Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Winter 2002 $4.95

Berlin • Lebanese in Clarksburg • Volcano • Death of Hank Williams

From the Editor: Classic GOLDENSEAL

How long have you been reading GOLDENSEAL? Perhaps you are one of the lucky ones who has a complete collection of magazines going back to 1975. If so, the look of our cover for this current issue will have a familiar ring to it. Beautiful old portraits and historical photographs, framed and inset, were featured on the cover of GOLDENSEAL for our first 12 editions. One cover that I particularly enjoyed was this example from October-December 1976, depicting Barbour County hymn writer Ida L. Reed.

More than 100 magazines later, it seems appropriate to me to revisit that classic GOLDENSEAL look. Having had a wild-eyed monster on the cover of our last issue, the idyllic vision of a young boy with a sled and his well-dressed mother from the early 1900's caught my eye. The lad on the sled, Maxson B. Collins, is now 92 years of age. He grew up in the pleasant surroundings of Berlin, a close-knit community in Lewis County where his father served as the local physician and baseball coach. Mr. Collins' story is the sort of heartfelt, succinct writing any editor would be proud to publish. It begins on page 29.

More classic GOLDENSEAL can be found in our stories about 99-year-old Walter Taitt of Volcano [see page 10], the Lebanese Michael family of Harrison County [see page 22], and Crider's Store in Hardy County [see page 34].

GOLDENSEAL stories are written, as we say, from the living memory of West Virginians. They are nearly always taken from first-person accounts or from direct interviews. Sometimes, these interviews appear in their raw form, published in what we call the Q&A format. This was quite a common practice in early GOLDENSEAL issues. We return to this approach for two stories in this edition, as you will discover in our in interviews with Marion County native Ben Borda [see page 16] and gravedigger Dallas Dunn [see page 40].

Another feature of early GOLDENSEAL editions revisited in this issue is the photoessay. This is especially useful in describing a process, such as Michael Keller's series of pictures about gravedigging [see pages 42-43] or in depicting artwork, such as Gerald Milnes' gripping study of West Virginia grave markers [see page 46].

The stories for this issue that proved to be the most challenging — and the most time-consuming — were those dealing with the death of Hank Williams. A musician of legendary proportions, Hank's sad life came to an end in Oak Hill 50 years ago. Many questions remain unanswered about this episode, and I worked extensively with author Maura Kistler over the course of the past few months to get the story told — clearly, honestly, and from the perspective of the people of West Virginia. It's classic GOLDENSEAL, and you'll find the results beginning on page 54.

This didn't start out to be a back-to-basics issue, but I'm glad that it has worked out that way. I hope that you enjoy it.

On behalf of the entire GOLDENSEAL staff, let me wish you and your family a blessed and peaceful holiday season.

John Lilly

Volume 28, Number 4 **Goldenseal** Winter 2002

p. 10

p. 22

p. 46

On the cover: Dressed for the season, young Maxson B. Collins poses on a sled in this studio portrait taken with his mother Ruby Jane Maxson in about 1912. Mr. Collins, now 92, shares memories of growing up in Berlin, Lewis County, beginning on page 29.

p. 34

p. 54

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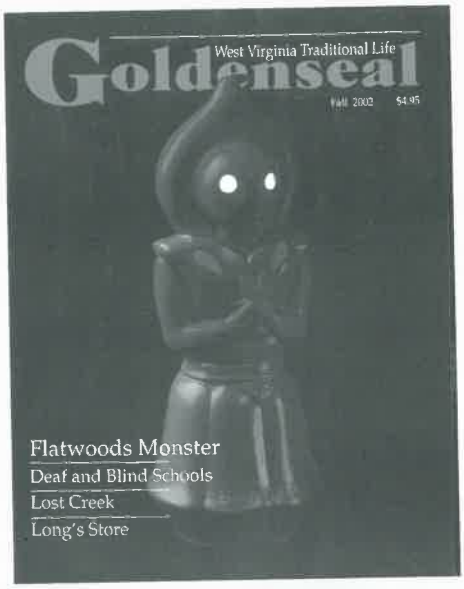
Flatwoods Monster



September 20, 2002
Dille, West Virginia
Editor:
Buddy Griffin's "The Legend of the Flatwoods Monster" [Fall 2002] brought to mind two forgotten incidents. One was an intriguing radio interview with Kathleen May done by Hugh McPherson in the early 1970's. [See "Hugh McPherson: 'The Prince of Highland Swing,'" by Debby Sonis Jackson; Summer 1988.] I heard the interview over Oak Hill's WOAY radio. I remember Kathleen telling about how their dog got sick and, a day or two later, died. She said they tried to report the incident to the Braxton County sheriff's department that evening, but that the officers had gone down to the Duck Creek and Frametown area to investigate a report of a possible plane crash. That could certainly tie into the rash of reported UFO sightings that evening.

The other incident was a fascinating conversation with a bread-truck driver, which took place in 1955 at Mullin's Store in Dille. To a captivated audience, the driver related how he had begun his delivery run out of Flatwoods around 5:00 the morning following the landing. Just south of Flatwoods at the head of Sutton Lane, the electrical system on his truck failed, the engine quit, and all of the lights went out. He drifted off to the side of the road. Then, about 50 yards ahead of him in the still-dark morning, he saw what he thought was a very large bear cross the highway. It moved off across the field to his right until it faded out of sight in the darkness. In a moment, the lights came back on, he started the truck up, and resumed his deliveries. At the time of the incident, the driver knew nothing of the landing in Flatwoods. He said he always wondered if what he saw that morning was really a bear, or the monster. And what caused his electrical system to malfunction just at that time?

I thought Ivan Sanderson's theory of what happened to the monster and its craft was a fresh and unique perspective.

Thank you, Earth People.
T.G. Griffith

September 9, 2002
Via e-mail
Editor:
We loved the article on the Flatwoods Monster with Dr. Judy Byers. [See "The Flatwoods Monster Goes to College," by Amy Baker; Fall 2002.] I participated in the Appalachian Folklore

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The Durbin Rocket, pulled by Climax #3 engine. Photograph courtesy of Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad.

still in existence. It was returned to West Virginia from a museum in Connecticut about a year ago. Today, it hauls tourists for the Durbin & Greenbrier Valley Railroad on thxe Durbin Rocket route along the Greenbrier River, south of Durbin. For information, call (304)456-4935.

The steam locomotive my brother and I saw and photographed in Ellamore is also still in existence at the Cass Scenic Railroad in Cass, where it is being restored.

I always enjoy reading GOLDENSEAL, and I look forward to the next issue.

Have a great day.
Alan Byer

Reading to Seniors

August 2, 2002
Via e-mail
Editor:
I have shared stories from two recent issues of GOLDENSEAL with residents of a retirement/assisted-living community where I present readings from time to time.

On my most recent visit, as I read about the *Princess Margy* sternwheeler and talked about the Kanawha River, several residents acknowledged that they were familiar with that part of West Virginia. [See "Captain Pete Grassie and the *Princess Margy*," by Lisa Blake; Summer 2002.]

The story of Joltin' Jim McCoy and his association with Patsy Cline and Ernest Tubb seemed to add a measure of intrigue as they listened intently. [See "Joltin' Jim McCoy: Morgan County's Country Music Troubadour," by John Douglas; Spring 2002.]

It is amazing how lives can be touched through the GOLDENSEAL articles; I am delighted to be a presenter of these stories, when I can. Thanks from those residents, and our best to you all.
Phylenia French

Thank you, Phylenia, for getting in touch, and for the generous work you are doing. Those who do not have a Good Samaritan like Mrs. French to read their GOLDENSEAL to them might wish to refer to our Fall 2002 issue, page 21, for information about the West Virginia Library Commission's wonderful audio tape program. For information, call (304)558-4061. —ed.

Renewal Snafu

September 15, 2002
Sarasota, Florida
Editor:
Being overdue with my subscription to GOLDENSEAL is a surprise to me. Apparently, there must have been a problem with the mail delivery or neglect either on my part or on the part of GOLDENSEAL.

Regardless of any of the above, I am enclosing a check, as always. I would not wish to miss one issue. I have every one of the magazines since 1980 stored in my back closet. Aside of the Bible, I estimate GOLDENSEAL to be the best book on the market. Thank you for reminding me.
Russell Moses

Thank you, Mr. Moses, for your understanding and for your renewal. As thousands of our readers discovered, GOLDENSEAL experienced a "senior moment" last September when our renewal letters somehow got crossed up. We apologize for the error and will try our best to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

We appreciate your patience and continued support. —ed.

class at the Summer Institute 2002 that Judy ran at Fairmont State College, June 17-28, 2002. The musical production about the Flatwoods Monster was fantastic. Dr. Byers and Noel Tenney's class was awesome! Kudos to both.
Martha Danzing

Films

September 4, 2002
Via e-mail
Editor:
I read with great interest your Fall 2002 issue. There are two stories in it that have connections to films that have been made over the last few years.

The first is a biographical film about Gray Barker. [See "Gray Barker: West Virginia Ufologist," by Matthew Mullins.] The film is called *Whispers from Space*. It is a 1995 feature-length documentary by Los Angeles filmmaker Ralph Coon, who came to West Virginia several times to make a film about this world-famous ufologist. The West Virginia International Film Festival held the world premiere of the film at its Spring Festival in Charleston, with the director present. The film is available for sale on VHS over the Internet from Facets Multimedia at www.facets.org.

The second film is *Amy*, a 1981 made-for-TV movie set at the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind in Romney. [See "A Campus Called Home: The West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind," by Kathee Rogers.] The film is based on a collection of short stories by Greenbrier County native Margaret Prescott Montague — West Virginia's most filmed novelist. Her 1915 collection *Closed Doors* was based on the lives of seven teachers and children whom she met when she visited her brother R. Cary Montague, who was then director of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind. *Amy* tells the story of a woman who leaves her wealthy husband to teach at a rural school for the deaf. This film was made by Walt Disney Studios and was originally called *Amy on the Lips*. It is available on-line at www.half.com.
Steve Fesenmaier

Cassity

August 29, 2002
Baltimore, Maryland
Editor:
I read the article "A Home in Cassity," by Shirley Gower in the Summer 2002 issue, with some interest for two reasons. First, it brought back memories of a visit to Cassity on an early summer weekend in 1973 or '74. My older brother was driving me from Morgantown to our parents' home in South Charleston, and we decided to stop in Ellamore to visit the Middle Fork Railroad. The railroad had ceased operation, but we did manage to find #6 — a Climax geared locomotive — along with several small diesel locomotives. Even though daylight was rapidly fading, we decided to try to follow the railroad tracks to Cassity, over a gravel road that seemed to be heading in the right direction along the tracks. I was convinced that we were lost, but my brother used a topographical map to plot our course through the darkness until we came to the old tipple in Cassity. We were both very tired by this time, and we ended up sleeping in the car by the side of the road. At dawn, we drove back to Ellamore to photograph what remained of Middle Fork Railroad and then drove on to South Charleston. We never did return to Cassity, though I have often wished that we had visited there during daylight hours.

Second, the author mentioned Middle Fork Railroad Climax geared locomotive #3 several times in the article. Remarkably enough, that steam locomotive is

Octopus

Teddy Peters with octopus in Thomas, January 11, 1946. Photograph by West Virginia Photo Company.

September 23, 2002
Burlington, West Virginia
Editor:
We especially enjoyed the "Photo Curiosity" of the octopus on the back page of the Fall 2002 issue. While presenting our monthly antique show to the residents of a local nursing home, activities director Linda Magruder gave us a packet of old pictures from Thomas, which she thought the residents might enjoy. Imagine our surprise when fourth from the top was a picture of the octopus with the young boy who caught it. We passed the picture around to the residents as we told about the article from GOLDENSEAL. It was quite a hit. The postcard did not identify the boy, but was stamped with "W.Va. Photo Co., Parsons, W.Va."

We hope you will receive more information so we can learn why the octopus was in the river and who put him there.
Yours Truly,
Ed and Catherine Weaver

October 28, 2002
Via e-mail
Editor:
I was truly amazed to come across the article on the octopus found in the river at the railroad station at Thomas. What happened in that incident is hilarious.

It seems my best friend was playing around the river, the north fork of the Blackwater, where it [passed under] the railroad tracks at the west end of the station. The truck that hauled the mail and the truck that hauled express parked on a sort of bridge beside the station.

Back then, the A&P grocery company had fish delivered packed in ice — very common in that day and age. As well as I can remember, there were about three to five octopuses on the top layer of the boxes that held the fish. The express driver, not knowing what to do with them, threw them into the river and forgot about them.

Well, along comes my friend (who is now deceased), playing along the river, and he discovered an octopus laying on a rock, which he said was alive. He picked up the octopus and headed up town to show his discovery. Of course, this went through the small town of Thomas like wildfire. The express driver thought it was a pretty good joke, so he said nothing. Then, UPI or the Associated Press got hold of [the story], and it went nationwide.

By this time, the express driver was afraid to say what had really happened. To this day, you'll find some old-timers in Thomas who will still tell you there was octopus in the Blackwater River, at one time.
Sincerely,
J.D. Bland

September 9, 2002
Point Pleasant, West Virginia
Editor:
I lived in Thomas, Tucker County, from 1931 until 1950. There was no mystery in 1946 about how those fish — or whatever they were — made it into the creek, located by the Thomas railroad station. Mr. Ed Breedlove delivered all packages that arrived on the train and that did not go directly to the post office. He said, "A delivery came for a man in Douglas." Douglas is a small town below Thomas. Ed asked a man at the station, who was going to Douglas to deliver a load of coal, if he would take the delivery since it was on his way.

The man in Douglas wouldn't accept the package, because he said that it was too old. So, Mr. Breedlove emptied the crate into the creek by the station. People came for weeks to look at whatever it was. Some said they were octopuses, while others were in doubt. Oddly enough, no one ever took the time to ask the man what he had ordered, and now Mr. Breedlove is deceased.
Thanks,
Freda Rhinehart

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.

Holiday Cheer

The third annual Appalachian Coal Town Christmas celebration will take place in Beckley, December 6-8. Hosted by the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine and Southern West Virginia Youth Museum, activities will be offered at a number of locations around town. Highlights include underground "light" coal mine tours, horse-drawn wagon rides, theatrical presentations, and traditional caroling in the refurbished Coal Camp Church. Some activities require an admission charge. For prices, schedule, or additional information, call 1-800-847-4898.

Blennerhassett Museum in Parkersburg invites visitors to explore international holiday customs through its display of Christmas trees from around the world, called Trees of our Heritage. A variety of ethnic holiday themes are represented, including festive decorations from Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean; there is also an Americana tree and a Kwanzaa exhibit. Trees of our Heritage is sponsored by Friends of Blennerhassett and Blennerhassett Island Historical State Park, and will remain on display through the end of December. For additional information, call (304)420-4800.

Model trains, holiday trees, and free children's activities will mark the holiday season at the Cultural Center at the Capitol Complex in Charleston. The Island Creek Model Railroad Club of Logan will operate its extensive and detailed track display in the Great Hall from December 7-15. Holiday trees, decorated by the Kanawha Garden Council of the West Virginia Garden Clubs, can be viewed in the Balcony Gallery until January 2. Kids are invited to make snow globes on Saturday, December 7; gingerbread houses on December 14; and specially crafted gift wrapping on December 21. All activities are open to the public, free of charge. For additional information, call (304)558-0162.

Shanghai Parade in Lewisburg. Photograph courtesy of Greenbrier Historical Society.

Lewisburg's annual Shanghai Parade will be held on New Year's Day in downtown Lewisburg. A local tradition begun more than 100 years ago, the Shanghai Parade reflects the area's German and Scottish heritage. Each year, as many as 2,000 people come to see floats, old cars, animals, people in costumes, and musical groups on parade. A special "Tradition Prize" is given to the entry that best depicts local heritage or historical interest.

The unique Shanghai Parade was brought to Lewisburg by early settlers from Bridgewater, Virginia, who coined the term "Shanghai" to refer to the custom of traveling in a group to see friends or relatives during the holidays, usually dressed in old clothing, masquerade costumes, or face masks. This year's parade will take place on Washington Street, from noon until 1 p.m. For more information, call the Greenbrier County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 1-800-833-2068.

Folk Art

A free exhibit of folk art is currently on display at the Huntington Museum of Art in Huntington. More than 100 pieces from the museum's permanent collection are included in a special exhibit titled, "The Pencil Moves and I Follow," available until March 23.

Works by several living West Virginia folk artists are represented in the exhibit. Among them are Putnam County woodcarver Reverend Herman Hayes [see "Redeeming the Wood: Self-Taught Woodcarver Herman Hayes," by Colleen Anderson; Summer 1999], Glenwood carver Earl Gray, and multi-media artist Cher Shaffer. Also included are works by the late S.L. Jones [see "'A Person Has to Have Some Work to Do': S.L. Jones, Wood Carver," by

"Head with Tongue Stuck Out," by Earl Gray, 1982.

Charles B. Rosenak; Spring 1982], Huntington colored-pencil artist Gerald C. DePrie, Guyandotte scenery painter M.A. Booth, and basket weaver Elmer Richards.

This exhibit helps to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the museum, which is located at 2033 McCoy Road in Huntington. The museum is open 10 a.m. until 9 p.m. on Tuesdays, 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Saturdays, and noon until 5 p.m. on Sundays; it is closed on Mondays. For more information, call (304)529-2701 or visit www.hmoa.org.

The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover in Japan, 1973. Photographer unknown.

Bluegrass Honors

West Virginia musicians Everett and Bea Lilly and Don Stover were honored last fall when the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) inducted them into its prestigious Hall of Honor. The announcement was made in Louisville, Kentucky, on October 17, as the IBMA held its annual bluegrass music conference and award ceremony. The Hall of Honor, which is housed at the International Bluegrass Music Museum in Owensboro, Kentucky, was founded in 1991 and pays tribute to those individuals who are considered pioneers of this popular musical style. The Lilly Brothers and Don Stover are the first West Virginians to receive the award.

Bea and Everett Lilly are originally from Clear Creek, Raleigh County, and began singing duets and playing the guitar and mandolin together at an early age. They relocated to the Boston area in 1952, and were considered instrumental in exposing Northern audiences to Appalachian music during their 18-year stay there. [See "Principal Influences on the Music of the Lilly Brothers of Clear Creek, West Virginia," by James J. McDonald; April-June 1975 and "'We Sing About Life and What It Means to Us': A Conversation With Everett Lilly," by Carl Fleischhauer and Tom Screven; July-September 1975, also included in the book *Mountains of Music: West Virginia Traditional Music From* GOLDENSEAL, see column at right.]

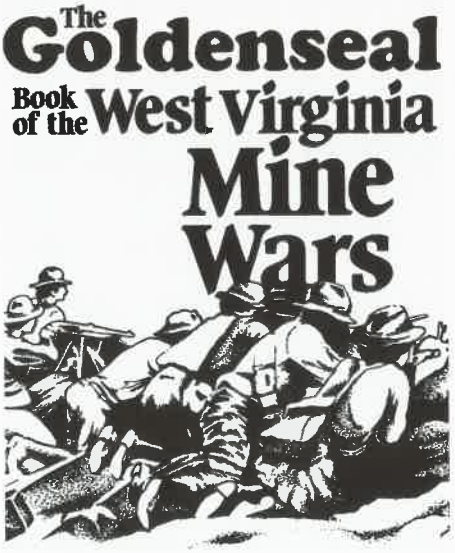
Banjo player Don Stover was born in White Oak, Raleigh County, in 1928. He played both old-time and bluegrass style banjo, and was a strong singer and an accomplished songwriter. He joined the Lilly Brothers during their Boston years, and remained closely associated with them throughout his life. Don passed away in 1996.

Bea and Everett Lilly continue to tour and perform, most recently with Everett's sons, appearing as the Lilly Brothers and the Lilly Mountaineers. For more information about the International Bluegrass Music Museum, call (270)926-7891 or visit www.ibma.org.

Winter Waters

Berkeley Springs will hold its 13th annual Winter Festival of the Waters with a series of water-related activities this January through March.

On Saturday, January 25, the festival gets underway with Spa Feast 2003, a free spa and health-related fair, which will take place from 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. at the Ice House in Berkeley Springs.



The West Virginia Mine Wars were a formative experience in our state's history and a landmark event in the history of American labor. GOLDENSEAL has published some of the best articles ever written on this subject. In 1991, former editor Ken Sullivan worked with Pictorial Histories Publishing Company to produce this compilation of 17 articles, including dozens of historic photos.

Now in its fourth printing, the book is revised and features new updated information. The large-format, 109-page paper bound book sells for $10.95 plus $2 per copy postage and handling. West Virgina residents please add 6% state tax (total $13.61 per book including tax and shipping).

I enclose $ ____ for ____ copies of *The Goldenseal Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars.*

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Highlights include free massages, yoga demonstrations, and information about a range of alternative health practices and treatments.

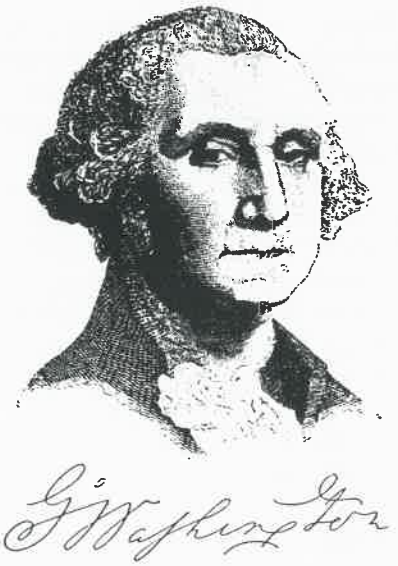
The festival continues February 20-22 with the Berkeley Springs International Water Tasting at Coolfont Resort and Conference Center. Bottled water and municipal drinking water from around the world will be judged, with as many as 100 competitors expected. A special seminar is planned on Friday, February 21, featuring speakers, discussions, and other activities. The seminar is presented free of charge.

The water festival will also include the annual George Washington's Bathtub Celebration, March 15-17, as local businesses offer a range of one-dollar specials, and renewed emphasis is placed on Berkeley Springs' close ties with the life and legacy of the famous first president.

For a complete schedule of the Winter Festival of the Waters, or for additional information, call 1-800-447-8797 or visit www.berkeleysprings.com.

George Washington Book

A new book about George Washington and his life and adventures in and around Berkeley Springs is available from author, editor, and GOLDENSEAL contributor John Douglas. *George Washington & Us* examines both fact and myth surrounding Washington's lifelong association with Berkeley Springs, using extensive excerpts from Washington's own diaries, as well as other historical references and documentation. The 68-page paperbound book includes a dozen illustrations and a useful bibliography. It is available from the author for $8.95 plus $2.25 postage and handling at P.O. Box 901, Berkeley Springs, WV 25411; West Virginia residents add 54 cents state sales tax.



Mary Ingles Draper Book

Pioneer woman Mary Ingles Draper, one of the most dramatic figures in the history of the American frontier, is the subject of a new book by author and GOLDENSEAL contributor Mary Rodd Furbee. *Shawnee Captive: The Story of Mary Ingles Draper* tells the amazing, true story of a young woman who was taken from her home in the New River Valley by Shawnee Indians during the mid-1700's. Her heroic escape and her journey by foot through hundreds of miles of wilderness back to her family are

on top of the oil tanks. In those days, water bottles for bicycles were unknown, and we often stopped at people's houses for a drink. One of our favorite stops was at the white house near the bottom of the hill as you enter Volcano. Walter or Frances would bring us a pitcher of water and invite us to rest on their porch. They seemed happy to see a group of scrubby youngsters on bicycles.

Today, the buildings and tanks are gone. The road is paved, and only a scattering of houses remain. A passerby would never know that a town of nearly 5,000 people once thrived in this narrow valley.

In 1863, W.H. Moore drilled the first producing oil well in the vicinity of what is now Volcano. Further exploration soon led investors to believe that the area was rich in oil. In 1864, William Cooper Stiles, Jr., a wealthy Pennsylvanian who had been exploring the potential of the Volcano area, organized the Volcanic Oil & Coal Company with $1 million in capital, and purchased 2,000 acres of what would turn out to be oil-rich land.

Stiles planned a community that, by 1870, was officially called Volcano. While many of the wealthy oilmen at the time moved into Parkersburg, Stiles established his home on a hill above town in Volcano. He called his estate Thornhill Farm and built an elegant 21-room mansion in the shape of a Maltese cross. It became the showplace of Volcano.

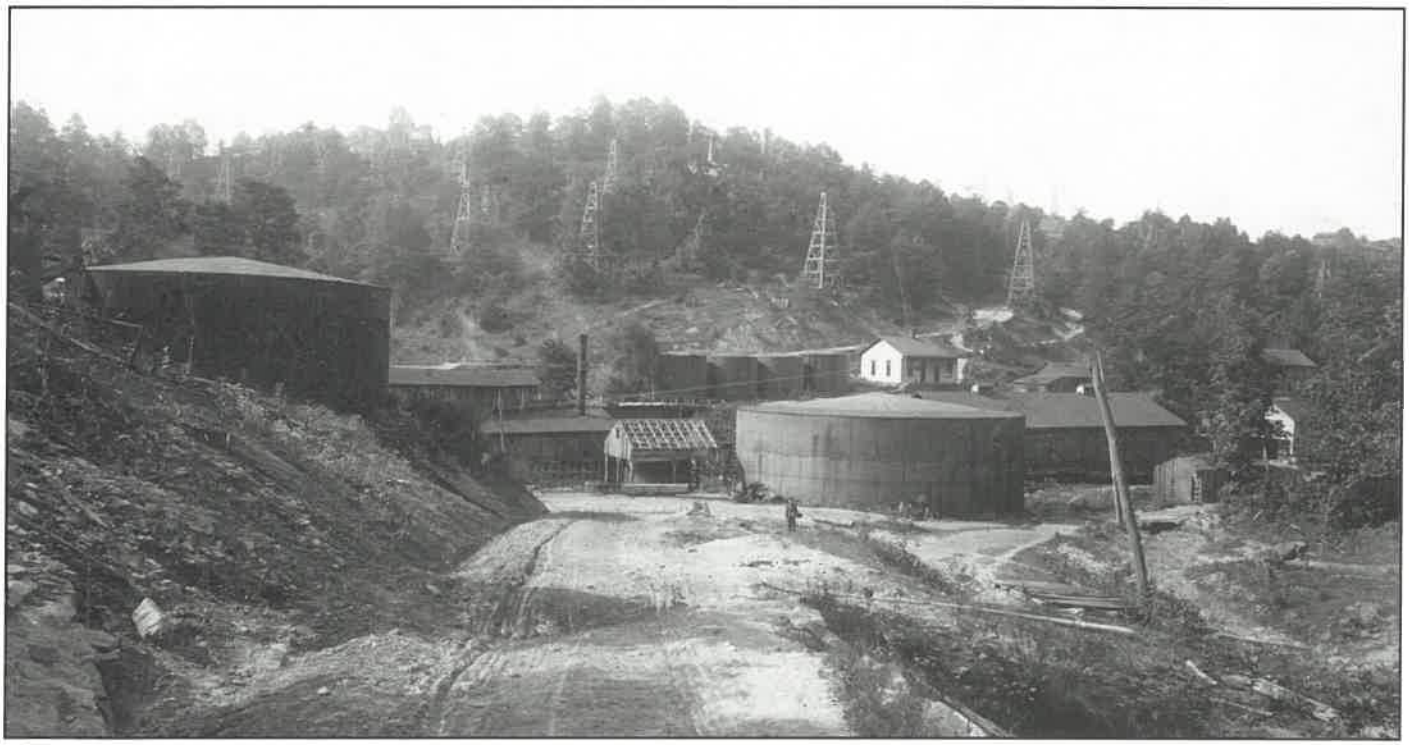
Volcano grew as people came to work in the oil fields and established business enterprises. At its peak, there were two hotels, Odd Fellows and Masonic lodges, a bowling alley, an opera house, several saloons, a sawmill, a barrel factory, a post office, a dozen stores, two schools, four churches, and hundreds of houses.

Volcano grew as people came to work in the oil fields and established business enterprises.

Tragedy struck in 1879, when a fire destroyed most of the buildings in Volcano. Stiles, unwilling to give up, rebuilt much of the town. Nature dealt another blow in 1884, though, when a windstorm destroyed more than 100 wooden oil derricks. Although Stiles remained in Volcano for the next decade, oil production never reached its pre-1880 levels. Finally, ill and discouraged, he decided to move to Parkersburg, but he died in his mansion on December 19, 1896, before he could make the move.

A year later, a devastating fire nearly destroyed Volcano once more. Although the town was never totally rebuilt, oil production resumed and was sufficient to keep Volcano going for another 60 years. By 1970, the wells were nearly depleted.

As I drove from Parkersburg to Volcano to see Walter for the first



The town of Volcano was established during the oil boom of the 1860's and '70's. Also known as White Oak, the town is thought to have earned the name Volcano because of numerous fires from burning oil and gas at the wells. At night, these fires caused the area to resemble the interior of a volcanic crater. This photograph from the late 1800's shows a hillside of oil derricks and several large holding tanks, courtesy of Leta Dunlap.

At its peak, Volcano was one of the most successful and productive oil towns in the country, thanks in part to W.C. Stile's innovative "endless cable" pumping system. This method allowed as many as 40 wells to be run by a single power station, requiring only one operator. Walter Taitt had the difficult job of keeping the system in operation, repairing the cable whenever it broke. Photograph taken in 1900, courtesy of West Virginia State Archives, WVSA hereafter.

time in five decades, I marveled at how short the distance seemed to be to his house. Riding on our bikes on a gravel road, the trip had taken us several hours. I wondered, as we approached, if Walter would still come out on the porch, or whether he would be confined to a wheelchair. I was pleasantly surprised when Walter walked out on the porch to greet me. Walter has the look and step of a man much younger than his years. We toured the house and then sat down to talk about his life in Volcano.

"When Volcano was no longer active," Walter says, "many people bought the houses, tore them down, and moved them to a new location. I'm the one who stayed." Walter purchased his house in 1925. "I was living in a company-owned house with a tin roof," he explains. "The company would not fix the leak, but they did sell me the house for $75. I bought an additional 20 acres for $75 an acre."

Walter married Frances Mahaney of nearby Petroleum, Ritchie County, in 1925. "I met her when I was riding my bicycle, and she was riding her horse," Walter recalls. "I didn't see her again for two years. Then we met again, and we just kept on meeting and meeting," he says, laughing. Walter and Frances worked side-by-side to remodel the house.

"It seemed like I was always working," Walter says. "I'd work eight hours in the oil fields and then come home and work on the house. The first thing we did was repair the roof. Next, we installed new windows, floors, and doors and added new siding. We ordered kitchen cabinets from Montgomery Ward and installed them ourselves." He also extended the porch around three sides of the house.

In 1927, Walter devised a system to bring running water into the house. "I built two wooden tanks — one at the top of the hill and one at the bottom," he explains. "I used gas power to pump water to the top tank, and it flowed by gravity to the bottom tank and into the house. We were the second house in Volcano to have running water." The Taitts did not use the pumped water for drinking, however. "I always hauled drinking water from Stiles Spring," he says, "which is about a mile down the road. I still have people bring me water from the spring."

The water system made it possible for Walter to add an indoor bathroom and laundry room to the house in 1929. Although having water running into the house was a big improvement, the day that Walter remembers best came in 1941. "That's when the electric power line reached Volcano," Walter says. "That was a big day. Frances and I got busy and wired the house!"

Walter raised a large garden each summer including corn, beans, onions, tomatoes, peas, potatoes, and other vegetables. "The company

plowed gardens for all the employees," Walter says. He planted 30 fruit trees — peaches, pears, and apples. In the summer, he picked wild blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries.

"Frances canned all summer," Walter says. "She would have over 700 jars in the cellar by the end of the summer. She baked all of our bread, so we didn't have to buy much at the grocery store. About all we bought was flour, sugar, salt, and coffee. Our cow gave all the milk we needed. The hogs, chickens, and turkeys provided us with meat."

Walter has lived in his house for 78 years. Today, he lives alone; Frances died in 1984. He cooks, does his own shopping and laundry, and keeps the fire going in his large wood stove. Neighbors bring him a supply of wood every fall. Although he admits to slowing down a bit and having trouble with his hearing, Walter's memory is sharp. He attributes his good health and keen memory to never using tobacco or drinking liquor.

Walter Taitt was born at Volcano on September 21, 1903. He is standing at the left in this photograph, taken about 1908. Next to Walter is sister Ethel, mother Maggie, baby brother George, and sister Marie, at right.

Walter enjoys reminiscing about his life in Volcano. "We had a lot of fun as kids," he says. Fishing and exploring the hills were favorite pastimes. "We went hunting without guns! We'd chase a rabbit down its hole, then dig it out and kill it," he recalls.

"On Halloween, we'd go around with a sack, trick-or-treating, and people would give us candy. I never soaped any windows," he declares. One Halloween was especially memorable. "A bunch of men took a buggy apart and carried the parts on top of the big oil tank," he says. "Then, they put it together again. The tank was 20-feet high and 50-feet across. When people woke up, there was a buggy on top of the tank. It took folks quite a while to figure out how the buggy got up there."

Walter welcomes visitors to his home and enjoys reminiscing about his 99 years in Volcano. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Christmas meant hiking into the woods to cut down the tree. "We decorated it with tinsel and little glass balls," Walter says. "Santa Claus came to the school, and there was a program at the church." On Christmas Day, he remembers having a big dinner and then visiting relatives.

"Kids then didn't have all the toys kids have today," Walter says. "I made my own bicycle. I found a bicycle frame in the trash dump and made wooden wheels. It worked pretty well and would coast downhill.

"We even made our own baseball equipment," Walter continues. "We took a small, rubber ball for the center and wrapped it with cord. We made our own bats, usually out of sassafras wood. We did buy our

Frances Mahaney of Petroleum, Ritchie County, Walter's future wife. Date unknown.

mitts, and the catcher had a real mask." When he got older, Walter played on the Volcano team. "We didn't have uniforms, like they do today," he says, "but we still had a good time." Walter played on the Volcano team for 35 years. "We would play teams from other towns around like Deerwalk, Dallison, Petroleum, and Cairo."

Life wasn't all play. "My father bought me a red wagon in Parkersburg," Walter says. "My job was to pull it to the grocery store and get ice. The store owner cut ice from the pond in the winter and then stored it, packed in sawdust, in the ice house."

School was more work than play for Walter. He went to a one-room school with 50 students. "I got a few scoldings, but no spankings," Walter insists. He did well in school, and his grades were consistently above average. On his sixth-grade report card, the teacher wrote, "Intelligent."

As he grew older, Walter participated in community social activities. He especially enjoyed Saturday night suppers. "At a pie supper, the unmarried girls brought a pie and auctioned it off," Walter says. "The boy that bid the highest got the pie. We would also have box suppers, where the unmarried girls prepared two dinners in a hand-decorated box. The boy that bid the highest got to eat with the girl."

At age 14, when Walter graduated from the eighth grade, he wanted a paying job. "I asked my father if I could work with him," Walter says. "When he refused, I went to the Power Oil Company to see if they would give me a job. The older men had been drafted into World War I, and the man that owned the lease put me to work walking the pipeline to check for leaks. I walked four miles, twice a day. I found some small leaks, occasionally. The railroad used to come to Volcano to pick up the oil, but after the fire in 1897, the railroad was dismantled," Walter adds, explaining the need for the pipline.

Walter worked for the Power Oil Company for 46 years. "The company had 135 wells. I learned every trade there is," he says. "I learned to do carpenter work, be a blacksmith, do mechanical work on the engines, and sharpen tools."

One of his responsibilities was to keep the continuous cable in operation. "Stiles put in the continuous cable system," Walter says. "It had wheels and connected as many as 50 to 60 wells, so they could all be pumped at once." Walter explains that the wheels

Walter wed Frances in 1925. The couple remained married for 59 years, until her death in 1984. They are pictured here during the 1940's.

"I learned every trade there is," Walter says of his 46-year career in the oilfields. He is shown here lubricating machinery, date unknown.

were double-grooved so that the cable could advance from one well to the next. "I fixed that cable so many times," he says. "The cable had six strands. Sometimes it would loop wrong, and other times it broke. When it broke, I would have to splice it together. When the system was moving, you couldn't tell where it was put together." Walter speaks proudly of his work with the Power Oil Company. "I started out as a pipeline walker and ended up as vice-president."

One of Walter's best memories is the day he had finally saved enough money to buy a car. "My first car was a 1920 Dodge touring car," he says. "I paid $750 for it. I took good care of my cars. I drove the 1920 Dodge touring car for eight years." His next car was a 1928 Dodge. "I paid $900 for the 1928 Dodge. I drove that car until 1941, when I bought a new Chevy coupe for $600. I drove that car for 19 years until 1960, when I bought a 1960 Chevy sedan for $2,000. I got $600 in trade for the Chevy coupe. My next vehicle was a Chevy pickup, but I forget the price. My last vehicle was a 1992 Chevy pickup that cost me $9,000."

Walter and Frances enjoyed driving to Parkersburg on Saturday nights for a movie. "We'd take one of the neighbor kids along with us," Walter says. "Another place we went was to the resort at Borland Springs. We'd eat dinner there. It was a grand place." Driving long distances did not interest Walter. "I've only been in three states — West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio — and that was to visit relatives," he recalls. "Frances was the traveler. She went all over the country with the homemakers' club."

Walter had to stop driving a few years ago because of failing eyesight. "I drove for 80 years," he says. "I started driving company pickups when I was 14. The state didn't require a driving license then. I drove until I was 94." Today, a neighbor drives him to the grocery and to his doctors' appointments.

I spent the last part of my interview with Walter looking through photo albums. As we sat on the couch, turning the pages and talking about the photographs, I asked him if he had ever wanted to live any place other than Volcano. "No," he said. "I just wanted to live in Volcano. I like it here."

BETTY LEAVENGOOD is a Parkersburg native and a graduate of Parkersburg High School. She received a degree in history and secondary education from Marshall University, and a graduate degree in history from Ohio University. An avid hiker and bicyclist, she wrote the *Tucson Hiking Guide* and the book *Grand Canyon Women* while living in Arizona. Relocating to the Parkersburg area in 2000, she recently completed a pictorial history of Wood County. This is Betty's first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Walter Taitt today. He has lived in this home for 78 years. Photograph by Michael Keller.

"Just a Good, Clean Life"

Interview by
Michael and Carrie Kline

Ben Borda grew up in rural Marion County, near this farmhouse. Today, Ben lives in Huntington, where he is chief of planning for the Huntington District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He has fond recollections of his childhood days, however, and still visits Marion County as often as he can. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Ben Borda of Marion County

Sometimes, our authors go fishing for one story and happily land another. Such was the case in 1996 and '97 when Michael and Carrie Kline conducted oral histories for the Huntington District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. To our delight, the Klines shared a portion of this research with GOLDENSEAL readers in the story, "Ohio River Voices: Echoes of the Army Corps," by Carrie Nobel Kline; Spring 1998. While they were interviewing professional rivermen and women from in and around the Huntington area, they also gathered many recollections of family and small-town life from other parts of West Virginia.

One of these interviews was with Ben Borda. Ben, at the time, was chief of environmental planning for the District, with a background in landscape architecture. He now serves as assistant chief of planning. In the interview, Ben shares vivid memories of life in Marion County among a community of Polish immigrants, farmers, and coal miners. He recalls extended family gatherings at his grandparents' farm near Rivesville. Even as a youngster, Ben was drawn to his natural surroundings. —ed.

Michael Kline: Tell us about your people and where you were raised.

Ben Borda: I grew up out in the country in Marion County, northern part of West Virginia. My folks lived in a small house across an old dirt road from my grandfather's farm. My grandfather had a small farm in some very hilly terrain. He had a few cows and horses. All of my grandparents on my mother's and father's side, they immigrated from Austria and considered themselves Polish. They spoke Polish, sort of a broken Polish, and a conglomeration of [other] Slavic languages. When I was growing up, I could pretty much understand what they were saying when they were speaking what they called Polish. I could speak several words of it myself, but that's mostly just a blurred memory. I'm not sure how much I would really understand now.

My grandfather worked in a coal mine up in what would be the east side of the Monongahela River, at a small mine they called Montana Mines. This was back when they were still using mules.

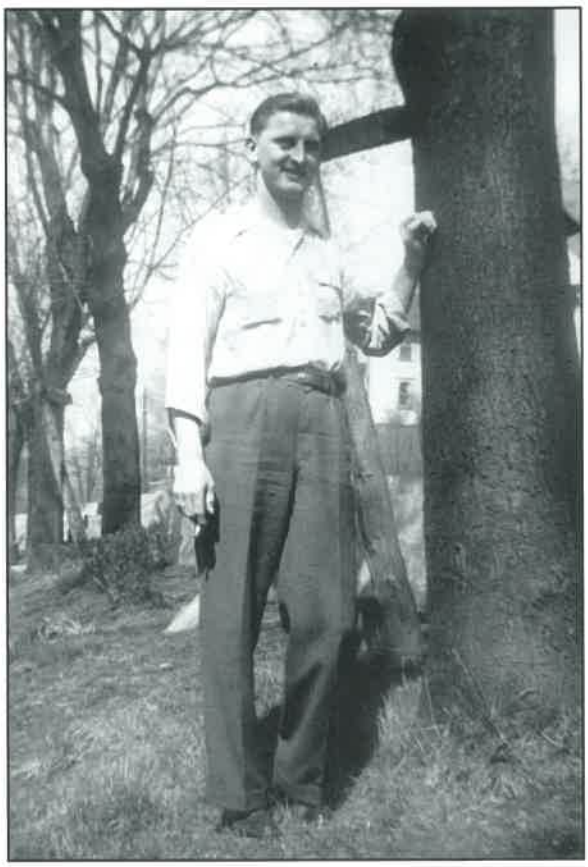
The Monongahela would, in regional terms, be considered to be a large river. His family lived on the west side of the river near a small, unincorporated place called Sugar Lane near Catawba, which is just north of Rivesville. Year-round, he would actually have to walk a mile-and-a-half to two miles through the woods, down to the river. [He] kept a small boat down there, and he'd row across the river and probably end up walking maybe [another] quarter of a mile just to get to the mines. And he did that year-round — summer, fall, winter, spring.

I can just imagine how that'd be in January and February, with high waters and incredible winds and cold. But he did do that. I've heard a lot of stories in that era about the coal miners. I guess there was nothing real unusual about my grandfather's life, compared to the way everybody was living at the time.

I grew up fairly isolated from what was going on in more urban-

Ben's ancestors were Polish on both sides. His mother's family is seen here in the 1930's. Ben's grandparents Paul and Suzanne Zukowsky are at the center, surrounded by their daughters. Standing at far left is Ann; next to Mrs. Zukowsky is Rose. In the front, at left, is Helen; Ben's mother Mary is at front right. Partially visible at the far right is Joe Zukowsky.

Ben's mother, above, Mary Louise Zukowsky, in about 1940. Ben's father, Tony Borda, is pictured below in the mid-1940's. The pair met at a polka party at the Paw Paw Inn, between Rivesville and Grant Town, in the late 1930's. They married in 1946 and raised two sons. The couple still live in their home near Rivesville.



type settings. Most of what I was focused upon was just working on the farm. You know, there's always work to be done there. Working in the hay fields was a very pleasant memory for me. Hard work, but there's no sleep that follows like after you've put in a day doing something like that. Helping feed all the livestock, working in the garden, keeping the lawns and fields mowed, that sort of thing. Just a good, simple, hard-working, clean life.

I think that fostered a real love for the outdoors. I don't know what the children who were growing up in the towns and cities were doing for entertainment, but all my time, when we didn't have chores to do, I was out in the woods. I amused myself with a lot of field guides — plants and animals. I spent most of my time keying out different kinds of plants, insects, birds, animals.

MK: As a young kid you did?

BB: Yeah, I sure did. I had most of the field guides when I was in grade school. I would get something like that for Christmas, get a *Peterson's Guide to Eastern North American Birds*, or something like that. That was very pleasant to me.

MK: Was there some sort of prevailing love of nature in your family?

BB: Not especially. I don't know of anyone else in my family that has as much of a love for that sort of thing. Wide variety of pursuits there. ...

My grandparents had a very large house with the gables and all sorts of unique and wonderful rooms, food pantries, and the old hob-nailed lights, and the big coal furnace in the basement that looked like an octopus with the vents going off everywhere. [They had a] partially unfinished basement, where it was always cool year-round, where they kept all the fruit jars and all that sort of thing. And the big porch that goes around the house. A lot of pleasant memories of my grandparents and my parents, cousins, neighbors, and friends sitting out on that porch in the evening.

My father, my grandfather before [he] got too old, [and] my uncles worked in the coal mines. Every weekend, they would gather at my grandfather's house and just relive all those mining experiences. The men always got together by themselves and "mined coal," while all of the women were in the dining room or the living room talking about, you know, other things. I don't remember any mining discussions coming from what the women were talking about. You know, they were interested in making quilts, canning, that sort of thing.

MK: Any old Polish songs?

BB: A lot of polka music. My grandfather used to sing a lot. They were half in Polish, half in English. I think they were his own versions. My dad used to listen to polka parties on the radio, Sunday afternoons, coming from Washington, Pennsylvania; or York, Pennsylvania. He really loved his Polish music.

If I happened to be walking by, he would always stop me and say, "Wait, hold on a second here. Listen to that. Who is that? You know who that is? Well, that's Little

Wally, or that's —." They all sounded the same to me. I couldn't tell one from the other. I could listen to a dozen different songs and think they were by the same band or sounded the same. But he always knew exactly who they were. He could tell, and he always wanted to know if I could tell who that was. Never forget that.

But at any rate, as I grew older and several of my relatives moved around a little bit, my grandparents got older. There just didn't seem to be as much of getting together at the old farm anymore on the weekends. The children got older and started moving in different directions. At some point as I was becoming a teenager, that sort of thing just wasn't happening anymore. I think [that was] largely due to my grandparents getting older and not being in good health, and a lot of my cousins moving off in other directions. About half of them were older than me, and they were already going off to school or going off to work somewhere else. That whole era just sort of came to an end.

But my parents still live in the same house. They sold the farm long ago, but they're still there, and I still see the farm all the time when I visit them several times a year. It still looks pretty much as it did 20 or 30 years ago.

MK: I always thought Rivesville was a very beautiful little place.

BB: I think in earlier times, it probably had been a beautiful little place. The population there seems to be highly dependent on, or in times past [had] been dependent on, coal mining. And with most of the mines up in that area being shut down, that's really impacted little towns like Rivesville.

I can remember growing up when there were huge trees that lined both sides of the river going into Rivesville, mostly sycamores, large sycamore trees. A lot of the kids, who were a little older than I, used to have big rope swings all over the place to swing off of, and jump in the river.

Ben Borda was born in Marion County in 1949. He is shown here at an early age with his parents, at their home near Smithville. Behind them is U.S. Route 19, north of Rivesville.

When I was in high school, junior high school, the Corps of Engineers built the high-lift dams on the Monongahela River. They built the dam below Rivesville. It's Opekiska. And Opekiska was, I think, completed right about 1967 or '68. That's when they cut all those magnificent trees down along the river there, because the navigation pool raised the river by several feet. That sort of changed the appearance of the approach from the south to Rivesville.

The Monongahela River figures mightily in the lives of those in and around Rivesville. These river banks were lined with large sycamore trees when Ben was growing up. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Ben Borda, at right, and younger brother Don discovered these impressive icicles growing off of their grandparents' porch in the mid-1950's.

MK: Is that the Pittsburgh District?

BB: Yes. Rivesville's in the Pittsburgh District.

Carrie Kline: What did people say when those sycamores were coming down?

BB: I don't have any recollection of public opinion as to what was going on there. I know, at the time, a new bridge was also developed going into Rivesville over Paw Paw Creek. The banks of the river where they took all these large trees out were, in turn, rip-rapped — stone slope protection. That gave the area a much more engineered, manicured, rigid appearance than the large trees and the natural banks. The old steel-trestle kind of bridges seem to be replaced more and more, these days, by just the level concrete, highway-type bridges.

I think people back then thought, "Hey, this is progress," you know. I don't think there was a negative public outcry. I think the mines were going full blast, everybody was working, everybody had a lot of money, and I think most people probably saw the new bridge and the new rip-rapped banks along the river as just another sign of progress. Don't really think they thought too much about the trees that had to be removed. That was progress.

And that appeased a lot of the local boaters and fishermen. A little town on the river like that would have a pretty fair boating and fishing public with that kind of resource — a big river right at your doorstep. There was enough space left for a boat launching — a fairly crude launching ramp and then a marina. So the townspeople, and the people of the neighboring towns that had boats or wanted boats, that really appealed to them. ...

I can remember swimming in that river when I was a junior in high school. I remember going down there in the summertime before my senior year. One day, after football practice, all the guys on the team decided we would pile into a few cars and head down [to] the river and jump in and cool off. And we did. I still remember what we smelled like when we came out of that river. We smelled like diesel fuel. The river's in better shape today than it was then.

Back then, we did a lot of fishing in the evenings, but catfish was really all that anyone was after. Very rarely did you catch anything else. There didn't seem to be nearly

Ben showed an early interest in nature and spent as much time as he could in the outdoors while growing up. He is shown here with his mother at "old Mr. Neeley's pond" in about 1959.

to pay the mark-up charged by a peddler in exchange for the convenience of buying necessities at their door.

Thomas' home was a small shanty in the Point Comfort section of Clarksburg, though he didn't spend much time there. He walked with his wares on his back through Harrison, Lewis, and Upshur counties, and parts of Wetzel County. He would often be out on the road for days at a time.

He sometimes exchanged goods for a warm meal or a night's lodging at a farmhouse. Most days, he ate sparingly, often only bread or a banana. He managed to save 50 cents a day — no small sum at the turn of the 20th century. My mother Helen, one of Thomas' daughters, recalls meeting a woman a few years ago from the Adamston area, who remembered buying goods from Thomas when he worked as a peddler. The woman, then nearly 100 years old, said that she still had the tapestry that she had bought from Mr. Michael.

Thomas initially used his savings to add to his supply of trade goods. Soon, he was able to buy a donkey to help carry goods. Now, with a lighter burden and an expanded selection, Thomas began going further into Wetzel County. He eventually bought a horse and wagon, as well.

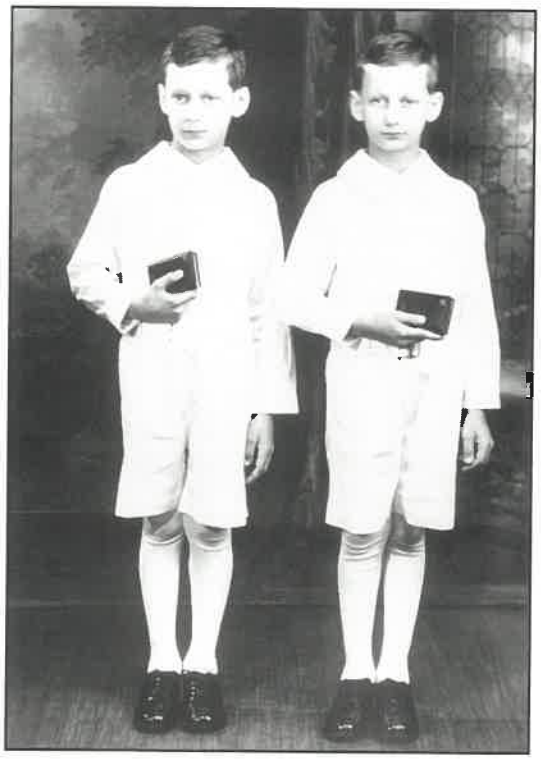
By 1910, the 34-year-old Thomas felt secure enough in his new home and had accumulated enough money to begin searching for a bride. He set his standards very high. One promising courtship with an attractive, red-headed American woman ended abruptly when she admitted that she had been "stepping out" with her previous gentleman friend.

The Michael family was growing during the early 1920's, when this picture of the Michael children was taken in Clarksburg. In the back row, from the left, are Joseph and George. In the front, from the left, are Mary and Louis.

Finally, like many Lebanese immigrants raised in the strict, old-country traditions, Thomas decided to return to his native village to select a bride. He and a friend set out together, both in search of Lebanese wives. They stopped first in New York City to visit friends. While in New York, a Lebanese friend told Thomas not to bother going all the way to Lebanon for a wife, since he knew of a young, Beirut-born woman living with her sister in New York. The young woman's name was Adele Heroui, and her sister was Fudwa Jalwan. Adele was employed as a garment worker at the

Sisters Anne, at left, and Helen posed for this studio portrait in 1939. Helen is the mother of our author, Mary Beth Stenger.

The Michael twins Anthony and Paul were born in 1928, the only two children of the family to have been born in a hospital. They are shown at their First Communion in about 1935.



The Michael family at 195 E. Pike Street in Clarksburg, in the late 1940's. Standing, from the left, are Joseph, Anne, mother Adele, Helen, and father Thomas; in the front, from the left, are Paul, Ann Michael (the wife of George, who was away in the service), Anthony, and Mary.

time. When Fudwa met Thomas, she tried to persuade him to remain in New York and meet Adele. "Why go to Beirut," she reasoned with him, "when I have a sister here who will make a great wife?"

After meeting Adele, Thomas must have agreed on her suitability, as they married in New York on May 12, 1910.

Like Thomas, Adele was a Maronite Catholic. Adele's family seems to have been much more affluent than Thomas' family, however. While in her early 20's, Adele spent several years in Paris, where she worked as a seamstress producing beautiful wedding gowns, and as a teacher. She spoke French and English, as well as her native Arabic. Her family was from the city of Beirut, while Thomas came from the countryside. Though the rural Saida region and the city of Beirut are both part of modern-day Lebanon, this was not always so — Thomas considered himself to be Lebanese, while Adele called herself Syrian.

The spelling of Adele's last name, like that of her husband, is uncertain. Spellings for my grandmother's name include Heroui, Hewewe, Heraoui, and El-Hrawy. Part of the confusion comes from the lack of written records. The only record that our family has documenting my grandparents' early years together is a beaded sampler, which my grandmother made to commemorate her marriage. It is in Arabic and had to be translated for us by a Lebanese friend. It reads, "Tanios (Thomas) Michael Chahine wedded Adele Salomon El-Hrawy, Friday, May 12, 1910." There is also an inscription, which reads, "Contemplate upon the universe and you will see the earth like an illusion, and every living spirit on it will perish and the glorious face of your God will remain." The translator told us that our grandmother carried the surname of the royal family; it has always been told in our family that Adele descended from royalty.

Unlike Thomas, Adele hadn't wanted to leave her homeland. When their mother died, Adele's sister Fudwa persuaded Adele to move to America with her and her young children. Fudwa's Lebanese husband, Mr. Jalwan, had died, leaving her a widow with three children. Fudwa later married a Mr. Mowish and moved to Parkersburg.

Thomas and Adele settled in Harrison County. They opened a store in the Kelly Hill section of Clarksburg. It was located in a green, two-story framed building. Adele worked alongside her husband, and the couple lived upstairs above the store.

Their first child, a girl, was stillborn. On November 30, 1912, a second child was born — a son named Joseph. Adele delivered the baby at home, as was the custom at the time. Their next child, George, was born October 15, 1914.

In 1916, my grandfather became a naturalized citizen of the United States. The certificate lists him as a subject of the Sultan of Turkey. I wonder how he felt about that.

During World War I, my grandfather wanted to fight for his new homeland. Thomas had avoided fighting for the Turks but now willingly presented himself at the Harrison County courthouse to volunteer to fight for America and her allies. But at 40 years of age, Thomas must have been considered too old. He never served in the U.S. forces, but his loyalty to his new country remained firm.

George announced that he wouldn't be bringing home any more girlfriends to meet his parents. The next time he brought a woman home, he had already married her.

The Michael family continued to grow and thrive. Two more children were born at the Kelly Hill store and residence — Mary Louise on March 21, 1917; and Louis on August 6, 1919.

Joseph, the eldest, still lives in Clarksburg. He often reminisced about working alongside his father in the Kelly Hill store. The store was located near the Phillips Sheet & Tin Plate Company. Many of the tin-plate workers bought their supplies from the Michaels. Young Joe would use his mother's Singer sewing machine to make white canvas pads, which he sold to the tin workers. The workers used these pads to pick up hot metal pieces at the factory.

Thomas would cash the mill workers' checks for them. The day before payday, he would go to the Union National Bank in Clarksburg and, on his signature alone, would borrow $5,000 cash for 24 hours. Thomas would use these funds to cash the paychecks then would repay his loan, plus the one-day interest on the funds.

Through hard work, long hours, frugality, and a remarkable talent as a salesman, Thomas managed to accumulate significant reserves. He began to venture into property investments. In 1920, he purchased a building in downtown Clarksburg for $35,000. Though he never opened his own store in the building — later called the Rex Heck building — the rental income from this and other real estate investments allowed Thomas to support and educate his growing family.

Thomas and Adele continued to add to their household. Anne Gertrude was born on May 22, 1924. Helen Cecilia, my mother, was born on September 24, 1925. Twins Anthony and Paul were born in St. Mary's Hospital in Clarksburg on March 31, 1928 — the last of the children to be born and the only ones not delivered at home. My mother remembers that Adele's life was in danger during the birth, which is why the twins were born in the hospital. My uncle Joe, then 16, remembers minding the store while his parents were at the hospital for the birth of the twins.

Like many immigrant families, the Michaels are very patriotic; all of the male children served in the U.S. military. Joseph Michael is pictured here in uniform, before a hike. Date unknown.

Thomas opened a second store in the Shinnston area in about 1933. Adele ran the Pike Street store, while Thomas and Louis walked to Shinnston every day to manage the store there. Somehow, Adele managed to care for her family of eight as she tended the store. She would work upstairs in the family home, then run downstairs to wait on a customer, all the while taking care of the younger children. Adele often had a child resting on her hip as she went about taking care of the store.

About six months later, Thomas remodeled the upstairs of the Shinnston store, rented the Clarksburg store to another shop owner, and moved the entire family to Shinnston. The family lived next door to one of Thomas' cousins. Each Lebanese family ran a store beneath their home. Thomas sold dry goods, and his cousin sold groceries. Thomas ran the Shinnston store for about a year before moving his family back to Clarksburg and returning to the Pike Street store.

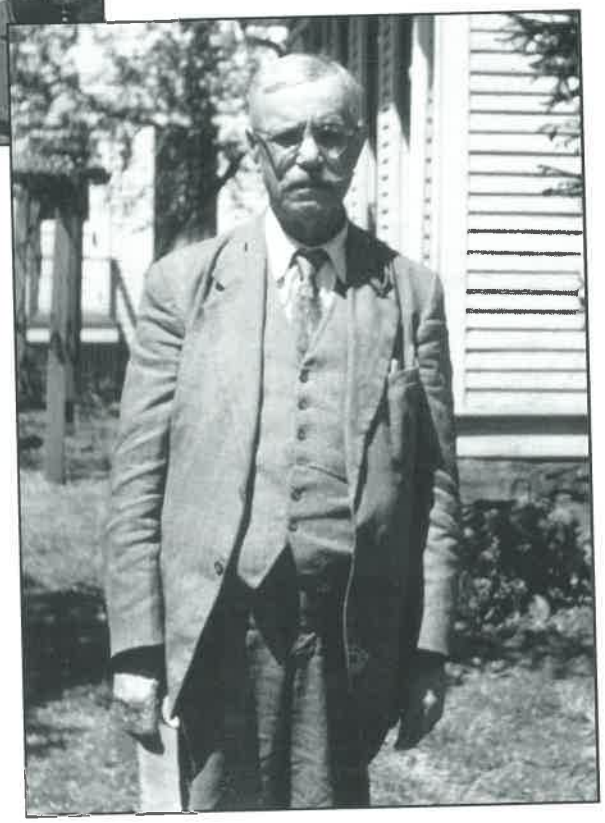
Grateful for his prosperity, Thomas gladly gave back to his community. During the years of the Great Depression, Thomas allowed an unemployed man and his family to remain in one of his rental properties rent-free for two years until the man found work. The man was a furniture maker. To show his appreciation, he made my grandfather a vanity dresser with a bench, which remain in our family today. Thomas also helped a bright, 18-year-old daughter of a widowed neighbor complete her education. The woman's husband had been killed working for the railroad. She had been left with a large family and was unable to afford to send her daughter to college. Thomas paid for the girl's education.

Thomas often donated store goods, such as canned goods, bedding, and clothes, to the Catholic priests for the needy in the community. There was no Maronite Catholic Church in town, so Thomas and Adele raised their family in the Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church of Clarksburg. In 1937, the family moved to a new home on Pike Street, one block from this church. That was the year when Thomas retired from store keeping and devoted himself to managing his real

estate investments.

Like many other children of immigrant families, the Michael children were raised with one foot in each of two cultures. When Joseph began his schooling, he spoke just a little English; he was fluent only in the Arabic language spoken in his home. After seeing Joseph experience a difficult transition to the school environment, Thomas and Adele decided that only English would be spoken in their home, so that the younger children could more easily adjust to school life. By adulthood, most of the Michael children could speak just a few words and phrases of Arabic, and none of them could read the Arabic language.

Above: Adele Michael at home, looking pleased, in her rocking chair. Date unknown.



Right: Thomas Michael in Clarksburg, in 1954, the year he died.

Thomas was a traditional Lebanese father and chose his children's careers, although the children didn't always follow his wishes. My mother Helen, for example, had wanted to become a teacher. Her parents were willing to pay for her to attend college, but only if she became a nurse, instead. She refused to study nursing. As a result, she never attended college.

Prospective spouses had to be brought before Thomas and Adele for their approval. My uncle Joe had one girlfriend whom his parents rejected simply because her slip was showing. To my grandparents, such a "slip" was a sign of immodesty.

However, these young Michael children were growing up in America, and, to them, the old ways were disappearing. George tired of his father's criticisms of his girlfriends and announced that he wouldn't be bringing home any more girlfriends to meet his parents. The next time he brought a woman home, he had already married her.

Despite his adherence to old-world traditions, Thomas' loyalty to his adopted country remained strong during World War II, as he encouraged his sons to join the service. All five of the Michael boys served in the United States armed forces; George retired from the service as a lieutenant colonel.

My grandparents never returned to their homeland, not even for a visit. My grandmother, known for her generous nature toward drifters who appeared at her door, would run off any beggars who had German accents in her attempts to be loyal to her new land during the war years. My grandfather studied American history in great detail and delighted in stumping his college-educated sons with questions about U.S. history, for which only he knew the answers. Thomas died on July 21, 1954; Adele lived until 1968.

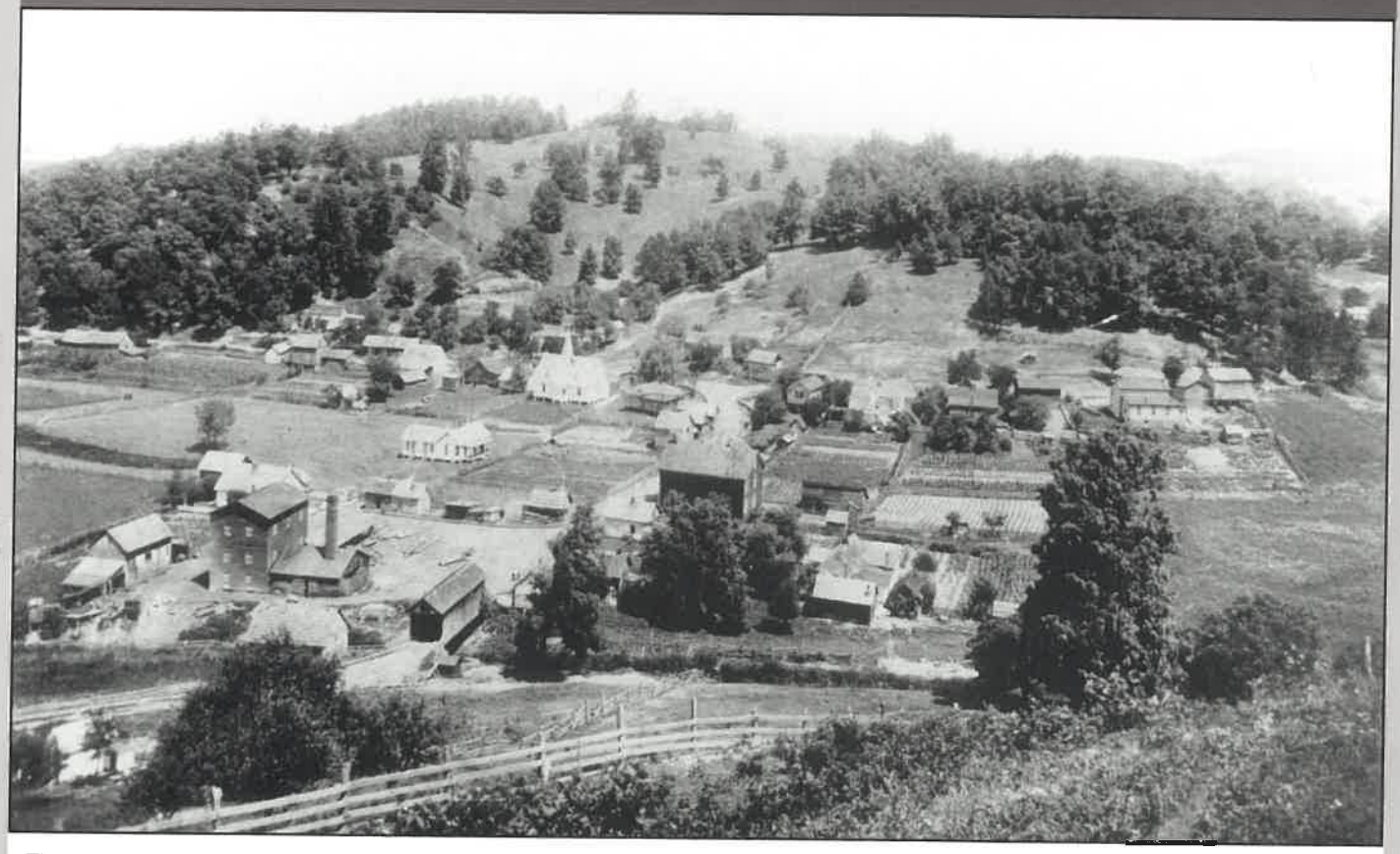
Like immigrants throughout our nation, the Syrian and Lebanese who settled in West Virginia embraced their new country. When I watch the turmoil and fighting in my grandparents' native land, I shudder to think that my family could have been embroiled in that conflict. A part of my heart weeps for any relatives of mine who might have remained in the Middle East instead of coming to this land of opportunity.

MARY BETH STENGER is a freelance writer originally from Clarksburg. She now lives in Lost Creek, where she and her family raise cattle, goats, sheep, and livestock dogs. She is also a certified public accountant and holds a degree in business from West Virginia University. Her work has been published in the *Clarksburg Exponent* and in *Dairy Goat Journal*. This is Mary Beth's first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Berlin

Boyhood Memories in Lewis County

By Maxson B. Collins



The Berlin community in Lewis County viewed from Laurel Lick Hill, in about 1900. Visible at lower left are gristmill, tannery, and covered bridge. At center is Myrtle Boram's store. Photograph courtesy of WVSA.

My father Dr. A.B. "Doc" Collins came to Berlin, Lewis County, in about 1908 to set up a practice. He had heard that there was no doctor there, so he established an office in the old post office building. He later built a two-room office nearby.

After due time, he married Ruby Jane Maxson, a local girl, and to this union I was born on May 14, 1910. I remember many things and places connected to my childhood years. There was the one-room school. Eventually, a three-room school was built, which I attended. It housed grades one through junior high.

The farmers' cooperative store was the largest institution in the community. The Farmers Store, as it was known, was supplied by wholesalers in Clarksburg. Orders came by railroad to Jane Lew and were delivered to the store at Berlin by horse-drawn wagon.

Doctor A.B. "Doc" Collins on a house call, date unknown.

Most foods that did not require refrigeration were sold there. Sometimes, there would be a stalk of bananas. There was always a very good supply of hardware, including lamp oil, which was used for lighting those homes that did not have natural gas. When we moved from Berlin in 1926, electricity still had not arrived, hence the need for lamp oil.

There was a good selection of piece goods and other findings for the ladies in the Farmers Store. There was a well-filled case of candy and several kinds of smoking and chewing tobacco. A tobacco cutter was attached to the counter. In the warehouse was a barrel of kerosene, on the floor was a bundle of bamboo fishing poles, and on a rack was a variety of buggy whips. The store bought chickens, eggs, and butter from local farmers. In the fall, the store bought several hundred pounds of local chestnuts and hickory nuts to be shipped to the city, along with several cases of eggs.

Myrtle Boram was the manager and only clerk. If one wanted school supplies, fish hooks, buttons, or salt fish, Myrtle had them. On the second floor of the Farmers Store was a large hall used by the Knights of Pythias Lodge and the Odd Fellows for meetings and functions.

Later, John Morrison opened a small store, and Tom Allman also put up a store nearby. Myrtle Boram kept a ladies' hat shop, which she opened by appointment, if someone wanted a new Easter bonnet.

Clyde "Blinker" Morrison opened a barbershop beside the store. In one corner, he repaired and resoled shoes. Later, a section was partitioned off to sell hand-packed ice cream. This was a loafing place almost every evening. In the lane between the store and barbershop was a place to pitch horseshoes. My father and I played as partners, and we became rather proficient.

In the lane between the store and barbershop was a place to pitch horseshoes. My father and I played as partners, and we became rather proficient.

Uncle John Maxson had a blacksmith shop. I enjoyed watching him shoe horses. I also enjoyed turning the blower for the forge and playing with his tools. If I needed my wagon repaired, needed a screw or bolt, or needed something made, Uncle John came through.

Across the road, Pierre Swisher had an automobile garage. He repaired all makes of cars. In front of our home was a large gristmill, which ground all kinds of grain. The miller also sold flour and feed. Attached to the gristmill was a sawmill. A large gas engine powered both mills. In the lot in front of the

The farmers' cooperative store in Berlin, shown here in 1910, was operated by Myrtle Boram for many years. It served the community as a general store, gathering place, and meeting hall. Photograph courtesy of WVSA.

mill were large stacks of logs, waiting to be sawed. There was usually a big heap of slabs, also, that were free to be taken.

Several oil and gas wells were producing in this area, and a gas compression station was built about three miles down Hackers Creek. [See "Before the 18-Wheelers," by Paul Moss; Spring 1998.] Several company houses were built to house the families of the workmen. Just across the creek was a gasoline recovery plant.

My father kept two horses. They were named "Dick" and "Ned," and they were used to make house calls. Sometimes, they were ridden or pulled a buggy. If there was a good snow, a sleigh was used. I accompanied Dad frequently on his calls. On one occasion, rain and darkness overtook us. Lightning apparently blinded the horse, and we ran over the bank. The buggy nearly overturned and threw us out. Not being hurt, Dad was able to unhitch the horse. We walked to the next farmhouse, where we secured a buggy and continued home. This is only one of many events in the "horse-and-buggy days" that I recall.

Author Maxson B. Collins, age 8, dressed for Sunday school.

The automobile era arrived, and one of the first I was able to see close at hand was a Reo roadster. The driver had brought four bushels of potatoes to help pay his doctor bill. Other folks paid in hams, slabs of bacon, apples, chickens, and other farm products. Dad's first car was a Model T Ford roadster. Like most boys, I was car crazy. Before long, I was driving the Model T on many calls. Eventually, the top wore out and was discarded. After that, if it rained, we wore slicker raincoats and hats.

The Model T Ford had one bad feature. Going uphill for any distance, it would run out of gas. The gas tank was located under the seat, and the gas would not flow up to the motor. On one occasion, we were going from Hackers Creek to Jesse Run when the engine failed. Taking the cushion off of the seat, I removed the gas cap and blew with

John Maxson, our author's uncle, operated a blacksmith shop adjacent to the Swisher home. The blacksmith shop is at left in this undated photograph, courtesy of WVSA.

A.P. Swisher sold gas and repaired all makes of automobiles at this service station in Berlin, shown here in 1937. This impressive wrecker appears to have its gas tank mounted in the cab of the vehicle. Photographs courtesy of WVSA.

all my pressure into the tank, forcing the gas to fill the carburetor. This process took us about 10 yards. We repeated this action several times and finally conquered the hill. It wasn't long before we had a vacuum tank installed, which prevented further trouble.

One time, I was along on a house call some distance from home. The housewife insisted that we stay for dinner, which she had prepared for Thanksgiving. The table groaned from the many delicious country foods it held. The food also attracted many flies, so the housewife continually kept the flies off the food using a broomstick, with strips of paper attached, as a fan.

Besides taking care of his practice, Dad had other interests, as well. One was baseball. He had played on a team when he attended the University of Louisville, and he soon organized a Berlin community ball team, which met with success. Doc also umpired many games.

Another of Doc's interests was local history. He consulted several history books and other sources and compiled a *History of Berlin Community*, which is on file with the West Virginia University Agricultural Extension office.

Realizing the area needed better roads, Doc became influential in getting a "Better Roads" bond issue passed. As a result, a hard road was built from Berlin to the county seat at Weston. Soon, other sections of the county received new roads, as well.

The Berlin Methodist Presbyterian Church was an important part of the community. I attended this church and was baptized there. My aunt Virginia Maxson was a longtime pianist, and another aunt, Madge Maxson, taught Sunday school. When word was received of the signing of the armistice at the end of World War I, the church bell tolled, and a large crowed gathered. A big bonfire was built in the parking lot across the road from the church.

Davy Ross was our mail carrier. The post office had been removed, and the mail was delivered by RFD. Davy came on a horse-drawn, two-wheeled sulky. He was a jolly sort, and we enjoyed talking to him and getting news from other areas.

Another man fondly remembered was J.S. Mohart, a drug drummer (or salesman), who came by horse at regular intervals to get Dad's orders for medications. My father dispensed drugs to his patients free with house calls, and at minimum prices from his office. Mr. Mohart always had a small present for me when he came to call.

Blaine Ferguson was the only black man I had ever seen. He lived with the Bonnett family and was available to help anyone who

Doc Collins, standing, was an avid baseball fan. He coached this team in Berlin during the early 1920's. Photograph courtesy of WVSA.

needed an odd job done. He was greatly liked and respected by the community.

My father occasionally visited a sick woman who lived near the head of Hackers Creek. She was designated by us children as "Mrs. Dirty Woman." In a room of her house next to the kitchen, she kept two shoats (or young hogs), along with the accompanying filth. She always paid her doctor's bills, however. After her death, the house burned. I was told that many silver and gold coins were found in the ashes.

The first radio I ever saw or heard was owned by Aunt Becky Starcher. Along with some friends, we went up to her home to see and hear the radio. As I remember, the only station we heard was KDKA in Pittsburgh. To hear it, we had to wear headphones.

After I finished junior high, we moved to Monongalia County, where I entered Morgantown High School. Dad soon established a practice in Blacksville. Later, he moved to Morgantown and continued to practice until his retirement. He died March 12, 1959, at the age of 79.

In the fall of 1998, I visited Berlin. I was surprised to see nothing but vacant houses in the village. A lady came out of the only house that seemed to be occupied. She could not answer any of my questions and knew nothing about the early community.

The blacksmith shop was permanently closed, as was the auto repair shop. John Morrison's store was gone. Tom Allman's store was closed. Proceeding down the road, I found that the Farmers Store building was completely gone, as were the barbershop and old post office. The house where I was born was still there, but across the road, the log lot was cleared. The gristmill and the sawmill were both gone. The pumping station was gone. Even the covered bridge across Hackers Creek was gone.

Most everything there was gone, gone, gone, except my boyhood memories.

MAXSON B. COLLINS was born in Berlin in 1910. After attending Fairmont College, Mr. Collins received a master's degree in elementary supervision from West Virginia University. He worked 40 years as a high school principal at schools in the Morgantown area, retiring in the early 1970's. This is his first published article.

Author Maxson B. Collins, age 92, enjoys some good reading at his home in Oakland, Maryland.

Edie Crider, age 86, sits looking at traffic on Route 55 from the window of her store, located near the summit of South Branch Mountain. The westbound traffic has come from the hills and curves of central Hardy County, up a long grade. At the store, the 18-wheelers gear down, preparing for a steep, two-mile descent to the creek where the Apostolic church sits beside an old building that once harbored Fitzwater's store. From there, the road ascends back up South Branch Mountain, through woods large enough to harbor bear. From the very start, Edie and her husband Irvin simply called the ridge "the mountain."

Crider's Store

Text and photographs by Bob Whitcomb

Edie doesn't tend store any more. Her eyes have failed, and she is no longer able to handle the day-to-day transactions. But the thousands of customers who have come into the store over the past 55 years remember her routine. When they took their purchases to the counter, Edie would take a small notepad and meticulously record the price of each item, subtotaling as she went, until she reached the final total. Today, Edie answers questions in the crisp, no-nonsense manner of a person who is accustomed to totaling correctly. Her memory is sharp, and she gives answers as concise as her grocery tallies.

It was 1945 when Edie and Irvin Crider moved to the store location from their farm in eastern Hardy County, bringing his lumber business with them. "We were in the lumber business when we moved here," Edie explains. "You brought your logs in, and Irvin sawed 'em. He would likely move his sawmill over here if this man wanted that done, and if this other man wanted something done, he'd move the sawmill there."

The early history of the store is uncertain. The neighbors told Edie and Irvin that the original store and house had been moved, and that a new store had been built in front of it in 1918 or '19. Paperwork shows that a gas station began to operate there in 1929. In the '40's, Raymond Orndorff leased the store from John Burch, the building's owner in the early '40's; Burch operated it for several years until he sold it to the Criders. Although they took immediate possession of the building and the accompanying 110 acres, the Criders were prohibited by contract from running a store there until the end of 1946, allowing Orndorff enough time to build another grocery store and gas station right across the road. Not only did Orndorff put the store directly across from Crider's, he had another one two miles down the road to the east. He lived in the back of that store. I asked Edie how he could run two stores. "He had three!" she says. "He had one over at Moorefield, too. He didn't want anybody else to have 'em, so he wanted to try to [run them]." Crider's store opened its doors to customers on January 1, 1947.

Edie answers questions in the crisp, no-nonsense manner of a person who is accustomed to totaling correctly.

Many roads in West Virginia — even major ones — were not paved 50 or 60 years ago. I asked Edie if she remembers them paving Route 55. "You mean hard capped?" she responds. "Well, it wasn't hard capped in '38, and when we moved

section of the new highway east of the store is already open. The entire stretch from Moorefield to Baker is scheduled for completion in the near future.

At present, Corridor H is providing a boom for the store. At noon, road workers come in to buy a sandwich and a can of pop. A line forms at the counter. Sharon busily makes sandwiches. In Edie's early days, she simply cut bologna and cheese and put it on a little paper, and the customers would eat it with crackers. Today, Sharon makes monster sandwiches for hungry men — huge, thick slices of bologna and cheese on white bread — "country bread," as she calls it. Then, the workers sit and eat, polishing the old bench by the pot-bellied stove. Edie sits in her easy chair beside the window. A neighbor, who has time to combine shopping and chatting, comes just to chat. For a short time, the store is a gathering place again — people chatting about their days, talking about what has happened and what might happen. But then, the workers leave to remount their bulldozers and proceed with their work on a highway that could possibly spell the end for Crider's store.

Signs in the front of the store are the same ones that have been there for years — "Game Checking Station," "Valvoline," "Valley Trader Sold Here." Now, beside them, is another. It simply states, "For Sale."

Buck talks calmly about the changes and why the store is up for sale. It isn't just Corridor H, he says. Every year, another company stops delivering. The day before I talked with Buck was the last day that bread would be delivered. Buck already knows what that means — a trip to Moorefield to try to find some bread and higher bread prices at the cash register. The same thing happened to the meat delivery. Now Buck has to drive to Mt. Jackson, Virginia, to pick up the meat. Those deliveries stopped on the mountain when the driver realized that he was losing $35 on each trip.

The prospects for the store are uncertain. Sharon believes that its days are nearly over. Edie is not hopeful for the future of business at the North River Road interchange. Buck believes that some entrepreneur may open a new business there — maybe even a truck stop with a diesel repair and tire business — pointing out that the interchange will be the most convenient stop along the corridor in eastern West Virginia. Whatever happens, old Route 55 will remain intact, at least to the extent that the farmers and the poultry operations can import feed and export their products.

Buck and Sharon have another place all ready for themselves to move into, if and when they finally sell the store. What will Edie do? "Well, it's theirs," she says. "There ain't nothing that I can do. I guess other people have moved, and I guess I can live, too, if they sell it."

Looking back on it all — the grueling hours on the farm, raising eight children, and 50 years of 100-hour weeks at the store without reprieve — Edie is satisfied. "I've always liked it," she says. "That's what I wanted to do when I was a girl — buy myself a place and work in a store. And that fell my lot in 1947. I don't know if there was much fun about it, but we worked it, and we made a livin'. That's the way it was."

Satisfied, Edie Crider smiles and welcomes customers.

There is another reason that country stores like Crider's are disappearing. People are apparently no longer willing to be tied to a business for the long hours necessary to keep the stores open. For potential replacement rural shop keepers, here is a job description, according to Edie. "It was soon as we got up in the morning until we went to bed," she says. "Just like now. We'd get up at 6:00. We opened up the store when we'd get up. It was open, if there was anybody to come in. [Even] if nobody'd come till 7:00, it would be open when they got here. It was no use to set back in there and keep the door locked, that was my thought. We kept it open until we went to bed. Just like now."

BOB WHITCOMB is a retired microbial ecologist from the United States Department of Agriculture. He and his wife Judith divide their time between their homes in Randolph County and rural Arizona, where they collect oral histories and folk poetry. They have compiled two books, the latest titled *Singin' in the Hills* about musicians Bill and Hazel Westfall. Bob's most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Summer 2001 issue.

Gravedigger Dallas Dunn

Interview by Amber Griffith
Photographs by Michael Keller

Dallas Dunn is a West Virginia gravedigger. He carries on an occupation that has been passed down to him through his family. The son of Charles Leo and Edith Dunn, Dallas grew up in Cross Lanes, Kanawha County. I interviewed him recently at his home in Nitro, on the deck by his swimming pool on a nice, fall evening. He spoke freely of his occupation as a gravedigger and all that it entails. —Amber Griffith

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Amber Griffith: So, you are a gravedigger. How long have you been doing this?

Dallas Dunn: Well, I am 47 years old and have been doing this for [more than] 30 years. I got started with my dad when I was 10. I would go with my dad on weekends and whenever I got the chance to go. My dad was a gravedigger for about 40 years. His dad, my grandfather Charles Lee Dunn, was also a gravedigger.

My dad and I would drive all over the state, mostly in the country at old country cemeteries. When families had a death, the funeral director would call my dad to dig the grave, because in certain areas they didn't have anyone to dig the graves. Sometimes, the families would dig the graves themselves, and we would take a vault and place it in the grave, and the families would cover them up.

AG: Gravedigging was something that was passed down to you?

DD: Yes. My dad started it as a side job, and then we got busier and began to build a reputation. People began to call us when there was a death in their family, and we would go dig the grave. We traveled all over West Virginia. It didn't matter whether it was winter, summer, day, or night.

AG: What are some of the things you like about your job?

DD: I like being outside, the physical work, and I like all the people you meet. I like the old country atmosphere. You meet somebody, and you remember them, and they remember you. You spend a lot of time talking with older people who used to do what I do.

AG: Do you [usually] dig in church cemeteries?

DD: A lot of them are church cemeteries, and a lot of them are old family cemeteries. I have even started family cemeteries where people have died and wanted to be buried on their own property. I've done that several times in the last year.

AG: And what are some of the dislikes?

DD: The hours are bad. If somebody calls you, you have to go. As a kid growing up, we would go and dig on Christmas Day even. [One time], after we had Christmas dinner, my dad and I drove all the way on the other side of Clendenin to dig a grave. I've missed holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, and funerals for my own family and friends, because a grave needed to be dug before the funeral the next day. It's not something you can put off until later. You have to do it right then.

5. A ground cloth is draped over the sides of the grave, the frame, and the surrounding area. Then, a casket lowering device is placed directly over the grave, as shown here. This device will hold the coffin during the graveside service and then is used to carefully lower it into the ground.

6. In addition to digging the grave, Dallas provides the canopy, folding chairs, and other items essential for the graveside service.

7. After the coffin has been set on the base, the upper portion of the burial vault, or dome, is lowered into the grave, as shown here. Once in position, the dome locks onto the base, creating a water-tight seal that can withstand up to 5,000 pounds of pressure.

8. Dallas uses a shovel to place dirt around the burial vault, then uses the Terramite to fill in the remainder of the grave. Finally, he decorates the mound with flower arrangements from the funeral parlor.

continued from page 41
point. That's why churches were put up on the hill, because when they would ring the bell, people could hear it better because the sound traveled better.

AG: What makes this mountainous area so different to dig in than other states?

DD: West Virginia is a pretty rural area. You've still got a lot of things done the way they used to be. Except for the big cemeteries, who are owned by outside companies who charge an outrageous amount to bury someone. These perpetual-care cemeteries where the grass is always mowed will charge four times as much as burying someone in a country cemetery. I get $350 to dig a grave, where a big commercially owned cemetery will charge you about $1,000. The younger generation doesn't want to do the upkeep to the family cemeteries. They would rather just pay someone to do it. The price of a funeral today is astronomically high. It used to cost, back in the '20's, about five to eight dollars. Now the average funeral cost is about $6,000 to $8,000. If you go cheap, it's still about $4,000.

AG: How long does it take to dig a grave?

I've had the grave fill up with water, dug through trees, dug in unmarked graves and had to fill them and go somewhere else. I've dug in snow so bad that by the time you get it dug, it's filling up with snow.

DD: By hand, if you have two pretty good-sized guys, you can dig a grave in about three to four hours. That is, if you don't hit any rock. If you hit rock, you may be three to four days digging. I've had graves that have taken three or four days to dig, because I've had to take a bar, a sledgehammer, and a pick to pound the rock out of the ground. Now we are a little more commercialized. We have gravedigging machines that dig just the right width and length. Now embalming and steel vaults allow us not to have to dig as deep, because we can protect the coffin better, and the embalming can prevent bacteria from spreading.

I go all over the state, depending on where the families' cemeteries are.

AG: What about all of the country cemeteries, where are these?

DD: A lot of the cemeteries, you have to walk to. West Virginia's territory is so rough, in places, that a lot of times it takes a four-wheel drive with chains on it. I've even had a lot of instances where I was pulled up a hill with horses and a buggy, with a sled to pull the equipment. There are several places in Clay County and Jackson County where the cemeteries are so far back on a ridge, there is just a little path to them. When we get to the bottom of the hill, we just take a sled and load up our equipment, and a guy will take a team of horses and pull us up the hill. I've had bulldozers pull me up a hill in the snow.

Something you might want to know is that most graves face east. Most older cemeteries are on a hill facing east toward the sunrise. They used to do this so the person would always be facing the sunrise.

It's picked up such pace now, though. It used to be that the funeral director would have three days, or so, before [the bodies] had to be buried. Back in the old days, they took the bodies to the houses. The women would wash and dress them, and they would have a wake in the home. Afterwards, they would have a big dinner, almost like a celebration. Today when someone dies, you may only have a few hours for visitation, and then the funeral is the next day.

AG: What about the weather, when it's winter and snowing hard?

DD: You go out all the time. Whether it's snowing and 20 degrees below zero, you still have to go. I've only had one time, in 1978 when we had a big snow, that a funeral was canceled because the weather was so bad. I had several funerals canceled that week. Most of the time, we go whether it's raining, snowing, sleeting, or 90 degrees. When everyone else is inside because it's so cold, we're out there. It's been so cold before that I've had icicles hanging off of my beard.

AG: Do you ever get a week, or so, with nothing to dig?

DD: Not very often, because when one funeral director is not busy, the other one is. I've built a reputation of somebody dependable. They know when they call me, I'm going to be there to get the job done. Families have enough to go through, and having a grave ready for a funeral is the most important thing. I've dug and had the grave fill up with water, dug through trees, dug in unmarked graves and had to fill them and go somewhere else. I've even dug in snow so bad that by the time you get it dug, it's filling up with snow. I've dug graves where the ground was so frozen that I had to take a pick to break the ground.

AG: What about the future? What does it hold for the gravedigger?

DD: Gravedigging has become a money-making market, just like everything else. These out-of-state companies have bought the funeral homes, and they have their own men to dig the graves. It has become a big, commercialized, money-making market. The big companies are buying up everything.

Stone

Left: These early to mid-19th century stones steadfastly stand guard in the misty weather of an early morning in the old Green Hill Cemetery at Union, Monroe County. These markers are masterpieces of early American folk-art design. All photographs by Gerald Milnes, courtesy of the Augusta Collection, Booth Library, Davis & Elkins College.

Right: The unidentified maker of this intricately carved but deteriorating stone left a good representation of work commonly found in the lower Greenbrier Valley. The carver was probably of German ethnicity. Dating from the first half of the 19th century, this and other stones with German folk carving depict natural motifs such as flowers, hearts, sunbursts, birds, and — in this case — a tree-of-life image.

loved ones, spiritual beliefs, or faith in earthly life's reward. These are reflected through specific calendar dates, inscriptions, and traditional cultural symbols that have emerged through time.

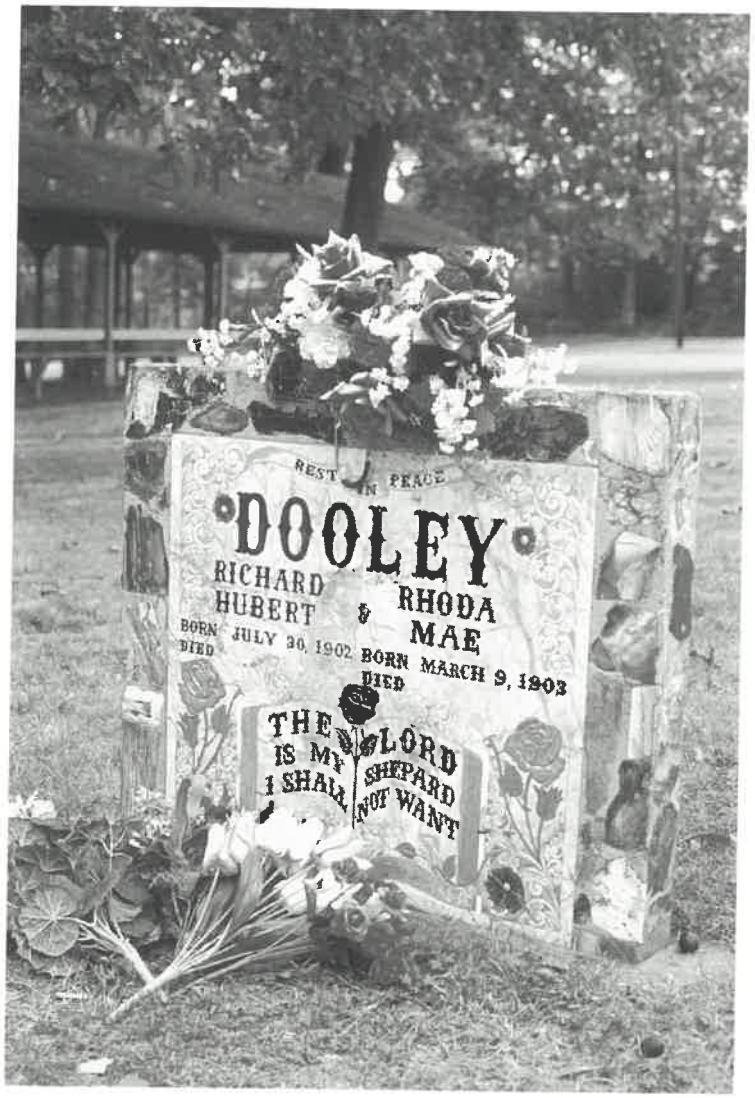
Regional stone carvers have always sought to create markers that symbolize the values of their clients. In West Virginia, there exist beautifully carved stones dating from just after the cessation of frontier dangers, with motifs that might reflect the carvers' English, German, or Scots-Irish ethnicity. In many cases, these markers can be found alongside monuments dating from the late 19th century, characterized by their symbolic and ornate design.

Even among modern 20th century marble and granite monuments, one will see graphic depictions of tractors, musical instruments, chainsaws, or other symbols of the deceased's talent or occupation. One can also find recently made concrete markers, created and decorated to commemorate the unmarked burial places of departed ancestors.

Beginning in the early 19th century, the willow became the most popular American symbol on grave markers. It is often depicted with an urn, one of many neo-classical symbols that became popular in the decorative arts at that time. The sorrowful symbol of the weeping willow turns up in traditional music; the old-time song "Bury Me Beneath the Willow" remains a favorite among rural country musicians.

This "winged hourglass" marks the grave of Rebeckah Harness, 1765-1824, at the old Olivet Cemetery in Hardy County. Winged figures — commonly represented in New England tradition as "soul faces" in death skulls, angels, and cherubs — symbolize the departure of the soul. In this rare motif, the hourglass clearly represents the limited time of the deceased's life on earth, departing, by wings, to eternity.

Wooden markers will not stand the test of time, but they provide a memorial that marks a grave until such time as a more permanent marker can be placed. In some instances, it may take several generations before a permanent one is erected. This wooden marker was photographed at the Holly Grove Cemetery on Paint Creek, Kanawha County.



This unusual composite stone was made in 1986 by Harold Dooley of Mount Nebo. While in California, Harold collected some exotic rocks and other materials and determined to construct a grave marker for his parents out of these items. From California, Harold brought the headstone back home to West Virginia where it was engraved by his nephew Herbert Dooley and placed in a church cemetery. Harold's father Richard Hubert Dooley passed away in 1990, Rhoda Mae Dooley in 1991, although the stone has not yet been engraved to reflect these dates. This photograph was taken in 2002 at the Hickory Grove Church cemetery in Mount Nebo, Nicholas County.

This recent homemade grave marker utilizes the Christian symbol of the cross in its overall shape. Marbles are used as decoration, providing a "make-do" solution for distinguishing the marker with objects that are easily obtained, weatherproof, and colorful. This marker, and practically every grave marker in older cemeteries in West Virginia, faces east — the direction from which many Christians believe the resurrection will come.

Tom Cole of Gauley Bridge prepares these memorials for the unmarked graves of his ancestors, located at a small family plot. The urge to permanently mark such graves is strong in West Virginia, where both a firm sense of place and family ties contribute to the practice.

GERALD MILNES is folk arts coordinator for the Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College at Elkins. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Winter 2000 issue.

Legendary country music star Hank Williams was found dead in Oak Hill, Fayette County, on January 1, 1953. This publicity photograph of Williams is courtesy of Charleston Newspapers, date unknown.

Questions about the incident, such as what time he had died, how he had died, what became of his hat, and exactly what Oak Hill should do now with the dubious distinction of being the "last stop of Hank's final journey," still elicit lively debate, 50 years later.

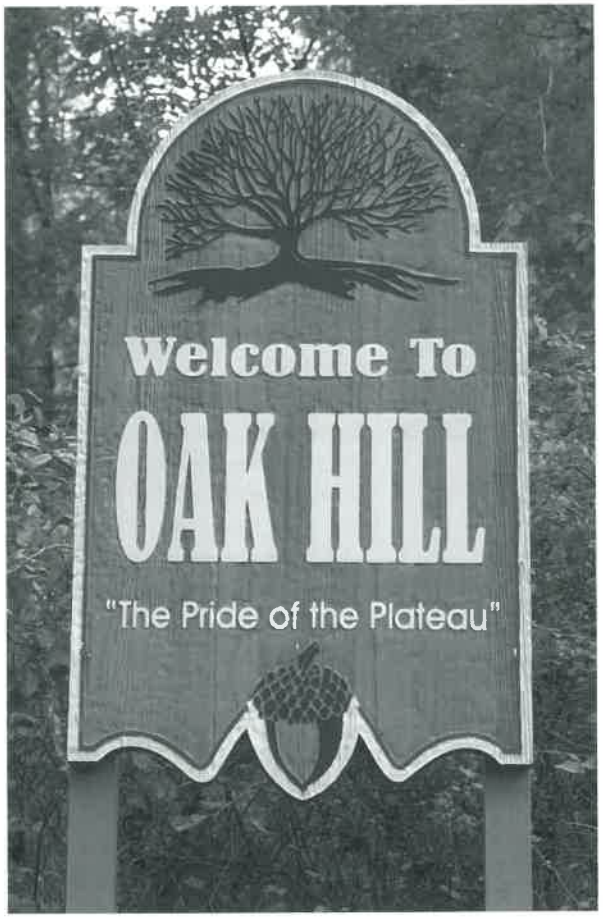
Hiram "Hank" Williams was born near Georgiana, Alabama, on September 17, 1923. Referred to by some as the "Hillbilly Shakespeare," he had a brief but phenomenally successful career, recording 130 songs, including 11 number-one hits. These included "Lovesick Blues," "Why Don't You Love Me?" "Hey, Good Lookin'," "Your Cheatin' Heart," and many others. Williams had been the most popular act on the "Grand Ole Opry" for three years, until he was fired in August 1952 for being unreliable — one side effect of his ongoing problem with alcohol. While his musical style may not have been to everyone's taste, his emotional, deeply personal songs delivered in a trademark hillbilly twang have proven to be timeless.

Hank Williams and his music are particularly revered in West Virginia. While he made few live appearances in the state during his four-year performing career, his popular recordings and radio broadcasts secured him a strong West Virginia audience, both during his lifetime and in the years following his death.

In Oak Hill, feelings about Hank Williams are mixed. Some residents have been deeply moved by what occurred here on January 1, 1953, to the point of erecting a monument and lobbying for the construction of a local museum in Williams' honor. Others seem anxious to forget their community's brush with the troubled young musician, while still others remain ambivalent or uninformed about this captivating chapter of Oak Hill history.

Undertaker Joe Tyree, retired police officer Howard Janney, and automobile dealer Ike Brown were all in Oak Hill on that fateful morning, and each played an active role in the events that took place here. Howard Janney was one of the responding police officers, Joe Tyree was the funeral director who took care of the body, and Ike Brown took part in the coroner's inquest. Young men just doing their jobs, they could never have imagined that their phones would still be ringing 50 years later, as fans, journalists, and the just-plain-curious continue to call. Fortunately, these are gracious men who have clear memories and share a down-to-earth perspective about the story and their places in it. They recount the events of that day simply, without sensationalism, speculation, or drama of any kind.

Unraveling the tale is no easy task. Numerous biographies and



MICHAEL KELLER

articles have been written over the years, chronicling the events leading up to Williams' death; no two accounts are in complete agreement. Briefly put, Hank Williams, in declining health and struggling to rebuild a faltering performing career, was booked to play four shows in two days: two shows in West Virginia at the Charleston Municipal Auditorium on the evening of Wednesday, December 31, 1952; and two shows in Canton, Ohio, on the afternoon and evening of Thursday, January 1, 1953. He left his home in Montgomery, Alabama, on Tuesday, December 30, in a Cadillac driven by 17-year-old Charles Carr, the son of a local businessman.

The pair encountered repeated delays as they headed north toward Charleston. They arrived in Knoxville, Tennessee, shortly before noon on Wednesday. Realizing that they were running behind schedule, they decided to catch a plane the rest of the way to Charleston. Their plane took off from Knoxville about three hours later, but it was unable to land at the Charleston airport because of fog. It returned to Knoxville. From there, Charles Carr phoned A.V. Bamford, the promoter of the concerts, reaching him at the Municipal Auditorium in Charleston at about 6:00 p.m. They agreed that, due to the distance and driving conditions, Hank would be unable to make either of the Charleston shows. Bamford instructed Carr to make sure he got Williams to Canton in time for the 3:00 p.m. matinee performance the following afternoon.

Hank Williams and Charles Carr left Knoxville at about 10:45 that evening, continuing north and east along the same route that they had plotted earlier, taking them through Blaine, Rutledge, and Bristol, Tennessee; Bristol, Virginia; Bluefield, Virginia; and into Bluefield, West Virginia, where they made a stop at around four in the morning. There, they reportedly picked up relief driver Don Surface at a local taxi cab stand. Staying on U.S. Route 19, they drove through southern West Virginia in the early hours of January 1, passing through the towns of Princeton, Spanishburg, Camp Creek, Flat Top, Beckley, and Mount Hope.

Sometime around 6:30 a.m., Williams' flashy Cadillac wheeled into the Skyline Drive-In, a simple, cinder-block restaurant located in Hilltop, a few miles south of Oak Hill. After stretching his legs and using the rest room, Charles Carr remembers going to check on Williams, who was reclining in the backseat and had been dozing fitfully for most of the journey. Carr is now 67 years old and still lives in Montgomery, Alabama. As he recalls, "I looked in

Hank Williams Found Dead in Back Seat of Car In Fayette County

OAK HILL, W. Va. (AP)—Hillbilly singer and composer Hank Williams died today while traveling through West Virginia en route to Canton, O., for a personal appearance.

Charles Carr, chauffeur for the radio and recording star, said the 37-year-old Williams became unconscious in his automobile near here. He was dead on arrival at an Oak Hill hospital. Cause of death was not immediately determined.

Williams, a Montgomery, Ala., resident, had been scheduled to make a personal appearance in Charleston, last night. However, the plane on which he was traveling returned to Knoxville, Tenn., after bad weather prevented a landing at Charleston.

State Trooper G. R. Lilly said Carr related that he and Williams then set out to drive by automobile to Canton. Williams was brought to the hospital here about 7 a. m. today.

his life, and was employed as the singer's chauffeur last Tuesday.

He said his employer had been in ill health for some time. After his plane returned to Knoxville last night, and the singer planned to drive through for his 3 p.m. performance today, his personal physician administered two shots, designed to allow Williams to sleep en route.

Carr said a bed was made up in the back seat of Williams's Cadillac convertible and the singer retired as soon as the trip began. He wore his cowboy attire.

After traveling all night another driver, Donald Surface was picked up in Bluefield at 5:30 a.m. today. Carr said he slept until the car neared Beckley. After they had traveled through Beckley en route to Mt. Hope, the chauffeur said he felt Williams and discovered he was cold and stiff." He was pronounced dead on arrival at 7 a.m. at the Oak Hill Hospital.

His wife and parents are sched uled to arrive this evening.

Williams was the composer of a

Raleigh Register, January 1, 1953.

Retired deputy sheriff Howard Janney of Oak Hill was one of the first people to respond to calls that Hank Williams had died. Officer Janney escorted the Cadillac to the local hospital, where Williams was declared dead. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Carson, to decide to conduct a coroner's inquest in an effort to rule out the possibility of foul play. A group of local citizens were quickly impaneled to serve on the coroner's jury. The inquest began at around 1:00 p.m., in an upstairs room at Tyree Funeral Home.

J. Ike Brown, 80, is the owner of the King Coal Chevrolet automobile dealership in Oak Hill and was one of six members on the coroner's jury. Ike had heard a good bit of Williams' music and was aware of Hank's reputation as an entertainer. While he might have been acquainted with country music, Ike was not particularly familiar with medical science or forensics. As Ike recalls, "I was never sure why they called me, but they wanted me to come down to the funeral home right away. Howard Janney took us upstairs to where the body was lying under a sheet. We spent about 15 minutes looking at it, and couldn't see anything wrong at all, just that he was unhealthy-looking. He was very, very skinny. I don't mean to be disrespectful, but there was sort of a comic feel about being there, because we didn't really know what we were doing.

"I was sort of impressed to see him," Ike continues. "You can't imagine the attention he got. The 'Grand Ole Opry' was a big deal. It was a strange experience." Unlike Tyree or Janney, Ike Brown remembers that there was a good deal of excitement in Oak Hill once word got out that Hank Williams had died. "There was a buzz about it," Ike says. "Nothing ever happened here, but then something did."

The coroner's jury reached a verdict that there had been no foul play and that Williams had died of a "severe heart condition and hemorrhage." With this verdict, local police involvement in the case came to an end, Charles Carr was free to go, and the Cadillac and its contents were secured in a bay at Burdette's Pure Oil station to await Hank's next of kin.

At about 3:00 that afternoon, an autopsy was performed at the funeral home by Dr. Ivan Malinin, a Russian pathologist from the Beckley hospital. The official cause of death was listed as heart failure aggravated by acute alcoholism. Though it is known that during his journey Williams was given two shots of morphine to help manage his acute back pain, and he was presumed to have been taking chloral hydrate, a strong sedative prescribed for him by doctor Toby Marshall, no traces of drugs were said to have been listed in the autopsy report. The report itself has apparently been lost or destroyed.

The next morning, Williams' mother Lillian Stone and Charles Carr's father arrived from

Pete Burdette's Pure Oil gas station in Oak Hill, now closed. Photograph by Michael Keller.

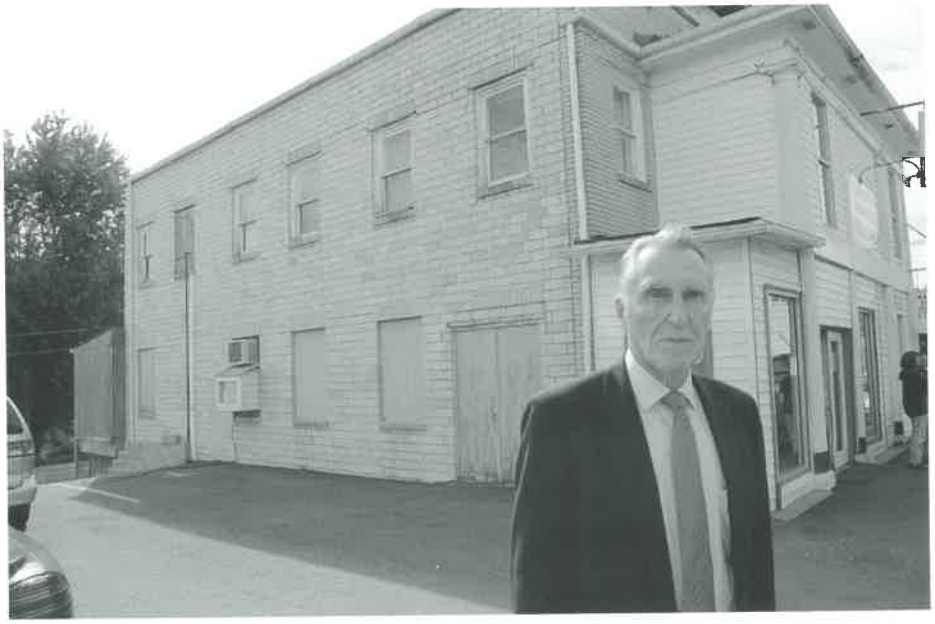
Undertaker Joe Tyree handled the body once it was taken from the hospital. In this photograph, Joe indicates where the autopsy was performed in an upstairs room of the old Tyree Funeral Home, located directly across the street from the hospital. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Alabama. The pair flew into Roanoke and took a taxi to Oak Hill because the Charleston airport was still fogged in. According to Joe Tyree, Mrs. Stone's first stop was the police station, where she was briefed on the situation. She had brought along legal papers establishing herself as next of kin, to the satisfaction of local authorities. Hank had married the former Billie Jean Jones Eshliman in October, but Hank's mother presented papers that indicated Billie Jean's divorce from her previous husband wasn't final until late December, rendering the marriage invalid.

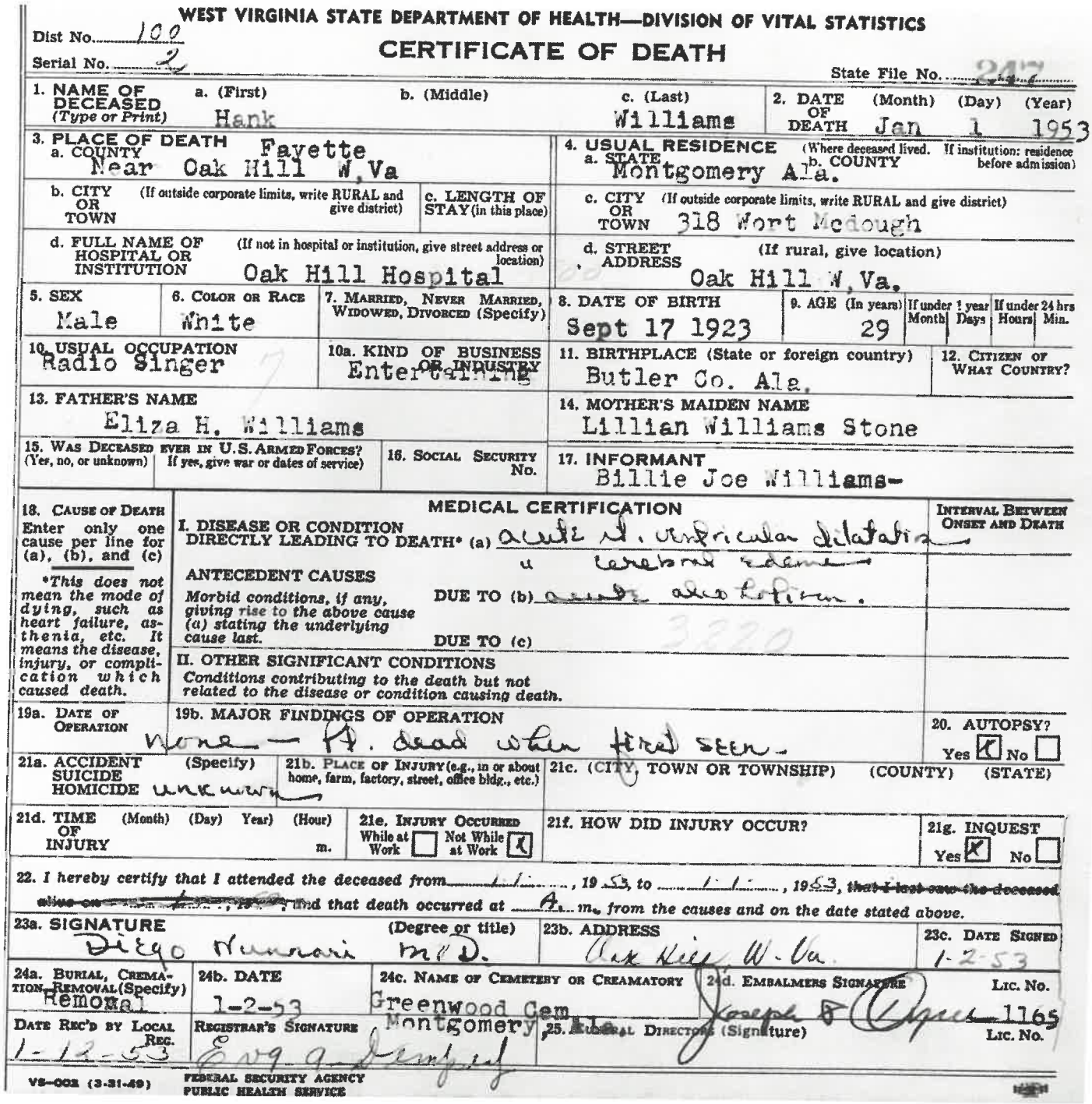
As Joe recalls, there was no question of who was in charge. "Mrs. Stone made all the arrangements," he says. "She chose a Batesville casket with silver finish and white interior. She went out to his car and chose one of his white cowboy outfits to bury him in." Tyree recalls that she was a "nice, stately-looking woman, very pleasant and composed. She held her grief." By the time Billie Jean and her father arrived later that day, Hank's mother had the situation firmly in hand. Contrary to some published reports, Joe states, "Neither the mother nor the wife ever saw the body while it was here."

Mrs. Stone arranged for Joe Tyree and his assistant Alex Childers to drive the body back to Montgomery, while she and the Carrs returned in the Cadillac. "The train would have taken too long," recalls Joe. Driving a hearse owned by Tyree Funeral Home, they left Oak Hill at about 4:30 p.m., on January 2. "I remember it was misting," Joe says. "We drove straight on through. All the way down, we kept hearing his songs on the radio. It wasn't until then I realized how famous he was. We'd pull into filling stations and the attendants would wipe the dirt off the license plate and see the West Virginia tags. They would figure it out and come ask me if we were carrying Hank back." They pulled into White's Chapel Funeral Home in Montgomery about 7:00 in the morning. "They had some bunks there, so we slept till noon, then headed back," Joe says.

At this point, Joe Tyree figured that the story had come to an end. Soon, however, the calls started. "At first, I'd get calls on New Year's Eve," he says. "You could tell that the people had been drinking or were in a bar. They'd want to prove to their friend that Hank had died in Oak Hill. I kept getting phone calls every year, or so." It wasn't long until devoted fans began making pilgrimages to Oak Hill. "Had a honeymooning couple from Branson, Missouri, come to meet



J. Ike Brown, an Oak Hill automobile dealer, was unexpectedly called to the Tyree Funeral Home the afternoon of January 1, 1953, to sit on a jury for a coroner's inquest into the death of Hank Williams. Ike is shown here in front of the site of the old funeral home, now a pharmacy. Photograph by Michael Keller.



WEST VIRGINIA STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH—DIVISION OF VITAL STATISTICS

Dist No. 100 Serial No. 2

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

State File No. 247

1. NAME OF DECEASED (Type or Print): a. (First) Hank; b. (Middle); c. (Last) Williams

2. DATE OF DEATH: (Month) (Day) (Year) Jan 1 1953

3. PLACE OF DEATH: a. COUNTY Fayette; Near Oak Hill W. Va; b. CITY OR TOWN (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give district); c. LENGTH OF STAY (in this place)

4. USUAL RESIDENCE (Where deceased lived. If institution: residence before admission): a. STATE Montgomery Ala.; b. COUNTY; c. CITY OR TOWN (If outside corporate limits, write RURAL and give district) 318 Mort Medough

d. FULL NAME OF HOSPITAL OR INSTITUTION (If not in hospital or institution, give street address or location) Oak Hill Hospital

d. STREET ADDRESS (If rural, give location) Oak Hill W. Va.

5. SEX: Male

6. COLOR OR RACE: White

7. MARRIED, NEVER MARRIED, WIDOWED, DIVORCED (Specify)

8. DATE OF BIRTH: Sept 17 1923

9. AGE (In years): 29; If under 1 year: Months, Days; If under 24 hrs: Hours, Min.

10. USUAL OCCUPATION: Radio Singer

10a. KIND OF BUSINESS OR INDUSTRY: Entertaining

11. BIRTHPLACE (State or foreign country): Butler Co. Ala.

12. CITIZEN OF WHAT COUNTRY?

13. FATHER'S NAME: Eliza H. Williams

14. MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME: Lillian Williams Stone

15. WAS DECEASED EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? (Yes, no, or unknown) If yes, give war or dates of service)

16. SOCIAL SECURITY No.

17. INFORMANT: Billie Joe Williams-

18. CAUSE OF DEATH

Enter only one cause per line for (a), (b), and (c)

*This does not mean the mode of dying, such as heart failure, asthenia, etc. It means the disease, injury, or complication which caused death.

MEDICAL CERTIFICATION

I. DISEASE OR CONDITION DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH* (a) acute d. ventricular dilatation

u cerebral edema

ANTECEDENT CAUSES

Morbid conditions, if any, giving rise to the above cause (a) stating the underlying cause last.

DUE TO (b) acute alcoholism.

DUE TO (c)

II. OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS

Conditions contributing to the death but not related to the disease or condition causing death.

INTERVAL BETWEEN ONSET AND DEATH

19a. DATE OF OPERATION

19b. MAJOR FINDINGS OF OPERATION: None — Pt. dead when first seen.

20. AUTOPSY? Yes [X] No [ ]

21a. ACCIDENT SUICIDE HOMICIDE (Specify) unknown

21b. PLACE OF INJURY (e.g., in or about home, farm, factory, street, office bldg., etc.)

21c. (CITY, TOWN OR TOWNSHIP) (COUNTY) (STATE)

21d. TIME OF INJURY (Month) (Day) Year) (Hour) m.

21e. INJURY OCCURRED While at Work [ ] Not While at Work [X]

21f. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR?

21g. INQUEST Yes [X] No [ ]

22. I hereby certify that I attended the deceased from 1-1-, 1953 to 1-1-, 1953, ~~that I last saw the deceased alive on ..., 19..~~ and that death occurred at 4 a. m. from the causes and on the date stated above.

23a. SIGNATURE (Degree or title): Diego Mancari M.D.

23b. ADDRESS: Oak Hill W. Va.

23c. DATE SIGNED: 1-2-53

24a. BURIAL, CREMATION, REMOVAL (Specify): Removal

24b. DATE: 1-2-53

24c. NAME OF CEMETERY OR CREMATORY: Greenwood Cem Montgomery

24d. EMBALMERS SIGNATURE: Joseph B. Ogle

LIC. No. 1165

DATE REC'D BY LOCAL REG.: 1-12-53

REGISTRAR'S SIGNATURE: Evelyn Dempsey

25. FUNERAL DIRECTOR'S (Signature)

LIC. No.

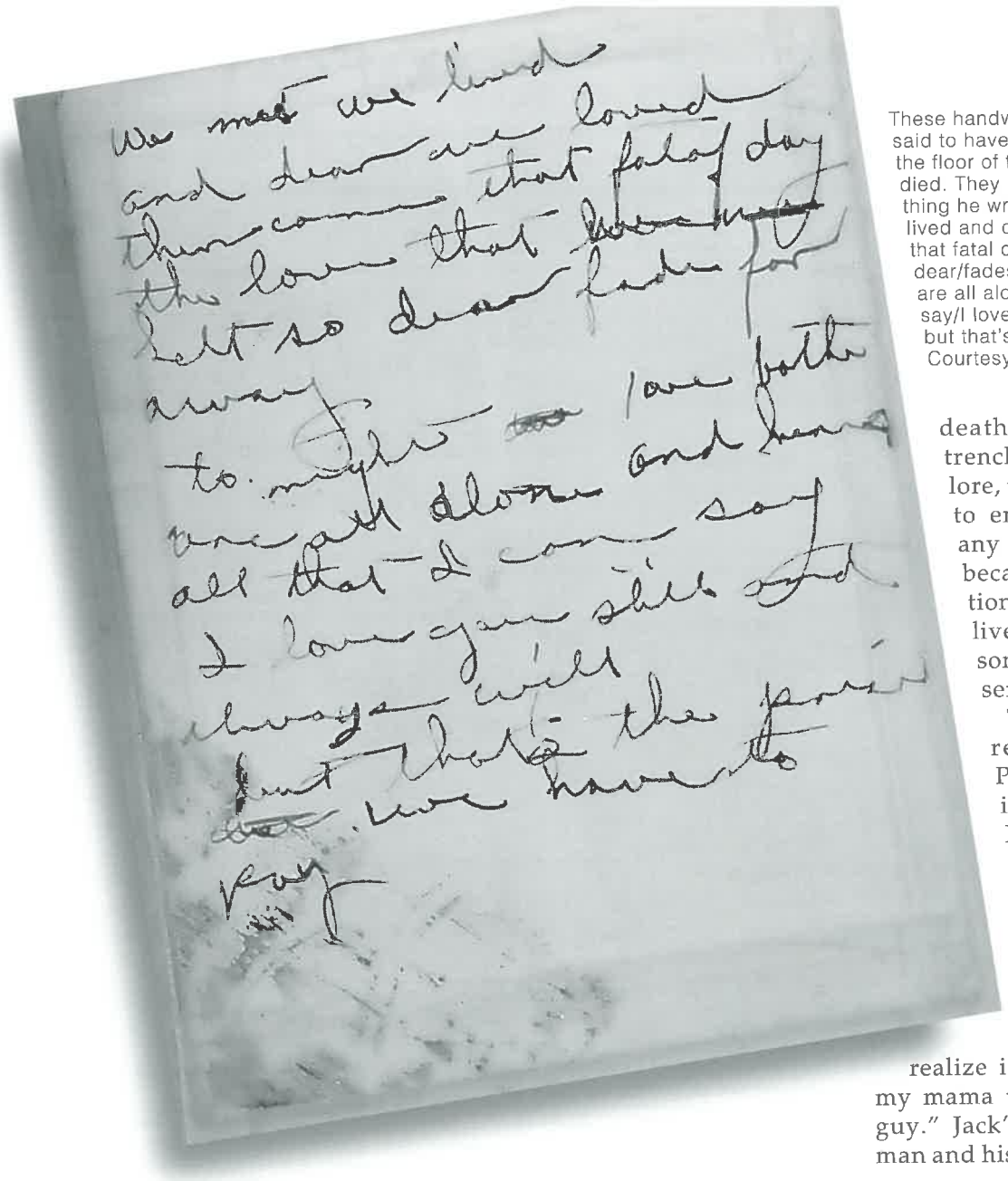
VS-OOR (3-31-49) FEDERAL SECURITY AGENCY PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

Hank Williams' death certificate. Courtesy of WVSA.

me," Joe recalls. "And some journalist from Sweden stopped by." Asked if this steady stream of visitors irritates him, he replies, "If they're interested, who am I to shut them off?"

Many details related to the death of Hank Williams continue to vex researchers, fans, and family members. Of particular interest to Oak Hill citizens are the mysteries surrounding some of Williams' missing possessions. Down at Riley's Café on Main Street, a teenaged waitress lights up when asked about the details. "Oh yeah," she says. "A regular of ours has his guitar and his cowboy boots." While these items were never reported missing, apparently his cowboy hat and pearl-handled .45 disappeared while the car was being stored at the gas station. Some people claim the hat is still around and will turn up one of these days. Others claim that it was sold. As Howard Janney recalls, "[Pete] Burdette stored the car, locked it up. He had the hat and was wearing it around. I went up to get it, and he said that Hank's mother gave it to him." According to a story around town, Burdette's hair started falling out soon after he starting wearing the hat. He claimed that the hat was cursed. Years later, Pete Burdette committed suicide behind the station.

While the story of Hank Williams'



These handwritten song lyrics were said to have been found in Oak Hill on the floor of the Cadillac in which Hank died. They are thought to be the last thing he wrote. It reads, "We met we lived and dear we loved/then came that fatal day/the love that we felt so dear/fades far away/tonight we both are all alone/and here's all that I can say/I love you still and always will/ but that's the price we have to pay." Courtesy of Hank Williams, Jr.

death has become an entrenched part of Oak Hill lore, the town has been slow to embrace this legacy in any official way, possibly because Williams' reputation as a drinker and hard-liver doesn't sit well with some members of this conservative community.

This lack of recognition really stuck in Jack Pennington's craw. Born in neighboring Scarbro, Pennington remembers clearly the first time he heard Hank on the radio playing at the "Grand Ole Opry." "After each song," he recalls, "there was all this static. We didn't realize it was applause. I told my mama that I really liked this guy." Jack's deep regard for the man and his music led to a lifelong

Hank Williams in West Virginia

Prior to his fateful trip through southern West Virginia on the first day of 1953, Hank Williams was known to have visited and performed in West Virginia on at least three occasions. The first of these was on July 4, 1951, at Camden Park in Huntington, where he appeared with his Drifting Cowboys band in a show booked by A.V. Bamford. [See "'The Sign of the Happy Clown': Looking Back on Camden Park," by Joseph Platania; Summer 1987.]

Hank Williams then came through West Virginia the following Labor Day weekend, appearing in Charleston on September 1 and in Huntington on September 2, 1951, as part of the mammoth Hadacol Caravan. The last of the great medicine shows, the Hadacol Caravan ran from August 14 until October 2, playing 51 shows in 50 days, in 18 states. The all-star lineup featured a variety of popular entertainers, such as movie stars Dick Haymes and Carmen Miranda, boxer Jack Dempsey, comedienne Minnie Pearl, Hank Williams, and literally a trainload of supporting cast and crew.

The caravan played at Watt Powell Park in Charleston on Saturday, September 1, then moved on to Huntington's Memorial Field House for a performance the next day.

GOLDENSEAL welcomes additional information about these shows or information concerning any other Hank Williams appearances in West Virginia.

hobby of collecting Williams memorabilia. When he entered the service in 1954, Jack left the area feeling like there should be some sort of memorial to the singer and his legacy. Returning 20 years later, Jack found that there was still no memorial. "I felt something ought to be done," he says. "I got talking with Roger Seay about it, and we got support from some folks we had met down at the 'Grand Ole Opry.'"

Pennington and Seay designed a simple, attractive memorial made of a $2,000 bronze plaque mounted on a stone pedestal. It features a likeness of Hank Williams and an affectionate tribute to Hank from his fans. Located on the lawn in front of the local library and across the street from the now-defunct Pure Oil station, the memorial was dedicated on September 17, 1991 — Hank's birthday. Mayor Eugene Larrick issued a proclamation making that day "Hank Williams Day" within the city of Oak Hill.

In 1993, a limited-edition Hank Williams postage stamp was issued by the U.S. Postal Service. The day that the stamp was released, Oak Hill postmaster Herb Balser released a limited number of embossed cachet envelopes, bearing a special pictorial cancellation designed by Oak Hill High School graduate Todd Short.

A Hank Williams tribute concert was held in 1993 at the Fayette Armory. Jack Pennington recalls that, as the band started into Williams' song "I Saw the Light," the power blew. "We all knew that the spirit of Hank was with us that night," he says. While the concert is fondly remembered by fans, it was not well attended. Mayor Larrick recalls that this was the point at which he realized that there just wasn't enough local support to move forward with bigger projects, such as a museum.

Larrick, while not a fan himself, saw the Hank Williams story as a possible tool for economic development in a community struggling to rebuild its economic base after the coal boom went bust. Asked if he feels that Oak Hill has taken advantage of the Hank Williams story, he replies, "Not nearly to the extent that it could have."

With the 50th anniversary of Williams' death approaching, plans call for another tribute concert and a retracing of Hank's final journey. "I'm doing what I'm doing for Hank Williams," says promoter Ralph Moore of Lineville, Alabama. "I just feel there is something lacking in his legacy. If this tribute is successful, I believe it will motivate people." The tribute concert is scheduled at the Memorial Building in Fayetteville at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 31. The tour retracing Hank's final journey departs Montgomery on Saturday, December 28. For further information about either activity, call Ralph Moore at (256)396-9376.

While Williams' death in Oak Hill was a random occurrence, Ralph Moore articulates what a number of local people have observed over the years — that there was something appropriate about the Hillbilly Shakespeare dying in West Virginia. As Ralph says, "Where he died took him right back to his roots."

Charles Carr compares the people of his native Alabama to the folks he met on his ill-fated visit to Oak Hill, saying, "The people of Oak Hill were the type of people I was used to being around. They are very genuine. There's nothing phony about the kindness these people showed me. I'll never forget it."

After 50 years, it's safe to say that the people of Oak Hill won't be forgetting, either, what happened here on January 1, 1953.

Hank Williams Memorial, dedicated on September 17, 1991, Hank's birthday. The memorial is located on the front lawn of the public library in Oak Hill. Photograph by Michael Keller.

MAURA KISTLER, originally from Evanston, Illinois, now lives in Lansing, Fayette County. She is co-owner of an outdoor retail business in Fayetteville. She holds a master's degree in education from the University of Virginia and has taught English at Oak Hill High School. Maura's writing has appeared in *Blue Ridge Outdoors* magazine; this is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Hank's Lost Charleston Show

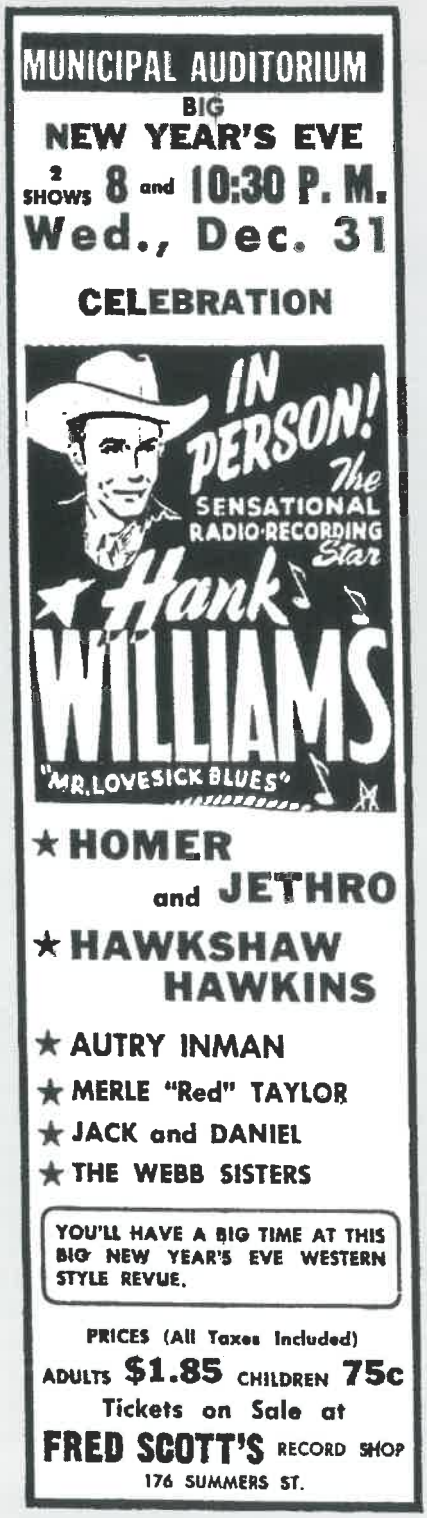
By John Lilly

When he left his Alabama home on December 30, 1952, Hank Williams had his sights set on West Virginia. He was billed as the headline act for a gala "Western Style Revue" at Charleston's Municipal Auditorium and was scheduled to perform two shows here on New Year's Eve night. Sadly, he never arrived.

Little has been written about this Charleston engagement. Most authors, researchers, and fans have shifted their attention instead to Canton, Ohio, where Hank was expected to perform the following day. On January 1, 1953, in Canton, the first public announcement was made about the passing of this beloved star, and a heartfelt tribute concert was performed in his honor.

Most of these same musicians, however, had been in Charleston the previous evening and had traveled from West Virginia to Canton after the New Year's Eve shows were apparently cancelled. Like nearly everything else related to the death of Hank Williams, the lost Charleston shows remain shrouded in mystery and contradiction.

The shows were booked in November 1952 by concert promoter A.V. Bamford. "Bam," as he is known, is now 93 years old and lives in California. He had booked Hank Williams many times over the years, and in November 1952 had just finished what he felt was a successful six-day swing through Florida with Williams. According to Bam, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day looked like "two great dates for shows," in his words, and he got to work putting them together. On such short notice, however, he had trouble finding large auditoriums that were not already booked. When he got word that the Charleston and Canton halls were available, he grabbed them.



Hank Williams had been unceremoniously fired from the "Grand Ole Opry" in August and was struggling to redeem himself. Bam was certain that Hank would make every effort to appear at the Charleston and Canton shows, and he promoted the events vigorously.

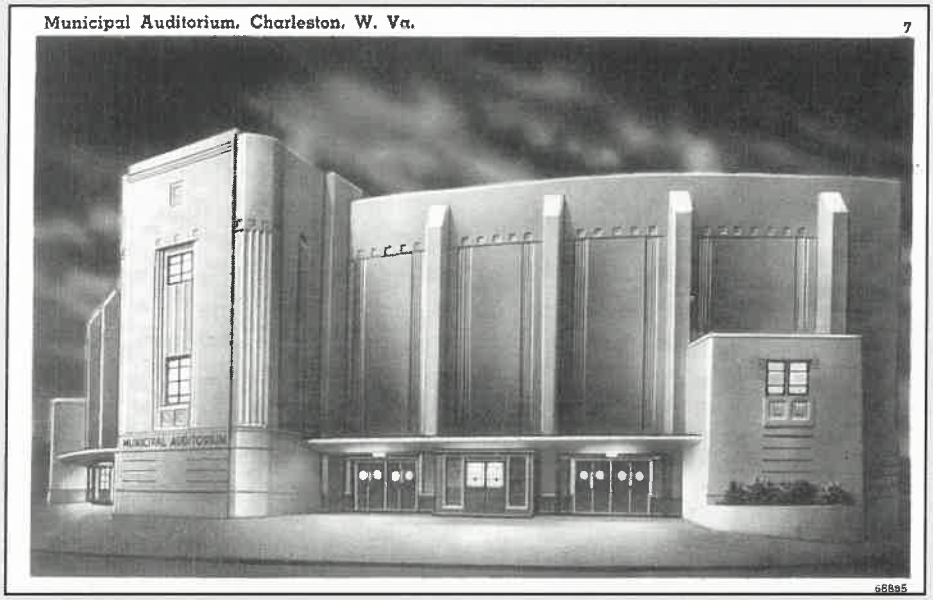
Sharing the bill were comedians Homer & Jethro, Huntington native Harold "Hawkshaw" Hawkins, Alabama singer and guitarist Autry Inman, bluegrass and country fiddler Merle "Red" Taylor, and two obscure duet acts — the Webb Sisters, and Jack & Daniel. Also to perform were bass player Buddy Killen and now-legendary steel guitarist Don Helms.

Don Helms was the only member of Hank's regular Drifting Cowboys band scheduled to appear that night. Don lives today in Henderson, Tennessee. As he recalls, he drove to Charleston on the day of the show, but there was an ice storm in the Nashville area, and it took him all day to complete the drive. He pulled up to the auditorium in time to see the other musicians packing up their equipment. "'You missed a good one,'" he recalls one of the musicians saying, indicating to him that a performance had already taken place. Don then got back in his car and continued driving to Canton, where he learned that his friend had passed away. "It capsized me when I heard that Hank had died," Don says.

Buddy Killen was scheduled to

The Charleston Gazette, December 28, 1952.

play bass. An Alabama native living in Nashville, Buddy was on his way to a very successful career in country music — first as a musician and later as a music publisher. In 1952, Buddy was 19 years old; he had already played bass with Hank Williams many times, as well as with other artists. In September of that year, he had married 17-year-old country singer June Webb. June and her 15-year-old sister Shirley performed as the Webb Sisters, and A.V. Bamford had booked the sisters as part of the Charleston-Canton package. Bam asked Buddy to drive June and Shirley to the shows, and to play the bass. To help sweeten the deal, Buddy says, Bam even bought a new set of tires for Killen's 1951 Pontiac. En route, Buddy and the Webb Sisters encountered icy conditions and freezing rain. "We slid off the road several times," Buddy recalls of that drive. Arriving at the auditorium at around show time, Buddy recalls seeing the musicians milling around on the sidewalk. He and the girls were told that the show had been cancelled due to bad weather, so they drove on to Canton. "The weather was so bad, only a few people showed up," Buddy says.



Charleston Municipal Auditorium, courtesy of WVSA.

Another musician scheduled to play at Charleston was guitarist and singer Floyd Robinson. Along with partner Autry Inman, Floyd was half of the Jack & Daniel duo. Seasoned musicians individually, Robinson and Inman were in the early stages of their efforts together. The pair had cut a few sides for Decca records in October 1952, billed as Jack & Daniel and the Sourwood Mountain Boys, named after the famed whiskey. Floyd is a multi-talented individual. He was on the Charleston bill, in part, to serve as lead guitarist, filling out the back-up band for the show along with Helms, Killen, and fiddler Red Taylor. A Nashville native, Floyd is now 70 years old and lives in Florida. He was in Minneapolis on New Year's Eve 1952 and did not make the trip to Charleston because, as he recalls, the show had been cancelled.

One individual who apparently did make it to Charleston was controversial doctor Horace Raphol "Toby" Marshall. Reportedly at the request of Hank Williams' mother, Toby Marshall had flown to Charleston to look after Hank and to accompany him back to Montgomery following the Canton show. Marshall had been supplying Williams with the powerful sedative chloral hydrate, and appeared to have gained the trust of both Hank and his mother.

Also waiting for Hank in Charleston was A.V. Bamford. Having driven up from Nashville that day with singer Autry Inman, Bam went directly to the auditorium. As he recalls, the roads had been slick during the early part of their trip, but the weather was milder by about 5:00 p.m., when they reached Charleston. "It was a little foggy, not bad weather," Bam recalls. "Not bad enough to hurt ticket sales." The Municipal Auditorium holds 3,500 people, and Bam had hoped to sell out the first show and get at least half-a-house for the late show. His guarantee to Williams was in the neighborhood of $1,500, and he estimates that he had sold about $3,000 in advance tickets.

At around 6:00 p.m., Bam received the phone call from driver Charles Carr, informing him that Hank was still in Knoxville, about 300 miles away. Recognizing that it was impossible for Hank to make either of the Charleston shows, Bam told Charles Carr to make sure that he got Hank to Canton in time for the 3:00 matinee the next day. On most other occasions, if Hank or another artist was unable to make a date, Bam would simply book a replacement act, and the show would go on as planned. In this case, however, Bam felt that he did not have enough time to find a replacement for Williams, and he decided to cancel. He instructed the ticket office to issue refunds, told the musicians to get to Canton, forfeited his deposit on the auditorium, and left for Ohio.

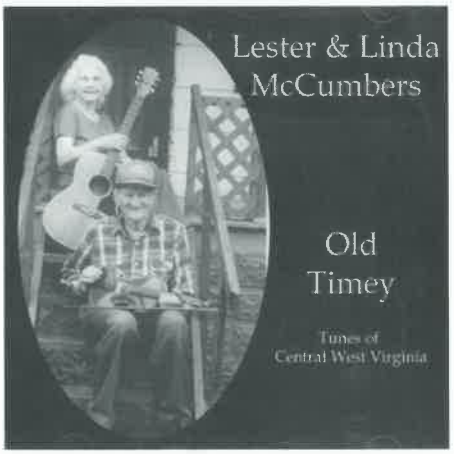
Considering his immense popularity, it is likely that Williams' fans in West Virginia were eagerly looking forward to this New Year's Eve engagement in Charleston. GOLDENSEAL would like to hear from any readers who held tickets for this lost show, and we welcome comments from any local residents who recall details of this fateful night.

Mountain Music Roundup

By John Lilly

The beauty and power of traditional mountain music is one of West Virginia's most distinctive cultural assets. This year, fiddlers, string bands, singers, and authors all contribute to the feast as we enjoy a bumper crop of books and recordings about old-time music.

Lester and Linda McCumbers from Calhoun County were each born in 1921 and have been married for more than 64 years, playing music all the while. Lester is a fine fiddler in the rustic, straight-forward style often associated with central West Virginia; Linda contributes her solid rhythm guitar and singing. It's about time someone made a recording of these two!

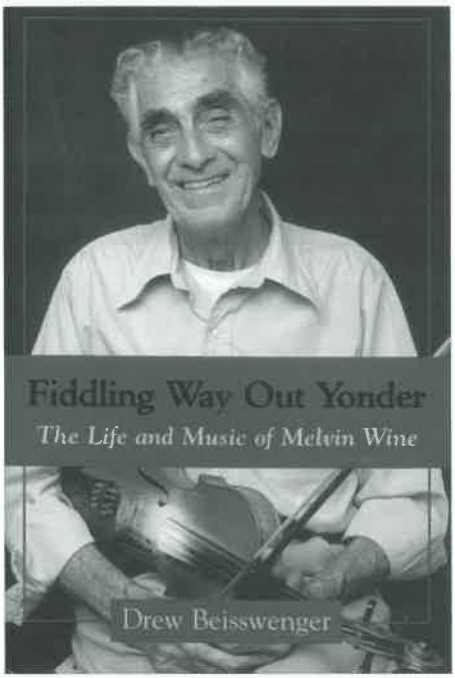


"Old Timey Tunes of Central West Virginia" by Lester and Linda McCumbers was recorded this past June at the home of Jake, Reed, and Dara Krack — neighbors and friends of the McCumbers. Jake studied traditional fiddling with Lester through a West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship [see "Passing It On: West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program," by Gerald Milnes; Winter 2000], and he honors his mentor with this documentation of Lester and Linda's music.

The recording is co-produced by Jake and Reed Krack and features 26 tunes and songs. Most of the material highlights Lester's lively fiddling, accompanied at various times by Linda on guitar, Kim Johnson on banjo, and Dara Krack on guitar. Jake plays second fiddle on two tracks, revealing some of the music the two fiddlers shared during their apprenticeship. In addition to popular instrumentals such as "Sourwood Mountain," "Cotton Eyed Joe," and "Arkansas Traveler," there are West Virginia chestnuts "Jimmy Johnson," "Old Mother Flannigan," and "Yew Piney Mountain," along with the unusual "Meat Upon the Goosefoot." Linda sings several old songs, including "Dreaming of a Little Cabin" and "Pretty Polly," and Lester joins her for duets on "Shake My Mother's Hand" and "Oh Those Tombs." The CD concludes with a few numbers by Lester, playing guitar and singing in an old-time country style.

"Old Timey Tunes of Central West Virginia" by Lester and Linda McCumbers is an honest and loving look at the music of two inspirational West Virginia artists who have long gone under-recognized for their skill, generosity, and lifelong contributions to our state's traditional culture. Three cheers to the Krack family for making this recording possible. The CD is available for $15 plus $2 shipping from WiseKrack Records, HC 71 Box 87, Orma, WV 25268; phone (304)655-7504, or visit www.jakekrack.com.

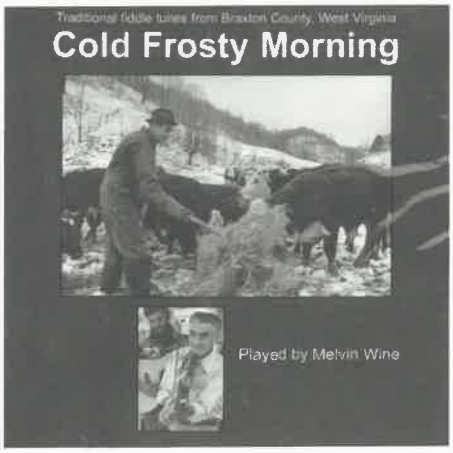
Fiddler **Melvin Wine**, at age 93, continues to inspire, teach, and motivate with his music. A new book and a re-issued CD recording provide fresh insights into the life and music of this living West Virginia treasure.

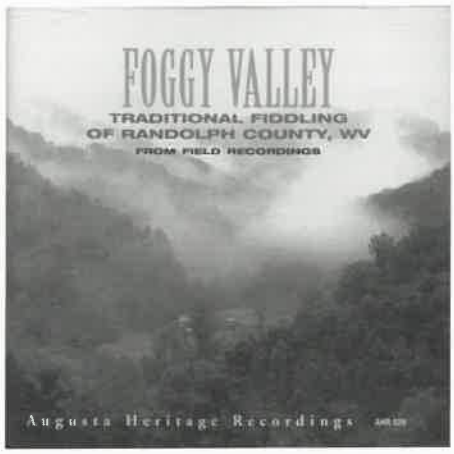


Fiddling Way Out Yonder: The Life and Music of Melvin Wine, by Drew Beisswenger, is a new book published by the University Press of Mississippi, based on interviews and visits conducted between 1995 and '97, while the author was living in West Virginia and completing his doctorate from the University of Memphis. The first five chapters deal with Melvin's family and per-

sonal history and present an overview of the role of the fiddle and traditional music in Braxton County. The book then moves into a detailed account of Melvin's repertoire, style, and playing techniques. One chapter transcribes in musical notation 10 of Melvin's fiddle pieces, providing a musicological perspective on these tunes. In the final chapter, the author expresses his opinion about Melvin and his music, along with his admiration and appreciation. As one might expect from a work of this nature, the book also includes a generous index, a complete discography, and more than two-dozen pages of footnotes and references. *Fiddling Way Out Yonder* is not only the most complete document available about Melvin Wine and his music, it stands as one of the most thorough studies yet published about the personal, spiritual, and practical aspects of rural, non-commercial music as it is played today in central Appalachia. The hardcover book sells for $40 and is available from the University Press of Mississippi, 3825 Ridgewood Road, Jackson, MS 39211-6492; phone (601)432-6205.

"Cold Frosty Morning: Traditional Fiddle Tunes from Braxton County, West Virginia," Melvin Wine's first recording, was released on LP in 1976. The original 16 tracks have now been digitally remastered and reissued on CD by Roane Records. For listeners who are just discovering Melvin's music, or for those who have cherished this collection for the past 26 years, the availability of this recording on CD is good news. It includes some of Melvin's most enduring performances of his most popular tunes, along with a pair of priceless family tales. For more information, write to Roane Records, P.O. Box 5294, West Logan, WV 25601, or visit www.fiddletunes.com.





"Foggy Valley: Traditional Fiddling of Randolph County, WV" is a recent collection of field recordings now available on CD from Augusta Heritage Recordings of Elkins. Produced by Gerry Milnes from material collected in Randolph County between 1994 and '97, this set of 26 instrumentals profiles the fiddling of nine local fiddlers, playing in a range of styles. Some of the musicians, such as Vandalia Award recipient Woody Simmons and Marvin "Shorty" Currence, might be familiar to GOLDENSEAL readers, while others are less well-known but equally talented, such as Boyd Phillips, Murrell Hamrick, and the late Charles Taylor. In addition to its value as a collection of regional fiddling, "Foggy Valley" preserves a small taste of the great music and fine times associated with Augusta's annual Fiddlers Reunion — a gathering of older West Virginia fiddlers that takes place each October, including most of these same musicians, along with many others. "Foggy Valley" is available by phoning (304)637-1209 or on-line at www.augustaheritage.com.

"A Henry Reed Reunion," by **Alan Jabbour**, **Bertram Levy**, and **James Reed**, revisits the repertoire of legendary Monroe County fiddler Henry Reed as played by three of his most faithful students. Folklorist and musician Alan Jabbour recorded Reed extensively in 1966 and '67, and Alan was instrumental in popularizing Reed's music through his own work with the Hollow Rock String Band of North Carolina. Now retired from the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress, Jabbour has rededicated himself to the performance of old-time fiddle music, and he returns to his own roots with this new recording. It was made in 2001 in Seattle, Washington, and includes 21 selections, all based on the playing of Henry Reed. The CD is available by writing to jabbour@myexcel.com or levybutler@olympus.net.

Two new string-band recordings present old-time music performed by some of the most gifted younger musicians active in our region today.

"Cross Ties" is the second recording from **Gandydancer**, a powerful group featuring five of

West Virginia's top old-time pickers and singers. Gerry Milnes, Dave Bing, Ron Mullennex, Mark Payne, and Jim Martin have been playing together for several years now, and their efforts as a band are shown to full advantage on this new recording. Mixing fiddle tunes, songs, musical styles, and varied instrumentation, "Cross Ties" moves rapidly through a wide landscape of traditional sounds. Along with rock-solid old-time fiddle music, the recording includes bluegrass, gospel, folk, and related genres, all of which are commonly played in West Virginia and all of which these musicians handle with style and confidence. A real highlight is their take on the square dance tune "Broke Down Gambler," which includes the stellar dance calling of Bill Ohse from Ripley. "Cross Ties" is available for $15 from Jim Martin Productions, P.O. Box 152, St. Albans, WV 25177.

"Goin' Back: Old-Time Tunes and Songs of West Virginia" is the new CD from the **Reed Island Rounders**, a trio of dedicated musicians from neighboring states who have collectively spent several decades learning, playing, and honoring traditional West Virginia music. Fiddler Betty Vornbrock and guitarist Billy Cornette are from Hillsville, Virginia, and banjoist Diane Jones lives in eastern Maryland. They

are frequent and welcome participants at many West Virginia music gatherings. This generous collection showcases music of West Virginia, played with skill and affection by these three. "Goin' Back" is available from Burning Wolfe Records, 715 Peacock Drive, Hillsville, VA 24343; online at www.reedisland.com.

Fiddler **Zack Fanok** of Morgantown has released his first CD recording, titled "Midnight Ride" on Roane Records. The 23 instrumentals feature this gifted 14-year-old musician accompanied by David O'Dell on banjo and James Summers on guitar. It is available from Roane Records, P.O. Box 5294, West Logan, WV 25601, or visit www.fiddletunes.com.

Pocahontas County banjo player **Dwight Diller's** new recording is called "Fabulous Festival Favorites," a collection of old-time tunes commonly heard at local music gatherings. It is available from Yew Pine Mountain Music, P.O. Box 148, Hillsboro, WV 24946; phone (304)653-4397 or on-line at www.dwightdiller.com.

Singer **Ginny Hawker** has been noted numerous times in these pages for her many great recordings. Her most recent release is called "Letters From My Father" on Rounder Records. Her first outing as a solo artist, "Letters From My Father" serves as a tribute to Ginny's late father, singer Ben Hawker. It also shows Ginny branching out in several musical directions, from her trademark mountain songs and unaccompanied hymns, to some fine bluegrass and honky-tonk country music. "Letters From My Father" is available from Rounder Records, One Camp Street, Cambridge, MA 02140; online at www.rounder.com.

Bill and Hazel Westfall of Ripley have been playing and singing old-time songs their entire lives and were the subject of a GOLDENSEAL story in our Summer 2001 issue. [See "'Still Singin'': A Visit with Bill and Hazel Westfall," by Bob Whitcomb.]

A new book titled *Singin' in the Hills* offers readers the opportunity to share time with the Westfalls through detailed interviews, recently collected and transcribed by Bob and Judith Whitcomb. In these conversations, Bill and Hazel discuss a wide range of topics, from their rural roots, to Bill's military service, to making moonshine on the kitchen stove. Music is at the core of much of the talk, however, as Bill and Hazel reveal a great deal about themselves and the old songs they love to sing.

The 336-page paperbound book sells for $18.95, plus $5.50 postage and handling, from the Augusta Heritage Center; phone (304)637-1209 or on-line at www.augustaheritage.com.

Goldenseal Index

Volume 28, 2002

Articles that appeared in Volume 28 are listed in the index below under the categories of Subject, Author, Photographer, and Location.

In the Subject category, articles are listed under their main topic, with many cross-referenced under alternate Subject headings, as well. Each entry is followed by the seasonal designation, volume and issue number, and page number. Short notices, such as those that appear in the regular column "Current Programs, Events, Publications," sidebars, "GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes," etc., are not included in the index.

The index for the first three volumes of GOLDENSEAL appears in the April-September 1978 issue; the index for Volumes 4 and 5 is in the January-March 1980 magazine. The index for each successive volume appears in the final issue of each calendar year. The cumulative index is available on our Web site at www.wvculture.org/goldenseal/gsindex.html.

Subject

Author

Photographer

Location

PHOTO CURIOSITY

"Journey to the Inn," reads the sign on the side of this distinctive vehicle. We assume that what we are witnessing here is a float in a Christmas parade. The photograph was taken in about 1950 in Hinton and comes to us via the West Virginia State Archives. Little else is known about this scene or its participants, other than the letters "AA" and "YMCA," which are visible on the sign, possibly referring to the sponsoring organizations.

If you recognize this innovative holiday conveyance or can add any information to our files about this picture, please let us know at the GOLDENSEAL office. Happy holidays!

Goldenseal
The Cultural Center
1900 Kanawha Blvd. East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305-0300

PERIODICALS

Inside Goldenseal

24
0 94295 76645 1