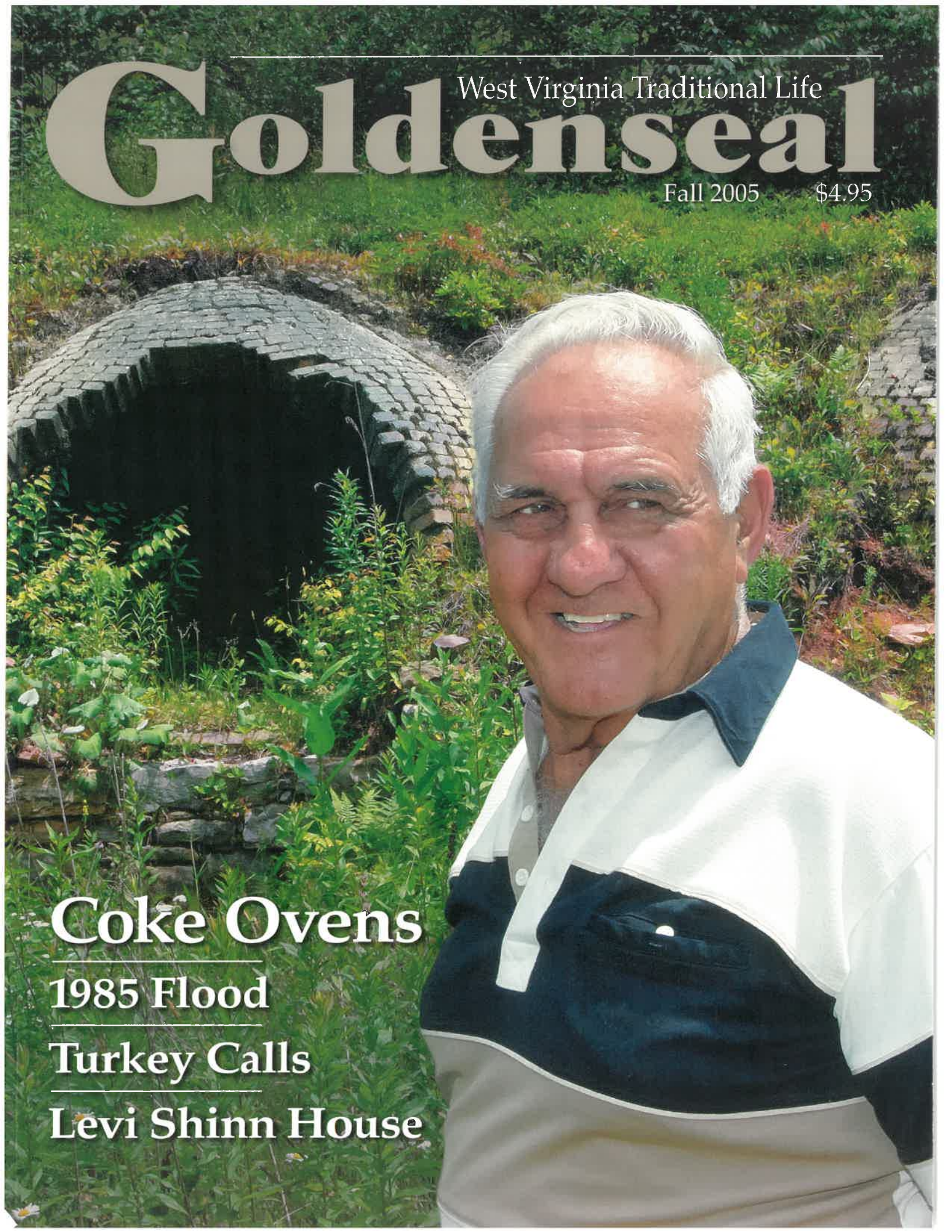


Goldenseal



West Virginia Traditional Life

Fall 2005

\$4.95

Coke Ovens

1985 Flood

Turkey Calls

Levi Shinn House

From the Editor: Don't Delay

This past summer, a specially designed Airstream trailer was stationed in Morgantown and Charleston for several days each, collecting oral histories for a project called StoryCorps. GOLDENSEAL was happy to lend a hand to this worthy effort, offering advice, practical assistance, and publicity. A number of GOLDENSEAL readers took advantage of this wonderful opportunity to record and preserve conversations with family or community members.

I had the chance and didn't take it. Too busy. Too distracted.

Then word came the other day that an elderly neighbor passed away. His name was Raymond Shamblin. I didn't know him well, but he struck me as a kindly old gentleman and someone with whom I should become better acquainted. He was involved in model railroading, and I saw him a number of times at the little clubhouse his group maintains near the entrance to Coonskin Park in Charleston. I learned that he had lived in our neighborhood more than 50 years and could recall when each of the houses was built. He knew why they called one street Viking Road and what went on behind closed doors in the big old boarding house located there. He told me about the steam engines that roared through our community before the tracks were pulled up, and about riding the Doodlebug car up to Blue Creek and back into town.

I often thought it would be a good idea to sit down with him and a tape recorder to get all this down for posterity. I procrastinated. Now he's gone. I mourn not only the loss of a genial neighbor, but the loss of all that history and knowledge, as well.

It happens all too often that someone contacts me at the GOLDENSEAL office with a story suggestion about an interesting friend, neighbor, or family member who is in declining health. Their sense of urgency is often frustrated by the logistical realities of collecting oral history, making a transcription, then writing and submitting a manuscript. That is compounded by the six to nine months it usually takes me to respond to a submission, and the six months to a year in advance that we usually need to plan the

magazine's content. In spite of everyone's best efforts, many of these stories simply get past us.

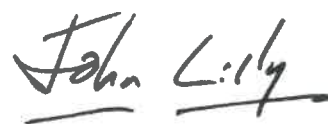
So, I offer this advice: Don't delay or wait for someone else to do it. Go ahead and interview the person — preferably with a tape recorder running — at the first opportunity. You might decide you will need to go back for more information, so don't wait for the "perfect moment." Please keep in mind that GOLDENSEAL stories are written and submitted by freelance writers. We don't have a staff of reporters, but rely on folks like you to send us manuscripts. If you do not consider yourself a writer, try contacting your local newspaper or library to see if they can refer you to a list of local authors. GOLDENSEAL pays 10 cents a word for published articles, so there is a little compensation involved for their time and effort.

Finally, please allow plenty of time. Contact your story subject while he or she is still in good health. Leave yourself enough time to enjoy the writing process, and our magazine staff enough time to do our jobs well. For more information, see our contributor guidelines on-line at www.wvculture.org/goldenseal/contrib.html, or call us at (304)558-0220 ext. 153, and we will be glad to send you a copy of our guidelines in the mail.

We deeply appreciate all of the story suggestions we receive at GOLDENSEAL. They let us know that you are interested in the magazine, and they help us shape the content of future editions.

On a more fundamental note, fall is the time of year when the largest number of GOLDENSEAL subscriptions come up for renewal. Keep in mind that we rely entirely on readers like you for the financial support we need to continue publishing GOLDENSEAL. Please watch your mailbox for that notice and respond accordingly.

Thanks in advance for your continued interest and support!





CCC Camp Tygart at East Dailey in 1935. Photograph courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

June 28, 2005
Beverly, West Virginia
Editor:

Thank you for your summer issue, featuring Tygart Valley Homestead. We enjoyed the story so very much. Our picture in the article has brought us cards and phone calls from old friends we have not seen for a very long time, as far away as Columbia, South Carolina. Makes us feel like celebrities.

Joe & Gloria Nitz

MacDunn

June 20, 2005
Wharton, West Virginia
Editor:

I just finished reading the summer issue of GOLDENSEAL and wanted you to know how much I enjoyed the article about MacDunn. [See "The Best of Times by Far: A Visit with Sue Dingess of MacDunn," interview by Erika Bain; Summer 2005.]

It brought back a lot of memories. We moved to MacDunn in the first part of July 1947, while the miners were off on miners' vacation, and moved away the first or second of December 1951. Vernon and Alice Mayes were about the first people we got to know, as we had to buy at the company store and used the scrip card. I remember Mr. Mayes in his long, white apron and his white hat he always wore. Everyone called him "Butch."

Those were the happiest years of my life. MacDunn was a good place to live. We lived in a little three-room house. Rent was \$8 a month. We had coal heat and also cooked with coal. No bills came in. If you worked, your rent and power were paid.

Things have changed so much, but I have so many memories of living there. I am 82 years of age, have been a widow since 1994. It's been a hard life, but a good life.

I would like to thank Sue Dingess for her story. It brought back many memories of a much happier time. Thank you, GOLDENSEAL, for some wonderful reading.
Dola Ramsey

June 23, 2005
Fairfield, Ohio
Editor:

How delighted I was when I opened my Summer 2005 GOLDENSEAL and saw the story on MacDunn and the train explosion in 1934. We lived in MacDunn from around 1933 until 1940 and moved to Powellton when I was 12 years old. We had a wonderful life there in that little coal mining community. I do remember Vernon and Alice Mayes, referred to in the story. They later lived in Powellton and worked in the company store there.

The story of the train explosion brings back a lot of memories. [See "MacDunn and the 1934 Train Explosion."] I remember vividly the morning of the wreck. We

lived right across the dirt road from the explosion — I was 5½ years old. My dad, Bill Black, was getting ready to go to work that morning and was dressing by the fireplace. Mother, who was expecting in March, was waiting on the back porch to wave to her dad and brother, who rode the train to work. (Fortunately, they did not work that day.) All of a sudden, there was all of this noise. It sounded like everything was blowing up. It was so chaotic that morning. Our house was on fire, though it was later put out. Dad grabbed me from the bed. Mother was hit with flying metal, but was not hurt seriously. Such a sad day. I remember seeing dead bodies lying around. So many young men killed.

Thanks for a wonderful story.
We enjoy reading GOLDENSEAL.
Sincerely,
Jean Lake

Vernon Mayes at MacDunn in 1942.



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Coal & Coke Anniversary

One hundred years ago, an important link in West Virginia's transportation chain was established, when Henry Gas-saway Davis' Coal & Coke Rail-way was completed from Elkins to Charleston in late 1905. This historic rail line was essential in establishing profitable mining and coke operations along its 175-mile run and helped to found many of the towns along the way, before becoming part of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad system in 1917.

Our friend, Borgon Tanner, from Vanceboro, Maine, alerted us to the anniversary of the build-ing of the C&C. His father had worked as a water boy for C&C road construction crews while a youngster in Gilmer County, and was later hired as a B&O fireman in Clarksburg. Borgon himself worked as a B&O fireman and recalls firing one of the old C&C engines in 1947.

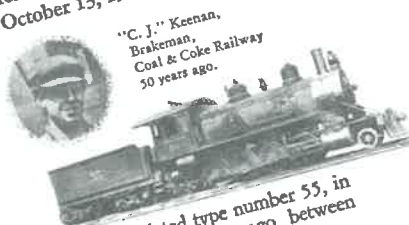
Borgon's brother was in charge of the coin and stamp department at the Lazarus Department Store in Columbus, Ohio, in the mid-1950's and forwarded to Borgon a First Day Cover of a commemo-rative stamp marking the 50th anniversary of freight service between Charleston and

Elkins. The stamp was canceled at Baltimore & Ohio Day, held in Charleston on October 13, 1955, and featured a picture of legend-ary C&C brakeman C.J. Keenan. Keenan was thought to be the world's youngest brakeman when he was hired at age 13. He also became the world's young-est fireman at age 15, and the youngest engineer at age 17.

A new book about the C&C has been published, titled *West Virginia's Coal and Coke Railway: A B&O Predecessor*, by Alan Clarke. The 170-page hardbound, large-format edition is richly illustrated and painstakingly chronicles the building of the C&C, its years of independent operation between 1902 and 1917, and its eventual incorporation into the B&O and CSX systems. The book was published in 2002 by TLC Pub-lishing and is available by writing to them at 1387 Winding Creek Lane, Lynchburg, Virginia 24503-3776.

Special thanks to Borgon Tan-ner for providing information and materials for this article.

Baltimore & Ohio Day
Charleston, West Virginia
October 13, 1955



"C. J." Keenan,
Brakeman,
Coal & Coke Railway
50 years ago.

C. & C. consolidated type number 55, in
freight service 50 years ago between
Charleston and Elkins.
Coal & Coke Railway, component of the
Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

Sponsored
by the
Casey Jones
Railroad
Unit

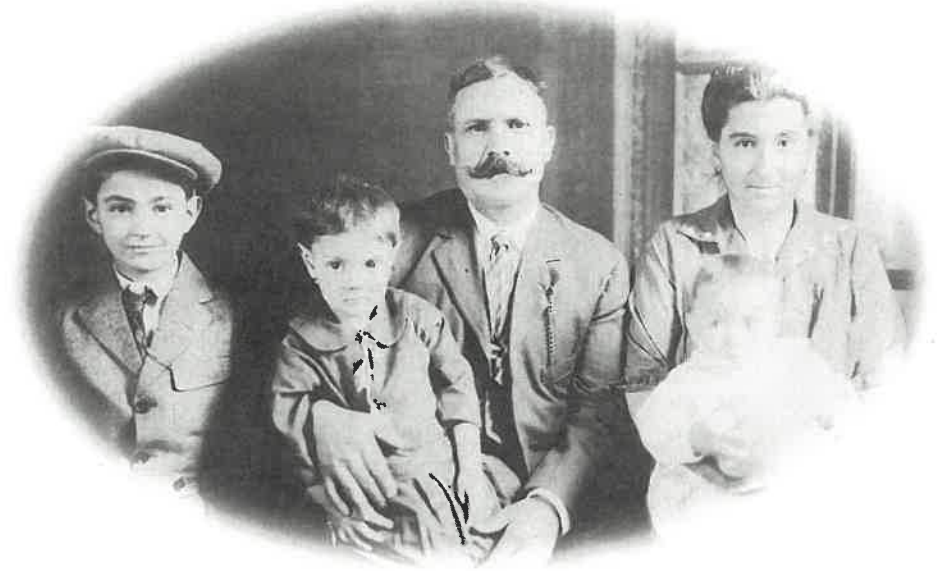


of the
American
Topical
Association



Courtesy of Borgon
Tanner.

Thousands of successful Italian-Americans live in West Virginia today because their ancestors immigrated here to work long, arduous hours in our coal mines for meager wages. The Leombrunos of Randolph County are such a family.



The Leombruno family in Coalton, about 1925. From the left, they are Eugene, Jeanette, father Concezio, mother Agatha, and baby Oreste.

Oreste Leombruno has not forgotten his heritage. He heard the stories and remembers the tragic and desperate times, as his ancestors worked to establish themselves in the New World. He has lived a long life himself and has traveled in their footsteps, following the coal and digging and scraping a living out of these hills.

I visited Oreste recently at his well-appointed home in Elkins. He offered my husband, Bill, and me glasses of his homemade wines: red or white. "There's no additives, no junk," he tells us. We chose white, sipped, then sat back to listen.

Oreste told us rock-hard tales of coal mining and of his family's struggle to make a life in West Virginia. The first to arrive was Oreste's grandfather, Antonio, who left his wife, Maria, behind in a small village 70 miles southeast of Rome. In the late 1800's, Antonio made the long Atlantic crossing.

According to a family history written by Wilma Leombruno, Antonio's 17-year-old son, Concezio, followed in 1900, with \$21 in his pocket. When the two heard about coke oven jobs in West Virginia, they came to see whether life would be good here. They settled in Douglas, Tucker County, where they lived in bachelor shanties. They pulled hot coke from the Davis Coal & Coke Company's burning ovens, making \$1.50 a day. They later worked for the same company at Harding and Coalton, both in Randolph County.

Italian law states that, at 18 years of age, men must return to the home country to spend a year in the army. If they refuse, they aren't allowed to return to Italy again. So, when he turned 18, Concezio went back to Italy to serve. While there, he married Agatha Petrella, but didn't have passage money for two. Leaving Agatha behind, he returned to America to earn enough money to bring her over.

Rejoining his father, Concezio and Antonio worked in a mine at Clover Lick in Pocahontas County,

where conditions were terrible. Still earning \$1.50 a day, they were paid only once a month, and much of that paycheck went for room and board. They wanted to resign but were told they might be killed if they tried. They left in the dark of night, walking over the mountains for days. The father and son then worked the coke ovens at Harding, until Antonio decided to return permanently to his family in Italy.

Alone now, Concezio moved to Coalton to work the deep mines. He boarded with the Antolini family, a better situation than a bachelor shanty. Italian communities had developed throughout the state, and a sizeable group of Italians had settled in Coalton.

Concezio finally earned enough money for Agatha's passage. She sailed from Naples in 1916 for the 23-day voyage to America. She stayed deep down in the ship, where fares were the cheapest and conditions were deplorable. The passage was difficult for the terrified young wife, who knew no English and was too fearful to try speaking. She watched heartbreaking health inspections at Ellis Island, where sick people were turned back, leaving their healthy family members to go on without them. Fortunately, Agatha passed inspection.

She found a train for Cumber-



Now retired and living in Elkins, Oreste is an avid gardener and winemaker. He is shown here with a recent harvest. Photographer and date unknown.

land, Maryland, but nearly starved on the way. She did not understand American money and was too scared to ask for help. Once off the train, she had no idea how to find her husband. Fortunately, she saw an Italian man whom she recognized. He helped her get food and put her on the right train.

Reunited, Agatha and Concezio moved into a company house in Coalton, where living conditions were good. The West Virginia Coal & Coke Company later sold these houses to the employees at reasonable rates. The families raised large gardens and kept pigs, cows, and chickens in the little town. A boom period brought other waves of immigrants from Poland, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Germany. Soon, there were stores, a railroad, a hotel, and saloons for people working in the coal mines and coke ovens. Kids played bocce, softball, and had dances at Coalton's large park. Concezio was famous for his accordion playing at parties and weddings. Oreste still has the accordion his father used and enjoys playing it today.

The Leombruno family grew. First there was Eugene. Then Jeanette, Oreste, and finally Libretta. At home and in the neighborhood, the family

spoke Italian, but contact with other children taught them different languages, as well.

Concezio built the outside bake ovens the Italian women used for baking bread and pizza. Oreste remembers, "They were fired up like coke ovens. Then we pulled out the ashes, mopped it out, and put in loaves of bread or pizza. Heat from the bricks would bake the bread. You could smell it all over the neighborhood.

"[Agatha] mixed up the dough in a big, 25-gallon wash tub. She would wrap her head, put a board on it, and carry the dough outdoors. She stored the bread in the cellar on a hanging rack so mice couldn't get it. Mom would do 14 loaves at a time."

In later years, most women decided buying bread at the grocery store was easier, but Agatha kept up the tradition of baking. She also made root beer and canned meats and vegetables for the long Randolph County winters. She was a fine cook, famous for quickly putting a great meal on the table from her canned delicacies.

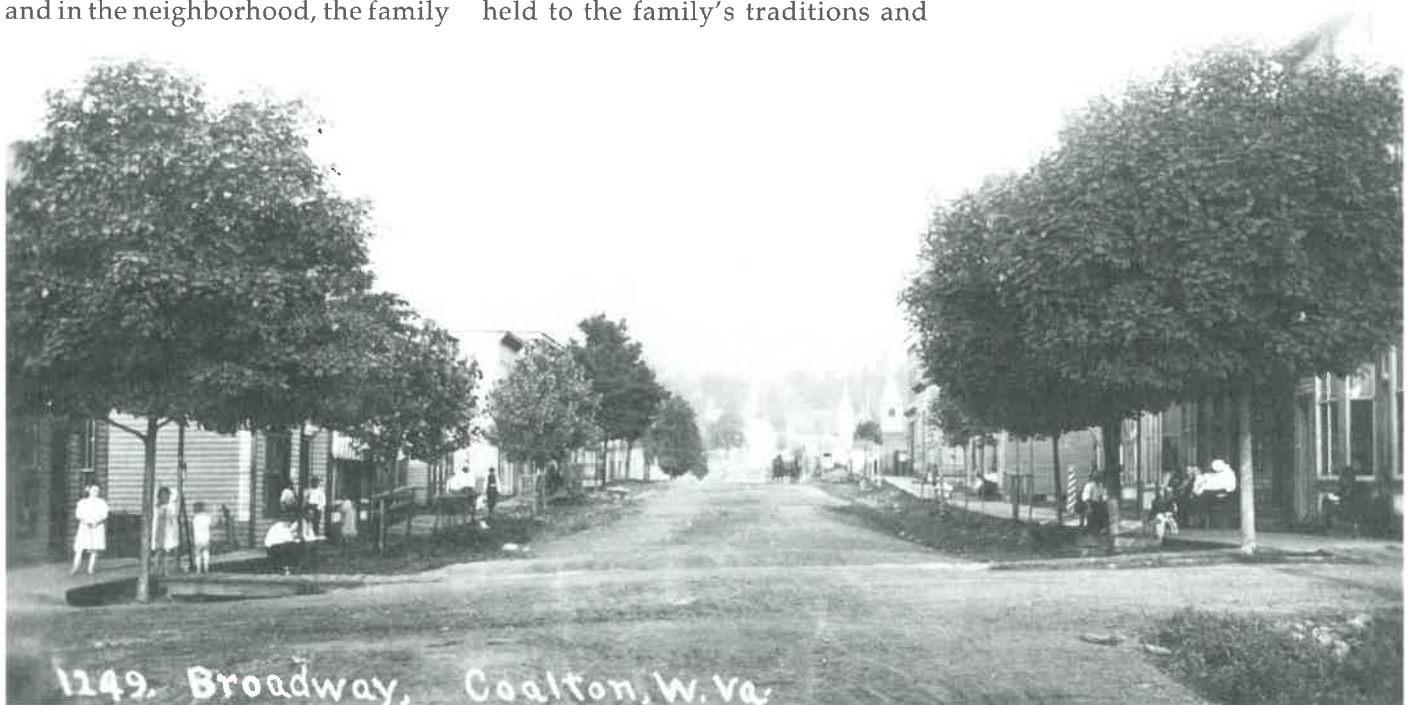
West Virginia life was good for the family, but they could not avoid all the bad times. In 1940, Concezio died at the age of 56, but Agatha held to the family's traditions and



Oreste entered the mines when he was 15 years old. He is pictured here in Coalton, about a year later, ready for work

their strong Catholic faith. Coalton people still remember her generosity and the wonderful aroma of bread baking in her outdoor oven.

By the time Oreste was 15 and a junior in high school, he had heard a lifetime of stories about the coal mines. He was not too interested



Coalton, Randolph County, was home to a diverse population in the early 1900's, including Italian miners. The Leombruno family lived here for many years. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, date unknown.

in school, so when his father died, Oreste traded school for work, without mentioning it to his mother. His first job was driving a horse in the Coalton mines.

"Horses pulled empties in and loads out," he remembers. In bigger mines, horses stayed inside. They had to work hard, but "horses ate good," he says. "You had to treat a horse good."

Men, however, were cheap and replaceable. Oreste remembers old times when his father talked about mine owners having little regard for the safety of the miners. "Men could get killed in there every day, nothing to it, but killing a horse was awful. They would have to buy another horse. Could always get another man."

Oreste's work driving horses paid poorly, so he asked his supervisor for a job hand-loading coal — a harder task, but it paid better. A month after he started in the mines, his family discovered he had left school. They were outraged, but they were grateful for the paycheck, which had ceased with Concezio's early death.

One day, Oreste was hand-loading a coal car when a big boulder fell on it. He got turned over in a small loader. "It took all the meat off my back," he says. The boulder fell on the coal car, but didn't go all the way to its bottom, or he would have died.

"The foreman called out, 'We got Oreste covered up,'" Oreste tells us.

"Boss replied, 'Oreste or horse?' [In Appalachian English, "Oreste" sounds like "horse."]

"Thinking it was the horse, the boss called back, 'Tie a chain around his leg, and drag him out.'

"The foreman yelled back, 'I got a MAN covered up.'" That painful accident put Oreste out of work for a year.

Oreste has worked with coal all his life, traveling wherever was necessary to find employment. He hand-loaded coal for the West Virginia Coal & Coke at Norton, Randolph County, then he worked for the Silvester Broth-

ers in Coalton. He and his friend, Carlo DeMotto, pulled coke from 15 leased coke ovens at Harding. Oreste bought a truck to load and haul coal in Randolph, Barbour, and Upshur counties. In 1948, he headed south to Wyoming, Mingo, Raleigh, McDowell, and Kanawha counties to strip mine with heavy equipment.

"Thinking it was the horse, the boss called back, 'Tie a chain around his leg, and drag him out.' "

In 1953, Oreste married Betty Hicks of Dailey, Randolph County, and took her with him to Bluefield. When that job closed down, they returned to Elkins, where their first son, Michael, was born. When work began at North Fork in McDowell County, and Matewan, Mingo County, the young family followed the jobs. Oreste, Jr. — known today as Spike — and a third son, Jimmy, were soon born.

In 1957, Oreste's mother, Agatha, and two of her sisters were driving south to visit Oreste, Betty, and their

little ones. As Agatha sat in the back seat of the car holding Michael, she passed away as they traveled. She was 64.

In 1962, Oreste, Betty, and their children came back to Randolph County, where they built their home on Chenoweth Creek. Daughter Theresa soon joined the growing family.

More sadness came to the Leombruno family when Oreste's wife, Betty, died in 1982, at age 50. Oreste carried on, continuing his work in mining, reclamation, supervision, and heavy equipment operation. He worked for 21 years as a supervisor for the Fairfax Trucking Company, stripping coal on Rich Mountain.

At Douglas, he did reclamation work where his dad, Concezio, and grandfather, Antonio, had worked the coke ovens so many years before. Today, hikers walk along the North Fork of the Blackwater River and find the area lush, green, and full of mountain splendor. Nature and reclamation efforts have worked wonders in this forgotten area of Tucker County, where years ago, amid noise and pollution, grimy-faced men mined the coal and produced the coke to fire American industry.

Oreste offered to take Bill and me



In 1953, Oreste married Betty Hicks. The pair are pictured here a few years later with their three young boys. From the left, the boys are Jimmy; Oreste, Jr. ("Spike"); and Michael. Photographer, date, and location unknown.

to Tucker County sometime to see the coke ovens where Antonio and Concezio had worked more than 100 years ago. So, on a bleak spring day, we met again and followed him from Elkins, through Parsons and Thomas, past the MountainMade arts and crafts center, along the North Fork of the Blackwater River toward the old community of Douglas. On our left were the remains of the old Davis Coal & Coke Company; on the right, the Cumberland Coal & Coke.

Farther down, I could see the town of Douglas. A few houses stood gaunt and gray, with black windows like sightless eyes. All was silent. Lining both sides of the road, we saw long, double rows of abandoned coke ovens, side by side. Thick moss

and lichens covered the stone ovens; willows and blackberry vines grew around them. Their mouths gaped open like black maws. There had been hundreds of them, aglow here from the late 1800's until the mid-1930's. Their construction still appears solid after all this time, in spite of their being built without mortar.

"If they'd used mortar, the walls would have cracked with the heat," Oreste explains. Masons put the bricks together with mud, which lasted through the intense heat of firing.

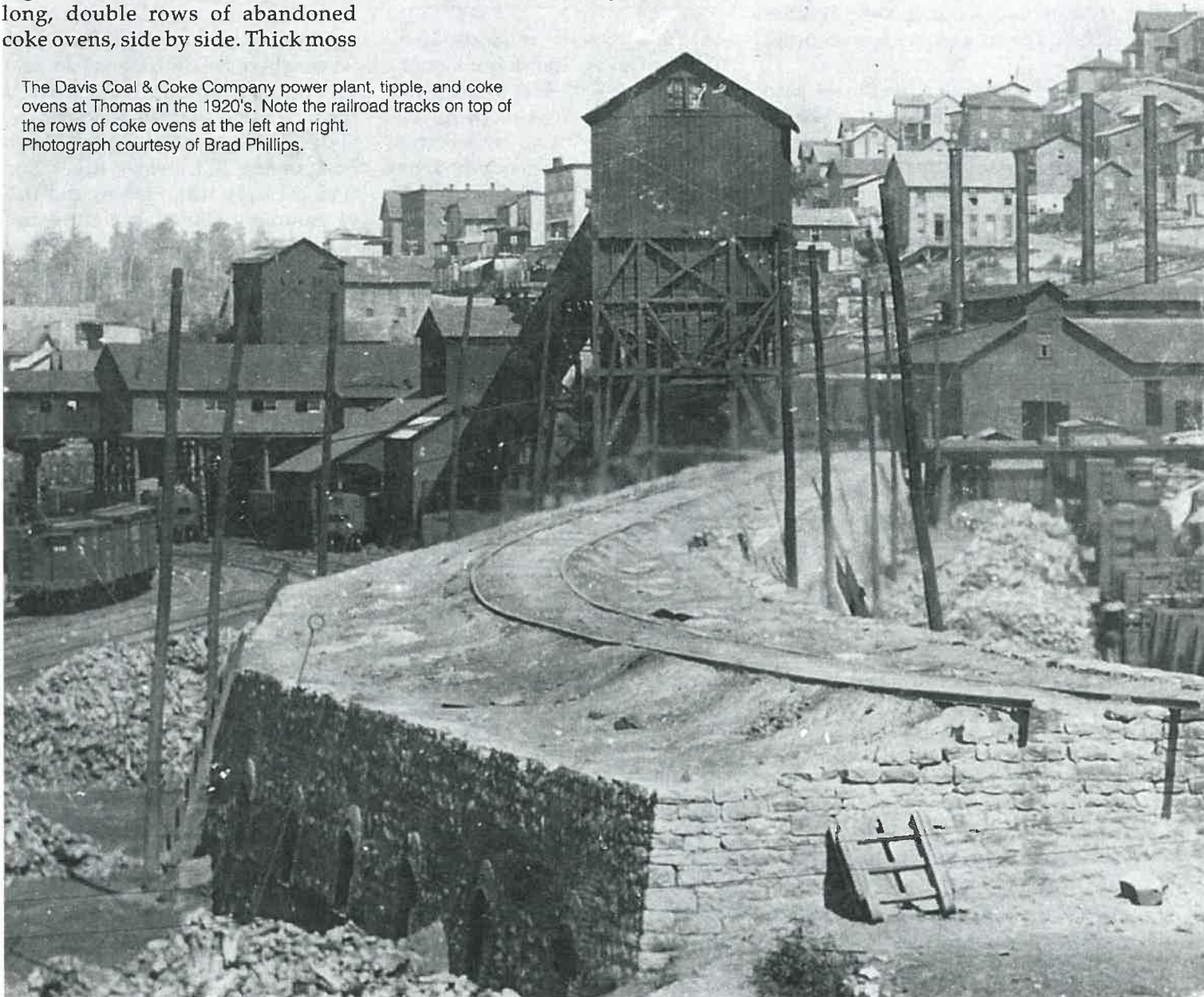
Pockets of stone, brick, and lumps of glistening black littered the area, industrial debris from years before.

Oreste bent over the rough ground to pick up a lump of coal, handing it to me.

"Feel it," he instructs. Then he found a lump of coke to put in my other hand. "Feel the difference?" he asks. "Coke is the carbon left from an incomplete burning of coal, because they control the amount of oxygen going in. The burning gets rid of gases and converts some [of the] coal to carbon monoxide and [carbon] dioxide. The benzene and carbon monoxide are deadly."

Both lumps were black, about the size of a golf ball. The coal was heavy, the coke feather light. I stuffed both

The Davis Coal & Coke Company power plant, tippie, and coke ovens at Thomas in the 1920's. Note the railroad tracks on top of the rows of coke ovens at the left and right. Photograph courtesy of Brad Phillips.



in my jeans pocket as mementos.

"How do you make coke?" I ask.

Oreste explains the process. When the rows of coke ovens were constructed, he says, a railroad track ran over the tops of the ovens. A little steam engine called a dinky pulled a coal hopper called a larry, and brought coal for the ovens. Dinkys were in use at Douglas, while other mines had electric-powered larrys.

Oreste wonders aloud about the derivation of the word. "Maybe from 'lorry,' the word for British trucks," he suggests.

Once the train was in place, the larry

dumped four tons of coal through an opening in the top of the oven, and workers leveled it off. Then the cast-iron lid was closed on top.

Workers started a fire of wood and coal, whose purpose was to make the bricks extremely hot. "Takes experience to know when the oven is hot enough," Oreste says. "After burning, an operator with a big hook dragged the remains all out and cleaned it up pretty good."

Then a finer grade of coal quickly went in through the front door. Workers carefully leveled this coal,

then quickly sealed up the door and the roof hole. If this coal bed were not level, the coal would not burn right.

"Heat from the brick caused spontaneous combustion," Oreste explains. "When it started to burn, you took the lid off and just cracked the door by removing a few bricks."

Forty-eight hours later, there were two tons of coke. Workers used coke racks and wide forks to load the coke onto railroad cars.

"This was called pulling the ovens,"





he tells us. They tore coke out with a hook, then used a scraper to clean out the oven. A train with steel hoppers parked just beside the ovens took the coke down to Elkins, and beyond, to fuel the nation's steel mills.

The backbreaking work was hard and dirty, and the pay was 50 to 75 cents an hour. A man could work three ovens a day. "He had to be very strong," Oreste says. "They kept going year round, through blizzards, rain, all kinds of weather. It was hot, hard work. The coke ovens ran day and night. Looked like the gates of hell. The air smelled like sulphur. Benzene went into the air. They finally learned how to capture the gases, and now they sell the benzene.

"Men earned three dollars for loading a coke rack. They would bring their wives and all their kids. The whole family could earn an extra three dollars a day. If you kicked back to the boss, you'd get more ovens to fill," he adds.

"Coke is the carbon left from the incomplete burning of coal, because they control the amount of oxygen going in. The burning gets rid of gases."

"There was a breed of people who would follow coke ovens," he continues, "and building them was a real art. Italian stone masons built the ovens.

"Thousands of men worked here once. They had big times, dancing, singing, fighting. The Mafia was here, you know," Oreste tells us. "There were some crazy people working here."

Oreste's father and grandfather

Oreste stands in front of a row of coke ovens at Douglas, Tucker County. His father and grandfather worked these ovens during the early 1900's. Oreste later did reclamation work at this same location. Photograph by Michael Keller.



A lump of coke left over from the Douglas coke ovens. Essential in the production of steel, coke is made from coal, which is partially burned in specially made ovens to produce the hot-burning, low-emission fuel. Photograph by Michael Keller.

on his son Jimmy's property, which generates electricity.

Because his first wife, Betty, did not speak Italian, the language was not a priority for the Leombruno children. Oreste, however, never stopped speaking Italian. For many people, Oreste is the link between the old country and West Virginia. When Italian letters come to Randolph County, the recipients often ask him to translate.

Oreste dances. He cooks spaghetti. He passes down family stories. In 2002, he married Wilma Farris, a lovely retired banker who has learned to care for all things Italian. When their two families get together for reunions, it's a huge and joyous event.

Strong, handsome, and active, Oreste is now 80 years old. He was born December 29, 1924. "He can never forget my birthday," Wilma tells me. "It's the same day as his."

Hard times and struggles are past for this family, but the younger Leombrunos know their proud heritage and will tell family stories to the little ones as years pass by. 🍁

MAUREEN CROCKETT is a freelance writer, photographer, and illustrator who lives in St. Albans. She is the author of *Jewels in Our Crown: The State Parks of West Virginia*, as well as numerous newspaper and magazine articles. Maureen's most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Spring 1998 issue.

had told him the stories. "Come pay-day, someone would say, 'Loan me \$20.'

"'No.'

"'Loan it to me, or I'll burn your house down.' That was an offer you couldn't refuse."

His father, Concezio, spoke of other bad people, as well. "Some men could burn up a man in a working coke oven," Oreste says. "If the victim was new, perhaps without family or friends, that was the last of him. If you threw a man in a hot coke oven, there would be nothing left."

On our way back to Thomas, I suggested we stop at the MountainMade store. When we pulled into the parking lot, suddenly Oreste recognized it. "That was our company store!" he exclaims.

Among the new clothing, books, pottery, wood carvings, and art objects on display, there was a wall of old photos. We saw a panoramic picture of Douglas in its heyday, with the hillside full of buildings. Today, Canaan Valley and Blackwater Falls attract tourists with state parks, vacation condos, restaurants, theaters, boutiques, and ski slopes. But during another time, the Douglas area roared with industry. The land remembers those years, where now only the silent coke ovens and the sealed mines

remain.

Oreste worked hard in the coal industry for 65 years and is now retired in Elkins. He calls it retirement, but he still rises at 6 each morning and works in the garden or his machine shop. Oreste once built a car from scratch, with a rumble seat, which his nine grandchildren love. He made a bicycle built for two, but the two seats are side by side. He constructed a waterwheel



After years of hard work, Oreste and his wife Wilma can smile and enjoy life. They are shown here recently at their home in Elkins. Photograph by Michael Keller.



In early November 1985, West Virginia was hit by the worst flood in 100 years. Tucker County was particularly devastated. Here, a cow carcass is entangled with flood debris beneath the Cheat River Bridge in Saint George. All photographs courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, unless otherwise noted.



Six days after the flood began, this car was still submerged in a torrent of swirling water at Hendricks on November 10.

After carrying the dog to the dry upstairs of the apartment, I started on my return trip down the alley for home. As I went through the water where I had just been a few minutes ago, I felt it going down over the tops of my waders. It was evident that the water was still rising, and rising fast.

While thinking about the dog rescue at Judy Bava's house, I got to thinking about going into the room and seeing the dog in the water and furniture floating about. It suddenly hit me. The lamps, and such, floating in the water were lit, meaning that I was wading in water with the electric still on, which could have given me one big jolt. It's possible that wearing rubber waders is what actually saved me, but I also believe that someone was really looking after me that night, even as stupid as I was.

It was between 7:30 and 8:00 when I got back to my house from rescuing the dog. As I entered my house through the front door, I told my wife that water was getting near

the back of the house, so we had better leave.

We put on our coats and prepared to leave, when another neighbor, Daris Alkire, came to the door and told us

Daris' actions were the first of many such good deeds that would be bestowed upon us before the whole ordeal ended.

that his new little one-story house was starting to wash away. Here was this young man who had just lost everything in his life's possession, attempting to get me and my family out safely and save whatever we could. He even moved my old pickup truck to higher ground. Daris' actions were the first of many such good deeds that would be bestowed upon us before the whole ordeal ended, many of which were unknown to us at that time. I will never forget the

actions of Daris Alkire, the way he truly showed the meaning of caring for your fellow man. Not feeling sorry for himself, he was out braving the elements to help others to survive. All that I can say is, "God bless you, Daris."

As we hurriedly left our home on Main Street, Aunt Burnetta fell in the water and dropped her pocketbook. It was retrieved by one of the family members as Daris and I got my aunt back on her feet. Difficult as this was, it appeared that there was one family member enjoying the night, this being our dog Tramp. A large black lab, she loved the water. As we were leaving the house, sure enough, Tramp decided to take a swim in the yard next to the house.

We all made our way down Main Street to my wife's parents' home. Dale and Evelyn Barr lived on Main Street, as well, and the water had not reached their home. In fact, they got no water in their house at all, as the northern portion of Main Street sat on a higher elevation than the eastern



The Wilson Apartments on Pennsylvania Avenue in Parsons were among hundreds of buildings destroyed, damaged, or condemned due to the flood. More than 4,000 homes were destroyed statewide. This photograph was taken on November 14.

side of the street. Even though we had nearly five feet of water in the downstairs of our house, our neighbors just across the street had water only up to the edge of their front door, but it did not get in. Their neighbors to the north, including the Tucker County Hospital, were flooded.

We arrived at my wife's parents' by means of our car and my gas company truck. Dale and Evelyn were listening to their police scanner, reporting all that was taking place throughout the area. It was at this time that our first real sense of panic took place. Their scanner revealed that some fire-

fighters were trapped by the raging waters at the River Bend Estates in the Holly Meadows area. We did not know at the time that my daughter's husband and his brother were two of the trapped men. Even though we suspected that my son-in-law and his brother were in that area, we tried to convince our daughter that they were not. However, the frightening ordeal could be heard by everyone over the scanner. Firemen called in panic as their fire truck began to wash away.

Here on Main Street, the water continued to rise, so we thought it would be best if we all moved to still higher ground, because we did not know when the water would stop coming up. My mother and father-in-law went to her sister's home, while the rest of us went to a small apartment rented by Jo Ellen Bland on Spruce Street. Jo Ellen was a patient in the Tucker County Hospital at that time, but earlier in the evening told my wife that we could go to her apartment to stay if we had to.

This small apartment had one bedroom, a living room, and a small kitchen. In the apartment were my wife, my daughter, my dog, and myself. A short time later, my daughter's



Residents begin the sad and tedious task of salvage and recovery. These men and boys are sifting through clothes in front of the K-G Stores in Parsons, date unknown.

Twenty 1985 Flood Facts

- 💧 Rain falls November 1-5, 1985
- 💧 November 4 rainfall for Franklin 7.55 inches
- 💧 November 5 rainfall for Petersburg 5.75 inches
- 💧 November 5 rainfall for Parsons 5.2 inches
- 💧 November total rainfall for Parsons 11.87 inches
- 💧 November total rainfall for Canaan Valley 15.16 inches
- 💧 Cheat River crests 3 a.m., November 5, at 21 feet, 8 feet above flood stage
- 💧 33 counties in West Virginia affected
- 💧 29 counties declared flood disaster areas
- 💧 Damage \$40 million in Tucker County
- 💧 Damage in excess of \$550 million statewide
- 💧 5 fatalities reported in Tucker County
- 💧 47 fatalities reported statewide
- 💧 4,389 homes destroyed statewide
- 💧 275 homes destroyed in Tucker County
- 💧 92 homes condemned in Tucker County
- 💧 266 homes with major damage in Tucker County
- 💧 19 businesses destroyed in Tucker County
- 💧 50 public buildings destroyed in Tucker County
- 💧 November 27, Governor Arch Moore declared Parsons the hardest hit town

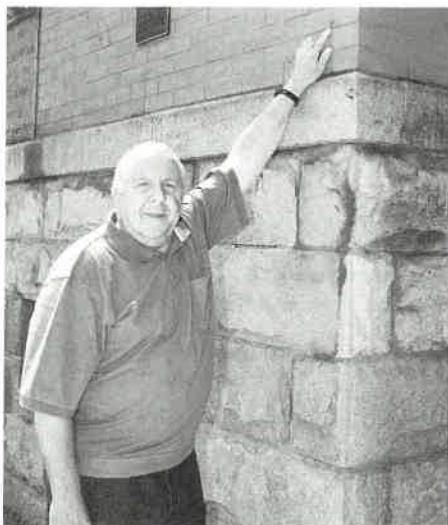
Sources: *The Flood of November 4-5, 1985 in Tucker, Preston, Grant, and Hardy Counties, West Virginia*, by Wayne Bittinger; McClain Printing Company, 1985.

Killing Waters: The Great West Virginia Flood of 1985, by Bob Teets and Shelby Young; Cheat River Publishing, 1985.

Killing Waters II: West Virginia's Struggle to Recover, by Bob Teets and Shelby Young; Cheat River Publishing, 1987.

mother-in-law, Bobbie McWilliams, came in also, with her dog.

It was nearing 11:00 when my son-in-law and his brother arrived. Donnie and Jimmy were soaked to



Author and former Parsons mayor Jerry DiBacco indicates the 1985 water level on the wall of the Tucker County courthouse. Photograph 2005 by Michael Keller.

the bone, both still shaking from their ordeal. Later, the boys began to speak of their frightening experience. They said they were attempting to locate some families in the Holly Meadows area when, all of a sudden, their heavy fire truck started to float. We later learned that by my son-in-law's effort, a number of the firemen were able to get to higher ground and be saved. As the truck began to float, Donnie took one end of a fire hose and swam through the swift water to higher ground. He then held the hose, with the other end attached to the truck, while the remaining volunteers got to safety. Shortly after the men got off safely, the truck continued to wash downstream. It showed up after the flood in Preston County.

While telling the story, my son-in-law's brother said, "I really thought I was going to die," as he sipped a drink of hot tea prepared by the ladies in the apartment.

Two decades have passed since that dreadful night of November 4, 1985. Some are wondering how long it took Tucker County to recover and get back to normal. Many of us have the opinion that, not only have we not completely recovered, we never will. Those who actually did recover are few and far between.

Some who had the most frightening experiences during that night of raging waters have since departed this world. One would have to believe that up until the day of their death, they remembered every detail of their terrifying ordeal.

There were some who attempted to come back, but due to the local economy, just didn't make it. Ken and Gerry Teagarden, the owners of the K-G Stores, were completely wiped out. The railroad is but a memory, as is the VFW club, which did not attempt a comeback. The A&P store was rebuilt, but after a few years, went out of business. When Parsons

This memorial, in the shape of Noah's ark, was erected in Parsons in 1995.
Photograph 2005 by Michael Keller.



Footware failed to come back, the loss of those 75 to 100 jobs really added to the unemployment woes within the community. Now, 20 years later, many store buildings remain empty, and many vacant lots are visible where businesses once thrived.

In spite of the loss, a few new businesses have come to the county seat. The old railroad depot is now being used as a craft shop and tourist-related rest stop. A flood wall has been built, which now gives the town protection from a so-called 25-year flood, which, as some put it, "is better than nothing." The flood of '85 was considered to be between a 100- to 500-year flood, and everyone realizes that there is no way flood protection can be obtained for a deluge of that size in this valley.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) has a buyout program where they purchased many damaged homes so that the former owners could relocate out of the flood zone. This program helped the families, but also caused a decline in the population within the area. Those homes were razed and the lots given to the city or the county. These lots, however, cannot be used for anything other than parks or gardens, and no structures can be built on them.

Those of us who remain cannot help but remember November 4, 1985. Some believe that Tucker County might be too tough to die. We realize that the happenings of that night and the weeks following were not the end, but actually the beginning of flood, sweat, and tears. 🍁

JERRY DIBACCO is a longtime resident of Parsons, who grew up in Thomas. A former newspaper reporter and columnist, county commissioner, and school board member, he is also a former mayor of Parsons. This article was excerpted from Jerry's self-published booklet, titled *November 4, 1985: The Beginning of ... Flood, Sweat, and ... Tears*. It is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

JOHN WARNER is owner of Otter Creek Photography in Hendricks and has lived in Tucker County since 1977. He has photographed widely in the United States, Mexico, and Central America. John's most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Fall 2002 issue.

In an isolated Marshall County hollow in the early 1950's, a young boy and his grandmother waded a creek, with the former toting a gunny sack and the latter carrying a minnow seine. When the duo come to a suitably deep pool, the grandmother instructs the boy to go to the head of the hole while she positions herself at its tail end.

The grandmother then tells the youngster to wade toward her, splashing all the way, and he does. And when the child arrives at the front of the net, he grabs hold of it, and together they lift the seine and its contents — a squirming jumble of crayfish, suckers, chubs, and a turtle. The crayfish will be boiled for lunch, the chubs canned for winter, and the turtle turned into soup. But the suckers, considered today by many city folks as trash fish, are the real prize. For in the Northern Panhandle of a half-century ago, suckers were regarded as “mountain salmon,” and fresh, fried sucker patties were a staple.

Today, that young boy is 57-year-old J.D. “Peck” Martin of McMechen. He has spent his life heeding the call of the wild, making a living as a taxidermist and gaining renown as one of West Virginia’s finest turkey hunters and callers.

He has also become one of the country’s most acclaimed makers of handcrafted turkey calls. Indeed, the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) has 47 times given awards to Martin’s box calls. And in 1996, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources commissioned him to build 40 American chestnut box calls for the Northeast Wild Turkey Committee convention.

Peck credits his grandmother, Ethel Leichter, for inspiring him to love the outdoors and the creatures that dwell there.

“She was born and raised at the headwaters of Fish Creek in Marshall County,” recalls Peck. “Grandma lived so far back in the woods that the hollow she had a house in didn’t even rate a name on the map, but the

folks thereabouts called it Bannon Hollow.”

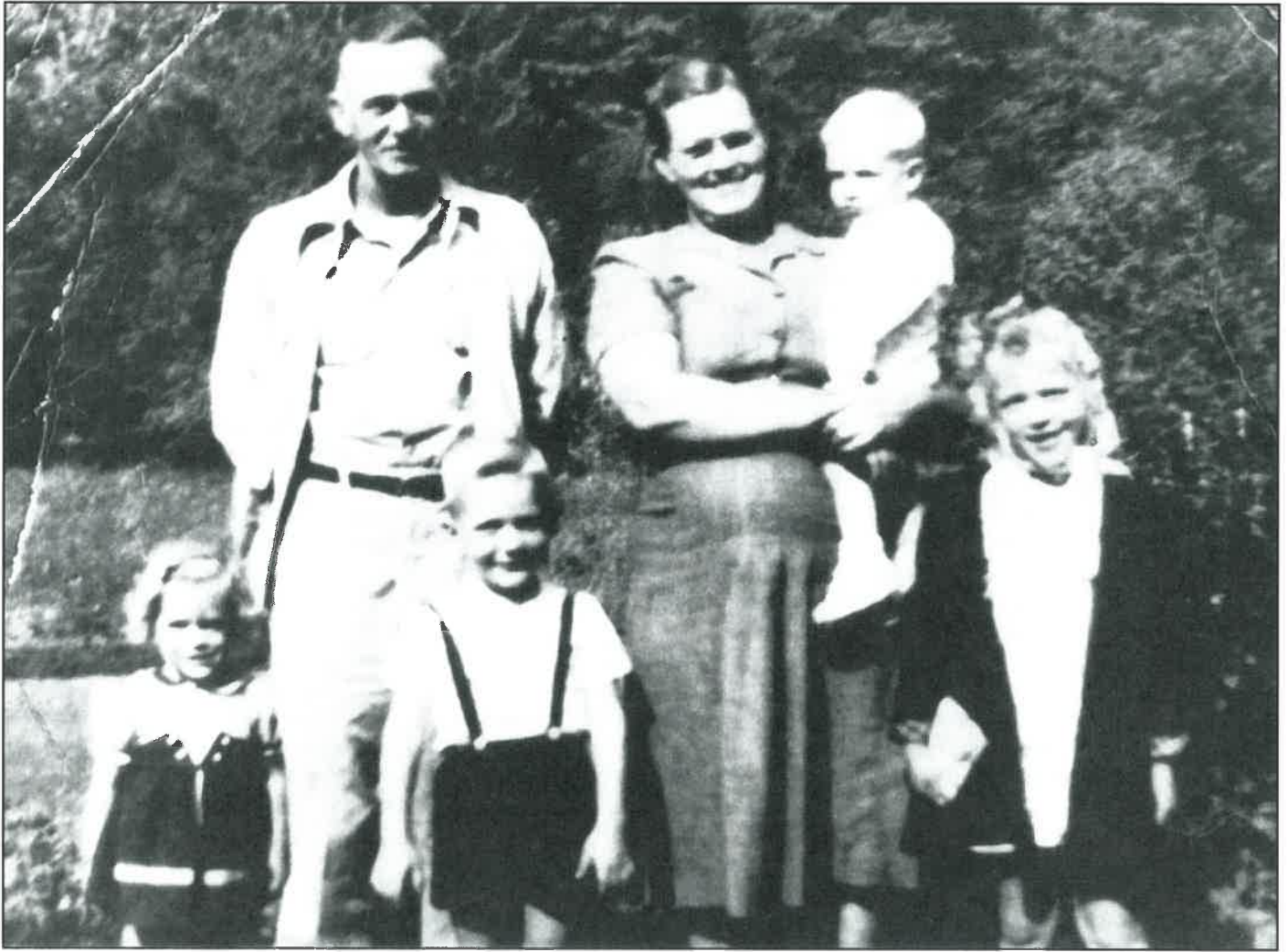
Subsistence farming was very much a part of daily life. In addition to seining the creek for various creatures, the family had an acre-size garden and a hog pen. The pigs were an especially important source of nourishment, and a real highlight of the family meal was the mince pie that Peck’s grandmother would make from hogs’ heads.

As was typical of 1950’s country boys in rural West Virginia, Peck began to fish and hunt early in his youth. He maintains that he can’t remember a time when he didn’t practice both pastimes. The self-reliance that his grandmother instilled in him made him forsake store-bought hunting and fishing gear. Besides, the family didn’t have the money to purchase such things.

“I always have wanted to do everything for myself, especially when it comes to fishing and hunting,” Peck says. “I made my own fishing lures, like jigs and spinners. And I learned



The back window of Peck's pickup truck sports the Gobbler's Choice logo. Peck still does business as the Martin Brothers, in honor of his late brother, John, who was killed while hunting in 1994. Photograph by Michael Keller.



Grandmother Ethel Leichter introduced Peck to the great outdoors when he was a youngster in the early 1950's. She is shown here at about that time, holding Peck's brother, John. Peck is standing in front, wearing suspenders.

how to track deer and recognize turkey signs, like where the birds scratched for food and what their droppings looked like."

During the 1950's, the deer and turkeys that made those signs were very uncommon in the Northern Panhandle. But rural families still needed fresh meat for the table. Peck's parents lived in nearby McMechen, so he was able to spend every weekend with his grandmother, as well as most of the summers. During the warm weather period, one animal in particular was their quarry.

"During the summer, Grandma and I went groundhog hunting just about every day," recalls Peck. "We took three things when we went after woodchucks: a .22 rifle, a terrier named Ring, and a 42-inch-long steel rod with a hook on one end and a

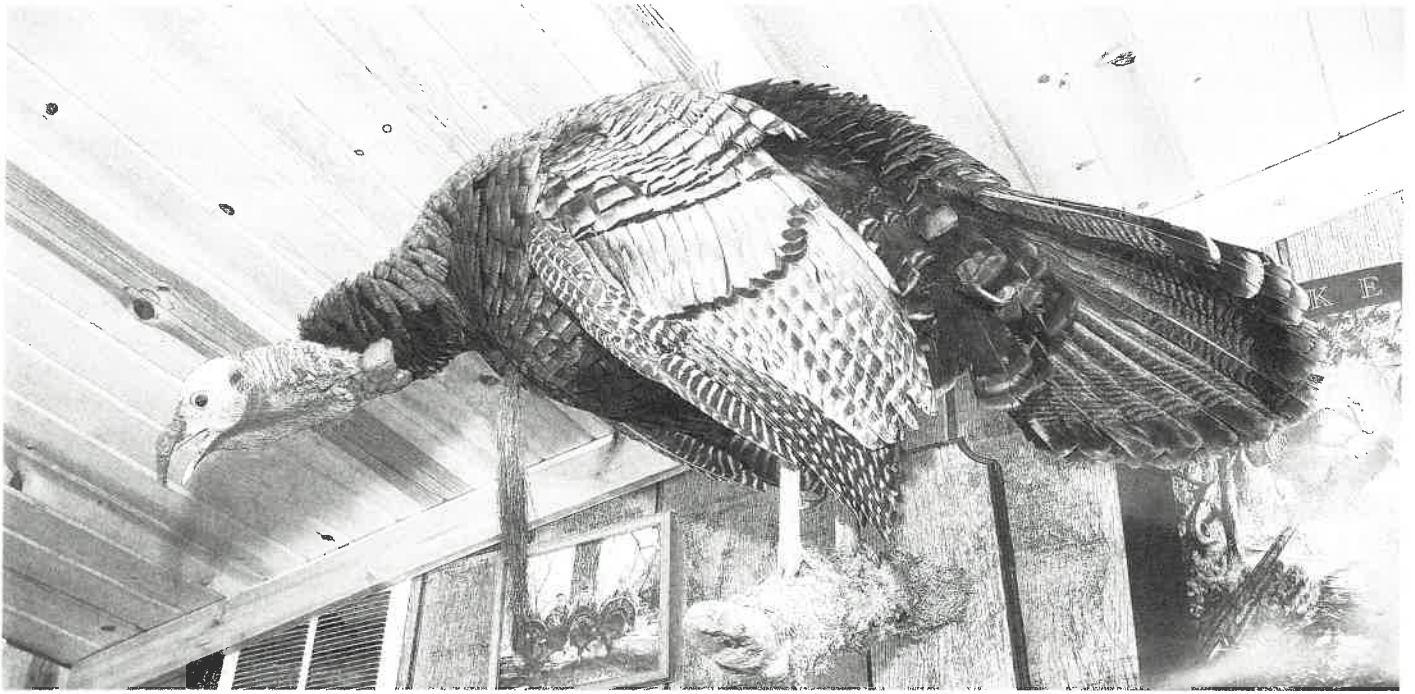
handle on the other.

"If Grandma had a clear shot at a groundhog, she'd go ahead and take it with the .22. But a lot of the time, a chuck would see us and take off running for its hole. And we'd send Ring off after it. The dog's job was to get between the groundhog and its hole and keep it from denning up. Sometimes the groundhog would still make it to the hole, and then Ring would go down after it. Then, Grandma and I would have to pull Ring out of the hole, and she would use the hook part of the steel rod to haul the groundhog out."

After field dressing the woodchuck, Peck and his grandma would take their prize home, where it would be parboiled for several hours. The meat would be fried in an iron skillet, along with herbs from the garden

and ramps that had been gathered from Bannon Hollow earlier in the spring. Accompanying fried woodchuck would be a salad of poke leaves, water cress, and dandelions — all of which had been reaped from nearby woods, fields, or Fish Creek.

In middle and high school, three things happened to Peck that helped shape his adult life. Because of his bright red hair, he acquired the nickname of "Woodpecker," which eventually was shortened to "Peck." In the seventh grade, his teacher, Mrs. Saunderman, gave her class an assignment to carve something from a soap bar. Peck fashioned an Indian chief with a full headdress and won the prize for best in his class. It was not until his ninth-grade woodworking class and a teacher named Bob Higgins that Peck began to develop



A mount of wild turkey, such as this one, led Peck to a taxidermy conference in 1988, where he began his interest in making turkey calls. Photograph by Michael Keller.

his fascination for wood.

"That English and math stuff early in the morning got me all bored," remembers Peck. "But when the time started getting closer for Mr. Higgins' third-period woodworking, I couldn't wait. I loved making anything with my hands."

As an adult, Peck found a way to combine his passion for the outdoors with a desire to work with his hands. He became a taxidermist and gradually built a reputation in the

Northern Panhandle as a master of the trade. In 1988, Peck decided to journey to Atlanta for the annual NWTf convention. He carried with him a mount of flying turkey to enter in the competition. Although Peck went to the convention primarily to see what his fellow taxidermists had on display, he traveled home inspired by the handmade box calls of such legendary craftsmen as Neil Cost and Lamar Williams.

What began as what Peck calls a

"gee whiz, maybe I could make calls like that" reaction to the works of Cost and Williams has now evolved into a full-time vocation. Peck's ability to turn a block of wood into a handcrafted call has gained him national acclaim.

"I guess most of my notoriety comes from the box calls I make from wormy American chestnut wood," explains Peck. "The American chestnut was such an important tree in the settlement of this country — our



Peck and members of his family bagged these turkeys in Hardy County in 1991. From left are Peck's sons, Jay and Scott; Peck; brother John; and John's sons, John, Jr., and Kevin. Photographer unknown.

forefathers used the wood for cabins, barns, wagons, furniture, rail fences, and much more — that I gain a real sense of patriotism from working with this wood.”

Peck is currently creating box calls from chestnut beams taken from a log cabin constructed in Elkins in the 1850’s. The trees that the wood came from were standing in the 1700’s, and the wood today is just as solid as it was then, he says.

Rail fences from the 1800’s and the early decades of the 1900’s are another major source of chestnut wood for craftsmen. The chestnut blight that swept across the East in the early decades of the 1900’s felled this tree that was once a dominant species in the region’s forest.

This past fall, Peck took an expedition to Virginia, where he purchased wood from another uncommon tree — the butternut, also known as the white walnut. Peck’s love of wood causes him to travel great distances to locate material that will produce just the right sound in his calls: the whistle-like sounds of a “kee-kee,” the raspy “yawk yawk” of a yelp, the soothing “cuck cucks” of a cluck, or the deep-chested gobble of a tom turkey.

“I love to start a call from scratch

with raw wood and turn it into a finished call,” explains Peck. “I love the smell of individual wood pieces, and I love the different smells coming together from all kinds of wood.”

The box-call maker reveals that red cedar gives off his favorite smell, because of the pleasantly pungent odor. He says it is also the most aromatic of all woods and the fragrance that dominates all others in his shop. Another favorite is Alaskan yellow cedar, which emits the odor of “yellow mustard on a hotdog,” he says. Interestingly, the wood variety that Peck least likes to whiff is black walnut, which he describes as having a very biting smell that is quite unpleasant.

As pleasurable as it is for visitors to inhale deeply of the smells wafting from Peck’s shop, the calls themselves are what people come to purchase. He says that chestnut box calls have almost a “mystical” sound. And he adds that although he may construct 12 to 18 calls out of one fence rail, each will have its own distinct tone. Peck emphasizes that American chestnut boxes, as a whole, feature a “deeper sound, a different rasp, a more lyrical tone” than do the calls from any other wood he has plied.

Each handcrafted box call, regardless of the wood used to construct it, gives off a unique sound. Peck says that he likes to pair a hard and a soft wood — for example, walnut and poplar, or wild cherry and poplar — to maximize the sound potential.

Mass-manufactured calls are typically constructed by means of a mortised bit or a milling machine. The wood is then dried in a kiln. These calls generally do not show much difference in the way they sound, which is typical of anything mass-produced, explains Peck. The heat of the kiln destroys too many wood molecules, leaving a call sounding flat and dead.

Peck cuts prospective box-call wood into six pieces with a 10-inch table saw. He air dries each call’s lids and sounding boards — the two long sides of a call.

“The process of constructing a wormy chestnut box call begins with two sounding boards,” Peck says. “I want the grain for them to run horizontal, as opposed to the grain of the lid, which runs vertical. The sound coming from a box call sounds so much more like a turkey when the grain of the sounding boards and the lid run in opposite directions. Then I cut two grooves on each of the sounding boards, mostly for cosmetic purposes. And I’ll cut a radius on top of the sounding boards, making them arch a little, so that the lid will slide over the boards more smoothly.”

Next, Peck takes the front and end pieces — known as the core block — and glues them to the two sounding boards. This partial call is set aside for several hours to dry. Then, he drills holes in the end core block and lid for the spring and screw. Finally, the lid is attached to the end core block, the bottom board is glued on, and the mostly finished call is left to dry for several hours before being sanded. The call is still not ready for sale, however.

“I have to run the call, that is, tune it by making strokes with the lid across the tops of the sounding boards,” says Peck. “The yelps and clucks that come out have to sound



Clamps hold bottom boards to the core blocks of several new box calls, as Peck sets them aside for the glue to dry. Once finished, these calls will sell for prices ranging from \$26.95 to \$200. For more information, call (304) 233-5518. Photograph by Michael Keller.



A finished box call. To make the desired sound, the lid is slid back and forth over the vertical sounding boards. A skillful hunter can make a wide range of calls with this one box. Photograph by Michael Keller.

like the yelps and clucks of a real turkey."

If the turkey talk that comes out is true to life, Peck applies clear lacquer



Peck Martin doing what he enjoys most — hunting wild turkey using one of his handcrafted box calls. Photograph by Bruce Ingram.

and his Gobbler's Choice Wild Game Calls logo to the box. For a collectible call, Peck will add such touches as hand-rubbing his creation with gunstock oil and adorning it with the embossed image of a turkey head and tracks.

Handcrafted wormy chestnut box calls are not just aesthetically pleasing. They have a practical purpose, as well.

"By doing such things as repositioning my fingers on the call, holding the call in my palm or vertically, and increasing or decreasing the pressure of the strokes, I can make one box call easily sound like seven or eight different turkeys," says Peck. "Add in the sounds of another box call made from, say, cedar and poplar, and you can really make some different turkey talk."

As Peck Martin answers questions about his call business, he mounts the head of a large buck killed this past deer season. Scattered about him are orders for calls as well as box lids, sounding boards, core blocks, and

bottoms resting in various stages of assembly. And mounts of whitetails, turkeys, bass, and trout adorn the walls. In a corner lie chestnut rail fence lengths from a Hardy County farm. Future wormy chestnut box calls exist within the wood, just waiting to emerge.

Peck is, he acknowledges, one of those rare individuals who has been blessed to live off nature's bounty, thanks to the knowledge and self-reliance that his grandmother instilled in him when she introduced him to the outdoors some 50 years ago.

"Grandma Ethel would have been proud that I have been able to make a living off the land," says Peck. "She was a great teacher." ❁

BRUCE INGRAM is an outdoor writer and photographer living in Fincastle, Virginia. He is the author of three books: *The Shenandoah and Rappahannock Rivers Guide*, *The New River Guide*, and *The James River Guide*. Bruce has written more than 1,500 magazine articles. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

"I Never Dreamed

**Gilmer
County's
Roxy
Ellyson
at 105**

By Harriet Whipkey

**Photographs by
Neal Menschel**

Soon to be 105 years old,
Roxy Ellyson of Gilmer
County sits on her porch
swing, holding a decorative
metal plaque, including a
picture of herself at about
the time of her marriage.





As a young woman, Roxy learned the guitar and played for a short while in a string band. She is shown here in about 1921, standing, at left, with her guitar. Other musicians unidentified. Photographer unknown.

in white taffeta. We couldn't afford a honeymoon, so after the wedding, we walked across the hill to Avon's home. Later, we moved into a little house on his father's place on Lower Big Run of Sinking Creek." Avon had a Ford car when they married. "He paid \$500 for it," she says, with noticeable pride in her voice.

Three daughters were born to the couple while they were living on Lower Big Run: Rosa Belle, Neva Lynn, and Mary Jo. Roxy recalls an incident when she and her daughters were home alone. "One night I was a-sittin' and readin' stories to the girls. Well, I heard this noise on the screen window, and I thought, oh well, it's the cat. So I went ahead reading. Then I heard the noise again. I thought, I'd better get up and hook the door. Somebody might come in. So I hooked the door. Avon came in from hunting in a little while, and I told him there'd been a noise at the window. 'The dogs got after something,' he said, but he went on to bed.

The next morning when he started to work, he spied this monkey up in a tree. So he come back to the house, got the gun, and shot him!

"There had been a show truck wrecked over someplace next to Cox's Mills, and the animals got loose. They always supposed that monkey was one of 'em. If I'd a-opened that door and saw that monkey, I'd a-died!"

When the family lived on Lower Big Run, they had five cows. "We bought a cream separator, and I milked those five cows and sold cream," Roxy recalls. "Then when we went to Tanner, we had no use for the cream separator, 'cause we could only take one cow with us. So we traded that cream separator for my first washing machine — a Maytag wringer type with a gasoline motor."

The family lived on the farm on Lower Big Run for six years and then moved to Tanner. "Avon was working for South Penn, which is Pennzoil now," she recalls. He got

promoted from a meter reader to an engineer and was told that, if he didn't take the promotion and move to Tanner into the company house, he would lose his job. The South Penn company house at Tanner was "quite a lot better than what we did live in," Roxy says. "We had electricity, running water, and an indoor toilet. I thought I was in heaven!"

Later, they moved into another company house up on the hill. "There were 60 steps up that hill," Roxy remembers. "Thirty steps, then a landing, and then 30 more. Everything had to be carried up." But Roxy recalls one time when she was grateful for that hill. She says, "This terrible flood came in August of 1943. The water got up to the tops of the windows in the company station. The flood washed houses away, and a woman and her baby were killed down at the mouth of Trace."

Several families lived in company houses at Tanner, and they formed a tightly knit community. "We had



Roxy and husband, Avon, at Tanner in about 1933, standing in front of their company house, owned by South Penn Gas Company. From the left, their children are Bud, Rosa Belle, Mary Jo, and Neva Lynn. Photographer unknown.

lots of good friends and neighbors while we lived there," Roxy says, one of them being the plant supervisor's wife, Mrs. Maude Giboney. "She was one of the best women I ever knew. Every time I had sickness, she was there." And Roxy was there for Mrs. Giboney, as well. Roxy has always believed that being a good neighbor and having good neighbors are of the greatest importance.

The 30 years the family lived in Tanner were busy ones for Roxy. She recalls, "We always raised a garden. There was more than one year that I canned over 1,000 quarts." In addition to vegetables, she says, "I used to try to pick 100 quarts of blackberries every year, and I usually got them.

"We raised our own hogs and killed them. We killed one early and then usually killed two more about the first of the year, so we had meat year-round. We always had a cow, so we had milk and butter, and I sold milk to the families in the other company houses." They also raised chickens for eggs and meat. "My husband always wanted people to come and eat. A lot of men'd come into the company station, may be bring a lunch pail, maybe not. Well, he'd

bring them up to the house to eat. I'd see 'em a-comin', and I'd think, what am I gonna give 'em this time? But I always found something, and I reckon they was satisfied, 'cause they always come back."

Two sons, Hale and Gail, were born after the family's move to Tanner. All five children graduated from Tanner High School. Roxy says she always stressed the importance of education to her children. "They can take money away from you," she says, "but they can't take your education. I was so anxious for all the kids to get through school. Now, I didn't have any problem with the girls, but the boys were a different story." All the girls completed their college courses, but the boys went through high school and one year of college each. She shakes her head and says, "That was it."

Avon was scheduled to retire from South Penn Gas Company in 1962, so they had to vacate the company house. In 1961, the couple moved into Roxy's current home, a white frame house in the Kanawha Drive community, about five miles below Glenville. "I had my eye on this place since it was built," Roxy says. "I wanted it so badly, but I had no

idea I would ever get it."

They lived there together until Avon passed away in 1992, at age 95.

Roxy has seen many changes during her lifetime, but perhaps the change that has impressed her most has been the advances that have occurred in transportation. From the memorable sighting of her first automobile, she progressed to taking an airplane trip with Rosa Belle and Mary Jo from Charleston to Mobile, Alabama, to visit her brother, Okey. Unlike her exuberance over the car ride at Alice when she was about 12, however, Roxy's only comment about flying is, "I enjoyed it."

There have been other visits out of the area, as well, but Roxy says, "I've lived in Gilmer County all my life, and I'm proud of it. I love Gilmer County." And Gilmer County loves Roxy. She was chosen the Belle for Gilmer County in the 1972 West Vir-



In 1972, Roxy was selected as the Gilmer County Belle for the West Virginia State Folk Festival in Glenville. Photographer unknown.



George Musgrave taught in one-room schools in Mason County for 42 years. He is shown here with a group of "scholars" at Beech Grove school during the 1897-98 school year, his first term as a teacher. Photographer unknown.

I was born in 1875, the ninth son in a family of 10 children. My father was Scotch; my mother was of Irish-German descent. My Grandfather Roseberry settled on a farm on the Monongahela River, where the town of Brownsville, Pennsylvania, now stands. The ground was fertile and [they] raised large crops of corn. [They] had no stock to feed it to, so they made it into corn liquor, which they could get across the mountains and find ready sale.

So the President sent a revenue officer over to collect the tax. They tarred and feathered him and sent him back home. The President sent the militia over, so they left their homes and came by flatboat down the [Ohio] River and bought property on Oldtown Creek [Mason County], where some of their descendants live now.

I commenced my career as school-teacher in the years 1897-98 in a one-room school known as Beech Grove, a mile above Point Pleasant. In those days, the teacher was supposed to treat the students at Christmas times,

and if [he or she] did not, they would shut the teacher out until they agreed to terms. I would not agree to their terms, so the large boys concluded to throw me out. I, at that time, was quite an athlete. I piled them up until they gave up the idea, but treated them to a pound of candy and an orange each a piece. This seemed to satisfy them, so I was asked to teach again 1898-99.

By this time, I felt I needed better preparation, so I took the spring and summer term at Morgantown. But when I came back, all the schools were taken except a school near Leon, known as the Eight Mile School. So in 1899-1900, I taught there.

Then in 1900-01, I was called to a school known as the Lock 11 School. This school was composed of 64 scholars in all grades, which I found quite a problem to control, which I did with the hickory stick, to my shame. But if discipline is not given at home, the school is the next place to prevent juvenile delinquency.

At this time, a thing happened in my life that changed conditions quite

a bit. I met and married a schoolteacher, who has stood by me through 58 years of married life and has been a great inspiration to me, although she did not like to teach.

In 1901-02, I taught my homeschool known as Gould Hill. Then in 1902-05, I taught Vanmatre School and then was called to be principal of North Point Pleasant School. I was asked to return, but I found the discipline to be easier in the country.

So, in 1906-08, I taught the White Church School. And 1908-09, I taught at Morning Star, also 1909-12. From Morning Star School, I came back to Vanmatre School, where I taught three terms from 1913-16.

By this time, the trustee system had changed its politics, and I was made supervisor in 1916-17 to the Lone Oak. From the term 1918-19, the state went Democratic, and I, being a Republican, was tossed out. But the county superintendent saved me and sent me back to Beech Grove, where I taught 1919-22.

I retired at [age] 65, on a salary of \$30 per month, after teaching 42 years and being district supervisor one year. My regret is that I had no more education in guidance, as I think that guidance in schools, with cooperation in the homes, will help to solve the problems of juvenile delinquency that seem to be taking the country today. 🌿

On this lazy summer day in July 2004, I wonder what Grandpa Musgrave would have to say about the way we conduct education today. His zeal as an advocate for better systems never waned, and I am sure he would have some advice for educators. —P.J.C.B.

PHYLLIS JEAN CARDER BAKER was born in Point Pleasant. She holds a Ph.D. in adult education from Ohio State University and is retired from the faculty of Marietta College in Ohio. This is Phyllis' first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

The Bob Harness and the Moundsville Pen Executioner's Story

Text and photographs
by Carl E. Feather

Bob Harness of Pleasant Valley, Marshall County, spent seven years as a prison guard behind the imposing walls of the West Virginia State Penitentiary at Moundsville. Fifty years after participating in his last execution, he has this advice for any person who ever thought they'd like to witness capital punishment:

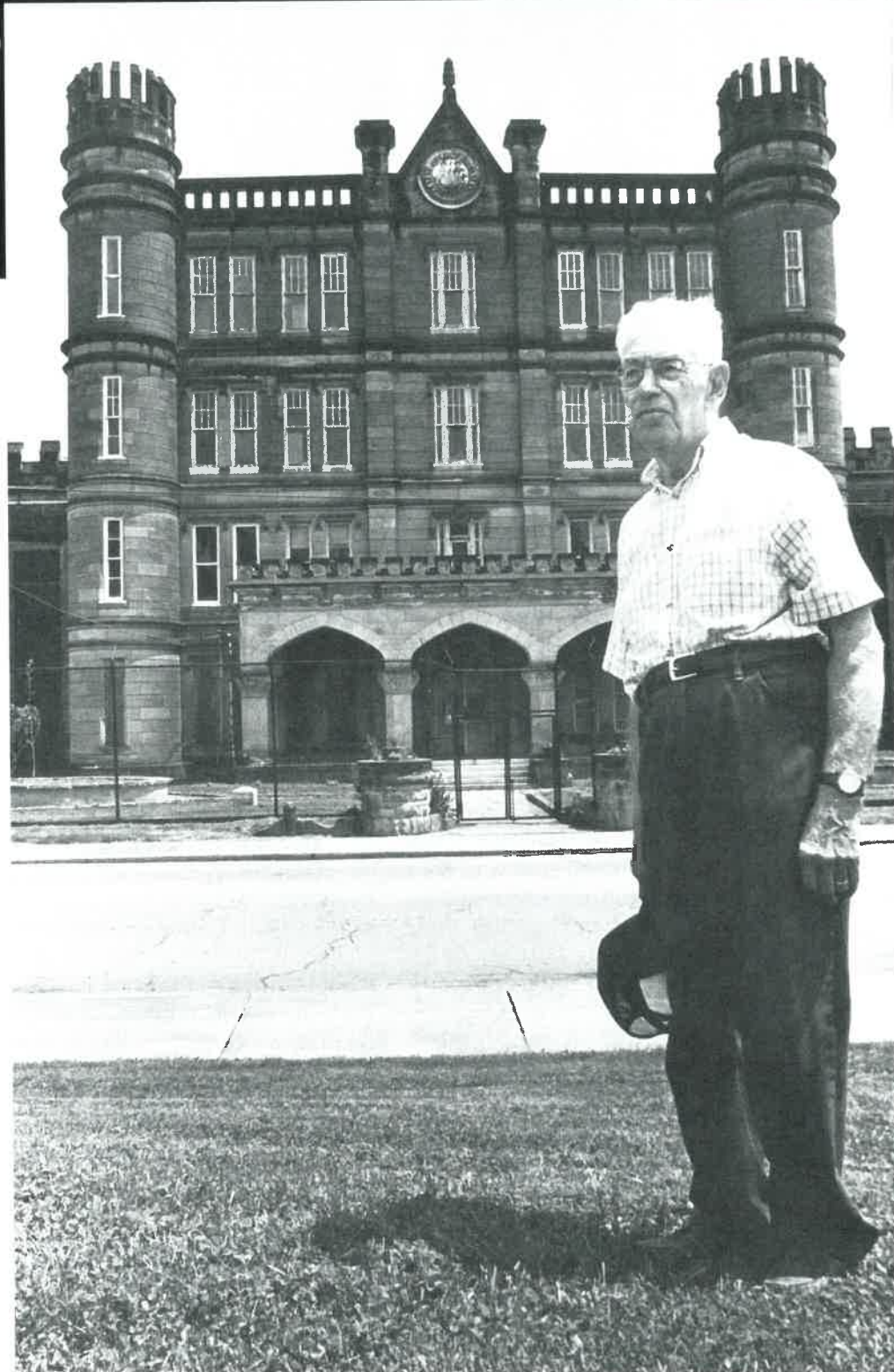
"If you ever have an opportunity to witness an execution, don't," Bob says. "Don't ever witness an execution. Some people think it's funny, but I'm telling you, you don't want to see it."

This grim topic is obviously something Bob does not enjoy talking about. His voice falters as he describes the nine executions in which he had a part while employed at the pen between July 1947 and July 1954.

"This isn't something that I'm proud of," Bob says. "But it is something that's history."

The state executed 94 men at the penitentiary, beginning with Shep Caldwell of McDowell County in 1899 and ending with Elmer Brunner of

Bob Harness of Pleasant Valley, Marshall County, near the main entrance to the West Virginia State Penitentiary in Moundsville. Bob worked here from 1947-54 and participated in nine executions.



Cabell County on April 3, 1959. Paul Kirby was warden at the prison when it closed in 1995 and is now executive director of the Moundsville Economic Development Council. Paul says that, to the best of his knowledge, Bob is the only surviving guard from the pen's era of executions. [See "A Tough Joint": The West Virginia Penitentiary at Moundsville," by Joseph Platania; Summer 1995.]

"The last guy who was executed here, I knew him real well," Bob says of Elmer Brunner. "He used to come in down at the annex — the death house — at 5:00 in the morning and give out donuts. He run the donut machine at the penitentiary, and he'd come in here delivering donuts to the guy that was being executed. You'd think he would know what could happen to him."

Bob, a soft-spoken, silver-haired gentleman who stands just five feet seven inches, defies the stereotype of the burly prison guard responsible for maintaining order among nearly 2,000 of West Virginia's toughest felons. The Hardy County native was just 23 years old and fresh out of the Army when he landed a job in the maximum-security facility. Work was in short supply in his native Moorefield, and a cadre of politicians and personal friends pulled a few strings to help Bob get a state job. Despite the political connections required to get a job at the prison, and the inherent dangers of working there, a guard's pay was only \$155 a month. Nevertheless, it was a fascinating job.

"This was an interesting place to work," Bob says. "There were all kinds of people in here. Some of them were not worth the salt in their bread, and some of them were very nice people."

When Bob started at the prison, roughly 1,730 men and 70 women were housed there. Bob says he was impressed by the enormity of the Gothic structure, but he was not afraid to work inside its six-foot-thick walls. He'd gained experience working with prisoners during World War II — a valuable lesson, because there

was no formal training offered for new guards at the pen. They were given a copy of the state's rules and regulations regarding prison guards and told they could be called upon to assist with an execution.

"When you start to work here, the warden tells you when you are sworn in, 'Now, do you understand you may have to participate in an execution?' And you say, 'Yeah, I understand,' thinking you'll never have to," Bob says.

The experienced guards trained Bob and set forth the ground rules for dealing with inmates. For example, prisoners always had to stay within zones indicated by red lines painted on the concrete floors. Crossing the line to approach a guard was an infraction of the rules, and a guard who played into the inmate's ploy was asking for trouble.

Guards were warned never to give chewing gum to inmates. "They'd chew it up and put it in the locks, and the locks wouldn't work," Bob says.

Inhalers containing Benzedrine were considered contraband, as well. "That was their dope, Benzedrine," Bob says. "They'd chew that and drink coffee and get crazy."

One of the first manual skills Bob had to learn was operating the wheel — a revolving door through which all pedestrian traffic entered and exited the prison. The wheel, a steel disc about eight feet in diameter, was embedded in the floor and enclosed in a cage of prison bars. More bars made up the wall around the cage. The operator sat inside an adjacent cage, from where he controlled all access and departure from the prison. Because the wheel was operated solely by the strength and skill of the operator, passengers were at his mercy.

"They used the control off an old street car, that's what they used to turn the wheel," Bob says. "It didn't have any brakes on it. You started the wheel, and when it started to move, you eased off and let it float around. And when it got [to the opening], you reversed it a little bit, and that stopped it. There was a pedal there. Whenever you took your foot off there, it locked it so nobody could get a hold of it and turn it around."

Directly above the operator was an alarm switch that could be activated by the guard in the event someone tried an armed escape or break-in.



Among his other duties as a prison guard, Bob operated the wheel — a revolving cage that served as an entrance and exit for inmates, staff, and visitors.



Standing where the Death House once stood, Bob describes the lay of the yard at the penitentiary. The Wagon Gate is thought to be the oldest part of the prison.

Bob says the idea was that the guard would be told to "stick them up," and upon doing so, his hand would trip the alarm switch.

"But there never was a man escape through that wheel," he says.

Motorized traffic entered the compound through the North Gate, which was the original part of the prison. This traffic consisted largely of work details from the ancillary operations that helped make the prison a self-supporting, self-contained community. Livestock from a prison farm provided meat and dairy; gardens and orchards provided fresh vegetables and fruit grown and preserved using inmate labor. A coal mine about a mile from the prison provided fuel for the prison's three boilers. Thirty-five inmates worked the mine.

"They had no problem getting men to work that, because there were a lot of miners [in the pen] from the southern part of the state," Bob says. "Some of the men earned their mine foreman papers while they were in there and were able to get a job when they got out."

Inmates also worked in soap, paint, mattress, and clothing factories on the grounds. The goods produced by these factories supplied other state institutions. For example, the paint went to the state road department; the clothing and soap went to inmates at Moundsville, Huttonsville, and Weston.

Prisoners who proved their trustworthiness, so-called "trusties," worked outside the prison on highway and public service details. Assignments to the factories, shops, and outside details were based upon conduct. Guards served as foremen of these operations and of the various shops within the prison. During Bob's tenure, he was foreman of the carpentry and machine shops and assistant supervisor of construction and maintenance.

It was in his role as carpentry shop foreman that Bob supervised construction of "Old Sparky." In March 1949, the state legislature specified electrocution as West Virginia's preferred method for carrying out the death sentence, and Bob was given

the task of designing and building the chair for Moundsville. His recollections of the hangings in which he had participated earlier provide a perspective on the rationale for electrocution.

Bob participated in four hangings: Mark McCauley, Mathew O. Pierson, Lemuel Steed, and Bud Peterson — all murderers. He recalls it as a "gruesome" form of execution. "It took 21 to 23 minutes to die," Bob says. "That's a long time."

Duties on the hanging detail included springing the trap door on the gallows. This task was distributed among three men who each pulled a rope upon the warden's signal. Only one of the three ropes actually released the door, however.

"I never had to do this," Bob says, "but there are two guards that stand on each side. When he comes down through there, they would walk over on each side of him and get a hold of him. And, of course, he's trying to kick and swing, and they'd just steady him."

Hangings were often carried out

before an audience selected by invitation of the warden or deputy warden. Bob says one of his greatest concerns was what those spectators thought of him and the other guards chosen to perform the duty.

During the first half of the 20th century, states began moving toward electrocution as a faster, more humane means of execution. Ohio had adopted electrocution in 1897, and that state's "Old Sparky" was the model for West Virginia's chair. However, there is a significant difference. While the Ohio chair used straps to restrain the inmate, the Moundsville chair used a system of weighted shackles for the arms and legs, with a single strap around the torso. The shackles, which made it easier for the guards to remove the body, were designed and machined by inmate James "Shorty" Vincent. "In a matter of less than a minute, you could have him out [of] there," Bob says.

Paul Glenn, an inmate, was head carpenter for the job. He accepted the assignment willingly. "They talk about inmates who didn't want to build the chair," Bob says. "Well, that's a bunch of bull."

The electrical system for the chair was purchased from Joe Caltabaugh, an electrical equipment dealer in Wheeling. Bill Widensall, an inmate electrician, worked with Bob to develop the switch panel that would transfer the power from the transformers to the electrode on the inmate's head. Three switches, wired in series, were used. That way, all three guards depressed the switches upon the warden's command for the execution to occur, but no one man bore the sole responsibility for "throwing the switch."

Thirty days prior to execution, the inmate was taken from his cell to the death house, a structure that has since been torn down. A couple of weeks prior to the event, names were drawn for those guards who would participate in the execution.

"I had a warden [Orel Skeen] tell me one time, 'I wouldn't have a man on staff who would volunteer to do

an execution, but I wouldn't have a man who wouldn't volunteer if I asked him,'" Bob says.

There were 13 men and two alternates on the execution detail. The alternates were called in the event that one of the other men backed out at the last minute, although to do so meant immediate dismissal. Bob recalls an execution where one of the chosen guards failed to show. A couple of months later, Bob happened to meet the guard, who offered an apology.

"He said, 'Bob, I'm sorry to let you guys down,'" Bob says.

"I said, 'Oh, I understand that. That's all right.' I didn't want to discuss it.

"He said kind of real harsh like, 'You don't understand — I sat down to put my shoes on, and my little girl came over to me and said, "Daddy, are you going to have to go and kill that man tonight?"' He said, 'That did it. It cost me my job, but I just couldn't do it after that.'"

One of the jobs on the execution detail was guarding the prison's power plant, which provided electricity to Old Sparky's transformers. Despite the popular legend, the lights never

In his role as carpentry shop foreman, Bob supervised the construction of Old Sparky. It was first used on March 26, 1951, when two men were executed for a murder committed in Kanawha County.



dimmed in Moundsville during an execution, because the chair was the only thing on the prison's power source during that time.

"Don't let them tell you the lights go dim," Bob says. "When the time came, the rest of the prison switched to purchased power."

Executions were scheduled for 9 p.m. That afternoon, the prisoner was taken out of the death house cell for a shave, haircut, and shower. Inmates witnessed the walk to the barbershop and often shook hands with the man as he passed. "That was the most solemn time in that prison," Bob says. "Those inmates

didn't yap and yell or protest in any way."

While the prisoner was absent from his death house cell, guards performed a dry run of the equipment. Bob constructed a tester — a board with 22 220-volt light bulbs wired in series, designed to verify the output of the transformers to the electrode. By watching the relative intensity of the bulbs as the power surged through the tester, Bob could certify that the chair was functioning as expected.

A specified sequence of power surges, programmed into the equipment, was used for each execution.

"Ten seconds at 1,800 volts. Ten seconds off. Ten seconds at 1,300 volts. Ten seconds off. Ten seconds at 1,800 volts. Ten seconds off," says Bob.

"The first one, that's the one that does it," Bob explains. "You know what happens to you? It solidifies your blood and creates a major blood clot. You have a massive heart attack. It stops the blood."

Other tasks on the execution squad included bringing an ambulance into the yard for removal of the body, escorting visitors chosen to witness the execution, strapping the inmate into the chair, attaching the electrodes and placing a leather hood over the head, removing the body after the execution, and being with the condemned inmate in his final hours.

The latter task fell upon Bob for the execution of Fred Clifford Painter, a Kanawha County man convicted of murder. He was executed March 26, 1951, the same night as Harry Atlee Burdette, also of Kanawha County. Both men had been convicted of stomping a man to death in downtown Charleston, and were the first in the state to be executed by electrocution.

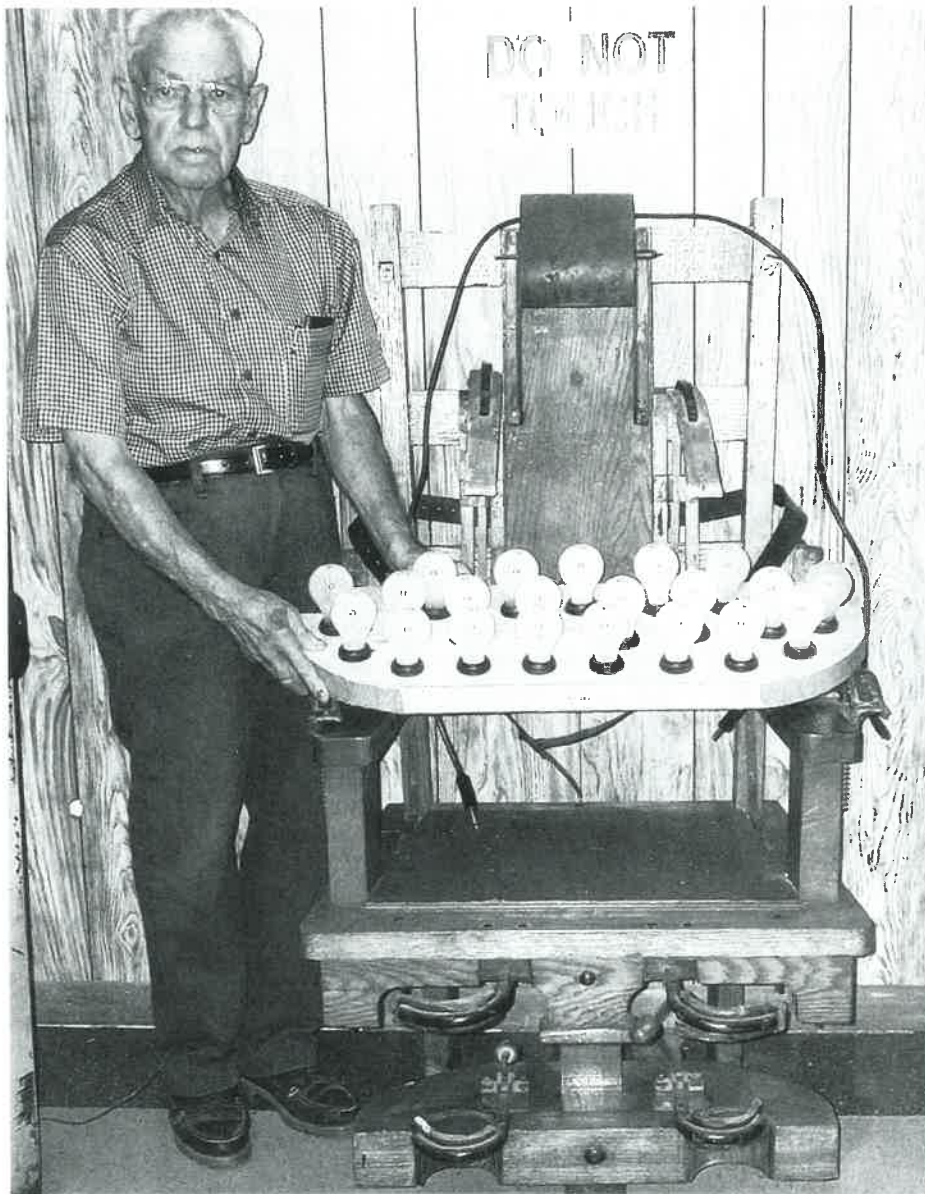
Bob was in the cell with Painter, Burdette, and Robert Bailey, a death-row inmate who was supposed to die with the other two that same night. However, just four days before the scheduled execution, Governor Okey Patteson commuted Bailey's death sentence to life in prison.

The three inmates wanted to eat together one last time, and they invited Bob to partake of their chicken supper.

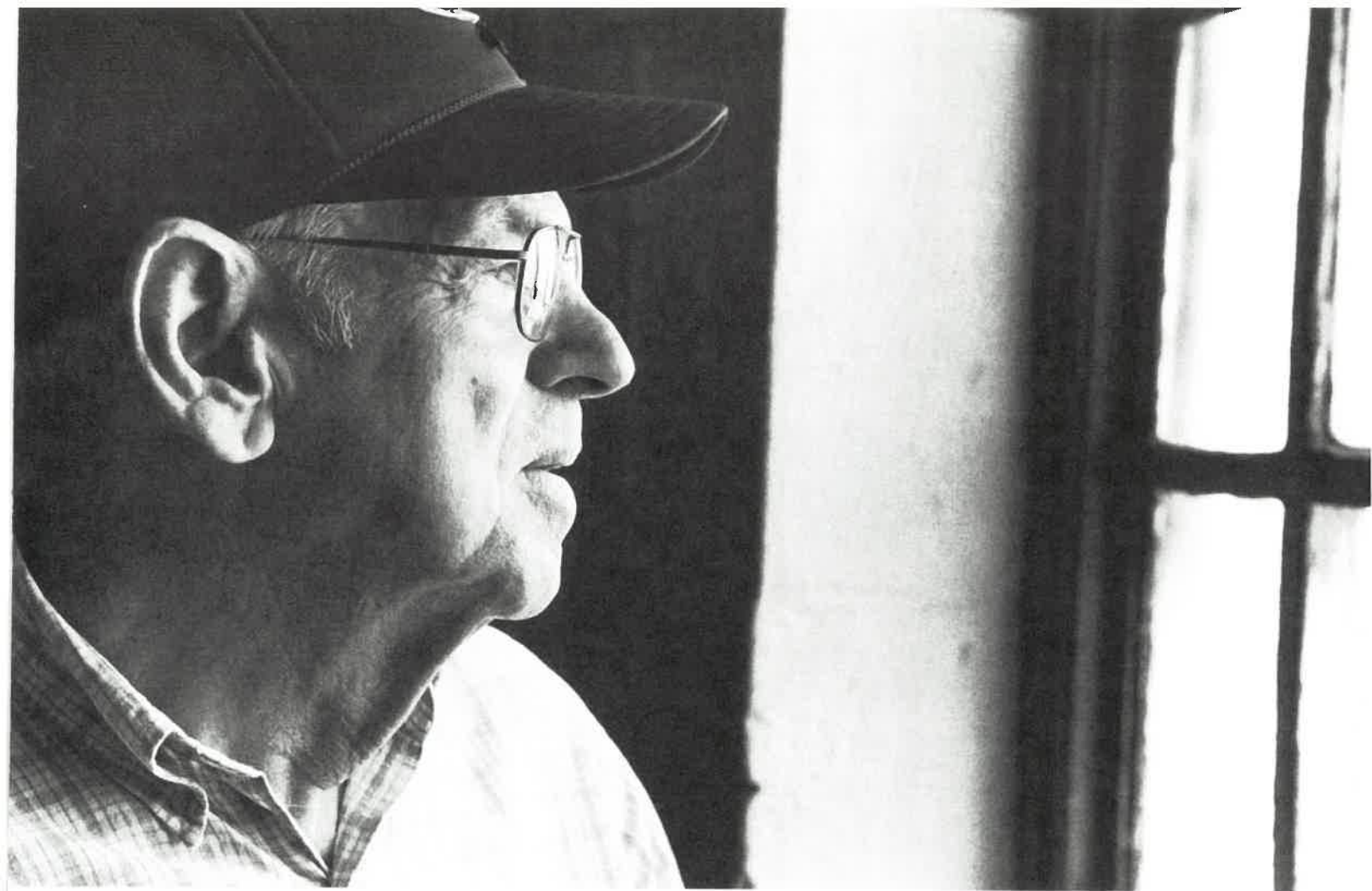
"Can you imagine trying to eat with three condemned men? Bailey reached over there and got a thigh of a chicken and put it on my plate. And the more I chewed that, the bigger it got," Bob says. "To this day, I don't eat the thigh of a chicken."

According to Bob, Burdette was first to die in West Virginia's electric chair.

"I can remember the minister came around to the cell door, and the pastor came into the cell with me and



Bob designed and built this tester to ensure that the chair was in proper working order prior to executions. Photograph by John Harness, date unknown.



More than 50 years after participating in his last execution, Bob is still haunted by memories of those experiences. "This isn't something I'm proud of," he says, "but it is something that's history."

this Painter," Bob says. "He said to him, 'Brace up now. Burdette's going.' And when he said that, [Painter] just stiffened up, and I thought, 'Oh, oh, here we're going to have it.' I stood up, and [Painter] stood up, and I took his arm, and he said, 'Let me hold your arm.' He took me by the arm, and we walked out of there. We walked up to the doorway there, and I set him down in the chair."

Bob says an electrode helmet was placed on the head of the prisoner. A sponge soaked in calcium chloride was placed between the head and electrode to provide good contact and prevent the flesh from burning. A leather hood, with an opening for the nose, was then placed over the head. A second electrode was attached to the left leg, creating a path for the electricity to travel through the heart.

According to the Moundsville *Daily Echo*, Burdette was strapped into the chair at 9:02 p.m. and pronounced

dead three minutes and 48 seconds after the first shock. Painter went in the chair at 9:10 p.m. He was pronounced dead nine minutes later.

Although gory legends of death in an electric chair are rampant, Bob says his observations run counter to these stories. He says smoke and flames do not shoot out of the electrode's contact point on the head, nor is the body so hot after the execution that the undertaker has to allow it to cool before handling it. Indeed, Bob recalls an undertaker who had witnessed an execution make the comment, "Now boys, that's the way to die," as he removed the body.

Bob participated in three more executions after Old Sparky's inaugural run that March night in 1951. Just two weeks later, James Hewlett of Cabell County was executed. Oshell Gardner died in the chair in April of the following year, and Tom Ingram on March 27, 1954.

In July of that year, Bob left the

prison job and went to work for Allied Chemicals in Moundsville, where he worked for 32 years as maintenance and welding foreman, skills he acquired while at the prison. Like those skills, Bob carries with him to this day the haunting memories of the nine executions in which he participated.

He recalls the aftermath of one execution in particular.

"One of the [guards] and I, we walked out of the prison together," Bob says. "And as we were walking out, this fellow said to me, 'Bob, I'd rather be home watching 'Howdy Doody.' I never forgot that. I thought, 'How true. How true that was.'"

CARL E. FEATHER lives in northeast Ohio and has family roots in Preston and Tucker counties. His book, *Mountain People in a Flat Land*, is published by Ohio University Press. Carl is the owner of Feather Multimedia, a freelance photography and writing business. He has been lifestyles editor at the *Ashtabula Star-Beacon* since 1991. Carl is a regular contributor to GOLDENSEAL.

Fall Victory



In October 1918, an epidemic of Spanish influenza swept the country and state. In Huntington, more than 3,000 persons were reported ill, and nearly 200 died before the disease was brought under control. Here, a Red Cross worker tends to a patient. Photograph courtesy of the Huntington Red Cross Archive, Marshall University

By Joseph Platania

Huntington's 1918 Flu Epidemic

"The greatest day the world has known since Christ was born," was one Huntington minister's characterization of November 11, 1918, the day the armistice ending World War I was signed.

It was a day of real rejoicing in Huntington and across the country, as a nation and a world weary of war breathed a sigh of relief.

Huntington, however, had another reason for rejoicing on that first Armistice Day. A severe influenza epidemic, which for six weeks had held the city and the state in its deadly grasp, had about disappeared.

Sometime in the spring of 1918, there was an outbreak of "Spanish flu," a disease so called because it had first severely afflicted Spain before striking other European nations. The scourge struck in two waves, the first reaching its peak in Europe and England in June and July. This was generally mild, with few fatalities and recovery usually coming within a week.

The second wave struck in September and was far deadlier. In one out of 10 cases, the patient became so ill that his death was more likely than his recovery. The epidemic entered the U.S. in early September 1918 and spread like wildfire, affecting 46 states by early October. In the congested cities, it reaped its greatest harvest of death. From September 8 to November 10, there were more than 82,000 flu deaths nationally. It

was the worst epidemic America had experienced in generations.

In West Virginia, the epidemic spread west from Lewisburg and the Eastern Panhandle. On October 4, Dr. S.L. Jepson, West Virginia's health commissioner, reported that influenza was prevalent in 16 cities and towns, from Martinsburg, Romney, and Keyser to Lewisburg, Welch, Charleston, and Nitro. The outbreak was worst at Lewisburg and at Keyser.

Huntington's health commissioner, L.D. Newman, announced that Spanish influenza had invaded that city, as well, but the community rolled up its sleeves and went to work to combat the epidemic's effects. Huntington was not unfamiliar with the spread of contagious disease. At the time of the flu outbreak, local schools were on the verge of closing because of epidemics of scarlet fever, diphtheria, and measles.

With 1,000 cases of flu in the city by early October, the local chapter of the Red Cross did a survey of nurses, doctors, and supplies of wholesale and

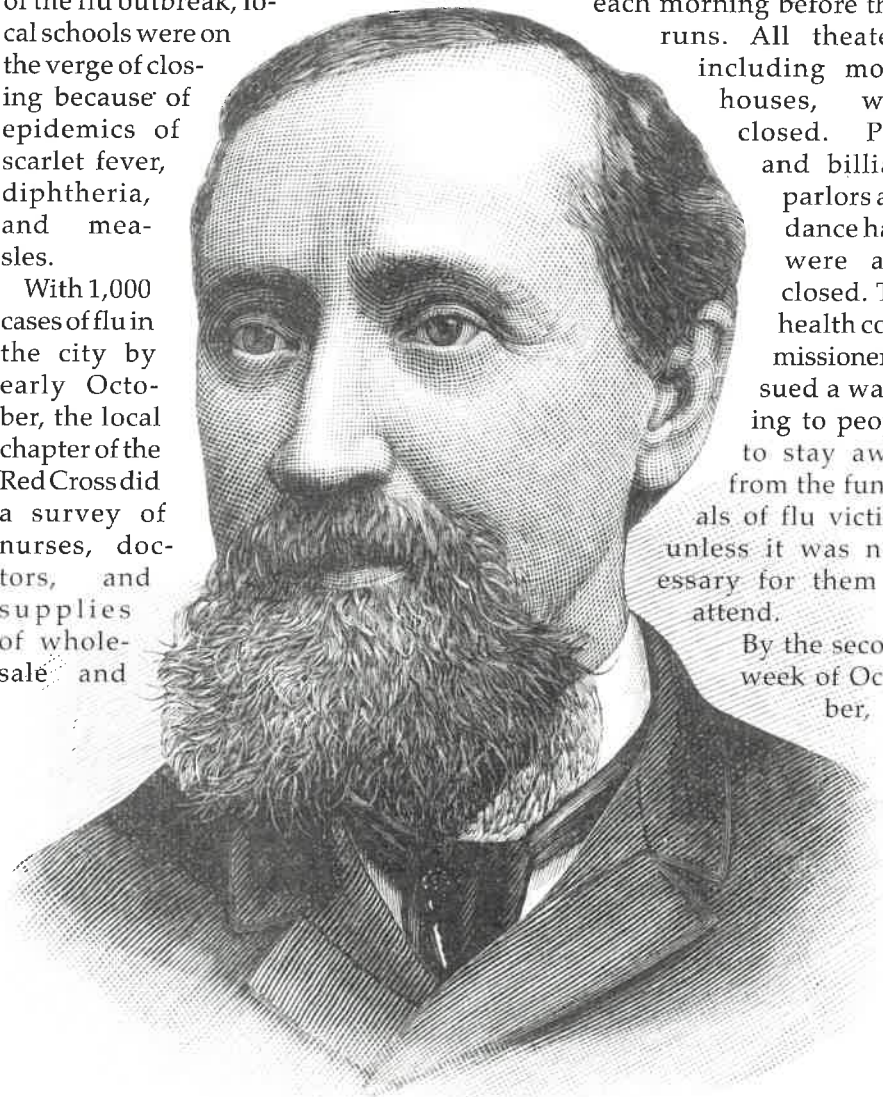
retail drugs. Three hundred notice cards were posted in conspicuous places around town, warning the public that an epidemic of Spanish influenza was prevalent. That number soon grew to 1,200.

The Board of Health quarantined against public gatherings and suggested that the nose and throat be washed twice daily with an antiseptic solution. All public schools were ordered closed. Health commissioner Newman later ordered all churches in Huntington closed, effective Sunday, October 13. All stores were to be closed at 6 p.m. on Saturdays, and they were to prevent large crowds from gathering in them at all times.

Streetcars would be permitted to operate only if windows were kept open and the cars properly fumigated

each morning before their runs. All theaters, including movie houses, were closed. Pool and billiard parlors and dance halls were also closed. The health commissioner issued a warning to people to stay away from the funerals of flu victims unless it was necessary for them to attend.

By the second week of October, all



State health commissioner Samuel L. Jepson. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

Huntington hospitals were filled to capacity, with long waiting lines. A citywide survey found 1,500 cases of flu in Huntington by October 10. Many cases had been reported to the health department of whole families stricken. Most new cases came from families where some member already had been ill. Families often had healthy members go to live with relatives to prevent their exposure to the contagion. This strain of flu was especially dangerous, since it often attacked the lungs in a high-risk form of pneumonia.

By mid-October, the crisis had reached an alarming stage, with more than 2,000 cases in the city. A local newspaper took note that there was an absence of medical care in "thickly settled poor sections of the city," where there were many flu cases.

Among measures proposed for combating the spread of influenza and other prevalent diseases was



All Huntington hospitals were filled to capacity during the crisis, including the Huntington State Hospital, shown here in 1912. Photograph from 1912 *Mirabilia*, courtesy of Marshall University Archives.

flushing the streets with water, especially in the business district of the city, since it had been weeks since heavy rainfall had washed the streets thoroughly. It was thought that dirt might be the breeding ground for germs.

Red Cross workers made thousands of fine gauze masks to be worn over the noses and mouths of doctors and nurses, and for use by anyone entering infected households or when exposed to crowds. Dr. O.I. Woodley, president of Marshall College, informed the board of health that 500 masks would be made in one day (October 15) at Marshall College workrooms.

Health authorities issued a call that would be often repeated during the next 30 days for male and female nurses. Volunteers were to report to the health department. Large kettles of soup were supplied to the Salvation Army Citadel hospital, while Boy Scouts and high school "cadets" were used as messengers for druggists to deliver medicine to flu patients. Other people volunteered to take patients by automobile to and from hospitals.

On October 14, health commissioner Newman commandeered whiskey held by the police department, which had been confiscated during enforcement of West Virginia's then-strict prohibition law. The law stated that this contraband was to be destroyed, but doctors told Newman that it was valuable medicine and a preventive, and the commissioner declared it would be "no violation of the law to use the whiskey for medical purposes

INFLUENZA GRIPS CITY; HEALTH BODY AFFIRMS ORDER OF COMMISSIONER

SCHOOLS AND SHOWS CLOSE FOR PRESENT

Pool Rooms, Dance Halls and Re-
vival Meetings Come Under
the Ban

MARSHALL COLLEGE HAS INFLUENZA CASES

Parochial Schools Close in Ad-
vance of Order—Rappold
Date Cancelled

In conformity with the order of Dr.
S. I. Jepson, State Commissioner of
Health, the Board of Health of Hun-
tington yesterday afternoon issued the or-
der of closing all public places, and
other places, and all public meetings must be abandoned.

JEPSON ORDER

Following is the order and statement combined issued Sun-
day night regarding the reporting of cases of influenza and the
closing of schools and other public places where the disease
is prevalent, by Dr. S. I. Jepson, state health commissioner:
"By advice of the surgeon health commissioner has issued
an order requiring all cases of influenza to be promptly re-
ported and quarantined until well. Local health officers are
herby required on the appearance of the disease in a com-
munity, to close all theatres, pool rooms, schools and other
crowded places, and all public meetings must be abandoned."
S. I. JEPSON,
State Health Commissioner.

DRUG SUPPLY OF CITY WILL BE EXAMINED

Red Cross Committee Will Also
Make Quick Survey of
Nurses

CHAPTER SUPPLIES AT CITY DISPOSAL

Consignment Names Committee
Which Will Help Stamp Out
Influenza

SAFETY FIRST IS MOTTO OF JEPSON IN FLU EPIDEMIC

in this emergency, when hundreds of people [are] afflicted and many dying."

The Salvation Army's Citadel hospital of 10 beds was placed at the disposal of the city, as well as its entire building. The Salvation Army's ambulance was in almost constant use during the epidemic. Adjutant C.A. Trew and his corps of people worked day and night as the army's hospital on the edge of downtown filled up with 25 to 30 patients. One of Trew's tireless

workers was Stella Fuller, who visited the sick in their homes and tried to do what she could to alleviate the suffering. "In one home, she found both father and mother were ill in the same room, the little children uncared for," read a newspaper report. It added, "The neighbors were afraid of the disease, and no nurse could be secured." Years later, Stella Fuller, after a 25-year career with the Salvation Army, founded her own settlement house in Huntington. [See "Actions Louder than Words: Remembering Stella Fuller," by Joseph Platania; Fall 1986.]

There were many others who worked valiantly during this time of crisis. A doctor came to Huntington from Greenup, Kentucky, 30 miles away, to offer his services in fighting the flu. Greenup hadn't been affected by the flu, and he worked in Huntington until he came down with the disease himself and had to return home. Church pastors made hundreds of visits to families in need, and retired physicians offered their services to the city.

A 12-man Citizens Cooperative



The Red Cross played an important part in Huntington's struggle against the 1918 flu outbreak, offering nursing care and practical assistance. This photograph shows a group of Red Cross nurses in the uniform of the day. Courtesy of the Huntington Red Cross Archive, Marshall University.

Committee, made up of doctors, church pastors, the president of Marshall College, prominent businessmen, and the head of the local Red Cross chapter, became the nerve center for Huntington's fight against the epidemic.

On October 16, the Citizens Cooperative Committee began its operations with headquarters in city hall, and the city appropriated \$10,000 to combat the epidemic. Huntington General Hospital on 4th Avenue was refurbished and was used as an emergency hospital. Extra heaters were donated by Marshall College. Street commissioner Matt Miser, chairman of the drug committee, stocked the hospital with medicine. The Huntington militia reserves offered the use of 25 blankets and 25 pieces of bedding for the hospital. Many nightgowns, sheets, and other bed clothing made by Red Cross members poured into the health department.

By October 17, 70 emergency nurses were listed at city hall, with 38 to do office work, cook, or do any other work that did not come into contact with the disease. A dozen homes

were volunteered in order to care for children. The Citizens Cooperative Committee asked every woman in Huntington to take a baby into her home from those homes where members of the family were stricken by the epidemic. A "baby bureau" was established to handle this task, as scores of cases of whole families being prostrated with the disease were being reported.

There were individual stories of courage and self-sacrifice during this time of crisis. The newspaper reported that one man, a railroad employee who lived in the Guy-andotte part of town, "nursed his entire family of six, who had been stricken with influenza. He was the only well member of the family, and it was impossible to secure a nurse. His devotion, care, and untiring efforts have put them out of danger, and they are improving rapidly," the newspaper stated.

As the epidemic neared its peak in Huntington, there were 51 patients in the emergency hospital, and the Salvation Army held 26. A woman who was a registered nurse offered

the use of her home as an emergency hospital and took five patients sent by the Citizens Cooperative Committee. An emergency hospital at St. Joseph's Catholic Church cared for six patients, as all other hospitals were reported crowded to their capacity. As fast as rooms became vacant, others occupied them.

Five downtown churches were used for cooking for patients in the emergency hospitals. The cooking was done by volunteer women as an agency of the Red Cross, with supplies paid for by city funds through the Citizens Cooperative Committee. Another kitchen in the Guyandotte part of town supplied food for the patients in the east end and for night nurses.

By October 18, 200 new cases a day were being reported by nearly 40 doctors across the city, "whole homes full of sick people, poverty-stricken homes as well as homes of ordinary comfort, ... whole families down with the malady and members not able to help one another," the newspaper stated.

The morning newspaper for October 19 carried the sad news that Leon Wiles, age 40, and the mayor of Huntington, had died in the early morning hours of flu, which had developed into double pneumonia. The next day, the newspaper reported that 50 lives was the death toll, to date, in Huntington, with six new names added to the "death roster" in the past 24 hours.

By the third week in October, Huntington had 2,500 to 3,000 flu victims, with 80 patients being cared for in the emergency hospital on 4th Avenue. This hospital was described by a newspaper reporter as "a large building stripped of its furnishings and filled, room after room, with hospital beds and cots placed just far enough apart for a nurse and doctor to walk between them."

As the epidemic went through its fourth week, scores of volunteer nurses worked around the clock, still finding victims lying in their homes at the point of death without medical or nursing care. The division



Huntington's mayor, Leon Wiles, fell victim to the flu epidemic, dying after a short illness on October 19, 1918. He was 40 years old.

assigning doctors accepted 80 calls a day. The newspaper reported that 16 members of one Guyandotte family, representing three generations, were all sick at the emergency hospital—a 75-year-old grandfather, three of his sons, 12 grandchildren, and a daughter-in-law.

During the beginning of the last week in October, the state health department reported that conditions showed a decrease in the flu epidemic, especially in areas where it had first struck. "All parts of West Virginia indicate a gradual victory over the disease," the report stated.

On October 25, the newspaper reported that the Chesapeake & Ohio Railway, Huntington's biggest employer, had 348 men on the sick list in the city and 1,725 men on the flu list for the entire western division, which included much of southern and western West Virginia.

By the last week of October, fewer persons were becoming sick from the flu compared with the previous week,

and beds in the emergency hospitals were becoming vacant. Members of the militia reserves were cleaning up the city, especially the poorer sections in the west end and along the riverfront. The epidemic struck hardest in poorer, crowded sections and led many citizens to question housing conditions in the city. It was hoped that a cleanup move might be the result of the epidemic, as well as strengthening the sanitary code to bring housing conditions under its scope.

In a newspaper article, however, Dr. J.E. Rader of the emergency hospital discounted the impression that unsanitary conditions were responsible for the disease. In the article, Dr. Rader stated: "It is not a sewer or filth disease, and because those afflicted are largely in the less clean neighborhood is not a criterion to go by. This was due to greater congestion in living conditions among poorer people. The influenza is a peculiarly



Adjutant C.A. Trew coordinated the local efforts of the Salvation Army to fight the epidemic in Huntington. He is shown here with a nurse in an undated photograph. Courtesy of the Salvation Army National Archives.

close-contact disease, and the best preventative is avoidance of that contact."

Although quinine and aspirin were major drugs used to treat influenza, the U.S. Army's surgeon general recommended a treatment for pneumonia that had proven useful. It was "placing between the teeth a wad of cotton saturated in alcohol, to which is applied 5 drops of chloroform. It is held this way for 15 minutes and removed. Then let the patient rest for 15 minutes or longer. Then inhale again 15 minutes and repeat procedure 24 times."

The spread of influenza was checked, though the public was warned to expect a high death toll for the next few days, since "patients were reaching a critical stage where a turn for the better or worse came, and usually pneumonia proved an aftermath." As the patient count at emergency hospitals was reduced, the Salvation Army hospital was notified by the end of October all new cases would be handled at the city's emergency hospital on 4th Avenue.

The newspaper reported that Stella Fuller, who had assisted in looking after many victims and had visited many afflicted homes, had finally fallen victim herself, as had her husband and young son, Robert. "They are improving," the newspaper added.

Nearly 3,400 flu patients had been reported to the health committee up to October 30, with hundreds of cases that were never called to the attention of the citizens' committee.

While health commissioner Newman issued a ban on all Halloween social activities, a special Halloween party was planned for children living at the Union Mission, who had been kept inside for nearly a month.

As October ended, the flu continued to recede in the Huntington area, although five to 10 deaths a day were

FLU CLOUDS BREAK HOPE RISING HERE

**ANOTHER WEEK
MAY SEE CITY
NORMAL AGAIN**

**Father Altmeyer, Spokesman for
Committee Warns of Danger
of Carelessness**

**NEED FOR NURSES IS
STILL MOST URGENT**

**Situation Remains Such as to Call
For Most Serious
Attention**

OVER-SUBSCRIBED

**West Virginia Counties in Both Cleveland and Richmond Districts
Over the Top.**

(By Associated Press.)

CHARLESTON, W. Va., Oct. 26.—Governor Cornwell today received from Baird Mitchell, Liberty Loan director for the six west Virginia counties in the Cleveland reserve district—Hancock, Brooke, Ohio, Marshall, Wetzel and Tyler—the following report:

"Mr. Mitchell's report shows that the allotment for these six counties was \$11,869,850, while the subscriptions of those counties amounted to \$14,184,160."

Governor MacCorkle has already reported that the 49 West Virginia counties which were allotted \$12,430,000 subscribed \$4,431,950, making a total subscription for the state of \$25,845,000, or a total over-subscription in the entire state of \$3,415,000.

**EIGHT DIE FROM
PLAGUE DURING
24-HOUR PERIOD**

**Is Average Number of Deaths
Daily During Past Week—Two
More Than on Friday**

**ONLY TWO IN LIST
ARE OF MALE SEX**

**Employee of West Virginia Rail
Company is One of the Victims
Recorded Saturday**

Huntington Herald-Dispatch, October 27, 1918.

being reported for the last days of the month. Health authorities urged that crowds still must be avoided, and convalescents must continue recovering. No meetings indoors or outdoors were permitted.

Doctors, who had made 1,081 calls through the health department during the preceding 12 days, made only 12 calls on November 1, the smallest number since the campaign against the flu began. As the epidemic loosened its grip, absentees at the C&O shops were cut in half, and other local industries were getting back to normal, as well.

By November 2, it could be reported that Huntington was "well past the crest of the epidemic, with only three deaths in the past 24 hours, the smallest toll taken by the epidemic in one day in the past week."

On Thursday, November 7, the front page of the newspaper heralded "PEACE" in banner headlines and

the news that World War I hostilities had ended. On Friday, November 8, came the long-awaited news that the quarantine would be lifted at midnight, permitting the opening of all schools, churches, and businesses. Motion picture houses would reopen on Saturday. Huntington schools, which had been closed one day less than five weeks, would have a thorough fumigation before they reopened on Monday, November 11. The Carnegie Library would also reopen on Monday, as would Marshall College.

The reopening of churches took place on Sunday, November 10. The newspaper commented that this had been "one of the most regrettable deprivations of the epidemic, and it was expected that the churches would be filled to their capacity."

On Monday, November 11, a day that became Armistice Day, schools reopened and the emergency hos-



The flu epidemic was largely over by early November 1918. Residents had double reason to celebrate, as World War I ended at the same time. Here, Red Cross nurses welcome a train of returning soldiers. Photograph courtesy of the Huntington Red Cross Archive, Marshall University.



HUNTINGTON RED CROSS ARCHIVES, MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

pital closed, leaving only the Salvation Army hospital with a few patients still recovering.

A fitting climax to Huntington's celebration of the armistice came during the evening of November 11, when a crowd of 2,000 met in the city auditorium and participated in a service of thanksgiv-

ing, a public gathering that would not have been permitted only a few days earlier. After the opening prayer and speeches, the audience joined in singing hymns. A closing prayer was offered, and the service ended with the singing of the first verse of the "Star-Spangled Banner."

While close to 200 persons in the city of 50,000, including the mayor, had died of the flu, that number and the rate of death were considered light, compared with the mortality rate experienced by other cities. Health commissioner Newman gave credit to the citizens of the city who, in his words, "responded liberally and heroically to all appeals for help."

The specter of death from Spanish influenza haunted Huntington,

as it did much of West Virginia and the country, for nearly six weeks during the fall of 1918. But the citizenry banded together and organized themselves to do battle with the epidemic. It was an all-out struggle but, because of the tireless and disciplined work of many, a tragedy of major proportions was averted. When the epidemic at last subsided, the people of Huntington, individually and collectively, had every right to be proud, for this had been "one of their finest hours." ❁

JOSEPH PLATANIA, a Huntington native, is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in the *Huntington Quarterly* and other publications. Joseph is a regular contributor to *GOLDENSEAL*. His most recent article appeared in our Fall 2004 issue.

The Box It Came In

By Richard Hartman

Saving the French Gratitude Train



West Virginia's restored forty and eight boxcar from the 1949 French Gratitude Train, on display in 1997 at Coney Island Veterans Park in Welch. Photograph by S.R. Burge.

On February 7, 1949, the people of West Virginia received a box full of gifts from the people of France. An antique French-made railroad boxcar loaded with gifts was accepted during a lavish ceremony at the C&O railroad depot in Charleston. The gifts were later scattered throughout the state, but

the unique and historic box they came in was almost lost forever.

After World War II, newspaper columnist Drew Pearson began a grassroots campaign to gather donations from the people of the United States to distribute to the war-weary people of France. Citizens of all 48 states, including West Virginia, donated \$40

million worth of food, clothing, and medical supplies. In 1947, they were delivered to France in 700 boxcars, called the Friendship Train.

In 1948, the recipients of this American generosity decided to say "thank you" in a similar fashion. Started as a local effort by French citizens, the project was taken over by the French



The original boxcar, presented to the state of West Virginia from the people of France in Charleston on February 7, 1949. Photographer unknown.

War Veterans Association. Mirroring the American aid, the French volunteers began to collect donations from the French people. After five years of war, occupation, and eventual liberation, the French people had begun rebuilding their lives. Their homes and belongings had been bombed, burned, looted, or scattered, but they searched through their possessions to donate family heirlooms, everyday items, and many other articles that reflected their individual appreciation to the American people.

More than 250 tons of thank-you gifts were packed in 49 railroad boxcars — one for each state and one to be divided between Hawaii and the District of Columbia. The boxcars had been built for the French National Railroad during the last half of the 19th century. West Virginia's boxcar was built in 1894. The cars were four-wheeled, metal-framed, wood-sided railcars used for general cargo hauling until World War I, when they were converted to military use.

Since they could carry 40 soldiers or eight horses, they were called "40 and eight" boxcars. American soldiers returned from World War I with memories of riding to the

battlefront and back inside these cramped quarters. Used again during World War II for hauling men and material, the 40 and eight boxcars became notorious for also transporting victims of the Nazi Holocaust. During the 1920's, American veterans formed fraternal associations within the American Legion, calling themselves the "Forty & Eight." Each local group was called a *Voiture* and was headed by a *Chef de Gare*. The statewide head was the *Grand Chef de Gare*.

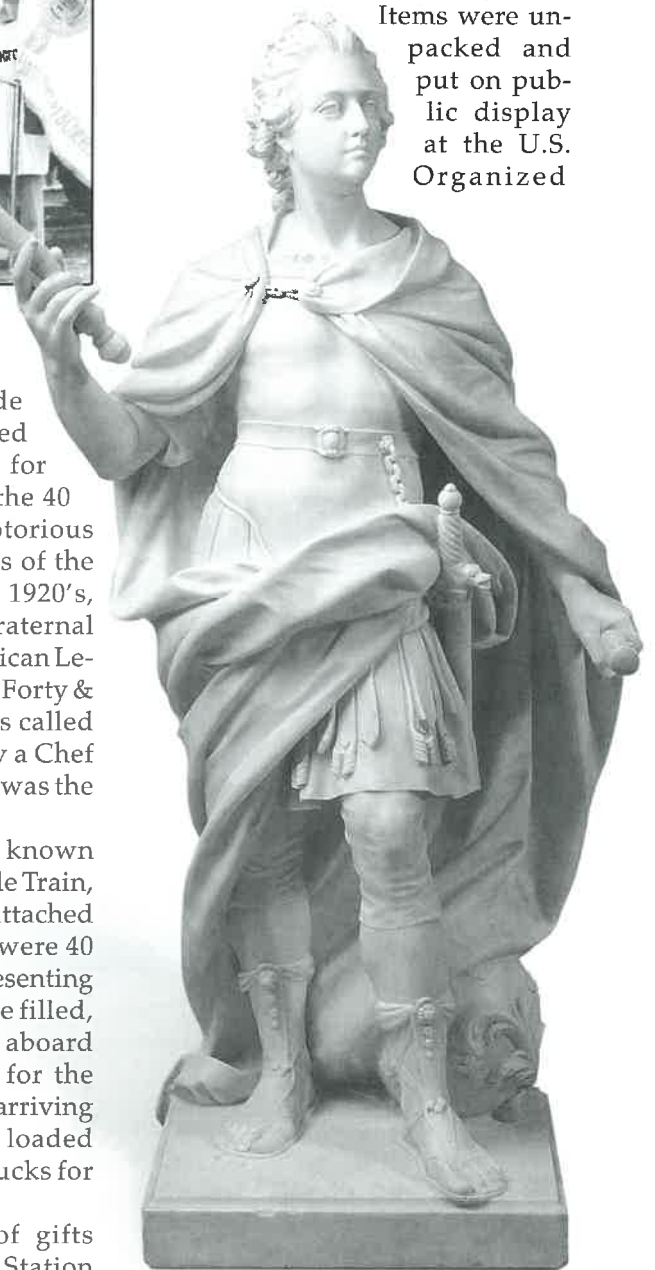
The French "Merci" Train, known locally as the French Gratitude Train, held more than 52,000 gifts. Attached to each 40 and eight boxcar were 40 painted wooden shields, representing the provinces of France. Once filled, the 49 boxcars were loaded aboard the ore carrier *SS Magellan* for the trip across the Atlantic. After arriving in New York, the cars were loaded onto flat railroad cars and trucks for distribution to each state.

West Virginia's boxcar of gifts rolled into South Side Train Station on Monday, February 7, 1949, amid celebrations, speeches, and a crowd of about 1,000 people. Joining Governor Okey Patteson, the Charleston

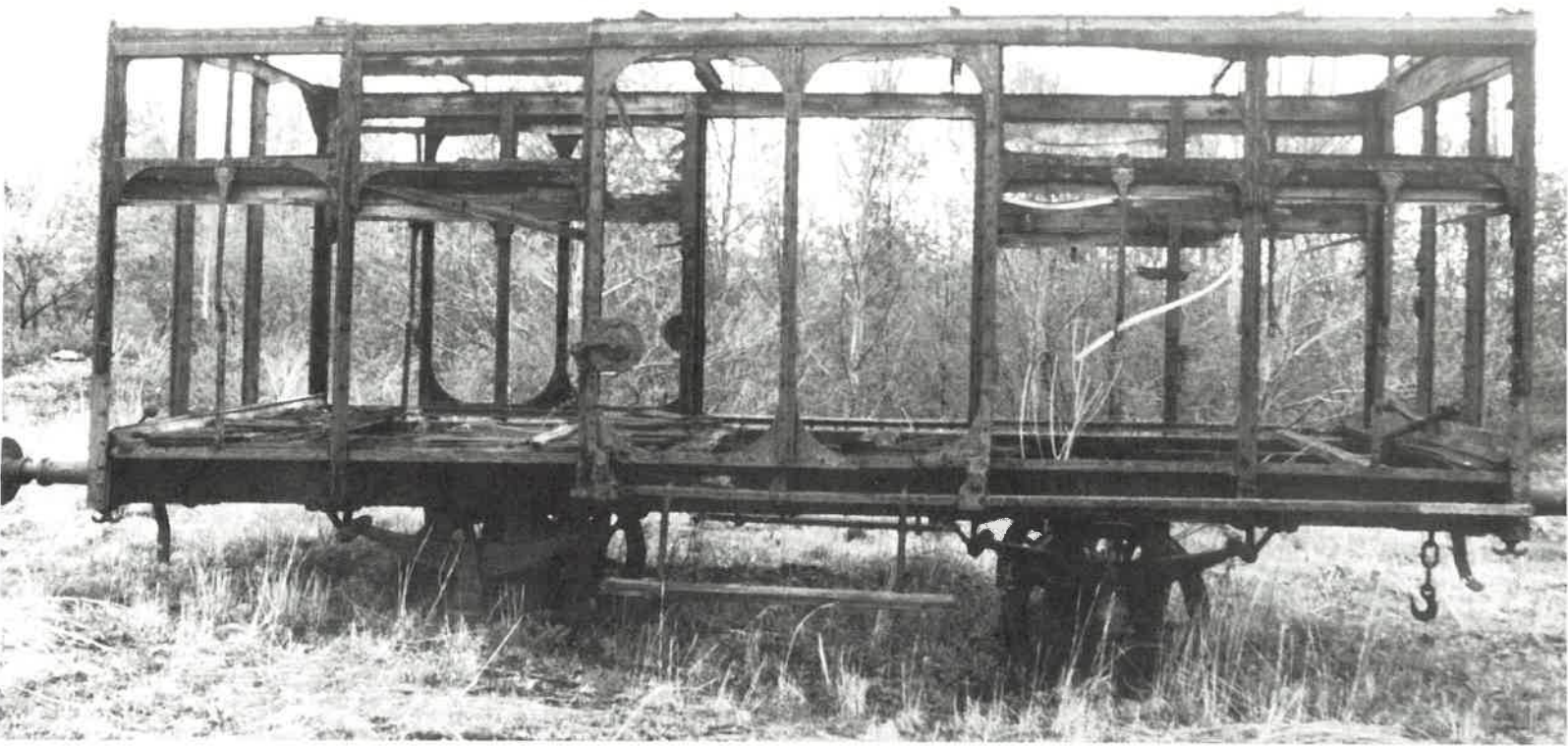
and Stonewall Jackson high school bands, and assorted dignitaries, was the columnist who started the original Friendship Train, Drew Pearson. Monsieur Louis Cast, chairman of the French Gratitude Committee, officially presented the car. His remarks were translated by a local French war bride, Maria Lou Engle.

The gifts were to be displayed in Charleston and then distributed to the organizations and cities that helped to organize the earlier Friendship Train.

Items were unpacked and put on public display at the U.S. Organized



A four-foot-tall marble statue of King Louis XV was among the treasures brought to West Virginia by the French Gratitude Train. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Museum, photograph by Michael Keller.



After several moves, West Virginia's forty and eight boxcar was left to rust in a South Charleston field before it was reclaimed and restored by a group of concerned citizens. Photograph by S.R. Burge.

Reserve Armory (WCHS auditorium) at 1016 Lee Street. There was great excitement over what our gift box contained. An 11-year-old farm girl, for example, sent her only doll, with a note saying, "I hope some little girl who sent food may love this doll as much as I do."

West Virginia's box also included a very valuable marble statue of King Louis XV and a crate inventoried as containing a medieval suit of armor. Other items included more common fare, such as plates, furniture, silks, and oil paintings. A sword fashioned from French coins was meant to be delivered to Eleanor Roosevelt, but was mistakenly packed in West Virginia's car. Once informed of the error, Mrs. Roosevelt allowed the sword to remain here on display. The exhibited gifts were held over at the WCHS auditorium through February 15 to accommodate the curious crowds. More than 10,000 people eventually went to see the treasures, before they were scattered among various civic groups throughout West Virginia. Many settled in the State Archives in Charleston. Included among the treasures were young tree saplings.

Some of these French oak saplings were planted at Tu-Endie-Wei State Park in Point Pleasant, where they still thrive. Many of the other gifts were also housed at the park. Other saplings were reported to have been planted on the State Capitol grounds.

*He reportedly arrived
just as a bulldozer
was about to shove the
boxcar into the
Kanawha River.*

But what became of the 40 and eight boxcar? A unique and ancient artifact in itself, the boxcar was presented to the West Virginia Forty & Eight Society. By then, many, if not all, of the wooden shields had been stripped from the exterior. Some had been taken by various veterans' organizations from around the state, while others found their way to the State Museum.

Charleston newspapers reported that the boxcar was moved from the C&O depot to 1804 Washington

Street East, a fenced-in plot provided by the State Road Commission. Today, that address no longer exists but is part of the Capitol Complex, approximately where the Veterans Memorial stands today. It did not stay there long, since construction of Building Three (the DMV Building) at that site began the following year. Indications are that it was moved to Daniel Boone Park, between U.S. Route 60 and the Kanawha River, just east of the Capitol.

The old boxcar was still resting in Daniel Boone Park in 1982, according to site drawings prepared by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In the spring of that year, the Corps began renovating Daniel Boone Park and improving the river access. In a remarkable stroke of luck, a member of the South Carolina Forty & Eight Society, Andy Dolak, visited Charleston on a nationwide search of all donated boxcars. Andy discovered West Virginia's boxcar at Daniel Boone Park. He reportedly arrived just as a bulldozer was about to shove the boxcar into the Kanawha River. Andy convinced the dozer operator to stop what he was doing while he raced back to the State Capitol to

find West Virginia State Museum officials.

Through his efforts, the car was spared and moved to a new location in St. Albans, where further efforts failed to restore and display the car. There was even talk about sending it to Grafton for display inside the historic Grafton railroad depot. That idea literally fell through when it was decided that the weight of the boxcar was too much for the depot floor. South Charleston also sought the rights to possess the car, but again nothing was finalized. A photograph taken in 1986 showed that the boxcar was intact and in remarkably good condition at that time.

After resting neglected in St. Albans, the boxcar landed in South Charleston sometime around 1992, in a field owned by Union Carbide. Between 1986 and 1995, the wooden roof and sidings were vandalized or stolen, leaving the interior exposed to the weather. After surviving two world wars, a trip across the

Atlantic, 30 years of neglect, and only moments from being sunk in the Kanawha River, West Virginia's boxcar spent its 100th birthday abandoned and decaying. By the time a new group of concerned volunteers rediscovered her, she was a rusted metal skeleton.

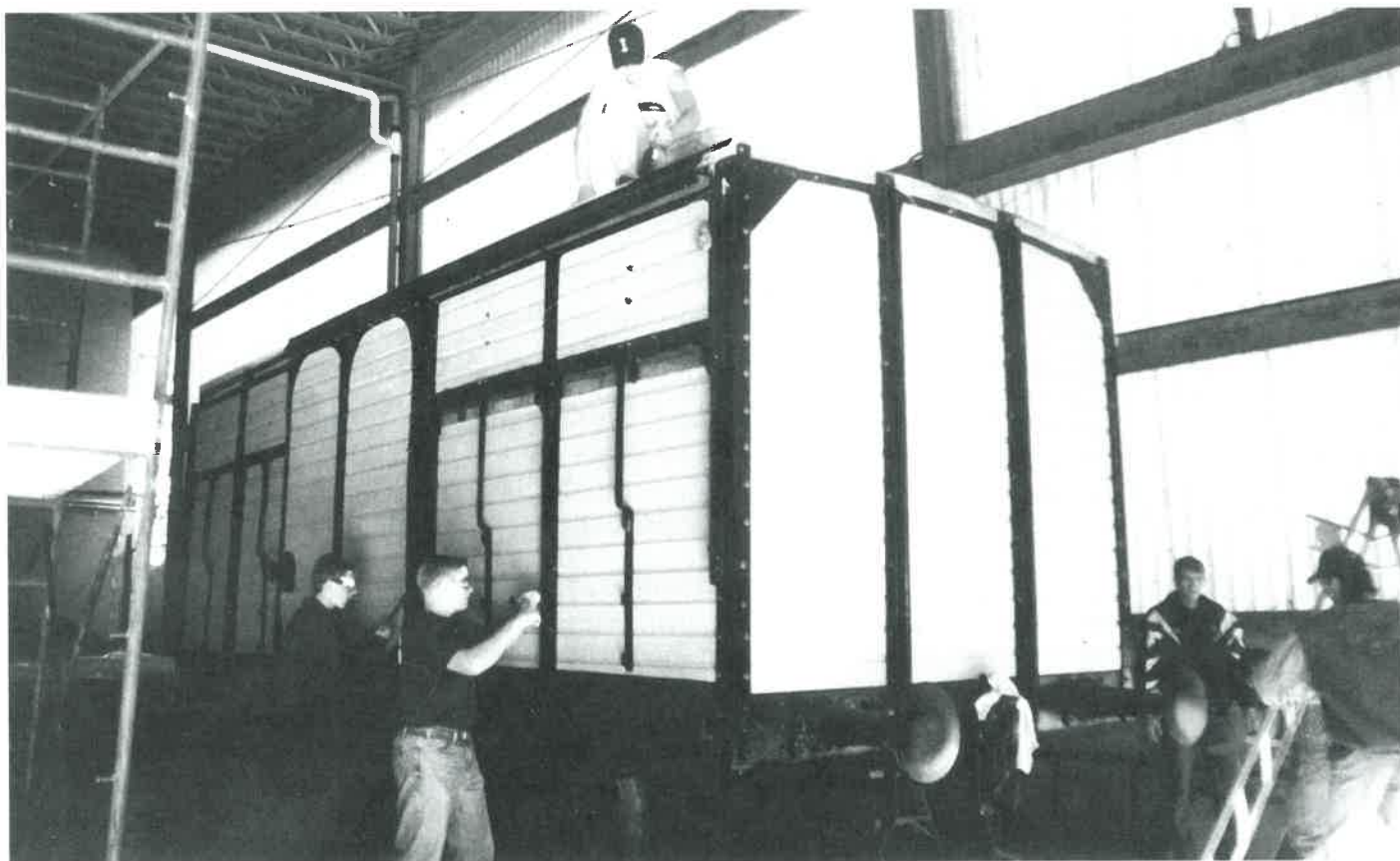
"When students realized why the boxcar had come to West Virginia and what happened to it, they couldn't believe it."

Russell Burge of the Forty & Eight Voiture of Welch, McDowell County, decided that they would take on the restoration of this relic. While serving as Grand Chef de Gare, Russell had to tackle the first problem—finding it. Nobody seemed to know exactly where it was. It took months before Jim Burdette and Bob Gurnee of the

Charleston Voiture located the boxcar in South Charleston, and almost a year to get the state to turn it over to the Welch Voiture.

On June 6, 1996, volunteers with donated equipment arrived in South Charleston. The Division of Highways dragged the rusted hulk off the Union Carbide property and onto a flatbed truck for its trip to Welch. Once it arrived in Welch, it was delivered to the McDowell County Vocational School and to building construction instructor Bill Chapman. Twenty-five to 30 students training in carpentry, welding, and auto and machine repair began working on the boxcar. Bill recalls the students' first reaction.

"What are we going to do with that junk?" they asked. The students were told the history of the Freedom Train and the French Gratitude Train. "When the students realized why the boxcar had come to West Virginia and what had happened to it, they couldn't believe it," he says. "Once they started to learn the history of



Students at McDowell County Vocational School, under the direction of instructor Bill Chapman, restored the boxcar. It took between 25 and 30 students about a year to complete the restoration, at a cost in excess of \$20,000. Photograph by S.R. Burge.

The Forty & Eight

After American soldiers returned from the trenches of World War I, they remained close to their war-time buddies. Since many had joined the recently created American Legion, it was within that organization that they sought to form a unique bond. For many who had served in France, one common thread was the 40 and eight boxcar, the French-made railcars that transported them, bucking and swaying, toward the front lines. These wood-sided cars got their name because they could carry 40 men or eight horses to or from the battlefield.

The WWI veterans decided to create an auxiliary society within the American Legion — the Forty & Eight Society. They organized their group using French railroad vernacular. Each local organization is called a Voiture Locale (local

boxcar). Each state organization is called the Grand Voiture. The presiding officer over each local is the Chef de Gare (stationmaster). Members of the Forty & Eight are known as Voyageurs Militaire (military travelers). The light blue chapeaus worn by members are designed after the caps worn by French railway workers.

The national body of the Forty & Eight was created in 1920, shortly after the creation of the American Legion itself. West Virginia organized its first Voiture in Huntington about 1937, bringing together veterans from Cabell and Wayne counties. Today, there are 12 Voitures in the state, with a total membership of more than 900 Voyageurs Militaire. Membership is by invitation only from among the members of the American Legion.



Nomination to the Forty & Eight is an honor, reflecting years of American Legion service to the community, state, and nation.

Since its creation, the Forty & Eight has launched numerous national programs to aid veterans and their families. These have included vaccination drives, nurses' training, and health research. The welfare of children has always been an important cause among veterans, and the Forty & Eight recognized early the benefits of conducting youth sport programs, including supporting the Special Olympics since 1982.

Additional information about the Forty & Eight can be obtained by contacting any West Virginia American Legion post.

—Richard Hartman



Russell Burge of the Forty & Eight Voiture of Welch was instrumental in saving the old boxcar. He is pictured here in 2004, in front of the car. The shields represent the 40 provinces of France. Photograph by Richard Hartman.

it, they started to get excited about it." They were also thrilled when they were told the boxcar would be displayed just down the street, "for all their families to see."

More than \$20,000 was raised

trip by Bill Chapman to see the South Carolina boxcar while he was on a family vacation. In order to replace the shields that decorated the sides of the car, Russell Burge located pictures of shields from boxcars held by

through donations and grants. Materials were donated from businesses and individuals throughout southern West Virginia. It took a year to restore. Bill Chapman says, "Being a veteran myself, it was a honor to work on it."

Photographs of boxcars restored by other states were used to guide the work, as well as a side

other states. Carmella Miano, a local artist, reproduced the shields for attachment to the restored car.

After a year of fund-raising and restoration, it was finally ready for display. On November 10, 1997, West Virginia's 40 and eight boxcar completed its long journey through time, war, neglect, and danger, to finally rest, secure and appreciated, along U.S. Route 52 at the Coney Island Veterans Park in Welch. The efforts of veterans, local citizens, public officials, teachers, and young students saved the old boxcar that held the thank-you gifts from a grateful people. We should be as grateful as they were, for when the present reaches back to restore the past, it always inspires our future. 🍁

RICHARD HARTMAN of Charleston was born and raised in Huntington. He holds master's degrees in political science and history from Marshall University, and is retired following a career in administration with several West Virginia state agencies. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Pushing and Shoving a Model T

By W. Howard Reeder

“You have to push them up the hill and push them down the hill.” Thus did my mother describe driving Model T Fords.

She used this description because of the three-pedal system designed by inventor Henry Ford for the operation of the Model T.

The three pedals were located on the forward part of the floorboards under the steering column. The left pedal was the most important for forward motion and a bit complicated, especially to people just emerging from the “horse and buggy” days. Pushed to the floor, the left pedal engaged the drive mechanism into low gear. After sufficient momentum, the pedal was released to allow the car to progress into high gear, which gave the Model T two speeds. Shoving the left pedal in halfway produced neutral.

The right pedal was the brake, though the Model T braking system was generally weak and ineffective. In going down grade or stopping, the left pedal had to be used in combination with the brake in order to control the vehicle. Another trick was to use the center reverse pedal as a brake in special situations, since there were no direct gears to damage or break. So going downhill became an art of using both feet in proper coordination, depending on the situation.

The middle pedal operated reverse. Shove to the floor to move the vehicle backwards. Have that left foot ready to find neutral quickly, and the right foot ready to move to the brake pedal immediately to stop and change direction. All these operations had to be performed smoothly and in proper sequence, or the motor would stall.

An outside crank handle in front of the radiator was used to start the engine. A half turn of the crank was usually sufficient, but sometimes a



A Model T Ford, similar to the one owned by the Reeder family during the 1920's. Photograph 1988 by Michael Keller.

full turn or more, which was called a “spin,” became necessary. Backfire could cause the crank to reverse so quickly that a broken wrist or arm might result. The safety trick was to grip the crank with the thumb on the same side of the crank as the fingers. Then the hand could slip

free without damage.

Our family lived near the foot of a hill at the head of Curtis Run in Lewis County. It was necessary to travel across the hill in order to reach the country store or the county seat of Weston. The hill was steeper on the far side, so returning home was

a greater challenge than going.

The pedal system on the Model T, and the many hills encountered, led to the remark by my mother. Not only did the pedals require pushing, but the whole car sometimes needed shoving, as passengers would unload to provide this service, many times in mud and rain.

Just beneath the steering wheel were two levers. The left one controlled spark, and the right one was the accelerator, or "gas feed," as it was called back then. To ascend a muddy hill, chains had to be used on the rear drive wheels. This caused extra load on the little four-cylinder engine, so it would choke down and stall frequently. In such situations, I learned to pull the spark and accelerator levers down wide open. As the Model T began to lose power, I let the low-gear pedal out to neutral. This allowed the engine to rev at top speed. Push in low gear again, travel a few feet, then repeat the procedure.

Ours was a 1922 Model T touring car, purchased new that year for \$496. Ford also made a roadster (one-seater), which was popular with the younger set. All open with soft top,

side curtains were provided, which had turn snaps for attachment, but a rainstorm might be over before the curtains could be retrieved and put in place. Although small isinglass windows were set in the curtains, vision was quite restricted.

During the early years, West Virginia vehicle law permitted purchase of license for only nine months of the year, so the car was stored during the winter months of January, February, and March. Of course, that soon changed, and license had to be purchased for a full year. I was glad, because roads were passable sometimes during the winter.

I began driving the Model T at the age of nine. When I was 12, we moved to Gladys Fork, where similar driving conditions were experienced. During the 1920's, many rural people purchased Model T Fords, because affordable, advanced transportation was provided this way. Both of my grandparents' families owned Model T Fords that were a year or two older, but not back to the brass-radiator style.

In 1931, my father purchased a three-speed, stick-shift Chevrolet Coupe. Like with the Model T, he

never fully mastered the skills necessary for clutching and shifting gears. Many older people never learned to drive any type of automobile.

Our Model T was sold during the Depression years for \$15. How sad! Some of the Model T's in our area were made into what young adults called "strip-down," where the body and any excess weight were removed. These light-weight Model T's could conquer the average West Virginia hill in high gear.

With strict parental supervision and the approval of local officers, I continued driving in rural areas until that magical birthday when a driver's, or operator's, license could be legally obtained in West Virginia.

After more than 70 years since handling a Model T, memories become faded, so I apologize for any technical errors. Also, I give credit to my good neighbor Brooks Melton, who helped to clarify some facts about the Model T. 🍁

W. HOWARD REEDER, from Lewis County, retired in 1980 after 40 years as an educator, assistant principal, and principal. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



The Reeder family in front of their Lewis County home at about the time of the story. From the left are Bernice, A.J., and author W. Howard Reeder. The dog was named Sport. Photographer and date unknown.

Life In the Levi



The Levi Shinn House, built in 1778, is the oldest standing structure in north-central West Virginia, located along U.S. Route 19 in Shinnston.

Alongside U.S. Route 19 south of Shinnston is a two-story log house commonly known as the Shinn House. Built in 1778 by Levi Shinn, the house was the center of a flourishing frontier farm where Shinn and his eldest son, Clement, successfully raised two families, consisting of 17 children. This landmark is a remnant of a tumultuous time in the Appalachian wilderness, when more than 100 forts and blockhouses were built throughout the Monongahela Valley. During the 1944-1953 period, and for several years after, we knew the Shinn House as the Michael house. It was my family's home.

In 1944, my father, Edward Michael, moved his family to the small Harrison County town of Shinnston, population 2,000, to open Shinnston Plumbing Company with two brothers-in-law. Born and raised in the Whetstone area near Mannington, Edward Michael's vision of the ideal home was a country setting where he could have a garden, a milk cow, some chickens, and most importantly, his rabbit dogs. As a teenager, he had quit school and started working in Bowers Pottery Company at Mannington — at the

Shinn House

By Edwin Daryl Michael

Photographs by Mark Crabtree

time, the largest such pottery in the world. The pottery, with an annual capacity of more than 3,000 commodes and lavatories, brought jobs to hundreds of young men. However, along with the welcomed wages came something not so welcomed. After a few years at the pottery, Edward knew he had to change occupations, when a doctor warned him that his white-lung illness, contracted as a result of thousands of hours of producing porcelain bathroom fixtures, was life-threatening.

His wife, Isolene, had spent her childhood as one of eight children on the Harrison Gump farm a few miles from Farmington, up Plum Run. Edward and Isolene had wanted their two boys — myself and my brother Roger — to experience the joys and challenges of living in the country.

When we moved to Shinnston in 1944, I was six years old, five years older than my baby brother. My dad had found a house just outside Shinnston that met his requirements of good location, some land, and reasonable rent. However, on June 23, the house was totally destroyed by the infamous Shinnston tornado. [See "The Shinnston Tornado," by Martha Lowther; Summer 1998.]

When the owner informed my dad that the house was gone, Edward immediately began searching for another house to rent. Unfortunately, the tornado, which killed 66 people and hundreds of farm animals, also destroyed more than 300 houses. Dad finally found a house about 10 miles from Shinnston, between Lumberport and Wallace, and paid one month's rent as a down payment. Two weeks before moving, however, he learned of a big, old log house, which although very old, was in a much better location, had modern amenities, and was available for us to rent. Only fate decided which houses

would be totaled and which would be spared by the horrible tornadic winds of the 1944 catastrophe. Although the 300-yard-wide path of the Shinnston tornado passed within a quarter mile of it, the log house built by Levi Shinn sustained damage only to the front porch, one outbuilding, and two trees. Throughout the home's long history, the watchful eyes of its many occupants and considerable good fortune had somehow saved

the log house from the destructive forces of Indian attacks, fires, insects, storms, and age.

Following a three-month delay for repairs, we moved into the Levi Shinn house in September. The original log house had two rooms downstairs and two upstairs. In the center of the house was a huge stone fireplace, with its main opening covering nearly one entire wall of the living room. The original occupants,



The Michael family in about 1944, when they moved into the Shinn House. Parents Isolene and Edward Michael are in the rear; children Roger and Daryl are in the front. Photographer unknown.



The living room was the center of activity in the house. This large fireplace was modified sometime prior to 1944, then was later restored to its original size.

and many who followed, depended on the fireplace, which was nearly 10 feet long and four feet high, for warmth and for cooking. The living room was truly the center of life in the original Shinn House. With its huge fireplace, cooking, eating, and most every other daily activity took place in that room. The other downstairs room, which contained only a small fireplace for heat, probably functioned primarily as a bedroom. Thus, on the coldest of nights, some of the occupants ended up sleeping on the floor in front of the huge living-room fireplace. While there was no direct source of heat in the two upstairs rooms, the exposed stone walls of the chimney would have radiated enough heat to make sleeping tolerable.

The original two-story log structure is much the same today as when it was first built in 1778, but it has undergone a few changes, some obvious and some not so obvious. No written record describes the design of the original house, nor do any records

tell what or when improvements were made. The floor of the cabin was most likely earthen until Levi, aided by his brothers and sons, was able to split enough logs to add the luxury of a wooden floor. The roof would have been covered with split shakes, and all support beams and

rafters would have been totally exposed. Because of the threat of Indian attacks, there was probably only one door in the house and no downstairs windows. While there is no evidence that shooting portals ever existed in the walls of the log house, the conditions that produced so many



Author Daryl Michael in the second downstairs room of the Levi Shinn House. Now used to house historic artifacts, this room was once used primarily as a bedroom, Daryl recalls.



Brothers Daryl (left) and Roger by the front porch of the Shinn House during the mid-1940's. Photographers unknown.

forts throughout the Monongahela Valley during the 1770's must have concerned Levi Shinn. The upstairs rooms possibly had small openings in the walls, at the locations of the four windows now present.

Windows — four upstairs and four downstairs — plus a second door were added to the log house, probably during the early 1800's, after the cessation of Indian attacks. Among the creature comforts that brought the log house into the 20th century were a small kitchen and an even smaller bathroom, both added to the rear of the house sometime in the early 1900's. Fortunately, natural gas had been run into the house prior to 1944, so we had the luxury of small gas stoves in the downstairs bedroom and bathroom along with a

gas cook stove. A back porch and a small front porch — the one damaged by the tornado — had been added a few years earlier. The front porch was barely large enough to contain a small swing, while the back porch was

*I have pleasant memories of sprawling
on a braided wool rug in front of the fireplace,
reading books or working picture puzzles.*

completely screened in and served as a place for the coal bucket, some firewood, muddy boots, dirty coats, the milk bucket, and numerous other objects.

Sometime prior to 1944, the fireplace opening had been reduced to what today would be considered a normal size. During our years in the Shinn House, we depended on the fireplace for heat, just as had the Levi

Shinn family. However, we had one luxury that the original occupants did not — coal. Every winter, my dad had a truckload of coal dumped into our small coal shed, and fires from that local bituminous fuel warmed the

house through many long, cold winters. The house had been chinked with mud between the logs to keep out the wind and snow, but my dad replaced that mud with

chicken wire and concrete before our first winter. The inside walls of the house were covered with wide boards — probably added during the 1800's — which sometime in the past had been covered with wallpaper. Although I have no memories of the house being uncomfortable, it certainly must have been hot in summer and cold in winter — except right in front of the fireplace. We would



Daryl surveys one of the two upstairs rooms in the house. After he was given one of these rooms for his bedroom, Daryl would sometimes lie awake at night, listening to the many strange sounds that accompanied the old house.

have worn thick wool sweaters and slept under heavy feather tick blankets during the winter months. I clearly recall ice freezing so thick on the windowpanes that we could not see out some mornings. I have pleasant memories of sprawling on a braided wool rug in front of the fireplace, reading books or working picture puzzles.

As the cold days of winter were replaced by hot, humid summer weather, we adjusted by getting rid of unneeded clothing. Hats, gloves, coats, and sweaters were the first to go. The shoes had to stay on until Easter, when we were allowed to go barefooted. By June, our daily clothing was quite skimpy, just blue jeans or shorts — no shoes, no socks, and certainly no shirts for my brother or me. We had no air-conditioning, and the kitchen would get unbearably hot in the summer. Some evenings, we ate dinner in the backyard on a makeshift picnic table.

Summers were fun, although hoe-

ing long rows of beans, hilling the corn, and pulling weeds from onions proved a little boring. We had a silver maple and a sugar maple in the front yard. I could climb almost

*Although we were not
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to the top of both. There was a tree-of-heaven beside the garage, but it lacked sturdy climbing branches. Fields around the house and woods behind the garden provided ideal playgrounds for young boys. A small stream ran through the woods, and a short hike over the hill brought us to the West Fork River. Sadly, there

were no fish to be caught, and swimming was forbidden. The river and almost every other stream in the area were bright orange from acid mine drainage. One of the very few disappointments about living in the Shinn House was the lack of fishing streams.

When Levi Shinn lived in the log house, the woods abounded with wild turkey, deer, elk, buffalo, black bear, mountain lions, and timber wolves. But when the Michael family lived there, no large wildlife were to be seen. There were rabbits in the fields, bobwhite quail at the edge of the woods, plus hawks and owls and a variety of songbirds, but the only larger animals I remember seeing were an opossum hanging in a sycamore tree and two deer. The deer, running around the hill several hundred yards behind the house, were the first deer I had seen in my life and the only deer we ever saw while living in the Shinn House.

A small earthen cellar under the

Levi Shinn House

Levi Shinn, credited as the founder of present-day Shinnston, was born in the colony of New Jersey in 1748. He first came to what is now Harrison County in 1772, where he and a younger brother acquired land before returning to New Jersey. In 1778, Levi Shinn returned to western Virginia for good, building the log house known today as the Shinn House — the oldest standing home in north-central West Virginia.

The spacious, two-story structure, along with a grist mill built on the shores of the West Fork River by Levi Shinn in the 1780's, became the center of activity for area settlers. Additional houses were built in the vicinity, and this became the nucleus for the town of Shinnston, first chartered in 1818.

Levi Shinn was a quiet and pious man, well-regarded in the community. In addition to running a profitable milling operation, he acquired land and resold it to neighbors and settlers, amassing a personal fortune. When he died in 1807, he left the house, mill, and hundreds of acres to his children.

Eldest son, Clement Shinn, inherited the house and adjacent property. Like his father, Clem-

ent was ambitious and industrious and built his own fortune through large-scale milling and livestock enterprises. Clement lived in the log house for the remainder of his life, passing away in 1840.

Clement's heirs then sold the log house to a man named David Morris, and it remained in the Morris family from the 1840's until 1959. It was during this period of time that the Michael family lived there — one in a series of tenants to occupy the Levi Shinn House.

In 1959, the home was sold to the Richardson Lumber & Construction Company. It was apparently unoccupied for several years, until the lumber company decided in 1972 to donate the home to the Shinnston Historical Association.

The Historical Association made efforts to restore the old log house as near as possible to its original condi-



The Levi Shinn House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 16, 1973. Photograph taken 1995 by James E. Harding, courtesy of the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office.

tion, removing plaster, drywall, and other modifications and stabilizing the structure. The restored house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 16, 1973. Since that time, it has been used as a museum devoted to the pioneer settlers of the Upper Monongahela Valley.

Four times each year, the house is opened to the public, including a Christmas party, scheduled this year on Sunday, December 4, beginning at 2:00 p.m. The house is also available for tours, by appointment.

For information, call the Shinnston Historical Association at (304)584-4071 or 592-1942; e-mail cards@iolinc.net.

house was accessed by a set of steep stairs from the living room. The floor was half earthen and half covered with flat stones. Lining the wooden shelves on three sides of the cellar were hundreds of Mason jars filled with the fruits and vegetables and meats that my mother canned. I remember the jars of bright orange peaches, so pleasant to look at, but even more pleasant to eat. There were jars with purple beets, yellow carrots, red tomatoes, bright yellow corn, green and lima beans, and pickles of various shapes and colors. In the light of a bare bulb hanging from the ceiling, the jars sparkled like jewels.

And there were jars with canned meat — chicken, spare ribs, and chunks of beef for making a hearty stew. On the floor sat large crocks, some with sauerkraut and some with pork sausage. Bushel baskets of apples and potatoes rested on the cellar floor, while onions and ears of corn hung from the rafters to dry. Although we were not totally self-sufficient, the big garden behind the Shinn House made us nearly so, for we grew almost everything imaginable.

We had a milk cow that gave enough milk to supply our needs, except for those spring days when she had been eating wild onions. At that

time, the milk was not fit for human consumption, and we had to pour it in the creek. Even the beagles refused to drink it. We did have plenty of meat to eat. My grandfather, Harrison Gump, had chickens and hogs and sheep and beef cattle on his Plum Run farm. Every fall, we would butcher several chickens, a couple hogs, a sheep, and one or two yearling beefs. Sugar-cured hams and lots of other canned meats provided additional meat for our table.

There were four modern-day buildings scattered around the Shinn House when we moved in. The one-car garage had an exten-



Author Daryl Michael outside the Levi Shinn House, where he lived as a child from 1944-53.

sion that served as a workshop, and a coal shed was nearby. Down the hill behind the house was the dog pen where Dad kept his two beagles, Butch and Scotty. The fenced-in run where they could get a little exercise was bordered at one end by the chicken house. We kept a few regular-size

hens and several bantam hens.

One of my chores was to collect the eggs every day, and I usually enjoyed it — but not always. Sometimes a hen sitting tight on her eggs would give me a hard peck on the hand when I tried to reach under her for the egg. Worse than that, however,

was reaching into one of the small hen boxes only to find a black snake making a meal of an egg.

Black snakes also liked our workshop behind the garage. The loft over the workshop was a good place to spread out onions to dry. To access the loft, a narrow ladder was built along the wall supports. I always liked to climb it, until the day I came face-to-face with a big, hungry blacksnake lying in wait for a mouse. All the black snakes that I remember seeing in and around the Shinn House were big. But obviously, when your nose is only a few inches from a black snake's tongue, any snake looks huge. I was never bitten, and none ever struck at me. After all, they were hunting mice, not boys.

While we saw an occasional black snake, we also saw garter snakes, but never a copperhead or a rattlesnake. The beneficial black snakes were attracted to the house because of the mice. Although we set traps for mice, we could never get rid of all of them. At the age of eight, I was given a Red Ryder BB gun and did manage to shoot a few house mice, but the black snakes were much more effective than I was at controlling nuisance mice. Starlings and a few house sparrows were unwelcome visitors that nested in the openings under the edge of the roof, and I managed to shoot a few with the BB gun, but I never made a dent in their numbers. I did a better job keeping the starlings out of the sour cherry tree. While I sat under the tree, the birds would steer clear. But as soon as I left, the starlings joined catbirds and robins to descend upon the ripening cherries.

In hindsight, I now realize that times were tough during that chapter of my life when we lived in the Shinn House. Though money was scarce, we never lacked for food. World War II was taking a toll on the country, and ration coupons were necessary to buy scarce commodities such as butter, sugar, and gasoline. Hoboes regularly passed our house carrying all their worldly goods in a small



If walls could talk, these logs would have much to tell, after more than 225 years. Though the house has been modified, renovated, and restored, the original hand-hewn logs are still in place.

bag. Many would stop and ask if they could work for food. My mom would always give them something to eat, even if it was only a slice of bread. She would then remind me and my brother how lucky we were to have a roof over our head, food in our cellar, and a father who had a job that paid a real salary, no matter how small it was.

When we had lived in the log house for two years, I was given my own bedroom upstairs. My little brother still slept in the downstairs bedroom with my parents, but I was deemed big enough to sleep by myself. In and around the log house, the sounds of critters seemed to be a natural part of the old structure. Other sounds, however, did not seem quite so natural. I could identify the scurrying sound made by a mouse as it ran through the wall and the brushing sounds of starlings and English sparrows as they flew into their holes. But some nights there were unfamiliar sounds. I remember lying awake, full of curi-

osity about what they might be. Not exactly human sounds, they seemed to come from the ceiling above my bedroom or from the other upstairs

Levi Shinn would be proud that the house he so lovingly built in 1778 has withstood the test of time.

room. Even now, after 50 years, I cannot really describe them. I remember them as high-pitched, perhaps caused by the wind blowing through the many openings around the roof. During the nearly 200 years of Shinn House history, there were probably several persons who died there. If any of their spirits resided in the house during our tenure, they apparently had no quarrel with us. Other than a few strange sounds and a few things mysteriously disappearing — which

my brother probably took — nothing abnormal happened.

Levi Shinn would be proud that the house he so lovingly built in 1778 has withstood the test of time and stands, 227 years later, as a proud reminder of the accomplishments of those early pioneers who faced and survived the challenges of the western Virginia wilderness. Levi also would be pleased, hopefully, that the Edward Michael family did our part in preserving this valuable remnant of an important era in the early history of West Virginia. 🍁

EDWIN DARYL MICHAEL, a native of Plum Run near Mannington, holds a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology from Texas A&M University. He taught at West Virginia University until his retirement in 1997. He is the author of more than 100 published works, including the book, *A Valley Called Canaan: 1885-2002*. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

MARK CRABTREE is a Brooke County native now living in Morgantown. He is a freelance writer and photographer and owner of Crabtree Photographics. Mark is a frequent contributor to GOLDENSEAL.



Echoes of the Flood at Harman

It was raining the morning I stopped at the Allegheny Restaurant in Harman. This was a steady, hard rain left over from Hurricane Jeanne. The kind of rain that makes Red Creek, Troy Camp, Horse Camp, and all the other tributaries that feed into Dry Fork run brown and swift.

Bill Mullenix and his wife, Shelby, worry when it rains like this. The torrents remind them of November 1985, when all along the Dry Fork and Cheat River valleys, dreams were destroyed and lives washed away. To this day, it bothers Bill to recall that week, although it's a frequent topic of conversation in his restaurant.

"It's sad. I hated to see that," he says on this late-September morning as he sits at a table in the restaurant's dining room. "Especially the kids. That's what tore me up. The kids. I love kids."

Mullenix's Allegheny Restaurant, located on U.S. Route 33 in the northeast corner of Randolph County, has been in Bill's family for more than 40 years. It is at street level, just west of the bridge that crosses Horse Camp Creek. The creek flows

within inches of Bill's workshop and just a few yards from their garage and residence, at the lower level of the restaurant.

Bill says floods are a way of life in his native Harman, but the one that came in November 1985 was like none other. "It seemed like this storm just circled around above us," Bill says between sips of milk. "It just poured the rain for three or four days. We knew something was going to happen."

A highly skilled gunsmith, Bill started moving his tools and other valuables from the workshop to higher ground as the waters of Horse Camp Creek flirted with their banks.

At the Harman School, Shelby, who taught business and English, nervously watched as Dry Fork rose throughout the morning. Finally, she went to the office and told the principal to dismiss the children immediately, before the bridges and roads became impassable. As soon as the students were loaded onto buses, Shelby left for home.

Meanwhile, Bill was fretting about the creek taking out the stack of winter firewood he'd worked so hard

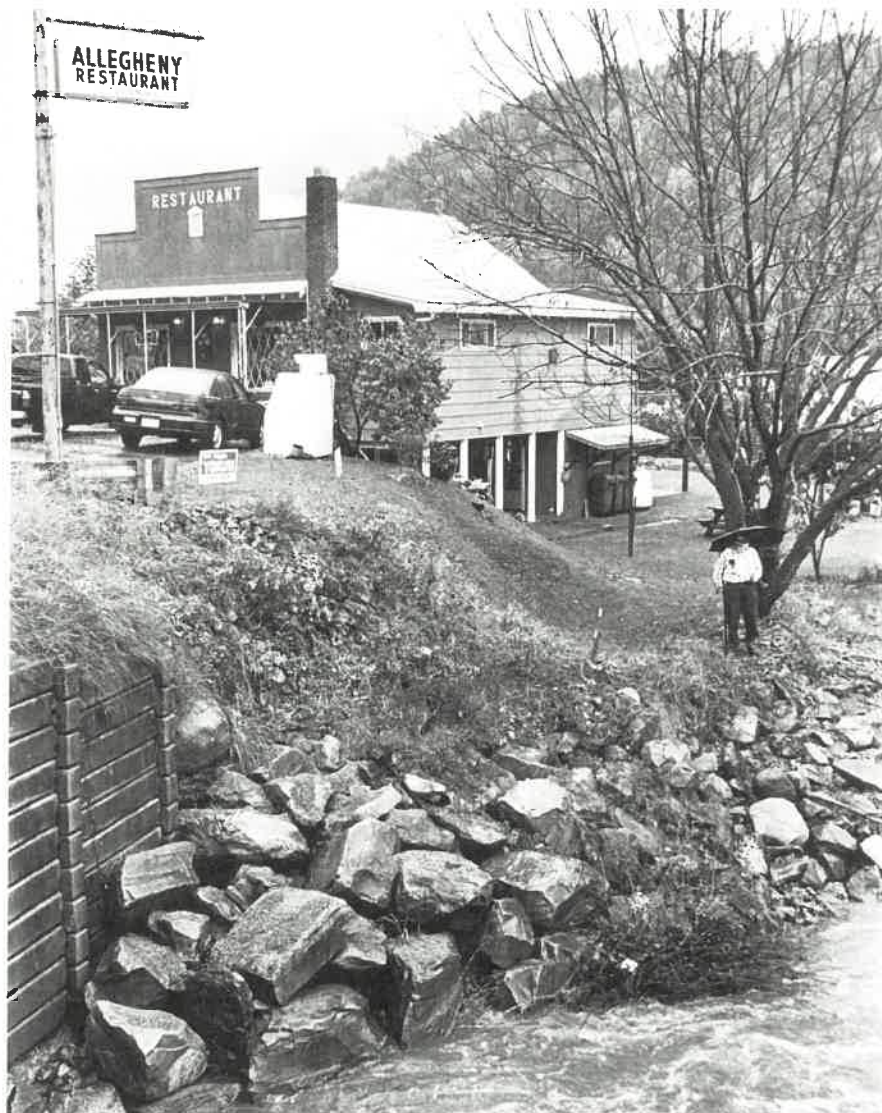
to cut and stack behind the garage. He prayed that the Lord would spare his wood, then went to work helping neighbors move themselves and their possessions to higher ground.

One by one, the bridges on Route 33 and Route 32 either washed out or became impassable, isolating the restaurant. By evening, the Allegheny and its parking lot had become an ark for valley residents displaced by the floodwaters.

"I looked down at the Dry Fork, and it looked like the



Bill Mullenix of Harman, Randolph County, sits in the dining room of his Allegheny Restaurant, recalling the flood of 1985.



Bill checks the level of Horse Camp Creek after a night of heavy rain in September 2004. Bill's restaurant was spared during the flood of '85, and served as a haven for displaced residents and recovery workers.

Spanish Armada going down there, all those mobile homes," Bill says.

Bill and Shelby cleared a spot in the middle of the dining room to accommodate the 25 to 30 refugees who bedded down on the restaurant floor that night. Shelby made coffee and fed the frightened guests. Dishes rattled from the roar and rumble of water and boulders crashing down the mountainside. The noise and sense of impending doom terrified the refugees.

"Then the electricity went off, and it was pandemonium," Bill says. He rigged up some flashlights, calmed the guests best he could, and tried to get some rest. "I was drenched from helping people," says Bill. "I laid down on a rug and went to sleep, wet as a dog."

Shelby slept with a roll of paper towels for a pillow, her head next to the door so she'd be awakened if anyone else arrived seeking shelter.

Bill awoke with chest pains the next morning and decided to risk the drive to Elkins to be checked out

by his physician, who put him in the hospital for several days. (It turned out to be a pulled pectoral muscle.) That left Shelby and her employees alone at the restaurant to feed refugees, power company workers, and National Guardsmen who came to the region's rescue.

The restaurant's stoves are fired with propane, so the lack of electricity didn't halt food preparation. A pot of either vegetable soup or chili was on the stove throughout the day. However, without electricity, perishable food in the coolers and freezers had to be used quickly before it spoiled.

Potable water was an issue for several days until a nearby mine company donated a large supply of bottled water. To wash dishes or flush the toilet, the user had to carry a bucket of water from the creek. "We called it the bucket brigade," says Shelby.

After power and telephone service were restored to the restaurant and the wholesalers' trucks starting rolling out of Elkins again, the Allegheny slowly returned to normal. But for several weeks after the

flood, the restaurant kept extended hours to feed National Guardsmen assigned to clear the valley of flood debris, including the remains of thousands of chickens and turkeys from the region's poultry farms.

Shelby set the tables using a Thanksgiving-themed paper placemat, but noticed the Guardsmen always turned the mats face down. She finally asked one of them why they did that.

"He told me, 'If you would have picked up as many dead turkeys and chickens as we have, you wouldn't want to look at a turkey, either,'" Shelby says.

Bill says their property suffered very little damage, and the Good Lord answered his prayer: Not one stick of Bill's firewood was claimed by the flood.

The subject of the flood often comes up when locals and out-of-towners stop in the restaurant for breakfast or lunch. Bill sums it up this way: "You have to be a survivor. You got to be a survivor in this country, or you won't make it." 🍁

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.

Mule & Donkey Show

The 13th Annual Mule and Donkey Show will be held on September 10-11 at Holly Gray Park in Sutton. Founded to educate the public about mules and donkeys, the show attracts owners and tourists from several states. Activities include riding, driving, halter, con jump, and flag and barrel racing. Classes, races, and contests begin at 5 p.m. on Saturday and resume at 11 a.m. Sunday morning.



Joe McCown with Traveler at the 2004 Mule and Donkey Show in Sutton.

For information on contestant rules and registration, and entry and camping fees, contact Karen Carr at (304)364-8364.

Fall Festivals

The 10th Annual Ed Haley Memorial Old-Time Fiddle Festival will be held on Saturday, September 17, in Ashland, Kentucky. "Blind" Ed Haley (1883-1951) of Harts Creek, Logan County, was legendary for his distinctive technique, timing, and flawless performance. In addition to a fiddle exhibit, the festival features workshops and contests for fiddlers of all ages. It begins at 9:30 a.m. at the Christian Life Center, 1628 Winchester Avenue, downtown Ashland. For more information, call Gail Fritz at (606)326-2134.

This year's Fall Fling of the Friends of Old-Time Music and Dance (FOOTMAD) will be held September 23-25 at the Fayette County 4-H Park in Beckwith. The FOOTBRIDGE Award for 2005 will be presented at that time to Frank and Jane George of Roane County [see "'Grandpaw Got Me Started': Frank George and The Old-Time Music," by Michael Meador; Spring 1983]. Each year, the award honors West Virginians who bring the best traditions of the past into the present, to be transmitted to the future.

Music performers for this year include Poteen, Stewed Mulligan, Meridian, the Rain Dogs, the Blue Ridge Rounders, Rachel Eddy, Ethel Caffie-Austin, the Cantrells, Heidi Muller, Soup Kitchen, and others. The festival also features contra and square dances, dance workshops, an instrument builders' panel, and a Rising Stars concert of young traditional musicians. FOOTMAD was founded 25 years ago and sponsors the festival as a means to promote West Virginia's traditional music and dance.

For more details, call Becky Kimmons at (304)345-0923. To purchase tickets on-line, go to www.footmad.org/festival.



Jane and Frank George. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Music on Display

The Huntington Museum of Art will present "Passing It On," a photography and multimedia exhibit featuring 10 traditional



Nat Reese. Photograph by Michael Keller.

musicians from West Virginia. The framed portraits, accompanied by sound recordings and interviews, include Hazel Dickens, Nat Reese, Carl Rutherford, David Bing, Bobby Taylor, and others. The exhibit opens October 22 and runs until January 15.

Two related exhibits will be on display at the same time and place. The first is a 60-piece photographic exhibit depicting the Grand Ole Opry during the 1950's. The other is an exhibit of work by Kentucky folk artists Charley and Noah Kinney.

For more information, call the Huntington Museum of Art at (304)529-2701; information is also available on-line at www.hmoa.org.

New State Songs

A CD recording of recently written songs about West Virginia is now available from Wingman Records of Cool Ridge. Originally issued by the State Lottery Commission in 2002, the new release, titled "The Road Home: Songs of West Virginia," includes performances by Doug Harper, Colleen Anderson, Larry Groce, Ron Sowell, and others. It is available on-line at wingmanrecords.com, or by calling (304)228-6767. [See "A State of Music: Songs of Hills and Home," by Richard Ramella; Summer 2004.]

Wingman Records plans other upcoming releases with West Virginia themes, as well. For information, or to submit material for consideration, contact Scott Hill at the phone number above.



Bramwell Book and Festival

Although Mercer County is best known for its company towns, it is also home to Bramwell, a community famous for its historic luxury mansions. A new book, *Bramwell: A Town of Millionaires*, by Louise Dawson Stoker and Dana Stoker Cochran, is a collection of more than 200 vintage photographs documenting the heyday of this town that once boasted more millionaires per capita than any other.

The 128-page paperback book sells for \$19.99, and is published by Arcadia Publishing. It is available on-line at www.arcadiapublishing.com; phone 1-888-853-2070.

Bramwell will host its ninth

annual Oktoberfest on Saturday, October 8, between 2 and 8 p.m. Attendees may sample home- and microbrewed beers and enjoy live musical entertainment. For more information, or to purchase tickets in advance, go to www.mccvb.com, or phone 1-800-221-3206.

Bramwell was the subject of a GOLDENSEAL story, titled "Millionaires' Town: The Houses and People of Bramwell," by Beth A. Hager, in our Winter 1982 issue.

Herb Association Fall Conference

The West Virginia Herb Association will hold its annual conference at Jackson's Mill on Saturday, October 22. Workshops, hands-on activities, and demonstrations will be available. Workshop topics include folk medicine, growing herbs, wild foods, and crafts.

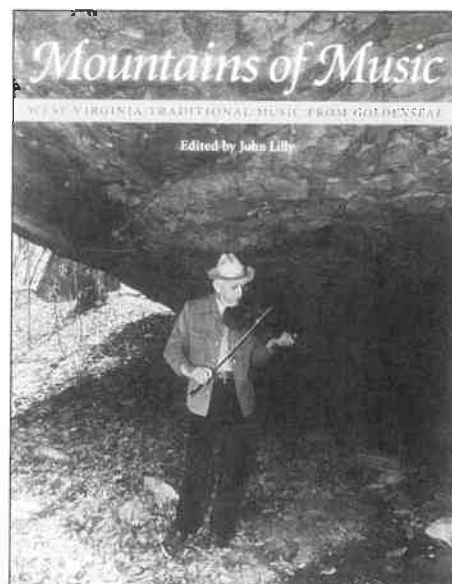
Founded in 1992, the West Virginia Herb Association is a non-profit organization designed to promote the propagation, cultivation, and use of herbs in ethical and environmentally sound ways.

For more information, or to obtain registration materials, contact Ann Nye at lnye@ma.rr.com, or phone (304)842-6385; on-line at www.wvherb.org.

Veterans' Day in Welch

The annual Veterans' Day march and program in Welch will be held on Friday, November 11. The parade begins on Howard Street and ends with a commemoration and guest speaker at the Coney Island Veterans Park. [See "The Box It Came In: Saving the French Gratitude Train," by Richard Hartman; page 51.]

Since its founding in 1918, the Welch Veterans' Day celebration has been host to presidents, senators, Supreme Court justices, governors, astronauts, and numerous military dignitaries. For more information, call Russell Burge at (304)436-3803.



Mountains of Music: West Virginia Traditional Music from GOLDENSEAL gathers 25 years of stories about our state's rich musical heritage into one impressive volume.

Mountains of Music is the definitive title concerning this rare and beautiful music — and the fine people and mountain culture from which it comes.

The book is available from the GOLDENSEAL office for \$21.95, plus \$2 shipping per book; West Virginia residents please add 6% sales tax (total \$25.26 per book including tax and shipping).

Add *Mountains of Music* to your book collection today!

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The Goldenseal Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars



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 updated information. The large-format, 109-page paperback book sells for \$10.95, plus \$2 per copy postage and handling. West Virginia residents please add 6% state tax (total \$13.61 per book including tax and shipping).

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One Book, One West Virginia

The West Virginia Center for the Book, an agency of the state Library Commission, is encouraging state residents to read, or re-read, James Alexander Thom's best-selling novel, *Follow the River*, about Mary Draper Ingles' captivity by Shawnee Indians and her subsequent escape.

The project, called One Book, One West Virginia, runs through December. It commemorates 2005 as the 250th anniversary of the pioneer woman's ordeal. Activities in conjunction with the project include local discussion groups in libraries throughout the state and related special events, such as an appearance by the author at the West Virginia Book Festival on October 22-23 at the Charleston Civic Center.

More information about One Book, One West Virginia, including details about local events, can be found at www.wvcenterforthebook.lib.wv.us, or by calling the West Virginia Library Commission at 1-800-642-9021. Information regarding the West Virginia Book Festival is available at www.wvhumanities.org.

Mine Wars Subject Heading

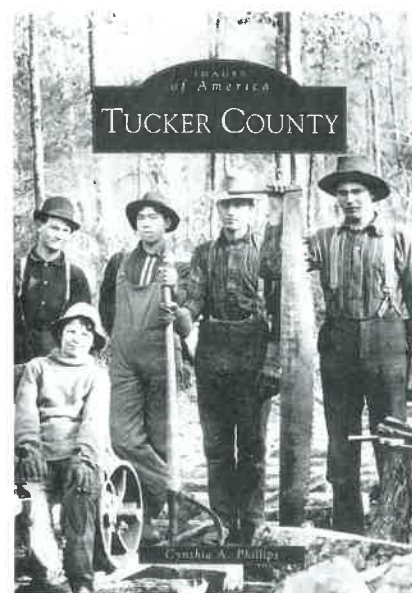
The Library of Congress announced this June the creation of a new subject heading titled West Virginia Mine Wars 1897-1921. The Library of Congress' catalog is the world's largest, and their classifications are used by libraries throughout the world.

The new subject heading follows the publication of a growing number of books on the topic, such as Robert Shogan's *The Battle of Blair Mountain*, William Blizzard's *When Miners March*, Lon Savage's *Thunder in the Mountains*, and *The GOLDENSEAL Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars*. To search the Library of Congress' catalogs, go to www.loc.gov. Look under Library Resources; click on Library Catalogs.

Moundsville, Tucker County Books

The history of Moundsville, Marshall County, is the subject of a new book, titled *Moundsville*, by Robert W. Schramm, part of the Images of America series from Arcadia Publishing.

Famous for its Gothic prison [see "The Executioner's Story: Bob Harness and the Moundsville Pen," by Carl E. Feather; page 38], Moundsville has many other sides, as well, many of which are highlighted in the book. The 128-page paperback includes a chronology, bibliography, and index.



In the same series is *Tucker County*, by Cynthia A. Phillips. More than 200 images are organized into chapters on railroads and logging; conservation; the Canaan Valley; and the towns of Parsons, Hambleton, Hendricks, Thomas, and Davis. [See "Night of Raging Waters: Parsons and the 1985 Flood," by Jerry DiBacco; page 14.] The 128-page paperback includes a bibliography. A portion of the royalties goes to support the teaching of Tucker County history to fifth graders.

The Moundsville and Tucker County books sell for \$19.99 each from Arcadia Publishing, available on-line at www.arcadiapublishing.com; phone 1-888-313-2665.

GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes

Woody Simmons, legendary Randolph County fiddler, passed away June 3, 2005. He was 93. A flamboyant and colorful figure, Woody was a fixture at West Virginia traditional music events, winning more than 200 prizes playing fiddle and banjo, and entertaining audiences with his engaging stories and flashy outfits. Woody received the 1983 Vandalia Award, and was profiled in a GOLDENSEAL story in our July-September 1979 issue, titled "Woody Simmons: Recollections of a Randolph County Fiddler," by Michael Kline.



Woody Simmons. Photograph by Doug Yarrow.

Captain Pete Grassie of Dunbar passed away June 11, 2005. Pete was best known as the owner and builder of the *Princess Margy* sternwheeler, featured on the



Captain Pete Grassie. Photograph by Michael Keller.

cover of our Summer 2002 issue and in an article, titled "Captain Pete Grassie and the *Princess Margy*," by Lisa Blake, in the same issue. Pete and his vessel became synonymous with river life and pleasure boating in the Kanawha Valley. He was 84.

William "Bill" Dysard, thought to be the last surviving son of a Confederate Civil War veteran in West Virginia, passed away June 27, 2005, one day shy of his 96th birthday.

Born near Lewisburg in 1909, Bill was the only son of Asbury Kincaid Dysard, an aging Civil War veteran, and his young wife, Betty Susan Echard. A retired highway worker, Bill was discovered by a local group of Civil War re-enactors in 2002 and was honored as an heir to his father's military legacy at a special ceremony. He was featured in the GOLDENSEAL article, "Bill Dysard of Lewisburg: A 'Real Son' of the South," by Belinda Anderson, in our Fall 2003 issue.



Bill Dysard. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Back Issues Available



- Winter 2001/Veterans Memorial
- Summer 2002/*Princess Margy* Sternwheeler
- Fall 2002/Flatwoods Monster
- Winter 2002/Berlin, Lewis County
- Spring 2003/Stained Glass Dome
- Summer 2003/General Charles R. Fox
- Fall 2003/Artist Boyd Boggs
- Winter 2003/Weaver Dorothy Thompson
- Summer 2004/1939 World's Fair
- Fall 2004/Grafton Trains
- Winter 2004/Toymaker Dick Schnacke
- Spring 2005/Newell Basketball
- Summer 2005/Tygart Valley Homestead

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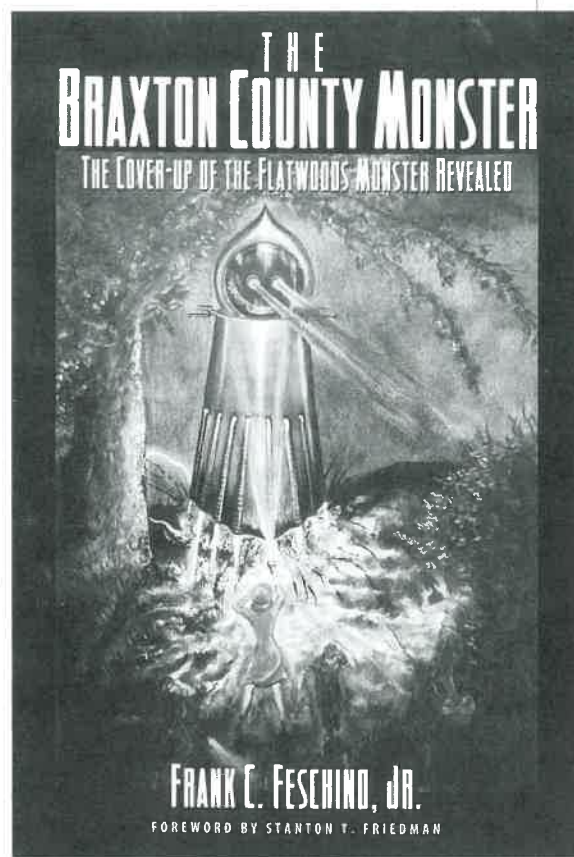
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Flatwoods Monster Book

September 12 marks the anniversary of one of the most mysterious events in our state's history — the strange 1952 sighting of the Flatwoods Monster in Braxton County. A huge national news story at the time, the matter has since become a part of local folklore, as tales of the creature — also known as the Braxton County Monster, the Phantom of Flatwoods, or the Green Monster — continue to circulate. The monster was featured on the cover of our Fall 2002 issue, along with an article, titled "The Legend of the Flatwoods Monster," by Buddy Griffin.

A new book from Charleston's Quarrier Press takes an in-depth look at the incident and attempts to make sense of the many conflicting stories and contradictory accounts surrounding it. *The Braxton County Monster: The Cover-up of the Flatwoods Monster Revealed*, by Frank C. Feschino, Jr., was published in 2004 and sells for \$29.95, plus shipping. Based on extensive interviews and research conducted by the author over the past 14 years, the 350-page, hardbound book is arguably the most complete work yet published on this subject.



Cold War tensions, UFO mania, conspiracy theories, and government manipulation all come into play as Feschino attempts to unravel the tangled tale. The result is a captivating account of the unexplained, as well as a chronicle of one man's determination to uncover the truth.

For more information, call 1-888-982-7472 or visit www.flatwoodsmonster.com.

Goldenseal

Coming Next Issue...

- State Archives Centennial
- Roseby's Rock
- Weirton Steel Chorus
- Mountain Music Roundup



LESTER RECEIVES VANDALIA AWARD



MICHAEL KELLER

Calhoun County fiddler Lester McCumbers received the 2005 Vandalia Award, presented by Culture and History commissioner Troy Body on Saturday, May 28, as part of the annual Vandalia Gathering, held at the Capitol Complex in Charleston. The Vandalia Award is the state's highest folklife honor and is presented each year to recognize lifetime contributions to West Virginia's folk culture. [See "The Vandalia Award: Portrait Gallery"; Spring 2001.]

According to the award proclamation, Lester was recognized for his longstanding dedication to the traditional fiddle music of central West Virginia and his continued efforts to share this heritage with younger musicians and audiences from across the state and beyond. Together with his wife and performing partner, Linda

McCumbers, Lester has been active with his music for the best part of the past 75 years. He was born in 1921 and has been playing fiddle and guitar and singing nearly all of his life. He and Linda were married in 1937. Over the years, they have played at square dances, concerts, radio broadcasts, and workshops.

In addition to musical activities, Lester has worked in farming, construction, factory work, mail delivery, and on rock, timber, and road crews. Together, he and Linda raised nine children on their rural Calhoun County farm. The pair were subjects of a GOLDEN-SEAL story in our Spring 2004 issue, titled "'Satisfaction in My Heart': Lester and Linda McCumbers of Calhoun County," by Kim Johnson. Congratulations, Lester!

Inside Goldenseal

Page 24 — Peck Martin of McMechen is a world-class maker of handcrafted wooden turkey calls.

Page 38 — Watching over dangerous inmates and participating in executions were all in a day's work for former Moundsville prison guard Bob Harness.

Page 44 — Huntington was hit hard by an outbreak of the Spanish influenza in the fall of 1918.

Page 30 — Roxy Ellyson looks forward to celebrating her 105th birthday this October. Author Harriet Whipkey introduces us to this remarkable Gilmer County lady.

Page 58 — The Levi Shinn House in Shinnston was built in 1778 and is now the oldest standing structure in Harrison County. The beautiful two-story log building was home to the Michael family from 1944-53, according to author Edwin Daryl Michael.

Page 14 — The 1985 flood was the state's worst natural disaster in 100 years. It was especially devastating in Parsons. We look back, 20 years later.

Page 6 — Oreste Leombruno's family followed the coal from Italy to Randolph County nearly a century ago, searching for a better life.

Page 51 — A historic French boxcar, once filled with treasure, was saved from the brink of destruction and now has a new home in Welch.

