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Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Spring 2021

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Black Gospel & Blues



Olive Abrams (left) of Racine (Boone County) tells stories and sings spirituals at the first Vandalia Gathering, 1977. The host (right) is Kate Long. Courtesy of the GOLDENSEAL Archives.





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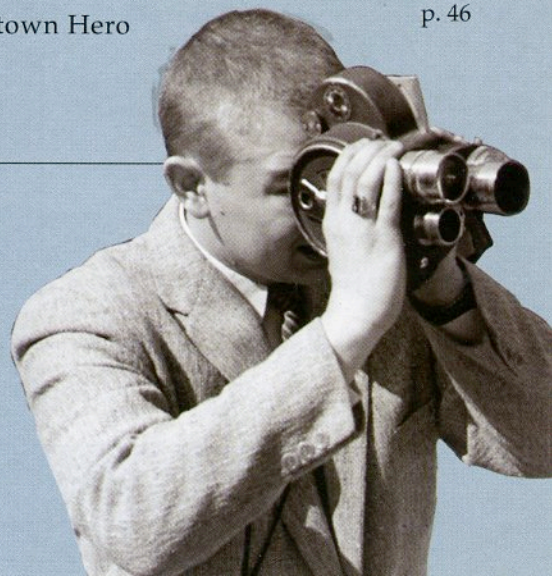
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On the cover: Gospel and soul singer Lady D (Doris A. Fields). You can read her article about the roots of Black gospel and blues on p. 12. Photo by Brad Davis for *The Register-Herald*.

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From the Editor

The year 2020 will be forever etched in our memories, as COVID ravaged our world, country, and home state, killing more than 2,200 West Virginians (a rising total as I write this). Many of you likely lost friends or family members; others were separated from loved ones for extended periods. Ultimately, bittersweet memories of those we lost will bring us both tears and comfort as we recall better times. Every single one of us is important to at least someone, even if we don't always realize it.

I lost a friend, Emily Haynes of Charleston, the day after Thanksgiving, and memories of her keep coming back to me in different ways. She was the type of person who, after only a few minutes, you felt like you'd known her your whole life. Even though she passed away at the way-too-young age of 47, she had an "old soul," as we like to say. Age is so relative.

Every moment I spent with Emily was genuine joy for me. Since her passing, I've often regretted not spending more time with her and listening to her wisdom about life. Emily loved and lived life confidently, even while battling chronic health problems that would have overwhelmed me. I think about that a lot now. Time is a gift that most of us never appreciate fully. With Emily's life as a continual reminder, I'll never take another day for granted. Each one is a gift to be cherished. I also try not to say "I hope" for something in the future. Hope is in the now.

Emily loved music perhaps more than anyone I've ever known. She sang old mountain ballads and spirituals that sent chills down your spine. Her a capella singing reminded me of the ancient voice of Maggie Hammons Parker (1899 – 1987) of Pocahontas County. As with Maggie, you could hear the pains and joys of life in each word and note Emily sang.

I again thought about Emily as I was reading this issue's cover story, in which Doris A. Fields traces the evolution of gospel and blues music, rooted in the fields where slaves toiled under conditions none of us can truly comprehend. In the most horrific situations possible, enslaved African-Americans found hope through prayer and song. I keep thinking about how much Emily—who researched the histories of every song she sang—would have appreciated Doris' article. Inspiration often springs from a desire for freedom—from physical suffering and from the forces that strive to hold us back. Whenever my inspiration needs a boost, I'll always think of Emily, whose middle name literally was Hope.

—Stan Bumgardner

GOLDENSEAL Good-Bye

Grits, Guts, and Glory

Brigadier General Chuck Yeager (1923 – 2020)

By Michael Evans Snyder

The 21-year-old Eighth Air Force fighter pilot was a long way from his birthplace of Myra (Lincoln County). In March 1944, the day after downing his first German fighter, Chuck Yeager was shot down over occupied France and hit the silk. Landing in woods surrounded by Germans, he was extremely fortunate to link up with the Maquis French Resistance.

Yeager is a German name (Jäger) that means *hunter*, but now he was the hunted. Dressed in a French suit, he was guided by the Maquis to the towering Pyrenees Mountains, the border with neutral Spain. Winter 1944 was a hard one, and he used every ounce of his strength and grit to make it through the knee-deep snow, partially carrying and dragging along a wounded airman who'd had his lower leg shot off.

But they endured, and by May, back in England, he went against regulations that prohibited shot-down fliers from returning to combat. The determined West Virginian went to the top. "I raised so much hell that General Eisenhower finally let me go back to my squadron."

Back in his F-51 Mustang, World War II's top fighter, with his 20-10 vision (he said he could see the bullets leave his machine guns), he survived 64 combat missions, recording 13 kills, including one of the first German jets and a bomber. "Dogfighting was what I was meant to

do," he stated. The former mechanic private was now a highly decorated captain.

He returned to Muroc Field in California in 1945, married Glennis Dickhouse, and soon became the top test pilot of research rocket-propelled aircraft.

On October 14, 1947, high above the Mojave Desert, he became the first man to break the sound barrier, at nearly 800 mph. Only he and Glennis knew he'd broken two ribs falling from his horse the day before. In horrendous pain with taped ribs, he had to use a broom handle to close the canopy. His historic Bell X-1 is now in the Smithsonian. Six years later, he set another speed record.

Later stationed at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio, he was frequently seen blasting over his childhood home in Hamlin (Lincoln County). There are houses there today with cracked plaster from the booms of his jet engine.

On October 10, 1948, he did a Charleston flyby to let folks see their first jet. Joe Mullins, age seven, remembers seeing a silver streak coming around the capitol dome and down the Kanawha River. During a boat race, Yeager's P-80 Shooting Star jet fighter thundered under the South Side Bridge at 500 mph and 30 feet above the water, and then up and away he soared into the western sky. "I think maybe he did a barrel roll also," Joe remembers.



(Left-right) Capt. Charles E. Yeager, Maj. Gus Lundquist, and Capt. James Fitzgerald stand in front of the Bell X-1 in which the Lincoln County native Yeager broke the sound barrier in 1947. The plane is now in the Smithsonian. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Chuck went on to serve in the Korean and Vietnam wars, rising to the rank of brigadier general. Writer Tom Wolfe raised Chuck's profile even higher in his best-selling book *The Right Stuff* (1979), followed by a movie of the same name (1983) in which Yeager made a cameo as a bartender. In 1985, *Yeager*, his autobiography, became an instant best seller, and President Ronald Reagan awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Chuck never lost his Lincoln County drawl, and as a man from Hamlin who knew him said, "He was just plain folks." He visited home regularly, and his legacy is written permanently in our state, including a statue in front of the

Hamlin PK-8 school and in the name of Charleston's Yeager Airport.

"But the guy who broke the sound barrier was the kid who swam in the Mud River . . . and shot the head off a squirrel before going to school," in his words. All the fame and all the glory never erased what he remained in his heart—a West Virginian. ✱

MICHAEL EVANS SNYDER is a writer and blacksmith-sculptor. In his younger days, he lived a very adventurous life across the United States and in Europe. His many occupations ranged from cab driver and sheep herder to newspaper reporter and teacher. He's a hunter and fisherman who lives on Dry Fork (Randolph County). This is his third contribution to GOLDENSEAL. His first was in our second issue ever (July-September 1975) and most recent was in our Winter 2019 issue.

Taking Root

A Seasoned Writer's Beginnings

By Kathleen M. Jacobs

Many years ago, before I began my teaching career at Charleston Catholic High School, I gathered the courage to contact GOLDENSEAL editor Ken Sullivan. I'd been an avid reader of the publication for longer than I could recall, and as an aspiring writer, I yearned to see my work published in the pages of this well-respected learned journal. Writers—and most creative souls—are notoriously known for being more than just a tad bit lacking in confidence, self-esteem, courage, and other characteristics that seem to pass them by as they journey on their rather precarious course to becoming authors.

As I recall, I had only a single publication I could tout to Dr. Sullivan. And, in looking back, I'm astonished I believed that would suffice. Surprisingly though, it made an impression. My short essay "Confinements" had been published in Berea College's literary journal, *Appalachian Heritage*. I continue to look back on its acceptance with deep gratitude for it was the start of what would culminate in many future publications over the years. It was and continues to be perhaps the most humbling of experiences. Although I felt that Berea's acceptance brought a measure of credibility to my query to Dr. Sullivan, I think he was most interested in my request to write a piece about the Hawk's Nest Tunnel Disaster, based on my master's work. And, as writers, I think we take from our initial correspondence with an esteemed editor what they sincerely gift: honesty and a straight-forward understanding—with a

very strong measure of objectivity—of what they instinctively know will resonate with their readers. It's a most certain focus that seldom, if ever, veers far from course.

As I walked to meet with Dr. Sullivan at his office at the Culture Center on the state capitol grounds, I looked to the expansive surroundings and thought very seriously about turning around and calling him with some outlandish excuse that I wouldn't be able to keep the appointment. In retrospect, I chuckle because after the initial introductions, the ensuing conversation was so very natural, so very stimulating intellectually that my earlier anxiety was reduced to rubble, like countless grains of sand flowing from an hourglass. It was delightful and reassuring and revealing and promising. And, it would blossom into a most professional relationship that continued for many years.

I'd written stories most of my life, beginning with locked diary entries; my first diary was red vinyl with an etching of a palm tree and the words "Daytona Beach, Florida," on the front. I wore its tiny brass key on a chain around my neck—a bit grandiose, but true nonetheless. And while I no longer have that physical treasure, I do carry it with me, tucked securely inside my



Our author, Kathleen M. Jacobs, 1990s.



Former GOLDENSEAL editor Ken Sullivan receives the 2015 Vandalia Award, our state's highest folklife honor. Photo by Tyler Evert.

heart every day, remembering those early moments when I believed that one day, I'd be a writer, an author. But it wasn't until my junior year at Gauley Bridge High School, when my teacher, Mrs. Dalton, began to compliment me on my writing skills, that I entertained my first imaginings that yes, indeed, it could happen. I could one day become an author. And in the years to follow, one teacher after another continued that encouragement, albeit with a very strong dose of what it would truly take to achieve that most challenging of dreams.

As I exited the Culture Center that day, I was filled with tremendous hope that my journey to becoming a published writer had been given a breath of fresh air, a strong belief that I just might have what it takes to see that dream come

alive. Dr. Sullivan didn't gift false hope to an aspiring writer. He didn't gift the promise of grandeur. He didn't gift a vision of a dramatic *writerly* life. What he did gift was his wit, expertise, and a very strong dose of reality that a writerly life doesn't encompass any of those shallow ideals; instead, if done correctly and with a deep, strong conviction in one's work, putting pen to paper—until the words and ideas flow—offers a very strong measure of accomplishment, and the rewards will follow. And, all these years later, he delivered on every single pronouncement. He took a very impressionable young writer and helped her find her voice, her style, and her courage to pen works that speak to the human condition—particularly as it answers the call of Appalachian people.

In the ensuing years, Dr. Sullivan accepted more of my articles for publication in GOLDENSEAL: one on my husband's grandfather's journey as an immigrant and successful businessman in West Virginia, one on the Hofeckers' Inn and Furniture Building, and one on Hubert Skidmore's novel *Hawk's Nest*. And with each acceptance, I learned so very much about Appalachian culture and our inhabitants, and I learned too about myself, knowing that these early pieces and their respective focus would travel with me throughout my writing career.

I'd go on to see my work published in other regional and national publications, always with tremendous pride that I was able to list GOLDENSEAL on my resume. And it was that entry that brought with it a most certain measure of credibility that time and again opened new doors of opportunity to bring more bright light to my work. And as I traveled to Iowa and Sewanee to further hone my writing skills, it was those treasured moments of truth from my correspondence and meetings with Dr. Sullivan that assured me that, indeed, I was ready to move on. And, in looking back, I believe it was the *moving on* that allowed me to return to Dr. Sullivan a bit of what he had gifted to me.

And as I hold in my hands my most recently published YA-novel *Betsy Blossom Brown*, I look to the overcrowded bookshelves on my West Virginia-made bookcase of rich tiger maple wood and scan my issues of GOLDENSEAL, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Appalachian Journal*,

Please check out some of Kathleen's wonderful GOLDENSEAL articles: "*Hawk's Nest, A Novel*" (Fall 1990), "You Always Want to Better Yourself: An Immigrant Success Story" (Summer 1992), and "Home to the Hofeckers: A Story of Bridge Building, Inn Keeping and Fine Furniture" (Spring 1993).

The Writer, and *Writer's Digest* and my own work: *Honeysuckle Holiday*, *Marble Town*, *Collected Curiosities*, and *The Puppeteer of Objects*, and my award-winning children's book, *Please Close It!*

Humility and gratitude envelope me in a most comforting way. And it's in that moment that I'm reminded of a medicinal herb called *goldenseal*, whose healing properties continue to gift immeasurable wealth to this West Virginia author, whose roots began in a small office on the capitol grounds with a most steadfast anchor at the helm. And in spanning my own bookshelves, I'm most grateful that each and every one of my works has set its own course in this region of pride and attachment; this isn't only where I'm most comfortable but where my characters also find strength and resolve in a world that struggles to hold on to both.

Thank you, Dr. Ken Sullivan! 🍁

KATHLEEN M. JACOBS's newest work is an early chapter book, *Sophie & the Bookmobile*. She holds an M.A. in Humanistic Studies, received the 2017 New River Gorge Writer-in-Residence, and was recently honored by *West Virginia Living* as the Runner-up Best Author, Best of West Virginia, 2020. This is her fourth contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Corrections

In our Fall 2020 issue about the Marshall plane crash, on p. 53, Charles Kautz should have been listed as the "full-time," not "acting," athletic director. On p. 54, defensive backs coach Frank Loria is buried in Clarksburg's Holy Cross Cemetery, not Huntington's Spring Hill Cemetery. As a side note, the Clarksburg History Museum (clarksburghistorymuseum.com), located at 445 West Main Street, has developed an exhibit about Loria, a native of the city. —ed.



The Appalachian Children's Chorus (ACC) performs a holiday concert at Charleston's Baptist Temple. Directing the chorus is Selina Midkiff, the group's founder and artistic director for more than 30 years. All photos courtesy of the ACC.

Expanding Horizons

The Appalachian Children's Chorus

By Audrey Pitonak-Goff

In fall 2020, the Appalachian Children's Chorus (ACC) celebrated its 30th anniversary. In the most unusual of times, we reflected not only on where the non-profit music-education organization has been but where it's going.

ACC provides artistic excellence, quality music education, and extraordinary opportunities to create a positive effect on West Virginia's youth. The children study and perform a variety of music

from simple unison folk songs to more challenging classical and multicultural repertoire—everything from Bach to Billy Edd Wheeler. Masterpieces of music from all styles and periods form the foundation for musical learning and the basis for the curriculum.

The chorus began in 1990 under the direction of Charleston's Selina Midkiff, who still wields the baton at times as the choir's artistic director. The chorus has

performed in nine international cathedrals; Washington's National Cathedral; EPCOT Center; St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican; New York's Lincoln Center; Carnegie Hall; and the United Nations. Having also made appearances in England, Ireland, Prague, and Austria, our state's official children's choir has served proudly as a Mountain State ambassador to the world.

ACC has performed with prominent artists, including Larry Groce of *Mountain Stage*, Vandalia Award recipient Ethel Caffie-Austin, jazz great Bob Thompson, English composer John Rutter, and Kanawha County native and country musician Kathy Mattea. The children have performed for governors, presidents, and other heads of state. Additionally, every other year, ACC hosts the national Appalachian Festival of Young Voices, which honors folk music in mountain tradition.

In fall 2019, ACC implemented a new choir, the ACC Academy, at Charleston's Mary C. Snow West Side Elementary School to bring music and singing to economically disadvantaged children in the state's capital. While supporting the school curriculum with music theory and proper singing techniques, the program fostered the personal and social growth of the participants, promoting their sense of self-esteem, accomplishment, and pride in a nurturing, team-oriented environment.

"ACC is a special organization to so many children and families in West Virginia," says Selina. "We never turn away a child because of financial constraints. We continue to be deeply appreciative of the community who attends our events and supports us so generously."

Additionally, since the number of students being educated at home has grown, ACC began offering an eight-week homeschool choir in fall 2019. Along with learning repertoire, the students gain

knowledge of good singing techniques as well as foundational music theory. In 2019, the Homeschool and ACC Academy choirs were included in ACC's annual Christmas concert.

Following a year of expanding horizons, the choir has focused on innovative growth in response to the environment created by the pandemic. Though the season has looked different, the chorus produced its first virtual concert in December 2020. Additionally, ACC created a new outreach project for 2021 that will provide a virtual music-studies class to area students. This free course was first offered to students at Mary C. Snow West Side Elementary School and then to other Title I schools in Kanawha County. The course's software helps students develop their skills in composition, pitch and rhythmic accuracy, sight reading, and music-theory concepts.

The second part of the outreach project is an interactive digital education package from past ACC performance videos—provided free to music teachers around the state. It includes two to three songs with background information on each piece along with the composer and historical context. With West Virginia and/or Appalachian songs, the package offers a history of the music and a short video from the composers/arrangers talking about their pieces. The main goal with both parts of this project is to support our state's music educators and students by expanding their resources in their quest to improve music appreciation, knowledge, and skills.

As summarized so succinctly by ACC graduate Hannah Graff, who went on to study music at West Virginia University, "I am proud I was part of something wonderful that is working to make this world a little better one song at a time."

Sarah Whiteside, who also graduated from the ACC program and studied



Chorus members have become proud ambassadors for West Virginia at home and around the world.

at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says she uses “the values that ACC instilled in me every day. Determination. Perfection. Excellence.” Without a doubt, the relationships, music education, and skills that ACC offer continually change lives and positively impact our state.

Above all, ACC celebrates the young and the music within them. The chorus’ rich 30-year history is replete with the spirit of West Virginia and represents all that’s good about our wonderful state. 🍁

You can learn more about the Appalachian Children’s Chorus at www.wvacc.org.

AUDREY PITONAK-GOFF serves as executive director of ACC. She holds an MBA with a focus in management from Grand Valley State University and has experience in both non-profit and for-profit companies as well as at all levels of education. She’s acquired a unique global perspective, having lived and worked around the world for seven years before settling in Charleston in 2006. Audrey appreciates the many ways that music enhances life, having sung in church and school choirs from age seven through college. Singing is still one of her favorite pastimes. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

The Teapot

By Ellen Lambert

In 1951, we ran away to get married. Since eloping was verboten in our families, there were hurt feelings, and, of course, the wedding gifts were sparse. Jack was scheduled to be drafted. He wanted someone to come home to, and I was afraid I'd lose him to the world. So we ran off . . . we did . . . to Oakland, Maryland.

Soon after, Jack stopped by his hometown grocery store in Wallace (Harrison County). He went to the counter to give his order, as was the custom at that time. Brent Estlack, the owner, said, "Say Jack, I hear'd you got married!" He reached up on a top shelf, lifted down a little, yellow, dusty, pottery teapot, wiped it off with his white apron, shoved it across the counter to Jack, and said, "Here's you a wedding present."

I was delighted when Jack brought that teapot to our tiny apartment that evening. After supper, while I was doing the dishes, we were listening to the radio and decided to do some tea the *pot way* with our new treasure. It was a lovely summer evening. We were settling into married life and delighted to be on our own together at last. We vowed we'd never part. We'd plotted our future, and this would be forever. Ah, what youthful bliss.

Ceremoniously, we poured our hot tea from that little yellow teapot and shared a moment we both would recall and treasure for the rest of our lives. For 63 years, we shared our tea as though it was the glue that bound us together. And perhaps it did. Whenever either one of us had a hard day, or was depressed, or was ill, or had some small victory, the other one would say, "Would you like a cup of tea?" To us, this translated into "I'm sorry," or "I'm proud of you," or "I don't know what to do," or "I'm so happy for you," or simply "I love you," or (perhaps most of all) "Let's stop what we're doing and talk a while." It was an unspoken, unbroken rule that the answer was always



"Why yes, let's do that. I'd love to stop and have some tea with you."

"Would you like a cup of tea?" reminds me of those two young, naive people who were so in love so many years and yet didn't know that love—nice as it is—is three-quarters commitment.

Through the years, we went through many teapots, some gifted, but we held to the thought that they should be unadorned and made of earthenware or pottery. We felt that perhaps, in some small way, this would remind us to keep humble and grounded in all our endeavors.

Ben Franklin related that when he became a little more prosperous, he was saddened when his wife replaced his favorite wooden porridge bowl with a china dish. Somehow, he'd felt the need to remember his more impoverished time. Having his porridge in his old wooden bowl every morning did just that.

Regardless of our achievements and accomplishments, we need to hold dear the simpler beginnings and recognize the difference between *wants* and *needs*. Sometimes, we need a wooden bowl, or sometimes a pottery teapot, to remind us.

Jack passed in 2014, and I miss him so. Every time I drink tea from our wedding gift, I'm still with him, and he's with me. 🍃

ELLEN LAMBERT was reared by her maternal grandparents in Grafton in the 1940s. They instilled in her the love of history and genealogy. Local activities also left her with fond memories of the B&O terminal in its "finest hour," but family history has outweighed all others. This is Ellen's third contribution to GOLDENSEAL. Her previous articles were in our Spring 2019 and 2020 issues.



Black Gospel & Blues

The Roots of American Music

By Doris A. Fields

Between 1870 and 1930, Blacks, mostly from Virginia and the Deep South, migrated to West Virginia in large numbers. They were recruited by the titans of industry to work in railroads, coal mines, and factories—jobs created as our state transitioned from a farm-based economy. With those people came their music.

In 1922, my father, Porter Cotton, migrated with his mother and brother from Selma, Alabama, to Cabin Creek in eastern Kanawha County in search of mining jobs. Cabin Creek is a collection of small coal mining towns up and

down a 20-mile hollow. At 11 years old, my father and his brother found work at Kayford, one of those small towns. His mother became a cook for the mine superintendent, and the whole family made their living from the coal companies, just like most other families on Cabin Creek.

Though no one in my family was musical, I remember music very early in my life, and it started at church. In Kayford, we lived next door to the church that Blacks attended. It was just a little one-room building, and I remember



Congregation and church band of a Black church at 1316 10th Avenue in Huntington, early 1900s. Photo by Bollinger Studios of Huntington. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Sherri Hughes Collection.

the floor shaking during really stirring songs when people would pat their feet and clap their hands. Gospel was my introduction to music. The rhythm and emotion of the music, not necessarily the words or setting, became a part of me.

My world as a child also included a steady dose of popular rhythm & blues (R&B), rock 'n' roll, and country music, thanks to TV and radio, which were constants every day. I'd watch TV with my grandmother, and when shows like *American Bandstand* and *Shindig* came on, she'd hold my arms above my head and say, "Dance, baby, dance!" I wanted to be one of the entertainers on *American Bandstand*. That became my only goal in life, and it would be today be if Dick Clark's show was still on the air.

Those were my introductions to the two genres of music that Xavier Oglesby and I have explored as part of the West Virginia Folklife Apprenticeship Program (sponsored by the West Virginia Humanities Council). For us, it's not been about researching or even performing. It's been about remembering.

Over the years, I've spoken to people from my father's generation who remember what it was like to be on the West Virginia music scene. One particularly knowledgeable and helpful source has been Hubert Jones, a native of Laing (Kanawha County). He's always been known affectionately as *Rabbit* to his friends. He's now in his late 80s but still retains his elephant's memory when he recalls the days of jazz and coalfield music. He was the one to tell me about



* The New Hope Baptist Church choir of Beckley performs at an early Vandalia Gathering. Photo from the GOLDENSEAL Archives.

Charleston's heyday regarding Black music. In the 1950s, Rabbit, with his partners MacDonald Cary Jr. and Warren Pope Sr., were the first Blacks granted a license to operate a nightclub in our state. He has been the unofficial *griot* of Black music history in central and southern West Virginia—actually, in our whole state. Rabbit knew and knows everyone on the music scene.

From him, I learned that the coalfields have produced many fine blues, jazz, and gospel musicians. Most of them performed all three genres equally well and used their talents not only to praise God on Sunday morning but to make some extra cash in juke joints on Saturday night. West Virginia was uniquely situated for touring Black musicians, even in more southern counties such as Logan and Raleigh. Ray Charles, Count Basie, Lionel

Hampton, and many others were no strangers to our southern coalfields.

Charleston was the main stop for many of these artists during segregation. It wasn't unusual for well-known performers to seek out Black nightclubs after their early shows for white audiences. They'd end up at places like the Crazy Horse and the Ferguson Hotel [see our Spring 2017 issue] to jam with local musicians into the wee hours of the morning. Some of those musicians were coal miners in town for a good time after a hard week of working underground; likewise, Charleston musicians often ended up in coal camps after shows to jam at all-night house parties. These weren't just nights out on the town. This was school.

During these jam sessions, the players exchanged new drum licks, chord progressions, and singing styles—no matter



Hubert "Rabbit" Jones taught himself to play the upright bass and later studied music at West Virginia State College (now University). The first chair in the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra double-bass section is named in his honor. Courtesy of the Charleston West Virginia Blues Society.

how talented the musician, everyone was treated on the same level. Imagine being a Sunday church pianist who got to jam with Ray Charles the night before? Although in the early 20th century, it was often illegal for different races to mix, many white audience members dared to follow their favorite Black performers to the segregated parts of cities after the main show.. This was where the magic happened. It's when the musicians felt most comfortable and played just for the love of music.

In Charleston, the area where touring musicians ended up was the Triangle District [see our Spring 2017 issue]. Little remains from those days, but before the Urban Renewal Movement leveled most of the region in the 1960s, it was the heart of Charleston's Black community and boasted over 20 Black-owned after-hours clubs.

From the 1940s to early 1960s, the Triangle was the place to be for Black music and the musicians who came through. In the late-night hours, touring and local musicians worked on their unofficial master's degrees in blues and jazz. The locals included Rabbit, who got to play with celebrated performers such as Count Basie. Rabbit Jones had the first double-bass chair in the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra dedicated to him by symphony philanthropist Lyell Clay.

Another well-known West Virginia artist who honed his skills after hours in the Triangle District is the great jazz pianist Bob Thompson. Jazz vocalist Ann Baker (1915 – 1999) was passing through Charleston with Billy Eckstine's big band in the 1940s. She fell in love with a local, married, and together opened the Shalamar nightclub, another long-disappeared Charleston landmark. Both Bob and Ann have been inducted into the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame. Blues singer Priscilla Price grew up in

the Montgomery area; now a fixture in Detroit's blues scene, she's performed all over the world.

West Virginia has produced a wide range of world-renowned Black artists. Whether it's blues, jazz, rock, or gospel, it's all blues! Johnnie Johnson (1924 – 2005) was the great pianist from Fairmont (Marion County) who hired a young guitar player named Chuck Berry to front his band, and the rest is history. Johnnie had a celebrated career writing with Berry and as a solo performer; he was later featured on songs by the Rolling Stones and Eric Clapton, among others. Fairmont now hosts an annual Johnnie Johnson Blues Festival.

And we can't forget Huntington's colorful Mary "Diamond Teeth" McClain (1902 – 2000), the half-sister of the Empress of the Blues, Bessie Smith. Mary achieved much more acclaim later in life than in her early days, when she was performing and traveling with her half-sister. Huntington holds an annual Diamond Teeth Mary Festival in her honor. Johnson and McClain are also in the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame.

As far as gospel goes, our state has produced many talented Black performers; however, none have achieved the worldwide success of their blues counterparts. One, though, does stand out, and that's West Virginia's Queen (or First Lady) of Gospel Music, Dr. Ethel Caffie-Austin. She's a gospel music expert but also a wonderful singer, pianist, and educator. The 2006 Vandalia Award (our state's highest folklife honor) recipient also helped preserve the gospel music tradition by founding the Black Sacred Music Festival in the 1990s at West Virginia State College (now University). This event, which took place during Black History Month each February, included a whole weekend of lectures, workshops, and performances. It was very popular



Our author, Doris A. Fields, and Xavier Oglesby present a gospel workshop in Charleston. Photo by Michael Keller.

with both Black and white participants and featured classes in songwriting, choir directing, performance, and many other areas of study.

Xavier and I caught up with Dr. Austin at the newly revamped Black Sacred Music Festival in March 2018 at Marshall University. We talked about how gospel music has changed and how many of its associated traditions have been lost in the name of progress. One challenge within the Black church is the idea of paying musicians for their services. Growing up, Dr. Austin was the pianist for her church. She told us she never got paid but quickly added that the pastor was also her father, which made compensation a non-question. It would've been unheard of to be paid to play in church. Now, with gospel artists and choirs topping the charts, there's no doubt that gospel music has become a business, and many young people treat it as such.

"They expect to get the pay when they haven't done the work," says Dr. Austin. By not doing *the work*, she means they haven't paid their dues. She, like so many others in the Black community, have *lived* gospel music, not just performed it. One taboo of the Black church community is calling gospel a performance. Just like with the blues, it's hard to keep true tradition from being watered down by those who are imitating the style and not evoking the same kind of emotion that made the music unique to begin with.

When Xavier and I did our first public showcase at Eagle Central Baptist Church in Deepwater (Fayette County), we both came away with similar thoughts. To take advantage of the number and variety of singers there, we intentionally inserted our showcase into an event that had already been planned. It was a convention of local gospel quartets. Groups from all over southern West Virginia were in attendance. As expected, most singers

were 50 years or older. What we didn't really expect was that the accompanying musicians were all 30 or younger. This made for an interesting dilemma. Although the groups covered older and newer music, the instrumentalists couldn't always follow the older traditional songs by ear. It probably wouldn't have been noticeable to someone who hadn't grown up in an older Black church, but it was aggravating, and even annoying at times, to those of us who grew up on those traditional songs. An unfamiliar chord in the wrong place can change the whole feel of a song! Well, apparently this isn't the case for youngsters who may have been brought up in church but also raised on hip-hop and BET. On the other hand, just the fact that these young people have chosen to be in church rather than on the streets is enough to forgive their slight misinterpretations of traditional songs. The old musicians are dying out, and there aren't very many left to pass on the traditions as the elders knew them. That was a big reason why Dr. Austin created the Black Sacred Music Festival.

Speaking of *feeling* in songs, Xavier and I also observed how differently the songs were *carried*—meaning how the lead vocalist chose to phrase the lyrics. This is where gospel splits into two categories. I grew up in a Baptist church. Baptist gospel has a slightly different feel from that of the Holiness church where Xavier was brought up. Traditional Baptist hymns are sung more straightforward, sticking closely to the melodies. It's very piano driven. On the other hand, in the Holiness/Pentecostal tradition, percussion is very important (sometimes the only accompaniment). Ad libs and vocal slurs are very common in this tradition. It's much more rhythmic than Baptist gospel. Both styles were very evident during our showcase.

With gospel music now in the hands of younger generations, much of it has



West Virginia's First Lady of Gospel Music, Dr. Ethel Caffie-Austin, our 2006 Vandalia Award recipient. Courtesy of the GOLDENSEAL Archives.

become almost indistinguishable from R&B and hip-hop. Rather than a choir accompanied by an acoustic piano and maybe drums, bass, and guitar, you now have full productions, complete with stage lighting and professional sound. This is much more common in larger churches, regardless of denomination.

There are many unwritten rules in the gospel music tradition, but when those rules are broken, they're not usually addressed openly. One of the first is not to blur the line between gospel and blues. Today, the lyrics and church setting are often the only hints that a

line even exists. More and more gospel instrumentalists walk a fine line between the two styles. And some newer gospel songs are all instrumental. Without words, how do we know it's gospel music? Just because it's played in a church? More and more gospel is being performed in nontraditional settings, so you have to imagine in your head the intent of the performer or composer.

Another unwritten rule is that you can't do both. Many Black artists have had terrible inner turmoil over playing the "devil's music" (R&B) *and* God's music. Xavier admits that he's rather conflicted

about it, so he considers himself a gospel singer who, on occasion, likes to sing other styles.

A more prominent West Virginian who had this same dilemma as a child was none other than the great Bobby Womack (1944 – 2014), who wrote “It’s All Over Now” (popularized by the Rolling Stones) and many other classics. I interviewed his late uncle, Henry Womack, during the first year of Charleston’s FestivAll (2007) at an oral history booth set up by West Virginia Public Broadcasting; I also was fortunate enough to interview him and Rabbit Jones on behalf of the Charleston West Virginia Blues Society. Henry told many stories about Bobby and his brothers and how they started out singing in churches across our state. Henry had been designated as the boys’ driver and guardian while on the road since they were all underage. Once discovered by the legendary Sam Cooke, they became the Valentinos, and thus began an R&B career for Bobby that would span six decades and land him a spot in the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame (2009).

As a side note, if you google Bobby Womack, it says he was born in Cleveland, Ohio. I was honored to perform for him when he was inducted into our state’s All Black Schools Sports & Academic Hall of Fame. I asked Henry about the discrepancy about Bobby’s birthplace because it’s well-known that Bobby and his family were from Northfork (McDowell County). Henry said their early record company didn’t want it known that Bobby was from West Virginia. They had family in Cleveland, and the company thought that would make a better back story.

We say that blues is America’s roots music because it is the root of American popular music. It was created by a people who’d been enslaved in a country that had no love for them and that



Soul singer Spyder Turner, a Beckley native, poses with Doris A. Fields. Courtesy of our author.

considered them an inferior race. Blues was born out of pain; everyday suffering was a way of life. The people who created the blues had no political or economic voice. The closest they came to having freedom of speech was singing, which allowed for a lot of innuendo and double talk. An example is the coded messages found in slave spirituals sung in the fields as guides for religious or physical freedom—for instance, the traditional hymn “Let Us Break Bread Together” is a slave spiritual with hints about secret meeting places. The blues had its roots in those spirituals, just as gospel did. It’s all the same. What began as a vocal expression of grief, emotional distress, and physical pain in southern cotton fields evolved into one of the main genres of American music. It transcended the fields and later chain



McDowell County native Bobby Womack (1944 – 2014) performs in Denmark in 2010. Photo by Bill Ebbesen.

gangs to become loved and imitated by people around the globe. Black Americans, descended from Africans, created something bigger than themselves and then gave it to the world.

West Virginia is only slightly different than other states where blues and gospel flourished side by side. Wherever Black people went, so did their music, which was adapted to suit the region and surrounding culture. As far as blues is concerned, West Virginia is kind of unique. It has no label as it does in other regions of Appalachia, which variously call it hill country blues, country blues, or Piedmont blues. Black music (blues) in our state borrows from our sounds, instrumental styles, and dialects. Gospel also does the same thing. For instance, a standard hymn like "This Little Light of Mine" is carried (phrased) differently here than it is in Mississippi. The melody is the same, but the feel is different due to the Baptist

and Pentecostal influence. Many older traditional gospel tunes share the same melody as some work or blues songs. For example, the work song "Take This Hammer" shares a melody with "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah." Intentional or not, the beauty of blues and gospel is in their flexibility. The singers can add or subtract verses and still have a perfectly healthy song.

The path Xavier and I started on was never about digging and researching. That's a job for another time. First, we had to remember who we are and where we came from. This music is where we come from. 🌿

DORIS A. FIELDS is also known as "Lady D," a singer, songwriter, actress, and artist, born in the coalfields of Cabin Creek and raised in Chesapeake (Kanawha County). She has a particular love of blues music and its artists. She uses many of her opportunities to see that early artists are acknowledged and remembered as the architects of American roots music. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Singer, musician, and storyteller extraordinaire Bill Hairston, 2019. Photo by Emily Hilliard.

“People start looking at people for who they are” W. I. “Bill” Hairston on the Power of Stories

By Emily Hilliard

When the old men would gather to tell stories in the Phenix City, Alabama, neighborhood where W. I. “Bill” Hairston grew up, he would sit at their feet and listen. After his family moved to the Lick Skillet area of St. Albans (Kanawha County) in 1960 when he was 11, storytelling helped him feel at home in a new place.

“Lo and behold, when I got to St. Albans, the same thing was happening on porches, under trees, wherever they were. Back then, it was mostly men who were just telling stories. I mean, these were

tall tales. That’s when it really fascinated me,” Bill says.

Back in Phenix City, Bill’s family resided in a largely Black community, and Bill had a strong understanding of himself within that context. In West Virginia, though, all of that changed for him, as the Hairstons were one of the few Black families in the area.

“I was trying my best to identify with my Hairston family, which at that time, I really didn’t have a good understanding of. I just knew that they were from McDowell County. But I remembered the banjo was at



In 1967, Bill (far right) helped represent West Virginia at a national 4-H conference in Washington, D.C., where he had tea with First Lady "Lady Bird" Johnson and met President Lyndon Johnson. Courtesy of Bill Hairston.

my grandfather's house, and so there was that connection. So I think a lot of what happened to me and a lot of my interests and understanding and zest to learn came out of a desire to just identify."

Like many rural kids in West Virginia, Bill soon became involved in 4-H. Though the Kanawha County 4-H camp was already integrated by the early '60s when Bill was part of the program, not all county 4-H programs in our state were, and there were still two state 4-H camps—the Black camp at Camp Washington-Carver at Clifftop (Fayette County) and the all-white camp at Jackson's Mill (Lewis County). Bill attended the last Black 4-H camp at Washington-Carver and the first integrated 4-H camp at Jackson's Mill the same year.

On his attendance at Washington-Carver, Bill says, "It was a great experience for me. Keep in mind I had left Alabama in a segregated situation, and I had been put into this integrated situation—being one of very few Black children—and then boom! There I was with all the Black kids all over the state. I mean I loved it! And I wished it continued."

Though he also enjoyed his experience at Jackson's Mill and wasn't aware of any issues with the integration of the camps, the Black camp had a specific focus on Black artists and culture that was lost in the integrated camp.

"There was a lot of art and poetry—Black poets, Black artists, Black history, Black music—all of those factors were a part of Washington-Carver that certainly



Bill playing his autoharp, 1972. Courtesy of Bill Hairston.

were not a part of any of the other 4-H camps, countywide or statewide.”

Bill drew from that programmatic emphasis on Black culture he experienced at Washington-Carver and incorporated it into the music and art he explored at the integrated 4-H camp and in other parts of his life.

“I remember one of the things that I did in the white camp was [sing the Black National Anthem, “Lift Every Voice and

Sing,” by] James Weldon Johnson because I picked that up in the Black camp. . . . Even throughout high school, whenever I was given an assignment, I was picking Black poets and Black [artists]—but I think that’s where that came from.”

Bill has continued to be involved in 4-H throughout his life. In 1967, he participated in a national 4-H conference in Washington, D.C., where he had tea with “Lady Bird” Johnson and met



(Left-right) Bill performs with David Perry of Wayne County at the Mountain State Art & Craft Fair at Cedar Lakes, 1970s. Courtesy of the GOLDENSEAL Archives.

President Lyndon Johnson. He also worked in 4-H camps in the summer as a college student, worked briefly in the extension service, and became a volunteer 4-H leader. "I'm what they call a West Virginia 4-H All Star, which is a specific honorary organization that you're chosen for. I'm part of the West Virginia 4-H Hall of Fame; I mean I'm a 4-Her in West Virginia!" he remarks.

Propelled by his desire to connect with his father's family, along with his budding curiosity in West Virginia culture, Bill became interested in old-time

music through his involvement in 4-H. At camp, Bill was always drawn to the guest musicians who'd come and play for the campers. "It seemed as though I just connected to those guys. I wasn't playing or anything, I just connected."

Under the mentorship of 4-H instructor Jane George [see Summer 2018], Bill was able to explore this interest further. "Little by little, she started introducing me to this and that and different music, particularly starting with Scottish music and dance," Bill shares. "She believed, and it later on turned out to be right, that

there was a Scottish background within the Hairston family."

With Jane and her husband, Frank, Bill was soon traveling extensively around West Virginia, visiting fiddlers, banjo players, ballad singers, and dancers.

"I not only visited [Frank and Jane], I stayed with them every chance I got. I spent tremendous hours with them. I'd just hop in the car and go with them wherever they went. Again, picking up on the music, picking up on the people, picking up on the culture."

Bill was with Frank and Jane when they first met Uncle Homer Walker, a Black banjo player originally from Mercer County. "He remembered a time when lots of Black people played those instruments. When radio became really popular and banjo in particular was picked up by this whole new group of musicians, Black folks were either overshadowed or just didn't want to play. They didn't want to identify," Bill says. "Once it was affiliated with white 'hillbillies,' it wasn't attractive, I don't believe, to some Blacks. So, little by little, guys like my granddaddy [Colonel Isaac Hairston] just sort of put it aside and went on to something else. That's a sad thing, but it happened."

Bill initially started playing fiddle, and then tried guitar and banjo, but landed on the autoharp as his main instrument. At age 18, when he was a freshman at Glenville State College, he was asked to emcee a Mountain Heritage Weekend. Through that gig, which happened 8-9 times a year, he made more connections with musicians, writers, and scholars in folklore, and began developing his storytelling skills.

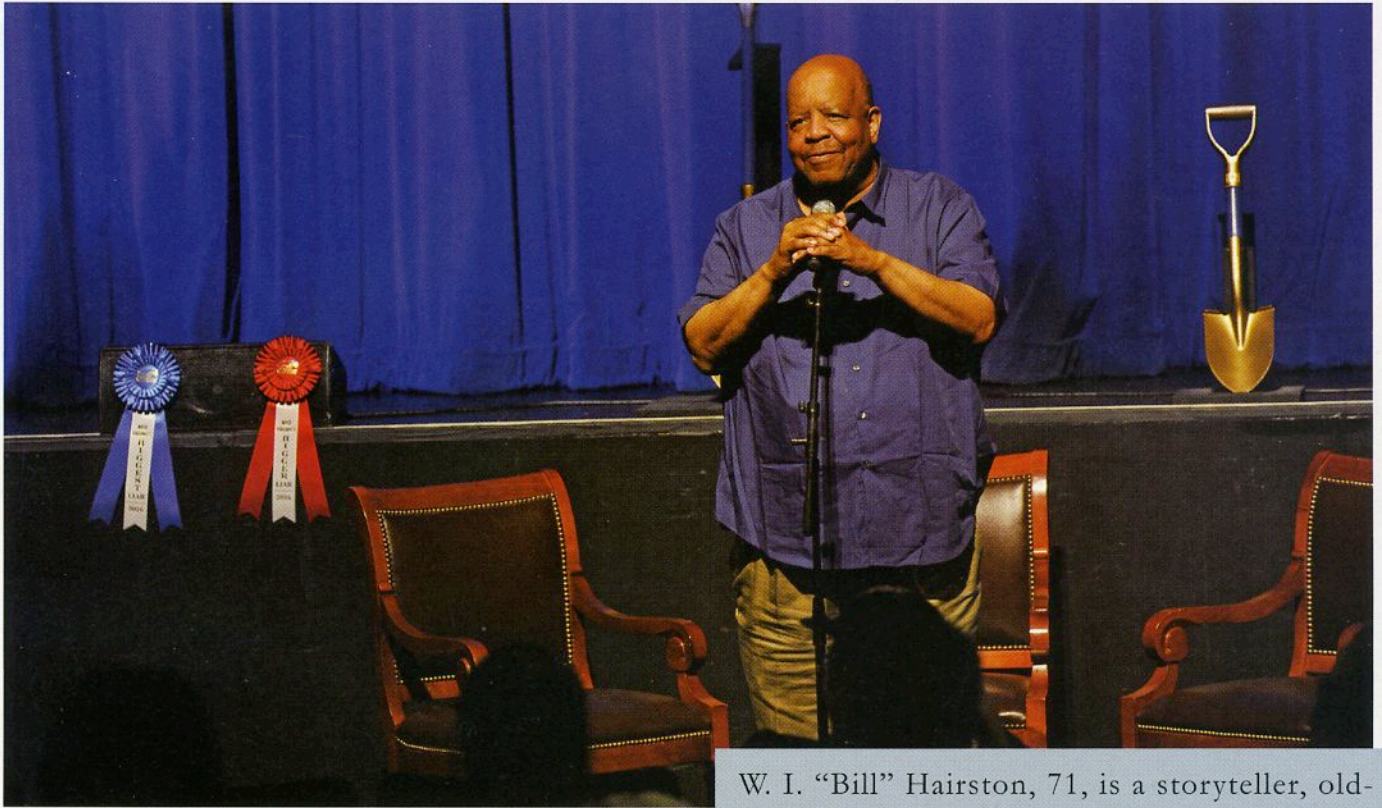
"As a part of all of that, I started reading, I started studying, I started interviewing people, and so I have this vast knowledge of folklore and folklife in West Virginia. I've visited everybody, and I've been in some places, particularly

in the '60s and '70s, where it might not have been wise for a young Black man to go, but my interest sort of overtook that."

As Bill was surrounding himself with West Virginia traditional musicians, most of whom were white, he also was exploring African-American traditions. He says, "Still to this day, I can be at the Glenville State Folk Festival one day and then back here in Charleston singing with [the] Martin Luther King Jr. Male Chorus in a little African-American church, just enjoying that."

Finding connections between those cultural traditions has long inspired him and is a main theme in his storytelling today. "If you see my promotions, it says, 'Bill Hairston combines the Appalachian culture that he was exposed to on the Coal River to the African-American culture that he is a part of.' So one of the things that I'm always doing, particularly with children and also with adults, without saying it, is putting together a storyline where it makes the person understand that the Appalachian culture that you're sitting in down in Monroe County or up in Gilmer County or wherever isn't that different from the African-American culture as far as the expectations, as far as the people, as far as the food, etc."

In the mid-'70s, Bill began emceeing the Stonewall Jackson Jubilee at Jackson's Mill, where he'd been one of the first Black 4-H campers. He also became a prominent emcee at the Appalachian String Band Music Festival ("Clifftop") at Washington-Carver, where he'd attended the last Black 4-H camp. Speaking of his emcee roles, where he's worked closely with traditional musicians and dancers, Bill says, "With all my interest and all my exposure, I doubt seriously if there's a traditional musician that exists in West Virginia now that I haven't experienced, know personally, sang with, or even played with at one point." He adds, "I've been a part of



Bill Hairston emcees the Vandalia Gathering Liars Contest, 2016. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

weekends where you just run into people that you've known for over 45 years. So that's essentially who I am."

From his emcee duties at the Jubilee, Bill built his storytelling career. Today, Bill Hairston is a celebrated storyteller across Appalachia and the country. He's coordinator of the Vandalia Gathering's West Virginia Liar's Contest and an active member of the West Virginia Storytelling Guild, the Kentucky Storytelling Association, the Ohio Storytelling Network, and the National Association of Black Storytellers and serves as West Virginia's liaison to the National Storytelling Network. In March 2020, he was a featured storyteller at The Moth Mainstage event in Charleston.

Never straying from his initial interest in stories as a point of connection across cultures, Bill says that his main goal when he tells a story is to build a bridge with the listener. "I learned through stories

W. I. "Bill" Hairston, 71, is a storyteller, old-time musician, and pastor living in Charleston. Through his storytelling, Bill combines the Appalachian culture he was exposed to on the Coal River with the African-American culture he's part of. You can get in touch with Bill for storytelling appearances at bhairston@ntelos.net.

that people will listen. And when people listen, then they start understanding you. When they can laugh with you, when they can cry with you, when they can be shocked with you, they tend to start identifying. If you can introduce people to a new way of looking at something, particularly race, particularly when they're not saddled with the—I'm trying to think of a word for it—the arrogance, the hate that people bring with it, or that people share, people then start looking at people for who they are." 🌿

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 80th birthday party of John G. Myres (front center with beard) on Plum Run (Marion County), 1908. He was the great-great-grandfather of our author, and this is the house where our author and his grandmother Essie (back row, fourth from the left) were born. All photos courtesy of our author.

Farm Family Photos

By Edwin Daryl Michael

West Virginia has always fought the negative stereotype of being a backward state. There's no question we've seen our share of poverty, but money alone doesn't define people. This negative stereotype has often come from photos. Throughout the 20th century, photographers, especially from outside our state, often focused selectively on the most rundown squalor shacks and misconstrued rural farm life for hardship. While some rightfully spotlighted systemic poverty and disturbing problems such as child labor, photos taken during the early coal mining days, Great Depression, and 1960s reinforced this statewide image. However, family photos, which focus on individual people and families, frequently leave a more positive impression. I can certainly say that about my own ancestors, who

lived in relative poverty in Marion County in the late 1800s and early 1900s, but who were comfortable and contented.

My great-grandmother Addie Ammons Myres kept two bound keepsakes during her life: the family Bible and family genealogy book (showing births and deaths of all close relatives). My grandmother Essie Myres Gump added one other bound keepsake during her life as a farmwife in the early 1900s: a photograph album. My mother, Eva Isolene Gump Michael, was the curator of these items during her lifetime, and they came into my possession following her death at age 101 in April 2017.

Bound books, other than Bibles, were rare in my great-grandmother's farmhouse. Books of literature were first brought home when her daughter Essie began school in 1898. This would become a lifelong love of my grandmother. The number of household books increased dramatically during the 1920s, when Essie's own children (my mother and her siblings) attended Upper Plum Run School, a one-room structure, built on property donated by my grandfather Joseph T. Myres, in the 1870s. My grandmothers explained to me that they were too busy to read. Even when they did have spare time during the long, dark winter days, the light generated by candles, kerosene lanterns, and coal-burning fireplaces was generally too poor for reading.

School attendance by the Gump children (my mother Isolene and her five siblings) coincided with the development of the oil and gas fields in Mannington, allowing natural gas to be piped into many homes on Plum Run. Combining mantles and globes with natural gas produced a soft, glowing light that made reading a pleasure. That's when books of literature began to appear in my Gump grandparents' house and other farmhouses in Marion County.

The relative new wealth in the Mannington area also gave birth to photo studios and the first generation of West Virginians who were captured on film. At least three photography studios operated in Mannington during the early 1900s: Bandy, Stewart, and Stewart and Wise.

The oil-and-gas boom also provided everyday people in the Mannington area with some discretionary money they could spend on non-essentials, such as photo portraits. Essie's first family photo album included mainly tintypes, printed directly as positive pictures onto a thin sheet of metal and subsequently coated with a lacquer. Tintypes could be developed, fixed, and handled within a few minutes of taking the picture.

Although the box camera was invented by George Eastman in 1888 and the Kodak Brownie was on the market in 1901, none of my relatives owned a camera when my mother lived at home with her five siblings. I was one of the first in our family to own a camera, receiving a Kodak Baby Brownie Special on my birthday in 1949.

In spite of the lack of personal cameras, my grandmother's photo album contains hundreds of family pictures—all apparently made by one or more professional photographers from Mannington or Fairmont. The album contains more photos of my grandmother Essie than anyone else. Many were of her alone, but several were of her Upper Plum Run School graduating classes. Those taken at birthdays/family reunions, attended by as many as 50 people, were obviously taken by a professional photographer.

Photos of family birthdays and reunions include so many individuals it's often difficult to identify my grandmother and her parents; names weren't recorded—only the date and site of each photo. One, taken in 1908, on the occasion of



The Upper Plum Run School, 1907. In the back row, teacher Emma Riffle is third from the right, and Essie Myres is fifth from the right.

my great-great grandfather's 80th birthday, included 44 people. A few attendees traveled on foot to the gathering, but the majority came by horse and buggy. To me, a photo showing the concentration of horses and buggies would have been far more interesting than a posed one of my relatives, but such photos were seldom taken.

The earliest photo of my grandmother was never placed in an album—it was much too large. A hand-colored 18" x 24" framed photo of Essie at age three (1895) has hung on the living room walls of my great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents. And now, it hangs in my own house. This striking image shows my grandmother standing on a straight-back wooden chair, with several unidentifiable

objects in the background. She wears a pink ribbon in her shoulder-length light-brown hair. The eye-catching red dress, trimmed with white lace, extends from neck to knees. She appears to be wearing black leggings and a lacy undershirt, in addition to shiny black leather shoes. It was the only color photo in our family's collection until Kodachrome film became relatively inexpensive in the 1970s. Most likely, it was taken in a professional studio in Mannington. Photographers would snap these portraits in black and white and then make detailed notes about the colors of the hair, skin tone, clothing, etc., and finally tint them by hand.

Personal photos of my grandmother at various ages reveal the stylish clothing she typically wore during public



Hand-tinted 18" x 24" photo of our author's grandmother, Essie Myres, at age three (1895).

appearances or for picture days. School photos show girls wearing long dresses or skirts and blouses, while boys wore ties, white shirts, suits, and knickers. Essie is easily identifiable in all the photos other than in her first-grade picture because she was the only student who wore glasses. Her stylish dress is most obvious in a 1907 school photo (see p. 34), when she carried a parasol—the only appearance of this accessory in our entire collection. It's most unfortunate the school photos are black and white because some girls were obviously wearing chic colored-print dresses.

The outfits my grandmother wore during private photo sessions reveal a surprisingly classy style of dress. A 1910 photo, when Essie was 18, highlights a large feathered hat, a white blouse with puffy sleeves and high lacy collar, a waist-cinching belt, and a long voluminous black skirt. An even better illustration is a 1909 photo, showing her with four foxhounds and her .25-caliber, lever-action, single-shot Stevens rifle (now in my possession). Most likely, the long full dress and the bow in her hair weren't part of her hunting outfit.

No photos show Essie, or any other relatives, in everyday clothing—the type worn to clean house, prepare meals, feed chickens, or slop hogs. Plain cotton dresses were the normal attire for farm girls and women of the early 1900s, but they weren't worn on picture days. I spent a good amount of time with my grandmothers during the late 1940s and early 1950s. The only dresses I remember them wearing were long and white—probably feed-sack dresses. Printed feed sacks weren't present during the early 1900s, when many of our family photos were taken. They didn't become commonplace until 1940, by which time sacks for chicken feed (and flour) were made of white cotton. Resourceful farm

women used such inexpensive, strong, white cloth to make dresses, towels, pillowcases, diapers, and any number of other practical items. They also made feed-sack shirts for the boys and men of the house.

The first time I studied these photos, I was astounded by the modish outfits worn by my grandmother and her classmates. Widely distributed photos from the first half of the 20th century give the impression that rural life in our state was somewhat primitive. That's because rural Americans, not just West Virginians, didn't wear what we often call our "Sunday clothes" to do chores. For example, photographers who documented the Depression were capturing everyday life and its practical clothing; however, even the poorest farm kids sometimes had a fine dress or shirt in their closets. While some were bought, others were hand-made. If farm women had the skills to craft gorgeous quilts and coverlets, wouldn't they also have made a fancy dress or stylish shirt for their children?

While money was scarce, most families did have some discretionary money. All students attending the Upper Plum Run School belonged to farm families. They survived by living off the land, with food provided by their livestock, garden vegetables, orchard fruit, and those wild foods free for the gathering. Most farmers, such as my grandparents, were "land-poor," as Grandfather Gump often described his financial status. He had land, but cash money was available only when he could sell livestock at the Rachel Stockyards. Sheep, especially their wool and lambs, were commonly sold at the stockyards in nearby Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, and were a fairly reliable source of income, meager as it may have been.

In various ways, farm families in Marion County obtained spare cash and

spent a portion of it on finer fabrics or finished clothes for both working and socializing. I remember my grandmother selling eggs and butter to Papa Joe Manchin at his Farmington grocery. Some of my grandmother's clothing as a teenager came from stores in Mannington, but her family ordered much of it from Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalogues, which numbered over 1,000 pages. These catalogues, delivered to farm families throughout most of West Virginia in the early 1900s, were arguably the most important published materials (other than Bibles) found in rural farmhouses at the time. The list of items available was almost beyond belief: groceries, medicines, musical instruments, bicycles, firearms, buggies, harnesses, doors/windows, refrigerators, sewing machines, furniture, cook stoves, carpets, plows, mowing machines, hay rakes, windmills, and, of course, clothing.

Before the arrival of indoor plumbing, gas, and electricity, the Sears catalogue was likely the single most important factor in modernizing rural life in the early 20th century. All a farm girl needed was to select the underwear, dress, hat, shoes, and corset she desired; fill out the order form; include the correct amount of cash (no checks accepted); and give the envelope to the mailman. Within a few weeks, she could be dressing as stylishly as girls living in Manhattan. What an innovative idea (and 100 years before Amazon)!

Admittedly, my grandmother may have had more stylish clothes than her friends. Essie was an only child and was, according to my mother, somewhat spoiled. The drilling of an oil well on her father's 150-acre farm brought natural gas to their farmhouse and cash to the family—money that could be used to buy a teenage girl the latest in women's fashion (not to mention fox hounds and a .25-caliber rifle).

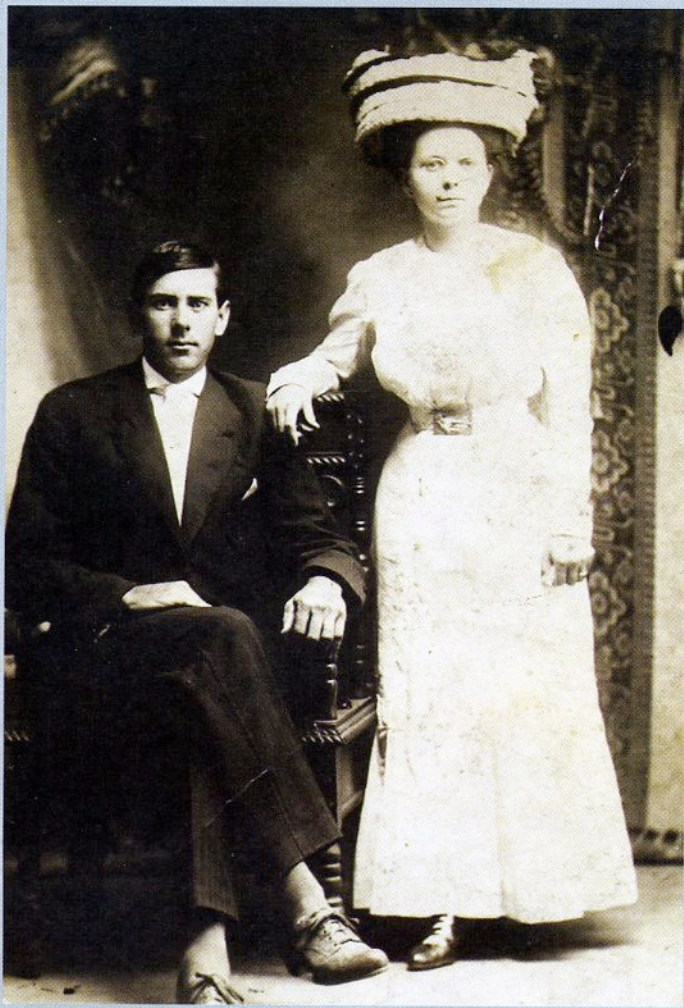
Several hundred photos in my grandmother's album are identified on the back; unfortunately, hundreds of others aren't labeled, and we now have no way of attaching names to faces—quite frustrating because I'm destined someday to discard these family heirlooms into the trash. What a loss! The only lasting value of these nameless photos is the illustration of clothing styles worn in formal or semi-formal settings during that era.

One other unfortunate feature is that of the nearly 1,000 family photos handed down to me, only one of them isn't posed. It's also the sole photo that illustrates any aspect of farm life: my Uncle Milford holding the reins of a team of horses, probably during the 1930s. My immediate ancestors were all farmers; however, I have no other photos showing daily life, or even social events other than school graduations. Due to the dearth of personal cameras and the expense of hiring professional photographers, it's logical that we don't have images of picnics or barn dances, sleigh riding or ice skating, quilting bees or cake walks. Nor do I have any of cutting hay or husking corn, tapping maple trees or hoeing a garden, butchering hogs or smoking hams, churning butter or canning peaches. How sad that we don't have more photos of the clothing, tools, and farm scenes that would give us a graphic picture of life on a hill farm in northern West Virginia because, as the old saying goes, "a picture's worth a thousand words." ❁

EDWIN DARYL MICHAEL, a native of Plum Run near Mannington, holds a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology from Texas A&M University. He taught at WVU until his retirement in 1997. He's the author of more than 100 published works, including the books *A Valley Called Canaan: 1885-2002*, *Shadows of the Alleghenies*, *Death Visits Canaan*, *The Last Appalachian Wolf*, *The Missing Hand: A Plum Run Mystery*, and *Coyotes of Canaan*. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL appeared in our Spring 2020 issue.

More Photos from the Myres Family Album







A recent photo of an old mine opening near Foster (Boone County) where local residents obtained coal for their homes. All photos courtesy of our author.

The Community Coal Mine

By Lawrence “Larry” Cabell

One of my earliest memories is riding on a sled pulled by Uncle Bill’s team of horses. I was five years old, and the year was 1937. He was moving the meager possessions of my parents, along with my sisters and myself, from our home at the head of Honey Fork, near Foster (Boone County)—we were the last house up the hollow—to a log cabin about a mile further down the creek.

My parents, Clarence and Roma Cabell, were married in 1927. Times were very difficult in the heart of Appalachia during

the Great Depression, which seemed to hit our state’s coal mining regions earlier than it did the rest of the country. The decision whether or not to raise a family during that turbulent time was never a major question because we had no assurances that circumstances would ever improve. I never fully understood why my mother called me “her Depression baby” since I had an older sister and two younger. Perhaps it was because I was the only child in the family who had a baby photo.



Our author, Larry Cabell, as a young boy, about the time period when he helped his father dig coal for their home.

My father and his brothers soon added a large room to the cabin, to be used mostly as a kitchen and dining area. My older sister and I were responsible for carrying most of the drinking water from my grandparents' home about 300 yards away. The water situation was supposed to be only temporary, but it lasted about six years. During that time, we never had our own well water.

The living room, which also served as a bedroom for all of us, was heated by a large cast-iron stove, and the chore of getting fuel—primarily coal—to keep the fire burning fell largely to me. My mother used old newspapers and a mixture of flour and water as glue to cover the cracks in the walls, but if the stove went

out during the winter or on cold nights, we were in dire straits.

There was a little community mine, where several families obtained coal for heating and cooking purposes. I never knew who actually owned the mine, which was about a mile from our cabin. My father, with the help of Uncle Bill and Uncle Perry, dug the coal and hauled it to a chute outside the mine, where they loaded it onto Uncle Bill's wagon. As I got older, my father and I dug a lot of coal.

It was a considerable distance from the mine opening to the face of the coal. By the time we got back to it, you couldn't see any daylight from the opening. It was as dark as dark can get, and, at first, it frightened me. A small carbide light attached to my father's cap produced enough flame to let us see and do our work. The carbide, actually calcium carbide (CaC_2), was in a container attached to the bottom bottom part of the light, and you had to add water slowly to produce a flammable gas called acetylene. My head was too small for the cap, so I carried mine in my hand and set it on the floor when I helped load the coal. [For more on mine lights, please see our Summer 2015 issue.]

The coal seam varied from 30 to 40 feet wide and was about 4 feet high. The height made the bent-over work difficult for a grown man, but, when I was first allowed to join in, I could stand up straight without bumping my head on the mine roof. Once we loaded our buggy, we either pushed it on wooden 2x4 tracks to the loading chute outside or sometimes used a small pony, which I loved, to pull it. The pony was my pet, and I was allowed to lead it in and out of the mine while carrying my carbide light.

Releasing coal from the seam where it'd been for some 300 million years was a difficult task and required several

steps common to commercial coal mining in those days. We bored 3 or 4 holes about 4-5' feet apart and 2-3' deep in the seam with an auger (about 1¼" in diameter and 3' long); you leaned into a breast plate attached to the auger with all your weight to pressure the drill bit. Then we placed dynamite into the holes. Using a small tamping rod (about the diameter of a pencil), we packed in the dynamite with mud and coal dust. Once we removed the rod from each hole, it left a small opening in which we inserted about a 4" squib, or fuse, loaded with black powder; another 2" at the other end was left without black powder. That extra 2" gave us time to light it—with the carbide light—and run outside for cover before it sparked the black powder and ignited the dynamite. Whoever lit the fuse had to move quickly to avoid the ensuing explosion. Even after the blast, we had to wait several minutes for all the smoke and dust to subside. After the air became reasonably healthy to breathe, we went back in and shoveled the blasted coal into our buggy.

Early on, my father always lit the fuse before scurrying out. This was even more dangerous than it sounds because a chunk of coal could travel a long distance at high velocity after the explosion. Dad always made it out safely. It was several years before I could persuade him that I knew the procedure well enough to let me light the fuses. The first time I tried it, I pivoted too quickly to run away, and my carbide light went out. I knew I had little time to make it to safety before the blast. I couldn't see a thing, so instead of trying to relight my lamp, I got down on my hands and knees and scrambled toward the entrance. Even in total darkness and on all fours, I sensed the general direction of the entrance; yet, I didn't quite make it all the way out before the blast. Dad came rushing in to

find me, but fortunately, I'd made it far enough to escape injury. He was, I think, more frightened than I was and never permitted me to light the fuses again.

By about 1942, our family had prospered enough to purchase a four-room house, and it was no longer necessary to dig our own coal. I was allowed to sleep by myself in the new living room, which had a fireplace. My parents had their own room and fireplace, but my sisters' room had no heat, so they had to bundle up in winter. We did have our own water well but no indoor plumbing.

My father, who I adored, died a few years later from cancer, leaving Mother with three teenage children. With no job experience, very little money, and only a ninth-grade education, she moved our family 220 miles north to Morgantown, where she achieved two major goals. She graduated first in her class of 21 at a local business college and made sure that each of her children got a degree from West Virginia University.

It was my father's desire that we not follow him into coal mining for a career, but it was my mother, Roma, who made it happen. Some years after completing her purpose in Morgantown, she returned to Boone County and married Omer Miller. In 2001, she passed away at age 89 in Chester (Hancock County), where she was living with my sister, Chloe Ann, and Chloe's husband, David Jester. I still get emotional thinking about the difficult times and hardships she endured for us children. ❀

LAWRENCE "LARRY" CABELL is a descendant of Dr. William Cabell, a founding father of Virginia. Larry grew up in Boone County eating pinto beans and cornbread and sometimes walking the nine miles to Scott High School, where he was the football team's star halfback. After serving in the Air Force and graduating from WVU, he had a 52-year career in forest management, which included work for Virginia U.S. Senator John Warner and his wife, Elizabeth Taylor. He finally retired at age 81. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Our author on his family farm
at the head of Honey Creek
near Foster, 1930s.



Greasy Neale

A Man for All Seasons

By Bob Barnett

Greasy Neale was one of the greatest—if not *the* greatest—athletes ever to come out of West Virginia. Who else was a three-sport high school and college star athlete, played both professional football and baseball, coached major college football teams, and coached an NFL team to back-to-back championships? And, in his spare time, he was equally excellent on the golf course and at the bridge table.

Alfred Earle Neale was born in Parkersburg on November 5, 1891, to William Henry and Rena Fairfax Neale. He went by Earle until the day he called a boyhood friend “Dirty,” and the friend retaliated by calling Neale “Greasy.” The name stuck. Neale, who had a good sense of humor, answered to “Greasy” the rest of his life.

Neale went to elementary school in Parkersburg but wasn’t a good student. “I was held back in fourth grade for two years. I could not learn to spell. I could not learn to read, but I was great in mathematics,” he said. Despite his math skills, which certainly helped him in sports and at bridge, he clearly had a learning disability that made reading and spelling difficult for him. He attended Parkersburg High School but dropped out after six weeks to work in a local steel mill. An exceptional athlete, Neale also played semi-pro football and baseball when he was off work on weekends.

After watching Parkersburg High teams play another two years, Neale re-enrolled in fall 1909 as a 17-year-old freshman (he’d turn 18 in November) so he could play



West Virginia University head football coach Greasy Neale at old Mountaineer Field in Morgantown, 1933. Photo by Scott Gibson, courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center.

sports. He was elected captain of the 1910 football team, which didn’t have a coach, so he acted in that role too, leading the Big Reds to a 5-2-1 record. The next year, Parkersburg hired B. B. Cooley to coach; with Neale as its star, the team raced to an undefeated 8-0 record and claimed the state championship.

In spring 1912, Neale didn’t have enough credits to graduate; however, he was about to turn 21—too old to play

high school sports. By this time, he was having success in minor league baseball, but what would he do in the fall and winter?

Harry Stansbury had the answer. Stansbury was the quarterback and captain of the West Virginia Wesleyan College football team and also acted as the school's athletic director. He was tired of being soundly beaten on the gridiron by WVU, so he decided to recruit key players and offer them financial help, even though that wasn't common in the early days of college football. His first two recruits were John Archer and Oscar Lambert from Marshall College (now University), which, at the time, was only a two-year normal school for teacher training. Stansbury offered them a chance to come to Buckhannon and get four-year college degrees at Wesleyan.

When Clarksburg High's football coach told Stansbury that Greasy Neale was the best high school player in the state, Stansbury quickly got in touch with him. At 6-feet tall and 170 pounds, Neale was a good-sized end for that era and typically the fastest player on the field. Even though Neale hadn't graduated from high school, Stansbury offered him room, board, tuition, and miscellaneous expenses. Like most colleges in our state, Wesleyan offered preparatory classes that allowed students to earn their high school diplomas while playing on the college's athletic teams. Neale jumped at the chance.

With Stansbury at quarterback and the talented John Ellison at tackle, the new recruits gave Wesleyan the nucleus of an exceptional team in 1912. Wesleyan easily defeated Glenville State 20-0 in its opener, but the second game would be the real test: facing WVU in Morgantown. In the 21 seasons since WVU's first football game, the Mountaineers had never lost to an in-state college and were 6-0 against

Wesleyan, including a crushing 36-0 defeat just 10 months earlier.

The Wesleyan game was the season opener for the Mountaineers. The first half was surprisingly close as WVU could generate only a 14-6 lead. The second half was different. Wesleyan unveiled its passing attack of Stansbury to Neale; Wesleyan completed seven passes in the half. The forward pass was a rare event in 1912. It had been made legal only in 1906 and had yet to become a popular offensive weapon. WVU had no pass defense because it never needed one. Few, if any, teams had ever passed against the Mountaineers, but they needed one on this day, especially after a 20-yard touchdown pass from Stansbury to Neale tightened WVU's lead to 14-12.

With five minutes remaining, Neale returned a WVU punt 40 yards. Stansbury called for a run in the middle of the field. During that play, Neale sneaked out near the sideline and laid down like he was hurt. Stansbury then called a quick play. By the time WVU's players could locate Neale streaking down the sidelines, Stansbury had thrown him a touchdown, giving Wesleyan the deciding 19-14 winning margin. The following Monday, ecstatic Wesleyan students snake-danced through the streets of Buckhannon and held a mock funeral for the WVU football team.

Wesleyan easily rolled through the rest of the season with a 7-0 record, outscoring its opponents 374 to 14. WVU's two touchdowns were the only points scored on Wesleyan all season.

In 1913, Neale's senior year in the academy program, the WVU-Wesleyan game was played in Fairmont before an impressive crowd of 3,400 fans. Neale was again a major force on both sides of the ball, scoring on a 40-yard touchdown pass and intercepting a WVU pass for his second touchdown of the day. Wesleyan

prevailed 21-0 and claimed the West Virginia state college championship. The *Buckhannon Delta* understatedly reported, "Neale played his usual spectacular game." Neale didn't return to Wesleyan for the 1914 season.

During the fall from 1915 to 1920, Neale coached football at Muskingum College (1915), West Virginia Wesleyan (1916-1917), the professional Dayton Triangles (1918), and Marietta College (1919-1920). While coaching college teams on Saturdays, Neale and his assistant, John Kellison, also played pro football on Sundays. Because most college administrators looked down on pro football, Neale and Kellison would drive to the first depot outside town, catch a train for their Sunday game, and play for either the Canton Bulldogs or the Massillon Tigers in the Ohio Professional League in those pre-NFL days.

During the spring and summer from 1916 to 1924, Neale was an outfielder for the Cincinnati Reds. His career highlight was hitting .357 in the 1919 World Series, leading the Reds to their first series victory. The Reds' win has always been overshadowed by the "Black Sox Scandal," in which eight White Sox players later were banned from Major League Baseball for life for taking money to throw the series. Reds players, including Neale, always contended they could've beaten the Sox even if the series hadn't been fixed.

In 1921, while continuing to jump between baseball and football, Neale coached the undefeated (10-0) tiny Washington & Jefferson College team to a stunning 0-0 tie against the mighty University of California in the Rose Bowl; even though it ended in a tie, it's still considered one of the major upsets in Rose Bowl history. From 1923 through 1928, Neale coached football at the University of Virginia, where his teams

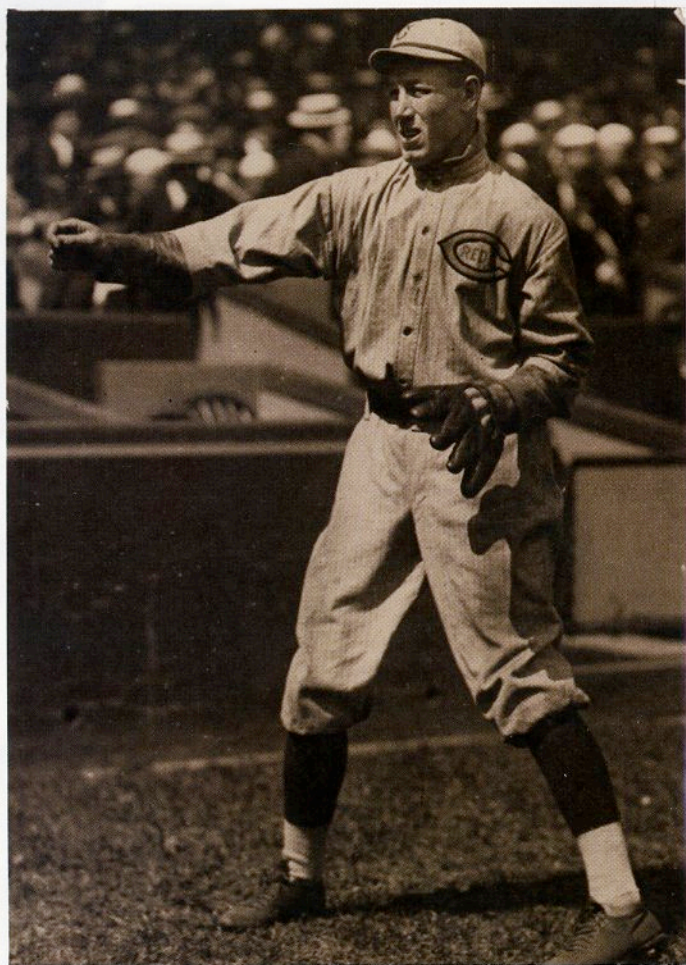
won a respectable 28 games, lost 22, and tied 5.

In 1930, he resurfaced as head coach of the semi-pro Ironton (Ohio) Tanks. He led the Tanks, a team of high school teachers and coaches, to wins over the NFL's Chicago Bears (26-13), whose star player was the legendary Red Grange; the New York Giants (13-12); and the Portsmouth (Ohio) Spartans, who were soon to become the Detroit Lions.

The game against Portsmouth was his last as a player. He was 38 years old and hadn't played in 12 years but had to insert himself into the lineup because of team injuries. At the local Elks Club, where the Tanks' players hung out, Neale had made a couple of wagers on his last game. "I bet that I would play 60 minutes, and I also bet that we would win," Neale told *Sports Illustrated* in 1964. He collected on both bets. He played all 60 minutes and caught a long pass, leading the Tanks to a 16-15 victory. His teammate Harold Rolf later said, "Greasy was so sore when it was over that he had to stay in bed for a couple days to recover."

Following his year with the Tanks, Neale returned to West Virginia when his old Wesleyan teammate Harry Stansbury, who'd become WVU's athletic director [see Winter 2020], hired him as head coach of the Mountaineers. Neale's Mountaineer teams weren't particularly successful, going 12-6-3 over three seasons (1931-1933).

After being let go by WVU, Neale was hired in 1934 by Yale's new coach, Raymond "Ducky" Pond. A 1925 Yale grad and football star, Pond had a nickname almost as colorful as Greasy. Pond was woefully inexperienced with only two years of prep-school coaching experience. He leaned heavily on Neale, who was the backfield coach and chief strategist. In an interesting side note, future President



Greasy Neale as a member of the Cincinnati Reds, about 1919. Courtesy of the Detroit Public Library, Ernie Harwell Sports Collection.

Gerald Ford—a Yale law student who'd helped lead Michigan to a national championship in 1933—joined the same coaching staff in 1935. The prestigious Yale University wanted to use Neale's given name, Alfred, instead of Greasy in press releases. Neale objected, "I have been Greasy as long as I can remember. If Yale doesn't want to use Greasy, they will have to get another coach."

In the 1930s, Yale and the Ivy League teams played big-time football, and Pond and Neale were immediately successful. The 1936 Yale team went 7-1 and was ranked 12th in the Associated Press poll. That season, Yale end Larry Kelley won the second Heisman Trophy ever given. The next year, Yale was ranked 12th again, and quarterback Clint Frank won the

1937 Heisman. In that four-year span, the Bulldogs compiled an excellent record of 24-8-1. Unfortunately, the next three years produced losing seasons, culminating in a 1-7 record in 1940. When Pond left to coach at Bates College in Maine, Neale was out of a job.

His career was far from over, though. Alexis Thompson, a 1936 Yale grad, had been a student member of the school's Athletic Committee and was very impressed with Neale. Thompson's grandfather had founded Republic Iron and Steel, and when Thompson's father died unexpectedly, Alexis became a millionaire. In summer 1941, at the young age of 27, he bought the Philadelphia Eagles. Thompson hired Neale as head coach of the struggling team. The move was actually a step down for Neale because in the 1940s, the NFL was a mere shadow of the more popular college game.

Neale's first two seasons in Philadelphia went badly; he won only two games each season. But nobody really noticed because World War II was taking center stage. No players were draft-exempt, and by 1943, neither the Pittsburgh Steelers nor Philadelphia Eagles had enough players left to field a team. The teams temporarily merged, and newspapers dubbed them the Steagles. They played their home games in Philadelphia, and the Steelers head coach, Walt Kiesling, and Neale were named co-coaches. The two rarely agreed on anything. Neale, one of the most innovative coaches ever, advocated for the new "T" formation, while Kiesling, a much more conservative coach, favored the traditional single wing. After a couple of heated arguments during preseason, Neale and Kiesling refused to speak to each other for the rest of the season. Neale coached the offense, and Kiesling handled the defense. Despite the wall of silence, the team finished with a 5-4-1 record, the first winning record in



Greasy Neale (left) playing cards with an unidentified individual. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Clarksburg Exponent Collection.

Eagles history and only the second for the Steelers. The following year, the team went back to being the Eagles.

But Neale had discovered magic during the Steagles season. For the next six seasons, he led the Eagles to an outstanding 48-16-3 record. The 1947 Eagles went 8-4 and won the Eastern Division but lost the NFL championship 28-21 to the Chicago Cardinals. The next two seasons, just as the NFL was beginning to capture some national attention, the Eagles won consecutive NFL crowns, defeating the Cardinals 7-0 in 1948 and the Los Angeles Rams 14-0 in 1949. Neale was recognized nationally as a football genius and became a legend in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, Thompson then sold the Eagles. Neale and the new owners clashed. The Eagles were upset in their 1950 opener by the Cleveland Browns—playing their first game ever in the NFL—and Neale was fired after the season following a disappointing 6-6 record.

Neale retired to an apartment in New York and a winter home in Lake Worth, Florida. He played golf—shooting

Research assistance was provided by English teacher Connie Colvin and Pam Carson, a librarian at Parkersburg High School.

regularly in the low 80s—and continued to be an excellent bridge player. He moved back home to Parkersburg in 1965.

His fame followed him. He was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame (1967) and Pro Football Hall of Fame (1969). Greasy Neale died in Florida on November 2, 1973, three days before his 82nd birthday. But as a proud son of West Virginia, Neale's body was returned to the Mountain State. He's buried at Parkersburg Memorial Gardens, a short distance from his boyhood home, Parkersburg High, and Greasy Neale Drive. ✱

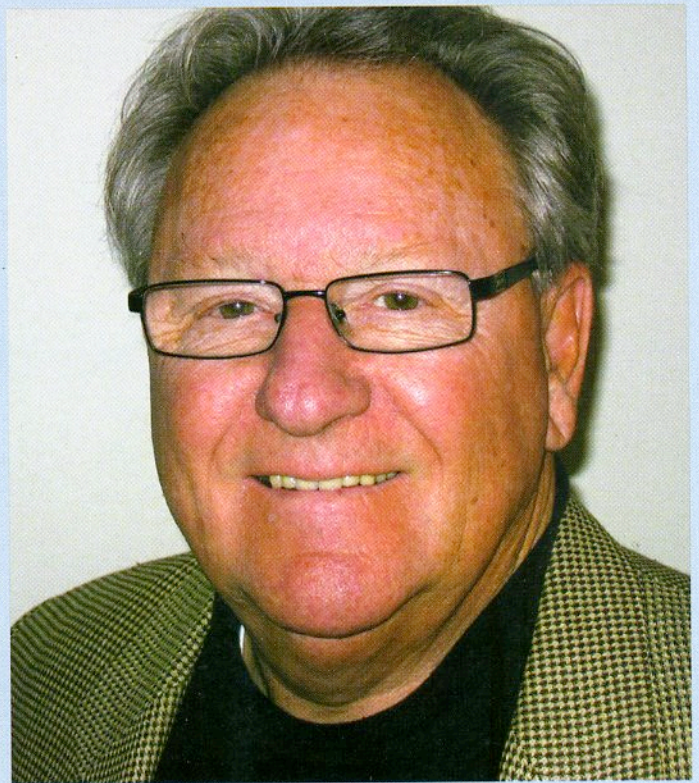
BOB BARNETT grew up in Newell (Hancock County) and taught at Marshall University for 35 years. He was the author of *Hillside Fields: A History of Sports in West Virginia* and *Growing Up in the Last Small Town: A West Virginia Memoir* and co-author of the recently published *The Black Athlete in West Virginia*. This was his 11th contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

GOLDENSEAL Good-Bye

Robert “Bob” Barnett (1943 – 2020)

Longtime GOLDENSEAL author Bob Barnett passed away October 25, 2020, in Sarasota, Fla. A graduate of Wells High School in Newell (Hancock County), Marshall University, and The Ohio State University, he was a faculty member at Marshall for over 35 years (1972 – 2008), serving variously as a professor, a division chair, and director of Grants and Research Development. He also was coach of Marshall’s wrestling team from 1972 to 1979 and holds every wrestling coaching record in school history.

Bob was a prolific writer, authoring numerous books, including *Growing Up in the Last Small Town: A West Virginia Memoir*, *Hillside Fields: A History of Sports in West Virginia*, and co-author of the recent publication (reviewed in our Fall 2020 issue) *The Black Athlete in West Virginia: High School and College Sports from 1900 Through the End of Segregation*. His last publication was a fitting one because he was both our state’s foremost sports historian and a leading chronicler of the experiences of Black West Virginia athletes.



Courtesy of Lysbeth Barnett.

If you have a chance, please read some of the articles he wrote for GOLDENSEAL, including “Black and White: Fairmont vs. Fairmont Dunbar” [Winter 2018]—about the first integrated high school football game in our state’s history—co-authored with his wife of 55 years, Lysbeth. —ed.

- “The Finals”: West Virginia’s Black Basketball Tournament, 1925-1957 (Summer 1983)
- “Something We Lived For”: Coach James Wilkerson Recalls Basketball and the Black Tournament (Summer 1983)
- Spring Baseball (Spring 1984)
- Friday Night Rites: High School Football in the Northern Panhandle (Fall 1991)
- Holding Court: West Virginia’s Tee Wall of China: Recalling the Greatest Dump in the World (Spring 1992)
- When the “Big Green” Rolled: Newell’s Championship Season (Spring 2005)
- First Rise and Fall of the Newell Park Zoo (Summer 2010)
- Girls’ High School Basketball Tournament (Spring 2013)
- Time in the Mountain State: West Virginia’s Golf History (Summer 2015)
- Black and White: Fairmont West vs. Fairmont Dunbar (Winter 2018)
- Greasy Neale: A Man for All Seasons (Spring 2021)



TV news pioneer Bill Kelley. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

Bill Kelley

Historian behind the Camera

By Aaron Parsons

The Broadway hit *Hamilton* musically asks the question, “Who tells your story?” Unlike in old films and plays, it’s not always the horned-rimmed bespectacled academic sitting behind a desk. This stereotypical and outdated image (Ok, maybe a few of us still fit that bill) forgets about a different type of historian: those who literally record our history in real-time. Every day, reporters and photographers are out in the field to make events known to the public, documenting history

in the making and gaining knowledge that often fails to make our history books.

One such person is Bill Kelley, who was born on July 26, 1934, to William Marshall “Buck” Kelley Sr. and Reba May Runyon. His father worked in eastern Kanawha County’s coal mines, starting as just a child; however, after nearly getting killed, Buck moved to Charleston to work for Standard Oil and later got a job at South Charleston’s Naval Ordnance Plant. Reba was from Charleston’s West Side.

Her mother passed away when she was only three years old, and she was raised by her grandmother.

Horace Marshall Kelley, Bill's grandfather, was a painter at Union Carbide in South Charleston. Horace was also a musician, an artist, and an acrobat. "The guy could do about anything," Bill recalls. "Every Saturday night, everybody would get together. My dad played violin and guitar; my grandfather played violin and guitar. An accordion would show up, a trumpet would show up, and a bass fella would show up, and everybody would play music, fry fish to eat, and drink beer. I really enjoyed that when I was a little kid. . . . [Horace] was kind of the leader of the group, but when he got killed, that was the end of that." Horace died in an explosion at Union Carbide in 1941.

Bill clearly recalls the day Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, only a month after his grandfather's death. "I remember we had left my grandfather's house—we lived on the West Side at the time—and as we went across the Patrick Street Bridge, the newsboy from one of the papers ran out with an *Extra*, holding it up saying, 'Japanese attack Pearl Harbor!'"

Bill's family had moved to the West Side from South Hills, generally a wealthier section of town. Bill notes, "It was sort of a culture shock, but it didn't last long because I had all these great kids to play with."

Bill recounts playing football with friends and competing in the soapbox derby. One time, he had to go to the police station to retrieve his football after his buddies, who'd borrowed it from him, got caught playing in the street while he was home doing chores. A police officer had the ball sitting on his desk and lectured Bill about the danger of playing football in the streets.

Bill was a Boy Scout. "I never rose to a high rank, but I had a lot of fun

and learned a lot," Bill says. He was the bugler for his troop and played the scouts' calls at many ceremonies. He even took part in a bugling competition, and his troop put a lot of pressure on him to win. Luckily, he was asked to play "Taps."

"When I got my paper and saw the call I had to play, I tossed it down and just started playing. I had 'Taps' down pat. . . . Once I finished, everyone in the troop was screaming and jumping up and down."

Bill attended Lincoln Junior High, located about where the Kroger on Delaware Avenue is today, and later went to Stonewall Jackson High. While in school, Bill worked at The Diamond Department Store's cafeteria and for the phone company. In the latter job, Bill traveled quite a bit locally and learned a lot about the area, which would later prove invaluable.

As a teenager, Bill was fascinated with film and the news. He would read the newspaper and listen to the radio. He used an 8-millimeter camera and tape recorder to document his family, friends, and school events, such as a pep rally prior to a game against Stonewall's rival, Charleston High. He later used audio from the pep rally in his film *Memories of Stonewall Jackson High School*. Bill says that after showing the film to old classmates at reunions, "people would stand up and applaud, and the girls would cry."

After high school, Bill considered going to college, but one day, he saw something that changed his course. "I remember going down Capitol Street with my dad, and we turned onto Washington Street, and there was a WSAZ camera at the front of the Daniel Boone Hotel, and they were doing *a man on the street*, and I was like, 'That's what I want to do.'" Luckily for Bill, WCHS-TV had recently gone on the air, and the station was looking for help.



(Left-right) WCHS-TV cameramen Dick Johnson and Bill Kelley. All photos courtesy of Bill Kelley unless noted otherwise.

Bill started at WCHS in 1954. He aspired to become a production assistant and, to his surprise, was given the position right off the bat. However, his excitement was quelled when he was handed a broom and told to sweep the floors.

"I did, as almost everyone else, a little bit of everything. I ran the cameras, did photography, production work, and swept the floors," Bill told Ron Hutchinson of the *Charleston Daily Mail* in 1994.

Bill got close with WCHS's chief photographer, Nilo Olin, who became his mentor. "He had tremendous camera

techniques," Bill says of Olin. "He'd gone through the [U.S.] Signal Corps Motion Picture School and had shot film in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, southern France, and in Germany during the Second World War. So, he knew his stuff, and he was the best in this area by far."

Bill covered a variety of news, such as President Dwight Eisenhower golfing with Sam Snead at The Greenbrier, the opening of the West Virginia Turnpike, Cecil Underwood's campaign for governor in 1956, and WVU home football games.

"The first time people in this area got to watch WVU play football, it



Bill Kelley films the dedication of the new bridge at Montgomery (Fayette County), 1956. In 2001, the bridge was named in honor of former House of Delegates Majority Leader Earl M. Vickers.

was 1954," Bill explains. He, Olin, and broadcasting great Ernie Saunders [see Summer 1990] had to shoot from the top of Old Mountaineer Field's original press box in the pouring rain and sleet during the 1954 WVU-Pitt game—a 13-10 upset of No. 7-ranked WVU. "We covered most the games for the next two years, so that was a chance for people in this part of the state to see WVU football."

Bill often covered Underwood campaign events. Some have credited Underwood with being our first governor to use TV effectively. One time, Bill was even mistaken for the young governor. "When

they broke ground for [the] Green Bank [Telescope], Cecil was supposed to break ground for it, but he got sick. . . . So, he tells a trooper to drive us up there so we can cover it. We get up there, and I've got a camera case, you know. So, I jump out, and this guy walks up and shakes my hand and says, "Hello, governor! How are ya?"

In 1956, Bill married Alice Anderson and was drafted by the military. "When I came off my honeymoon, my pre-induction notice was waiting on me," Bill explains. However, he didn't meet the physical requirements. He did, however, aid the



(Left-right) Bill gets an autograph from singer Pat Boone at Kanawha (now Yeager) Airport, late 1950s.

military by shooting footage. He once rode in a helicopter with the Army National Guard to help find a missing child on Campbell's Creek and even parachuted from an Air National Guard plane to a boat to film the plane landing on water.

Bill's career path changed in 1957 after an explosion at the Monsanto Chemical plant in Nitro. He and his crew recorded footage of the blast's aftermath. "I went down to where the explosion was, and it was mayhem. They were bringing guys out and so forth. I got film of some of that, and this guy comes up to me and he says, 'I need your film. You can't shoot film in here.' Something happened that turned his attention, and I handed [the film] to Dave Riley and said, 'Get it back to the station right away.'" Because he captured that footage and got it on the air, Bill was offered and accepted a job at WSAZ.

Shortly afterward, Bill covered a story that put him and other reporters in great danger: the integration of schools in Matoaka (Mercer County). In October 1957, there was a multi-day anti-integration demonstration at Matoaka High School. During the protest, Bill and his team filmed Black students being attacked by some of the demonstrators. Seeing the cameras rolling, protestors threw eggs at and shouted threats of violence toward the news crew. "I remember a lady, one of the teachers up on the second floor, yelling at the crowd, saying, 'Get that photographer!'" Thankfully, Bill and his team weren't harmed, and startling images from their footage spread nationwide.

While at WSAZ, Bill covered other historical events, such as the 1960 Holden mine disaster, the 1960 presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy, the deadly



An African-American student is attacked as he tries to enter Matoaka High School (Mercer County), October 1957. This is a screen capture from film shot by Bill Kelley. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, WSAZ-TV News Film Collection.

1961 Charleston flash flood, and Point Pleasant's Silver Bridge tragedy in 1967. While covering the 1961 flood, Bill found out from his colleagues that his wife and children had been forced by the deluge to abandon their home. "I went in the newsroom, and they said, 'Your wife had to leave your house. You have water in your home on Maryland Avenue.'" Bill's wife had to carry their two children out of the home in chest-high water.

Bill also covered the trials of former Governor Wally Barron and several of his associates who were indicted in 1968 on bribery charges. Though most were found guilty, Barron was not, but he went to prison in 1971 for bribing the jury foreman during the original trial. Bill was there to see it all.

"They all went to prison. I covered all those situations. One of the toughest

things was, one of the leaders, I knew his daughter. He brought his daughter with him to court, and she was watching me as I was filming them. It was tough. . . . And Wally, before he came in for the trial the first day, he came over and shook hands with me."

In 1969, West Virginia launched our first public TV station. Hearing this, Bill knew it was once again time for a change. After 13 years with WSAZ, he left to work for West Virginia Public Broadcasting (WVPB). "We couldn't find a studio in Charleston, but we found a school in Nitro that we could convert into a TV studio. . . . I was there to help put the system on the air," Bill explains.

At WVPB, Bill worked with teachers to develop education programs and create documentaries. He was executive producer of *Legislature Today*, which



Bill Kelley pretends to give a speeding ticket to Huntington native Soupy Sales (at the wheel of a swanky Fork Deluxe convertible) as part of a "Drive 55" personal service announcement for West Virginia, 1982.

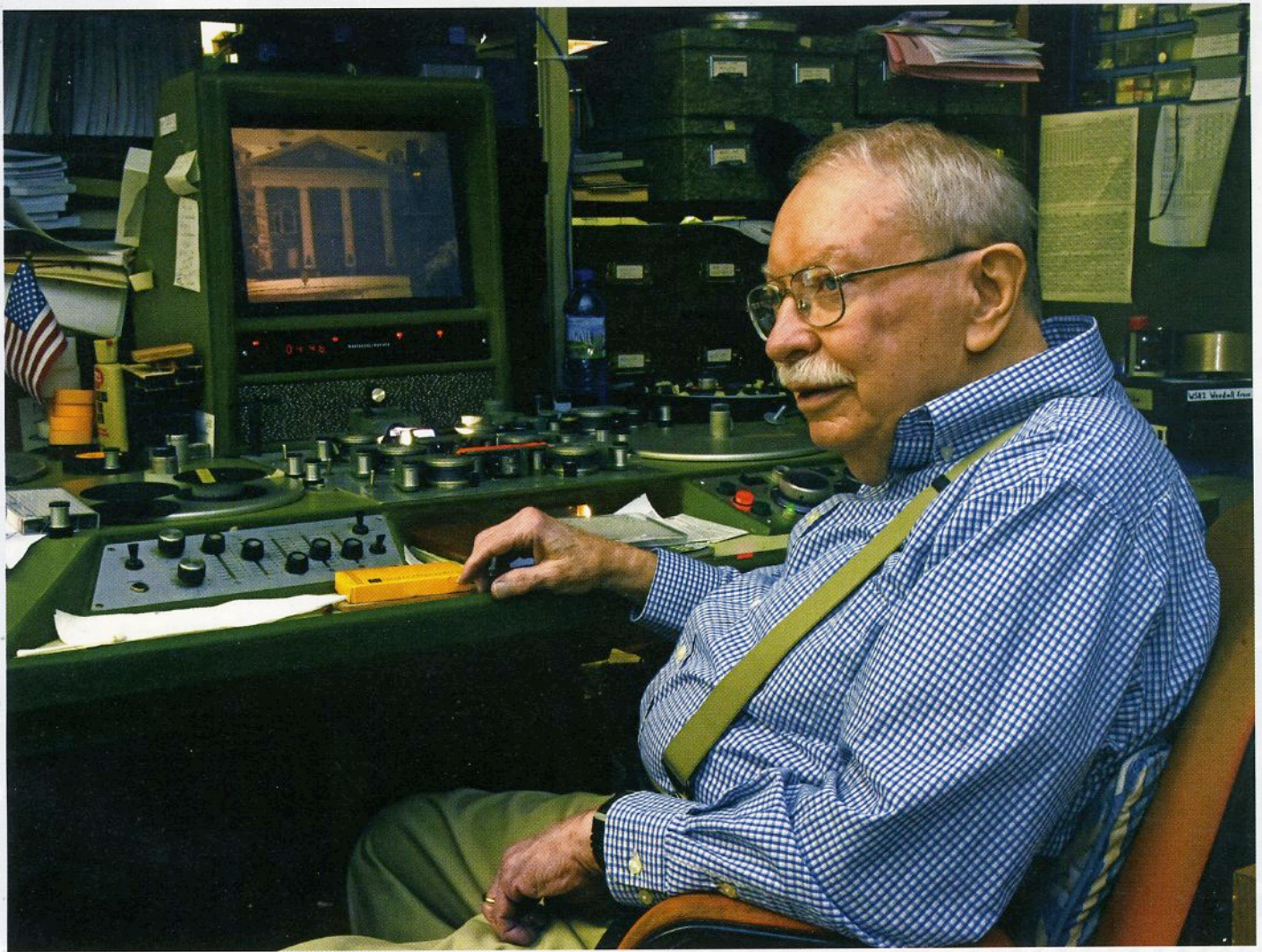
aired daily when the legislature was in action. He also shot several public service announcements—some featuring A. James Manchin and Soupy Sales—and later became manager of WVPB's Charleston facility. Bill worked for Public Broadcasting for 26 years, retiring in 1996.

Bill began volunteering at West Virginia Archives & History, helping to identify people, locations, and anything else he could recognize in old news films. Some 25 years later, Bill still comes to the State Archives to search through film. And for more than 40 years, he's produced a weekly broadcast for Charleston's Calvary Baptist Church.

Bill still lives in Charleston with his wife, Alice. Their son, William (Billy)

Marshall Kelley III, is a photographer. He's been a picture editor for the *North Pilot* newspaper and now digitizes photos for the state of California. Their daughter, Kari Smolder, lives in Charleston, and the Kelleys have three grandsons and two great-grandsons.

Bill's received much recognition for his work. In 1975, a film he made on fire safety won the Ohio State Award for Television Excellence. He also won several AP Best News Film of the Year awards and was part of the first class inducted into the West Virginia Broadcasting Hall of Fame. He also served on the advisory board for West Virginia State College's (now University) Department



At age 86, Bill Kelley volunteers regularly to help catalog historic films in the West Virginia State Archives collection. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

of Communications in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bill was recognized as a West Virginia History Hero for his work in recording and preserving local history. Governor Cecil Underwood—Bill's longtime friend who was serving his second term 40 years after his first one—was there to give him the award.

Reflecting on his career, Bill says, "I consider my work more as a cinematographer than a photographer." His fond memories include shooting footage of traditional musicians like the Morris Brothers from Clay County, meeting Pat Boone at Yeager Airport, and being the first to shoot film of Jerry West playing basketball.

Bill has been a witness to and recorder of so many vital historical events. Because of people like him, we can see parts of our history come alive in front of our own eyes. So, when we think about historians, let's not forget about those who literally document it. Some historians work behind a desk, while others do it behind a camera. 🍁

AARON PARSONS is the photo archivist at West Virginia Archives & History. A native of Logan County, he graduated from Man High School in 2010 and earned a B.A. in history and psychology at Marshall University and an M.A. in public history at WVU. This is his fourth contribution to GOLDENSEAL, the most recent being his article about Hubert Humphrey's 1960 presidential campaign in our state (Summer 2020).

The Day the Comic Books Burned

By Ben Calwell

Seventy-three years ago, in the Roane County seat of Spencer, Superman got a taste of kryptonite.

The Man of Steel's demise came in a schoolyard bonfire fed by comic books and stoked by adult fears that reading the 10-cent fantasies and funnies were causing America's youth to fall into depraved states of juvenile delinquency, not to mention weakening their minds for more serious literary pursuits.

On October 26, 1948, students at Spencer Grade School, led by their reading teacher, Mabel Riddle, filed out of class to watch a large pile of about 2,000 of their collected comic books go up in flames—likely worth tens-of-thousands of dollars in today's collectors' market. The fire happened in an atmosphere of "moral panic" across the nation, according to the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, an American non-profit organization founded in 1986 to protect the First Amendment rights of the creators, publishers, and retailers of comics. From the 1930s even to the present day, comic books "have been stigmatized as low-value speech," according to the organization.

Additionally, an anti-comic-books editorial by Sterling North, "A National Disgrace," was published in the *Chicago Daily News* in 1940 and reprinted in newspapers across the United States. One quote from the editorial reads, "Badly drawn, badly written and badly printed—a strain on young eyes and young nervous

systems. . . . Their crude blacks and reds spoil the child's natural sense of color; their hypodermic injection of sex and murder make the child impatient with better, though quieter, stories."

It was against this backdrop—a fear of youth being corrupted—that the Spencer Grade School comic-book fire occurred. It burned hot with a fuel that included not only Superman but also the pages of Batman, Dick Tracy, Mutt & Jeff, Archie & Jughead, Andy Panda, Bugs Bunny, Captain Marvel, the Flash, and a host of others.

"The Great Comic Book Conflagration"—as former state senator and longtime newspaper columnist Orton Jones calls it—went, in today's parlance, *viral*. Newspapers from across the country picked up the story, as well as an Associated Press (AP) photo of students watching the fire from Schoolhouse Hill.

Orton—now 83 and still practicing law in Spencer—was in the sixth grade at the time and had brought some of his comics to be burned. He went along with what Mrs. Riddle was urging her students to do but was smart enough not to bring his best comics to school that day to be incinerated.

"All I knew was that Mrs. Riddle had set this as a day to bring your comic books and have them burned. I was willing to go along with the program, but not too far. I didn't take any that were worth anything," Orton says. "I brought



Students at Spencer Grade School (Roane County) burn their comic books in a bonfire, October 26, 1948. Photo by A. H. Sizemore, courtesy of the Associated Press.

mine just to be consistent with what was expected of me without going too far in that direction."

As Orton remembers it, there wasn't a lot of discussion among the students as to whether it was right or wrong to burn comic books. They just did it because their reading teacher had asked them to. However, Orton says that not all the teachers at Spencer Grade School approved of the bonfire. The country was just a few years removed from World War II, and burning comic books smacked too much of the Nazi book burnings in Germany.

"Some of the other teachers had criticized it," he says. "Some of the teachers were quoted (in press accounts) as having said that they thought it was too much like Germany. Others said it would do no good—that [the students]

were going to go right on reading comic books."

Indeed, burning the comic books had no effect on the students. Orton and his friends were captivated with comics in that pre-TV world.

"We would trade them in the neighborhood. We would take a stack three or four inches thick and go from door to door to other kids' homes and sit around in the living room or bedroom . . . we would trade and move on," Orton says.

The comic books they read usually revolved around good conquering evil.

"Law enforcement won out every time over the crooks," he says.

However, good conquering evil in comic books wasn't enough, apparently, to sway Mrs. Riddle and the local school Parent

Teacher Association (PTA). She told the PTA that studies showed comic books were harmful to young minds. Student David Mace, now deceased, was 13 at the time. Mrs. Riddle enlisted him to spur his classmates into rounding up their comics for the bonfire. According to news accounts, young David even "officiated" at the event. He told the students:

"We are here today to take a step which we believe will benefit ourselves, our community and our country. Believing the comic books are physically, mentally and morally injurious to boys and girls, we propose to burn those in our possession. We also pledge ourselves to try and not to read anymore.

"Do you, fellow students, believe that comic books have caused the downfall of many youthful readers?"

"We do."

"Do you believe that you will benefit by refusing to indulge in comic-book reading?"

"We do."

"Then let us commit them to fire."

The local newspaper reported, "At least 2,000 copies of 'Dick Tracy,' 'Superman' and other comic thrillers went up in smoke here Monday afternoon, as 600 Spencer Elementary School students declared war on their long-time favorites. The young pupils gave the heroes an appropriate funeral service and then proceeded to dump them into a huge bonfire and watch them burn."

Before David Mace died, David Hajdu, a professor in the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, interviewed him for his 2008 book *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America*.

In Hajdu's book, David recalled his involvement in the comic-book fire: "[Mrs. Riddle] was extremely dedicated—that's the way our school was and the way our

teachers were. She explained to me about [the harm] of comic books, which I didn't know about. I read 'em and I never even noticed. The things she had to say made a lot of sense, I could see that, and she told me we could do something about it, and I said, 'Well, let's go!'"

The comic-book fire put Spencer on the map. Newspapers across the country picked up the story, and Spencer's *Times-Record* printed follow-up reports about which out-of-state newspapers had carried news of the event, or the photo taken by A. H. Sizemore and used by the AP.

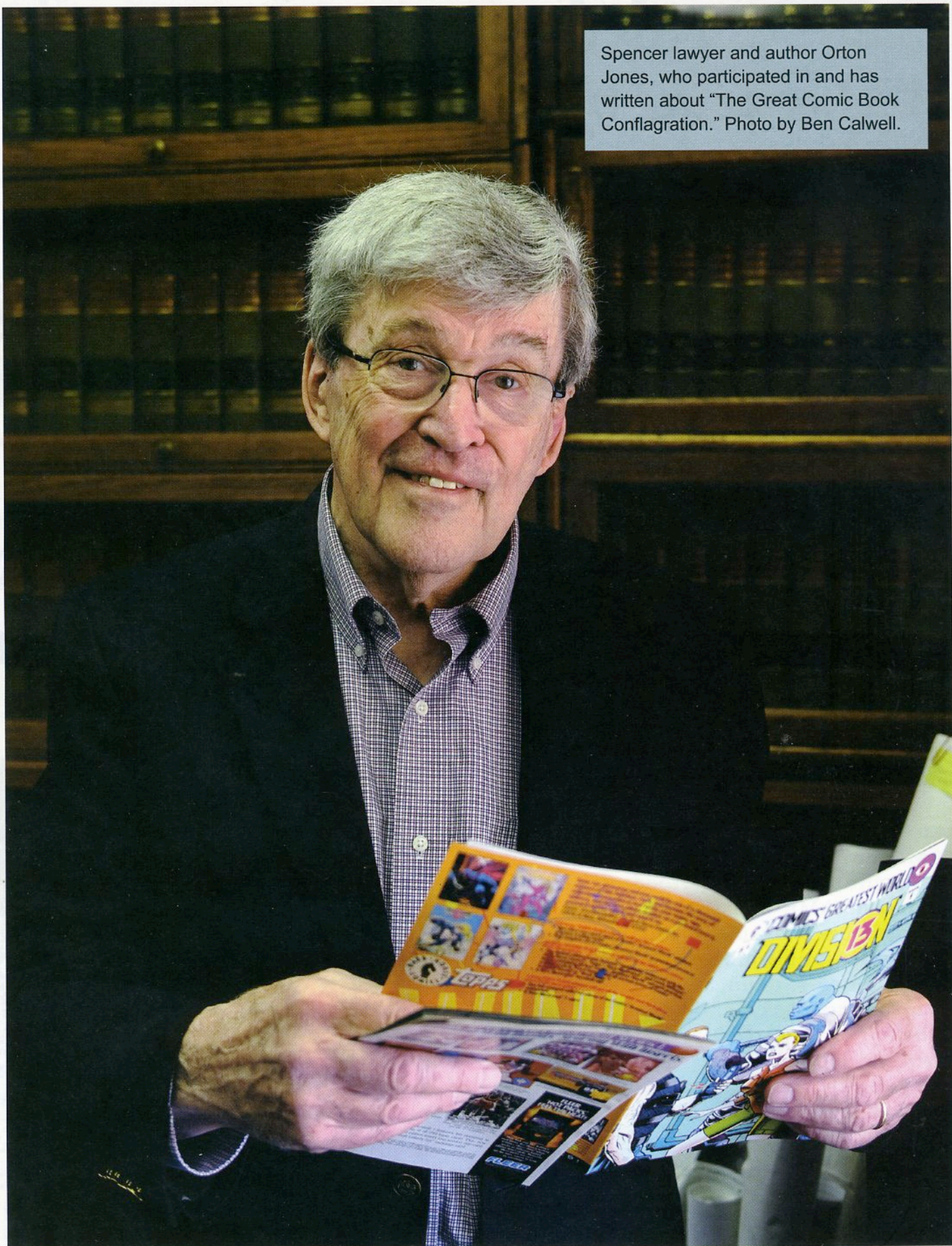
The *Times-Record* also noted a clever headline in a California paper: "Spencer Grade School Is Still Drawing Attention." The *Times-Record* article mentioned that "several stories have been carried on national news services in the past few weeks, of the growing fight against 'injurious comics,' and at least one more bonfire was held at a Catholic school, with about 2,000 books going up in flames."

As a part-time newspaper columnist for the *Times-Record* and *Roane County News*, Orton Jones has written about the comic-book fire he witnessed as a sixth grader. In a 1988 column, he wrote, tongue in cheek: "Comic books, up to then, had been an important part of my life. You can imagine my shock and dismay, therefore, upon learning that comic books were not good for you."

Reflecting on "The Great Comic Book Conflagration," Orton summed up his column with these words of wisdom: "We went right back to reading comic books as usual. And trading them around. But the whole thing took on a new dimension. We now knew we were being corrupted. And that made it all worthwhile." ✱

BEN CALWELL is a retired newspaper reporter and photographer living in Charleston. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Spencer lawyer and author Orton Jones, who participated in and has written about "The Great Comic Book Conflagration." Photo by Ben Calwell.



The Birth of MAW

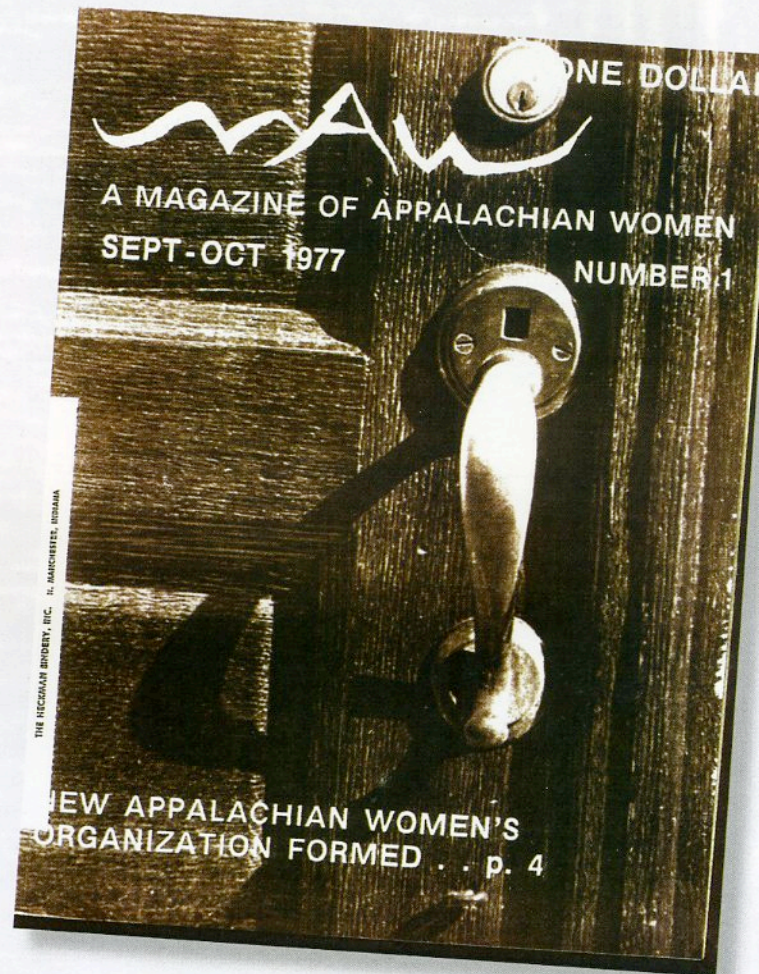
A Magazine of Appalachian Women

By Miriam Ralston

I came to West Virginia filled with innocence and good intentions and came out as a fighter for the rights and a voice for women in the Appalachian Mountains. Coming here in the mid-1970s, I was enthralled by the state's immense savage beauty, untamed as far it still could be, still echoing voices of its native and immigrant past: of Scots-Irish and German folklore and of coal miners' daughters struggling to find their own identity.

This is how MAW: *A Magazine of Appalachian Women* was born. So far as I know, it was the first magazine by, for, and about women in the Appalachians. It was not a high-glossed enterprise of career women on the up and up. It was a grassroots endeavor about Appalachian women who were helping to build the present day's strong foundation, and to define the issues important to them.

After my own activity in civil rights, and several stints in editing and writing, my husband, Paul Salstrom, and I were managing Appalachian Movement Press (AMP) in Huntington. Our print shop was controlled by Tom Woodruff, a union organizer. AMP had started in 1969 from a grassroots movement and was a pillar of activist publishing in the region. As Shaun Slifer says in an article about his forthcoming book, AMP did "not exactly adhere to a particular political party platform, but AMP *was* heavily influenced by two key ideological frames: (1) a burgeoning Appalachian identity movement that was taking hold in the region broadly [and] (2) a growing focus on the concept of Appalachia as a colony within a colony as an abstraction for understanding how it feels to live in the region—particularly the



The first issue of MAW. All images courtesy of our author.

Central, coal-rich areas like West Virginia and Eastern Kentucky."

I thought this was an appropriate place to house a publication such as MAW. Paul, now a professor emeritus of history and an activist himself, mostly oversaw AMP's operations. I helped in the printing, collating, mailing, and photography end of it. When 1977 rolled around, there was a renewed interest in

the Women's Rights Movement. I'd been writing and editing for a while and, when this movement started to gain new momentum, my brain was bursting with ideas. The idea of MAW was born. *A Magazine of Appalachian Women*.

To me, the iconic Appalachian woman is strong, born out of the rich clay dirt her daddy tilled, where her mother grew potatoes and the persimmons are sweet enough to make your teeth hurt on a hot sultry day under immense trees. The Appalachian woman also whittles wood for her children's toys and weaves baskets and chairs from white-oak strips. She works the land, works with her hands, tells handed-down stories, and helps make the art and the culture that surround her.

Why *Appalachian* women? What differentiates them from others—for instance, from women of the High Plains who built their homesteads from the sod that surrounded them? Historical records tell us quite a bit about where they came from and where they settled in the Appalachians. This origin story, to borrow a modern phrase, gives Appalachian women a diverse and unique history, which intrigued me, and which, as a writer and artist, I wanted to honor. But in reality, I admittedly knew nothing of the true Appalachian woman. I'm not her (perhaps there's a part of her in me). However, I didn't come from her roots. I wasn't born here. I'm an outsider, a writer, an observer, and, above all, a woman. My wish was and is to give Appalachian women homage and acknowledge their gifts from this beautiful part of the world. She has so many talents, such rich history. She helped build the culture of Appalachia, and she needed to be acknowledged.

During the mid- to late-1970s, the Women's Rights Movement was gaining international and national attention. The United Nations proclaimed 1975

International Women's Year. A women's conference was held at Marshall University in spring 1977, which gave me an opportunity to promote our new magazine. I made leaflets and distributed them at the conference. The leaflets took fire. I met women who were equally enthused about MAW. I spoke at conference sessions and drew interest from women interested in the plan, some of them professors at Marshall.

From these contacts, I gathered an editorial board ready and eager to promote a journal dedicated to the women of Appalachia. To our knowledge, it'd never been done before. This was our chance—as women writers, activists, and academics—to give voice to a history not yet acknowledged. I set up a first meeting as a gathering of minds to combine our knowledge, know-how, desire, and willingness to start a publication. Some had writing experience, many with artistic talents and desires. It was an excellent *mélange*. Our goal was to promote women's voices that came from the hollers, back roads, cities, and universities, primarily with an artistic slant.

The cover of the first issue carried a photograph by one of the artists. It showed a door, in deep red, similar to the clay hills. The door was inviting in future participants and readers and those simply curious.

From there began subscriptions. Donations, writings, and artistic material started pouring in. Then a friend walked into our office. He was an Associated Press (AP) writer who'd heard about MAW and wanted to tell our story. The AP article ran in the local Huntington newspaper and about 50 others nationwide. It brought more publicity than I expected.

MAW was unique in that it was itself grassroots and featured women whose



Our author, Miriam Ralston, in the 1970s and today.

work had never been published before and others who wrote about issues specifically of interest to women in Appalachia.

During this beginning phase, I also started the not-for-profit Appalachian Women, Inc. (AWI). This period was highly charged with energy and productivity. Two other events also changed my life. I became pregnant with my first child, and my father passed away. The idea of AWI was, as I wrote in the first issue, "(1) To provide space for women's creative work and to foster a spirit of cooperation and support among the region's women, (2) to provide space for an interchange of ideas among the diverse individuals who share Appalachian womanhood, [and] (3) . . . to create films or workshops on such subjects as child abuse and women in prison." We also planned to publish a photo book about women in Appalachia. All of us had high energy and enthusiasm, and lacked no restraint. Until one day.

With the ability of MAW's workforce and the subscriptions that kept pouring in, we were sailing. I must also add here that my devoted husband, Paul, helped

in every aspect behind the scenes. He encouraged us and helped keep things sane. He was my advisor, consultant, and coach. I couldn't have done it without his help.

As MAW issues 2, 3, and 4 rolled off the presses, and we were aiming for issue 5, there was an adversary lingering in the background who saw what we were doing as a threat to how he perceived the purpose of Appalachian Movement Press. His name was Jack Frazier. He had no role in MAW but was against anything that might interfere with his personal priorities. He became very threatening until one morning, we came into the office, and it was completely sabotaged. Records, files, works-in-progress, photos strewn all over the floor. Nothing was left intact. We discussed it with Tom Woodruff, the union organizer who ultimately controlled our press. That was the end . . . almost.

In the following days, I gave birth to my first child, a girl, as we kept gathering material for the magazine and searching for an alternative way to publish MAW's fifth issue. My mother



Issues 2 and 3 of *MAW* covered a wide range of topics, including midwives, Appalachian women and mental health, a dollmaker, and poem by Pulitzer-Prize-nominated author Lillie Chaffin of Kentucky.

came and offered to help us financially, but I knew she really couldn't. We soon moved away from Huntington—out into the country, where it was better for my newborn child. From there, we scratched together issue 5. We contracted the actual printing to another press in Huntington but did the rest ourselves.

I didn't want *MAW* to die, but with our press gone, we were blocked. In issue 5, I made a plea to the readers, which was answered by The Council on Appalachian Women based at East Tennessee State University. We set up a meeting. The council wanted to acquire the rights to the magazine's future and publish it from where they were based. We sold them our remaining back copies and said "goodbye" to *MAW*. I was devastated, but I also had a beautiful new baby.

In the end, the Council on Appalachian Women put out only a few issues, for reasons unknown to me. The grassroots endeavor of *MAW* worked for a couple reasons. First, it was the right time and place, where a fire was already burning. Second, perhaps more importantly, it's because women came together without pay to create something out of nothing with a unified passionate belief in promoting

women's voices. Many such journals and magazines come and go because they aren't supported by big donors and corporate backing. *MAW: A Magazine of Appalachian Women* seemed special, the first grassroots endeavor of its kind to speak for, by, and about Appalachian women. Few today have even heard of *MAW*. It was born and died before the Web. Nevertheless, for those who saw it and heard of it, it was a welcome sign, pointing toward other such endeavors. Many more publications came after that. In fact, *MAW*'s assistant editor, Huntington native Valerie Staats, soon created a similar journal at the University of Iowa, which she called *Iowa Woman*.

It was in the air. From there, I was at Brandeis University, where my husband was acquiring a Ph.D in history. I went into theater and helped initiate the first feminist journal at Brandeis. We named it *Artemis*. 🌿

MIRIAM RALSTON is an actress, writer, artist, and avid feminist who founded *MAW: A Magazine of Appalachian Women* and Appalachian Women Inc.; co-founded *Artemis*, a feminist journal at the University of Brandeis; and inspired the making of *Iowa Woman*, a feminist journal at the University of Iowa. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



The cherry blossoms in full bloom at Ruggles Orchard in Hampshire County. Photo by Nancy S. Hoffman.

Ruggles Orchard

By Nancy S. Hoffman

In spring 2019, my husband and I took a road trip from our home in Preston County to Ruggles Orchard at Points, near Levels (Hampshire County), about 15 miles northeast of Romney and 12 miles north of Springfield. I hadn't been there in nearly 30 years, at which time the original Ruggles, Kenneth Sr. and Kathryn "Grammy," were the owners. They were two of the most comfortable people to visit with, something like a favorite uncle and aunt.

I distinctly remember Kathryn thinning the peaches, and she went by her own particular rule of thumb. She made sure each longer branch had two peaches and one each on the shorter branches to ensure healthier fruit.

Kenneth originally drove a milk route for Thompson's Dairy of Wheaton, Maryland. After the dairy closed, Kenneth got a job at a gas station. One day, his cousin invited him to the Levels area to look at some land. What a surprise! He discovered



The original owners of the orchard, Kenneth (Sr.) and Kathryn "Grammy" Ruggles. Photo by Nancy S. Hoffman.

nice rolling land and wonderfully sloping hillsides about 1,000 feet above sea level. It was ideal for an orchard, so he developed a year-round plan for monitoring, watering, weeding, fertilizing, mulching, pruning, thinning, and harvesting.

Kenneth started his orchard in 1972. Any farming operation is a combination of science, experimentation, and guesswork due to factors such as soil, climate, elevation, and available labor—in this case, his immediate family. For example, the Ruggles learned over the years that instead of growing big standard apple trees (about 25-feet high), it was much less labor intensive to grow dwarf trees (about 12-feet high) because you could reach most of the fruit from the ground.

They developed an irrigation process to water the trees during warmer dry months. When necessary, they separated the tree limbs with short boards to prevent rubbing or a "growing over" effect; to reduce costs, they built a sawmill to cut their own boards. They also developed a pruning routine, another mixture of science and learned experience. Pruning is one of the most important keys to growing good fruit trees because it both keeps growth in check and removes dead or damaged stems.

The orchard was a family effort from the start. At first, the Ruggles had their two sons and two daughters to help. One of the sons, Kenneth Jr., got married in 1978. He and his wife, Paula, had four children,

who were expected to help out as soon as they were old enough. Today, Kenneth Jr., Paula, and their son Shannon are the main workers at the orchard. They do most of the pruning, thinning, and picking. Paula handles most of the phone calls and selling, while Shannon takes care of the Internet end of the operation. Shane, an older son, helps on weekends, particularly with repairing equipment. Their daughter Holly, a registered nurse, also assists when needed during the busy seasons.

Paula grew up in a suburb of Baltimore but spent her summers in Shinnston (Harrison County), where her mother was from. She always wanted to live in West Virginia but never dreamed she'd someday live on a Mountain State farm and work in an orchard. She just knew that God puts you in places where you can learn from His blessings. She felt truly blessed when she met her in-laws, Kenneth Sr. and Grammy. She soon learned that Kenneth Sr. was hard working and truly honest to the point he'd sometimes hurt your feelings but was always there to lend a hand when someone was in need. Grammy was the most kind, loving, and caring person Paula had ever known—the heart and soul of the orchard. She thinned peaches until the day before she passed away in 2012. Customers enjoyed seeing her as much as the bounty of delicious fruit and were amazed how strong she was, even in her 80s. In addition, Grammy loved her family and always enjoyed her children and grandchildren. Kenneth Sr. died in 2013.

When we met up with Kenneth Jr., Paula, and Shannon in spring 2019, Paula herded us, and our dog, Lady Too, into her 1999 Jeep (I'm a longtime Jeep owner myself) for a trip through the orchard—and a trip it was, as good as vanilla ice cream over fresh peaches. Off we went through the orchard, sometimes turning on a dime, and soon we arrived at

Grammy's 100-year-old Stayman Winesap apple tree. Oh, was that an awesome sight! I immediately started figuring how many apple pies I could make from it. We toured the 127 acres of beautifully manicured rolling land with various types of fruit. The orchard has 18 acres of apple trees with 30 different varieties; we got to witness some blossoming. We saw, just to name a few, Lodi Yellow Transparent, McIntosh, Jonathon, Grimes Golden (which first originated in Brooke County in the early 1800s), Northern Spy, Golden Delicious (first discovered in Clay County in 1912), Stayman, Rome, Wolfe River, and York. I've specifically listed these because they're the only ones I would personally use for pies or apple sauce, or just to eat raw.

Eight acres are dedicated to peaches, including John Boys, Red Havens, and Loring's. The orchard's original peaches were July Burbanks and Sullivans, but the Ruggles found that they dropped from the trees too soon before reaching a good color. Their peaches today have a better red-blush color. I was so busy taking photos of apple and peach trees that the number of acres for pears, plums, nectarines, and cherries (sweet and sour varieties) escaped my paper and pen.

The Ruggles have fostered continuity with the original orchard that Kenneth Sr. started nearly a half-century ago. As we approached the family home, we noticed some twig-like stakes in the garden. They were actually graftings, or *water sprouts*, from the elder Ruggles' original trees. These will be grated to different rootstocks.

Since our visit was in May, we were delighted to see many lovely Wisteria blossoms in full bloom along the road from Route 50 to Points. The drive would be equally beautiful as the leaves change in fall—especially if you're aching for some homemade apple pie, cider, sauce,



Our author, Nancy S. Hoffman, with a bushel of Pink Lady and Golden Delicious apples. Photo by Paula Ruggles.

dumplings, or any other dish you want to try your hand at. On our trip, we packed up our own Jeep with as many bushel baskets of peaches as we could cram in and then shared with family back home in Preston County. We still had good and plenty left over to put up for the winter!

The family picks all the peaches, pears, plums, nectarines, and apples, but customers pick their own cherries—by appointment: 304-492-5751 (if there's no answer, please leave a message because the Ruggles are often out in the field). In addition, you can search for Ruggles Orchard on Facebook. The Ruggles' fruit is also available at farmers markets in

Cumberland, Frostburg, and Oakland Mountain, Maryland; please check with these markets for days and hours of operation. 🍁

NANCY S. HOFFMAN is a third-generation pioneer and lifelong resident of Preston County, retired health information management administrator, and graduate of West Virginia University, with a bachelor's in general studies. She contributes written and oral histories at the monthly meetings of the Terra Alta Day history group, or to anyone who has the time to listen. She is a hand-quilter and well-known cook, loves to paint, and probably knows more about farming than most books could teach. This is her third contribution to GOLDENSEAL; she wrote articles about Terra Alta entrepreneur E. S. Evans and local stockyard manager Delores Pomeroy in our Winter 2018 issue.



(Left-right) Fellow WAVES Jessie Lucke and Isabel Lobb Jones. Courtesy, respectively, of the University of North Texas Libraries Special Collections (from the school's 1953 yearbook) and the family of Isabel Lobb Jones.

WAVES Jessie Lucke and Isabel Lobb Jones West Virginians by Birth and Choice

By Barb Howe

Jessie Ryan Lucke was born in West Virginia, went to college, and taught here. Then left. Isabel Lobb Jones was born in Minnesota, went to college, and taught there. Then left.

They met at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, during basic training as U.S. Navy WAVES in winter 1943. Their journey continued to Washington, D.C., where they worked for the chief of Naval Operations. Jessie had volunteered. Isabel had been invited to join. The West Virginian never married and ended up in Denton, Texas. The

Minnesotan married and ended up in West Virginia. Jessie frequently talked about her Navy career and remained active in the Naval Reserve Officers School. Isabel didn't—until spring 2019. Jessie used her veterans' benefits. Isabel never did. Their paths diverged, and they lost contact with each other.

Their stories reconnected, indirectly, in spring 2019 because of Liza Mundy's 2017 book *Code Girls: The Untold Story of the American Women Code Breakers of World War II*. The West Virginia University (WVU) Retirees Association

was hosting a book-club gathering at Morgantown's Heritage Village to discuss the publication. Betty Maxwell, a Heritage Village resident, invited her friend Isabel to attend and share her Navy experiences. After the discussion, Betty suggested I interview Isabel for WVU's West Virginia & Regional History Center. Looking into information about Isabel's Navy colleagues, I discovered this West Virginia connection between her and Jessie.

Jessie Lucke was born on May 28, 1914, in Greenbrier County, the daughter of Robert and Jessie Lucke. Robert was a Presbyterian minister in North Carolina, where Jessie's three brothers were born between 1917 and 1923. In 1927, the family moved to Parsons (Tucker County), where Robert became minister of the Presbyterian church.

On May 20, 1932, Jessie graduated as valedictorian of Black Fork District High School. On June 3, 1936, she graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor of arts from Davis & Elkins College as valedictorian of that school's largest class to date. Her commencement speech was entitled "World Peace." In 1937, she was hired as a substitute teacher in Tucker County schools and, two years later, was earning \$990 for 35 weeks of teaching. The next year, 25-year-old Jessie was teaching math and living with her parents in Parsons. She taught there for 2½ years before moving to Charlottesville to get her master of arts in English from the University of Virginia. In August 1942, she was released from her contract at Parsons High to teach in another state. She enlisted in the WAVES in Richmond on November 11, 1942, "because there were no attractive teaching positions" in Virginia.

After the war, Jessie received her Ph.D. in English in 1949 from the University of Virginia with funding from the G.I. Bill; her dissertation was "A Study of

the Virginia Dialect and Its Origin in England." By this time, she was using Ryon as her middle name. In 1950, after teaching a year at New York University, she moved to North Texas State College (now University of North Texas) in Denton to teach English and retired in 1977 as professor emerita.

When interviewed for the Denton *Record-Chronicle* for Armed Forces Day in May 1960, Jessie said she regularly attended meetings of the Naval Reserve Officers School in Dallas and participated in summer training programs of the Eighth Naval District Headquarters. She retired from the Navy Reserves in December 1969. Jessie died on May 1, 1984, in Denton.

Isabel Lobb was born on August 5, 1919, in Minneapolis. Her parents were Albert James and Mary Cunningham Lobb. Isabel's father was the business manager for the Mayo Clinic, so she knew many of the clinic's physicians and their families. She graduated from Rochester High School and attended Vassar College for a year before transferring to the University of Minnesota, graduating in 1941. She taught high school in Austin, Minnesota, for about 15 months before resigning to join the WAVES.

Isabel met Reverdy Hamlin Jones Jr. when he was a Mayo resident and then reconnected with him when he returned from overseas military service. They were married on December 19, 1944, in Saint Mary's Chapel of Washington, D.C.'s National Cathedral—after she received special permission to wear a wedding dress instead of her dress uniform. Lt. Commander Jones was then stationed at the Norfolk Naval Basin, and Isabel transferred there in February 1945.

Isabel and Reverdy welcomed their first child, Reverdy III, in October 1945. Thomas, Caroline, and Anne followed.

Reverdy Jr. retired from the Navy five or six months after the war ended, and the family moved back to Minnesota so he could finish his residency at Mayo. After about a year, they relocated to Roanoke, Virginia, at the suggestion of former Mayo colleague Marcellus Johnson III—the nephew of Louis A. Johnson, a prominent Clarksburg citizen who'd soon become President Harry Truman's secretary of defense. Their next move was to Philadelphia for five years.

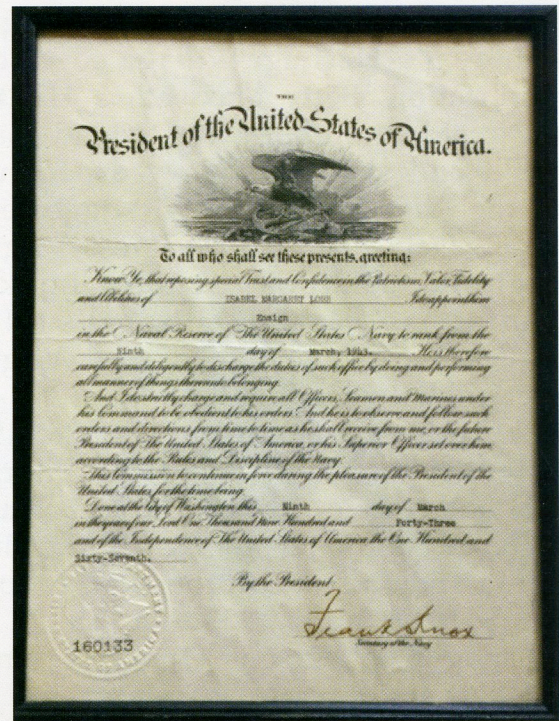
Isabel proudly declares, "I became a Mountaineer in 1965," when the family moved to Fairmont.

Reverdy, a cardiologist, had accepted a position at the Fairmont Clinic, which had opened only seven years earlier on Locust Avenue. The clinic was originally established to care for the area's miners but soon expanded to serve others. Reverdy applied for the position because, as a Virginia native, he wanted to "live south of the Mason-Dixon Line." By that time, sons Reverdy III and Thomas were cadets at VMI, and Caroline and Anne were in high school. In 1962, Isabel's father came to live with them until he died in 1972.

Isabel began her 50-plus years of volunteering with that move to Fairmont. Having been secretary of the Junior League in Roanoke, she quickly joined Fairmont's Junior League, organized by miners' wives. The group sponsored clothing drives each year and an annual party to raise money.

Doctors' wives often socialized in auxiliaries, and, in 1965, Fairmont's was just getting started. Isabel "pushed for it" to succeed and took pleasure in befriending wives of doctors from other countries and welcoming them to the community.

Reverdy volunteered to go to Vietnam for three months after the Tet Offensive, which started on January 30, 1968,



Isabel Margaret Lobb's commission as an ensign in the Navy Reserves, March 9, 1943, signed by U.S. Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox.

because the military needed doctors. His letters home were printed on the front pages of Fairmont's newspapers.

Later that year, on November 20, Consol No. 9 mine at Farmington exploded, killing 78 men; 19 bodies were never recovered [see Fall 2018]. Reverdy got a call that morning and drove to Farmington to give emotional care. Isabel joined him at the James Fork United Methodist Church, where families had gathered. After talking to people there, she went back to Fairmont and started calling churches to let them know what the miners' families needed. She also took soup out for several days and, with her husband, went to the homes of miners' families. Isabel clearly remembers meeting a woman from Croatia who'd lost her husband in the mine.

In 1972, the Veterans Administration (VA) contacted Reverdy because of his service in Vietnam and asked him to be



Isabel in "retirement" but always busy, enjoying one of her favorite hobbies, reading. Courtesy of the family.

chief of medicine at the Louis A. Johnson VA Medical Center on the south edge of Clarksburg. Both Isabel and Reverdy were vets, but the VA didn't know about her service. She never got a VA identification card and never talked about her Navy experience. With their sons married and the children out of college, Reverdy and Isabel lived on the hospital grounds because he was on call 24/7. Although she belonged to the auxiliary for Clarksburg doctors' wives, it didn't meet very often.

Isabel volunteered there for the American Red Cross, doing filing and typing one day a week and, on weekends, contacting service members in cases of emergencies that required them to return home. One of the most important responsibilities of the Red Cross, then and now, is providing "24/7 global emergency communication services and support in military and veteran health care facilities across the country and around the world." Someone would call the Red

Cross because he or she needed to bring a child back to the country, perhaps because of a death or illness in the family—as occurred with the Farmington Mine Disaster. Isabel would call a special phone number at the headquarters of the person's camp to get a message to the service member. She "hated to have to do that" because it meant passing on bad news. But, even in those worst scenarios, the service members sometimes thanked her for calling.

Reverdy retired at age 65 in 1978, and the Joneses moved back to Fairmont, where he opened a small private practice before passing away in 1980.

Back in Fairmont, Isabel expanded her volunteer work while also helping to raise her daughter Anne's children, Caroline and Stephen. At Fairmont General Hospital, every Monday for several years, she was "sitting at a desk and giving orders to other women who sat behind her to go up to the hospital floors to make deliveries or run other errands."

As a member of the Christ Episcopal Church auxiliary, she worked at the food bank one day a week. Ruth Early, head librarian of the Marion County Public Library, lived across the street and "recruited" her to do filing and paperwork there on Monday mornings for 15 years.

Anne was in the Fairmont Junior League with Gayle Manchin, so Isabel made phone calls for future Governor and U.S. Senator Joe Manchin's first political campaign in 1982.

In 2003, Isabel relocated to Charles Town (Jefferson County), at age 85, because her children thought she was getting too old to live alone. She moved near Caroline and son-in-law Dr. Robert Webb's home but still lived alone. She quickly fell in love with the town. With seemingly boundless energy, she volunteered one day a week doing filing at the Charles Town Public Library and one day a week at the Jefferson Memorial Hospital gift shop, where she enjoyed greeting people and got other volunteers to stock books and magazines. She also helped with bake sales and used-clothing sales to raise money for Charles Town's Zion Episcopal Church. Ten years later, at age 95, her children made her stop volunteering—at least in Charles Town.

In June 2017, at age 97, Isabel moved to Morgantown's Village at Heritage Point, "a great place to live," as she described it, because she had family members living in Morgantown. She was perhaps a bit reluctant to be the subject of this article when I first asked her but agreed just to "give encouragement to people to do other things and talk to older people and tell them they still have a life. . . . People in their 80s need to get a life and do more." A widow at age 60, Isabel thinks that other people should work until age 65 and then volunteer. She made friends quickly

at Heritage Village and followed her own advice, helping at the library there by checking-in the newspapers daily and putting books away. It "gives me something to do."

In summer 2019, she celebrated her 100th birthday. By this time, she had 4 children, 8 grandchildren, and 15 great-grandchildren, plus in-laws. Anne, a Fairmont State College (now University) graduate, is a nurse in Morgantown. Ten family members are WVU alums. Anne's children, Caroline Graziani Labritz and Stephen Graziani, practiced on Isabel on their way to graduating from WVU's School of Dentistry and then opened practices in Westover and Charleston, respectively. Caroline's husband, Charles Labritz, has a master of business administration degree. Grandson Thomas Jones and son-in-law Robert Webb are doctors; Robert practices in Charles Town. Daughter Caroline Jones Webb, Stephen's wife Marie, grandchildren Christopher and Matthew Webb, and Matthew's wife Erin are also alums. Matthew teaches at Suncrest Elementary School, and Erin is a lawyer with Kay Casto & Chaney.

Betty Maxwell had warned me that Isabel was hard to reach because she was constantly out of her room doing something, so we scheduled conversations around her church services, Tai Chi classes, readers' theater group, and the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup games. Her final advice: "Don't just sit in your room all the time!"

Isabel passed away on December 30, 2020, at age 101. When Betty Maxwell informed me, she remarked, "What a life!" ❁

BARB HOWE taught American women's history and women's studies at WVU. She now co-teaches occasional courses on women's history and women's literature with Dr. Carolyn Nelson at the WVU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. She thanks Betty Maxwell for introducing her to Isabel Jones. This is Barb's fourth contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



Isabel Lobb Jones holds her World War II Navy photo, 2020. Photo by Ron Rittenhouse for *The Dominion Post*.

WAVES in World War II Washington, D.C.

By Barb Howe

In July 1942, Congress authorized the WAVES (Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service) as the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Naval Reserve.

That summer, Isabel Lobb received a letter asking if she wanted to be a Navy officer. She didn't know why she'd been contacted but immediately said "yes." She went to Chicago in October for a physical exam and was sworn in as an ensign on November 11. On December 22, Isabel joined her college friend Cathy Johnson on an all-women train to Springfield, Massachusetts. They took a bus to Mount Holyoke College (students were on vacation) in South Hadley as two of the 50-60 women in the first group to be trained there. Isabel, Cathy, and two other sister officers celebrated Christmas Eve at an Amherst hotel. They couldn't drink because they were enlisted, so they enjoyed "extra champagne on the ham."

A month later, Isabel and Cathy took the bus to Northampton, Massachusetts, to continue their training at Smith College. There, they met Jessie Lucke, who'd been at Smith since before Christmas, and Mary Ivey Courtney from North Carolina. Isabel was the only one who'd received a letter as the other three had enlisted the previous fall. The four stayed together until Isabel transferred to the Norfolk Naval Base in spring 1945 to join her husband.

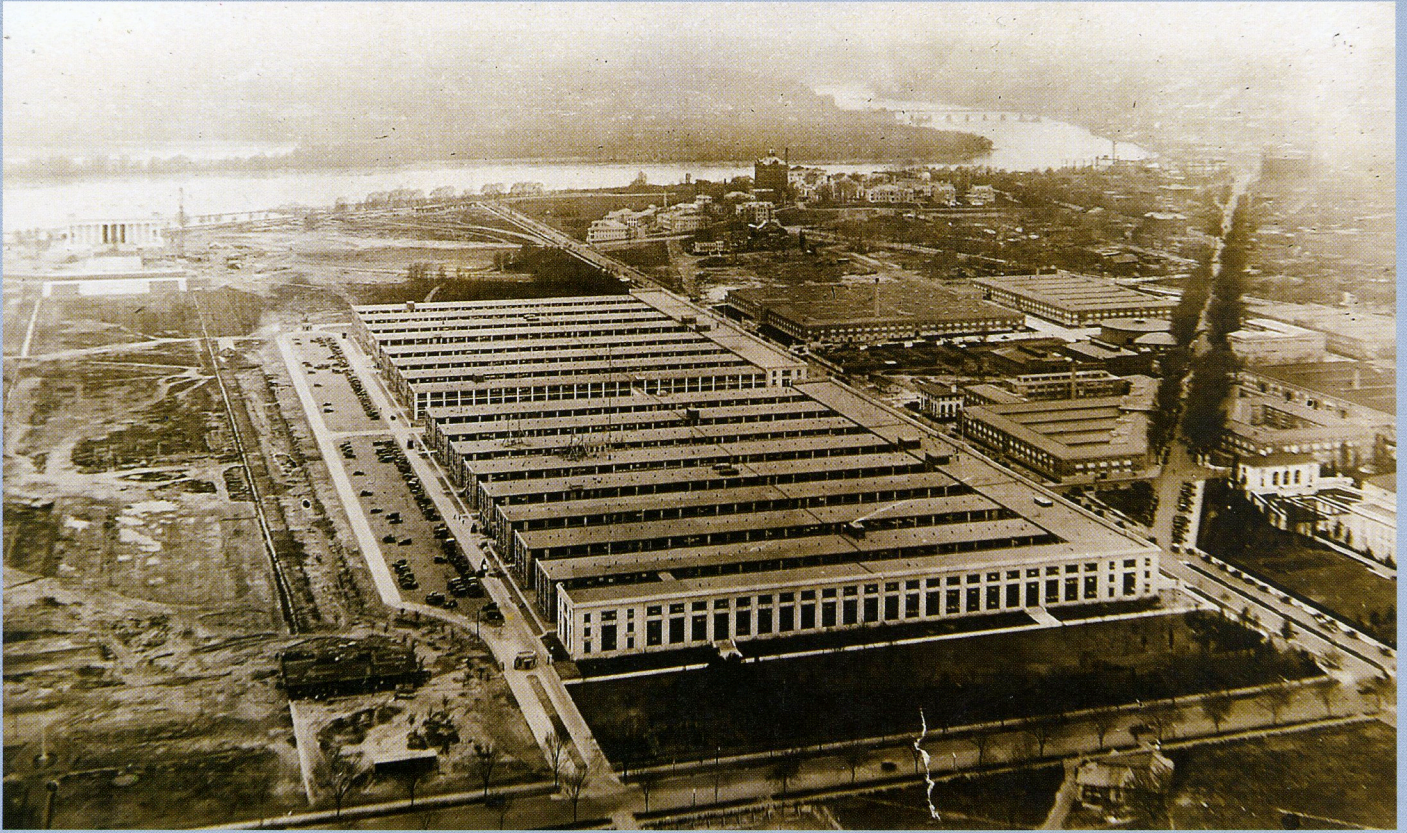
"They didn't know what to do with us exactly," Isabel remembers. "We couldn't wear any jewelry except a watch. We learned about ships and how to type." They added some marching at Smith,

and Jessie remembers, "The WAVES weren't very popular with the staff of men officers, for teaching WAVES to drill wasn't their idea of fighting a war."

Jessie requested to go to Washington. For Isabel, the Navy "needed us in Washington, so we went" by train. The women didn't know what they would do there and never heard the word *code* mentioned.

The four officers eventually stayed at the Wardman Park Hotel on Connecticut Avenue, NW. That summer of 1943, they wore heavy uniforms "and nearly died because it was so hot." The next summer, they had seersucker uniforms "and loved that."

They were stationed in the Office of Naval Operations on the third floor of Main Navy (now demolished) on Constitution Avenue. They used an encryption device, like the Enigma machine, that was changed daily to decipher American and British codes related to the movement of submarines in the Atlantic and Pacific Theaters. Deciphering the British codes required subtracting numbers and then using a book to convert the numbers into words. If needed, they checked a map in the nearby admiral's office. Timing was critical to be sure they telegraphed the right ship and knew where she was headed to avoid submarines. There was so much traffic leading up to D-Day on June 6, 1944, that the women knew something big was imminent. Given the hundreds of ships at sea at any time, the women kept busy, grabbing meals at the building's cafeteria



During World War II, Jessie Lucke and Isabel Lobb deciphered American and British codes on the third floor of the old Main Navy Building in Washington, D.C. It was built in 1918 and demolished in 1970. In this photo, taken shortly after the building was completed, note the construction work on the left for the National Mall Reflecting Pool and the not-yet-completed Lincoln Memorial in the faint distance. Courtesy of the U.S. Navy.

and traveling home late at night by bus. Washington was a very safe city.

Isabel never knew what the women did who worked on another floor of their building nor that hundreds were breaking German and Japanese codes at Virginia's Arlington Hall and Washington's Mount Vernon Seminary, as Liza Mundy describes in her book. "Those of us who were chosen," Isabel says, "knew that when we left that building, we never talked about it"—except twice, when Isabel reassured friends that certain ships were safe with a cryptic phoned "Okay." Because she never talked about her wartime work, she understood Mundy's interviewees' reticence even decades later.

Isabel served only a few months after transferring to Norfolk, but one night, she was called out to deliver a message to an office in Portsmouth after two ships,

You can hear Barb Howe's entire oral history with Isabel Lobb Jones at the West Virginia & Regional History Center, 304-293-3536 or wvrhcref@mail.wvu.edu.

including an American one, had crashed off the East Coast. Two men with guns sat in the back of the Jeep as escorts, and they took a ferry across the Elizabeth River so she could hand-deliver the message. "No one spoke. We were scared to death."

Isabel had to resign when she became pregnant, laughingly remembering that some said she "was the first legitimate officer to have a baby." If she'd stayed another month, she would've been promoted to first lieutenant. Isabel first heard the term *code girls* when she and family members read a Washington newspaper notice about Mundy's 2017 book. 🍁



Ernestine Hess Davey of Ansted (Fayette County) aboard the USS *Refuge* during World War II. Courtesy of the family.

Ernestine Hess Davey

An Unsung Hometown Hero

By Sara Bragg Aikin

As a child, I grew up in a neighborhood known simply as *The Hill* in the small town of Ansted (Fayette County). A particular treat was spending time at the Hess farm next door. Herbert and Nellie Hess had acres of hayfields and gardens, along with cows, ducks, pigs, chickens, horses, and other critters. My friends and I often were hired to help with feeding and harvesting, although payment seldom was with money. Instead, we were paid with homemade ice cream from fresh milk or slices of sweet watermelons that Herbert often grew.

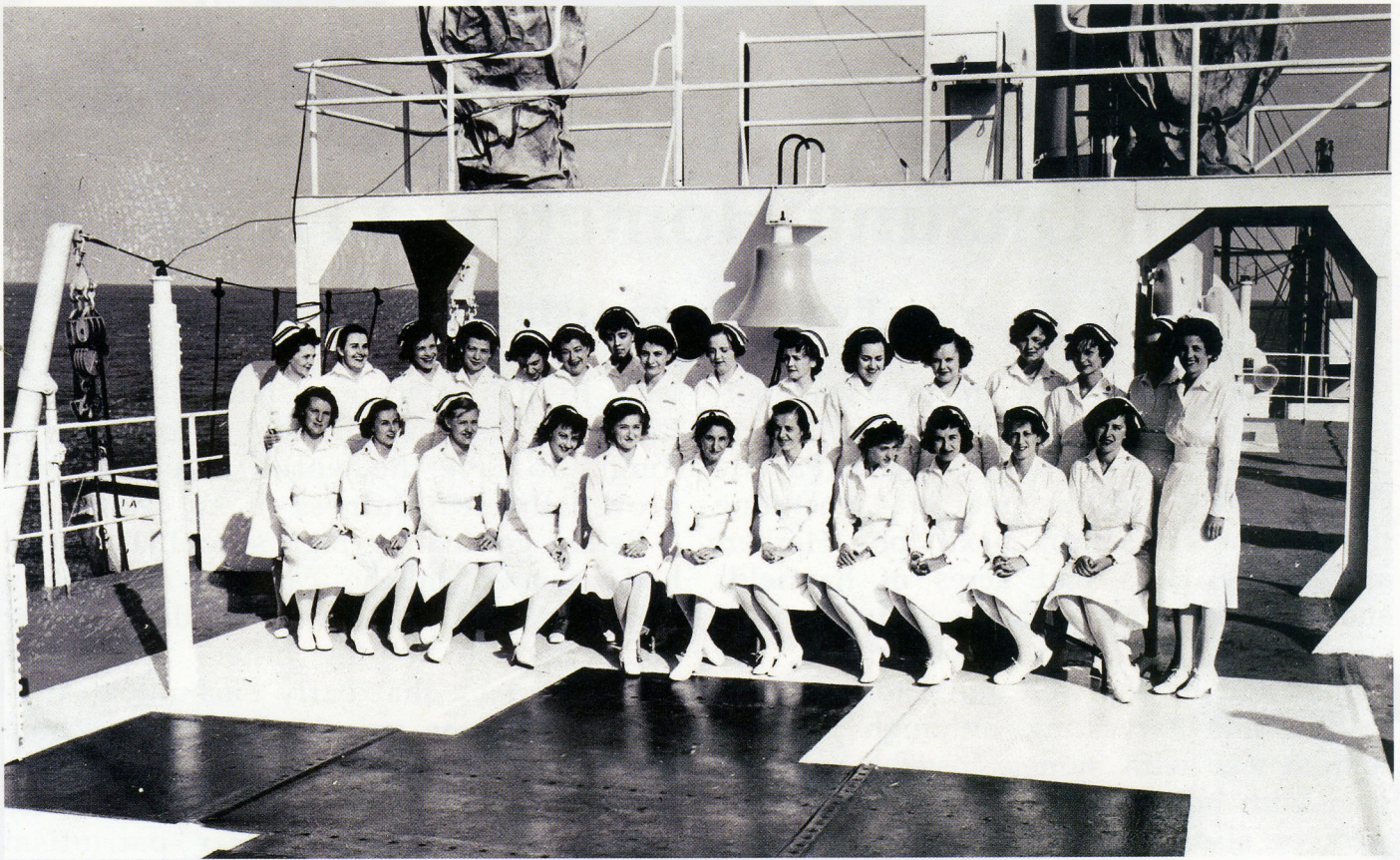
A special treat for me after a hot summer's day of helping was to relax in the cool of the old farmhouse's living room. In those un-air-conditioned days, I tried to position myself in front of the oscillating tabletop fan, which allowed an unobstructed view of pictures that seemed to cover every available surface. An upright piano in the corner was adorned with photos of the Hess children—Ernestine, Bud, Bob, Rose, Anne, and Denny. All were grown and gone from home by the time I became a *Hill kid*, but I knew them through the stories of their shared childhoods with my own brothers and sisters.

During those cooling-off periods, I often lost track of time gazing at the picture displays. One, in particular, never failed to spark my imagination. Ernestine, the oldest Hess daughter, was posed in a crisp, white nurse's uniform and standing on the walkway of a ship. World War II had ended a few years before I made my debut, and stories from those days

were fresh in my young mind. I imagined Ernestine as one of the heroines who fought to save the world. Later research proved the truthfulness of my fantasies.

Before graduating high school, Ernestine had assisted in the care of an elderly neighbor, whose son was a doctor. Her dedication to helping others apparently was fueled by that early encounter. After high school, she completed nursing school at St. Francis Hospital in Charleston and worked as a nurse at that facility for more than a year. Her patriotism surfaced during the height of World War II, and she joined the U.S. Navy on December 1, 1942. Her brother Bud had set the tradition for military service, and Ernestine and her brother Bob followed his lead.

After several stateside posts, Ernestine was assigned to the USS *Refuge*, a hospital ship that accompanied the country's fleet into battles against both the Japanese and German armies. The ship sailed 80,000 miles and served in the European, American, and Asiatic-Pacific theaters. From Okinawa to Operation Torch to Normandy, the *Refuge* followed U.S. warships. Unlike battleships, the hospital ship was required to be lit at all times, making it a conspicuous nighttime target for submarines. Despite the constant threat, Ernestine and other medical personnel risked their lives to care for wounded soldiers. While the term *basket cases* later evolved into a disparaging term for people with mental and other health issues, it was used historically in reference to patients who had lost limbs



In this photo of WAVES aboard the *Refuge*, Ernestine is seated fourth from the left. Courtesy of the family.

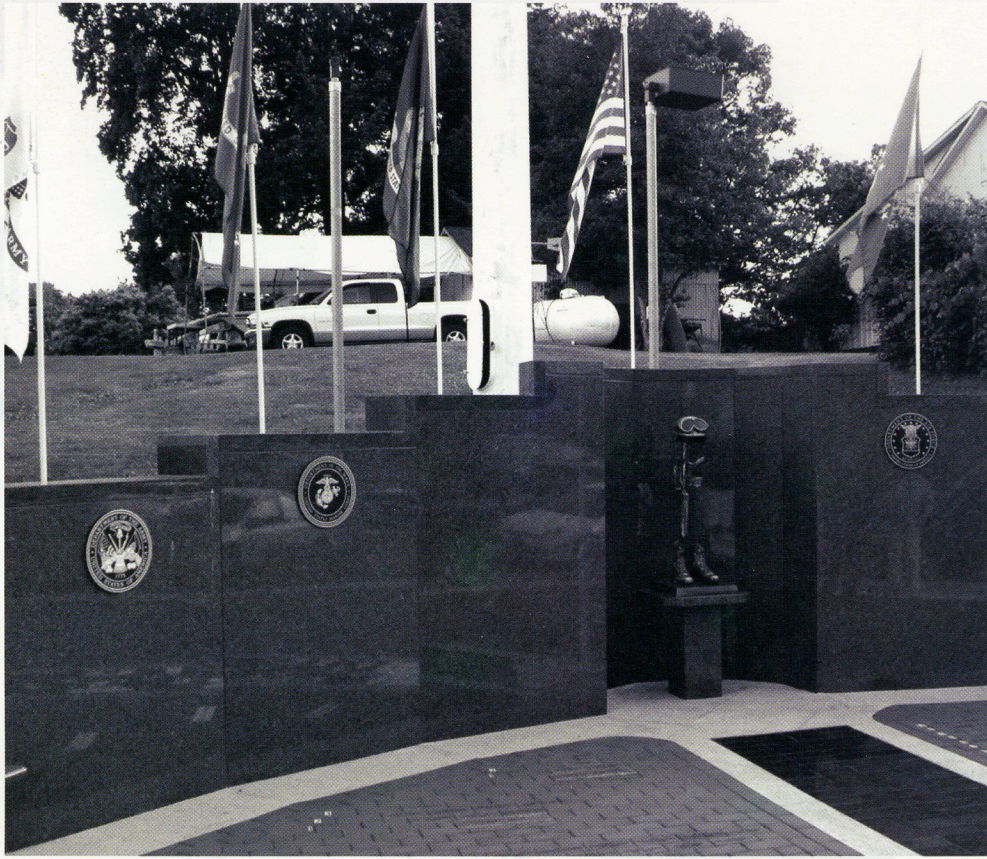
and had to be placed in carriers (baskets) before loading. The *Refuge* took in these cases and, too often, served as transport for American heroes who didn't survive.

On June 6, 1944, the Allied forces attacked German troops entrenched on the coast of Normandy, France, in the largest seaborne invasion in history. Once again, the *Refuge* was on site in the victory that became the turning point for World War II in Europe. Ernestine's maiden name caused confusion among the wounded Nazi prisoners of war who were being transported along with Americans. Seeing *Hess* (a traditional German surname) on her nametag led many to believe she'd be more sympathetic to their military cause. Her unwavering patriotism quickly dashed those misconceptions, yet, forever dedicated to saving lives, she treated them with the same care as all her patients.

Other unique experiences awaited this young woman from Ansted. During

her hospital ship's stopover in Rome, Ernestine, the ship's chaplain, and four other nurses were included in a meeting with the Pope. Questioned about the impact of her faith, she admitted that she wasn't Catholic and that attending the meeting was the only way she could get liberty (a pass in Navy vernacular)!

Her commendations attest to Ernestine's dedication and bravery: the European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with Bronze Battle Star, the World War II Victory Medal, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon, and several others. When her Navy service ended in 1946, she worked briefly as a model in New York City and traveled the country as a private-duty nurse before her unfailing patriotism prompted her to reenlist in the Navy in 1949. At a posting in Jacksonville, Florida, Ernestine met Lt. Junior Grade Frank Davey, and they married in 1950. (Ernestine's rank was higher than her



Ansted's veterans memorial park on Route 60 honors Ernestine Hess Davey and other veterans from the town. Photo by Sara Bragg Aikin.

husband's, and she never let him forget it.) Ernestine continued her service until the couple learned they were expecting their first child, Francine. Ernestine was discharged with honors in 1951. She and Frank soon added sons Mike and Pat to the family as Ernestine embraced her role as a military wife with the same passion and zeal that had been apparent in her active duty.

Postings across the United States and in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, eventually led the family to live in Pensacola, Florida, where they remained after Frank's 28-year Navy career ended. The tradition of military service continued through their son Mike (Air Force) and grandsons Charlie Neal (Navy) and Aaron Davey (Army National Guard). Two of Ernestine's five grandchildren served in the military, and three others became nurses—a testament to their grandmother's shining example.

During the pandemic that has hit the world, many are being recognized for their sacrifices to help others, and medical personnel once again are on the front lines. A commemorative brick in Ansted's impressive memorial to hometown military veterans simply notes, "Lt NC Ernestine Hess Davey, U.S. Navy." But the unofficial Navy motto—*non sibi, sed patriae* (not self, but country)—illustrates the unwavering patriotism that her passing in January 2021 at age 99 can never dim. Ernestine's devotion and service to our country should serve as an inspiration and a goal, not only for her West Virginia hometown neighbors and friends but for every proud American. 🍁

SARA BRAGG AIKIN's love of words was fostered by a family of readers and through her career of more than 35 years at an education research-and-development corporation in Charleston. Now retired, Sara relishes the time she can spend sharing her perspectives on life, faith, and her beloved Mountain State. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.



(Left-right) Undercover West Virginia State Troopers Chuck Little and Don Shade, 1968.

The End of Cinder Bottom

By Jeffrey Shade

On the Summer Solstice 1968, an old pickup truck bearing New Jersey license plates pulled out of the Welch State Police barracks and crept along Route 52 toward Keystone (McDowell County). A few days prior, just across the state line, in Bluefield, Virginia, the two troopers in the truck had convinced a coal foreman to donate them some mining work clothes and safety helmets. Donned in their new coal array, the men finished their makeup on the foothill of a roadside McDowell County coal mound. Each rubbed chalky black cinders across their palms, necks, faces, sleeves, and pant legs. Once soot-sodden, grime-ridden, and deeming themselves to be up-to-snuff tired-looking miners, they

“Recently a man asked me where I lived and I told him ‘Keystone.’ He then asked, “‘Where is Keystone?’ My answer was that it was ten miles from nowhere and a half mile from Hell.” –from *Sodom and Gomorrah of Today, or The History of Keystone, West Virginia*, by a “Virginia Lad” (1912)

“We shut down Cinder Bottom.” –Chuck Little (2019)

hopped back in their truck and proceeded to Keystone.

Notorious for 70-plus years of gambling, moonshining, and prostitution, by 1968, Keystone had earned a scandalous history. An author who identified himself only

as “Virginia Lad” forged notoriety into Keystone’s history with his 1912 memoir *Sodom and Gomorrah of Today*. He specifically focused on the section of town known as Cinder Bottom. His stinging, religious, racist (many of the bootleggers and prostitutes were Black), and moral invective against the town’s vice culture made Cinder Bottom synonymous with sin. By the 1960s, though, the apex of those vice years had long passed, a consequence of increased law enforcement and a declining population in once-booming McDowell County. But its reputation persisted and was described by musicians who used to perform there, such as Nat Reese, and mentioned memorably in John Sayles’ 1987 film *Matewan*.

Once home to Appalachia’s best-known red-light district, the town’s politicians and policemen were co-conspirators, and profiteers in the vice. In trade for legal protection and money kickbacks, the prostitutes were at their beck and call. Various accounts report town police beating madams who resented unscheduled visits. One anomaly was a police chief who tried to enforce the law and found himself in a Cinder Bottom cinder alley after being tossed through a plate-glass window.

By the turn of the 20th century, with copious reserves of coal and a shortage of labor on hand to extract it, coal operators began recruiting manpower—predominantly eastern European immigrants and southern Blacks. In the short course of a decade, McDowell quickly became one of the most racially diverse counties in Appalachia. Garret Mathews writes how “miners and railroad people hightailed it to the Appalachian hamlet of Cinder Bottom . . . leaving wives and consciences behind.”

Historian Deborah Weiner notes that in the early 20th century, local Black leaders referred to the county as the “Free State of McDowell” and to Keystone

More about Cinder Bottom

Please see “Cinder Bottom: A Coalfields Red-Light District” by Jean Battlo and “Another Idea of Cinder Bottom: ‘Sure We Got Problems’” by Denise Giardina (both in Summer 1994) and “From the Bottom Up: Cinder Bottom’s Red-Light District” by Katherine R. Spindler (Summer 2017).

as “the mecca of the coalfields.” With a population growing too rapidly for the county clerk or census takers to chronicle accurately, the atmosphere was ripe for machine politics. Add to that a wide-open culture of vice, and one can imagine the gist of the Free State of McDowell at the time.

Things weren’t so cozy in Cinder Bottom, where some women scrounged to earn a living any way they could. In fact, as Katherine Spindler suggests [see Summer 2017], prostitution was one of the few occupations where women had some control over how they made a living, how much they made, and how much of that money they could keep.

In Cinder Bottom, the brothels were scattered amongst some 20 places, often advertised as boarding houses. Some were little more than shanties, lining up like dominoes on Coal Street, the narrow, cinder-paved, half-mile semicircle known by locals as Red-Dog Alley. There, prostitutes sat on porch railings and leaned against galvanized pipe bannisters trying to woo potential customers.

West Virginia’s very first undercover state troopers, Chuck Little and Don Shade, were the two men driving toward Keystone that first day of summer 1968. Little was stationed at Beckley, and Shade (who died in 2003) worked out of Logan. I caught up with Little a couple years ago. Despite being 80 years old, he was still on the beat—well, the detective beat,

working as a private fraud investigator for a law firm—with vivid memories of the night the bottom fell out of Cinder Bottom.

“Driving through Cinder Bottom in the wee morning hours” (1:25 a.m., according to newspaper accounts), “we spotted a Black rotund woman sitting on the bannister in front of Nellie’s Place. Dressed in a miniskirt and red wig, she shouted out, ‘Park that truck, honey. Come on in here.’”

Little, 29 years old and piloting the wheel, wasted no time. Eyeballing a parking spot along Red-Dog Alley, Chuck threw the truck into park. Seconds later, they entered Nellie’s Place. By all appearances, the undercover cops had just punched-out at a local mine and had some money to spend.

Once inside, Shirley Baker, a Pittsburgh native wearing a red wig, called out to her friend, Beverly Harris, another Pittsburgher. Bellied up to the makeshift wood-slab bar, Baker poured two shots of bourbon, opened a couple beers, and charged them \$2 for the four drinks. With the jukebox wailing and the whiskey flowing, Baker began shaking her hips to the music, sashaying around the bar toward Shade, inquiring, “You ready to have a good time?”

“What I was concerned about,” Chuck recounts, “was *not* taking part and then leaving. The houses were so close together, we were afraid the word would get out that maybe these two guys aren’t really who they said they were.”

So, the troopers came up with a plan. They informed the women they were going to “shop around a bit” for other possibilities.

“That’s when Baker responded,” Chuck recalls, “‘Well, Ok, honey, but you’ll be back.’”

Little and Shade left and traversed all the brothels in Cinder Bottom.

“There were college students from all over the East Coast,” Chuck recalls. “From across the state line in Virginia, all the way down to Richmond. . . . It was funny as hell.”

Although local miners comprised the vast majority of Cinder Bottom’s customer base, they weren’t the exclusive clientele. College demand was widespread in the 1960s. Gary Browning, a retired state trooper stationed in Welch from 1965 to 1972, recalls an incident while patrolling through Cinder Bottom.

“It was the winter of either ’66 or ’67, and a group of several young men were standing outside one of the brothel shanties.”

Unschooling in the level of respect state troopers commanded in those days, the college loiterers “started giving me some lip as I was cruising by. An hour later, the entire group found themselves in the McDowell County Jail. Come to find out, they were returning from Huntington, where they’d just played Marshall University in basketball. It was a college basketball team from somewhere in Virginia,” Gary recalls. “They were taking part in the services offered there in Cinder Bottom.”

Parents began receiving calls from their sons, explaining the predicament. “The next day,” Gary says, “a bunch of unhappy parents, having driven from all over the East Coast, were suddenly driving into Welch and posting bail for their sons.”

So why did Little and Shade go to Cinder Bottom for the sting operation in June 1968? With 70 years of cops turning a blind eye to the oldest profession, why the hurry?

“It got to a point,” Chuck recalls, “where these prostitutes were knocking men over the head. Cpl. Benny Helms, working out of Princeton at the time, informed me that all these men were going to Cinder Bottom . . . and then



The Dunglen Hotel, on the New River near Thurmond (Fayette County), was another notorious hub for prostitution and gambling, making the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest continuous poker game on record: 14 years. Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Quin Morton Collection.

Thurmond

Keystone's Cinder Bottom wasn't alone as a prostitution, liquor, and gambling center. About 60 miles northeast is Thurmond (Fayette County), where brothels thrived for the first three decades of the 20th century. Thurmond was once described as "Hell with a river running through it." Thurmond proper was a dry town with strict (but not always enforced) vice laws. In reality, though, it was the hub of a sprawling crime syndicate. Prostitution once thrived in two hotels: the Lafayette and the more glitzy Dunglen, which boasted 100 rooms, a spacious lobby, and a ballroom.

The Dunglen brothel catered more to top brass in the coal industry and wealthy traveling salesmen. In the 1920s, a single night's stay in The Dunglen cost \$2.50, nearly a day's wages at the time for hard-working miners in McDowell. High-dollar prostitutes at The Dunglen wine and dine their clients and might even take them for a spin on the dance floor. When The Dunglen burned down in 1930, it marked the beginning of the end of Thurmond's wild years, but in Cinder Bottom, the red lights were still ablaze.
—Jeffrey Shade

they'd gain consciousness a few hours later with their billfolds gone."

But it was problematic to convict the thieves because, as Chuck says, "All these men were married, so they simply couldn't afford to prosecute or be a witness against anybody." Had they pursued justice, their home lives would have come to an abrupt end. Yet the complaints kept pouring in.

"Finally, Helms called me and said, 'Chuck, why don't you and Shade go

down there and do something about this?' So that's what led us to putting the heat on for the first time . . . because of the violence that had been developing, along with the stealing."

I asked Chuck why the Keystone cops hadn't done anything about the problem before, and he replied, "The city cop there liked [the prostitution], and he never arrested anyone that might hurt the business." In Keystone's heyday, the brothels also stayed in operation by



The Keystone City Hall was implicit in the crimes of Cinder Bottom, as everyone from political leaders to law enforcers received kickbacks and other benefits from the town's vices. Courtesy of the Eastern Regional Coal Archives, Kraft Memorial Library, Bluefield.

paying kickbacks and providing other favors to city leaders, including law enforcers.

So, the night after Little and Shade's visit, they led a caravan of five state police cars and two pickup trucks to Cinder Bottom. They'd implicated 23 women the night before but, on Saturday night, brought in only 19.

"We brought all of [the prostitutes] back down to Welch that night," Chuck remembers. "The streets are real narrow, so we had to pull up on the sidewalks in front of the justice of the peace. We had 19 women in five state police cars. We took in the first woman but kept the rest in the cruisers because we didn't want the word to get out. You see, it was six-months mandatory jail, and we knew the girls in the car wouldn't want any part of that, and we needed to keep quiet what was happening inside so as to keep peace outside in the cruisers. So,

one by one, we took them into the justice of the peace. Each was sentenced to six months in jail."

Chuck continues, "Henry Capehart, a Black attorney from Welch, I loved that guy"—Chuck says with genuine pride—"he was the defense attorney." I asked Capehart later that week where the other four girls were, and he replied, "Well, trooper, you don't like red-eye gravy and biscuits every morning, do you? We like to change the menu down there in the Bottom."

Capehart happened to own two of the houses in Cinder Bottom.

"So, come Monday morning after the raid that weekend," Chuck chuckles, "Capehart walks into the barracks, and he says, 'Trooper, I'm here this morning seeking mercy 'cause my clients can't stand justice.'"

They laughed it up and did a bit of bargaining. Chuck asked Capehart what

he knew about this or that crime on a particular date, and they worked out a few deals, trading information for plea bargains.

Chuck adds, "And that's how the system worked back then."

Turns out there was a regional prostitution circuit at the time. A "trifecta," according to Chuck: Fort Knox Army Base in Kentucky, Pittsburgh, and Cinder Bottom.

On August 15, Shirley Baker was the first suspect to be tried. She assured her attorneys, Abeshire Cunningham and Capehart, that she wasn't guilty and, furthermore, had no previous record. Capehart believed Baker and used her clean record as his defense argument.

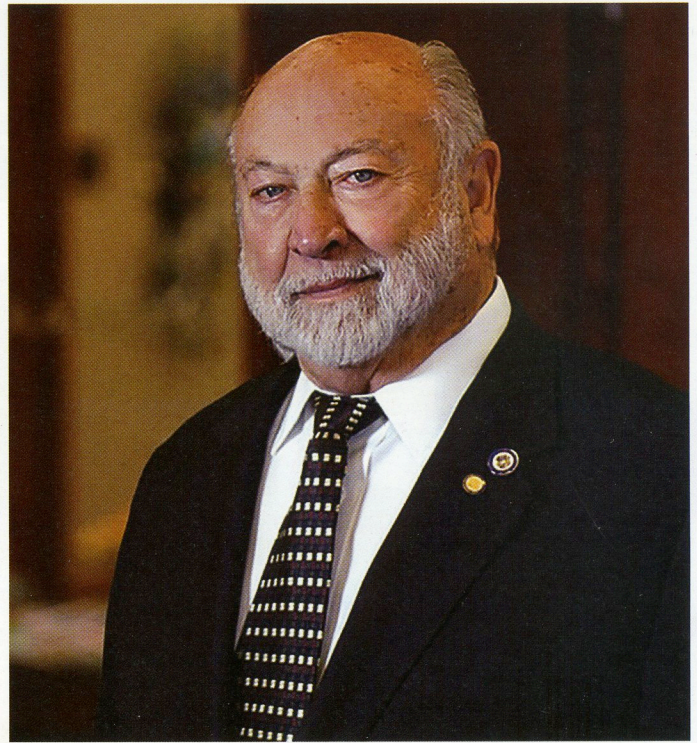
After making his case, Capehart took his seat. The floor was now all Wade Watson's, McDowell County's assistant prosecuting attorney. Little and Shade, who'd done their investigative homework, brought a two-page rap sheet to court with them. As it turned out, Baker had been arrested five times in Pittsburgh for loitering and prostitution.

Baker was found guilty. In the aftermath, Capehart huddled up the rest of the women and explained Baker's verdict. The rest then changed their pleas from not guilty to guilty.

"After the trial," Little recounts, "Capehart came up to me and said, 'Trooper, I've been caught with my pants down before, but never this bad. You really laid it on me this time.'"

After the June 1968 raid on Cinder Bottom, Keystone's historic red-light district crumbled. Literally. Russell Madison, a McDowell County contractor back in the '60s, bulldozed most of the houses in Cinder Bottom that same year and replaced them with a 25-unit housing project.

"It was hard for people to see that we were helping them," Madison told



Former State Trooper Chuck Little, now a private fraud investigator in Charleston. Photo by our author.

the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* in a 1975 interview. "Some didn't want the projects once they found out they couldn't hustle them. The only problems I have now are trying to get people to keep the grass up and getting rid of the dogs."

And so it ended. West Virginia's Sodom and Gomorrah. The county certainly witnessed more deadly deeds (the assassination of Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers during the Mine Wars) and greater theft (the Bank of Keystone embezzlement scandal), but Cinder Bottom was the long-running crime drama most closely associated with the Free State of McDowell. ✱

JEFFREY SHADE is a graduate of Marshall University (B.A.), Abilene Christian University (M.A. in Greek), and Princeton Theological Seminary (M.Div.). He created and co-owned Baristas Cafe and Pub in New Martinsville (Wetzel County) from 1998 to 2017. He currently practices as a licensed massage therapist and enjoys world traveling. Though he peddled craft beer for two decades, he prefers marijuana. This is his first contribution to GOLD-ENSEAL.



Dating back to 1882, the Lenox Store is considered Preston County's oldest, continuously operating business. The building dates to 1892, according to one historical reference. It's owned by William F. Bolinger II and his mother, Evajeane Bolinger.

West Virginia Back Roads →

Full Circle, Full Service in Lenox

Text and photos by Carl E. Feather

One might guess that Preston County's oldest, continuously operating business is a funeral home. Not so, although at one time, a funeral home operated in the north section of the Lenox Store, founded in 1882.

Located on the Brandonville Pike (County Route 3), just a stone's throw south of the "Lenox unincorporated" highway sign, the general store was originally known as Forman's Store. Charles W. Forman and his father-in-law, Jacob C. Smith, established it the same year Charles married Mahala I. Smith, the daughter of Jacob and Catherine (Feather) Smith. Charles and Mahala's hard work paid off, and on May 16, 1900, Charles became the sole owner.

In that era, traffic through the frame building was guaranteed because it was

also home to the Lenox Post Office. Legend is that when the locals learned that their hamlet was getting a post office, they met in Forman's Store to determine a name for their previously anonymous wide spot in the road. The suggestions were tossed into a hat, and someone pulled the Lenox moniker. The post office closed in the early 1900s, but the store hummed along without it, aided by another ancillary service: the town's funeral home.

Astute visitors will note that to the right of the main entrance is a second door, 40 inches wide, large enough to accommodate caskets. Owned by funeral director/embalmer William McKinley Wilhelm, the Lenox Funeral Home was separated from the store by a wall, torn out when the parlor closed. The parlor

lights, however, were left intact, and one of them still has the original globe. According to an advertising calendar, the funeral home was still operating in the late 1930s.

Charles died in 1915 and Mahala in 1924. Their son, Worley Klet Forman, and his wife, Nina, were the next owners. Worley was the undertaker's assistant and helped his parents with shop-keeping whenever the undertaking business was slow.

"He has a prosperous business, the country 'round Lenox being rich and patronage good," noted H. S. Whetsell of Worley Klet in his second volume of *A History of Preston County*, in which Whetsell dates the store's construction to 1892. That's likely a typo since S. T. Wiley's *History of Preston County* confirms the 1882 date for the business start.

Today, Evajean Bolinger and her son and daughter-in-law, William "Bill" F. II and Janice, own the store, which has been in the family since the early 1960s. Bill's parents, William and Evajean, and his grandmother, Mabel Graham, purchased it from the Forman family in 1961. The Bolinger's son, Billy III, is the fourth generation in the family to work there.

"Originally, my grandmother (Mabel Graham) who had half-interest, was a nurse's aid in Kingwood," co-owner Bill II tells me as we sit in his "office" at the back of the store. "She moved here and needed a little bit of extra income, something to do. And when Granddad retired from the board of education as the head of maintenance, he needed something to do and worked in it. When my mother retired from teaching school, she needed a little something to do, as well. So, everybody had been using it for retirement, something to keep them going, until we bought it. I'd like to see [my son] get a job, then I'd come down here, and it would be a little something to do," Bill says.

Bill and Janice have three boys: Nathaniel, a lineman; Cordell, a civil engineer; and Bill "Billy" III, a WVU grad who runs the store and fixes computers on the side to generate extra income. If his parents were to pay Billy what he's really worth, it would put the business in the red.

"What he eats from here is basically his pay," Bill II says.

When asked why he sticks around the store working for snacks, Billy replies, "I don't really have a reason."

"He's a bit shy . . . and this has helped him a lot, being in here," his father says.

Bill recalls a better time, when the place grossed about 50% more than it does these days. Better days were back when Preston County's coal mines were busy and miners filled their gas tanks, coffee mugs, and lunch pails at the Lenox Store. But the mines have closed; most of the former miners and their families have departed the community.

Further, there's intense competition from the Family Dollar store at Bruceton Mills and Dollar General at Valley Point. Interstate 68, just nine miles north of the store, offers quick access to shopping in Morgantown. And while the area north of Lenox is enjoying a housing boom due to municipal water becoming available, Bill says most new residents don't "realize we're open" and take their business to town.

Billy says he can spot a newbie by his or her puzzlement over the self-service gas pump. There's no place to swipe a credit card, so the motorist comes inside and says, "I need \$20 worth of gas, but I don't see where to pay."

"We say, 'Go ahead and pump it,'" Bill says. "That really shocks them. The pump won't shut down [automatically]. Then they'll come back in with their 10 cents or whatever it went over."

The store extends credit for gas and other purchases to established customers. Despite Billy's work with computers, purchases are kept on handwritten ledgers. Most customers settle their debts on payday; a few want a statement before settling, and even fewer require a phone-call reminder.

"We still do a little bit of the old 'jot-'em-down' stuff, but we try not to take on any new [credit] customers," Bill says.

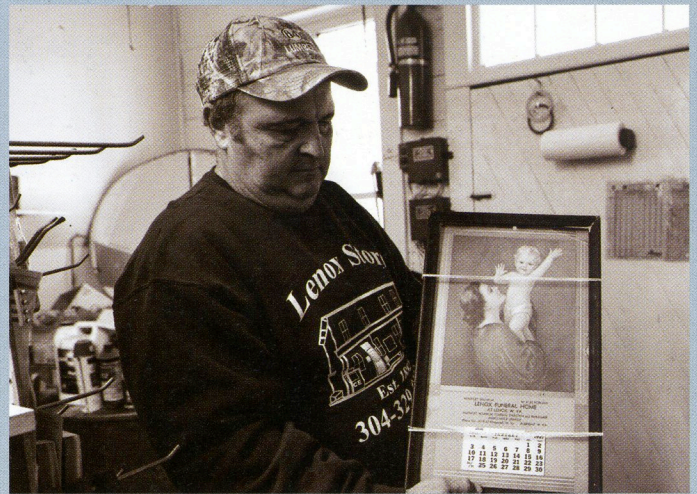
Then again, many of their credit accounts are extended family who live within a radius of two or three miles. As Bill talks about his customer base of 100 to 150 regulars, one of his nieces calls to tell him that her kids will be down to get some snacks and that she'll stop over to pay for them later in the day. Bill says immediate family members have a key to the store so they can go in whenever, get what they need, jot it down, and go on their way.

"We're our own best customers," Bill says. "We all live so close we could walk down here if we had to."

Another relative, Eugene Jordan, Janice's brother, stops to buy some air-compressor line fittings. He lives a half-mile away and says he'd do "a lot more traveling" if his family didn't have the Lenox Store. To meet the handyman needs of customers like Eugene, the Bolingers stock plumbing, electrical, and HVAC supplies at the back of the store.

"It's more of a convenience," Bill says, explaining the store's role in the community. "It is not a necessity. If we are going grocery shopping and we're in town, like anybody else, we go to the supermarket."

That said, it's a godsend for older and handicapped people in the community. For these folks, the Bolingers will assemble their orders for pickup, calculate the total, and pack everything into their vehicles. They'll even make change in the parking lot.



Bill Bolinger II holds a calendar from the Lenox Funeral Home, which was located in the store for many years. The wall that separated the funeral home from the store has been removed, but the 40-inch-wide door (in background) is a holdover from when the entry accommodated caskets.

"They also have pulled into the parking lot and blown their horn to have full service at the gas pump and/or give us a list for inside purchases," Janice says. "We happily oblige."

The Bolingers close the store on Sundays, but residents know that if an emergency arises, a phone call will get them access.

"I've had people call me at two in the morning and say, 'My stovepipe fell off. Can I come down and get one?' And I'll go down and open the store," Bill says.

Once, when search teams were scouring the countryside around Lenox for "a local boy who was involved in an airplane accident," the store was a local source for fuel and provisions. And when a wide-ranging power outage shut down gas pumps and stores in the Kingwood area, the Lenox Store's generators kept its pumps up and running.

In addition to selling one grade of gas, the store has diesel and home heating oil, the latter typically sold and delivered to homes by a supplier. But Bill says that by offering it by the gallon, they help their neighbors who can't afford a delivery of 100 gallons or more at a time. Bill even

provides one customer with a 50-gallon tank for his fuel purchases.

While the store occasionally gets a passing motorist who stops to fill up, most fuel sales are for four-wheelers and other ATVs that buzz past the store and across the trails and ridges of Preston County's Pleasants and Portland districts. "We sell a bunch of gas in five-gallon cans," Bill says.

Fuel accounts for more than 50% of the sales; profits pay the electric bill. While their fuel supplier will deliver the product, usually 1,000 gallons at a time, other vendors are reluctant to go 10 or 20 miles out of their way to make deliveries. At one point, Bill had to drive 15 minutes to Albright to meet the dairy-products delivery truck because their sales volume did not justify the remote stop.

Bill says they literally go the extra mile to stock what customers request—thus, there are school supplies as well as canned fruits and vegetables alongside a few knickknacks, pre-viewed DVDs, and hunting licenses. The mainstays of many rural mom-and-pop stores, alcohol and lottery tickets, are not sold at Lenox Store.

"It's always been a dry community, and we honor that," Bill says.

Lenox Store is also a local gathering place, although the community center across the street can be rented for formal gatherings, such as weddings or baby showers. Lenox Store has a function in the community center's operation, as well—taking reservations for the center and another community landmark down the road, the Lenox (Lutheran Church) Memorial Cemetery.

Bill serves as the de facto sexton of the cemetery, which operates on donations left at the store, earmarked for upkeep of the cemetery and the church. The church is used only once a year anymore—a memorial service in June—but the donations have helped preserve the

You can visit the Lenox Store at 10737 Brandonville Pike in Lenox. They're open every day but Sunday, 8:30-5:00. Give them a call at 304-329-0306.

historic structure. Bill says he's fulfilling his grandmother's dying wishes by caring for the cemetery, which has burials going back to 1814.

"My grandmother, before she died, told my mother, 'Don't let it go to rot and ruin,'" Bill says. "Nina Forman and Paul Feather started a perpetual care fund."

There's been a surge of interest in the cemetery, through both genealogy and the fact that, previously, the lots were free—that's the way it was set up. "People way outside the community would hear that we had these free lots, and they'd come from 25 or more miles. So, we have implemented a \$100 grave-reservation fee. We're not selling them; we're reserving them for you," says Bill, who counts about two dozen un-fulfilled reservations.

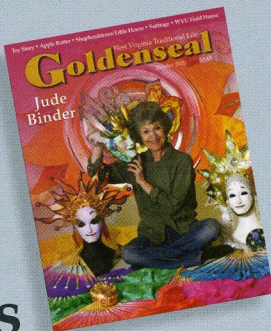
The cemetery records are among the many historical and cultural gems in this simple white building. If you look closely at the wood wall toward the back of the store, you'll see a jagged chunk of metal protruding from the boards. Bill says it was from the store's safe, which thieves once blew up to access the store's cash.

The building's floor of rough-cut lumber has been sanded by decades of foot traffic and scrubbing. To protect the surface and impart a finish, the owners periodically apply linseed oil, but the foot traffic of farmers, hunters, and ATV riders frustrates those efforts.

"They come in with cow manure on their boots, and they kick it off on the porch; they don't kick it off in the parking lot," Bill says.

The centerpiece of the store is the brass scale, used to weigh the slab bacon, cheese, screws, nails, grass seed, and any other merchandise sold by weight. The device's accuracy is certified annually by

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Billy Bollinger weighs some cheese on the store's Stimpson scale, which is used to weigh everything from babies to screws to fish.

a state employee. It can weigh up to 10 pounds without adding counter-balancing weights, which extend its capacity to 90 pounds. That's adequate for the most common purchases.

"People will bring their babies in to have them weighed. We put a box on the scale and weigh it, then put the baby in the box and weigh it," Bill says. "As infants, our children were weighed frequently on it," Janice adds. Customers also bring in their fish and other game for an official weight.

Life comes full circle in this store. Babies are weighed and cemetery lots reserved at the same counter where milk and bacon are sold and where farmers buy fuel that powers their tractors, which transform Preston County's lush green meadows to tan hay for the black Angus. Stories are swapped, complaints aired, weather observed, and fat chewed on cell phones as it was once discussed in front of the pot-bellied stove of the Forman's Store. No wonder the Bolingers continue to keep the doors open, despite its lethargic financial performance.

"The place really needs to be closed," Bill admits. "It would take a lot of stress off us. But we don't want to close it up on our watch. It's a piece of history . . . and that is why we want to keep it open as long as we have it." 🍁

CARL E. FEATHER is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Preston County. He has family roots in Tucker and Preston counties and is author of the book *Mountain People in a Flat Land*. You can follow Carl's blog at the-feathercottage.com, where he often writes about West Virginia and posts video content related to Goldenseal stories. Carl has been a longtime GOLDENSEAL contributor, dating back to his first article in our Summer 1987 issue.



Standing outside the Lenox Store are (left-right) William F. II and Janice Bolinger and their son, Billy (William III), who operates the business for his parents.

Inside Goldenseal

