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Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Summer 2022 $5.95

Clifftop

Clifftop regular Ralph Roberts, of Braxton County, 93 years young. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

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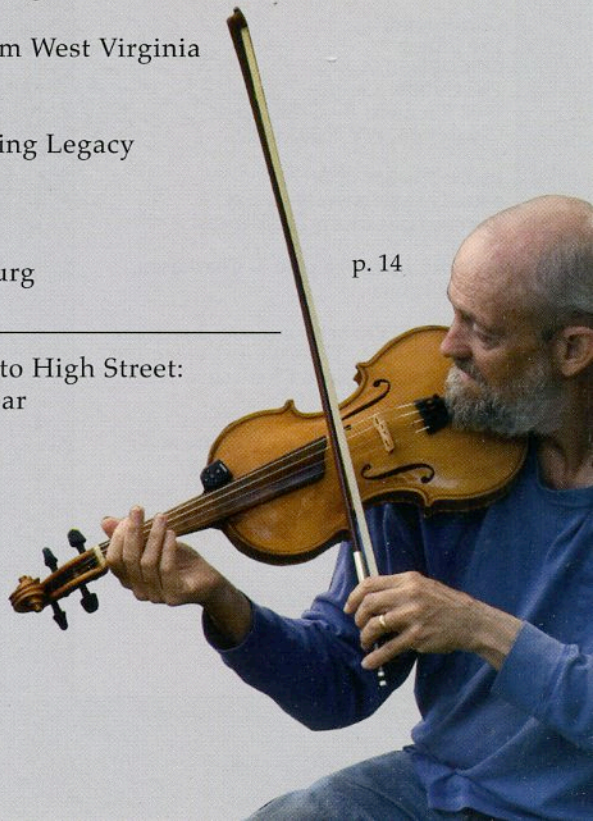

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On the cover: The Appalachian String Band Music Festival (Clifftop) in Fayette County. Photo by Brennish Thomson.

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From the Editor

Our editor at Seneca Rocks, summer 1979. Photo by Doug Bumgardner.

The summer of 1979 was my favorite childhood vacation—and I never left my home state. I'd just finished a year of West Virginia Studies and couldn't wait to see everywhere I'd learned about. (If you've read this column before, you may recall I've always been a proud history nerd.) Armed with Stan Cohen's *Historic Sites of West Virginia: A Pictorial Guide*, my parents and I crisscrossed the state, taking in everything from John Brown's Fort in Harpers Ferry to my ancestors' old stomping grounds in Pendleton County.

I've thought a lot about that trip while compiling this issue of the magazine, which has a very summery feel. It is filled with fun activities to do in West Virginia and nostalgic memories of summers past. Like me, I'm sure many of you are looking forward to a summer of music, camping, parks, and just getting outdoors. Even though it's probably sweltering by the time you're reading this, it's 18 degrees while I'm writing it. So, my mind keeps drifting toward warmer days.

While I love a good beach trip, the mountains are calling this summer, and what better place to enjoy them than in the Mountain State? I'm obviously biased, but you can't top our state's beauty in all seasons, the kindness of our people, our talented musicians and artists, and the rich history that's all around us.

What better time to go some place you've never been? Or revisit somewhere that was important to you long ago? If you live in West Virginia, a breathtaking view is only a few minutes away or perhaps just outside your front door. If you grew up here but moved away, come back for a visit and explore your roots. This may sound like a travel agency commercial, but it's really an appeal to remember why you fell in love with West Virginia in the first place. As Ovie Mitchell once commented about our ancient mountains [see K. D. Bradshaw's article on p. 34], "If you'll listen, you can hear their mem'ries."

—Stan Bumgardner

Live Music at Ashby's Fort

Irish Shanty performs at Ashby's Fort. Photo by Randy Crane.

Ashby's Fort is a museum dedicated to the French and Indian War, located in Fort Ashby (Mineral County)—the site of one of the first two frontier forts ordered by George Washington in 1755. But it's much more than the outline of the original stockade and visitor center. A 1783 log building just west of the stockade has become a center for music, the arts, and other community events. For several years, the log building (known locally as "the Old Fort") has hosted concerts ranging from 18th-century music to contemporary pop to rollicking Irish tavern songs to Appalachian / Celtic tunes with a modern flair.

The Old Fort is an intimate venue. It seats 50 or so people in the front room, so the musicians are close to the audience. The lighting is subdued and the amplification minimal. In cold weather, fires lit in the double fireplaces in the back room lend a coziness and touch of woodsmoke to the building. The space has hosted the holiday event Cider and Carols for the past few years as well as a "Canjo" workshop—where a local artist demonstrates how to build a musical instrument from everyday materials.

In response to the popularity of this concert space, Ashby's Fort is constructing an outdoor performance pavilion just in back of the visitor center. The pavilion—funded in part by the state Department of Arts, Culture & History's Cultural Facilities and Capital Resources Grant program—will have a stage, full sound and lighting system, and covered area for lectures, art events, and even picnics.

Details about upcoming events can be found on **ashbysfort.org** and on Facebook: The Friends of Ashby's Fort. *–ed.*

Letter to the Editor

Revisiting Mother Jones at Marmet
February 17, 2022
DeKalb, Illinois

Dear Editor,

In your Summer 2021 issue, Gordon Simmons summarized the case historians have built for seeing "Mother" Jones as a "Fallen Angel" in the Blair Mountain telegram incident of August 1921: (1) Jones, aging and infirm, had lost her nerve and her connection with miners. (2) Jones was susceptible to flattery and became the governor's tool. (3) Jones sold out the West Virginia miners, and even undermined dissidents at the 1922 UMWA convention. (4) Jones' humiliation was so severe that she never returned to West Virginia, showing that she was guilty of one or all of the above.

Mother Jones was no angel. She disliked the moniker anyway. No defense can be made for her deceit. But fuller research on her modifies these interpretations. My forthcoming book on Mother Jones will add more.

The claim that Mother Jones had lost her connection with the miners in the years before Blair Mountain is easily dismissed. There is a lengthy record of influence, including letters and reports from West Virginia, whether by workers, military spies, or operators. According to labor reporter Art Shields, who talked to her at the time, Jones thought the Armed March was a trap being set to destroy the union. Many since have agreed this was an astute assessment. All of these events took place amidst spies and operatives, and that made trust difficult.

The events at Lens Creek, where she presented the telegram, came in a feverish moment when there was no plan other than armed uprising from the district leadership. Some thought it would be good if federal troops intervened. She did not. Two camps of federal soldiers were being "held ready" for the governor's call when she arrived there on August 23. Jones sought to delay Governor Ephraim Morgan's impending call by persuading them to reconsider. Jones knew that federal troops were a death knell for unions in struggle, a wisdom born of experience. As many have acknowledged, the rank-and-file brilliance on the Blair Mountain Battlefield was not matched with a plan that could wield real power for workers in the aftermath of the surrender to federal troops.

Why did she not just say this to the assembled miners at Lens Creek? She likely did, and more. She spoke for quite a long time there on August 23-24, and we have no transcript. But UMWA District 17 leaders Frank Keeney and Fred Mooney sought to make *her* the issue—rather than focusing on the wisdom of an armed confrontation that included hanging a sheriff. She considered this cowardice of leadership as well as humiliating. They did not repudiate unsigned vicious leaflets charging she was in the employ of their enemies, even though years later, they acknowledged it was not true. This kind of ugly factionalism flourished in the era.

Mother Jones left Marmet determined to prevent the federal troop deployment, something Morgan wanted. She arrived in Washington, D.C., on August 25 and met with officials in President Harding's administration, including the War Department. They sent Gen. Henry Bandholtz, who arrived in the middle of the night in Charleston and compelled Keeney and Mooney to disband the march. While that was initially successful, the rank-and-file did not follow Keeney and Mooney's direction in the white-hot conflict that erupted after miners were murdered at Sharples. Jones protested sending troops when Morgan's pro-operator delegation met with Harding officials to insist on it.

In the weeks after the armed conflict, Jones tried to build public understanding:

"If the employers can form their army, the workers naturally think they can do the same. That's logical, isn't it? And that situation is the ulcer from which flows all the poison. Until it is removed, there will be no peace." She asserted that the rank-and-file spirit shown in the battles was a positive sign. She met with senators to find a way to revoke the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency's charter. She raised funds for the miners still living in tents.

Jones came back to West Virginia on September 10, first to Matewan and then escorting senators and their investigating team through tent colonies of evicted miners. She sought to hold a procession of miners' wives but was stopped by Morgan's military commander, National Guard Maj. Thomas B. Davis, who had held her prisoner in Pratt in 1913. She vowed to help the men get out of prison and to testify on their behalf.

Back in D.C. in early October, she lobbied the Harding Administration to address the injustices. She sat with the widows of Sid Hatfield and Ed Chambers when they came to Washington to testify at hearings on the West Virginia violence.

The jailings left no reserve for a fight against the blanket injunctions forbidding the UMWA from organizing. Union president, John L. Lewis, bowed to the courts, rejecting Jones' call for him and other AFL leaders to join her in defying the injunctions, filling the jails of West Virginia, if necessary.

When her Lens Creek meeting became the prosecution's focus in the Charles Town trials against the miners for insurrection / treason, Jones vanished to avoid the witness stand. An enterprising reporter used subterfuge to find her and ask why. "I can't do them any good, and so the best thing is to keep my mouth shut." She hoped the trials would get over soon so that she could go back to organize, but they continued for more than two years. Meanwhile, her rheumatism, which had worsened since 1920, led her on a continual search for relief and strength. She commented often that she sought to get better so she could go back to West Virginia. But the union was collapsing as she predicted.

Mother Jones went to Kansas in early 1922 to convince UMWA dissident Alex Howat to place bond and get out of jail (where he was defending workers' rights) to fight Lewis, so the notion that she was reinforcing Lewis' power is nonsense. Her convention comments—that fisticuffs were no replacement for the hard work of organizing to save the UMWA's future and specifically to organize West Virginia—came after she knew they didn't have the votes. She conferred with West Virginia miners in April 1922 but found them allying with Lewis, before he put the district into receivership. Still, she was never broken, always confident workers in West Virginia would rise again.

Given these obstacles, she relied on personal power, all she had left. She had worked for Morgan's opponent, Samuel Montgomery, in the 1920 election. A never-cited sentence of her September 1921 convention remarks acknowledged Morgan was under the sway of the interests. But she began a correspondence with him that grew more saccharine as she attempted to get the men released from prison, influence him, and gather intelligence. It's a descent that doesn't do her image much credit, but it was not simply servile or due to flattery. She pressed Morgan to outlaw the mine guard system, something he finally did submit a bill for in 1923. He persuaded the Republican state senate but could not move the Democratic House to pass the bill.

Mother Jones had made unionizing West Virginia her cause since 1897. She had been at the heart of it, and this inglorious resolution left her heartbroken.

Rosemary Feurer

ROSEMARY FEURER teaches labor history at Northern Illinois University and is director of MotherJones-Museum.org. She is the author of *Radical Unionism in the Midwest, 1900-1950* and is completing *The Illinois Mine Wars, 1860-1935*.

Our New State Folklorist

By Jennie Williams

I'm thrilled to join the West Virginia Humanities Council and direct the West Virginia Folklife Program as the new state folklorist. Reflecting on the years I've spent learning and working with artists and musicians, folklife organizations, and my folklore and ethnomusicology colleagues and mentors, it's an honor to hold this "very cool job title"—as my friends called it when they heard my good news. I believe West Virginia Folklife is a model for similar programs throughout the nation due largely to this state's extraordinary history of practicing and preserving folklife, including (but not limited to) traditional arts, storytelling, crafts, languages, foodways, music, and dance. I'm eager to immerse myself in the research and innovative projects that came before, which will serve as a foundation for my work.

This has been a dream of mine since 2012, when I attended the Maryland Traditions Folklife Festival and learned how easily we take for granted important creative expressions in our everyday lives. The festival featured participants of the Maryland Traditions Folklife Apprenticeship program. The apprenticeship pairs set up their tools and examples of their work on a blocked-off street near the festival stage as they answered questions about their crafts and community traditions. I quickly recognized Roberto Rivera and his son Julian, who I knew from my family's church. Roberto had been teaching Julian how to build a 10-stringed Puerto Rican cuatro, known as the national instrument of Puerto Rico. Roberto learned this craft in the 1990s during his apprenticeship with luthier Diomedes "Yomi" Matos, who has since been awarded the distinguished National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) National Heritage Fellowship. I greeted them enthusiastically and, in awe of their beautiful work, said, "I had no idea you made these!" I felt at once impressed and amazed but also stunned knowing that even though I'd gone to high school with Julian, I was unaware of his family's talents or story. The experience energized me to create opportunities like this for others to fully appreciate and recognize the value of stories and creative traditions—folklife.

I grew up in the small town of Woodsboro in Frederick County, Maryland, in a family full of visual artists, although I chose instead to play the guitar, like my mother. Shortly after that festival, I started an internship at Maryland Traditions, the state's folklife program. While learning the basics of fieldwork documentation and about folk and traditional arts, I developed a better appreciation of the cultural contexts and institutions in which I was raised. I'm very grateful to the program directors at the time, Michelle Stefano and Cliff Murphy, who introduced me to the roles of state folklife programs, as well as to my American Studies professors at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who encouraged me to pursue this career path. In 2014, I interned at Smithsonian Folkways Recordings in Washington, D.C., where I met Emily Hilliard, my predecessor as West Virginia's state folklorist. Emily and I would play music together at parties—before I moved to Bloomington, Indiana, for graduate school and she moved to Charleston to found the West Virginia Folklife Program. Years later, I find it remarkable how our paths have crossed again, and I'm thankful for her friendship and guidance as I catch my footing in this new role.

At Indiana University, I earned my master's degree in folklore and ethnomusi-

Photo by Michael Keller.

cology in 2017 and then became a Ph.D. candidate in ethnomusicology. Early on, I worked closely with Jon Kay at Traditional Arts Indiana (TAI) to secure NEA funding to restart the TAI Apprenticeship Program, which has since supported five cohorts of folk and traditional artists. I'm very proud of those years I spent on documentation projects, survey fieldwork, and exhibits, as well as the connections I made with artists. I'm incredibly thankful to my professors who supported my public folklore work experience, which often went beyond my required coursework. My fieldwork at TAI led to long-term relationships with musicians in rural South-Central Indiana, who graciously allowed me to record their stories and music for my dissertation research. I appreciate their close friendships and the traditional music knowledge they imparted to me, especially as I learned to play the mandolin during their old-time and country music jams.

The West Virginia Folklife Program is a project of the West Virginia Humanities Council. It's supported in part by the NEA Folk & Traditional Arts Program. The program is dedicated to documenting, preserving, presenting, and supporting our state's vibrant cultural heritage and living traditions. For more information, visit **wvhumanities.org** and **wvfolklife.org** or contact Jennie at **williams@wvhumanities.org** or **304-346-8500**. You also can share your stories and community traditions to the West Virginia Folklife hotline: **1-844-618-3747**.

Since arriving in Charleston a few months ago, I've been heartened by the enthusiasm for this program I've seen from our partners and the Humanities Council's board members and staff. I'm thankful for this warm welcome and their trust in me to carry on the work. I'm excitedly planning trips across the state to meet our most recent Folklife Apprentices. In the coming years, I'd like to develop a program where individuals can learn and teach documentation skills and consider the most appropriate practices for preserving and showcasing folklife in their own communities. I want to continue making educational resources about West Virginia folklife publicly accessible by adding to our digital archival collection at WVU Libraries, continuing our partnership with Public Broadcasting, and writing this regular column for GOLDENSEAL. I look forward to working with our partners at the state Department of Arts, Culture & History, the William G. Pomeroy Foundation's Legends & Lore Roadside Marker grant program, and the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation's Central Appalachian Living Traditions Program. One thing I find invigorating about being your state folklorist is that I'll always be learning about West Virginia, the communities that have been here for generations, and my fellow Mountain State residents.

GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes

Courtesy of the GOLDENSEAL Archives.

Honey Davis (1926 – 2019) & Sonny Davis (1926 – 2021)

These two siblings—known professionally as the Davis Twins—got their start in country music as children, winning the Ohio State Fair Amateur Contest in 1938. Two years later, their mother brought them to Wheeling, where they became stars on the WWVA *Jamboree* as young teenagers. Soon, they were playing in Fairmont with Grandpa Jones on the *Sagebrush Roundup* [see Winter 2004]. They moved from one radio station to another around the country before landing at WTIP in Charleston, where they performed with Honey's husband, Sleepy Jeffers. They were featured artists on "The Buddy Starcher Show" and "The Sleepy Jeffers Show" on WCHS-TV [see Spring 2013]. Sonny also was a disc jockey on Charleston's WCHS and on Logan's WVOW as well as the first DJ at St. Albans' WKLC. The Davis Twins were inducted into the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame in 2020. Honey died on May 18, 2019, and Sonny passed away on November 24, 2021.

Courtesy of the family.

Maureen Crockett (1937 – 2020)

Maureen Crockett passed away in St. Albans (Kanawha County) on April 20, 2020, at age 82. After earning a master's in English literature from WVU, she and her husband, Bill, lived in New York for over a decade before relocating to Charleston in 1969. As her obituary stated, she developed a "fierce love" of West Virginia. She wrote about a wide variety of topics for newspapers and magazines, such as *Wonderful West Virginia*, and particularly loved writing about and painting nature. Some of her most memorable articles were focused on edible wild plants, and she was a leader in an annual conference on the topic at North Bend State Park that began in the early 1970s. We're honored that she authored 15 articles for GOLDENSEAL. She's survived by her husband of 62 years, Bill.

Photo by Carl E. Feather.

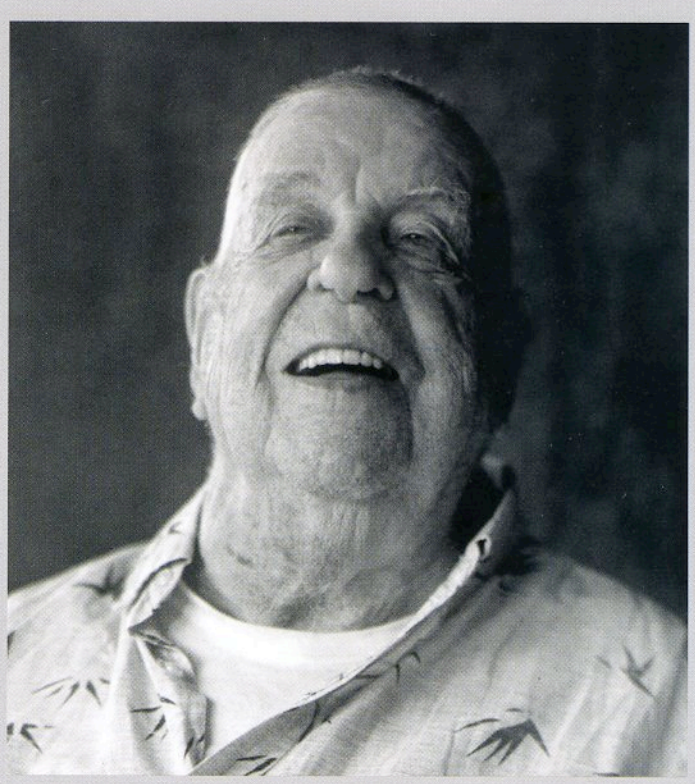


Photo by Lisa Elmaleh.

Jim Davis
(1932 – 2021)

Jim Davis passed away on September 25, 2021, at his home in Oceana (Wyoming County). A native of Heaters (Braxton County), he graduated from Lumberport High School and lived many years on Cunningham Run in Shinnston (Harrison County). A Navy veteran, he was a certified welder and electrician. As featured in Carl E. Feather's article from our Winter 2008 issue, Jim built giant metal sculptures of coal miners and flowers, carved eagles from logs, and wrote poems. He also played the harmonica, lifted weights, and rode motorcycles. He credited all his work to the Lord: "Whatever a person does, I think before you can do anything, you got to ask for God's help." He leaves behind his wife of 65 years, Virginia Mae Hall Davis.

Al Leonard
(1918 – 2021)

Al Leonard [featured in our Fall 2021 issue] passed away at his Romney home on November 3, 2021, at age 103. As his obituary in the *Hampshire Review* notes, Al, a native of Missouri, "came to Hampshire County for a fishing trip in 1959 and never left." In Laiken Blankenship's GOLDENSEAL article about Al, he talked about his lifelong love of hunting and fishing but particularly about trapping foxes, which he considered the cleverest adversary. When asked who taught him to trap, Al replied, "The fox learned me, taught me how to watch what I was doing." Al got to see a copy of the article before he passed, and the cover photo—taken by Lisa Elmaleh—was published with his obituary.

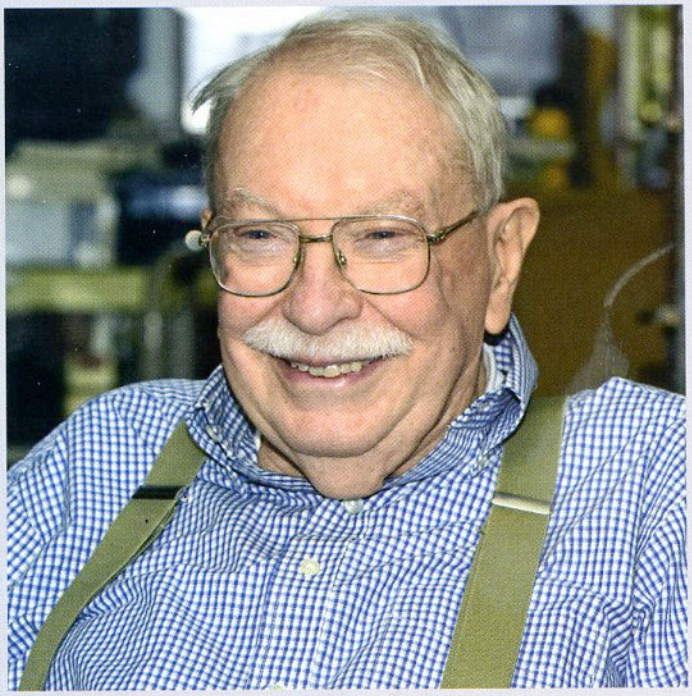


Photo by Steve Brightwell.

Bill Kelley Jr.
(1934 – 2022)

Bill Kelley passed away on January 23, 2022, at age 87 [see Spring 2021]. A graduate of Stonewall Jackson High School, he began his long career as a broadcast journalist in 1954 with WCHS-TV in Charleston and was a cameraman for WVU's first-ever televised football game that same year. After covering a chemical explosion in Nitro in 1957, he moved on to WSAZ-TV in Huntington. That year, he filmed a violent school integration protest in Matoaka (Mercer County). He also covered major national events, such as the 1960 Democratic primary, and tragedies, such as the 1967 Silver Bridge Disaster in Point Pleasant. In 1969, he helped launch our state's first Public Broadcasting TV station in Nitro. In his retirement, he spent countless hours doing work for his church, Charleston's Emmanuel Baptist, and helped identify people and places in historic news film for the West Virginia State Archives. He's survived by his wife of 65 years, Alice Anderson Kelley.

Photo by John Baumgartner, courtesy of the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame.

George Crumb
(1929 – 2022)

George Crumb died on February 6, 2022, at age 92. The Charleston native was one of the most significant avant-garde classical composers of the 20th century. When he was 17, his *Poem for Orchestra* was performed in concert by the Charleston (now West Virginia) Symphony Orchestra, with his father playing clarinet and his mother on cello. He graduated from Charleston High School and that city's Mason College of Music & Fine Arts before becoming a music professor at the University of Pennsylvania (1965 – 1997). In 1968, he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for music for his groundbreaking *Echoes of Time and the River: Four Processionals for Orchestra,* which, among other unusual elements, featured a rhythm representing West Virginia's state motto, *Montani Semper Liberi* ("mountaineers are always free"). In 2001, he received a Grammy for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for *Star Child.* For his contributions to the world of music, George Crumb was one of the initial inductees into the West Virginia Music Hall of Fame in 2007.

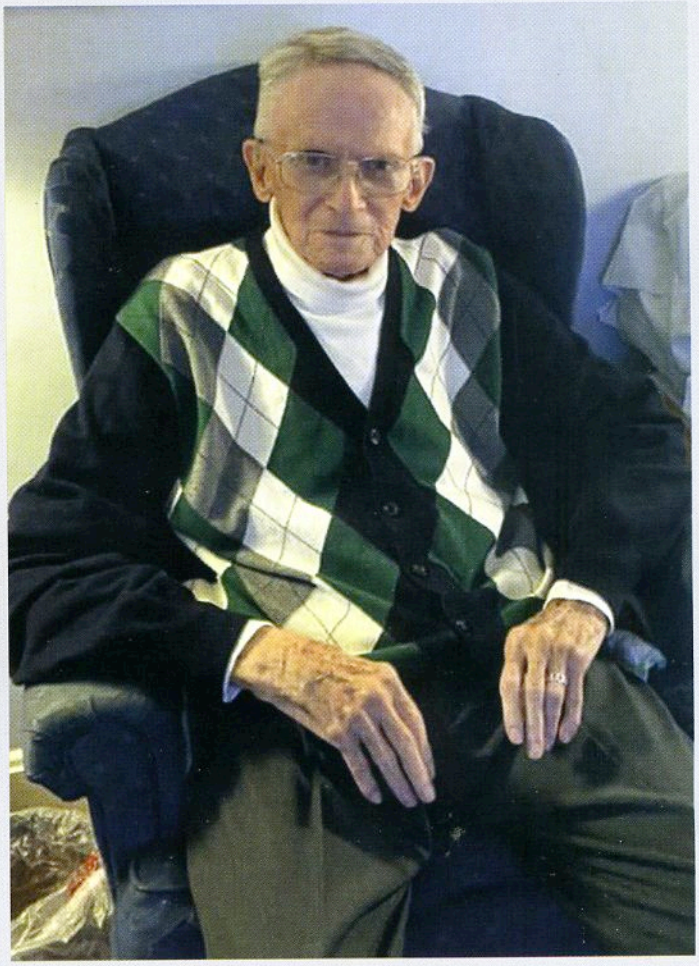
John W. Payne
(1920 – 2021)
By Kevin Payne

John W. Payne, who wrote two articles for GOLDENSEAL [Summer 2011, Winter 2015] and was the subject of another [Winter 2014], passed away on September 27, 2021, at age 100. He was born November 22, 1920, in Belington (Barbour County), the son of Lewis and Pearl (Lantz) Payne. He grew up on a farm off Route 250 with his three brothers and two sisters. After graduating from Belington High School (1940), he moved to Baltimore, manufacturing B-26s for Glenn L. Martin Aircraft. During World War II, he was an aerial engineer in the 13th Troop Carrier Squadron in the South Pacific. He served in five campaigns and rose to staff sergeant. After the war, he served nine years in the Air Force Reserve but was recalled to active duty during the Korean War. In 1954, he married Norma Sinsel and settled in Columbus, Ohio, where he worked for North American Aircraft. John and Norma were inseparable until her death in 1993. They had two daughters, Cathy and Jan, and a son, Kevin. John later worked in management at CVI. One of his career highlights was working on NASA's Viking 1 Lander. Along with his team members, John's name and signature were engraved on a plaque on the spacecraft, which landed on Mars in 1976. He also was an integral part of the team that built the first MRI full-body scanner. He always served the Lord. After coming back from Korea, he was a trustee at Belington's Corley Church before moving to Columbus, where he was the lay leader for Miller Avenue Church; he also preached on Wednesday nights and later at Whitehall Church. But his heart remained in West Virginia. He returned home every chance he got, avidly followed WVU and Marshall athletics, and subscribed to *The Barbour Democrat, Wonderful West Virginia,* and GOLDENSEAL. After retiring, he loved spending time with his grandchildren: Cara, Christa, and Craig Moore, and Susanna, Sheila, Shelleigh, and Matthew Harris. He traveled often to the State Archives and county courthouses to research family history, which he published in *The Payne Family Chronicles*. His garden was the envy of his neighbors. He also was a skilled woodworker who restored antique violins and a cello. He was laid to rest next to his wife, Norma, in Barbour Memorial Cemetery.

Courtesy of the family.

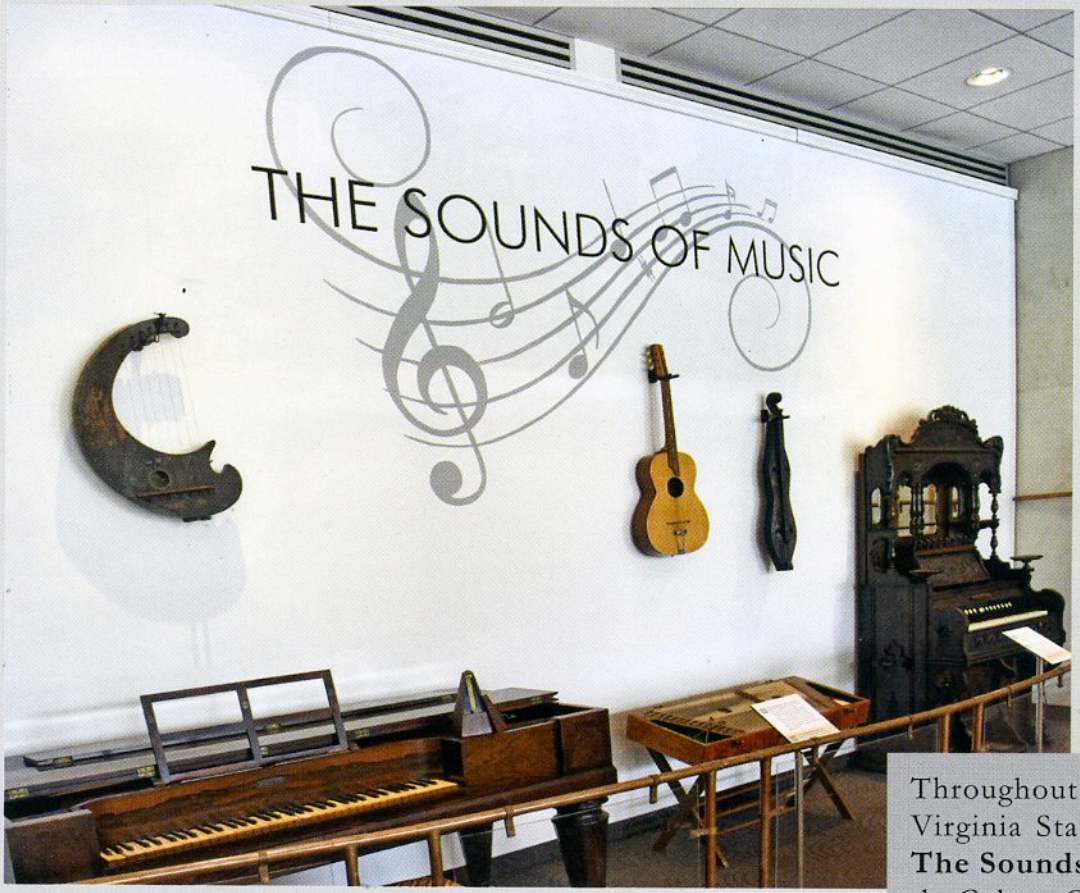
Fred Barkey
(1933 – 2022)
By Stan Bumgardner

Teacher and historian Fred Barkey passed away on February 10, 2022. He's survived by his wife of 67 years, Sandra. I knew Fred before I can remember; when I came into this world in the 1960s, my father and Fred worked together at Morris Harvey College (now University of Charleston). In addition, Fred taught at St. Albans High School and Marshall University College of Graduate Studies. I was never a formal student of Fred's, but I learned an awful lot from him—and not just about history. He loved to tell stories of everyday working people. He wrote about coal miners and glass workers as if they were royalty. To him, everybody was uniquely interesting, and no one person was more important than another. Fred thought everybody had a story to tell, and he was always ready to listen. Fred was one of the preeminent scholars of West Virginia's labor history—not just the stories of unions but what it was like to work in the back-breaking jobs that built modern America. He was kind-hearted and had a gift for getting people to share the things that made them laugh and the things that broke their hearts. A big part of his gift was his sense of humor and perfect deadpan delivery of a punch-line, which helped him connect with students and those he interviewed. He could also get very serious when talking about our state's tragedies. To Fred, a coal disaster wasn't about a date or statistics; it was about families and communities being torn apart. Whether he was interviewing, teaching, or working alongside you, he treated you with a level of respect seldom seen these days. Please dig into your GOLDENSEAL archives or visit a library and look for the five articles he wrote for our magazine, featuring Belgian glassworker George Delforge [Oct.-Dec. 1975]; Michael Owens and glassmaking [Spring 1996]; his mother-in-law, Alice Cassady Holstein, and her experiences growing up in a coal town [Spring 1997]; Belgian and French glassworkers [Summer 2001]; and his father-in-law's role at the Battle of Blair Mountain [Spring 2016]. He once described historical research as being "at the heart of life's great adventure." Fred made the lives of everyone he encountered a much greater adventure.



Courtesy of the family.

New Music Exhibit at the Culture Center



Throughout the summer, the West Virginia State Museum will host **The Sounds of Music** exhibit at the Culture Center in Charleston. It features a wide variety of antique instruments—from autoharps to zithers—honoring the Mountain State's rich musical history. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

Correction
On p. 45 of our Spring 2022 issue, this photo of Lee Hammons was misidentified as Sherman Hammons. Photo by Rob Gay.

A midafternoon jam session at the 2019 Appalachian String Band Music Festival at Clifftop.

Clifftop

Three Decades of Music, Family, and Magic

Text by Stan Bumgardner and photos by Steve Brightwell

They say every room has an acoustic sweet spot, where all the sounds blend perfectly together. Sometimes, you can find it in nature. For me, one of those places is in Fayette County, about 100 yards up from the "Bottom," under a canopy of trees, during the Appalachian String Band Music Festival (better known as Clifftop). I try to get there around midnight, when the music is in high gear. Hundreds of musicians, spread out over acres and mostly hidden in the darkness, are playing different tunes, often in different keys, but seem to be in unison. In theory, it should sound utterly dissonant, but when I relax and stop trying to zero in on one specific tune, the cacophony becomes a tightly choreographed symphony of fiddles, banjos, guitars, basses, mandolins, accordions, and instruments jerry-rigged from whatever campers can put their hands on. Some of us wait all year for this moment—or, in the

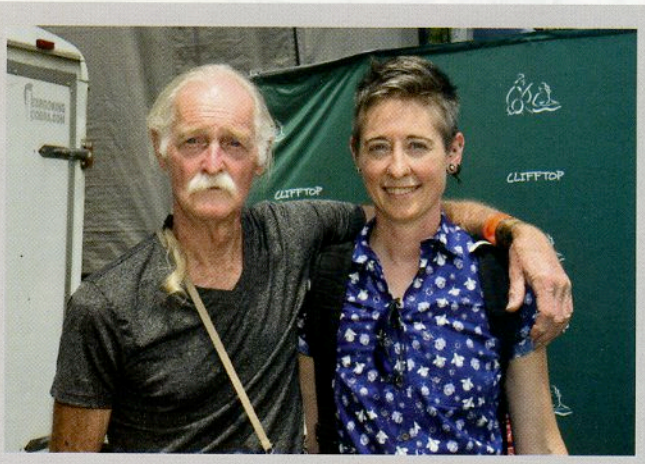
case of 2022, three years since the pandemic canceled the last two festivals.

Clifftop takes place near the rim of the New River Gorge at Camp Washington-Carver, which opened in 1942 as the nation's first statewide 4-H camp for African-Americans [see p. 24]. As a young 4-H'er here, singer-storyteller extraordinaire W. I. "Bill" Hairston learned what's often called the Black National Anthem, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" [see Spring 2021]. In the early 1960s, he attended our state's last segregated 4-H camp at Washington-Carver and first integrated one at Jackson's Mill (Lewis County) in the same year. He'd later become a popular stage emcee at Clifftop.

Over the last three decades, Clifftop has taken on a life of its own, thanks to the devoted attendees who've made it what it is. In many ways, they *are* the event. Each year, it's a summer home away from home for thousands, as the site turns into a mountain village of tents and motor homes, some with their own identities. Carterville. McManustan. The Cajun Tent. Geezer Hill—a name embraced by the musicians who camp near the original 80-year-old camp water tower and like to hit the sack a little early (about 11 p.m., early for here).

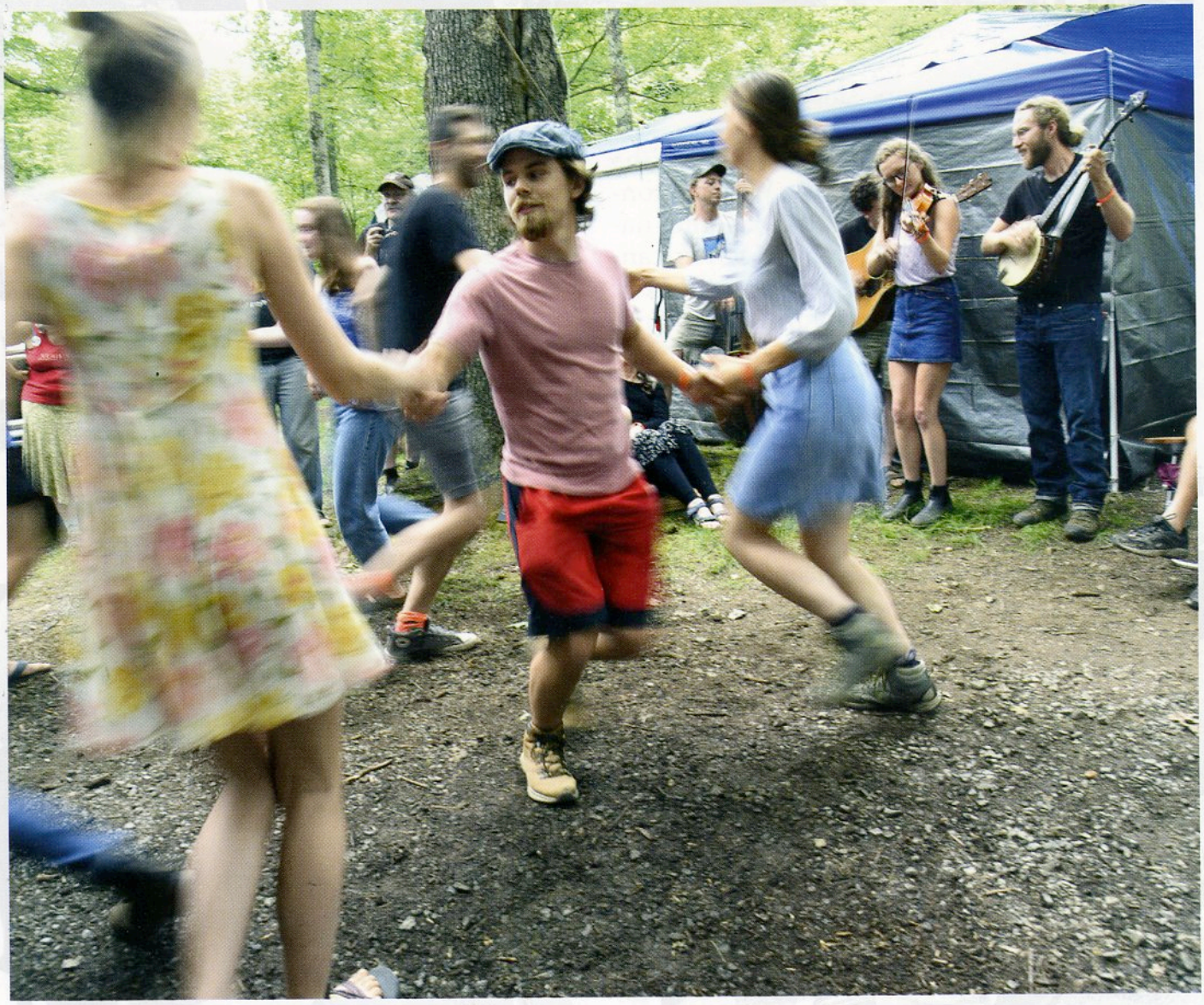
Like so much about West Virginia, Clifftop really can't be explained, only experienced. Since I have trouble putting it into words, I like to ask folks what it means to them. I first posed that question to a retired couple about 20 years ago. They were traveling cross country in an RV going to music festivals. When I inquired, "What makes Clifftop different from the others?" the husband responded matter-of-factly, "There *are* no other festivals like Clifftop."

Just as some people trek to national parks or baseball stadiums each summer, others follow music festivals. Back in the late 1980s, one of these musical travelers, Charleston's Will Carter, noticed a gap in the old-time music calendar the first weekend in August—just before the long-running Fiddler's Convention in Galax, Virginia. Festivalgoers on their way to Galax had a week to kill and nowhere to go. At the time, Will played bass in the Green Meadow String Band with Bobby Taylor (fiddle), Mark Payne (banjo), and Tom King (guitar). As Will tells it, "I'd been to Galax and Mount Airy. Those are great festivals, but they're not in this pristine setting," motioning to the luscious trees around him at Camp Washington-Carver. "I saw the potential for this as a great facility to host the old-time community."



Richard and Rachel Eddy, Morgantown, W.Va.

Many parents bring their kids to the festival. For Rachel Eddy, it was the other way around. She brought her dad, Richard, here for the first time about 15 years ago. Then, he started bringing his younger daughter Libby. Both Rachel and Libby are now professional musicians. Rachel recalls, "The first time I came, I was 19, and it was 20 years ago. I'd played old-time for 10 years but had no idea there was a whole community that did this. People unplug their phones. It's a time to just be present. It's like a festival created by the attendees. I feel like for many musicians, Clifftop each year is the ending of one spiritual journey and the beginning of another. It brings my whole year together and inspires me for the next."



The Big Possum String Band throws a CD release party at Clifftop.

He brainstormed with Bobby (2010 recipient of the Vandalia Award—our state's highest folklife honor) about a unique music angle and with then-site director George Jordan about logistics. Bill Drennen, former commissioner of what's now the state Department of Arts, Culture & History, signed off, and the Appalachian String Band Music Festival was born in 1990.

Will and Bobby borrowed some standard contest ideas from other festivals but added a distinct twist. Will enjoys playing other music in addition to old-time—country, rock, blues, jazz, which aren't necessarily embraced by all fans of traditional music. "When I went to other festivals," he remembers, "they didn't have a space for our style in the contests. So, we created the Nontraditional Band Contest for Clifftop." He laughs and adds, "It was a little bit selfish because I wanted a contest my band could compete in." Now known as the Neo-Traditional Band Contest, it's become an all-day staple on Friday each year. These bands look for creative ways to stand out from the rest. You'll hear instruments made from PVC pipe, cellos played as basses, and sometimes even a copy of GOLDENSEAL brushed like a snare drum. One year, a band dazzled the crowd with

Woody McKenzie,
Rich Creek, Va.

"The best thing for me is that I've been a teacher most of my life. I'm what you call a semi-professional musician. I don't come here to show off. I love to just play with other musicians. It's great that people come here to learn, and you don't have to be a virtuoso. I met a couple of girls from Japan who were playing, and I was dancing. I'm 67 years old, but I was like a little kid again."

Barbara Rosner,
Frankfort, Ky.

"This is where it all started for me. I lived 30-plus years on the West Coast. I got involved in a weekly old-time jam, but the songs didn't sound right because they're so rooted in the place where they came from. As an outsider, I wanted to know what was going on. Once I experienced the music and community here, it hooked me. This is where so many traditions all come together. Clifftop is like the motherlode of festivals. There's something specifically West Virginian about the hospitality whenever I come here."

traditional Hawaiian music. Another time, a group of teenagers from Japan played Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze" on string band instruments.

Clifftop also hosts a Traditional Band Contest on Saturday and contests for individual fiddlers, banjo players, and flatfoot dancers. The previous year's band winners are invited back the next year to perform a one-hour concert. Some 32 years after the festival's inception, Bobby Taylor still coordinates the contests, bringing in some of the nation's best musicians as judges.

One thing that's quickly apparent at Clifftop is the level of respect campers have for one another and for the site. Many are now close friends who keep in touch throughout the year. When most festivals end, the grounds look like a litter bomb has gone off. Not at Clifftop. The campers take care of the place like it's their own, and in many ways, it is.

Giving campers a sense of ownership was part of the original plan. As Will recalls, handing out so much autonomy was a little risky in the beginning: "The Carver staff initially thought every campsite should be marked off, like in state parks. I said to draw lines for the roads, tell people where not to camp, and the campers will do the rest." The late George Sheaves, who supervised the site for two decades, is an unforgettable figure in the annals of Clifftop. A very straight-forward guy who ran a taut ship, he expected Will's approach to lead to chaos. But after that first festival, George remarked that "these people left the place cleaner than when they got here."

"Family" is probably the most common response I get when asking why Clifftop is so special. Not only does it feel like a big family, but many of the young adults

Keith and Forrest McManus,
Trinity, N.C., and Prescott, Ariz.

Keith's band, Stewed Mulligan, performed at the first Clifftop in 1990, and he's been a fixture ever since. He recalls, "We'd been to Galax and other festivals, but there was no camping festival with music like this in West Virginia. From the beginning, we were talking about passing on the music traditions, and it's still happening.

"The other part of the festival is family. We see these people once a year, and some are my own family. For instance . . . this is one of the few times I get to see my son [Forrest]. We've slowed down a lot with festivals, but Clifftop is a *must*."

Keith, who started a weekly old-time jam in Morgantown [see p. 82], attracts hundreds to his Clifftop campsite, known as McManustan: "I'll be paying attention to playing. Then, all of a sudden, I look up and think, 'Where did all these people come from?' Sometimes, the music takes over, and people can't stop clogging. They just dance, dance, dance!"

who grew up here now bring their own kids. It's always amazing to see children playing fiddles and banjos here with incredible talent, intensity, and enthusiasm. Paul Roomsburg is part of the Romney Camp, a group of Hampshire County old-time musicians and their friends who've attended for two decades. In 2019, he was joined on stage in the Traditional Band Contest by his son-in-law Luke Suddah and grandsons Kade and Lane. "It took me 20 years to get to this point," Paul says with immense pride. Like me, he has trouble describing the festival: "People ask me to tell them about Clifftop. It can't be explained. There's music all around all night. It's magical."

Sierra Ferrell, originally from Charleston and now an acclaimed Rounder Records artist, uses that same word: "More than any other festival, Clifftop is about the people here. It's *magical*."

Dakota Karper, another Hampshire Countian, grew up at the festival and now runs The Cat and the Fiddle music school in Capon Bridge. Clifftop has been an essential part of her life: "As a child, I was running around learning to make friends with people a little different from myself, then exploring my independence as a teen, and then finding my passion and career in music through my 20s. Clifftop is a flame that's kept my drive for folk music burning and inspired me to share the warmth with others in my community when I return home."

As a youth, Dakota apprenticed with Joe Herrmann of Paw Paw (Mineral County).

What We Did during Our Summer Vacations without Clifftop?

As much as folks missed Clifftop in 2020 and 2021, many found time for their own projects.

Clifftop regulars from Hampshire County built a mini-version of Camp Washington-Carver's landmark water tower and hosted their own "North Clifftop" in summer 2021. They wound up with more than 40 musicians camping out and playing old-time music all weekend.

The Mississippi Travelers—a string band from Hopewell Junction, New York, featuring Harry Bolick, Brian Slattery, James DiCroce, and Charlie Shaw—recorded a CD with original tunes named for places near Clifftop: Smoot, Rupert, Lewisburg, Rainelle, Midland Trail, Sam Black Church, Danese, and Charmco, among others. Brian writes, "Harry Bolick . . . wrote a series of tunes early in the pandemic named after all the towns around Clifftop. . . . They sound to me now like part cry of grief, part hope for the future, and part testament to the resilience of a most wondrous and vibrant community of friends and musicians, scattered across the country and world, who managed to keep the flame alive during a dark and windy time."

Joe and his wife, Sam, played at the first Clifftop in 1990 with the Critton Hollow String Band and have been regulars ever since. Joe underscores what so many say about Clifftop: "It's like a reunion of family. We've known some of these people for 40 years." Sam adds, "He took the words right out of my mouth."

Some musicians, like John Nelson of Hurricane (Putnam County), plan their whole year around this event. When Clifftop ends each year, John starts a much-followed clock on Facebook that counts down to the minute and second of next year's festival. He's one of hundreds who camps outside Camp Washington-Carver ahead of time to get a

(Right-left) Paul Roomsburg of Augusta (Hampshire County) plays in the Traditional Band Contest with his grandsons Kade and Lane and his son-in-law Luke Suddah.

prime camping spot when the gates open. To say the least, relatively flat campsites at the top of the New River Gorge are at a premium. John shows up early for the fellowship as much as anything: "It's a chance to surround myself with family, friends, and music. There's no other place I've ever been that is as magical as that mountaintop. It feels like home."

Music is the common thread that brings us all together. There's something for everyone—from players to dancers to listeners. Want to learn a tune? Sit in on a 20-minute jam of "June Apple" or more obscure tunes that musicians save up just to share at Clifftop. It's an intense master class where you try to absorb as much as you can in a few days.

While the contests are a treat, the best music you're likely to hear takes place far from the stage, often in the wee hours of the morning around tents and lanterns. A first-time Clifftoper named Smiley from St. Simons, Georgia, competed in the 2019 Neo-Traditional Band Contest with the band Beurrrl (with three r's). He was blown away by the experience: "A friend of mine brought me here. I had no idea there was all of this. A lot of the really good bands aren't even competing!"

Harpers Ferry (Jefferson County) native Chance McCoy is a Grammy-winning multi-instrumentalist who played with the band Old Crow Medicine Show from 2012 to 2019. These days, he has a recording studio and writes music not too far from here in Monroe County. The festival has been a vital part of his musical life: "Clifftop was the event of the year, much like the old-time tent revival for early settlers or the summer solstice in the Old World—every day of the year leading up to that celebration. It's a reunion of our musical community, where individuals from far-flung hol-

As Sam Leslie of Evergreen, Col., found out, playing a copy of GOLDENSEAL as a percussion instrument during the Neo-Traditional Band Contest can earn you a free subscription to our magazine.

The Camp Washington-Carver Staff

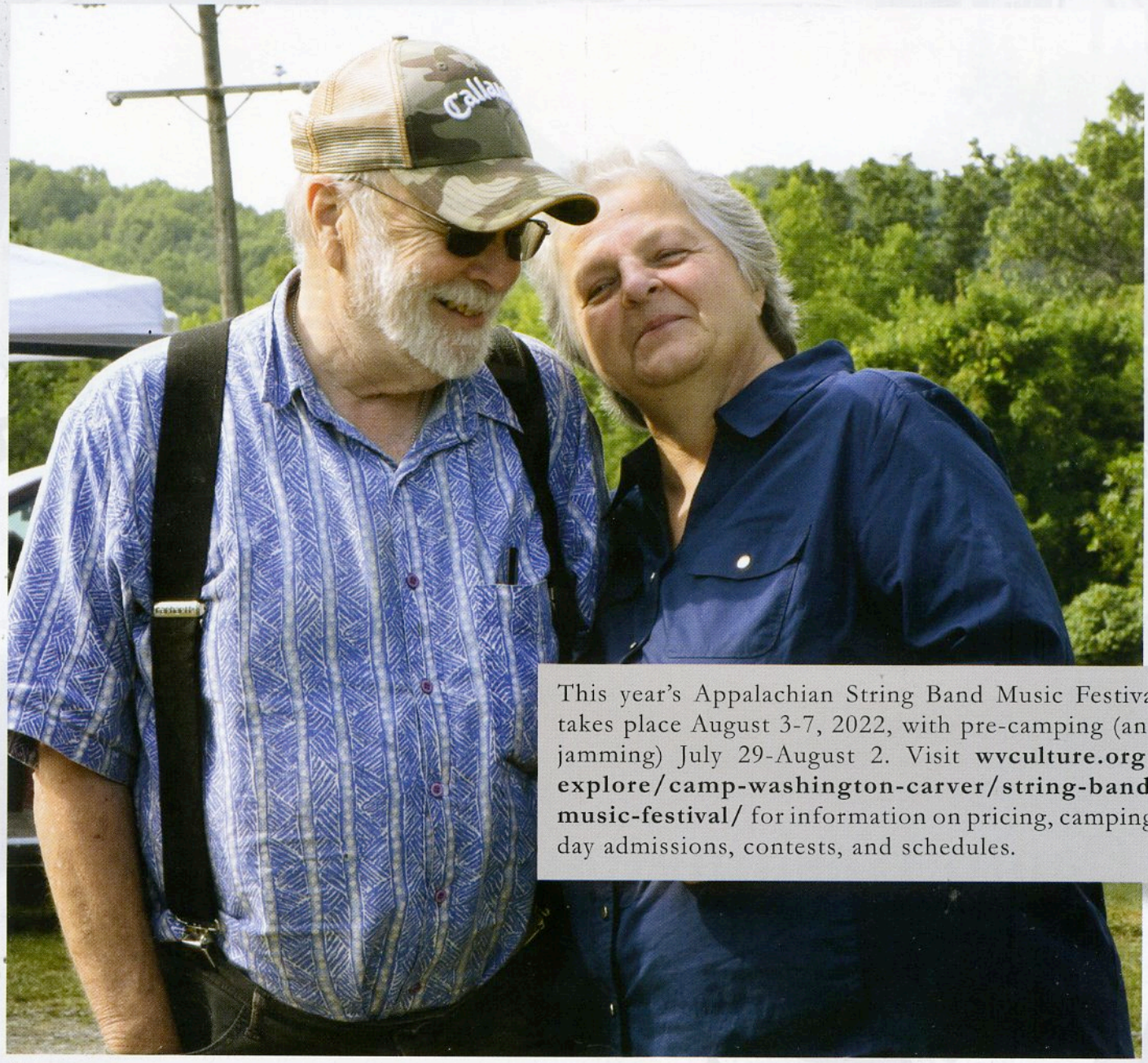
Floyd Ramsey was a familiar sight at Clifftop for 22 years. He retired at the end of 2019. Floyd could always be found at the congested top of the hill, directing traffic to the rhythm of his whistle. If you've ever jammed up the works by parking where you're not supposed to, you've met Floyd. But he's also helped campers haul ice to their sites, get their cars out of the mud, or call medics in case of emergency.

Clifftop wouldn't be what it is if not for the dedicated staff. You'll be hard-pressed to find a festival that's any better maintained. They work yearlong to prep the site (cutting the grass takes weeks) and nearly constantly during the festival. So, whenever you're at Clifftop, be sure to thank the staff for making Camp Washington-Carver the exceptional place it is.

Clifftop will never forget the Rev. Fred "Tomato Freddie" Swedburg (1948 – 2021)—his great humor, his music, and those delicious heirloom tomatoes.

lers to foreign countries gather to share the music we all so dearly love. I still come here often, although I keep a low profile these days, mostly watching from the shady edge of the woods and shaking hands with old friends I run across."

At this year's festival, we'll be remembering some of those friends who are no longer with us. On March 4 of this year, Marvin Gaster of North Carolina passed away. He was a cherished fixture at Clifftop, as was "Tomato Freddie" Swedburg of Orange, Massachusetts, who died of cancer in January 2021. In addition to playing music, Fred loved giving away his heirloom tomatoes to other campers, always with a big smile on his face. In 2019, he told me why Clifftop was so special to him: "It used to be about the music, but now it's about the friends. The friendships are the



This year's Appalachian String Band Music Festival takes place August 3-7, 2022, with pre-camping (and jamming) July 29-August 2. Visit **wvculture.org/explore/camp-washington-carver/string-band-music-festival/** for information on pricing, camping, day admissions, contests, and schedules.

Two of the best banjo pickers around: 2019 Vandalia Award recipient Dwight Diller of Pocahontas County and Kim Johnson of Kanawha County.

best ever." Fred's obituary mentioned his love of Clifftop, and Clifftop will never forget him and the others we've lost over the years. Being part of a big family means carrying on the spirit of those who can't be with us in person anymore.

So, it's the big family reunion, the music, the beauty and history of the place, and so much more rolled into one magical experience. Perhaps Steve Austin of Portland, Maine, sums up how most of us feel about Clifftop: "This is like the real world. When I leave, I have to go back to the other world."

Speaking for myself, I wish the real world was a lot more like Clifftop: a big friendly family with great round-the-clock music

STAN BUMGARDNER is the editor of GOLDENSEAL. STEVE BRIGHTWELL is the photographer for the Department of Arts, Culture & History.

Camp Washington-Carver at Clifftop (Fayette County), 1950s. Both photos courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Camp Washington-Carver Collection.

Camp Washington-Carver Turns 80

By Stan Bumgardner

Clifftop is held at Camp Washington-Carver, West Virginia's Black 4-H camp before public facilities were desegregated. Named for education pioneers Booker T. Washington (who grew up in West Virginia) and George Washington Carver, it was dedicated near the old coal-mining town of Clifftop on July 26, 1942, as the nation's first statewide 4-H camp for African-Americans.

The 4-H movement started in the early 1900s as a series of agricultural clubs for young people but evolved into a wide range of programs, including nutrition and meal planning, cooking, flower and vegetable gardening, canning, quilting, and first aid [see Michael Meador's article, Summer 1984]. Even though county camps were at the heart of the 4-H movement, by 1929, West Virginia had whites-only camps in 44 of our 55 counties but none for African-Americans.

The Extension Service, which oversees 4-H, was headquartered at WVU, while Black Extension work was stationed out of West Virginia State College (now University), our state's African-American land-grant college. In 1936, that college's president, John W. Davis, appealed to the legislature for a statewide Black 4-H camp, with cabins and a swimming pool. At the time, our state's only other public pool for African-Americans was behind the Black high school in Clarksburg.

Music has always been a big part of Camp Washington-Carver's history.

With funding from two New Deal programs—the Works Progress Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps—construction of Camp Washington-Carver began in 1940. One of the first things built was the water tower, still the tallest structure on the northside of the New River Gorge. Within two years, work was completed on all the buildings, including the Great Chestnut Lodge, the largest American chestnut building in the world.

By the 1950s, some 1,600 African-Americans were attending the camp annually, including hundreds of adults who trained in everything from farming to teaching to homemaking to coal-mine safety. In the early 1960s, West Virginia's 4-H programs were integrated, and Washington-Carver was used increasingly less. In 1979, the college transferred the facility to the state Department of Culture & History (now Arts, Culture & History) to be used as a "rural cultural arts center." For many years, the department operated the African-American Heritage Arts Camp, honoring the legacy of the site's founding.

Today, the facilities are available for rent for reunions and other functions. The Appalachian String Band Music Festival (Clifftop), which started in 1990, is the camp's largest program. As the late author Norman Jordan, who taught at the arts camp in the 1980s, noted, "Regardless of what [the camp] becomes, its roots will always represent a landmark for African-American unity and achievement" [see Winter 1999].

Photographer Brennish Thomson used a slow single-shot exposure to capture this late-night jam at Clifftop.

The Clifftop "Spirit Jam"

By Rebecca Kimmons

Camp Washington-Carver was awfully quiet in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic, but some say the place beloved by folks around the world hums with music all the time, if you have ears to hear.

It was late one night at Clifftop some 20 years ago, after the dance at the Great Chestnut Lodge had ended. Dance caller and fiddler Tim Jenkins was walking down to the "Bottom," where the young'uns and the Cajuns and the wild children of the woods go to camp, where the music goes on nonstop for days, boiling down to a murmur in the tranquil hours just before dawn. Looking for some fun, Tim heard the clear strains of a melody from somewhere over the hill.

He gazed down into the dense woods but could see no path, no action. Off in the distance, though, the sound of haunting music filled the night air, and he couldn't help himself. He turned off the path and headed toward this wondrous tune he'd never heard before.

He followed his ears to a clearing where the music was pulsing. Two men, sitting on either side of a lantern, were playing banjos. Their clothes were old and worn. The lantern was old-timey looking. Its flickering flame lit the men's faces. The tune wound around and around, as old-time music does, and in no time, it was winding around in Tim's head. The men never looked up at him, and he didn't in-

terrupt them. He just stood in the shadows. Listening.

After a while, Tim headed back up the hill to summon his friends. When he turned back for one last look, the clearing was dark. The men and the lantern had vanished. But the tune played on in his head as he walked back.

"Where'd you go?" his friends wanted to know.

"It might be a little difficult to explain," he told them. "But listen to this tune. Have you ever heard it before?" He fiddled the notes and told his friends where it came from.

One youngster in the group was Ryan Smith, a fiddler from Pittsburgh with deep family roots in the Beckley area. The tune wound its way into Ryan's head, too, and he quickly picked it up. The "Spirit Jam" soon made its way into Clifftop lore.

One languid Clifftop afternoon several years ago, my son, Chris Kimmons, asked Ryan to play it. Chris worked to catch it on the banjo. The tune has a melancholy feel that's characteristic of many fiddle tunes. Some call it modal, folk slang for tunes that combine minor and major scales to create a seductive, eerie sound. Ryan then told me where the tune had come from.

"I don't write fiddle tunes," Tim Jenkins said, when I talked to him in September 2020. "I was definitely channeling the music."

I asked him if he was frightened by that ghostly scene 20 years ago. "No," he answered, "I'm not afraid of these kinds of things. I'm open to them."

REBECCA KIMMONS is one-third of the a cappella trio Bare Bones and is well-known at Clifftop and other festivals. Her fiction is included in the 2019 anthology *Fearless: Women's Journeys to Self-Empowerment*. She lives in Charleston with her husband, Bill, a longtime emcee at Clifftop. This is her fifth contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Photo of John Lilly by Steve Brightwell.

Kingdom

By John Lilly

A kingdom was made in the shade of the oak and the sycamore tree
A beautiful spot where cares were forgot and no one had a TV
Where the perps and twerps and geeks and freaks gathered down by the stream
Such a beautiful kingdom or was it only a dream?

It started way up on Geezer Hill for the old and the old at heart
And went clear down to McManustan where the people sleep in their cars.
Some made their homes in nylon domes and soared on angel wings
They played their five- and six-string harps and made their fiddles sing

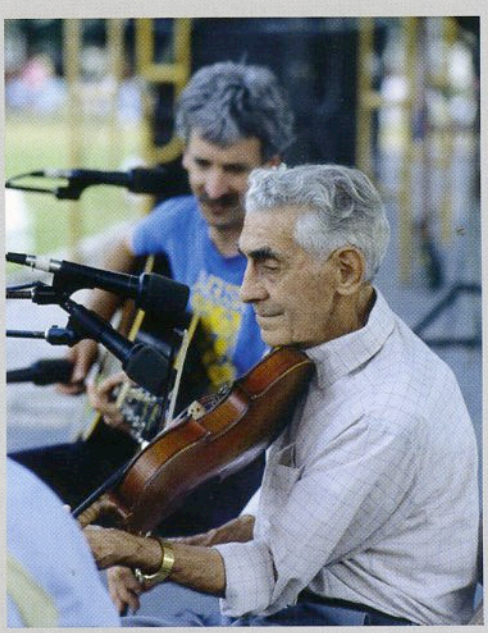
Some found a little romance, some made a tune or two
Some learned at night that the chiggers still bite and the spiders will climb in your shoe
Some of them thought they were pirates, some never went to bed
Some danced till dawn with a red dress on while the music danced in their head.

JOHN LILLY was the editor of GOLDENSEAL for 18 years (1997-2015) and is an award-winning songwriter, vocalist, and instrumentalist.

Clifftop: The Early Yeaars

These photos from the mid-1990s were taken by Michael Keller, courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives, Division of Culture & History Collection.

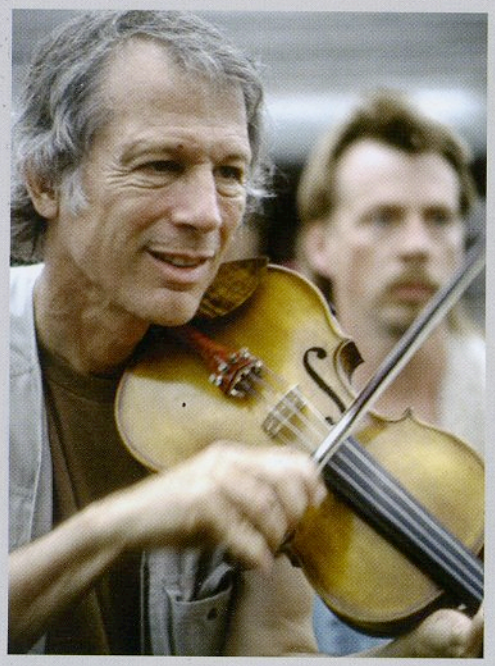
(Left-right) Jimmy Costa and Jim McGee at the old Mail Pouch sign.



(Right-left) Melvin Wine and Gerry Milnes.

Lester McCumbers.

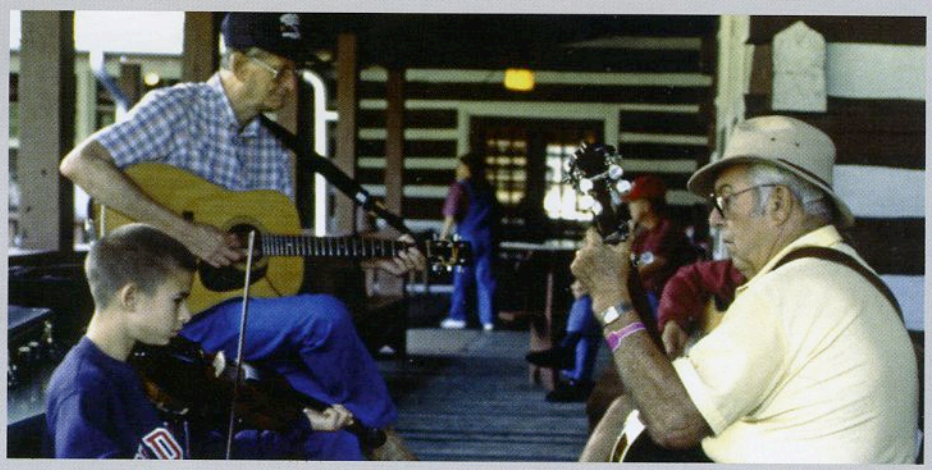
(Left-right) Sam and Joe Herrmann and Paul Kovac.



John Hartford.

(Left-right) Molly Stouten, Alice Gerrard, and Gail Gillespie.

(Left-right) Joe Newberry, Jody Stecher, and Jim Nelson.



(Left-right) Jake Krack, Ray Adkins, and Jack Strickland.

Ralph Blizard.

John Blisard of Allegheny Echoes helps a young fiddler.

Fly fishing for trout in the Allegheny Highlands. Photo by Ron Snow, courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives (WVSA), Departments of Commerce & Natural Resources Collection.

The Best Reason

By Michael Evans Snyder

It was a fine July day. The streams were up from recent rains, and I wanted to catch brook trout. I was way up the headwaters of the Potomac River over in Pendleton County. Green mountain walls surrounded me, and bright sunshine was bombarding the glistening little fast-water stream flowing through the rugged valley. The end of the narrow road was directly ahead.

I didn't know the country well, so I pulled my truck over when I saw a couple of boys fishing. The youngsters climbed up the bank to meet me.

"Look at this trout!" the smaller boy exclaimed. Clutched tightly in his fist was a small, very dead, but very handsome wild brook trout.

"Pretty brookie, boys!" I exclaimed. I told them who I was and that I lived over the mountains a ways.

"There's lots more of 'em up the river," I was informed, quickly sending my hopes upwards several notches. I talked with them for a while, confessing that I wasn't sure which branch of the stream they were referring to.

"Come on, we'll show you," the larger boy said. He then ran past a nearby trailer, hollered, and we were off into the dense trees and rhododendron.

I was glad to accept their invitation as guides. My only previous trip to this locale was a hot and unsuccessful one with my son many summers earlier. But a friend

told me this little-known stream was indeed full of brookies—*Salvelinus fontinalis*, the native trout of the Appalachians.

Brothers Jimmy and Ronnie were my lively guides, about ages 13 and 11, respectively. Clad in shorts and sneakers, the boys led me past a nice pool dammed up with rocks.

"That's our swimmin' hole," Jimmy exclaimed. The first branch above it was an icy-cold spring run. Three trout shot past my legs as I crossed. A good sign. Sparky, their little yellow feist, was in the lead. He was a first-rate squirrel dog, the boys let me know.

"There. Now that's a good hole," said Jimmy, pointing to a pool several feet deep running below a slanting, gnarled sycamore.

"Let's see you catch one," he challenged skeptically. The boys were vaguely aware of fly fishing but had never seen any proof that it was in the same league as eight-pound spinning line and fishing worms.

The water was clear and uncommonly high for dog days, not much lower than late spring. The fly I had on was a beadhead Prince nymph. My first cast was right on target and taken almost instantly. After a brief but scrappy tussle, I brought the gleaming wild brook trout to hand and quickly released it back into the bright fast-moving water.

"Wow!" Ronnie yelled when the trout hit. "Ain't ya gonna keep him?" he shouted in stunned belief as I let the fish go.

"Nope. I debarb my hooks and let most of my fish go, guys. That little trout will be a lot bigger when we catch it next year. Let's go catch some more!"

"Alright, Mike, let's go!" he shouted. Somewhere upstream in the dense forest, Sparky was barking with intense gusto.

"Got one treed—told 'ya he was a squirrel dog!" Ronnie proudly bragged.

As we waded up the boulder-dotted stream, I told the boys to stay behind me and on my left because I didn't want to impale them on my back cast. But I only appeared to be leading. Sparky, his wet tawny fur now dripping, was the real leader as he dashed merrily ahead.

In a short time, I was into another small brookie. It bore the same mottled green sides and vivid crimson spots, each surrounded by sky-blue halos with orange, black, and white accents on its fins and flanks. The brookie, a char—its true taxonomy—is the harlequin of the salmonoid world.

"You're puttin' this one back, too, ain't ya?" Jimmy stated matter-of-factly.

"Yep. Watch how I hold it and just push the fly out of its lip. Now we'll put it back in the water facing upstream."

We waded through some shady stretches; others dappled in sunlight. We had to skip several nice pools as there wasn't enough room to cast under low-hanging branches. As we moved on, we began to pick up more trout in briskly flowing pocket water, showing the boys that a lot of trout do indeed exist outside their beloved holes. None of these July midday brookies were particularly large, but they were spirited and took the nymph with relish.

The strikes began to decrease after a while, so it was time to switch tactics. The current was moving fast enough over the rocks to refract bright sunlight, and a dry fly sometimes works at midday in such conditions, especially where there are also shady patches.

"Let's try a dry fly, boys." They looked puzzled as we sat down on the bank. I showed them a Renegade, a bright attractor that's produced many trout over the years. I explained that dry flies have lighter hooks and more hackle feathers, so they have to be greased. I handed my wooden landing net to Ronnie. Studying it, he asked me the meaning of *Montani Semper Liberi*, hand-lettered along with my name on its handle.

"It means *mountaineers are always free,*" I told the youngsters. Then we waded back into the swift, cool water, interlaced here and there with pinkish-white rhododendron in the height of their bloom. The first brookie to take the dry fly hit it with gusto. I set the hook, and it skittered across the water towards me. The whole thing took place in an eye wink.

"Hey, that's alright!" Ronnie hollered excitedly.

But my Renegade didn't keep producing, so I switched to a more realistic, gray Parachute Adams. This classic dry began to take fish from most of the pools and pocket water—to the delight of the boys who were now scrambling to see who got to release the trout first.

My young pals started pointing out likely pockets as we moved up the creek. Hopefully, my concepts of sport and conservation were lodging in their youthful minds, teaching them an alternative to just catching and keeping. And catch them we did, trout after trout, as we continued upstream through the dense forest surrounding us.

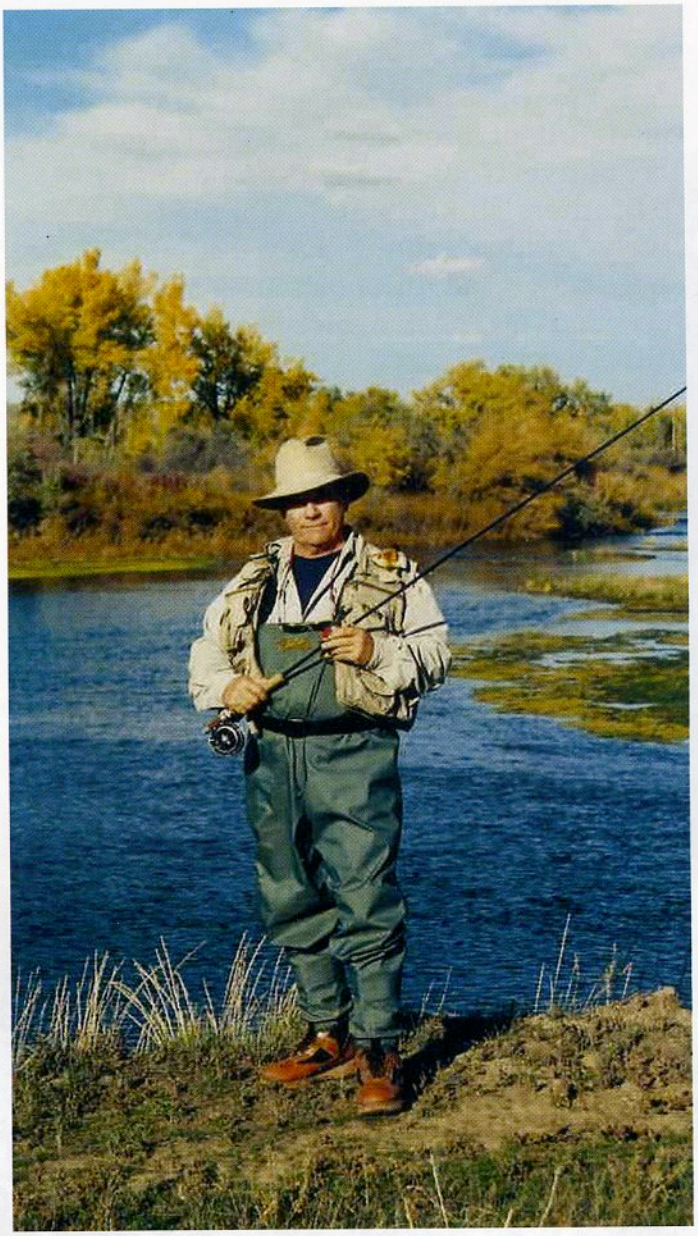
Later, when it was time to start back, Jimmy asked, "If we show you our beaver dam, will you not tell anyone where it is?"

"I won't show anyone, boys," I promised.

We left the stream and plunged through a swampy area, thick with greenbrier and hemlocks, until we reached a 50-foot-wide active beaver pond. Slowly and quietly, we stalked alongside it. I could see numerous brook trout slowly cruising, a few of them in the 15-inch class—giants for Allegheny brookies. The sun was glaring straight down, not a drop of shade anywhere on the still water.

"I don't know, guys. I don't think we can catch them; it's too bright."

Slowly, I sneaked into position. My weighted Prince hit the water and began to sink. The trout swirled away and then swam back out of curiosity, but no takers. Other fly patterns met the same results. I knew they wouldn't go for anything until the low light of evening.

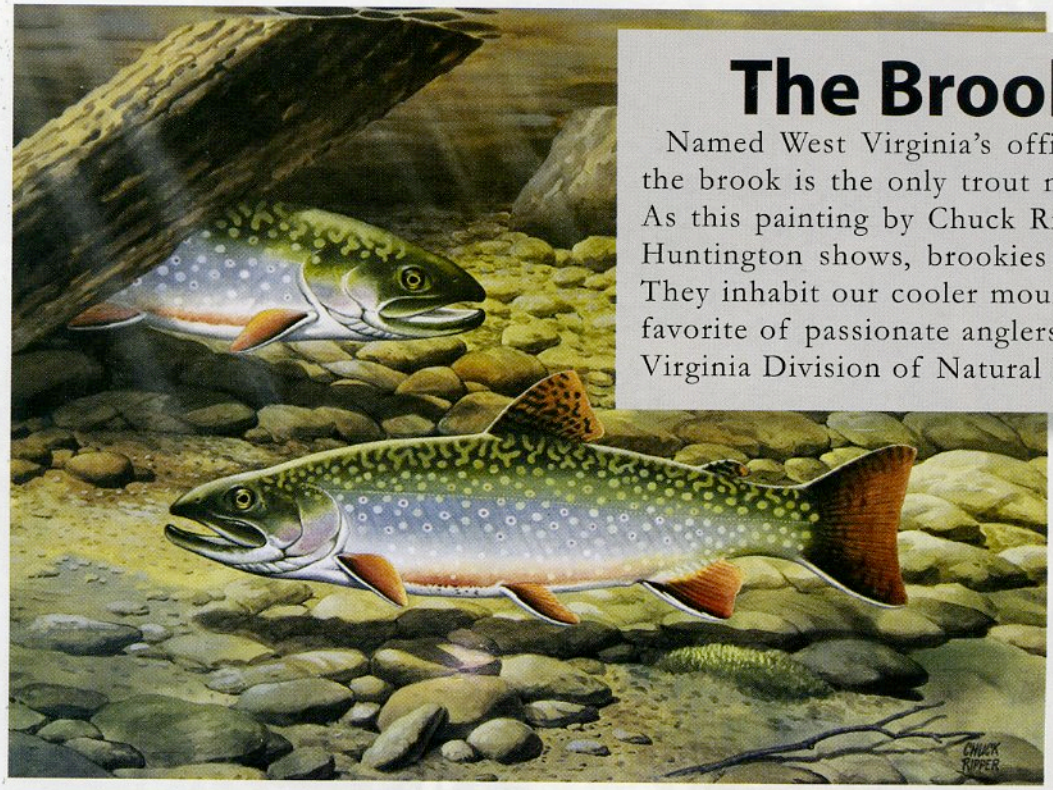


Our author, Michael Evans Snyder.

"That's Ok, we can't catch'em either. All we do is snag up. But did ya ever see such nice ones?" Jimmy asked wistfully.

"No, I haven't, fellas," and I was telling the truth. We went back to the stream where the nicest trout of the day had taken my Adams.

"Keep it, Mike!" one of them urged. "Whoops, it already slipped off. Sorry, guys," I grinned as the trout shot back upstream.



The Brook Trout

Named West Virginia's official state fish in 1973, the brook is the only trout native to West Virginia. As this painting by Chuck Ripper (1929 – 2019) of Huntington shows, brookies are brilliantly colored. They inhabit our cooler mountain streams and are a favorite of passionate anglers. Courtesy of the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

I then told my excited companions I was going to show them how to fly cast. They deferred at first, but I soon coaxed them into it. They both did fine, their smiles growing as they got the knack of it. They joined countless other kids I've taught to fly cast over the years, most of them on the grass behind the middle school where I taught for 20 years.

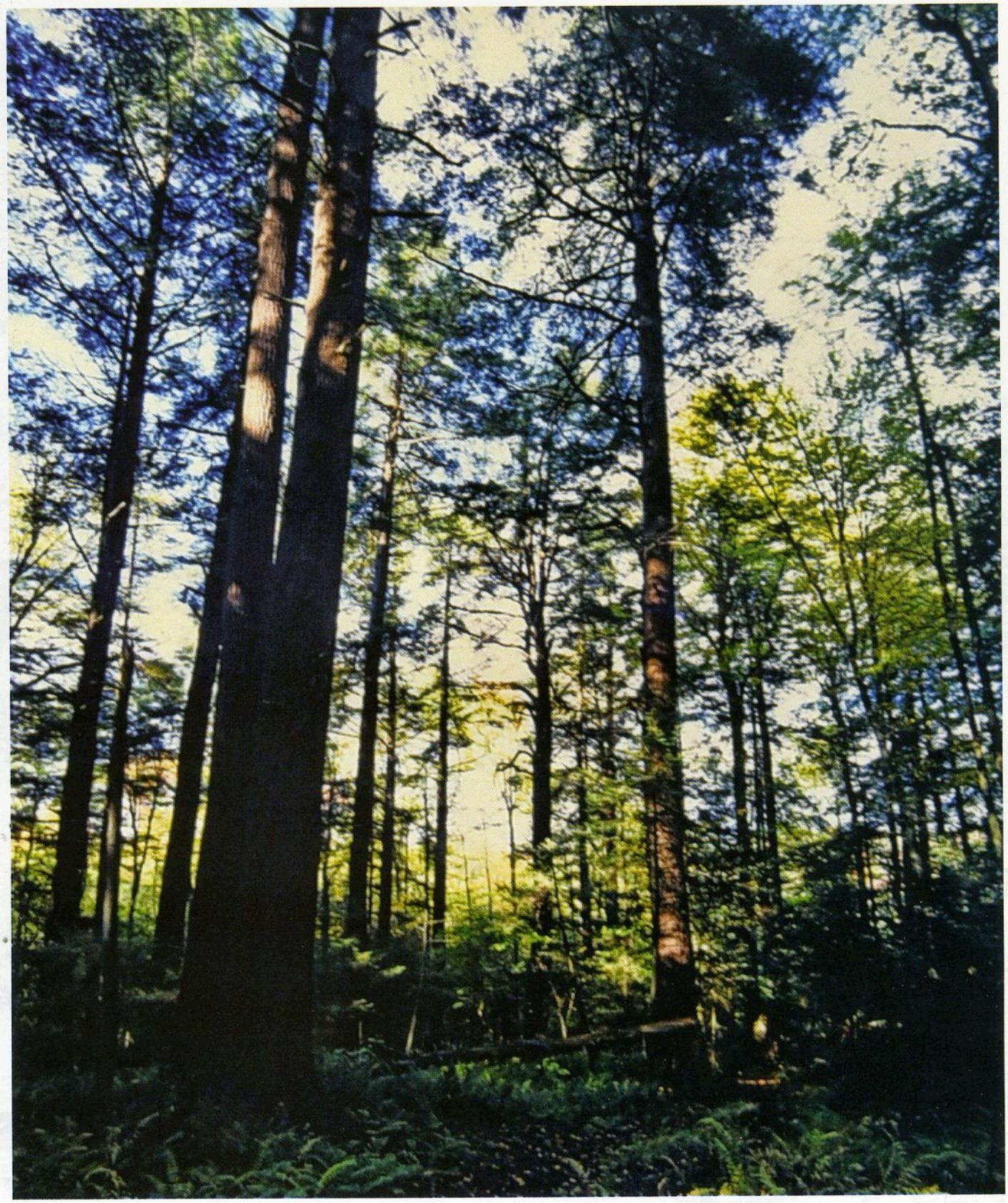
At my suggestion that we take a dip, the boys quickly hit the pool. I was in shorts, so I took off my fishing vest and shirt and waded into the 60-some-degree water. As I did, Ronnie accidentally splashed me. When they realized I was game, they went at it as hard as they could, whooping and drenching their not-so-young pal. I dove in, popped back up, and let them have it. Arms were flailing, water flying, and our tumult of shouts and laughter ringing through the tall timber.

Afterwards, I said, "Come on, guys, we'd better get home now. I don't want your mother worrying."

Both boys thanked me for the casting lesson. I told them I'd return to fish with them some late afternoon. They said we could try for some larger trout downstream on some bigger water behind a certain farmer's meadow. Sparky fired off one final bark, and they disappeared into the trees, headed across the stream toward home.

As I drove away in my pickup, I mused about why we fish. First, I think, is for quantity—to see how many we can catch. The second is for size—to catch the biggest fish possible. Then, one of those sudden and rare revelations hit me, something I once knew but had long forgotten. There's a third and best reason to go fishing—just to have a good time. Purely and simply, to have fun. As I headed back down the narrow road, I realized this had been a day of fishing I'd never forget. And I never have.

MICHAEL EVANS SNYDER is a writer and blacksmith-sculptor who lives on the Dry Fork near Harman (Randolph County). A retired teacher, he served in the Marine Corps Reserve, operated a fly-fishing school, and initiated a successful effort to create an *In God We Trust* license plate. He's a direct descendant of John Snider, Indian captive and early Monongalia County pioneer. Mike's memoirs, *Bury Me in West Virginia*, are available as an online e-book. This is his fourth contribution to GOLDENSEAL; his first was in our second issue ever, in 1975.



The timbers reach to the heavens at Cathedral State Park. Photo by Ron Snow, courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives (WVSA), Departments of Commerce & Natural Resources Collection.

The Heaviness of Memory

By K. D. Bradshaw

It's said that the difference between the old and the young is the perspective of time. The old live in memories, the young in dreams of the future—and two moments in time cannot coexist; one will always crowd the other out. But now, in my 60s, I often find myself hopelessly fixed between these two concepts. The mystery is in how we choose between the important and insubstantial, the sensory connections that trigger them. We capture specific moments through sound, smell, and touch and then cling to their essence, even if the details grow cloudy. Recalling them strengthens the sense of meaning in our lives. It's that light, ethereal quality of such memories that imparts significance to the present. Memories, invariably, also carry the burden of consequences.

"Step soft on the flat of your foot, not heelin' it like you're on a sidewalk in town." He turned around and took another step through rhododendron that lined the brook we were following toward its source just below the ridge. Trying to keep up, I'd forget to concentrate on how he expected me to walk in the woods. As easy as it would have been, he never followed the trails, well-worn from countless generations of deer and bear.

"When you're in the mountains, you'll always leave sign and smell. Better they try to pull it out of the air than have it rubbed on the end of their nose." The densest thicket never deterred him. His movements were deliberate, but slow, fluid-like. Instead of allowing limbs and leaves to swish back in place, he'd softly release them. Following on his heels, I was thankful for that courtesy, at least.

The valley was high and bowl shaped. A small spring-fed creek squeezing out from between layers of heavy gray rock flowed strong and clear every day of the year and harbored the tiniest of trout. Ovie Mitchell would take them cornbread, spreading coarse crumbs from a calloused hand over the little pools. North facing, shadowed from the sun's strongest rays, the stand of huge timber grew tall and gun-barrel straight; thick, heavy limbs of red oak, poplar, mountain ash, and maple supported a great canopy that even blocked the midday light of summer. The dark, rich soil remained damp and cool even in August's heat. Winter's low sun never shined on the cove. It would often be mid-May before all the snow melted. We climbed up into this hollow perhaps half a dozen times a year. It was almost always to hunt bees, sassafras, ginseng, and yellowroot, although sometimes there was no other purpose than just to soak in the abiding peace. When he wanted to go, he'd call me. Sometimes, he went alone. I never asked him why, but later, when I found out, I always felt a little rejected. It took years to realize that with all the changes he'd seen in his lifetime—the family dramas, the world, in general—this was a haven, a place to fondle and examine old memories, a reminder of who he was in a place that hadn't changed since his childhood.

For reasons now lost to time, the W. M. Ritter Company bypassed logging a section of this extensive, flat-topped mountain—named *Guyandotte* on the old land maps—back in the early 20th century. As a young boy, Ovie watched the timber above his home disappear day by day and heard the Shay locomotives carrying huge logs out of the narrow valley and the whine of the big bandmill down below at Maben (Wyoming County). But the crest of this ridge and the cradled hollow on its northern face were never touched. It could have been any

number of reasons. Diptheria ran through the logging camps after the winter rains and great flood of 1913, then came the Great War, taking away many able-bodied loggers in 1917, or the influenza epidemic that followed it. Possibly, the company surveyors simply miscalculated the boundaries of the tract.

There were gray squirrels, but not as many as could be found in the hardwood flats on the drier side, where the mast was heavy. Mostly, the big-eyed flying squirrels lived here, making their nest in hollow linns. Deer passed through in the summer feeding on succulents and drinking from pools that stair-stepped their way to the head of the river far below. Birthing their fawns here, they sought refuge from the pesky flies and bobcats that preferred to hunt in the thicker growth around logging slash on the southern face. The park-like timber wasn't good for hunting, from a four-legged predator's point of view. Stalking was impossible, even in late summer when the nettles grew waist high, so the deer became opportunists, moving ghostlike along the trails while occasionally stopping to dig for chipmunks or sniff an interesting odor. Raccoons denned in the mountain ash, gorged themselves on nuts and berries, prowled along the creek for small lizards, and pilfered as a matter of character. We once found where one had dug up a nest of yellowjackets at the base of a huge locust. On an April night, the ill-tempered insects were, as Ovie called it, "stoved up with cold" and the 'coon got his fill with no consequences.

That valley was where we went for honey. My favorite has always been from the basswood, but it's hard to find today. Most people like poplar honey; to me, it's like licking the board. The old-timers used to say that the very best came from the blossoms of the mountain chestnut, a honey so clear—they called it *white*—and lightly sweet that nothing else could compare. Listening to them talk about it left the feeling that I'd missed out on an important part of life and was somehow guilty for its loss. The creek water ran cool and clear, providing a drinking station for the bees on their way back to the hive. We watched them, army like, as they lined the banks by the dozens. With their thirst quenched, they'd launch upward, fly a circular path above the treetops to get their bearings, then head for the hive. In late summer, ginseng grew in large patches on the forest floor like ornate, bright-green Persian carpets embroidered with tassels of red berries. Among them stood tall, symmetric four- and five-prong plants, many of which had begun their lives in the palms of Ovie's hands decades before.

Walking up the narrow creek—pausing, listening, and watching—he used the moment to catch his breath. I was young and just as breathless but still full of energy yet, out of an almost worshipful sense of respect, never tried to hurry him. He smoked and chewed tobacco all his life, as did most miners, and started digging coal by hand in the drift mines when he was 14. Paid only for the coal he dug and loaded by hand, working long days in seams rarely higher than 24 inches, the mines broke his body but not his spirit. I watched him, at 70 years, hoe the garden on his knees, crawling from row to row. Even if he could fully straighten, which he could not, he would have stood barely over five-and-a-half feet. An uncelebrated member of that generation of men who were too young to fight in World War I, too old to fight in World War II, he'd remained steadfast, working in the darkness under the mountains as the world burned uncontrollably beyond them. Most of his coworkers and friends never returned home.

On our last walk, it seemed like we paused more than usual, watching beams of light slip gradually over the ridge from the southeast. I was leaving soon for boot

Climax engine No. 303 at Warden (Raleigh County) hauls logs to the mill at Maben (Wyoming County). Courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center.

camp at Parris Island. Ovie had a better idea of what the future held than I did. The tiniest and most delicate of buds had already begun to sprout, decorating dogwoods and young maples like tiny ornaments, blushing red, as if ashamed to be seen in their naked winter dress. On this ridge, white dogwoods had managed to resist the disease that thinned so many of their kin on the neighboring mountains. American chestnuts, their smooth lead-gray stumps now standing like mute pillars of an ancient temple, were not so fortunate. The blight that killed them reached every hollow and mountain in this country back in the 1920s, when Ovie was still a young man. It affected the trees only when they reached seed-bearing age, he said. I heard similar stories from my grandfather, who'd passed away years before. Even after the great trees died, new generations continued to spring each year from old root systems and long-buried nuts. Sometimes growing thick, like stands of bamboo, the saplings withered and perished at five, maybe six years of age. You could make walking canes from the smaller shoots, cut the larger poles (five or six inches in diameter was as large as I've seen before they withered), and let them dry for later woodworking projects. As late as the 1990s, I found small stands of wild chestnut still growing near the crest of remote south-facing ridges in Boone and Wyoming counties.

Ovie wore only leather work boots, chinos, and a cotton or flannel shirt out in the woods. He kept his long sleeves fastened at the wrist even in summer like all the old people did, and when he got cold, he'd put on a blanket-lined work jacket made

The W. M. Ritter lumber mill at Maben (Wyoming County), about 1918. Courtesy of the WVSA, Meadow River Lumber Co. Collection.

of blue denim with a corduroy collar. His gloves were knit, soft, and brown. A short-billed cap topped his head. Sitting quietly, back to a tree or cradled in the roots of a blowdown, his faded denim and oily work brogans blended into the background. We never sat in the same place twice. His blue-gray eyes watched not only for movement but for any stillness that was out of place. He could interpret all the sounds of the forest as well as the meaning in its silence. The old people who actually lived in these mountains knew more about the practical aspects of the woods than the scientists did. *"They get all their learnin' from books. That ain't a bad thing, but it's like if them books don't say it, then it ain't true. This mountain, its ways was true long before there was nary a book ever wrote . . . even the Bible."*

He'd seldom speak when we were out, except to admonish me to quit fidgeting. Settling down, the black-capped chickadees would come first, an excited chatter punctuating the erratic game of flying tag they always played. It was, after all, their home and we were first, intruders, then welcomed as visitors. They loved the sunflower seeds he scattered around our feet. The last few times we were out, knowing the world that I was growing into, he reached over and took me by the knee, with a worn smile in his blue eyes, and said, *"Always 'member who you are, where you came from."* I never saw myself or my family as special, so I missed the importance of those admonishments for a long time. Ovie Mitchell died in 1984 when the ginseng was red with berries. I missed his funeral—being part of a brutal civil war in the mountains of Central America that would soon test every measure of who I was and where I came from.

Back home years later, I cut the last standing timber in that valley. A coal company had been permitted to mine deep beneath the surface and was taking the entire mountaintop with it. I worked as a cutter for the logging / lumber compa-

ny that contracted with Chessie Resources, the owner. There were many exceptional trees at the head of that hollow. One, in particular, haunts me: a northern red oak that was over 48 inches in diameter at the stump. Straight and clear, the trunk measured 76 feet to the first limb, where it was still 23 inches in diameter. Cut into 16-foot, prime-grade logs, they filled the log bunks of a tandem-axle truck. That oak was not the largest tree I'd ever felled, but it impacted my life more than any other. Ovie and I had sat against the base of that very tree. I feel both blessed and cursed that I was the person who cut that stand of timber: fortunate that I could ensure they were removed with a sense of awe and respect, cursed that I played a part in the destruction of the mountain. All those years before, never once did such a thing cross my mind—that it'd all be gone so soon, let alone that I'd be the one to do it. Our crew climbed the ridge to watch her fall. We carefully counted the growth rings. As near as we could figure, she'd stood just below this northeast crest of Guyandotte Mountain, near the head of Burnt Fork, for 486 years. That tree, and so many more I cut that week, were just saplings before there was ever the idea of America. My head swirled with emotion as I held back tears.

"Them trees, them biggest ones, is tender."

I thought about what he said and asked, "You mean the wood?"

He pursed his lips. "Yeah, that too. But I mean their heart."

"The heartwood? Not the sapwood?"

"I mean their heart, boy. It's heavy with mem'ries. That's what makes your heart tender. They been here longer than us. If you'll listen, you can hear their mem'ries."

I put her on the ground in seven minutes.

The stream and its trout are gone. There are no bees, no springs. The ginseng and yellowroot are now buried under a mountain of rock hundreds of feet deep and half-a-mile wide. The land itself has been forever altered—leveled, flattened with man-made drainages and sloping hills seeded by grasses created in a laboratory. Perhaps my old friend, knowing full well the rest of the world's demands, would have preferred me to be the one to cut that timber. I like to think so. Still, that belief offers very little solace.

Ovie Mitchell (1913 – 1984). Courtesy of our author.

A few miles away, just off Ravencliffe Road, an ancient, massive poplar still stands, granted many reprieves from the saw over its lifetime. Best described as monolithic with a diameter of over eight feet, its existence serves as a monument to a past relegated to old stories and photographs, perhaps a condemnation of the inevitability of our future.

K. D. BRADSHAW lives in Fayetteville (Fayette County) with the storied memories of his and his wife's families, both of whom settled in these mountains right after the Revolutionary War. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

All photos courtesy of our author.

Life on Panther Fork

By Virgil L. Smith

A little white farmhouse still stands at the head of Panther Fork of Sinking Creek in Gilmer County. I know because I go back occasionally just to sit on the front porch swing and take in the valley and surrounding hills, just as I remember them from 70 years ago. Larry Jefferies owns it now, and he's always kind enough to let me indulge myself in nostalgia. At the top of one hill stands Panther Rock, a huge boulder totally concealed by tall trees now. When I was a child, it was surrounded by pasture. On the last day of school, I'd take the pages from my used workbooks up there and launch paper airplanes, which glided to their landings hundreds of feet below. Panther Rock also was a refuge from storms of conflicts with my dad.

I was 11 when we moved there. We left behind the paved roads of Route 5 and traveled six miles up Sinking Creek's dirt road. Panther Fork splits off from Sinking Creek at what was once the thriving town of Lucerne. Nothing but the crumbling country store was still standing there by 1947.

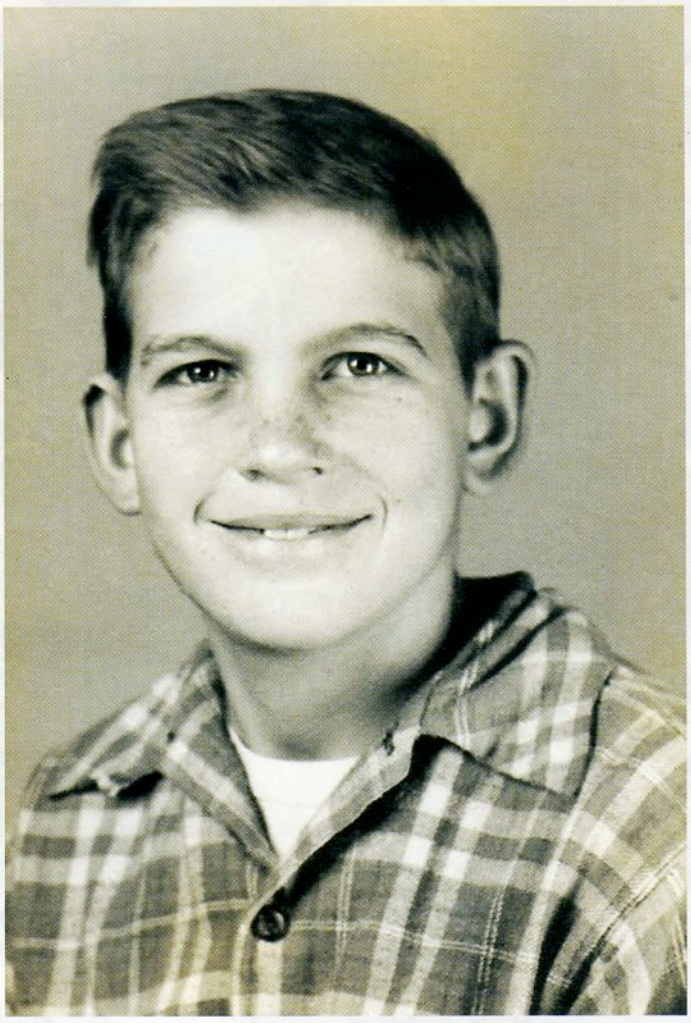
For the next seven years, we lived with the dust of summer and the mud of winter. Tire chains were required, and I can still hear the rhythm of a broken cross-link slapping against the fender. The road was just wide enough for two sets of ruts.

Where the paved road ended at the mouth of Sinking Creek, my jokester cousin erected a sign: "Choose your rut carefully, you'll be in it for the next two miles." The ruts were so deep our truck bumper would be pushing a mud-and-water mix. My brother Don, who was given to exaggeration, liked to tell people he was driving home one evening, saw a hat in the road, got out to pick it up, and discovered a grown man underneath. Asked if he wanted a ride, the man replied, "No, thanks, I'm on a horse."

Whenever the sun finally dried the mud, the state road crew would grade down the ruts, giving us smooth traveling—for a few months. The one mile of Panther Fork Road, however, was our responsibility. With sledgehammers, we knapped soft sandstone rock and dug shale and gravel from road banks and creek beds to fill the ruts and keep it passable.

Because we lived at the head of the hollow, we had what was called a "contract school bus." It was nothing more than a wooden enclosure on our truck with wooden benches all around the bed. The Gilmer County Board of Education paid us to transport children out of Sinking Creek. My brother Ford drove it. When the road would flood by the culvert at Hayward Ellyson's place, Ford would remove the fan belt and drive 200 or 300 feet, guessing where the road was as water ran over the running boards. On the other side of the creek, he'd replace the belt and continue to school. In all those years on slick red-clay roads, he had only one accident. Just above Bill Bailey's place, Ford slid off the road and overturned down an embankment. The wooden rack shattered, leaving us kids scattered down the bank. Miraculously, no one was seriously injured.

When the mud made the roads impassable for two or three weeks during the spring thaw, we'd catch the regular school bus by walking three miles across the hills, past the Low Gap Schoolhouse, to the town of Alice on Horn Creek Road. On our way there, we'd carry a kerosene lantern in the dark, set it down when the bus arrived, and then pick it back up on our way home just as dusk was setting in. We never saw our home in daylight except on weekends.



Our author, Virgil L. Smith, back when he lived on Panther Fork.

The 147-acre farm on Panther Fork was the first my father ever owned. With 13 children, ours had been a life of renting from one place to another, clearing and caring for someone else's land. There were five of us boys and two girls still at home when my dad bought the farm. We'd clear brush to create pasture and meadow land. Our top-of-the-hill meadow was covered with an acre of sassafras saplings. We spent weeks grubbing them out by the roots. The sweet scent filled the air, and for 21 years,

The family's contract school bus often got stuck in the mud on Panther Fork's roads.

I kept a piece of sassafras root from that hill in my school desks. I actually still have it. I scrape it occasionally to savor that sweet root beer fragrance and remember.

We created our own entertainment. We tamed foxes, groundhogs, flying squirrels, hawks, and crows. Almost every year, we had a pet crow, always named Tinker. Crows are clever, mischievous creatures. They'd methodically walk the clothesline and pull out the clothespins, dropping our clean clothes on the ground. Tinker liked to use our well-water bucket for his morning bath, so we had to punch holes in the bottom to drain it quickly after we drew our drink. I well remember the fate of one Tinker. I caught him stealing some small screws I was using to build a birdhouse and threw a chip of wood at him. He flew away, perched himself on an electrical wire, stretched out his wing, and touched the grounded guy wire. Electrocution was quick, and he fell dead to the ground. I felt the full weight of an executioner.

We never caged any animal, so some reverted back to the wild. Such was the case with my red-tailed hawk, acquired from the nest while still a white fluffy chick. Just to feed him every day, we had to kill something living. I spent hours in the barn and corn crib shooting mice and rats with my BB gun. When he finally flew, I made a leather covering for my wrist and would call him from the sky to land on me. Finally, he got to the stage where he'd only hover above, so I'd toss a rat into the air. His sure talons never missed.

Sunday afternoons in spring would find two or three of us and the Heckert boys headed for a nice hickory fence row at the edge of the meadow. We'd climb a slender tree almost to the top, bend it over until it touched another, climb that one to the top, and then repeat the process. The goal was to see who could go the greatest distance without touching the ground. We acquired multiple scrapes and bruises, but I don't remember any broken limbs. Years later,

When the road flooded, Virgil's brother Ford would remove the fan belt and drive the bus through high water.

when I taught Robert Frost's "Birches," I could relate to the poem:

> "When I see birches bend to left and right . . .
> I like to think some boy's been swinging them"

My dad always had foxhounds. Friday summer evenings, he, Hayward Ellyson, my Uncle Coy, and others I can't remember would gather at our house to climb to the high-hill meadow. As darkness set in, they'd release their dogs. The purpose wasn't to catch the fox but to listen to the dogs' voices as they topped the distant ridge. Each man knew the sound of his hound, although a spirited discussion sometimes ensued as to whose had topped the hill first and was therefore in the lead. That debate would continue on the sidewalk in front of Tally Wright's Barber Shop on Saturday morning as they all showed up for their weekly grocery trip to Glenville. They took the sport seriously, but for me, there was just a certain serenity being under the Milky Way on a high-hill meadow on a warm summer night listening to the voices of Clem and Sue, my dad's foxhounds.

While summer was good for fox hunting, a wet winter snow made tracking good for small game. We'd follow their footprints to their dens and spend hours with a mattock and shovel digging them out. In the case of skunks, we paid a dear price for their pelts. Once we killed them, we skinned them and stretched their hides on a tapered board to dry. A number-one skunk—all black with a small white stripe on its nose—might fetch a dollar when Grant Greynolds, the fur trader, came to buy our pelts.

Our little farmhouse had a cut-stone cellar. I can still see the board shelves rowed

Virgil (far left) with his brother Dean, sister Loretta, and their dad's foxhounds.

One of Virgil's "Tinkers."

with half-gallon green jars capped with zinc lids. Two 20-gallon crocks were filled with pickled beans and sauerkraut and capped with cheesecloth and a round rock to control the fermentation. But nothing could control that smell. Unfortunately, the cellar contained our cream separator, which I had to turn after each milking. The odor was a real test of my endurance. I never ate the pickled beans, but if I could sneak enough sugar, I could make the sauerkraut barely palatable.

On the bank outside my bedroom window was a huge boulder. Every night, it became the stage for a whippoorwill, whose comforting song filled the night air. I spent many nights with the window open, absorbing the sounds of crickets, katydids, and my whippoorwill. It was the genesis of my first book of poetry: *Where the Whippoorwill Sings*.

I suppose our farm was typical of most in central West Virginia. We had a team of horses, three milk cows, a dozen or so chickens, a small flock of sheep, and a couple hogs. That, along with a huge garden, made us pretty much self-supporting. Except for an occasional chicken, our meat was pork. On a frosty Thanksgiving morning, the scalding barrel of water was heated. I could never witness the shooting of the hogs since they were almost pets to me. Once killed and bled, they were lowered from an oak beam tripod into the scalding water and then scraped of all hair. Entrails tumbled into a zinc washtub, and the shoulders and hams were cut and sugar-cured in the meat house for winter. The sausage mill ground late into the night. Sausage cakes were canned in jars, and the grease turned white as it cooled in the cellar. It's probably no coincidence that with all that bacon, ham, fried potatoes, and beans cooked with ham, most of us 13 children ended up with heart disease and clogged arteries. But when I remember those breakfasts with Mom's grease-laden golden biscuits, I tend to forget my 13 heart stents.

We always needed cash to buy the necessities we couldn't produce. With a crosscut saw, we felled trees from our woods for coal mine bars and railroad ties. That was one of my early thrills towards manhood—driving our team of horses and skidding logs down the hill to a loading dock. When

Our author and his sassafras root keep his memories of Gilmer County alive.

the big army truck came to pick them up, it was always a cash sale. All that enterprise ended when my Uncle Carl Heckert, who lived down the road, purchased a huge two-man chainsaw and could cut four trees to our one. The contract went to him, and we yielded to progress.

In the summer, we dug ginseng, yellowroot (goldenseal), and mayapple roots. In the fall, we cracked hickory nuts and black walnuts. Removing the black walnut hulls was a dirty, tedious job, and the stains were almost permanent. One day, while shelling corn in our big upright sheller, I observed that a corncob was about the same width as a black walnut shell. It was a eureka moment. I got the big flywheel turning fast and dropped a walnut down the shoot. It came out hull-less and clean, but I still had one problem. If my dad caught me shelling walnuts through his corn sheller, I'd pay dearly. I knew he went to Glenville every Saturday morning for groceries, so as soon as he left, I'd shell the walnuts and then run a couple bushels of corn through the sheller to remove the stain. If he ever wondered why my hands were no longer stained, he never said so.

Our life on Panther Fork was a hard-scrabble existence where the seed of hard work was planted early. Lessons learned on that little hillside farm formed the fiber of my soul. The sledding hill is woods now, and most of the outbuildings are gone, but the house still stands, and the front porch where we gathered in the evening to sing gospel songs is still there. I go back as often as I can, where my little mountain laurel still dots the hillside and the smell of honeysuckle fills the valley.

Now, if you don't mind, I think I'll scrape my sassafras root again, inhale the root beer fragrance, and remember.

VIRGIL L. SMITH is a native of Tanner (Gilmer County). He graduated from Glenville High in 1954 and Glenville State College (now University) in 1959. He earned a master's degree in English and theater and is a retired teacher. Virgil has two books of poetry, *Where the Whippoorwill Sings* and *The Bluebird Still Sings*, and two DVDs, *Appalachian Roots* and *Beyond Autumn*. This is his second contribution to GOLDENSEAL; you can read more about his childhood in our Winter 2012 issue.

Vacationing during the Pandemic

Touring Our State Parks and Forests in 2020

Text and photos by Travis Vandal

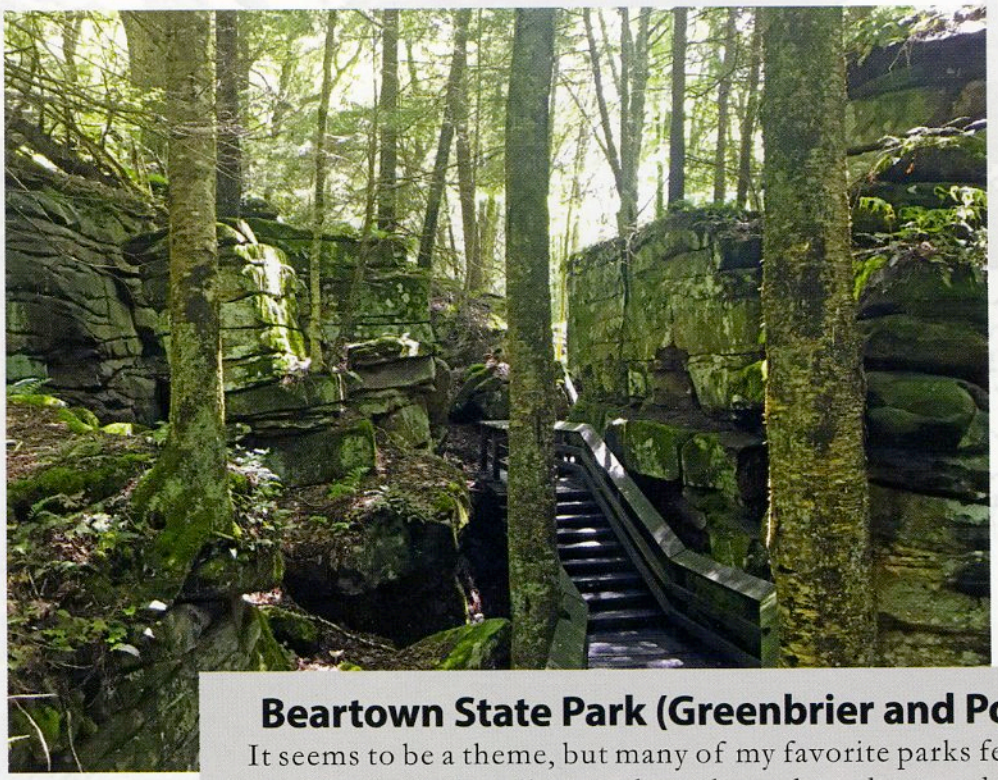
To say the least, none of us will ever forget the COVID-19 pandemic. Thousands of West Virginians have passed away, many more have experienced once-in-a-century hardships, and for some of us, the comforts we've taken for granted ceased almost instantaneously. As a West Virginia Studies teacher and the father of two elementary-aged boys, my routines at work and home changed drastically. The last days of the 2019-20 school year—usually a joyous time for teachers and students alike—were consumed with worrisome uncertainty. By the start of summer 2020, I felt defeated. My get-up-and-go just wasn't there. After a couple weeks of binge-watching the madness on streaming sites, I decided enough was enough. It was time to get back to the safest, most socially distant environment I could think of: West Virginia's great outdoors.

That summer, I visited all 49 state parks, forests, and park-run sites. Some were solo trips: just me, the van, and Sirius XM. I had a lot of 10-hour days, taking in as many parks as possible. I brought the family along on some trips. The boys, my wife, and I spent a couple nights in Davis taking in Blackwater Falls, Seneca Rocks, Smoke Hole Caverns, and Canaan Valley. My wife and I explored the eastern panhandle, worked our way back down through Hardy County, and finished up in Holly River State Park, a true gem. A West Virginia Studies colleague and I toured some other places and filmed videos for class in case we had to start the school year virtually, which ended up happening.

Along the way, I collected "hiker's medallions" for a walking stick as proof of visit, and to have a cool souvenir. Here's a little scrapbook of my 2020 summer vacation, focusing on 10 "day-use" parks. Some offer overnight lodging or camping, but all can be scenically pleasing day trips—depending on how early you get up. Also, in this day of digital wizardry, I took these photos with just my phone, making the adventure less cumbersome than a couple decades ago, when I was lugging heavy camera equipment around. I hope my trip enthuses others to get out and experience West Virginia. Enjoy the ride!

Audra State Park (Barbour and Upshur counties)

The site of Barbour County's original 4-H camp, Audra State Park, near Buckhannon, opened in 1950 on land previously owned by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. It's a wonderful daytime getaway. The Middle Fork River offers some recreational water play, but the real attraction here is the boardwalk that leads hikers under the hanging rocks of Alum Cave. Audra has overnight camping, as well.

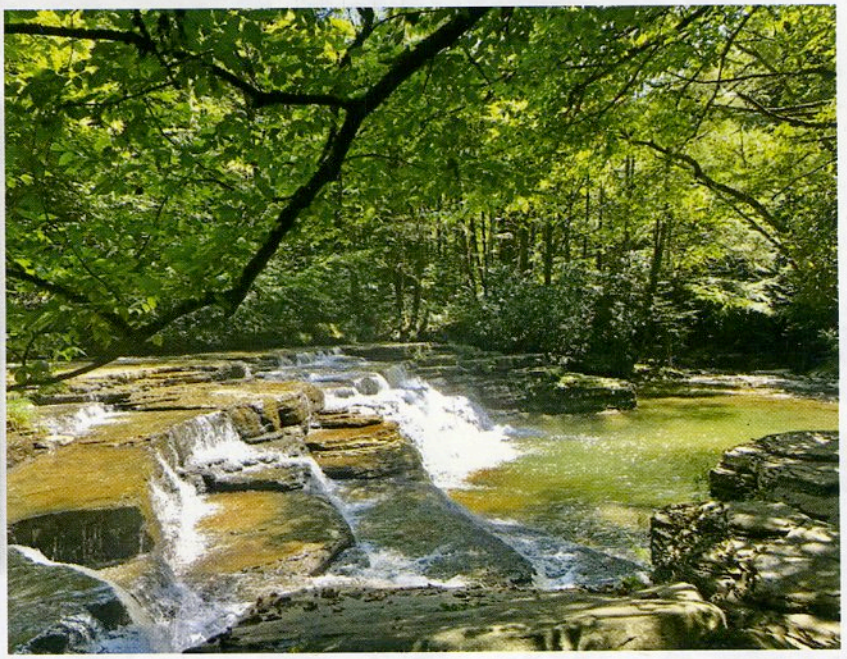


Beartown State Park (Greenbrier and Pocahontas counties)

It seems to be a theme, but many of my favorite parks feature boardwalks. Beartown's 1½-mile planked trail meanders through and around ancient boulders and offers plenty of opportunities to encounter some of our state symbols: black bear, northern cardinal, monarch butterfly, and many others. Beartown is one of our relatively newer parks, dating back to 1970.

Camp Creek State Park & Forest (Mercer County)

Although I didn't get to spend as much time here as I would've liked, Camp Creek—one of our most recent parks, opened in 1987—is wonderful for campers. There are two easily accessible waterfalls, plenty of trails, and activities for kids. Another perk is it's easily accessible off the West Virginia Turnpike (I-77).

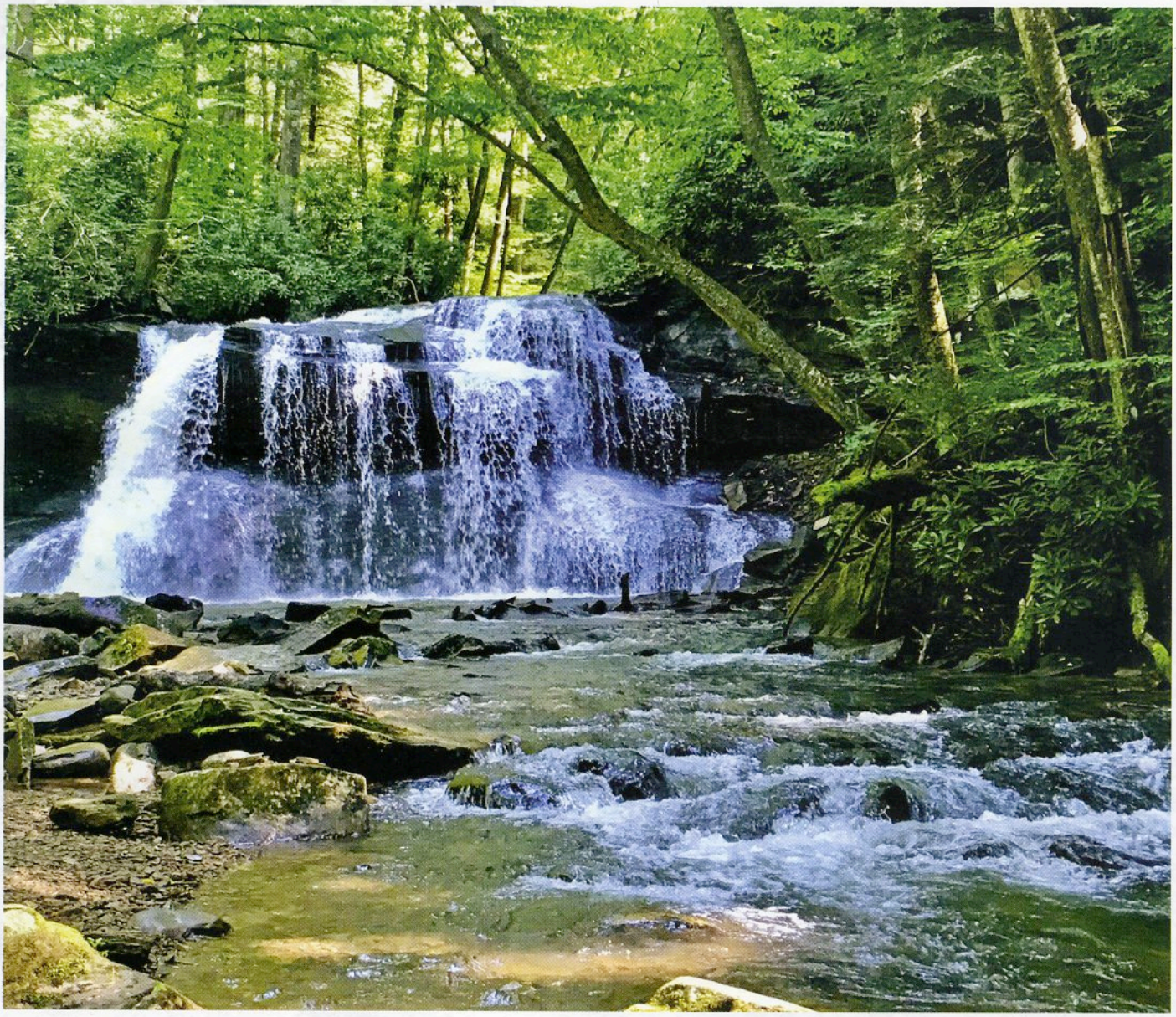


Chief Logan State Park (Logan County)

This was one of our first trips. My family and I wanted to get out of Charleston for a short drive. We headed south on Route 119 (Corridor G), saw the sign for Chief Logan State Park (established in 1968), and thought we'd do a little hiking. The trails here, such as Cliffside, were just what we needed. It also includes Museum in the Park (the former park restaurant), which features artifacts from the West Virginia State Museum collection, and this rare C&O locomotive from the 1940s.

Hawks Nest State Park (Fayette County)

In my mind, Fayette County is an essential West Virginia experience thanks to the plentiful hiking, biking, whitewater rafting, scenery, good-natured people, and the New River Gorge Bridge. But I hold it dear for a different reason. My great-great-great-great-great-grandfather Abraham Vandal, a colonial militiaman from New York, settled here and supplied the land where the courthouse now sits—a plaque commemorates him. We make nearly monthly trips, stopping first at Hawks Nest State Park. We ride jetboats and the tram (the original 1970 version is being replaced this year), picnic, and simply enjoy the views. If you haven't been on the New River Gorge's Endless Wall Trail (part of the National Park Service), put this on your "to do" list straight away. And the view at the end of the Long Point Trail just as the sun sets behind the bridge is something every West Virginian should see at least once.



Holly River State Park (Webster County)

This was the last of my 49 state park visits. Did I save the best for last? Perhaps. Holly River is a beautiful 8,000-plus-acre (our second biggest park) dense forest in Hacker Valley. The area was settled by Swiss immigrants about 1870 and became part of our park system in 1954. The Upper Falls are easily accessible by vehicle, but at least four others are hikeable. It has a campground, restaurant, one-room schoolhouse museum, and plenty of wildlife. I plan to make this park my first one next time so I can return for a much longer stay.

Lost River State Park (Hardy County)

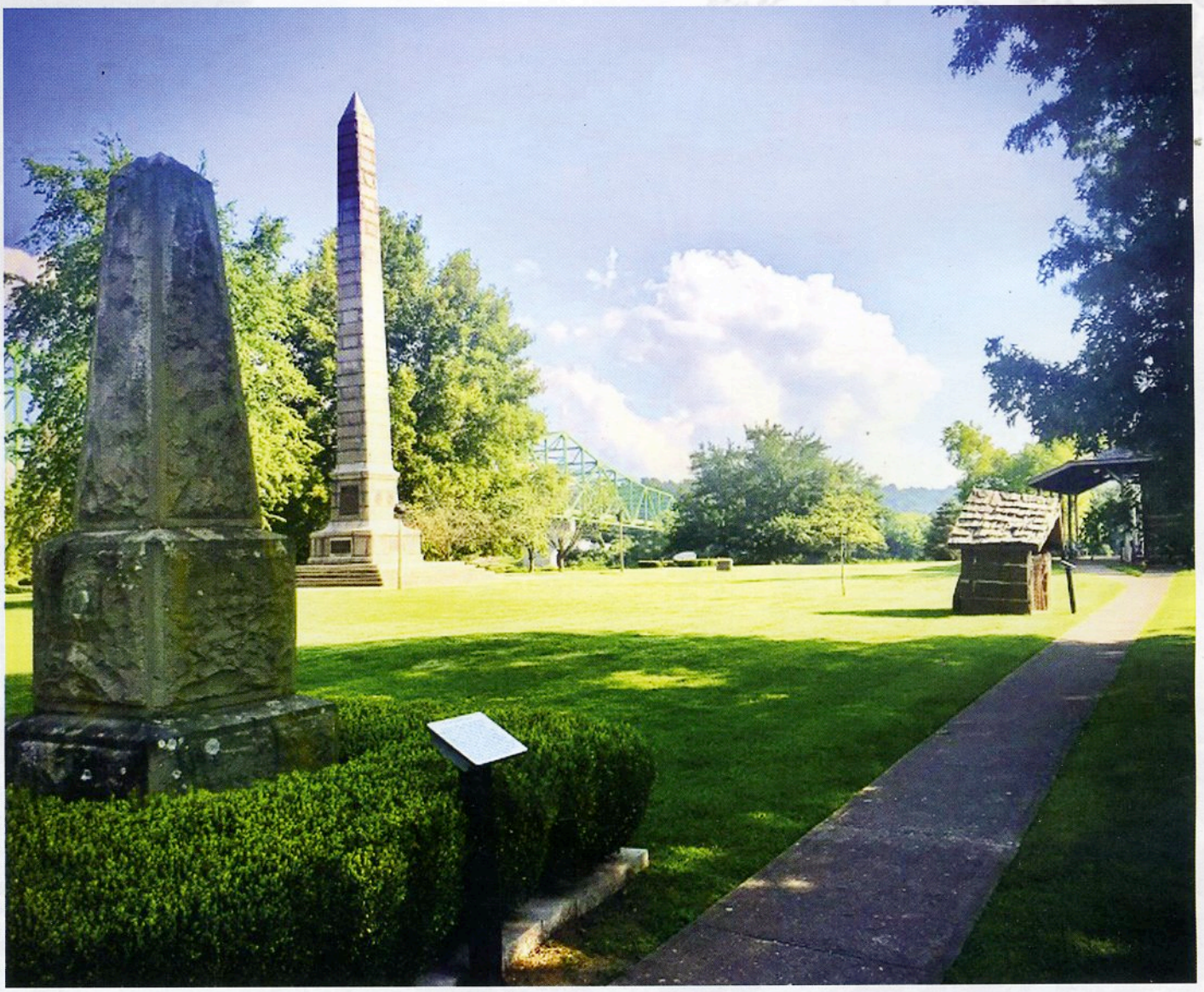
Lost River, opened in 1937, is a gorgeous park and home to the summer vacation cabin of Henry "Lighthorse Harry" Lee, a Revolutionary War general and father of Robert E. Lee. Here, I learned my most important park lesson: prepare properly for your hike. When we got there, we were pressed for time, and I really wanted a photo from the iconic Cranny Crow Overlook. The trailhead was just beside the horse stable, but we didn't take the time to get more water or snacks—nor did we research how long the hike would take. An hour up the trail, and nearly 800 feet higher, we reached the top. The view was worth every ounce of sweat, but we learned something: maybe ride a horse next time.

North Bend State Park and North Bend Rail Trail (Ritchie County)

I loaded up the bikes and took my two boys on a father / sons day trip to Parkersburg. After taking the ferry to Blennerhassett Island Historical State Park for a mansion tour, we headed east on Route 50 to Cairo (pronounced *care-o*) to North Bend State Park, which the state began developing in 1951 on some old oil and gas fields. We rode our bikes directly onto the rail trail, which spans 72 miles along the old Baltimore & Ohio Railroad bed, built before the Civil War. Going through the old tunnels is definitely a little creepy, especially if you're familiar with tales of the Silver Run Tunnel ghost. Although we didn't see her—at least that we're aware—we enjoyed a great ride.

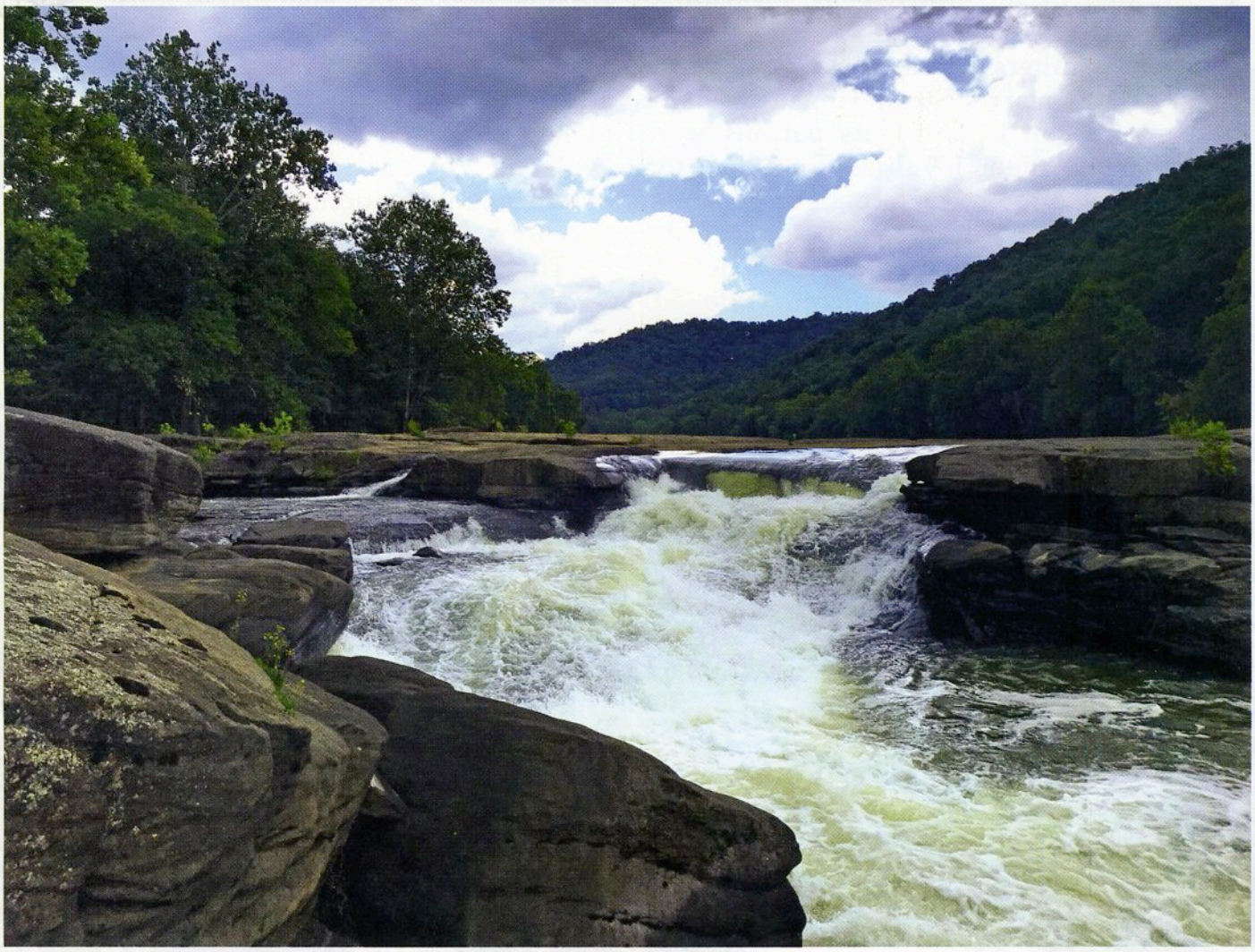
Tu-Endie-Wei State Park (Mason County)

The remains of Shawnee Chief Cornstalk, a tragic figure in our frontier history, are interred here. The Wyandotte words "Tu-Endi-Wei" translate to "point between two waters," which, in this case, is where the Great Kanawha joins the Ohio River. This scenic little spot rests at the end of a river walk along a floodwall with murals depicting the Battle of Point Pleasant between Virginia Militia and Shawnees in 1774—as well as other local historic events. Also, the Mansion House Museum on the grounds really takes you back in time.



Valley Falls State Park (Marion County)

Valley Falls was an old mill and railroad town until fire and floods destroyed it in the 1880s. It became part of our park system in 1964. This was a great little surprise not far from Fairmont. While I was taking pictures, a man nearby screamed and jumped off a rock, nearly falling into the river. He yelled, "There's a rattlesnake under that rock!" As a snake enthusiast, I had to see. It turned out the man had risked his life over a common water snake, one of 21 non-venomous species found in West Virginia. I told him he had nothing to worry about, but he was adamant that it was, in fact, a timber rattler and scampered away like Indiana Jones.



TRAVIS VANDAL was born and raised in Kanawha County, where he still lives with his wife, Brianne, and two kids, Tanner and Dillon. He's a full-time West Virginia Studies teacher at John Adams Middle School in Charleston. In addition, he's a singer / songwriter, photographer, and guitar instructor. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Honky-Tonk Reflections

The Harris Steak House in Point Pleasant

By Ostie Mathisen

Located in smalltown USA, on a Main Street no longer flourishing—like so many others across this great country—was the Harris Steak House in Point Pleasant (Mason County). Its patrons were persistent in their loyalties for they too were victims of so-called economic progress. It sat without flashing neon signage, the epitome of a smalltown café. It felt homey.

Outdoors, there was a picnic table advertised as "outside dining." When you entered, there was a musty odor. The owner, Carolin Harris, had lost her husband and three-year-old son in the Silver Bridge collapse in 1967. Then, she ran the restaurant for nearly a half-century, from 1969 until her death in 2016.

I have so many fond memories of Carolin and her restaurant. The place felt like home. I'd sit down in a booth labeled as the "Smoking Section." It's the last place I knew where I could enjoy my pipe after an old-fashioned greasy breakfast of fried potatoes, eggs sunny-side up, old-fashioned sausage, and two crisp pieces of toast. The jukebox set the atmosphere as George Jones and Tammy Wynette accused each other of "doing me wrong."

Several men sat in the back. One guy in a wheelchair had an oxygen tank strapped to the back. He'd light one cigarette after another, finding comfort in knowing his oxygen supply would ease his clogged lungs when he left.

The cook would see me walk in, come over, and give me a hug. She was about my age and held several jobs just to live. Arising at 3 a.m., she had a rural paper route, driving a 30-year-old Chevy truck seven days a week. She'd get to the café at 7 a.m., cook until 1 p.m., and then head to her third job: cleaning houses. I tipped well and got special treatment. Once, just making conversation, she drew my attention to a frail man sitting alone.

"That's my first husband," she said.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Oh, he had wandering eyes," and I chuckled.

"Of course," she adds, "I wasn't much better. He worked on the river and would be gone 30 days at a time. My boyfriend at the time also worked on the river in a 30-day cycle, opposite from my husband's."

"Well," I said, "it seems to me you had a similar problem."

At that moment, George's melancholy voice accused Tammy of the same thing. The cook smiled, laid her head on my shoulder, and said, "I guess I did." Then, she arose to fix my breakfast.

Most of the patrons lived on Social Security. Carolin let patrons run tabs for food and cigarettes, and her big payday was Social Security Day, when everyone got their checks.

I miss Carolin, the cook, and that restaurant. In my head sometimes, I go back there. A new record comes on. It's Brenda Lee singing, "I'm sorry." I light my pipe and stare at my coffee. Now, it's Merle Haggard, in honky-tonk fashion, describing his bouts with drinking. One record after another sets the honky-tonk mood. There's a brief moment of silence. I ask for anoth-

Carolin Harris (1942 – 2016) and our author, Ostie Mathisen, in front of her Point Pleasant restaurant.

er cup of coffee and put my quarter in the jukebox. I guess I'll stay for a while. I'm in a honky-tonk mood as I reflect on my own life. Amen for folks like Carolin, the cook, and smalltown cafés.

OSTIE MATHISEN earned a B.A. and an M.A. from Marshall University. For many years, he was a teacher, banker, and horse farmer. He's involved in many civic activities and a writer with an interest in small-town American values. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Bluegrass legend Doyle Lawson (white hat) & Quicksilver close out the first night of the 2021 Pickin' in Parsons Bluegrass festival. The 78-year-old Lawson has been a mainstay at Pickin' but plans to retire this year.

A Great Pick

The Pickin' in Parsons Bluegrass Festival

Text and photos by Carl E. Feather

Parsons residents thought John and Joyce Bowers were zany when they purchased land in the floodplain of Shavers Fork River in 2004. Perhaps even zanier was their plan: to make the Tucker County seat—which had been nearly wiped off the map by the 1985 flood—an international bluegrass and traditional music destination.

"Folks in this town told us it wouldn't work," John says during a rare moment of rest on the Pickin' in Parsons stage.

The five-day festival, held the first full week of August at the Bowers' Five Rivers Campground, has drawn thousands of music fans from 46 states and up to 12 nations. While the lingering pandemic—which canceled the 2020 event—impacted the 2021 lineup, it couldn't thwart the fans' enthusiasm. John estimates 6,000 attended last year, a number corroborated by the bulging campground, sold-out motels and lodges, lines of vehicles, and overflowing chairs and blankets that sprawled beyond the 10,000-square-foot pavilion.

Pavilion seating policies are to bring your own chair, first come, first served; the rows just below the rustic stage fill up long be-

There's plenty of dancing at Pickin'. Here, the music moves Benny Fitzwater of Clay County and a fellow fan to kick up their heels a little.

fore the dew burns off the grass. Insomniacs and early birds find a use for their foibles here, where a line forms in the dirt road long before the gate opens at 8 a.m.

Perhaps even more fortunate and dedicated are the fans in the front row of motorhome spaces facing the pavilion and stage. "I just got lucky," says Mark Tinsman, who parked his Wildcat camper in one of the front-row spots. "My number just came up for this," landing the newbies in a premium location.

Mark and his wife, Ann, turn the festival into a vacation, like their campground neighbors, Terry and Connie Rowe of New Martinsville (Wetzel County). "The first thing is the music," Terry says. "It's very good. And it's all very official, the way it's done here. It is a nice setup."

"They got music, and they got friendly people," Connie says. "You never hear cross words from any of them."

The Rowes, attending for the fourth year, have already reserved their spot for 2022. "This is my vacation for the year," Terry says. "We come two days before the festival and leave the Monday after."

The campground's 175 full-service camping sites and 23 tent sites are filled for the festival. At least that many campers—with their own sources of electricity and water—park beyond the developed sites on what was just a grassy wasteland when the Bowers purchased it.

"It was really just property," as he describes the state of things in 2004. "The grass was waist-deep when we got it. We cleaned all that up and cleaned up along

Al White of Pickens does a little two-step to the tunes.

the river's edges." The initial purchase included a low area, since abandoned, that made for a natural amphitheater. As more land became available, the Bowers expanded the grounds.

"We have combined 18 pieces of property to get to where we are today," John says. They own 51 acres, lease several more, and are always looking to expand. One purchase included the house where the couple live, a welcome relief from the early days when they and their daughter Katelyne made do in a 30-foot-long camper out of economic necessity. Now, they own several residences on the property.

John and Joyce are Upshur County natives and lifelong music lovers who grew up more familiar with rock 'n' roll. "My parents listened to mostly early country music and bluegrass," John says. "And I guess the band that really got me interested was the Osborne Brothers. They had that appeal to younger fans with, of course, their incredible musicianship and harmony but also the flash with their sharkskin suits and big hats. And they were a very professional-looking band."

His interest in the genre eventually drew him to Music in the Mountains, the now-defunct Summersville (Nicholas County) bluegrass festival and personal passion of Eunice (1917 – 2017) and Edgar Kitchen (1919 – 2013).

"I went there for 37 years," John says. "I made a lot of friends there."

Joyce recalls her husband revealing his lifetime dream to her as they traveled back to Uphsur County from their first festival together in Summersville: he wanted to start a bluegrass festival tucked into the mountains of West Virginia.

John worked at an HVAC store, and Joyce was a personal caregiver. "We just happened to meet somebody who happened to say, 'I think we have a spot for you that would work,'" John recalls.

On the way to Parsons for his initial walk through the property, John stopped for lunch at the Purple Fiddle in Thomas, where he met the county's live-music pioneer, John Bright. Bright warned him that the "event promotion business can burn you out." Undaunted, Bowers walked the riverfront property and came up with a bold plan: sell their land in Upshur County, move into their camper on the Parsons property, and commute to his job at Bruce Flooring in Beverly (Randolph County) while preparing the land for a festival.

"We sold everything we owned, and what we brought with us came in the back of a pickup truck," Joyce recalls.

While clearing land and building a stage, the couple began planning their first festival, held on a Sunday in 2004. "We were so excited; we couldn't wait to get it started," John says, explaining why they jumped the gun so quickly. "It was a one-day festival, with just five regional bands. One of them was me and a couple of other guys." John, who plays bass, says his group, Area 304, disbanded soon thereafter to the great benefit of traditional music. The couple had much larger strings to wrestle with than those on a bass fiddle.

"In the first year, we lost more money than we invested," recalls Joyce.

"We had terrible weather," John recalls. "At one point, I looked out at the crowd, and I saw a pool with two inches of water in it, and our soundman sitting in the middle."

The crowd amounted to "25 people and 15 dogs," recalls Edmond Hayes of northeast Ohio, who attended that first festival with his wife, Shirley. Despite the soggy start, the couple has returned for each festival thereafter. Edmond says it was pure happenstance that they came upon the event. "We had a campsite up in the eastern panhandle and were heading there when we went through Parsons and saw the sign for a bluegrass festival," Edmond says. "We decided to stop and take it in; been there ever since."

Joyce and John Bowers founded and manage Pickin' in Parsons. They pose on the festival stage, where they also renewed their wedding vows in 2018 for their 25th anniversary.

Looking back on that first year, John and Joyce admit they probably jumped into it too quickly, but they took their financial lumps. "You got to learn to be adaptable," John says. "It takes a lot of grit to do this. You got to be willing to be knocked down a lot."

Reviewing that debut attempt with his mother, Karen Bowers, they hit upon the idea of creating a revenue stream and drawing more festivalgoers by adding campsites. Then they went to work. "My mother and I put in the first 10 campsites," John says.

The entrepreneurs also realized that to attract seasoned bluegrass fans, they'd need some nationally recognized bands—a challenge for an upstart festival. "Bands didn't

want to talk to us when [we had] no reputation," Joyce says. Nevertheless, Ronnie Reno, eldest son of bluegrass legend Don Reno, agreed to perform at Pickin' in 2005, allowing the couple to tap into the national market. Ronnie and the Bowers have become friends, and he played the festival each year until he retired in 2019.

"I think Ron Reno was a tremendous component of our growth," John says. "We used him as a reference, and a lot of times, we got our foot in the door because he's so respected in the business."

The other watershed event was winning the International Bluegrass Music Association's Event of the Year in 2017. "That really, I think, solidified it for us because that is voted on by your peers in the music business, and to receive an honor like that was really a motivator for us because we had no idea we were even being considered or been nominated. To win that award, really, it meant a lot to us," John says.

Signs noting that achievement are posted right below the Parsons city-limit signs. The economic impact for restaurants, grocery stores, and lodging facilities has been huge, says Jessica Waldo, executive director of the Tucker County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). "People know the [festival's] name," she says. "It puts Parsons on the map as far as bluegrass goes. People love the event."

Jessica says traffic at the CVB increases as bluegrass fans seek out literature about other Tucker County attractions. Since most lodging is in the Davis / Canaan Valley area, the CVB and nonprofits work with Pickin' to shuttle people to and from the event.

"I think it says a lot about the tourism bureau [and other partners] in Tucker County that they are willing to shuttle you for free," John says. "This is a big economic boost for them to have an event like this. We have some restaurants here that say this makes their summer. Some people come and stay the whole month of the event."

John says the event has experienced a steady growth. "I want this to be a destination for bluegrass, so when people think of Parsons, West Virginia, or Tucker County, I want those names to be synonymous with bluegrass and the festival," John says. "If you go to only one festival a year, I want it to be this festival and want it to be the best of the best. Not necessarily the largest, but the best. I want this to be the best deal right here."

Part of providing the best possible experience, especially outdoors, is good sound. John rents his audio equipment from Blue Ridge Sound in North Carolina. The company is well-known in bluegrass, and its technicians work with many Pickin' performers elsewhere. So, Blue Ridge is already familiar with each band's sound preferences, which is essential to attracting good acts.

"High-caliber bands want to sound good," John says.

Most groups are all acoustic, but the selection criteria are flexible enough to accommodate percussion and electric instruments. "It is so multifaceted. There's this wide, all-encompassing umbrella. So, just calling it 'bluegrass' is kind of generic. There is so much variety in that [genre]. Primarily, our focus is about bluegrass and hillbilly music," John explains. "It's really what our fans want."

The challenge is to keep the programming fresh while retaining the traditional element so young people, newcomers, and old-timers all feel right at home. "We are seeing more young people," John says. "If you put on a show and the caliber of the musicians is good enough, you are going to attract people who are not familiar with the music."

Fans travel great distances and cross oceans to attend. In 2019, fans from 12 nations—including Australia, Sweden, Mexico, and India—were here. "Asia is the second-largest market for bluegrass behind the United States," he says. Before the pan-

Easy access to the artists is a big draw for fans. Here, bluegrass star Caleb Daugherty signs a souvenir for Morgantown's Scott Reppert.

demic, Pickin' hosted a family of four from Asia for seven years straight. It cost them about $25,000 for each trip!

The way band members interact with the fans before, during, and after the performances is as important as the instruments they pick, pluck, and bow. "We like bands that are personal, interactive," John says. "It's about accessibility."

Bands typically travel in recreational vehicles, which they park beside a reception building next to the stage. When acts change, incoming band members walk by an area accessible to all fans, who can pose for photos with band members. Many continue to greet fans and autograph photos and merchandise at a booth near the stage. Even top bluegrass stars, such as Rhonda Vincent and Doyle Lawson, make themselves accessible.

"I've seen Rhonda stand for three hours after a show talking to each and every fan who wanted to tell her a story or have a picture taken with her," John says. "That's pretty unheard of for the music business. A lot of big-name acts won't sign a picture or talk to people."

That accessibility further solidifies the relationship among the fans, bands, and festival, creating a collective atmosphere centered around the music rather than personalities. "We are music lovers, so this is not necessarily work for us," John says. "This is more of having a private event and inviting 6,000 of your closest friends."

The founders keep the party clean with a "no alcohol / drugs policy." Joyce says they could make much more money if they sold alcohol, but they want parents to feel comfortable bringing their children or grandparents to the festival. Even dogs are accommodated as long as they stay outside the fenced-in area around the stage. For many fans, the event doubles as a vacation or family reunion.

"We meet people from all over the state," says Benny Fitzwater, a retired coal miner from Maysel (Clay County) who's become a regular. "We look forward to coming together; it's like a family. We got to keep

this going. The people are so friendly. There is something in the spirit here that gives you a drive for this kind of music."

"It's a lot about the people," says Larry Arbaugh of Pendleton County. "You just sit down and listen. I'm always interested in making new friends, and this is just a great atmosphere for that."

"I love this place," says Zion Napier, mandolin player for the Indiana-based Caleb Daugherty Band, between signing autographs. "The crowd, the people. Everybody is super nice."

C. J. Lewandowski, founder of the Tennessee-based Po' Ramblin' Boys, says his band has been a regular at Pickin' since 2016. "It's John's and Joyce's passion to present something good," C. J. says. "The lineup makes it good. And John and Joyce are always looking for something better for the festival."

That incessant search for fresh, quality bands breaking onto the scene has helped the founders establish long-lasting music relationships. Po' Ramblin, which has been nominated for a Grammy, keeps coming back to this humble stage each August—the only West Virginia venue out of the 50 or so festivals they played in 2021.

"There's not a whole lot of opportunity to play in this part of the country," observes C. J. "They are doing something good for the state, and they don't skimp on talent."

The task of putting together a top-talent lineup for the five-day event is ongoing; the couple is always looking for promising new bands while staying grounded in familiar mainstays. While running the festival and campgrounds is a year-'round full-time job for John and Joyce, it was just four years ago that John finally left his day job to devote all his time to this passion. Both Bowers need all their energy during festival week, when two to three hours of sleep per night is the norm. It'd be even worse if not for dozens of volunteers who empty trash bins, sell and take tickets, answer guests' questions, and staff the souvenir stands.

Connie Grushecky, who lives in Pennsylvania near the Mason-Dixon Line, volunteers at the camp store. She works from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m., selling T-shirts and soft drinks while strains of bluegrass drift through the doors. "We hear the music real well from here," she says. "I enjoy it very much, and the camaraderie. It really helps to have people who care, who give each person personalized attention. It's all in how you treat people."

Fans are free to bring their own non-alcoholic beverages and food. A few vendors sell hamburgers, hot dogs, ice cream, and other festival staples. "We vet them pretty carefully," John says. They want vendors with unique products and fair pricing. One beneficiary of the festival is WV Caring, a hospice organization that raises money as a food vendor.

Coming from working-class backgrounds, John and Joyce are aware that many bluegrass fans simply aren't flush with the cash some festivals charge. "We try to make it very affordable for everyone," John says. In 2021, a five-day pass to see 25 bands was $85. Rather than allocate a large chunk of the budget to one headliner, John and Joyce prefer to make each band the "star of the hour." Gracing the sides and back walls of the stage are dozens of metal stars that commemorate each act that's performed at Pickin'.

Stars from the canceled 2020 festival are conspicuously absent, but John, who personally spent some downtime with COVID-19, says the pandemic had some positive side effects on the genre. Without heavy touring schedules, musicians returned to the basements and living rooms where their music is birthed. "There's a lot of new material, phenomenal material, some of the best," Joyce says.

John says the hiatus also tugged at the hearts of fans. "I don't think people will

The Seldom Scene, which closed out the third night of the 2021 festival, will be performing again at this year's event.

take live music and live venues for granted any longer," John says.

Terry Rowe is among them. "I'll see you here again next year. If you can't have fun, life ain't worth living," he says.

"As long as I am alive and able to drive, I'll be here," Mark Tinsman says. "This was our first time, but it won't be the last."

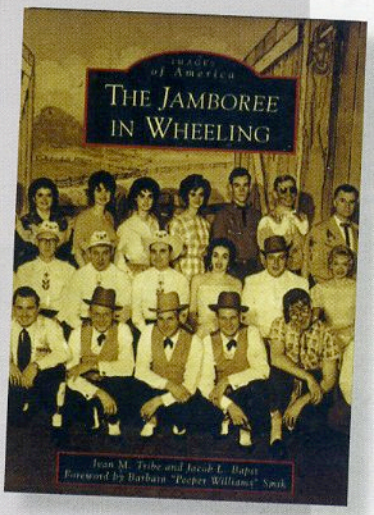
And Edmond and Shirley Hayes, the Ohio couple who've attended every festival since the beginning, plan to be back this year. He'll be 88 but still may get up early and wait in line to secure a front-row seat. And he'll do some reminiscing with his campground neighbors, John and Joyce, and the hundreds of other friends the couple have made over the last two decades at Pickin' in Parsons.

"I just like the people at these bluegrass festivals," Edmond says. "John and Joyce are the best people in the world, and they run a great place there."

CARL E. FEATHER is a longtime contributor to GOLDENSEAL. He and his wife, Ruth, live in Bruceton Mills (Preston County). Check out his blog at thefeathercottage.com for videos, stories, and photos from his beloved West Virginia.

The Jamboree in Wheeling

Anyone who loves country music will enjoy this new book by Ivan Tribe and Jacob L. Bapst (Arcadia Publishing, 127 p.). It's a pictorial history of the *Jamboree*, Wheeling's country music radio spectacular, which started in 1933. The biggest stars in the industry graced the *Jamboree's* stage over the years, but the program also offered an outlet for regional musicians, such as Doc and Chickie Williams and Slim Lehart [see Spring 2022]. The authors devote space in the book to these local musicians, shining a spotlight on many *Jamboree* legends who should be better known in both our region and nationally. The book is available in some local stores and from online sellers. *–ed.*



Ebony and the Greek performs on West Virginia Day, June 20, 1973, at the state capitol in Charleston. Unless noted otherwise, all photos by Harry Schaefer, courtesy of the National Archives.

Ebony and the Greek

A Funk Band from West Virginia

By David Fryson

In summer 1973, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sent photographers around the country to document environmental changes caused by various kinds of pollution, demographic shifts, and urban renewal. On June 20, one of those photographers, Harry Schaefer, made his way to a special West Virginia Day celebration on the steps of the state capitol in Charleston, where my funk band, Ebony and the Greek, was performing.

The gig was a Music Union Local 136 Trust Fund-sponsored concert. It was the day before summer '73 started, and I remember it like it was yesterday. The audience's response was so positive we returned weeks later to play for thousands of young people. That crowd was so enthusiastic they

On that West Virginia Day, the band featured (left-right) Louie Stanley (keys), Henry "Jello" Graves (percussion and flute), Billy Dunham (lead vocals), Shelly Bausley (sax), David Fryson (drums), Dean Alan Sims (trumpet), Stanley Bolland (lead guitar), and James "Bucky" Barksdale (bass).

didn't want us to stop. Local music union president Ned Guthrie [see Fall 1987] suggested to the crowd that Ebony and the Greek needed to embark on a national tour. Already thinking in that direction, we decided to take our show on the road.

West Virginia's old-time and country music heritage is world renowned, but few know of our jazz, funk, soul, and rhythm & blues history [see Spring 2021]. It's unfortunate that our state's African-American presence isn't well-known. Part of the Appalachian myth is that our region is deficient in diversity, especially in terms of Black music and the African-American experience, in general. Few outside our state know that West Virginia State College (now University) and Bluefield State College attracted African-American musical acts from across the nation. The Southern Coalfields—really, from Charleston south—was a popular destination for Black big bands during their heyday in the 1930s and 1940s.

Charleston had a rich music scene in the 1960s and 1970s [see Spring 2012], much of it reflecting the African-American ex-

The 1973 West Virginia Day audience enjoys Ebony and the Greek's free afternoon concert.

perience. Jazz legend and internationally known pianist Bob Thompson reflects that more than 20 Kanawha Valley establishments had live music in the mid-1960s and 1970s, much of it showcasing Black music. I was thrilled to be a part of that scene from ages 11 through 22.

The '60s and '70s were a time of racial tumult in America, and many sectors of the church and other societal institutions were in retrenchment. But the pop-music scene was at the forefront of fostering a more integrated and accepting society. This started with rock in the 1950s and continued with record companies such as Motown, Atlantic, Columbia, and Stax leading the way.

Before we formed Ebony and the Greek, our members had played in different bands. In summer 1971, Rodney Edwards, James Barksdale, Stanley Bolland, and I traveled to Washington, DC, to back up the up-and-coming Dynamic Superiors of Motown fame. This group had the first openly gay lead singer of a soul group. That fact itself was a culture shock for us as young men from West Virginia and offered us a look into the humanity of the LGBTQ+ community, which has lasted a lifetime for me. The energy of the big-city music scene was

overwhelming. During that summer in DC, some people came just to hear the young boys from West Virginia, and that became a draw unto itself.

Planning to be on the road full-time with this soon-to-be-famous singing group, I had decided not to return for my senior year of high school. As fate (or providence) would have it, on the July 4 weekend of 1971, a club where we were playing outside Springfield, Massachusetts, burned to the ground (some say it was mob inspired), destroying all our equipment and necessitating a return to Charleston. Nevertheless, our success that summer in DC made us realize we could play with the best musicians anywhere.

When we came back to Charleston, Rodney Edwards and I returned to high school for our senior years. Stanley Bolland started playing in the local group Ivory Flower with a young Louie Stanley—yes, two Stanleys in one band. Stanley and Louie started plotting. One by one, they replaced their original members and formed Ebony and the Greek as a super group of some of the best local funk musicians.

Our name was derived from the fact that in the beginning, all of us were African-American except for Louie, who was of Greek heritage. Louie's father, Spyros Stanley, was a Greek immigrant and well-known entrepreneur, parking lot owner, former musician (who'd occasionally break out his harmonica for friends and family), nightclub proprietor, and our original manager. Because of Spyros' influence and generosity, Ebony and the Greek had great equipment, nice travel vans and trucks, and a place to practice in the basement of his original family restaurant. When we weren't on the road, we also were the house band at his Skylight Lounge on Summers Street.

We traveled extensively throughout West Virginia, Ohio, and Michigan; as far east as Halifax, Nova Scotia; and as far west as Denver. Although we never made it as a national act, Ebony and the Greek hovered on the fringes of notoriety and left an imprint wherever we performed. A Black funk group from West Virginia that could really jam, featuring a Greek keyboardist who could really sing and dance, was quite the novelty. We later (after I left the band) recorded the single "Slick" with a B side written and sung by Louie entitled "Don't Nobody Want to Be My Friend." A few of our other cover songs from that time can be found on YouTube.

Our membership changed over 10 years. At that West Virginia Day performance in 1973, the only missing original member was brass player Leon "Rodney" Edwards, who had just left to join a band in DC. Later, we added musicians—some of them white, who we called "blue-eyed Ebonies" to keep the tenor of the group name. Others who played with us at one time or another included John and Richard Lovejoy, Bobby Harrold, Morris Hambleton, Eddie Barber, Gail Mosby, and Meredith "Buster" Coles.

Our years with Ebony and the Greek were some of the most eventful of our lives. I wistfully remember that sunny summer day on the Capitol steps nearly a half-century ago and how it catapulted us to professional status. Thank goodness there was a photographer to record that event. It shows how the government's investment in culture pays dividends in our national consciousness.

Behind these still pictures are the hopes and dreams of young West Virginians trying to make their way in the world of music. Life goes so quickly, and it's hard to believe these memories are from so long ago.

DAVID M. FRYSON retired as WVU's Senior Advisor to the President for Diversity Outreach. He is an attorney and an ordained minister, currently serving as senior pastor at the New First Baptist Church of Kanawha City in Charleston. He also serves nationally as a higher education diversity consultant. This is his second contribution to GOLDENSEAL. His first was about the enigmatic relationship between his wife Joy's great-great-great-grandparents, a slave owner and slave, at Institute [Summer 2020].

Whatever Happened to the Band Members?

Stanley V. Bolland (guitar) was a band founder. A strong lead guitarist, he had played with many integrated bands, such as the Dynamic Delegation, at a young age. In late 1973, Stanley left Ebony and the Greek and formed Stratus, still a powerhouse band on the West Virginia music scene that also performs on USO and military tours around the world.

Louie "The Greek" Stanley (keyboard) was a key reason our band had such notoriety—due not only to his Greek heritage but also his extreme talent at the keyboard. Louie could play all styles, sing, arrange music, and dance great. He played multiple keyboards in a very innovative percussive style. Whenever we traveled, African-American crowds fell in love with "The Greek" because of his dancing and on-stage presence. He also gave us access to venues that were otherwise limited to bands with all-Black members. After the demise of Ebony and the Greek, Louie played with the Ritz Band—the house band at Charleston's Club Ritz. Everyone was amazed at Louie's talents and near perfect pitch. After his playing days, he managed one of his family's parking lots until his death in 2016. He's survived by his sons Elias K. Stanley and Damon (Keisha) Hamby and grandchildren Damon Jr., Micah, and RaeLynn Faith Hamby.

Leon "Rodney" Edwards (trumpet, flugelhorn) was a talented original member who'd played in popular bands in junior and senior high. His playing was reminiscent of a young Louis Armstrong. Rodney, James Barksdale, and I were all members of The King Kurtis Band in school. Rodney graduated from Stonewall Jackson High in 1972 and moved to DC to live with his brother. He joined the nationally known band Black Heat, which recorded for Atlantic. Rodney later attended Oral Roberts University, married Babette Edwards, and had three children: Leone B. Walker and Carleton D. and Rodney Edwards, Jr. He lived the rest of his life in the DC area and died in 2018.

Dean Alan Sims (trumpet) came to Charleston from Springfield, Ohio. He lived with his grandfather in Institute and attended West Virginia State College as a music major. Dean was the second person to leave the group, eventually returning to Springfield. He later performed with nationally known funk bands such as the Ohio Players. Dean continues to play nationally and is the lead for multiple bands. He's best known now as a Louis Armstrong impersonator.

Henry "Jello" Graves (percussion, flute, lead vocals) joined the group after attending a year at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston. A multitalented musician, he played percussion and flute during our early days and later became one of the lead singers. Henry joined the military after the band's demise and performed with Marine Corps traveling ensembles. A West Virginia State College grad, he's married to Alberta Graves, and they have three children. Henry is the principal of South Charleston Middle School, leads the Men's Chorus at All Nations Church, and is the music minister for Pilgrim Home Baptist Church.

Shelly Bausley (sax) was our energetic front-man and spokesperson, known for his talking, dancing, and playing. Shelly did everything hard and enthusiastically and often went out into the crowd to dance with the audience. An outstanding saxophonist, he's still part of the Charleston music scene. For many years, Shelly was a supervisor at the South Charleston Stamping Plant. Nearly 30 years ago, he became the senior pastor of the Pilgrim Home Baptist Church in Jefferson (Kanawha County). His church services are music oriented and involve his family. He's the former vice moderator for the Mt. Olivet District of Baptist Churches. He and

A slightly later version of Ebony and the Greek, featuring in front: (left-right) Billy Dunham, Rick Lovejoy, Stanley Bolland, Louie Stanley, Henry "Jello" Graves, Shelly Bausley, and David "Fry" Fryson; in back: James "Bucky" Barksdale and Bob Harrold. Courtesy of our author.

his wife, Sherri Harris Bausley, have three children: Al, Brian, and Levitra. While Al plays at his dad's church, Brian is a singer / musician /writer for nationally known gospel star Jason Clayborn of Louisville.

James "Bucky" Barksdale (bass) performed with various local bands, including The King Curtis Band, from the '60s through early '80s. For many years, he was an employee with NAPA Auto Supply. He continues to play in area churches. He and his wife, Julie Barksdale, have one child, Arielle. In an interesting side note, James and Julie's marriage was the first ever performed by now-nationally famous Bishop T. D. Jakes. Julie was Jakes' first church administrative assistant when he was getting started in West Virginia. James continues to use his very strong, innovative, slap style of bass playing in church services.

Billy Dunham (lead vocals / guitar) was our original lead singer. After Stanley Bolland left, he took over as lead guitarist. He's one of the few band members who continues to play music full-time. Billy currently lives in Johnson City, Tennessee, and performs nationally. He owns Dunham Music Group (SESAC) Catalog #425920 and Jazmae Music Publishing & Label PA32CH, with multiple titles available.

As for me—**David "Fry" Fryson (drums)**—I was the third original to leave the group, returning to college in late 1975 after traveling with the band for almost four years. I married Joy Morris in 1976, and we have three children—David Jr., Aaron, and Kristina—and now five grandchildren. I received a bachelor of science in Music Education from West Virginia State College in 1979 and a Juris Doctor from WVU in 1988. After practicing law for many years, I became the founding Chief Diversity Officer / Vice President for Diversity at WVU. I'm also an ordained pastor and often preach at Shelly Bausley's church for his pastoral anniversaries. I continue to play drums and keyboard.

Campers line up outside the main building of Camp Lightfoot in Summers County, about 1965. All photos courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center.

Camp Lightfoot

A Social Welfare Initiative Turned Lasting Legacy

By Ed Garten

Who would have thought that in Depression-era McDowell County, a social worker's advocacy for coal camp children would leave a legacy that persists today? Indeed, Florence Haughton Jones' work pushed against the grain of an industry that often held little regard for workers' families. In the 1920s and 1930s, after decades of fighting the Mine Wars and facing ongoing government investigations into coalfield conditions, many coal companies began adopting a paternalistic view toward their employees. Instead of butting heads with miners, coal companies would begin building so-called model coal towns with better housing and offering more recreational opportunities.

In 1933, Jones, a social worker employed by Koppers Coal, a subsidiary of Eastern Gas & Fuel Associates, approached Thomas

E. Lightfoot, the company's vice-president for welfare and compensation. She persuaded Lightfoot to establish what would become, within the mining industry, the most progressive youth outdoor camping and recreational experience in the nation.

Within a few years, Lightfoot had moved Jones' idea to reality. The company didn't own any land appropriate for a campsite, so, for a few years, it rented facilities. An initial group of employees' children attended the Fayette County 4-H Camp at Beckwith in summer 1935. The company kept expanding camp locations each year until 1941, when it purchased a permanent site of 83 acres and erected buildings on the banks of the Greenbrier River nine miles from Hinton (Summers County).

By the early 1950s, Camp Thomas E. Lightfoot consisted of an administration building, 11 cottages for campers, a cook's cottage, a modern infirmary, a director's cottage, a storage building, a farm building, a sports equipment storage building, a rifle range, and a waterfront shelter. The main building featured a kitchen, dining hall, camp office, craft shop, furnace, and showers. Farm operations were part of the camp program, supplying fresh vegetables for the children.

By 1955, the program included swimming, boating, canoeing, junior and senior life-saving courses, fishing, rifle shooting, archery, crafts, sports, nature study, Indian lore and crafts, scouting, human relations, storytelling, and a camp newspaper. Other special programs and activities consisted of a vesper and candlelight service, a water carnival, a track meet, patriotic programs, and evening council circles with campfires.

Not all coal companies were this progressive, but Eastern stood out, realizing that contented employees were more productive—and less likely to go on strike. Camps, bowling alleys, theaters, and buildings for social clubs and youth gatherings were relatively inexpensive investments to keep workers and their families happy.

One camper, now in his early 80s, told me, "Eastern Gas & Fuel was a good, safe place to work in the '40s and '50s. The union was strong, with a good concentration on safety. The miners were well paid. It was a good life."

Typical of the racial segregation of that period, the company sent the children of its African-American employees to Camp Washington-Carver, our state's Black 4-H camp, at Clifftop (Fayette County) [see p. 24]. Camp Lightfoot was partially integrated in 1963 and fully in 1967.

Despite the segregation, Camp Lightfoot stood out from similar programs in terms of ethnic inclusion. For instance, the children of Japanese employees—shortly after the end of World War II—affiliated with the company's offices in New York and Boston, attended Lightfoot. For many children from rural West Virginia, these were their first interactions with youth from big cities. Recently, one camper from that period observed, "When I was there, we had the Japanese kids who really added something special to our experience. And then we had the kids from the New York City area plus the kids from Louisiana. Growing up in a small, isolated coal town like Wharton (Boone County), having the opportunity to spend two weeks with the Japanese cohort of young people was an awesome experience. I remember learning some Japanese words and sharing one another's cultural practices."

Yet another camper, now in his 70s, added, "I became good friends with one of those Japanese boys. In the coal camp where I grew up, we didn't see a lot of, well, anything foreign. My father was a good, kind man who just died a few years ago at age 98, but he was also a Marine who fought in the Pacific. He had had no opportunity to work through his animosity toward the Japanese, in general. I wasn't

The camp nurse attends to a boy's injured toe, 1959. Based on his grimace, we're guessing she might have applied a little Mercurochrome just before the photo was snapped.

thinking of him when I brought Makoto home for a few days between camp sessions. My father credits getting to know him with helping him shed any remaining ill feelings toward the Japanese as he really liked Makoto and could see we were close. I am sure that there are other stories like this. By the way, company employees' kids from Louisiana were only a little less exotic to us coal camp kids!"

As mines closed and miners were laid off in the early 1960s, many of the coal company's amenities and benefits began dying off. A company's bottom line often crowded out social-welfare expenditures, but Camp Lightfoot persisted until 1984, when after another major consolidation, the company ceased to support the property. Nonetheless, one former camper observed, "Especially in the '60s, after the theaters . . . even the company stores closed down, Lightfoot was a godsend to a lot of us—two weeks away from what could be grimy, cloistered little lives." And unlike in "real life," there was very little class status at camp. It didn't matter if your parent was a superintendent, a boss, or a regular miner, all the kids were treated as equals. Camp-

Memories of Camp Lightfoot

"It was a great experience for me and my brother. There was nothing to do in the holler. We went every year, and it taught independence, responsibility, tolerance, and respect for those who were different than us."

"My dad worked at the Pittsburgh office, and I couldn't wait for camp every summer. That bus ride was part of the camp experience. It was a great work-up to get to the best place in the whole world. We 'Pittsburgh kids' would get to see all the kids we never saw through the year. I would be ready to jump out of my skin just waiting for that bus to come pick us up."

"I came to camp with the small group of kids from Boston. . . . [My dad] also spent a couple of years in the Oceana and Beckley offices (he was a 'suit,' not a miner). My love of camp started in 1971 and continues to today—my favorite two weeks of the year!"

"My father worked as a miner for Eastern Gas & Fuel at the Wharton complex. At that time, most miners were being paid the average wage of the state, but as many have heard, 'money can't buy happiness,' and there were so many things the company provided for us, but Camp Lightfoot was at the top of the list."

"I loved going there every summer, and to me, it was the best place in the world. I can recall my mom coming to visit at the end of the first week, and I got upset because I thought she came to take me home. Thank goodness she didn't!"

"Our parents loved getting rid of us, and sometimes, we loved getting away from them!"

Campers head down to the swimming hole at Camp Lightfoot, about 1970.

ers could bring some money with them but had to turn it into the "camp bank." They could charge some candy, pop, and stamps on their bank account—with the stamps, campers were encouraged to write letters home.

As a means of discouraging homesickness, children weren't informed that the camp had a telephone. And the bumpy bus ride to camp from McDowell County and more distant locations was part of the overall experience.

Changes come to all organizations, even those with noble purposes. In 1985, the company closed Camp Lightfoot. A spokesperson noted in the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* that "the camp was born out of a progressive idea and the moral awareness that the children of the then existing coal camp communities lacked the opportunity to experience life beyond their immediate environs. That need was met and met successfully by Camp Lightfoot."

In that same piece, the spokesperson candidly acknowledged, "Prosperity has brought with it tremendous gains in transportation, accessibility, and personal wealth, making possible family vacations and a life outside the once-isolated coal communities." A progressive idea had come to an end because of progress, but over the run, well over 30,000 young people were given the experience of delight, exploration, and wonder along the banks of the Greenbrier.

In 1986, when Eastern Gas & Fuel was sold to Peabody Coal, Lightfoot still appeared to have a future. However, the next year, the *Beckley Post-Herald* reported that Peabody had no immediate plans for the property. Today, it's owned by Appa-

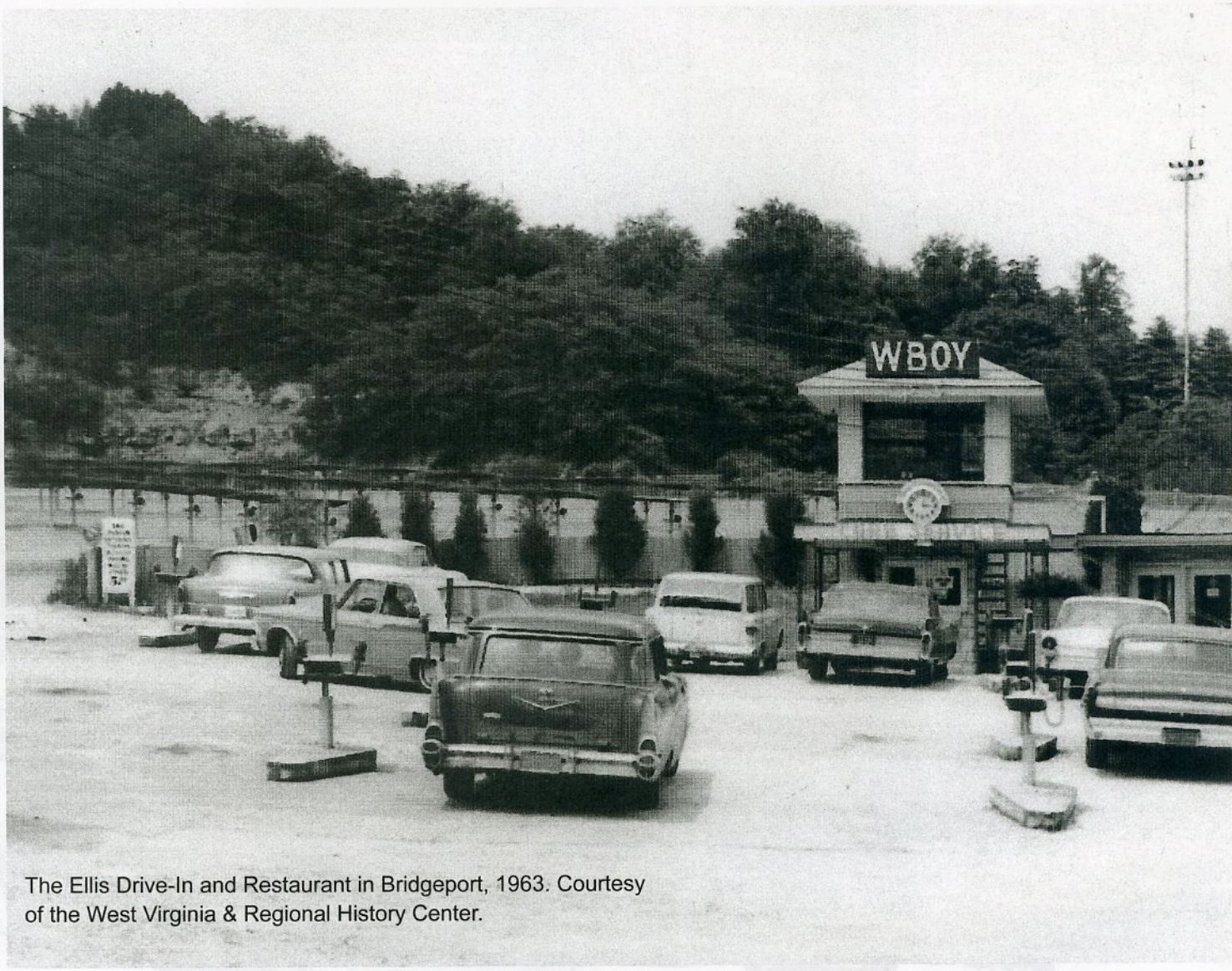
There's a Facebook group for former Camp Lightfoot campers: **https://www.facebook.com/groups/40748363593/**

Dr. Stokes, the camp doctor, and Partner, his dalmatian, about 1950.

lachian Headwaters. The Appalachian Beekeeping Collective and the Camp Waldo ecology education camp operate on the grounds here at various times throughout the year.

For former campers and staff members, the highlight of the year is the annual reunion. Each year, folks who attended the camp from the 1940s through the early 1980s bring their extended families back to the grounds to reflect and remember. The alumni continue to affirm what the company spokesperson said when the camp closed for good in 1985: "Camp Lightfoot has been a wonderful experience for literally thousands of young people, years full of happiness and warm memories. And, though Camp Lightfoot's role in life has been concluded, those who knew it know that the world is a better place for it having been there."

Dr. ED GARTEN grew up in Summers County near Talcott. Now retired, he served over 40 years as a professor and administrator with four universities. His last 22 years were with the University of Dayton, where he is emeritus dean and professor. His research interests continue in the areas of education leadership and social justice. This is his second contribution to GOLDENSEAL; his first was about the desegregation of Summers County schools [Summer 2020].



The Ellis Drive-In and Restaurant in Bridgeport, 1963. Courtesy of the West Virginia & Regional History Center.

Drive-In Movie Stowaways

By C. R. Thomas

Andy Brian Hamilton moved to the Hill on South Seventh in Clarksburg when he was in eighth grade and I was in the ninth. I still remember the hard-hitting tackle he threw on me at Alvarez Football Field—the matchbox-sized vacant lot next door to Alan Ogden Alvarez's family's home, two doors from where Andy lived and four doors from my house. Andy—or Drew—and I soon became good friends.

Initially, I was drawn to Andy for several reasons. He was good at sports, especially football, making the high school varsity three straight years. He was witty, cynical, and intelligent and had a profound interest in adventure. Andy, I, and perhaps a dozen other guys bonded together over our exponentially cynical values, sardonic perspectives on life, and love of sports. We had many things in common but not everything. Each had his specialties. As a

high school derelict, I specialized in wild things—instigating pranks and trouble, getting drunk, and going on hitchhiking adventures. Andy, who tried to be cool like James Dean—or rather Dean's *Rebel Without a Cause* anti-hero, Jim Stark—was absolutely fascinated by my excursions. When he heard about me getting blitzed one Saturday and hitchhiking with two other guys in the back of a huge *Pittsburgh Press* newspaper truck bound for Pittsburgh 120 miles away, Andy wanted to experience something like that for himself.

For years, though, we never set out on an adventure together. His parents kept a closer watch on him, and because he was a year younger, he usually hung out with his own classmates, whereas I tended to hang out all over town—making friends primarily by playing basketball, telling jokes, and trading insults.

Oftentimes, we guys sat on a wall, steps, or street corner talking late into the night about our various pranks and misdeeds. Andy seriously regretted not having any "really neat adventures." I always promised him that one day, we'd find something wild to do. Then, one summer day right before his junior year and my senior year, our first real outing fell into place.

Our plan was simple: find a ride to the Ellis Drive-In in neighboring Bridgeport,

hide in the car trunk, and then sneak in without paying. When no authorities were watching, we'd pop out of the trunk, hang out near the concession area, check out girls, and, at times, watch the movie. Bob Davis, my classmate from the East End, had a car and a date one Saturday night and agreed to help. Bob stipulated, "You can both hide in my car trunk to sneak in, Chuck, but then, you'll have to find your own ride back home to Clarksburg." I emphatically assured my longtime friend, "No problem, Bobbo! You get us there. Andy and I *will* find a ride back! GUARANTEED!!"

The plan went well. Bob and his girlfriend picked us up in front of Hagan's Ice Cream Store. When we were almost to the drive-in, we stopped so Andy and I could get into the trunk. Once inside, Bob let us out. It was almost as if the Trojans had snuck their covert horse into a drive-in theater.

Andy was ecstatic. At last, he was in the midst of an adventure. We found a good spot close to the concession area. Since the drive-in was about five miles from Clarksburg and only a mile from downtown Bridgeport, there were girls there from all five Clarksburg high schools, including our own—Washington Irving—and also from Bridgeport. We talked with the ones we knew and yelled in the direction of some others. A few voluntarily came over to talk with us, probably because Andy was good looking. Anyway, we saw hundreds of people heading for refreshments—his classmates, my classmates, and other people we knew from dances and parties.

We were exuberant as the coming attractions played. But Andy was so pumped because we got in free and were meeting all these good-looking girls. We hoped some of them might even pick us up later as we thumbed our way back home. We were *positive* we'd get a ride back to Clarksburg.

At intermission, we beat the crowd to the concessions, met a few more girls, and saw even more people we knew. As the second half was ending, we exited hastily so we could get out to Route 19 and start hitchhiking. We picked a spot to thumb where a car could easily pull over to pick us up. Everything was going like clockwork, as the old cliché goes.

After about 5,000 cars zoomed by, Andy's mood changed. I did mention he was cynical but neglected to add that during bad times, he could be downright pessimistic. This was one of those times. Once the drive-in was empty, we had two choices. We could stand there on the far side of Bridgeport Hill—almost five miles to Clarksburg and even farther to South Seventh Street—and keep thumbing or start walking. We opted to hike, without the hitching part.

Neither of us was joyous. To pass the unfortunate two-and-a-half-hour trek, we started cursing the people who didn't pick us up. About an hour later and a little after midnight, we greeted two older down-and-out drunks walking in the opposite direction towards Bridgeport. I yelled, "HEY-Y-Y!!! How ya' doin'?" They mumbled back something incoherent from the other side of the highway and continued on. That long, boring, arduous walk home was a bleak ending to our hoped-for adventure that initially had so much promise.

The marquise du Deffand's quotation about the length of a journey is well known: "The distance is nothing; it is only the first step that is difficult." Based totally on our experience that dismal night of walking 4.6 miles home, I think Andy—were he still alive—and I would humbly disagree: "In a journey, the first step is nothing; it's the next 8,489 steps that prove to be the most difficult."

Dr. C. R. THOMAS, formerly of Clarksburg, was a buck sergeant in the U.S. Marine Corps. He's currently working on his sixth college degree at age 83. This is his second contribution to GOLDENSEAL; his first was "Cough Drops and Mother's Day" [Spring 2009].

The Drive-In Movie Theater in Lewisburg

Text and photo by Pete Ottaviano

I lived in Lewisburg (Greenbrier County) from 1983 to 1985 while attending the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine (WVSOM). Lewisburg is a small town of about 4,000 friendly people. It has a very historic background with many buildings dating back to the 1800s. The State Fair happens in August each year in nearby Fairlea; the area is teaming with nice restaurants, unique shops, craft breweries, and a distillery; and The Greenbrier is located only a few minutes away in White Sulphur Springs. If you've never been to Lewisburg, it's well worth the trip.

I have many fond memories of my time there. I remember driving down Route 219 between the I-64 exit and downtown. About halfway down on the right side was a drive-in theater. At night, you could see the movie on the big screen all the way from 219. I didn't think much of it at the time other than it provided nighttime entertainment for local people. In the 1980s, we just took for granted that drive-ins would always be there.

Prior to leaving Lewisburg, I decided to take a closer look at the drive-in during the day. Much to my amazement, when I got closer, I noticed that the screen appeared to be a big slab of concrete built onto a house. I assumed the theater operators lived in the house but couldn't verify it. One side of the house had a ticket booth, with a narrow road running beside it. The backyard was a big field where the cars parked.

It seemed unique compared to standard ones I'd seen across the country. My brother had a book called *The American Drive-In Theaters*. I searched through the whole book but didn't see one picture of anything similar to what Lewisburg had.

Sometime after 1990, I made a return trip, and sadly, the drive-in had closed. The backyard field had been converted into a self-storage company. Fortunately, the house with the concrete slab was still standing.

The only information I could find on the internet was that it opened before 1974 and was operated by D. Warren. My hope is that some people who read this might be able to share some memories and history about this unique drive-in.

PETE OTTAVIANO, a native of Spencer (Roane County), graduated from Marshall University and the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine. He presently lives in Huntington, where he's a physician at the Hershel "Woody" Williams VA Medical Center. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Moving Up to High Street

Old-Time Jam Has New Venue in Art Bar

Text and photos by Carl E. Feather

Old-time musicians jam in Morgantown's Art Bar on a soggy evening, 2022: (left-right) Jim Wilson (with bass), Larry Spisak, Jeanne Sutton, Gabriel Bass, Lily Farabaugh, Kathryn Madison, Shane McManus, and Chris Hollingshead.

Morgantown's Old-Time Music Jam has a new venue and faces, but organizer Shane McManus says its mission of preserving old-time string music still strikes a sweet chord with players and listeners alike.

The jam was a year-round Wednesday-evening fixture at the Morgantown Brewing Company for many years before the pandemic shook up things. Shane, son of the jam's founder, Keith McManus, says that during COVID-19, the pub's owners

WVU student Lily Farabaugh (center) joined the old-time jam in early 2022. It gives her an opportunity to learn from others, including mandolinist Kathryn Madison (right).

sought a more financially viable entertainment option for its Wednesday-evening slot. The string players went in search of a new location and found it just two blocks east, on High Street, where Stephen Wilson and Robert Able opened their Art Bar in fall 2021. An eclectic eatery with a commercial kitchen that can be rented by the meal or day, the Art Bar hosts "all types of live music," poetry readings, and artist workshops and exhibits. Art even pervades the table coverings—sheets of white paper on which guests are encouraged to doodle and color with markers and crayons. A craft project can be added to a sandwich order for a few dollars.

"People come here for the food, but they also are coming for the events we are doing," Stephen says.

Shane and Stephen were high school classmates, and that provided a connection for the jam's relocation. Stephen says the gathering is a great fit for a fledgling business with a miniscule budget for live entertainment. Having the jam in the bar two or three nights a month provides a steady supply of customers who buy food and beverages (alcoholic drinks are currently limited to wine and cider). Further, the fun family-friendly atmosphere is a great place to introduce youngsters to old-time music.

The regular musicians include WVU senior Lily Farabaugh, who first attended the jam with friends as a listener in December 2021. She played in her high school marching band, owned a guitar, and was interested in old-time string music. However, playing with a group of veteran string players was a new experience. Her enthusiasm attracted the attention of banjo player Sue Gimbal, who introduced herself and her mandolin to Lily. Two days later, Lily

purchased her own mandolin and has been attending the jams ever since—as a player.

"The first couple of times, I didn't know what to do. I just watched," says Lily, who now does more playing than watching. "I really enjoy it. It is really different from what I've done before. I like [the genre]. It's different from what you hear on the radio."

Changes in life situations have altered the core group from those pre-pandemic days when Keith, Shane, Vince Farsetta, Taylor Runner, Jamie Lester, Jim Wilson, and Sue Gimbal were at the core. Keith and Vince set a hard-driving intense pace for the jams, which Keith guesses started about 20 years ago.

"[One year] we played [at Morgantown Brewing Company] on St. Patrick's Day," Keith told me in 2018. "I told the manager . . . that I'd like to get a weekly jam going there. And he said he'd be willing to pay us, but I told him, 'No, just give us a pitcher of beer.'"

Keith's passion for old-time music originated in his Southern California childhood. There was music in the household and in his genes; one grandfather played the banjo but died before Keith was born; the other played the fiddle until his arm was blown off while turkey hunting, and he switched to the harmonica and coronet. By the time Keith was 10, he was taking guitar lessons under his mother's encouragement.

A chance encounter with fiddler Jay Unger (composer of "Ashokan Farewell"—the theme to Ken Burns' *Civil War* series) prompted Keith to pick up where his turkey-hunting grandfather left off. By that time, Keith had migrated to Doddridge County, where he and other back-to-the-land adherents had taken up farming in the late 1970s. With old-time string music readily available in the Mountain State, Keith was drawn into festivals, workshops, and jams.

"We'd play weekends at somebody's home or go to the local fiddlers' contests or Augusta Heritage Center," Keith recalls. "Next thing we knew, we were playing a lot of the festivals as the Stewed Mulligan band. We didn't have to advertise because we were all extended family."

When the jam was still at Morgantown Brewing, it earned a reputation with players and fans alike for being "high energy with great players," observed Bruce Ziff, a Canadian law professor and five-string banjo player who dropped in to listen and was soon recruited to play. Bruce was eating at the bar when Keith noticed his banjo. Keith introduced himself and encouraged Bruce to join them on stage.

"From my one visit, my sense is that Keith McManus is the heart and soul of this gathering," Bruce observed after that 2018 visit. "Keith gives the jam a certain gravitas that it might not have without him. He's an impressive guy."

Another veteran of the jams, Vince Farsetta, is a native of the greater New York City area. He discovered old-time music during a stopover in West Virginia in the early 1970s. Back in New York, he purchased a banjo and started studying the clawhammer style. Within six months, he was back in the Mountain State learning old-time string music from the masters. He also had a reggae band in Morgantown for many years and still dabbles in different styles, but he focuses primarily on that hard-driving old-time style.

Vince lost a great punchline when the jam moved from Morgantown Brewing, whose building once housed the Gabriel Brothers retail chain. "I used to buy my long underwear where we play music," Vince quipped back in the day.

The 2018 version of the jam also included Jamie Lester, a sculptor who's created more than 40 large-scale bronze public art pieces, including Morgantown's Jerry West and Don Knotts sculptures [see Summer 2018]. He says the Morgantown jam helped him gain confidence in another aspect of

(Front to back) Tom D'Avello, Larry Spisak, and Jim Wilson.

his artistry. "Keith is like a surrogate father to me," says Jamie, a mandolinist. "He has inspired, advised, assisted, consulted, and influenced me greatly throughout my career as a sculptor."

Jamie became acquainted with Keith back in the early 1990s, when he was a WVU sculpture student and McManus was a shop technician there. Several years passed before Jamie had the courage to attend a jam and add his strings to the mix.

"It is one of those cultural happenings that affects me deeply," Jamie says. "The jam has certainly helped me gain confidence as a musician. I have learned a tiny sample of the old-time tunes played at the jam, but they have influenced my songwriting powerfully."

"Old-time" music generally refers to tunes and styles derived from the traditional music of the British Isles, which hitched a ride to Appalachia in the stringed instruments

Keith McManus (standing, with fiddle) and banjo player Vince Farsetta lead the jam at its former site, the Morgantown Brewing Company, in 2018.

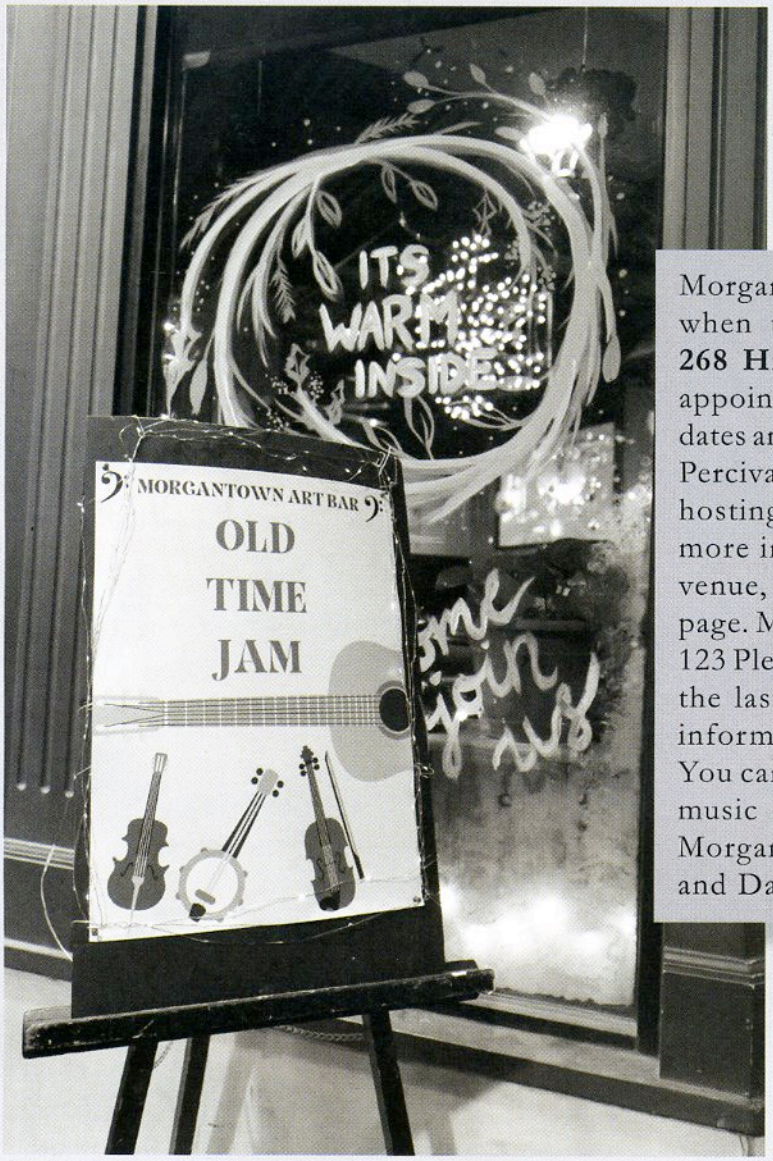
of immigrants. It is music of celebration, gathering, and sharing, making it perfect for jams. Concurrently, old-time music is "very regimented, with precise melodies that are repeated in strict patterns," says Jamie. Improvisation is frowned upon. These tenets make for an accommodating, nurturing atmosphere at the jam, which, Shane says, focuses on "traditional and old-timey tunes. I am a fan of all genres, and I try to incorporate all genres in the tunes that we play. So, sometimes you'll hear me play an African rhythm or Spanish baseline for an Italian riff, but it is all old-time and traditional."

Keith has largely handed over the leadership mantel to Shane, who says, "I do find myself to be a large driving force in the jam, but I'm not alone," Shane says. "Jim and Sue are both the great driving forces. Really, the key to this music is that it's fiddle tunes, so we need a good fiddle player to drive it, and that is the secret."

Fiddles, guitars, mandolins, banjos, and basses are present in varying numbers, providing constantly changing textures and sounds, session after session.

Vince notes, "People come in from out of town. You never know who is going to be there. I've had complete strangers come up to me and tell me that they've never seen anything like this. They really loved it."

"If you come next week, it may not be the same as it is tonight," says veteran bass



Morgantown's Old-Time Jam gets underway when the players arrive at the **Art Bar, 268 High Street, Morgantown**, on their appointed Wednesday evenings. For specific dates and times, visit the Jam's Facebook page. Percival Hall, on the WVU campus, has been hosting an old-time jam since the 1970s. For more information on this Tuesday evening venue, visit the Percival Pickers' Facebook page. Morgantown's iconic live music venue, 123 Pleasant Street, hosts the Sunday Shindig the last Sunday of each month. For more information, visit **123pleasantstreet.com**. You can also stay in the loop about old-time music and dance in this area through the Morgantown Friends of Old-Time Music and Dance: **morgantowndance.com**.

player Jim Wilson during a break. "It's always changing."

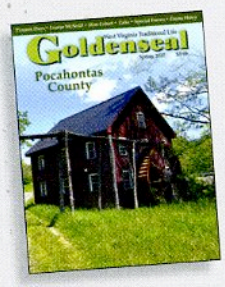
In talking with different musicians, it seems like the pandemic has given them more time to hone their skills. "Everyone is getting better, like much better," says fiddler Larry Spisak.

"There are a lot of variables in the final product and how the results will be," Shane says. "But I feel like our final product quality is just as amazing, though the players have changed slightly. We do try to stick with a stringed-instrument vibe. We try to incorporate brass and wind instruments as well as percussion ensemble, but they are challenging to incorporate and very much depending on the players' knowledge of music as well as the heritage and tradition of the music that we play."

Chris Hollingshead is one of the jam's non-string-playing members. He has a case full of harmonicas—but plays them one at a time—and drives 90 minutes from Pittsburgh to participate. His wife, Kathie, comes along to keep him company and crochets while he and the others jam.

"I like to do a repetitive craft while they are playing," says Kathie, who feels that the music helps her productivity.

Chris typically plays five to six different jams a week, and while all of them involve traditional music, he says each has its own flavor. "Old-time music has very different cultures," he says. "It's a language. Differ-



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ent places have different versions of it. It's like different accents [of the same language]."

Like Lily Farabaugh, WVU chemical engineering student Niko Kreider has found community and friendship here. Although classically trained, Kreider says he "never really connected with that music." However, he found bluegrass and old-time much to his liking.

"The energy in that room is contagious and intoxicating in a way you can't help but fall in love with," Niko told me.

"On top of the music, the people there were so welcoming, even on that first night we showed up to pass the time," he adds. "Keith offered his home as a free place to crash or for my parents to stay any time they came for a visit. Everyone was helpful in teaching me tunes I didn't know and helping to show me the melody or the chords, or even down to the stylistic nuances of music."

Anyone who shows up at the jam toting an instrument is encouraged to join in. Thanks to the Art Bar's Facebook page and other social media platforms, musicians just passing through sometimes drop in; a player from Massachusetts who showed up on a wintry evening was quickly assimilated into the group.

"Everyone was so welcoming and supportive of myself and other people that [are] new to old-time or new to music, in general," Niko says. "Every one of us had to start as a beginner, and we all do our best to recognize that in others and encourage them to continue pursuing the music. To me, the thing that makes [the jam] so special is the community."

Alumni of the jam have gone on to play in some bigger-named bands. The Hillbilly Gypsies, The Jakob's Ferry Stragglers, and The Halftime String Band grew out of this venue.

The encouragement, camaraderie, and energy have kept this weekly reunion going for so many years and continue to attract new players and listeners. Keith shares a story about how music can unite people in a way that even romantic love can't. He recalls one of his banjo students coming to a lesson obviously depressed. Upon questioning, Keith learned that the young man's girlfriend of six years had dumped him. He consoled the student and encouraged his dedication to the instrument, poetically reminding him that "girlfriends come and go, but you will always have your banjo."

Tessa Dillon (fiddle) of Kanawha County and John Lane (bass) of Illinois perform at Clifftop, 2019. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

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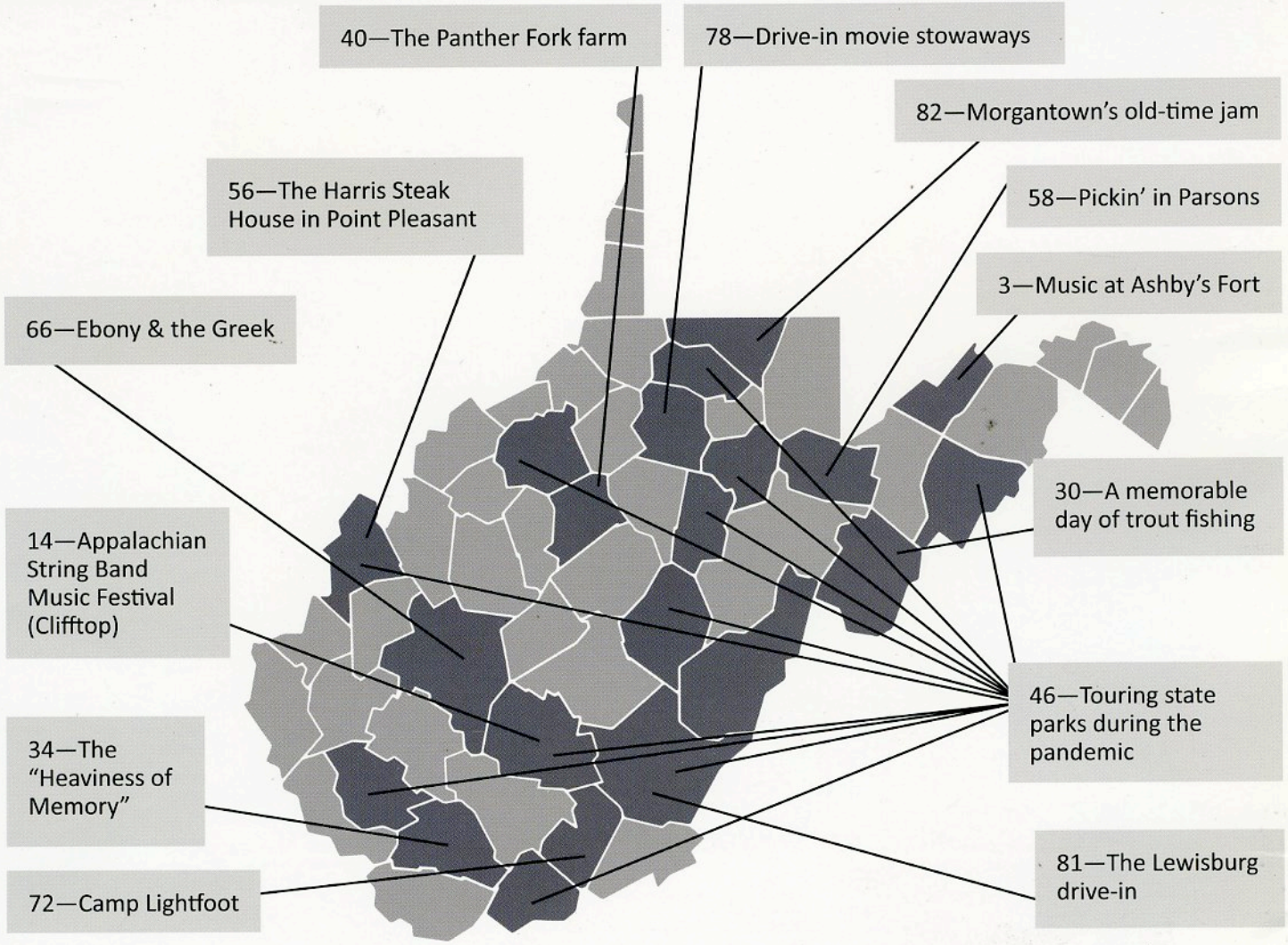

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