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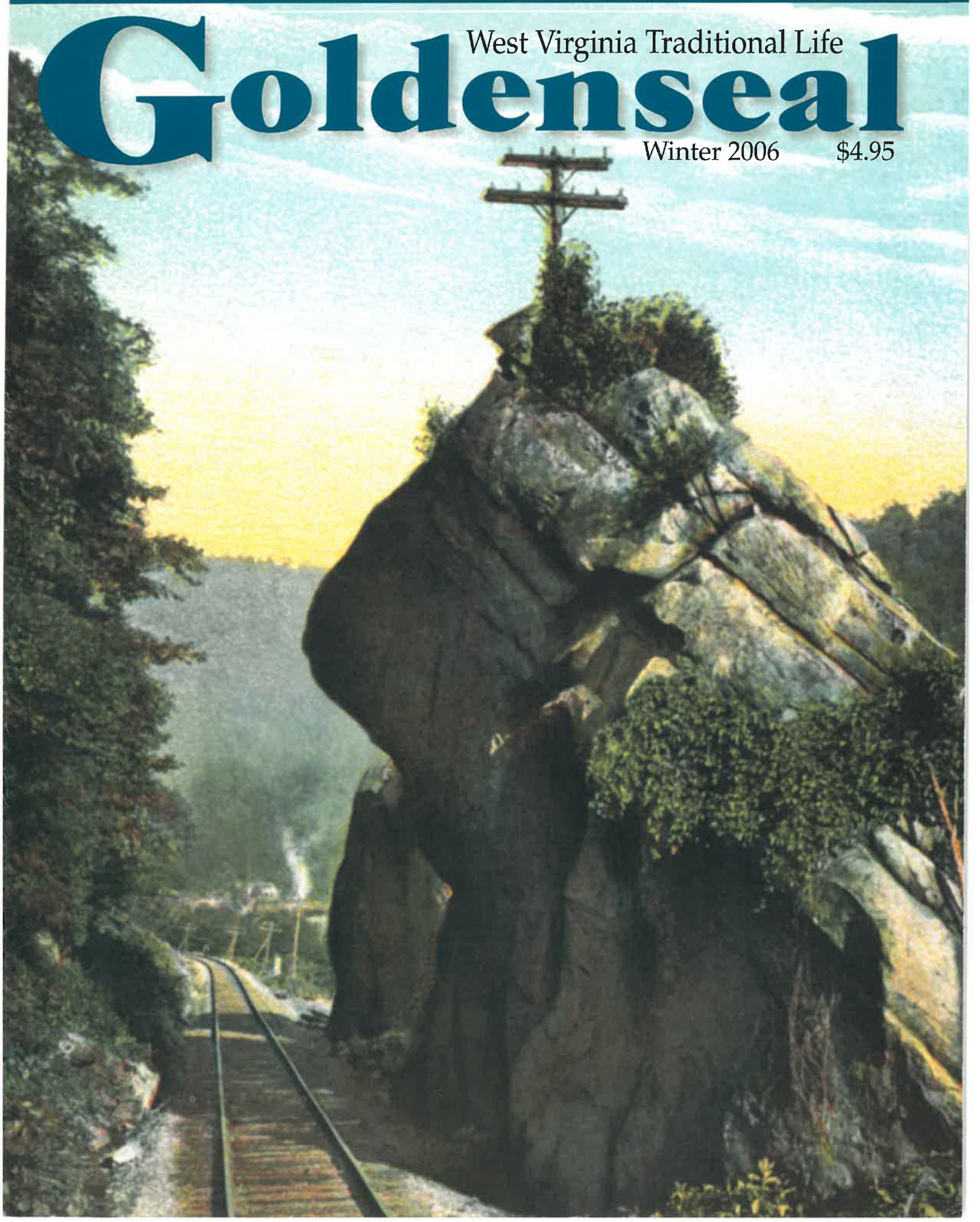
# Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Winter 2006 $4.95



# From the Editor - Thanks Be

Nothing says "Happy Holidays!" like a possum in the living room. Wearing a fancy hat. This cheery photograph spoke to me somehow, so I thought I'd share it with you, for no particular reason. Thanks to Bill Rainey of Charleston, who took this fine picture of Nina Pearl, lovingly held by Caroline Chamness. Bill and Caroline kept the fully domesticated, properly licenced, and obviously well-fed marsupial as a house pet for three years. They report that Nina Pearl was gentle and friendly, as all beasts should be during this blessed season.

This is a season of thanks and reflection. Here at GOLDENSEAL, we are certainly thankful for you, our loyal readers. You support us with your subscriptions, gifts, renewals, and book purchases. You also support us with your phone calls, e-mails, and letters, giving us encouragement, story ideas, and an occasional reality check. We appreciate all three. As I prepare our regular "Letters from Readers" section each issue, I always include a few of the short notes that arrive along with our subscription mail. You've seen them in print from time to time under the heading "Renewal Mailbag." Well, as often as not, we run out of space, and the "Renewal Mailbag" often ends up on the cutting-room floor. Here are a few examples of what you've missed:

Buckhannon, West Virginia
This year's issues have been outstanding. Keep up the good work.

Washington Courthouse, Ohio
Thanks for the great history lessons. Makes me proud to be a West Virginian from Logan County.

Paw Paw, West Virginia
You know, after reading every issue, I just wish I was born in West Virginia.

Prospect, Pennsylvania
Thank you for reminding me to send in my payment. I would not like to miss one issue of my GOLDENSEAL — it's the best. Thank you all for doing a fine job. I was born and raised in good old West Virginia, and I love coming back home.

We get a lot of this kind of mail, and it warms our hearts. Others write that they would like to see more stories about their favorite subject or their particular part of the state. (Please see our on-line contributor guidelines for information on submitting freelance manuscripts or story proposals at www.wvculture

.org/goldenseal/contrib.html.) A few write to tell us that they can no longer take the magazine for one reason or another. We hate to see them go, but we do not take offense and we wish them well. Some write in with story corrections or additional information, and we usually try to publish these letters. Once in a great while, a reader is unhappy and writes to us about that. These folks generally get a detailed personal letter of explanation from the editor.

All in all, we are very pleased with, and quite proud of, the mail you send us. Other magazines should be so lucky. We are also thankful for the 80%, or so, of you who faithfully renew your subscriptions each year. You are the backbone of our financial operation. We are grateful, as well, for those who give gift subscriptions, and we are always thrilled to welcome new readers. We hope you enjoy the magazine as much as we do and plan to stay with us.

Of course, many challenges still face us. Our circulation numbers are still in decline, and our production expenses continue to rise. Suffice it to say that if you have not yet "re-upped," now would be an excellent time to do so! Thank you once again for your continued support and encouragement. We wish you all the joys of this holiday season and a peaceful, prosperous New Year.

John Lilly

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On the cover: The Whitcomb Boulder, postcard view circa 1908; courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, photographer unknown. June C. Jones' story begins on page 18.



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# Letters from Readers

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

MICHAEL KELLER

**Pumpkin House**

September 18, 2006
St. Albans, West Virginia
Via e-mail
Editor:
Glad for more people to know about the Pumpkin House, saw it for the first time last year. [See "3,000 Points of Light: Kenova's Pumpkin House," by John Lilly; Fall 2006.] It is well worth a drive. Great story, great issue.
Thank you!
Debbie Sutton

October 9, 2006
Cochiti Lake, New Mexico
Via e-mail
Editor:
I loved the Fall 2006 issue of GOLDENSEAL for many reasons.

The Pumpkin House — when not in Crum, I lived in Kenova (my brother still lives there) and I worked at Griffith & Feil Drug Store for Ric's father, Dick.

Bonnie Watts and Cabwaylingo — as a wee child, I lived in Cabwaylingo State Forest, just across the road from where the swimming pool is now located. [See "Cabwaylingo State Forest: Bonnie Watts' Playground," by Carl E. Feather; Fall 2006.] Today, there is nothing remaining of the old homestead. I loved the article. I intend to write Bonnie a letter.

Great work! Wayne County should love it.
Lee Maynard

**Midland Trail**

September 13, 2006
Williamsport, Pennsylvania
Editor:
Bob Moore's article in the fall issue of GOLDENSEAL brought back memories of driving over the Midland Trail many times as a rehabilitation counselor serving Greenbrier, Nicholas, Pocahontas, and Webster counties in the mid-1940's from my office in Charleston. [See "Homer L. Wells: Midland Trail's Mystery Photographer," by Bob Moore; Fall 2006.]

A look at the New River from Hawks Nest and a dinner at the Lee Tree Tavern on Sewell Mountain, with wild blueberry pie and vanilla ice cream topping for dessert, gave me emotional and physical lifts.

Eating there and viewing the area where Robert E. Lee is reputed to have purchased his white horse, "Traveler," released tension I sometimes acquired following a coal-laden truck slowly up the Big Sewell.
Thanks for GOLDENSEAL!
W. Alfred McCauley

September 17, 2006
Via e-mail
*[Forwarded to GOLDENSEAL by author Bob Moore and used by permission. —ed.]*

I enjoyed your article about Homer Wells and the Midland Trail. You did not mention Homer's 4-Minute Photo Shop in Montgomery. Did you know about it? My grandmother, Mary Bird Muncil, ran the shop for Homer, and I worked there one year on Saturdays when I was a boy growing up in Boomer. Homer also set up a temporary photo shop at the West Virginia State Fair that year, and I and my grandmother worked there and stayed in a little trailer, which Homer provided.

As memory serves, I worked there when I was about 15 years of age, which would have been around 1950. The photos were taken on positive (not negative) paper and were ready in about four minutes, hence the shop name. I worked in the darkroom and was taught the development process by Homer. He and May came into the shop from time to time and occasionally spent the night there in a little trailer behind the shop. You were right about May doing the painting — she taught my grandmother to paint the photos when the customers wanted it done.

As well as I remember, Homer was not a tall man, as one contributor stated. He did smoke a pipe, usually wore a hat, and was always well-dressed. May was a small, pleasant woman. At that time, they still lived on Route 60, across from the country club. I have lots of family pictures taken at the shop, but none of Homer or May.

I hope that my comments have been of some value to you.
Best wishes,
Richard G. Bird

**Ethel Caffie-Austin**

Ethel Caffie-Austin. Photograph by Michael Keller.

October 9, 2006
Via e-mail
Editor:
I was so pleased when I read in GOLDENSEAL that Ethel Caffie-Austin won the Vandalia Award in May. [See "Current Programs•Events•Publications"; Fall 2006.] I was in her choir at the very first Vandalia Gathering, and she was a very patient and talented lady. The group was a mixed bunch of people, but before it was over, we sounded like singers.

Congratulations to a great gal!
Thank you,
Bonnie Collins

*[Bonnie Collins received the coveted Vandalia Award in 1990. Congratulations to you, as well, Bonnie! —ed.]*

"On the Midland Trail near Ansted, W.Va." Photograph by Homer Wells, 1924.

# Here's My GOLDENSEAL Gift List!

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Ramps. Photographer and date unknown.

**Ramp Festivals**

August 4, 2006
Yorktown, Indiana
Via e-mail
Editor:
When a neighbor learned I grew up in Wheeling, he gave me two issues of GOLDENSEAL. I read them from cover to cover and enjoyed them very much. Because of college, military service, employment, and now retirement, I have not lived in West Virginia since graduating from high school. My parents and brothers are deceased, and I have no relatives living in West Virginia. Reading GOLDENSEAL was an adventure in going back home.

Reference was made in the Spring 2006 issue to "Ramp Festivals." [See "Current Programs • Events • Publications"; Spring 2006]. I am not familiar with the term, nor do I know what a ramp festival is. Could you please enlighten me?
Paul W. Nesper

*Ramps are a type of wild leek — similar to an onion — that grow in the early springtime in the woods across parts of West Virginia and other states. Some folks enjoy eating them, raw or cooked.*

*Ramp festivals and ramp suppers are popular springtime events in West Virginia, usually acting as local fund-raisers. Ramps are served, along with other foods — generally ham, potatoes, cornbread, beans, and desserts. Some of the festivals include ramp-based cooking contests, along with live entertainment and other activities.*

*More information about ramps and ramp festivals is available on-line at www.kingofstink.com. Thanks for writing. —ed.*

**Fiddling John Johnson**

September 19, 2006
Wharton, West Virginia
Editor:
I am 83 and have enjoyed your magazine for many years. I was named for Fiddling John Johnson's mother. We all grew up together. My brothers and the Johnson boys played together. I have heard my youngest brother say many times that Johnnie was the best friend he ever had. [See "'A Pretty Good Thing, All the Way Around': Michael Kline Interviews Fiddler John Johnson"; Winter 1981. This article also appears in our book Mountains of Music; see page 8.]

Johnnie spent many, many nights at our house and played the fiddle. I remember very well the first time I heard Johnnie play the fiddle. He was 11 or 12 years old. I was about six or seven years old.

We knew a lot of people you have done stories on from Clay County. Oh, for the good old days when life was simple!

Good luck, and may God bless you all.
Dola Ramsey

Fiddling John Johnson. Photograph by Doug Yarrow, 1981.

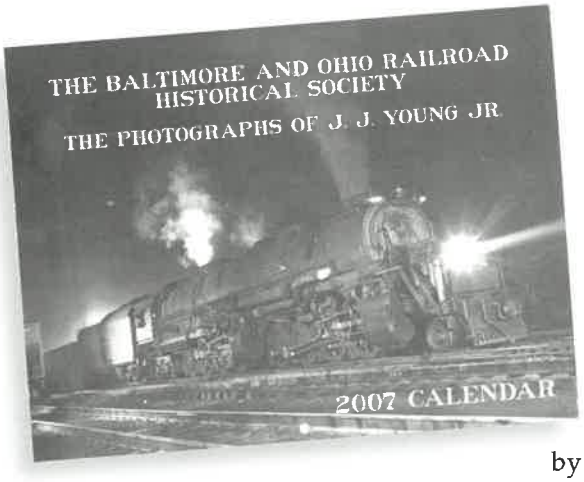
# Current Programs • Events • Publications

*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.*

**Railroad Calendar**

A 2007 wall calendar featuring the railroad photography of J.J. Young, Jr., is available from the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Historical Society. Railroad scenes in Parkersburg, Wheeling, Benwood, and McMechen are among the subjects for Young's memorable black-and-white photographs. [See "Capturing Steam: Railroad Photographer J.J. Young," by Bob Withers; Summer 2001.]

Born in Wheeling in 1929, Young was best-known for his dramatic photographs of steam-era trains, although there are images of diesel and diesel-electric machines included in the calendar, as well. The calendar sells for $10, plus $6 shipping, from B&ORRHS, P.O. Box 24068, Baltimore, MD 21227; on the Web at http://borhs.org.




**Railroad Books**

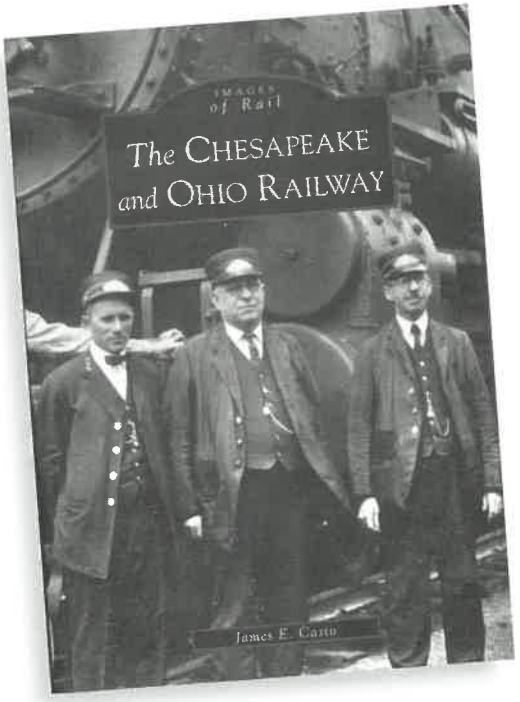
*The Western Maryland Railway in West Virginia*, by Alan R. Clarke, presents a selection of the black-and-white photography of G.H. Broadwater, taken between the years 1905 and 1912. The book features several hundred of Broadwater's images, organized by geographical regions, documenting both the railroad and the West Virginia communities located along its lines from Keyser to Elkins, including Belington, Huttonsville, and Durbin. There are also maps and chapters on connecting railroads and branch lines.

This large-format, 176-page hardback sells for $29.95 and is available at bookstores or from West Virginia Book Company, 1125 Central Avenue, Charleston, WV 25302; on the Web at www.wvbookco.com.

*The Chesapeake & Ohio Railway*, by James E. Casto, features more than 200 historical photographs, postcards, advertisements, and memorabilia related to the C&O. There are chapters on stations and depots, steam, diesel, the Greenbrier Resort, as well as the C&O trademark — Chessie the kitten.

The 128-page paperback is published by Arcadia in their Images of Rail series and sells for $19.99. The book is available at area bookstores or from the publisher, phone 1-888-313-2665; on the Web at www.arcadiapublishing.com.

Photographs of the C&O illustrate *Appalachian Conquest*, by Eugene L. Huddleston. The book also includes treatments of the Norfolk & Western, Virginian, and Carolina Clinchfield & Ohio railroads. The author provides a detailed history of the effects of mountain geography on railroads in the southern mountain region — much of it in West Virginia. It includes more than 190 images,




diagrams, and maps.

*Appalachian Conquest* is a 138-page, large-format hardback from TLC Publishing and sells for $29.95. The book is available at bookstores or from West Virginia Book Company, 1125 Central Avenue, Charleston, WV 25302; on the Web at www.wvbookco.com.

For railroad fans interested in more recent images, *Virginian Railway in Color*, by William G. McClure and Jeremy F. Plant, offers more than 200 full-color photographs, many dating from the 1950's and '60's, of the railroad that spanned Virginia and southern West Virginia before becoming part of the Norfolk & Western.

The 126-page, large-format hardback sells for $59.95 and is published by Morning Sun Books, 9 Pheasant Lane, Scotch Plains, NJ 07076; on the Web at www.morningsunbooks.com.

Sister Mary Diane Bushee. Photograph by Michael Keller.

### Pallottine Sisters' Anniversaries

Sister M. Diane Bushee of Huntington was one of six Pallottine Missionary Sisters celebrating the anniversaries of their first profession of vows this past August. Born and raised in Princeton, Sister Diane entered the novitiate while studying nursing at St. Mary's in Huntington.

After finishing her education at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., she returned to Huntington, where she has served in a number of nursing and administrative positions at St. Mary's Medical Center. Sister Diane is currently vice president of mission integration at St. Mary's, as well as vice provincial for the North American region for her religious order. She celebrated the 50th anniversary of her initial profession of vows. [See "Mission in the Mountains: West Virginia's Pallottine Missionary Sisters," by Joseph Platania; Spring 2003.]

### Harpers Ferry Black History

African American History Month will be commemorated at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park with a special exhibit on display throughout February 2007. This year's exhibit will highlight the life and career of Freeman Murray, from his involvement in the Underground Railroad before the Civil War to his role as a co-founder of the Niagara Movement at Harpers Ferry in 1906.

The opening ceremony will be held Sunday, February 4, at 2 p.m., and will feature Anita Lambert, Murray's great-granddaughter and author of his biography. Following the program and ribbon cutting, there will be a book signing and reception. For more information, phone Marsha Wassel at (304)535-6298; on the Web at www.nps.gov/archive/hafe/home.htm.

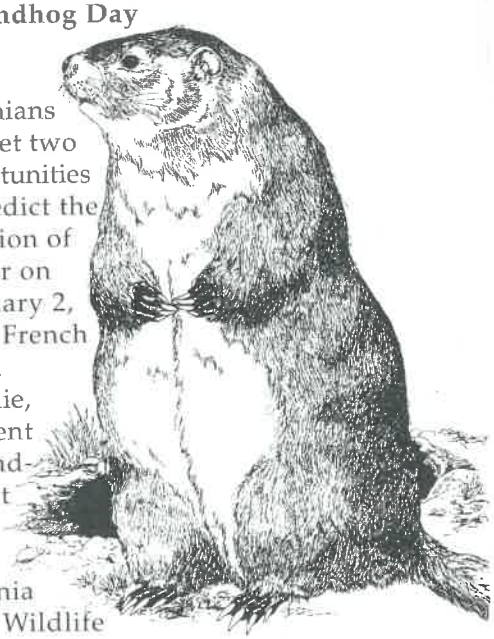
### Walter Reuther Memorial

A dedication ceremony for the Walter Reuther Memorial at Heritage Port in Wheeling was held October 12, 2006. Reuther, a Wheeling native, was president of the United Auto Workers (UAW) from 1946 until 1970, as well as serving as president of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) beginning in 1952.

In addition to his lifelong efforts on behalf of industrial unionism, Reuther was also noted for his early support of civil rights and for the student movement. The memorial consists of a statue of Reuther and informational plaques about his family and his life. The dedication was a joint event of the UAW, the City of Wheeling, and the Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation.

Walter Reuther Memorial in Wheeling, dedicated October 12, 2006.

### Groundhog Day



Adapted from *Small Animals of North America Coloring Book*, by Elizabeth A. McClelland; Dover Publications, Inc.

West Virginians will get two opportunities to predict the duration of winter on February 2, 2007. French Creek Freddie, resident groundhog at the West Virginia State Wildlife Center in Upshur County, will be the center of attention at this annual celebration, held each Groundhog Day since 1978. For more information, contact the center by phone at (304)924-6211; on the Web at www.wvdnr.gov.

Concord University in Athens will hold its 29th annual Groundhog Day observance with a celebrity Grand Groundhog Watcher, whose identity is yet to be announced. The event includes a ham-and-eggs breakfast at the Student Center Ballroom, beginning at 8 a.m., costing $6.50 per person. For details, or to make reservations, phone 1-800-344-6679, ext. 6056; e-mail alumni@concord.edu.

### Fasnacht Festival

Fasnacht is a Swiss tradition meant to drive away Old Man Winter, and visitors to Helvetia, Randolph County, on February 17, 2007, can participate in the annual Fasnacht Festival. The Lampian Parade begins at 8:30 p.m. A masked dance at the Helvetia community hall runs from 9 to 12 and includes a costume contest. The festivities conclude with a midnight bonfire and the ceremonial burning of Old Man Winter and an "after-party" at Star Band Hall.

For more information, phone Sandy Burky at 1-877-794-7768; on the Web at www.helvetiawv.com.

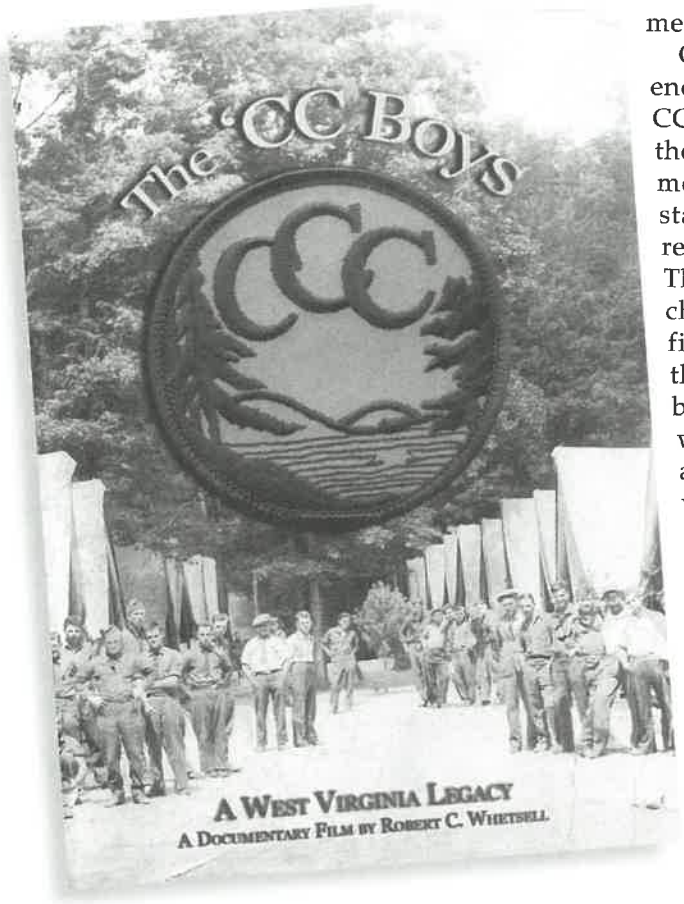
### History Day

February 22 will be History Day at the State Capitol, where dozens of local history and genealogical societies will man exhibits in the Capitol rotunda. History Day was begun 12 years ago by West Virginia Archives and History. Among the day's events will be the annual recognition of History Heroes. Deadline for groups making Hero nominations is December 31; deadline for registration for organizations wishing to display is January 15.

For more information, contact West Virginia Archives and History, The Cultural Center, 1900 Kanawha Boulevard East, Charleston, WV 25305; phone (304)558-0230; on the Web at www.wvculture.org/history.

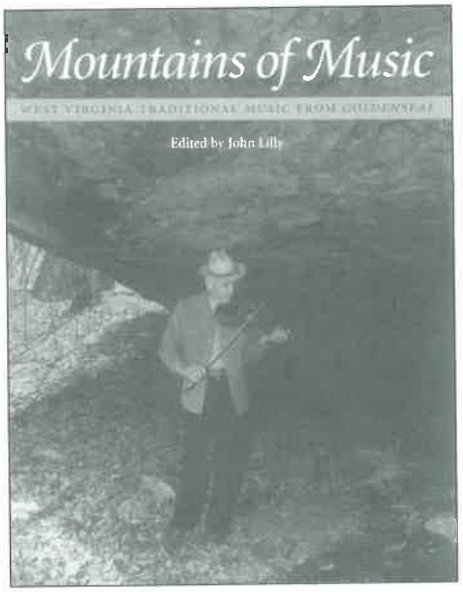
### CCC Documentary Film

*The 'CC Boys: A West Virginia Legacy* is a new half-hour documentary DVD by Robert C. Whetsell. The story of the transformation of West Virginia's forests and farmlands by the Civilian Conservation Corps between 1933 and 1942 is told through the eyes and words of former CCC members.




One of the most enduring impacts of CCC projects was the creation of our modern system of state parks and recreational forests. This work is chronicled in the film, along with the accompanying bonus footage, which includes additional interviews and rare archival footage.

Co-produced by Gerald Milnes, *The 'CC Boys* sells for $25 and is available at Main Line Books or Bittersweet Books in Elkins, or on the Web at www.augustaheritage.com.




*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 $23.95, plus $2 shipping per book; West Virginia residents please add 6% sales tax (total $27.39 per book including tax and shipping). Add *Mountains of Music* to your book collection today!

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# Music from the Past

*We often get letters from readers, informing us about West Virginia musicians from long ago or requesting information about historic players or singers from around the Mountain State. Here are some notes from two interesting exchanges of this sort, which we felt were worth sharing with our readers. —ed.*

**Fiddling Bill Baldwin** was born in 1922 in Handley, located between Pratt and Montgomery, in southeastern Kanawha County. As a young boy, Bill became interested in the fiddle while watching an older neighbor playing, according to Bill's daughter, Penny Berthel, of Ireland, Lewis County. Day after day, he would watch the man fiddling on his porch. One day, Bill announced that he could play the fiddle himself, simply from watching. Skeptical, the man passed the fiddle to Bill, who promptly began to play the challenging instrument. The man and Bill made an agreement that if Bill would slop his hogs all summer, the man would give Bill his fiddle.

Bill and his younger brother, Sid, did slop hogs all summer and were presented with the fiddle that fall. Both brothers learned to play. One time, Penny tells us, Bill accidentally broke his fiddle bow. Undaunted, he wrapped the hair of the broken bow around the fiddle strings and learned to play all four strings at once, creating a sound similar to that of an old-fashioned foot organ.

Bill Baldwin become a remarkably accomplished fiddler, winning many contests. According to his family, Bill won the West Virginia state championship four times and competed against legendary fiddler Natchee the Indian [see "Natchee the Indian"; Spring 2003], who used the same "foot organ" trick in contests, possibly having picked it up from Bill Baldwin.

Penny sent us a homemade cassette tape of Bill's playing, which

Bill Baldwin, at left, age 16. Holding the fiddle is 15-year-old Sid Baldwin. The brothers earned this fiddle by slopping a neighbor's hogs for a summer. Photograph approximately 1938, courtesy of Penny Berthel.


The Happy Harmonizers of Lost Creek, Harrison County, in about 1930. They are, from the left, Charlie Boyles, unidentified fiddler (possibly Dale Boyles, or Jake Boyles a.k.a. Granger Dodd), banjo player Peg Riggs, and Fred Boyles. Photograph courtesy of Borgon Tanner and Louise Boyles.

verifies the family's claim that Bill was indeed a fine fiddler. His style was in the Kanawha Valley tradition, emphasizing smooth bowing, clear notation, and a quick tempo. The tape also reveals Bill as a fine finger-style guitarist. Unfortunately, Bill never recorded commercially. He passed away in 1986, at the age of 64.

The **Happy Harmonizers** from Lost Creek, Harrison County, performed over local radio in the late 1920's or early '30's. Brothers Charlie and Fred Boyles each played guitar in the band. In a vintage publicity photograph recently forwarded to us independently by two separate relatives, the brothers are shown playing matching steel-bodied resonator guitars.

Also pictured in the band are a banjo player identified as Peg Riggs, and a fiddler. One source identifies the fiddler as a brother named Dale Boyles. Our other source identifies the fiddler as Jake Boyles, a young man originally named Granger Dodd, who was raised in the Boyles household from the time he was 13 years old. Jake eventually served as the mayor of Lost Creek, as well as constable, justice of the peace, dog warden, school bus driver, and truant officer.

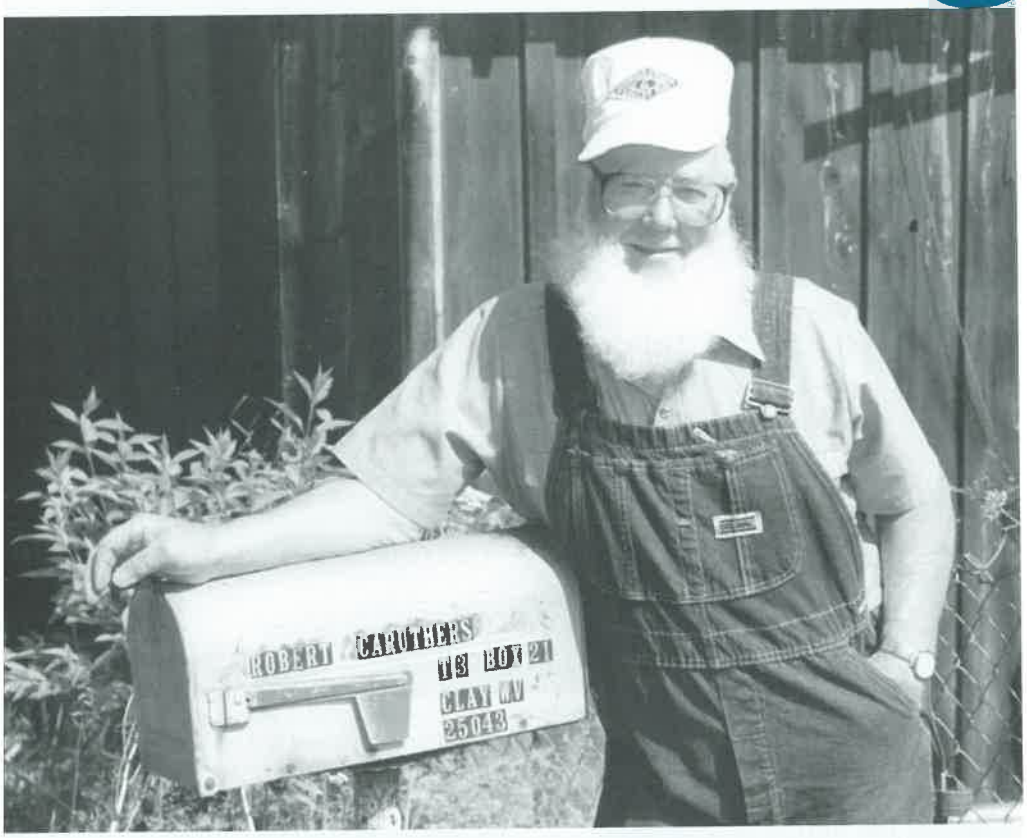
Guitarist Charlie Boyles later became a mine technician and eventually suffered from a case of black lung. He was known to be a colorful character, amusing friends, neighbors, and children for hours with his stories and antics.

Fred Boyles, on the other hand, was the steady, dependable type. At an early age, he settled in Youngstown, Ohio, where he took work at a steel mill.

The Boyles family was quite large and very poor. There were 18 children: 13 boys and five girls. The family also took in two additional mouths to feed, including Jake. Given these circumstances, it is curious that the Boyles brothers appear so well-dressed in their publicity picture and are shown playing such fine musical instruments. This suggests that the brothers were rather accomplished and successful as musicians, and that they possibly had secured a sponsor — a common arrangement at the time.

*To the best of our knowledge, all of these musicians have passed on. We welcome additional information from any other surviving relatives or from other readers who might recall the Happy Harmonizers or Bill Baldwin. —ed.*

# Recalling Bob




Retired BC&G railroad hostler and engineer Bob Caruthers, at his home in Clay, Clay County, in 1993. Photograph by Larry Fellure.

# Last of the BC&G Steam Railroaders

**By Alan Byer**

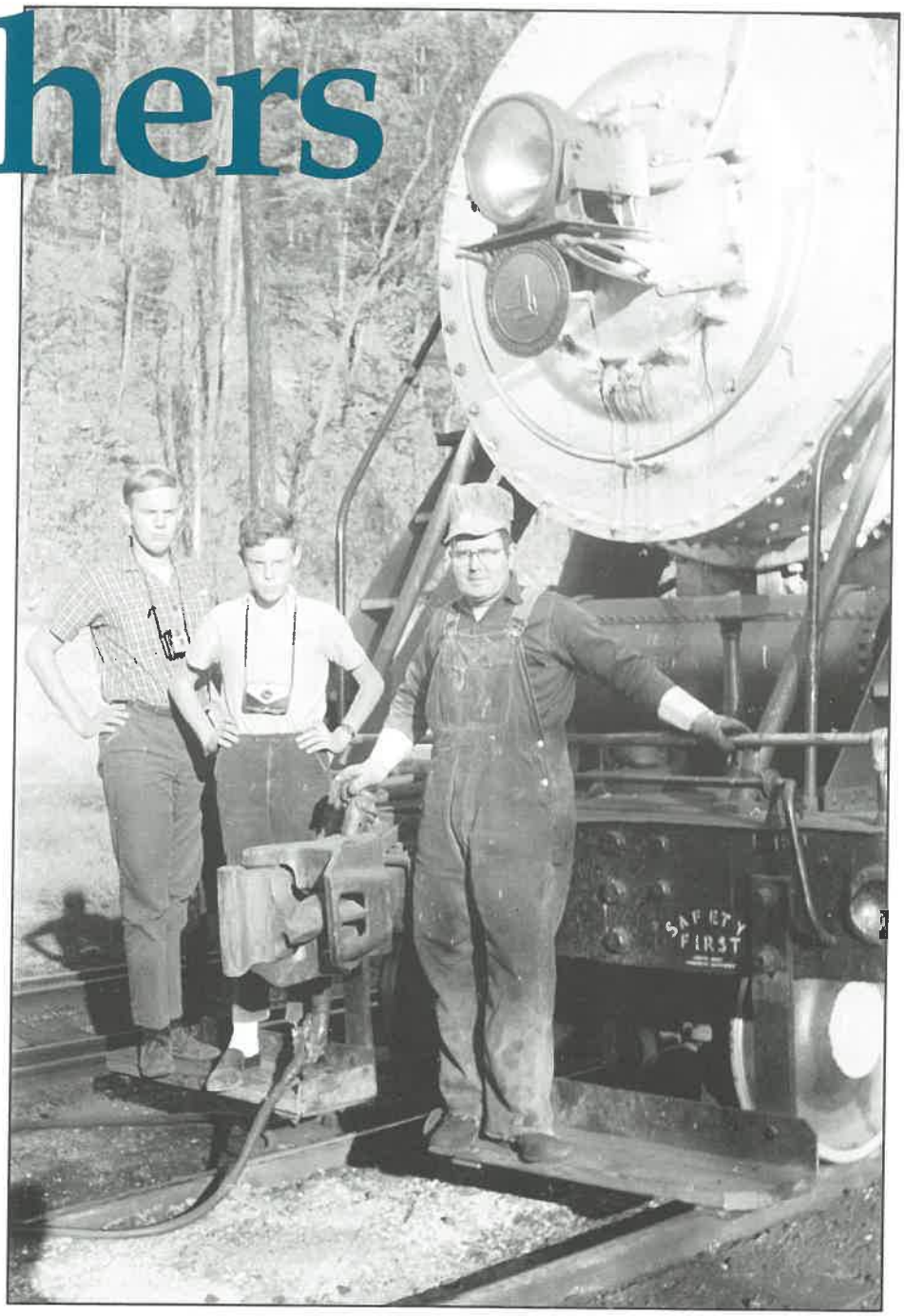
My parents called me in January 2005 to tell me that Bob Caruthers had died. I read his obituary on the Charleston Newspapers Web site and was struck less by what it said than by what it didn't say: that Bob Caruthers was the last surviving crewman of the last steam-powered common carrier east of the Mississippi — the Buffalo Creek & Gauley Railroad (BC&G).

I grew up in South Charleston and became acquainted with the BC&G in the summer of 1964. I met Bob Caruthers four months later, and he made a lasting impression.

My Uncle Ed suggested our first visit to Dundon, the railroad's headquarters in Clay County. He and his family had visited us in June 1964, when I was 14 years old. Uncle Ed had read that the BC&G had ceased operations, and he wanted to see it before the locomotives and other equipment were sold off and dispersed.

We drove from South Charleston to Dundon, where we walked around the rail yard and took photographs for about an hour. Three steam locomotives were left. Number 4, a large-boilered locomotive with a 2-8-0 wheel arrangement, was parked in front of the shop. Number 14, another big 2-8-0, was behind the shop, partially disassembled. Number 17, a 2-8-2 that appeared to be in poor condition, was on another track.

# Caruthers




Our author, Alan Byer, met Bob Caruthers in October 1964, in Dundon, Clay County. On that day, Bob posed for this photograph with brothers Andy, at left, and Alan Byer. Photograph by the boys' father, Arley Byer.

Later, we drove on to the sawmill town of Swandale, where we found the company's last Shay locomotive, Number 19, with a new paint job, a "For Sale" sign next to the headlight, and a Georgia Pacific symbol on the cab. Though we didn't think much about it then, my dad remarked that the rails in the yard and along the main line were shiny, as if a train had passed recently.

My next visit to Dundon came a month later, when my brother Andy and I persuaded our Boy Scout leader to detour to Dundon on our way to a camping trip. That rest stop worked out so well that the scouts stopped there three more times in the coming months. The second time, we could see smoke curling from Number 4's stack. I began to think that reports of the railroad's demise might have been premature.

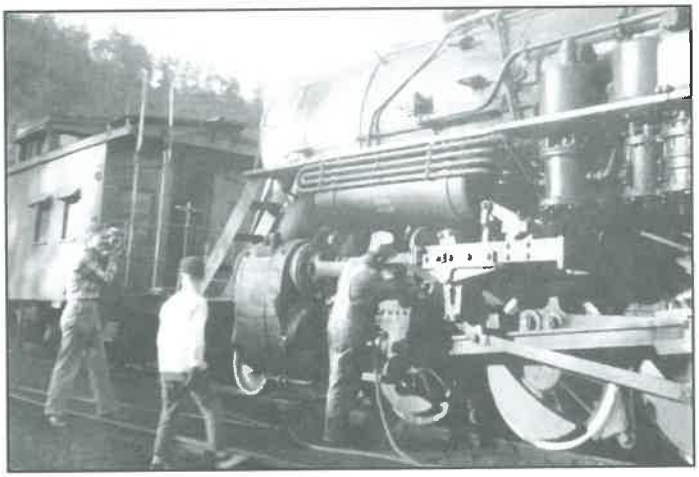
When the scouts stopped at Dundon in August 1964, locomotive Number 4 wasn't in front of the repair shop, where we had seen it earlier. Soon, however, we heard a steam whistle and could see smoke rising from around the bend. Number 4 steamed into view, with a red caboose in tow, and then moved past us into the rail yard. For the next hour, we watched in awe as the crewmen serviced the locomotive and then ran it back and forth in the yard, we presumed for our benefit.

As soon as I returned home, I mailed a letter to the BC&G office asking what days the trains were running. In about a week, I received a very nice reply from Mr. E.C. George, the assistant treasurer. He told me that trains were running to Swandale every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and even told me what time the trains left Dundon and how long a round trip would take.

As fall gave way to winter that year, we began to read articles in the Charleston newspapers indicating that time was running out for the BC&G. Several weeks later, in October, we decided to drive over to Dundon again to see the BC&G in operation.

We left early and arrived just as the crewmen were making their final preparations. Ralph Acree, the shop foreman, walked over and handed each of us a release form. As we read and signed the forms, the locomotive left the yard in a cloud of steam and smoke. We had hoped to ride in the locomotive cab or the caboose, but resigned ourselves to watching and photographing the train.

We stood by and watched the train pass the yard on its way to the B&O interchange and again on its way back, with empties in tow. Then, we climbed into our car, hoping to




Bob Caruthers uses a grease gun to lubricate the running gear of BC&G's Number 4 engine, while Arley Byer takes his picture (at left). The boy visible in the foreground is Bob's son, Robert Caruthers, Jr. At right is the photograph Arley Byer was taking in October 1964. Photograph at left by Andy Byer.

arrive in Swandale before the train did. However, we were stopped by road construction about two miles away. As we waited, the train clattered past us on its way to the mill. We were still waiting when it passed us again on its way back. Frustrated and dispirited, we drove back to Dundon.

We arrived in Dundon just as the locomotive and caboose rounded the curve and then pulled into the rail yard. The crewmen tied down Number 4 and then headed for their vehicles. However, one man dressed in coveralls and a railroader's hat walked toward us as the others were departing. He introduced himself as Bob Caruthers, told us that he was the hostler, and added that he was about to put Number 4 to bed. We followed him to the locomotive, and he invited us into the cab. As we watched, Mr. Caruthers moved Number 4 a short distance and then stopped. Using floor-mounted levers, Bob "shook the grates," dumping what was left of the fire onto the roadbed.

Just then, a young man climbed into the cab, and Bob introduced us to his son, Bob Jr., who took a seat on the engineer's cushion. With his father coaching him, Bob Jr. worked the throttle, reverse lever, and air brake to move the locomotive back and forth in the yard. Bob Sr. pointed to the steam gauge and explained that he needed to reduce the pressure before he could tie Number 4 down for the evening. After several passes, Mr. Caruthers told his son to couple the locomotive to the caboose. With a jolt that might have been harder than intended, the locomotive joined couplers with the caboose. Bob patted his son on the shoulder and said, "That didn't hurt anything. This all takes practice."

The rest of that afternoon was a pleasant blur. Mr. Caruthers retrieved a grease gun from the shop and then proceeded to lubricate the running


The BC&G made its final steam run on February 27, 1965, at Dundon. The train crew, from left, were hostler/engineer Bob Caruthers, conductor Carsel Hamrick, brakeman Sam Burkhammer, fireman Ab Wilson, engineer Jobe Young, and brakeman Bernard "Moon" Mullins. Photograph by Larry Fellure.

gear as we followed him around the locomotive taking photographs and talking to him. He showed us a conveyer that he was setting up to coal the locomotives and told us that he hoped to have it running soon. As the sun began to set, Bob's daughter walked up and told him that his dinner was ready. Mr. Caruthers shook hands with us, and then he and my dad exchanged telephone numbers and addresses. As we drove away, we could see Bob and his son and daughter walking across the bridge to their house.

When we got home, Dad and I went into his darkroom and developed the film from our visit and then made enlargements, using his homemade enlarger. The next day, Dad mailed the photographs to Mr. Caruthers.

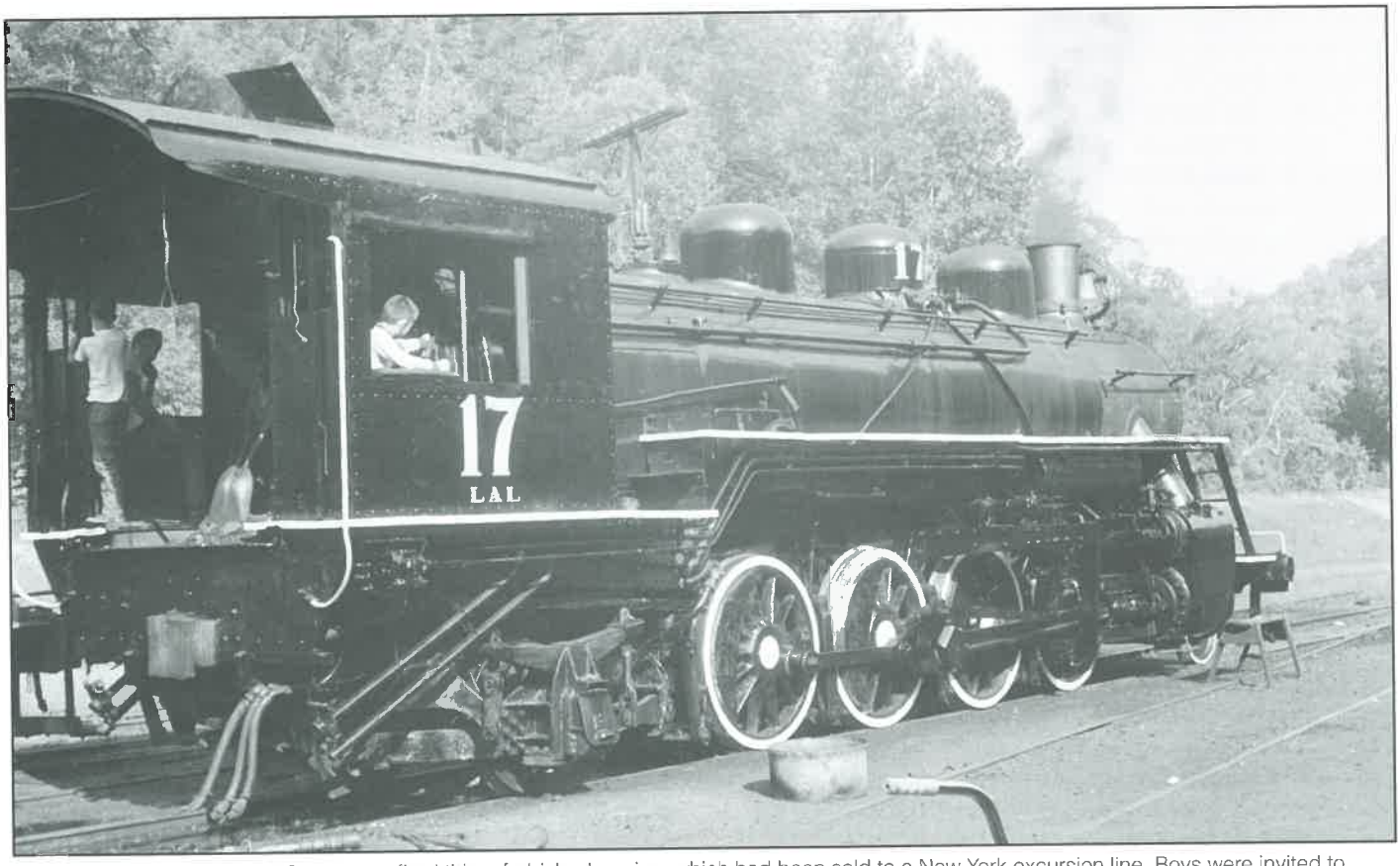
Late one evening in February 1965, Bob called to tell us that the BC&G's last run would take place the following Saturday morning. Management had rescheduled the run so that a larger crowd could be there. When we arrived at Dundon, many vehicles were already parked in front of the office and others were arriving. Television crews were setting up their equipment, and several dozen people were watching and photographing the crewmen readying the locomotive. We walked around, taking it all in, and snapping photographs. [See, "The BC&G and the Last Stand of Steam," by Cody A. Burdette; Fall 2004.]

Someone organized a group photograph of the train's crew, and they gathered next to the locomotive cab steps while most of the crowd stood around them in a semicircle. A few minutes later, Mr. Caruthers yelled from the locomotive cab, and we followed Number 4 to the conveyer he had shown us in October. He fired up the engine, and then we watched the tender fill as Bob shoveled coal onto the belt.

Photographer Ferrell Friend took this picture of BC&G engine Number 4 during its last commercial run on February 27, 1965. The photograph appeared on the cover of the "State Magazine" section in the Charleston *Sunday Gazette-Mail* on March 7, 1965.

*I thought that steam whistle made the most beautiful music I had ever heard.*

The crew was readying the locomotive to leave the yard, so we walked back to our car, intending to meet the train in Swandale. However, Mr. Caruthers walked over and told us that they had decided to allow anyone who was interested to ride in one of the passenger cars. We climbed aboard a green-painted combination car and took a seat on a bench. Engineer Jobe Young paused at a waterspout just up the track so that fireman Ab Wilson could top off the tender, and then the train set out for Swandale. Because the locomotive was operating tender-first, we could see smoke pouring from its smokestack through the open door of the caboose, which separated the passenger car from the locomotive. Whenever the train approached a crossing, engineer Young blew a series of two long whistle blasts, one short, and then a final long that trailed off to a whisper. I thought that steam whistle made the most




In September 1965, the BC&G crew test fired this refurbished engine, which had been sold to a New York excursion line. Boys were invited to shovel coal and explore its cab, as seen here. Photograph by Arley Byer.

beautiful music I had ever heard.

When we arrived in Swandale, the crew allowed us to climb down, and then they proceeded to make up the train. All too soon, they started rounding up their passengers for the return trip. We climbed aboard and settled into our seats, and, in a few minutes, the train started to move. The crew had coupled the locomotive to the other end of the train for the trip back, and we could see Swandale receding behind us through the caboose door.

Just a few miles up the track, the train shuddered to a stop. Bernard "Moon" Mullins, the conductor, entered the car and told us that we could climb down to take photographs of the train as they did a "photo run-by." After the passengers assembled in a group, the crew backed the train out of sight. With the locomotive's whistle wailing, the train sailed past us, as camera shutters clicked. We then reboarded the train.

Finally, the crew stopped the train at the Dundon crossing. We climbed down and watched the caboose disappear around the bend. We could still hear the whistle when we stopped at a pay telephone a mile or so up the road. This time, I thought the sound had a melancholy quality.

A week later, as I was unpacking the Sunday papers for our *Daily Mail* paper route, I found the bundle wrapped in a large photograph of BC&G locomotive Number 4. The people at the newspaper wrapped our papers with misprinted pages, and that photograph was on the front page of the "State Magazine" section. I called the newspaper office the next day and made arrangements to buy an enlargement from the photographer, Ferrell Friend, and that print is still a prized possession.

*True to his word, Bob called us a few weeks later to tell us that they were going to test fire Number 17 the following Saturday.*

In the summer of 1965, my dad suggested that we drive over to Dundon once more to see what was left there. We expected to find the yard empty and weeds growing between the rails, but were surprised to find the crew working on Number 17 in the shop. Mr. Caruthers was there, and he told us that a New York railroad, the Livonia, Avon & Lakeville (LA&L), had purchased Number 17 for passenger excursions. Bob told us that they planned to fire it up for a test run soon and promised to call us when he knew the date.

True to his word, Bob called us a few weeks later to tell us that they were going to test fire Number 17 the following Saturday. As we rounded the last curve into Dundon, we could see Number 17 steaming in front of the shop without its tender, which was just visible inside the open shop door. A crowd was there, and several

boys were taking turns shoveling coal into the firebox. Mr. Caruthers greeted us, saying, "Those boys just don't understand how to keep a fire hot. They're using way too much coal." He went on to say, "You boys climb on up into the cab. We'll be taking her out in just a little while."

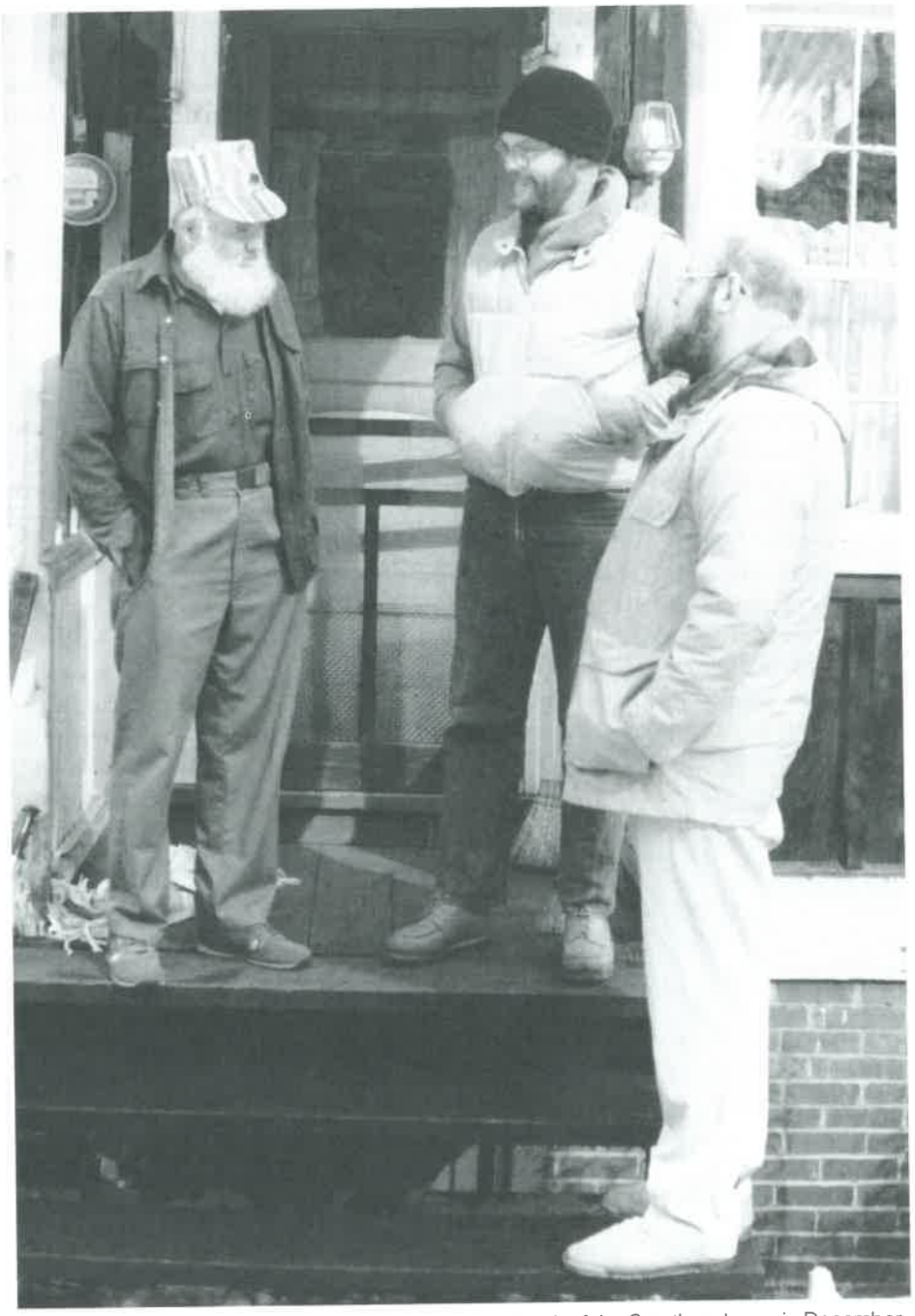
Andy and I took a seat on the fireman's cushion. A few minutes later, Bob climbed up and adjusted some valves while other crewmembers disconnected the water line. He said, "You boys hold on now," and then released the airbrake and eased back the throttle. The locomotive moved slowly up the yard track and onto the main line. Bob reversed the locomotive, and Number 17 chuffed around the curve until we could no longer see the yard. He reversed the locomotive again, but this time continued to ease out on the throttle. With its homemade whistle screaming, Number 17 roared past the yard. The noise was deafening. I could see that Mr. Caruthers was talking to us, but I couldn't hear what he was saying.

Bob eased Number 17 back down the yard track and then explained that others were waiting for a ride. So Andy and I thanked him and climbed down to rejoin my dad and younger brother, Matthew. Andy and I needed to get back to South Charleston to pass our papers, so we watched until Number 17 had disappeared around the curve on its next run, and then we climbed into the car for the drive back home.

That was the last time we would see a locomotive under steam on the BC&G. Though we didn't realize it then, we had been the only outsiders there that day with the BC&G and LA&L crewmen and their families. When we returned months later, the yard was almost empty, the shop was abandoned, and the only remaining locomotive — Number 14 — was leaking white lagging onto the ground.

About 10 years later, I stopped by Dundon on my way to Morgantown on a snowy winter day. I had read that the BC&G had been reopened to haul coal from a strip mine near Widen, this time using a diesel locomotive, and I hoped to see and photograph the train. I flagged down a passing car. The occupants, an elderly man and his wife, confirmed that the BC&G was running again and added that Bob Caruthers was the engineer. They gave me directions, and I set out through the swirling snow. However, after driving for some time over roads that were becoming increasingly narrow and rough, I concluded that I was lost. As I eased down an icy grade, a car appeared from around a curve up ahead and then pulled up next to me. Bob Caruthers rolled down his window and asked if I was okay. Though the look on my face probably betrayed me, I was too embarrassed to tell him that I was lost. I turned my car

Matt Byer, our author's younger brother, covers his ears in response to the steam whistle on Number 17. Photograph by Arley Byer.



Bob Caruthers, Alan Byer, and Andy Byer visit on the porch of the Caruthers home in December 1990. Photograph by Arley Byer.

around and followed him until he turned off at the Dundon road, and then I continued to Morgantown.

Many years later, when my wife and I visited my parents for the Christmas holidays in 1990, my dad suggested that we drive over to Dundon. Andy was visiting with his family, and we all set out for Clay County. When we arrived in Dundon, nothing remained in the yard but the shell of a wrecking crane. However, we could see that most of the old company houses across Buffalo Creek were still there, so we walked across the bridge and then up to Mr. Caruthers' house. I knocked on the door, and Bob's wife answered. She told me that he was downstairs, looking at his old photographs. She called to him, and, in a few minutes, he joined us on the porch. He had aged since I last saw him, and he now sported a bushy white beard. Andy, Bob, and I stood on the porch for quite a while, talking about old times, and my Dad took some photographs. A cold wind started to blow and my wife and I needed to drive on to Baltimore, so we shook hands with Mr. Caruthers, walked back to our car, and then set out for home. That was the last time I visited Dundon and the last time I saw Bob Caruthers.

In the spring of 2004, I started working on an article for *Log Train* magazine about our experiences with Bob and locomotive Number 17. To verify my information, I called Bob on the telephone. Mrs. Caruthers answered and told me that Bob was very ill and confined to bed. However, I heard her ask if he felt well enough to talk. In a moment, he was on the phone. He told me he remembered that day nearly 40 years earlier and agreed to look at my article. Some weeks later, I mailed him a copy. When I called about a week after that, Bob's wife held the receiver so that he could talk to me, and Bob told me he recalled that day just about the way I did. I promised that he would receive a copy of the finished article. After the magazine was mailed in August 2004, I gave them another call. Mrs. Caruthers held the receiver once again, and Bob thanked me, before he became too tired to continue.

Bob Caruthers died January 20, 2005, bringing to a close an important chapter in state history. Gone was the time when coal and timber barons ruled their own fiefdoms, successive generations worked for the same company, and the employees of an operating railroad welcomed a curious 14-year-old boy into their realm. Those days will live on in everything that has been written — and will be written in the future — about Bob Caruthers and the Buffalo Creek & Gauley Railroad.

ALAN BYER was born in South Charleston, the grandson of a railroader. He earned a B.A. in English from WVU and works as a technical writer in the Baltimore/Washington D.C. area. His writing has appeared in *Trains Magazine*, *West Virginia Hillbilly*, and *The Log Train*. This is Alan's first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Huntington attorney Ted Macdonald in 1950.

"Apple Grove."

"Oh, Apple Grove?" I said. "I know that area very well. I spent many a wonderful day at the Northcott farm at Homestead, which originally belonged to my grandmother, Mrs. Beardsley."

"Oh, yes I know that farm and I knew Andrew very well indeed."

"You did?" I said, "Andrew was my first cousin, the son of my mother's first sister, Nola Beardsley Northcott."

"Well," the man said, "I didn't know Judge Northcott or Mrs. Northcott at all, but I was the station master for the B&O railroad up at Glenwood. And every now and then, Andrew and a friend of his named Starkey would come into the station to talk with me. They were older, but I enjoyed them very much. They were full of spirit and jollity. Andrew was a rabid Republican and Starkey a rabid Democrat. They kidded each other about politics a great deal and tried to get me to say whether I was a Democrat or a Republican, and whether I would support their candidates. Andy said, 'If you come out as a Republican, I'll see to it that you'll be nominated for sheriff.'

"Anyway," says this man. "I knew Andy very well indeed."

And I said, "Well, what is your name?"

"My name is Brown."

Of course, I didn't remember any Brown up there. But then he continued.

"The Northcott farm included the Jenkins farm. Did you know Miss Jenkins?"

I said, "Oh, very well indeed, at a distance. I was a small boy when I knew her, and was frightened of her, but also had a great deal of respect for her. She was a very close friend of my grandfather, Dr. Beardsley."

"Well," Brown said, "I knew her pretty well, too. She came up to the station at Glenwood about once a week to collect her mail and packages. She always had a great deal of mail of the nature of magazines and books. This was when I was quite young, about 18. She was always very severe and reserved. She never called me anything but Brown. She would say, Brown this and Brown that. But we were always pretty friendly. I realized she was highly educated, and I enjoyed her."

Then Brown paused. By that time we had moved up the aisle away from the meat counter so somebody could get in there. We were standing there talking like a bunch of old women. I could see that he was full of something he wanted to say, and his eyes had sort of a faraway, distant look — sort of sad, almost tearful.

Brown said, "You know, I had a very wonderful experience on account of Miss Jenkins. She had a young college student come to visit her from New York City. Her name was Lucretia. Lucretia had worked under Miss Jenkins when Miss Jenkins was a librarian at Columbia University. When Miss Jenkins came back to

The Jenkins home at Greenbottom, near the Cabell and Mason county line. Late 1920's photograph courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Victor Wilson Collection.

Margaret Jenkins, as she appeared in the late 1800's. Miss Jenkins' encounter with Mr. Brown and Lucretia most likely took place in the mid-1920's. Photograph courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Victor Wilson Collection.

the old house at Homestead, she invited Lucretia to spend the summer. Lucretia came, and, of course, when Miss Jenkins drove up to Glenwood to get her mail, she brought Lucretia with her. She was the prettiest thing I ever saw. She was a ravin', tearin', up-jump beauty, and sweet and attractive and so very wonderful. The first time I saw her, I fell in love. I couldn't get my mouth to open at first. But she was friendly, and we got along beautifully. We talked and joked, and she was a flirt. I had never had a date or had much to do with girls before, and, believe me, she knocked me over for a loop." All this, said Brown. (I, of course, am paraphrasing, because I cannot remember exactly what he said. But this was certainly the sense of it.)

"Well," I said. "That sounded pretty good. You must've had a nice time with her. Did you ever have a date with her?"

Brown replied, "I finally got up enough nerve to ask her if I could come down to see her. I was careful to do that in front of Miss Jenkins, because if Miss Jenkins didn't want me, I wouldn't go down there. Lucretia said sure, she'd be glad to see me anytime. And Miss Jenkins didn't say anything, so I considered that I could go without Miss Jenkins' opposition.

"So," said Brown, "I caught the morning train going to Huntington, since I knew the locomotive engineers. They would let me ride in the cab, and they would slow down almost to a stop to let me get off at Homestead. Of course, riding in a locomotive cab, where coal is used as a fuel, was a very dirty proposition. So I always had a paper sack with a clean shirt and a towel and some soap. And when I would light from the train, which stopped right there at Homestead to let me off, I would go over to that fresh water spring — that was always clean and cold and reviving — about 100 yards from the railroad on the other side of the tracks from the old Jenkins house. And washed my face and neck and combed my hair and changed my shirt and then hid the dirty shirt in the bushes near the tracks, and then [I'd] go see Lucretia.

"And we would sit on the porch and walk in the bottom and walk down to the river and it was just marvelous. Then when the afternoon train came back, up the river going towards Pittsburgh, I would have made an arrangement with the engineer to stop. I would be standing by the tracks, and I would get on and ride back to Glenwood. I don't know how many times I did that, but every time I did it, I was more and more in love with Lucretia.

"And then September came, and Lucretia had to go back to Columbia. I think she was then a graduate student working in the Columbia library. I wrote to her at Columbia, and she wrote back. We had a considerable correspondence. I was very careful not to become too intimate, but I tried to make myself clear by little suggestions. If I got a letter from her that had any significance at all, I was overjoyed. I remember the first letter that I received from her, which she signed 'Your's truly.' I said to myself, she means that she is truly mine."

Brown was really gone.

"Well," I said, "how did it turn out, Mr. Brown?"

"Well," he said. "We kept up this correspondence, and I was getting hotter and hotter. When it came close to Christmastime, I began to wonder. Should I send her a Christmas present? Would she be insulted? Would she think it was presumptuous of me, just a country boy from up in Glenwood, West Virginia, sending a sophisticated city girl in New York City a Christmas present? Would it be better if I sent her a Christmas card? If I sent her a card, should it be a sentimental card? I wondered," said Brown, "whether I was doing the right thing at all by keeping up the correspondence, because I realized I was in love and wanted

to marry Lucretia. And what in the hell would Lucretia want with me, whose only job was a station master in a country station in the wilds of West Virginia? I wondered about that and wondered about that.

"One day, a big package came addressed to Miss Jenkins. It was from Lucretia. So when Miss Jenkins came and picked it up, I said, 'How is Lucretia?'

"Miss Jenkins said, 'Now, Brown, you stop worrying about Lucretia. She's alright. I've invited her to come down for Christmas, and she can't come.'

"Well," said Brown. "That made up my mind, that I wouldn't send her a Christmas present. After all," said Brown, "where could I have bought the Christmas present? At the general store, I could have bought a poke of horehound candy, or four or five lengths of licorice whips, maybe even a handkerchief or so, but I couldn't buy anything for a girl in New York City. So I didn't buy her anything. On Christmas day, I wrote her a letter. On New Year's day, I wrote her another letter, but she didn't reply. I never heard from her again. I asked Miss Jenkins from time to time about Lucretia, but she was abrupt and didn't have much to say. But my heart was broken."

And he actually had tears in his eyes. That old guy, he must have been past 70 at that time, in 1974 or 1975, and he was still dreaming about Lucretia.

"Well," Brown said, "about two years later, Miss Jenkins came in and had something under her arm, and she said, 'Brown, I owe you an apology.'

"I asked what she had done that she had to apologize for, and she said, 'Do you remember that package I got two years ago for Christmas from Lucretia?'

"I said, 'I surely do, Miss Jenkins.'

"She said, 'When I opened it up, it was full of cosmetics. Paint and powder and mascara and lipstick and perfume, all that stuff. Now that crazy girl knew me well enough to know that I didn't use anything like that. So I tossed the whole thing in the far corner of a deep closet. The other day, I decided to clean that closet out, and I found this box full of these cosmetics. So I pulled it out to throw them away, and I found in the bottom of the box, a box addressed to you from Lucretia. And here it is.'

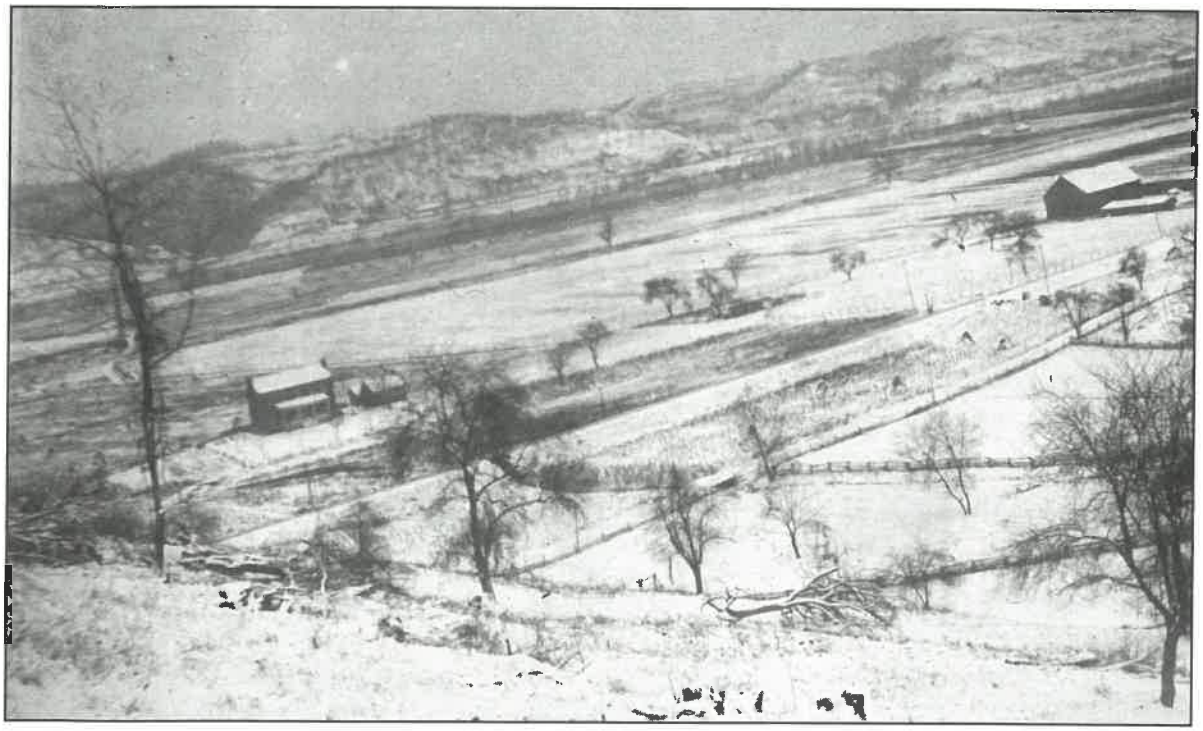
"I saw that box and my heart sank, because I knew what it was. It was a Christmas present from Lucretia. I did not send her a Christmas present, and I didn't thank her for this Christmas present. I opened it up, and it was a box of cosmetics for men, a shaving stick and brush, men's shaving lotion, and cologne."

I think by that time he was about to cry about it.

He said, "I didn't know what to say. I took the box and turned my back. And Miss Jenkins blushed a little bit and turned around and walked out. She never mentioned that box again. And I never mentioned Lucretia again. I suppose she's married and had grandchildren, of course, by now, but I would still like to see her."

That was Brown's Christmas story. And it's true, I'm sure. It sounds very true. Miss Jenkins was always one to hide any sentimental notions and to be quick and abrupt.

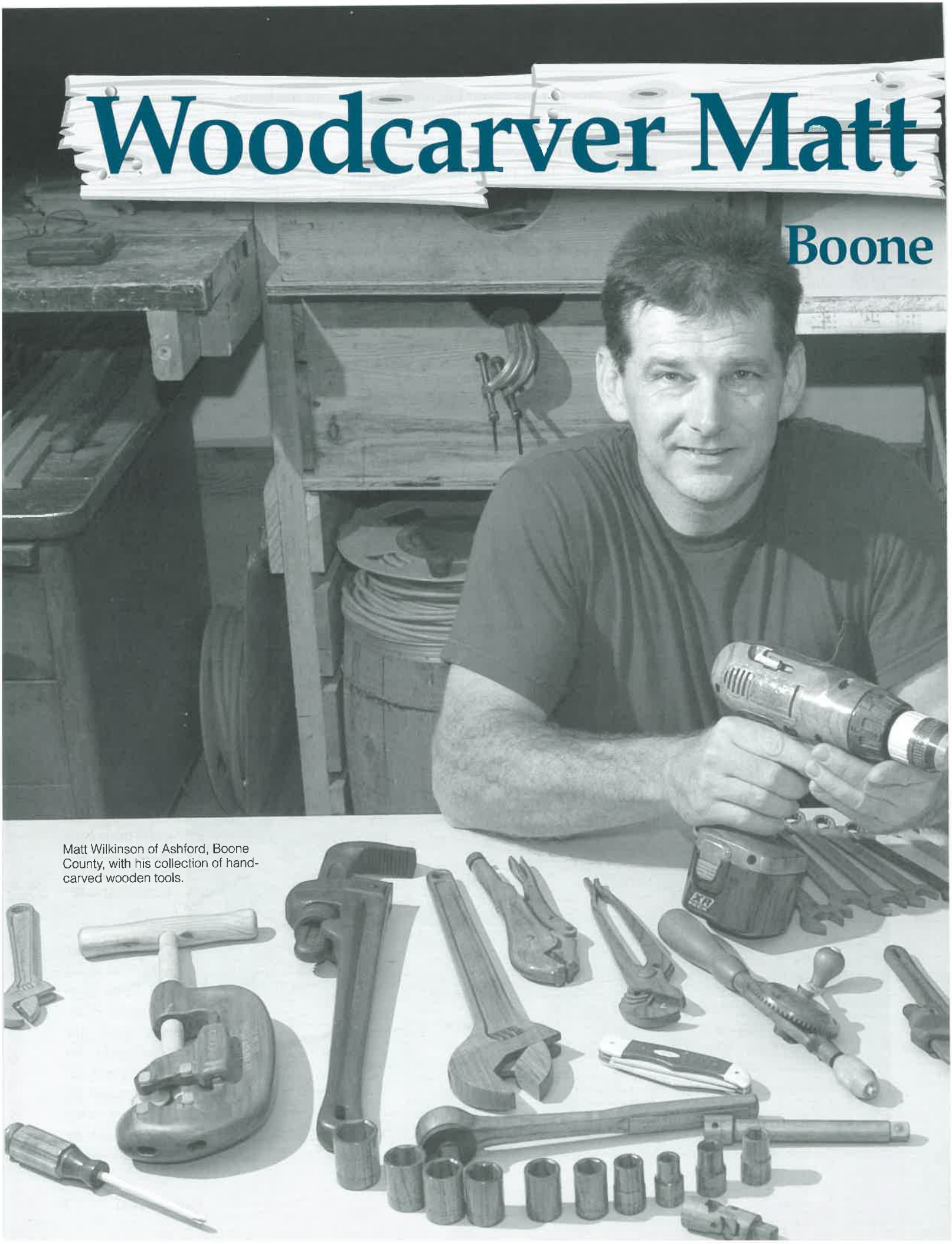
She must have felt differently. She must have realized that she had broken up that romance, even though unwittingly, but she probably figured that it was the best thing to do. Surely, young Mr. Brown from Glenwood, West Virginia, would not be a good mate for a New York girl from Columbia University.



The Jenkins home and plantation during the winter of 1906. This view is looking northwest, across the Ohio River.

GOLDENSEAL *wishes to thank U.S. Army Corps of Engineers archeologist Bob Maslowski for his gracious assistance and for bringing this story to our attention. —ed.*

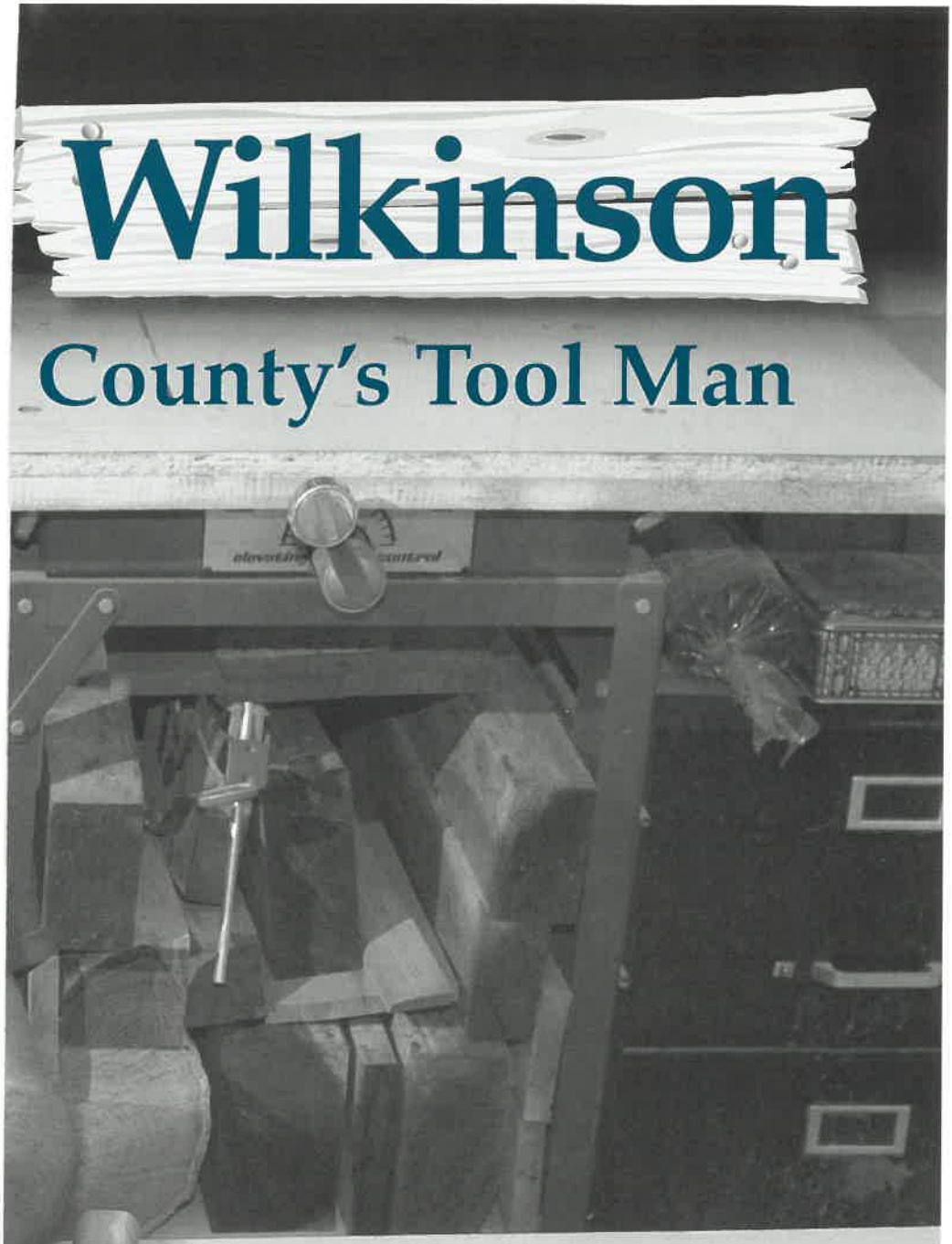
# Woodcarver Matt Boone

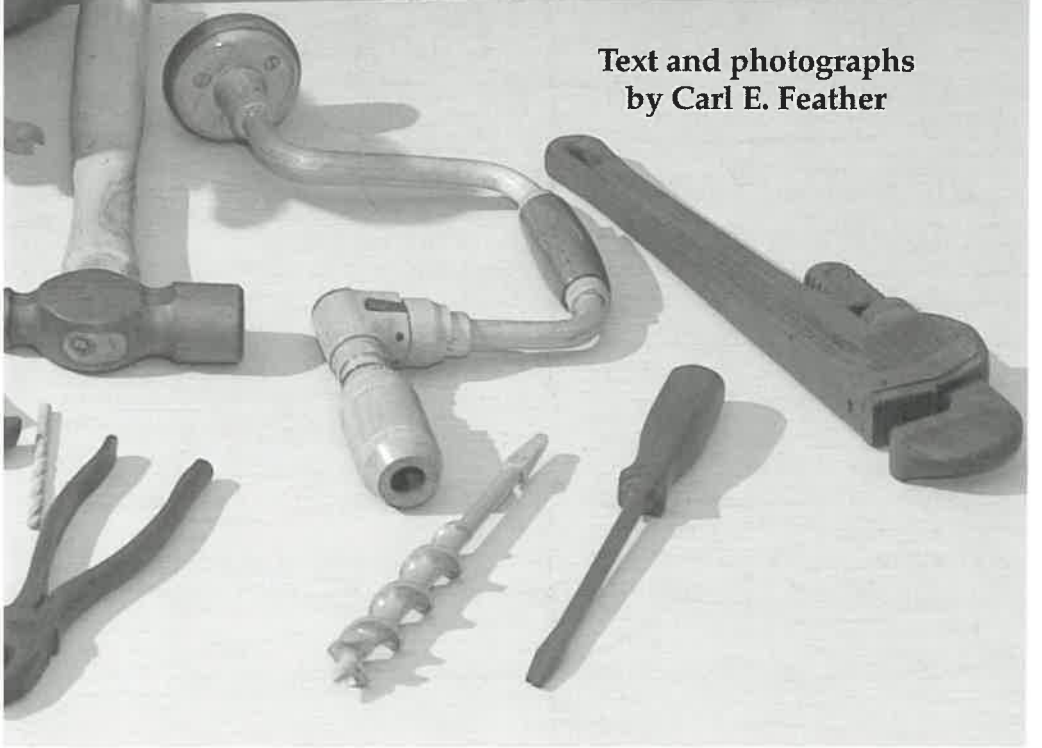


Matt Wilkinson of Ashford, Boone County, with his collection of hand-carved wooden tools.

# Wilkinson

## County's Tool Man





**Text and photographs by Carl E. Feather**

Matt Wilkinson can't identify the source of his woodcarving talent. He's unaware of any ancestor who possessed his knack of releasing objects from a block of hardwood with a knife and some homemade tools. The closest genetic explanation he can come up with is his mother, Peg, whose drawings decorated the halls of the schools in Matt's native Peytona, Boone County.

Matt is likewise at a loss to identify the reason he picked up his Old Timer pocketknife 20 years ago and started whittling a pipe wrench out of a block of black walnut.

"It wasn't long after I got married," Matt says, as we sit on the long porch of his Ashford, Boone County, home on a Friday afternoon in early July.

"He had to get away from the nagging wife," chimes in Ann, his wife of 24 years. "That's what he tells everybody."

Matt elaborates to defend himself. "I'd always whittle on sticks, and for some reason — I was working for the gas company — I thought I could carve a pipe wrench. Once I got started, I thought there has to be other tools I can carve, too."

That was around 1986, to the best of Matt's recollection. He has since carved at least one tool a year and now has a large toolbox filled with priceless hardwood carvings of screwdrivers, pipe wrenches, Channellocks, socket wrenches, drills, bits, and dies. Matt's tremendous talent is apparent to friends, neighbors, and co-workers, but beyond that, he's unknown in West Virginia art and craft circles. Matt is very protective of his carvings and doesn't allow them out of his sight for competition or exhibition.

"I'm really reluctant about that," Matt says. "I'm scared to death it will come up missing. Even if I have them insured and they end up lost, I'm still out."

The obscurity of Matt's work parallels the remoteness of his residence off Boone County Road 1. Until just a few years ago, the numerous long drives that branch off the county road

Matt and his wife, Ann, walk down a road near their Boone County home. Matt built this house on family land in 1995.

didn't have names. The protests of befuddled and lost delivery drivers brought about idyllic monikers, like Honeysuckle and Dogwood lanes.

Although it's not listed as such on maps, the family calls their hollow along Big Coal Creek "Graley Bottoms." Ann's paternal grandfather, Earl Graley, settled on this land decades ago, one of the few relatively flat places in Boone County where a person could farm.

Ann grew up on these bottoms with her sister and brother, Tara (Holstein) and Brian. Ann and Matt married in 1982, and they started their lives together in a mobile home on property that belonged to her parents, Jerry and Jean Graley. "When we moved here, they still had cattle," Matt recalls. "We lived in a pasture field in that mobile home."

Cattle no longer graze in this valley, and the two watering ponds have been given a second lease on life as fishing holes. After Ann's parents built a new house on the bottoms, Matt and Ann mapped out a spot for their home on a knoll overlooking one of the ponds. Matt took off a month from work in 1995 and, with help from another man, put up the foundation and frame. Over the next year, working evenings and weekends, Matt finished the house that he, Ann, and their daughter, Faith, call home. Since then, both of Ann's siblings and their spouses, plus several aunts, uncles, and cousins on the Graley side, have built homes here. Matt says of the 13 families in this neighborhood, 12 are related. They all get along well, although the contact is often as neighbor-to-neighbor rather than as family members.

*"All the tools I make, I make so they'll work."*

"It's strange, because we see her sister and brother almost daily. But as close as we are to some of the other ones, we rarely see them," Matt says.

The baker's dozen of beautiful new homes that dot this valley create an attractive neighborhood, yet the centerpiece of it is an old, weathered barn erected in the 1970's for the Graley cattle farm. Matt says the barn's weathered siding makes it look older than it really is.

What distinguishes this barn is the huge American flag painted on one side of the barn's metal roof. The flag measures 24 x 55 feet. Matt and Ann painted it in the weeks following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001.

"We were all caught up in it," Matt says. "We had just recently painted [the roof] with aluminum roof coating. I guess I had this harebrained idea that we could put a flag up there."

"He was sitting here one day, and he said we should paint a flag on that barn," Ann says. "I said, 'You design it, and I'll paint it.' It's a way to show our patriotism."

Matt measured the roof then started working out the details on paper. He determined each star would have to measure 19 inches, point to point, to maintain proper proportions. Matt then cut a stencil for the stars and painted the star fields on the roof facing their home and overlooking the pond.

"The trickiest part was getting the stars in line," says Matt. Once all 50

stars had been painted, he and Ann painted in the blue around them. He used a chalk line to establish the boundaries and lines for the 13 red-and-white stripes.

It took the couple about two weeks in October 2001 to complete the flag. Ann painted during the day, Matt in the evenings and weekends.

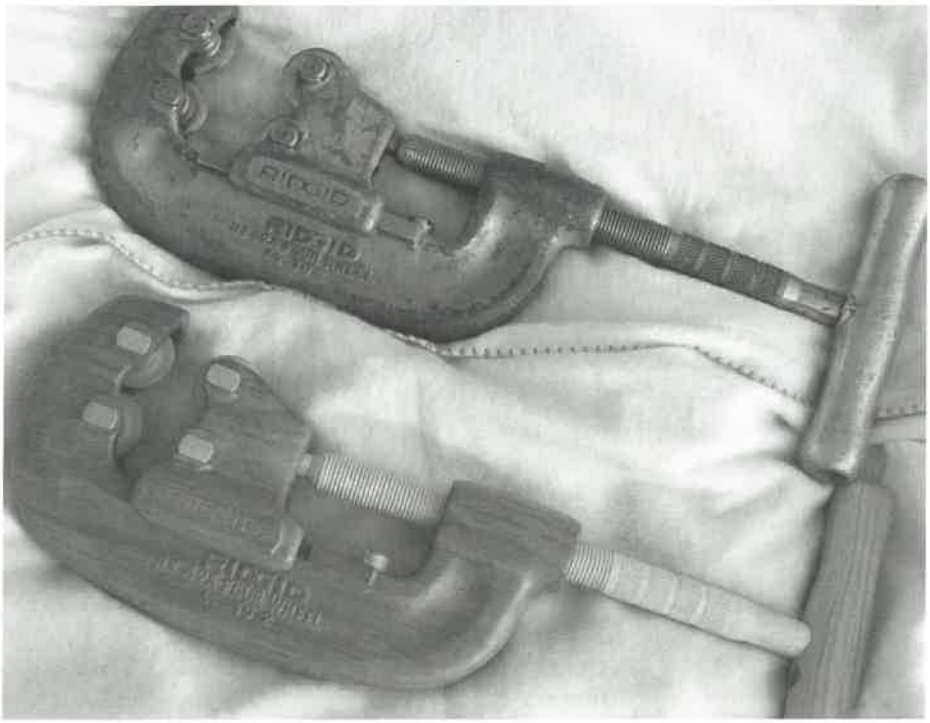
After nearly five years of weathering, the flag has taken on a rustic patina, which Matt actually prefers to the fresh look. Nevertheless, he and Ann are making plans to repaint it.

With a flag on a barn roof to maintain and five acres of very steep hillsides to mow, Matt doesn't have to look for activities to fill his spare time from March through October. But once the outdoor work is done in the fall, he returns to his carving passion.

This pastime has a direct link to what he does at his day job: All of the hand tools he's carved are ones he uses in his work as a gas company utility worker. Like most of the young men in his community, Matt assumed he would work in the coal mines after high school. At the time, the mines were not hiring, so Matt had to look for opportunities elsewhere. His father's friend Cotton Bradley owned a small natural gas delivery company, Indian Creek, and Matt worked for him part-time. From there, he was able to get a full-time job with a larger utility company, eventually acquired by Dominion.

His work involves the use of pipe wrenches, Channellocks, drills, and other hand tools. Despite using them eight hours a day, Matt chose the tools of his day job as subjects when he started carving. He just took a good look at the pipe wrench that helped him make a living and started carving it out of a block of walnut with his Old Timer knife.

Working on it in his spare time, Matt turned out an exact replica of the tool in about six months. Every one of the teeth on the jaws is accurately reproduced, as are the grooves on the adjustment bar. The knurled ring that spins on the bar functions, opening and closing the jaws with the same precision as its metal brother. Other than the wood not withstanding the pressures that would be placed upon it if applied to a pipe fitting, the tool is fully functional and detailed, right down to the name of the manufacturer and part number.




The tools that Matt carves are precise, working replicas of actual hand tools found in his tool box. Here, a metal pipe cutter and Matt's wooden version are side-by-side.

Matt at age eight, in the third grade at Peytona, Boone County. Though Matt showed no early interest in art or woodcarving, his mother's drawings were displayed at local schools.

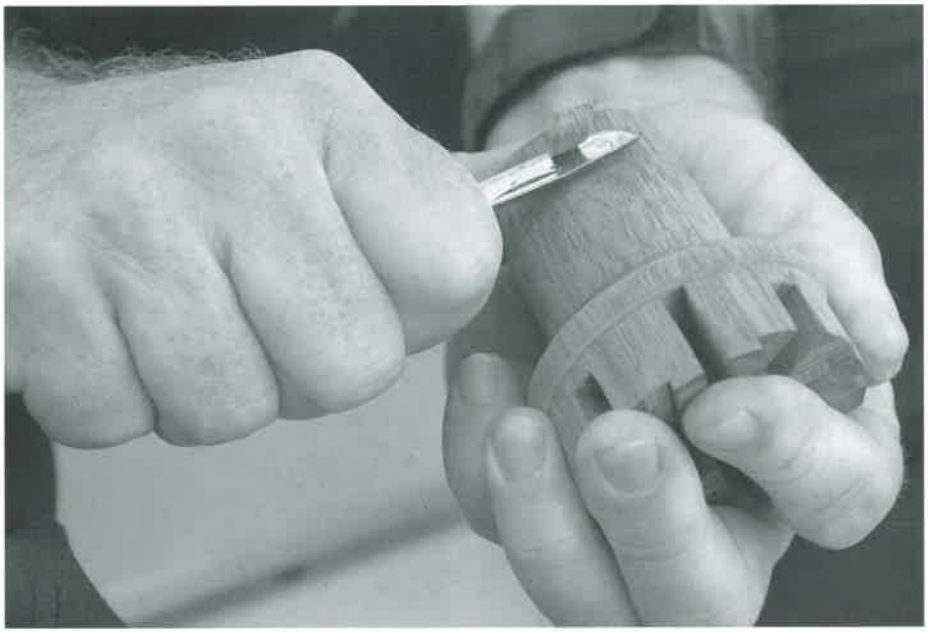
"All the tools I make, I make so they'll work," says Matt.

Maintaining that approach wasn't difficult on items like the screwdrivers, hammers, or even crescent and box/open-end wrenches. But he also insisted that the hand drills, pipe cutters, and ratchets be fully functional, as well, within the limitations of the materials. For the hand drill, he made a spring-operated chuck that grips the wood bits he carves. A similar engineering approach was taken on the auger drill he carved. A rubber band provides the tension of the Vise Grip's jaws.

If a tool is assembled with screws, like the auger drill he carved, Matt makes the screws out of wood. He roughly whittles the form of the screw, then forces the resulting piece of wood into the metal part to create the correct form and spacing of the threads.

Matt uses various kinds of woods to replicate the colors of the items being reproduced: walnut and cherry for dark tones of the painted parts, butternut and maple for the shiny metallic sections. His preferred woods are walnut and butternut, all harvested from the forest around their home.

His mainstay tool is a 25-year-old



A 25-year-old Old Timer pocketknife is Matt's primary carving tool. Here, he is roughing out the form for a die.

Old Timer knife, its blade worn from repeated sharpening. Matt also uses a metal scraper or pieces of curved glass to create the flowing lines of the handles and sockets. When it comes to carving the fine details, such as the lettering, Matt uses a jeweler's screwdriver like a chisel. He considers his work with the pocketknife "whittling," the more detailed work "carving."

"I do have lots of gouges and chisels, but I use that Old Timer a lot," he says.

Every carving begins with a roughing-out stage, which Matt does with saws and drills. He disassembles the actual tool and then creates each part in wood.

"I start off by making measurements to get the shape," he says. "Then I put that on the block of wood."

Once the individual parts are cut out and roughed in to fit and work with each other, Matt can add the details. He says the most time-consuming part of the process is getting the parts to work properly once they come together.

"Believe it or not, roughing it out and getting it in shape is tougher for me than getting the details," he says. "The details don't take too long."

Matt uses the actual metal tool to help him design and tweak the operation of its wooden counterpart. For example, if a tool involves fitting a part inside it, such as a die that goes into a pipe wrench, Matt will use the metal receptacle to get the shape and dimensions of the wooden part just right.

"It's almost like making a die out of the original," he says.

The other trick Matt uses involves the prudent use of a wood-burning stove.

"I get rid of my mistakes," he says. "You always make mistakes. It's just a matter of how bad they are. There are always more pieces of wood if you mess up."

It's impossible for Matt to say how long it takes him to complete a carving, but the standard unit of measure for this kind of work is a season, not hours or days. Typically, Matt spends three to four evening hours and most of his Saturdays in the garage, carving and whittling. He and Ann have different tastes in television programming, so it just doesn't work out for him to stay in the house and be a couch potato in the winter.

"I just have the radio going and pretty much concentrate on what I'm doing," he says. The pastime has a therapeutic effect.

"It gets my mind off everything else," he adds.

"It helps him sleep," Ann says.

Just as Matt has to keep active in the winter months, he also needs to be constantly challenged by new projects. "If I make too many of the same thing, it loses its appeal," he says.

Matt's masterpiece is this battery-operated reproduction of a DeWalt power drill. It took Matt most of a year to painstakingly carve the drill's case and chuck. He then inserted the inner workings of the drill in the case to create a functional unit. Every detail is preserved, down to the fine print on the body.

Matt and Ann Wilkinson relax, overlooking their pond and barn. They painted a huge American flag on their barn roof in October 2001.

His most difficult carving — his masterpiece — is a fully functional battery-powered drill.

"I had to tear up a DeWalt drill so I could get the dimensions of it," Matt says. He saved the electrical and mechanical innards of the drill so he could reinstall them inside the wooden outer shell that replaced the plastic original. Matt says carving something that thin was one of the many challenges that faced him on the project.

He made the shell by sawing the block of wood in half, then scooping out the interior to the dimensions demanded by the inner workings he had to pack inside.

"Getting the inside to where things would fit was challenging," he says. "It was a lot of trial and error to get everything to fit in there."

The base of this drill, also fashioned from wood, holds the batteries. This base contains a paragraph of fine print molded into the plastic, and Matt reproduced every word in the wood, using his homemade tools.

Matt spent more than a year building his drill, which he completed in 2005. He has since worn out the battery from demonstrating the drill to so many people. As with all his tools, the drill elicits a response of wonder, even from experienced carvers.

"I believe they are surprised to hold it in their hands and see that it works," he says. "My foreman at work is real good about bringing up my tools to people who visit. If his boss or someone else from the company is visiting, he'll have me bring in my tools so they can see them. They are always pretty amazed when they see them for the first time."

Even after seeing her husband turn out progressively more difficult pieces for more than two decades, Ann is impressed by his work.

"It amazes me when he comes in with these things and they work," she says.

Of course, Ann sees the struggle and frustration that goes into each piece, as well. Although she can't offer Matt technical advice, she does encourage him.

"I tell him he can do it, and to go back out there and try again," she says. And that's exactly what he does.

Matt doubts that he'll ever run out of tools to reproduce in wood, as long as he can continue to solve the challenges involved in carving them.

"I'd like to make a hand saw," he says. "I've been thinking about the blade, but it might be too delicate [if made from wood] and I'd break it. There are probably other tools I'll work on."

Matt entered one of his carvings, the 18-inch Rigid pipe wrench, in the West Virginia State Fair. It took first place. But fear of having his work stolen or damaged keeps him from entering it in other competitions or exhibitions.

He plans to leave his carvings to his daughter, who is not interested in carving but has an artistic bent toward photography. Matt does not sell his work, but the idea of making a living with his knife and carving tools often crosses his mind on those winter evenings.

"I like it. There are times I wouldn't mind if it were my profession, if I could find the right opportunity," he says. "But I'd probably go broke."

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

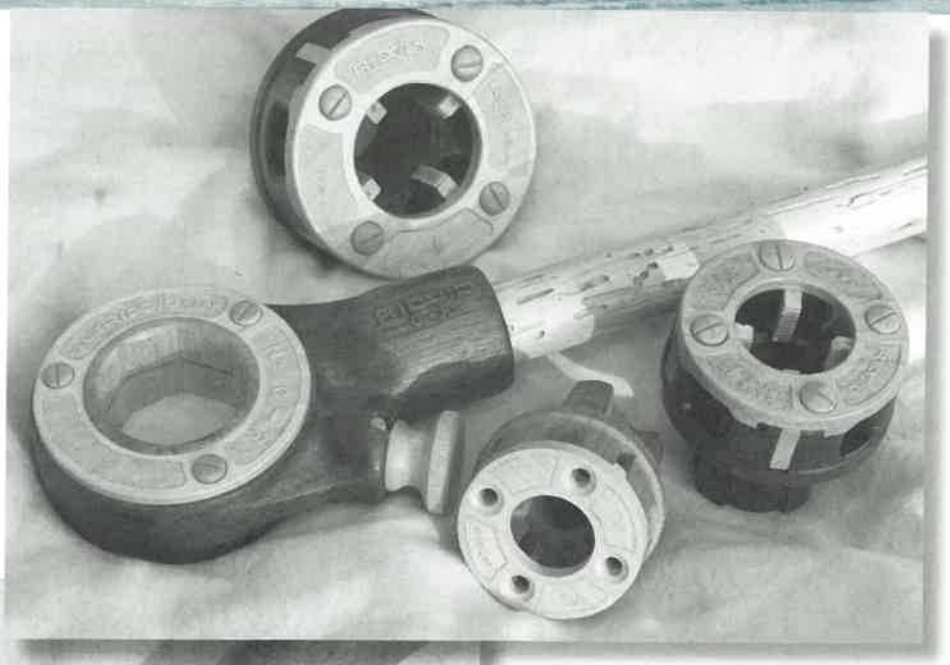
# The Tools of M


A pocketknife with two folding blades. Also, a set of ½-inch sockets, to accompany a ratchet (not pictured).

**Wood artist Matt Wilkinson taught himself to carve, inspired by the shapes of hand tools he uses in his job with a natural gas utility company. He has been creating intricate wooden tool replicas for 20 years.**

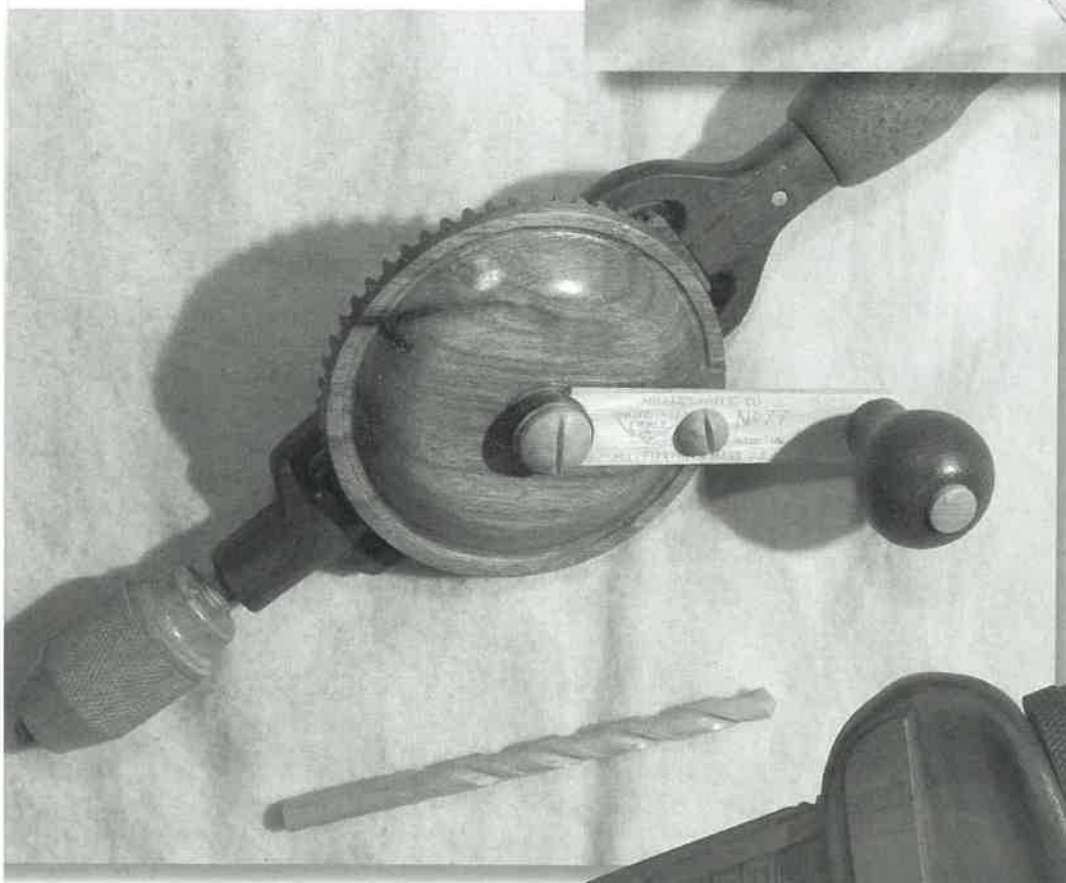
# att Wilkinson

**Photo Essay**
**by Carl E. Feather**



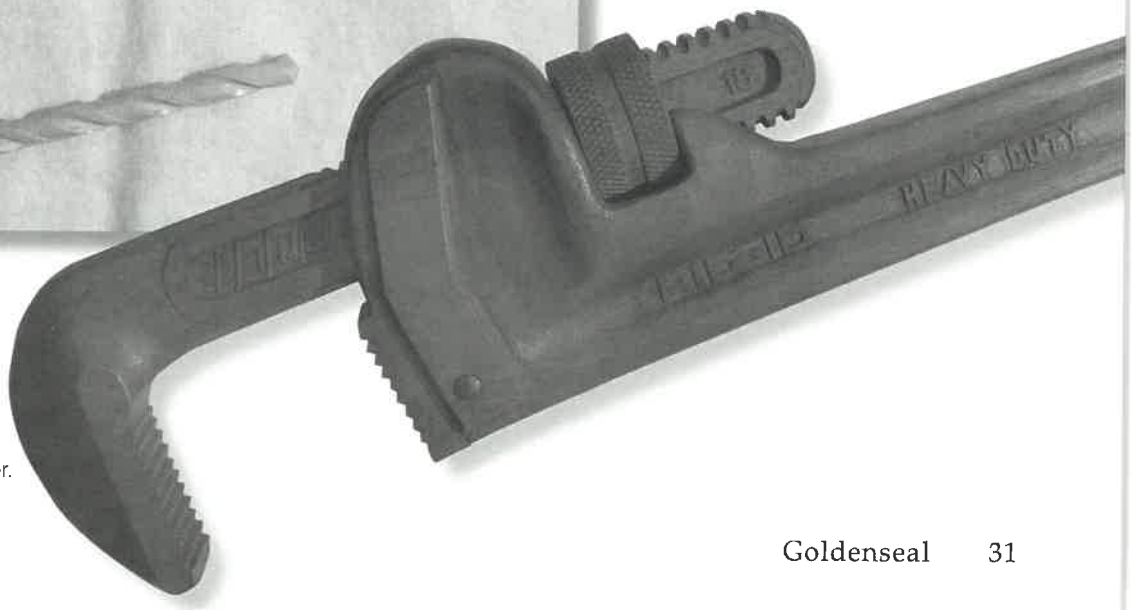
(Left) This detail of a hand plane shows the different woods Matt uses to achieve the desired effect. He even carves the fully functional retention screws.

(Above) Matt chose wormy maple for the handle of this die wrench. The dies are made of walnut and maple.



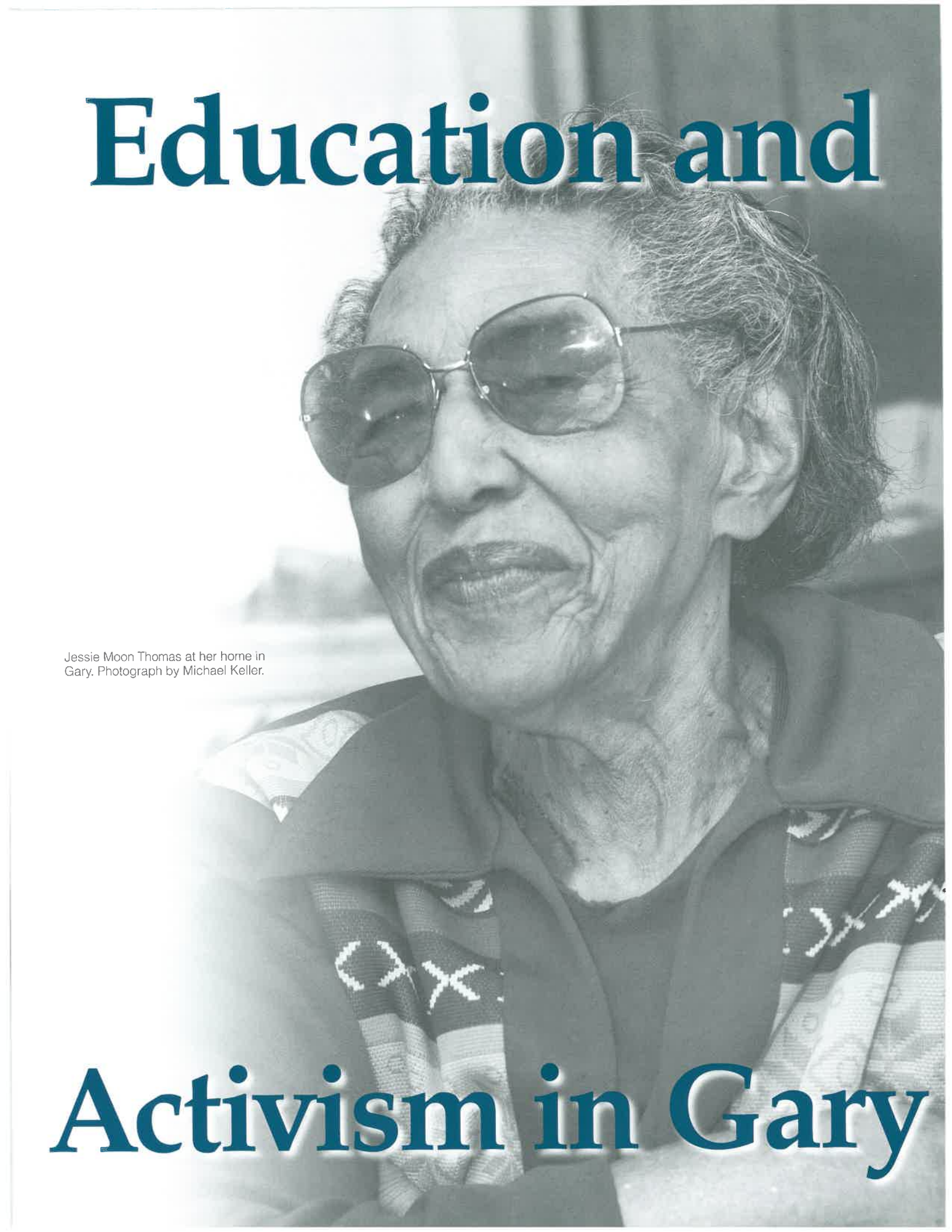
A working hand drill, complete with wooden drill bit.

A fully functional 18-inch pipe wrench.



(Left) Matt holds his hand-carved pipe cutter.

# Education and Activism in Gary



Jessie Moon Thomas at her home in Gary. Photograph by Michael Keller.

# A Visit with Jessie Moon Thomas

By Ancella Bickley

For Mrs. Jessie Elizabeth Moon Thomas of Gary, education and activism tend to intertwine. This has always been so in her family.

One of the earliest acts pairing education and activism in her family was carried out by "Aunt Rachel," one of her mother's enslaved ancestors, who was taught to read and figure by the slave mistress. Providing Rachel with some education was not an altruistic act on the part of the slave mistress, Mrs. Thomas suggests. Rachel was taught these skills so that she could help with household records, "count the hams in the smokehouse," Mrs. Thomas says with a chuckle. After completing her record-keeping chores for the day, Rachel came back to the slave quarters in the evening and taught reading and arithmetic to the children in the family, although it was illegal to do so. When freedom came, Rachel continued to teach other black children.

Rachel's family built on this head start in education, which they passed down to their descendants. Initially a teacher in Mercer County, Jessie's grandfather, Cheshire C. Froe, became a coke boss and was elected one of the early black magistrates of McDowell County. Her father, S.B. Moon, was the first principal of a black high school in Gary. "When we started to school, we could [already] read," Jessie Thomas says of herself and her seven siblings. "I was able to skip the first year in school. In those days, we had primer and then the first grade. I went right to the first grade." Though her family never had good clothes or a lot of money, she says, "we always had the best of books. My grandfather always made sure that we had books. My daddy always got free books, you know, samples of books."

A teacher for 42 years, Mrs. Thomas followed in her mother's footsteps when she enrolled at Bluefield State College in 1931 and, later, began to teach. "My mother was in the first graduating class at Bluefield State in 1903," she recalls. After finishing at Bluefield, her mother, Martha "Mattie" Froe, began teaching at Gary. This is where Mattie met and married Saunders Moon, a graduate of the Virginia Collegiate Institute (now Virginia State University) in Petersburg, Virginia, and a graduate of law school in Pittsburgh. "My father had a friend here, Thomas Whittico. They'd known each other down in Virginia. Tom Whittico was the editor and publisher of the black newspaper, *The McDowell Times*, and he persuaded my father to come to Keystone.

"My daddy loved to write," Mrs. Thomas says, explaining that her father used his ability to write and his association with Tom Whittico and his newspaper to bring to the public articles about the ways that black people were being treated in the Gary coalfields.

The articles annoyed Colonel Edward O'Toole, general superintendent of the Gary mines. Mr. Moon agreed to stop writing them in exchange for being permitted to live in a company house. This exchange began a cooperative relationship between Colonel O'Toole and Mr. Moon, which helped to improve some of the conditions under which blacks were living in the area. [See "Gary: A First-Class Operation," by Stuart McGehee; Fall 1988.]

"My father always worked in the background," Mrs. Thomas says, referring to her father's behind-the-scenes aid and advice to his friend, activist and black attorney Harry Capehart. Capehart served in the West Virginia State Legislature and

Grandfather Cheshire C. Froe with his three daughters in 1892. Standing at right is Jessie Thomas' mother, Mattie. Standing at left is Jessie Froe, and seated at right is Vicie Froe.

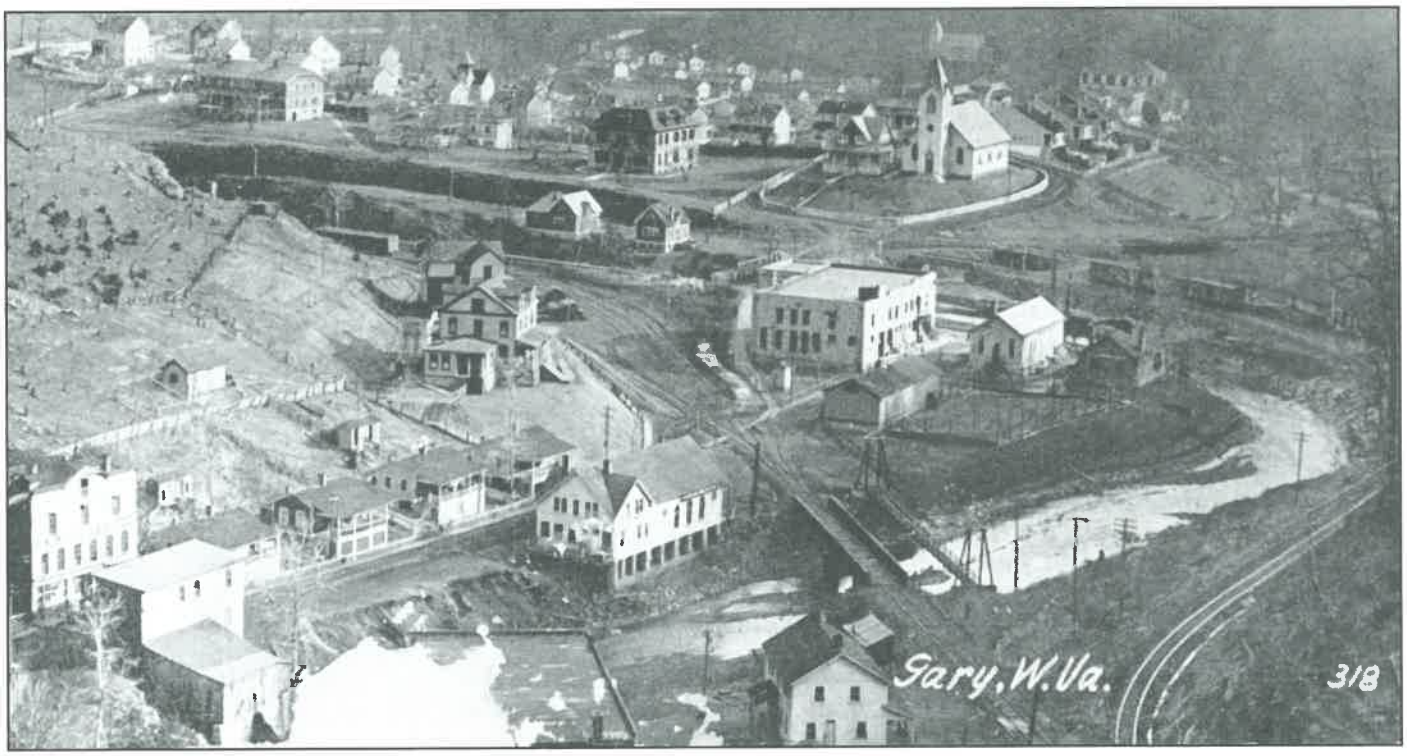
The Froe sisters at Gary in 1935. All three women worked as teachers. From the left, they are Vicie Rann, Jessie Perkins, and Mattie Moon.

promoted the passage of an anti-lynching law and other significant legislation affecting the lives of black people in West Virginia.

"We were all like that," Mrs. Thomas says, referring to her immediate family's propensity to work in the background. "My mother said we were sneaky," she says, with a laugh, as she recalls her family's quiet manner of helping to bring about change.

Mrs. Thomas was born Jessie Elizabeth Moon in 1913 and is a lifelong resident of McDowell County. A product of the state's segregated school system, she graduated from Gary District High School and attended Bluefield State College. Her parents were both teachers. "My daddy died in 1929," she recalls, "and my mother taught until I could begin teaching. I only went to Bluefield State for a year and one half. Back then, you could get an old-time temporary certificate, so that's how I started out. But I just kept going to summer school." Along with her studies at Bluefield State, Mrs. Thomas also amassed college credits from summers spent at Hampton [Institute] University, Howard University, A&T State University, and West Virginia State [College] University. She graduated from Bluefield State College with a bachelor's degree in education in 1939 and received a master's degree in education from West Virginia University in 1954.

Mrs. Thomas taught at elementary schools in several McDowell County communities: Havaco, Gary, Iaeger, Elbert, and Tharp. Although not active in political parties herself, she was punished, she felt, because of her mother's associations. Reminiscing about her early teaching jobs, Mrs.




Gary was once one of southern West Virginia's busiest and most productive coal communities. This undated postcard view shows the Tug Fork river through Gary and the growing development along its banks. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

Thomas says, "I taught in Gary until the politics changed." She recalls the period when Democrats became the dominant party in the area. "In those days, your job depended on politics. My mother had a history of being in the opposite party — [she] was a Lincoln Republican," Mrs. Thomas says, referring to the devotion of many early black voters to the Republican party, because President Lincoln had freed the slaves. "I was told that her choice of party might affect my employment. [My mother] was active with the Republican women's organization. She grew up in Elkhorn with Memphis Garrison [West Virginia civic activist and Republican organizer and campaigner] and often traveled to Huntington and other places with her."

As a result of her mother's political affiliation, Mrs. Thomas was moved from the school in Gary to one in the less-developed community of Iaeger. When a member of the board of education saw her in the company store in Iaeger, he asked her — in what she considered to be a rather snide manner — how she liked teaching "down here." She replied, "Oh, I like it fine. I'm so poor that anywhere I teach is all right, so long as I can make some money." When he said, "Maybe something might happen and you might get back to Gary," Mrs. Thomas answered, "Whatever happens will happen."

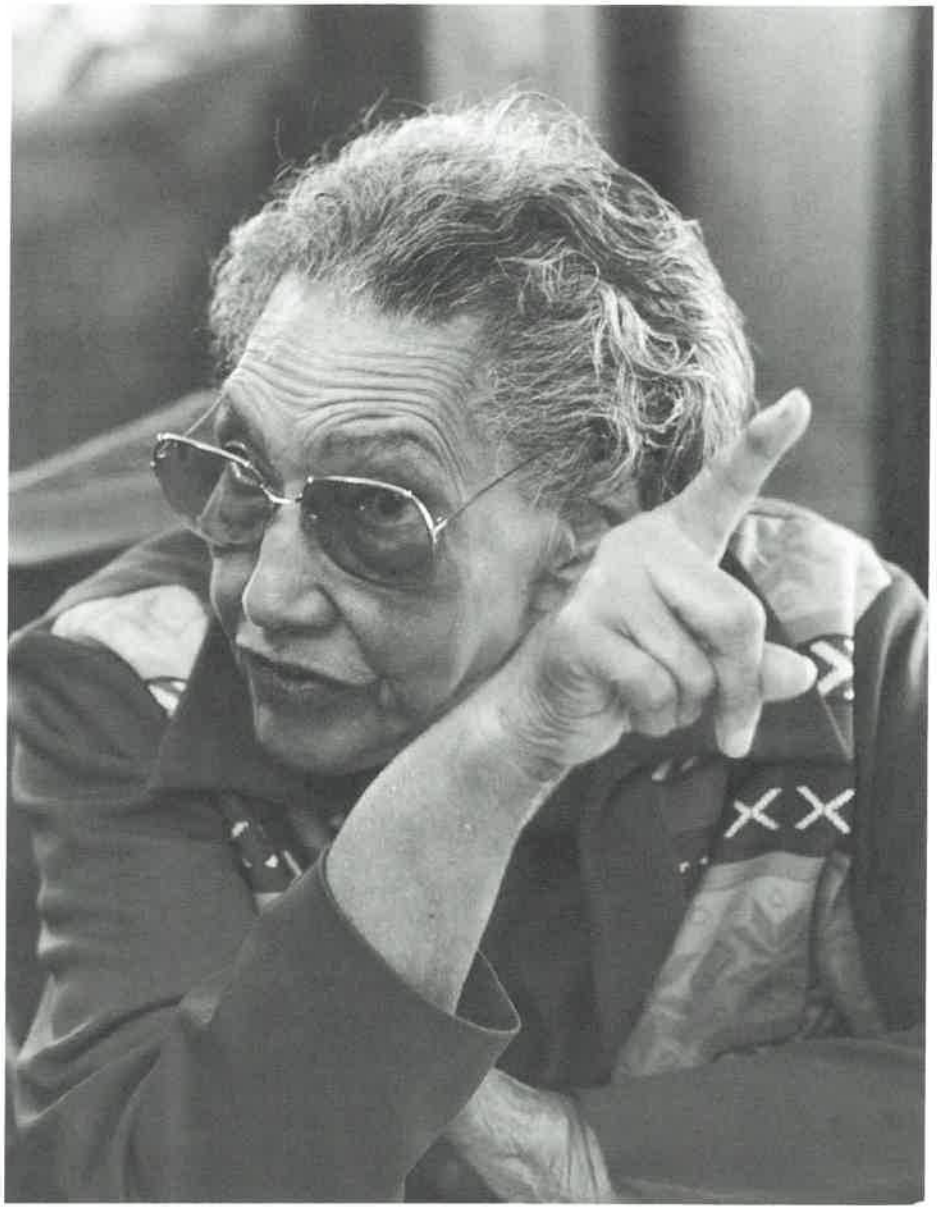
"So, after awhile, I came back to Gary," she recalls. Her husband, Arthur Thomas, was teaching at Elbert. "When he went to the Army, I took his job and was the principal up there," she says. "When they integrated, I went to Tharp, and then I ended up integrated at Gary."

When integration came, the black schools were closed and most of the principals were demoted. Mrs. Thomas says that the school to which she was moved had a white female principal, with whom she had taken classes while studying for her master's degree and principal's certificate at WVU. "I knew what she knew," Mrs. Thomas continues, "and they knew that I did. It was a pretty big school, and most of [the other schools] had an assistant principal. One of the other teachers said, 'I just don't understand why we don't have an assistant principal up here.'

"'Because Jessie Thomas is here,'" Mrs. Thomas responded, suggesting that those in charge understood that if an assistant principal were to be named without considering her for the position, a question regarding the method of filling it would be raised. Rather than risk the question, they chose not to appoint an assistant principal.

As a black teacher in the public schools of McDowell County during this period, Mrs. Thomas says that she had no problems with white parents or students. In fact, she indicates that some of the white parents sought to have their children placed with black instructors, because they were good teachers. Occasionally, she still sees some of these former students — now adults — who tell her, "I wish you could start my child in school."

When the black teachers were transferred to white schools following integration, some of them were assigned to classes lower than those they had traditionally taught. For example, in the black school in which she formerly worked, Mrs.



At age 93, Jessie Thomas is articulate and active. She vividly recalls her 42 years as a teacher in McDowell County and her lifelong involvement with social causes. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Thomas taught sixth grade. But after integration, her white female principal assigned her to the first grade. Mrs. Thomas made the adjustment, however, developing the methods and materials necessary to work with the younger children.

"After I stayed there for awhile," Mrs. Thomas recalls, "[the principal] said, 'Mrs. Thomas, I'm going to recommend that you be changed to the sixth grade.' I said, 'No. When I came here, you put me in the first grade. And when I retire, I'm going to retire from the first grade.' So I stayed with the first grade, and I was very successful with the parents. It would make her so mad, because the parents would come to the office and say they wanted their kids to be in my room next year."

Mrs. Thomas was never a part of any organized racial protests. "I was teaching, and I had children," she explains. Her activism found individual expression, however, in a variety of other ways. For example, in the school to which she was transferred after integration, she fought for the right of a handicapped black student assigned to her class to have an aide to facilitate her instruction. Although the board of education had made aides available to others during the previous year, Mrs. Thomas was told that they would not provide an aide for her student, because they didn't have the money. Mrs. Thomas determined that she would pursue the request all the way to Washington, if necessary. She believed that without an aide, carrying out the needed instruction for the handicapped student would not be possible, considering the other responsibilities of the classroom. After school officials at the local level denied the appeal, Mrs. Thomas says, "They had a trial, and we had to go to Charleston. We [the principal, the superintendent of McDowell County schools, and Mrs. Thomas] drove down together in a van. The judge ruled in my favor. Coming back, they didn't speak to me all the way back. They let me out of the van here. They didn't say good night. I said good night," she says with a chuckle.

"I integrated the dormitories at West Virginia University," she says, as she continues reminiscing about her personal combination of education and activism. "The president of West Virginia University, Dr. Stewart, was speaking at a county teachers meeting [in Welch in the early 1950's]," she recalls. Although he invited questions at the end of the session, Mrs. Thomas says that she made no remarks publicly, but approached him after the session. "I went up to him and said, 'Dr. Stewart, I plan to come to WVU to complete my work for my master's. I don't feel like running all over town trying to find a place to stay. I want to have access to the library and other facilities, and I wondered if I could stay in the dormitory?' He said, 'I'm glad that you asked me that question privately.'

"Shortly after that conversation," she continues, "I received an application blank for the dormitory. I filled it out and went on down to WVU and stayed in the dormitory. People were friendly. I was friendly, too. The blacks called me Jackie Robinson."

Jessie, at left, with her husband, Arthur Thomas, and cousin, Thelma Topson-Woody, in 1966.

Just as Mrs. Thomas stood up for her own rights and those of other people, she was also quick to recognize and applaud activist thinking in others. For example, she recalls one of her favorite instructors while at WVU, Dr. H.G. Wheat, a teacher whom she thought was very progressive. "Whenever I would go there, I would always try to get in his classes. He was a math teacher and did a series of books that were used in some of the schools. He was very fair. He made the most brilliant speech on integration that I have ever heard. That was the lecture one morning. He based the speech on the Bible. Some of the students didn't like it. I was sitting there shaking my head, and some of the other students said to me, 'Did you know what he was talking about?' I said, 'Yes, I understood perfectly.'"

Mrs. Thomas' family tradition of personal activism was continued by her son, James. Now a physi-

Jessie Thomas enjoys the view from the porch of her home, where she has lived since 1934. Photograph by Michael Keller.

cian in Delaware, Dr. Thomas taught at Northfork High School before he attended medical school. When he learned that black students at the newly integrated school were not permitted to join the Key Club, he brought suit on their behalf.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has long been a part of life for members of this family. "I am a life member of the NAACP," she says. "My father and grandfather were charter members of the McDowell County branch of the organization. We were reared on the [NAACP] magazine, *Crisis*."

As she thinks about her own activism and that of her family, Mrs. Thomas says, "My people were the kind to get involved when they heard of any kind of segregation, even before others thought about it. You see, many people are afraid to speak up but are glad when somebody else does." She laughs as she remembers what one old lady once said to her: "'I'll give y'all credit. Anywhere y'all go, things change!'"

Beyond her teaching and activism, Mrs. Thomas has been a faithful member of the Rockhill Baptist Church for 72 years. She has found satisfying social outlets through activities at the church and through her sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha.

A spry 93-year-old, Mrs. Thomas continues her life in the ways of her family. These days, however, her combination of education and activism takes a different form — that of helping to preserve history. She has done extensive research on her family's history. "It's all there," she says, as she points to the books and papers on her work table, "From the Gold Coast of Africa to Cheshire County, England, to Lebanon, Virginia." She also shares her knowledge of the community through an occasional article she writes for the *Welch Daily News*, making local history available to another generation.

"I wrote about this house," she says, as she looks around her home. We moved here in 1934. I'm almost as old as it is," she says with a smile. "The granddaughter of Mike Silagi, the man who used to own it, came to visit me. She wanted to see the house. It used to be a boardinghouse and restaurant for miners." She points to the front of the house, which faces a railroad track. "The train stopped right there, and the miners would get off and come here.

"I've loved living in the coalfields," she says, and chuckles as she looks at her crowded work table. "I can't move now. I've got too much stuff."

ANCELLA R. BICKLEY holds a doctorate in education from West Virginia University. She is a former professor at WVU, and a former professor and administrator at West Virginia State University. She is the author or co-author of several books and articles about West Virginia black history and a frequent GOLDENSEAL contributor. Ancella's most recent story appeared in our Winter 2004 issue.

Ellie Mannette with steel drum and tools in his Morgantown workshop. Photograph 1996 by Bob Beverly.

# STEEL

**By Michelle Wolford**

You wouldn't know it to look at Ellie Mannette, but he recently turned 79. Though his curly hair is gray, his trim physique and high energy give him the appearance of a younger man. His speech is rapid — despite nearly 40 years in the United States, his Trinidadian accent is still thick. His movements are quick and purposeful. He is a man with a mission.

Mannette's mission is the continued development of the steel drum, a richly melodic percussion instrument first made from discarded oil barrels on the Caribbean island of Trinidad some 60 years ago. The steel of the 55-gallon drums is heated and hammered to produce a broad range of musical tones — a range that is still being expanded.

Ellie Mannette is widely credited with developing and refining the instrument, and its tuning, over the past half-century, and is often referred to as the "Father of the Modern Steel Drum." For the past decade and a half, he has proudly carried on this legacy from the hills of Monongalia County, as an artist in residence at West Virginia University.

The drums are now treasured members of orchestras all over West Virginia, the United States, and the world. And the most sought-after brand of those instruments bears the Mannette name. They're made at Ellie's workshop in Granville, just outside of Morgantown.

Born in Trinidad in 1927, Man-

# DRUMS IN MORGANTOWN

## Percussion Pioneer Ellie Mannette


nette was at the forefront of the steel drum's development. After the British government banned African drums in Trinidad, revelers found other ways to make music. They first used bamboo, and, later, trash cans and biscuit tins. In the years after World War II, discarded oil drums became the percussion instrument of choice on the island.

Mannette had been developing the drums in his father's yard. He says the European classical music he heard growing up in Trinidad was his inspiration. Too poor to afford a conventional instrument or lessons, Mannette says he dreamed of finding a way to make that music with the tools that were available to him.

"As a kid in the islands, 10, 11, 12, 13 years old, I went to public school," he says. "We were ruled by the British, and they played a lot of classical music all day — Chopin and Beethoven and Strauss — and all these great orchestras play all day. And as I listened to the orchestras, I said, 'I must develop those voices from trash cans.' I didn't know what the voices were, but I was hearing it, day in and day out. It got so embedded in my mind. I would listen to it till I go to sleep. Having that music in my head, I began to beat on the trash cans to create the voices that I was hearing in the orchestra. I created those voices one at a time by trial and error, because how do you develop the voice of a cello? How do you develop the voice of a violin, a bass on trash? I have to say, maybe I had God's gift for creativity — a creative mind. I saw the pictures in my head as to what I should do and how it should be done to accommodate the voices I was hearing."

Mannette was chosen as one of the first to take the instrument to Europe. In 1949, he was selected to perform in the Trinidad All-Star Percussion Orchestra and traveled to England. Offered a scholarship to study in England, Mannette disappointed some members of his family and his country when he turned it down. Instead, he returned to Trinidad and the steel drums he loved.

Recently, those steel drums, many of them in voices Mannette created, have found a place in American popular music. Country and pop singer Jimmy Buffett's sound is tied to the instrument. The steel drum has also been used in such diverse musical styles as classical, punk rock, and jazz. Though still most often associated with island music, the instrument has recently become a staple of middle and high school bands. WVU has a steel drum ensemble, and more than one alumnus has formed a band with the pan, as it is often called, at the forefront. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find a fair or festival in or around Morgantown that doesn't feature at least one group with a steel drum — more often than not, entire steel drum orchestras perform. Many schools around the country have also embraced the steel drum. And Ellie Mannette is a big part of the reason. He's trained countless drummers, drum makers, and tuners and has shipped drums all over the world.

In 1992, after 25 years in the United States — traveling from state to state, from university to university, lecturing on the making and tuning of steel drums — Mannette was named an artist in residence at the WVU College of Music.

"I was so comfortable in this state that I was eager to do what I can to help this area," Mannette says, "to help the people and spread my music and my talent into the area. I train young people to carry my work forward. My philosophy is,

Ellie Mannette in a classroom. Ellie came to West Virginia University as an artist in residence in 1992. Photographer and date unknown.

'What does it profit a man to keep what he knows to himself?' It doesn't benefit anybody. So I always feel I should share my unique talent and skill with the young people."

He tells students not to give up on school like he did many years ago. "I had a skill that carried me through," he tells them, "but you may not. Finish your education."

And for many WVU students, Mannette has been a part of that education. In addition to his work at the university, he operates Mannette Steel Drums, Ltd., and his apprentices are university students and graduates. His shop has grown from a single room in the basement of the WVU Creative Arts Center to a large warehouse near Westover.

Mannette came to the United States as an educator in 1967. Murray Norell, a New York social worker, asked Mannette to teach students in inner-city neighborhoods in the five boroughs to play steel drums. Mannette accepted the challenge. He formed a youth band, and soon city officials were hearing about them. The group was invited to perform in Central Park's Tavern on the Green. That concert drew much attention to the instrument and to the music it could make.

"Music educators at Queens College and Medgar Evers College invited us to perform there in the late '60's and early '70's," Mannette says. "Medgar Evers College wanted a set of steel drums. And in 1971, I met James Leyden. He also wanted a set of steel drums. He had played with Tommy Dorsey and the Glenn Miller Orchestra. He taught me much I didn't know about music. He coached me and made me a better builder."

With an increased understanding of music, Mannette also became a better tuner. Though he has a natural ear for music, he learned to use sophisticated electronic equipment to tune drums, making them more practical for orchestral use.

Invited to speak and perform at a music educators' conference in the Poconos, the builder impressed the teachers. "Two or three months after," Mannette says, "the orders for drums started coming in. It blossomed from there."

He continued to travel from college to college, building and delivering drums, performing, conducting clinics, and tuning. In 1991, at a clinic at North Carolina's East Carolina University, Phil Faini arrived to order steel drums for WVU.

Faini was head of the university's percussion program. "In 1969, our percussion ensemble took a tour of South America for the State Department," Faini recalls. "We went to Trinidad and were exposed to the whole steel drum business and met the top people. And, of course, we heard about Ellie Mannette. At the time, Ellie was in the United States. We attended a workshop, and I thought steel drums would be great to add to our collection. But I was told, if you didn't have someone to tune them, you'd be in trouble."

"When he ordered the drums," Mannette says, "I said, 'Who are you? Where are you from?' He said, 'West Virginia University.' I had never heard of it. I had no idea where it was. But I told him, 'I have other orders. I will build your drums as soon as I can.'"

"Ellie told me he could have them for me for my next concert in October," Faini says. "This was April or May. He got them to me — they came about a day before the concert. We incorporated them into our concert quickly. After that, Ellie promised he'd come and give us a free tuning."

When Mannette arrived in Morgantown in the summer of 1991, "We were hosting the Governor's Honors Academy," Faini says. "I was teaching them steel drums and African drums, and Ellie came to do the tuning.

"I asked if he'd like to meet with students and told him I was sure they'd like to meet the 'Father of the Steel Drum,'" Faini recalls. "So he came in, and it was amazing to see his rapport with [the students]. I said, 'Ellie, did you ever think about settling down and teaching?' And he said, 'Yeah, people have talked about it, but no one's ever done anything about it.' I asked him if he liked West Virginia, and he said yes. I said, 'It's warm here in the summer, but it gets cold in the winter.' He said, 'I like the change of seasons.' He said he'd like to come.

"The provost at the time was Bill Vehse. He said, 'We have a hiring freeze, so I don't know.' I told him it was an opportunity to get someone really special in here. [Vehse] was a musician, too — he played cello — so he was sympathetic to the arts. After a couple months or so, he said, 'I think I can come up with a little money.' So Ellie said he'd come for a semester."

Mannette recalls the invitation. "I was in Portland, Oregon, and I got a message from my answering service: 'A faculty position is open for you January 15 at West Virginia University.' I said, 'I will try to make it, but I have all these contracts.' I was building drums, working as a technician, clinician, doing demonstrations. I cut some short, and instead

of coming in at the intended time, I came in March of 1992. I came in on a Monday, and I saw on the bulletin board, Ellie Mannette's going to do a demonstration for the faculty and staff on Saturday. I wasn't ready for it, but I did it. I did my first clinic at the Falbo Theatre in the Creative Arts Center. I did an hour and a half, and the college had good reviews about it. They said it was very professional. From that point on, I began to build a good name for myself at the college here."

With the school's support, Mannette started a training program for WVU students who wanted to learn to build and tune drums. It was called the University Tuning Project. "Students would come to the basement to be trained and then go back to class," Mannette says.

"After a semester, Bill Vehse got me more money to put him on [permanently]," Faini says. "He made drums, taught, and tuned our drums. He made us a full complement of chrome drums. So that was the start of it all."

Kaethe George, Mannette's business partner at Mannette Steel Drum, Ltd., and president of the Mannette Foundation, says the position made good sense for Mannette. "He's a natural teacher," she says. "He doesn't think of it as educating. He has an innate ability to want to impart information. There was synergy between him and students when he was just doing workshops. Morgantown has been the best thing for that part of him. He was like a minstrel — he planted a seed here and a seed there. He needed to be in a place where people could come to him."

Mannette remembers being struck by West Virginia's beauty, even on his first visit.

"When I first come to the state," he recalls, "we drove from the south coming north. We picked up Interstate 77. There were winding roads up the mountains, and I said, 'This is a most impressive state.' I loved it right away. And the people were so wonderful. It's like Trinidad — if you go there as a visitor, everyone asks, 'Can I help you? Can I take you around?' And that's just exactly how it was for me when I came to Morgantown. The people here are so warm and hospitable. I was surprised — it's a rural state and predominantly white. And I'm a black man — and for people to show me such warmth, I was very impressed and I felt very, very good about it."

Tuning a steel drum is a high-decibel proposition. Here, Ellie covers his ears while a pair of students at a 2001 steel drum workshop use a hammer to adjust the tuning on a drum. Photograph by Bob Beverly, courtesy of West Virginia University Photographic Services.

Steel drum ensembles and orchestras have become increasingly popular in recent years, especially among younger musicians. These students are participating in a workshop at WVU in 2001. Photograph by Bob Beverly, courtesy of West Virginia University Photographic Services.

Kaethe George says during his first years at WVU, graduation was a tough concept for Mannette to grasp. "He had a hard time getting used to graduation," she recalls. "He was emotionally a basket case. He'd ask, 'Where's Susie?' and I'd say, 'Ellie, she graduated. It was time for her to move on, start her life.' It took him a good six, seven years to really get used to 'Susie graduated' and not have a tear come to his eye."

After five years in the basement of the Creative Arts Center, Mannette says, "The space was too small — we needed more room." And there was another problem. To fashion a musical instrument from a 55-gallon drum, you use heat and a hammer. "We were banging all day," Mannette says. "Everybody complained about the bang, bang, bang. People are trying to rehearse piano, cello, violin, whatever, and all they hear is bang, bang, bang. So we knew we had to move."

A student who lived in Granville noticed an empty warehouse on Dents Run Boulevard. "The Granville building had been vacant for many years," Kaethe George says, "and the landlord was flexible about payment. We incorporated formally as Mannette Steel Drums in 2000."

Mannette says even after he left the Creative Arts Center, he stayed busy and involved. "Students came here and took coaching, day in and day out," he says. "I prepared music for students in the steel drum orchestra, maintained instruments, lectured on the evolution of the art form — how the drums developed."

Many of Mannette's apprentices are WVU graduates, though not all in music. Undergraduates can take independent study hours to work with Mannette, who is still an adjunct professor at the College of Creative Arts.

The drum shop in Granville is always busy. Drums orders are "growing steadily," Kaethe George says. "We've shipped 12 to 15 sets of instruments a month over the last two years." The drums are shipped all over the world.

Mannette Steel Drums also hosts an annual Festival of Steel in Morgantown. Started in 1992, it has grown from an initial class of eight to a 2006 benchmark of 121 students. "We had to close enrollment," Mannette says, "because we cannot provide instructors and instruments for all of them."

In 1999, Mannette received the most impressive of the many awards he's been given since moving to the United States. In 1999, at a White House ceremony, first lady Hilary Rodham Clinton presented Mannette a National Heritage Fellowship. The prize honored his groundbreaking work in creating the steel drum, developing many of the instrument's innovations, revolutionizing the tuning process, and his efforts to perpetuate the steel drum through teaching and other means. The nation's highest honor in folk and traditional arts came with a $10,000 prize. Along with fiddler Melvin Wine (1991), weaver Dorothy Thompson (2000), and songwriter/singer Hazel Dickens (2001), Ellie is one of only four West Virginia residents or former residents to receive this important award.

What qualified Mannette for this high honor? A lifetime of "firsts." He was the first man to "sink" a steel


The offices and workshop location of Mannette Steel Drums, Ltd., on Dents Run Boulevard in Granville, near Morgantown. Photograph by Mark Crabtree.

A dedicated teacher, Ellie Mannette has inspired countless students and musicians during his 60-year career in steel drums. Here, he works with a student at a 2001 workshop at WVU. Photograph by Bob Beverly, courtesy of West Virginia University Photographic Services.

drum, making it concave instead of convex. (Others worked from the inside of oil barrels and hammered the steel up.) He was the first to use a 55-gallon drum, now the standard for steel drums. He was the first to use a rubber mallet to play the drums, thus reducing the noise of wood on metal. And he can claim "firsts" for seven of the 10 steel drum "voices" now in use: lead (1946), bass (1950), double seconds (1952), double guitars (1954), triple cellos (1956), tenor basses (1960), and quad duet (1996).

In 2005, Ellie Mannette and Kaethe George founded the Mannette Foundation to promote, research, and document the legacy Mannette helped create. The foundation plans to develop a museum and scholarships, as well as cultural, economic, and educational exchange programs between West Virginia and students in Trinidad.

Mannette is proud of the work he's done in West Virginia. He says it's the least he can do for the state that welcomed him with open arms. Governor Gaston Caperton even made him an honorary West Virginian in 1996. But in 2008, Mannette will leave West Virginia. He plans to retire and return to Trinidad. "I hate to have to leave this university to go home, because they have been so wonderful to me," he says. "And the town of Morgantown, I cannot say in words what this city and this university has done for me. So I have to go home because I have no family here anymore, and I don't know if I want to retire and fade away in the city of Morgantown."

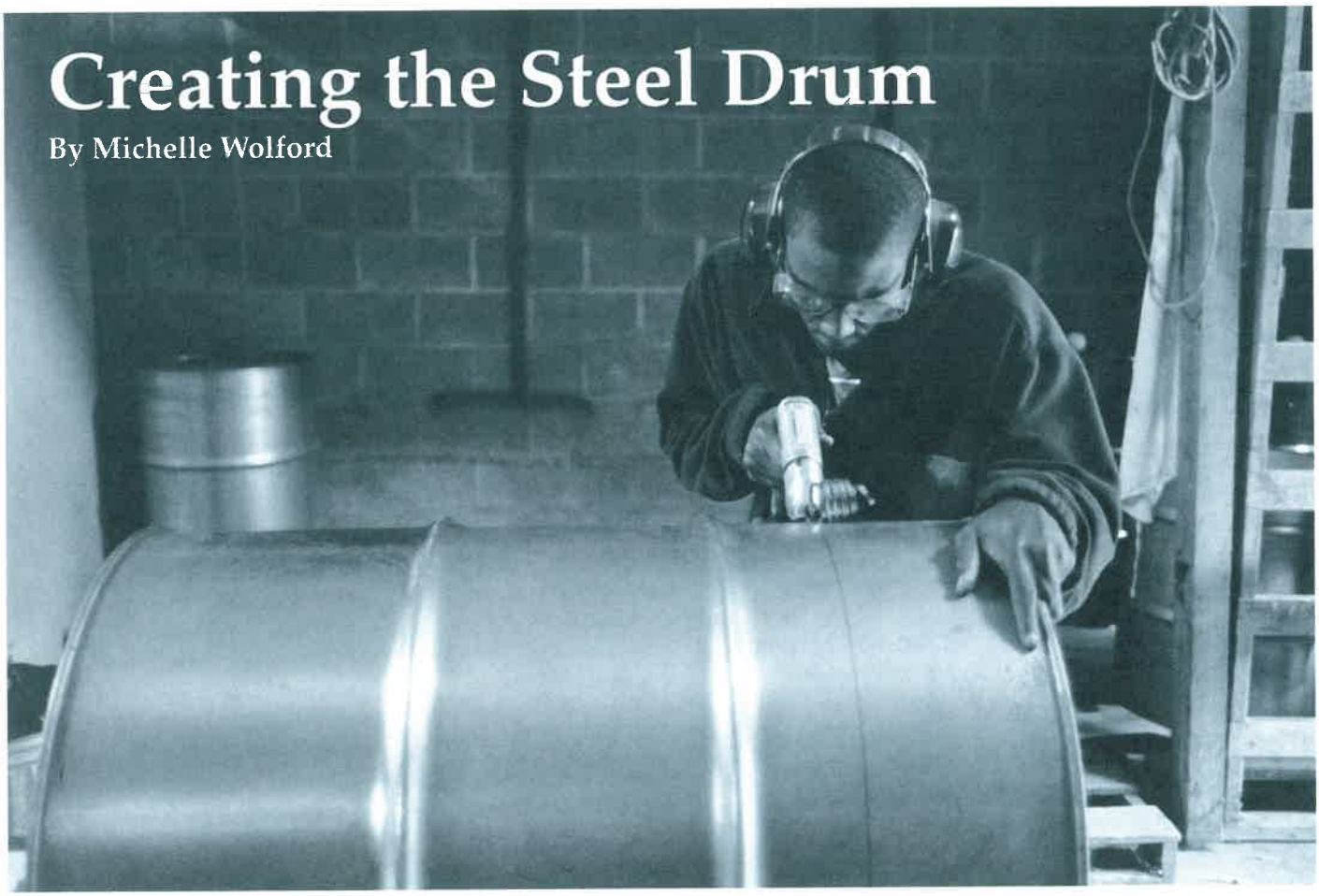
Kaethe George says Mannette is often asked, of all the places he's lived and worked in the United States, why he has made his home in Morgantown, West Virginia.

"People are so surprised that he's settled here," she says. "They ask him why, and his answer is very simple," she says. "He tells them, 'Because they invited me.'"

MICHELLE WOLFORD grew up in northeastern Ohio, the daughter of Webster and Nicholas county natives. She earned a degree in journalism at West Virginia University and is a writer and copy editor for the *Dominion Post* in Morgantown. This is Michelle's first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

# Creating the Steel Drum

By Michelle Wolford



Steel drum builder Eric Fountain begins the construction process by cutting a 55-gallon drum into two pieces. The larger section will become a tenor bass; the smaller section will be made into a lead drum. Photograph by Mark Crabtree.

Steel drums came from trash. They began during an altercation between tamboo-bamboo bands in Trinidad, 60-some years ago. According to Chanler Bailey, president and CEO of Mannette Steel Drums outside Morgantown, competing bands dropped their traditional percussion instruments and began beating on trash cans instead.

"They realized that wherever there were dents in the metal, it created a different sound," Bailey says. "They were very percussive, not melodic like today's drums."

Early steel drums produced only three notes. Since then, the steel drum has evolved into a sophisticated musical instrument in 10 distinct "voices," or tone ranges, and capable of 33 separate notes.

Ellie Mannette is credited with developing many of the new drums. He was the first to use a 55-gallon oil drum. He was the first to "sink" a drum, once he realized that a concave surface could produce more notes than a convex one. He figured out how to produce 14 notes on one, then kept adding notes wherever he could.

Billy Sheeder, who studied under Mannette in West Virginia for eight years, says Mannette drums evolved because of the music Ellie was trying to play.

"When he was a kid they were playing African rhythms," Sheeder says of Mannette. "And he loves classical music. With the steel drum, he's always wanted to merge the sounds. He wanted the drums to sound like a symphony, and he did that. When the WVU Steel Band plays a classical piece, it's that beautiful, as if it was a symphony playing it. That's purely him. I don't know of any of his peers who were going in that direction."

The drums are played by striking raised note surfaces with rubber-tipped aluminum or wooden mallets. Many of the finest drums are made in Monongalia County, using the same method Mannette and others perfected over the years through trial and error.

The instrument emerges from its industrial shell through hammering, heating, and more hammering. The builder begins by sinking the top of the drum. "You take a big hammer, and you start pounding the flat surface of the barrel into a smooth bowl shape," Sheeder says. The steel is stretched from the outer rim of the drum.

Next, you shape the drum. "You make little V-shaped areas and beat them back. This sort of rounded area starts to become like a flat plane," he explains. "You're putting in flat panels where the notes are going to be."

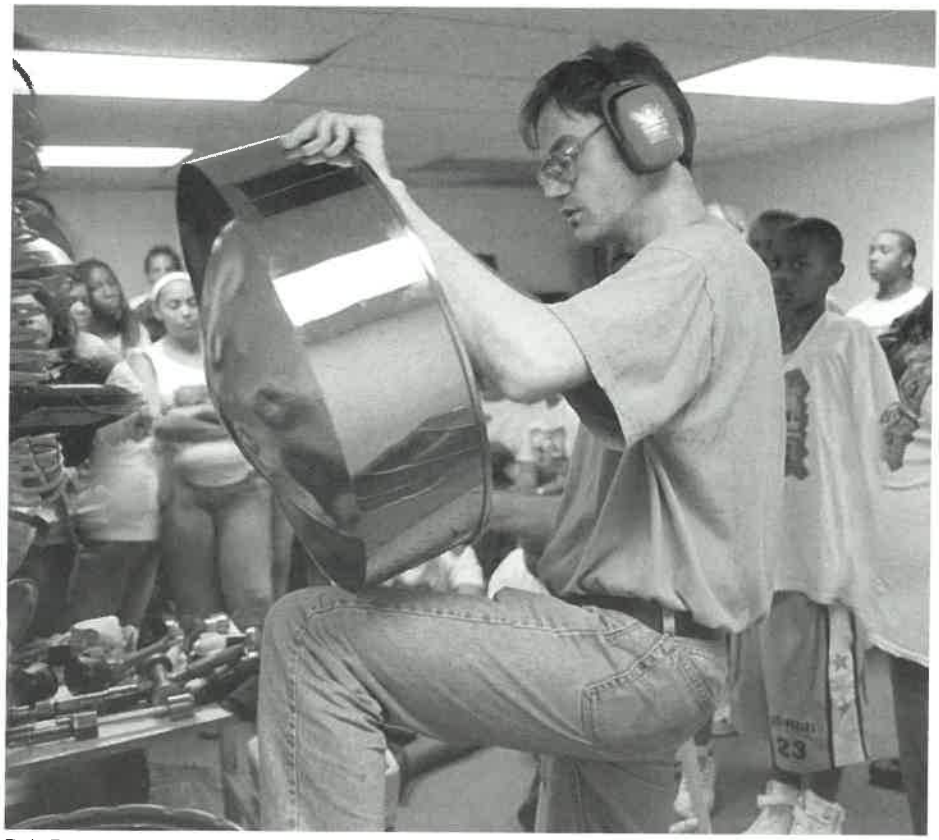
Then you map out with a marker the edges of the notes. With a metal

punch, you create a line that defines the perimeter of each note. Then you flatten it out again. The drum is then placed over a kettle burner and heated.

"No one really understood why they were heating the drum — it had just always been done," Sheeder says. Finally, a doctoral student from the University of El Paso studied the process. "He looked at the metal under a microscope through different phases of the building," Sheeder says. "The molecules looked like they were all mashed together and misshapen, like chaotic spider webs. After the burn, it looked like graph paper." Heat releases tension in the metal, he says, and gives it more stability.

During the tuning process, the drum's sound is transformed from oil barrel clang to a precise bell-like tone. Using a hammer and a blow torch, the tuner works first from the underside of the drum, beating the metal upwards, "making like a bubble in the note," Sheeder says. After this manipulation, the main pitch emerges. "You're taking the pitches up and down, sharp and flat, tightening and loosening areas of the note with the hammer. It's the same concept as a guitar string – the shorter the distance of the string, the higher the pitch."

This recent exhibit at the Monongalia Arts Center in Morgantown marks 60 years of the modern steel drum. Visitor Maria Pereira of Atlanta stands by a display of steel drums. Photographer unknown.



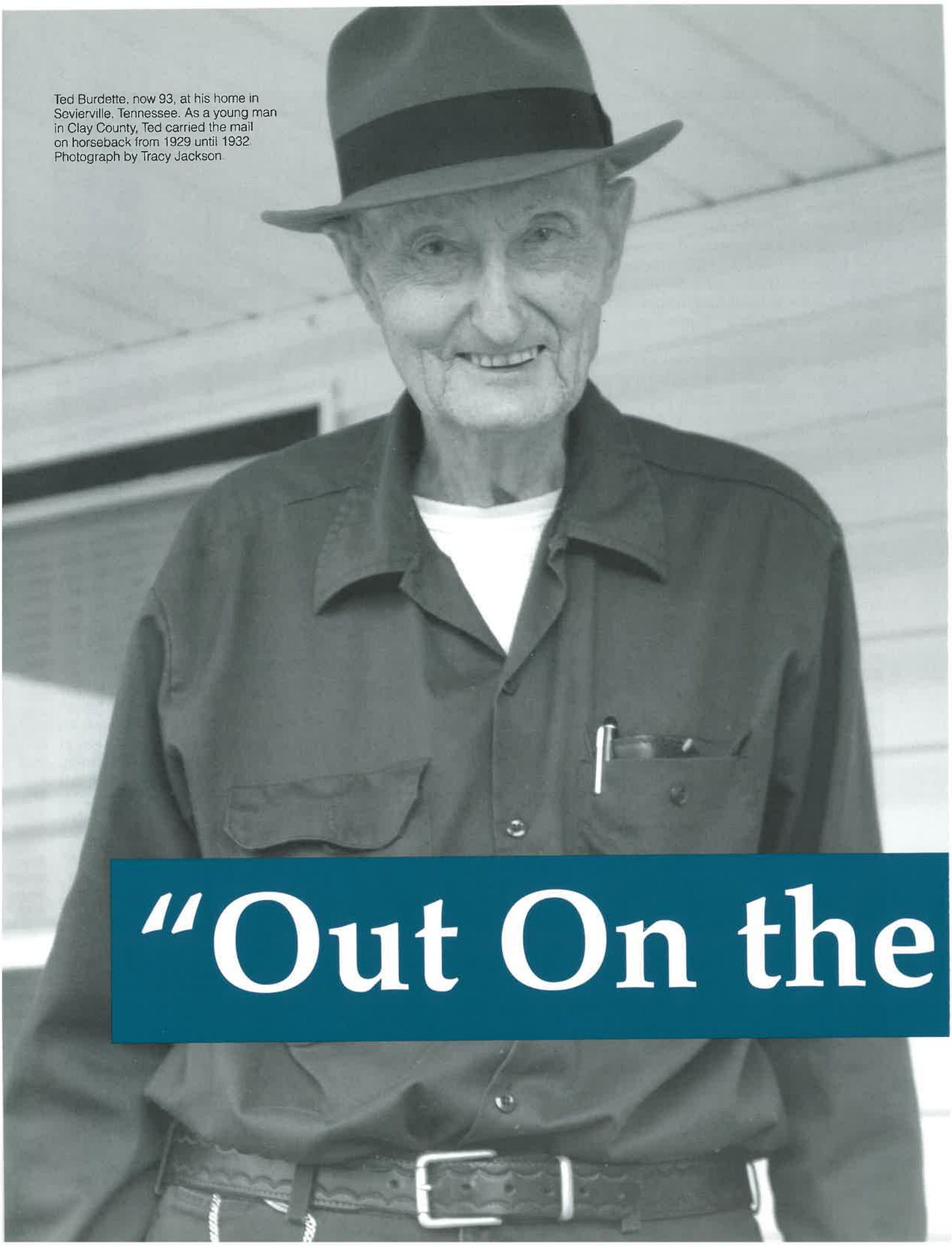
Rob Davis tunes a drum, as student visitors look on. Photograph by Mark Crabtree.

Sheeder, Bailey, and a handful of others are continuing the work Mannette began. Sheeder is no longer with MSD — he, like Mannette before him, travels the country on tuning trips. Bailey and others remain at the warehouse near Morgantown, carrying on Mannette's legacy. All are grateful that the master craftsman chose to share his knowledge with them.

"The others are so protective of their secrets and their methods," Sheeder says. "If Ellie had not chosen to do what he did, there would be a serious lapse in the quality of the instrument all over the world. Ellie was the only one who was concerned with passing it on."

When Mannette retires, which he plans to do by 2008, Bailey says he'll carry on at the drum shop.

"The entire purpose of him being here is that when he fades away, the level of craftsmanship and his sound will carry on," Sheeder says. "And it will carry on from these people here."



Ted Burdette, now 93, at his home in Sevierville, Tennessee. As a young man in Clay County, Ted carried the mail on horseback from 1929 until 1932. Photograph by Tracy Jackson.

# "Out On the

# Tales of a Mail Rider

**By Cody A. Burdette**

The day dawned cold and windy with a light snow on the ground. A tall, lean young mail carrier entered the barn to feed his horse before going on to a hearty breakfast of his own. The talk at the table centered around the hard times of the country, for this was 1929 and the Great Depression had just begun.

The young man was my father, Theodore A. "Ted" Burdette, and he carried the mail by horseback in northern Clay County from 1929 until 1932. He met the mail train each morning at Camp Creek, on Elk River, near Procious. He left Camp Creek headed for Paxton, then on to Pigeon. He met the Ovapa mail carrier at Paxton and gave him his mail from Camp Creek. His last stop on the route was at Wanego on Granny Creek.

At this time, the postmaster at Procious was L.J. Reed, the postmaster at Paxton was Little Floyd Samples, the postmaster at Pigeon was Manfield Harrah, and the postmaster at Wanego was Sam King.

On a regular day, the mail consisted of five or six mail sacks, plus one first-class locked mail cask. This was laid across the saddle, and then he sat on it. During holidays, the mail load was so heavy back in those days, my father had to use a one-horse wagon

Horses and mules were used to deliver the mail to rural residents in West Virginia until they were replaced by early trucks and automobiles. Here, postal carrier Schuyler G. Hughes of Lewis County prepares to make his rounds on horseback in 1916. Photograph courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Vania Hughes Williams Collection.

## Trail"

to carry the load. When the mail load was heavy, he had to walk behind the horse the whole distance from Camp Creek to Wanego. From Paxton to Pigeon there was no road, just a trail through the woods where giant ferns and large timber stood. Even today, in some places, you can still see signs of the old trail where my father carried the U.S. mail in the 1930's.

This job paid $1.15 per day, plus board. It was a 20-mile round trip from Camp Creek to Wanego and back. The mail had to go in all kinds of weather, so my dad took a beating on this job. But these were hard times, so my father felt lucky to even have a job.

In the winter months, when the temperature would drop way down below freezing, the water from many of the creek crossings would splash up on his feet in the stirrups and his feet would then freeze to the stirrups. When he arrived at the next post office, he would have to ride up to a post or a tree and kick it until his feet were free of the stirrups before he could dismount.

In the summer months, on the high ridge between Paxton and Pigeon, he could see summer storms coming for miles. He would sometimes have to whip his horse into a run along the narrow mountain trail to outrun the storm. As the wind began to rock the trees and lightning and thunder filled the sky, my father, then only 16 years old, knew he had to beat the storm off this high ridge, for there was no place to shelter the horse or man from the storm.

In the dead of winter, at Christmastime, the mail load would be so heavy that he was unable to ride his mount. In order to get up the muddy, snowy hills, he would hold onto the horse's tail. This way, the horse would pull him up the steep hill.

In wet weather, Granny Creek would get out of its banks, thus making it hazardous for my father to cross the creek. He would cross the creek by placing his legs up on the

The Burdette family of Clay County, mid-1920's. Ted Burdette is pictured at left, a few years before he began carrying the mail.

horse's neck, and this would keep his feet and legs dry. Sometimes, the horse would have to swim for a short distance.

At this time, the big oil and gas boom was going on at Granny Creek. Large amounts of pipe and oil-field equipment were hauled in by teams of horses and yokes of cattle from Camp Creek to Granny Creek. This was before there were good roads in the area, so cars and trucks were few.

Transportation was mostly by train at this time in Clay County, with two freight trains north and two south each day. Also, there were two passenger trains north and two south, plus one through passenger train in each direction at night.

I recently talked with my dad about his days on the mail route. These are his own recollections of his early manhood, when he delivered the U.S. mail by horseback:

"It was a lonely job that tried the true grit of a man," he said. "You had to depend on yourself and your horse for everything when you were out on the trail. It was up to only you to get the mail through. Heavy loads of Montgomery Ward and Sears Roebuck catalogs, as well as Christmas toys and radio batteries, were carried in the mail sacks by horseback over treacherous mountain trails. Sometimes, the horse would snort and shy away from the trails. This was a warning that there was probably a rattlesnake in the path ahead.

"I worked for J.C. Smith. He had bid on the mail route and hired me to ride the route. I boarded at his home on Camp Creek Mountain. I will never forget the excellent meals his wife prepared for us back in those days. I not only worked for these people, they were true friends. And the friendship has endured a lifetime."

A typical day in the life of a mail rider began at 6 a.m., rain or shine. After feeding his horse and eating breakfast, Dad would return to the horse barn and saddle his mount.

Sometimes, this was quite a show as he tried to swing into the saddle. Some of the horses and mules were about half wild and would not want to be ridden by anyone. Dad said that when he would turn his back on some of them, he could feel the wind off their teeth as they tried to take the seat of his pants out.

Then came the stomping and trying to rub the rider off his back against the sides of the barn or any other building that was handy. Finally, after a bucking spree, the horse or mule would settle down, and horse and rider would head for Camp Creek to meet the morning northbound mail train by 7:30 a.m. When the train arrived at the station, mail sacks were unloaded by the baggage man on board the train. Dad would load the sacks on his horse and start his journey into the wilderness of Granny Creek.

One of the mules that Dad used on the mail route was a mean mule, with a mind of his own. Sometimes, he would balk and stop dead in his tracks, acting like he had seen something in the trail ahead. It did not matter how much Dad spurred and whipped him, he usually did what he wanted to do. On one occasion — Dad said that he remembered it very plainly — the mule stopped dead in his tracks and threw up his ears, like he had seen the devil in the trail ahead of him. The more Dad spurred him with the double-roller Mexican spurs that he wore, the more the mule backed up, until finally backing through a barbed wire fence into a field of corn that was about knee high. There, he tried to buck and kick my father from the saddle. But being used to riding mean horses and mules, my dad stayed in the saddle. After awhile, Dad saw that the mule

Map by Terry Lively.

was going to tear down the whole cornfield, so he dismounted and led him back to the road. By this time, the mule's mean spell was over, so he followed behind Dad with no trouble.

A few days later, this same mule was put on a one-horse wagon at Paxton and started toward Procious. After going only a few hundred yards, he stopped dead in his tracks again, threw his ears up, and stared ahead like he saw the devil again. Although Dad whipped and yelled commands at him, he started backing up until he backed the wagon over a steep, rocky bank and into the creek. When the wagon reached the creek, he stopped. But it was too late, for one wheel of the wagon was demolished.

He then let Dad lead him back up the creek bank, dragging the wagon behind him. Dad borrowed an axe and cut down a good-sized sapling. He placed one end of the sapling on the front bolster of the wagon and the other end under the hub of the broken wheel, which acted like a sled runner for the broken wheel, thus letting him bring the wagon back home. This was a common practice in the oil and gas fields around Granny Creek at this time, so Dad had seen it done many times.

*As he stood up, Dad heard the lonesome sound of broken merchandise falling in the mail sacks.*

Another time, in the dead of winter about Christmastime, he was going up Horner Fork of Laurel Creek, headed for Pigeon. Since the mail was heavy that day, he was walking behind a mule — a different mule this time. A short distance from the post office at Paxton, while crossing a creek, the mule started across but then decided to turn and go up the ice-filled creek instead. Dad shouted commands at him, but he only kept going up the creek, until he finally went around a bend in the creek and was out of sight. The next sound Dad heard was the crashing of the mule as he fell down on the slick ice. When Dad got to the mule, all he could see was the mule thrashing his feet, trying in vain to get up. Each time, his feet would fly from under him and he would land with a crash on the many toys and glassware that were in the mail sacks. Dad finally got to him, and by taking him by his bridle, was able to get him on his feet.

But as he stood up, Dad heard the lonesome sound of broken merchandise falling in the mail sacks. He knew he would have to explain this at the end of his route at Wanego, so he began thinking of a story to tell the postmaster at Wanego. He came up

When the volume of deliveries grew too large to be carried on horseback, wagons and buggies were pressed into service. Here, carrier Henry Weatherholt of Upshur County, holding mailbags, poses for a picture with his horse and wagon. Photograph courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Thomas Collection, date unknown.

Ted Burdette eventually had a long career as a railroad man. He is now retired. Among his many current interests is playing old-time fiddle, as shown here. Photograph by Tracy Jackson.

with the idea to tell the postmaster that the train crew was responsible. He told them that there were so many mail sacks that morning that the train crew kept throwing them off, even after the train was underway, and some of the sacks struck cross ties that were stacked beside the track.

Dad had a lot of good horses on this job, and most of the time he had a good mount to ride. At Wanego, he fed his horse from the feed he carried around his saddle horn. If he was on time, he would arrive at Wanego around 11 a.m.

Back then, Wanego, Procious, and Pigeon each had a little store, along with a post office. So if Dad had any money, he could get himself something to eat at these stops. But, most of the time, Mrs. Smith packed him a lunch, which he carried with him.

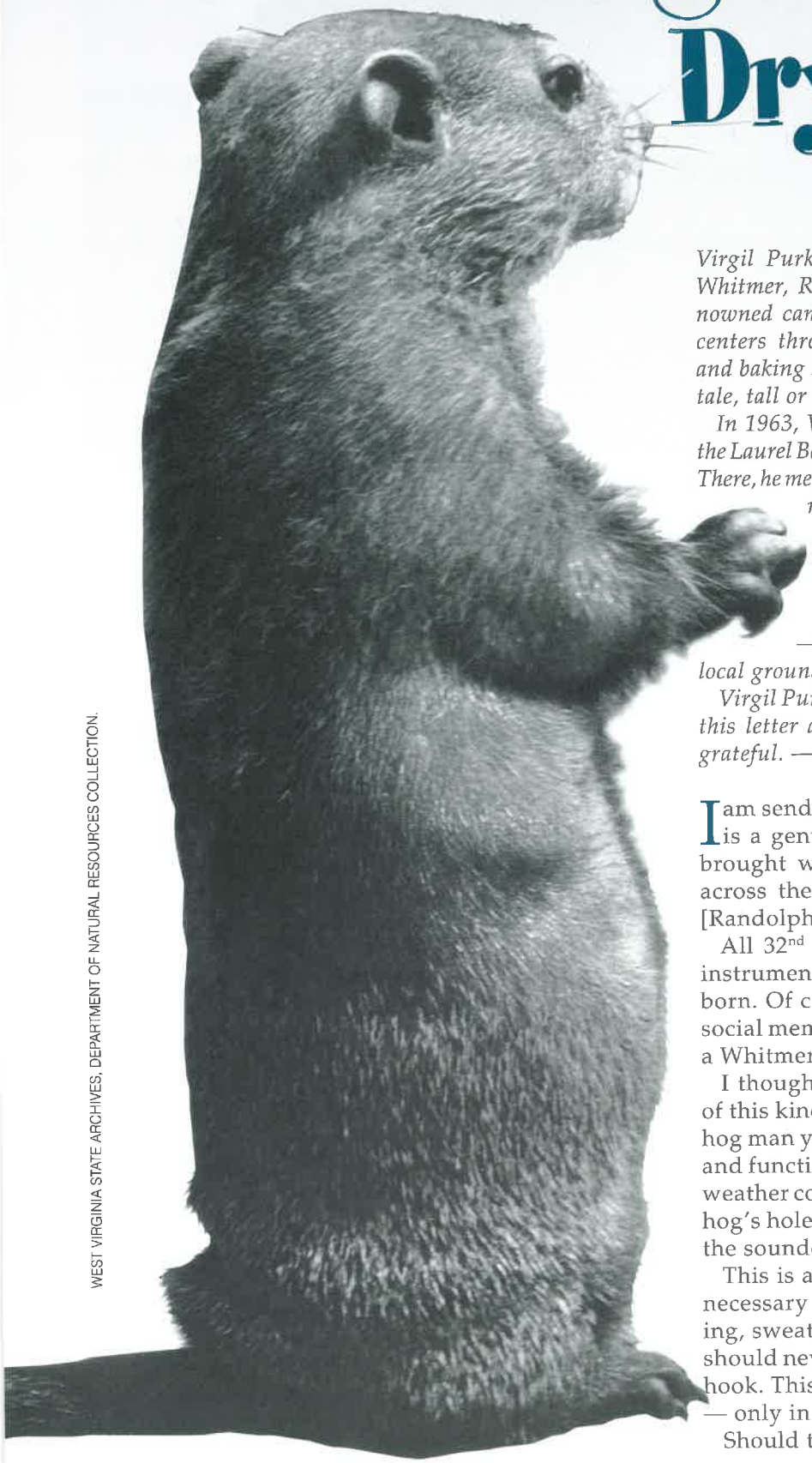
In order to meet the southbound mail train, Dad had to be back at Camp Creek by 3:10 p.m. This gave the postmaster time to sort the mail before the train arrived at 3:28 p.m.

Today, my father looks back on those days with amusement and tells grandchildren about how it was back then. I talked with him recently about the mail route and wrote this story from what he told me of his experiences on the route.

He said one thing the mail route taught him at an early age was to depend on no one but himself, for out there he was all alone and had to work out the many problems that arose each day. These were hard times, and jobs were few and far between. My dad said through all of the hardships of the mail route, he still felt lucky to have a job.

CODY A. BURDETTE grew up in Montgomery, Fayette County. He worked for the Elk River Coal & Lumber Company during the 1950's and later worked as an automobile mechanic. He is now retired and lives in Sevierville, Tennessee. Cody's most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Fall 2004 issue.

# Groundhog Lore from Dry Fork



WEST VIRGINIA STATE ARCHIVES, DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES COLLECTION.

**By Virgil Purkey**

*Virgil Purkey was a colorful character, indeed. Born at Whitmer, Randolph County, in 1902, Virgil became a renowned camp cook at logging camps and remote railroad centers throughout the Potomac Highlands. His cooking and baking skills were legendary, as was his ability to tell a tale, tall or otherwise.*

*In 1963, Virgil was working as chief cook and manager of the Laurel Bank Rest House at Slaty Fork, Pocahontas County. There, he met and befriended a young traveler, Borgon Tanner, a recent GOLDENSEAL contributor. The two struck up an engaging and extended conversation.*

*A few months later, Virgil wrote a whimsical letter to Borgon, describing a supposed "groundhog sounder" and going into considerable — and occasionally outrageous — detail about the local groundhog population and its culinary potential.*

*Virgil Purkey passed away in 1981. Borgon recently found this letter and forwarded it to us for publication. We are grateful. —ed.*

I am sending you a groundhog sounder. This sounder is a genuine reproduction of the one my ancestors brought with them when they blazed the first trail across the Alleghenies and settled in the Dry Fork, [Randolph County].

All 32nd Degree Dry Forkers are familiar with this instrument. To be a 32nd Degree, you have to be native born. Of course, you would be eligible to belong as a social member of the Dry Fork clan if you used to court a Whitmer girl.

I thought you might be interested in an instrument of this kind and value, as you are somewhat a groundhog man yourself. This instrument is simple to operate and functions perfectly in any climate, temperature, or weather conditions. You just pound the ground near the hog's hole, and if he isn't in his hole, a little bell inside the sounder will ring.

This is a great labor saver and will save a lot of unnecessary digging, coughing, punching, frying, swearing, sweating, sledging, and blasting, as a groundhog should never be blasted or pulled out of his hole with a hook. This sounder should never be used as a weapon — only in self-defense.

Should this instrument ever get out of adjustment or

out of tune, do not attempt to fix it yourself, but consult a 32nd Degree Dry Forker, as they are all experts and are taught this guarded secret of repairing from infancy. You see, the components are very delicate and sealed inside. In presenting this sounder to you, I feel sure you will derive much pleasure and enjoyment and satisfaction out of using it, and it will last you the balance of your life. *[No sounder was delivered. —ed.]*

Now I should give you some valuable tips on the groundhog subject, as I was trained under some of the most famous groundhog people of Dry Fork, such as Whistle Pig Bill Harper, Groundhog Uncle Lum Helmick, and Groundhog Aunt Sallie Porter.

*There is nothing more appetizing for breakfast than creamed groundhog livers on toast.*

Groundhogs are very essential in man's diet and his very existence on earth, and if precautions and measures are not properly taken to prevent their extermination, they will be as scarce as native brook trout. So the lovers of groundhog have decided to do something about it and have formed an association, known as the Pure-Bred Groundhog Growers Association. [It was formed] to prevent the inhuman, barbarious, and mass slaughter and extermination [of groundhogs]. With careful and selective breeding, [it will] produce a more compact and leaner groundhog. There is no reason why we can't have an annual harvest of 100,000 groundhogs per year, instead of the present yearly crop of 50,000.

This is a non profit-sharing association, and membership is free. Anyone is eligible to become a member who has captured, killed, or maimed 100 groundhogs in his lifetime or has married or courted a Dry Fork boy or girl. All members are free to have all the groundhogs they can eat in summer and not over 100 in their possession for winter use, such as cured, salted, pickled in brine, canned, or any other favorite method of preservation.

This is in order to discourage some corporation from going into the processing business for commercial purposes. If this should ever happen, Mr. Groundhog is doomed. Groundhogs are not only necessary for food, but their hides are very useful when tanned. They are used for making men's wigs and ear muffs, children's moccasins, and ladies' garters, bras, and g-strings, which all Dry Fork women wear and cherish.

Groundhogs make nice pets for children and grown-ups and, when properly trained, perform tricks that are amusing, amazing, and astonishing. The reason February 2 is called Groundhog Day is that they faithfully emerge from hibernation just as truly and faithfully as the swallows return on March 19 to Capistrano in California.

The best-flavored and most highly prized groundhogs of any place in the world grow in the Osceola section known as the Sinks of Gandy Creek. There, the altitude is just right, the climate and weather conditions are ideal, and [there is] a wonderful supply of pure limestone water and natural food. The surroundings and environment [produce] a keener vision, as [the groundhogs] can spot a man or dog approaching from a greater distance.

You have no doubt heard there are 1,000 ways to cook an egg. Well, there are 1,001 ways to cook groundhogs. They should always be eaten with ramps or garlic and should be cooked out of doors. The pure, open air will prevent them from absorbing the odors of other foods and spoiling that natural groundhog taste and smell, which is so desirable.

Just to mention a few ways to prepare the groundhog: groundhog cocktail, groundhog hash, groundhog gelatine dessert, groundhog chowder, and smoked groundhog with ramp tops and skunk cabbage. There is nothing more appetizing for breakfast than creamed groundhog livers on toast. The aroma is so delightful and pleasing to the nostrils, [it] just makes your mouth water. I have a copy of Groundhog Sallie's recipes on preparing groundhog in the most delicious forms and tidbits.

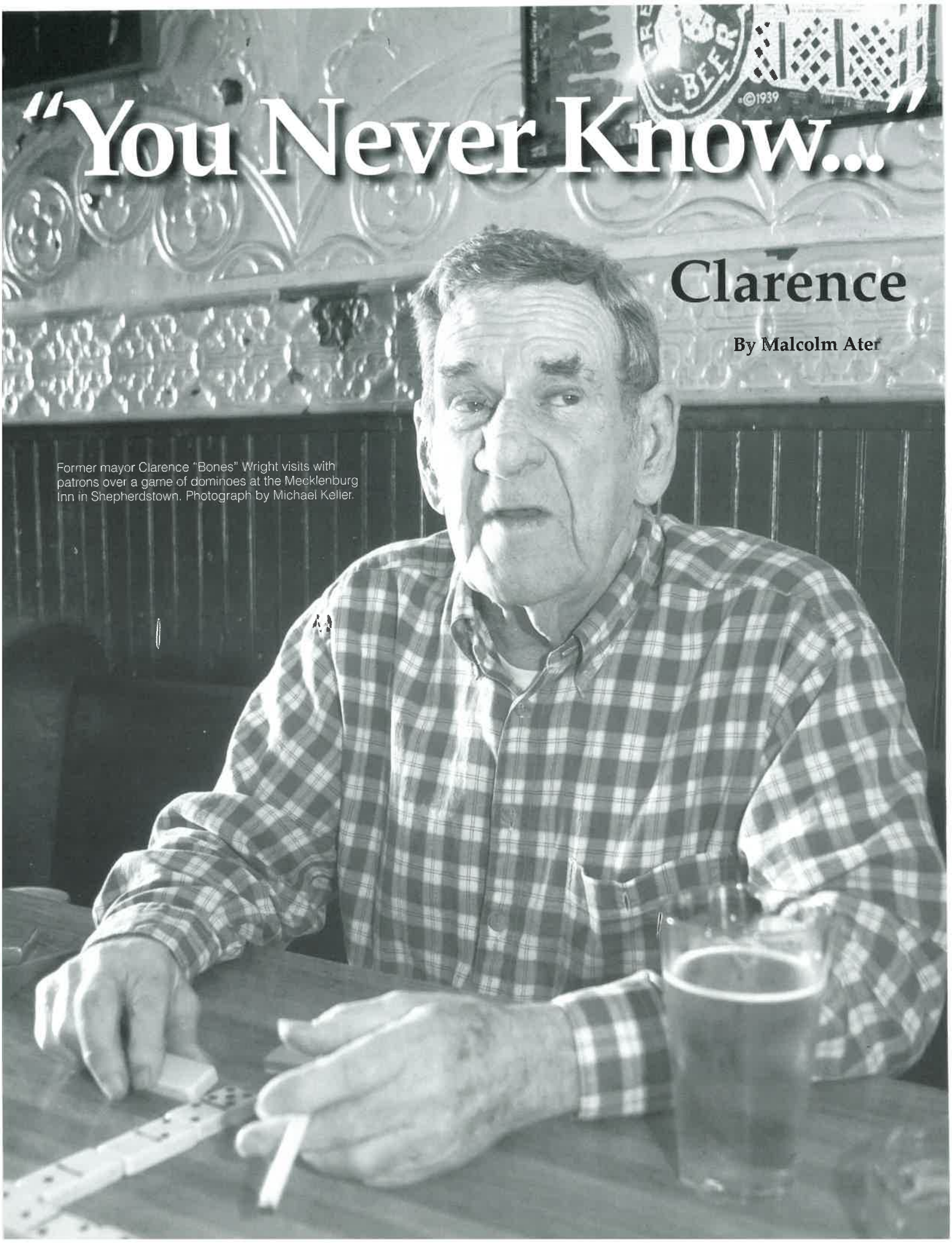
The Ramp Diggers and 'Seng Diggers and Whittlers Convention is held at Whitmer during the annual homecoming, and so is the Pure-Bred Groundhog Growers Association. I am always there to supervise the culinary art of preparing groundhogs. They still give beehives and hogs heads as prizes [to] the champion whittlers. You had better attend the next one and make a day of it.

The Laurel Bank Rest House at Slaty Fork, Pocahontas County. Photograph by Borgon Tanner, 1963.

# "You Never Know..."

## Clarence

By Malcolm Ater




Former mayor Clarence "Bones" Wright visits with patrons over a game of dominoes at the Mecklenburg Inn in Shepherdstown. Photograph by Michael Keller.

On just about any afternoon in Shepherdstown, you're likely to find former mayor Clarence "Bones" Wright sipping beer and playing dominoes (and he HATES to lose) with town cronies at the Mecklenburg Inn. At 83, he has a way of drawing people to him like a magnet. While people might not be interested in the dominoes game, they are nearly always interested in what he has to say, as they huddle around within earshot. This historic Jefferson County town has changed dramatically since he first moved here 55 years ago, but Bones keeps the past alive with his endless stories of local characters and a simpler way of life.

# "Bones" Wright of Shepherdstown

On one particular winter day recently, he was reminiscing about the time a gang of motorcycle thugs rode into town with the attitude that they were above the law. And for Bones Wright, it proved to be the most traumatic time of his life.

"It was back in the '60's," recalled Bones. "We had a new fella, Buzzy Carroll, as our only police officer. As mayor, he always gave me a call when there was trouble. Well, we had trouble that summer day. A motorcycle gang was causing quite a stir at one of the watering holes. I hurried to our little police station, where Buzzy outfitted me with a billy club while he carried a loaded riot gun. He'd already called the State Police and passed the word in town, and together the two of us went over to the Shepherdstown Bar & Grill."

The playing of dominoes came to a halt as Bones took another sip of beer and continued his story. "We got down to the beer joint just as the ringleader himself came staggering out of the bar and started relieving himself as he drank from a bottle of beer. Buzzy told the fat-bellied hooligan he was under arrest, and the guy tried to take a poke at him. I tell you, quick as a flash ol' Buzzy whipped his riot gun into action and cracked him flush against the chin with the butt of his gun. He just crumpled to the ground, and Buzzy bent over to cuff him. But there was more trouble coming."

Bones paused for another gulp of beer, the dominoes game all but forgotten. Other patrons at the Mecklenburg Inn pulled up chairs around Bones' table and unabashedly listened in. "By now, them other bikers had filtered outside — musta been 20 of them — and they began to circle around us." Bones reeled his head back and laughed before continuing. "But them bikers didn't realize they were messin' with the people of Shepherdstown, and that was their undoin'. We were a close-knit town back then, and everyone knew each other and everyone helped each other out. Word had already gotten 'round about the bikers, and, before you knew it, people were comin' running from everywhere. Someone shouted, 'Don't worry, Bonesy, we're behind you!' And with that, the townspeople began surrounding the bikers! Maybe these bikers weren't as dumb as they looked, I dunno. But they sure as hell jumped on their bikes mighty quick and roared out of town."

"Did you haul the ringleader off to jail?" questioned a forgotten domino player.

"Yeah, we cuffed the guy and loaded him and his bike into the back of an old van. But that was hardly the end of it," Bones answered, stroking his chin. "The state boys had set up a road block over in Kearneysville and arrested 14 more of the gang as they tried to flee.

Young Clarence with an Easter basket in about 1926 at his hometown of McMechen, Marshall County. He was tagged with the nickname "Bones" several years later, due to his slim physique.

Bones joined the Navy in 1943, the year this picture was made. He is shown here, at left, with his brother Henry in Glen Easton, Marshall County.

As mayor of Shepherdstown, I had to go over to Charles Town to swear out a warrant against 'em. When I got to the jail, they saw me and began yelling obscenities, which didn't bother me none. But then they began screaming that they were going to come back to Shepherdstown and burn down my house and Buzzy's house. Then the [expletives] crossed the limit of decency by threatening to kidnap and kill our children."

Bones pointed a finger at a wide-eyed listener and added, "I'll mess with any man who wants to mess with me, but don't mess with my family! For the next two months, my stomach was in knots as I worried about the safety of my kids. It was a long time before things got back to normal for me. They never came back, of course, but you never know what you're getting yourself into."

Bones probably didn't know back in 1951 what he was getting himself into when he moved to Shepherdstown. Born in McMechen, Marshall County, in 1923, he did his early schooling there before he, his parents, and two brothers — Abe and Harry — moved over to Glen Easton, located along a main Baltimore & Ohio Railroad line near Cameron. Back when he was a skinny 12-year-old kid, he was playing marbles with his brothers in the backyard when a neighbor boy passed by and not-too-kindly remarked about his thin frame, "Why you ain't nothing but a sack of bones." The name stuck. Bones graduated from Cameron High in 1941. That's where he met his future wife, Mary Louise Burley. He then went to work with his father as a boilermaker for the B&O, before enlisting in the Navy in 1943.

Bones married Mary Louise in 1948 and earned his degree in education from Fairmont College, then began working on his master's in education from West Virginia University. Bones began his long love affair with Shepherdstown in 1951, when he moved with his wife and son, Rick, to take a job as principal/teacher at the nearby three-room Shenandoah Junction School. "I think my most important job, at least in the eyes of the kids, was going over to Boswell's butcher shop every Thursday evening to pick up the biggest, meatiest soup bone I could find for our school lunch on Friday," Bones recalled. "It was awful important to the kids."

Three years later, Bones left the school system to work at the Newton D. Baker Veterans' Hospital in Martinsburg, retiring after 32 years as personnel director. Bones and Mary Louise always thrived on working with the public. Mary Louise served in World War II as an officer in the Army nursing corps and later worked for 15 years as a nurse at Shepherd College. Bones was anxious to do his share, too. So when two of his close friends, local newspaper editor C.S. Musser of *The Independent* and Musser's son, Willie, urged him to run for mayor of Shepherdstown in 1964, Bones answered the call.

Things were quite a bit different back then. Bones had an annual operating town budget of $14,000 to pay the combined salaries of the town council, one-man police force, and town handyman, along

with paying for the various town supplies, insurance premiums, and road paving expenses, not to mention the upkeep and maintenance of the town's prized rotor-rooter for cleaning out backed-up sewer lines. The town didn't even have a police car. Poor Buzzy Carroll had to drive his own car on the town beat!

But Shepherdstown was growing, and Bones helped usher it into the 20th century by buying a modern police car for Buzzy and an up-to-date truck for trash, getting rid of the town dump at the edge of the Potomac River and buying land for a new sewage plant and a new water treatment plant. Bones provided direction for the town's future growth during three consecutive terms as mayor, but he declined to run for a fourth term in order to spend more time with his growing family, which now included three daughters: Anita, Rebecca, and Mary Ellen.

But the people of Shepherdstown were not done with him yet. Against his wishes, Bones was easily elected as a write-in candidate for town recorder, a job he reluctantly accepted. In 1978, he returned as mayor, stretching his tenure of leadership from the 1960's and '70's into the '80's.

*"Back in the '50's and '60's, living in town was a real adventure."*

"Back in the '50's and '60's, living in town was a real adventure," came the words floating through the air as another game of dominoes ground to a halt at the Mecklenburg Inn. "We had three main adventures, as I call them. They all happened on a daily basis, but they were all different," he began, confusing inexperienced eavesdroppers.

"The first adventure was making the daily trek up German Street to one of the four grocery stores for your everyday needs. Not as simple as it sounds, because it would take a good hour, or more, as the owners of the stores or local residents would sit outside on one of the benches that was in front of every store. Naturally, you'd have to be polite and stop to chat with everyone you saw. It took more time to buy your simple milk, bread, and butter than it did to cook a whole Sunday meal for a dozen people." Bones yawned. "Some of them women could go on forever.

"Now, the next big adventure was going to the post office," he continued. "Sure, there was the usual hello's and friendly banter with your neighbors, but it was only a warmup for what you did after leaving the post office, which was going to sit on the wall.

Holding court at the Mecklenburg Inn. From the left are author Malcolm Ater, Bob Watson, Mike Cutlip, Rebecca Moore, Bones, and barmaid Brenda Doss. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Bones came to Jefferson County as a teacher and principal in 1951. He eventually took work at a veterans' hospital in Martinsburg, where he retired as personnel director after 32 years. Bones is pictured here in the late 1950's.

[The famous "wall" of Shepherdstown is located in front of the old Jefferson County courthouse, in the middle of town.] There on the wall, all the local men would congregate, businessmen and loafers alike. I tell you, on that wall virtually every problem in the world would be solved. No problem was too big or too small that we couldn't solve it, 'cause someone always had an answer for everything."

Bones leaned forward on the table and lowered his voice to the people around him. "Course if there was a problem that concerned a local folk, we was all careful not to mention the person by name. But of course we all knew who we were talking about. Everyone knew everyone's business."

Bones chuckled to himself as he recalled a particular incident. "There was one time when a young fella asked a girl out for dinner, but the gal had to decline because she'd been sick for the last few days with diarrhea. The fella slapped his forehead and said, 'Dang, I forgot all about that,' and she screamed back, 'How'd you know I had diarrhea?' Then he really messed things up by saying, 'The whole town's been talking about it.'"

Bones wiped his mouth with the back of his sleeve as he washed down more beer and laughed loudly. "Fool boy should of known better'n to ask her out for dinner, 'cause we'd already discussed her diarrhea on the wall earlier that day."

A few eyes rolled in the pub as Bones continued. "The last big adventure," he said near the end of his day's oratory, "was going down to the old train depot to greet the new daily arrivals and waving good-bye to those residents who were leaving. Since the train's daily arrivals and departures were on a regular schedule, you could tell the time just by watching the people walk down to the station. May seem simple nowadays, but we sure enjoyed it back then." He sighed, then lamented, "Sadly, the last passenger train stopped in Shepherdstown years ago, and with it stopped one of our big daily adventures. Truth be told, it was the end of an era for us."

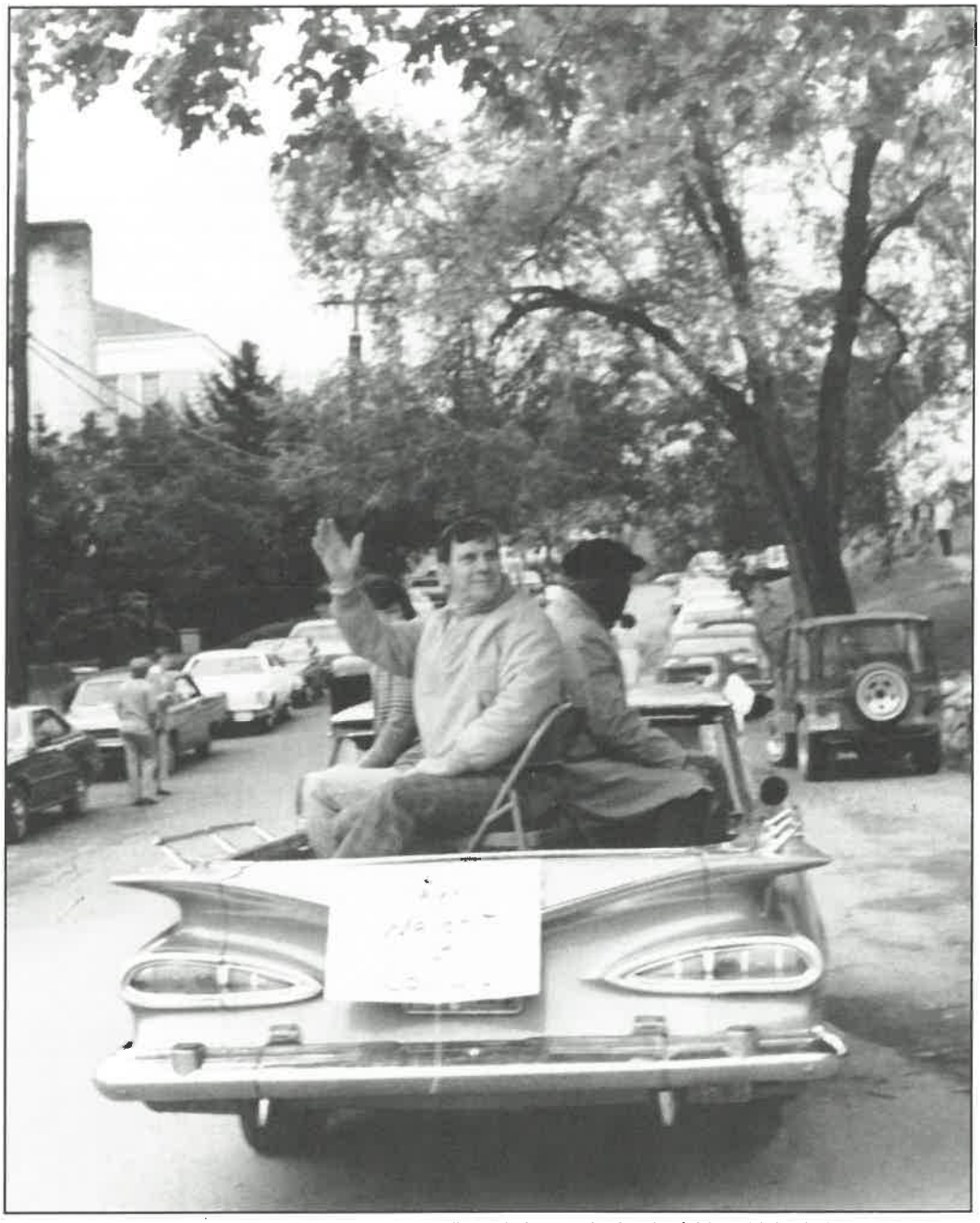
Bones laid his last domino on the table and announced, "Game, boys. Cost you a buck a piece, but consider yourselves lucky I didn't skunk you." With that, he collected his money and strolled out into the fading afternoon light of German Street.

It was snowing the following afternoon when I returned to the pub. As I entered the Mecklenburg Inn, I heard a loud voice bellowing from within. "Play your domino, boy! Dang it, you gonna talk or play dominoes?" The


Shepherdstown is considered West Virginia's oldest town, and the Mecklenburg Inn is one of its oldest establishments, founded in 1793. It remains a local landmark and is a popular gathering place. Bones Wright has been a regular here for years. Photograph by Michael Keller.

voice was unmistakably that of Bones, and he sure wasn't winning. It's perfectly okay for conversation when Bones is winning at his favorite game, but if he's losing, there's no time or patience for small talk.

It wasn't until the first game was over and Bones was comfortably ahead in the next one that the conversation began to flow again. "That snow reminds me of the time when ol' Willie Musser called me up to his newspaper office for a break-in," Bones recalled. "Seems both his front windows had been smashed out. Well, we followed a trail of blood from one window around his office into the back and back again into the front, right out the other window. We were stumped for a bit, until we found more blood in the snow crossing the street. We followed that trail of blood up a side alley until we found a dead buck laid out in the snow. 'Parently, that buck saw its reflection in the glass and kept charging itself through the windows. Reminds me of some of the young [human] bucks we got in town here — more brawn than brains."

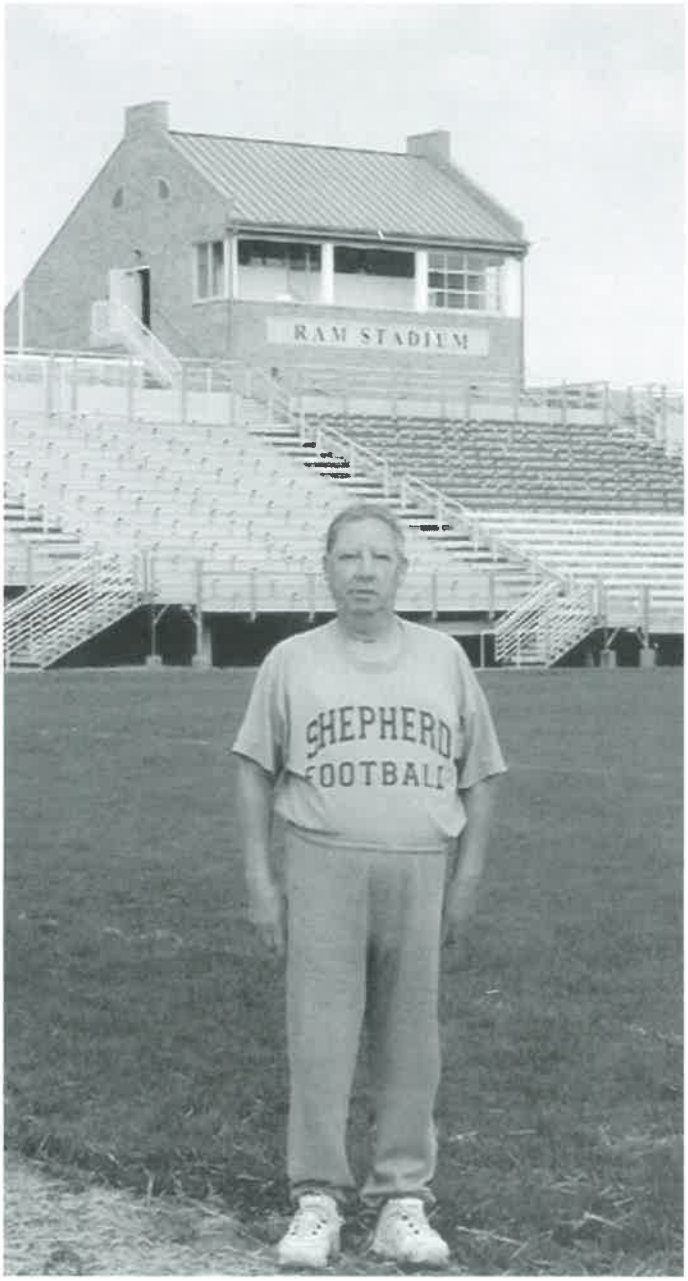


"Mayor Wright and Council" reads the modest cardboard sign on the back of this vehicle during a 1966 Homecoming parade through Shepherdstown. Bones served for four terms as mayor, beginning in 1964.

One of the customers tossed a few logs into the pub fireplace just as Bones warmed up to stories about some of the more colorful town characters. "Speaking of bucks, we used to have a fella lived outside of town named Buck. Nice fella, too, but sometimes drank a bit too much. And when he drank too much, I always worried about him finding his way home on really frigid nights. You know, maybe laying down to take a little nap and never gettin' up again. So when I was mayor, I always had Buzzy drive his car towards Buck's home to be sure he made it back safely. Found him a coupla times, too, layin' right out in the snow, or else he'd a been a goner for sure."

"But who was the one town character that really sticks out in your mind, Bones?" someone wanted to know.

"Easy," replied Bones without batting an eye. "Nicest fella you'd ever want to meet — Charlie Kave. Whole town loved him. Ya see, Charlie was what we now call autistic. Though he didn't have much schoolin,' he had a heckava mind. The whole town knew him, and Charlie had a story to tell about everyone. Good stuff, too, things you might not hear from someone else. Charlie would tell you everything he knew, and maybe what some folks didn't want you to know. And, boy, could he mimic other people! He used to sit in on professors' lectures over at the college and then later recite the whole lecture, word-for-word, with all the professor's mannerisms and expressions. And he'd go to every church in town and do the same thing with the preachers, complete with all their soul-saving Hail Mary's and




Charlie Kave was one of the colorful characters who helped give Shepherdstown its distinctive flavor, according to Bones. Charlie was a diehard fan of the Shepherd football team and is shown here at the university stadium. Photograph courtesy of Shepherd University Sports Information Office, photographer and date unknown.

what have you. Don't know if all the preachers realized how much they were entertaining the whole town!"

"I've heard of Charlie," spoke up a relative newcomer to town. "He was a big football fan, wasn't he?"

"My lord, Charlie's whole life was wrapped up in Shepherd football," agreed Bones. "Back in '66, the team had a big game at Chase College up in Cleveland, and Charlie wanted to go something bad, so he stowed away in the luggage compartment of the Greyhound bus. The fumes damn near killed him. By the time the bus arrived in Cleveland, Charlie was unconscious and half dead. They had to rush him to the hospital for an emergency tracheotomy so he could breathe. When Charlie finally came around the next day and found out the game had started without him, he raised such a fuss yellin' and screamin' that the hospital staff dumped him off in an ambulance to watch the second half of the game. Anything to get rid of him."

Bones wiped away a tear from laughing. "I don't reckon Charlie missed a Shepherd home game in more than 50 years. I can still picture him riding his bicycle around town with his little Shepherd College pennant waving in the breeze behind him. And the Shepherd players loved him as much as he loved them. All through the years, those boys looked after Charlie and never let anyone give him any trouble. They made Charlie feel welcome wherever he went." Bones paused and then became serious. "When Charlie died, I think just about the whole team and all the coaching staff went to his funeral. His picture hangs today in the Shepherd University athletic facility, so he can always remain a part of the team." Bones let out a deep sigh and fell silent.

Later in the evening, after the pub had thinned out and most people had gone home, we moved over to the fire, trying to keep warm. Bones stared deep into the flames, and I knew he was reflecting on his life in Shepherdstown. "You've seen a lot of changes over the years, haven't you?" I finally asked.

"Maybe more than I care for," he said. "When I first came to Shepherdstown, I thought it was the quaintest and best small town in America to raise a family. All four of my children went to school here and all four attended Shepherd College. A wonderful town with wonderful people, but things are different now... ."

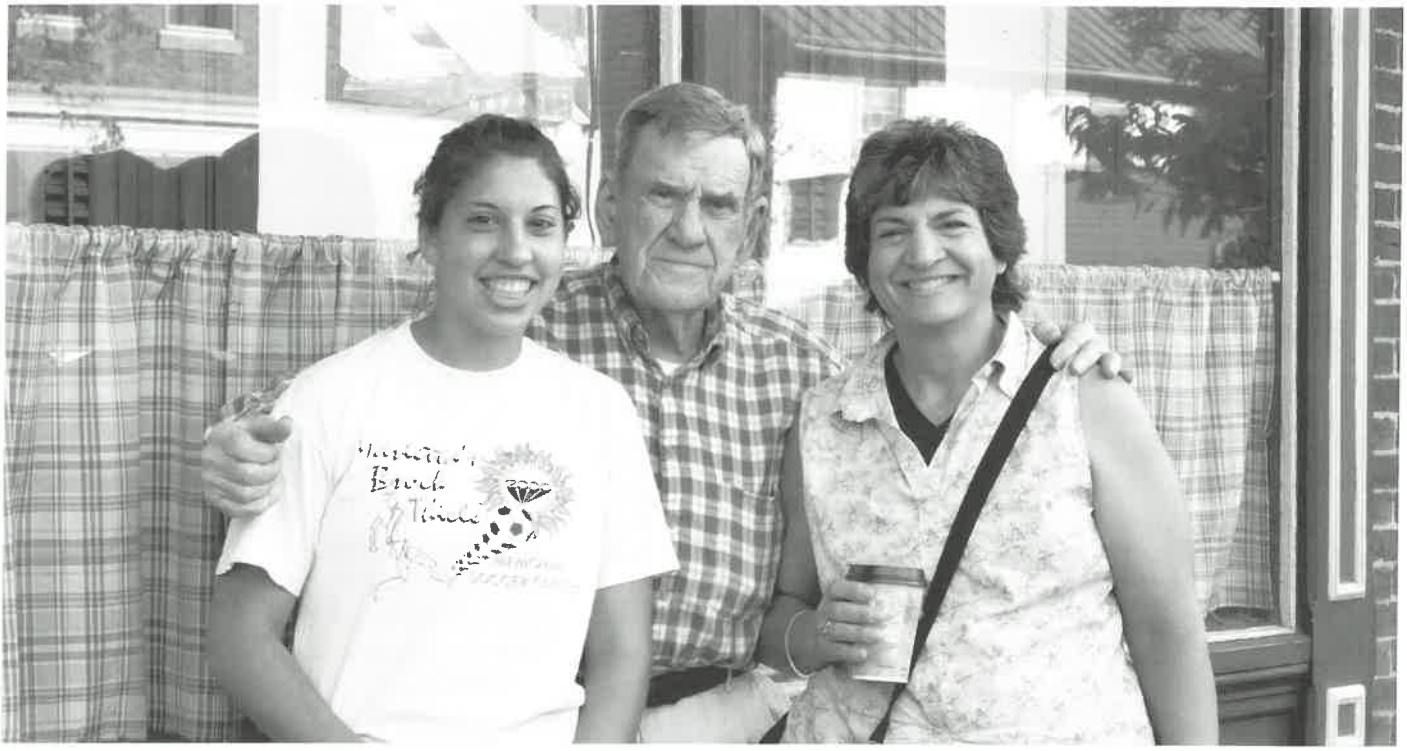
He told me how the entire town had turned out one fine spring day in 1970 to honor their state-championship baseball team with a parade down Main Street, and the boys had been treated to free Cokes all summer long at Betty's Restaurant. But the local high school is gone now, chopped down to a middle school.

Gone, too, is the old Shepherdstown Pharmacy, where old men gathered each morning to swap outlandish lies and tell a few truths. If you needed medicine at two in the morning, owners Clark and Joyce Thornton would open the store for you or maybe even deliver it.

*"What I miss most is simply the way everyone used to say hello to you when you walked down the street."*

True, Betty's Restaurant is still here, but the local kids no longer play the pinball machines or dance to the jukebox, because the restaurant now caters to the many out-of-town tourists.

"Yes, things are different," Bones repeated. "But what I miss most is simply the way everyone used to say hello to you when you walked down the street."



Emily (left) and Assanta Wight fall under the charms of Bones Wright on the streets of Shepherdstown. Photograph by Michael Keller.

He smiled somewhat ruefully. "Don't get me wrong. Shepherdstown is still the greatest place in the world to live. But with all the new people arriving in droves from the city, they'll never know the special quaintness we had, or just how great it really was." He finished his beer and stared back into the fire.

No, they won't, I thought. Not unless they run into Clarence "Bones" Wright playing dominoes and holding court at the Mecklenburg Inn.

MALCOLM ATER was born in Virginia and educated at Old Dominion University and WVU. A resident of the Eastern Panhandle since 1983, he is a special education instructor at Harpers Ferry Middle School. Malcolm has also worked as a sportscaster and is a former editor of Shepherdstown's *Good News Paper*. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Fall 1993 issue.

# Read More about Shepherdstown

A new book, titled *Shepherdstown*, by Dolly Nasby, features more than 200 vintage photographs related to the history of the oldest town in West Virginia. Located on a convenient ford across the Potomac River, the town was originally chartered by the general assembly of colonial Virginia on December 23, 1762, as Mecklenburg, in honor of the British queen's German homeland. By 1820, however, the name had changed to Shepherdstown after Thomas Shepherd, the landowner who built a gristmill and stone fort there and later designed the town on 50 acres of his own land.

The book offers an array of visual images, including historic homes, public buildings, and churches. An entire chapter is dedicated to photographs of daily life of families and community members, mostly drawn from the early decades of the 20th century. Another chapter is devoted to the history of education, with photographs of dorms and other buildings from the early years of Shepherd University prominent among the selected images.

While early railroad and automobile illustrations make up the bulk of the chapter on transportation, a picture of the model steamboat designed and operated by James Rumsey begins the section, quite understandably, since the story of arguably the first steam-powered paddleboat figures so importantly in Shepherdstown's historical claim to fame. In addition to a chapter on clothing, fashion, and style, the book concludes with a section of contemporary scenes, highlighting the vintage appearance that the town still exhibits to visitors and residents today.

*Shepherdstown* is a 128-page paperback, published in 2005 by Arcadia Publishing in the Images of America series, as were this author's previous volumes on nearby Harpers Ferry and Charles Town. The book sells for $19.99 and is available from local bookstores or from Arcadia, phone 1-888-313-2665; on-line at www.arcadiapublishing.com.


Text and photographs by
Carl E. Feather

# Meet Betty Thompson
# The Weather Lady of Glady

It gets really, really cold in Glady. "Thirty-two below zero," says Betty Thompson, one of the Randolph County community's 24 full-time residents.

Betty, who recently turned 81, speaks with authority when she talks about weather extremes in Glady. She's been keeping track of the weather here since August 1, 1973, when she signed on as a volunteer weather observer with the National Weather Service.

"There was a gentleman by the name of Omer Smith who lived on top of Shavers Mountain," she says. "He used to do it, but when they decided to make the four-lane highway, he had to move away. He suggested I do it."

Her station, officially known as Glady 1N, is located on the Glady Fork Road property she and her husband, Herbert, have lived on since 1969. The next closest station is 10 miles over the mountain in Beverly.

Her weather monitoring equipment consists of a dual thermometer on the front porch, a precipitation gauge in the front yard, an electronic temperature gauge in the side yard, and a pair of sharp eyes.

Betty Thompson of Glady, Randolph County, is a volunteer weather observer with the National Weather Service. Here, she uses a gauge to measure precipitation.

The NWS temperature-measuring devices are designed to capture the high and low readings for the previous 24 hours. Every morning, Betty records those extremes, measures the precipitation that fell on her front yard, and reports that information to NWS at Charleston — by 7 a.m.

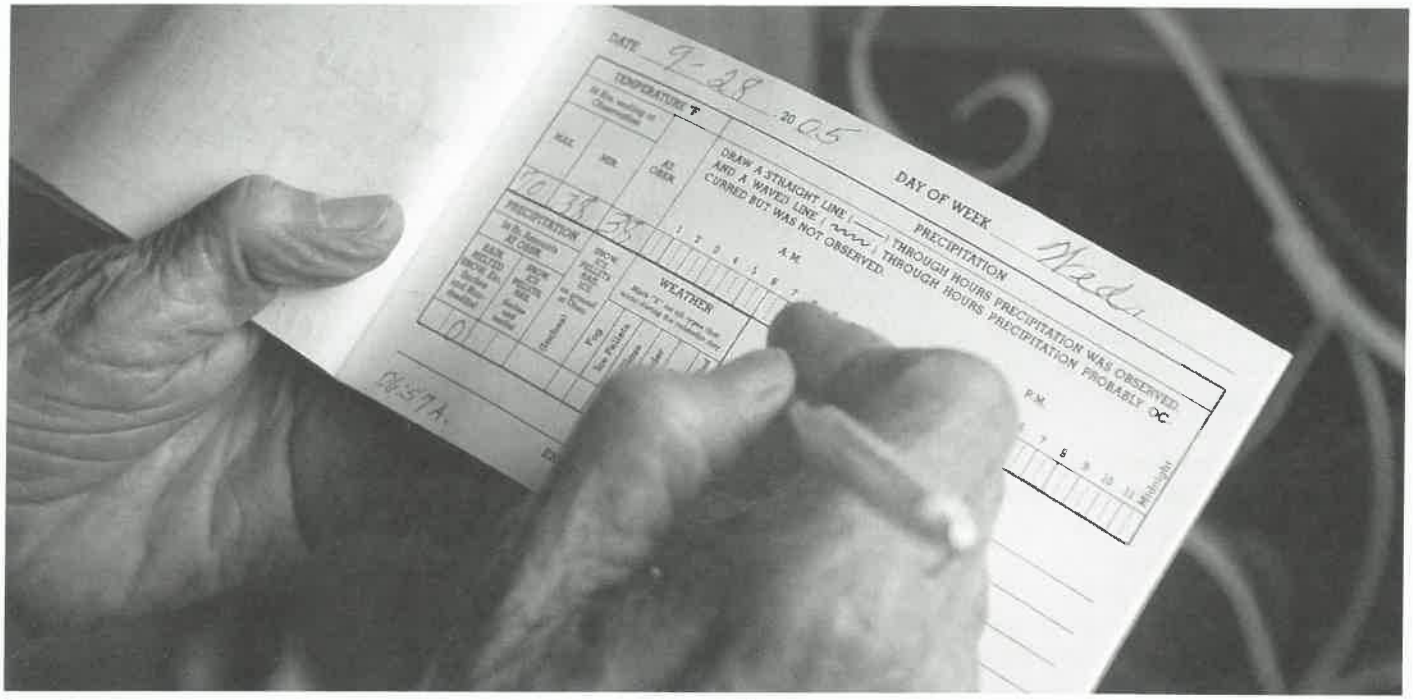
"I'm an early riser," says the retired school bus driver. "Especially in the winter, when I have to shovel snow out of here."

The information collected at Glady is more than trivial knowledge. The environment of this little hamlet, situated at 2,840 feet elevation between Middle and Shavers mountains, is one of weather extremes. Heavy rains create flooding in the spring, strong thunderstorms roar through the area in the summer, and the winters are downright cold and snowy — typically 90 to 100 inches of snowfall every winter.

"It's not as cold as Canaan Valley or Pickens," she says. "But we are usually seven to 10 degrees colder in the winter than Elkins, and we get several more inches of snow."

Betty recorded the all-time low of her career, that minus-32 degrees, back in February 1977. While that's an extreme, she's seen some very cold mornings in more recent years. She recorded a minus-13 degrees on January 28, 2005. Exactly five months later came the other 2005 temperature extreme for Glady — 90 degrees.

Precipitation is collected in a metal cylinder about five inches in diameter. It was set up in her front yard by the NWS when she began her duties. A funnel at the top of the cylinder collects the precipitation and diverts it to a smaller cylinder nested inside the



Betty has kept meticulous records of weather conditions in this remote mountain community since 1973.

outer one. Once a day, Betty dips an official measuring stick into this smaller cylinder to measure to the nearest 1/100th of an inch the amount of rain that fell in the previous 24 hours.

Betty says the heaviest rain she's ever recorded at Glady was during the torrents that caused extensive flooding throughout the Cheat River Valley in November 1985.

"It sure was coming down," says Betty, who measured more than five inches of rain during that infamous weather event. [See "Looking Back Ten Years Later: The Flood of '85," by Todd L. Newmark; Fall 1995.]

At that time, Betty also had the responsibility of measuring and reporting the levels of Glady Fork, which flows a few hundred yards behind their house, and Shavers Fork, which involved a two-mile drive over a narrow, twisting road to Bemis.

According to a memo issued by the NWS, Betty's "prompt action aided in river flood forecasts for downstream communities like Bowden and Parsons."

That memo was issued on the occasion of Betty receiving the John Campanius Holm Award in 2000. Every year, the NWS singles out a maximum of 25 weather observers from around the country to receive the honor, named after the Lutheran minister believed to be the first person to make systematic weather observations in colonial America.

Betty says the awards are nice, but the job is its own reward. "I'm just interested in nature, I guess," says Betty. "It's been real interesting and rewarding."

Betty seldom misses a day in her reporting. Her husband, a retired school bus driver, electrician, and welder, doesn't substitute for her if she's too ill to tend the gauges. He has interests of his own — caring for the picnic pavilion and grounds where many area reunions and homecomings are held, raising a garden, and building O-gauge locomotives and cars from just about any kind of scrap metal imaginable, including school bus exhausts.

"She enjoys it, and I don't know anything about it," Herbert says.

Betty's work has made her a trusted authority on Glady weather. The school district often consults with her when a decision on a snow day has to be made. She has provided weather data to Columbia Gas, which has a field station near Glady. And residents often call to get the official word on just how cold it got overnight. "One woman at Bemis calls me a lot, because her parents live in Ohio and they want to know what the weather was here," she says.

Newspaper reporters and broadcast journalists also consult Betty when they need a quote from one of the state's coldest locations. Betty has provided data to The Weather Channel and used to get calls from a TV station in Chicago whenever Glady registered an unusually biting temperature.

"But when they found out the town of Glady was less than 10,000 people," she says, "they didn't call me anymore."

# New Books about Music

**By John Lilly**

Three new books about traditional country and old-time music are now available, each exploring a different side of this complex and fascinating topic.

***Music in the Air Somewhere: The Shifting Borders of West Virginia's Fiddle and Song Traditions***, by Erynn Marshall, explores the intricate relationship that exists between old-time instrumental and vocal music in the Mountain State. A young Canadian graduate student, Erynn Marshall conducted interviews and made field recordings in central West Virginia for several years, beginning in 1998. She spent most of her time with fiddlers Melvin Wine, Lester McCumbers, Woody Simmons, and Leland Hall and with singers Phyllis Marks, Rita Emerson, and Linda McCumbers.

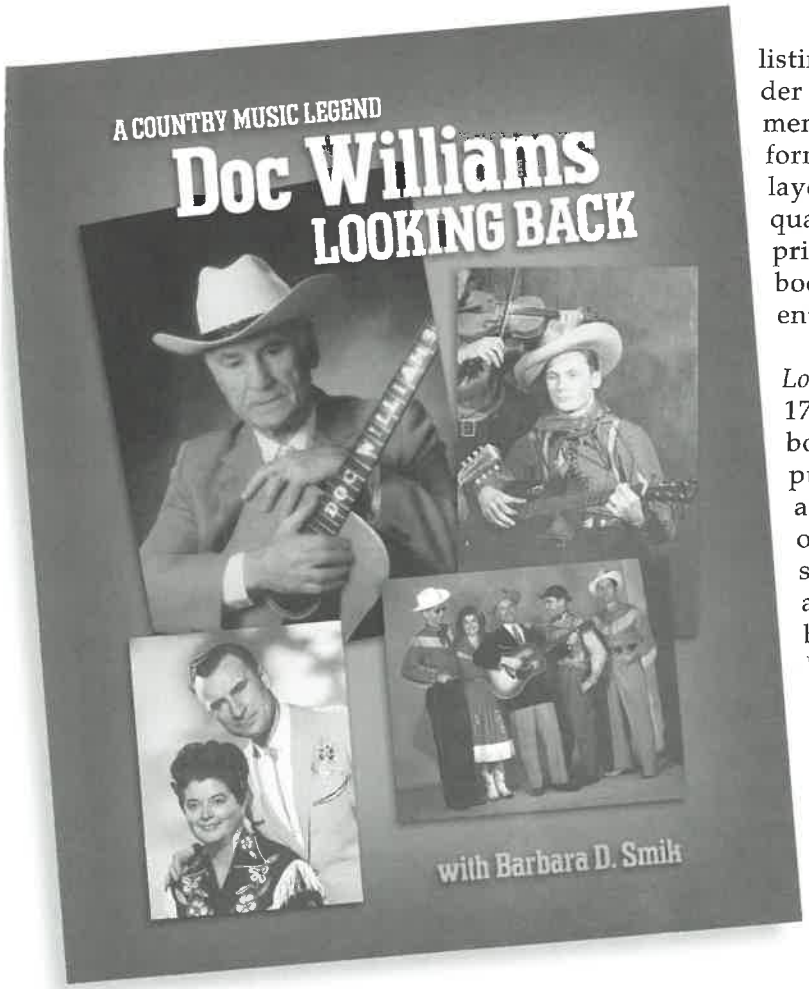
In her book, Erynn examines these musician's lives, repertoires, and varied approaches to the music. Of particular interest to GOLDENSEAL readers will be the extensive oral histories she has included, along with the accompanying audio CD of field recordings and vintage performances.


The CD alone is worth the price of the book, as it includes many scarce and wonderful recordings, such as Rita Emerson singing several unaccompanied songs and ballads, along with a very rare recording of Woody Simmons performing "Lonely Little Robin" with his 13-year-old son, William. Woody often bragged about William, who passed away at an early age, and it's good to have this small souvenir of father and son playing music together.

The book is based on Erynn's graduate research and includes some rather academic material, including detailed musical analysis and some theoretical and sociological content, which might or might not be of strong interest to the majority of our readers. Invaluable, however, are the appendices, including an exhaustive list of every song or tune played or sung by the author's primary musical subjects — Melvin Wine's and Woody Simmons' lists each run more than six pages in length. A generous glossary, bibliography, discography, videography, Internet source list, and index add to the value of this important publication.

*Music in the Air Somewhere*, a 271-page hardbound edition, is published by the West Virginia University Press and sells for $35, including the accompanying CD. It is available on-line at www.wvupress.com or by phoning 1-866-988-7737.

Doc Williams is the oldest living regular performer from the "World's Original WWVA Jamboree" in Wheeling. Born John Andrew Smik, Jr., at Cleveland, Ohio, in 1914, he arrived in Wheeling as a professional singer, entertainer, and bandleader in 1937, using the stage name Doc Williams. Together with his wife, Chickie; brother, Cy; members of the Border Riders band; and three musical daughters, Doc forged a long and illustrious career in country music. In a new autobiography, titled ***Doc Williams: Looking Back***, written with the help of daughter Barbara D. Smik, Doc does exactly what the title suggests, as he recalls the unlikely and often charmed life he led in the uncertain world of country music. [See "Doc Williams: A Half Century at the 'Wheeling Jamboree,'" by Ivan Tribe; Spring




1987. This article also appears in our book Mountains of Music; see page 8.]

Written in a casual, conversational tone, the book is based on transcriptions taken from Doc's memoirs, dictated into a home tape recorder between 2002 and 2004. It took nine 90-minute cassette tapes to hold it all and most of two years for Barbara Smik to get them all transcribed. The results read like a long car ride with Doc, relaxed and affable, calling up details of his varied life and career and waxing poetic about the blessings he has enjoyed along the way.

Scores of professional and family photographs, along with handbills, postcards, and advertisements, are a welcome bonus. Also included are a "scrapbook" of additional illustrations, supplementary recollections and interviews, letters and e-mails from fans and friends, and a comprehensive listing of the Border Riders band members. The large format, attractive layout, and high-quality paper and printing make this book especially enticing.

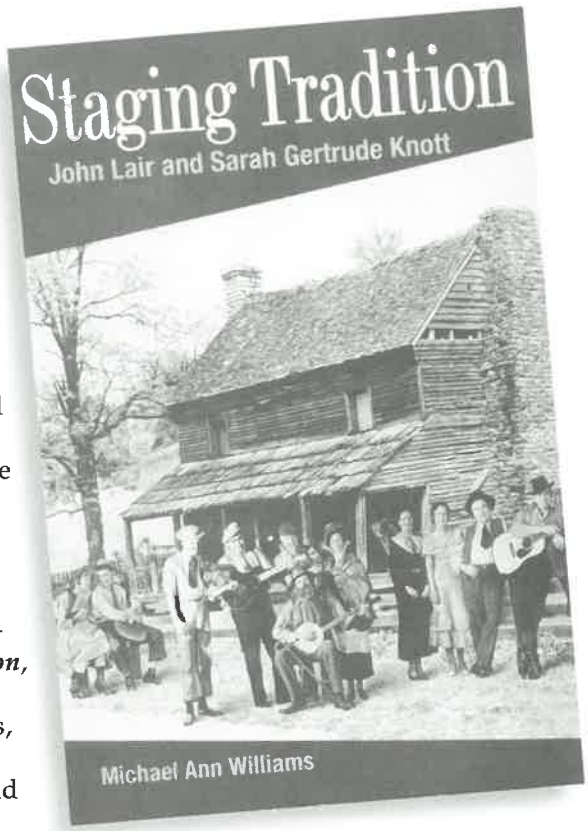
*Doc Williams: Looking Back* is a 176-page paperbound volume, published by Creative Impressions of Wheeling. It sells for $29.95 and is available by writing to Wheeling Music & Publishing Company, P.O. Box 902, Wheeling, WV 26003; phone 1-888-232-9623 or on-line at www.docwilliams.com.

Here in the 21st century, folk festivals and country-style radio and stage entertainment are considered as American as baseball and apple pie. This was not always the case. Sarah Gertrude Knott and John Lair were two pioneering promoters and organizers who helped create the templates for the hundreds of folk festivals and "Opry"-style stage shows that have come and (mostly) gone in the last century. Knott founded the National Folk Festival in 1934, and Lair established the Renfro Valley Barn Dance in 1937.

In a new parallel biography, titled ***Staging Tradition***, published in 2006 by the University of Illinois Press, author Michael Ann Williams presents the lives and careers of Knotts and Lair in tandem, showing how each of these energetic and ambitious individuals followed their own theatrical and financial interests to create unique expressions of traditional culture — or something like it.

In the book, Williams outlines how Lair used his radio connections and business acumen to fabricate the imaginary Kentucky mountain community of Renfro Valley, based on idealized memories of his Rockcastle County upbringing. Knott, a theater maven also from Kentucky, successfully lobbied the federal government to finance and support her vision of regional and multicultural music and dance as sophisticated stage entertainment.

The result is an intriguing account of how grassroots culture — especially Appalachian culture — has come to be viewed, presented, manipulated, and preserved through public performance. *Staging Tradition* is a 221-page paperbound edition and sells for $20, on-line at www.press.uillinois.edu.



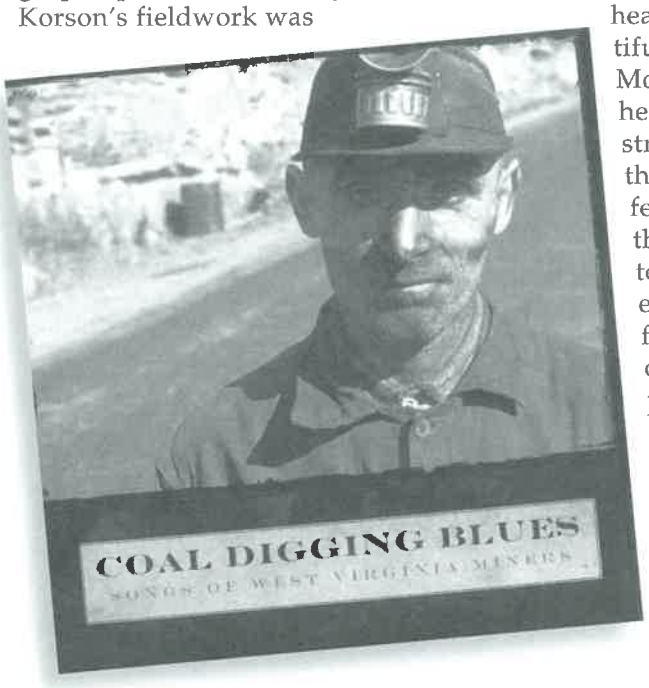
# Mountain Music Roundup

By John Lilly

In our last installment of this annual review of mountain music recordings, we concentrated on several important reissues and posthumous releases of West Virginia fiddlers. [See "Mountain Music Roundup," by John Lilly; Winter 2005.] This time, we'll get caught up with some of the fine vocal recordings now available.

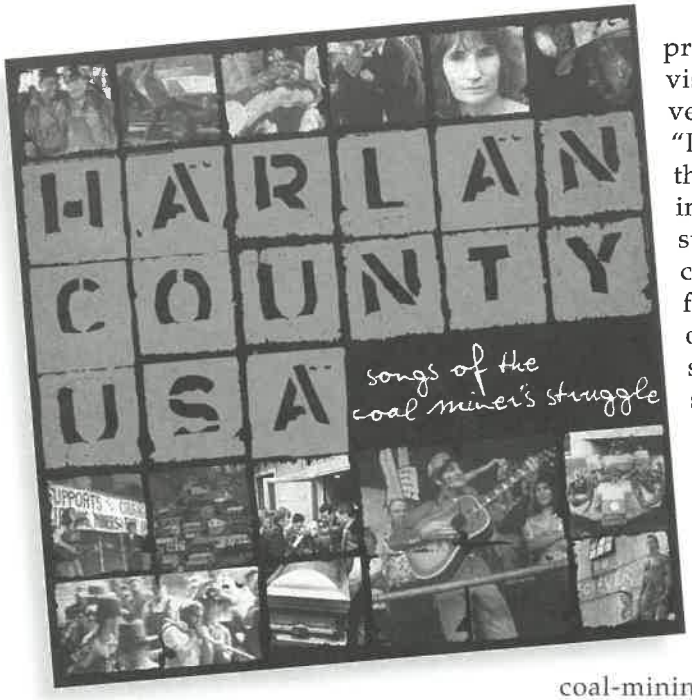
Coal mining in West Virginia not only "keeps the lights on," as the billboards and bumper stickers say, it also provides plenty of grist for the mill in terms of topical songs and songwriting. Two new CD releases present a cross section of coal-mining songs from the past 65 years.

***Coal Digging Blues: Songs of West Virginia Miners*** is a new collection from the West Virginia University Press Sound Archives Series. These 19 field recordings were made in 1940 by folklorist George Korson and represent a range of blues, country, and black gospel-quartet musical styles. Korson's fieldwork was funded by the United Mine Workers, and all of this material reflects the strong pro-union sympathies of the performers. It is a tradition among activist and topical songwriters to borrow melodic and lyrical ideas from traditional and popular songs and customize them to fit their particular message. This practice is in evidence here, which takes on an almost surreal aspect during some of the gospel-flavored pieces: John L. Lewis stands in for Saint Peter ("Bill Green, Better Run On"), working in an underground mine is equated to entering hell ("I Don't Want to Go Down Yonder"), and union participation becomes heaven itself ("How Beautiful Union Must Be").

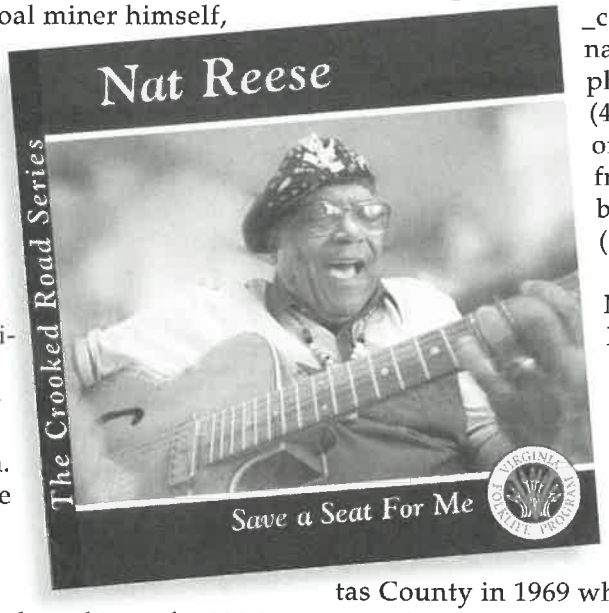



Most of the performances here are surprisingly strong, considering that the singers were not professional musicians, and the audio quality is better than what you might expect from 65-year-old field recordings. Some of these selections were previously issued on the 1965 Library of Congress LP *Songs and Ballads of the Bituminous Miners*, reissued on CD by Rounder Records in 2002 [see "Mountain Music Roundup," by John Lilly; Winter 2003], but the majority of these songs are offered here for the first time. The collection was compiled and produced by Mark Allan Jackson. Jackson arranged the songs in the chronological order in which they were recorded, between March and May 1940. Unfortunately, this arrangement creates some awkward sequencing, especially at the beginning of the CD, where one would usually hope to find some of the strongest performances. This minor quibble aside, *Coal Digging Blues* makes a powerful statement about the importance of the union in the working lives of these singers, at a time when the eight-hour day and basic safety issues were still a matter of heated debate. The CD is available for $16, on-line at www.wvupress.com; phone 1-866-988-7737.

***Harlan County USA: Songs of the Coal Miner's Struggle*** (Rounder 11661-4026-2) brings the subject of mining up to the 1970's and '80's, when a new generation of workers and their many urban sympathizers brought renewed pressures to bear on the coal industry and its governmental overseers. Taking its title from Barbara Koppel's 1973 award-winning film, this CD is more a sampler of coal-related bluegrass and traditional-style music from the archives of Rounder Records




than a film soundtrack. The liner notes point out, for example, that four of the seven Hazel Dickens selections included here were used in the movie, but they do not indicate which ones. Nor is it clear which others of the 22 songs on this fine collection are connected in some way to the movie. Little matter, however, as most all of these tracks are "in the spirit" of the documentary film and deal with mining and its profound effects on workers and communities in West Virginia and elsewhere in Southern Appalachia. Stand-outs, in addition to the seven songs by the always-wonderful Ms. Dickens, are previously unissued numbers by unaccompanied singers Jim Garland ("The Death of Harry Simms") and Sarah Ogan Gunning ("Hard Working Miner"), as well as contributions by Florence Reece ("Which Side Are You On?"), Nimrod Workman ("Coal Black Mining Blues"), and Phyllis Boyens ("Dream of a Miner's Child"). More puzzling are the inclusion of several apparently non-topical instrumental tracks (perhaps they were in the movie) and "celebrity" appearances by Doc Watson and Norman Blake — pleasant, but marginally relevant. (I guess they have to sell records somehow.) The presence of Merle Travis singing a sparse 1959 version of his mega-hit "Dark As a Dungeon," on the other hand, fits right in. It includes a rarely sung extra verse, concerning the risks of slate fall ("Where the demons of death often come by surprise/One fall of the slate and you're buried alive"). The *Harlan County USA* CD is an excellent sampling of traditional and contemporary songs and performance styles, reflecting the concerns of those in the coal-mining regions of the southern mountains. It is available for $12.99 from Rounder Records, on-line at www.rounder.com, or by writing to Rounder Records, One Camp Street, Cambridge, MA 02140.




A former coal miner himself, Mercer County bluesman **Nat Reese** has had a long and illustrious career as a professional musician since leaving the mines as a young man. Nat was the recipient of the 1995 Vandalia Award and the subject of a 1987 GOLDENSEAL feature story. [See "Something to Give: Nat Reese's Early Life and Music," by Michael Kline; Winter 1987. This article also appears in our book *Mountains of Music*; see page 8.] Though Nat moved to southern West Virginia in 1928, he was born in Salem, Virginia, in 1924. Thanks to these early Virginia ties, Nat has been the subject of much study and documentation by the Virginia Folklife Program, including a new CD recording, called *Save a Seat For Me* (VFHCR105). If you've ever seen Nat perform live at the Vandalia Gathering or elsewhere, you will recognize his relaxed, soulful blues and swing stylings. On this recording, made in 2005 and released in 2006, Nat performs with only his guitar accompaniment and presents 16 of his best-loved numbers. Included are favorites, such as "The Preacher and the Bear," "Ain't Gonna Throw It Away," "Too Many Bad Habits," and "On the Sunny Side of the Street," along with a dozen others. While Nat has recorded most (possibly all) of these songs elsewhere, it's good to hear them again and to have them all together on one CD, including an informative 10-page booklet. *Save a Seat For Me* is available for $14.99, on-line at www.virginiafolklife.org/program_crooked_natreese.php; phone (434)924-3296, or directly from Nat by phoning (304)425-6338.

**Maggie Hammons Parker** was born in 1899. She was living in a remote area of Pocahontas County in 1969 when she met Dwight Diller, a young banjo player with a tape recorder and an abiding interest in the music and lives of the Hammons family. Dwight was joined by Wayne Howard, another young researcher, and together they made hundreds of hours of field recordings of members of this remarkable family. Today, Dwight, Howard,

Maggie Hammons Parker. Photograph by Gerald Milnes, 1986.

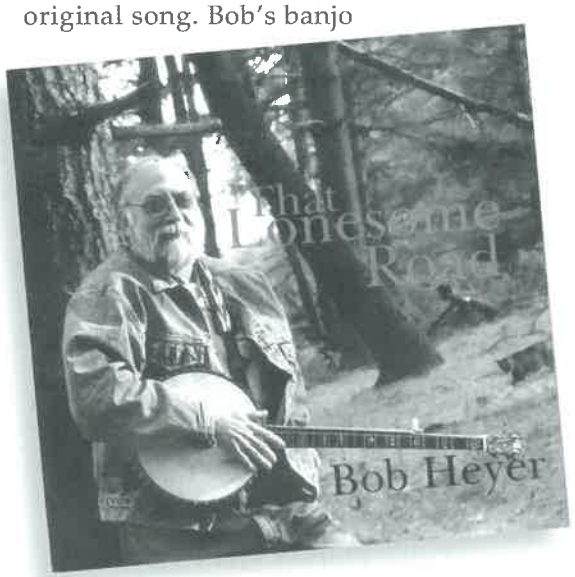
and others — known jointly as the Hammons Legacy Team — are methodically releasing their trove of documentary Hammons recordings in a series of CD's.

Maggie was known primarily as a singer. In all, Dwight and Howard recorded her singing 107 songs — enough for seven CD's. On *Songs: Sampler #1* (Hammons Legacy YPC-H-004), Maggie sings 17 unaccompanied mountain ballads and songs, recorded between 1969 and 1974. She also plays one tune on the banjo, "Red Rocking Chair," which she subsequently sings unaccompanied. Maggie carried on a deep tradition of mountain song, which has become quite rare in recent years. She drew her material from a range of sources, though the most striking portion of her repertoire consisted of ancient and dramatic story songs — ballads — thought to have been brought to this country centuries ago by English, Scottish, Irish, and Scotch-Irish settlers. Songs such as "Lady Gay," "Roving Irishman," and "Young Henry Lee" fall into this group. Other songs she sang were of a more modern vintage, though they all rang clear with truth and authority as she sang them. Her vocal style was unadorned and was set at the highest end of her vocal range, producing a keening and lonesome sound. These field recordings include a fair amount of background sounds, as well as some incidental conversation along with the music. This is a welcome added feature, in this case, because it is a pleasure to hear Maggie speak. Her high, weathered voice, distinctive accent, and rustic use of language were a thing of beauty and lend a context for those unfamiliar with her unaccompanied style of singing. *Songs: Sampler #1*, along with many of the other Hammons Legacy releases, are available on-line at www.morningstarfolkarts.com; phone (304)799-4965. They sell for $15 each.

Two other recent releases of West Virginia singing come from younger artists, at least in relative terms. **Roger Bryant**, of Logan County, and **Bob Heyer**, of Wheeling, are both familiar faces on the state's folk festival stages, not only as performers, but also as presenters and emcees. Roger, the grandson of 1984 Vandalia Award recipient, Aunt Jennie Wilson, is a regular participant at the annual Vandalia Gathering in Charleston. Bob has produced and hosted the popular Mountain Moon Coffeehouse concert series in Wheeling for nearly 20 years and is a regular participant at the West Virginia State Folk Festival in Glenville. Both men possess fine instrumental skills, write and collect West Virginia songs, and sing with smooth baritone voices.

Roger Bryant's latest CD is called *On the Banks of Old Guyan* (Roane 119), and it features a decidedly local flavor. Traditional material, such as the title song, "The Ballad of Roseanna McCoy," and "Vance's Confession," are mixed with Roger's own compositions about the land and the people of the Guyandotte Valley. Stand-outs are Roger's "The Vixen of Stratton Street" and "Vandalia Sky" — a tribute to the Vandalia Gathering, itself worth the price of the CD. *On the Banks of Old Guyan* is available for $15 from Roane Records, P.O. Box 5294, West Logan, WV 25601; on-line at www.fiddletunes.com.

Bob Heyer's new CD, titled *That Lonesome Road* (TRM 004), features Bob singing and playing banjo, guitar, and dulcimer on a mixture of traditional and original material, often over-dubbing more than one instrument per song. "Cherry River Line" is a highlight from the traditional side of the ledger, while Bob's own "Hard Luck Blues" is a particularly memorable original song. Bob's banjo




playing deserves special mention; he takes pains to credit Dwight Diller as his early inspiration on that "infernal contraption," as he calls it. *That Lonesome Road* is available for $15 from Table Rock Music, 14 America Avenue, Wheeling, WV 26003; phone (304)232-9850 or e-mail bheyer@ovis.net.

# Goldenseal Index

## Volume 32, 2006

Articles that appeared in Volume 32 are listed in the index below under the categories of Subject, Author, Photographer, and Location.

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

The GOLDENSEAL Index is published each year in the winter issue. The cumulative index is available on our Web site at www.wvculture.org/goldenseal/gsindex.html.

## Subject

# Author



# Photographer

# Location




U.S. POSTAL SERVICE STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY 39 U.S.C. 3685 FOR GOLDENSEAL: WEST VIRGINIA TRADITIONAL LIFE (U.S.P.S. NO 013336), Filing date October 1, 2006, published quarterly, at The Cultural Center, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25305-0300. Number of issues published annually: 4. Annual subscription price: $17. The general business offices of the publisher are located at The Cultural Center, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. East, Charleston, WV 25305-0300. John Lilly is the contact person at (304)558-0220.

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F) Total Distribution 15,824
G) Copies not Distributed 1,542 (Office Use) 884 (Returns/Shredded)
H) Total 18,250
I) Percent Paid 100%

The Number of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date:
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John Lilly, Editor


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- ___Summer 2002/*Princess Margy* Sternwheeler
- ___Fall 2002/Flatwoods Monster
- ___Spring 2003/Stained Glass Dome
- ___Fall 2003/Artist Boyd Boggs
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- ___Summer 2004/1939 World's Fair
- ___Fall 2004/Grafton Trains
- ___Winter 2004/Toymaker Dick Schnacke
- ___Summer 2005/Tygart Valley Homestead
- ___Fall 2005/Coke Ovens
- ___Spring 2006/Pepperoni Rolls
- ___Summer 2006/Elaine Purkey
- ___Fall 2006/Pumpkin House

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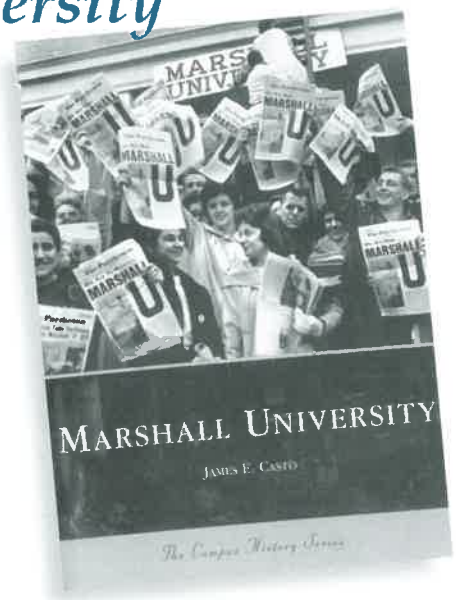



A photographic history book of Marshall University, written by James E. Casto of Huntington, is available in Arcadia Publishing's Campus History Series. With more than 200 images, arranged in eight chronological chapters, Casto traces Marshall's history from its inception to the present.

The book begins with the founding of Marshall Academy in 1837 in Guyandotte. By 1858, the preparatory school had been re-chartered as Marshall College. Casto's captions contain a wealth of information, such as the fact that Marshall was closed during the Civil War and reopened in 1867 as a normal school to train classroom teachers. The earliest photograph of Marshall is found here, dating from 1870. Photographs from the years just preceding the turn of the 20th century reveal familiar buildings, such as present-day Old Main, which began as a series of separate structures, united as one building years later.

The development and evolution of the physical campus is visually documented as one of sustained growth. By 1961, Marshall was deemed substantial enough to merit designation as a university.

The entirety of chapter six is devoted to the 1970 airplane crash that killed 37 members of the football team along with numerous others, and the aftermath of that tragedy. In a comment made ironic since the recent release of the film, *We Are Marshall*, Casto wrote in 2005 that if "the story of Marshall football were made into a movie, no one would believe it."

The book's final chapter covers the 1990's to 2005, ending with the appointment of Stephen Kopp as Marshall president. Casto's interest in and attachment to his alma mater remain evident throughout, not only in his discovery of images previously unpublished, but also in his well-researched and detailed captioning.

*Marshall University* is a 128-page paperback and sells for $19.99, available at bookstores or from Arcadia Publishing, phone 1-888-313-2665; on the web at www.arcadiapublishing.com.

## Goldenseal

### Coming Next Issue...

- Women and Coal
- Violin Maker Harold Hayslett
- Decoration Day
- Winning Vandalia Liars

# Photo Curiosity

"Stop, or I'll strum the dulcimer!" Woodcarver and instrument builder Claude Keaton of Spanishburg, Mercer County, stands guard in the doorway of his workshop, holding a dulcimer made in the shape of a shotgun — or is it a shotgun in the shape of a dulcimer? In either event, this three-stringed musical weapon is typical of the creative streak that was evident in Claude's carving and instrument building. In addition to dulcimers in unexpected shapes, Claude made fiddles, cellos, and various wooden figures, each with an imaginative flare. He was also a talented flatfoot dancer. Claude is now deceased; Gerald Milnes took this wonderful photograph of him in 1992.

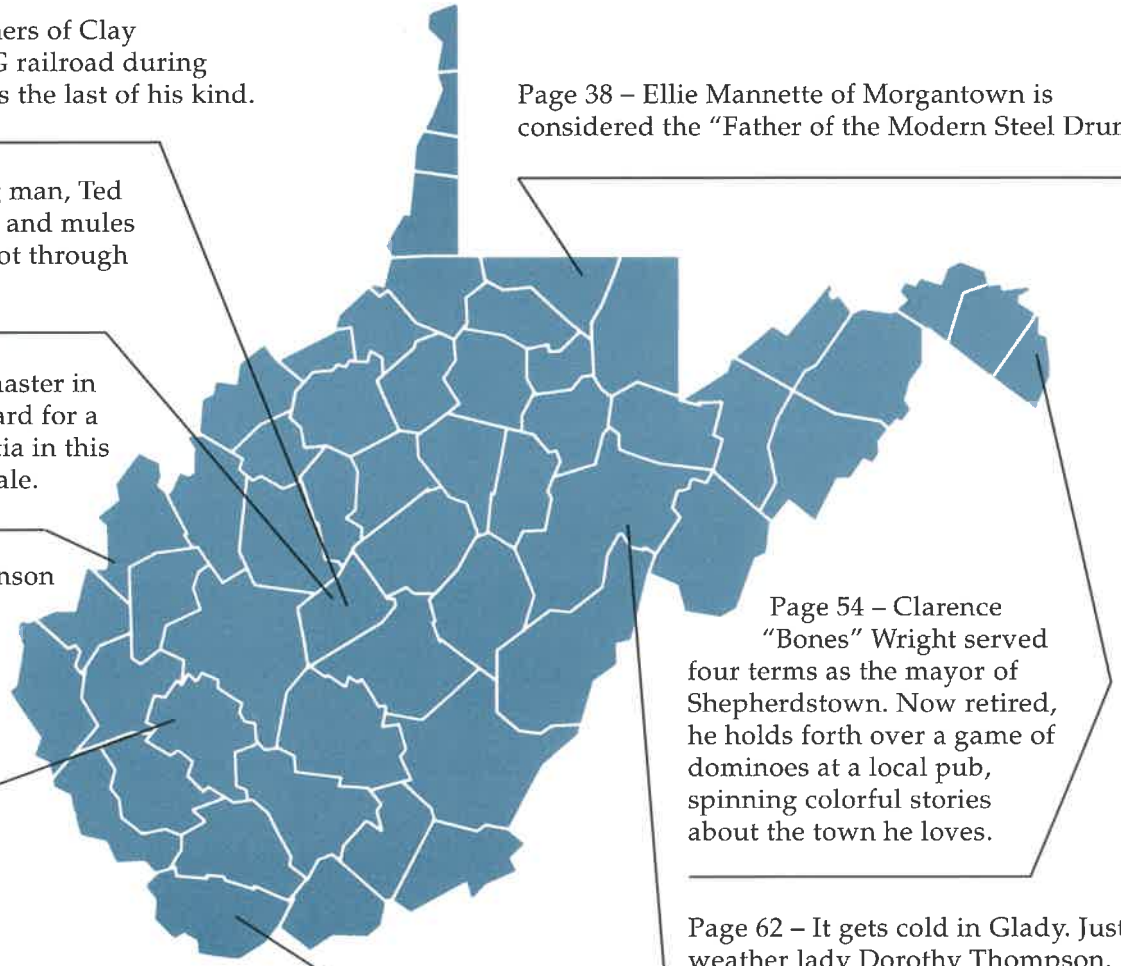
If you knew Claude Keaton, or know of other unusual West Virginia musical instruments or wood carvings, please let us know at the GOLDENSEAL office.

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

PERIODICALS

# Inside Goldenseal





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