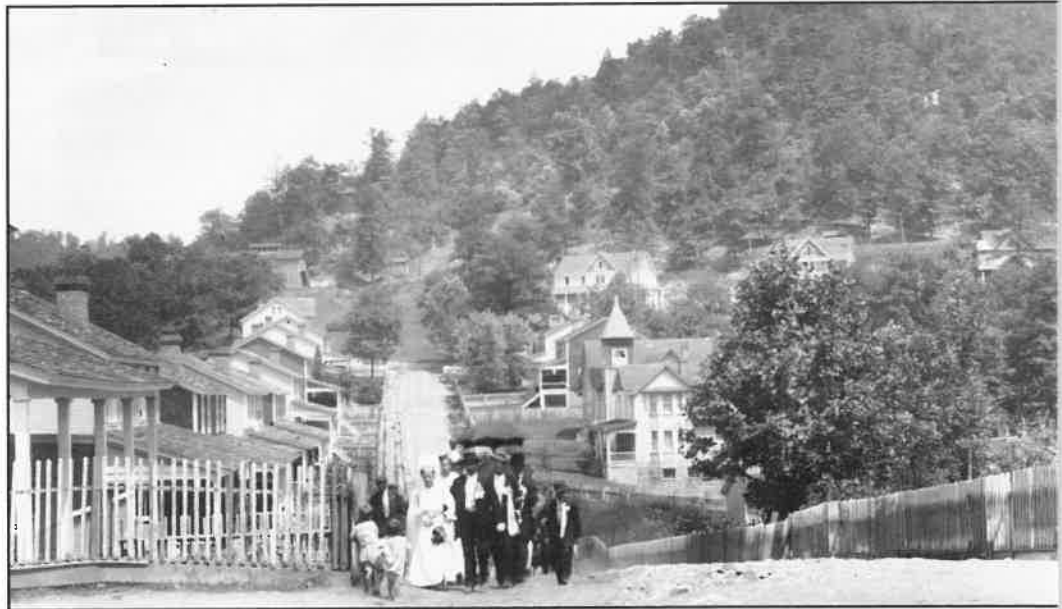




It was possible to receive a complete primary and secondary education within the Gary complex. Students at above left study arithmetic in one of nine elementary schools in March 1925. The photograph at above right shows the 1922 "Coal Diggers" basketball team of Gary High School. Photographers unknown.



Residents remember Gary as a good place, a community of tranquil day-to-day living as well as the occasional celebration. The wedding party at right heads up Church Street at Number Three works. Photographer and date unknown.



Gary was a thoroughly planned community. Our final view (bottom) shows Number Three works, the town of Gary proper. Churches and other important structures occupy central locations, flanked by residential blocks. Three fine houses for top management overlook the town from behind. Photographer and date unknown.



The company provided emergency and medical services throughout its empire. Gary's "Ambulance No. 1," at left, was one of the first motor ambulances in McDowell County. Photographer and date unknown.



"A Cover for the Nation"

Ella Martin's Blue Eagle Quilt

By Michael M. Meador
Photographs by Michael Keller

Every quilt has a story. The story tells of the quilt's maker, what that person was like, the circumstances under which the work was done, to whom the quilt was presented, and even who slept under it. Each quilt, however humble, has a personality of its own, made up of more than just cloth and pattern.

This is the story of a quilt with a character and history that sets it apart from most, a quilt that was crafted in the depths of the Great Depression by a West Virginia coal miner's wife and presented to the president of the United States, Franklin Roosevelt. A quilt which was lost for 30 years after Roosevelt's death and which after a series of serendipitous events has recently returned home to West Virginia. This is the story of a truly great quilt, artistically and in its own history, a story pieced together in almost the same fashion as the quilt itself.

In 1933, the United States was in the third year of the Great Depression. Unemployment was widespread and hopelessness and despair had settled on the country. For many Americans, the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 offered the only hope of escape from the downward economic spiral. Shortly after taking office in 1933, FDR pushed through Congress his famous "Hundred Days" legislation, a quick series of laws designed to turn around the worst effects of the Depression. One of these was the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, establishing the National Recovery Administration. The NRA allowed industries to collaborate for what amounted to price fixing and the regulation of competition. In exchange, labor was

allowed to organize freely and all parties pledged to work for national recovery.

Any business that signed on to the appropriate industry code was permitted to use the NRA's famous blue eagle logo on its advertising and publicity to show that it was conforming to the president's program. This fierce bird, grasping the cog wheel of progress in one talon and a bolt of lightning in the other, quickly became the symbol of America's recovery from the Depression. The design was displayed in store windows throughout the country, often accompanied by the slogan, "We Do Our Part." The NRA eagle brought hope to a country which had been driven to its knees.

The West Virginia coalfields were particularly hard hit by the Depression. Thousands of miners were out of work and had no place to look for employment. Roosevelt, with his cocky grin and upbeat New Deal programs, inspired hope of recovery among many West Virginia working men and their families. The esteem that they felt for the aristocratic New Yorker is evidenced by portraits still prominently displayed in homes throughout the Mountain State.

Esteem was expressed in other ways as well. In November of 1933, Ella Lancaster Martin, a Mercer County miner's wife, sent a letter to President Roosevelt. "Dear Sir," she wrote, "I have just finished a beautiful quilt, portraying the Blue Eagle and N.R.A. as a cover for the nation.

"Out of appreciation of the National Recovery Act, and what it means to the people, and as an expression of confidence in the N.R.A.

I wish to send this quilt as a present to you.

"Since it has meant a real sacrifice to me both in time and means to make the quilt, I want to know just how to send it so as to be sure you will get it."

Mrs. Martin did not exaggerate when she spoke of sacrifice. The early Depression years had hit the Martin family hard. "We moved a lot," daughter Betty Lancaster recalled in a recent newspaper story. "About 1931 my sister, Mary Lou, became ill with scarlet fever and Lorraine got the same bug. Lorraine died at age 12. After that, father lost his job and everyone was so poor. We moved to Montcalm with my father's mother because we had no place else to go."

Two weeks after writing her letter, Mrs. Martin heard from Roosevelt's private secretary, M. A. LeHand. "The President has received your letter of November twenty-seventh and requests me to thank you heartily for your courtesy. I would suggest that the quilt be sent to the President at the White House, Washington, D.C."

Mrs. Martin had also solicited the advice of her congressman, Representative John Kee of the old Fifth District, about presenting her gift to the president. Her original letter to Kee and his reply unfortunately have not been preserved. She wrote to Kee again after hearing from LeHand. This December 13, 1933, letter speaks eloquently of hard times in the coalfields.

"I am a woman of the common people. The wife of a coal tippie mechanic, the mother of three children, a son seventeen years old, and



Mary Lou Baker and Betty Lancaster stand by their mother's handiwork. Mercer County Extension Agent Margaret Meador, below, tracked down the Martin descendants, now living out of state.



two daughters, ages twelve and eight," Mrs. Martin wrote.

"Like so many worthy people of our good state and country my family has struggled through the depression but still chained with debt.

"If in any way you will be so kind as to convey the idea to Mr. Roosevelt that along with the broader meaning of the quilt, it means real sacrifice from the hands of the donor, I shall be very grateful to you, and may in some way in a small degree be able to return the favor."

On the same day that Mrs. Martin wrote Congressman Kee, she sent her blue eagle quilt off to Washington. "I remember them wrapping it in brown paper and mailing it to the White House," Betty Lancaster says. Mrs. Martin sent the following cover letter to President Roosevelt. In it she describes the quilt and explains her unique design.

Montcalm, Mercer Co. W.Va,
Dec 13 1933

Chief Executive
Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir: I am sending you today

The Short Flight of the Blue Eagle

In 1932 the number of unemployed Americans stood somewhere between 12 and 15 million, one out of every four workers. Small businesses, factories and banks were closing. Unable to make mortgage payments, farmers and workers were losing their homes.

On March 4, 1933, Franklin Roosevelt became president, proposing a "New Deal" as his answer to the Great Depression. At his urging, Congress rushed through a series of dramatic new laws during a special session known as the Hundred Days.

One of the most significant of the new laws was the National Industrial Recovery Act. Passed in June 1933, the NIRA created the National Recovery Administration. The NRA was responsible for the preparation and enforcement of codes of fair competition within key industries. Representatives of industrial firms wrote codes addressing quality standards and working conditions. They set minimum wages and maximum hours and fixed prices.

In return for permission to set prices and conditions, business accepted the famous section 7a of the NIRA. The most long-lasting component of the NIRA, it stated that "Employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and shall be free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers."

The effects for West Virginia were profound, particularly in the coal industry. Miners and mine operators had fought bitterly during the coal wars of the 'teens and '20's. Generally speaking, labor lost and management won. Section 7a reversed that. Within a few weeks the West Virginia coal industry went from nonunion to union. As historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., wrote, an "army of organizers" invaded the coalfields. "They carried the gospel of

unionism into Kentucky, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Illinois, blaring their message on sound trucks, dispensing free beer in the summer sun."

General Hugh S. Johnson was the first head of the NRA and the creator of its bold blue eagle. The general sketched a figure patterned after an old Indian ideograph. It was retouched by a professional and eventually became the official NRA symbol, bearing the legend "We Do Our Part." Johnson saw his eagle as a powerful rallying point. "When every American Housewife understands that the Blue Eagle on everything that she permits to come into her home is a symbol of its restoration to security," he said, "may God have mercy on the man or group of men who attempt to trifle with this bird."

Nonetheless, the blue eagle's flight was to be a short one. The brash general created enemies in his fervor for the NRA. Donald Richberg, who had assisted in drafting the original act, thought

Johnson was pushing too hard. "The war on the Depression cannot be won by a single cavalry charge," he stated. Roosevelt backed Richberg, announcing the general's resignation in 1934 and appointing Richberg as his successor.

In 1935, the Supreme Court ruled that the National Industrial Recovery Act was unconstitutional, arguing that the law delegated too much legislative power to the president and involved the federal government in the internal trade within states. The NRA fell when its parent act was declared unconstitutional, although section 7a survived as part of the National Labor Relations Act.

Ella Martin was one "American Housewife" who took the call of Johnson's blue eagle to heart. She made her quilt to honor the National Recovery Administration, its popular symbol, and the president who tried to save a nation. We remember her as a woman who did her part.

—Debby Sonis Jackson



the N.R.A. quilt of which I wrote you recently.

Please accept this quilt with my best wishes for the policies for which it stands.

I believe this to be the first quilt of this kind to have been made. You will

much and hope it will convey to you the confidence, in you, that is felt by the people in the West Virginia coal fields.

Very Sincerely Yours
Mrs. Ella L Martin

January 15, 1934

My dear Mr. Kee:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of January fourth addressed to Mr. Howe, enclosing one addressed to you by Mrs. Ella Martin of Montcalm, West Virginia, in reference to a quilt which she sent the President some time ago.

In view of the sacrifice entailed in making and sending this quilt to the President, as indicated in Mrs. Martin's letter to you, the President does not feel that he could retain it.

I am therefore returning the quilt to you with the request that you send it on to Mrs. Martin and explain to her that the President is reluctant to accept gifts of considerable intrinsic value.

Very sincerely yours,
M. A. LeHand
Private Secretary

What transpired after Congressman Kee received LeHand's letter and informed Mrs. Martin of it is uncertain. Although correspondence has not been located, perhaps Kee again contacted the White House in behalf of Mrs. Martin. Something like this must have happened, because in mid-January she received the following from Roosevelt:

January 18, 1934

My dear Mrs. Martin:

I received your letter of December thirteenth and want to thank you heartily for the beautiful quilt which you were good enough to send me some time ago as a present and as an expression of confidence in the National Recovery Administration. I am pleased to accept this fine piece of work made by your own hands and I appreciate the spirit which prompted you to present it to me.

Very sincerely yours,
Franklin D. Roosevelt

Roosevelt's correspondence with Mrs. Martin was the last that she or her family heard of the blue eagle quilt. The following years would bring radical changes to the nation. The National Recovery Administra-

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

January 18, 1934

My dear Mrs. Martin:

I received your letter of December thirteenth and want to thank you heartily for the beautiful quilt which you were good enough to send me some time ago as a present and as an expression of confidence in the National Recovery Administration.

I am pleased to accept this fine piece of work made by your own hands and I appreciate the spirit which prompted you to present it to me.

Very sincerely yours,



Mrs. Ella L. Martin,
Mont Calm,
Mercer County,
West Virginia.

President Roosevelt accepted the quilt after negotiations involving his private secretaries and Mrs. Martin's Congressman. Roosevelt wrote on January 18, 1934, "to thank you heartily for the beautiful quilt."

find it a "cover for the nation." Each state is shown as being under the Blue Eagle. I have grouped the states as they enter the constitution. Each "blue eagle" was cut from plain blue cloth, and each "N.R.A." was cut from red, and sewed on the white block, by hand.

I enjoyed making the quilt very

Congressman Kee, on January 4, wrote to another Roosevelt secretary, Louis McHenry Howe, on Mrs. Martin's behalf. He enclosed the letter she had written to him on December 13. The response from the White House was surely something other than what he and Ella Martin expected.



Above: Ella Lancaster stands at center rear, with friend's hand on shoulder, in this group portrait from Weyanoke School. Ella was about 15 at the time. Photographer unknown, about 1913.

Below: Ella's descendants proudly gathered in Charleston when the blue eagle quilt was presented to the State Museum. Great-grandson Ray Watson holds down the front row, while daughters Betty Lancaster and Mary Lou Baker stand at right, with John Baker and Eugene Evans between them.





It belongs to West Virginia now: Mary Ann Shindle signs the quilt over to the State Museum while Culture and History Commissioner Norman Fagan stands by. Mrs. Shindle made her generous gift during the Cultural Center's annual quilt show.

tion was declared unconstitutional by a conservative Supreme Court in 1935; World War II, which the United States entered in December 1941, effectively ended the Depression; and FDR died in 1945 at Warm Springs, Georgia.

Ella Martin's quilt on the death of President Roosevelt was presented by Mrs. Roosevelt to the chief of mail at the White House. In 1976, this woman placed the quilt for sale in a consignment shop at Carl Vinson Hall, a military retirement home in McLean, Virginia. Here it was purchased by Mary Ann Shindle, a quilt collector from Vienna, Virginia. "I think I got it for \$68," she recently recalled for a newspaper reporter.

Mrs. Shindle was told at the time of purchase only that the quilt had been given to President Roosevelt during the Depression. Fortunately, Ella Martin had embroidered her name and the date the quilt was completed on the underside of her work. With this information, Mrs. Shindle set out to discover what she

could about the history of the quilt and its maker, Ella Martin.

In the summer of 1987 Mrs. Shindle visited the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York, to determine if there was any information about the quilt in the library's files. Her inquiries produced the original correspondence between Mrs. Martin, President Roosevelt and Congressman Kee. This information told Mrs. Shindle about the circumstances under which the quilt was made, but she was still curious to know about Ella Martin. What was she like, were her children still living, and what had happened to her after the final correspondence with Franklin Roosevelt?

The answers to Mrs. Shindle's questions came through a rather curious set of circumstances. Montcalm, where Ella Martin was living when the quilt was created, is located in Mercer County. Mary Ann Shindle teaches school in Vienna, Virginia, with Henry Friedl, a native of Athens, West Virginia, also in Mercer County.

Ella Martin

An Uncommon Woman of the People

Ella Sarah Lancaster was born February 27, 1898, near Meadows of Dan, Virginia. Shortly after her birth she moved with her parents, Sally Harrel Lancaster and Garland Lancaster, to Mercer County, where her father took a job as a coal miner. The family's move was part of a wave of workers surging into the Southern West Virginia coalfields at the turn of the century.

Ella attended a one-room school at Weyanoke, near present Matoaka, in Mercer County. In 1915, at the age of 17, she married Charles William Martin. Charles had been born in 1888 at Hinton, to parents originally from the Blacksburg, Virginia, area. Ella

and Charles were married in Princeton on Christmas Eve, and soon set up housekeeping at Weyanoke. Charles worked as a stonemason, bricklayer, mechanic and tippie foreman for the mines.

The couple's first child, Garland Eugene, was born in November of 1916, followed by a daughter, Ennis Lorraine, two years later. Daughters Elizabeth and Mary Lula were born in 1921 and 1925, respectively. In 1930 Ennis Lorraine died of what was probably a streptococcus infection.

The young family lived in Matoaka until around 1932, when they were forced to move in with Mr. Martin's mother in nearby Montcalm. As

daughter Mary Lou Baker recalls, "My father was out of work and we had to move in with Dad's mother. Times were tough and we didn't have anyplace else to go."

It was while the Martins were living in Montcalm that Ella completed the quilt for the newly-elected president.

"The idea to make the NRA quilt for President Roosevelt no doubt came from my father," figures Ella's daughter, Betty Lancaster. "My father was a staunch Democrat and my mother was a Republican. Politics was the only thing I can remember them disagreeing over. He claimed she killed his vote. I rarely saw him pouting at my mother, but when he did it was usually on Election Day.

"Once my mother decided to make the quilt for the president it became more important than anything else. She bought all new cotton material, an extravagance considering the times," continues Betty. "I remember my mother making the blocks. Nobody could help her, not even her mother-in-law. She did let her make some blocks but none of them ever made it into the finished quilt."

Mrs. Shindle informed Henry that she was seeking information about the maker of the NRA quilt. He contacted his mother, Sally Friedl, in Athens, asking her to see if Mrs. Martin's family was still living in Mercer County. Mrs. Friedl, aware that the Mercer County Extension Homemakers were sponsoring a quilt show in conjunction with the county's 150th birthday last year, contacted Margaret Meador, WVU extension agent in Mercer County, to see about having the quilt displayed at the show in October 1987.

The extension agent got in touch with the Shindles, who agreed to bring the quilt to Bluefield for display. With only six weeks remaining before the show, Mrs. Meador also began to search for the Martin family. The first week was spent in contacting persons now living in the Montcalm area without any results, so the agent decided to make a plea for help in her weekly column in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*.

Once the quilt was mailed to the president and his letter of appreciation was received, the family would not hear of it again for nearly 45 years.

Meanwhile, the Martin family lived with Grandmother Martin for about two years and then moved back to the Matoaka area when work became available there. Around the time of the Second World War, the Martins moved to Radford, Virginia, where Charles found work at the Hercules Powder Plant, now known as the Radford Arsenal. Son Garland never recovered from injuries received during the war. He died in October of 1945. After the war the couple lived in Radford until Charles's death in 1953.

Following the death of her husband, Ella eventually moved to St. Petersburg, Florida, to be near her daughter, Mary Lou, who was living there. Ella worked for a time as a seamstress and died in a nursing home in St. Petersburg in 1975. She was buried in Radford.

Ella Martin was a multit talented individual with many outstanding accomplishments. She was a skilled seamstress and finished several

At this point, Aubrey Bailey, a retired principal of Montcalm, took up the search for Ella Martin, supplying Mrs. Meador with numerous lines of inquiry. The trail of contacts included Mrs. Dewey Lacy, who directed inquirers to her niece, Elizabeth Poin-dexter of Roanoke, Virginia. The latter remembered the quilt well and told of Ella Martin's death, but wasn't sure where the two surviving daughters were. She put Mrs. Meador in touch with Ella's sister-in-law, Blanche Stevens of Bluefield, who suggested she call Ella's nephew, Earl Lancaster in Princeton. Mr. Lancaster's son, James, gave her the telephone number of the older of the Martin daughters, Betty Lancaster, now living in Clermont, Florida.

With less than two days remaining before the quilt show, the search was over. When Betty Lancaster was informed of the discovery of the blue eagle quilt, she said that she and her sister, Mary Lou Baker, now living in St. Petersburg, had often wondered what had happened after it left their

mother's hands. She promised that if it were at all possible, she and Mary Lou would fly to Bluefield for the show.

When they got there, they found other relatives from Virginia and Pennsylvania, as well as many old friends, for by now the publicity about the quilt had reawakened old memories of the Martins in the Montcalm and Matoaka communities. During the two days of the show a joyous, continuing reunion was held in that corner of the Brushfork Armory where the bright NRA quilt was on exhibit.

So impressed were Warren and Mary Ann Shindle by the emotions engendered in those who came to view the quilt that they expressed the feeling that it should stay in West Virginia. As Mary Ann said, "The quilt belongs to the West Virginia people." As a result of their generosity, Ella Martin's gift to the president now has a permanent home in the West Virginia State Museum at the Cultural Center in Charleston. ♣

quilts. She was active in her church and participated in theatrical events in the church and community. She also wrote poetry, and her daughters remember her reciting favorite poems from memory. She wrote the words and music to a beautiful Christmas hymn, "Christmas Carol," which has been published.

"She never let anything get her down," remembers Betty. "Whenever she was working around the house you could always hear her singing hymns at the top of her voice."

Mary Lou, when asked to recall what she could about Ella Martin making the quilt for President Roosevelt, summed up her talented mother: "I was only eight years old when Momma made the quilt for the president but I can remember everybody being excited about it. This type of thing was not unusual for my mother. She was always doing something exciting. She wasn't a person that nothing happened to."

Although Ella Martin spoke of herself in the letter to President Roosevelt as "a woman of the common people," it is agreed by all who knew her that she was an uncommon woman.

— Michael M. Meador



Ella Martin was a Mercer County miner's wife struggling to bring her family through the Depression when she took time out to sew her "cover for the nation." This portrait was made several years later. Photographer unknown, about 1941.



For Paul and Frances Custer, the Great Depression was the time to begin a family. Here they pose with their firstborn, Catherine, in 1934. Photographer unknown.

I was 21 in the fall of 1929, when the stock market fell. I lived in a very nice new four-room house with a full basement and running water in the sink, but no bathroom. The rent was \$18 a month. It was located about three miles from the town of Clarksburg in a small farming area.

I was teaching when Paul Custer and I married on December 15, 1928, but as was the custom at that time I was not rehired after marriage. The Depression set in gradually. At first a few plants shut down, but within a few years all the factories and plants were closed.

My husband was working in the office of a window glass plant which closed early in 1930. He was very fortunate. Within two weeks he became an employee of the Hope Natural Gas Company, from which he retired in 1969. He was hired for \$125 a month and worked five and a half days a week. Soon his wage was cut to \$104, and he worked five years before it was restored to the original wage. The company put many employees on a three-day week and let go all but three of the men with less than five years' service. My husband was one of those kept.

My father also worked for the Hope, as a rig builder. His work was cut to three days a week. When he retired in 1937, he received a small pension from the company and \$22 a month from the new Social Security program. My mother was paid \$11 by Social Security. She was rich!

My husband's parents had a dairy farm and sold milk to a relative, who

After the Fall of '29

A Clarksburger Recalls the Great Depression

Reminiscences by Frances Upton Custer
Photographs by Greg Clark

Today, Mrs. Custer treasures memories of the 1930's. Her family was fortunate not to suffer any real privation, she says.

in turn sold it to the local hospital. The relative had financial trouble and owed my father-in-law for a two years' supply when he took bankruptcy. He never did pay my father-in-law. One sister-in-law worked in an office for \$60 a month and another one worked in a store from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., six days a week, to earn \$35 a month. By all contributing, they managed. They lived as most others did at the time, by not spending for anything that was not a necessity.

Women were paid a dollar a day for doing housework and many unskilled men were paid the same. Those employed by large companies who were skilled and experienced made more. But many factories closed and all salaries were cut.

The biggest changes I noticed when the Depression began were the people out of work, the fall in prices, and the scarcity of money. My family did not have money in a bank that failed. In fact, none of us had much money at all. My father had bought Standard Oil stock through his company, accumulating a few shares prior to the Great Depression.

I can't say that my life-style changed, for like most people at the time we always had made a little money go as far as possible. I was one of five children, and my father had to pay his own expenses when working. If his work took him away for the night, he paid his own lodging. This took a large part of what he earned. We had little money, but somehow my brother and younger sister earned college degrees and the rest of us got a year or two of college. We had a school teacher board with us, which helped. We all got degrees in later years. My younger sister was in college during the Depression.

People just did not have much money. Good quality, well-styled cotton dresses could be bought for \$1.98 and \$2.98, but I made my own. Best quality material could be bought for three yards for 59 cents. And the stores couldn't sell it at that price. People just didn't have the money.

None of my family lost their cars or

houses, but many people did move in with relatives.

I cannot say that the Depression changed my basic values, except that the inclination to "eat it up, wear it out, do without" was strengthened. We were fortunate that we did not have relatives to support. Many of our friends and neighbors regularly sent money to relatives and had sons and daughters who lived in cities return home. I had two cousins who were school teachers. One was dismissed when the rule was made that

only one in a family could be hired. The one who kept her job supported two sisters and helped a brother and his family. I think families and neighborhoods were much closer at that time.

Everything was incredibly cheap, but if one did not have a job or money, the cost made no difference. The ones I knew who were without work were helped by families and made savings, if any, go as far as possible. My cousin who had worked for a steel mill was without work for





Fatherhood meant a \$12 raise for Paul Custer. That brought his Hope Natural Gas wages up to \$116 a month. Photographer unknown, 1934.

some time. He moved his family to California, found work, and lived out his life there. I did not know any fathers who deserted their families.

Farmers had a hard time because taxes were high, although lowered in West Virginia after 1932. Grain and other livestock feed were high in comparison to prices received when products were sold by the farmers. There were a number of years when the rainfall was below normal and crops were poor. Many farmers lost their land.

I think the main foods eaten by most people were dried beans, potatoes, and bread. We raised large gardens and canned all the surplus vegetables. We also canned fruits. My husband's father would butcher two hogs in the fall. We never bought ready-made or prepared desserts or soft drinks for home consumption, or snacks of any kind except popcorn. Unbelievable as it seems, I remember menus published by the government that allowed 20 cents a day a person. That is about what we spent. I can't

say that people I know skipped meals, but many ate little. I remember reading about the soup kitchens and bread lines, but never saw either.

I had a child born in 1934 and one in 1936. Like many others, I used evaporated or whole milk for the formula and cooked all my own cereals and vegetables. We washed the diapers, and most mothers made their children's clothing. Then, as now, much depended on the attitude of the parents. I knew one mother who was left with four boys when her husband died. She raised them without the help we have today. It must have been difficult, but the boys all turned out well.

For recreation we read, listened to the radio, visited with friends and had them visit us, and played games. And the movies were important. We often went in time to get in on the cheaper afternoon fare. We saw many of the big pictures, but did not attend as regularly as many of our friends and neighbors. While we did not go regularly to "bank night," many friends did. One saw one's acquaintances, a movie, and had a chance to win money at bank night. Bank night lasted a couple of years, I would say. Our favorite radio programs were "Lowell Thomas," "Showboat," "Amos 'n' Andy," and "Fibber McGee and Molly."

Going for a car ride was perhaps the leading recreation. Gas was cheap, and one could enjoy conversation and the countryside.

We celebrated Christmas as always, with family dinner and gift exchange. We made many gifts and bought what we could afford.

There was no alcohol to speak of, and while many men smoked, few women did. Hard liquor was illegal until 1933, and beer was not sold in the early years. The fast set of young men in the universities started drinking about this time. I remember asking a cousin if there was drinking in her town. She replied, "Only among the recent graduates of the university." Drinking was beginning to be shown in the movies but not in advertising. Home brew was made by a

Mrs. Custer's special souvenir of the Depression is a vintage coffee pot. She bought it the day the banks shut down.

few on a small scale and some wine by older men, but it created no problems to the general public.

It was a struggle for most congregations to keep their churches open. Many discontinued and sold their buildings. In most cases, all the churches could do was try to pay the minister and the utilities. Organizations such as the YWCA and the YMCA suffered. However, the basic programs of the churches continued.

The New Deal had little effect on me personally at that time. Of course, over the years the effects have been tremendous. We were strong Republicans and did not agree with many of President Roosevelt's views. I still do not think his programs ended the Depression, but rather the war did. However, the CCC, WPA, and so forth, did provide jobs. None of my immediate family worked for these government programs. Throughout, we kept faith in the American system of government.

Where in the 1930's we were a rural nation, now we are urban. I fear for our nation if a depression were to come today. The culture is different today, with instant gratification not only the wish but the command of most adults as well as children. Morals have broken down. Back then, we never locked our doors in the daytime and not always at night. I don't remember being afraid. Now, even though I live on a quiet residential street, I keep my doors locked.

My fondest memories of that period are of the births of our daughters, but that would be the same in affluent times or depressed times. The hospital had closed a floor because of lack of patients, and my first daughter was the only baby in the nursery for seven days. People didn't go to the hospital as often as they do now.

In 1933 we bought a new Model A Ford sedan. My husband was given a pay raise of \$12 when our first daughter was born, and his salary was returned to the original wage of \$125 a month in 1935. He received another raise in 1936 and, with the birth of our second daughter, we moved into

town. As I remember, there was a general upturn in the economy by 1939.

I think the thing that stands out most in my memories of the Depression is the day the banks did not open. My husband had cashed his check the previous day and I went to town to take care of the bills. I found the banks closed. No news had been given out, and the only ones who knew were people who were near a bank when it was supposed to open. I carried the unbelievable news to an

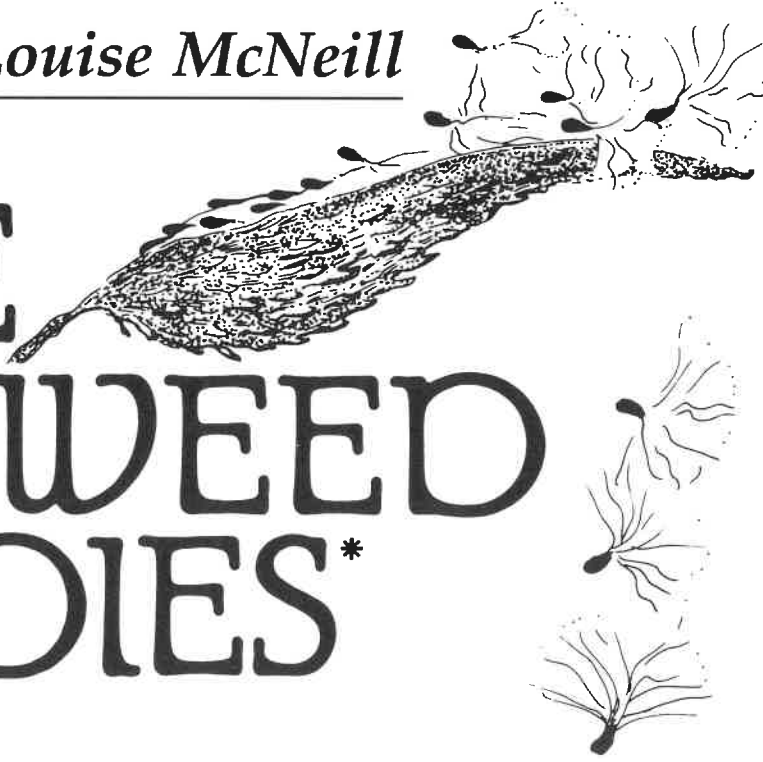
aunt who worked in the office of a department store. Then I went to pay bills at another store and found out they didn't know it, and to the furniture store for the same reason and they didn't know. They all immediately called their bank and learned that it was true. I had unwittingly taken part in an historic event.

I bought a coffee percolator which was on sale and went home. I have kept the percolator in remembrance of the day. To me, that was the start of the Great Depression. ♣



From a Memoir by Louise McNeill

THE MILKWEED LADIES*



“We’ve published stories by hundreds of West Virginians over the years, and occasionally we let folks do their own stories. Firsthand reminiscences speak with a directness impossible to replicate. Good examples of this sort of writing are hard to find, but when it’s good it’s very good.

We’ve found some of the best in the new memoir by Louise McNeill, state poet laureate and the grand lady of West Virginia writing. Miss McNeill established herself as an American poet with the publication of *Gauley Mountain*, an astonishing collection of historical poems, in 1939. She has published several books of poems since then, including the 1977 *Elderberry Flood*.

Now Louise McNeill caps a lifetime of poetry with a fine work of prose. *The Milkweed Ladies* is the story of a strong mountain family in Pocahontas County. You’ll like it if you like West Virginia at all. The memoir was published this month by the University of Pittsburgh Press, and this excerpt is used here by their kind permission. — ed.

I. A Patch of Earth

The farm, a wide plateau of rocky, loam-dark fields, lies above Swago Crick, along the Greenbrier River of West Virginia and some twenty-five to thirty miles north of the Virginia line. This patch of earth is held within a half stadium of limestone cliffs and mountain pastures. On the surface, the Swago Farm is quiet and solid, green in summer and in winter deep with snow. It has its level fields, its fence rows and hilly pastures. There are some two hundred acres of trees and bluegrass, running water, and the winding, dusty paths that cattle and humans have kept open through the years. There are three small woodlands, two of them still virgin and mostly of oak.

On one of the knolls is the weedy

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myrtle-grown graveyard where we have buried our people for 150 years. Before then, we buried them where we now forget. We call the knoll the Graveyard Hill, and the cattle graze there outside its wire fence and crooked gate. Higher up on the ridgetop and canting over toward Captain Jim’s orchard is a rusty pole set like a crucifix — a television antenna that stands as though it were put there to mark our soldiers’ graves. One grave is for Captain Jim, my father’s father, who went with the Virginia Rebels; another is for the boy, Elbert Messer, who was fatally wounded in World War I.

Some of the gravestones are too old to read, their names eaten away by time and water; the faint rock-etchings are filled now with gray moss. It is one of these stones that marks the grave of our great, great, great cousin Jacob, who died back in the 1800s when he was just nineteen.

Cousin Jacob was sick of the “bloody flux” a long time before he died and used to come up here on the hill to sit under an oak tree and read his Bible. So they buried him under the oak, and for a hundred years it stood there, heavy with age and old funeral keenings, and was called the Jacob Tree. But that tree is gone now, and Little Manfred’s tree too, and the willow tree Granny Fanny planted over the grave of her dead baby back in 1875.

But even older than the old graves were the primordial oceans that once covered our fields and cast their sea-shells into our rock. When the ancient waters receded, strands of pink and broken coral were left scattered — as they are still scattered — across the meadows. This is not coal country. No rotting swamps lay over these slopes and upland valleys, only the oceans weaving and receiving as they laid the pink coral down: coral rock

and white limestone rock, and the underground streams sucking in the dark. Through all our generations, we have picked and hauled corals and piled them in roseate heaps along the fence rows and in the swamp.

So it was with us, and is with us still, over two hundred years and nine generations of the farm keeping us, and we believing that we keep the farm. But that is not the way it is in the real truth of it, for the earth holds us and not the other way. The whole great rolling earth holds us, or a rocky old farm down on Swago Crick.

Until I was sixteen years old, until the roads came, the farm was about all I knew: our green meadows and hilly pastures, our storied old men, the great rolling seasons of moon and sunlight, our limestone cliffs and trickling springs. It was about all I knew, and, except for my father and before him, the old Rebel Captain, all that any of us had even known: just the farm and our little village down at the crossroads, and the worn cowpaths winding the slopes; or we kids driving the cows home in the summer evenings; or the winter whiteness and stillness, Aunt Malindy's "old woman in the sky" picking her geese, the "old blue misties" sweeping out of the north.

Some of our tales were old and old, going back into time itself, American time. Living so long there in the same field under the same gap in the mountain, we had seen, from our own ragged little edge of history, the tall shadows passing by. "Old Hickory" in his coach passed along our dug road one morning; General Lee one evening on his way to the Gauley Rebel camps. Then, in 1863, as we watched from our cliff walls and scrub oak bushes, the great Yankee army passed on its way to the Battle of Droop: all day long the clank and spur and roll of their passage, 2,000, 3,000, 4,000, 5,000 hard, blue Yankees, their bayonet tips made bloody in the sunset.

Grandpa Tom, our "old one," had gone with George Rogers Clark to Kaskaskia and had run the Falls of the Ohio under an eclipse of the sun. Uncle Bill went to Point Pleasant against old Cornstalk and his Ohio Shawnee; then Little Uncle John to the War of 1812; Captain Jim to the Virginia Rebels, his brother Al to the

Louise McNeill

West Virginia Poet Laureate Louise McNeill comes from the rocky farms of Pocahontas County. She was born at Buckeye in 1911 and began teaching in local one-room schools in 1930, at age 19. After seven years in rural education, Louise McNeill taught at the Aiken Preparatory School in South Carolina from 1941 to 1946.

College teaching brought McNeill back home to West Virginia, when she returned to an assistant professorship at West Virginia University in 1948. She later taught at Potomac State College, Concord College and Fairmont State, where she was professor of history from 1969 until her retirement in 1973.

McNeill earned a B.A. from Concord College and an M.A. at Miami of Ohio. She attended the Bread Loaf School of English in Vermont, where she worked with Robert Frost, and the University of Iowa writers workshop. McNeill also holds a Ph.D. in history and English from West Virginia University.

Also known by her married name, Louise McNeill Pease, the distinguished poet was named West Virginian of the Year in 1985. She is active in various Appalachian festivals, writers workshops, and official events in her capacity as poet laureate. She has appeared at Mountain State colleges, on educational television and on radio programs.

Despite substantial literary and scholarly achievements, Louise McNeill lists "farm background" at the top of her resume. Her writing evokes universal feelings, but the subtleties and language of rural West Virginia predominate.

Her publications include books of poetry; prose, fiction, and essays; scholarly works; contributions to anthologies and textbooks; and poetry published in periodicals from *Harpers* and *Atlantic Monthly* to *Good Housekeeping* and *Saturday Review*. Her best-known book of poetry is *Gauley Mountain*, published in 1939 with a foreword



by Stephen Vincent Benet. McNeill received the prestigious Bread Loaf Publication Award for *Time is Our House* and the West Virginia Library Association Annual Book Award for *Paradox Hill*, both collections of poetry. Her most recent book of poetry, *Elderberry Flood*, was published by the Department of Culture and History in 1977.

With *The Milkweed Ladies*, her new memoir, Louise McNeill returns once again to her beloved theme of life in the mountains. Through these stories of one West Virginia family, she touches us all with a longing for simpler and sweeter times.

Yankees. My father, in 1906, sailed with Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet; then Cousin Paul and Cousin Coe "to make the world safe for Democracy."

But before I grew up and went out into the world — and a bloody thing I found it — we were all at home there in our faded cottage in the meadow, all of us safe and warm.

Sometimes now, a quiet sense comes to me, the cool mist blowing in my face as though I am walking through islands of fog and drifting downhill slowly southward until I feel the mountains behind my shoulder. Walking on, I can see the light in the "big room" window as I come to our cottage standing in the meadow under "Bridger's" Mountain, as it always stands on the fore-edges of my memory, and the old farm where I ran the April fields and pastures to my great rock up in the woodland where the lavender hepaticas grew. Then I knew just the earth itself: the quiet measure of the seasons; the stars in the sky; the wheat field in August, golden; darkness and day; rain and sunlight; the primal certainty of spring. Then we were all there together, the years not yet come on us, these seventy-five years of war and money and roaring turnpikes and torrents of blood.

I know, deep down, that our one old farm is only a ragged symbol, a signet mark for all the others, the old and far older hardscrabble mountain farms of Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia, all the briery fields scattered across the mountains south. And how the earth holds us is still a dark question. It is not the sucking deepness that draws us, for the earth is mother, protector, the home; but the oppressor too. It requires, sometimes, the very lifeblood of its own, and imprisons the fly-away dreams and bends the back of men and women. Yet to love a familiar patch of earth is to know something beyond death, "westward from death," as my father used to speak it.

We could sense, just beyond our broken-down line fences, the great reach of the American continent flowing outward. Because we stood so long in one place, our rocky old farm and the abundant earth of the continent were linked together in the long tides of the past. Because the land

kept us, never budging from its rock-hold, we held to our pioneer ways the longest, the strongest; and we saw the passing of time from a place called solid, from our own slow, archaic, and peculiar stance.

II. G. D.'s Sea Chest

It seems the Swago Farm has always been there for me, and fragments of the stories drifting across my mind. How the stories first came to me I cannot answer, for they came in bits and pieces. But I know that I was always there in my small place in the circle and always listening, the scraps and fragments sinking down into my child-mind.



When G.D. left
that January evening
on the "down train"
for Norfolk, Mama
held his promise that
he would write,
send money, and
drink no more
whiskey as long
as he lived.

The Indian years were still close to us, and the two Indian graves still lay quiet in our Tommy woodland. The old Seneca Trail, running south from the Iroquois Nation, wound its way across our pastures, and the cows still followed it. It was the same deep-sunken trail that had once been used as an Indian treaty line, one of the long train of broken treaties, so that in those years half of the farm had been white land, the other half red.

So there were Indian stories: the time the big seven-foot Indian came to the Tommy cabin; the day the two Indians came to Aunt Malindy's and ate her gravy and bread. Or the day the two Bridger boys, John and Jim, were killed up on the mountain

owned by Mr. Auldrige, so that we always called it Bridger's Mountain, and on summer mornings the turkey buzzards lingered over, floating down-drift on their black, silent wings.

"Save the Farm!" "Save the Farm!"

The words ring like a bell up there on Bridger's Mountain, ringing out generation after generation. For more than two hundred years, from 1769 to 1988, our menfolk have farmed the land, walked on it, known it down deep; and each man in his turn has tried to pass the land down religiously, or *more* than religiously, to the oldest son. Each generation in turn must "Save the Farm," then after that it is up to the next man, or sometimes a woman, to take up the task.

First, Grandpa Tom, our first settler, saved the farm — took it, actually — from the Shawnee Indians in 1769, and then went off to the American Revolution to save it from George III. Grandpa Tom took up our land, and Uncle Dock said it was in the springtime, and the chimney stones of Tom's cabin are still scattered over in our Tommy meadow in the thicket of wild plums.

I heard the stories again and again of Captain Jim, my grandfather, the verse-writing, hard-set Rebel soldier, who died right after I was born so we passed each other in the door, and who came back from Yankee prison to save the farm.

Captain Jim lay eighteen months in prison at Fort Delaware. They told how he promised himself if he ever got out alive, he would go home, clear the thorn patch, and build a new house under Bridger's Gap. In prison, he wrote a little brown notebook of love poems and death poems and a long poem called "Virginia Land." In 1865, when the Yankees set Captain Jim free, he walked back to Swago and set to.

Captain Jim built our white house and married Granny Fanny, and when he was fifty-four years old, my father was born. He was named for General George Patton (the grandfather of "Old Blood and Guts," the World War II hero) and for Stephen A. Douglas, and he was called G. D. G. D. was the Captain's only son, his only child, and the old man doted on the boy. As Granny Fanny told it, the

Captain taught him to smoke a pipe while he was still a baby sucking on her breast, and pretty soon the old man taught him to chew and spit. He whittled him out a little wooden hayfork and taught the boy to read and write and speak orations, and he planned how G. D. would become a big lawyer and take over the farm.

But when G. D. was sixteen, he went off bumming freight trains into the Oklahoma Indian Territory. Styling himself "The Boy Orator of the Allegheny," he had some handbills printed up and traveled over Oklahoma and Texas spouting orations and charging fifty cents a head. Once he orated to six Indians in their lodge house, giving them his best eagle-screaming rendition of "Webster's Reply to Hayne."

For a few years, G. D. would seem to settle down, work on the farm and do some schoolteaching, and then he would be off again. As the century turned, G. D. was studying law in Washington City, but he came back to Swago and married Mama. Before my older brother Ward was born, they moved into their own house up at Marlinton, the lumber-railroad boom town that was sprouting on the point of land between the river and Knapps Crick. It was there, in the raw, new lumber town, that G. D. began to practice law.

The great lumber boom was sweeping the Appalachians, and G. D. was elected prosecuting attorney, serving as a *de facto* sheriff, riding the log woods with a pistol in his pocket. But he had started drinking down in Washington City, and when he came to court drunk one day he was disbarred by the other lawyers and then by the state bar. One evening in 1906, G. D. took the train to Norfolk, enlisted in the navy, and went off with Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet.

When G. D. left that January evening on the "down train" for Norfolk, Mama held his promises that he would write, send money, and drink no more whiskey as long as he lived. But for Mama it was still dead winter, the house in town was under foreclosure, she still had little Ward, two years old, to carry on her hipbone, another child in her womb sac, and no roof to put over their heads. She thought of going to Captain Jim's, but knowing she was not wanted,

turned to her own father's house on Dry Crick. They could not turn her away. But she kept thinking of Captain Jim, and in years after, when she spoke of him, she would smile.

Her stories, and many others, came to me of my grandfather, Captain Jim. He had seen the trumpeter swans passing over, and in 1830, the wild pigeons with their wings blotting out the sun. And they told how he said he had lived to see his only son turned drunkard and Republican, gone off sailing with "that buck-toothed Roosevelt's" navy, leaving the farm and all its hills and meadows to rot and die. The Captain watched the thorn bush taking the pasture, the fences leaning, the



I would intently
study the postcard
picture of Cannibal
Tom, riding a
bicycle naked. I
had never seen a
bicycle, though I
had heard Mama
sing about one
built for two.

smokehouse falling down. At the last, he had to sell what he called his "woodland-up-the-hollow" to the loggers; and they came in, cut down his oak trees, and left behind them only the bleeding skid roads, the tangles of dying slash.

My mother had heard, through gossips and whisperings, that the bitter old Captain was planning to deed the farm to his nephew, Uncle Dock. So, as soon as my sister Elizabeth was born, Mama took the baby and little Ward and moved in with Captain Jim and Granny Fanny. She was coldly received, but she stayed on. Her name was Grace, and she had come to save the farm.

G. D. sailed around the world for

four years. At last, in 1910, after Mama had sold her fleur-de-lis watch to send him train fare home, he came walking and whistling back over the meadows. He had a cannibal's carved eating fork stashed away in his grip sack, the grip he always called his Sea Chest. He kept his Sea Chest beside his chair through nearly fifty years of farming, and bookkeeping, and writing, and teaching, and he could never get the sea out of him.

I never knew the young G. D. who took off for the navy, and I was always told that the man who came back to save the farm was a very different man. He always seemed to me as tough as a side of sole leather. He neither laughed nor cried; he always smoked his pipe. He hung it in the wry corner of his mouth and looked out at the world with cool, dark eyes. He had black hair and dark skin, high cheekbones and heavy shoulders. When I was a little girl, he would lift me on his big shoulders and call me Fatty Jake. I loved the stories he told, stories that became legends told up and down Swago Crick of far, far places nobody but G. D. had ever been.

G. D. told of the day they passed through the Straits of Magellan, February 1, 1908, where the Winds of the Williwaw blew screaming and the glacial fogs swept in. Or of the morning they sailed into Sidney Harbor in the old U.S.S. *Glacier* and down in her boiler room the temperature was 140 degrees. G. D. would tell again and again of the day, off of Tokyo, when a Japanese naval officer named Tojo came on board the *Glacier* and poked around as though he was looking for something or had something in mind.

So the sea was always close to the land on Swago Crick, and the strange names: Fiji Islands, Patagonia, Manila Bay. Yet because the land would never let him go, G. D. would hitch up old Bird and go out and plow the corn. By the time G. D. had come back from the navy, my family had been on the farm so long that it would not let loose of its people and had its own meanings laid down in secret under its earth, under the scattered stones of Old Tom's first cabin, and under the sweet clover roots of the Hollow Meadow, under the bluegrass pastures and the corn.

III. Granny Fanny's Thorn Broom Handle

The summer of 1911 was the summer The Slashing saved the farm. The Slashing, that tangled mass of dead branches the loggers had left on Captain Jim's up-the-hollow when they skidded away the virgin oak, had begun to let in sunlight that summer and had allowed black raspberries to grow. Even now, seventy-five years later, when I go home, my sister Elizabeth and I will sometimes speak about The Slashing as though it were still a living thing. That winter, the year I was born and the old Captain died, there was no money and no job for G. D., still unable to practice law. G. D. began to write short stories that winter because he thought he might get a little money from them.

He sat late at the kitchen table, writing sea stories and railroad stories, and two eerie ones called "The White Dog" and "The Black Pearl." Then he typed them up on an old Oliver typewriter he got hold of and sent them off to the magazines and got them back.

It had been six years since G. D. had touched a drop of whiskey, and he and Mama began talking about him trying for a school job. He would have to take the teachers' examination, and to take it, he would have to go to town. He had no decent shoes and no decent suit of clothes to wear, and so, as he and Mama tried to plan, the new clothes became almost a life and death matter. At last, G. D. talked of selling one of the cows, or of going back to the navy. He kept talking about it, and Mama would cry. But before G. D. could decide, the springtime came, and The Slashing began to leaf out again.

One day when Mama was picking a mess of greens for supper, she saw, spreading across the ruined tangles of the hilltop, some tall white flowers, acres of white flower bushes. When she went to look, she saw that they were black raspberry vines. Mama told that she had never seen such a patch of raspberries, and she would tell it again and again, always, as though The Slashing had been sent by God. The wild birds must

have planted the seeds, for usually a slash will come in blackberry vines and fireweed, and the only raspberries on the farm had been a few bushes around the orchard fence.

Black raspberries always sold at a good price, and as the blooms fell off and the green berries began to form, Mama watched and hoped for rain. A good wet season came, and in July, our miracle: the wild harvest. The berries ripened juicy and purple-black, bushels of them; and Mama and G. D. and Granny Fanny, with my older brother and sister helping them, went up into The Slashing and picked and picked. I was only a baby and stayed with Aunt Malindy, and Mama would come home every few hours to let me suck. In the evening, they brought home the great lipping-full buckets and carried them down to Milltown for straight cash.

So G. D. got his shoes and new suit, walked to town, took the teachers' exam and passed it. There was a vacancy in the home school and the trustees decided to give him a chance. G. D. went to teaching that fall of 1911 and taught in one school or another, and later in college, for nearly fifty years.

When G. D. was seventy-four, his college gave him an honorary doctor of laws degree, and just for the hell of it, his young lawyer friend wrote a letter to Charleston and got the old sailor readmitted to the West Virginia bar. These legal proceedings put G. D. into a quizzical frame of mind. A few laugh wrinkles gathered around his eyes and — as though speaking of the world in general — he made one guarded remark: "It's something of an oddity to me."

In the early years of his teaching, G. D. had some orange handbills printed up and went around the county on another speaking tour. His speech this time was called "The World Through a Porthole," and he would tell the people about geography, and about Cannibal Tom, and the historic passage his fleet had made through the Magellan Straits. He carried his mementos in his Sea Chest and displayed them in faded one-room schoolhouses all up and down the cricks: the boomerang from Australia; the iridescent mother-of-pearl; Cannibal Tom's eating fork; and the great piece of brown and

white tapa cloth from out in the Pacific islands of Polynesia and Samoa, as big as Grandma Susan's coverlet. The names called softly in the country schoolhouses: Coral Sea, Pago Pago; and on the wall of our best room in the farmhouse, G. D.'s "diploma" hung in its nice frame, bordered with seahorses, and sea serpents, and starry ocean shapes. G. D. got his "diploma" when he had been initiated into the Holy Order of Neptune as the fleet crossed the equator going south. At night by the fire, if I asked politely, I was allowed to look again at the tapa cloth and Cannibal Tom's fork, and I would study intently the postcard picture of Cannibal Tom, riding a bicycle naked. I had never seen a bicycle, though I had heard Mama sing about one built for two.

One of my first memories is of Mama in her Japanese kimono, sitting by the woodstove, singing me a song. The isinglass windows on the stove glow red, and on top of the stove is a shining, silvery decoration like the steeple on a church. Mama is holding me in the warmth of her kimono — the only beautiful garment she owns — a Japanese kimono made of palest green stuff, with white chrysanthemums and pale birds flying through the flowers. Mama's hair is loose around her shoulders and falls down to her waist in a golden-lighted fan. Somehow, she is not at all the Mama I know day by day in the kitchen and barnyard, the work-ridden farm woman in her calico dress, faded sunbonnet, and ugly Sears Roebuck shoes. As we sit there, she is singing to me:

Sweet bunch of daisies brought
from the dell,
Kiss me once darling, daisies
won't tell.

Or the song is sad and low:

Many the hearts that are
breaking
If we could read them all;
Many the hearts that are
breaking
After the ball.

I remember another song Mama would play on her old "potato bug" mandolin out on the porch in summer, with our new porch swing squeaking back and forth. Sometimes

we would get a lemon from town and have lemonade, and Mama would play:

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true.

I'm most crazy, all for the love of you.

All day Mama worked over the hot stove in the kitchen or scrubbed clothes on her washboard or milked the cows up at the milk pen. Or she sewed our clothes on her foot-treadle sewing machine, or in the fall, rendered out hot lard and canned the sausage cakes. But I always remember the other Mama, sitting in her pale green kimono or standing out in the meadow with a wild pink rose in her hand. For, besides her tame flowers, her snowballs, bridal wreath, and thousand-leafed rose bush, Mama knew all the flowers of the fields and woodlands: the orange meadow lilies, the purple hepaticas on the rock, the pale dancing Dutchman's britches on The Slashing hill, growing there in the half shade as The Slashing covered its scars and came to woods again.

There was even a sweet-brier rose, the English eglantine of the poets, growing on the wild hillside under Bridger's Gap. It had escaped from some cabin dooryard; and the horehound had escaped too, and the sweet anise, wandering away from the cabins and running wild on the hills. In later years, when I too wandered away, I would find them and cry out their names in recognition: Sweet William hiding in the grasses of the prairie, blue lupine I found in the sand barrens of Carolina, a pink lady slipper in a Maine forest, tansy by a Massachusetts cellar hole, or sometimes I can still smell, blowing east over Hartford, Connecticut, the scent of cinnamon rose.

The cinnamon rose on the wall of our farmhouse belonged to Granny Fanny, my father's mother, and hers too, the row of bachelor buttons, the pink sweet rockets by the garden fence. But Granny Fanny had little time for fussing around with flowers. She was busy in the kitchen or stable or running the hills with her gunnysack, picking her loads of wild plums or wormy apples, or half-rotten kindling wood.

In 1914, the Austrian archduke had

been assassinated at Sarajevo and the world was engulfed in war, but Granny was not of this century; she was wild and running free. Born in 1840, she still roved the rocks and waste places, tended her ash hopper, which made lye for her homemade soap, and poured tallow into her candle molds.

It was as though, standing in her hilly pocket sometime about 1861 or 1862, she had set her thorn broom handle into the world's axis and brought it to a grinding halt. In her long black dress and black bonnet, she walked the hills of another time, and perhaps, even of another country, and gathered pokes of horehound and "life everlasting" to cure the



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twentieth century of its "bloody flux." She was an old pioneer woman, thin and wrinkled as a dried apple, and with her secret in her that she always kept from everyone. On her back, where she had bent it so long under the burdens, a great knot had grown as big as a wooden maul. In her old age, she wore it like a saddle, the seal and saddle of the mountain woman.

When she was no longer needed in the kitchen, Granny Fanny would go into the fields and woodlands with her gunnysack, or she would take her thorn bush broom and sweep the dirt from the floor of the woodshed, then sweep the path and yard so slick and clean that there was hardly a splinter left. Or she would find a dead sheep

out in the pasture, pull the wool off it, pick the burrs from the wool, wash it, card it, spin it, and knit it into crooked mittens and socks. But she would never sew or do fine quilting or mend the clothes. If clothes wore out, she threw them in the fire.

Granny Fanny was not at all a proper woman like my other grandma, my mother's mother, Grandma Susan, who worked only at housework and wove coverlets and always spoke so nice and fine. Granny Fanny would sometimes have a high fit of temper, pack up her black "gretchel," and go whipping over the hill to Aunt Mat's. She was high tempered, tight-lipped, even, in a sense, an unlovable woman, and yet I loved her with a wild, fierce kind of love and would always fly to her defense. But Granny Fanny had her own sharp tongue, her black "gretchel," and her secret. When I was a child, I could feel that secret in her, and I wanted to know. I wanted to know so much that sometimes, when she tried to sing, I would look at her hard and try to see if her secret was hidden down in the song. Granny was not one for singing and had only one tune. She would sing it in her high cracked monotone, always the song about the little horses:

Oh, the black and the bay and
the dapple gray

And all the pretty little horses.

Sometimes her cracked voice would get to running over and over in my head, and in years after, whenever I thought of Granny Fanny, her song would come back to me like the crackle of thorns in the hearthfire.

Grandma Susan would sing in church: "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand," or "Rock of ages cleft for me"; but Granny Fanny would not go to church, nor to prayer meetings, nor to the pie suppers down at school. The only place she would go was to trade and barter. She would "take her foot in her hand," she said, and whip down over the hill to sell her butter pats or jars of apple butter. She would trade her goods for sugar and coffee and tobacco, for she was still smoking her old corncob pipe, and would carry her store things back home in her sack. If she got cash money, she would put it in her long black leather purse, then stick it un-

Buying the Book

The Milkweed Ladies, by West Virginia Poet Laureate Louise McNeill, will be published this month by the University of Pittsburgh Press. The memoir is a 136-page book, available in hardback or paperback.

You may purchase *The Milkweed Ladies* in bookstores or directly from the publisher. Mail orders must include the purchase price (\$8.95 paperback or \$16.95 hardback) plus \$1.50 postage and handling per book. Send your order to the University of Pittsburgh Press, 127 N. Bellefield Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

Pitt Press offers several other books of West Virginia interest. They include the outstanding new field guide, *Amphibians & Reptiles of West Virginia*, by Marshall University professors N. Bayard Green and Thomas K. Pauley, and Morgantown historian Edward M. Steel's two-volume collection of the speeches and correspondence of labor agitator Mother Jones. West Virginia University professor Keith Dix's history of the mechanization of coal mining will be issued next January.

You may request a catalog by writing to the above address.

der her bed tick to be safe and sound. Granny had never heard of the Protestant Ethic; she was just an uneducated old woman who hadn't learned the evils of working and saving, and she wanted no foolish things — only coffee and tobacco, and her mantel clock with the gargoyles staring out above its face. The only time she ever spent money "foolishly" was the time she went to White Sulphur, a journey of some forty miles, to attend the reunion of Confederate veterans — a trip that was always spoken of in the household as though Granny Fanny had gone to farthest Spain.

White Sulphur was where the Old South had once curtsied on the Greenbrier piazzas, and where the Rebels and Yankees had fought along the road in the desperate August days of 1863. Granny Fanny had helped with the wounded there, and there she first met Grandpa Jim, the old Captain. In 1913, at the reunion, she heard the drums beating again and saw the "Stars and Bars" floating there.

To Granny Fanny, and to all of us in 1913, Captain Jim's war was still "The War." "Back in time of The War," Granny would say; and the Captain's bills of Confederate money were still hidden down in the closet trunk. "Before The War," "In time of The War," we said, as though it had been the only war on earth.

In 1916, we got our first telephone on the farm, and one of the first pieces of news I remember it bringing us was of a new war. It was a big black wall telephone and you could

call "Central" with "a short and a long." The telephone man walked by our house every week or so to check the blue glass things up on the poles. The line ran across our farm fields, up Bridger's Mountain, and through the Gap. It followed the old Seneca Indian road, and the telephone wires would sing in the wind. In April 1917, Mama got a telephone call that we had declared war on Germany.

So the Swago boys began to go off to war again: Cousin Coe and Cousin Cliff, Cousin Paul from up at town; and Elbert Messer and Dennis Cloonan; then Jim Auldrige, from down the river road. G. D. wanted to enlist in the navy, and though Mama begged him not to, he wrote anyway, telling them about his navy years. He felt they could use him, needed him, and when the answer came back that they didn't want him, he was quiet and bit on his pipestem. He was over forty years old.

G. D. went all over the county in the winter of 1917, selling war bonds; and he went up to the train to say good-bye to the boys and wrote to Cousin Coe over in France. Mama knitted khaki hug-me-tights and mittens. We had meatless days and talked about the "Starving Armenians" and "The Huns." One day, when I found a poke of candy out in the elderberry patch, Mama made me throw it away because, she said, the Germans might be dropping pokes of candy down from their airplanes to poison American children.

1918 was the winter of the flu, and when I was better, I knelt down by

my bed in my long flannel nightgown to say my prayers: "God keep the boys safe Over There. Don't let the Kaiser kill them. Bring them all home safe."

At night, G. D. would come home with his copy of the *Toledo Blade* and read us the news from the Marne, Belleau Wood, and Flanders Fields. And down at the village, they painted the river bridge from red to a dull gray color so the Germans could not see it and bomb it down.

After the armistice, Elbert Messer and Jim Auldrige came home to die, but Cousin Coe and Cousin Paul were safe. Down at school, we learned the poem by heart:

In Flanders Fields the poppies grow

Between the crosses row on row
That mark our place and in the sky

The larks still bravely singing fly.

Then, almost as suddenly as it had come to us, the war faded into the past. They buried Elbert Messer up on our Graveyard Hill and gave the coffin flag to his mother for, Mama said, you must never bury the flag. So Captain Jim and Elbert lay not too far from one another; and Granny Nancy, whose father had come over with Lafayette, lay just inside the rusted gate. Death and life always run together, so in the last spring of the war, a little boy was born and named for the old Captain. We called him Jimmy, my brother, Young Jim.

With another war behind us and the quiet years ahead, we were all there at home under Bridger's Mountain, and Granny Fanny, eighty years old and her hair suddenly bobbed off with "the Flappers," was still running the fields to gather in her pokes of tea herbs: "life everlasting" and pennyroyal. When I walked with her across those autumn waste places and heard her speak the name, "life everlasting," my mind kept repeating it. It was a dry, gray ugly flower that lay like a talisman in my heart.

By 1918, most of America had left the old agrarian ways behind; yet down on Swago, down on all the little farms of Appalachia, the mountain geography still closed us inward. Granny Fanny's thorn broom handle was still stuck into the world's axis, holding it tight and strong. ♣

In the 1840's and 1850's, the potato famine caused a mass exodus from Ireland, with almost a quarter of the population leaving the country. Many set out for America in search of a better life for themselves and their families. Eventually, the Irish population in the United States would surpass in numbers the nation they left behind.

This is the story of one Irish family's journey to America, their travels and eventual settlement in Clarksburg, and the trials and tribulations of their descendants. The story of these events has been passed down in my family from generation to generation, and is recalled here through many conversations with my father and cousin, Earl and Mary McAndrew, now both 92 years old.

Michael Joseph McAndrew was born in 1832 in Glen Castle, County Mayo, Ireland. He was a school teacher by trade. The son of Michael Joseph McAndrew and Kathryn Lally, he had one brother and three sisters and was married in the late 1840's to Ellen Barrett.

Mike was my great-grandfather. Bad times in his homeland convinced him to set sail for America, where it was said people had plenty to eat and there was enough work to go around. Mike and Ellen sold their land and house in 1857, keeping only those personal effects which they could take with them. The money they received for their property was only enough to provide passage for themselves and their baby, Bridget, so they were forced to leave their two older daughters with Ellen's family. They would make the trip at a later date. To make matters worse, Mike was beaten and robbed on his way home from selling what little livestock they owned. Left with only their boarding tickets, the family was forced to borrow extra money from relatives.

Little is known about the length of the trip or the conditions on the ship as the McAndrews crossed the Atlantic. It has been said that to save money the family disembarked at Boston, since the cost was a half-dollar cheaper than going on to New York. They found that the citizens of Boston had no affection for the hordes of Irishmen streaming off the boats. Many potential employers displayed signs reading "Irish Need Not Apply."



Earl and Geneva McAndrew on the porch of their Clarksburg home. Earl's Irish grandfather immigrated to America in 1857 and to West Virginia a decade later.

Four Generations An Irish Family in West Virginia

By Mike McAndrew
Photographs by Ron Rittenhouse

Eventually the family left Boston and settled in Mount Savage, Maryland, near Cumberland, where Mike was hired at a foundry. While no longer a teacher, he had steady work and was able to provide for his family.

Back in Ireland, Mike's sister Kathryn Gallagher was preparing to cross the ocean with her husband and the McAndrew daughters, Mary and Ellen. The Gallaghers arrived in 1859. Legend has it that they passed through Harpers Ferry by train and

were held there during John Brown's raid on October 16th of that year. John Gallagher, fearing for the lives of the two young girls, hid them under his long overcoat, promising in his best Irish accent to "murder the man that sets foot on me coat tails." The train was finally allowed to leave, and the girls were left unharmed.

Surviving this incident, the group made it safely to Mount Savage, where Mary and Ellen were reunited with their parents. The Gallaghers later returned home to Ireland.

With the family together again, Mike and "Nellie," as he called his wife, settled into their new surroundings. They became U.S. citizens in 1860 and voted that fall for Abraham Lincoln. While the Civil War heated up, the immigrant family struggled to maintain its existence.

As the war drew to a close, Mike and Ellen discovered that they were soon to be parents again. On April 12, 1865, a baby boy was born. Two days later Lincoln was assassinated. Neighbors thought the boy should be named Abe in honor of the fallen president. The parents instead chose Patrick James, a good Irish name. Another son was born early in 1867. He was called Sam. On Christmas Day in 1867, yet another son was born. This baby was given his father and grandfather's name, Michael Joseph.

All was well at home, but Mike's work situation grew increasingly bad. Business at the foundry slowed and workers were laid off, including Mike. Unable to find another job in the area, he became interested in what he had heard about Clarksburg. The town was in West Virginia, which had just been made a separate state four years earlier as a result of the war. The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad had come to Clarksburg back in 1856, and work was now underway on the excavation of new railroad tunnels there.

The McAndrews again gathered all their belongings and moved. They settled in what is now the Summit Park area of Clarksburg. Mike had expected railroad work but instead found a job as a coal miner. It was a far cry from the teaching career he had left in Ireland. The mines at this time were unregulated and hazardous, with workers putting in 12- and 14-hour days. Nonetheless, after leaving his homeland and moving his family twice, Mike was content to stay in the mines and make his home in Clarksburg, which was quickly becoming a major town in the region.

Sadly, on October 27, 1868, Mike McAndrew was killed in the mines by a slate fall at the age of 36, roughly 11 years after coming to America. The Clarksburg newspaper squeezed in a one-sentence death notice next to a newsstand advertisement.

Irish settlers in America endured the same prejudices that other nationalities were subjected to whenever they arrived in this country in great numbers. As time passed, they became known as hard workers and were accepted within the community. This, however, did not make the widowed Ellen McAndrew's job any easier. She was left to raise six young children on her own, ranging from age 17 to less than a year.

To feed six hungry mouths, Ellen ran a boarding house and saloon in the East End of Clarksburg. This building was next to the train depot, which was located where the Southern States Co-op store now stands. Later the family moved farther down Pike Street to what is now the location of Ramon's Restaurant, where Ellen made clothing and quilts for a living. Her brothers helped out as much as possible.

Eventually, the children grew up and went their separate ways. Mary, the oldest, traveled to Washington where she became a housekeeper for Admiral Dewey. Ellen and Bridget married and raised children in the East End. Pat also remained in the area, becoming supervisor of a Consolidation Coal Company mine at Clarksburg and later at Farnum, on Route 19 near Shinnston. His son Mike was boss of the Dawson Mine near Shinnston, and his daughter Mary worked for Dr. Cole in an office downtown. She still lives within a block of her cousins and contributed many details to this article.

Sam married Lucy Latstetter, whose family owned the Latstetter Building where the Lowndes Bank is now located in downtown Clarksburg. He was known for many colorful poems published in the *Clarksburg Telegram*.

Michael Joseph, my grandfather, married Kathryn Ward, and they had four children between 1895 and 1903. He ran two horse-drawn delivery wagons and also served on Clarksburg's city council. Mike's father had been killed in the mines when he was less than a year old, and Mike was determined to be a good father and provider for his own four children. In 1907 he built a house at 173 East Pike Street, which still stands next to the Immaculate Conception Church.

With a new home and a thriving

business, life looked promising. But the satisfaction and security that the six McAndrews experienced when they moved into their new house were short-lived. One day at work Mike lifted a keg of whiskey into the back of a delivery wagon to prove to an employee that it wasn't too heavy to handle. The strain of the lift ruptured his appendix, apparently already infected. Mike was carried to the hospital on a stretcher. Physicians at the time diagnosed the condition as a "boil in the stomach." Unable to recover from the complications, Mike McAndrew died at the age of 40, four years older than his father had been when he was killed in the mines.

The same agonizing set of circumstances beset Mike's wife as had confronted his widowed mother. Left with four children, ages 11, nine, four, and one, she continued to run the delivery business that Mike had started. Boarders were taken in at the new house. The older boys helped by getting odd jobs.

During the next few decades, Kathryn's children grew up and took their places in the community. Jimmy worked at the Clarksburg Trust Company and later at the West Virginia Bank as a teller. During World War II, he was a corporal in Army intelligence. After the war, Jimmy worked for the Fourco Glass Company for many years, eventually becoming treasurer during the 1960's. He passed away in 1983 at the age of 86.

Frank went into politics as his father had, serving two terms as an officer for the West Virginia House of Delegates, one term as assistant to the clerk of the Senate, two terms as Clarksburg city clerk, and one as city manager. He also ran the Clarksburg water board before accepting a similar position in Saint Joseph, Missouri, where he worked until his death in 1982 at age 79.

Daughter Kathryn worked for a time at the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company and later as a teller at the Union National Bank. She still lives in the house that her father built on East Pike Street.

Earl, my dad, was 11 at the time of his father's death. Being the oldest child, he helped his mother to provide for the family by picking up odd jobs where he could. With younger



Above: Mike McAndrew, Earl's father, was a second-term Clarksburg city councilman when this portrait was made in 1906. He died in an occupational accident a year later. Photographer unknown.

Below: Kathryn McAndrew was left to raise a family alone, as her mother-in-law had been. Here she poses with younger children Frank and Kathryn by her side, and Jimmy (left) and Earl at rear, four years after Mike's death. Photographer unknown, about 1911.

brother Jimmy, Dad would go to the various establishments that did business with the family delivery teams, collect what was owed, and bring the money back to their mother. "When we went into saloons to collect, we kept rocks in our pockets to throw at the drunks in case they tried to steal the money," he recalls.

Needing every penny, the two boys also delivered the *Clarksburg Exponent*. Their route covered a large portion of town, including the Glen Elk B&O Railroad station, where they sold papers to passengers for three cents a copy. When the Trader's Hotel in downtown Clarksburg burned in 1911, Earl and Jimmy sold 300 copies of the special edition.

In addition to the paper route, Dad delivered groceries for Colonel Byrd's East End grocery store, using his own wagon. He and Jimmy also tended cattle kept by their neighbors on Pinnickinnick Hill just to the north of their house.

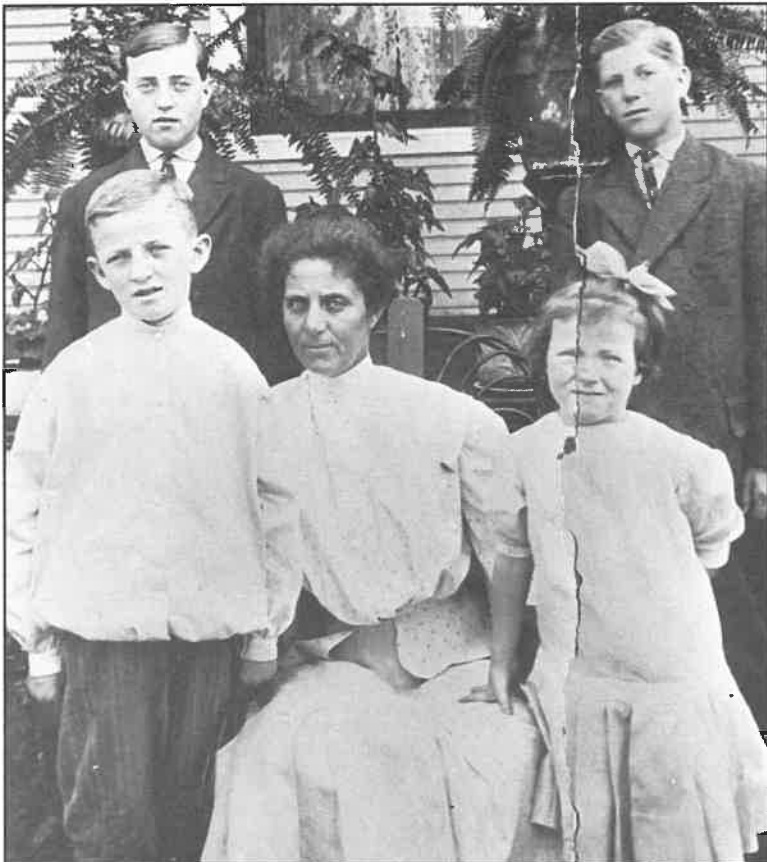
Of all the stories my father tells, one of my favorites is about being

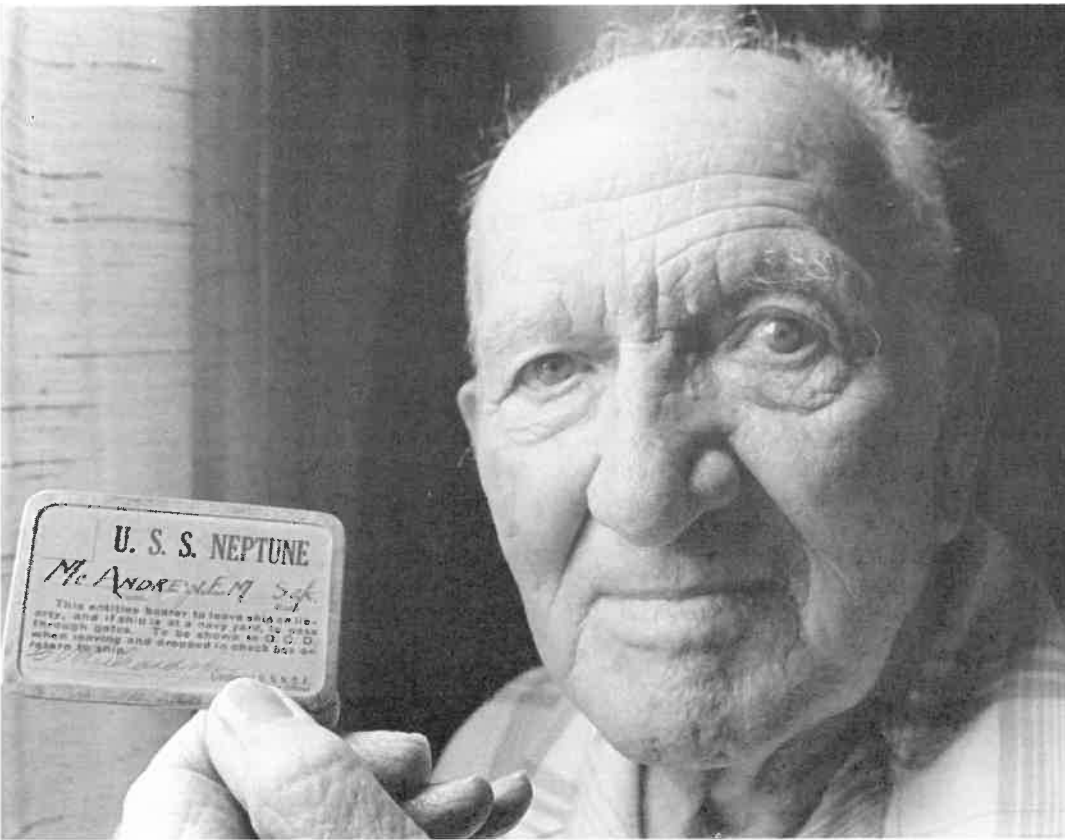
sent onto Pinnickinnick Hill one day to gather cattle as a thunderstorm approached. On the way up, they passed several men who had gathered to play poker and drink. The boys listened to their colorful language, then practiced the curses as they continued up the hill. Just as they were walking by a big oak tree, lightning struck it. "That lightning bolt nearly knocked us out of our shoes," Dad said. "We got down on our knees and started praying as fast as we could, 'cause we knew God was mad at us for cursing."

Pinnickinnick Hill had an old Civil War trench at the top which the soldiers had used for a bunker, and Dad remembers looking for bullets and cannonballs buried in the dirt. The trench has since been replaced by a radio tower.

There are possibly other Civil War remnants to be uncovered in town, he says. "Supposedly, in the East End there was an old well in the block of Pike Street between Park Avenue and Oak Street where we

Below right: Earl was still in short pants and curls when this portrait was made, about 1902. Younger brother Jimmy stands beside him. Photographer unknown.





Earl served with the navy in World War I, finding his greatest adversary to be the deadly flu epidemic of 1918–19. Today he treasures the passcard (left) that got him on and off the USS *Neptune*.

used to play baseball," Dad reports. "The circus was also held there many years ago. The well was finally covered with a big flat rock because it was dangerous."

"In my childhood, I remember being told by some oldtimers that Confederate soldiers used this area for a campground during the Civil War. When they heard that a Union battalion was approaching from Parkersburg, they stuffed one of their cannons in that well because they didn't have time to pull it up the hill and they didn't want the Union to be able to use it."

Ironically, when Dad bought a home in that same area on South Park Avenue years later, there was a large flat rock in one corner of the lot right under the topsoil that prevented my mother from extending her flower garden. The rock is so large that to this day no one has made the effort to unearth it and see if it is covering the well.

At an older age, Dad worked in the Gillis Peanut Wagon, which could usually be found on the side of the street in downtown Clarksburg. The smell of hot buttered popcorn and fresh roasted peanuts filled the air

and summoned passersby. Dad remembers being told at the end of each day to "put all the money in a bag, stuff it in my jacket, then run like hell through the middle of the street so no one could stop me."

In his teenage years, Dad continued his string of different jobs. He worked at Swager's Ice Cream Parlor, which was across the street from the Gore Hotel, Clarksburg's finest. He also operated the elevator in the Empire Bank building on the corner of Main and 4th streets, one of the first elevators in town, and even drove a beer truck for the Tierneys.

There was no lack of customers for the beer. The East End and Kelly Hill neighborhoods were not the quietest parts of town at the time. Inhabited mostly by Clarksburg's Irish population, there were five saloons and a brewery within a three-block area. "If someone wanted beer, they would send a kid up to the saloon with a nickel and a wooden bucket," Dad says. "The bartender would fill it up and they would run back home."

Robberies were common, and Dad remembers he and his brother chasing a thief out of their mother's bedroom with a baseball bat. "We were

in front of the house and heard someone banging around upstairs. Jimmy was scared, so I grabbed a baseball bat and we snuck up the stairs and surprised a man in Mom's bedroom going through her jewelry. He jumped out the window onto the outhouse roof, and ran down the alley behind the house."

In 1912 at the age of 17, Dad left school and started working at the "Tin Plate," a steel mill in Summit Park. He made a two-mile trek to and from work each day on foot, and soon became friends with many of the Greeks who lived in the area and worked at the mill. [See *GOLD-ENSEAL*, Fall 1982, pp. 57-64.] The Greeks made an impression on the Irishman. According to Dad, "they would bring a big hunk of cheese and a piece of bread for lunch each day, then sit there and take turns taking a bite out of each one. They were sure hard workers."

The Tin Plate was Phillips Sheet and Tin Company, later a subsidiary of Weirton Steel. It was in operation for many years, and produced sheet steel annealed with a thin coating of tin. At its peak, there were 12 mills in production.



The Glen Elk Station railroad crew were a rugged bunch. Earl McAndrew is fifth from left in the back row. Photographer unknown, about 1928.

Dad worked with the tin after it was pressed. "Each sheet was first rolled out real thin, then 'pickled.' As the weighmaster, I marked up each piece with the size and weight, counted them and loaded them into boxes," he explained. The pieces were then moved to the shipping department and sent to customers.

Work at the Tin Plate was often hazardous, and many workers were cut by the machinery or the sharp edges of the product. "I remember the day Jimmy Cann cut some of his fingers off," Dad says. "The doctor made me hold him still while they sewed up his hand."

Dad worked there until the age of 21, when he volunteered for service during World War I. While he wanted to enter the Aviation Corps with a friend, he instead ended up in the Navy and was assigned as a seaman, second class to the USS *Neptune* in May 1918. The *Neptune* assembled and laid mines in the Caribbean.

Going through basic training in Norfolk, he became friends with sailors from all over the country. Dad tells the story of one boy from North Carolina who had rarely been off the farm. "They told us there would be services on Sunday, and a priest would be there for Catholic mass for those who wanted to attend. I noticed that this guy looked agitated for some reason, so I asked him what was wrong. He said that he was a

Baptist and had never seen a priest. He had been told that they had horns on their heads just like the devil. So I said, 'They sure do. Coming right outta their foreheads.' That Sunday he went AWOL."

The deadly flu epidemic swept the world in 1918-19, and Navy ships were not immune. After the *Neptune* set sail for the Caribbean, the crew soon came down with a lethal strain of the disease. Many died on the ship and were buried at sea. To avoid getting the fever, Dad says he would go "down to the mess each day and ask for the biggest onion they had, then eat it raw. I never got sick.

"To make things even worse," he recalls, "eventually they ran out of everything on the ship except soup beans. Everyone had to eat beans three meals a day for about two weeks until we got back into port. I bet I didn't look at another soup bean for 10 years."

After having served for more than a year, Dad was given a discharge to go home and help support the family. Prohibition was in force, so his friends sent word to bring back some whiskey when he returned to Clarksburg.

"I remember carrying three quarts home in my duffel bag, and I managed to get it all the way to Clarksburg without breaking them or being searched. When I got off the train at the depot in Glen Elk, the first people

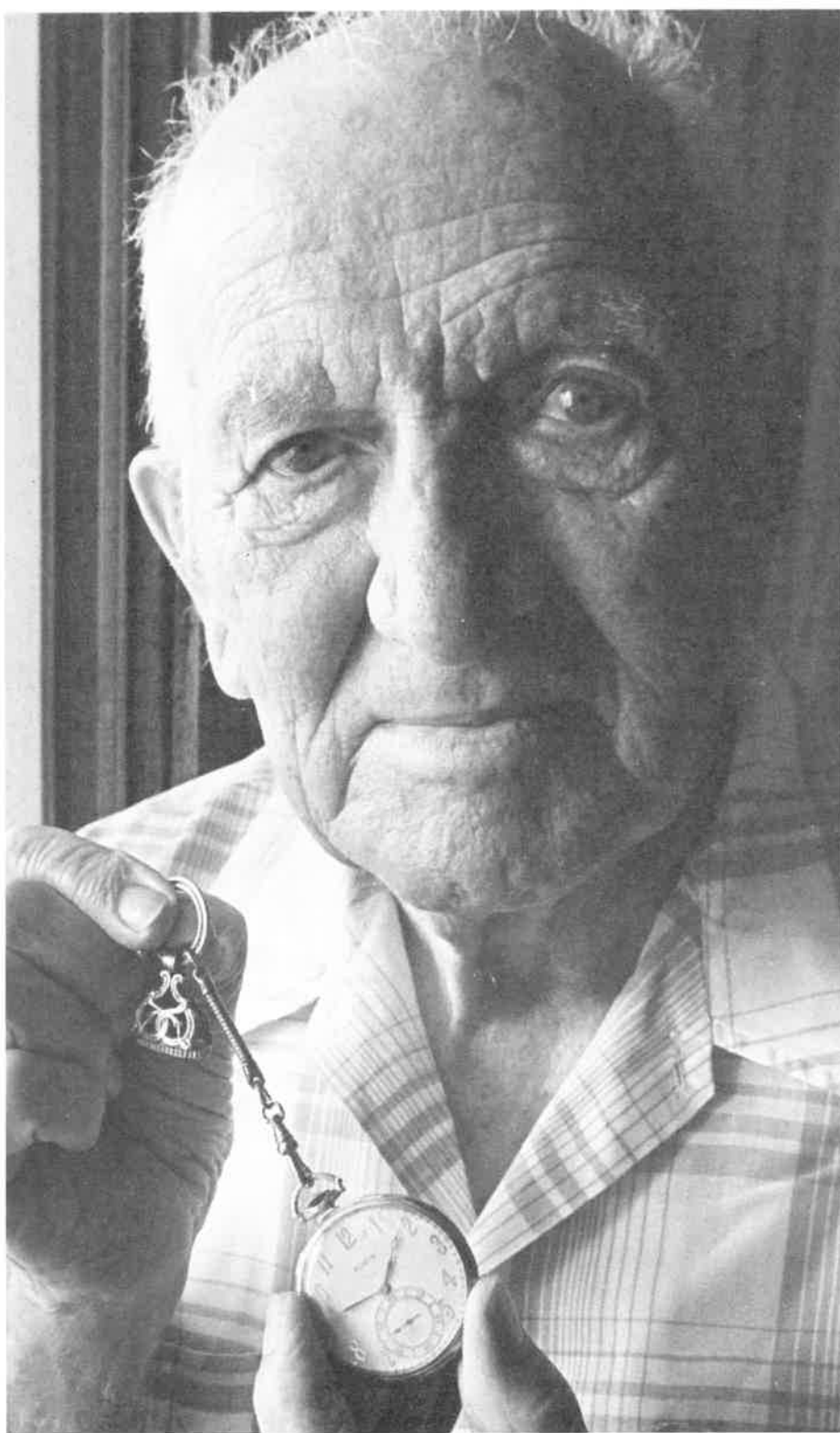
that recognized me were two cops I knew.

"They must have stood there and chewed the rag for a half hour," Dad continues, "asking me about where I was in the Navy. I kept the duffel bag real still on the ground between my legs so it wouldn't move and let the bottles clank together. When they finally left, I beat a path to the Knights of Columbus Hall, and were they ever glad to see me walk through the door."

After returning home from the service, Dad resumed his string of jobs. Brother Jimmy was working for the Hope Gas Company on a new gas line in Clendenin, near Charleston, so Dad headed south to work there. However, his desire to be closer to home eventually landed him a job at the railroad roundhouse in the Glen Elk area of Clarksburg. There he worked with Pat Madden, Mike Crowley, John Mulloney and Pat Judge, all old friends.

One Sunday after running supplies to the West End from the B&O supply house, Dad and a friend were allowed to take the engine back through the Glen Elk station and leave it in the East End near the Tin Plate. Trying not to be late for the seven o'clock mass, they decided to pick up some speed while going through town.

"We had 'er wide open, hell-bent for election, going through the



Earl McAndrew cherishes the memories and mementos of a proud Irish heritage in America. Here he holds father Mike's gold Elgin.

station," he remembers. Unfortunately, the B&O superintendent, Martin Tighe, saw them flying through Glen Elk and reprimanded the two amateur engineers. Needless to say, it was the last time Dad was allowed to run the engines, and he even picked up a new nickname in the process: "Railroad."

Dad also held a job as blacksmith for the B&O, but he soon learned of a better opportunity and was hired by the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company as a manager in their East End store. Dad held onto this job, working for A&P for roughly 18 years. During the Depression, he was often approached by people unable to pay

cash for groceries asking to barter for enough food to feed their families. Dad paid for one man's groceries so often that he was provided with enough logs to build a log cabin at Maple Lake in Bridgeport after the next war.

As one might imagine, prices at the time were amazingly low when compared to today's costs. Dad remembers selling 10-pound Swift Premium hams for \$1.50, 10-pound bags of soup beans for 39 cents, bread for 10 cents a loaf, and 25-pound bags of flour for 39 cents.

The A&P Company began consolidating stores during World War II. The East End market was targeted for closing, so Dad was offered the Grantsville store. Not wanting to leave town, he instead took a job in the office of the Dawson Coal Mines out toward Shinnston. His cousin Mike was superintendent of the mine, which was at its peak of production.

Dad worked at Dawson in the billing department for several years. There he met my mother, who worked in the post office at the Dawson company store. Dad finally ended his bachelor days at age 63, when he married her in 1958. I was born a year and a half later, acquiring the old family name of Michael Joseph.

After a time Dad again switched jobs, moving on to his next job at the Sports Shop in downtown Clarksburg, which was located next to the present Rex Heck's Newsstand on Main Street. The Sports Shop supplied local high schools with sporting goods and also sold hunting and fishing gear. He worked there for roughly 18 years before retiring at the age of 72.

My father has seen much in his time. Born before the computer, radio, television, the airplane and automobile, he has lived to see men land on the moon. There's a big generation gap between us — he's 92, I'm 27 — but we're both proud to carry on the American line begun by Irishman Mike McAndrew more than a century and a quarter ago. Having lived through four wars and a variety of economic booms and busts, Dad is more than willing to give anyone who asks (and some who don't) an earful of his philosophies on life. I hope to do the same if I live to that age. ✱

Haints, Hairy Men and Headless Mules

Some Supernatural Stories for Fall

By Charlotte H. Deskins

Storytelling has long been a tradition among the rural families of southern West Virginia. There are riddles and songs, dramatic tales of adventure and tragic accounts of star-crossed love. I enjoyed them all during my McDowell County childhood, but my particular favorites were the spooky ones — tales of wild creatures, fair angels, the devil himself, and many other wondrous and frightening things.

These tales have been handed down in my family for so long that time has blurred their origins. They are told and retold until they have been absorbed word for word by another generation.

They are simple stories but often gruesome. Some of them were used to keep us obedient. As a child I remember being terrified of venturing out alone after dark. In the black of night "Rawhide" and his sidekick "Bloody Bones" waited to snatch up wandering children and carry them off to a lonely cave where they would be eaten. These hideous creatures got their names because Rawhide wore the skins of his victims around him like a cloak while Bloody Bones was always gnawing on a knee bone from his latest kill.

Everyone differed as to how these fellows looked. I pictured them as two ugly trolls. I had no interest whatsoever in finding out if my theory was correct. Oddly enough, Rawhide and Bloody Bones were exempted from carrying off any child who had his parents' orders to go outside to bring in a load of wood or bucket of water.

Adults used to pull a prank on us called "White Calves." One of them would tell an unsuspecting child that if he were to go outside and walk

around the house three times in the dark a pair of white calves would come back in with him. Once this was accomplished the adult would point out the calves of the child's legs and a good laugh would be shared by all.

We were frightened by the prospect of being carried off by the neighborhood witch and forced to clean her house. As everyone knew, witches were very poor housekeepers. The more you tried to clean the house the dirtier it would get. You could never get it clean. Witch housekeeping tales were usually told to reluctant mother's helpers. Just the thought of being forced to clean a witch's house was enough to make that mop or dust cloth fly!

Less threatening were knocking spirits. Still, they could be frighten-

ing, for they occasionally foretold of a death. A knocking spirit was a small ghost who frequented walls and chimney corners. Its presence was made known by a steady, rapping noise. You could ask a knocking spirit questions and it would answer by knocking twice for "yes" and once for "no." Many a lively practical joke has been played on a naive cousin. With an empty spool and a piece of thread one could easily create a knocking spirit to answer questions and tell the future.

Certain locations cast a spooky spell. My father, Jacob Hicks, remembers that Headless Mule Hollow got its name from a ghostly apparition that used to haunt the place. Other areas were reported to have been inhabited by hairy men or ape-like creatures. Various families had



their own tales of having encountered these strange beings. Mine was no different. One night as my uncle was coming home late from town, a hairy man jumped directly into the path of his Model T. Uncle swerved to avoid hitting the creature and when he looked back in the rearview mirror it was gone.

At another time my grandmother thought she saw a hairy man cutting through her cornfield during a thunderstorm. The creature had long, hairy arms. When the rain was over she went down to investigate and found a path cut through the field. The corn stalks were pushed over in a trail leading to an open window.

Our most intriguing hairy man story came from Great-uncle Jim Hicks. Jim lived alone in a tiny, isolated cabin near a ridge. One morning he got up early, as usual, and started his breakfast. Just as his bacon was sizzling there came a sharp banging at the door. He looked out the window, but it was still too dark to see anything. Using the peep hole on his front door he peered out. There was an eye peering back at him! Just then he began to hear awful noises outside — a loud thumping and piercing screams. He stuck his rifle out the window and prepared to fire. Suddenly all was silent. Jim pulled his gun back and found that the barrel had been bent at a slight angle. Slowly he opened the door and looked outside. His front porch was covered with long, reddish hair.

Grandmother had her own hairy visitor one day, but there was nothing supernatural about this one. It happened while she was making hominy, a tasty delicacy made by soaking field corn in lye water. As any mountain housewife knows, making hominy is an all-day job. Grandmother was hard at work when she heard a scratching at the door. At first she thought it was the dog wanting to come in. Looking out the window she saw a young bear instead. He looked hungry.

She didn't know what to do. She hated to shoot a young animal and, besides, my grandfather had taken the only gun powerful enough to kill a bear with him. The bear was scratching as if he were going to come through that door any minute. He would scratch at the front for a while,

then go and scratch at the kitchen door. Grandmother was frightened for herself and for her new baby.

Suddenly she got an idea. She lifted down the big pot of hominy. As soon as the bear rounded the corner going to the other door she flung the kitchen door open and set the pot outside. Then she latched the door back and braced both of them with cane-bottomed chairs. She took her baby and climbed into the loft.

It didn't take that bear long to sniff out Grandmother's good hominy. And what a feast he had! He licked the pot clean, then bounded off into the woods. When my grandfather came home that night he found his wife and son waiting for him in the rafters.

Bear tales abound among McDowell storytellers, some of them plenty spooky themselves. Wilma Rose of Jolo, tells of a certain woman who used to do laundry and housework for her neighbors. She had a new baby which she took to work with her. At about dusk her husband would meet her by the fence to take the baby home. She would come along later, after she had finished her work.

One night the woman had to work very late. It was dark when she carried her baby to the fence. Standing in the shadows was a tall, dark figure. She barely glanced up as she handed the baby over the fence because she was so tired. She finished her work and came home. Seeing the cradle was empty, she asked "Where's the baby?"

"I thought he was with you," the surprised husband replied. "I was a little late getting to the fence. I waited and waited, but when you didn't show up I went home."

The poor woman's heart nearly stopped. She told her husband what had happened. They got a group of people together to go and look for the child. They searched all night and all the next day. Finally, the baby was found lying unharmed next to a fallen log. He was fast asleep. All around the log were bear tracks. What the mother had thought was her husband in the darkness was a brown bear.

While some of these stories have a base in actual events, others were clearly fables designed to teach us

lessons. Children were raised very strictly in those days. We were taught to honor our father and mother and always to show respect for God and the church. Stories reinforced these teachings.

For example, there is the tale of two children, a boy and a girl, who were too young to help their mother. She would let them play at the edge of a wheat field while she did her work. One day they decided to pretend they were in church. The little boy started stomping around in imitation of the preacher. He grabbed the little girl and bent her backwards in the tall stalks of waving wheat as if he were baptizing her in the river. "I baptize thee, Sister," he intoned, "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost!"

When their mother saw them playing like this she was upset. She told them they must never mock the preacher or make fun of church. Those things were holy and it would be the same as taking the Lord's name in vain.

The children promised to behave, but the next day they forgot her warning and began to play church again. This time they began to make up funny songs about the preacher to the tune of "The Old Rugged Cross." Just then a ghostly voice came rising out of the wheat field. "Sing right, Children!" it whispered, "Sing right!"

They were so scared they ran all the way home and stayed inside for the rest of the day. And they never mocked the preacher again.

In addition to Christian reverence, we were taught such values as kindness and generosity. Vanity and greed were punished and a giving nature rewarded in the stories we heard.

Consider the case of the foolish Sal Ramsey, for example. Sal was beautiful but very vain. As an orphan she had been taken in by her kindly old aunt. Sal had lovely red hair which she always wore hanging down her back. She would never allow it to be pinned up or braided.

Sal's aunt owned a green silk scarf. One day the old woman brought it out of her cedar chest and showed it to Sal. "When I die," she said, "I will leave this to you."

Sal liked that idea. She began to think of the scarf often, imagining



"Grandmother thought she saw a hairy man cutting through her cornfield during a thunderstorm..." All drawings by Andy Willis.

how she would tie it in her pretty red hair. She hated to wait for years to own it. Finally, she decided to kill her aunt.

She soon got the opportunity. They were crossing a swollen stream. "Here, let me help you," Sal offered in a sweet voice. She pretended to take her aunt's arm to steady her but instead pushed her into the swift water where she drowned.

Sal cried more than anyone else at the funeral. But as soon as she got out of sight she wiped her tears and took the silk kerchief from her coat pocket. Bending over a still pool of water she tied the scarf in a fancy bow and stood back to admire herself. Suddenly Sal's face grew pale and she let out a scream.

Standing behind her was the devil.

He was nearly ten feet tall and had hands like the claws of a bird. His feet were cloven as a goat's, and great leathery wings stood on his shoulders. His eyes were dark and piercing and his ears were long and pointed like two tobacco leaves. When he spoke, fire and brimstone came out of his mouth.

"I have come for you, Sal Ramsey," he whispered, "to take you home with me. You were blessed with great beauty but your mean spirit prevailed. You have killed a loved one for a silly trinket. Now prepare to live with me in everlasting fire!" He reached for her with his claws.

Sal tried to run away but he wrapped his claws in the locks of that long, red hair and carried her high above the treetops. All that remained

of wicked Sal Ramsey was the green silk scarf hanging from the highest tree.

Or consider the tale of Peasy and Beansy. Peasy and Beansy were sisters. Peasy was gentle and kind, but Beansy was cruel and lazy. One day their mother took sick. Peasy suggested that the two of them pick some fresh blackberries for her supper.

Beansy did not want to pick blackberries. It sounded too much like work to her. After they had gone a little way into the woods, she suggested that they split up. As soon as her sister was out of sight, Beansy threw down her bucket and began to play. She wandered through the woods and soon was lost. After a while she grew very thirsty.

Just then she heard a voice calling to her. "Please help me," it cried. It was a little spring that spoke. It was all clogged with dead leaves and bits of twig. "Ha! Help yourself!" said the selfish Beansy, and she went her merry way.

Soon she began to get hungry. She walked into a clearing where another voice was calling. "Please help me, Little Girl!" It was a cake sitting over a fire. "Please lift me onto the cool, green grass before I burn!"

"Why should I do that?" asked Beansy. "Why, I might burn myself!" And so she went her way.

Soon it grew dark and Beansy began to shiver from the cold. She found herself drawing near a grove of pine trees. They were covered with stinging worms. "Please help us," they begged. "Please pull off these worms before they eat us alive!"

"Not I!" declared Beansy, "I might get stung myself!" And she walked on, cold, hungry and thirsty until she met her sister again.

Peasy's hands were rough and work-worn but she was smiling. "You'll never guess what happened to me," she said. "I got lost in the woods. But I met a little spring all clogged with leaves. When I cleaned him out he thanked me with a cool drink of water. Then I met a little, brown cake. I burned my hands pulling her off the fire, but she rewarded me with all the sweet cake I could eat. And then I helped pull some stinging worms off a grove of pines and they made me this cloak of pine needles to keep off the chill. I was so warm and snug that the few stings I received hardly bothered me at all."

Beansy began to cry. She realized how selfish and lazy she had been. Her tears fell upon her sister's hands and made them smooth and white again. When the sisters got home, Beansy herself, milked the cow and made the cream and served up fresh blackberries to her mother and sister. And she was never mean or selfish again.

Infant mortality was a serious problem in southern West Virginia as late as the 1950's. Perhaps that is how the story called "The Easter Angel" came about, as a means of explaining the death of a baby brother or sister.

Once a man and woman wanted a child very badly. After many years

God heard their prayers, but there was a shortage of babies in heaven so he asked one of his littlest angels to go down to earth and be their child. The angel agreed, but after she arrived she was very sad. She loved the man and woman but she longed for her life back in heaven. She began to grow very sick and pale and the Lord knew he must bring her back soon. Yet her earthly mother prayed daily that she would get better and live. Finally, she prayed a desperate prayer. "Please, Lord," she begged, "Just let my little one live until Easter Sunday."

Amazingly, the child grew fat and healthy again. When Easter came the woman dressed her in a pink gown and bonnet and gave her a little Easter basket she had made herself. They had a wonderful day.



That night she heard a strange, soft noise in the baby's room. It was like the low coo of a dove. She ran to see what it was. The baby was nowhere in the room. Only her pink dress lay spread out on the bed. The baby's pillow was torn open and the feathers inside were arranged in the shape of a cross. The Lord had taken his angel home.

As children we were also encouraged to be brave. The following story tells of a courageous and resourceful little boy who lived all alone in the woods. This story was told to me by Tom Deskins of Bartley, McDowell County. He says it was frequently told to his class by the teacher during Friday afternoon story hour.

Once there was a little boy, according to the story, who lived all alone in a little cabin in a lonely part of the woods. He was an orphan child who had to live by his wits, but he got along very well.

His cabin had a bed in one corner and a stove in the other. He had two holes with ladders leading up into the attic. One night a varmint appeared at his door. It was a mean-looking varmint with a long tail. "Let me in, Little Boy!" he growled, "I'm going to eat you for my supper!" And it broke down the door and came after the little boy.

The race was on! Up one ladder and down the other the varmint chased the little boy. He was beginning to tire and the varmint edged closer and closer. Suddenly the boy noticed the butcher knife he used to cut his meat was stuck into the wall nearby. Quick as a wink he grabbed it and threw it as hard as he could. The knife cut the varmint's long tail off and it ran screaming out into the dark night.

The little boy looked at the long tail. He was hungry and it looked pretty good so he made some soup on it and ate it for supper. Then he fell fast asleep.

Later that night he was awakened by a deep voice. "Little Boy!" the deep voice said, "I'm out in your yard. Give me back my tail-y bone!"

The little boy sat up in bed. He was very frightened.

"Little Boy," the voice came again, "I'm coming down your path! Give me back my tail-y bone!!!"

The little boy began to feel around in the dark for his knife.

"Little Boy — I'm on your porch! GIVE ME BACK MY TAIL-Y BONE!!!"

The little boy picked up his butcher knife and flung it. It went right through the door. All was quiet. He went and opened the door and found he had stabbed the varmint right through the heart!

Such stories were a vital part of my childhood. I hear modern parents say that they would never tell their children such tales for fear that they would scare them. Perhaps they have a point. Yet I think they served me well. They were not only chilling entertainment, they were also instructive. While demonstrating that the world is full of uncertainty and danger, they also showed that it contains goodness and imagination. They taught us how to feel and dream more deeply and to tackle life and its fears head on. ♣

Recasting a Landmark

New Life

for an Old Sutton Church

By Mike Gioulis

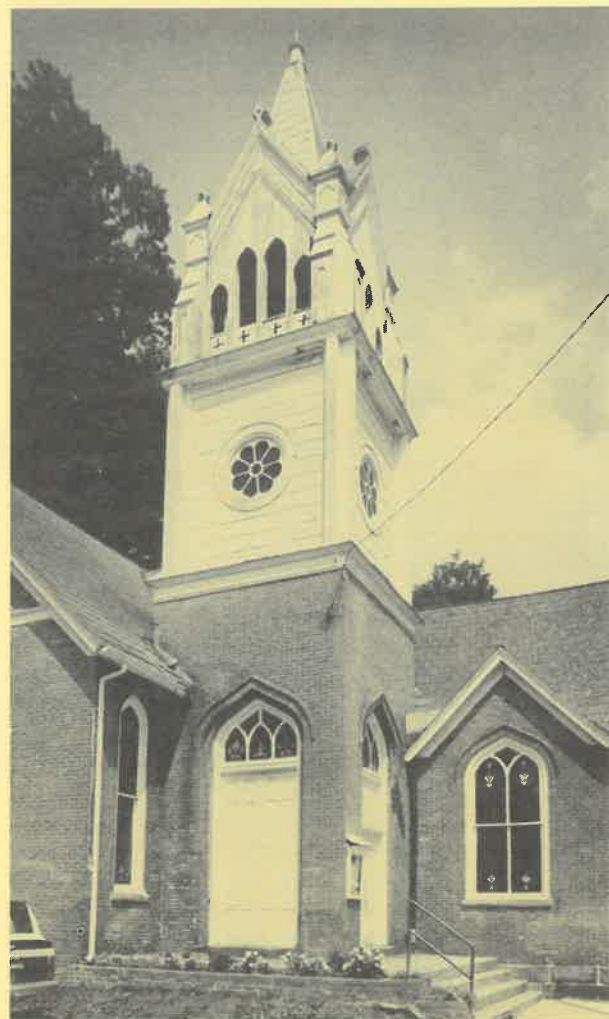
Earlier this year, the old Methodist Episcopal Church in Sutton rang for the first time with the sounds of picking instead of praying. The historic structure played host to workshops and concerts on the subject of Appalachian folk music, or oldtime music as it is called around here. People from several states came to Braxton County to study traditional fiddle and banjo with musicians Gerry Milnes and Ron Mullenex, two of West Virginia's finest.

Following the afternoon sessions, which attracted as many as 20 musicians from as far as Maryland, Mis-

souri, Ohio and New Jersey, the church pews filled up for an oldtime music concert. State champions and local players showed up to entertain the crowd. These included such familiar names as Ernie Carpenter, Jimmy Costa, Melvin Wine, Quincy Hawkins, and Ginny Hanks. Some who played into the early hours of the morning were not on the schedule, but showed up with their instruments anyway for the inevitable picking session.

Once again, the church was a focal point of the community. The busy inaugural weekend included the ex-

The church exterior (right) is in the Gothic Revival style, with steep slate roof and bell tower. The interior (below) has been outfitted with theatre lights and a makeshift stage, but the architectural features have been carefully preserved. Photos by Michael Keller.



hibit of quilts by local artist Lola Jackson, a former ribbon winner at the big Vandalia quilt show in Charleston. Clyde Case, who had never performed before an audience, discovered a fine storytelling talent Saturday night. He recited a story passed down through generations in his family concerning Davy Crockett. He was a favorite of the crowd.

The week after the oldtime music concert, the church again filled with Appalachian storytelling fans. Gail Herman, from western Maryland, lectured on the history of storytelling and its variations throughout the world. Afterwards, she broke into a number of stories that entertained and captivated young and old alike.

These events of late winter and early spring mark the beginning of a new role for one of Braxton County's most venerable buildings. Constructed in 1896, during the local lumber boom, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the largest in Sutton. It cost \$7,100 to build and the contractor came from out of town to do the job. It was the first brick church in Sutton and one of the first brick buildings. The bricks were made locally on the property of Baxter and Hyer, prominent businessmen of the

period. The church stands on Main Street, catty-corner to the county courthouse.

The architecture follows turn-of-the-century fashion for a prestigious religious edifice. The church is of the Gothic Revival style, with its steep-pitched slate roof and tall bell tower with entrance and pointed windows. The windows are made up of stained glass panels in geometric patterns. The floor slopes down to the pulpit, to give all a good view and listening post. The pews were custom made for the sanctuary and curve to form concentric circles. The ceilings are decorated with wood planking and the trusses are exposed, showing the strength and solidity of the construction. Original cast iron floor grates attest to the installation of an early coal-fired central heating system.

The brick church was the largest congregating place in Sutton, reportedly seating 480, and widely used for meetings. There were the normal weddings, baptisms and funerals, and also graduation exercises for the high school. Many residents remember their commencement exercises in the old building during the 'teens and '20's. I'm sure many also recall sleepy Sunday mornings spent in the church.

With the passage of time and the coming of different ways of doing things, the aging church changed hands and was used less and less. Eventually it was totally abandoned as a religious meeting place. The last congregation to own it built a new church on the outskirts of town, easier to get to and less costly to maintain. The old building was put on the block. Various uses were contemplated for the property, most people probably expecting it would fall before the wrecking ball and parking meter.

Now all that has changed. Last February the church was full of talking and listening people. In March, it was again full. This time they were there to enjoy bluegrass and gospel music and view the latest creation of local artist Bill Hopen, a bronze sculpture of Saint Joseph. The church had been spared. Hopen had purchased the structure for use as a studio and community facility. The former church has been deconsecrated and is now the Landmark Studio for the Arts.

"When I bought the building I really didn't know what I was going to do with it," the new owner says. "I knew it was beautiful, special, and it would have been a terrible loss if it was torn down. It has a personality of its own. It provides a perfect backdrop for music, theatre, and visual arts. The building has been full practically every weekend since its transfer, with concerts, plays, meetings, rehearsals or other functions," Hopen adds. He hopes the old church's new role will assure its survival in perpetuity, and intends to donate a preservation easement to the Braxton County Historic Landmark Commission to prevent future destruction.

Sutton has welcomed this new use of its oldest church. Some people had reservations at first, but that changed to support as the studio remained busy through its first summer of operation. Residents and former parishioners have taken the opportunity to revisit one of our county's more prized possessions. One elderly lady traveled from Charleston for the kickoff concert, as much to see the handiwork of her grandfather who worked on the pews as to hear the music. She left a donation on the way out. ✻

Upcoming at the Landmark

Still in its first year of operation, Sutton's Landmark Studio for the Arts has already been used by several community groups. The Hillbilly Players of Sutton staged a production of "Hello Dolly" and the Braxton County High School drama department presented "Oklahoma" shortly after the performing and visual arts center opened last spring. The high school performance drew 1,200 people during its short run.

Plans are underway to keep the historic structure alive with performances, plays and workshops. Starting September 23 and 24, oldtime musician Gerald Milnes will conduct a workshop and perform. In October, on the 7th, 8th, and 9th, the Braxton County High School drama department will present "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead." Later in the month, October 14-15 and 21-22, the Hillbilly Players will present "Blithe Spirit." The last performance before spring brings back the Hillbilly Players in "Oliver" on December 3rd, 4th, 10th, and 11th.

The Landmark Studio reopens in March with a high school production of "Up the Down Staircase" on the 17th, 18th, and 19th. The Hillbilly Players will present "The Rose Tattoo" on March 31st and the 1st, 7th, and 8th of April. They'll return on June 3-4 and June 10-11 with a performance of "Once Upon a Mattress."

A trust fund, the Landmark Church Restoration Fund, supports the repair and other preservation work at the old church. For further information on the Landmark Studio for the Arts, contact Jim Walker, 601 Main Street, Sutton, WV 26601, (304) 765-7566.

MOUNTAIN STAGE



"Mountain Stage" host Larry Groce checks notes during a lull in the action. The show goes out from Charleston's Capitol Plaza Theater to 120 stations nationally.

From Right Here in the Mountains West Virginia Public Radio's "Mountain Stage"

Photographs and Text by Jim Balow

From Kodiak, Alaska, to Panama City, Florida, from Presque Isle, Maine, to San Luis Obispo, California, and in all corners of West Virginia, radio listeners tune in each week to "Mountain Stage," a two-hour live musical variety show produced in Charleston.

Producer Andy Ridenour starts each broadcast with the words "From the historic Capitol Plaza Theater in downtown Charleston, West Virginia, welcome to another 'Mountain Stage' with your host Larry Groce." The grinning, relaxed Groce takes his cue, strums his lap dulcimer and launches into the theme song he wrote for the show, "Right Here in the Mountains."

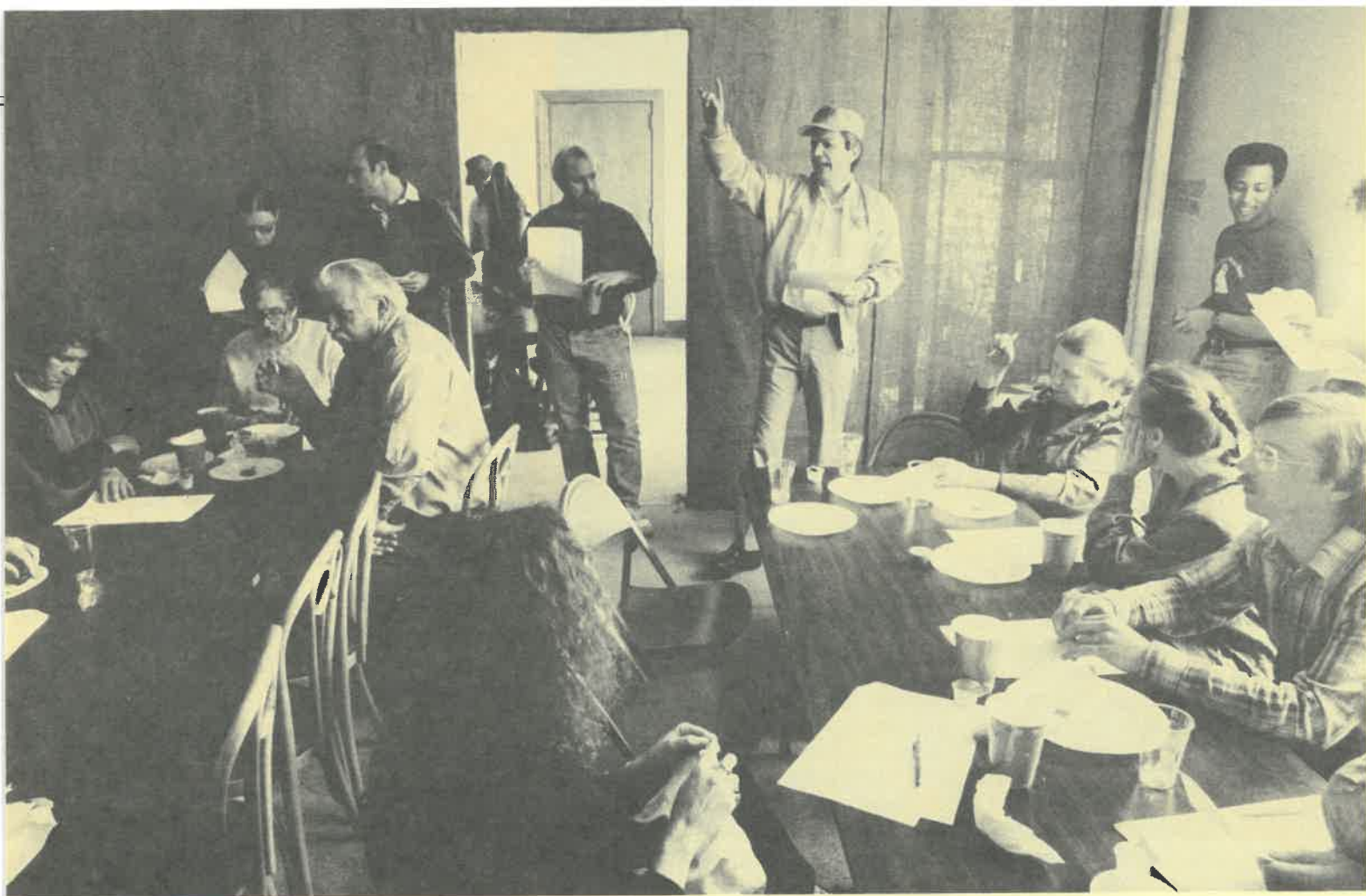
For the next couple of hours Groce, the Mountain Stage Band and an unpredictable assortment of guests will treat listeners to an eclectic collection of music, sometimes spiced with poetry or humor.

The mix works. Each month more stations, including some that once looked down their noses at anything from Appalachia, pick up the show. Since "Mountain Stage" first went into national distribution through National Public Radio in July 1986, an average of two stations per month have added the show to their schedules.

"We picked up 40 stations right away," Ridenour said. "As of July 1988 there were 120 stations carrying the show." The list includes all eight member stations of West Virginia Public Radio. This network now reaches across the state, with stations in Charleston, Beckley, Buckhannon, Huntington, Martinsburg, Morgantown, Parkersburg and Wheeling.

Groce and Ridenour have been with "Mountain Stage" since the first pilot show in 1981. Groce, a native of Dallas who has lived in Barbour County for the last 16 years, is a nationally-known musician who topped the pop charts in 1976 with his self-penned single, "Junk Food Junkie."

Ridenour grew up in Washington, D.C., attended Concord College and moved to West Virginia in 1968. He began his broadcasting career as a disc jockey for WCIR in Beckley and joined the staff of West Virginia Public Radio about 10 years ago.



Backstage belongs to co-founder Andy Ridenour. Here he instructs performers in the ready room before a show.

Groce credits Ridenour with dreaming up the concept for the show. "Andy Ridenour called me," he said. "It was his idea. I guess he thought of me fairly soon, because he knew he would need some help with on-the-air talent and someone who knew something about music, performing and putting a show together."

"I'm the only one that's been on every 'Mountain Stage' show," Groce said. "We did a pilot in 1981 but we didn't actually start producing shows until December of 1983." Guests on the first show included the lively Deni Bonett and Julie Adams, who bill themselves as the Fabulous Twister Sisters, and the Bob Thompson Trio, a Charleston-area jazz combo.

Thompson remains a frequent guest on the show and the Twisters have become part of the Mountain Stage Band and a regular duo act. "When I heard the Twisters I suggested to Andy we try to get them as regulars, because I felt we needed some female regulars on the show

and they seemed to have the right talent and the right spirit," Groce said.

"As regulars at that time we had Eric Kitchen as pianist and a guy named Scott Green as bass player. He was a Morgantown jazz musician and played upright bass and saxophone."

"The Earl of Elkview was a regular," Groce continued. "In the beginning he was billed as a co-host and then he became a regular guest like the Twisters. He was on until the fall of '86." The Earl is Charleston lawyer George Daugherty, a popular humorist and storyteller.

Today the house band includes most of the members of the rock band Stark Raven — Bonett on fiddle, Adams on acoustic guitar, Ron Sowell on harmonica and guitar, bass player John Kessler and drummer Ammed Solomon — plus keyboard player Steve Burczyk, who also plays in the jazz group Still Portrait.

As funding for Mountain Stage grew, so did the frequency of shows.

"We did one show a month in '84," said Ridenour. "In '85 and, I believe, in '86, we did two shows a month. We did 16 shows in '85, 23 in '86. In '87 and this year, we'll do 40 shows."

Growing from a local show to one heard on a third of the 350 public (non-commercial) stations in the country has not always been easy. "When we first started this people told us we'd be lucky to have 25 stations," Ridenour said. "They said it couldn't be done, you can't do something like this in West Virginia. We beat that into the ground."

"We've had to knock a little harder on a few doors and had a few doors slammed in our faces, because we're from the Appalachian region. People look on this as somewhere that could not produce a quality product. Sometimes it was pretty blatant," said Ridenour.

"Not being from here, though my family has roots in Taylor and Preston counties going back to the late 1700's, we have nonetheless adopted some of the traits of mountaineers —



Kentucky balladeer Jean Ritchie and West Virginian Harvey Sampson were among recent guests on the show. "Mountain Stage" includes authentic mountain music among other musical styles.

persistent, stubborn, independent. We know we're a quality product and won't let a little negative reaction stop us."

"It's difficult to live with a stereotype," said Groce, taking up the same theme. "Everyone from the beginning assumed we'd have a traditional bluegrass show. My opinion is it's kind of an unfair criticism."

"Country music is an anathema to public radio," according to Groce. "If they think you're country, they stay away like the plague. Having Kathy Mattea on the show is taking a chance in a way, because they want to slip you into a stereotype."

Though Groce and Ridenour are listed as co-producers, they perform widely different tasks. Ridenour takes care of the traditional offstage nuts-and-bolts functions of a producer — contacting and signing guests, paying bills and making travel arrangements. Groce is more of an artistic director and the onstage host.

"All the acts that want to be on the show or that we want to get on the

show are screened by me," Groce said. "I give Andy a graded list of what I think of an act. From that list Andy is the one who puts together the individual shows. The format is, I guess, a musical variety show or music performance show. The key of it is that it's music mostly, and that it's live performance."

"We don't want everything on the show," said Groce. "It's not appropriate. Some of the things that are ruled out immediately are all the pop music types. We can't compete with commercial radio. Why should we put on what they're putting on? Public radio isn't here for that purpose."

"We shy away from classical musicians unless they tend to be more adventurous, the kind of musician who likes to come on and try something crazy. We don't exclude almost anything else, except mainstream country, pop, and rock."

"Almost everything else is open game for us. That includes all kinds of traditional music and contemporary folk music from all cultures. It

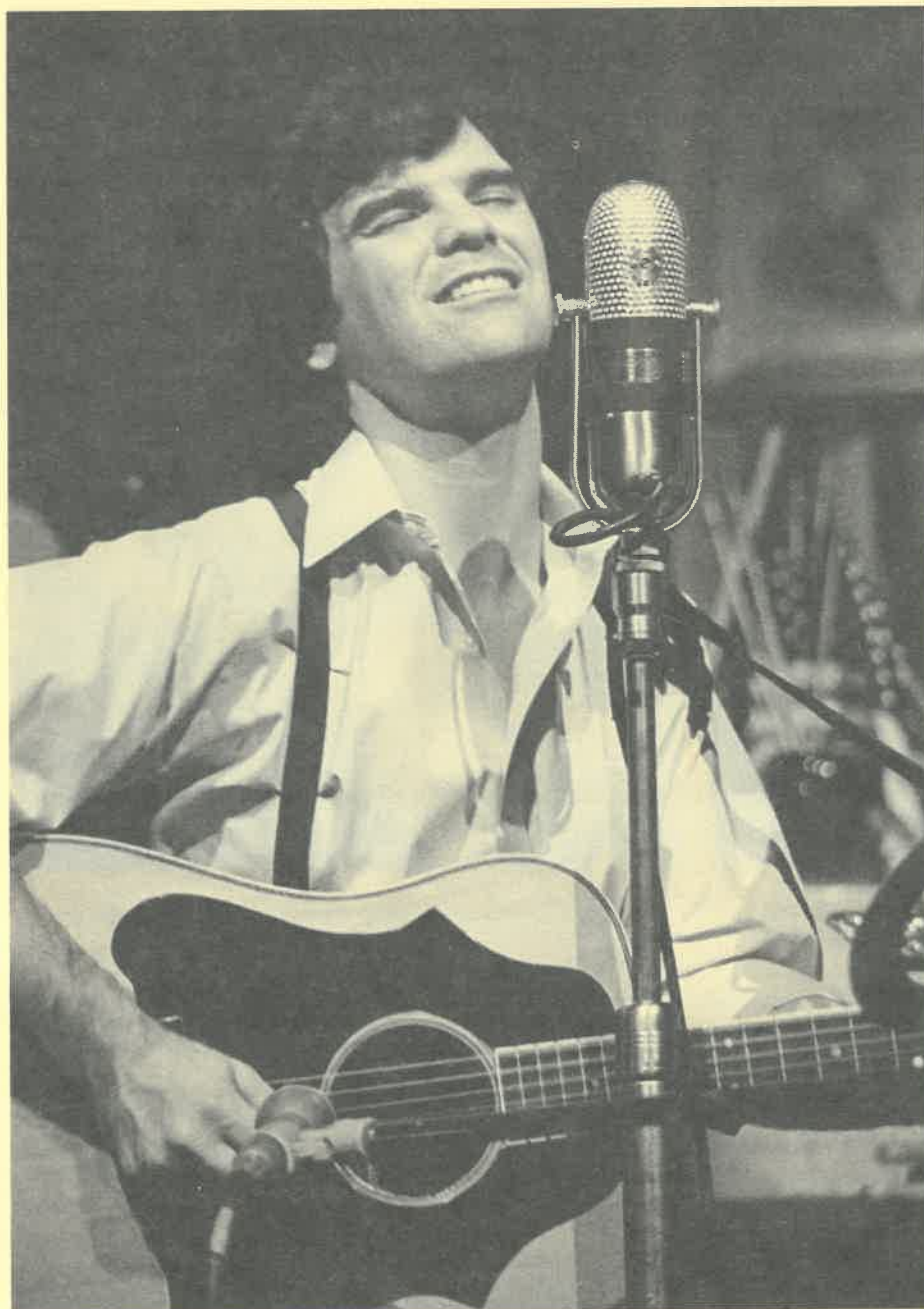
includes blues, bluegrass, jazz music of all kinds. It includes ethnic music. It's pretty wide."

"We feature as many West Virginia performers as we possibly can," Groce said. "In the very beginning we didn't have much choice. As the show progressed, we ran into several problems, like having the same performers over and over."

"In the area of traditional players we've had quite a few — Doc and Chickie Williams, French Mitchell, Lefty Shafer, Harvey Sampson. We've had the West Virginia String Quartet and the Montani String Quartet."

"We always give the benefit of the doubt," the radio host continued. "If we have two artists of similar talent, we'll pick the one with the West Virginia connection. But just being from West Virginia won't get you on the show. People from San Bernardino or Austin, Texas, don't give a darn where you're from, and we're a national show."

Sampson, an oldtime fiddler from



Larry Groce shares production duties with Ridenour and is the onstage personality. He generally performs a few songs as well. Photo by Rick Lee.

Mound Run on the Calhoun-Braxton county line, played a recent show with the Big Possum String Band — banjo player Larry Rader of Elizabeth, guitarist Charlie Winter of Charleston, and fiddler Franklin George of Roane County.

Rader organized Big Possum several years ago to preserve some of Harvey Sampson's tunes. "That old man plays the oldest music I've ever heard and the oldest music Frank's heard," Rader said. "And he don't

play with anybody, either," added Frank George. "You play with him. It's all I can do to play second fiddle."

Big Possum's 10-minute set followed Ozark humorist Mitchell Jayne and preceded famed dulcimer player and singer Jean Ritchie.

Other past shows have included such nationally-known names as Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Miriam Makeba, Odetta, Jerry Jeff Walker, Loudon Wainwright, the Red Clay Ramblers, Nancy and Norman Blake, Vassar

Clements, the Whites, the Bobs, Bob Gibson, Dave van Ronk, Tom Paxton, bluesman Brownie McGhee and beat poet Allen Ginsberg. As Groce says, it's a wide list.

"I never expected for us to achieve what we have this quickly," Ridenour admitted. "In some ways it's almost scary. We've had to take chances, but the opportunity was there and we went after it. Larry's been the visionary. I'm always looking at what can we do tomorrow. Larry's looking at what can we do next year."

"There are quite a few artists that I'd like to see on the show that we have gone after and not gotten yet, but I think we will," Groce said. "The Roches, Richard Thompson, the McGarrigle Sisters. Bigger acts like Los Lobos and Mose Allison. Mike Murphy we may get. Joni Mitchell — we've talked to her before.

"I would like more big-name blues artists like Albert King, also Leonard Cohen, Steeleye Span, Fairport Convention, The Chieftains. Arlo Guthrie and John Prine — they haven't said never, haven't said yes."

"Mountain Stage" has come a long way in a short time and Larry Groce makes no bones about shooting for the stars now. "Bob Dylan and Paul Simon — they're at the top of the list." ♣

GOLDENSEAL readers in and near West Virginia may tune in "Mountain Stage" at the following West Virginia Public Radio FM stations: WVFP — 88.9, Martinsburg; WVNP — 89.9, Wheeling; WVPN — 88.5, Charleston; WVWV — 89.9, Huntington; WVPB — 90.3, Parkersburg; WVPB — 91.7, Beckley; WVPW — 88.9, Buckhannon; and WVPM — 90.9, Morgantown.

The show airs live in West Virginia at 3:00 p.m. each Sunday. "Mountain Stage" may also be heard in most other parts of the country; check with your local public radio station for the time.

Those wishing to attend "Mountain Stage" in person are welcome to come to the Capitol Plaza Theater in Charleston. The warm-up show begins at 2:30 p.m. on 40 Sundays of the year. Admission is \$2.50 for adults, \$1.00 for senior citizens and students, and \$5.00 for families. For further information you may contact West Virginia Public Radio, 600 Capitol Street, Charleston, WV 25301; (304) 348-3000.

Flowers for Jim Comstock

Richwood honored favorite son Jim Comstock during this year's Cherry River Festival. Comstock was born in the Nicholas County town in 1911, and founded his famous *West Virginia Hillbilly* newspaper there in 1956.

Considering his subsequent output of words, it's hard to believe that Comstock didn't learn to read until he was ten. That changed things forever. "After I learned to read, my Lord, the printed word was God to me," he says. He went on to study journalism at Marshall University. After Marshall, Comstock taught school in Richwood and wrote for the *Clarksburg Telegram* for ten cents per column inch. "I paid for the first house I lived in, at ten cents an inch," he says.

Comstock came up with the idea to start his own paper while serving in the Navy. Back home, he launched the *Richwood News Leader* in 1946. A decade later he announced to partner Bronson McClung that it was time to do what they had always wanted to do, start a statewide newspaper. The idea was to create a hometown weekly for the entire state.

The colorful *Hillbilly* soon brought notoriety to its editor. Comstock has appeared on national talk shows and been chastised by the U.S. postmaster general for perfuming his printing ink with ramp juice. His promotional efforts have garnered him a fair amount of attention as well. He cre-

ated an annual statewide "Past 80 Party" to honor older folks. He brought the "University of Hard Knocks" into being to grant degrees to people who have succeeded without benefit of a college education. Commencement ceremonies are held each year on campus at Alderson-Broadbush College.

Comstock's *West Virginia Heritage Encyclopedia*, his most substantial publishing venture, is a monumental accomplishment in sheer size alone. The 50-volume set is the culmination of a 20-year effort and includes state history, folklore, ghost stories, superstitions, and music among its subjects. Another major work, *West Virginia Heritage*, is a seven-volume series reprinting articles and documents by and about West Virginians. Comstock's own best writing has occurred on the back pages of the *Hillbilly*, and has been collected in the books *Best of Hillbilly* and *Pa and Ma and Mister Kennedy*.

Comstock offers his publications for sale through the Hillbilly Bookstore in Richwood, a regional bookstore specializing in rare books and classic reprints of West Virginia publications. He was a founder of Mountain State Press, which publishes books of West Virginia interest.

The Cherry River Festival honored Comstock with a parade, the performance of the "Best of Hillbilly" play, and a special "Flowers for the Living" tribute. Ironically, the "Flowers" idea was introduced by Comstock, as part of the festival, years back. Senator Jennings Randolph was the keynote speaker for the tribute luncheon. Colleagues from around the state and old friends from home were present for the August 10 event at the Richwood City Building.

Comstock says he is in the business of pointing out what's good about West Virginia to outsiders, while telling West Virginians what's wrong with their state. "I don't think West Virginia is better than any of the other states, but I think it's as good," the scrappy editor says. Jim Comstock is one hillbilly the Mountain State couldn't have done without. ♣

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Jim Comstock from our 1981 interview. Photo by Doug Chadwick.



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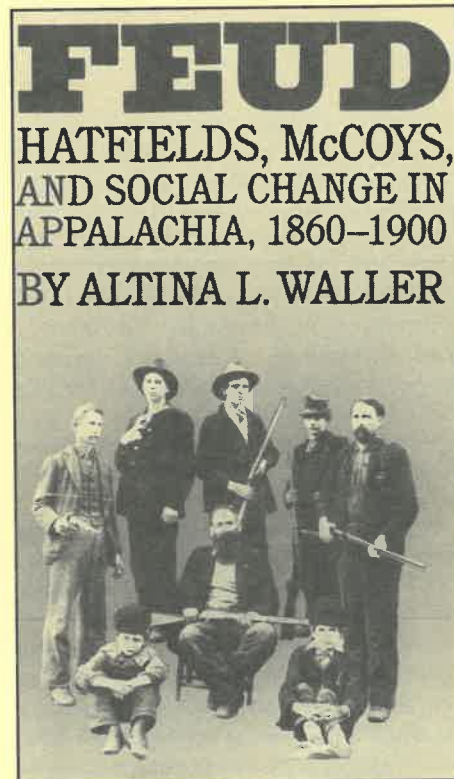
Book Review

The latest book on the Hatfield-McCoy feud was recently published by the University of North Carolina Press. *Feud: Hatfields, McCoy's, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900*, by Altina L. Waller, is the most comprehensive social history of the famous vendetta yet undertaken.

The feud rocked the Tug River border between West Virginia and Kentucky in the years 1878-82 and again in the late 1880's. The violence resulted in the murder of at least a dozen people, the execution by hanging of one, and an official standoff between the two states.

The family warfare has been the subject of numerous novels, articles, movies, plays, and several major historical studies. Historians generally have attributed the feud either to native contrariness and leftover Civil War animosities or to the social tensions produced by rapid industrialization. Waller prefers a variant of the latter interpretation, arguing that the feud arose from the ambitions of homegrown entrepreneurs, especially Devil Anse Hatfield, and later was exacerbated by the influx of much larger outside developers. At this point Devil Anse found himself on the other side of the fence, now defending conservative community norms rather than flaunting them by his own aggressive aspirations.

Feud is an excellent social history of the Tug Valley during the critical transition from a subsistence to an industrial economy, and a good account of the tangled affairs of the major participants, especially on the Hatfield side. The book is top-heavy on analysis, however. Waller stretches to fit every event into her theory. No one doubts that the strains of social change were tremendous, but some events surely are attributable to other factors. Sometimes a



cigar is just a cigar, to misquote Sig-mund Freud, and some parts of a feud may be nothing more than helacious brawling. Community friction, personal crankiness, and greed, lust, and a range of other human passions all enter in as largely unpredictable elements in the equation.

Analysis aside, *Feud* is a readable book and a thorough piece of research. Keep it on the shelf beside Otis Rice's more conventional *The Hatfields and the McCoy's* and you'll have everything you need to know about America's most notorious shoot-out.

— Ken Sullivan

Feud: Hatfields, McCoy's, and Social Change in Appalachia, 1860-1900 is a 313-page book, with illustrations, a bibliography, and index. It may be purchased for \$32.50 hardbound, or \$12.50 paper-bound. Send mail orders to the University of North Carolina Press, P. O. Box 2288, Chapel Hill, NC 27514.

In This Issue

JIM BALOW grew up in Detroit and New Jersey. He taught photography in McDowell County, and later worked as a photographer for the John Henry Memorial Foundation in Princeton. He now lives in Charleston with his wife, GOLDENSEAL designer Nancy Balow, and is a reporter for the *Charleston Gazette*.

GREG CLARK is a photographer for the Department of Culture and History.

FRANCES UPTON CUSTER was born in Harrison County and has lived there all her life. She has raised a family and is retired from the Harrison County school system, where she taught for 10 years. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

CHARLOTTE H. DESKINS, a McDowell County native, now lives in Virginia. Her short fiction and poetry have been published in various magazines, and she has received awards for her writing from West Virginia Writers and Mountain State Press. She is a regular contributor to GOLDENSEAL.

MIKE GIOULIS, a former historical architect with the Department of Culture and History, is an historic preservation consultant in Sutton. This is his second contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

MICHAEL KELLER is the chief of photographic services for the Department of Culture and History.

MIKE McANDREW was encouraged to submit the story of his ancestors by the dean of GOLDENSEAL freelancers, Arthur Pritchard. Formerly of Clarksburg and Charleston, McAndrew now lives in Virginia. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

STUART McGEHEE, who holds a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, is a history professor and chairman of the Division of Social Sciences at Bluefield College. He is also archivist at the Eastern Regional Coal Archives and "nuts about the history of southern West Virginia." This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

MICHAEL M. MEADOR was born in Hinton and grew up in Princeton. He attended Concord College and Marshall University, graduating with a degree in sociology, and is now a student at the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine. Meador, not to be confused with photographer Michael Meador, is a regular contributor to GOLDENSEAL.

JOSEPH PLATANIA, a Huntington native, earned his B.A. and M.A. at Marshall University. He has worked for the West Virginia Department of Welfare and as a claims examiner for the Veterans Administration. A part-time instructor at Marshall, Platania has worked as a freelance writer for the past several years. He is an occasional contributor to GOLDENSEAL.

GERALD RATLIFF is a photographer for *Wonderful West Virginia* magazine.

RON RITTENHOUSE, a Mannington native, has been chief photographer for the *Morgantown Dominion Post* since 1969. He is a member of the National Press Photographers Association, the Professional Photographers of West Virginia, and the American Photographic Historical Society. His hobby is collecting old cameras and photographs, to preserve the heritage of our pioneer photographers. He is an occasional contributor to GOLDENSEAL.

TIM TERMAN, originally from Kentucky, has been in West Virginia since 1976. He earned his journalism degree from West Virginia University. He now lives in Morgantown with his wife and three children and works as a public relations writer for WVU. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

MARY THRASH is the author of *West Virginia Courthouses: A Pictorial History*, published in 1984. She is a native of Lost Creek in Harrison County and a graduate of Ohio University. She is a freelance writer and recently researched the subject of outhouses for the *Clarksburg Exponent-Telegram*. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

ANDY WILLIS, a native of Pennsylvania, has lived in West Virginia nearly 15 years. A former chemical industry employee, he now lives in South Charleston and works as an artist and musician. His illustrations have appeared in earlier issues of GOLDENSEAL.

CORRECTION: Sara Kaznoski informs us that the group of seven widows received 67 acres of land, not "over 600" as reported in the Summer GOLDENSEAL ["Miner's Widow," p. 57].

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Inside Goldenseal

Page 44 — Frances Upton Custer began her family in the Great Depression. She first wrote these memories of life in Clarksburg after the 1929 stock market crash for a grandson's school project.

Page 20 — Antique gas engines are exhibited at Sistersville's Oil and Gas Festival each year. Tim Terman explores the history of the great engines and talks with the collectors who keep them running.

Page 14 — Marie Boette of Parkersburg is a music teacher with a serious interest in West Virginia folk music. She began collecting songs in French Creek in the 1930's.

Page 28 — No town was finer than Gary in its prime, residents say. Photographs and the recollections of the people who lived there tell a story of boom times in the coalfields.

Page 61 — Charlotte Deskins recalls ghost tales, fables, frightening stories based in fact, and some of life's lessons from her McDowell County childhood.

Page 55 — The McAndrews are part of Clarksburg's rich Irish heritage. Mike McAndrew tells the story as recalled by his 92-year-old father, Earl.

Page 9 — Wilbur Veith's family established the Falls Mill grist mill in 1858. Wilbur remains in the Braxton County community today, welcoming visitors, recounting local history, and doing for others.

Page 65 — The old Methodist Episcopal Church at Sutton has been converted to a community arts center. Preservationist Mike Gioulis tells of the transformation.

Page 48 — West Virginia Poet Laureate Louise McNeill has just published her first novel, *The Milkweed Ladies*. Three chapters of the bitter-sweet Pocahontas County family saga are premiered here.

Page 36 — In 1933, Mercer County miner's wife Ella Martin made a quilt to show her support for President Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration. After 55 years, the NRA quilt has come home to West Virginia.

