

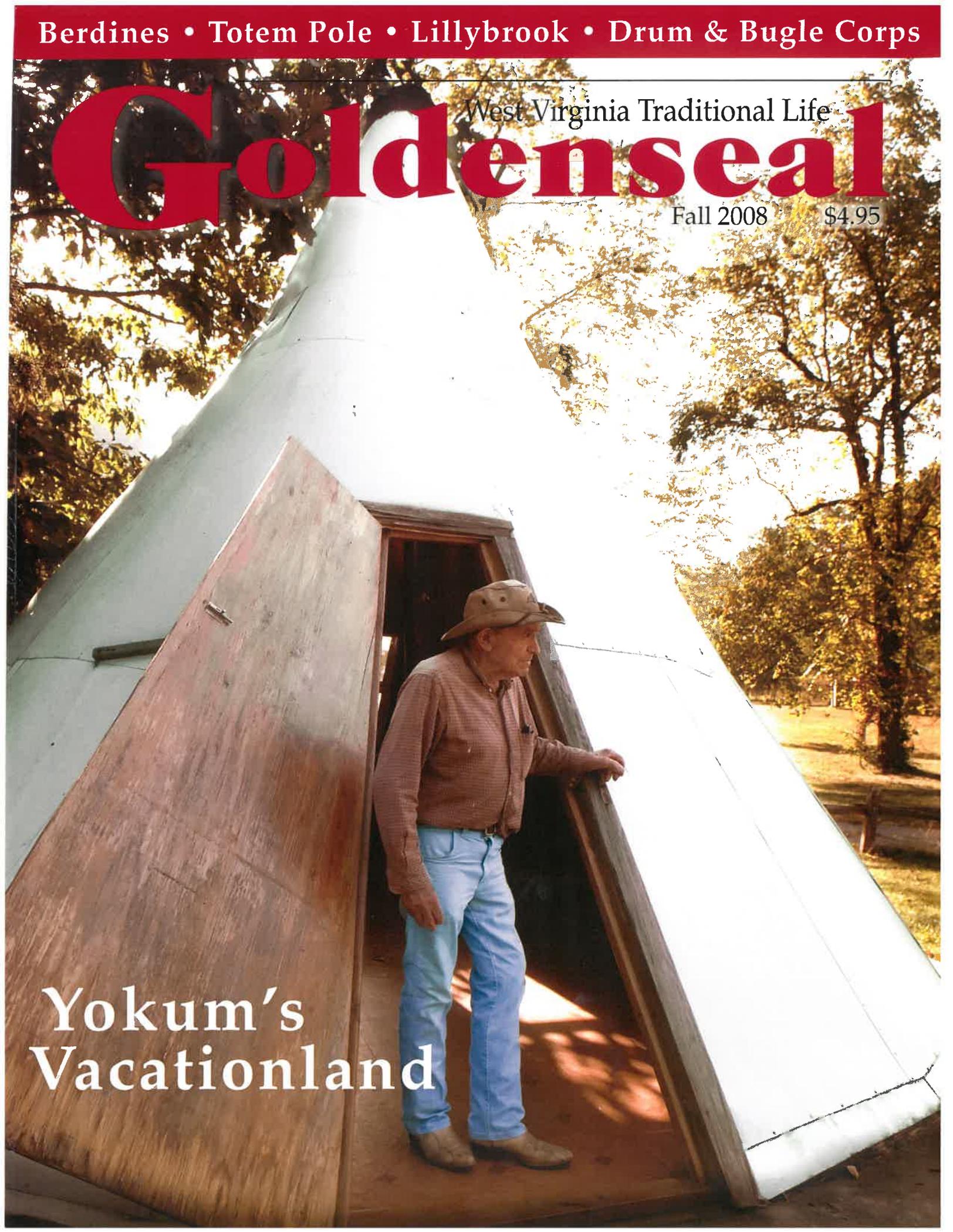
Berdines • Totem Pole • Lillybrook • Drum & Bugle Corps

West Virginia Traditional Life

# Goldenseal

Fall 2008

\$4.95



Yokum's  
Vacationland

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## From the Editor: Teepees and Totems

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The teepees across from Seneca Rocks are a memorable sight. I've driven past them many times over the years and have often wondered about these unusual structures. So, it pleases me to share their story with you in this issue and to introduce you to their owners, Carl and Shirley Yokum. [See "Yokum's Vacationland: Carving Out a Big Life at Seneca Rocks," by Carl E. Feather; page 10.]

It's also a pleasure to highlight the work of Carl E. Feather as our cover story. Carl is a prolific writer and photographer whose work appears in *GOLDENSEAL* with great regularity. Every recent issue, as a matter of fact. In addition to his steady stream of interesting and well-written feature stories, Carl has been the author and photographer for our popular *West Virginia Back Roads* feature since it was introduced in Spring 2004. We appreciate Carl and are glad to see his beautiful work grace the cover of this issue. Thanks, Carl!

The teepee on our cover suggests a theme underlying a number of stories in this issue — West Virginia's fascination with Native Americans and their symbols. In addition to the teepees at Yokum's, we learn about an iconic totem pole in Fairmont [see "Chesney's Totem Pole: Tribute to a Fairmont Landmark," by Raymond Alvarez; page 34] and the making of wooden archery bows [see "Bow Making in West Virginia," by Nathaniel Simons; page 30]. While the woodland Indians who inhabited Appalachia certainly hunted with bows and arrows, teepees and totem poles are most often associated with Native Americans from different regions — teepees from the Great Plains and totem poles from the Pacific Northwest.

Nevertheless, they appeal to us, and, like so much of West Virginia traditional life, we find ways to adapt them to our own uses and circumstances. It's my feeling — and the feelings of a few colleagues I queried in planning this issue — that the use of Native American symbols by modern-day West Virginians, and their depiction in this magazine, are a sign of respect and admiration. That is very much how it is intended, and I sincerely hope that

is how it is taken. I'll let you know if I hear otherwise.

Another theme that shows up in the second half of this issue deals with the fine work done by our state's volunteers and fraternal organizations. We learn of the veterans' cemetery maintained by American Legion Post 32 in Raleigh County [see "On Hallowed Ground: Jimmie McGrady and Beckley's American Legion Cemetery," by Pauline Haga; page 48], American Legion Post 9's Junior Drum & Bugle Corps in Bluefield [see "Marching to Glory: Bluefield's American Legion Junior Drum & Bugle Corps," by Stuart McGehee; page 58], and the Newburg Rotary Club's annual pressed-cider fund-raiser [see "*West Virginia Back Roads*: Pressing Cider in Preston County," by Carl E. Feather; page 64]. These organizations and their members provide a tremendous service to the state, and our hats are off to them.

Two more important items: This is an election year, so be sure to get out and vote. West Virginia was a pivotal state in the last two national elections, so please remember that every vote counts.

Finally — and perhaps most importantly — we hope you will keep *GOLDENSEAL* in mind as you plan ahead for your holiday gift-giving. If you enjoy this magazine, surely you can think of at least one person on your list who would enjoy it, as well. Thanks for your support!



PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL KELLER

*John Lilly*



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On the cover: Carl Yokum emerges from a rental teepee at Yokum's Vacationland, located at Seneca Rocks, Pendleton County. Photograph by Carl E. Feather. Our story begins on page 10.

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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.

### Fenton Glass

June 12, 2008  
Richmond,  
Virginia  
Editor:  
The  
GOLDENSEAL  
Summer 2008  
front cover  
is more than  
beautiful,  
colorful, and  
historical. I  
especially  
enjoyed  
"Fenton: A  
Century of  
Art Glass in  
Williamstown,"  
by Dean Six.  
What a great  
legacy Fenton  
is for our state

of West Virginia. I have a few  
colors and pieces of Fenton.

Thanks for the gift of time  
at age 93. I enjoyed all of your  
"From the Editor." I am sure you  
will get new subscribers soon.  
Keep up the good work.  
God bless you,  
Parthenia Edmonds

*God bless you, too, Parthenia. It's wonderful to hear from you. [See "A Dream Fulfilled: The Life and Times of Parthenia Edmonds," by Pauline Haga; Winter 2000.] —ed.*

June 11, 2008

Via e-mail

Editor:

The Summer 2008 edition has  
articles about Fenton Glass,  
Bridgeport, Organ Cave, Rainelle  
Airport, and moonshine.  
GOLDENSEAL has it all!

I think this issue is one of the

best. Sometimes, the magazine  
focuses on traditional life that

has no  
immediate  
link for  
me to the  
here and  
now. For  
example, a  
historical  
article or  
an article  
about a  
miner's  
family.  
Great  
human  
interest,  
but not always  
something  
that would  
inspire me to  
hop in my car  
or log on to  
the Internet to

learn more about.

The Summer 2008 issue looked  
a little more like *Our State*  
magazine in North Carolina.  
One might stop by Rainelle  
Airport en route to Clifftop, run  
out and purchase some Fenton  
glass, or replicate the road trip to  
Pocahontas County.

Kudos to you for a great issue.  
Janis L. Antonek, Ph.D.

June 10, 2008

Mineral Wells, West Virginia  
Editor:

GOLDENSEAL's Summer 2008  
issue is a lot like my Grandpa  
and a handcranked freezer of  
ice cream in the early 1950's.  
Each freezer made was the very  
best. What would we do without  
memories?

Keep up the good work!  
Margie Dye



## Shadows of the Past

June 14, 2008

San Marcos,  
California

Editor:

I just had the pleasure of finding Marty Olsen's photoessay in this month's GOLDENSEAL and want to thank you for sharing his beautiful story with us. [See "Shadows of the Past," by Marty Olsen; Summer 2008.]

I may be on the other side of the country, but my family and memories are rooted in Greenbrier and Logan counties. Dr. Olsen's photos of the Cole farm are so similar to the images that run through my own mind — memories of summers at Granddad's farm in Alvon, days spent swinging from the rafters in his barn, and hours lost ambling down the rocky bed of Anthony Creek. How nice to once again see physical evidence of such things! I hope this is not



Photograph by Marty Olsen.

the last of his contributions to GOLDENSEAL. His writing and photos brought new depth to a worthy publication.  
Julianna Brackman McDuffie

## Rainelle Airport

June 9, 2008

St. Albans, West Virginia  
Editor:

Thank you for such a wonderful article about the Rainelle Airport and the owner, Squire Haynes. [See "The Joy of Flying: Squire Haynes and the Rainelle International Airport," by Janet Estep; Summer 2008.] I grew up with his family as our neighbors, and Squire took me and my one brother and three sisters on our first air flights. He was a wonderful man.

I just want to let you know about one mistake in the article. The photo on page 28 states that it is Herb Shuck. It is not.

It is definitely a photo of Squire. He is holding his walkie-talkie he used to talk to the pilots coming in for a landing. Thank you again for the article.  
Elaine Yanak

*Oops! Sorry for the misidentification. We appreciate your setting us straight.  
—ed.*



Lawrence "Squire" Haynes.

## Road Trip

June 25, 2008

Lewisburg, West Virginia

Editor:

I enjoyed reading the Summer 2008 GOLDENSEAL, including David Halsey's story, "Road Trip: An Eye-Opening Journey to Pocahontas County in 1947." Would it be possible to determine the date of the picture on page 38, captioned "Postcard view of Greenbrier Military School main building in Lewisburg?"

This, of course, is now the main building of West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine.

Thank you,  
C. Kyle Jones

*According to the staff at the West Virginia State Archives, that photo was made in 1921. Thanks for asking. —ed.*

## Chapel Cars

June 24, 2008

Beckley, West Virginia

Editor:

Just a note of appreciation for the story titled, "Glory Bound: Chapel Cars Come to West Virginia," by Wilma Rugh Taylor; Winter 2007.

Recently, I used this article for a mission program for my American Baptist Women's Circle at the First Baptist Church in Beckley. I found it to be of great interest, and I learned a great deal of the work of early missionaries in West Virginia. I

Chapel car *Messenger of Peace*.

MAIN BUILDING, GREENBRIER MILITARY SCHOOL, LEWISBURG, W. VA.



Postcard view of Greenbrier Military School main building in Lewisburg. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, 1921.

learned while giving the program that the chapel car *Grace* has been restored and is on display at our American Baptist Conference Center in Green Lake, Wisconsin.

On a personal note, my father grew up in the Glen Jean/Thurmond area and told me of the trains that came through there.

Again, many thanks.  
Phyllis B. Allen

## Ferrell Friend

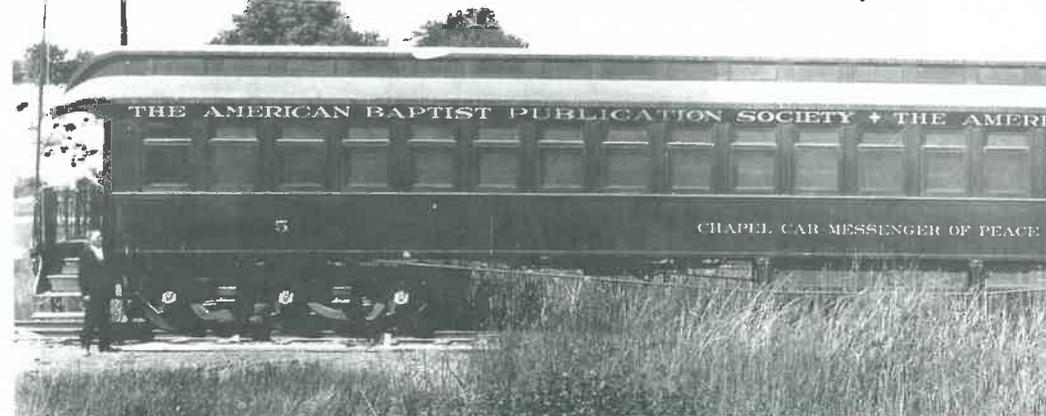
June 18, 2008

Sutton, West Virginia

Editor:

The letter identifying the people in the Scary Creek baptism picture in the Summer 2008 issue was a pleasant surprise, both to me and to the photographer, Ferrell Friend. Our thanks to Tim Meadows, the reader who provided the identification.

The original article that included the baptism picture also told about Ferrell, at age 15, driving the first vehicle across the almost-completed bridge over Elk River at Dundon, near Clay, as a high school sophomore on a summer job. [See "Country Photographer Ferrell Friend: 70 Years Behind the Camera," by



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# Current Programs • Events • Publications

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*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.



Lou Maiuri receiving the 2008 Vandalia Award. Photograph by Michael Keller.

## 2008 Vandalia Award

Traditional dancer Lou Maiuri, of Summersville, received the coveted Vandalia Award for 2008 on Saturday, May 22, as part of the 32<sup>nd</sup> annual Vandalia Gathering at the Capitol Complex in Charleston. Lou was presented the award by commissioner Randall Reid-Smith. Born in Montgomery, Fayette County, in 1928, Lou is the son of Italian immigrant parents. A natural-born dancer, Lou excelled both as a performer and a teacher of mountain dance. Today, he is known across the state and throughout the country as a leading proponent of traditional Appalachian dancing. He was pictured on the cover of our Spring 2008 issue and was the subject of an article, titled "I Dearly Love to Dance': Mountain Dancer Lou Maiuri," by Doug Van Gundy.

## Marble Museum

The National Marble Museum has recently relocated to Weston from its previous home on the West Coast. The Museum of American Glass in West Virginia now houses the extensive collection of marbles, including a 1<sup>st</sup>-century Roman glass marble, German-made marbles from the 1890's, and a 1975 ribbon-swirl marble



Glass marbles from Cairo Novelty Company, Cairo, Ritchie County.

from California artist Ro Purser, regarded by many as the founder of the modern art-glass marble movement. West Virginia marbles are well-represented, as well, as the Mountain State continues to be an important source of glass marble manufacturing. [See "Champions with Dirty Knuckles: Marbles in the Mountain State," by Richard Ramella.] The museum is located at 230 Main in Weston and is open from noon until 4:00 p.m. daily, except Sundays, Wednesdays, and major holidays. Admission is free. For more information, visit <http://wvmag.bglances.com> or phone (304)269-2005.

## Glass Pass Web Site

A new Web site encourages glass enthusiasts to visit glass factories, museums, gift shops, and outlet stores throughout West Virginia, eastern Ohio, and southwestern Pennsylvania. The site, [www.glasspass.org](http://www.glasspass.org), offers on-line information and links, as well as suggested day trips and car tours of significant glass sites in the tri-state area. West Virginia destinations include

Weston's American Glass Museum in West Virginia, Williamstown's Fenton Art Glass [see "Fenton: A Century of Art Glass in Williamstown," by Dean Six; Summer 2008], and Moundsville's Fostoria Glass Museum.

## Turnpike Exhibit

The historic Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike

Skip Johnson, Summer 2007.] That was in 1928.

The story came full circle on June 6, 2008, when Ferrell, now 95, participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Dundon Bridge. Afterwards, Governor Joe Manchin walked with him across the new span.

"Actually," says Ferrell, "I only walked halfway across. It was a hot day, and that was as far as I could go. The governor called for his car and directed the driver the remainder of the way across, and on to Clay, where a reception was being held. I accepted the ride with considerable gratitude."

Ferrell recalls that the vehicle he drove over the bridge in 1928 was a small, white flat-bed truck. This time, 80 years later, he rode in the governor's car. My best wishes, Skip Johnson

**Dr. Coleman C. Hatfield**

April 29, 2008  
St. Albans, West Virginia  
Editor:

I always have to wait in my optometrist's office, so I took along the Spring 2008 GOLDENSEAL to read the last half. Dr. Tom Griffith noticed it, and I told him about the magazine, promising to leave it for his patients.

While my eyes were getting blurrier, he leafed through it. He noticed the tribute to Dr. Hatfield, the grandson of Devil Anse Hatfield. [See "GOLDENSEAL Good-Bye";



Dr. Coleman C. Hatfield. Photograph by Michael Keller.

Spring 2008.] Tom recalls that Dr. Hatfield had taught at the optometry school in Chicago when Tom was a poor, young student there.

None of the West Virginia students could afford to go home for Christmas, so Dr. Hatfield insisted that they and their families come to his home for a big Christmas feast. "I have never forgotten his kindness," Tom says.

Later, Dr. Hatfield came home to practice his profession and became president of the state optometrist's association. When Tom graduated, he came back to St. Albans to practice in the town where he was raised.

Best wishes,  
Maureen Crockett

**Renewal Mailbag**

June 30, 2008  
Murrieta, California  
Editor:

I truly enjoy the articles you print in GOLDENSEAL. I left West Virginia 52 years ago, but I have family still in the area. I love seeing how the state is improving in quality of life for the residents.

Keep up the good work.  
Norma Shrewsbury

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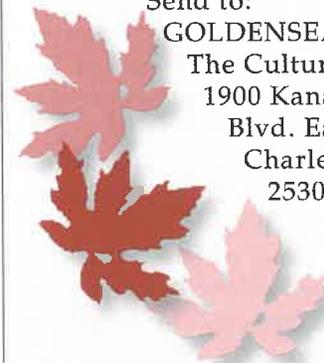
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Items on display in the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike exhibit at the Beverly Heritage Center. Photograph by David Vago.

is the subject of a new display at the Beverly Heritage Center and Rich Mountain Battlefield Visitors' Center in Beverly, Randolph County. The new exhibit showcases the turnpike, a main transportation corridor connecting the Allegheny Mountains with the Ohio River Valley in the days before railroads or paved highways. The Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike served as the main roadway in or out of Randolph County during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was a hotly contested

"Joe Coal," part of the McDowell County Miners Memorial in Bradshaw. Photograph by Geneva Steele.



supply route during the Civil War. For more information about the turnpike, visit [www.spturnpike.org](http://www.spturnpike.org). To learn more about the exhibit or the visitors' center, phone (304)637-7424.

### McDowell Miners Memorial

Eight new names have been added to the McDowell County Coal Miners Memorial in Bradshaw, adding to the more than 600 names already commemorated there. First dedicated in 1992, the memorial is updated each year, as family members contribute \$100 each, plus \$2 per letter, to the

Sandy River Action Committee in exchange for having their loved ones' names added to the monument. According to founding member Geneva Steele, individuals must be McDowell County residents and have either worked in the mines for at least 10 years or have been killed in the mines. New names are added

each October. The memorial statue, named "Joe Coal," was designed by Bluefield sculptor James Bailey and sits on land donated by the Georgia Pacific Railroad. For more information, phone Geneva Steele at (304)967-7840 or write to HC 61 Box 37-B, Paynesville, WV 24873.

# The Goldenseal Book of the West Virginia Mine Wars



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

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

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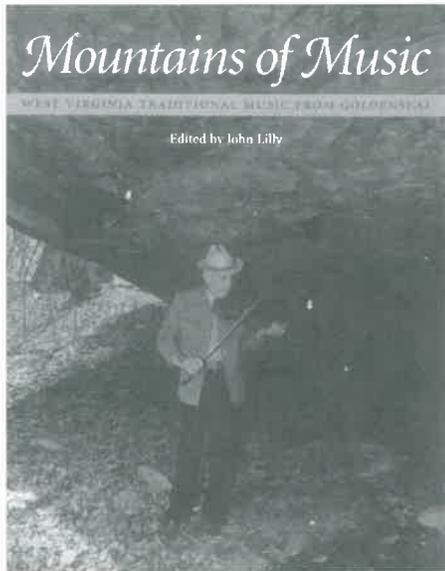
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*Mountains of Music: West Virginia Traditional Music from GOLDENSEAL* gathers 25 years of stories about our state's rich musical heritage into one impressive volume. *Mountains of Music* is the definitive title concerning this rare and beautiful music — and the fine people and mountain culture from which it comes.

The book is available from the GOLDENSEAL office for \$21.95, plus \$2 shipping per book; West Virginia residents please add 6% sales tax (total \$25.26 per book, including tax and shipping). Add *Mountains of Music* to your book collection today!

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-or-

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New road sign on I-70 in Wheeling. Photograph by Kirt Donley, West Virginia Division of Highways.

### Musical Highway Sign

Wheeling country music stars Doc and Chickie Williams have been honored with a stretch of Interstate 70 now named for them. The approximately three-mile-long section of highway through downtown Wheeling, between Washington Avenue and Elm Grove, is now marked with road signs that read "Doc and Chickie Williams Highway: Country Music Royal Couple." The designation was approved by the state Legislature last session in a resolution cosponsored by Andy McKenzie — a state senator, Wheeling's mayor-elect, and Doc and Chickie's grandson. The Williamses were longtime stars of the WWVA "Wheeling Jamboree" radio program and drew a loyal following across the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada for more than 50 years. Doc, age 94, still lives in Wheeling. Chickie passed away in 2007, at age 88. [See "Doc Williams: A Half Century at the 'Wheeling Jamboree,'" by Ivan Tribe; Spring 1987, also appears in the

book *Mountains of Music: West Virginia Traditional Music from Goldenseal*; see coupon at left.]

### Walden Roush at 100

June 17, 2008, was declared Walden F. Roush Day in Point Pleasant, in honor of Roush's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. Roush was featured on the cover of our Winter 1986 issue and was the subject of an article, titled "An Important Part of Our Heritage: Walden Roush Recalls Mason County's One-Room Schools," by Tony L. Williams. The centennial celebration was held at the West Virginia Farm Museum at Point Pleasant, which Roush was instrumental in establishing. The party was attended by commissioner of agriculture Gus Douglas, mayor Leonard "Buster" Riffle, members of the county commission, and many family members and well-wishers. A personal letter of congratulations from U.S. Senator Jay Rockefeller was read aloud. Walden Roush worked for many years with Mason County schools but is most widely recognized for his tremendous volunteer work with various local organizations, particularly the farm museum. Happy birthday, Walden!



Walden F. Roush. Photograph by Hope Roush, courtesy of the *Point Pleasant Register*.

## Creature Conference

The legendary Flatwoods Monster and Point Pleasant's Mothman will be the subjects of a two-day conference, planned September 12-13, at the Alban Art & Conference Center in St. Albans. Several authors and researchers are scheduled to speak, including Jeff Wamsley, curator of the Mothman Museum in Point Pleasant.

The legend of Mothman originated in November 1966, with a string of alleged sightings in Mason County. It has since been the focus of several books, plus a Hollywood movie. A Mothman statue is prominently displayed in downtown Point Pleasant.

The Flatwoods Monster, also known as the Braxton County Monster, the Green Monster, or the Phantom of Flatwoods, made national headlines in September 1952, when a group of adults and young people, investigating a flash of light in the sky, came upon an unexplained creature, measuring 12 feet tall and emitting a strange metallic odor. The sighting sparked a media frenzy, making it one of the top national news stories of 1952. [See "The Legend of the Flatwoods Monster," by Buddy Griffin; Fall 2002.]

For information about the upcoming conference, call (304)550-2426 or visit [www.flatwoodsmonster.com](http://www.flatwoodsmonster.com).

## GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes

**Iris Bell**, Charleston piano player, jazz singer, and composer, passed away on April 19 at a nursing home in Buckhannon. An accomplished musician and performer with a repertoire in excess of 7,000 songs, Iris is best known to GOLDENSEAL readers as the writer of "This Is My West Virginia," named the official state Centennial Song in 1962, then declared one of three official state songs in 1963, along with "The West Virginia Hills" and "West Virginia, My Home Sweet Home." [See "West Virginia's Three State Songs," by Richard Ramella; Summer 2004.] Iris played nightclubs and speakeasies throughout the Kanawha Valley until 1967, when she accepted a long-term engagement in Michigan. Returning to Charleston in 1978, Iris was a regular performer at the annual West Virginia State Jazz Festival at the Cultural Center and appeared elsewhere around the valley. She was 73.



Iris Bell. Photographer unknown.



"Jeep" Hall. Photograph by Michael Keller.

James Edward "Jeep" Hall, of Gallagher, Kanawha County, died recently in Charleston. A retired coal miner, Jeep was instrumental in helping to organize the black lung movement during the 1970's. Jeep was a 10-year-old boy when a flash flood roared through Paint Creek, killing 18 people and devastating the area. An eyewitness to the disaster, Jeep shared his memories of the deluge with author Matthew Mitchell in his Spring 2005 article, titled "Water from Hill to Hill": The Paint Creek Flood of 1932." The flood occurred on July 11, 1932, and Jeep passed away 76 years later, on July 11, 2008. He was 85.

James Edward "Jeep" Hall, of Gallagher, Kanawha County, died recently in Charleston. A retired coal miner, Jeep was instrumental in helping to organize the black lung movement during the 1970's. Jeep was a 10-year-old boy when a flash flood roared through Paint Creek, killing 18 people and devastating the area. An eyewitness to the disaster, Jeep shared his memories of the deluge with author Matthew Mitchell in his Spring 2005 article, titled "Water from Hill to Hill": The Paint Creek Flood of 1932." The flood occurred on July 11, 1932, and Jeep passed away 76 years later, on July 11, 2008. He was 85.

## Heritage at Shepherd

Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, Jefferson County, will host its annual Appalachian Heritage Festival this October 3-4, with concerts at the Frank Art Center Theater on the university campus. This year's festival highlight will be a Saturday evening performance by Ralph Stanley & the Clinch Mountain Boys.

A unique feature of the festival is its involvement with the university's Appalachian Writer-in-Residence program, this year featuring southwestern-Virginia native Adriana Trigiani. Following a week of literary activities on campus and in the community, Ms. Trigiani will present a reading during the festival's Friday night concert. For additional information, visit [www.shepherd.edu/ahwirweb/](http://www.shepherd.edu/ahwirweb/) or phone (304)876-5113.



Yokum's Vacationland, in the shadow of Seneca Rocks, includes two motels, a restaurant, campgrounds, cabins, rental teepees, a convenience store, riding stables, and much more. This sign points visitors toward the restaurant and registration.



# Yokum's Vacationland

## Carving Out a Big Life at Seneca Rocks

Text and photographs by Carl E. Feather

Left: Carl and Shirley Yokum of Seneca Rocks, with one of their fully insulated rental teepees.

**Carl and Shirley Yokum of Seneca Rocks don't have a dramatic love story like that associated with the Native American lore of West Virginia's most famous rock formation. Nevertheless, their 70 years of marriage and incessant labor in the shadow of these magnificent rocks make for a contemporary hospitality legend.**



Carl Yokum is in his early 90's. His family history at Seneca Rocks goes back to the late 1860's. Carl is shown here by the North Fork of the South Branch, a popular fishing spot when he was growing up, and an attraction to fishermen through the years.

**Y**okum's Vacationland, including their store and motel, is at the busy intersection of State Route 55 and U.S. Route 33 in Pendleton County. Just across Seneca Creek is their Princess Snowbird's Indian Village, which offers primitive camping, honeymoon cabins, and teepees for rent. Northeast, toward Petersburg on Route 33, lie the rest of this hospitality empire: a restaurant, a second motel, five modern log cabins, and a second campground. Carl and Shirley also own the old schoolhouse where they studied as youngsters, the modern Seneca Rocks Elementary building that they purchased a few years ago, their home, several other houses, and a family cemetery.

There is more. Across the private bridge that spans the North Fork of the South Branch of the Potomac River is the Yokum cattle farm, original homestead, and the homes of Yokum grandchildren. The Yokum riding stables offer horseback rides to the top of the rocks. Carl also owns pastureland elsewhere in the region. With the exception of the stables, all of these properties, covering about 1,000 acres of land, are operated by Carl, who is in his early 90's, and Shirley, in her late 80's.

Both Shirley's and Carl's families

go back several generations in their connections to this land. Shirley (Bland) traces her ancestors back to Jacob Sites, who settled at the rocks in 1839. A reconstruction of his pioneer site has been built by the U.S. Department of the Interior as part of its recent development of the recreation area. Sites' descendants owned the famous rocks until the federal government condemned the property in the 1960's, in an action that the affected parties still remember with anger and resentment. [See "Selling Side-by-Side at Seneca Rocks," by Carl E. Feather; page 18.]

Jacob Sites' original holdings were divided among successive generations. Shirley's maternal grandmother, Delzena "Della," inherited the land on which Yokum's store now stands. Della's parents and grandfather started the store.

The Yokum connection to the land northeast of the Mouth of Seneca goes back to the late 1860's, when Adam Yokum married Rebecca Mouse, whose father had a farm in this valley. Adam served in Company I, 7<sup>th</sup> regiment of the West Virginia Volunteer Infantry.

He fought at Antietam, Gettysburg, Chancellorsville, and the Second Battle of Bull Run. Adam lived to be 84 and shared many of his Civil War tales with his 14 grandchildren, one them Carl.

Carl is the son of Esten and Elizabeth (Judy) Yokum. The family had a history of both agriculture and hospitality by virtue of living on the cattle-drive route that extended from Virginia to the Sinks of Gandy, a popular summer grazing area. A cattle drive between Moorefield and the sinks typically took three days, and the Mouth of Seneca was a popular place to overnight. The Yokums had both the pasture and rooms to accommodate livestock and men as they passed through the gap.

"This one guy, a colored guy, would drive 50 head of cattle out of here himself. A big collie dog and they would stay over here at my home across the river," Carl says. "We had a pen across here, this place above the road. They could turn them in there for the night."

When the highway between Seneca Rocks and Petersburg was paved in the mid-1930's, Carl sensed an

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## Both Shirley's and Carl's families go back several generations in their connections to this land.

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Shirley (Bland) Yokum's family roots at Seneca Rocks go back to 1839 and pioneer settler Jacob Sites. Her family owned the rocks until 1968, when they became federal property. Shirley and Carl work daily, maintaining their vast tourism and hospitality empire.



Carl and Shirley, at the time of their marriage in 1938.

for the wallpaper. Each cabin had only a bed and washstand. A well topped off with a hand pump provided the "running water." Carl figures he had about \$25 to \$30 invested in each cabin.

"I built two and rented them for a dollar a night, five dollars a week. That's when a dollar was worth a dollar," Carl says. "My first customers were two guys from Ohio. They come in here, and they paid me a dollar for one day. They cooked fish and everything, and they wanted to stay the rest of the week, so they paid me four dollars. When they got to the end of the week, they wanted to know if they could stay another week. When they got to leave, they said they were a bit short on money and wanted to know if I'd take their check, but it bounced. So I got five dollars for the first two weeks I was in business."

With the family farm and a fledgling tourist business to his credit, Carl asked Shirley to be his wife. Shirley and Carl met in grade school as students in the little schoolhouse they now own. "In elementary school, we used to write letters back and forth," says Shirley.

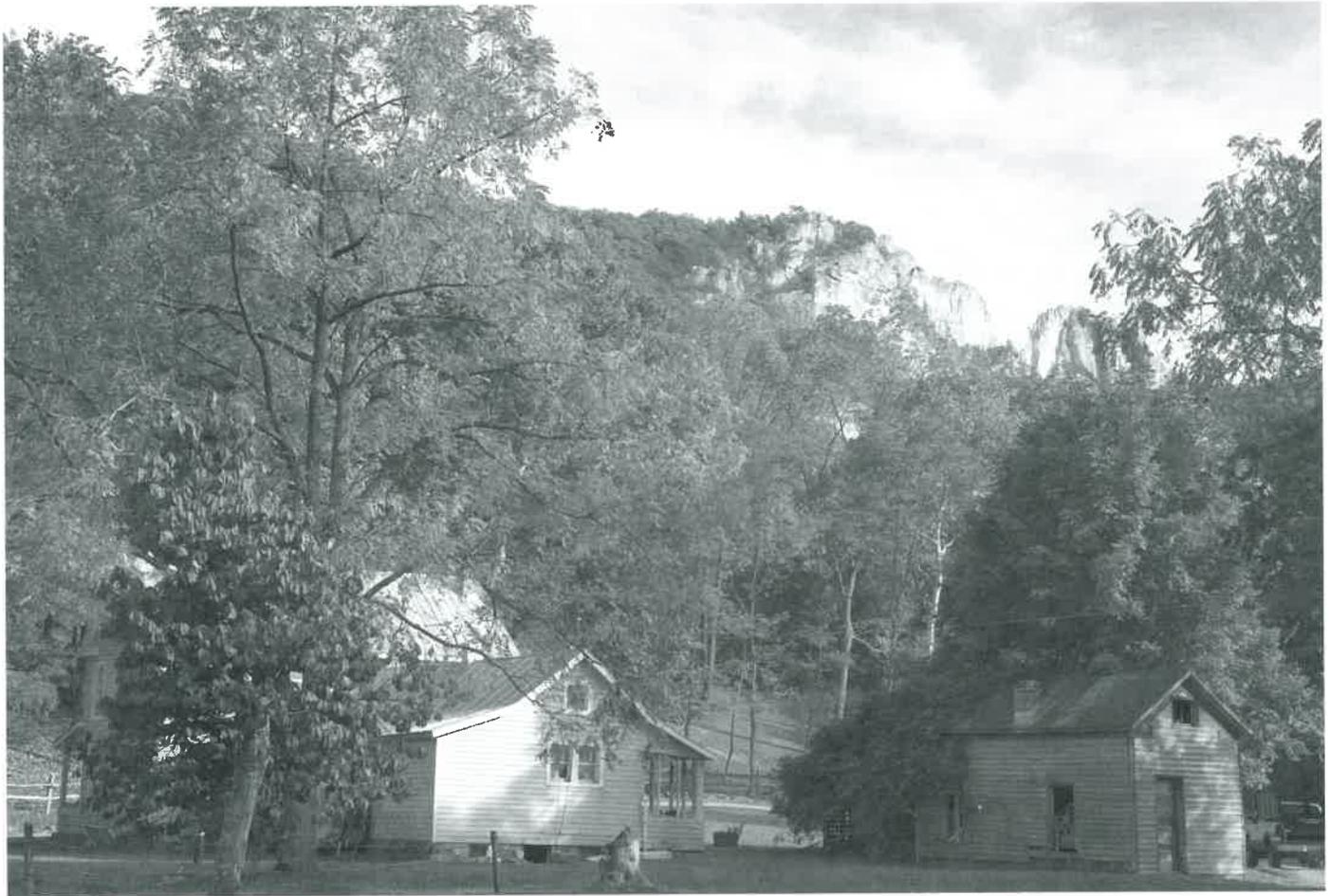
After graduating from Circleville High School, Shirley went to Akron, Ohio, where she stayed with her aunt while attending business school. Shirley's desire was to be a nurse, and she had received a scholarship to that end. But her family didn't have the money to match it, so she chose business school instead.

Carl stayed behind, farmed, and worked on his little hospitality business. They were married in Winchester, Virginia, on October 7, 1938.

Carl's cabin holdings had grown to four by 1938, but the new couple stayed in the Yokum farmhouse

opportunity. Dating back to the Seneca Indians, this area had a reputation for fine hunting and fishing. Carl liked to fish and knew there were plenty of bass in these streams to attract a good tourist trade, especially once the valley was more accessible to travelers.

The two original cabins of what would become Yokum's Vacationland were constructed on the flat land between the highway and the North Fork. Built of green logs Carl felled and hewed, the cabins were constructed in 1935 and served him for 50 years. Carl's mother helped him cover the interior logs with cheesecloth, which provided a base



The Yokum home, with a spectacular view of Seneca Rocks.

until Carl could build a proper house for them. He harvested logs from the farm with a crosscut saw. His father's cousin helped him mill those oak and pine logs into 20,000 board feet of lumber, which was dried in a kiln Carl built. They moved into the new house in 1940, and Shirley promptly opened a tourist home.

"My mother always kept a couple of boarders," Shirley says, explaining the inspiration for her business. "They would be working on the road or whatever, and there was no place for them to stay. She did that from the time I was a little kid, so that's where I got that [idea] from."

Within three years, the couple had two children plus cabins, a tourist home that served meals, and a farm.

"It wasn't easy," recalls Shirley,

who charged just 30 cents for a home-cooked meal. To make extra money, they caught hellgrammites in the river and sold them to fishermen at 40 cents a dozen.

"We did whatever we could to make money," Shirley says. "He'd catch animals and skin them, dry the hides and sell those. We bought the paint for our house with the money from that. We worked hard, believe me."

World War II brought gas rationing, which decreased the tourist trade. Soldiers replaced tourists in 1943, when Seneca Rocks became the site of a military training school for rock climbing. [See "Climbing to Victory: WWII Assault Training at Seneca Rocks," by Robert C. Whetsell; Fall 2007.] The Yokum Tourist Home accommodated the camp doctors, instructors, visiting officers, and, occasionally, their

wives. "We even had a lieutenant and his wife sleep in our kitchen," Shirley says.

"Carl used to cut hair for the soldiers in our basement," she continues. "They'd give him a quarter to do that. He asked me to cut his hair one time. It was the last time he ever did that."

On Saturday nights, the couple provided soldiers with transportation to the movies in Petersburg. They put benches in the bed of their  $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton truck and hauled the men to town in the back of that truck. "They would sing all the way down the road," Shirley says. On one trip, the truck's headlights failed on the way to Petersburg. Because the truck's bed was covered and the men preoccupied with singing, they never knew Carl made the trip in the dark without the benefit of illumination — he was that familiar

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Not content with a tourist home, cabins, and restaurant, the couple purchased the store and expanded it to include a motel with kitchenette rooms. They also built two campgrounds and a second motel. They were constantly reinvesting their profits in the business.

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with the road.

Steady growth marked the post-war years for both their business and the region. Columbia Gas brought a distribution line across the mountain and built a pumping station just north of the Yokums' home. Carl worked on its construction and, after it was built, went to work at the plant as an operator. He worked there 29 years, balancing the full-time job with farming and myriad Vacationland responsibilities, which included constructing a new cabin every year.

Carl also served as a fire warden for 45 years, leading a crew of six-to-eight firefighters. During the WWII years, forest fires were frequent, the result of careless soldiers and war maneuvers. He says the worst fire he ever fought was on Dolly Sods, for three days and three nights. One thousand acres burned.

In 1947, the couple built the restaurant. "I bought that old garage building up there. It was a CCC camp, it was all good lumber. That's what I built that out of," Carl says.

Shirley was the cook for many years and went to the Greenbrier Cooking School to improve her skills. In the 1950's, the restaurant served a Sunday buffet of all home-made items, which usually included one or two gourmet dishes. The perennial favorite, however, was their sausage, made from hogs raised on the Yokum farm.

"We used to make our own sausage, brown it in the oven, and can it," she says. "They'd

come from miles around just to get some of my sausage."

Not content with a tourist home, cabins, and restaurant, the couple purchased the store from Shirley's mother when she was ready to retire and expanded it to include a motel with kitchenette rooms. They also built two campgrounds and a second motel. Carl says they were constantly reinvesting their profits in the business.

"Lots of times, we spent the last 50-cent piece we had, and we didn't know where the next one was coming from," Carl says.

Shirley was the entrepreneur, always looking for opportunity. She says the couple once had riding horses they kept about an hour's drive from their home. "And we had to drive over there every weekend. We had to hire a man to stay over and take care of the horses. We rode up in the woods, and you rode back and couldn't see anything," she says. "We owned the whole side of this rock, back up in this holler, all the way up. I just got another brainstorm one day, and I hired a man with a 14-foot-wide blade. I said, 'You follow me, and we're going to build this trail.'"

Thus began the horse-riding trail to Seneca Rocks, another Yokum enterprise. Operated today by their grandson Virgil "Bub," Seneca Rocks Stables makes three trips a day to the top of the rocks. The trail is wide enough for emergency vehicles and thus provides a lifesaving resource to the many climbers.

Indeed, Shirley's interest in the welfare of her neighbors led her to become an emergency medical technician. She served on an ambulance crew for 10 years, her way of fulfilling her adolescent dream of becoming a nurse.

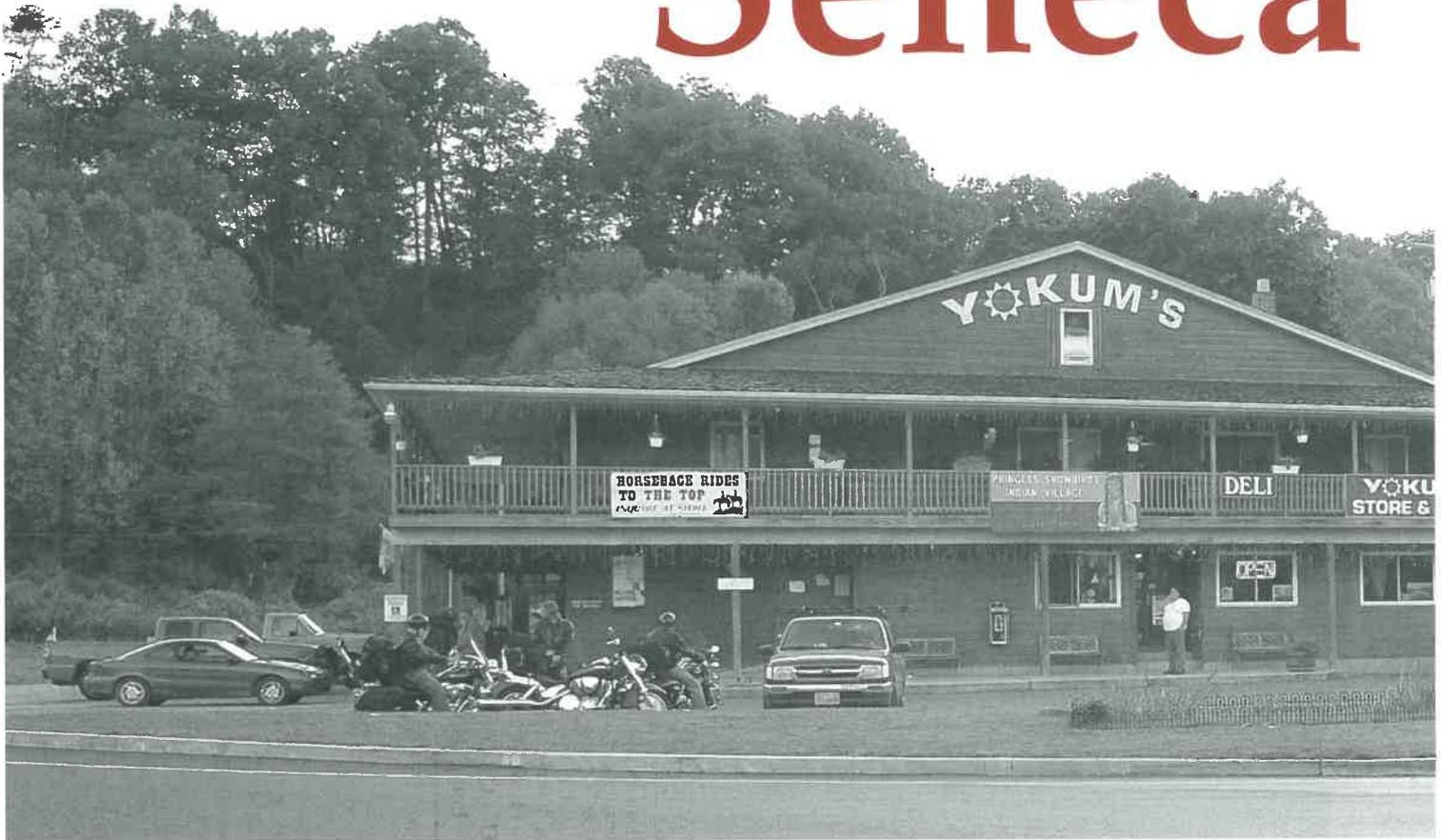
With so many irons in the fire and long days the norm, maintaining a marriage could have been a challenge. "One thing [that kept us together] is that he learned to let me do my own thing," Shirley says. "And whenever we got too bogged down, I'd take him on a long trip. You have to keep him interested."



Reservation calls for the cabins and motel ring in at the restaurant, where Shirley records them in a book.

# Selling Side Seneca

Text and photographs by Carl E. Feather



In an age when most small towns have seen the general store go the way of 32-cent-a-gallon gasoline, Seneca Rocks is an anomaly. This Pendleton County crossroads has two general stores — Harper's and Yokum's — with only a driveway separating them.

The coziness is more than coincidental. The owners of these stores have a common ancestor in Jacob Sites, who settled in this valley in 1839. Jacob's substantial land holdings were divided among his descendants. His granddaughters, Anna and Delzena "Della" Sites, ended up with the two parcels that host the general stores. Anna, who

married Joseph Martin "J.M" Harper, got the parcel to the north; Della, who married Stewart L. Bland, got the one closer to the rocks. Each sister's husband decided to go into shopkeeping: Harper in 1902, Bland in 1923.

Bland's store, now Yokum's, was built by Byron and Erma (Harper) Bland and Byron's father, Stewart. Bryon was a World War I veteran, teacher, mail carrier, and shopkeeper. Erma Bland was a self-taught pharmacist who drew her supplies from the mountains and her knowledge from tradition and necessity.

"People would come in from up

and down the mountain asking, 'What can you do for this or that?'" says Shirley Bland Yokum, who took over Bland's Store when her mother was ready to retire. "Our mother could mix her own salve. She made her own gargle. You won't find a better gargle."

The gargle, which the family still uses at the first sign of a sore throat, is made from vinegar, soda, salt, powdered alum, and water. "It fizzes. It doesn't matter, you gargle with it, and it will stop a sore throat," Shirley says.

Shirley and her husband, Carl, chose to modernize their store and devote its second story to a motel,

# -by-Side at Rocks

Two general stores, Yokum's and Harper's, sit side-by-side at the intersection of U.S. Route 33 and State Route 55 at Seneca Rocks. The owners share a common ancestor, but run very different businesses, allowing them to coexist since 1923.



which offers a front-porch view of the famed rocks. [See "Yokum's Vacationland: Carving Out a Big Life at Seneca Rocks," by Carl E. Feather; page 10.] The store is bright, the walls lined with beverage coolers. The long rows of steel shelving

The interior of Yokum's store offers modern amenities, ample lighting, and neatly stacked shelves full of snacks and souvenirs for the busy traveler.





Harper's Old Country Store dates back to 1902. Still in the Harper family, it has yielded little to the demands of time.

devoted to groceries, snacks, and souvenirs give it the look and selection of a suburban convenience store.

Joe and Carolyn Harper, fourth-generation owners of Harper's General Store, take an entirely different approach.

"We want to maintain the store as a step back in time," Joe says. Established in 1902 by Joe's great-grandfather, J.M. Harper, the general store retains most of its original fixtures and materials: oiled floor boards worn smooth by a century of foot traffic, a pressed-tin ceiling, circa-1910 brass cash register that still works, and oak-framed glass candy case manufactured by M.L. Himn a century ago.

This dichotomy explains why two stores are able to coexist here. Yokum's appeal is to the traveler looking for quick service and convenience. Harper's caters to the ex-

periential shopper willing to invest the time it takes to adjust his eyes to the dim interior and his mind to the feeling of stepping into a time warp. Harper's appeal is to the shopper who wants to meet the owner and spend a few minutes or an hour talking weather, gas prices, farming, or politics. It's also for the biker or outdoors enthusiast who wants a T-shirt or other memento that makes a statement about personal interests and destinations visited.

Harper's is part store and part museum. In addition to the many original fixtures, several specimens of native wildlife are exhibited, including a five-foot stuffed black bear that towers over a selection of West Virginia products and souvenirs. Joe Harper shot the bear May 17, 1983, in retribution for the death of Harper's sheep. The store's stuffed coyote and bobcat were likewise victims of pest control.

Harper's interest in killing predators stems from his other occupations — he is the largest sheep farmer in the state and one of the largest cattle farmers. Joe says the Allegheny Mountains have the finest pastureland in the United States and produce equally fine livestock. But attacks from coyote and bear cut into the profits — Harper's lost at least 117 sheep to them, and he's quick to launch into a rancher's perspective on wildlife management if given the opportunity.

Just as Joe Harper is adamant about shielding his investment in livestock, he carries on the Harper tradition of protecting the family's retailing interests by forecasting and responding to economic and cultural trends.

When his great-grandfather started Harper's, it was a true general store that stocked homestead and farm essentials — farming tools to

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Harper's is part store and part museum. In addition to the many original fixtures, several specimens of native wildlife are exhibited, including a five-foot stuffed black bear that towers over a selection of West Virginia products and souvenirs.

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Owners Joe and Carolyn Harper strive to keep Harper's Old Country Store as original as possible. This 1910 cash register still works.

"Buck" Harper, who had it until 1984. Joe says his father possessed the same great vision as his father and grandfather by foreseeing the tourism boom. Buck and several other individuals started the Potomac Highland Tourism Council. Joe continues the tradition and serves as president of the board.

It was under Buck Harper's watch that Seneca Rocks and nearly 400 acres

sewing needles, livestock supplies to fabric.

"Roads weren't that good, and a lot of people didn't have a car," Joe says, explaining the local retailing environment that would eventually support three general stores at what was then called Mouth of Seneca. "This is a little hub here. There's only one avenue that goes west [through the mountains], and it's right here."

Like Joe, founder J.M. Harper was involved in farming and built structures, many still in use.

"He was smart. He did some engineering feats that are phenomenal," Joe says of his great-grandfather. "I keep [the buildings J.M. built] maintained. I couldn't replace them."

J.M. Harper had the store for about 10 years, until his son, D.C., came over from Piedmont, where he had been a school headmaster

after graduating from Marshall College in 1908.

Foreseeing transportation's future, D.C. started selling gasoline in 1914. For many years, the store was Exxon's oldest dispenser in West Virginia. D.C. Harper initially sold only a few gallons of gas a month, but he saw the future of travel and became a Ford dealer. He also became a farm machinery dealer as mechanization replaced the horse. By 1920, he had to install a 275-gallon tank and hand pump to fuel the sales he made.

When electricity came into the valley, D.C. responded by stocking refrigerators, fans, freezers, light fixtures, and the wiring and hardware necessary to connect customers to the power grid.

D.C. owned the store until 1964, when he became ill and agreed to sell the stock to his son, Bardon

of surrounding land passed from ownership by Sites descendants to the federal government. The government condemned the rocks in 1968 and, through eminent domain laws, offered \$6,800 to Sites family descendants, who owned Seneca Rocks and 132 adjoining acres. Buck took the government to court, and the land owners were able to negotiate a more favorable settlement, \$185,000 for the main attraction's 73 acres, says Joe Rozich, lands program manager for the U.S. Forest Service in Elkins. The acquisition of the rocks via the condemnation process remains a sore spot with the Harpers. Rozich is sympathetic toward their position.

"That's really a difficult process," Rozich says. "The family in that area has been there forever. It's really an ugly thing. I don't know what else you can say about it."



Chuck Saunders, a frequent customer at Harper's Old Country Store, chats with clerk Joanie Kisamore as she opens the store for another day. Unlike its neighbor, Harper's is old-fashioned and quirky.

The clerk behind the old wooden counter — whether it's Joe, who opens the store 7 a.m. every morning, seven days a week, or Joanie Kisamore, a full-time employee for 12 years — is the heart of the store, knowledgeable about everything from what size

Harry Mahoney, a retired Forest Service employee who lives in Elkins and worked for the service during the time the rocks were acquired, sheds more light on the action. He says the condemnation was rooted in a 1965 federal act that established the Spruce Knob-Seneca Rocks National Recreation Area. The act mandated acquisition or interest in up to 100,000 acres of land in the area. Seneca Rocks was among the high-priority properties the government wanted to acquire. To accomplish that end, the Forest Service used condemnation to wrest the rocks from landowners unwilling to accept the government's offers.

"There was considerable upset, concern," says Mahoney.

Thanks to efforts by U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, federal condemnation laws have been amended to protect tracts that remain in original family ownership, Mahoney says. Despite losing the rocks through condemnation, the Harper family learned to make sweet wine from these sour grapes, building upon the region's popularity with outdoor-recreation enthusiasts while

continuing a tradition of caring for established clients.

The first several customers each morning are often residents passing through on their way to work or business in Petersburg or Elkins. Buck Warner, a former sheriff of Pendleton County, stops most mornings to get a cup of coffee and his farm supplies. Like many of the long-established customers here, Buck tells Joe to chalk up his purchases to the credit account and he'll settle up with him later.

"One time I paid him \$589," Buck says. "It was getting up there a little too high."

Joe says he's continued his grandfather's approach to shop-keeping: "We're too small to stock a lot, but what we have will be of good quality."

The store stocks hardware, pipe fittings, electrical supplies, and tools area farmers need. The fact that he's a farmer himself guides Joe in selecting that stock, some of which is kept in the storeroom and has to be requested at the counter.

"If you don't see it, ask for it," Joe says. "We've probably got it."

bolts are stocked to the date of a local resident's garage sale or where to get a bicycle repaired.

Joe says they try to establish a relationship with people who stop here; he likes to find out where they live, what brings them to this crossroads, and share a little of the store's history with them.

There's no table and checkerboard here, although Joe can point to the spot behind the souvenir counter where his father once kept one. The gathering point today is the circa-1950 kerosene heater near the counter, where local woodsmen thaw out after a long day and visitors warm their hands and feet after scaling the rocks.

Many of these visitors also purchase gifts to take home with them. Carolyn, a retired English teacher, has the job of selecting unique items, especially custom T-shirt and sweatshirt designs visitors won't find in other souvenir shops. Joe says the area has become extremely popular with motorcycle riders — U.S. Route 33 is considered one of the best biker highways in the nation — and they have changed the merchandise mix to meet the



Joe Harper stands on the porch with his daughter-in-law, two grandkids, and one of their friends. From the left are granddaughter Cali Harper, friend Carly Cooper, grandson Cole Harper, daughter-in-law Ashley Harper, and Joe.

interests of this crowd.

Increasingly, many users of the recreational area are professionals looking for intense, challenging outdoor adventure during the day and upscale food and beverage at night. In response, Joe put an addition onto the back of the store to house coolers, stocked with beverages and cold food items that campers and locals need. As further indication of the differences between Yokum's and Harper's, the former store's coolers are stocked with national-brand beers, while Harper's focuses on cold ones from micro-breweries that cater to the tastes of their clientele.

Likewise, the Harpers' restaurant, the Front Porch, offers a specialized menu with entrees like leg of lamb, whole wheat pita sandwiches, salads made from scratch, and fresh-dough pizza.

"No burgers, no French fries," Joe says.

Located above the store, the Front Porch restaurant features a namesake outdoor dining area that provides diners with a stunning view of the rocks. Inside, the original

wide, hardwood boards have been caulked and refinished to create a rustic setting.

Joe says they added the restaurant after his father died. He and his sister inherited the store, but she didn't have an interest in running it, so he purchased her share. "We saw a need for a small specialty restaurant. It's been a tiger by the tail," he says. The restaurant, which seats 60, is often packed.

"Next Saturday night (which was Memorial Day weekend), they will be standing in line to get in," he says.

Joe hopes there will be a fifth generation of Harper ownership of this store and restaurant someday, although their sons have their own professions. Scott and his wife, Susan, live in Missouri. Son Matthew and his family live at Seneca Rocks. Like Joe, he's involved in cattle farming and also has a farm equipment rental business. Matthew's wife, Ashley, and their children, Cali and Cole, can often be found in the restaurant or watching the traffic from the bench on the store's front porch. Like Joe and Carolyn,

they live just a few hundred feet from the store.

Joe Harper says there's one more reason the two stores have coexisted all these years, and it has to do with politics. Back in the early days, general stores often hosted the local post office, and getting the contract was a matter of political connections. "The Blands were Democrats, and the Harpers were Republican," Harper says. Depending upon which party was in power, either Bland's or Harper's store would host the post office. The town of Seneca Rocks, Zip Code 26884, has had its own freestanding post office since 1970.

Politics aside, Joe feels the fact these two stores have survived side-by-side in Seneca Rocks for so many generations is testimony not only to the owners' ingenuity, but also the families' ability to get along with each other.

"We're friends, and we don't bicker back and forth," he says. "My wife and I go down to eat at Yokum's Restaurant often. Yokums come in our store to buy farm supplies and hardware." 

# BERDINE'S VARIETY

BERDINE'S  
OPEN  
MON-SAT  
10:00-7:00





white, and blue. Toys and kites fill a display window carrying the sign "Why did Cairo lose its marbles?" — a reference to Harrisville's sister town up the road, which lost its marble factory in 1986. Notwithstanding the sardonic sign, another poster advertises an upcoming marble festival in Cairo. Ritchie County was once a locus for glass factories, producing marbles for the games schoolboys played at recess in bygone years. [See "Champions with Dirty Knuckles: Marbles in the Mountain State," by Richard Ramella; Summer 1993.]

Just inside the front door are two barrels holding sassafras and horehound candy, other favorites from the past — and the present. Toys and candy — this place is a wonderland for kids.

Above the candy looms a bookshelf. There's A.A. Milne's *Pooh Goes Visiting* next to a copy of *The Book of Bad Manners*. Kids zero in on those, while adults find themselves bemused by *Kafka's Soup*, a history of world literature in 14 recipes, including references to the Marquis de Sade, Homer, and John Steinbeck — quite an intriguing book for a rainy day and emblematic of the strange and wonderful finds the store's buyers have provided.

To the right of the front door is a large and colorful display of crochet, knitting, and sewing materials. Here are all the luscious colors of a big crayon box, arrayed on shelves holding wool, spools of thread, needles, and crafters' notions.

Visitors wander up and down the four crowded aisles, stopping to pick up the Coca-Cola memorabilia or consider the ant farm or a box of foot-long pencils, too fat to conveniently hold. The tin ceiling is the only part of the store not crammed with merchandise. Even very high shelves hold items for sale, although I learned later that those high shelves get dusted only once every two or three years.

High and low, there is stuff I want to take home, everywhere I look something extraordinary. As I walk the aisles, the ancient wooden floors creak beneath me. Everyone here moves slowly, looking, thinking, picking up curiosities.



Dean Six and his brother bought Berdines in 1983, with money gathered from a court settlement following the destruction of his previous store by an errant freight train.

Fred Berdine, shown here in an undated photograph, owned and managed the variety store beginning in 1954, when his father retired. Fred and his wife ran the business until the early 1980's.





Karen Harper checks out some customers while Dean Six works at his desk, surrounded by merchandise and activity at Berdines 5 & Dime.

When playing such a strange instrument, Dean comments, "People's inhibitions break down. They laugh or gasp. Sometimes Karen and two customers serenade others. This definitely doesn't happen at K-Mart."

Karen adds, "We make people smile."

Dean leads me toward the front of the store, near the wall on the right side. He points to a wooden shelf full of strange holes behind the candy counter, some holes a half-inch deep. "Ice picks broke the candy apart," he says. "Can you imagine how many wooden splinters the community ate over the years?"

Berdines gives out wooden nickels throughout the year, legal tender at the store from Thanksgiving to January, when they get the most business. "People

can keep the wooden nickels or spend them," Dean says. "Most don't spend their nickels. They just collect them year to year. We also have simple stocking stuffers, like ladies' handkerchiefs and this rolover cat."

The cat runs in circles, then rolls over. "Each one must be tested. They sell for \$6.80. This is one of my favorite toys," he says.

Others of his favorites are a little TV set and an old-fashioned View-Master. I wandered up an aisle, looking at bird whistles, tools, and a wooden pick-up sticks game. There was a spinner to work in sunlight that shone like a rainbow. There were kaleidoscopes, marbles, roll-on garters, and suspenders. Beyond were cedar boxes, dollar harmonicas, and West Virginia glass. There were crutch tips for canes or lawn furniture, made of

rubber, not plastic.

People visiting North Bend State Park or the adjacent rail trail or fishing on North Bend Lake find their way to this unique store, where they can spend enchanted hours.🍁

*Berdines 5 & Dime is open Monday through Saturday, 9 to 5 throughout the year, except major holidays. Phone (304)643-2217, or visit [www.berdinesdimestore.com](http://www.berdinesdimestore.com).*

MAUREEN CROCKETT is a freelance writer, photographer, and illustrator who lives in St. Albans. She is the author of *Jewels in Our Crown: The State Parks of West Virginia*, as well as numerous newspaper and magazine articles. Maureen's most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Spring 2006 issue.

MICHAEL KELLER is director of photographic services for the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.



# Bow Making in West Virginia

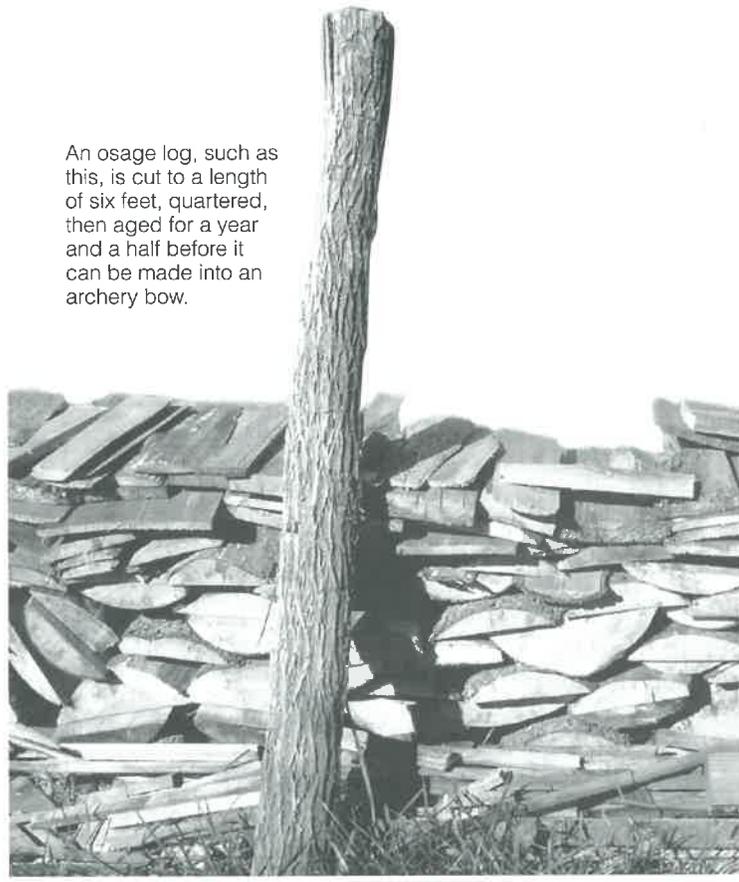
By Nathaniel Simons  
Photographs by Renee Simons

**M**y family loves American history. We love to read about everything from the settlement of the first colony to now. With this love comes a commitment to experience life the way our forefathers did. As a result, we do a lot of primitive things. My

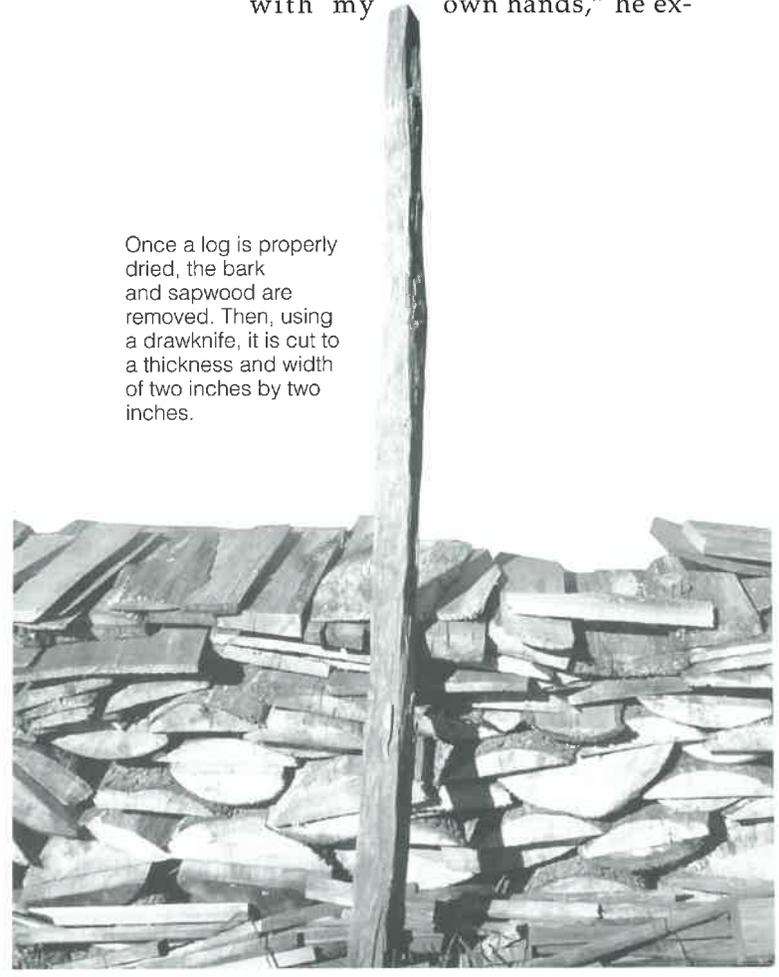
dad, the Reverend David W. Simons, from Ritchie County, and my uncle, Ronald Simons, from Pleasants County, taught me about outdoor survival. We can make fire with flint and steel, or with a bow drill. We can make lean-tos and other forms of shelter, as well as many other things.

My uncle began to make archery bows about 10 years ago. "I love anything outdoors and making my own stuff to hunt with," he says. "It's that whole survival thing." My dad began to make bows about nine years ago. "I enjoy the challenge of building something with my own hands," he ex-

An osage log, such as this, is cut to a length of six feet, quartered, then aged for a year and a half before it can be made into an archery bow.



Once a log is properly dried, the bark and sapwood are removed. Then, using a drawknife, it is cut to a thickness and width of two inches by two inches.





plains. Bow making is something that takes a lot of time and patience. A person wishing to build bows must be a person who will see things through till the end.

Bows have been used for thousands of years. The Bible talks about archers during Old Testament battles. The bow has played a significant part in many important battles throughout history. What we see in the movies of hundreds of archers lined up and shooting into the air and letting the arrows fall within the enemy lines was true in many cases. Bows were also used for hunting and were very popular among Native Americans across the continent, including in present-day West Virginia.

The best type of wood to use, according to my uncle and dad, is

osage, with the second-best being hickory. Each is a strong wood that can withstand considerable strain. The style of bow making they use

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**Bows were used for hunting and were very popular among Native Americans across the continent, including in present-day West Virginia.**

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is from both the Native American and Scots-Irish cultures, both found here in Appalachia.

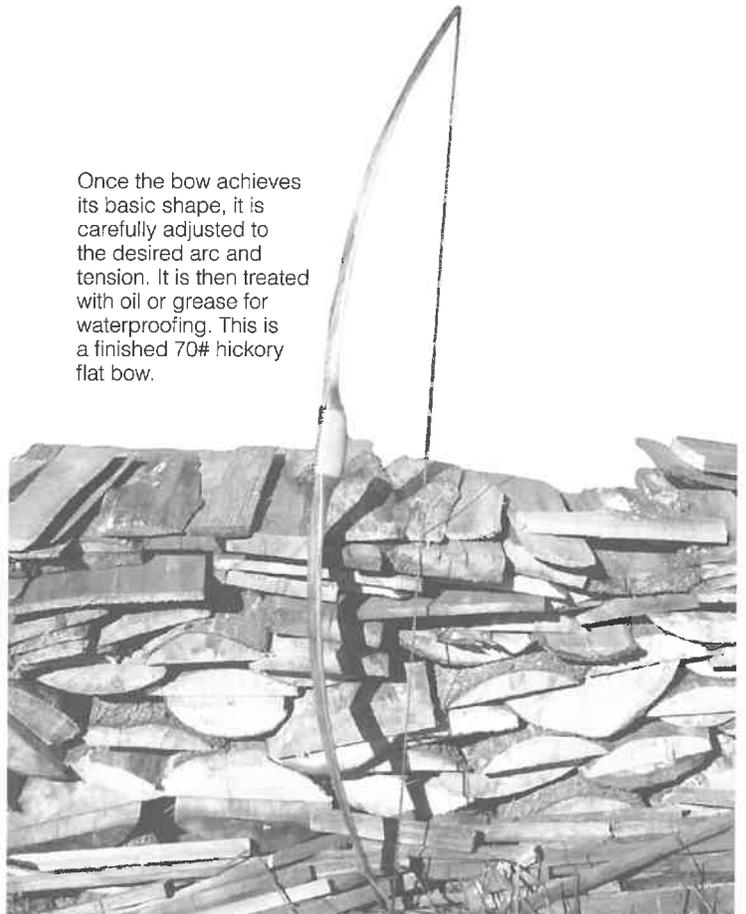
According to my uncle, "The first thing a person has to do is find a tree from 10 to 12 inches in diameter. The next step is to cut it down and cut out a six-foot-long piece of log. The log then has to be [split in half] and then quartered. The bark must be left on and the ends painted with varnish." The wood must be left to dry for a year and a half.

After the wood has been dried out, the bark must be removed. If working with osage, a thin layer called sapwood must also be taken off. Hickory does not have sapwood on it and only needs the bark removed. After this, a drawknife is used to find a thick growth ring that goes all the way from one end to the other. Once this is done, the wood must be cut to two inches thick and two inches wide, while

With the handle as the midpoint, the bow is carved progressively thinner toward each end.



Once the bow achieves its basic shape, it is carefully adjusted to the desired arc and tension. It is then treated with oil or grease for waterproofing. This is a finished 70# hickory flat bow.



still being 72 inches long. That side of the bow, which is the back, is not to be touched anymore.

All the work now goes to the belly of the bow. The center must be found, which, of course, is at 36 inches, and marked. This is where the handle will be. The handle is then formed by filing and is left thicker than the rest. The bow is made progressively thinner down to the tips of the bow. The bow must be bent and the thickness continually adjusted. The thickness of the bow is what determines the poundage of the pull. The thicker it is, the higher the poundage. The string notches are then cut with a round file. The string is looped on the ends. It can then be placed on the bow.

After all of this, the bow is bent back to the desired draw length.

This is done by using a tillering stick. According to my dad, "The tillering stick is a stick with notches in it sitting vertical off of another board. The handle of the bow is placed in a groove, and the string

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Hunting with a bow  
is challenging,  
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is put into the notches. This is done to whatever the draw length of the person is. The limbs [or halves] of the bow must be at the same angle during the bend. If they are not,

the limb that is not bending right is trimmed down with a pocket knife." Tru oil is put on the bow to make it waterproof. Of course, if a person wants to be purely authentic, bear grease is used. This has to be done, because, if wood gets wet, it bows and warps.

The next step is to make the arrows. Cedar is a good wood to use, but the best is river cane from the Carolinas. It grows native there and is similar to bamboo but is solid, not hollow. A feather is split for the fletching, but only the rounded side of the feather can be used. Fletching is the feathers on the side of the arrows that help to guide the arrow in flight. "Only the right wing can be used," my dad says. "The left wing cannot be." The fletching is then glued onto the backs of the



A drawknife, scraper, and rasp are some of the tools used in bow making.



arrows.

The tools used in bow making are a drawknife, scraper, ax, hatchet, and a round file for creating the string notches. In all, they cost about \$75. When asked how much the bows sell for, my uncle says, "I gave more away than I sold, but you can get anywhere between \$400 to \$700 for a bow."

Both my dad and uncle love to hunt. My dad deer hunts with his bow and has killed several deer. He has one osage and one hickory bow that he made and uses. My uncle has used his for deer and turkey hunting and has also been successful.

When shooting one of these hand-made bows, there are no sights like on a compound bow, which are most commonly used today. Shooting instinctively is a must. This is done by aiming down the arrow to the target. This is harder than using sights, because sights are used to help find the range. One of these bows has an effective range of 30 to 40 yards. They are also extremely quiet.

The bows that my dad and uncle made are really works of art. Their beauty is something that must be seen to be appreciated. Making them is time consuming, but the

final results make it all worthwhile. Hunting with a bow is challenging, but being out in the woods with nature is beyond words. For me, the whole experience is one that will not soon be forgotten. 🍁

NATHANIEL SIMONS is a native of Ritchie County, now living in Hometown, Putnam County. He is a history major at West Virginia State University in Institute and wrote this article as a class assignment for a West Virginia History class. This is Nathaniel's first published writing.



Ronald Simons, our author's uncle, with a six-point buck, taken with a 55# osage flat bow with deer antler tips.

Totem pole and cabin overlooking Fairmont in the late 1940's. Photograph by John Champ Neeley.



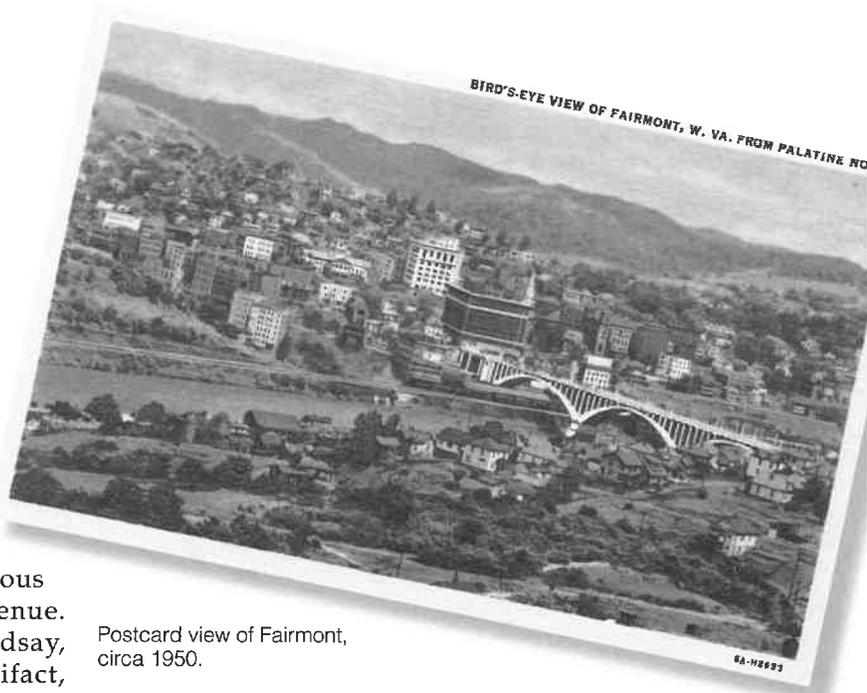
# Chesney's Totem Pole

## Tribute to a Fairmont Landmark

By Raymond Alvarez

**O**n a warm fall afternoon in 1965, my freshman civics class at Fairmont Senior High was made more interesting by the prospect of an after-school hike to see a famous landmark — a totem pole located atop View Avenue. The trek was organized by classmate Jack Lindsay, who claimed it was a unique and interesting artifact, located on a hill overlooking all of the downtown area. Not being that familiar with Fairmont, as I was a bus student from the northern outskirts of town, I decided to tag along, figuring I could catch the City Lines bus to Meredith Springs later that day. Besides, I had never seen a totem pole up close and in person, and I felt honored to be included in the adventure.

As Marion County students, we knew a little about the Native Americans from our area, mostly nomadic Shawnee tribes who followed the rivers to fertile hunting grounds. We were taught that the name of the river that formed at Fairmont came from an Indian term meaning “caving banks.” We also learned that an Indian mound once existed near 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and Fairmont Avenue on the former site of the second campus of Fairmont Normal School. The ancient mound and the Victorian structure housing the normal school were long gone, as a modern post office and federal building was constructed on that site by the 1940's. Fairmont Normal School became known as Fairmont State Teachers College when the new campus was constructed at its present-day site on Locust Avenue in the mid-1920's. The college yearbook became known



Postcard view of Fairmont, circa 1950.

as The Mound in reference to the historic site of days long gone. However, I never knew a totem pole still existed in the town. This was news to me.

A highly energized Jack led a small group of freshmen boys from Oakwood Road across Locust Avenue to Bryant Street, where we climbed higher until we reached View Avenue. We hiked about a mile across View overlooking Watson Avenue, where some of the first prominent homes of Fairmont were constructed. We crossed over to Quarry Avenue, which ended at a private road called Circle Drive. Our destination, Jack explained, was right over a small rise. We ended up on the north side of the hill, and the vista of Fairmont was beautiful. From this wooded precipice, the city bustled below in a miniature collection of interconnected buildings and streets. All the trees on the surrounding mountains shone in gold, red, and russet colorings. We could see nearly all of East Fairmont on the other side of the meandering Monongahela River, beautiful and green, as light sparkled off the tiny ripples made by the warm breeze that sunny afternoon.

“There’s the totem pole,” Jack pointed out, interrupting my perusal of the town. When we got closer to



inspect it, I wondered what kind of Indians erected such a thing.

"Is that Popeye?" I asked, gazing at one of the eight carved figureheads stacked along its 24-foot height. A woodpecker ignored us and chipped away on the face on the top. It was the likeness of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Despite its timeworn visage and faded coloring, it remained an imposing totem, but it was unlike anything I had ever seen in history books. The other heads were whimsical and quixotic. None of us said much of anything, and then finally I asked if it were real. Jack explained that it wasn't a real Indian artifact, but it had been there as long as he knew. His father, Dr. John Lindsay, had told him that it was erected by a surgeon who died about a decade prior. That was all Jack knew about the totem pole's owner. I realized then we were on private property. The pole belonged to someone.

I lingered after Jack and the others left to enjoy the panorama a while longer, finally winding my way down a very steep McCoy Street to Locust Avenue, where I knew the way to town. As I rode the bus north, I turned to see the totem pole, standing like a beacon in the autumn skyline. Sadly, I don't recall looking for it again as my school bus rumbled along Locust Avenue to the high school each day.

Eventually, I filed the adventure away and never really thought about it again until 1991, when I was working on the administrative staff at Fairmont General Hospital. Dr. Lindsay was still a member of the medical staff, and I got to know him well. One day, I mentioned the trek his son organized for a nerdy group of freshmen to see the unusual landmark 26 years earlier. Dr. Lindsay launched into a discussion of the totem pole's creator, Dr. Chesney Ramage.

"Now he was a character," Dr. Lindsay stated, adding that the relic was long gone. Dr. Lindsay recalled many trips he'd made with family and friends to view the



Dr. Chesney M. Ramage in about 1934.

totem pole. That name "Chesney" seemed familiar, and I remembered seeing an old water fountain in the hospital corridor with a plaque that read "Have a Drink on Chesney." Upon closer inspection, it listed Dr. Ramage's full name and date of death.

Dr. Lindsay explained that his widow, Rae Carroll Ramage, had instructed the surgeons in the community to honor Chesney's memory with a water fountain for the doctor's lounge, as the only future drinks they'd have on Chesney would be water and nothing stronger. This bit of information intrigued me, so I decided to learn more about one of the most colorful physicians that had practiced in Fairmont. Shortly thereafter, I was introduced to Dr. Ramage's widow, and we began a long friendship that lasted until her death in November 2006. Over the years, I pieced together the story of Chesney and his totem pole as Mrs. Ramage involved me in her pet projects to further the memory of her late husband and that of her brother.

Chesney MacCauley Ramage, M.D., was born in West Milford, Harrison County, in 1883. At the age of five,

his parents moved to Fairmont, at a time the area was bustling with coal mines and oil wells. Chesney graduated from Fairmont High School, which was part of the original Normal School at the top of Adams Street. His graduating class in 1900 was the largest in the history of the school. As a high school graduate, Chesney was eligible for a teaching certificate and taught in a one-room school in the Rivesville area. There, he boarded with a farmer, who took a great interest in the young man and encouraged him to pursue his education. The farmer also enlisted the young man's help constructing a log cabin used for hunting.

Chesney enrolled at West Virginia University, where he participated as a member of the Men's Glee Club and the Delta Tau Delta Fraternity. After graduation, he entered Johns Hopkins University Medical School in Baltimore. He received his medical degree and returned to Fairmont to establish a surgical practice by 1910. Around that time, young Dr. Ramage was named superintendent and chief surgeon at Miners' Hospital (later known as Fairmont Emergency Hospital) on Guffey Street.

Dr. Ramage was no ordinary surgeon. Among his contributions to the community was the establishment of an orthopedic program for polio victims from 1917-1921. Polio epidemics were frequent occurrences in many of the small mining towns in Marion County at that time. As Fairmont's chief health officer, he also initiated inspection for milk and dairy operations in 1912. He supervised the establishment of the city's

first water filtration plant. In 1923, he became one of the first surgeons in north-central West Virginia to be named a fellow in the American College of Surgeons. He supervised the school of nursing. His association with Fairmont Emergency Hospital lasted until his death in 1957.

Lillian Rae Carroll graduated from Fairmont State Teachers College in 1933, and after a career as secretary to the state's financial auditor, became the financial secretary at Fairmont Emergency Hospital in 1937. In 1941, she married Dr. Ramage, who encouraged her to continue her education in nursing, which she completed at the hospital in 1946. Rae worked as a surgical nurse with her husband in his private practice part-time for the next 10 years.

In addition to his medical career, Dr. Ramage enjoyed singing, hunting, fishing, and writing. He wrote many short stories under the name of C. MacCauley for the *New York Masonic Outlook*, dealing with aspects of Scottish Rites Masonry. In the late 1940's, he penned a novel, *The Brazen Serpent*, around the theme of the emblem of the 25<sup>th</sup> degree, symbolizing the healing arts. His love of hunting and adventure were well known to his peers, as he made many trips to Canada and western mountainous regions.

In 1939, he built a small log cabin on his acreage situated on approximately eight acres above View Avenue. The hilltop property had a unique overlook that included nearly all of Fairmont, Palatine, and the Monongahela River Valley. During his travels



Miners' Hospital, later known as Fairmont State Hospital, was the Fairmont Emergency Hospital when this photograph was made in 1940.



Rae Carroll Ramage as a nursing student at Fairmont Emergency Hospital in about 1945.

to Canada and the American West, he studied tribal objects, including totem poles. These traditional poles include carvings of animals, plants, or other natural phenomenon revered as symbols of a society. Chesney decided to complement the cabin with symbolic icons from his era on a tall, dead chestnut log from the farm owned by Bart Watson on Straight's Run in Monumental. He and Rae used a crosscut saw and ended up with a trunk, six feet in circumference and 28 feet in length. Dr. Ramage then commissioned Steve Wilson, a local farmer, to haul it on two connected wagons pulled by a double team of horses along the six-mile trip back to Fairmont and up the steep hill to the Ramage property.

Once he had his log, Chesney needed an artisan to create what he envisioned as symbols of his society. Rae's brother, Robert L. Carroll, a graduate student in mathematical physics at West Virginia University, volunteered, though he was skeptical about his abilities to perform the task. Robert had been an apprentice

dye maker at Fairmont's Owens-Illinois plant, and Dr. Ramage felt that this experience would provide Robert the talent to carve likenesses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, an owl, an American Indian, Popeye the Sailor Man, the character logo from Esquire magazine, three assorted gargoyles, and, of course, the brazen serpent — six feet in length at the end of the pole.

Robert labored on the project for six weeks. Rae painted the faces with bright enamel colors, and the pole was deemed complete. A crew from the Monongahela Power Company erected it in 1942, securing its base in concrete at a depth of four feet. The totem pole stood proudly at a height of 24 feet above ground and could be viewed from the main streets of Fairmont, as well as from Merchant Street on the East Side.

The totem pole soon proved to be a popular attraction. Residents and guests enjoyed walking up from Watson Avenue to see the monument, which served as a silent sentry over the town. Dr. Ramage eventually created a small park at the end of Watson Avenue so that easy access could be made to the totem pole without tramping through his yard.

Over the ensuing years, the log cabin deteriorated, and Dr. Ramage dismantled it in 1950. In the late 50's, he suffered a stroke and died in July 1957. During the next two decades, the chestnut pole, with its wormy interior,



Dr. Ramage erected his 24-foot totem pole on a hill above Fairmont in 1942, where it stood watch until 1984. It depicted Franklin Delano Roosevelt, an owl, and an American Indian, as shown at right. Also included were Popeye the Sailor Man, three gargoyles, a character logo from *Esquire* magazine, and a six-foot-long serpent.

eventually succumbed to the combined effects of weather, ants, woodpeckers, and, sadly, some vandalism. By 1973, the section above the serpent rotted and fell away. The serpent remained, slightly truncated but still overlooking the town for another 11 years, until the City of Fairmont excavated a new 16-inch water line adjacent to it in 1984. As the project progressed closer to the property, the remaining section of the totem pole was hauled away. Tossed in the county landfill, the demise of Chesney's totem pole was hardly noticed.

During Dr. Ramage's lifetime and thereafter, many former Fairmont residents returned, often bringing their grandchildren, to see the totem pole they fondly remembered. John Champ Neeley took a photograph in black and white in the 1940's and it was later enhanced with photography oils by James Nigh. This photo graced the cover of Robert Carroll's lighthearted book, *West Virginia Wit and Wisdom*, published in 1986.

In the dedication, Carroll stated that FDR, whom Chesney envisioned as the top man on the totem pole, sported a cigarette in a holder and Popeye smoked a pipe. Carroll didn't take credit for creating the images Dr. Ramage desired; he claimed that they were already in the log and all he had to do was remove the outside layers of wood.

Dr. Ramage's totem pole is a unique segment of the history of Fairmont. Dr. Robert Carroll went on to a distinguished career as a nationally recognized physician. Following Chesney's death, Rae worked 26 years as a night supervisor at Fairmont General Hospital, until her retirement in 1983.

The totem pole was a significant Fairmont landmark for 42 years. The last time I saw Rae Ramage was in October 2006. Jack Lindsay, who had a successful career as a dentist in Morgantown, had passed away that week, and I recalled for Rae the day that Jack led a group of high school freshman across her yard to view the totem pole. She smiled and said, "The Lindsays were always great fans of the totem pole!"

Her death at the age of 92 followed a few weeks later, and I was named executor of her estate. She wanted to honor the lives of her brother and her hus-



band and devoted her later years to philanthropic support. After her brother's death in 1997, Rae established a physics lecture series and scholarship program in his name at Fairmont State University. She also endowed the Dr. Robert L. Carroll Chair in Physics at West Virginia University's Eberly College of Arts and Sciences. A large brass plaque in Woodburn Hall is dedicated to him as the first doctoral candidate in mathematical physics at the university. Her estate also granted gifts to the Fairmont Senior High School Foundation in honor of Chesney; the Marion County Historical Society; her beloved church, Central Methodist in Fairmont, where Chesney sang in the choir until his death; and several other nonprofit organizations.

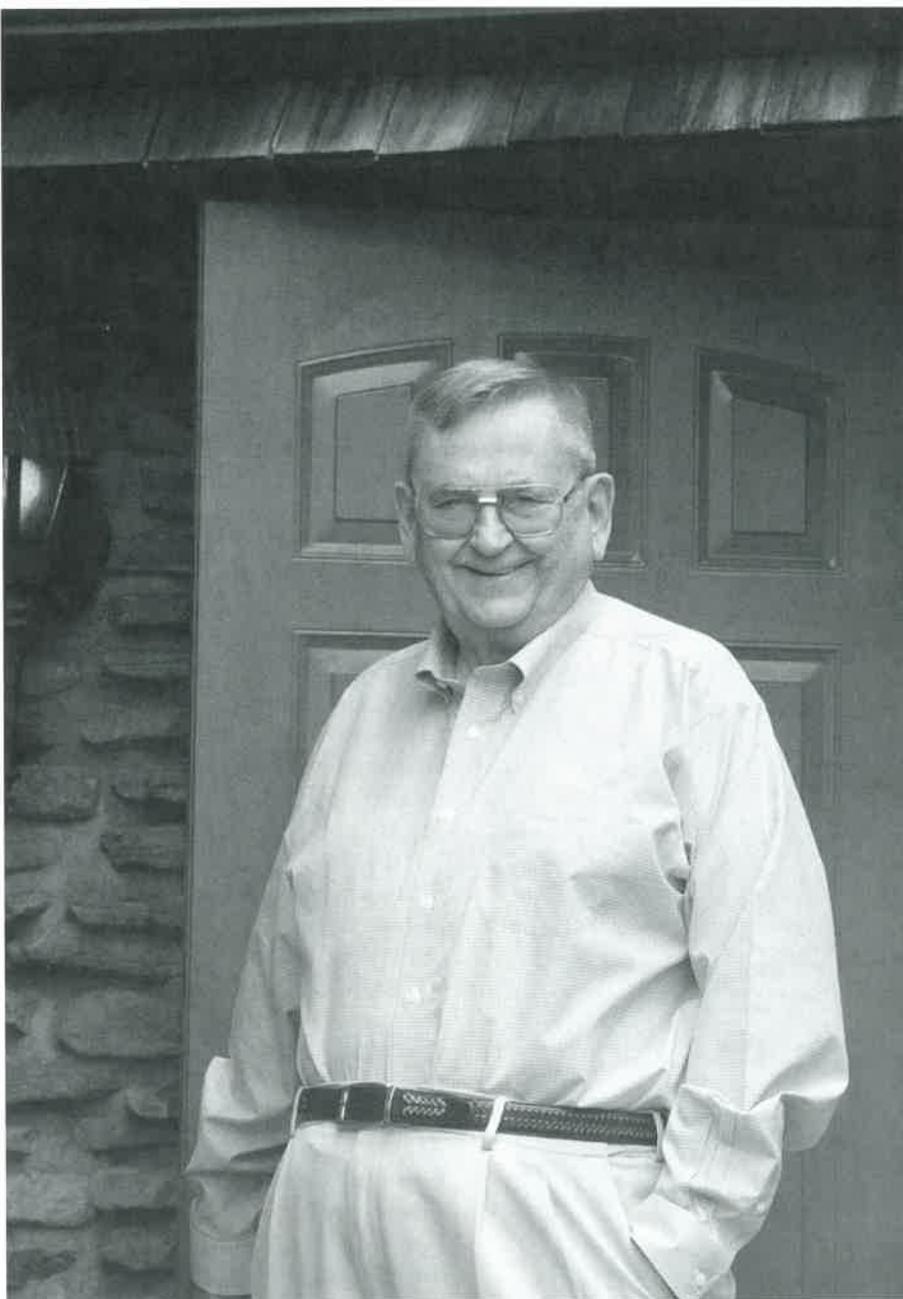
Prior to Rae's death, Fairmont State's Foundation contacted me about a means to recognize her contributions. With the assistance of FSU's graphic designer, Bob Hefner, we developed three illustrated storyboards, designed to honor Dr. Ramage, Rae, and Dr. Carroll. Rae gave her final approval of the endeavor shortly before her death, and Bob had them printed and framed. These were dedicated in January 2007 and are now prominently displayed in the Health Sciences Building at Fairmont State.

The story of Dr. Ramage and his totem pole can also be found at Fairmont General Hospital, where

Rae endowed funds for an endoscopy outpatient unit named for her late husband in 1994. A copy of Hefner's graphic is also displayed at the Marion County Historical Society.

Dr. Ramage's contributions to the health of Marion County and the region were significant in their time. Though all the key people who connected me to the totem pole have passed on, the memory of it remains with those who recall this important landmark and for those who are reminded about it through the various tributes that remain. 🌿

RAYMOND ALVAREZ is a native of Marion County and a graduate of West Virginia University. He is corporate vice-president for Regency Hospital Company and makes his home at Rock Lake, Marion County. He has written several articles that have been published in health journals. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Winter 2007 issue.



Among the most prominent of citizens in most communities is the local physician. Some towns might be fortunate enough to have a few. Many, however, have only one, or the nearest might be miles away. Although the town of Parsons has had several through the years, when you mention doctors to folks there, invariably they will speak of "Dr. Pete."

**D**r. Guy H. "Pete" Michael, Jr., was born in Norton, Randolph County, in 1925. His father, Guy Sr., was the third generation of what would turn out to be four generations of doctors in the Michael family. Pete's mother was the former Mildred Coffman of Clarksburg.

The first physician in the Michael family was Pete's great-grandfather, John. John owned a large farm and gristmill in Preston County. Unbelievably, the successful farmer decided at the age of 48 that he wanted to become a doctor. He went to Baltimore and completed the

Dr. Guy H. Michael, Jr., known around Parsons as "Doc Pete."

# A Life Well Spent

## "Doc Pete" of Parsons

necessary training to fulfill his dream. He raised five sons who became doctors, including Pete's grandfather, Willis.

For a while, Willis and his family lived in Hendricks in Tucker County. While Willis was practicing medicine in Hendricks, a traveling fireworks salesman stopped by the family home and asked the country doctor if he could rent his barn in which to live, keep his horse, and manufacture fireworks. Willis agreed. The gentleman occupied the building, figuring it would take him two or three months to build the fireworks and then sell them in the local communities for the Fourth of July. One night during the man's stay, there was a loud explosion. The building was destroyed, and the man, his horse, and Dr. Michael's horses all perished in the fire.

Willis eventually ended up practicing medicine in Norton. The mining industry was strong in the area at the time, and Norton was a thriving community. Later, Pete's father, Guy Sr., became a physician and practiced in the same area, traveling to Philippi and Grafton to perform surgeries. Pete recalls both his father and grandfather making house calls on horseback. He also remembers, as a teenager, accompanying his father to the Myers Clinic in Philippi to see patients. [See "The Myers Clinic: A Family Legacy in Barbour County," by Barbara Smith; Spring 2005.]

In 1939, Dr. Samuel Weisman built the Tucker County Hospital in Parsons. He practiced there until 1943, when he sold the hospital to Dr. Guy H. Michael, Sr. About this same time, Pete graduated from Belington High School, and the family moved to Parsons. Pete entered West Virginia University and graduated with a B.S. degree in 1945. He entered medical school there and finished the two-year pro-



Above: Dr. John Michael was the first of four generations of physicians in the Michael family. He left a successful career in farming to study medicine at the age of 48. Photographer unknown.

Above right: Dr. Willis Michael practiced medicine in Hendricks, Tucker County, before moving his practice to the mining community of Norton, Randolph County. Photographer unknown.

Right: Dr. Guy H. Michael, Sr., purchased the Tucker County Hospital in Parsons in 1943 and soon expanded and modernized the facility. Photographer unknown.

Below: "Doc Pete" in 1950, early in his medical career. Photographer unknown.

gram in 1947. He proceeded to the medical school at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and received his M.D. in 1949. He completed a two-year internship at the 2,000-bed Philadelphia General Hospital in 1951. He worked the emergency room there and recalls he "saw a little bit of everything."

The young Dr. Michael returned to West Virginia and passed his state board exams in Charleston. He began assisting his father with surgeries at the family-owned hospital in Parsons. Simultaneously, Pete began seeing his own patients in the hospital in the morning and in the afternoon at





The Tucker County Hospital as it appeared in 1939. Photograph courtesy of the City of Parsons.

an office he established in Thomas. He would return to the hospital in the evenings to see patients in the office or the emergency room. This went on until the late 1950's, when the elder Dr. Michael was stricken by a heart attack and a stroke, which left him disabled and bedridden.

The original Tucker County Hospital had just a handful of patient rooms. A few years after purchasing it, Dr. Guy Sr. had the facility expanded to 49 beds. The building also housed the typical necessities, such as an x-ray room, laboratory, and kitchen.

Dr. Pete, who is most often referred to simply as "Doc Pete," recalls they had difficulty keeping surgeons at the hospital after his father was unable to work. He states they had several, including a couple of excellent ones, but for various reasons they did not stay long.

During his early years practicing medicine, Doc Pete's fees were \$2 for an office visit, \$5 for a house call, and \$25 for delivering a baby. He estimates that he delivered approximately 2,000 babies. Myself, my two sisters, and two of my brothers are

included in this number.

Doc Pete served as Tucker County Health Officer for many years. One of the diseases he recalls as being a significant problem during the early days of his career was rheumatic fever. Complications from this disease often led to damaged heart

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During his early years practicing medicine, Doc Pete's fees were \$2 for an office visit, \$5 for a house call, and \$25 for delivering a baby.

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valves and muscles. Pete states that the use of penicillin decreased the prevalence of the disease, and it was pretty much eradicated by the mid-1960's. He feels the misuse and overuse of the antibiotic, however, has diminished its effectiveness, resulting in more resistant germs, or "superbugs."

Doc Pete possesses a sharp mind and a keen sense of humor. He remembers many amusing incidents that occurred during his medical career. Among them was a tale of a woman who suffered from epilepsy. The lady went into a state where she was suffering one convulsion after another, a condition that can actually lead to death. She had been afflicted in this manner for several hours when she was brought into the hospital. Dr. Pete loaded her with the normal medicines, which did not improve her condition, so she was placed under general anesthesia. This therapy was successful in stopping her seizures. She then entered a state that caused her to sleep continuously for two or three days. Eventually the patient began to arouse from her sleep. One of the nurses exclaimed, "She's coming around!" At that same time, a local minister was making his rounds. The nurse asked him if he would like to say a few words to the lady. The preacher said, "Sure." He bent down towards the woman and asked her, "Do you love the Lord?" The groggy woman looked up at him and replied, "No, but I

love Doctor Pete!"

Because of the great number of babies he delivered and people's affection for him, there were several infant boys named after Doc Pete. He affirms there were many boys named Pete or Michael in his honor.

He also had a goat named after him, by a lady he treated for a blood clot in her leg. While she was having lab work done, she told the technician her husband had "gone to Pittsburgh for the West Virginia Bowling Tournament." The technician thought this strange and asked her to repeat it. He then asked her, "Don't you think it is kind of strange they would have the West Virginia Bowling Tournament in Pennsylvania?" The woman thought for a moment and then muttered, "That, that," and proceeded to call her husband an unflattering name.

Soon after the wayward husband returned from his "bowling trip," his wife asked him to fix the electric fence that contained their goat, "Dr. Pete." The fence was falling down in places, and the lady said she would turn the electricity off as her husband repaired it. As the man grabbed the fence wire and went to straddle it, the offended wife turned the juice back on. As the husband screamed in agony, she yelled at him, "How did you like your trip to Pittsburgh for the West Virginia Bowling Tournament?" She gave him a few minutes of this treatment before finally relenting.

This same lady brought her young son in one day to the hospital. Doc Pete was astonished to see a doorknob protruding from the boy's mouth. She informed the physician she had been working on it for two hours and had been unable to remove it. Pete placed the lad on the exam table and simply squeezed his nose shut and immediately extricated the doorknob. The woman asked Pete, "What should I do about that?" He replied, "Take him to a psychiatrist!"

As Pete recalls, many of the local "winos" also provided some

memorable episodes. One incident occurred when one of the drunks thought he had been bitten by a rattlesnake while searching under a cabin for some moonshine. An ambulance was called for the man, and he was brought to the hospital with the sirens blaring. A man who lived next to the hospital came down to see what all of the fanfare was about. He recognized the patient as one of his drinking buddies and entered the hospital to check on him.

Meanwhile, Doc Pete was examining the man who said he had been bitten on the wrist by the poisonous snake. After the physician pried the man's fingers from the wound, he observed some small scratches. Pete states the man might have

into the exam room, and removed a brand-new pack of cigarettes from his buddy's shirt pocket and told him, "If you're going to die, you won't be needing these!"

According to Pete, before the Michael family owned the hospital, there were two men who worked there as orderlies, who both had drinking problems. On one occasion, the two removed specimens of appendices, gall bladders, and such that had been preserved in alcohol. After they removed the specimens from the jars, they drank the alcohol. One of the men later became homeless and began sleeping at the county jail each night. Pete states the man became such a nuisance that the jailer convinced the judge to sentence him to "six months out

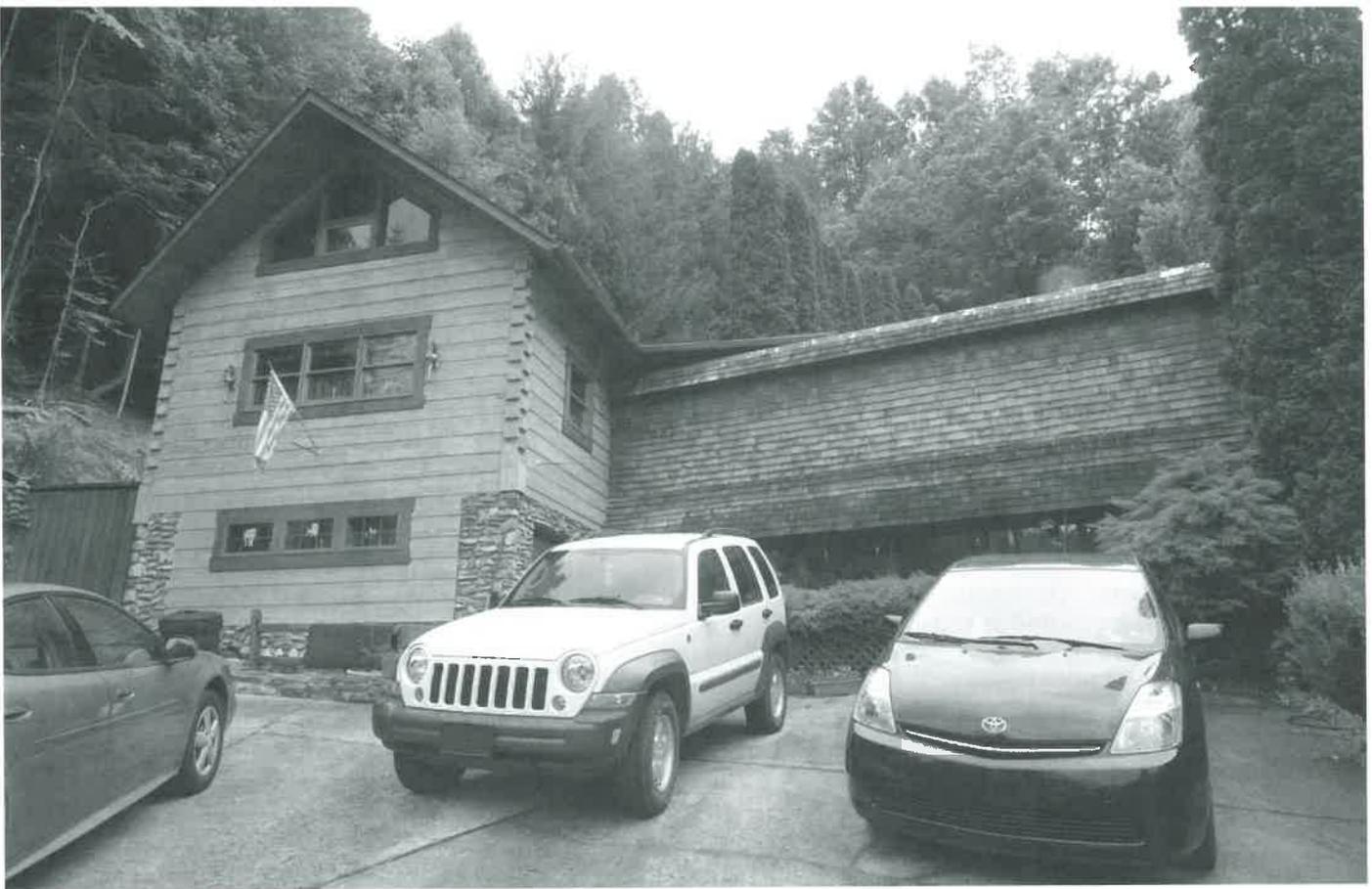


Doc Pete, age 82, has a sharp mind and many fond memories of his long and rewarding career.

been bitten by some kind of non-poisonous snake, but he did not have fang wounds indicative of a rattlesnake bite. The patient was continuously screaming out, "Oh Lord, I'm gonna die! I'm gonna die!" His friend, who was standing in the hallway observing the theatrics, stepped about two steps

of jail." Pete claims this story was featured in a "Ripley's Believe-It-or-Not" column.

One day early in his career, Pete went out at 2:00 to make a house call. The house was located across the street from an old hotel in Parsons. Just as he got out of his vehicle, he saw a fire truck coming down the



The Michael home, on the outskirts of Parsons. Doc Pete designed this elaborate structure, part of which is built underground.

street. The hotel had a veranda, and the fire truck pulled right in front of it. A lone fireman exited the truck and pulled out a fire hose that was several feet long and hooked it to the hydrant. Pete recalls the old building was "primed to burn," and soon the veranda was on fire. As the single firefighter was busy, Pete was amazed to see the fire hose itself catch fire! The fireman soon discovered this, got into the fire truck, and took off in it, pulling the fire hose from the hydrant, causing water to fly everywhere! Pete jokingly states, "They didn't save anything but the lot that night!"

Another night, Pete received a call that one of the tallest men in Parsons had suffered a heart attack. The man had been downtown drinking and was being somewhat rambunctious. He somehow offended a large, rotund lady, whom Pete recalls as "having the strength of two bulls." The woman picked the drunk up and gave him a "bear hug" and broke two or three of his ribs. That was the man's "heart attack."

In contrast to these humorous anecdotes, Pete recalls a story of great

tragedy that happened one year in late October. There was a sawmill located across the Cheat River from Hannahsville, on Route 72, near the Preston County line. The men who worked at the sawmill had to cross the river in a large, homemade wooden boat each day to get there. The men had on large boots and, since the weather was cold, two or three pairs of pants. It was a Friday evening and Halloween. The workers were eager to go home and therefore put more men in the boat than normal. The vessel was ill-equipped to handle such a load and capsized in the frigid water. Instead of hanging onto the boat and floating downstream to safety, the men attempted to swim to shore. Pete theorizes that they couldn't have swum more than a few feet in those conditions. Subsequently, all five men were dragged from the water, and Pete was called to the scene. None could be resuscitated. At least partly because of this accident, Pete believes water safety should be taught in every school in West Virginia.

Although Pete states he thor-

oughly loved practicing medicine, he does admit the long hours were tiring. Most nights, he would not leave the hospital until 10 or 11 o'clock. Oftentimes, he was the only doctor in town and would be called out in the middle of the night due to a car accident or an individual's acute illness. Fortunately for him and his patients, he lived right beside the hospital and could be there in a matter of seconds.

As much as he enjoyed the medical profession, Doc Pete did not encourage his son, J.D., to enter the field. (Pete had another son who died at birth.) Pete says J.D. never mentioned it, but he believes his son would have studied medicine had Pete pushed him. Instead, J.D. became a teacher. He lives in Arizona, where he has two sons, neither of whom are doctors.

I inquired as to what things in the medical community are perceived differently today than they had been in previous years. Doc Pete mentions cholesterol as an example. He says, at one time, a number of 200 was considered good. Furthermore, if you had an LDL of 100 or

even more, it was acceptable. He states the current way of thinking is, if you come from a family with a history of coronary disease or arteriosclerosis, you should attempt to get your LDL down in the 60 or 70 range. Another change involves estrogen therapy. When Pete was in medical school, experiments were performed on prisoners serving life terms, who were paid to take estrogens. The belief was that it would cut down on coronary disease. He says that turned out not to be true. It was apparent to me through our conversations that the retired doctor continues to be kept informed on medical issues and other current events. He periodically still attends seminars, even though he is no longer actively engaged in practicing medicine.

In November 1985, a devastating flood hit the town of Parsons. [See "Night of Raging Waters: Parsons

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**Fortunately for him and his patients, he lived right beside the hospital and could be there in a matter of seconds.**

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and the 1985 Flood," by Jerry Di-Bacco; Fall 2005.] The hospital had two feet of water in it, and the facility closed down for a period of three weeks for repairs. It reopened for a short while and was then purchased by Davis Memorial Hospital of Elkins. The old hospital was torn down in the early 1990's and was replaced with a new building, operated by Davis Memorial. It is now known as Tucker Community Care and is an outpatient facility, operating from 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m.

Doc Pete retired in 1992. He and his wife, Betty, live just outside of Parsons in an elaborate house, which Pete designed. At 82 years of age, and in spite of some heart problems and two bypass surgeries, he remains quite active. He is devoted to watching poker on television. His favorite pastime, however, is camping. He leases a site along the Dry Fork River, and most summer days he can be found there. It is a peaceful atmosphere and the perfect place to listen to the retired doctor regale visitors with tales of a life well spent, delivering babies and treating the ill and injured. 🍁

TOM FELTON is sheriff of Tucker County and a lifelong resident of Parsons. He is the author of three books of local tales and history. Tom is a 1974 graduate of Parsons High School. He received degrees in sociology and law enforcement from Fairmont State University. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Fall 2006 issue.



Doc Pete and his wife, Betty, share the couch with two dogs during a recent visit to their Parsons home.

# Respecting Miss Skaggs

By Bert W. Hudson

Very early in my career at Kanawha County's Bullpush Hollow Elementary School, I committed an offense that taught me the truth of that old American adage, "Put your brain in gear before you begin talking."

**B**ullpush Hollow was located on Smithers Creek, approximately two miles northeast of the city of Smithers and about five road miles from Montgomery. Cannelton Coal & Coke Company operated a coal mine on the mountain above the community of Bullpush as well as a coal tippie located at the foot of Bullpush Mountain. There were perhaps 30 company houses, a one-room school building, and a narrow dirt road wedged between the sides of Bullpush Mountain and the creek. Bullpush Elementary was a one-room school in which a single teacher taught three grades. Although most of the town of Cannelton was within the bounds of Fayette County, Bullpush Hollow was part of Kanawha County.

The residents of Bullpush were mostly conservative folks who respected professional people and believed in traditional social values. My parents, like most other parents in our community, believed in old-fashioned child-rearing theories, such as "spare the rod and spoil the child."

Teachers then ranked at or near the very top among professional groups in terms of the degree of respect accorded them in their communities. With rare exception, parents of that day could be counted on to support any teacher who was accused of unlawful or unprofessional conduct.

Back then, college scholarships were very rare, miners' families were large, and the wages of coal miners were so low that very few miners were able to provide the financial support a child needed to attend college. Additionally, jobs outside the coal mines were scarce, and when a miner's child did land such a job, he or she was expected to use his or her earnings to "help out your daddy." It was very common in those days for boys to drop out of school and take a job in the mines at or before age 16.

This unfortunate combination of factors made it nearly impossible for a miner's child to pay his or her



Author Bert W. Hudson in about 1940, around the time he attended class taught by Miss Opal Skaggs at Bullpush Hollow Elementary School.

way through college. Therefore, very few children of coal miners graduated from college. However, in each generation a handful of extremely gifted, determined youngsters were able to hurdle the barriers that stood between them and a college education. Those few outstanding individuals were generally regarded as the stars of their generation and were accorded the utmost respect among their peers and in their communities. My teacher, Miss Skaggs, was such a person.

As a mere first grader, I was unaware of the fact my parents regarded teaching as one of the most honorable of all the professions. Moreover, I had no idea that Miss Opal Skaggs was the star of my father's peer group. Thus it was that one evening at the dinner table, I repeated some very ugly gossip about my teacher that I had picked up from my classmates. On that unfortunate evening, I informed my parents that my teacher, "Old Lady Skaggs," was unfair, mean to her students, and not very bright.

My father, who was rightly shocked at my accusation, asked, "What on earth are you talking about?" That question should have alerted me to the fact that I was on dangerous ground, but I continued to venture out into this mine field. So I replied, "Well, if we talk in class without her permission, she always does something unfair, such as take away our recess period. She also picks on some of us, makes us work too hard, and assigns us the most stupid homework you can imagine."

Glaring at me, Dad replied, "Listen to me, Mr. Know-It-All. The homework that I've helped you with was not excessive or stupid. And I know that Miss Skaggs is a very kind person. Also, despite the fact that she had to work herself half-to-death to earn enough money

to pay her way through college, she is the only one of my classmates to graduate from college. Mr. Smarty Pants, your teacher had such a hard time while she was working her way through college that she often went without adequate food, clothing, and other essentials. Most people who encounter such hardships give up

their dream of graduating from college, but not Miss Skaggs. I've known that fine lady all my life, and I know that she got where she is today by hard work and great sacrifice.

"Everyone in this town knows that Miss Skaggs is one of Fayette County's finest ladies and best teachers. You are totally out of line, for you have been very disrespectful of your elders by repeating gossip about Miss Skaggs. Additionally, you made no effort to determine whether there was any truth to the comments you made about that lady. Go to your room, and I'll be in there shortly to teach you to respect your elders, your teacher, and other decent folks."

Well, that old hickory switch affected the most remarkable and enduring attitude adjustment that I've ever experienced.

After that unfortunate evening, the label of "Old Lady Skaggs" seldom entered my mind again, and I never uttered another bad word about that fine woman.

Three years in Miss Skaggs' class taught me that my dad's assessment of her was absolutely accurate. I still feel very guilty and sorrowful every time I recall the day I made those disparaging remarks about one of the finest ladies and teachers I've ever encountered in 73 years of life. 🍁

BERT W. HUDSON grew up in Cannelton's Bullpush Hollow, and graduated from East Bank High School. After a 20-year career in the U.S. Air Force, Bert earned a Ph.D. in applied psychology from the University of Cincinnati. He worked as a psychologist in Missouri until his retirement in 1995. He now lives in San Angelo, Texas. This is Bert's first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Wilson Hudson, our author's father, in about 1930.

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I was unaware of the fact my parents regarded teaching as one of the most honorable of all the professions. Moreover, I had no idea that Miss Opal Skaggs was the star of my father's peer group.

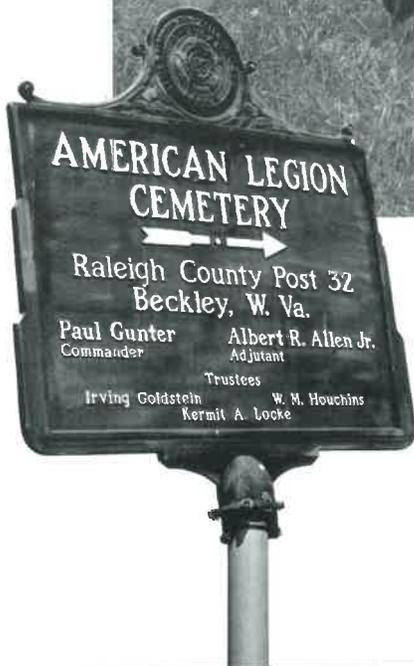
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# On Hallowed Ground

By Pauline Haga

Photographs by Michael Keller



Volunteer Jimmie McGrady maintains the American Legion Post 32 military cemetery in Beckley. Trimming around the 227 grave markers is the most time-consuming part of the job, he says.

## Jimmie McGrady and Beckley's American Legion Cemetery



As Jimmie McGrady slowly mows past the magical rows of “dressed and covered” markers of soldiers of wars past at the American Legion Post 32 military cemetery, he hopes those 227 fallen heroes will never be forgotten.

**J**immie, who joined the Beckley American Legion post years ago, has become a constant volunteer, helping with one project after another. During the summer months, he makes certain the military cemetery, one of only a few in the state, is kept immaculate.

“It is not a chore or something I do that I would call a burden,” says Jimmie. “I volunteered to take on this project seven years ago when another volunteer had to quit because of ill health. I hope my health will hold up to let me keep this hallowed ground immaculate for years to come.”

McGrady says he was a small child

when his father, Paul McGrady, was called to the service of his country during World War II. “He was wounded at the Battle of Iwo Jima, and that ended his career,” Jimmie says. Jimmie heard many harrowing stories of that war from his father. But, when he reached manhood, those stories did not deter Jimmie from volunteering in the United States Army, serving with the Seventh Cavalry Recon as a corpsman. “I wanted to be a mechanic,” Jimmie recalls, “and when I wrote ‘mec’ on my chosen career status, they must have thought I meant ‘medic.’ After my proficiency test, they must have felt I should be a medic. After

eight-and-a-half years in the army, I never did run into any dire medical emergencies, only a few scrapes and bruises among the soldiers,” he says with a laugh.

Thinking about what his father must have had to endure as a soldier in the war and at the fierce battle at Iwo Jima, McGrady wonders aloud as he walks past the graves in the American Legion cemetery “what their days were like in a fox hole in France during World War I [and] all over Europe in World War II.” He walks past the grave of the first foot soldier killed in the Korean War from the United States, Kenneth Shadrick, a resident of Wyoming



Left: Albert Dean (1846-1928) served the Union Army during the Civil War in the 101<sup>st</sup> U.S. Colored Infantry. He was reinterred at Beckley in 2001.

Right: Sergeant Cornelius H. Charlton (1929-1951) served in Korea and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Originally buried at Pocahontas, Virginia, he was reinterred at the American Legion cemetery in Beckley.




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“Each of those veterans buried here has their own unique story,” Jimmie says. “A lot of history here.”

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County.

A Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, Sergeant Cornelius Charlton, killed in the Korean War, was initially buried in Pocahontas, Virginia, in a large cemetery, which was left to growth for many years. No one realized that he was a recipient of the highest award bestowed on a soldier, and his grave was soon covered over in briars. Finally, a movement was made to care for the graves of all soldiers who had received the Congressional Medal of Honor.

“Our American Legion Post 32 invited the family and the United States Army to have his body reinterred in our military cemetery, where he would lie in honor and in a cemetery which has perpetual care,” Jimmie says. “As I mow this

cemetery each spring, summer, and fall, I feel it is an honor to make certain none of these soldiers are ever forgotten and their graves are well cared for.”

In addition to the reinterment of the Congressional Medal of Honor recipient, another noted ceremony to take place at the Legion cemetery was the reinterment of an African American Civil War soldier, from a hillside graveyard in an old coal mining town. He served the Union army. Buried in the same cemetery was another black Civil War soldier, who served the Confederacy. He will soon be reinterred next to the Union soldier, and a special ceremony will take place.

When the ceremony to honor the Union Civil War soldier took place in 2001, President Abraham Lincoln

impersonators from all over the United States were in attendance. Among those was the commander of the American Legion Post 32, Jimmie Rubin.

“You can see President Abraham Lincoln strolling down the rows of military markers quite often,” Jimmie says with a laugh. “He comes to inspect my work.”

One of the graves “Lincoln” strolls by is that of Andrew J. Honaker, officially listed as the longest-living Civil War soldier in Raleigh County.

“Each of those veterans buried here has their own unique story,” Jimmie says. “A lot of history here.”

McGrady says one thing that really bothers him is the fact that on Memorial Day, there are very few



Former residents gathered for the first Lillybrook reunion at Grandview Park in 1978. Everyone in this photograph was over 70 years old at the time. The reunion still takes place each year on the Sunday before Labor Day.

Spain, Ireland, Italy, Scotland, and elsewhere. As a result, we became more-or-less segregated in the early days. The blacks lived in "colored holler," Spanish and Italians in the junction, and whites covered the rest.

Lillybrook was a thriving coal mine, and much coal was taken out of the mountain, especially during and after World War II. About 1954, the miners were notified that the mines would be shut down for a while. The miners thought they would be called back to work, but it was not to be. The company was sold, and it was finally decided that it was not profitable to bring the coal out, so Lillybrook was shut down permanently. It was a sad day. The school was closed and then the store. The families started leaving for all parts of the country. Some found jobs in other mines and

various jobs in West Virginia. The houses were sold for \$25 a room and were torn down for the lumber. Lillybrook was no more. Just memories.

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**The miners  
thought they  
would be called  
back to work, but  
it was not to be.**

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In 1978, the late Betty Burton Moore came up with a wonderful idea to have a Lillybrook reunion. Our first one was held on September 3, 1978, at Grandview Park. We had about 350 people there, about 20 of them over 70 years old. They came from Virginia, Michi-

gan, California, Florida, and other states — a wonderful day. We had dinner, and lots of memories were traded. We have had the reunion for 29 years, every Sunday before Labor Day. Needless to say, most of the "old timers" have passed on. Now we're lucky to have 100 in attendance, but we still enjoy each other, and the memories never die.

Lillybrook is no more, but as long as one of us that lived there is alive, it will always be remembered. The bond that grew between us will always be there. 🍁

HUCIE MAXEY was raised in Lillybrook, graduated from Stoco High School in 1946, and joined the U.S. Navy. He later earned a degree from Bliss Electrical School in Washington, D.C. Relocating to Michigan, he worked for General Electric as a heavy equipment mechanic for 35 years, retiring in 1988. Hucie lives with his wife in Flint, Michigan. This is his first published article.



# Marching to Glory

## Bluefield's American Legion Junior Drum & Bugle Corps

By Stuart McGehee



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**In time, the group fielded more than 100 smartly dressed, crisply striding musicians in complex formations and parades.**

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daytime performances, and show-stopping coal mining coveralls and carbide-lamp helmets on loan from the Pocahontas Fuel Company for evening events. Their carefully choreographed headlamp twirling routine was a crowd-pleaser everywhere they marched.

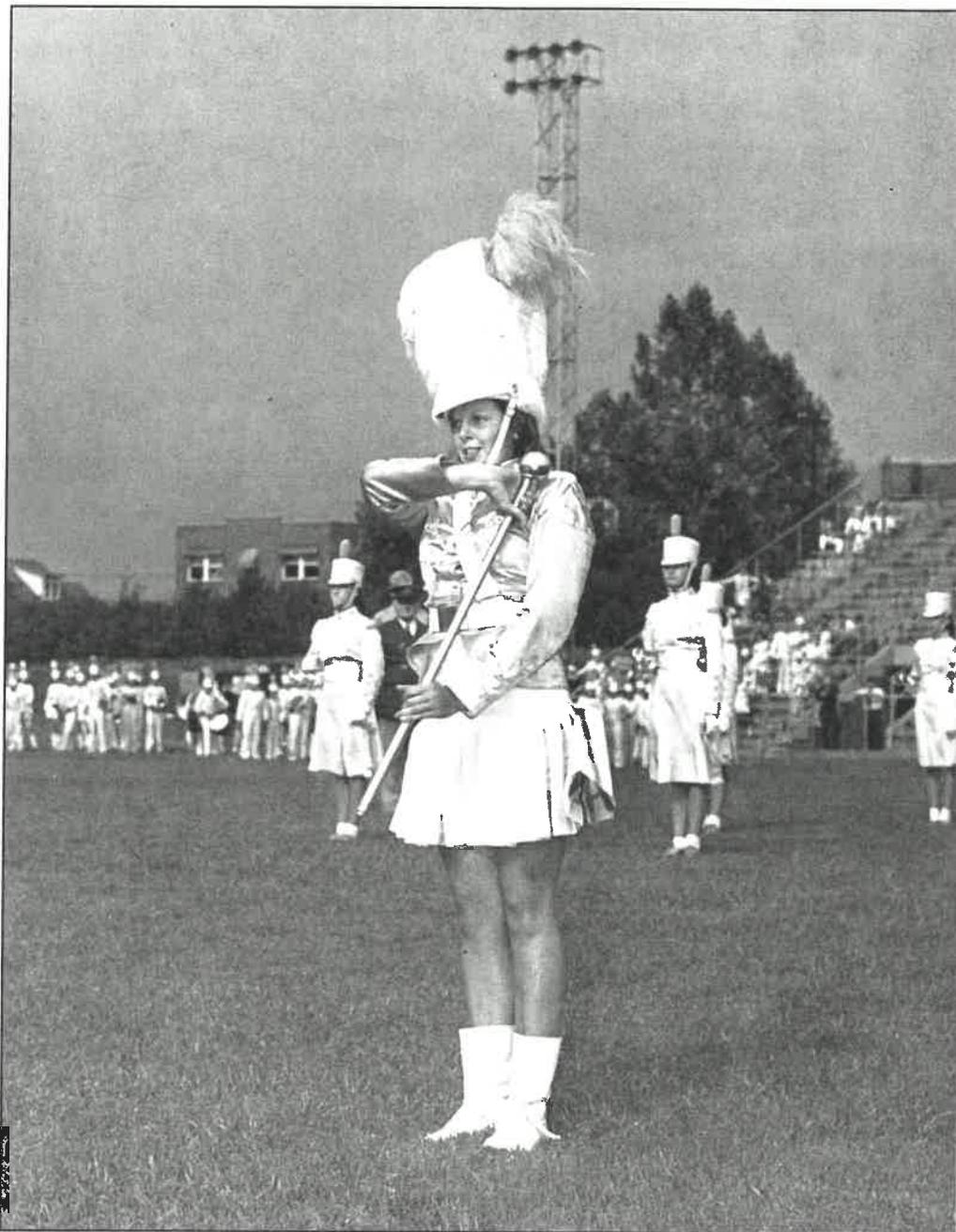
First performing at local gatherings, the Corps soon found itself in regional demand, high-stepping in events such as the Burley Bowl in Johnson City, WVU Homecoming, Bristol's Dogwood Festival, as well as community events in Grundy, Virginia; and Hazard, Kentucky. State championships came quickly and became routine, winning six in a row and eight in all during the 1930's, beating out Beckley, Grafton, Parkersburg, and Montgomery in 1938.

Leader of the organization after 1933 was its drillmaster, Dave Warden, younger brother of Bluefield mayor and prominent coal operator, Henry Warden, both of whom worked at the American Coal Company's sprawling operations around McComas in Mercer County. Dave, a New Hampshire native whose education at the Military College of New England molded the Bluefield legionnaire experience, was a World War I veteran and a coal company chemist. His daughter, Helen "Sis" Warden, was the superstar, winning major-ette competitions with confident regularity. She and her father kept clippings and scrapbooks, donating them to the Eastern Regional Coal Archives in Bluefield's Craft Memorial Library.

The Corps performed two types

of displays. Parades at fairs and festivals showed off the outfit's marching and musical ability to the general public. More demanding, however, were the competitions with other marching youth squads. There were strict guidelines and

score sheets upon which teams were judged and ranked. Between 128 and 132 steps per minute only were permitted and exactly counted, in a 15-minute scripted routine designed to impress the judges. The teams were ranked on such practices as cadence, inspection, maneuvers, execution, and general effect. These struggles usually took place at high school football fields and showed off the hard training and repetitious drills the groups endured. The Bluefield youngsters learned these maneuvers indoors



Helen "Sis" Warden, daughter of director Dave Warden, was a national champion drum majorette. Photograph courtesy of ERCA, date unknown.



boot-camp style discipline. Here are the written rules and regulations for the cadets:

*"Each member of the Corps shall at all times except during the athletic period and swimming period, conduct himself in a military manner.*

*"Each member is required to stay within the boundary of the camp at all times. The boundary and restricted areas will be orally outlined.*

*"No smoking will be permitted by any member of the Corps at any time.*

*"There will be no unnecessary roughness or disturbance in the barracks, mess hall, or on the campus, at any time. No candy, drinks of any kind, empty bottles, cakes, fruit, or food of any kind will be allowed in the barracks.*

*"Each member shall see that his cot and equipment is kept in an orderly condition at all times.*

*"Only during swimming periods will any member be allowed in or about the building in which the pool is located.*

*"With the exception of the athletic field, when going to and from, each member shall stay on the walks and not on the grass of the campus.*

*"After the sounding of taps, the barracks will be absolutely quiet, with each member in his cot and no talking permitted.*

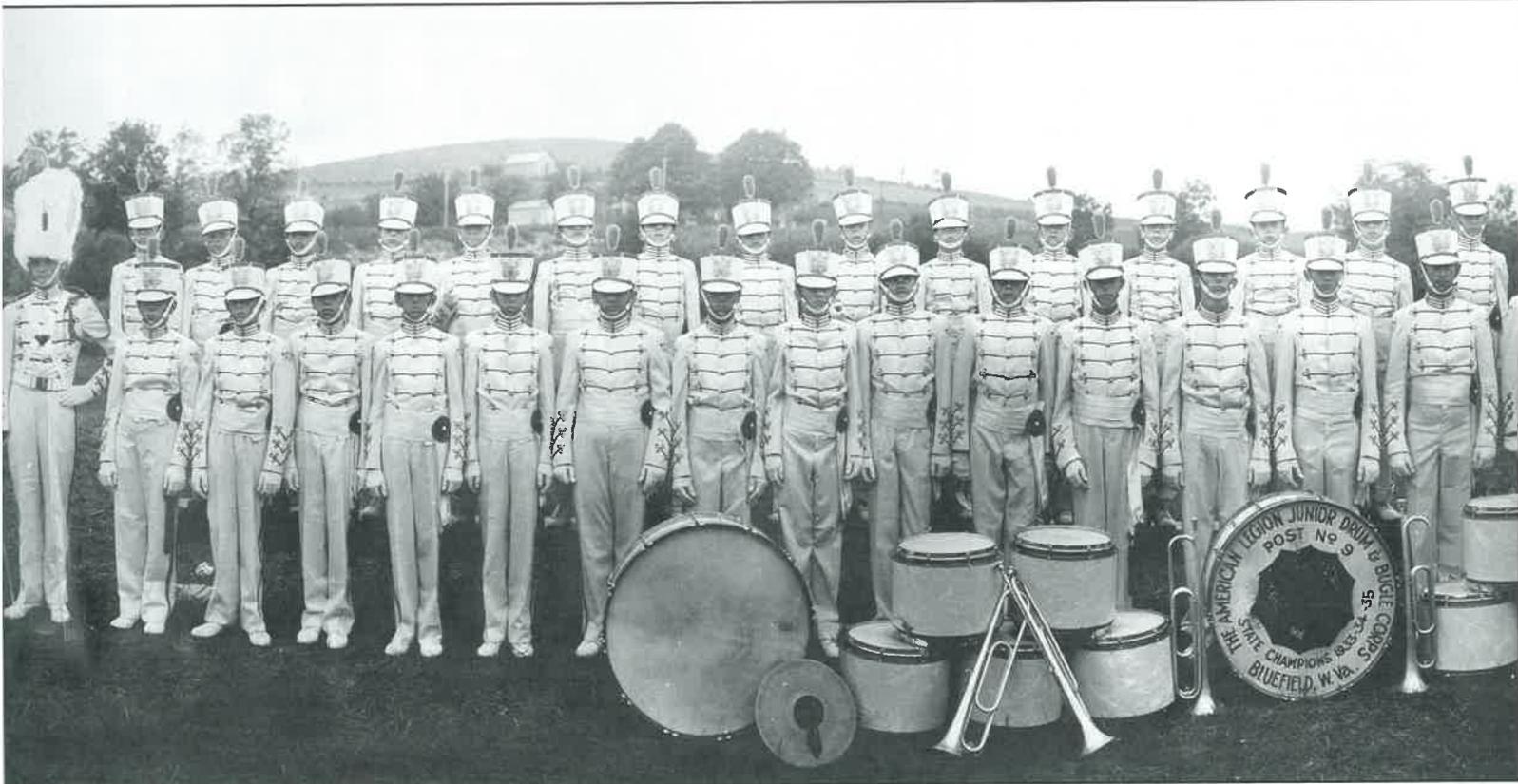
*"Strict observance of the above rules and regulations is requested from each member of the Corps."*

This 1930's European-style martial training paid off, as the string of state championships showed almost immediately. But more was to come. Raising funds from the Chamber and the Pocahontas Operators Association, Warden began taking the Drum & Bugle Corps to ever-wider competitions. Soon the Bluefield youth band began making national headlines, winning the American Legion 40 & 8 national championship title in Cleveland in 1936, again in Chicago in 1939, on to Miami, finishing second at St. Louis in September 1939, with another good showing in New York

at Ramsey school auditorium, outdoors at Mitchell Stadium, and then honed them during rigorous, sequestered summer band camps, normally held at Concord College, in nearby Athens.

The intense Concord camps were the key to the outfit's success, as Warden demanded and received

This detail from a 1936 panoramic portrait shows the group in their formal daytime marching uniforms. The full photograph includes 73 corps members. Photograph by Nunnally's, courtesy of ERCA.



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## Today, trophies line the cases of the American Legion headquarters, testimony to the Corps' tradition of excellence.

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City. The field trips were rare opportunities for many of the students to view big-city, urban America, riding passenger trains and seeing the fabled tourist sites.

"Those kids are tops anywhere," wrote a grateful Ned Chilton, managing editor of *The Charleston Gazette*, to Warden after a stirring showing at the state capital. "I get a rare kick out of seeing them swing along." They showcased at the 1937 Mercer County Centennial parade, getting rave reviews from the Labor Day Coal Festival in Hazard. Rosters of the teams in the public library read like a "who's who" of Bluefield's genteel society at that time.

Pearl Harbor changed all that. It might be said that the Corps was a casualty of the war, as so many

members enlisted and went to serve their country, no doubt excelling in basic training. Helen Warden married Beaver High School all-state running back Joe Black, who entered the service after attending VMI on a football scholarship. American Legion Post 9 is named for Steve Riley and Harry Vest, a pair of Corps members who lost their lives during World War II.

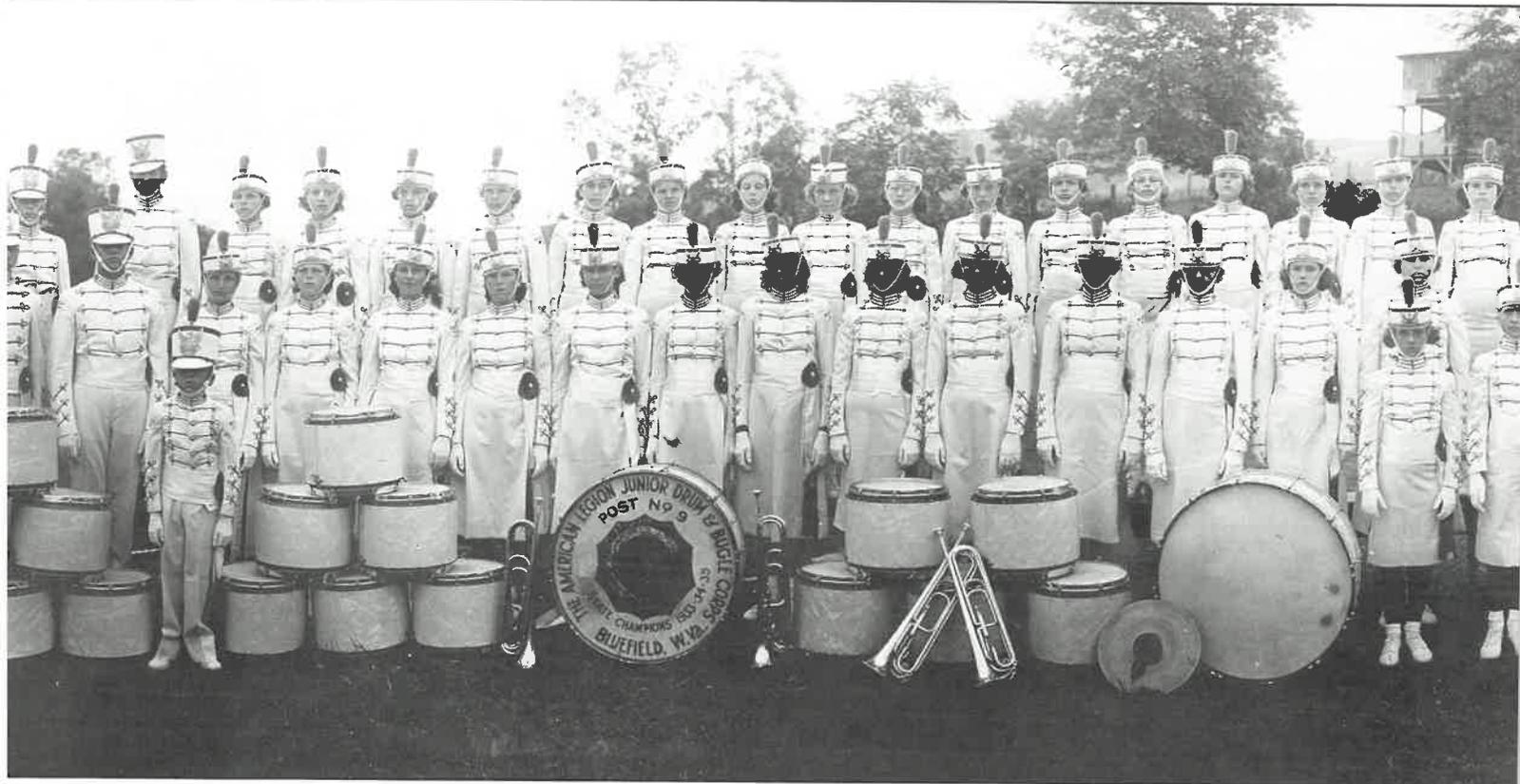
Although the band was reconstituted after the war, it never again possessed the same leadership or the numbers as in its heyday. Dave Warden died in 1942, and sponsorship changed hands after Hiroshima. Their last state title was in 1947, and they disbanded in the early 1950's, as interest waned. The group's slow demise mirrored that of its host community, as mechani-

zation of the coal industry changed mining from labor-intensive to ever-more-highly sophisticated technology. The city's population dropped, and the N&W became the Norfolk Southern, switched to diesel, and replaced the grand old roundhouse with a modern locomotive repair shop.

Today, trophies line the cases of the American Legion headquarters at the youth center on Stadium Drive, testimony to the Corps' tradition of excellence. The members never forgot the camaraderie and pride that came with the fellowship bonds they forged, marching all across America and bringing ringing acclaim to the Mountain State.

"I'd do it again. I just like playing the drum," recalled Powell Davis. "I'm a country boy. I like music." 🍁

STUART McGEHEE holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Virginia. He teaches history at West Virginia State University in Institute, is archivist at the Eastern Regional Coal Archives in Bluefield, and is the former "Coal Page" editor for the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph*. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Summer 2003 issue.



## Pressing Cider in Preston County

**D**on Brewer of Gladesville spent his 74<sup>th</sup> birthday putting the squeeze on 100 bushels of Golden Delicious and Stayman apples.

It was a warm, sunny day in early October 2006, and there were probably a thousand other things Don and the 10 other members of the Newburg Rotary Club could have been doing, but they chose to perpetuate a 30-year tradition of making cider along State Route 92 at Scotch Hill, Preston County.

"We got an idea to try to make some money for our Rotary," says Howard Dugan of Arthurdale,

explaining how this tradition started. "One of our members had a lot of apples and a grinder we could use, and we've been using it ever since."

The member was the late John Dale Orr of Gladesville, who willed the small mill and press to the club. Partly out of respect for his kindness and the tradition he founded, and partly out of the service club's incessant need for funds with which to perform their good deeds, the cider sale has continued with dedication and a lot of sore muscles.



Don Brewer, Richard Cornwell, and Ralph Pyles, left to right, participate in the annual cider pressing on behalf of the Newburg Rotary Club in Preston County.

"This is just one of the rituals we do every year," says Tom Willis as he fills a plastic jug with cider filtered through cheesecloth. "We don't make that much money from cider."

The cider is made on a Monday at the end of September or beginning of October.

"This is actually our meeting," says Tom, a member since 1994. "We do this in lieu of our meeting."

Regular meetings are much less laborious — the meetings come to order at 6:15 p.m. at the New-

burg United Methodist Church every Monday. The date of their cider pressing depends upon the availability of two essential ingredients: apples and workers.

Club president Richard Cornwell, who owns a janitorial and paper products supply business, has to schedule a day away from his tasks to man the press. For other members, like Howard Dugan and Charles Fortney, the timing is not as critical.

Howard was born in 1913. Charles is younger. He was born in 1915, but he's been in the club a little longer than Howard. In fact, he's the sole surviving charter mem-

ber of Newburg Rotary, founded 1941. Charles was teaching at Newburg High School when its principal told him a new Rotary Club was being formed at Newburg. Charles was already familiar with Rotary's work — his brother was a member at Terra Alta — and Charles agreed to join.

He says they started with 18 members and never exceeded that number through the years. The club has done a lot of good for the community in the decades it has been in existence. It purchases and gives out candy to local kids at Christmas, takes care of the cemetery and World War II monument at Newburg, holds a Halloween festival, and sponsors Boy Scout Troop 80, of which Charles was scoutmaster 51 years. They also hold a health fair and biannual auction as fund-raisers and support Rotary International's worldwide efforts to eradicate polio.

Dedication to those causes, plus the excuse to play hooky from autumn yard and household chores, motivates the men to make the cider.

Preparations begin with the purchase of apples. There was a time when John David Orr provided all the apples. But the supply of Preston County fruit dwindled to the point where the men must now travel to Romney to get enough to make their cider.

"We used to spend a whole day picking apples," says Tom Willis. "With the older guys, it just got to be too difficult to do. So now we just take my trailer and go over and have them dump the apples in it."

On average, that's about 100 bushels of cider-grade apples.

The press is stored in the garage of a late mem-



The apple cider is pressed and sold in one day, a Monday in late September or early October. Proceeds from the sale help support the Rotary Club's service work.

ber, Bill Silcott, whose widow lives next door to the widow of Bill's brother, Carl. It is in the front yard of that house they make the cider, starting about 7:30 a.m. and continuing until all 100 bushels have been pressed — by hand.

It's pure grunt work, forcing the large, screw-fed plate onto the wooden barrel of chopped apples. But the men recall a time when the work was even more laborious, before they acquired a motor drive for the previously hand-cranked chopper.

"It was a gift from the sheriff of Preston County, Ron Crites, three or four years ago," Charles Fortney says. "He used to come down here and help us. He said, 'I believe I can remedy that for you.' The next year he called and told us he had a machine for us, and that's what he gave us."

A division of duties makes the work go smoothly, but not necessarily fast. The small press accommodates only three pecks of chopped apples at a time, making for a very long day. Sometimes, it takes two days.

The cider is advertised in local media and sold by the road, \$4 a gallon. Charles Fortney recalls a time it was sold for \$1 a gallon. A member stays with the cider until it's sold out, usually three days.

Until 2006, that job went to Bill Silcott. "He always strained it and put it up in plastic jugs and sold it. He'd sit in a chair down here. We're going to miss him," says Howard Dugan. 🍁

*For information about the 2008 cider sale, phone Rotary president Richard Cornwell at (304)892-4302 after 8 p.m.*

# The Art of Pressing

The members of the Newburg Rotary Club in Preston County have a 30-year tradition of hand-pressing fresh apple cider each fall. Author and photographer Carl E. Feather visited them during their autumn ritual in 2006 and filed the report that appears on the preceding pages. While there, Carl captured a wealth of artistic photographs, depicting these hard-working men going about their time-honored chore, and we couldn't resist sharing a few more of them with you. We hope you enjoy this seasonal photo spread. —ed.



Stayman and Golden Delicious apples are poured into the hopper for grinding.

John Willis (left) and Don Brewer put some muscle into squeezing cider from the chopped apples. Rotary Club president Richard Cornwell, at right, checks the hopper.



Close-up view of the gears of the Rotary Club's vintage cider press.

Photoessay by Carl E. Feather

# Apples



Tom Willis (left) uses cheesecloth to strain the freshly pressed cider into containers, while his nine-year-old nephew, Devon Larew, stands ready to label the jugs.

The finished product, ready for sale.



# Films on West Virginia and Appalachia

By Steve Fesenmaier

## **A Moving Monument: The West Virginia State Capitol**

2008 55 min. MotionMasters

The West Virginia State Capitol literally floated down the Ohio River from Wheeling to Charleston, moving back and forth several times, before finally establishing itself at its current location on the shores of the Great Kanawha River in Charleston. Diana Sole, producer and director of several West

Virginia historical documentaries, including films about the Reverend Leon Sullivan, U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, and Supreme Court Justice John Marshall, created this film to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building that was designed by Cass Gilbert and completed in 1932.

Access: All public libraries in the state have a DVD copy.

## **The Road to Opportunity: 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the West Virginia Turnpike**

2004 45 min.

WV Dept. of Transportation

The West Virginia Turnpike is a busy four-lane toll highway, 88 miles in length, between Princeton and Charleston. Once

derided as a "road to nowhere," it has become a model for highway construction around the country and the world, completing the link between the Great Lakes and Florida. Vintage

documentary footage of the construction and 1954 opening celebration are mixed with contemporary interviews with state leaders, including U.S. Senators Byrd and Rockefeller, and several West Virginia governors, including Okie Patterson, who was instrumental in starting the project despite vast obstacles. Classic automobile commercials from the 1950's add some context of the importance of this highway before the inter-

state system began. The film was produced by the West Virginia Department of Transportation in association with the West Virginia Parkways, Economic Development & Tourism Authority. Access: All public libraries in the state have a DVD copy. Phone (304)558-9231.

## **Ken Hechler: In Pursuit of**

**Justice**

2008

120 min.

Marshall University Libraries

As a U.S. Congressman, West Virginia Secretary of State, university professor, author,

and environmental activist, Ken Hechler changed the face of West Virginia and national politics. [See "The Lonely Battle: Ken Hechler's 1958 Campaign," by Gordon Simmons; Fall 2007.] West Virginia Public Broadcasting's Russ Barbour and Chip Hancock worked for several years, along with dean of Marshall University libraries Barbara Winters, to produce the first comprehensive documentary about

one of the Mountain State's most influential citizens. Interviews with colleagues, including George McGovern and Robert Dole, show Hechler's devotion to helping the common citizens of the state and country.

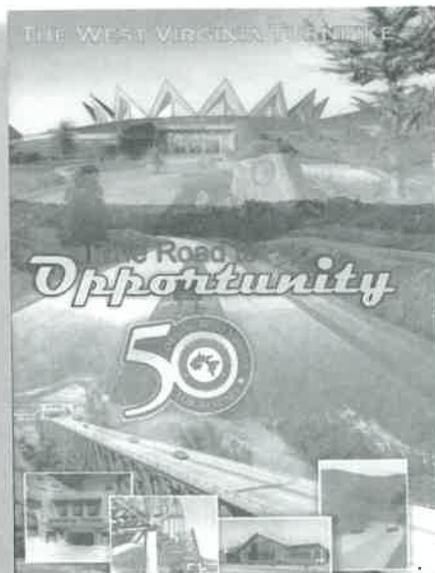
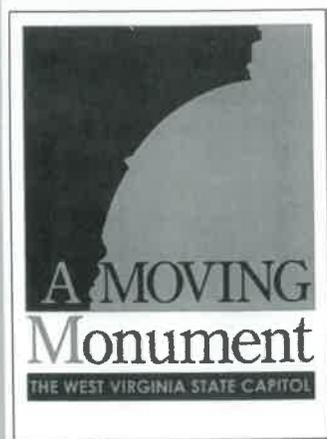
Access: All public libraries in the state have a DVD copy, or e-mail wintersb@marshall.edu

## **Hillbilly: The Real Story**

2007 120 min.

Moore Huntley Productions

This controversial documentary aired last year on the History Channel, renamed from its original title, *Appalachia: America's First Frontier*, and with country music singer Billy Ray Cyrus added as narrator. Beyond its inflammatory new title and



stereotypical characterizations of moonshiners, snake handlers, and gun-toting feudists, lie some interesting historical insights. The two-hour film sheds new light on Revolutionary War battles, railroads, mining, unionization, and dam building in the mountains. The film has been criticized for what some see as its lack of depth and diversity, but praised by others for taking this subject matter to a large national audience.

Access: <http://store.aetv.com/html/product/index.jhtml?id=115530>

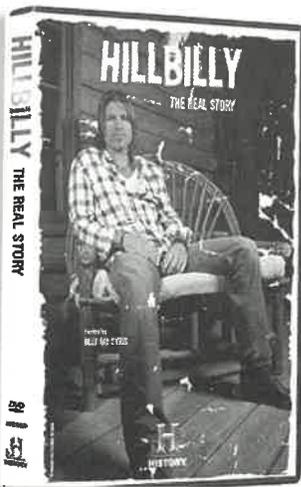
**Fiddlin' Wayne Strawderman**  
2005 28 min. Real Earth Productions

Wayne Strawderman of Hardy County has been entertaining folks with his fiddle and mandolin playing for more than 50 years. This film tells about his early life growing up in Mathias, his musical influences, and the "good-home fellowship" that characterizes him and his music. The film contains archival photographs, excerpts of Wayne playing fiddle tunes at the Lost River Museum and with his popular band the Trout Pond Pickers, and commentary from his good friend and band mate Ralph Hill.

Access: <http://realearthproductions.com>

**Icy Mountain: The Quirky Fiddling of Leland Hall**

2007 36 min. Augusta Heritage Center  
Braxton County fiddler Leland Hall (1915-2003) might be an obscure player to some fans of



old-time music, but his unique style and personality place him squarely in the middle of the Central West Virginia fiddling tradition. As the subtitle of this film suggests, Leland's music is a bit quirky, which accounts for a lot of its appeal.

This documentary was filmed on location in 1995 and in 2000. It takes viewers inside Leland's home and introduces them to this soft-spoken man and his unusual style of solo fiddling. The DVD bonus features include 10 of Leland's tunes, played at normal speed and digitally slowed down — at standard pitch — for clarity or learning purposes. This fine film is another feather in the cap of folklorist and award-winning filmmaker Gerald Milnes.

Access: [www.augustaheritage.com/store.html](http://www.augustaheritage.com/store.html)

**Experience Fenton**  
28 min. Fenton Art Glass

Established in 1905, the Fenton Art Glass Company has been producing beautiful and collectible glass from its factory in Williamstown, Wood County, for more than 100 years.

[See "Fenton: A Century of Art Glass in Williamstown," by Dean Six; Summer 2008.]

This promotional film traces the company's history and shows how many of its most popular products are made. It emphasizes the relationship between the Fenton management — still under family control — and the glass workers who produce the products.

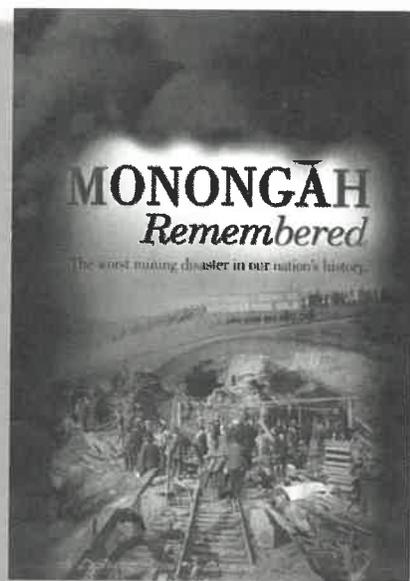
Access: [www.fentonartglass.com/shop/item.asp?item=FG142](http://www.fentonartglass.com/shop/item.asp?item=FG142)

**Monongah Remembered**

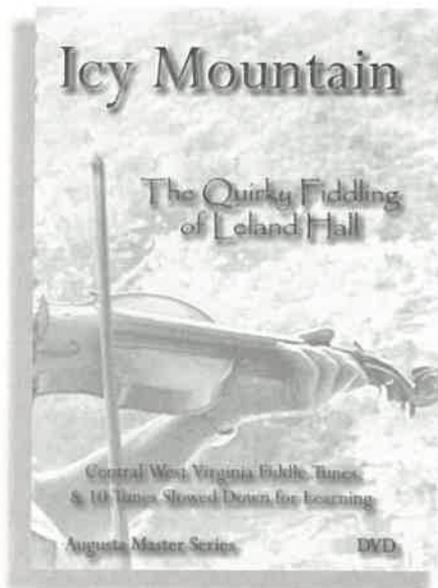
2008 30 min. Peter Argentine Productions

The Monongah mine disaster took

place in the small Harrison County town outside Fairmont on December 6, 1907. Officials placed the number of fatalities



ties at 361, though later estimates were quite a bit higher, making Monongah the most deadly mining disaster in U.S. history. [See "No Christmas in Monongah: December 6, 1907," by Eugene Wolfe; Winter 1999.] Most of the victims were immigrant workers, many from Italy, who left farms and families to pursue the American dream, only to wind up casualties of the industrial revolution they helped to fuel. Pittsburgh filmmaker Peter Argentine connects the impact of the Monongah disaster with its eventual ramifications for governmental safety regulations. Using compelling personal accounts, provocative archival photographs, impassioned interviews, and meticulous



research, this film weaves a tale of immigration, catastrophe, and consequences, particularly relevant in light of recent mining disasters.

Access: [www.monongahmovie.com](http://www.monongahmovie.com)

### **Burning the Future: Coal in America**

2008 89 min. American Coal Productions

In the wake of the coal mining tragedies of 2006 and 2007 in West Virginia and Utah, many Americans ask why we still mine coal. The reason is startling: Each time a switch is flipped, we burn coal. According to estimates, 52% of America's electricity comes from coal, but at a shocking cost to the environment and local communities. This new film from American Coal Productions soberly illustrates the suffering of the residents of West Virginia who struggle to preserve their mountains, their culture, and their lives in the face of the omnipotent King Coal. Promoting energy conservation and the development of alternative energy sources, the filmmakers encourage consumers and suppliers to take an honest look at America's energy consumption and embrace change.

Access: [www.burningthefuture.org](http://www.burningthefuture.org)

### **Rise Up! West Virginia**

2008 75 min.

Patchwork Films

Award-winning filmmaker B.J. Gudmundsson goes on a personal journey from her birthplace in Pocahontas County to the southern coalfields, where she joins the Mountain Keepers, who have

been fighting a 20-year battle against mountaintop removal coal mining. Interviews include Maria Gunnoe of Bob White, Larry Gibson of Kayford Mountain, Julian Martin and Robert Gates of Charleston, and George Daugherty of Elkview, with music from Agust Gudmundsson, T. Paige Dalporto, Jim Savarino, Buddy Griffin, and others.

Access: [www.patchworkfilms.com](http://www.patchworkfilms.com)

### **A Flaming Rock: Coal!**

2007 61 min.

Cadiz/Hicks Productions

This pro-coal film, made by Enoch Hicks and Ellery E. Cadiz, looks at the geology and history of coal, and traces mining methods from the earliest hand-loading efforts to today's mechanized techniques. It pays tribute to the dedicated men and women who mine coal and describes their liv-



ing and working conditions through the years. In addition to its 15 chapters of primary content, the DVD contains bonus features, including a history of mine safety, a history of mining machinery, a simulated mine explosion, and a virtual tour of the McDowell County town of War, home to filmmaker Enoch Hicks, which is depicted as a typical mining community.

Access: [www.aflamingrock.com](http://www.aflamingrock.com) or phone (937)258-2306.

### **Mother Jones: America's Most Dangerous Woman**

2007 23 min.

Mother Jones Museum

Mary Harris "Mother" Jones was a rabble-rouser and union organizer like no other. She is remembered across the Mountain State for her vigorous and flamboyant efforts to promote organized labor in the coalfields between 1900 and her death in 1930. Filmmakers Rosemary Feurer and Laura Vazquez, two professors at Northern Illinois University, directed

this first complete film about the life of the legendary agitator. The 23-minute documentary includes the only known film footage of her, speaking on her "100<sup>th</sup>" birthday. Though some might question her precise age on this occasion shortly before her death, few contest her tenacity or dedication to "her boys" in the labor force during the turbulent early years of the movement. The film won first place in the Documentary division at the Geneva Cultural Arts Commission Film Festival. Access: <http://motherjonesmuseum.org>



### **Widen Film Project**

2008 55 min. Killer Productions

Many people in Clay County recall life in Widen, the famous company town built by J.G. Bradley, who was a national and state coal mining leader and who personally ran the town. In 2006, Charleston filmmaker Kelley Thompson interviewed area residents, labor leaders, and historians about the now-defunct town, its historic 1952 labor strike, the Buffalo Creek & Gauley Railroad, and local sports. [See "Coach Bobby Stover: The Making of a Clay County Legend," by Kara



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Perdue Stover; Fall 2007.] This production was funded by the Central Appalachia Empowerment Zone.

Access: E-mail killer64@suddelink.net or phone (304)344-1990.

**The Last Ghost of War**

2008 57 min.

*Gardner Documentary Group*

This film is about the long-term effects of Agent Orange on the people of Nitro who produced the chemical, the American and Vietnamese soldiers who had direct contact with it, and the civilian population of Vietnam who continue to have long-term exposure. Many are plaintiffs in a class-action lawsuit against 32 U.S. chemical companies. Attorneys, activists, scientists, and military experts present the latest information on the on-going disaster, continuing 30 years after the end of the Vietnam War. Greg Harpold, a South Charleston filmmaker, filmed local scenes and people.

Access: www.gardnerdocgroup.com

**Back to the Bottle**

2008 25 min.

*Laughing Cat Films*

West Virginia filmmaker Francesca Karle made national news with her first film about the homeless in Huntington, titled *On the River's Edge*, made during high school as a Girl Scout project. [See "Films, Videos, and DVD's on West Virginia and Appalachia," by Steve Fesenmaier; Fall 2006.] Now a sophomore at Marshall University, she has returned to the streets of Huntington to make a film about alcoholism. One of the

street people Karle portrayed in *River's Edge* tells his own story of how he became addicted to alcohol. Several local experts on the disease are interviewed, and Hollywood actors Jamie Lee Curtis and Clint Howard also appear.

Access: karle2@marshall.edu

**Trailer Trash: A Film Journal**

2007 53 min.

*Don Diego Ramirez*

West Virginia native Don Diego Ramirez was raised near the race track in Charles Town, Jefferson County. This autobiographical tale talks about his life in a trailer home without electricity or running water, and how he overcame his upbringing by studying art at Shepherd University. The filmmaker has captured the raw emotions of his family in this disturbing and compelling true-life

tale, narrated by Ramirez. Home-movie footage is woven together with candid interviews to create an extraordinary personal statement about poverty, prejudice, and the harsh reality of drug addiction in rural America.

Access: www.trailertrashafilmjournal.com



STEVE FESENMAIER is the research librarian and film advisor for the West Virginia Library Commission in Charleston, where he served as director of film services from 1978-99. He has founded and programmed numerous film festivals and film series and has reviewed films for several publications across West Virginia. Steve is a regular GOLDENSEAL contributor.

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# All About Abbagoochie

In the early weeks of 2001, panic spread across Webster County, concerning a mysterious and dreadful creature, called the Abbagoochie. Thought to have been introduced by the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources from the jungles of Costa Rica, the frightening carnivore was said to be about the size a large dog, with needle-sharp teeth, lightning-fast reflexes, and a nasty personality.

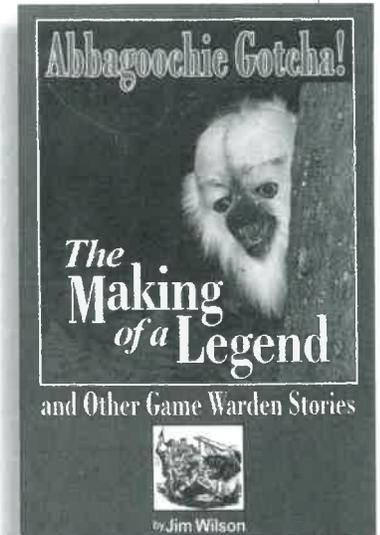
The whole thing was a hoax, as it turned out, but in a matter of a few days, people were sleeping in their barns with shotguns, keeping their kids home from school, and phoning in eyewitness accounts.

The uproar was soon laid to rest, once *Webster Echo/Republican* editor Tom Clark set his readers straight concerning a recent column by outdoor writer Jim Wilson, who introduced the mythical Abbagoochie as a spoof.

In *Abbagoochie Gotcha: The Making of a Legend*, Wilson recounts the story of this phenomenal episode, from its inception over a cup of coffee, to its visual basis in a whimsical creation by a local taxidermist, to its propagation through Wilson's weekly newspaper column. The new book not only clarifies the origins of this surprisingly potent local legend, but serves as a lesson in the public's willingness to believe the press, no matter how fantastic the tale.

GOLDENSEAL readers might recall Jim Wilson as the author of an article in our Summer 2000 issue, titled "One With Nature: Mountain Man Coy Fitzpatrick."

The 175-page paperback volume also includes reprints of some of Wilson's most memorable columns, as well as his favorite stories concerning game wardens in the West Virginia mountains. The book sells for \$12.95, plus tax and shipping, and is available from Betty Wilson, 1 Upper Tract Road, Monterville, WV 26282; on-line at [www.abbagoochie.com](http://www.abbagoochie.com).



## Goldenseal

Coming Next Issue...

- Coal Art
- Blind Alfred Reed
- Jones Diamond
- Riding the *Cardinal*



# PHOTO CURIOSITY



Whatever happened to Dick Cook, the walking man, who trekked through West Virginia each year on his way to Florida?

Photographer and author Pauline Haga [see "On Hallowed Ground: Jimmie McGrady and Beckley's American Legion Cemetery"; page 48], then a cub reporter just out of high school and still named Pauline Davis, encountered this unusual scene in October 1958, as Mr. Cook strolled through Beckley on his annual southern journey from Michigan. She snapped this photo, interviewed Mr. Cook, and sold the story to both the Beckley newspaper and *Grit*.

She discovered that Mr. Cook, then 49 years old, pulled this 300-pound trailer for his health and had been doing so for the past seven years. He claimed to have logged 29,754 miles through 48 states and had plans to write a book about his adventures. He said West Virginia was one of his favorite states, because the people here were so friendly. We suspect that he was also partial to the geography, since he rode his "Little Red Wagon" on the downhill stretches, controlling his speed with a drag brake.

Thanks to Pauline Haga for sharing this marvelous image with us. If you have any additional information about Dick Cook, his wagon, or his book, please let us know at the GOLDENSEAL office.

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PERIODICALS

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## Inside Goldenseal

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