

Eric Eyre • Cockayne Farm • Sowball • Cinder Bottom • Keyser's Cobbler

Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Summer 2017

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Reminiscing
about Richwood



Rick Barbero of *The Register-Herald* captured these images of downtown Richwood during the flood of June 23, 2016. Richwood and other towns damaged by the flood have bounced back to different degrees, but much work remains.

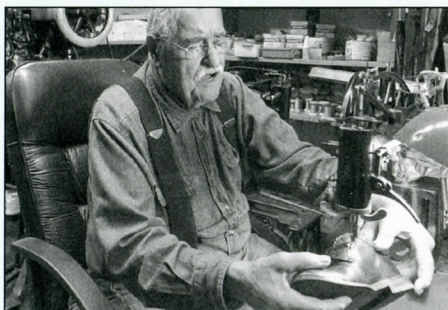




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On the cover: Goldie Webb of Richwood recalls working in the world's largest clothespin factory. Photo by Mark Romano.

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From the Editor

June 23 marked the one-year anniversary of the 2016 floods that killed 23 West Virginians, destroyed thousands of homes and businesses, and caused untold damage. The counties affected by the flood—namely Kanawha, Clay, Fayette, Nicholas, and Greenbrier—are still trying to recover and will be for years to come.

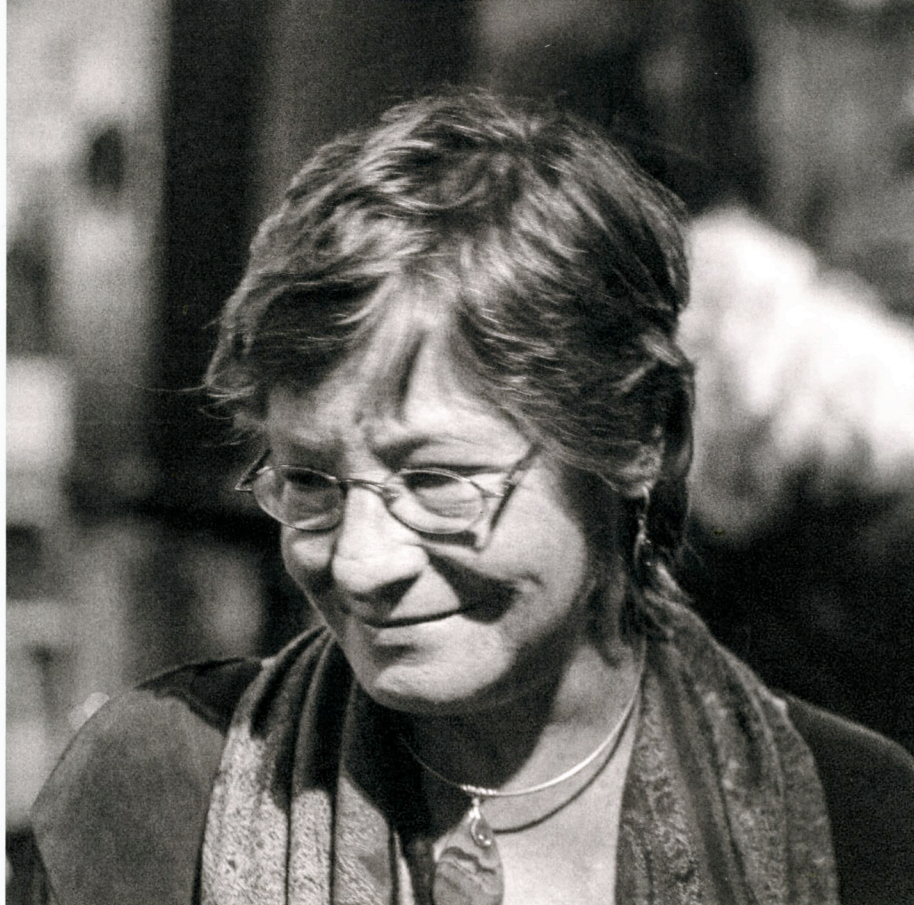
Some places are struggling to find their way back—a task made even more daunting due to our state's struggling economy, government red tape, and the eternally tangled web of insurance rules and regulations. The town of Richwood is one of those recovery stories. While many in this small Nicholas County community are rebuilding, Richwood still faces many ordeals. First and foremost is the risk of starting a business in a flood-ravaged town that has been losing population for decades.

Despite early assurances that the devastated towns would be rebuilt, money always becomes a stumbling block. One current solution

calls for closing Richwood Middle and High Schools and consolidating them into larger facilities closer to Summersville, some 30 minutes away. One problem with this plan is that it extends the school days for Richwood students. In a broader sense, however, the impact is even greater. Small towns get their identities largely from local schools. Folks in Richwood are rightly concerned that losing their schools will eventually lead to losing their town.

Decisions like these are difficult, and our two staff members at GOLDENSEAL are far from qualified to weigh in with anything more than opinions. What we can do, though, is remind readers of what Richwood was like in its glory days. This issue of the magazine pays tribute to Richwood. We look back to when the town was thriving in the mid-20th century thanks to the booming timber industry, with spinoff businesses like the world's largest clothespin factory.

We have about 200 remaining copies of our special Fall 2016 issue dedicated to last year's flood. We would be glad to provide a free copy to anyone directly affected by the flood. If you suffered losses, please feel free to contact the GOLDENSEAL office at 304-558-0220. Ask for Kim, and she will provide you with a complimentary copy while supplies last.



Terri Marion (1949-2017). Photo by Chase Henderson.

Looking back at the past isn't just a jaunt down memory lane. It's a reminder of what once was and what could be again.



Finally, I would like to say a few words about a long-time colleague and friend. Terri Marion was one of the finest editors and proofreaders I've ever known. Terri was a key team member for just about every project I've worked on in the last quarter century, and she greatly improved each one. She played a major behind-the-scenes role at the Vandalia Gathering and Appalachian String Band Music Festival at Clifftop. She also had a hand in every issue of GOLDENSEAL from 1987 through the Winter 2016 issue.

Terri, who worked for the West Virginia Division of Culture and History from 1987 to 2017, passed away on May 17, just six weeks after her retirement. She was 67.

These days, you hear a lot of negative comments in the news and social media about state government employees. My personal experience, though, is that West Virginia state government employees are typically much more like Terri—hard workers who've stayed on the job far past retirement age. Terri stayed because she loved what she did, did it extremely well, and was passionately dedicated to West Virginia's culture and history.

Most importantly, Terri was a very kind soul. I'll always remember her caustic wit, smile, knack for nick-

names, and unique turns of phrases. When you asked Terri how she was doing, she'd quickly shoot back, "Fine as frog hairs." She had a million of them.

Her edits were spot on. I only rejected one that I can remember. Last year, an article mentioned a variation of baseball where players could get the runners out by hitting them with the ball. Never a big sports fan, Terri wrote back to me, "Get them out of what?"

Anyone who ever met Terri will miss her forever. I've lost a dear friend and one of the greatest characters I've ever known. Good-bye, Terri. I truly love you!

Stan Benzardner

Letters from Readers

2016 Flood

March 26, 2017
Middletown,
Connecticut
Editor:

I'm writing as a native West Virginian who currently lives outside the state and region. In the last few issues, you've given us really important coverage of the challenges—as well as the great resilience—that have characterized the last year for many living in the Mountain State. And though your magazine certainly plays an important role for folks living inside the state, I want to emphasize the important role it plays for those of us living outside West Virginia, too.

The Special Issue on the Flood of 2016 not only helped bring myself and our family closer to the latest catastrophe that plagued so many folks in central West Virginia but also quickly became an important tool for us to use with our friends and coworkers when trying to communicate the impact of the floods. Because these floods were so poorly covered in the national media, GOLDENSEAL played a key role in picking up the slack. Few people we know could



look on Sam Owens' photo of Kathy Bostic without asking questions to learn more; pretty soon, folks were inquiring about West Virginia, generally, and in some cases

even asking how to help, even from a distance.

In the next issue, there was so much to illustrate the incredible ways that West Virginians (and our traditions) persist and thrive even against great odds. I'll just mention a few key examples. From Steve Fesenmaier's look at recent Appalachian films, to Paul Gartner's always-welcome "Mountain Music Roundup," to another one of Emily Hilliard's ex-

cellent pieces on West Virginia foodways, these pieces are wonderful testimonies to the life of the region. In this way, your magazine not only helps me stay connected but again and again becomes a talking point for me to advocate for West Virginia and West Virginians.

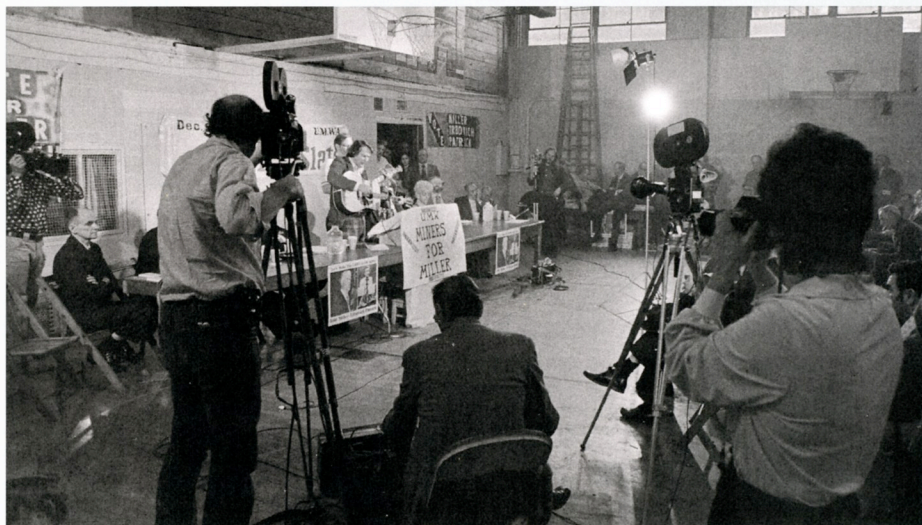
So, as my Grandma used to say, "Good on you!" Please keep up the important and excellent work for West Virginia and for all of us—wherever we happen to live at the moment.

Sincerely,
John Conley

David Morris

February 12, 2017
Port Republic, Maryland
Editor:

I was sorry to read of David Morris' passing. Like



The Morris Brothers performing at a Miners for Democracy rally at Osage, 1972. Photo by Carl Fleischhauer.

many fans of Mountain State traditional music, I remember enjoying the Morris Brothers' music as well as their grass-roots festivals in Ivydale in the 1970s. The GOLDENSEAL obituary (see Winter 2016) mentions David's work for the Miners for Democracy in the 1972 UMWA presidential election won by Arnold Miller. As it happens, I took some photographs of David and

John performing at a Miners for Democracy rally at the Shack, a community center in Osage, Monongalia County, in December 1972. As you can see from the wide-angle photo, there was great national interest in the campaign, and it received extensive media coverage. Miller won and was certified as president later that month.

Best wishes,
Carl Fleischhauer

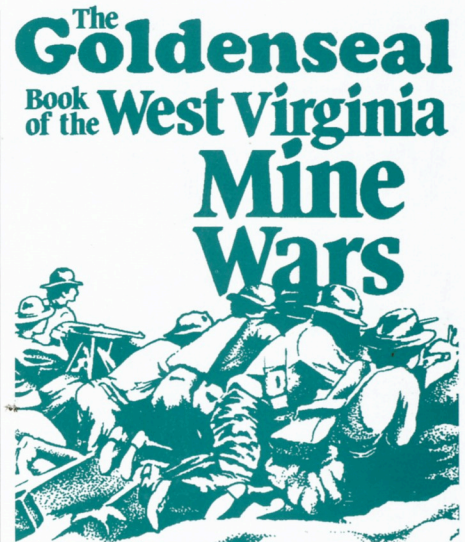
GOLDENSEAL Good-Bye

Oreste Leombruno, who was featured on the cover of our Fall 2005 issue, passed away in Elkins on December 3, 2016, just weeks before his 92nd birthday. The



Oreste Leombruno. Photo by Michael Keller.

son and grandson of Italian immigrants, he was born at Coalton in Randolph County in 1924. He started working in underground coal mines when he was just 15. He later performed just about every task in the coal industry—from unloading coke ovens in Tucker County to supervising heavy equipment at strip mines in Wyoming, Mingo, McDowell, and Kanawha counties. He eventually did reclamation work at the same Tucker County mine site where his father, Concezio, and grandfather, Antonio, had once worked. He retired at age 83 and spent much of his time visiting with family, gardening, playing the accordion, cooking Italian food, and making homemade wine. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Betty Hicks Leombruno, and is survived by his widow, Wilma Farris Leombruno.



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

The large-format 109-page paperbound book sells for \$12.95, plus \$2 per copy shipping. West Virginia residents, please add 7% state sales tax (total \$15.86 per book).

Please make check or money order payable to GOLDENSEAL. Send to:

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West Virginia Mine Wars
The Culture Center
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Please provide a complete mailing address.

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West Virginia Journalist Wins Pulitzer

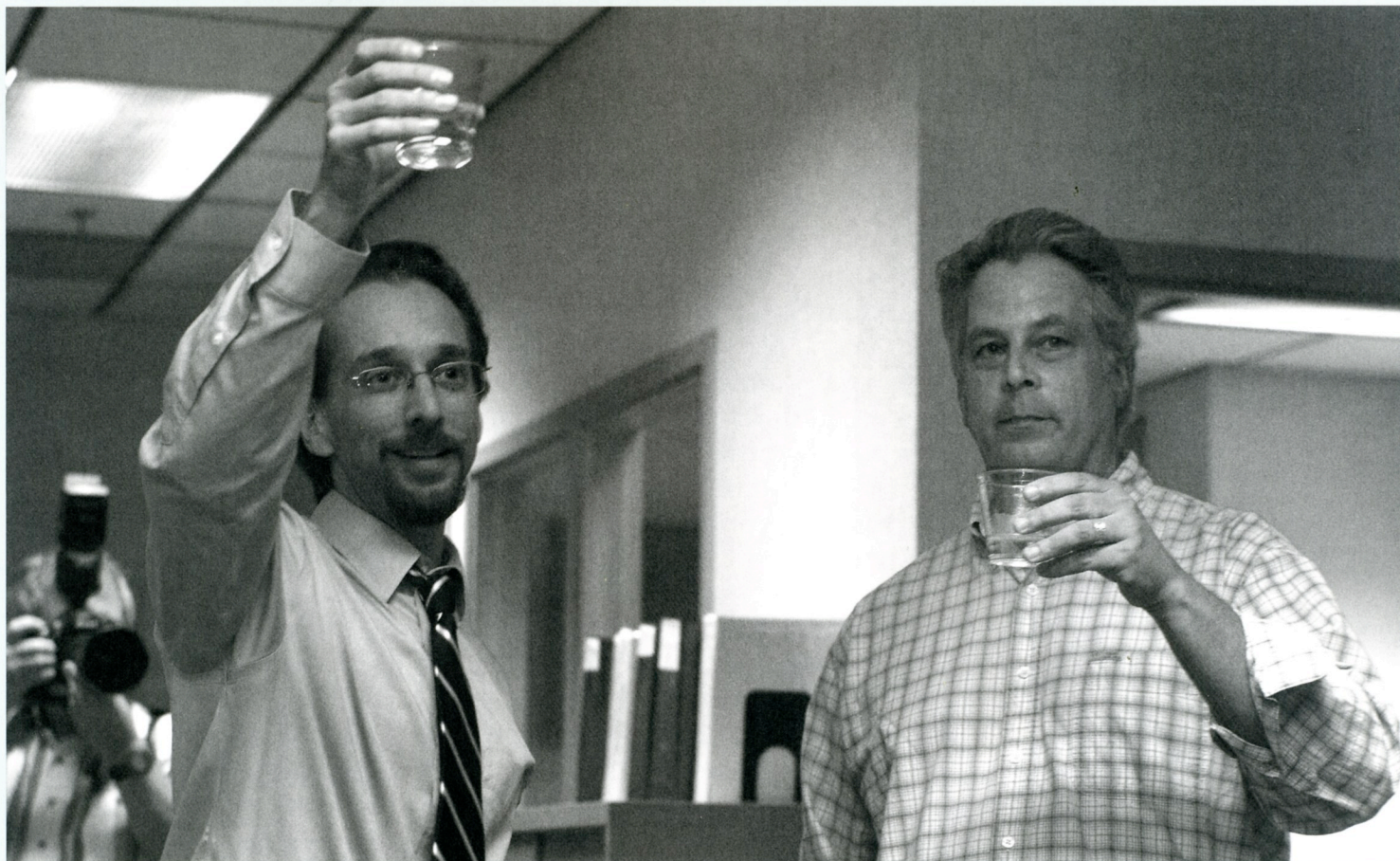
By Stan Bumgardner

For only the second time in history, a West Virginian has been honored with the Pulitzer Prize for journalism. Eric Eyre of the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* is the 2017 recipient of a Pulitzer for investigative reporting. The official citation honors Eric's "courageous reporting, performed in the face of powerful opposition, to expose the flood of opioids flowing into depressed

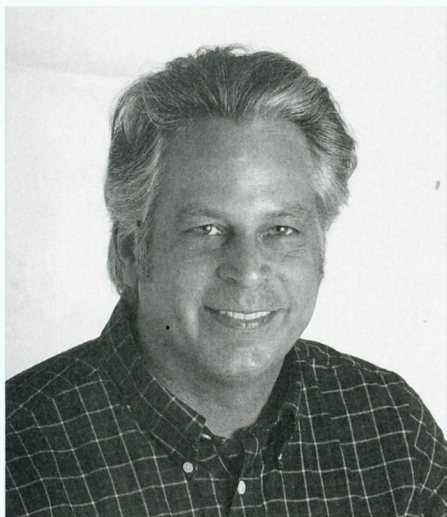
West Virginia counties with the highest overdose death rates in the country."

Eric presented stunningly tragic statistics about prescription drug abuse, but it was his personal anecdotes that put human faces on the story. As just one example, Mary Kathryn Mullins "doctor shopped" in Beckley, Logan, Madison, and Williamson to obtain 90-120 Oxycontin pills a week with just

\$200 cash and no insurance. She died of an overdose two days before Christmas in 2015. She was 50 years old. Eric also detailed how various federal and state government entities and officials, pharmaceutical companies, doctors, health care facilities, insurance companies, attorneys, and individuals have contributed to the opioid crisis.



The remarkable news of Eric Eyre's Pulitzer caught the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* newsroom a bit off guard. The staff had to make a quick run to Kroger to stock up on champagne for a celebratory toast. Photo of the *Gazette-Mail* Executive Editor Rob Byers (left) and Eric Eyre (right) by Kenny Kemp.



Eric Eyre. Photo by Kenny Kemp.

Eric's Pulitzer is a major achievement for West Virginia journalism, particularly for a newspaper with a circulation of only 37,000.

On one hand, it details an ongoing catastrophe playing out before our very eyes. On a more positive note, though, it highlights that even in times of crisis, West Virginians fight back against the odds. Eric's reporting, in part, has already led to one result: a congressional committee is examining whether the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency has been lax while prescription painkillers have flooded into West Virginia.

"We wanted to put the focus on the root causes and costs of the epidemic," Eric says. "By doing so, we hope we are part of the solution."

A native of Broad Axe,

Pennsylvania, Eric Eyre, 51, joined the *Charleston Gazette* (as it was then known) in 1998. An incredibly humble and affable person, he worked on this series for three years while keeping up with his other tasks of reporting on the statehouse, covering the police night-shift beat once a month, and writing more than 250 articles a year. ✱

West Virginia's only other Pulitzer for journalism was awarded to Jack Maurice of the Charleston Daily Mail in 1975 for his commentaries on the Kanawha County Textbook Controversy.

Eric Eyre's Findings

In his three-part series, Eric detailed how pharmaceutical companies inundated West Virginia with highly addictive prescription opiates between 2007 and 2012. During this period, 780 million hydrocodone and oxycodone pills poured into the Mountain State, whose population in 2010 stood at less than 1.9 million. This breaks out to 433 pain relievers for every man, woman, and child in our state.

During this time, 1,728 West Virginians fatally overdosed on prescription painkillers. Wyoming, McDowell, Boone, and Mingo counties ranked one through four nationally in terms of fatal overdoses caused by pain pills. Mercer and Raleigh counties also ranked in the top 10, while Logan, Lincoln, Fayette, and Monroe counties were in the top 20.

Breaking it down even further, Eric uncovered that a single pharmacy in the Mingo County town of Kermit, population 392, had received nearly nine million hydrocodone pills over a two-year period. He pointed out examples like this across the state, but the most egregious incidents occurred in the southern coalfield counties, which have been decimated by the declining coal economy. ✱



One part of Eric Eyre's series focused on Mary Kathryn Mullins, who died of a drug overdose in 2015 at age 50. Her mother, Kay Mullins (left), has helped raise Mary Kathryn's daughter, Tiffany Vincent, who's also battled drug addiction. Photo by Sam Owens, courtesy of the *Charleston Gazette-Mail*.

Adventures Menu

I'm sitting in the back booth of a Parkersburg restaurant on an unseasonably warm February afternoon. A red, white, and blue Filipino flag hangs on the wall. Michael Jackson blasts from the speakers as the waitress sets a Fiestaware plate in front of me. The bright green plate is stacked high with meat and potatoes and noodles with vegetables, topped with what look like miniature egg rolls.

The chef, Daniel Lubuguin, and his wife, Ellenita Lubuguin, are the owners and operators of Philippines Best

Food. They sit across from me, pointing out different dishes and their ingredients. When he gets to the pork adobo, Daniel tells me, "The Spanish have been [in the Philippines] for 400 years. This is basically how they preserved the meat—they only used salt and vinegar back then. Then the Chinese came, and they introduced soy sauce. That's how the Filipinos started mixing it up, and they got this blend."

While in traditional Filipino cuisine, adobo is generally served with bananas or pineapple, Philippines Best

Food serves its version with potatoes "for West Virginia tastes," Ellen says. "You know, meat and potatoes."

The noodle dish is *pansit* (also spelled *pancit*), which Ellen says is traditionally served at all Filipino birthdays and special events. The long, thin rice noodles symbolize long life. The *lumpia shanghai*—meat and vegetables rolled in spring roll wrappers—are also common at celebrations. "It's finger food," Ellen adds.

The foodways of Spain, China, Japan, Indonesia, and the United States were



Sharing Traditional Filipino Food in Parkersburg

Text and photo
by Emily Hilliard

brought to the Philippines through trade and colonization. These foods blended with the indigenous foods of the island nation, resulting in the Filipino cuisine of today.

Here in West Virginia, Daniel and Ellen's Filipino offerings are influenced by local tastes and cultural preferences. They recently added a burrito to the menu, upon a suggestion from their son. The fillings offered are classic Filipino dishes like *adobo*, sweet and sour chicken, or *teriyaki* chicken, all rolled in a Mexican flour tortilla. It's been very popular. While Ellen and Daniel often alter their dishes to suit customer predilections, they are committed to using fresh ingredients and preparing everything from scratch. Daniel travels to Maryland once a month to source spices, herbs, and other ingredients from a Filipino market.

Ellenita came to West Virginia in 1985 with her first husband, an American, who is now deceased. Daniel moved to the United States in 1994, settling first in Marietta, Ohio. The two met through their church in Marietta, but are both from Luzon—the Philippines' largest and most populated island—and even worked at the same military base

there. Daniel learned to cook at a restaurant on the base, where he prepared both American and Filipino cuisine. He's never used written recipes but cooks by taste. "It's like home cooking," Ellen says.

Four years ago, the couple opened Philippines Best Food on Parkersburg's East End. Though it was initially just a carry-out, last year, they expanded into a neighboring empty lot and added a dining room and outdoor porch seating.

Ellen and Daniel would like to offer more traditional Filipino fare but are concerned about customer response. Since my visit, however, they've added an "Adventures Menu," which includes *adobo pucit* (squid cooked in *adobo* sauce), marinated milkfish, and *sini-gang* shrimp, described on the menu as "Tamarind sour broth with vegetables and shrimp with head."

When I asked how the new more traditional items have been received, Daniel said it's been a slow process, but they've been fairly popular. Recently, when a customer ordered *diniguan*—a pork stew cooked in pig's blood—his only complaint was that it wasn't traditional enough, specifically because it didn't include the offal (internal

organs and entrails). "That's just not gonna fly in West Virginia," Daniel said.

Gradually, though, the restaurant is building a local following and introducing more traditional Filipino cuisine to Parkersburg. "We have a customer who always comes in asking for the squid. We don't always have it, but he loves it," says Daniel, remarking on the prevalence of *calamari* in Italian cuisine. Because Filipino food is so multicultural, it's not that difficult to find common ground with the foodways of other ethnicities and traditions.

"The community is supporting us for being a small business," Ellen comments. "And they're supporting Filipino food, actually. Some people will say, once you taste Filipino food, then you'll get it." 🍁

Philippines Best Food is located at 1757c Seventh Street in Parkersburg and is open Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-8 p.m.

EMILY HILLIARD is West Virginia's first official state folklorist with the West Virginia Folklife Program at the West Virginia Humanities Council. She writes a regular column for GOLDENSEAL. Learn more about the West Virginia Folklife Program at wvfolklife.org.

The

By
Beverly Steenstra



With most men of working age deployed overseas during World War II, women took factory jobs that were previously unavailable to them. Here, an unidentified packer prepares clothespins for shipment. Photo by Finley Taylor. All Finley Taylor photos courtesy of Mark Romano.

Right: Plumes of black smoke from the clothespin factory, lumber mills, and paper mill were a constant reality in Richwood during the early 20th century. Photo by Finley Taylor.

I had a grandmother I never knew. Born in the Nicholas County town of Bays in 1920, Mabel May Jones disappeared after 1947, with only an occasional postcard making its way back to the family. May, as she was known, gave my birthmother, Donnie, and my Uncle Dennie to the Children's Home Society of West Virginia in 1946 and made a new home in Wilmington, Delaware, with Bluefield native Ted Chambers. In the late 1970s, Donnie and Dennie started searching for their birthparents and eventually found their older brother and

sister, Uncle Dale and Aunt Etta, and numerous aunts, uncles, and cousins living in Braxton, Webster, and Nicholas counties.

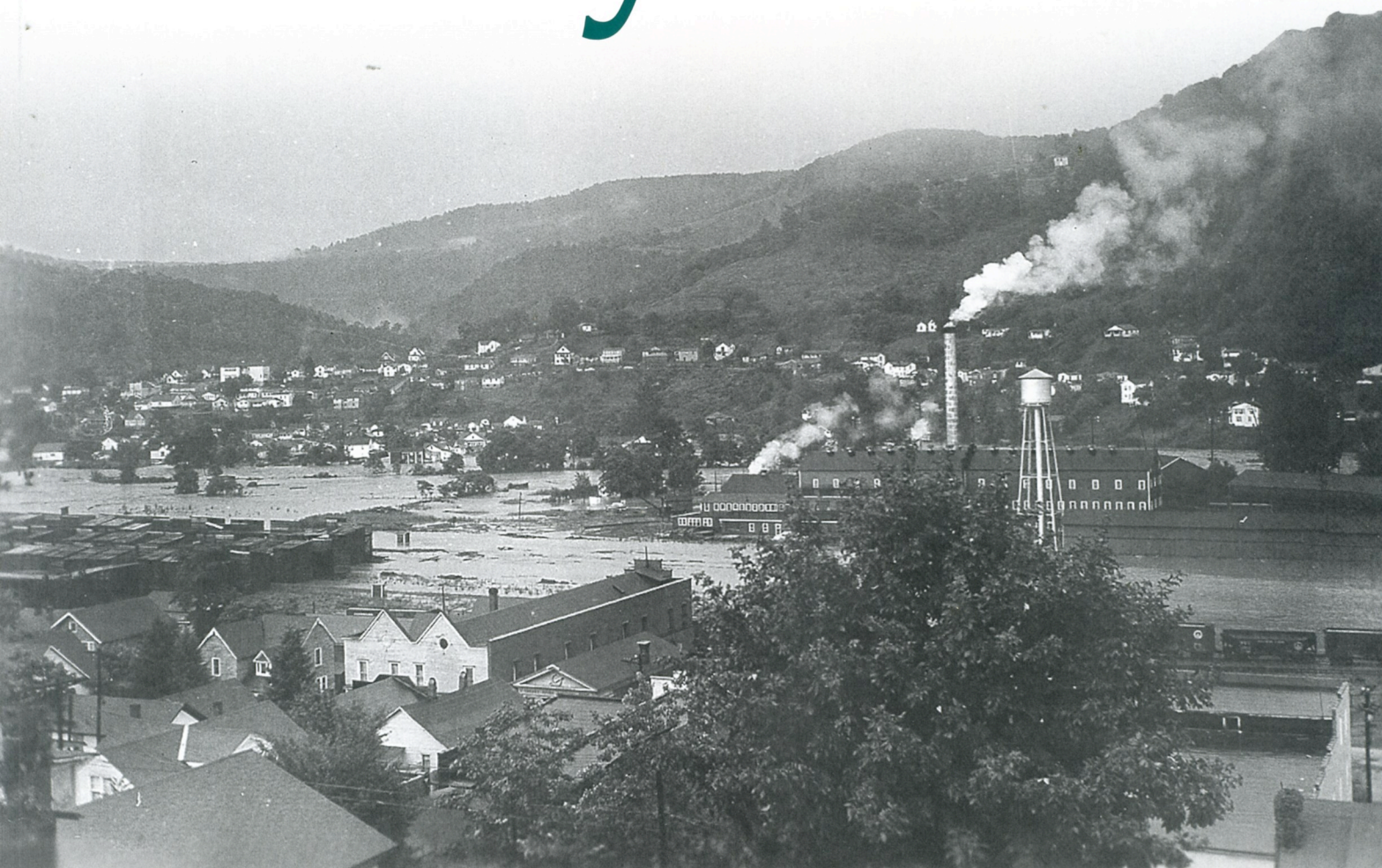
May worked at a clothespin factory in Richwood in the early 1940s.

Nearly all of our newfound family shared bits and pieces of information about my grandmother, but little that was reliable or concrete. I joined the search in the 1990s but wasn't much help. We did confirm one fact: May worked at a clothespin factory in Richwood in the early 1940s. A clothes-

pin factory? Who entertains thoughts about clothespin factories, especially in the 21st century? Well, this particular factory, operated by the Wallace Corporation, was the largest of its kind in the world!

A few years ago, I visited Aunt Etta, who was old enough to have solid memories of May. We sat at her kitchen table, trying to piece together wedding licenses, birth certificates, and what few photographs we had. We questioned how May could have just disappeared. Suddenly, Etta started, "Wait a minute; I'll be right back."

World's Largest Clothespin Factory





Thousands of cut trees, destined to become clothespins, were dumped into the factory pond. They were soaked and treated with a mysterious broth that removed the bark. This 1908 photo shows flatbed train cars filled to capacity with timber. Note the log planks used as sidewalks. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.



This view of the factory from the 1920s shows workmen posing in the pond area. The fairly dilapidated-looking building in the background was the main factory building. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

She rummaged upstairs and returned with a handful of small clothespins! May had brought these for Etta to play with when Etta was a small child, and they had been long forgotten. When she handed them to me, I felt like I was holding something sacred. My grandmother had actually touched them and maybe even made them herself! Etta gave me four of the clothespins, which now sit beside me as I write this article.

In searching for my heritage, I'd stumbled upon an entire culture in rural America that once revolved around wood. The largest clothespin factory in the world began as the

Dodge Clothespin Company in 1901. With the "rich wood" abundant in the area, and the expansion of railroads into Nicholas County, the enterprise held great promise. Because of its durability, beech was the best wood for clothespins, and there was plenty of beech enveloping Richwood. The company received a steady supply from the Cherry River Boom and Lumber Company and later from the U.S. Forest Service. Dr. Bob Henry Baber, current mayor of Richwood, speculates that the "crème de la crème" of the trees would have been milled into boards and that the mill's "seconds, and thirds, and fourths, [which]

are amazing . . . used to end up, frankly, at the clothespin factory."

In 1923, the Dodge factory was purchased by a group of local businessmen and was the Steele-Wallace Corporation until 1928, when Steele sold his interest to Wallace. The enterprise was known as the Wallace Corporation until announcing its closure in 1958. It struggled into 1959, when the Forester Manufacturing Company of Farmington, Maine, which owned Wallace, sent the factory's equipment to Sweden to begin operations there.

While clothespins were the main product and moneymaker, the factory also generated a



At age 93, Goldie Webb stays busy with her many hobbies. Almost every day, she finds time to play her steel guitar. Photo by Mark Romano.



Goldie Bender (soon to be Webb), 1942. Photo by Finley Taylor.

variety of other items. In 1908, a wooden dish department was added, manufacturing wooden and paper trays through 1943. Toothpick production followed in the 1930s, and the humble round clothespin competed with the spring-type model and a square clothespin, which had the advantage of not rolling if it was dropped. The products had interesting brand names: Acme, Good Housekeeper,

Maid of Honor, Top Fire (a rather peculiar choice for a highly flammable product). Housewives and photographers worldwide benefited from the four million board feet of birch, beech, and hard maple timber churned out at the Richwood factory.

The late Millie Hammonds Stinnett, a Richwood stalwart—without whom this article would not have been possible—

provided me with an early tinted postcard of the factory, with pretty hues of blue, ochre, and green. Black-and-white photos are less flattering.



In 1942, 18-year-old Richwood native Goldie Webb was looking for a job. With a high school diploma and a fiancé fighting in Operation Torch under General Patton in North



Left: Finley Taylor took this photo of Charles Lenzy "Bud" Webb (1912-1972) and Goldie Webb shortly after they were married in 1944. Right: Goldie loves to paint, drawing inspiration from the people and sites around Richwood. Photo by Mark Romano.

Africa, she was eager to earn money, and the clothespin factory employed hundreds. That summer, she spent an entire week trying to get hired there. Her aunt, an employee at the factory, put in a good word for her, and Goldie began a two-year stint as a *slotter* and *packer*. Slotters operated the lathes that inserted slots into the clothespins, and packers packed the boxes for sale.

On her first day, Goldie came home at lunch to tell her mother about her new job. Her mother said she wouldn't have believed it if it hadn't been for all the sawdust in Goldie's hair.

"I enjoyed it, loud noise and everything," Goldie recalled recently at her Richwood home. She even got used to the ever-present splinters. "I got lots of splinters under my fingernails," she says. "We wrapped

brown paper tape around our fingers to keep them out, but it didn't keep many out."

Goldie made 35 cents an hour and worked from 8:00 in the morning until sometimes late at night, but always put in a solid eight hours. She had a union card, but when asked what the Richwood Clothespin and Dish Workers' Union did for her, she replied, "I don't remember."



Goldie holds one of the clothespins she helped make in Richwood in the 1940s. Photo by Mark Romano.

No doctors or nurses were on site, no masks were supplied to help stem the inhalation of sawdust, no fire extinguishers were available, and no fire-escape plan existed, which is incredible considering the amount of wood processed and the number of employees who smoked as they worked.

Goldie's memories of making clothespins with neighborhood girls—most of whom were

also waiting for boyfriends to return from overseas—paint a picture of a thriving economy in Richwood during World War II. Fellowship was as much a part of the job as the job itself. Goldie still talks about the half-hour lunch breaks, when most workers made their way to the Rainbow Grill to get two chili dogs for a dime. She notes that the chili-and-onion-filled buns didn't include the "dog."

Clothespins of lesser quality were often turned into painted dolls or sold by the bagful as fuel for kitchen stoves. When Goldie's coworkers weren't working the pond or splitting wood, they were playing pranks or gossiping. And the chutes that carried unfinished pins to the slotters occasionally were invaded by garter snakes or other live critters. Once, word spread that an employee



The factory added spring-type clothespins in the 1930s. Photo by our author.

had been murdered because he was having an affair with another man's wife and that his body was at the bottom of the pond. Nobody seemed to want to mount a recovery effort.

Allen Barker likely has the largest collection of memorabilia from the largest clothespin factory in the world. An avid historian, his enthusiasm for the "pin factory" is unparal-

leled. The evolution of the business and the humble but utilitarian clothespin are centerpieces of his collection, but Allen has all manner of other paraphernalia: paper trays, ceremonial Cherry River Navy *scabbards* (giant clothespins to be worn at major events), political memorabilia that mention clothespins, postcards, toothpicks, wooden butter dishes, clothespin boxes and

bags, mini-sized bowling pins, clothespin jewelry, original news articles, even clothespin pens—the scope is remarkable.

Allen can answer nearly any question about the factory. For example, J. B. Dodge, the factory's founder, didn't have a proper name. "J" didn't stand for John, James, or Joshua, and the "B" wasn't for Bruce or Benjamin. As a newspaper article from 1916 pithily com-

The Cherry River Navy

Allen Barker has wonderful stories about the endearing Cherry River Navy. "The Cherry River Navy officers," Allen says, "were issued a special lapel pin as part of their regalia. The Cherry River Navy was part of the Spud and Splinter Festival, which, in turn, had associations with the clothespin factory."

But what was/is the Cherry River Navy? It's actually a tongue-in-cheek honorary society, established in 1937, to highlight the importance of

completing West Virginia Route 39 from Richwood to Marlinton. The inside joke is that Cherry River—a Gauley River tributary that flows from Pocahontas County through Richwood—is unnavigable.

Allen continues, "Up until the Marlinton Road was constructed, the only way into Richwood was the Greenbrier Road or down from Hinkle Mountain. The only way out the other end was the railroad grade."

So, the Cherry River Navy had virtually nothing to do with boat-

ing, and everything to do with land traffic. "On to Marlinton!" was its motto.

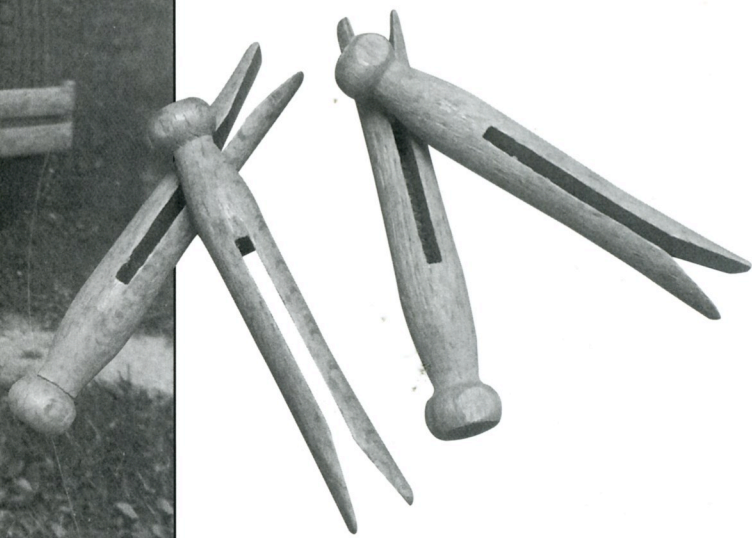
Even after Route 39 was completed in 1945, the Cherry River Navy forged on. It still sails each August on a float in the Cherry River Festival in downtown Richwood. The navy has included such honorary admirals as Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, Richwood newspaper publisher Jim Comstock, and Babe Ruth.



The Spud and Splinter Festival was one of the big annual events for the Cherry River Navy. This Finley Taylor photo is from the first festival, held in August 1937.



The inspirations for our author's research: A picture of the grandmother she never met, May Jones, and her four clothespins from Richwood. Photographer unknown.



ments, this titan of enterprise was but "christened with the alphabet." Who would know this but Allen?

Allen also engraves clothespins with the word "Richwood" for necklace pieces, and I'm honored to have one. He distributes them to students when he gives history presentations at schools. When floodwaters decimated Richwood and so many other towns in June 2016,

I was reminded of my little clothespin jewelry piece and wore it for months afterwards. So, my family's search for my missing grandmother led me to this amazing little town. By the way, I eventually discovered that my grandmother Mabel May Jones died some years ago. I may not have known her while she was alive, but because of her, I have four precious family heirlooms and found

the world's largest clothespin factory—right in the heart of Nicholas County. 🍁

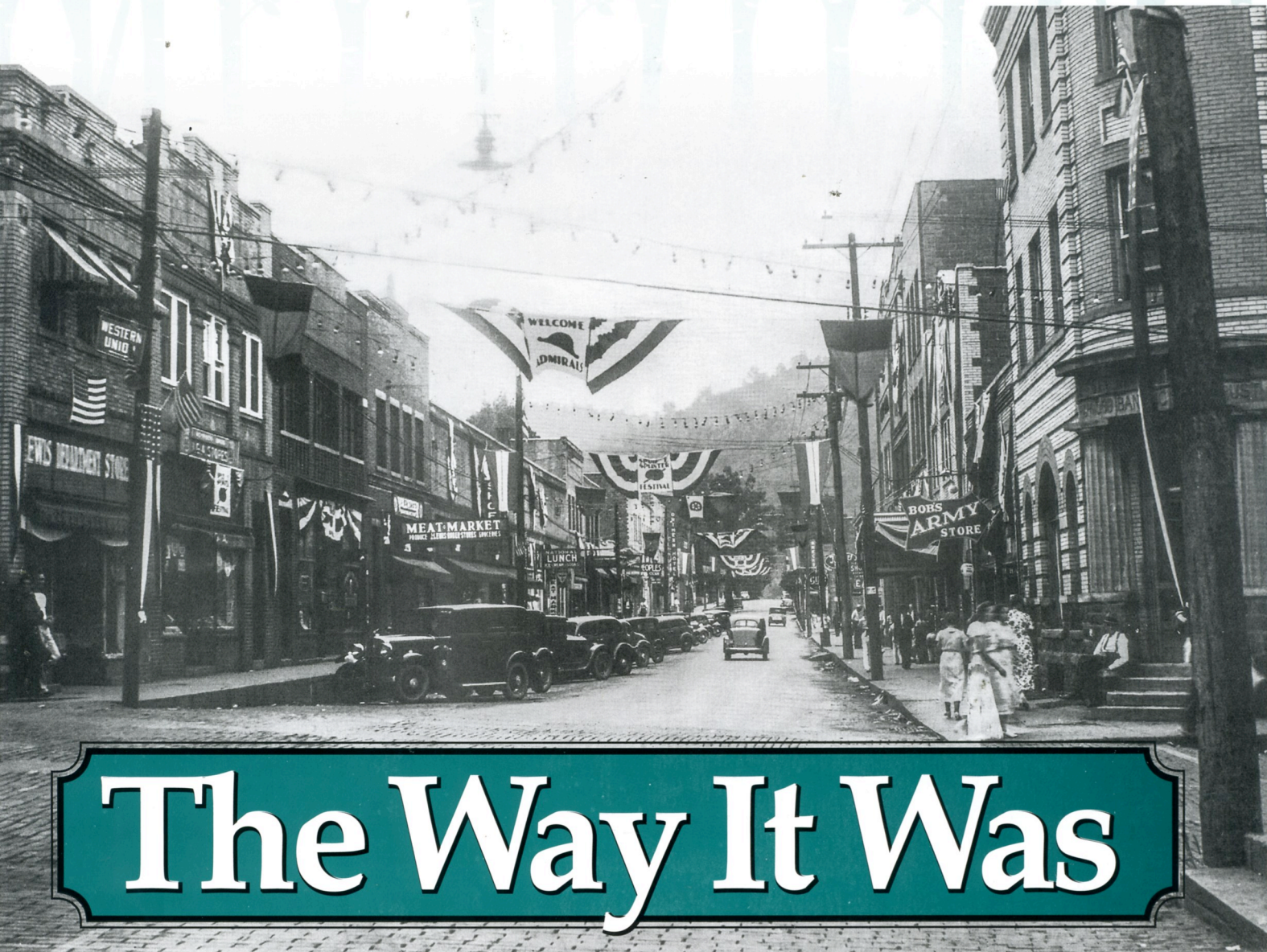
St. Albans native BEVERLY BROOKS STEENSTRA is a graduate of Marshall University, a historian, and former research analyst for the West Virginia Senate Committee on the Judiciary. She is a board member of the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame and the advisory board for the Children's Home Society of West Virginia. She lives in Charleston. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Richwood

**By Olive Workman
Persinger,
as Told to Donna
McGuire Tanner**

Olive Workman Persinger was an early singing sensation on radio stations in Charleston, Wheeling, and Oak Hill. Before her death in 2015 at age 94, she shared with her daughter, Donna McGuire Tanner, her memories of Richwood in the late 1940s. To find out more about Olive's years on the radio and nursing, please see "A Country Girl Comes Home" by Donna McGuire Tanner (Spring 2000) and "Night Riders on the Air" by Linda Myers Browning and Donna McGuire Tanner (Spring 2009). —ed.

Olive, Linda, and Melvin Myers,
1950s. Photographer unknown.
Courtesy of our author.



The Way It Was

Main Street in downtown Richwood about 1940 on the eve of the annual Spud and Splinter Festival. Photo by Finley Taylor. All Finley Taylor photos courtesy of Mark Romano.

As soon as I saw all the old buildings, I knew I was home. My husband, Bill, and I were attending an event for seniors called the "Past 80 Dinner." It is held annually in Richwood. My daughter Linda had driven us almost 100 miles from Cunard in Fayette County to bring us

to Richwood High School.

My mind returned to 1948. I was 27 years old, and Linda was a toddler three years old. My late husband, Melvin Myers, and I had relocated to Richwood. At that time, it was a flourishing town.

As Linda's car reached the intersection of Main Street and

Oakford Avenue, I remember that there used to be bricks on the street at that crossing. The three of us surveyed the scene before us. Linda and I were not seeing it as it is now, but the way it was.

Richwood was a typical town in that era. The Woolridge Coal Company was nearby.



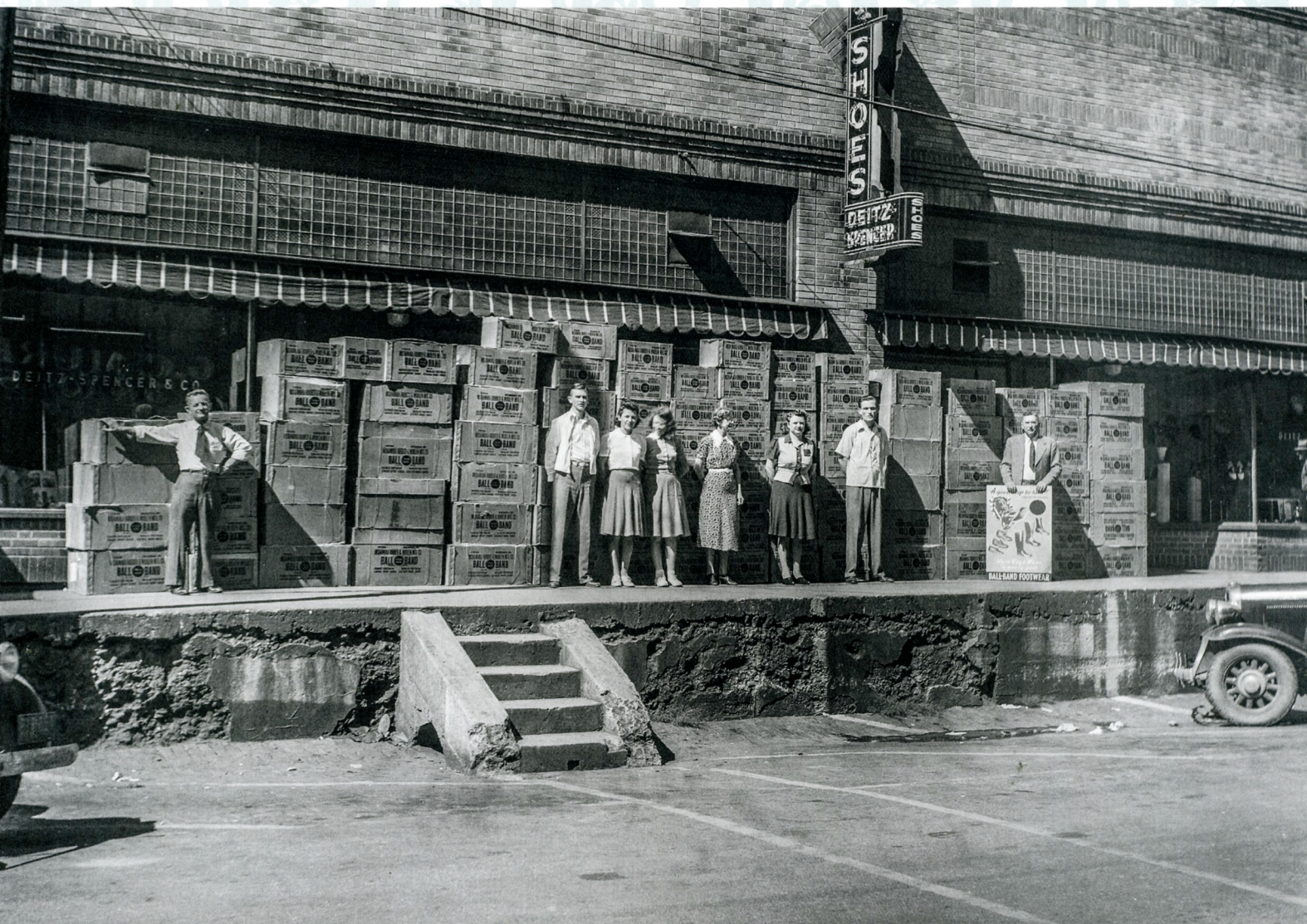
The Richwood High School Band helps celebrate the release of the new 1937 Chevys at Morris Chevrolet. Photo by Finley Taylor.

The company store was where most mining families shopped. People seeking employment had plenty of places to work. Cherry River Bottom Lumber Company supplied many jobs. Even more people (especially women) could find work at the clothespin factory, or the Broom Handle and Chair Company.

Many businesses lined Main Street. I often shopped at G. C. Murphy's five-and-dime store,

the IGA supermarket, and a shoe store. There was a funeral home and a bank. When visitors came to town, they would stay at the Virginia Hotel. They had several places where they could eat. Prelaz's Restaurant and a soda fountain and Main Street Café. The Richwood High School students usually ate lunch at Ritzy Rae, which I remember was near a gas station.

There was entertainment of all kinds for the young and old. People would line the street to watch the Richwood High School bands, or soldiers marching in a parade to the armory. A ramp (a wild plant, with a pungent odor) festival was, and is, held every spring. A radio station provided news and music. My brother, Philip Workman, had a program on there. He played the guitar,



(Left-right) Alvin "Shorty" Spencer, unidentified man, Freddie Perkins, Juanita Wahling, Bessie Deitz, unidentified woman, Sam Hall, and unidentified salesman in front of the Deitz Spencer Shoe Store in Richwood. Photo by Finley Taylor.

and his family sang; even my mother, Bertha Workman, joined them.

It always amazed me how everything seemed to be connected to the lumber industry. Locals bragged the world's largest hemlock tree was found in an area of woods there. Another huge hemlock tree was cut and used to help build the Titanic.

Almost all the streets were

given names with the lumber business considered: Maple Street and Greenbrier Road. The Cherry River has flooded the town several times. The high school mascot was a lumberjack. We lived on Cranberry Street, and Linda and her many friends (the Cranberry Gang) attended Walnut Elementary School.

Children (there were plenty) had a swimming hole, or Sat-

urdays would find youths at the roller rink or two movie theaters. Linda later told me she and her cousins used to climb up in the old brick smokestacks, where the tannery paper mill had once been. There were two rope swinging bridges spanning the Cherry River where the children loved to play.

Of course, on Sundays, we had many churches, of all de-



The Richwood Presbyterian Church on Main Street. Photo by Finley Taylor.

nominations, where we could worship.

I have many good memories, but one that I often laugh about is the day I was shopping on Main Street, when I saw a man dressed in a gray uniform. He was wearing a cap, and his pants flared at the side, but was tight around the ankles. I knew he was not in the military, or a pilot. So, I discreetly followed him. When he stepped

into the shoe store, I asked the clerk who this strangely dressed man was. She told me he was the car driver for a famous person. I had heard that a Hollywood celebrity owned and operated a lumber business, and his daughter lived in Richwood. He would come often to check on his business. I could not believe that the man I had followed was Jack Benny's chauffeur.

There were two hospitals in Richwood, the old Sacred Heart was replaced by a new Sacred Heart, which was run by nuns, and had a Catholic School. I began my lifelong nursing career there. The other hospital was the McClung Hospital located on Oakford Avenue and Main Street. It was a smaller one, but very good in emergencies, especially when blood was needed. A loud



Flag bearers lead a parade waving the Stars and Stripes and the West Virginia state flag in Richwood. Photo by Finley Taylor.

siren-like police car would ring. I would swiftly run as fast as I could because I knew it was probably my older sister Athaline. She had a very serious nose-bleeding condition. When the bleeding started, it was difficult to stop. As soon as she came in with one of her nosebleeds, they would rush to turn on the siren. One day, a man was merely passing by the door of the hospital. He

just walked in and gave his blood, which helped to save my sister's life. A long line of Richwooders would line up as soon as they heard the emergency siren. Sometimes, when Athaline's bleeding could not be stopped, she would be transferred to a hospital in Charleston.

Richwood is no longer a booming town. It is a shadow of the place I knew, but to me

and Linda, it is still home, and we remember it as it was. 🍁

DONNA MCGUIRE TANNER is a 1966 graduate of Mount Hope High School, now living in Ocala, Florida. She is a freelance writer who has had more than 500 articles published. Donna's most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Spring 2009 issue.

» Last « Photographers

By Anne Johnson and
Mark Romano

All photos are courtesy of
Mark Romano.

» FINLEY TAYLOR «

Many of the photos in the previous articles were taken by Richwood photographer Finley Taylor (1887-1976). Finley's keen eye and skills at lighting and photography make him one of the last great old-style photographers—from hauling around a heavy camera and tripod, to taking lengthy exposures, to using dangerous darkroom chemicals to develop images. We thought you might enjoy some of Finley's amazing photos from 20th-century Nicholas County. For more about Finley and his photos, please see "Finley Taylor" by Luther D. Baker (Winter 2013). —ed.

For centuries, photographers have documented people's lives by preserving images. Finley Taylor of Richwood was a master photographer, intentional and strategic, and a philosopher of human nature. Around the turn of the 20th century, Finley lugged his

cumbersome 5x7 Rochester field camera through rugged logging camps, photographing families who lived and toiled during the great logging era in Nicholas County. He was also an accomplished portrait photographer. In archiving the people of his beloved Richwood, Finley had a special

way of depicting their souls and exposing their genuine character.

He began his career working with photographer G. W. Yorty of Gad, about 30 miles west of Richwood. Finley followed G. W. to various gatherings, picnics, funerals, and celebrations, hoping to learn his secret craft. Eventually, G. W.

A self-portrait of Finley Taylor, posing by a Nicholas County waterfall, 1940s.





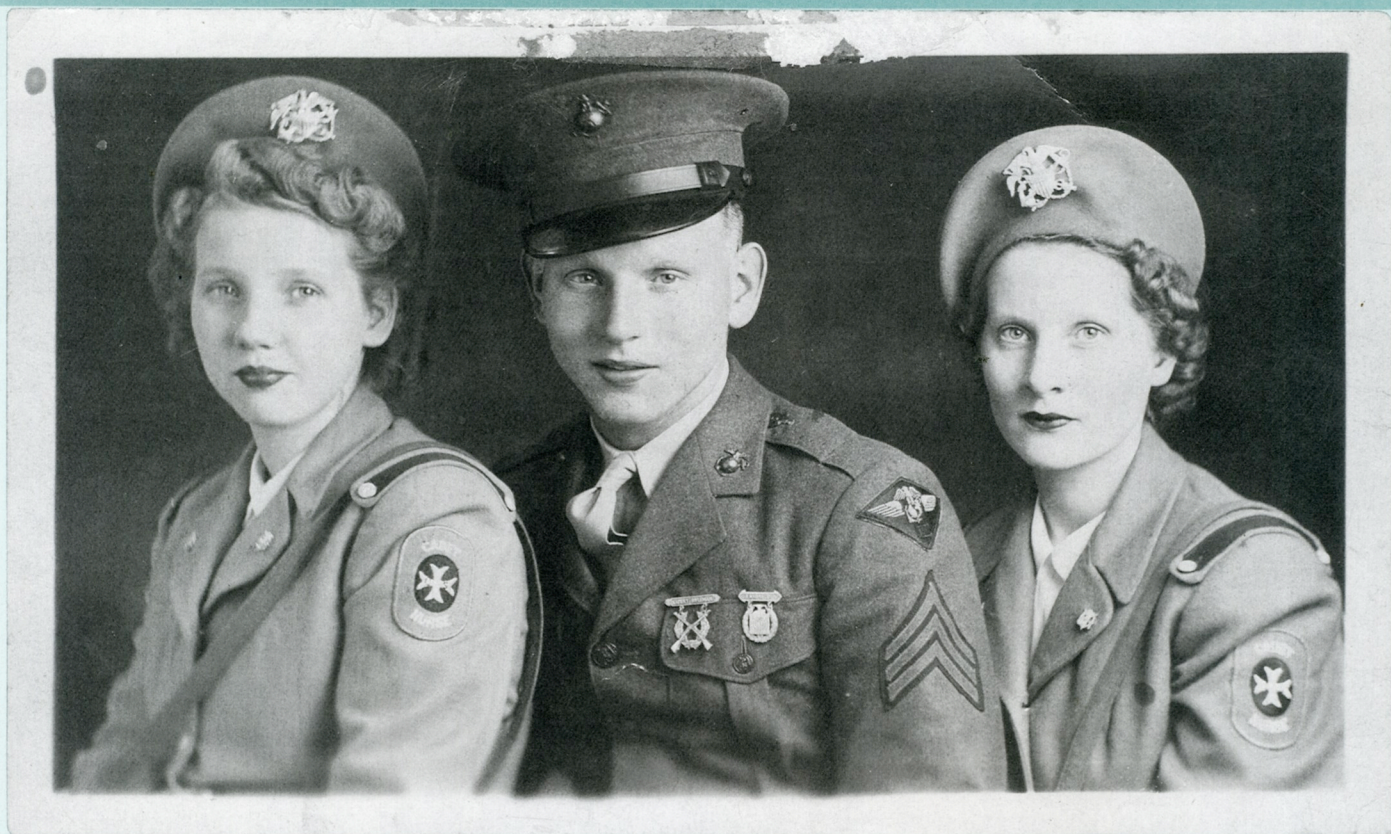
migrated west to care for his declining health, and Finley, with his wife and children, moved east to the booming town of Richwood, where he was employed by the Cherry River Boom and Lumber Company.

As land speculators purchased virgin forest, commercial logging operations expanded in Richwood and surrounding areas. Richwood's sparse population of 24

grew to more than 4,000 in 1911. Finley quietly but purposefully watched the hum and scuttle of the town's residents and, with his camera, began recording the growth of a new era. With his wife's assistance, he developed images in his darkroom and eventually opened a home studio, photographing local townspeople. He truly captured the essence of his subjects, often dressing them in

humorous attire to relax them and bring out their true selves. As part of his job, he also photographed chilling crime scenes, car wrecks, and funerals.

While Finley enjoyed his studio portraits, his photography really shined when he traveled around the mountainside on horseback. Away from the familiar territory of controlled studio lighting and into the dim forests of the Cranberry



Wilderness log camps, Finley perfected his use of natural light and produced much of his greatest work.

He spent long days set-directing various logging camp workers and their families in strategic poses.

In doing so, he recorded their primitive, yet subtly elegant, ways of life. Many were immigrants from Italy, Czechoslovakia, and Slovenia and didn't speak English. Still, Finley communicated with and sold them photos, which they

shared with their loved ones across the ocean.

Finley Taylor continued his work for 38 years. On July 16, 1949, he retired, unexpectedly and somewhat mysteriously. He took his last portrait and folded



his black cloth one final time. After his wife's passing, Finley lived with his daughter until he died in 1976. He's buried in the Richwood Cemetery.

Finley Taylor was a photographer ahead of his time. His gift for depicting the uniqueness of an individual or family was a beacon to future photographers. ❁

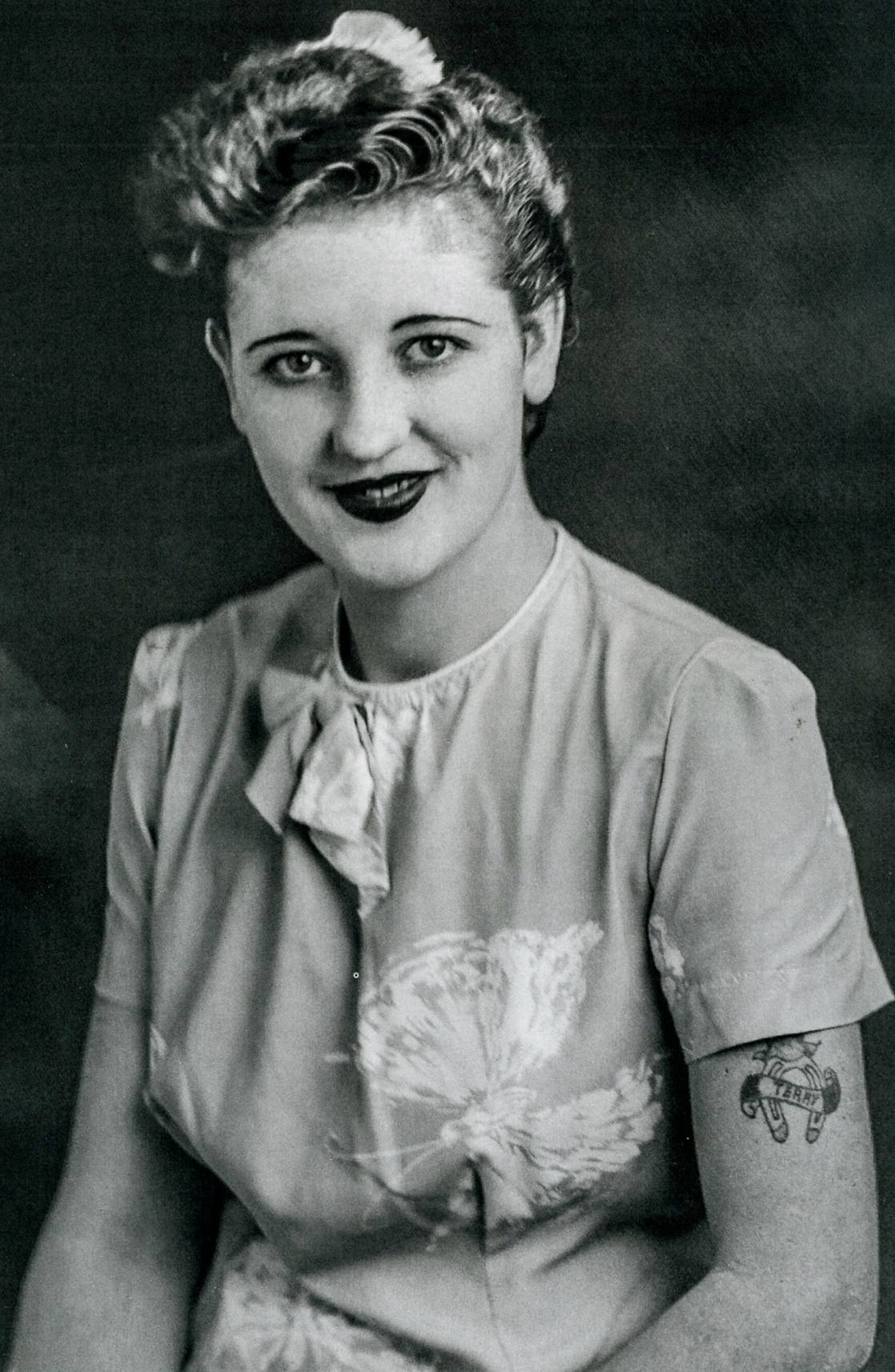
ANNE JOHNSON and MARK ROMANO have documented the lives of Finley Taylor and other photographers, such as famed newspaper editor Jim Comstock, in their series Last Photographers. Their first three books follow Finley's career through his journal entries, which Anne has re-created

in his voice. You'll travel with Finley, share his celebrations and challenges, and uncover the dark family secret that eventually sends him into early retirement.

For more information, please visit www.lastphotographers.com, e-mail mark@publishingbyromano.com, or call 304-872-1759.











The Cockayne House in Glen Dale,
2016. Photo by Steve Brightwell.



The Cockayne House

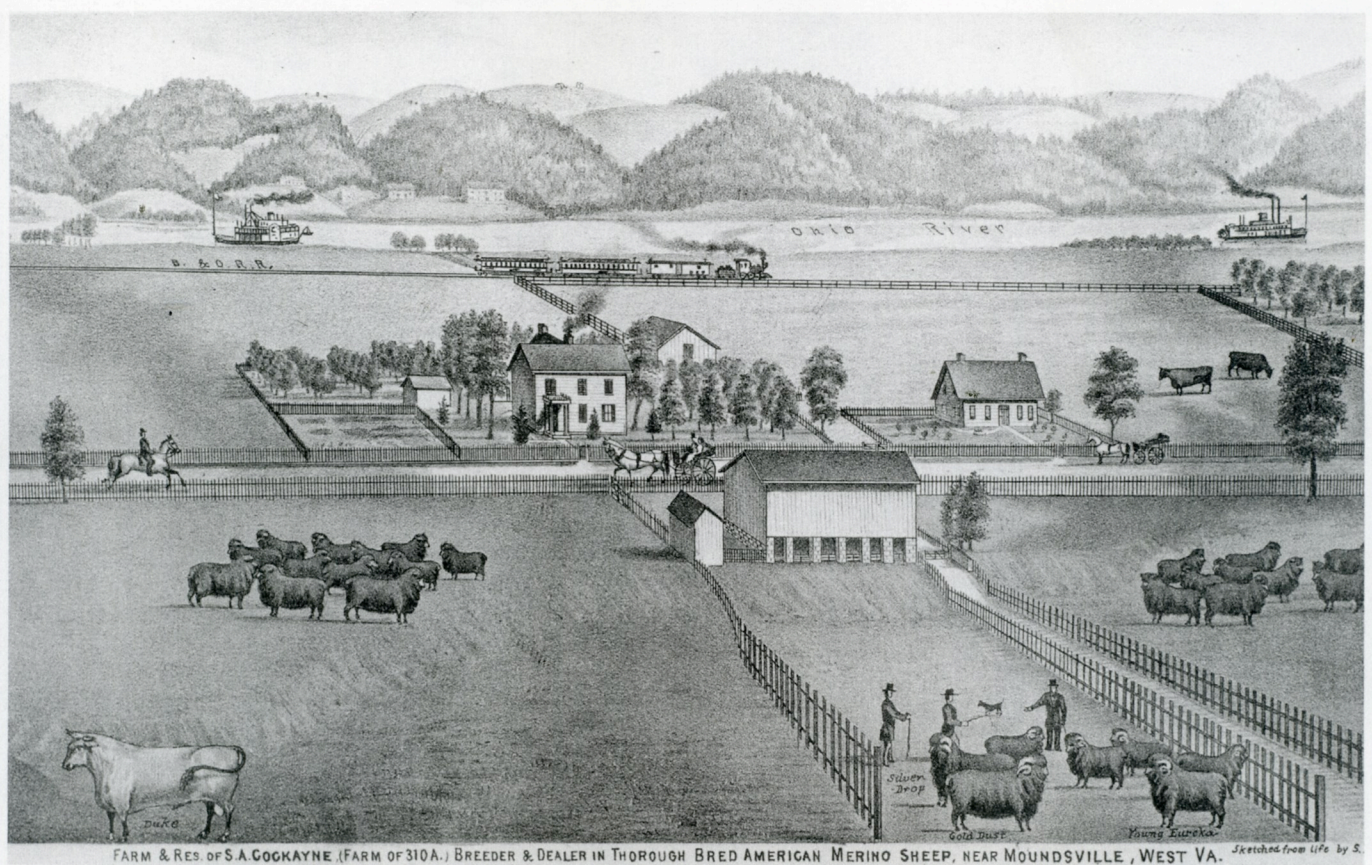
The Cockayne Farmstead in Glen Dale is one of West Virginia's great preservation stories. While the city of Glen Dale and the Marshall County Historical Society have taken lead roles, the project has been a team effort.

The Cockayne House dates to 1850, though the original farm-

stead is much older. Samuel Cockayne moved his family from Maryland to what is now the city of Glen Dale sometime between 1795 and 1798. The region was literally on the edge of America's western frontier, but the Cockaynes weren't alone.

In 1769, Ebenezer Zane settled at the confluence of the Ohio

River and Wheeling Creek—several miles to the north. Then, in 1771, Joseph, Samuel, and James Tomlinson arrived at the confluence of the Ohio River and Grave Creek—about two miles south of the Cockayne Farmstead. Joseph Tomlinson later laid out lots for the town of Elizabethtown, which became part of Moundsville in 1866.



The Cockayne Farm and House were featured in the *Illustrated Atlas of the Upper Ohio Valley*, published by Titus, Simmons & Titus in 1877. Note the proximity of the road (now West Virginia Route 2), railroad, and river. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Bob's Lunch Collection.

A Preservation Effort by the Whole Community

By Larry Shockley

About the time Tomlinson was laying out his town, Samuel Cockayne was building a log cabin near Wheeling Pike (now West Virginia Route 2) on a 539-acre farm. While he was primarily a farmer, Cockayne also operated a tavern, known as the Andrew Jackson Inn. About 1850, his son Bennett built the Cockayne House that

still stands at Glen Dale. Bennett served as postmaster in Moundsville and operated a general store in Elizabethtown. Bennett's oldest son, Alexander, operated Glen Dale's first school in the house.

Another of Bennett's sons, Samuel A. J.—whose footprints and initials are imprinted in the farmhouse's stone hearth—

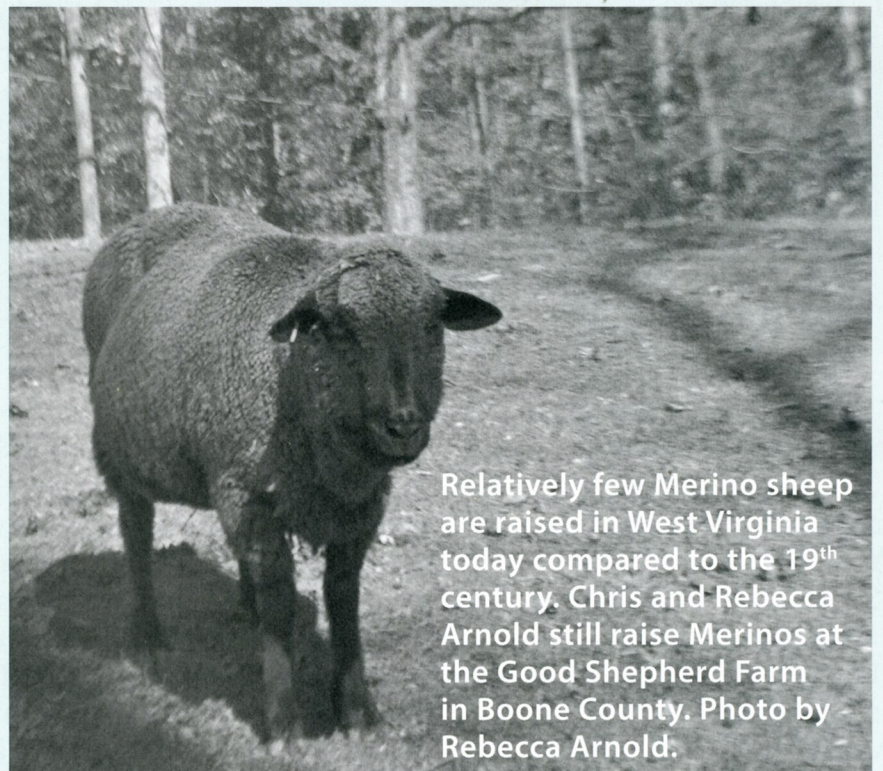
would bring fame to the Cockayne Farmstead. Samuel A. J. purchased cattle, hogs, and other livestock from distant farms, but it was his ideas about sheep husbandry and marketing that brought Samuel A. J. renown. He stressed the importance of purity in the wool industry, as seen in his comments here to the Mc-



Pictured holding the basket, Hannah Cockayne (1840-1917) named the family farm Glen Dale, inspiring the town's name, as well. She was married to Samuel A. J. Cockayne (1841-1904). Here, Hannah and her daughters pick grapes. Courtesy of the Cockayne Farmstead.

Cormick Harvesting Machine Company: "There can be no permanent, profitable or satisfactory results secured in sheep husbandry without the use of pure bred rams. . . . The time has gone by where anything but pure blood will satisfy the intelligent wool grower."

In 1868, Samuel A. J. Cockayne brought his first prized Merino rams to the farm. Merinos are sheep—originally imported from Spain—valued for the high quality and softness of their wool. According to a newspaper account from the time, Samuel A. J. spent \$1,500—about \$24,000 in today's money—on one Spanish Merino ram from Vermont. In addition to purebred sheep,



Relatively few Merino sheep are raised in West Virginia today compared to the 19th century. Chris and Rebecca Arnold still raise Merinos at the Good Shepherd Farm in Boone County. Photo by Rebecca Arnold.



Sam Cockayne (1921-2001). Courtesy of the Cockayne Farmstead.

he also bought purebred pigs from Ohio.

In addition to emphasizing quality, Samuel A. J. was ahead of his time with marketing. Not merely satisfied with word of mouth about his prized livestock, he placed ads in distant newspapers to promote the days and times when he'd be selling his animals. Only eight years after purchasing his first Merino, Samuel A. J. gained international acclaim by winning first prize from the U.S. Centennial Commission at the 1876 International Exhibition in Philadelphia. Two years later,

he won notice for his sheep at the International Exhibition in Paris.

By 1877, the Cockayne Farm had become so prominent it was featured as a lithograph in the popular *Illustrated Atlas of the Upper Ohio River Valley*—what many consider the “most extraordinary county atlas” of the 19th century.

Samuel A. J. and his wife, Hannah Jane Alexander, worked the farm for the rest of their lives. By the time their son Samuel A. inherited the farmhouse and most of the farm in 1917, it'd become known locally as the

Glendale Farm, and the town of Glen Dale was named in honor of the farm.

Samuel A. carried on the family farming tradition. He formed a cooperative in the region and was designated as a “county wool dealer.” He gathered wool from local farmers, combined it with his own, and sold the lot in eastern markets.

In later years, Samuel A. passed along most of his farm business to his son—named Samuel A. J., like his grandfather. The young Sam, as he was known, planned to dedicate his life to agriculture and dropped out of high school to give the farm more attention. Although military service in World War II delayed his farming ambitions, he still wrote home regularly to find out how the farm was faring in his absence.

Sam came back from the war in 1945 a changed man—much more reclusive than in the past. His mother died a few months before he returned, and his father passed on in 1954. Sam began living a much more secluded existence. He continued to farm his ancestors' land but, unlike his ancestors, refused to use modern agricultural equipment. Instead, he worked the land with a horse and plow. It was reported by a relative that he considered modern machinery to be the “work of the devil.”

Sam continued farming the large homestead by hand until selling a good portion of it in 1965 to make way for John Marshall High School—located directly across from the house



The living room is decorated as it might have appeared in the late 1800s. Much of the furniture has been donated by descendants of the Cockaynes. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

on Route 2. Sam spent most of the rest of his life isolated in two back rooms of the mansion. His hermit-like lifestyle is the main reason most of the house appears to be frozen in time in the 19th century.

Sam steadily became even more of a recluse. In 2001, Nila Chaddock of the Marshall County Historical Society snapped a photo of the old farmhouse and mailed a print to Sam. She sent it on a Thursday. On Monday, she received a handwritten reply in the mail, saying simply, "Thank you for the picture, Sam Cockayne."

Later that same year, Sam entered a nursing home and died shortly thereafter. Upon his death, it was discovered he'd left a gift to the community. In his will, he donated the old family farmhouse and all its contents to the city of

Glen Dale. By this time, the farmstead had been reduced from its earlier 303 acres to only the Cockayne House and one-half acre of land. The city asked the historical society to document, preserve, and restore the house, its contents, and the surrounding property.

Nila, vice president of the society at the time, agreed to chair the committee overseeing the project. She recalls, "We had no experience in such a massive undertaking and no real background in historic preservation. So, the early challenge was just comprehending what we needed to do, adopting a vision for how the project should unfold, and convincing others, such as grantors and the community, that it could be done."

The initial restoration work stabilized the house. To seal

out water, contractors rebuilt a box gutter system and replaced the slate roof. It was the very definition of a group effort. Nila's husband, Philip, chipped in to carve new wooden brackets for the box gutters, based on a mold from the originals.

The front porch columns, decking, and roof were restored in 2007. Curators documented and cataloged more than 1,500 artifacts, including furnishings, clothing, toys, jewelry, tools, original artwork, and magazines dating from the 1850s through the 1950s. A volunteer digitized more than 12,000 letters, newspapers, legal documents, social invitations, school records, and more. Students from West Virginia University's Public History, Cultural Resources Management, Interior Design, and



For several years, students from John Marshall High School—located directly across Route 2 from the house—have raised a kitchen garden, based largely on Sam Cockayne's FHA diaries from the 1930s. Photo by Steve Brightwell.



Nila Chaddock and the Marshall County Historical Society played a key role in the house's restoration. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

Fashion Merchandising programs developed policies for maintaining and displaying historic textiles, digitized each room of the house using 3-D laser scanners, and formulated a collection management plan.

Meanwhile, Moundsville lawyers Lou Khourey, Jonathan Turak, and Christopher Turak stepped in to purchase the smaller 19th-century family home next door that had belonged to Lisa Cockayne, the widow of Sam's brother. The attorneys immediately leased the house to the society, which helped protect the overall property until the society could get the funding to pay off the mortgage and deed it to the city. Keeping with the community focus of the project, Lisa had directed that all proceeds from the sale of her home go to the local

animal shelter and towards an annual scholarship for a John Marshall student. For years, the society used this smaller house as office space and as its primary base of operations, where volunteers could clean and store artifacts and hold workshops for students. Today, in addition to serving as office space, Lisa Cockayne's old home serves as a visitor center for the region—ensuring that the house will be open to tourists and students on a regular basis.

In 2008, the society hired a program director. Tom Tarowsky oversaw education outreach as well as continuing restoration and cataloging work. He notes, "By mid-November 2009, work on the exterior was completed, and the structure was returned to its appearance, ca. 1895-1905. The focus of future efforts then



Wheeling native Jamie Vosvick (left) donated his own time to lead archaeology digs at the farm. Courtesy of the Cockayne Farmstead.

turned toward its mechanical systems, like climate control and wiring."

After seven years of building the Cockayne Farmstead's programs, Tom officially retired in 2015.

The Cockayne garden is another fascinating part of the story. For several years, the society has partnered with John Marshall students to plant a kitchen garden. "Our vision," says Nila, "has been to develop the property into an educational and cultural center. We encourage teachers and students to utilize the house in their studies, sometimes in unusual ways. The school's horticulture department plants gardens each spring on the south lawn. An early advanced English class created public service announcements, videos, and a brochure for

us. We've had ties with the [high school's] arts department and West Virginia studies classes. . . . After all, the school is built on Cockayne land."

The garden is based in part on diaries kept by Sam when he was a Future Farmers of America (FFA) student at Moundsville High School in the 1930s.

The interpretive effort also received an early boost from archaeologist and Wheeling native Jamie Vosvick. Jamie was driving by one day, saw the work being done, and offered to volunteer. Nila remembers, "Jamie called us out of the blue and offered his services free of charge. He performed shovel-pit testing on the property and started documenting the massive collection of artifacts."

Jamie continued his volunteer work by excavating the

midden (an old trash dump) and privy (outhouse remains) on succeeding West Virginia Days. Both excavations provided a wealth of information about the day-to-day life of the Cockaynes in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Jamie's research indicates the Cockaynes ate quite a bit of rice, pumpkins, grapes, berries, garden peas, peaches, and pears. He also authenticated an Adena burial mound on the site dating back 2,000 years—located only two miles from Grave Creek Mound, the largest of its kind in the country.

Even with these successes, much work remains. Due to funding restrictions, the society has had to prioritize the restoration and interpretive work. Nila says, "That's why we sometimes had to focus on restoring significant pieces



Here is a section of the privy volunteers excavated near the house. Courtesy of the Cockayne Farmstead.



From 2008 until his retirement in 2015, Tom Tarowsky served as program director at the Cockayne. Courtesy of the Cockayne Farmstead.

of property to the farmhouse: the south lawn, the prehistoric mound, and the 19th-century home that serves as the project's visitors' center. And at times, we had to put the acquisition of the property ahead of restoring the house."

She emphasizes the team effort that's gone into the restoration: "This has happened over and over again. Just when we needed it most, just when we think something is impossible, someone has unexpectedly stepped forward."

The legacy of the Cockayne family and the farmstead spans the length of human existence in Marshall County—from its earliest inhabitants, to the first white settlers in Glen Dale, to the farm's award-winning Merino wool, to the first school

in Glen Dale, and now to a beautifully restored mansion that will educate children and adults for decades to come.

Nila Chaddock places the farmstead's importance in context, "The Cockayne Farm covers the entire history of the area. The Cockaynes represented the lifestyles, values, and work ethics of those early pioneers who helped to build our great state and nation."✻

LARRY SHOCKLEY works as an Archives Specialist for the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. He holds an M.L.I.S from Florida State University, an M.A. in history from Marshall University, and a Cultural Resource Management certificate from West Virginia University. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Samuel A. J. Cockayne

By Nila Chaddock



Sam Cockayne, as he was known, was born in Glen Dale on November 29, 1921. He was educated in West Virginia schools and completed his studies through the 10th grade at Moundsville High School, dropping out to help with the family farm. He plowed fields; grew corn, oats, and vegetables; raised livestock; and maintained farm machinery and buildings.

Sam registered for the draft at Selective Service Board No. 1 and entered into active Army service in July 1942. In two weeks of basic training as a private, he qualified as an M1 rifle marksman and carbine sharpshooter. He then became a radio operator and achieved the rank of private first class, fourth-class technician.

He installed and operated tactical field radio transmitting and receiving equipment, sent and received messages by Morse code, used light signals, and repaired the equipment. He eventually earned an Asiatic-Pacific Theater campaign ribbon with seven bronze stars, the Philippine Liberation ribbon with two bronze stars, and a Good Conduct ribbon.

The last resident of the Cockayne House was Sam Cockayne (1921-2001). Upon his death, he donated the house and one-half acre of the original farm to the city of Glen Dale. Courtesy of the Cockayne Farmstead.

As with most other servicemen, Sam signed up for term life insurance for \$10,000. It cost \$3.25 each month and was deducted from his pay. Before he went to the forward areas, Sam had to be immunized for smallpox, typhoid, tetanus, and typhus. Sam was honorably discharged in September 1945 and received a lapel button with a picture of an eagle, which he and his friends laughingly described as "a ruptured duck."

Back in Glen Dale after the

war, he became known as an eccentric character; some now attribute his personality change in part to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) suffered in the South Pacific. But, Sam Cockayne never lost his sense of humor, as recalled by local resident Bill Knuth: "I was riding the bus home from Moundsville by myself one day in 1948. When I got on, I said 'hello' to Sam Cockayne, who was sitting on the long seat behind the driver, and found a seat half-way back. Intending to get off at

Lee Street, just past where Sam would get off, I waited for him to get up before I rang for my stop. Well, Sam didn't get off, and as I stumbled past him in a hurry, he looked up, grinned, and said, 'Fooled you!'" *

NILA CHADDOCK is a retired office manager for the Gold Khourey & Turak law firm in Moundsville. She is a board member of the Marshall County Historical Society and, since 2001, has served as chair of the society's Cockayne Committee. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Sam Cockayne spent much of his later years in this back room of the Cockayne House. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

Where in the World

By Kathy Marks

Everyone knows that country roads take you home, and in West Virginia, some of those roads can take you to really strange-sounding places. It's Odd but True that West Virginia is colorful, not just scenically but also in the way some out-of-the-way places have been named. Historically, the "Odd" people have wanted unusual names for their towns, and the "True" people have requested post offices. Sometimes, the "Left Hand" doesn't know what the right is doing.

One Roane County community made a "Mountain" out of a "Mole Hill." In 1949, folks in Mole Hill went along with a Borden Milk Company promotion to change their town's name to Mountain in exchange

for construction of a better road. The name remains, even though the road didn't happen for another 10 years and had nothing to do with the name change.

I grew up in Braxton County and always wondered how Cat Heaven got its name. I looked at historical books, such as John D. Sutton's *History of Braxton County and Central West Virginia* and Skip Johnson's *River on the Rocks* and reached out to friends, relatives, and social media.

Cat Heaven Road is in Tesla—not the car or the rock band. My great-grandmother Alice Carlotta "Lotta" (Tippens) Wilson was the second-longest-serving postmistress in Tesla, spending 30 years on the job. My family always understood

that Lotta had named the Tesla post office in the early 1900s, but nobody was exactly sure why. However, we do know that Lotta was fond of unusual names, christening her own children Cyril, Luella, Crystabel, Fredora, Yula, and Zelda. Perhaps she was a fan of Nikola Tesla (1856-1943)? The great Croatian-born inventor helped develop the alternating-current (AC) electrical system and early wireless technologies—not to mention inspiring the names of the car and band—but how well was he known in rural Braxton County in the early 20th century? By the way, Lotta's daughter-in-law Dorothy Wilson was Tesla's last postmistress, serving 37 years. When she retired in the 1980s, the post office closed.

MOLE HILL -- NOV. 28, 1857

JACOB LANTZ, POSTMASTER

MOUNTAIN -- JULY 1, 1949

H. K. HAYMOND, POSTMASTER

W. VA.

This ribbon commemorates a Borden Milk promotion from 1949 that prompted the Roane County town of Mole Hill to change its name to Mountain. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Karen B. Stripes Collection.

Is Cat Heaven?



The road to Cat Heaven in Tesla. Photo by our author.

So, back to how Cat Heaven got its name. Skip Johnson gave two popular versions of the story. One is the rather obvious explanation that a woman with many cats once lived there. The other is that a family of bobcats once denned at the head of the hollow. My cousin John Tinney suggests

that the folks at Cat Heaven simply loved cats and kept a relatively large number of them for such a small community.

ANIMALS AND WHERE THEY TRAVELED

Some places are named because of a likely attribute, such as Seng Run, which is just down

the road from Cat Heaven. For the uninitiated, Seng Run refers to an area that was and possibly still is known for gathering ginseng—ginseng hunters don't like to give away their hunting places.

There are lots of little isolated areas in Braxton County—and across the state—with “lick” in

the name: Elk Lick, Katy Lick, Lick Fork, Salt Lick, and Two Lick Run, the last of which is in Tesla. A lick generally refers to a place where elk, deer, and other wildlife came to lick salt. Outside of the Kanawha Valley, Braxton County was one of our bigger salt producers in the early years of settlement.

Buffaloes were another animal that traveled to salt licks in large numbers, so we have more than our share of buffalo place names. There's a Buffalo Lick in Kanawha and Roane counties, Buffalo Run in Monroe County, Buffalo Shoals in Wayne County, Buffalo Station in Monongalia County, and at least 10 Buffalo Creeks—not to mention towns once or still named Buffalo in Brooke, Jackson, Logan, Morgan, and Putnam counties.

Low-lying areas have commonly been called "bottoms," such as Fraziers Bottom in

Putnam County. It's not known whether or not the potentially risqué word *bottom* inspired the postmaster at Marlin's Bottom to change his town's name to Marlinton in 1887.

Old Woman's Run empties into Elk River at the upper end of Sutton, and Granny's Creek at the lower end. Animals used to shelter in the cliffs between Granny's Creek and Old Woman's Run. A very large bear made her home here once and raised several broods, becoming a legend to hunters who called her "Old Woman." The bear, which had a very large track, ran free for several years but eventually was killed. So, locals paid tribute to her by dubbing the stream Old Woman's Run.

And while we're in that area, what about Granny's Creek? When the original surveys were made in Braxton County, few conveniences were avail-

able. John Sutton wrote that a young man in a surveying party kept complaining about the hardships of the work and often remarked that if he were at home with his grandmother, he "could get green beans and other vegetables to eat." After listening to his moaning long enough, the other surveyors began calling the stream "Granny's Creek." Anita Brown has an alternate take on Granny's Creek. According to her great-grandfather Andrew Jackson Hopkins, the name has a less sarcastic origin: "When [the surveyors] were at Granny's Creek, there was a nice lady who cooked for them. She went by the nickname of Granny."

YOU NAME IT

There are lots of other practical, impractical, and sometimes downright silly place names in West Virginia. Some towns appear to have been named by hungry people: Pie and Pancake, for instance, which barely left a Crum. For the more health conscious, you could try Cucumber, Kale, or even Paw Paw—named for our native version of the banana. You might like dill or sweet pickles, but don't go to Pickle Street in Lewis County looking for that Appalachian delicacy because it was just a code name at the general store for whiskey.

Instead, you might look for something to drink in Sassafras or have Coco with that. Mona Griffin graciously provided me with clippings and family information about Coco in Kanawha County. James



Carlotta "Lotta" Tippens Wilson (1882-1968) was the second-longest-serving postmistress of Tesla. Courtesy of our author.

Marshall Ross, Coco's first postmaster, kept submitting possible town names to Washington. Each one was rejected because there was already a town with the same name. In a 1953 interview with the *Charleston Daily Mail*, his wife, Laura Ross, clarified how Coco came into being. James and Laura's daughter, Forest Rose Ross, wanted to name the town Poco, inspired by her favorite book about a fighting rooster. When James hurriedly scribbled his request to the U.S. Postal Service, it looked like he'd written a C instead of a P, so the town became Coco in 1888.

Myra Elaine (Miller) Freeman—who used to live at Turtle Creek in Boone County—recalls the *Coal Valley News* printing a headline about a prominent death in Big Ugly. While it was accurate, the headline had to raise some eyebrows: "Big Ugly Woman Dies." Big Ugly, located in Boone and Lincoln counties, is named for Big Ugly Creek, ironically, a very picturesque stream. There are two theories about this one. One, it might have been named for railroad surveyors charged with the *ugly* task of clearing lines. The other theory is that land in that area was unsuit-

able for farming, which sounds more plausible. Struggling to grow food on land that was rocky and prone to flooding likely inspired names for the communities of Hard Scrabble, Scrabble Creek, Hateful Run, Troublesome Valley, and Difficult Creek.

John Sutton told the story of a man named William Strange who was assisting Samuel Young in surveying the Elk and Holly rivers. After getting lost from his party, Mr. Strange's "gun was afterward found with his initials cut on the stock. He wandered in destitution and perished on the stream



This is all that's left of the old post office building at Coco. Photo by Guy Bumgardner.

which bears his name. This unfortunate frontiersman cut his name on a beech tree along with this inscription:

Strange is my name
And strange is the woods
And strange it is
I can not be found."

Hence, the Braxton County town of Strange Creek got its name.

VIOLENCE COMMEMORATED

Battle Run in Clay County was named for an epic encounter between a bear and a boar hog. At the end of this battle, the hog limped home, collapsed under his owner's bed, and died. The owner backtracked the blood trail and found a large dead

black bear and evidence of a mighty fatal struggle.

Booger Hole is another Clay County community associated with violence. According to Bob Weaver, editor of the *Hur Herald*, more than a dozen residents were brutally murdered or just vanished from Booger Hole. One theory is that some disreputable residents settled in that remote hollow to hide from someone or something. The murder victims included clock repairman Joe Clark and Russian-Jewish peddler John Henry. Lacy O'Brien Boggs, described as peculiar and suspected of being a witch, died from gunshots through her window. A father and son charged with her murder

were let go after telling a Clay County officer that the woman had witched them and that she was a shape shifter. As for the name Booger Hole, some think it's a synonym for a legendary bogeyman that haunts the hollow.

Weaver also talks about Burnt House in Ritchie County. Yes, a house burned there, but there's much else to the story. Before the Civil War, Jack Harris of New York brought his son, William, and three slaves to Ritchie County to build a stagecoach tavern on the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike. Locals started questioning his relationship with one of his slaves, Deloris, who was seen in the community



Even the community center in Big Ugly has a rather odd name.

wearing nice dresses and finer accoutrements. Peddlers with large stocks of goods started disappearing, and rumor had it that Harris cut off a peddler's head with a razor-sharp corn-cutting knife. As the story goes, Deloris cleaned up the mess, and Harris and another slave dumped the body in Dead Man's Hollow.

Travelers on the turnpike were warned not to stop overnight at Harris' tavern, and Pinkerton Detectives were called in to investigate. Jack and William Harris immediately sold their tavern, Deloris, and their other

slaves to a local widow, Susan Groves, and headed west.

Then, one Sunday morning, Parson Woodford was in the third hour of his fire-and-brimstone sermon when the congregation began smelling something burning. Harris' old tavern was on fire. The more adventurous church members approached and saw Deloris inside the tavern wearing her best clothes, dancing and singing, as the building burned around her. Even though she perished in the fire, Deloris' ghost was supposedly seen around the community for

nearly three more decades. And that's how Burnt House got its name.

No matter where we hail from in the Mountain State, we're always proud to claim it as our home. And if you aren't in West Virginia, you're certainly thinking, "Country roads, take me home." 🍁

KATHY JOHNSTON MARKS is a Braxton County native. She is a retired child abuse investigator, having done that job in West Virginia and Illinois. She is the author of *Faces of Right Wing Extremism* and numerous articles in *Law and Order* magazine and *Police and Security News*. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



There are so many Lick place names in West Virginia it's hard to count them all. The editor and his son found an Elk Lick Memorial Church while looking for the old post office at Coco. Photo by Guy Bumgardner.

Sowball

By David Ball

Growing up in rural West Virginia during the 1940s and 1950s may have been the golden years of true country life. The Great Depression and World War II were over, and some economic relief was slowly finding its way through the Mountain State. Although many young men were drafted to serve in the Korean War, there were no radical changes in lifestyle. However, our quality

of life was improving as electricity became more available to rural residents.

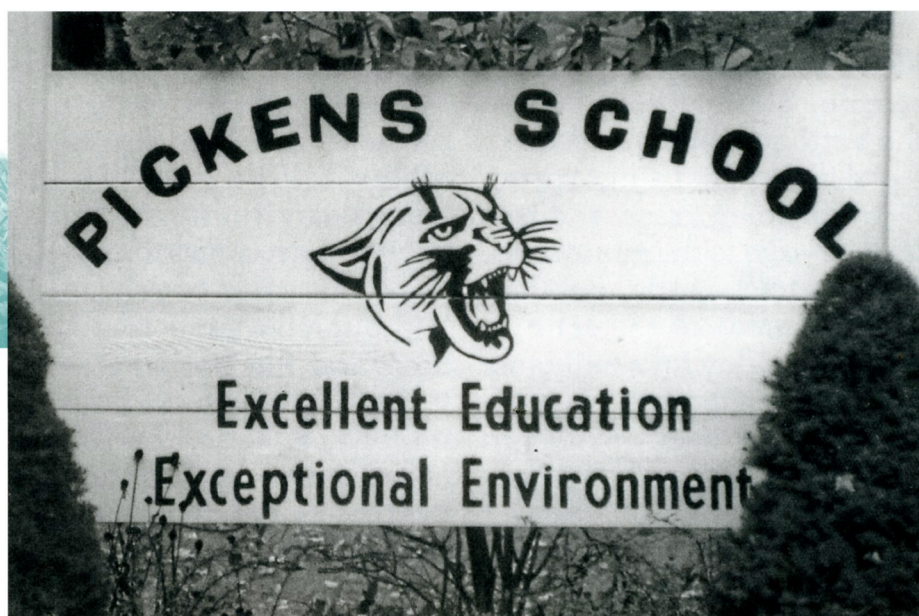
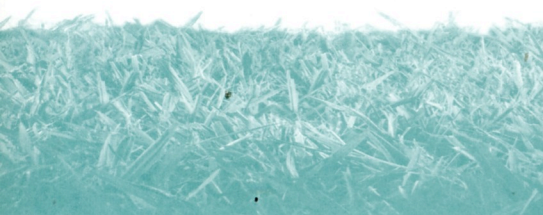
The education system in rural Barbour County was slow to change, and not much physical upgrading had taken place. On the other hand, for those of us who grew up in one-room schools, it was a time of student freedom and independence—since virtually all rural children walked to school.

My eight siblings and I all walked two miles to Huffman Grade School. Unlike today, none of us had *helicopter* parents or grandparents who held our hands each step of the way. We took our school responsibilities seriously, and homework belonged solely to the one to whom it was assigned.

While life in Appalachia had its share of drawbacks, there were also some long-



Our author and his eight siblings attended the one-room Huffman Grade School in Barbour County. It was built in 1869 and closed in 1961. All photos are courtesy of our author.



term benefits that shouldn't be overlooked. The determination and success of those students demonstrated that rural America was not all wrong, and responsibility builds quality character and good citizens.

Baseball, still America's favorite pastime, was played in virtually every community throughout West Virginia. Rural schools frequently played softball against one another on rocky ballfields. Girls and boys played together, and the girls were often the strongest competitors. To get to the games, students either walked or were crammed into a teacher's vehicle. It was fun, exciting, competitive, and a wonderful educational tool that taught us teamwork and interpersonal skills.

Kasson High School was in northern Barbour County. In 1925, its first graduating class had six students. It served as the area high school until 1958, when it was consolidated with Belington High for five years, and then Belington and Philippi were consolidated into Philip Barbour to become Philip Barbour. Kasson continued to serve as an elementary school for several years until a new school was built, and the old was one razed.

One game from back then merits reliving. In 1950, Kasson High had two sports: basketball and baseball. Dorwin Wolf was the principal, and Delmar Nestor was the coach. I had two brothers on the baseball team. Hayward was a senior, and Wilbert (Wib) was a freshman. Other players on the squad were Duane Ritter, Jimmy Miller, Arthur (Shade) Marsh, Paul Kelley, Donald Semmelman, Willard Cleavenger, Gene Ritter, Billy Freeman, Earl Reed, and Dorsey Clayton.

Kasson was scheduled to play against Pickens High in April 1950. Coach Nestor arranged for a school bus to transport his team to Pickens. Most of the boys hadn't played that far away before, so it was a real adventure for them. Excitement echoed through the classrooms, and time moved at a snail's pace until the magic day arrived. The Kasson players loaded onto the old bus along with their gear. They were Pickens bound.

Pickens is located deep in the mountains of Randolph County and has always been fairly sparsely populated. It's home to the annual Maple Syrup Festival in late March, when the landscape comes alive with activities and patrons enjoying wonderful pancakes and maple syrup.

The Pickens Class of '50 had 14 graduates. Luke Crossland was the principal, and Wayne Bunner was the coach. Pickens was even more rural than Kasson, and the boys on both teams were all "farm-hardened" fellows. They were strong and dedicated to the game. Most had to walk several miles to practice since students rarely had cars back then. For the folks around Kasson, Pickens was light years away.

School budgeting for equipment and uniforms was virtually nonexistent. "One size uniform fits all" was the standard for both schools. Needless to say, neither team won any awards for being the best dressed.

The Pickens faculty and student body made up the cheering section. The ballfield was in the bottom next to the school. April in Pickens brings spring flowers, green grass, and tree leaves—due to the mountains, spring comes a little later than in other areas of the state. It was a great day for a ballgame in the little glen at Pickens.

Both teams were anxious to show their stuff. My brother Hayward was on the mound for Kasson. A lefty, he threw a pretty wicked ball, but his control often needed a little help. His best pitch was his curveball, but he also had a few other tricks, if he could get them to work. He swung a heavy bat and had a slight lead for highest batting average on the team.

The guys from Pickens were no slouches with the bat, on the mound, or in the field. They were tough, and they knew it. The game was pretty even until Pickens scored a couple of runs. Kasson's third baseman, Shade Marsh, got injured on a fluke play when a Pickens player was sliding into third. Shade's thumb was broken and dislocated, but that didn't knock him out of the game. Coach Nestor taped his thumb tightly to the palm of his hand and kept him in even though he couldn't grip the bat—he bunted the rest of the game.

As noted, spring was transforming the Pickens landscape. The grass was becoming lush on the ballfield and also on the other side of the outfield fence. Animals and humans are much alike when it comes to appetizing food—they both want it. Although the game was a nail biter and the cheering could be heard throughout the local hollows, it hadn't had much of an impact on the large hog grazing and grunting beyond the outfield fence.

With a couple innings left, our Kasson guys were doing all they could to stay afloat. We'd loaded the bases, and Hayward was stepping up to the plate. He'd already had a two-hit day, but the big pressure was on now. All eyes were on him as he kicked the dirt and readied his bat. Like his teammates, he wasn't a big

guy, but he was a wiry farm boy.

He watched a pitch or two before jumping on one right down the middle. As the farm boys say, "It had good wood on it." The ball took off like a golf ball hit with a two iron. It kept drifting and drifting before disappearing over the wire outfield fence. The Pickens fans sat in total disbelief.

It turned out to be a one-in-a-million shot. As the ball finally drifted back down to earth, it hit the side of that innocent hog, which let out a loud "whoosh," whirled around in total disgust, and looked for the culprit who'd interrupted a perfect afternoon snack. The disgruntled victim just stood there staring at the out-of-control crowd that was now laughing so hard that many were crying.

Our author's father, G. H. "Rasty" Ball, attended the Bull Run School in Tucker County in the early 1900s.





1950 Kasson graduates Shade Marsh (left) and Hayward Ball—the hero of the day—still relive the big sowball game 67 years later.

Hayward's grand slam boosted Kasson to the win that day, but the real winner was the sow that stopped the game for several minutes while both teams regained their composure. Without a doubt, it was Hayward's greatest game: three solid hits, including the big one. The story of the great sowball homerun was retold many times on the way back to Kasson that evening. By the time the bus had parked, the hog had a name and had doubled in size. And surely, Hayward had called his shot, just like Babe Ruth, pointing to the very pig where he was about to hit his blast. Unfortunately, Hayward didn't get the game ball because neither team

was brave enough to retrieve it from the mad swine.

Although Kasson won, no one remembers the final score. To this day, Brother Hayward and some of his classmates still relive that eventful day in April 1950, when one *sowball* stole the show. And Shade Marsh's thumb still shows the effects of *Pickensitis*.

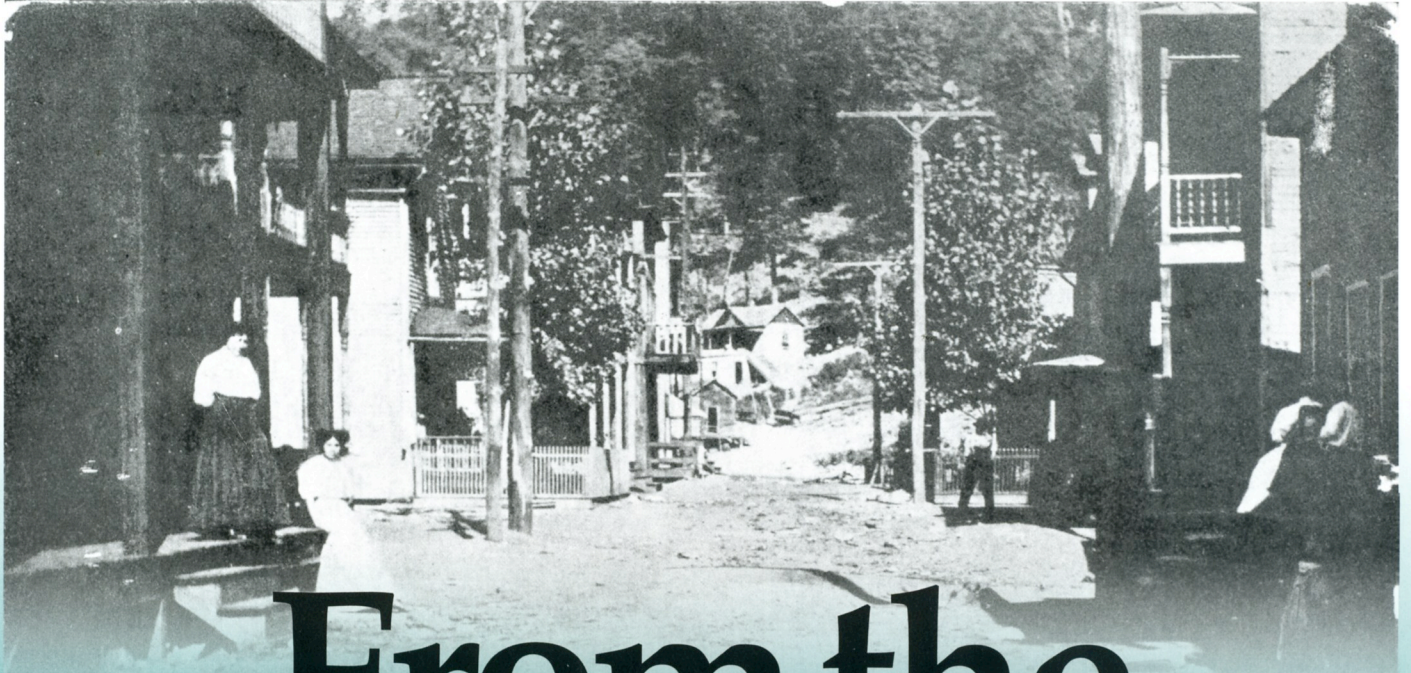
Baseball and softball are good today but not what they were when nearly every girl and boy took part in America's favorite pastime. "One size uniform fits all" may not have been classy, but the memories of those times are pure platinum to those of us who would get excited at the sound of "Play Ball!"

The original Pickens High

School building was taken down a few years ago, and a new building was constructed at the same site for grades K thru 12. Yes, they still have a ballfield, but the resident sow has moved to a more-friendly environment. 🌿

DAVID BALL grew up in Moatsville, Barbour County. He has authored two books of short stories about growing up in that place known as "almost heaven but not quite": *Ground Hog Dinner* and *Moatsville Stories—An Appalachian Upbringing*. In 2002, he retired from the U.S. government in South Carolina. David and his wife, Henrietta, met in the eighth grade at Kasson High School. After David's retirement, they returned to the mountains near Moatsville, where they enjoy many hobbies and an abundance of beauty.

Top: This ca. 1910 postcard shows the Coney Island area of Cinder Bottom, which was known for its brothels. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.



From the Bottom Up



Bottom: This photo from *Sodom and Gomorrah of Today* (1912) offers a bird's-eye view of Keystone. Note the coal operations, coke ovens, and company houses on the left across Elkhorn Creek. Courtesy of the Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Kraft Memorial Library, Bluefield.

In its heyday in the early 20th century, Cinder Bottom—a small section of Keystone in McDowell County—was known regionally, nationally, and even internationally for its infamous red-light district. Railroads arranged special routes around coal miners' vacations, dead bodies supposedly were found on the streets weekly, and World War I soldiers stationed in France shared stories about their adventures in Cinder Bottom. Cinder Bottom even gets a chillingly memorable

mention in John Sayles' 1987 film *Matewan*.

Despite its fame, though, the power players of this mini-sin city have remained a mystery. In a town that thrived on illegal businesses, who truly ran the show?

Perhaps the first question should be, "Why was prostitution allowed to thrive so openly in McDowell County?" The most obvious answer involves so-called dirty cops. In his book *Bloodletting in Appalachia*, former state Attorney General

Howard Lee recounted his 1909 visit to Keystone, where he watched the chief of police beat a madam. According to Lee, the madam had resented the chief's unexpected visit because it wasn't time yet for his next bribe.

A Welch attorney, Mr. Hassan, recalls the Cinder Bottom brothels from childhood and explains that the police payoffs actually regulated criminal activity to some extent. Police tended to protect illegal businesses that paid their bribes

Cinder Bottom's Red-Light District

By Katherine R. Spindler



Here's a similar view of Keystone as it looks today. The town's population was about 2,000 in 1910; today, it's less than 300. Photo by our author.



This ca. 1910 postcard shows Bridge Street in Keystone. Prostitutes reportedly worked in the buildings with bay windows on the right. Note the store on the left, which sold everything from rugs to coffins. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

regularly. For instance, many cops would step in to stop violence against prostitutes because it would draw undue attention to the payoffs and those who ran illegal prostitution, gambling, and drinking rings.

Surprisingly, some coal companies encouraged—and perhaps controlled—Cinder Bottom’s illicit activities based on the theory that satisfied workers were more productive. But, the biggest mystery revolves around a question Lee asked the chief of police, “Who owns these dives?”

The chief’s response? “That is a matter that is never discussed.”

The answer likely lies in the overlooked role of women—

and, in this case, prostitutes—in the southern coalfields. As playwright and historian Jean Battlo remarks, “These were hard-core, hard-headed businesswomen with a sense of capital. Only opportunity, education, gender, and class prevented them from competing with the local coal barons for the legitimate economic leadership of the region.” [See “Cinder Bottom: A Coalfields Red-Light District” by Jean Battlo, Summer 1994.]

Madams and sex workers had to operate profitable businesses while using their legal and political savvy to stay out of jail. These stories, which are documented in the depths of the McDowell County Courthouse, show that prostitutes relied

on various methods—from evasion to political maneuvering—to prosper in Cinder Bottom’s vice economy.

Through *evasion*, prostitutes could avoid criminal liability by disassociating themselves from their businesses. Few brothel workers were West Virginia natives. Of the 17 women who lived in Mary Dickerson’s brothel in 1910, only three were from West Virginia; 11 hailed from Virginia, and the rest came from Kentucky and Georgia. There were no West Virginia natives among the eight adult women living in Ella Kelsaw’s brothel: half were from Virginia and the rest from Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Thus, sex workers could maintain a



This stylishly dressed woman in Keystone appears in stark contrast to the bleak surroundings. Courtesy of the Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Kraft Memorial Library, Bluefield.

certain level of anonymity by moving around from town to town.

In addition, even when prostitutes more or less settled down in one place, they didn't work for just one madam. A 1909 charge cited Blanche Miller as loitering in Ada Nichols' "house of ill fame"; yet, by the following year, she was living in Kelsaw's boardinghouse. Likewise, Marie Marshall resided in Kelsaw's boardinghouse in 1910 but, according to an indictment, was living in Dickerson's brothel two years earlier.

It made sense for prostitutes to change locations frequently or separate their workplaces from their living spaces. This made it less likely to get charged for living, boarding, or loitering

in a house of ill fame. It also made it more difficult for a madam to be charged with a crime when the other women residing in the house actually worked in a separate brothel.

So, why would some madams risk owning their own brothels? On the surface, it doesn't seem like the benefits of ownership would override the potential criminal liability. The answer, however, seems to be very simple: money. Ownership provided madams with at least two sources of incomes: the prostitution business plus rent.

The most notorious account of Cinder Bottom is featured in the 1912 booklet *Sodom and Gomorrah of Today, or the History of Keystone West Virginia*. The

author, going by the pseudonym "Virginia Lad," unveils the underground workings of Cinder Bottom while passing along his unyielding judgment on the topic. Virginia Lad discloses, "Many houses of ill fame will be found conducted under the name of a restaurant."

The 1910 census cites Mary Dickerson, Ada Nichols, Ella Kelsaw, and Rebecca Robertson as "proprietresses" of "boardinghouses," which is technically true since the sex workers paid rent to the madams. According to Battlo, one young madam invested her brothel proceeds into a restaurant where "Cinder Bottom patrons could eat and drink. Combining services [she] became a wealthy woman."



This photo, with an unidentified woman posed on the porch, depicts the typical type of housing near Keystone in the early 1900s. Courtesy of the Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Kraft Memorial Library, Bluefield.

Dickerson was involved in several aspects of Cinder Bottom's vice economy. Her first charge—in 1898, as Mary Miller—was for keeping a restaurant without a license. The next year, she was charged with betting at cards “elsewhere than [in] a public place” and losing “a greater sum than twenty dollars” within 24 hours. Ada Nichols followed suit. Separate indictments from December 1908 assert that she kept a house of ill fame but also “did unlawfully sell, offer and expose for sale spirituous liquors.”

So, the potential profits that could be generated from combining prostitution, food, drinks, and gambling often outweighed the risks of owner-

ship. And the perks were grand, indeed. Virginia Lad refers to Mary Miller's *mansion*, which she built “[f]rom the money she accumulated in this nefarious traffic.” He describes Miller's residence as “the prettiest and most modern house in town.” And so, Mary Miller/Dickerson, though debased by the author as “a large negro woman,” overcame discrimination against her sex and race to become a successful business owner.

Name changes were another evasion technique. The following are name variations in the 1910 census compared with McDowell County indictments—note that some of these could be due to inaccuracies in recordkeeping. Rose Bess

Steward was also known as Rose Bess, Ella Kelso became Ella Kelsaw, and Blanche Meller also went by Blanche Miller. Most striking is Mary Miller, whose first criminal record appeared in 1898. In June 1899—two charges later—she appeared as Dickerson but was again “Mary Miller” two months later. While some name variations are debatable, the unified identity of at least Mary Miller/Dickerson is indisputable based on legal and census records.

With regard to name changing, it's worth noting that publications at the time were all too eager to castigate sex workers, prompting some to use aliases. Virginia Lad names and scorns a large scope of Cinder Bottom madams while



Mary Miller/Dickerson's house in Keystone still stands. Just more than a century ago, it was considered the "prettiest and most modern house in town." Photo by our author.

referring specifically to a white-trafficking conviction against Ada Nichols.

COALFIELD POLITICS

Financially, Cinder Bottom depended on revenues from prostitution, showing just how embedded it was in Keystone's culture and suggesting another reason for its long-term success: political maneuvering. By networking through Keystone's legal and social systems, madams obtained a level of protection and respect that was unheard of in many cultures at that time.

A good example is Mary Miller/Dickerson's 1899 conviction for gambling. The record states E. H. Harper bound himself "jointly . . .

and firmly" on a \$200 bond to Miller/Dickerson. Harper was an attorney—perhaps Dickerson's own—which begs the question, "Why would a lawyer risk such an enormous deposit based solely on a madam's 'good behavior,'" as stated in the record?

In 1910, Harper was living with his three brothers, one of whom was the "proprietor" and "bartender" of a saloon. Dickerson's success nourished the town's vice economy, which meant Harper had a personal interest in allowing Cinder Bottom's madams to conduct their business freely. It's arguable that Harper's own profits might have suffered if Dickerson had been forced to shut down her operation.

Virginia Lad describes "three houses joined together. In the first one is a negro restaurant and house of ill fame containing negro women, the second is a negro saloon . . . while the third house is a house of ill fame containing white women. All three of these houses are owned and operated by three negro brothers, one of whom is a lawyer."

And who built "[j]ust below this place" the "finest brick residence in Keystone?" Mary Miller/Dickerson.

Yet, Harper was far from Miller/Dickerson's most significant political connection. Based on a 1904 indictment, the arresting officer was acting under orders from "G. T. Epling, recorder of the town of



The Keystone City Hall was a bevy of legal and less-than-legal activities in the early 1900s. Courtesy of the Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Kraft Memorial Library, Bluefield.

Keystone for J. Ferd Thomas, the Mayor of said town, who was absent from said town at the said time."

Virginia Lad claims that Thomas was a drinker and gambler and that in his absence, Epling stepped in and "joined

hands with the 'gang.' . . . In order to do this, he played to the negros (*sic*) and made A. L. Calhoun, a wealthy negro and member of the Council ever since the town was incorporated, his first lieutenant, or right hand man." He asserts

that Calhoun, in fact, "was the power behind Epling's administration and that if you wanted anything accomplished in Keystone that it was not necessary to see the Mayor but to see Calhoun."



In the 1920s, Keystone political leader E. Howard Harper played a hand in state and national history. He was elected to the legislature in 1926 as a Republican but died a year later. In January 1928, his wife, Minnie Buckingham Harper, was appointed by Governor Howard Gore, to complete her husband's two-year term. In doing so, Minnie Buckingham Harper became the first African-American woman in U.S. history to serve in a state legislature. During her one session in the West Virginia Legislature, she served on the House committees on Federal Relations, Railroads, and Labor. Later that year, she chose not to run for election. It would be more than two decades before another African-American woman served in the legislature. Elizabeth Drewry, also from McDowell County, was elected to the House in 1950 and spent 13 years in the legislature. ✱

Minnie Buckingham Harper, 1928. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

Calhoun was known for extending hefty financial support—often in the form of jail bonds—to different Cinder Bottom madams. He was president of the Union Political and Social Club, which Virginia Lad excoriates as “a negro organization composed of criminals and . . . negroes with a few white people mixed in, among them was the mayor. They had a club room where women from the *tenderloin section* visited and it is common knowledge that Mayor Epling attended dances in this hall and danced with these disreputable women, both white and colored” (emphasis added).

A court subpoena on Dickerson’s behalf in 1905 included Harper, Calhoun, and Epling, all as allies. Therefore, court proceedings in the region were likely a mere farce since the primary figureheads were trying to protect their own financial, political, and in some cases, personal interests in Cinder Bottom.

And it does not appear that the madams were under the thumbs of Keystone’s politicians; rather, they exerted their own influence in the political community. Given the extent of Cinder Bottom’s nefarious reputation, there are relatively few indictments for prostitution, and the charges that do exist rarely include high-positioned politicians.

Even when women were indicted for crimes of vice, they seldom served time. In 1908, Dickerson, Kelsaw, Nichols, and Robertson were all charged with running brothels. However, according to Virginia Lad, political pressure led to the cases being dismissed, implying that Epling and “other members of the machine of McDowell county” had convinced Governor William M. O. Dawson to pardon Calhoun, which had the indirect effect of protecting not only Calhoun but all Keystone political leaders and Cinder Bottom madams.

LOOKING BACK

The story of Cinder Bottom is much more than a tale about sex purveyors in the southern coalfields. These women’s tactics reveal an insight into McDowell County’s courts, politics, and community life. While their trade may have been as illegal then as it is now, Mary Miller/Dickerson, Ella Kelsaw, Ada Nichols, and Rebecca Robertson were among the most successful entrepreneurs in McDowell County’s boom time. They also represent an important, yet overlooked, part of our history. ❁

KATHERINE R. SPINDLER is a recent law school graduate focused on indigent criminal defense and criminal justice reform—including sex workers’ rights. As a coal miner’s daughter, she is proud to be half West Virginian. Her love for the state has only grown through the kindness and hospitality of McDowell County residents, to whom she is deeply grateful. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



In our Summer 1994 issue, Vandalia Award recipient Nat Reese (1924-2012) shared with Michael Kline his memories of playing music in Cinder Bottom. Photo by Michael Keller.

Someone was killed down there about every week. There was gambling, hustling, numbers playing, prostitution. You could buy whiskey, any kind you wanted: Scotch, bourbon, good moonshine, bad moonshine, almost-good moonshine. And home brew. Every other door, or every three or four doors, there was a house you could buy whiskey or something else. And if that’s not wide open, I don’t know what you would call it.

And see, the law at that time was ruled by the biggest company that’s there. It was a politician deal. People had no say-so, much. The politicians say, “I’m getting money from that place and that place and, so don’t you bother them. As long as nobody ain’t hurt or nothing, just pass on by.” —Nat Reese ❁



THE NIGHT RANG

Vaudeville, the most popular form of theater in the early 20th century, was usually a hodgepodge of unrelated comedy and musical acts grouped together on a common bill. Actors and musicians toured small towns, giving Americans an hour or two escape from their everyday lives for a dime or a quarter. Some audience members also took it as an invitation to “act up.”

Fairmont had two vaudeville houses. The Grand Opera House on Jackson and Monroe streets was touted as “the finest amusement edifice in West Virginia” when it opened on January 16, 1902. The *West Virginian* newspaper announced its much anticipated arrival: “Before the curtain rises on opening night, there will have been between \$60,000-70,000 spent on the construction of this Thespian temple.”

The building featured 1,260 seats, a bowl floor, orchestra circles, 14 boxes, the balcony and gallery, a ladies’ parlor, toilet rooms, a manager’s office, check rooms, and ante-rooms. Dressing rooms and the

Eva Tanguay in *Ziegfeld’s Follies*, ca. 1909. Photo by Baker’s Art Gallery, Columbus, Ohio.

EVA TANGUAY DOWN THE CURTAIN IN FAIRMONT

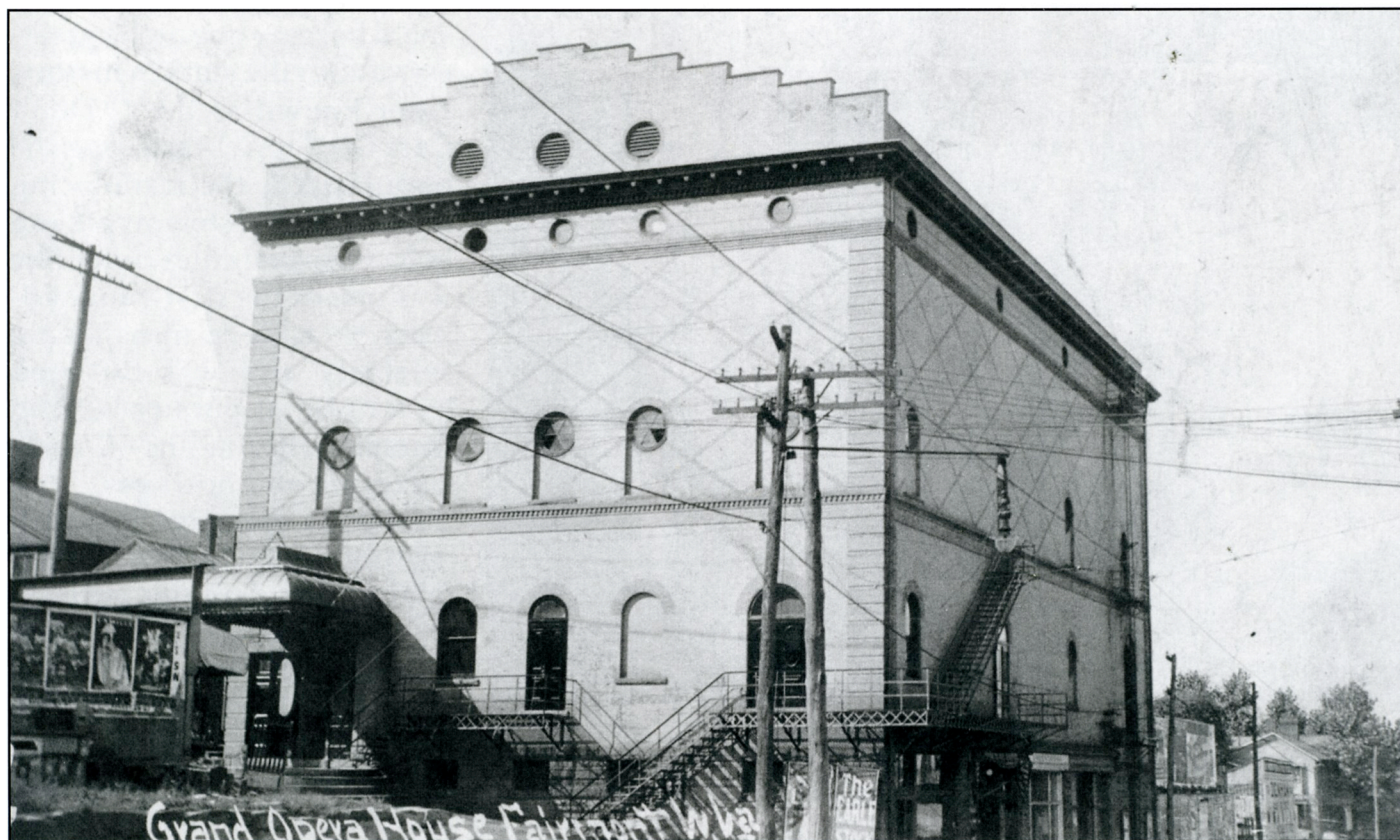
by
M. Raymond Alvarez

orchestra room were located below the 33' x 62' stage. The theater was equipped with fly galleries and rigging for scene changes, storerooms, and a "most modern switch board for stage purposes complete with a set of dimmers." The building had more than 500

electric and gaslight fixtures. The interior was tinted stucco, and the exterior was buff brick and stone. Colored art glass was used in the building's many round windows. A series of fire escapes allowed patrons to exit "in less than two minutes." A *porte cochere* extended over the

sidewalk at the main entrance on Monroe Street.

The theater was the brainchild of several local businessmen: L. J. Thomas Miller, M. A. Joliff (sheriff), Sam R. Nuzum, E. F. Hartley, John A. Clark, Sr., A. A. Hamilton, L. C. Powell (editor of the *West Virginian*);



Fairmont's Grand Opera House, shortly after it opened in 1902. Courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center.

and L. S. Horner (manager of Clarksburg's opera house). Fairmont's T. L. Burchinal constructed the building based on designs by Pittsburgh architect J. E. Allison.

According to newspapers, Fairmont's Grand Opera House aimed to attract "the best of high class theatrics to Fairmont." And it was feasible to bring production companies, actors, and large elaborate sets to small towns—even for one night—thanks to the spread of railroads. Fairmont's Grand Opera House was located only a few blocks uphill from the train station.

In 1952, C. E. "Ned" Smith, longtime editor of the *Fairmont Times*, recalled the early years of vaudeville in town: "Back in those days Fairmont did not seem to be so far off the beaten path. With no radios, movies or automobiles, we seem to have done pretty well. Having two or three big shows in town every week, we did not feel that to find the world we had to go out and look for it, but that the world, especially the world of glamour, was knocking at our door."

He recalled a particular controversy at the Grand Opera House. Smith, who was in col-

lege at the time, observed the affair on January 14, 1903—the memorable day Eva Tanguay and an entourage of New York actors arrived to perform *The Chaperons*, a two-act musical variety show with 41 performers. With book and lyrics by Frederic Ranken and score by George Lederer, it was billed as a "spectacle, opera, farce, ballet and vaudeville in one great entertainment." Tickets—priced at \$1.50, \$.75, and \$.25—went on sale January 12.

The newspaper featured photos of Eva Tanguay and lead actor Walter Jones. It noted that the play's scenery could be described as "sumptuous even in these days of extravagant stage presentation."

Eva Tanguay, 24 at the time, was just beginning to make a name for herself beyond New York City. Before she was done, she'd become one of the greatest vaudeville stars in history. Later known as the "I Don't Care Girl" for a brash song she popularized, the trailblazing artist shattered stereotypes as a boldly sensual entertainer. She was one of the first vaudevillians to achieve mass-media celebrity and was escorted by a cadre of publicists, who trumpeted her on- and off-stage successes and outrages.

Tanguay appeared in lavish costumes—including a coat made from pennies—which she often designed. With an unremarkable singing voice, her appeal grew from her physical presence and charisma more than dramatic talent. She performed suggestive songs in a robust manner that made



Louis Johnson (left) and Ned Smith (1885-1959), editor of the *Fairmont Times* from 1925 until 1959. Johnson (1891-1966) was a founding partner in Steptoe & Johnson, one of the state's leading law firms, and served for 18 months as U.S. Secretary of Defense (1949-1950) before being fired by President Harry Truman. Courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center.

her an audience favorite and commanded one of the highest salaries of any performer. And like many later stars of screen, stage, and music, Tanguay was at times idolized, objectified, and condemned by the public for her sexuality.

Her risqué performance at Fairmont's Grand Opera House drew jeers from some boorish teenagers in the front row. Some 49 years later, Ned Smith wrote the following about the incident: "Miss Tanguay, you all know, was for many years a nationally known actress with characteristics, that added to her luster on the stage. On one occasion when she appeared here . . . Mr. Clark and several other boys of his age sat upon the front row and caused Miss Tanguay so much mental dis-

tress while performing her first song upon the stage that she ordered the curtain rung down and would not raise it again until the youthful offenders had been removed from her sight."

Smith was probably more than an *observer* to the incident since he was also a close friend of "Mr. Clark." John A. Clark, Jr., was the 17-year-old son of a wealthy businessman who just happened to be one of the opera house's incorporators. According to Smith, Tanguay had the young men arrested and dragged up for trial the next morning before Justice of the Peace John I. Swindler. As Smith recalls, "To a man they were firm in the conviction that they had done nothing to cause Miss Tanguay to stop her

show and yell into the wings for a man named Sam to ring down the curtain."

Smith added that Fairmont was a rough-and-tumble city where the "weak and the irresolute fell by the wayside" and defended his friend Clark as being "chivalrous to a fault"—the type who would never "chew tobacco in the presence of a lady . . . or be caught with liquor on one's breath." Being accused of conduct "unbecoming of a gentleman" was perhaps the greatest insult to someone of Clark's social status.

When Smith initially shared his recollections, Clark—by 1952, a respected coal operator in Fairmont—recalled the events differently. He asserted that the shoe was on the other foot—Tanguay didn't have

TANGUAY TANGLE

Music By
LEO EDWARDS

WORDS BY
BLANCHE MERRILL

Writer of
"GIVE AN IMITATION OF ME,"
"EGOTISTICAL EVA,"
"I CAN'T HELP IT,"
"TANGUAY RAG," etc.

Sung by
EVA TANGUAY

CHAN. K. HARRIS

6

EVA TANGUAY

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"ENERGETIC EVA"
IN FIVE REELS
WITH
SPECIALLY ARRANGED MUSIC

EVA TANGUAY is the world's greatest eccentric comedienne.
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EVA TANGUAY this season played her 27th return engagement in the Alhambra Theatre, New York.
EVA TANGUAY holds the Box Office record in every vaudeville theatre in which she has appeared.
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him arrested; rather, he and the other teenage hooligans had her “yanked into court.” If this is true, she easily could have retained a local attorney to get the charges dismissed. However, based on Clark’s telling of the story, the actress loved a good show—on or off

the stage—and was intrigued by the fact the judge in the case was named “Swindler.”

Based on this version of the tale, Tanguay appeared in Justice of the Peace Swindler’s court early the next morning, accompanied only by her maid, and announced she would rep-

resent herself. Swindler listened to the testimony of Clark and his friends, which included a young Ned Smith as a witness. When Swindler heard their version of the story, he pondered judicially for a brief moment and then dismissed the case against Tanguay.

So, what really happened? The local paper didn’t cover the court proceedings, so all we have to go by is Ned Smith’s less-than-unbiased account and Clark’s less-than-objective memories. As such, we’ll likely never know.

Interestingly, the newspaper did report on another crude incident related to the same show. The headline read, “Lusty Screams Saved ‘em!” followed by the capitalized subtitles: “ACTRESSES WERE IN DANGER” and “NIGHT CLERK WAS FAST ASLEEP.” The *Times* reported that two Fairmont men had attempted to break into the room of cast members Annabelle Gordon and Emma King at the Gans Hotel around 2:30 in the morning. The two men sneaked past the night clerk, who was napping at the desk. The paper didn’t know how they found the women’s hotel room but noted they had been “flirting with the girls during the performance earlier that evening.”

The Lotharios begged to be allowed into the room, but both women screamed, awakening the night clerk who rushed to their rescue and threw the men out. One of the young actresses told a reporter, “We were scared almost to death. The men shook the door hard and



John A. Clark, Jr., who allegedly heckled Eva Tanguay at the Opera House, is shown here in his later years, when he was a wealthy coal operator. Courtesy of our author.

when we would not let them in, they simply talked awful. They were badly mistaken if they thought we were flirting with them. . . . We don't flirt, Yes of course they would have broken in if we had not scared them away by screaming."

These anecdotes describe how stage actresses were often objectified merely as sex objects—a problem that would become better known as mass media evolved. And despite Smith's defense of Clark, chivalry doesn't appear to have been a widespread character trait among Fairmont's young

men at that time—at least the ones getting front-row seats for vaudeville shows.

After recovering from their ordeal, Gordon and King continued their stage careers for several years. Their names can be found today in Broadway archives. By 1910, Eva Tanguay was earning upwards of \$3,500 a week—the equivalent of nearly \$100,000 today. Unfortunately, she supposedly lost more than \$2 million in the 1929 stock market crash and retired a few years later. She died at age 68 in 1947 and is buried in Hollywood's Memorial Park.

As for the Grand Opera House, it continued presenting stock companies, touring shows, and one-night attractions. By the mid-1920s, movies were sweeping the country, and vaudeville was on its way out. So, the Grand Opera House closed. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) bought the building, gutted it entirely, built three new floors above the Jackson Street level, squared the windows, and covered the ornate exterior brickwork with gray stucco. The IOOF hall was located on the top floor, and the rest of the building was converted to commercial space.

The IOOF building was torn down in the early 1980s; today, the site is a small private parking lot on Jackson Street. The lot doesn't seem large enough to have housed a majestic theater a century ago. The Grand Opera House probably was forgotten by most Fairmont residents after 1930.

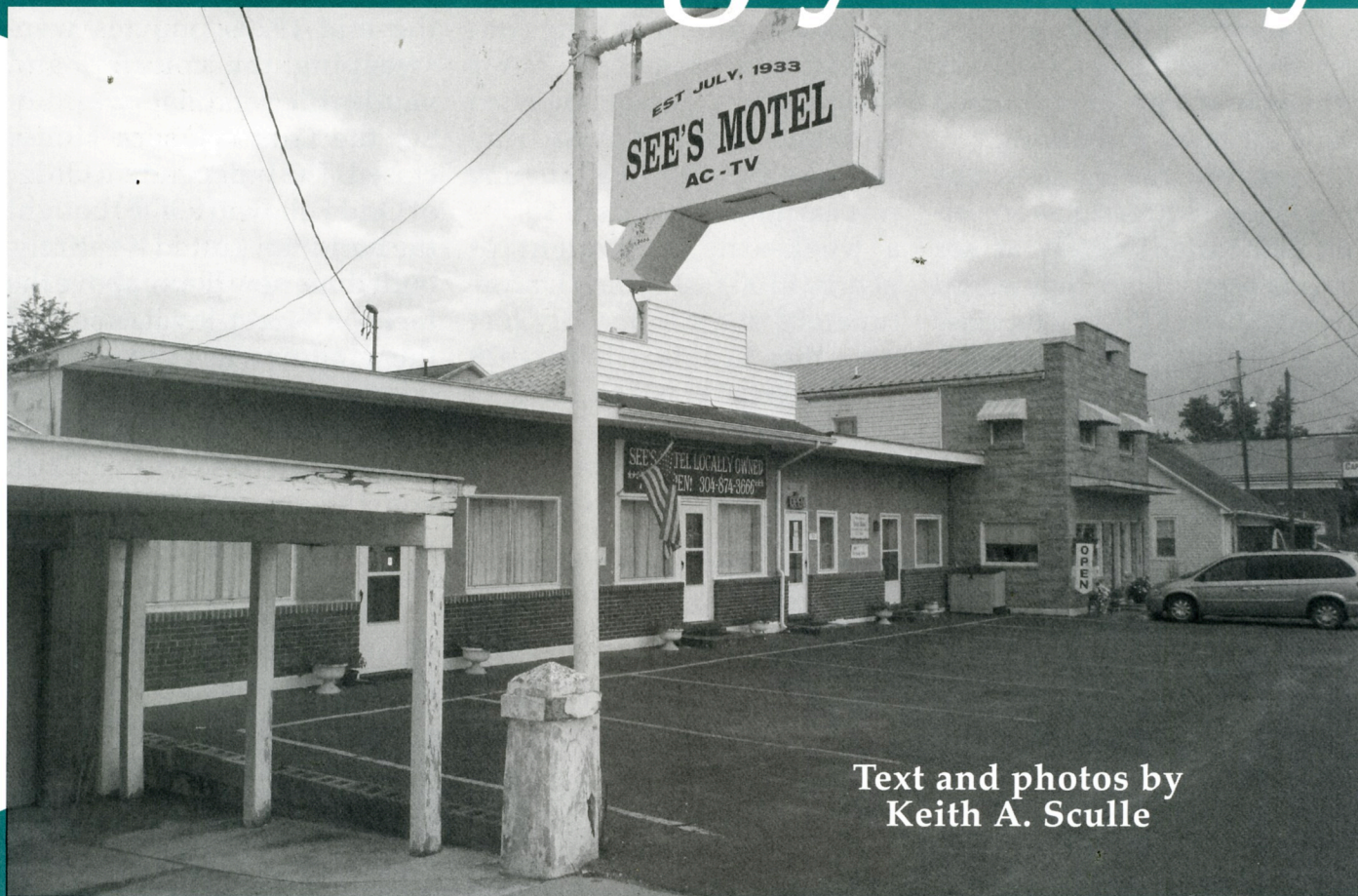
While other famous people would pass through Fairmont over the years, it's possible that none ever generated the excitement of the night Eva Tanguay brought down the curtain at the Grand Opera House. ❁

Marion County native M. RAYMOND ALVAREZ holds undergraduate and graduate degrees from West Virginia University and a doctorate in health care from Central Michigan University. He's a visiting assistant professor for WVU's Public Administration program and a health care consultant. This is Raymond's 12th article for GOLDENSEAL. His most recent contribution was in our Spring 2016 issue.



"The Queen of Vaudeville," Eva Tanguay (1878-1947) appearing as Little Lord Fauntleroy, ca. 1890. Courtesy of The Henry Ford Museum.

"Charmingly funky"



See's Motel in Wardensville

The 20th century ushered in vast technological changes—the airplane, automobile, radio, television, personal computing, and the Internet, not to mention a plethora of life-extending medicines and various weapons of mass destruction. In terms of summer, though, perhaps two developments changed American culture more than any other: air conditioning in cars and roadside motels.

The terms *summer driving* and *comfort* were polar opposites for

the first four decades of the 20th century. Early carmakers had tried to slow down the summer sweat with unique features, like Kool Kooshions, which elevated the driver slightly, allowing air to flow below the seat. Later, fans were added, but as we all know about fans on a sweltering day, if you don't have air conditioning, you're just blowing around hot air. Finally, in 1939, Packard introduced an in-car AC system located in the trunk, but it was cumbersome because

the only way to turn it off was to disconnect the AC drive belt. Air conditioning in automobiles didn't really become a common feature until the 1950s. But it helped give birth to long summer vacations. For much of West Virginia, that meant trips to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. This often occurred during the last week of June or first week of July and came to be known in coal country as the "coal miners' vacation."

In the Eastern Panhandle,

popular vacation destinations were Ocean City, Maryland, and Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. Before the Interstate Highway System, these were lengthy trips, even with the comfort of AC. So, parents often broke up their travels by staying in relatively inexpensive hotels near the highway—hence, the mushrooming of motor hotels, or motels, across the country.

As the interstate and corridor systems have cut down on travel time and chain hotels have taken over the landscape, that first generation of motels has quickly disappeared. Mom-and-pop motel chains are increasingly the subjects of research, and some are even historic sites.

The first lodging named a *motel* was the Milestone, which opened in 1925, in San Luis Obispo, California. It gained considerable attention over the years, and the Native Sons of the Golden West dedicated it as a historic site in 1988.

Wardensville, located at the intersection of U.S. 48 and State Routes 5 and 259 in Hardy County, has its own version of the Milestone. Chris See, who was born nearby in 1901, came to Wardensville in 1927. Prior to that, he'd worked in a variety of jobs. He'd built roads and railroads, worked in the timber industry, and picked peaches in a local orchard. He and his wife, Orpha Dellinger See, had one child, Marlene. These three ran the Sees' businesses from 1933 to 2012.

In 1933, Chris started his first business—a service station on Main Street in downtown Wardensville. To take in more

revenue from travelers, he and Orpha opened the White Star Restaurant next door in 1935. In addition, Orpha's parents, Charles and Ada Dellinger, opened Wardensville's only movie theater, the Doric. Orpha and Marlene kept it running until 1978.

There are some differences of opinion about when the four-room motel started. Signs at the site date it to 1933, although the current manager hasn't found anyone who can remember it before 1944. That's likely because 1944 was a turning point for the Sees and Wardensville. That year, a disastrous fire destroyed about one-fourth of the downtown, including all of the Sees' businesses except the service station. Chris built the current See's Motel after the fire.

See's Motel was a landmark stopping place during the decades of the "big summer vacations." It also was a central gathering place on weekends in Wardensville. The Rev. Cecil Hancock recalls big Saturday nights at See's: "We'd come to town, looking for girls. Chris See would put speakers up outside the hotel, and we could listen to the Grand Ole Opry."

Chris, Orpha, and Marlene all pitched in to do their share. Chris died in 1999, followed by Orpha in 2003 and Marlene in 2012.

Without Marlene, the motel seemed destined for demolition or some other use. As discussions unfolded, the city's recorder pronounced See's Motel "a Wardensville landmark." Best to prevent its demolition,

or worse, see it transformed into storage units.

Wardensville acquired the property and established a 12-member development authority to put the motel back in business. Joseph Kapp, head of the authority, had successfully restored several other buildings in town while retaining their historical authenticity. Joseph reasons that Wardensville needs a motel for folks passing through town—whether they're on their way to a wedding, funeral, family reunion, or trip to the beach.

See's Motel is a great preservation success story—showing how a community can pull together to keep a local landmark alive and to continue honoring the Sees for all they've given Wardensville. It also pays tribute to the great motel era of the 20th century. And it's becoming a popular niche place to stay overnight, described by one outdoor enthusiast blogger as "charmingly funky." ❁

To make reservations at See's, contact 304-874-3666; 30 W. Main Street; Wardensville, WV 26851.

KEITH A. SCULLE, Ph.D., has co-authored (with John A. Jakle) and published with university presses 10 books about automotive roadside commerce and, by himself, written numerous journal articles on the subject. From the time he began his career in historic preservation, he realized the importance of automotive roadside businesses but also noted an absence of serious academic attention to the subject. Wherever he travels from his home in Illinois, he's on the lookout for local examples of automotive roadside commerce that can expand the subject's historical appreciation. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

West Virginia Back Roads →

Keyser's Cobbler

Text and Photos by
Carl E. Feather

Carl E. Feather recently wrote this article about Keyser's legendary cobbler, Guerino "Reno" Calemine. Sadly, Reno, age 90, died while we were preparing the article for print.

"He was the 'mayor of Keyser,'" says Bart Lay, owner of the Solar Mountain Records shop, next door to Reno's shoe repair shop. "(His passing) has left a big hole in the community. He lived a great life, right up until a week before he died. He was just rocking."

We thought it would be a fitting tribute to Reno to publish Carl's Back Roads column in more detail for this issue. —ed.



Guerino "Reno" Calemine pauses outside his Keyser shoe repair shop. His father, Dominic, started the shop in 1904 and trained Reno in the business.

Following in His Father's Soles

Guerino Calemene rides to work every day. There are three amazing things about this statement.

One, Guerino is 90 and still works four days a week at his Keyser shoe repair shop at 25 Armstrong Street. Two, except for heavy snow days, his ride is a bicycle. Three, his shop has been around for more than 110 years yet has had only two owners: Guerino and his late father, Dominic.

"My father started in 1904," Guerino says. With those five words, Guerino, better known in Keyser as "Reno," begins his father's story of immigration from Italy, a narrow escape from death, determination, and patriotism, which explains the unusual adjective in his shop's name: Calemene's Patriotic Shoe Shop.

"He came here when he was 16 years old," Reno says. "He came by himself. He landed in Rome, New York, where he paid \$5 to get a job. He worked a week then was let go. That's the way they treated immigrants back then."

Next came a job in a nail factory in Youngstown, Ohio. Then, Dominic received word



This photo of Reno's parents, Dominic and Teresa Calemene, hangs in the shoe shop, along with other family photos.

from a cousin that he could get him a job on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad at Piedmont in Mineral County.

"He got a job on the work train, and that's how he ended up in Piedmont," Reno says of the town near Keyser.

As was the custom, workers played poker in a caboose when the work was done. "Another train came along and collided with their caboose. Two people got killed, and my father's legs were smashed, all broken," Reno says.

At the Keyser hospital, Dr. Hoffman insisted on amputating Dominic's mangled leg. Dominic, unable to speak English, adamantly expressed through an interpreter that he would be extremely "disappointed" with the doctor if that happened. After several impassioned exchanges, the doctor

agreed to do surgery. Reno says the doctor wired together the pieces of his father's shattered leg.

"And you know, I saw an X-ray of that leg when my father was 80 years old, and you could see the wire still in there," Reno says.

His father spent a year in the hospital; Reno says the railroad paid for his care. A nurse, Mrs. Romig, took special interest in the immigrant and taught him how to speak and read English. When Dominic was finally released to resume his life, he decided to stay in Keyser and

open a cobbler shop.

Reno says his father learned the trade as a youth in Italy. With Keyser being a railroad town and enjoying prosperity, there was plenty of work to be had, even though the town already had several shoe repair shops. His father set up shop in a frame building on Armstrong Street. The little shop, run by an immigrant with a limp, prospered.

"In 1913, he went back to Italy," Reno says. "Apparently, he had made enough money that he could afford to close up this place and go back.



Hand tools are still part of a cobbler's trade, as Reno demonstrates in his Keyser shop.

While he was there, he met his wife, Teresa Calemine. No relation to each other."

Dominic brought his bride to the United States and resumed his cobbler work in Keyser.

"He liked Keyser, and this is where he wanted to stay," Reno says. "My father and mother are both buried here."

When America sent its young men to the battlefields of World War I, Dominic tried to enlist but was rejected due to his injury. So, Dominic did his part by being the most patriotic person in Keyser. He played the part of Uncle Sam in min-

strel shows and parades and sold Liberty Bonds at his shop.

"He sold more Liberty Bonds than anybody else around here," Reno says. "One day, he came to work, and the sign was on his shoe shop: Calemines Patriotic Shoe Shop."

The name stuck, and to this day, Reno proudly holds fast to the patriotic legacy of his father and mother. The couple had four boys, each of whom served his country. Three became cobblers, as well.

Carlo, the first born, was at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked. He served in

the Army Air Corps throughout World War II and received several Purple Hearts.

"He had shrapnel in his head, and they buried him with that in there," Reno says of his brother, who lived to be 89 and is buried in Wisconsin. He chose a career path other than shoe repair.

Orlando, the second born, went into shoe repair in North Carolina. He was the shortest lived of the boys and died at 68.

Reno, born March 5, 1926, was next in line. He entered the armed forces as soon as he turned 18 and was assigned



Shelves filled with repaired shoes and boots attest to the need for shoe repair shops, even in these throwaway times.



This view of Reno and his workbench shows the variety of hand tools still used in the shoe repair business.

to Camp Lee, where he taught shoe repair. While that seems like a strange military assignment, Reno says there was a need because so many wounded soldiers needed orthopedic footwear. A sergeant in the orthopedics section gave Reno access to the lab, and Reno learned human anatomy and orthopedic skills.

"He let me fool around in there, and that's where I really picked up the skills to take care of wounded soldiers," Reno says.

Julio was the last child born to the couple. "He was in the shoe repair business, too. He went into it in the Cumberland (Maryland) area. He retired 10 years ago, and he wanted me to retire, too, but I

never did," Reno says. "He told me, 'Retirement is not the best thing when you are our age. All you do is sit and sit. And pretty soon you can't walk.'"

Julio, a widower, lives in Michigan, where his stepchildren live.

Reno heeded his brother's advice and refuses to suffer the same fate brought on by inactivity. Depending on the company he's in, Reno has several explanations for why he continues to work.

"I'm here because I didn't want to stay home," he says. "My wife pays me \$50 a month to come over here."

He says that working late into life is all about self-preservation.

"I want to stay mobile until I die," he says. "If I keep working, I'll be that way. That's the trick. Whoever says that retirement is the golden years is crazy. Those people who retire and sit down end up in the nursing home. Retirement is not the golden years unless you keep yourself busy. The truth is, the golden years are those years leading up to retirement."

"There ain't no disgrace to growing old. It's just inconvenient," Reno adds.

His shop is open Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. If Reno has a doctor's appointment or other personal obligation, he calls his friend, Greg Rotrock, who comes down and opens the shop.



This 1963 snapshot shows Reno (right) working alongside his father, Dominic.

"He has the key to this place, and when I can't come over, I give him a ring. I've always kept this place open so (his friends who loiter in the shop) have a place to go," Reno says. "I usually have company from the time I am open. If I am busy, I don't pay any attention to them and go back and work."

In the front part of Reno's 14-foot-wide shop, he and his friends sit in four elevated, repurposed, metal kitchen chairs on the shoeshine platform that came from a hotel on Main Street. The platform is made of marble, and the stanchions are pure brass.

"This was a five-seater," Reno says. "But this place is too small for five seats, so (his

father) cut it down to four."

The shoeshine station is closed for business; if a customer wants his shoes polished, Reno uses a lathe-like machine in the backroom. But for decades, the shoeshine station was the busiest spot in the shop. There were numerous dance halls in Keyser in the first half of the 20th century, and Reno says no dapper gentleman would go to a dance without a shine on his shoes. Dominic, and later Reno, paid young men to shine shoes long after the repair shop closed on Saturday evenings. Many of those old shoeshine boys still stop by to reminisce. "Jimmy, Gerald, Bubb," Reno says, naming off a few dozen of the young men who made

money shining shoes for him.

"The place would be open until 9 or 10 p.m.," Reno says. "There were five shoe shops in Keyser in those days, and there were three more in Piedmont."

A black-and-white shoeshine cost a nickel, a white shine a dime, and tan shoes were 15 cents when Reno began polishing shoes at the age of 8.

"This is where I learned the shoe repair business," Reno says, pointing to the row of seats. "I bought my first bicycle with money from shining shoes. The bicycle cost \$24."

Reno says he purchased all his clothes with his shoeshine money; his father allowed him to keep everything he made, but he did pay his father for the polish. Ever since I started shining shoes, I never asked Dad for money," Reno says.

Reno received free vocational education as part of the deal. The first task he learned was to remove the soles from shoes.

"Step by step, that's how I learned," he says.

The shoe repair business is the only job Reno has ever known. "There was never a better boss," Reno says of his father. Dominic taught his son not to rush through a job and to do it right the first time. Otherwise, he'd risk alienating a customer and having to do it all over again.

"If it took me all day to put on a pair of heels, that was OK. He wanted it done right," Reno says. "Speed comes after

perfection,' Dad used to tell me, 'I want you to do the job right.' And he always said, 'The customer is always right. Right or wrong, he or she is always right.' We tried to do everything right."

Reno and his wife, Elva, raised two children on the wages he earned from the shop and from Elva's job as a registered nurse. Reno trained their son, also named Guerino, but he chose a career in food service.

"He retired from Kentucky Fried Chicken. He was a vice president," Reno says proudly.

Their daughter, Carla Hastings, lives in Keyser and has a son, Howard J. Hastings, Jr., who

has six children. Reno and Elva have two great-grandchildren.

Reno is one of a handful of cobblers left in West Virginia. Even in metropolitan areas like Washington, D.C., finding a cobbler can be difficult. David White drives 110 miles from Ashburn, Virginia, to have Reno put new soles on his dress shoes. Even factoring in the cost of the drive, White considers it a bargain.

"For \$27, I got a new pair of shoes," says the U.S. Coast Guard/Navy commander retired, who grew up in Keyser.

Reno tells White that the job was a tough one because modern shoes aren't manufactured

to be repaired. He pulls out the mangled mess of plastic that was the original sole. Reno says using the old technique of putting soles on shoes with nails no longer works because the materials won't accept the nails. For David White's shoes, Reno tried a new type of adhesive that will, with any luck, do the job as well as traditional methods.

Reno says the job probably would have cost his customer two to three times as much in a metropolitan shop, which likely would be just a drop-off point for the cobbler. Even Reno couldn't survive on the shoe trade alone, and his com-



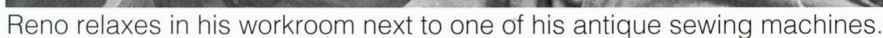
Greg Rotrock, a fixture in the shop, and Reno take a break on the shop's marble shoeshine platform.

"If I were to advertise, I would be so doggone busy," Reno says. "But I'm doing fine this way."

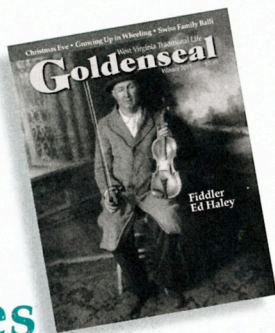
on March 5, 1959. As flames raced toward the shoe shop, neighbors and strangers alike pitched in to carry out the cobblers' precious equipment and tools—the economic lifeblood of two generations.

The equipment suffered smoke and water damage but was salvaged and stored in a building across the street. The next day, Reno and Dominic received an offer from a bank, where Reno had recently signed for a \$6,500 loan to finish his house. At first, he was worried the bank wouldn't

"I said, 'Are you crazy? I got enough to pay without that big place,'" Reno says. But the bank was more interested in keeping a cobbler's shop open than getting what the space was worth. For the next six months, while a new building was constructed on the old site, the shop was located next to the bank, now the library.



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"I had a (cobbler shop supplies) salesman come in and tell me that I had the biggest shoe repair shop in the world!" Reno laughs.

Nearly 70 years later, Reno still works with the same vintage tools and equipment that were purchased by his father and salvaged from the fire. That's one of the reasons he can keep his prices so low—his equipment was paid off long ago. He keeps it running with a stash of spare parts and good maintenance.

"It is OK if I die over here because that will mean that I died on my two feet," Reno says. "As long as I can come over here and work, I am going to do that." ❁

Reno passed away on February 23, 2017—in the same house where he was born almost 91 years earlier. His body was interred in the St. Thomas Cemetery in Keyser; his legend as a "savior of countless soles" will live on until the last soul who knew him joins Reno for an eternity.

"So many will miss his hearty hellos and his boisterous laugh," stated his obituary published in the Mineral Daily News. "His was truly a life well-lived." —ed.

CARL E. FEATHER is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Ashtabula County, Ohio. He has family roots in Tucker and Preston counties and is the author of the book *Mountain People in a Flat Land*. Carl has been a longtime GOLDENSEAL contributor, dating back to his first article in our Summer 1987 issue.



Above and right: Keyser's Cobbler: Guerino "Reno" Calemene (1926-2017).

CALEMINES PATRIOTIC SHOE SHOP

25

Our Hours
MONDAY 9AM - 4PM
TUESDAY 9AM - 4PM
WEDNESDAY 9AM - 4PM
THURSDAY 9AM - 4PM
FRIDAY 9AM - 4PM
SATURDAY 9AM - 4PM
SUNDAY CLOSED

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Page 72 — The late cobbler “Reno” Calemine leaves a lasting legacy in Keyser.

Page 64 — Vaudeville star Eva Tanguay brings down the curtain at Fairmont's Grand Opera House.

Page 8 — Filipino food becomes popular in Parkersburg.

Page 6 — Charleston's Eric Eyre earns West Virginia's second Pulitzer Prize for journalism.

Page 10 — Our cover story about Richwood looks back at the world's largest clothespin factory, the memories of Olive Persinger Tanner, and the photos of Finley Taylor.

Page 56 — A new study examines the madams who ran Keystone's red-light district.

Page 70 — A motel in Wardensville is one of the oldest of its kind in West Virginia.

Page 52 — A baseball game between Kasson and Pickens high schools turns into a game of sowball.

