West Virginia Traditional Life

Goldenseal

Winter 2005 $4.95

State Archives Centennial

Weirton Steel Chorus

Boatbuilding

Rosbys Rock

From the Editor: Sweet Success

I have good news! On April 17, Governor Bob Wise put his signature on House Bill 2824 extending a state consumer sales tax exemption to GOLDENSEAL for the sale of magazines. We are grateful to the governor for signing this legislation and to all of the state senators and delegates who voted for it. Special thanks go to Delegate Mary Pearl Compton from Monroe County who introduced the bill in the House of Delegates and enthusiastically urged her colleagues to join her in supporting it.

A great deal of work went into navigating this bill through the legislative process, and we do not have room here to individually thank all of those who helped or encouraged us. I would, however, like to especially thank Ginny Painter from the Division of Culture and History for her tireless persistence in seeing this thing through. Thanks again, Ginny — I know that it would not have happened without you! I also wish to thank Senator Andy MacKenzie, Commissioner of Culture and History Nancy Herholdt, and Secretary of Education and the Arts Kay Goodwin for their help and support.

Finally, and most importantly, I wish to thank all of the GOLDENSEAL readers who expressed their concern and support during this process. I can't tell you how relieved I am to be able to finally lay this matter to rest, and devote my full energies to producing the best possible magazine for you. Whew!

Speaking of which, I think we have a good one on our hands here. For all of you who have been asking for more train stories, this summer issue should satisfy your thirst. From the stunning steam engine on the front cover to the mysterious railroad bridge in our "Photo Curiosity" [see inside back cover], there are probably more train and train-related pictures and stories in these pages than in any previous issue of GOLDENSEAL. In my opinion, the railroad photography of J.J. Young is as artistic and accomplished as any ever made, and we are very proud to feature an extended look at the photographer and his work. Our story by Bob Withers begins on page 10.

Another long-awaited feature included in this issue is our visit to the McDowell County community of Coalwood. World famous as the site of Homer Hickam, Jr.'s, book *Rocket Boys* and the film "October Sky," Coalwood is a very real place with its own rich story to tell. Stuart McGehee, one of West Virginia's foremost coal historians, has written a concise account of the rise and fall of this model mining operation. His story begins on page 52. Former GOLDENSEAL editor Ken Sullivan offers his insight into Hickam's writings on page 57, and photographer Mark Crabtree takes us to Coalwood today. Mark's piece, beginning on page 60, is highlighted by an eloquent commentary from Homer Hickam himself — exclusive to GOLDENSEAL — in which the best-selling author reflects on his hometown.

I could go on and on. Suffice it to say that I am well-pleased with this issue, and hope that you are, too. As usual, a lot of work went into it, but as we all know, nothing worthwhile ever comes easy, and there are few magazines as worthwhile as GOLDENSEAL.

One regret — while preparing this issue, dealing with tax matters, and making-do without a current assistant editor, I unfortunately did not have time to organize a fall bus trip for this year. Work on the tour has traditionally been done in time to announce the trip in the summer issue, and I am sorry that I did not have the opportunity to properly plan a trip for Fall 2001. If all goes right, we'll be back with a new bus tour in Fall 2002. We'll keep you posted.

In the meantime, have a great summer, and enjoy this issue of GOLDENSEAL!

John Lilly

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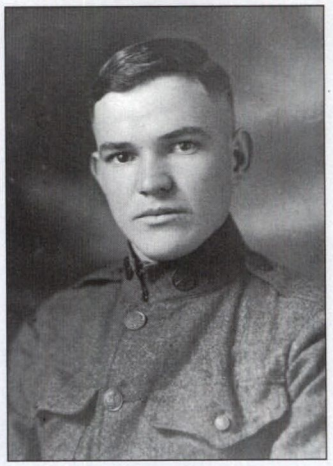

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On the cover: Railroad photographer J.J. Young captured the power and beauty of steam travel with his camera during the 1940's and '50's. Here, a B&O engine waits at Wheeling in 1952. Our story begins on page 10.

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Letters from Readers

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Coondogs

January 29, 2001
Charlottesville, Virginia
Editor:
I have enjoyed reading each issue of GOLDENSEAL, and the Winter 2000 issue has caused me to write this letter about a coon hunt in Preston County in the 1920's or early 1930's. You, along with many coon hunters, will not believe this story. But it is true.

"Chance," a Treeing Walker hound in Kanawha County. Photograph by Michael Keller.

My first cousin, the late George Shay, grew up in Independence (formerly Raccoon) in southwestern Preston County. He was a large, strong, athletic type who liked football, basketball, and especially boxing. One evening, he overheard some older men talking and laughing about a coon hunt that they had recently enjoyed. He broke into the conversation and asked if he might go with them on a future coon hunt. They all agreed that he could, and told him that they would get in touch the next good evening for coon hunting.

When that evening came, George was notified and joined the group for his first coon hunt. Four coondogs were taken along for this hunt. Two were older and well-trained, while two were younger and were being trained.

Upon entering the woods, the dogs were released and soon treed a coon. When the party arrived at the tree where the dogs were going wild, it was soon discovered that the upper trunk of the tree had a hole in it, and that this was a den tree. The party quickly set about cutting the tree down.

George was told to take a lantern and one of the older dogs, go down the hill to the edge of a nearby stream, and wait for the coon or coons to come his way. He was told that he and the older dog were to keep the coon from getting into the stream. Well, when he was in position, the tree was felled in his direction. The older dog started at the butt of the tree and ran up inside it. He came out the top of the tree straight toward the waiting George.

Soon, all hell broke loose at his location. The dog went wild, the lantern went sailing through the air, and screams, loud yells, and curses rang forth. The men at the den tree quickly moved to see what all the commotion was about. They found George with this enraged, full-grown coon in his bare hands. George had it by the back of the neck with one

hand and by the rear with the other. He was trying to break its back by bringing his two huge hands together. The coon didn't like it one bit and was biting and scratching like only an angry coon can do. Moreover, the dog George had with him wasn't one bit of help. His barking and biting further infuriated the coon.

When the other men finally recovered from what they saw, they got the coon in a gunny sack. After the laughter died down, George was given his first lecture in Coon Hunting 101: Bare-handed is not the way to catch a coon of any size or shape.

Then the men heard the two young dogs back at the den tree barking and throwing a fit. They all quickly moved back to the den tree where George brushed the other men aside and proceeded up the tree to the den hole where the younger dogs were having a tizzie. He quickly shoved the dogs aside, reached in the hole, and withdrew — bare-handed of course — a young coon that wasn't about to give up without a fight. George quickly turned to hand this coon to one of the other men while he reached in the den hole with the other hand to get a second unappreciative young coon. No one wanted either of these young coons, so George wound up with two fighting-mad coons — one in each hand. Barking and biting dogs beside George only added to the problems.

These two young coons were finally bagged, and the hunt ended. To the best of my knowledge, this was my cousin's first and last coon hunt.

Can anyone top this one? Now keep it truthful.

Sincerely,
Gordon Larew

January 25, 2001
Franklin, West Virginia
Editor:

Thank you for your informative article on the coonhounds and their handlers [see "Coondog Heaven," by John Blisard; Winter 2000].

"Puffy," an American Blue Gascon hound in Franklin, Pendleton County.

The French hound that you referred to as a foundation breed for the modern bluetick [see "What Is a Coondog, Anyway?" by John Blisard] is what is now known as the American Blue Gascon. Although listed in the UKC bluetick registry, they are of the "old-fashioned" variety and greatly exceed breed standards, routinely weighing in at 100 pounds. This most noble of hounds make wonderful house pets and have great stamina and heart in the woods.

Introduced to America by General Lafayette as a gift to George Washington in the 1700's, this ancient breed today is virtually unknown to the general public. Distinctive because of their incredibly lush coat, long ears, lack of brown markings, and thundering voice, the old-fashioned hound was considered too large and slow for competition hunts and fell into near extinction during the early 1900's. Houndsmen have long prized this dog and have preserved the foundation stock for six centuries; it endures today through the tenacity of serious fanciers.

My Big Blue, "P.R." Womack's Huckleberry Blue, a.k.a. Puffy, was bred in Kansas City, but West Virginia has several breeders of this rare, beautiful, and powerful coonhound.

For more info on the American Blue Gascon, visit www.cadvantage.com/~driftwod/ on the Internet. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,
Marla Zelene Harman
104 Walnut Street
Franklin, WV 26807
(304)558-2659

March 15, 2001
Via e-mail
Editor:

I am from Monroe County, way down in the bottom of the state. I recently saw my first issue of your magazine. I absolutely loved it. It was the Winter 2000 issue and featured a lot of stuff about coon hunting. My father was an avid coon hunter, peaking at times with close to 40 dogs, I believe. He hasn't hunted in a while due to an injury to one of his feet. His foot gives him a lot of trouble, and he can't climb these West Virginia hills like he used to. He read the articles about the coondogs, too, and he enjoyed them.

I would like to thank you for bringing such great stories that we as native West Virginians can relate to. As I read your articles, I was ready to jump up and down at points when I knew about the

subject or knew the place where something had happened.

My father is also a fourth-generation logger. His family was said to have moved from overseas to Carroll County, Virginia, and worked as farmers a long, long time ago. It is believed that they were of the Dunkard faith, or something similar. They weren't making enough money to support themselves in Virginia, and found that they could make one dollar a week logging in Glace, here in Monroe County. Ever since then, the Hubbard family from Glace have been loggers.

As you can tell, you already feel like a part of my family by the way I keep rambling on. If you could, we would really like to hear a few logging stories, and some more coon hunting would be great. I really do appreciate your magazine.
Sincerely,
Bobbi Hubbard

Red Henline

March 19, 2001
Buckhannon, West Virginia
Editor:

Fiddler Red Henline, 1947.

I want to tell you how much I enjoyed the article and pictures about Red Henline of Upshur County [see "'He Just Loved the Music': Traditional Fiddler Red Henline," by Robert Spence; Spring 2001]. I knew him well and enjoyed his music plus his friendship. I enjoy your magazine, too.
Sincerely,
Frances Lynch

Home Remedies

October 10, 2000
Statesville, North Carolina
Editor:
Being born and raised in West Virginia in the 1940's and '50's, there were a lot of home remedies from the CCC, WPA, and family.

Juice of three weeds on a bee sting will not swell. Black walnut — nuts, hulls, and all — in a room will get rid of fleas. When cutting off the head of a chicken, take the feathers from under the right wing and put them on the ground. Lay the chicken back on them. The chicken will flop, but not off the feathers. These are tried and true from those West Virginia hills. I'm sure there are a lot more that your readers know.

How about an article about these things from your readers? We have already lost a lot of the Indian's folklore. Let's not lose this part of our heritage! I enjoy my GOLDENSEAL very much. Can't put it down till I finish it when it arrives. I'm from Belington.
Sincerely,
Loy Ervin Smith

Take Me Home

December 22, 2000
Columbia, Tennessee
Editor:
We have started having an annual get-together for the Middle Tennessee people who are from West Virginia. For the last two summers, we have had a picnic and talked about our ties to the great state of West Virginia. We have had more than 60 people each time. We are 45 miles south of Nashville. If anyone knows someone in our area, please have them give me a call at (931)381-0393, or drop me a note at 103 Walden Road, Columbia, TN 38401.

We enjoy reading your magazine.
Sincerely,
Linda Taylor Walter

March 27, 2001
Cincinnati, Ohio
GOLDENSEAL,
I am so proud to be from West Virginia. Wait a minute! I was born and raised in Kentucky and now live in Ohio. After reading GOLDENSEAL for three years, I feel like a native son.

Thanks for a great magazine and keep up the good work.
Norman V. Smith

March 14, 2001
Via e-mail
Editor:
Anyone who visits your Web site [see www.wvculture.org/goldenseal] is apt to be stricken with an incurable case of wanderlust that can only be remedied by a visit to the hills of beautiful West Virginia!

You've done a great job for the tourism industry by your presentation. Thank you for all the hard work and time you've invested in my home state. Your dedication and commitment to quality work is evident.
Phylenia French

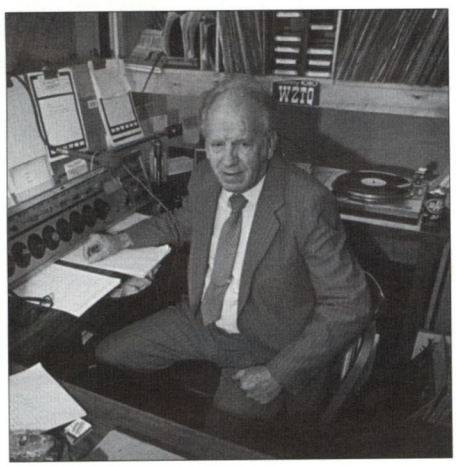
Thanks for those kind words, Phylenia. The summer travel season is indeed upon us, and we encourage all of our readers, both in-state and out, to explore West Virginia during this time of year. For state travel information, call 1-800-CALL-WVA.—ed.

GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes

Frank Thomas, aviator, philosopher, author, and poet, died at his home in Fayetteville on March 23, 2001. He was 79. Frank was well-known and well-loved both locally and nationally for his ceaseless devotion to flying, his independent approach to life, and his rock-bottom five-dollar fee for an airborne tour of the New River Gorge. He built, owned, and operated the Fayette Airport where he taught more than 1,000 people how to fly. Our article by Louis E. Keefer, "Flying Frank Thomas: 'Just Like a Preacher With a Calling,'" appeared in Summer 1992.

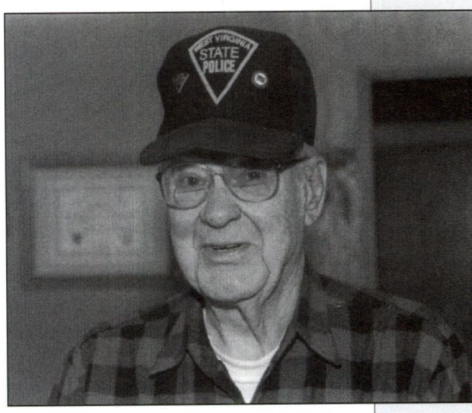
Aviator Frank Thomas. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Clarence Clifford "Slim" Clere, popular radio entertainer, musician, and Charleston-area businessman, passed away on April 14 at age 86. Slim was born in Ashland, Kentucky, in 1914, and made a name for himself during the 1930's and '40's as a country music entertainer over radio stations in Huntington, Charleston, and elsewhere. He was best known as half of the duo, "Slim and Tex" along with popular country singer T. Texas Tyler. In his later days, Slim managed several businesses including Putnam County radio station WZTQ. Slim was featured in our Spring 1982 issue [see "Slim and Tex: Mountain Boys on West Virginia Radio," by Ivan M. Tribe].



Slim Clere at WZTQ radio. Photograph by Rick Lee.

Juliette Auger Fortner passed away on October 20, 2000, at age 65. She grew up near Elkview, Kanawha County. Juliette's colorful childhood memories of her foster grandparents Helen and Harry Fain were the subject of her article, "Granny and Paw," in our Winter 1992 edition. Juliette had a long career as a state worker with more than 30 years of public service. At the time of her death, she was secretary to Public Service Commissioner Otis Casto.



Bill Seal, former state trooper. Photograph by Michael Keller.

William Raymond "Bill" Seal served in law enforcement for more than 41 years, nearly 30 of those with the West Virginia State Police. At 91 years of age, Bill was the oldest living former state trooper. He died on March 19, 2001. In our Spring 1999 article, "'All In a Day's Work': Former State Trooper William R. Seal," by Ben Crookshanks, Bill related his experiences as a motorcycle patrolman during the 1930's and '40's, working strike duty, busting up moonshine stills, and subduing desperate criminals. Bill made his home in Fayetteville.

Fiddler **Glen Smith** of Elizabeth, Wirt County, passed away on April 5, 2001, at age 77. Glen was one of the state's top traditional musicians having won numerous contests and awards in his nearly 70 years of playing music; he received the Vandalia Award in 1998. Known for his driving musical style and dry sense of humor, Glen and his wife Helen were active participants at many festivals and folklife events across the state. Helen was among the women profiled in our last issue [see "Vandalia Wives," by Kim Johnson; Spring 2001], and Glen was the subject of a feature story in our Summer 1990 issue [see "'I've Always Loved Music': Champion Fiddler Glen Smith," by Jacqueline G. Goodwin].

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.

Summer Workshops

Thousands of people will take to the hills this summer in search of new skills at folk arts workshops across the state. Here are a few recommendations:

Fort New Salem, a recreated West Virginia frontier settlement in Harrison County, has a busy summer planned with public activities from Memorial Day through late October. Highlights include the Heritage Sampler Camps to be held June 20-22, July 11-13, and July 25-27. Aimed at youngsters aged eight to 14, activities at these day-camp workshops range from Appalachian music and farm life to leatherwork, print shop, and woodworking. The cost is $18 a day.

Other events at Fort New Salem this summer include free summertime socials July 21 and July 28, Front Porch concerts July 14, 21, and 28, and a mountain dulcimer weekend August 11-12. For complete information, call director Carol Schweiker at (304)782-5245 or visit the Salem-Teikyo College Web site at www.salem-teikyo.wvnet.edu.

Allegheny Echoes offers summer workshops in Appalachian music and verse at Snowshoe, Pocahontas County, June 24-30. Music classes range from "Raw Beginner Fiddle" with Pam Lund to "Intermediate/Advanced Flatpick Guitar" with champion picker Robert Shafer. In addition to instrumental and vocal music offerings, classes are available in creative writing, basketry, and Appalachian woodenware.

Allegheny Echoes' student performance at Snowshoe last year.

Evening plans include square dances, jam sessions, public concerts, and a Wild Meat Cookout. The workshops and evening concerts serve to kick off the three-day Snowshoe Music Festival scheduled on the mountain June 29-July 1, featuring many top-name bluegrass and country music acts. For information, visit their Web site at www.alleghenyechoes.com., or call (304)799-7121.

The Augusta Heritage Arts Workshops at Davis & Elkins College in Elkins is the oldest and largest program of its kind in the state. Their five-week summer schedule begins July 8 and culminates with the public Augusta Festival on the weekend of August 10-12. Each of these five weeks has one or more central themes ranging from Blues and Swing Week (July 8-13) to Irish Week (July 22-27) and Old-Time Week (August 5-12), with a wide variety of other music, dance, craft, and folklore classes filling out the schedule each week. Special "Folk Arts for Kids" and Elderhostel programs are also available during the day, while evening activities include dances, jam sessions, craft displays, and performances. The Tuesday and Thursday evening concerts are open to the public and highlight the talents of each week's instructional staff. For a comprehensive catalog, call Augusta at (304)637-1209, or visit their Web site at www.augustaheritage.com.

Cedar Lakes Craft Center near Ripley offers classes from February through November. This summer's workshops, which run from July 15-August 3, include papermaking, stained glass, basketry, beadwork, quilting, tinsmithing, Windsor chairmaking, and watercolor. Several related Elderhostel classes are scheduled at Cedar Lakes from August 19-24. Most workshops are one-week long. The craft classes take place following the annual Mountain State Art and Craft Fair, one of the premier craft events in West Virginia, scheduled this year July 4-7 at Cedar Lakes. For information about the craft workshops or

to request a free catalog, call (304)372-7873, or visit their Web site at www.cedarlakes.com.

Horses and Horseshoes

A calendar of upcoming equestrian activities is available from the West Virginia Department of Agriculture. The free publication is called "Horse Events 2001 in West Virginia." Listings range from rodeos, barrel races, and tack sales to pulling contests, riding lessons, and horse, mule, and donkey shows throughout the state. Copies are available by calling (304)558-2210.

For those who prefer pitching the shoe of the horse, a busy summer is planned by the West Virginia Horseshoe Pitchers Association with contests and other activities scheduled nearly every week. Among the biggest horseshoe-pitching events of the year is the annual state tournament to be held in Parkersburg on September 1. Organizers expect to host more than 100 contestants. For more information, call Charles Brunner at (304)366-7986, or visit www.horseshoepitching.com.

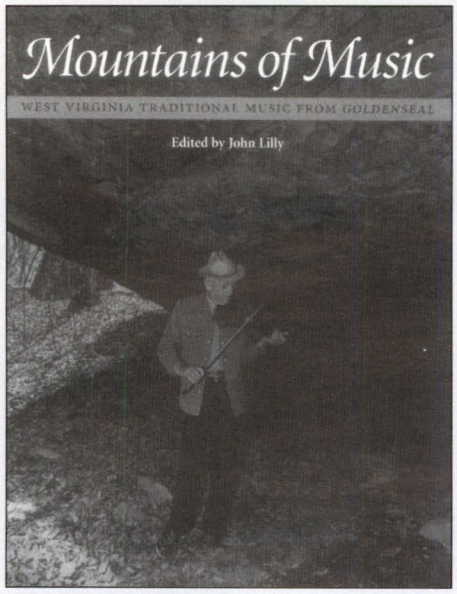
More Summer Fun

Shepherdstown, West Virginia's oldest town, will host a walking tour of 20 private gardens, churchyards, and old cemeteries on Saturday, June 16, from 10:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. The event, called the third annual Back Alleys Tour and Garden Party, is a benefit for the Shepherdstown Library and includes self-guided tours of local gardens, children's activities, garden-related art and vendor booths, and an afternoon tea at 3:00 p.m. at the Episcopal Church. Tickets for the garden tour are $10; the tea is $5. For more information, call (304)876-2786.

The West Virginia State Folk Festival will take place in Glenville, June 21-24. Now in its 52nd year, this festival is a popular event among many of the state's traditional musicians [see "'Let's Keep It Traditional': West Virginia State Folk Festival Turns 50," by Bob Heyer; Summer 2000]. A highlight of the festival is the over-50 fiddle and banjo contest, scheduled at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, June 22, on the campus of Glenville State College. For more information, call (304)462-8427, or visit www.etc4u.com/folkfest.

The 51st annual West Virginia State Gospel Singing Convention will be held July 22-29 at Mt. Nebo, Nicholas County. The weeklong event includes choir singing, quartet singing, and Sunday worship services. All singers are welcome. Longtime GOLDENSEAL readers may recall our photo essay and story about the Singing Convention from Summer 1982 [see "Singing On the Mountain: The West Virginia State Gospel Singing Convention," by James Samsell]. For more information, call (304)472-3466 or (304)624-9322.

Lebanese heritage in the Wheeling area will be celebrated on August 12 at Oglebay Park. The event, called Mahrajan, is sponsored by Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Catholic Church [see "Our Lady of Lebanon: The Maronite Church in Wheeling," by Cheryl Ryan Harshman;



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!

I enclose $____ for____ copies of *Mountains of Music.*

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Summer 1990]. The Lebanese heritage festival begins with a worship service at 11:00 a.m. Afterwards, there will be Lebanese food for sale, live Lebanese music, and children's activities until about 6:00 p.m. This is the largest public Lebanese cultural event of the year in the Wheeling area, and organizers expect as many as 3,000 people to attend. For more information, call (304)277-3230.

River Boating

While rowboats and canoes are seldom seen these days plying the mighty Ohio and Kanawha rivers [see "The World's Fair In a Rowboat," by W. Merle Watkins and Bill Watkins; page 66], magnificent sternwheelers are still a common sight. Three of the grandest — the "American Queen," "Mississippi Queen,"

From the top, the "American Queen," "Mississippi Queen," and "Delta Queen" steamboats.

and "Delta Queen" — will make stops in West Virginia ports this summer. On Saturday, July 21, the "American Queen" will arrive in Huntington at about 8:00 a.m., departing at 1:00 p.m., as part of a five-day, round-trip cruise beginning and ending in Cincinnati.

The "Mississippi Queen" will make its first-ever stop in Charleston on Friday, August 10. This extensive, nine-day cruise begins and ends in Pittsburgh, and also includes stops at Wellsburg, Huntington, and Blennerhasset Island.

The "Delta Queen" will visit Huntington on Thursday, August 30, then cruise up the Kanawha River for a stop at the Sternwheel Regatta in Charleston on Sunday, September 2. This trip begins and ends in Cincinnati.

Boat passengers will come ashore to visit these West Virginia cities during their stops here, though there will be no public tours offered of the historic river boats while they are docked. All three boats are operated by the Delta Queen Steamboat Company of New Orleans. To book passage on one of these cruises, or for more information, call 1-800-543-1949, or visit their Web site at www.deltaqueen.com.

Tending the Commons

An ambitious and creative new Internet Web site from the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress offers a detailed look and the land and traditional ways of life in the Coal River area. The site, called "Tending the Commons: Folklife and Landscape in Southern West Virginia," can be found at http://memory.loc.gov/ammen/cmnshtml/. It is drawn from research conducted between 1992 and 1999 as part of the American Folklife Center's Coal River Folklife Project which documents traditional use of the mountains and their natural resources by the people of the region. The Web site currently includes more than 1,250 photographs of the area, 679 sound recordings, and extensive local

Joe Williams with ginseng. Photograph by Cyntha Scott Eiler, Library of Congress America Folklife Center.

information examining such topics as traditional harvesting, religious and cultural events, and industrial activities such as mining and timbering.

The site, as well as the original fieldwork, are largely the work of folklorist Mary Hufford. Mary tells us that the site is still expanding; an interactive timeline and other features are yet to come. For more information, contact Mary Hufford via e-mail at mhuf@loc.gov.

Heritage Travel

Heritage tourism plays an increasingly larger role in the state's growing travel and tourism industry as people from within and outside the state discover and visit many of West Virginia's historical and cultural treasures.

Two colorful brochures are now available highlighting this travel trend in different parts of the state. "Mountaineer Heritage" covers heritage travel opportunities in Lewis, Harrison, Marion, Monongalia, and Preston counties including Prickett's Fort, Fort New Salem, Jackson's Mill, Arthurdale, and a variety of other stops in the north-central region of West Virginia. Copies are available by calling 1-800-CALL-WVA.

"Hatfield & McCoy Interpretive Tour" includes a detailed map of locations in the southwestern part of the state connected to the infamous family feud. Also included are many historical photographs, a detailed account of the events surrounding the conflict, and a feud timeline. This free publication will be of interest to anyone wishing to learn more about this fascinating topic, as well as to those who wish to plan a visit to these historic sites. To request a copy, call the Tug Valley Chamber of Commerce at (304)235-5240.

Historic Places Book

Response has been tremendous for the new book, *Historic West Virginia*, published by the West Virginia State Historic Preservation Office and the Division of Culture and History [see "Current Programs, Events, Publications"; Spring 2001]. The first printing has been distributed, and plans are underway for a second printing later this year. For those interested in reserving a free copy of this impressive publication, write to Katherine Jourdan, The Cultural Center, 1900 Kanawha Boulevard East, Charleston, WV 25305-0300; or send e-mail to katherine.jourdan@wvculture.org.

History Heroes

The state honored 50 individuals for their efforts to preserve West Virginia's past with the March 22, 2001, presentation of the History Hero awards. The awards were presented in the Cultural Center's West Virginia State Theater in Charleston by Nancy Herholdt, the commissioner of the Division of Culture and History.

Among those honored were several individuals familiar to GOLDENSEAL readers. These include Rita Emerson of Coxs Mill [see "'Busy About the Lord's Business': Rita Emerson, Woman Preacher," by Susan Leffler; Winter 1992], sign painter Harley Warrick of Wheeling [see "Interviewing the Best: Tom Screven Talks to the Mail Pouch Man"; Winter 1994], and Ed Weaver of Burlington [see "'Not a Going Business': Ed Weaver's Service Station Museum," by Bill Moulden; Fall 1993]. Also receiving History Hero awards this year were GOLDENSEAL photographers Ferrell Friend of Ivydale and Gerald Ratliff of Charleston. Congratulation to all of the recipients!

History Heroes are nominated by local historical societies and organizations across the state; the awards are presented at the Capitol Complex each year on History Day, usually held in February or March. For nomination guidelines or other information, contact the State Archives and History section at (304)558-0220 ext. 166.

Rita Emerson. Photograph by Susan Leffler.

Capturing

Railroad Photographer J.J. Young

By Bob Withers

Photographs by J.J. Young

Photographer J.J. Young today. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Down 14th Street, up Eoff Street, through the Yellow Cab lot to Chapline Street, past the post office, over 10th Street, and across Main Street. Pedestrians, stand aside! A young man is tearing through downtown Wheeling, camera dangling from his neck, swinging wildly from side to side. What could provoke this mad dash through midday traffic? This risk to life and limb?

Why, a train whistle, of course. And not just any train whistle. A "hooter" — a low, mournful tone unique to the grandest Baltimore & Ohio steam locomotive of them all, the mighty EM-1. These articulateds — massive, roller-bearing war babies — were among the largest railroad engines ever made.

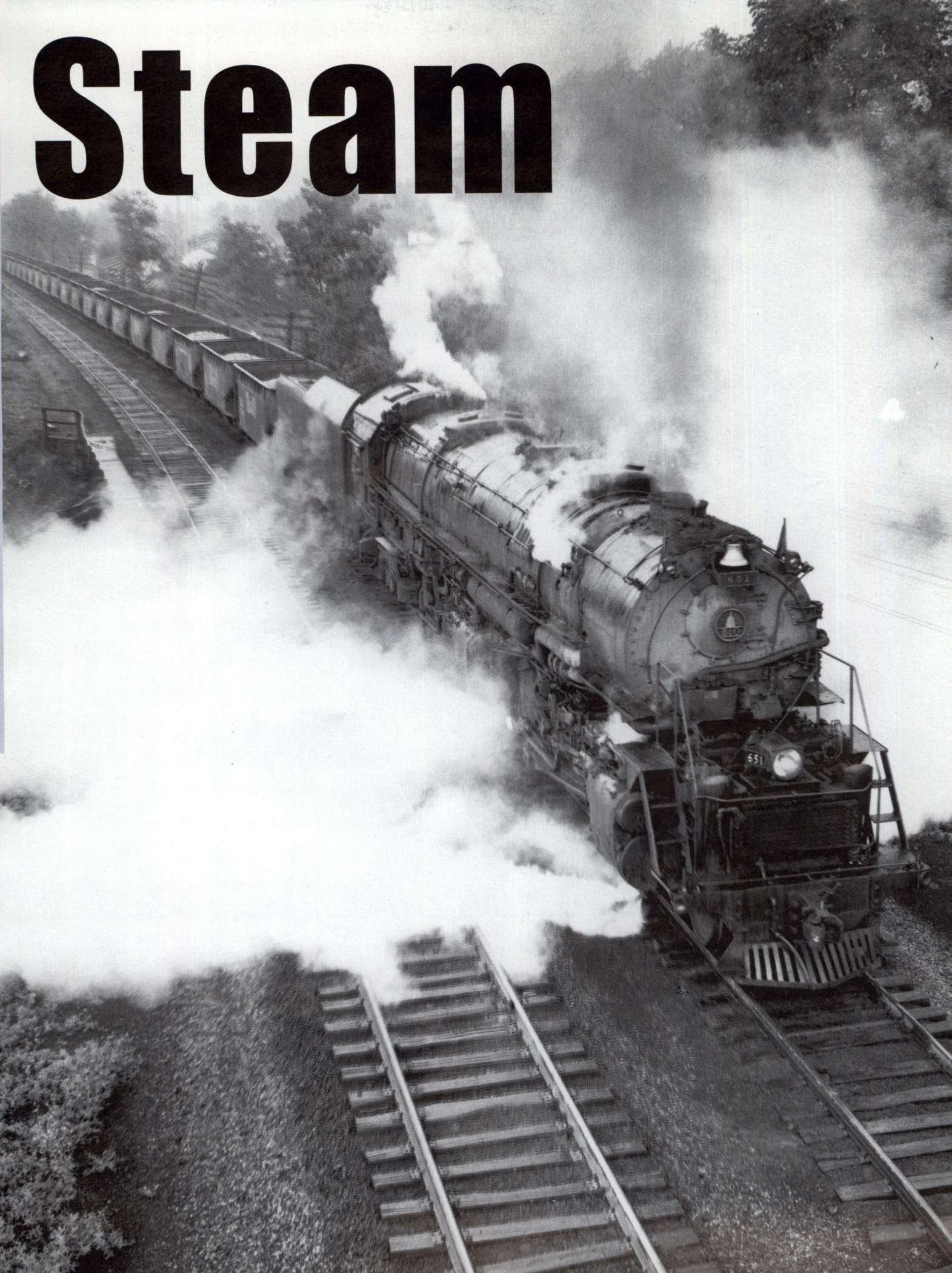
A long, heavy coal train — in local parlance, a "humper" — has just departed B&O's nearby Benwood yard for a Lake Erie dock, and the "one long and three shorts" has notified the man with the camera that the engineer has "whistled out the flag" so that he can take water at Bridgeport, just across the river in Ohio. That provides the man with a chance to do a little humping of his own, catch up with the train, and take a picture of it.

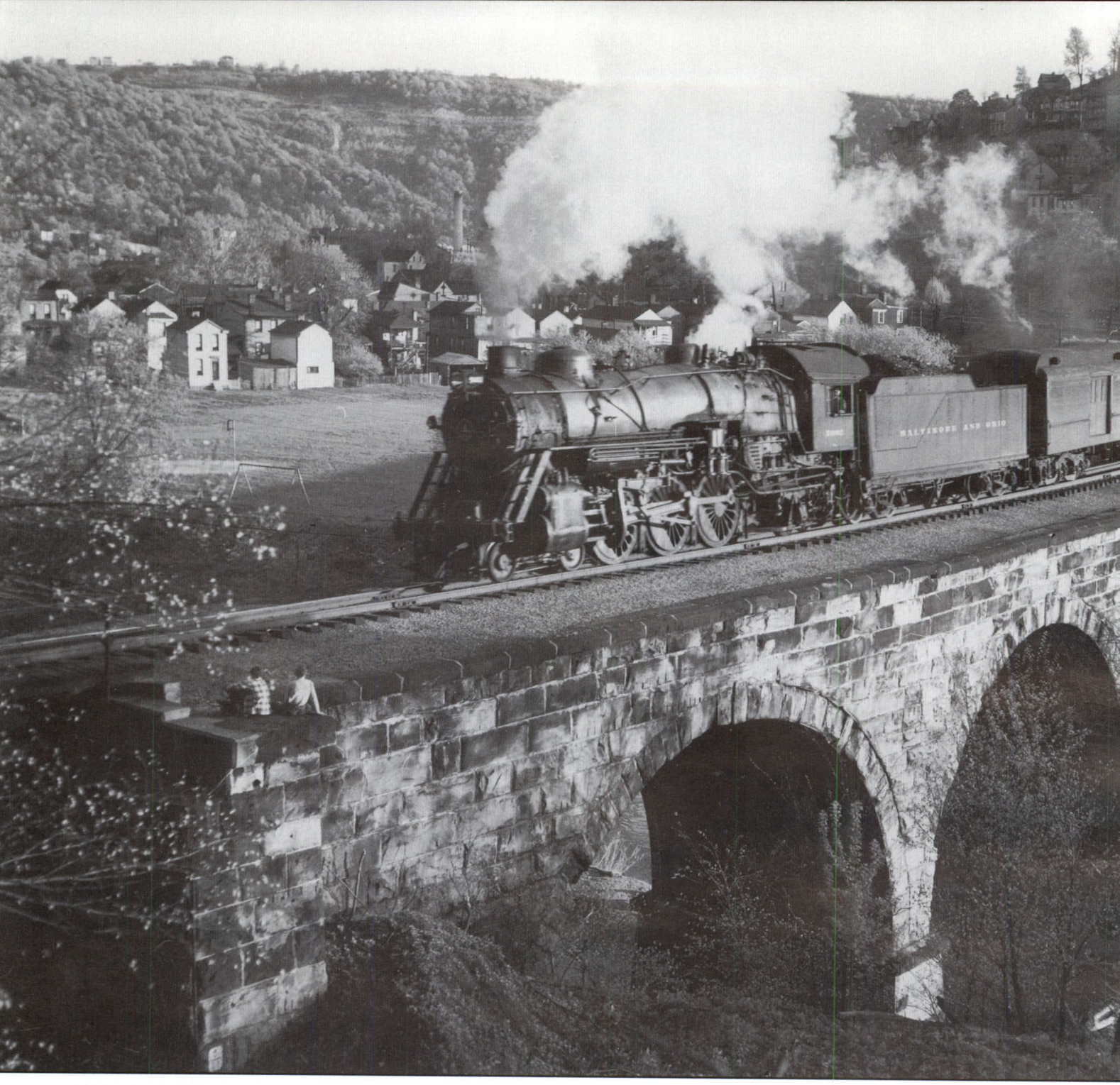
Listen. Another blast. Two longs, a short, and a long. He's whistling for Lincoln Avenue. The engine crew has slaked the iron horse's ravenous thirst and is ready to get back on their train.

"Got to keep moving," the man puffs to himself as he reaches the Suspension Bridge to Wheeling Island. The marathon already has extended for more than two miles; now it's only a couple more blocks. Finally, he reaches a friend's house. A friend with a car — an "ancient, old wreck" of a red Chevy convertible, cranked up and ready to go. These pals don't waste time with telephones; when a hooter calls, they head out. The result is always the same — a fun day of chasing trains and capturing dozens of priceless, nostalgic images.

Meet J.J. Young, Jr., a 72-year-old Wheeling native whose best friends from the start have always been steam locomotives and the trains they pulled. The race that he and

On the opposite page, a Baltimore & Ohio locomotive steams through McMechan, Marshall County, in the summer of 1957.


Steam



A B&O passenger train crosses Wheeling Creek in Wheeling on its way to Pittsburgh in May 1950. J.J. Young grew up a short distance from this location and enjoyed a ringside seat perched on the bridge abutment, just like the two young men shown here.

fellow railfan Jack Norton ran across Wheeling back in the mid-'50's has long passed. But, since Young taught himself how to handle cameras at an early age, his thousands of stunning images resurrect for 21st century eyes the symmetrical dances of these fire-breathing, smoke-belching beasts, far beyond their fatal appointments with the scrap yard.

Destiny must have decreed that Young love trains. In front of his boyhood home at 977 McColloch Street, the B&O's "Pike" curved across a stone-arch viaduct and disappeared into Tunnel No. 1, providing him with a constant panorama of passenger and freight trains running to and from Pittsburgh. Yard engines frequented the area, switching between the Pure Oil plant and the Union Stockyards. On the far bank of Wheeling Creek, a Wheeling & Lake Erie line conveyed that company's trains to and from downtown Wheeling. And, just across McColloch, Wheeling Public Service streetcars trundled back and forth from the car barn. Young took it all in.

"From the time I was a year-and-a-half old, I could pull myself up on the window sill and watch it all," Young says from his present-day home in Charleston. "Those old

Mallets fascinated me," he says, referring to the large, articulated engines of the day.

Later, he would sit mesmerized on his front porch. Or, when W&LE train No. 35 was due out about 2 p.m., he would go over the backyard fence and up on the hillside behind his house for a better look from an outcropping of rock near Lind Street.

"I had the grandest show in the country," he says. "It was my own 12-inches-to-the-foot scale model railroad. When you lived in such close proximity to railroads, you either loved them or hated them. I loved them."

Eventually, Young found that he could make friends with the crews and snag rides in the locomotives. His first ride occurred just shy of his seventh birthday when he spied a work train on the W&LE line, which by then had been taken over by the Pennsylvania Railroad, lovingly known as the "P. Co."

The flood of March 1936 had taken massive chunks of cinder ballast out from under the right-of-way that clung to the creek bank, leaving whole sections of track hanging in midair. Once the line was operable again, the work train had secured several gondola-loads of slag-fill from the nearby Wheeling Mold and Foundry, and was dumping it in the worst remaining spots by means of a flatcar-mounted traveling crane positioned between two of the gondolas.

Young J.J. lit out to see what was going on — without stopping to get his parents' permission.

"You didn't tell my Old Man anything like that," he says. "You'd get whipped."

He gawked from the field across the street from his home.

"But that wasn't close enough," he says.

The tiny youngster climbed up the jagged steps of the nearby abutment on the B&O's viaduct.

"I'd put my hands up, hoist one leg up, then drag up the other one," he laughs. "It was a job getting up there."

J.J. Young, it seems, was destined to love trains. He is shown here, arms folded, at age nine with brother Edward and sister Mary Virginia alongside a Wheeling & Lake Erie locomotive in 1938.

He walked across the ballasted B&O bridge, which had no guardrails, climbed down the other side, and walked about 200 feet up the Pennsy track to see the action. He was all goggle-eyed, and engineer George Painter got curious.

"Young fellow, what you doing?" he asked the lad.

"I came over to see what you fellows are doing," the boy responded.

"Come on up," the smiling engineer said.

According to J.J. Young, "When you lived in such close proximity to railroads, you either loved them or hated them. I loved them." Here, a B&O passenger train from Pittsburgh comes down the middle of 17th Street on its way to Wheeling Station early one December morning in 1955.

"That's the wrong thing to say to a railfan," Young declares today.

The boy reached for the bottom rung of the ladder, which appeared to be twice his height off the ground.

"Don't think that stopped me," he says with a smile.

Somehow, he lifted himself up — eyes wide and mouth gaping.

"The engineer's seatbox was like a throne," he says. "That was heaven."

The boy stayed put all day as the crew alternately dumped slag and returned several times to the little yard at Peninsula Junction to reposition loads on either side of the crane. Finally, they returned to Benwood to lay up.

Young doesn't remember how he got home, but that part wasn't important. "My mother, very early on, adjusted to the fact that I was a vagabond," he recalls. Turns out that cab ride in a train was the first of many.

A few years later, his mother said to him one afternoon, "Johnnie, why don't you go over and watch some trains?"

Immediately, J.J. was suspicious; he, his brother, and two sisters always had chores to do around the house. But he went, taking up a perch atop the tunnel portal where he could watch trains but still keep an eye on the house. Shortly, he noticed several of his schoolmates stepping onto his front porch and it dawned on him — this was his 11th birthday, and his parents were planning a surprise party for him.

Photographer O. Winston Link

While J.J. Young was exploring the byways and rail yards of northern West Virginia capturing the last days of steam travel on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad with his camera, photographer O. Winston Link was on a similar quest in the southern part of the state preserving images of the Norfolk & Western's final generation of steam engines.

Ogle Winston Link was a New York-born public relations photographer who fell in love with the beauty and majesty of steam trains. During a 1952 visit to the Virginia mountains, Link determined to document these magnificent creatures before they reached extinction.

Like J.J. Young, Link sought and received the approval and cooperation of railroad management in order to gain special access to these trains. Unlike Young, however, Link adapted sophisticated commercial studio photography techniques to create his images, resulting in spectacular — and occasionally surreal — composition and lighting effects.

O. Winston Link took hundreds of dramatic photographs of Norfolk & Western steam engines between 1955 and 1960. This nighttime shot of a N&W class Y-6b Mallet in Northfork, McDowell County, was taken in August 1958. Photograph courtesy of Link Photographic Trust.

From 1955 till 1960, O. Winston Link photographed the N&W's southern Virginia and West Virginia lines, creating hundreds of dramatic photographs. He would sometimes plan a specific shot for several days, hiring actors, choreographing train movements, positioning lighting equipment, and timing the anticipated plumes of smoke and steam. He preferred night shots since they allowed for greater control of the lighting and generally produced the most stunning results.

According to writer Bob Withers [see accompanying articles], J.J. Young and O. Winston Link met once, at a railroad history convention in Roanoke, Virginia, in 1957. Link took the convention by surprise with his unusual nighttime photographs. J.J. Young showed Link one of the few night shots he had taken, and drew a favorable reaction from the New York photographer, who told Young that the shot looked like something that he would have done. "Coming from him," Young says, "that was high praise."

O. Winston Link passed away on January 30, 2001, at age 86. His railroad photography has taken on a life of its own, however, fostering museum exhibitions, books, and widespread attention among railfans and photography buffs. An extensive display of Link's railroad pictures was featured at the Huntington Museum of Art in 1998. A similar exhibition is planned this coming October 26 through December 15 at Tusculum College in Greeneville, Tennessee. Link's former assistant, Thomas Garver, will present a talk on Link's photography at the exhibit's opening on October 26. For more information, call Tusculum College at (423)636-7348.

Thomas Garver is also the author of a book, *The Last Steam Railroad in America*, featuring the photographs of O. Winston Link. The 144-page hardbound, large-format book was published in 1995 by Harry N. Abrams Publishing; it features 127 illustrations and descriptive text by Garver. An earlier book, *Steam, Steel & Stars: America's Last Steam Railroad*, by Tim Hensley, was published by Abrams in 1984. It also includes Link's railroad photography and an afterword by Thomas Garver. Both books are available in West Virginia libraries or for purchase through Pictorial Histories; phone 1-888-982-7472 or (304)342-1848.

A B&O "humper" crosses the Ohio River Bridge between Benwood Junction and Bellaire, Ohio, in March 1954. These trains transported West Virginia coal to Holloway, Ohio, and on to Lake Erie.

"My mother always said I was the black sheep of the family," he says. "She and my grandmother were always trying to turn me into a civilized human being. But I have never been a social animal."

He walked downtown to the B&O station and talked his way into a cab ride on train No. 72 to Pittsburgh.

"When I arrived at the Smithfield Street station, I deliberately called my mother to infuriate her," he says. "She said, 'Where are you?'"

"Pittsburgh," he said triumphantly. There was a long silence, and the line went dead.

After a 30-minute layover, Young rode back to Wheeling in the cab of train No. 77 — the overnight run to Parkersburg, Huntington, and Kenova. His dad was waiting at the station.

"He whipped my [tail] all the way home," Young recalls.

Then there was the Thanksgiving morning when Young was 14 years old and his mother sent him out for a loaf of bread, some salt, and a couple of other items for Thanksgiving dinner.

"She said, 'Go up the street and find a store that's open, and get me these things,'" he recalls. "I got all the way downtown — to 12th and Chapline — before I found a store that would be open, but not 'til noon. And I wasn't going to walk all the way home and back."

That was deadly for a kid who knew passenger train schedules. "I knew the crew on the morning P. Co. train from Pittsburgh, so I walked down to their station at the foot of 10th Street. There was a raised walkway parallel to the track that put you at about deck level with the cab."

"Ever after that," Young says, "whenever I left the house, my mother always told me, 'Send me a postcard when you get there.'"

Sure enough, Young secured a ride with the engine crew as the emptied train deadheaded to Benwood to have the engine turned and serviced. Then it returned to Wheeling to load passengers, express, and mail and go back to Pittsburgh.

"Ever been to Pittsburgh?" a crew member asked.

Young hesitated. He knew what was coming, and he didn't want to lie.

"With us?" the crew member added.

"No," Young answered truthfully.

"Would you like to take a ride?"

"Let's go!"

Young figured he had time to arrive at the P. Co. station in Pittsburgh, catch a streetcar to Smithfield and Water streets, catch B&O train No. 75, and still get home in time for dinner, albeit without the groceries.

"But at Smithfield Street, I ran into this engineer who used to run between Wheeling and Pittsburgh and now he was on the Buffalo [New York] train.

"'Hey, you want to take a ride?'

"Now that was the worst thing he could have said," Young recalls. "That's like asking a poor man if he wants a nine-course dinner." So Young headed farther north. And when his friend reached the crew change point of East Salamanca, New York, he put the boy on with the guys going to Buffalo.

"If they got me there, I'd find my way back somehow — maybe ride a freight train, or thumb," Young says. "Getting there was the only thing that mattered."

When he arrived in Buffalo late

that night, he considerately called his mother.

"Where are you?"

"Buffalo."

"Buffalo, New York? How did you get to Buffalo?"

"On the train. They do run there, you know."

"Ever after that," Young says, "whenever I left the house, my mother always told me, 'Send me a postcard when you get there.'"

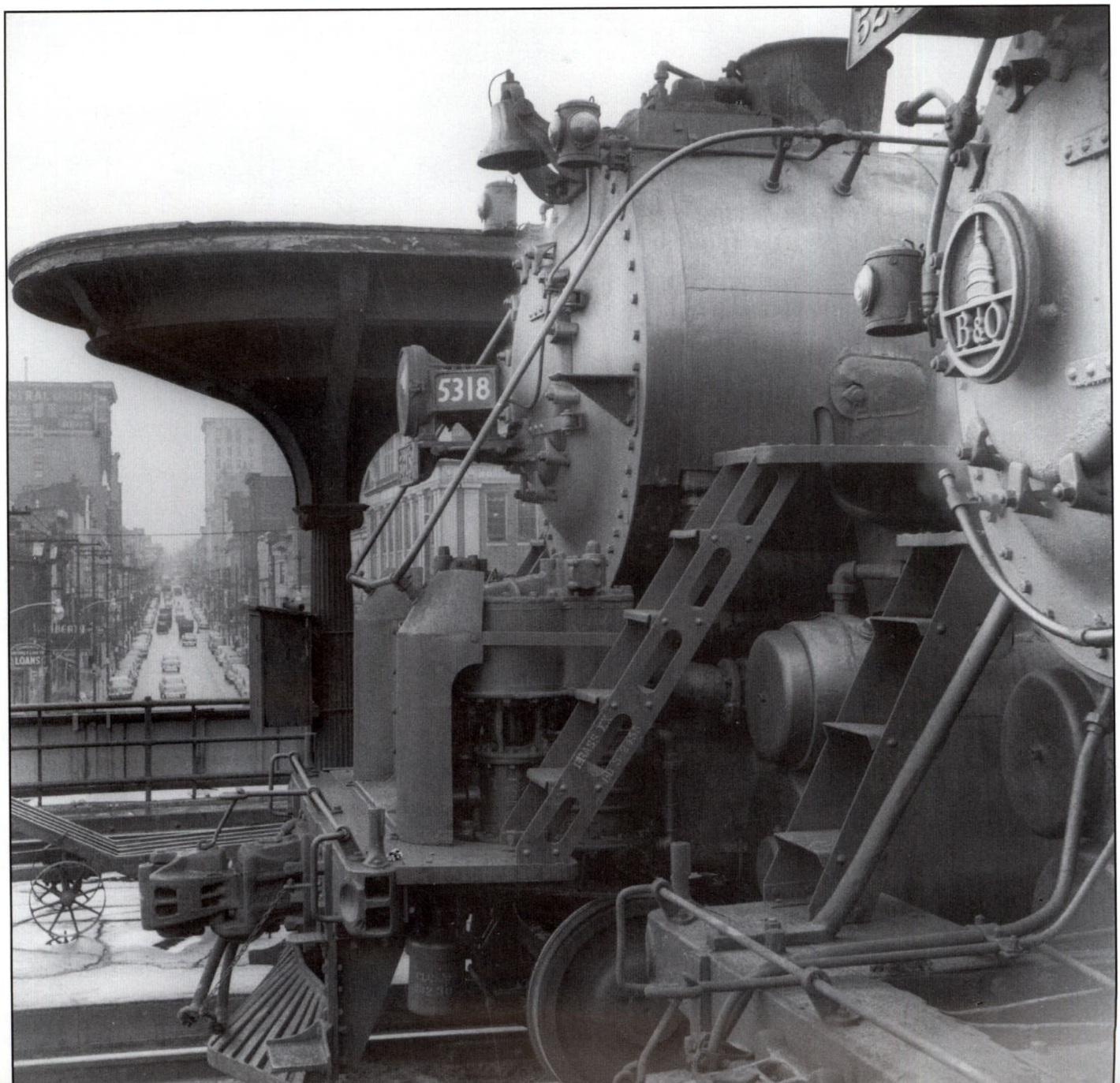
Things were different with train and engine crews in those days. "Today, in most places, a railroad yard is like an armed camp," he says. "They had a whole different philosophy in the '30's, '40's, and '50's. They were railfan-friendly. It was a whole different mentality."

For Young, B&O's welcome mat became official after wartime security concerns had abated. At last, he felt comfortable hanging around the B&O's magnificent station with his camera. Finally, he worked up enough courage to go see Wheeling Division Superintendent J.J. Sell — a batch of photos firmly in hand — to ask for official permission to roam the local yards.

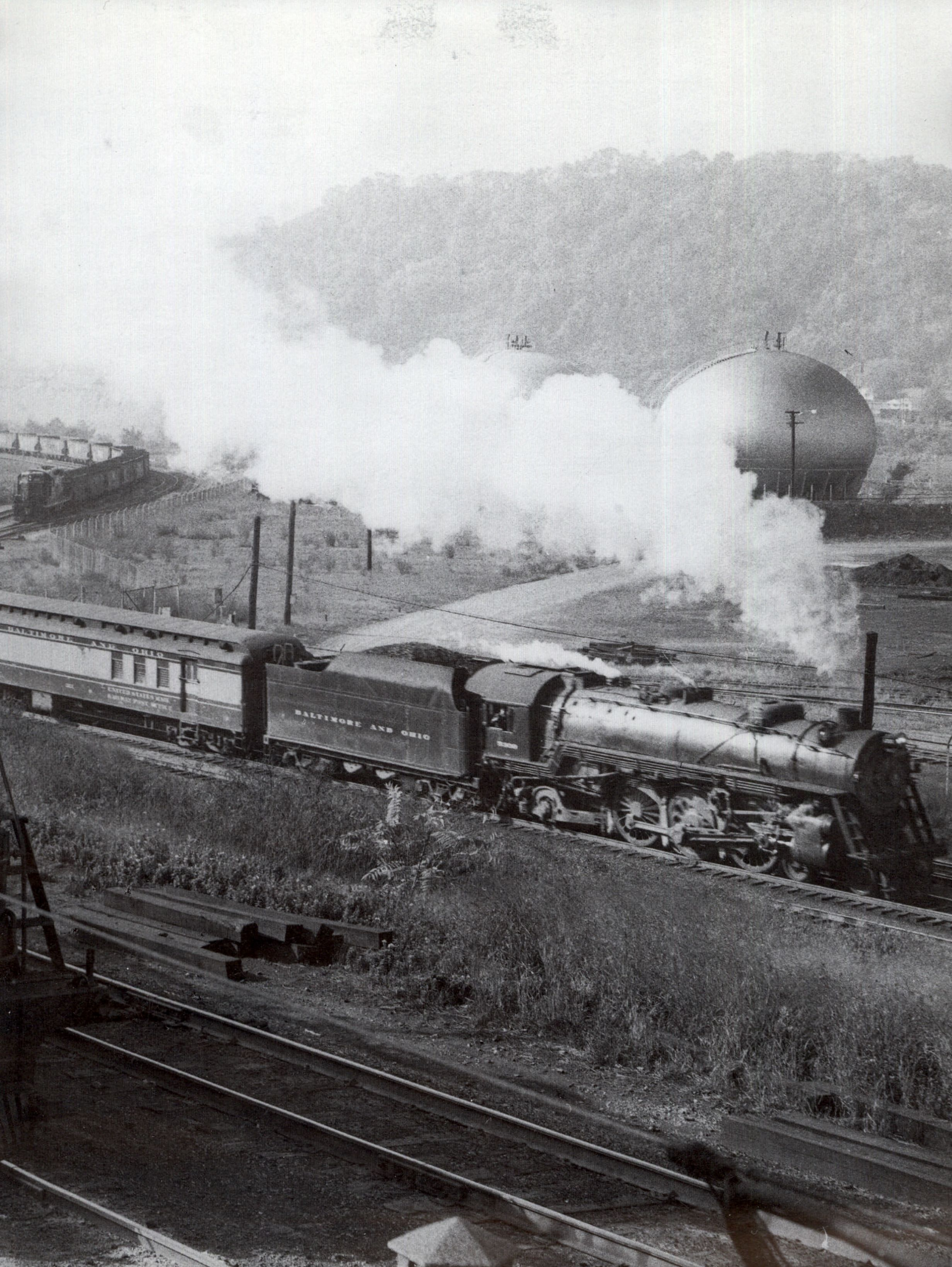
"I ascended the marble stairs to his office, made a quiet entrance, and asked his chief clerk if it would be possible to see Mr. Sell," Young recalls. "The chief clerk disappeared behind the crinkled-glass door with 'Superintendent' painted on it in gold letters, and after what seemed like an eternity, he reappeared and said Mr. Sell would see me. Wow!"

Young entered the office hesitantly as Sell motioned him in, introduced himself, and asked his

Market Street looks almost like a movie set in this stunning photograph from December 1955. Two B&O passenger locomotives wait on Wheeling's elevated station tracks, impatient to start their day.



J.J. Young managed to capture three huge trains in this single shot at Benwood one summer morning in 1956. At left, a B&O class EM-1 with a long, heavy string of lake coal waits on a siding while a passenger train, enroute from Grafton to Wheeling, steams through. At the far end of the yard, a diesel patiently — and prophetically — waits its turn.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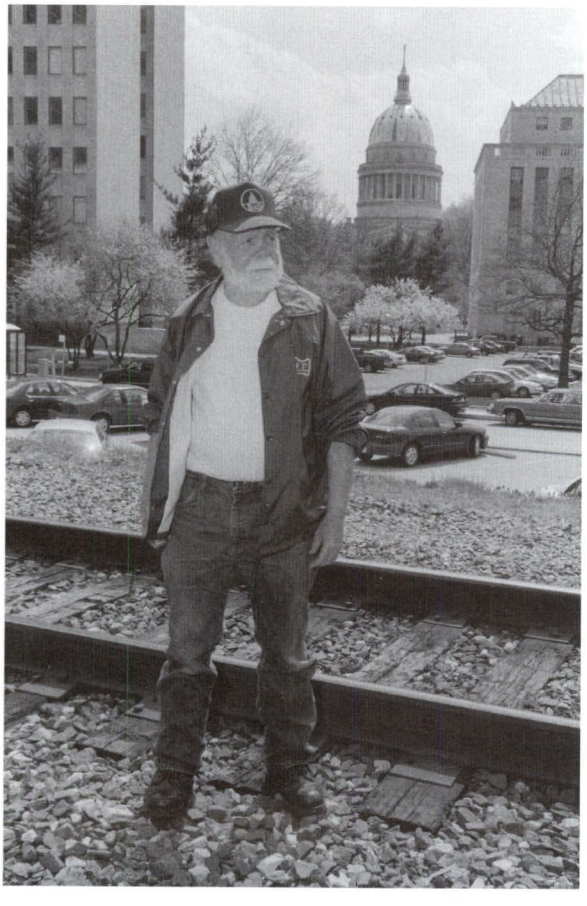


Years ago, train and engine crews were "railfan-friendly," according to J.J. Young. Above, fireman Harry Greenwood pauses for J.J.'s camera while his giant B&O class EM-1 takes on water in September 1955.

J.J. Young is now retired and lives with his wife Liz in Charleston. He still loves trains and cameras, however, and indulges these interests at every opportunity. This photograph at left was taken during a recent visit to the Capitol Complex, where J.J. quickly found the nearest set of railroad tracks. Photograph by Michael Keller.

name. The photographer suspects he stammered his reply.

"John Sell was of small stature, but he was a big man in demeanor and treated railfans with a degree of respect totally lacking today," Young says. "He very quickly put me at ease. I showed him some of the photos I had taken around the station and he asked what he could do for me. Imagine — what he could do for me."

While Sell continued to look through the photos, Young told him of his plan. J.J. had discovered that most of the trains on the B&O's Benwood-to-Lorain line — the humpers — were turnarounds to Holloway, Ohio. He wondered if it might be possible to arrange a cab ride on one of them. Sell surveyed the photos for several more agonizing minutes, then looked up at Young.

"I didn't know it, but he had been watching me, noticing that I looked both ways and stepping over the rails, not on them, when I crossed the tracks," Young says. "He told me he wished he could instill in his employees the sense of safety that I exhibited. Then he told me to go down to Benwood and get on any train and tell the crew he had OK'd my going with them."

Sell also told his new friend that if any crew members questioned the order, they were to call his office and speak to him directly for confirmation.

"He then called in his chief clerk and dictated to him a message over J.J. Sell's signature that he had given his permission for me to ride engine cabs on Wheeling Division trains, which I was to read to any 'doubting Thomases,'" Young says. "But that was never necessary. I was accepted by every B&O crew member I came into contact with."

This carte blanche, red carpet gave Young and his photographic talents access to hundreds of hot locomotives — including one bright day in 1952 when he actually learned to fire a humper out of Benwood.

Alas, such adventures vanished all too soon. The last fires were dropped in Benwood in 1958, the same year that Young was laid off from his job at Wheeling Mold and Foundry. He found work in Binghamton, New York, eventually becoming a photography technician and teacher at Broome Technical College. He and his wife Liz moved back to West Virginia — this time settling in Charleston — after he retired in 1995.

He's been back to Wheeling — including the day in 1998 when he conducted guided tours for the Baltimore & Ohio Historical Society — but it just isn't the same. The steamers are gone, as are the passenger trains and most of the sprawling Benwood yard. The B&O station still exists as the West Virginia Northern Community College, but the elevated station tracks and platforms have all been torn away without a trace.

"It was enough to make you cry," he says.

Young donated more than 400 of his photographs to the community college that year, and Governor Cecil H. Underwood recognized his role in preserving state railroad history when he presented J.J. with a History Hero Award at the Cultural Center in Charleston.

Young remains his own man. Oddly, he never worked for a railroad, except for a little more than two years as a W&LE telegraph operator right out of high school. He's never owned — much less worn — a necktie; he also never learned how to drive a car. But mention "railroads," and be prepared for an afternoon that passes too quickly.

"When I think of all the things I've been privileged to do, it's amazing," he says. "I have often wondered why I was so lucky, but I just got to the place that I didn't question it. I just enjoyed it."

BOB WITHERS is a reporter and copy editor for the *Huntington Herald-Dispatch*. He is a journalism graduate from Marshall University, a Baptist minister, and a lifelong railroad enthusiast. He has written for a number of publications including *Trains* magazine, and is a frequent GOLDENSEAL contributor; his most recent article appeared in our Winter 1995 issue.

Road foreman of engines A.K. Jacobs has one eye on the camera from the gangway of the EM-1 class engine on the left. This "Fairmonter" is hauling empties back to the mines in north-central West Virginia, while the approaching "Benwooder" is hauling lake coal in the summer of 1957 at McMechan.

J.J. Young and His Camera

J.J. Young, Jr.'s, photography career began when he was five or six years old.

"I used to smuggle my Old Man's Zeiss folding camera out of the chifforobe," he says. "I had to put it back in the exact place and in the exact manner I found it, so he wouldn't find out."

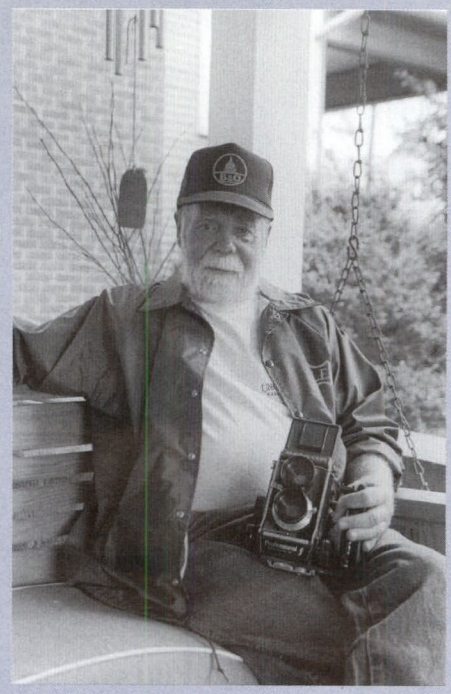
By the time J.J. was seven, he realized that a safer course was to buy his own camera, so he shelled out three or four dollars for a Brownie box model.

"I figured I'd eventually make the mistake of putting the Zeiss back wrong," he says. "I saved a good butt-licking that way."

He moved up to a Kodak Vigilant, his first folding camera, at age 11 or 12, but found that it was too slow.

"It had a top shutter speed of 1/100 of a second, but I liked action shots and the engines would always blur," he says. "So I bought a Kodak Monitor when I was 16 or 17. It had a top shutter speed of 1/400 of a second, which suited my purposes fine."

When J.J. was 20, he took the plunge and bought a Speed Graphic. He managed to get a good deal from a truck-driver neighbor



Photographer J.J. Young and his trusty Mamiyaflex camera, at home in Charleston. Photograph by Michael Keller.

In addition to his considerable technical skills as a photographer, J.J. Young possesses an innate sense of composition, and knows precisely when to "pull the trigger." In this shot from November 1947, a Cooperative Transit Company streetcar trundles down Main Street in Wheeling, while two young women hurry across the brick pavement and steel tracks in a captivating urban portrait.

who had lost control of his vehicle and had run it over a hill. The trucker needed money, so J.J. snagged the camera, film holders and film-pack adapters, filters, a flashgun, and case — all for $200.

The Speed Graphic's 4x5" negatives provided crisp, sharp images, but it was a bear to transport.

"I used it only about three years," he says. "It was rugged, but an expensive beast to feed. And it was a pain to haul around. I finally got tired of dragging around all those film packs and cut-film holders."

So, at age 24, he bought a Yashica Mat twin-lens reflex.

"That proved adequate until I dropped it down 15 cellar steps onto a concrete floor," he admits.

His next acquisition, a Mamiyaflex — which, like the Yashica, featured 2¼" square negatives — provided a new area for experimentation: interchangeable lenses. This is the camera he still owns.

Through all of this, J.J. never took a photography class. He taught himself, and obviously did a fair job of it. Eventually, he was prepared for the next step — learning to develop negatives and make prints.

"I used to have a finisher in Wheeling until he messed up a set of negatives with valuable B&O stuff on them," he says. "Half of each negative looked like it was fully developed, and the other half was only half-developed."

Never again, he swore. J.J. secured the free services of a neighbor — who, after a couple of evenings, had him "burning and dodging" with the best of them.

"My biggest headache was getting the film onto the reels," he recalls. "But I finally managed it, and continued to expand my knowledge by using my own common sense."

When J.J. was laid off work in Wheeling, he found a job at a photofinishing plant in Binghamton, New York.

"I was proficient enough at it to become assistant manager," he says. "I did developing and specialty industrial work for clients like IBM, Universal Instruments, and GE. In fact, I helped design GE's in-house photo unit."

When J.J. went to Broome Community College in 1963, he was a "jack-of-all-trades" photographic technician who developed the school's photo section and a curriculum that remains in place today as part of the college's two-year communications and media program. For 15 years or so before he retired on June 30, 1995, he taught 12 hours of photography classes a week as an assistant professor.

J.J. still enjoys being behind a camera, and railroad trains are still his favorite subject. He continues to use his 35-year-old Mamiyaflex for black-and-white pictures, along with a 35mm Pentax for occasional color work.

Though he farms out most of his processing these days, J.J. still knows his way around a darkroom, working with State Archives' technician Ed Hicks to print many of the pictures used in the accompanying article.

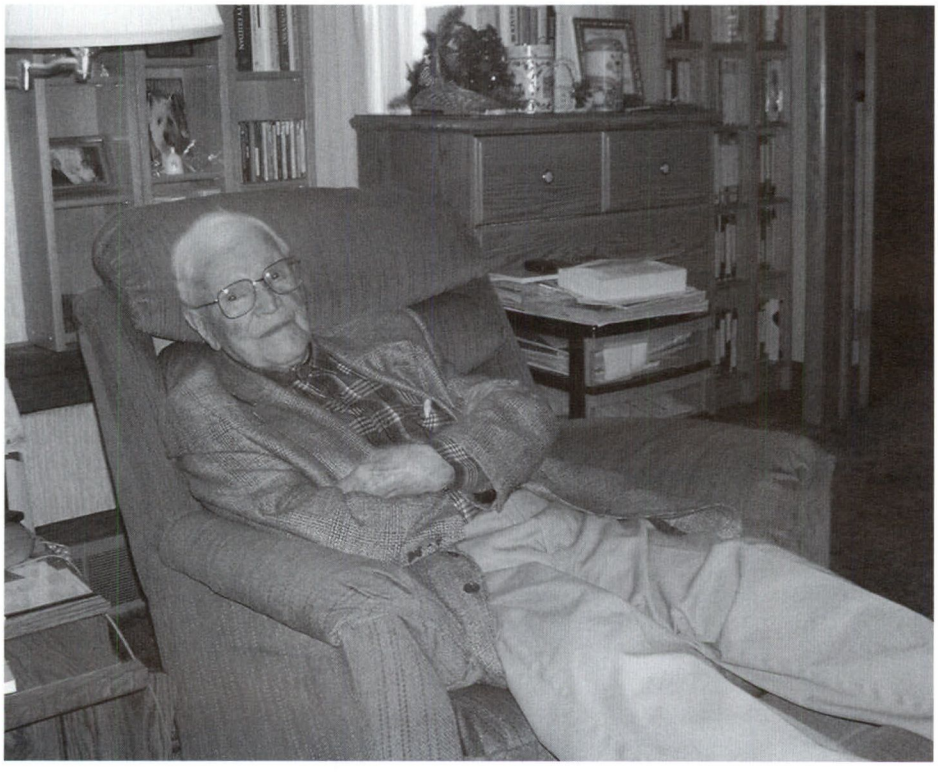
As J.J. says, "I've played around with these things too long to give it up now." — Bob Withers

The dangerous world of railroading is captured in this 1954 action shot taken by J.J. Young in Benwood. Here, operator Francis South stands in the snow, using a special tool — a train order delivery hoop — to hand instructions to the engineer of a passing train.

A Frenchman in Clarksburg

By Olga S. Hardman

Recalling Glassmaker Danton Caussin

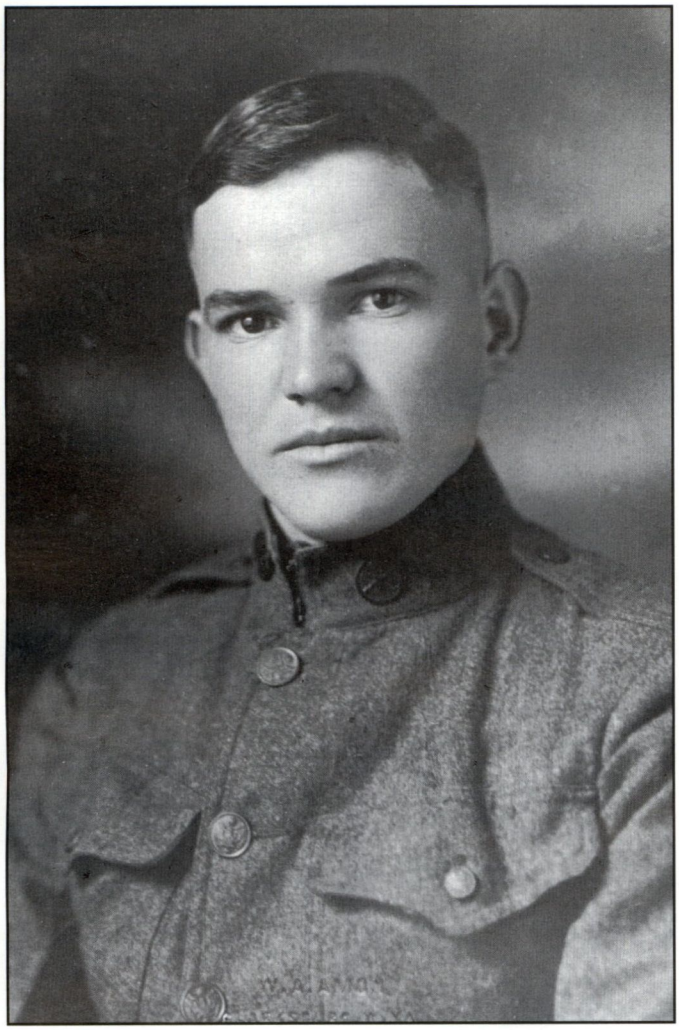


It was July 4, 1895, and the Caussins were enjoying a family outing in their horse and buggy. They had lived in Pittsburgh for three or four years since their arrival in America from Aniche, a small town in the north of France, and were on their way to a picnic to celebrate the July 4th holiday.

Julien Caussin was driving the buggy while holding his infant daughter Marie on his lap. Maria, pregnant with their fourth child, was seated beside her husband, and the two older children, Julius and Clarice, were in the back seat.

Suddenly, the back strap of the horse's harness broke, throwing the full weight of the buggy against

Danton Caussin, age 105, relaxes at his home earlier this year. Photograph by Mark Hardman.



Danton Caussin of Clarksburg was born in 1895, and lived 105 active and productive years. He is shown here in his World War I military uniform in 1918. Photograph by W.A. Amon, Clarksburg.

the horse's hind legs. Frightened and hurt, the horse bolted sharply causing the buggy to careen wildly and finally upset.

Young Julius got a cut on his head that required 18 stitches to close. Clarice was thrown from the buggy and landed unharmed in a hay stack. But the infant Marie was crushed to death in her father's arms. Julien and Maria were essentially unharmed, although both were badly shaken and grief-stricken at the loss of their child.

Three days later, on July 7, 1895, Maria gave birth to a son, Danton Leon Caussin. Julien named him after a famous French general, Georges Danton, who was known for his daring, his strength of character, and an ability to make swift decisions. No doubt Julien was hoping to endow his new son with these same character traits.

My Uncle Danton told me this story about his parents — my grandparents — and about his own birth. On July 7, 2000, Uncle Danton celebrated his 105th birthday. *[Sadly, he passed away on April 1, 2001, shortly before this article went to press. — ed.]*

At 105 years of age, Danton was still bringing joy into the lives of others. The ladies who delivered his "meals on wheels" during the week couldn't wait to get to Danton's house. He often served them French cookies called *galettes* which he baked himself. His mother Maria Boulanger Caussin brought the recipe and her *galette* iron from France around 1892, when she and her husband came to the United States to work in the flat-glass industry.

Julien Caussin named his son after a famous French general, Georges Danton, who was known for his daring, his strength of character, and an ability to make swift decisions.

In 1899, after working for a few years in Pennsylvania, Danton's father Julien, along with several other French and Belgian immigrants, decided to build their own cooperative glass plant in West Virginia. Each man put in the same amount of capital, and each man had an equal say in the operation.

And so it was that Danton, at the age of four, moved to Clarksburg with his family. The immigrants had decided to build their plant in the section of Clarksburg called Pine Grove. This site was chosen because natural gas sold for only 10 cents per 1,000 cubic feet, and a railroad was already established in the area. Hence, there was a cheap source of energy and a ready-made way to move their product to market.

Just four blocks up the street from the factory site was a small, frame cottage which housed the offices of the Pine Grove Land and Manufacturing Company. The only other house in the area was a two-story frame just three blocks from the factory site. This was the house that Julien rented for his growing family, and it was here that Danton grew up.

North View, as the area was later named, was primarily undeveloped land at the turn of the century but was poised for development. Lots were laid out in 36 blocks, and a block-and-a-half square was laid out for a public park. There was a 300-foot water well and windmill in the center of the park. Danton and his brother Julius helped their father carry water from this source once a week for the family laundry.

The new glass plant was called the Lafayette, reflecting the French and Belgian heritage of its founders. As more and more glass workers moved to Clarksburg to work in the glass plant, many houses sprang up in North View.

By 1903, the population of the community had tripled. It was at this time that Julien purchased the house he had rented for his family. Danton had many playmates and a lovely park in which to play. When Danton's family first moved to Clarksburg, all the maple trees in the park were only saplings; now they are mature trees that have weathered more than 100 years of storms, and more than 100 years of sunshine.

Danton's father was a strong, frugal, hardworking man who invested his earnings from the glass plant in real estate. By the time he died in 1917, Julien Caussin owned five houses, all surrounding the family home at 2200 Hamill Avenue.

For more than 70 years, Danton lived in a duplex on Goff Avenue which his father had built in 1907. His house was directly across the street from the park where he played as a boy, so Danton still had the pleasure of looking out his window to watch children at play.

In the center of the park, near the windmill, there was a grandstand on which the community band and other musical groups performed periodically. On Sundays, the park became one large picnic area with the French, Spanish, and Italian immigrants all gathered within their own little groups consuming their own culinary delights, and their own particular variety of homemade wine.

Danton spent a lot of time during his youth taking care of Belgian hares. The rabbits were excellent fare for the table, and Danton enjoyed raising them. As a matter of fact, many of his friends and neighbors knew Danton by his nickname, "Bunny" Caussin. In his later years, most of his friends over 70 years of age still refered to him as "Bunny."

While Danton was growing up, North View was either dry and dusty, or a sea of mud if it had rained. There were no sidewalks, so one's shoes were always either dusty or muddy.

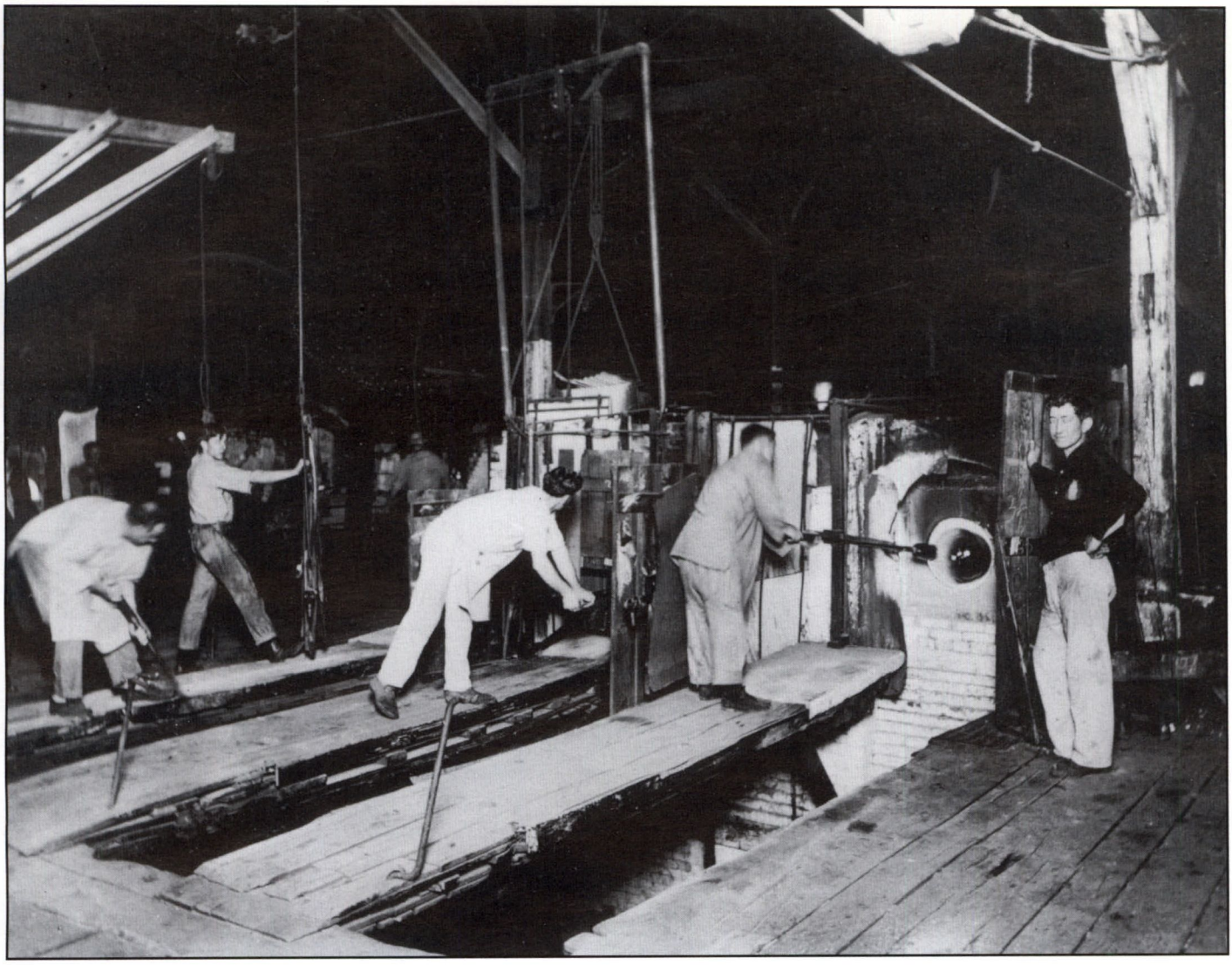
After the plant was well-established, the Frenchmen built a social hall located at 2009 Goff Avenue. It was a large, two-story frame structure that contained a saloon, card room, and other meeting rooms on the first floor, and a large dance hall on the top floor. They named the structure Lafayette Hall.

It was here that Danton Caussin became a great dancer. He delighted in telling me that the "city girls" (from the heart of Clarksburg) used to love to come to North View to dance with the French boys. Since young people had no transportation, they had to walk to North View which was a mile or more from downtown. Because the area was so muddy or dusty, everyone carried their dancing shoes in their hands as they walked to the hall in their boots. Every Saturday night, there was an assortment of boots parked on the stoop outside Lafayette Hall while inside, all the young people danced the evening away.

French and Belgian glassworkers established several cooperative glass plants in Harrison County, including the Lafayette in Clarksburg. This photograph shows the board of directors of the Lafayette glass plant in 1914. Danton Caussin's brother Julius is standing at the far right.

Since Danton's father was a "gathering boy," Danton worked with him for three years to acquire his union card as a glass gatherer.

As was the custom then, young men were apprenticed to their fathers for three years to get the necessary union card to practice their respective trades. Since Danton's father was a "gathering boy," Danton worked with him for three years to acquire his union card as a glass gatherer.



Creating handmade window glass was a challenging and time-honored skill, and a specialty of many Belgian and French immigrants to West Virginia. In this photograph from about 1908, Belgian and French workers at the cooperative Banner Glass plant in South Charleston, working at the factory's swing hole, illustrate the glassmaking process. Photograph courtesy of Fred Barkey.

The Lafayette began as a pot-furnace operation in which the molten glass was heated in large clay pots. Sand, potash, limestone, coal dust, and cullet (broken glass) were placed into the pots and heated until molten. This material was then gathered onto long steel blowpipes by a gathering boy. It required gathering three or four times to get the necessary 20-30 pounds in a large lump on the end of the pipe, Danton recalled. The gathering boy then took this molten mass to a cast-iron block where it was blocked into a ball. Then, the glassblower blew the ball to a diameter of about 13". The glassblower's helper, called a snapper, would then carry the ball up to the blowing furnace where the ball was heated again, and the blower began the process of forming it into a cylinder.

The blower would then swing the cylinder, called a roller, in a long, narrow shaft in the floor called a swing hole. By blowing, turning, swinging, and intermittently reheating the glass, the desired cylinder length of 55" to 60" was achieved. The cylinder was then split open on one side and taken to the flattener where it was laid smooth in a special oven, called a lehr or annealling oven, for gradual cooling. After cooling, it was then ready to be cut to desired window size by the cutter. If your home was built at the turn of the century, the glass in your windows was made in this way.

In 1917, when he was 22 years old, Danton left the glass plant to serve in World War I. Since he could speak French fluently, he assumed that he would be sent to France, as all the other North View boys had been. Imagine his distress when he found out that he was going to Camp Lee, Virginia, instead, to teach soldiers how to properly use their gas masks. Out of the 13 young men from North View who were

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West Virginia's Belgian and French Glassworkers

By Fred Barkey

Most West Virginians are surprised to learn how important Belgian and French immigrant glassworkers were to the industrial development of the Mountain State. Their story involves the complex relationship between old-world craftsmanship and American technology, the growth of craft and industrial labor unions, and deep family connections that persist to this day.

The story begins in the late 1870's when glassworkers began leaving south-central Belgium and neighboring areas of northern France to escape deteriorating conditions in their industry. Over the next decade, thousands of these craftsmen found employment in the window-glass factories of Pittsburgh.

These craftsmen entered workplaces in which they felt very much at home, because window-glass production at the time remained the same handcraft process it had been for hundreds of years. Workers still gathered and blew molten glass into cylinders that were then split, flattened, and cut to specification. Although Belgian and French craftsmen constituted only 30-40% of the workforce in a typical window-glass factory, the power of their knowledge and tradition gave them a great deal of respect and influence in the workplace. For centuries in Europe, they had controlled entrance into their trades by accepting only relatives as apprentices. Moreover, their notions of reasonable wages, work periods, and norms of production were generally respected by factory owners, many of whom had been craftsmen themselves.

A strong craft union movement had developed in Pittsburgh by 1880. Eventually, a merged window-glass workers union was formed as the L.A. 300 of the Knights of Labor. The new union formalized the workplace practices of the various trades, including the times of year when craftsmen could and could not work.

The power of the L.A. 300 over the production process in the window-glass industry lasted but a decade. The initial blow came in 1889 with the introduction of a new technology which allowed manufacturers to melt the raw materials to make glass in a continuously operating tank, rather than using the traditional clay pots placed inside a furnace. While this new technology still required all the skills of the glass trades, it nonetheless began to undermine the L.A. 300. Since the new melting tank proved more efficient when used round the clock in larger factories, many employees moved out of Pittsburgh to places where they could find cheaper plant sites and control the length of their workday with less interference from the union. When the L.A. 300 could not meet the demands of the larger facilities for more skilled workers, the tank-factory owners aggressively recruited more Belgian and French immigrants creating potential division in the ethnic solidarity that formed an important core in the union.

The power of their knowledge and tradition gave them a great deal of respect and influence in the workplace.

The fate of the L.A. 300 was further eroded by two additional developments in the industry. First of all, a group of 17 of the largest window-glass producers created the first trust in the industry, the American Window Glass Company. Essentially a marketing organization, the AWGC began to stabilize product prices by trying to control wages and working conditions. Second, and ominous in its long-term implications, was the introduction in 1903 by the AWGA of a device for mechanically creating glass cylinders. Invented by John Lubbers, a glass craftsman, the machine potentially eliminated the need for gatherers and blowers, which meant a cut up to 50% of the standard cost of skilled labor.

Fortunately for the window-glass craftsmen, some technical difficulties in the introduction of the Lubbers machine, and an expanding market for window production, provided a decade-long reprieve from the full impact of mechanization and reorganization in the industry. The skilled glassworkers survived during this period by creating cooperatives to produce glass themselves, or by finding employment in small, independent companies. For a while, a number of these firms moved to the so-called "gas belt" region of the Midwest. A few years into the first decade of the new century, however, news of the fine silica, free or inexpensive plant sites, and an apparently inexhaustible supply of cheap natural gas in West Virginia lured more and more of these small glass factories to the Mountain State.

By 1910, at least 21 hand-glass plants operated in the western third of West Virginia [see "George Delforge and the Banner Window Glass Company of South Charleston," by Fred Barkey; October-December 1975]. One-third or more of these hand window-glass factories were cooperatives. More than 3,000 workers labored in West Virginia's hand plants at the time and ac-

counted for almost 30% of such window-glass production in the United States.

It is likely that half or more of the skilled glassworkers who came to West Virginia at the turn of the last century were first- or second-generation immigrants, including a very sizeable Belgian-French contingent. Besides helping to create a significant block of ethnicity where little or none had existed, the Belgian and French arrivals added a strand of vibrant community life to places where they settled. Ethnic club halls where card playing, reading, dancing, and picnics took place — and where aid was given when needed — began to dot the state's cultural landscape. In an era when a community was often judged by the quality of the town band, Belgian and French musicians took a back seat to no one. Belgian and French voters added to West Virginia's emerging Republican ascendency, attracted to that party's advocacy of a high, protective tariff system. Other window-glass workers placed their fate with the Socialist Party and its promise of public ownership of major industries and their principles of democratic administration and distribution of resources.

Unfortunately, Belgian and French window-glass craftsmen in West Virginia were unable to protect the very skills that were the basis for their institutions. By the early 1920's, all of the hand-plant trades, except cutting, were eliminated by a continuous glass-drawing machine first introduced at the Libbey-Owens-Ford window plant in Charleston [see "Mike Owens's Glass Company," by Fred Barkey; Spring 1996]. The National Window Glass Workers, the amalgamated union which the hand-plant workers put together to represent them after the demise of the L.A. 300, tried to save the ever-diminishing opportunities for the skilled trades. The NWGW worked with hand plants to try to stay competitive by rationing production, splitting shifts, and temporarily reducing wages. Finally, the union established its own plant in Huntington in the hope of demonstrating that hand methods could still be profitable. It didn't work, and in 1927, the plant closed, making it the last hand window-glass factory in the nation.

The adjustment of West Virginia's Belgian and French glassworkers to the age of large machine-plant production of windows was often traumatic. Some craftsmen retired, others started small businesses, some became laborers, and some even took their own lives. In time, however, most adjusted to the new technology and went on to become a part of the new industrial union which rose in the state's window-glass industry in the 1930's.

Fortunately for West Virginia, most of these workmen stayed in the state and continued to lend their considerable leadership and talent to the Mountain State. While the members of the first generation of immigrants have nearly all died off, as late as 1970, Belgian and French citizens with at least one parent born in the old country still constituted West Virginia's third-largest ethnic group.

Belgian and French glassworkers at a picnic in South Charleston in about 1914. Photograph courtesy of Fred Barkey.

In 1991, an organization was formed in Clarksburg to promote the heritage and traditions of these original Belgian and French glassworkers. The Belgian-American Heritage Society of West Virginia sponsors a variety of events throughout the year, including a picnic each July to celebrate National Belgium Day. For more information, call Society president Vickie Zabeau Bowden at (304)623-4489.

In South Charleston, activities related to Belgian and French heritage are conducted through the South Charleston Museum and library. For information, call Theresa Witt at (304)744-9711.

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Community bands were a point of pride for many West Virginia towns in the early 20th century. The Lafayette Concert Band, shown here, included Danton's brother-in-law August Malfregeot, standing on the far left in the back row, date unknown.

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called to the service, Danton was the only one not sent to France. He said that he was somewhat sorry that he didn't go overseas, but his instructor role had its compensations. From a $21-a-month buck private in April 1918, he became a $33-a-month sergeant in August of the same year. Furthermore, he had no guard duty or kitchen chores. He laughingly said, "I was a goldbrick." On November 11, 1993, when he was 98 years old, U.S. Senator John D. Rockefeller presented Danton with a World War I 75th Commemorative Service Medal at Veterans Day ceremonies in Clarksburg.

After the war, Danton briefly returned to his trade as a gathering boy. Danton's father had died in 1917, and his father's plant, the Lafayette, was destroyed by fire in 1919. But the Rolland Glass Company had rebuilt the old Peerless Plant next to the site of the Lafayette, and Danton eagerly started work as a gatherer for that company. At that time, there were seven hand-glass plants in and around Clarksburg.

In 1920, however, Pittsburgh Plate and Libbey-Owens-Ford — two plants that made glass by machine — started a price war with each other. This competition literally priced the hand-glass plants out of business. Danton was then hired by the Rolland Glass Company to manage its box shop.

As foreman of the box shop, where the wooden boxes were made for packing the glass for shipping, Danton's day began at 6:00 a.m., and ran until 3:00 p.m., five days a week. It was Danton's responsibility to maintain a stockroom of wooden boxes in assorted sizes, with other boxes made to order. Danton maintained a stock of between 30,000 to 35,000 boxes. The factory regularly made enough glass to fill at least one B&O boxcar a day. When orders were plentiful, they sometimes filled as many as five boxcars a day. Danton worked as foreman of the box shop for more than 40 years. Of the 22 men who worked under Danton in that box shop, only five survive today.

Danton and his wife Mary were together for nearly 44 years. Mary Dixon had come to Clarksburg to work for the telephone company in 1919. She was the seventh child born into a farm family in Flat Rocks, Preston County. They met, not surprisingly, at a dance and were married in October 1920. Mary passed away in 1964.

Danton and Mary had three children: Eugene Dixon, Danton Leon, Jr., and Mary Kathryn. Danton Leon, Jr., was killed in his mother's arms in an automobile accident when he was only eight months old, an eerie reminder of the tragedy which touched Danton's family 33 years earlier. Eugene, an insurance adjuster, was a talented arranger of music for the big-band sound who produced many arrangements for various dance bands around Clarksburg, including his own. He died of a heart attack at the age of 53. Mary

Mary Margaret Dixon wed Danton Caussin in October 1920. They were married nearly 44 years at the time of her death in 1964. The couple had three children.

Kathryn is a professor of dance at West Virginia University and is coordinator of the dance program there.

Among Danton's avocations in the years following his retirement, raising roses was one of his favorites. Danton carefully tended his rose garden until his 90th year.

Danton also loved dogs. When he was a young boy, he had a dog named "Five Cents." When I asked him why he would give a dog such a name, he responded, "Because when I took him home, my dad said he wasn't worth a nickel."

Aside from his family, Danton's greatest love throughout his life was West Virginia sports. He regularly attended WVU football games until 1998 when he was 103 years old. In 1917, to go to Morgantown for a game, he would catch any train going north and get off at Westover and walk over to the stadium, which was then located on the downtown campus. In more recent years, he went to the games in the comfort of his daughter's automobile, then traveled in a golf cart to his tier in the stadium.

Danton was an avid bridge player all of his life and credited the game with keeping his mind alert. Since many of his family members also loved the game and many of them lived close by, you could find a bridge game going almost every Sunday afternoon and often on weekday evenings.

Danton was extremely proud of his French heritage and was quick to tell you the foods he preferred because "that's what French people eat."

Danton was extremely proud of his French heritage and was quick to tell you the foods he preferred because "that's what French people eat." The foods he liked, of course, were the ones his mother prepared for him as a growing boy. He said that what he missed most about his childhood were the wonderful fragrances that came from his mother's kitchen: the odor of wild game or domestic rabbit simmering in a dry red wine; leeks sautéing in butter for vichyssoise; onions, garlic, thyme, and bay leaf added to turtle soup, pate, leg of lamb, veal chops, pork loin, and beef stews. With the aid of his friend and domestic helper Mrs. Becky Betler, he still baked *galettes*, mostly because he loved to smell the fragrance of them baking.

I stood in awe of this man for

The Peerless and Lafayette glass factories in Clarksburg. The Lafayette, at right, burned in 1919; the adjacent Peerless plant was eventually rebuilt as Rolland Glass Company. Danton Caussin worked for both companies at different times, retiring from Rolland Glass after 43 years as foreman of the box shop. Postcard courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, date unknown.

Danton Caussin making a *galette*, a traditional French cookie, at his home in 1999.

Danton lived in this house at 2127 Goff Street in Clarksburg for more than 70 years. This recent photograph shows him with his longtime caregiver and housekeeper Beckey Betler on the left, and granddaughter Jean Ann Caussin on the right. Danton passed away on April 1, 2001.

many years and was most impressed with his attitude of gratitude. He always seemed to be content with, and grateful for, whatever he had, and didn't hesitate to express his thanks for everything.

One of his character traits which I respected most was his equal treatment of, and respect for, everyone. He always showed the same respect and kindness to the cleaning lady he sat beside on the city bus, as the brilliant medical minds who treated him when he was hospitalized about 10 years ago for a broken hip. To Danton's mind, no one was of greater importance because of his or her station in life.

Danton was always very independent. He would never ask anyone to do anything for him that he could possibly do for himself, even when it became difficult for him to do some things because of stiff joints and the natural impairments of old age. When I chided him because I found him waiting for the city bus to go to the hospital to have a cataract removed, he simply replied, "But, honey, the bus stops right across the street." It took some doing on my part to persuade him to get into my car and be driven to the hospital, even though he was 96 years old at the time.

Periodically, I interviewed Uncle Danton and tried to get him to share his wisdom and the secret of his health — mental, as well as physical. When I asked him what advice he would give to young people, he said immediately, "Be honest. If you don't know something, don't hesitate to say so. Tell it like it is."

Julien Caussin was right to name his fourth child Danton. For he truly was endowed with all the positive character traits of a great French general, and then some.

OLGA S. HARDMAN is a freelance writer and music educator from Clarksburg. She holds a master's degree from West Virginia University and is a retired coordinator of music education for Harrison County schools. Her writings have appeared in a number of publications including the *Music Educator's Journal* and on her own Web site, www.wvnet.edu/~fsa00180. This is Olga's first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Still Singin'

A Visit with Bill and Hazel Westfall

Interview by Bob Whitcomb

If you attend almost any West Virginia music festival, you are certain to find Bill and Hazel Westfall of Ripley. When they are not playing on stage, they are enthusiastically jamming round and about the grounds. One of the most rewarding parts of hearing Bill and Hazel perform is hearing the rich verbal descriptions they give of their music and of the hills from which it comes. My wife Judith and I sat down recently with Bill and Hazel and talked with them about their roots, which run deep in the music and in the West Virginia hills. —Bob Whitcomb

Bill and Hazel Westfall enjoy a song at their home near Ripley. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Hazel Crihfield was raised in Bell Grove, Jackson County, the eldest of 12 children in her family. She is seated here, at left, holding brother Darrell in about 1936. Her sister Della May holds baby Charles Walter; brother John is on the right. Hazel has many clear and fond memories from this period in her life.

Hazel's parents Betha May and Joseph Wesley Crihfield in 1956 at their homeplace.

Bob Whitcomb. We always see you playing music at every festival we go to. Where did all this music come from?

Hazel Westfall. My mother was a beautiful singer, and she taught me how to sing. She was a happy-go-lucky person. When she was in her kitchen a-cookin', she would always sing. She'd sit around the fireplace with some of us children waitin' for Dad to come in from work, and she'd sing all those old songs: "The Little Black Dog That Walks With Me," "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," and "Oh, How I Love Jesus," "The Streets of Laredo," all the old things. I wondered how Mom knew all those songs. Come to find out, she'd sing in church, and she used to play a banjo, and she'd go places where they had birthday parties and things like that. When we kids got of a pretty good size, though, she quit playin' instruments and just sang. She had a whole bunch of brothers and two sisters, and they all could play music, too. They were originally from "Old Virginia," we call it now, down around Danville. And that's where all this music came from.

Bill Westfall. Hazel's momma was a singer, her grandpa was a singer, all her relatives were singers, and her sewing machine, it was a Singer, too! (Laughter)

HW. I was the oldest of 12 children, so Mom wanted me to work with Dad. I worked out in the fields as soon as I was big enough. There I was, hoein' corn. I had real bright red hair, and I had it plaited up down my back, and I had freckles — oodles of 'em — barefooted and all, hoein' corn out there in that field, and the sweat bees a-bitin' me, but I was still singin'. See, that singin' is in me! I can't get it out!

Bob W. So your music came right on through the family?

HW. Yeah. I knew my Grandpa real well. He was a good man. He and the boys would work all week, and on Saturday all these people would come in. They had old guitars hangin' on their walls. They'd

clear off the chipyard where they cut the wood, and they'd have a square dance there. There'd be four, five people come and play music — fiddles, banjos, guitars, and I think they had an old squeezebox-type organ. Then in wintertime, they'd take every bit of furniture out of the living room, and they'd square dance in there. That was my Mom's family. Grandpa did a lot of fiddling. Played the mouth organ. And he sang and danced. He mostly danced when he was playin' the fiddle, and he played the banjo, too. And every one of his 10 children could play two or three instruments! Anyway, they played those instruments, and they'd have about two squares of square dance. They called it an old-time hoedown, you see. When you laid your hoe down, on the weekend, you picked up your guitars, and you sang and you played. That was your entertainment. Now my Dad's family was completely different. All they thought about was workin'. They had their chores and everything like that, you see.

Bill W. My parents didn't really have time to play music. They had to work to make a living. But when we lived back out there in the country, now, maybe in the summer when it was warmer, they would take the rugs up off-a the floor and have a square dance. Musicians from all around the county would come. It'd go until maybe midnight, and then they would leave. Now, what they would do most of the time would be to get away out there on the ridge somewhere, a nice open place, and maybe there'd be some stumps or somethin', and they'd sit down and play 'til mornin'!

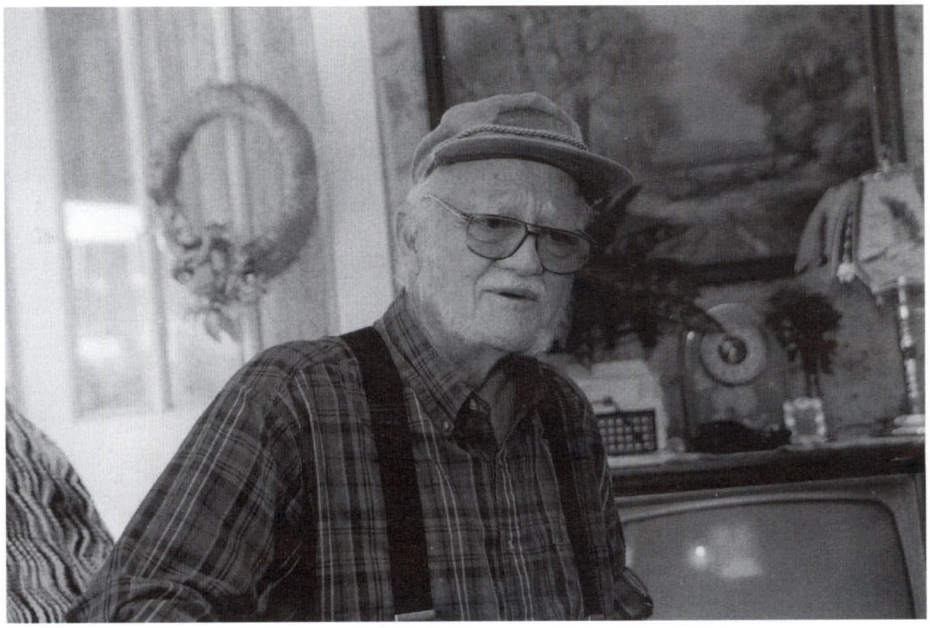
Bob W. Are there some memories of that farm life that come back to you?

HW. Our farm was on a hill. In the summertime it'd get real hot and dry, and we'd take our water up there and put it in a big ol' stone jar, so it'd be in the sunshine. That water would get real hot, and then we'd take a bath with it in an old galvanized tub. There were times when water was hard to get. The drought in 1930 was bad. Oh, it was terrible! I was just three, but I remember Mom takin' us to visit my aunt. She had me by the hand, and she was carryin' my little brother — he wasn't but a couple of weeks old. I was barefooted, and I was cryin' because my feet were hurtin' and dry, hot. During the drought there wasn't any grass. Down around the crick there were some big ol' weeds — horseweeds we called 'em — and we'd cut 'em and haul 'em up for the cows and horses to eat. We'd have to haul water a long ways for the animals.

Bob W. Did your dads hunt?

HW. Sometimes Dad'd go huntin' and get three, four, maybe five rabbits. We'd clean 'em, put 'em in saltwater, soak 'em overnight. Then we'd pour the water off and roll 'em in flour and fry 'em. Sometimes we'd just cook 'em in a pot and save the broth, and we'd make gravy and cook sweet potatoes. That'd be a good dinner.

Bill W. My Dad hunted rabbits some, and I did, too. When I was 16 or 17, we'd take dogs and go back across the hills squirrel and rabbit huntin'. We'd come to a patch of woods, and we'd hold the dog 'til we got pretty close to the woods, and then we'd turn that dog loose and tell him to go in there and hunt the squirrel. And he'd run right on in, and he'd tree a squirrel every time! All we had to do was run in there and just see where he was a-lookin'. We never missed gettin' a squirrel that way. I remember I was out huntin' on Pearl Harbor Day.



Bill Westfall today. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Bob W. Can you tell us a little about your experiences in the war?

Bill W. After the war started, I got my draft call and took my examination and passed it. There wasn't nothin' wrong with me. I was hopin' they'd find somethin', but they didn't. So they asked me which I wanted, the Army or Navy. I always did think I could run further than I could swim, so I said, "Well, I'll just take the Army." And they said, "Would you like the Navy?" and I said, "No," and they said, "Well, you're in it!" So, I was in the Navy. I went to Great Lakes up there and took my training, and after that we rode the train all the way out to California. I was there about two weeks at the naval base at Shoemaker, and then we loaded on a ship and headed across to Australia. We were in Australia there for maybe a week, and then

Bill Westfall holds a puppy in this 1941 snapshot taken at Ripley. His friend Dell Casto is at left with a larger dog.

we were sent to New Guinea, up there where the headhunters live. I was there for a year on the naval base, the main supply base for the Seventh Fleet.

I had been in New Guinea for a year without leave when the war ended in Germany. The ones that had been there that long, they was sendin' back to Australia for duty. The rest was a-loadin' on, gettin' ready for the invasion of Japan. But they dropped the bomb, and they didn't have to go all the way to Japan.

But I had gone back to Australia. I was at Brisbane. I liked it — I was there for a year — came home in '46. That's where I started playin' the guitar. They had a USO, where they would have free cigarettes and coffee. Servicemen could go there and get their coffee, and girls would come in, and you'd dance — they had a big dance floor — and they had guitars you could check out and play if you wanted to. Well, I'd get me a guitar out, and I'd start playin', and I learnt some when I was over there. "The Little Mohee!" Found that in a songbook over there in Australia, and that was the first song I really learned off by heart — I had to learn it 'cause I couldn't take the book with me!

Bob W. How did you two meet?

Bill W. When we were kids, I lived acrost the hill from her — way back probably a mile. It was on the other side of the holler. That was at Fletcher in Roane County. Well, in those days, when people would get sick, you used to go visit and sit up with 'em. Of course, Hazel and I were just little, maybe seven or eight. For some reason, we went by Hazel's house, and our moms didn't want me and Hazel to get together because someone was sick. They had her in the house and wouldn't let her out. While my mother and her mother was a-talkin', I got around there and raised the window, and I pulled her out. Well, they had missed us, so they got to lookin' for us. And there we were, out there in the orchard playin' in the apple trees!

Bob W. And then you got married quite a bit later than that!

Bill W. After the war, I came back here and met up with Hazel again. We'd each been married, but it hadn't worked out. After a few years, we got to playin' music, and we would go to church and play. You see, I played the guitar, and I didn't have anybody to help me sing my songs. And Hazel was tryin' to play the guitar, and she liked to sing. And one day, we just got together and started playin' and singin', and it just worked out perfect. Everybody said, "Why don't you get you a job on the radio and sing on Sunday mornings?" And we put on a half-hour program of gospel music on Sunday mornings.

Then we made a record, singin' about Jesus, and we sold 'em for a dollar apiece. And then we got us a little songbook out, and we just decided we were just goin' to play music, we liked it so well. We just kept right at it. At one time, we made us a phonograph where we could record 78 r.p.m. discs. We

Bill and Hazel put out this songbook in 1950. They are pictured singing over radio station WMOV, Ravenswood, with Basil Casto, Hazel's first husband.

just did that for the fun of it. People'd come in and say, "Whoa, I'd like to have that on a record!" "Well, we'll just run you off one for a dollar." Let's see, that would have been in the '50's we did that.

Bob W. You sing a lot of old-time hymns and gospel. Did that start right there when you were growin' up?

HW. I'd be workin' in the field and all, but when church time would come, I'd say, "Dad, I can't work any longer, I gotta go to church." So I'd go in and clean up and get ready and go. We had to walk about two, two-and-a-half miles to church. If we had shoes, we wouldn't wear 'em until we got almost there. We'd get dust all over, you know, and we didn't want to get it in our shoes, so if we'd find a puddle hole of water, we'd wash our feet off!

Bob W. What was your church like?

HW. Well, it was about 28-feet wide, and it mighta been 40-feet long. It didn't have a steeple. It was sorta gray, just made out of planks on a foundation of sandrocks. I think it had three windows on each side and the door in the middle. There was a sign right above the door that said Fairview United Brethren Church. It had seats in rows. They were hewed-out pews, no pads or anything on 'em — just plain wood; it mighta been chestnut. Just old planks on the floors. There was a pot-bellied stove in the middle. If you got cold, you'd go up there and get your back warm.

They had a little prayer list agin the wall, said "We need prayer for so-and-so." And then we had the Ten Commandments over there and a picture of Jesus and a cross made out of lumber — just a cross. Then there was a mourner's bench. That's where you'd go if you had somethin' on your heart that you wanted to talk to Jesus about. You'd get down on your knees in front of the altar and pray to Him for your answer. It says in the Bible, if you don't ask, you don't receive, so we asked Him for things we needed, and we relied on Him.

There was a little pulpit that the preacher preached from. And there were three seats on each side for the choir. We had a little choir. Some of the men in that choir had patches on their knees.

Lots of times when the preacher would preach a sermon, it'd touch your heart real close and tears'd run down your face. Sometimes the preacher would get that way, too. He'd be preachin' a sermon, so close to Jesus, so much power in it. You could feel it and see the tears come down his face, and you knew he had it in his heart, because he was rememberin' what Jesus went through when He died up on that cross.

But when we worshiped, it seemed to me that we were happy. There was a little old lady — aw, she was old then! And she had a

little ol' handkerchief, and her hair was a-twisted up on the back of her head, and she was a-testifying, tellin' what Jesus had done for her. She'd get a little bit happy, threw her handkerchief around, and she said, "Praise the Lord! Thank you, Jesus! Oh yeah!" And everybody was sayin' "A-men!"

And of course, they took a collection. If you'd have a good day, you'd have maybe 10 dollars in the collection. Sometimes it wouldn't be over two or three dollars. It wasn't ever very much. We'd have 35 or 40 people on a good, good Sunday back then.

Bob W. How did you learn your old-time music?

Bill W. You know, when people nowadays play old-time music, they're playin' the old-time that *they* know. But with most of 'em, it's not a national old-time. We play more of a national music. It's what we heard on the radio. It's the same thing they played at the "Grand Ole Opry" at Nashville. And we used to listen to Renfro Valley from Kentucky, and music from Arkansas, back in the Ozark Mountains.

Used to be there wasn't so many stations, and you could pull 'em in from a long ways off. I had a big, long antenna, and I'd sit there with my hand on the dial, and I'd keep tunin'. WLS, Chicago had a big barn dance. I'd get the "Suppertime Frolic" and WJJD, Chicago. Oh, I listened to 'em all my life. In the daytime, I'd tune in Fairmont and get Buddy Starcher and Lee Moore and Doc Williams and the Border Riders and Cherokee Sue and Patsy Montana.

Hazel Westfall today. Photograph by Michael Keller.

There was an organ in our little church, but lotsa times we didn't have anybody that could play it. Once, we had a woman, boy, she'd get on there and just play, you know. But after she passed away, we like to never got somebody to come in and play like she did! They didn't have the rhythm! She had the rhythm, you know! We usually just sang without music, just sang outta our songbooks. "Precious Memories," "Where Could I Go But to the Lord," "The Old Rugged Cross." There's lots more — "To Canaan's Happy Land," "Rock of Ages" — I can't think of all of 'em.

See, you heard these songs all the time, so if once in a while someone gets to singin' them, they'll come right to you. You'll hear a song, and then maybe sometime later, that song'll come driftin' by, and you reach up and grab it. And hope you can remember the words!

Bob W. Is any of your music from Jackson County, here where you live?

Bill W. Well, Billy Cox [William Jennings Cox, a.k.a. the Dixie Songbird] lived in Jackson County. In fact, he probably was a little bit of relation to me. He sang, and he was a recording artist. He lived over around Charleston for a long time in a little place, I think it was one or two rooms, and he wrote songs. They said when he died, he had a stack of songs he had written on tablet paper that would reach from the floor to the ceiling. He wrote "Shack Number Nine" about the people in Jackson County. It's just a simple little song, but you know, it's a true one. The good ones are true. I sing that a lot, and there's a little story that goes along there.

When the railroads were young, most of the trestles were made of wood — ties, you know, piled up pretty near 100 feet. On the end of the trestle, there was a barrel with no top on it, and you'd get that barrel full of water. That was in case the coal-burning train would catch the trestle on fire. Some of the main lines'd have a watchman out there to make sure it was all right. He would have maybe more than one trestle to look after, and he'd go from one to the next, dependin' on his schedule. He would live in his shack out there along the track. That's where he kept his supplies and his whiskey. And his dog was always with him, 'cause it was a lonesome job.

Well, whenever he'd be goin' from one trestle to another, a lot of times that dog would jump a rabbit, and he'd be a-runnin' that rabbit. The watchman didn't have time to wait, but he knew that dog would track him to wherever he went. So, he'd head for shack number nine. That was his main shack, where he kept his whiskey. (Sings)

"Take me back to my shack number nine.

Take me back to my shack number nine.

There's a dog on my track,

And a quart in my shack.

Take me back to my shack number nine."

Bob W. You travel around quite a bit now, don't you?

Bill W. We go around West Virginia here, to Glenville and Jackson's Mill and places like that. We were over at the Vandalia Gathering one time, and Margo [Blevin] came up and said, "I need you fellers up there at Elkins to help me out [at the Augusta Heritage Workshops]. We need you to help us a-jammin'." That's been 16, 17, 18 years ago. Well, we got over there, and Margo said, "Boy, everything has been good. Why don't you just stay another week?" So we did. We had a big time, and everybody else did, too. We've been a-goin' back ever since.

HW. I was clogging, you know, while they played their tunes. That first year, I danced three hours for 'em, a-playin' their fiddles. Then, I hadda tell them, "This is too much!"

Bob W. Looking back, would you change anything?

HW. I had a good, happy childhood. A lot of my school-day friends are gone now. But what's left, we gather round every year, just a little piece from the old schoolhouse, and have a dinner. Everybody brings something. That's keepin' the old memories alive. The old things of life. It was rough enough livin', but we were used to it. We were happy as long as we had somethin' to eat and a few clothes on our back! And we've got our music now!

Bill W. We went back to playin' music before I retired. I found me a guitar, and we sounded better and better, and enjoyed it more and more, so we've played right on. That's all we've done for the last 15 years. Play, play, play. People will say, "When can I come over, and we'll play some music?" So we say, "Anytime you come, we'll drop anything we're doin', and we'll just play music, because that's our first concern. To play music!"

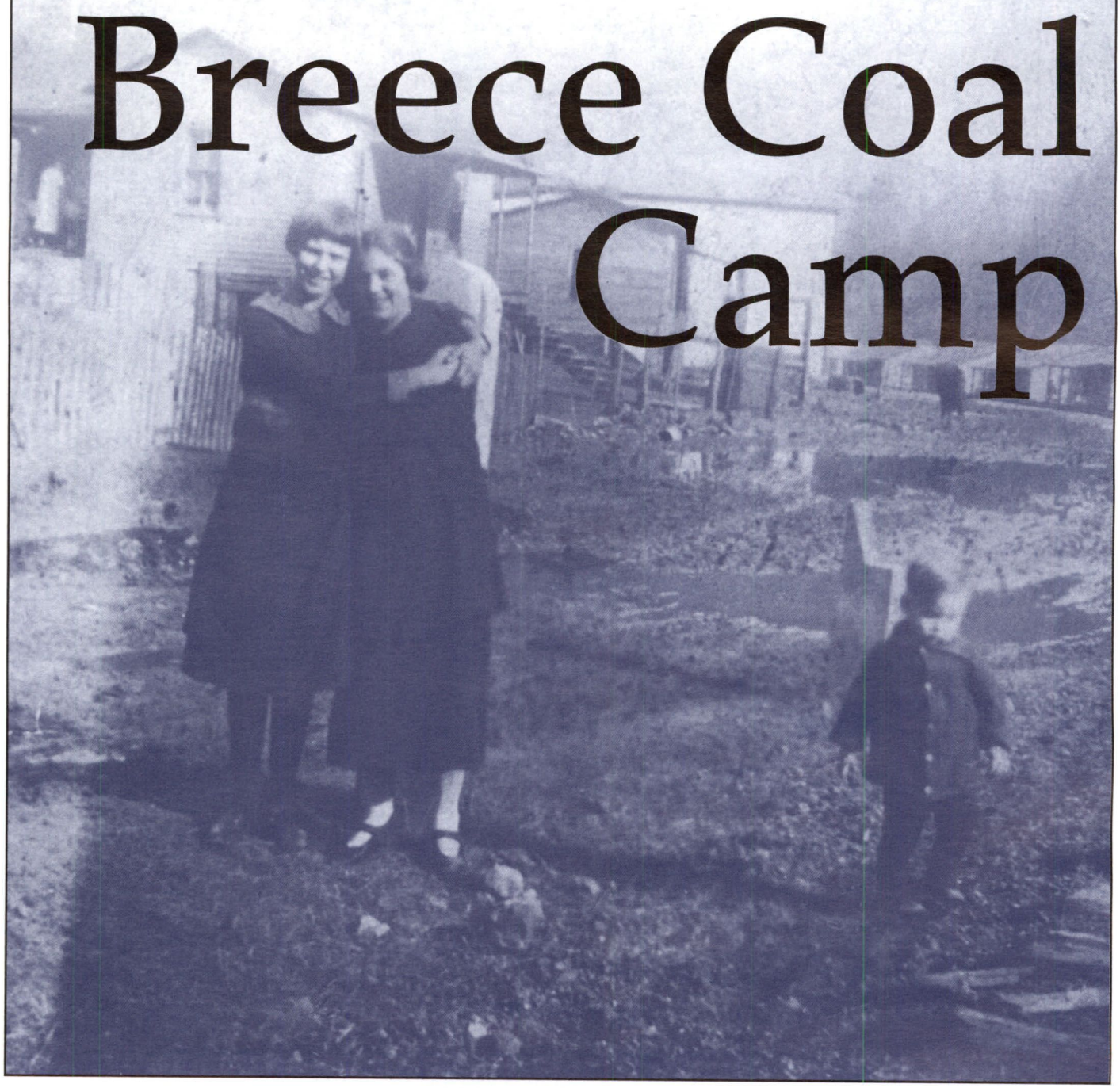
BOB WHITCOMB is a retired research scientist for the United States Department of Agriculture. Bob and his wife Judith have homes in Randolph County and in Patagonia, Arizona. They spend much of their free time collecting oral histories and are working on a book based on their interviews with Bill and Hazel Westfall. Bob's most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL was in our Summer 1998 issue.

Bill and Hazel are inveterate "jammers," known for their friendly and welcoming attitude toward other musicians. They are shown here during a recent Augusta Festival at Elkins City Park in Elkins with guitarist and GOLDENSEAL contributor Michael Kline at left, Anne Werbitsky from Toronto, Canada, at center, and an unidentified guitarist at right.

Memories of a Miner's Wife

Life in Breece Coal Camp

By Shirley Linville



Shirley Linville and her family lived in Breece Coal Camp, Boone County, from 1923 until 1928. Shirley is seen here at Breece in 1923, at center, with her sister-in-law Birdie Linville. Shirley's eldest son Curtis is at right.

There were lots of good people — and a lot of love — in Breece Coal Camp.

Those were the days. In 1923, my husband and I, along with two children, moved into a four-room house in Breece Coal Camp. My husband Spurgeon Linville worked at the Horse Creek Block Coal mine as a motorman. Some of the men loaded the coal into coal cars, and my husband would hook onto the cars with his motor on wheels, pull the cars to the tipple, and dump the coal into railroad cars.

Breece Coal Camp was located some 30 miles southwest of Charleston in Boone County on Big Horse Creek at the mouth of Dog Hollow. We had all of the "luxuries" that people had in the coal camps of the 1920's. This included no electric — we used oil lamps for light. No gas — we used coal for cooking and heating. No running water — we carried our water from an overflowing well for drinking and cooking. We carried our water from the creek for bathing, washing clothes, and scrubbing the coal soot off the wooden floors. No inside toilet — our toilets were holes dug in the ground, away from the house and not too close to our neighbor's place. The holes were covered usually by a wooden structure that could be moved when the hole got full, and you had to dig another one. Since we didn't have access to store-bought toilet paper, the newspaper bought each Sunday served this purpose, along with our used Sears and Roebuck catalogs.

There were 52 houses in Breece Coal Camp that stayed full about all the time. When one family moved out, another would move in almost immediately. Most everyone traded at the company store. You could get an advance on your husband's wages that he got every two weeks by getting scrip from the paymaster that was only good at the company store. These advances were then deducted from your husband's weekly earnings on payday. Some women would be at the company store every morning to get what their husbands made the previous day. When payday came around, some families would get nothing, as they had taken it all in advances. You then had the more ambitious women who saved every penny they could and sometimes took in other people's washing and ironing, since most of the miners wore white shirts on their days off, to help their husband provide for their families.

On Saturday mornings, you could see 10 or more men in their white shirts sitting on the railroad tracks talking, but you noticed when they started to get up, they rose very slowly due to back problems most of them experienced from working in the low coal. To this day when I go out shopping and I see a man bent in the lower part of the back, I know he is either a miner or has been one.

There were lots of good people — and a lot of love — in Breece Coal Camp. Most of the men and women were happy and got along well. When the children got into fights, the parents always blamed the other child for starting it. When the girls got into fights, they would pull hair and slap each other and then run home. The boys would fistfight and stand their ground, but when one was losing, he would usually run a short ways and then start throwing rocks at the other boy. When the kids did get into fights, they were back playing with each other within a couple of hours.

There were no telephones in the camp, but lots of gossip. Sometimes you could see four or five women on the railroad tracks telling each other what had happened in their end of the camp.

There were not any public buildings in Breece Coal Camp, but there was one old, unoccupied house where we held Sunday school and church. The public buildings were in the upper coal camp called

Shirley Linville today at her home in Danville, Boone County. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Families were close, and life was good at Breece, as Shirley recalls. Here, Shirley's sister Ruby May Merrill poses for a picture with Shirley's daughter Birdie, at left, and son Curtis. Breece Coal Camp houses are visible in the background in this 1927 photograph.

Morrisvale Coal Camp owned by the Horse Creek Block Coal Company. The Morrisvale Camp had gas and electric, but the houses were older than at Breece. The Morrisvale Camp also had a doctor's office, state police headquarters, company store, telephone, and a clubhouse.

In 1911, a man named George Breece, who lived in Charleston, came to Boone County to open a mine. He stopped at a friend's house who was a mine superintendent for Warner Block Coal Company. After a couple of days at his friend's house, he decided to go up Dog Hollow to see if he could find coal. He didn't find any coal but did find plenty of virgin timber. He decided right then to move the timber out of Dog Hollow and built the first house in an area that became known as Breece. By 1916, there was a store, clubhouse, church, schoolhouse, Odd Fellows lodge, a post office named Mistletoe, and lots of three-room houses. On August 9, 1916, at 8:00 in the morning, it started to rain, and by 12:00 noon Breece lumber camp was completely washed away. This ended the George Breece lumber job.

In 1917, World War I was upon us and business had started to boom. Horse Creek Block Coal Company was already in progress and was hiring men of any color or race. The company started building houses for Breece Coal Camp on land owned by Boone County Land Company. It didn't take long to build the houses or to fill them up with good, courteous people who would ask you if you needed help caring for your children, or if you needed something from the store. Most of all, they were just good neighbors.

To my surprise, my friend Vertie Griffith Barker, who I had went to school with five years earlier, moved into the fifth house below us, along with her husband and baby daughter Nellie. This was a joyful moment for both of us to

Shirley and Spurgeon Linville raised a large family which eventually included eight sons and one daughter. The family is seen here in Ohio in 1932, four years after they moved from Breece. From left, the children are Jimmy, Jack, Junior, Birdie, and Curtis.

We had people that were extravagant and ambitious. People were kind, respectful, and showed love and concern for one another.

meet again and to talk about our school days.

We didn't have any daily paper in our camp, but a man named Dan Cabell got the *Grit*, *Cincinnati Post*, and *Chicago Tribune* papers on Saturday evening and started selling them early Sunday morning. My husband would buy all three papers, and we would have a lot of good reading on Sundays.

Monday was sort of a special day in the coal camp. On Monday morning, the Sunday papers would go into our outside toilets or privies. Monday was also wash day. We washed the clothes in large tubs of water on washboards. We hung them on a clothesline to dry. How good they would smell after drying in the sunshine and fresh air.

We always had time after the clothes were done to go into the field and pick a mess of wild greens to cook for supper. One woman would watch the children while two would pick three bags of greens — one for each. There wasn't any space in the camp to raise a vegetable garden, so on Monday mornings we three women would watch for a teenage boy named Ronald Sigmon to come riding into the camp on his horse, loaded with fresh vegetables. The three of us would buy all he had. Then the three of us — Brookie Powell, Esta Miller, and myself — would build a fire in our four-burner coal stoves and put on a pot of pinto beans to eat along with our wilted lettuce and green onions that we had bought from Ronald.

Our biggest event each month was when a back peddler would come to the camp with a big suitcase on his back and a small one in his hand. The large one usually contained clothes, and the small one had jewelry such as pins, beads, rings, bracelets, and pencils. This was the bag I liked best.

We had good days and bad days in the camps. We had lots of sick children with what we called summer complaint. The children would get feverish, vomit, and have loose bowels. Some of the older people would get sick with it and die.

We had several events the years we lived in Breece Coal Camp. On October 7, 1924, George Williams shot and killed Everette Chandler. On September 11, 1925, Johnny Williams got hurt working on the Warner Block tipple and died on the way to the hospital. Some people got dog bit, some got snake bit, but that was life in the camps.

By 1928, rumor had it that the Horse Creek Block mine had dug all the coal out of the hill. This meant that the men would have to look for another job in another coal camp.

For us, living in Breece Coal Camp were the days when life seemed a lot simpler. We had people of different races, color, and nationalities. We had people that were extravagant and ambitious. People were kind, respectful, and showed love and concern for one another. In those days, people trusted each other. Hardly anyone ever locked the doors to their house unless they were leaving for a few days, and then they would tell a neighbor where the key was in case someone needed to get in. It was a time when the doctor made house calls and everyone showed up for church on Sunday morning. It was a time when a mother washed her baby's diapers and hung them out to dry.

Though it seems those days are gone forever, I say, "Hail to the West Virginia miner, and keep West Virginia going."

At 96 years of age, Shirley remains cheerful and active. Here, she reviews some of the many photographs on display in her home. Of her nine children, six served in the military, and four are still living. She has 11 grandchildren, 17 great-grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. Photograph by Michael Keller.

SHIRLEY LINVILLE was born Shirley May in 1905 in rural Logan County. She married Spurgeon Linville in 1921 and moved to Breece Coal Camp in 1923. Later, Shirley and her family moved briefly to Ohio, returning to Logan County in 1932. She now lives in Danville, Boone County, where she stays active with quilting projects and taking care of others, including her younger sister. At age 96, Shirley is thought to be the oldest person to ever write an article for GOLDENSEAL. This is her first contribution but, she hopes, not her last.

"A Good People Doing a Good Thing"

Pinch Reunion Reaches 100

By George Daugherty

Summer in West Virginia is not complete without its reunions. There are literally hundreds of them across the state during this season, but none is more unique — or older — than the Pinch Reunion. Celebrating its 100th anniversary this August, it is held at Pinch, a quiet community located up the Elk River about 10 miles above Charleston.

While most summer reunions draw together particular family, school, military, or church groups, the Pinch Reunion is a community gathering open to everyone. It features the necessary elements of food, fellowship, and fun important to most successful reunions, but the Pinch Reunion boasts other unusual features, as well, which have made it a magnet for West Virginia political figures, writers, musicians, and community and religious leaders for the past 100 years.

Shortly after the beginning of the 20th century, William W. Wertz, then a young man of 22, and a group of former school classmates decided that they wanted to establish one weekend each year when they could meet and renew old friendships. They hoped that this yearly reunion would raise the religious, educational, and civic standards of the community. The first gathering took place in 1902. In 1905, the Pinch Reunion Association purchased a wooded cove near Pinch called Rockwood Glen to hold their reunions. In 1912, Burton Pierson was given $300 to construct a large pavilion on the site to serve as a permanent home for many of the reunion activities. Mr. Pierson supplied all of the labor and materials.

Good food makes a good reunion. Here, attendees at the Pinch Reunion in Pinch, Kanawha County, prepare to "dig in" at the 1988 gathering. The 100th Pinch Reunion is planned this summer. Photograph courtesy of the Charleston Newspapers.

The "Wigwam," as it is known, still stands; its ample stage area and bench seating remain the hub of activity at each reunion.

Over the past century, the Pinch Reunion has seen the advent of the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, woman suffrage, television, penicillin, the hard road, man walking on the moon, and the computer age. It has survived World War I, World War II, the Great Depression, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Desert Storm. It has honored veterans repeatedly, as recently as last year.

Among the more unique reunion features has been the inclusion of debates held each year on topics of current interest. Some of these have included "That the Pen is Mightier Than the Sword," "That the Right of Suffrage Should Be Extended to Women," "That the Horse is More Useful Than the Automobile," and "That the Hard Road is More Important Than the Railroad."

They hoped that this yearly reunion would raise the religious, educational, and civic standards of the community.

Music has always been an integral part of the reunion, and the range of musical styles included have reflected the broad interests of those in attendance, from traditional folk and country music to opera and brass bands. For many years, an old-time fiddlers' contest was held; it was revived three years ago as the "Maynor's of Elkview Fiddlin' Mike Humphreys Fiddle Contest." Many prominent bluegrass and country artists have performed at the reunion over the years, and this tradition continues. Recently, the patriotic band concerts have been revived on Sunday afternoon featuring the Charleston Metro Band.

William W. Wertz was a four-time mayor of Charleston, as well as a judge. Judge Wertz presided over the reunion for 50 years, and then turned the reins over to Pearl Matheny Rogers who presided for the next 27 years. Mrs. Rogers' daughter Libby Rogers Squire has been at the helm for the past 23 years.

Judge William W. Wertz, four-term mayor of Charleston, was the founder of the Pinch Reunion. He organized the first gathering in 1902 along with many other community leaders including Vernon and Oney Jarrett; W.P. Slack; D.R. Jarrett; Morgan Matheny; A.J. Nichols; George G. Reynolds; Rosa Barger; Minnie G. Slack; Elizabeth and Chloe Goodal; Elsa Clark; Pitt, Will, and Wilbur Morris; Ward Morris; W.F. Shirley; Whiston Hughes; Bud Farrell; George Acree; Andrew Boggs; Lula Gatchel; George Thumm; Racie Allen; Ted Lipscomb; Wes Odell; and many others.

The late George and Emma "Ninnie" Matheny, the parents of Pearl Matheny Rogers, lived in a beautiful homeplace next to the reunion grounds. For many years, they supplied a wonderful home-cooked meal on Sunday to family, friends, and visiting dignitaries. U.S. Senators, governors, and local business, political, and religious leaders were regular beneficiaries of their hospitality.

Pearl was born in the shadow of the Wigwam 86 years ago. She has served in virtually every role in the reunion at some point, and is still its guiding force as "president emeritus." As a tiny child, she remembers going to the spring to bring water to her mother and standing on a box as the official "automatic" dishwasher for the Sunday meal. Her mother would kill the chickens, churn the butter, make buttermilk, and prepare vegetables from the garden, as well as make homemade bread. Pearl particularly remembers Governor William A. MacCorkle's fondness for buttermilk, and U.S. Senator Chapman Revercomb's wife Sarah's fondness for the homemade bread. Pearl's father and mother spent weeks in preparation for the event, including meticulously mowing the grass and whitewashing the tree trunks. As Pearl grew older, her mother would permit her to go to the reunion grounds where five cents would buy a Coca-Cola, and 10 cents a balloon and candy.

Pearl's cousin was Elizabeth Matheny Wertz, wife of the Judge. She was affectionately known as Aunt Bibby. Aunt Bibby and her friends would attend reunions in their finest outfits, including parasols which were for "show" and not for "blow." Many times they would stay overnight, which meant that the children got to sleep on the floor. This was no hardship for Pearl, however, and she was compensated for her inconvenience by getting to try on the beautiful hats of Aunt Bibby and her friends.

As time passed, Pearl was told by "Uncle Judge" Wertz that she was old enough to take part in the reunion debates. Her first topic was "The Pen is Mightier Than the Sword." She was coached by Dr. Shirkey, lawyer Guy Stone, Andrew Boggs, and Vernon Jarrett, who taught her how to argue; they said she had a natural talent.

So that the young people might have a bigger part in the reunion, it was decided to have a literary contest on Saturday morning. Young men and women were coached during the early years by Aunt Minnie Slack, Rosa Barker, Mrs. A.C. Dixon, and Miss Florence Reynolds. Pearl recollects Aunt Minnie drilling her and the other children on elocution and proper delivery. Pearl's first effort was "The Highwayman," and she did not win the first prize. Under Aunt Minnie's year-long tutelage, however, Pearl later mastered "Ma and Her Checkbook," and won the first-prize desk donated by Woodrum's Home Outfitting. She still has the desk in her home today. Businesses from all over Kanawha County donated prizes, and every child who competed got a prize of some sort.

One year, my cousin Lillian Agnew convinced my mother that I was old enough to compete; she taught me "Little Boy Blue," to my mother's chagrin. Lillian assured "Miss Ruth," the worried mother, that she would prompt me from the front row to avoid catastrophe. During the competition, fear set in, and soon Cousin Lillian's voice was

Rockwood Glen in 1908. This beautiful piece of land was purchased in 1905 as the permanent home of the Pinch Reunion. Photograph courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

heard more clearly — and more often — than that of her terrified student. I was rewarded only with a pair of jacks, which I considered a girl's prize, instead of the eight-cell flashlight which I had lusted after.

Pearl remembers a young couple seen to "moon," glassy-eyed, at each other under the beech tree, to the amusement of everyone. One of her fondest memories is seeing the same couple under the same beech tree 50 years later, still in

Author George Daugherty inspects the stage of the "Wigwam" — the center of reunion activities — on a recent visit. The structure was built in 1912 by Burton Pierson at a cost of $300. Photograph by Michael Keller.

More About Pinch

Now a quiet, residential community along the Pinch-Quick Road, the Kanawha County village of Pinch was once a prosperous oil boomtown. Early in the 20th century, nearly 1,000 oil and gas wells were dug in the hills between Pinch and Blue Creek making that section of Kanawha County one of the top oil-producing regions in the country. The Pinch oil fields reached their productive peak in 1917 and 1918.

The name Pinch is a shortened form of Pinch Gut and dates back to pioneer times when, according to local lore, a group of white hunters were trapped in a creek bed and were nearly starved to death by a hostile band of Native Americans. The term "gut" was occasionally used to describe a small stream, and held a double meaning in this case for some years.

After several changes, the name Pinch was finally taken in about 1918.

A book about the history of towns along the Elk River was published last year by the Elk-Blue Creek Historical Society. The 505-page hardbound book is the second volume of local genealogy and history published by the group, and includes extensive information about families and towns "Up Elk River." *Elk River Communities: Kanawha County, Volume 2* includes several pages of information about Pinch including 25 pages of reprinted bulletins from the Pinch Reunion from 1902 till 1926.

Copies of *Elk River Communities* are available at several local businesses along the Elk River, or through the Historical Society at P.O. Box 649, Elkview, WV 25071; phone (304)965-5016.

Poster for entertainment at the 99th Pinch Reunion, held last year.

love, and celebrating their golden wedding anniversary. Clearly, emotion, as well as intellectual pursuits, have always been an integral part of the reunion.

For many years, one of the highlights of the weekend was the "greasy pole." George Matheny, the superintendent of grounds, would strip a tree, grease it to utmost slickness, and erect it in a prominent place on the reunion grounds. Judge Wertz would then climb a ladder and place a five-dollar bill on top of the pole. Any young man or woman who could climb to the top and bring down the five-dollar bill got to keep it. Every three or four years, someone would be successful, achieving local hero status as well as becoming extremely affluent among his or her childhood friends. Over the years, this was one of the most exciting events of the weekend.

Pearl Matheny Rogers today. Pearl was president of the Pinch Reunion for 27 years, and now serves as "president emeritus." Photograph by Michael Keller.

Good food has traditionally been served by local charitable and community groups in stands on the reunion grounds. This year it will be served from a brand-new stand constructed by Charles England, superintendent of grounds. I remember attending my first reunion at age five. Being provided with money by my Aunt Florence Reynolds, I recall eating so many hot dogs that severe stomach distress and illness ensued. In other words, I overate and threw up, just like you're supposed to do as a kid on reunion weekend. A few years later, while the greasy pole was being climbed, I was invited to sit next to some local boys and ended up in a yellow-jackets' nest. The problem was compounded by the fact that I was wearing short pants, as was the custom in those days. I made several frantic trips around the reunion grounds and interrupted the proceedings before I was caught and partially relieved of my problems. For each of these adventures, I am still "kidded" to this day.

It was a tradition for many years for gubernatorial candidates to debate on Sunday, with a promise that the winner would return the following year. In 1952, the Democratic candidate William C. Marland and Rush D. Holt, the Republican candidate, refused to debate each other during the entire campaign [see "The Hard Road Home: Governor William Casey Marland," by Rod Hoylman; Fall 1998]. However, they honored the Pinch Reunion by agreeing to make non-political talks. The reunion was the only occasion on which they shared a platform during the long campaign, and both men made perhaps the best "non-political" political talks of their careers, to the great glee of the audience.

For many years, Judge Wertz would greet all political candidates

100th Pinch Reunion

August 10-12, 2001

Reunion president Libby Squire will ring in the 100th celebration of the Pinch Reunion on Friday evening, August 10, at 7:00 p.m. Following the traditional singing of "The West Virginia Hills," the reunion will host a fiddling contest sponsored by Maynor's of Elkview. The "Fiddlin' Mike Humphreys Old-Time Fiddling Contest," named after the local fiddling legend, is expected to draw many of the top musicians from the area, vying for $500 in prize money.

The Pinch Reunion continues on Saturday, August 11, with a battle of the bands and another $500 in prize money. The competition will go on all day long, depending on the number of entries. In the evening, a concert is scheduled beginning at 7:00 p.m. featuring music by the Hillbreed and the James Harrison Family.

On Sunday, August 12, an interdenominational church service will be held at 9:00 a.m., with the Reverend Jim Gunnoe and special music by Bob Carte. A busy afternoon is planned beginning at 1:00 p.m. featuring a stellar and diverse lineup of West Virginia performers, all of whom will be presented with "The Sammy" award. Performers will include tenor Roger Lucas, soprano Deborah Lucas, guitar flatpickers Robin Kessinger and Robert Shafer, and singer/guitarist Roger Bryant. Performing vocal and piano selections will be Pinch native Dr. Timothy Paul Shafer and his family, followed by a special performance of "Orange Blossom Special" by fiddler Buddy Griffin.

The highlight of the Sunday activities will be the presentation of "The Sammy" to U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd at 2:30 p.m., followed by an address from Senator Byrd.

MICHAEL KELLER

The 100th Pinch Reunion will conclude with a patriotic concert by the Charleston Metro Band, beginning at 4:00 p.m., followed by the singing of "God Be With You Till We Meet Again."

All activities will take place at the Pinch Reunion grounds, located about one mile off of U.S. Route 119 across the Elk River from Elkview. For more information, call (304)965-3545 or 965-3084.

on Sunday, and they were usually given an opportunity to speak. Judge was a noted Republican, and former sheriff "Cousin" Mick Slack, a red-hot Democrat, would sit in the audience in a white suit and Panama hat, and he and the Judge would trade humorous remarks, to the delight of the audience. Knowledgeable politicians knew that if those two liked you, regardless of your politics, you would likely do well with the "Up Elk River" electorate. Judge Wertz passed away in 1956.

Judge Wertz's widow, the beloved Aunt Bibby, regularly attended the reunion until her death in 1991, and epitomized the spirit of the reunion with her grace and dignity.

Pearl was recently asked why it is important to preserve the reunion and keep its record of consecutive years' celebration intact. She reflected upon the year of the great flood, which killed so many people. The community was stricken with sorrow and sadness. She and others took a lantern, went to the Wigwam, opened the reunion with

Candidates for governor have traditionally made the Pinch Reunion a stop on the campaign trail. Here, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Charlotte Pritt chats with George Daugherty during her 1996 visit to the reunion. Photographer unknown.

Elizabeth Matheny Wertz, known to her friends as "Aunt Bibby," was a popular figure at the Pinch Reunion for many years. She attended with her husband, reunion founder Judge W.W. Wertz, until his death in 1956, and continued to attend regularly until her death in 1991. Photographer and date unknown.

"The West Virginia Hills," said the "Lord's Prayer," sang "God Be With You Till We Meet Again," dismissed the reunion, and then went about aiding the grieving families. Thus, the tradition was preserved.

Pearl emphasizes that the reunion is based on the love of God, family, and country. She recalls that the first Elk District High School graduation was held at the Wigwam, and that Ed Jarrett's father's wedding was at the Wigwam, along with many other weddings and funerals. She notes that John and Zora Hafer, and later Ed and Henry Hafer and their wives Mary and Audrey, supplied loud speakers and chairs and helped in so many other ways over the years. She recalls that the O.V. Smith family — local storekeepers — and Larry Maynor — a local merchant — as well as other local businesses, have been such great supporters through the years. They saw — and continue to see — that the Reunion is strong in spirit and good works, and that the local citizens want it to continue to be an enduring institution.

She remembers operatic singer Mildred Jarrett Templeton singing so beautifully, and the performances of magician Al Snyder. She recalls Audrey Gross and the Reverend Ross Culpepper and his lovely wife Ollie who played the accordion when other musical instruments were not available. One of Pearl's fondest memories is of Ollie playing patriotic music and walking up and down the aisle leading the singing the year America won World War II. She remembers Thelma Fouty decorating the platform with freshly cut pine, and someone playing taps from the graveyard on the hill honoring those who gave their lives in our wars. Pearl adds, "My memories of the reunion are all good. We are a good people doing a good thing. It is important to our people that it must not end."

During the last quarter-century's reunions, Pearl's daughter Libby, the current president, recalls bees' nests in the rafters, and having to oust a family of snakes from the old oak tree stump on the hill before the grass could be cut. She is also very familiar with the strategic maneuvering required to keep the band instruments away from the leaks in the old tin roof, which has now been repaired.

When Pearl informed Libby in 1977 that it was time for her to "get under the load" — and that the reunion committee had also decided that I would serve as vice-president — Libby and I were absolutely certain of our commitment to the reunion, and equally respectful of the responsibility. Translating the traditions of the past and configuring them into activities

Current reunion president Libby Rogers Squire attended her first Pinch Reunion as a baby in 1947. She is circled in this crowd shot from 1955; photograph by the *Charleston Daily Mail*. Note the ladies' hats.

that would appeal to a new generation would be our challenge.

Libby's father, the late Earl Rogers, carried her to her first reunion on a pillow in 1947, and she hasn't missed one since. She brought her daughter Anne, now the recording secretary of the reunion, in 1971; in 2000, Anne's young son Ethan attended for the first time. Libby and Anne, like the Judge and Pearl before them, have served in many capacities.

Libby explains the success of the reunion during the years that she and I have been in charge by pointing out the natural division of responsibility. "George has the talent and the stage presence, the personality, and the gift of entertaining," she says. "I am incredibly tenacious and very good at organization and making lists so that the 'nuts and bolts stuff' gets done. Together, we've been a great team."

Libby vividly remembers 1978, her first year as president. Since it was an election year, candidates for local, state, and national offices were straggling in before and during the Sunday afternoon program. Having grown up in the reunion, as well as in a politically-oriented family, she was well-schooled in the importance of decorum and protocol. Unfortunately, those were also the days when women's hairstyles were quite formalized; it had been the practice to cover the back of the platform with plastic so that the hairdos were safe from the slightest breeze. It was quite hot that Sunday, and the platform was very crowded. There we were — Libby and I — sweating, nervous, knowing that the "president emeritus" was chuckling to herself quietly. Much to our chagrin, in our rush we had forgotten to bring a writing tablet or paper of any kind. We were reduced to writing notes on a stray paper plate, hoping fervently that we would manage to introduce the speakers in their proper order. Needless to say, it was the last year for the plastic, and the lovely breeze now reminds us of how very inexperienced we were.

Libby is heard to say almost every year that this reunion has been "the best one ever." And every year it's true. Some years bring tears — and smiles — as we remember the loss of a precious friend. (The beloved Dr. A.C. "Junior" Dixon passed on this year.) Some years, the program is geared to a current event, leaving everyone emotionally energized to go out and try to make a difference. But every year, you're glad you came.

"The Sammy" Award

A reunion highlight is the presentation of the honorary Good Samaritan Award for a Lifetime of Service to Mankind — "The Sammy," for short. Here, West Virginia Secretary of State Ken Hechler, left, presents "The Sammy" to Navy Cross winner William Sanders while reunion president Libby Squire looks on. The first awards were presented to newspaper editor Jim Comstock and Marion McQuade, the founder of Grandparents' Day. Subsequent awards have been given to "Woody" Williams, West Virginia's last surviving Medal of Honor winner; Colonel Ruby Bradley, the most decorated woman in the history of the United States Armed Forces; the O.V. Smith & sons family; the Larry Maynor family; the Hafer family; Edith and Ed Brewer, editors of Elk River history books; and Ken Hechler, author of *The Bridge at Remagen*. Others include author Denise Giardina; Ruth Snyder, founder of Apple Harvest Festival; storyteller Bonnie Collins; Randy Barnes; the Lilly Family Reunion; Ruby Morris Musselman; Audrey Clark Gross; Charles England; Arden Cogar, international woodchopping champion; Connie Strickland, coach of the Herbert Hoover champion quiz team; Paul Mace, war hero; Dr. A.C. Dixon, Jr.; Al Frey, legendary band leader; Orville Proctor; the Rev. James Gunnoe; Buddy Griffin and the Griffin Family; and Dr. Anne Olofson.

GEORGE DAUGHERTY is a trial lawyer from Elkview. As an entertainer, he is known as "The Earl of Elkview" and performs American and Irish songs and stories, with a special emphasis on West Virginia. He is also an actor, theatrical producer, director, and songwriter. George has been involved with the Pinch Reunion since 1936. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Historic Coalwood

By Stuart McGehee

"There was a breeze coming down the hollow. The dogwoods low on the mountain waved as if asking me to look at their glory. They were like white bouquets God had stuck in the stands of ancient oaks and hickories, glistening green in their own new growth. I heard something and looked up and down the road for its source. It wasn't just a single sound. It was Coalwood, moving, talking, humming its eternal symphony of life, work, duty, and job. I stood alone on the side of the road and listened to my town play its industrial song."

—from *Rocket Boys*, by Homer Hickam, Jr.
(copyright 1998 by Delacorte Press)

The phenomenal success of author Homer Hickam, Jr.'s, autobiographical *Rocket Boys*, and its subsequent film version "October Sky," has drawn renewed attention to the southern West Virginia coalfields. Fans of the popular coming-of-age book and movie enthusiastically make the arduous trek down Routes 52 and 16 to visit the McDowell County hollow where the remarkable story took place. This new interest invites a closer look into the unique and fascinating world of Coalwood, a historic West Virginia coal company town.

Coalwood was the proud product of George LaFayette Carter, one of the few natives of Appalachia to strike it rich when industrialization came to the mountains shortly after the Civil War. Carter was born in 1857 in Hillsville, Carroll County, Virginia, the eldest of nine children of a disabled Confederate veteran. Young Carter learned the bookkeepers' trade. He married well, as they say, wedding his storekeeper boss' daughter. A shrewd, natural businessman, Carter invested wisely and became a conduit for New York capital eager to develop the booming turn-of-the-century Appalachian industrial economy. Holdings in timber, coal, iron, and railroad stock soon made Carter a key player in the evolving industrial development of the rugged and remote mountains. From his Johnson City, Tennessee, base, the private and unpretentious en-

trepreneur expanded into Kentucky and southwest Virginia, purchasing banks, newspapers, mills, and factories. His charitable and philanthropic contributions helped build East Tennessee Normal School, now East Tennessee State University.

In 1905, Carter bought some 20,000 acres in McDowell County's "smokeless" coalfields, and began constructing an industrial community out of the wilderness. He named it Coalwood. The low-vola-

Coalwood was a thriving mining town for much of the 20th century. It was founded in 1902 as a company town for the Carter Coal & Coke Company, and transformed a tranquil hollow in rural McDowell County into a productive industrial center. Coalwood is shown here, circa 1910, with its busy tipple at center and company houses in the distance. Photograph courtesy of the Eastern Regional Coal Archives, hereafter ERCA.

Coalwood founder George L. Carter, date unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University.

Early company houses in Coalwood, circa 1910. Photograph courtesy of ERCA.

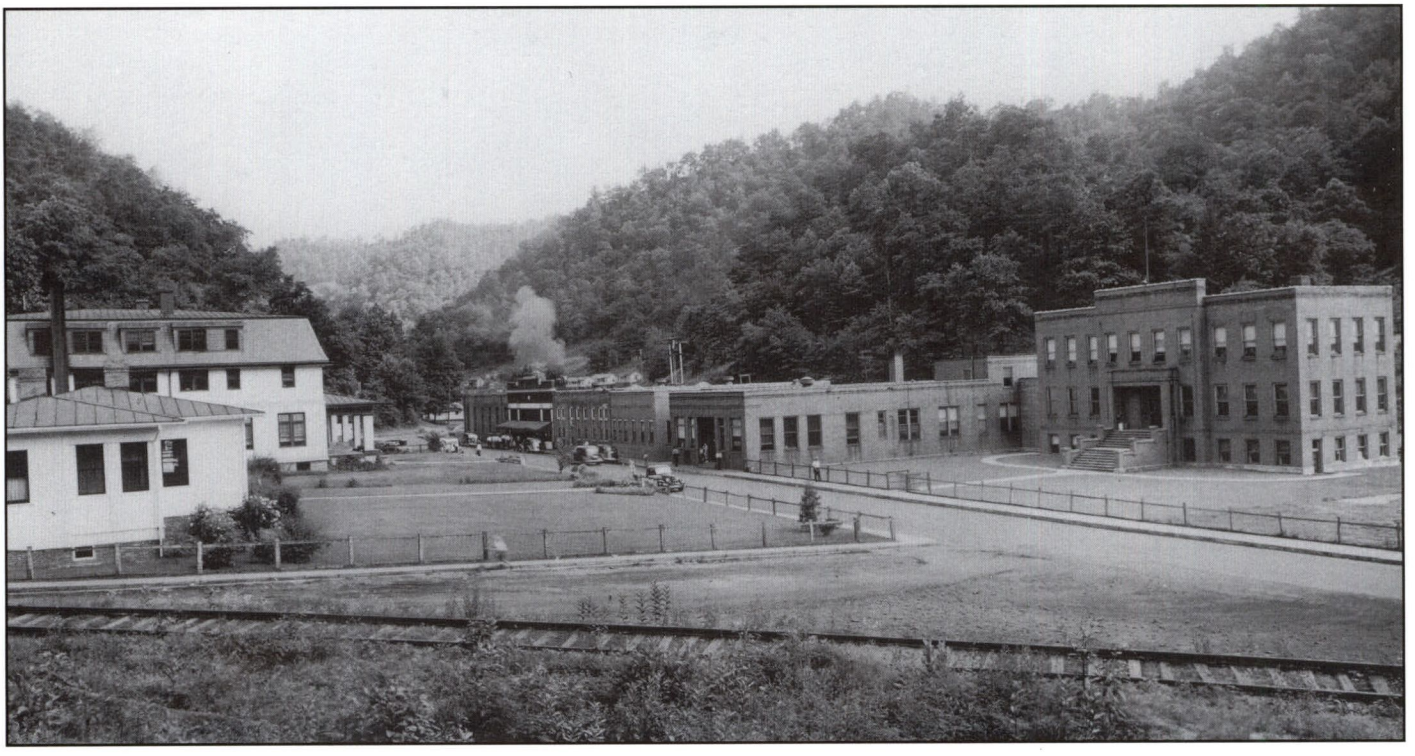
George L. Carter employed a mostly white, racially homogenous workforce during the early years of his Coalwood operation. This practice changed in later years after Carter sold the company. Pictured here are the Coalwood machine shop and supply department crews, circa 1910. They are, from left, Nick Weaver, F.G. Spracher, Blaine Goad, Dan DeHaven, Ed Faulkner, Earl Schrader, Sherman Burton, Ted Worrell, and C.M. Fitzgerald. Photograph courtesy of ERCA.

tile, low-sulphur #4 Pocahontas coal seam there was the world standard for metallurgical and steam fuel. The seam stood some six feet high, but required a heroic, 600-foot-deep shaft to reach the heart of the mineable reserves. Carter built a wooden tipple, company houses, offices, and a store to supply the needs of his workers; the nearest community of size was Welch, an arduous and circuitous 10 miles away across several devilish ridges.

The first coal came up the shaft in 1905, and by 1907, Coalwood mined some 200,000 tons annually. By 1915, nearly one million tons ran out along the Norfolk & Western rails each year from Coalwood, through Bluefield, to Lambert's Point at Norfolk, Virginia. There, the N&W maintained a huge dockside port facility for shipping Coalwood's product — what the railroad proudly termed "fuel satisfaction" — around the world. The abundant and economical energy from the southern West Virginia coalfields helped transform America from a rural, agricultural country into the urban industrial giant of the 20th century. Carter Coal & Coke Company, as the Coalwood operation was called at the time, trailed only the huge conglomerates of the Pocahontas Fuel Company and United States Coal & Coke in southern West Virginia in terms of productivity and employment. Soon, Carter opened a second operation at Caretta, across

Coalwood Girl Scout troop during the 1920's. In the front row, from left, are Mildred McGraw, Ruth Berlin, Toinette Stutso, Mary Stutso, and Mary Sue Fleenor. In the back row are scout leader Corrine McPhail, Ada McDonald, Marjory Hardin, and Lucille Chatfield. Photograph courtesy of West Virginia State Archives, Carol DeHaven Collection, hereafter WVSA.

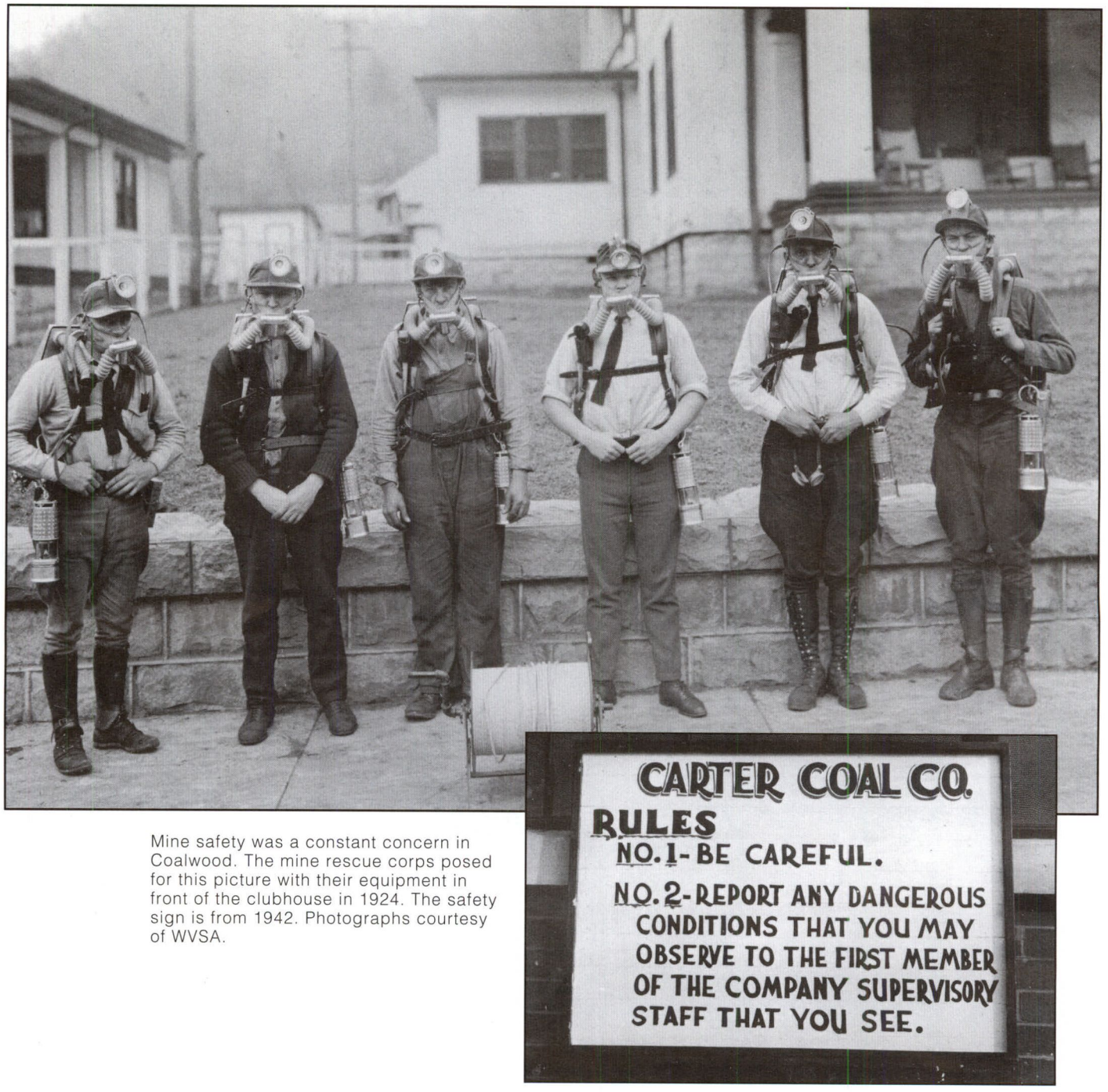
Downtown Coalwood as it appeared in 1936. On the left is the clubhouse and doctors and nurses' quarters. Across the street are the coal company headquarters and company store. Most of these structures still stand in Coalwood. Photograph courtesy of ERCA.



the mountain from Coalwood proper.

The 1917 *West Virginia Bureau of Mines Annual Report* included a fascinating snapshot portrait of Carter's creation. According to the report, 500 miners at six separate mine openings produced over half-a-million tons of coal, hauled by 12 mules and numerous electric gathering locomotives. Carter and his family lived in the clubhouse in "downtown" Coalwood, and he personally supervised the largely white, racially homogeneous workforce.

In 1922, the wily coal operator sold Coalwood outright to Pittsburgh Consolidation Coal Company for some $17 million. Consolidation Coal rebuilt the already productive community, constructing huge, steel-girder preparation plants, and the by-now-familiar company office and store, doctor's and nurses' quarters, distinctive clubhouse, public swimming pool, and hundreds of new houses with indoor plumbing and electricity. The aggressive Pennsylvania company attracted hundreds of new miners and their families, especially African Americans and European immigrants, diversifying the remote and close-knit company community. At its peak, Coalwood was home to some 2,000 southern West Virginians. Their ethnic origins were listed in company records as "Bohemian, Croatian, Syrian, Slavish, and American."



Mine safety was a constant concern in Coalwood. The mine rescue corps posed for this picture with their equipment in front of the clubhouse in 1924. The safety sign is from 1942. Photographs courtesy of WVSA.

By the 1930's, Coalwood was recognized nationally as a "model town," where management invested wisely in the quality of life of its employees and reaped the benefits in increased productivity and relative labor contentment. The *Washington Post* noted in December 1936, "It is a town in remarkable contrast to surrounding villages where squalor and poverty are the word. With houses painted and surrounded by flower gardens and lawns, it looks more like an alpine village than the begrimed coal towns of most of America." There was never a major disaster — morbidly calculated by the industry as the loss of five or more lives at one time — in Coalwood, yet roof falls and haulage accidents resulted in some 50 deaths in the town's first 75 years. In West Virginia's often ghastly and macabre coal industry, this was considered an acceptable rate of "tons produced per fatal accident." African American coal miners were grossly over-represented among the injuries, reflecting the reality of life underground in racially segregated America.

In 1933, Consolidation Coal defaulted on its annual payments to Carter, and the property reverted to the original coal operator. Although George L. Carter died in 1936, his son James W. Carter continued as general superintendent of what became the Olga Coal Company in 1946. Phenomenal productivity continued as the operation

How Hickam Got Away

By Ken Sullivan

I'm the editor who turned down the Homer Hickam story.

I remember that very well, as you may imagine in light of subsequent events. It was several years ago. I was then editor of GOLDENSEAL, sitting in the seat now occupied by John Lilly.

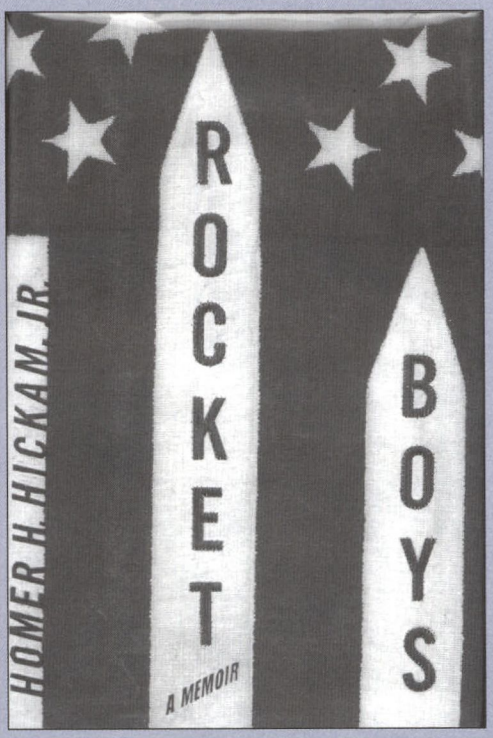
My buddy Mike Burdiss came in one day with a clipping from the Smithsonian's *Air & Space* magazine. It was a short, first-person reminiscence from a NASA engineer who had gotten his start as a boy shooting up homemade rockets in McDowell County.

Mike was a lobbyist for the United Mine Workers at the time. He said that he had found every kind of person from the West Virginia coalfields but a rocket scientist, and now he had found one of them, too. He thought we should expand the idea into a GOLDENSEAL article.

I told Mike I didn't think Homer Hickam had much of a story. At least not a story of the sort this magazine publishes, focusing on the folklife and traditional culture of West Virginia.

I was thinking about the rockets and not the boy — and after his best-selling books and a Hollywood movie, I'm now prepared to reconsider.

Homer Hickam, in case you don't read anything but GOLDENSEAL and the Bible, wrote the best-selling memoir *Rocket Boys* (1998) and its sequel *The Coalwood Way* (2000). *Rocket Boys* was made into the 1999 movie "October Sky" starring Chris Cooper, Laura Dern, and others. These works tell the story of Hickam and three buddies at War High



School who perfected some pretty amazing rockets, and went on to win the 1960 National Science Fair. Mostly, it is the story of tenacity and triumph under less-than-advantageous circumstances at the end of the coal-camp era and the beginning of the Space Age.

Hickam has won the hearts of West Virginians. I realized that fact after recommending *Rocket Boys* to Dick Gould, a Charleston businessman. Dick had thanked me several times, and recently told me of recommending "October Sky" to a friend of his. This fellow called Dick back late one evening to thank him, having just returned from the movie in tears. These are both hard-nosed, practical, middle-aged men of the world. Neither is a starry-eyed romantic, so far as I know, but each was profoundly moved. Their reaction was typical of the way West Virginians have taken to Homer Hickam.

Partly it is because Hickam is a good writer with a good story. (At least he is a good writer of autobiography; his 1999 science fiction novel *Back to the Moon* impresses me as pretty lame.) After all, it is the quality of Hickam's writing and the tale he tells which kept him on the *New York Times* best-seller list for months and months. There aren't enough West Virginians alive to account for that kind of literary lift. Plainly, plenty of others are reading Hickam's stuff in addition to the home folks.

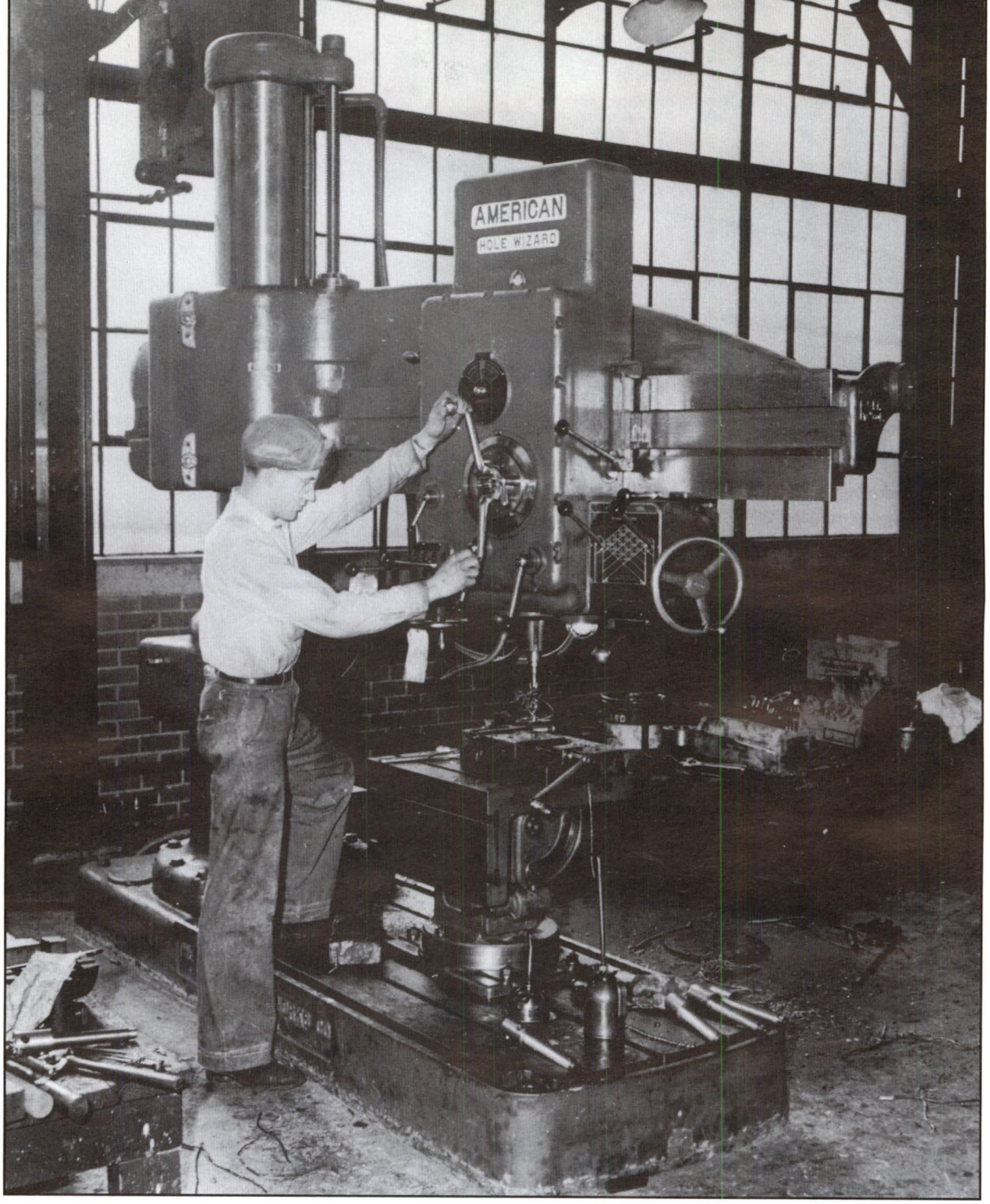
The real attraction to us, I think, is simple affirmation — a validation of the worth of who we are and what we are. Hickam reminds us that great stories may be woven in Coalwood, West Virginia, just as well as in any other place. All the world remains a stage, and our little corner of it is as good as any.

That affirmation is what moved my friend Dick and his friend, I think, and me, as well. And probably that's what brought Mike Burdiss to my door in the first place.

Mike visited me again awhile back — and yes, he reminded me of the big one that got away. He was kind enough not to point out the line in the *Rocket Boys* introduction where Hickam says that it was the *Air & Space* article that "gained the attention that led to this book."

Well, good. It gained someone's attention, anyway, and I'm glad that it did.

KEN SULLIVAN edited GOLDENSEAL magazine from 1979 until 1997. Ken holds a Ph.D. in industrial history from the University of Pittsburgh. He is executive director of the West Virginia Humanities Council.

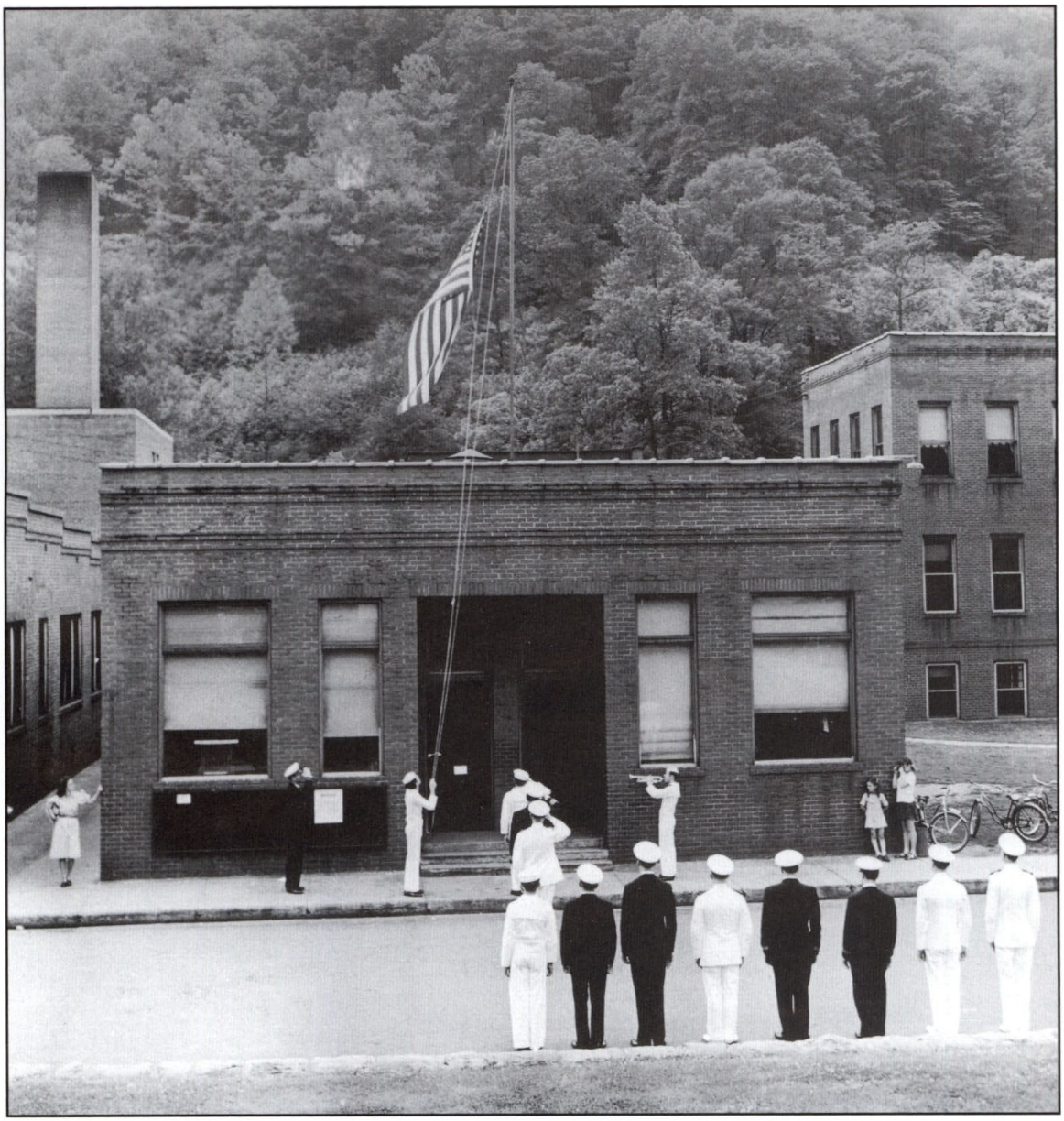


A machinist operates a radial drill in the Coalwood central machine shop in 1943. The machine shop, and the off-the-record cooperation of company machinists, played a central role in young Homer Hickam, Jr.'s, subsequent rocket-building experiments. Photograph courtesy of WVSA.

employed 1,300 workers, utilized mechanical loading machines underground, and averaged a staggering two million tons per year throughout World War II. The centrality of the coal industry to American economic development was starkly illustrated when the United States Navy briefly took over the operation of the facility during the industry's post-war slump and attendant labor unrest.

Coalwood and its sister town Caretta remained highly productive coal operations well into the late 20th century. Around 500 miners — many of whom now took advantage of better roads to live elsewhere and commute to Coalwood — produced on average around one million tons annually. 1983's Pocahontas Coalfield Centennial Celebration featured a lengthy television program on Coalwood, including a fascinating interview with retired foreman Homer Hickam, Sr. Eventually, however, mechanization, petroleum competition for the global energy market, and the exploitation of more easily mineable coal seams in faraway Wyoming made Coalwood increasingly less profitable. The LTV steel corporation, which owned Olga by 1980, shut down the mine in 1986, laid off the remaining 200 workers, and sold the houses to the employees who remained in what rapidly became a bedroom community for other mines still running southern West Virginia coal.

The once-thriving model coal town now entered into a period of



After World War II, the federal government placed the Coalwood mines under the supervision of the United States Navy, underscoring the importance of the Coalwood operation to the nation's economic stability and security interests. On June 30, 1947, at 12:01 p.m., the Navy returned possession and control of Coalwood to the company. They marked the occasion with a military ceremony, shown here. Photograph courtesy of WVSA.

relative uncertainty. The failure of the unincorporated community's public service system in 1989 resulted in an investigatory Appalshop film, "Ten Miles to Fetch Water," and its superintendent was convicted of environmental violations and sentenced to two years home confinement.

Recently, though, things seem to be looking up. Sparked in part by the notoriety of hometown author Homer Hickam, Jr., a renewed sense of pride has developed among former and current residents. Some 500 former Coalwood residents gather each year for a huge reunion in Hillsville in southwestern Virginia — the hometown of George L. Carter — to celebrate the close ties of family, community, and work which still unite them.

In 1991, the parent LTV corporation arranged for the company records, photographs, and other documents to be deposited in the Eastern Regional Coal Archives in the Craft Memorial Library in Bluefield, where they attract genealogists and coalfield historians alike. The payroll books alone tell a remarkable story: the story of Homer Hickam's Coalwood, of coal miners' West Virginia, and of hard-working Appalachian America.

STUART McGEHEE holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Virginia. He serves as chair of the history department at West Virginia State College in Institute, is archivist at the Eastern Regional Coal Archives in Bluefield, and is the former chair of the West Virginia Archives and History Commission. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL was in our Fall 1998 issue.

Coalwood Today

Text and photographs by Mark Crabtree

Signs welcome visitors to Coalwood, McDowell County. The town has experienced renewed interest in recent years from both within and outside the community.

As a fan of the book *Rocket Boys* and the movie "October Sky," I was curious about the town of Coalwood. In March 1999, I drove to McDowell County to see what Coalwood is like today, and spent a fascinating day exploring the area and photographing many of the buildings and places featured in the book and movie. After returning home, I put some of the pictures I had taken, along with a bit of commentary, together as a Web site on the Internet.

When GOLDENSEAL editor John Lilly requested something about present-day Coalwood for this issue of the magazine, I decided to ask *Rocket Boys* author Homer Hickam, Jr., for his thoughts about his hometown today. Here is Mr. Hickam's eloquent response:

The Country Corner convenience store serves as a local grocery, restaurant, gas station, meeting place, and unofficial tourist bureau. Ernest "Red" Carroll, father of original Rocket Boy Jimmy Carroll, drives the truck seen here with the handwritten advertisement etched in dust.

"When I first returned to Coalwood after an absence of many years, I was devastated to find my beloved hometown in what I considered terrible condition. The coal mine, for which my father had dedicated his life, was gone — the deep tunnels allowed to fill with water, the tipple above carted away by the federal government in a well-meaning but foolish program to remove every vestige of mining operations from the terrain. In doing so, they had, in effect, removed my heritage, as well. From a population that once neared 2,000, only a few hundred people were left.

Red Carroll shows the overgrown site of Cape Coalwood in March 1999. Since that time, work has been done to reconstruct the Rocket Boys' former launch site, and a feasibility study has been undertaken to designate the area as a new state park.

Many houses, once well-tended by proud families, were abandoned and disheveled. The Coalwood school, where my friends and I spent happy, productive years being educated by fine teachers, had been burned down by vandals. The company store was closed, the windows boarded over. The post office, where once the doctor and dentist also maintained their offices, had been torn down. The clubhouse, the center of Coalwood's social activities, was closed and crumbling. The old machine shops — where once the rockets of the Big Creek Missile Agency were built — were shuttered, the machines inside long since sold off. At Cape Coalwood itself, I found a forest — the tailings that made up the slack dump that we used as our rocket range had been hauled away. A people I'd once known as energetic and productive were mostly gone. Where once three times a day, a long line of men emerged from our misty hollows to go to work at the mine, now there was nothing but silence. My heart ached for all that had been lost.

But then I began to look a little closer. The people who had remained behind were still the same proud people I'd once known. There were much fewer of them now, but they were still determined to make something good of their lives. After my book *Rocket Boys* and the movie "October Sky" came out, the townspeople formed the Cape Coalwood Restoration Association and began to restore not only our old range, but also as much of the town as they could. Every year, two celebrations are held: Rocket Boys Day in June, the October Sky Festival in October. Coalwood people are also working hard to rebuild the infrastructure not only of Coalwood, but all of McDowell County. I am so proud of the people of Coalwood. They were — and are still — the best people in the world." —Homer Hickam, Jr.

If you'd like to visit Coalwood yourself, the unofficial information clearing house and meeting place is the Country Corner store on State Route 16 in Coalwood; phone (304)297-5102. Peggy Blevins of the Cape Coalwood Restoration Association can provide information by e-mail at peggyblevins@hotmail.com.

Rocket Boys Day will be held June 30, 2001. The bigger event, the October Sky Festival, will take place October 6, 2001. Contact the Country Corner store or Peggy Blevins for information.

Homer Hickam's personal Web site at www.homerhickam.com has a wealth of information including some nice historical photos, Coalwood festival information, and details about his upcoming third book on Coalwood, *Sky of Stone*, due out in October.

Apple Computer has a Web site with some Coalwood photos and "live action" interviews with the original Rocket Boys and other people featured in Hickam's Coalwood books. Go to the Apple Learning Interchange at http://ali.apple.com/events/coalwood/.

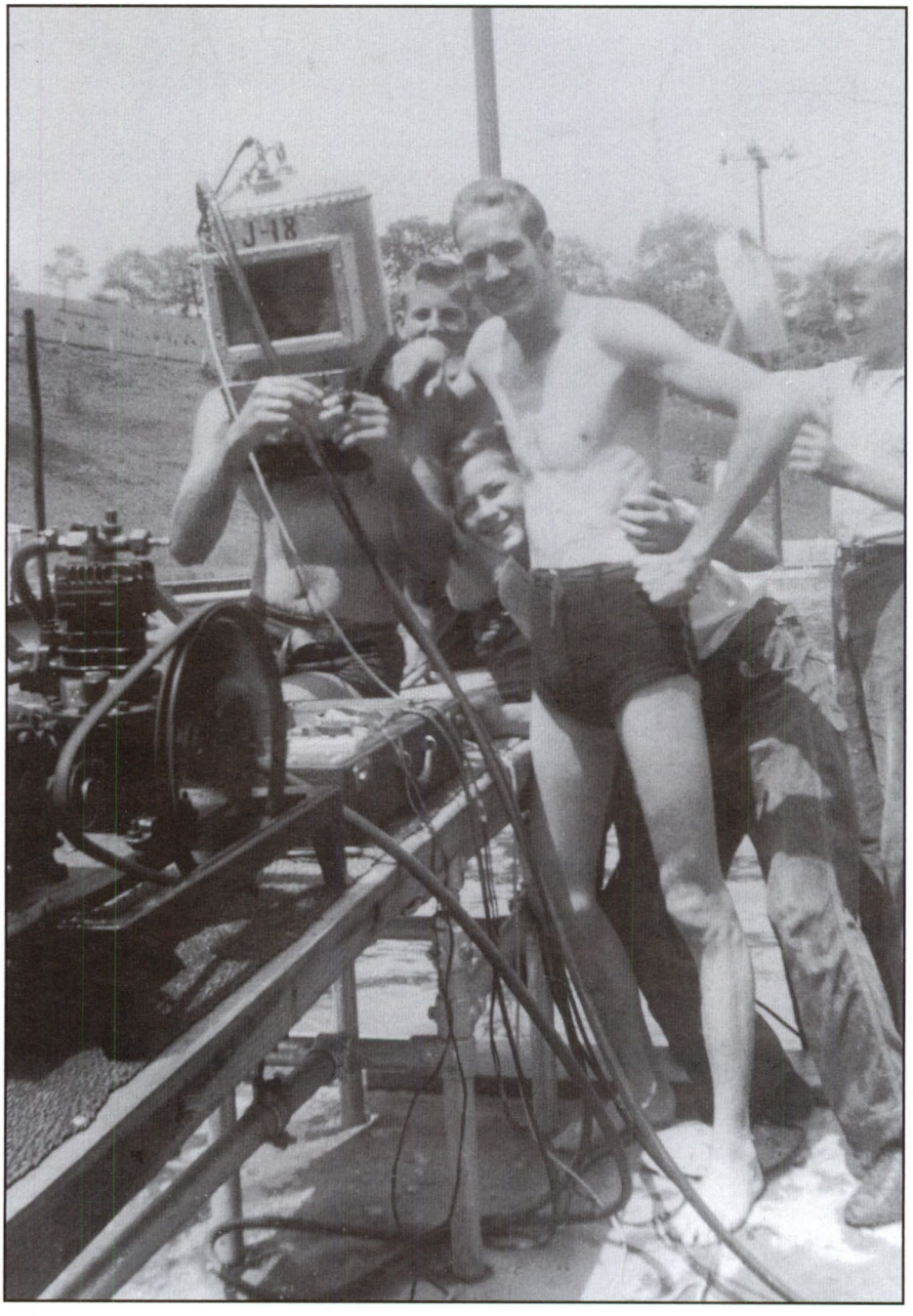
To see the Web site I built after my first visit to Coalwood, go to http://homepage.mac.com/crabtree/coalwoodp1.htm.

MARK CRABTREE is a professional photographer living in Morgantown. He is a regular GOLDENSEAL contributor.

Rubble from a demolished home is burned in Coalwood. The house was purchased by a neighbor who has plans to use the lot.

By James Warrick

Helmet



Jim Warrick and buddies with a homemade diving helmet in 1938.

Boys will be boys. And from Newell to Coalwood, West Virginia boys have always found inventive ways to expand their horizons. Twenty-five years before the youth of McDowell County touched the sky with their experimental rocketry, some pioneering young men in the northern reaches of Hancock County looked for adventure below the waterline.

The transition of the Newell area from farmland to an industrial complex began with the dawn of the 20th century. The first step was to build a much-needed bridge from East Liverpool, Ohio, over the river to Newell. Work started on June 2, 1904, and was finished 13 months later. The first crossing was made on July 4, 1905.

In 1905, work began on the giant Homer Laughlin china plant. It was 664-feet long and 300-feet wide, and was designed to employ 1,200 workers. In 1907, it was completed and went into production as the largest plant of its kind in the world [see "The Homer

Boys

Laughlin China Company," by Jack Welch; Spring 1985].

In 1906, there were only a few isolated homes standing in Newell, but by 1907, about 130 homes had been built, and the population stood at 700.

I was born there in 1918. My parents purchased a home at 5th and Jefferson streets. My friend Dick Martin lived four houses down on the same side of the street. The grade school was located one block away, and Dick and I started school there at the same time. As we got older, we roamed all over town and through the woods behind our homes.

In the summertime, we would find a lot of boys and girls at the Ohio River taking a dip. It was only a short walk from Jefferson Street, down past plant No. 6, across the railroad tracks, to a nice stretch of riverbank. Though I never learned to swim, I always enjoyed going down to the river.

Sometime around 1934, I read an article in the Pittsburgh paper about two boys making a diving helmet. Boy, oh boy, what an idea! I told Dick about it, and we both decided it was a good project to work on.

In Dick's backyard, there was an old chicken house that he had turned into a shanty. This was the place where we we talked about life, exchanged ideas, and went to hide from the world. This was the place where we would start our work on the helmet.

You can't build something if you don't have the materials, so we set out to find the parts we would need. The first thing we needed was a large hot-water tank to use as the body of our helmet. Back in our days, these boiler tanks were quite common. As I remember, they were usually around five-feet high, made of rolled galvanized steel, and riveted every two inches or less where they came together.

On the top was a steel cap which was riveted on and had threaded holes for two 3/4" pipes. On the bottom, a round, convex piece of steel was riveted on.

So off we went, Dick and I, to try and find a discarded hot-water boiler. Try as we may, we didn't find anything the first day. Tired, hungry, and dirty, we went back to the shanty to talk over our situation and see where we should go the next day.

Dick Martin, left, and author Jim Warrick have been friends since their childhood in Newell, Hancock County, where they made their first diving helmet in 1934. They are shown here a few years later as young men preparing to ride motorcycles.

When school let out, we decided that we would go to the pottery dump [see "Wall of China: Recalling the Greatest Dump in the World," by Bob Barnett; Spring 1992]. There, half-hidden by pottery rejects, we found our hot-water tank. Although the tank must have blown up by the looks of the 12-inch gash in its side, it was just perfect for us. It was a job for us to carry that heavy monster home to the shanty, but we were bound and determined to start this project.

The next day, we measured and laid out the markings with a piece of white chalk where we had to cut. The overall length of the helmet was to be somewhere around 30 inches. We wanted to make this cut first so we could discard the rest of the tank.

By today's standards, this work would only take a

short time. But this was back in the '30's, at a time when we kids didn't have access to sophisticated tools. We did the cutting with a hacksaw blade, with a rag wrapped around one end to protect our hands. I can't really say how long it took us to cut everything, but if you had asked us when we were 15 years old, we would have said, "It took us forever."

Once the first cut was made and the armpits were cut out, we had to put something on the rough metal so that the weight of the helmet, with its sharp edges, didn't cut into our shoulders. We solved this problem by taking a garden hose, cutting it lengthwise, and slipping it on the edges. To make it even better, we took some sort of a padding material we had found and cut it into strips. By locating where the bolts would be, we hand-drilled each hole, and when all holes were drilled, we bolted the padding on.

The window was the hardest part to do, with hacksawing and making the window frame. When the frame was made, glass was cut to fit the opening, and was puttied in. Coat-hanger wire was criss-crossed over the glass to protect it and was secured to the window.

Two handles were bolted on, one on each side, just above the armpits. This made it easier to carry the helmet and to place it on the diver's head.

We then put a fitting on the top for the air hose. The other end of the long hose was attached to a hand-powered tire pump which was to be our oxygen supply. A hole was also drilled for an eye bolt to attach the safety line.

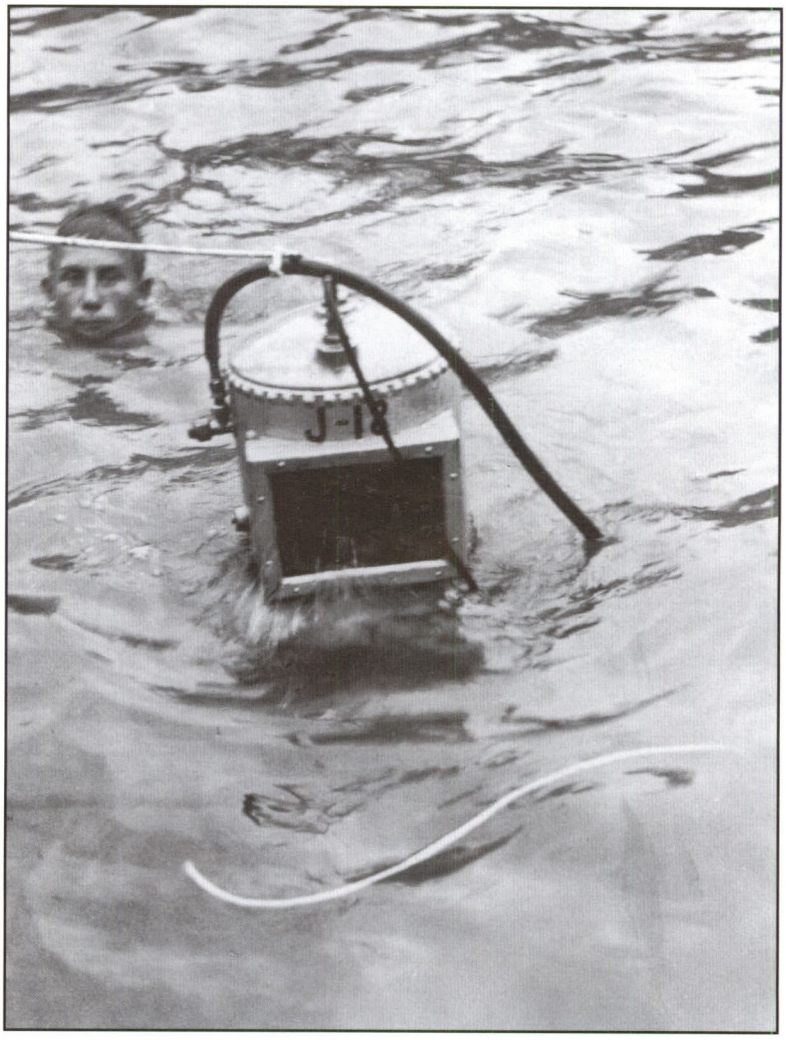
We found some silver or aluminum paint and gave the helmet a paint job. And for no reason that makes any sense, we marked it with the insignia, J-18.

By this time, all the other guys in the neighborhood knew about our project. It was a good thing that they were all "pumped up" about it, because we figured that we would need plenty of help operating that tire pump.

On the day of our first dive, a group of fellows followed Dick and me down past plant No. 6 to the Ohio River. I put the helmet on and waded out into the water. With the "pumper" pumping furiously, I attempted to submerge. I was embarrassed to discover that we had forgotten one minor detail — a helmet full of air wasn't about to sink without weights attached to it. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't go under. When Dick took his turn, he solved the problem by using rocks for weight. By trial and error, we soon learned just how much weight to carry.

We also learned that being the pumper was no easy job. It was exhausting to stand there, bent over, pumping and pumping with that little tire pump. When you were under water, it was easy to tell when the pumper was tiring. If he didn't pump fast enough, water began to rise into the helmet and cover your mouth. If it got to your nose, you would lift the helmet off your head and come up for air. Since everyone took turns diving and pumping, you could easily get back at the culprit when he dove.

After discussing our first dive, we



Jim Warrick takes the J-18 for a dive.

came up with several improvements. One — we needed weights on the helmet. And two — we needed a place where you could enter the water from above, not walk into it.

The closest place we could think of was at dam No. 8, several miles downriver from Newell. As long as there were no boats going through the lock, we could put the helmet on and go down a metal ladder that was imbedded into the concrete, which is what we did.

Things were much better now. The water was deeper, and the pumper knew not to fool around. On one of my dives, I took a hatchet along and chipped my initials into the concrete. The initials might still have been there, but the dam vanished long ago, making way for a larger dam downriver.

In 1935, my mother and I moved to Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, and I left my friends and the diving helmet behind. The next year, I was out of school and things were getting boring until I met a new friend by the name of Jim Rohm. I told him of the diving helmet, and he became very interested.

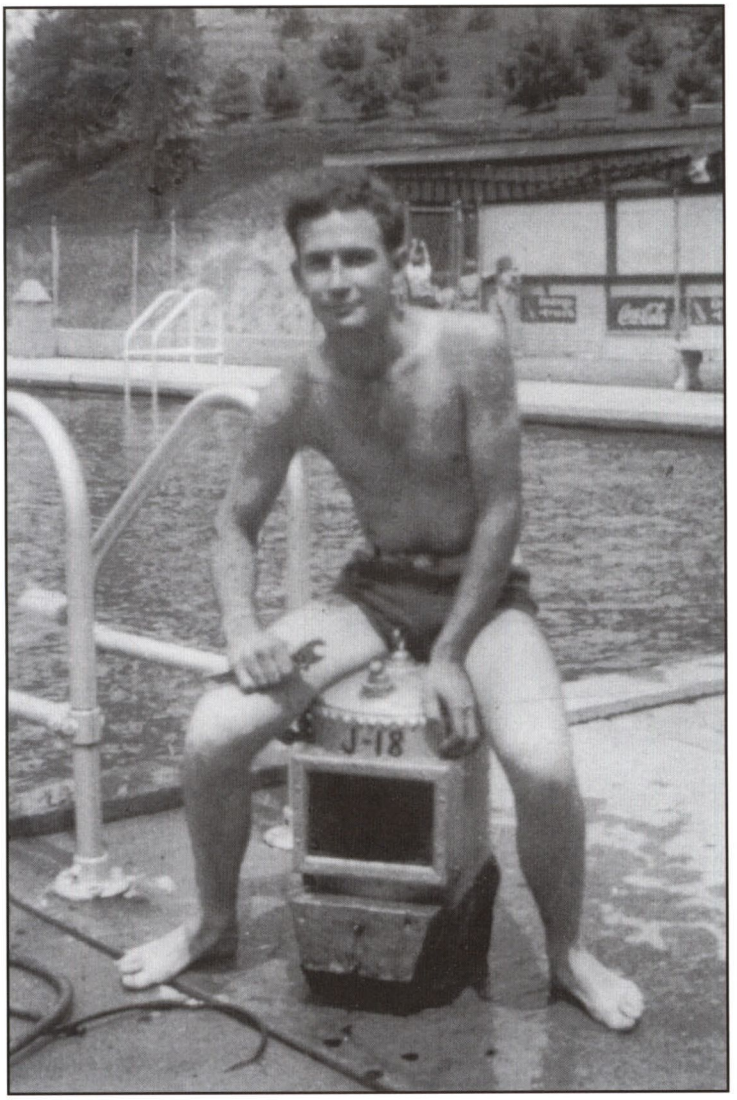
Later on, I worked at an auto dealership, and we were able to get the helmet cut out in a wink of an eye. The radio man at the dealership rigged up a two-way telephone system from the helmet to a control panel on shore. We now had underwater communications.

Jim delivered papers for the daily newspaper, so he asked the head man if he would donate "x-number" of pounds of babbitt to use as weights for the helmet, and he said yes. Babbitt was used to make type for the printing presses. We made a mold and melted the babbitt down and filled both molds equally. When they were cool, we drilled two holes in each piece, and two holes in the back and front of the helmet. We carried the weights to the diving place and then bolted them to the helmet.

No matter where we went, my friends and I always drew a crowd with the new, improved J-18. The helmet was such a hit in our town that it was eventually put on display in a downtown store window, along with some sunken treasure we found while diving in the area.

Dick doesn't remember what happened to the Newell helmet. The new helmet that Jim and I made was under the next-door neighbor's back porch when I went off to war, but it wasn't there when I returned home four years later.

I've kept my head above water ever since, but I'll never forget the fun we had diving in the J-18. I'll bet I am the only diver who could never swim a stroke.

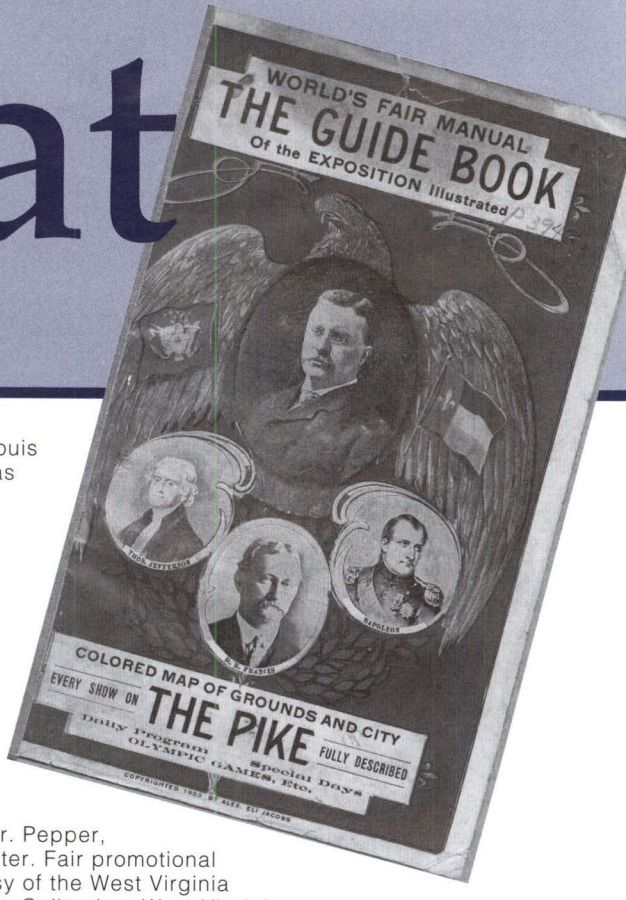


Jim Warrick, wrench in hand, poses with his second J-18 diving helmet at a swimming pool in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1938. All photographs in this article are of this second helmet; unfortunately, no photographs are known to exist of the original helmet made in Newell in 1934.

JAMES WARRICK was born in 1918 and was raised in Newell. His family moved to Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, when he was 17 years old. He flew cargo during World War II and, after the war, settled in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he still lives. Always handy with tools, he designed and built display materials for Slaymaker Lock company, built houses, and worked in fabricating and machine shops until his retirement at age 71. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

The World's Fair In a Rowboat

By W. Merle Watkins and Bill Watkins



The 1904 St. Louis World's Fair was an event of historic proportions. Among the modern wonders introduced or popularized at the fair were hot dogs, ice-cream cones, iced tea, cotton candy (called "fairy floss"), Dr. Pepper, and peanut butter. Fair promotional booklet courtesy of the West Virginia Regional History Collection, West Virginia University Libraries.

In the spring of 1904, stories of the size, wonders, and magnificence of the St. Louis World's Fair made their way over the whole country. Pictures and articles in the periodicals, advertising matter of the railroads and hotels involved, as well as educational pamphlets scattered by the Exposition Company, caused the thoughts of the nation to dwell more and more on the record-breaking World's Fair. It is a fact easily to be credited that in the heart of every person in this broad land, there existed a desire to behold the snow-white palaces erected on the Missouri plains — the wealthy, for display; the studious, for knowledge; the common people, to see the sights; the thief, for plunder. The motives may have been various. But, though many stayed away and gave excuses of indifference, if everyone honestly studied himself and put aside all considerations of expense and affectations of unarousable ennui, the fair was a magnet to the world.

So it was that the contagion reached my home in Grafton. The idea of a railroad excursion was distasteful to me. The uncertainty concerning accommodations and the stories of the hold-up schemes practiced upon the powerless public to a degree were discouraging. But from the moment the subject of an all-water trip was broached, all things seemed to fit right into the scheme to furnish us the most profitable and enjoyable summer of our lives.

The idea first suggested itself to some WVU students from Grafton who noticed the ease with which launches were run from Morgantown to Pittsburgh.

This is the story of my father W. Merle Watkins and his friend Charlie Shaw who rowed a small boat from Grafton more than 1,000 miles to Cairo, Illinois, in 1904, to attend the St. Louis World's Fair. Merle Watkins (1881-1958) lived in Grafton nearly all of his life. He was a graduate of WVU and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. A practicing lawyer, he also served as prosecuting attorney, mayor, state senator, and circuit judge. Charlie Shaw also attended school in West Virginia then entered government service and spent most of his career as a representative of the U.S. government in the Panama Canal Zone. A third friend named Davie Ramsay also started out on the trip, but opted out after some early mishaps in the journey.

The basis for this article is a handwritten journal put together shortly after the trip, along with excerpts from the trip log which my father kept while on the river. These verbatim sections from the journal and log are interspersed with my explanatory or narrative notes. This treatment allows us to focus on the West Virginia portions of the trip, while at the same time maintaining an overview of the entire remarkable journey. —Bill Watkins

W. Merle Watkins in 1902 at age 21, two years before he and friend Charlie Shaw took a rowboat from Grafton to the St. Louis World's Fair. Photograph by A.A. Rogers, Morgantown.

A half-dozen fellows might purchase a launch, and starting at Fairmont, run to St. Louis in two weeks. However, this was mere talking. The price of a launch was too much money to invest in one trip; the boat could never be brought back to Grafton after the trip, and would have to run the very doubtful chances of a sale.

Now I was a six-footer of the rapid-growing kind. About a year before, I had been taken by the physical-culture craze, and had just felt my muscles expand enough to make me eager to undergo a good, hard siege of physical training. How rowing would benefit the back and shoulders! Charlie Shaw, several years younger, possessed equal enthusiasm and grit enough for just such a trip. When the plan was suggested to him, he jumped at it. Never afterward did his ardor cool.

There was a third party concerned. Davie Ramsay liked the plan but could not easily enter into arrangements of which so little was planned out. He had already decided upon a voyage to Scotland to visit his birthplace, and a Scotchman does not change his mind. Still, he could not altogether let go of the trip, and entered into the plans with as much zest as either of us, even to the extent of going along on the first day's journey.

By the first of spring, we had made up our minds and decided to start out about the middle of May. Of course, it would not do to let the scheme be made public, for the members of the public are great scoffers, and we were not very sure of ourselves anyway.

A point in history was also an incentive. The old Ohio Valley pioneers used to start from Fort Pitt in their flatboats and thus drift out to the prairies. The romance connected with their experiences held a certain glamour for us.

Now it would be nice, even logical, to say that Shaw and I were experienced boat owners, and thus were counting on the use of a familiar craft for the challenge at hand. Such, however, was not the case.

We had to have a boat. What kind should we get? We wrote for catalogs. A good boat costs money. But we were going to the fair, and why should not a boat company look upon it as a good advertisement to exhibit a boat that had just survived a trip of 1,120 miles? It seemed plausible that they would,

Postcard of Grafton, circa 1910, shows the approximate spot where Merle Watkins and his crew launched their boat on May 23, 1904. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

and therefore we wrote them. Here is a sample of the letters:

May 1, 1904
Grafton, WV
———— Boat Company

Dear Sirs:

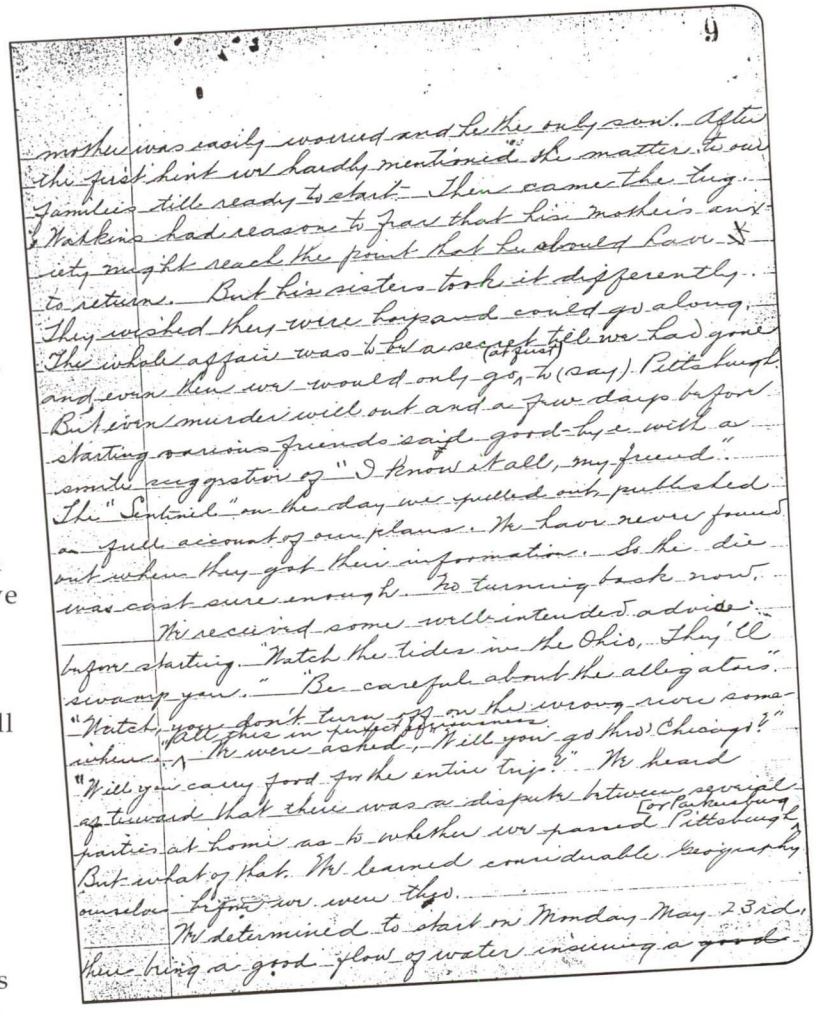
You furnish Charles Shaw and Merle Watkins with one of your Model "J" rowboats here in Grafton, and they will row it to St. Louis, and there turn it over to your exhibitors at the fair. Grafton is 153 miles up river from Pittsburgh. Both of us were born within 100 yards of the river, and either with raft, skiff, or skates have been on it for a large fraction of our lives. We are able to do this thing for we are both tall, strong fellows, and have an intense love for all sorts of athletics. You can inquire about us from any banker, preacher, the mayor, chief of police, or any businessman in town. If you furnish the boat free, we will take it to St. Louis, and you may use it for advertising any way you see fit. If we fail, we will pay you full price for the boat.

Yours truly,
Watkins and Shaw

But the boat companies did not see things this way, and so we bought a 15-foot, steel, double-ender fitted with two pairs of oars. It weighted about 150 pounds on the scales and something over a ton when you carried it. It was advertised not to leak, and did not until we put it into the water. This boat cost $29 plus extra oars and freight.

In spite of all, the boat ran well, promising a rate of six miles an hour, without current. Every day, we pulled to "get together" and to harden our hands.

Pittsburgh, 153 miles down the river, was our first objective. We would do that distance within six days. Fairmont, 22 miles the first day; Morgantown, 26 miles the second; thereafter, we could lay out our route a few days at a time. The first day would be the hardest for more reasons

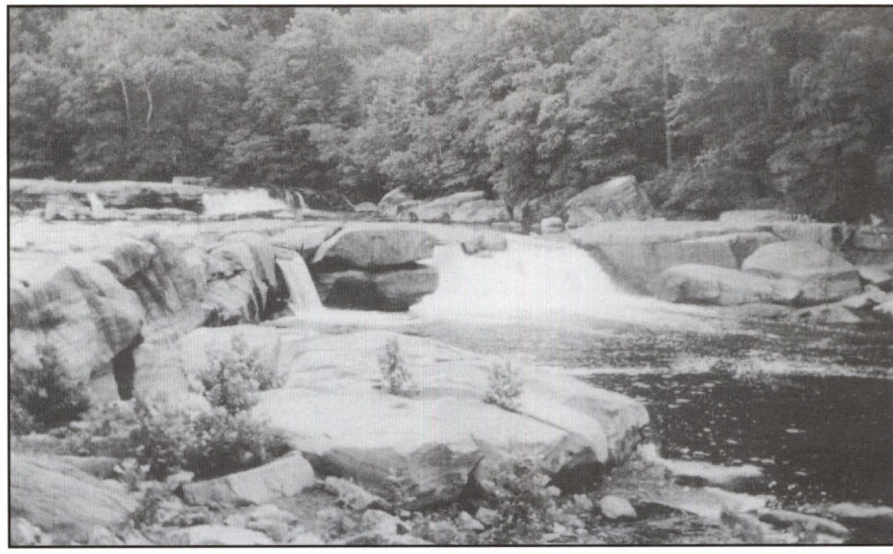


An excerpt from Merle Watkins' 63-page, handwritten journal about their river adventure. He writes, "We received some well-intentioned advice before starting. 'Watch the tides in the Ohio. They'll swamp you.' 'Be careful about the alligators.' 'Watch you don't turn off on the wrong river somewhere.' All this in perfect seriousness."

than one. Valley Falls and the narrow gorge extending for two miles below looked to be the hardest challenges of the whole trip. There was nothing to do but to carry the outfit around — "to make portage."

The ambitious crew and their new boat made an uneventful departure from friends and family in the Tygart Valley River as it passed through Grafton. As suggested above, the first big challenge arose at Valley Falls, less than 10 miles from Grafton.

The travelers very prudently pulled their boat out of the river above Valley Falls, and started portaging, using the railroad tracks as a path. As one might expect, the boat and supplies grew progressively heavier as the portage continued, and the decision was made to relaunch the boat before completely bypassing the rapids.



Valley Falls below Grafton, the site of misfortune for the travelers on the first day of their trip. Photograph courtesy of Bill Watkins.

May 23, 1904

12:30 p.m. Launched again after making second trip for goods. Mate [Shaw] shoots rapids. Captain [Watkins] and passenger [Ramsay] walk, carrying camera and grub. Passenger thinks boat can shoot with two, and descends bank to enter boat. Captain remains on bank with camera and one pair of oars. Attempting third and last shoot, the boat swamps. Shaw jumps out and tries to swim ashore. The swift current whirls him away from the rocks. Clad in a heavy flannel shirt, he is almost helpless but finally catches hold of the boat and is rescued by two men who pull out from Hammond in a skiff. What is left of the outfit is landed on the big rocks at the head of the island opposite the town where repairs are made, clothes dried, some new provisions obtained, and all rest up. The losses consist of all Shaw's extra clothing, all the grub except two jars peanut butter, one can pork and beans, and two tincups and buckets, besides, worst of all, one pair of oars and the rudder. Shaw was all-in after his fight for life. So we all rested till 3:00. Someone of the party, fearing the effect of the disaster upon us and as a fix for the others' spirits, said, "Well, we can't give it up now." It was the right word spoken, and in a moment, all were more determined than ever.

3:00 p.m. Make new start. Captain takes boat through shallows around Hammond. Is in light rain.

3:15 p.m. All aboard. Pass four islands. Find one lemon of lost grub. Recover one oar at Howell, picked up by a boy. Fruitless lookout for rest of lost items.

6:10 p.m. Arrived in Fairmont in good condition. Satisfied with first day's work, despite loss of one pair of oars. Will sleep at Uncle Croft's. Passenger returns by freight to Grafton.

Thus ends the first day of the voyage. Still ahead is the challenge of negotiating the locks and dams designed primarily for large sternwheelers and barges, and in general, survival on the river. Log excerpts from May 24, 1904, tell the story.

May 24, 1904

10:35 a.m. A bright morning. Hot. Make start from east side of river where we had hauled the boat up into a front lot the evening before.

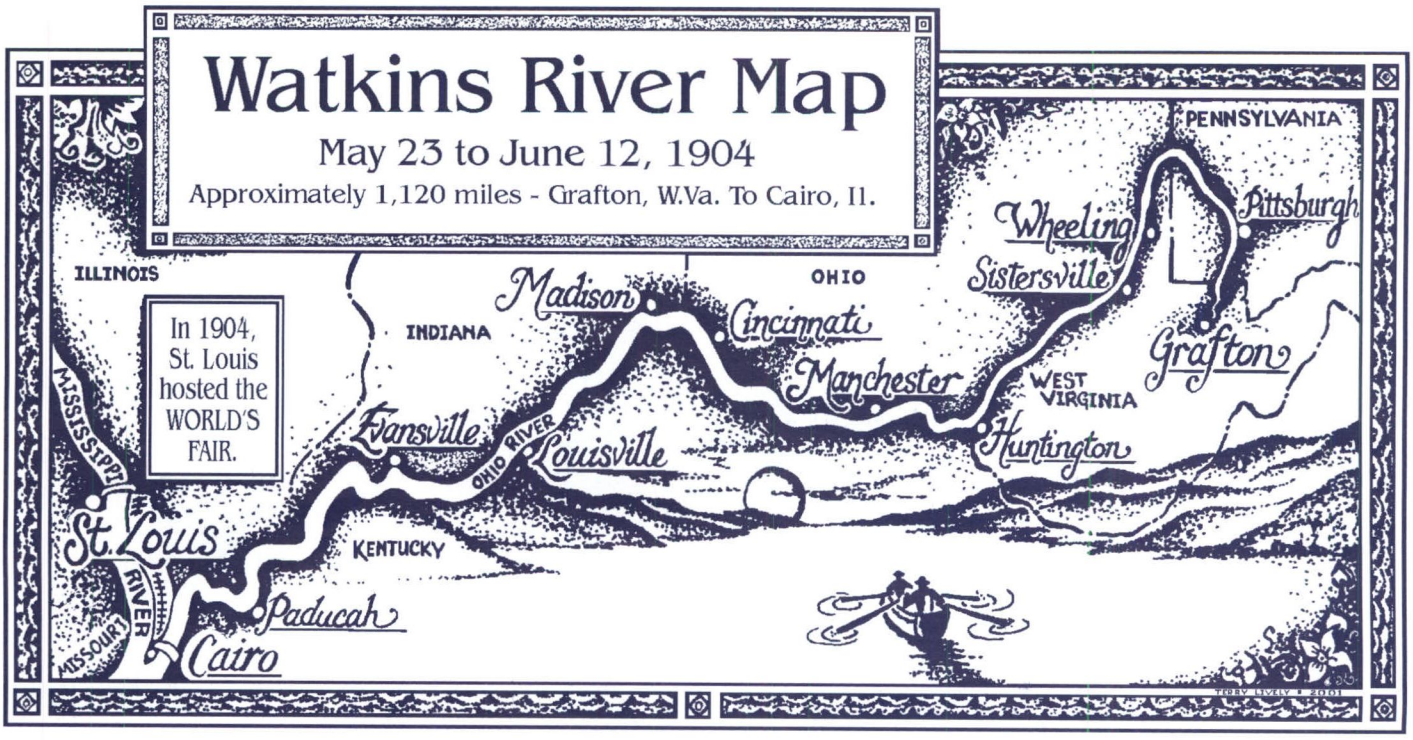
11:00 a.m. Arrive at Lock 15. Town of Hope. Dragged the boat around. Will try to have it put through the next one by bluff or flattery.

12:00 noon Pull in at the west bank of the river opposite the dirty coal town of Montana and eat dinner. Sun very hot. Rest an hour.

2:34 p.m. Lock 14. Go through like a top. We awake to our rights from U.S. [government] as a vessel on navigable waters. An old salt on government pump boat prophesies a 10-mile current in Ohio [River], and that our boat will ride the waves like a duck. Passed two boats and rode their swells nicely. Four little boats carry between Fairmont and Morgantown. Lockkeepers are good-natured set of fellows. Pleasant to pass time of day with them. We sign a blank at each lock — Kind of Craft: Skiff; Name: Cairo; Tons Burden: One-sixth; Captain: Watkins; From: Grafton; To: St. Louis; Cargo: Tinware and Breakfast Food.

3:45 p.m. Lock 13. Thirty-five minutes from last lock, four miles. Make seven-and-a-half miles per hour easily. Not tired, but blistered. It took just four minutes to empty this lock of water.

4:20 p.m. Lock 12. "Warming you up?" asked locktender. "Oh, just frying out a little," we answer as we drift between the grates of this lock, half-mile



below Little Falls, which is falls no longer, not even a vestige of current being left.

5:30 p.m. Lock 11. Just below Uffington. The island formerly claimed by the hermit Dr. Allsap is all underwater, except for a few willows. Here is perhaps the widest place in the Monongahela River. Both tired, but only three miles to Morgantown. We will do the proper thing for the larder this evening. Look out, Morgantown.

6:20 p.m. Lock 10. Morgantown. Passed a jovial camping party a little way up the river. Counted 50 16-gallon kegs of beer — emptied — piled on the river front and a dozen cases of empty bottles. Nothing like enjoying yourself!

After these adventures early in the trip, Shaw and Watkins appeared to settle into the river routine, with only a few mishaps on their daily rowing sessions.

After leaving West Virginia north of Morgantown, Shaw and Watkins arrived in Pittsburgh on the morning of Saturday, May 28. This provided a welcome break in the routine, and they managed to see the Pittsburgh Pirates lose to the Cincinnati Reds, as well as an organ concert at the Carnegie Museum in Schenley Park. However, they did not linger long, and were soon back on the river, heading for the Ohio River towns and cities of West Virginia.

May 31, 1904

10:00 a.m. New Cumberland and New Martinsville are pretty towns. We now enter the oil country. After an invigorating swim, we pull into the pretty town of Sistersville, one of the cleanest and handsomest in the state.

June 1, 1904

4:30 p.m. We land under the Ohio River bridge at Parkersburg. The Ohio River is lined with boat houses whose dwellers are subject to no law save their own sweet will.

June 3, 1904

9:00 a.m. Point Pleasant is a sleepy old town in a pretty spot. There is to be a Republican convention tomorrow, and they are already guessing how many will be killed or hurt. We shall stay a few hours. [*My father was a lifelong Republican. —Bill Watkins*]

June 4, 1904

4:30 p.m. Arrived at Huntington somewhat the worse for wear. Huntington shows its more southern latitude. The principal street is probably 150-feet wide, and save for occasional awnings over a few feet of sidewalk, absolutely unsheltered from the penetrating rays of the sun. ...In a temperature below 80 in the shade, it is likely a nice enough place. A main item of commerce appears to be lumber. We had to row around some miles of logs to get a landing.

At this point the intrepid travelers departed West Virginia for the last time on this trip, heading down the Ohio River. The log book continues its description of days on the river, and overnight stops along the way in Cincinnati, Louisville, Evansville, Paducah, and finally —

June 12, 1904

Midnight At midnight, we float under a high railroad bridge of 22 spans in the river. Just below is a large town. Unexpected as it is, it must be

Cairo! *And it is!* After a few day's cleaning and packing, we fasten all equipment to the boat and ship it home. We take the Mobile & Ohio Railroad to St. Louis, reaching there Wednesday, June 15, 1904.

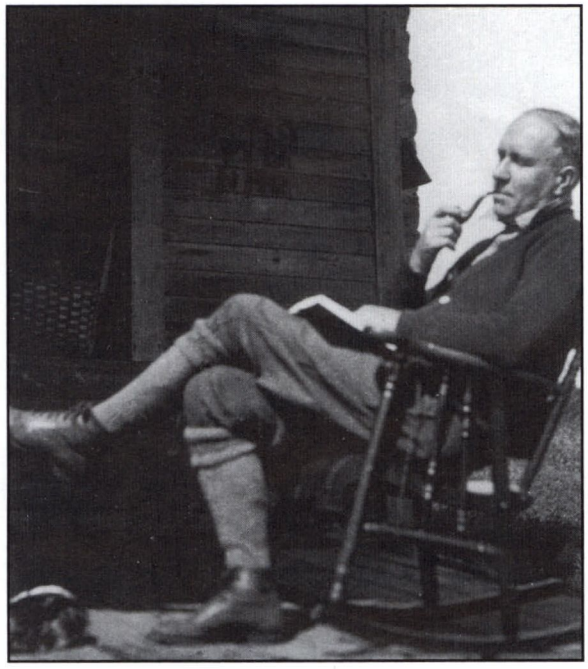
In St. Louis, Merle Watkins and Charlie Shaw were met by two of Merle's sisters, who had taken the train from Grafton. Although they stayed for less than a week, the travelers gave the fair "rave reviews." They were especially impressed with the historically oriented displays.

They all returned home via the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, Grafton being a major junction for the B&O on its St. Louis-to-Washington line at that time. Their rowboat also made the trip home by rail from Cairo, though on a somewhat slower schedule. It arrived safely, and was used on the Tygart Valley River for many years thereafter. My brother Dick and I can remember with pleasure a number of much shorter rides in the boat around the Grafton area.

We now return to the journal for my father's final comments.

In just three weeks time, we traversed the 1,120 miles of water extending from Grafton to the Mississippi River, going the whole length of the Monongahela and Ohio rivers, and the navigable part of the Tygart Valley.

It seems a short three weeks now, though there were times when the miles seemed to be nearly endless. Many a day we were discouraged, wondering if we could make it. Then we would think of the work as a succession of small distances that are easily accomplished, instead of one almost insurmountable task.



Merle Watkins relaxes at a favorite spot in Canaan Valley in the 1930's.

We had splendid weather, very hot, but generally clear. We got along with much less sleep than we expected — four to six hours each night was all we got, and we were able to pull hard on it. We had good fortune with our outfit, too, after the first day, losing little. Most importantly, our health has been splendid, with backs, arms, and shoulders strengthened appreciably.

W. MERLE WATKINS passed away in 1958 in Grafton at 78 years of age.

BILL WATKINS was born in Grafton in 1926. He earned two master's degrees from West Virginia University, and served in both World War II and the Korean War. A retired chemical engineer, he worked at Union Carbide in South Charleston for 33 years. He has two published books to his credit and a third one on the way, all on technical subjects. This is Bill's first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

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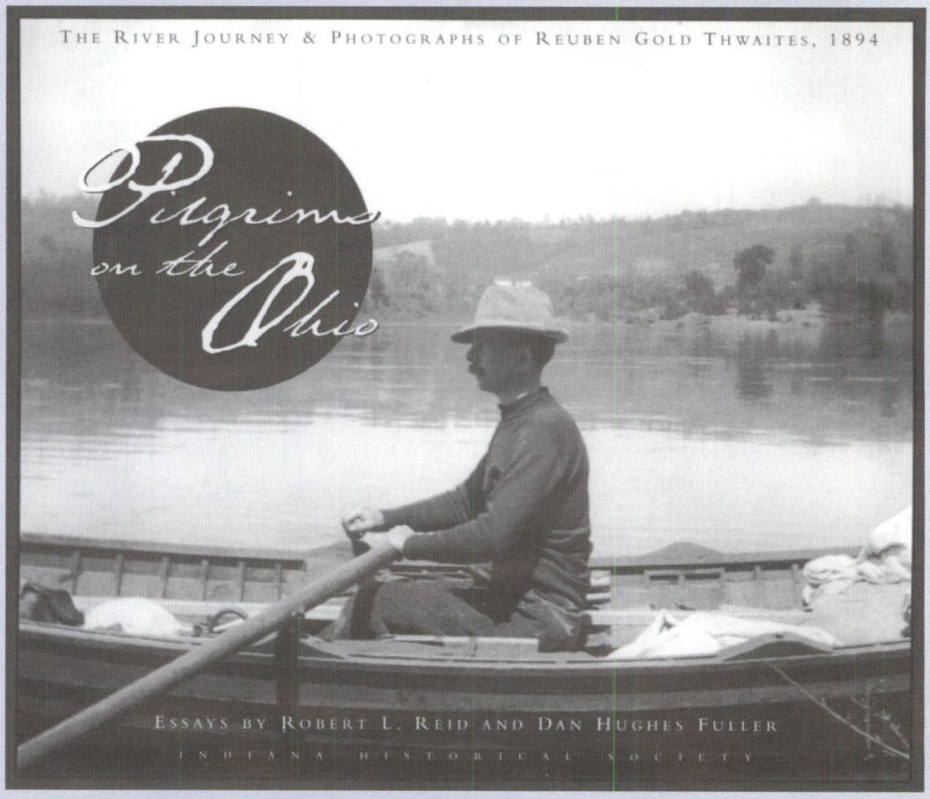
Pilgrims on the Ohio



In 1894, 10 years before Merle Watkins and Charlie Shaw rowed their small boat from Grafton to Cairo, Illinois [see "The World's Fair in a Rowboat," by W. Merle Watkins and Bill Watkins; page 66], Wisconsin historian Reuben Gold Thwaites and his family undertook a similar voyage.

A 105-page book about Thwaites' adventure, *Pilgrims on the Ohio: The River Journey & Photographs of Reuben Gold Thwaites, 1894,* has recently been published. Of particular interest to GOLDENSEAL readers are the two-dozen-or-so photographs and descriptions included from the one-week West Virginia portion of the trip.

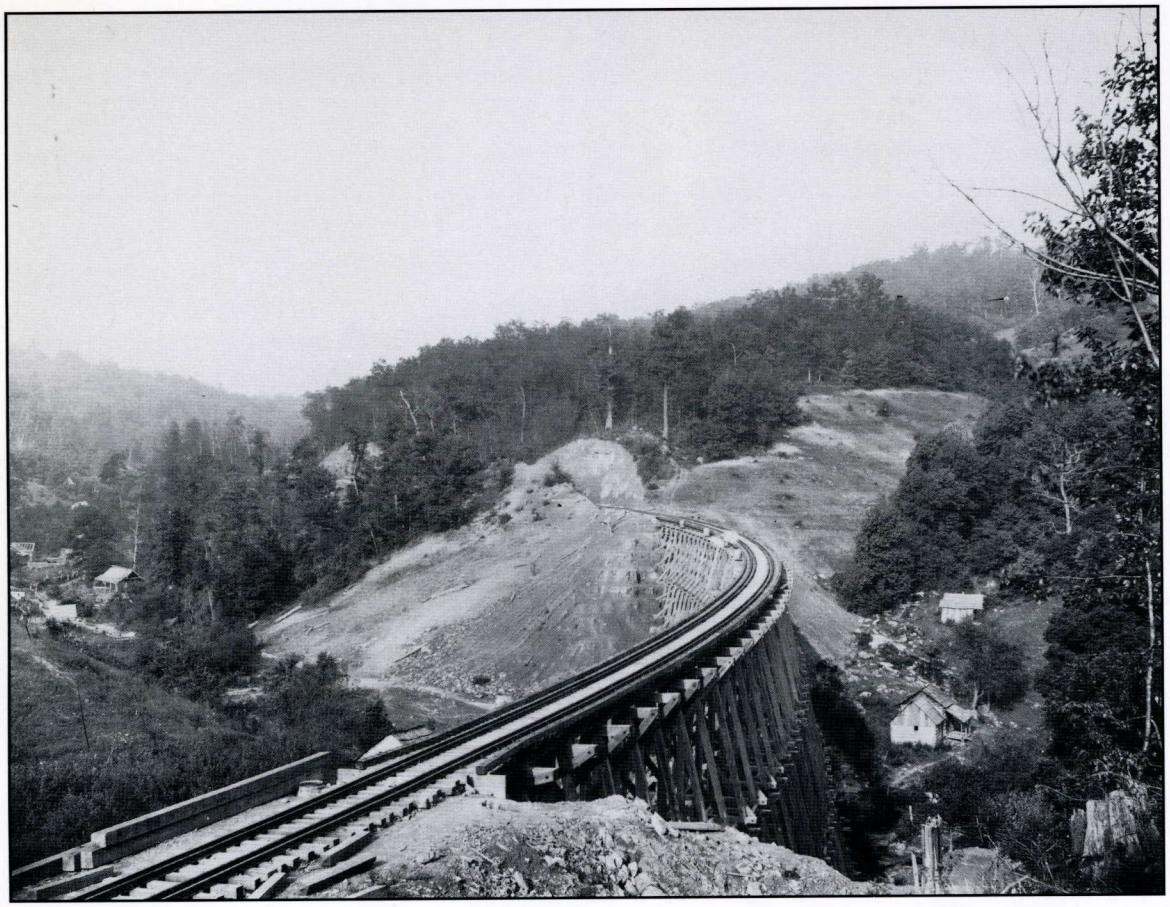
Pilgrims on the Ohio offers a portrait of the river as it most likely appeared to Watkins and Shaw ten years later as they rowed their way to the 1904 World's Fair. The book is available from the Indiana Historical Society; phone (317)232-1882, or check their Web site at www.indianahistory.org.

Goldenseal

Coming Next Issue...

- Apples, Apples, Apples
- Jim Costa
- Norton House in Malden
- Philippi Mummies

PHOTO CURIOSITY



Do you recognize this intricate railroad trestle? Photographer, photo collector, and GOLDENSEAL contributor George Bragg from Glen Jean brought this photograph into our office to see if any of our keen-eyed readers could identify its location.

George tells us that the photograph was taken by Bill Trevey [see "The Reliable Bill Trevey: Glen Jean's Photographer," by Melody Bragg; Winter 1988], which strongly suggests that the image was made in Fayette County before 1925.

Close inspection reveals several striking details. The meticulous stair-stepping visible on the far hillside is a method still used by bridge builders today. The towering wooden bridge supports, however, appear to be quite unique. Also unfamiliar to us is what appears to be a double set of rails in use along this section of track, perhaps a narrow-gauge set of rails laid within a standard set.

If you recognize the site of this beautiful bridge, or can enlighten us about any of its unusual design features, please contact us here at the GOLDENSEAL office.

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

PERIODICALS

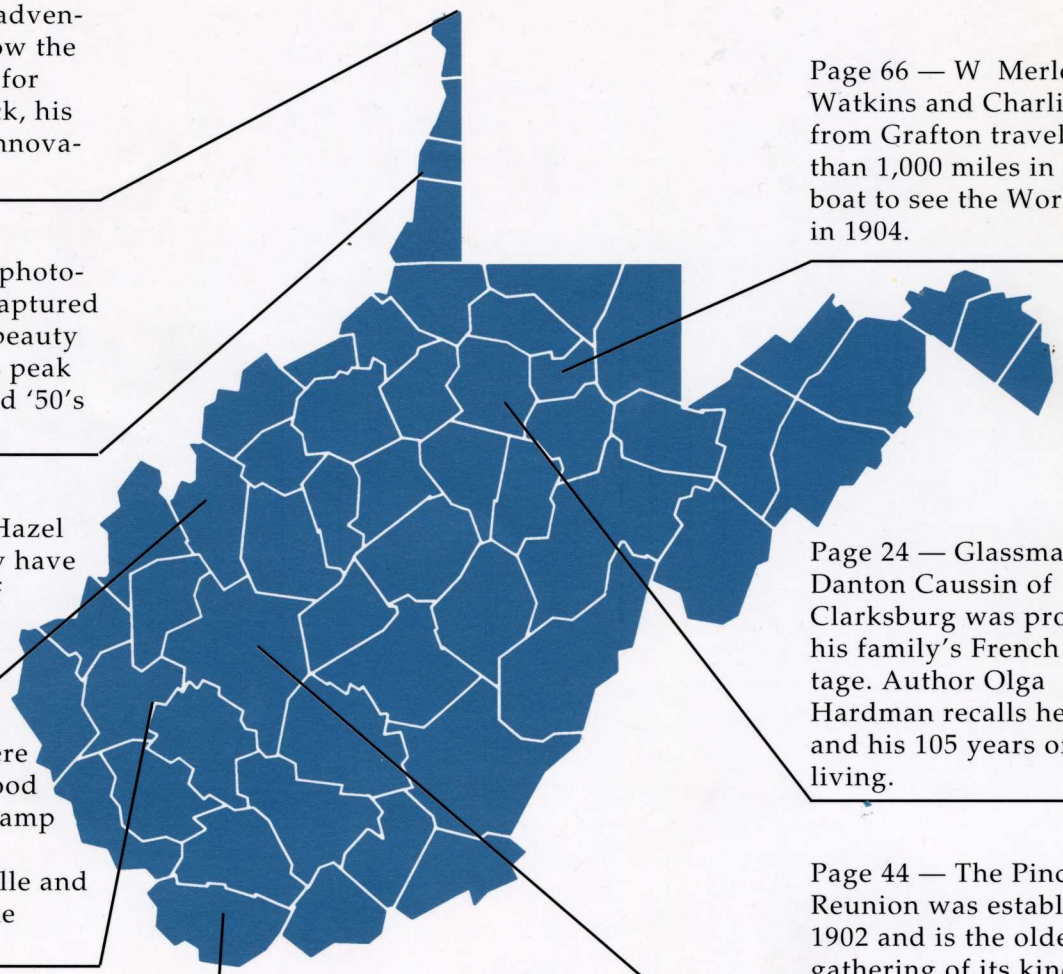
Inside Goldenseal

Page 62 — Fun and adventure waited just below the waterline in Newell for author James Warrick, his buddies, and their innovative diving helmet.

Page 10 — Railroad photographer J.J. Young captured the excitement and beauty of steam travel at its peak during the 1940's and '50's in Wheeling.

Page 33 — Bill and Hazel Westfall from Ripley have enjoyed a lifetime of music together, and are "Still Singin'."

Page 40 — Times were hard, but life was good in the Breece Coal Camp in Boone County for author Shirley Linville and her family during the 1920's.



Page 66 — W Merle Watkins and Charlie Shaw from Grafton traveled more than 1,000 miles in a rowboat to see the World's Fair in 1904.

Page 24 — Glassmaker Danton Caussin of Clarksburg was proud of his family's French heritage. Author Olga Hardman recalls her uncle and his 105 years of joyful living.

Page 44 — The Pinch Reunion was established in 1902 and is the oldest gathering of its kind in the country. Author George Daugherty takes us to Pinch and tells us why the reunion is so special.

Page 52 — Coalwood is one of West Virginia's best-known mining towns. Stuart McGehee tells us the history of this famous McDowell County community.

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