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Most folks today don’t remember Wetsel Seed Company’s beginnings in the Valley. Even if you do, you’ll enjoy reading the story of D.M. Wetsel, who came to the area 100 years ago and founded a business that has included three generations of sons, and has set milestones in agricultural technology.

It’s people like Wetsel who have added ingredients to the Valley that can never be taken away. And it’s the people of today who are working to keep yesterday’s heritage alive by preserving history with a personal touch.

You won’t have to imagine turn-of-the-century Valley life after reading “Come in and sit a spell.” Zadee Showalter, a Harrisonburg resident, shares her memories of Valley life with us through anecdotes and accounts of the early 1900s. The late C. Grattan Price, whose life spanned more than nine-and-one-half decades and whose stories span even more, recalled in an interview shortly before his death, Harrisonburg’s change from a horse-and-buggy town to the city it is today.

But history doesn’t stop here. Two long-time Valley residents rise early to give people a “birds-eye” view of the day’s weather conditions. Meet Clayton Towers and Wilmer Shank, who have spent most of their lives observing weather and reporting to area weather and radio stations.

The Shanks and the Ways, two young Valley couples, are attempting to keep pieces of area history alive by renovating old buildings into their homes. And Timothy Gaglio, a New Yorker turned Valley restaurant owner, has converted an old Staunton mill into one of the finest restaurants in the area—while still retaining its historical significance.

Joe Boyd keeps the heritage of early craftsmanship alive in his modern-day brass bed factory. So do Jerry Rainey and Priscilla Blosser-Rainey, who raise sheep and maintain an old-fashioned wool processing operation on their Timberville farm.

The C&E Diner has yet to become a historic landmark, but the college students and truckers who’ve tasted the steak and eggs, agree that for a good, quick meal in the middle of the night, there’s nowhere better. Charlie and Eunice Shifflett own and run C&E, and explain what it’s like to get up when most everyone else is going to bed.

The Valley has preserved a little bit of nostalgia in a changing world. We hope the Summer 1981 issue of Curio has continued to highlight the people and places that are making history in the Shenandoah Valley.

—editor

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About the cover:

D. M. Wetsel displays grass and corn samples in this photo taken about 1909.

PHOTO STAFF

JEFF SPAULDING is a JMU junior from Pound Ridge, N.Y. He is majoring in communication arts, concentrating in Radio/TV and Film, and in English. He plans a career in photojournalism.

ED CAMPION is a JMU senior communication arts major from Annandale, Va. He plans a career in visual communication.

JOE SCHNECKENBURGER is a JMU senior communication arts major from Baltimore, Md. He plans a career in photojournalism.

NANCY DETTINGER, from Fredericksburg, Va., is a JMU junior. Majoring in communication arts, she has a Radio/TV concentration and is planning a career in TV journalism.

ADS STAFF

DOUGLAS A. STEARMAN is a JMU senior majoring in communication arts, with concentrations in journalism and speech communication. He plans a career in sales or public relations.

JAMES SAUNDERS is a JMU senior from Madison Heights, Va. He is majoring in economics and planning a career in business.

DIANE COUSINS, a JMU senior from Richmond, Va., is double-majoring in English and communication arts. She plans a career in business communication.
'Come in and sit a spell'

Valley folks remember the good old days

Article by Kathy McLoughlin
Photography by Jeff Spaulding

EDITOR'S NOTE: The interview with Mr. C. Grattan Price was conducted shortly before his death.

The turn of the century. Harrisonburg’s Main Street was merely a long dirt road. The elementary school or “chicken coops” was situated downtown, and Dr. Neff made housecalls to area residents. Court Day was the third Monday of the month and the Rockingham National Bank was officially open for business.

The Valley has changed since those horse and buggy days, but there are still many residents here who have witnessed the adding of the ingredients that give the Valley its special warmth and flavor. Their happy memories reflect the simplicity of the Valley in the early 1900s.

Dr. Raymond Dingledine’s family moved to the area in 1900, and lived on the land presently occupied by James Madison University’s Anthony-Seeger Campus School. “I remember a lot of open spaces on South Main...lots of fields we used to play in,” says Dingledine, history department head at JMU.

Born in Port Republic, Zadee Showalter remembers getting up at 4:00 a.m. to ride into Harrisonburg on horse and buggy to shop. “We always went to Whitesell’s Livery Stable,” the 78-year-old Showalter recalls. “I remember going into town to buy my outfit for Radford College in 1918. I bought high-top shoes, a brown coat and a black felt hat. Joseph Ney’s brother came out to wish me good luck.”

Valley life was simpler at the beginning of the century. “Thursday was visitin’ day,” says Showalter’s sister Selda Foltz, and Showalter remembers the familiar greeting of “Come in and sit a spell.” Foltz adds that “there were always neighbors to help take care of the sick.” Showalter says that when the neighbors couldn’t help, the town doctor could. “He’d come to see the sick and usually
spend the night." Now, both agree that some people don’t even know their neighbors.

C. Grattan Price well remembered the turn of the century. Chairman of the board of Rockingham National Bank until his death in March, Price said, “People were happier then. Now I think we’re moving too fast.”

This fast pace has changed many aspects of the Valley; however, agriculture is still predominant. Both Price and Showalter grew up on farms, and Showalter’s husband, Grant, was a farmer until his retirement. We grew everything, Zadee says, and Grant adds that because of the area’s agricultural base, there was enough food during the Great Depression.

While Showalter’s family grew most all of their food, she remembers coming into town to buy cucumbers and oranges. But these were the days before large grocery stores, when merchants greeted their customers at the door with “Howdy, ladies, and what can I do for you today?” Each store was its own specialty shop, and Showalter says there was always a big cracker barrel in the store.

The area colleges and university have brought education and culture to the area. Prior to Wilson Auditorium’s opening at JMU, which brought many plays to the area, residents enjoyed movies at the Virginia Theatre downtown and dancing at the Newman Building. Price reminisced about taking a date dancing and then calling on the livery stable for a ride. “For $2.00, they would take you and your date home,” he said chuckling. The first movie in Harrisonburg, according to Price, was “a silent movie shown at Assembly Hall downtown.”

Dingledine also remembers hearing about the premiere of “Birth of a Nation,” in 1916. “It was a motion picture spectacular,” he adds.

Showalter’s memories of entertainment include taffy pulls and taking long walks. “At school we had spelling bees and made mud pies,” she says smiling. She recalls days of memorizing for recitations and spelling bees in the one-room school house in Port Republic. On rainy days, “Children of school age would see who could write the longest sentence of two-, three- or four-letter words,” she says. “My longest of two-letter words that I remember was ‘As it is, if it is to be, it is up to me to do it.’

At night, her family would walk down the road a mile and listen to “Amos ’n’ Andy” on a neighbor’s radio. WSVA was the first radio station in the area, broadcasting in 1935.

Besides movies and games, the annual Rockingham County Fair was a big summer event. It was held on the grounds adjacent to the present Harrisonburg High School and was the gathering place of merchants, farmers and townspeople, says Harrisonburg City Planner Robert Sullivan. He adds that annual turkey festivals were also popular. Price said he drove turkeys to town on foot from his farm.

Before the 1950s, Harrisonburg was less than a gourmet lover’s delight. “There was definitely a lack of nice places to eat,” says Dingledine. Friddle’s Restaurant, located downtown, was the place to go for a good meal. “It was a nice, family-style restaurant.” The Palm Room of the Kavanaugh Hotel was also a good restaurant, according to Dingledine. He believes that because of the large college population, fast-food restaurants have now become popular in the area.

The population has changed somewhat since the turn of the century. Because of the increase in industry and the addition of educational institutions, the Valley can now boast the addition of many educators and business people.

Also included in the changing population are the doctors and nurses who came to the area with the 1912 opening of Rockingham Memorial Hospital. At that time, there were only 18 beds and nurses worked 12 hours.

Zadee Showalter, holding an ABC board, stands next to an old school desk from the Mt. Clinton School. On top of the desk is a Palmer Method Series writing tablet, a school bell, one of Grant Showalter’s grade school report cards and an old blackboard eraser.
hours a day for $5.00. Showalter was the 27th graduate of the nursing school there.

She says that during hot summer days, George Rontopoulos, the late owner of George's restaurant and sandwich shop on West Market Street, would bring ice cream to the nurses in training. Rontopoulos owned an ice cream shop then, and would make special trips out to the hospital.

The first Harrisonburg High School was located in what is now the Municipal Building, but because of anticipated city traffic, says Sullivan, it was moved to its present location on High Street. Dingleline adds, "I watched them put the cornerstone in the new high school. He remembers attending elementary school in what were called "chicken coops." Chicken coops, says Dingleline, were the classrooms for elementary school children located diagonally across the street from the main school in town.

Selda Foltz attended the State Normal School for Women (now James Madison University) from 1912-14. She tells the story of a Maryland Eastern Shore girl who couldn't afford to pay the school's tuition because her father was a poor potato farmer. Julian Burruss, then president of the school, allowed the girl to attend and pay her tuition in potatoes. Foltz remembers there being only a few buildings on campus, and most of the girls paid their way through school by working in the dining hall.

Transportation has also progressed since 1900. Although trains were the principal means of travel, Price recalled first seeing an airplane in the early 1900s. Pilot Dan Hartman gave residents rides in his airplane, and in 1938 he opened his own airport.

"The first car I can remember was owned by Dr. E.D. Davis," said Price. "Since everyone else was still riding horses, Dr. Davis had to stop and lead the horses around the car." Showalter saw her first car in 1914. Harrisonburg began paving roads in 1916 and the first gas station, said Price, had round hand pumps and was located near the old freight depot on North Main.

Showalter remembers a Mr. Robinson, who used to deliver gas and oil to gas stations, first by horse and buggy, and later in a delivery truck. "One time he ran out of gas and had to draw enough from the tank to get him to Harrisonburg," she says.

It was less than 50 years ago that downtown Harrisonburg was the focus of city life. Court Day was the third Monday of the month and farmers and townspeople gathered in Court Square. Showalter says it was exciting to watch the horses leave at the end of the day. Joseph Ney's and B. Ney's were the main shopping stores, as well as B. Bloom's. And the offices of Drs. Bidler, Neff and Turner were located on Court Square.
Showalter remembers that in 1913, Dr. Turner examined her eyes, "and gave me my first pair of glasses." She wore a pair of Ben Franklin wire-framed glasses. That same day she also made a visit to the city dentist, Dr. Switzer.

Price said that Dr. Neff lived where the old Leggett's building is. "He had a horse and carriage and called on families for births."

Hugh Morrison, Sr. had the first photography studio downtown and many residents got their first photograph taken by him.

Many of the items bought in local grocery stores today were delivered to the home at the beginning of the century. The iceman delivered 100 pounds of ice for $.35 and the milkman came by with milk for a nickel a quart. Grant Showalter says the ice came in "big blocks 18-20 inches long." Zadee adds that she just sold a glass quart milk bottle for $65.

She also remembers ice houses. "Sawdust was the insulating material," she says. Men would go to a river and cut the ice in blocks, haul it to the ice house, pile the ice putting layers of sawdust in between, and fill the house, layer by layer. "In the summer it was fun to get a hunk of ice..."
for drink or to make ice cream,” she says.

Religion has always been an important facet of life in the Valley. Showalter remembers going to church every Sunday as a child and attending Wednesday night prayer meetings. Selda Foltz adds that there was always an interesting boy you’d want to see when you went to the meeting. Showalter also remembers daily family worship. This occurred usually before breakfast because “all members got up in time for breakfast,” she says.

There were also Sunday school picnics each summer. “We went on hay wagons drawn by four horses,” Showalter recalls. The food was carried in bushel baskets, clothes baskets or wooden tubs. “I think the church is still the center of community activity,” Price said.

While the Showalters aren’t sure whether they like all the innovations that have come along since the turn of the century, they agree that life is much easier now. “Two things that mean the most to me,” says Zadee, “are refrigeration and electricity.”

Dingledine says that it’s “hard to stay the same: I’ve personally adjusted to change and changed along with it.”

Price said “things are quite different now” but “that’s good.”

Gone are the “chicken coops” and Court Day. But the stories and legends carry on. The past is a part of Valley heritage that can never be taken away. Many of us didn’t experience early Valley life, but we can experience the memories of those who share them with us. Throughout the years, strong tradition has continued, and as Price said, “Valley spirit and warmth are still here.”

KATHY McLOUGHLIN, a JMU senior from Annandale, Va., is majoring in communication arts and minoring in business administration and French. She plans a career in public relations or magazine work.
It's early to rise for two of the Valley's better-known weather observers

Article by
Brian Daley

Photography by Jeff Spaulding and Ed Campion
“In Harrisonburg, it’s 42 degrees and crystal clear. We got a rock solid barometer readin’ of 30.14.” The voice on the radio cheerfully reports the morning weather conditions. “Clayton just called in from Bridgewater and he’s a little colder, his thermometer’s at 41 degrees, but his barometer’s like a rock, too, at 30.15. He says he can see a couple of light clouds out over the mountains to the west, but the sun’s just as bright there as here.”

The voice continues, “Wilmer’s out on Apple Tree Lane towards Mt. Clinton, and he’s got a real fine day, too. His thermometer’s at 42 degrees and his barometer’s at 30.12. Wilmer had a high yesterday of 51 degrees and a low of 26 degrees last night.” The Morning Report goes on to sports; the subject then turns to a roll of insulation that fell off somebody’s truck.

Clayton Towers and Wilmer Shank are old friends to listeners of WSVA’s early morning talk show. They’ve been observing the weather and calling in their reports to WSVA and WKCY radio stations for about 20 years. It’s a hobby for them, and this hobby provides a valuable service to Valley residents.

Clayton Tower’s devotion to his hobby, however, makes weather observing seem like more than just a pastime.

A tall, neat man with thinning gray hair and a warm smile, Clayton has observed the weather ever since his youth. Growing up on Maryland’s Eastern Shore near Easton, he says, “I used to watch the weather while working on our farm. While going around the field on a riding plow, I used to watch all the clouds in the sky.”

Following an 18-month tour in the army which took him to the Far East, Clayton came to the Valley and enrolled in Bridgewater College. During his sophomore year, Clayton got a close-up look at the 1949 Valley flood, still one of the worst natural disasters in area history.

He remembers watching from the roof of his dormitory as water swept down Main Street in Bridgewater, pushing cars up against trees, and moving homes off their foundations. “That was really something,” Clayton exclaims, as if seeing it all in front of him again, “I guess three people were killed during that flood.”

For the past 30 years, Clayton has taught at various schools in
Rockingham County. His activity as a weather observer extends back almost that far. He has recorded temperatures for 22 years and moisture for 17 years. Clayton is unsure of exactly how or when he got involved with calling in the weather to radio stations, but figures he’s been getting up before 7 a.m. every morning but Sunday for about 15 years to phone in information.

He consults two primary sources for each day’s weather report. The first is the weather station box located in his back yard. The dirty white wooden cabinet stands about four-and-a-half feet above the ground, and houses several thermometers, including two high-low thermometers that register the daily maximum and minimum temperatures. Also protected is a barometer.

A precise precipitation reading is measured by consulting Clayton’s government standard rain gauge. This cylindrical unit is about 36 inches high. Rain water and melted snow collect in the conical top of the tube, and are stored for measurement in a thin tube inside the black cannister.

Less exact is the instrument Clayton uses to measure snowfall. It is a simple dowel rod in a base, but according to Clayton, “Snow blows and piles up in drifts and is difficult to measure. You’ll probably get an average measurement with any report you hear.”

The second equipment set Clayton checks for his reports is much more advanced. It is a digital weather computer, put together from a kit, which uses electronic sensors to gather information. “A friend helped me put it together,” Clayton says. “We’re actually kind of surprised that it works at all, but it does a real good job.”

With just the touch of a button, Clayton can get temperature and barometer readings, determine if the barometer is rising or falling, at what rate change is occurring, and what the wind chill factor is... all from the warmth and comfort of his hobby room.

Wilmer Shank would rather walk outside than consult a computer to determine the temperature. The 81-year-old West Rockingham resident gets up every morning to check his thermometers and gauges. He seems perfectly satisfied with his old-fashioned, non-computerized setup. He recently purchased a new thermometer complete with metric readings but never uses the centigrade side. “I’m no Russian,” he says, “so I don’t need it! If you’re a Russian, maybe you can read it, but I’ve got no use for it.”

Wilmer’s interest in weather, like
Clayton's, can be traced to his boyhood. It was sparked by his grandfather, who was also a keen observer of Valley weather, having documented daily weather conditions in 11 volumes reaching as far back as 1860.

Wilmer says he read his grandfather's diary and has been hooked for life.

During his early years, Wilmer kept busy working on his father's fruit farm on the south side of Mole Hill. He guesses that he completed the fourth grade, but had to leave school to help out on the farm.

Later, Wilmer became a dairy farmer, and in 1924, started keeping a weather diary as his grandfather had done.

After living in Dayton for a while, from 1950 to 1954, Wilmer moved out to the country again, this time to Stultz's Mill, near Mt. Clinton. It was from here that he began calling in weather reports at the request of his good friend Wip Robinson, the former WSVA morning talk show co-host.

In 1973, however, Wilmer moved to his present home on Apple Tree Drive, a couple of miles south of the mill.

But if Apple Tree Drive is his address, why does Wilmer call from Apple Tree Lane? "I had started calling it Apple Tree Lane back in '73," Wilmer chuckles, his gray-green eyes bright and twinkling, "but the state came along and told me it was Apple Tree Drive. So I just decided to call my driveway there Apple Tree Lane. Well, the state went along with that, and even had signs printed saying Apple Tree Lane."

His ruddy cheeks glow and his tiny 5-foot frame seems taller as he proudly says, "I'm probably one of the only folks in the state to have my driveway officially recognized."

Recognition is something that both Clayton and Wilmer have become accustomed to, although both deny any celebrity status. Being known, however, does have its advantages.
Clayton relates the story of the time his wife, Jacqueline, was cashing a check, but didn't need to produce any identification or a social security number, simply because the check had his name on it.

"That was all the guarantee the teller needed," Clayton smiles. I guess she trusted my weather reporting, so she trusted my wife, too." Wilmer also admits that he is well-known. In fact, that's what he likes best about his hobby.

"People hear my name and call me," Wilmer says. "I've made many friends that way. I've got thousands of friends."

But Clayton and Wilmer hold differing views of weather itself. According to Clayton, weather is a phenomenon, which, if approached and studied scientifically, can be understood and explained. He says that although the study of weather is extremely complex, much can be learned through books, radio and TV.

"But constant observation," Clayton says, "is the best teacher."

Wilmer views weather as another part of nature, something to be accepted as a part of life. But he, too, points to observation and learning from past weather occurrences as the best predictor for the future. Wilmer even goes so far as to agree that old sayings such as, "Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning! Red sky at night, things are all right," usually prove true.

"Sure, if there's a ring around the moon and there's a star in the ring, it's gonna rain tomorrow," Wilmer asserts matter-of-factly. "If there's two stars, it'll rain in two days. If it snows, and the snow sticks to the leaves, it'll snow again in three days. You watch and see, these can be counted on."

Clayton and Wilmer are called many times each day for weather forecasts. "I don't like to give weather information for people going on trips," Clayton warns. "Weather is too tricky and I don't want to be held responsible if the forecast doesn't hold up."

As well as their daily 6:30 a.m. calls to the radio stations, Clayton and Wilmer provide other useful services. Each day, Clayton sends weather reports to the National Weather Service in Washington D.C. By means of a touch pad attached to his phone, he is linked directly to the NWS's computer. He lectures on weather to colleges and public schools. He also discusses his hobby with contractors, insurance companies and many others. An insurance company from Lynchburg once contacted Clayton for help in settling a claim.

Obviously, with such a demand for weather information, Clayton and Wilmer could make a handsome profit if they chose to sell their knowledge. But Wilmer looks honestly surprised when asked if he ever considered the possibility, and agrees with Clayton, saying, "...that would take all the fun out of it."

Clayton Towers and Wilmer Shank have both achieved a fair measure of notoriety as weather observers. For Clayton, it has allowed him to teach people about the study of weather, so that they can enjoy it as he does. For Wilmer, it means the opportunity to meet new people, make new friends. Neither cares as much about being famous as about providing a service to their neighbors. As for being radio stars, they'd probably both just as soon sit on a hill and watch the clouds roll by.

BRIAN C. A. DALEY, a JMU senior, is from Fairfax, Va. A communication arts major, he plans a career in sales or public relations.
Dale Enterprise, originally operated by Bishop L.J. Heatwole, and now by his son-in-law E.L. Grove, recently celebrated its 101st anniversary as the official weather station for the Rockingham County area. Heatwole became interested in weather when he was young, and was encouraged by his mother to study and observe it. He began operating his weather station for the Signal Corps, and in 1880, was asked by the National Weather Service to report his observations to them. As well as a weather observer, Heatwole was an ordained Mennonite bishop.

Heatwole was succeeded as operator of Dale Enterprise by his daughter. E.L. Grove got involved, he says, "...because I fell in love." He married Heatwole's daughter, and has been in charge of weather observing at Dale Enterprise since 1964. His activity recording weather patterns is voluntary, but he gets a small stipend from the NWS for allowing several computerized sensors to be placed on his home.

Recording weather data does not take a great deal of time, Grove says, but involves a responsibility to be there every day to take readings. Still, the compiling of all the data collected over 100 years is a mountainous task. It was done by Tommy Thompson, public information photographer at James Madison University, and self-described, "unofficial climatologist for Rockingham County." The following are some of the memorable events recorded at Dale Enterprise and compiled by Thompson.

- **Hottest Recorded Temperature**: 105 degrees (July 21 and 22, 1926)
- **Hottest Week**: July 19-26, 1926
- **Coldest Recorded Temperature**: -25 degrees (January 14, 1912)
- **Coldest Week**: January 13-20, 1893
- **Coldest Month**: Average temperature 20.5 degrees (January, 1977)
- **Most Rainfall, One Hour**: 2.15 inches (between 4:15 and 5:15 p.m., July 6, 1955)
- **Most Rainfall, Three Hours**: 4.50 inches (between 7 and 10 p.m., July 23, 1926. It is interesting to note that this rain broke the record heat spell noted above.)
- **Most Rainfall, One Day**: 4.70 inches (October 15, 1954)
- **Most Rainfall, One Month**: 14.27 inches (June, 1901)
- **Most Rainfall, One Year**: 68.31 inches (1886)
- **Earliest Snowfall**: October 10, 1979
- **Most Snowfall, One Day**: 24 inches (December 20, 1880, and March 6, 1962)
- **Most Snowfall, One Month**: 42.5 inches (February, 1899)
- **Most Snowfall, One Year**: 64 inches (1962)
- **Latest Snowfall**: April 30, 1925
Valley truckers agree, 'It gets in your blood'

Article by Jerry E. Shank
Photography by Nancy Dettinger

At midnight, Frank Mitchell pulls out from the Shen-Dutch plant. With a load of 650 cases of eggs, he will make a total of 10 stops in Lynchburg, Danville and Roanoke. He won't get home until eight the next evening.

Mitchell, of Broadway, is a driver for Shen-Dutch Foods of Harrisonburg. Solidly built and quiet spoken, Mitchell became a regular driver about two years ago after quitting his job as an oil burner serviceman.

The lure of the road and the handling of a large truck is attractive to many people. The most common response from truckers when asked why they drive for a living is, "It gets in your blood!"

Yet, according to several drivers in the Shenandoah Valley, there are good points and headaches in their profession, just as in all other jobs. The benefits and frustrations can depend on the personality and needs of a driver. Another factor is whether the driver is an owner-operator leasing his truck, an independent, or a salaried company employee.

Millard Turner, also from Broadway, is an independent trucker who has been hauling livestock for 13 years. Turner says, "It has taken all my 13 years to know the regulations and restrictions on trucking and I'm still learning." He says that every trucker who runs out of state has to keep a log on his time and mileage. "By law, you are allowed 10 (con-
Millard Turner pulls a "possum belly," a livestock trailer.
mistake on the road. He claims that some car drivers report a trucker for something as simple as having an interior cab light on while driving and "blow it all out of proportion." He also cites an experience in one town where a woman "cussed him out" for blocking a street while backing up to a loading dock.

He concedes, however, that most four-wheelers are helpful and courteous. Turner adds, "Four-wheelers can make you mad, but you have to stay cool on the road; it is no place to take out your feelings on other people."

Disruption of family life is another problem truckers face. "One week on the road is not so bad," says J.G. Shank, "but when you're gone for two weeks or more, you really miss home."

Turner's wife, Elva Lois, indicates that it's not so bad with her husband gone since the children are grown. However, Turner admits that Elva Lois had to practically raise their four girls by herself.

"It's a different way of living, no boss, you're by yourself."

Buying a truck today is just about as hard as buying a new house

Other challenges truckers confront are winter driving conditions, inadequate sleep and the monotony of the same route.

Concerning winter driving, J.G. Shank says, "If it's bad here, it's always worse other places. If you get caught in a blizzard, you just sit it out at a truckstop and watch TV or catch a nap in the sleeper."

"The other day it was in the teens on the Gulf Coast in Louisiana," Nelson Shank says, "and 41 degrees in Bangor, Maine." He claims he has had to wait as long as 24 hours for roads to be opened up.

Frost seams in the roads (bumps due to the expansion from freezing weather) are prevalent in the northern states. J.G. Shank hit one in Maine, and says that due to an injury resulting from it, "I laid in the sleeper for a couple days afterwards."
With the tension on the road and long hours away from the comforts of home, a driver's life might not seem so great. However, many improvements have been made in the truck itself to make the driver more comfortable.

Air-ride seats, air-ride cabs, comfortable sleeper cabs, air-conditioning and tape decks are a few of the improvements over the last decade. Additionally, better and more convenient truckstops have been built.

Anyone who is unacquainted with today's big trucks will find the cab an impressive sight. The novice will probably find his first climb inside a bit awkward. Once inside, however, the air-ride seats are exceptionally comfortable, and an attractive wood-grain panel of gauges faces the driver. Between the driver's seat and passenger's seat is a row of switches including an air-brake lock for the tractor and a separate one for the trailer.

A huge ivory-colored steering wheel and power-steering make handling the rig much easier than the older trucks, according to Mitchell.

Upon returning to the Shen-Dutch garage, Mitchell grasps the red-handled gear shifter and moves through the 10 gears easily. It is 8 p.m. and another long drive is behind him as he parks the trailer and flips the air-brake switch. He pulls out a crank handle and winds down the support legs of the trailer. Then, he pulls a lever on the tractor to disengage it from the trailer and unhooks the air lines. His last little chore is hooking the electric heater on the "KW" engine, an essential for diesels in cold weather.

Riding for 20 hours and unloading all those eggs makes for a long, weary day. While eating dinner, the sound of diesels can be heard on the interstate. It will continue all night, tomorrow and beyond, for the trucks and their drivers are the connection between wholesale and retail. They are the lifeline between big business and small business.

"Trucking is considered to be the last frontier," remarks Turner. "Truckers are today’s cowboys."

JERRY E. SHANK, a JMU senior from Broadway, Va., is majoring in communication arts. He has a degree in biology and plans a career in agribusiness or magazine work.
A replica of an old Chesapeake and Ohio steam engine approaches one of the water towers at Logan's Staunton station.

The Train Man

A Staunton resident takes memories of old Valley railroad lines and brings them back to life

Article by Louis Eacho

Photography by Jeff Spaulding
The headlight of the steam engine flickers on. The engineer slowly guides the train on its journey. Rounding the bend, the train passes farm houses and cows grazing near the tracks.

The engine gathers speed on a straight section of track, moves across a couple of bridges and begins its passage up the mountain to Clifton Forge and White Sulphur Springs.

Navigating the locomotive and railroad cars through a steep mountain tunnel and by some small West Virginia towns, this engineer must have conducted the run 10,000 times before, but it wouldn't be obvious from looking at the gleam in his eyes or the childlike grin on his face.

Approaching the Staunton station, he slows the train down and prepares to put on the brakes. Both the steam engine and a couple of passenger cars overshoot the station. Slightly embarrassed, he drives the railroad cars in reverse and then laughs at himself.

Logan, who has taken and studied photos of area railroad stations, has gone through great pains to duplicate the actual train run. He believes his rail system is authentic because he has ridden the actual Valley lines many times during his lifetime.

The centerpoint of Logan’s system is a replica of the old Staunton station, a Christmas gift a few years back from his wife, Eleanor. Designed by Staunton artist and family friend Onnie Bailey, the model has arched windows, rounded stairwells and even an air conditioning unit hanging from a side window.

This model is “really amazing,” Logan says with obvious pride. The old gray passenger station is one of the “nicest parts of my collection” and adds to the authenticity of the train set.

In the middle of the entire system is a control panel with the transformers that Logan uses to operate his trains. He uses 15 switches to conduct the main lines, with extras used to pull cars off a side yard. “I’m no electrician, so I keep the wiring pretty basic,” he muses.

Sitting at Logan’s “Staunton station” beside a water tower is an old black Chesapeake and Ohio steam engine “getting a drink.” He adds that now only the cement foundations to these old water towers are still standing at the real station, since diesel engines don’t require water.

Behind the steam engine are the George Washington passenger train cars, which Logan points out were put into service in 1932.

The best thing about Logan’s system, he explains while still standing in front of the control panel, is that “I can keep adding on. Several weeks may pass at a time before I can get down here, though, to work,” he says, looking over at a nearby table filled with paint brushes, jars of paint and railroad parts.

Besides the train set, the basement is full of other railroad memorabilia. Original signs from the abandoned Fishersville and Staunton stations hang from the wall, along with Logan explains the best thing about his railroad model is that “I can keep adding on.”
railroad calendars picked up throughout the last 20 to 25 years. An old ticket-taker box is on one wall next to a cabinet filled with time tables and travel guides from his many railroad trips. Train magazines are neatly piled upon one set of shelves with a couple of old train lanterns on top.

Logan’s devotion to the railroads has always been a big part of his life. At 62, he still keeps alive a hobby that began in his early childhood years.

Unlike many other children who got their first taste of the railroad by playing with a traditional train set, Logan says he had more of a “real life experience.”

Growing up in Harrisonburg, Logan lived on South High Street. The Chesapeake and Western, and the Baltimore and Ohio lines were “practically in my back yard,” he says, while the Southern line was on the north side of town.

The crew of the C&W was always friendly, and allowed kids to ride along while they shifted freight cars, Logan says. There were often minor derailments that could only be fixed by using extra help from other crews. When this happened, youngsters would come down from an area of South High Street known as “Foundry Hill” just to “watch the show,” he adds.

“Morning, noon or night we could always hear either passenger or freight trains coming in,” Logan recalls. The proximity to “the real thing caught my initial interest.” Since long distance travel by automobiles was difficult in the

The crew of the C&W was always friendly, and allowed kids to ride along while they shifted freight cars

Valley during the late 1920s, Logan explains he was fortunate enough to take numerous trips by train. In addition to trips to Staunton and Dayton, his family also traveled to eastern Virginia or Maryland. These rides used to “fascinate me,” he recalls.

Logan graduated from Harrisonburg High School. Three years later, he graduated from Bridgewater College. Logan says his interest in railroads became apparent while choosing which graduate school to attend. He narrowed his choices down to the University of North Carolina, Duke University and the University of Wisconsin. Other than the fact that Wisconsin had a fine history department, he wanted to take “long train rides on all kinds of Midwest routes,” so that’s where he went.

World War II interrupted Logan’s graduate study and at the end of the war, he returned to Wisconsin, married Eleanor and received his doctorate degree in history and economics. Quite appropriately he chose to do his dissertation on the “Development of the French Railroad During the 1850s.” He jokes, “I finally had the chance to combine business and pleasure.” Logan began teaching at the University of Akron, where he found more time to pursue his hobby. This was the first time he began putting small train models together.

Standing in the midst of his control panel for the model, Logan points to the detail put into his “Valley” railroad system.
A few years later Logan began teaching at the University of Pittsburgh, an area he likes to refer to as a “railroad fan's heaven.” He adds, “my office overlooked one of the B&O lines, so I could always watch freight trains struggling up the hill.”

While living in this area, Logan and Eleanor began making frequent trips to New York by train. “Even though we got our first car we still used the train,” Logan recalls.

Once while returning from Chicago to New York, he put Eleanor and his daughter on one train line and took another one he had never ridden himself. “It took me eight hours longer to reach New York than it did for them, but I was just interested in taking different lines.”

Logan also put together his first model train set in the basement of his Pittsburgh home. When he moved to Staunton to begin teaching at Mary Baldwin College in 1967, he began his current and largest model.

“Traveling by train was commonplace for Logan and his family, but in 1966 they made the first of what was to be four transcontinental trips by train. “With all of the passenger service disappearing, I felt almost an urgency to do it” he stresses.

The objective of these trips was not to quickly reach a destination, but to give them the chance to ride on different train runs. Logan has ridden on such famous trains as the California Zephyr, the Super Chief and the Empire Builder.

“My wife enjoys this relaxed and easy mode of travel,” explains Logan, who spends weeks preparing all of the arrangements necessary for such a trip. He notes rail travel is relatively expensive since they go by a Pullman car, but “at least our hotel moves 300 to 400 miles a night.”

At one time anyone could hop on a “parlor car” at several points in the Valley and get to New York City overnight, Logan says. Now Staunton has the only area passenger service left. With trains leaving at midnight and 4 a.m., business isn’t exactly booming, he says with a sigh.

As an economist, Logan can logically understand the financial woes of the railroads, having “seen it all happen before my eyes.” By the mid-1950s the passenger railroad networks began failing.

The railroads will continue to be a part of the industrial scene in the Valley and across the nation as well, points out Logan. The railroad shipper who can carry large loads a long distance should be in demand indefinitely, he adds.

Sitting in his den, Logan is surrounded by framed pictures of rusted train scenes, famous steam and diesel engines and a couple of old railroad stations. On one of the shelves is a train lantern, along with a few model steam engines. An economics text book lays open on the desk.

“My family has joined my interest in trains,” remarks Logan. “We’ve chased trains for years. Eleanor’s always been patient.”

As for building model train sets, Logan says, “I’ve been a loner with this hobby. I can set my own pace, don’t need to worry with deadlines and have no group meetings to be involved in. This is just for me.”

LOUIS EACHO is a JMU senior, majoring in communication arts, who plans a career in public relations. He is from Hampton, Va.
Dining out

The White Star Mills Restaurant

Article by J. Allen Andrick
Photography by Nancy Dettinger

While visiting friends in Staunton during the 1979 Thanksgiving holidays, Timothy J. Gaglio decided that the old vacant flour mill, located in Staunton's wharf district, would be ideal for a restaurant endeavor.

So the New York native, along with his wife and father, leased the mill. Construction began on February 1, 1980, to convert the bottom floor of the three-story structure into what has become quite possibly Staunton's most elegant and finest dining establishment—White Star Mills Restaurant.

"I wanted to combine the finer points from many of the restaurants that I dined at in New York to decorate the mill," the one-time executive of a major lighting manufacturer says. But he adds that before this could take place, much work had to be done on the mill.

Gaglio recalls that the mill was in poor condition when remodeling began. Milling equipment, left behind when the mill closed in 1963, had to be removed. The floor had to be dug up and replaced, and about half of the huge chestnut beams used to support the heavy mill machinery were also removed.

The 4-foot thick limestone walls that serve as the foundation were sandblasted, and water lines were drilled to provide water for the bar and kitchen. "They destroyed three diamond-point drill bits drilling through that block," Gaglio laughs in amazement.

As weeks passed, the restaurant began to take shape, and Gaglio applied his decorating ideas. "Once half of the beams were removed and the floor laid, I started decorating," Gaglio comments.

The focal point of the restaurant is the 30-foot long bar Gaglio installed. It is solid stone with a 4-inch thick Buckingham County bluestone slate top. One of the chestnut beams became a foot rest at the base of the bar.

The original sprinkler system,
installed in 1890, was one of the first in the area, according to Gaglio. Encouraged by the local fire department to retain the system, he left the pipes in place and painted them a brilliant red. "I think it has turned out to be a great asset to the restaurant's appearance," Gaglio says, smiling. "The customers seem to like it."

Gaglio also employed a local stained-glass manufacturer to do a series of eight window portraits. Six of the windows that decorate the back wall of the restaurant depict the old-fashioned bread-making process. One of the other windows is a painting of grapes, consisting of 15,000 pieces of glass.

"Many people suggested hanging old milling tools on the walls," Gaglio says. "However, I believe a less demanding decoration was more satisfactory."

Opposite, White Star Mills offers a variety of homemade desserts. Windows along the back wall depict an old-fashioned baking process. Top, the original sprinkler system, brightly painted, hangs exposed over the bar. Right, a replica of a flour sack from the original mill.
The restaurant opened on July 1, 1980. Chef Dennis Young, a 1979 honors graduate of the Culinary Institute, was hired to oversee food preparation.

The restaurant seats 120 people and offers a selection of 16 entrees, ranging in price from $6.95 for a filet of sole to $15.95 for a filet mignon. The menus are printed on replicas of old flour sacks.

Among the most popular appetizers on the menu are French onion soup and Oysters Remick.

Entrees include three types of veal, fresh seafood and beef selections. All entrees are served with fresh, home-baked bread.

A cart, located in the center of the restaurant, contains a wide selection of homemade desserts, including cheesecakes of all varieties, strawberry pies and chocolate cakes.

"We try to offer an interesting menu to our customers," Gaglio says, "along with a professional staff that gives good service. I hope that the customers will tell their friends that this is a fine place to dine out."

According to Gaglio, White Star Mills has seen an increase in customers every month since its opening.

"I've done some advertising, but most of our customers say they heard about us through someone who has dined here," Gaglio says proudly.

The restaurant has grown into an excellent dining establishment. For anyone who enjoys fine food in a warm, courteous and friendly atmosphere, White Star Mills is well worth visiting.

J. ALLEN ANDRICK, a JMU senior from Broadway, Va., is majoring in communication arts. He plans a career in magazine journalism.
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Photo Gallery: Allen Litten

Article by

Joe Schneckenburger

“I like to think of myself as a newsman first and an artist second. I simply enjoy photography in itself. Every part of it is exciting to me—it has to be in the news business.”

This is the viewpoint of Allen Litten, chief photographer of Harrisonburg’s DAILY NEWS-RECORD.

Photography is his life. Litten’s camera doesn’t rest just because he’s not on assignment. Even while on vacation, his wife can’t get him to stop shooting.

Litten got his first camera, a Kodak Brownie, when he was 7. By age 12, with the money he earned from a paper route, he bought a home processing kit and began to print his own photographs.

He got a part-time job as a pressman’s flyboy with the DAILY NEWS-RECORD when he was 15. He stacked newspapers as they came off the presses. From there, he moved into the mail room, hand-stamping addresses on newspapers that were to be mailed out. Next, he moved into the ad printing shop, setting hot lead type. He soon dropped out of high school to work full time. In his spare time, he sold free-lance photographs to the newspaper. At 21, he was offered the only photography position with the DAILY NEWS-RECORD.

Litten’s workload has increased since then and so has the department. He now heads the five-person photography staff.

Although he enjoys his position, Litten says he would like to spend more time actually photographing. Only about half of his time is spent shooting; the other half is devoted to planning, assigning and paperwork. However, Litten, now 45, has no strong desire to move elsewhere.

He also enjoys darkroom work. Litten feels that not all pictures are created in the camera. He may spend many hours working on a single print before he achieves the effect he desires.

Litten says the most difficult photo event he ever covered was an airplane crash in the Shenandoah National Park in the 1960s. The Civil Air Patrol prevented newsmen and photographers from getting near the crash site. At the time, however, Litten was serving with the National Guard. His job was to keep news media away from the site and assist with the rescue attempt. But he had hidden two cameras in his coat, and was in a position to get pictures other photographers couldn’t.

He says his most enjoyable assignment was covering Harrisonburg’s National Guard unit on their trip to Wales, Great Britain, in the spring of 1979. When not taking pictures, he did research in Chester for Harrisonburg’s Bicentennial supplement in the DAILY NEWS-RECORD. “I really enjoyed the experience because I got to see places I had only previously seen in history books or movies,” he says.

Since beginning his photographic career, Litten has won over 150 awards from organizations such as the Virginia Press Association, the Virginia News Photographers Association and the Virginia Professional Photographers Association. In both 1968 and 1969, he was the co-winner of the Virginia Photographer of the Year award. Litten says he still feels “10 feet tall” when he wins an award, just as he did when he won his first award in 1956.

Born and raised in Harrisonburg, Litten speaks highly of the area. “I don’t need anything from anywhere else. The area is very beautiful, and there are many opportunities here. There are still plenty of fresh, new photographic possibilities in Harrisonburg, and I would like to explore them.”

Below, Allen Litten has been photographing the Valley for most of his life. Right, the first photograph Litten received an award for was taken in 1955 when Hurricane Hazel came through the Valley.
Boyd Brass Bed Co.

Joe Boyd has built a nationwide business from a basement hobby

Article by Donna Talbott

Photography by Jennifer Young
He stalks in wearing an old loose, army jacket over a worn flannel shirt. His walk is busy, purposeful. It's what you'd expect of a man who works between 70 and 80 hours a week, travels better than 1,000 miles a month, and over the past 10 years has spent his spare time building a business with distribution spanning the United States.

His name is Joe, and his smile is as quick as his walk and as easy as his manner. It's obvious he's doing something he not only enjoys but also takes great pride in. He's Joseph D. Boyd: the "Boyd" of Boyd Brass Bed Co.

He describes himself as the "sales, production, shipping, receiving, cost analysis, owner, manager, foreman, inspector, delivery boy...the whole nine yards," of his company, and has been making brass beds since 1968. At that time Boyd was looking for a brass bed and "couldn't find anything that looked half decent," so he decided to make his own. He now has about $250,000 worth of investments, two retail stores, two bed factories, and a running ad in the WASHINGTON POST. Even so, Boyd smilingly insists, "I don't do this for a living...it's still a hobby."

His "hobby" is presently centered in Timberville, where he operates two factories and a brand new showroom. He has another retail bed store in Springfield, Va., where he works Monday through Thursday keeping store during the day and selling insurance at night.

Until recently, Boyd sold beds strictly to wholesale furniture dealers. Now his business is taking a
different turn. For nationwide wholesale, Boyd employed 20 salesmen who dealt with over 200 stores across the U.S. He didn’t have any type of showroom and left the advertising to the wholesalers. But people still enjoyed coming directly to the factory.

Despite the bustle and filth of the factories, Boyd thinks customers probably like coming there better than to a showroom. “People like to go in places where they’re making things and watch. We were making something there, and there were always beds sitting around, and at that time about 20 people were working in that small building, so it was crowded and it was exciting. We had ladies come in there that looked like they just came out of the beauty parlor, and get in all that dirt. They liked that. Most people like that,” he says.

Problems with financing the salesmen and difficulties involved with wholesalers are factors which caused Boyd to move into retail selling. Too many furniture stores were going bankrupt on him, he says, so now “if you want to buy this product you have to buy it from me.” The switch led Boyd to replace his traveling salesmen with two retail stores and a large shipping operation. The store in Springfield has been open since November 1980, and the showroom in Timberville since December of the same year.

The Timberville showroom is a long, white, one-story cinder-block building with “Brass Bed Factory” painted on its side in bold, 6-foot letters. It is located off Exit 66 of Interstate-81, and its plain exterior makes it look more like a tobacco warehouse than a brass bed store.

Right now only the front fourth of the building is used, but that part is plenty big to do justice to between 15 and 20 of Boyd’s brass creations. Besides king, queen, full and twin-sized beds, the showroom also has end tables, trundle units and hall racks.

In the near future, Boyd plans to sell the buildings that now house his factories and move all the production processes into the back three-fourths of the Timberville showroom. This move will not only bring the advantages of centralization to his company, but will also allow customers to once again be exposed to the excitement and glamour of the bed-making craft itself.

When Boyd first took up the hobby of bed-making, he began with a degree in architecture from The College of William and Mary, an available basement, and absolutely no background in metalworking. For his first trick, Boyd says he simply bought some brass tubing, looked over a few antique beds, and by trial and error made a bed. That first bed took between three and four years of piddling with designs and parts to complete: now he is making between seven and 40 beds a week, depending on demand.

The extent of the growth of his company has surprised even Boyd. “I got involved,” he says, “I didn’t go out here and say, ‘Boy, I’m going to start a brass bed business,’...it was a hobby and I had plenty of time to do it...one thing led to another, and before you know it you’re in some kind of business.”

The processes Boyd uses to make his brass beds now are much more refined than the trial and error methods of his basement days, but the product is also much more refined. He offers 25 different styles of graceful, gleaming artwork and gladly caters to special requests. His beds range in price from $650 for a simple twin bed to $2,400 for an intricately patterned queen-sized one.

His theory of production is that “there are two ways to make anything: good or indifferent.” There is no question as to which side of the fence he stands. He insists that his products are of the highest quality possible. His beds are made with all brass dye-cast parts, which are much
heavier than the spun parts that many companies use. The larger pieces of brass are lined with steel, and he also uses steel screws, common to antique brass beds. "I'm just trying to make a product that's as good as we can make it," he says, "and guarantee it for as long as we can, which is for life."

Not only are all his beds sold with such a guarantee, but they are also engraved with the owner's name and purchase date. "Everybody that buys one builds a statue for themselves," Boyd says, "and when we sell one I guess we're building statues for ourselves, too, because they'll be here forever. It's not like an auto," he says in a soft, chuckling voice, "three years from now it won't be in a junkyard."

The quality of his products, Boyd reveals, "doesn't come from an ad on TV." Instead, Boyd insists, "you get quality from kicking butts." Whenever he's in the factories, Boyd is the driving force that keeps everybody in line. Although he doesn't do much of the brass buffing himself anymore, he knows the process from A to Z and demands perfection. For now he works mostly with the prefabrication and design of the beds.

According to Boyd, each bed made demands "about $250,000 of investment and a lot of time." For each design his company offers, and for any variations, a pattern is first drawn on cardboard. For the smaller parts, wooden patterns are made. Then the brass tubing is measured, cut out, pre-drilled, buffed, assembled, boxed, and shipped. "It's not like stuffing envelopes," Boyd laughs.

To bend the brass, the tubes are packed with sand and the metal is wrapped around the patterns. The most complicated bed involves 140 hours of labor. About $1,000 worth of buffing pads are used each week, and every bed is inspected by Boyd before it is shipped. The factory work, Boyd says, is "a dirty, filthy job." During a single day's work the buffing machines that change the dull, brownish tubes into flashing brass-beds-to-be parts create layers of black, soot-like filth an inch thick. And it doesn't land only on the floor. The craftsmen have what appears to be a five o'clock shadow before most people have finished their breakfast. Every part of every bed has to be buffed, checked for scratches, and possibly rebuffed. Despite daily clean-ups, the floor of the buffing room is seldom seen.

The other rooms aren't nearly as dirty, but they are just as busy and cluttered. The walls are lined with ceiling-high brass tubes, and there are shelves of boxes containing a wide variety of tiny and not-so-tiny parts.

One of the biggest expenses Boyd has encountered over the last 10 years is trying to find sources for all the parts. For instance, one small
The buffing process has become a regular routine for Jeff Kirby.

part, a "spider," which is used to connect joints of the beds, took him five years to find. "I had to make my own until then," Boyd says. Another essential part—small round brass balls which decorate the ends of the bent brass tubes—cost him over $500 in phone calls to find.

According to Boyd, the search for sources never ends. He says even his factory workers don't know where all the parts come from, and even though many people ask, he makes it a policy not to reveal his sources. "A lot of guys start brass bed companies and come to you and want to know everything, but I never did that," Boyd says. "It took me a long time to find all the sources, so we don't let that out. We don't let out where we get the parts from."

Other than sources, Boyd's biggest expense is advertising, which, he says, "is where most of the profit goes in any business." The only advertising he does in the Timberville area is through two billboards on I-81. He uses trade magazines, newspapers and television to advertise out of state. His products are advertised in many airline magazines, and in 10 newspapers in the Washington, D.C. area. Boyd insists, however, that the beds advertise themselves. "Everything we ship out of here has our name on it, and that's probably the best advertisement we can do," he says.

DONNA TALBOTT, from South Boston, Va., is a senior at JMU. She is double-majoring in data processing and communication arts, and plans a career in data processing or journalism.
D.M. Wetsel’s agricultural experiments have evolved into a family business which employs over 100 Valley residents

Article by Paige Smith

Daniel Wetsel came to Goods Mill in east Rockingham County in 1882 from his birthplace in Adams County, Pa. He obtained work on a local farm and soon opened a blacksmith’s shop in Port Republic.

In 1896, Wetsel purchased a small 24-acre farm near Port Republic. Here, he experimented with fruit trees and seed corn. This was the beginning of Wetsel’s agricultural research of the various soils and climates of the Shenandoah Valley.

This small farm was not only the origin of Wetsel Seed Company, but it was also the birthplace of Daniel’s son, Earl.

Earl Wetsel is a pleasant man in his early 80s. He has been associated with the company all his life, first by helping to run the family farm and retail store, then as president for over 50 years, and now as chairman of the board.

Wetsel is eager to talk about his family and their business. “I can remember as a kid, my Dad always dickering with seeds,” Wetsel recalls. “He always wanted a bigger farm so he could experiment.” His father’s dream became a reality in 1905 when he purchased 160 acres, later known as the “Green Island Seed Farm.” This plot of land includes a 120-acre island just below the North and South Forks of the Shenandoah River. “It was a family project to clear and work the island,” Wetsel remembers.
As the demand for Wetsel's seeds grew, Daniel Wetsel took advantage of monthly county court days and other farmer assemblages to display and discuss his seed corn and to book orders for spring planting. By 1907, the green, horse-drawn buggy, identified as the "Green Island Seed Farm Wagon," became a familiar sight in Harrisonburg, Staunton, Waynesboro and Charlottesville. Daniel Wetsel's knowledge and advice became so sought after that he was unofficially referred to as Rockingham's first county farm agent.

"I can remember as a child, my father traveled as far as Hagerstown by train with the seeds he grew himself," Wetsel recalls.

Daniel Wetsel soon decided to go into the retail seed business. Wetsel Seed Company was officially established in February 1911, the date that "D.M. Wetsel & Son" opened on the corner of North Main and Gay streets. It was the first exclusive seed and plant store in the Shenandoah Valley. Arnold Wetsel, Daniel's eldest son, served as manager of the retail store while his father continued his agricultural research and wagon marketing.

The operation of "Wetsel & Son" did not prove to be a lucrative business venture, and it soon became apparent that the young company could do better in a more centralized location, near Harrisonburg's prime retail district. "We soon discovered that we were too far out," recalls Wetsel, so in 1912 "we moved our store to North Court Square," at the present location of Joseph Ney's.

Earl Wetsel became president of Wetsel Seed Company in 1917 when his brother, Arnold, was called to Fort Lee, Va., during World War I. In 1935, the company erected its own building at its present location on West Market Street.

Wetsel Seed Company's retail growth has been limited to a single branch store in Waynesboro, which opened in 1933. The company has realized most of its expansion in the area of wholesale distribution.

Wetsel first entered the wholesale market with the introduction of packaged seeds in the early 1920s. The 1930s date the beginning of Wetsel's truck delivery service and since 1960, deliveries have been made on a fixed route schedule. The distribution area has grown over the years to include Virginia, and sub-
Daniel Wetsel used his Green Island Seed Farm Wagon to distribute seeds and offer agricultural advice to Valley residents in the early 1900s.

Matt Wagner

Daniel Wetsel

substantial regions of West Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania.

The company has continued to grow and diversify under the guidance of Earl Wetsel and his sons, Nelson and Bob. Nelson assumed the presidency from his father in 1971.

Wetsel’s inventory has increased from seeds and plants to include garden supplies, chemicals, tools and many other home and garden beautification items. To simplify the marketing of the diversified inventory, Wetsel has joined forces with other wholesalers across the United States to establish GroGroup, Inc. GroGroup markets under the logo “Growise” and the purpose of this organization, according to Wetsel Seed President Nelson Wetsel, is to “bring a uniform approach to dealers handling garden supplies, so they can easily obtain a complete line of garden supplies, regardless of location, at a competitive price.”

The Wetsels pride themselves in always trying to uphold a reputation of high-quality service to their customers. “We delivered to people in the country even before we became distributors,” says Earl Wetsel. Another service Wetsel has provided to its customers is the extension of credit, especially during hard financial times. During the depression of the 1930s, the Wetsel Seed Company helped to keep many Valley farms going.

Concerning today’s economy, Wetsel says, “There might be another crash, but it won’t be so concentrated or sudden. But that doesn’t mean a business shouldn’t take chances. The new warehouse over, we just went to something new. We have always been willing to change; and we’ve always taken advantage of opportunities.”

Wetsel attributes much of the company’s success to “boys—we’ve been lucky to have a lot of boys in our family!” Nelson and his brother Bob are both top company executives. Nelson’s sons, Tom and Jeff, are the latest generation of Wetsels to work toward the success of the company.

Although the modern offices of Wetsel Seed Company are large, there is an undeniable feeling of informality about them. Paintings of rural scenes and photographs of the early days of Wetsel Seed Company decorate paneled walls. The board’s meeting table could well double as a dining table for a large family: Earl Wetsel seated at the head of the table, surrounded by his sons and grandsons, all following in the steps of the company’s founder, Daniel Wetsel.

PAIGE SMITH, from Buena Vista, Va., is a JMU senior majoring in English and minoring in communication arts. She plans a career in magazine work or public relations.
Preserving the past

A Burketown couple turns an old gristmill into a modern home

Article by Teresa Caviness  Photography by Jennifer Young

For many people, one of the most important and expensive investments they will make is a home. And many dream of making that investment by renovating an old house. Philip and Donna Way of Burketown have added their own twist to that dream and have turned it into reality.

The Ways have blended traditional warmth with rustic charm to turn an old gristmill into an inviting and spacious home. In 1973, the Ways purchased Burketown Mill, an empty building 11 miles south of Harrisonburg.

The present structure is more than 100 years old. The mill was burned during the Civil War when Union soldiers passed through town, says Philip, but was immediately rebuilt.

Philip and Donna spent three years trying to draw plans for their home and find a contractor to take the job. The difficulty of the project gave them only limited success in both areas. Discouraged, they decided to sell the mill. The Ways never really wanted to give up their project, and Donna says, "We were afraid somebody would call, and we would have to sell." They soon decided to withdraw their ad.

They spent six months drawing plans and in the spring of 1978 tore down an old barn to obtain some of the lumber they later used in the house. To date, they have torn down a total of three barns to supply wood for their home.
The building is “quite original,” Philip says, adding that few structural changes were required. One beam in the basement and about 10 percent of the siding were the only replacements that had to be made on the original structure. “A lot of people find something major has to be done when they undertake this kind of project, but we were extremely fortunate. Overall, the mill was in good shape,” Donna says.

Four original beams run across the mill. The beams are 13 inches wide and 40 feet long, crossing each other in what Donna calls a “tic-tac-toe” pattern. According to the original plans, the beams form nine 13-by-11 foot rooms.

“We were hoping for open spaces with the least amount of obstruction,” Philip says. “At first, it was hard to picture being able to do anything with it. It seemed small, but with each wall added, the mill seemed bigger.” The ceiling is 16 feet high and the house is open two stories in the foyer and living room.

Enough work was completed by December 1979 to allow the Ways to move in. They spent their first Christmas there with very little furniture.

Before they moved in, they spent every night, and Saturdays and Sundays working on the house. “We’ve probably put in $50,000 worth of hard time if you figure on $2 per hour,” Philip says, smiling, “and we’ve pulled out many nails.” Donna adds, “Some days, I spent all my time just pulling old nails from the beams and walls.” Both agree “the time spent has been more than worthwhile to us.”

The house has been furnished in what Philip calls “early Salvation Army decor.” Donna says, “Most of the house has been decorated and furnished from craft shows and junk shops.”

“We wait until we see what we like and then we buy it. For example, we are looking for a tapestry for (the living room) wall. We have an idea of what we want and when we find it, we’ll buy it,” Philip says.

Perhaps the most unique feature of the Way home is the five-foot stained glass window in the living room. When the family was vacationing in Myrtle Beach, S.C. they saw a similar window in an antique shop. They went back the next summer to purchase the glass and transport it home. No delivery services would take on the job because of the fragility of the hand-blown glass. When they returned home, the Ways found someone locally to cut the glass and build the frame, which form a double-octagon. The window, positioned above the sliding doors which lead onto the wooden deck, reflects the sun and casts red, blue, yellow and green shadows on the walls.

Philip says he was able to construct the 20-by-26 foot deck because the
hand-hewn lumber he obtained from the old barns cut down on the expense.

The fireplace is covered from the ceiling halfway to the floor with gray, wooden barn boards. The remainder of the fireplace is plastered in white with a stucco design. It serves as a divider between the living room and the foyer. Philip plans on covering the rest of the fireplace with man-made stone. He says the weight and cost of covering the entire fireplace with the stone would have been enormous and impractical.

Much of the artwork on the walls has been collected from friends. Two batiks in shades of orange, brown, green and white blend in with the rustic atmosphere created by the wooden beams and barn boards. Batiks are made by drawing a picture in wax and then dipping it in a color.

As with the other furnishings in their home, they both agree that they "acquire the things which have meaning to us." Philip adds, "We want a part of our friends to be here."

The master bedroom and bathroom, as well as the utility room, are also located on this level of the house. A brass bed is the dominant feature of the bedroom, and French doors at the opposite end of the room open up to the utility room and closet. The closet was designed around heating pipes in order to conserve space, Philip says. He even installed a laundry chute which would allow the children to send their clothes down from the upstairs bathroom.

On the second floor, the family room overlooks the living room. The walls display Philip's collection of horns and tools. Steps lead to the loft area of the house which has not been remodeled yet. Philip hopes to someday turn the loft into a studio or put in solar power panels.

Wesley and Ericka's bedrooms are side by side, also on the second level. An interesting aspect of the house is the unique use the Ways have made of seemingly odd or dated hardware. Bridle hooks are used as towel racks. Mill bags are framed and decorate the walls on the upper level. A framed poster from an old cigarette advertisement hangs in Wesley's room.

Philip says that he and Donna have been very lucky, both supporting each other throughout their project. Both doubt they will ever regret their decision to renovate the mill, says Philip, because they are preserving the past through their restoration.

TERESA CAVINESS, from Patrick Springs, Va., is majoring in communication arts. A senior at JMU, she plans a career in public relations.
Preserving the past

For the Shanks, an old schoolhouse becomes home

Article by Jerry E. Shank  Photography by Jennifer Young
In August, 1977, my wife Janet and I finally realized we had grown tired of landlords and noisy apartments. We were eager to find a home of our own.

With soaring real estate prices and limited funds, we had problems finding the right home for us, until my uncle called one day to tell us about an old two-story schoolhouse on his farm.

Uncle John had done some remodeling, however, when we saw the property, we found that much remained to be done. Sanding and painting was needed both inside and out, and the foundation was in rough shape.

The yard, overgrown with weeds, was cluttered with broken bottles, Campbell's Soup cans, discarded toys and automobile parts. Enclosed by a rusty fence, the field next to the house was covered with red clay and broken limestone. We were skeptical.

It wasn't until Uncle John quoted a price and announced that he would finance it for eight percent that we began to seriously consider a deal.

The initial repulsion to the place began to turn into a challenge. I began to envision calves grazing in the 11-acre field, and several trees in the front yard. After some haggling over the price and several technicalities, the deal was closed.

The task facing us was frustrating. It seemed like we would never have the time to do all we wanted to do. The demands of full-time jobs, along with the needs of the place, kept us very busy.

Work began in earnest the morning after our first night at the house. I started what was to become a daily pattern of visiting the local hardware store and farm supply dealer. The first purchase included several tools, a mailbox and a treated pine fencepost.

As I dug a posthole, I hit solid limestone at 18 inches: a problem that I eventually learned to live with. I planted the post in concrete, painted it, attached the mailbox, and added the number "177." Our old house now had a new address.

For over a week, Janet and I clipped weeds and raked broken glass and other junk. We eventually hauled away seven loads of debris. After clean-up work, we set aside the clippers and rake for a pick and shovel.

Several loads of clay, which sticks to the bottom of your shoes and adds on with each step, had been dumped next to the foundation of the house. I tackled this problem by building terraces with loose field stones forming the walls. I was able to get about 20 free tons of topsoil from a neighbor who was building a new driveway, but a year passed before the clay was covered with grass and the mud problem was solved.

The first year of hard labor on evenings and weekends brought growing satisfaction as we completed job after job. As each task was finished, the blisters and sore
muscles were forgotten and we began a new project.

John Geil, a farmer who lives nearby, often stopped by our house. "It sure is looking nice," he would say, "I like your idea of using rocks for a terrace." His compliments spurred us on. He loaned us tractors and other equipment which saved us an enormous amount of work.

Eventually, we replaced the old wire fence with a whiteboard one, a neighborhood characteristic. Many of the posts had to be set in concrete due to the shallow limestone. I was able to buy six-inch oak boards for 22 cents a board foot. This resulted in one-half acre of enclosed yard and garden for around $250.

During the second year we made many changes to the inside of our house, adding a closet to an upstairs bedroom, and carpet and paint in three rooms. By hiring an independent carpenter rather than a local contractor, I saved $200.

In November of that year, we obtained estimates for insulation for the house which ranged from $450 for fiberglass to $1,200 for foam. We opted for the fiberglass and later added three-and-a-half inches to the existing 8 inches in the attic. Fiberglass batting was also installed under the house. We made the mistake of washing the clothes that we wore during this project with our other laundry, resulting in fiberglass particles causing much irritation for several weeks.

Another of our projects was the addition of storm windows. We ended up with a different measurement for nearly every window, and not surprisingly many of the frames were crooked. Installation was frustrating. We made the best of the situation through the use of metal shears and caulking compound, however, several of the windows ended up being hard to open and close.

An oil furnace was installed soon after we moved in. With help, I was able to put up a new chimney for it for less than $150. Since our ceilings are close to 10 feet high, two vents were placed in the upstairs floors to take advantage of the natural upward draft of warm air. The vents can be opened or closed to regulate temperature with the same effectiveness as a thermostat. Through the use of a woodstove and three cords of wood, during our second winter we burned less than 100 gallons of oil.

Not long after we installed the wood stove, Janet and I came home one evening to find smoke pouring from our upstairs windows. The fire department extinguished a burning mattress, but not before the upstairs floor, walls and ceiling sustained more than $2,500 in damage.

We were so discouraged that we almost felt like giving up on the old house and building a new one. The repairs and facelift on the bedroom that burned, however, helped Janet and I to change our attitude and continue planning improvements.

With money saved by using a wood stove and additional funds from a home improvement loan, we had a well drilled and installed a new water system.

Our previous supply had come from a 1,600 gallon cistern that required a truckload of water nearly every three months, preventing us from watering plants or keeping animals. The new well hit the edge of an underground stream and produces 10 gallons a minute, an amount adequate to serve our needs even if we decide to start a commercial poultry operation.
The cost of the well, pump, labor and accessories came to $1,650, which was reduced considerably because no well casing was needed (205 feet of solid limestone!). Geil brought in 30 tons of topsoil to cover the water line and did some grading. Now where only thistles and wiry sage once grew, stands a lush green lawn.

In all, we planted about 100 lbs. of grass seed. One large maple and two mulberry trees provided the only shade in the yard. Mulberry sprouts come up every year, and Janet and I consider them a nuisance. Our solution was to plant more desirable shade trees and evergreens, and wait for them to grow before cutting out the mulberries. That way we can still have some shade near the house.

As the son of a commercial horticulturist, my love of trees is seen by the number of them I have planted around the house. They include two Norway spruces, four white pines, one sweet gum, one purple-leafed plum and a quaking aspen. I have also planted a number of small shrubs.

After bringing the house and lawn to a condition that we could live with, I began building the line fence that would enclose our 12 acres, a job I had put off for some time.

I had accumulated over 200 fenceposts from my uncle’s farm, spending six Saturdays cutting down locust trees and sawing them into seven-foot lengths. The only expense was gas and oil for the chainsaw.

I was able to talk Geil into drilling the postholes and using a piledriver on his tractor to plant the posts. After shaving the bark off, it only took one day to put in 89 posts covering 950 feet. Janet and I also stretched the fence and built a floodgate over the creek. The actual construction of the fence took a full week and cost about $800.

In the Fall of 1980, I completed the remaining 560 feet of fence forming the perimeter of our land. Sometimes I wonder where I got the energy to do all that.

Many people have complimented us for the changes we have made. But the real satisfaction comes from within, for now we can look at old photos and know that through our efforts a ugly small corner of Rockingham County once again looks good.
The River Farm

A Valley couple operates an entire wool production process

Article by Donna Sizemore  Photography by Ed Campion

Located in the picturesque countryside near Timberville, The River Farm harbors a piece of yesterday alive in the Shenandoah Valley. In the center of the farm, water from the Shenandoah River trickles over tiny rock formations. The landscape is dotted with red barns, and white, brown and black sheep graze on the hillside.

Inside these red barns and in the stately mansion of Jerry Rainey and Priscilla Blosser-Rainey are spinning wheels, looms and mounds of wool.

When Priscilla and Jerry met in 1973 both were ready for a change. Priscilla was a "retired housewife" and Jerry had worked as a space engineer on the Apollo moon missions. The couple made that change when they married and began operation of their own sheep farm on The River Farm. "It was a second chance at life for both of us," says the tall, blue-eyed Priscilla.

Not only do Priscilla and Jerry raise 120 ewes and four rams, but they operate an entire production process from shearing and dying fleece to selling their wool products by mail order. In addition, Priscilla conducts classes on spinning and weaving eight weekends each year.

"People come from all across the country," Priscilla says, adding that students stay overnight in New Market and come to The River Farm for classes during the day. Lessons
are held for beginners and intermediates. Students range in age from 14 to 75. According to Priscilla, the Rainey's advertise their classes and fleece business in various weaving and spinning journals.

Operating a sheep farm requires an enormous amount of work because all items produced are handmade. These items are more expensive but are of better quality, Priscilla says, as she picks up one of her crocheted sweaters. "This is a do-it-yourself area," Priscilla notes, "you sell better in a large city because (cities) are so far removed from rural life." She adds that city people have an appreciation for craft items as well as the means to afford them. Enough yarn for a sweater may cost as much as $90.

"As a craftsman you have to specialize," stresses the soft-spoken Priscilla, adding that spinning wool yarn is her specialty. However, Priscilla also spins silk and other materials she purchases. "I just have to whip out something creative every once in a while. We craftsmen have to work like crazy.

It wasn't until Priscilla began operating the farm that she realized how many steps are involved in crafting wool. Sheep must be tended and fed properly so they will produce good-quality wool. They eat grass in the summer, and hay, grain, corn and barley in the winter.

Shearing takes place in late April. Platforms are set up and the sheep are marched onto them and forced to sit. After several strokes with the electric clippers, the wool is removed in one piece. Most sheep produce an average of 12 pounds of fleece a year. Once sheared, fleece is sold through the Rainey's mail order business or spun and woven by Priscilla.

As a special interest, Priscilla and her husband raise black sheep, a breeding process which takes four-to-five generations. Their goal is to produce natural colored wool. Both Priscilla and Jerry are members of the National Colored Wool Growers Association, an organization designed especially for growers interested in producing black, gray and brown wool.

Some wool is dyed naturally at The River Farm, Priscilla says, noting that they use materials such as tomatoes, plants and flour.
Despite all the other work she does, Priscilla's main contribution to the farm is her craft ability. Her love for crafts may have been an inherited trait; her great-grandmother was a spinner. But her success has come from many hours of long hard work. "I embroidered as a child," Priscilla reminisces, "and knitted while I was in college."

Their home is filled with spinning wheels of all shapes, sizes and origins, and come from Pakistan, Europe and Colonial America. "Wheels are placed in the kitchen so I can spin a few minutes while cooking dinner," Priscilla explains, as she demonstrates the spinning process.

Usually the fleece is combed first, she says, and then yarn is spun from the fleece and fed onto the wheel. Spinning is twisting the thread while it is being pulled. "If it looks easy to the people who are watching, then I've arrived," Priscilla says, as she glances up from her wheel.

Weaving is a different process, Priscilla notes, as she walks into the weaving room. She winds threads onto the loom both vertically and horizontally and pushes pedals that raise the threads, thus forming cloth. The size of the finished cloth depends on the size of the loom used. "There is not a high cash flow for spinning or weaving because it is slow," she says.

Priscilla's home is filled with treasures from her crafting. Antique wheels and knitted hangings adorn her walls. "I consider myself a businessperson, a craftsperson, a teacher and a sheep farmer," says Priscilla. She applies all these skills to her old-fashioned operation, one practically unique in these mechanized times. The gleam in her eyes is evidence enough that she's proud of her work, and of The River Farm.

DONNA SIZEMORE, a JMU senior majoring in communication arts, plans a career in magazine work or public relations. She is from Skipwith, Va.
Welcome to the C&E Diner

Despite their odd hours, Charlie and Eunice Shifflett are successful because “we just serve good food.”

Article by Tim Hall

Charlie Shifflett says he has never worked a regular 9-to-5 shift in his life, but possibly would like to “when I get older.”

There are a large number of late-night eaters who hope that he never gets the chance, because that would mean the closing of one of the area’s most unique restaurants—the C&E Diner.

As most of Harrisonburg is set to pack it in for the night, the C&E Diner, open from 11 p.m. to 8 a.m., Sunday through Friday, is just beginning its business day. Since October 1975, Charlie and his wife Eunice have provided an instant “fix” for the late-night muncher. Their customers range from truck drivers to college students and are so large in number that Charlie sheepishly admits there is no need for advertising. “We have all the business we can handle right now,” he says.

Why is C&E so popular? Charlie thinks it is mainly the customers’ desire for a good meal at a reasonable price.

The menu varies from hamburgers to breakfast dishes. A meal of steak, homefries, two eggs, toast and orange juice costs about three dollars.

“I guess word just gets out that we serve good food.”

The most popular item on their menu, the Shiffletts agree, is tenderloin. “The college crowd doesn’t know a lot about that. They like to try it and usually end up ordering it when they come back,” Charlie says, while Eunice adds “it seems like we can never have enough tenderloin. That’s what we always run out of first.”

The Shiffletts keep their prices down by not wasting food and by maintaining a low overhead, according to Charlie. For example, the salt-and-pepper shakers are fashioned from old baby food jars.

The interior of the diner is definitely well-worn but is clean, and the building’s exterior has undoubtedly seen better days, too. The Shiffletts are hesitant to do much renovating because they are unsure how long they, and the decaying building itself, will be there.

“The building is too old and would cost too much money to fix up the way we would want to,” Charlie says. “Plus, I think the city has some plans to tear down this area in about four or five years. We’re both 58, so we don’t plan on working more than four or five more years, anyway.”

When the Shiffletts took over the diner in 1975, it was a 24-hour establishment. A lack of good employees, however, forced the Shiffletts to readjust their working schedule, Eunice says. “We had to change, and 11-to-8 were our busiest hours, so we decided to be open during that time,” she adds. The diner now employs three other people.

Charlie says they would be forced to operate around-the-clock now if it weren’t for their sizeable college clientele. In fact, they have often closed for a few weeks during the summer when nearby James Madison University is not in session.

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“The college kids are real good customers, very understanding.” Charlie says. “Boy, can they eat!”

C&E has obviously succeeded operating during odd hours, but these hours sometimes breed a big problem: the occasional drunk and unruly customer. Although they do not serve beer, the Shiffletts periodically have to contend with persons who have had one too many.

“Beer is a headache; that’s why we don’t serve it,” Charlie says. “Even if we did, it would only be for an hour because the law says we can’t sell it after midnight.”

When an inebriated customer comes in, Eunice usually handles the situation because Charlie is often in the back. “She doesn’t take any guff off them,” he says, laughing.

Right, Charlie finishes adding receipts.

Photography by Jeff Spaulding
Charlie has seen his share of customers during 43 years in the restaurant business. "My dad managed a restaurant in Harrisonburg, and I started working for him in 1938. He made $15 a week plus commission. This is all I’ve ever done; I finally went into business on my own in 1953," Charlie says.

C&E Diner is the sixth restaurant the Shiffletts have operated in the Harrisonburg area, and although he is the one with the most experience, Charlie admits that his wife "probably knows more about the business than I do. I just work the grill; she's the boss." Eunice is in charge of ordering all the food for the eatery, which may go through as many as 360 eggs in one night.

The Diner is like any other business, though, requiring more time than just the business hours for success. It is definitely not an 11-to-8 venture for Charlie and Eunice; both have put in as many as 70 hours a week. Eunice usually arrives about 9 p.m., while her husband comes in at 11 p.m. and leaves about nine in the morning, four hours after Eunice has gone home.

Charlie divides the diner's customers into two categories; the late-night eater and the breakfast eater. "We like to think of the diner as a place where the night owls meet the early birds, and for the most part that is true," he says. The customers during the first few hours of business differ from day to day, but "we usually get the same people for breakfast," says Charlie. "They eat before they have to go to work, and most of them come in just about every morning. I get to know most of them because they usually sit at the counter. I like to get a cup of coffee and sit down to visit with them," he adds, saying, "some have been eating here every morning since we opened."

The restaurant's unusual hours do not give the Shiffletts much time for other activities, since they are usually asleep while the rest of the community is at work. They do, however, find time to spend with their two children and their grandchildren.

"Both of our kids live nearby and drop by the restaurant when they can," Charlie says. Two of their grandchildren attend JMU.

Charlie and Eunice admit the restaurant business has been hard, and that is why they don't expect to work too much longer. Eunice has been suffering from bad health..."
lately, although it is not evident by
the way she greets her customers
with an earnest smile and a cheerful
"how ya doin' this morning!"

Charlie and Eunice both admit they
have come close to throwing in the
towel many times. "Sometimes I just
want to say 'to hell with it'," Charlie
admits, and Eunice says she has had
the same feelings at times.

The long, unusual hours, the back-
breaking work and the occasionally
troublesome customer are problems
that sometimes seem too large to
overcome. When the time comes to
close the doors for good, however, it
is doubtful Charlie and Eunice
Shifflett will look back with any
regrets. The customers may, though,
as they look for another late-night
restaurant that satisfies their
stomachs and their wallets. Not only
will the C&E tenderloin be hard to
match, but so will the hospitality and
personality of the Shiffletts.

TIM HALL, a JMU senior communica-
tion arts major from Martinsville, Va.,
plans a career in newspaper or magazine
work.

Above, Charlie and an employee, Shirley Rexrode, bring in eggs. The diner may
go through as many as 360 eggs in one night.
Tumbling Tots

Children develop self-confidence through educational gymnastics

Articles by Jennifer Young
Photography by Joe Schneckenburger
"Look at me! I did it, I did it! Did you see me? Watch, I'll do it again," shouts the gleeful child who has successfully jumped on a trampoline, walked on the balance beam, and performed a forward roll on the floor exercise mat.

Grins from ear to ear and sounds of laughter abound each Saturday from 25 enthusiastic tiny tots dressed in brightly-colored leotards and shorts. These youngsters participate in the modern educational gymnastics program at James Madison University.

The best age for children to start gymnastics is 3, when they can readily relate to the challenges of the movement laboratory, says Jane Myers Kruger, program instructor. Through movement, the child achieves, explores, expresses himself, grows and learns and thus becomes capable of more learning.

Kruger came to JMU in 1964 to head the elementary school physical education program. The gymnastics school program was one of several established to provide a practicum site for training students to implement movement theory and movement techniques for children.

She started the Tumbling Tots gymnastics program, aimed at meeting the body management skill needs of 3 through 6 year olds, in 1972. Safety training and movement problems challenge the children to use their bodies creatively and efficiently.

The gymnastics program, taught by Kruger and 10 student assistants, meets Saturdays at JMU's Godwin Hall from September through April. For the "die-hards," a three-week session is held during the summer.

Of all the gymnastics clubs throughout the country, the largest enrollers are pre-school children, Kruger says, adding that thousands of pre-schoolers participate weekly in gymnastics.

"Children are fascinated by gymnastics," Kruger explains. "The whole beauty of the program is the development of a positive self-concept and good body management skills," she adds.

Jill Hartt, 11, from Bridgewater, is an example of how gymnastics can build self-confidence. Hartt's mother enrolled her in Kruger's program when she was 8. She felt that by doing gymnastics, Jill would overcome her shyness.

"I needed self-confidence. I started to get better after I learned some new tricks and my coaches and friends told me that they were good," says the all-around gymnast for the Shenandoah Valley Gymnastics Club.

A lot of individual attention is given to each of the 25 children in a class period. There are two instructors for every group of five children.

"We try to teach on an individual basis because we can't put them into the same box," Kruger explains. "Every child comes from a different background and we have to be sensitive to their needs."

The gymnastics program, which she calls "the environment," changes each Saturday. At first, some 3-to-4 year olds are a bit apprehensive and appear wide-eyed or motionless. After a period of adjustment, they begin to understand the way the lab works "and don't waste any time exploring the new worlds," Kruger says.

The children start on low equipment and progress to more challenging stations such as the balance beam, bars or trampoline. "To them, it's like Christmas. The children can't wait to get on the equipment," Kruger says enthusiastically.
From the first lesson, safety training procedures are taught for every skill learned. The children are taught how to safely land, roll and jump so they can manage in any situation.

"We do not force the child to do anything before they are ready," says Kruger. "By commanding children, we are developing robots and not thinking individuals. I want to develop in all children the 'I can' attitude—I can jump, I can swing, I can hop and I can land."

Kruger adds, "They need to learn this. If the child develops a good positive self-concept between the ages of 3 and 6, then he or she can handle Olympic style gymnastics."

Olympic style gymnastics differs from modern educational gymnastics in that Olympic style is more structured and harder for a young child to handle.

No matter what gymnastic style a child participates in, it is apparent that they all watch for teacher approval. A 5-year-old walks down the 4-inch wide balance beam without falling, and when she steps off the beam, she looks straight at the teacher for acknowledgement. The instructor recognizes this and enthusiastically says "very good." In response, the child joyfully smiles.

The boys of each age group tend to seek more vigorous movement than girls and for longer periods of time, Kruger says. They are more daring and enjoy more running and climbing.

At the end of each lesson, the children receive "mat lessons" for five to ten minutes, enabling them to work on components of locomotor skills, balance and rolls. These lessons help lead them to the understanding of Olympic style gymnastics.

The mat lessons increase to 20 minutes by the end of the semester as their endurance improves. "This
increase in attention span is a good yardstick of what you can accomplish with the children," Kruger says.

Children can only handle about one hour of instruction per session. Each class must be a successful learning experience for the child because, says Kruger, "if they aren't successful, the children won't come back."

"Children need to develop skills or they will become viewers instead of doers," says Kruger. "A poor self-concept keeps children from tackling other problems they will continually face in their growing-up years. We have to start young or it's too late when we wait.

After completing his ladder climb, this daring young gymnast waits for the teacher's acknowledgement.

JENNIFER YOUNG, a JMU junior from McLean, Va., is majoring in communication arts, concentrating in journalism. She plans a career in photojournalism.

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Like any dedicated gymnast, Laurie Roller, a 16-year-old Harrisonburg High School junior, practices year-round. She works out two-and-a-half hours every day with her high school gymnastics team, and puts in a few extra hours with the women’s gymnastics team at James Madison University on Thursday and Sunday nights.

After the high school gymnastics season is over, she continues to work out at JMU and goes to its gymnastics clinic for two weeks during the end of the summer.

Roller started gymnastics when she was 6, because her friends were participating in Hayes Kruger's Saturday gymnastics program at JMU.

“One should start gymnastics at 6 or 7 years old or even earlier,” says the 5-foot, 103-pound gymnast, “because you can learn more tricks faster and you are so much more flexible.”

“It takes a lot of coordination. I was real flexible before, but you tend to lose some of that flexibility when you get older. That’s why it is so important to start young,” Roller says in a soft-spoken tone.

Although petite, she demonstrates extraordinary power and strength in her moves, best seen in her floor exercise routine.

Roller must execute her routine in an area of 12 meters by 12 meters. The beauty of the exercise is reflected in her ability to vary the spatial and temporal dimensions of her routine. She also incorporates the art forms of continuity, rhythm, dynamics and movement design, combined with leaps, turns, poses and tumbling moves.

She has short, muscular legs that enable her to bounce high off the mat, performing an amazing combination pass of a front handspring to a front flip to a round-off back handspring to a back lay-out. Roller only has 10 seconds to catch her breath before her fast-paced music begins again.

She competes in the all-around division, performing on the balance beam, the uneven parallel bars, the vault and in floor exercises. Roller and her teammate, Nancy Shank, also a junior at Harrisonburg High, were the only two to make it to the state gymnastics championship in February. Roller placed third in the floor exercise and Shank placed 10th on the vault.

Besides the state championship, Roller placed fourth at her high school’s regional meet for floor exercise, second on vault and all-around, and third on the balance beam and uneven parallel bars. At the Parkview Invitational meet, Roller placed ninth in the floor exercise. She placed fifth in the floor exercise at the Harrisonburg Invitational gymnastics meet.

While the floor exercise is her strength, she says the balance beam and the vault seem to be her weaknesses. “I’m scared of the beam because it is the easiest piece of equipment to fall off. But I learned to do a back handspring on the beam after several months of practice,” Roller says.

Just recently, she says she has regained her confidence and has learned to do a front handspring with a half-twist off the vaulting box.

“I’m still building my confidence up; it takes a lot of work to be totally self-confident,” says Roller. “Before I started gymnastics I wasn’t sure if I could do anything.”
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