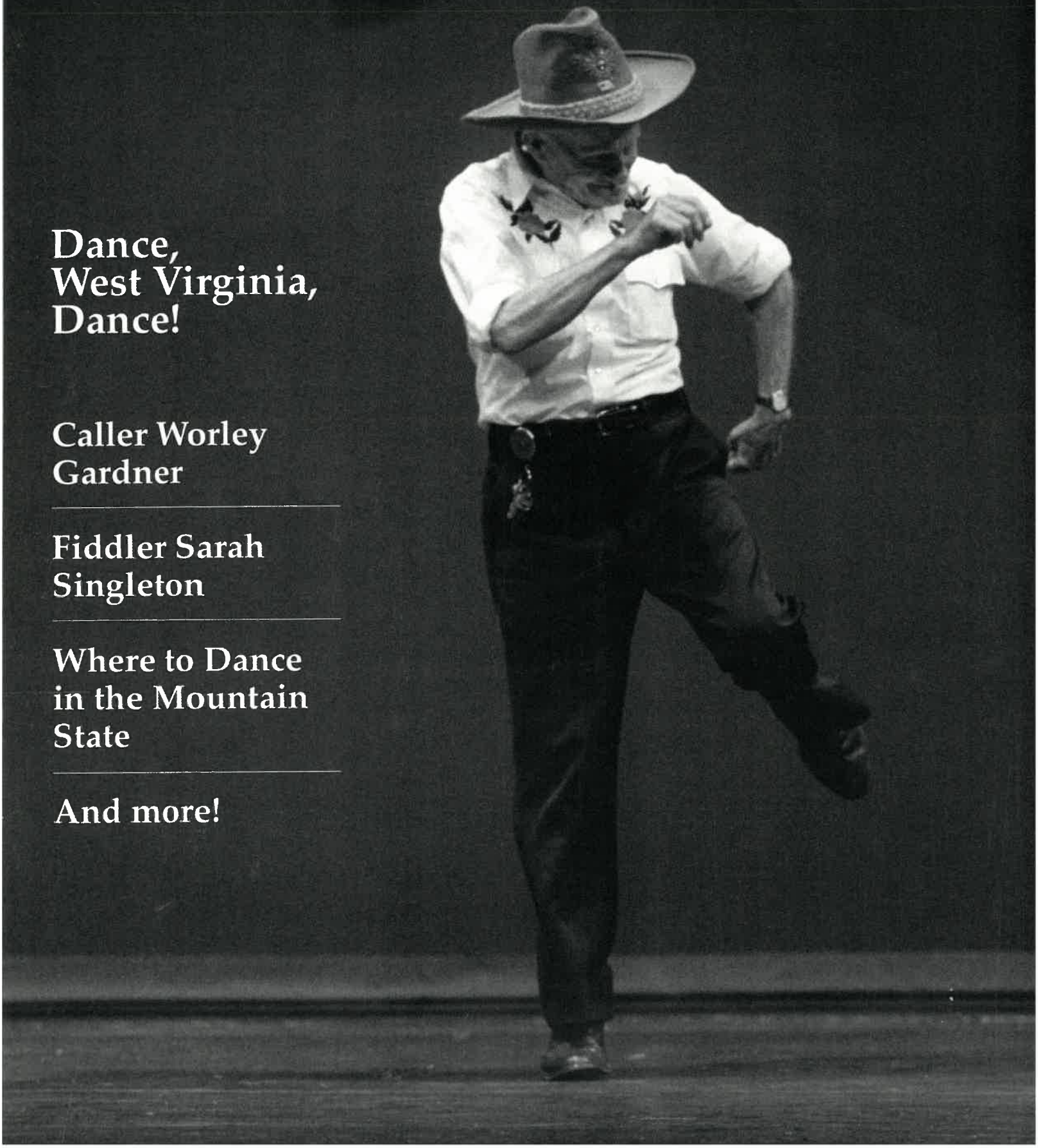
Vol. 18, No. 2 • WEST VIRGINIA TRADITIONAL LIFE • Summer 1992 • $3.95

# Goldenseal



## Dance, West Virginia, Dance!

Caller Worley Gardner

Fiddler Sarah Singleton

Where to Dance in the Mountain State

And more!

The Mother Jones imprisonment site at Pratt, as it appears today. Photo by Jeff Seager.

The famous agitator, Mother Jones, in her prime. Courtesy West Virginia and Regional History Collection, WVU.

# Mother Jones at Pratt

The State Historic Preservation Office announced in March that West Virginia has a new National Historic Landmark. It is the Mother Jones Prison Site in Pratt, Kanawha County, known locally as Mrs. Carney's boardinghouse. The famous labor organizer, "Mother" Mary Harris Jones, was held there during the West Virginia Mine Wars.

Mother Jones's imprisonment came during a time of bitter, bloody strikes in the Kanawha Coalfield. According to the book *Mother Jones Speaks*, edited by Philip S. Foner, shortly after the deadly "Bull Moose Special" armored train attacked the miners tent colony at Holly Grove, Mother Jones went to Charleston to consult Governor William E. Glasscock. It was February 12, 1913, and the labor leader was immediately arrested upon her arrival.

In the *Autobiography of Mother Jones*, she describes her capture in Charleston and later incarceration. "As I was going along the street, a big elephant, called Dan Cunningham, grabbed me by the arm and said, 'I want you!' He took me to the Roughner (sic) Hotel, and sent for a warrant for my arrest. Later I was put on the C. and O. train and taken down to Pratt and handed over to the military. They were not looking for me so they had no bullpen ready."

Mother Jones was held at the boardinghouse, and she and Mrs. Carney became friends. The military authorities brought charges against her for stealing a machine gun, attempting to blow up a train, and conspiracy to commit murder. While Mother Jones was imprisoned she continued her fight for West Virginia's miners despite a bout with pneumonia.

In her autobiography, Mother Jones says that the turning point of her imprisonment came when she was visited by journalist Cora Older. "She got all the facts in regard to the situation from the beginning of the strike to my unconstitutional arrest and imprisonment," Jones wrote. "She reported conditions to Senator Kearns (sic), who immediately demanded a thorough Congressional inquiry.

"Some one dropped a *Cincinnati Post* through my prison window. It contained a story of Wall Street's efforts to hush up the inquiry. 'If Wall Street gets away with this,' I thought, 'and the strike is broken, it means industrial bondage for long years to come in the West Virginia mines.' I decided to send a telegram, via my underground railway, to Senator Kearns."

Mother Jones successfully smuggled out a message for Senator John W. Kern of Indiana, a union sympathizer, to read on the U.S. Senate floor. The message was not a moderate one: "From out of the military prison wall of Pratt, West Virginia, where I have walked over my eighty-fourth milestone in history, I send you the groans and tears and heartaches of men, women and children as I have heard them in this state. From out these prison walls, I plead with you for the honor of the nation, to push that investigation, and the children yet unborn will rise and call you blessed."

With national attention focused on the events in West Virginia, incoming Governor Henry Hatfield soon released Mother Jones from her prison in Pratt. She had been confined for 85 days. The 20-year prison sentence handed down by the military court was later suspended.

The naming of the old prison site as a National Historic Landmark brings West Virginia's total to 13. Such high recognition is reserved only for locations with truly national significance, as opposed to properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places which also takes local and state significance into account.

Debby Sonis Jackson

Published for the
STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Gaston Caperton
Governor

through the
Mountain Arts Foundation
in behalf of the
Division of Culture and History
William M. Drennen, Jr.
Commissioner

**Ken Sullivan**
Editor

**Debby Sonis Jackson**
Assistant Editor

**Cornelia Crews Alexander**
Editorial Assistant

**Colleen Anderson**
**Nancy Balow**
Graphic Design

GOLDENSEAL (ISSN 0099-0159) is published four times a year, in the spring, summer, fall, and winter. The magazine is distributed for a $15.00 yearly contribution. Manuscripts, photographs, and letters are welcome. All correspondence should be addressed to The Editor, GOLDENSEAL, The Cultural Center, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25305-0300. Phone (304) 558-0220.

# Goldenseal

Volume 18, Number 2 Summer 1992

COVER: Henry Neylon is Charleston's best-known street dancer, but photographer Michael Keller caught him on stage. Mr. Neylon recently turned 90. Our dance stories begin on page 9.

**2** Current Programs, Events, Publications

**4** Letters from Readers

**7** Patchwork in the Glen
*By Susan Leffler*

**9** Worley Gardner
Mountain Music, Dance and Dulcimers
*Text and Photographs by Mark Crabtree*

**16** Sarah Singleton
A Fiddler All her Life
*By Teresa Hamm*

**20** So You Wanna Dance?

**24** "You Always Want to Better Yourself"
An Immigrant Success Story
*By Kathleen M. Jacobs*

**28** Streets Paved with Coal
*By Christopher G. Janus*

**31** Bob Adkins
Lincoln County Gas Man
*By Lenore McComas Coberly*

**36** Settling Family Differences

**38** Home Forever
Carving a New Life in Tucker County
*By Susan Leffler*

**42** Patience and Sawdust

**44** Photoessay: The Stones of Stanley Paczosa

**47** Flying Frank Thomas
"Just Like a Preacher with the Calling"
*By Louis E. Keefer*

**54** Mine Mishap
*By David Halsey*

**58** Stories in Wood and Metal
Marshall Fleming's Little Hidden Valley
*Text and Photographs by Woodward S. Bousquet*

**65** The Family Drug Store
Recalling a Huntington Business
*By Patricia Stevens Bianco*

**70** Hillsboro Observes the Pearl Buck Centennial
*By James E. Casto*

**72** The Ballad of John Morgan

PHOTOS: Woodward S. Bousquet, Greg Clark, Mark Crabtree, Glenn Studio, Michael Keller, Susan Leffler, Jeff Seager, West Virginia Photo Company

# 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 event announcements and review copies of books and recordings, but cannot guarantee publication.*

## The Appalachian String Band Music Festival

The third annual Appalachian String Band Music Festival will be held at Camp Washington Carver from July 31 to August 2. The historic rural arts camp is located off U.S. Route 60 at Clifftop, near Babcock State Park in Fayette County.

The festival highlights the best of America's old-time string band music. Featured bands will include Stewed Mulligan and the Morris Brothers from West Virginia, along with several other groups from other parts of the country. Five individual "West Virginia Masters" — Dwight Diller, Alan Freeman, Glen Smith, Ira Southern and Robin Kessinger — will perform during the festival.

As usual, the heart of the three-day event will be the music contests. There are categories for traditional band, nontraditional band, fiddle, and banjo, with sizable cash prizes for the top five winners in each. Contestants are asked to pre-register by July 1.

Daily admission costs $2, with rough camping available at $15 for the weekend. Motor homes may park for the same fee; no hookups. There are showers available and plenty of good country cooking at the camp's big chestnut log lodge.

The Appalachian String Band Music Festival is sponsored by the West Virginia Division of Culture and History. Call (304)438-6429 for information.

### 1920 Census

The Archives and History library at the Cultural Center recently acquired microfilm records of the 1920 U.S. Census for West Virginia, the most important information released for state genealogists and historians in a decade.

The West Virginia census, preserved on 137 rolls of microfilm, was added to the library in March. It was purchased with donations and a grant from the Friends of Culture and History. The manuscript census shows the actual census return forms, filled out in longhand by census takers at the time with such information as the name of household members, their sex, race, marital status, year of emigration if foreign born, literacy, birthplace of parents, ability to speak English, rent or own home, status of mortgage, occupation, industry and class of worker. Although statistical summaries are released after each census is taken, this firsthand information is withheld for 72 years in the interest of individual privacy.

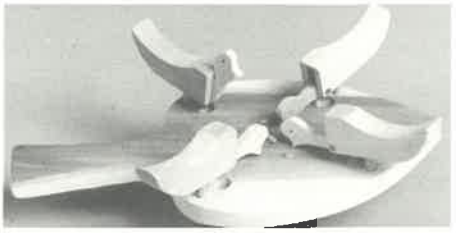
The 1920 census counted every individual living in a household on January 1, 1920. The 1920 census was the 14th census of the United States. Of the nearly 106 million residents recorded, 1,463,701 were located in West Virginia.

The public is welcome to research the West Virginia records from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 1 to 5 p.m. on Saturday. Archives patrons can now work with every West Virginia census from 1790 to 1920, with the exception of the 1890 census which was destroyed by fire before it could be copied. For more information call the State Archives at (304)558-0220.

### Folk Toys Book Reprinted

West Virginia craftsman Dick Schnacke is the author of *American Folk Toys*, recently reprinted for a third time. The 160-page softbound book is fully illustrated and includes an index. *American Folk Toys*, a how-to guide on the making of many folk toys familiar to the mountain culture, sold 100,000 copies in earlier editions.

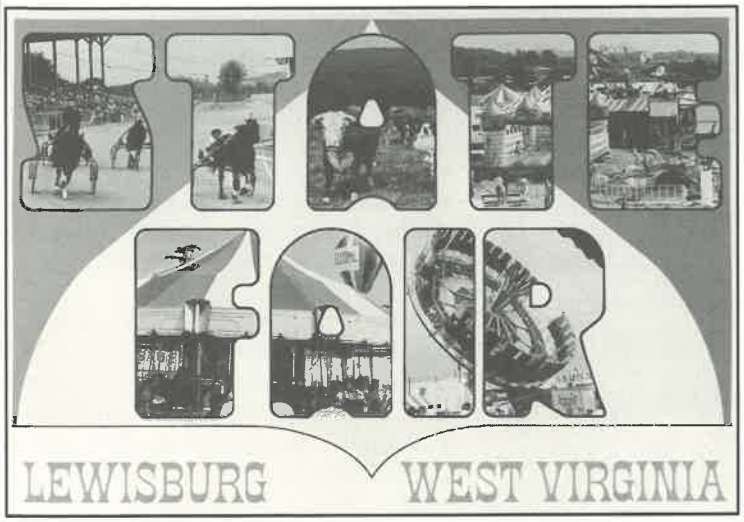
The book is divided into chapters on balance toys, trick toys, and shooting toys, among others. The action and skill toys category shows readers the fun of such toys as a flipperdinger, a whimmydiddle, a do-nothing machine or a stick horse. The limber jack, the wrestlers, and chickens pecking are found under animated toys. Other chapters deal with dolls, noisemakers, woodcarvers specialties, vehicles and flying toys, tops, games and puzzles.



This is the pecking chickens folk toy.

Dick Schnacke was one of the organizers of the first Mountain State Art & Craft Fair at Cedar Lakes near Ripley in 1963, West Virginia's centennial year. He now owns and operates the Mountain Craft Shop in New Martinsville, the nation's leading producer of folk toys.

*American Folk Toys* may be ordered for $9.95, plus $3 for shipping, at American Ridge Road, Route 1, New Martinsville, WV 26155; (304)455-3570. West Virginia orders must include 6% sales tax. A complete 1992 catalog of American Folk Toys with 328 items listed is also available from Dick Schnacke's Mountain Craft Shop.




Postcard courtesy State Archives.

**State Fair Memorabilia**

The West Virginia State Fair at Lewisburg is collecting items to illustrate the colorful history of the statewide agricultural event. A State Fair memorabilia display is planned when the 1992 fair opens August 14.

The memorabilia project hopes to collect old pictures, ribbons, newspaper articles, posters, postcards and other souvenirs of years past. State Fair personnel plan to continue the exhibit at future fairs as well.

The State Fair traces its origins to a Lewisburg event begun in 1858 and interrupted by the Civil War. The first postwar fair was held in Lewisburg in 1869, followed by one at Alderson in 1877. By the early 1890's, the fair had returned to Lewisburg and became known as the Great Greenbrier Valley Industrial Exposition by 1895. The Great Greenbrier Valley Fair took hold as the official name in 1921, and in 1941 the legislature passed a resolution naming the event the State Fair of West Virginia.

If you have items you wish to donate or loan for the State Fair memorabilia display contact Marlene Ferguson at (304)645-1090 or write to her at P.O. Drawer 986, Lewisburg, WV 24901. The 1992 West Virginia State Fair runs from August 14 through 22 at Fairlea, near Lewisburg.

**Kanawha Sternwheeling**

*Sternwheelers On the Great Kanawha River* is an illustrated history of the only major navigable river located wholly within West Virginia. The Kanawha flows 97 miles from Gauley Bridge to the Ohio River at Point Pleasant.

Gerald W. Sutphin of Huntington and Richard A. Andre of Charleston coauthored the 198-page book. More than 400 illustrations, mostly from Sutphin's personal collection, tell the river's story. Sutphin designed the oversized hardbound volume, and Andre researched parts of the book at the West Virginia State Archives, as well as in Wheeling, Cincinnati and elsewhere.

The new book reprints newspaper stories, ads, handbills, freight records, maps and historic black and white photos from a time when sternwheel packets and towboats were a way of life for the people of the Kanawha Valley. "Spend your vacation on the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers" reads one ad, "Pittsburgh to Charleston and return just $24.00."

*Sternwheelers on the Great Kanawha* may be purchased in bookstores or from Gerald W. Sutphin, 204 Chestnut Street, Huntington WV 25705. The cost is $25, plus $1.50 sales tax for West Virginians. Mail orders should include $1.91 postage.

**Big Plans Underway at Cass**

The Mountain State Railroad & Logging Historical Association, in cooperation with Cass Scenic Railroad State Park, is working on a living history exhibit at Cass. The exhibit, named Whittaker Camp No. 1, will be located at Whittaker Station, a major stopping point for Cass Railroad excursions with a beautiful view of the surrounding mountains.

The outdoor exhibit will offer a look at logging in the 1940's and will include a steam skidder, a diesel log loader, several log cars designed and built by the Meadow River Lumber Company at Rainelle, an original Mower Lumber Company camp car and a reconstructed camp car, and an 1880's caboose. The logging equipment is to be placed on three sidings at an elevation of 3200 feet. Visitors will ride a logging train through two switch-backs and up an 11 percent grade to get to the Whittaker exhibit site.

The MSR&LHA says the display is a "tribute to the adventurous and perilous days of logging, a brief look into the everyday life of the lumberjack in West Virginia." The group seeks funding through government, public and private grants, corporations and individuals. Those who donate $50 or more will be recognized on a donor plaque, according to the logging history association. A 15-page project report is available for $5, including postage and handling.

Contact John Bledsoe, Project Co-Manager, MSR&LHA, P.O. Box 9164, Huntington, WV 25704. Tax deductible donations may also be sent to Bledsoe.

**Law and Order and the Miners**

The West Virginia Mine Wars continue to attract publishers' attention, with the newest book coming from Appalachian Editions of Charleston. *Law and Order vs. the Miners: West Virginia, 1906-1933*, by Richard E. Lunt, was originally issued by Archon Books of Connecticut in 1979. The Appalachian Editions version appeared early this year.

Lunt covers the years of greatest violence, which ended in 1921, then carries the story on through national labor law reform and the resulting victory for the miners in the early 1930's. His book differs from most others in its attention to legal history and documentary evidence, supplying a valuable new perspective. While most historians have concentrated on the spectacular events of the troubled period, Lunt views the changing legal framework as more decisive. He regards the 1907-17 Hitchman Coal & Coke Company court case, which upheld wide use of the anti-union

injunction and "yellow dog" contracts, as particularly important.

Hitchman was a Marshall County company and Lunt's treatment of this case serves to direct attention to labor struggles in West Virginia's northern coalfields. He highlights early unrest in the Fairmont Field and the Northern Panhandle, as well as the better-known battles in Kanawha, Logan and Mingo counties.

*Law and Order vs. the Miners* is a 223-page paperback, with index, bibliography, and extensive footnotes. The book may be purchased in bookstores for $12.95 or ordered from Appalachian Editions, 1532 Quarrier Street, Charleston, WV 25311. Please include $3 postage and handling for mail orders.

**New West Virginia CCC Book**

Milton Harr of Charleston is the author of *The C.C.C. Camps in West Virginia, 1933-1942*. A 1939 graduate of the WVU Forestry School, Harr writes from experience. He worked as a student aide at CCC Camp Lewis in Lewisburg during the summer of 1936, and in 1940 and 1941 he was a squad foreman at Camp Rhododendron in Morgantown and Camp Bowers in Pickens.

The Civilian Conservation Corps was a program of the Roosevelt New Deal to put young men to work on public conservation projects. Harr says that while much has been written about the CCC nationwide, little information is available on the Mountain State's camps. His book names 66 camps in West Virginia. A state map with camp locations and two historic photos introduce the reader to West Virginia's CCC program. Accompanying text describes the camps, personnel where known, and local site work.

Kermit McKeever, former chief of the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources' Parks and Recreation unit, wrote the book's foreword. *The C.C.C. Camps in West Virginia, 1933-1942* is a staplebound book of 49 pages. It sells for $3.95 at Trans Allegheny Books, 114 Capitol Street, Charleston, WV 25301. For mail orders, include $3 for shipping and handling. West Virginians should add 6% sales tax. If you are ordering more than one copy send $.50 shipping for each additional book.

# Letters from Readers

*GOLDENSEAL welcomes letters of general interest from readers. Our address is The Cultural Center, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25305-0300. Published letters may be edited for brevity or clarity.*

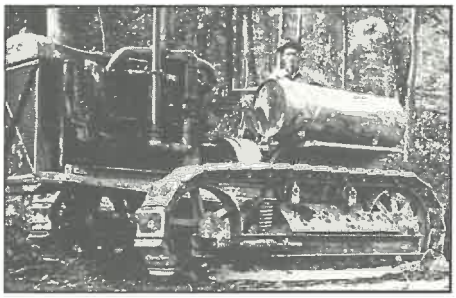
January 29, 1992
Rainelle, West Virginia
Editor:
My son Jud Gilkeson bought a copy of GOLDENSEAL for his dad at Christmas. It featured the story of the Meadow River Lumber Company (Winter 1991).

While opening our gifts on Christmas morning, my husband, Fred Gilkeson, was looking through the pages. I looked over at him and he was crying. He said, "My gosh, it's Dad." On page 12 the man sitting on the tractor at the bottom of the page was Stoughten E. Gilkeson.

We have about the same picture. On the back of our picture is written, "Box Tractor 1st one owned by Meadow River Lumber Company," no date. Also, on page 17, the man standing at the end of the table with the white apron was the cook for the Meadow River Lumber Company, Mr. Ernest Smith.

All Christmas Day our family took turns reading the story and remembering someone no longer with us.
Yours truly,
Norma Gilkeson

Stoughten Gilkeson on the Caterpillar tractor.



**Too Fast**

December 19, 1991
South Charleston, West Virginia
Editor:
I believe you put too many zeros, or not enough decimal points, in the speed of the sawmill carriage in the Meadow River Lumber story (GOLDENSEAL, Winter 1991).

Only Cape Canaveral could boost that heavy log and carriage to a speed of 120 miles per hour in ten feet of travel.

If the log, the carriage, and two men had attained that speed, they would probably have stopped about Gauley Bridge!
P. D. Roberts

*Oops! We checked with writer Ben Crookshanks who checked with his source, West Virginia lumber history authority Roy B. Clarkson, who in turn checked his source. We've decided the 120 mph applies to the speed of the saw, not the carriage. Thanks for the correction. — ed.*

**Indoor Plumbing**

March 20, 1992
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia
Editor:
The Spring '92 GOLDENSEAL reported young Christopher Noe's winning story at the Vandalia 1991 Liar's Contest. It was about 70 years ago that I first read that story. Then I was just about Christopher's present age.

Christopher had to explain that his aunt wanted to ask whether there was an indoor toilet at camp so she delicately wrote "bathroom commode." She abbreviated it to B.C.

which was mistaken for Baptist Church.

In the '20's, the lady asked about the W.C. "Toilet" of course was not a proper word, but everyone knew W.C. meant water closet — except the one who answered the letter, and he took it to mean Wesleyan Church.
Sincerely,
Bassett Ferguson

**Clair Bee**

January 20, 1992
Wading River, New York
Editor:
I was fascinated by the story of Clair Bee (GOLDENSEAL, Winter 1991). My father used to buy me his books as a kid. Little did I know he was from Grafton, which is a place our family has visited a few times. We have come to really like it, with its railroad relics, great lake, and friendly people.

Clair Bee at work.

I also learned that Clair Bee, a West Virginia native son, spent many years on Long Island, where we are from.
Thanks,
Harry Katz

**Wings Over Glen Dale**

February 21, 1992
Buckhannon, West Virginia
Editor:
Thanks for an interesting account of the Fokker plant in Glen Dale (GOLDENSEAL, Winter 1991). Having lived in Glen Dale from 1927 to 1942, I recall several things about this facility.

The take-off of that first F-10 for Pan American was viewed by me as I was walking down Wheeling Avenue from the Glen Dale grade school toward my home on Tomlinson Avenue at 10th Street. In the early 1930's I delivered the morning paper, *The Wheeling Register,* to a restaurant in the south end of the plant. My brother, Ralph (who still lives in Moundsville), was employed in the machine shop at the plant and began working there for 25 cents an hour.

When that first F-10 was about finished it was in the large room on the north end of the plant. Some final work was being done, I believe, on the rear skid of the plane when it was set on fire. An employee received a reward for quickly extinguishing it before much damage was done.

At a later time I recall seeing and walking around the Ford trimotor which had been piloted by Floyd Bennett when he flew Admiral Byrd over the North Pole. It landed in the river bottom field just west of the plant.

Thanks again for putting my memory in gear to rethink those incidents of 60 years or more ago.
Sincerely,
Frank D. Berisford

**Sliding at Swandale**

April 23, 1992
Liberty, West Virginia
Editor:
I was born and raised at Swandale (GOLDENSEAL, Spring 1992). It was a wonderful place to grow up. There was a good group of young boys and girls who lived there, and we all got along just fine together.

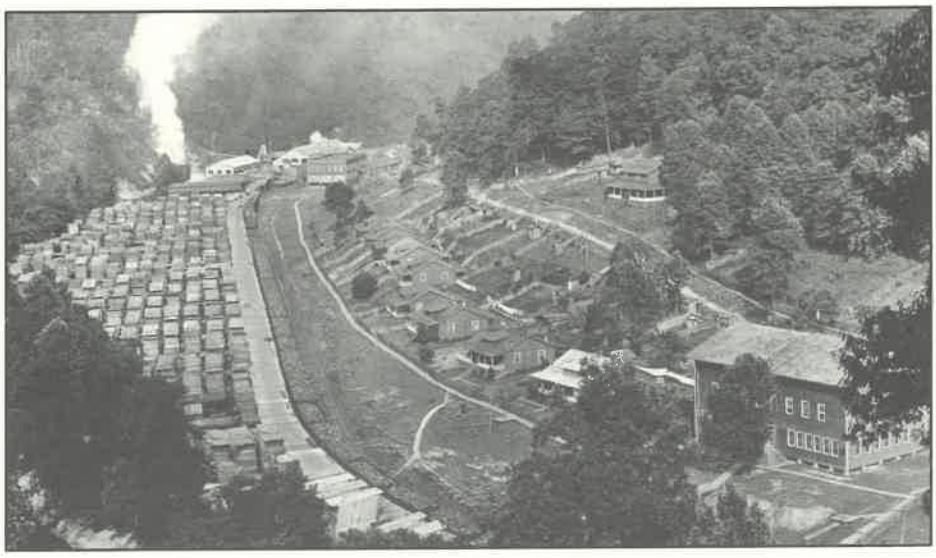
It would be good for your readers to know how Swandale got its name. The first superintendent in charge at the start of the lumber job was Mr. Cap Swan. They thought they would put "dale" after his name and call it Swandale.

Mr. Swan stayed there a few years and left. They brought in another boss by the name of Carl Straw. He was a good Christian man and real nice. If he caught anyone drinking around town or on the job he sent them down the road.

To start with, they had a one-room school house. As the town grew they built a community building with six rooms for school on the first floor. Upstairs they had a basketball gym where we had all activities, church, and Christmas plays. There were silent movies and other things. They made a good baseball diamond. We played Widen, Dundon, and Clay and had some good games. On Christmas they gave each one an orange, a box of candy, and a ball of popcorn. Once a year the company would take us all on a picnic and they furnished the food and drinks.

The boys in the community fell on the idea of building a slide on the hill. The company had wooden docks down in the bottom beside the railroad tracks where they stacked green lumber to season out. The main docks were about a mile and a half long and

Swandale, with the lumber docks at left. Courtesy State Archives.



had wings about 400 or 500 feet long and about six feet high. Beside the dock were low concrete piers to stack lumber on. Each stack was about 12 feet high, or about six feet above the docks. They stacked the lumber 16 feet long about six or seven feet wide.

Between each stack was a rack of one-by-four stacking strips, and that was what we used to build our slide. We got those strips and took them up on the hill where we were going to build our slide. We put them together down the hill like a little track. We nailed them about four inches apart and made it strong and sturdy. We made it about 120 feet long, steep enough to go fast.

We got a oak board 12 inches wide and cut it three feet long and cut strips six inches long and nailed it in the center of the board at each end to keep it on the track. On top of the board at the front end, we nailed a strip to put our feet on. We went to the place where they kept wagons and buggies and one-pound cans of axle grease, and we took a can of the axle grease. We used the grease to grease the tracks. That would make it just fly down the track.

It is a wonder we did not get killed.
Fred Johnson

**Hanging John Hardy**

March 16, 1992
Mullens, West Virginia
Editor:
The story of the John Hardy hanging in the Spring 1992 GOLDENSEAL is also of interest to Mullens, West Virginia.

Andrew Jackson Mullins, the founder of the city, was a deputy sheriff in McDowell County, from Belcher Mountain, the same as Thursa H. Mullins Belcher in your story. In 1894 A. J. Mullins helped with the hanging of John Hardy. A grandson of A. J. Mullins said that his grandfather put the noose around John Hardy's neck.

Thursa H. Mullins Belcher was probably a niece of A. J. Mullins. Her husband, also a deputy sheriff, was a brother to John Turner Belcher, a brother-in-law to A. J. Mullins.

After A. J. Mullins founded the town of Mullens the name was incorrectly spelled as "Mullens" when the application for the post office was altered, but that's another story.
Sincerely yours,
Jack Feller

## Wheeling Postcards

Our "Wheeling West Virginia — No Comma" postcard pun story tickled a lot of readers, to judge from the response.

Among those we heard from was Walt Thayer of Wenatchee, Washington. Mr. Thayer, a long-time GOLDENSEAL fan and faithful correspondent, sent the antique advertisement from a Wheeling boots and shoes manufacturer which we've reproduced here. Look closely at the smaller illustration inset at the lower right and you will see that the children are "wheeling boots and shoes" in their wheelbarrows. This use of the Wheeling pun apparently predates the postcards featured in the last GOLDENSEAL.

Fred Layman had more important business in mind when he sent us a selection from his extensive West Virginiana collection. The "Getting Down to Business in Wheeling" postcard is from 1917, he says. Check the lower right again — Mr. Layman says that that is poison ivy by the man's feet. Maybe the busy couple left their rendezvous with more of a souvenir than they expected?

—ed.


# Patchwork in the Glen

## A Quilt Coming Together One Piece at a Time

By Susan Leffler

The Gilmer County town of Glenville, best known as the home of Glenville State College and the West Virginia State Folk Festival, has gone to work to help itself.

Over the past decade hard times have left several buildings on Main Street empty and many others with peeling paint and sagging awnings. The Derrick Cafe is the most vibrant survivor of the once prosperous natural gas industry and coal trucks haven't been a problem on the back roads for a long time.

According to the Community Resources office, about half of the county's population receives some sort of government assistance and most public school children here qualify for free lunches. But the people in the rolling hills that surround Glenville are descendants of independent-minded farmers who raised their families on hard work, staunch Christian values and lots of back-porch music. "They want to find a way to help themselves," says Community Resources' Donna Shreve.

A little more than a year ago, Shreve and other area residents and business leaders got together and decided to form "Patchwork in the Glen," an organization determined to find a solution to the community's economic woes by turning Glenville into a craft village featuring retail stores, classes and demonstrations, historic tours, and cultural activities.

"We all got tired of going to meetings where nothing happened," Shreve says. "One day we just decided that now was the time and we could do something. We decided to take the plunge."

The "plunge" was the decision to open a member-owned craft co-op called Crafters in the Glen. This past March, 25 volunteers started building shelves, painting walls, and refinishing the floors of an empty store owned by the United National Bank.

Kay Miller and Ola Boggs help to prepare for last spring's opening of the Patchwork in the Glen craft co-op. Photo by Susan Leffler.

In exchange, the bank gave the co-op three months free rent. Sixty-seven people joined the co-op. They'll take turns staffing the storefront as well as making purchasing and business decisions for the group. Members will set their own prices on woodwork, ceramics, quilts, baskets, knives, and so forth, and the co-op will add a percentage to cover operating costs. Everything the co-op handles will be handmade by West Virginians and subject to the group's quality control standards.

Sadie Kelble says Crafters in the Glen hopes to market its products by mail and is working on a catalog. It also will put brochures in regional businesses and tourist attractions to lure customers to Glenville.

The co-op, which officially opened in April, is one component of an ambitious master plan to boost Glenville's economy. The umbrella organization, called Patchwork in the Glen, is working not only to improve downtown Glenville's appearance but also to find space for proposed craft workshops and classes. On Main Street cracked windows are being replaced, sidewalks fixed, and wooden trim covered with shiny new paint.

Mack Samples, president of the folk festival and Dean of Admissions at the college, says most of the town's businesses, including the two newspapers and the bank, have been supportive of the rejuvenation project. He says the Patchwork group is still negotiating with town merchants for permission to use or possibly buy a few Main Street buildings.

The Country Store, a craft and collectibles shop currently run by the

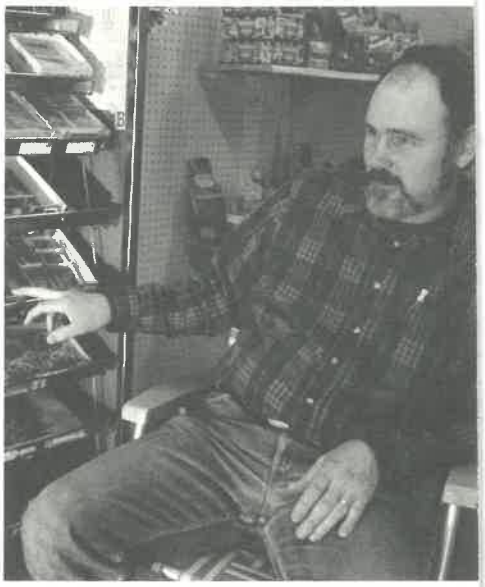
folk festival, and the Little Kanawha Valley Bank building, which is listed in the National Historic Register, are already a part of the Patchwork in the Glen project. Mountain Trapper Crafts, the Community Resources Craft Store, the Gift House, Gil-Co Pharmacy, and Minnich Florist are also participating in the economic development of the downtown area.

Samples says the group would like Glenville to become a regional hub for crafts and the preservation of Appalachian culture similar to Berea, Kentucky. He says plans for museum space, and an old-fashioned ice cream parlor are currently in the works. Samples believes that the festival, widely regarded as one of the most authentic in the country, offers a realistic cornerstone for the town's dreams.

Glenville residents know it will take a lot more time, money, and elbow grease before they see any concrete economic returns on their efforts. But people like Donna Shreve say the community is already profiting from the project.

"There are people from all income levels. They're getting along fine and they're talking, forming groups, having lunch together," she says. "They say goodbye and hug at night and then come back and work together in the morning. That didn't happen here before. People think they can make a difference now. They feel comfortable speaking their minds. I think you'll see some real changes in Glenville," Shreve says.

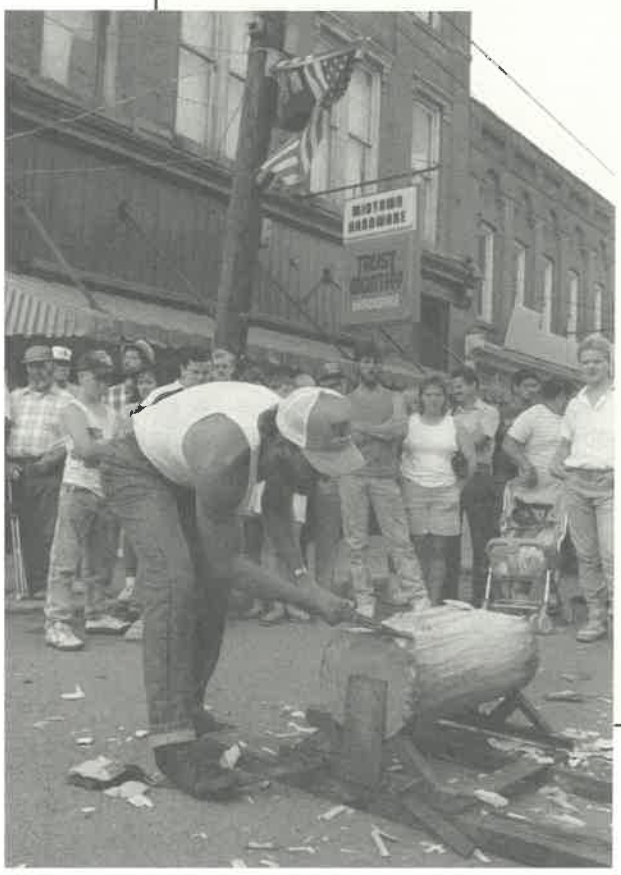
The Crafters in the Glen Co-op is open from 9:00 to 5:00 Monday through Saturday. Most Glenville shops will have extended hours during the folk festival in June.



Scott Schimmel, shown here at his Mountain Trappers store, supports the new co-op. Photo by Susan Leffler.

## *By Traditional Means:*
# The State Folk Festival at Glenville

The West Virginia State Folk Festival, affectionately known by its many fans as simply "Glenville," starts with a square dance Thursday June 18 at 7:00 p.m. and ends with a religious service Sunday June 21 at 10:30 a.m. In between, there's an old-fashioned spelling bee, shape-note and gospel singing, a woodchopping contest, craft demonstrations and sales, and more good times and jamming than you can imagine. There will be fiddle and banjo contests Friday and Saturday afternoons and music programs both those nights.



Glenville 1991. Photo by Susan Leffler.

The late Dr. Patrick Gainer, West Virginia folklore pioneer and professor at WVU, started the festival at Glenville College in 1950 to "preserve the remnants of West Virginia traditional life." The philosophy of today's gathering has changed very little. Festival president Mack Samples says commercialism and even amplified music are strictly taboo at Glenville.

"We feature original, non-professional, dyed-in-the-wool West Virginia musicians, dancers, singers, and craftspeople," says Samples. "We were involved in the preservation of the traditional arts long before it became fashionable and long before outsiders took notice of our culture."

Festival regulars include fiddlers Melvin Wine, Glen Smith, and Frank George; banjo pickers Phoeba Parsons and John Morris; and the Samples Brothers band, among others. But the informal jam sessions in the Conrad Motel parking lot or on the courthouse lawn are still the heart and soul of the Glenville festival.

"There aren't any workshops or classes," says Samples. "No one has to announce that an old fiddler is going to be at a certain place at a certain time to teach fiddle licks. The young and old soon find each other. Tradition is passed down by traditional means here," he says.

Hotel space in Glenville is limited to the Conrad Motel. You can bet they are full by now; try calling them at (304)462-7316 for next year. Motel 79 is about 15 miles away in Burnsville. Camping is available at Cedar Creek State Park, eight miles away. You may call (304)462-7361 for more information about the West Virginia State Folk Festival.

# Worley Gardner

## Mountain Music, Dance and Dulcimers

**Text and Photographs by Mark Crabtree**

"That old man who played the dulcimer would come to your house and play all day if you gave him a meal. If you had moonshine to drink, he'd play better and stay longer."

That old man, Simon Meyers, and his hammered dulcimer playing started a lifelong love of the instrument for Worley Gardner.

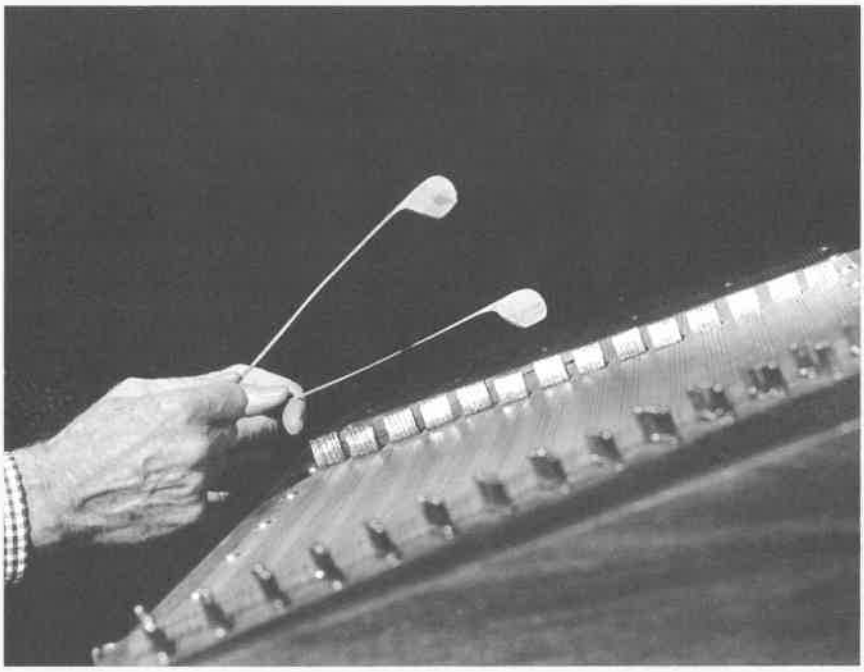
It doesn't take a free meal or moonshine to get Gardner to play music. You're likely to find him playing dulcimer, mandolin, fiddle or banjo at most any gathering of old-time musicians anywhere near his Morgantown home, at festivals around the state, and, of course, at the Winter Music Festival he directs.

Playing what he calls "mountain music" started early for Gardner, but it wasn't until many years later that he learned to play dulcimer, on an instrument that had been played by Simon Meyers himself. It's a long story, and a good one.

Worley was born February 19, 1919, in rural Monongalia County. "I grew up on a typical West Virginia farm — it was hilly as the devil! It was halfway between Blacksville and Daybrook, four miles to either place. All the work was done with horses. We didn't have a tractor back then. We raised cattle and grew our own food.

"The paying crop on the farm was cattle. We didn't take them to auction in those days. Buyers would come around every fall. They'd make you an offer by the pound. You'd either take it or hope someone would come by with a better offer. When you did sell, they'd take your cattle off and weigh them, then you'd get your


Worley Gardner on his music porch with a hammered dulcimer of his own creation.



Worley Gardner says anyone can learn to play the hammered dulcimer.

# Learn to Play the Dulcimer

According to Worley Gardner, "If you can hum a tune, you can play the hammered dulcimer." You don't have to read music or have any specialized knowledge. Just pick up the hammers and find the notes by trial and error. It'll be mostly error at first, but with practice, finding the right notes will become automatic.

You will find plenty of opportunities to meet and learn from other dulcimer players in West Virginia. For example, the Marion County town of Mannington, home of the late dulcimer evangelist Russell Fluharty, has been called "the dulcimer capital of the world."

"The Mannington District Fair has featured hammered dulcimer playing every year since the 1930's," says Patty Looman. "When I was in high school in the 1940's, my parents would take me to hear Russell Fluharty play his dulcimer at the fair every year. I thought, 'Dear God, do I have to listen to that again?' We kids weren't interested in that kind of music. We wanted swing and the other music that was popular then. I never dreamed I'd end up being a dulcimer player myself."

Looman, who has changed her tune, is now chairman of the Mountaineer Dulcimer Convention. The group first met in 1971 with five members. Now, about 125 enthusiasts get together twice a year in Mannington to play, and to swap tunes, techniques and dulcimer lore. For more information, contact Patty Looman, 228 Maple Avenue, Mannington, WV 26582.

The Augusta Heritage Arts Workshops features a Spring Dulcimer Week, plus dulcimer classes during their summer session. For a catalog write to Augusta Heritage Center, Davis and Elkins College, 100 Sycamore Street, Elkins, WV 26241-3996.

Farther south you'll find the Almost Heaven Hammered Dulcimer Society meeting the fourth Saturday of each month at the St. Albans Library. Contact Sally Hawley, 425 9th Avenue, St. Albans, WV 25177.

— Mark Crabtree

payment. That was the farm's earnings for the year. We also had a gas well on the farm. We got a royalty check for that every three months.

"There was a gas boom then. My dad, William Gardner, worked a team of horses in the oil fields when he could. What he did was put the casing in the wells. Sometimes he'd be gone for a week at a time making the rounds of the wells in the territory."

Music was the main pastime at the Gardner farm. "We didn't have a radio, except for a crystal set, so we played our own music. My dad and my grandfather played fiddle. Most of my brothers and sisters played an instrument." Worley was the youngest of 12 children, so there was quite a lot of music. "We would play at the house, whoever was there and wanted to play. We played a good bit. I learned some songs from my dad, like 'Bull Pup,' that I've never heard anywhere else."

*"That old man who played the dulcimer would come to your house and play all day if you gave him a meal. If you had moonshine to drink, he'd play better and stay longer."*

Worley played guitar first, but it wasn't long before he picked up mandolin and banjo. Banjo was the only instrument he ever took lessons on. "I play two-finger picking," Worley says. "It's the old type that was out in the country around that time. You use your thumb and index finger. It's not a style you find much anymore. This fellow in the neighborhood, Elva Foley, came and tried to teach me lessons. Practically his whole family played banjo."

It wasn't long before Worley started playing guitar for square dances. He remembers, "I helped play for dances up there. I don't know how old I was, but my sisters would have to carry


my guitar, because it was too much for me to carry that distance.

"In those days they had dances in people's houses. They'd empty up a room in the house. Sometimes they'd have two adjoining rooms and we'd play music in the doorway between the two rooms. They always had a caller for each set of four couples. He'd dance within the set and call while he was dancing. It was up to each caller what dance he wanted to do. When you'd look out over the sets there'd be four or five different figures going on at the same time.

"That went on for a long time because there wasn't all these mikes and power equipment. I played dances in '42 in Fairview at a great big dance hall. They had ten or 12 sets in there and every one of them had a caller within the set."

Worley played regularly for dances, but the first time he danced himself was in 1936 at the Fox Hunters Reunion in Daybrook. "Even after

Margaret and Worley, who recently celebrated their 50th anniversary, have made music together for a long time. They met at high school and appear side by side in yearbook photos from the Daybrook High School class of '36.


that I wouldn't dance. I thought it was crazy. I couldn't remember all that stuff."

Margaret Tennant remembers that as her first dance, too, but evidently her future husband failed to make an impression. She says, "I knew Worley but I don't recall seeing him there. We grew up about six miles apart as the crow flies over the hills, but that would be a long walk following the roads. I didn't know him at all until we started high school together." Margaret started dating Worley when he came home for weekends while attending West Virginia University. They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in January.

The Gardners had the first of four daughters before Worley left for the war in 1943. He spent 22 months with the Second Division Artillery as a high speed radio operator, leaving the service as a T4 Technical Sergeant.

When he returned from World War II, Gardner went back to his job with Monongahela Power Company. "After the war I wasn't involved with music or dancing in any way, shape or form for a number of years. I was concentrating all my energies into making a living for my family. I didn't think I had time for anything else."

It was about ten years before Gardner was drawn back to playing music. "The company was going to have a square dance. They got me to come and help play music. Then I played for years at square dances, but I didn't call and I didn't dance."

Margaret remembers that it was in the '60's they started dancing and Worley got interested in calling. "We went to Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, to dances at the firehall," she says. "Buckwheat Lemley from Blacksville called. Worley liked him so well that he took a tape recorder and taped Buckwheat's calls."

Worley says, "I thought he was the best caller I'd ever heard. He had almost perfect timing. He made his calls go with the music, but it was also in perfect time with your motion on the floor. That's what I liked about Buckwheat's calls. It wasn't just standing up there yelling words at different times. I call it singing calls. Maybe he had different words for it."

With singing calls each dance fits a particular tune, Worley explains. "You sing the calls to the melody. Buckwheat was the one that introduced me to that. I used those tapes I made to learn the figures, then I started calling them myself.

"I picked up dances from other callers, too. I used to think that was a real hard job, but it's not that hard to learn if you break it down. The only thing you have to do is learn to take one couple through.

"I called at the Big Country Ranch in West Finley, Pennsylvania, every Saturday night for two and a half years. But it just got to be too much. It tied up every weekend. Dancing is a lot more fun than calling, I'll tell you that right now. Now, playing for a dance is work. Calling figures is work. It's nice to know how to do it, but the enjoyment is out there on the floor."

Worley obviously enjoys the work, though. In 1972 he started calling for a monthly square dance at the Marilla Recreation Center in Morgantown. After a time it got to be every two weeks, and it continued for nearly 18 years.

The Marilla dances were featured in *West Virginia Square Dances*, a book by Robert C. Dalsemer, published in 1982 by the Country Dance and Song Society of America. Worley taught at the society's summer camp near Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1982.

Gardner does one thing a little differently than other callers. He explains, "They always used to line up the set a certain way. Your head couple was always facing you or had their back to you. They did it traditionally that way, and people still do it that way. Well, that's just not necessary. It doesn't matter who starts off. Then, the others just follow in turn. That really puzzled them up in Massachusetts. They thought it was funny how we just started dancing and it didn't make no difference who was head couples."

About the time Gardner started

## Square Dance Book

Worley Gardner's talents are appreciated by many. Robert G. Dalsemer is among those who have recognized his contributions to traditional music and dance, in the book *West Virginia Square Dances*. Worley's music, dance and calling skills are the subject of a chapter in Dalsemer's book, and an appendix of "Tunes for Worley Gardner's Singing and Semi-Singing Calls" closes out the book.

Dalsemer visited five West Virginia communities with established dances in researching his book and says he presents the dances "exactly as he found them." Dalsemer is a dance caller and teacher himself. In *West Virginia Square Dances* he describes each community — New Creek, Morgantown, Helvetia, Dunmore, and Glenville. Each town has its own dance tradition and Dalsemer explores this closely, describing the style of dance for each place, providing diagrams and the words of the caller.

Formerly an artist-in-residence in Randolph County, Robert Dalsemer now works at the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina. His *West Virginia Square Dances* is a small, softcover publication of 85 pages. It includes a bibliography. To order a copy send $9, plus $3.50 shipping and handling, to Country Dance and Song Society, 17 New South Street, Northampton, MA 01060; (413)584-9913. Credit card orders will be accepted.

calling dances, he heard that a childhood neighbor, Dora Foley, had died and a hammered dulcimer was going to be for sale in the estate auction. Dora was the brother of Elva Foley, Worley's banjo teacher in the 1920's, and the nephew of Simon Meyers, the dulcimer player who had visited the Gardner farm when Worley was a boy.

"I always did like the sound of the dulcimer, and I wanted to learn to play it. I had gone to the sale when Simon Meyers died, but there wasn't any dulcimer there. I heard that Simon's dulcimer had burned up in a fire at his house, and that the dulcimer he played in later years was owned by his nephew Dora Foley.

"I went to the sale and bought that dulcimer for 30-some dollars. It was a match to the one Simon Meyers played in the '20's. They'd both been made in the Foley family. The one I bought is over 100 years old.

"I didn't know anything about a dulcimer then. My neighbor in Morgantown was a professor of music at the university and he helped me figure it out and restore it. That's the one I learned to play on.

"Learning to play was just trial and error. It really isn't hard. I could pick out 'Red River Valley' right off. Then I was hooked."

Worley's style of playing isn't like that of most dulcimer players. "Most of them play the notes with this hand, then that hand. What I'm doing is beating time with my left hand. I play the tune with my right hand, and my left hand keeps time while playing notes in the chord.

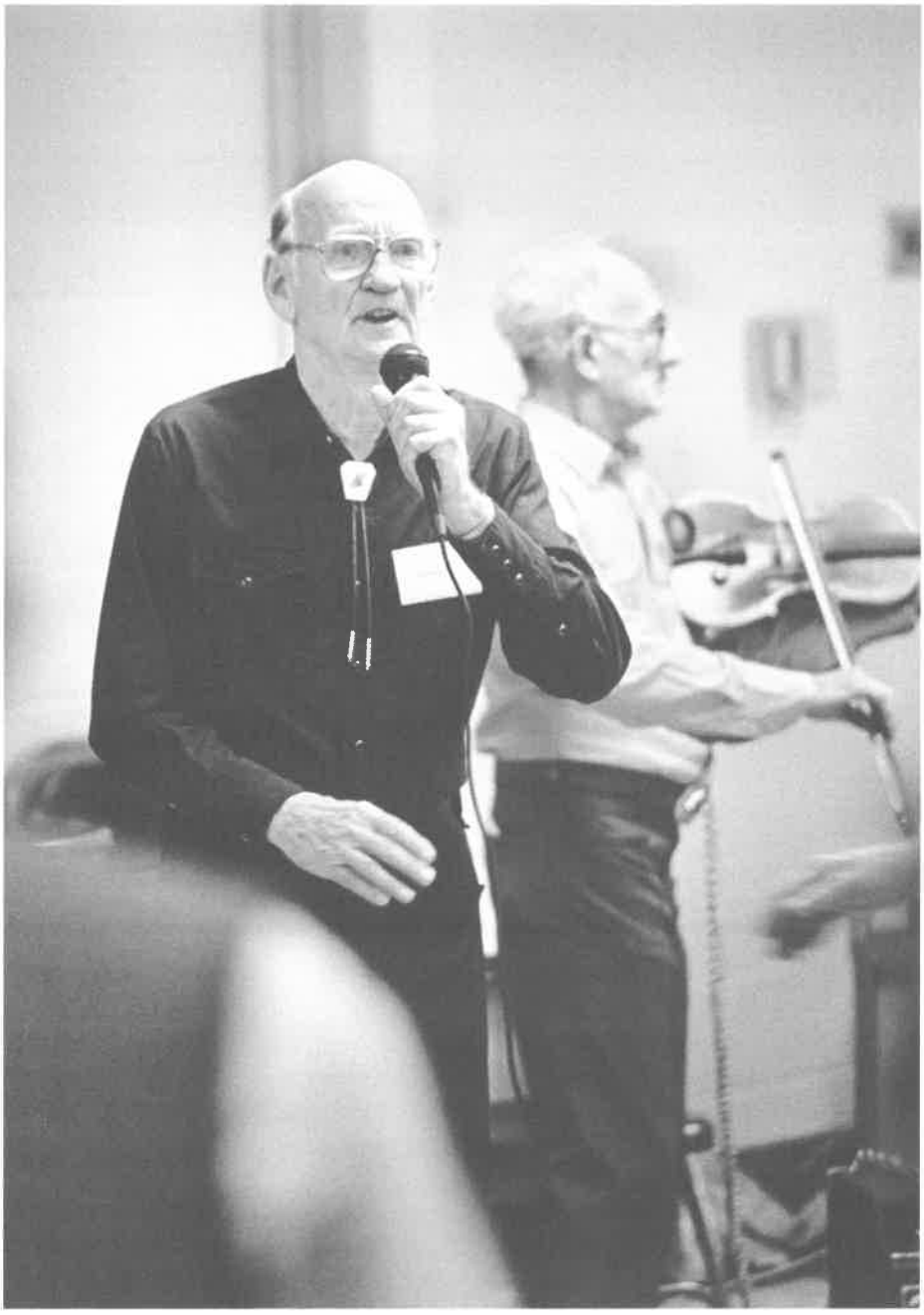
"That old man must have played something like that. I think I just had the memory of the sound of it, and copied that when I was learning. You really don't know what makes you do it a certain way."

Worley's brother Asel retired and moved from Washington, DC, to Kingwood, Marion County, about this time. "His first year there he almost went stir crazy," Worley says. "He was interested in dulcimers, so I said we should try to make one. The first one we made just fell apart. It wasn't strong enough and the string tension buckled it up. The next one we made, I kept to play myself. Then we started selling them."

The first few dulcimers the Gardner brothers built were copied after the old dulcimer Worley owned. Then Worley started experimenting. "I designed them and Asel built them. I had been playing dulcimer with square dance bands. They let me play, but you could tell the musicians didn't give a damn for the sound of that dulcimer. The strings were real short and they were just too high-pitched. They didn't blend with the other instruments. What we did then was lengthen the strings to bring them lower on the scale. When you lengthen the strings, you end up with a bigger box. All of that made for a more pleasant sound.

"Another thing we experimented with a good deal was the number of strings to a group," Worley adds. The Gardners' dulcimers have up to 27 groups of strings. Each group is tuned to the same note. "When you add more strings to a group, you get more resonance. We tried from two to eight to a group. The quality of sound was improved by up to five strings in a group, but from five to eight I didn't

Margaret made this photo of Worley about 1940, near Moundsville. "We'd taken our mothers on a Sunday drive," she recalls.



Worley is well known as a dance caller. Here he works this year's Winter Music Festival in Morgantown, with fiddler Blackie Lemley behind him.

really hear much difference."

Another problem with the original dulcimers was that they were hard to carry. "They were trapezoid-shaped and you had to cover them up with something to carry them. We just decided that if it's a box, let's make it like a box and put a lid on it. Putting it in its own case was our own idea, but when I went to the Smithsonian I found out it was nothing new. They had dulcimers like that in their collection made in France in the last century."

Worley's visit to the Smithsonian Institution was in October of 1977. He was there as a featured performer at the museum's Festival of American Folklife. Four hammered dulcimer players from around the country were brought in to demonstrate their craft each day at the Museum of History and Technology.

"Two things were really special that week," he recalls. "We played for a luncheon that Mrs. Mondale, the Vice-President's wife, was giving for the foreign ambassadors and their wives. The other thing was a square dance. I told them, 'Forget it! You can't have a square dance here. Nobody will pay any attention to it.' Well, I was surprised, but we had a good square dance. Those people could really dance. So, that was fun. These things just happen to you as you go along."

Something else that just happened to Worley was a feature on CBS Radio. "Well, this fellow called and said he was from CBS. I thought he was just trying to put one over on me." But Rob Armstrong flew in the next day to record Worley and some friends playing and talking about their mountain music. That was broadcast August 2, 1985, on CBS's *Newsmark Magazine*.

By this time the Gardners' dulcimers were selling well. A lot of people saw and heard them at the Mountain State Art and Craft Fair in Ripley.

"Our first year at Ripley was 1969," Worley recalls. "We didn't sell a single dulcimer. Then they took off. Word got out we were doing this. We shipped them all over the country. Asel was making them year-round. My brother Willis wanted to learn to play the dulcimer, so we built him one. He played with me until his death in 1979.

Then Asel died in 1983. "We'd been partners for 18 or 19 years," Worley says. "We'd had a good relationship.

"I thought about getting someone else to build dulcimers for me, but I never did. After all, this was a hobby for me. I just wanted to see what we could do with it. I figure we made between 400 and 500 dulcimers altogether.

"I didn't go to Ripley that next year, since I didn't have any dulcimers to sell."

But Worley found out that he was in demand at festivals whether he sold dulcimers or not. Now he performs at Ripley, the Vandalia Gathering in

*"After the war I wasn't involved with music or dancing in any way, shape or form for a number of years. I was concentrating all my energies into making a living for my family."*

### Worley Gardner Recordings

If you've somehow missed hearing Worley Gardner's dulcimer playing at festivals around the state, or if you just want to take some of his mountain music home with you, here's your chance.

Worley has produced two recordings, *Mountain Melodies* and *Mountain Melodies II*. Both include many well-known traditional tunes. The second recording also includes "Middle Ridge Waltz" written by Worley's friend, the late Sloan Staggs, Worley's own "Mitchell's Tune," and "Bull Pup," a tune Worley learned from his father.

*Mountain Melodies* is available on record or cassette. *Mountain Melodies II* is on cassette only. Order any of these for $9 each, plus $1.50 postage and handling from Worley Gardner, 1332 Cain Street, Morgantown, WV 26505.

Charleston, and the Stonewall Jackson Jubilee at Jackson's Mill every year.

He puts on his own festival, too. It started one winter when he had driven to an old hotel in Burlington, Mineral County, to play music with his friend, banjo player Sloan Staggs. "There wasn't all these things going on like now," Worley recalls. I told Sloan we ought to have a regular get-together so musicians would have something to do in the winter." Worley sent invitations to his friends and acquaintances, and hosted his first Winter Music Festival that same winter.

This past March 140 musicians from six states joined Worley in Morgantown for a weekend of non-stop music at the 14th Annual Winter Music Festival. Now the festival is sponsored by the Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners of Morgantown, but Worley Gardner still runs the show. He's often too busy to play much music himself, but always


makes time to call for a traditional square dance on Saturday night.

Does he have any more projects in the works? "Man, I'm 73 years old," he says. "I just want to play music and enjoy myself. But, I tell you, I would like to see somebody building the dulcimer I designed. I think we made a good dulcimer."

Keeping the music alive is important to Worley Gardner. Here he (at left) plays in a regular Tuesday night session of the Morgantown Friends of Old-Time Music.

Sarah Singleton fiddles for the Town and Country Pickers. Zita McQuain plays guitar at left and Marian Long at right.

# Sarah Singleton

## A Fiddler All Her Life

**By Teresa Hamm**
**Photographs by Michael Keller**

Sarah Singleton of Bragg's Run has been a fiddler all her life. Born and raised in Braxton County, "the 13th child from the top and the fourth from the bottom," she says that she used to sit in a corner and listen to her father, John Jackson Blake, and his friend George Morris make music. "When I was little I was always right there, listening to the fiddles. It didn't matter about other instruments. Just so the fiddle was there, I was there."

Sarah's dad and his people had walked from Greenbrier County to Braxton. John Blake was a farmer, fiddler and rock cutter. Sarah's mother, Biddie Jane Bragg, played the jaw harp and sang for the younger children when the work was done in the evenings. Sarah remembers her mother singing the lonesome "Wildcat Holler," perhaps when her father was away on a rock-cutting trip:

Wildcat Holler is the meanest place on earth
Where the mountain dew's a-plenty and you get your money's worth.
The rattlesnakes rattle and the grizzly bears roam
And Wildcat Holler is the place I call home.
I'm going crazy, don't you wanna come along?
I'm going crazy, there's something wrong.

"She used to be a pretty singer," Sarah says of her mother. "She sang old ballads that I never did hear anymore after she sang them. I wish I'd had sense enough to write them down, but I couldn't write then. She would just sit and sing — just to entertain us, you know."

Since the Blake family was so large Sarah remarks that there was never a time when all of them were together at one time. But there were always plenty of brothers and sisters around to make up a square dance band or a work detail.

And the work was hard on a farm in the mountains. "We dug our living out of the ground," Sarah recalls. "Dad would rent a corn patch. We'd have to sprout it off, and then we'd have to dig it up with hoes to plant the corn in, with broad hoes. We'd have to stretch a string out along the hill to plant with a corn planter. That's the way we raised the corn. He'd clear off maybe an acre or two to plant the corn, and then we would have to dig it up [without plowing]. People don't know what we had to go through with when we growed up. Nobody knows but us."

Times were hard, but laughter was plentiful. Sarah tells a story about the time a scorpion* ran up sister Loni's leg, and another story about a muskrat running up brother Hobart's pants leg. When Hobart threw the muskrat off it narrowly missed his sweetheart Beulah's head, but Beulah later became Hobart's wife anyway!

This last incident occurred while hunting snapping turtles. Sarah remembers that they used to go in "big gangs" to catch turtles, some wading in the water and some remaining on shore. Those in the water would reach back under the creek bank to grab the turtles, sometimes getting bit in the process, then throw them out to whomever was waiting on the bank. Sarah gives me a blow-by-blow description of how to butcher a snapping turtle, in case I should ever need to know.

Turtle was an occasional treat, but mostly the Blakes ate what they raised. Sarah's mother grew and stored many garden vegetables. Apple butter was kept in stone jars sealed with wax. I was surprised to find that canning, which I usually think of as "old-time," was not in much use back in Biddie Jane Blake's time. Instead, delicacies such as pickled beans were stored in big, wooden barrels that sugar and salt came in down at the store. John Blake bought these barrels "for little or nothing," Sarah says.

Make-do comes through loud and clear when talking to Sarah. She grew up in a four-room house "stuffed with people," she says. "Yeah, it was crowded. We had two beds in this room, two beds in that room and two beds in that room, and sometimes there was four to the bed. We got used to being like that, and we thought we was supposed to do that. So it didn't bother us a bit.

"You learned to give and take," Sarah says. She tells about when brother-in-law Jake Dean came and worked with her dad and stayed with the family. Every night Sarah's brother Basil would put a small

* A regional term for skink, a type of lizard.


pumpkin under Jake's pillow. Every night Jake would lay the pumpkin down on the floor without making a fuss before he went to bed. But one night he got mad. "He got up on the bed, stood up, and he hit that pumpkin down on the floor and just busted it all to pieces," Sarah says.

Lora, one of Sarah's brothers, would often trick the older brothers by putting beans between their bedcovers at night. When the tired workers would try to crawl into bed the racket began. "Mom got to raking their heads for that because she said [they were] wasting the beans. You didn't waste nothing at our house. We didn't throw nothing away."

Time was one thing that got wasted, but only occasionally. When the children went to the store they would get into "some of the awfullest messes you ever saw," Sarah says. A bunch of kids would be sent to nearby Burnsville for groceries, she recalls. Along the way they would run, fight, make up, "piddle off," and talk about what they wanted to be when they grew up. Sarah at first thought she wanted to be a nurse but when she got to playing music she decided she'd rather be a musician.

Her childhood memories include making music, even before she had a proper musical instrument. "We used to get our old cornstalk fiddles and sneak out behind the barn, you know, and they'd dance. Didn't you ever make a cornstalk fiddle out of a

The Blake sisters brought their music to the students of Bragg's Run School at the request of teacher Eulah Mick, left. The musicians are Loni, Sarah, and Macel Blake, with Mabel Dean. Sarah says brother Basil Blake began making mountain dulcimers, such as that held by Macel, after returning from World War I. Photographer unknown, late 1920's.


Whitey Radcliff, Howard Knight, Sarah Singleton, Ernie McCall and Jim Adkins made up a busy local band in the 1960's. Here they play a Weston "remote" for Buckhannon radio station WBUC. Photographer unknown.

cornstalk? It's the way we did." The kids learned to dance by mimicking their elders. They would sing an old song like "Skip to my Lou," replacing each verse with a figure call:

Grand change, skip to my Lou
Grand change, skip to my Lou
Grand change, skip to my Lou
Skip to my Lou, my darling.

John Blake's fiddling was Sarah's main early musical influence. She remembers sitting in a corner while five or six fiddlers held forth around the fireplace.

"They would start fiddling over here and they'd fiddle clear around," she says. "And they'd play the same tune and see who could play it the best. I swear, I'd laugh! Then they'd argue: 'Now, that's not the way it's supposed to be played.'" Sarah says that she always liked her father's fiddling the best.

# Welcome to the Dance

As newcomers, my husband and I had heard that West Virginians are the warmest people in the world. Our experience in meeting fiddler Sarah Singleton, and participating in a Flatwoods square dance, went a long way toward convincing us.

We were a little reluctant to plunge into a community dance, even with Sarah playing. After months of procrastination, we invited another couple and headed off to Flatwoods Elementary School on a Friday evening in spring. I had been looking forward to meeting Sarah and hearing her music for about a year, but as the road rolled snakily on, I began to fret. Maybe we should have gone to one dance ourselves before inviting anyone else. But I knew the music would be good, and in any case it was too late to worry about it now. We were almost there.

When we walked in, people were sitting at tables lining three sides of the small gymnasium. We had to cross the empty dance floor to find seats, and I felt everyone looking at us and wondering who we were.

The emcee got right down to business by announcing that there were some new people there tonight, and he wanted everyone to make us welcome. It was rather alarming having all the attention focused on us in this manner, somewhat like being a visitor at church. A half-dozen people came over and introduced themselves, all at once it seemed, and kept us busy answering questions about ourselves for some minutes.

By then the dance was beginning. The next hurdle we had to clear was the dancing itself. We had never danced where the dances were called "from the floor" — that is, one of the dancers calls while dancing, rather than from a microphone up front with the musicians. Fortunately, it turned out that many of the calls were the same as ones we had done previously. And with the caller there in our circle of dancers, it was easy to hear and understand him. Sometimes this is not the case when dances are called from the front.

The thing that put us at ease more than anything else was the way everybody helped us through the dance in a constructive, smiling way. Dancing with a group of strangers is not always so enjoyable as it was that evening. Sometimes experienced dancers resent the intrusion of newcomers because they foul up the smoothness of the dance. But the other dancers that night were glad to have us, and determined to enjoy themselves regardless of a mistake or two.

At the end of that first dance there were smiles all around and someone told us that we caught on fast. After that, it was easy.

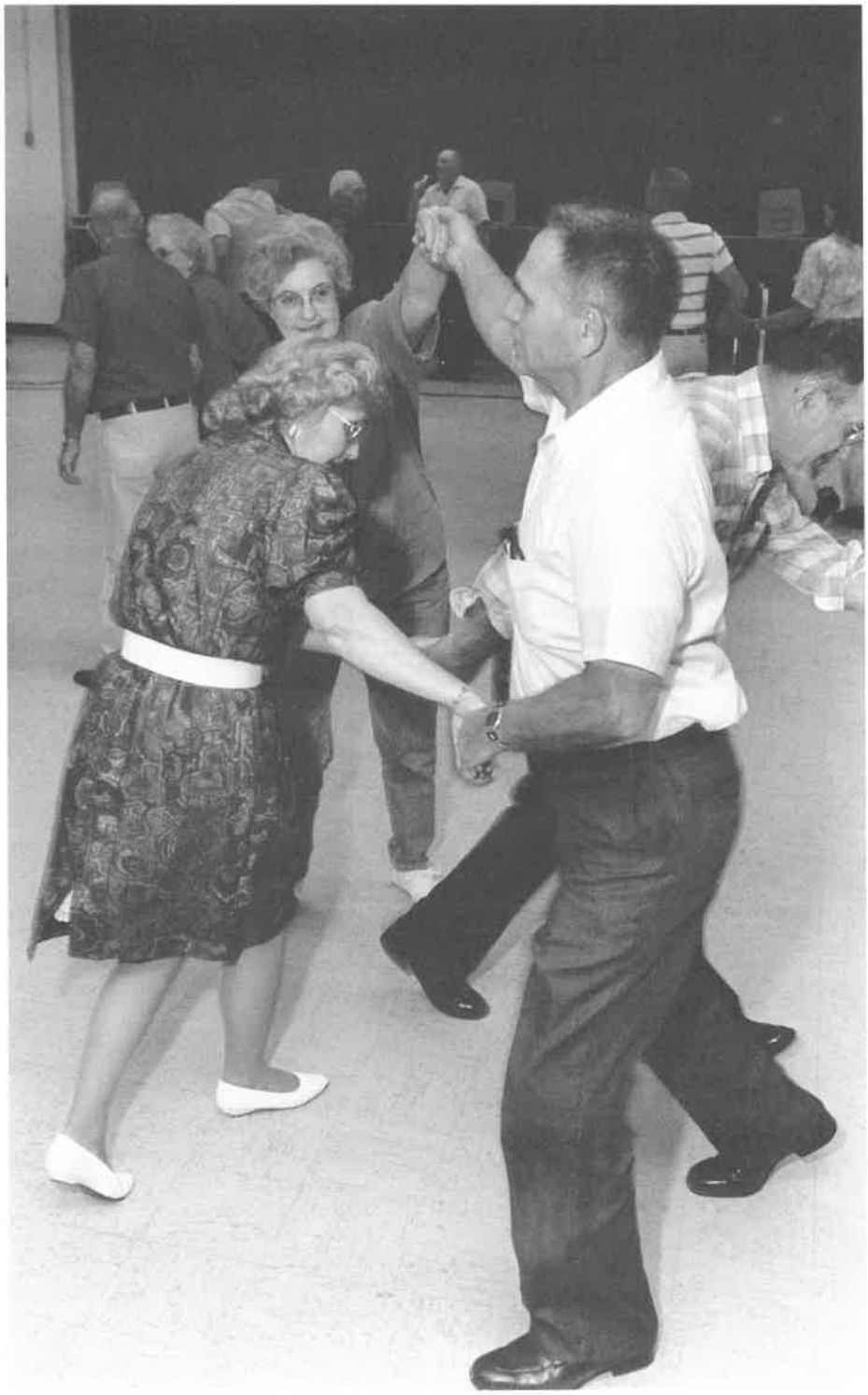
The local people seemed to know each other well. Spirits were high and jokes and teasing filled the air: "Turn her loose, it's my turn now!" and "Let's see you work those feet!" As people got warmed up

By the age of 11 or 12 Sarah was learning to play. She was given her first fiddle by brother-in-law Jake Dean. Jake had told her that if she learned how to play a fiddle, he'd get her one, so she'd been practicing with her father's fiddle. John Blake would sit down with her and play a tune and she would listen. "Jenny Lind Poker" wasn't an easy tune to learn, she recalls. "My dad sat with me one time for two hours and tried to teach me to play that and I still can't play it!"

Difficult tunes notwithstanding, Sarah Blake was fiddling for square dances by the age of 14. She and some of her siblings would walk out of an evening to entertain somewhere. "Me and Loni and Bas and Berth, we'd walk maybe three or four miles to this house and we'd play for square dances, and then we'd walk back home that night." When asked how long the dances lasted, she laughs. "Whenever we'd quit, then they'd have to quit, because they wouldn't have any music."

Sarah tells about one time when her sister Bertha was going to spell her on the fiddle for awhile. "We was over at Vern Harris's one night, playing for a square dance. I was the only fiddler there, so Berth said, 'Sary, if you want to rest I'll play one.' I said, 'Okay.' She played 'The Old Black Cat.' Tunie Harris was calling figures. Directly Berth was going to play again and Tunie got up and says, 'The next damn time "The Old Black Cat" is played I ain't a-calling figures.' So Berth didn't play, she let me play. That was the only tune she could play."

Sarah also remembers going to fiddle contests when she was young. When she was 16 or so, she and her father and her brother Hobart attended a fiddle contest in Summersville. She played against her dad and 25 or 30 other old-time fiddlers in that contest. "We got up on the stage. All of us lined up and stood up, and we just



A Braxton County community dance is the place to have a good time. These dancers were photographed in Flatwoods in April.

individual dance styles emerged all around the floor.

I was having so much fun that I had almost forgotten about the couple who had come with us. Some experienced dancers had adopted them, baptizing them into the waters of Braxton County folk dance. I glanced at them from time to time, and they were both smiling. I mentally uncrossed my fingers.

One highlight of the Flatwoods dance was that there was vocal music in addition to the instrumental music for the dancing. Musicians other than the official band for the evening dropped by and helped out. All the singing was good, and it was a nice change of pace to listen to a Carter Family song or a Hank Williams number while resting. It was like getting a concert and a dance all in one!

With each new contribution to the musical fare, the evening grew sweeter and people drew in closer to the music and to each other. I was glad we came, and I think the regulars were glad to have us there.

—Teresa Hamm

# So You Wanna Dance?

West Virginians will dance whenever they have the chance. Michael Keller photographed this couple in Charleston a few years ago.

Weekends find West Virginians dancing as communities across the state keep old traditions alive and learn a few new steps as well. Styles range from community dances which have changed little from fiddler Sarah Singleton's childhood to barroom two-stepping and fancy western-style dance teams in coordinated costumes. You can bet they all have a good time.

The Friends of Old-Time Music and Dance (FOOTMAD) have a monthly dance at the First Presbyterian Church of South Charleston, 508 2nd Avenue. They dance "squares, contras and other versions of old-time dance," according to FOOTMAD member Linda Marsh, with a live caller and live music. Admission is $4 per person. Dances start at 8:00 p.m. and go until the dancing is over. For more information call (304)722-5874.

In Greenbrier County dancers get together every Saturday night at Rooster's Chicken House on U.S. 219 just outside of Ronceverte. Lonas "Rooster" Honaker says the building is indeed an old chicken house, and notes that he does not serve alcohol. Folks gather there to dance the old-time squares to live music and the figure-calling of George Sively. Admission is $4 a person and dances run from 9:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. For more information call (304)645-2297.

Fiddler Sarah Singleton tells GOLDENSEAL that square dances are held the first Friday of every month at Braxton County High School at Flatwoods. There's live music from 8:00 to 11:00 p.m. and admission is $5 a couple or $3 a person. Call (304)765-5387 for more information. Photographer Mike Keller visited this dance last April, and he says it's a good time.

Every Saturday night in Kanawha County square dancers and cloggers get together at the Cin-San Auditorium on 21st Street in Nitro. The auditorium opens at 6:00 p.m. The live music and dancing get going at 7:30 p.m. and run until 10:30. Admission is $5 per person, $4 for seniors, and $1 for children under 12. For more information call (304)755-7763.

Near Ripley there's the Jackson County Jamboree every Saturday night from 8:00 p.m. to midnight with two live bands — country and bluegrass. Jamboree dancers prefer the old-time round dance and the Texas two-step. Admission is $4 for adults and $2 for children 12 and under. For more information call (304)372-8838. The Skateland in Ripley also holds regular square dances on Friday nights. Admission is $6 for couples and $4 per person. Call (304)372-2921 for more information.

Nancy Friel of the Pocahontas Promenaders had lots to say about square dancing. She is active in western-style dancing but says the Promenaders also incorporate old-time square dance into their club. Friel says the different styles of dance have learned to get along. "We're not married, but we cohabitate," she says.

Tom E. Sharp is the group's old-time dance teacher and a caller himself. He teaches by request at a workshop held by the Promenaders every Tuesday night from September to May. Members of the group perform as the Marlinton Square Dancers during Marlinton's Pioneer Days.

Every second Saturday the Pocahontas Promenaders get together at Marlinton Elementary School for mostly western-style square dancing. The dances are held from 8:00 p.m. to 11 p.m. with a live caller. Paid admission is voluntary. The group also offers a class where participants can earn a certificate in either old-time or western-style square dancing. For more information call Tom Sharp at (304)799-6560.

This summer the State Square and Round Dance Convention is scheduled for August 7, 8 and 9 at West Virginia Wesleyan in Buckhannon. Caller Ruth Moore says this is the fifth year it's been held there, and she expects between 700 to 900 dancers to attend this time. Moore promises plenty of good fellowship.

The convention features modern western-style square dance, clogging, and round dancing. The round dance is done with couples who dance together in a big circle. There is a registration fee to participate in the State Square and Round Dance Convention. Lodging is available at West Virginia Wesleyan dormitories and in local motels. Those who dance are required to attend classes during the event. For more information call Ruth Moore at (304)842-3960.

—Debby Sonis Jackson

played the tune we wanted to play."

There was no sound system, no accompaniment, and no other female fiddlers at the contest. Sarah was used to that, because fiddling was mostly a man's pleasure in the old days. "Back then I was about the only girl that ever played the fiddle," she says. "Everybody was just flabbergasted. Everybody'd walk for miles just to hear me play the fiddle and I just sounded awful, you know, squeak-squeak, squeak-squeak. It was awful to listen to, I'll tell you."

Sarah tells about later meeting the fiddler for Flatt and Scruggs at an open-air theater between Gassaway and Sutton. She was married by then to Jim Singleton, and her husband liked to brag on her music. "My wife here can play the fiddle," Jim said to the professional. Sarah remembers that the Flatt and Scruggs fiddler replied something to the effect that, "He always liked to see a woman play the fiddle, said he could just laugh up a storm at 'em, said they hold a fiddle in a funny way."

When radio came in, Sarah's ears were open to the new sounds. On Saturday nights people would descend on those lucky enough to own radios and listen to the "Grand Ole Opry" out of Nashville. Arthur Smith and Hank Williams are mentioned as we talk about music over the airwaves.

It seems that performances on radio (and later television) refreshed and stimulated individual musicians, while undoubtedly altering local styles in general. But Sarah was fortunate to grow up in an area with strong, persistent musical traditions of its own. She remembers so many fiddlers "just born and raised around here." Among them were the Allen men, George Morris, Bob and Melvin Wine, Ernie Carpenter, and others.

So Sarah never had to travel far in search of music and dance. "Back then, about every Saturday night there was a square dance on Bragg's Run some place, up at Hub Stout's or at our house or some place else. All we'd have to do was go out and holler at our neighbors, get up on a little bank there and holler, 'We're gonna have a square dance tonight!' And everybody'd be there. Or they knowed the signal — Lora would whistle by blowing on his hands and they knowed there was going to be a square dance."

The Pickers proudly carried Sarah's banner on a recent foray into Ohio. Snapshot courtesy Sarah Singleton, 1980's.

Most dances were held in people's homes, the furniture having been moved out of the largest room. These were usually crowded affairs, with neighbors catching up on the local news.

While attending high school for one year in Akron, Ohio, Sarah met and married Jim Singleton in 1934. She says that she thought she wouldn't be playing for square dances after she got married, but people would still hunt her up to come and play. The whole family, which eventually included daughter Sue and son Reetis, would bundle up and go. Sarah relates that she would nurse her daughter and then lay her down in another room and go out and play for the dance. With her son Reetis it was the same, she says, "only he was like a fairydiddle, he wouldn't stay put."

Gradually dances ceased to be held in peoples' homes. Sarah says that the house dances went out about the time that beer gardens and dance halls were being built. She mentions that sometimes dance platforms would be built on the outside of the building, as in the case of Falls Mills. Upon occasion these dance hall dances could be quite rowdy, Sarah reports. "The whole bunch'd get drunk. Did you ever play for a bunch of drunks? The people who didn't drink pulled the other ones through the dance."

Women, on the whole, didn't drink back then, so roughly half of the dancers remained sober. When I asked Sarah about her opinion of women imbibing she replies, "Didn't seem like it would hurt a woman any worse than a man."

By the 1960's Sarah was playing in a band that performed a variety of musical styles. There was Sarah on fiddle, Ernie McCall on snare drums, Whitey Radcliff on steel guitar or five-string banjo, and "Little Howard" Knight on guitar and vocals. Their other guitar player, Jim Adkins, also acted as announcer. They would play for Ernie's dance hall, the Shangri-la, in Weston, on Saturdays. On Thursdays they would travel to Buckhannon and make a tape for WBUC to broadcast on Saturday night.

Sarah describes the range of their music. "Used to be I could play some of them twists, you know. 'The Peppermint Twist,' I used to play that on the fiddle. We played dance tunes and they'd play and sing. Some of it was bluegrass, some of it was old-time. We just had a mixed-up band."

At about the same time Sarah was also busy playing more traditional square dances at Adrian and Weston with her brother Basil on banjo and second cousin Gerry Dean on guitar. There was just no telling what would happen at a dance. "I used to play

over at Gassaway in the community building," Sarah says. "They took somebody out of jail one night over there to play the guitar with me. The jail's down underneath, and they went down there and took him out of jail. He played the guitar with me, and then they put him back in jail again!"

Sarah also remembers a particularly rough evening down at Falls Mills. "They was fighting over there one night, Old So-and-So got Mr. What's-His-Name down in the floor and jumped on him with both feet. He was bleeding all over. I went and got a pan of water and washed him and washed the blood up out of the floor and went to play for the square dance again. We left before the state cops got there. Everybody left. Back then they didn't have no telephones, they couldn't call, you see. So we was all gone by the time they got there."

In addition to nursing the wounded, there are other special skills needed to be a dance fiddler. Sarah's father played hornpipes and polkas with a lot of rhythm in the bow, and she thinks that is essential.

"A lot of fiddlers said to me, they said they could never play for a square dance, they didn't have the right rhythm. Well, I was brought up with it, see, I knowed what to do." Sarah says that one of the lessons John Blake repeated over and over was: "If you don't have a certain time to a tune, you might as well not play it."

Endurance is also a key factor in being a dance fiddler. "One night me and Willard Montgomery was playing," Sarah recalls. "We played 45 minutes for one dance. And you're only supposed to play 10 minutes for each set! Well, they was out there in a great big, long ring and they just kept a-dancing and a-dancing. I winked at Willard and I thought, 'We'll just play and wear them out.' But they wore us out!"

Although Sarah has mainly played fiddle over the years, she has recently brought out her dulcimer for performances at Augusta Dulcimer Week, which is held each April in Elkins. She plays a dulcimer handmade by her brother, the late Basil Blake.

Basil brought the pattern for the dulcimer back from France after World War I and eventually became

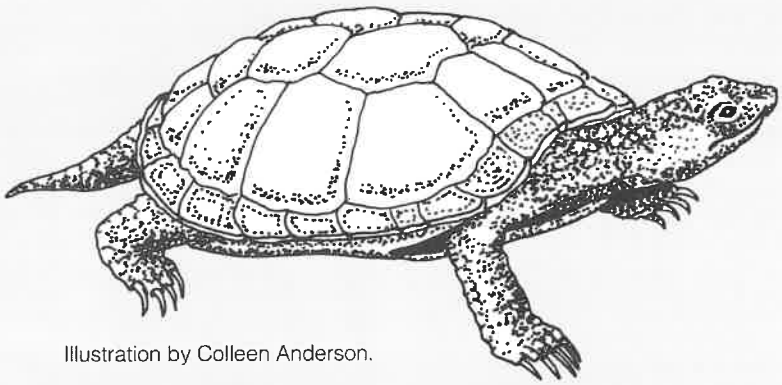


Illustration by Colleen Anderson.

# Turtle Talk

The snapping turtle, *Chelydra serpentina,* is common in most of West Virginia. Sarah Singleton says they were abundant in Braxton County in her youth. At my Upshur County home we occasionally see them traversing our driveway in the spring, presumably searching out the pond. Powerful and primitive looking, they take their time. With a line of progenitors stretching back nearly unchanged for about 175 million years, they can afford to.

The first sentence in nearly every nature guide I consulted pointed out this reptile's short temper. My husband, satisfying a naive curiosity about the creature, once received a hard left hook to the chin. Able to pull the animal off, Stephen was luckier than his former boss, who, when bitten in the forehead as a child, had to have a pair of pliers come to his aid.

There's an old superstition that when a snapping turtle bites he won't let go until it thunders. Sarah doesn't really believe that. She is the veteran of many early summer turtle hunts, when people would get together and pull 30 or 40 turtles out from under the creek banks. She says they would "grab the turtle wherever you could grab him." Turtles as big as a dinner plate and bigger were dropped into the bag, and smaller ones let go.

Once home, the turtle's head was chopped off and the neck, legs and part of the tail were cut out of the shell. This is not a job for the faint at heart. Sarah tells me, "I don't care how long [since] you've killed them, turtles will still kick when you're skinning them. Then after you put them in the skillet you can see them moving." Young turtle tastes fine fried like chicken; older specimens may need five or ten minutes at ten-pounds pressure in the pressure cooker. Sarah is partial to turtle gravy, and many people make soup from turtle.

Turtle lore says that snapping turtles are usually harmless while underwater. The former occupants of our house said it was fine to swim in the pond, but they did mention that the turtles were hell on ducklings and fish. The fine book *Amphibians & Reptiles in West Virginia,* by Marshall professors N. B. Green and T. K. Pauley, says that Green once saw a snapping turtle catch a cottontail rabbit which had come to the Tygart River to drink. I don't know how big Professor Green's snapper was, but I've seen some snapping turtles in the vicinity of our house almost as big as the lid to a 30-gallon trash can.

Some people not only catch snappers, but also fatten them up, feeding them table scraps. The creatures may weigh from ten to 40 pounds in the wild, but can double that in captivity. Turtle meat is good frozen, and Sarah Singleton thinks she has some turtle in her freezer right now.

—Teresa Hamm

The generations learn from each other at West Virginia country dances. That has been going on since her girlhood, Sarah says.

known as a West Virginia dulcimer maker. Shoe tacks were used to hold his first instruments together and fret markers were cut out of comb, as were the bridges. Basil made hundreds of instruments and shipped them as far away as California. Sarah recounts that when she was about eight or nine years old she and her sisters would "get them down and hammer on them until we'd get a tune."

Over the years, Sarah has played music at home, at school, at church, and at dances, festivals and fundraisings. The band she plays with now, the Town and Country Pickers, recently helped the Flatwoods Elementary School raise money for new playground equipment.

At 77, Sarah Singleton stays busy — she helps cook for community dinners, meets with her woman's club, worships at the Heaters Methodist Church, works in her garden, and fiddles up a storm. Recently she was designated a master folk artist by the Augusta Heritage Center and I apprenticed with her in the summer of 1990. I came away with a much greater appreciation of the effort involved in learning another's music and a great appreciation for Sarah in particular.

One day I asked her just when she decided to take up the fiddle. "I used to be out in the yard of a night and my dad would be playing," she told me. "He would get out and play for his own pleasure, you know. If he didn't want to play, he wouldn't play for you at all. Sometimes he would and sometimes he wouldn't, it just depended on how he felt.

"But one night he was playing this fiddle tune, 'Nellie Gray.' I was out in the yard. And that was the most beautiful tune I believe I've ever heard. Something went through me, and I said, 'Oh, I wish I could do that.'"


Sarah Blake Singleton is proud to stand with the mountains of Braxton County behind her.

# "You Always Want to Better Yourself"

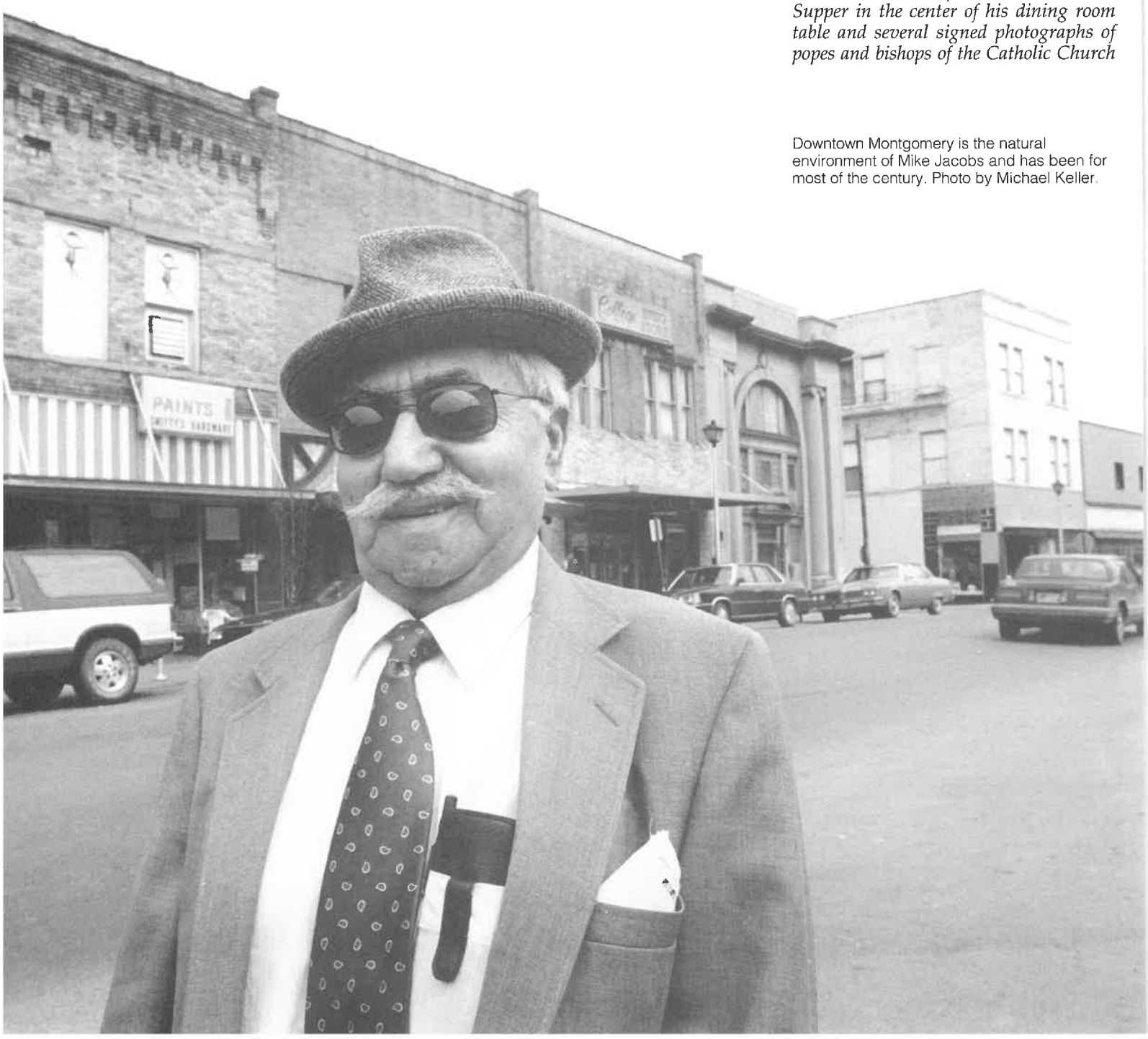
## An Immigrant Success Story

**By Kathleen M. Jacobs**

*On April 12, Mike Jacobs of Montgomery celebrated his 93rd birthday. I have known him since 1976, when I married his oldest grandson, John Michael. In February, I interviewed Mr. Jacobs at his home about his early childhood in Lebanon, his decision to immigrate to America, and the obstacles he met and mastered along his lengthy journey from Jerusalem bellhop to a successful businessman in West Virginia.*

*Mr. Jacobs's demeanor is spirited and polite. Although his frame is small and his difficulty in walking is sometimes painfully obvious, he carries himself with pride and independence.*

*A piece of carved marble depicting Christ and his Apostles at the Last Supper in the center of his dining room table and several signed photographs of popes and bishops of the Catholic Church*




Downtown Montgomery is the natural environment of Mike Jacobs and has been for most of the century. Photo by Michael Keller.

*displayed upon his mantel are evidence of Mike Jacobs's strong religious beliefs, which he carried from his homeland to the new country. He talks with pride about his membership in the Knights of Columbus, and credits to his strong faith his success in business, the community, and throughout his family and life.*

*In 1990, Mr. Jacobs was awarded the key to the city of Montgomery for his lifelong service to the community. Although he has been a West Virginian since 1921, he still speaks with the accent of his motherland.*

Mike Jacobs with a company truck, about 1951. He started off with borrowed money but was well established by this time. Photo by Glenn Studio.

**Kathleen M. Jacobs.** Mr. Jacobs, tell me about your early years.

**Mike Jacobs.** I was born in 1899 in Lebanon. I came from Lebanon to Jerusalem. I stay five or six years in Jerusalem, and I had a brother there. He came over here in 1920. After he came over here, I don't have anybody over there in Jerusalem and nobody left in Lebanon but cousins, so I decide to come over here to Montgomery, West Virginia, in 1921, because all of my people was here in Montgomery.

**KMJ.** Why did your people choose Montgomery as their new home?

**MJ.** I had an uncle was in Wheeling, then he came to Marietta, Ohio. He never had no luck either place. He find out there was work in the coalfields of West Virginia, so he came to Montgomery.

**KMJ.** What did you do for a living?

**MJ.** First, in Jerusalem, I work in a school as waiter on the tables for all the teachers. Then I find out I can get better job in hotel, making more money, so I give my boss notice and told him I stay 30 days. He said, "That's all right if you got better job, because you always want to better yourself." So, after 30 days I went to work in Cook's Hotel as a bellhop.

One day, fellow was in hotel, named Peter from Texas, him and his wife came in and wanted a room. He found out that I was getting ready to come to United States in two or three days, and he said, "Tell you what I'll do. My wife likes you and I like you, and I would like to take you home with me to Texas. I'm a rich man, and I'll make you my son and put you through school and make something out of you."

I told him, "No, thank you." He said, "Why?" I told him that I was going to where my people was in West Virginia.

**KMJ.** What was it like coming to Montgomery after being in Jerusalem?

**MJ.** [At the] time we came in here to Montgomery, West Virginia, it was nothing but swamp. Just a few businesses on Third Avenue. They don't have no sidewalks. They had wood, like wide lumber, and we walk on that to go in the stores. They had one fellow that had a ten-cent store, and a few [other] fellows, they had a store. Only one car was here. On Third Avenue about a block and a half was brick.

A couple of years ago, I was going up town walking. The water company was having trouble and they was digging. I told him, "You gonna hit brick here." He said, "Mr. Jacobs, you're crazy."

I said, "Okay, thank you, call me crazy." By the time I came back he had the brick piled up all around him and he said, "Mr. Jacobs, I'm sorry I

*I told him, "No, thank you." He said, "Why?" I told him that I was going to where my people was in West Virginia.*

Mr. Jacobs recalls rough times as an immigrant getting a start in business. Photo by Michael Keller.

called you crazy. I never thought we'd find brick here."

**KMJ.** What kind of work did you do in Montgomery?

**MJ.** I asked my brother, "How you all make any money here?" When I come here from Jerusalem I had $2,200. In no time I made that over there. "How y'all make money here?" I asked him. "I see mountain here and moun-tain here and the river and the rail-road." He said, "Hush up, we gonna get you a job." I said, "Okay."

So he got me a job, working confectionery store. I work there for a few months, and the man got married and turned around and put his wife in the store. Then I worked for a fellow by the name of George Taylor. I work for him 11 months and then I bought a Ford truck. I pay $631 cash, and I started peddling from house to house.

At first when I went peddling from house to house, I was ashamed because I never done anything like that in my life. I come into town one day, and fellow by the name of Emory Champe, a rich man, said, "Mike, come here and tell me what you do." So I told him. I said, "Well, Mr. Champe, I got a cow bell, and I take it and shake it. I don't know, I'm kind of ashamed."

He said, "Come on, sit down next to me, I'll learn you a lesson. Never be ashamed to try and sell a man something and make a profit — that's the only way you can make a living. You take a man who stole some stuff, man who murdered someone or raped someone, now that's bad, that's something to be ashamed of."

Well, next day, I start going from camp to camp, and I start to make some money. I went up Morris Creek, Cannelton Hollow and Paint Creek. Then I started giving credit to people. Well, at the time, they was making 30 cents on a ton of coal. People owe me $15, $20, and they come to me and say, "Mr. Jacobs, that's all we draw, how we going to pay you?" I tell them, "That's okay, from now on you have to pay cash for everything." I tell them, "If you buy from me, it's cheaper, buy from the [company] store, you pay big money for it."

One day, I loaded up my truck with watermelon, flour, bacon, and eggs, and I decide to go over to Carbondale Hollow. I went over there and time I get in hollow over there, I took the cow bell and shake it, and they started to come in. I sold the watermelon for 75 cents, company been selling it for $1.50. I sold 25 pounds of flour for 75 cents, sometimes 85. Company sell it for $1.50. Sold pork and beans. And before I finish hollow, I sold everything.

Time I come out, I saw the watchman. Watchman go to same church I go. Name's Bill. He said, "Mike, what you doing here?" I told him, "Well, Bill, them people hungry, I decide to come over here and sell some of my stuff."

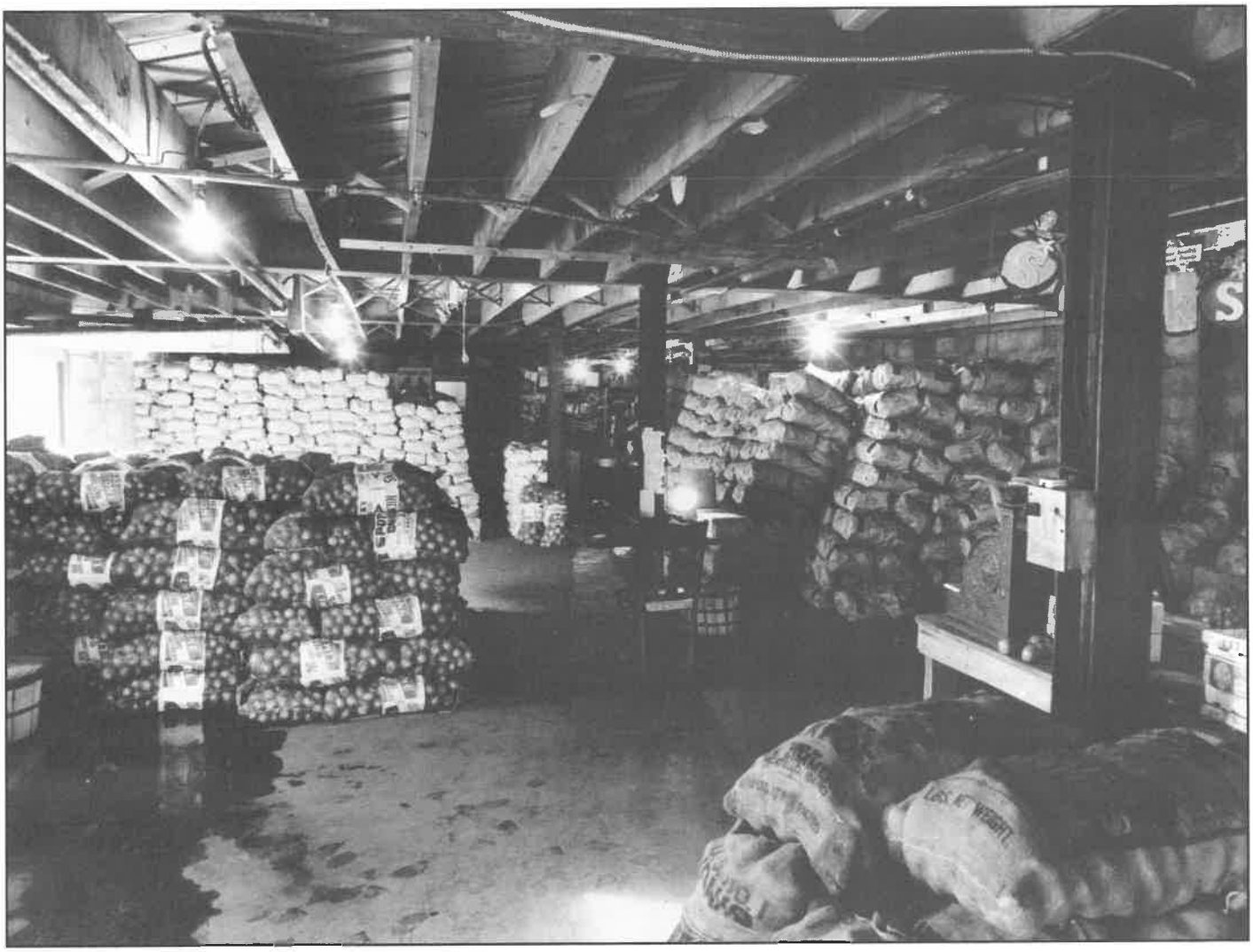
He said, "I don't want you to come back here any more. That's company property and you're not supposed to come in here and you know it." He said, "If you come back, I'm gonna have you arrested."

So, next Sunday, I load up again and same thing happen. Time I finish hollow, I sold everything. "I know what you told me, Bill, but, number one, I need the business and, number two, those people here are paying too big prices for this stuff." He said, "I want you to go to justice of the peace tomorrow at 7:00 in the evening." I said, "Okay."

Time I went to JP, who was a good friend of mine, he said, "What's your trouble?" I said, "Look, I'm your friend, and I want to let you know what's happening." So, I told him what happened. He said, "You tell Bill to go to hell, but don't go over there no more because the property belongs to the company and they can keep you out." So, I never went back over there.

Anyway, some people, they can pay me, some don't pay me, and I went behind. I almost go broke. There was a fellow by the name of Harry Gordon who owned a factory that made ice cream and soda pop. One day I said, "Harry, I'd like to borrow some money from you." I told him my story and he said, "Well, you learn [when] you give people credit." It was the Depression and times were pretty bad.

*Remember the people who are your customers.*
*Be nice to them, even if they get mad at you.*
*Show them you like them.*



The Jacobs warehouse was stuffed with an abundance of fresh produce. Mr. Jacobs carried so many potatoes one year that his competitors dubbed him the "King of Potatoes," he says. Glenn Studio, about 1951.

"I'll go to the bank and get you $500, and you start again," he said. I start giving credit again, though, because I felt sorry for people. And I get behind again. I can't pay even the water bill, and they shut it off. I missed five payments on my truck, and I went to tell the people to take their truck because I couldn't pay for it. They tell me that they don't want the truck, and they think I'm a good, honest man and I'll get on my feet again. I told them, "Yes, I will, some day."

I had an insurance policy, and I cashed it in and they gave me $100. All my utilities was cut off by then, so I paid deposits again and start them over. No more credit. After I paid my deposits, I had $65 left.

I went from here to Roanoke, Virginia, and got a load of produce. On my way back, I stopped at Piggly Wiggly in Beckley and asked the man if he wanted some produce. He said, "What you got?" "I got apples, beans, potatoes. Come outside, I'll show you," I said. He said, "What grade of apples you got?" I said, "Pippin, U.S. No. 1." He said, "How much?" I said, "Seven dollars a barrel." So I heard him tell his buddy, "Seven dollars a barrel, that's a good price. We're paying $8." He opened one barrel and said, "I'll take them all."

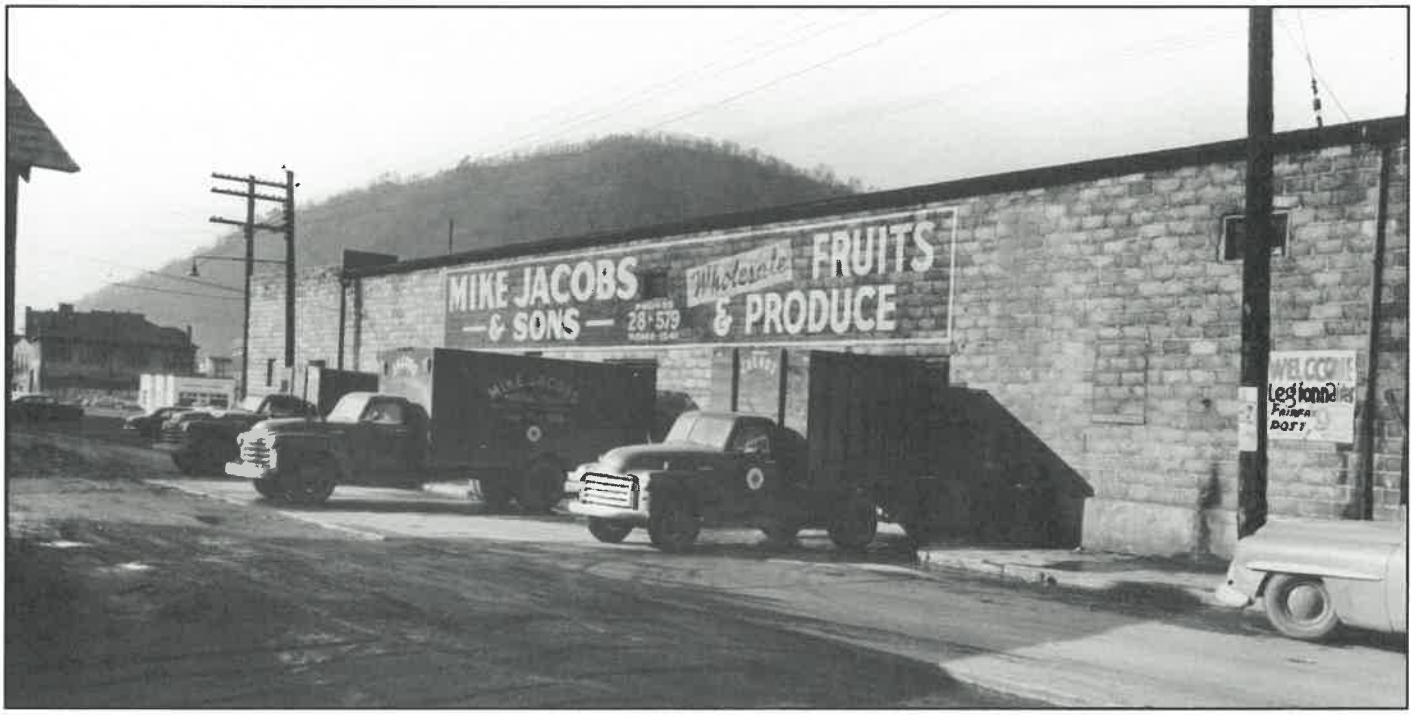
I said, "Wait one minute. I'm sorry, I can't give you all. I got another customer, I got to divide it up. I'll give you one barrel. You give me an order, and I'll bring you a truckload." He said, "Okay."

Time I got back to Montgomery, I saw Mr. Tabit — he's a businessman in town. He said, "I'll give you $40 for what you have left on your truck." He told me that you can't go into wholesale business for $65. I then laid all my money on his counter and told him to count it. He counted $175 plus the $40 he give me. He say, "What bank you robbed? I got to hand it to you."

Next day, I went to the bank and talked to Mr. Claypool, the bank president. I said, "You remember Harry Gordon signed a note for me here?" You see, I never paid for two years. I was really behind. "I'm gonna give you $15 down and pay the interest," I said.

Mr. Claypool said, "But Harry paid it already."

I went to Harry and I said, "Harry, look, I'm raising my kids in this town. Someday I'm going to have a brand-new car and a new home, and you know what you gonna say? You gonna say, 'Okay, Mr. Jacobs, that so-and-so, he beat me out of $500.'




# Streets Paved with Coal

## A Greek Family's Trip to Montgomery

**By Christopher G. Janus**

*Christopher Janus's Greek immigrant family arrived in Montgomery in 1917, a few years before Mike Jacobs settled in the Kanawha Valley town. The late 'teens were tumultuous years of wartime upheaval, compounded by racial and ethnic prejudice and a devastating worldwide influenza epidemic. The Januses endured great suffering.*

*In 1985 Mr. Janus retold parts of the family's story as the novel,* Miss 4th of July, Goodbye, *based in particular on his sister Niki's bittersweet experience as a new American. The book was made into a Disney movie for national television broadcast in 1988.*

*The following passage, told as a letter to Niki's grandfather and excerpted by permission, is the first chapter of the novel.*

Dear Papou,

We have finally arrived — and on my sixteenth birthday! Dear Grandfather, you were right. The streets are not paved with gold — certainly not here in Montgomery, West Virginia. Nearer the truth, the streets are paved with coal, and men go to work in the mines with clean faces and return with blackened faces. But I will write more about this later. First I must tell you about the voyage.

Sometimes I cannot believe that we are really here. I wake at night thinking I am in one of the hammocks or bunks of the ship, with hundreds of people around me, with the smells and the fear. I think for everyone on our ship it will be an experience we will remember as long as we live. There was so much suffering, illness and even, Papou, some poor people who died. At the same time I came to understand how brave and how good people can be, and by their kindness lighten a little the suffering of others.

During the first few days, many people became seasick. Women were separated from men in steerage and we slept, some in bunks, some in hammocks. The ventilation was bad and every day the air became more foul. One woman had a baby boy — and the father named him "Columbus." Another woman had a miscarriage. One poor older woman, just a few days out of port, died in her sleep. When the sailors came down to wrap her in a cloth and carry her out of the steerage, I cried although I never knew her.

Mana lost twenty pounds during the journey. Even then we were luckier than most because Papa was able to move about the ship doing odd jobs for one of the officers who was Greek. That's Papa. And every now and then he brought Mana and me some food from the upper deck — or, as they called it, "First Class."

After the third day out Papa was able to get us to share a cabin. I felt sorry for the people who would remain in steerage but I was grateful for Mana's sake. We slept in shifts. The mate used the cabin during the

Outside the warehouse, trucks stand by to make deliveries to grocers, coal company stores and other retailers. Glenn Studio, about 1951.

Harry, I'm not going to let you do that. I'm going to get on my feet and pay it." And I did.

**KMJ.** Did you buy that brand-new car and new home?

**MJ.** Yes, I did. My first car was a Chevrolet. Time I built my home here, I had $4,000 and needed $3,000 more. I went to Claypool, and I asked him for the money. He said, "Oh, no, I don't know what you're building. I can't give it to you, we'll have to have a meeting. I doubt if you get it." Well, I got mad, and the minute I walk out who do I meet? Harry Gordon.

He said, "What's wrong, Mike?" I said, "I been over to see the boss, and he refused me for some money."

I started to walk away, and he grabbed me and said, "Wait a minute. Come here, come back here." He said, "Let's go see the boss."

Well, we went back to see Claypool. Harry said, "What's wrong with Mr. Jacobs? He came out here, and he is mad."

Claypool said, "He wants some more money, and I don't know if we're able to give it to him or not." Harry said, "Give me a blank note." Claypool said, "What you going to do?" He said, "I'll sign my name on the note, give that boy all he wants."

Claypool told Harry, "We'll take care of it." And I got what I wanted without Harry signing the note, and I finished the house.

I started making payments and before the war was over I decide I was going to pay off the note to the bank. Claypool said, "You don't have to pay it all." I said, "Well, I understand after the war, people may lose their homes, and I don't want to lose my home." Claypool said, "We don't want your home." I said, "I'm gonna pay it." Claypool said, "We can't make no bread and butter out of that." I said, "That's your hard luck."

**KMJ.** Mr. Jacobs, how would you sum up your business philosophy?

**MJ.** Find out what's the best item you can make money at, [find the] best location, and don't worry about competition. Competition always brings you business. You got to be honest with the people and got to tell them the truth. Your expenses must be below your income, or you got to cut down. Can't have expenses above income.

Remember the people who are your customers, who pay your rent, who pay your wages, expenses, and utilities. Be nice to them, even if they get mad at you. Show them you like them. Always put a smile on your

day. Mana, Papa and I slept in it at night. I can't tell you, Papou, what it's like to be able to smell a little fresh air and, even, to see the stars.

When our time to arrive in America came closer, everyone grew excited. They talked about the great statue in the harbor of New York they called the "Mother of Exiles." The mate who had made the voyage many times explained that it was 151 feet high and weighed 450,000 pounds! He told us there was an inscription on it written by a Jewish poetess named Emma Lazarus. O Papou, the words of that poem he translated for us were so beautiful that I must write them down for you here.

> Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
> The wretched, refuse of your teeming shore.
> Send these, the homeless tempest-tossed to me.
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Then, when we finally saw the statue, it was everything we had thought it would be. She is like a giant Greek Goddess holding up her torch for all the people of the world to see, a torch that would light all the dark places and all the dark feelings homeless people have in their hearts.

But once we landed and were taken into a big building and lined up for questioning and identification, there wasn't time to think of that noble woman. Fortunately, with the English I learned in school, I was able to help Papa and Mana answer their questions.

"Have you any diseases? Have you any money? Are you really married to this woman, and is this your daughter? Where is your marriage certificate (which Papa did not have)? Have you some way of supporting yourself in the United States? Were you ever arrested in Greece and for what? You can't bring this wine into the country!"

At this point in the interrogation, Papa told me to tell the official that the wine was really for him and would he please take it — a gift from an immigrant to an American. After that there didn't seem to be any problem but one — our name *Xenopoulos*.

The immigration official said to my father, "My friend I'm going to do you a favor. With that name you're not going to make it in this country. No one will be able to pronounce it because it's too long and too foreign. I'll give you a choice: What about Poulos or Xenos or something like that?"

"Papa," I protested, "why should we change our name that is a thousand years old?" (Isn't that what you told me, Papou?)

Papa said, "Don't argue. Pick a name and let's get out of here."

Papou, I picked Janus. Wasn't he the god of beginnings, with two faces: one looking to the past and the other to the future? I thought it was appropriate — and Papa said "Fine." Mana said, "So this is America — what a pity!" and she cried.

But they allowed us to enter and now we are George and Olymbia Janus and daughter Andronike, shortened to Niki, Postal Box 235, Montgomery, West Virginia.

We are here! Beginning a new life!

I love you, dear Papou.

Niki

Miss 4th of July, Goodbye, *copyright 1986, was published by Lake View Press, Chicago, Illinois. The book may be purchased for $12.95 in bookstores or ordered from Sheffield Books, P.O. Box 10334, Chicago, Illinois 60610. Mail orders should include $1.50 shipping and handling. The West Virginia Library Commission has a limited number of autographed copies for sale as a special fund-raiser. You may call the reference librarian at (304)558-2045 for details.*

Mike Jacobs is a man at peace with himself. "I've had a good life," he says.

face. Good merchandise, good service, always gets the business.

If you're a young man going into business, say, "I would appreciate it if you could give me a little business, and I'll try to give you good service and good quality." If the man says, "Well, I don't need anything now," that's okay. You say, "Mind if I come back here, maybe you need something later. I'll be glad to give you good service." The man knows you mean well. Next time, he'll give you a little business to start with until he finds out how good your service is, then he'll give you more business.

**KMJ.** Who did you marry?

**MJ.** I married a school teacher. Her name, Virginia. She was born here in West Virginia, and I met her here. We fell in love. Her mother, she don't want me. Her father wanted me. So we went away and got married, 1924. We got along fine. She was a fine woman. We had three boys and one girl. I have 18 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. I have a good family, proud of them, good reputation.

When we moved to this house, there was no sidewalks nor street lights. I talked to my neighbors, I got good neighbors, and we all signed petition and gave to city officials. Then we got sidewalks and street lights.

**KMJ.** How many years were you in business?

**MJ.** I started in 1932, during the Depression, and I retired from that in 1955. When I retired from wholesale business in 1955, I opened a little grocery store beside my house and retired again in 1972.

**KMJ.** Where was your produce business located?

**MJ.** First I had my business here in the part that is the driveway. I had a garage here. Time I build this house, I built an apartment and garage. That's where I had my warehouse.

Tabits, they had their own building on the railroad. They had to buy so many railroad cars and they were $6 a month. Mr. Tabit came to me — railroad company told him he has to get more cars or move out — and he said, "Well, how about you renting space from me?" I said, "Okay, what you want for it?" He said, "I want $150 a month." I said, "No, but tell you what I'll do. I'll give you $100 a month, and you pay all utilities. That's the only way I can take your offer." He said, "Okay."

So, every year I get seven, eight railroad cars. One year, I had 50 cars loaded with potatoes. My competition used to call me "King of Potatoes." I loved my work. I had good customers. I had 17 coal companies as customers. During World War II a lot of people went on the black market. I never went on the black market.

**KMJ.** Would you change anything?

**MJ.** Nothing. I loved my family and my work. If I could ask for anything, it would be [to have] my sight back so that I could see the people I've done business with and work some more myself. I've had a good life.

*One year, I had 50 train cars loaded with potatoes. My competition used to call me "King of Potatoes."*

# Bob Adkins
## Lincoln County Gas Man

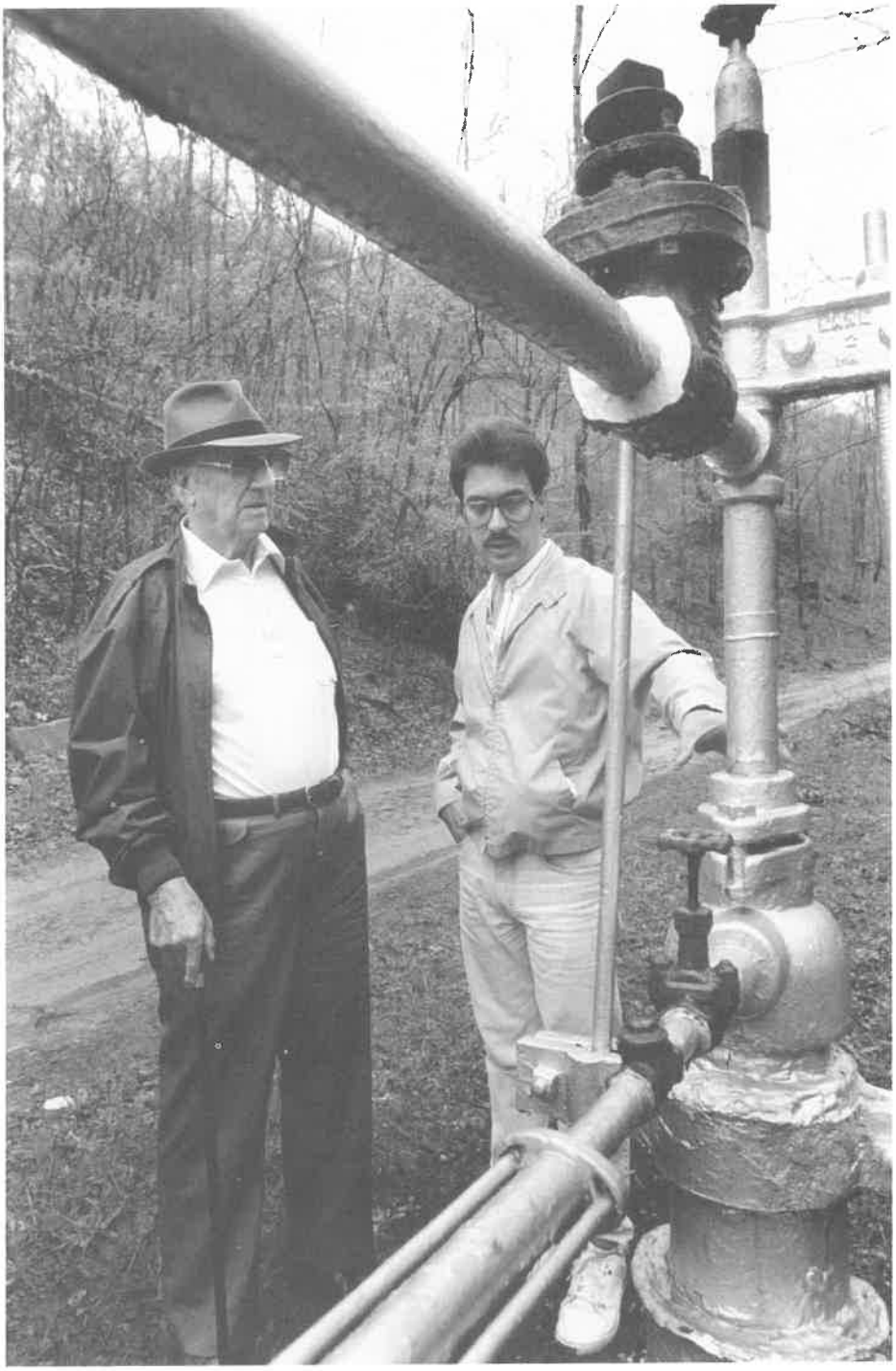
**By Lenore McComas Coberly**
**Photographs by Michael Keller**

Bob Adkins has lived in Lincoln County all his life. His family left Harts and moved across the county to Hamlin in 1920 when he was 17. Harts has had a rough history, according to some, but Bob says there were good people and bad people there just like anywhere else.

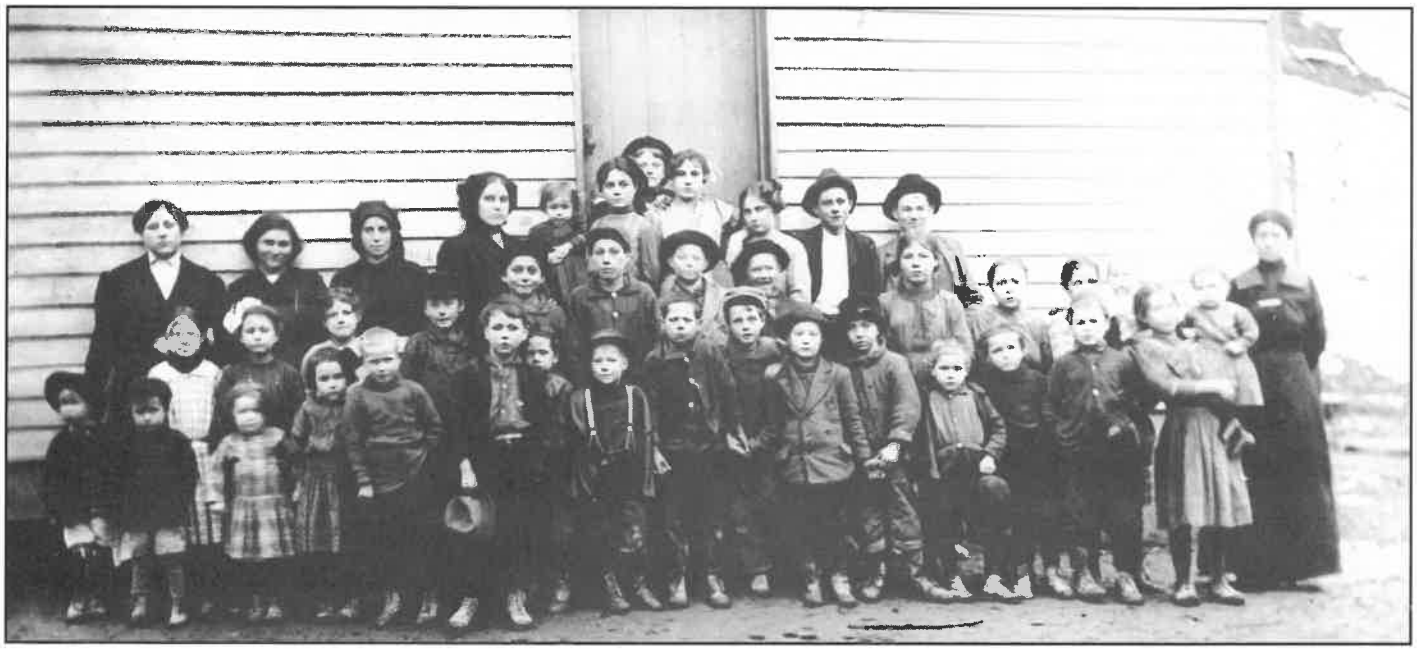
As a grown man, he met Judge Charlie Ferguson while drilling for gas in Wayne County. The judge told him about the Dingess family and how they had come from the Blue Ridge into the Guyan Valley and taken possession of an island near present Logan town. They killed the Indians living there and created a law of their own. This confirmed for Bob what his mother, Brooke Dingess Adkins, had told him about her people. The Dingesses subsequently spread through Logan and surrounding areas.

Bob's great grandfather, Henderson Dingess, located on Smoke House Fork of Big Harts Creek in present Lincoln County. Henderson's son, Hugh, was Bob's grandfather. The hills were covered with virgin timber and the Dingesses made part of their living floating logs downstream. They also had an orchard and a federal license to make apple brandy.

Three of the Dingess girls married Paris Brumfield's sons. Haline, who married Al Brumfield, was to play an important part in Brooke's life. Haline and Al built a boom across the creek to catch logs that were floated into the Guyan in the spring. Al charged by the log and prospered. They built an eight-room house and put in a store.

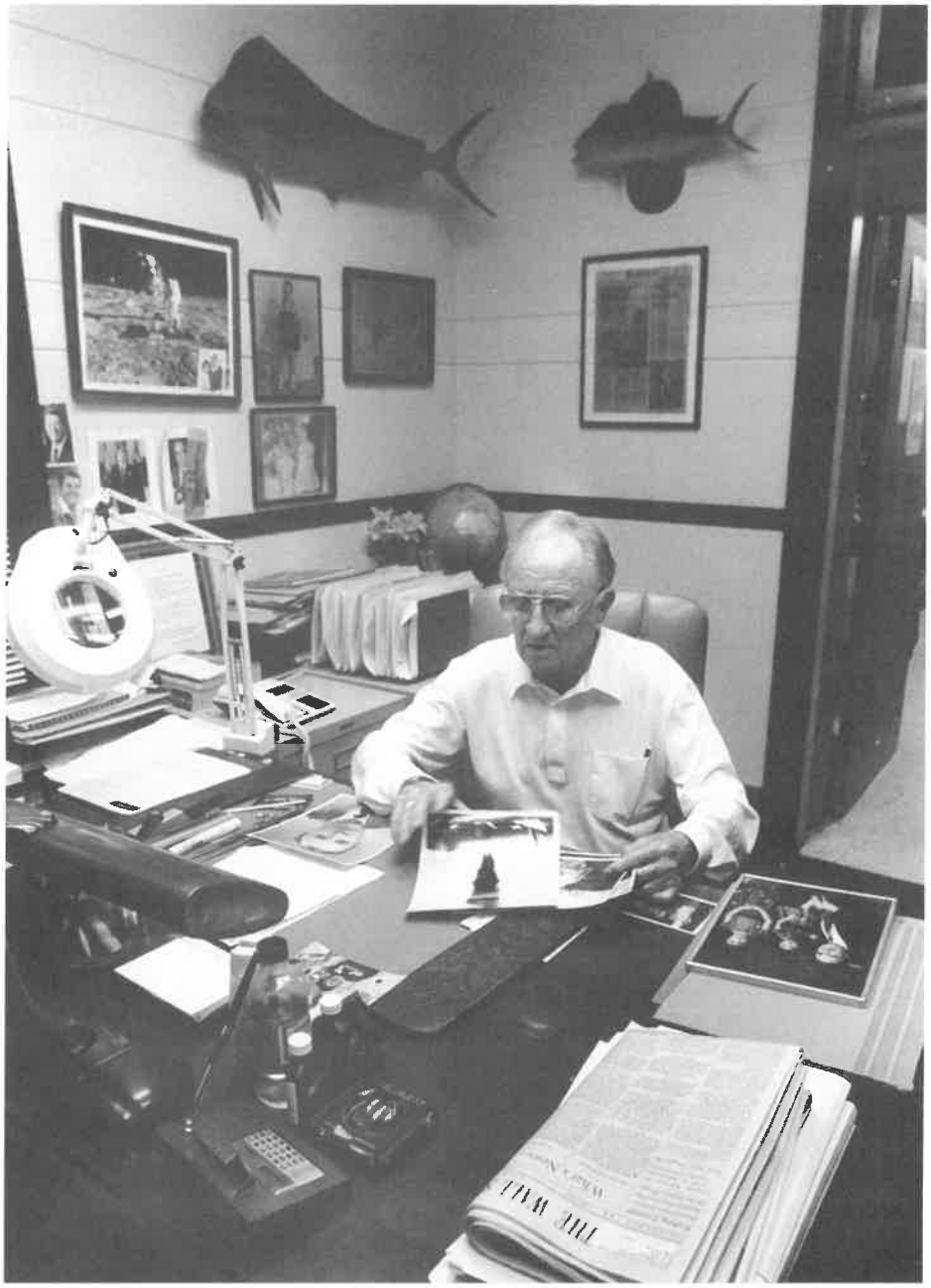


Bob Adkins inspects a gas well with grandson Ron Hooser. Ron does much of the company fieldwork nowadays, but no one knows more about the Lincoln County gas fields than Mr. Adkins.



*Above:* This is "Harts Creek University," according to Bob Adkins. He stands at center front, with cap and forelock, with mother Brooke Adkins, the teacher, at far right. Photographer unknown, about 1913.

*Right:* Mr. Adkins is quite a talker, but he won't try to tell you that those trophy fish came from Mud River. He works regularly in his office at age 89.



Haline ran the store and offered food and lodging to travelers.

A man named Runyan came from Kentucky to Harts and put in a rival store and saloon. One Sunday Al and Haline were riding double on one horse on their way down the creek from seeing her daddy, Henderson Dingess. Some men shot at them and hit Haline in the cheek, the bullet exiting the other cheek. The men got away, but when it was found out that Milt Haley and Green McCoy had disappeared suddenly that night everyone agreed that they had been hired by Runyan to kill Al Brumfield. Runyan also left Harts that night. Eventually Haley and McCoy were found and brought back to Harts and killed.*

All that happened long before Bob's birth in 1903, but he recalls unsettled times from his own early years in the community. He says that it was not uncommon for someone who wanted

* See Michael M. Meador's article, "The Lincoln County Crew: A Feud Song," GOLDENSEAL, Summer 1986, for a fuller treatment of this incident. Copies are available for $3.95 from the GOLDENSEAL office.

another person to be gotten rid of to hire someone to come to Harts from Kentucky and let it be known that he was mad at the individual to be murdered. The local resident who wanted the murder done would then quietly take care of it himself, but the decoy from Kentucky would leave suddenly and be blamed for the crime. West Virginia and Kentucky had no extradition laws so this system was foolproof.

Following the Brumfield shooting Bob's mother Brooke came, as a young girl, to help the injured Haline at her store and boardinghouse. At Haline's she met Albert Adkins and his wife, the former Emma Jane Hager. When Emma Jane died of tuberculosis after three years of marriage, Brooke lined the pine coffin Albert made for his wife.

Haline let Brooke go to the country school, then Brooke taught for a time before she married the widowed Albert Adkins. Albert and Emma Jane's wedding picture was to hang in their home for the rest of their lives. Bob grew up knowing about the fabled Emma Jane and, in a strange turn of fate, eventually he married her niece, Madge Hager. Brooke and Albert had two daughters younger than Bob, Ruby and Ruth. They also raised Emma Jane's nephew, Homer Hager. He went away to World War I and returned to work with Bob building houses.

Bob's early years included schooling in Ferrellsburg to about the fourth grade. When the family moved to Hamlin he went to school to Madge Hager and Bernard Jaynes. He was a teenager by then and didn't want to take reading, so he asked Mr. Jaynes if he could take arithmetic. Mr. Jaynes told him to take what he wanted and stayed in at noon to teach him.

At about this time, Everette McComas was a tool dresser with Cash Wolf's Huntington Development Gas Company, which had wells near Myra, up Mud River from Hamlin. In 1922 Everette came to Hamlin and boarded at Brooke Adkins's boardinghouse. He and Bob became friends and courted the sisters, Ida and Madge Hager. When they all got married they built one house in which both couples lived while they built a second house.

By January 1923 Bob and Everette had decided to drill for gas and went to Charleston to get a drilling rig. They had no cash money and their wives begged them not to undertake the financial risk involved in the new venture, but the two young men were determined. The car was cold, so they stopped at West Hamlin and got canvas to help seal the Model T against the weather.

Everette McComas in WWI uniform. Everette and Bob spent their first years in business together before Everette's untimely death in 1929. Photographer and date unknown.

In Charleston they went to the McJunkin Company, but McJunkin wouldn't talk to the would-be gas men. Next they went to the Continental Supply Company, whose home office was in Houston, and Continental agreed to sell them a rig for which another driller could not make his payments. They gave ten $500 notes, payable every 60 days. The three houses Bob owned in Hamlin were put up for collateral. The drilling tools were shipped to Alkol.

Albert Black and Philip Hager, who was Bob and Everette's father-in-law, had a company called Bear Branch Gas. They hired Bob and Everette to drill two wells for them. Then United Fuel hired them to drill an offset well. The young partners were in business now, and work picked up as they went along.

Everette had boarded at one time with the David Miller family near Spurlockville. They had become friends, and now the Millers leased land to Everette and Bob. They called their new company the David Gas Company and sold $20,000 worth of stock to anybody who would buy it at $100 a share. They drilled three wells but found that United Fuel wouldn't buy their gas, because it was too far from the main Pennzoil line which served wells throughout the gas field.

So Everette and Bob went to Pittsburgh and talked with executives of the South Penn Company. South Penn agreed to build a six-inch line from the main line to Bear Branch. David Gas Company built its own lines to Bear Branch.

When their capital was down to $500 and Jimmy Cooper from Elkins Branch wanted them to drill four wells on land he had leased, they went, as they had before, to lawyer A. F. Morris in Hamlin. He advised against this venture but agreed to introduce them to banker Lou Sweetland. Morris told the younger men not to be afraid of Mr. Sweetland, but Bob remained anxious. Late one night they went to the bank to meet with the banker. Morris explained the situation. Sweetland asked questions and finally said, "Go ahead, boys."

They were to have many such night meetings at the bank, and Mr. Sweetland insisted that minutes be kept of every one. Sometimes he talked with Bob alone. Maybe the banker told him things he thought Bob ought to know, or maybe Mr. Sweetland just wanted to talk. Bob nearly went to sleep on more than one occasion as the old man talked about the Masonic Lodge. And Mr. Sweetland gave him correction from time to time. Once he asked what kind of explosive they were using at the wells. Bob replied, "Du Pint." Mr. Sweetland said, "Pont, Bobby, Pont." Bob Adkins remembered that 60 years later.

When their second well on the Cooper lease was a good producer Mr. Sweetland said to go ahead with two more wells. As it happened, Hope Natural Gas had leases on either side of the Cooper lease. Russell Morris, A. F.'s son and also a lawyer, advised Bob and Everette to get land around the Hope lease to keep them from drilling.

Cora Egnor, who worked at the

Business success brought its rewards. Mrs. Adkins and daughter Helen pose here at Fort Lauderdale, 1936. Photographer unknown.

Capitol in Charleston, owned an interest in the land they needed. Bob traveled to Charleston and took her and her mother to dinner and acquired the lease for $100. Mr. Sweetland had coached him to pay no more than $50, but when he heard the details the old man said, "Oh, Bobby, what a fine deal!"

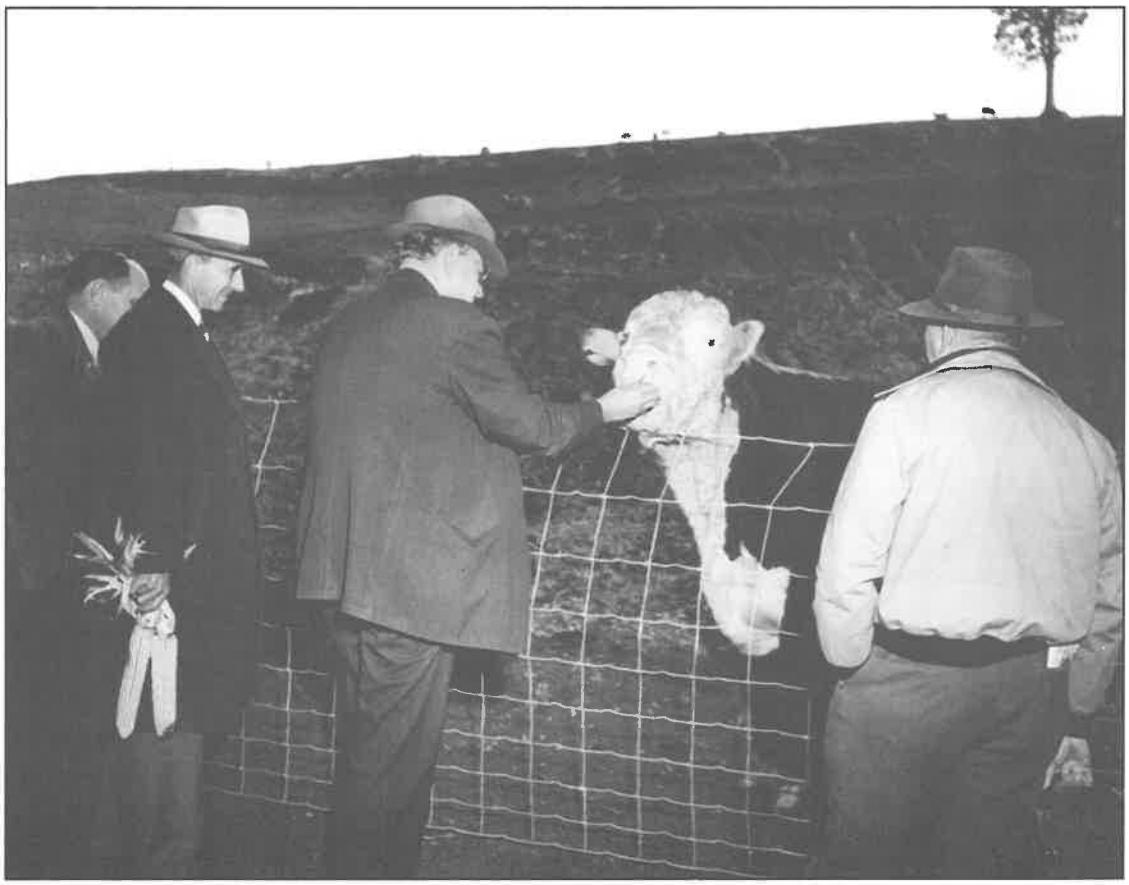
One day when it was not yet summer and the open Model T was comfortable to ride in with the sun on you and the wind in your face, the drillers took the road up Turtle Creek. It was deep rutted and wet where run-offs from the steep hill ran across it. Everette was driving. Bob always seemed to prefer having someone else drive. Everette had three cars before Bob got his first Ford.

Mr. Sweetland was with them, which was unusual but pleasant for the two young men. They admired and respected the banker and would never have called him Lou or Louis. He was older than they and would always be "Mr. Sweetland" to them. Everette didn't know all the people on Turtle Creek, but he was a McComas and Turtle Creek people knew of his people. They had been in Carroll District as long as anyone had been there. So Everette's habit of just stopping anywhere and falling into conversation was more than friendliness, although he did like to talk.

As they drove up under a big beech tree they saw old man Nelson working his grindstone in the yard. Everette got out and called, "Howdy, how are ye, Mr. Nelson?"

With his back permanently bent, the old man tipped his head to peer at the younger man. "Who is this?" The conversation was launched and Bob and Mr. Sweetland soon joined Everette in easy talk. The old man did most of the talking. They discussed the weather and the crops and talked about some timber high on the hill above them. As they talked, Mrs. Nelson saw them from the house and started dinner.

They had just gotten around to how you could get a truck up over the hill behind the house when Mrs. Nelson called them to the table. There was beans, potatoes, cabbage, cured ham,



Former Governor Henry Hatfield, shown here feeding Jerry the bull, was among Adkins's business associates. Mr. Adkins stands by with more corn. Photographer unknown, 1949.

cornbread, fried eggs, coffee, and she even had a thin, warm cake for dessert.

After the blessing they ate. Then the men walked up the hill behind the house and drove two stakes, which Bob carried with him, where they wanted to drill wells. Mr. Sweetland took the lease agreement out of his pocket and Mr. Nelson signed it. Everette went to get the car. Then they walked on down the other side of the hill and Everette met them at the bottom. There wasn't much of a road there, but Everette McComas could drive anywhere.

"That was a good piece of business, boys," Lou Sweetland said, when they had let Mr. Nelson out of the car and waved good-bye to Mrs. Nelson who was sitting on the porch. It was sweet praise, but Bob and Everette knew without being told that to drill for gas you first had to get legal access to the mineral rights. They knew there was a job to do, and that they could do it. They also knew that if they did it well they would never again be poor.

The brothers-in-law were natural partners. It was Everette who understood the mechanical and production end of drilling. Bob hustled to get leases, find pipe and get it shipped, find pipeline connections, and learn the political angles of doing business.

Then the great tragedy occurred. Everette was killed at Riverhead Well No. 3 on the mountain at the head of Mud River. It was December 17, 1929.

Bob had to quit building houses after Everette McComas was killed. It had been Everette who was at the wells. Everette liked to sing and got along well with the workers. When Bob had introduced him to Ida they had liked each other at once. They would sit on the Hager porch together and go to church. Bob says Everette was a good religious man, which Bob feels that he was not.

Perhaps a little of Bob died with Everette, a certain light-heartedness. Bob didn't have time to fool around with baseball, but Everette played. Everette bought a Model T car and then a fancier Overland. Bob had three houses before he got his first car, a practical Model T on which he put a five-foot truck bed to haul nails, cement, and so forth.

Bob went back after the funeral and finished the Mud River well and then moved on to other locations. He was never again to have a friend like Everette McComas, but he had learned early in life to accept tragedy and go on living. It was with this same stoicism that he faced the death of his infant son, Hale Pearman Adkins.

Thus the Hager sisters both suffered great loss at a young age. Ida's husband was dead at 30, and she was expecting her third daughter. Madge's baby son died, and Bob was often lost to all but his work. The birth of daughter Helen in 1931 was the great joy of their lives, and they always kept fond and appreciative feelings for each other.

Bob had some basic principles on which he did business. The first was not to have anything to do with people who weren't honest, and the second was not to hire any workers who didn't live in Lincoln County. He relented only in hiring bookkeepers from Charleston, but made sure they moved to Hamlin. A third principle was based on the belief that stockholders don't know what to do, and the producer is really on his own in trying to do the best for himself and for them.

An Adkins employee prepares an explosive charge for a well on the Hatfield farm. Photographer unknown, 1949.

During the 1960's Bob had a partner, Bill Burchert, with whom he drilled 21 wells. In 1970 the head of Pennzoil called to say he wanted to send his son-in-law to Bob to be trained in the gas business. Bob agreed only reluctantly, but he came to like the neatly dressed Peter Mark. They too drilled 21 wells together, but Bob would not go back to Pennsylvania with Peter for further ventures there. He says it was too far to transport Lincoln County workers.

One of Bob's worst experiences was having a well on a hill just outside Huntington burn. A Hamlin man, Ed Stickler, was killed. Twelve others were hurt. Bob took care of everything not covered by Workman's Compensation and roofed Mrs. Stickler's house and bought the children books and clothes.

Honors and success came as Bob Adkins matured in the business. The

# Settling Family Differences

## Bob Adkins Relates the Haley-McCoy Affair

*In 1986, GOLDENSEAL published Michael M. Meador's "'The Lincoln County Crew:' A Feud Song," an account of events leading up to the killing of Milt Haley and Green McCoy in 1889. Meador based his research largely on versions of a surviving ballad, especially as sung by Irma Butcher, and on printed sources.*

*Another important source has now surfaced. As it happens, gas driller Bob Adkins has family connections to some of the participants in the tragic affair, and he provided the following account to writer Lenore Coberly in a 1990 interview.*

A fellow named Runyan came in from Kentucky and put in a store and saloon and made competition for Haline and Al Brumfield. They lived at the mouth of Harts. Paris Brumfield lived half a mile below on good bottom land. Had sons Charlie, Al, Bill, John, and two daughters. Caroline Dingess married Charlie Brumfield, Haline Dingess married Al Brumfield, and Harriet Dingess married John Brumfield. Henderson Dingess was my great grandfather and the father of Haline.

Well, when that fellow came and put in a store it was believed he would like to get rid of Al. Every Sunday Al and Haline rode up the hollow to Harts Creek to see her daddy, Henderson Dingess. They both rode on one horse. Runyan gave some men a side of bacon and a barrel of flour to kill them. They got in a sinkhole and shot at Al on the way back. Al jumped off, but they hit Haline in the cheek and the bullet went out the other cheek.

Al ran and got away and then came back for Haline. She knew there were two men but she didn't know who they were. Thought it was Burl Adams but became convinced it wasn't him. Runyan just left, and they looked for him the rest of their lives. Then they missed Milt Haley and Green McCoy. They just left their families and disappeared. Figured it was by steamboat on the Ohio.

News got to Cincinnati that $1,500 was offered for Haley, Runyan, and McCoy. A detective there found [Haley and McCoy],

The old Brumfield house still stands at the mouth of Harts Creek. Al and Haline Brumfield were on their way back home when ambushed by Haley and McCoy. Photo by Michael Keller.

West Virginia Association of Oil and Gas Producers named him "Gas Man of the Year" at the Sistersville Gas Festival a while back. He says he doesn't go much for such things but admits he enjoyed meeting a senator that day.

After Madge's death, Bob married Rena Weaver, a Hamlin telephone operator who grew up in Griffithsville. She keeps him straight, he says, and in some ways she reminds Lincoln County people of the younger Brooke Dingess.

He still manages his drilling business, drilling wells even during the current slump in his industry and using new technology to extract more gas. He is 89 years old. Why does he keep working at the remodeled Hamlin house which he and Everette McComas first built? Why not? What else is a gas man to do?

Bob knows that there is still work to be done and a new generation coming up. Grandson Ron Hooser consults him about the right-of-way to a well. Bob tells him to do it the way he and Everette used to do business. Go and talk to the woman who owns the land. "Tell her you and Bob Adkins want to do what is right. We don't want her unhappy."

"Yes sir," the young man in jeans says, and is on his way. His grandfather is pleased.

Bob Adkins says he lives on his Hamlin back porch. We caught him there on a rainy day last spring.

and when Al heard they had his men he went down posing as sheriff, paid the reward, got them on the N&W train to Wayne County by Kenova, then up Twelve Pole Creek to Tug River. Breeden was a railroad stop and they walked from there to Harts by Left Fork of Twelve Pole.

Haline's brother, John Dingess, had a saloon at Dingess on the way. They stayed there and stayed the next night at Grandpa's. His daughter Brooke was 14 at the time. That night they took Milt Haley out, told McCoy they had hanged him, then McCoy told the whole story. Haley was held and made to listen to McCoy. Then they brought Haley in and he called McCoy yellow and still denied all of it. Next day they went along West Fork of Harts to Fry. Stayed at Aunt Catherine Fry Adkins's house at Fry.

She was in the kitchen with the two men tied together, everyone drinking. Someone shot the lamp out over her head. Then they shot the men and took axes to their heads. This wasn't much strange. They took the law into their own hands but made sure it was the right people.

Al Brumfield come to Grandpa's that night but slept up the hollow. [They] took the bodies to West Fork of Harts and buried them in the same grave. Their relatives kept quiet.

I know of 18 murders within ten miles of where I grew up. I made it a point to tend to my own business. People lived by the gun. Never saw but one fist fight. Never knew anyone to kill a stranger. They were settling their own family differences.

— Bob Adkins

# Home Forever

## Carving a New Life in Tucker County

**By Susan Leffler**

When 80-year-old Stella Zalatoris reminisces about her Tucker County childhood, she remembers standing for hours looking over her father's shoulder while he sketched fairy-tale houses and elegant cathedrals.

Then Stanley Paczosa would take out his delicate fretsaw, steady his elbow on the table and, following his drawings, cut intricate pieces of wood for his model buildings. His two most elaborate buildings, "Cathedral with Clock" and a model of the United States Capitol, now belong to the West Virginia State Museum in Charleston. The cathedral is made of 760 pieces of wood.

Stella doesn't remember anyone teaching her father his craft, called "fretwork," and assumes he fashioned the lace-like woodwork from memories of his childhood in Poland. He'd spin yarns about growing up in the small industrial town of Krosno while Stella played with the wood shavings under the workbench. She would daydream and sift sawdust through her fingers until her mother broke the spell.

"She'd get on me for getting dirty and then she'd scold him for doing his woodwork instead of fixing things around the house," Stella says. "He'd just laugh. He was so easy going. Nothing bothered him."

Stanley was born near Krosno in southeastern Poland on May 7, 1878. When he was a teenager he worked with his father as a stonemason and later enlisted in the Polish army. In 1904 he married Dorothy Zemenski and they started what was to become a family of two daughters and seven sons. Stanley put in long hours cutting and laying stone with his father, but money was scarce.

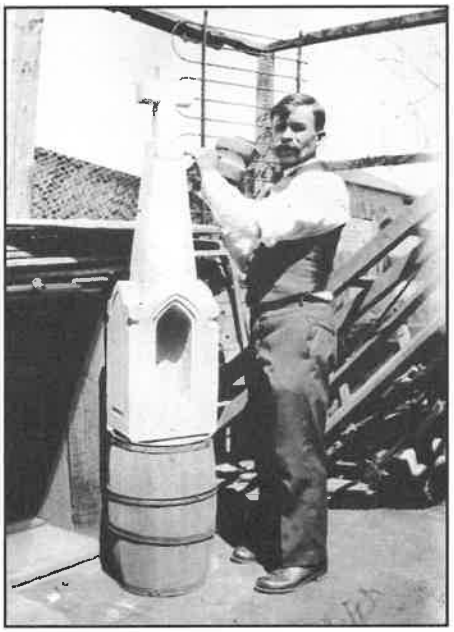
Poland was a poor country and talk in the pubs and other places where

Stanley Paczosa was proud of his Tucker County home and family. He stands here (in hat) with brother Eddie, sons Metz and Adolph, wife Dorothy with baby, sons Jack and Harry, and daughter Stella. Photographer and date unknown.

young men gathered often turned to the land of opportunity across the Atlantic. One of the rapidly growing number of Poles to try their luck in America was Stanley's neighbor, John Lawrence. John came back to Krosno telling stories of a land where there were still wild places to homestead and jobs lucrative enough to feed a traditionally large Catholic family.

When John returned to his new home in Davis, West Virginia, he sent Stanley letters describing the booming timber town. The town, named for U.S. Senator and railroad mogul Henry Gassaway Davis, boasted seven churches, four hotels, two banks, and a 1,200-seat opera house. The Blackwater River that ran beside the community turned the wheels of two sawmills and a planing mill. There was also a tannery and later a box factory.

The nearby Canaan Valley contained the best stand of red spruce in the world and the lumber barons went after it with a lust that rivaled the California gold rush. In 1884 the last spike was driven for the new railroad connecting Davis with the outside world. Within the next decade the population had skyrocketed to four thousand.



A talented stone carver among other things, Stanley works here on the top of the tombstone he made for himself and Dorothy. He set the impressive monument in the Mount Calvary cemetery decades before he died. Photographer and date unknown.

*Davis was full of young Polish men who would rush to the railroad station if they'd heard women were coming from their homeland.*

John Lawrence's descriptions of Davis were the final inspiration Stanley needed. In 1906 the 28-year-old stonemason sailed for New York, leaving Dorothy and their two children behind until he could earn enough to pay for their passage. He moved in with Lawrence and got his first job in the New World at the Davis Coal and Coke Company. The money was good, but Stanley hated working underground so he quit and became a jack of all trades.

Years later Stanley told his daughter stories about that period of his life, including a colorful description of the town bachelors meeting the train. According to the story, Davis was full of young Polish men who would rush to the railroad station if they'd heard women were coming from their homeland. Every time a lady stepped off the train they would yell "she's mine, don't bother her" or "that's the one I'm going to marry." Stanley, already married, would go along to watch the others and laugh, knowing that the women always came to join a husband or another relative.

For four years he saved money for his own family's passage, working as a carpenter to build houses for newcomers, cutting timber, and repairing roofs. Although he was a skilled stonemason who could make beautiful headstones, there was not much market for them.

The community in its early years was too healthy to keep a gravestone man busy, Stella figures. "I guess he took up mining before making gravestones because there weren't enough people in Davis dying yet," she says. "It was a young town of pioneers."

In 1910 Stanley sent for Dorothy and their two sons. They arrived in April. Stella, the first girl of the family and the first native-born American, was born the following year. The Paczosas bought a four-room frame house surrounded by several acres of land. Stella moved back to her childhood home a few years ago.

The Paczosas bought two milk cows, a hog, and some chickens, and Dorothy planted a big vegetable garden to feed the growing family. She worked on the farm, even helping to cut and rake the hay, while Stanley continued to work at anything he could. Occasionally he'd have a chance to use some of the things he'd learned working alongside his father. Stanley made stone gate posts for the cemetery in the nearby town of Thomas, and built two stone fireplaces in the neighboring community of Aurora.

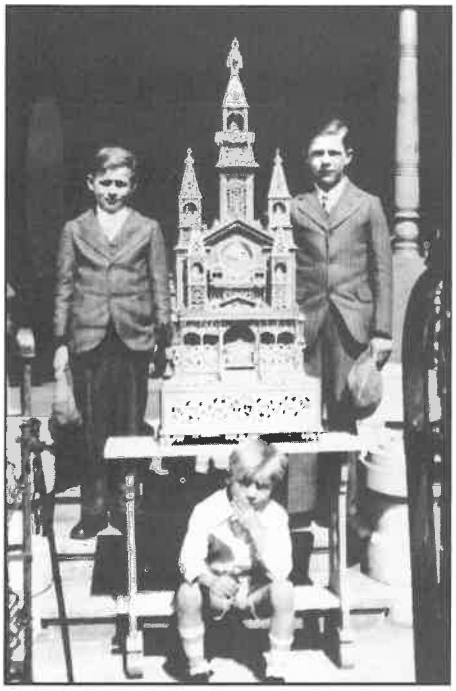
When he did extra jobs like this he'd use the money to add onto the family's small house. Stella remembers it as being homey but very cold during brisk Tucker County winters. "When it's winter here, you know it," she says. "We'd all huddle by the fire to keep our ankles warm."

Stella says the family always ate well, thanks to her frugal and hard working mother. Dorothy Paczosa baked three times a week and made her own cheese and sauerkraut. But long hours in the kitchen and the garden, combined with a tendency to worry about family finances, kept Dorothy from really enjoying life, her daughter believes. "She worked mighty hard. She didn't like to go out much except to church. She wasn't a mixer."

Stella remembers her father as being just the opposite, enjoying get-togethers with neighbors and always willing to lend a hand or a dollar to a friend.

Neither Dorothy nor Stanley had more than a fourth-grade education but both could read and write their native language. They always spoke Polish with each other and with their children. Stella remembers that almost all the adults in the neighborhood spoke Polish to each other, but the children used English when they played together.

"The kids had to be knocked in the head to pick up Polish. We all said we



Stanley worked as expertly in delicate wood as in stone. His fretwork cathedral clock, shown here with sons (left to right) Stanley, Jr., Andrew and Harry, was glued together of hundreds of intricate pieces. Photograph, 1940's.

*"In a small town a dance is a dance and everybody goes. They all learned the polka and the waltzes and everybody would try to sing along even if they didn't speak the language."*

could speak American here. Our parents were hurt." The adults in the Polish community worked to keep their culture alive through song, dance, and holiday celebrations, she recalls.

Stanley was the president of the local Polish lodge, Groupy 756 Z.N.P., Polish National Alliance, for 18 years. Once a year it would hire a polka band from a big city and hold a dance. The whole town, Poles and non-Poles alike, would turn out.

"In a small town a dance is a dance and everybody goes. They all learned the polka and the waltzes and everybody would try to sing along even if they didn't speak the language," Stella remembers. "Those were the happiest times ever."

The Polish families all attended Saint Veronica Roman Catholic Church in Davis, even though the services were conducted in English. During the holidays the Poles would sing their own religious music at home and celebrate Christmas and Easter in the tradition of their homeland. Stella remembers her parents singing duets from an old Polish hymnal.

"It was just beautiful when they sang," she says. "Just gorgeous. Dad loved to sing. He couldn't wait for the holidays. They were his best days because he could sing his heart out."

Stella says she and the other children never learned the songs because they were afraid their parents would make them sing all the time. The children, she says, were more interested in the special holiday foods. On Christmas Eve there were 12 kinds of food served in honor of the 12 Apostles. Stanley would start the meal with a toast. "'We're all here together and let's toast to each other,'" Stella recalls him saying. He would give even the smallest child a little toddy or wine for the toast. "'Now we'll all break bread,' he'd say, and pass around a hunk of bread for each person to break off a piece and eat. Then he'd say, 'Now let's all hope and pray that we'll get together here another year.'

The actual meal would begin with baked fish and onions served with potatoes, pirogis (boiled dough filled with, in this case, prunes), sweet cabbage with beans, and tiny green peas. Stanley would tell stories or rhymes during the meal, especially if there were small children at the table.

"One was a Polish verse that I can't translate very well," says Stella. "Dad would get up and he'd knock at the window and say something like, 'All right, wolf, stay away from my door. We don't need you around, we need some more [food].' Why, those little kids' eyes would about pop out of their heads when he'd knock to scare that wolf away."

The festive meal was topped off with borscht, a cold, thin, red beet soup with mushrooms in it. Everyone at the table was supposed to taste something of all 12 foods even if it was just a teaspoon, Stella says. After the meal the children could eat the fruit and candy they'd gotten as gifts.

At Easter the Polish families ate kilbassi and eggs and ham served with red horseradish. The Paczosas killed a hog each winter and made liver sausage and head cheese. "I'm sure our family didn't have the best of meals because there were so many of us. But we kids thought they were great," Stella says.

Stanley didn't earn much money during the winter when it was too cold to work construction or even cut gravestones. By the time Stella was in primary school people in Davis and the nearby community of Thomas were ordering monuments and headstones from her father. He'd cut them during the warm weather and use the long winters to sketch designs for new ones.

"That's when he had time to draw, because you don't have to fix broken things in the winter if they are outside. If Mother wanted something fixed, he'd say, 'Dorcha (his pet name for her), you know it's too cold out there, too wet out there, wait until spring,'" Stella remembers.

The winter was also Stanley's time for designing and drawing his intricate fretwork pieces. He never

Stanley and Dorothy Paczosa's Christmas card portrait. Dorothy is remembered as the worrier of the family.

# Patience and Sawdust

## The Fretwork Hobby

Fretwork became popular in the United States in the mid-1800's and remained in vogue for decades afterwards, as patient craftsmen such as Stanley Paczosa glued together elaborate creations of intricately cut pieces of wood. Many of their lacy clocks, picture frames, and candelabras have a distinctly Victorian flavor. The work was purely recreational with no function other than decoration.

The craft was first practiced in this country by well-to-do artisans who had seen fretwork pieces while traveling in Europe. To this day many fretwork patterns come from Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. Although daughter Stella Zalatoris recalls that Paczosa drew his own patterns, his delicate toy carriages, crucifixes, and jewelry boxes have the old-world flavor of his native Poland. His work also reflects American designs of his day.

The cathedral clock was one of the most popular designs seen at U.S. fairs and competitions in the late 19th century. Paczosa's "Cathedral With Clock," which his family recently donated to the West Virginia State Museum in Charleston, is a later example of this Victorian-style fretwork. Paczosa worked on the piece for 538 hours and finished it in 1930, according to museum sources.

He completed his other major work, "The Capitol," two years later. Paczosa worked on this 497-piece model for 437 hours, leaving a marvelous model and mounds of sawdust. This design may be original with Paczosa, since other examples are not known. He gave a personal touch to both cathedral and capitol by adding small family photographs. A picture of the artist himself graces the back of the cathedral's door.

Early fretwork artists used small hand-held fretsaws or coping saws, consisting of a bracket frame with


*Left:* Stanley's coping saw and spare blades. He cut thousands of tiny wooden parts by hand. Photograph by Susan Leffler.
*Above:* "Cathedral With Clock" is Stanley Paczosa's version of a common fretwork design. It stands more than four feet tall. State Museum Collection, photograph by Michael Keller.

interchangeable blades, and Stanley Paczosa continued to work with hand tools into the mid-20th century. Equipment was imported in the early days, and expensive. Fretwork became popular among the working class in this country only after the introduction of a reasonably priced foot-powered scroll saw in 1870.

In 1865 the Sorrento Wood Carving Company of Boston and Chicago boasted that it was the only mail order house in the world solely dedicated to fretwork supplies. A magazine called *Fret Sawyers Monthly* started publishing at about the same time. Today fretwork supplies and information are still available by mail order. Two Wisconsin woodworkers, Patrick Spielman and James Reidle have co-authored several books on the craft, including *Classic Fretwork Scroll Saw Patterns* and *Scroll Saw Fretwork Techniques and Projects*. Both are published by the Sterling Publishing Company, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. You may request a catalog of fretwork supplies by writing to Reidle Products, Box 661, Richland Center, WI 53581.

"The Capitol" shows pictures of Lincoln and Washington as well as members of the Paczosa family. State Museum Collection, photograph by Michael Keller.

made them to sell but rather as gifts for the family. He fashioned little toy carriages, sets of dominoes, and a mule and cart that moved. He made jewelry boxes for his daughters with their names cut into the lids and drawers that pulled out with tiny handles. Eventually the family's small house was filled. Stanley's work covered every spare table and shelf and hung from the walls and across the doorways.

"It was just like a museum in a big city when he was alive," says Stella. "As many as 25 people used to come through here in a day to see the things he made. I always had a lot of dusting to do."

Stanley entered his two largest and most elaborate pieces, "Cathedral with Clock" and "The Capitol," in the Tucker County Fair and won first and second prizes. He cut tiny pictures of individual family members from black-and-white photographs and glued them onto the two model buildings, giving them the look of small shrines.

The local notoriety of his fretwork and his gravestone cutting brought Stanley in contact with an increasing number of people outside of the Polish community. He picked up a fair amount of English and in 1935 both he and Dorothy applied for United States citizenship. As part of the application process, they had to learn about the workings of American government and memorize the pledge of allegiance in English. Stella remembers her parents preparing for the citizenship examination.

"They'd ask each other questions," she says. "It was really cute. They couldn't pronounce the words right. It was funny."

It was harder for Dorothy, because she stayed home most of the time and spoke Polish with the family and neighbors, but she passed the test on her first try. Stanley missed by one point.

Daughter Stella Zalatoris still occupies the Paczosa family house. The "Call Again" door hanging is Stanley's creation, of course. Photograph by Susan Leffler.

"My dad didn't want to go back after he failed the first time, but my mother told him he was going back whether he liked it or not. She was really one of them pushers. You did what was supposed to be done. She knew the rights and wrongs of this world," Stella says.

When they got their citizenship papers, Stanley and Dorothy changed the spelling of their last name to P-a-c-o-s-a to make it easier to spell and pronounce in their newly adopted language. They were Americans now, and Stella remembers that they never missed a chance to vote.

"They'd get up early in the morning and get all dressed up fancy to go and put in their votes," she recalls. "They were so proud. My older brothers got their papers and they always voted too. They all believed that when you live in a place, you do as the others do. You don't just avoid that."

*"On his payday he'd go to the store and buy a dollar's worth of penny candy. He'd see the neighbors' kids playing marbles and he'd pour that sack of candy right into the middle of the game."*

# The Stones of Stanley Paczosa

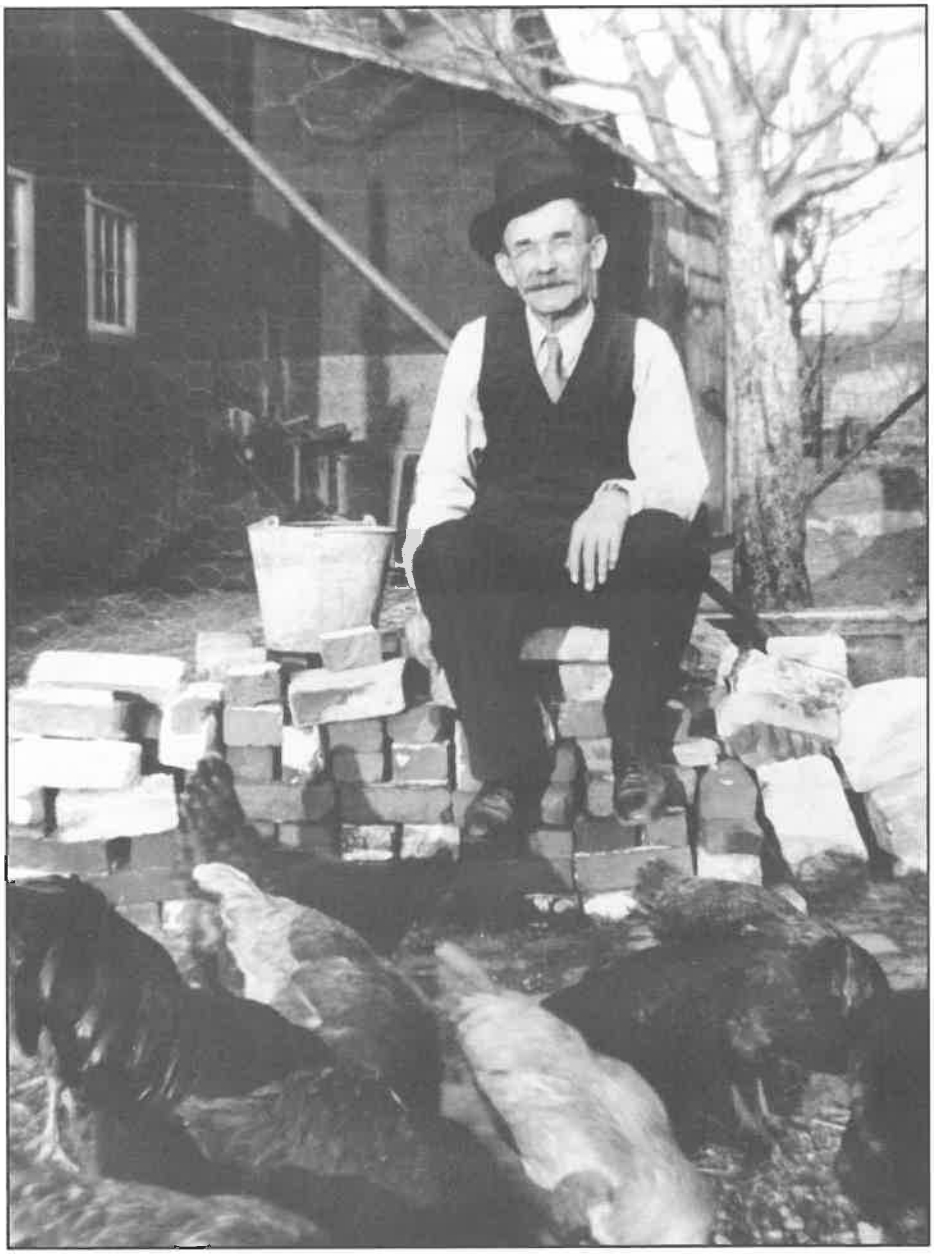
**Photoessay by Susan Leffler**

Stanley Paczosa came to America as a talented stonecarver and monument maker and hoped to support himself by that trade. Ironically, however, he found Davis, a lumber boom town at the time, too young and healthy to support a tombstone man. Stanley turned his talents in other directions, while supporting his family by construction work and other jobs.

As his town aged the gravestone business picked up, and Stanley eventually left an impressive body of stonework to the community. His work includes the three monuments with crosses (*right*) as well as the touching carved coffin (*below*) which marks a child's grave.

The Paczosa family monument (*opposite, left*), placed in the cemetery 25 years before Stanley's death, received special attention. The niche held a small statue of the Virgin Mary in earlier times. The inset plaque (*opposite, top right*), gives Stanley and Dorothy's names, their birthplace, and the epitaph "Home Forever" in Polish.


DOM
WIECZNOSCI
FAMIELIYNY
STANISŁAWA
I. DOROTY
PACZOSA
OD. KROSNA
Z POLSKI



Stanley Paczosa communes with his chickens. He is remembered today as a talented, gentle soul. Photograph by West Virginia Photo Company, 1944.

Despite the fact that she had no trouble passing the English competency test, Dorothy never felt comfortable with her second language. Stella remembers an incident that took place after she was married and living a few blocks away from her parents. Her mother had asked her to come over and translate for an interview she had with two insurance agents. The men arrived before Stella did, so she stood outside and listened to her mother answer the agents' questions.

"She did just fine," Stella says. "Mother grabbed me and whispered in my ear that they'd arrived early and she didn't know how she'd done. I told her she must have done all right because they were starting to leave when I got there."

Stella stayed close to her parents after her brothers had all moved away looking for work. She visited with them several times a week and often brought her children to watch Stanley at his fretwork and listen to his stories of Poland.

"He really loved his grandkids and all the children in the neighborhood. On his payday he'd go to the store and buy a dollar's worth of penny candy. He'd see the neighbors' kids playing marbles and he'd pour that sack of candy right into the middle of the game and cover up the marbles. The kids didn't know where the shooter went. He thought that was really funny. Those kids knew if they saw him with a poke, they were going to get a treat."

Stella says her father was always disappointed that she didn't teach her children Polish.

"My excuse to my dad was that I was married to a Lithuanian and that I talked to him in American because I couldn't talk Lithuanian and he couldn't talk Polish. My father would tell me not to give him that excuse. 'Your husband works eight hours a day. Why don't you talk to your kids a bit in Polish and teach them a bit about Poland. That's not a forgotten tongue yet. There are a lot of Polish people in this world.'"

Despite the fact that he scolded her about this, Stella says she was always her father's favorite, "a real Daddy's girl," as she puts it.

"After I got married my father would always come to my house if he and Mom had a fight. She'd still get mad at him for doing his fretwork, instead of fixing something she wanted repaired around the house, and he couldn't wait to tell me about it. She would say to me later, 'Yeah, I saw him trottin' up to your place.' Then she'd laugh. He knew he could tell me anything. He was guilty sometimes, though, and I knew it."

Stanley developed a heart condition in his later years and had to stop doing heavy work. He continued to make grave markers, including an elaborate one that he made for himself and Dorothy and placed in the Mount Calvary cemetery 25 years before he died. The inscription, in Polish, reads "Home Forever For Dorothy and Stanley Paczosa From Krosno."

Left to herself, Dorothy bought two canaries to cheer up the empty house. She stopped singing the Polish holiday songs when Stanley died, but she hummed them to herself as she worked.

"Do you know, those canaries learned those songs," says Stella. "When Mom was sick before she died they'd sing them for her."

*Frank K. Thomas loves God, West Virginia, and flying. For more than 50 years, he has flown small, single-engine airplanes, and has accumulated career statistics that number in the thousands. He has instructed more than a thousand student pilots, flown thousands of charters, and logged well over 20,000 flight hours. He laughs when he tells you he quit keeping logbooks when his desk drawer got so jammed that he couldn't open it.*

*But Frank Thomas is not just an aviator. He's also an author, a poet, an artist, and a philosopher. His book,* It Is This Way With Men Who Fly, *now in its fourth printing, is more than a collection of flying experiences and a fascinating history of aviation in West Virginia. Scattered throughout are poems, including the one after which his book is titled:*

*When dark and restless skies are*
*passing by*
*Like the clouds, I too am restless to fly,*
*To see the mountain's other side.*
*Onward, upward, it beckons me until*
*at last I must surrender*
*homeward bound*
*To the bonds of Earth, compelling*
*man's spirit to look up*
*Henceforth, every landing a vow at*
*dawn or dusk I will fly again.*
*It is this way with men who fly.*

*Your first impression of Frank Thomas is that he's a tall, well-built man who resembles Senator Barry Goldwater. If you meet him at his airport near Fayetteville and he's just come down from flying several tourists over the New River Gorge, he'll probably still be wearing the flip-up sunglasses he attaches to his heavy horn-rimmed bifocals, and gesturing grandly about the marvelous things visible from the air. He's all exuberance and enthusiasm.*

*Mostly he wears jeans, a plaid shirt of some kind, a brown corduroy jacket, and red hunting cap. He looks as if he's just chopped firewood, and there's a good chance that he has. He walks with quick, short steps, a kind of choppy gait that is the result of an airplane accident. On some occasions, he might strike you as gruff: He has been clinically deaf since childhood and sometimes may speak a little too loudly.*

*In fact, he is a gentle man, but ruggedly individualistic. You'd expect that of a 70-year-old, who, at the age of 25, took 11 acres of West Virginia mountaintop and*

Frank Thomas at the prop of his Cessna 172. He has flown thousands of hours in light planes such as this.

# Flying Frank Thomas

## "Just Like a Preacher with the Calling"

**By Louis E. Keefer**
**Photographs by Michael Keller**

By 1950 Frank Thomas had built his airport and helped to educate a generation of GI Bill pilots. Photographer unknown.

*In those days probably not one person in a thousand had ever even flown in an airplane, let alone flown one themselves.*

*pretty much built his own airport — cutting down the trees surrounding it, laying out a 2,200 foot runway, building an operations shack with cobblestones from the New River, and putting up the first wooden hangar. He did most of the work himself, buying still more land and putting up additional buildings as he went along. For 45 years, Frank Thomas has operated what aeronautical charts show as the Fayette Airport.*

*Of course, he admits to a few fights with state and federal aviation authorities. But he is proud that he's never had to buckle under to the government, or taken even a penny's worth of financial assistance. If Frank Thomas is prone to speak his mind about politics and politicians — a tendency to which he readily admits — his words are no harsher than those of anyone else who hates bureaucratic nonsense.*

*Thomas also is a deeply religious man, with the strongest possible respect for man and the natural environment. From the air, he sees things that may be concealed from observers below, among them some terrible damage from strip mining. He argues strongly about the need to apply more stringent rules against any company or individual who would harm the state's natural resources. He loves West Virginia, and would save as much as possible from the ravages of the bulldozer.*

*When I arrived at his airport he'd already flown his Cessna 172 "once around the cabbage patch," and was just adjusting a blanket on the engine cowling to keep in some of the heat. Two hours later, he invited me to go up with him, and I said sure! We flew over Thurmond, Ansted, and Gauley Bridge, and I'd have happily stayed up with him all day. Here are a few things he told me about himself during the morning:*

**Louis Keefer.** How did your love affair with flying start?

**Frank Thomas.** I don't remember a time when I didn't want to fly. As a child, when I heard an airplane overhead, I'd run out of the house and watch that plane until it was clear out of sight. Maybe this would be something that a person might not like to say, but [it was just like] a preacher with the calling. I've always had this burning desire to fly, to work with students, and to show people how this beautiful and magnificent land looks from the air.

**LK.** What did your family think about that?

**FT.** They were understanding and supportive. I was born in Lansing, over on the New River, the youngest of eight. My father kept books for a coal mine, and died when I was only four. We moved to Oak Hill, where Mother raised all of us with help from my older brothers. She was a beautiful, most outstanding person. I don't think the sun ever beat her up. She canned, farmed and did everything. She'd been a school teacher, but after her babies started coming, there wasn't time for that.

We had a small truck farm near Oak Hill, raising hogs, chickens, and cows, and various vegetables. I was only six then, but I helped load eggs, tomatoes, roasting ears, and other vegetables on the family truck that my brothers took into the coal towns to supply the company stores. When we got there they'd put me to watching over the produce while they unloaded and took things inside. I remember the local kids would come steal some apples and run like heck. There wasn't anything I could do about it.

**LK.** When did you actually start to fly?

*Left:* There is nothing fancy about Fayette Airport. Frank built the office from stones from the nearby New River.

*Right:* Fayette Airport, 1946. The airport saw its busiest years just after World War II, with as many as 125 students learning to fly under GI benefits. Photographer unknown.

**FT.** I was 18, I guess, and I had just graduated from Oak Hill High School. I went to Beckley College for a while but I wasn't learning much, so I began spending all my time around the old Beckley-Mount Hope Airport. Herb Sessler was my instructor. I could tell you lots of stories about that wonderful man, and I started my lessons in 1940. They cost $2.50 for a 15-minute flight in those days, and I learned mostly on Piper J-3 Cubs and a Great Lakes Trainer.

**LK.** Wasn't that still pretty expensive?

**FT.** Well, I made a little money by ushering and cleaning up in several movie theaters owned by my brothers. They helped financially in other ways, too. Everything I had I spent on flying lessons, because that's all I cared about. I got my license in 1941 after about 40 hours in the air, plus the written examination, just about the same as required today.

**LK.** What did you do after that?

**FT.** Now and then I'd ferry a plane somewhere, or anything else that would let me get some air time. One job I recall was to fly a J-3 Cub down to old Wertz Field at Institute. It was still early morning when I took off from the airport at Beckley, and by noon I was already heading back home. I hitchhiked, because I had forgotten my wallet. Very likely, I didn't have any money anyway. I was pretty careless about such things. I'm not sure I even got paid for the job. The main thing was that it was a chance to fly.

*I knew the piece of land I wanted for my airport. It was just a short grass strip, but I knew what I could do with it. I was young and not a bit afraid of hard work.*

I think I was 20 or so at the time, and probably looked younger. When the drivers who picked me up asked me what I'd been doing, and I said I'd been delivering an airplane, they'd looked me over kind of sideways, shake their heads and say, "Yeah, oh sure." In those days probably not one person in a thousand had ever even flown in an airplane, let alone flown one themselves. After the first few rides, I learned to quit saying what I'd really been doing.

**LK.** Were you an aviator in the war?

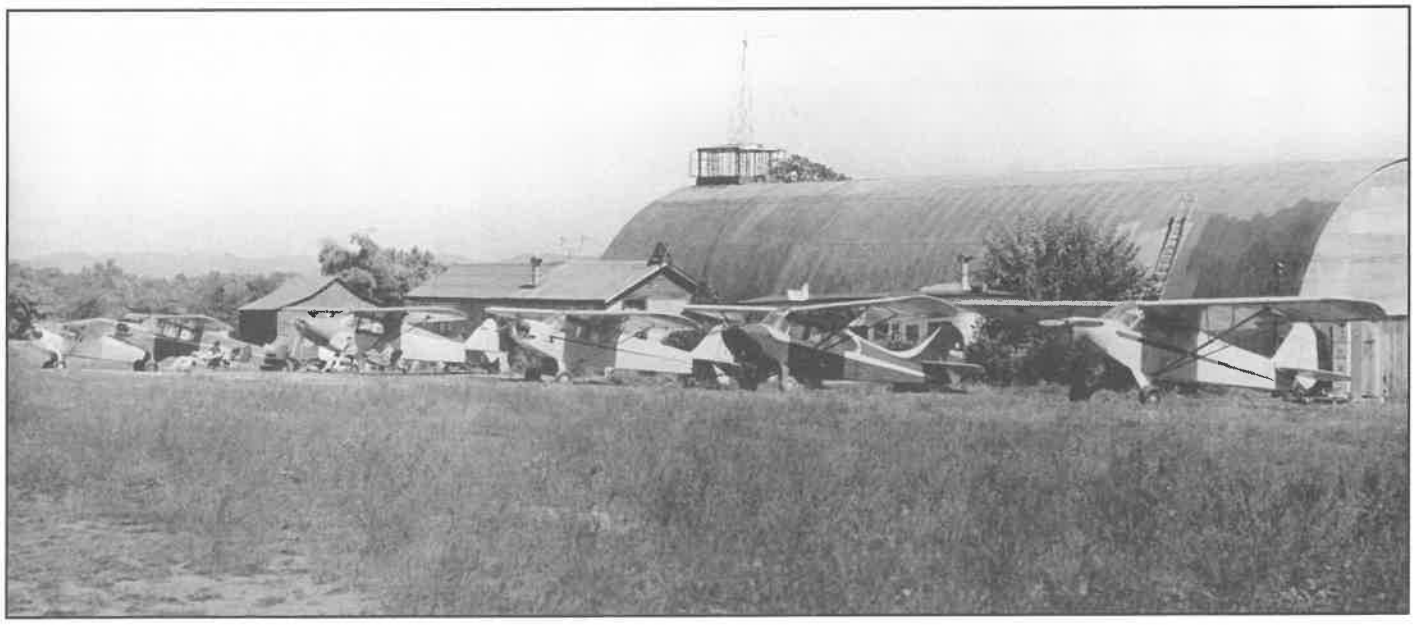
**FT.** No. I was disqualified by my deafness, which has been nearly total since childhood. But even before Pearl Harbor I wanted to get into [the war]. I went up to Canada to try and join the RAF. They were taking Americans at that time. But that was fruitless, because I failed their physical exam, so I came home and volunteered as an instructor in the Civilian Pilot Training Program. Most of my students ended up in the Air Corps after I taught them the fundamentals of flight.

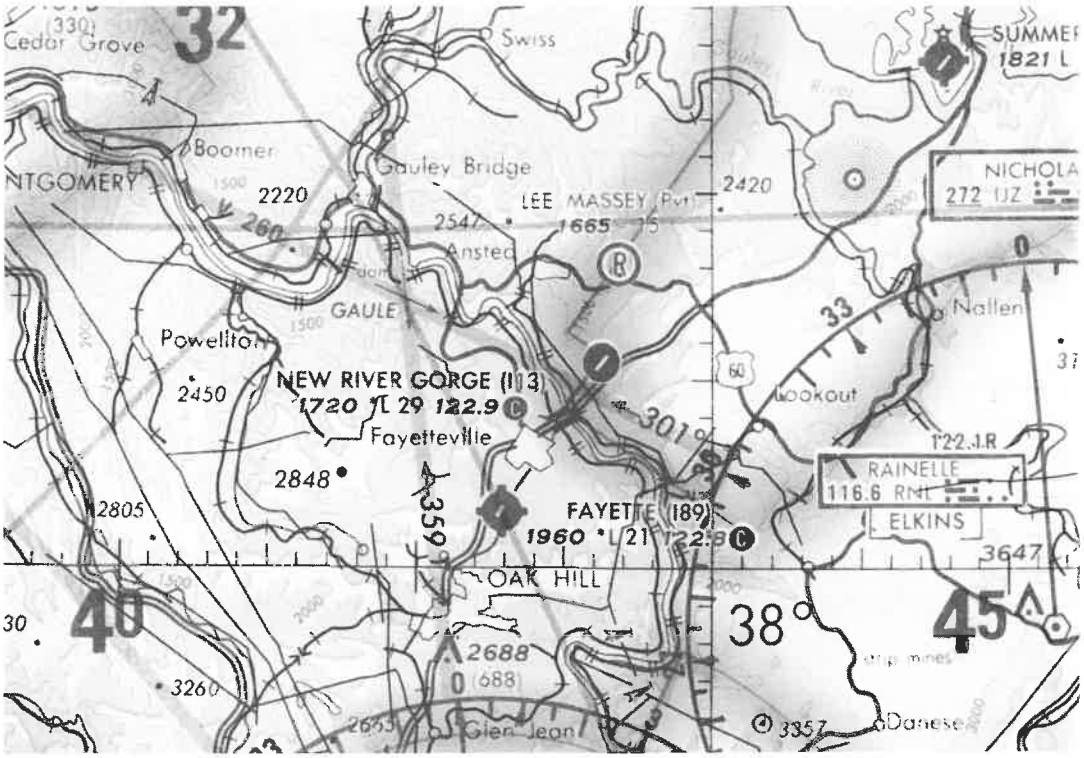
**LK.** How did you acquire your airport?

**FT.** Well, I had to have some money, so for a while I worked at the steel plant at Alloy. It was an awful job and I quit after three months. But it paid 78 cents an hour, which was pretty good then. I remember that when I worked nights, the plant was lit bright as day by the furnaces, and when I'd go outside for a breath of fresh air, and then come back in, it was like entering the gates of hell. It made me love flying even more than I did before.

Of course, I knew the piece of land I wanted for my airport, I had flown over and around it many hundreds of times while I was based at Beckley. It was just a very short grass strip, but I knew what I could do with it. And I was young and not a bit afraid of hard work.

You see, it's probably the second oldest airport site in the whole country. It goes back at least to 1912, when they held the Fayette County Fair and that was one of the bigger fairs in the east. As a promotional stunt, they brought in Colonel Paul Peck with his Curtiss biplane to fly





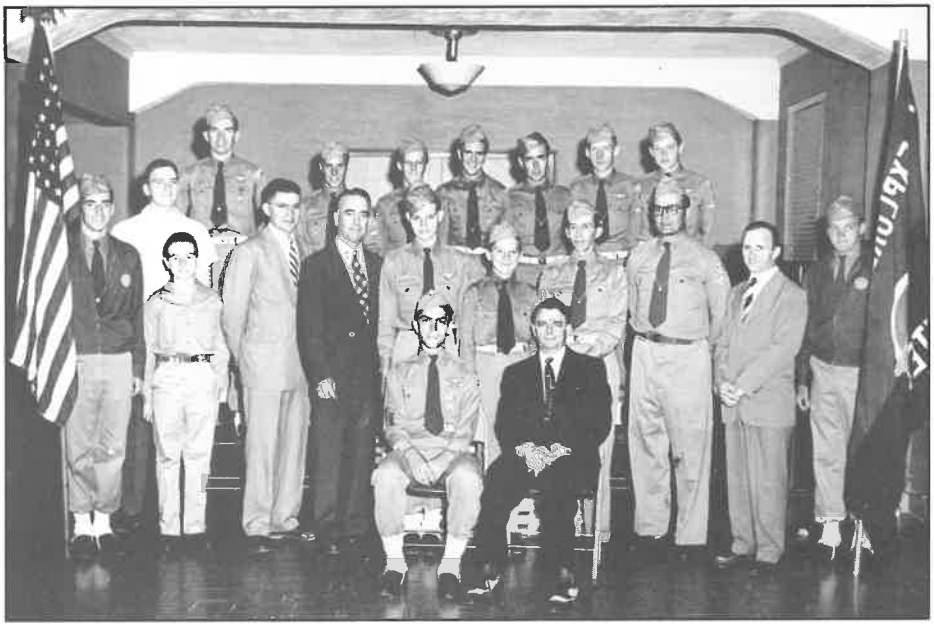

This aeronautical chart shows Fayette Airport in the center foreground. The symbol indicates that there is a paved runway and fuel available during normal hours.

*I preach air safety to my students and I practice it myself. You know the old saying, "There are old pilots, and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots!"*

circles around the grandstand. I think they trucked his plane into this field, because the old main road ran right by here.

People came from miles around in their horses and wagons to see him take off and land. Paul Peck was a famous flyer, one of the first licensed pilots in the United States and what's more a local boy, born over in Ansted and raised in Hinton. Peck later crashed and was killed in Cleveland, Ohio.

Frank believes in youth work. This 1964 photo shows him (third from right, second row) with a scout group. Senator Robert Byrd sits at the front. Photographer unknown.



But to get back to your question: In 1945 I leased 11 acres of this land, with an option to buy, which I did, ten years later. I had to do a lot of work before I bought my first airplane, knocking down some big trees, grading it out, and so forth. I expect that a lot of people probably thought I was crazy to build an airport out here but I was determined.

**LK.** Sounds as if you took a big gamble. Wasn't it tough going financially, to make the airport a success?

**FT.** I was lucky. Right after the war, the government ran a big program whereby veterans could learn to fly under the GI Bill. My operation met all of the Veterans Administration's requirements and at one point we had 125 students. We built up to three instructors, two mechanics, and nine airplanes. They were mostly Piper Cubs, but there was one Aeronca and also one Taylorcraft. For several years we were going day and night almost. The GI Bill program put us on our feet.

I'm happy to say that I've never had a student who fouled up later in his flying career. Some of them still fly with the airlines, and some of them have already retired. I had some letters from former students who flew during Desert Storm. I was always very tough about safety in flying and it's really paid off over the years. I'm very proud of my students, and what so many of them have accomplished.

**LK.** What happened when the post-war demand for flying lessons began to taper off?

**FT.** That's when I got into for-hire charter service, flying folks out to Washington, Baltimore, and several of the beach resorts. I've made hundreds of trips over to Washington. I used to charge only $185, and made money doing it. Sometimes I flew dead people, too. Lots of West Virginians went away during the war and afterwards to find jobs in Ohio and other states. Later, if they died, their families here might want them returned to be buried in the family plots.

I remember once I was flying a body back from Columbus, and was just about to take off when two federal inspectors came tearing out on the field and waved me down. They insisted that I open a body bag I was

# Floatplane Flying


## Our Author's Pilot Training

When I took a joy ride with Frank Thomas last December, it had been 15 years since I'd been up in a light plane. It was still a thrill, maybe because I used to be a pilot and could fully share his enthusiasm about flying.

Like Frank, I was badly bitten by the flying bug as a young man. My first time up was in 1936 at old Scott Field near Yorkville, across the Ohio River from Warwood, West Virginia. It cost one dollar to fly down the valley and circle Wheeling in a big Curtiss Condor. It was noisy and pretty scary for an 11-year-old, especially when the wings flapped with every air pocket we hit. But I was hooked all right.

After the war, in early 1946, I used my army mustering-out pay to take lessons in the Piper Cub floatplanes then based under the Wheeling suspension bridge. I remember that just before my solo, my flight instructor told me he didn't care how many times I bounced, so long as I didn't dig the tips of the floats in the water. I landed nose-high, just as he said, and bounced about six times.

My instructor was an Air Force captain just back from flying "the hump" from India to China. He was thoroughly bored but couldn't get another job. Now and then he'd doze off. At other times he'd have some fun by demonstrating the technique of a forced landing. He'd cut back the engine and glide silently down behind some farmer out in the fields around St. Clairsville, and then throttle up in an explosion of sudden noise. He explained that it really was possible to land a floatplane on grass, so long as the grass was a little wet. From then on, I worried after every rain that he'd be tempted to demonstrate.

He also taught me how to do stalls and spins. I don't know how many pilots have spun floatplanes, but I doubt that the designers ever intended it. Surely the aerodynamics are complicated, because the floats are nearly as big as the fuselage itself. I remember that one day after we'd landed and taxied over to the dock he walked along the wing poking at the leading edge. Seems a couple of ribs had collapsed while we were practicing spin recoveries.

*He explained that it really was possible to land a floatplane on grass, so long as the grass was a little wet.*

Years passed, and in 1971 when I was living in Pennsylvania, I got my private license and bought a two-seater Cessna 150. I was never a skilled pilot (although a careful one), and I quit flying some time ago. But I never fail to look up when there's an airplane in the sky.

In his book, Frank Thomas explains quite correctly that, "When bitten by the flying bug there is no known cure. For temporary relief, visit your nearest flight instructor for continuous treatment by flying until job is obtained. Warning! If flying is not continued, some agony will reoccur."

— Louis E. Keefer

The New River Gorge Bridge is Frank Thomas's favorite landmark.

carrying. Evidently they felt I was carrying contraband of some sort, maybe drugs. Well, I said "No way, boys, but if you want to see what's inside, be my guest." They must have looked at me, and then at that bag, and then back and forth at each other, for a minute or more, and then they just turned and walked away. They never bothered me again that way.

In the 1950's, I flew five or six hours a day spotting forest fires. When the state started its program with fire towers and so forth, we'd work together. They might spot a fire first, then I'd fly over to it to take a closer look so I could suggest how best to fight it. From the air, we could see what direction the fire was going, whether it was headed uphill or downhill, and how many men, and how much equipment would be needed to fight it. It's a terrible shame that the state ever took the fire towers down. Look at the awful mess there was with last fall's forest fires, when we didn't have them! There was heavy smoke all the way up to Philadelphia.

**LK.** Have you ever had a flying mishap?

**FT.** Sure. Lots of them. I've broken a lot of things, including both my legs. But none of those mishaps were on account of carelessness or trying to act smart. I preach air safety to my students, and I practice it myself. You know the old saying, "There are old pilots, and there are bold pilots, but there are no old, bold pilots!"

**LK.** Has most of your flying been confined to West Virginia?

**FT.** Well, yes, more or less. But I've been on 400 different airports around the country, so I've gotten around a bit. I have my instrument and commercial ratings, so I'm able to go anywhere I want to in an airplane.

**LK.** What about now? What kind of flying are you doing now?

**FT.** Mostly, I'm flying the tourists who stop by here after they've seen the New River Gorge. They stop at the new park and see it from the ground, or part of it, then they want to see the rest. I take them up for $5 each, a minimum of two at a time. That only pays for the gasoline and upkeep on the planes, but it gives me a chance to fly a lot, and to show people more of this wonderful, beautiful world.

You know, from just around here, you can see everything — beaver dams, white water rafting, where Stonewall Jackson's mother is buried, a confederate graveyard, Hawks Nest State Park, maybe some deer grazing through the forest. Some days you might see a steam plume rising from the John Amos plant in Putnam County, or see the long profile of the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia. I never tire of it! I can hardly wait until the next day to go up again. It never gets old.

**LK.** Have you ever been married?

**FT.** No. Flying has been my grand obsession. I have been totally and completely wedded to that all my life. When I was a lot younger, I had a girl friend who I finally got to go flying with me. After a while, we came back and landed, and I thought I'd made the best landing I'd ever made in my whole life. When she asked me if we didn't hit pretty hard, I knew right then that the romance was over, and that's why I'm an old bachelor today. I live here in this house with my sister Elizabeth, and we do just fine.

**LK.** What do other aviators think of you? Aren't you considered some kind of flying legend around the state?

**FT.** No, no, no. Certainly not. I'm not even a particularly good pilot. But I don't doubt that in terms of dedication to the flying profession I would be number one. That's all I'd ever claim. I sure don't count myself as any kind of legend.

**LK.** You've written one book. Are you going to do more?

**FT.** Yes, actually I'm starting something about the weird things that happen. You might call them supernatural, or just very coincidental things. Things that are not easily explained. I've been collecting stories for years, and one of these days I'll try to get them together.

**LK.** You paint some, too, I understand.

**FT.** Yes, but I'm self-taught, and I have no pretensions on that score. I'm pretty proud of this five-foot painting of Jesus Christ, and I've got some other ones I like.

**LK.** How long will you go on flying?

**FT.** I'll fly as long as I can do it legally, that is, pass my physicals and fly enough each month to stay current and safe. I still take the biennial tests required by the FAA even though they're more conversation than anything. Just making sure that I know all the new rules and regulations.

**LK.** Have you had a happy life?

**FT.** Absolutely wonderful. I doubt that you'll ever again meet anyone else who's spent his entire life doing exactly what he wanted to do, exactly where he wanted to do it, and who's been as happy and as motivated doing it. I just hate to leave the field at night.

Frank Thomas, ready to ride. "I can hardly wait until the next day to go up again," he says. "It never gets old."

*I doubt that you'll ever again meet anyone else who's spent his entire life doing exactly what he wanted to do, exactly where he wanted to do it.*

The Brule Smokeless Coal mine about the time of Ralph Halsey's accident. The same mountain claimed his father's foot years before. Photographer unknown.

# Mine Mishap

**By David H. Halsey**

It was Saturday, the first of September, 1951, a summer's night with a clear sky despite a blanket of early morning fog. The weather had been dry for several weeks, dog days. The trees that covered the mountains of Wyoming County had lost their green brilliance to the duller tones of late summer. Some poplars and sycamores in the narrow V-shaped valleys near Slab Fork Creek had already begun to lose their leaves. Poison ivy and Virginia creeper vines were taking on a rusty crimson.

This was to be my father's last working day and nearly his last day on earth. The events of this day left sharp and deeply etched memories with us, to the point that every other day would always bring a thought relating to this one. My family would never forget. Some of the minute-to-minute details have faded, yet most of that day's events are as vivid as if they occurred just yesterday.

Morning always came early for Ralph Halsey. The last few weeks had been busy, and this was the sixth straight day that Ralph had worked a ten-hour shift. He was especially tired since he was spending his evenings helping to dig out a basement under the Pierpont Community Church. He would come home, grab a bite to eat, then go to work on the church project.

Coal production was at its peak for the Brule Smokeless Coal Company, his employer. Every employee who could manage his finances was living comfortably. Ralph's family was doing exceptionally well since he had worked every day that he could since 1928. Every cent he earned went toward the betterment of his family. He never withdrew a dollar in company scrip. He had spent 23 years in a coal mine without an accident.

These years following World War II were a time of national recovery, a breathing spell just before the '50's era took hold. The country was prospering, becoming mobile, and the shine was wearing off nearly two decades of Democratic presidents. Bituminous coal miners were working six and sometimes seven days a week. There was an especially large demand for southern West Virginia's metallurgical coal, a high quality mineral that looked like sparkling black diamonds and contained more energy per pound than any other coal anywhere else on earth. It was not uncommon for miners to work two shifts some days, which was referred to as "doubling back."

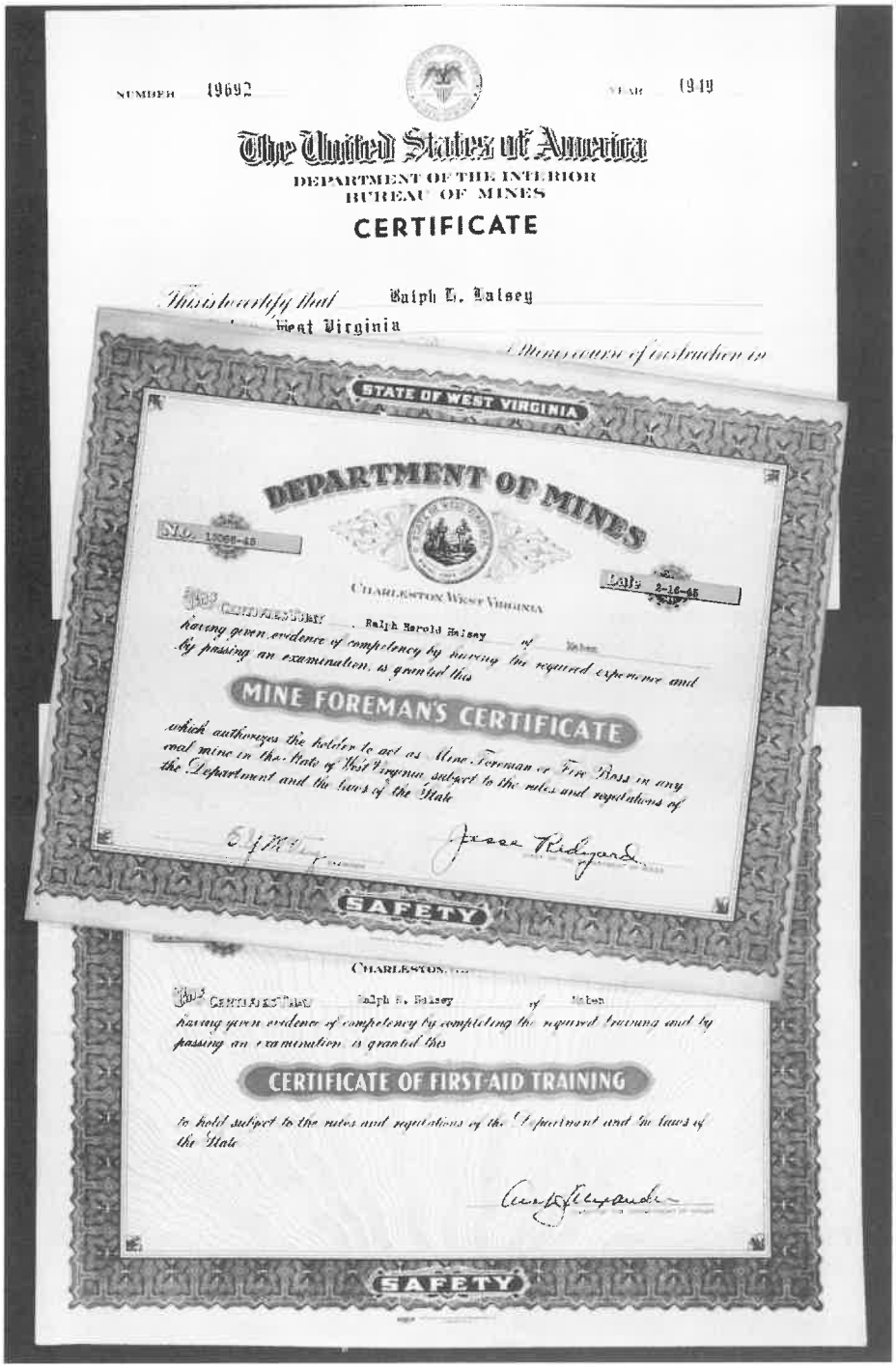
Ralph Halsey had worked his way up to a job as mine foreman. Brule Smokeless was a subsidiary of Oglebay Norton, a progressive company which provided many rewards for his efforts. His family had grown to six children, and Ralph was 42.

At four o'clock that Saturday morning he ate a hard boiled egg, a biscuit, and started oatmeal cooking for the children when they awoke later. He put his lunch into a round metal miners' pail, along with a container of milk. By a quarter to five he was on his way, driving the three miles of winding mountain road to the bathhouse.

Before 1947, the year he bought his first car, Ralph had always left home dressed in his work clothes and walked to the Otsego mine, just north of Mullens. This lasted for about 19 years. Back then he had bathed in a No. 3 washtub in the kitchen, since there was no indoor plumbing at home and no bathhouse at work.

Ralph seldom saw the morning sun. On the mountain road, State Route 16, he could gaze over the steep bank to the creek several hundred yards below. In the moonlight the fog appeared as a long sinuous mass of interlocking feathers following the stream as it meandered in and out of the brush. After the first few curves the creek disappeared into the dark, not to return until the end of his journey as he descended the mountain.

At Tunnel Point, at the top of the mountain halfway to work, a bird flew into his windshield. Some might have taken it as a bad omen, but




Ralph Halsey was proud of official certificates showing progress in his mining career. His foreman's papers put him in charge. Photo by Michael Keller.

Ralph was not especially superstitious. He thought about turning back, but the thought soon left his mind.

The Otsego bathhouse was a cinder-block building, whitewashed and rectangular in shape, about two and a half stories high. On the inside was a large open room surrounded by about 20 shower heads, stained orange from the iron-laden water. In the outer coves were the foremen's dressing room, shower and office. The miners changed to their work clothes inside the big room. Their "lockers" were baskets hanging from the ceiling by pulley and chain. Clean things went into the basket and dirty things on a hook beneath it. The other end of the chain could be locked to the wall, then unlocked and the basket and hook lowered so items could be removed.

Ralph dressed in his work clothes in the foremen's room. This was the sixth day for these work clothes. Each piece needed to be washed, particularly the long underwear which had turned from whitish gray to grayish black. After the long johns came the overall pants and flannel shirt. Then came the coveralls, Ralph taping the legs over the boots to keep coal dust out and cold air from going up his legs. After the denim jacket came a thick leather tool belt. Finally the Beech Nut chewing tobacco, lunch pail, note pad, time book and mine maps. Then came the half-mile walk to the mine opening, or "portal" in miner's parlance.

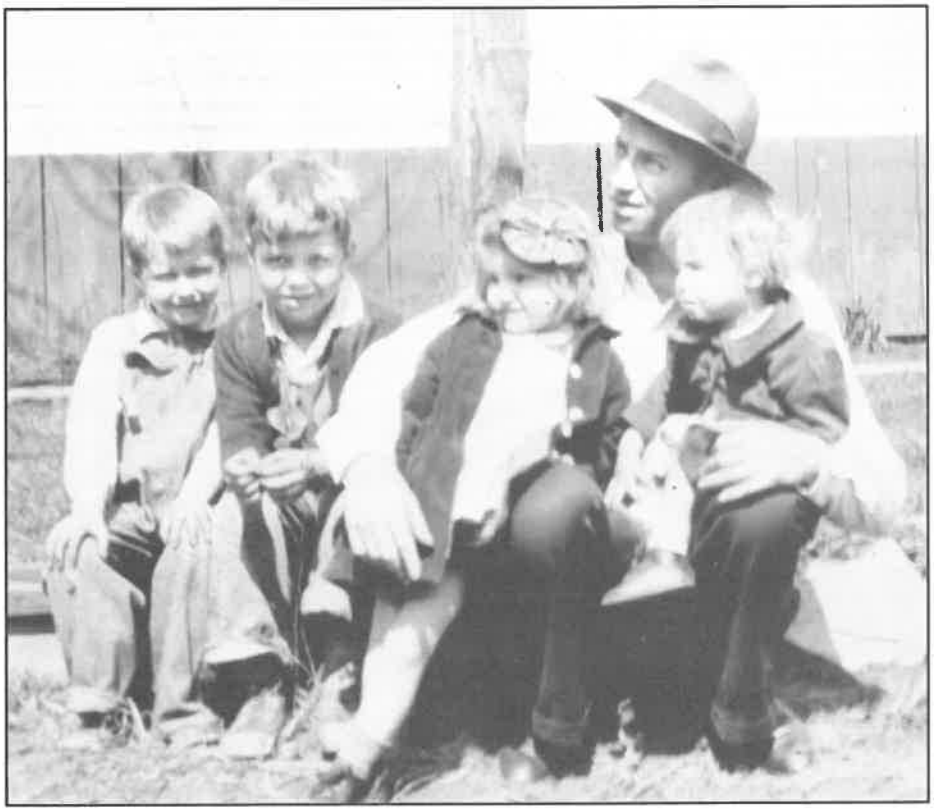
At the mine mouth, the conveyor belt appeared, a black monster's tongue rolling smoothly to the hum of powerful electric motors. Ralph made a last stop in the dispatcher's shack to get a head lamp with a fresh battery. Also he had to gather the latest information on the conditions at the mine face, and allow the "fire boss" time to check the mine for methane gas, which was done between shifts. He also had to make sure that enough workers were present with the right skills to make the Saturday shift successful, all before entering the mine.

Soon the "hoot owl" shift would arrive via the conveyor belt. Their night's work was done. Once they were outside, the belt would be reversed to transport the day shift and its supplies inside. This was the only time that supplies could be taken inside the mine, so careful planning and coordination were needed by the foreman and the supply people. Mine foremen were required to determine what supplies were needed for their shift, such as rock dust, electric wire and light fixtures, Airdox explosive devices, lubricants, and so forth. Ralph was responsible for whatever happened on the day shift.

It was about 6:15 as the day shift gathered at the portal exchanging pleasantries. This was a ritual time. Each man spoke to Ralph, calling him by his first name. He responded by their first names. Collectively, the crew was referred to as "the men." It was understood that you had to be a "man" to work in the coal mine.

After a couple miles of undulating belt ride into the mountain's belly, the miners arrived at the working coal face. This was a routine that Ralph had followed since 1928, a trip that he would never take again.

At the mine face each man went about his particular chore. The crew



Mr. Halsey with his children several years before the mishap. Photographer unknown, about 1944.

included drillers who drilled holes for the Airdox explosives, compressed air devices which shattered the coal from the seam without fear of a gas or dust explosion. There were men who operated the cutting machine that undercut the bottom so that when the shot went off, more coal would be broken from the face with less energy than would be required if shot "from the solid." Other men shovelled coal onto the short conveyor belt and ran the duck bill loading machine that scooped up the loose coal after the shot. There were men whose function it was to set the timbers and build cribs in the appropriate places. Some spread rock dust into every exposed crack and cranny to reduce the chances of a dust explosion.

The man who bossed the operation was Ralph. He could do any job that his section crew was required to do, so that the assigned number of cuts were made and the men would load their quota of coal. Ralph's crew was special. Everyone carried his own weight. There were no deadbeats. The day shift contained the seasoned veterans, because it was the prime time to work and veterans got first choice. White and black men worked as a team inside the mine but lived segregated outside. This bothered Ralph, but he never talked much about it.

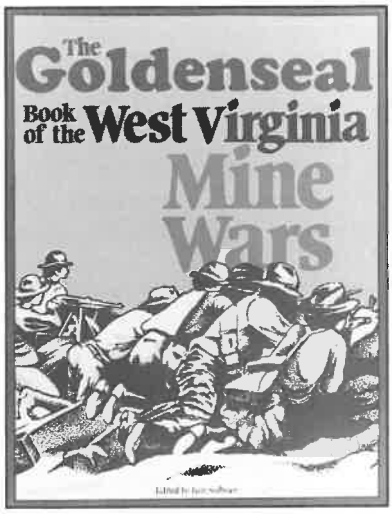
The morning went well, generally uneventful. One of the men whose job it was to run a cutting machine got sick and had to be replaced. This machine performed a critical task. Since Ralph was the only other person who could run the machine, he took over the job.

By lunchtime he was exhausted. He ate in a daydream, leaning against a timber close to an electric motor that drove the belt. Here the vibrations provided a massage and the machinery provided some warmth.

There was an unprotected roller installed on top of the nearby conveyor belt. This was probably to prevent the belt from flopping up and down from the slack caused by the pulsating surges as the motor strained to generate enough momentum to overcome the weight of the coal and to maintain a constant speed.

At about 12:28 p.m., Ralph turned to push off from a timber as he attempted to stand erect on his knees under the low ceiling, a maneuver he had done many times before. His hand missed the timber by about a foot, not surprising since he was in a cramped space and not looking. It was a little thing, but the consequences were grim. Ralph's gloved left hand hit the running belt. He flinched too late, as the roller and belt in lightning unison gobbled up his hand, his forearm, upper arm and quickly began gnawing into his rib cage.

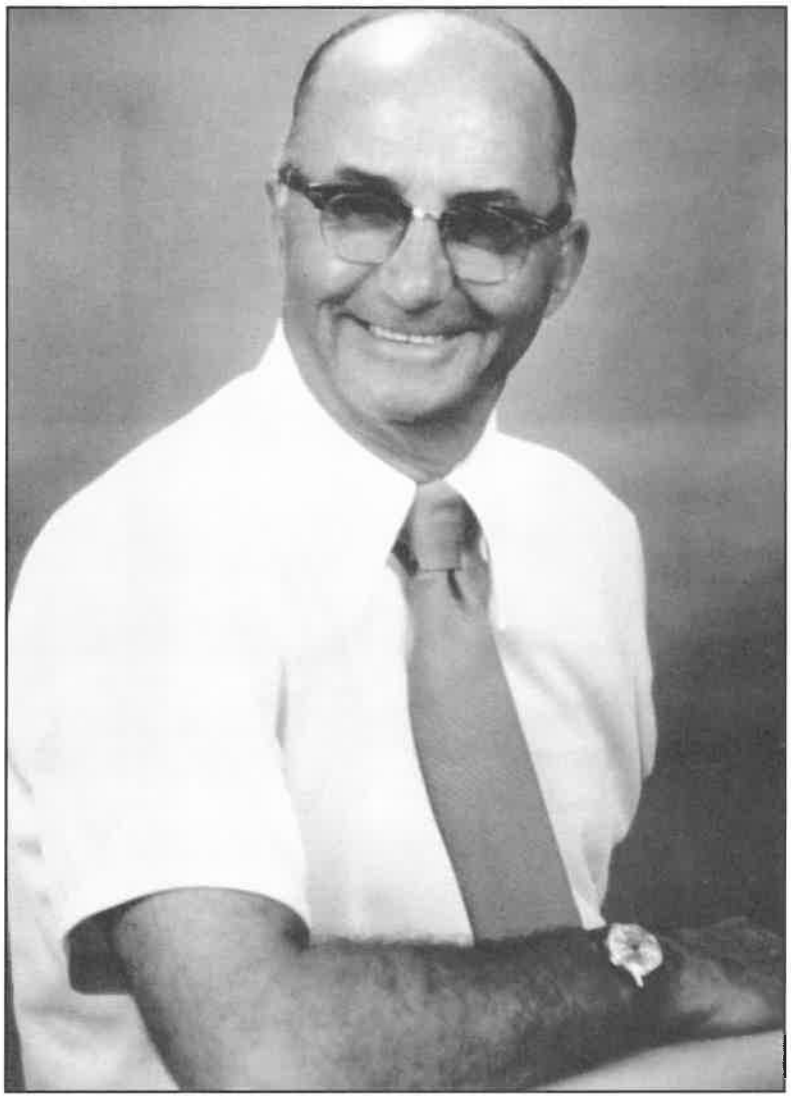
In an instant the roller and belt ground flesh, bones and tendons into a bloody mass. Finally, the hungry monster turned him loose as the men stopped the belt and began to render




**Mine Wars Book**

In the fall of 1991, GOLDENSEAL released its first book, *The Goldenseal Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars*. The 104-page oversized paperback book features reprints of 18 articles, plus additional short features, addressing one of the most controversial periods of American labor history.

*The Goldenseal Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars* sells for $9.95 at The Shop in the Cultural Center in Charleston and at bookstores across the state. Mail orders, including $2.50 postage and handling (and 60 cents sales tax from West Virginians), may be sent to Trans Allegheny Books, 114 Capitol Street, Charleston, WV 25301.



Ralph Halsey many years after the amputation. Our writer says he carried on a productive second career. Photographer and date unknown.

first aid. Ralph knew he was seriously hurt, in life-threatening trouble. He must get to the outside if he was to have any chance of survival. He threw the dangling remnants of what a few moments ago had been his left arm and hand over his right shoulder and around his neck and told the men to put him on the belt. He also told one of the crew to call an ambulance to meet him at the mine portal.

The journey from the coal face to the outside seemed to take an eternity. Ralph was in a state of semiconsciousness. He thought of six fatherless children left to an unhealthy spouse. A strong willpower was not going to let this happen as long as there was an ounce of life left in his body.

Ralph may have thought of other mining accidents, explosions that blew mangled bodies and body parts out of the mine shaft into tipple screens, or belt fires that required carrying casualties from a black, smoke-filled mine. Each case, whether fire, explosion, slate fall or machine accident, almost always caused death.

Perhaps he thought about the hunting and fishing trips he had made to Pocahontas County, or maybe of his many nights coon hunting. And how was he going to squirrel hunt with his shotgun, with only one arm and one hand? Maybe a thought crossed his mind about how he was supposed to help slaughter hogs at Thanksgiving time, only a couple of months away.

There should have been lots of life left at age 42, a chance to see his "chaps" mature into adults, to enjoy grandchildren, to do those things that make life worthwhile.

Ralph gave directions to the men who were trying to evacuate him from the mine site. Here his judgment failed him. He wanted to be taken to Beckley, 30 miles away, instead of to Mullens, only three miles. His men knew that he would not survive the Beckley trip.

By the time the men transported him to the mine mouth, the ambulance was waiting. Ralph finally drifted into unconsciousness. His body was reacting to the trauma of having the left limb literally torn from the shoulder. Loss of fluids was soon to become the critical issue of survival.

At the hospital amputation was followed by transfusions. The doctors used 16 pints of rare O-negative blood, donated by the many volunteers who answered a call over WWYO radio that Ralph Halsey needed help. He spent several days near death. Then he awoke in the Mullens General Hospital to discover that he was alive minus an arm, had eight broken ribs with most of the skin gone, and a broken collar bone. He later recalled wondering how his father had felt losing a foot and part of a leg in the same mountain at the young age of 19.

Ralph later awoke with a strong craving for oyster stew. He had not eaten in six days. Helen Wolfe Halsey, his sister-in-law, married to his only brother, lived near the hospital. She gladly obliged, cooking Ralph's stew then and many times while he recuperated.

Ralph said that he remembered waking up once in the operating room, feeling a twinge and hearing something hit the floor. No doubt that was the remnants of a limb which I and a dear friend and trusted neighbor, Vescar Rhineheart, buried the night of that same long day. Everything was rewrapped with the sheet that came from the hospital and put into a wooden box. The burial location was known to no one else until after Ralph died.

Ralph himself never knew and he never asked. With time he recovered from his horrendous accident, and he lived many more years. We lost him in 1983, at the age of 73, to natural causes.

*Right:* The smile alone would bring in visitors. Marshall Fleming at the door to his small folk art museum. Courtesy National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

*Far right:* The Little Hidden Valley has several attractions. The display case at left holds train models, with the museum in the "barn" and the chapel beyond.

# Stories in Wood and Metal

## Marshall Fleming's Little Hidden Valley

**Text and Photographs by Woodward S. Bousquet**

Marshall Fleming's wood-frame house was once a sawmill shanty. It sits back from a side road off another side road on a Mineral County mountain.

Huge chestnut trees, victims of the blight, became construction timber just downhill from Fleming's front porch. He can tell the story in detail, because he helped his father saw those trunks into lumber back in the late 1920's. They used a sawmill rig powered by a Frick steam engine that a pair of strong horses moved from place to place as needed. Marshall was only 12 then. His main job was to stand beside the steam engine and stomp out flaming cinders that occasionally shot out of the steam engine's stack, threatening to set the woods afire.

Steam engines no longer belch smoke and hurl sparks into the sky. And the chestnut trees are gone. But Marshall Fleming remembers the sights, sounds, and smells. Other vignettes from his past linger as well — the circus coming to town, trains challenging the steep grade that takes them up and over the Allegheny Front, and the ripe red apples he picked with his mother.

Through his skill with a pocket knife, band saw, tin snips, and paint brushes, Fleming has found a way to capture these memories as folk art. He began two decades ago, after being disabled by a back injury. The wooden horses, brightly-painted circus wagons, models of farm equipment, and other miniatures he crafted crowded his house so much that he built a museum in his yard to hold his growing menagerie. "I had them in my shop and piling here on the bed and my wife was raising thunder about it. That's the truth. I had to do something."

The trip to Fleming's home and museum in New Creek bridges several intervals of time. As U.S. Route 50

descends steeply from Knobly Mountain, it passes rock layers that were tipped vertically as the Appalachians arose nearly a quarter-billion years ago. Then quarrying exposed these sturdy limestone strata in a time much more recent. A secondary road branches south towards Grayson Gap. Here the valley is narrow, the houses small. The forest of tulip poplar, red maple and oak is typical of cut-over land on lower mountain slopes across the state.

Fleming's family felled some of the trees here. "They used to have an old tannery in town," he recalls. "They would tan with bark. My daddy, he hauled bark in there. We cut trees all around here. Chestnut oaks. In the spring of the year when the sap was up, you could peel the bark then. We had our own truck and we hauled it all. And sometimes we'd peel bark and haul it to Indiantown, Pennsylvania.

"After I come home from the army in the late '40's, we peeled a lot of bark, hauled it, and put it in a boxcar in town. But the feller that took the bark never paid my dad for it. He said the money never came in. And I told my dad, 'You're my daddy but I'm going to tell you something. I've peeled my last bark.' He said, 'Marshall, I have too.'"

The road crosses from Knobly to the flanks of Saddle Mountain and then climbs gradually to Penneroil Road, named for the European plant brought by settlers and widely used in "spring tonics" to rid the body of winter-borne germs. Near the top of a hill, Fleming's hand-painted sign invites passers-by to turn down his gravel driveway to visit his Little Hidden Valley Prayer Chapel and Woodcarver's Museum. If the traveler has made arrangements beforehand, Marshall Fleming is waiting on his porch, ready to give a tour.

"I like to be out here where you don't hear everything," he explains. "Up here it's quiet."

But not always. In addition to the local families, school classes, and scout troops that drop by from time to time, folk art collectors have discovered Fleming and his work. From September 1990 through January 1991, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American Art in Washington featured "Made with Passion: The Hemphill Collection of Twentieth-Century American Folk Art." Included was Fleming's four-foot-long model of President Kennedy's funeral procession complete with flag-draped coffin, caisson, and eight horses.

The Smithsonian exhibit displayed nearly 200 other pieces from the well-known collection of Herbert W. Hemphill, Jr., co-founder and first curator of the Museum of American Folk Art. An illustrated catalog by Linda Roscoe Hartigan accompanied the exhibition, along with *A Fish that's a Box,* which showed objects from the Hemphill collection to challenge younger readers to use their imaginations and creativity as folk artists do. Fleming's Kennedy caisson is pictured in both books.

Another of Fleming's caissons had appeared earlier in Elinor Horwitz's *The Bird, the Banner, and Uncle Sam. Images of America in Folk and Popular*


The museum interior is a unique place of the artist's creation. Models vie for space with clippings and other items of interest.

*Art*, published in 1976. At about the same time, John Rice Irwin acquired three pieces from Fleming, including a caisson. They are exhibited at Irwin's Museum of Appalachia in Norris, Tennessee.

Unlike the Museum of Appalachia complex, which includes several dozen buildings, Marshall Fleming's museum is one of this nation's smallest. It measures only about eight by 11 feet. Shaped and painted like a barn, it sits on the edge of a wooded ravine that forms one of the boundaries of his property. The doorway is flanked by American, Confederate, and West Virginia flags. One outside wall sports a place mat showing Devil's Saddle, a prominent dip in Saddle Mountain's ridge that tourists can view from a nearby overlook on U.S. 50.

Inside the museum, shelves start at either side of the doorway and surround the visitor. Marshall's works take up virtually every available space. A model of a farm cart tips its load of cement blocks while the driver tries to regain control of the horses. Directly above sits a sheet-metal replica of an International Harvester threshing machine. Two carved Civil War soldiers in blue and gray uniforms stand at attention nearby. Teams of mules or horses pull a McCormick-Deering reaper, a load of logs, a Wells Fargo stage coach, and a farm wagon. Although it's his largest and best-known piece, the Kennedy caisson may not catch one's eye at first, because of everything else that vies for attention.

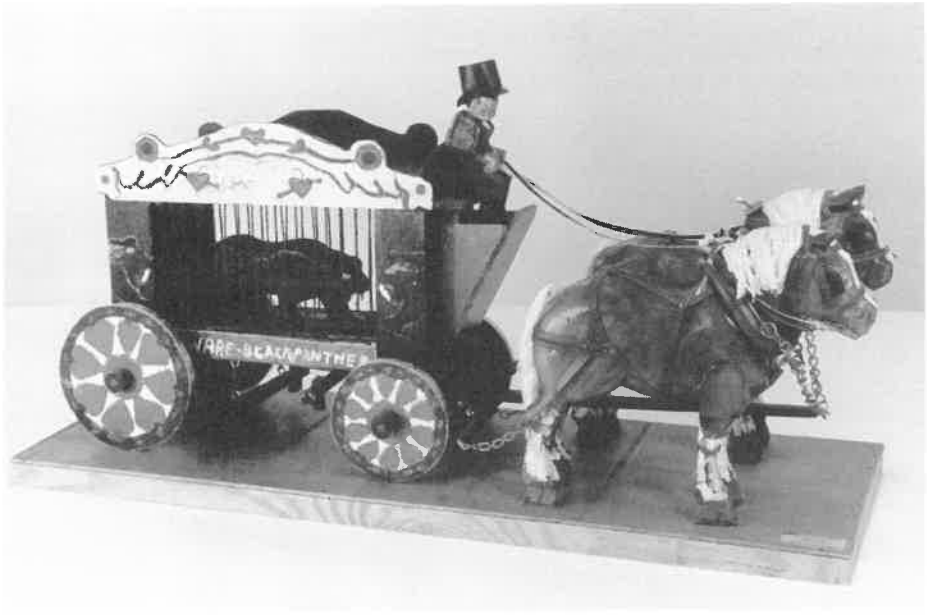
An eager visitor trying to get a closer look may stumble over a Brockway truck model on the floor. Fleming was inspired by a picture of an old Brockway ten-wheeler in a magazine. It presented a challenge when he tried to build it.

"My biggest problem was the wheels," he says. "Would you have any idea how I made them? It just happened to come to me. See, what I done was I sawed a round block off and I cut a groove around it. And I cut that real heavy electrical wire and I wired [the ends] together and pulled it in that groove so it couldn't get off. They look pretty well like tires."

Farther back on the floor, an elephant leads a procession of horse-drawn circus wagons that make up what Marshall has dubbed his "Flemingo Circus." They remind him of the circuses that once rolled through New Creek for performances in Keyser or further north to Cumberland, Maryland. What child hasn't dreamed of traveling with a circus, especially one bearing the family name?

Each wagon carries a different animal and has a message to onlookers painted on its sides: "Beware — Black Panther," "Please Don't Feed the Giraffe." The horses' rigging reflects Fleming's resourcefulness. Two Clydesdales, for instance, have collars made of strips of leather from an old pocketbook, copper wire, and two hat pins. These draft animals also sport vinyl reins and steel hitching chains.

Among the many problems Fleming had to solve in building circus wagons was fitting the driver's body to the contours of the seat. "What I do, I get a piece of wire that's soft. I set it down there on that seat and bend the wire, where his feet is, where the legs are, where he sits down, and the back. Then I bend the wire around and make a head. That gives me the pattern to cut. That's the reason the



One of the circus wagons from the "Flemingo circus," this one for the fearsome black panther. Fleming's attention to detail may be seen in the close-up of the Clydesdale horses. The harness is fabricated of leather, plastic, metal and tiny chains.

driver sets so good on that seat. I learnt that from my own, just experimenting."

Aside from the Kennedy caisson, perhaps the most striking model in the museum is a Victorian funeral wagon pulled by two coal-black Shire horses. Fleming estimates that he put at least 350 hours of work into the piece. The hearse's oblong windows and gold ornamentation were especially time-consuming. Its rear door opens so the coffin can slide out. When one half of the coffin is opened, a well-dressed corpse sits up slightly. Opening the other end reveals a mirror, a reminder to visitors of their own mortality.

The funeral wagon driver's black suit and top hat contrast with his flowing white beard. "I remember that old man, Little Dave Rotruck," Marshall recalls. "He wore a beard just like I put on there." Rotruck was a mortuary jack-of-all-trades: He made coffins, arranged funerals, and drove the hearse to the cemetery. The business remains in the hands of the Rotruck family today, and another of Fleming's funeral wagons is on display in their parlor.

The museum contains far too much to appreciate in a single visit, and more of Fleming's handiwork is elsewhere in his yard. To one side are three outdoor display cases that house larger carvings. Replicas of a log cabin and a Civil War cannon sit nearby. On the museum's other side stands a miniature church, which Fleming calls the Little Hidden Valley Prayer Chapel. The exhibit case closest to the museum holds a steam-powered sawmill — and all those memories of engines, chestnut logs, and his father.

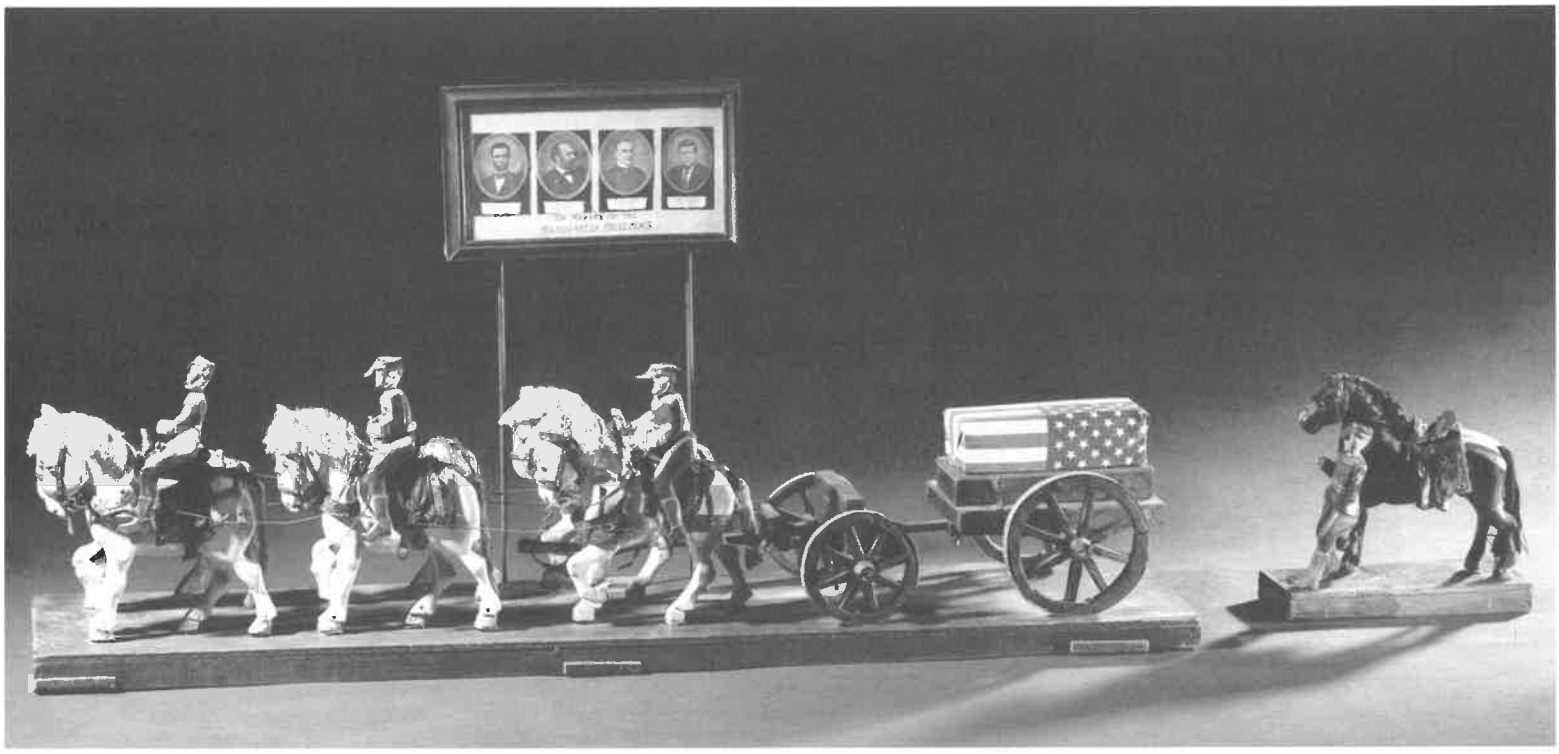
"The engine we had was an old Frick," Fleming recalls. "It wasn't no tractor. It was a portable that you had to hook horses to. When we were sawing, us kids had to watch the smoke stack because it was fired with chestnut slabs. Them engines would put out fire, out of the stack. We'd have to fight fire around there to keep it from getting the woods.

"My dad, he was the sawman. Our friend Earnest Blackburn fired and I off-beared, what time I wasn't fighting fires. Them logs was so big that you had to turn them over [on the log carriage and run them through a second time] to get the slab off.

"The big problem with the steam engines was water," he continues. "It wouldn't inject the water itself, so we'd have to carry it from a sump over there in the field. As a kid, about half a five-gallon bucket was all I could carry at a time. We'd store it in a 55-gallon drum. That was hard work to fill up them. Then we had to carry the water up to the boiler.

"Later, after the Second World War, we got to using regular old car motors. We had a big old Buick motor. They'd do sawing if you hooked 'em up right. You didn't have all that watering stuff to fool with."

Fleming made his model with a Peerless steam engine, and a log carriage, sawman, and off-bearer. He remarked how difficult it was to remember exactly the way the machinery looked a half-century ago, but the intricacy in his work sometimes belies the intervening years. A



Fleming's Kennedy funeral caisson procession belongs to the Smithsonian Institution. The caisson was exhibited for several months in 1990 and 1991 at the National Museum of American Art. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution.

projection on the top of the model steam engine's boiler — made of a bolt, several nuts, and a washer — is especially detailed, and so are the stories that go with it. It is the engine's governor, Fleming explained. "When you was sawing, you didn't have a throttle, but it was the governor [that kept the speed constant]. Whenever you've got too much pressure, that there valve would open and let steam off. That kept the engine from blowing up."

Marshall Fleming was the second of Charles and Lula Harrison Fleming's ten children. He was born in 1916 when the family lived and farmed in Cameron Orchard, a Mineral County community adjacent to New Creek. The Flemings soon moved to New Creek, where Marshall, two brothers, and their families live now. In 1923, he started elementary school. "We had eight classes in one room," Fleming remembers, "and when it come your time you'd go up and set on the recitation bench. When that class was over you'd take your seats and another class would come up."

School and chores often left little time for other activities, but Marshall found ways to combine his manual skills with his imagination. Then as now, the objects he made reflected his personal experiences and interests. As he puts it, "When I was a kid, I was just making stuff to fool with. Cut out paper chickens or cows or something, put 'em out in the field. Get grass and put it for haystacks and all that kind of stuff. Made me an old truck sometimes. Maybe cut a spool in two, find an old cigar box and make wheels to put on it. That's what I played with.

"These milkweed pods, they look like chickens. I'd break farmer's matches off and put them up there for legs and play with them as chickens. I always was crazy about chickens.

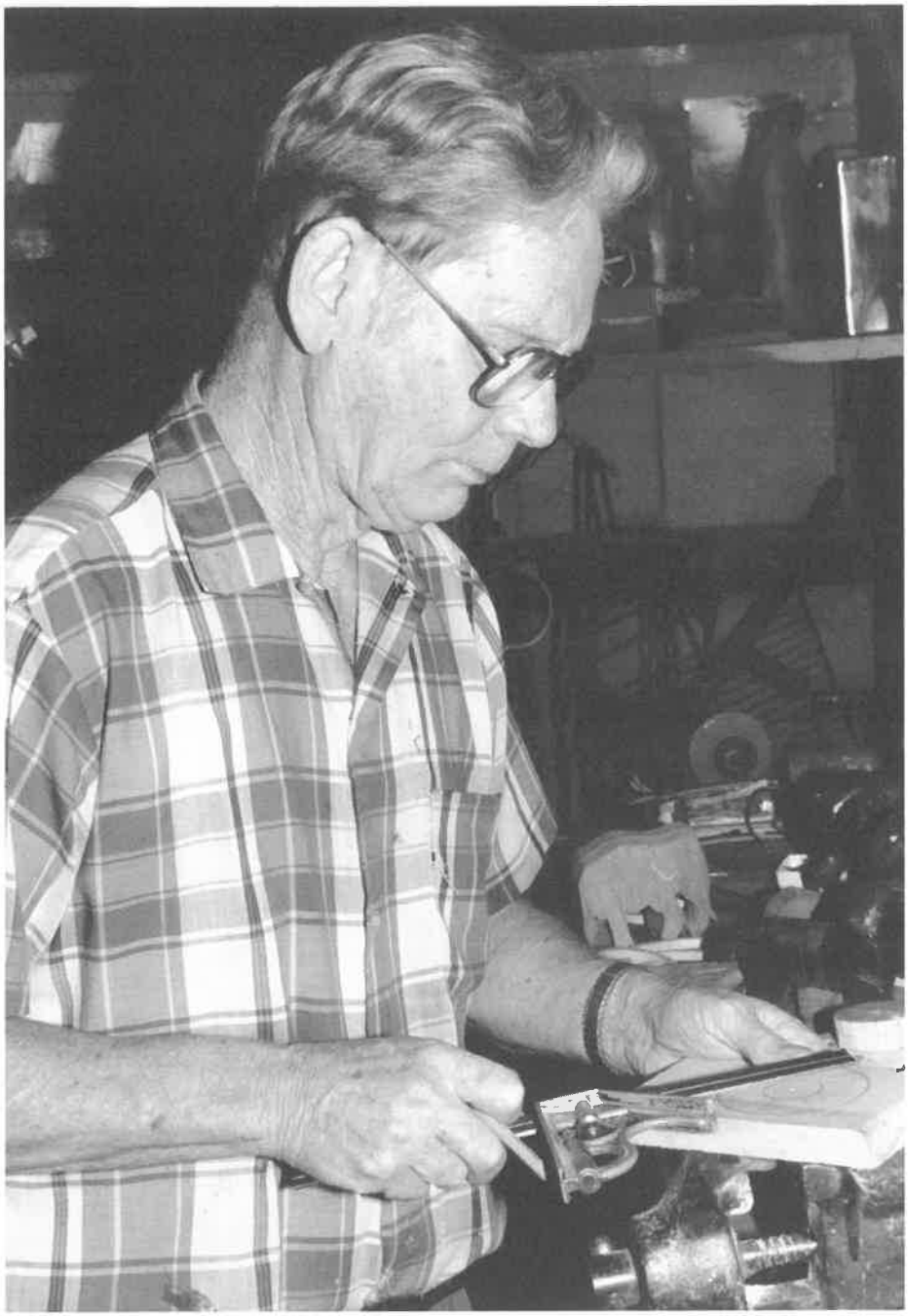
"I made all kinds of things like that. I made the mistake of building an airplane once. I tore up [my father's] tool box to make it, and I put his tools in a cardboard box. He found it, and he grabbed the wings off that thing and wore 'em out on me. I'll tell you, that's what he done."

Marshall's reading ability allowed him to skip the 7th- and 8th-grade readers, so he went from New Creek's sixth grade class to his first year of high school in Keyser, the county seat. "I only went through the sophomore year and I had to quit to go to work. It was during the Depression and my dad was trying to put four of us in the high school. It was just impossible."

His father worked for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad then, a job he held for 32 years. Each day Marshall could hear puffing engines and blowing whistles as trains struggled along the 17-mile grade up the Allegheny Front just west of New Creek. "In 1927 my daddy got a pass," he recalls. "He could ride any railroad and he took me and my oldest sister to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, down to the battlefield. President Coolidge was there that day and made a speech. I was only about 11 years old, and I'll never forget."

In his largest display case, Marshall commemorated his father and the railroads with two ten-car model trains he made out of scrap wood and wire. They represent the B&O and C&O lines. Marshall painted the Allegheny Front on the metal flashing below the shelves that hold the trains.

Fleming was drafted in 1941 and discharged in 1946. Trained as a rocketeer, he served with the Army in Luzon during World War II. After the war, Marshall returned home and worked for the Moorefield Plywood Company for five years until the firm "took a bankrupt law, and they went



Entirely self-taught, Fleming figures things out as he goes along. Truck wheels, such as the one under way here, are a good example of his experimentation.

and laid us off." His manual skills landed him a job making furniture for the Raygolds Company, another area business.

Fleming worked for Raygolds for about a year and then, in the early 1950's, he took a job with the State Road Commission. "In the winter time it was bad," he says, "and I'd be gone three, four days before I could get back." The snow would blow off the mountains and pile up 15 feet deep, sometimes leaving his car covered with snow at the end of a long day. He would shovel it off and head home, only to discover that the back roads leading to his house hadn't yet been cleared.

His last job was with the maintenance staff of the Mineral County Board of Education. A back injury during Fleming's teenage years, "from bending saplings down, jumping to the ground," caught up with him, forcing him onto partial disability in 1973. He took early retirement a short time later. Marshall had been carving off and on for about a dozen years, but the increased free time provided many more opportunities to reminisce, tinker, and create.

It had been around 1960 when Fleming, inspired by television shows of the "Wagon Train" genre, attempted his first wood carving, a model of a covered wagon. "I made the horses first," he says. "Didn't want to make a wagon and not have no horses with it. I throwed that [first] horse in the box. I thought I'll never [be able to] make a horse. One day I went in there and picked it up and got a-looking at it and done a little cutting on it. Made a pretty good horse. So I made another one like it.

"I think the first ones I made I carved the manes and the tails. But then I got to thinking about it. Looked more natural with thread, and I got to gluing the thread on. The first thread I got wasn't mouse proof. Mice got in and ate all the manes, tails off."

Fleming built his first Kennedy funeral caisson about six months after the president was assassinated in 1963. One found its way into the hands of collector Herbert W. Hemphill. In September 1989, Andrew Connors, Curatorial Associate at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art, informed Fleming that the Hemphill collection had been donated to the museum. The caisson was among the items considered the collection's "crown jewels" and selected for the first exhibit.

Word spread quickly, and Fleming was interviewed by a local reporter. With both modesty and pride, the artist remarked, "I never dreamt of something like that a-going into the Smithsonian. They always told me the stuff had to be pretty good to get in there." Additional newspaper articles followed when Connors came to New Creek to videotape Fleming and his work and when the Fleming family went to Washington for the black-tie reception that accompanied the exhibit's opening. Marshall, his caisson, and his stories attracted a sizable crowd at that event.

"I never had so many pictures took of me in my life," he exclaimed. "They was tickled to death 'cause I was down there." Fleming and Hemphill autographed each other's exhibit catalogs at the reception. Afterwards, Marshall was philosophical. "I have to thank him [Hemphill] for giving me credit for being down here. It just ain't every feller, a poor man, has a chance in this lifetime like that."

Fleming's largest work is his Little Hidden Prayer Chapel, a small church he built in his yard adjacent to the museum. If it were full-sized, the chapel would fit comfortably into the


Marshall Fleming at the door to the Little Hidden Valley Prayer Chapel. It is a place for quiet meditation, he says. Photo courtesy Smithsonian Institution.

rural landscape almost anywhere in the Appalachian Mountains. Years ago, he and his mother had been picking apples beneath the trees in front of where the chapel stands now. She had remarked that this particular corner of the property would be a lovely place for a small building.

As Marshall tells the story, "I kept a-dreaming about building a little church for seven years. I'd get to singing about it, and so I went and built it. And when I was working in here it just felt to me like there was somebody watching me, every move."

Relatives, friends, and community members donated many of the materials Fleming needed for constructing the building and furnishing its interior. Their names appear on an honor roll of donors. Completed in 1975, the chapel remains unlocked 24 hours a day. "I'll defy any man to come in here by hisself and set down and just meditate a little bit," Fleming says. "Before you leave here, you feel like somebody's been with you. I never come in here by myself; it just seems like whatever watched me build it is still with me." Many visitors come and go quietly; Marshall later finds new names in his guest register or an offering on the altar.

Each of Fleming's buildings, models, and miniatures can be viewed as an individual work of craftsmanship and ingenuity. But they add up to something more. Together in the Little Hidden Valley they create what folklorists call a folk art "environment," a handmade personal place. They tell the story of a man's life and values, the story of his family and community. To best understand their meanings, talk to Marshall Fleming.

"You can't see anything 'til you get off these highways," he will tell you. "It's a pretty place up here. I'd like everybody to come here and enjoy theirselves. Anything I got don't cost them half a penny. When I come into this world I didn't have nothing. When I leave all I'll have is my name. It will all be disposed of whenever the Man upstairs blows his horn."


The Stevens Building housed the drug store and several other businesses. This picture was made July 3, 1941, photographer unknown.

# The Family Drug Store

## Recalling a Huntington Business

**By Patricia Stevens Bianco**

The corner drug store was part of my family since before I was born. Originally the sign above its front door read "Stevens Kut Rate Drug Store," a holdover from the snazzy jargon of earlier times. When the store was remodeled in the early 1960's the sign was changed to "Stevens Drug Store," sedate and correct. The family drug store, which closed several years ago, endured for 54 years and became a Huntington landmark.

Joe Stevens, my father, bought the place in 1934. American business in general was slow and Huntington in particular was not a prime spot to locate at that time. But Dad was tired of working for the People's Drug Store chain, so he decided to take the plunge. He bought not only the pharmacy but the entire building in which the business was located. Working hard, he and my mother, Betty, survived the Depression. Then they caught the coattails of the economic upswing after World War II and claimed their share of the American Dream.

They did it by working together. In the early days of the pharmacy Joe and Betty had no hired help. Together they waited on customers, stocked shelves, cleaned up, and ran the soda fountain, and even made homemade ice cream. I have fuzzy recollections of dark booths and tables along the wall and a long bar, far above my head, where ice cream and phosphates were served in dishes and glasses made of gleaming nickel and silver.

They had begun their lifelong partnership during Dad's college days. He worked for a drug store in Cincinnati, while he was a student at the Cincinnati College of Pharmacy. It was at the store that he met Betty, a slight, pretty blonde who often came in to use the pay phone. My folks still chuckle as they recall those days. He thought she was the cat's pajamas but she seemed more interested in the dial tone than in Joe Stevens.

Our author as a toddler with Brother Joe. The window display advertises house slippers at 49¢ a pair. Photographer and date unknown.

One day she whisked into the store to make a call in the midst of an August heat wave. Betty tugged the phone booth door closed despite the heat so that no one could hear her conversation. Finishing her call, she found that the door was jammed. She spotted Joe in the back of the store and called to him. He didn't respond. Betty was in a hurry to get home to her Aunt Grace's. She pounded on the door and called again. He still didn't seem to hear.

After many minutes of pounding and calling, Joe grinned, called out "In a minute, honey," and strolled to the front of the store. Searching under the stuck door he found a wooden match stick jammed in the track, but he took his time removing it. A sizzling Betty, covered with sweat and anger, stormed out of the store without so much as a "thank you." Of course they got married, after an introduction like that.

Stevens Drug Store was located in the two-story Stevens Building. My father often tells the story of the 1937 Ohio River flood when water swamped Huntington's downtown streets and he, trapped in the store, spent several nights sleeping on a small bed stored in the building's cramped, dusty attic. Years later, when the occupants of the building noticed they were the victims of many thefts, Dad quietly entered the attic and scared away a man sleeping in the same bed. He found a long, thin stiletto hidden under the mattress.

Another tale Dad loves to tell is his World War II cigarette story. Older readers may remember that cigarettes were hard to get during the war. Some folks quit smoking but others simply endured from one shipment of smokes to the next. By sheer luck Joe received a large shipment of Lucky

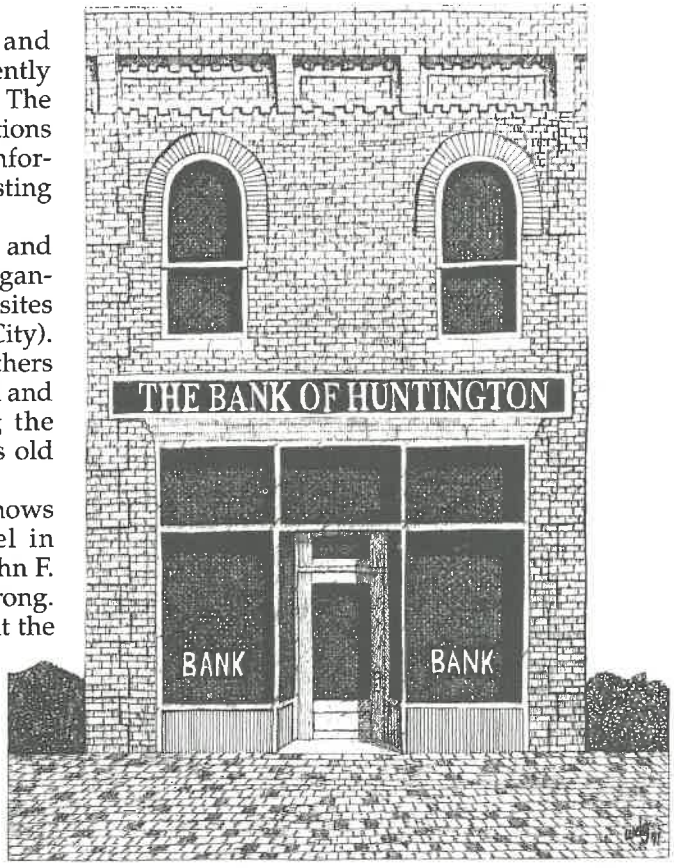
## Landmark Art By Goebel

William D. Goebel of Charleston, a freelance artist and publisher of limited edition prints and notecards, recently released *Landmarks: Charleston, Huntington and Beyond.* The large format book is a collection of pen-and-ink illustrations of historic and popular landmarks. A paragraph of information on architectural descriptions, history, and interesting facts about the landmarks accompanies each drawing.

The drawings depict landmarks mostly in Charleston and Huntington, with the "beyond" section taking in Morgantown, Wheeling, Fayetteville and several out-of-state sites (such as the famous Woolworth building in New York City). Some of the landmarks have been demolished and others still stand. The artist is dedicated to historic preservation and has spent much of the past ten years documenting the historic architecture of his home state. He says he likes old buildings better than he likes pictures of them.

Goebel has great admiration for his subjects and he knows them well, describing the old Daniel Boone Hotel in Charleston right down to famous guests like Senator John F. Kennedy, Walter Brennan, Betty Davis and Louis Armstrong. Goebel says that folk singer Bob Dylan wanted to stay at the Daniel Boone just because Elvis had.

*Landmarks: Charleston, Huntington and Beyond* is a large-format hardcover book. It sells for $29.95 and may be purchased in bookstores or from Landmarks Publishing Company, P.O. Box 75036, Charleston, WV 25375. For ordering information call (304)344-0009.




The Bank of Huntington as portrayed by William Goebel.

Strikes and advertised them in the *Herald-Dispatch*. The following morning he found people lined up around the block when he arrived to open the store.

"Everybody get back from the front door so I can get in," Dad said.

"Listen, buddy, get to the end of the line and wait your turn just like the rest of us," replied one big bruiser in the line. "I been here since 5:00 a.m. and nobody's getting in front of me without a fat lip."

Finally, Dad circled around the back of the building and entered through the basement. People who had seen him try to get through the line laughed when they recognized him as he stood behind the cigar counter and waited on them. He laughed with them.

Mother left full-time work at the drug store to raise my brother, Joe Jr., and later me. She helped out for years, however, whenever one of the counter girls didn't come to work. Sometimes she delivered prescriptions in the old yellow cab we owned. Actually, it was formerly a cab and formerly yellow. Brother Joe spray-painted the car green one summer while I, a little child, stood downwind and gradually turned green myself — except where my bathing suit had been.

Running the cigar counter register, serving the soda fountain, and stocking the shelves were some of Mother's responsibilities when she worked at the store. My folks told me they didn't have money for extra stock in the early days, so they placed one or two bottles of aspirin or cough medicine up front and backed them by rows of empty boxes so that the shelves appeared full.

Mother quit only once, over an incident now long forgotten. She stormed around the block, furious with Joe, and then she had to go back to work for they had no other employees at the time. She also once had the humorous misfortune to confuse a request for condoms with Prophylactic-brand toothbrushes, much to the consternation of the customer. He decided he wanted to talk to the pharmacist.

The drug store held magic for me when I was little: A candy counter to tempt me, blue pill boxes to play with, a cozy balcony from which I could see all but not be seen, and cold bottles of Coca Cola. The magazine counter was by far my favorite place in the store. We had *Little LuLu, Superman, Captain Marvel, Plastic Man,* and all the other comics. We also had *The Saturday Evening Post, Look,* and women's magazines as well, including racier ones like *True Romance.* (Not that I was allowed to read *True Romance* — I was told the experience would "over-stimulate" me.) Although employees discouraged customers from lingering to read the magazines, I was allowed this privilege while sitting in the old, green leather chair with the curving chrome arms.

For several years in my young life, my folks gave me a quarter each Sunday afternoon so that I could go to the movies while they worked at the store. My favorite theater, the Keith-Albee, was an exotic palace with ornate gold columns and red velvet, stained glass, mirrors, and hanging lamps with tassels. The theater's proscenium arch was decorated with crests and golden nymphs. Rising above my head was a domed ceiling replete with sparkling stars and bordered by the three-dimensional outline of a Moorish city. During boring parts like "Movietone News" I could lean my head back, watch the stars twinkle, and let my mind wander.

If Mother and Dad worked a little late on Sundays, I could stay through both shows of the double features or maybe see the same movie twice. While the folks counted pills I watched Tyrone Power, John Wayne, Betty Davis, and Joan Crawford. I knew that the movies weren't real, but on some level I believed them. While I walked back to the store from the theater I tried on the characters. The family just thought I was "acting funny" again. My career in theater probably began at the movies in the Keith-Albee.

When we closed the store on Sunday evenings, Dad put the money in the safe. Cash register drawers were left open and empty and narcotics were locked away. Then we pulled the hanging strings on the overhead lights, turned down the heat or shut off the fans according to the season, locked the door and walked down the street and had supper at Bailey's


The Keith-Albee's grand sign drew Patricia Stevens down the street and around the block for long Sunday matinees. Photo by Michael Keller.

Cafeteria, Jim's Grill, or Bibbs Restaurant.

Brother Joe began working at the store when he was in Camack Junior High School. Most days he took me to nursery school on his way to Camack. He delivered me on the handle bars of his bike, or by roller skating with me on his shoulders. After school he worked for Dad, delivering prescriptions by bicycle or stocking the shelves. As it turned out, Brother Joe worked at the store for the rest of his career. He graduated from the Cincinnati College of Pharmacy, like Dad, then married Jeannette, his childhood sweetheart, returned to Huntington and worked in the family business for 40 years.

My family was sure that I too would become a pharmacist. I worked in the store for several years during the summer months when Marshall High School wasn't in session. I over-rang the cash register, found the "no sitting while on duty"

The imposing Keith-Albee lobby during the theater's heyday. Photographer and date unknown, courtesy State Historic Preservation Office.

# The Keith-Albee Theater

Writer Patricia Stevens Bianco recalls spending long Sunday afternoons of her childhood in one of Huntington's landmarks, the Keith-Albee Theater. To her it was "an exotic palace," and it may be that again to another generation of young people.

The Keith-Albee is unusual among the grand old movie houses in that it still survives as a commercial movie theater, operated today by the Greater Huntington Theater Corporation. But the Keith-Albee of Patricia Bianco's day has changed. In the mid-1970's the building was divided into four theaters and movie-goers today may select from several different pictures at any given time.

A current cooperative effort between Marshall University and the federal government will study options for the future preservation of the building.

The Keith-Albee is located in the historic district of Huntington. It is famous for its ornate interior, and its three main stories and large cupola loom over downtown Huntington at 925 4th Avenue. The Keith-Albee was built in 1928 to replace the Orpheum and Palace Theaters, overflow vaudeville houses located two blocks to the east. When construction was completed after 14 months at a cost of two million dollars, Huntington had a showplace that was dubbed West Virginia's "temple of amusement."

The Keith-Albee was designed by architect Thomas W. Lamb. It featured a dome-shaped ceiling, painted in neutral colors so that small concealed projectors could produce images onto a "sky."

Huntington journalist Bill Belanger of the *Herald-Dispatch* recently wrote about the recollections of Huntington attorney E. Henry Broh on the Keith-Albee's opening night: "That night was as close as many Huntingtonians would ever get to Broadway," Broh recalled. "I remember the crowds around the theater outside, the blaze of lights outside and inside; the orchestra rising from the pit, and the organ coming up on another elevator at a separate height....I remember the excitement of watching lights go down and the music coming up.... And of course I remember the dark ceiling and the stars twinkling as the clouds drifted across."

rule abusive, and dusted the boxes on the low shelves by taking off one penny loafer and running my stockinged foot over the row that customers could see. Pharmacy was not for me, although I liked counting pills, tamping powder into capsules, and reading and drawing while holed up on the balcony.

The absolute best day of the year at the drug store was New Year's Day, when we closed for inventory. The ritual actually began several days in advance when our house became redolent with the smell of the chili that Mother made to serve us as we counted everything from pills to hair nets. On the big day we ate the chili heated in a roaster oven in the store.

Over the years, the staff expanded as business improved. We all took inventory: Dad and another pharmacist, Fred Neff, who worked beside him for 35 years; the women who worked behind the counters (called "counter girls" in those days); Joe and Jeannette; the delivery boys; and even my elderly grandmother. Generally, one of the delivery boys spent the day in the basement bathroom, his head against the cool white porcelain and his stomach still in anguish from the New Year's party the night before.

We counted everything — pills, stockings, candy bars, greeting cards, cigarettes, soap. I loved inventory and was allowed to take part even when I was so little that I couldn't count very well. In those early days Brother Joe followed me and recounted. On New Year's Day I still get an urge to count.

In the short time I worked at the drug store, I got to know our customers. I enjoyed them. Huntington is a warm, hospitable town where people are friendly. We had a few strange customers, however, and of course they fascinated me in particular. One woman bought — and, we surmised, consumed — 60 Mallow Cup candy bars a week. Another woman always put on her white gloves before she handled money. She bought cases of rubbing alcohol with which she wiped down everything in her house to disinfect it. I always wondered how her husband and her cat survived her quest for germs.

Customers liked to visit with Dad. He had a smile and a handshake, and generally a little story. Drug salesmen came in grinning, the newest jokes on their lips. At that point the men went back into the prescription room so that we women couldn't hear. A lot of murmuring was followed by guffaws.

Of course, things changed as time went on. Dad retired and gave Brother Joe the drug store more than 20 years ago. A dozen years later he gave the Stevens Building to Joe and me. The store finally closed when Joe himself retired three years ago and moved to Florida.

For 54 years Stevens Drug Store had stood on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Tenth Street and watched the neighborhood change. The Whirligig Restaurant gave way to a distinguished bank. The bakery across 10th Street and behind the church disappeared. Parking meters and street lights sprang up. Cars became more numerous and horse-drawn milk carts disappeared.

Our family home on Pea Ridge was sold long ago, and with most of my family now in Florida I no longer have a reason to go to Huntington. My next trip there will probably be to sign the papers for the sale of the building, but for me the drug store will never really be gone. It will linger in my memory as the place where first I tasted bubble gum after the war, where I secretly read *True Romance* in the balcony, where I introduced my fiancé to my father and brother, and later, where I brought my precious baby daughter to meet the folks behind the counters.

Places like that never really disappear.

The family drug store is gone now but the Stevens Building remains a substantial structure in downtown Huntington. Photo by Michael Keller.

*Above:* The stately Pearl Buck Birthplace at Hillsboro expects many visitors this year.
*Right:* Pearl Buck won both the Pulitzer and Nobel prizes and the hearts of millions of readers. Photos courtesy State Archives.

# "There Are My Beginnings"

## Hillsboro Observes the Pearl Buck Centennial

**By James E. Casto**

When Pearl S. Buck died in 1973, her obituary, as reported by The Associated Press, gave a brief account of her death, then launched into a capsule biography: "She was born in China June 26, 1892...."

Not so. The date and year of her birth were correct, but Pearl Comfort Sydenstricker — Buck was the name of her first husband — wasn't born in China.

The error was perhaps understandable. After all, Pearl Buck spent much of her life in China, a land she came to know so well and write about with such skill in *The Good Earth* (1931) and other books that her writing earned her both the Nobel and Pulitzer prizes. She was the only woman ever to capture both honors.

However, Pearl Buck was born not in China, but in West Virginia — 100 years ago this year.

Her parents, Absalom Sydenstricker and Caroline Stulting Sydenstricker, were Presbyterian missionaries. The Sydenstrickers had been stationed in China for 12 years, during which three of their four children had died in infancy of tropical diseases. It happened that their new daughter was born while they were home on furlough — at the Hillsboro farmhouse that was the home of Pearl Buck's maternal grandparents, the Stultings. When she was less than four months old, her parents returned to their mission station, taking their infant daughter with them.

But though her birth in West Virginia had been more or less a matter of chance and though she was to return only for brief visits in future years, Pearl Buck came to have a special feeling for her native state. In China, on the long nights, with her father often away on journeys to remote parts of the country, she listened to her mother tell of her own childhood in West Virginia.

"In spite of our living in China," she was to write later, "our Mother always taught us to call America home." And, in some ways, "home" for Pearl Buck was always Hillsboro.

"Had I been given the choice of place for my birth, I would have chosen exactly where I was born: my grandfather's large white house," she once said in an interview. "I should say West Virginia affected me very much. I have a strong sense that there are my beginnings."

Today, the handsome farmhouse where she was born is the Pearl S. Buck Birthplace Museum, acquired

and restored in a drive spearheaded by the West Virginia Federation of Women's Clubs and Jim Comstock, editor of *The West Virginia Hillbilly*, a homespun Richwood weekly with a nationwide circulation.

Since it opened to the public in 1974, the 12-room frame house, said to have been built sometime in the 1850's, has attracted thousands of visitors to its picturesque setting in rural Pocahontas County. Those in charge of the restoration depended a great deal on Pearl Buck's writings and recollections, and a visitor to the old house almost senses the presence of the quiet young girl who would grow up to be a world-famous writer.

Remembering a summer she spent at Hillsboro when she was nine years old, Pearl Buck recalled sitting on the front upstairs porch, eating grapes from the vines that wound up the columns, and reading Charles Dickens. So when the house was being restored, a grape vine was planted where she remembered it. Today it all but covers one side of the porch.

The biggest help toward putting the exterior of the house back to where it was in the 1890's came from a photograph made outside in 1900, showing some of the family, including the writer's grandfather, Hermanus Stulting.

Many of the furnishings in the house are originals from the Stulting home. Others are period pieces, similar to those that would have been used. In the parlor are Chinese shoes, small swatches of embroidered silk, banners with Chinese inscriptions and an Oriental fan.

The Stultings, who originally emigrated to this country from Holland, were fine craftsmen in wood. All the wood in the house, except the traditional wide pine board flooring, is walnut, painstakingly worked by the men of the family. The spindles on the railings of the stairway in the front hall were done by hand. When the house was being restored, the front stairs still were the original ones. A newer stairway had been installed in the back hall, but when workers explored the attic they found the original stored away and were able to reinstall it.

Along with the usual problems of restoring a house, a few unexpected ones came along. The floor in old Hermanus Stulting's bedroom, for example, was covered with nine layers of linoleum and plywood. Workers carefully peeled away layer after layer, eventually reaching the original floor.

The walls and ceilings throughout the house are made of horsehair plaster — most of it original, with only a bit of patching here and there — and the wall colors in each room are said to be the very colors that were there in 1892, the result of intricate detective work that involves chipping away tiny pieces of the plaster and going down through the various coats of paint to the first one.

At one point, a section of ceiling has been stripped of the plaster to reveal its wonderful construction. The beams were mortised in — no nails used.

The original family organ reposes in the library-music room as it did in the days when the musical Stultings devoted one night each week to playing and singing. It's said that patriarch Hermanus Stulting would rise early each morning, dress, go to the music room and play six hymns. When the sixth hymn was finished, he expected his breakfast to be ready and on the table.

The house has been given a fresh coat of paint and undergone a general sprucing up in anticipation of what promises to be a busy year. The centenary of Pearl Buck's birth is expected to attract a record crowd of visitors to Hillsboro. Special events scheduled for the anniversary include a play, "Between Two Worlds: The Pearl Buck Story" by West Virginia playwright Jean Battlo, which will be performed on the museum grounds on June 26. The 100th anniversary of the author's birth will be celebrated with a birthday party on the museum grounds on June 29.

*The Pearl S. Buck Birthplace Museum at Hillsboro is open daily from May 1 to November 1, from 9:00 to 5:00 Monday through Saturday; Sunday hours are 1:00 to 5:00. Admission is $3 for adults and $1 for students. Reservations for group tours should be made in advance.*

*For further information, write to the Pearl S. Buck Birthplace Foundation Inc., Box 126, Hillsboro, WV 24946, or call 1-800-336-7009 or (304)653-4430.*

## Back Issues Available

If you want to complete your GOLDENSEAL collection or simply get acquainted with earlier issues, some back copies of the magazine are available. The cost is $3.95 per copy. A list of available issues and their cover stories follows. To get your back copies, mark the issue(s) you want and return with a check for the right amount to GOLDENSEAL, The Cultural Center, 1900 Kanawha Blvd East, Charleston, WV 25305-0300.

___Fall 1980/Recalling Mother Jones
___Fall 1981/Myrtle Auvil of Grafton
___Winter 1984/Webster County's Mollohan Mill
___Fall 1985/Dulcimer Maker Ray Epler
___Spring 1986/Blacksmith Jeff Fetty
___Summer 1986/The Draft Horse Revival
___Fall 1986/West Virginia Chairmaking
___Summer 1987/Camden Park History
___Summer 1988/Broadcaster Hugh McPherson
___Fall 1988/Craftsman Wilbur Veith
___Spring 1989/Printer Allen Byrne
___Summer 1990/Cal Price and *The Pocahontas Times*
___Winter 1990/Sisters of DeSales Heights
___Summer 1991/Fiddler Melvin Wine
___Fall 1991/The Zekanys of Logan County
___Winter 1991/Meadow River Lumber Company
___Spring 1992/Home to Swandale

You may also order bulk copies of current or past issues of GOLDENSEAL, as quantities permit. The price is $2.50 each on orders of ten or more copies of the same issue.

**Address Change?**
**Please enter your old and new addresses below.**

**OLD**

Name

Address

**NEW**

Name

Address

## New To GOLDENSEAL?

We're glad to make your acquaintance and hope you want to see more of us. You may do so by returning the coupon below with your subscription check for $15. You will find a place there for a friend's name as well.

Thanks — and welcome to the GOLDENSEAL family!

Mail to:
GOLDENSEAL
The Cultural Center
1900 Kanawha Blvd. East
Charleston, WV 25305-0300

Date _____

Please add the following name(s) to the GOLDENSEAL mailing list.
I enclose $15.00 for each subscription. *Make checks payable to: Goldenseal.*

Name _____ Name _____

Address _____ Address _____

__New __Renewal __New __Renewal

If this is a gift subscription, please indicate the name to be signed on the gift card
Please include your own name and address if giving a gift subscription.

# The Ballad of John Morgan

One of the most popular features ever published in GOLDENSEAL was the Spring 1990 cover story on West Virginia's last public hanging, the execution of mass murderer John Morgan at Ripley in December 1897. His sensational crime and punishment was just the kind of event to inspire contemporary ballad writers, so we were disappointed not to find any apparently authentic Morgan ballads in our research for the story. Nor did any turn up in the extensive correspondence following publication of the article.

Consequently, we were pleased to hear from Sue Allen Nichols of Glenville this past April. She wrote as follows:

> One of my favorite childhood memories was the ten-mile car ride between my home in Glenville and my grandparents' home near Lockney, Gilmer County. My grandmother, Beulah Burch Carpenter, cradled my head in her lap, tickled my face, and sang two ballads — over and over again.
>
> The first was about the last public hanging in West Virginia, that of John Morgan, which her father, Charles I. Burch, had witnessed:

John Morgan

On the 16th of December
Just at the hour of noon
In Ripley, Jackson County
John Morgan met his doom.

It was on a mild November
The mildest ever seen
Early on Wednesday morning
He murdered Chloe Greene,
Her daughter, Miss Matilda,
Her son, young Jimmy Greene,
And tried to kill Miss Alice
When by the proof was seen.

Young Johnny was arrested
And taken to the jail
And there the jailer locked him
Without a chance for bail.

He was taken by the sheriff
And by the jury tried
And while his friends were sorry
He neither wept nor cried.

And so they built a scaffold
Upon a little knoll
And there they hung John
Morgan,
God pity his poor soul.

He leaves a wife and baby
To grieve for him till sore.
He leaves two loving sisters
Who'll never see him more,

Unless he is converted
His sins all washed away.
Perhaps they'll meet in Heaven
On the Resurrection Day.
(as sung by Beulah Burch Carpenter)

Ms. Nichols goes on to say that Beulah Carpenter's other ballad, also included with her letter, concerned Eugene Butcher's fatal train wreck in Lewis County in 1912. "Perhaps Eugene Butcher could be a future story," she suggests.

Well, maybe so, maybe so. We're always looking for good material. But in the meantime, our sincere thanks for this fine ballad.

— Ken Sullivan

## GOLDENSEAL Index Updated

The GOLDENSEAL master index, covering articles published since the beginning in 1975, was recently updated to include stories from 1991. Copies may be purchased from the GOLDENSEAL office.

Articles are cross-referenced under more than 100 subject headings, while separate sections index articles by author and story location. Photographers are also listed. Judging from the response, GOLDENSEAL's index has proved to be a valuable research tool for those interested in West Virginia's history and traditional culture.

You may order a copy of the 142-page GOLDENSEAL master index by sending $15, plus $2 postage and handling, to GOLDENSEAL, Cultural Center, Capitol Complex, Charleston WV 25305.

# In This Issue

PATRICIA STEVENS BIANCO says she hung out at her parents' Huntington drugstore for 18 years while attending Pea Ridge Elementary School and Marshall High School, and "assorted summers thereafter." She is now a theater professor and director of the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford's theater program. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

WOODWARD S. BOUSQUET chairs the Environmental Studies Department at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina. He met folk artist Marshall Fleming during a leave from teaching and says that folk art provides a new way for him to explore the relationships between people and land. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

JAMES E. CASTO of Huntington is a veteran West Virginia journalist. He now serves as associate editor of the *Huntington Herald-Dispatch* and is a regular commentator on West Virginia Public Radio's "Morning Edition" news program. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

GREG CLARK is photo preservation archivist for the Division of Culture and History.

LENORE McCOMAS COBERLY is a native of Hamlin and a graduate of WVU. After completing an MBA at the University of Pittsburgh she moved to Wisconsin with her chemical engineer husband. She has written books, articles, and poetry, in addition to teaching writing. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

MARK CRABTREE was born in Brooke County and earned a B.S. in journalism from WVU. Crabtree, who now lives in Morgantown, has worked extensively as a photographer and served as project coordinator for the West Virginia Coal Life Project's photography exhibit. His last contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in Winter 1981.

DAVID H. HALSEY, born in Wyoming County, earned an engineering degree from Marshall University. A retired colonel from the Army Corps of Engineers, Halsey was officially commended for his work as operations officer during the Buffalo Creek dam disaster in 1972. Colonel Halsey has published numerous articles in technical journals. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

TERESA HAMM is a native of Charlottesville, but has lived in Buckhannon for the past six years. She studied fiddling under an Augusta apprenticeship with Sarah Singleton and describes herself as a singer/songwriter with a "wide interest" musically. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

KATHLEEN M. JACOBS grew up in Fayette County. She studied history at West Virginia Tech under Dr. Otis Rice and completed her M.A. at the West Virginia Graduate College. She works as a freelance writer and has been published in *Appalachian Heritage* and *Down Home* magazines. Her last contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in Fall 1990.

CHRISTOPHER G. JANUS was born to Greek immigrant parents in Kanawha County in 1911. A retired investment banker, he was educated at Harvard and Oxford. He has also worked as a special writer for *The New York Times*, written numerous short stories, and published several books. This is his first appearance in GOLDENSEAL.

LOUIS E. KEEFER is a writer and out-of-practice pilot. Born and raised in Wheeling, Keefer earned degrees from Morris Harvey College, WVU and Yale. He is a retired planning consultant and now lives in Reston, Virginia. He has published two books and numerous articles. He is a frequent contributor to GOLDENSEAL.

MICHAEL KELLER is the chief of photographic services for the Division of Culture and History.

SUSAN LEFFLER is the folk arts specialist for the Division of Culture and History.

JEFF SEAGER, a native West Virginian, is a Charleston newspaper writer and photographer. He formerly worked at the Department of Culture and History as a photographer, and has published photos in newspapers in West Virginia, Ohio and Guam. His last contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in Summer 1988.

Mountain Arts Foundation
The Cultural Center
1900 Kanawha Blvd. East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305-0300

Address Correction Requested

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 2868
Charleston, WV 25301

# Inside Goldenseal

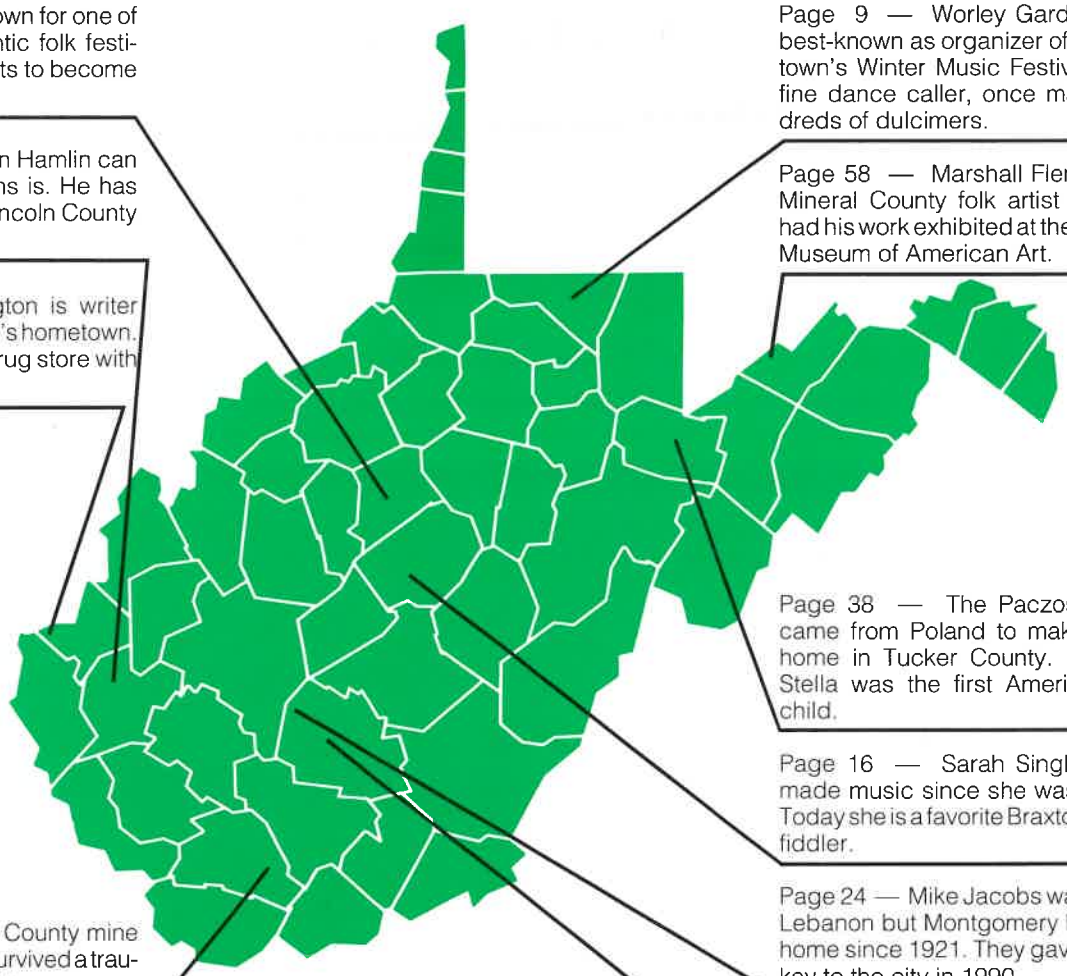
Page 7 — Already known for one of America's most authentic folk festivals, Glenville now wants to become a major crafts village.

Page 9 — Worley Gardner, now best-known as organizer of Morgantown's Winter Music Festival and a fine dance caller, once made hundreds of dulcimers.

Page 31 — Anybody in Hamlin can tell you who Bob Adkins is. He has done business in the Lincoln County hills since 1923.

Page 58 — Marshall Fleming is a Mineral County folk artist who has had his work exhibited at the National Museum of American Art.

Page 65 — Huntington is writer Patricia Stevens Bianco's hometown. She recalls the family drug store with special affection.



Page 38 — The Paczosa family came from Poland to make a new home in Tucker County. Daughter Stella was the first American-born child.

Page 16 — Sarah Singleton has made music since she was a child. Today she is a favorite Braxton County fiddler.

Page 24 — Mike Jacobs was born in Lebanon but Montgomery has been home since 1921. They gave him the key to the city in 1990.

Page 54 — Wyoming County mine foreman Ralph Halsey survived a traumatic accident. He went on to a productive second career.

Page 47 — Flying Frank Thomas has spent his life doing exactly what he wants to do, he says.

22
0 94295 76645 1