Goldenseal

West Virginia Traditional Life

Volume 7, Number 4 Winter 1981

Top: Former United Mine Workers president Arnold Miller and project director Randy Lawrence examine machine gun from the early days of labor strife in the coalfields. Photo by Mike Keller
Above: The black lung movement is discussed in one part of the "Coal Issues" section of the exhibit. Photo by Rick Lee.

Coal Life Exhibit Opens

"The Mining Life: Coal in Our History and Culture" opened to the public on September 27, at the Cultural Center in Charleston. The 5,000-square-foot exhibit will continue until the end of December, and later move to Huntington and Wheeling.

The most comprehensive museum exhibit ever assembled on the history of coal in West Virginia, "The Mining Life" follows the industry from the late 1800's to the recent past. There is a walk-through coal mine from the hand-loading era, followed by a representative depiction of early coal operators. A large section on life in the coal company town features a scale model of the town of Gary, in McDowell County. A final section reviews coal issues, from early labor organizing attempts through the more recent black lung and union reform movements.

"The Mining Life" is the first of three exhibits planned under the West Virginia Coal Life Project, jointly sponsored by the Department of Culture and History, Huntington Galleries, and the Mansion Museum of Oglebay Institute. The Project is funded by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, by an appropriation from the State Legislature, and from other sources. The Project has been in the planning stage for about five years, with Randy Lawrence serving as director since early 1980.

Closing at Charleston on December 31, the exhibit will be at Huntington Galleries from January 24 through the end of May. It will be at Oglebay's Mansion Museum at Wheeling from June through August. Components of the exhibit eventually will be installed permanently at the State Museum at the Cultural Center, with other parts to tour the state.

More photos on inside backcover. ⟶

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Goldenseal

A Quarterly Forum for Documenting West Virginia's Traditional Life

Volume 7, Number 4 ✦ Winter 1981

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Cover: Fiddler John Johnson, on a winter walk near his Nicholas County home. Michael Kline's interview with Johnson begins on page 9. Photograph by Doug Yarrow.

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Current Programs • Festivals • Publications

Mountain Music

The latest flyer from Poca River Records lists several albums likely to be of interest to mountain music fans. Included are "Elzics Farewell," featuring the music of Clay Countians French Carpenter and Jenes Cottrell, "Traditional Music" by Franklin George of Mercer County, and other records by Glen Smith and the Mountain State Pickers, the Wild Turkey String Band, and Dorsey Harvey.

These albums may be ordered for $5.95 each, from Poca River Records, P.O. Box 667, Fairmont 26554.

Canning Methods

We heard from Margaret M. Meador, Princeton Home Economics Extension Agent, concerning Yvonne Snyder Farley's "Plain Cooking" article in the Fall GOLDENSEAL. Meador praised Barbara Meadows as "a superb example of the mountain homemaker who can create a wide range of delectable dishes from simple native foods." However, Agent Meador recommends against the water bath canning method mentioned in the article:

"Those wishing to use water bath canning procedures for vegetables and meats are perfectly free to do so, but they should be aware of the risks.

Since 1917 the United States Department of Agriculture has been issuing warnings that the temperature of 240° Fahrenheit necessary to destroy the bacterial spores that cause botulism can only be reached in a pressure canner at 10 pounds pressure.

This is no idle threat. During the 50 years between 1925 and 1975, only four deaths were attributed to botulism from consumption of more than 800 billion cans of commercially processed food, which is under strict government regulation, while 450 deaths were reported from consuming only a small fraction of this amount of home canned foods.

Unfortunately, many more deaths would have resulted had it not been for the fact that mountain cooks routinely boil canned vegetables vigorously before serving (usually far longer than the 10 minutes required) which destroys any botulism toxin present. There is always the possibility, though, that vegetables or chicken may be used for salads without this pre-heating.

Reliable, up-to-date information is available free of charge from any West Virginia University County Extension office for those who wish to can with safety."

Six Miles Out

Mountain State Press recently announced publication of *Six Miles Out*, by Barbara Smith of Philippi. The new novel joins the growing list of West Virginia books published by the still young press.

Six Miles Out is set mainly at Cedarcrest, a fictitious nursing home near Elkins. The book explores the physical problems of aging and dying in a youthful society, and—perhaps most of all—the simple matter of being put away after one's more productive years are over. The novel features some fine writing, and is totally heart wrenching in places.

Barbara Smith is professor of literature and writing at Alderson-Broaddus College, where she also serves as chairman of the Humanities Division. She edits *Grab-a-Nickel*, a literary journal. Her poems, articles, and short stories have been published in a wide variety of literary and professional periodicals and anthologies.

Six Miles Out (paperback, 104 pages) may be ordered for $4.50 from Mountain State Press, University of Charleston, Charleston 25304.

State History Bibliography

West Virginia University recently published *West Virginia History: A Bibliography and Guide to Research*, by Harold M. Forbes. The bibliography is a comprehensive guide to the primary and secondary sources for researching West Virginia's history.

West Virginia History is designed to replace Charles Shetler's earlier *Guide to the Study of West Virginia History*, now more than 20 years out of date. The new book includes more than 3,000 entries, fully indexed by author and subject, and broken down by categories. There are three major sections, one each for local histories, topical studies, and general histories and reference works. The listings include books, articles, theses, and other printed and unprinted matrials. Over 700 county-by-county citations will be of special interest to local historians.

Forbes is an Associate Curator at the West Virginia Collection, and his book is an important supplement to the bibliographic work of his fellow WVU librarians, Robert Munn and George Parkinson in particular. From now on, amateur and professional historians will probably begin their research in *West Virginia History*, and move on to more specialized bibliographies if necessary.

West Virginia History is an attractive paperback, illustrated with historic photographs drawn from the West Virginia Collection. The 359-page book may be ordered for $9.00, from West Virginia University Library, Morgantown 26506.

GOLDENSEAL Back Copies

As the GOLDENSEAL circulation continues to grow, we are receiving more and more requests for back issues of the magazine. Unfortunately, we are now out of most issues, and most of those we do have are in limited supply. There are no pre-1977 issues available, and none for most of 1978 and 1979. Of 1980 and 1981, we have sufficient quantities only of October-December 1980, Fall 1981, and the current issue.

GOLDENSEAL is now received by almost all school, college, and public libraries in West Virginia, and many libraries in other states. Some have full sets of back issues, and we urge our readers to check with these institutions for copies we are unable to supply.

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.

Arthurdale

Bridgeport, WV
July 27, 1981
Editor:
I saw a copy of your April-June 1981 issue. I found it very interesting. Both my maternal and paternal grandparents were original homesteaders at Arthurdale. My parents were part of the second group to get homesteads. My aunt is Glenna Williams who is pictured in the article. In fact, I believe the cover of the magazine is her parents' (the W. W. Williamses, my grandparents) homestead.
Sincerely,
Charlotte H. Cathell

Shinnston, WV
July 4, 1981
Editor;
I want to thank you for the April-June 1981 issue of GOLDENSEAL. Reading the story of Arthurdale brought to mind the early days and beginnings of my teaching career, which started in one-room schools of Harrison County and continued over a period of 44 years, climaxing as a high school principal. How well I recall the hardships and privations of the "Depression era." I was making the enormous salary of $89.00 a month for six months. In order to get some money, we took our checks to the bank, and they cashed them after keeping 10% of the check for the accommodation.

I like your publication so well that I am enclosing my check to pay for the bound editions of GOLDENSEAL for 1980.
Sincerely yours,
Burlyn M. Rector

Fayetteville, WV
July 13, 1981
Editor:
The April-June issue of GOLDENSEAL carries an article about Arthurdale which pictures and describes the "Godlove" chairs made there. In the home of my grandmother, Martha Ann Riner, and later in my home, there were two such chairs: One a small straight chair, and a little rocker of this exact pattern or style.

Grandmother died in 1934, age 93. The chairs were in existence long before 1934 when Mr. Godlove came to Arthurdale.
Very truly yours,
Lilly P. Duncan

York, Pennsylvania
August 25, 1981
Editor:
I'm glad to see GOLDENSEAL, Vol. 7, no. 2, and applaud its attention to native and cultural patterns.

May I add a significant point to your history of Arthurdale—the fact that President Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt had their first introduction to homesteading and productive living for the unemployed—and the resulting development of Arthurdale—through Ralph Borsodi, founder of School of Living. His early approach to decentralism as a needed cultural trend began with his historic 1928 book, *This Ugly Civilization.* This was America's first critique of centralization, for which he was invited to assist Dayton to recover from its almost total collapse during the Depression.

I was a member of Dayton's First Liberty Homestead community, and elected to work with Ralph Borsodi since that time. It's been a significant part of this half-century, and the now emerging interest in simpler living, appropriate technology, and the place of agriculture and self-sufficiency, has its roots in Ralph Borsodi.
Sincerely,
Mildred J. Loomis
Director of Education
The School of Living

Wheeling Grocers

Wheeling, WV
August 3, 1981
Editor:
Recently I had the opportunity to read Volume 7, number 2, of GOLDENSEAL. The article about "Flaccus Grocery" was most interesting and touching to me since William C. Flaccus is my grandfather. My mother is Eleanor Flaccus Garrison, now 78 years old. My grandfather passed away when she was only 16 but she has told us many interesting things about him.

I am a teacher at Bridge Street Junior High in Ohio County and would be happy to pay for a copy if any are available. It would mean so much to me.

Also I would like very much to get on your mailing list for future issues.
Thank you,
Eleanor Bland

Wheeling, WV
July 1981
Editor:
I just read an article about the Flaccus family in your April-June 1981 magazine. These were my ancestors and I thoroughly enjoyed reading the story. My father is 83 years of age and the last Flaccus living in Wheeling.

A friend of mine receives this magazine and I would appreciate if you could put me on your mailing list if possible. We have visited the Cultural Center several times and really appreciated our visits.
Sincerely yours,
Elizabeth Flaccus Loos

Blackie Cool

Wolf Summit, WV
August 15, 1981
Editor:
Enclosed is my check for $10.00. I was not at all surprised that you need help to continue publishing GOLDENSEAL, as there have been so many cuts by the federal government. I sincerely hope that each one who receives GOLDENSEAL will respond generously, and we will be able to receive your magazine from now on.

I especially liked the article "Whoop It Up A Little Bit," as the Sheriff Ferrell mentioned was truly a happy-go-lucky person. My first cousin married his daughter. My cousin sometimes would get somewhat provoked by Mr. Ferrell, especially after his retirement. He would go for a visit and find Mr. Ferrell had the last lump of coal in the furnace, and was sitting in the living room smoking his pipe and blowing smoke rings toward the ceiling, not in the least worried that there was no more coal.
Best wishes,
Mabel D. Scott

Mother Jones

Clarksburg, WV
August 23, 1981
Editor:
We would like to be put on the mailing list of this fine magazine, which was handed to me while in Florida last winter. I have read this issue through twice.

I was born and raised in a coal camp about five miles southeast of Clarksburg. I heard so much about Mother Jones, and the explosion at the Monongah mine happened two years after I was born, in 1905. My father worked in the mines 48 years and retired at 65, lived a few years, and passed away with cancer.

Getting back to Mother Jones, a friend of mine a few years ago told me quite a story about her arrest in Fairmont. The sheriff refused to put her in jail, and she stayed in the sheriff's home. A famous man who became governor of our state later on blocked her bond. He was lawyer for the coal company. Of course, the man who told me the story has passed away, so I have no other proof of my story.

The coal miners loved Mother Jones, who was quite a woman, I guess. She fought for the miners.
Respectfully,
Samuel M. Davis

Mayor Eddy

Bethesda, Maryland
August 8, 1981
Editor:
I read all the GOLDENSEALs with great interest for I was born in West Virginia and lived there for a number of years. I was particularly pleased to read about the all-woman administration in Friendly. The mayor, Stella Eddy, was my aunt by marriage. Her husband, Dr. J. O'Neill Eddy, and my father, Dr. Nathan E. Eddy, were brothers. I lived in Auburn in Ritchie County but I spent much time in Friendly.

The description of the all-women's term of office was excellent. There was just one omission that I can think of. Prior to the women taking over the government, Friendly was a speed trap. Revenue was obtained by posting low speed limits at either end of the town and fining individuals who went too fast. One of the first official acts of the mayor, as I recall, was to have the signs removed.

Thank you for recording the early history of one of the more beautiful states in the U.S.A.
Sincerely,
Bernice Eddy Wooley, Ph.D.

Clifftop Mine

Beckley, WV
August 7, 1981
Editor:
I have just received my second issue of GOLDENSEAL. I find the magazine to be most interesting.

For instance, the Fall issue with the Clifftop mine panorama picture section showing the four men: Cecil Gilkerson, Joseph Cooper, John Smith, and "Cab" Jones were all men with whom I had worked at the Clifftop mine.

My mother, Carrie Herndon Bales, was born at Clifftop in 1891. Her father, William Lewis Herndon, was the mine superintendent there for a number of years, and later his son, Lewis Herndon, became superintendent. Lewis Herndon still maintains a home at Clifftop.

I lived at Clifftop for 20 years. My first mining experience was at the Clifftop mine, where I started to work at age 16 with my father, Grover C. Bales. I later worked for 42 years at the mine at McAlpin. I have been retired since 1974.

I am enclosing my $10 contribution, and I shall look forward to each issue of GOLDENSEAL.
Sincerely,
Woodrow Bales

Helvetia

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
July 9, 1981
Editor:
While visiting my great niece in French Creek, I read your magazine. I enjoyed it so much.

I am 90 years old and came to Helvetia, West Virginia, from Switzerland at three months of age. I've been in Philadelphia over 60 years, but still have relatives in West Virginia, and visit as often as possible.

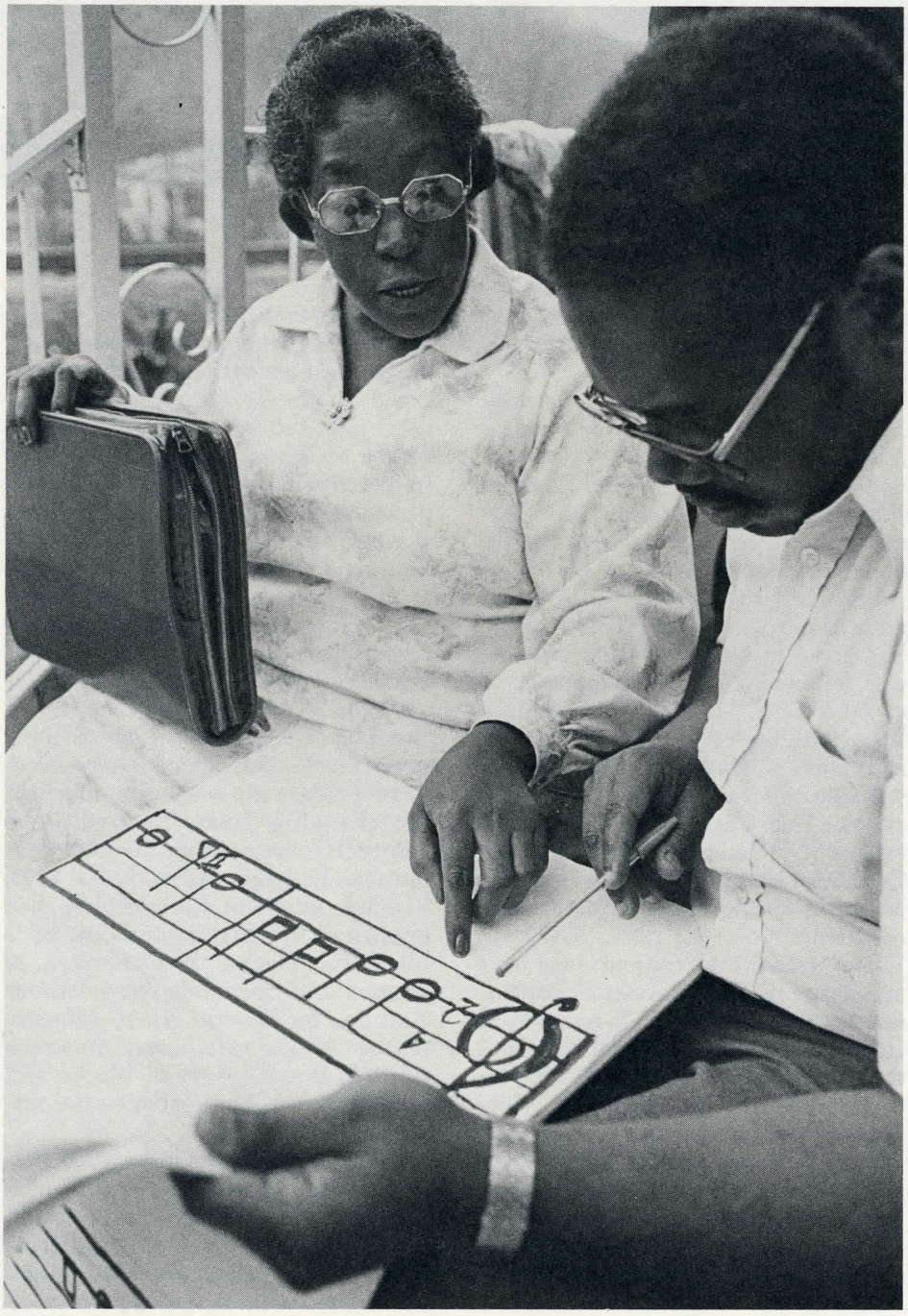
I would really appreciate receiving your magazine, as I love West Virginia and anything that pertains to it.
Sincerely,
Della Dilworth

Ivydale

Wilmington, Delaware
July 29, 1981
Editor:
Please put me on your mailing list to receive GOLDENSEAL. I am a board member of the Brandywine Friends of Old Time Music which has had a long-standing interest in the music of West Virginia. I was particularly amused by a reference in your April-June issue to the Morris Brothers Festival which, you said, was known for "traditional music, good times, and rain." Truer words were never spoken. I can remember sleeping in my car at Ivydale one year and listening to the rain on the roof all night, then waking up in the morning and finding that the small stream on the Morris Brothers' property had become a raging torrent that had risen well above the shaky wooden bridge that was our sole means of escape. Fortunately, the rain stopped and the water rapidly subsided.
Sincerely yours,
Sheldon N. Sandler

"Where Could I Go But to the Lord?"

Shape-note Singing Among Blacks in Southern West Virginia



Amelia Edwards explains her seven-syllable notation to author Edward Cabbell. Miss Evans, of the Pleasant Valley choir, is working on a book of shape-note rudiments.

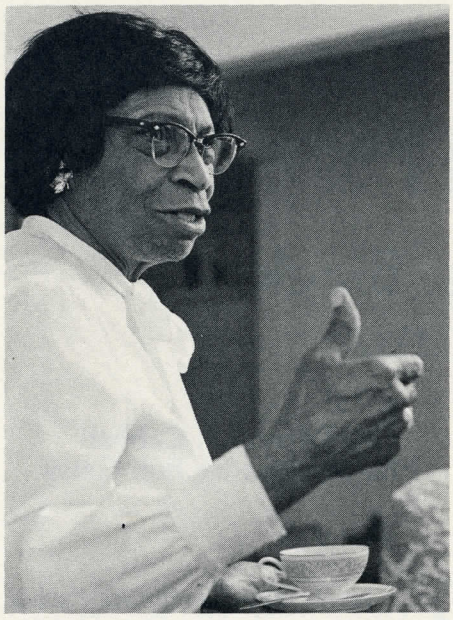
By Edward J. Cabbell
Photographs by Bob Gates

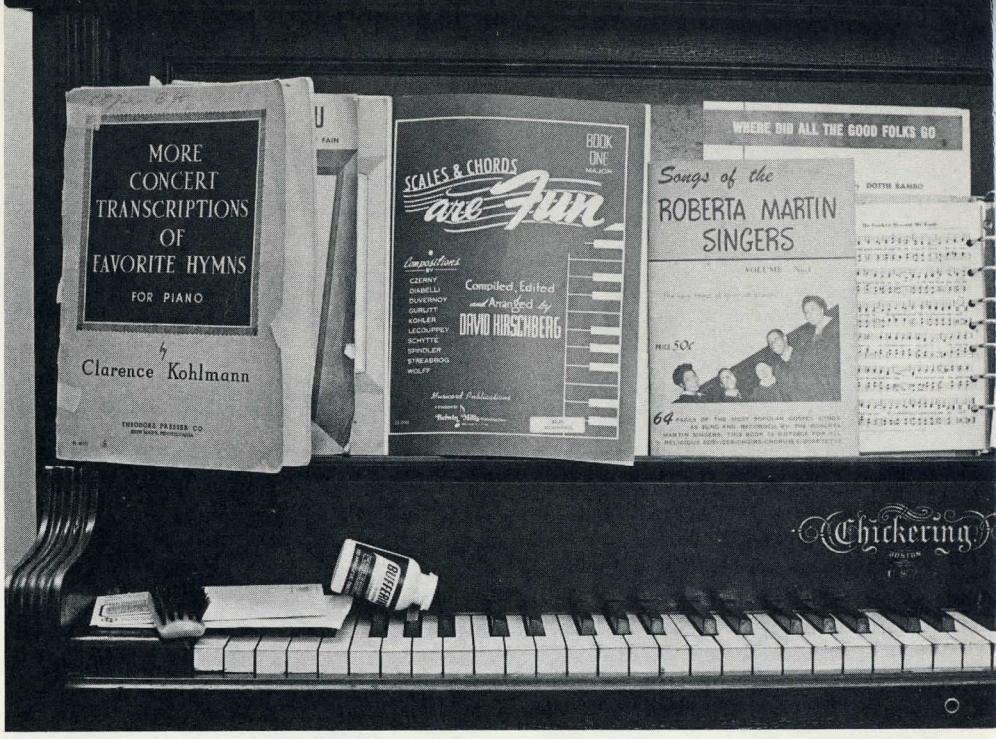
In a recent Religion in Appalachia class at Appalachian State University, my instructor required a final class presentation. I asked myself, "Just what can I do on the subject of religion in Appalachia?" I was in the graduate program in Appalachian Studies and concentrating my work on the black experience in Appalachia. So little has been written about blacks and about religion in the southern mountains.

As I searched my mind I recalled a conversation I once had with Ruth Boggs of Beckley, about the shape-note singing tradition among blacks in southern West Virginia. Mrs. Boggs had informed me of the New Era District Number Two Shape-Note Choir in Beckley, as well as other black groups in nearby Carlisle, Harvey, and Summerlee. I was aware of shape-note singing among whites in the Appalachian South but I had not known of this tradition among blacks.

However, Mrs. Boggs quickly informed me that if I had been born in a rural area in the 1930's, I would have been very much aware of the shape-note tradition among blacks. "Shape-notes, and of course spirituals, were all we had until church congregations had enough money to purchase pianos. I think it was in the '40's when most folks started to get pianos. All of us used to sing shape-notes from the Vaughn and Stamps-Baxter books before then."

Upon remembering the conversation I knew that I had my presentation. I contacted Mrs. Boggs and made arrangements to meet some black shape-note singing groups in the





Etta Persinger directs the New Era District Number Two choir of Beckley.
Persinger's well-worn piano is her favorite workplace.

Beckley area. I also asked Bob Gates of Charleston to come along and help with some photography and video work that I wanted to do during this field trip.

In the meantime, I attempted to do some research and study on the black Appalachian shape-note singing tradition. I could not find anything. I was able to locate songs by black gospel composers such as Thomas A. Dorsey, Charles H. Tindley, and Clevant Derricks in most shape-note songbooks. I also located *The Colored Sacred Harp* songbook compiled and published by Judge Jackson of Ozark, Alabama, in 1934. However, additional readings revealed that most of the blacks in Jackson's northern Mississippi and southeastern Alabama area used the Cooper and Denson *Sacred Harp* singing books. According to John Work's pioneer article, "Plantation Meister-Singer," in *Music Quarterly* in 1941, a shape-note singing tradition had been a part of the black heritage of that area since about 1880 or earlier.

Historically, blacks and poor whites in the South owe each other a great-musical debt. Each received major exposure to the other's religious music and song styles at the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening that swept the South in the early 1800's. Apparently, at these highly emotional gatherings black and white southerners learned songs and song styles from each other. Some of the songs were forgotten, some were absorbed into the folk culture, and some were published in printed hymnals.

The printed hymnals were usually accompanied by a simplified form of musical notation known as shape-notes. Introduced in New England about 1800, this notation was borrowed by the South and was primarily used to spread the music of black and white southerners throughout that region. At first a four-syllable music known as "fa, sol, la, mi" emerged, and was followed by the development of a seven note "do, re, mi" notation. This singing style migrated south from New England, by way of Pennsylvania, and then down the Shenandoah Valley to the farms and plantations of Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas. Here the first great concentration of southern shape-note activity occurred.

The tradition trekked into our mountain region as America continued to surge westward. It remains in scattered pockets of Appalachia and the South today, more out of the cultural preference of black and white shape-note singers than anything else. Generally, shape-note music teachers and writers of this period provided much more access to white southerners than to blacks. However, the tradition was maintained among many blacks in the rural, isolated areas of the South where it was popular among the whites.

Perhaps the continuation of shape-note singing among blacks owes much to the great gospel paperback hymnal boom in the 1920's. The editors of these publications apparently took no regard of the race of the composers. In the shape-note songbooks of this period we find such black gospel classics as Thomas A. Dorsey's "Precious Lord" and "Peace in the Valley," Charles H. Tindley's "Stand By Me" and "Take Your Burdens to the Lord and Leave Them There," as well as Clevant Derricks' "Just a Little Talk With Jesus" and "We'll Soon Be Done With Troubles and Trials." Nevertheless, some blacks considered shape-notes to be a white musical style and held the changing from the traditional spirituals to be a serious threat to their musical heritage. As early as 1801, Richard Allen, in Philadelphia, had published the first hymnbook by a black for blacks, *A Collection of Hymns and Spirituals from Various Authors, by Richard Allen, Minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.* But many rural blacks still continued the black shape-note tradition.

Upon being introduced to Etta Persinger, director of the New Era District Number Two Shape-note Choir, I learned that she had migrated from eastern Virginia, where shape-notes were popular, into the Beckley coalfields. When she arrived she even taught some whites in the area the

A Brief History of Shape-note Music

By Alice Fortney Welch

Early shape-note singing was called "fasola" singing, the name being derived from the common scale in use in 16th-century England. The scale, *ut, re, me, fa, sol, la, si,* has eroded to simply three syllables, *fa, sol, la,* among the masses in England. To fill out the seven notes of the octave, people sang, "*fa, sol, la, fa, sol, la, mi.*" Fasola singing entered America through New England. In the 17th-century churches of New England, only a few tunes were used, no musical instructions were given by the churches, and the words of each song were lined out.

In 1721 a musical innovation in the region occurred when John Tufts and Thomas Walter published *An Introduction to the Singing of Psalm Tunes* (Boston, 1721), and it was a radical innovation because it contained 25 new tunes and was the first tune book compiled in the colonies. Gradually, music expanded beyond church use into the secular environment. Singing schools began to be held in 1770.

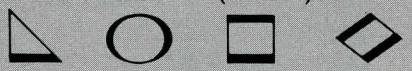
Early singing schools were held in taverns and were generally frowned upon by religious people. Students learned the songs by note, and after much practice, they were allowed to sing the words of a song. The singing schools were usually 24 afternoons and evenings, ending with an "exhibition." Then the singing master would leave the community, and the pupils would fill the ranks of the local church choirs.

In order to make the learning of notes easier, various teachers began developing new methods of notation. The result was "character" or "shape" notation, now used exclusively in its original form by the fasola folk and in a further developed form by many others.

It has not been absolutely determined who first developed the note shapes. Some historians give the credit to the New England singing school teacher, Andrew Law, and some give the honor to two partners in songbook compiling, William Little and William Smith. Both the former and the latter could claim a "new method" because their methods were not exactly the same.

Law (c. 1803):

Little and Smith (c. 1802):



The best way to trace the growth of shape-note singing is to follow the trail of the songbook makers. The compilers of the songbooks were always singing teachers and composers. At least 38 different books appeared in the four-shape notation between 1798 and 1855. One of the most popular was James H. Hickock's *Sacred Harp*, published in 1844. The last one published was John G. McCurry's *Social Harp* in 1855.

The first southern rural singing activity seems to have been in the Great Appalachian Valley of Virginia, the first singing master there being Ananias Davisson, who compiled *Kentucky Harmony* in about 1817. While Davisson was supplying the English-speaking people, the numerous Germans in the Valley were using *Choral-Music*, compiled by Joseph Funk and written in German. Funk was one of a large family of Mennonites who had emigrated from Pennsylvania and settled in a village called Mountain Valley, later changed to Singers Glen in honor of the musical activity of the village. This German songbook eventually fell into disuse as the German population learned English and became Americanized, but the German music teachers remained active.

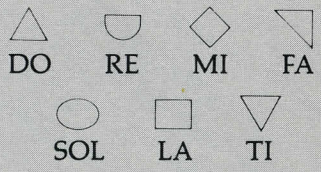
The fasola folk were mostly German and Scots-Irish, with some English thrown in. In spite of the fact that the Germans were more numerous, and had a rich religious and musical background, their influence was not as great as the Scots-Irish because the German songs were wedded to the German language. Soon the Germans became regular fasola Americans. For this reason many of the tunes used by the fasola folk are of Scots-Irish flavor and secular in nature. The Celtic idiom was also evident in the scales upon which the tunes are based. Some of the scales are hexatonic. The majority of the fasola tunes were based on these "gapped" scales.

Other hymn-tune influences were ancient ballads, current popular songs, fiddle tunes, and dance tunes. George Pullen Jackson, the southern religious song scholar, has written, "Fiddles and all that went with them were generally taboo with religious folks. But the fiddle tunes were too good to remain in the exclusive employ of the devil, and all it took to bring such tunes into books of 'sacred' tunes was a set of religious words." For example, a variant of "Turkey in the Straw" was used by both religious and political songwriters.

Another type of song used by the fasola folk was the camp meeting song. Camp meetings were religious meetings held in cabins or open fields. Songbooks being mostly unavailable, songs had to be already well-known or made up on the spot. These would come closer to real folk music than any other, and the ones that had continued popularity eventually were included in hymnbooks. In fact, the camp meeting songs helped to sell books. "The Heavenly Port" and "Parting Friends" are two examples of camp meeting songs, "A Poor Wayfaring Stranger" being a variant of the latter. Many Negro spirituals are very similar to certain camp meeting songs and seem really to be variants of white spirituals rather than exclusively Negro creations. Historians are not in agreement as to whether blacks created their own songs or simply absorbed them

from rural whites living nearby.

The fasola type songs were well suited to the rural folk and their primitive lifestyles, but the songs were eventually scorned by urban church people. At about the beginning of the 19th century, due to the influence of European music, the *do-re-mi* system was introduced into America and spread slowly from the city to the country. The new system met stiff resistance from the shape-note singers until some of the songwriters realized that the solution was to develop a seven-note notation to go along with the *do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti* scale. The first to have great success was Jesse B. Aikin of Philadelphia. His book, *Christian Minstrel*, endured for decades and went into as many as 171 editions. At least six other different systems of seven-shape notation were developed, including those by the previously-mentioned Joseph Funk. It was the Aikin system which survived and is still used. The shapes are as follows:



At the present time the seven-shape-note system is still used by millions, yet its very existence is unknown to most professional musicians. Most religious groups use instruments, making it unnecessary for the congregations to really learn how to sing. The hymnbooks are printed in round notes, and those who don't read music simply sing along with the organ.

Reprinted from GOLDENSEAL, Volume 4, numbers 2-3 (April-September 1978), pp. 14–15, based on research in George Pullen Jackson's 1933 classic, White Spirituals in the Upland South. *The same GOLDENSEAL also includes "Shape-note Singing in Appalachia: An Ongoing Tradition," by Alice Fortney Welch and Jack Welch, describing shape-note music teaching and the shape-note tradition among white West Virginians.*

Author Cabbell in conversation with Ruth Boggs.

gospel shape-note style. Mrs. Persinger, a music teacher, is well versed in both the round-note and the shape-note musical traditions. Her group has participated in the Vandalia Gathering, the West Virginia festival of traditional arts in Charleston, and the John Henry Folk Festival, an Appalachian inter-cultural heritage festival. The group is known for its slow, bouncy beat and the dynamic personality of Mrs. Persinger. Several members of her group, such as Willie Colvin and John E. Dolsey, recall with pride several of their families singing shape-notes, and grew up with this singing style as part of the black heritage in the coalfields of southern West Virginia.

Traveling to the Carlisle area, just outside of Oak Hill, I met Waverly Matthews, a shape-note singer for more than 50 years. He fondly remembers learning shape-notes when he was young from an elderly black man in Fayette County. Mr. Matthews now directs the Pleasant Valley Shape-note Choir. Armelia Evans, one of the members of his group, is working on a shape-note rudiments book. She simplified her flat key notation to me as "five boys eat apple dumplings greedily" and her sharp notation as "go down and eat breakfast first." "Of course," she added, "no sharps or flats leave us in the key of C." She then took out a graduated Wurlitzer tuning fork that had been passed down through her family and pitched a tune for me. Listening to the Pleasant Valley group do "Where Could I Go But to the Lord" amazed me. The rural presence is very much a part of their music.

In comparison to white shape-note singers I had heard, the black singers tended to follow the shape-note discipline less rigorously. The blacks were much more improvisational in their approach. Ornamentation and exclamation transformed their music into something much different from what was noted in the hymnals. New harmonies and blues notes departed from what was written. Vibrato and grace notes made the music unique and interesting.

I had my class presentation, but left this field trip feeling that there is a dire need for much more study of gospel shape-note singing among blacks, particularly those using Vaughn and Stamps-Baxter music. The southern region of West Virginia is a good place to start. The music is good and the people are friendly.

"A Pretty Good Thing, All the Way Around"

Michael Kline Interviews Fiddler John Johnson

Photographs by Doug Yarrow

The first time I heard John Johnson playing the fiddle in his little trailer on top of a ridge near Sutton I thought of an uncut forest and the flow of primeval energies. The measures from his long-drawn bow seemed to roll over me and to soar and dip like the wind and rain. Some of the crooked musical turns with bent time tumbled out of his fiddle like water cascading over rocks of different colors and shapes. After a while John's music began to live in my mind like a melodic blueprint of the mountains themselves and I felt deeply touched by the power of his driven cadences and the craggy beauty of his images.

John Johnson was born 65 years ago, December 29, 1916, in an apartment above the jail in Clay, where his father, Seymour Johnson, was the Clay County jailer. John claims to have hit about every jail in the country since then. He was the sixth in a family of ten children.

John has lived a restless and intensly artistic life, having rambled and fiddled his way through 46 states and much of Canada and Mexico. He is a prolific poet—from a large family of poets—and paints vivid primitive scenes of mountain life in oil colors. He is also a timberman, sawyer, cowboy, and carpenter of seasoned experience and considerable knowledge. Mostly he is a shy person possessed of an astonishing ability to communicate through his music, verse, and art. He lives currently with his daughter and her family in Craigsville, but says he may soon hit the road again for Kansas, California, and "who knows where else."

Excerpts follow here from a taped interview made March 7, 1981, at the home of Susie Johnson Hicks in Craigsville, with John recalling some of his earliest memories of music making in Clay County.

Fiddler John Johnson.

Johnson was living with his daughter, Susie Johnson Hicks, when this interview was recorded.

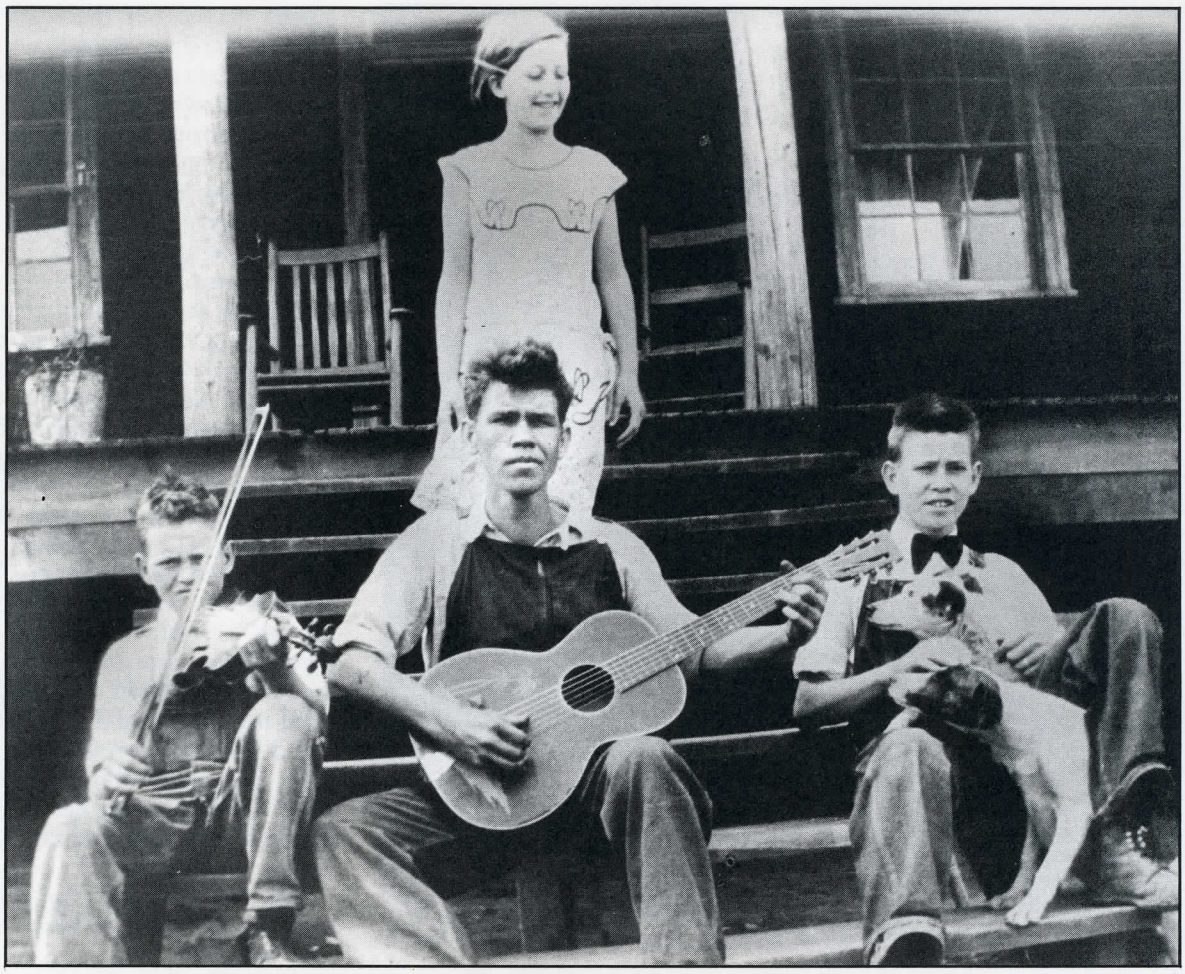
John Johnson. My dad bought an old fiddle from Joe Carte, the ferryman there at Clay. Ferryman Joe, I called him. He was one of the first men that lived in Clay and he had a ferryboat there. He lived on the Clay side of Elk River. Over on the Dundon side, across the river from the mouth of Buffalo, his bell was over there. People would come there and ring the bell and he'd shunt them across the river. It was 10¢ to ferry the river. And if the water was up high and they couldn't reach the bell then they had to walk all the way around down the railroad a mile, and then up through town another mile to be where he lived. And if they was kids going to school they had to walk almost that far. The schoolhouse was way up the hill there. So Ferryman Joe, as I called him, lived there for years and years, and he's the one my dad bought the old violin from.

My dad's name was George Seymour Johnson. And most of the people called him Semer. He could play the fiddle some, but he wasn't a fiddler. Very few times I ever heard him play in my life. When he brought that old fiddle home off of Joe Carte, that was the first time I ever heard him play. After that I doubt if I ever heard him more than three or four times. He never did play the fiddle hardly any, but he could play pretty good. He knew a lot of them old tunes like "Soldiers Joy" and the "Boatsman," and all those kind, you know.

My mother's father, now he was a famous fiddler. His name was Alexander Hamrick. They called him Alex. He was born and raised over there in Swandale where that bandmill used to be. And then he sold about 2000 acres there to the Elk River Coal & Lumber Company at Widen. And he kept about 150 acres back on top of the mountain and built a house up there. People would come from all over the country and get him to play the fiddle—he was hard to beat on that fiddle—and they'd always bring their jug of whiskey and like that. Later on he was converted and made a preacher. And he quit playing the fiddle. Soon the fellows that come there with their jugs, you know, would stay at home. He says, "I'm done, I'll never play no more." So that was the end of his fiddlin'. It's something similar to about all the old fiddlers: most of them usually quit when they get a little bit old. I'm figuring on quitting myself.

Michael Kline. Where did Alex learn? Did his daddy play?

JJ I don't know where he learned to play from. All I know he played the fiddle and was hard to beat at it. My dad, now, when he was a boy, learned what tunes he knew from old Sol Carpenter. Old Sol Carpenter, you know, he was another famous fiddler. Sol said he'd never see the day when he could fiddle like Alex Hamrick. When



John Johnson started fiddling young. Here, brother Charles plays guitar, with brother James and sister Maxine nearby. Date and photographer unknown.

Grandpa Hamrick pulled a bow across a fiddle your hair started tickling. That's the way it was when Dad drawed a bow across the fiddle strings first time I ever heard him. It just seemed like my hair started feeling funny, see, like your hair is raising up now. And it just thrilled me all over, you see. My mother noticed it. I was the only one of the kids that was much interested in it. So my dad said, "Do you want to try a tune, son?" And that was something very unusual for Dad to allow us to touch anything that he had. Tools, or anything like that, he didn't allow us to bother them. But I took the fiddle and played "The Unclouded Day" right off the rib. So from then on I played the fiddle.

Along when I was 12 or 13 they'd come there at night and steal me away. Dad wouldn't allow me to go, but they'd come in at night and steal us away, me and Charles, my brother. He was a guitar player. And they'd take us to play for dances all over the country. They come here and got us one time, a bunch of them did, and went down—it was winter—we got down there to what's called Eagles Bend on the Elk River. It's about a mile above Clay. And the river had so much ice floating, we couldn't get across the river, which had a boat on the other side. My brother James pulled his clothes off and swum the river in that ice and got that boat over there and come over and got the rest of us and our instruments. And we went over to the place they call the Old Fields dance hall and played for a dance over there that night. If you made a quarter then you was doing good. I didn't ever have any money. None of us ever had any money. That's the way it was at home. If I went anywhere to play they had to steal me away at night.

MK Didn't you tell me one time that your dad brought a lot of fiddlers home, though?

JJ Oh, I couldn't mention, I don't know how many old fiddlers used to come there. Lee Triplett, he was always there. One time my dad brought Lorrie Hicks from Calhoun County. He was left- and right-handed, both, he'd just flop her over and play the other way, left and right. He was a good fiddler. And then old Jim Lyons, he'd come there all the time. Old Chaney Armstrong from Richwood, he come there and stayed two months. I learned about 500 tunes from him. Afterward we had a '21 model Pierce Arrow, seven-passenger, and we took Chaney home. My dad gave him two pigs for coming to teach me the tunes, you know. I think Edden Hammons was at our house one time. There was a fiddler's contest at Clay. Chaney Armstrong and Ed Hammons, I think, came from Richwood. Every Sunday there was a big gang there, maybe. In the summertime especially there was 100 to 150 to feed. My mother and all

Johnson's life on the road never left as much time with his family as he would have liked. This photograph, with the car standing ready in the background, perhaps represents a parting scene. Date and photographer unknown.

the girls done all the cooking for them. We had an ice pond. We'd cut ice, store it in the icehouse in the summertime. Strawberry time, we had ice cream and strawberry shortcake. And they came from everywhere especially to hear music. Everybody brought an instrument of some kind. And we really had a time on weekends.

MK Sounds like your dad had a lot of interest in seeing you learn to play the fiddle.

JJ At that time my parents was really proud that I was able to play. Then we got us a band after that. I was about 15 then, I guess. Me and my brother Charles and Noble Knotts, he played the harmonica, and Lee Legg was the banjo. We played at WCHS in Charleston several times. We used to get a large box of Baby Ruth candy bars for playing down there. That was the pay we got.

Then about 1931 we moved to Richmond, Virginia, just outside Richmond on a farm there in Louisa County. I played then at WRVA in Richmond several times. Could have played steady all the time with Grandpa Jones and Sunshine True and the Oklahoma Sweethearts. I was about 17 when we moved to Virginia. We was out there about four year and moved back to West Virginia.

MK What caused your dad to move over there?

JJ Well, one of Dad's brothers, Uncle Rice, traded for that farm out there and wanted my dad to move on it. My dad sold his property he had in Clay and moved out there. It had a mansion on it and two big tobacco barns, a big cattle barn and all that stuff. There was a $4000 lien against it. My dad didn't know, see, Uncle Rice didn't tell him anything about it. My dad was pretty old then. He was in the sawmill business and he wasn't making no money. People just robbed him. And me and my mother and two sisters stayed out there. I cleared 27 acres of land by myself with an axe. Chopped her down. Four acres of pine I grubbed with a mattock.

A man come in there one day and wanted a payment on the place. He had the papers right there. We didn't know anything about it. My dad wasn't making enough to pay and they wanted the money right off the reel, quick as they could get it, or they were going to seize the place. So we moved back to West Virginia. He lost all that. I couldn't number the times he lost thousands of dollars. Hundreds of thousands. It come into his hand and went right out. My mother always said to him, "It's a good thing you didn't get all that money in your hand." Then he would say, "I want to know why it wouldn't have been good for me?" "Well," she says, "if you'd a had all that money at one time you'd a got the big head and we'd a never lived together: you'd a been one place and I'd a been somewhere else." So that's the reason all his fortunes went down the drain. But he was a fortune hunter. He liked to hunt them fortunes.

MK Run down your sisters and brothers for me. I've heard you mention several.

JJ Well, the girls was Ernestine, she was the oldest. She died when she was young. Ernestine, Josephine, Clementine, Irene, Maxine, and Lorriane was the girls. And the boys was Charles, George, James, and John. Ten altogether. I was the sixth one down.

When we come back from Virginia we lived above Clay on top of the hill. Then my dad bought 76 acres and lumber enough to build a five-room house. I went to work at Swandale, walked six miles each way for three years, and bought lumber enough to finish the house. Carried a lot of it on my back across them hills. Carried all the lumber from Swandale to frame the doors and windows and the baseboards and all that. My dad got him a couple of little Jersey calves. We broke them to work, made a yoke to haul logs with to build a barn, smokehouse, all that. And the stones that went under the house, them calves pulled them. We lived there a long time, and dad finally sold that and bought his old home place down here on Kingers Ridge, where he died. My mother stayed there till she died, at

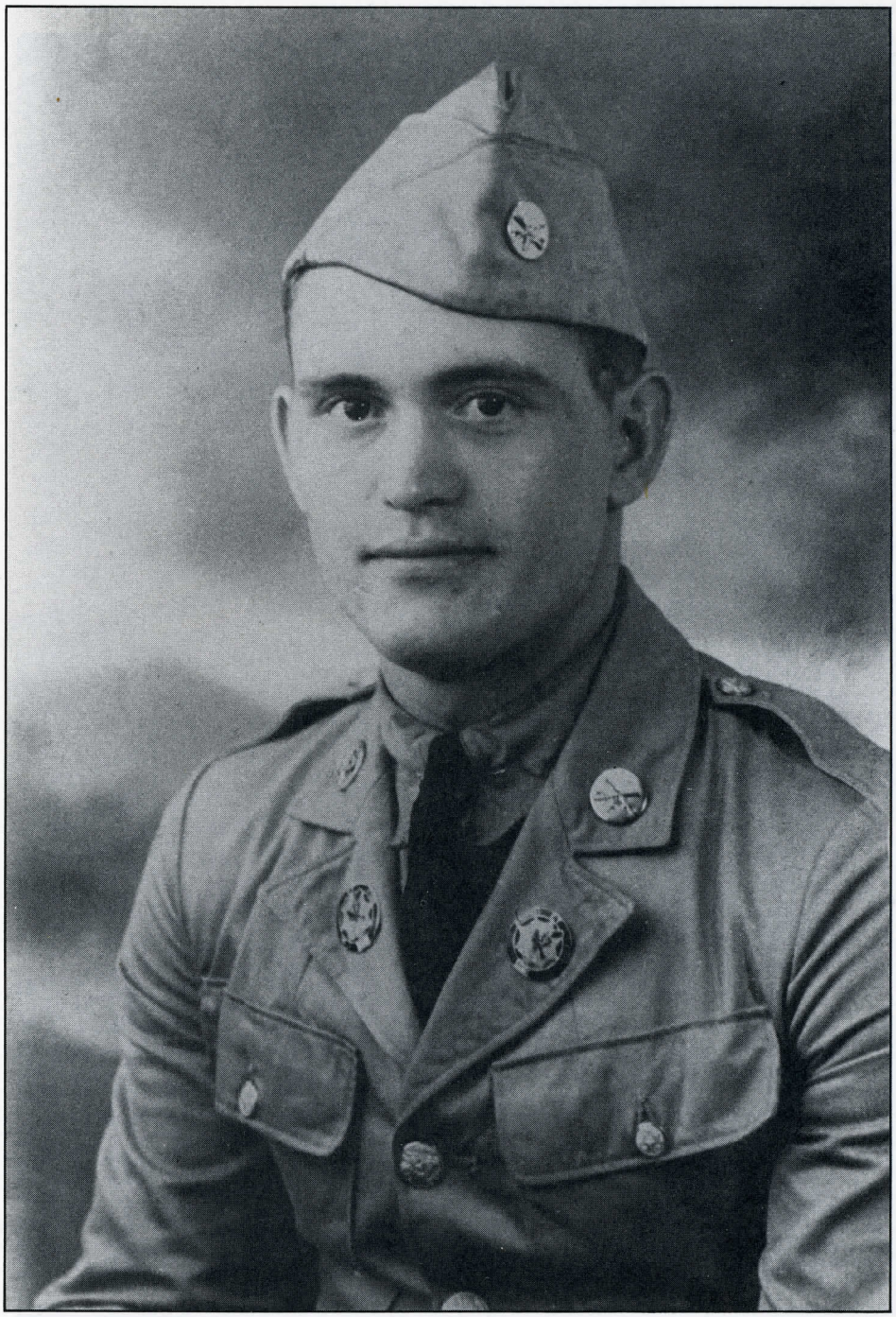
the same place.

I lived with them sometimes and helped out. I built a big barn there, and after I built the barn I had to go away to work. I had a woodworking shop there and a turning lathe that would weigh, I expect, 700 pounds. It was in a building just out from the house a little piece. I come in one night and Mother said, "John, what do you reckon happened to your shop?" I said, "I wouldn't have any idea. What happened to it?" She said, "You don't have any shop now." "Well, how come I don't have any shop now?" She says, "There's nothing out there." I got a light and went out and there was nothing there. The ground was clean. No building. No nothing. We had a big granary over top and my shop underneath. Every kind of a tool a man could need, blacksmith shop and everything. She said just a whirlwind come down and picked it up and took it away. There was never a piece of that house or a tool or a lathe ever found, but one auger bit. My mother just happened to be down in the holler there below the house a quarter of a mile 'senging one day, and found an auger bit where the twister had turned it loose. That's all that was ever hear tell of about that stuff. We never did know what happened.

MK Getting back to your childhood a little bit more, you said that you could learn a fiddle tune just by hearing it one time?

JJ Yeah, it used to be I had no trouble learning a fiddle tune. I'd just hear a tune one time, I had it right then. And I used to go down below Clay there, a place called Pigtown. It's still there yet. It was a coal mining place. There was a fellow lived there by the name of Dorvel Hill. I was bashful back then and wouldn't go in anybody's house hardly. I'd sit on the railroad and listen to Dorvel play the fiddle at night. And I learned most all of Dorvel's tunes. I just set down there and listened to all his tunes and then go home and play them. First one I ever learned from him was "Rag-time Annie." I don't remember all of them. "Under the Double Eagle." Some of them good old tunes, "Dill Pickle Rag." I couldn't name all of them.

Old man Lee Triplett, I learned a lot of tunes off of him, "Wild Horse and the Red Trace," some of them like that Lee played. One time me and my dad went over to Catlettsburg, Kentucky, to see Blind Ed Haley. We found out about him from old man Jim Ryans. Used to work for my dad. He played the fiddle a little and fixed fiddles. Then I heard Natchez the Indian play a lot of times. I think he was a Sioux Indian. And another fiddler you probably know, Clark Kessinger. I played with him along in the '40's and the first part of the '50's. He was a fast, smooth fiddler. I went to see him just a week before he died. He was playing in a contest and had a stroke, and the fiddle fell right out of his hand. He lived in St. Albans, just a little ways from my sister there. I went and played the fiddle for him, played "The Forked Deer." Clark said, "That's not 'The Forked Deer.' " "Well," I said,



Johnson served in the army in the 1930's. Date and photographer unknown.

"I don't know whether it's 'The Forked Deer,' or not, but I learned it from a record that Arthur Smith made when I was a kid, and I know that tune's way older than I am." And Clark said, "That ain't 'The Forked Deer.' " But you see, I play six parts of "The Forked Deer" and he just played two. So I suppose that's the reason why he said that wasn't "The Forked Deer." I learned that whole tune just like Arthur Smith played it. I've heard lots of other fiddlers put just two parts to it. Old Chaney Armstrong, he just had two parts to it.

MK Tell me more about your childhood memories of Clay.

JJ Well, back then Clay was just exactly like it is now. It never did change. People always had to go somewhere else to work, if they had any work. Never did have anything there for people to work at. Someone wanted to put a big paper mill in there, plenty of timber, but they wouldn't let them do that. So it's right now today just like it was when I was born. Never changed a bit, except they built a new high school and a new courthouse. That's all the change that's ever been made in the place.

Johnson has been fiddling for more than 50 years. "First time I heard my dad draw a bow across the fiddle strings, it just seemed like my hair started raising up," he says.

Eustas Murphy ran a store up there. He could undersell just about anybody around. A fellow come in there one time to buy a bunch of stuff, and he got it pretty near all bought and he saw a crosscut saw hanging there on the wall. And he said, "How much is that saw, Mr. Murphy?" "Well," he said, "that's $3.95." "Ain't gonna pay it, not a gonna pay no such price. I can get it at Sears Roebuck for $3.49." "Well, if you want to buy at Sears and Roebuck go right ahead. I'll sell it to you the same price as Sears and Roebuck." "If you'll sell it to me at the Sears Roebuck price, I'll take it!" "Okay." Eustas went ahead and got all his groceries. He just left the saw hanging there. Fellow says, "Well, I'm ready for my saw." Eustas says, "You haven't bought an envelope yet." "Well, what do you want with an envelope?" "Well," he said, "how you gonna mail that order? You got to have an envelope to mail that order." He says, "That's a penny, and 2¢ for the stamp, that's 3¢." "Well, I'll pay 3¢." "Well," he says, "the money order, that's 15¢." "I'll pay that." "Now," he said, "you haven't paid the shipping charges on that saw yet." "Well, add it on." Eustas finally got it figured up and after the fellow got it all paid for Eustas still left the saw hanging there. "I'm ready to take my saw now . . . " "No," says Eustas, "you have to wait two weeks for the saw. If you'd a ordered that from Sears Roebuck you'd a had to wait two weeks for it." "Give me the saw, I'll pay your price!" And he took his saw.

In the early days the school children, the ones that went to Clay from the Dundon side, either had to ring that ferry bell down there and get across the river—and Ferryman Joe could only haul about two or three across at a time in the boat—or, if the river was up, they couldn't ride the ferry at all. They had to walk all the way around the railroad and be late

for school. And lots of times a freight train was switching there on the tracks and they couldn't get across the bridge. Sometimes they wouldn't get to school 'til noon. So my mother wrote a poem about how they needed a bridge at Dundon. My dad took it and had it published in the Clay paper. I know a few words of the first one she wrote, but I don't remember the rest. She wrote five poems altogether. The first one started out:

"Near the yawning outlet of Big Buffalo
Where the crowds of people come and go
The people of Clay County need a bridge
To splice the road to Punkin Ridge."

Then she told in the poem about how the river was up, and about the train switching there and how them railroad ties was covered with ice, and how the children might slip and fall and break their arms and legs. She told all that in this poem, and how they had to walk the extra mile around the railroad and up through town to high school, and get there late, and how they were degraded and everything else. All in poetry. My dad would take them and have them published.

And every time a poem was published they'd build a little more on the bridge. The first time they built the piers. They built for a grade-crossing bridge that went right across the railroad. And before they got a chance to lay another piece of steel she wrote another poem and told what danger there was in that grade crossing. About how they needed an overhead bridge. And my dad took that to the paper, and, boy, that there O'Connor was his name, he was the big bridge man, and how he roared when he heard that one. She had the whole court there at Clay in an uproar over that bridge. Well, they started the addition to put the bridge up across there on the hill, and finally they got that part of the pier made, and there it set again. We never heard no more about it for a while. And Mother asked my dad, "What's the reason we haven't heard anything about that bridge down there?" "Well," said my dad, "they say this and they say that and they say the other, and I don't know what they're going to do about it."

So she wrote a poem titled, "They Say." And it started out:

"They say that Gabriel's horn will blow
The time we know not when
They say they'll build a bridge to Clay
The time we know not when . . . "

And it was "they say" from there on with every man's name on it that was in West Virginia. Never missed a one. When they read that, buddy, they burnt their feet. And they started to work on the bridge again. And then she wrote another one, I forget the title of it. And then the last one she wrote was in thanks for the bridge. The bridge is right there today, and they wanted to put her name on the head of it. But she wouldn't let them do it.

Her name was Missouri Edith Hamrick Johnson. She's the one I was telling you about the writing spider writing her name. The spider wrote it M-O-Z-U-R-A, so she went by the name Mozura ever after that.

MK Wait a minute, John, what do you mean the spider wrote her name?

JJ Well, she called her children out on the porch one morning, and there in the morning glory vines she showed us the writing spider. It had her name wrote big in the web in wide, white letters: M-O-Z-U-R-A. And she never went by any other name, never wrote her name any other way after that. I saw one of them writing spiders here last summer but you couldn't tell what it had wrote. It had just started to write. Very seldom you see them. They're a large yellow spider, real pretty spiders. And, of course, a lot of people think they're phoney, they think they can't write, and all like that. But they do. They really write.

MK Did your mother attach some significance to the spider writing her name? Did she think it was a sign of good luck?

JJ No, she didn't believe in luck. There wasn't any such a thing as luck to her. All that she believed in was God-sent. She believed that's the way her name was wrote on the book of life in heaven. That was her belief.

MK And you saw the spider?

JJ Yeah, we all saw it, the whole family saw it.

MK Do you get your writing ability from your mother?

JJ I don't know, I can't write nothing, really.

MK Just books and books and books of poetry!

JJ Well, sometimes I get in the mood to write something, a song, maybe. I've wrote a few. Would you like to hear about my horse I had?

MK Oh, yeah.

JJ I used to have a good old horse,
I called him Faithful Dan.
I was just a kid, of course.
But I felt more like a man.
I'd ride him all the live-long day
Old Dan could not be beat.
I did not have to feed him hay
Because he could not eat.
Now old Dan was homely,
And he was precious to my soul.
But you know the horse was only
A long, slim hickory pole.

MK That's nice. When did you make that?

JJ Back in the '30's, somewhere along about '32.

MK Did your brothers and sisters write poems, too?

JJ Yeah, about all of them, every one of them can write something. I don't know if I ever saw a poem Clementine wrote or not. But all the rest of them wrote.

MK Did you sit around and talk verse in your house, or what? Make up songs all the time? How did this get started?

JJ No, I really never wrote a song 'til I was about 20 years old. I wrote some songs been copyrighted by somebody else, you know, like "The High Cost of Living," I wrote that song.

MK Tell me a little about the school you went to.

JJ Oh, I went to school down in Dundon, West Virginia, when I first started. 'Course, I didn't know anything about school, and I didn't know what you went there for. When a person done wrong there the teacher'd flip them on the ear with a rule. First day I ever went to school I was crawling around on the floor, and got a whipping for that right off. I never had much schooling, didn't know much. Never did learn anything in my whole life. Still don't know nothing. Can't imagine anything, and can't see straight: I'm all the time looking around a curve and sliding down a hill or something. Never do anything right. 'Bout all I can draw is flies, and

A Musicological Look at John Johnson's Fiddling

By John A. Cuthbert

In the summer of 1947, Louis Watson Chappell, a folklorist from West Virginia University, met John Johnson in Strange Creek, West Virginia. Having heard of Johnson's musical prowess from other fiddlers in the Braxton County area, Chappel had come equipped with a disk recording machine with which he had been engaged in documenting and preserving West Virginia's musical tradition for over a decade.* On this occasion, his efforts were well rewarded. Johnson proved to be not only an abundant source, but also one of the most skilled musicians Chappell had ever encountered.

Oddly enough, according to Chappell's notes, Johnson did not possess a fiddle when the two met one August morning; thus, their first job was to borrow one. This task was evidently accomplished in short order for before the day was out 20 12-inch aluminum disks, embracing some 80 tunes, had been recorded. In addition to being remarkable from a technical standpoint, the recordings emphasize the wide variety of sources, styles, and types of fiddle music which flourished in West Virginia in the 1940's.

The Johnson recordings are as varied as they are numerous. Classic old-time fiddle tunes such as "Forked Deer" and "Fisher's Hornpipe" are interspersed with more modern pieces like "Dixon County Blues," "Down Yonder," and "Honeysuckle Rag." Also included are many play party and dance songs, including "Cumberland Gap," "Granny Will Your Dog Bite," and "Hop Light Ladies," as well as traditional ballad and hymn tunes: "Barbara Allen," "Amazing Grace," and "The White Pilgrim"—altogether an eclectic mixture of old and new, sacred and secular.

Stylistically, the recordings exhibit a hybridized manner of playing which was derived from many different sources. As Johnson has stated, his style was nurtured in the midst of a mountain fiddling tradition for which central West Virginia is famous, characterized by modal melodies, persistent drones and highly accentuated rhythms produced by relatively short, irregular, bowing patterns. His debt to this tradition is most evident in his performances of regional favorites like "Shelvin' Rock," "Camp Chase," and "Jimmy Johnson," among others. In general, however, in the wake of fiddlers heard on radio and records, or encountered during travels through Texas and elsewhere, by 1947 Johnson's playing had become somewhat less localized. Elements of ragtime, blues, and "Texas" or "contest" style are all detectable in his music which is typically fast and clean, and attests to his skillful manipulation of a long bow.

The general stylistic influence of Fiddlin' Arthur Smith is especially noticeable. Not only is this apparent in Johnson's version of "Forked Deer," but also in numerous other cases, particularly in his selection and renditions of old Smith tunes like "Dixon County Blues" and "Cheatum County Breakdown" (Bluebird Records Number 6369, 7351) as well as "Listen to the Mockingbird" (Bluebird 5843). Johnson's "Hell Among the Yearlings" also bears notable similarities to Smith's version on Folkways FA2379, particularly in the performance of syncopated chords in the low strain. A similar passage, played strummento, occurs in the second part of Johnson's "Garfield's March." A real tour de force, this piece contains streams of slurred parallel thirds and sixths alternating with fast clean runs which provide ample evidence of the fiddlers adept coordination between bowing and noting.

As a rule Johnson's up-tempo tunes are fast-paced and permeated with crisp and even scale passages. Double-stops are employed sparingly, not generally as drones, but for color and accentuation at structurally important points. In slower pieces, though, where the emphasis is on harmony and intonation, successions of melodic double-stops frequently create a lush two-part texture.

Johnson's playing exhibits many characteristics of progressive old-time fiddling, and indeed, he readily admits his predilection for Benny Thomasson and others, yet variation and development which are fundamental to that style of playing are by and large absent from the 1947 recordings. Johnson's and Kessinger's (County 747) renditions of "Under the Double Eagle" begin essentially the same. Kessinger's successive repetitions are in reality variations; Johnson's are not.

Nevertheless, Johnson's playing is far from dry. Monotony is never a problem to a fiddler with his dexterity and sense of musicality. In many ways his music is a reflection of himself; restless, fast moving, and diverse—an outgrowth of an extraordinary life and an extraordinary man.

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*Chappell is perhaps best known for establishing the factual basis and circumstances surrounding the John Henry legend in his book *John Henry: A Folklore Study*. (Jenna: Frommansche Verlag, 1933; reprint ed. Kennikat Press, 1968). Professor Chappell's archive of 647 aluminum disks recorded throughout West Virginia from 1937–1947, embracing nearly 100 performers, is preserved in The West Virginia Collection at West Virginia University.

then only in the summertime. That's just about all I know about myself.

When I went to school there at Dundon they pronounced me totally blind. And the teacher wrote a note home, "This boy absolutely has to have glasses for he is practically blind and cannot see the letters." My mother wrote on the other side of the note, she says, "If you'll teach him his letters he can read them." Well, I couldn't learn anything in school, that was for sure. So my mother told me she would buy me a pair of gloves that had a fringe on the cuff of them, like an Indian made them, if I would learn my letters. In 15 minutes I knowed every letter there was in the book. All she had to do was tell them to me one time and I knew them all. And in school I couldn't learn anything.

MK What about fiddle playing, John? I don't know if you're the best fiddle player in the world, but you're as good a fiddle player as I ever heard anywhere. And you told me you had never played the fiddle very much.

JJ I doubt if all told in my whole life, if every hour that I played the fiddle, I doubt it it made six months. I don't know about fiddling. I can't figure out what kind of a brain a fellow's got for to play a fiddle. I don't know. Probably something wrong with him.

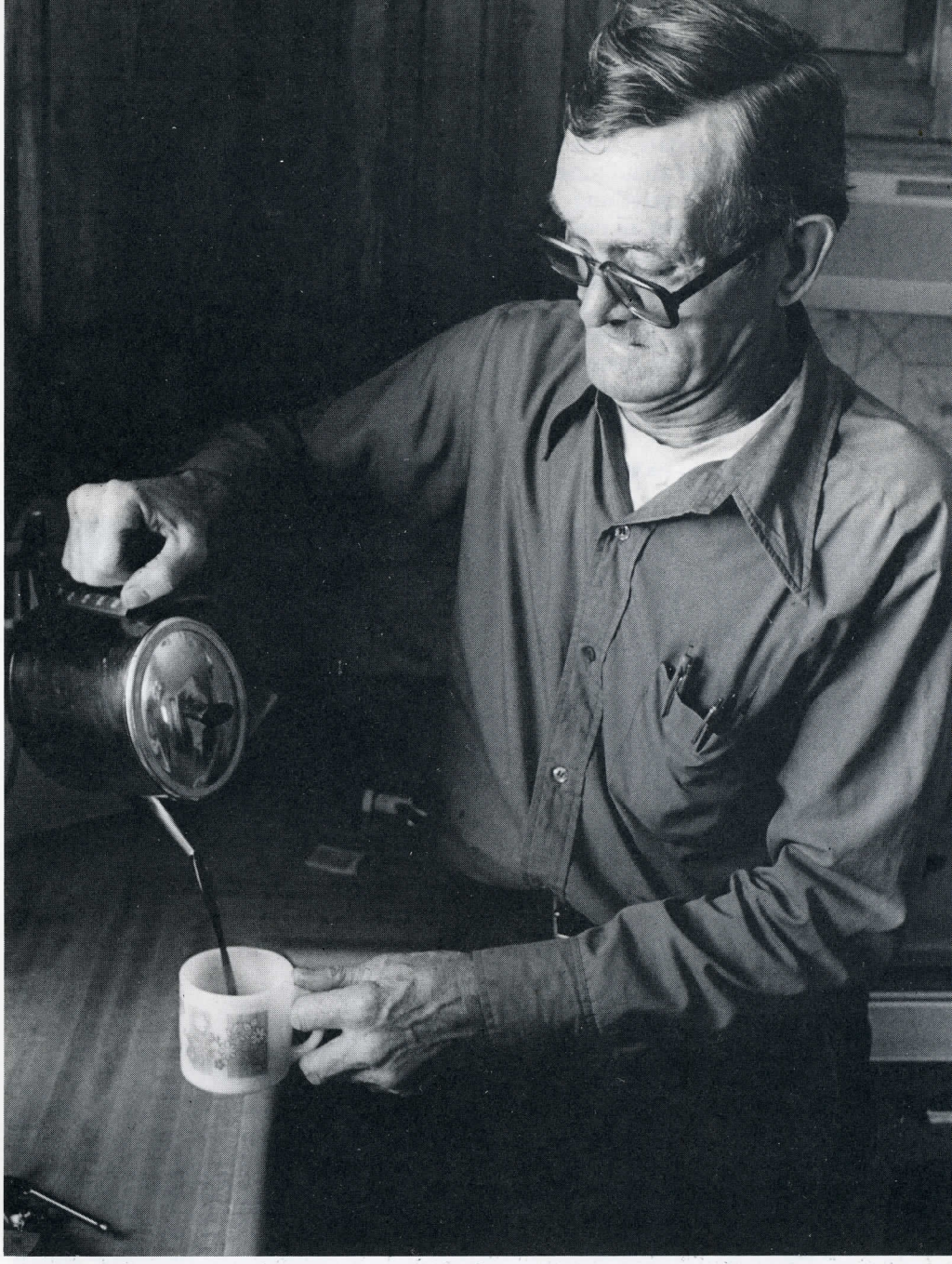
MK But anyway, as a young fiddler you just started going around to different parts of the country? Where did you go?

JJ Oh, I been everywhere. I been in all the states, I fiddled in all of them, from one side to the other, around and around and around and back again. There's really not very many fiddlers in West Virginia that I played with, but I played with a lot of good fiddlers in Texas, Ben Thomasson and all them fiddlers down around Fort Worth and Dallas. I met a lot of good fiddlers in Houston, but I don't know any of their names. They're hard to beat down there. Good fiddlers down in that country.

MK How'd you get to Texas to meet those guys?

JJ Well, to begin with, I first went there when I was 14 years old. Hoboed down there. Had an uncle lived in El Paso then, the first time I went. I got to like Texas, and in later years I had a cousin lived in Arlington, Texas, so I went home with him one time. And then people got to knowing me down there. I worked around a lot. Have a cousin there now in Pecos, Texas, Bayard Johnson from over here at Frametown. He's bought a big ranch down there. One time I went down to Mena, Arkansas, and got in with these Ward boys, they were brothers. They build steel buildings of all kinds in Houston, and they wanted me to go over and work with them down there. But instead of getting a job, they put me to cooking. I didn't like that.

One day I went into the B&B Music store there to get a guitar string. I was looking at these fiddles and this fellow Bill come around to ask me what I wanted, could he help me? I told him I wanted a first string for a guitar. He says, "You interested in these fiddles? You play a fiddle?" "I play a little." "Let's hear you play one." And he hands me a fiddle. I hit a note or two and he says, "Let's hear that 'Sally Ann Johnson' on that thing." So I played it for him. That's how I got invited to a big party that night. This guy Bill whatever-his-name-was picked me up that evening about 7:30 and we went way out in the country to this fellow's



Recalling one adventure, Johnson says, "I like to froze to death that night. Went in that beer joint the next morning, my knees popping together. I drunk one cup of coffee, what I didn't shake out I drunk, and then drunk another one. And I said, 'That's the last of the money I got.'"

house. He was a state roads superintendent and he had about nine fiddlers there, didn't hire anything but fiddlers. We played there all night. Played 'til 5:00 the next morning and they had to go to work. He had fiddlers from everywhere around there, and I don't know any of their names. We took turns about playing there, and they recorded all the tunes we played. We had a pretty good time that night. I learned a couple of tunes, but I don't remember what they was, but we sure did hear some good fiddling there that night.

MK What is it about Texas style fiddling that's different, do you think?

JJ I don't know. That Ben Thomasson, almost all those fiddlers, played something near the same pattern. They have a different style from most everybody else. I don't know just what you'd call it. I just play the way I learned myself, don't know anything else. Yeah, I pull a long bow. Some people uses a shorter bow. But I never did see but one bow that was long enough for me, really. I found it in a dresser drawer in Massachusetts. It was just the length of that dresser drawer. I had that bow a long time—had an ivory frog on it—before somebody stole it and fiddle and all off me. Never did see it no more.

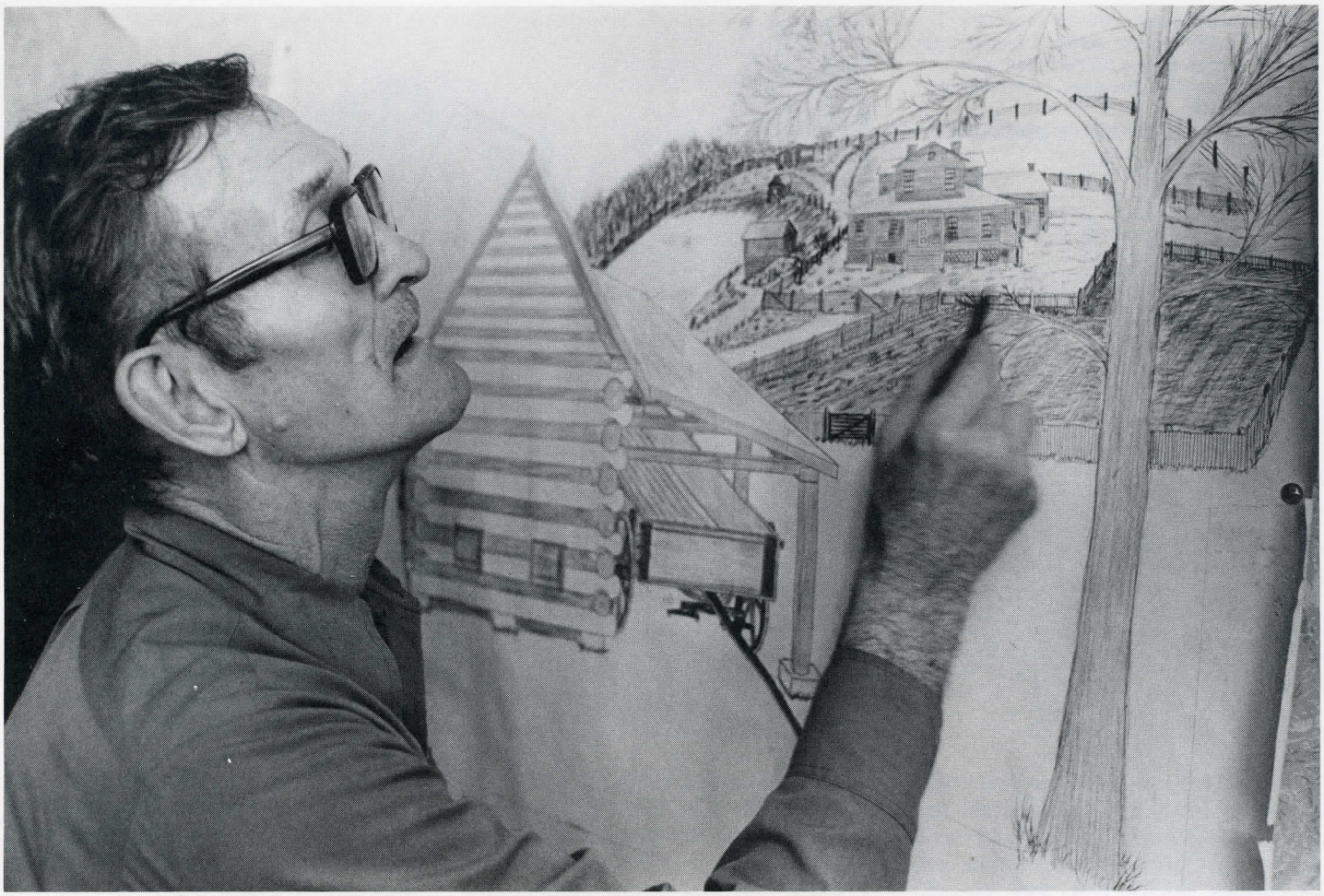
"When I'm really playing the fiddle, I probably have a frown on my face. And that's the way my Grandpa Hamrick was."

But I fiddled everywhere. Fiddled my way out of jail one time. Dr. Lockheart was sheriff in Clay and he had an old fiddle. I stayed in jail all one night and the next morning he comes down. "What are you doing in here?" "Well, just like the rest of them." "Well," he says, he opened up the door and said, "come on, I'm glad you're in here. Been wanting to hear you play the fiddle." He lived upstairs there, the same place where I was born. He took me upstairs and let me eat my breakfast and handed me the fiddle. When I got through playing he said, "Go on down the road. You don't have to be in jail." Got me loose. That was one time the fiddle done me good.

And then another time I got in jail down there in the same place, Clay. And the jailer was Joe Carte, that Ferryman Joe's son. When I come out in front of the magistrate she says, "John, as many times as you've been here, I think I oughta give you ten days." I said, "Whatever you say." Then Joe Carte says. "You ain't gonna give John ten days. I'm gonna pay his fine! He wrote a poem about my dad, and it's every word the truth. And I've got it right here in my shirt pocket. Read that." And she read the poem and says, "Just let him go." And that was twice I got out, once for poetry and the other for fiddling.

But I've been everywhere, practically, married all these women. I've been looking for another now, just mailed a letter out to one this morning. I might get her, she lives in California. I met her on a Greyhound bus, a real nice woman. I might pick her up later. Of course, she'd have to learn to eat groundhog if she lived up here. About all they've got to eat in West Virginia is groundhog and poke greens.

MK Did you play the fiddle for her?



As with other artists, Johnson's creativity takes a variety of forms, including mural painting. He also writes verse.

JJ No, I didn't play, she don't even know I can play a fiddle. Probably be a good thing not to tell her 'til after we're married. Then they'd be a sure divorce right there. Quick as they find out you're a fiddler, that's the end of it. But all these marriages was well worth it. Yeah, they was all good women, but out of the whole bunch there wasn't a one could play a tune on anything. I think maybe one could play a flute. I never heard her play, but I heard she could. And the last one I married, she took every dud of clothes I had. Never left me a pair of socks, not a pair of shorts, nor a sheet of paper to write on. And a brand new three-quarter ton truck, four-wheel drive, she loaded everything there was in it and down the road she went, and I haven't seen her since.

MK Do you think you'll do better with this next one in California?

JJ I ain't sure whether I'll get her or not. Merritt is her name. I been trying to think of a poem I might make on her. Merritt, she ought to rhyme good with that there snuff, you know that Garrett snuff? But after you've been married five times and half the time you can't remember your wives' names, I think maybe it's time to quit.

MK Why did they all object to your fiddle playing?

JJ When a fiddler starts out to go play somewhere, the average woman thinks he's got 40 other women around his neck, just because he can play the fiddle. Back, oh, about '52, I was playing at the U.S. Grill in Charleston through the week. We got through playing one night and I started to count up our tips. I had it divided up, about $4 a piece, laying on the bar, when somebody tapped me on the shoulder. I looked around. Nice looking girl standing there. "Are you going with me?" I says, "Well, if you wait 'til I divide this money up I'll be right with you." She took her hand and swiped all that money off of the bar. Then she reached down in her dress and pulled out a roll of $50 bills about like that. I said, "You fellows pick up the chicken feed, boys. I'm going!"

Out the door we went, right around the corner on the Boulevard there. She says, "I live right up there. The old landlady is cranky. If she notices who you are, just keep going. Here's the key. When you get to the top of the stairs turn left, the second door on your left." So I went. I got inside before she got there. About that time she come up. I could hear her out there talking with the landlady. "That's not the same man you had up here last night." "Yes it is. That's my husband." "The man you had in here last night wasn't that tall. He didn't have no fiddle, either." "Well," she says, "it's my husband, it's the same one I had."

Anyway, we got by with it for three nights. So she says to me next morning, "I want to go down to Capitol

Right: "When a fiddler starts out to go play somewhere, the average woman thinks he's got 40 other women around his neck. But after you've been married five times, I think maybe it's time to quit."
Far right: John Johnson with his granddaughter Heidi.

Street and buy you some new clothes." We went down to Capitol Street and she got me a new outfit from one end to the other: shoes, socks, clothes, underclothes, shirts, belt, and brought them back up to the apartment. "Now, I want you to change clothes. Get them clothes off of you." I said, "What do you want me to get my clothes off for? These are new clothes I have on. Ain't nothing the matter with my clothes." "Yes, there is. I don't want you to have anything on that any other woman ever touched." Right there I knew I was full in the hands of the Devil himself.

Well, three days was up and the old woman throwed us out. We went down Lee Street, went into the Lee Hotel. Couldn't play music, she wouldn't let me go nowhere and play. Lost my job. Had my fiddle setting in the corner. I didn't even smoke cigarettes, but I said, "I'm gonna run down and get a pack of cigarettes." "You ain't going after no cigarettes, you don't even smoke cigarettes." "Yeah, I smoke cigarettes, I'm going down to get a pack." She grabbed my fiddle and says, "I'll hold this 'til you get back." That made me mad, and I grabbed the fiddle right out of her hand and walked out the door. Just a few days after that they picked that girl up. She was on parole from Atlanta for killing a man with a high-heeled shoe. She went back to Atlanta. That was one of the best I ever had on my rounds. I could tell you about some more. Probably be better not to. I may want to get married again, and if they hear all these things, I may never find a woman.

MK None of them ever liked your fiddle playing?

JJ One of them liked my fiddle playing, but I had to secretly play it for her when nobody else was around. Couldn't play it for the public, that was out.

MK What is it about the fiddle, anyway?

JJ It's not the fiddle, it's the way you play the fiddle. Why if some fiddlers sit there and play it from now on no woman would pay any attention to it. It's the fiddler, ain't the fiddle.

MK Do you think sometimes people are more interested in your fiddling than they are in you as a person?

JJ Yeah. One hundred percent. Because for sure I don't have any personality at all. I'm no showman, can't put on a show. I can't get on stage and put on a big smile when there's nothing to smile about. They tried that with me on television. I wouldn't even begin to laugh. I just throwed the fiddle down and quit. When they told me I had to smile I walked out. When I'm really playing the fiddle I probably have a frown on my face. That's the way my Grandpa Hamrick was. My mother said she'd never seen him smile when he was playing the fiddle. If you're going to play the fiddle you have to put your whole heart into it. But if the fiddle means more to you than anything else, it's time to quit. I never did make anything with a fiddle in my whole life. What little dab I did make didn't do me a bit of good, not one bit.

One time in Roosevelt, Utah, I played all day long until midnight. Went in there with 15¢ and when I come out I had 73 silver dollars. And I was playing every tune they asked me to play, never missed a tune. Right at the end of the evening a man throwed five silver dollars down and says, "There's $5 says you can't play 'Green Grow the Lilacs.' " Well, I couldn't think of it. And the crowd hollered, "Hey, fiddler, you didn't let that five silver dollars scare that tune out of you, did you?" I said, "No, I didn't let $5 scare it out of me, but I can't think of how it goes." "Well, you can't play it. We got you stumped now!" I just shoved back a dollar of his money and said, "Here's a dollar

says you can't whistle or hum it." He couldn't whistle it nor he couldn't hum it. They turned on him. "Hey, you wouldn't know that tune if you heard it!" "Yes, I would," he said, "I know that tune, I just can't think of how it goes." "Well," I said, "it's the same way with me." But just about that time I thought of Tex Ritter and one of Tex's old tunes. I said, "Wait a minute," and I raked them five back. I said, "I've got it!"

So I played him "Green Grow the Lilacs." I come to find out he owned the hotel across the street and he gave me a room that night. The next morning at 8:00 he pecked on my door. "Come on, we'll go eat breakfast." I was going on to Price, Utah, and he took me out of town and offered to take me plum to Price, if I wanted him to. I says, "No, I can catch a ride across that hill." That was one streak of luck, if you can call it luck, with a fiddle. That helped me out. But other times I'd probably play the same tunes and get nothing, and wind up worse off.

One night I was playing there in Price when an Indian come in. "You want a job herding sheep?" "Sure." "You play fiddle good, I hire good fiddler." That fellow never saw a sheep, I don't think. He was one of them Ute Indians. I went with him all the way to Goshen, Utah. There was a beer joint over there they called the Dog House. Glass was at least six inches deep around the building where they'd broke up all kinds of bottles. And I was right there for one month playing the fiddle, sitting up on the bar. There wasn't a chair in the place or a table. Sit up on the bar or stand up, or any way you could get to play the fiddle—for a month—with not one bite to eat. Slept in a little back room there. For a month.

Old man Jim Eskelson lived right next door. He owned the building and rented it to these Indians. So old Jim says one day, "You know, these Indians will keep you over there 'till you die, playing the fiddle, and they won't give you nothing?" I says, "I don't care, this is my body I've got, this is mine. I don't care how long. I'm the one staying over there, they ain't keeping me over there." "They're giving you beer, ain't they?" I says, "Yeah, I get beer. I don't have to drink it if I don't want it." "Well, what are you staying over there for?" I says, "What's it any of your business what I'm staying over there for? I'm playing the fiddle for these Indians."

Well, about the end of the month this guy, Ronnie Young was his name, that was running the beer joint, he says, "If I buy you a change of clothes would you go out to my place and fix a little fence for me? How long would you work if I bought you a change of clothes?" I said, "I'll work 'til I pay for the clothes." "Come on." He took me to Roosevelt, bought me a $40 hat, a pair of boots, two pair Lee riders, everything. Took me out to his ranch and showed me the fence. It was a good fence, but he wanted willows wove in the wire. I wove willows all that day. That evening he come back, him and another guy. "By George," he said, "I wish I'd a had you here long ago." I'd put about a half mile of them things in the fence, and me without anyting to eat. Well, they fixed me a couple of bologna sandwiches and they left. I wove willows the rest of the week. I finished up that string of fence and he hadn't come back yet. So I hitch-hiked out of there, walked four miles to the highway, caught a ride, went back to the Dog House, and he wasn't there. He'd closed her down. Old Jim Eskelson said, "You may never see them fellows again." I hitched out of that place, finally got out of there with nothing but the clothes I wore. So that's what a fiddle got me into that time.

Then another time there was an Indian wanted me to go home with him.

He composed all kinds of songs and he could really play the piano. So I went home to see him. He took a case of beer. A hundred and twenty miles out in the mountains up in there to his house at the end of the road, and next morning there wasn't any beer. I got up early and went out looking around. Nothing but pine and cedar trees. There was some brush piled up against the fence. Then I seen a couple of bones laying around there. I pulled back the brush and there was a skeleton of a man laying there, or a woman, one. He probably ate that one 'cause there wasn't a bite of food in the house. I figured my bones was going to be there next in a brush pile. A hundred and twenty miles out there. No beer.

I says, "Well, buddy, I got to hit the road." "You can't walk out of here, don't you know it's a hundred and twenty miles across that desert?" "I don't care if it's 500," I says. "I'm going across it." Down the road I went. "Hey, come back here." I just kept going. I got a couple of miles down the road and I heard that old truck a going. I had it right in my mind: mister you just make one move like you're going to harm me and you're a dead man. It'll be your bones instead of mine. He stopped "Get in, I'll take you back." So he did. He took me back over there. And from that time on I never went—yeah, I did. I went with one other Indian.

He had a brand new Pontiac and a sheep ranch. He had a lot of money. He said we'd go out on this sheep ranch. These sheep herders never seen nobody year round. Said they'd like to hear that fiddle. We started down the highway. There was about I'd say 40 or 50 ring-necked pheasants along the ditch, just thick way down through there. He said, "Hang on." He just whirled her to the right, down over that bank, him a doing 60 miles an hour! Don't know how in the world he kept from turning over. And, buddy, them feathers flew, the air was full of them. Then we got out and gathered up the pheasants, 17 or 18 we got out of that bunch. We went on. On the left-hand side was another gang. "Hang on." Whew-man, he plowed the ditch as we were going down through there and we got another big load of pheasants. We took them out to the sheepherders to cook. I played the fiddle, we drunk whiskey, beer, and wine, and we had pheasant to eat. That was the last Indian I went home with.

And then one time I was going to Canada. Had 20¢ in my pocket. It was the fall of the year and real cold. I got up in the woods, and cutting brush, made me a bed. I laid down there and like to froze to death that night.

The next morning my knees was just a cracking. I went down and there was a beer joint there, just opening it up. Went in that beer joint, it was good and warm in there, my teeth was a cracking, my knees was popping together. This drunk there got a six-pack, and I got a cup of coffee, 10¢. I drunk that coffee, what I didn't shake out I drunk, and drunk another one. And I said, "That's the last of the money that I've got."

"Where are you going?" he asked. I says, "Well, I'm going up in Canada. I thought I'd go up there and see if I could find some work, in the timber or something." "Well, you can get all the timber work you want right over here in New Jersey." Just shows you how an old sot drunk can help a feller out—undoubtedly, God Almighty set that drunk there, brought him right up the road and put him right there.

Drunk says, "Ever work on a sawmill?" I says, "I can do anything on a sawmill." "Well," he says, "a man has got a sawmill not very far from here and he was wanting me yesterday to work for him, but I can't work because I drink too much. And I don't like to work on a sawmill anyway." So he took me right over there—the whole side was out of his truck—and I like to froze to death, wind blowing through that truck. Two men was working there on the mill. One was an Indian and the other was an offbearer. "I come over here to see about a job," I said. "I'm needing a man, but I never did have a drifter that was worth much." I says, "You can use your own judgement, but you'll never know whether I can work 'til you hire me. You ain't got nothing there I can't do." "Can you saw and grade lumber?" I says, "Yes, sir." "I'm going to try you."

Well, I only had a pair of dress shoes on because when I left Worcester, Massachusetts, I took my car with all my clothes and over a hundred dollars worth of fishing tackle and pulled it down through the woods and parked it by the lake and left it set there with a note on the steering wheel to my brother for a gift. Left a full tank of gas in the car and hit the road a hitchhiking. They found that car three months later and thought I'd jumped in the lake and drowned, that's all they could figure out. And my brother like to never got the car. But the police finally give it to him months after. But anyhow, I says, "I ain't got no work shoes." He says, "I think I've got a pair, a brand new pair here if they fit you." He was a big man, weighed around 300 pounds and strong as an ox, too. He went and got a pair of brand new loggers boots, fit me to a hair, exactly my size. "You can have them for $10." "All right." Then I ate supper with him.

I met him the next morning at Bill's Cafe. He sent them other two guys home. Me and him run that sawmill. I done the off-bearing, the edging, and stacked the lumber by myself. Had a big Hyster there, about a six-foot fork on it. I pulled her up there, tilted her back a little, and throwed the slabs on. And when the Hyster was full I jumped on and dumped the slabs and brought back a load of logs and put on the carriage. When we sawed out all the logs we had, we headed for the mountains the next day. I cut timber. He had a bulldozer and made roads. He skidded the logs, had a truck with a loader right on it. That evening at quitting time we had it loaded, ready to go. Me and him run that sawmill, nobody else helped. I worked way up 'til the winter and I left there in the wintertime. Smoke blowing down the chimney, you see. Bad weather a coming.

Anyway, I took the flu and there was a liquor store close to the hotel where I was staying. I went in and bought a pint of brandy. That liquor fellow said, "Buddy, you're sick, ain't you?" He put his hand on my head. It was real hot. So he give me a bottle of lemon juice and said, "You get in your room and pour you a glass half full of whiskey and fill her up with that. Drink it, and get in bed and cover up." Well, I did. Gulped down a pint and got into bed, just like he said. After a half hour I began to feel pretty good. I crawled right out of that bed and went down to get another pint and a bottle of lemon juice. He says, "I'm

"Most fiddlers usually quit when they get a little bit old. I'm figuring on quitting myself," John says, although we don't expect him to lay down the bow anytime soon.

telling you, you ought to stayed in bed, you'd have been well in the morning."

Well, I got me another pint and another bottle of lemon juice and back to my room I went again. Gulped down the whiskey and lemon juice and started playing a Gibson guitar I had there. Several people in the hotel come in and listened. I had my door left open on purpose so they could hear. I was singing some songs in my room when a fellow from the bar downstairs said, "Well, buddy, I guess you'd better put it away for the night." "Okay." So they all left. I throwed a few duds in my suitcase, left that guitar sitting right there—2:00 in the morning—and down the highway I went. In a blizzard, buddy, in a blizzard! Wasn't no buses run on that road at all. I walked three miles. There was a truck stop on the left, a tractor and trailer setting there. I walked in just almost froze to death. Man says, "Good lord, you know you'll freeze to death out like that. It's 20 below zero out there." I says, "Well, I can't help that. I've got to go." I told him I was going to Baltimore. "Well," he says, "you get in that truck out there and I can put you in Albany." I got the Greyhound from Albany to Baltimore. That was one of my good luck times when I hit that place. I could tell you a lot of things that happened when you'd think the next minute was death. I could tell you a lot of them.

MK Do you like being in situations like that?

JJ Don't bother me a bit. One time I was drifting through Akron. There was a circus there, and I went loafing around that circus. They was tearing down a small sideshow tent, and I went over and asked the guy for a job. Never had worked in a circus in my life. He says, "Yeah, I need a man steady." I said, "I got a suitcase. Is there any place I could put it?" "There in that trailer." So I got my suitcase and put it in this trailer with all the monkeys. There was a fellow stayed in there and he kept a hoot owl in there and a buzzard, and I don't know what else. A monkey or two. It stunk. There wasn't nothing to sleep on but tents and tentpoles, them great big ones. I stayed with the circus two weeks. We went on through Cleveland, Ohio, and all the towns going west. Got over to Clay, Ohio, right out of Toledo, there. I said to the guy, "When am I supposed to get paid?" He says, "You can get paid any time right over there in that tent." But the man in the tent says, "You'll have to have an order." The other man said, "You don't need an order." So I was getting in a pretty good mess of it, being two weeks with no money.

So then he says, "Say, did you ever sell any peanuts?" "No," I said, "I never." "Well," he says, "Try your luck. Buy a carton of peanuts for 5¢ a bag and sell them for 15¢. You give me half of what's left. You make $36 on the whole thing." So I went to selling peanuts and sold out for $36 and hit the road with what money I had. I got about half a mile down the road and a car pulled up. "Hey, buddy, going into town?" Some old guy driving a Chevrolet. I got in the car and he said, "You been working for that circus? Ain't it a shame, them poor animals, they never feed them." I says, "They don't feed anything else, either, and they don't pay." Well, he took me into Toledo and gave me a $10 bill.

I was there two days and went down to Manpower to see if I could get a job. It was surrounded with gays and blacks and whites of every sort. I couldn't go in there, so I left. I just got around the corner and a pickup truck pulled up, two men it it. "Hey buddy, were you down at Manpower just now looking for a job?" I said yeah. "Come on, get in." I got in and went to work for them at $4 an hour pointing up chimneys. That pulled me out of that ditch. And I could tell similar ones like that. Probably take me the rest of the day to tell them all. Things like that happened to me, where I was pulled right out of the hands of death, where I'd have starved to death or been killed.

But I've been everywhere, practically, in the United States, in Canada and Mexico. Played the fiddle, worked here and yonder, worked everywhere. Work a while, go somewhere else. Went when I pleased and come back when I pleased. That's the way a person ought to live. It's a pretty good thing all the way around.

Memories of the Oil and Gas Fields

Conversations with Pleasants County Oil Workers

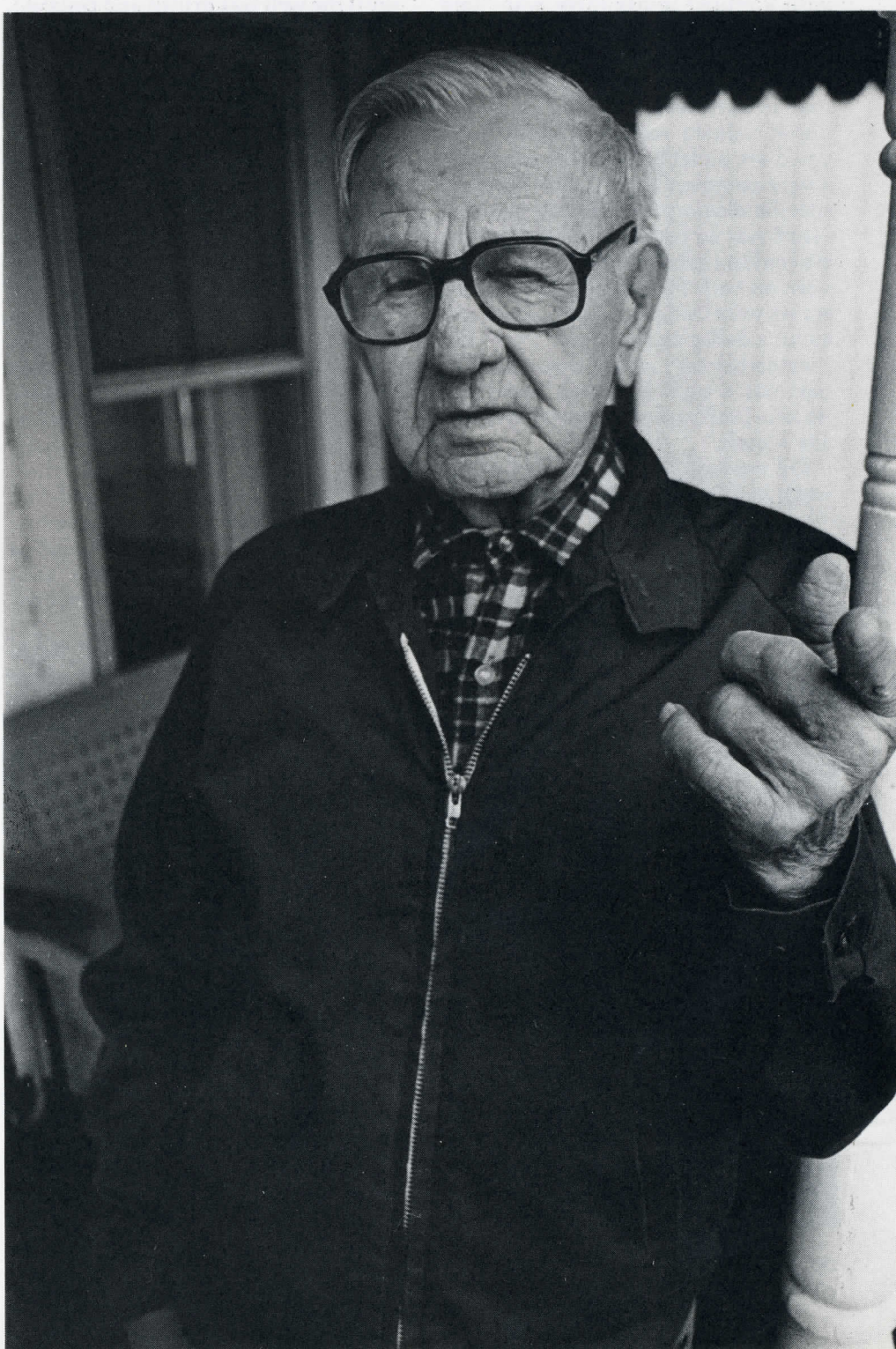
By Yvonne Snyder Farley

Photographs by James Samsell

"I never did anything I liked half as much as when I worked in the oil fields. I always wished I'd stuck with it," said Hank Dotson, 88, as he sat on his living room couch one afternoon last March thinking over those 20-some years he'd spent in the oil fields. Like most Pleasants Countians, Hank keeps up on the current miniboom in the local oil and gas industry. He is fortunate that his memories reach back to the early part of this century to the steam engine and to the cable tool drilling practices.

Hank got his start in the oil business by working with and watching his father John, who had spent his whole life at it. In fact, Hank says that early experience helped him land his first job at the age of 20, dressing tools in Kanawha County's Blue Creek field on the Elk River. He termed Blue Creek "a dandy nice field." Hank remembers that he didn't work around Pleasants County that much: "I worked on a few wells around here when I wasn't doing anything. But mainly I worked away from here. They never paid much around here. A lot of them didn't have very much work to do." By age 23 Hank had become a driller, which was the most skilled and highest-paid job available. He says that he made $6.50 a day in 1916, which "was considered pretty good wages." The tool dresser received a dollar less than the driller.

According to Hank the early oil workers went wherever the wells were. "Now back then, it was pretty common to hear of a field opening up. You'd see them packing their grips



"I never did anything I liked half as much," Hank Dotson says of oil fields work.

and away they'd be a going. Just like the Mexicans follow the farm trade." In the late 'teens and early 'twenties Hank himself worked in southern West Virginia, Kentucky, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. After spending time at other jobs, including the local oil refinery, he returned to the oil fields and last worked in Michigan in the early 1950's.

Sometime before 1920 Hank remembers that he went to a southern Kanawha County town named Standard to build an oil rig. He boarded with a retired miner there who "told me all about how everything was down there." Hank said, "Now just before that they had had a strike. The coal houses were all in a line, you know, painted red. You'd go by and you'd see bullet holes in the windows, a very common thing." But his most specific memory of that visit was that "stuff was so cockeyed high the miners couldn't get out of debt, that's what went on back then. Compared to miners we were well paid. They only made about a dollar and a quarter a day. But I remember very well at that time they paid 60¢ a peck for green beans and up here [in Pleasants County] they was 15¢ a peck."

Oil workers had no trouble finding work in those days. "The contractors would grab you—glad to get you. Sometimes they would go to an oil well supply store and tell them that if a tool dresser came in there to get his name and address. One time I came up to Charleston from Kentucky and it wasn't two hours before I had a job—just that quick. I remember that in 1914 it was slow—just one well close to where we was. But a man named Harry Ray came to the house and wanted to see if we'd work on a well."

An oil worker would stay on the job until the well was drilled and finished. That took about 30 days. "You'd stay where you could," recalled Hank. "And in West Virginia and Kentucky, boy, we got some dandies." Sometimes the oil companies would operate a camp for the workers. Asked if these were very nice, Hank sarcastically replied, "Yes, they were nice. Everybody clomping in and out—if you got an hour's sleep, you were lucky." Once down on the Elk River, he and the other workers spent the winter in a tent. He added, "It was a rugged life. I was working in Oklahoma and they had a little boarding house right there close to the well—three miles away. We'd come off work and go over there, eat our supper, get our pail washed, pack our pail, bring it back and that was our breakfast for the next morning." Traditionally, oil workers pulled 12-hour shifts. Sometimes the men would carry a skillet in their tool boxes and cook on the forge.

Hank liked work in the oil fields because he felt it gave a feeling of independence to the worker. "You knew what you had to do and you did it," he said. And although the work took him to almost inaccessible areas at times, he enjoyed that. "You were always out in the jungle." He gave an example of how difficult it was to reach one place he went to work. "I got on a train to go to a job in Kentucky. The contractor said to me, 'Now you get off in a little place there called Price. And on your right down there, there's a road that goes to the right. You take that out about four or five miles. Now when you get out there, there's a fellow that lives on the upper side of the road who's got a team of horses and he's got a boy there who'll go with you to ride the horse and bring the other horse back.' That's how we went out. Of course, generally we walked. In fact, most of the time you had to walk."

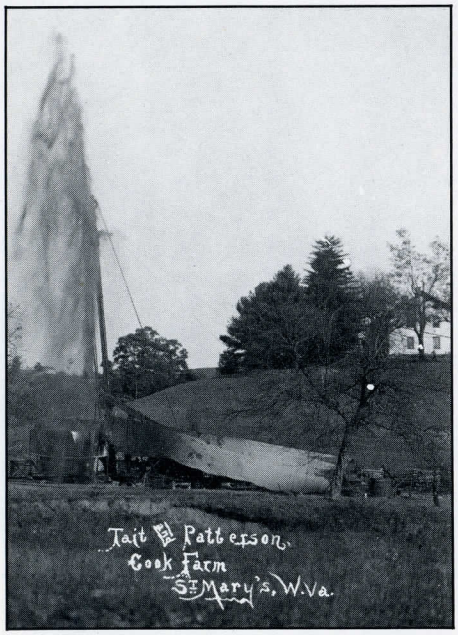
And there were snakes. "I was working on a well down in Mingo County and they had to build a half a mile of road to get the machine up to drill this well. There was a great big dark hollow there. The other guy, a native from down there, he always kept a gun at the shanty. One day he said, 'Well, I think I'll go down there and see if I can find me a rattler.' There were a lot of rattlesnakes around there. So he went down a couple of times and we didn't hear nothing of him. Third time down, we heard him shoot two or three times. And here he came, and he had one. It had 11 rattles on it. That snake had a big knot in its tummy and he just cut it open and there was a baby rabbit in there—must just have eaten it. So he cut the rattles off it and he had them in his hand. I was standing right by the lazy bench. Had a flashlight. Well, he put those rattles up to his ear to shake and just when he did, I held that flashlight up by his ear. He just hollered—he thought they'd lit up!"

Work in the oil and gas fields was hard. The degree of difficulty depended on the kind of geologic formations found in different fields. In West Virginia, Hank said, where drillers encountered hard rock, the bit would have to be dressed more frequently. Work was easier in Michigan and Oklahoma, where workers drilled through a gray shale.

"When you're drilling," said Hank, "you run into different sands, different kinds of formations—you run into slate or sand and then you can run into a hard rock that nobody has a name for it. Down in Kanawha County, from 12 feet to about 500 feet deep, we named it "kratch" rock because that stuff would burrow right into your steel. That's just the name we called it. I never heard of it before." But a good driller knew how to cope with the differences. "All you got to go by is the jar on that cable, that's what you go by. If you're not hitting rock, it will slide up and down so smooth. In harder rock there will be a heavier kickback on the cable." The driller could also analyze the cuttings brought up by the bailer, and the condition of the bit.

The work was dangerous. "There's a lot of chances getting injured around

Gushers were more common in the early days of the West Virginia oil fields. This Tait-Patterson well was near St. Marys. Postcard view, courtesy of Carol Cooke.



Top: Postcard view of the great Spindle Top field in Pleasants County. Courtesy of Carol Cooke.
Center: Pulling a well, around 1914. Young Ralph Glenn drives oxen John and Fred, with Carol Cooke astride. Sam Glenn steadies Carol, and Claude Glenn and Chalmers Holliday stand by the well. Photographer unknown, courtesy Carol Cooke.
Bottom: Oil Well Supply Company store in St. Marys. The tall sign at the right window lists current market prices for oil. Date and photographer unknown.

an oil well. When you're drilling a well there's a danger of getting burnt. When you get below a certain place drilling a well you take all the precautions you can. You move your forge back out of the rig." Hank can remember one near miss with disaster. "One time I was pulling pipe out of a well about three miles from where we lived. The derrick had stood there a while but they had abandoned this well and we hooked onto the pipe. We had a triple and a double block.* We made several pulls but the pipe was stuck and this fellow said, "Hank, go up on that derrick and see how that top's holding out.' I went up there and she was just ready to come in. Those nails were stretched out—I bet they were pulled out that far all the way around," he said, holding his fingers several inches apart to demonstrate the seriousness of the incident.

Of course, any discussion of dangers in the early oil and gas industry brings to an oil man's mind nitroglycerin, which was used until recently to shoot wells for increased production. The shooters, as those daring men who handled this explosive were called, kept the nitroglycerin stored in small magazines located throughout the county. The highly explosive material was transported in specially-constructed "shooting wagons," which featured a compartment under the driver's seat for safe storage.

Bob Snyder, a St. Marys native, remembers when the magazine in Tanhouse Hollow blew up: "The shooters traveled back and forth up Tanhouse

*A block and tackle pulley arrangement.

Hollow in their big high buggies. There was a gate that had to be opened for them when they came because someone kept cattle up there. We would see the shooter coming and would run up to where the gate was open and close it for him. We'd stay there until the shooter came back with the nitro, and repeat the process. Usually he'd flip a quarter or more down to us—which in those days was quite a bit of loot for eight- or ten-year-old kids.

"I believe that the magazine blew up about 1920—give or take a year or two. I was in the kitchen eating and my mother was making mincemeat pie by the window. The explosion knocked the glass out of the window into a big washpan of mincemeat and probably spoiled a couple of gallons. It really shook us up. They said there were about 200 quarts when it blew up. Later an investigation showed that the kerosene stove which was there to keep the stuff from freezing got soot in its pipe and caught fire. It broke out hundreds of windows in St. Marys and the company, the Young Torpedo Company, had to replace them."

Snyder added, "One of the shooters we used to open the gate for was Cliff Sloan, who was later blown up down above Marietta. They never found enough of him to bury. It was common knowledge that shooters suffered from headaches caused by the fumes from nitroglycerin. And they were reputed to have been heavy drinkers."

"The best oil there is." Pennsylvania crude flows into the separating drum at Zeke Dye's well.

Hank Dotson remembered yet another example of how nitroglycerin earned the respect of oil field people. "I'll never forget one time," said Hank, "Jake Able and I were sitting out there where the post office is now and we heard an explosion. At the blacksmith's shop, there where Clovis's had the building they took out, they had a shooting wagon in there, fixing it. And this explosion cut loose and we ran to the corner—which wasn't very far—and that black smoke was just rolling out of there. There was the guy out there in the street looking like he was trying to get up. He had been working back there on one of those wagons and there'd been some of that [nitroglycerin] spilt. While he was working around on that wagon and pounding around, he hit it. There was two horses in there too. You know, it didn't hurt him and it didn't hurt those horses either— but it sure scared the devil out of him!" That was about 1924.

Hank wondered at the lax way such a dangerous substance was handled in those days. "They kept it stored in those magazines. They'd go out and shoot a well and if they had any extra left, they wouldn't come back to the magazine—they would just take it out in the woods and cover it up with leaves. There have been times when people out hunting have shot at it. I've seen the cans out in the woods." He remembered too that "They'd bring those wagons into town and they'd let them set right there in the street the same as you would a car. Yes, they didn't have any rules and regulations on them. They weren't as careful back then." Bob Snyder says he can remember that he and other children would swim and play around the magazine near his house.

If there is anything else characteristic of the early drilling days it is the steam engine. Hank can remember when he helped power with steam: "One time I was working on a well, and I heard about a well across the river where they couldn't keep the steam up. I just happened to be fin-

ishing up. This fellow came to see me and said to me, 'Hank, how'd you like to go on a well with me over on Davis's Run?'

"'For Joe Kiggins?' I asked, because I'd heard about it. They'd had the coal come in on a barge and it had sunk and the water had settled in on it and covered it with fine mud. And I had never fired with coal. So I told him, 'I'll go over but I won't guarantee I'll stay.' I went home and told Dad—he'd had experience. He said, 'I'll tell you what to do. Keep the center of your fire thin so you can get a good draft. Don't fire heavy—fire light, but often.'

"I went over and I did what he told me—I fired light, scattered the coals and kept the sides banked up. This contractor came up and I was sitting there on the tool box with that old boiler just a poppin' and a poppin'. He said, 'I see you're wasting an awful lot of steam.' I told him, 'I heard about this well before I came over here—about how you couldn't keep steam up. I think you've got steam now.'"

Cable tool drilling was the accepted method of operation in West Virginia and the Appalachian region until the late 1940's. The standard cable drilling rig was housed and supported by a structure that had two parts: a derrick, first of wood and later steel; and a low structure which housed the engine, the belt, band wheel, and other power devices. These rested on a foundation of heavy supports called rig timbers. The first few feet of a well were drilled by "spudding"—drilling without the walking beam because there wasn't sufficient head room for the tools from the walking beam until about 60 feet. Drilling was continued as a string of cable tools was hitched onto the walking beam. As drilling proceeded the tools were withdrawn and a bailer lowered into the hole to bring up loosened material.

"Today they're doing what they thought back then couldn't be done around here," said Hank, in reference to the use of modern rotary drills. This has made drilling much faster. Hank, who has had the privilege of seeing the oil and gas industry evolve from the early part of this century, is optimistic about the energy future for Pleasants County. "I think there's plenty of oil and gas in this country yet. They could run onto a good field if they keep on pecking."

Zeke Dye, with heavy oil field hand tools. "Now can you imagine what kind of men they had back then?" he asks.

Oil on French Creek—Harold "Zeke" Dye

A relative of Harold "Zeke" Dye, named Ray Brown, wrote and illustrated a book in the 1930's nostagically recreating the days around 1904 which he had spent on the family farm near French Creek. Today Zeke lives on that farm and he has carefully preserved the book. Author Brown evokes sentimental feelings for the almost peaceful co-existence of wells and family farms:

"A score of years has passed by since this particular scene occurred, but durin' my dream it all came back to me again; Why! Bshaw! I could hear the chuggin' of the engine at the old powerhouse just across the run, and then the mournful wailin' and screechin' o' cables and pumpin' jacks. (Sounded like some creature in terrible distress and agony.) And from up and down the creek there came back an answerin' chorus and an aroma of crude oil-filled air."

Zeke himself talks a lot about what it used to sound like in rural Pleasants County during the early part of this century. He said he felt right at home when he paid a visit to the oil history museum in Titusville, Pennsylvania, several years ago. "At Titusville they have a recording of a gas engine and of the shackle lines squeaking—and you'd think you were right out in the oil fields."

Zeke said that his father-in-law who lived in nearby Calcutta slept in a bedroom where the exhaust arm from the pump engine went right up over top of the room. "They slept with that 'Bang! Bang! Bang!' going all the time. But if that engine would stop, it would wake them up." Zeke's wife Gladys agreed: "You couldn't sleep if they weren't running."

The French Creek section of Pleasants County where Zeke, like his father and grandfather, has lived, supported a lot of oil and gas activity. Zeke's father worked for many years in the oil business, and also farmed. In the late 1920's Zeke worked around area wells and later went to Michigan for a while. He spent 37 years, most of his working life, at the oil refinery in St. Marys. He retired five years ago.

Zeke remembers that in the 1920's French Creek was still experiencing quite a bit of activity. "Here you could see two or three teams every day. And not only that, but there were about eight or ten men who worked on the pipeline crew. You'd see them all the time—working, going up and down the road with a team or two teams every day. They'd have a leak or be hooking up a tank, you know, where they'd drill a well. Every day of the

Oil and Gas in Pleasants County

Pleasants County is a small Ohio River county. Until the May 1978 disaster at Willow Island, many West Virginians didn't know much about it. Colin Anderson Center, the state residential school for the mentally retarded, is in Pleasants County. There are two chemical plants, an oil refinery, and a large power plant. It's a prosperous county that spends lots of money on its schools. The county seat, St. Marys, has as its claim to fame a railroad track running right down Main Street through the center of town. It was the kind of place that when asked, "Where are you from," as a Pleasants County native I often had to reply—grudgingly, to be sure—"Near Parkersburg." That's no longer true.

Now the citizens of this closely-knit county of around 8,000 people find themselves at the center of a mini-boom in the drilling for oil. The county clerk's office is jammed as people pack into the courthouse to pore over books looking for oil and gas leases or to seek drilling permits. For Pleasants County sits in the Appalachian Basin, believed to be one of the largest unexplored sources of oil and gas in the lower 48 states. Although the oil fields in this area will never approach Texas or Alaska as energy sources, current prices for oil make drilling in the region profitable again—even if a well only produces a few barrels of crude a week.

Prosperity is in the air and the excitement of a boom is apparent. But as the pumping jacks bring up the oil, controversy has been brewing in St. Marys about the safety of the wells and about the damage which has been done to local properties by drillers. The city has attempted to implement ordinances to regulate drilling within St. Marys itself. Outside the county seat others worry about the damage to water wells and rural countryside.

West Virginia now ranks ninth among the nation's oil and gas producers and the excitement is expected to continue. Just as an influx of outsiders coupled with the local dreams of power, security, and luxuries that came with the turn-of-the-century oil boom in this area brought a conflict of values to rural communities, the present boom can be expected to do the same. Those who support the drillers are opposed by those who see this as a little-guy-versus-the-rich-guy issue and it's become emotional.

But Pleasants County has been through something similar to all of this before. It was in August 1859 that the people of Titusville, Pennsylvania, heard that "Drake's Folly," as many onlookers had come to consider it, had justified itself. This first well was full of oil, and America's petroleum age was born. The oil excitement in West Virginia began with the completion of a well near Wirt County's Burning Springs in 1860. The rush to Burning Springs began immediately and within a couple of years it extended to Horseneck in Pleasants County. There, according to one source, the first well produced at a rate of 1000 barrels a day. From that time on oil was a Pleasants County mainstay, destined to become the county's oldest continuous industry. The excitement of the original discoveries leveled off after a while but oil production did continue and many residents spent the 1870's making staves for oil barrels. St. Marys

world you would see them." He said, too, "Back then everybody worked in the oil fields. There was no other work around. Now, they had the refinery in St. Marys, but the people who lived in town worked there. People didn't make too much money in the oil fields and they had large families. They had to farm. They had their cows and raised their gardens and grew their own food."

Various sections of the county were leased and exploited by different oil companies. Zeke said that the Dinsmoor Oil Company owned Calcutta while Tait-Patterson held the rights where he lives. Broad Run leases were controlled by Pennzoil. Some of the early oil workers in his section of the country, says Zeke, were Raymond Faust, Roland Dye, Claude Emrick, Chris Faust, Frank Ingram, and Lew Ingram. At Calcutta he remembers that his father and grandfather worked there along with Sherman Brown, Charlie Ruckman, Ira Hill, John Knight, and Dick Bailey.

Zeke's interest in the mechanical and technical has led him to collect many tools used in the oil and gas industry as well as to mentally catalog how each was used. But none of this could be described as an idle hobby since Zeke operates and maintains two working wells on his land—a gas well drilled in 1898 which produces enough heat for his house and another on the farm, and an oil well (circa 1900) which still produces a barrel or a barrel and a half a week. While sorting through the tools he'd pulled out of a shed, Zeke picked up a 16-pound sledge hammer with great enthusiasm. It had once been used to dress the bit in cable-drilling days. He said that to dress a 13-inch bit would take half an hour. "You'd have to stand there and swing like this for half an hour. Had to drive the steel back and spread it out. Then lay it up on its edges and pound it so it would be round. Now can you imagine what kind of men they had back then? I know when I first started out, man, I thought I would die. Trying to swing that sledge like that."

Included in his collection are pipe tongs, a pipethreader, a device used to

alone had eight or ten cooper shops.

In 1885 the county entered into its second and greatest oil boom. As drilling operations progressed and several "gushers" were discovered, news reached the outside world and oil men hurried into the county to lease everything available. The coming of the railroad brought further growth. This railroad was promoted by a Parkersburg refiner and associate of the Standard Oil Company, Johnson N. Camden. Historian John Williams focuses on this founder of the West Virginia oil industry in his book *West Virginia and the Captains of Industry*. According to Williams, by 1879 Camden had through a series of complicated transactions left local West Virginia crude oil producers no choice but to "contract their petroleum for shipment eastward to the Standard's Baltimore refineries." Williams says that the railroad between Huntington and Wheeling was a profitable venture in its own right, giving "West Virginia the first north-south rail connection located wholly within the state and . . . driving from the river the barges that had on occasion provided troublesome links between independent oil producers and refiners in the Ohio Valley and the Standard's markets in the West."

From then on, business continued to boom. Hotels, new businesses, banks, and churches all came as crude oil production climbed. But economic progress brought other changes too. Robert Pemberton, a local newspaperman who wrote the *History of Pleasants County*, says in that book that by 1898 St. Marys had become much like a frontier town:

"Along with the oil men of the better class there came a leavening of the coarser element, demanding saloons and gambling rooms. These they could not have lawfully, but several saloons were opened in violation of the law, and for a few years, backed by powerful influences, ran their course openly. The police reports for 1900 show that six 'speakeasies' existed in the town, besides several gambling resorts. Many arrests were made and fines imposed, but the breaking of the law continued."

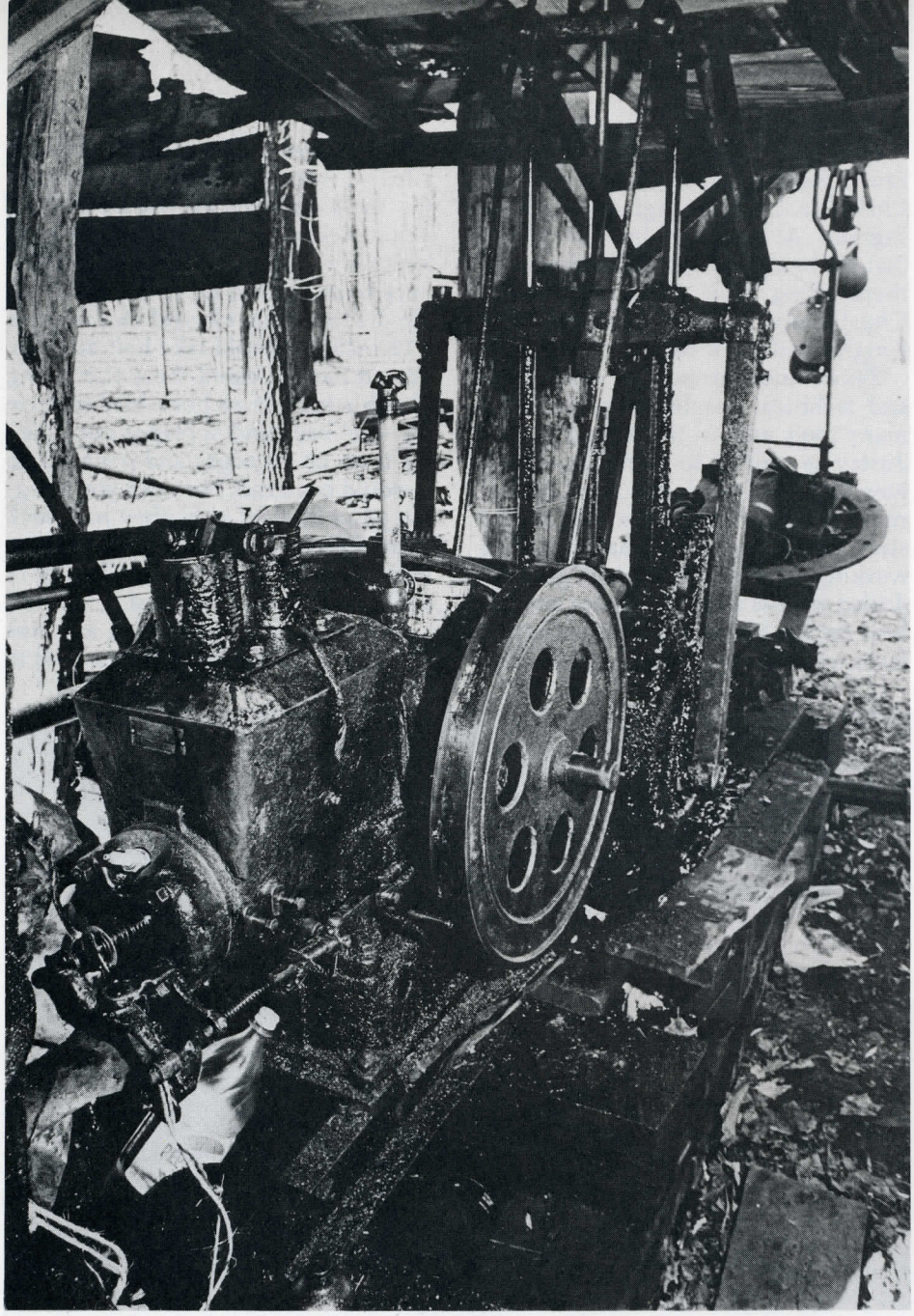
The same kind of activity—on a more lavish scale—was taking place upriver in Sistersville which far surpassed St. Marys as a center for oil production and excitement. In 1900 West Virginia's oil production peaked at 16 million barrels.

If Pemberton's "coarser element" was an eye-opener for the local citizenry, so was the arrival of the "better class." Some envied or copied the opulent life-styles of the oil rich, but there were also those who did not. One man wrote bitterly about a local oil family who came to the county from Pennsylvania:

"They flew high for a while on the fruits of others' labors—paid men $40 or $50 a month who lived in shacks with small gardens while they had a mansion and $1500 pearl inlaid guns for skeet shooting. They paid the local kids who placed the clay pigeons in the machines 15 cents for two hours work."

By 1906 the leading oil activity in Pleasants County was in what became known as the Spindle Top field. Pemberton classed it as "the last of the great pools that have been developed in Pleasants County." As new fields opened in the West many Pleasants Countians left for bigger and better opportunities. Although the drilling excitement moved on, local wells continued to pump and some people stayed around and drilled. There are many men today who were active during the 1920's and 1930's in the oil and gas business. And many rural county residents are familiar with the steady clanking of the old pump house engines that continued to pump small amounts of oil for many, many years.

—Yvonne Snyder Farley



Original machinery is still in use in Zeke Dye's 1898 gas well.

melt babbitt* in, tubing, rod elevators, and an old rope block. The usual length of a string of cable tools was about 40 feet and the weight depended on the size hole to be drilled.

It was a short walk from Zeke Dye's tool shed to the 1898 natural gas well drilled by Tait-Patterson. Drilled 1,398 feet to the geologic stratum known as the Maxim Sand, everything on the well is original. As he stood beside the well and looked up at the hills, Zeke began talking about people who had lived and worked around this country. He began with the story of how Bob McFarland was injured.

*A metal alloy used for lining bearings.

"It had rained and water came in on the engine house and got on the belt. Bob took his coatsleeve to wipe the water off the belt and it caught and took him through the pulley. His wife had a premonition that he was hurt and at 2:00 in the morning she got her son up and told him to go down and see about Bob. Something had appeared to her and told her that Bob was hurt. Her son said there was nothing to it, and said, 'Mom go to bed, you're just worried.' But she wouldn't do it. So she said, 'If you don't go, then I'm going.' So the son went down, and there he laid—where he got caught and was taken through the engine.

"They carried him home, up on the hill, and put him to bed. They went to town and got the doctor. He came out and said that there wasn't any use bothering. Bob would die anyhow. So they left him lay there for a few days, and he lived. They got the doctor out there again. He sent to Parkersburg and I can't remember the name of the two doctors who came up on the train, but they came. The company paid for it. They came up and said his arm would have to be broken over and they'd have to operate on his chest—his ribs were broken. His wife wouldn't let them do it. So from that time on until the day he died—it couldn't have been ten years ago—he never slept in a bed. When he laid down he couldn't breathe from his crushed chest, you see. He sat up in a chair and slept."

Zeke has remembered many of the accidents. There was a Mrs. Lawrence's husband who was caught in an engine and killed. Zeke also recalled that John Patterson, my own great-grandfather, caught his coatsleeve in a band wheel as he reached across it to set down his lunch and was killed. "Right there in town, where the cemetery is, was a derrick pole and well. Mac Ingram climbed to the top of it, the guy wire broke and it fell and killed him. And there was Don Gault's brother, Paul, he worked for Dinsmoor Oil. They were pulling a well and he pulled the pole in on him. In fact," said Zeke, "it's still dangerous. Over here in Ohio two years ago, in Washington and Noble counties, 17 men were killed in a year's time. They have improved some, but work on these rotaries is fast and dangerous work."

Spice Run is a small stream that winds along beside Zeke's house. To reach the oil well, one must cross the narrow metal bridge that spans the little run and walk across the field. There is the pumping jack which has been faithfully at work for the past 80 years or so. Its power comes from a Century electric engine (ove 100 years old) housed in a wooden shed. At one time three wells could be pumped off this engine. This oil well is rather shallow—only 530 feet to the Cow Run Sand, which Zeke pointed out was "the one they got the most oil from around here." Zeke pumps this well once a week, and it is called a

"stripper" because it produces under 10 barrels a day.

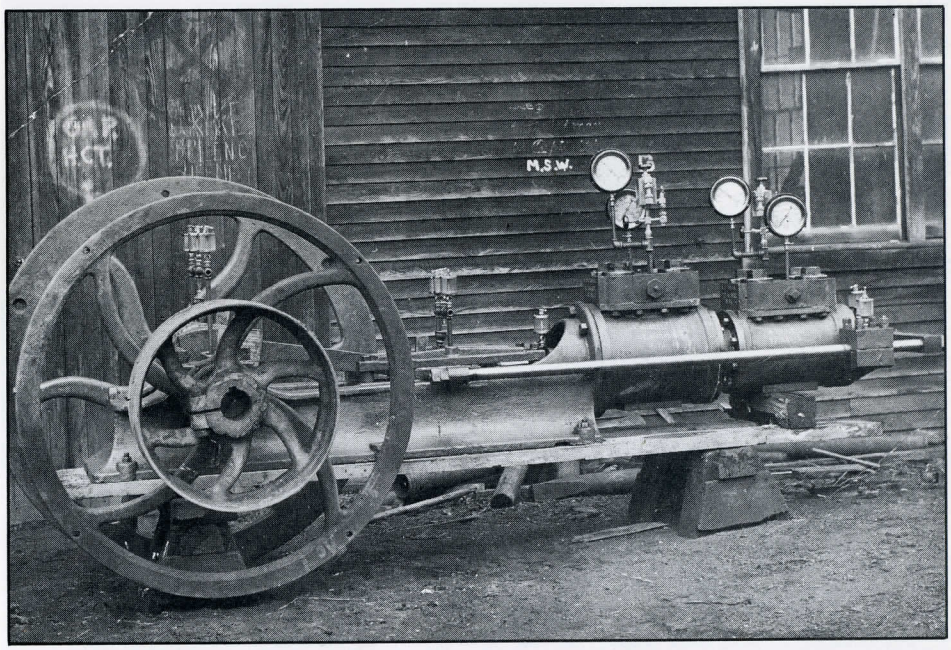
Then Zeke sat down by the pump jack and pointed up on the hillside. "Right up there was an engine house they called the Zeke Dye. Right on top of that hill up there was one they called the Jim Dye. And right in there was another engine house they called the Dave Dye. And everyday you could hear them running—besides another engine up here where I am going to take you. Can you imagine what it was like in that day and age?"

The oil pumped from the well flows down to a separating tank near the creek. Zeke ran his hands through the slimy green stuff whirling around in a galvanized steel drum which separates the oil from water. This drum sets on top of the metal holding tank. "That's the best oil there is. That's Pennsylvania crude. Paraffin base. That's the real stuff. Salt sand oil is black heavy oil." There is another kind of oil, "real light, almost clear," that comes from the Injun Sand, which Zeke said he'd seen used directly in a Model T Ford many years ago.

The separated oil goes from the steel drum into the holding tank below. When that is full Zeke calls the local refinery and they pick it up. Many years ago there were gathering pipelines. The Eureka Pipeline came right down the creek. "The gauger [who worked for the pipeline company] would come out and run what they called a 'thief' check to see how much water was in the tank. It had to be below this connection. The gauger would open that connection, gauge it, and the oil would run out into the pipeline to Eureka." The gathering pipeline traveled along the creek to different wells. This pipeline and others fed into about 100 tanks the company owned across the Ohio River. Each tank held 10,000 barrels, according to Zeke. "They'd try to hold the oil in those tanks until the prices went up." It was mandatory to sell through the pipeline.

In earlier days people would sometimes climb up on top of oil storage tanks carrying lanterns and be blown up. Heaters used to heat the tanks during the winter often contributed to the tanks catching on fire too. "I've seen my mother crying and my Dad would have to take off, you know, he'd have a tank on fire someplace. That was a common thing back then to burn up a tank of oil. Several of them I can remember when I was a kid. Boy, you talk about a fire, they make it."

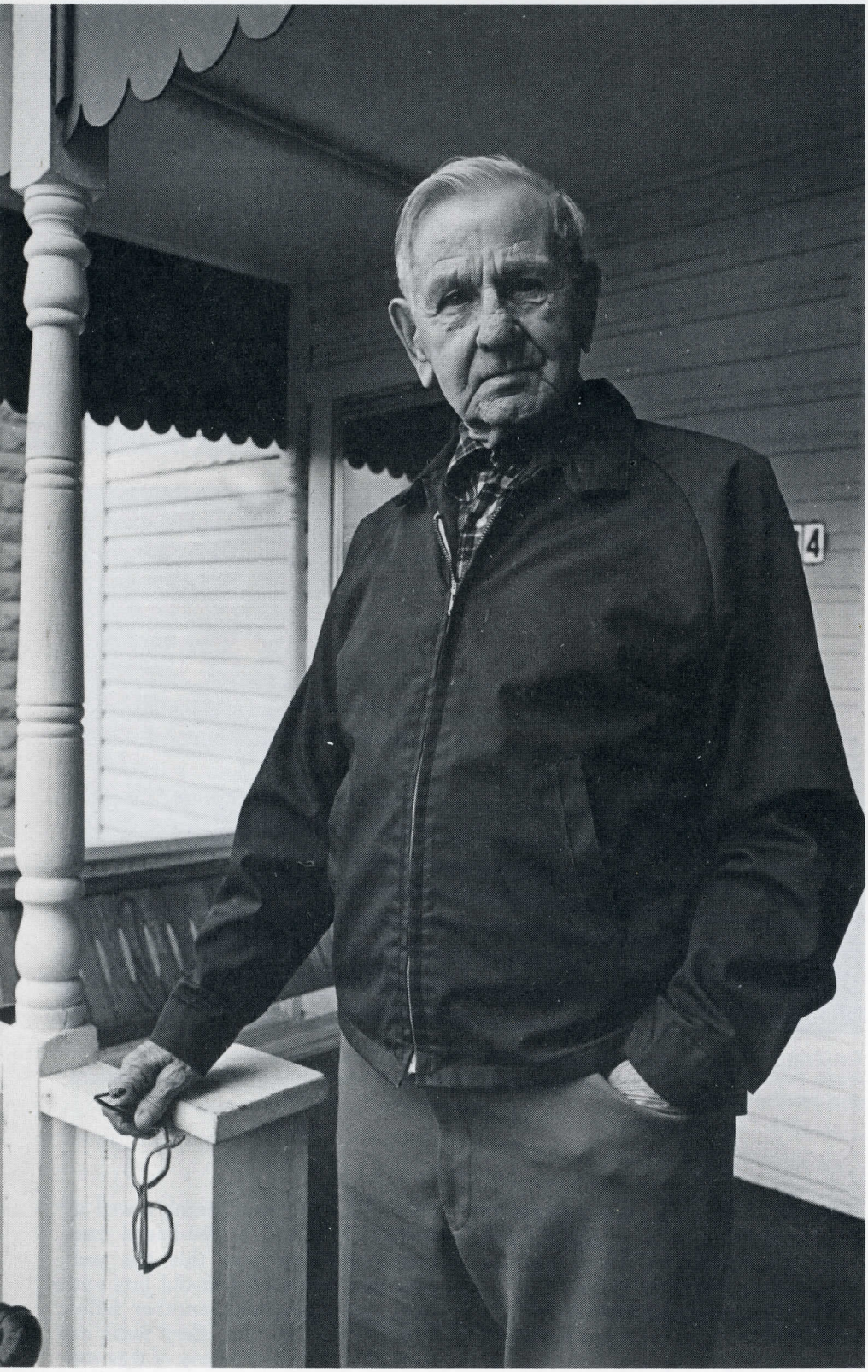
That discussion brought to mind a more recent tragedy around the oil tanks. "Last year up at Calcutta, there was a guy, he didn't know anything about oil. They were fixing a well up there. They had a 100-barrel tank there, pumping into this gas well. This guy had a 12-year-old boy with him, and along with another fellow that owned the land, they went out there. The boy was on top of this 100-barrel tank—now a 100-barrel tank is



Top: Zeke Dye pumps both oil and gas on his farm, from wells older than he is.
Above: This Russell vacuum pump and compressor belonged to the Dinsmoor Oil Company. Postcard view, courtesy Carol Cooke.

about 12 feet high. The boy was on top of this tank and the manhole was open. He was hollering into that tank to hear an echo.

"Well, he was singing and hollering into that tank and they were working there. Then next thing you know, the boy fell in. The tank was three-fourths full. Of course if you fall in, you're done for. You get one breath and you're unconscious, because the tank's full of gas. You can't float in oil anyhow because it's light. When the boy fell in, the man ran over, jumped up on the ladder and went on top of the tank. The men there with him told him not to do it—tried to hold him—but he jumped in and they both died. So they had to get the people out of there, had to fish around. Had a stick and they put nails on it and pulled them up to the top where they slipped ropes over them and pulled them out."



Hank Dotson worked the oil fields of several states before his retirement.

With Zeke leading the way, photographer James Samsell and I went up on the road to a nearby farm to take a look at a now-deserted pumphouse engine—a "New Watts Miller Engine," patented in 1915. Zeke remembers its grander days. "Man, you can't imagine what it was like when it ran. Now that was a real engine," he commented with a true appreciation of fine machinery. Then he took us to examine a much smaller Simplex gas engine on what was once known as the Taylor farm. That little engine once pumped five wells. It's still in good shape.

The Depression and a Slow-down

Julian "Baldy" Hall worked in the oil-contracting business with his father Howard during the late 1930's. His father had worked as a teamster, tool dresser, and driller before going into the contracting business himself. "Business was slow at that time," recalled Julian. "Most of my dad's drilling had been done earlier in the 1920's." His father drilled the big Betty Wait well at Nine Mile, which once produced 100 barrels a day.

As Julian remembers it, a driller in those days would be paid about $2 or $3 a foot. By comparison, he said, today's drillers get about $11 per foot. However, today they are drilling down deeper to the Ohio Shale.

Towards the end of the 1930's things declined. "Things got rough at that time," he said. "There was no price for oil—oil was dirt cheap. People just gave it away." In 1937 his father went out of business.

Like many men who were once active in the local oil business, Julian keeps up on the current scene. And, like many, he says that he liked what he did. "It was fascinating. If I were able, I'd be in the business today."

"The Only Product is Oil"

Looking Back at the Town of Volcano

By Mark Rowh

As one drives through a quiet section of rural Wood County about 20 miles east of Parkersburg, it is difficult to imagine the area as ever being a bustling center of activity. Yet a little over 100 years ago that was precisely the area's character; it was a vibrant, growing region capitalizing on what for the time were huge and highly profitable quantities of oil and natural gas. Times were booming indeed, especially at one location where oil had been discovered shortly after the Civil War. Legend has it that the first well gushed forth so violently that it reminded the lucky drillers of a volcano, and both a community and its distinctive name were born. By the late 1870's the town of Volcano boasted a population of several thousand and all the traits of a California gold rush town.

Like a newly discovered comet, however, Volcano's story was as brief

Volcano's Episcopal Church. In 1873, the town also had Baptist and Methodist congregations. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

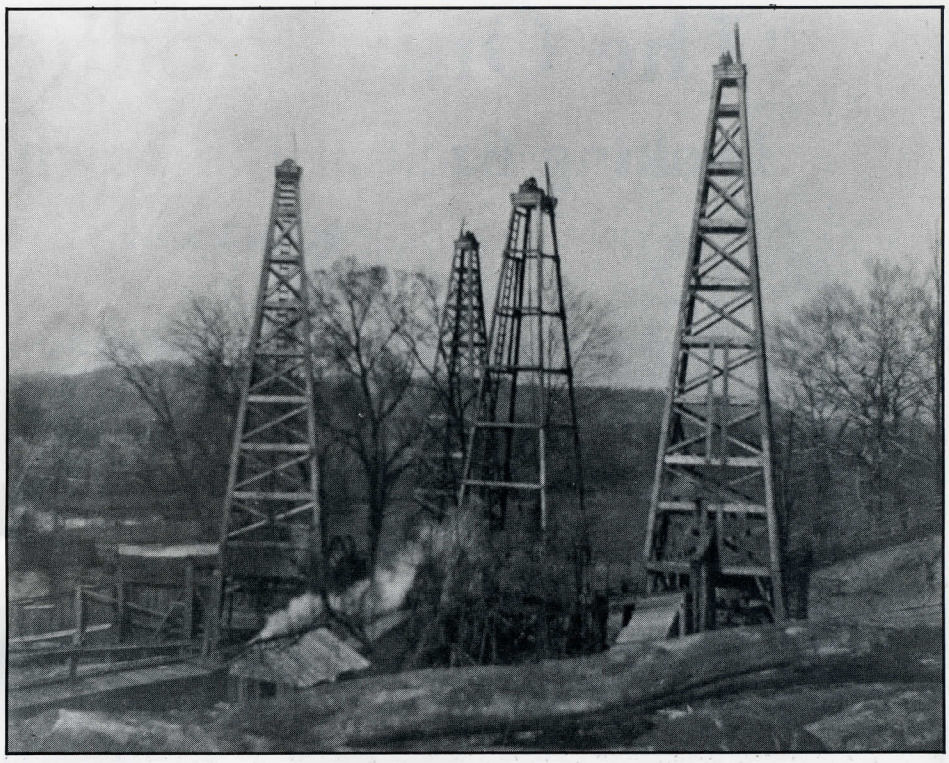
as it was spectacular. A tremendous fire all but destroyed the town in 1879, and shifting oil markets precluded any substantial reconstruction. Today Volcano is only a memory.

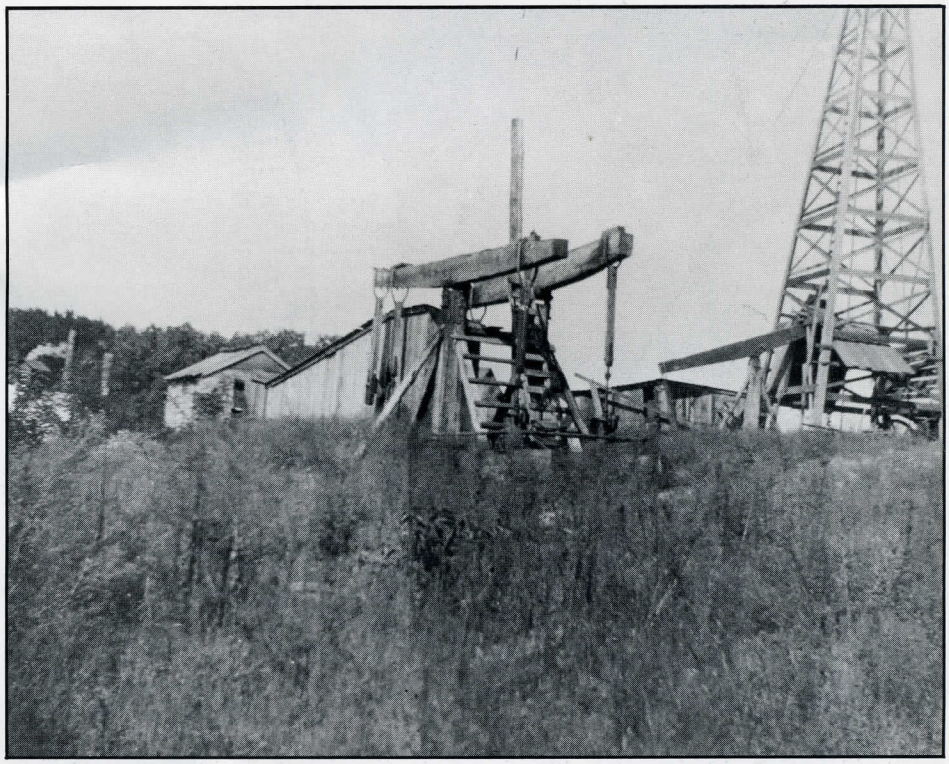
In its heyday, though, the now almost forgotten community showed all the signs of a bright and dynamic future. The town's weekly newspaper, *The Volcano Lubricator*, described Volcano as it existed in December 1873:

"Volcano is located in Walker district of Wood County, about 20 miles from Parkersburg. Its population in the town proper is now about 900 souls. The only product is oil; and the people hail from nearly every State in the Union. There are about 200 dwelling houses scattered all over the hilltops and in the valley; there are three churches, Episcopal, Methodist, and Baptist, all having regular ministers employed, and live *ones too; the united membership of the churches amounts to nearly 350. There is a Masonic lodge with a membership of about 40; and a Good Templars lodge numbering about 150 persons. We have a railroad, a telegraph office, a fine new hotel, two large machine shops, and one large boiler shop. Our post office, we believe, ranks 3d class. We have four grocery stores, two ladies' furnishing stores, a dentist office, drug store, and a jewelry store. We have two practicing physicians and two lawyers, together with a moral, wide-awake community to back all this up."*

Clearly the *Lubricator* was a keen observer of the community, and most of what we know about Volcano comes directly from the pages of surviving issues. Frankly "Dedicated to the Oil Interests of West Virginia," the newspaper seldom missed a chance to promote the industry in general and Volcano in particular. Founded in 1872, the *Lubricator* provides a fascinating look at the young town, as seen by editor and publisher George P. Sergent.

Among other things, editor Sergent concerned himself with the morals of the community, and was not above chastising wrongdoers in print. On one occasion his *Lubricator* noted that "our Miss Jennie Casteel gave a public exhibition of herself on Sunday last, near the Twin Lick trussle." Sergent went on to say that Miss Casteel was





Top: A cluster of wooden derricks near Volcano. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.
Above: Producing oil wells and nearby derrick. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.
Above right: Pump station shack. In the early oil fields single engines sometimes pumped several wells. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/WVU.

joined in her "orgies" by "two married men, whose names we will not mention this time owing to the fact, that we believe that there [sic] poor wives have enough disgrace to bear now." But the *Lubricator*'s patience was limited with the morally lax, male or female, as the editor cautioned the two men involved. "We never warn you but once; next time we hear from you, young men, we shall get your names in type of no unmistakable character."

But George Sergent was above all a town booster, and he dwelt more often on the good aspects of Volcano. He was troubled by the town's reputation, and once asked, "Whence comes this oft repeated story of the immorality of Volcano? We ask, where can you find a community that has a larger percentage of good Christian people? Let some of our base traducers answer these questions." Again he mentioned no names, but clearly included among the "base traducers" the newspapers of competing towns, "which seek every opportunity to defame Volcano."

Sergent bragged about Volcano's good citizens and lectured the bad, and probably observed that both traits were carried to extremes in the boomtown atmosphere. Like West Virginia's coal and timber towns, Volcano was a rowdy place, but evidently trying to settle down to respectability.

Largely because of Volcano's early demise, information other than that provided in the town's newspaper is sketchy and sometimes contradictory. One source claims that Volcano's population swelled within a few years to 8,000, while another gives a more conservative estimate of 3,000. At any rate, enough information has survived to allow a reasonable assessment of what the town must have been like.

The image we have today of Volcano becomes a little sharper when we place into perspective the events and personalities, the reality of life in the decade following the Civil War. When the *Lubricator* passages quoted above were first published, the war which had divided the country and forced the birth of West Virginia had been over for less than ten years. Ulysses S. Grant was entrenched in a second term as president, the American frontier was still being pushed forward, and George Custer had yet to face the Little Big Horn. On the literary scene, Mark Twain was the hottest item around, while Willa Cather had just been born. The practice of scientific medicine was still in its crude infancy, but men, their first modern war behind them, were learning to kill with increasing sophistication. Thomas Edison was an energetic young man with amazingly perceptive visions of the technological society which lay just ahead. With the automobile, airplane, and complicated communications systems still to come, technology had nevertheless developed to the point where petroleum was no longer used only by medicinally minded Indians or farmers creative enough to adapt it as a lubricant. Instead, some of its many applications had become widely enough known that the value of petroleum, or rock oil as it was also called at the time, was firmly established.

Thus when oil was discovered in Wood, Pleasants, and Tyler counties, among others, it did not take long for existing towns to blossom or new communities such as Volcano to spring into existence.

The early discoverers of oil in the region were delighted not only with its accessibility but also its quality. *Hardesty's Historical Hand Atlas* (1882) noted that the area around Volcano (called both White Oak and the Heavy Oil Region):

". . . yielded exclusively a heavy [oil] . . ., from wells varying from 300 to 500 feet in depth. Several large flowing wells at one time attracted large investments to this section. Since then a number of them which were measurably exhausted were bored several hundred feet deeper and yielded a light oil, similar to that obtained in the residue of the oil belt. The heavy oil in this section is exclusively used in its crude state as a lubricator on railroad and other machinery, and simply purified from water and other extraneous matter by settling in a tank; and freed from grit by a process of heating or steaming, not injurious to the lubricating quality of the oil."

The plentiful supply of oil had begun attracting outside investors as well as local entrepreneurs in the late 1860's, as more and more wells dotted the landscape like sprouting mushrooms. Major producers included the West Virginia Oil and Coal Company, the West Virginia Oil and Oil Land Company, and the infant Standard Oil Company, already creeping toward ubiquity. The fields in the Volcano area received a major boost from the completion of a pipeline which carried the oil to the Little Kanawha River

John Schaffer's store was the last surviving building in Volcano. Date and photographer unknown, courtesy West Virginia Collection/ WVU.

near Parkersburg. Some refineries were conveniently located right in Parkersburg, while both railroads and the Ohio River served as major avenues for transportation of the crude elsewhere.

By 1870 the Volcano fields were producing several hundred barrels daily, an appreciable total by the standards of the day. Bringing a price of around $4.00 per barrel, the oil injected the local economy with new life, and the boom was on. The growth of the industry was far from steady, however; production in West Virginia and elsewhere fluctuated widely, and prices dipped and rose accordingly.

Despite the fluctuations, Volcano was obviously a bustling and prosperous town, progressing rapidly along with the oil industry while at the same time maintaining a relatively orderly and conservative existence. There were of course rough edges, such as streets often made impassable by the mud. One can imagine the setting: a barrel-laden wagon lumbering down muddy streets, its sides stained by petroleum and dirt, men stepping far aside as it passes to avoid being splashed; the clatter of metalworking ringing in the air, blending in with the occasional barking of dogs and cries of playing children; hot odors from the machine shops mingling with the sharp smell of horses, leather, and cooking.

But the picture fades as we reach the late 1870's. By then oil prices were substantially lower, and some of the luster of the earlier days had passed. Still, the town's future held promise. But the huge fire on August 4, 1879, proved to be the final arbiter of change. Engulfing the town and destroying virtually all of it, the fire signalled an abrupt end to the glory days of Volcano. With reduced production potential at many local wells and growing interest in new fields elsewhere, Volcano's days of opportunity had come to an end.

Anna Guarascio Peluso

Preserving an Italian Art in West Virginia

By Joan Savereno

Photographs by Rick Lee

Anna Guarascio Peluso at work, in her Fairmont home.

As most Americans know, hundreds of thousands of Italians were part of the large immigration to the United States in the early part of the 20th century. Not as well known, however, is that for many of these people New York City's "golden streets" were merely the intermediate step in a journey which would end in West Virginia—a land rich with "black gold" and in need of laborers to extract that wealth.

Italians headed to West Virginia along with other southern and eastern European immigrants to establish what is now a surprisingly diverse ethnic culture. They developed a migration network from Italy to West Virginia, with people from the same Italian towns settling in West Virginia towns where friends and relatives had earlier settled. Immigrants sought the familiar. They developed a support system of family and friends who helped them find homes and jobs, and with whom they could share Italian traditions. The tri-city area of Fairmont, Clarksburg, and Morgantown is a typical example of such a network. A large concentration of Italians settled there from the Calabrian region of southern Italy, from towns like San Giovanni in Fiore, Cosenza, and Reggio di Calabria. Today second-generation descendants maintain extended families which often include distant

relatives, godparents, and family friends. They keep in contact by congregating at significant life events such as weddings, anniversaries, and funerals.

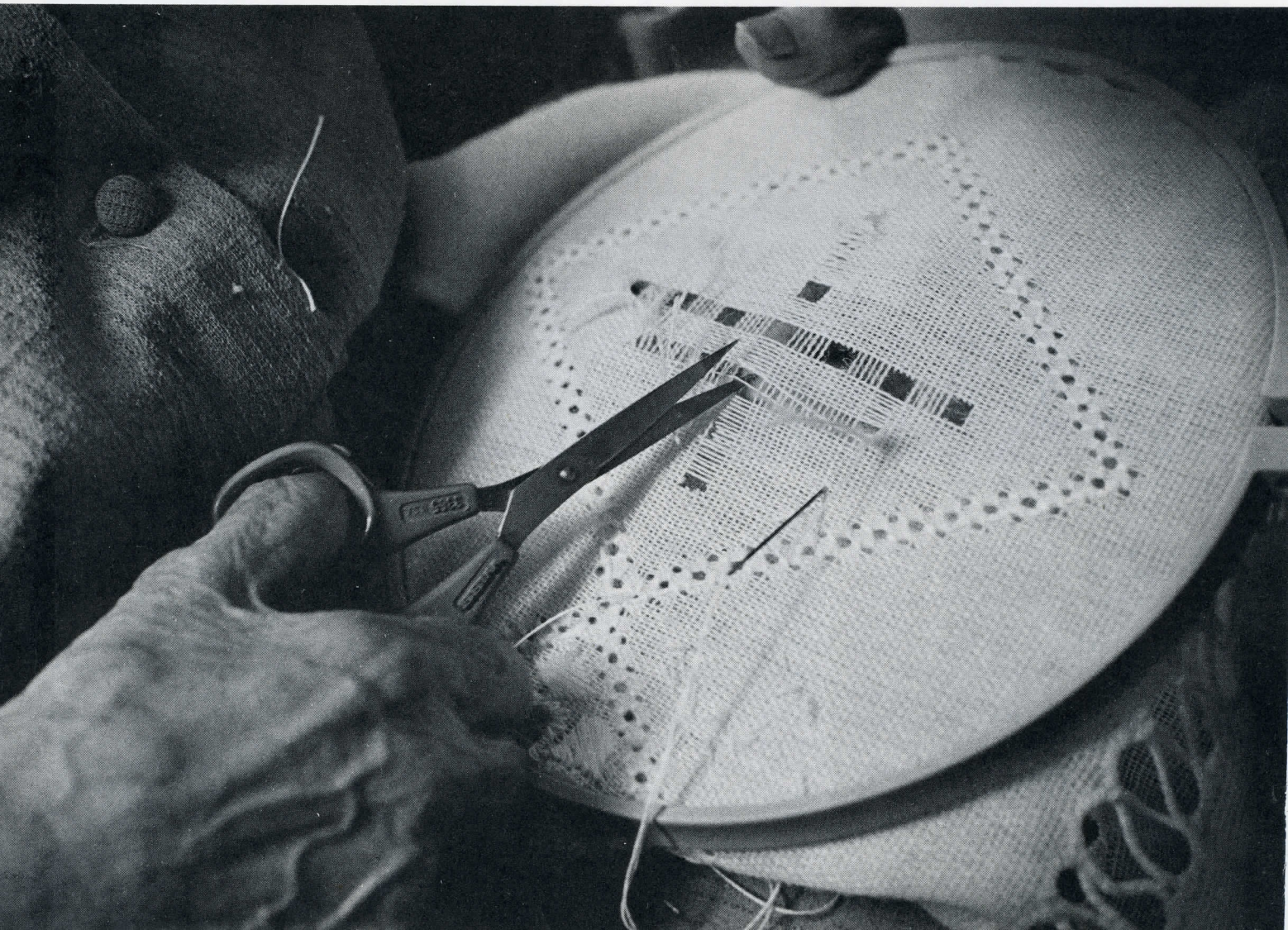
My great-grandmother, Anna Guarascio Peluso, was part of that historic migration. In May 1915, at age 25, Anna arrived at New York Harbor's Ellis Island immigrant station, accompanied by her two young children. She came to join her husband, Dominick, who had left Italy more than two years earlier to work in the coalfields near Fairmont. Dominick's trade in Italy had been stonemasonry, but Anna says he preferred mining coal. This was his second venture to the United States. The first time he had come at age 15 to join his brother and work in the Monongah coal mine.

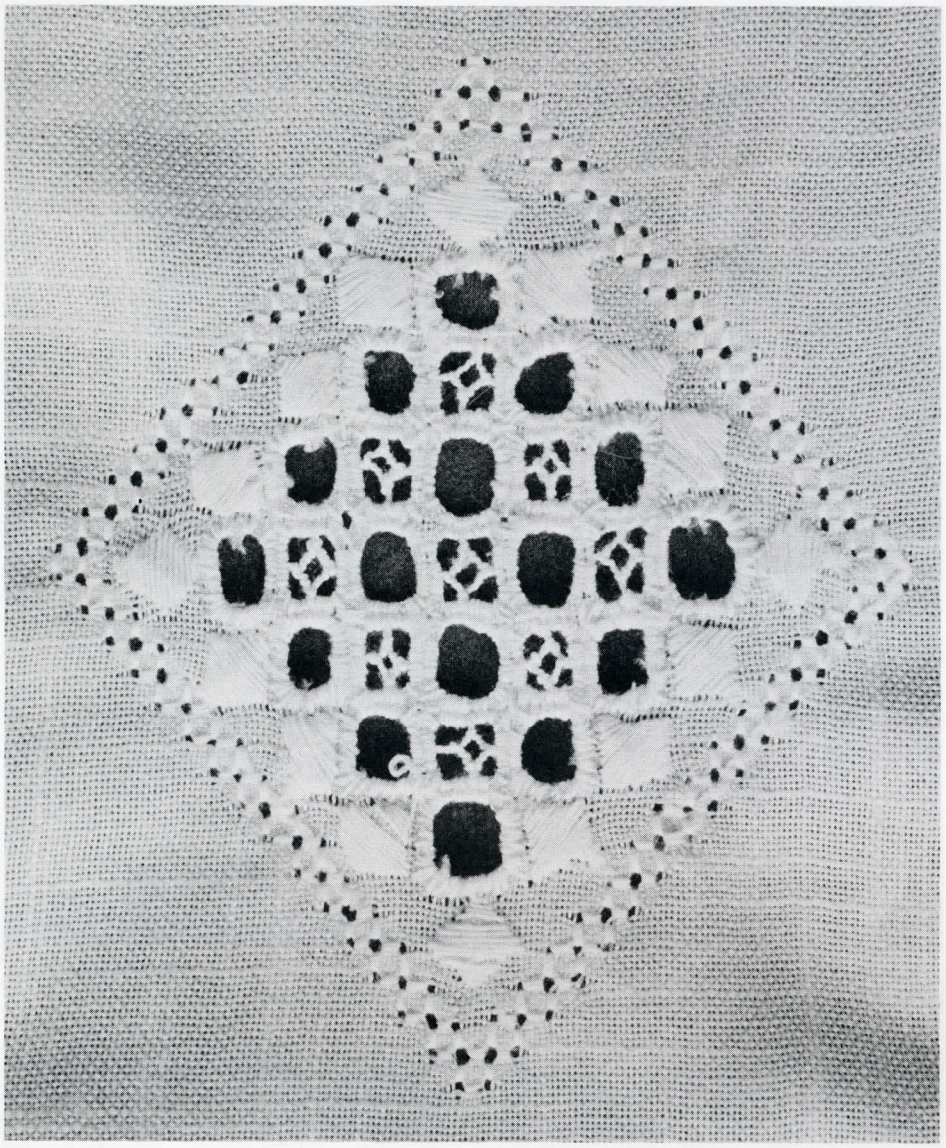
At 20, Dominick Peluso returned to San Giovanni, where he met Anna. After one year they married, following an arrangement made at his request by his mother and Anna's aunt and mother. Anna reluctantly consented. She was 17 and wanted to marry another man, whom her mother felt was too young. She says, when asked why she married someone she was not sure of, that at that time an Italian girl did not question the wishes of her mother. Anna's father, who had emigrated to New York when she was ten years old, disapproved of the arrangement because she was so young. He never wrote Anna's mother again. Anna feels that he used her marriage as an excuse to cut off contact because he had probably acquired another family in America—as did so many men who left their families in the "old country." Anna never saw her father again.

Anna grew up in San Giovanni, though she was born in Magisano in the town of Catanzaro in 1890. She was one of five children, and is now the only surviving member of her immediate family. She is the only one who immigrated to the United States.

The Guarascio home was similar to all the others in the hillside town—one room with a brick floor and an attic. They were attached row houses built close to the street. Cooking was done in a fireplace in the house, though bread was baked in a communal oven in the center of town. A wealthy family owned the bakery. A woman was hired to stoke the fire, clean the ashes, and take bread in and out of the oven.

Anna remembers helping her mother with bread baking. Once every two weeks, as was the custom, each family made 100 pounds of flour into bread. Dough from the previous baking had been kept for yeast. Four or five families could use the oven in one day. Payment for use of the oven was two loaves of bread, one for the caretaker and one for the owners. When Anna came to Marion County, Dominick built a bakeoven in Kilarm which she shared with two other women. Later, when they moved to nearby Watson, he built another oven. Every two weeks





Left and above: In cutwork, threads are cut away to create the desired pattern. The open spaces are partly filled in with embroidery.

Anna made 50 pounds of flour into bread. She says the bread remained fairly fresh for two weeks and that farm families in Italy only baked once a month.

Before coming to America, Anna completed school to the fifth grade, equivalent to a higher grade in the United States. Anna's mother did not want her to continue school after the fourth grade. Her teacher and principal told her she was bright and should continue; her mother relented and allowed her to attend school if she knitted one-half of one stocking (her mother did commission work for the wealthy of San Giovanni) before she left each morning.

Under this arrangement Anna went to school for four or five more months. She remembers that one day she sat outside knitting stockings as she read her school book, when her mother called her inside. She left her knitting and book on the chair. When she returned she discovered her book had been stolen. She says she could not afford to buy another book, and was so ashamed to tell her teacher she had lost the book which had been a gift from that very teacher that she never returned to school. "I was pretty good in school," Anna says. She believes if she had continued, she could have been a teacher. As it turned out, she became a teacher of a different sort.

Anna learned to crochet at an early age by watching her mother and another woman. She learned embroidery from her fourth-grade teacher, and learned to knit from another teacher, whom she helped to knit a sweater. All these skills later helped her earn a living when she did work commissioned by other people, much of it for women's dowries.

When Anna was 14 her mother paid for lessons from a woman who taught her different stitches. The stitches Anna refers to were part of the traditional embroidery of that region. It was done with undyed thread on natural or white linen. Anna says women in San Giovanni spun the thread and wove the linen that was used. The embroidery is called "punto tirato" (drawnwork) and "punto tagliato" (cutwork). Often the general term "openwork" is used for both. Drawnwork involves pulling the fabric's woven threads (either the warp or weft*) in one direction only and binding them with other thread. Cutwork is a further evolution of this same idea in which both the warp and weft are drawn. They are then cut to leave an empty space. Finally, the hole is filled in with a needle stitch to create various designs. Drawnwork and cutwork are the precursors to lace. Cutwork was used as decorative embellishment on altar linens and religious vestments as well as for personal use on table and bed linens, and clothing.

Anna says that in her town cutwork was used only on the front of white chemises that comprised part of the married woman's traditional costume. A vest of velvet or brocade was worn over the chemise, allowing the cutwork to be displayed. A pleated, full-length skirt of wool or a heavy-weight cotton, depending on the season, was worn with this. A starched white triangle served as a hat to complete the outfit. Occasionally drawnwork was done on bed sheets in San Giovanni.

Anna learned quickly, and was soon helping the other girls in the class. When her mother found out, she refused to continue paying for lessons. Two of the girls Anna had been helping wanted her to continue teaching them. They had never asked the teacher for help and were ashamed to do so.

*Threads which are interwoven at right angles to each other to form a fabric. The warp threads run lengthwise to the loom, and the weft (or woof) crosswise.

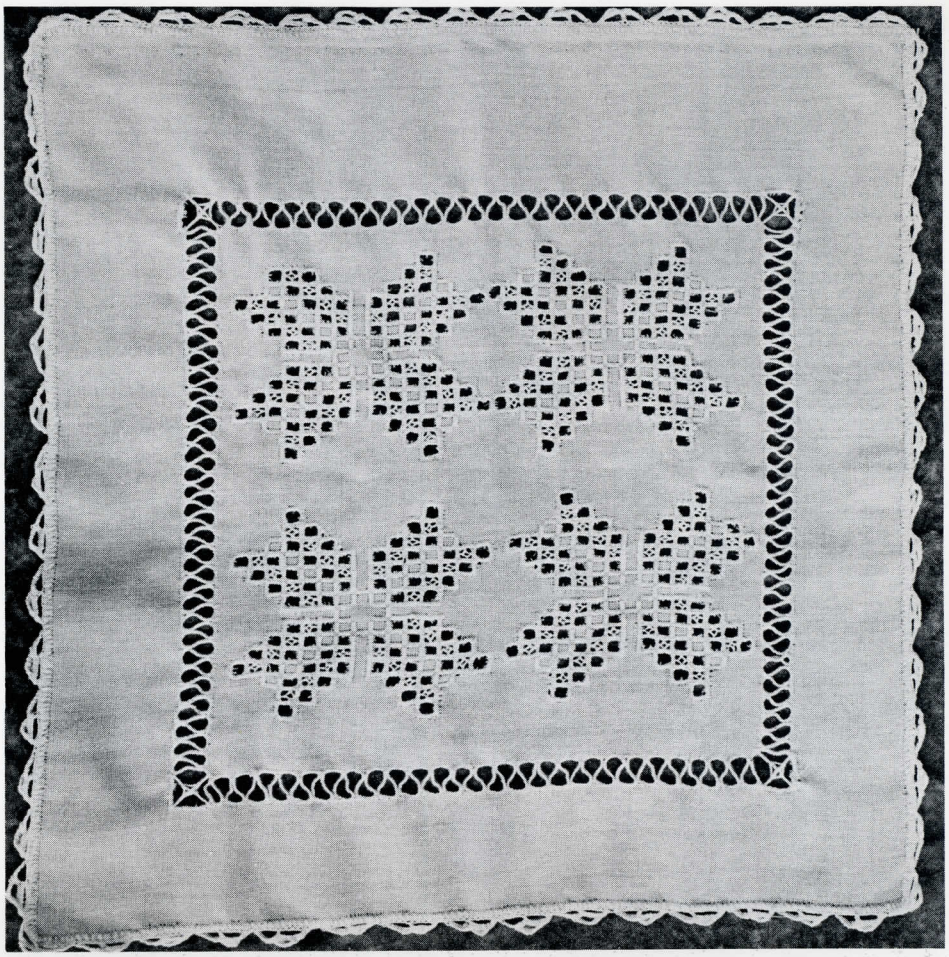
Anna persuaded her mother to allow the girls to come to her home every day for lessons. Anna did not accept payment for this since the girls were her friends.

Anna and Dominick had been married for a year when he was drafted into the Italian army. After a year of service away from home, he returned home for one year. In 1911, Italy declared war on Turkey and Dominick was called into service again. The Italian government paid a mere 16¢ a month to a wife and 8¢ for each child (Anna had two). So Anna supported her family by tutoring young girls in cutwork and reading. During this time she says that an envoy for King Vittorio Emmanuel III came to San Giovanni searching for samples of needlework to bring to the Queen. Anna was referred to him as the best embroiderer in town. He requested that she finish two samples of cutwork in one week. Since she could not complete the work in such a short period, she recruited another woman to do one of the samples. The envoy returned and paid her 10 lire for each sample.

After three months in Turkey, Dominick returned home for two months. At this time he decided to return to the United States to avoid another military stint. Anna and the children remained in San Giovanni for two and a half years until Dominick sent them the fare to join him.

To obtain a passport and tickets for the trip Anna traveled to Naples—about a 200-mile journey. Once there, she was required to pass a physical examination which would allow her entry to the United States. Anna remembers boarding the ship "Andate Aleghiliera" with her children and only one small bag of personal belongings. She had given her gold jewelry and handworked linens to her family before leaving because her husband had told her everything she would need could be bought in America. Anna says she was sick for almost the entire 15-day trip. She received some help with the children from three men from her village who were also destined for Fairmont.

When Anna arrived in New York she sent a telegram to a friend in Fairmont to inform Dominick of her arrival, since there was no telegraph service to Coon's Run where Dominick was living. He met them at the train in Fairmont where the family, once again reunited, took a streetcar to Everson and then walked to Coon's Run.

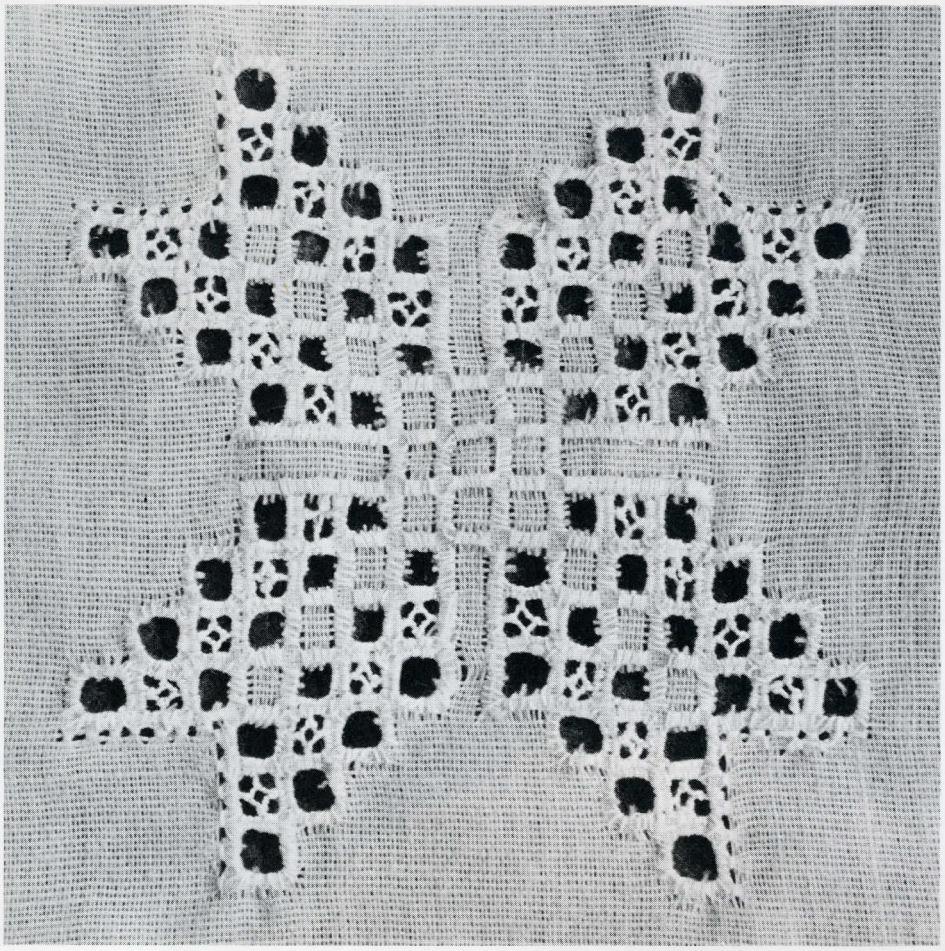


Above and right: As in quilting, individual patterns together form an overall design. Italian villagers used cutwork for a variety of decorative purposes, depending on local customs.

Anna disliked the United States for months after her arrival. She will tell you emphatically, in her heavy accent, "I left my mother, I left my brothers, everything. I never like very much." Dominick had not told her to what sort of place she was coming. She was shocked when she first saw Coon's Run, with only a creek and a few wooden houses. She had grown up in a tightly-knit community of extended family and friends. Life in Italy centered around the Church and the numerous religious festivals. There were ten Catholic churches in the small town of San Giovanni. The closest Catholic church to Coon's Run was in Monongah—a walk of about five miles.

Finding her new life difficult, Anna says she cried every day for the first few months. She longed to return to Calabria. A wealthy woman friend in Italy had told her to remain in the United States for five years; then, if she still wished to return to Italy, the friend would send her the fare. By that time, Anna says, she could not return because Dominick liked America and there were now more children to raise. Besides, Anna had met other Italian families and had learned to speak English, which made life less stressful. She remarks, "The American people was pretty nice, everybody like me after I can talk a little bit. After I can talk, I had lots of friends." Roots had begun to sprout and now she says she is happy she remained in West Virginia.

Once in the United States, Anna did not do cutwork. Since it had been used only for women's traditional dress (she had left hers in Italy), there was no need for it. She did continue to make crocheted lace, some of which was commissioned work. She usually made yards of lace that was then sewn



onto bed linens. She also made crocheted lace corset covers which were quite in vogue. The barter system prevailed, and Anna usually received a chicken or butter for her labor. But once the company store manager asked her to make ten yards of crocheted lace for his wife. He paid in cash. Around 1930 a friend in Watson showed Anna the "star" pattern of cutwork she was doing. It was a pattern Anna knew, and she made four or five pairs of curtains that were commissioned by neighbors. It was the first cutwork she produced in American and was to be the last for a long time.

Overall, Anna did much less needlework than she had in Italy. Life in America discouraged devoting hours upon hours to such tedious work. Machine-made articles were more desirable, and easily available. Anna remarks that buying curtains at Murphy's was a lot easier than making them—a choice that had not been open to her in Italy.

The immigrants' desire to assimilate was another factor contributing to the decline of cutwork. First- and second-generation Italians tried desperately to become Americans. To them this meant not being identified with anything "Italian." In addition, the less immigrants demonstrated their Italian heritage, the less likely it was that they would be subjects of ridicule. Immigrant children were especially sensitive to the jibes of others, which increased their desire to assimilate and be rid of the Italian stigma. Verbal abuse was the less harmful side of discrimination, which often raised an uglier face. But despite these hardships, cultural traditions persisted. Some, like the cooking, survived better than others.

The Pelusos made many moves in the ensuing years—all to neighboring mining communities. All their houses were owned by the mining companies. They were either four-room single dwellings, or double houses with a four-room residence in each half of a two-story house.

Anna says moves were so frequent because work in the mines was scarce and Dominick was involved in union strikes. The first strike occurred when they lived in Kilarm in 1923. After that strike, the union was broken. Another occurred in 1927. That strike lasted a year during which time blacks from Alabama, unaware of the situation, were brought in by the mining companies to act as strikebreakers. The second year the union was broken once again and the miners went back to work. Anna remembers that during the strike many families were forced to move from their homes and live in wooden "barracks" because they were union people.

About 1926, Anna was notified that her oldest brother had died in Italy. When she was about 40, she received news from Italy of her mother's death. She does not remember which parent died first, but about 1927 another brother wrote her saying that her father had died in New York. Anna had not seen any of her family since she had left Italy.

Anna and Dominick's final move was to a company house in Fairmont. Not long after, in April 1945, Dominick died of a heart attack while working in the mines. Anna bought their house from the coal company, and continues to live there today. Like most Italian women of her generation, she never considered remarrying. She looks back on her married years as a time of intense hard work and maintains that her joy comes from children, grandchildren, and friends.

In 1974, at age 84, after nearly a 60-year absence from her native land, Anna returned to Italy to visit relatives. It was a time of firsts and lasts, of great joy and deep sorrow. She took her first plane trip. She returned to her hometown of San Giovanni for an all-too-brief visit, and while she was there made a trip to Cosenza where her nieces and nephews now live. She also traveled to Messina, in Sicily, where her youngest and only surviving brother Vincent lived. Seeing her brother upset Anna because her memories of him were as a healthy young man. Now he was blind and in a wheelchair. One month after she returned to the United States she received word that he had died.

Perhaps the most significant event of her trip was Anna's reunion with Maria Rosa Iaquinta, her former pupil, whom she had taught cutwork as a young girl in Italy. Maria Rosa was now teaching cutwork to her own granddaughter. She also visited Maria Iaconsi for whose dowry Anna had done embroidery long ago. She showed Anna some of that work and gave her a pillow sham with red initials in cross-stitch to take home. Inspired by seeing her own embroidery and Maria Rosa still doing cutwork, Anna resumed doing cutwork upon her return home, after a lapse of 60 years.

Seven years later, Anna continues her work. Although a few of the women she had taught in Italy also emigrated to Fairmont, none of those still living now practices the art. In spite of the fact that Anna left her pattern book in Italy and so cannot make all the patterns she once knew, she remembers many designs and continues her work undaunted. In fact, it is this work that was once her livelihood that now gives her a continued zest for life.

Two years ago, at age 89, Anna decided to undergo surgery that would save her life. Her doctors feel she made a miraculous recovery from an operation she had only a 10% chance of surviving. One of the results of the surgery and her advancing age is that she cannot walk unaided. She has had to relinquish her hobbies of cooking, baking bread, and gardening. She now does cutwork constantly, taking a break when family (she has five children, seven grandchildren, and 23 great-grandchildren) or friends—many much younger than she—pay a visit. She maintains a stamina and optimistic outlook on life that are an inspiration for those who know her.

In recent years, many Americans have begun attempting to revive and sustain ethnic traditions. The art of cutwork is a unique aspect of Italian-American culture and an important part of West Virginia's ethnic heritage. Little awareness of this art form remains. Traditional artists such as Anna are old and do not have the resources to share their expertise with others. Although these artists take pride in their work, the artistic creativity and rarity it represents often go unnoticed. Since virtually no one is learning the art of cutwork, when these artists die its beauty will be lost to future generations. It is hoped that this article will generate more interest in and appreciation for cutwork and all traditional art forms. They are important for the survival of our rich cultural heritage.

Mrs. Peluso came to West Virginia in 1915, at age 25. "I left everything," she says, recalling her initial homesickness.

The author would like to hear from people with knowledge of other cutwork artists, living or dead. Write Joan Savereno, at 1620 Crestmont Circle, Fairmont 26554, or 221 E Street, NW, Washington, DC 20002.

"West Virginia—That'll Win Ya!"

The Fesenmeier Brewery at Huntington

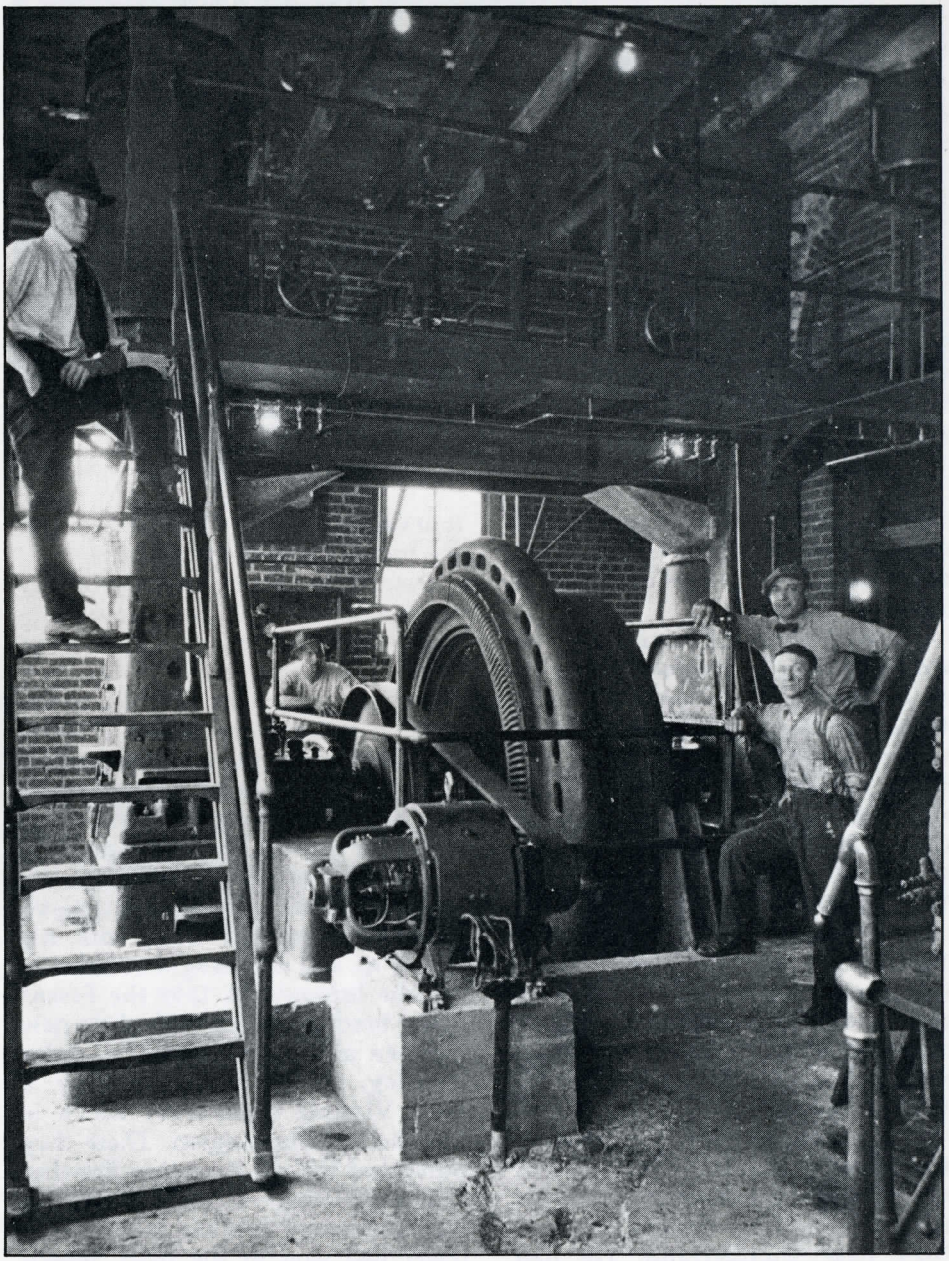
By Steve Fesenmaier

I grew up in a German-American family in Minnesota, drinking beer from my early years. Beer was—and is—the national drink in Germany, and German immigrants brought the custom with them to America, eventually popularizing the beverage in their new country. At home we drank beer in moderation at mealtime, and socially on all festive occasions. We drank it, but we had never brewed it, so far as I knew.

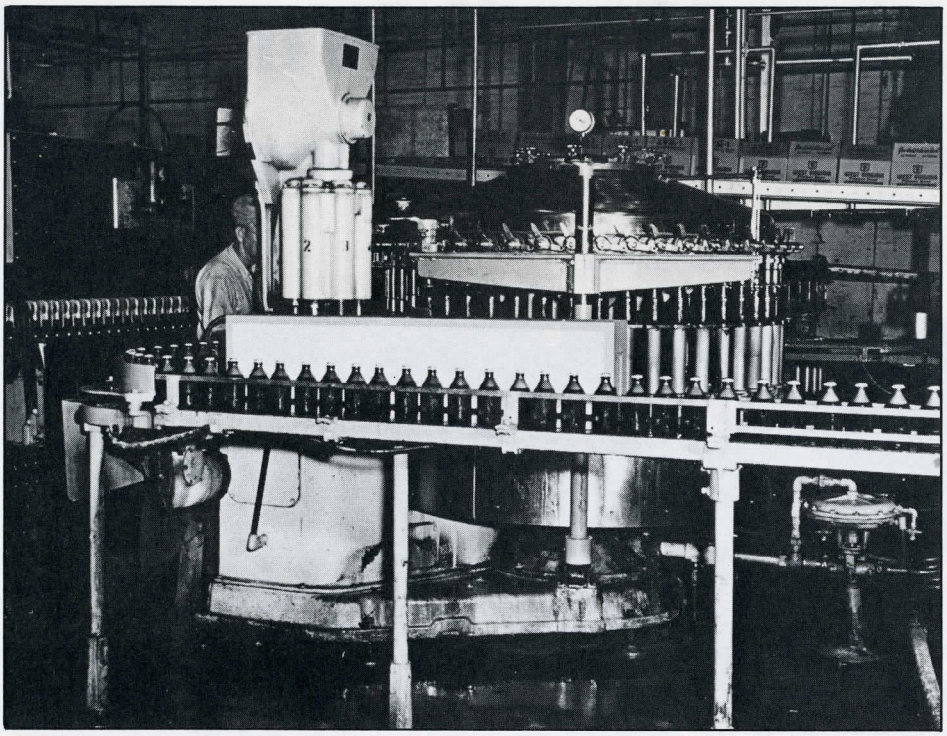
Then one day, my Grandfather Hugo showed the family a can of "Fesenmeier Beer," brought back from the East by one of the in-laws. No one took the can seriously, thinking the relative had picked it up at some state fair which custom-printed cans of beer with the buyer's name on them. The Fesenmaiers we knew had never been anything but farmers and mechanics, along with a few eccentrics like my Uncle Gene, boxing promoter and manager. Years later I wrote to the Beer Institute in Washington, inquiring about such a brand, and heard nothing from them.

But a surprise awaited me when I moved to Charleston in 1978 to become head of Film Services for the West Virginia Library Commission. When I told my new friends that my last name was "Fes-en-maier," many responded, "Did you say 'Faz-en-mayer'? I used to drink a lot of that beer back before they closed down a few years ago." It seemed that perhaps some distant relative, with a different pronunciation and slightly different spelling of the name, had beat me to West Virginia.

I knew the history of my own branch of the family fairly well. The Fesenmaiers were among the early German settlers of Minnesota, dating back to the 1840's. The story goes that three brothers came to the New World from Wurtenberg—one going to the Milwaukee area, one to Baltimore, and one to Wisconsin and then on to Minnesota. The Minnesota Fesenmaiers eventually settled in New Ulm, a town founded as a utopian commune by idealistic and industrious Germans. The Fesenmaiers stayed around New Ulm, and built a good reputation among the families of the area. One Dr. Fesenmaier did marry a lady of the night, to be sure, but he too became respectable, eventually becoming



The Fesenmeiers installed $300,000-worth of new equipment to celebrate the end of Prohibition. Photographer unknown.



Modern machinery bottled and capped Fesenmeier beer. Date and photographer unknown.

county coroner. Our Fesenmaiers were enthusiastic beer drinkers, but evidently none of them had ever become brewers.

The West Virginia Fesenmeiers were another matter, for they've been brewers and brew masters for generations. Rebecca Fesenmier Kayes, now living in Huntington, once recalled that "my family has been connected with the brewing business since the early ages—starting with my great-grandfather in Germany in the early 1800's; then my grandfather in Cumberland, Maryland, and later in Huntington, and now my father and two uncles." Mrs. Kayes wrote those words for a high school English project nearly 20 years ago, and her father and uncles are now dead, as is the family business in Huntington.

These Fesenmeiers established themselves in America in 1851. In that year Michael Fesenmeier brought his bride to a farm on the old National Road near Cumberland. He had learned to make beer while still a boy in Germany, and shortly after the Civil War he started a small brewery on his Maryland farm. As demand grew, he expanded his operation. Refrigeration was the biggest problem, and that was solved by harvesting natural ice in the winter months and storing it in vaults dug into a hillside between the brewery and the farmhouse.

Eventually, Fesenmeier's brewery outgrew his farm, and was moved into the town of Cumberland. Once things were running smoothly at the new plant, Mr. Fesenmeier returned to the farm in the country with his eldest son, George, leaving the family business in the hands of younger sons Michael, Jr., Andrew, and John.

Further growth was made possible by a number of moves, both corporate and geographic. In 1893 patriarch Michael Fesenmeier died, with his four sons and two daughters inheriting the brewery. In 1899 the Fesenmeier brothers, along with their new partner and brother-in-law, John Kearney, moved to Central City, a West Virginia community which is now part of Huntington. There they purchased the old American Brewing Company, using—according to family legend—money brother John Fesenmeier had won in the Irish Sweepstakes.

The Fesenmeiers reopened the American Brewing plant as the new West Virginia Brewing Company. A major problem during the early years was the unpaved Central City roads, which became impassable to heavy brewery wagons during bad weather. The young businessmen added more horses and waited for their community to be annexed to Huntington, which offered better municipal services. Annexation came in 1909 and local street paving followed, but somehow a "Neutral Strip"—also known as Noodle Strip—between the two areas remained unpaved. For years the Fesenmeiers stationed an extra team of horses at the Strip, to help their beer wagons across the mire.

In West Virginia the Fesenmeiers settled down quickly to the business of making beer and ale, with brother John as brew master. Over the years they'd market several brands, including West Virginia Premium, West Virginia Pilsner, and West Virginia Ale. A potent Special Export beer was brewed for sale in Ohio and other areas allowing "high test" beer exceeding the 3.2% alcohol content allowed by law in West Virginia.

The Fesenmeiers were in business in Huntington for more than eight decades, and they encountered misfortune many times during those years. In 1905 a fire gutted the brewery, and in 1913 the rebuilt plant was damaged by the great Ohio River flood of that year. Both the family and the business suffered tragedy in 1938, with the untimely death of 34-year-old Mike Fesenmeier, the firm's secretary and sales manager.

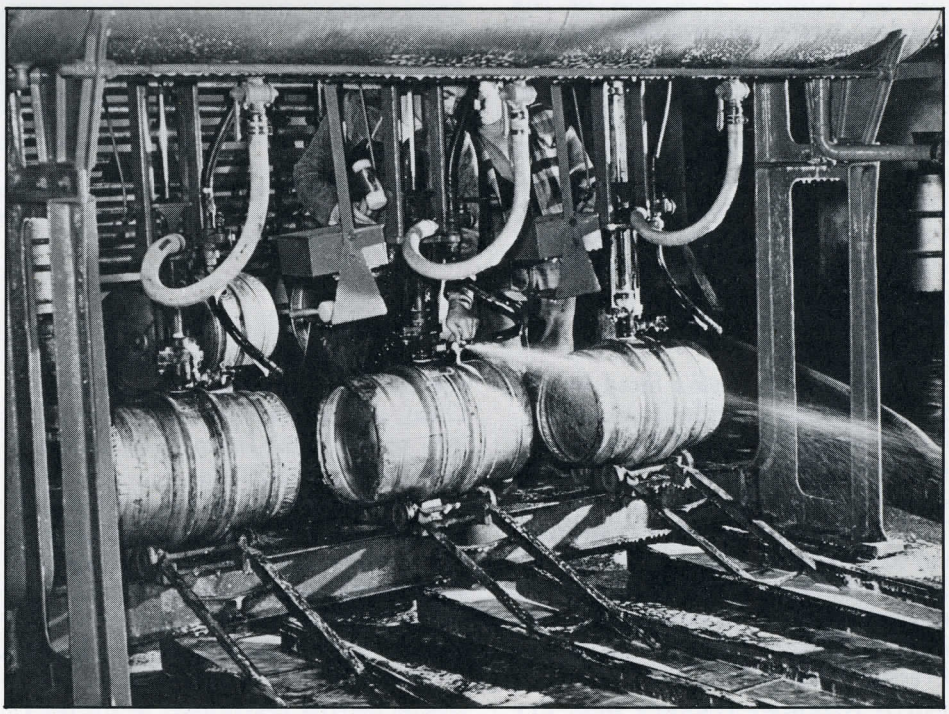
By far the biggest catastrophe to befall the company in its early years was prohibition. West Virginia went "dry" by state law in 1914, a few years before national prohibition took effect. The Fesenmeiers were left stranded with an expensive brewing facility, with no legitimate use to put it to. Like other brewers and distillers, they converted their plant to other work, first going into meat packing and later into ice and cold storage. The brewing equipment was sold at a large loss, and brewery workers who wished to continue their trade scattered to the remaining "wet" states.

Through 20 years of state and national prohibition, the Fesenmeiers never gave up their passion for making fine beer. When it became apparent in the early 1930's that the experiment with abstinence had failed and that prohibition would be repealed, they began to lay plans to refurbish their old brewery buildings. By the spring of 1934, $300,000-worth of

Above: Bottled and labeled beer moved on to the packer, where 24 bottles were automatically counted into cardboard boxes. Date and photographer unknown.
Below: Draft beer was packed in kegs for shipment to the saloon trade. Date and photographer unknown.

modern equipment had been installed, 30,000 wooden beer crates had been bought, and 17 train-carloads of bottles—nearly a million bottles in all—had been ordered. The country might be in the midst of the Depression, but the Fesenmeiers expected Americans to be thirsty after the long dry spell.

The modernized brewery had a production capacity of 9,000 gallons daily, and the brewers had a quarter-million gallons of beer laid by for May 5, 1934, the first day of distribution. A spirit of labor organizing was sweeping West Virginia at the time and president Michael Fesenmeier announced that union brewers would make his beer; the union label on every bottle was expected to help sell the brew to miners and other union workers. Fesenmeier further proudly noted that "no expense has been spared in making our product the equal of any on the market today." Even so, the bottled



beer would sell at the Depression price of 10¢, down from 15¢ in 1914.

The Fesenmeiers took advantage of the reopening to change the brewery's name from the West Virginia Brewing Company to Fesenmeier Brewing Company. Of the original brothers, John and Andrew had died during prohibition, and the firm was gradually passing into the hands of the younger generation. The aging Michael Fesenmeier retired to Maryland in 1934, turning the presidency over to J. Franklin Fesenmeier, son of John and grandson of company founder Michael Fesenmeier, Sr.

The resurrected brewery would serve a large area within a 100-mile radius of Huntington. This included much of West Virginia, and parts of adjacent Ohio and Kentucky. The days of heavy beer wagons struggling through the muddy Noodle Strip were long past, and a fleet of 25 modern trucks was put on the road to serve beer distributors throughout the Fesenmeier territory.

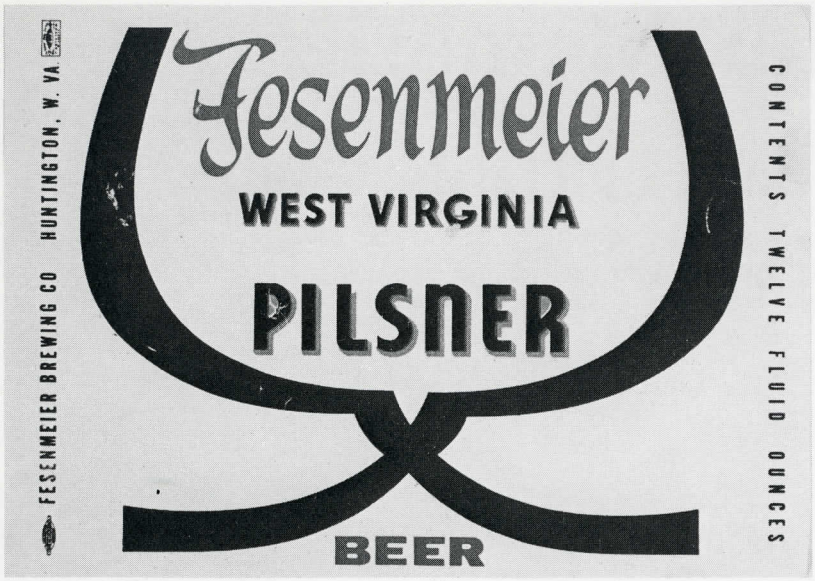
The Fesenmeier name began to appear prominently on the products of the renamed brewery, but for the first several years the company manufactured only the old kinds of beer. Toward the end of the Depression the Fesenmeiers sensed a change in local tastes and began plans for a new pilsner, to meet the demand for a lighter beer. Brew master M. A. "Gus" Fesenmeier, another grandson of the founder, was brought home from a New York brewery to supervise the change in the company's product line.

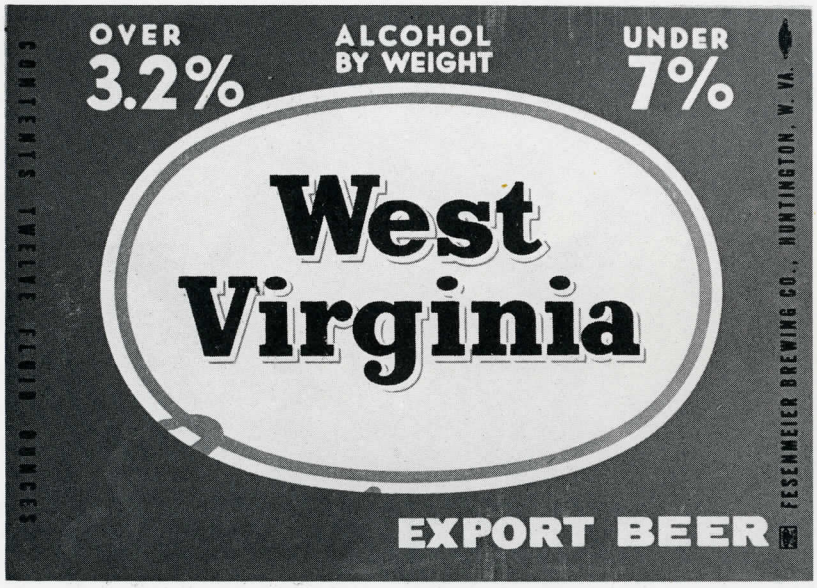
The Fesenmeier company celebrated its 50th West Virginia anniversary in 1949 with a giant fireworks display. Fittingly, production peaked that year, with a total sale of nearly 60,000 barrels of beer. After that, however, production fell by 5,000 barrels within a few years, as the family struggled with changing times.

Among the problems faced by the brewery was the complex local market. Full-strength beer could be sold only in Kentucky and Ohio, with West Virginia allowing only the weaker "3.2." This meant that the Fesenmeiers had to do separate production runs of the two beverages, as did any other brewer wishing to do business in West Virginia. The high-test sales area was severely restricted in the 1950's, as eastern Kentucky counties went dry under local option laws. Thereafter, Kentuckians bought their beer across the river in such places as Ironton, Ohio, which was purchasing nearly 20% of the total Fesenmeier production by the mid-1950's.

The most serious postwar difficulty was the growing competition of national beer companies. Local breweries were being swallowed up by the big firms, or driven out of business altogether. This discouraging trend was as apparent in West Virginia as elsewhere, leaving Fesenmeier as the only brewery in the state by the 1950's. Rosemary Lyons, formerly a Fesenmeier secretary, recalled that the relative lack of company advertising hurt in this battle with the nationals. "We thought it was the best beer around," she said. "But since it was local, people thought that it wasn't as good as the other brands. We didn't have as much advertising as the others. We should have sold a lot more beer." The limited advertising the company could afford was low key, using the motto "West Virginia—That'll Win Ya!"

Above: A "Fesenmeier Centennial Beer" bank was among the promotional items issued by the brewery. Photo by Rick Lee.
Right: West Virginia Pilsner, Fesenmeier Special Export, and West Virginia Special Export were among the many brands brewed by the Fesenmeiers. The high-test "export" beers were for the out-of-state market. Photos by Rick Lee.





The brewery that had weathered national prohibition might have survived the damage of local option laws to parts of its market, but it could not indefinitely withstand the pressures of competition from the national brands. Also, at this critical time the family-managed company faced another succession crisis, as the third generation passed into old age and death. Gus Fesenmeier died in 1965, to be followed by long-time president J. Franklin Fesenmeier in 1970. Rosemary Lyons felt that the upcoming generation was less interested in taking over the busness than earlier Fesenmeiers had been.

Mounting pressures culminated in the sale of the Fesenmeier Brewing Company in 1968, to businessman Robert Holley of Huntington. Holley renamed the brewery the Little Switzerland Brewing Company, and added a Swiss facade to the company offices, in hopes of attracting tourists. The company kept the old brands and added a new beer, "Charge," to its line of products.

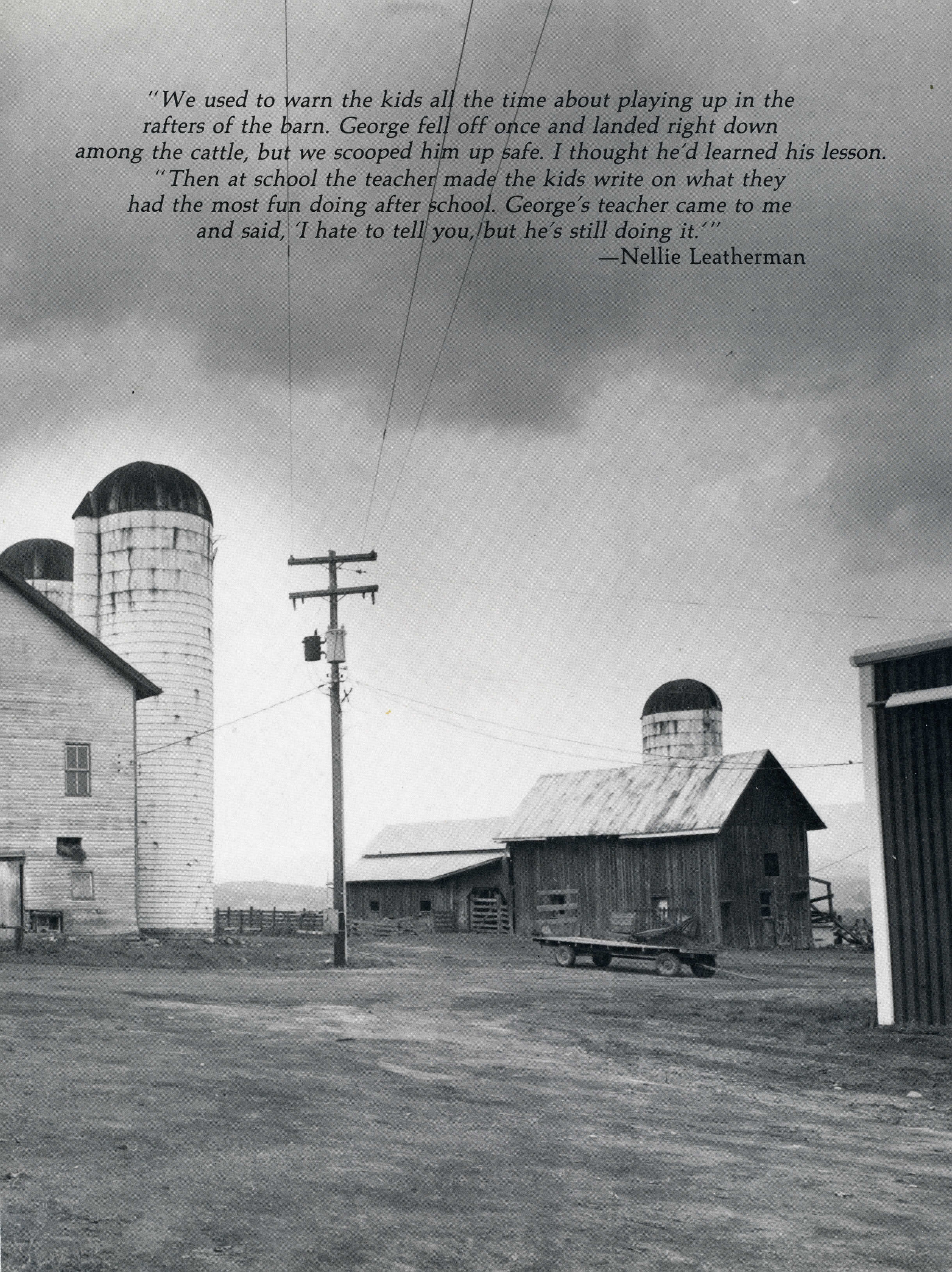
Little Switzerland failed to become a tourist attraction, and failed in the more important business of making good beer at a profit. In a couple of years the brewery again changed hands, this time being sold at public auction for delinquent debts. The new owner, a Columbus brewer, liquidated the business, closing the doors for the last time in July 1971. A year later the Huntington *Advertiser* announced that the Fesenmeier buildings were being razed, to make way for a new shopping center.

The sale and eventual closing of the brewery meant the loss of a way of life for the several dozen remaining workers—a life of hard but evidently satisfying work at an ancient craft, punctuated by morning and afternoon beer breaks. The Fesenmeiers lost a long family tradition of working together, and then gathering—brothers, uncles, fathers, sons, and cousins—in the firm's "hospitality room" to compare notes over beer after work. Huntington lost free access to the hospitality room for civic meetings and celebrations, and lost a major city landmark to the wrecking ball. West Virginia lost its last brewery, but kept the memory of three generations of a hard-working German family.

"A Place for Memories"

The Leatherman Barn of Hardy County

By Lucy Taylor
Photographs by Doug Chadwick



"We used to warn the kids all the time about playing up in the rafters of the barn. George fell off once and landed right down among the cattle, but we scooped him up safe. I thought he'd learned his lesson.

"Then at school the teacher made the kids write on what they had the most fun doing after school. George's teacher came to me and said, 'I hate to tell you, but he's still doing it.'"

—Nellie Leatherman

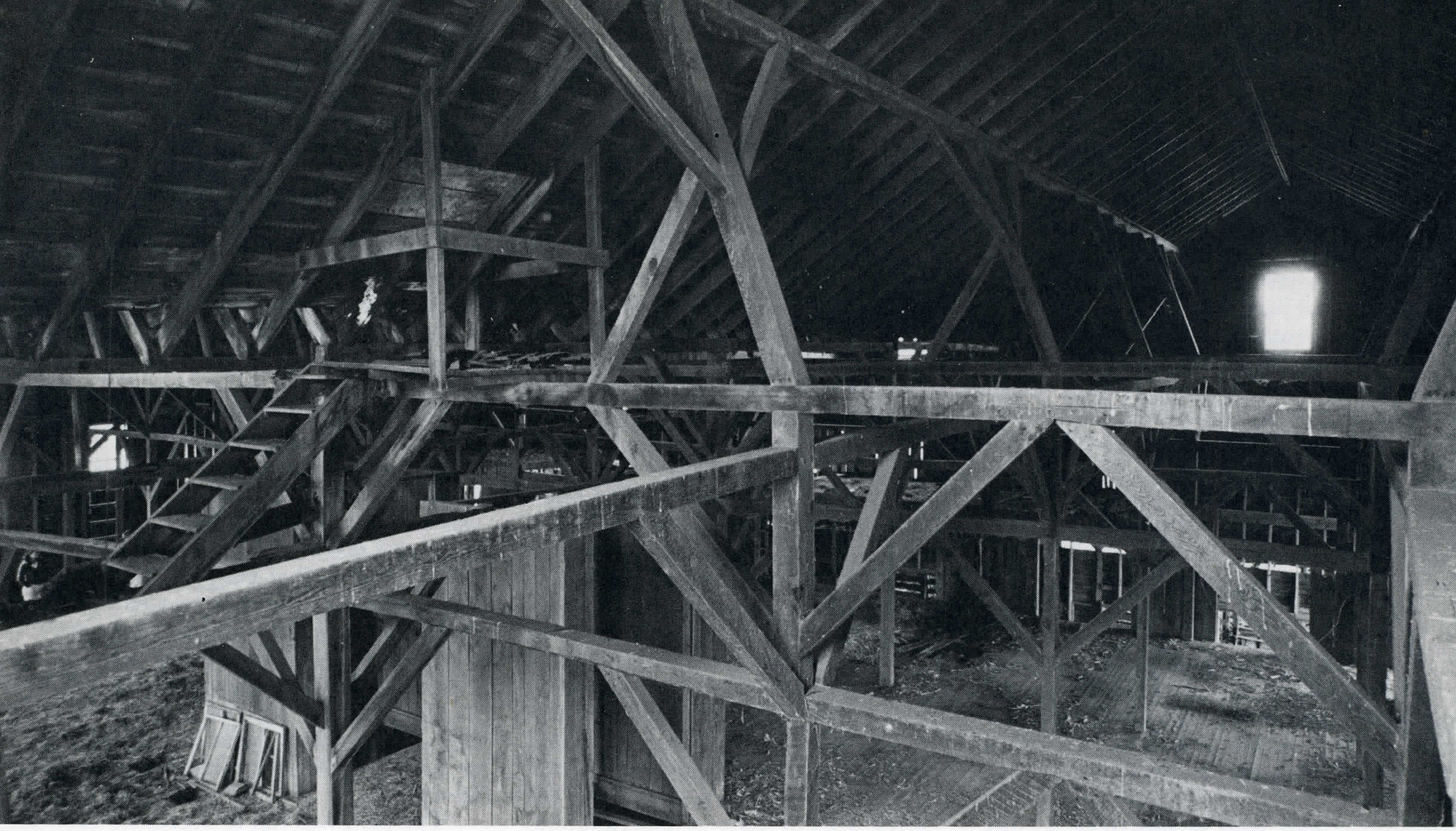
To a city dweller a barn may be a place to store hay and keep cattle, but anyone who grew up on a farm, who spent carefree hours adventuring among the hay bales and the rafters of a spacious loft knows the truth—that a barn is really a fort or a medieval castle, a buccaneer's roost or an outlaw's den, a place as hospitable to trolls and fairies as it is to cattle and sheep. And, of course, a barn is a place for memories.

Ask the Leatherman family. Four generations of Leathermans have worked and played inside the vast and ornate barn that George T. Leatherman constructed on a pinnacle in Old Fields, in Hardy County, between 1903 and 1917. Local carpenters erected a barn out of the native white oak that became, upon its completion, the largest wooden structure in West Virginia at that time.

Not only was it the largest barn of its time, but certainly one of the most bizarre-looking. To the driver approaching on Route 220 north, the barn at a distance resembles the peaked rooftops of a medieval hamlet, with its eight cupolas, three gables, and twin silos. Driving nearer, the rest of the structure comes into view, and a visitor to Old Fields for the first time will realize that the little "village" is really the elaborate roof of one enormous barn.

Ava Leatherman, the granddaughter of the barn's builder, remembers the confusion the appearance of the barn sometimes caused. "People would stop because they thought it was a large Catholic school or church. Sometimes a dozen people would stop in a day just to look at it.

"My grandfather built the barn big because he had several hundred head of cattle to shelter, and he knew, too, that in spring floods would come



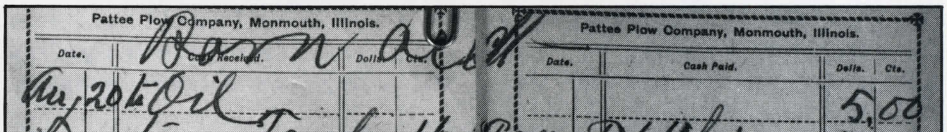
Left: Silos are sometimes called the watchtowers of prosperity, but this church-like entryway suggests that George T. Leatherman held to a more spiritual view in building his barn.
Above: Throughout this century young Leathermans have thrilled in climbing among the barn's beams, and then grown up to warn their own children against the dangerous practice.
Below: George T. Leatherman kept careful accounts of the building of his barn. These two pages from a 1903 ledger show purchases of galvanized roofing, paint, labor, hardware, and other items.

through the valley and wash the hay away. In those days they had the old-time haystacks. He wanted the barn large enough to store all the hay and feed the cattle in the dry.

"At that time they used the pulleys and hay forks pulled by the horses to pile up the hay, tons and tons of hay, and you needed room for it."

Bud Leatherman, grandson of George T. Leatherman, just shakes his head and says, "I don't know why my grandfather built a barn like that. I don't know if he had a nightmare or what."

Whatever the dream behind the fanciful barn, George T. Leatherman kept meticulous account of its construction. In a tattered booklet, now held together with paperclips, that advertises "The Pattee's Patent New Departure Walking Cultivator" on the cover, he noted the expenses in painstaking detail. The entries begin on May 23, 1903, and include a check for $15.00 to painters written on October 24, 1903; $6.00 for four gallons of green paint; and $55.30 for nails. On



Pattee Plow Company, Monmouth, Illinois. — Barn acct

Date.		Cash Received. / Cash Paid.	Dolls.	Cts.
Aug	20	to Oil	5	00
"	"	to Tank 16 gage 8 X 10 feet	59	50
"	21	" Paint	4	05
"	"	" Freight on Hand tools	5	5[illegible]
"	"	" Hauling Roofing	19	[illegible]
"	22	" 8 Sqs # 28 gage Roofing 375	30	00
"	"	freight on Roofing 142 1.35	2	97
"	30	" 12 days with team + 2 [illegible] hauling dirt	36	00
Sept	10	" Spouting & fixtures	21	82
		" P D [illegible] for weatherboarding	8	15
"	"	By Spouting to [illegible] Merrill $6,30		
"	18	To Barndoor fixtures of J Kyger Hd. Co.	10	78
"	18	To 1 Keg Nails	3	00
"	23	" 4 Gal Green paint	6	00
"	"	" Stanchion fixtures	1	17
Sept	24	" 47½ days carpenter work 1.60	76	00
"	"	" Dressing lumber	12	080

November 7, $12.00 went for "hauling cement to sewer pipe," a job requiring four horses and four days. Six days spent "hauling gravel and sand by 4 horses and 2 hands" cost Leatherman $24.00; three coats of paint for the new barn cost him $44.35.

Leatherman writes in the beginning of the account book, "The lumber used in this barn was cut and sawed at Walnut Bottom and hauled in with 4 horse team by Albert [his son]. Also round hundred feet of extra lumber that was dried and sold to pay for the cost of sawing, cutting, logging, and hauling."

All told, the total cost of labor and materials for the barn came to $4,229.26.

By today's standards, that cost may seem modest enough, but in 1903, putting that much money into a barn that was not only functional, but aesthetically striking as well, may have seemed pretty extravagant, especially for a man who is described by his great-grandson, George Leatherman, Jr., as reportedly "tight." "Maybe Great-grandad was penny wise and pound foolish," shrugs the fourth-generation Leatherman with a laugh.

The Leatherman barn stands two stories tall and includes three main sections that are really three barns strung together. The third "barn" was added later, which explains why one of the inside walls is made of the same German siding as the outside of the barn.

"That wall was originally one of the sides," says George Jr., "before Great-granddad decided to add the third section. In those days, you had to have all that space to accommodate the hay, which was stacked loose. Today the hay is baled and takes up less space, but it's heavier. The barn is too weak now to stack the hay up very high."

Indeed, looking at the barn from the front, the sagging of the huge structure is painfully apparent. The main door slants drastically, as does the window directly over it. The entire middle section tips precariously.

"The barn is set on poles," explains George Jr., "and the poles have rotted off. This section is in danger of collapsing; unless something can be done about it, one of these days, it'll fall in."

Originally, a ditch was dug, and poles were put in based in rock. According to George Jr., to correct the barn's present state of deterioration, the barn would have to be jacked up while concrete was poured in. A new roof would have to be added to allow for drainage; the colorful cupolas and gables that give the barn its fanciful appearance unfortunately also cause water to collect on the roof, causing further damage to the structure.

"A second roof would keep rain water from collecting in the gulleys and rotting the roof," says George Jr. "Right now, though, there's not much we can do. To renovate the barn would cost between 15 and 20 thousand dollars. We don't have that kind of money to put in it."

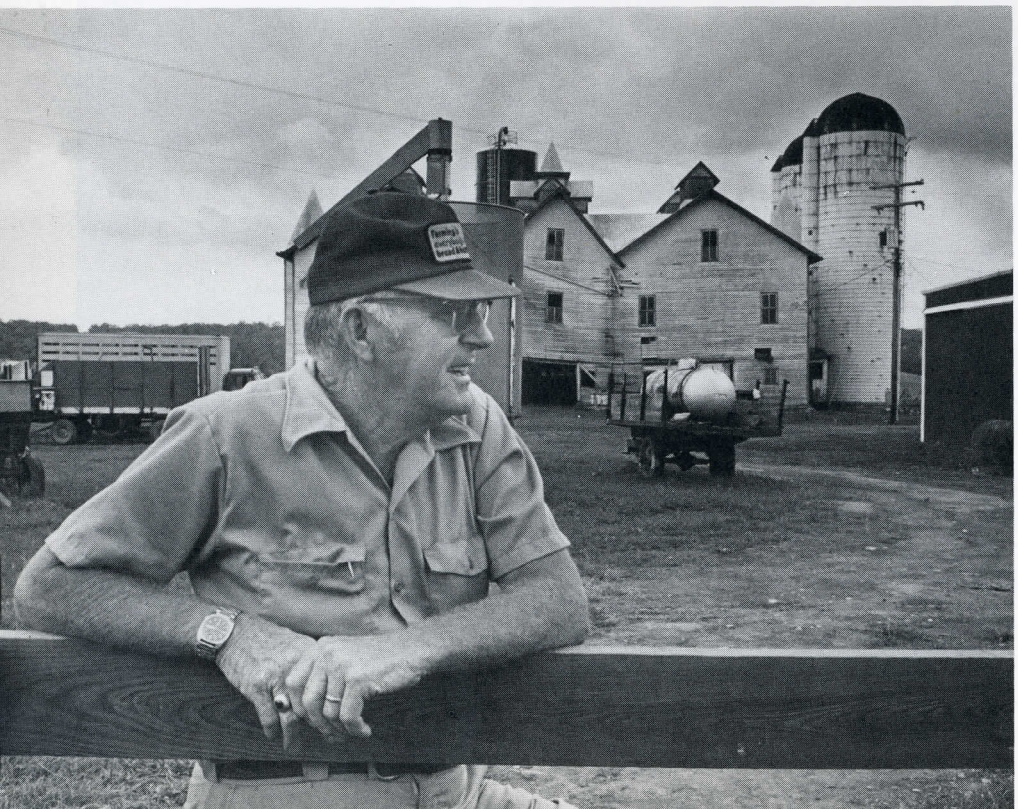
If the Leatherman barn does collapse, it will bring with it the end of a host of memories, including much of the heritage of the Leatherman family.

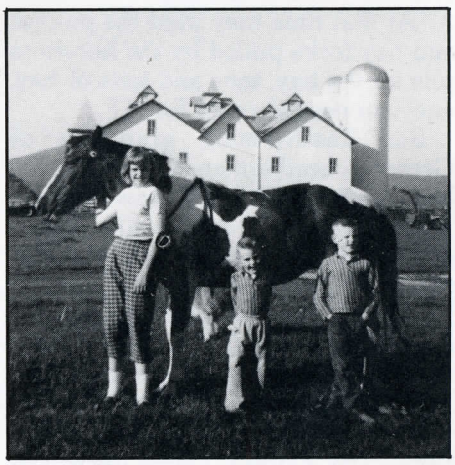
Ava Leatherman, born in 1917, when the third segment of the barn was being completed, is only one of the Leatherman children whose childhood was enriched by what was then called "the fairy tale barn."

"I played in that barn all the time I was growing up," Ava recalls. "We kids would walk the high rafters or climb up the spouting on the side of the barn clear to the top, maybe 75 feet in the air. We'd play hide and seek, leap off the rafters down into the hay, or tunnel through the hay and hunt for eggs.

"The barn was full of pigeons then, just like it is now. Sometimes there'd be so many pigeons the men would shoot them, and a bunch of little pigeons would be left with no mamas. We kids would raise them, feed them on milk and bread. Did they live? Shoot, yes, they did fine.

"I remember, too, there were times when the ensilage we fed the cattle would drain off the sides of the barn and ferment. The pigs and cattle would





Left: "Farming is everybody's bread and butter," according to the cap worn by George T. Leatherman II. Mr. Leatherman stands in front of the barn that has helped put bread and butter on his own family's table for four generations.

Above: The barn looks fresher in this 1958 snapshot of Betty, Albert II, and George III.

Below: Three generations of Leatherman men—George II, Albert II, and Albert III—gather around an undersize tractor in the farmyard.
Right: A Hardy County farm family: George T. Leatherman III, George T. Leatherman II, Betty Leatherman Bosley, Albert Leatherman III, Joannie Leatherman, Albert Leatherman II, and Nellie Leatherman.

drink it and get drunk; the pigs would run around squealing and the cattle would be bumping into each other.

"When I got older, I'd bring kids home from college, city kids, and they were just in heaven climbing around. We'd read books and tell stories. I felt sorry for kids who'd never been inside a barn before."

Ava Leatherman has lived in Wardensville for the past 33 years and rarely revisits Old Fields, but she knows that, without renovation, the barn's days are numbered.

"That's sad, really sad, to think of it falling down. That barn was part of our childhood. We grew up in it. Kids today don't know what it's like to climb up in the rafters and burrow down in the hay. To this day I still have dreams about playing in that barn, hunting eggs."

A visitor to the Leatherman barn today will find unexpected reminders of the barn's history and age. Just inside the main door hangs a Budweiser "King of Bottled Beer" sign from the 1920's, used by grandfather Albert Leatherman as a breeding chart. Among the scribblings on the faded wood sign are notations like, "Bred white cow to guernsey bull, August 12, 1955." Further down are listed the names "Randy, Jane, Blanche—foaled on—" followed by dates which are indecipherable with age.

A basketball hoop mounted in one corner of the second floor was used for practice by George, Jr., and his brother Albert. That part of the floor sags badly now; it's unsafe to walk on.

"We'd like to find some historical society to help us preserve the barn," says George Jr. "It's a shame for it to crumble, but we can't keep it up the way we'd like to."

In the late afternoon sun, an uneven light filters through the cavernous loft; the beams cast slanting shadows. In a peculiar way, the vastness and cool dimness of the loft is reminiscent of a cathedral.

Inside the calf pen, an ailing calf is being doctored. "We don't keep milk cows anymore," says George Jr. "It's easier to buy milk. Everyone is time conscious these days."

We stroll outside, past the water trough and cisterns that date from the construction of the barn. A flock of guinea hens scatters at our approach.

"I love this barn," George Jr. says, "but it's obsolete. There won't be anything like it built in the future."

That will make the loss of future generations still more poignant if the strange and beautiful "fairy tale" barn that George T. Leatherman built does come crashing down someday.

The Barns of West Virginia

By LeRoy G. Schultz

The beautiful old barns of West Virginia are slowly fading away. We don't need them. They are obsolete by today's farm technology and our cult of the new. The vandalism of time, wind, fire, and insect damage have begun to wipe out a treasured part of our past.

Those of us raised on farms knew the barn realistically and intimately. Who can forget his childhood days in those burnished castles—the warmth of cow's flanks on a cold day, intoxicating aromas of alfalfa and timothy, watching a midnight midwifery, squeezing warm milk directly in the mouth from an udder. If you were lucky you got your first kiss in a barn. Modern ecologists will never sense closeness to nature until they've pitched steaming manure on a frosty morning.

Log barns were the first built in the state, and they were made with trees cleared from virgin land. The logs used were left round, usually, and occasionally the spaces between the logs were chinked with mud. Machine-made nails and hinges gained popularity after 1790, and were used for various types of barn doors, windows, and hayloft openings. Prior to 1790, wooden pegs were used instead of nails. Later, logs were hewed square with broad axes and the corners dovetailed. As the logs deteriorated many were sheathed in clapboard. The circular blade was adopted by West Virginia sawmills in 1820, making barn siding more available.

The log barn, the senior citizen of barns, can still be viewed in all of West Virginia's 55 counties. The barn historian, Henry Glassie, traced the log barn's origin to early Europe and found this type of structure most common in southern Appalachia. The first floor was used for housing oxen, a cow, or horses, and the upper level or loft for the storage of hay. As late as 1860 large barns were not needed. The West Virginia farmer was harvesting by the hand scythe and a good day's work consisted of cutting one acre of hay.

By 1875 new farm technology and fertilizers resulted in greater production and the individual capability of farming more acres. New animal stock was introduced, along with new markets, and the state's agricultural economy boomed. The horse-drawn rake was introduced, replacing hand labor. There were great increases in the numbers of beef cattle and, later, dairy cattle, as well as crop production of corn, wheat, buckwheat, apples, tobacco, oats, and potatoes. These all called for larger barns.

The size of the barn in West Virginia varied to fit the needs of the farm, the contours and size of the land, and the wishes of the farmer. The new barns had to be large enough for fully loaded horse-drawn wagons to enter directly inside, thus saving labor in hay removal and storage. From 1875 to 1925 West Virginia saw the building of the large barns which still stand today. They were called Switzer or bank barns, or more popularly, the German-Pennsylvania barn, the most distinct contribution to American rural architecture in history. The original versions and their later adaptations are most prominent in the Eastern Panhandle, but they occur in all of West Virginia. Their chief characteristics are the fore-bay or overshoot, and a second story wagon entrance. The ground floor was used for housing of livestock and the main floor above for hand threshing, while there were mows for hay storage. The silo, imported from Hungary, was first introduced in Illinois in 1873, and its use quickly spread to West Virginia. The first silos were made of wood much like a giant barrel, and later of brick, stone, or cement. Silos were called "Watchtowers of Prosperity," since a farmer's wealth could be gauged by the number and size of his silos.

Around 1900 yet another barn style was brought to West Virginia. It was the round or many-sided barn first introduced in the New England states in 1824. By 1900 the round barn was highly recommended by most schools of agriculture of the land grant universities. I have been able to locate only six round barns remaining in the state, and in a world of squares they stand out. This exotic style of barn had the advantage of wind resistance, less building material, and massive open space without supporting posts at center. Sometimes silos were built in the center of the barn to prevent freezing and make feeding of livestock easier.

The Hamilton barn near Mannington is the best preserved round barn, and stands as a landmark. Built in 1911 over a ten-month period with carpenters drawing 30¢ per hour, the barn was constructed of materials taken directly from the farm. The main floor is oak and the siding of yellow poplar. At center it stands 75 feet tall, with a cathedral ceiling. The roof is made of several thousand pieces of slate brought in from Indiana. Folklore has it that a round barn left no corners for the devil to hide in.

Excerpted from a longer article by Mr. Schultz in GOLDENSEAL, *Volume 4, numbers 2–3 (April-September 1978).*

The Robey Theater of Spencer

A Roane County Tradition

By Jim Mylott

One experience that has been shared by many Roane Countians over the past 73 years has been an evening at the Robey Theater. Hamond Robey opened his first theater, the "Dreamland," in June of 1907. It was first located in the building on Main Street in Spencer now occupied by the Rite Aid drugstore and, while it has been moved a few times over the years, it has continued to offer fine entertainment to the residents of the area. In fact, it has recently come to light that the movie theater opened by Hamond Robey may indeed be *the* oldest continuously-operating movie theater in the United States.

The Dreamland was described as an instant success by the first ticket seller for the theater, Okey Harris. Mr. Harris, who will soon celebrate his 90th birthday, recalled that the interest in this new form of entertainment was so strong that Robey very often held four or five shows a night to accommodate the crowds. "Everyone wanted to go to the show," Harris said, and the fact that the same movie was shown all week did not stop many from coming back two or three times during the week. People were fasci-

Mrs. Kerry Carpenter has sold tons of popcorn over the years. Photo by Chuck Wyrostock.

DREAMLAND

We will open up in a few days a

Dreamland Theatre

in the Knotts building, adjoining McMillan's.

The Scenes AND Illustrated Songs

will all be clean and up-to-date and our room will be wired up for electric lights, electric fans, and well seated with chairs and everything will be neat and comfortable.

On account of the heavy expense we have been at in installing an electric plant it will be absolutely necessary for us to charge 10 cents admission.

Soliciting a liberal patronage, I am,

YOURS RESPECTFULLY,

H. H. ROBEY.

Hamond Robey, who founded his Spencer movie house in 1907, later opened other theaters in Ravenswood and St. Marys. Born in 1881, he was still a vigorous showman when this portrait was taken in 1956. Photographer unknown. At left is Mr. Robey's original 1907 ad announcing the opening of the Dreamland (later Robey) theater.

nated by the movies. Harris described these films as a "revelation" to the people who crowded into the small theater night after night. Most had never seen a movie before, for the industry itself was still very new. Thomas Edison gave the first demonstration of his newly created movie projector in 1896 and the first complete story in motion picture form, "The Great Train Robbery," was produced by the Edison Studios in 1903. The people in the area had been reading about movies for a few years, and when Robey took the initiative and opened the Dreamland, they flocked to the theater to see this new technological marvel for themselves. The Dreamland was the first movie theater to open in the county, and probably the first in the central West Virginia area. Robey quickly developed a love for "show business" and he stayed with it for the remainder of his life.

Hamond Robey was born on his parents' farm on the Left Fork of the Upper Reedy. His grandparents, Randolph and Louisa (Hardy) Robey, were originally from Marion County, and they were part of the first great pop-

The Robey Theater will be 75 years old next summer, and Roane Countians are still lining up for tickets. Photo by Chuck Wyrostock.

ulation boom in Roane County, made possible by the completion of the Glenville, Ripley, and Ohio Turnpike in 1851. The Robeys settled there that year with their six children, the youngest of whom was John Nelson Robey, Hamond Robey's father. After serving in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, John returned to Roane County and in 1872 he married America Howell, the daughter of Moses Howell of Upper Reedy. Hamond, the fourth of six children, was born in 1881.

Robey moved to Spencer in 1903, when he was 19 years old. He and the Rev. Elijah J. Harris (Okey Harris' father) formed a partnership and bought out the J. S. Brown Furniture and Undertaking business. Robey learned the trade and operated the business for a number of years. On October 27, 1905, he married Ora Harris, his partner's daughter. Then in 1907 Robey launched a new sideline, the Dreamland Theater.

The timing for the opening of the new theater was excllent. Spencer was booming during these years. It was the beginning of the oil and gas development in the county and Spencer, the railhead for the Ravenswood, Spencer & Glenville Railroad, was the center of this activity in the county. The population of the town nearly doubled between 1900 and 1910, and to the native population were added hundreds of oil field workers who, as Freddie McIntosh, Jr., once said, "roamed the streets on Saturday night" looking for something to do. Along with the oil and gas development came another important change—a tremendous increase in the amount of money circulating in the local economy. Thousands and thousands of dollars came into the county through leasing rentals and royalty rights, along with the economic benefits to the stores and hotel in town brought by the influx of workers. It was one of the most

Above: Robey went all out to promote the 1927 war film, "Tin Hats." The local National Guard unit marched to the theater on opening night, firing several volleys out front, and presumably lent the soldier and equipment shown here. Photographer unknown.
Right: The stage of the Robey has also seen many live productions. Here is the local cast of the 1931 play, "Womanless Wedding." Photographer unknown.

exciting and dynamic times in Spencer's history. The oil and gas development was bringing new wealth into Spencer and life there was changing rapidly. Robey's Dreamland Theater was one of the most popular changes that came to town.

The Dreamland soon outgrew its original location. In 1908 Robey moved the theater to the building on Main Street that presently houses the Coney Island Cafe. He re-opened the theater under a new name, the "Wonderland." It continued to be the most popular entertainment attraction in town. Along with Okey Harris, Robey also employed Ron Crislip, Clyde Mitchell, and Eunice Morgan to help with the scenery and music. The scenery consisted of painted vistas, such as mountain scenes or cityscapes, that were positioned around the movie screen and which were moved by two assistants as the dramatic action changed on the screen. The music and words were provided by a photograph record synchronized to the action on the screen. Or at least it was supposed to be—according to one patron, the words were often heard when the actors' mouths were closed.

No one seemed to mind, though. In 1909 Robey again changed the name of the theater. It had now become the Lyric Theater. He also formed a partnership that year with Joseph M. Schwender (who had married Robey's sister Ollie the previous year). In 1911 the theater was moved for the last time. Robey and Schwender purchased a vacant lot in between the Odd Fellows building and the Arlington Hotel on Main Street. Together with the Knights of Pythias Lodge, they built a three-story building. This new theater was opened as the Auditorium Theater.

Hamond Robey was also responsible for introducing two more new forms of entertainment to the county during this decade, bowling alleys and

a skating rink. In 1908 he was granted a license from the town council to set up a bowling alley in the Parson building on Main Street; Charley Glover managed this business for many years. This game was called "box ball" then, and like the movie theater it was an immediate success. Robey, along with W. E. Waybright, also opened a similar bowling alley in Walton, after 17 voters from Walton District submitted a petition to the County Court requesting that they grant the necessary license. In 1910 Robey and E. W. Glaze opened another bowling alley in Spencer, along with a skating rink which was located in the building left vacant by the Spencer Manufacturing and Machine Company.

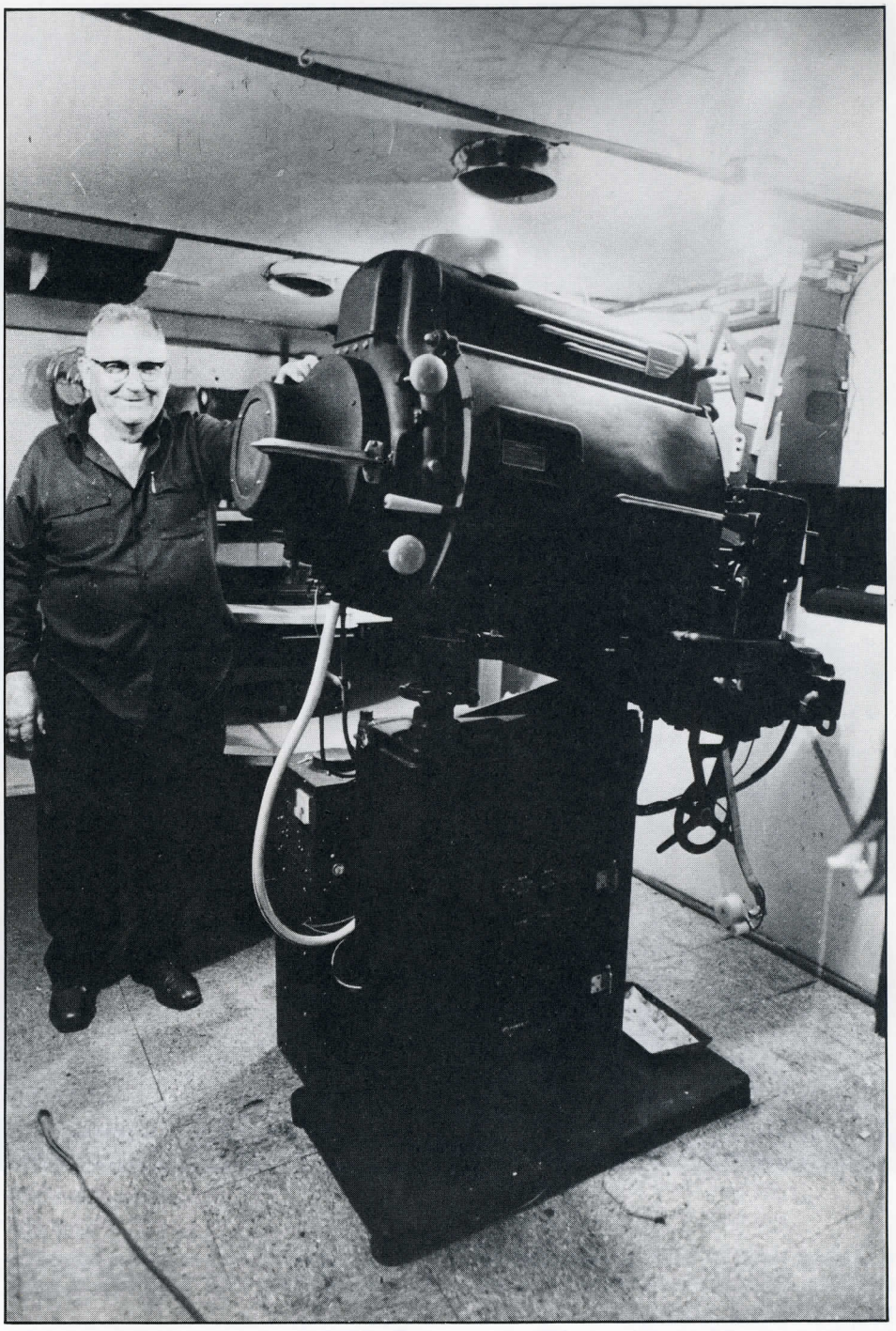
By 1910 there were two more movie theaters in Spencer. Harley D. Wells purchased the necessary equipment to show movies in his Opera House, and later that year Homer H. Cottle and F. E. Rhodes opened the "Family Theater" in town.

But it was Robey's Auditorium Theater that continued to be the most popular theater in Spencer. In his new theater Robey also began presenting live performances, ranging from the popular vaudeville troupes of the day to performances by the Mendelssohn Male Quartet and Concert Company and the West Virginia University Glee and Mandolin clubs.

Three factors came together in the 1920's to make Robey's Auditorium Theater one of the main social and entertainment centers in the county. Harley Wells closed his Opera House in 1923 and the Family Theater had long since closed, so the Auditorium became the only theater in Spencer. More importantly, the 1920's witnessed a tremendous growth in the number of automobiles in the county. Dayton Rhodes' Ford dealership garage was perhaps the most popular place in the county during these years.

The Model T Ford was selling for as low as $260 and Rhodes could not keep up with the demand. Hand in hand with the growth in automobile sales was the surge in the construction of paved roads in the county. Federal, state, and local funds were combined to finance the paving of many of the main highways in Roane County, while at the same time most of the secondary roads greatly improved. This all worked to give the people of Roane a mobility never before possible. Where once it took all day to get to Spencer by horse and wagon over the mud roads, now, with the automobile and paved roads, the two-way trip was only a matter of hours. The businesses in Spencer profited greatly from the new ease of transportation, and attendance at the Auditorium

Below: The Robey Theater in 1938 looked very much as it does today. Photo by Ola Spencer.
Right: Ola Spencer worked at the Robey from 1936 to 1979. Photo by Shelby Young.



Theater skyrocketed.

The decade of the 1920's was the era in which the major movie studios developed the "star" system, promoting actors and actresses in a variety of films and roles to the point where the public became more familiar with, for instance, Hoot Gibson or Theda Bara than with the major figures in history and literature. Robey, along with his theater manager Clark Munson, presented four different movies a week in evening and matinee performances. The bill for the week of February 22, 1926, included Ronald Coleman and Velma Banky in "Dark Angel," along with a comedy short, "Wild Goose Chase," starring Ben Turpin. Hoot Gibson in "Spook Ranch" was the Saturday matinee, and the Lillian Gish movie "Romola" followed on Monday and Tuesday. The week ended with a showing of Zane Grey's "Vanishing American," starring Richard Dix and Noah Berry. The admission prices ranged from 15¢ for the matinee to 40¢ for the feature films.

Robey and Munson also displayed some creativity of their own. In May of 1926 they produced their own film composed of scenes from the county. The clean-up work after a wreck on the B&O was shown, along with baseball practice at the Simmons field with Coach Sims and Worthy Schumaker. Scenes of the courthouse square were

Below: Ola Spencer, with unidentified women, shows off early '50's poster for a DeMille technicolor extravaganza. Photographer unknown.
Right: Harry Spencer accepts ticket of son Harry Spencer, Jr. The elder Spencer, a pre-World War II Robey employee, later spent most of his working years in Ohio before retiring to Spencer—and to part-time work at the theater.

included, along with shots of the road construction at Billings. The construction of the McKown Hotel and the demolition of the Methodist-Protestant Church on Market Street (in preparation for the construction of the new church) rounded out the film. It was titled "Extra" and it became a regular short at the theater.

In July of 1926 Robey began a major remodeling of the theater. The work continued throughout the summer, and, as a replacement to the closed building, Robey set up a "Tentatorium" theater on the high school athletic field. This 40-by-70-foot tent was the scene of an appearance of a movie star that July. Little Jackie "Hoo" Ray, a native of Parkersburg and a member of the "Our Gang" troupe, performed a song and dance act, and later a film clip of Ray and a host of movie stars was shown.

Meanwhile Robey was completely transforming the theater building. He brought in the architectural firm of Carmichael and Millfaugh, of Columbus, Ohio, to design the new theater (this same firm had earlier designed the lavish Kearse Theater in Charleston). The concrete work was done by the firm of Henry Minns and Chester Dodd, Sr., and the Boggs and Rhodes Construction Company handled the steel and brick work. Charley Glover fashioned all the woodwork throughout the theater. It was reported that the total remodeling cost was $100,000, which was quite an investment in 1926. This is the theater as we know it today.

On September 6, 1926, the theater re-opened as, for the first time, the Robey Theater. The opening night of what Dan Pendleton, the editor of the *Roane County Reporter*, called "Spencer's amusement palace and shrine of the silent drama," was an evening of both oratory and entertainment. Congressman Harry C. Woodyard gave the welcoming address, followed by Albert Heck's talk on the "Relation of the Theater to the City." R. W. "Worthy" Schumaker, the superintendent of schools, then addressed the 700-member audience on "The Theater as a Civic Institution." The Pathe Newsreel followed, along with a comedy short, and then the evening's main feature, "KIKI," starring Norm Talmadge, was presented.

The pomp and ceremony surrounding the opening of the new Robey Theater pointed out the fact that motion pictures were now accepted as an integral part of community life. It was not all that long ago that movies and the "stage" were thought to be sinful. Okey Harris mentioned that his father, the Rev. Harris, received some criticism for allowing his son to work in a theater. But all that had changed for most people, and now the movies were an important part of everyday social life.

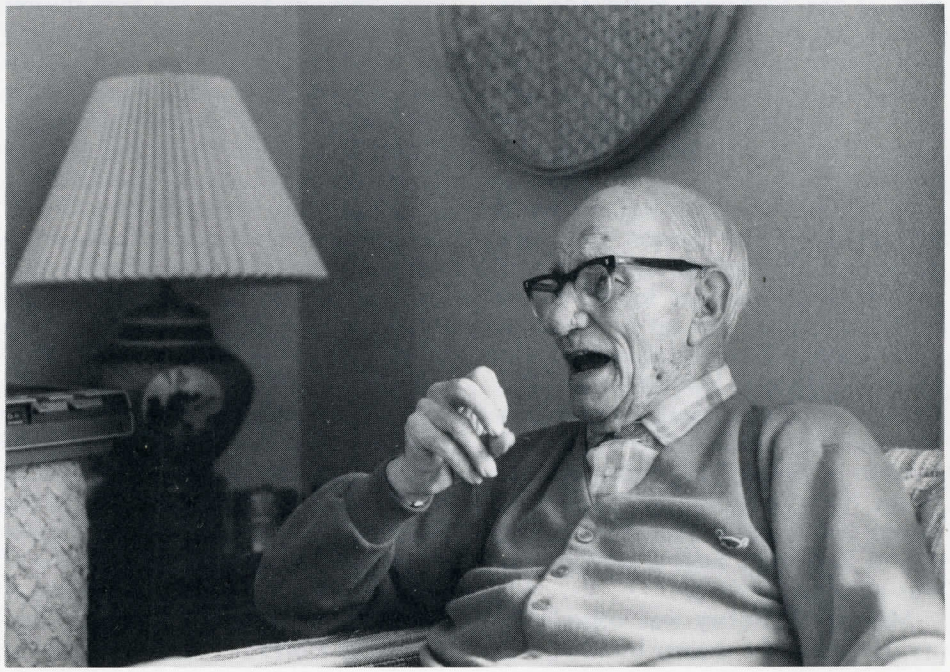
Left: T. Michael Burch, present owner of the Robey, stands with past owner, Mrs. Pat Robey. Mrs. Robey is the daughter-in-law of founder Hamond Robey. Photo by Chuck Wyrostock.
Bottom: Okey Harris, who went to work at the original Dreamland theater in 1907, still remembers Hamond Robey and the movie business.

Movies were also changing the people who were watching them, for they had a significant cultural impact on their audiences. For those sitting and watching a silent drama unfold on the screen of the Robey Theater, a whole new glimpse of life was presented, one that was far removed from the ridges and hollows of Roane County. The movies were, by and large, products of the urban areas of the nation and the stories and dramas they presented were a reflection of urban values and life. A new world was brought into focus for the people of rural areas of the nation, like Roane County, and quite often this world was presented in a romantic and adventurous light. "Thrills—Fast, Rough, Roaring Chicago—The Loop, Glittering Michigan Boulevard—Jazz Babies, the Jazz Belt," so ran the advertisement for "That Royal Girl," when it appeared at the Robey Theater in 1926. City life was presented as exciting, glamorous, and most of all, enticing. The motion picture was one of the chief social forces, along with the radio and the automobile, that would radically change the culture and values of rural America during the decade of the 1920's.

By the late 1920's Hamond Robey owned movie theates in Ravenswood and St. Marys, as well as the one in Spencer, and he was one of the first theater owners in the area to install equipment for the new "talkies," as the early sound movies were called. "Alias Jimmy Valentine," starring William Harris and Joan Crawford, was the first sound movie shown at the Robey. The success of this new motion picture technology marked the end of the silent film era.

The stage of the Robey Theater was also the scene of numerous local live productions, such as the "Womanless Wedding," presented by the Lions Club in 1929; or "Corporal Eagen," a three-act comedy produced by the American Legion in January of 1931. This production had a cast of 150 local people. High school plays, graduations, old-time fiddling contests, beauty contests, and a score of other activities made the stage of the Robey Theater the leading community center for the past 50 years.

Vernon Robey, Hamond's son, took over the management of the theater as his father advanced in years. Then in 1978 the theater passed from the family's hands to the current owners, Mike and JoAnn Burch. The Burchs' commitment to continuing the tradition begun by Hamond Robey in 1907 is apparent, and no doubt many more generations of Roane Countians will share the pleasure of an evening at the Robey Theater.



A Special Place and Two Special People

A Visit to Shepherdstown

By Jeanette Brown

Photographs by Mark Crabtree

Shepherdstown. A town small enough so there's no smog, small enough so that people care about each other, large enough for a college, cosmopolitan enough for up-to-date thinking on world affairs, a place rumbling with history. It is also a place where the visible remains of that history are treasured and restored amid much discussion and devoted effort.

I had heard about Shepherdstown as being special, and wondered if it would prove to be on investigation. I found I only had to ask—in the restaurants, the libraries, or the people on the streets—"What's so great about Shepherdstown?" and the words came tumbling out.

"It's the quality of life here. Clean air, not much industry. Great people. Great college students."

"It's partly our history. Take the name Washington, for instance; we have many descendants of his family here. Dr. John Washington, for example, is now restoring Harewood, oldest of the Washington houses, built in 1770 by Samuel Washington, George's brother. The many jokes about places where Washington slept don't apply here. George really did spend much time with brother Sam at Harewood."

"It's our scenery, our land. Just look around you."

"We have had so many 'firsts' here. I guess it's just human nature to want to be the winner, to be the first to accomplish something. We had the first schoolhouse in West Virginia, and the first newspaper. And it really was Rumsey, not Robert Fulton, whose

Helen Link and Charles Unseld rest a bit on the steps to a Shepherdstown sidewalk.

Left: Charles Unseld enjoys bridge, and says Mrs. Link is "a great player" herself.
Right: Helen Link still sings regularly at 93, and has no plans to quit. "It's just that I love singing, I guess," she says.

steamboat was the first to move over water. Also, most people don't realize it, but we had an inventor who is claimed to have predated Alexander Bell, in working out the telephone, by the name of Dolbear."

"We have an exceptional center for senior citizens. They've even had some of the older folk telling stories taken from their family histories put on tape, to be used on programs or for historical data."

I was also told that Shepherdstown was special for its people. One waitress mentioned an unusual twosome on their entertainment circuit, Mr. Unseld and Mrs. Link. "You really should investigate them. I won't tell you how they're unusual, you'll find out." She gave a mischievous smile. Later, checking in at the college music department, I again encountered the names Link and Unseld. Next stop was the Lutheran Parish House, which is used by eight churches as office for a cooperative venture. This includes sustenance and social work for all, where needed, regardless of creed. The group also publishes a newspaper, which has achieved recognition from a national magazine. Here again the names Link and Unseld came up.

So now, here I was, in his living room, persuading Mr. Unseld, a slight, friendly person, to talk. His voice was low-pitched but strong, spilling out the words eagerly and quickly. Charles J. Unseld, age 91. One half of a singing duo much in demand.

"Well, yes, I've done a good bit of singing this last year. I still play instruments some. Sang in the choir till I was 88, but now Mrs. Link and I work together. She's 93, you know. She takes high soprano, and I make up tenor or alto for harmony.

"Way we got started, we were invited to sing at the Shepherd College Alumni Banquet. That went over pretty big." He chuckled. "We just had to keep on performing, maybe 12, 15 times this year. Hobby Club over at Martinsburg, and several churches, places like that."

"You know this is pretty unusual at your age," I remarked.

"Well, yes." He smiled. "But my health's pretty good. I go to the doctor, and he says I'm O.K. Except that I do smoke. Last time I went I asked, "How about my smoking, Doc?"

"He said, 'Well, you know that isn't doing you any good. But if you quit you'd probably die. Here you are, at your age, no emphysema. You're still breathing well, and considering the pleasure it gives you, why not just keep on the way you're doing."

Mr. Unseld gave me a shrewd sideglance. "I'm not saying the Doc would say that to anyone else, you understand, so better not quote him on that."

"What type of music goes best for you?"

"In the old days, it was all kinds. Country, classics, jazz; but now with Mrs. Link we stick to religious music. One of the favorites is 'Whispering Hope.'"

"'Whispering Hope?' That must bring back memories for many."

"Yes. I even do that on my harmonica for the older folks."

"And the other instruments you mentioned?"

"Well, there was violin, harmonica, Jew's harp, horn, piano. I don't play piano anymore, I'm called legally blind now."

I looked at him in amazement. There'd been no indication he couldn't see clearly. He went on talking, not asking for sympathy.

"But violin, now. We played a concert for the Retired Teachers' Group. A big group that was, eight counties. There were three of us playing, and all of us had canes." He chuckled. "A group of cane musicians! Three canes!" It was all a good joke.

"What was your regular profession, other than music?"

"I had 25 years with Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and I've been a school teacher."

There was a silence, he made no other comment on that.

"Music is more fun to talk about? When did your musical career start?"

"I'd say about 1904. My father was a poor man. But he somehow managed to buy us an organ, one of those old foot-pumper styles. And my cousin, she started me playing on it. From then on, I tried all those other instruments. My father died in 1910, but when we moved, I managed to take that organ along—wasn't going to give that up!

"One instrument I used to play was the horn. An interesting thing, you know, the horn is usually just a slide instrument, but this one had three stops—a valve trombone, like.

"In my young days, we had a Swiss principal at school. He started a cadet corps which played in all the parades. I played too, though I didn't belong to the corps. Couldn't afford the uniform, but I borrowed one and marched in the parades. Played fife for the fife-and-drum corps.

"I got started playing the violin by using my brother's. He had died in 1901. I got so I could play hoe-down for the country dances."

"And now you're enjoying Shepherdstown and your music."

"Music and other things, too. I like to play bridge. You'd best ask Mrs. Link about that. She's a great bridge player."

Our interview ended on a somber note. When I asked, "What do you think of the state of our country?" he said, "I think we are bankrupt. And I don't know the solution. I can't help but think about Rome, and what happened there."

Regardless of the future, Mr. Unseld is living zestfully, enjoying his friends and his music, and still taking trips with his son's family in their palatial motor home.

Now, of course, it was important to talk to Mrs. Link, age 93. She was pleasant and welcoming, though confined to her home with a slight illness.

Proof of how much the town loved her came in the form of other visitors. Just while I was there three neighbors dropped in, to help her with her shopping, housekeeping, or to bring her home-baked treats. Like Mr. Unseld, she'd lived in various other places before coming back to Shepherdstown. With her pastor husband, she'd been 21 years in Mt. Pleasant, North Carolina, and at a pastorate in Strassburg, Virginia.

"So of course I sang in the choir in all those places, naturally the minister's wife has to do that. My husband gave me credit for helping his ministry always. He died eight years ago."

When I asked how she'd gotten started here, she went back a step farther than Mr. Unseld had.

"The Emeritus Club knew we'd both been singers, and a couple of years ago they managed to get hold of some music that was right for us. We performed, and the audience liked us so well the next thing we knew we were singing for the Alumni Banquet at college!

"Shepherd College is completely responsible for my musical training. I did lots of singing during my college days there, choir and otherwise. Back in 1905–07, Mr. Muldoon was head of the musical department, and leader of the band, too. He sponsored new groups of us students, and kept us at it."

"They tell me you have a high, clear soprano, extra high, and lyrical, not reedy like most older folks," I said. "How do you do it?"

She laughed. "It's just that I love singing, I guess."

"How do you account for your youthful approach at age 93?" I asked.

"My husband said everyone needs some action, some pleasure. To stir up the brain. He loved sports—tennis and games—bridge, and so on. With me, it was music. He'd garden, too, and supply at various churches here. And I kept singing."

Before leaving town, I took the waitress' advice, to "just look around you." A stroll along Main Street (German Street) showed it to be typically small town, in that there were shops on either side for about two blocks. But these were well-kept buildings, mostly dating back to the 1700's and 1800's. Just south of town, from a thickly-wooded high bluff, the land drops spectacularly down to the Potomac River, curving placidly along the eastern border of Shepherdstown.

Walking east of Main Street, through well-groomed college parkways, I saw handsome, clean-cut buildings, set in a circular pattern on vast green lawns. The students strolling about also maintained the "clean-cut" image, as I had been told.

My final judgement was that Shepherdstown really is special. Living proof of the quality of life there are Mrs. Link and Mr. Unseld, happily pursuing their careers at ages 93 and 91.

A Visit to Shepherdstown

German Street, with old Opera House at left.

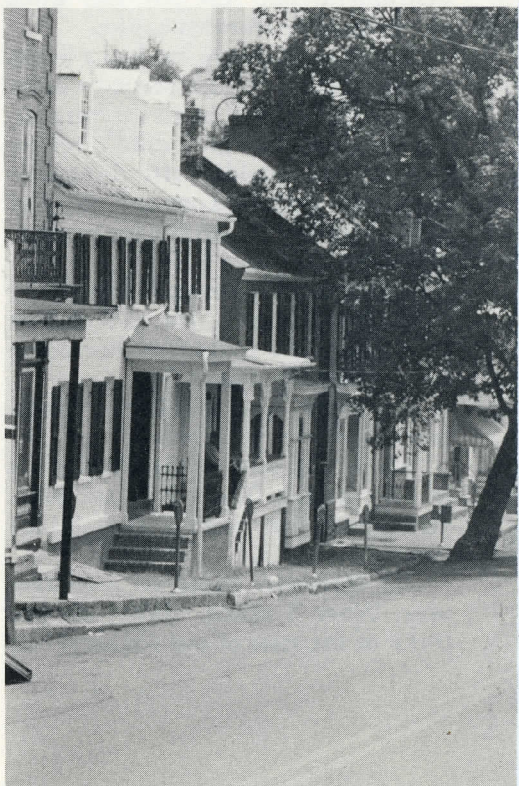
Travel West Virginia

Earlier this year, Governor Rockefeller announced the "Travel West Virginia" campaign, launching the program with his own statewide tour. The idea was to alert potential visitors to our state's attractions, while reminding West Virginians themselves.

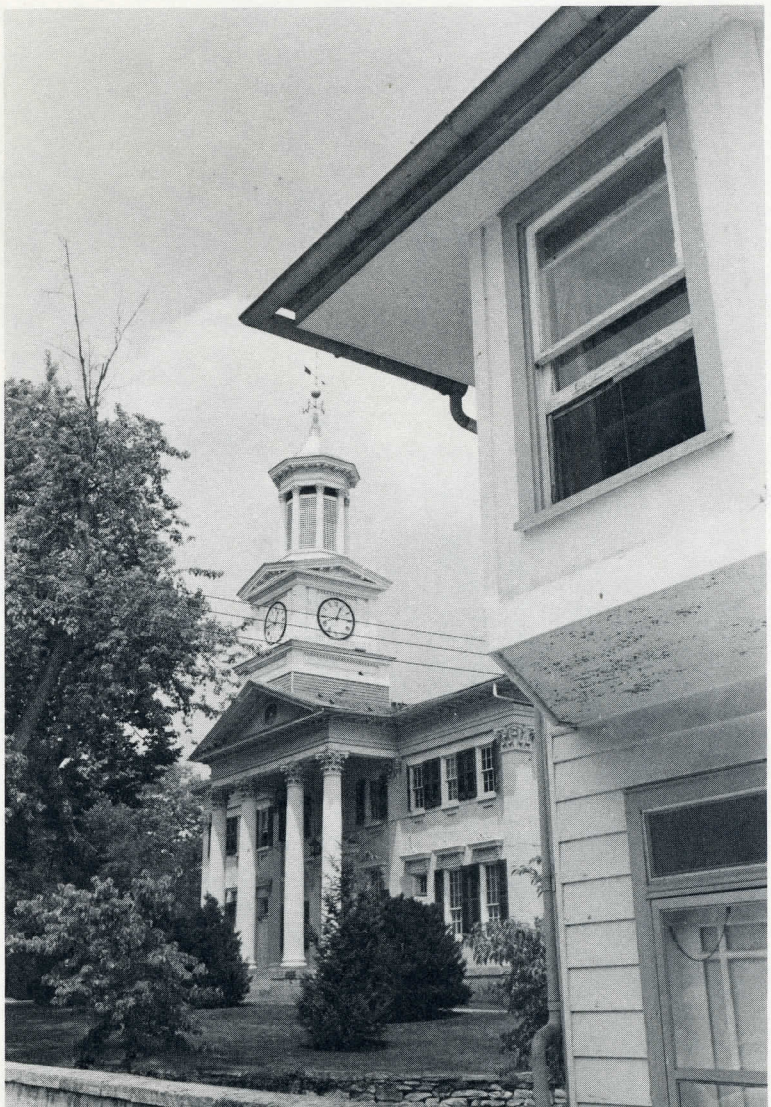
We at GOLDENSEAL traditionally have been less directly involved with West Virginia's natural beauty than have our colleagues at *Wonderful West Virginia* magazine. However, a part of our mission has been to promote historical and cultural sites, and—most of all—to encourage appreciation of West Virginia's finest natural resource, its people.

In this spirit we are offering this "Visit to Shepherdstown" article and photoessay. This is our second "Visit to" article in 1981, the first ("A Visit to Hardy County," also by Jeanette Brown) appearing in January-March. The response has been favorable, and we expect to publish such articles from time to time in the future.

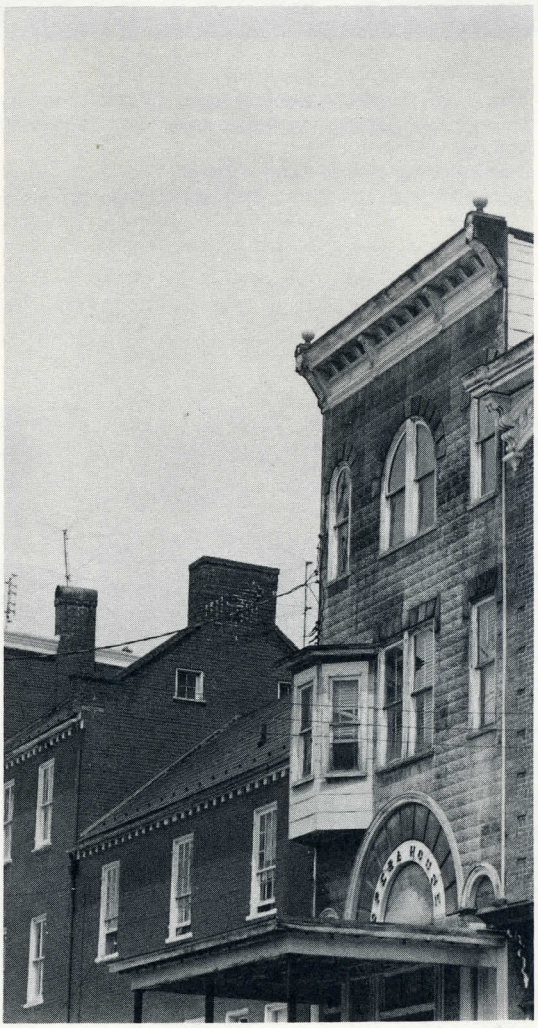
Meanwhile, enjoy a visit to West Virginia's easternmost city through the pages of GOLDENSEAL—and then in person, the first chance you get.



Above: View from the Yellow Brick Bank restaurant, in the old Jefferson Security Bank building. The historic Entler Hotel, at right, is now being restored.
Below: Another view of German Street.
Right: McMurran Hall, on the Shepherd College campus.



Right: Potomac River, with old bridge piers in foreground. Monument in rear is to James Rumsey, recognized in Shepherdstown as the real inventor of the steamboat.
Below: Historic mansions along German Street.
Bottom right: Close-up view of the Opera House and other buildings on German Street.



Goldenseal Index

Volume 7, 1981

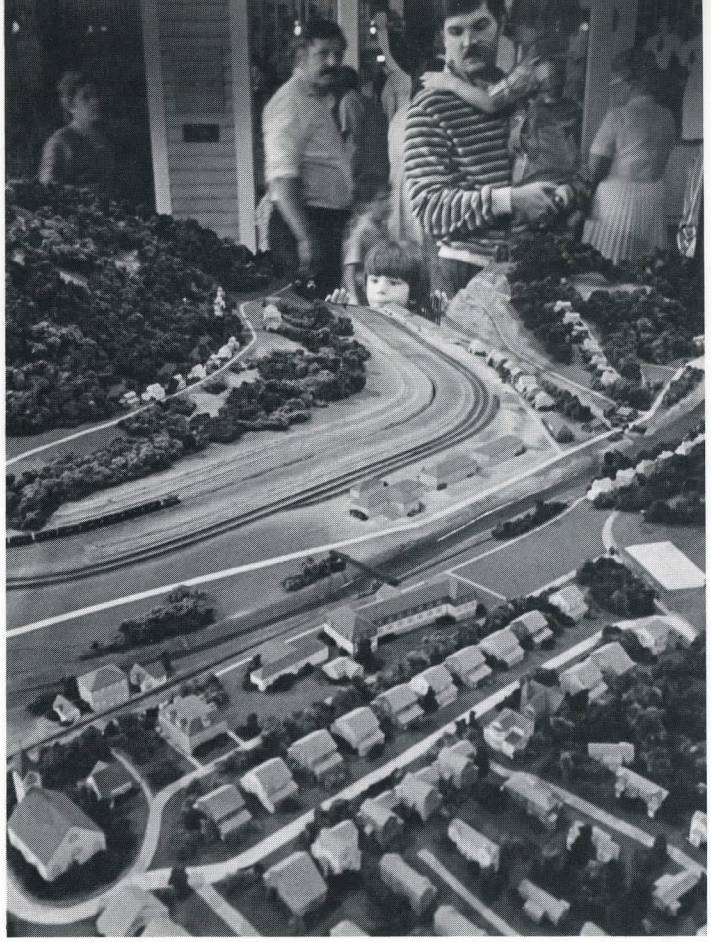
Articles which appeared in Volume 7 are listed in this index. The index for the first three volumes appeared in the April-September 1978 GOLDENSEAL, the index for Volumes 4 and 5 in the January-March 1980 issue, and the index for Volume 6 in the October-December 1980 magazine. In the subject index section each article is listed under its major subject area. When more than one article appears under a heading, the order is alphabetical by first word of title. Each entry is followed by the month and year, volume and number, and the page number. Page numbers shown throughout are the first pages of the articles. The short notices which appear in the regular department called "Current: Programs-Festivals-Publications" have not been indexed.

Subject

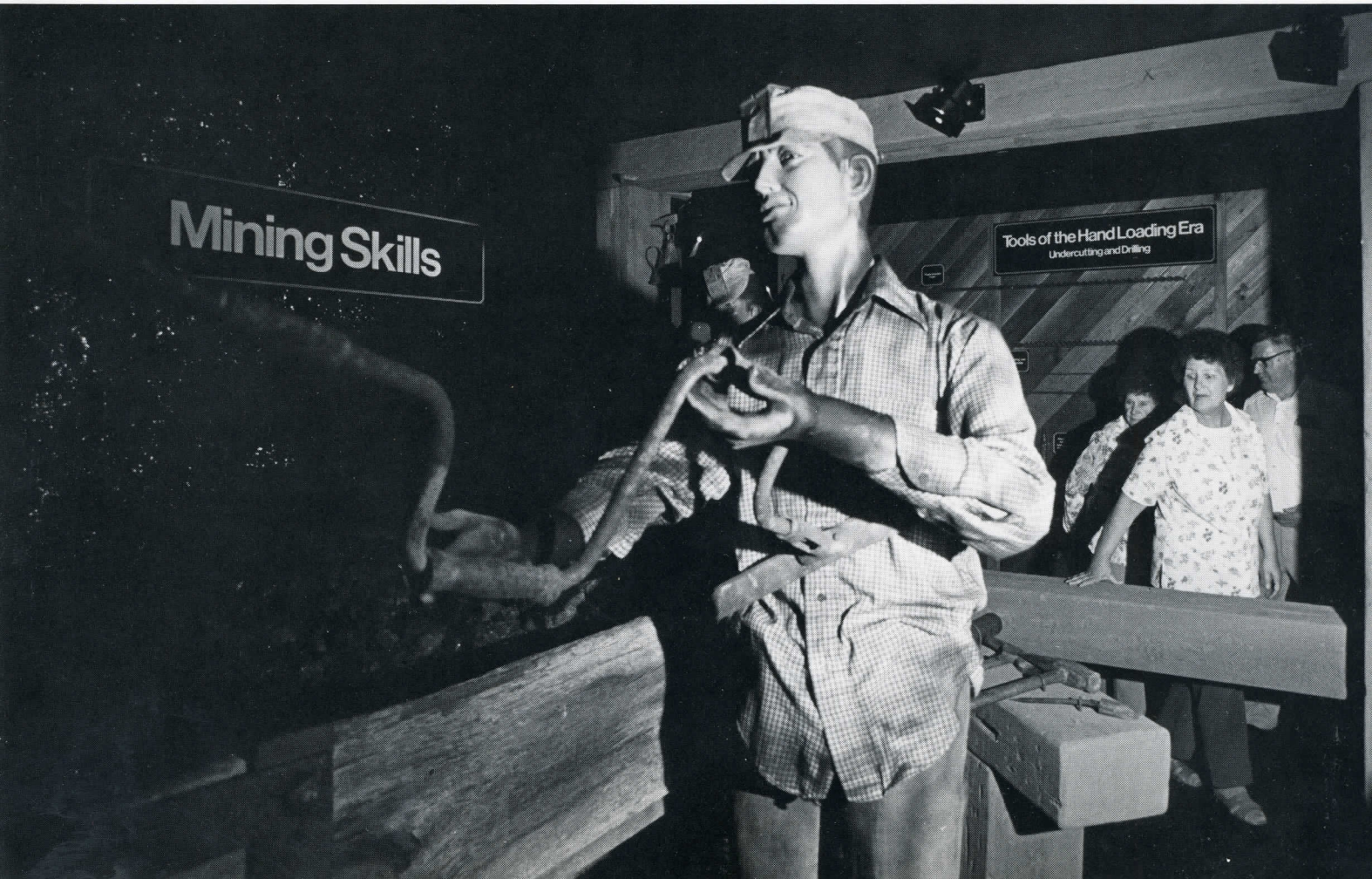
Author

Photographer

Location



Left: After leaving the mine, visitors study early coal operators. Photo by Mike Keller
Right: Exact scale model of the town of Gary, McDowell County, is the centerpiece of the company towns section. Photo by Rick Lee.
Below: Mannequin augers coal in display of mining skills from the hand-loading era. Photo by Rick Lee.



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In This Issue

JEANETTE BROWN is currently living in suburban Washington, D.C., but makes frequent trips to West Virginia. She has taught school, directed dramatic productions, and worked as a Vista volunteer with Indo-Chinese refugees. Since she began freelancing, her writing has appeared in various publications, including the Denver Post's *Empire* magazine, and *Catholic Fireside* in England. Her first article for GOLDENSEAL, concerning the naming of Needmore in Hardy County, appeared in the January-March 1981 magazine.

EDWARD J. CABBELL is a native of Eureka Hollow in McDowell County. He is founder-director of the Princeton-based John Henry Memorial Foundation which sponsors the annual John Henry Folk Festival, *Black Diamonds* magazine, and John Henry Records. Currently he is studying the black Appalachian experience at Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina, where he is enrolled in the M.A. program. His most recent work for GOLDENSEAL was "A Tribute to Uncle Homer Walker" in the July-September 1980 issue.

DOUG CHADWICK was born in North Carolina and grew up in Maryland. He attended Reed College in Portland, Oregon, Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and a school for filmmaking and video in Rome. Chadwick moved to West Virginia in 1970 and has worked as photographer for the *Fayette Tribune* and the *Raleigh Register. True Facts . . . in a Country Song*, a film by Chadwick and Susan Burt, premiered at the Cultural Center in December 1980. He has contributed periodically to GOLDENSEAL.

MARK CRABTREE was born in Wellsburg, Brooke County, and received a B.S. in journalism from West Virginia University. He has worked as a photographer for the Morgantown *Dominion-Post* and the Beckley *Post-Herald*, and served on the staff of the Maine Photographic Workshop in the summer of 1979. He also served as project coordinator for the West Virginia Coal Life Project's photography exhibition, and contributed the article on Red Ribble, as well as prints of Ribble's photos, to the January-March 1981 GOLDENSEAL.

YVONNE SYNDER FARLEY is a native of St. Marys, Pleasants County. She graduated from Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and worked for several years as a staff member for Antioch's Appalachian Center in Beckley. She now lives in Beckley, with her husband Sam, a coal miner, and son Luke. Yvonne worked most recently as a religion reporter for the Beckley *Post-Herald*, and now does general freelance writing. Raleigh County cook Barbara Meadows was the subject of Yvonne's most recent GOLDENSEAL article (Fall 1981).

STEVE FESENMAIER, a native Minnesotan, received his B.A. magna cum laude and his M.A. from the University of Minnesota. Since 1971 he has worked in all areas of filmmaking and film promotion, and was recently elected to the national Film Library Information Council. He has been the head of the Film Services Division of the West Virginia Library Commission since 1978. He is an amateur brewer, and recently married the granddaughter of a Charleston saloonkeeper.

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. Michael served as assistant to the editor of GOLDENSEAL in 1978, and now lives and works in Randolph County. His most recent contribution to GOLDENSEAL was the interview with Arnold Miller in the April-June 1981 issue.

MARK ROWH of Bluefield is a Putnam County native and a graduate of West Virginia State College and Marshall University. He is a member of the administrative staff of Bluefield State College, where he also teaches English. His stories, poems, and articles have appeared in a number of publications. His first work for GOLDENSEAL was the article on the history of the Hawk's Nest Tunnel, published in the October-December 1980 issue.

JAMES SAMSELL is a Morgantown native, a graduate of West Virginia University, and an Air Force veteran. He was formerly chief photographer for Beckley Newspapers, Inc., and also worked as a reporter for the Beckley *Post-Herald*. Currently working as a commercial photographer in Beckley, he is married and has a daughter. Samsell's photos of Mabel Gwinn and Barbara Meadows appeared in the Fall 1981 GOLDENSEAL.

JOAN SAVERENO is a native of Fairmont. She received a B.A. from West Virginia University and her M.A. from The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. On leave from her position in the education department at the Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, she is studying Italian cutwork with her great-grandmother under a Folks Arts Apprenticeship Fellowship Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. This is her first appearance in GOLDENSEAL.

LUCY TAYLOR is a native of Richmond, Virginia, and a graduate of the University of Richmond. She has worked as a feature reporter for the *Grant County Press* in Petersburg, and currently lives in Richmond where she freelances for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch, Richmond Lifestyle*, and *Chesterfield News-Journal*. Her work has also appeared in a number of other publications. This is her first article for GOLDENSEAL.

DOUG YARROW has lived in West Virginia since 1969, and has taught photography at Big Creek High School in McDowell County since 1978. His work has appeared in many publications, including a *Newsweek* cover in 1978. His last work for GOLDENSEAL appeared in the January-March 1981 issue, to which he contributed the photos of Lena Kiser, to accompany the interview "To Marry a Soldier."