

Blue Creek • Philippi Football • Elkhorn • Buckwheat

# Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Fall 2013

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Folklife Goes  
to College

A group of young women are captured in a traditional dance performance. They are wearing black short-sleeved shirts and blue jeans. The woman in the foreground is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile, her right arm raised. Behind her, other women are also in similar poses, some with arms raised. The setting appears to be an indoor space with large windows in the background, possibly a dance studio or a community room.

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# From the Editor – Back to School

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Looking over this issue, I realize that we have inadvertently assembled a special back-to-school edition. How clever of us! High school football, alumni reunions, even a delightful article about taking the train to school put us in a mind of our school days and golden school memories that we carry with us through the years.

Before becoming editor of this magazine in 1997, I worked at Davis & Elkins College as publicist for their Augusta Heritage Center and related folklife programs. I also attended college there and proudly processed through a snowstorm in my cap and gown in May 1996 to receive my diploma from future governor Bob Wise. It was a memorable day to be sure.

While in school at D&E I became aware of the cultural and professional differences that existed between the traditional academic community and the “folkies.” While the two groups respected each other and coexisted, there was little common ground.

My, how that has changed! Not only are folk arts and regional studies embraced at D&E, but robust programs are in place at Fairmont State University, Shepherd University, and Glenville State College as well. Each program is unique, and each teaches students — and us — an important lesson about heritage and preservation. See the story, called “From the Hills to the Classroom: Folklife Goes to College,” which begins on page 10.

School buses have run the hills and hollers of West Virginia for generations. Yet a few lucky souls in Kanawha County can brag that they went to school in a unique way — aboard a special train. Author Bob Withers — himself a true “train nut” — eagerly attended a reunion of the “Rail Riders” and files a heart-warming report, titled “Readin’, Writin’ and Ridin’ the Rails.” See page 18.

I have a soft spot for a good sports story, and author Ralph “Butch” Neal has given us one in spades. The unlikely 1960 Philippi High School Bulldogs mounted a remarkable season, and the folks in Barbour County still recall the details. See “Football 1960: Philippi High School’s Perfect Season,” beginning on page 40.

Finally, the bittersweet realities of life in and around McDowell County come to bear on two

of the county’s memorable high schools: Elkhorn and Elkhorn Elks. One black and one white, these schools educated thousands during their day and today have sadly gone to ruin. These two institutions are fondly recalled at local reunions and here in

GOLDENSEAL, thanks to Bluefield journalist Bob Archer. See story on page 46.

Articles about entertainer-turned-author JoAnn Davis (page 34), Preston County’s last remaining buckwheat mill (page 58), Kanawha County’s Blue Creek Island (page 26), and Wheeling’s iconic Everbreeze estate and farm (page 52) round out this issue. I hope that you enjoy it!

GOLDENSEAL will mark its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014. We are excited about reaching this milestone and are contemplating a few changes to accompany this significant achievement. For those who are due to receive a renewal notice, please be on the lookout for a brief survey on the back of your “tab card.” It’ll ask a few very simple questions, invite your comments, and ask for your e-mail address. Thanks in advance for your cooperation as we move toward a more modern and efficient method of communicating with our readers.

We are also preparing a digital archive of all back issues, and are contemplating a new digital edition of GOLDENSEAL as well as a few cosmetic changes. The magazine hasn’t had a facelift in 15 years!

Of course we will continue to publish the familiar and beloved print edition and will cheerfully send paper copies of your renewal notices if you prefer. But times are surely changing, and we are determined to meet the challenges of those changes. Thanks again for your help, cooperation, and continued support!



Photograph by Michael Keller

*John Lilly*



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On the cover: Cassidy Dickens, Matt Kupstas, and other members of the Appalachian Spirit traditional dance team from Davis & Elkins College rehearse. Photograph by Tyler Evert. Our story about folklife programs at West Virginia colleges begins on page 10.

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# Letters from Readers

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

## Centennial

July 19, 2013

Via e-mail

Editor:

My sister, Tina, and I are writing to thank you for the coverage you gave to the West Virginia Centennial Commission in the summer issue. [See "Recalling the Centennial: West Virginia at 100," by John

Lilly; Summer 2013.]

Our mother, Mary Sonis, was mentioned in the story. She worked many years in West Virginia business and government, and often said her years at the Centennial Commission held the best memories for her. This photograph belonged to Mom. We are sending it so that GOLDENSEAL readers can see some of the people



Staff and members of the West Virginia Centennial Commission in Charleston, 1963. In the front row, second and third from the left, are Mary Sonis and executive director Carl Sullivan. In the second row, first and second from the left, are Evelyn Borstein and Lloyd Calvert. In front of the pillar at far left is Don Flesher. In the back row at far left is Duane Morgan. Photographer unknown.

who worked to make the 1963 State Centennial a success, particularly Lloyd Calvert, Carl Sullivan, and our mother.

Thanks again for a fine story. Debby and Tina Sonis

### Fairmont Map

July 15, 2013

Via e-mail

Editor:

Every issue of GOLDENSEAL is a bouquet of precious memories, and the Summer 2013 issue is no exception. Jaunts down memory lane abound in "Hidden in Plain Sight: Marion County's Civil-War Era Landmarks," by Shannon Colaianni Tinnell. The large map on page 22, locating Fairmont and vicinity, was essential to her story. It also brought forth memories concerning this area of West Virginia, not only during the era of the Civil War but also in the years that followed.

Among such memories for me was Cam Henderson. Cam recruited extensively in the Fairmont countryside for athletes to build the famous teams he assembled during his college years of coaching. Among the athletes he recruited was my coach Clyde P.

"Pud" Hutson. I played for Coach Hutson in the years 1944-46 at Stonewall Jackson High School in Charleston. When the team played away games I was often among the players in Coach Hutson's car during the ride home after the game, when the coach told us many stories of his youthful days.

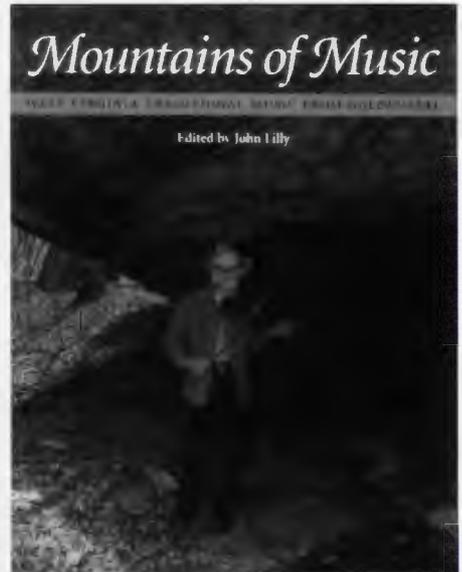
One story he told us was when he first met Cam Henderson. "I was still eating peas with a knife," he said. His point, as he continued talking, was that our need to learn was paramount. Cam, as sports fans know, became a famous West Virginia coach and "Pud" was among the finest ever among West Virginia high school coaches. Every story was designed to underscore the importance of learning from books, living a decent life, and achieving good things. During my playing days, riding home from games with coaches was one of the greatest rewards I received from playing sports.

For other readers, surely the map will bring forth their own West Virginia memories when they read Shannon Colaianni Tinnell's story in GOLDENSEAL's Summer 2013 edition.

Sincerely,  
C.W. "Bill" Jarrett



Pylons on the bank of the Monongahela River in downtown Fairmont, remnants of the Civil War era suspension bridge. Photograph by addieandchelsiephoto.



*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 \$33.95, plus \$2 shipping per book; West Virginia residents please add 6% sales tax (total \$37.99 per book, including tax and shipping). Add *Mountains of Music* to your book collection today!

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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 historical photos.

Now in its fourth printing, the book is revised and features updated information. The large-format, 109-page paperbound book sells for \$12.95, plus \$2 per copy postage and handling. West Virginia residents please add 6% state sales tax (total \$15.73 per book including tax and shipping).

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July 8, 2013

Via e-mail

Editor:

In my article, "Hidden in Plain Sight: Marion County's Civil War Landmarks," there is a slight error with the photo caption used to identify the old suspension bridge across the Monongahela River.

The large pier in the center of the river is, in fact, a remnant of the "low-level" bridge that replaced the suspension bridge in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The twin pylons mentioned in the article do still exist on the west side of the river at the bottom of Madison Street, but are hidden by the pier from this angle. Shannon Colaianni Tinnell

*Thanks, Shannon. I apologize for the incorrect photo and caption, and appreciate this opportunity to set the record straight. Thanks for the clarification and for another fine story. —ed.*

## Mushrooms

June 20, 2013

Via e-mail

Editor:

I really enjoyed your latest is-

sue, especially the wild mushroom pieces. One of our fondest memories is picking morels for morel/ramp omelets there at the Balli place. [See "Visiting the Balli Sisters of Helvetia," by Alan Byer: Summer 2010.]

I was a little surprised that your authors didn't mention two agaric species — horse mushrooms and agaricus campestris — which are probably the most common and among the easiest to identify of West Virginia's edible wild fungi. They're usually found in grassy fields or on lawns. The less-than-edible (some say mildly poisonous) members of that family are the woodland varieties. Horse mushrooms and agaricus campestris are closely related to the commonly cultivated mushrooms found in every grocery store. I should point out that the only time I've gotten sick from wild mushrooms was after I consumed some well-past-their-prime agaricus campestris. Even the best of the edibles can become poisonous if they're too far gone.

All the best,

Alan Byer



Agaricus campestris — "meadow mushrooms." Photograph by Bill Roody.



Rare 36-star flag.

### 36-Star Flag

June 21, 2013

Petersburg, West Virginia

Editor:

I read with great interest the information on the inside back cover of the Summer 2013 issue of the *GOLDENSEAL*, concerning the 35-star flag. Reference was also made to the 36<sup>th</sup> star being added on July 4, 1865, representing the state of Nevada, also a "Battle-Born State." I understand that this was then the official U.S. flag until March 1, 1867, when Nebraska was added to the Union. I own a 36-star flag, and the story of this flag and how I came to be the owner may be of interest to you and your readers.

My wife and I attended the estate auction of Mr. Raleigh Lee Willison on June 5, 1976, in Fort Ashby. This auction was conducted on Mr. Willison's homestead in a rural section of Mineral County. An outstanding feature of this site was his home, a log cabin.

The auction started, and the first item to be auctioned was a bundle of old paper blinds wrapped in brown paper. As the auctioneer

held the bundle in the air, I noticed a red and white material wrapped around the blinds in the paper covering. I thought it might be a 49-star flag. With no bids coming from the crowd, I bid 50 cents for the bundle. The auctioneer accepted my bid and threw the dirty bundle to me. When I got home, I opened this paper bundle and discovered much to my surprise and the surprise of my family that the flag had 36 stars.

After examining the flag, it was evident to me that this flag was cherished by someone. Although it was damaged and soiled, someone had taken the time and effort to lovingly whipstitch the tears and replace the lost linen with any available material of appropriate color.

I have contacted the Nevada Department of History, and they have asked that I donate this flag to their archives. For now, it is framed in a wormy chestnut frame and hangs on the wall in our family room in Petersburg. Our intentions are to pass this unexpected prize to our grandson in the future.

Sincerely,  
William Kent Hudgins

## Happy Holidays!

Simplify your holiday shopping by giving the gift of *GOLDENSEAL*. Twenty dollars buys a year's worth of good reading, with special discounts for two- and three-year gifts.

*GOLDENSEAL* brings out the best of the Mountain State — stories direct from the recollections of living West Virginians, beautifully illustrated by the finest old and new photography. After nearly four decades of publication, the stories just keep getting better. Stories that are just right for you, not to mention those on your holiday gift list.

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**Happy holidays!**

## Corton

July 5, 2013

Hagerstown, Maryland

Editor:

A few months ago Mack Samples wrote an excellent article on Corton/Cornwell. [See "Hope and Success in Corton"; Winter 2012.] The Cornwell Gas Compressor Station was a very dear place to my wife, Wanna Lee Burnside, and me. We have a picture of some of the men who worked at Cornwell. The picture was taken during World War II.

We were able to identify many of the men who worked at the Cornwell station at that time. They are as follows:

Front row, left to right: Willis Booher, Cleveland Taylor, Clarence Burnside, Clarence Bates, "Pete" Judge, unknown, Ira Woodburn, unknown, Clay Westfall, unknown, unknown, unknown,

Frank Russe, Vester Evans, and Donald Payne.

Second row, left to right: unknown, unknown, unknown, Kyle Brake, unknown, James Kennedy, Nell Lipscomb, Raymond Samples, Homer Cook, unknown, unknown, Ira Boggs, Asa Payne, unknown, unknown, Lawrence Samples (Mack's father), unknown.

Third row, left to right: unknown, Nathanael Pritt, unknown, unknown.

Sincerely,  
James C. Haught

## From Inmate

March 12, 2013

St. Marys, West Virginia

Editor:

I just received the anticipated Spring 2013 edition of GOLD-ENSEAL. It's always good to see the old photographs and to read about yesterdays. I have many

yesterdays, and tomorrow is but unknown.

West Virginia has a wealth untapped, not in oil or gas or coal, which makes people rich who have never been here while hill folk suffer the damages and health hazards of the wells and mines. A wealth being depleted is the family farm, small communities working together, clean air, water, and woodlands. Appalachia has a rich, renewable resource in its music. This music is a breath of the life of the mountains.

We need not electric things. Perhaps we would be better off if we lived as the Mennonites. The only thing I would require for my own true happiness is love of family, a wooded holler, and mountain music. Someday I will again hear the dulcimer, fiddle, and mandolin.

Gregg Smith  
Prisoner #48796-1  
S.M.C.C.-757



Workers at Cornwell Gas Compressor Station at Corton, Kanawha County, early 1940's.

# GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes



Jessie Beard Powell. Photograph by Carl E. Feather.

**Jessie Beard Powell** was born at Bartow, Pocahontas County, in 1915, in the home known as Travelers' Repose. Among the notables who took lodging at this historic inn were Abraham Lincoln, Stonewall Jackson, and Ambrose Bierce. Jessie was raised at this landmark and was wed here in 1941. After living abroad, she returned and spent the last 50 years of her life at the inn. A former teacher and owner of the Cass Country Store at Cass Scenic Railroad, Jessie was a popular figure in the Bartow area. She was pictured on the cover of our Winter 2012 issue and was featured in the story "Sweet Repose in Bartow," by Carl E. Feather. Jessie Beard Powell died June 2 in the same room where she was born. She was 98.



Paul Whiteman. Photograph by Richard Bailey.

**Paul Whiteman** of Bridgeport, Harrison County, died April 12 at the age of 103. A native of Bridgeport and a 1927 graduate of Bridgeport Union High School, Paul was considered an elder statesman among the school's alumni and a keeper of local history, having experienced much of that history firsthand. Paul was a carpenter and homebuilder by trade and also worked in the natural gas business and at a nearby Union Carbide plant. A football player, Paul married his childhood sweetheart, Ellenor Lawson, in 1930. The couple celebrated their 78<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in 2008. Paul was featured in the article "Paul Whiteman Recalls Early Days in Bridgeport," by Richard Bailey; Summer 2008.

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# Current Programs • Events • Publications

*GOLDENSEAL* announcements are published as a service, as space permits. They are not paid advertisements, and items are screened according to the likely interests of our readers. We welcome event announcements and review copies of books and recordings, but cannot guarantee publication.

## Castle Halloween

Castle Halloween, located at 1595 Boggs Run Road in Benwood, Marshall County, is a year-round museum displaying Halloween memorabilia, including costumes, folk art, candy containers, toys, games, papier-mâché Jack O'Lanterns, art, and paintings related to the paranormal. More than 35,000 items are on display, spanning 250 years. Not a haunted house or a ghost tour, Castle Halloween presents the artifacts and social history of this time-honored holiday in a family-friendly setting. Curators Pamela Apkarian-Russell and Scott Russell also have established a research library, have written articles, and offer personal appearances. For more information or to schedule a tour or a personal appearance, phone (304)233-1031 or visit [www.castlehallooween.com](http://www.castlehallooween.com). There is an admission charge.



Postcard from the collection of Castle Halloween.

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## 20<sup>th</sup> Fiddlers Reunion

The Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College will present its 20<sup>th</sup> annual Fiddlers Reunion on November 1-3. The gathering begins Friday evening with a costume-optional Halloween square dance at the Randolph County Arts Center, followed by a full day of jam sessions and performances featuring the largest concentration of older West Virginia fiddlers in

the state. Saturday activities run from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. At 4 p.m. is a clogging and flatfoot dance competition, which will highlight members of the college's Appalachian Spirit traditional dance team. The reunion concludes with a nondenominational gospel music sing on Sunday morning at 10 a.m. For more information about the 20<sup>th</sup> annual Augusta Fiddlers Reunion, call (304)637-1209, or visit <http://augustaheritagecenter.org/fiddlers-reunion>.

## Appalachian Heritage Fest

Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, Jefferson County, will present its annual Appalachian Heritage Festival at the university on September 27-28. The festival is offered as part of Shepherd's Appalachian Heritage program, coordinated by instructor Rachael Meads. [See "From the Hills to the Classroom: Folklife Goes to College," by John Lilly; page 10.] Featured performers will include Lester McCumbers, the Hillbilly Gypsies, John Lilly, and others. This year's writer-in-residence will be Frank X. Walker from Kentucky, who will be on campus

from September 23 to 27. The winner of the annual writing contest will have the opportunity to read their prize-winning story to a live audience at the university's Frank Arts Center auditorium. Workshops will be offered on Saturday afternoon. For more information, phone Rachael Meads at (304)876-5326 or visit <http://passweb.shepherd.edu>.

## Hall of Fame Inductions

The West Virginia Music Hall of Fame will hold its 2013 inductions on Saturday, November 16, at the Norman L. Fagan Theater, located in the Culture Center in Charleston. This year's living inductees will be multitalented Wheeling native Tim O'Brien; bluegrass stars Melvin Goins and his brother Ray Goins (deceased); singer, actor,



2013 West Virginia Music Hall of Fame inductee Wayne Moss. Photograph by Donn Jones.



Former Buckwheat Festival Queen Ceres Jill Dawn Ross and James N. Crane in 1988. Photograph courtesy of Jan's Studio.

and television host Peter Marshall; and renowned Nashville studio guitarist and South Charleston native Wayne Moss. Deceased inductees will include Ada "Bricktop" Smith, a popular 1920's dancer, singer, and nightclub owner; Ohio County opera singer Eleanor Steber; and famed gospel music group the Swan Silvertones, from McDowell County.

The inductions are open to the public at a gala celebration that will include appearances by past inductees Kathy Mattea, Charlie McCoy, and others. The awards show will also be broadcast live over West Virginia Public Television and West Virginia Public Radio.

For ticket information or to learn more about the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame, visit [www.wvmusichalloffame.com](http://www.wvmusichalloffame.com) or phone (304)342-4412.

### Buckwheat Festival

The 72<sup>nd</sup> annual Preston County Buckwheat Festival will take place

September 26-29 in Kingwood. Famous for its thin, brown buckwheat cakes and whole-hog sausage, the festival also includes live entertainment, vendors, livestock show, three parades, carnival rides, Irish road bowling, and king and queen coronations. Sponsored by the Kingwood Volunteer Fire Department, the Buckwheat Festival is the largest annual event in Preston County. For more informa-

tion, visit [www.buckwheatfest.com](http://www.buckwheatfest.com) or phone (304)379-2203.

### Accordion Club

The West Virginia Accordion Club will stage its second annual accordion concert on Saturday, October 12, at the Life United Methodist



Connie Mantini in 1950. Photograph by Johnnie Mantini.

Church Hall on Mary Lou Retton Drive in Fairmont. The show begins at 4:00 p.m. Featured players will include Connie Mantini. [See "I Like to Make People Happy": Connie Mantini and His Accordion," by Norman Julian; Fall 2004.] Other performers will include five-time national champ Bill Cosby, along with Mike Takash and Ron Utt.

The Accordion Club was formed in 2012 and is open to anyone interested in playing or listening to accordion music. The group meets the first Monday of each month at various locations in Fairmont and Morgantown. For more information, call group president Mike Takash at (304)366-1456, or write to West Virginia Accordion Club, 314 Marion Street, Fairmont, WV 26554.

### Irish Cultural Workshop

Irish history and heritage will be the focus of a workshop scheduled at Cedar Lakes Conference Center at Fairplain, near Ripley. The six-day session will take place October 22-27 and will feature renowned scholar, musician, and folklorist Mick Moloney, originally from the Irish city of Shannon. The workshop is called "The Shamrock Shore: Irish Culture and History at Home and Abroad" and features

folklore and myths of Ireland, including tales of Leprechauns, fairies, kings, and queens. The instructor will also review major historical developments in Ireland such as the arrival of the Celts, the Gaelic Order, the rise of Christianity, the potato famine, the "troubles," and the emigration to America. An accomplished musician, Moloney will also entertain with traditional and contemporary Irish tunes and songs. A public concert will take place on Saturday, October 26.

For more information or to register for this class, visit [www.cedarlakes.com](http://www.cedarlakes.com) or call (304)372-7860.

# From the Hills

## Folklife Goes to College

**W**est Virginia's rich folk heritage has a life of its own, surviving from generation to generation in unexpected ways. Ancient skills and traditions once passed along on rustic front porches in remote hollows today can also be found at festivals, on the Internet, and in many college classrooms around the Mountain State.

Dr. Judy Byers teaches folklore and folklife studies at Fairmont State University. A Fairmont native, Judy is Italian American on both sides. She completed her undergraduate study at Fairmont State and received a doctorate in pedagogy from West Virginia University, doing her dissertation on folklore and dramatics.

"I've been very fortunate that I've

been able to combine the pedagogy with literature, with folklore. That's what I'm about. Those three areas," she says.

Judy started at Fairmont State in 1974 as a part-time instructor, becoming full-time in 1982. In 1998, the college introduced a minor in folklore studies under the university's English Department, now

Dr. Judy Byers in her office at Fairmont State University in Fairmont. She has taught here since 1974.



# to the Classroom

By John Lilly  
Photographs by Tyler Evert

called the Department of Language and Literature within the College of Liberal Arts. To date more than 100 students have gone through the program; plans are under way to develop an interdisciplinary major in folklore studies in the next couple of years.

Judy and her assistant, Noel Ten-

ney, follow in the academic footsteps of several prominent West Virginia folklorists, including Drs. John Harrington Cox, Louis Watson Chappell, Patrick W. Gainer, and Ruth Ann Musick. Judy especially admires the work of Ruth Ann Musick, whom she knew quite well.

Dr. Ruth Ann Musick arrived at Fair-

mont State in 1946 as a mathematics and English instructor. The Missouri native was a trained folklorist with a strong interest in tales, legends, and beliefs related to ghosts and the supernatural.

While still a child, Judy met Ruth Ann when the folklorist came to the Prozzillo home to collect ghost

Dr. Byers with one of the displays at the newly remodeled Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center. This refurbished dairy barn is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and serves as the central office and classroom for folklife and folklore studies at Fairmont State.



tales, which were sometimes told at gatherings of Judy's family on Sunday afternoons.

"I would often stay to listen," Judy recalls. "I was fascinated! Stories, beliefs, customs, traditions, following the planting signs. Following the signs for everything — everything was a sign. Everything had a reason."

Ruth Ann Musick visited the Prozzillo home regularly for 11 years, during which time she and Judy became fast friends. Judy would visit Ruth Ann at the college, and was present at the folklorist's death in 1974. As a student Judy took Ruth Ann's Folk Literature class. Today

she has built an entire program upon that foundation.

Judy and Noel teach in the newly remodeled Frank and Jane Gabor West Virginia Folklife Center on the Fairmont State campus. The former dairy barn houses classrooms, a library, the Dr. Ruth Ann Musick Archives, an expansive exhibit area, and an upstairs concert/dance space. Courses include Introduction to Folklore, Folk Literature, Material Culture, and a class in Regional Culture, History, and Geography. According to Judy, these classes expose students to the three main components of folklore studies: the oral, the material, and the customary.

Fairmont State offers the most traditional approach to folklore or folklife studies in the state, exposing students to the scholarly work of some pioneering folklorists as well as teaching them the skills to conduct their own research and documentation.

"We are dedicated to the identification, preservation, and perpetuation of our region's rich cultural heritage," Judy says. "And we do it through academic studies, all kinds of educational programming, festivals and performances, and publications. ...It is through education that the perpetuation continues."

Shepherd University, in Shepherdstown, Jefferson County, is home to instructor Rachael Meads and her Appalachian Culture class. Rachael, a Glenville native, grew up attending the West Virginia State Folk Festival at Glenville and was fascinated with the people and heritage that the festival represents.

"I grew up with it," Rachael says. "I think I went to every single folk

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*"It is through education that the perpetuation continues."*

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festival from the time I was really little. For me, growing up with that model taught me what it means to be from the region."

Earning a bachelor's degree in English from what was then Shepherd College, she got her master's in English at West Virginia University. She was hired out of graduate school by Shepherd and has now been there 20 years.

Officially the director of student activities and leadership and coordinator of the Shepherd University Performing Art Series, Rachael is also a professor of Appalachian Studies. She teaches Appalachian Culture and Appalachian Music and serves on the board that oversees Shepherd's Appalachian Studies

Rachael Meads, instructor at Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, Jefferson County.



program. Students at Shepherd can earn a minor in Appalachian Studies from the English Department.

Senior Steve McKenzie of Neersville, Virginia, expects his bachelor's degree in English this fall, with a minor in Appalachian Studies. His first class with Rachael Meads was Appalachian Music, co-taught with Adam Booth.

"That was the class that turned me on to Appalachian Studies," Steve says. "It was just so rewarding. I have a passion for music, and I have a background of Southern Gospel and a little bit of bluegrass and steel guitar. When I took that class I just fell in love with it and had to take more of the Appalachian Studies classes.

"It was the most non-traditional class I have ever taken!" Steve continues. "She played some clips of old-time music, bluegrass, and commercial country. We discussed

the term 'Appalachia' and what it means, what Appalachian music is. The class evolved through student input and student projects where we all picked an artist to present. I picked Bill Monroe and studied the history of commercial bluegrass.

"We also had a shape-note teacher come in. We arranged the classroom in a square and we sang shape-note hymns. We also had some flatfoot dancing that was taught in the course. And some square dancing at the same time. It was not the typical classroom setting!"

"We take a very 'cultural studies' approach to it," Rachael adds. "Everything is in a framework that relates to everything else. You can't look at one piece without looking at the others. Especially the music. You can't talk about music and dance without talking about, 'How did this get here? Where'd it come from? What role do the Cherokee play in

this? What role do the slaves play in this? What role do British Isle people, immigrants, play? What about other immigrants? How does it all come together and sort of blend and mesh?" You can't just study it and look at it; you also have to immerse yourself in it in some way. Which is the reason for experiential learning, the reason for field trips."

Each year in the spring, Rachael loads her students in a van and heads for the hills, frequently Pocahontas County, where the group stays in cabins, explores local heritage sites, and hosts performances and visits with area folk artists. This past year was the 19<sup>th</sup> time that Rachael has mothered an entourage of undergrads, an annual getaway that Rachael not only enjoys, but relies upon to achieve her educational objectives.

Unique to her program is a generous exposure to Appalachian literature. The first Appalachian Culture class

Students, staff, and members of the Meads family on an annual field trip to Pocahontas County. Seated, in the front row are, left to right: Jessica Hall, Cassie Roby, Skylar Sade, and Meghan Parks. Standing in the middle row are Rachael Meads, daughter Lucy Meads, Melissa Swanson, Flora Meeker, Twanda Taylor, Nicole Mine, Kyle Shaddix, Michael Perrin, and Sean Payne. In the back row are: Stephen McKenzie, Sai Seng Mine, Jonathan Becker, and John Meeker.



in 1994 gave rise to the Appalachian Writer-in-Residence Project at Shepherd, coordinated by English professor Dr. Sylvia Shurbutt and supported by the West Virginia Humanities Council.

The literary and experiential components come together each fall when the university presents its annual Appalachian Heritage Festival, a weekend-long celebration of regional culture, held on campus. In addition to evening concerts and afternoon workshops, the festival includes a writer-in-residence and a student writing contest. Each year during the Friday night concert, the winner of the writing competition is recognized and has the opportunity to read the winning composition in front of a live audience.

"In my earlier education," Rachael says, "no one ever told me that this was a culture and that this was important. This [program] has ramifications beyond [the class-

room]. Students suddenly have this new, fiery pride and passion about where they're from, and get excited about it. That's the payoff! That's the payoff, too, for West Virginia. What I think we're going to see is that people like Steve now want to pass it on and want to incorporate it into their teaching and their work, how they use their talent. They become ambassadors for the region. They become great spokespeople because they have a better understanding of what it's all about."

Davis & Elkins College in Elkins is home to the internationally recognized Augusta Heritage Center. Founded in 1973 as a community-based heritage arts initiative, the Augusta program became an official part of D&E in 1981. Augusta is known for its popular five-week summer workshop series. Themed weeks such as Blues Week, Irish Week, Old-Time Week, Vocal Week, and others, attract thousands of students to the

campus from across the country each summer. Augusta also runs weeklong workshops in the spring and fall, produces documentary recordings and videos, presents a popular evening concert series, and for many years administrated the West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program. [See "Passing It On: West Virginia Folk Arts Apprenticeship Program," by Gerald Milnes; Winter 2000.]

Until recently, the college and Augusta's heritage arts workshops have coexisted, with little official interaction between the two. Times are changing, however, and there is an increasing crossover between college life and Augusta.

Matt Kupstas, a young and talented clog dancer, recently organized a student dance ensemble specializing in tradition-based step dancing. An administrative assistant for the Augusta Heritage Center, Matt is also an adjunct instructor and dance instructor for the college's folk heritage

Matt Kupstas, facing forward at left, dancing with the Appalachian Spirit traditional dance team at Davis & Elkins College. Also, from the left, facing forward, are Susan Krakoff, Ashley Stitely, and Conner Berkey. Facing away, from the left, are Cassidy Dickens, Millie Ompps, Barbara Fellenstein, and Becky Hill.



performing troupe. Matt arrived at Augusta in 2009 as an AmeriCorps VISTA worker, assisting the college with its Appalachian Studies curriculum. Though the program is still in its infancy, the college recently established a minor in Appalachian Studies, due in part to Matt's efforts.

A Maryland native, Matt attended Mars Hill College in Western North Carolina, where he danced with the college's award-winning Bailey Mountain Cloggers dance team. While attending Mars Hill College, he attained a bachelor's degree in sociology.

Matt has a long-standing interest in traditional dance. At age 11, he joined Eileen Carson's Footworks dance ensemble in Baltimore, making his first foray to D&E at age 15. After attending Augusta as a student for several years, he later helped teach Teen Week dance students.

As an individual dancer, Matt has

won several awards over the years, as well as competitions as a member of the Mars Hill dance team. By the time he arrived in Elkins to do his AmeriCorps VISTA work, Matt had been dancing for 15 years. Word traveled fast.

"My first or second day on the job," Matt recalls, "[Dr.] Vic Thacker [dean of faculty] came in my office and asked me if I wanted to teach a winter term course in clogging. Blew me away! It was the first time I met him. I didn't have a master's [degree] or any formal degree in dance. He knew of the Bailey Mountain Cloggers and wanted D&E to have a clogging program as well."

Many D&E students, familiar with the Augusta program, were already trying their hands at flatfoot and clog dancing; 24 people signed up for Matt's winter term dance class in 2009. The college's heritage dance and music group was soon up and running. By the fall 2011 term, students

were able to get academic credit for learning traditional dance at D&E and for participating in the college's performing arts ensemble.

The group is called Appalachian Spirit. Inspired by Augusta, it is an independent, extracurricular college activity, and it is in demand on campus and at local events, as well as at venues farther afield.

Veteran Augusta folk art coordinator and recent Vandalia Award recipient Gerald Milnes directs the student string band class, whose participants provide live music for the dancers. Though recently retired, Gerald plans to stay involved with Appalachian Spirit.

"I teach them the tunes that they use, I teach them the songs that they sing," he explains. "Most of what they sing are songs that I've collected. There's not a lot of instruction in terms of technique, but I try to get them steered in the right direction in terms of playing dance music."

Scotty Leach (fiddle) and Rebecca Wudarski (guitar) provide live music for the Appalachian Spirit dancers. Students are eligible to receive academic credit for their participation in this group.



They're young — they like to take the music in new directions. And that's good, too."

The college supports the heritage arts ensemble with recruitment and scholarships. Dance students receive scholarships through the college's Fine and Performing Arts Program. Musicians receive scholarships directly from the office of the college president. The college sees Appalachian Spirit not only as an educational experience for the student participants, but also as an outreach and recruitment tool for the college.

Taking live performance to an entirely different level, Glenville State College, in Glenville, offers the world's first four-year degree in bluegrass music. Founded by renowned musician and Vandalia Award recipient Buddy Griffin, the program is aimed at preparing students for the rigors of being a professional bluegrass musician.

Meghan Darby is the current director of the Glenville State bluegrass music program, having taken over

when Buddy Griffin retired in 2012. A graduate of the program, Meghan recalls being recruited by Buddy Griffin at a bluegrass music festival in Summersville in about 2003, when she was still in high school.

"My dad plays Dobro and sings, and my mom plays," Meghan says, explaining her musical upbringing in Ohio. "I graduated high school in 2006 and came to Glenville for the bluegrass certificate — I got a degree in early elementary education. I was in the [bluegrass] band every semester." Meghan later enrolled in Marshall University's Graduate College and expects to receive her master's degree in education with an emphasis in instructional technology.

The bluegrass program was started in 1997 by Buddy Griffin and fine arts chair John McKinney as a way to incorporate traditional music with the college's fine arts program. It grew, and in 2003, the college offered a four-year degree in bluegrass music

— actually a bachelor's degree in music with an emphasis in bluegrass. [See "'There Was Always Music': Vandalia Award Recipient Buddy Griffin," by John Lilly; Fall 2011.]

Students take music theory, concert band, choir, and other core musical offerings in addition to spending time learning banjo, fiddle, mandolin, or other instruments specific to bluegrass music. Students learn instrumental and vocal techniques, recording skills, and stagecraft. Starting this fall, students will also be able to participate in bluegrass music internships.

"They might be helping run a festival, they might be hosting their own [radio] show, they might record a CD. There's a ton of different options," Meghan explains. "It's really open-ended." This fall will also mark the introduction of two classes in

Below: Students in the Glenville State College bluegrass band load up the van, en route to another performance. Right: Glenville students present a program of bluegrass music at Troy Elementary School, Gilmer County. From the left the musicians are Robbie Mann (fiddle), Jordan Hall (guitar), Laiken Boyd (fiddle), Jordan Young (guitar), and Toni Doman (bass).



bluegrass music history.

The emphasis of this program, however, is clearly on performance and professionalism. Dressed in sharp, matching outfits, the students smile at the audience, present stage-ready introductions and between-songs banter, and perform an entertaining and varied program of traditional bluegrass music. Meghan estimates that the band performs at least 30 of these shows a year, many far from home.

Other colleges and universities in the state offer opportunities for students to explore traditional culture as well. Marshall University houses the Appalachian Studies Association, publishes the *Journal of Appalachia*, and hosts the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia. West Virginia University is home to the Louis Watson Chappell Collection, an irreplaceable archive of early field recordings of West Virginia folk music and part of the impressive West

Virginia and Regional History Collection at the West Virginia University Library. West Virginia University Press has issued a number of important books and recordings related to West Virginia folk culture.

Fairmont State University, Shepherd University, Davis & Elkins College, and Glenville State College each have significant archives of their own. Fairmont State's Ruth Ann Musick Archive contains the writings, correspondence, and research of Dr. Musick. Shepherd University has archived audio recordings of many of its Appalachian Heritage Festival concerts, including performances of many now-deceased West Virginia artists, such as Melvin Wine, Patty Looman, Hazel Dickens, and others.

The Augusta Collection is a vast archive of documentation gathered mostly by Gerald Milnes and comprising more than 25 years of performances and field recordings of West Virginia artists, housed at

the Booth Library on the Davis & Elkins College campus.

The Fern Rollyson Collection at Glenville State includes important papers, correspondence, and other documentation of the early years of the West Virginia State Folk Festival. The Glenville collection also features photo and audio documentation of the Folk Festival as well as a vast resource of recorded bluegrass music. The John Hymes, Jr., Central West Virginia Oral History Collection includes more than 100 hours of interviews with mostly older individuals, collected in the 1970's and '80's.

While it is unlikely that classrooms, libraries, or other academic approaches will ever replace oral learning, when it comes to the traditional folk arts, today's students have an unprecedented number of choices. 🍁

JOHN LILLY is editor of GOLDENSEAL magazine and a graduate of Davis & Elkins College.

TYLER EVERT is photographer for the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

Passing it on to the next generation, members of the Glenville State bluegrass band answer questions following their show at Troy Elementary School.





# Readin', Writin' and Ridin' the

For a while, they're children again. There are canes, eyeglasses, halting steps, and arthritic twinges. But when precious memories bubble to the surface, the years melt away.

**T**he 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Rail Riders' Reunion, which took place last October at the Quick Area Community Center in Kanawha County, attracted 56 people from

six states. In times past, they have come from as far off as Washington, Oregon, and California.

Their common bond is that they or their relatives had once ridden trains, not buses, to school. The "children" lived along a 34.4-mile New York Central (NYC) branch line that ran up the Elk River from Charleston, crossed the river at Blue Creek, and ascended up the narrow, twisting Blue Creek territory — which had virtually no roads — for its final 21 miles to Hitop. The railroad was built

to haul the products of several coal mines, logging operations, and oil wells and carry passengers between several tiny communities. Trains averaged 15 miles an hour, crossed 52 bridges, and negotiated 120 curves from one end to the other.

In fact, conductor Lee Hill, who started working in 1913, remembered a passenger asking him if the barn on the J.H. Copenhaver farm was the same one she had seen five minutes before.

"Sure is," Hill told her. "And if

Big Tunnel  
Blue Creek  
Coco  
Kennedy  
Quick  
Blakeley  
Coco  
Wills Hollow  
Victor  
Hitop  
Middle Fork  
Three Mile  
Pond Fork  
Melia  
Kendalia  
Shrader  
Sanderson  
Oil Siding  
Acup  
Pentacre

# TRAIN RIDERS' REUNION

Photograph by Kelli Hoover Swain.

Left: The New York Central Railroad (NYC) ran this little Beeliner train from Charleston up Blue Creek and on to Hitop and back, twice daily, carrying children to and from school. Photograph 1954 by Richard J. Cook, courtesy of the Allen County (Ohio) Historical Society.

Right: Edith Brewer and Pat Kennedy attended the 2012 Rail Riders' Reunion at the Quick Area Community Center in Quick, Kanawha County. Photograph by Kelli Hoover Swain.



By Bob Withers

# Rails

you wait just a few seconds longer you will see all of its four sides.”

For decades, the Kanawha County Board of Education’s school buses couldn’t come anywhere close to the children’s homes, so the school board paid the fares for up to 200 students each year to ride the branch’s passenger trains. Few other passengers accompanied them.

NYC operated two round trips between Charleston and Hitop — one in the morning and one in the afternoon, keyed to the schedules of

Blakeley Grade School, Quick Junior High School, and Elk District High School.

At first, the trains were operated by steam locomotives pulling a baggage/mail combination car and a coach. But on Friday, December 29, 1950, a small diesel replaced the steam engines, which in turn was replaced by gas-electric “doodlebug” M-10 and a coach. Steam and diesel locomotives substituted for the M-10 or were called out of Charleston to drag it back to town when it broke

down, which was frequently. When the old gas-electric car finally gave up the ghost on April 13, 1953, NYC assigned “Beeliner” M-465 to the run. The Beeliner was a diesel-powered, self-propelled Rail Diesel Car built by the Budd Company, known to locals not only by its marketing monicker but also as the “RDC” or the “KV.”

The car’s shiny, fluted aluminum siding added a touch of class to the line and was economical to operate. There was an engine cab at each end, so all the engineer had to do at





model of the Oak Hill Grade School on Dutch Ridge that took a year for him to construct. When Oak Hill students were ready for the junior high grades, they went to Quick — the building that now serves as Quick’s community center and site of the reunions. But Jack doesn’t say a lot about his train trips.

“I went [to school] when I had to,” he says.

His wife, Freda, elaborates.

“He had to stay home and help his aunt who raised him,” she says.

romance on the rails. Charleston native Ed Brewer, 86, remembers NYC conductor Lee Hill as the man who made sure Brewer got to visit the young girl he was seeing up Blue Creek. Brewer boarded the train at Lilly Street in Charleston and sat down. Hill came back through the car punching passengers’ tickets. If the young man had one, he nodded his head and Lee would come over and punch it.

“But if I didn’t have the money for a ticket,” Brewer says, “I would

with pictures.”

There were some wannabe Lotharios, too.

“You would watch a certain girl as the train pulled into her station [in the morning] and you would also watch [her] as the train pulled out from her station in the evening,” says Harold Dunbar. “But you never said ‘boo’ at any time to her.”

One of the brakemen tried to impress two widows near Quick.

“He borrowed flowers from one and gave them to the other,” Harold

Anne Lee Edens Thomas of Bedford, Virginia, Jack’s twin sister, was the more experienced train rider, especially in high school.

“We lived on Dutch Ridge,” she says. “I had to walk four miles to catch the train at Sanderson, ride 12 miles to Elkview, then ride 12 miles back to Sanderson, and walk four miles home.”

The tunnel kissing wasn’t the only

quietly shake my head back and forth once, and Lee would pass me by like he didn’t know I was there.”

That girl, by the way, was Edith Burns, now Edith Brewer, Ed’s wife of 67 years. Every year, she brings scrapbooks crammed with photos and railroad memorabilia.

“I have books on every town where there were stations for the children to board,” she says. “I keep it up

says. “[But] the other found out, and his whole scheme fell apart.”

Occasionally romance turned to embarrassment when a boy sat in a reclining coach seat turned to face the seat where his girl was sitting and his buddies sat behind him.

“They would kick the seat forward and he would land on top of the girl,” Harold recalls.

Locals didn’t only appreciate on-



Railroad bridge at the town of Blue Creek, where the NYC crossed over the Elk River before continuing 21 miles to Hitop. Photograph by A.C. Dixon, date unknown.

board romance; they also felt a romantic kinship with the right-of-way itself. In 1912, John William Robinson and Mary Ellen "Ella" Cline were married inside Oil Siding Tunnel!

"We didn't have to sit down," she says. "We could run around and visit."

Carnes also remembers how some of the kids discovered the coach's

this in the seat," as he leans back and forth and waves his arms.

Donald Summers adds that Paisley always overshot the station stops and had to back up.

The boys liked to tease brakeman Sands.

"They would get some of the cigarette butts from the smoker car and stuff them into the lock on the inside door to where they kept the mail sacks they carried to all the post offices up Blue Creek," says 86-year-old Ronald Carnes. "Then, when it came time to deliver the mail, he couldn't get the inside door open and he would have to go outside and open the baggage door."

Strange, isn't it? No one seems to remember the perpetrators' names!

Ronald's wife, Betty Kennedy Carnes, says time passed quickly on the train.

light switches.

"They waited until the train was in the middle of the tunnel, then turned on the lights to catch people kissing," she says.

The boys sat with the girls they liked and waited until the train went around a curve to scoot closer, Edith Brewer adds.

The engineers became legends in their own time. Forrest "Spike" Jones was a smooth runner. But Frank O'Dell remembers that Pat Paisley was a rough engineer who liked to run fast.

"He bounced the schoolbooks right out of the shelf above the seats," Frank says. "I remember going like

Frank views the train as a glimpse into the world away from Blue Creek.

"Our house didn't have electricity or running water or an indoor toilet," he says. "I got to get on a train every weekday, where they had all these things."

Frank's cousin, Ed O'Dell, tells about the time that trainman Mutt Seafler threw him off the train for fighting and he had to walk to school for a week.

Edith Brewer says everyone enjoyed the train rides and companionship.

"We could go where we wanted



The Beeliner rests at the end of the line at Hitop in the mid-1950's. Photograph by Richard J. Cook, courtesy of the Allen County (Ohio) Historical Society.

to and sit where we wanted to," she says. "We didn't miss that much, aside from that we didn't stay after school for sports."

Eva Shaffer, who worked for the railroad at Blakeley and distributed tickets to the kids, attended some of the earlier reunions and recalled how the trains once were the source of news from the outside world. After each election, engineers blew their whistles to indicate winners and losers. She remembered hearing the whistle when Woodrow Wilson was elected president in 1912.

"They always blew the whistles when Democrats won," she said. "They

never blew the whistles when Republicans won."

Curtis Morris rode the train from Pentacre to Elkview during the final three years it ran.

"I had ridden the train many times before high school with my mother to and from the Charleston Broad Street depot when she went shopping or when I had doctor or dental appointments," he says.

On one occasion, a coal train derailed above the Morris home.

"Until the wreck was cleared, the students from Quick to Hitop had a holiday," says Morris.

But times were changing.

In June 1958, NYC asked the West

Virginia Public Service Commission for permission to drop the money-losing trains or, failing that, for a 150% increase in the cost of the children's 30-day tickets. For example, between Amelia and Quick, the cost of a 30-day ticket would increase from \$6.45 to \$16.15. Between Amelia and Elkview, the 30-day rate would jump from \$10.40 to \$26. The PSC took almost a year to decide that the trains must remain, and cut the proposed increase in half.

By that time, roads had been constructed and improved to the point that they could accommodate school buses. The PSC finally permitted NYC to discontinue the runs alto-



Attendees inspect notebooks and memorabilia at the 2012 Rail Riders' Reunion. Photograph by Kelli Hoover Swain.

gether — leaving coal trains as the branch's only traffic.

Trains 296, 297, 298 and 299 — in truth, Beeliner M-465, which made two Monday-through-Friday round trips — vanished after the last runs on September 10, 1959.

Dunbar and Harley Kennedy developed the idea of having reunions. The first, in 1992, attracted 180 people. They have taken place every year since, with participants signing their names on rosters labeled with each station stop.

Artifacts from the past are on display, including trainmen's brass, train logs, timetables, 30-day train tickets, and old photos that help generate memories.

The rail riders pose for photographs, grouped according to the

station where they boarded each morning. Participants are asked to fill in names under photos of unknown students, while others study a 20-foot-long hand-drawn map of the branch line. In recent years, death has taken some of the riders, and there is mourning for those who departed in the past year.

It took two tries to get together in 2012; the original date of June 30 was canceled at the last minute because a horrific storm had blown down trees, blocking roads and knocking out electric power in the area. Folks who had driven from as far away as North Carolina had to go home and plan another trip on October 6.

Too soon, it's time to leave, and attendees walk to the parking lot and get in their cars for the trip

home. A short distance behind the building, weeds hide rusty rails that wait for a train that runs now only in memory. 🍁

*The 2013 reunion is scheduled for September 28 at the Quick Area Community Center. For more information, call Edith Brewer at (304)965-5016 or Carlos Morris at (304)344-8655.*

BOB WITHERS is a retired reporter and copy editor for the *Herald-Dispatch* in Huntington. He is a journalism graduate from Marshall University, a Baptist minister, and a lifelong railroad enthusiast. He has written five books on railroads and contributed to the *Encyclopedia of North American Railroads*. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Winter 2008 issue.

# The Last Run of the Rail Bus

By Marion D. Leake

I was in the sixth grade at East Bank Elementary, and it was the last day of school in 1958. My dad, John R. "Jack" Leake, a railroad engineer for about 28 years, got the approval for me to get out of school that day to accompany him on the last trip of the rail school bus. He had worked the rail bus only the last year due to some health issues, and this was the last trip he would make as an engineer. I didn't get the significance of all this until several years later.

We boarded the Budd Car at the rail station in Charleston. Several other people boarded with us who also wanted to ride this last trip of this unique vehicle. Then came the students, all excited as it was their last day of school and they were on their way home for

the summer. There was talk among everyone about this being the last run of the rail school bus and that they would be traveling on regular school buses next year. My father told me that some of the kids had to walk several miles to catch the train, so being picked up closer to home was good for them.

As we started up Elk River, the car swayed back and forth, making stops and letting off kids here and there, with shouts of "Have a good summer" and "We will miss you," until we reached Hitop, near Blue Creek. Here he picked up the throttle and moved to the other end of the car to start the run back. We hadn't traveled far when there was a person by the tracks, and he stopped the car. It was one of the students whom we had let off earlier, and he had forgotten a

jacket on the train. Dad said that someone would forget something almost every trip and would wait until he came back down the river to retrieve the item.

I have talked with several people over the years that rode the Elk River rail bus, and they have related many stories of the friends and other memories they had while riding the Budd Car to and from school. I once met a person that was on the last trip, who remembered a little kid running back and forth between the front and rear of the train as we went up the river to see the scenery and where we were going and where we had been.

Where we had been is history, and where we were going was to a new era and a different world.

This diesel-powered Budd car had dual controls — it could run in either direction. The last engine to run the old school route up Blue Creek to Hitop, it made its final school run in June 1958 and completed its passenger service in September 1959. Photograph courtesy of Marion D. Leake.



# Pleasant Island



Map and illustrations by  
Terry Lively © 2013.

By Michael K. Wilson

# Sin and Salvation in the Elk River



Most folks passing near Blue Creek in Kanawha County on U.S. 119, unless familiar with the area, don't know it's there. Some notice the tall tower on the north bank of the Elk River that helps support a 343-foot suspension bridge, barely wide enough for a lawn tractor. The bridge provides a pedestrian connection from a small parking lot alongside U.S. 119 to a six-acre island in the middle of the Elk River. Pleasant Island, as it has been known since 1970, has a history of both sin and salvation.

Little is known of the island's early history. Archaeologists doubt that Native Americans would have

passed up such a landmark in the Elk without some activity, but early maps do not make note of an island. An 1865 survey map of Kanawha County shows a feature in the approximate location of the island, probably marking the location of an early oil well. Drilling started in the valley during the mid-1800's, and oil and gas would play a prominent role in the island's development in the years to follow.

Land transportation, other than by horseback, was nonexistent in the Elk River Valley until the late 1800's. Roads were few, and U.S. 119 was not constructed at its present location until 1923. In those years

the river itself provided the most reliable means of transporting goods as well as passengers up and down the valley. As steamboats continued to ply their trade, another mode of transportation made an appearance in the Elk River region. The Charleston, Clendenin & Sutton Railroad (CC&S), chartered by a group of Charleston businessmen in 1890, ran on the south bank of the Elk and laid tracks as far as Clay by 1904. In 1906 the CC&S was bought by former United States Senator Henry Gassaway Davis and was reorganized as the Coal & Coke Railroad. Following his takeover of the line, Davis extended the track to Elkins. The Coal & Coke was purchased by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in 1917.

Shortly following the appearance of the CC&S, another railroad began laying track on the north side of the Elk. The Kanawha & West Virginia Railroad (K&WV) line started in Charleston as a link with the Kanawha & Michigan Railroad. The K&WV ran up the Elk and crossed the river on a large bridge at the mouth of Blue Creek. In 1907 the line was completed to Blakely, for a total of 34.4 miles of track. In the years to come, many would use the railroads, in addition to the river, to make their way up the Elk in search of rest and recreation. [See "Readin', Writin', and Ridin' the Rails," by Bob Withers; page 18.]



The six-acre island included an oil well, seen here. Photograph courtesy of the Anna Faye Fizer Collection, date unknown.

According to records, early owners of the island, then called Blue Creek Island, included E.W. Crawford, George W. Connell, and James F. Brown, a trustee for the Kanawha Valley Bank who took over ownership of the property following the settlement of the Connell estate. On March 16, 1898, the island was deeded to Thomas C. Hall, who was part-owner and vice president of the Jarvis Oil Company. Hall was born in Ritchie County, then still a part of Virginia, in 1857. His father, Cyrus, who was also involved in the oil business, was a Virginia senator during the Civil War in addition to being a well-known attorney in Richmond, Parkersburg, and finally Charleston. Shortly after taking ownership of the island, Thomas deeded the property to his young niece Bessie Hall, the daughter of his brother Benjamin, a

lawyer who preferred gambling as a profession. His gambling could be one possible reason Thomas put the property in the name of his niece as opposed to his brother. Regardless, Benjamin and his family — which consisted of his wife, Susan, and their three children: Bessie, Helen, and Snyder — took up residence on the island and established a small farm.

Shortly after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Benjamin realized that the island offered possibilities beyond agriculture. The Elk Valley oil boom had begun in earnest, and the area was rich with oilfield workers looking to spend their wages. In addition, city dwellers from Charleston desired a getaway location to rest and fish on weekends or to escape the hot city during the summer months in the days prior to air condition-

ing. Benjamin correctly figured the shade-covered island would be the perfect location. What followed was a transformation of the island from farm to resort. A large two-story hotel and associated buildings were constructed, and rooms were set aside for games such as blackjack and roulette. The resort was advertised as the Island Inn, and calling cards were distributed throughout the region pointing out the many attributes, activities, and facilities that the island offered.

Soon special excursion trains were chugging up the Elk from Charleston on the Coal & Coke line. While some steamboats, and later gas-powered craft, also brought visitors up the Elk from Charleston, the boats did not operate regular excursions as the railroads did.

Guests arriving by train would

Advertising card for the Island Inn on Blue Creek Island, date unknown, courtesy of the Anna Faye Fizer Collection.

# ...The Island Inn...

**B. B. HALL, PROPRIETOR.**

*On Blue Creek Island in Elk River, 14 Miles From Charleston. Fine Fishing,  
Plenty of Boats, Live Bait. An Ideal Spot For An Outing. Delightful  
Shade, Beautiful Scenery, Cool Breezes*

✦ **EXCURSION RATES ON THE C. & C. RAILROAD.** ✦

*\$2.00 Per Day. Special Rates by the Month.*

**BLUE CREEK, Kanawha Co., WEST VA.**

disembark on a large platform on the Blue Creek side, or south bank, of the Elk, across from the island. In a 1987 *Charleston Daily Mail* article, former area resident Rex Crouser said, "At the upper end [of the platform], a set of real nice steps 16-foot wide and handrailings went to a walkway across a swinging bridge. There was a saloon there belonging to Jim Andy Melton and a boarding house where oilfield workers lived."

Once guests crossed over to the island, they could check into rooms that cost two dollars a night. Accord-

ing to various accounts, the hotel was considered plush for the day. Once settled in, visitors would participate in the different forms of recreation. Besides games of chance, guests could go fishing, boating, swimming, or simply relax in the shade and cool breeze, or as long-time Elkview resident Dan Campbell said in the *Charleston Daily Mail*, "They would gamble, drink, and fish — maybe all three."

The reputation of the Island Inn continued to grow as did its number of guests. Rex Crouser recalled

that, "It looked like a herd when they got off the trains. There were lots of suitcases. All it was, they had money." Not only did the visitors include oilfield workers and residents of the capital city, but soon the guest register showed travelers from neighboring states of Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, and as far away as Missouri and Florida.

Business on the island remained brisk until around 1912 when the oil boom slowed and many workers left the valley, ushering in the Island Inn's decline. Additionally,



Pastor Charles Meadows shortly following the purchase of the island by Mount Pleasant Baptist Church of Elkview. The former Island Inn is visible in the background. Photograph courtesy of the Anna Faye Fizer Collection, circa 1970.

the United States entered World War I in 1917, and many young men of military service age left to fight in Europe. These setbacks, along with other economic factors, forced the closure of the resort around 1918. Or as Rex Crouser said in 1987, "Ben Hall had enough money anyway. ... People stopped going on those wild weekends."

Following the demise of the resort, the Halls returned the island to its prior function as a family homestead. Dan Campbell said, "After the rough and rowdy days, you'd never find a more clean-living family than the Halls." One daughter, Helen, married and moved away, but the rest of the family spent the rest of

their lives on the island. The last family member, Snyder, was in his late 70's when he died on May 31, 1969. It was shortly following his death that nearby Mount Pleasant Baptist Church became involved in the island and began an association that continues today.

In 1970, the pastor of Mount Pleasant was Charles Meadows, who saw the island not as a resort, but as a Christian youth camp. Some members of the congregation were initially hesitant to accept the idea, considering the investment and labor required to complete the project. Plans progressed, however, and the church purchased the island and buildings from the estate of Snyder

Hall in August 1970 for \$15,000. They renamed the property Pleasant Island and began the substantial task of rehabilitating the grounds.

In the years following the closure of the resort, especially as the family members grew older, the condition of the island declined. The buildings were dilapidated, and the property was overgrown with brush and weeds. The old bridge had been torn down by Snyder several years before his death due to acts of vandalism to the property. Consequently, access to the island was restricted to row-boat.

The first work undertaken by the congregation was to clear the thick brush. Grape arbors and rose gar-



The 343-foot suspension bridge, as viewed from the island, looking across the Elk River toward U.S. Route 119. The bridge was built with volunteer labor and was completed in July 1972. Photograph by Gary Scott, 2008.

dens of the earlier Hall years had been heavily overgrown by vegetation that made it impossible to see beyond 25 feet. Long-time church member Dale Hamrick recalls taking the first bulldozer through the river in order to clear brush on the island. The cleanup also led to the discovery of several items from the island's past, including a 1906 ledger of winnings and losses, a roulette

table, and empty liquor crates.

While some small, dilapidated buildings were razed, three of the original buildings — the hotel, a smaller two-story annex, and a small house — were remodeled and utilized for summer youth camps. By the 1980's the two larger buildings, although remodeled, finally fell victim to age and years of neglect and were replaced by modern structures.

Today, only the house remains from the original buildings.

The major task for the church was to provide permanent access to the island. A bridge was needed, and early estimates from contractors approached \$40,000. This was a significant sum of money at the time, so the church members decided to do the work themselves.

The late Kenneth "Skee" Settle, a



Picnic following the ribbon-cutting ceremony on July 30, 1972, marking the beginning of a new era on what is now called Pleasant Island. Photograph courtesy of the Anna Faye Fizer Collection.

long-time Mount Pleasant member, said that the original plan was to construct a low-water crossing, utilizing cut-up railroad tanker cars. This plan ran afoul of the United States Coast Guard regulations, which place tight restrictions on navigable waterways, including the Elk River. The Coast Guard regulations resulted in the suspension bridge that stands today.

"We built it from the seat of our britches, really," said Tom Young, one of the bridge builders. Although many men from the church, including Skee Settle and Tom Young, had worked in construction, no one had experience building suspension bridges.

The pier locations were drilled approximately 55 feet deep to reach bedrock, then were filled with concrete and steel rebar. Tom said that the four anchors that secure the

cables for the suspension bridge were also reinforced with rebar and contain 10 yards of concrete each, or an equivalent of 20 tons of concrete for each anchor.

Good timing, or perhaps Divine intervention, also played a role in the construction of the bridge. While work progressed on the structure, I-79 was under construction nearby. Tom said that the interstate construction contractor parked a crane at the mouth of Blue Creek during the weekends. Approached by the bridge builders, he agreed to allow them to use the crane provided they paid his operator. The operator volunteered his time on the crane to set the steel pier towers and later hang the cables.

Finally, with great fanfare, the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the bridge was held on July 30, 1972. The *Charleston Daily Mail* estimated a

crowd of 800 turned out for the church service and picnic that followed on the island. Old-timers swapped stories of island adventures, and the deacons and trustees presented Pastor Meadows with a diamond ring to mark his sixth anniversary at the church.

The first youth camps were held the following summer, and as the years go by, the camps have continued to grow. Campers now come from several churches, both local and out of state. Many former campers, including several now in the ministry, tell of how the experience changed their lives. Lee Swor, the pastor at Mount Pleasant since 1986, said, "It's amazing how the Lord has used the island."

Besides camps, the island and its facilities are used by church teen groups every Wednesday night. Since



This structure, on the site of the old hotel, was built in the mid-1980's. It houses dormitories on the ground level and a chapel above. Photograph by Gary Scott.

1995, the teens have also utilized the island during the last two weekends of October for an outreach ministry that portrays life and death situations from a Christian perspective, an event that draws thousands each year. It has also been the home of Elk Valley Christian School soccer and softball teams. The school, a ministry of Mount Pleasant, was formed in 1974 and continues as one of the longest serving fundamental Christian schools in the state.

Set as it is in the middle of a river, flooding looms as a possible island hazard. Occasionally, during periods of heavy rain, rising water will encroach upon the island. The bridge itself has never been in peril

because of its height above the Elk. However, every few years, water will cause minor damage to the buildings, especially the kitchen and dining room that are located in the structure near the northern channel of the river. Fortunately, the damage to date has been minimal.

In the past century the island has been transformed from the Island Inn, considered a den of iniquity by some, to Pleasant Island, a place of redemption. This did not occur without the vision and hard work of a multitude of volunteers. Pastor Swor summed up his feelings when he said, "I am thankful for the vision Charles Meadows had and for the effort men and women put in with

volunteer labor."

The island's change from a resort offering the vices that good preachers of the day spoke against to a tool of the Gospel might be compared to a biblical parable where the sinner comes out of darkness to the light. Just like many who have visited the Elk River landmark in the last five decades, the island has indeed been born again. 🍁

MICHAEL K. WILSON is a Clay County native now living in Atlanta, where he works as an historian and cultural resource manager. Michael attended Glenville State College, Marshall University, and West Virginia University, and is a former senior historian for the West Virginia Division of Highways. An experienced author, this is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Early view of Blue Creek and Blue Creek Island. Note the structures on the island, visible at right, at a time when the island was used as a resort. Photograph by Colebank Studio, courtesy of Terri Maynor Hardman.

# JoAnn Davis

By Mort Gamble



# Singer, Author, Survivor

**W**hen former Jamboree USA music star JoAnn Davis released her new children's book, *Finding Pepper*, and a companion DVD at Bethany College in May 2012, she attracted an admiring audience. That was nothing new for someone who had performed for thousands during a rewarding, four-decade career as a gospel and country music headliner. She greeted guests and signed autographs for hours, easy duty for this veteran entertainer.

For Davis, her recent debut as an author marked the opening of yet another new door — the latest in a lifetime defined by unexpected turns and new beginnings. Balancing life on the road and beyond the spotlight can be hectic for any performer. In JoAnn's case, it included keeping up a full schedule of performing while simultaneously running a motel and raising a family. In some ways, JoAnn hints, that was the easy part. When crisis came, and it has been a familiar visitor in her life, resurrecting JoAnn Davis, the person, was more challenging. But she has become an expert in doing so.

Reminiscing recently at a restaurant in Wheeling, she offers a few artifacts from her musical career: publicity photos, posters, programs from 40 years on the road. She speaks in a quiet, even, and gentle voice, the singing side of it a victim to cancer a little more than two years ago.

"I'm sure I have other items at home," she says hopefully. "We went through a flood...."

A daughter of the Ohio Valley, JoAnn Davis grew up on a farm. When asked where it was, she answers politely, "Which one?"

JoAnn Davis of Ohio County was a professional entertainer for more than 30 years, much of that on WWVA's Jamboree USA.

By the time she had graduated from Triadelphia High School, her family had moved 12 or 13 times.

"My dad would buy a small farm, fix it up, sell it, move into a larger one," she recalls. "Fix that up, sell it. He was always buying the next farm. I went to a lot of schools; I was always the new kid. [I would] just figure out where the library was, where the little girls' room was, make a few friends — then we'd have to move again. Two words described my life then: afraid and scared."

Her mother had left the family when she was two, not to return until years later. JoAnn loved her father deeply, however. "Dad was my whole world," she says.

JoAnn's father would drop her off on Sunday nights for her first summer job at age 17 at the Wheeling Y.W.C.A., where she stayed during the week until he picked her up again on Friday nights and would take her back to the farm. Her father had remarried, but JoAnn's new stepmother, though "fine with boys, didn't know what to do with girls," JoAnn says. Life on the home front was "not a good situation," as JoAnn puts it. To make matters much worse, her father died prematurely, at 43, of Addison's Disease. Neighbors took her in, and she never returned to farm life.

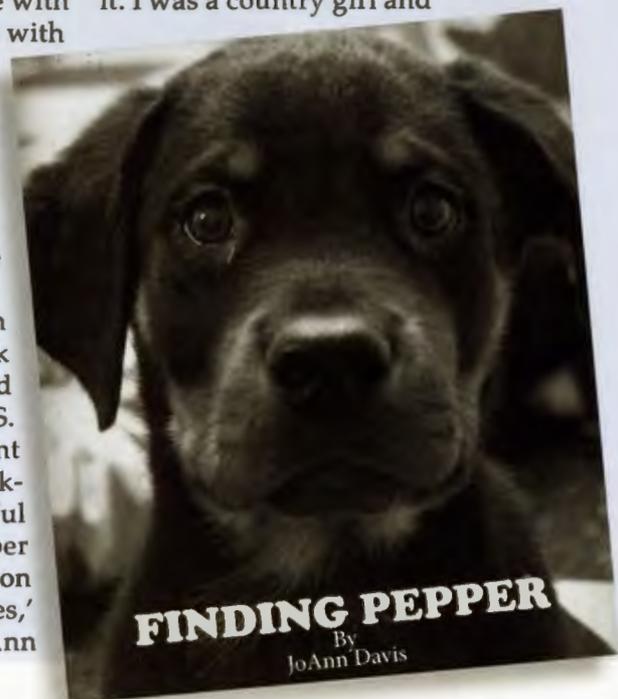
Right after graduation from high school, JoAnn went to work as a secretary, receptionist, and switchboard operator for the L.S. Good & Company department store in Wheeling. She was working the phone circuits one fateful Friday afternoon in November 1963 when an operator came on the line. "'Please clear the lines,' the operator ordered," JoAnn

remembers. "Emergency calls only. Our president has been shot."

JoAnn's next job came through Bethany College, collecting students' tuition in the business office. Marrying her first husband, the neighbors' son, produced two of her three children, Bob and Robin, but the marriage lasted just five years.

A visit to Wheeling radio station WWVA in search of some guitar lessons led to a meeting with the man who would be her new husband. Jimmy Stephens was an established country music star from Hartford, Connecticut, billed as "The New England Country Gentleman." He had become a member of the WWVA Jamboree in the early 1960's. Jimmy and JoAnn were introduced by John Corrigan, then the director of the Jamboree.

"He told me that Jimmy could offer the lessons," JoAnn says. But there was only one problem: "I didn't like him. He could be two different people. He was handsome and knew it. I was a country girl and



never thought I'd be involved with someone of his sophistication. What strengthened my belief about that was what he said after our very first lesson together.

"You know," Jimmy told me that day. 'I never liked to see a woman playing a guitar. I like to see them standing alongside a man, singing.'

"And I said, 'Oh, really?' and wondered why I was there." She told him that there would be no more guitar lessons. Yet JoAnn still nurtured a desire for music.

"I had no musical training. On the farm, we worked day in and day out. Dad believed we shouldn't be involved in any extracurricular activities. But I had always wanted to sing. I liked it, but never dreamed it would be possible beyond singing in school plays."

One day, JoAnn and her sister-in-law were walking down Market Street in Wheeling when a big Cadillac pulled up, its horn blowing. It was Jimmy Stephens. Would JoAnn meet him for coffee?

By now separated from her first husband and living with her brother

in Warwood, JoAnn says she still had no desire to take any guitar lessons from Jimmy. There were a few phone calls back and forth. After her divorce was final, she agreed to see him. But borrowing a line from a popular TV show, she wondered, "Will the real Jimmy Stephens please stand up?"

"I had been wrong about him," she says now. "He was wonderful. So I married him."

JoAnn started singing around the house whenever Jimmy played the guitar. "He liked what I did," she remembers. "Our voices blended. It was all a natural. He'd been to music school, was a trained professional. He was what everybody called a 'singer's singer.' Professionals would stop and listen to him.

"Jimmy was quite a bit older than I was. He had already sung in bars until 2 or 3 in the morning. I never paid my dues in that way. But when we married, he put me right up there with him. He was shorter than I was. Lots of times so we'd look level, I didn't wear heels. That led to a lot of jokes on stage. 'What do you want to be when you grow up, Jimmy?' a woman asked once from

the audience."

Their act evolved and was eventually contracted for weekend dates all over the country. The World's Original WWVA Jamboree signed them to do shows once a month. Some of these performances were part of what were known as package shows. Jimmy and JoAnn would travel to concert dates to appear with other stars like comedian Crazy Elmer, Doc and Chickie Williams, Holly Garrett, Karen McKenzie and her sisters, Patty Powell and Bob Gallion, and eventually with such Nashville stars as Merle Haggard and Dolly Parton.

"We worked a lot of benefits, like the March of Dimes," JoAnn recalls. "One night we went over to the WTRF-TV studios, straight from the Jamboree show where Merle was appearing with us, to where the Easter Seals telethon was being broadcast. The station asked us if we could get Merle to come over. Jimmy said for me to ask him.

"Why me?" I asked Jimmy. 'Because you're the pretty one,' he told me. Merle came, but said, 'I will be happy to do that under one condi-



JoAnn, at center, with other children climbing on a car at Short Creek, Ohio County, circa 1950.



JoAnn at age 16 in 1962, wearing bobby socks and listening to music.

tion. You get me over there and get me back.”

JoAnn drove him over to the studio to make sure he didn't get lost in downtown Wheeling.

“He was a wonderful gentleman. They called him a rebel, but he was nothing but a gentleman,” JoAnn recalls.

Although their stage show was a mix of gospel and country, JoAnn preferred the spiritual songs. “If I hadn't had my faith, I would never have survived my childhood and what I'd been through. We sang in a lot of churches, met so many new friends.”

Just how many friends Jimmy and JoAnn had was made clear after Jimmy suffered a severe heart attack at age 42. Following an announcement over WWVA made by disc jockey Buddy Ray, the singer received 10,000 cards from fans and well-wishers. Jimmy was hospitalized for two weeks, and JoAnn had to learn how to cook without butter, eliminating cholesterol from their newly strict diet.

During his hospitalization, Jimmy insisted that JoAnn do a scheduled

engagement in Anmoore without him. “He was one of those performers from the old days who believed that the show must go on,” she says. “So I gathered all the faith I had to perform on my own. You talk about praying. The band and several of us went down for the show. Crazy Elmer knew I was shaking in my shoes. He took my hand before the show started and prayed with me. ‘This show is going to be just fine,’ he said. And it was.”

Another venue proved, surprisingly, to be less nerve-racking for JoAnn — the former West Virginia Penitentiary at Moundsville.

“‘Now these people are here for a reason,’ Jimmy told me as we prepared to entertain some of the inmates. I was the only woman picked for that show because of my long dress. I always wore long dresses or gowns when I performed.

“On the inside, a lot of them were singing gospel songs. I didn't realize that there were many gospel groups in the prison. Some of them are still performing today. After the show, as I liked to do, I walked among them to talk. Soon I could hear the steel

doors of that room banging shut. I found out later that Jimmy and others were watching me the whole time through some kind of mirror.”

JoAnn and Jimmy played all over the country, including at the famed Lambs Club in New York City, the turf of such stars as Frank Sinatra and Joey Bishop. Nashville beckoned, but JoAnn felt it was better to keep their base in the Wheeling area. When not on the road, they ran a motel business — the Valley Motel in Valley Grove, which they operated for 25 years — and raised their family, which by now included another daughter, Jomana.

“I was a reluctant celebrity,” JoAnn says. “We didn't chase the media. I decided to be the best mother I could be. We toured on weekends, worked at the motel during the week.”

Life on the road, though grueling, offered its own rewards. “Karen McKenzie and I often traveled together,” JoAnn says. “We talked a lot. She and I became close.”

Traveling long hours in tight quarters, one also learned everyone's idiosyncrasies. “We called Jimmy ‘City Limit Jim,’” she recalls. “He's



A reluctant celebrity, JoAnn traveled around the country with her second husband and singing partner, Jimmy Stephens. This bus was their home away from home.

driving, our kids are in the back on pillows. We get out of the city, Jimmy pulls off. I take the wheel and drive to the outskirts of the town we were to play in. Once there, he'd wake up having slept the whole way, and get back in the driver's seat to make his entrance. People would say, 'Jimmy, you must be exhausted.'"

There was nothing funny about one memorable show in 1976 that was to feature the popular Dolly Parton. Scheduled to perform at the Jamboree, the singer had been receiving telephoned death threats and was advised not to appear. According to a story in *The Wheeling Feeling* trade newspaper, Parton did not learn of the threats until she arrived for the show.

"Her bus was parked. She was in it," JoAnn remembers. "We had to fill in for her. The audience was aware of the situation. Detectives stood on either side of Jimmy and me as we performed. Plainclothes police were seated out in the audience. They found the man that night. He did have a gun."

For JoAnn and Jimmy, the show went on — for 42 years altogether. Along the way they were divorced, but they continued to perform as a couple who still loved each other, even as a door was beginning to close on their lives.

A "terrible smoker," in JoAnn's words, Jimmy developed cancer. JoAnn increasingly needed to care for her ex-husband during the last 16 years of his life. Jimmy and JoAnn were invited when the Jamboree scheduled one of its reunion shows in 2006, but Jimmy's deteriorating health made the appearance doubtful.

"He wasn't on the program," she says. "But I wouldn't do the show without him. I pushed him in a wheelchair out on stage, handed him a microphone. He finished one song, but couldn't do another. He apologized to the crowd. He wanted me to go on. You know how hard it is to finish a song with a lump in your throat?" Jimmy Stephens died later that month.



JoAnn and Jimmy Stephens performed together for 42 years, a partnership that outlasted their marriage by 16 years.

By now, the wear and tear of operating a motel while she was off the road began to take its toll on JoAnn. "With a motel, you're up all night and all day," she points out. "Someone's TV goes out, you're carrying a new one room to room. You're lifting and beating mattresses, changing beds. It was wearing out my back." Her back problems developed while she and Jimmy were still performing, but eventually with surgery and "a great doctor," she overcame that problem.

In 2003 JoAnn married for the final time. Within a week of their wedding, her husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer. A doctor promised to keep him alive as long as possible; their marriage survived eight months and a day. Inheriting debts she could not manage, she found herself starting over at age 60. "No

house, no job, no husband," JoAnn states.

But something worse was in store for the singer.

"I couldn't reach higher notes," she says. "Jimmy had pushed me, but I couldn't reach them. About two years ago, I went in for a routine exam. I had nodules on my vocal cords." One proved to be malignant, and cancer was also found in the isthmus of her throat and her thyroid, a portion of which had to be removed. Again JoAnn had surgery. For three months, she lost her voice altogether. Her children fixed her up with a phone so she could text messages to them. Her voice returned, but she could no longer sing.

Then a new door opened. JoAnn's friend Shirley Kemp, who works at Bethany College's Erickson Alumni Center, suggested she write a book.



JoAnn Davis today. Photograph by Mort Gamble.

"I love books, love to read, love children," JoAnn says. "I always read to my children and now my grandchildren. I've been a tutor to the Ohio County schoolchildren. I've read to children at the Laughlin Memorial Chapel. So when Shirley said, 'Why don't you do a little book?' I had no idea what she had in store."

That "little book," an illustrated story of a child who adopts a dog she names Pepper, has sold more than 1,000 copies. The companion DVD, featuring JoAnn reading to Bethany-area children, was produced at the college.

"It's a step above the level of the old Dick-and-Jane books," JoAnn comments. "It's geared to young children, to wind them down for bedtime. I updated a story I had been working on for some time. I'd like to write others. I wrote a lot of songs and poetry during my singing career."

Bewildered by her success, JoAnn can only say, "I don't understand this, or where it's going. But thank you, Lord."

Today, as she reflects on the mystery of her life's purpose, she marvels at her children, "a source of happiness and pride. They've always been there for me. I couldn't have accomplished what I did without them."

And she is especially mindful of the special day of her son's birth, March 5, the date as well of her father's death. "My dad had meant everything to me," JoAnn says. "One year later exactly after he died, my son was born. I celebrate that day.

"I've always believed there is a reason for everything that happens," she concludes. "It may not be disclosed, but it's important to hold that in your heart." ❁

MORT GAMBLE was born in Cumberland, Maryland, and grew up in Moorefield. He earned a doctorate from West Virginia University in higher education leadership and currently is assistant to the president at Bethany College. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Summer 2011 issue.



The 1960 Philippi High School Bulldogs football team. "Sugar," a miniature bulldog and the team's mascot, is visible in the front row in front of player number 48.



By Ralph  
"Butch" Neal

Philippi High School had just had its greatest football team ever. In the 1959 season, 103 boys came out for football when the team first met in August. That team eventually went 9-1 with a senior-laden roster. The 1960 team would be made up of mostly untested seniors and juniors, with the exception of the starting quarterback and halfback who were returning. Many questions loomed concerning the prospects for this talented but inexperienced squad.

# Football 1960

**E**arly that summer the three Philippi coaches began discussing plans for the football season, with the start of fall practice scheduled to begin on August 15.

Leading the football program was George Byrer, a native of Philippi and a 1932 PHS graduate. After a stint in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), George had a stellar athletic career at Fairmont State College, where he graduated in 1937. Coach Byrer went on to coach high school for a total of 42 years in Sissonville, South Charleston, Philippi, and Philip Barbour.

He and assistant coach Joe Pelaez had hired a young man who had just graduated from Alderson-Broadus College and who aspired to teach and coach. Don Poluszek, a native of Moundsville, had been a stalwart on Coach Rex Pyles' A-B Battlers basketball teams, and Coach Byrer saw his enthusiasm for high school athletics. Don Poluszek went on to spend the next 37 years in West Virginia high school and college sports, the last 12 years at Marshall and West Virginia University.

Philippi in the late 1950's and early 1960's was a thriving community. Local coal and natural gas industries as well as Alderson-Broadus College gave the community a sense of stability as well as an enviable quality of life. In the late summer and early fall of 1960, the town became wrapped up in high school sports as the Philippi Bulldogs made football history.

Many of the PHS players came from hard-working, blue-collar families. As important as football was, work still came first at home. Most players spent the days leading up to the



George Byrer coached high school football in West Virginia for 42 years, most of those in Barbour County. He also taught English. He is seen here in his sophomore English classroom at Philippi High School in 1959.

start of August practice working in the hayfields. Some of the team members dug ditches for a septic tank system.

Philippi High School had no athletic field for football practice or home games. In the 1930's, A-B College offered their baseball field to the local high school to play their home football games, which was much

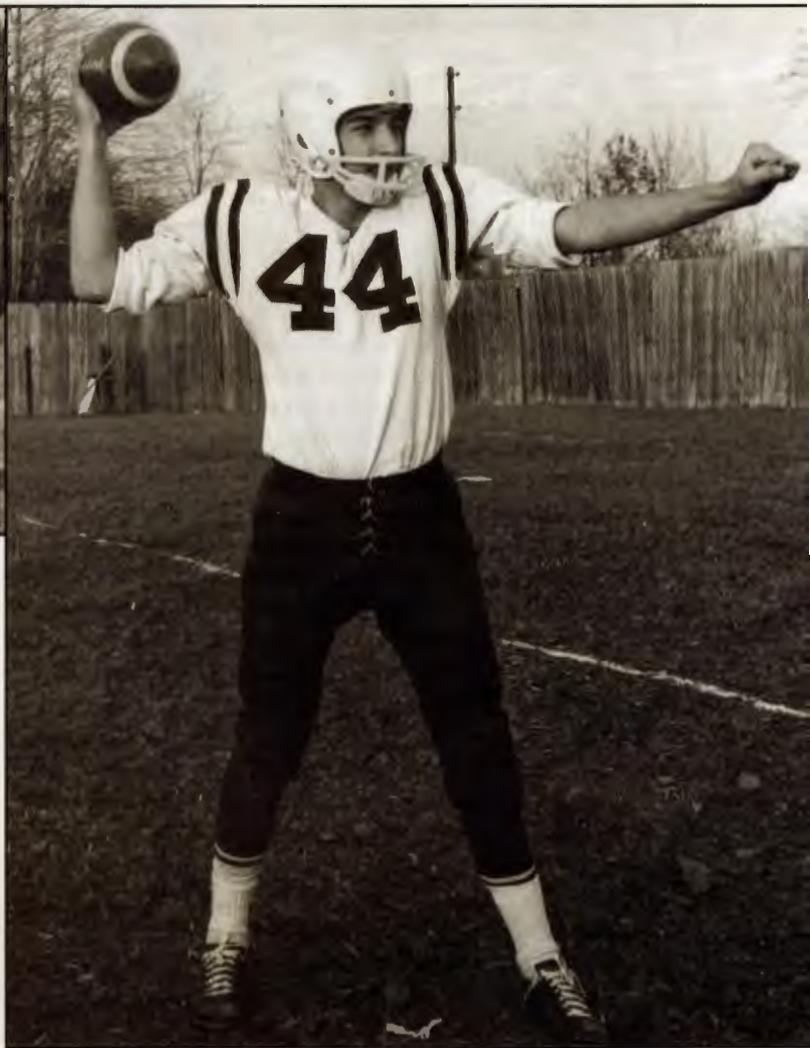
appreciated by the community and the athletes. At times practices were held on the Shaw family cattle farm just outside of Philippi. It was a little unnerving for the players who had to watch out for "cow pies" and groundhog holes.

Some remembered after a grueling afternoon of football practice that members of the team would spring

# Philippi High School's Perfect Season



Philippi High School had no football field of its own, so players used other facilities for practice and home games. These players are shown practicing at nearby Alderson-Broadus College.



Gary Snider, starting quarterback of the undefeated 1960 Philippi High School Bulldogs football team.

from the old football school bus once it arrived back at the school, get a quick shower, gather their homework, and run down Main Street to the Philippi Covered Bridge. It wasn't that the players needed extra conditioning — the quicker you made it to the bridge, the better odds you had of being able to hitch a ride home. With a good portion of the roster being made up of boys from outlying areas, hitchhiking home from practice was a necessity.

"There weren't a lot of cars on the road back then, and hitchhiking home was something a lot of us had to do," 1960 team member Vic Zara says. "Everybody in the community knew we had to, so it wasn't hard to get a ride. Sometimes you didn't get home until pretty late, and if you had homework, you did that and then went straight to bed. A lot of people think football games are won on Fridays, but they are won with how you practice through the week. We

practiced hard, and we were ready to play."

For several seasons, Coach Byrer had employed an unusual, unbalanced wing-T offense that he had seen the Massillon (Ohio) Tigers use to win state titles in Ohio. This innovative offense required teamwork in order for the offensive plays to be successful. Plays focused on brute power, and precision blocking was essential for success and required the players to be in top physical condition.

The Bulldogs opened the season in late August at Kingwood. Team member Charlie Byrer remembers that game being possibly the hottest and most humid football game

the team ever played. It was also during that game that he realized something special could be in the making. Guard Dale Taylor broke free and ran up the middle for a long touchdown run, leftback Ralph Alkire and fullback Ron Zara added touchdown runs, and the Bulldogs were off and running with an 18-6 victory. Everything just seemed to click from there on.

The next five games made up the



most dominant stretch of the season for Philippi. The Bulldogs beat Gassaway 39-0 in week two, came back with a 31-6 win at Weston in game three, and then put up three consecutive shutouts against Buckhannon, Belington, and University. Ralph Alkire scored three times in the win against Weston, including two touchdown receptions from Snider. Ron Zara added a pair of touchdown runs.

Quarterback Gary Snider scored three rushing touchdowns in the 33-0 win against Buckhannon. Ralph Alkire had a 62-yard touchdown run, and Ron Zara added another TD on the ground. Against the rival Hawks of Belington, the Bulldogs put up 539 yards of total offense. Gary Snider had two more rushing touchdowns. Ralph Alkire had another, and Keith Ketchem scored on a 46-yard run.

Keith Ketchem shined again in the 39-0 victory against University. He scored on a 60-yard run, caught a 17-yard pass and a 55-yard pass from Gary Snider, and returned a punt 55 yards for a touchdown. Ralph Alkire found the end zone again on a 10-yard run, and Charlie Byrer threw his first touchdown pass of the season to Tom Cannon. The win against University improved Philippi to 6-0 and set up a battle of unbeaten teams the following week against rival Monongah.

"Monongah was a powerhouse back then. [They were] a lot like us as they had a lot of hard-working families making up the community," Charlie Byrer says. "They had a linebacker that was so big and tough — Mike Preolette — he wore a mask as a face guard. Back then everybody had either one or two bars on the face mask but he wore a mask. He



Philippi High School, circa 1960.

looked like Darth Vader."

The crowd that October evening in Philippi was estimated between 5,000 and 6,000 when the unbeaten Lions traveled to Philippi to face the unbeaten Bulldogs. The crowd would not be disappointed.

Gary Snider had a first-half touchdown run for Philippi, and Monongah got on the board with a TD run from Charles Keith. But Keith Ketchem broke loose for a 50-yard touchdown run on the second play of the fourth quarter, securing the 13-6 victory for the Bulldogs.

The next two weeks saw Philippi pick up victories against Bridgeport 20-6, and Parsons 38-6. During the Bridgeport game, Gary Snider's knee went out and Charlie Byrer and Rookie Baughman ran the offense at quarterback. In the Parsons game, Ron Zara had a pair of touchdown runs, while Keith Ketchem added one and Gary Snider threw a 40-yard touchdown pass to Ralph Alkire.

Now with a 9-0 record Philippi had one more obstacle in its path

and perhaps a little payback on its mind. The one blemish on the 1959 record came at the hands of Notre Dame in a close away game in Harrison County. The 1960 rematch in Philippi saw an estimated 7,000 fans show up. The game was played on a bright, sunny Saturday afternoon. Charles McDaniel, chemistry and science teacher at PHS, filmed all of the games in black and white during the season. He suggested to the coaches that the final game be recorded with 16mm color film since it was a day game.

The game was about as evenly matched as one can get. Notre Dame had 162 yards of offense, while the Bulldogs had 156. The Irish took an early lead as Jim Scott scored on a 10-yard touchdown run. Gary Snider scored from one yard out in the second quarter to tie the game at 6. The Philippi defense dominated the third and fourth quarters, setting up a late eight-yard touchdown pass from Gary Snider to Keith Ketchem that secured the 13-6 win and the





Cheerleaders for the 1960 Bulldogs were, from the left, Paulette Cox, Carolyn Spotloe, Shirley Gouer, and Jennifer Purkey.



Game action during the 1960 season finale, which pitted Philippi against Notre Dame. Here the Bulldog defensemen pursue an Irish ball-carrier en route to a 13-6 Philippi victory, securing an undefeated season for the Bulldogs. Photograph taken from a film by Charles McDaniel.

perfect season.

"I'll never forget that day," Charlie Byrer says. "All those fans and the excitement at the game, and afterwards just driving through town with everybody honking their horns and celebrating. It was an unbelievable feeling and moment."

The state playoff system was different in 1960 than it is today. In fact, there were no actual playoffs. The state championship game was between the No.1 and No. 2 ranked teams. In Class AA that season, Philippi finished third, just a few percentage points behind Mt. Hope. As a result, Mt. Hope and Williamson met for the championship in a game that ended 7-7. Williamson ended the season with a record of 9-1-1, Mt. Hope finished at 9-0-2, and the undefeated Bulldogs of Philippi High School had 10 good reasons to support the argument that they were the best in the state in 1960.

The Bulldogs averaged 26.2 points

per game in their 10 victories but were even more impressive on the other side of the ball where Philippi gave up just 37 points all season. That's an average of 3.7 points allowed per game. Four opponents were shut out, and nobody scored more than seven points in a game against the Bulldogs.

Work ethic, community support, and great coaching were all factors for the 1960 Philippi team, but winning every game on the schedule required a little bit of talent, too. The Bulldogs, it turned out, had plenty.

Ralph Alkire was an all-state honorable mention running back and one of the team's top defensive players. Jimmy Allen was a first-team all-state offensive tackle who was recruited by the University of Wyoming. Jimmy was a bruising presence in the team's running game.

Gary Snider was the top quarterback in the area and earned second-

team all-state honors. Dale Taylor was an all-state honorable mention selection at guard and a key running back at times. Ron Zara was an all-state honorable mention selection as a fullback, and Don Corder earned all-state honorable mention honors as a tackle.

"There wasn't any one player more important than any other player," Ralph Alkire says, looking back. "It was the whole team."

In 1963, Philippi High consolidated with Kasson and Belington high schools to form Philip Barbour High School and became the Colts. In October 2010 members of that 1960 Philippi team as well as cheerleaders, coaches, and fans gathered in Philippi for a special 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion. Cheerleaders Paulette (Cox) Snider, Jennifer (Purkey) Conaway, and Shirley (Gouer) McCauley along with Ralph Alkire and Charlie Byrer planned the 2010 event. Players and wives, along with Coach Don





Players, cheerleaders, coaches, and fans gathered to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Philippi High School undefeated season in October 2010, shown here at the Medallion Restaurant in Philippi.

Poluszek and assistant PHS principal (and later Philip Barbour HS principal) Don Cleavenger attended. Team members came from Georgia, South Carolina, Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia. Letters were received and read from those who could not attend, one from as far away as New Zealand.

DVD's of several of the 1960 games were shown during the dinner program, and tribute was paid to team members and coaches who had passed away, including Dorris Byrer, wife of Coach Byrer. Players remembered Dorris with great affection, acknowledging her as their "surrogate mother" and crediting her for being a major force in the success of the team, feeding them, transporting them, washing their uniforms, and establishing the "Football Mothers," a group that evolved into the Philip Barbour Athletic Boosters.

Members and cheerleaders of that

1960 team spent the next evening at a special dinner in the Medallion Restaurant, reflecting on the undefeated season and all that it meant to them.

"It wasn't just the football team though," 1960 cheerleader Paulette (Cox) Snider says. "Everyone knew and loved Coach Byrer. He was so well-respected and just a big part of the community. Coach Byrer was so passionate about football, his team, and his players, it sometimes caused transportation problems. One time after a win against Weston, he was so excited that he got on the bus to celebrate with his players on the ride home. Once back in Philippi, he realized he actually drove over to Weston, and one of the assistant coaches had to drive him back so he could get his car."

"For Coach Byrer, football season was 365 days," team member Ralph Alkire says. "He was always thinking

about football, his players, and plays to run. We all loved him. It was such an honor to play high school football and play for him. As good as we were, I think part of it was nobody wanted to let Coach down. He taught us so much. We had respect for authority. We did whatever he said because he was the boss, he was our coach." ❁

*The author acknowledges the contributions and assistance of the following: Chris Johnson, Paulette Snider, Jennifer Conway, Charlie Byrer, and Don Funk. The editor wishes to thank Bob Barnett.*

RALPH "BUTCH" NEAL has lived in West Virginia since he was one month old. His family roots in the state go back five generations on each side. He holds a master's degree in business administration from West Virginia University and a doctorate in information systems from Virginia Commonwealth University. Butch lives on a farm between Morgantown and Grafton. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



# ELKHORN

By  
Bill Archer



## A Tale of Two High Schools

**T**here were two Elkhorn high schools in McDowell County — Elkhorn and Elkhorn Elks. Both schools have been closed for several years, but the graduates of both keep coming back to southern West Virginia for reunions.

The all-black Elkhorn Elks holds a biennial reunion on even-numbered years in Charleston. On the odd years, Elkhorn Elks participate in a reunion at the Rock in Algoma in Northfork Hollow that draws hundreds of graduates of black schools from throughout the region.

The primarily white Elkhorn High School Indians, on the other hand, have been coming back to the Bluefield area for annual reunions since 1980. Additionally, the last three years of graduates from Elkhorn High and the first seven years of graduates from

the consolidated Northfork-Elkhorn High School gather annually for a reunion of “Those Fabulous ‘50’s”; the integrated Northfork High School has its own reunion.

While the graduates of the two Elkhorn high schools and other equally proud expatriates from coal mining communities like Jenkinjones, Jaeger, and others return home annually or biennially to absorb the beauty of the mountains, there was nothing particularly idyllic about coal camp living. It was a hard life where tragedy, hardship, and isolation were common experiences.

Tragedy may have been at the heart of James Ellwood Jones’ strong feelings for the health and education of the children of Elkhorn-area coal miners. James was the son of pioneer coal man Jenkin Jones. He held a

mining engineering degree from Columbia University in New York City and invented the Jones Coalloader, a predecessor of the continuous mining machines used today. His most lasting legacy, however, is evidenced by his concern for the education, health, and well-being of the coal mining families that worked at his mines.

When McDowell County opened the two Elkhorn high schools in 1922, James Ellwood Jones was the catalyst. Along with managing the 25 coal mines of the Pocahontas Fuel Company, Jones represented the Elkhorn District on the McDowell County Commission. Along with schools, Jones orchestrated the creation of a free dental clinic for all school-aged children of McDowell County, and he also provided full college schol-

arships for hundreds of McDowell County public school students.

"James Ellwood Jones was real interested in the schools and the community," says Thomas Clark, a 1937 graduate of Elkhorn High School, in a telephone interview from his home in Goshen, Indiana. "There was a picture of him in the gymnasium at Elkhorn High School. He donated all the equipment in the gym, including the swimming pool. There was a cottage next to the school where teachers lived. At the time, that cottage was the only one of its kind in the state. James Ellwood Jones made sure that they had good teachers at Elkhorn."

Thomas, now 94, was born February 23, 1919, in Switchback. His father was a section foreman on the Norfolk & Western railway, and their home was located beside the tracks, just a few hundred yards from where the

high school was built. His father, Walter W. Clark, was one of the few Democrats in McDowell County at the time and was elected as a justice of the peace in 1932. Thomas Clark was partially crippled due to polio in 1923, and instead of working in the coal mines, went to New River State College — now West Virginia University Tech. He taught school briefly in Boone County, but returned to Elkhorn in the early 1940's, where he taught mathematics until the school closed at the end of the 1953 school year.

"It was a real close-knit community at the school," Thomas says. "The black and white kids practiced sports together, but didn't play games against each other. The Elkhorn Elks had some great athletes. There was a semi-pro baseball team, the Switchback Black Cats, that had several Elkhorn Elks kids on the

team and were as good as any ball club around."

When graduates of Elkhorn High School and Elkhorn Elks High School went out into the world, they were amazed that few other high school graduates had been exposed to the kind of cultural, academic, and athletic education that they had experienced. Gail (Davidson) Shaffer played violin in the Elkhorn High School orchestra and string class taught by Elizabeth Jackson, and clarinet in the Elkhorn High School marching band.

Elkhorn closed as a high school in the spring of 1953. Almost as a last hurrah, however, the 58-piece band, under the direction of Joseph S. Lassak, was invited to perform at an event in New York City that April.

"A reporter and photographer with LIFE magazine traveled with us to New York for a story they were

Opposite page, left: Elkhorn High School, circa 1953. Opposite page, right: Elkhorn Elks High School today. Photograph by Bill Archer. Below: Singer Karl Miller entertains at the 2012 Elkhorn High School reunion. Photograph by David McNeil.



doing about the band," Gail says. She still has two of the photos that Allan Grant submitted to LIFE on May 5, 1953. "Something came up and they didn't do the story, but it was a great trip," she recalls. Gail graduated from Elkhorn-Northfork High School in 1957.

Russell Synan, 85, graduated from Elkhorn High School in 1946. He still lives on the farm on top of Peel Chestnut Mountain that is bisected by the Virginia-West Virginia state line. Russell and his wife, Pat, host an annual patriotic event on Independence Day, featuring old-time and bluegrass music, as well as a pumpkin festival in October.

"Pocahontas High School [in Pocahontas, Virginia] would have been a lot closer for me to attend, but students weren't allowed to go there unless we paid," Russell says. "During the Depression, we didn't have



James Ellwood Jones, vice president of the Pocahontas Fuel Company and founder of both Elkhorn and Elkhorn Elks high schools. Photograph courtesy of Eastern Regional Coal Archive, Craft Memorial Library, date unknown.

any money, but no one did. I went to [elementary] school at Leckie, West Virginia, that we called Little Creek, until the third grade. Then they started running the bus up here on the mountain, but we still had to walk quite a ways to catch it."

By the time Russell started seventh grade at Elkhorn High School in 1940, the swimming pool that James Ellwood Jones had built in the basement of the gymnasium complex had been filled in, and the area was converted into a shop for vocational training.

"Elkhorn was one of the most modern schools around," Russell says. "We had football and basketball teams, an orchestra, band, and manual training shops. Mr. [Edward W.] Richardson was our principal. He was strict, but he was good to us."

Russell Synan worked on transmission lines for Appalachian Power for 37 years.

Jimmie L. Robinson who now lives

in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, was a member of the Elkhorn High School class of 1953. "I haven't been back to the school for a few years," he says. "The last time I was inside, I saw that Eddie Richardson's desk was still in the office."

Like many of his classmates, Jimmie's health has had its ups and downs, but he remains devoted to his high school and tries to attend each reunion if he can.

Dr. Jack Howard Barger graduated from Elkhorn High School in 1952. He grew up in Switchback, and is now a retired research entomologist. He holds a Ph.D. from Ohio State University and lives in Delaware, Ohio, where he spent his career working at the Northeastern Forest Experiment Station's Forest Insect & Disease Laboratory. He retired 18 years ago. Since that time, he has applied the same kind of research zeal that he used in his several pub-

lished works to compile data on his high school alma mater. Among the myriad volumes in his collection is a circa 1921 annual from the Northfork School District that shows all of the students of the district schools, both black and white. That was before the new Elkhorn School District was formed, and it provides an unusual snapshot of school segregation in West Virginia in an area where there were equal numbers of black and white students.

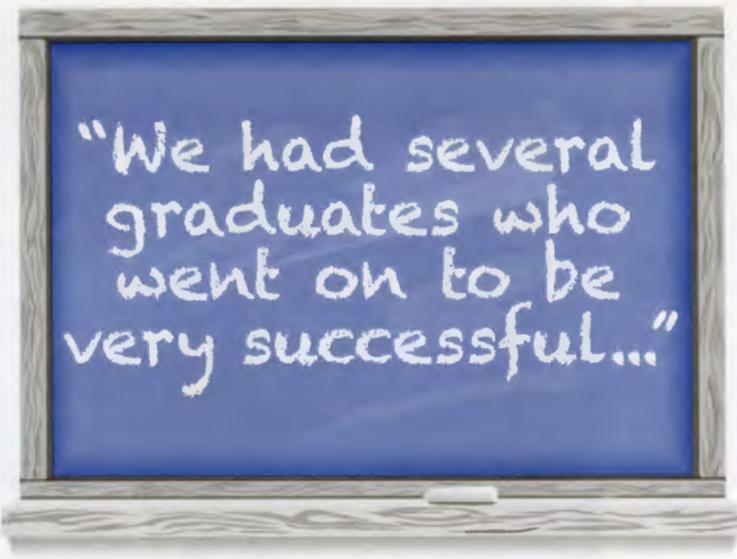
While the coal miners of the Elkhorn District made an impact on the Industrial Revolution, their sons and daughters have effectively changed the world in terms of the arts, entertainment, business, labor, politics, and sports. Guy Otto Farmer, Elkhorn High School class of 1930, earned a Rhodes Scholarship as a student at West Virginia University, where he earned his law degree in 1936. Guy joined the National Labor Relations

Board in 1938 as an attorney and was appointed chair from 1953-55 by President Dwight David Eisenhower. After leaving the NLRB, Guy served as counsel for the Bituminous Coal Operators of America.

Both Elkhorn High School and the Elkhorn Elks produced leaders who made a broad impact. Lieutenant General Robert E. "Bob" Gray was born in Algoma and graduated from the all-black Elkhorn Elks High School in 1959. After high school, he went to Ohio State University and joined the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) to help cover his college expenses. He was commis-

sioned a lieutenant in the U.S. Army upon graduation and was one of only

a few line officers in the U.S. Army to serve in a leadership role during three different tours in the Vietnam



War. Bob died in an automobile accident on November 23, 2011.

Elkhorn Elks High School was

one of four all-black high schools in McDowell County. The other black schools were Kimball High School, Gary District High School, and Excelsior High School. These schools produced many successful graduates. Elizabeth Drewry, for example, became the first black woman elected to any state legislature nationally in 1950, when she was elected to the West Virginia House of Delegates. Raised in Elkhorn, she was educated in the black public schools and returned to teach in McDowell County.

Mary Ray graduated from the all-black Elkhorn Elks High School in the class of 1960. "We had several graduates who went on to be very successful in the business world, the arts, the medical

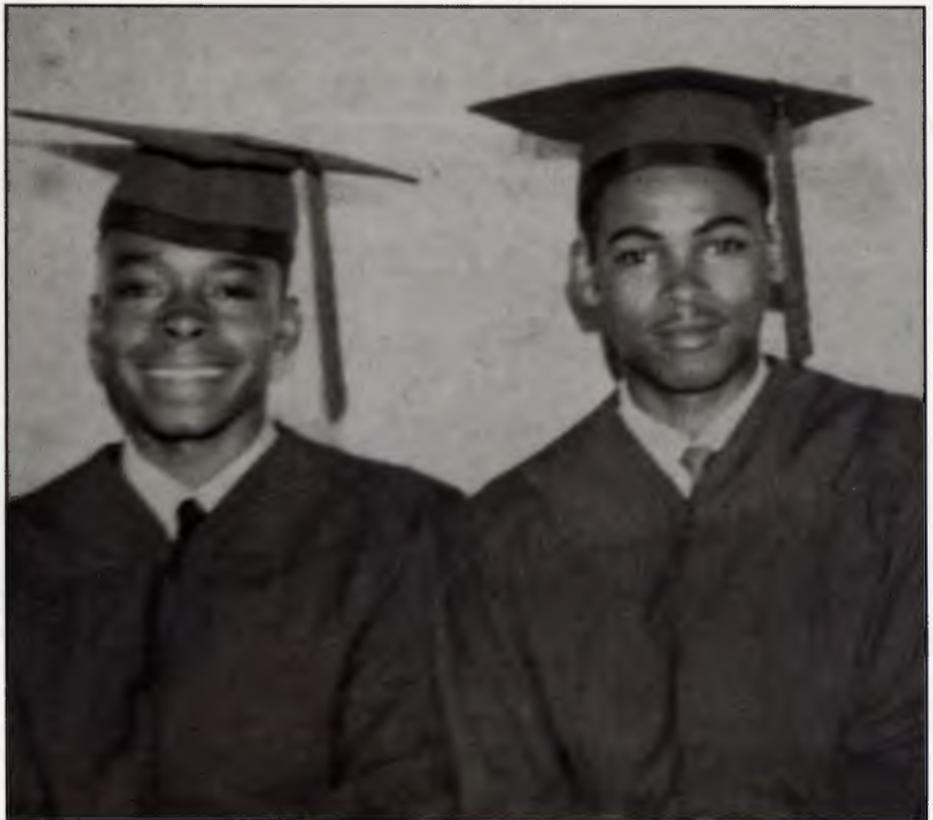
Attendees at the 2012 Elkhorn High School reunion. Photograph by David McNeil.



professions, education, business, and more," she says. Mary and her husband, Curtis Ray, who graduated from Elkhorn Elks High School in 1959, still live in the ElkrIDGE section of Northfork, and keep up with their classmates at the biennial Elkhorn Elks reunions.

Thomas Clark recalls that during the time when he attended Elkhorn High School, the Elkhorn Elks students started classes at 7 a.m., each morning and the Elkhorn High School students started at 9 a.m.

"We 'rode the same buses back then," Thomas recalls. "We had some white bus drivers and some black bus drivers, and nobody thought much about it back then. The only thing I didn't like was that the black kids got out early and could go to work on the evening shifts at the mines. We got out late, but Mr. Richardson would let you out early to go to work



Shirley (Norris) Ofsa, at left, and Mary Alice St. Clair, twirlers for the Elkhorn High School Indian Marching Band. Photographer and date unknown.

Bob Gray, at right, a 1959 Elkhorn Elks graduate, became a lieutenant general and had a distinguished career as a U.S. Army officer.



as long as you behaved yourself."

"As far as I knew, the kids in both schools always got along well together," Mary Ray said. "We all grew up in a time when nobody ever locked their front doors. Didn't need to."

Margaret "Tish" (St. Clair) Beasley, a 1947 graduate of Elkhorn High School, remembers that the black bus driver who picked her and her sister up liked her sister better than her. "If my sister was running late, Charlie Hairston would wait for her. But if I was late, he would pull away from the bus stop even if he saw me running."

Tish is the mother of Virginia Tech and Pittsburgh Steeler defensive lineman Tom Beasley, who earned two Super Bowl rings. She says that growing up in Elkhorn was a great experience.

"I thank God that this is where He put me," she says. Tish Beasley retired as postmaster in Northfork,

and her husband, Bob Beasley, retired as branch president of Ameribank, also in Northfork. "It was a wonderful place to live and to grow up in. We had an orchestra, glee club, a thespian club, girls' basketball, a Latin club, and more.

"What we have makes up for what we don't have," Tish says. "The people you grew up with encouraged you to be successful. We had fantastic schools where you could learn Latin, Spanish, or French. We could play outside after dark, and no one locked their doors."

When Shirley (Norris) Ofsa graduated from Elkhorn High School in 1950, McDowell County was West Virginia's third most populated county with 98,887 people. As hard as it might be for some to believe, McDowell County held that third-place population ranking from the time Elkhorn High School opened in 1922 until it graduated its last

class in 1953. Elkhorn High School held an enrollment of 335 students in grades 7 to 12 in its final year.

The school boasted one of the state's most beloved marching bands — a band that marched proudly in Governor William C. Marland's inaugural parade — an exceptionally talented and dedicated faculty, great athletic teams, and a sense of community that endures as one of the school's most steadfast legacies.

Shirley Ofsa has had the task of organizing the reunions for the past several years; she has served three terms as president of the Elkhorn High School Alumni Association. She was a majorette with the Indian Marching Band, and has been so dedicated to preserving the traditions and symbols of the school that she saved the old headdress that the head majorette wore when she led the band to performances throughout

the region and beyond.

Shirley maintains reunion records and continues to produce the *Indian Smoke Signal*, a publication that provides news to the Elkhorn High School alumni.

Olivia (Farley) Anderson, widow of renowned columnist Jack Anderson, served as secretary for the reunion committee in 1980, the year her late husband was a reunion guest.

Time continues to reduce the ranks of the graduates, but planning the event, publishing the biannual *Indian Smoke Signal*, and securing the site for the event are still daunting tasks. About 300 people attended the reunion on June 21, 1980. There weren't that many at the reunion on August 3, 2012. "We had 50 for Friday night, and 75 for Saturday," Shirley says. The 2013 reunion will be the 33<sup>rd</sup>.

"Our scholarship fund has provided over \$100,000 in scholarships to de-

scendants of Elkhorn High School graduates," Shirley notes. "We used to hold our reunions at the National Guard Armory in Brushfork. But for most of the years, we had great relations with [a hotel] in Bluefield. We had a luau there one year and even roasted a pig. People came from as far away as California for these reunions," Shirley says, then pauses. "This will be the last one," she adds.

While the series of regular reunions may end in 2013, the legacy of the Elkhorn experience will live on in the dreams of yet unborn generations of descendants of Elkhorn who know that they, too, can make a difference. 🍁

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Jimmie Robinson ('53) and Louise Robinson McNeil ('44) attending the 1990 Elkhorn High School Reunion.



# Everbreeze



Text and photographs by  
Carl E. Feather

**T**he snow began falling Thanksgiving Day 1950. By the following Monday three feet of it covered the streets of Wheeling, and drifts several times deeper clogged the highways. The city, cut off from the farms, dairies, and bakeries of the region, was running short on sustenance.

"The dairies were desperate for milk," recalls Harlan "Ted" Carter III, who had recently graduated from West Virginia University and was helping his parents on their Everbreeze Dairy Farm when the storm roared across Ohio and West Virginia. [See "More Bad Weather:

The Big Snow of 1950," by Joy Gilchrist; Spring 1997.]

Some two miles from the National Road, atop a high ridge overlooking the city, the Carter family farm had plenty of milk. The challenge was getting it down the winding, drifted Boggs Hill Road. When it became evident that no plow, let alone a milk truck, could negotiate the steep hill, Ted and his father hitched up the farm's draft horses, Buck and Pearl, to a large wooden sled. They loaded the sled with as many five-gallon cans of milk as would fit, then braved the near-blizzard conditions to deliver their milk to the United

Ted and Jeanne Carter in front of their home at Everbreeze, the palatial estate that has been in Ted's family for five generations. The pair are holding a framed facsimile of the original deed.

Dairy processing plant's truck, which was waiting for their arrival.

A photograph of that memorable delivery hangs in the first-floor den of the Greek revival-style home of Ted Carter and his wife, Jeanne Sheets Carter, the fifth generation of Carters to live at Everbreeze, one of the oldest working farms in Ohio County.

Everbreeze is aptly named. There is always a breeze and more often a wind that blows across this ridge near West Liberty. The two-story



## Life at an Ohio County Landmark

Historical photograph showing Ted Carter and his father, Harlan, delivering a load of fresh milk on Edgington Lane in Wheeling during the Thanksgiving blizzard of 1950. Photographer unknown.

brick home, erected between 1848 and 1852, houses both the family and the artifacts of Carter history in Wheeling — from a facsimile of the original deed signed by Patrick Henry to the oil painting of Jeanne when she was crowned Mrs. West Virginia (1959).

Ted inherited Everbreeze and 64 acres of the original 400 after the death of his mother, Lois Boyd Carter, in 1997. His sisters, Mary Carter Topp and Ruth Carter Lewis, own adjacent

Everbreeze acreage and lease it for pasture and crop production.

As the only son, Ted says it was an unspoken assumption that he would continue the tradition of a Carter descendant living at and farming Everbreeze, an honor and responsibility Ted and Jeanne take very seriously. In the nearly two decades they have lived at Everbreeze, they have protected the historical integrity of the house and farm buildings wherever possible. But they have also made concessions, including a modern kitchen befitting a former television cooking-show hostess, home economics teacher, and 4-H leader.

“He didn’t have a whole lot of choice about the kitchen,” Jeanne says of her domain, which features a gas range where the wood stove once stood, Corian countertops, and solid-cherry cabinets that cleverly mask the television and refrigerator.

Nevertheless, Ted takes pride in the fact that the original horsehair plaster is retained in all of the rooms except two bedrooms, where remodeling necessitated re-plastering the walls.

“You have to live in it,” Jeanne says. “It’s not a museum.”

That meant adding closets to the bedrooms, an amenity that would

have been absent 150 years ago — tax assessors treated deep closets as extra rooms and taxed them accordingly.' Clothes were hung on square nails pounded onto a board, one of which Jeanne retains on the wall of her sewing room as a reminder of the way Richard and Margaret Faris Carter would have lived.

Richard was the son of Arthur and Bethann Beall Carter, who migrated from Maryland to western Virginia and in 1796 purchased 400 acres on what would become Boggs Hill Road. The Carters were farmers, mostly sheep farming in those days, when the dozens of steamboats that called upon the port of Wheeling linked the farm to markets far beyond the Ohio Valley.

The oldest farm building on the property harks back to this era. Built circa 1819, the old wool house fea-



This summer kitchen at Everbreeze dates back to the 1840's. It has also served as employee quarters and mudroom.

tures a tongue-and-groove interior that was designed to keep mice from infiltrating the wool stored inside.

By the late 1840's, the Carter family had acquired sufficient wealth to build a home befitting their status in life. The house that Richard had built for his bride took four years to construct. The work included a two-story summer kitchen and farm-hand quarters. Primarily a storage building

these days, the old summer kitchen comes in handy when Ted and friends come back from a day of hunting and need a place to warm up and remove their muddy boots and clothing.

The construction of this house is attributed to D.W. Gibson, a master carpenter from Wheeling. While the workmanship has certainly stood the test of time, and the constant winds that blow across this ridge, Jeanne points out that the width of the door frame molding varies from top to bottom.

"You don't pick geometric wallpapers for the rooms, believe me," she says.

The two parlor ceilings on the first floor feature ceiling rosettes with differing patterns and motifs. Jeanne has found a match for one of them in a Natchez, Mississippi, home, but has yet to encounter documentation of an identical rosette.

The ceilings in the first-floor rooms are 12 feet high, but a doorframe under the spiral staircase requires most men to duck as they pass through. Jeanne suspects that doorway is the result of a midstream modification of the house that resulted in a second story with lower ceilings than originally planned. The other ramification of this impromptu design change is



Jeanne Carter stands in the doorway of one of the second-story bedrooms at Everbreeze.



Ted Carter stands with a quince tree that has grown at Everbreeze for decades.

that the staircase is not a full turn of the spiral.

Regardless, the staircase is a stunning feature created without the use of any supporting posts. The steps are cantilevered into the walls, allowing the staircase to float above the foyer. Jeanne says at least three brides have descended this staircase on their wedding days: Ted's Aunt Betty Boyd (his mother's sister), and his sisters Ruth and Margaret. And the parlor has hosted at least two wakes for members of the Carter family: Ted's mother and his grandfather.

By the time Ted was old enough to work the farm, the transition had been made from sheep to dairy cattle. Ted says the change was made in the late 1920's.

"The sheep were competing for the grass in the pastures," Ted explains. "Cattle need taller grass so they can wrap their tongues around it, but the sheep were eating right down to the ground."

The farm had Guerneys and Holsteins when Ted was a lad, but gradually moved to Holsteins only.

They typically milked about two dozen head.

Vegetables, sold directly to consumers in Wheeling, also were grown at Everbreeze. Ted says the orders for potatoes would start to come in as early as July, and once the harvest was in, Ted and his father loaded the Ford truck and headed into Wheeling on a Monday morning. That day was selected because the housewives would be hanging their laundry out, and Ted and his father could peddle the potatoes to the ladies as they worked in their backyards.

"You'd be surprised how many bushels of potatoes you could sell in an hour or two," says Ted, who had the job of carrying the spuds to the customers' basements. "Most of the houses had bins that you'd pour the potatoes directly into."

Ted's father always raised Irish cobbler potatoes. The harvesting was done by hand, and the wool house was used for storage. Ted says they would block out all the light in the house while the potatoes dried for a week or so before they started selling

them.

Potatoes sold for around \$2.50 a bushel when Ted was growing up. Ultimately, that income helped pay for his college education at West Virginia University. Ted says there was never any question about whether or not he would go to college. His mother, a college graduate, made sure he went to WVU. She drove him to Morgantown and walked with him to the administration building in the late summer of 1946.

Ted's major was dairy science. As heir to Everbreeze, "That was a given," Ted says. He excelled in the university studies and earned a position on the university's dairy judging team.

Ted and Jeanne met at WVU. The daughter of Clarence A. and Ella Waddell Sheets of Green Bank, Jeanne grew up around farming and learned consumer science skills from her mother, Future Homemakers, and 4-H. She spent a great deal of her childhood and adolescent summers at West Virginia's State 4-H Camp, Jackson's Mill. [See "Head, Heart,



Ted and Jeanne Carter met at WVU in the late 1940's and recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary.

Hands and Health: The West Virginia 4-H Movement," by Michael M. Meador; Summer 1984.] Jeanne thrived on 4-H and by the time she was a college sophomore, was one of two women from West Virginia to serve as delegates to the 1949 National 4-H Conference in Washington, D.C.

Jeanne also had 12 years of piano lessons and aspired to a career in music. But as she faced the moment of truth, declaring a major at WVU, she selected vocational home economics.

Her skills in food preparation are what first attracted Ted to Jeanne, who had an assignment in a cooking lab on the first floor in Oglebay Hall below a lecture hall for the agriculture students whose class dismissal coincided with the completion of the cooking assignments. The hungry male students made a beeline for the lab after their class.

"He told me that one of the reasons he asked me for a first date was because my food looked better than anyone else's," Jeanne says. Recalling that first date, she says Ted was so

quiet "I decided to go out with him again just to see if he could talk."

Jeanne says if there was one thing Ted talked about on those early dates, it was Everbreeze. Eventually it came time for him to take Jeanne home to meet the family and see the farm. Jeanne recalls thinking the farm was beautiful. She also recalls being interrogated by Ted's Aunt Emily, who eventually put her stamp of approval on Ted's choice.

While there, Ted challenged Jeanne to demonstrate her baking skills by making a cherry pie. "His mother had canned a lot of pie cherries, and I could bake a very excellent cherry pie," Jeanne says. "But the quart of cherries I selected had their seeds in them. The pie tasted good, but there was a lot of spitting and chewing going on."

Ted, who was in the Reserve Officer Training Program at WVU, received his degree in 1950 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force Reserve. Jeanne had two more years at the university, and Ted returned to Everbreeze,

where he put his education to work making the farm more efficient and profitable. Ted says he introduced artificial insemination, production record keeping for each cow, and contour plowing techniques.

"At the time, it was a little bit difficult [to make the changes], but Dad went along with the ideas," Ted says. "We made some pretty drastic changes in some cases."

Drastic change came to Ted's life in 1952, when he was called to active duty in the Korean War. That same spring, Jeanne graduated from WVU, a stipulation her parents had placed upon her marrying. They were married on a weekend in May, went on their honeymoon, and, the following weekend, Jeanne received her diploma (*magna cum laude*). They then moved to Dayton, Ohio, where Ted began his tour of duty. He eventually went to Korea, during which time Jeanne returned to West Virginia and worked as a Mason County home economics agent for the WVU Extension Service.

When Ted returned home from



Korea, the couple settled down to farm life on Everbreeze. They lived in half the house, and Ted's parents in the other half. Jeanne found work hosting a 30-minute live cooking program, *Heart of the Home*, on Wheeling television, even as they were starting their family.

"I was probably the first pregnant cook on TV," Jeanne says, recalling those days.

The couple lived at the farm from 1954 to the early 1960's, when family health issues and a decision to further their education necessitated moving off the farm. Ted was hired as a biology and general science teacher at Warwood High School and discovered a penchant for education that was even greater than his love of farming. He obtained his teacher certification from WVU and earned a master's in education administration and certification in counseling and guidance. Jeanne earned a master's plus 30 hours in counseling and guidance.

Their years in education were spent away from the farm, which changed direction in the late 1960's, when

failing health forced Ted's father to liquidate the dairy herd. The land was leased to other farmers until Ted and Jeanne moved back to the farm after the death of Ted's parents.

Ted discovered that there was a market for small, rectangular bales of hay that women who have horses could easily handle. The niche crop fit well with his schedule and the land. In a good year, Everbreeze will yield two cuttings of the hay.

While growing hay on Everbreeze perpetuates the farm's status as a working enterprise, Ted says the economic realities of agriculture are such today that it would be impossible to do what four generations of Carters did before him — take their living from the land.

Ted and Jeanne, through their many professional and community contributions, have greatly expanded the volume of family artifacts in Everbreeze. The top of Jeanne's piano is a showcase for the many awards and recognitions the couple have received.

The couple have two children: Richard and his wife Kim Coleman

Carter of Wheeling; and James and Jane Carter Bengier of North Easton, Massachusetts. Their grandchildren are Chad R. and his wife Kim Murphy Carter of Wheeling; Steven P. Carter of Wheeling; and Chelsea Bengier of North Easton; and two great-grandchildren, Joseph and Alexander Carter of Wheeling.

As for who will be the next generation to live at Everbreeze, Jeanne and Ted make no demands upon their offspring, although Ted takes great delight in having Joseph and Alexander visit. He uses those visits as a time to teach them about the source of their food as well as the distinction they have of being the eighth generation of Carters to lay down their heads at night at Everbreeze.

"You can't control [ownership] from the grave," Jeanne says. "You can only leave it in good condition for the next generation." 🍁

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# The Buckwheat



Above: Hazelton Milling Company in Hazelton, Preston County. A mill has stood on this location for more than 200 years; this mill dates to 1914.  
Right: John G. Evans, a third-generation miller, talks with a visitor at his family-owned buckwheat mill, located about 27 miles from Morgantown.

## Preston County's Hazelton Mill

# Stops Here

Text and photographs  
by Carl E. Feather

**F**or a few brief moments on a perfect October day in 2012, it was as if John G. Evans were once again a lad looking out the window of his grandfather's Preston County gristmill.

Sitting at the desk of Hazelton Milling Company in Hazelton, John could see customers lined up to purchase buckwheat flour, hulls, and bran. The recent spurt of business reminds him of those halcyon October days of long ago, when his grandfather was the miller and his father the apprentice to a thriving business that has all but disappeared from West Virginia.

"There used to be one of these on every stream," John says, naming Muddy Creek, Clifton, and Bruceton mills as examples of communities built around the local gristmill. "Back then, the farmer didn't travel very far with his horse to go to the mill. The farmers used to bring their grain here in wagons. I'd see them lined up and down the road, waiting their turn. There would 10, 12, 15 of them waiting to get in."

After more than seven decades of living and working around the family mill, John knows when the cacophony of slapping, whirling, grinding, and chugging indicates a

healthy state of things just beyond the door of his office. The sounds of the machinery, belts, stones, blowers, and gears laboring against the buckwheat are as familiar to his ears as the voice of his wife, who according to John, makes his buckwheat cakes just the way he likes them: thin and brown.

Do not err by calling those thin, light, earthy flavored creations "pancakes."

"Pancakes — that a bad word," John says, his reprimand tempered with a smile.

While its name suggests that it is a grain akin to wheat or rye, the



botanical fact of the matter is that buckwheat is a fruit whose family members include sorrel and rhubarb. Technically, buckwheat is therefore a cereal impostor. Encased in a hard hull, the buckwheat germ, or groat, is triangular shaped, like a beechnut, which is the source of buckwheat's original name, "beech wheat."

Although buckwheat is rich in amino acids and other essential nutrients, its popularity is much greater in China and Russia than in the United States. That is changing, however, thanks to the gluten-free nature of the product, which fits well into the diet of those with celiac disease or those who follow a variety of current gluten-free dietary regimens.

Buckwheat was first planted on Preston County's hillsides and valleys in the summer of 1859, the year an early June frost wiped out the traditional grain crops. Preston County farmers responded by planting the hardy buckwheat, which can be planted as late as July for an October harvest.

John says buckwheat plantings are relatively rare in Preston County these days. In 2012 only 200 acres or so were grown by farmers in the mill's neighborhood, which includes Western Maryland. Nevertheless, servings of buckwheat cakes are as plentiful as curvy roads in this region. On select Saturday mornings year-round, the thin, crisp staples are mated with butter, syrup, and sausage patties at fire halls, churches, and farmhouses. Buckwheat breakfasts are a popular fundraiser here, usually sponsored by civic groups such as volunteer fire departments.

And since 1938, Kingwood has hosted the annual Preston County Buckwheat Festival that elevates the fruit to staff-of-life status. [See "Preston County Buckwheat Festival," by Peggy Ross; Fall 1997.] The buckwheat that goes into the thousands of cakes that are served at the festival is ground at the Hazelton mill. John says the festival alone will order about three tons of buckwheat flour from the mill in a typical year. Most folks

who slather butter and syrup on the thin cakes don't know that the flour is processed at Hazelton, in what is the state's last commercial mill dedicated exclusively to the task.

"I don't know of any mill in West Virginia that is still doing this, although there are some mills up in New York State that still do it," he says.

*[While the Hazelton mill is thought to be the only remaining mill in the state devoted exclusively to buckwheat, at least two other West Virginia gristmills continue to grind buckwheat along with other meal or grain: K-Mac Mills in Mount Lookout, Nicholas County; and Reed's Mill in Second Creek, Greenbrier County. —ed.]*

Packaged under the Star Mills label, as it has been for more than 100 years, the flour and self-rising buckwheat cake mix produced by this mill are sold and shipped throughout the United States, thanks to the mill's Internet presence,

Buckwheat was once a common field crop in Preston County, requiring a large crew and heavy equipment at harvest time, as seen here. In 2012, only about 200 acres of buckwheat were grown locally. Photograph courtesy of Jan's Studio, date unknown.

flour.com. Although the product is sold year-round, or until supplies are exhausted, the mill's operation season is limited to September through December, when the buckwheat harvest is taken from fields across the eastern and midwestern United States.

"It's a seasonal thing. Beginning with September, the first job is to supply the Buckwheat Festival," says Tonia Hall, a mill employee.

The festival and Evans family ownership of the mill roughly parallel each other. John's grandfather, John D., was a full-time miller who ran Clifton Mills in Clifton, Preston County, prior to purchasing the Hazelton mill in the 1930's. John's father, Dayton Evans, took over the mill from his father and also worked in the coal mines to support his family of eight children. John was just nine years old when his father took over the mill in 1945.

"It had been shut down for a few years," John says. "He bought it and started it back up. I suppose it had

been shut down because of the [war] economy."

John took over the mill from his father in 1963. His daughter, Victoria Evans Lewis, has since purchased it, but John remains the hands-on overseer and lives just a few houses down the street from the mill. His son, Doug, is the miller and maintenance man responsible for keeping the machinery running at peak efficiency. Most of the major pieces of equipment are more than 100 years old; it seems as if the equipment that gives them the most trouble are the modern items, such as the hand-held sewing machines used to close the bags of hulls, bran, and flour with a white string.

The relative simplicity of the vintage equipment allows John and Doug to make repairs with basic materials and a little ingenuity. One of the canvas conveyor belts shows evidence of multiple repairs and splices as it makes the endless journey between the first floor and attic.

"If you were that old, you would

have some of them, too," John says, commenting on the belt's patchwork repairs. The mill itself dates to 1913, but John says there were predecessors at this very location.

"There has been a mill at this location since the 1700's," John says.

The siting was due to the presence of water power. Mill Creek, a relatively feeble stream that wanders about moss-covered rocks in a narrow passage behind the mill, once delivered sufficient flow to power the machinery of the current mill's stewards.

"The mill had an 18-foot overshot wheel," John says. "The mill ran by water power. They always built the mill along the creek where they had water power."

John never saw the mill operate on water power, but he recalls playing on the wheel, which was removed in the early 1950's.

"We weren't allowed [to play on it], but we did," he says. "Me and my only brother [Harry Wayne], we'd get in that wheel [like a hamster in



Volunteers flip buckwheat cakes at the Preston County Buckwheat Festival at Kingwood in 1968. Photograph courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

a wheel], and we'd get it going."

When John was born in 1936, the mill was already on its third power source. John says that Mill Creek's flow became unreliable after the big timber was cut out and the mountains could no longer gradually surrender their aquatic resources to the streams. In 1917, according to the date on the concrete chimney that still stands across the street from the mill, a boiler house was built and its product, steam, was piped under the road to the mill to drive the mill's machinery.

John says steam was a "good bit before my time," but he does have a good recollection the mill's third source of power.

"They had an old car engine in there," he says. "It was a straight-eight Studebaker engine."

After two or three years of running the mill on the Studebaker engine, his father invested in a diesel engine. John upgraded the diesel engine to a 100-horsepower model in 1963.

The engine powers the drive shafts that in turn power the cutters, burr stones, and conveyor belts. The sifters and cleaners are operated by electric motors.

"The mill [power source] used to run those too, but I decided to convert them to electric," John says.

John says there was a time when the mill would grind just about any kind of grain on a "toll" basis: the mill would keep a percentage of the grain as payment from each customer.

"If they brought in 50 pounds of grain, we might keep 10 to 15 pounds, and then we'd sell the flour," John says.

The mill became exclusively dedicated to buckwheat in 1964. At this same time, the number of farmers growing grains for processing in flour was decreasing. Over the next four decades, many of the smaller mills around the state were closed forever.

As to why Hazelton survived as

a one-trick pony, John looks to his wife.

"She says I don't have blood in my veins, I have buckwheat flour in them. I just enjoy it," he says.

Despite having a festival dedicated to the fruit, many Preston County farmers have not shared John Evans' passion for it. This has necessitated importing buckwheat from out of state in order to meet the demand for the Star Mills brand. While milled in Preston County, the buckwheat itself may have been grown in a field down the road or trucked in from New Jersey. John says there was a two-year period where he had to go as far as Kansas to find a supply. He finds no regional difference in the quality or taste.

"Buckwheat is buckwheat, I don't care where it is grown," John says. "There is no difference in quality."

The milling process is another matter. A nearly lost art, milling is to grain what pressing is to wine. Done properly, the full nutritional



Buckwheat flour from the Hazelton mill is bagged and sold under the Star Mills name, as seen here.



Doug Evans, miller at the Hazelton operation, keeps an eye on the machinery at his family's 100-year-old buckwheat mill in Preston County.

value and flavor profiles of the fruit are recovered for further exploitation in the finished product.

John keeps his grandfather's milling manual that provides a written reference to the occupation locked up in his safe. But in practice, experience and lessons passed down through the generations are what fuels their craft.

The process begins with delivery of the grain, which is stored in metal silos behind the mill. The mill can purchase grain that has already been cleaned and dried to the optimum moisture content, but more often than not, those processing steps are done at the mill.

The grain comes directly from the field to the mill by truck. The first step is to clean the grain, an operation performed by machinery on the third floor of the mill. Using a combination of air blowing across the grain and screens, the cleaner removes chaff, stones, and pebbles.

The grain is tested for moisture

content prior to purchasing. If the content is too high, John won't purchase the grain. Prior to grinding, it must be brought into the optimum range, 11 to 12 percent, for grinding. Propane is used to fire the dryer — moisture content determines how long the grain is subjected to the heat, but John says it typically requires about 1½ hours to dry 300 bushels.

The dryer enables the mill to operate efficiently and independent of other processing facilities. John added the capability in the late 1960's. Prior to that, the grain had to be trucked to a drying facility in Somerset, Pennsylvania. Long before these commercial drying operations were available, the farmer would store his buckwheat crop in the open end of the barn; a year later, it would be ready for thrashing and milling.

"In the old days, they'd cut a bunch of it and shock it, then haul it to the barn, stack it, dry it, and thrash it," he says.

The first step in milling the dried

grain is to run it through steel rollers that crack the hard hulls and release the buckwheat groats. The rollers are on the first floor; a system of wooden cups attached to a canvas conveyor belt delivers the cracked buckwheat to sifting machinery on the third floor. The hulls are separated, and the buckwheat is returned to the first floor of the mill, where it is fed into a pair of horizontal millstones, 60 inches in diameter, housed in a wooden box called the hub.

The Hazelton stones were imported from France in the mid-1850's. "They were the Cadillac of burr stones," Doug says. John says they are not specific to buckwheat milling; the same stones were in use when corn and wheat also were milled at Hazelton.

The bottom stone, or bed, does not rotate. The top stone, the runner, spins a fraction of an inch above the bed. Buckwheat is fed into the center of these stones; furrows in their faces provide a conduit for the groats to



The top stone, or runner, spins inside the wooden hub, where the buckwheat flour is produced.

move between the stones from the inside out. The edges of the furrows act as scissors, reducing the hard fruits to flour and bran.

There are both science and art at work when earth's fruit encounters earth's bones. Every few minutes, John or Doug pulls a handful of the fresh flour from the hub and rubs it between his fingers.

"We're looking for the quality of the flour, how fine it is," John says.

John feels that the stones impart a subtle but unique quality to the mill's flour.

"There is something about that stone that makes the flour so much better," John says.

The stones eventually develop a glaze on them and periodically require "facing." A wood derrick above the hub is used to carefully lift the stone from the hub so the miller can gain access to the glazed furrows.

Facing is done with a hammer

and a variety of metal, chisel-like tools developed specifically for the purpose. John, who learned the skill from his grandfather and taught Doug, uses both antique and modern tools. It is a hazardous job because of the specks of stone or metal that can fly off and strike any unprotected objects or surfaces.

"You have to wear goggles and gloves," John says. "It takes a good while to do the job. You do that in the summer."

John says the mill's stones are original and, thanks to diligent, skillful facing, they continue to serve him well. Nevertheless, the mill owns replacement stones, also of mid-1850's vintage. "At one time, the mill used three stones, so I have a couple of extra sets," John says.

The flour and bran spun off by the stone travel upstairs to another sifter, where the components are separated. The bran is pulled off for bagging;

the flour goes to holding bins.

Both hulls and bran have economic value. The hulls are used for animal bedding and upholstery filler—those over the age of 40 might recall the buckwheat pillow craze of the 1980's. The bran, with a protein content of 29 percent, is purchased by regional farmers as a livestock feed additive. Doug says some of their flour customers also purchase bran as a fiber supplement that restores some of the nutrition lost in the milling process.

A room separate from the mill houses the bagging operations. The bagging room is also where the mill's self-rising mix is formulated and bagged. The formula has been passed unchanged through four generations of mill ownership. The mix is a handy way for buckwheat cake lovers to make the treat without going through the work and wait of creating a "sour" batter.



Tonia Hall fills a bag with hulls that were removed from the buckwheat during the first stage of milling. The hulls are useful as animal bedding or upholstery filling.

The flour, bagged in quantities of two, five, and 10 pounds, also has a classic buckwheat cake recipe on the bag.

"They've used that recipe for generations," John says.

The bagging room employs several area women who work as a team to fill a bag, sew a line of thread across the top, and pack them in boxes for shipping. In 2012, the team consisted of Brandy Loughry, Alicia Murphy, Shannon Baker, and Pam Rosenberger.

As with the Evans family members, most of the employees have a taste for buckwheat. Alicia says her favorite buckwheat dish is waffles made with the self-rising mix. She makes them with slightly less water than is used for the buckwheat cakes recipe. She likes to top off the waffle with an over-easy egg and let the yolk explore the depressions.

"I'm getting hungry for buckwheat

cakes now," she tells John as they take a break in the mill office. "John, why don't you go up to the house and make some buckwheat cakes for us?"

John reminds them that their break time just about over, and there won't be buckwheat cakes for lunch, at least not today. Besides, the walk-in traffic is far too brisk on this perfect autumn day to indulge in satisfying the miller's appetite for his product.

A Hudson resident, Everett Kidwell, stops by the office to place his order, a 50-pound case of the flour.

"I'm going to eat it," Everett said. "First thing I'm going to do is take it home and put it in a freezer. I eat a good bit of [buckwheat cakes]. I bought a special freezer to put the buckwheat in."

John collects the money and thanks Everett for his patronage, then returns to monitoring the music of milling. There is particular comfort in the

earthy song of the runner whirling above the bed; the round stones seem so fitting to the chore, so emblematic of the overarching cycle of planting, growing, and milling. John Evans, the miller with buckwheat in his blood, is as much a part of that circuitous journey as the falling leaves outside his window, the drive shafts and stone revolving in his mill. There is hope in all that revolving, and hope is always a good business in which to be, no matter how many revolutions one's life has completed.

"My daughter says I have to stick around for at least another 25 years," John says with a grin. 🍁

*Hazelton Milling is located 27 miles east of Morgantown on State Line Road, off the Hazelton exit of I-68 in Preston County. The mill is open for sales and tours during the fall milling season. Call (304)379-7755 to make sure the mill will be open.*



John Evans and his son Doug take a break from the arduous job of milling on a busy day in October 2012. The mill is in the fourth generation of Evans family ownership.

# West Virginia Back Roads



Text and photographs  
by Carl E. Feather

## Eating Green with a View in Morgan County

**T**he panoramic view of the Potomac River valley demands a response from motorists as the stunning vista breaks out of the forest a short distance west of Berkeley Springs on State Route 9.

A pull-off on the river side of the road provides parking for those who want to stop, snap a few pictures, and read the interpretive sign. On the left is the Potomac River, flanked by the C&O Canal and CSX rail tracks. Straight ahead is a Maryland mountain occupied by a farm, and beyond that, the mountains of Pennsylvania. Farther west and visible along the river is the community of Great Cacapon and West Virginia's Eastern Panhandle mountains rising above it.

One would assume that this view is owned by the state. Not so, discovered Patti Miller and Leslie Hotaling, who in 2005 purchased the 40 acres that plunge 1,000 feet from this overlook to the railroad tracks. As part of the deal, they got Panorama at the Peak, the restaurant on the opposite side of the highway.

An Alexandria, Virginia, realtor at the time, Patti had no restaurant management experience and no interest in owning an eatery when she and Leslie, a former department of public works director, were approached about an "investment opportunity" in Berkeley Springs. A short time prior, Patti and Leslie had purchased a 100-year-old home in the area after falling in love with Morgan County.

"We were totally enchanted," Patti

says during a recent afternoon lull at the restaurant. "I guess we were smitten by Berkeley Springs, the mountains, the clean air, dark skies, clean water, and hiking trails."

And the view from Panorama Point. "We were stunned to find out the overlook was privately owned and felt it should be protected," she says. "We weren't looking for a restaurant, but the environmentalists in our hearts convinced us to do this."

Patti says the view is the most impressive overlook in the Eastern Panhandle and has become a marketing icon.

"A lot of people want their ashes spread here," Patti says. "If that doesn't convince you of the importance of this, what will?"

Patti and Leslie assembled a group

of like-minded investors and purchased the property in June 2005. Two months later, they re-opened the restaurant.

Originally built in 1929 by the Niner brothers, Paul and Ed, it operated as a steakhouse for 25 years prior to the partners' purchase.

Constructed from native timber and stone, the original structure was expanded at a later date in a style incongruous with the older section. And there had been "updates" over the decades that buried the craftsmanship and rustic, log interior under layers of often gaudy embellishments.

"This room was like an excavation. There was 75 years' worth of cigarette smoke on the wood. We took all this stuff off the original building, the lattice they'd put up, and the old



Patti Miller, general manager of Panorama at the Peak, looks out a restaurant window toward the famous vista of the Potomac River and mountains beyond.

storm windows and doors that were between the two rooms.”

One of the most splendid features revealed by the excavation was a sunburst measuring about four by eight feet and crafted from at least 17 varieties of native woods. Inlaid above the massive stone fireplace in the original room, the sunburst is both a piece of forestry history and stunning art. Patti says guests familiar with timber have been unable to identify all the different types of wood in the piece and suspect that they came from trees that no longer grow in the region.

Panorama is a “green” restaurant, which puts environmental, human, and animal health on the same plate, says Patti, who adopted a vegetarian lifestyle years ago.

The women offer meat dishes on the menu, but, in most cases, only from regional organic producers who ensure humane treatment of the livestock. When food cannot be purchased locally, the women purchase organic and humanely produced ingredients from other sources, whenever available. They truly believe that “you are what you eat,” says Patti.

Operating a farm-to-table restaurant is challenging, even in a rural area, because the business models of restaurants and farms are often at odds with each other. Restaurant owners want a steady supply of the same food; farmers can only give them what’s in season, and they want to know there will be a market for their produce or meat when harvest comes.

The restaurant’s solution has been to go with the flow and change the menu weekly, tweaking recipes and offerings to match what is in season. Scott Collinash is the restaurant’s executive chef, and Patti says he does a tremendous job of coming up with creative dishes that incorporate the bounty of the local growing seasons.

Their restaurant’s green approach to eating, combined with the striking view of the Potomac River valley, earned the eatery a spot in the “101 Unique Places to Dine in West Virginia” list. But Patti says one of the things that helped earn the restaurant its “unique” status is endangered. And the magnitude of the threat far exceeds the investors’ resources.

*Ailanthus altissima*, or tree of heav-

en, has invaded the mountainside below the overlook and threatens to choke off the view. The partners have tried in vain to attract funding and resources to eradicate the growth, which resembles sumac and has already claimed the foreground view of the panorama.

“It’s a nightmare,” Patti says. She and Leslie want to build three hiking trails on the river side of their property, including a strenuous one that would go all the way to the Potomac. And they are investigating ways to ensure the view entrusted to them will never be compromised by commercial, residential, or industrial development.

After looking at the view every day since 2005, Patti says she’s not grown tired of it and continues to spot something new every day, every season.

“The better you get to know it,” Patti says, “the more you see it and appreciate it.” 🍁

Visit Panorama at the Peak online at [www.PanoramaAtThePeak.com](http://www.PanoramaAtThePeak.com) or call (304)258-0050.



Travelers stop to admire the view from Panorama at the Peak, located along State Route 9 just west of Berkeley Springs. From this vantage, West Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania are all visible.

# New Books Available

By John Lilly

Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, Jefferson County, opened its doors to 42 students in 1871. Today it is a thriving, modern institution offering more than 60 undergraduate programs and five graduate programs. A new book from Arcadia Publishing, part of Arcadia's The Campus History Series, illustrates the development of the university through more than 200 vintage photographs. *Shepherd University*, by author Dorothy E. Hively, includes an author's introduction, followed by 127 pages of illustrations and informative captions.

Also from Arcadia, in their Images of America series, comes *Italians in West Virginia*, by authors Victor A. Basile and Judy Prozzillo Byers. Early immigrants to the farms and industrial centers of West Virginia, Italians have remained a strong and influential ethnic community in the state. This book focuses primarily on the vibrant Italian community in north-central West Virginia, particularly in the Clarksburg area.



Like most Arcadia books, *Italians in West Virginia* offers an author's introduction followed by 127 pages of vintage photographs and captions.

Both books are available at local book stores as well as from the publisher at [www.arcadiapublishing.com](http://www.arcadiapublishing.com); phone (843)853-2070. The cost is \$21.99 each, plus shipping.

*Working Class Radicals: The Socialist Party in West Virginia, 1898-1920*, by Frederick A. Barkey, is an important new work from West Virginia University Press. Boasting several thousand dues-paying members in 1914, West Virginia's Socialist party was once a prominent feature of the state's political and economic landscape. Author Frederick A. Barkey examines the rise of the party through factions of the organized labor movement and immigrant groups, followed by its rather sudden decline.

Based on oral accounts, demographic studies, and his own expertise, Barkey, a retired Marshall University professor and founder of the West Virginia Labor History

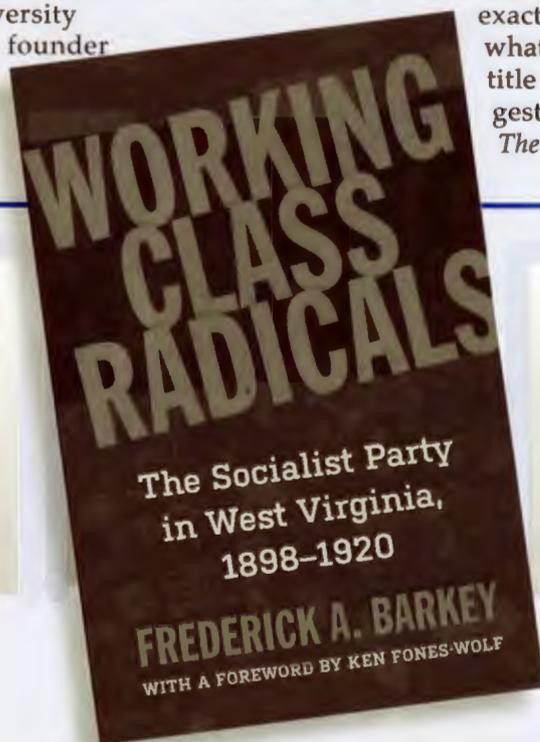
Association, presents a thorough review of this little-known chapter of West Virginia's labor history and its political implications.

This 271-page paperbound book includes an introduction by Dr. Ken Fones-Wolf, a bibliography, index, and two appendices. *Working Class Radicals* sells for \$24.99 and is available on-line at [www.wvu.press.com](http://www.wvu.press.com); phone 1-800-621-2736.

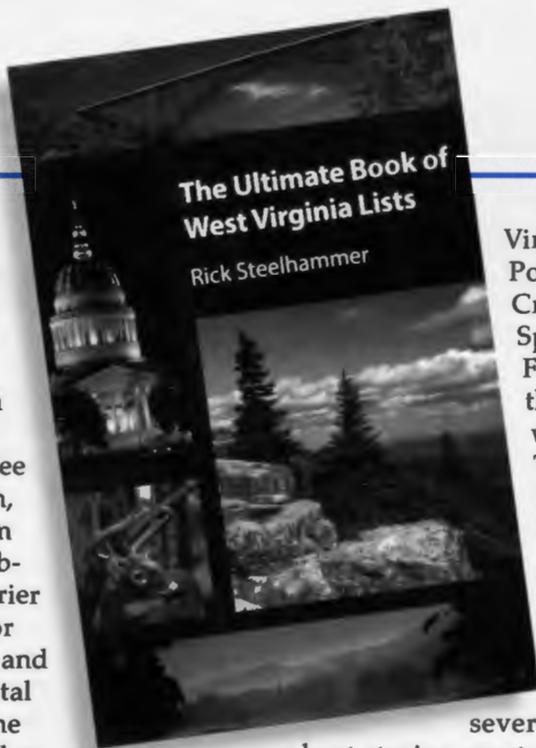
*The Ultimate Book of West Virginia Lists*, by Rick Steelhammer, is a trivia hunter's dream come true. Did you ever wonder what the top 10 oil-producing counties might be? How about the weight of the state's largest rutabaga? Would you like to see a list of all the buildings, roads, dams, and public facilities named after Robert C. Byrd? (It's impressive!)

Author Rick Steelhammer, a columnist for *The Charleston Gazette* for more than 30 years and a humor columnist for *The Sunday Gazette-Mail*, has assembled a mind-numbing collection of obscure and interesting facts about our state and organized them into

exactly what the title suggests: *The*



*Ultimate Book of West Virginia Lists*. This 126-page paperbound book would make an excellent addition to any coffee table, bathroom, or waiting room in the state. Published by Quarrier Press, it sells for \$8.95 (with tax and shipping the total is \$13.99) on-line at [www.wvbookco.com](http://www.wvbookco.com); phone 1-888-982-7472.



*Evolution of the West Virginia State Police Uniform Since 1919*, by Merle T. Cole and Donald R. Davis, is another book that lives up to its name. Authors Cole and Davis, both retired federal workers, offer a brief history of the West Virginia State Police, followed by the legal requirements for uniforms and insignia. The remaining 23 pages of this self-published, 33-page, large-format edition are devoted to illustrations showing various badges, stripes, insignia, and uniforms worn by the State Police over the years. [See "Second to None: Eighty Years of the West

Virginia State Police," by Ben Crookshanks; Spring 1999.] For copies of this booklet, write to Merle T. Cole, 1005 C&O Dam Road, Daniels, WV 25832.

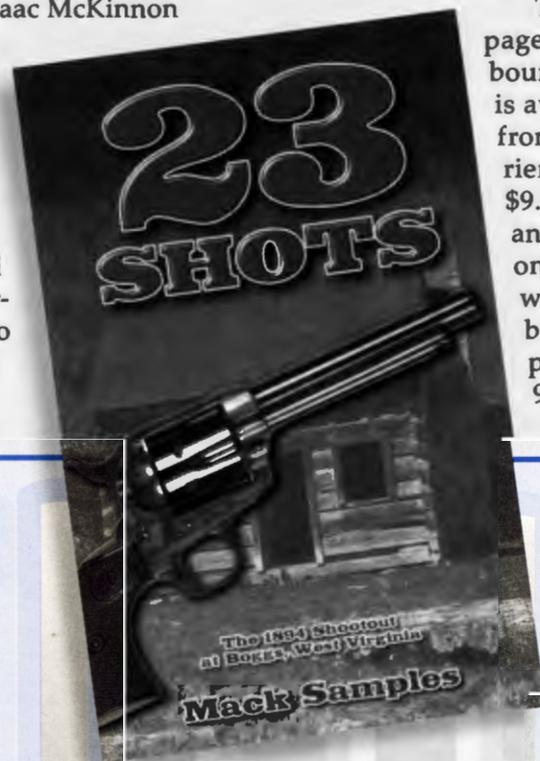
With Halloween around the corner, several books of ghost stories, mysteries, and the macabre have crossed our desk here at the GOLDENSEAL office.

*Monsters and Ghosts of West Virginia* is a short but colorful booklet aimed at young readers. Authors Erin Turner and Isaac McKinnon have assembled the usual cast of bizarre characters — Mothman, the Flatwoods Monster, Bigfoot, the Greenbrier Ghost — and added some lesser-known creatures to create this collection of scary bed-

time stories or campfire tales. *Monsters and Ghosts of West Virginia* is a 62-page paperbound volume with color illustrations by Erin Turner. It is available from Quarrier Press for \$9.95, plus tax and shipping, on-line at [www.wvbookco.com](http://www.wvbookco.com); phone 1-888-982-7472.

*23 Shots* is a fictionalized account of a true-to-life shootout at Boggs, Webster County, in 1894. The gunfight took place in a post office and involved five men and a dozen or more bystanders. Author Mack Samples, 2003 Vandalia Award recipient and frequent GOLDENSEAL contributor, has researched this notorious incident and created a fact-based story of moonshine, murder, and mayhem set at a time when West Virginia closely resembled the Wild West.

The 112-page paperbound edition is available from Quarrier Press for \$9.95, plus tax and shipping, on-line at [www.wvbookco.com](http://www.wvbookco.com); phone 1-888-982-7472.



*Legends of the Mountain State* and *Legends of the Mountain State* Volumes 2, 3, and 4, are edited collections of ghostly tales from West Virginia. Each of the four books is a collection of 13 horror stories set in the Mountain State, each written by a recognized — in many cases award-winning — author. Michael Knost is the editor of all four editions; famed McDowell County native Homer Hickam wrote the foreword to Volume 3.

Volumes 1, 3 and 4 sell for \$18.95 — Volume 2 sells for \$14.95 — plus tax and shipping. All four volumes are available from the West Virginia Book Company, on-line at [www.wvbookco.com](http://www.wvbookco.com); phone 1-888-982-7472.

GEM Publications of Beaver, Raleigh County, continues to issue fine historical books from the New River region and the southern coalfields, including a generous supply of West Virginia horror and ghost tales.

*Coal Mining Mayhem and Murder: The Incredible New River Coal Field 1900-1912*, by George and Melody Bragg (2010), is a collection of news stories and photographs from the *Fayette Journal* and the *Fayette Tribune* newspapers during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these stories involve mine mishaps, violent crimes, and human tragedy. This 102-page book sells for \$20.

*Window to the Past* (2011) is an anthology of five books published by George and Melody Bragg over the past 20 years, all concentrated on the history and legends, life and lore in the New River Valley. *Thurmond: Dodge City of the East*; *Ghost Towns of the New River Gorge*; *Legends and Life on the New River*; *Mine Disasters of Southern West Virginia*, and *Window to the Past* combine in this 276-page, large-format book. It sells for \$25.

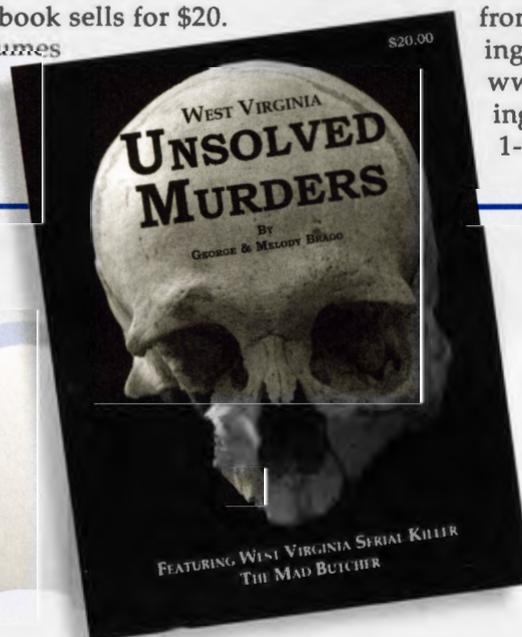
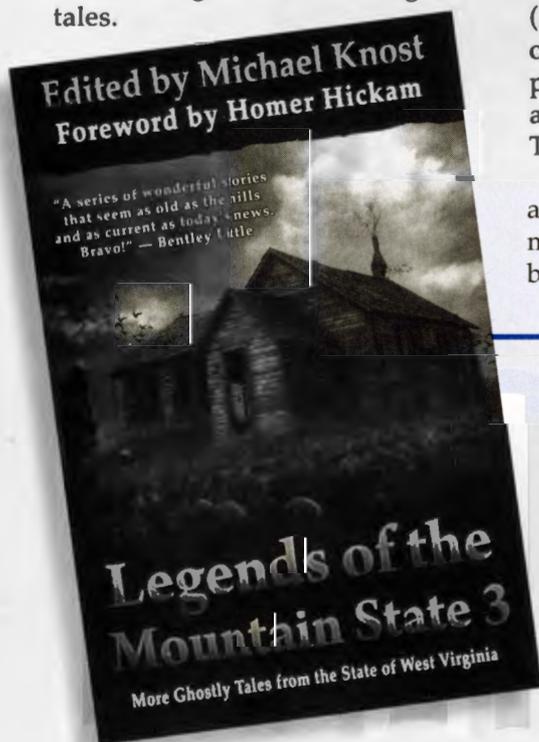
*West Virginia Unsolved Murders*, also by George and Melody Bragg (2012), is another anthology, this one combining the texts of three previous unsolved murder books, available now under one cover. This 208-page book sells for \$20.

All three volumes are large-format paperback editions.

tions, containing excellent and generous illustrations, many of them by famed Glen Jean photographer W.O. Trevey. [See "The Reliable Bill Trevey: Glen Jean's Photographer," by Melody Bragg; Winter 1988.] To order or for additional information, visit [www.coalphotos.com](http://www.coalphotos.com) or phone (304)256-8400.

Several new biographies have arrived recently, chronicling the lives and times of both prominent and everyday West Virginians.

*James Clark McGrew: West Virginia Statesman and Servant*, by Susan M. Hardesty, tells the life story of staunch Unionist and West Virginia founding father James Clark McGrew of Kingwood, Preston County. A representative at the fateful legislative session in Richmond on April 17, 1861, McGrew sided with the minority in an 88-55 vote for secession. Following that vote, McGrew traveled back to Preston County and began work on establishing the new state of West Virginia. *James Clark McGrew* is a 117-page paperback volume and sells for \$17.50, available on-line from McLain Printing Company at [www.mclainprinting.com](http://www.mclainprinting.com); phone 1-888-654-7179.



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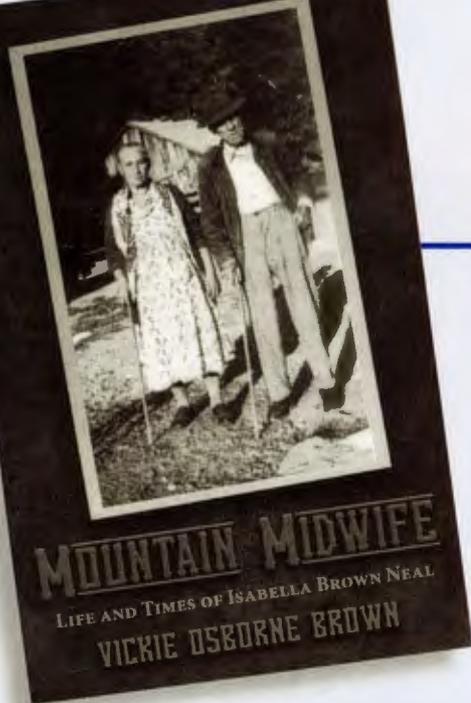
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*Mountain Midwife: Life and Times of Isabella Brown Neal*, by Vickie Osborne Brown, and *Stories of a West Virginia Doctor's Son*, by Greenbrier Almond, MD, are personal accounts of rural medical care during an earlier time. *Mountain Midwife*, published in 2010 by Mountain Memories Books of Charleston, tells the story of an intrepid and outspoken woman who traveled the back roads of Clay County, delivering babies and dispensing wisdom. The author estimates that Isabella delivered more than 3,000 babies in her 40-year career. This 150-page paperbound edition sells for \$12.95.

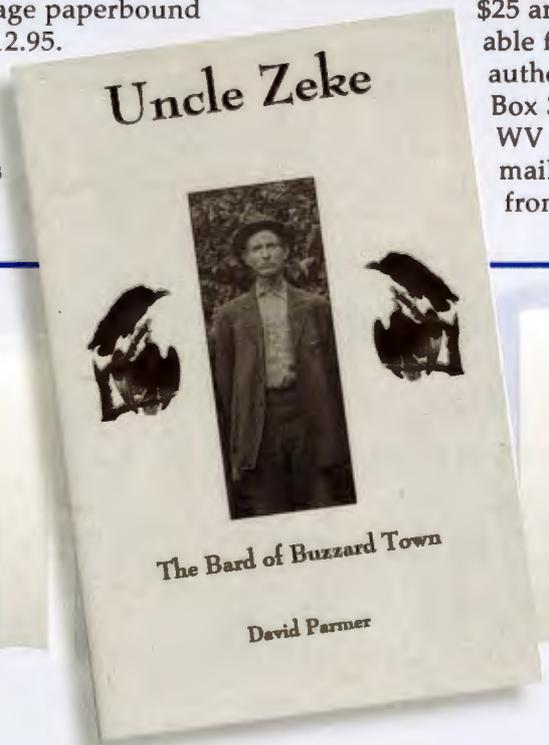
Doctor Harold Almond wrote two volumes of his own memories as a country doc-

tor in Upshur County during the 1950's. This new edition is written by his son, Greenbrier Almond, himself a psychiatrist and author. His perspective as the son of a country doctor is unique and illuminating. It is a 115-page paperbound volume and sells for \$15.

Both books are available from the West Virginia Book Company on-line at [www.wvbookco.com](http://www.wvbookco.com); phone 1-888-982-7472.

*Uncle Zeke: The Bard of Buzzard Town*, by David Parmer, is an entertaining account of the life and work of columnist and commentator Patrick Newton Blake, whose four decades of newsy and humorous columns appeared in the *Weston Independent* and the *Braxton Democrat* newspapers. He wrote under the pen name "Uncle Zeke," from the mythical community of "Buzzard Town." Author David Parmer introduces us to this clever author and his amusing and insightful work. This 182-page hardbound edition sells for

\$25 and is available from the author at P.O. Box 39, Hinton, WV 25951; e-mail [gbrcliffs@frontier.com](mailto:gbrcliffs@frontier.com).



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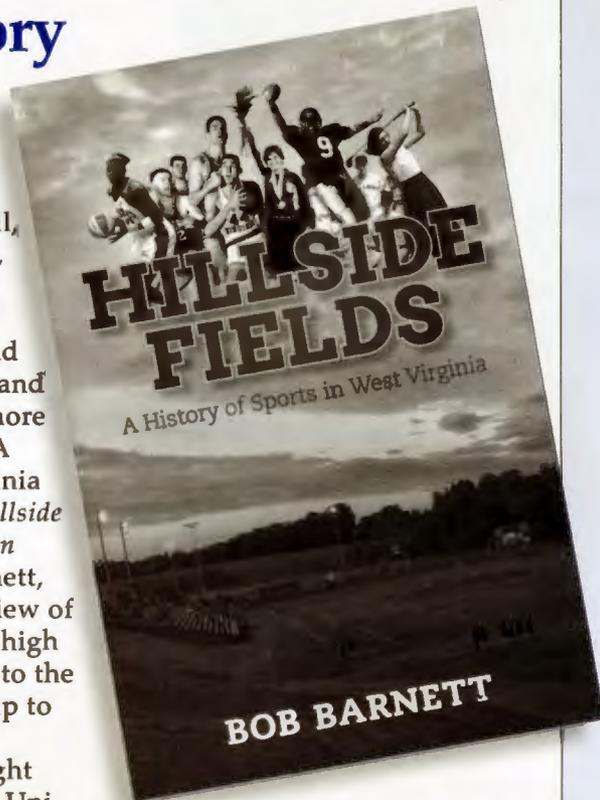
## Sports History

Next to religion and music, there are few things that engage West Virginians more than sports. Football, basketball, baseball, golf, gymnastics, you name it. The history of sports in the Mountain State is rich and varied and includes tales of triumph and heartbreak, followed by more heartbreak and triumph. A new book from West Virginia University Press, titled *Hillside Fields: A History of Sports in West Virginia*, by Bob Barnett, offers a compelling overview of professional, college, and high school sports dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and leading up to recent times.

Author Bob Barnett taught sports history at Marshall University for more than 35 years and has written more than 300 articles, including several for GOLDENSEAL. His grasp of the subject is without peer, and his writing style is concise and articulate. This book covers both the large and the small, from the Marshall tragedy of 1970 to the magical 1964 West Liberty Hilltoppers baseball season; from the headline-making achievements of WVU during the Don Nehlen years, to the quiet beginnings of the state's oldest golf course in Greenbrier County. Bob introduces celebri-

ties — Earl Lloyd, Mary Lou Retton, Cam Henderson — as well as local heroes as he paints a portrait of sportsmanship, determination, and competition in this mountainous region.

Separate chapters are devoted to baseball, golf, football, basketball, women and sports, and high school athletics. The 429-page paperbound volume also includes an epilogue, end notes, bibliography, index, maps, and photographs. The book sells for \$22.99 and is available on-line at [www.wvupress.com](http://www.wvupress.com), phone 1-800-621-2736.



## Goldenseal

Coming Next Issue...

- Stages Costume Shop
- Hackers Creek
- Oil and Gas
- Poet Karl Dewey Myers



# Milnes Receives Award



Photograph by Tyler Evert

Congratulations to Gerald Milnes of Elkins, who received the 2013 Vandalia Award on Friday, May 24, as part of the 37<sup>th</sup> annual Vandalia Gathering. The award was presented by Culture and History Commissioner Randall Reid-Smith. The Vandalia Award, West Virginia's highest folklife honor, is given each year to an individual in recognition of their contribution to the state's folk and traditional life. Gerald Milnes was honored for his extensive work as folk art coordinator at the Augusta Heritage Center at Davis & Elkins College, as well as his filmmaking, photography, audio recordings, writings, and musical accomplishments. Gerald recently retired after 25 years at the Augusta Heritage Center.

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## Inside Goldenseal

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Page 52 - Ted Carter and his wife, Jeanne, are the fifth generation of Ted's family to make their home at Everbreeze, one of the oldest working farms in Ohio County.

Page 34 - Singer and author JoAnn Davis has led an interesting life, which she discusses with author Mort Gamble.

Page 40 - Philippi High School's 1960 football team had an undefeated season. Ralph "Butch" Neal and others look back on the glory days.

Page 46 - Elkhorn High and Elkhorn Elks High educated McDowell County youth during the heyday of this rugged and coal-laden county.

Page 58 - Hazelton Milling in Preston County may be the only remaining mill in West Virginia devoted entirely to the art of grinding buckwheat flour — an essential ingredient in the making of buckwheat cakes and the key element at the annual Preston County Buckwheat Festival.

Page 10 - Folklife education is a growing area of study at several West Virginia colleges and universities. We visit programs at Fairmont State, Shepherd, Davis & Elkins, and Glenville State.

Page 18 - Blue Creek was a stop along the New York Central Railroad branch line that once took children to school. Blue Creek is also home to Pleasant Island — a small slip of land with a checkered past.

