Goldenseal

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Goldenseal

A Quarterly Forum for Documenting West Virginia's Traditional Life

Volume 5, Number 3 ✱ July-September 1979

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current programs·festivals·publications

To Our Readers

GOLDENSEAL is constantly looking for items to feature in our *Current Programs, Festivals, Publications* section, and we look to our readers to help keep us informed of upcoming events in the areas of West Virginia crafts, traditional music, festivals, and publications. However, we do have a printing schedule to maintain, and any item to appear in an upcoming issue must be received by the GOLDENSEAL office three months in advance of that issue's publication.

If you know of events that might be of interest to GOLDENSEAL readers, please let us know. We need background information on the event, the name of the contact person, and the contact's address and phone number. But we do need to know three months in advance in order to get the announcement in the magazine in time for publication. Groups sending out press releases and printed announcements should take particular care to mail their information to us early.

Augusta Heritage Arts Festival

The Augusta Heritage Arts Festival will be held in Elkins on August 3-4. The two-day festival wraps up this summer's Augusta Heritage Arts Workshop, which began in early July. The Workshop, now finishing its seventh season, offers classes in traditional crafts, music, and dance.

On Friday, August 3, the festival will feature a quilt display, craft demonstrations, and live music in downtown Elkins. There will be a Friday evening concert at Harper-McNeely Auditorium of Davis and Elkins College, with Wilma Lee Cooper, Bessie Jones, Glen Ohrlin, and Sandy Bradley and the Gypsy Gyppo String Band. Saturday will continue Friday's festivities downtown, with the additional entertainment of a fiddlers' contest. Saturday night's Harper-McNeeley concert will feature Mick Moloney, Eugene O'Donnell, Tim Britton, Billy McComiskey, and the Irish Step-toe Dancers, and Ethel Caffie.

Concert admission is $3.50, or $3.00 in advance, senior citizens and children half-price. Tickets or further information may be had from: Augusta Heritage Arts Festival, P. O. Box 1725, Elkins 26241, phone (304) 636-0006.

Doc and Chickie Williams Hold Reunion

Doc and Chickie Williams, headliners with the famous WWVA Wheeling Jamboree, will celebrate their 45 years in country music and their 40th wedding anniversary on Sunday, October 7, with an Old Friends and Fans Reunion Concert. The Reunion will be held at the Field House at Wheeling College from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Tickets are available at $5.00 advance sale, $6.00 at the door, children under 12 half-price.

Marion Martin and Cy Williams, members of the show for 25 years, will perform at the Reunion. Current Doc Williams Show performers will also be present, including Roy Scott, Rube Shafer, Big Bill Barton, and Silly "Willy" Wiggins. The famous "Swinging Granny," Helen Fisher, plans to attend, as well as the Williams daughters, "Peeper," "Poochie," and "Punkin."

"It will be a great show, a day to remember," said Doc Williams. "Nowhere else could we gather in one place such a great cast of personalities and performers. We've come a long way together with old friends and fans since 1934. Come help us celebrate."

Old friends and fans who plan to join Doc and Chickie for some good old-fashioned fun and nostalgia may write for tickets to Doc Williams Reunion, Box 902, Wheeling, WV 26003.

Craft Outlets and Events Listing Offered by Department

The Arts and Humanities Division of the Department of Culture and History has compiled a listing of West Virginia craft outlets and craft events, which is available to the public at no charge.

The craft events listing includes the name and dates of each event; the name, address and phone number of the contact person; and a brief breakdown of each event's offerings, such as craft sales, demonstrations, exhibits, competition, music, etc. The craft outlets section lists the outlet's name, address and owner's name. Craft outlets from all over the country are included in the listing, but each outlet listed carries work by West Virginia craftspeople and artisans.

If you would like a copy of the listing, or if you are aware of any craft events or outlets not included in the listing, contact Mack Miles, Craft Representative, Arts and Humanities Division, Department of Culture and History, Capitol Complex, Charleston, WV 25305. Phone (304) 348-0220.

Coal Miners Research Association

Those interested in researching and preserving the history and culture of coal miners and coal towns are invited to join the Coal Miners Research Association. The Association is a national organization, with members in Colorado, Utah, and other western and midwestern coal states as well as in West Virginia and other parts of the Appalachian coalfields. Included in the membership is a wide range of humanists and social scientists, as well as nonacademicians.

Members receive the Association Newsletter three times yearly, and are invited to participate in Association conferences, projects, and workshops. Annual membership dues are $5.00 for individuals, $25 for institutions. Those interested should contact Treasurer Roger Meade, Coal Miners Research Association, Ohio Historical Center, I-71 and 17th Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43211.

From *Appalachia: A Self-Portrait.* Photograph by Robert Cooper, copyright 1974.

Appalachia: A Self Portrait

A major new collection of Appalachian photography has been published by Appalshop of Whitesburg, Kentucky. *Appalachia: A Self Portrait* features the work of seven West Virginia and Kentucky photographers from the Mountain Photography Workshop, an Appalshop affiliate. Almost all the group are native or resident Appalachians—hence the book's subtitle—and the photography is concerned entirely with the mountain region.

The photographers offer a range of personal interpretations of the Appalachian experience. Bob Cooper of Sutton contributes nostalgic, place-oriented photographs of his neighbors, their homes, and the landscape of his native central West Virginia during the current period of rapid change. Will Endres documents the story of C. F. Grey, the Glenwood herb doctor known as Catfish Man of the Woods (GOLDENSEAL, July - September 1977). Linda Mansberger photographs her own working class family in Morgantown. Earl Dotter, formerly of the *United Mine Workers Journal* and Appalachia's best known photographer, continues his earlier important work on black lung disease. Other photography, by Lyn Adams, Shelby Adams, and Wendy Ewald, is primarily from the Whitesburg area of Letcher County, Kentucky.

Psychologist Robert Coles, who has written extensively about Appalachia, contributes an introduction to *Appalachia: A Self Portrait.* Coles believes the book's photography provides "a social and cultural education for all of us." Loyal Jones, director of the Appalachian Studies program at Berea College and past executive director of the Council of the Southern Mountains, provides the text of the book.

The *Self Portrait* photographs toured widely before publication. They were exhibited at Oglebay Institute in Wheeling in October 1978, and at Huntington Galleries in May of this year. In March 1979 the photographs were at the Eleventh Street Photo Gallery in New York, at Muray State College in Kentucky in June, and they will be at New York's International Center for Photography during August. The Kentucky Arts Commission will tour the exhibition through June 1980, and the Southern Federation for the Arts is expected to show it across the South for one year after that.

Altogether, the book and exhibition present one of the finest modern collections of Appalachian photography yet assembled. *Appalachia: A Self Portrait* (112 pp., 75 photographs, soft cover) may be purchased for $8.95 plus $1 postage from Appalshop, Whitesburg, Kentucky 41858. The orginal photography project was underwritten by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Old Time Live Radio Show in Beckley

An "Old Time Live Radio Reunion" is planned for September 15-16 in Beckley, to be held outdoors at the Raleigh County Courthouse. The program is sponsored by the Third Century Arts Council and the Downtown Beckley Business Association. The show's format will be in the style of a live radio program in the early days of radio and will be broadcast by a Beckley area station. Performances are open to the public at no charge.

(This year's Vandalia Gathering, a presentation of the Department of Culture and History, took as its theme "West Virginia's Golden Age of Radio," and featured a live broadcast reminiscent of the radio shows of the '30's and '40's.)

The program will include many now-famous traditional musicians who began their careers in live radio in the '30's and '40's. The Lilly Brothers, Bea and Everett, whose influence has been so important to traditional music in the last three decades, are scheduled to appear. Also performing will be Little Jimmy Dickens, originally from Bolt, a Grand Ole Opry star who began his career singing live on WJLS, a Beckley radio station, and Wilma Lee Cooper, a fellow Opry regular and a native West Virginian.

For further information on the Old Time Radio Reunion, write the Third Century Arts Council, P. O. Box 1205, Beckley, WV 25801.

Smithers, West Virginia **Published**

John Cavalier has recently published a short history of Smithers, Fayette County. The new book details the history of the town itself and of nearby parts of the Valley district of the county. Cavalier, a county educator and Smithers city recorder for 36 years, writes with the confidence of an eye witness to much of his story.

Like other Fayette towns, Smithers matured with the coal industry. The Kanawha River town was more accessible than most, however, and thus developed earlier than did other coal communities in the county, particularly along New River. Cavalier's account, like other short histories, tends to dwell on the more exciting episodes, but overall he offers a good narrative.

Smithers is printed by McClain Printing Company of Parsons, West Virginia, and features their usual bookbinding craftsmanship. For $10.50, the hard cover book may be ordered directly from John Cavalier, Box 177, Smithers, WV 25186.

Italian Heritage Festival

The first West Virginia Italian Heritage Festival is scheduled for August 31 and September 1 in Clarksburg. The festival, expected to become an annual event, celebrates the rich culture and the social and economic contributions of West Virginians of Italian descent.

The street festival plans to recreate an outdoor marketplace from Renaissance Italy. There will be traditional pageantry, roving minstrels, jugglers, and authentic costumes. The festival will feature outdoor cafes, with traditional foods and wine tasting. International and local folk dance groups will perform.

For more information, contact Festival Director Bob Kovacevich, P. O. Box 1041, Clarksburg, WV 26301. Phone (304) 624-4411.

Outdoor Drama in Logan

Originally written and performed for Logan County's centennial in 1952, "The Aracoma Story" returns this summer for its fourth consecutive season, with performances on August 2-5 and August 9-12.

Based on one of West Virginia's more romantic legends, the drama is the story of Aracoma, daughter of Shawnee Chief Cornstalk, and her love for Bowling Baker, a white renegade and scout for General Braddock's army, whom she rescued from death and later married. Set in the area along the Guyandotte River that is now Logan, "The Aracoma Story" is also an account of the terrible wars fought by the Shawnee Indians for control of southern West Virginia.

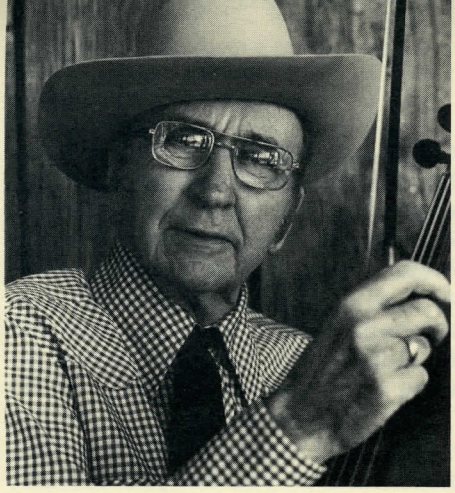
This year's company will include a cast of 150. The summer program is sponsored by local, CETA, and other sources, and will offer classes in performance and stagecraft skills as well as two productions, "Fiddler on the Roof" in July and "The Aracoma Story" in August. Each show runs for eight performances at the amphitheatre at Chief Logan State Park. For tickets and further information, contact Sandra Cook, Manager, "The Aracoma Story," P. O. Box 2016, Logan, WV 25601. Phone (304) 752-0253.

Hardy County Heritage Weekend

The 1979 Hardy County Heritage Weekend will be held September 29 and 30. Twenty-six homes and buildings will be open for tours, all of them fine examples of early 19th to early 20th century architecture, and most of them furnished with antiques of the period. Many of the homes are still lived in by descendants of the original builders.

In addition to the tours, there will be craft sales and exhibits, with a special quilting demonstration on Saturday, and several other craft demonstrations during the weekend, including the use of blacksmithing tools. The "Knights of the South Branch" will offer an example of tournament riding, an art directly descended from medieval tourneys and a favorite sport of Southern gentlemen. There will also be a muzzle-loading rifle contest, a reenactment of Civil War battles, and an antique auction on Saturday evening at Moorefield High School.

Cost of tickets is $4.00 if purchased by September 15, $5.00 thereafter; single home visits $1.50 each. The price includes punch and cookies served at the new library in Moorefield. Special discounts for busloads may be arranged. There is no price reduction for children, who must be accompanied by an adult. This is not a conducted tour. Visitors may tour any or all of the places open during the hours specified. Hours unless otherwise stated will be 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 6 p.m. Sunday. Tickets and brochures may be obtained by contacting the Hardy County Public Library in Moorefield, (304) 538-6065, or by writing Heritage Weekend, Box 301, Moorefield, WV 26836.



Photograph by Doug Yarrow.

Woody Simmons

Recollections of a Randolph County Fiddler

By Michael Kline

"All Smiles Tonight," a documentary recording of the fiddle music of Woody Simmons, is scheduled for early fall release by the West Virginia Department of Culture and History, on the Elderberry Records label. Woody is accompanied by Jimmie and Loren Currence, Burt Dodrill, and Paul Armstrong, on various instrumental numbers, including the title cut, "All Smiles Tonight," the previously unrecorded "Susie's Band," "West Virginia Highway," and "Mitchell's Clog." The record is produced and engineered by Paul Reisler. Michael Kline collaborated in the project, and the following GOLDENSEAL interview will be reprinted as liner notes for the album.

"All Smiles Tonight" is the first Elderberry Record and reflects the commitment of the Department of Culture and History to the preservation and documentation of West Virginia's traditional culture. The album will be competitively priced, and available at the Craft Shop at the Cultural Center and through other outlets. Orders may be addressed to The Craft Shop, Cultural Center, Capitol Complex, Charleston 25305.

The following article was transcribed from a taped interview with Woody Simmons on January 23 of this year at his home on Mill Creek, 16 miles south of Elkins in Randolph County. Laverne Simmons was present at the interview and recalled many details of her husband's long musical career, in which she was briefly a singing partner during the early years of their marriage.

At 67, Woody Simmons is perhaps the most highly decorated local fiddler to come up in central West Virginia. His legendary smooth bowing style and effortless soaring phrases, and his combative approach to contest playing have won him the admiration of a large following of contest and festival audiences throughout the State. Plagued with a recent heart condition, Mr. Simmons has had to curtail his physical activities considerably. Yet he has kept his musical spirit together in the past year, and with quiet determination and twinkling smiles, has walked off stage after stage with ribbons and trophies of every description. At the Vandalia Gathering this past Memorial Day, Simmons won three prizes and an honorable mention in stiff fiddle and banjo competition.

But more importantly, Woody Simmons has displayed a warmth and hospitality toward musicians of all kinds, that has served to foster the oldest and best traditions of music in his community and state. Mr. and Mrs. Simmons have opened their home as a kind of haven to both ordinary and extraordinary musicians and, as the two of them readily offer, they have yet to meet any visitor from whom they didn't learn something about music or life, or both.

Woodford Simmons was born on Becky's Creek, just south of Huttonsville, in 1911, and grew up with two older sisters, one of whom married Gus McGee, a fine fiddle player in Elkins. Florence Tacy and William Ison Simmons, the parents, were married on Becky's Creek in 1896, and lived out their married lives there. Woody Simmons revered his parents and has fond memories of the isolated home place. He recalls that his father loved music and played some hymns and polkas on the accordion, but says that none of his grandparents were involved in music making.

Michael Kline. Tell me about the musical traditions in your family on both sides that you can remember anything about.

Woody Simmons. My grandfather and grandmother on either side never played any music. My father played an old accordion a little bit and he could pick out a few tunes on the banjo.

MK Where did he learn, I wonder, if he didn't learn the accordion from his parents?

WS I wouldn't have any idea. He played an old tune he called "Fee-be-I," or something like that. I remember that. And he played some hymns on the accordion and "Irish Washer Woman," I believe he played that, and some polkas.

MK Well, when did he come to Becky's Creek?

WS Well, I'd say in, maybe in the 1880's. They just decided they didn't like it over in Virginia, so they moved back to West Virginia in a wagon and two horses. My dad owned a place up at the head of Becky's Creek. And from what my dad said, they had it pretty rough at that time. I heard him say they had no matches or anything, go and borry some fire coal from a neighbor and bring and start a fire in the morning if the fire would happen to go out. And they'd shoot in the chimney with a muzzle-loading rifle to start a fire. Heard him speak of that and heard him talk about wolves. Why, the wolves would be around so thick that when they got ready to go to the house they'd have to get a big pole and set the pole a-fire and carry it on their shoulder to keep the wolves off of them until they got to the house. And they made sugar.

MK The sugar camp was back further up in the head of the mountains, was it?

WS Uh huh, and big timber! They just cut the old sugar camp out here

about 20 years ago. Awful big trees, big timber back at that time.

MK You must have some recollection of Randolph County before all the timber was cut off then, do you?

WS Oh, yeah. I worked in the woods for the Wilson Lumber Company a couple of years. Cut timber and drove grab and drove team and done about everything. This big store down here on the corner was the company store. I walked from there to the head of Becky's Creek, about seven miles one way then. And we worked from daylight 'til dark. Working in the woods, yeah.

MK What sort of character was your father, anyway? You told me once you never heard him swear on oath.

Laverne Simmons. He didn't.

MK Was he stern or did he have a sense of humor? Was he hard working?

WS He was a hard working man, yes sir. He worked hard and he liked to drive teams of horses. He was an awful good hand with the horses. He was a blacksmith, he done a lot of blacksmith work, built wagons.

MK Where do you suppose he learned that trade? Is that something his father knew?

WS No, I don't think his father was a blacksmith, knew anything thing about blacksmithing. I don't know where he picked it up, but ever since I can remember he had a blacksmith shop and shoed a lot of horses. I put shoes on one horse in my time. But I could turn the shoes and toe 'em and weld and everything like that. I learned a lot of blacksmithing work.

MK He had a shop right there on the place, did he?

WS Yes, sir, right on the farm, pretty close to that old granery. Had a blower and everything. Made his own tongs and everything that he worked with.

MK He even made the first instrument you had?

WS Yeah, he made the first banjo I ever had, yeah.

MK Can you describe how he did that?

WS Well, he split out a piece of white oak. And I don't remember how thick it was, probably one-half inch thick. And then maybe he used a saw on it to saw all the way around it and make it bend easier. And then he put it in a kettle and boiled it. And bent it around, and pinned it together some way, and then all the metal parts he made in the blacksmith shop. He used an old groundhog hide on it for a head, tanned the hide and made the head, and made the neck out of locust. And he only put five frets on it and made them out of fencing wire. And, of course, it had wooden tuning pegs, I think they was made out of locust. And the first strings he used on it was screen wire.

MK Screen wire?

WS Old screen out of a screen door, raveled out, but you couldn't tune them up very high. And the first tune I learned to play was "Silent Night."

MK Where did you hear that?

WS Well, I heard it around Christmas [school] programs, you know. And then finally we walked to the I. P. Russel store here in Mill Creek to get a few things, and seen he had banjo strings, and the brand was *Sunrise.* They was 20¢ a set. That Russell still lives in Mill Creek, he'd remember about it. And I bought a set of them strings and put on that old banjo and I really thought I had something! Oh, my, I thought that was the finest banjo in the world. Then the next one I got when I came home from school one evening. Why, my dad had traded a feller ten chickens for a banjo, a factory-made banjo. It had 38 brackets on it.

The old Simmons homeplace at Becky's Creek, where Woody grew up. Photograph by Doug Yarrow.

MK You didn't have anybody to teach you to play. What kind of finger style, picking style did you work out for the banjo?

WS Well, I first started out by using three fingers and my thumb. I used the third finger on the first string only and the second finger on the second string only, and the first finger on the third string, and the thumb on the fifth string and fourth string. Never crossed over at any time.

MK So you got a sort of roll going with your fingers?

WS Yes sir. Then I played the claw hammer style. Some of them called it frailing.

MK Where did you first hear that?

WS Seems like the first feller I seen do that was Cletus Johnson. And maybe Floyd Swecker, that was my brother-in-law. Seemed like I seen him do the clawhammer style . . . I didn't play that very long 'cause everybody seems to not like that style of playing.

MK What do you mean they didn't like it, that was the old-time style, wasn't it?

WS Old-time style, yeah, but they kind of got away from it. They just seemed to didn't pay any attention to it. They said they didn't like the banjo played that style. They made fun of you playing that way, yeah. They called it "nigger style."

MK But by that time you were hearing a different style on the radio?

WS I was hearing a different style on the phonograph. It was an old Edison Victrola. Played on them rolls. [Fred VanEpps] sounded to me like he was playing with two fingers and his thumb. That's when I started playing like that, around in the '20's. Played "Golden Slippers" and "Blue Ridge Mountain Home." Sounded like he was using two fingers and his thumb, and that's where I got picking that style.

MK You started to tell me a little about hearing "Silent Night" at Christmas programs in your school. Was the school there on Becky's Creek? What was it like?

WS Yes, it was there on Becky's Creek, about a mile and a half from my home. Some days I'd ride the horse to school, in bad weather.

MK Who was your favorite teacher back at Becky's Creek?

WS Ethel Rosencrantz, Ethel Rosencrantz See. She married Roland See.

MK Did Ethel board in the community some?

WS Uh huh. She'd go home and stay all night with each one of the students during the school session. She went home and stayed all night with us when I was about 13 years old. And me and her walked about five miles that night to a dance on the mountain. She taught me to dance. I danced three sets with her. Yeah, she was a fine school teacher.

William and Florence Tacy Simmons, Woody's parents, at home on Becky's Creek, near Huttonsville, in 1935. Photographer unknown.

MK Was she a young-like person, or an older woman?

WS She was 21 years old when I went to school with her.

MK Uh huh. I can see maybe why you paid attention. Well, now, tell me about this dance. What kind of music did they have?

WS Arnold and Lilburn VanPelt played the music. I believe Arnold used an old mandolin. It was one of them that was made like a gourd, and we called it a "taterbug" back at that time. But I don't believe he had a guitar, though. I think the first guitar he ever had he made it himself. Arnold lives in Pennsylvania now and Lilburn, he still lives here in Mill Creek. He's up in his 80's, Lilburn is, and he won't play anymore. Not interested in it at all.

MK Can you tell me what it was like when you were a small child growing up on the farm? Did you work pretty hard as a youngster?

WS Oh, yeah, had to work all the time. You only got one pair of shoes a year and you went barefoot most of the time: When you went to Sunday School, why you'd carry them in the summer. You'd tie the strings together and put them over your shoulder and carry them 'til you'd get almost to the church, after you got a ways from the church, why you'd take the shoes off and go home barefooted. You went barefooted until it started frosting, getting cold.

Yeah, pretty rough. At the age of 13, when school was out, I went to work for old Battershel. He was a contractor and graded the road from Huttonsville to Mingo. And I worked on the roads 'til school started. The wages then was about 25¢ an hour. You worked ten hours a day. I grubbed stumps and done a little bit of everything. We had mules and wagons they hauled dirt in.

On Saturday, why, and of an evening after school, there's something to do all the time on the farm. In the winter months we'd clear off a piece of ground. When my dad bought that farm, it was all woods. You started building right in the woods and cut the timber off of it. There was a sawmill moved in and sawed all the lumber, and then the lumber was dried—of course not dry kilned, it was just air dried. My father started building a house right in the woods. We'd clear out a plot of ground in the winter, and in the spring of the year, then we'd plow it up with one horse and a shovel plow. He made his own hoes to hoe with, and those stumps were still there and you'd dig them sprouts off the stumps. It's called "new groundin'." You didn't have to use no dust nor anything on the beans to keep the bugs off. There'd be no bugs or anything on them and you raised real good beans and

corn, anything you'd plant growed real good. Then, the next winter, why, you'd clear up another place. Plowed it up and kept on 'til you got enough land cleared that you could raise hay.

MK And some pasture, maybe?

WS Yeah, and pasture fields. We had sheep, cows and a team of horses. And on the buildings you'd use shingles split out of red oak. I helped on the shingles for the old buildings. They're up there yet today. I've still got the tool we used, they called it a "froe," I believe. They used that to split those shingles with, and they've been on there 65 years at least.

MK Did you put them on in the new of the moon, or did you pay attention to the phases of the moon?

WS At a certain time you used to put them on. They claimed that if the moon was ruling up, that if you put them on, they'd all turn up. Yeah, we put them on when the moon was ruling down.*

MK What about in the mountains. Was there a lot of game to hunt back then?

WS There was plenty of game back at that time. You'd kill squirrels right there at the house. They'd come into the corn field on the old rail fence, and you could kill a mess of squirrels any time. There wasn't too many deer, though, but in later years they's a lot of deer.

MK Did you hunt a lot of bear at that time?

WS Well, no, I didn't, but the old fellers did. They'd talk about how they'd catch 'em. An old bear is awful fond of honey. Well, they'd put honey in a nail keg and drive the nails in sloping, and the old bear, he'd tee his head in there and he couldn't get it back out. He couldn't see where he was going. Then they'd track him down and kill him, you know. They'd eat the bear. Used bear and deer and everything for food.

MK What about fiddling? Can you remember your first fiddle?

WS Yes, sir, the first fiddle I ever owned I bought off an old man by the name of Smith Shreve. I built fires in the school house and done the sweeping, and paid him for the fiddle in the spring of the year when I got my check. I was 13 years old. I believe I give $15, wasn't very much. I've still got it. It's a fine old fiddle.

MK What made you want to fiddle so bad that you built fires every morning and swept out?

WS Well, sir, I really enjoyed music back at that time. I thought, there's nothing like it! And I just wished and wished that I could have a violin. Old man Smith Shreve told me he'd sell me that one.

MK Did he give you some lessons along with it? Who taught you to play?

WS Well, I just picked it up myself.

MK Now, Woody, how could you just learn to play the fiddle? I mean, could anybody do that? I know I couldn't.

WS Well, sir, I tuned it up the first thing I got it. Then, of course,

Jimmie Currence of the Currence Brothers accompanies Woody in these impromptu sessions *(below and opposite page)* and on some of the numbers from the "All Smiles Tonight" album. Photographs by Doug Yarrow.

*The new moon is said to be "ruling up" with its tips pointing in a generally upward direction. According to traditional folk belief, this is the proper time to plant, since the moon will pull the plants upward, and a bad time for roofing, since the shingles will buckle upward. The waning moon is "ruling down"—a bad time for planting but a good time for roofing.

I heard Gus McGee play, and John Geer, he lived there close, and he played the fiddle. I learned an old tune off of him called "Ninety Days in Georgia." But I believe the first tune I learned was "Soldier's Joy." And then the "Mitchell Clog," that was one of Wren McGee's tunes. He was, along about them days, a champion fiddler. He lived on McGee Run and played the fiddle. I was at Dave's house several times, and then Ballard McGee, that was Gus's dad, he made a fiddle out of poplar. The old fiddle sounded pretty good. I heard him play a lot. Then Clint McGee, he played the old fiddle that his dad made. I stayed there a while. Clint and I cut timber, and we'd play a little music of the night. He'd play the fiddle and I'd play it. We didn't have no guitar or anything.

MK What were some of the pieces you played with him?

WS "Sally Goodin" and "Sally Ann," that's an old tune I heard Dave McGee play. I've heard it several different styles on the fiddle, but [the McGees] had a style different from everybody else on "Sally Ann." They tuned the fiddle up in a high bass and played it. I used to play "Turkey in the Straw" tuned up that way because everybody else did. Old Fiddlin' John Carson, that's the way he tuned his fiddle. "Sugar in the Gourd," he tuned it up high bass to play it.

MK When did you first hear him?

WS Probably 1918 or '20, somewhere around there. Smith Shreve, now he had a phonograph. When he first started out he had one he carried. It was pretty heavy, though. It was a Victor, and he had it fixed some way another he could put a pole through that old Victrola. Had it fastened to it and put it over his shoulder, the records over his other shoulder in a sack. He'd carry that around to people's houses and play those phonograph records. He really enjoyed it. I met Smith one time up there on the Huttonsville straight, had mud roads back at that time, and he said, "Come over tonight," he said, "got the best 'Turkey in the Straw' you ever heard. Fiddlin' John Carson!" We'd all meet there, a whole lot of people'd go to Smith's to hear those phonograph records. He kept right up with them. When a new one came out, why he'd have it.

MK Who were the great fiddle players over here in Mill Creek, was Charlie Bell one of them?

WS Charlie, he lived up on Elkwater at the time he was doing the fiddle. He taught them all to play,

his wife, Howard, Lee, and Bobby played. He had a band of his own family. And they played pretty good music. I'd go over to Charlie's and play with him of the night, walked about three miles one way. Yes, Charlie's a mighty fine man. I don't know how he learned his music, but he composed an old tune called "Susie's Band," and I put it on the record. I rearranged the tune, he wanted it recorded awful bad. I've got permission to record it. Charlie's 93 years old. He lives down near Valley Bend. He played up until he cut his fingers off in a saw. He can still play accordion some, but now Charlie was a pretty good fiddle player.

MK So after Smith's Victrola people got radios, did they?

WS Yeah, they got a radio that operated off of batteries, and only one could listen at a time on it. You had to use earphones. Then finally they got one that had a big horn on it, and everybody could listen in the house. But it wasn't too good. There was a lot of interference back at that time, you know. But we'd listen to a station that had the old country music on, you know, hillbilly music. I heard John Carson and Arthur Smith. They had a station at Hopkinsville, Kentucky, used to hear a lot of good music over that but I just couldn't remember who did the playing. But the Grand Ole Opry was the main place.

MK What about the Carter Family and Jimmy Rogers?

WS I worked a long time to learn "The Wildwood Flower" on the guitar. I finally worked it out. [Then a piece] that Jimmy Rogers could pick out on the guitar. I learned that from records, see. The Carter Family put out a lot of records and I learned all of their songs. I could play all them on a guitar, could pick them with a straight pick or my finger picks, either one . . . Yes, and I played with Clayton McMichen in Virginia. They'd have fiddlers' contests, and Clayton, he'd always win. Couldn't beat him on a fiddle. He'd never take the prize though. He'd always hand it down to Emery Street—we called him "Stroupy"—he was from Harrisonburg. He was in the monument business there. That's what caused his death, that old dust. He done the work with chisels, you know. Terrible thing. "Stroupy" was an awful good fiddle player.

MK So you just soaked up every bit of music you could find locally. You were interested in everybody who played anything, whether it was guitar or banjo or . . . ?

WS Yes, anything. Accordion, or anything. Feller by the name of Bernard Kuhn come in here from Cameron, West Virginia. I'd play the fiddle and he'd play the accordion. He was might fine, he'd play any fiddle tune, could read any music. I played a lot of music. Every spare minute I got I'd put it in on the music. 'Course I never went out and played for a living, I just played for the fun of it mostly.

MK While you were growing up you sought out all the people that played locally, but you were also listening first to the gramophones and then to the radios, so you were getting two kinds of influences. I guess everybody who played was paying attention to the radio music, weren't they?

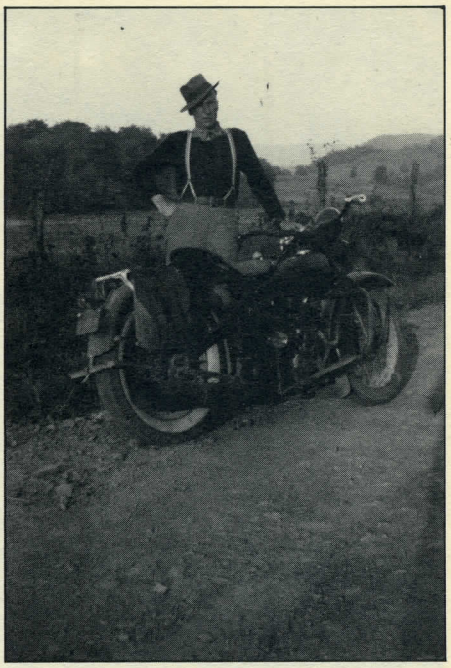
WS Dh yes, they'd set up 'til . . .

MK And try to play like Fiddlin' John Carson or . . . ?

WS And music back in them days was harder to learn than it is now, because you couldn't see nobody play and you just had to figure out what he was doing the best you could. It's much easier nowadays because you can see them play, 'bout how they're bowing the fiddle, or picking the banjo or guitar, everything like that, you know.

MK Well, when did you first notice a class of professional musicians who did nothing else but travel and play on the radio?

WS Back in, oh, 1936, somewhere along there. You could make more money back in '28, in the '30's, up in '35 and '36, at playing around just the local places, houses and square dances. I've played for dances by myself a lot of times. And then maybe we'd have a guitar player and would take up a collection. Some of the fellers, them Sees up here, was very liberal with their money. They liked to



Motorcycling was a passion second only to fiddling in Woody's younger days. Photographer unknown.

dance and they'd throw in a $10 bill. That was a lot of money back at that time. Ten dollars was ten days hard work. Ralph See, he was Circuit Clerk for years here at Elkins. And he'd say, "Now boys, we got to pay the fiddler." He wore one of them hard-shelled straw hats and he'd take her round. They'd always throw in a $10 bill apiece, them Sees would. I made more money back then than you could make in the '40's or '50's. Back in the '50's now, why music went over pretty good, but still there was no money in it. I tried it down through Bluefield and around, and a man could starve to death playing.

MK Well, by 1930 you were a pretty swell young feller, weren't you? You played music a lot, what else did you do for fun?

WS I'd fish and hunt. Oh, yes, and rode them motorcycles. Yes, sir, I even tried out riding the walls —just about a day. I seen I wasn't going to last long at that.

MK Riding the walls? What was that?

WS Oh, that was over at the Pocahontas County Fair. It was a thing like a silo, about 50 feet high, the walls were straight up and down. The motorcycles belonged to the company.

MK How did you get started up the side of the wall, did you have stricky tires?

WS [You started up a ramp] slanted like that, and then as you got on the walls, why, no trouble to ride on the walls.

MK And you could actually do that?

WS Yes, I could ride a motorcycle, stand up on it or anything.

LS Tell him what you did, tell him how you rode the motorcycle.

WS I rode it every way you could get on it . . . stood up on it and played the fiddle.

MK No!

WS Stood up on the seat, yes, and rode it right down through Mill Creek. Lot of them fellers can tell you.

LS He rode it from Huttonsville to Valley Bend standing up on the seat.

WS Backwards.

MK Was that a big old Harley, or what was it?

WS Big Harley Davidson, yes. I rode it on rock road or anything standing up on it. Most perfectly balanced feller in this country! I could have rode a wire, where you walked a wire, no trouble for me to balance anything. Keith Ambler brought his motorcycle over here from Buckhannon, to get me to dress it up for him a little bit. I did, and we took it up the road. He was in the car, had two other fellers with him. I drove it up to the foot of Cheat Mountain and adjusted the carburetor up real good, set the points, and maybe put a new set of spark plugs in it. Coming back down, why, at about 60 miles an hour, I stood up on the seat and passed him. And old Keith, he couldn't hardly get over that. He come back up and said, "Wood, please don't do that again. You don't know how that scared me!" But it wasn't no trouble to me, I could ride it. Any way I wanted to get on, it didn't make any difference.

Woody and Laverne Simmons, c. 1935. Photographer unknown.

MK Tell me more about the Pocahontas County Fair.

WS We was playing music all at the same time. Gander Digman, Bill Rosencrantz, Tuck Withrow, and Bob Carr. Stayed in a tent there part of the time. Part of the time we slept in the barn with the horses. Yes, and Gander Digman, he'd get there usually before I did. The Fair lasted a week, and maybe I wouldn't get there 'til on Tuesday. And he'd be there, they'd have him dressed up. He played the steam organ. He'd play for the hoochie-koochie girls, you know.

MK What do you mean, "hoochie-koochie girls," Woody?

WS Well (laughs).

MK What do you mean by that?

WS They were the girls that done the dancing on the stage, you know. Yes, and they'd come on . . .

MK Was that an imported act, or were they local Pocahontas County girls?

WS No, no. That was a big carnival. And they'd come out on the stage and do these dances, you know, and he'd play the steam organ for them. And he was a champion dancer. There was nobody in the world could beat him at dancing.

MK He stayed pretty steamy himself, I guess?

WS He was a regular clown up there. He'd join up with us and play with us when we got there. He'd always win the dancing contest. Sometimes, well, Hemp Carpenter might have beat him a time or two. But Gander was pretty hard to beat. And Pete Mosder, he was playing in the band. He had a Gibson tenor banjo. I've never seen him from that day to this. He lived at Independence, West Virginia. We had our pictures taken together.

S. P. Wallace was a wholesale druggist. He was president of the fair, I believe, and he let me sleep in his office one night. And then fiddled in them fiddlers' contests, and fiddled agin a mighty hard old feller, Edwin Hammons. Sometimes I beat Edwin, sometimes he'd beat me. Then one year they had a banjo contest. I went to see Jay Richards in the hardware store, and I bought a brand new banjo to play in the banjo contest. They were also going to have a fiddlers' contest the next day. Well, they ruled me out and wouldn't let me play in [either] contest. I took the banjo back, told them to give me my money back, but they wouldn't, I had to keep it. The old banjo's still around. Paul Collett down here at Elkins owns the banjo now. He give me $40 for it. And I offered him $50

back for it. I would give him that back, to have the old banjo back again.

MK Was it about that time that you met Laverne?

LS When you rode the motorcycle and played the fiddle, well, we were already married then. We had been going around together on Becky's Creek for about a year before we even thought we was courting. We'd known each other all of our life. He'd dated every girl around but me. Finally he settled down with me.

MK Did you play music together?

WS She played the mandolin. She'd have been a fine singer, a fine musician if she'd kept on playing—why, if she'd kept on I'd probably be singing, too. Quit playing.

MK Why did you stop?

LS Just did . . . I played with him for a long time, but I was young and Woody was young when we was married, and I'd get mad easy and he would, too. And I guess I just quit. I played a few dances with you, didn't I?

WS Yeah.

MK You know, a lot of fiddlers I've talked to over the years tell me they quit for a while. Did you ever quit playing?

WS Yes, sir, I quit, but I don't remember how many years. I thought maybe about ten, but I don't think I did. Didn't quit that long, did I, Laverne?

LS No, because you began playing dances when William was tiny little. You started playing with Zillah Hutchinson. You never quit no more, you played steady.

WS But they'd be a lot of times I'd quit for a long time. Now one time I quit and went to work on a strip job at night. Went to work on a shovel, could make more money working on the shovel. Back at that time there wasn't much money in playing. You'd play at those club houses, why they'd maybe pay you $5 or $6. You'd burn gas coming and going, and you didn't make anything out of it. Far as going out to make a living playing music, I never did fool with that.

Woody Simmons and Zillah Hutchinson playing at the Log Cabin in Elkins, c. 1950. Woody and Zillah performed together regularly for several years. Photographer unknown.

Fiddle contests at the Forest Festival in Elkins drew large crowds and lots of local fiddlers. The prize money was good and the competition stiff. The festive spirit brought people together from all over the countryside despite unpredictable, spitty October weather. The downtown section was blocked off for street dances and other exciting events. Simmons attended the very first Forest Festival in 1930, when he was just 19, and won the fiddle contest. He recalls interesting details of early festivals.

WS I don't remember what the prize money was. Wasn't much, though. I believe I played "Mississippi Sawyer." And we played several years. Dewey Hamrick was just talking last summer like he got a big laugh out of it. He played in the contests, too. He lives over in Princeton. At that time he lived on Point Mountain.

[In 1932] me and Brownie Ross tied for first place. Brownie, he was from Wendell, West Virginia. Worked in the coal mines. He was a real good fiddle player. That year they judged by the applause of the crowd, and you couldn't tell any difference. They's both the same. So it was decided we'd play another tune, said we had to play the same tune in the play-offs. Brownie said, "How about Mississippi Sawyer," and I said alright. So we played it, and still Dick Collett, the feller that was doing the judging, couldn't tell any difference in the applause. And he said we'd just flip a coin, so they flipped the coin and I won.

MK What were those early Forest Festivals like?

WS They had street dances. I played for the street dances for years and years. They have it up in a building now, and nobody goes hardly. But there was an awful crowd there when they had it on the streets. We played on a platform up to the YMCA and they danced on the street. There sure was a lot of people attending, I know that. Usually it was pretty weather, only it was kind of cold. One year I remember the second day of the Forest Festival there was three inches of snow.

MK When did your radio career begin?

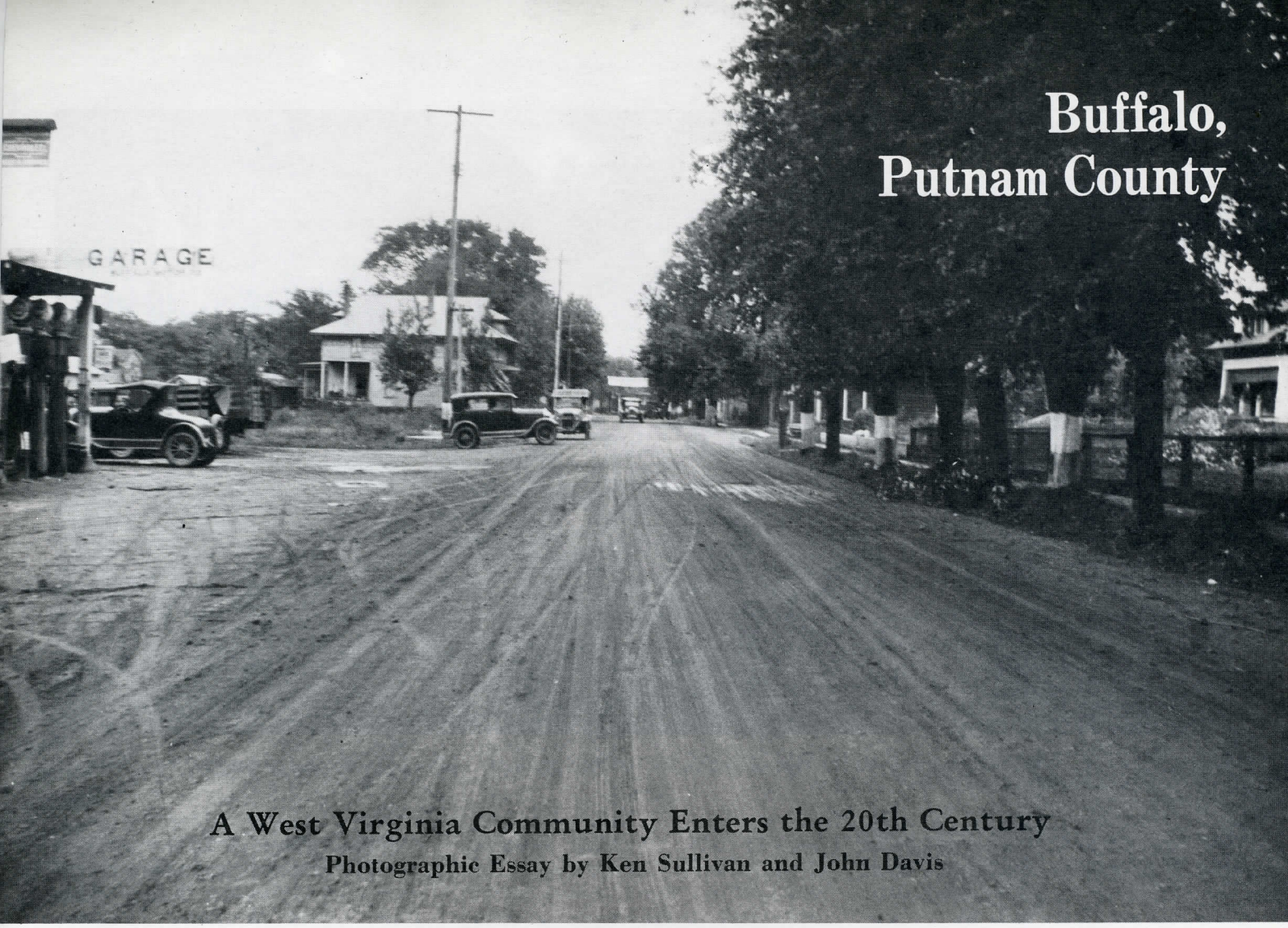
WS In 1935, I believe it was, I played with the Leary Family over in Harrisonburg, Virginia. I played for them regular when Wilma Lee was [a girl]. Wilma Lee Cooper, she's still playing over the Grand Ole Opry. Jake Leary was her dad, you know. She played the guitar and I done the fiddle. They was great singers. Nobody could beat them.

LS Wilma Lee started out playing the guitar, playing radio shows.

WS Yeah, they was the greatest singers there was ever in this country. They could sing most any style, they sung Carter Family songs. They would sing a lot of hymns.

Then I fiddled for Joe Phillips and the Dixie Pals in Fairmont. Was on the air at 5:30 to 6:00 in the morning, then from 9:00 'til 9:15, and 4:00 to 4:30 [Sagebrush Roundup]. I didn't play there very long, didn't even join the union. They wouldn't let me carry my fiddle case even then, cause they was checking there all the time. There were several groups on the air in Fairmont at the time. Snap and Ginger was there, and another group. Arnold Selman, the banjo picker, he went with me. He didn't have no job. And we stayed there in Fairmont. We got to playing bluegrass with Snap and Ginger some, and was going to kind of organize as a band. Frankie

(Continued on page 61)



Buffalo, Putnam County

A West Virginia Community Enters the 20th Century

Photographic Essay by Ken Sullivan and John Davis

Route 35, Buffalo's Main Street, c. 1923. Buffalo Motor Company, a Chevrolet dealership, at left.

BUFFALO, Putnam County, is one of the oldest communities on the Kanawha River. The site at the mouth of Cross Creek was first occupied by American Indians, settled farmer-hunters whose flourishing village supported 500 to 1,000 people by the mid-1600's. Within a century their community had disappeared from the riverbank, however, a casualty of tribal wars and the European diseases preceding white expansion westward.

George Washington is supposed to have been the first white American to visit the Buffalo area, in 1770. Washington, a major land speculator, had extensive holdings on the lower Kanawha, and he arrived with a party of surveyors. William Clark of Culpeper, Virginia, was the first Buffalo land owner, and his daughter's family became the first permanent white settlers in the early 1820's. Clark's son-in-law, Benjamin Craig, laid out the town of Buffalo in 1833, incorporating it in 1837.

As Buffalo's first mayor, Craig proudly watched his community grow. The town's first important industrial establishment was the Oldaker mill, built at its Buffalo location in 1836. A larger mill followed in the 1840's, built by the Pitrat brothers. Craig himself was a partner in Buffalo's first store.

Within a generation after its founding, Buffalo was a thriving river town. An 1854 letter notes the existence of the Pitrat steam-powered grist mill, a steam sawmill, two churches, eight shops, and a bakery. There were 250 to 300 residents. Buffalo was linked by the Kanawha River to the rich Ohio Valley trade, and served an extensive agricultural hinterland of its own. The surrounding river bottoms were more suited to a plantation economy than most parts of West Virginia and Appalachia, and the area supported a few slaveholders and a small black population. Benjamin Harrison Sterrett, a major plantation owner, was a community opinion leader, and Buffalo's sympathies were pro-Southern as the Civil War crisis approached.

Cultural life in 19th century Buffalo centered around the Buffalo Academy, opened as a private school in 1849. Quarried stone and bricks for the building were manufactured locally, and Buffalo's leading citizens directed the joint stock company managing the Academy. The sturdy building was put to military uses during the Civil War, and was in the hands of both armies at different times during the conflict.

Taft political rally, 1912. Many other Republicans, in West Virginia and nationally, shifted to Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party that year, and Democrat Woodrow Wilson was elected.

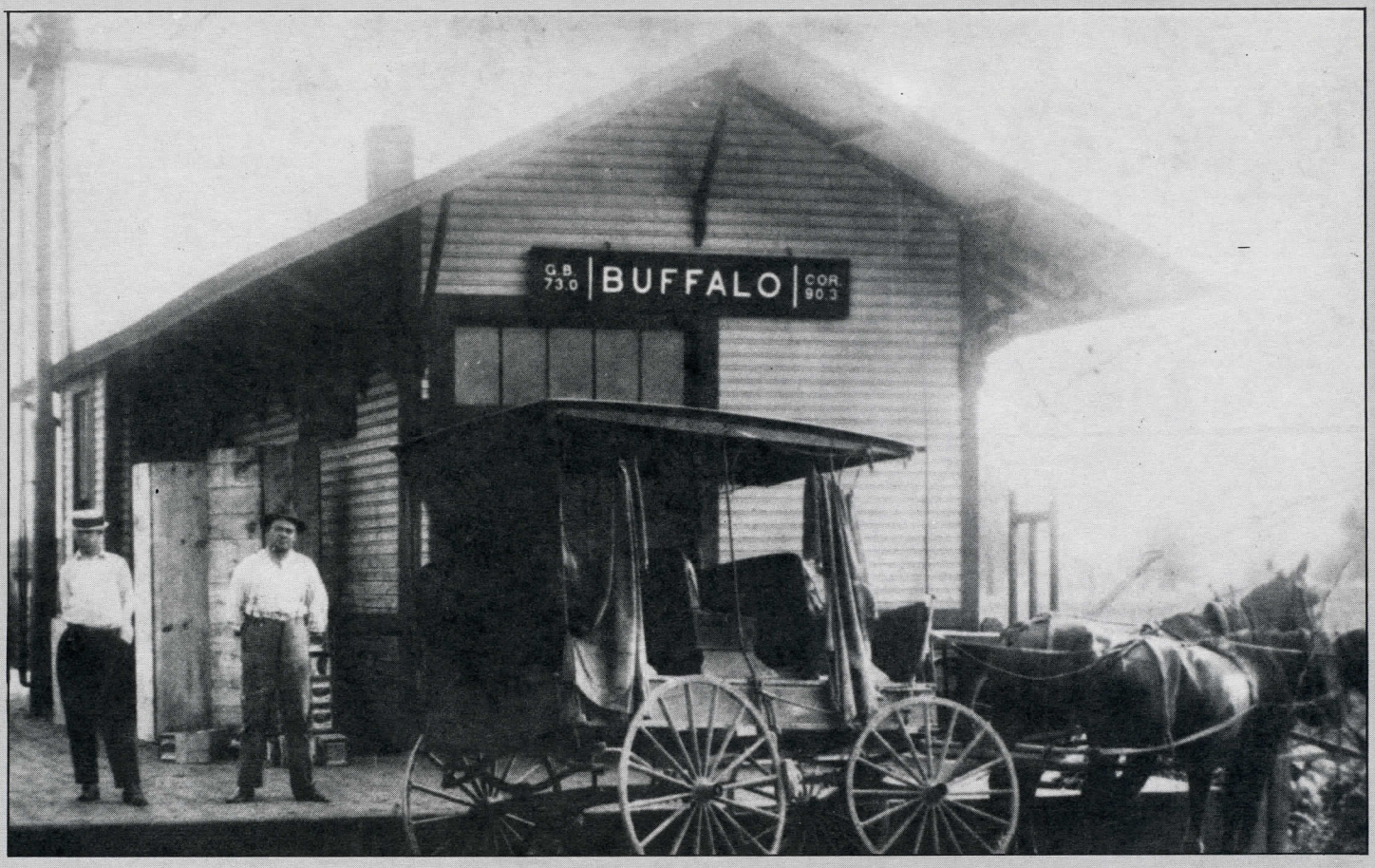
Necessary repairs were made after the War, and the Academy passed into the hands of the Buffalo School District and later into the county school system. It was retired from active use in the early 1950's, after more than a century's service to education.

The transfer of the Academy to the public school system signalled an important change. Buffalo after the Civil War would no longer be content with private education for a select few, instead demanding an equal chance in life for all—in theory, at least, and perhaps largely in practice. A more democratic society was emerging, and Buffalo thrived under the new order.

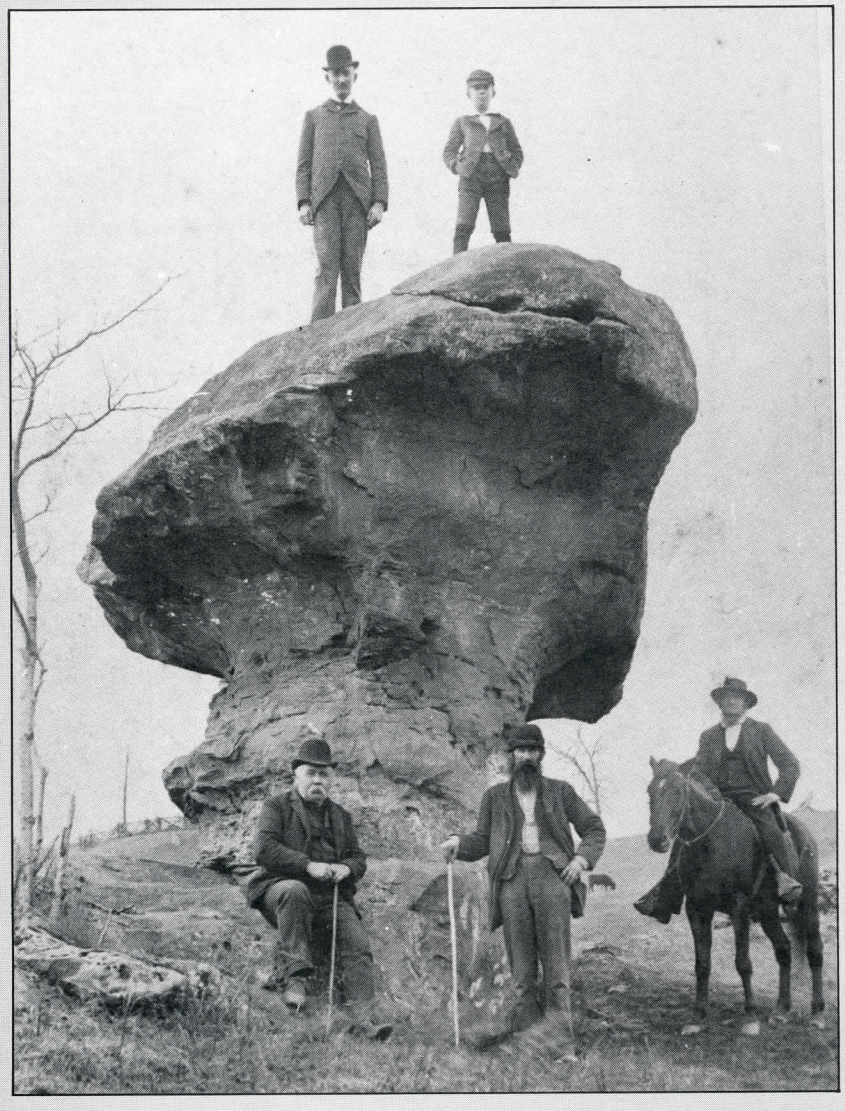
As it approached and entered the 20th century, Buffalo was at the height of its community development. A prosperous business district lined Main Street, and citizens bought and sold in a variety of modern stores. River boats stopped regularly at the town landing, and townspeople made smaller boats for their own use on the river. Visitors and traveling salesmen stopped at the Buffalo Hotel, then managed by the Holstein family, and Cecil Blake made a living carrying people to and from the railroad depot and the river landing in his horsedrawn hack. In 1912, voters rallied for William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, or Teddy Roosevelt, as their political preferences dictated, and during the World War all rallied for the soldiers overseas. Men worked at the Buffalo Mills, in shops or stores, on farms or on the river, and the Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, and other organizations provided a social life after work. There was a city band, a baseball team, and—after 1923—a high school football team to do battle with other schools in the Valley. Buffalonians attended church on Sunday morning, visited or made excursions to the Devil's Tea Table and other scenic places in the afternoon, and they appear to have been happy.

During these years, Joe Wallace was Buffalo's crippled jeweler and photographer. Wallace took a keen interest in community affairs, photographing most of the townspeople and the important and unimportant events of day-to-day Buffalo. Mrs. Ruth Lewis, Wallace's daughter who is now in her 90's, recalls, "Papa made a picture of everybody there, and when he'd make a picture of a group or family, he'd make an extra one for himself and toss it into a certain box in the corner. When he died, I inherited that big box of pictures—everybody that ever lived in Buffalo that I know of." Most of the pictures that follow were made by Wallace, and many of them came from Mrs. Lewis' box.

John Davis of modern Buffalo is no less interested in his community than Joe Wallace was before him. Over the last several years, Davis has gathered and carefully copied all the Wallace photographs he could find, along with hundreds of others from Buffalo and Putnam County. Buffalo is fortunate in having had citizens such as Wallace and Davis, and their work offers a unique glimpse of a West Virginia community entering the modern era.



Above: Cecil Blake's hack at Buffalo Depot. Blake stands at left, in white hat.
Left: Renner's Store. Mr. Renner leans proprietorally against the door, center.

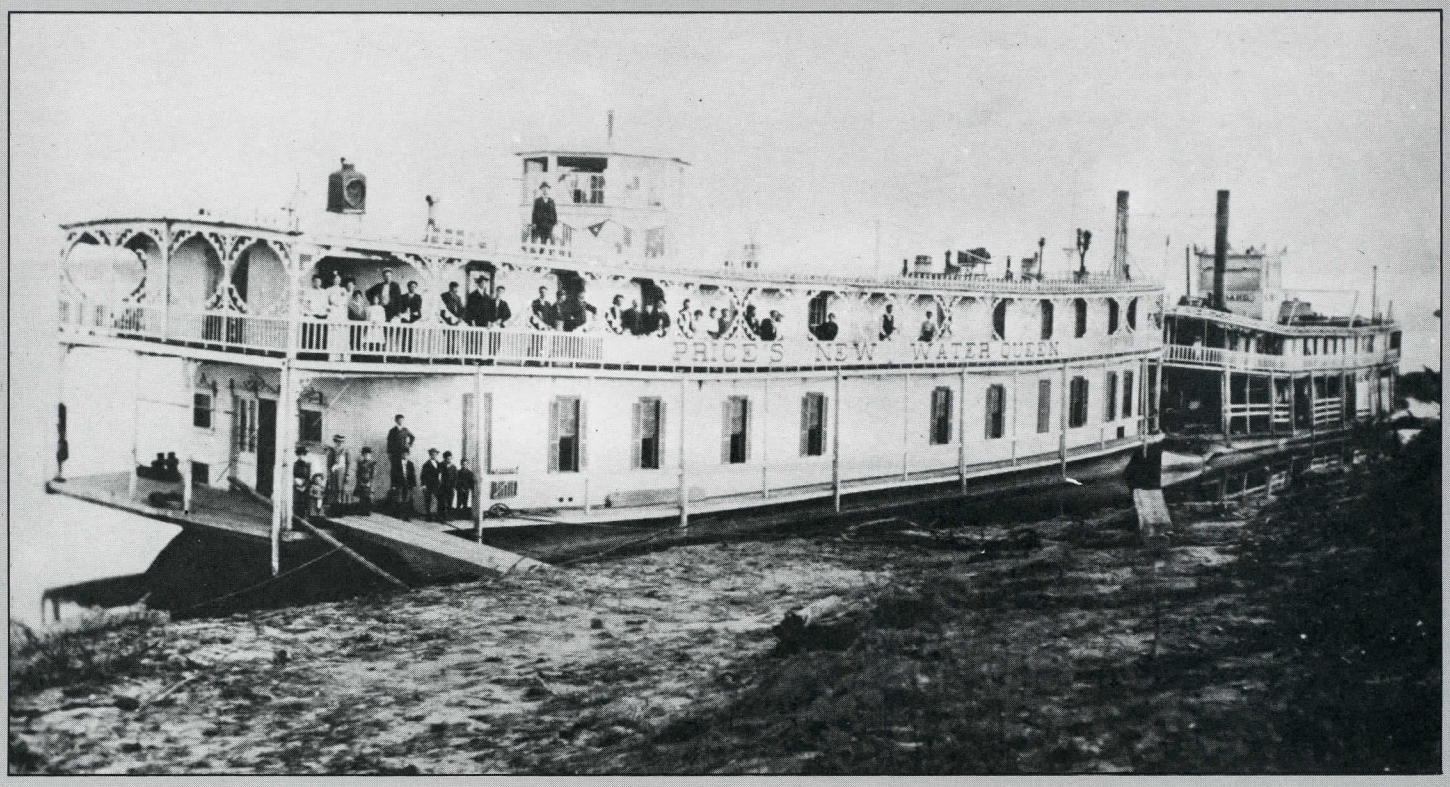


Left: Devil's Tea Table, near Buffalo, was a local landmark. Squire J. H. Collins, justice of the peace, is seated in front.
Below: Squire Collins at home.
Above Right: Dentist J. E. McComb with his horse and buggy. French Thornton at left.
Below Right: Dr. McComb with a new form of transportation, c. 1910.

Left: Charlie Holstein in his barbership. Woodrow Wilson campaign poster suggests the year was 1912 or 1916. *Below:* Jim Cochran's Store. *Above and Below Right:* Charles Harris Hardware and Quickle's Groceries and Dry Goods occupied the same building at Main and Mulberry Streets at different times in Buffalo's history.


GO TO CHARLES HARRIS FOR HARDWARE.
FURNITURE. HARNESS. PAINTS. OILS. VARNSH.
WAGONS. BUGGIES. HARROWS. DRILLS. LIME. CEMENT.
SASH AND DOORS.
BUFFALO WVA.

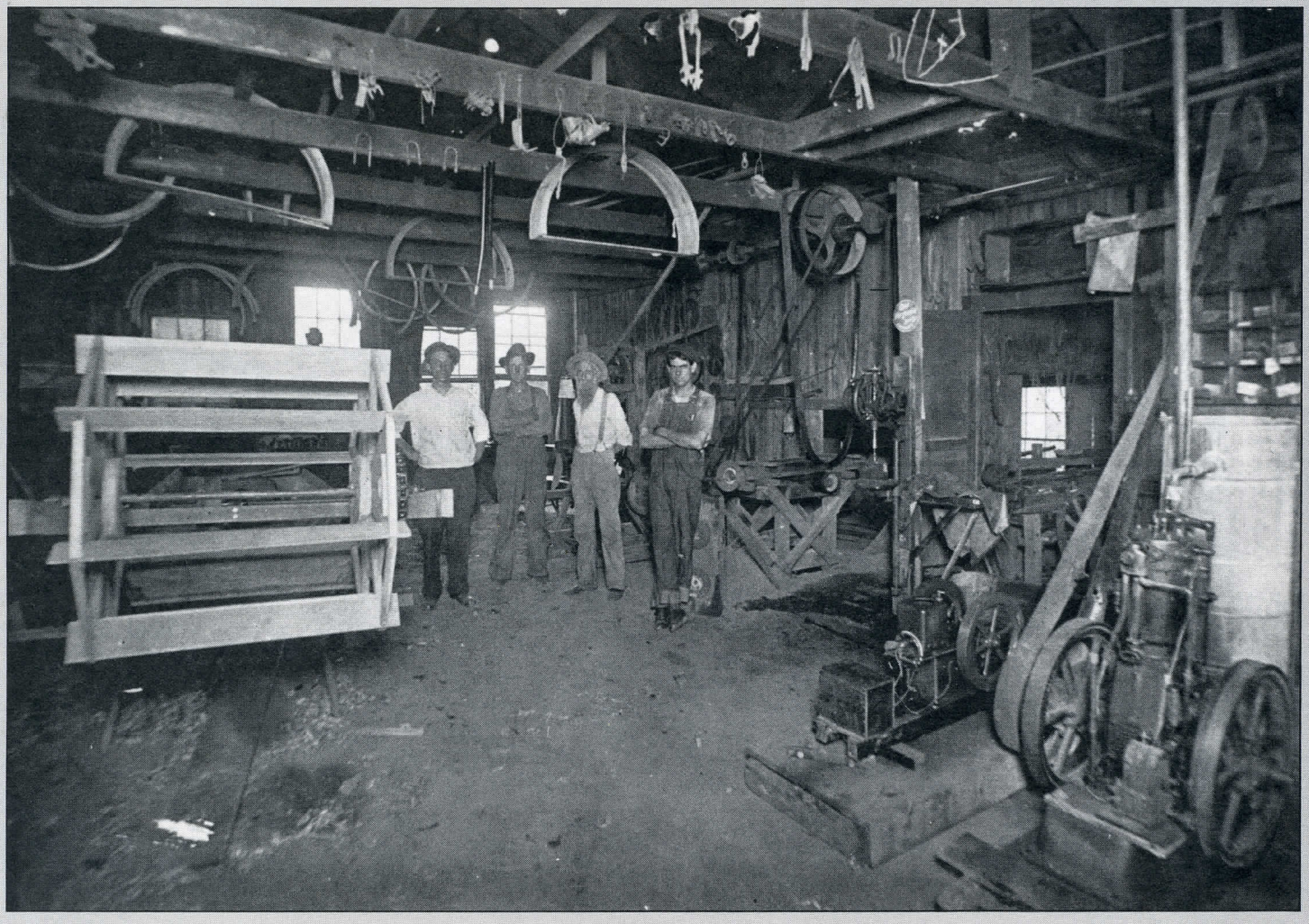
Top: Oscar Douglass, grandfather of the present West Virginia Agriculture Commissioner Gus R. Douglass, is at center rear of this baseball team. *Bottom:* Buffalo's first football team, academic year 1923-24. John Davis' uncle, Harold "Rounder" Davis, is third from left; coach L. K. Lowenstein, at right, was later superintendent of schools in neighboring Kanawha County. Only two of the young men had ever seen a football before the fall of 1923, and Buffalo lost its first game to Point Pleasant, 28-0.



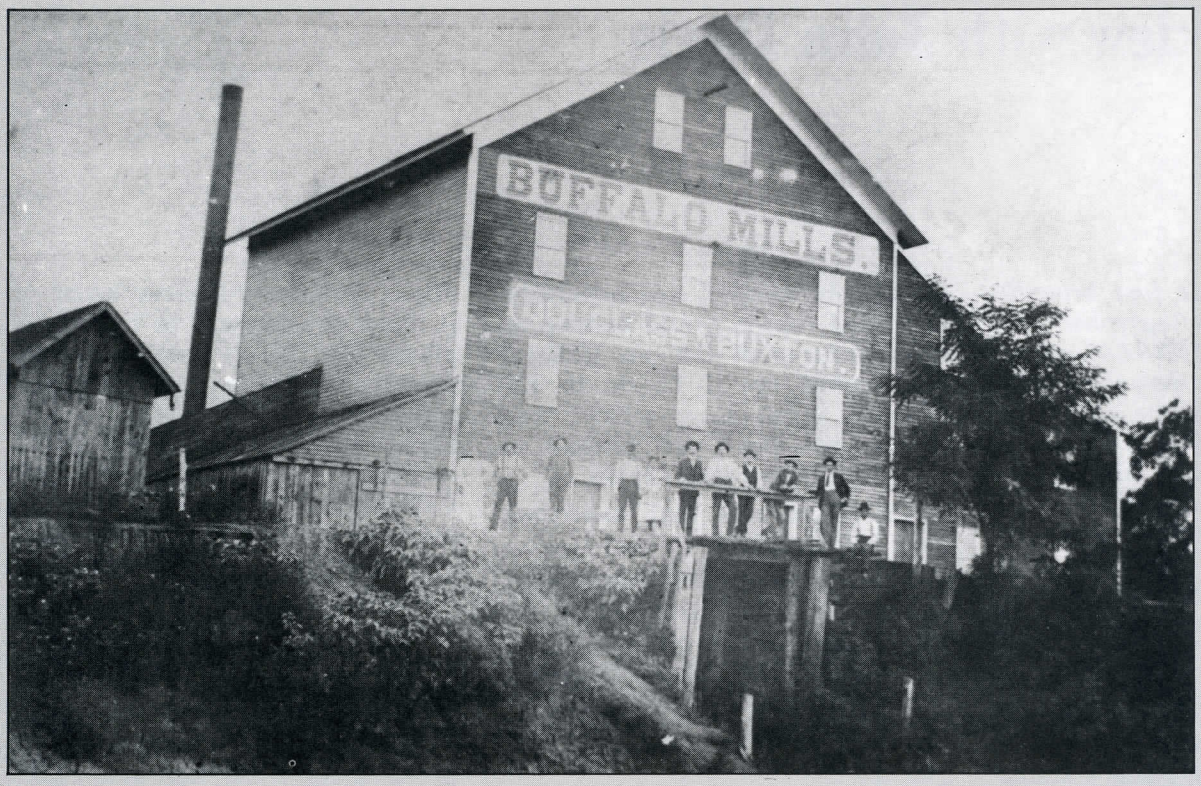
Above: Price's New Water Queen was one of the showboats stopping regularly at Buffalo and other river towns.

Left: "Baby Blanche" Pickert, one of the Price's showboat performers.
Lower Left: Brothers Jesse and Joe Patchell, river captains, aboard an unknown steamboat. Jesse's wife sits beside him.
Below: John Davis I, in three-piece suit, with 83 pound catfish taken from the Kanawha. Harold "Rounder" Davis stands on other side of his father's catch.

Above: The 1913 flood inundated West Virginia communities from Wheeling southward, and Buffalo was no exception. Lula Holstein, of the innkeeper's family, stands with arms akimbo on porch roof, while manager Elizabeth Holstein looks from window.
Below: Buffalo Hotel at a later, dryer time. Mrs. Elizabeth Holstein is standing in front of the door; son Charlie Holstein stands at other side of door. Lula Holstein is the handsome young woman in the large white hat.
Above Right: Road crew grading Cross Creek Road, outside Buffalo.
Below Right: Henry Raynes' blacksmith and machine shop. Jude Martin, noted carpenter and boat builder, stands by the "Eureka," the small paddlewheeler under construction at left.



Above: Main Street patriotic rally during World War I, c. 1918. Buffalo Academy in background.
Above Right: Buffalo Mills was a major employer.
Below Right: Main Street, Buffalo


BUFFALO MILLS.

An Interview with John Davis

By Ken Sullivan

When John Davis first brought his remarkable photographic collection to the GOLDENSEAL office, editor Ken Sullivan took the opportunity to interview him about his interest in the subject. In a wide-ranging conversation Mr. Davis discussed not only historic photography, but also local history, historic preservation, and his own deep roots in Buffalo and Putnam County. A shortened version of the interview follows.

Ken Sullivan. How did you get started on your project?

John Davis. Well, I was a stamp collector, you know. During the Bicentennial they wanted me to do a philatelic display, and somebody suggested that it would be nice to have pictures of the old Buffalo. They asked me if I'd do it. Of course, I didn't know what I was getting into, but I just jumped in and went ahead and started.

KS When was that, sometime back before 1976?

JD That was in '74. See, we was planning on the Bicentennial, on '76. We had pictures out in '75, then '76 was the big thing. Then the stuff just kept piling up.

KS What was the first batch you got hold of?

JD Well, somebody asked me for something about the old creamery in Buffalo. I'd never heard of it. Now you know, I've lived here all my life. So my neighbors were sitting up there, an old couple, lived right up from me. I asked one of them, "Have you ever heard of the creamery?" Well, this Annie McCulloch, she's a character anyway, she said, "Why, Aunt Bessie's got a picture of it over home." So here she came with a shoe box full of pictures.

KS What happened after that?

JD I just started asking other people, and you know one person would tell me about somebody having a picture of this, and other people having a picture of this. Like Mrs. Frazier, I went up there

John Davis of Buffalo. Photograph by Richard Lee.

to visit her one day, and she had a picture of the first owned automobile in Buffalo which was a fascinating picture to me. First car privately owned.

KS And you feel that because you were born and raised there, people knew you and knew that they could trust you?

JD Oh, yes. There was no question about that. I know I'd go back to some of the old timers, and they never even hesitated in letting me borrow their pictures. None of them worried about it.

KS At first, your pictures were coming from Putnam County and after a while county natives elsewhere in the country started sending things?

JD Oh, yes, yes. Mrs. Ruth Lewis from down in Florida, she was going to mail some to me and I said, "Oh, no! They'd get lost in the mail." She said, "Well, I'll insure them." I said that wouldn't be no good, the pictures would be gone. Then when she came up from Florida, she brought all of them. Of course, her father, he was the photographer there in Buffalo, so the majority of my pictures were what her father would take.

KS What was his name?

JD Joe Wallace.

KS And he took a lot of the pictures that you've got?

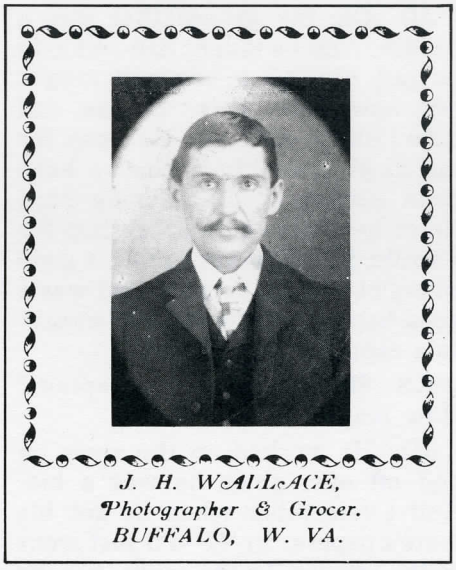
JD Oh, yeah, yeah. And then, see, you'll find a lot of pictures on post cards. Jim Cochran's store, these photographers would come through and take pictures and put them on post cards and then he'd sell them. I found a lot of them like that, with his advertisement on there, "Compliments of Jim Cochran's Store."

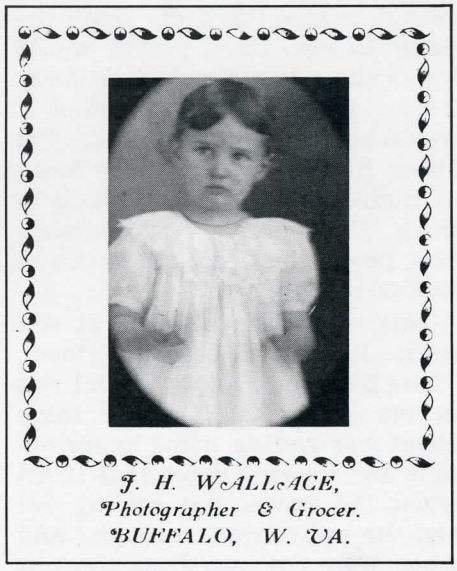
KS So it was an advertising gimmick?

JD I suppose so, in a way. I don't know whether he gave them away or sold them. But I surmise that he sold them. That picture of the creamery, first picture that really got me started, was on a post card.

KS This Joe Wallace—he had a photography studio there in town?

JD Yeah, he had it right in his store. He ran this store, the way I understand, and he'd taken pictures of everything. I've got one here, with kids dressed up, having a funeral for a bird. They got the bird in a wheelbarrow, and they had pall bearers and the chief mourner in black.





Wallet-size portraits by photographer Joe Wallace.

KS You got most of your Wallace pictures from his daughter, Mrs. Ruth Lewis. Did other people in the community have his photographs?

JD Everybody that lived in Buffalo, even my family. I found where my dad was born, and a picture of my grandmother taken by Mr. Joe Wallace. He must have been a nice guy. You can imagine a man taking time to take pictures of kids, just any little incident. When he would take pictures for people, Mrs. Ruth told me he'd make one for them and then he'd make one for himself, and put it over in a box. He'd always make two, so there was a pretty good record kept of his picture-taking.

KS What about the rest of Putnam County? Does a lot of your photography collection come from the rest of the county, or mostly Buffalo?

JD Well, right now it's mostly Buffalo. I'm picking up a few things here and there on other cities, but so much stuff has turned up in Buffalo, you know, you copy what you have. There are pictures available from parts of the county which I want to do—Red House and Winfield, Hurricane and Poca. But I haven't had time to do anything on the others to amount to anything.

KS Do you think that other communities in West Virginia would have this kind of photographic history to them?

JD You know, it's hard to say. I've thought about that, I've thought every city should be doing this. But I don't know. For Joe Wallace, it must have been more of love with him than taking pictures for money, 'cause he took pictures of everything. And when you had a man like that taking pictures, then you're going to have a pretty good record. Whether every city had a man like that, I don't know. It would be hard to tell. But I'm sure that there must be some other cities that have maybe more than what I've found.

KS You think that Buffalo's fortunate in having had a person there who was interested in recording a community on film as he lived in it?

JD Oh, yes, yes. I definitely do. And I'm fortunate that there were so many people that were interested in Buffalo and loved Buffalo

enough to save this stuff. That's the thing to me. That people would love a city where they'd save every little thing like that. A lot of it would be meaningless to them, you know, just as a picture. But being of Buffalo, it meant something to them. That's been a warm satisfaction, people that think as much of Buffalo as I did.

This was quite a town at one time. It was a beautiful town. Those trees—you know, when I was in the service all I could think about was getting home in springtime and walking down that street when the leaves was coming out and the sun coming through. And when they cut out those trees, it like to broke my heart. Right there where I was showing you. That was my thought, to walk down that street right there.

KS When would you say was the high point of Buffalo's history?

JD I don't know what you mean by that. See, it burned down two or three times. Buffalo at one time had several doctors, practicing physicians, there. Had a drugstore, a millinery shop, a bakery, couple of barbershops, several mercantile stores—you know, which handled everything. And I guess at one time it was a steamboat town, really. Steamboat trade, and they had the brickyard, all the bricks was made there for these buildings. They had a furniture factory, they had cooppers made barrels—it was quite a prosperous town. And the mill, big red mill—that was back before the War. That mill there, the old mill was kind of the thing that drew people in, from Kentucky and Ohio and everywhere, to get their grain ground down.

KS Have your people been in Buffalo for generations?

JD Well, my grandfather married grandma there in 1899. They were from over in Ohio, Ironton, Ohio. I had an Uncle Bill that made harnesses here, and I feel like that he lured grandfather over to Buffalo, where he met grandma, and married. Around the turn of the century—I'd say 1890's.

KS What did your grandfather do for a living?

JD Oh, my grandfather was a barber. And he taught dad—he said he put him on a box and taught him how to cut hair. 'Course, dad didn't like to cut hair. He'd pay for me to go somewhere else to keep from cutting it! But during hard times he'd run that barbershop for a while. He could have made a good living at being a barber. Dad was a good barber, but he worked mostly as a captain on the river.

KS He was a river captain? How long did he do that?

JD He worked on the river on and off ever since he was a kid. And I remember when he got his mate's papers. In '41—I'd just went in the service. In the early '40's, he got his master's papers.

KS And that made him a captain? Did they use steamboats at that time?

JD Steamboats back there when I was a kid. I don't know when the first diesels come there, but it was during the War. No, it wasn't, either. Fish started dying in the river about '34, '35. People blame all that on the chemical plants, but I think those diesel boats had a lot to do with that, oil on top of the water. I remember we used to go dip catfish out, you could dip up a boatload of them where they couldn't go down, just swimming on top of the water.

KS Did you ever spend any time on the river yourself?

JD Oh, yeah, I worked on a steamboat. Wheeled coal on a steamboat. That was after the War, '46. First job I had after I got out of the service. Deckhand on a steamboat. Wheeling it out of a barge and up for the stokers, stoking the furnace. That was a good healthy life. It would burn so much and you'd wheel so much, like in the daytime we'd wheel double so we wouldn't have to be out there at night and wheel it. You're coming out of a barge about 11 foot down, and up a ramp, boy. I've seen boats pull in there, couldn't leave 'cause they couldn't get enough deckhands. They'd start up there with one wheelbarrow and fall over and just quit.

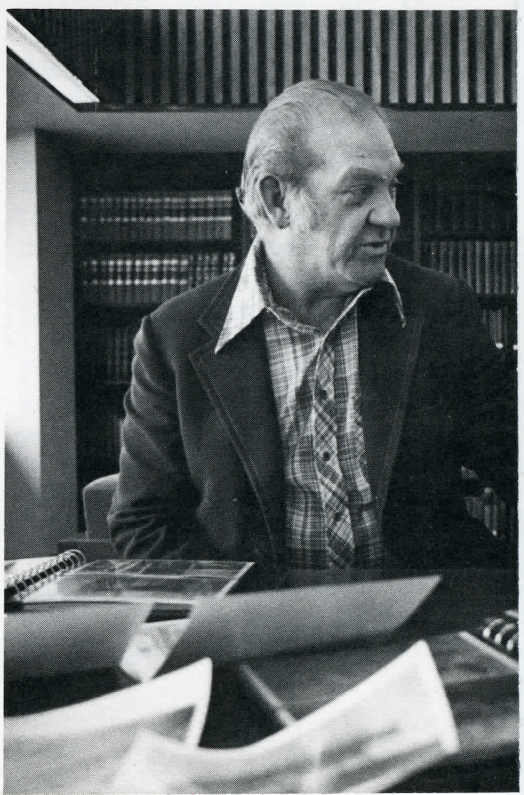
KS Where did the boats run to and from? What kind of runs did they make?

JD Some of the boats went all the way to New Orleans. 'Course, now at that time I worked for Armco Steel, and we went to the head of the Kanawha to get coal and to Huntington—that was the run I was on. Then when I was with Island Creek Fuel and Transportation, we run to Huntington and Pittsburgh.

KS Do you ever interview any of these older people that you work with in gathering your photographs?

JD Well, I've got two or three, but seems like every time I go to interview one I get so tied up listening at them I forget to turn the tape on. It's fascinating to me, those stories, you know. And what's really fascinating is some of the stories that they think, "Well, I shouldn't have told this." Take that lady I was telling you about that give me that first picture. I said, "Annie, that house you live in is pretty old, isn't it?" She said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, who lived there?" She said, "Old woman who lived here"—I forget her name, she called her by name—"she dressed like a man, overalls and everything." Said, "She decided to get

John Davis discusses Buffalo photography projec
Richard Lee.



married and she bought fancy nightgowns and negligees and she caught pneumonia and died." If I was writing stories down, stories like that are the thing I'd print!

KS We'll print it this time. You're also active in Putnam County in historic preservation?

JD I haven't had much luck so far, just that Academy. I'm trying to preserve that. Well, anything—like the Sterrett farm, or the Atkinson place, or the Academy, or even if they was going to tear down one of the churches I'd get up and holler, you know. Anything that's torn down that's historic, somebody's got to get up and holler about it. Try to make an effort to save it, in other words. Yet there's nothing I can do about it, just like I say, holler.

KS Could you give us a little history on the Academy, just a few words?

JD Well, a bunch of people went in and formed the stock company and built a school. Felt like they needed the school, and they built the Academy. That was 1849, and I don't know when it ceased to be a private school. But I know in the Civil War both sides had the possession of it at one time. It was used as a hospital during the Civil War, and there was troops stationed there. And then, after the Civil War, it was turned over to the county school system—not the county, to the district, because I don't think at that time they had the county system. The schools was left up to the districts. And then in 1950 it ceased to be a school.

KS And it was an academy from 1849?

JD 1849. It was a school of fine arts and science, and they taught classics, you know. And people came from different states, from everywhere, to go to school there because it was one of the first schools around. You know, that type of school. And I think Rossetter, the first principal, he went on to Marietta College, and I've heard a lot of people say Marshall University sprang from this Academy.

KS Is the building in danger now, or is it just a question of ownership?

JD Just a question of ownership. We're trying to establish that now, supposed to go to court this month. The lawyer was down to the city council the other day, one day this week, and he thought things looked good for us.

KS Who is active in that? The historical society is trying to establish ownership?

JD No, when I got those deeds I put it in the city's name. I feel like they will have to use the historical society as a guide to what historical purposes to use it for.

KS What use would be made of it?

JD Well, main thing is saving it. And what they have in mind would just be a meeting place, I suppose. I would hope that they might set one room aside for a library which could be an extension, you know, from the one in Hurricane. And then I'd like to see them restore a room of it like it was when I went to school there.

KS Oh, you went to school there?

JD Yeah, that was my first, and my dad went to school there. And I'd like for them maybe to try to find the desks and things like they used then and set one room up like it originally was a school. Then a place where people can have meetings, like our historical society might take a notion to want to meet there. Make it available for organizations, community use.

KS What was it like when you were there in school?

JD Oh, best years of my life, mercy. It's hard to explain something like that. It's just like anybody's youth—that's the best years of your life. I remember the warm days and the cold winters. Teachers would wrap each student up—that's the thing that I remember mostly, is the care that the teachers would take for the young kids.

KS The Academy is going to be nominated for the National Register of Historic Places?

JD Well, I'm pretty sure.

KS Now, you started your photography collection in '74. Did you have an interest in history before that?

JD Well, just through my stamp collection. I've always had it in my stamp collection, I'd say.

KS Do you have any time for your stamp collection now?

JD I got rid of it. I kept part—I've got part of my stamp collection. It's something I've been doing ever since—oh, I'd say '35, '34—is stamps. You don't break away from it that easy. I've quit a hundred times but went right back.

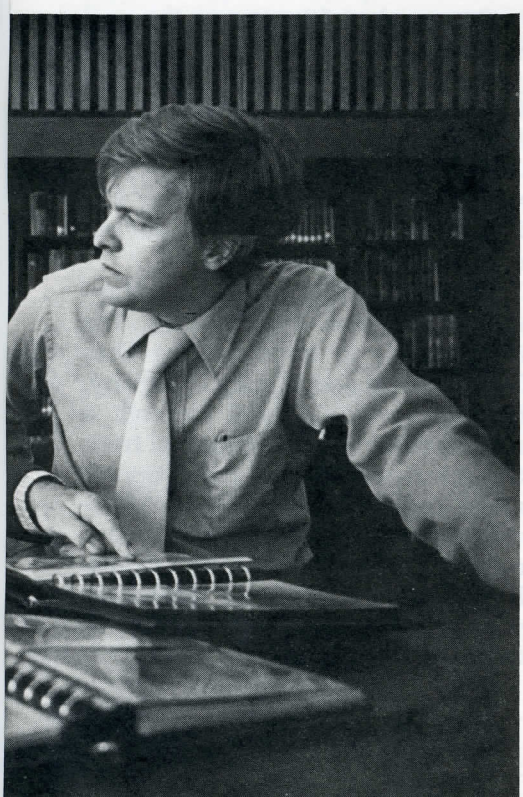
KS This must be costing you a lot of money as well as time, isn't it?

JD More than I can afford, but it's got to be done. That's the way I feel about it. It does. At times it's really pinched me real much. But there's nobody else to do it.

KS You feel it's got to be done?

JD Yeah, I say that, I say that with a lot of feeling. I think it should be done, and I'm going to do what I can. Of course, you know, you can only go so far anyway, do so much. And I don't think there's as much being done about it as there should be, or could be done. Like I say, there's people that could do this, I figure, ten times better than I can. But they won't do it.

n GOLDENSEAL editor Ken Sullivan. Photograph by



"A Hard Life, Anyway You Take It"

Recollections of a Putnam County Miner and Mine Foreman

By Gary Simmons

IN the southern tip of Putnam County, along the Kanawha River, are four small towns which owe their existence to the mining of coal. Bancroft, Plymouth, Black Betsy, and Raymond City were coal towns, built by coal companies that mined a nearby seam of coal from the 1860's until 1943. Except for a slag pile or two along the highway that leads down the river, or a group of look-alike houses at Plymouth, there is scant visible evidence that these were mining communities.

Coal is said to have been discovered in Putnam County near the mouth of the Pocatalico River about 1790, although none was mined until 1865 when the Averill Coal and Oil Company opened a mine at what was to be later named Raymond City. In the 1880's the Queen City Mining Company and the Energetic Coal Company opened mines at Queen City (now Black Betsy) and at Energetic (now Bancroft), respectively. They mined a five-foot seam of bituminous coal known as the Pittsburgh Number Eight. Over the years the mines were bought and sold, closed and reopened, but the fact remained that coal was the reason these towns existed.

D. Guy Thomas, who lives at Lanham, began working in 1904 in the mines at Raymond City. All told, he has worked 58 years in the coal industry. He spent most of those years at the Raymond City and Plymouth mines. I have visited with Mr. Thomas on several occasions, asking him about the towns, the mines, and his own life. The following includes excerpts of our recorded conversations.

Thomas' family moved to Raymond City from Poca in 1902. His father went to work for the Otto Marmet Coal and Mining Company, helping build a tunnel through a mountain for transporting coal from the mine to rail and river tipples along the Kanawha River. Afterwards the elder Thomas opened a company store at Harmond Creek. It was at the store in 1904 that young Thomas got his first offer of work in the mines.

Mule pulling mine car at the Number One mine at Harmond Creek. Driver unknown. Photograph c. 1904, by F. L. Hard, St. Albans, West Virginia, From collection of Reverend Robert Lett, Dunbar.

Working in the Mines

Gary Simmons. How did you get started in the mines?

D. Guy Thomas. I was down to the store—just wallering around with [Dad]. Wasn't doing anything—and there was a boy quit trapping in the mine, and old man [Andrew] Utt, the mine foreman, come in and asked Dad did he care to let me go in the mines to trap. And Dad said, "No, if he wants to go." Well, I said, "It'd tickle me to death to go." I thought I was a man then, you know, getting in the coal mine. They fixed me up a big lamp and mixed oil, kerosene and lard oil—wasn't supposed to burn any kerosene oil—to make a good light. And I was an 11-year-old boy. That was on my birthday. And down in there I went.

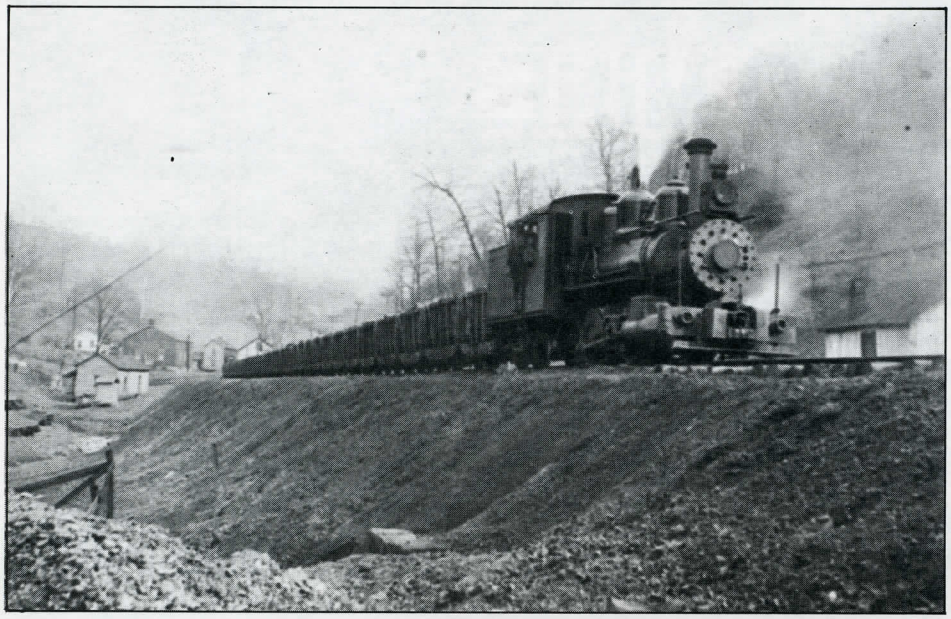
Thomas' first job, trapper boy, was one usually held by teenage boys. A trapper ventilated the mines by opening and closing doors, or brattices, at the entries. Also they opened the doors for the mule drivers who hauled the coal outside. Later, he became a pardon tender, working outside the mine, coupling the cars filled with coal that had come from the mine for their next trip to the tipple. He helped mine coal with his father and brother for a time, and when he was 14 he began to drive a mule himself.

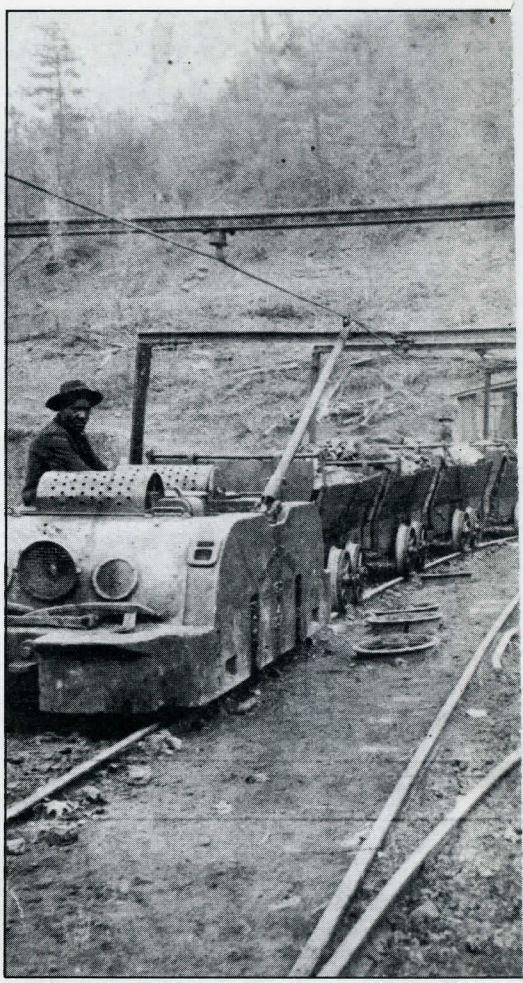
About 1917 Thomas left Raymond City in hopes of making more money elsewhere. A brother got him a job digging coal in eastern Ohio.

DGT I had a brother that worked over in Ohio and he come in here on Christmas, and he just made me believe, you know, you could just shake a bush and the money'd fall off'n it out there, you know. So I went back with him. I didn't stay too long. They didn't feed me too good out there.

"Well," I said, "I'm going home. I'm going to leave here." I caught a train and come on in to Wheeling. Had to lay there about two

Below: Dinky pulling loaded buck jimmies from Coal Hollow tipple to the tipple at Raymond City. Date unknown. Photograph by F. L. Hard, from the collection of Reverend Robert Lett.
Right: Number One mine entrance at Harmond Creek. Giles Dickerson, a miner Mr. Thomas remembers, is driving the Jeffrey motor, one of the first electric motors at the Raymond City mines. Photograph c. 1904, by F. L. Hard. From the collection of Reverend Robert Lett.





hours, and then I come in down there at Raymond City. Coming along up Muddy Gut there I broke the handle off my suitcase, and I had to carry that thing under my arm. Didn't have nothing to tie it up with. Come on in, got home over here about dark. First thing I said, I said, "Maw, you got any bread?" [laughs] And they said they'd just been talking about me. Well, that trip broke me. I went back over and got a job over at the mines.

After serving in the army infantry during World War I, Thomas again returned to the mines at Raymond City. He worked under the mine foreman there for about a year until he took and passed examinations certifying him as a mine foreman. He worked at the Raymond City mines until December 12, 1933, when he was hired by the Hatfield-Campbell Creek Coal company up the road at Plymouth.

DGT The general mine foreman come up by where I was boarding over there at Poca and told my sister where I was boarding to tell me to stop down to his house. I went down. He wanted to know if I still wanted that job as mine foreman. I said, "Yeah." Well, he said, "We'll have to go up and see the boss tomorrow. Be up there by noon."

Mr. Mitchell [the mine superintendent], he lived on Quarrier Street. I had never seen him; didn't know him. And he just called me "Guy" like he'd known me all his life. He said, "I understand you want to come down with us." I said, "Well, I wouldn't mind it, trying it." "Well," he said, "we're in need of a man, or a foreman, quick, one of them." He said, "We're in need of a man."

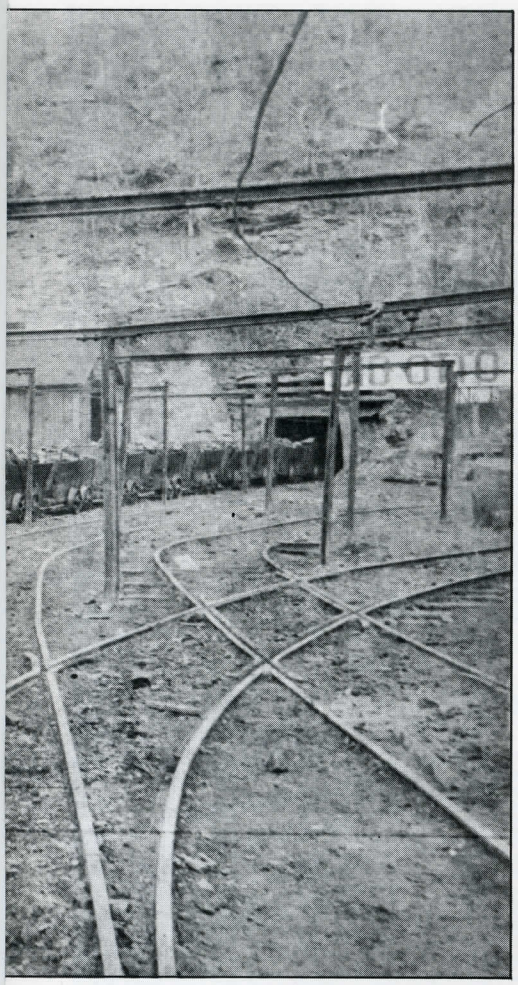
Well, the first thing I asked him was how much he paid. "Well," he said, "we never did have an assistant mine foreman by the month. We always paid him by the day." Said, "We paid him $6 a day. But, I will give you $135 to start you with, and if you're worth more money than that I'll give it to you." Well, I said, "Mr. Mitchell, that's $15 less than I been getting." I was getting $150. "Yeah," he said, "but you're working like a dog." And I wasn't there [at Plymouth] too long, just a little while, till I was getting $185 a month.

GS Back when you became a mine foreman, what all were your responsibilities?

DGT Well, you was responsible for every man in that mine.

GS In what way?

DGT In safety. Every way. The law was you should visit him once



Below: From left to right, John Gott, D. Guy Thomas, and Andrew "Andy" Gott on their way home from work. Photograph c. 1911, by George Kelly of Kelly's Creek. From collection of D. Guy Thomas.

a day, every man in there. A lot of times I've had 200 diggers and loaders, and I couldn't possibly visit all of them. I didn't do it—I got by with it—I couldn't. You couldn't make that many places. But that was the law.

A mine foreman has got a lot of burden on him, I mean to tell you. They run a man trip both morning and night, hauling the men into the mines. And there was all that roof. You didn't know what time there might be a fall. Maybe there could be a fall and kill a whole trip of men. That would be something, you know. Well, the mine foreman has got all of that on him. He's got to examine that top once a week, or more than that if necessary. He's responsible for everything. And he's got the company on him, he's got the men on him, he's got the mine inspectors after him, he's got the federal inspectors after him, everybody's after him. So he's right in the hole all the time. And yet they can't do without him. You've got to have him.

Thomas soon became general mine foreman at Plymouth. He worked there until the mine was abruptly closed in 1943. He recalls getting the news from the mine supervisor, W. C. Mitchell.

DGT He called me up from Cincinnati. And when I was talking to him he said, "Well, Guy, I got bad news for you." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Plymouth is done." I didn't know whether he was going to fire me over the telephone or what. He said, "Plymouth is done." He said, "Can you clean it all up in the next couple of shifts?" I said, "If I do, I'll have to put on another motor." He said, "Do whatever you want to do." [All the miners] just thought it was just a line, you know. It was getting about sign-up time. They just thought it was hot air. I said, "You boys will see." "Oh," they said, "they got the wool pulled over your eyes." "It'll be over your eyes before it's over with," I said, "you'll see."

GS Why did the Plymouth mine close up?

DGT Well, you know, World War II was on, and the boys, they just—they just kept a-going, calling them, taking them away. And what wasn't going to the army was going to the plant. And they got down too low on men.

The Communities

GS Back here in the early 1900's, when you started coal mining, there was a mine at Raymond City, one at Black Betsy, and another at Plymouth. Now, all of these towns were . . .

Harmond Creek company store, owned by the Marmet Coal & Mining Company of Raymond City. Date and photographer unknown. From the collection of Oren Cristy, Bancroft, West Virginia.

DGT . . . connected with one or t'other of them mines. They had come to work in them, the whole community, all of them.

GS Now where did all the miners come from that worked at these mines?

DGT Well, here at Raymond City, they'd come seven or eight miles. Walked it.

GS So, are you saying that mostly local people mined?

DGT That's right, that's right.

GS Were there any miners here of European origin? Were there Italians or others?

DGT Well, now and then there'd be a Spanish come in, or Italian. They didn't work too many of them.

GS How about black people?

DGT Oh, they worked a lot of colored people.

GS Where did they come from?

DGT Well, they come from Virginia and different places. As good a bunch of colored folk you'd want to be around.

GS Did they live in the communities, too?

DGT They lived over in Coal Hollow.

GS Were they segregated from the rest of the community?

DGT Well, no, they was whites lived over in there, too, with them.

GS What did the people do for recreation here?

DGT Oh, they might go to church. Lot of them drunk the whiskey. But outside of that there wasn't nothing. Now and then they'd have a little hoedown dance, but the company didn't approve of that, having dances on their property, in their houses.

GS What would the company do if you did?

DGT Oh, well, they'd give you a jacking up over it, but they never was too many of them had them.

GS Were there places in town, in any of these four towns that I mentioned, where people would go and have a good time?

DGT Oh, yeah, yeah.

GS What sort of places were they?

DGT Well, they was just a lodge hall down on the first floor. Had one in Coal Hollow where the col-

ored boys was. They had a lodge in there. I forget just what the name of the lodge was. And then Knights of Pythias Hall down at Poca. And then they had some kind of outfit over in Poca that you could go to.

GS What would they do?

DGT Oh, have a little picture show. Maybe some fellow'd come in sometimes, you know, have a show in the schoolhouse. They had them here on Harmond's Creek.

Thomas said that showboats would make occasional visits and remembered hearing their "pipe organ" music. He said that he had been on a showboat and that people "just carried on in there."

GS Well, what would you do on Sunday?

DGT Oh, go to Sunday school or church. Some of them would, just like today, they don't do nothing. Get drunk. That's about the way it runs.

GS Well, you've mentioned drinking a couple of times. Did people get to drinking and get into fights?

DGT Well, sometimes they did. Yeah, you bet.

GS At these lodge halls, you figure?

DGT No, no, not there. Around out in the country, like where there wasn't no law, that's when they usually carried on. Wasn't no law in here.

GS Why would they have fights?

DGT Oh, maybe fall out over their girls [laughs]. I don't know, I didn't have to do that. I was a pretty good boy myself. Kids gets by now with a lot of stuff. Oh, lord, I've seen kids do things around here, if we'd done why, we'd have been touching our tails yet.

GS At its largest, how many miners do you think were employed by these mines around?

DGT I would say there was around 700 or 800, at all three places.

GS How about now?

DGT Oh, well, it's different now. There ain't nothing here to get. Ain't nothing. No more coal.

GS Tell me about the coal. What was it used for?

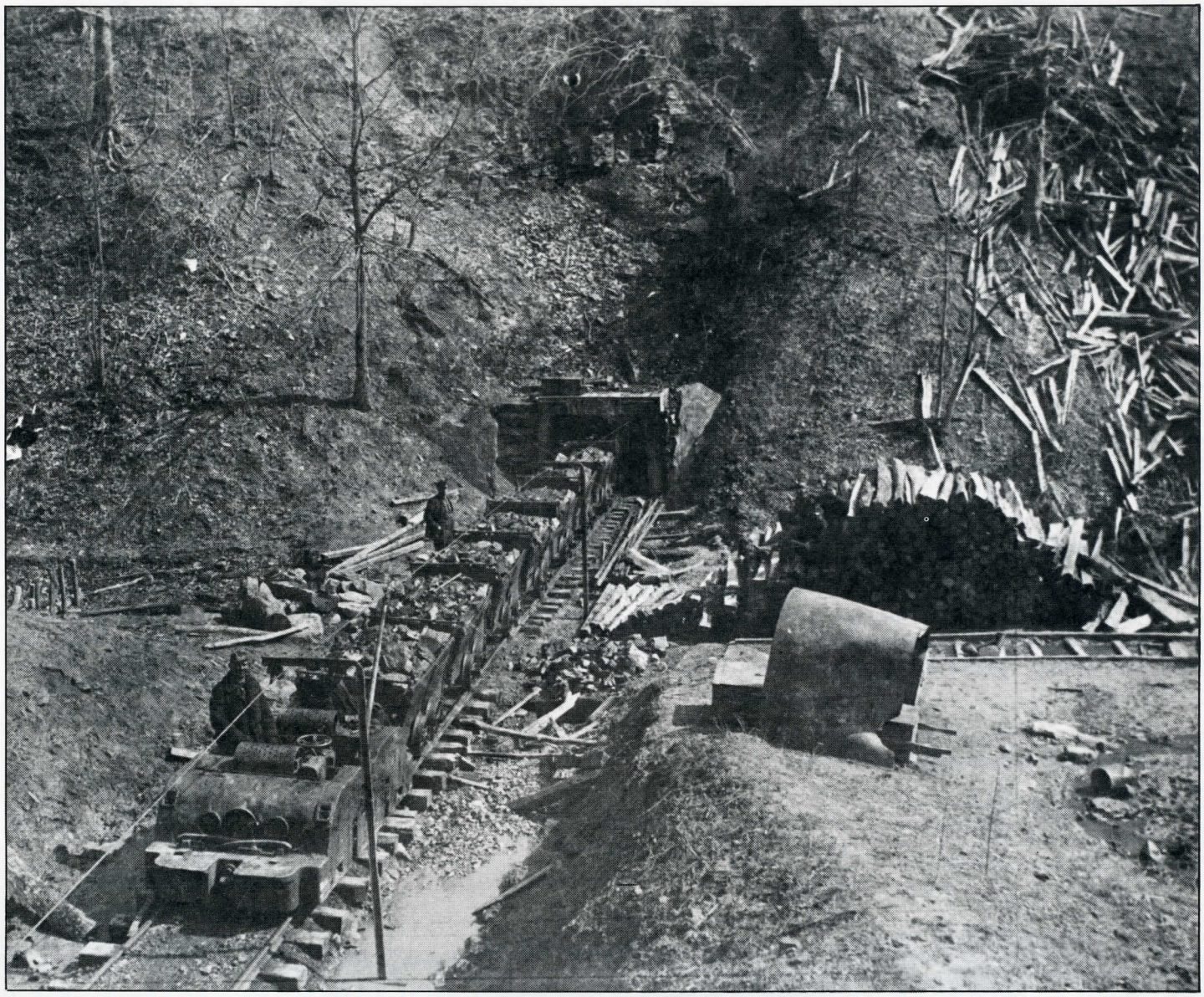
DGT Well, Carbide used a lot of it. The Nitro plants, Visco, Monsanto. They sold a lot of house coal, and they shipped to Cincinnati by rail and by river. It all was shipped out, what they didn't sell out around here.

End of an Era

GS Now, what did you do after these mines closed?

DGT Well, after they closed I went into a little mine, me and old man Bill Somerville and little Bill Mitchell. We leased a mine off of Plymouth, the Hatfield-Campbell's Creek [Coal Company] over at Plymouth, Manila Creek. And we stayed in there awhile, worked awhile, and it looked like every-

Many of the original company-built houses still stand at Plymouth. Photograph by Gary Simmons.



A trip leaving the Number Three mine at Raymond City c. 1905. Note mine timbers scattered at right. Photograph by F. L. Hard. From collection of Rev. Robert Lett.

thing we touched was agin us, and I quit. I just let them have it. I told them they could just have my part of it. I had about $2,000 in it, and I never did get nothing out of it.

Well, then I come out here [near Lanham] and worked in these country mines awhile and helped my brothers out, Bill and Denver. They had to have a certified man. Then, there wasn't none around but me in this part. I come out and worked for them awhile, and then I put my application in at Carbide, I worked over there about six or eight months, and I just couldn't take it. The fumes liked to kill me.

Well, then I went up on Cabin Creek, and got a job up there. I stayed up there, oh, I don't know, maybe six weeks, riding 80 miles a day. My health was bothering me, and I had to just quit it all. Then I come here. I had property up town, and then we bought this place out here. Moved out here, and I been here ever since. Then I had a little mine of my own up there, and I took care of it and took care of Charley Lane's and my brothers' too. They had to have it inspected every day, and I took care of that for them. And so in '63 they quit. Carbide quit taking coal, and that just killed this place deader than four o'clock. And you see we had the coal pretty well robbed anyway. We had had a lease since '46, and there couldn't have been much left around. They quit in '63, Carbide did. And she just kept dropping off and off. Now, there ain't nothing on Harmond's Creek working.

GS If you had it to do over again, would you be a coal miner?

DGT No, I think I would've went to school and made a lawyer! No, I'll tell you. Coal mining is a hard life, any way you take it.

Above: John Massey reminisces with a former workmate. Photograph by Gary Simmons.
Below: Former miners take their places for the 1979 edition of another group portrait. Photograph by Gary Simmons.

Eleventh Annual Raymond City and Plymouth Miners' Reunion

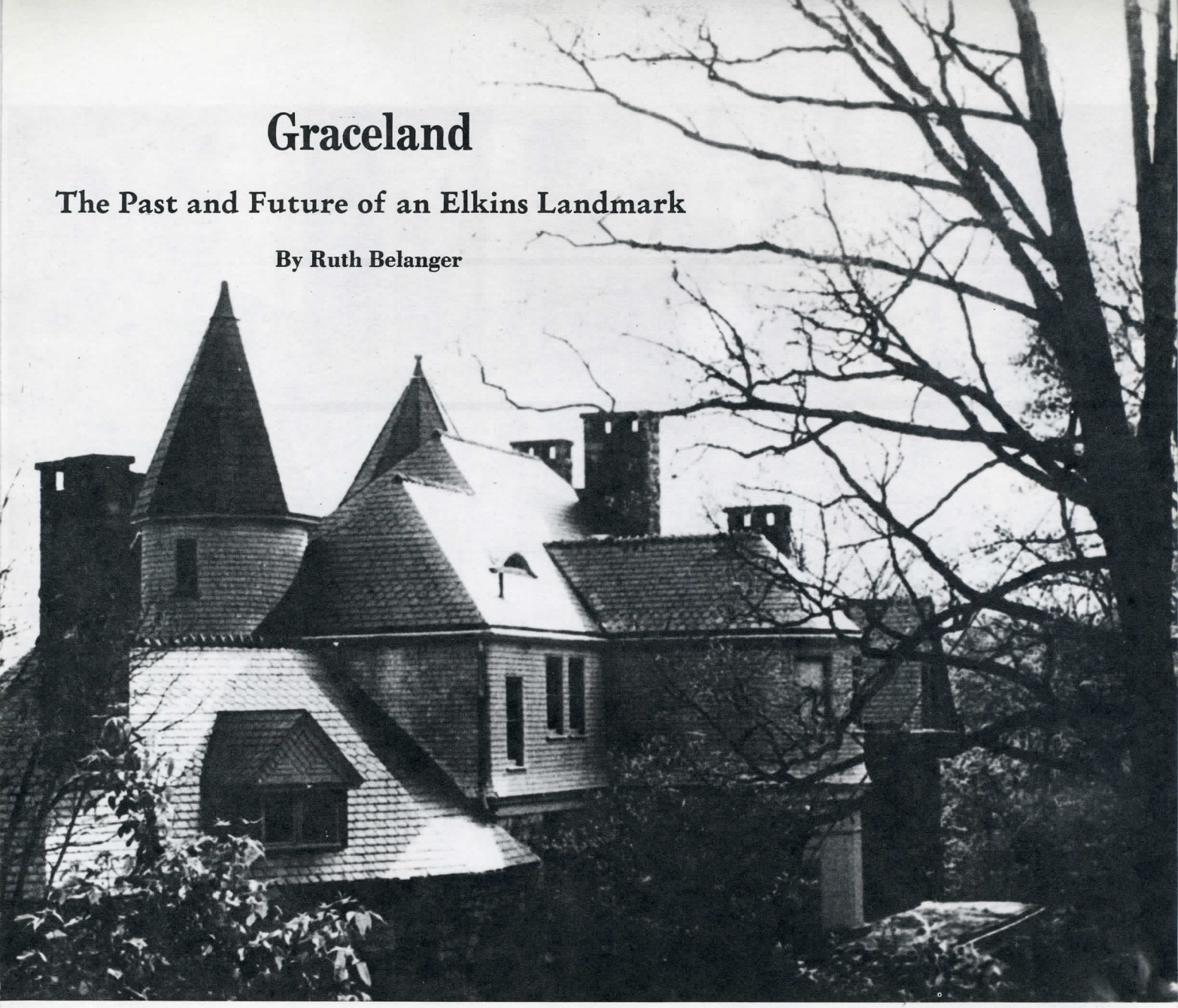
On Sunday, June 10, retired Putnam County coal miners got together for the Eleventh Annual Raymond City and Plymouth Miners' Reunion. The all-day affair, at Washington Park near Plymouth, was an occasion for gospel music and good eating, and especially for talk of the old days when local mines were booming and these men were in the prime of life.

Left: Andrew Holloway (left) and Huey Britton discuss a lard oil lamp once used in the mines, while D. Guy Thomas ponders the photographer. Photograph by Gary Simmons.
Below: Claude Withrow arrived late but in time to greet old friends. Photograph by Gary Simmons.
Bottom: After a picnic lunch, gospel singing and lawn-chair conversation carried into the afternoon. Photograph by Gary Simmons.

Graceland

The Past and Future of an Elkins Landmark

By Ruth Belanger



Photograph by Bob Wrobleski.

DRIVING north towards Elkins on Route 219 you see a red-roofed turret far ahead. It provides a bright splash of contrast to the trees that surround it. As you enter the city limits of Elkins it quickly flashes from view like a red winter cardinal. If you continue north on Route 219 you can catch another glimpse of it on your right near the overhead railroad bridge.

Should you pull off the main highway to find the house with the red-roofed turret you will wind up on the campus of Davis and Elkins College. You'll be able to walk all around the huge structure and peek in through the windows that aren't boarded up yet. There are no official signs, however, to tell you anything about the structure. A handpainted scrawl on the window above the main door says "Graceland," but it looks too much like graffiti to give it much credibility.

On your way back out from the College you might notice a sturdy stone wall running along the soccer field on your right. As you turn right at the corner back onto Route 219 there is an iron statue of a man on a horse. People from Elkins call it "The Iron Horse" and regard it as a local landmark.

The man on the horse is Henry Gassaway Davis. The stone wall is part of a wall he built around his large estate in the late 19th century. The house with the red turret was his summer home, and its name really is Graceland. He is the "Davis" part of the college, Davis and Elkins, which he helped to found and endow. Henry Gassaway Davis was one of West Virginia's major early capitalists and politicians, building railroads, mines, mills, banks and hotels, and—to no small degree—the modern state itself. In his old age, when it came time to build a final West Virginia

home for himself, Davis built Graceland. Much of the man and of the extravagant time can be seen in the house.

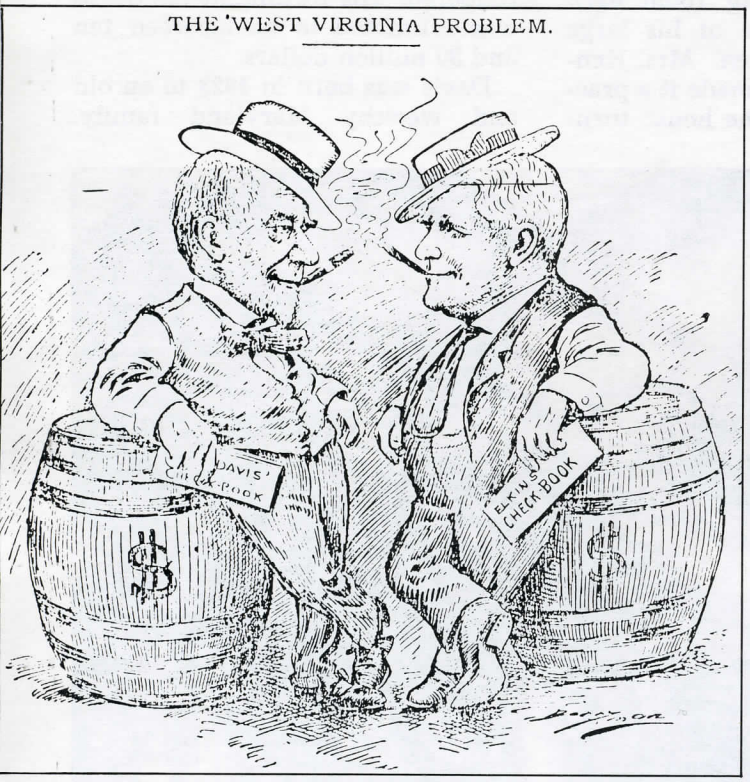
There are other landmarks left by Henry Gasaway Davis in Elkins. The Davis Memorial Hospital which he founded in 1902 in honor of his wife began as a small hospital with approximately 20 beds. Currently in the process of expanding, the hospital will soon offer more than 100 beds.

The handsome church on the corner by the statue is the Davis Memorial Presbyterian Church, built by Henry Davis and his brother Thomas, in 1894, in honor of their parents. Today it shelters one of the largest congregations in Elkins. Sitting at the busiest intersection of downtown Elkins is the bank he founded, Davis Trust. It is the oldest bank in Elkins, built in 1891. Its location is Third Street and Davis Avenue. In addition Davis donated land for the Elkins City Park and for the Maplewood Cemetery, where he is buried.

Reminders of Davis are not confined to the town of Elkins. There are small towns in West Virginia bearing the names Henry, Gassaway, and Davis. The town of Junior in Barbour County is named after his oldest son, Henry Gassaway Davis, Jr. Alva Rowe, lifelong resident and past mayor of Junior, says that originally the town was named Rowetown after his great-grandfather who ran the store there. H. G. Davis wanted to name a town for his son, and when he bought up the land around Rowetown he changed the name to Junior. The town's namesake was later lost at sea.

There is an heroic-size statue of

Democratic Senator Henry Gassaway Davis (served 1872-1884) and his Republican son-in-law, Senator Stephen B. Elkins (1896-1911), were criticized for their lavish use of family money to dominate West Virginia politics, as in the cartoon below. Davis was 81 years old when nominated for Vice President in 1907, but campaign photographs presented him as a vigorous old gentleman, at home on horseback or in a rocking chair. Photographs by G. V. Buck, Washington, D. C.



Davis on his horse on Capitol Street in Charleston exactly the same as the "Iron Horse" statue in Elkins. In the winter of 1900 Davis purchased land and a brick building for an orphaned children's home and presented it to the Children's Society of West Virginia. The home was referred to as the Child's Shelter. Throughout his life he contributed to the home's upkeep on a regular basis and left a permanent endowment for it in his will. Davis also purchased and donated the land for the first YMCA to be built in Charleston. The Capitol Street statue is on the YMCA grounds.

Henry Gassaway Davis

Henry Gassaway Davis was a West Virginia State Senator, a U. S. Senator from West Virginia for two terms, several times a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, and in 1904 the Democratic vice-presidential candidate.

Davis, then 81, was not expecting the nomination and the following is an excerpt from his personal journal concerning the event: "July 6—When my platform was adopted I thought my work was done. I went to my car and started for home, on my way I was telegraphed I was being voted for Vice-President. This was a great surprise to me. I was nominated on the first ballot and made unanimous. July 10—Came from St. Louis Democratic Convention, was met at Belington by a band which came to Elkins. Was met at depot by a thousand or more people and escorted home."

There were speculations that the Democratic Party was after Davis' money, and a cartoonist at the time labeled the party nominee "H.

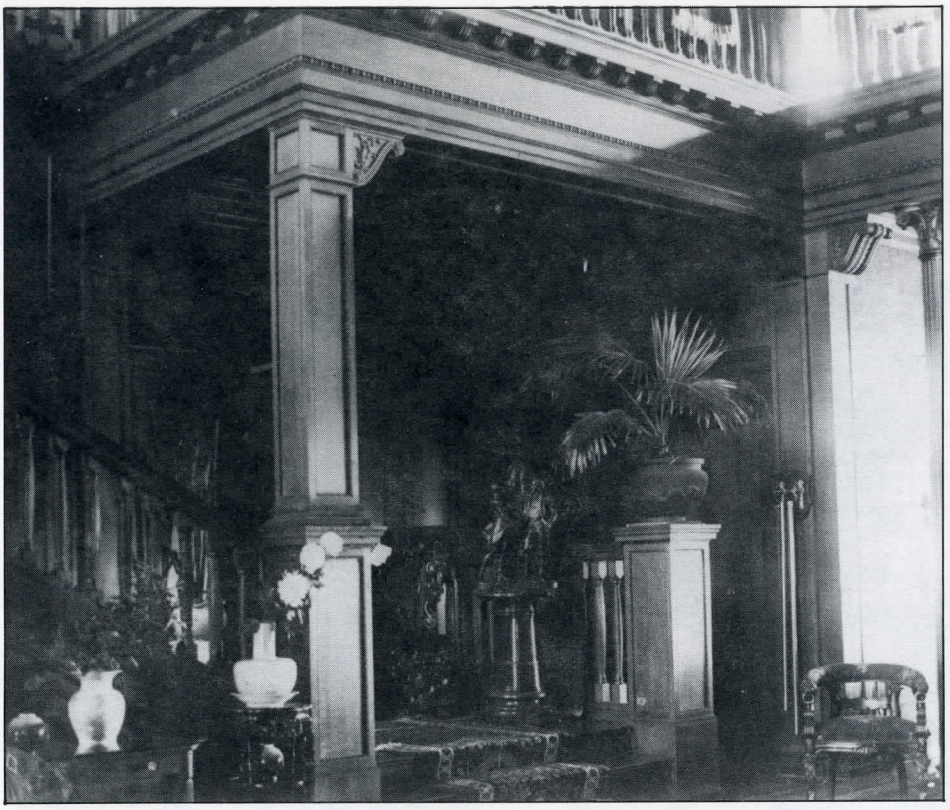
Giveaway Davis." Nonetheless, he accepted the nomination, running with presidential candidate Judge Alton Parker of New York. They were defeated by Theodore Roosevelt. Davis' age was an issue in the election, and official campaign photographs were careful to show him as a vigorous old gentleman, equally at home on horseback or in a rocking chair.

Henry Gassaway Davis was a man who believed very strongly in his religion and in keeping the Sabbath holy. Horses and ponies were put to pasture Saturday night and allowed to roam free all day Sunday. He insisted that only hymns were to be played on the Steinway grand piano in the parlor on Sundays. Taking advantage of the fact that he was tone deaf, the family would play secular music slowly and he wouldn't know the difference. The children's swings were tied up on Saturday night to discourage them from engaging in frivolities on the Sabbath.

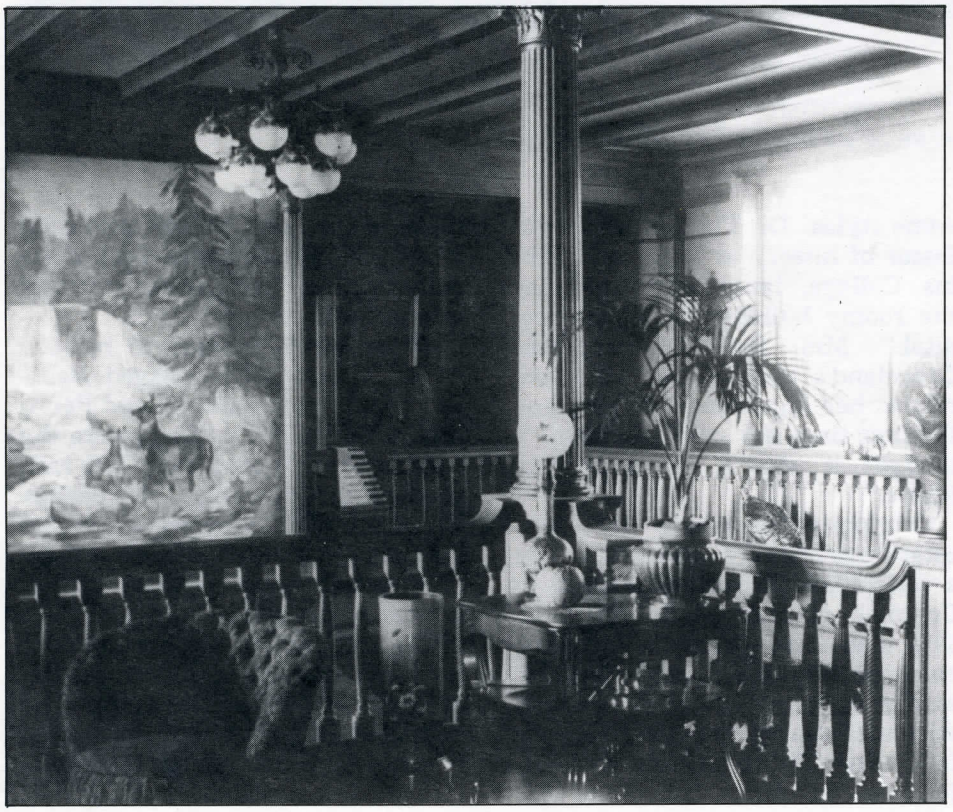
Despite his great wealth and well-known philanthropy, Davis was of frugal personal habits. Granddaughter Bruce Lee Kennedy remembers that he always took a wicker basket, lined with green felt, to bed with him. The basket contained one dozen of each type of silver tableware, which Davis returned to the dining room each morning for the use of his large family of five children. Mrs. Kennedy recalls that he made it a practice to go through the house turning out lights in empty rooms because of the expense of electricity. The estate built its second tennis court five feet shorter than regulation length, because the Senator felt the extra fill would be too costly. Mrs. Davis had her own little economies also, and at her death the family found boxes and boxes of string which she had saved for possible future use.

Davis was not just a politician and philanthropist. He also owned a vast amount of land in West Virginia, some of which he farmed, some he mined coal from, some he timbered. His fortune at his death was estimated to be between ten and 30 million dollars.

Davis was born in 1823 to an old and wealthy Maryland family.



Left: Main hall, c. 1896-97. Gentleman at right is an unidentified Davis relative. Photographer unknown.
Above: Main hall stairway, c. 1896-97. Note Three Musketeers statuette on landing. Photographer unknown.
Below: The upper hall projected over the main hall below. The 15-foot mural of Blackwater Falls is now unaccounted for. Photographer unknown.



When he was 14 his father lost a great deal of money in the Panic of 1837, and subsequently the family was reduced to relatively modest circumstances. One of young Davis' first jobs was on the railroad, and railroads were his first and greatest love. He worked his way up from brakeman for the B & O Railroad to president of his own line, the Coal and Coke. Throughout his life Davis built railroads to serve his widespread coal and timber interests, risking capital on rugged West Virginia terrain that other investors shied away from. Sue Randall Lee, his granddaughter-in-law, says that Davis chose the site for Graceland because it afforded him an excellent view of his coal trains from the windows and porches of the house.

Also named "Graceland" was the Senator's custom-built railroad car. This luxurious car was equipped with a kitchen, a room for the cook and porter, dining room for 12, stateroom with double bed and washroom, a bed and an upper berth and a small bath with shower. Special Dresden china was used for family dining. Graceland was always put at the end of the train so that no one would "accidentally" walk through the car.

Both the private car and palatial home were named for Davis' youngest daughter, Grace. She is remembered as being intensely devoted to dogs. It is said that some of her four-footed friends, festooned with ribbons and bows, accompanied her down the aisle when she married Arthur Lee in 1898. She buried her favorite dogs in a cemetery near the house and marked the graves with marble headstones.

In 1939, after the land the pet cemetery was on had been sold, the tombstones were moved to the hill behind her son Thomas' home in Elkins. Mrs. Sue (Thomas) Lee remembers that when her mother-in-law went to Arizona for the winter she would take a local train so she could get off frequently to exercise the dogs who traveled with her.

Henry Davis' oldest daughter, Hallie, married Stephen Benton Elkins, an Ohio-born politician who came to West Virginia by way of New Mexico. Elkins was a Republi-

Graceland library, c. 1896-97. Bookshelves and furnishings are in cherry. Photographer unknown.

can, and in 1895 won the U. S. Senate seat that his Democratic father-in-law had left in 1883. The city of Elkins, of course, was named for the younger Senator, and thus Davis found himself living in a community named for a son-in-law and a house named for a daughter. The Elkins' own mansion, next door to Graceland, was named Halliehurst, in honor of Hallie Davis Elkins, and is now also in the possession of Davis and Elkins College.

Castle on the Rhine

Graceland has been variously described as being an example of Norman architecture, Victorian architecture, or a combination of Richard Hunt Chateau and Queen Anne styles. Dr. Thomas Ross, professor of history at Davis and Elkins College, laughingly describes the roomy building as "early hospital." Mrs. Sue Lee captures Graceland's essence best when she relates her impression of the home the first time she saw it in 1931, "I thought it was a castle on the Rhine."

Originally, the whole Graceland estate was 360 acres and was run in a self-sufficient manner similar to Colonial plantations in Virginia. The place had orchards, gardens, chickens, pigs, sheep, cattle, a dairy, and an ice house which was stocked with ice from its own pond. A very few items, like sugar, salt, and coffee, were purchased outside. In 1931 there were four indoor servants; while Henry Davis was alive there were as many as 14 house servants at one time.

When Davis decided to build a home in Elkins he engaged Baltimore architects Baldwin and Pennington to design it. They were the same architects that the B & O railroad used to design its depots. There are those who see a similarity between the spacious first floor of Graceland and railroad station houses of the time.

The main hall on the ground floor is 60 feet long and 28 feet wide. The ceiling was two stories high. The main fireplace was so large that it took six-foot logs. The Davises furnished the cavernous room so that

Senator Davis' study. Photograph by G. V. Buck, Washington, D. C.

seating was around that fireplace. A 15-foot-high mural of Blackwater Falls hung above the mantle.

Graceland had 13 master bedrooms and ten master bathrooms. In all there were at least 35 rooms for family use, and additional rooms for the servants and storage. The southern porch overlooking Elkins was larger than the north one. Bruce Lee Kennedy recollects that "We lived there all summer long." It was furnished with palms and rare orchids that were kept in the two greenhouses during the winter. When the porches were remodeled later, Grace's initials were worked into the ballustrade.

Wood paneling is found throughout the house. The parlor is paneled in bird's eye maple and the main hall in golden oak. The floors, trim, and bannisters are of oak, bird's eye maple, cherry, and walnut.

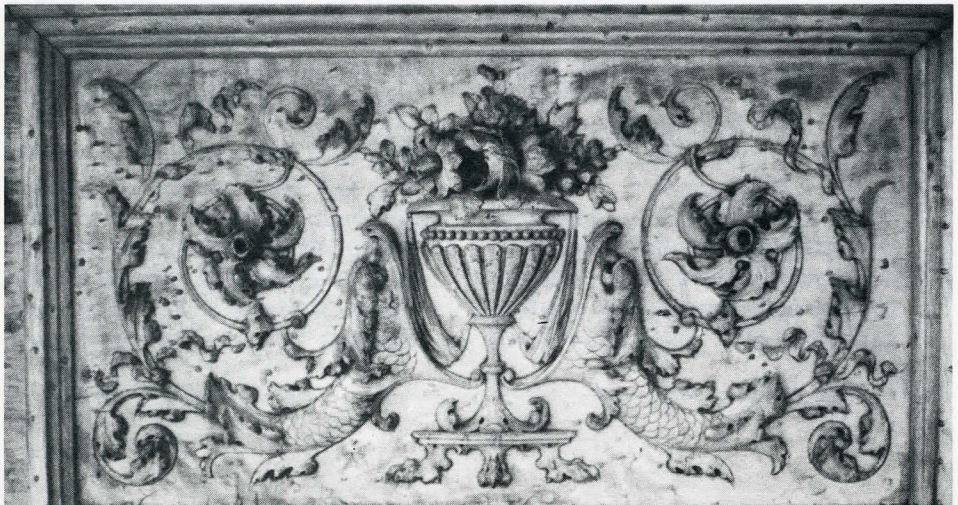
Graceland was built for the lavish entertaining expected of a man of Davis' stature. The dining room table seated 22 comfortably. Stained glass windows were made by a workman from Tiffany's. Kermanshah oriental rugs graced the floors of most rooms, even the bathrooms, closets, and attic. Bathtubs were of marble. What was once a heart-shaped driveway is now a paved parking lot.

There are Delft tiles around the library fireplace depicting various Bible verses. In the summer of 1977 eight of these priceless tiles were chipped away and stolen. Special red clay imported from Ireland was used for some of the hearths as well as on the tennis courts. Daughter Grace's room was built with a sun porch so that she could dry her hair in the sun after washing it.

Although Graceland was built in the last decade of the 19th century it was equipped with many "modern" conveniences. The house featured gas lights, electricity, telephones and a burglar alarm system. For amusement there was a nine-hole golf course, two tennis courts, horseback riding, and a bowling alley. At nearby Halliehurst there was an indoor swimming pool, and Fourth of July fireworks displays in the summer.

Above Left: Graceland, north elevation, 1896. Photographer unknown.
Lower Left: Graceland mansion, north elevation, as restoration begins. Tiffany stained glass windows from above porch are in storage and will be returned when work is completed; stone pillars to be replaced with wood, as in original construction. Photograph by Ruth Belanger.

Above: Interior view of boarded-up north turret. Photograph by Ruth Belanger.



The Davis children were not neglected. Their own playhouse, near the main house, contained a kitchen, dining room, large porch and a cast iron stove that burned wood. In it the children cooked and gave their own dinner parties.

While the children were imitating the grown-ups, the Davis family was entertaining some of the most important personages of the time. President Theodore Roosevelt, President Woodrow Wilson, Bernard Baruch, and President Benjamin Harrison all were social visitors to the home. President Harrison was such a close family friend that he had his own designated room set aside on the third floor for his visits. President Grover Cleveland spent his honeymoon at Deer Park, a Maryland home of the Davis family.

Graceland was continuously occupied by the Davis family from the time it was built until 1939. Mrs. Thomas Lee lived in the home from May to August of 1932 as a young bride. She explains that she preferred not to live there because of its immense size. "It was so dark in there you had to light a lamp to read even in the daytime. There weren't any cozy little nooks to sit in."

When the family decided to sell Graceland, the grand mansion that had been constructed at a cost of several hundred thousand dollars was auctioned for $25,000. Local parties acquired title at the 1940 sale. A year later the mansion was bought by a Presbyterian group and given to Davis and Elkins College. The rest of the 360 acres of the original estate were sold in almost 1,000 small parcels.

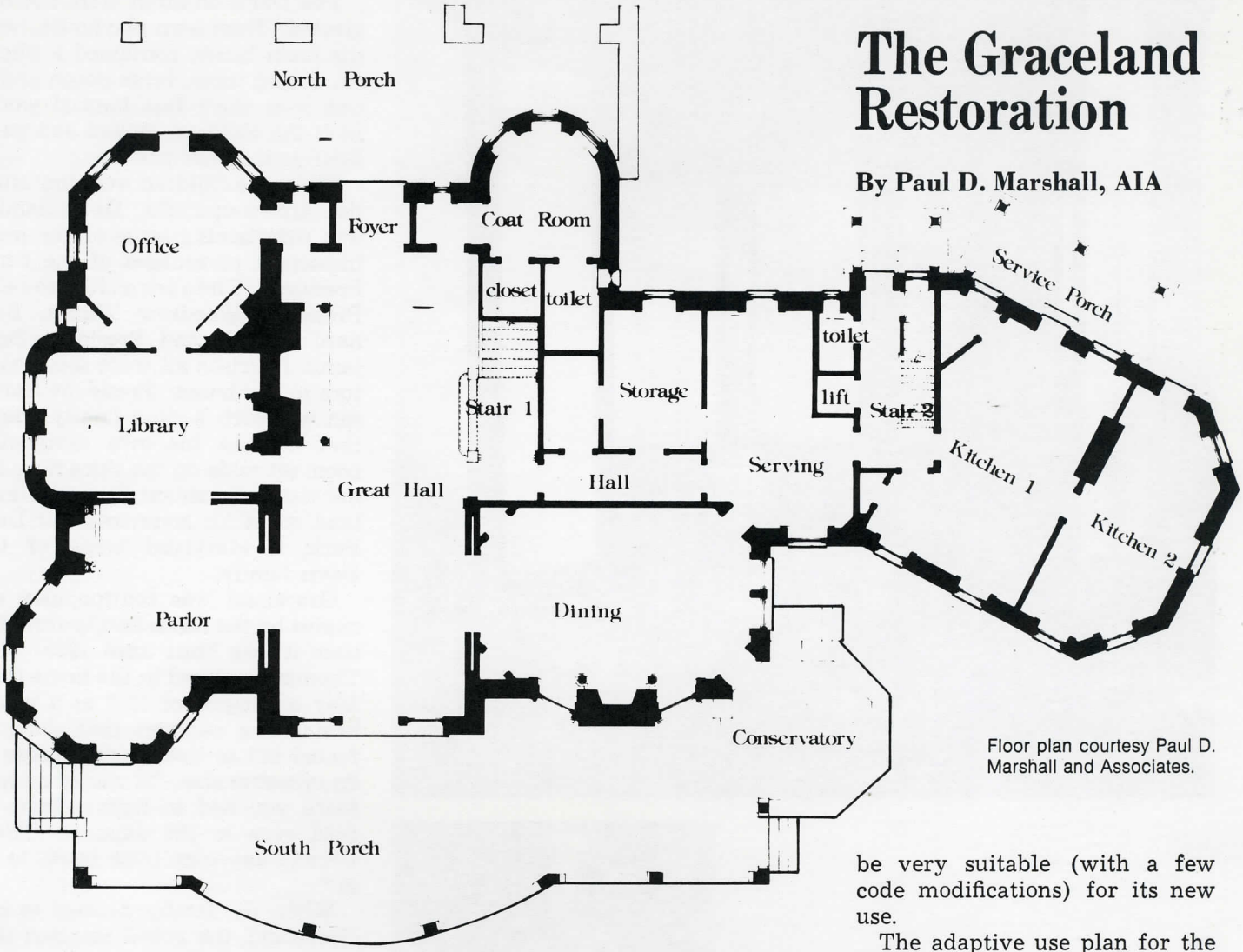
Graceland was used by Davis and Elkins as a men's dormitory for 40 students from 1941 until 1970. Due to heating problems in 1970, the students were moved out. In September 1970 the West Virginia Antiquities Commission placed Graceland on the National Register of Historic Places.

Rescuing Graceland

The building was empty and unattended from 1970 until 1977 when

The Graceland Restoration

By Paul D. Marshall, AIA



Floor plan courtesy Paul D. Marshall and Associates.

The first time I saw "Graceland" was in February of 1978 after my firm had been commissioned by the Davis & Elkins College Administration to study the feasibility of restoring the building and its adaptive use potential.

It has been "love at first sight" since first walking through the cavernous interior of this splendid Victorian giant. The carved column capitols, balusters, mantels and trim are exquisite and are in rather good condition.

Our early inspections found several areas of severe plaster damage from roof leaks and lack of interior heating. Other interior problems included missing balusters and Delft tiles, and broken stained glass windows, obviously the work of vandals. The building, although having suffered these latter problems and some thoughtless renovation work in the past, has come through the years almost intact as first planned and in remarkably good condition.

The restoration program is basically two-fold. First, we intend to stabilize the building from the standpoint of environmental conditioning both inside and outside; and, second to restore the building back to 1904, the time when Senator Davis enjoyed the pinnacle of his political life. The building had been in existence for about ten years and had become a focal point for family, community, and political activities. The house of 1904 will be very suitable (with a few code modifications) for its new use.

The adaptive use plan for the building is to move most of the administrative offices and the alumni center into the restored mansion. The Senator's office and the adjacent library will become the space for the college president and his administrative assistants.

The relocation of administrative functions from Liberal Arts Hall to Graceland will restore needed academic space in Liberal Arts Hall, the purpose for which it was designed. The concentration of administrative offices will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the college administration.

The restored mansion will exhibit a significant portion of the Darby Collection of early West Virginia historic artifacts which

is now owned by Davis & Elkins College.

A new heating and cooling system, new insulation, and restoration of the doors and windows of the mansion will aid in making the building more energy efficient.

The environmental problems are already under attack. The red Vermont slate roof of the main house is being repaired and restored, and masonry above the roof line is being pointed and flashed. Almost all valley and flashing metal is being replaced along with portions of the hanging gutters and built-in gutter boxes. Close inspection of the existing metal shows considerable fatigue from the years of service. Most of the original slate is in good condition and is being retained.

Before next winter, it is hoped that enough funds will be available to provide some of the interior environmental protection required to stabilize plaster and paint deterioration. We hope to at least install some space heaters in critical areas.

Long range restoration will include reconstruction of the conservatory (greenhouse) off the dining room and south porch, restoration of the north and south porches, reconstruction of the north carriage entrance, interior restoration and the return of exterior painting to the original colors. The progress of the program will be entirely controlled by the availability of funds contributed by private sources and matching Federal grant monies.

Historical research is one of the most important areas of the restoration process. The research must be careful and thorough, removing doubt and guesswork from planning and reducing the almost inevitable compromises. Much of the research into Graceland's history has been completed and it has revealed some interesting facts about the house.

For example, the porch floors were originally wood and the porch roofs were tin. Instead of the existing non-Victorian wrought iron railings and stone columns, there were elegant wood columns and railings. These will be restored.

Old photographs of the building exterior and interiors have revealed much about the decorating and furnishing tastes of the family. There were typically Victorian hand painted frescos of flowered design embellishing the walls of the dining room and the walls and ceiling panels of the great hall. Unfortunately, these paintings have been buried beneath layers of later decorating tastes.

The wood shingles on the exterior of the building will be stripped of the burdensome coats of paint that have hidden their natural beauty and finished with oil stain as noted in the original specifications. The beautiful interior woodwork will be cleaned and refinished as per the original intent.

Physical research has required architectural drawings produced from actual measurements of the building as we found it. This is a laborious and time consuming task but one of the most necessary exercises in the program due to the fact that all restoration drawings are based on the documentation of the building's existing condition. Further documentation consists of extensive photography and the taking of hundreds of paragraphs of notes.

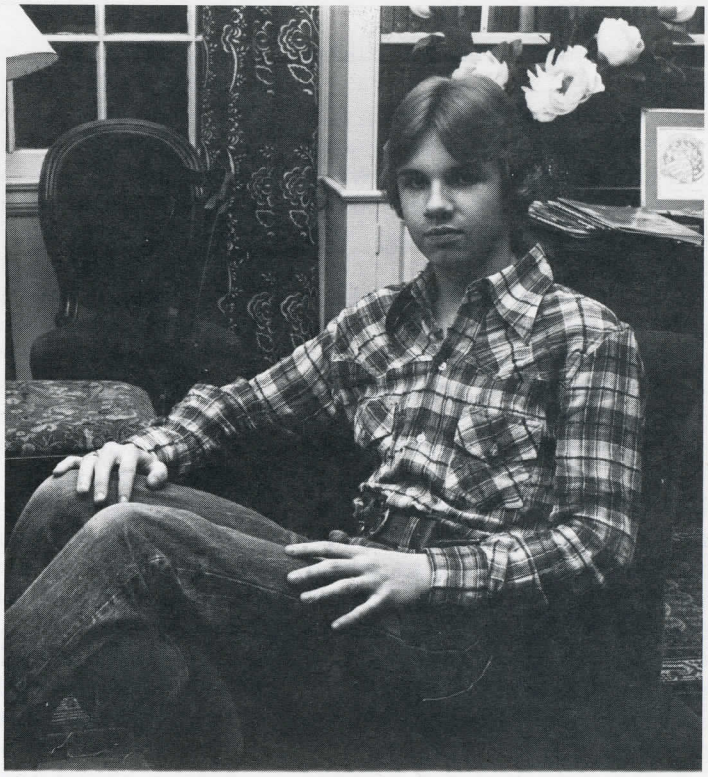
Much has been done but there is much yet to do. We are very gratified that the roof is under construction, even though there is not enough money to finish the roof work—the service wing will not be cared for under the present financial resources. We look down the road, however, to that time when Graceland will be alive with activity and people can once again enjoy the beauty and grandeur of this grand old legacy from the past.

a group of junior high school students interested themselves in the old home. In 1977 they incorporated as a non-profit organization known as the "Graceland Foundation" for the sole purpose of restoring Graceland. Brian Ball was named president, Jon Olson vice president, and Brad Ball treasurer. Mrs. Sue Lee is acting as advisor to the group. The teenagers are actively engaged in returning original Graceland articles to the mansion. This involves tracking down the items and raising the money to buy them. So far the group has been successful in securing candelabra, silver service, table linen, monogrammed bedsheets, towels, portraits, a pewter fruit bowl, two hand-engraved leatherbacked chairs, several dining room chairs of blue pigskin, hand embroidered curtains made in Greece, oriental rugs, a hand-carved bed, and many iron servant beds for return to Graceland once major repairs have been made.

The Foundation tried many ways of fund raising. Jon Olson chuckles as he tells of one of his most enjoyable and profitable methods — a lady's sack lunch. It was in 1977 when the students first started the project. They had managed to clear the debris out of the dining room and a path through the junk that had accumulated from the floor up to the second floor above the main hall. They used a broken-down ping pong table and boxes and crates to sit on. Mrs. Lee brought linen and finger sandwiches in a picnic basket, and women from Elkins were invited for a makeshift but delightful indoor picnic. As the women left, they wrote out checks to the representatives of the Graceland Foundation at the door.

Why is the restoration of Graceland so important to a 15 year old like Jon Olson? "It [Graceland] has deep historical significance. If we don't restore something of historical significance in Elkins now, while there is still time, there won't be anything left for our grandchildren to remember by." In recognition of their efforts, Norman L. Fagan, Commissioner of the West

Mrs. Sue Lee, granddaughter-in-law of Henry Gassaway Davis, acts as advisor to the Graceland Foundation. Photograph by Ruth Belanger.



Jon Olson of Elkins is vice president of the Graceland Foundation, which publicized the need for restoration. Photograph by Ruth Belanger.

Virginia Department of Culture and History, has named the student volunteers Ambassadors of Culture to travel around the state speaking about preservation.

The Foundation and the College are not affiliated, and the two groups have not always seen eye to eye. Charleston architect Paul Marshall, who directs the Graceland restoration for the College, believes the Foundation's best work has been in publicizing the issue and in locating lost items for return to the mansion. Marshall urges that actual renovation work be left to professionals. He emphasizes that the College has ultimate responsibility for the restoration, and that he values the cooperation of the Foundation and of Davis relatives as the work proceeds.

Paul Marshall and Davis and Elkins College have laid out a detailed restoration strategy. There are three planned phases of repair, with the purpose of the first phase to arrest and eliminate deterioration. This phase includes repair of the red Vermont slate roof (which has already begun), a new heating system, and the repair and refinishing of the main hall. The most crucial problem facing Graceland right now is the leaking roof which is causing plaster and wood damage.

Marshall says that, "The house is really in a good state of preservation and can be restored." Despite the fact that Graceland has been the victim of vandalism in recent years — torn out bannisters, stolen tiles, smashed windows, broken chandeliers, painted graffiti on the walls — the basic structure is still sound. Pans were placed throughout the house this past winter to catch the leaks from the roof to prevent further water damage.

State historic preservation funds of $25,000 for the restoration of Graceland have been matched privately. Nevin Kendall, vice-president of Development for the College, says that "When the roof is done we will have exhausted all our resources." How much will it take to restore Graceland completely? "We're talking about at least one million dollars. Probably more than that eventually." Both Kendall and Marshall note that the school is actively soliciting further private contributions.

Projected plans for Graceland are to relocate college administration offices and the Alumni Center there. The College's Darby Collection of West Virginia historic artifacts will also be on permanent exhibit. This collection includes guns, Indian relics, antique household tools and articles made of horn and bone. The Darby Collection bears no relation to the Davis and Elkins families.

Dr. Thomas Ross, Davis and Elkins historian, feels that, "Any building with as much historical heritage as Graceland has should be maintained. What if no one had preserved the old structures in England, or Mt. Vernon or Monticello? In a state this young, a building like this is unique because of its association with a man so closely related to the early formation of the state." He added that Graceland will probably be one of the few homes still standing 100 years from now that will be indicative of the turn-of-the-century era of unregulated free enterprise.

The First Mountain State Forest Festival

Organizing an Elkins Tradition

By Thomas F. Stafford

Program for the first Mountain State Forest Festival in 1930.

The 43rd annual Mountain State Forest Festival begins in Elkins on September 30 this year. Governor Rockefeller has been invited to crown Grace Ann Gainer of Richwood as Queen Silvia XLIII. The coronation is scheduled for October 3 on the campus of Davis and Elkins College.

The coronation of the forest queen will be the featured event of the weeklong festival, but of a more lively nature will be such attractions as a woodchopping contest, turkey calling contest, hang-glider exhibition, and muzzle-loading rifle competition. Grand Ole Opry stars Dave and Sugar, Wendy Holcombe, and the Currence Brothers will entertain festival goers in D & E's Harper-McNeely Auditorium on Friday evening, October 5. The Kingston Trio will perform on the evening of the coronation. NBC chief Fred Silverman will serve as honorary parade marshal for Saturday's Grand Feature Parade.

Over the years the Forest Festival has brought the famous as well as the obscure to Elkins, with President Carter walking last year's parade route before an estimated 100,000 people. The original Mountain State Forest Festival in 1930 was a more modest affair, however, as the following article recalls.

IRONICALLY, the Mountain State Forest Festival in Elkins originated from a rivalry between two other communities, one in West Virginia and one in Virginia. In 1930, Elkins community leaders journeyed across the mountains to Winchester, Virginia, seeking guidance in how to organize and manage a local homecoming. They found the Winchester people concerned that their popular Apple Blossom Festival would be endangered by a proposed Apple Harvest Festival in nearby Martinsburg. Figuring that fall festivities in Elkins would undermine Martinsburg's plans, Winchester welcomed its visitors warmly, urging them to organize a full festival instead of a mere homecoming.

When the idea was broached to the Elkins committee, they said de-

spairingly, "We don't have apples." "But you have forests," the Winchester people replied, and thus, in the months that followed, the Forest Festival was born and the Martinsburg Harvest Festival died.

At first, not everybody in Elkins wanted to take on so massive an undertaking as a festival. Many of them favored a community homecoming, for they thought their town simply wasn't big enough to organize anything as grandiose as they had seen or read about at Winchester.

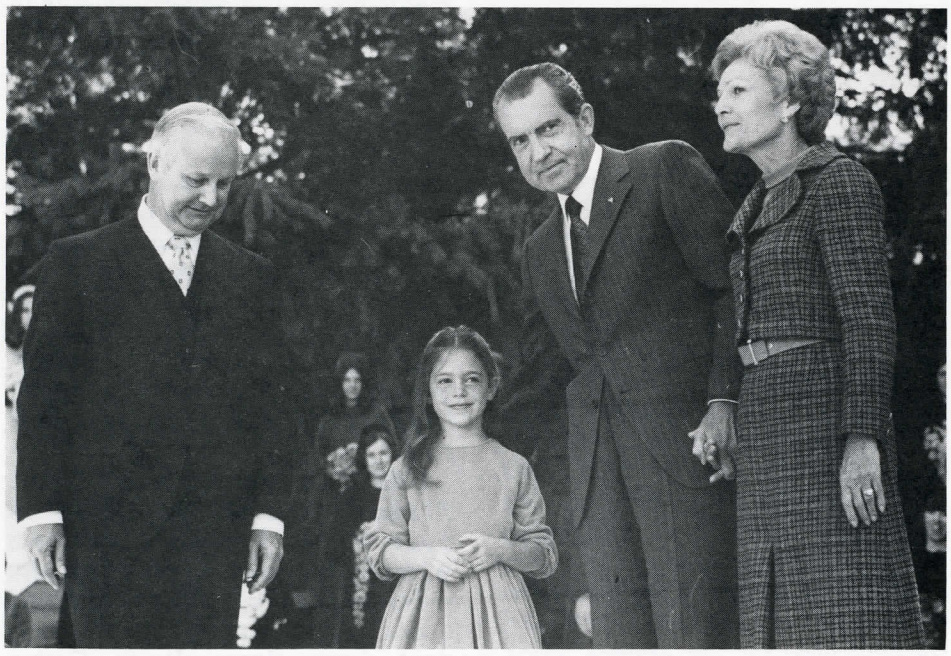
Elkins, in 1930, had a population of less than 8,000, and while it had grown briskly since its incorporation in 1890, it was not a major trade or social center among West Virginia cities. Two trains a day, with a coach and baggage car, traveled out of Elkins to Grafton and to Cumberland, Maryland; "locals," they were called in the idiom of the times. There was a bus line serving 12 counties in central West Virginia, and connecting, so the advertising proclaimed, "with bus lines for all points, east, west, north and south."

Hotels and restaurants also were a problem. While adequate for the "drummers" who peddled their wares up and down the Western Maryland Railroad, or visiting sporting figures who stopped en route to the hunting and fishing grounds in the Monongahela National Forest, it was questionable whether they could handle the crowds which would pour into town for a three-day festival of fun and games.

There was the Hotel Randolph, "finest hotel along the Seneca Trail," with 100 rooms and 50 baths; the Thompson Hotel with its "modern conveniences;" the "homelike" Delmonte Hotel; and the daddy of them all, the Tygart, still a thriving enterprise which then had rooms for "$1.00 and up."

Restaurants didn't advertise in the first Forest Festival program, but oldtimers recall that wholesome food was available at City Restaurant, the Seneca Trail and the Old Inn. Or, if a snack was preferred, there was Neale's Drug Store with

Above and Below: Tree felling and woodchopping contests give a strong woodland flavor to the Forest Festival. Photographer unknown.
Opposite: Occuring a month before the November elections, the Forest Festival is a traditional gathering place for incumbent and aspiring politicians. Photographers unknown.



its "light lunches" and the short-order counter at the railroad station. With none of them still in business, all that remains is the memory of 5¢ hotdogs and full-course meals for 50¢ a head.

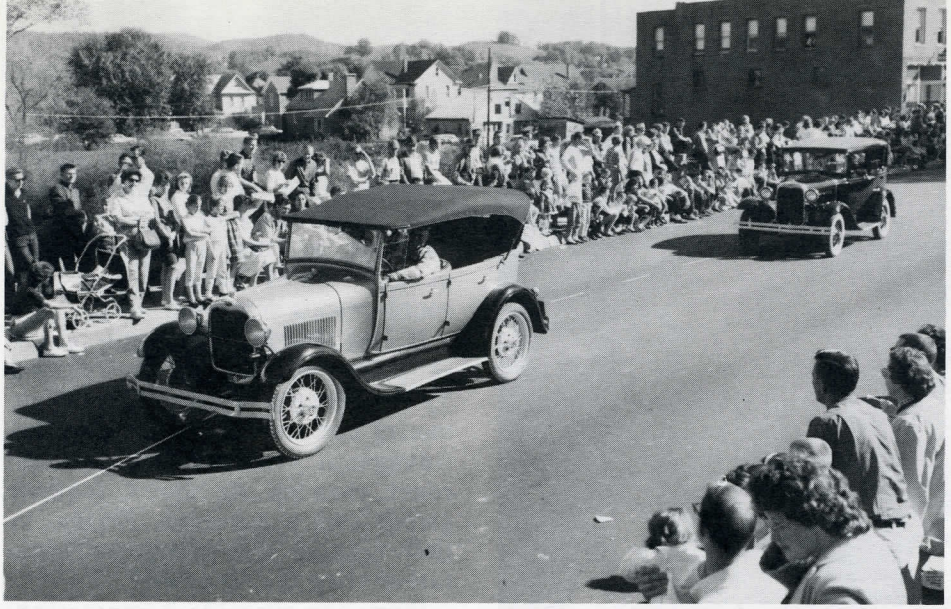
It's no wonder that some of the early festival planners were chilled by the thought of committing their money and time to a full scale extravaganza, with a queen and her court, parades, air shows, football games and a carnival. Elkins, in their opinion, was spinning dreams rather than facing reality.

First, the citywide homecoming, then, a county fair, were proposed as alternatives to the festival. Dr. James E. Allen, president of Davis and Elkins College, who had been asked to permit use of college facilities for the coronation and queen's reception, suggested the fair, saying, like so many others, that a smaller event was better than one which could well leave a residue of unpaid bills and communal bitterness.

But the visionaries, the dream merchants prevailed, and work eventually was started on a festival to be staged October 30 through November 1.

George Dornblazer, superintendent of Rains Lumber Sales and a man who had staged a successful gathering of Shriners in Elkins the year before, was appointed director general. Assisting him were YMCA secretary J. O. Hunnicut, L. L. Cook, manager of the Elkins Credit Bureau, and their respective secretaries. They set up shop in the Wilt Building, and together they began a recruitment program that drew on every shade of talent Elkins could muster, running into hundreds of people.

Help in generous measure came from the State of West Virginia. James Blaine McLaughlin, then agriculture commissioner, came to Elkins often during the planning period to lend assistance, and he, together with William Cook, state superintendent of schools, contributed money from their budgets to the meager festival treasury. What these gentlemen did that first year has now become a precedent. It is



Grand Feature Parade. Date and photographer unknown.

traditional for the governor to crown the queen, for state officials to appear in the parades, and for the legislature to appropriate funds for festival expenses. Currently, the appropriation is $25,000 a year.

Another early idea that helped make the festival a success was that which led to appointment of festival princesses by members of the legislature and the West Virginia congressional delegation. It not only made the Forest Festival a prestigious event among West Virginia galas, but it drew continuing support from the persons who occupy seats of power in government.

Many times during the early months of planning for the first festival, director Dornblazer mentioned the need of an Elkins band. Elkins had the high school band and IOOF Home Band, but Dornblazer thought it was fitting that a city band be formed to lead the grand feature parade.

The band was subsequently formed by Walter Fitzwater, manager of Valley Supply Company, and his brother Mike, who both were musicians. The official festival band has since given way to the plethora of high school bands which now march in the grand feature parade, but it acquitted itself well that first cold day, after only one practice session and parading in uniforms furnished by the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

Probably the biggest attraction of the first Forest Festival, other than the coronation, was the Curtis-Wright Flying Circus from Pittsburgh, which performed daily at Davis Field. Also featured were the Scarlet Hurricanes of Davis and Elkins College, a powerhouse in eastern football circles, who played Oklahoma City University, and Elkins High School, which played Shinnston.

The score of that latter game now is lost in the dimness of time, but two of the protagonists, "Biggie" Goldberg for Elkins and "Big Joe" Stadyhar for Shinnston, went on to football glory at the University of Pittsburgh and West Virginia University. Goldberg became an alltime All-American at Pitt, and Stadyhar went from WVU to the Chicago Bears where he became an alltime All-Pro tackle.

The Forest Festival program enthusiastically described Elkins and its environs. Of the Seneca Trail, then a well-known legend for everything from a restaurant marquee to a bus line logo, the program said:

"The war trail of the Six Nations from Chatauqua, New York, to Georgia, the longest trail known, passes through the city. In the City Park are oak trees that were standing when America was discovered; that have looked down upon the Indian warriors as they passed on their conquering way to the South; that saw the countless pioneers as they traveled from the land of their birth in the East to the forests of the West . . . ; that viewed the marching and retreating armies of the Civil War; and witnessed the coming of the railroad and the building of the city."

The area around Elkins, also according to the first festival program, was the "Land of the Golden Trees." Evidently, when the first settlers, David Tygart and Robert Foyles, came into the valley, it was autumn and the forests had reached the zenith of their fall beauty. That same autumn, Foyles and his family were wiped out by Indians and Tygart moved back across the mountains into a more settled section of Virginia.

Most of the business establishments which ran advertisements in the first festival program are gone now. Out of the 107 which advertised, only 18 are still in business.

The festival, when it finally was held, was marred by near zero weather. But it was enough of a success that those who promoted it decided they would stage it annually, regardless of weather. Only war broke the continuity. In the 49 years since the first was held, there have been 43 festivals, the event having been suspended during World War II and not revived until 1949.

Unlike its progenitor, the Apple Blossom Festival, the Mountain State Forest Festival has grown through the years in proportion and prestige. Today, it is a week-long event; it has attracted every president from Roosevelt to Carter except Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, and such other notables as Neil Armstrong, the first man to walk on the moon; and, though those in charge currently won't admit it, the festival is the single biggest gathering place in all of West Virginia for aspiring politicians.

All things considered, today's festival is not significantly different from the first one, other than the time it is held. A weatherman was called in after that initial near disaster, and despite rain, snow or high winds, which are not an uncommon occurrence, the Mountain State Forest Festival is held the first week in October.

The Poet of Lawnsville

By Bob Spence

ON a day in the middle of the last century—most likely a summer day in 1852—Thomas Dunn English, poet and phrenologist and an American original, came to the town of Lawnsville in the Guyan Valley of Western Virginia for the first time. Lawnsville was the county seat of Logan County, which was already a quarter-century old, and English was to become Mayor of Lawnsville. He stayed only a few years, but managed to change the town's name, write some local poetry of questionable quality, and become an enduring part of Logan folklore.

Joseph Martin wrote in the 1840's that the poet's new home town was "situated in a fertile bottom in a bend of the River Guyandot surrounded by mountains abounding in stone, coal and iron ore." First named the Islands of the Guyandot, the village later was called Lawnsville, then—at English's suggestion—Aracoma, and finally Logan, the name it still carries.

English was then 33 years old, already had been scalded as a "bullet-headed and malicious villain" by Edgar Allan Poe, and was (as he remained until the end of his life) a slender, sharp-featured figure with a walrus moustache and a most unusual way of looking at life.

He was, we are told by Logan doctor-writer Sidney B. Lawson, "an eccentric character of versatile talents; and man of brilliant intellect, a mixer of medicine, learned in the law; proficient in the sciences of his day, and a dabbler in politics of a local character." While living his 83 years, English managed to do many things, not all of them perfectly, often with a little inspired madness, always with imagination.

"Never Lawyer Enough To Hurt"

English was born in Philadelphia, a son of Robert English, on June 29, 1819. His people were of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. After converting to the Quaker faith, his ancestors immigrated to America with William Penn in 1683 and settled on the land that would become Burlington County, New Jersey. In his later life, when English wrote an autobiography that now belongs to the New York Public Library, he mentioned he was proud that "the frame of the original building erected by the emigrants nearly two hundred years since is part of a building standing now in the original site."

English attended Wilson's Academy in Philadelphia, the Friends' Academy at Burlington, and then studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania before starting work for the Pennsylvania Geological Survey.

"Dr. E."—the doctor himself wrote—"commenced his connection with literature at an early year, writing for the leading Philadelphia papers as far back as 1836." By 1839 he had done some writing for *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine.*

Also that year, English wrote a paper defending the phrenological theories of Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Kaspar Spurzheim, and won his medical degree with that paper. Time, incidentally, has been more kind to English than it has to Gall, Spurzheim, and their contention that the shape and formation of a person's skull can be used to judge his or her character.

After beginning a medical practice, English, for unknown reasons, became more interested in the law and chose to study it for three years. He was admitted to the bar in 1842, but later noted, "I never was lawyer enough to hurt me."

Soon literature became more attractive to him than either of his other professions. "In 1844," Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft write in *American Authors,* "English moved to New York, where he edited an anti-Tyler paper called *Aurora. . . .*"

He admitted himself that "I was president of a political club and did a good deal of stumping. I dare say that I was unnecessarily offensive in my remarks at times, and provoked a good deal of ill-will." *Aurora* failed and its editor was appointed weigher at the port of New York. While there, he wrote a poem, "The Gallows-goers," which was widely circulated during the anti-hanging crusade in New York in 1845-50.

By then, English had been involved in a famous episode. In 1845, he "tried his hand at editing *The Aristidean,* a magazine of reviews, politics and light literature," to which Edgar Allan Poe and Walt Whitman were contributors. Poe quarreled with English and, when he published his series "The Literati" in *Godey's Magazine* the next year, Poe ridiculed English as "Thomas Dunn-Brown."

English struck back by printing a card in the *New York Evening Mirror* that accused Poe of forgery. Poe then sued the *Mirror's* editor, Hiram Fuller, for libel and collected $225 in damages. The incident, however, clouded Poe's reputation for years.

In 1848, English edited the *John Donkey,* which F. L. Mott judged as "one of the most successful attempts at a comic journal, perhaps, in the country." Mott added that "it (the journal) is said to have attained a circulation at one time of 12,000, but libel suits ruined it after it had brayed valiantly from January to July, 1848."

English, *American Authors* sighed, "had an irrepressible tendency to bad temper and scurrility." Apparently not everyone thought so, for English married Annie Maxwell Meade in 1849, and, three years later, moved to Logan County.

Above: Thomas Dunn English. From the Library of Congress collection. Photographer unknown.
Above Right: Logan in 1880. Photographer unknown.
Lower Right: Logan Court House, c. 1870. Photographer unknown.

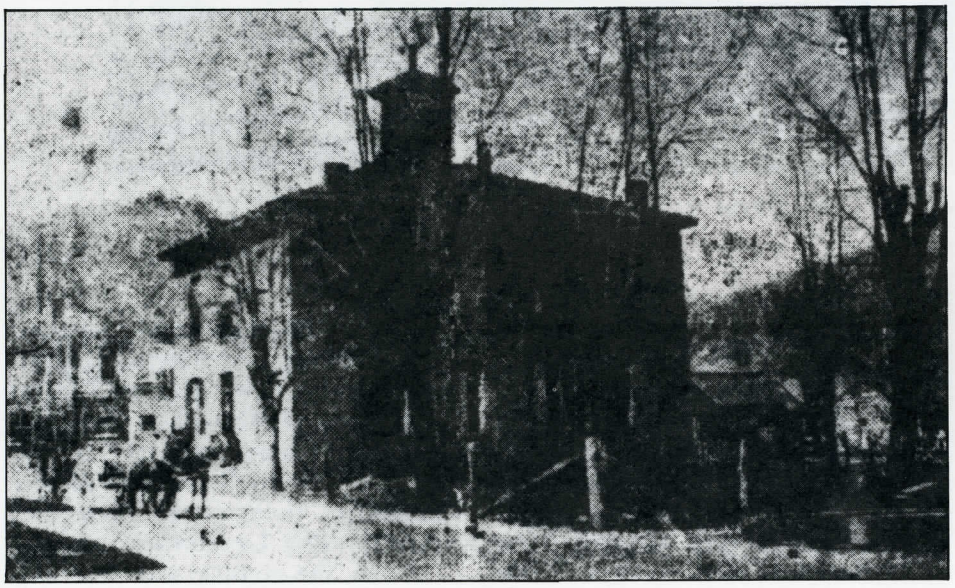
Of Poetry, Politics, and Power

There has been, and still is, much speculation about the reasons Thomas Dunn English left the literary scene in New York and made the then still-dangerous journey to Logan County, well in the wild part of Virginia.

As with nearly anyone, it is safe to think that English had a medley of reasons for moving. A first, though probably minor, part of his decision was the quarrel with Poe. It was embarrassing to English, for Poe later boasted that he had given his rival a "sound thrashing" that he would have trouble forgetting. Another cause for English's move may have been his marriage and the sudden necessity to make a living for the four children he fathered soon after. But still another reason may have been the most influential.

By the 1830's, Americans were becoming aware that their land contained immense reserves of coal—coal so plentiful that it was more than sufficient to stoke the incredible industrial expansion of the United States in the decades after the Civil War. By the 1850's, it was fully understood that the fuel lying under Appalachia in magnificent seams of both anthracite and bituminous coal was the national power source for the vital railroad lines already reaching west from New York, Baltimore, Albany, and Philadelphia.

The southern part of Western Virginia in the 1850's was no less richly endowed than the rest of the mountain region. By common consensus, there are six seams of coal in Logan County, although "because of splitting and because of varying heights above water level due to folding, there still exists among expert engineers some disagreement as to positive identifica-



tion of these seams," according to Logan historian Helen Harvey.

From the mountaintops down, these seams are the Lewis-Stockton or Five-Block; the Coalburg; the Winifred; the Chilton; the Cedar Grove or Island Creek; and the Number Two Gas or Eagle. The quality is variable, with the Island Creek and Eagle seams considered by many the choice coal.

If the coal of 1850 Logan County was not attractive enough by itself, the virgin timber of the valley's hills added to the county's wealth. A handful of investors realized this rather quickly and harvested almost all of that wood between 1870 and 1910.

Perhaps the finest description of these natural resources was given in the 1890's by a wild and flamboyant newspaper editor-Southern orator named Henry Clay Ragland. Even at that late day, Ragland still was trying to arouse government interest in either sponsoring a Guyan Valley Railroad or improving the channel of the river for navigation.

To that end, he wrote, "In the matter of timber and coal, there is no other part of the state that can compare with the Guyandotte Valley, and when the wealth that crowns its mountains and that which is hidden in its deep recesses shall be fully understood and justly appreciated, the magic wand of capital will be, by its talismanic rod, converted into living beauty."

Ragland added that the Logan-Mingo area was the heart of the southern coal fields and that north of the Coal River and south of the Tug Fork, "we find a marked decrease both in the quantity and the quality of the coal deposits, as well as the advantages of working the mines."

But the first men to realize this were not grandiloquent newsmen or poets. They were, instead, a group of New York investors who, in 1849, formed the Guyandotte Navigation Company. Their scheme was to build a series of wooden locks and dams in the river from the town of Guyandotte—now a section of Huntington—through present-day Cabell and Lincoln Counties into Logan. They completed the work as far as Chapmanville and were marketing the coal shipped on barges in 1851.

English, apparently, thought the idea was an excellent one and found it sufficient reason to leave his New York home and travel, with his family, to the Western Virginia mountains.

By 1853, Thomas English's interest in coal was burning. "At one time," Logan historian Harvey wrote, "T. D. English had 27 separate coal leases, one for 3,900 acres." S. T. DeJournette, another county historian, added that ". . . Thomas Dunn English incorporated the Methcomah Cannel Coal Company with holdings of 4,000 acres in Wayne and Logan Counties. He also formed the Otetiani Cannel Coal Company with the help of Samuel K. Zook, which held title to 3,000 acres."

While there is no way of knowing English's exact intentions today, he was evidently scheming to be in at the beginning of the Logan coal in-

Logging at Stallings Hollow, near Logan, c. 1900. Photographer unknown.

dustry. His dreams of mineral empire would not be realized, but English made his presence felt in the very human ways of poetry and politics.

In politics, English's interest from the first seems to have centered on organizing the government of Logan County and the town of Lawnsville. Although lacking local government, Lawnsville was not a new community when English arrived. In fact, the town had been settled in the 1820's by an enterprising trader named Anthony Lawson, who built a trading post at the confluence of the Guyandot River and Island Creek as soon as the spot was safe from Indian raids.

It was natural for the farming families who settled the county to build their homes near Lawson's store. By the time Joseph Martin (of the *New and Comprehensive Gazeteer of Virginia*) arrived in the 1840's to give the village its first published description, Lawnsville had grown to a fairly substantial town. Since the establishment of Lawson's store, Martin wrote, "a handsome courthouse, clerk's office and jail have been erected of hewn stone. Also, several dwelling houses and others are now being erected.

"The other improvements are two houses of entertainment, two mercantile stores, one tanyard, one smithshop, one tailor shop, and one boot- and shoe-maker establishment. Besides, there are several house carpenters and various other mechanics."

Anthony Lawson's grandson, Robert Lawson, later wrote that when English arrived in Lawnsville he built a house on Guyandotte Avenue, a throughway that no longer exists, but which was located slightly farther down the riverbank from Main Street in Logan today. Since there were few, if any, doctors in the village, it is natural to think that English became well-known. Later he became popular, and then influential, as his natural interests in politics led him on.

At one time he served the town as postmaster, an undemanding position then, since the mail came from Brownsville—now Marmet—only once a week over the route of old U. S. 119. English's main accomplishment, then, could have been incorporating Lawnsville.

When the county was first surveyed in 1824, Lawnsville was chosen as the seat of government and a frame courthouse was constructed. In the easy-going manner of the day, however, evidently no deed was recorded for the building. To English, this oversight was intolerable.

In either late 1852 or early 1853, he wrote a letter to the General Assembly of Virginia asking for permission to reorganize the town. The letter is preserved in the Virginia State Archives in the 1840-61 box of legislative petitions.

In his letter, English claimed that he and eighteen cosigners "respectfully represent that they are de-

sirous of having that portion of Logan County, lying contiguous and around the courthouse, incorporated under the name of 'The Town of Aracoma,' agreeably to the bill annexed, and pray your honorable body to enact the said bill into a law." Thus Lawnsville was renamed for Aracoma, legendary daughter of Cornstalk, Shawnee commander at the Battle of Point Pleasant. We can imagine that the new name was pleasing to the romantic poet.

At about the same time, English was appointed by the Logan County Court to put the courthouse on a solid legal foundation. The deed that was written—dust-dry as many of the time and filled with quaint references for the public square boundaries—is found on page 584 of County Deed Book C.

In practical terms, the deed states that Anthony Lawson, Allen Butcher, James Lawson and Reece Browning agreed to donate land to the county for the already-standing courthouse. The deed also marked off the land for the public square between Stratton Street, Jefferson Street, Washington Avenue and Guyandotte Avenue.

With those things accomplished, English ran for, and was elected, mayor of Aracoma. His duties, we can assume, were not too tiring, for a Logan legend persists that he spent much of his time resting against an elm that grew on the riverbank and writing poetry.

There was much of this work: "The Logan Grazier," "Guyandotte Musings," "The Boone Wagoner," and "Gauley River." For once he may have been at peace as he reflected on his love for the land:

Here in these grand old woods
whose shade,
So dusky brown befits my lot,
I sit within the leafy glade
And gaze upon the Guyandotte.
And as I sit, to calm betrayed,
Drink deep the beauty of the
spot.

One of the most picturesque views would have been the rafts made of hundreds of logs that were taken out of the valley to market in Guyandotte, Louisa, or Cincinnati. As he watched, English was moved to write another poem famous in West Virginia. It was called "Rafting on the Guyandotte."

Thrice a hundred logs together
Float as lightly as a feather;
On the freshet's foaming flow
Swift as arrows shoot, they go
Past the overhanging trees,
Jutting rocks—beware of these!
Over rapids, round the crooks,
Over eddies that fill the nooks,
Swirling, whirling, hard to steer,
Manned by those who know no
fear.
Tough-armed raftsmen guide
each oar,
Keeping off the mass from shore;
. . . . . .
One who dullness seeks to change
For a feeling new and strange,
To the loggers' camp ground send
him,
To a ride like this commend
him—
Ride that pains and sorrow
dulces
Stirring brains and quickening
pulses,
Making him a happier man
Who has coursed the fierce
Guyan
When the June-rain freshet
swells it,
And yellow rage impels it.

It was while watching the industrous raftsmen, perhaps, that the poet had his great economic inspiration: why not load the timber rafts with coal, and let the one commodity carry the other to market? Men could be hired to cut timber and make rafts, others to dig coal, and both products sold downriver for a good profit.

During the next several years, as the deeds in the county courthouse show, English was active buying land, keeping part of it, and selling some to Samuel Zook in New York City.

Yet English's grand schemes came to naught, for reasons which are unclear now. The legalistic deeds tell little of dreams or of disappointments. English's interest, perhaps distracted by larger public events of the pre-war 1850's, perhaps darkened by failure to get a corporation organized, faded by mid-decade.

"For Caution Best Comports with Age . . . ."

Thomas Dunn English left Logan County in 1856, probably because his hopes for an empire of coal had failed; perhaps because he wanted to work more in journalism.

He lived awhile in Tazewell County, Virginia, and then moved to Bergen County, New Jersey. During the Civil War he sympathized with the South, but was elected to the New Jersey legislature in 1862. He was defeated for re-election.

In 1870, English purchased *The Old Guard* from Chauncey Burr, who had managed it for seven years without a financial loss. In English's hands it failed "after a few numbers." Six years later he received an honorary LL.D. from William and Mary College and, in 1878, was on the staff of the *Newark Sunday Call.*

There the image fades. English lived quietly after 1878 and little is heard of him until 1890, when he was elected to Congress. He served two terms as a Democrat, but was defeated for a third term.

In his autobiographical sketch he mentions that "His most worthwhile recent productions are probably a series of national ballads... illustrating the history of the country . . . ." Those poems were, he added, "mostly simple narratives wherein an attempt is made in easy — sometimes peculiar — meter to tell the story of a battle or noted event, with a close attention to detail; and the characteristics of the time and place wherein the scene is laid."

In 1894, English's daughter Alice published his *Select Verse* by subscription. Though his poems have been soundly berated, some of them show an almost haunting prescience. "The Coal Baron" first tells a rather grim story of a medieval nobleman who ruined himself by oppressing his people. English then writes:

Now we have a baron who plays
the same game,
His methods may differ, his ends
are the same;
Poor pay to the swart, toiling
miner he deals;
With high price the store of con-
sumers he steals;
The fetters of law are mere cob-
webs to him,
He rends them asunder at will or
in whim;
The beggar and bondholder both
must pay the toll
To swell the fat purse of the
Baron of Coal.

In a more gentle mood, he wrote the poem "Now I Am Old," celebrating the ambitions of young people that he no longer had to handle. It included the lines:

I've lived a rather stormy life,
Have fought my way for many
years,
And welcome respite from the
strife.

Without any bitterness in his final years—despite troubles with near-blindness and the death of his wife Annie in June 1899—English was almost serene. He realized that his greatest reknown came from a minor poem he wrote in the 1840's, called "Ben Bolt." He once said that a race horse, a ship and a steamboat were named for the poem. The horse, he said, was "a plater;" the ship sank; and the steamboat blew up.

In much the same way, English's plans for coal vanished. But with a twist he may have appreciated, other men with money went to the land in West Virginia that had forgotten Lawnsville and built the coal industry he had dreamed fifty years before. English himself died an obscure death on April 1, 1902.

About "Ben Bolt"

Writing about "Ben Bolt" in the *West Virginia Review* in 1928, J. Roy Fuller noted that "if a man writes a poem a little more sentimental than any other, and then some ten years later moves to another state, it seems that the towns and counties around his new home will, years later, recall the very spot where the poem was written."

That is what happened with Thomas Dunn English and his most famous poem—twice. English lived in Logan County in the 1850's and in Tazewell County, Virginia, some years later. Both counties claim "Ben Bolt," with Logan arguing that English wrote it at the home of James A. and Vicie Nighbert and dedicated it to Alice Lawson. Tazewell claims that he wrote it at the Peery-Wynne home at Ben Bolt and gave it to Alice Wynne.

Actually, "Ben Bolt" was written in New York in 1843. Journalists N. P. Willis and George P. Morris were looking for original writing to help fill an issue of *The New York Mirror,* which they were trying to revive at the time. They turned to English, then a young lawyer, and asked him to write a poem. He tried, and failed. They asked him to try again. He did, and the poem "Ben Bolt" was born.

Ten years later, English's poem was the subject of controversy when the *Cincinnati Nonpareil* accused him of stealing it from an 1825 British publication. Writing from Logan, English countered the charge in an 1853 letter to his friend Rufus Griswold in New York. He reaffirmed his claim in his autobiography, and his authorship has generally gone undisputed over the past century.

English himself considered "Ben Bolt" to be "twaddle," but it has outlived everything he did.

Ben Bolt

Don't you remember sweet Alice,
Ben Bolt—
Sweet Alice whose hair was so
brown,
Who wept with delight when you
gave her a smile,
And trembled with fear at your
frown?
In the old church-yard in the
valley, Ben Bolt,
In a corner obscure and alone,
They have fitted a slab of the
granite so grey,
And Alice lies under the stone.

Under the hickory-tree, Ben Bolt,
Which stood at the foot of the
hill,
Together we've lain in the noonday
shade,
And listened to Appleton's mill.
The mill-wheel has fallen to pieces,
Ben Bolt,
The rafters have tumbled in,
And a quiet which crawls round
the walls as you gaze
Has followed the olden din.

Do you mind of the cabin of logs,
Ben Bolt,
At the edge of the pathless wood,
And the button-ball tree with its
motley limbs,
Which nigh by the doorstep
stood?
The cabin to ruin has gone, Ben
Bolt,
The tree you would seek for in
vain;
And where once the lords of the
forest waved
Are grass and the golden grain.

And don't you remember the school,
Ben Bolt,
With the master so cruel and
grim,
And the shaded nook in the run-
ning brook
Where the children went to
swim?
Grass grows on the master's grave,
Ben Bolt,
The spring of the brook is dry,
And of all the boys who were
schoolmates then
There are only you and I.

There is change in the things I
loved, Ben Bolt,
They have changed from the old
to the new;
But I feel in the deeps of my spirit
the truth,
There never was change in you.
Twelvemonths twenty have past,
Ben Bolt,
Since first we were friends—yet
I hail
Your presence a blessing, your
friendship a truth,
Ben Bolt of the salt-sea gale.

(Continued from page 12)

Moore, he was over the whole group of us. He got after us and said no more "criss-crossin' around," playing with first one group and then the other. I decided I was quitting, and we come up here to Elkins and went on Radio WDNE.

MK Was that in '49, the year you opened the restaurant in Mill Creek?

WS Yes, I was at Huttonsville, and then in 1950 we moved to Mill Creek. [Managed] a Pure Oil station down on the corner, was there a couple of years.

LS He had the gas station and I had a restaurant down there.

WS Then we moved up above the Post Office here behind the restaurant for 25 years.

MK Was that where the deer got in?

WS That was before we had the restaurant.

LS Now tell him about it, just like it was.

WS Well, I had sold a car to a feller, and I was coming down here and meet him to fix the title up. Got up here to the high school building, why a deer jumped across the road in front of me. There was a real steep bank on the other side, and he run up agin that bank and a barbed wire fence up there. The bank was so steep that he couldn't jump over the fence, and he run back down into the road in front of my car. I kept after him down through town.

LS Blowing the horn at him.

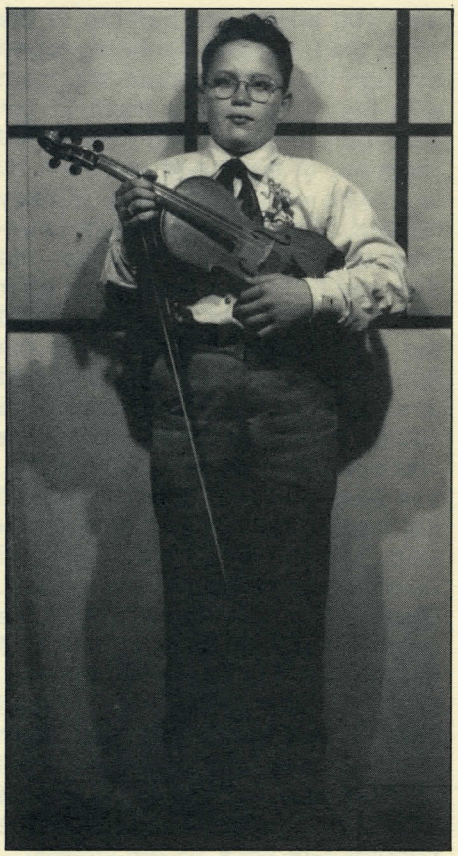
WS Blowing the horn. And the show building was on the left of the road at that time. 'Bout time for people to go to the show. I wanted to run the old deer down by the show building so everybody could see him. Now the police, his name was Red, he heard the horn a-blowing and he thought it was somebody speeding. He got behind a telephone pole there and he said he meant to blow the tires off that car when it came along. Said about that time he seed something pass that looked like a big Jersey cow. The deer was running 35 miles per hour, was what he was doing. I kept the car right up to his heels. He didn't seem to want to get out of them bright street lights, you know, and my car lights. He just stayed right in the middle of the road right down through there. 'Course there was no cars coming either way, only me. I slowed up before I got to the show building. I wanted everybody to see the old deer, that's the reason I was blowing the horn. When he got to the bank corner up here, why, he jumped up on the sidewalk. He took the sidewalk and Ham Gum, he can tell you about it. Ham's getting up in years. Ham, he was standing on the corner. He and somebody was talking, and the old deer jumped through this big window, oh, it must have been, I don't know, it's an awful big glass window.

LS Post Office.

WS Post Office window, yeah. Ham said he thought it was somebody throwed a damn big rock through the window. Ham talks kind of rough. About that time the police, he was hid down there, he said, "What's going on here?" And I said, "There's a big deer jumped in the Post Office." People, you know, commenced to gathering around this commotion. In a half-an-hour, why there must have been 150, 200 people there, cars a-stoppin', you know, and parking in the road. Red was just a-running round through the people spreading them with his arms, telling them to get back off the street, that deer would jump out of there and cut them all to pieces with his hooves. Finally he said, "Go get Wrightmeyer to unlock the Post Office and get the deer out." So they had to go after Wrightmeyer, and they unlocked the door and opened up and the floor was slick with oil. The old deer, his hooves, you know, he couldn't walk. He'd fall down. He was cut a little bit, he was bleeding, and Red said that deer'd die, said his throat was cut and he'd die. I said, "Ah, he won't die." The old deer wouldn't come out at all. George, that was Red's brother, he come up around there and started to look in to see what was going on, said "What's going on around here?" Red said, "Get back from there, George, that deer'll jump out of there and cut you all to pieces with them hooves. Get back off the streets! Get back off the streets!"

And by gracious, Ray Amos, he come up around there. He had been to Helen Bell's store and he had a sack of groceries on his back. He hadn't even attempted to go over and look in. Red grabbed Ray by

Woody Simmons pushes back from the dinner table for reminiscences with interviewer Michael Kline. Photograph by Doug Yarrow.



Woody's son William *(above left)* a Randolph County musician of legendary ability, played several instruments and many different styles of music. Tragedy struck the Simmons family when William was paralyzed in an automobile accident at age 27. Unable to play music again, he died years later from complications arising from his injuries. Woody's first heart attack followed his son's death by three weeks. Photographer unknown. *Above right* is Woody's group at WDNE, Elkins, in 1950. From left to right, Woody Simmons, William Simmons, Rusty Helmick, and Arnold Selman. Photographer unknown.

the arm and reached for his blackjack. "Now I told you two or three times to get back off the streets here," Red said, "I could take you to jail here in a minute." Ray says, "Well, I haven't been doing nothing!"

"Woody, I'll have to get a warrant for you," Red says. "All right, Red, I says, "I've had a hundred dollars worth of fun out of this." But he says, "I'll have to get a warrant for you now. I'll have to call the state police and the game wardens." I says, "All right." He says, "That deer's gonna die." Still the deer wasn't out of the Post Office yet. Couldn't get it out, you know. Well, they deputized Ralph Brady, went and got him to go in to the Post Office, see if he could get the old deer out. As soon as Ralph went in the Post Office, that deer jumped out the other big glass window, broke it. You can see the windows as you drive by, how big they are. And the deer ran off up the road. There must have been, I'd say at least 150 people there. Never seed such a crowd in my life.

Red went to old man Luther's office and wanted to get a warrant for me, the deer jumping in the window, me running the deer down through there. I come down the next morning and seen what went on. The game wardens come up and the polices, but they never done nothing about it.

In 1949 Simmons went on the road again in search of radio work, this time with the encouragement of old friends, Jack and Helen Williams, natives of Oklahoma, who had previously played music over the radio in Bluefield. The Williams' said there was radio work to be had if they would all travel and play together. In the company of his old banjo-picking friend, Arnold Selman, and his 12 year old son, William, Simmons set out to tour Bluefield, Princeton, Beckley, and other music meccas in southern West Virginia. Woody describes the circuit-riding adventure as a terrible struggle, even to find a place to stay. But the three of them finally found a room near Princeton with a kind woman who charged only $2.50 apiece per week. "She took a liking to us, and she'd stay up at night 'til we come in and feed us, and didn't charge us anything for food." Using Princeton as a base, Woody, William, and Arnold booked shows across the southern counties to Williamson. But they ran into stiff competition. Ezra Cline and the Lonesome Pine Fiddlers were on the road at the time, as were Rex and Eleanor Parker. Lester Flatt was working in Bristol, Tennessee. The Simmons group was footing all its own bills, " . . . and we just couldn't make any money at all." So Woody left William to travel for a while longer by himself and went home to Laverne in Mill Creek. After a few weeks, they drove over to Princeton to rescue their exhausted, star-struck son, and they brought him home.

At the age of 13 William was a kind of child prodigy in the world of country music. Laverne had gotten him started chording the mandolin when he was a very small child, and it wasn't long before he had a guitar in his hands. Woody says he " . . . played the fiddle, too. I taught him to play the fiddle when he was four years old." William could fiddle like Benny Martin, pick like Lester Flatt, and sing like Bill Monroe, according to his father.

WS Music was just real easy for him, yes, sir, he never had no trouble learning anything. He'd hear a song once and he'd know the tune and know the words. He never had to work hard at playing music, he could play any style, rock and roll or any style, it didn't make any difference. And he could read music, I think that advanced him some. He wouldn't play with nobody that played the least bit out of time, now that was just out with him. If I'd break time the least bit in a tune, why he'd stop me right then. After he got crippled up he couldn't use his arm no more, but he'd listen to us play and tell us where we was losing time. He'd straighten me out not later than a year before he died. He said nobody could dance the way we was playing the tune.

MK How old was he when he was injured?

WS Twenty-seven. He played right up 'til that time, played with all kinds of groups. I've got 45 RPM records he cut with the Pelferry Brothers in Kentucky. He done the fiddling for them. And the next week after he got crippled they was over at the hospital and wondered if he'd be able to cut another album, another record with them.

MK You told me Bill Monroe was William's idol?

WS Yeah, [Bill Monroe] was at our place all day one day, down at the restaurant. 1951. He played two shows and didn't have an amplifier with him, and used my equipment. He was there all day. And William had boxing gloves. Bill put the gloves on him and, I believe, Gordon Terry. Got out there and boxed. Had a big time that time. Rudy Lyle was with him. He had a Gibson banjo, and on the second show he asked William if he thought I'd care if he'd go down and get my Bacon banjo, he'd like to play it. And William took him down. When they come out on the second show, why he had that gold-plated Bacon & Day banjo of mine. He really liked it. Gordon Terry was with him at the time doing the fiddling.

MK Did you fiddle some with Bill, did he like your style?

WS Yeah, I played with him, I played all his songs back at that time. Any of them songs he sang, I could play them.

MK What happened after that? What kind of style did William develop?

WS Well, he started out in bluegrass music. Then when he went into the service he stayed in Newfoundland. Why, he got a rock and roll band. And then in Goose Bay, Labrador, he played western and country music. Then he was in Texas and he played different styles of music there. He also had a group of musicians in Florida. But when he went to Newfoundland he had a rock and roll band. It was an awful good band. I have the tapes out here.

The car Woody built for the 1959 trip to Newfoundland. The car had a 1941 body, Olds 88 engine, Lincoln transmission with overdrive, Chrysler power brakes, and Cadillac four-barrel carburetors. Photographer unknown.

MK Did you tell me you went to visit William there?

WS Yes, I went in 1959. I drove a 1941 Ford up there. I built that car. Took the car body in the garage and taken the body off the frame and cleaned the frame up real good and cut it out. Had to change the master cylinder and put power brakes on, power brake unit off a Chrysler. Put a Lincoln transmission and overdrive in it. Cut the torque tube and drive shaft. Welded the torque tube back. Re-splined the drive shaft. Cut 12 and ⅜ inches off the drive shaft and the torque tube. And bored an Olds 88 engine to four inches. Put a three-quarter cam in it and solid lifters with adjustable tappets and two Cadillac four-barrel carburetors on it. Had windshield washers on it, back-up light, adjustable springs—make them any tension I wanted. Power steering. Had Lincoln hubs and drums on it. Adjustable shocks. It would do most anything you wanted it to, that car would.

The engineer here on the Penn Line said I'd never make it up there and back in it, the brakes would burn out in it. I told him they wouldn't burn out any quicker in it then they would in a Chrysler. So I left at 1:30 on a Sunday morning. Two o'clock Sunday afternoon, I was going through New Haven, Connecticut. Monday morning I called back from Augusta, Maine, at 7:00. And Tuesday morning at 8:00 I was at North Sydney, Nova Scotia. Got on a ship there at 8:00 that night, and got off at Port aux Basques, Newfoundland, at 8:30 the next morning. Hit blacktop road, it only lasted 17 miles. Oh, I had 135 miles of rock base road to drive on. William met us out of Stephensville, Newfoundland, about 4:00 that evening. And we went into Stephensville to his home.

William said we could go to the dance with him that night at the road house, the Rose Club. Said he had a rock and roll band. I told him then, I said, "Now, that's going to be a joke." When they pulled back the curtain I really had a surprise. He had a good rock and roll band. He kept his violin there beside of him, and he played lead guitar. Then he said I'd just as well play with them. I played a few waltzes on the fiddle and got by with that, got $15 a night while I was there.

MK Sounds like you really enjoyed the trip.

WS Yes, I really did. I caught a lot of nice salmon fish. And Martin, he was a guide, he tied my flies for me—it was unlawful to fish with spinners in the Harry's River—and I'd catch fish, because he knew how to tie flies. We caught a lot of nice salmon. Then there was no law on brook trout. Caught some 18 inches long. You catch as many of them as you want, catch them any way you want.

And then I got acquainted with a lot of musicians. When I was up to St. John's [Newfoundland] I cut a tape for the Canadian Broadcasting System. They wanted to know where I had been in Newfoundland, and the only place I could think of was Port aux Basques.

We left the first of September, the day moose season come in. They wanted me to stay there and moose hunt with them, to go with them before the season come in, but I was afraid to go. Because if they caught me killing a moose out of season up there, they'd have kept me a lifetime.

MK Woody, you've had a lot of setbacks in your music through the years, haven't you?

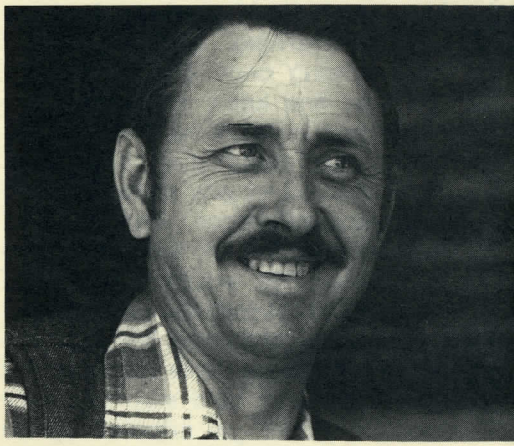
WS Sure have. In 1968 I got paralyzed, got my spine broke in two places in a truck wreck hauling coal for the Carnation Milk Company. Hauled coal for them for 15 years. And I just got down the road here a mile and a half and a feller come around on my side of the road. I tried to stop. Wasn't much of a wreck. Everybody said they didn't know how in the world I ever got hurt. But the doctor said I was born with a narrow spine and didn't take much to snap it. Well, I couldn't use my hand and couldn't even walk for a time. And then when I did get so I could use my left hand a little bit, I couldn't use my right one. I couldn't lift the music, or anything like that, and it kind of throwed me off 'til I didn't even know the tunes, you know. I forgot all the tunes.

People would put the fiddle in my lap, Kenny and Merle, and I couldn't do anything with it, couldn't even lift it. And one night I was watching television, and they was there trying to get me to play. I seen Paul Warren on the television and he played an old tune, "Take Me Back to Tulsa." And I said, "I used to play that tune." I got the fiddle and sawed around a little on it and got so I could sort of play it just a little bit. Well, from that time on I kept working on that tune and got so I could play it again—I played it for, oh, two or three months.

And then I went over to Marlinton Pioneer Days and got in the fiddlers' contest. Some of them played two tunes, some of them played three, but I could only play just the one tune. I had to walk with a cane at that time, and I got out in the crowd and sit down in a chair. They said the contest would be judged on smoothness and tone quality. And they named over the third place winner. Of course, I knew, well, I thought, no chance of me winning anything. And named over the second place winner. And they named over the first place winner —it was me! Won first place on that old tune. But actually that was the only tune I could play. Well, I kept a-gaining a little all the time then. I got so I could play, but it was mighty hard because my fingers just wouldn't hardly work at all. Some of the tunes I never did gain back to this day. And "Fire on the Mountain." I had one awful time with that. I had to hunt up an old disc that had it on to get it figured out. That's the way I got back on to it again after I got disabled.

MK Just felt your way back.

WS Uh huh. Still bothers me yet in my hands. Just don't work good. Jim Andy says to me, says, "I want to get up close to you and watch your fingers because," he said, "I know you're doing a lot of work with them fingers, but I can't see them." And he got up close and watched them. I don't raise them very high off the finger board, because I lose time if I do, see. And the closer I can keep them to the strings, why, I can make the notes much quicker. And he says, "I see what you're doing now, you're not clearing the strings very much." And he said, "That's an advantage." But I had to learn to do that



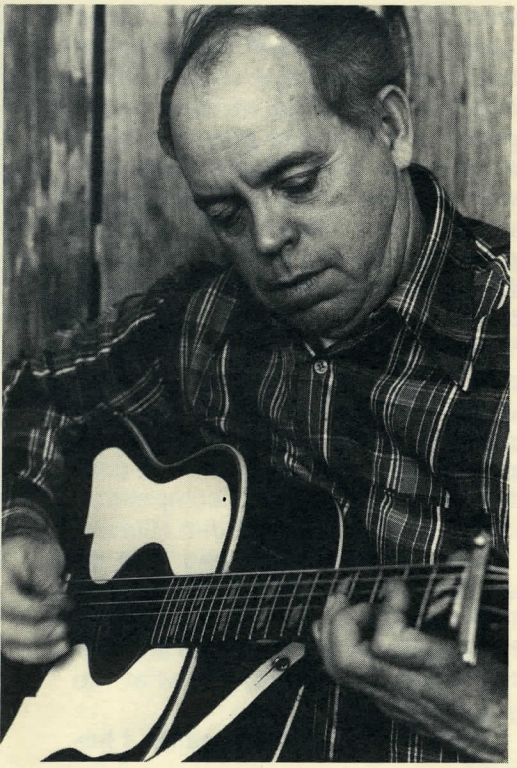
because I couldn't move my fingers as fast.

MK And you just got back from all that trouble and then your heart gave out?

WS Yeah, I had a heart attack in 1978, February 12. Had open-heart surgery the third day of August, 1978. Yes, they said it was the worst heart surgery they'd ever performed in that hospital. Said they came awful near losing me.

MK But you came right back and have been winning steadily at contests ever since.

WS I went over to Morgantown last fall, I went in the hospital down here, and the doctors decided they'd put a monitor on me and let me go. And they said, "Well, let him go. Better be over there than laying in the bed, and if he dies, well, he'll die happy." So I went over there [the Mountaineer Days Festival in Morgantown] and played about 30 minutes in the afternoon, and I had to make a report every hour how I was doing and feeling. I did. And the next day, then, I went over there, the next night, and



Woody Simmons, Jimmie Currence, and Paul Armstrong *(above).* Armstrong and Currence provide musical back-up for some of the cuts on "All Smiles Tonight." Photograph by Doug Yarrow.

won first place in the fiddlers' contest on Saturday night, November 4.

MK Looking back over all your musical life, who do you think are the great fiddlers who influenced you?

WS Edwin Hammons. He was the best old-time fiddler that I ever heard, I belive. He played here in Mill Creek in a contest. He won a competition or two here in Mill Creek.

MK Beat you on your home ground, huh?

WS Yes sir. Well, he did beat me.

MK Did you ever go down home with him? What were his people like?

WS None of his boys didn't play the fiddle, as I know of. But Burl, that's his nephew, he's a pretty good fiddle player. Burl Hammons, yes. But old Edwin, now, he had some tunes he was hard to beat on, "Billy in the Low Ground," and then he made that old "George Washington March" up himself. One day I said, "Edwin, play me the 'George Washington March'." He said, "I'll play her for you, but I won't play her fer —" he called Dewey Hamrick 'Jewey'—he said, "I won't play her fer 'Jewey,' but I'll play her for you." And he did, he played me the "George Washington March," and I learned it from him. I won a fiddlers' contest in Glenville with it. I could never win nothing at Glenville, only with the old "George Washington March." You tune the fiddle all together different to play that. Edwin Hammons would drop the G string down to D, and the E string down to D.

A lot of them says that Burl Hammons can play as good as Edwin. But I'll tell you the same I'd tell Burl, that he couldn't play noways near like Edwin. Burl'd agree to that, too. Burl's a real good fiddle player but nothing like Edwin. Edwin could play a lot of tunes, and he used his fingers properly, and he done a good job bowing the fiddle.

MK Who were the other great ones from that time?

WS Wren McGee. Wren would play a piece and Edwin would say, "Let me have the fiddle." He'd play the same piece and try to beat him, and if he got a little something different, why Wren would say, "Let me play her again." Wren, he was pretty hard to beat. Couldn't ever keep up with him, because anybody that'd play a tune like him, why, as soon as they'd play it like him, he'd play it some other way. Wasn't no use to try to learn to play like him, 'cause if you'd learn to play a tune just exactly like he did, why the next time you heard him he'd play it different. Wren, he'd win most of the contests back in them old days.

MK What about the great radio fiddlers? You mentioned Arthur Smith and Clayton McMichen.

WS But you couldn't leave Chubby Wise out! Chubby Wise was a mighty fine all-round fiddler, I think.

MK He prospered during the 1940's, was it?

WS Yes, he fiddled for Hank Snow for 16 years. Big Howdy Forrester was fiddling for Bill Monroe, and Chubby, he was down in Florida. He heard on Saturday night that Forrester had to go to the Army on Monday, so he drove to Nashville on Saturday, and he asked at the door where Monroe was. He said they told him back behind the curtain. And he asked if he could go in and see him. They said yeah. And he went in there and asked Monroe, "I hear you need a fiddle player." Bill said, "Yes, I do." Said, "Can you play?" Said, "Yes." Said, "How about playing me a hoedown." He said, "All right." Said he played "Katy Hill." Monroe said to him, he said, "How about playing one of my songs that I sing, and let me sing and you play it." And he said he done "Footprints in the Snow." Bill said, "Where's your clothes at?" So he fiddled for him for several years. Then he done fiddling for Lester Flatt and them, too, I think.

To me, when it come down to bluegrass music, I don't think there was anybody can beat Bill Monroe. And any of the boys he trained, I think, is the best. I never thought that none of them could play as good after they left Bill Monroe. 'Course, that's just my opinion of the thing. Seem to me like he could train them to play real good.

MK Did the bluegrass music challenge you, Woody? You were always kind of an inventor, weren't you, always changing tunes a little bit, trying to develop your own style?

WS Yes, sir. Yes, I play a tune different from what a lot of fellers do. Just like "Gold Rush," I can play it the way it was played on the record, but I have a style of my own to play. I can play it either way.

MK I know that you made up at least one fiddle tune, because a few months ago I was in Bemis, a little place where I had never been before. And there standing by her gate was a woman named Mrs. Shifflet. We got to talking, and she told me that she had helped name one of your fiddle tunes and had won some kind of a prize.

WS Yes, yes. Arnold [Selman] and I worked on an old tune and got so we could play it together. We played over Radio WDNE every day.

We didn't have no name for the tune, so I decided to give a prize to who'd send in the best name. And this Shifflet woman from Bemis sent in the name, "The Fiddler's Hornpipe." And I chose that for the name of the tune, and I give her a gold necklace. And I played this tune, well, 28 years, I reckon. Yeah. But somebody come out with a tune something near it. I don't know what they call it. I don't know whether they learned it off of me, or where it comes from, but it's almost like mine. So I kind of dropped my tune, don't play it much anymore.

MK Woody, how do you feel about what's happening with music these days?

WS Well, I'm going to tell you one thing, I'm awful glad that the young generation has picked up the music. Somebody's got them interested in it, and I think they're doing wonderful. The boys and girls that's playing now, they're way advanced in the music. Back when I was their age, there was very few people could play music like them. They're learning quicker, 'cause they've got somebody to instruct them and teach them, I think.

MK Woody, you're in the midst of putting out your first record, and you've had some help from the Currence Brothers. Can you tell me something about them?

WS I've known Jimmie and Loren Currence since before they played.

MK Since they were young boys? Did you know their daddy?

WS Oh, yeah, their daddy, Jacob Currence. He never missed hearing our program. He'd be out in the cornfield, Jimmie said. We'd come on at 12:00 in the day, and he'd say, "Boys, it's time for Woody to be on the radio. Let's throw these hoes down and get to the house." And Jimmie said he'd pull his chair up close to the radio, it was a battery radio, I figure. At that time, they lived over back in the "High Germany" country, over here back of Blue Rock. It's a real rough country to get in and out. And his dad said, "Now, boys, be right still, you're going to hear something here in a little bit." Soon as we came on the air we'd always play a hoe-down tune. Jimmie said his dad said, "Now it's going to take something to beat that feller." I've played off and on with them for years. Jimmie used to play the mandolin along with me.

MK Did their dad play any?

WS No, but he was a good singer. His mother was a fine singer. I have an album here of them singing hymns. Jimmie and Lody [Loren] was singing on it, too. First time they played on the radio or television they went to Pittsburgh and I let Lody have my old Gibson guitar. He didn't have any music back at that time. And they had it pretty bad. They was crippled up and was lucky to live as long as they have. They're fine musicians, a good bunch of boys. They always played as hard as they could with me to help me win a contest. And they've never made me feel a bit bad from beating me in a contest.

MK What is the toughest contest you ever played in?

WS Well, my toughest contest was down here to Elkins. Lions Club had it, they built me up pretty big, and I'd won it a couple times, and they give a big write-up in the paper. I just had to play real good to win that contest, and then tied with a feller. We had to play a waltz and a hoe-down, and I'd played these old waltzes so many times that I'd get kind of tired of them. So I played the "Roxanna Waltz," and I got Jerry Milnes to play the guitar. I trained Jerry to play the guitar after me, and on the play-off on the tie, why, Jerry, he played with me and I won that contest. It was right smart competition there, a feller name of Jim Hilders.

MK Woody, if you had it to do all over again, would you play it like you did, or do you think you'd have gone on the road and shot for the Nashville scene, or what do you think?

WS I'd just do it the same, I believe.

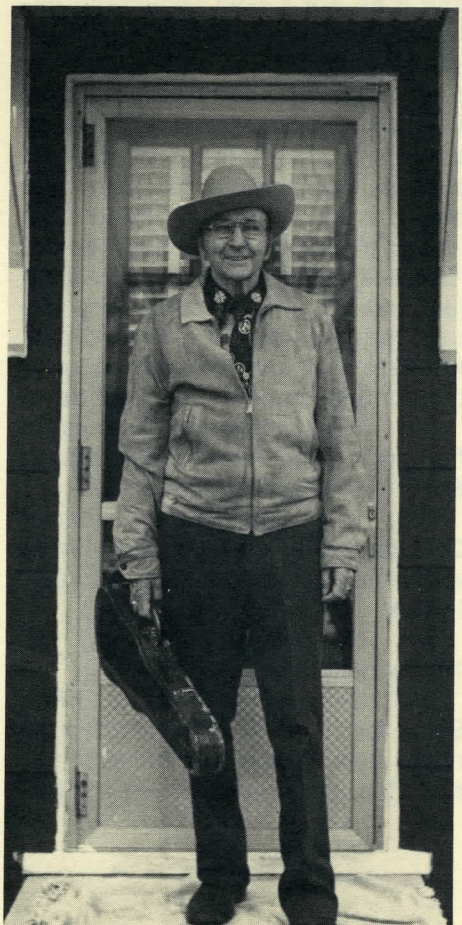
MK That's what I like to hear.

WS Believe I got more enjoyment out of it. That's right. I'd go out here and play just as quick all night for nothing as if somebody'd say, why I'll give $200 if you go and play. Back when I was playing around it was kind of like PTP. Promise to pay. Somebody'd say, "I'll give you $5 if you come over here and play a dance." Well, they'd all get a drink or two and they'd forget to pay the fiddler, you know. And you'd go home without any money.

I always played with anybody, it didn't matter, now, they didn't have to be the finest players. Or if they could just play a little bit I still played and tried to enjoy playing with them. There'd always be a good note made somewhere on the fiddle. I'd listen. There would always be somewhere in the tune something that interested me. A lot of people would just hear a tune and say, "Why, you can't play," and wouldn't listen no more. There's no fiddler that I've heard but what I couldn't find something that he made sound good somewhere along the way.

Special thanks to Caroline Rapking for transcribing this interview.

Woody Simmons pauses at the front door of his Mill Creek home. Photograph by Doug Yarrow.



Woodie's Style in Perspective

By Bob Dalsemer

The following was written in response to a student inquiry about development of the Woody Simmons style of fiddling. Bob Dalsemer, now living in Baltimore, plays the fiddle and other instruments, and was a Randolph County artist in residence in 1977-78.

First, let me say that I don't think that categorizing fiddle styles as "traditional," "commercial," "old-time," "bluegrass," and so forth, ever gets you very far in understanding fiddling. The categories are usually applied by non-fiddlers, and lead to a lot of misunderstanding. Fiddling styles vary greatly from fiddler to fiddler. Some tend to play rough, some smooth, some use a lot of bow rhythm and do very little in the way of fancy noting with the left hand, some do a lot of noting and pull a long bow. Some, like Woody, work hard at getting a smooth, sweet tone out of the instrument, while others like more bite to the sound. Some fiddlers have been playing for 50 years, like Woody, and some for two. Basically, fiddling is an art, and as such is open to all kinds of individualism. A fiddler's style is like a fingerprint—it is unique and readily identifiable to those who really listen.

Another deceptive categorization that has been cropping up is the "regional style" theory. There may be some validity to this argument if the fiddlers in question have played together regularly for years, like French Carpenter and Wilson Douglas. But I think that to say that there is, for example, a West Virginia style of fiddling is false. Compare Clark Kessinger, Melvin Wine, Ed Haley, Joe Meadows, and Burl Hammons, and you'll see what I mean. Add Senator Byrd to the list, now that he has an album out. So if, for example, you hear someone talk about the Mount Airy-Galax fiddle style, it usually means Tommy Jarrell, because if they listened carefully to other fiddlers from the same area (Benton Flippen, Fred Cockerman, Emmett Lundy, Buddy Pendleton, or Jimmy Edmonds) they would have to conclude that the styles are all different from each other.

How then do fiddlers develop a style? There are a number of influential things. Most of the older fiddlers had music in their families or in their immediate communities. This was a good source, and in cases like Burl Hammons or Melvin Wine, the only source available. Some of these musicians, like Melvin Wine and Tommy Jarrell, learned the older, local repertoire, played around in their home communities, and at some point—usually after marrying and having a family—gave up playing for 20 or more years. These fiddlers, then, have an older, local repertoire that is relatively uninfluenced by radio and records. Their playing, when discovered by young, predominantly Northern musicians, has an archaic, almost foreign, sound that is very attractive. It is the style of fiddlers like these that is usually dubbed "old-time." And they are all very good at what they do, though we must recognize that their repertoire and technique are limited when compared to Clark Kessinger, Joe Meadows, or Woody.

Now we come to the influence of the media. Commercial records of fiddle music began to be made in 1923, and by the late 1920's were widely available in the Southeast. Woody had a lot of exposure to Fiddlin' John Carson, Clayton McMichen, and others via records during this period. Also, in 1925 or so, radio started featuring fiddle music, and by the early '30's, the Grand Ole Opry was beaming all over the East. Fiddlin' Arthur Smith played on the Opry all through the '30's, and his influence was immense.

Along with the media attention to fiddle music came a corresponding increase in possibilities to see personal appearances by many of the great fiddlers of the day. Radio and records made it possible for fiddlers like McMichen and Smith to become full-time pros, and they began to tour widely. Woody in his younger days had lots of opportunity to learn not only from local fiddlers, but from radio and records and personal appearances. In addition, the wider availability of the automobile in West Virginia made travel to other parts of the State more possible, and thus opened up influence by musicians outside the immediate home community.

Thus, while I think Woody has a style of his own, he has been influenced by a number of fiddlers along the way—McMichen, Arthur Smith, Chubby Wise, and Kenny Baker, particularly. These fiddlers have all been highly creative, and highly influential in their respective times—McMichen and Smith in the '30's, Wise in the '40's, and Baker in the '60's. It is not at all surprising to me that a musician of Woody's ability and enthusiasm should continue over the years to be challenged to learn new techniques and new tunes. While he was still recuperating from the first heart attack, I gave him a tape of *Dad's Favorites,* a new album by Byron Berline, and when I returned a week later he had already learned a tune off it.

One big influence in Woody's desire to keep up with the latest styles in fiddling no doubt came from his son, William. Their relationship was much more than father-son. They were music buddies, too. In the late 1940's they were both into Bill Monroe's

music, with William singing high like Bill Monroe—his voice hadn't changed yet—and Woody taking the Chubby Wise breaks on the fiddle. They apparently appeared quite a lot on WDNE then, with a Scruggs-style banjo player. William was perhaps Woody's only musical peer in the area—and by all accounts was in many ways much more talented and versatile than his father.

Why, then, with all this fiddling ability, didn't Woody take it up as a profession? I'll share some of my speculations with you, providing you don't take them as gospel truth. First, the nature of the professional fiddler has changed drastically since the days of Clayton McMichen and Arthur Smith. These two were stars in their own right, fronted their own bands, and got their names on the labels of the records of major record companies. Since the 1940's, almost all the great fiddlers have been sidemen to some vocalist: Howdy Forrester with Roy Acuff, Wise and Baker with Bill Monroe, Joe Meadows with Jim and Jesse. There are just now in the '70's beginning to be some small exceptions like Vassar Clements, although he, too, was a sideman for many years. Making a living at fiddling has always been hard enough, but it's also meant playing someone else's music more than your own — subordinating yourself to someone else, i.e., a vocalist. Given what you know about Woody, his ego, his individualism, can you really imagine him as a sideman in somebody's band?

Then there's just the practical aspect that he had to support a wife and son, and thirdly, it's probably better to be a respected musician in your home community than to have to prove yourself on the road all the time. As a "contest" fiddler, Woody got the adulation and recognition that a "star" would get without the necessity to subordinate himself to a singer, or go on the road to make a living. He also made some extra bucks at the contests, as well as playing for square dances. He does his own thing and does it well—and that is most important, not whether it's folk or traditional or commercial or whatever.

Perhaps I'll end up with some thoughts about my relationship with Woody and what impressed me about his music. I've been lucky to have had a lot of encouragement in my own musical journey from older amateur and semi-professional musicians, and so Woody just seemed a natural person to hang out with during my stay in West Virginia. My own fiddling taste was just getting to where Woody's is. I was expanding my horizons technically, learning some harder tunes, without yet being into the kind of vocal back-up stuff that bluegrass requires, or the far out improvisations of swing and jazz.

So for me, Woody's music was stimulating, without being awesome. Somebody like Joe Meadows might have intimidated me with technique, but Woody's stuff was reachable, challenging for me. Actually I never set out to learn Woody's tunes, although he showed me a lick now and then. It seemed like hanging around and playing some and enjoying each others' company was always more important than learning specific tunes. And, in fact, it's that slow process of absorption that is really the "folk" method of education, rather than any formalized process of lessons. I took away few of Woody's tunes, but a lot of his outlook—more of the context of his music than the music itself. I was also inspired by Woody to work a lot harder to produce a rich, full tone from the fiddle, and to get clarity of notes. These are things in which he excels.

So then, here are a few things I find impressive about Woody and his music:

His boundless energy and enthusiasm for music. How else could he play for more than 50 years, constantly growing and learning musically? After 50 years he still enjoys playing for his own pleasure around the house, by himself! He and Laverne have also made their home a warm and welcome place to all musicians and music lovers over the years.

His concern for getting the best possible sound out of an instrument. This is manifested, not only in his technique, but in his collection of fine violins and banjos, and in his own construction of several violins and banjos.

His ability to play well, even excel, under the demands of contest playing. This is a special talent apart from being able to play well in one's living room.

His ability to play slow waltzes well—something many younger fiddlers like myself often neglect to learn. It requires great bow and tone control, as well as ability to play double stops in higher positions on the neck.

Woody is no Burl Hammons or Melvin Wine with an archaic, "exotic" style that appeals to the revivalists. It is thus that he has never recorded or been paid the kind of attention on a national scale that these others have. This doesn't mean that he has not been influential. He has befriended and played with many, many younger musicians, and, while never lavish in his praise of others, if Woody says a kind word to you about your music, you know he means it.

Woody is quite a character, and is already something of a legend in central West Virginia, as Edwin Hammons before him. I am happy that you folks are insuring that Woody's music, unlike Edwin's, will live on after he is gone.

Letters from Readers

GOLDENSEAL welcomes letters of general interest from readers. Our address is Department of Culture and History, The Cultural Center, State Capitol, Charleston, WV 25305.

Choteau, Montana
May 27, 1979

Editor:
As one who grew up in the southern West Virginia hills in Summers County, I want to commend you on your excellent magazine.

I was particularly impressed by your January-March 1979 issue, with the series or articles about the West Fork River-Skin Creek area south of Weston — an area the Corps of Engineers has fingered for obliteration with a dam. And as is usually the case, the developer interests speak in terms of statistics: a thousand people; 19,000 acres; 95 ft. high by 620 ft. long; construction will bring . . . and so on.

You do a wonderful job of presenting the usually too-little-considered human and historical side of the picture: the cost in nonstatistical and non-monetary values that will be felt by wiping out yet another area of traditional qualities that America was originally built upon.

It seems that we should be preserving our pockets of culture — area like West Fork-Skin Creek — rather than destroying them by creating a sort of homogenous least common denominator for America, based on the pattern of Los Angeles.

Yet the trend is widespread throughout our country. I have lived in Montana a dozen years now, and we face many of the same kinds of problems here: a chipping away at the last remaining high-quality roadless areas and a threat of development of our last pockets of wilderness—for the sake of "progress." For the sake of monetary profits, for the sake of fueling our grossly wasteful appetites for more and more energy. It is a type of "progress" that unfortunately brings with it one undesirable factor so often overlooked: a deteriorating quality of life for all of us.

Surely we need to re-define "progress" as a search for greater knowledge and wisdom; a satisfaction in using our resources responsibily, not wastefully; and an understanding of the qualities that are truly valuable in this life—our natural and human heritage, cultural and family traditional, and the little everyday miracles of Nature. Rather than bigger dams, shinier gadgets, and more money.

Your magazine seems to be furthering that cause, and I thank you for your good work. Please add my name to your mailing list for GOLDENSEAL.

Sincerely yours,
Gene Sentz

Weston, WV
April 21, 1979

Editor:
I received my current issue of the GOLDENSEAL magazine and was very pleased with the interesting reading in it. I have already read it from cover to cover and passed it on to a neighbor to read.

I have always been interested in West Virginia history, its people, and progress. I have a collection of West Virginia scenic post cards as a hobby.

I want to thank you again for the wonderful magazine and for putting me on your mailing list. If you have any old copies I would also be glad to receive them.

Sincerely,
Virginia Jewell

Roanoke, WV
April 26, 1979

Editor:
I want to thank you for the extra copies of GOLDENSEAL. I'd also like to explain why it is important to us to have them!

By now you are aware of the Stonewall Jackson dam controversy. Because the threat of this dam has hung over our heads for 40 years, the area portrayed in the January-March issue of your magazine has remained relatively unchanged. The dam has also brought the communities together in a common cause.

Because this area is all privately owned and the people very private themselves, it had been difficult to let the other people of the state known that our area is unique and worth preserving. The cultural resources study we forced the Corps to hire Gilbert-Commonwealth to do, along with people such as Tom Screven, Bob Swisher and Kate Long, has ensured that if we should lose our fight, a chronicle of sorts has been done in GOLDENSEAL. We very much appreciate the sensitivity and taste shown by the authors. It is not easy for our people to become public and was especially difficult for my husband and I and the Posts to have our relationships openly displayed. We've done it in order to save it.

Were it not for magazines such as GOLDENSEAL, Roanoke itself and many of the unique architecturial structures would already have been destroyed. As it is the Corps still has not asked the Advisory Council to study the consultants' recommendations for National Registry eligibility. But no further sites have been destroyed.

I wish you could experience the pride our people have in the GOLDENSEAL articles. I'm sorry for any inconvenience or added expense we have caused. It is not our intent to cause problems, only save our community.

Sincerely,
Francine Snyder

Wheeling, WV
April 25, 1979
Editor:
I recently discovered GOLDENSEAL, and really enjoyed the April, 1979 issue. As a lifelong resident of West Virginia, I was impressed by the information and format of the magazine.

I would like to ask that my name

be added to your mailing list. If there are back issues available, I would appreciate them also.

I am a teacher in the Junior High School age group, and your magazines will be helpful many times. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Martha F. Wharton

Morgantown, WV
March 15, 1979

Editor:
I recently saw a copy of your magazine and would like very much to be put on your mailing list.

I was born in 1908, in Dellslow, West Virginia, and have lived all my life in Monongalia County. I was a coal miner for 30 years starting in 1923, and the articles I saw in your magazine brought back old memories.

Thank you,
Charles W. Myers

Montclair, New Jersey
April 27, 1979

Editor:
Many compliments on your astounding and outstanding magazine. It is virtually the best of its type I have ever seen. I'm sure we all mourn the loss of Tom Screven and wish the best for him, treasuring and building upon the legacy he left us. I would also like to add to a statement he made about Carl Fleischhauer in his parting address. Carl is one of the most remarkable individuals I have ever met and consider myself fortunate indeed to be among his circle of friends. His contributions to American Folk Tradition are incalculable, and I hope someday he will receive his proper and just recognition, which in my mind would be nothing less than monumental.

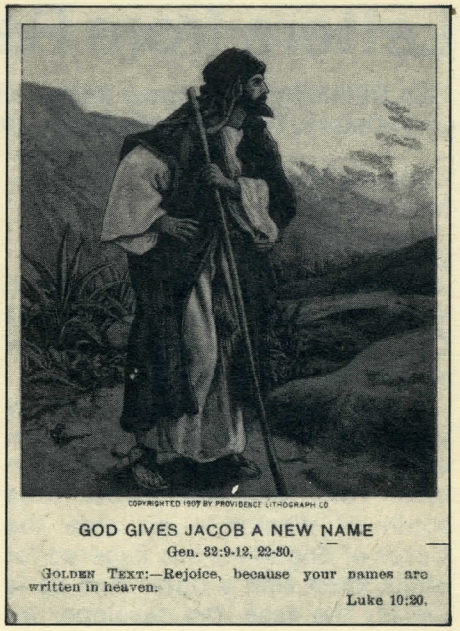
I would appreciate it very much if you would add the names of my parents and my wife's parents to your subscription list. Both are native West Virginians.

Thanks very much, and again, highest praises to you.

Sincerely,
Lee Martin

REVIEW

GOLDEN TEXT:—So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.
Acts 19:20.



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GOD GIVES JACOB A NEW NAME
Gen. 32:9-12, 22-30.

GOLDEN TEXT:—Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.
Luke 10:20.

Morgantown, WV
April, 1979

Editor:
I have seen two of your most interesting GOLDENSEALs that a neighbor loaned me, and I wish very much to get my own. Please send it to the above address, and if they are still available, I would like the latest one, volume 5, number 1 (January-March, 1979).

I am enclosing some picture Bible lesson cards I got in Sunday School; as you can see, that was our lesson each Sunday. I am 82 years old now, and I attended church and Sunday School at Hebron, Pleasant County, West Virginia, where I was born and married. I also have nearly 300 post cards from before 1915, but not as old as the Bible cards. I have about any kind of post card: several of buildings in cities, comic, Christian, Valentine, Easter—and of course, from my sweetheart, Forest D. Fleming, whom I married in 1915.

Sylvia Owens Fleming

Weston, WV
April 30, 1979

Editor:
I ran across a copy of the GOLDENSEAL at the UHC Hospital in Clarksburg, and I liked it so much that I was interested in receiving each copy as it is printed.

I am 79, and GOLDENSEAL reveals so many of the things and happenings down over the times that I am familiar with. It is a pleasure to review them again. I think it is a grand mazagine for the old, as well as for the young.

Dayton Jones

Wahoo, Nebraska
May 3, 1979

Editor:
May I take this means to thank you for putting my name on your GOLDENSEAL list. I enjoy GOLDENSEAL very much. It is one of my favorite magazines and I look forward to each issue.

The article, "Bringing the Kids Back Home to George," January-March 1979 issue, makes one realize the true value of family, friends and community in a way that has never been appreciated before. How wonderful to use the same tools that have been passed down from generation to generation, loved and cared for, instead of putting them in a museum.

What a beautiful way of life you have in your community, and may it ever be so.

In appreciation,
Mrs. Anna E. Olson

Stella Monk, Quiltmaker

Mrs. Annie Estelle Monk of Ohley, Kanawha County, died on May 28 of this year. She was 57 years old. Mrs. Monk was a founding member of the Cabin Creek Quilts Cooperative, and served as president of the board of the Cooperative for two years.

An expert quilter, Mrs. Monk often represented Cabin Creek Quilts at craft fairs and other events. In addition to her travels for the Cooperative, she was hostess for many hundreds of learners and admirers in her own home.

Among her many outstanding works is a quilt, "Young Man's Fancy," which was presented as a Bicentennial gift to the State and is now part of the permanent art collection of the Department of Culture and History. This gift to the people of West Virginia typifies the generous spirit of the woman who once remarked, "I sell a lot, but, I'll tell you, I just love to give them away. Like, for graduation presents, or if I hear someone's house burned down—I send over a quilt. I'd rather give them away then sell them."

Stella Monk was a special friend of former editor Tom Screven and of other members of the GOLDENSEAL family of readers and contributors. After her death the following letters were received by GOLDENSEAL, and are printed here as a tribute to Mrs. Monk.

Stella loved to have people interested in quilts come to visit. Visitors from all over the world have sat around Stella's kitchen table for coffee and cake and to talk over "quilts." The quilting room—where Stella's stash of quilts and tops was kept—was right off the kitchen.

She not only worked with Cabin Creek Quilts, but also did a number of special projects, including wall hangings for Yale University and the West Virginia Commission on Aging, and a special pillow for Senator Jennings Randolph on his birthday. I usually did the design work and lettering on these, and she called me her "ghost artist."

After Stella resigned as president of the board of Cabin Creek Quilts, I remember her getting worked up over Co-op business and showing up at board meetings—not to say anything, but just to let the board members know she was interested.

Mack Miles, Charleston

During my six years with Cabin Creek Quilts Cooperative I knew hundreds of quilters, and none loved quilting or the Co-op any more than Stella Monk. At the start Stella insisted upon accepting only the highest quality quilts, which established Cabin Creek Quilts' high standards. As the second Co-op president, she was known to scrub the floors on her hands and knees or to charm the cash out of a coal company executive or a foundation grants officer. Stella's quilts now belong to museums, celebrities, and to poor people who needed them.

Stella loved all kinds of people, especially if they were from someplace different. She shot from the hip on every issue. Her quilting, smile, laugh, and sense of what was right made her a legend in her own time. I'm so glad I knew Stella. I'm so sorry she's gone.

Jamie Thibeault, Charleston.

Stella Monk generally parked her station wagon in her front yard so that visitors, even before meeting her and her husband Blane, were likely to read the bumper sticker: "Thank God I'm a Hillbilly." The slogan delighted Stella. Hers was a direct, cheerful, generous spirit. She offered and expected sincerity, and it was easy to develop a strong affection for her in the course of an afternoon.

I met Stella in 1970, and was able to enjoy with her the growth and success of Cabin Creek Quilts. Her involvement in the Cooperative amounted to a full-time devotion, and her enthusiasm extended far beyond her obligations as president of the board. She could always find time to take on a special project, entertain a reporter or photographer, spread out another dazzling quilt, teach an aspiring quilter, or feed a few unexpected guests.

She was among the most talented quilters in the Cooperative, and, though she admitted it very reluctantly, was also an accomplished designer. She loved putting together colors and shapes, and her designs were distinctively her own — bold and beautiful.

Shortly after I met Stella, she "borrowed" a quilt top I had acquired—to "copy the pattern," she said. She returned it a few weeks later, completely quilted and finished, with a hug and an apology for keeping it so long. The gesture was characteristic of Stella. She was advisor, protector, co-worker, champion, rare friend and second mother to many people. We all miss her.

Colleen Anderson, Charleston

In This Issue

RUTH BELANGER was born in Trenton, New Jersey, and received a B. A. in English from Trenton State College. Her father's people, the Shumans, are from Mannington, and she now lives in Elkins. Ruth makes her living doing free-lance public relations and photojournalism. She contributed black and white and color photography to the last GOLDENSEAL, and is working on an article on mountain midwifery for a future issue.

MICHAEL KLINE is a Washington, D. C., native who spent childhood summers in Hampshire County. After receiving his B. A. in anthropology from George Washington University in 1964, he moved to Appalachia full-time, working in various poverty programs in Kentucky and West Virginia. In 1970 he and Raleigh County photographer Doug Yarrow created "They Can't Put it Back," a slide and music program about social and ecological struggles in the mountains. His LP recording with Rich Kirby of coal mining songs, also called "They Can't Put it Back," was re-pressed by June Appal Records in 1977. Michael served as assistant to the editor of GOLDENSEAL in 1978, and now lives and works in Randolph County.

GARY SIMMONS was born in Spencer, Roane County, although he has lived in other parts of West Virginia and out of state. He attended Syracuse University and WVU, and is an Air Force veteran. He has worked in cinematography at WWVU-TV in Morgantown, and was assistant to the editor of GOLDENSEAL from 1977 to 1978.

BOB SPENCE was born and raised in Logan, and his people have lived there since 1790. He graduated from Marshall University in 1974, with a B. A. in journalism. He worked for the *Logan News* for 11 years, then as assistant to the president of Southern West Virginia Community College, and now makes his living as a free-lance writer. In 1976 Bob wrote *The Land of the Guyandotte,* a 600-page history of Logan County which is still available from the author.

THOMAS F. STAFFORD is a native of Grafton, attended Potomac State College, William and Mary College, and received his B. A. degree in journalism from West Virginia University. He is a former editor of the *Raleigh Register* (Beckley), vice president of Beckley Newspapers Corporation, and assistant editor of *The Charleston Gazette.* He currently is clerk of the United States District Court for Northern West Virginia with headquarters in Elkins.

Correction

The April-June GOLDENSEAL failed to credit this powder horn to Joe and Melva Gillispie of The Horn and Antler Shop in Morgantown. The Horn and Antler shop features muzzle-loading rifles, horn craft, and scrimshaw jewelry.

Department of Culture and History
The Cultural Center
State Capitol
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Address Correction Requested

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