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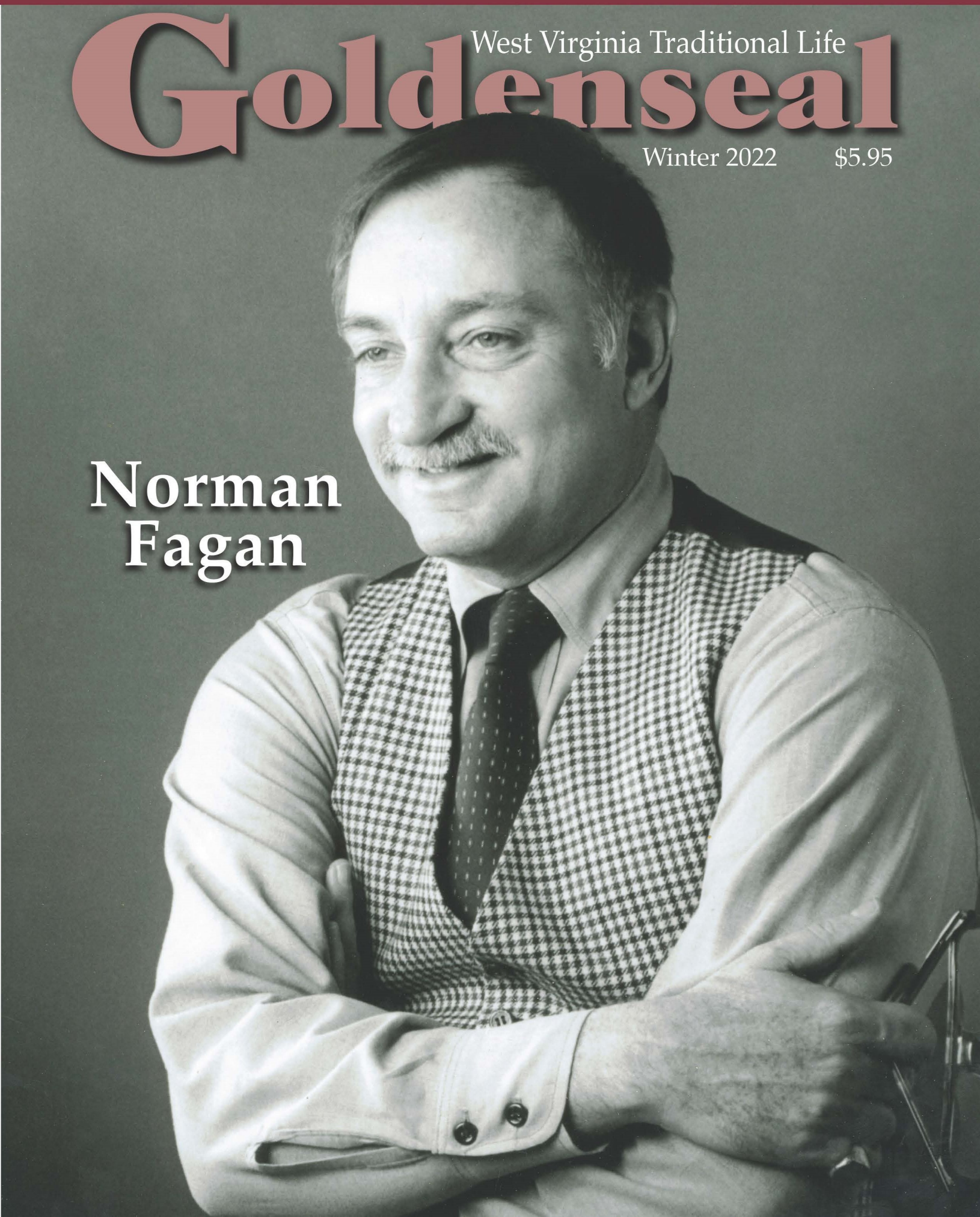

Norman Fagan

Rev. Bob Wilkins, Volunteer Chaplain of the Philippi Fire Department. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

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On the cover: Norman Fagan. Courtesy of Norman Fagan.

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From the Editor

Laiken Blankenship

As some of our readers may know by now, GOLDENSEAL has a new editor. I wanted to take the time to introduce myself here in this space as the new editor. I am a proud West Virginia native, and entirely honored to be working with GOLDENSEAL and all of the great West Virginians who make this publication what it is—a state treasure. Coming after all the superb editors this publication has seen to date provides some large shoes that I hope to be able to fill. Tom Screven, Ken Sullivan, John Lilly, and Stan Bumgardner worked tirelessly for a combined total of 47 years with this publication—that is roughly 188 issues, not to mention countless hours of work dedicated to GOLDENSEAL. I grew up in Marshall County, and under the guidance of my parents and grandparents, came to understand what a unique and beautiful place West Virginia is. I often attended the Saturday night square dances with my maternal grandfather, Hoopie Cecil (originally of Wetzel County) and soon grew to love old-time music. I can honestly say I would not be where I am today without his influence in my life. Our family lost him when I was only 17, but the life lessons he instilled in myself and his children are still strong within us. In college I had the opportunity to further study the music and culture of Appalachia, solidifying my love of this region. It is for people like my grandfather, a retired coal miner, that I eagerly undertake the challenge of GOLDENSEAL. The true purpose of this magazine is, after all, to tell the stories of the everyday people of our state—as Ken Sullivan stated in his 1979 introductory issue, the purpose of GOLDENSEAL is to "document the life experiences of West Virginians past and present." I understand the importance of GOLDENSEAL and what an honor it is to get to help share these stories. I am grateful to all those who have come before me, and grateful for this opportunity to help continue the legacy that is GOLDENSEAL.

– Laiken Blankenship

Civic Empathy Through History Exhibit at Ohio County Library through February

By Seán Duffy

We have recently installed an important new exhibit in partnership with the Heinz History Center in Pittsburgh.

The project is called "Civic Empathy Through History," which brings together a network of 15 sites throughout our region that create engaging experiences to build empathy and serve as the foundation for civic engagement. The project highlights stories and artifacts across these sites that show how people have taken action to make positive impacts on their communities. The Library has the honor of representing WV.

L-R Bob Stakeley (Heinz History Center), Jimmie McCamic (Library board chair), author Tom DeWolf, Wheeling Mayor Glenn Elliott, Seán Duffy, Ron Scott, Jr. (YWCA), Rosemary Ketchum (Wheeling City Council).

The artifact we chose to highlight is a typewritten speech from the YWCA Collection that was delivered on February 9, 1936, by Harry H. Jones, Wheeling's only African American attorney at the time. He spoke on the city's White-owned radio station WWVA—so his target audience was the White residents of Wheeling.

Titled "Wheeling's 20th Man," [see Fall 2019 for more on this subject] it referred to Black's representing one twentieth, or 5%, of the city's population at the time. The speech centered on the conditions faced by Wheeling's African American citizens under "Jim Crow" segregation. In a courageous challenge to the Wheeling community, Jones asked people to consider the inequality of Jim Crow, in terms of access to jobs, housing, recreation, and education. He appealed for empathy for the African American community and asked listeners to consider the legal and social changes needed to address these inequities.

At this link, you can hear the speech read by Ron Scott. https://www.ohiocountylibrary.org/docs/oq_OCPL-Archives_YWCA_Wheelings-20th-Man.mp3.

The exhibit attempts to illustrate this event and period of time with a diorama that includes images and text about Lincoln School, various leaders in the Black community over time, and events that illustrate the struggle to overcome a segregated history. We conclude that Wheeling's past still impacts the present. The phrase "justice and candor" from the "20th Man" speech is still relevant for us.

We asked Ron Scott to rewrite Harry Jones's 20th Man speech as if he was delivering it today. You can listen to Ron's modern version, "Acceptance, Understanding, & Opportunity. The 20th Man That Stands Before You," here: https://soundcloud.com/walswheeling/20th-man-speech-for-2022-by-ron-scott.

GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes

Larry Cabell
(1932-2022)

Lawrence "Larry" Everett Cabell passed away on January 25, 2022. A native of Boone County [see spring 2021], Larry was the only member of his high school class to receive a degree from West Virginia University. He financed his education by maintaining a local gasoline service station and support from the G.I. Bill, graduating debt free in 1959. Due to his father's death in 1951, he delayed his education to help support his family and volunteered for the United States Air Force. His two years of college and time in ROTC made him eligible for training to become a crypto analyst, one of the most coveted jobs in the Air Force. While stationed in England he met his wife, Joan Hargreaves, and they were married in 1955. They moved to Morgantown in 1956 so Larry could complete his education in Forest Management at WVU. After graduation, Larry was employed for 15 years by the Virginia Dept. of Forestry. Five of those years were spent in Louisa County where he was awarded the Jaycees Outstanding Young Man of the Year award in 1965. In 1974, Larry decided to establish a consulting forestry business in Albemarle County, Virginia, which lasted almost 40 years. Larry was extremely successful in self-employment and often commented that it never really seemed like "work". It was this lifelong work and love of nature that kept Larry active and independent until the very end. Larry retired after almost 55 years of forestry work in Charlottesville, Virginia. He and his wife spent their retirement years enjoying time with friends, neighbors, and loved ones. – *ed.*

Larry Cabell. Courtesy of the family.

Howard Teets
(1926-2022)

Howard Teets of Rowlesburg, a musician and lover of West Virginia, passed away on May 12, 2022, at his home with his daughters, Sandy, Sue, and Dottie by his side. Howard was a veteran of World War II, serving in the U.S. Navy. He was a member of the Bricklayers Union for over 50 years and a member of the Laurel Mountain Church. He enjoyed spending time with his family, visiting friends, gardening, taking walks, beekeeping and talking about God. He will be greatly missed by his family and friends. An avid singer and musician, Howard played the spoons, two-sided harmonica, guitar, jaw harp, and handsaw. As noted in our Spring 2021 article by Candy Thompson, Howard never learned to read music saying, "It comes from your soul. You have to know where your soul stands to play good music." I think it's fair to say he knew where his soul stood, and has added his voice to that heavenly chorus.

Howard Teets. Courtesy of the family.

Roy B. Clarkson
(1926-2022)
By Randall S. Gooden

When Fred C. Babcock, chairman of Babcock Lumber Company, wanted someone to write about the history of his company's

GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes

operations in West Virginia for its centennial commemoration in 1987, he turned first to Roy B. Clarkson. No one questioned the preeminence of Dr. Clarkson's expertise on the timber and lumber industry in the state. His book, *Tumult on the Mountains: Lumbering in West Virginia 1770-1920*, had given him that prominence, and his book, *On Beyond Leatherbark: The Cass Saga* sealed that reputation when it was published in 1990.

Roy B. Clarkson. Courtesy of the author.

Dr. Roy B. Clarkson, 95, passed away peacefully at his home overlooking the Monongahela River in Westover (Monongalia County) on September 12, 2022. Dr. Clarkson was a native of Cass (Pocahontas County). He was born on October 25, 1926, to Walter and Mertie Curry Clarkson, the youngest of 11 children. Dr. Clarkson grew up during the years of the Great Depression and World War II and recalled that life meant "working all the time," at his family's home across the Greenbrier River from Cass. His father was a carpenter and often traveled for work, and his mother was left to tend to the large family with much help from the oldest brother, Ivan. The younger children helped as well, and that meant caring for the cow, hogs, and chickens, and the family's large garden. Roy gained an early appreciation for plant life in the garden, and Sunday walks gave him his first exposure to wild plants. He noted that he "was out in the woods a good bit when I was a kid."

Dr. Clarkson attended Cass Grade School and graduated from Green Bank High School. He began working on Saturdays at Mower Lumber Company during his senior year and eventually worked there six days a week. Although he had injured his back at work, he was drafted into the U.S. Army in February 1945. Clarkson first served as a truck driver but later was assigned as a clerk typist in the army finance office in Seoul, Korea, and remained in the service until August of 1946.

Dr. Clarkson entered Davis and Elkins College on the G.I. Bill and majored in math in preparation for becoming a teacher. He lived in a rented room and worked in Elkins and commuted to Cass on weekends. After graduation, he taught for a year at Green Bank High School. He then pursued a master's degree in education at West Virginia University. It was during classes there that he met Georgia June Hardwick of Westover, and they were married in 1952. Clarkson taught for the next four years at Suncrest-Flatts Junior High in Morgantown.

He turned to a career in biology and was accepted into the Ph.D. program at West Virginia University. Dr. Earl Core, head of the Biology Department, recognized Clarkson's talents and hired him as an instructor. He completed his degree in 1960 and joined the tenure-track, eventually becoming a tenured member of the biology faculty at WVU. Dr. Clarkson quickly became renowned as an expert in Appalachian plant life and was the co-author of *Forest Wildlife Plants of the Monongahela National Forest* and widely published in journals, including *Castanea*, the journal of the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society. Clarkson was a longtime treasurer of the society and received its Elizabeth Ann Bartholomew Award. Among other honors, he was a member of the West Virginia Agriculture and Forestry Hall of Fame. He retired from WVU in 1992 with the rank of professor emeritus.

GOLDENSEAL Good-Byes

I first met Dr. Clarkson when he spoke at the West Virginia Day celebration at the West Virginia and Regional History Collection at WVU in 1993. It was, of course, as an expert on the state's natural resources that I wanted to hear him, but I got to know him better as a kind and charitable man. He was well known in the community in civic organizations, but on a quiet level, he was a good and caring neighbor and friend. His home of over sixty years was a neighborhood destination for Halloween and the Fourth of July, but the people nearby remember him most for his individual acts of service. These people include my parents, and it was as their neighbor that I talked with him and learned about him and his family. He was active until the last months of his life—in his friendships and in his care for his yard, a veritable botanical garden sloping down toward River Road, across from Morgantown. Dr. Clarkson leaves a legacy as a gentleman scholar, an attentive father and grandfather, and a loving and devoted husband. He will not be replaced.

Barbara Diane Smik a.k.a. "Peeper Williams" (1940-2021)

By Ivan M. Tribe

Barbara Smik was the oldest of the three daughters of WWVA *Jamboree* stars Doc and Chickie Williams. She performed on the program herself off and on for a number of years usually with her younger sisters Madeline "Poochie" and Karen "Punkin" who had earlier collectively been known as "Chickie's Chicks." With them, Peeper recorded for Wheeling Records. Well educated, Barbara had a Master's Degree from the University of Pittsburgh and taught for years in several schools in Europe. Later, she returned to Wheeling and spent two decades or more as manager of the Doc Williams Country Store, across Main Street from the Capitol Theater, a popular retail outlet for music fans.

Barbara Diane Smik. Courtesy of the family.

I first met Peeper about 1979 and she became a great help and guide as I worked on my book, *Mountaineer Jamboree: Country Music in West Virginia* (1984), as well as two later books co-authored with Jacob Bapst. Jake recalls, "The first time I met the Williams Sisters was in a book talk at the Wheeling Library [2015]—they sang "Happy Birthday" to me." Then, on our last volume, "Barbara was a gracious and thoughtful hostess when we visited her home [scanning photos and taking notes]. She treated us like family." Reflecting back, he concluded, "Peeper was very proud of her family's role in the . . . *Jamboree*. She had a driving commitment to keeping the past alive and recognized." She wrote several articles of her own and edited her father's memoirs, *Looking Back* (2006).

Jake and I made our last visit to Peeper in June 2021. We later learned that she was in the early stages of leukemia. Her condition worsened in succeeding months and she died in mid-December. Barbara had a private service attended by family and a few close friends. She is survived by sisters Madeline and Karen. *The Jamboree in Wheeling* is dedicated to her as will be a forthcoming *Goldenseal* article.

They Called Him Woody

By R.G. Yoho

His name was Hershel Woodrow Williams, but most folks knew him simply as "Woody." The nickname was in no way meant to diminish Williams or his extraordinary service; it was simply that Woody made everyone he met feel important. Woody always lifted the folks he met and made them feel like they were somehow his equal. But they weren't his equal. Perhaps few ever were.

Born the son of a staunch West Virginia Democrat, Williams was named after President Woodrow Wilson. His first name was taken from the doctor who delivered him and calmly assured the parents that the tiny, three-pound baby would indeed live. And live he did. I first met Woody when I was penning my first book, "Heroes in Our Midst," in early 2001. He graciously agreed to meet with me at what was then his home in Ona, West Virginia.

In 2001, Williams was West Virginia's only living Medal of Honor recipient; until recently, Woody was World War II's ONLY living Medal of Honor recipient. From where I lived, it was approximately a two-hour drive from my home, just across the river in southeastern Ohio. Upon driving up to his place, Woody met me at the van with a friendly greeting and shook my hand. Although it appeared to me that Williams seemed rather small in stature, I recognized that he was indeed a giant in all the qualities that matter.

Woody invited me to follow him inside and for the next two hours, I was captivated by the stories this man shared with me. This Medal of Honor recipient and I sat at his kitchen table. He made me a cup of coffee. Woody showed me his Medal of Honor; he even let me hold that precious object in my own hands. It was a day I will never forget and always cherish. He related tales from his childhood, growing

Williams salutes the flag at the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Dedication Ceremony. June 20th, 2021. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

up on a small West Virginia farm, to his time working in Whitehall, Montana, with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's depression era Civilian Conservation Corps — an experience which he believed uniquely prepared him and many other young men of that time for service in the military.

"I was there when Pearl Harbor happened. I didn't even know who the Japanese were," Williams said. "I just knew somebody had done something to America that I wasn't happy with. Everybody else was unhappy too and I just wanted to join them."

Williams had never come from a military family. However, when he was a child, he was greatly impressed by a couple of Marines who used to tell him stories. Later realizing that their great tales of daring

were undoubtedly fabricated, the young Williams was nonetheless enthralled by them. He was also taken by their neatly creased uniforms and the remarkable shine on their shoes and the bills of their hats. "I am sure that was what influenced my brain to say, 'If I ever get in the military, I want to go in the Marines,'" Williams said. Despite his outrage about the Japanese attack, Williams was still too young to enter the military. In November of 1942, he resigned from his contract with the CCC to enlist in the Marines. "I volunteered," Williams said. "I would have been drafted; it was just a matter of time."

In the Pacific, Woody would learn to use a flamethrower. Williams, the self-described "lowly two-stripe corporal" mixed all his own fuel. The Marines also placed him in charge of training six other men, all of them privates or PFCs. The weapon's inaccuracy and limited range led them to experiment with different types of fuel. After many fruitless attempts, they came up with a mixture that worked. A precise combination of diesel fuel and high-octane gasoline gave them a weapon with an effective range of 30-35 yards. If you fired it towards the ground, it created a huge ball of fire that rolled on the ground towards the target.

For the one act of heroism on Iwo Jima which earned him the Medal of Honor, Woody raised his hand and volunteered for what he then believed would be a suicide mission. "It's always been difficult for me to tell my story," he said, "because whatever you say sounds like bragging."

The Japanese pillboxes, concrete reinforced bunkers that guarded the airfield, were covered with black, volcanic sand, many feet deep. Bombing them would only blow up the sand, but leave them intact. Built in self-protecting pods of three, any one of the structures could protect at least one of the others. The apertures for automatic weapon fire were on the front only. The rear of the pillboxes, where the Japanese entered through a small hole, were protected by rough terrain, beachfront, and jagged cliffs. Five men were lost in the initial moments of the attacks. Several more were wounded in the next six hours. Yet despite the losses, the Marines were no closer to neutralizing the Japanese threat. The platoon commander, Second Lieutenant Howard Chambers asked for a volunteer to take out the pillboxes. Out of the crowd stepped Woody Williams, who said, "I'll try to see what I can do."

The 5'6' Williams strapped a 72-pound flamethrower on his back. He was also equipped with a 12-pound pole charge, filled with fifteen blocks of TNT. Approximately sixty yards ahead of him were the targets, the formidable Japanese pillboxes. For the next four hours, Williams would brave hell. Moving through a maze of bomb craters and shallow ditches, where the Japanese had buried lines for communication, Williams, ran, crawled, and inched his way up to the pillboxes. He emptied his flamethrower into the pillboxes, threw it down, and then returned for another while still under hostile enemy fire. Time after time, he made his way back to the pillboxes with a fresh flamethrower and set the concrete structures and their occupants ablaze.

Four hours later, the small but tough West Virginian was forever destined to join the proud annals of military history, "Darned if I know why I didn't get a scratch. I often wonder about it, why I survived and others didn't." The ultimate cost of their victory was substantial. When that immortal flag raising on Mt. Suribachi was captured on camera, 6,140 brave Marines had purchased Iwo Jima with their lives. Another 18,000 of their comrades-in-arms were also wounded in the struggle. Near Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia, there is a monument to honor the valiant

American heroes of Iwo Jima. The inscription on the monument read: "Where uncommon valor was a common virtue."

Not long after returning to the United States, he married Ruby, the woman whose ring he proudly wore through his Pacific campaign. After working in construction for a month, Williams was offered a job with the Veterans' Administration in January of 1946. "It wasn't work. My job was to assist veterans, dependents, and their families," said Williams. "Every day was different. Every day was interesting. And I couldn't wait to go to work."

The death of the brave Marine riflemen who died protecting him, while Woody took out those pillboxes, is never far from his mind when speaking about the events on Iwo Jima. Williams remembers them often. "Any time I wear the Medal of Honor, I don't wear it for me. I wear it for those guys," Williams said. "Had they not been there, I wouldn't be here. They gave their lives so that I might survive. It's their honor I wear. I'm just a caretaker." Woody Williams was not only a caretaker of the Medal of Honor. Woody and those other brave Marines on Iwo Jima were also the caretakers of freedom. And the cause of liberty was never in better hands. We owe them everything.

Williams at the Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Dedication Ceremony. June 20th, 2021. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

On June 29, 2022, Woody Williams, 98, World War II's last Medal of Honor recipient, died peacefully at the VA Medical Center which bears his name, and I was indeed blessed to have briefly known him. Yes, Woody was small in stature, but he was bigger than life in all the qualities that truly matter. The United States and West Virginia have suffered the loss of one of its finest sons, the likes of which we may never see again. RIP, Woody! We'll miss you, sir.

The "WV 5" siblings from left to right, Cleo Vernell Mollett, Sr. (72),Tanners Lee Mollett (67), Christina Mollett (65), David Lee Mollett (70), and Doretha ElaineMollett (69). Photo by Michael Keller.

Always Keep the Memories Alive: A Memorial Day Tradition in Edwight

By Jennie Williams

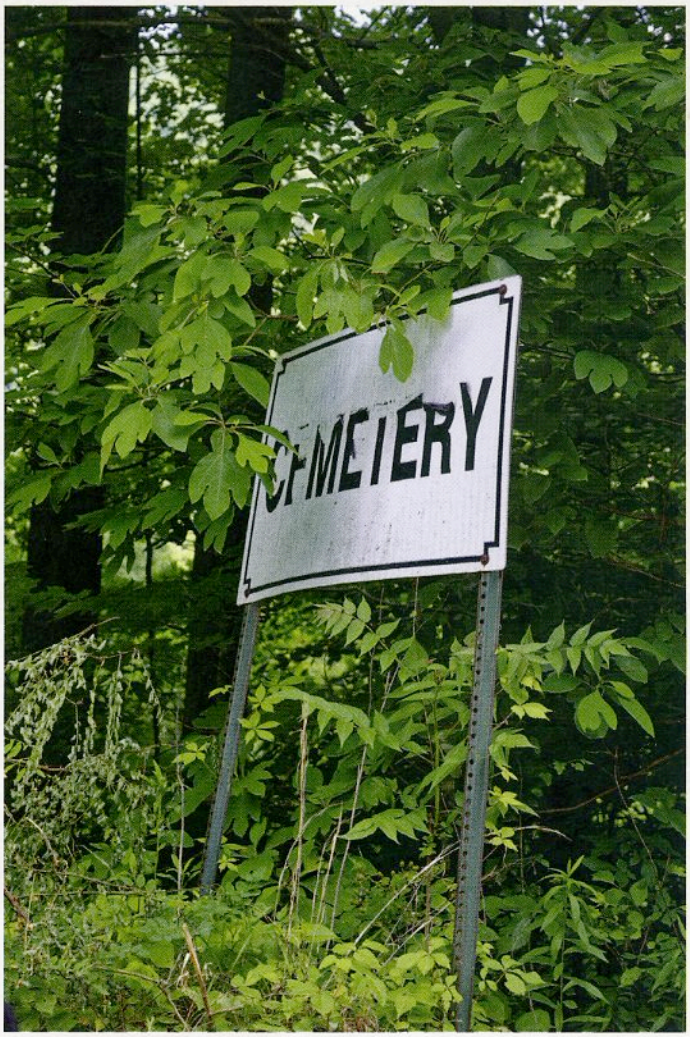
On Memorial Day, one might drive by a cemetery and see brightly colored flowers dotting each gravesite in remembrance of those who have passed. For Doretha Mollett and her family, they reserve this holiday every year to carry on a tradition of remembrance and reunion at both private and publicly accessible gravesites located in southern West Virginia. Since 1959, Doretha and her four siblings, affectionately referred to as the "WV 5" when they are together, have dutifully returned to visit their community cemetery in Edwight (Raleigh County) to clear off the graves, lay flowers, and honor the memory of their ancestors and the tradition their grandmother Bell Wilson had started. They now bring their children and grandchildren on this pilgrimage so that the next generations may carry on the tradition for years to come.

Ready with rakes and bags full of flowers, 27 family members gathered in Edwight on May 30, 2022. A former coal camp community where the WV 5 and Daniel "Uncle Danny" Wilson were born and once lived, Edwight is now an unincorporated com-

munity. Its historically Black cemetery is located within the grounds of a routinely guarded coal mine property. Each year, the family arranges with the coal operators to allow their entry. A sign that reads "CEMETERY" marks the trail entrance to the Edwight cemetery, which is now otherwise hidden within a wooded bend of a winding gravel road. The family never knows what condition to expect of the cemetery until they arrive, but for the last seven years, the coal operators have cut back the underbrush and trees prior to their arrival. The Mollett's extend their heartfelt thanks to the coal operators, who have made their access to the cemetery easy and have participated in its maintenance over the years.

The WV 5, siblings Cleo Vernell Mollett, Sr. (72), David Lee Mollett (70), Doretha Elaine Mollett (69), Tanners Lee Mollett (67), and Christina Mollett (65) reflect on their relocation in 1959 when the coal company closed and demolished their neighborhood, effectively displacing their young family and community. Tanners was three years old when his family left, and he describes the experience of coming back each year to decorate the graves on Memorial Day. "It became a tradition, even a family reunion of sorts because that's the time that was automatic for us to be together. It also coincided with our graduations — that was a big deal for our family." Their uncle, Daniel Wilson (80), son of Allen Wilson (1885-1955, buried at Edwight) and Bell Wilson (1907-1991, buried at Boone Memorial Gardens in Madison) tells stories about Edwight. He remembers the town, the company store with a pool room and a post office, the coffee shop and the bus stop, the family names of his neighbors, and the Glorious Church of God and Christ.

Anissa Mollett (27), daughter of David Lee Mollett, shared the story about "the house on the hill", a story which her father, aunts, and uncles imparted to her about the importance of the Glorious Church of God and Christ. "They always talk about the house on the hill," Anissa explains. "They moved from Edwight, West Virginia after the coal mines closed, but the coal mining company was tearing down all the houses because they owned them, but they couldn't tear down the church itself which had been built by the people in the community. So, my family was able to gather the wood from the church in Edwight and take it back to Switzer, West Virginia [Logan County] and build on the land."



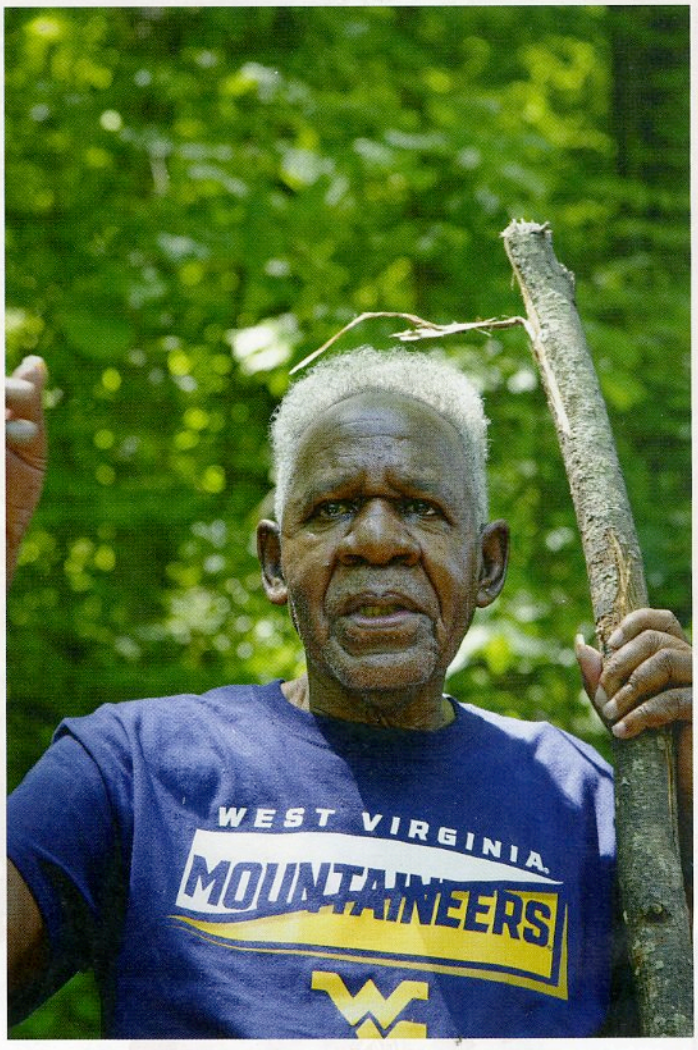
A sign that reads "Cemetery" marks the cemetery entrance. Photo by Michael Keller.

The tradition of returning to the Edwight cemetery began locally, as Bell Wilson would bring her family to visit from Logan County two hours away. They used to meet up with the Clay family, their Edwight neighbors, and the families would

share in food and fellowship, preparing a lunch of fried chicken, potato salad, and chocolate cake. As the WV 5 grew older, had their own kids and moved out of state, the tradition began involving extended members of the family including aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends traveling from out of state to attend. In recent years, members of the family have traveled from their homes in New Jersey, South Carolina, and Delaware, with Uncle Danny traveling all the way from Florida. They now visit cemeteries in Madison and Logan as well during the same trip.

In 1996, folklorist Mary Hufford and photographer Terry Eiler documented stories and took photographs of the Mollett Family at the cemetery in Edwight, which are now part of the Coal River Folklife Collection housed at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. Anissa was impressed to learn that this collection features an interview with her Uncle Tanners during a Memorial Day visit to the Edwight cemetery. When her father asked Anissa to describe her feelings of visiting the cemetery for the first time this year, she said, "It feels a lot more significant, like I should have been on this trip a long time ago, but I'm thankful to be here now." Anissa recorded the stories her family shared during this trip so that she could remember and carry on their memories.

Doretha Mollett knows that the next generation will soon need to take up the torch as it becomes increasingly difficult for her aging family to travel to West Virginia. She reached out to the American Folklife Center (AFC) to see if someone would be available to meet up with their family to record stories and reflections nearly thirty years later. The AFC notified me of the request, and I immediately connected with Doretha who kindly invited West Virginia Humanities Council photographer Michael Keller and me to attend. The Mollett family introduced me to a place where I likely would not have known about without their invitation. It was inspiring to witness the Mollett's commitment to their family tradition and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to record their reflections and memories of Edwight.



Daniel "Uncle Danny" Wilson (80), born and raised in Edwight, WV. Photoby Michael Keller.

This story is a reminder that the traditions we practice are not static, rather we have to prepare and be adaptable if family traditions are to stand the test of time. Over the past six decades of returning to the Edwight cemetery on Memorial Day, the Mollett family has seen a changing landscape surrounding the cemetery, new coal operators who need to be notified of their

Daniel Wilson and the WV-5 gather with their children and grandchildren at the entrance of the Edwight cemetery after cleaning the gravestones and sharing family stories. Photo by Michael Keller.

arrival, and changing attendance as friends and family have passed on and the children grow older. "You're honoring your ancestors. You tell the stories to your kids, and they tell it to their kids," Doretha reflected, "You always keep the memories alive and the family history so you know where you came from." The Memorial Day 2022 documented photos and recordings are to be deposited in the West Virginia Folklife Collection at the West Virginia University Libraries for future generations to access.

I would like to extend a very special thank you to Doretha Mollett for providing consultation during the writing of this article, and for inviting the West Virginia Folklife Program to attend this event – it was a great honor. Thank you as well to Daniel Wilson, whose final trip to Edwight may have been in 2022. Thank you to Anissa Mollett and the Mollett Family, Michael Keller, Black By God Founder Crystal Good for including a family photo at the cemetery in the Juneteenth 2022 BBG issue, Allina Migoni and Michelle Stefano at the American Folklife Center, and folklorist Mary Hufford.

JENNIE WILLIAMS is our state folklorist with the West Virginia Folklife Program. She writes a regular column for GOLDENSEAL. You can contact her at williams@wvhumanities.org or 304-346-8500.

My Father's Only Toy as a Kid—a Little Red Wagon

By Dr. C. R. Thomas

Some childhood experiences are searing, registering indelibly in our memories and following each of us well into adulthood.. One such experience happened to me at 4 years old. I was accompanying my father downtown. I can still envision certain parts of it quite clearly. After we had passed Washington Irving High School, navigated our way briefly on Lee for half a block, and then turned left down Fifth Street again, my father asked a question, "So you like going to town with me?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Why do you like going to town?" He asked.

"Because when I go to town, you buy me a toy!" I answered.

"Do you think every time that I take you to town you will get a toy?" He asked, seriously.

"Yes," I said smiling, not comprehending where his questions were leading.

"Do you know how many toys I had when I was a little boy growing up?" He asked me.

Now in retrospect if you will think for a minute about childhood and the extent of your mathematical knowledge and concepts back then, you will recall that at 4 years old, we had very limited knowledge. We were not usually familiar with numeration systems, whole numbers, integers, rational and real numbers, and mathematical systems in general. Therefore, drawing upon the only two numbers I was familiar with in my fourth year of life—Number 1 and Number 2—I took a wild guess, "**One**?"

"That's right! When I was a little boy, I only had one toy—a little red wooden wagon. That was my only toy. So you shouldn't expect that every time you go to town with me that I'm going to buy you a toy." His message stuck, and over the years, I learned that my father had grown up in a very poor home—especially in his early years. He used an outside bathroom located a distance from the house that later caused him some kidney problems.

Mr. Clarence M. Thomas, the author's father, as a young adult. All photos courtesy of the author.

During my entire life, I only saw my father actually cry once. When I was 8 years-old, he talked about the hardship he had experienced at that same age. He said, "My father had no job, no money, and nothing in the house for us kids to eat—except for making cornbread." I remember my father recalling his opening a

The author as a young boy pictured with his father, Mr. Clarence M. Thomas.

box of corn meal and pouring it into the mixing bowl. Then, a real $5 dollar gold-piece tumbled into the bowl, making a loud clinking noise. At that point, my own father began to cry—his face contorting painfully from his own childhood memory—as he continued, "Maybe the money had fallen out of a worker's pocket somehow into the cornmeal and ended up in the box. That day we ate hot cornbread. The $5 gold-piece gave us hope that we had money for food until our luck changed, and, until we got through that really bad time, no one would go hungry."

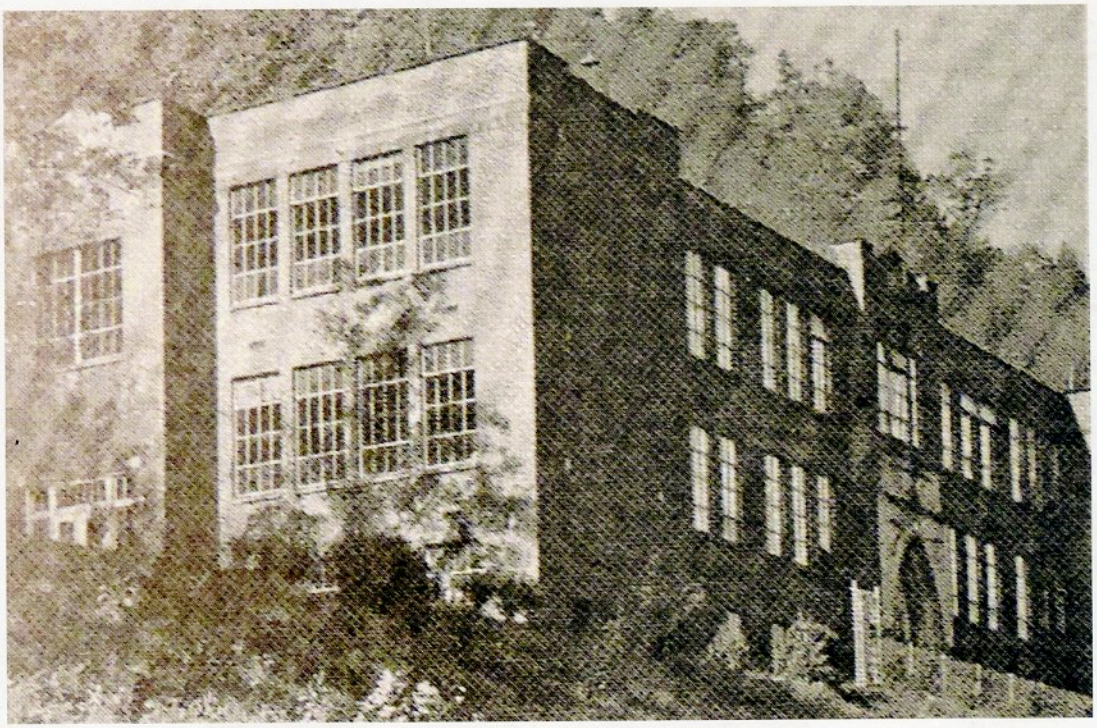
My father's testimony about finding a $5 gold-piece in a box of cornmeal only added intensity to my first searing memory about his only childhood toy, a little red wagon. That experience increased my own resolve to *never* ask my father for things or money. My father's childhood story also deepened my own strong commitment to develop my own lasting work ethic and become self-reliant. Many kids growing up back then developed similar values.

As an introduction to my essay, *My Father's Only Toy as a Kid—A Little Red Wagon*, I began recalling my own living conditions in the early 1940's and contrasted them with the abject poverty that my father endured when he was a small boy. I remember our kitchen being clean but stark—the kitchen sink was nothing like what is available today. It was designed for the working class, and the kitchen sink was nailed onto the wall. My mother fashioned some old orange crates underneath the sink for storage, and she designed and sewed some curtains to hide what was stored there. When my father was growing up, he lived in a house with no inside toilet. He had to go to another location some distance from the house in order to relieve himself. It was dark and probably cold at night so he trained himself to resist the urge, so to speak. But doing so caused him some problems later in life when he suffered from incontinence and weak kidneys.

I never experienced the hardships my father did as a youth, but I remember as a 4 year old child the pain on his face when he told me about his only toy as a kid and the conditions of his life at that time. Even as a youth, going forward, I vowed not to ask for unnecessary material things from my father.

The contorted painful look and the early poverty of my father played a monumental part in my becoming a playwright. My father, in his early life, rode to Pittsburgh on streetcars to attend plays. He didn't write, but he was very serious about going to plays and analyzing them. This essay serves as the beginning of the collection of essays *Whelps, Varmints and Social Urchins*, a work in progress, soon to be published.

DR. C.R. (CHUCK) THOMAS, a Clarksburg native and veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, is a retired university professor and currently directs an acting workshop using one or more of the 80+ plays that he authored. Although he was challenged academically in his early school years and never made an "A" grade except for gym class, he was able to maintain a 4.0 average during his doctoral studies and graduated *summa cum laude* in his economics and finance degree. This is his third submission to GOLDENSEAL.



Coalwood School. All photos courtesy of the author.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

By Bill Mahoney

It was 1948. I was in the third grade at Coalwood School in McDowell County, West Virginia. My teacher Mrs. Laird told our class that I would be singing a Christmas song with Carol Todd, a classmate, for the holiday PTA meeting. Stand on a stage and sing in front of a bunch of people? No way. But teachers ruled the roost then. I was doomed.

Carol was cute as a picture and sometimes nice. She was taller and smarter than I was too. I wanted to be her sweetheart but I had no idea how you could generate interest from a girl. I just knew there had to be a better way than singing a Christmas song with her.

"O Little Town of Bethlehem" was selected for us to sing. My strategy was to mouth the words and let Carol do the singing. We practiced. Carol sounded good. I was not liking this.

The fateful day for our singing arrived too soon. And Carol was sick. What? Come on now. That's not fair. Carol has to sing or I'm a dead duck. But she was in bed sick, and I was headed for a solo performance that evening in front of about a hundred people.

Maybe Carol was sick, but I could almost hear her giggling at my dilemma. And I had thought maybe she could be my sweetheart. Not going to happen. Forget that.

I figured my mother, a teacher at the Coalwood School, had something to do with this. She always thought her little Billy could sing.

The PTA meeting was in the school gymnasium, with a stage at one end. Chairs were set up on the main floor so the audience could view the stage.

It was time. The crowd had gathered. My performance was listed in the PTA program, there was no way out.

Mr. Likens, the school principal, welcomed everybody. There was a prayer (I

The author's third grade school photo.

Mrs. Virginia Mahoney, the author's mother, a teacher at Coalwood Elementary, seated at her desk.

needed that), the Pledge of Allegiance, and a reading of the last meeting's minutes. I was scared.

And then Mr. Likens said, "Here is Billy Mahoney, from Mrs. Laird's third grade, to sing 'O Little Town of Bethlehem.'" The curtain opened and I was standing there, spit-shined in my clean pants and starched shirt. My hair was combed.

The piano player began playing and I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. The piano player started again. This time I was squeaking and heading for an early ending. I got through one verse. The piano player continued with verse two, but I bowed, turned on my heels, and disappeared behind the stage.

I was purely quivering, but it was over and I was still alive. I never knew if Mother was satisfied with what had happened. A few people told me I did good, all speaking out of duty. I don't know what they told Mother. I'm sure she was proud of me, but we didn't talk about it. Thankfully, Daddy wasn't there. I had barely survived.

It's amazing to me that this experience has stayed with me through life. I think about Carol and Mrs. Laird and that gathering of PTA people anytime I hear or sing this Christmas hymn. And mother had protected her reaction. Somewhere along the line, I gladly decided the whole experience was funny. But I've never forgotten that it was traumatic.

In 2018, we had our Big Creek High School Class Reunion at Pipestem State Park near Princeton (Mercer County). We hadn't been there long and I spotted Carol across the large lobby. She is a pretty woman. I thought she saw me too. She walked my way. As she approached, she softly said, "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

BILL MAHONEY is the son of Virginia and Merrell (Spud) Mahoney—respectively, a teacher and a miner for about 35 years in Coalwood. Bill's parents retired to Kentucky in the late 1960's. His sisters, Jill and Jane, are deceased. Bill and his wife, Sylvia, live in Greenville, North Carolina. Carol Todd DeHaven lives in Coalwood with her husband, Jim. This is Bill's second contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

From the Skies to the Mines:
The Life of Okey DeRaimo

By Aaron Parsons

On May 30, 2018, Okey DeRaimo and his son, John, entered the West Virginia Archives and History Library carrying a box full of nearly 2,000 photo negatives that they intended to donate. When archives staff began looking at the images and speaking with Okey about them, we were all quickly blown away. Working as a photographer at several mines for ARMCO Steel in the late 1940s and into the 1950s, Okey had captured images of underground mining unlike any we had ever seen. The more we spoke with Okey, the more interesting the conversation became. Prior to working for ARMCO, Okey had been a bombardier in the 401st Bomb Group and was a POW in Germany for 16 months. Learning this raised many questions in mind, particularly how a World War II veteran quickly became such a talented photographer, but unfortunately, there was no time for all my questions to be answered.

As I worked on processing Okey's photo collection with former archives fellow Lloyd Tomlinson, so many questions started burning in our minds. The more images we saw, the more we wanted to know about the man who was behind the camera. Once we finished processing the collection, we tried to contact Okey, but unfortunately, we had no luck. However, after a few months passed by, I got lucky and stumbled onto a webpage run by Okey's family. Thankfully, there was a link to email them, and his son, John, quickly responded. He and his brother, Okey DeRaimo II, happily shared information with me about their father's life and graciously agreed to let me speak with him. With so many questions still burning in my mind, I called Okey up to speak with him about his life experiences.

Okey was born in Widen, West Virginia on September 13, 1921 to parents Vincenzo and Rosa Corsi DeRaimo. Shortly after his birth, Okey's family moved to Notomine, which used to be up the head of Cabin Creek. Growing up during the Depression, Okey recalls that things were "pretty rough", and that most of his family worked in the coal mines just trying to make ends meet. "If old enough, you worked in the coal mines," Okey said. Despite this, Okey and his eight siblings still had fun while they were young. "We had many games we played such as Hide and Seek, Andy Over, Kick the Can, and best of all, ball games. We never had a baseball, but we wrapped something up with tape and used that."

Okey DeRaimo as a young man, Photo Courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

Okey began school in a one-room schoolhouse at Notomine. From there, he went to Decota Grade School, Leewood Jr. High, then East Bank High School. During junior high, Okey played on the football team, but once he reached high school, he was unable to due to the long distance from his home to the school and lack of transportation. In 1939, Okey graduated from East Bank High School. "I was the first DeRaimo to graduate from high school. My brothers never had a chance to go because they had to work in the coal mines," Okey explained, "but I must say they all supported me or I would have never made it." After graduating from high school, Okey started taking classes at New River State College in September 1939.

While in school, Okey met his future wife,

Okey and Wife Pricilla. Photo courtesy of the DeRaimo Family.

Pricilla, through mutual friends. "A couple of my buddies, Lacy Stout & Marcus Carr, asked me to go with them to Coal River. Their dads had autos, so I went. They knew these girls and we invited them to go with us." Even though he didn't get to be with the girl he wanted the first night, he got a second chance. "The next time they asked me to go I said, 'I would if I could be with the little pretty one' and they agreed." Okey and Pricilla have been together ever since. When asked what he thought the first time he saw Pricilla, Okey laughed and said, "Well, I thought she looked like she'd be nice."

Okey and Pricilla were very happy together, but their lives were completely changed when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entered World War II. After the attack, Okey quit school and joined the Army Air Corps. "If the enemy bombed your base and sunk your ships, you had to do something," Okey once told Sandy Wells of the Charleston Gazette-Mail, "So we started joining up. I joined the Air Force as soon as the war started." Before he left for training, Okey proposed to Pricilla under an apple tree in her parents' yard. "When I was ready to leave, I went over to Pricilla's and we were in the yard under the apple tree and I asked if she would wait for me. She said, 'Yes.'" Shortly after, Okey left for training in Texas. Okey wasn't the only member from his family to go to war. His brothers, Louie, Charles, Albert, Fred, Joe, and Angelo, all joined the cause as well. The only brother to remain at home was Tony, who had an essential-worker deferment through Carbon Fuel. Pricilla's brother, Ralph, joined the Marines and was killed defending his country.

Initially, Okey went to San Antonio, Texas to train as an Air Corps Cadet. However, after several weeks of training, it was decided that Okey was "too mechanical," and he was sent to Fort Worth, then Childress to train as a bombardier. Okey graduated on May 13, 1943, as a Second Lieutenant. Okey's mother and Pricilla both came to his graduation, then he came back to West Virginia for a short leave. He and Pricilla were married in Beckley on May 20, 1943.

After his leave, Okey went to Utah for gunnery training, then was sent to Ephrata, Washington to meet his flight group. In Ephrata, he and his crew were assigned to the 401st Bomb Group and were shipped to Great Falls, Montana to train together as a group. They piloted a plane known as "Temperamental Jean." "Our crew became quite acquainted, we had 6 weeks of training as a group. I think in all our training, time at Great Falls was our most enjoyable." Okey recalled. From Great Falls, Okey and his crew were sent to Denethorpe, England, the 401st's main base.

The crew's first five missions saw them flying over Sarr Valley, Bremen and Ruhr Valley. Their sixth mission, however, turned dire. As they were flying over Ludwigshafen, Germany, one of the planes they were flying with accidently dropped an incendiary bomb on their right wing. "We dropped out of formation and turned in direction of Switzerland," Okey explained, "After about 15 minutes the pilot decided we had better get out before things got worse. We all bailed out." The crew's radioman lost both of his legs as a result. The crew's co-pilot, John Phillip England, was never heard from again.

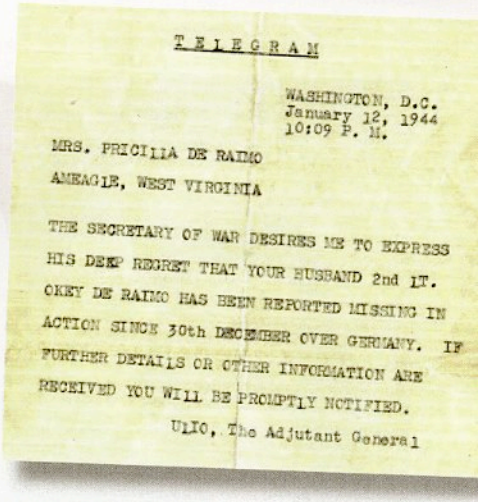
After bailing out, Okey came down in Al-

sace-Lorraine. "It was 1:00 p.m. December 30, 1943. I landed on a plowed field and buried my parachute," he recalled, "I headed in a western direction trying to avoid any towns or people. At about 5 o'clock I came upon a farmhouse and tried to get directions, but they didn't cooperate. Instead, they sent for soldiers. I didn't try to escape from the farmers because they all had pitchforks. Anyway, where could you go? Germany occupied all of Europe at that time. "

When taken by the Germans, Okey learned that the crew's pilot, Traian Neag, had been captured and imprisoned as well. Okey was held in solitary confinement for 11 days, then shipped to Stalag Luft I in Germany. While at the camp, Okey explained that the Germans often fed their prisoners beans and barley soup. "You had to pick the worms out just to eat the soup, but you could never get them all out," Okey explained, "But if you're hungry enough, you'll eat anything." While held at the prison camp, Okey grew close with the other prisoners, particularly with those he roomed with.

Okey was reported missing in action to his wife on January 12, 1944. Though everybody feared the worst, Pricilla knew in her heart that Okey was still alive. On February 1, 1944, she was proven right when she received a second telegram from the Red Cross informing her that Okey was a prisoner of war. To this day, Okey is still grateful to the Red Cross for all they did to help him as a POW. While he was in the prison camp, they brought him and the other prisoners food, recreational items, books, and sometimes letters from home. One such letter was how Okey found out that he was a father. "I believe I was the only father in our room, although I didn't find out until October that Brenda was born. We had a bet of our entire group whether it was Brenda Gay or Brenda Kay. I got a letter and picture from Pricilla in October to settle the matter."

On May 1, 1945, Russian forces arrived in Barth and freed the prisoners of Stalag Luft I. However, Okey remained at the camp until May 15, when U. S. Troops arrived to get him after all the other prisoners were gone. "We stayed at Barth until May 15th when airplanes from the U.S. arrived and flew us to France and Camp Lucky Strike. My group was last to leave as we were assigned as M.P.s." After 16 and a half months as a prisoner of war, Okey was finally able to come home. He returned to the U.S. in July 1945.



TELEGRAM

WASHINGTON, D.C.
January 12, 1944
10:09 P. M.

MRS. PRICILLA DE RAIMO
AMEAGLE, WEST VIRGINIA

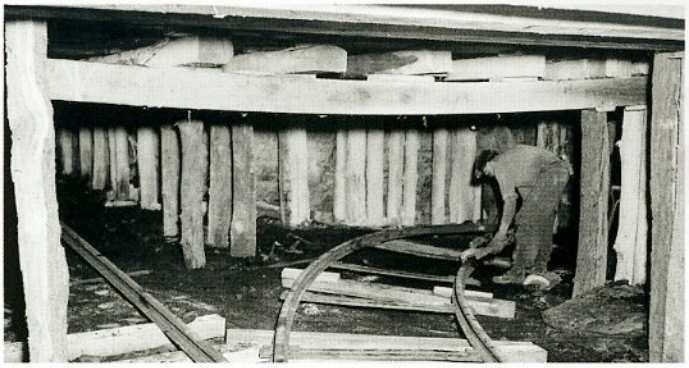
THE SECRETARY OF WAR DESIRES ME TO EXPRESS HIS DEEP REGRET THAT YOUR HUSBAND 2nd LT. OKEY DE RAIMO HAS BEEN REPORTED MISSING IN ACTION SINCE 30th DECEMBER OVER GERMANY. IF FURTHER DETAILS OR OTHER INFORMATION ARE RECEIVED YOU WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED.

ULIO, The Adjutant General

Telegraph received by Pricilla notifying her of Okey's MIA Status. Photo courtesy of the DeRaimo Family.

Upon returning home, Okey's main concern was getting to his wife. He first arrived in Boston, then traveled to Fort George Meade, Maryland. From there, he caught a train to Charleston, then rode the bus to Cabin Creek and caught a ride the rest the way to Notomine. His family planned to drive him to his wife and daughter in Ameagle, but they faced many difficulties along the way. "The car itself was able to make the trip but the tires could not. After traveling all day and repairing flat tires about 10 to 15 times, we finally got to Colcord. There was only a couple more miles to go, so I gave up and started walking." Okey explained. Luckily, a friend saw him walking and gave him a ride the rest of the way. At last, Okey was reunited with his wife and able to see his daughter for the first time.

In September of 1946 Okey began taking classes at WVU. He and Pricilla were staying with Pricilla's aunt and uncle, but after a short time, Pricilla returned to Ameagle. Wanting to be with his wife, Okey left school to join her. Upon his return, he got



An example of Okey's work during his time as photographer with ARMCO Steel Corporation. Photo by Okey DeRaimo courtesy of the West Virginia State Archives.

a job working at the #9 mine with Carbon Fuel Company. In January 1947, he took a job at the #4 Hernshaw mine at Montcoal, thus beginning his career with ARMCO Steel Corporation.

Okey was hired by ARMCO to be an engineer, but they also had something else in mind. From 1947-1952, he served not only as an engineer, but also as a photographer. After hiring Okey, ARMCO sent him to Ashland, Kentucky to learn about photography, as they wanted a photographer at every coal mine to take pictures for the company magazine. Prior to this, Okey had no experience with a camera. "They chose me because I was available," he explained. His son John also stated that he has been told on more than one occasion that ARMCO hired Okey because he could "hit a baseball for a mile," and they wanted him to play on the company's baseball team.

As an ARMCO photographer, Okey used a Speed Graphic 4x5 camera to take most of his pictures. When taking photos underground, he had to take flash bulbs and other lighting down into the mines with him. Though it sounds difficult, Okey said it wasn't too hard to get the equipment into the mines. "It wasn't that hard at all," Okey said of setting up his equipment, "you just had the 4x5 camera and the flash bulbs. It wasn't enough to really cause you much trouble." Okey took many candid shots of the men at work inside the mines, as well as pictures of community events and everyday life in several coal towns across Boone, Raleigh, and Kanawha counties.

After his stint as an ARMCO photographer ended in 1952, Okey remained an engineer until 1960, when he became section foreman at Robin Hood in Boone County. He remained in this position until 1970, when he took a position in the engineering department once again. In 1982, Okey retired from ARMCO, having worked for the company for more than 35 years. During his career, Okey and his family lived in various towns, including Montcoal, Sylvester, and Nellis. In 1981, Okey moved to Charleston, where he remained until he moved to Florida in 2018.

Following his retirement, Okey spent much of his time traveling. He made several trips to Italy to see relatives, as well as visiting other places in Europe. He belonged to a POW club and attended conventions across the nation. Okey and Pricilla were the proud parents of five children: Brenda, Carolyn, Rosemary, John, and Okey II. They also have multiple grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Okey passed away on September 16, 2022, in Fernandina Beach, Florida at the age of 101. He was preceded in death by his dear wife Pricilla and daughters Brenda and Rosemary.

After speaking with Okey, I'm glad to say that I was not disappointed because his story was every bit as interesting as I expected it to be. It also made me realize that very few of those who fought in World War II are still with us, and that learning their stories is not only a privilege, but a responsibility. We owe it to those like Okey DeRaimo, who sacrificed everything they had to defend our country, to tell their stories so that those in the future will forever know why they were the "Greatest Generation."

AARON PARSONS is the Director of West Virginia Archives & History. A native of Logan County, he graduated from Man High School in 2010 and earned a B.A. in history and psychology at Marshall University and an M.A. in public history was WVU. This is the eighth contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Norm in his Culture Center office before his retirement in 1989. All Photos courtesy of Norman Fagan.

Norman Lawrence Patrick Fagan

By Debby Sonis

A self-described "benevolent dictator," Norm Fagan was the first commissioner of what's now the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture & History. He explained his choice of words during an interview in late 2021 at his Putnam County farm in Red House. "It's better to have a benevolent dictator. Somebody has to have a vision, set boundaries, and carry it through to a point where it can grow. Kick over that first domino and watch it happen!"

Norm was first appointed director of the Science and Culture Center (now known simply as the Culture Center) on the State Capitol Complex by Governor Arch Moore in 1974—two years before the building was completed. As executive director of the West Virginia Arts and Humanities Council, he'd been involved in plans to build the center as early as 1969 [see Summer 2016].

As it happened, Norm had left our state in 1970 but was lured back home by Governor Moore to oversee the building of the cultural center he and the governor had envisioned. His four years away only strengthened his desire to showcase the many talents of West Virginians and give them a place where they could feel at home doing them. Norm's years away from here were well spent. From early 1971 through summer 1972, he served as education director for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and worked as the center's liaison to 50 state arts agencies. In 1972, he became further immersed in the arts when he accepted a job offer from Nancy Hanks, then chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), to serve as director of Performing Arts and Public Media Programs for the NEA. Norm was responsible to the chair-

man for the endowment's music, dance, theater, and public media programs until 1974 when the hills beckoned him back home.

He came to call West Virginia home due in part to a tumultuous upbringing in Pittsburgh, PA, where his roots were never fully planted. He and his sister Sarah were in and out of foster homes from an early age once their mother died. He attended parochial schools for eight years and public schools for four. Following eight years (1950 – 1958) in the U.S. Air Force, Norm attended the University of Maryland and Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie-Mellon) and ultimately graduated from the Pittsburgh Playhouse School of the Theater (now Point Park University). He went on to work as the casting director for CBS' *Route 66* TV show and production manager for Kentucky's Iroquois State Park historical dramas. He then returned to the Pittsburgh Playhouse, where he was production stage manager for its four theaters.

It was Norm's 1961 move to Beckley to become producer and general manager of the West Virginia Historical Drama Association that cemented his lifelong commitment to the Mountain State. His job at Grandview Park's Cliffside Amphitheater started with the Civil War drama *Honey in the Rock*, which tells the story of West Virginia's statehood. He soon added a regular "Hootenanny" on some of the theater's "dark nights" (Mondays) when *Honey* wasn't on stage. The Hootenanny brought a young David Morris (1944 – 2016) and fellow Clay County musician Jenes Cottrell (1901 – 1980) to the stage. "There was an out-of-state promoter making money off [older traditional musicians], paying a pittance and a meal," Norm says, who believed they deserved better; he gave it to them. Years later, he and David brainstormed in Norm's office at the Culture Center to establish and name the first Vandalia Gathering in 1977. The Memorial Day weekend celebration of all things West Virginia continues to this day.

Norm and sister Sarah, ages five and three, in Pittsburgh, 1937.

During the end of his time with the Historical Drama Association, Norm worked with composer, theater producer, and Broadway performer Ewel Cornett and Boone County native Billy Edd Wheeler—songwriter, musician, poet, and playwright—to develop a musical, *The Hatfields and McCoys*, for Grandview's amphitheater. Ewel, the association's incoming producer and director, and Billy Edd, a famous and favorite son of West Virginia [see Summer 2016], wrote the music and the script for the play, respectively. In a 2015 interview with *The Register-Herald* in Beckley, Norm remembered Willis Hatfield, son of patriarch Devil Anse, attending opening night in 1970. "He was 89 years old, and when the show started, [the character of] Devil Anse came out, and I looked over at [Willis], and he had a tear in his eye."

That is indicative of what Norm knows to be true. "The arts provide a direct connection to the soul," he says. This conviction played a large part in his work

Fagan at his graduation from the Pittsburgh Playhouse School of the Theater (standing, second row, third from right) in 1959.

to build, staff, and open the first Culture Center for all West Virginians in July 1976.

Governor Moore gave Norm free reign to work with the architects, hire staff, blend the various state agencies that would occupy the new building, and establish an operating budget. "Anything I wanted to do, I could do. No one had ever done it before, so there were no precedents. And, the governor was right there, too," Norm recalls.

"With the creation of the department, the challenges were many. First, to create an administrative configuration by which the agency would operate and secondly, to create a programming structure through which it would fulfill its charge and bring identity to the department and the center. To guide us in our early days, I acted as both commissioner and program director. Since we were *the first*, everything we did was creating precedent."

Two areas contributed greatly to the success of those early days: a budget that supported strong programming and the hiring of the first staff. "I requested funding from the state legislature and reported directly to them. It was straight programming money, including the State Archives, too, and everything came out of one pool of money."

As far as hiring staff, Norm also had a plan there. He didn't hire anybody who had previously done that particular job anywhere else. And, he wasn't out to win any popularity contest, instead instilling his vision for what the state's first Culture Center could become. "The staff didn't have to

Fagan with Roger Stevens, founding chairman of the Kennedy Center and the National Endowment for the Arts, circa 1969. Stevens was also a prolific producer of Broadway musicals, including West Side Story.

like me. I wanted to earn their respect."

One of the first hires was Jackie Fletcher, now a CPA living in South Carolina. An arts management intern at the state Arts and Humanities Council, Jackie was hired as the events coordinator at the center. A big job. Jackie says it best: "There were a lot of 'firsts' within the first couple of years of opening the West Virginia Culture Center with regards to events: a first statewide Theater Festival; a statewide Dance Festival; a first Jazz Festival featuring state jazz greats but also bringing in national stars such as Marian McPartland, Dizzy Gillespie, and Phil Woods; and a first Vandalia Gathering festival, bringing together traditional musicians and artists from throughout the state." Jackie joined Fagan and David Morris in planning that first Vandalia.

"Norman wanted the facility to be the best, not just for the person attending the event but for the performing artist...Outside, during [the] Vandalia Gathering, Norman thought of everything to make sure that the traditional artists were comfortable and safe. And, for Vandalia, there were so many volunteers! It was a massive operation! Everything was 'free' to the person attending the event...all you had to do was show up, and you would get to enjoy some of the state's finest performing artists. What Norman created in all of us was a feeling of pride for the arts in West Virginia...because he showcased all of it."

In the beginning, too, the goal was to present, promote, and document the unique culture of West Virginia artists, artisans, and organizations. Norm says, "To facilitate this, I met with the International President of the American Federation of Musicians and local union officials and obtained a unique blanket waiver to broadcast live and recorded musical performances." The technical staff made sure that happened in the theater, the Great Hall, and on the grounds of the State Capitol Complex.

Fagan with renowned Bauhaus architect Walter Gropius at the Huntington Museum of Art in 1968. Gropius designed and oversaw construction of the museum's expansion project named for him.

Steve Payne was a staff photographer at the Department of Commerce when Fagan hired him to document Culture Center events, exhibits, and programs. He says, "I started with the dirt floors in the basement before the building was actually finished. Norm and I had a meeting to discuss this. At the time, there was no photo lab or anything. He told me I had $16,000 to $20,000 to build and outfit a photography department. I was on cloud nine. My responsibility was anything photography related, whenever it was needed.

"The black-tie opening was just amazing. Arts people from all corners of the state celebrating a pivotal moment for the arts in West Virginia. What experiences! I knew nothing about old-time music or quilting and quickly got a world-class education from the real makers, not from a historian. At every turn, I was learning something new. The energy in that place during festivals was electric!" Steve adds, "To know Norman is to love him. He is one of the most gracious people I've ever met. He listens with intent and cheers everyone on to new heights. He brought the arts to the masses here like no one else I can think of, and he rarely took credit."

The first technical director was Bob Shreve, hired from the theater graduate program at WVU. For the past 30 years, he's worked in theme park design management for Walt Disney Imagineering, Universal Studios, Universal's Islands of Adventure, Universal Creative, and Herschend Family Entertainment. Bob recalls, "I first met Norm in April of 1976 when I was hired to be the first stage technician for the West Virginia Culture Center, which was then under construction. I was hired by Gary Parsons, who was the first director

Fagan with Governor Arch A. Moore in the great hall of the Culture Center.

of operations for the center. It was my first major job, and I was immensely proud to be on his staff. We were all young—Jackie Fletcher, Sharon Mullins (exhibits coordinator), Carolanne Griffith (information services director)—and for many of us, it was our first opportunity to plan and execute events.

"From April to July of 1976, we planned and prepared for the grand opening of the facility. Opening day was something I will never forget. We programmed shows in the State Theater all day, one after another, from the Charleston (now West Virginia) Symphony to the Putnam County Pickers. The place was so packed with people the only way I could get from the control booth in the balcony to the stage was by using the overhead catwalks and climbing down a ladder to reach the stage. I have never worked that hard in my life, but, in truth, it was one of the most exhilarating days of my life as well. Working with Norman in the late '70s and early '80s was mind-blowing. Due to a resurgence of the coal industry, West Virginia was cash-fat, and Norman had Arch Moore's ear and trust. Together, they created an atmosphere in the state that honored our people, their past, and their traditions. West Virginia in the late '70s was ranked ninth nationally in per capita spending in the arts, something we were all immensely proud of at the time. The things we created were wonderful and unavailable anywhere else in the world—the West Virginia Dance Festival, Vandalia, the Quilt Show—they were either unique or the first of their kind."

Greg Devereaux, a graduate of WVU's College of Law and a theater undergrad who later in life served as California's San Bernardino County chief executive officer, was hired as the first deputy commissioner. Jo Ann Huffman of Charleston directed the administration arm, and Flossie Yokum of Cabin Creek was hired as comptroller. Don Page [see Spring 2004] moved from the Department of Commerce to direct the crafts program, and Jim Andrews came over from the Department of Education to head the Arts and Humanities Division.

With that core group in place, the Culture Center had plenty of room to grow. A multifaceted technical department was created. Bob Shreve got the go-ahead to hire technicians to maintain the State Museum, fabricate and install exhibits, support and manage live entertainment events, and provide technical assistance to arts communities around the state. "Suddenly, I had people to manage—Tom Pasinetti, Michael Switalski, Gloria 'Tiny' Bailey, Phil Kovacevich—with others popping in and out as needed," Bob remembers.

One of the most prominent showcases came in the form of the West Virginia Juried Exhibition, which opened in 1979. The biennial art show presented the best work of our state's well-known and emerging artists. Out-of-state jurors judged the entries, and winners were given the largest cash awards of any comparable exhibit in the country at that time; in 1979, 18 artists

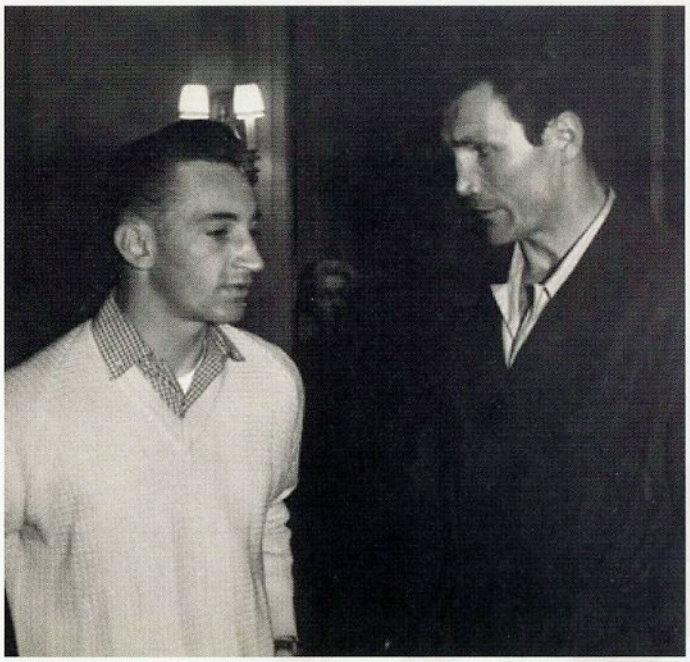
received a total of $33,000. The exhibition continues today and presents the work of West Virginians in crafts, sculpture, photography, prints, drawings, mixed media, paintings, and digital arts. Winning entries become part of the State Museum's permanent collection.

Many out-of-state artists came to West Virginia through Fagan's contacts on the national stage, including B. B. King, who headlined the 1986 Jazz Festival; jazz artist and educator Dr. Billy Taylor; polka king Frankie Yankovic, who performed regularly in the Great Hall during the Vandalia Gathering; and famed musical theater choreographer and dancer Agnes de Mille, who took part in the Community Theater Festival.

Norm's ties to the arts world were remarkable both in who he knew and the support he garnered—from both sides of the aisle. He met presidents Nixon and Ford, U.S. Senator Jennings Randolph, and U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy, who he consulted for the Kennedy Center's education program. Norm was referred to by members of the Kennedy family as "that man from West Virginia." U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd nominated Fagan to serve as chairman of the NEA.

He knew fine artists, writers, singers, arts leaders, directors, and symphonists. Fagan maintained close ties with Roger Stevens, founding chairman of both the Kennedy Center and the NEA, and Lily Polk Guest, a renowned arts advocate and founder of the Friends of the Kennedy Center. Norm credits Academy Award-winning actor Jack Palance as his inspiration to pursue a career in the arts. They met in Berlin during the 1957 filming of *Ten Seconds to Hell*, a film set during World War II in which Norm makes an appearance. In later years, Palance visited the Culture Center and purchased an armload of quilts from the craft shop.

And it was Norm's time at *Honey in the Rock* that led to other lasting friendships with U.S. District Judge Joseph R. Goodwin; his wife Kay Goodwin, former cabinet secretary for the Department of Education and the Arts; and Beckley native and Academy Award-nominated actor Chris Sarandon. Fagan has maintained strong ties to all three. Sarandon (*Dog Day Afternoon, Fright Night, The Princess Bride, The Nightmare before Christmas*) got one of his early breaks appearing in *Honey*. He says, "I cannot think of the arts in West Virginia without thinking of Norman, a transplanted son of our state that he holds so very dear to his heart. His work on behalf of the artistic health of the Mountain State can't be exaggerated. It lives on as his legacy, a legacy that is immense and profound."



Fagan and Jack Palance during the 1957 filming of *The Phoenix* in Berlin. The film was released in 1959 and retitled *Ten Seconds to Hell.*

Much of the success of the Culture Center may be attributed to its festivals, tours, exhibits, and the opening of its doors to all West Virginians. But one-of-a-kind celebrations were part of the programming, too. "We produced special events such as the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the State Capitol building. We held ceremonies for official occasions—Quilt Stamp Day and the installation of the state Poet Laureate Louise McNeill Pease—and hosted visiting

Norm with Joan Mondale during her 1980 visit to the Culture Center.

dignitaries," Norm says. This included a 1980 visit from Joan Mondale, the wife of Vice President Walter Mondale, who wrote to Fagan: "Norman: You are absolutely fabulous (as director, writer, and producer)! I do not think it possible to have done more, seen more, met more, or learned more than you managed to squeeze into that brief but wonderful hour's visit to the Cultur[e] Center." When other states would ask how to run their arts programs, Joan Mondale consistently pointed to the excellent example of Norm Fagan and West Virginia. Norm notes, "We also created a publishing arm, Elderberry Books, named for its first publication *Elderberry Flood* by state Poet Laureate Louise McNeill Pease." The department's Elderberry Records produced the LP and CD *The Music Never Dies: A Vandalia Sampler 1977-1987.*

The agency's most popular and enduring publication, GOLDENSEAL, moved from the Department of Commerce in 1977 to the new Culture Center with founding editor Tom Screven. In 1979, Ken Sullivan became the editor and state director of folklife, establishing storytelling sessions and the West Virginia State Liar's Contest as part of the Vandalia Gathering.

Norm points to the Vandalia Gathering as his favorite festival "because it epitomizes who we are."

"Who we are" was important to all aspects of Fagan's job as commissioner. He broke new ground with documentation and presentation, but he believed in education, as well. Only he didn't call it that. He felt whatever people learned had to go beyond the doors as an outgrowth of the Culture

Norm with a Conestoga wagon, part of Camp Washington-Carver's Old-Time Days Festival, early 1980s.

Center. Bob Shreve remembers, "We made resources available for education. I got to travel all over the state and meet wonderful people, advising them on their needs to improve their facilities or shows. Through the technical assistance program, Fagan created a program that had the ability to touch every hollow in the state. We traveled everywhere, assisting county school systems, libraries, community theaters, you name it—if they asked for help, they got it. I truly believe that it raised the bar in traditional arts and entertainment in the entire state."

As commissioner, Norm took on responsibilities outside the arts as well. In 1985, Governor Moore appointed Fagan to the Veterans Memorial Commission and charged the department with its "housing and administering." Judy Shreve, a cultural center staffer, managed the commission. The department held a design competition and began vigorous fundraising. Ground was broken near the Culture Center for this magnificent tribute to our fallen veterans in 1990, the year after Norm retired.

Two satellite facilities came to life during Norm's time. "We were given the added responsibilities of operating West Virginia Independence Hall in Wheeling and Camp Washington-Carver in Fayette County, which required additional programming," Norm says.

The restoration of Camp Washington-Carver, once our state's Black 4-H camp [see Summer 2022], was a monumental task. Bob describes it as a rural arts park: "We set about to transform the camp, upgrading the water systems, electrical systems, installing a commercial kitchen, and creating dressing rooms and performance spaces on the grounds. Working with Norman was a joy. He was always the first to step up and meet any challenges. I think that is one of the things I really learned from him: Nothing is too big to handle. Just stop, break it down into its components, and then tackle each one." Bob adds, "He was a major proponent of a defined role for management. The role of a manager is not to do but to remove the obstacles that prevent his team from performing their best. And, don't ac-

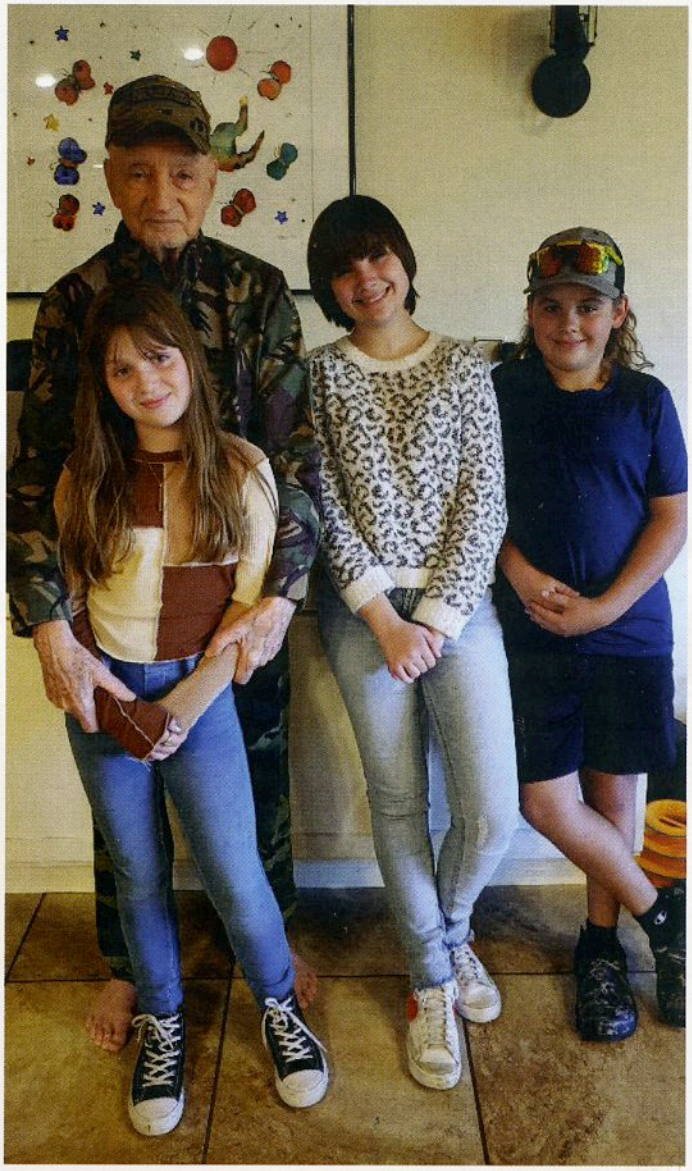
cept second best, no matter the reason. Figure out a way to get the best."

Norm says, "It was a creative time, an exciting time, an inspiring time, a time of joy and frustration. Oh, there were tribulations, but overcoming them made us more confident. None of it could have happened without the brilliant, hardworking staff with which I had the honor to serve...talented and dedicated to the vision of creating something wonderful, something original, something that had never been. Arch Moore was the best boss I ever had," Fagan adds. "He was positive about everything, and he lived on so many levels. He may have done wrong but he did so much right and good. I think the building should be named the Arch A. Moore Jr. Culture Center."

Norm Fagan retired in 1989. He served four governors in the course of his career: Hulett Smith, the governor that Norm credits with bringing the arts into state government; Arch Moore; Jay Rockefeller; and Gaston Caperton. In retirement, he continued his connection with the arts by consulting with cultural facilities, including fairs and festivals, arts centers, museums, and community cultural organizations. He taught arts administration at WVU for eight years and conducted faculty seminars in arts management for the university. Fagan also consulted with West Virginia State University on its arts programs.

Norm unquestionably was one of the most significant arts administrators not only in West Virginia but in the nation. In recognition of this, the State Theater at the Culture Center—the facility he helped design and operate—was named for him in 2001. That same year, he received the Vandalia Award, which he established in 1981 to recognize the lifetime contributions of individuals who "embody the spirit of our state's folk heritage and...traditional culture." The award is our state's highest folklife honor.

At 90 years, Norm stays busy cutting the grass on his farm and mentoring his young neighbors. He's godfather to Natalie, Brooklyn, and Landon Vaughan and is also involved in the creative pursuits of his young friend Chloe Steadman.



Norm with the Vaughans. The kids (l-r) are Brooklyn, Natalie, and Landon.

"It's been a helluva trip," he says. "I don't feel like anything about my life was unplanned. It just seemed to naturally go from one thing to the other. It was supposed to happen."

DEBBY SONIS, a Charleston native, served as assistant editor of GOLDENSEAL from 1988 to 1998. She was managing editor for *The West Virginia Encyclopedia*, published in 2006 by the West Virginia Humanities Council. This is her fourth contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

Life on Jim Ridge

By Don Coleman

As the seasons change, and the Holidays approach, kids begin to anticipate all the celebrations that Christmas brings with it. Our Christmas activities in the 1950s began after Thanksgiving. The activities included Christmas plays in the one-room schoolhouse and one-room church.

My childhood memories of Christmas include Dad doing things to keep us wondering where Santa was going to appear next. One vivid memory I have was the time he left candy in a pan by our door—Santa must have been there, or the candy would not be there, we thought. Another tradition Dad kept each year was to provide the traditional candy, fruit, and nuts. Those items were always in large amounts: a crate of apples, a crate of oranges, and a crate of tangerines. English walnuts were the preferred nuts, but we always had access to peanuts, hazelnuts, and other varieties. The candy usually included plenty of hard candy and a supply of soft sweet anise.

Our Christmas eve included fireworks and other symbols of celebration. Dad worked in Ohio where he could buy plenty of fireworks, and he did. All of that activity ushered in the time for presents from Santa and playtime with the toys late into the night. Mom was up bright and early on Christmas Day cooking the ham and turkey and preparing several side dishes. There was always, of course, a large fruit cake available. After the delicious meal Mom prepared, we spent the afternoon playing with the gifts we received. We did not have the movies; *Home Alone*, or *The Christmas Story*, but we still had the instruction, "Be careful, you might shoot your eye out." I remember the year we hung the target over a picture on the wall, and we did shoot the glass out—glad it was not a Picasso or the Mona Lisa! Mom and Dad gave us all the excitement of Santa Claus. However, the Christmas plays at church and the limitless love from Mom and Dad left no doubt about the real meaning of Christmas: Love came down at Christmas when Christ was born in Bethlehem.

My first experience of learning was in a one-room schoolhouse. My teacher was Mrs. Bertha; a kind and caring person that was an experienced teacher. Unfortunately, she retired, and we did not have experienced teachers for my remaining seven years of elementary school. Most of them were right out of high school, with little or no teaching experience. Most tried and did all they could with the tools that they had. That was my first eight years of school. The year following eighth grade the bus to Buffalo High School passed our house and, just like that, my brother and I started high school.

With the exception of some math skills and an interest in geography, I was in no way prepared for high school. The details in English classes were completely new to me; I had never heard of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, or conjunctions, much less anything about diagramming sentences. Fortunately, I had learned how to be a survivor—which was one thing most students *had* learned in the one-room schoolhouse. I got through that first year by surviving any way I could. I did feel comfortable in vocational agriculture classes with my experience on the farm. Mr. Forrest Skinner, the teacher, cared about the students' learning and we discussed farm things, but also wrote speeches and learned many things about practical living.

As I reflect on growing up, I realize what a privilege it has been to live from the horse and buggy days to the jet age. How times have changed! During my work-

The attendees of the Walker Chapel Christmas Play c. 1950. All photos courtesy of the author.

ing days on the farm, there may have been a tractor or two on Jim Ridge but the only horsepower I experienced were three horses: Fox, Ide, and Fred. Fox and Fred were two large workhorses, Ide was a small horse and was pushed into duty when the large horse Fred died. My Dad and Grandpa owned about 200 acres of land altogether. Fox, Ide, and Fred were workhorses in the day and often used by members of the family as riding horses in the evening—usually to church. I can remember one night my brother and I were riding Ide to church, and she decided she did not want us riding. She started jumping like a bucking bronco. As she jumped, the saddle girth broke, and we went sailing into a ditch. We were not hurt, but it was not a pretty sight.

Sibling rivalry was alive and well between my brother James (Bob) and myself. However, when there was work and play to be done, we were very supportive of each other. For example, we were taking the horses and wagon to Grandpa's house after work one day. As we rode around the ridge from Dad's house to Grandpa's house we started goofing around and I cracked the horses' reins and started them running by using my favorite expression from the Lone Ranger shows, "Hi Ho Silver!" By that time the horses were running away, and I had no control over them. My brother Bob climbed out on the tongue of the wagon and got on one of the horses. He tried to stop them but could not do it. In an attempt to get off the horse, he jumped into a ditch. I thought he was injured when he landed in that awkward manner, but he was not hurt.

We did not need a Dukes of Hazzard-style show for adventures, we made our own. I quit yelling "Hi Ho Silver" and held on for dear life as the horses continued to run away and through a fence gate stopping where they usually did. If there was a moral to this story it would be: don't start something you can't stop.

As workhorses, Fox, Fred, and Ide were used to pull all of the farm equipment; iron wheel wagons, mowing machines, plows, cultivators, and others. My fondest memories of the iron wheel wagon were the

The author's family in front of the house built in 1939 by their father.

My Mom and Dad were, for the most part, homesteaders. Pictured are members of my family standing beside the house Dad built in 1939. I can recall playing on a sandpile at age four while he sawed boards and drove nails. My Dad, J. E. Coleman built the house in 30 days. His tools included a carpenter's square, a hand saw, a level, a hand planer, a hammer, an ax, wood chisels, and a few cement tools. Today, I remember Jetty and Letty Coleman providing my two brothers, my sister, and me with a decent family atmosphere under the most difficult circumstances. It is easy to idolize the past and make things seem more significant than they were. However, the house Dad built stands as a symbol of family life in 1939. Thanks, Mom and Dad for your unselfish love that built our house, and, above all, made it home.

times we would ride the wagon between my dad's farm and my grandpa's farm. When we would come to a house where the neighbor was rocking on the porch, my grandpa would often stop and talk for a long time. I enjoyed that front porch folklore. It is interactions like this that I fondly look back on and have good memories of. The nostalgia of the "front-porch" is illustrated by singer-songwriter Michel Jonathan when he sings, "We need a front porch around the world...we gotta slow it down and learn to sit a spell."

I can remember using the horse-drawn mowing machine to mow the pasture field for my grandpa; however, my most vivid memory is that of my Dad and Brother mowing wheat. To do that, an extra seat was attached to the mowing machine. My brother drove the horses, and my dad would sweep the wheat into a bundle and drop the bundle off. Someone would come along behind the mowing machine and take several straws of wheat and wrap the wheat bundle, so it would stay together. The bundles would be put into a wheat shock. They were later picked up and saved for the annual visit of the threshing machine. The machine operator would move through the community and neighbors would join each other in getting their 'thrashing' done.

My memories of the turning plow are a different story, it was a very difficult item for me. It required going back and forth in a field turning only about 14 inches of the ground each time. It was a test of fortitude and patience to follow a turning plow all day—I did not have very much fortitude and patience when I was a teenager. I re-

The author playing the banjo for a "strum- a-long" at a local banquet.

call our neighbor saying that he had to rest before going to bed after walking behind his turning plow all day.

Bringing things full circle, my first job was, strangely enough, teaching in a one-room school. Like many of my one-room teachers, I had no teaching experience. A couple of students gave me a hard time, I was not prepared for that. A couple of the students helped me get organized, and I was thankful for that. I went on to teach elementary school for three and a half years. During that time, I took extension and Saturday classes from Morris Harvey College (Now the University of Charleston). I later went to West Virginia State College for a year (Now West Virginia State University).

It was through my involvement in classes and watching sports there that I experienced many new feelings. After all of those emotional feelings, I was brought to a deeper religious experience. I discovered that the Holy Spirit, for the most part, was more of a comforter and helping presence, than a giver of good feelings. In other words, God does not necessarily remove the difficulties of life but helps us through those difficulties. Despite some hard times, it seemed all my prayers were being answered—it was in 1959 that I would become a United Methodist Pastor, my Darling Roberta would marry me, we would move to Tallmansville (Upshur County), and I would be the pastor of the Tallmansville Charge. At that time, I transferred my college credits to West Virginia Wesleyan and continued my learning.

I finished my college work at WV Wesleyan College and received my BA degree in 1962. In the fall of 62, Roberta, with our son Terry, and I moved to Delaware, Ohio where I attended The Methodist Theological School. I graduated from METHESCO In 1966 and worked with Pastor Dr. David DuBois, Sr. Pastor in St. Paul's Church in Parkersburg (Wood County) for one year. By that time, going with the flow meant accepting appointments wherever the Bishop and District Superintendents thought I should go. Becoming a Methodist Pastor meant I was an itinerant preacher, traveling from town to town. Those towns for me and my family included Parkersburg, Elizabeth, Gassaway, Philippi, Spencer, Keyser, and my retirement to Flatwoods (Braxton County). I am grateful for having lived and worked in all of these towns, including the negative and positive experiences.

Family highlights during those years include the birth of our Son Terry in 1961, Carol in 1964, and Ron in 1975. Other family highlights have included the birth of our four grandchildren: Garrett, Ryan, Courtney, and Shelby. My family as it was in 2014, grieved the death of my Darling Roberta, leaving us with many living memories of her love, care, intuition, and creative ability. Since then, I have been blessed with four great-grandchildren: Jack, Graham, Hanna, and Hudson. Through it all, I had those fond memories of my life on Jim Ridge as a foundation to build upon, and for that, I will always be grateful.

DON COLEMAN is with the West Virginia Conference of The United Methodist Church-Retired. This is his first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

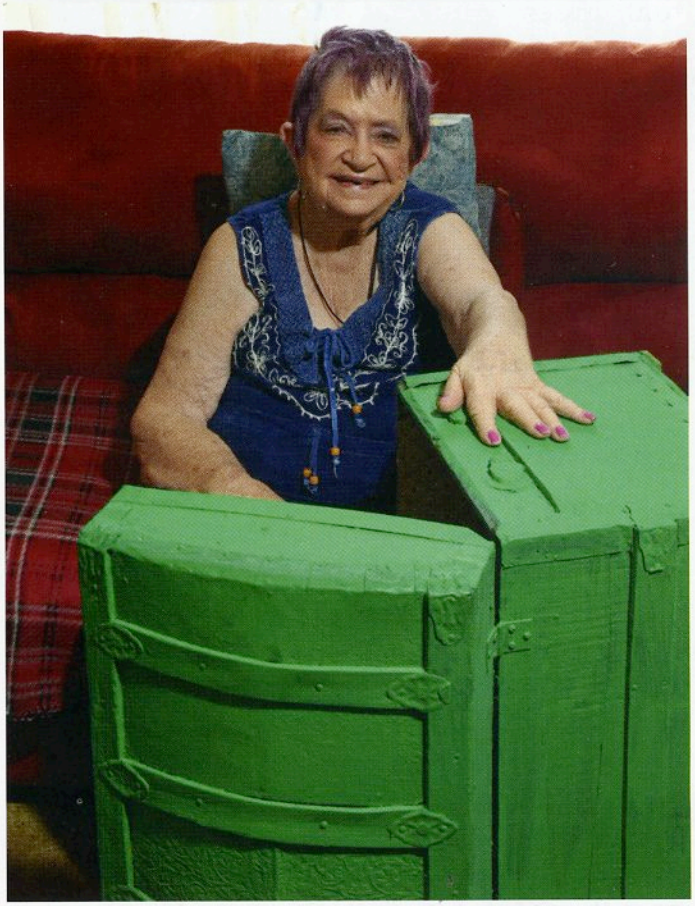
The Mystery Of Grandma's Trunk

By Patsy A. Reckart

Once a year, I have a luncheon for some of the girls I went to school with. We graduated in 1953, and we are all in our 80s. We love to get together and share our memories. It's a covered dish luncheon, and everyone brings something. For days and days, I work on my house. I want it to be spotless. I like decorating with antiques, or things that belonged to my grandmother. She was born in 1874, so some of her things are really old.

My husband had an outbuilding where I store things I need for the luncheon. I decided to go and check in the building to see what I could use to decorate with. I had a hard time getting the key to work, but after several tries, it finally turned. Just as I pushed the door open, I saw a little brown furry thing run across the floor in front of me—I wasn't afraid, so I went on in. My husband had all kinds of tools on tables and hanging on the walls. He had built a couple of shelves up close to the ceiling, where he had things stored. Looking around, I found an old churn with no lid and a couple of cream cans, and I found the big can that grandma used to keep her flour in when she bought it by the 25 lb bag. Then, all at once, I saw my grandma's trunk high up on one of the shelves. I found a step ladder, and after the hardest time, I finally got it down.

When I opened it, I was shocked that all the things I'd stored in it were gone. Where were all my school papers and books that I wanted to keep? I had stored my kids' toys, their first shoes, some of their first romper suits, some of their baby pictures, and some blankets—one was specially quilted. Everything was gone. As soon as my husband got home, I asked him what had happened to all my things. He said, "I had to put a new bottom on it, and all the things in the trunk were molded, so I had to throw it all away. I comforted myself knowing I still had Grandma's trunk, and that's all that mattered,



The author pictured with her Grandmother's trunk. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

The trunk was painted a hideous green and lined with wallpaper that had big red roses. The insides were still in good shape, but I knew I had to redo the outside. I found some black paint on my husband's work table, so I painted it black. I painted all the trim in antique gold. I didn't bother with the wallpaper on the inside. I sprayed the cream cans with a coat of black paint. When they dried, I put them on either side of my living room fireplace and set two big dolls on them that my mom had made about 30 years ago. As I surveyed

my handiwork, I began to reminisce.

My brother Jimmie and I grew up with Grandpa and Grandma, who always kept that green trunk at the foot of her bed. Sometimes, on a rainy day, she would tell us stories about her green trunk. Jimmie, who was about six, would call it that hideous green trunk. I have no idea where he learned the word hideous. One morning, it was raining, so she put on her glasses and pulled a chair up close to her trunk. When she opened it, we crept up close to see what she had in that trunk. She would always tell us, "Eyes on, fingers off." Everything in that trunk was so special to her. I remember a round sort of globe with a sea horse in it, or that's what she called it. She had several sets of salt-and-pepper shakers [I still have two of them]. She had a set of dishes her mother had given her but used them only for special occasions. She had a crocheted tablecloth and—she always had a bag of candy. She loved marshmallow peanuts and always gave me and Jimmie three or four. Sometimes I would say to her, "Grandma, where did you get that trunk?" And she'd say, "That would be a story for another rainy day," and then she'd take off her glasses, close the lid, and put the chair away.

One morning, soon after asking her for the story, Jimmie and I woke up to the sounds of Thunder. I told Jimmie, "It's going to rain," and he said, "Good, maybe Grandma will tell the story about where she got that hideous green trunk." It was about an hour later when the rain started. We could hear it pounding on the roof. Jimmie yelled, "Grandma, it's raining," and she yelled back, "I'll be there drekly. I'm going to get some kivvers (what she called bedcovers) so we can sit on the floor." Just then, there was a loud clap of thunder, and the rain came pouring down. Grandma jumped up. She had to set some pots and pans under all the leaks Grandpa had promised to fix but never seemed to have time for. Finally done, she came back in, brought us sugar cookies, and sat down on the floor with us. Then she began her story.

The author's grandmother Rochette. Photo courtesy of the author.

"Back years ago, when I was about 12, I lived with my mom and sister Annie and my two brothers Rye and Guy in a little house up a hollow on Posey Run. We had cows and hogs and chickens. My brothers had to milk twice a day and slop the hogs twice a day. Mam saved the cream, and then she would churn it into butter and sell it. My sister Annie and I took care of the chickens. Oh, how I hated to go in that chicken house. Sometimes, we would see a black snake in the feed barrel, and I'm deathly afraid of snakes. We gathered the eggs every day, and on Saturday, we would take them to the store and trade them for things that Mam needed in the house.

"If there was any money left we could buy fabric and thread to sew with. Fabric was 15 cents a yard, and thread was five cents a spool. After that, if there was any money left we would buy a poke of candy. I made a lot of things for my hope chest, or that's what I called it. My hope chest was an old suitcase that someone had given me. I made aprons—Mam told me I should wear a clean one every day. I made dresser scarves. I made a few baby clothes, and I even made a couple of kivvers, and then in later years, I got the green trunk." I interrupted her, "But Grandma, where did you get it?" She said, "Well, kids, that story will have to wait for another rainy day."

This was the start of the story she would tell us over the coming weeks on rainy afternoons. We were always eager to hear more. One rainy day, Grandma had her chores done and she sat down with us to continue the story of her trunk. We had been patiently waiting. She sat down and said, "It was Saturday evening, and we were all sitting on the porch. Mam had spent the day baking bread, so the whole house was pretty warm, and we were all outside waiting for the house to cool down. We saw a wagon coming down the road. It was piled high with everything you could think of, and it was pulled by two beautiful horses. A little ole man was sitting high on the seat, and running by the wagon was a big collie dog. When he got to our gate, he stopped and said, "Top of the day to you. My name is John Lee, my horses are Nellie and Ben, and my dog is Rosie. And then he said, 'You can have anything on my wagon for something to eat and a place to spend the night.' Mam said, 'I don't see anything I want, but my girls might.' Annie didn't want anything, but when I saw the green trunk, I told him that's what I wanted. Mam said she could find him something to eat and some scraps for Rosie.

"John Lee took the horses around back to the barn and gave them some hay. Rosie followed them. He found some clean clothes on the wagon and headed down to the creek to wash up. Mam yelled and told him his food was ready. He came up to the house and ate the food she'd fixed for him. It didn't take Rosie long to eat her scraps since she was so hungry. John Lee thanked us all, and he and Rosie went to the barn. The next morning, he was gone, and the green trunk was sitting on the porch. That green trunk became my pride and joy. I spent all my free time making things for it."

Grandma was 17 when she met and married our grandpa. Jimmie asked, "Grandma, how did you meet him?" That's when she told us— "That'll be a story for another rainy day." Having finished her story, she looked at me and said, "You know the green trunk will be yours one day." Jimmie looked at me and said again, "I still don't know why you'd want that hideous green trunk." Now, many years later, I look at Grandma's trunk and think of all the miles it's traveled. I think of all the things it's held, but most of all, I think of the love it's brought.

PATSY A. RECKART was raised in Orlando (Braxton County) by her grandparents Tom and Bridget Godfrey. The oldest of five children, she went to a three-room school before going to Burnsville High School. She's been telling stories for years and published a children's book. At age 87, she plans to continue writing. This is her third contribution to GOLDENSEAL [see Spring 2019 and Fall 2021].

Boothsville: A Photo Essay

By Carrol Riffee Strawderman

This view shows a bustling Main Street. Leo Kennedy's store was where the horses and wagons are pulling out. It was located beside the Reed Store, established by town founder Robert Reed. The church steeple was the Methodist Episcopal church, built in 1927 or 1928. All photos courtesy of the Author.

Boothsville in Marion County was once a thriving town of industry with a strong future. Today, you might drive right through it without realizing a bustling community once existed there.

The Booths Creek area was first settled between 1758 and 1765 by Capt. James Booth and Col. John Thomas. In 1778, during the height of Revolutionary War violence on the frontier, Booth was killed in an Indian raid near present-day Monongah. Col. John Thomas would die three years later in another attack that took place in 1781 along Booths Creek, near the site of the town of Boothsville. After that, it was mostly abandoned for several years; although, some settlements sprung up, including my first ancestors in the region, Evan and Lydia Ann Dyke Thomas, who claimed more than 2,000 acres in 1783.

Robert Reed laid out the town of Boothsville in 1839, established a store on Main Street, opened the first post office, and donated two lots to be used by the Baptist

Hotel D'Bolt was built in 1843. In this photo from the early 1900s, Earl Reed is the boy on the porch. The building was torn down in the late 1930s or 1940s.

church—the original church stands in the same location today. The town was officially incorporated in 1840.

By the 1880s, Boothsville had more than 75 buildings, including a flour mill owned by the father of Federal Judge Harry Watkins. Boothsville was also home to Fred Martin Torrey, who would become a famous sculptor in Chicago later in his life. Present day Boothsville now lies within three counties: Marion, Taylor, and Harrison.

Today, it's hard to believe all of this existed. The beginning of the end was when the railroad was completed from Fairmont to Clarksburg, bypassing Boothsville, which is now a shadow of its former self. These photos give you just a bit of a glimpse into what Boothsville was like in its heyday. I would like to thank Linda Rutherford, Jackie Steele, and the late Betty Reed Dowdell for sharing these historic photographs with me, without them this act of historical preservation would not have been the same.

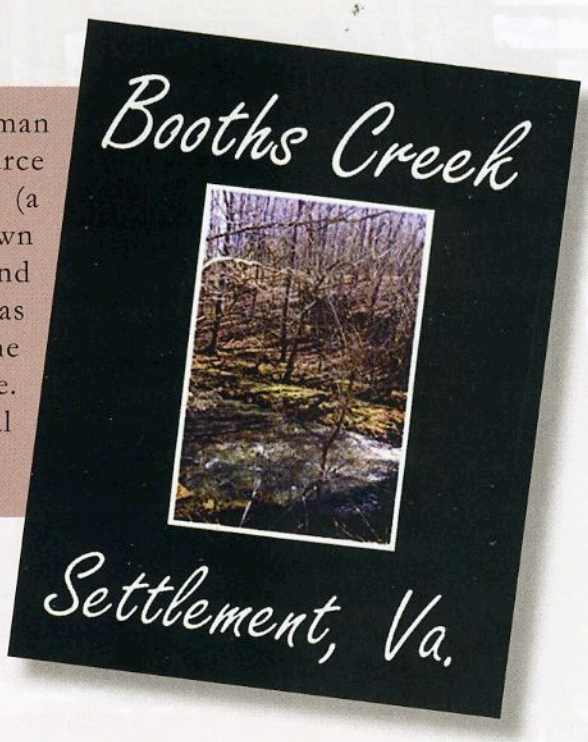
This covered bridge was situated at the lower end of Boothsville. Today there is a concrete bridge at that location.

A birds-eye view of Boothsville. The land incorporated for Boothsville in 1840 was originally part of the Martin Farm, which at that time was the most valuable land estate in Northwestern Virginia.

Selz was a shoe company founded in 1871 by German immigrant Morris Selz, and based out of Chicago Illinois.The company went out of business at the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929.

The flour mill off of Short Cut Road, run by Troy Newbrough. The mill closed its doors in 1930, and was torn down before WWII.

Booths Creek Settlement, VA, by Carrol Riffee Strawderman (McClain Printing Company, 100 pp) uses primary source records combined with extensive research by the author (a genealogist) to present a well-written account of the town of Boothsville. It shares historically accurate stories and photographs that give the reader a glimpse of what it was like living in that era. This book is a good resource for the historian looking to learn more about this region of the state. Interested readers can find a copy of this book at some local libraries, and housed in the West Virginia State Archives.



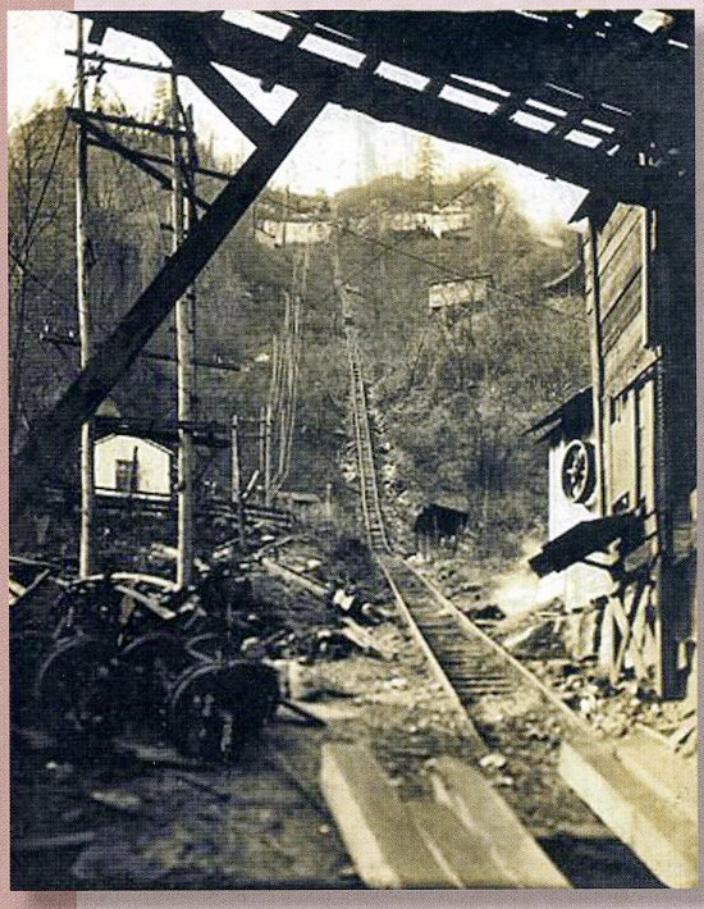
In this birds-eye view of the town the Boothsville school can be seen, the roof is just visible behind the trees.

CARROL RIFFEE STRAWDERMAN is a native of Fairmont, born on Boothsville's Main Street. Both sides of her family can be traced back to the early settlers of the Booths Creek Settlement. Carrol is the proud mother of two children, and grandmother to four grandchildren, and 2 great grandchildren.

An Ode to Kaymoor Mining Town

By Clifford Davis

Kaymoor is a pretty mining town
To see it you have got to look down.
It nestles on a mountain side
Of a Canyon that is deep and wide.
It is not bounded by a Chinese Wall
Just by rocks both great and small.
Its oft been said by visiting men
Those rocks someday will be its end.
Its coal is of the highest in B.T.U.,
To coal buyers that was nothing new.
Many a man that here loaded coal
Left this town a very happy soul.
When its work time whistle does blow
One may think seeing the hustling
Around, that they are doing this for show.
Yet after one watches for a while
He says with a big smile
It takes all this to make the tipple go.
Now this is not my imagination
Come see this town on your vacation.
About it then you won't jest
For Kaymoor West Virginia is rather picturesque.



Kaymoor Mine, photo courtesy of the Davis Family.

Clifford "Knot County Davis (1903-1991)

Throughout his life one could find his poetry written on brown bags, napkins, envelopes, scrap paper, or tucked in books. He was a coal miner for 39 years including Superintendent of Kaymoor Mines during its heyday.

He artfully captured the reality of coal mining, the beauty of WV, philosophical insights, and other fun observations of everyday life and family.

The Faces of Historic Preservation:
Karen Nance

By Susan M. Pierce

Karen Nance has demonstrated a lifelong love of history and commitment to historic buildings in Cabell County and her spirit doesn't give up, no matter how many roadblocks may appear — she finds a way to move forward, and for that I respect her dedication and resolve. A few years ago I decided to interview her in order to learn a little more about her life and how she got involved in historic preservation. I knew Karen Nance was born in Huntington before I asked, but I wanted to hear her story. "I was born in St. Mary's Hospital in 1954." Nance said."Lots of good things happened in 1954 like *Brown v. The Board of Education*."

I didn't know how she and her husband, Johnny, met. She told me that they were just two years apart at Barboursville High School, and crossed paths often. One time they were at an apartment house; one went out the front and the other left out the back door. They met at Rose Gallery and again at a family reunion at Nance's Great Aunt Goldie's. "We were related by marriage, not blood." She laughs. Her Great Aunt Goldie married Johnny's relative, Hezekiah. They finally got together and were married in 1973. Nance recalls, "I told Johnny that if he wanted to go live in any other state, marry someone else, cos I'm not going anywhere."

Johnny and Karen were always interested in historic preservation and old houses from the beginning of their marriage. Realtors kept showing them duplexes and not old homes thinking they wanted to rent half of the house. Johnny's dad had built their house; so the newly married couple built their own also, but they still loved old homes. They started their business as Energy Savers and Construction, but in 1987 changed the name to Old House Doctor. It stuck. They went to their first historic preservation conference in 1984 (During these years Karen was also furthering her education, earning a B.A. in history and basic humanities from Marshall University in 1987, and an M.A. in geography from Marshall University in 1994). At the 1988 National Trust for Historic Preservation conference in Cincinnati, they toured an old-

Karen Nance with Husband Johnny Nance at a Barn Dance in the building that now houses the Rick Whisman Civil War Museum. All photos courtesy of the author unless noted otherwise.

History Heros recognition ceremony 2019. From left to right: Curator Randall Reid-Smith, History Hero Gwen Blevins, Karen Nance, and Victor Greco. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

er Irish neighborhood — everyone in the neighborhood had red hair like Karen. In the neighborhood, buildings were boarded up to be protected until they could be repaired. Nance would take notes on this practice and put it to good use in the near future.

When they came back to Huntington, they found out the Madie Carroll House in Guyandotte was going to be demolished [*Madie went into a nursing home in 1973 just after the building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Her nephew, Lou, inherited the house and he gave it to the Greater Huntington Park and Recreation Board].* The Board was letting the VFW take care of it. Karen went to photograph the house and met Billy Halley who said, "Take good pictures, cos it is coming down." That wasn't what Karen wanted to hear. She met with the VFW quartermaster who was glad someone was interested

L-R Karen Nance, Delegate Dr. Matthew Rohrbach, History Hero John F. Hanna, and Kim Cooper, Assistant Superintendent of District Safety and Ancillary Services for Cabell County Schools.

in it. He told her that his wife and daughter would make him sleep on the porch if he tore down the house. Karen and other supporters made an appointment with the park board. Karen explained how they had learned in Cincinnati how they could board up the house to protect it. The park board agreed to let the group work on the house!

The group formed the Madie Carroll Preservation Society. Nance recalls, "The State Historic Preservation Office gave us a grant for the roof and foundation. We raised the matching funds and that is how we got it started with our first big grant." That year, the Society hosted a military ball. When I first called to talk to Karen, I actually spoke with Johnny who chided me not to call their outfits "costumes." He said that they became reenactors because of historic preservation. A lot of reenactors don't understand historic preservation. "If you can't touch the ground, what's the use of reenacting?" Johnny and Karen dress as civilians, not as soldiers.

Karen says she can't feel any ghosts when she goes into the Carroll House. Others can. On one occasion the alarm at the Carroll House went off and Henry Smith, a neighbor, unlocked the door to let the police check the house. The officer drew his gun on the mannequin in the music room. Any time the police come over, they can't get out of the house fast enough.

Karen is pleased that so many young people visit the Madie Carroll House. In 2016 four hundred kids attended Education Days. Now in 2022, that number has increased to around 900. Volunteers talk

Photo Caption: Karen Nance and Leann Haines, dressed for a historical reenactment event.

about nineteenth century medicine and the clothing of the time period, not just about weapons from the Civil War. Karen talks about the Underground Railroad. Johnny talks about construction methods. Nance and the Society have more plans for the Madie Carroll House. They keep getting more antiques donated. She would like to restore the wallpaper. They have an operating table that moved from battle camp to camp. Someone donated an original nineteenth century dress. The Society hopes to repair the barn and use it to hold the collections so that the House can be refurbished properly (as of 2019 The Madie Carroll House Preservation Society has opened the Rick Whisman Civil War Museum located in the building that was formerly the barn).

During our phone conversation we touched on other projects that Karen has worked on in Cabell County. Many of them involved the State Historic Preservation Office in some way or another. Karen won't give up on the building or bridge she has decided to protect. Of them all, you can tell the Madie Carroll House holds a special place in her heart. She says she is "real proud of the Carroll House."

SUSAN PIERCE of Charleston, is the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer for West Virginia. For over 35 years, she has helped identify, nominate to the National Register of Historic Places, and provide grant opportunities and tax credit assistance to West Virginia's historic resources. Through this mutual commitment to historic buildings, landscapes, farms, cemeteries, and other cultural resources she has also accumulated many friends across the state. This is Susan's second article for GOLDENSEAL.

Nettie Preached Her Lungs Out

By Barbara B. Grigg

When my mother reached her 80s, my question about an old photo snatched a family skeleton out of a deep closet. "Oh, that's Nettie, that old tent preacher." Up perked my ears. Her dismissive comment belied my own United Methodist upbringing by a Church of Christ mother and Methodist father. Oddly enough, I had emerged from my hippy-era college years' search for truth as, what I later came to know was, a flaming evangelical. Aflame but a fledgling, it took moving to another state and floundering for a decade to find and settle into my ultimate spiritual tribe. Wondering how this new bit of family lore may have bent my quest, I set off to discover all I could about Nettie Belle Farris, born in 1896.

My mother, Mary Elizabeth (Libby) Farris, was born in 1923 in Goodwill (Mercer County). As a baby she rolled off her changing table one day and out a second-story window, landing next to a rain barrel—a tale for another time. But because she lived, I am here to tell this tale. Nettie married Frank Farris, my grandfather's brother; this made her my mother's aunt. Mom recalled visiting her Uncle Frank and Aunt Nettie in Covington, Virginia as a child. When the family went to their knees at their chairs for bedtime prayers, Frank and Nettie began calling on the Lord with loud cries and energetic physical expressions. Although their behavior may have been unusual to my mother, it was not unprecedented. This led me to one of the main questions of my research— How did Pentecostalism come to West Virginia?

The Azusa Street Revival that broke out in 1906 in Los Angeles, California is now commonly regarded as the genesis of the 20th-century Christian Pentecostalism explosion. The 2001 Handbook and Directory of

Frank and Nettie Farris. All photos courtesy of the author.

the Montcalm Pentecostal Holiness Church records: In April 1906, a black preacher named William J. Seymour in Los Angeles preached with the power of the Holy Spirit after receiving the gift of speaking in tongues. In November 1906, minister G. B. Cashwell, the white minister of a Holiness Church in Dunn, North Carolina, "wrote an apologetic letter to his brethren and told

The original "Tabernacle on the Hill." Montcalm Pentecostal Holiness Church, c. 1910.

Front page of the Bluefield Daily Telegraph, May 20th, 1924.

them he was going to Los Angeles to seek the Baptism of the Holy Ghost." Cashwell returned in December 1906 filled with the Holy Ghost and on fire. On December 29, 1906, a revival started in Dunn that spread all over the East.

The writer didn't document a link between Cashwell and nearby Virginia ministers. However, he noted that between December 1906 and November 1909 "these two white Southerners were led to leave their homes in Virginia and head to the rugged, undeveloped, mountains in southern West Virginia." In his exhaustive academic work, "Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture," Grant Wacker wrote: "Though external social relations continued to be structured by the segregationist proscriptions of the Jim Crow era, inside the church the racial groups mixed frequently and amicably. In that context, they spoke highly of one another." G. B. Cashwell, a white Holiness Church evangelist from North Carolina, journeyed to Azusa in the fall of 1906 to receive the Pentecostal blessing in an interracial setting. Returning to North Carolina, Cashwell talked of the "colored people" who were baptized in his meetings, exulting, "All the people of God are one here." In Memphis, Cashwell met. C.H. Mason, founder of the mostly Black Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Mason impressed Cashwell as a "precious brother," one "filled with the blessed Holy Ghost." (p.104)

In a 2005 phone interview, Rev. R.C. Turner, former pastor of Montcalm Pentecostal Holiness Church, explained how the Pentecostal revival reached into the Mercer County coal fields. "The revival here started at Thornhill, up the holler near McComas. They first met in tents, then at the Oddfellows Lodge, and finally moved to a storefront in Montcalm. Between 1907 and 1911 that building was dynamited, so they worshiped in a tent behind today's church site. After the storefront blew up, the congregation built the Tabernacle on

the Hill. Although the Tabernacle no longer stands, the road to it is still called Tabernacle Hill Road."

Nettie Farris was Montcalm Pentecostal Holiness Church's only female senior pastor, serving from 1928-1930, starting at age 32. Ordained in the Virginia Conference of the Pentecostal Holiness Church (PHC) in 1925, she immediately transferred to the West Virginia Conference in a split that same year. In 1926 she was appointed pastor at Coalwood and Hemp Hill, preaching in tent meetings as an evangelist. Ordained in 1929, Sister Nettie pastored at Montcalm until 1930, then continued to tent preach and pastor at Giatto PHC and Merry Branch PHC until 1934. In 1935, Mrs. Farris was listed as the pastor of Covington and Mitchelltown churches in the Greenbrier District. The 1936 Minutes list her as the pastor of Covington PHC. In 1937 and 1938 she was listed as an evangelist. [*Special thanks for this official compilation to Dr. C. R. Conner, Assistant Superintendent and Conference Archivist, Appalachian Conference IPHC, received July 5, 2005]*

Travel other than by train in those days was common and difficult. Most people used horses with or without buggies or walked on unpaved roads. Montcalm's PHC 2001 Handbook and Directory says of their early days: "Being the month of January in 1910, it was bitter cold; however, this did not stop the people from coming. They came on foot from miles around. There were few automobiles at that time and even if a person had one, the road from Montcalm up Crane Creek to McComas was so bad no one would risk damaging it trying to make the trip. Most people would come by train if they could afford it, or if they couldn't, they'd walk along the tracks that the train used." Ordinarily, tent meetings were held in good weather: the *Bluefield Daily Telegraph* announced or covered them at least three times in June and July of 1928.

Meanwhile, Pentecostal tent meetings weren't all that was on fire in early 20th-century southern West Virginia. Sister Nettie Farris' ministry was set against a backdrop of vast social drama. To begin with, the southern coalfields where she preached were communities lying near or along the train routes between Bluefield's infamous Baldwin-Felts security office and the coal mines they monitored. Trains circulating into the coal fields from Bluefield included stops like Matewan — home to the famed 1920 massacre, which resulted in the 1921 assassination of Sid Hatfield on the steps of the McDowell County Courthouse: both are within a day's train ride of the Bluefield yard.

One can imagine the emotions of the various stakeholders encountered along the route during this time. Southern West Virginia experienced mine wars in 1912-13 and 1920-21, including events slightly north like the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain when martial law was nearly enacted and Mother Jones became famous for miner unionization. Along with civil unrest, the Spanish Flu epidemic raged from 1918-1919.

And finally, another distinguishing trait of the region and era was the reputation of the nearby community of Keystone (McDowell County), modestly described as "rollicking," In 1912 an author named "Virginia Lad" ventured into Keystone to live and investigate for six months. He compiled his findings into a $1 booklet some 50-pages long entitled "Sodom and Gomorrah of Today, or the History of Keystone West Virginia." Keystone was on the main line of the Norfolk & Western Railway, 24 miles north of Bluefield. With specific detail, Virginia Lad's high-minded complaints included the easy mixing among "whites, negroes, and foreigners" in politics, illegal gambling establishments, and brothels. Whites and Blacks, in particular, were in cahoots in local and state government politics and local policing, all managing to profit handsomely

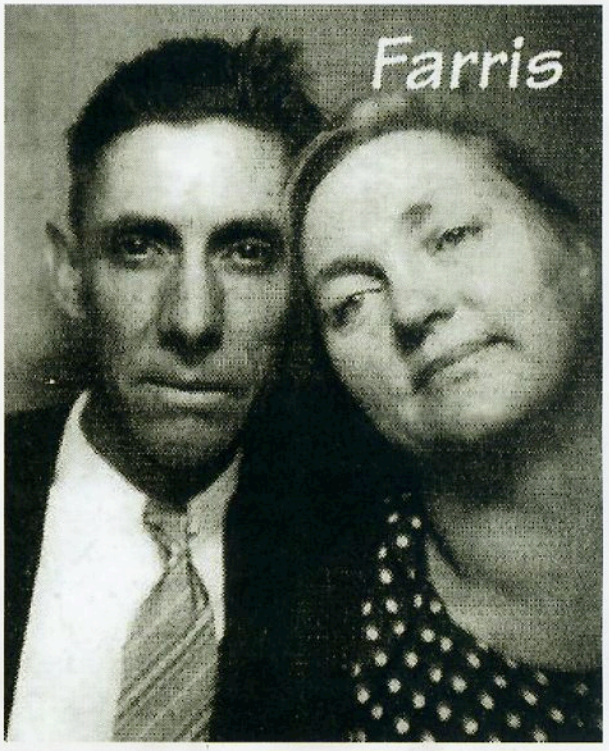
Montcalm Pentecostal Holiness Church, pictured in 2005.

from overlooking the vice. Along with all this came routine robbery and murder by those likewise interested in profiting from the place. The sparse number of displeased upright citizens were powerless to counteract these actions.

Taken altogether, perhaps the social upheaval of the times contributed to the more colorful anecdotes cited in Montcalm PHC's 2001 Handbook and Directory. "During the first meeting at Thornhill, rotten eggs were thrown on the worshippers who were shouting and praising God. Once while Rev. Bolen was preaching, a large hornets' nest was thrown at his feet, but God quieted the hornets and no one was stung. After moving to Montcalm, the meeting house was dynamited by wicked people. On another occasion, local ruffians heckled and interrupted our preacher at a tent revival. After taking all that he felt like he should take, the preacher excused himself, chased the two men down the road, thrashed them convincingly, came back to the pulpit, and continued his sermon." Not too heavenly to be earthly good. That last story's my favorite. Incidentally, the plaque on the current church exterior indicates two of the congregation's former buildings burned down.

Like pulling a hen's teeth, I was able to pick the following anecdotes from Nettie's niece, my mother, Libby. Frank & Nettie lived in Covington, Virginia when Libby was a small child (1920s). They would come and stay with Libby's parents, James and Nona Farris in Duhring (Mercer County)

for a week at a time while Nettie would preach in the nearby coalfields. Libby herself attended one meeting as a preschooler: all she remembers is someone rolling on the ground under a tent. Frank Farris had a good job as mine supervisor, often commuting from home in Covington to Winding Gulf Colliery, at Goodwill or Sagamore Colliery, at McComas. Around 1924 they moved to Rock (Mercer County). Libby recalls Nettie once told her "Many of the people in my church speak in tongues, but the Lord has never allowed me to speak in tongues." Nettie was genuine and sincere in her faith, as was her husband, Frank. As the story goes, Frank once had to have surgery on his arm. For some reason there was no anesthesia for him at the hospital, so he sang hymns at top of his lungs while they operated.



Frank and Nettie Farris c. 1930s.

Lest you think you've come upon a set of perfect saints, Frank and Nettie had their human foibles. Libby's family's impression was that Nettie would leave her two girls with anyone who would take them so she could go and preach. Libby wasn't allowed to play with Nettie's daughters because they were thought to be "typical preacher's kids," that is—pretty wild. Frank used to remind Libby's dad (his brother James) that the Lord was blessing him and Nettie because they were serving Him, and tithing. Libby's dad took that as meddling, not a testimony. But Frank died in 1981 at age 98, so maybe he was right. In widowhood Frank remarried a Seventh-Day Adventist lady; they observed separate Sabbaths. Libby said Frank went behind his new wife on Sunday, forbidding her to do the wash. Her analysis was, "They had a lot of problems in their house because of their religion."

Sister Nettie Farris was considered a good preacher, "highly regarded." She was very solid, not flakey. Libby recalls that speaking in tongues, rolling on the ground, and falling out in the Spirit would occur during her services. But no snake handling or strychnine drinking, atypical behavior practiced among some other Pentecostal sects around the same time in the region. [The Appalachian practice of snake handling arose from the ministry of George Hensley who was ordained by the Church of God in 1915, shortly thereafter left the denomination to pursue his convictions and ministered primarily in areas of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia just south of southern West Virginia counties.]

On August 9, 1939, Sister Farris went to her eternal reward on her 43rd birthday after fighting tuberculosis for a year and a half at the Beckley Sanitorium. In the end, her sister-in-law Nona Farris may also have been right when she said Nettie died because "she preached her lungs out."

BARBARA GRIGG has an M.A. in Communication and has taught English and Journalism at Fairmont State University. This article represents an overview of more in-depth research on the subject, which she hopes to have published in the near future. Anyone wishing to contribute information or consider publication may contact her at brbrgrgg@gmail.com. This is her second contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

You Are Cleared to Land:
Pearl Bragg Laska

By Deanna Edens

Have you ever heard of The Pearl of Alaska? How about The Hillbilly Eskimo? Do you know the name of the woman who received the Wright Brothers' Master Pilot Award at the age of ninety-seven? Well, her name is Pearl Bragg Laska Chamberlain and these are some of her stories. Pearl was the first woman to fly her own plane from the Lower 48 up the Alaska Highway to Alaska. She worked as a flight instructor, bush pilot, and as a cryptographer for the Pentagon. She flew in five Powder Puff Derbies, and was also a WASP trainee and famous "99er." Pearl was a member of the UFO's (United Flying Octogenarians), and the mayor of Fairbanks actually declared a "Pearl Laska Chamberlain Day." Pretty impressive, eh?

Pearl Laska Chamberlain during her time with the Army Air Corp, as a WASP trainee. All photos courtesy of the author.

Pearl grew up on Chestnut Mountain in Summers County. Her father, Johnny Bragg fought hard to get a school in the area and in 1919 the news came that a teacher had been found and school would finally open. When the ten-year-old girl entered the one-room schoolhouse, which had been torn down and reassembled on Chestnut Mountain, she consciously observed a huge wood burning stove in the middle of the room and rows of desks, each able to seat two or three students, facing the front of the small area. There were four boards painted black that served as a chalkboard and everyone hung their coats on nails in the back of the room and placed their shiny lard pails, which stored their lunches, underneath their coats as they arrived.

Although her education was off and on, due to the district running out of money from time to time, Pearl managed to graduate from the eighth grade two weeks before her fourteenth birthday. However, attending high school was a different story. She would have to find a way to earn money and travel back and forth to Hinton. Fate intervened, and even though she was the poorest student in class she never let that bother her. She had found a place to live! Room and board in exchange for a few hours of housework each day. Every Sunday she would hike down the mountain to board #14 and attend school in Hinton for the week. At the age of seventeen Pearl took a written test that gave her a "temporary" teaching certificate, thus blazing a trail of expectations for their younger siblings. Even though The Great Depression was affecting more and more folks at this time, she was able to secure a job as a schoolteacher and worked in one-room schoolhouses all over Summers County, in-

cluding Tug Creek, Hurley, Rocky Bottom, Brooks and the Chestnut Mountain School where she had first started her education.

Pearl had a dream as she trudged through West Virginia's snow and mud a mile and half down Chestnut Mountain, across Brooks Creek and another mile up Tug Creek Mountain to the one-room school where she was teaching. Her dream, come spring, was that she would have a few dollars tucked away to pay for flying lessons. But the responsibility of helping two sisters in college made squirreling away a few dollars from her eighty-dollar a month check very difficult, and at the end of the seventh month of school the district ran out of funds and closed the schools. What a blow! She had one hundred twenty-five dollars for flying lessons, but only thirty dollars for personal expenses. She found out she could learn to fly in Bluefield, which was only thirty miles away. So she got a room with kitchen privileges for five dollars a month and showed up at the airport with money in hand.

True, in 1926 there were women already flying—Amelia Earhart and a few others. Unfortunately, there were none in or near Bluefield and she soon sensed what a dim view Harvey Amos, airport manager and instructor, had of women driving flying machines. Even so, Harvey accepted her one hundred twenty-five dollars so he could have his telephone and electricity reconnected, and went about bravely showing her how to use the stick and rudder in a Kinner Fleet Biplane. Soon Harvey introduced her to Ernie, who had learned to fly a Jenny in the late twenties. He was particularly fond of moonshine, since he had broken his vertebrae in an airplane crash years before, and Ernie and Pearl quickly became friends. This led to her becoming Summers County's first licensed aviatrix. It was in 1940 that Pearl chose Davis and Elkins College to renew her teaching certificate. During registration an announcement on the bulletin board caught her attention: CIVILIAN PILOT PROGRAM OPENS THIS SUMMER. One woman was permitted in the class of ten, and she hastened to take the military physical due to her age. At this time candidates had to be between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five years old and Pearl was now thirty-one. Fortunately, the midwife who attended her momma at birth had failed to record the event so she scribbled down her birthdate as being April 29, 1915, instead of 1909, and passed the physical without any problem. At summer's end with thirty-five hours of flying time, she passed the Civil Aeronautics Authority test and received her Private Pilot Certificate.

Still looking for a way to get flying time she accepted a position with the Army Air Force as a cryptographer and was sent to West Palm Beach. The cryptographers, all women, were recruited to encode and decode secret messages and were on duty around the clock. Those not on shifts had extra time to spend the glory days of youth with the military men who were stationed nearby. It was during this time that Pearl received the very important message declaring, "Guadalcanal is secure for the Allied forces." Her heart was beating wildly and her palms were sweaty as she translated the critical dispatch. It was a moment she would never forget and she felt extraordinarily proud to be serving the United States of America. She soon became intrigued by the Army Air Corp and thought if she became a WASP (Women AirForce Service Pilot) maybe she could continue to fly. She signed up and they sent her to Sweetwater, Texas, for flight training. She shared a room with six other girls and there was one bathroom for twelve others. The line in the morning was unbelievable, so she woke up before the chickens to race to the toilet.

When she first arrived, the bulky flying suits, called zoot suits, appeared to come in only one size—extra-large. Pearl, not having

too much meat on her bones, could hardly move at times. With her chestnut hair curling at her shoulders, soft eyes, and petite frame, she was the perfect picture of a wholesome southern girl. Not at all the type to be dressed in oversized combat-type overalls and heavy boots. But in spite of these little inconveniences, she worked hard, followed directions and didn't mind when she flew in an open cockpit through snowstorms, rain, extreme heat or sleet. She just wanted to soar. However, the war was ending and she was cut from the program so she decided to go to Alaska so she could become a bush pilot.

From Pearl's experiences she knew there would be no flying in winter, and as much as it grieved her to do so, she gave up September and early October flying for a teaching position and was assigned to the McGrath Territorial School. McGrath's one-room schoolhouse was almost heaven in comparison to West Virginia's schools where she was teaching before the War. There were books, numerous supplies and a two-room apartment in the building for the teacher to live. Her students were Eskimo, Indian, and Caucasian in grades one through six. Although they were a little better off than her students in West Virginia, she still put a pot of soup or beans on the heater at noontime for anyone who wanted something warm in their belly, like she always did when she was teaching in the mountains.

In spring of 1946, Pearl had completed the school season and set out to buy her airplane. She flew to Seattle and went to the main office of the Northern Commercial Company, where she attempted to persuade them to sell her an Aeronca airplane. Once she was escorted to President Bellingham's plush office she stated her case. "I'm on my way down south to visit my parents and I wish to take delivery of an Aeronca Chief at the factory in Alliance, Ohio." President Bellingham crossed his arms and

Pearl pictured in Alaska, a member of the Civil Air Patrol.

gave her a slight nod indicating she should continue. "It would be great advertising for the company if a woman were to ferry an airplane to Nome," she said with great confidence.

"I can sell anything in Alaska, Pearl." He glared at her over his eyeglasses. "I don't need to advertise." Her ego immediately deflated. "Additionally," He said, "the factory is on strike and the only two aircrafts available are already spoken for. Sorry, but I can't help you."

This was a minor setback for Pearl, she had overcome many obstacles in her lifetime and this would be another. She would just continue her search. Pearl found a used 1939 Cub Coupe, Piper J4, and flew home to West Virginia to pick up her airplane.

Her return to Alaska was an adventure, traveling through a raging forest fire, losing her chamois skin, which was used to strain gasoline, and having an Eskimo stumble and fumble right smack dab through the fabric wing of her plane while she was refueling. A wing on a plane is obviously indispensable, and she needed to find a way to make the needed repair. This ingenious woman, who was raised to be resourceful, found a can of dope glue and with her nail

scissors cut out a square from her cotton *Gone with the Wind* skirt, patched up the hole and flew on to Nome. It was a difficult trip, but this was how Pearl became the first woman to fly her own plane from the Lower 48 up the Alaska Highway to Alaska.

A month after returning to Alaska she married Lew Laska, a merchant in McGrath. In 1947 their only child Lewis was born and soon after Lew began to complain of stomach pain. After a consultation with the only local nurse, it was agreed Lew needed surgery and would have to fly to Anchorage. The operation went well but after he returned home the wound site wouldn't heal. They later traveled to Seattle where he learned he had cancer. It was a trying time in the life of Pearl Bragg Laska with a new baby and her husband dying. Sadly, Pearl and Lew were together for only two short years.

In 1948 and 1949 the All-Women Transcontinental Air Race began and would become popularly known as the Powder Puff Derby, which was a reference to the 1929 Women's Air Derby by humorist and aviation advocate Will Rogers. It wasn't until 1955 that Pearl flew in her first derby. She didn't win. Actually, Pearl never won first place in a Powder Puff Derby, perhaps because it is a handicap race, nonetheless she still considered it one of her finest aviation accomplishments and she always aced a perfect landing.

In January of 1981, Pearl moved to Riverside, California, to be close to her sister Pauline and it was here that she met and married her second husband, Ed Chamberlain, at the age of seventy-five. Since she had sold her plane while caring for her parents in West Virginia, she rented a Cessna 150 and crafted two special pillows to help boost her visibility while dancing with the clouds. She also joined the local chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association and a group called the Flying Octogenarians. At the age of ninety-four she passed the physical to renew her pilot's certificate. Although the child was grown, the dream was not gone. She flew up in the clouds over the blue-gray Appalachians passing over Chestnut Mountain where she had grown up. She circled around and followed the New River, its far bluffs looked blue in the distance, they were flat-topped and covered with dark, dense forest and brilliant cerulean-green meadow grass, and then she set her sight on the landing strip and once again aced a perfect landing.

Pearl Bragg Laska Chamberlain.

"There is no other pilot maneuver that demands the full test of skill, depth perception, judgment, experience, and alertness than the final approach to landing. Anyone can fly an airborne plane. On final, like life, it is the last act before termination of flight. I know of no other joy that I have had than the thousands of final approaches I have made, each time trying to make it better than the last. The pure joy of command and flying that aircraft on final is the pilot's report card. I am on the Final Approach of my life. I have little regrets, I have had thrills and experiences and I am pleased to hear the tower when they say, 'Pearl, you are cleared to land.' "

Pearl Bragg Laska Chamberlain
1909-2012

At the age of one hundred three, Pearl Bragg Laska Chamberlain made her final flight and one can only presume—aced a perfect landing.

DEANNA (JONES) EDENS currently lives in Michigan and is a native of West Virginia. She teaches college classes in the areas of psychology and leadership. Deanna has written many books about West Virginia and its people which are available on Amazon. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

First In—Last Out
The Story of Firefighting

By Barbara Smith

Phil Hart Belington Fire Chief, and Rev. Bob Wilkins, Volunteer Chaplain of the Philippi Fire Department. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

Phil Hart is the current fire chief in Belington (Barbour County) as well as in Bridgeport (Harrison County). He was 16 years old when he joined the Barbour County company in which three older brothers were already involved. He's still active 40 years later. "I like to help people," he explains, a statement reinforced by the fact that he served on the Barbour County Commission from 2001 to 2018, six of those years as president.

"There have been a lot of changes in firefighting," he says, "some positive, some not so positive. On the plus side, in some respects at least, it is not as dangerous as it used to be; although, we do have some frightful experiences, my worst one being the time I was inside a burning building when the roof collapsed. That was a heart-stopper.

"Our equipment and uniforms are of far better quality now, and we have much better federal and state guidelines and far better training. All firefighters, whether volunteer or paid, must complete 200 hours of training, and we do thorough background checks, and the physical exams are tough and must be repeated annually. There is al-

Phil Hart in a setup scene from the movie *Ladder 49* in which he was an extra c. 2004. Photo Courtesy of Phil Hart.

ways that hoped-for result to keep us going—saving a structure or, far better, bringing people out alive." He notes improvements in prevention practices, including going into schools to make sure that teachers are fully trained and that fire drills take place as prescribed. "We're glad," he says, "to do anything we can to prevent the real emergencies."

On the negative side, Chief Hart notes diminished support from the public. "It's hard these days to enlist new firefighters, whether volunteer or paid. It's a widespread problem, a lack of willingness to be involved, to commit to anything. Although the paid personnel are likely to make a career of firefighting, volunteers last only five to seven years. Funding has become a huge problem. We get some support from the state and local governments, and, in most locations, there are municipal fees or fire fees, but we have to pay for all our new equipment and uniforms—which we are required to replace according to federal formulas. When we do have to replace a fire truck, for instance, we have to come up with hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Bob Wilkins in 1968—a new firefighter. Photo courtesy of Bob Wilkins

If we're pricing a 100-foot ladder and platform truck for use in very tall structures, we're talking half-a-million dollars. And you know how the public resists fundraisers or increased taxes. It's hard." He frowns. "Our outfits last maybe 10 years if we're lucky. Replacing one, including the helmet, runs about $500 per man."

All equipment, Phil says, must be inspected at least annually, like a car inspection, at which time appropriate replacements are mandated. "That's one of the tasks of the state fire marshal and his team. We pay private companies to come for inspections. The fire marshal authorizes such companies but also checks to be sure that training and record keeping are current and compliant. The marshal also investigates suspicious fires and checks out dangerous structures

and activities. He has the power to arrest anyone who commits a crime such as arson or sending a false alarm."

The organization of a fire department is indicated, in part, by the uniforms, especially the helmets, which are color coded by local companies to indicate assignments, such as the ladder and rescue operations. All officers in all companies, however, wear white helmets.

The Rev. Bob Wilkins sits opposite Phil as they talk at the Belington Fire Station. He, too, is a longtime firefighter. "I began when I was 17, living in Long Island, New York. I played the bugle in the fire department marching band. Soon after that, I became a real firefighter, a volunteer on the active squad but was paid, minimally, as their radio operator. That lasted five years, after which I joined a research project at Columbia University, stationed in Alaska for three years and serving as a navigator while we plotted icebergs in the Arctic Ocean." After that came two years as an engineer at NASA, and then Bob became an ordained United Methodist minister. In the mid-1970s, he was assigned a pastorate in Philippi, where he eventually served as director of Heart & Hand Ministries.

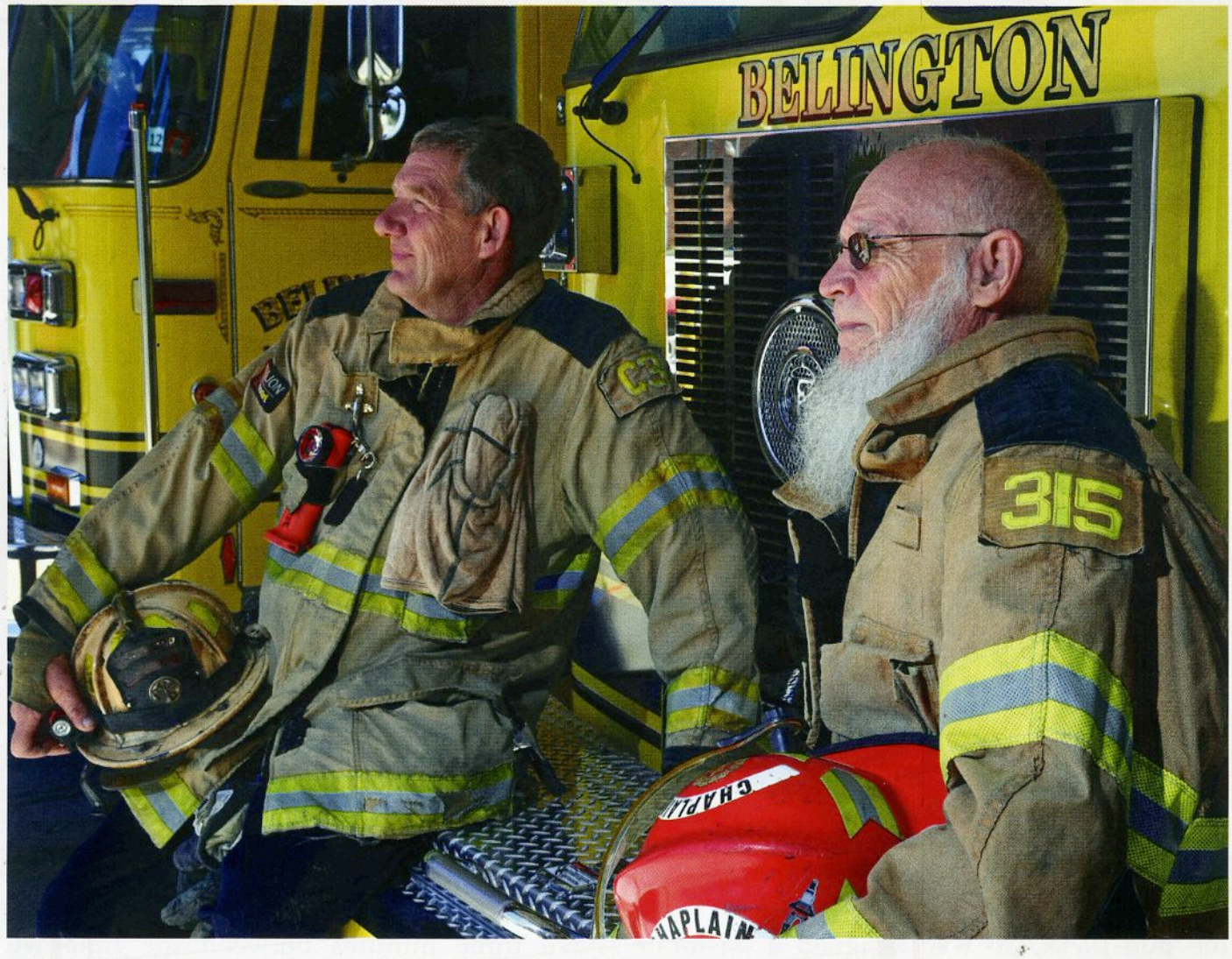
After retiring from Heart & Hand in 2015, Bob became volunteer chaplain for the Philippi Fire Department, one of the few such chaplains in West Virginia. Training for that post was provided by the Federation of Fire Chaplains, of which he's a member. He also, however, is a first responder and goes to all the fires with the Philippi squad. "We chaplains play several roles," he reports. "First, we try to assess the fire victims' needs, including contacting family and friends and pastors. We also try to meet the spiritual needs of members of the squad, whatever and wherever and whenever those needs may arise. We also serve as a liaison between the fire department and the community." Bob also serves as magistrate for the City of Philippi.

Echoing Chief Hart, Bob describes the positive and negative aspects of current firefighting. "Technology is a big plus," he says, "in terms of both equipment and communication. Generally, conditions are safer, and a lot more effort goes into prevention. Inspections are sometimes a nuisance, but they make our jobs much safer and more secure. And training is much more thorough. What we call 'fire school,' the 200 hours required, takes as much as six months, plus any specialized or advanced training the person wants, and the training always includes the nature and handling of hazardous materials. Part of that training can be done online, but most of it takes place in a central location such as Elkins or Morgantown or at the West Virginia State Fire Academy at Jackson's Mill. If we have enough new people at any one time, the instructor may come to us."

Then he turns to the negative: "We are constantly reminded—because of the building materials in use today—that fumes are highly toxic and ignite very quickly. That part of the job is extremely dangerous. We have three minutes between the time we enter a structure and must have people out of the building before they become incapacitated by smoke and fumes. Firefighters have more time because they wear a breathing apparatus—air tanks."

Bob makes one more important point: "The fire departments in Philippi and Belington and Junior are responsible for the entire county. In the old days, we were responsible just within the city limits. Now, we cover the whole area. It used to take us just a couple of minutes to get to a site. Now, it may take 20 minutes or more depending upon traffic, weather conditions, and availability of personnel."

Emergency signaling via telephone and other electronic devices goes through the 911 dispatcher and is simultaneously sent to the police, emergency medical squads, and fire departments. Most current emer-



Phil Hart (L) and Rev. Bob Wilkins at the Belington Fire Station. Photo by Steve Brightwell.

gencies are not fires, however. Some 80% involve vehicle accidents, rescue operations, or medical crises.

Chief Phil Hart sums up the major problem in firefighting today: "It's a big business, especially when you realize that 70% of firefighters are volunteers who have to agree not only to extensive training and retraining but also to large amounts of time and effort and personal cost. Also, the tests are not easy to pass—an average of about 50% who take them pass the first time." He clenches his fist. "It's not surprising that this profession carries a high rate of stress and suicide and cancer caused by toxic fumes. It's a very high-risk occupation."

Phil breathes deeply and says, "We only wish the public were more aware of our problems and more appreciative of what we do. We're here to help in whatever way we can."

In terms of the courage and dedication of firefighters, their national motto says it all: "First in—last out."

DR. BARBARA ATKESON SMITH (1929-2021) was a poet, author, and editor of many books and novels and was a feature writer for Outdoor West Virginia and GOLDENSEAL. Dr. Smith taught at Alderson Broaddus University for more than 37 years and served for 20 years as the Chairperson of the Division of the Humanities where she developed a popular major in Technical Writing. These are just a small number of her life accomplishments. This is Barbara's 20th article for GOLDENSEAL, and though it may be the last article she contributed to GOLDENSEAL, her memory will live on for decades to come through the many works she penned.

A Short History of Firefighting

By Barbara Smith

The practice of firefighting probably began soon after fire itself was discovered and harnessed, both a boon and a menace to human survival. One early record, included in the Columbia University Electronic Encyclopedia, notes that an early Roman named Marcus Licinius Crassus developed his own fire company of 500 men who were sent to structure fires—not to combat the fire but to buy the burning building at a ridiculously low price. If the owner agreed, the men would extinguish the fire; otherwise, the building was allowed to burn.

The earliest written records of organized firefighting were made by Augustus, emperor of Rome, around 25 BC. The method, still used in some remote and primitive areas today, was the "bucket brigade," which involves passing buckets of water from person to person to reach the fire. Axes broke up whatever might be fueling it, and long hooks pulled down dangerous and otherwise inaccessible elements in the fire.

The next truly major development came after the massive 1666 fire in London, which destroyed several square miles of property and left thousands of residents homeless. Insurance companies organized squads to guard buildings they had insured. Buildings not insured were refused protection. Two hundred years later, the British government finally established firefighting companies. The standardizing of on-foot operations began in Scotland in 1830. Equipment came under comparable control late in that century.

Vehicles designed as fire engines came into existence during the 17th century. Their primary purpose was to carry tubs of water for use by the bucket brigades. In some cases, a pump was set in the tubs to get the water into the buckets. Leather hoses were first designed and used in Holland late in the same century; 200 years later, cotton-covered rubber hoses came into use. More recently, various types of nozzles have been designed, and chemicals are added to the water depending upon the type of fire involved. Foam is used instead of water to fight combustibles such as oil, tar, and gasoline.

In the United States, as early as 1631, John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, outlawed wooden chimneys and thatched roofs. In 1648, Peter Stuyvesant, governor of New Amsterdam (later New York), named four men as wardens to patrol the city for fire hazards and levy fines on anyone who violated city ordinances. It was Benjamin Franklin, however, who in 1736 organized the colonies' first citywide fire brigade: the Union Fire Company in Philadelphia. It wasn't until after the Civil War that government agencies took over the firefighting endeavor and until the mid-19th century that some firefighters were hired full time and paid for their labor—beginning in Cincinnati in 1853. Interestingly, at least one source suggests that some 7,000 men were hired and paid as firefighters in Rome as early as the first century AD, probably prompted by the fire on July 19, 64 AD, that destroyed some two-thirds of the city.

Grandpa's Medicine

By Jennifer Cline

My Grandpa, Loren 'Cat' Cline, was born in 1908 in Wyoming County. I was extremely fortunate to have him in my life until 2010 when he died at the ripe old age of 102. During my childhood,, he told me many stories about growing up. I often reflect on how different things were when he was younger compared to when I was a child. One of the things that stood out the most to me was the way people dealt with and treated illnesses.

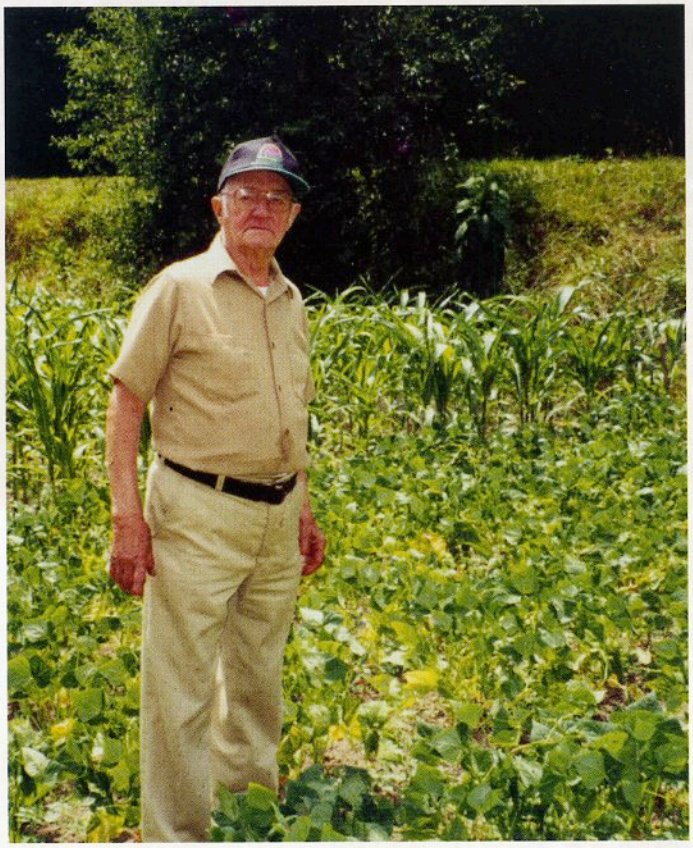
Oftentimes for people of the Appalachian mountains, going to the doctor was not an option—either due to the lack of doctors in an area or to the ability to pay for treatment. However, people had great faith in their home remedies to treat and cure the sick. Today, we know many of these remedies as old wives' tales. It is thought that many of these old remedies are a combination of early European and Native American medical practices which led to the development of a unique culture of medicinal cures and healing rituals, many of which sound very strange to us today. But these cures and treatments were not at all strange to the people of Appalachia during that time. Even though these old remedies seem superstitious and ritualistic to many today, when Grandpa Loren was a child, it was commonplace.

It was not until just a few years ago that I realized my grandpa was 20 years old when penicillin was discovered. We take for granted the availability of such a lifesaving medicine today. But without the antibiotics and medicines that we are accustomed to in modern times, Appalachians had to find their own ways to treat the many illnesses that plagued them and their loved ones. Those remedies would be passed down through generations. Many Appalachians, especially older generations, still prepare teas and poultices to this day from the indigenous plants that surround them, preserving many ancient Native American traditions.

Teas were used often due to the abundance of plants available, as well as the simplicity of making these herbal drinks. Teas were thought to have a multitude of different healing properties depending on the plant, root, or other ingredients it contained. Many everyday ailments were treated with homebrewed teas.

For example, if someone suffered from stomach ailments, sarsaparilla or ginseng tea might be offered. However, if it were ulcers, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea that they were suffering from, they would likely be given comfrey weed tea. Goldenseal or yellow root tea was often used for sore throats, or one could paint the throat with iodine. Whichever was preferred. Yellow jaundice would be treated with tea made from wild cherry tree bark. The bedwetter would be given watermelon seed or cornsilk tea, while the asthmatic would need to drink wild ginger tea. A baby who suffered from hives might get a bottle of ground ivy tea. Headaches were frequently treated with snake root tea and the backache sufferer, or one suffering kidney complaints, would be sure to keep some queen of the meadow flowers for their medicinal brew.

A cattail poultice might be used to treat burns, scrapes, insect bites, and bruises. Cattails also secrete a honey-like substance that can be used to treat small wounds and even toothaches, because it has antiseptic properties. Cattail Root could be used for high blood pressure. To draw out infection, use beet leaves or an oatmeal poultice. Sassafras was considered 'right' for everybody and used as a cure-all to remedy ulcers, stomach troubles, skin troubles, sore eyes, phlegm, dropsy, gout, and syphilis. It can be brewed with nutmeg for dysentery, or with honey for the flu.



The author's grandfather pictured in his garden.

Although teas and poultices are still used by some today, many old wives' tales seem completely ridiculous because they have no real curative properties of any kind, but they were still commonly used by early Appalachians. One of my favorites is a remedy for warts. To rid oneself of a wart, a person was to steal a dirty dishrag from their mother. Then they were to take this dishrag and bury it. When the dishrag rotted, the wart would be gone. One could also pick at the wart until it bled and rub three grains of red corn into the blood and then feed them to a red chicken. Another option was to wash the wart with rotten stump water. I am not sure how these remedies would rid anyone of a wart, but the people of this time seemed to believe that they worked.

Grandpa Loren would not have gone to the dentist for a toothache, but instead would have used one of the many home remedies readily available to him. One of those remedies was to put iodine on the affected tooth, even though I cannot imagine how bad that would have tasted. A catnip poultice applied to the affected tooth could also be used. An even more common but painful remedy involved placing a piece of carbide inside the tooth. Anyone who grew up around the coal mines knows that carbide was used in old mining hat lamps to light the miner's way through the darkness. It was believed that the carbide would kill the toothache, but I imagine it killed more than the ache!

Some old wives' tales were just revolting. One remedy for thrush that Grandpa Loren talked about is a particularly good example of this: catching a minnow and then rubbing it in the poor babe's mouth. Another cure for thrush was to let someone who never knew their father blow in the baby's mouth. An even better example is the brew of turkey feces made into a tea to cure measles. Bedwetting? Chew on a hog's hoof after it has been scorched off the foot. And still stranger was the idea that rubbing the brains of a rabbit on the gums of a teething baby would soothe the pain. And one must not forget, cigarette smoke or urine will cure an earache. Still other remedies included rubbing turpentine around the belly button to get rid of worms, tying acifidity bags around the neck to prevent whooping cough and colds, putting raw beef or the dead snake itself on a snake bite to draw out the poison, axle grease or poke juice for boils and sores, paregoric, castor oil, whiskey, and a host of others.

My grandpa grew up with this kind of medicine. I was from a younger generation, so it is no wonder that Grandpa Loren's medicine seemed so strange to me as a child. With all this in mind, can you imagine what would happen if one were to become ill around Grandpa? Well, you need not imagine anymore because I can speak from personal experience. And I am certain many of you reading this can relate

Acifidity bags were common during the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918; the prime ingredient of the acifidity bag was asafoetida—an extract from a plant in the fennel family considered by many to have strong anti-viral components. Asafoetida was approved by the US Pharmacopeia (an independent, scientific, non-profit organization dedicated to improving public health, founded in 1820) as preventative medicine against the Spanish Flu. The spice came in resin or powdered form and was placed in muslin bags to be worn around the neck.

as your parents or grandparents likely used some of these same remedies.

As a child, I seemed to be plagued with earaches. But Grandpa Loren had a cure. Sweet oil; just a few drops in the affected ear would make the pain go away. At least that is what Grandpa told me anyway. I truly do not remember getting any relief from the process of that thick oil oozing into my ear canal followed by a large wad of cotton to keep the oil from seeping back out. However, I should count myself lucky, since another cure for earaches was chicken fat! I can just see myself sitting at a table, waiting on the chicken to boil so the fat could be drained off and dropped into my ear! Ewww!

Other favorites of Grandpa Loren's included mercurochrome and gentian violet. Every little scraped knee or elbow was destined to become red or purple. I had no idea what that purple stuff was supposed to do, but it was pretty neat to walk around with such colorful knees and elbows. And if by chance there was no purple or red stuff around, aloe vera would be used in its place. It was always sticky but oh-so soothing.

However, Grandpa Loren's favorite remedy, and a cure-all in his eyes, was Vicks VapoRub. I am not sure at what point this salve entered grandpa's medicine chest as it is not what one normally thinks of when talking about Old Wive's Tales. However, this little blue jar could always be found somewhere in grandpa's house. He used it for toothaches and headaches, applying just a dab. Any little cough was certainly tended to by a good rubbing of Vicks over the entire chest area. I can remember falling asleep to the smell of menthol and eucalyptus many nights. But one thing I could never understand was when Grandpa Loren had a sore throat or a tummy ache, he would ingest a little of what he called Vicks salve. One must wonder if that helped or compounded the ailment. Even today, menthol smells make me smile as childhood memories come flooding back.

Fortunately, I made it through childhood without the use of some of the more ridiculous or revolting remedies and no damage was ever done by any of Grandpa Loren's cures. I grew up to be quite healthy. And today we know that many of the home remedies used do have some medicinal properties. Today, many acknowledge the benefits of more traditional and holistic approaches to treating illnesses and many movements promote natural healing and herbs over pharmaceuticals. They are rediscovering that in many cases, "grandpa's medicine" was not just ritualistic and superstitious, but was indeed rooted in long-forgotten practices of nature-based healing. Granted, oddities were adopted along the way, and although Grandpa Loren may not have been a "medicine man" or some fancy doctor, he did have one medicinal cure that is better than any modern medicine—love for his family and a need to protect them and keep them safe. Even if that meant sharing the little blue jar of Vicks salve!

JENNIFER CLINE has a BA in History with a concentration in American History and a minor in Sociology. She is a 2015 recipient of the History Hero Award presented by the West Virginia Department of Arts, Culture and History. Ms. Cline is currently the middle school social studies teacher at Charleston Catholic High School. This is her first contribution to GOLDENSEAL.

L-R: Ray Benson, Leroy Preston, Danny Levin, Chris O'Connell. All photos courtesy of Sam Seifert.

"Wheel in the Woods"

The West Virginia Roots of Asleep at the Wheel

By John Lilly

The crowd was excited. They had waited hours for tickets, hours in line for admission, and heard three warm-up bands. They were more than ready for the headline act to take the stage. The announcer hollered into a microphone, "Western swing ain't dead!" Crowd cheered! He hollered again. "Western swing ain't dead!" More cheering. "It's Asleep at the Wheel!"

Asleep at the Wheel is unquestionably West Virginia's preeminent Western Swing band. Many believe Asleep at the Wheel has been the biggest thing to happen in Western Swing music in the past 50 years. It happened in and around Paw Paw, West Virginia.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, many native West Virginians left the state in search of greater opportunities elsewhere. Others heard the call of the hills and found a place for themselves, and a few dozen of their closest and most hearty friends, in the abandoned or neglected farmhouses and other rural structures found in Appalachia. Including Morgan County, West Virginia.

Hundreds of miles away from Morgan County, two college friends were feeling restless. Ray Seifert and Reuben Gosfield

L-R Gene Dobkin, Ray Benson, Chris O'Connell, Floyd Domino, Lucky Oceans (seated with beard), Leroy Preston (seated right).

were both raised in the suburbs of Philadelphia before enrolling in college—Ray at Antioch College in Yellow Spring, Ohio, and Reuben in Maryland. Both were bright, ambitious students, but their futures were to be found along a different path, they felt.

The pair discovered that they had many common interests. These included playing in a band. Not just a band, a great band! Not just a great band, but a popular and successful band. A real country band. One that could rock like there was no tomorrow! And stay in motels and have stage outfits and stage names! Enthusiasm took over, and before they knew it they were making plans.

One weekend Ray and Reuben took a road trip to Boston. While there, they met a musician who was to play an important

role in both of their lives. His name was Leroy Preston, and he was a songwriter, guitarist, and singer. And oh, yeah. He was playing drums in a band when they met him. Perfect! Leroy was attending Northeastern University in Boston. His roommate's girlfriend was Sandy Seifert—Ray's sister. Ray and Reuben met Leroy and the stars and planets aligned.

"We sat around jammin' and playin' and stuff," Leroy recalls. "Talkin' about all these big ideas. Out of that little get-together formed the nucleus of the band. I don't remember all the details, other than we had a lot of fun tossing around the idea of playing some country music—country blues, some of the folk-blues, and stuff. Ray had just seen Commander Cody and met those guys," Leroy continues. Ray, Reuben, and Leroy admired the eclectic approach of Cody's band. "We were all looking for something to do," Leroy recalls. "Band-wise and concept-wise and the idea of being eclectic but with a real country base appealed to all of us."

College students, the three young men were deciding how to spend a scheduled semester off when this band idea came up. Reuben had a friend who said, "'My dad has an apple orchard in West Virginia. There is a cabin on it, and you guys could all go there and hang out!'" Leroy says. "That's about all it took!" Leroy was raised on a dairy farm in Vermont, so he knew what they were about to get into—sort of. They were about to get back to the land on a grand scale. No heat, no water, no electricity, no money, no food, no car, and the nearest neighbor was a 20-minute walk away. They also didn't know very many country songs and weren't yet very good on their instruments. But they were deeply committed to the idea of creating a country band in the West Virginia backwoods, and they would let nothing get between them and their dream.

Ray Seifert became Ray Benson. Reuben Gosfield became Lucky Oceans. They found some Western-style shirts and met some girls who could sew and cook. Slowly, and painfully at times, their dream began to take shape. Most of the time they were loose, back-to-the-land hippies, but when it was time to rehearse, they became serious. Ray emerged as the band leader. One only needs to spend a few moments in the daunting presence of Ray Benson to appreciate how he came to be the leader of this unruly bunch.

Ray stands six-feet, seven-inches tall, wears size 16 shoes, and has a booming baritone voice. He also had—and has to this day—a clear, shining vision of what is possible if you are willing to work hard enough and wait long enough. More than 100 musicians and vocalists have passed through the ranks of Ray's band. He is the only one who has stuck with it. More than 50 years, as of this writing.

"It was 1969," Ray recalls. "The cities were burning. It was crazy! So we decided, let's go find a farm. And we did!" The cabin they lived in was built in the early 1800s of hand-hewn logs. It once served as a stage stop between Berkeley Springs and Paw Paw and was just the place to learn how to be a band and how to be a survivor. "We had lofty ideas and no fear," Ray says proudly and truthfully. "We got there in March of 1970. We'd forage. There were wild berries. We had friends who would bring us deer to eat." Sometimes their meals were a little grittier than they care to recall.

Guitarist Bill Kirchen, a founding member of the band Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen, became close friends with the Wheel and shared the table with them during those desperate days in West Virginia's eastern panhandle.

"There were the remains of a deer on the kitchen table," Bill recalls. "It had been butchered and cooked. There was this carcass up there. The deer, I found out, had been killed by the asleep at the wheel pick-up truck and a ball-peen hammer."

Yes, the group was gradually gaining important survival skills. They also began to gel musically and soon developed a following among some of the local residents. Reuben—now and forever known as Lucky Oceans—became an accomplished steel guitarist. He found a special type of inspiration one morning while visiting the small house out back. Though their log-built home boasted no plumbing—indoor or outdoor—it had been used over the years as a hunting cabin and was equipped with a small "necessary" out behind the main house.

One bright morning, Lucky emerged from the outhouse and announced enthusiastically, "I've got it!" The other band members asked, "You got what?"

"The name! I've got the name of the band!"

"What?"

"What?"

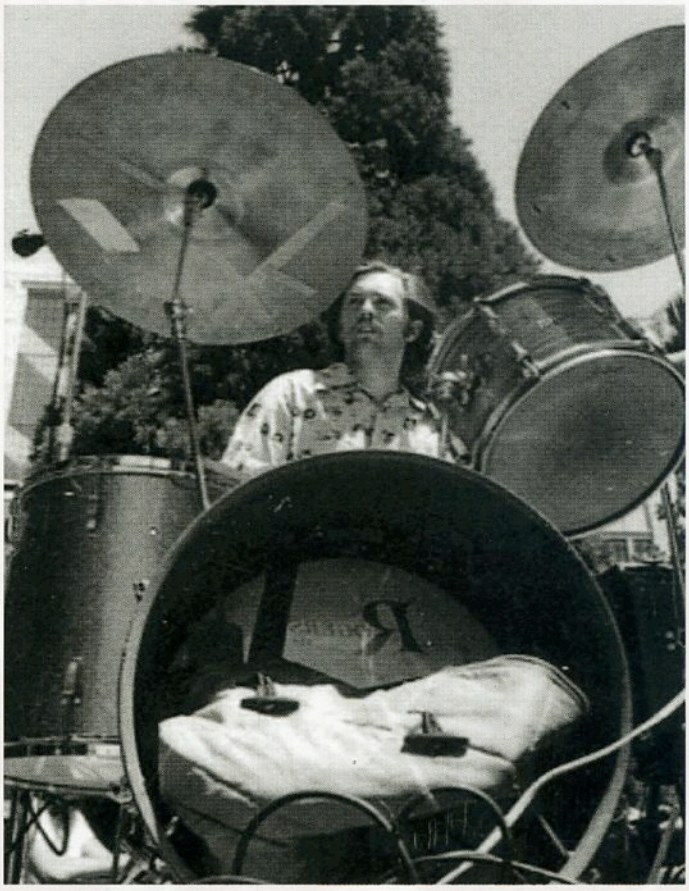
"Asleep at the Wheel!" Long pause...

"What?"

After a few seconds of letting it settle in on everyone, Ray jumped on board with the new name. And from then on they were Asleep at the Wheel. Unique, quirky, if you have to ask they can't tell you!

In recounting how this unlikely wagon load of suburban college dropouts stumbled into the wilds of West Virginia with very little to recommend them and emerged less than two years later poised to record, travel, and perform is still a bit of a mystery. The members of Asleep at the Wheel were quick studies. Although they each tried their hand at all of the instruments they could imagine they might need, each band member eventually found his true calling. Lucky was the steel guy. Leroy played rhythm guitar, sang, and wrote songs. Ray was the primary vocalist, songwriter, and frontman.

Every fan of country music—literally every fan—is familiar at least by name with the King of Western Swing, Bob



Leroy Preston c.1970s.

Wills. Together with his band the Texas Playboys and the dozens of stunningly great musicians and singers who pulled a stint on the iconic Bob Wills tour bus, Bob Wills created, popularized, and set the standard for the style of music we know today as Western Swing. From the late 1920s until bandleader Wills' death in 1975, jazz met country and blues went western across Texas and Oklahoma, then later into California and onto the big screen and around the world.

The Texas Playboys and a few dozen other bands kept Western Swing in the limelight in Texas and Oklahoma with their adventurous repertoires, skilled and sometimes amazing solos and arrangements, top vocalists, and rhythm sections that could consistently get you up on your feet, and dancing. But it was Bob's trademark hollering and unpredictable stage antics

Magnolia House where the band lived in Paw Paw, West Virginia, 1984.

that were most distinctive and inimitable.

Asleep at the Wheel absorbed those details throughout the summer and fall of 1970. Ray, Lucky, and Leroy listened attentively and repeatedly to those classic records as well as recordings of Hank Williams, George Jones, Merle Haggard, Ernest Tubb, Count Basie, Buck Owens, Hank Penny, Louis Jordan, and others. But all roads led them back to Wills, it seemed. Ray Benson in particular studied the music, the improvisations, the tempos, and the showmanship of Wills and his ensemble. Ray was keenly aware of Wills' repertoire and where it all came from—Texas dance hall tunes, jump blues, sweet pop melodies, original songs, Jimmie Rodgers and Emmett Miller songs, Cindy Walker songs, novelty numbers, and jazz. Jazz was the underlying truth behind practically everything the Texas Playboys undertook. And by extension, nearly everything Asleep at the Wheel did musically led them right back to jazz. Following several months of wood-shedding, Asleep at the Wheel felt ready for the big time—an empty bar in a remote corner of West Virginia.

Welcome to the Sportsman's Club! This cinder block slice of heaven turned out to be just what the Wheel needed at that moment. That was an opportunity to get in front of a live weekly audience and see if they would be accepted as a country band—a long-haired country band. They learned the classics, the requests, the jazzy swing numbers, boogies, and the original material. They kept the dance floor hopping past midnight most Saturday nights. No pay, no cover charge, but someone would pass the hat several times each night, and slowly the hat started coming back fuller and fuller. This money was important to the band, but equally important was the acceptance and validation this meant from the local audience.

The nearest neighbor was 20 minutes away, Ray emphasizes, "but they all knew there were hippies up in this house with a band! So when we would play in Paw Paw, every kid from a hundred miles around would try to make it down, as well as the old hillbillies who loved our traditional country music." This loyal, local crowd was the key to the band's short-term success.

The key to the band's long-term success were the opportunities they had to play to larger audiences in bigger rooms in nearby Washington, D.C. Commander Cody and others turned the Wheel on to several high-profile engagements in and around D.C. Following one such engagement—Asleep at the Wheel opening for the popular California country rock band Poco—two young women found their way to Paw Paw and the house where the band members were staying.

Chris O'Connell and Emily Paxton had seen the Wheel's recent Poco set near

Magnolia House, present day.

D.C. and were impressed enough to scout them out. The pair of young women had known each other for several years, had written songs, and sang together since they were 10. Ray, Lucky, and Leroy looked at one another, all thinking the same thing. A couple of female vocalists would add new dimensions to the fledgling band. Both young women were invited to stay. Flattered by the invitations, they got back in the car and drove off into the sunset anyway. A couple of months later, one returned. Chris O'Connell joined up and immediately became a key element to the sound and look of Asleep at the Wheel from then on.

"We thought we would start a band, have a hit record, buy a farm and move back to West Virginia," Ray says with a chuckle. Instead, they started a band, made several records, and hit the road for 48 years.

From West Virginia, where they got their start and became something important and noteworthy, they eventually joined their friends Commander Cody and the Lost Planet Airmen in California, and a few years later settled near Austin, Texas, where they are to this day.

In 2021, Asleep at the Wheel celebrated their 50th anniversary as a band and returned to visit their roots in West Virginia's eastern panhandle. They played a chilly outdoor concert and recalled many miles, many years, and a great many fine musicians and songs from their past. Ray Benson is still a powerful presence, a larger-than-life bandleader, and a masterful showman. He will ride this thing as far as it will take him. Given where he started and where he has been, there is apparently no limit to where he and Asleep at the Wheel might show up next!

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

Metamorphosis in Building B

By Merle T. Cole

In 2002, I visited the West Virginia State Police (WVSP) Academy at Institute to do "original records" research into the agency's history. On arrival, Lt. Debbie Totten led me to a small storage room in the basement of a classroom building. In one corner stood a stack of loosely arranged cardboard boxes. "Here you are, sir," Debbie gestured. "Help yourself. Let me know when you've finished so I can lock up."

To my chagrin, the materials were in no apparent order, and had seemingly been selected for retention according to the lights of whoever had been the designated "historian" at any given time. Further, I found only a handful of typescript original reports. This mishmash of documents, plus a small collection of fascinating but incompletely captioned photos, constituted the official WVSP archives.

Fast forward a decade. In November 2011, I wrote to the superintendent, Col. Jay Smithers, requesting assistance in initiating a new series of State Police histories. He assigned Lt. Curt Tilley, Academy deputy director, as point of contact. When I met with Curt in February 2012, he escorted me to the "new archives" in Building B. I was absolutely stunned. Every wall and all floor space were covered with display stands, equipment, framed photos and selected documents! This much improved collection also offered more original documents, such as a register of equipment distributed to named officers in each company during 1920. Ironically, the very plethora of material hampered a clear understanding of the agency's evolution.

Hit "FF," advancing another decade. See now! To commemorate the WVSP Centennial, the West Virginia State Museum staff had created a special exhibit at its Theater Gallery in the Culture Center in 2019. As summarized in the museum's August 2020 newsletter, lead exhibit specialist Darren Husband was then assigned to work with the State Police to design cases, select new carpeting, and add ceiling and window elements. The objective was to create a completely new look for the former archives space in Building B. The transformation was completed by combining artifacts from the Centennial exhibit with selected material from the existing archives, depicting agency development in decade increments. I was honored when Darren requested my input regarding display content and organization. Despite numerous obstacles arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, he accomplished the mission in 2021—and splendidly! Future plans call for visitor-activated information kiosks and periodic temporary displays. The museum is open by appointment only. Visitors can arrange a museum tour by calling (304) 766-5800.

Typical of the concise, well-illustrated panels which move the museum visitor through the State Police story from the Creative Act of 1919 to the present. Photo by Don Davis.

MERLE T. COLE was born and reared in Raleigh County, graduated from Marshall University, and worked for various federal agencies before retiring to his native county. Merle is widely recognized for preserving the history of West Virginia law enforcement and military organizations, resulting in selection as West Virginia History Hero, Fellow of the Company of Military Historians, recipient of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution Historic Preservation Medal, and induction as an honorary member of Special Forces Association Chapter 68. This is Merle's twelfth Article for GOLDENSEAL.

On May 5th, 1880 telephone service came to Wheeling, West Virginia. Historian David Sibray reenacts as an early telephone technician and works on some of the same equipment used in that same time period. All photos by Steve Brightwell.

The Fairmont Telephone Museum (Marion County) is just off the beaten path of downtown Fairmont (214 Monroe St. Fairmont, WV 26554) and welcomes visitors of all ages. This museum, as one might expect, tells the history of telephones from their oldest piece—an early switchboard from the 1880s—to current technology. The museum contains various switchboards, pay phones, booths, test boards as well as other telephone equipment. The tour guides are retired from the field and can give you first hand industry knowledge. The museum is open Thursdays 9am-12pm, or by appointment at 304.366.1631 / 304.983.2463. Stop by and check out the museum on your next trip through Fairmont!

An assortment of pricing charts, notes, an operator's book on phone etiquette are placed with a vintage operator earpiece on the desk of a telephone switchboard at the Fairmont Telephone Museum in downtown Fairmont, WV.

A wall of assorted old and more recent telephones at the Fairmont Telephone Museum.

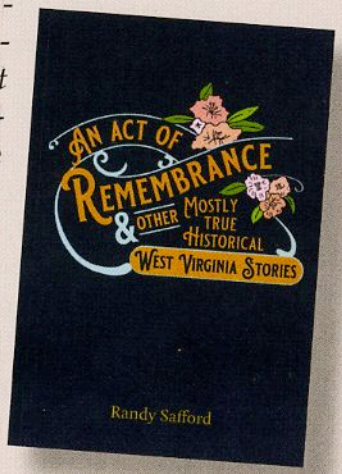
From left: Retired Verizon/Frontier telephone employees Sue Merrill and Terry Patterson volunteer at the Fairmont Telephone Museum in Fairmont, WV. As former employees of several phone companies these two have seen many changes with technology and have a vast knowledge of the many items on display at the museum.

West Virginia Books Available

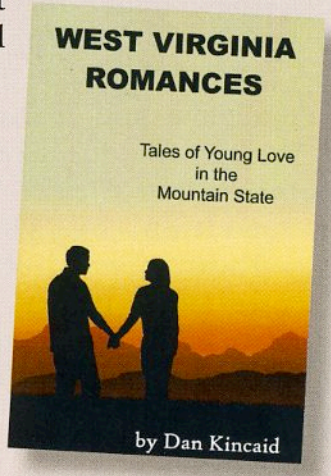
By Laiken Blankenship

We love promoting new books about West Virginia and Appalachia at GOLDENSEAL. Most of these publications have been mailed to our office for review, so this is not a comprehensive listing. We try to include these reviews in our Winter issue each year. If you know of a West Virginia history book that came out this year or will be out next year, please ask the author or publisher to send us a review copy: GOLDENSEAL, Culture Center, 1900 Kanawha Blvd. East., Charleston WV, 25305-0300.

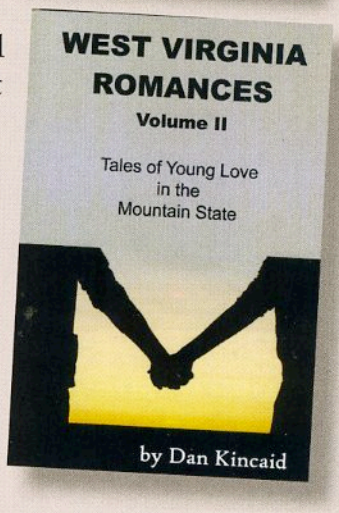
If you're looking for a copy of one of the following books, consider checking first with your local independent bookstore or the publisher. Though most of these books are available online we always encourage folks to support in-state businesses.



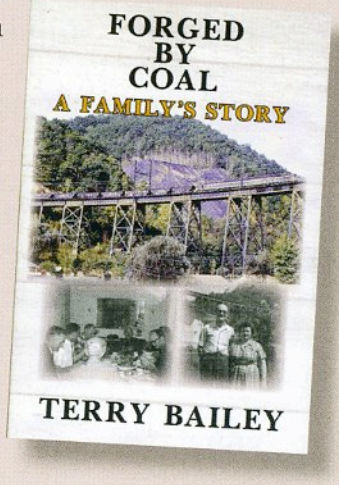
An Act of Remembrance & Other Mostly True Historical West Virginia Stories by Randy Safford (Populore Publishing Company, 177pp.) is a captivating collection of short stories, based upon true moments in West Virginia's past. Our Fall 2022 issue included an excerpt from one of these short stories *Celtic Cross*. One story, towards the end of the collection features an interesting juxtaposition—a nursing student who's research into the 1918 Spanish Flu Pandemic coincides with a new, present day pandemic, as the Coronavirus was just beginning in 2020. Though the tales vary in content, each one tells a compelling story of everyday individuals from West Virginia. In the author's own words, "...they [the stories] spoke to my conviction that we all have a worthwhile story to share—a story that is unique to each of us, but also part of the universal story of humanity."



West Virginia Romances: Tales of Young Love in the Mountain State Volume I and II by Dan Kincaid (Cade Holley Publishing, 184 pp., 171 pp.) features various love stories from around the state. Readers may recognize locations such as Marshall University, Snowshoe Resort, The Monongahela National Forest, and Blennerhassett Island. Though these stories are works of fiction, readers may well find echoes of their own experiences within the pages. These cleanly written accounts share charming stories of young love—suitable for readers of all ages. Readers young and old may enjoy these stories and will perhaps reflect back on their own tales of young love.

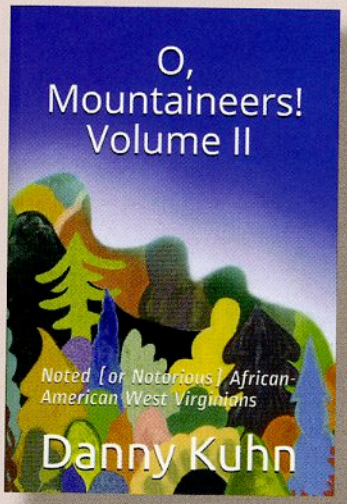


In Terry Bailey's *Forged by Coal: A Family's Story*, (self-published, 314 pp.) Bailey gives his firsthand account of growing up in the coal camps of West Virginia as part of one of the last generations to do so through, as the author states, "sometimes tragic but often joyful times".



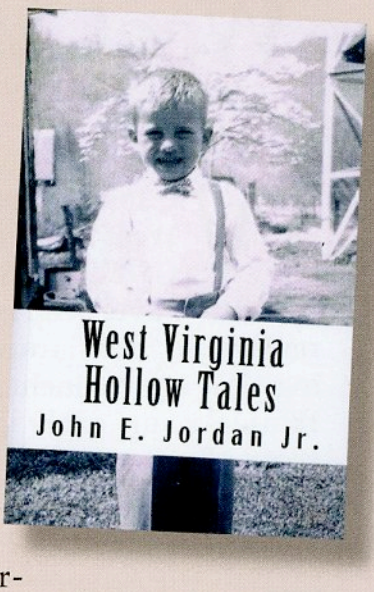
Written from Bailey's perspective, this book recounts not just his story, but that of his whole family. This book is a well written and charming account of life across the '40s and '50s in rural West Virginia, though the author does not shy away from some of the harsher realities of coal camp life. Despite their struggles, Bailey's parents were able to provide their children with all their needs, and a loving home.

O, Mountaineers! Volume II: Noted (or Notorious) African-American West Virginians, written by Danny Kuhn (favoritetrainers.com books, 244 pp.), tells the stories of African American West Virginians, and includes some difficult to find genealogical information. It highlights those both well known, and some unknown, but whose impact was just as significant. From Greenbrier County's Ada "Bricktop" Smith, to the Black watchman on duty at Harper's Ferry when John Brown's mob of abolitionists invaded the town, these tales are shared in a conversational manner. It reads as stories from one friend to another, as the author states in his introduction, "...think of this as a conversation between us, on your porch. We're telling each other stories we've known, or heard or read things about."

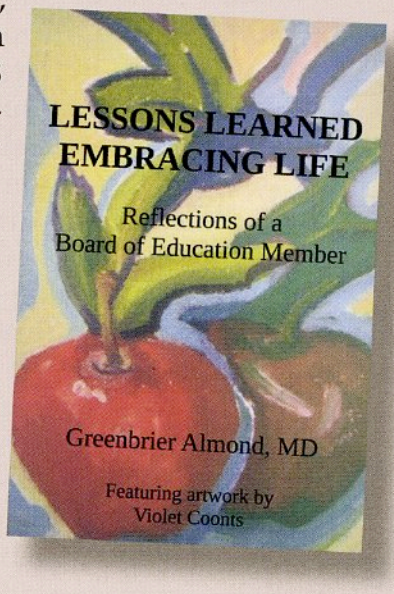


Kuhn does not shy away from some of the darker aspects of our history, recounting both the positive and negative. This historically accurate collection was well researched and with its easy to read cadence, pulls the reader in almost immediately. These stories are an important part of West Virginia's past and present, and make for a memorable and informative read.

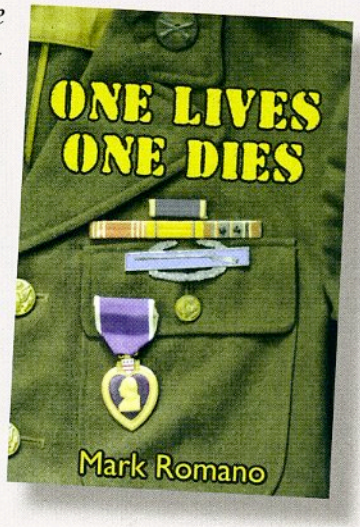
West Virginia Hollow Tales by John E. Jordan (self-published, 492 pp.), is a compilation of three books written by the author. *Ted!It's Too Close to Sunday!*, *Front Porch Talk, and On Angel Wings*. This compilation features humorous tales from 'Johnny', the author's young self, growing up in the southern coalfields of WestVirginia, during the '50s and '60s. In a letter from the author, he states, "Life was isolated from the outside world's concerns. That allowed the children to roam carefree in the mountains and play in the creeks and rivers that were our playgrounds. Our lives were not idealistic, but we were unaware of our situation." While these stories don't necessarily overlook the hardships of life in the southern coalfields, they do document a positive story of growing up in West Virginia.



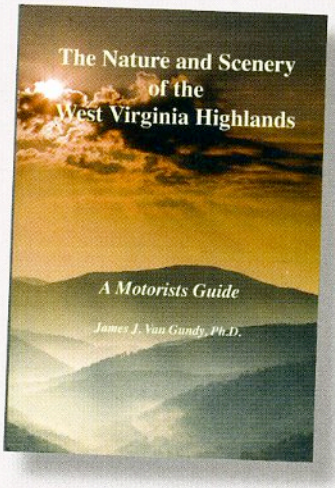
Lessons Learned Embracing Life: Reflections of a Board of Education Member, by Greenbrier Almond, MD, featuring artwork by Violet Coonts (McClain, 164 pp.) is a collection of 54 of Almond's 428 weekly columns, originally published in *The Record Delta*. Also featured are 27 full-color reproductions of artwork by the late West Virginian Artist Violet Coonts. Though the column was originally intended to educate the public on the inner workings of the public school system, the collection



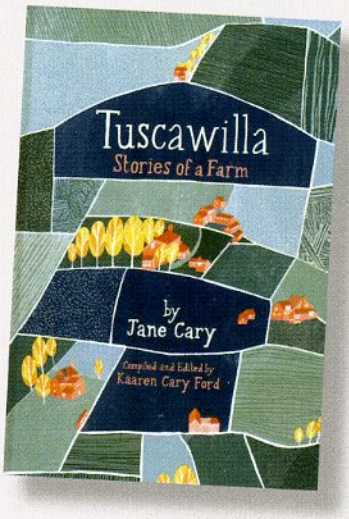
encompasses several topics such as education, community, rural living, and lifelong learning.



One Lives and One Dies by Mark Romano (Publishing by Romano, 243 pp.), is a moving story of two soldiers from West Virginia—one from Richwood, one from Landisburg—during WWII. Their stories are told in a compelling narrative through use of real journals, letters, interviews, and photographs. Easy to read, and easy to understand, it is no less impactful to the reader who experiences firsthand the worry and trials that the soldiers and their loved ones experienced during that time. As the reader learns bits of the lives and histories of these two men, they also gradually learn their fate. By alternating letters from the soldiers with present day interviews the book follows a captivating then-and-now storyline that will keep the reader engaged and eager to keep reading.



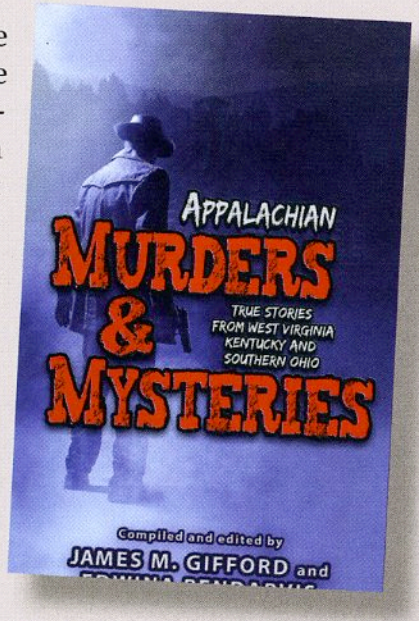
James J. Van Gundy, Ph.D. has published *The Nature and Scenery of the West Virginia Highlands: A Motorists GuideU* (McClain, 394 pp.). This guide takes an extensive look at theWest Virginia Highland counties, a region encompassing 28 of our 55 counties. The book is divided into two segments, the first of which introduces readers to the region, and highlights what they can expect to see on their travels. It includes information on the geologic history, and flora and fauna that can be found within the Highland region. This information sets the reader up for the second portion of the book which is comprised of several descriptive narratives of the segments of highways that are most likely to be traveled by visitors. The book also includes extensive appendices as well as an index that make it easy to navigate for readers looking to find specific information. Intended as both introduction and guide, this book offers travelers a sound companion on their journey through the Mountain State.



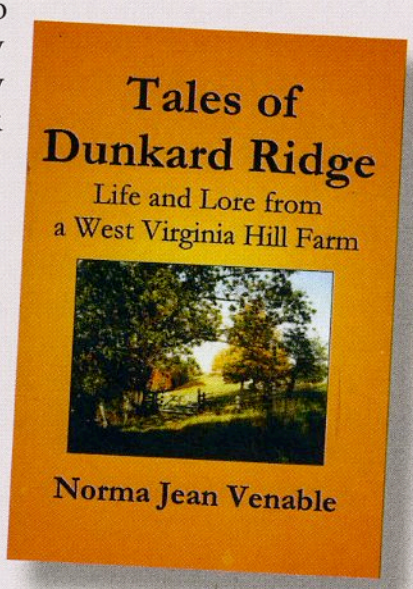
Tuscawilla: Stories of a Farm, written by Jane Cary, compiled and edited by Kaaren Cary (Blackwater-Press, 149 pp.)Ford recounts the history of a working Greenbrier County farm during the mid twentieth century. Tuscawilla was home to two families, the Knights who owned the land, and the Cary's who worked the land. Jane Cary was even the farm manager for a time after her two brothers passed away. This collection of memories, put together by Jane's niece Kaaren from Jane's own written memories (transcribed from her notes on old yellow legal pads) recount tales from a time gone by. Community picnics were frequent, and helping hands could always be found during hay season. Heartwarming and humorous, this book is one readers will appreciate!

Appalachian Murders and Mysteries: True Stories From West Virginia, Kentucky, and Southern Ohio (Jesse Stuart Foundation, 411 pp.), complied and edited by James M. Gifford and Edwina Pendarvis is a collection of twenty three true tales of murder

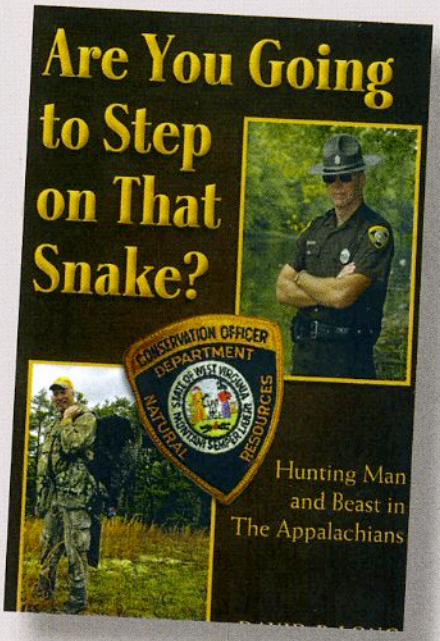
from across the mountain state and central Appalachia written by 17 different authors. Primary and secondary sources were used to write these stories, set in a historical and regional context. Featuring both solved and unsolved cases that range from the 19th century into the 21st, these stories paint a grisly picture of the darker side of Appalachia's history. From the tourture and murder of a young slave girl in 1809 to the brutal stabbing of a 2012 high school student by her two closest friends, these haunting and heart wrenching tales will keep the reader turning page after page.



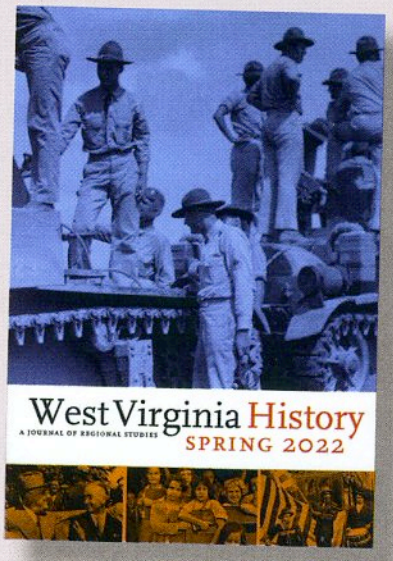
Tales of Dunkard Ridge: Life and Lore from a West Virginia Hill Farm written by Norma Jean Venable (self-published, 192 pp.) tells the story of two self identified "city folk", who grew up in New York State making the move in 1967to rural Monongalia County. They soon got to know their neighbors, and recorded the stories they shared of 'the old ways of life' — the reader can determine which ones may be embellished. Many of the residents in the area can trace their family history back to the pioneer families who settled the region in the late 1700s . Riddled with funny anecdotes, and even including a few recipes, this book is sure to keep readers entertained!



Are You Going to Step on That Snake? Hunting Man and Beast in the Appalachians, by David R Long (self-published, 149 pp.), a retired West Virginia conservation officer, recounts the author's experience across the three decades that he worked for the Department of Natural Resources. Readers join him as he tracks poachers, traps wild animals, and patrols the wild back country of West Virginia. From rattlesnakes and bobcats, to bears and whitetail deer, Long paints a picture that will resonate with all outdoorsmen. There's something about being outdoors from a young age, and learning to live from the land that creates an indelible impression on our memories within this landscape. The author shares memories that will evoke similar recollections from most readers who harbor the same love for the outdoors and West Virginia.

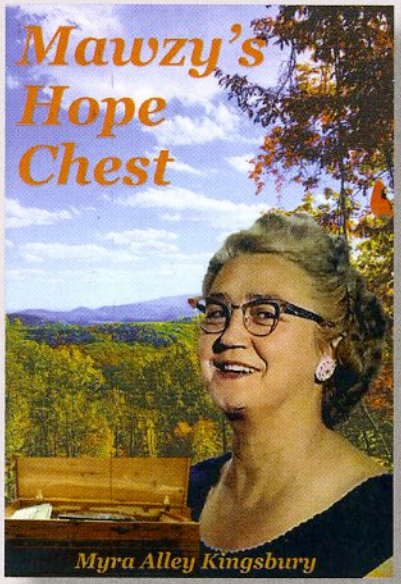


Readers can find the West Virginia University Press' Spring edition of *West Virginia History: A Journal of Regional Studies: Volume 16,*



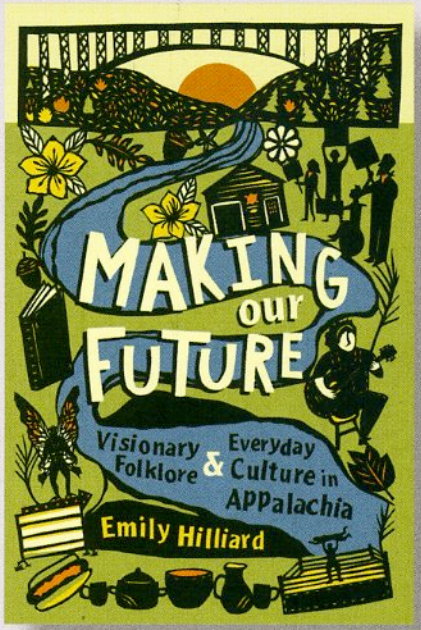
No. 1 (63 pp.) available for purchase online. This edition contains two articles, and five book reviews covering The organization of the ROTC at Marshall University and a discussion of the Civil War and Union war policies, as well as thought provoking book reviews on subjects such as race, our connection to place, Robert Kennedy's 1968 tour of Appalachia, and the ongoing battle against the opioid epidemic.

Mawzy's Hope Chest by Myra Alley Kingsbury (Book-broker, 318 pp.) tells the story of the Author's maternal Grandmother, Grace Louise Walker, dubbed 'Mawzy' by her grandchildren. Born near the turn of the 20th century in Southern West Virginia, Mawzy would grow to be the "matriarch and inspiration for her siblings, her children, her grandchildren, hundreds of school children, and her church family." Kingsbury was inspired to write the novel after coming across Mawzy's hope chest, full of memories and documents from Mawzy's life.



With these sources and heavy research, Kingsbury was able to create this moving story of a remarkable woman taking charge of her life—living as a single mother in a time when society disapproved of such actions, earning her education, and going on to become the principal of Springdale Elementary. Though her life was not empty of tragedies, Mawzy makes the best of the cards she's been dealt and continually strives for better. An inspiring read of a memorable West Virginian, Mawzy's Hope Chest will have readers laughing, and crying, and perhaps pondering the lives of their own grandmother.

Making Our Future: Visionary Folklore and Everyday Culture in Appalachia written by former West Virginia State Folklorist Emily Hilliard (University of North Carolina Press, 312 pp.) is a great new addition to the field of Appalachian Studies and the collaborative ethnographic fieldwork of folklorists. In her approach to writing this book Hilliard was very careful to work with the interviewees in a way that ensured they were a part of the whole process, and had a say in what the final product was. Hilliard writes in her introduction, "Ultimately, the folklorist asks not to direct the or control the conversation but to be invited into conversations that are already happening between the individual practitioner, the community of practice, and the creative expression."



This book, with chapters on West Virginia foodways, music traditions, and even pro-wrestling, is a creative, and at times humorous, look at the folklife of West Virginia and Appalachia. It is informative, and written in a style geared toward general readership. It will make a great addition to anyone's shelf, scholar or otherwise. *Making our Future* is a great illustration of how our cultural heritage is ever changing and expanding, and certainly worth sharing.

Christmas Trees Fit for Royalty

The Story of a Preston County Tree Farm

By Carl E. Feather

What started as a Future Farmers of America (FFA) project in 1941 has become a Christmas tradition in the greater Morgantown region—wandering the acres of King's Tree Farm in Bruceton Mills in search of a perfect Christmas tree. Demand for King's trees is so great that the owner limits sales to roughly 400 established customers on "the list." That is all a one-man operation can handle, says William "Billy" King, who co-owns the farm with his brother, John. "The whole reason for the list is not to control who comes in here but the number of people that come in here," Billy says. "Our loyal customers, we could sell them a twig and they would be happy. They understand what it takes to grow a tree."

Billy's father, William Thurman King (1925-2005), started the farm with a one-acre planting of seedlings while a high school student. Agriculture was part of the curriculum, and as a member of Future Farmers of America (FFA), William Thurman had to develop, research, and write a business plan for a farm-based business. The student then executed the plan, usually on a family farm, and kept track of expenses and income from it. Typical projects were raising livestock or growing vegetables or grains. William Thurman's project was outside this box and years, not months, were required to prove its success. "[His project] was more of a projection for six to eight years, when they reached a saleable height," Billy says. The FFA instructor approved the project, although it strayed from the norm.

A publication from the West Virginia Conservation Commission, the forerunner to the West Virginia Division of Forestry, guided William Thurman in site selection, soil preparation, planting, pruning, and pest management. Current Division Director Tom Cover questions if there was much consumer demand for live Christmas trees, particularly in Preston County, which is blessed with evergreen varieties in its forests. There was no state industry group, either. The West Virginia Christmas Tree Growers Association came along in 1954, and William Thurman was among the founding members. A visionary, Billy's father saw greater Morgantown as his target market. The area was booming with war-production activity and an influx of urban-dwelling workers. He planted approximately 800 Scotch, red-pine, white-pine, and Norway-spruce seedlings, obtained through the W.Va. Forestry Commission, on one acre of the family farmland. Billy's father projected the retail value of a mature tree to be 50 cents. In 2021, King's buyers were paying around $65 for a comparable tree they cut off the lot.

A call to serve his country might have scuttled William Thurman's tree farm investment, but family members tended to the planting in his absence. By the time he returned from duty in 1947, the first crop,

A sign on Route 73 east of Bruceton Mills, Preston County, points up the hill to the tree farm that was started 75 years ago as an FFA project. All photos by Carl E. Feather unless otherwise noted.

at 6 feet tall, was ready for harvest. "Dad put a few [trees] in back of his Willys Jeep and took them down to Bruceton one evening. He set up in front of the Bruceton Bank and sold the trees for $1.50 apiece. When he came back, he had $4.50." Encouraged by the sales, William Thurman planted more seedlings and arranged to sell his cut trees at a riverfront lot in Morgantown. "It wasn't the nicest of neighborhoods," Billy says. "This was in the 1950s and it was industrial waterfront, a working man's wharf." Knowing his father's penchant for frugality, Billy suspects his dad chose the location because rent was free. "My father was very frugal. He was born during The Depression, and he squirreled away and squirreled away all his life," Billy says. Eventually, the location worked against sales, however. "A lot of his customers told him that they wanted a tree, but did not want to go into that neighborhood,"

That precipitated a move to Morgantown's new Suncrest neighborhood. Billy says that the dirt lot off Route 705 where his father sold trees now hosts a fast-food restaurant. He recalls accompanying his father and brother on their sales trips to the lot, which earned a deserved reputation for offering well-groomed trees fresh from the farm. Buyers loved the trees and convenience of purchasing a fresh evergreen from a lot rather than one shipped in from other parts of the nation. His father treated customers fairly and made shopping at the lot a no-pressure, pleasant experience. "Dad always said, 'The back seat is your future,'" Billy says. What his father meant was that if he gave the family's children a good experience and memory, they'd buy trees from King's after they married and started a family. Youngsters William Thurman even made future customers of those folks without the means to buy a tree on Christmas Eve. "You took a big selection of trees to the lot, and there would always be a few trees left over on Christmas Eve," Billy says. "He'd write 'FREE' on a piece of plywood and give away whatever was left by that evening. He'd rather do that than haul them back and burn them."

Julie Havanas of Morgantown recalls going to that Morgantown lot with her parents back in the 1950s. She has purchased a King tree every Christmas since. She and her daughter and son-in-law, Marcie and Frank Huy, along with their son Seth, drove out to the farm the Saturday before Christmas 2020 to select their tree. Holiday music played on their SUV's sound system while the family scoured the lot;

Billy King takes a break from a long day of work on the tree farm that his father started as a FFA project. Billy continues the operation to honor his father.

Julie waited in the backseat, guarding the hot chocolate and other supplies essential to the tradition/winter picnic. "We make a whole day of it," she says. "It is the only place (in the Morgantown region) where you can come out and cut down a fresh tree of your liking." Braving eight inches of snow on the ground, Marcie, Frank, and Seth gave cursory looks to several dozen trees before narrowing their selection to two. Marcie says a driving factor in their decision is envisioning how the prospect will look in their house; she tends to select trees too tall for the space, but somehow each year they select the perfect one. "We are never without a fresh tree from here," Marcie says. Even when she was in college and living away from home in Virginia, William Thurman and Billy arranged to get a fresh tree delivered to her apartment.

William Thurman wisely kept a list of the customers who bought trees from his lot, and that document helped him shift the operation to a cut-your-own experience in the late 1960s. Construction of Interstate 68, Corridor E, through Preston and Monongalia counties, was the catalyst. The four concrete lanes cut a swath through the King farm, established in the 1800s. William Thurman was the fourth generation to live on the farm. Billy says the operation was typical of other Preston County family farms, the working of which provided food for the family table, firewood for the stoves, and an excess of products for cash sales. Self-sufficiency was a full-time job. "To the best of my knowledge, Grandpa (Scott William King) never had a job off

A photograph from the 1950s shows William King posing in a field of young trees; that same planting of trees is shown in the second photograph from 2021. Date and photographer of 1950s photograph not noted; Billy King collection.

the farm," Billy says. The 300-acre King farm lost 50 acres to the highway, including the land on which stood the farmhouse in which Billy's father was born. Only one of the 11 original farm buildings was spared, and that was because the family relocated it. The farm received 50 cents compensation for each Christmas tree destroyed by the construction, less than the cost of a seedling. With the farm bisected by an Interstate and many of his future Christmas trees uprooted and destroyed, William Thurman did not have enough trees to stock a lot, so he changed the operation to cut your own."In 1969, he got this idea to sell trees here. You'd put your family in the car, drive out to the farm and spend a couple of hours looking for your Christmas tree, then cut it and take it home," Billy says.

The operation was rustic in those early years—customers rode on a wagon pulled by the farm's 1963 Ford Jubilee tractor. It eventually became Billy's job to drive the tractor; a burn barrel at the edge of the field provided a station where he ate his lunch of bologna sandwiches, warmed his chilled body, and swapped stories with tree hunters. During those years, he learned the art of planting, trimming, and selling trees. He recalls approaching his father in the summer of 1973 or 1974 with a request for a 22 Magnum rifle to rid the farm of groundhogs. After setting forth his case for purchasing the must-have item, Billy's father gave a terse reply: "Sounds like you need a job, boy." About that time, a friend of the family, Steve Lebnick, pulled up in a pickup and struck up a conversation with Billy's father about needing help with a strip-mine reclamation project. Lebnick needed workers to reseed the land with hay that had to be spread across the barren soil. "Next thing you know, I was jumping in the truck. I went over and

A snapshot from the fall of 1963 depicts William King at work on his tree farm with the help from an unidentified individual. Spraying the trees for insects and other infestations remains part of the ongoing work of raising handsome Christmas trees. Billy King collection.

worked on that project, making $1.85 an hour," Billy says. More work around the Steve and Mary Lebnick farm and properties followed, including painting the barn one summer so it could be a backdrop for their daughter's wedding. "Steve was a cool dude; he taught me so much. And his wife, Miss Mary, was a great cook who always fed the help," Billy says. "I cleaned the barn and made hay. He'd come get me every day that he needed help."

There were chores on the King farm, as well, that Billy, John, and their sisters Debi and Pam were expected to do. "You did what dad told you to do—hauling in firewood, planting trees, trimming them. I did everything on the tree farm except spraying [with pesticides]," he says. When it came time for him to strike out on his own in the world, Billy headed to Phoenix, then Baltimore, in the mid-1980s. His parents understood; they knew that the tree farm would not provide enough money to sustain the owner. That was the case for his parents, and it remains true to this day. "My dad never considered the trees his job," Billy says. "It was his hobby, and your job came first." For William Thurman, that job was driving Bus No. 2, the only one in the Bruceton Mills area, for 34 years. Concurrent with that job, he also worked as a substitute, and eventually full-time, mail carrier. In 1981, Billy took over his father's bus route and held it until relocating to Phoenix after three years. The relocation meant Billy was unavailable to assist his family during the holiday.

Within a short time of moving, Billy realized the farm was a part of his heritage that he could not ignore. An offer to come to Baltimore, which would give him access to a large job market and still put him close enough to help on the tree farm, arrived from Billy's godfather. The strong work ethic instilled in Billy by his father and the Bruceton Mills farming community

William King, who started his Christmas tree farm as a high school student, is shown at work in it 20 years later. Billy King collection.

helped him succeed in the Baltimore automotive market. He discovered selling cars was like selling Christmas trees."I loved my father, and he gave me his gift of gab," Billy says. "Selling cars came very naturally to me." So did hard work. "There was always sweat in anything you got," he says. Billy developed a deep respect for his father's ability to grow premium trees, the likes of which the farm's not seen since William Thurman passed—at least according to Billy. "He grew beautiful trees, I just try to grow a tree," he says.

Billy had no interest in taking over the farm and or expanding it. The moment of decision came on Nov. 23, 2005, just as the family was preparing for the farm's opening. "He had just sold his first tree for that year," Billy says. "Although we normally didn't open before Thanksgiving, a customer needed a tree and convinced Dad to sell one early. His father died shortly thereafter. "He died gracefully. He never forgot his name, his wife's name, or his kids. He died gracefully, just like he was," Billy says. Despite the crushing grief, King's Trees opened on schedule with his mother Janet and Billy attempting to fill William Thurman's huge boots; the tradition continued. "2005 was a very, very difficult year. All these people were coming to the farm with smiles on their faces, asking where Dad was. It was a tough year," Billy says. New buyers flooded the farm that year and Janet, being inexperienced in how her husband planted according to the list, panicked and took on more new customers. As a result, the farm went through a period of rebuilding and additional planting to bring sales and supply into balance. To pull it through, Billy adopted a trick he'd learned in automobile sales: Make the potential buyers feel like they were about to become members of a "country club" designed just for them. Working from the list of prior buyers, Billy designed a club

Frank Huy (right) clears snow from the branches of a prospect while his wife Marcie and son Seth size up a second tree at King's Tree Farm in Bruceton Mills.

with unique benefits, foremost being able to select and cut the tree of your choice. This perk resonates with King's customers, known to drive a couple of hours to get a tree.

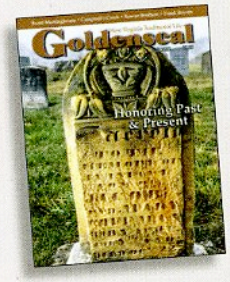
"For at least 17 years, I had a family come from Salisbury, Maryland," Billy says. The wife was a teacher and the husband a contractor who worked at the FBI center. Traveling I-68 back home, the husband noticed the King's Tree sign along the interstate and surprised his wife with a live tree. "After he got his tree from us, his wife would not let him get a tree from anyone else," Billy says. "He'd come up to me and say, 'Man, I wish I'd never met your dad.' That was the standing joke. He enjoyed talking to Dad and respected him." Those relationships are worth thousands of dollars in advertising and were built over four generations of Christmases. And, while they are gratifying for Billy, there are not enough of them from which to make a living. "I always thought he was kidding when Dad said he could not make a living off this," Billy says, "But you cannot. There is no way you can live off it." He renovates houses, has rental property, deals in antiques and collectibles, and cuts, sells, and delivers firewood to augment the farm income. He says expanding the farm—planting more trees and opening it up to first-time buyers—would not net more income because his expenses would rise by hiring workers. In his late 50s, Billy has no children to help him on the farm, so he must keep its size manageable as a one-man hobby. "I will grow trees until the day I die. We'll never give up hope," he says of the farm's future. "As I get older, I will have to downsize, but I'll face that bridge when I have to."

One of the cultural bridges the farm had to cross is adapting to a Thanksgiving weekend opening. His father would not sell the first tree until the second weekend

Billy King trims each tree growing on the tree farm at least once a year. He uses both hand trimmers and power trimming equipment to shape the trees into the classical 'Christmas-tree shape' his customers expect. "You do this for 10 years before you get a paycheck," he says.

in December. Now, Billy grudgingly opens Thanksgiving to satisfy consumers' new traditions and cultural patterns."Christmas is too commercialized," he says. Yet, there's no denying that without that commercialization, he would not have this part-time job with an annual payday and a decade of labor behind each tree he sells. "You get to do this for 10 years before you get a paycheck," Billy says as he takes a break from grooming his trees on a hot summer afternoon. It is demanding physical labor that scares away most young farmers whose bankers don't understand the economics of Christmas tree farming. "If your heart is not into this, it will break you," he says. And he's not talking about just the hectic weekends between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Once the ground thaws in early spring, Billy drives his tractor up the long hill to the fields and digs out the stumps from the prior year's harvest. The soil is groomed to receive the new seedlings.

Because the number of nurseries dealing with commercial Christmas tree seedlings is dwindling, Billy must order seedlings two years in advance of planting. They arrive starting the second week in April; he plants each one by hand. "One hundred-twenty-five trees a day is about the best I can do," he says. "You have to dig a pretty nice-sized hole for each tree. I use a spade shovel." In a typical spring, Billy plants 1,100 to 1,200 seedlings. He knows from experience that only half of the seedlings planted will make it to a marketable age and condition. Billy says one seedling costs around $1.65. Given the 50 percent mortality rate, the grower's initial investment in each Christmas tree is around $3.30. Billy recalls his father complaining about the nurseries being "crooks" when the price was 27 cents per seedling! The seedling cost is minor, however, compared to the input of labor and supplies required to transform the seedling into a Kings tree.



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Herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizer are applied on schedule to encourage tree health and growth while warding off a range of pests and threats, from molds and fungus to bugs and deer. Drought or soggy weather present challenges that require additional intervention. During one particularly bad growing season, Billy had to make 30 applications of pesticides; one chemical costs around $100 a gallon. He's not a fan of spraying chemicals on trees that will end up in a home, but he can't grow the tree that his customers have come to expect unless he uses them. "You would not want the tree if I didn't use them. Trust me," he says.

By the time the new arrivals are in the ground and the first sprays are applied, it's time to mow the grass. It takes Billy three days to mow the 12 acres of tree farm, and he typically mows three times per growing season. By mid-June, the pine trees are vying for his attention; if they are not trimmed by the Fourth of July, they will not re-bud for growth in the next year. By the time the pines are trimmed, the grass needs mowing again. Then comes trimming of the blue spruce and firs. Through all of this, he watches for signs of fungus, bacterial infection, insect infestation, and wildlife damage that will trigger a preventive response from him. During October and November, Billy prepares the roads to and through the fields for the influx of hundreds of cars and SUVs. He lines up his helpers for the season, mostly extended family and dedicated friends who enjoy the challenge of tying trees to car roofs in the rain and snow. One thing he does not have to worry about is advertising, aside from posting the sign at the entrance to the farm stating no new customers are being accepted this year. "We have not advertised in 40 years," he says.

Like the tree farm's founder, part of the payoff for Billy is seeing members of the "back seat" generation establish their tradition, as well as connecting to the parents and grandparents who still share their memories of coming to King's Tree Farm. Invariably, the conversations always go back to the man who started it all as an FFA project. "If I can stand in my father's shadow, I will die a happy man," Billy says, "Following in his footsteps is out of the question. They were just too big."

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.

Billy King holds one of several pests/ diseases that can damage and destroy the trees he grows. An infestation can negate years of work and investment. Photo by Carl E. Feather.

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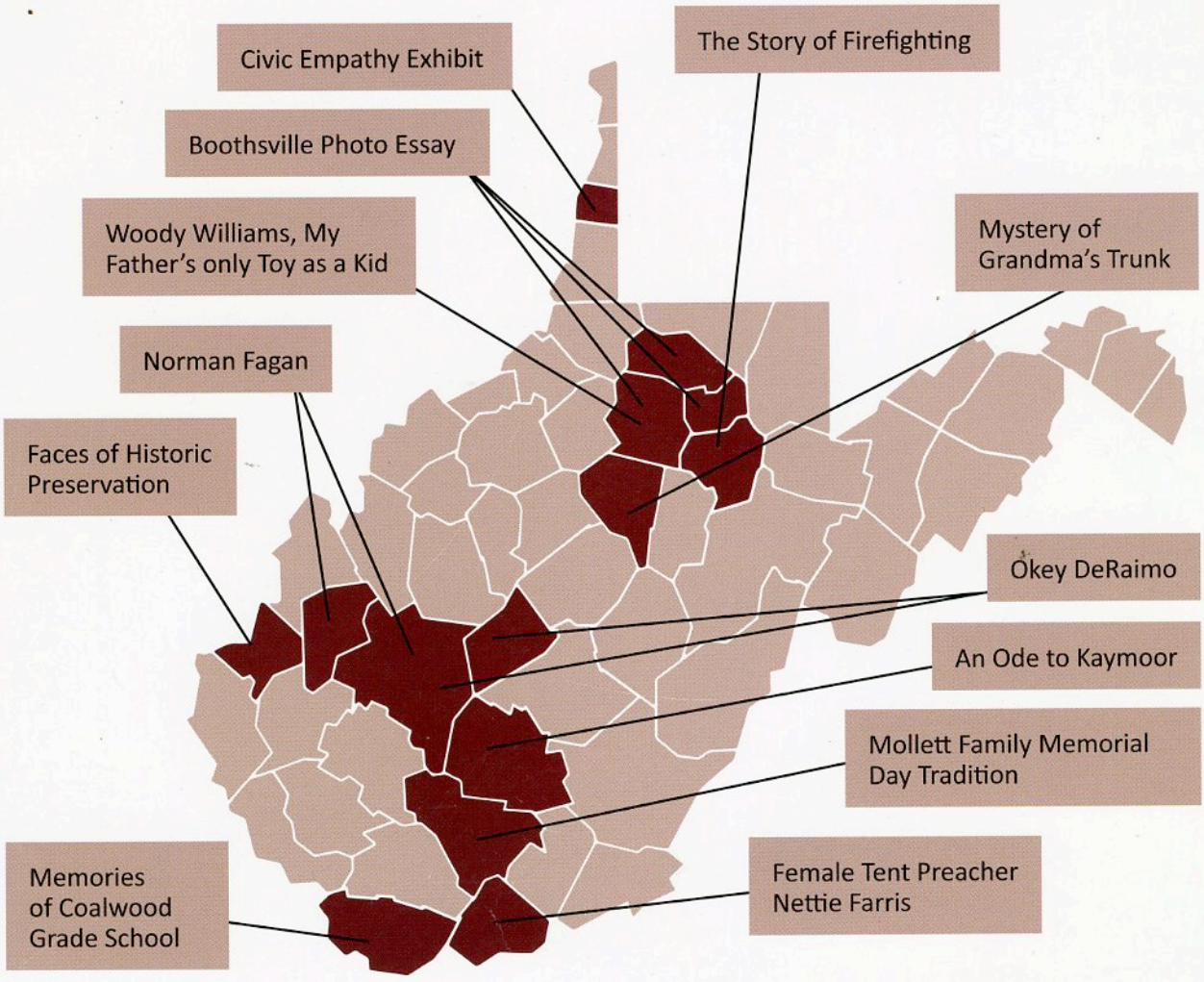

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