

West Virginia 150

Celebrating 150 Years of Mountain State Success

BY CHARLES MORRIS

WEST VIRGINIA—the only state formed by Presidential decree—became a state on June 20, 1863. In the midst of the Civil War, with skirmishes and battles surrounding them, the state's founding fathers worked through major decisions about electing officials, writing a constitution, choosing a site for the state capitol and the many other details of becoming a new state.

To mark the state's 150th birthday, the West Virginia Division of Culture and History is preparing to celebrate the state's sesquicentennial with an exhibit that highlights West Virginia's people, places and events through the decades from 1863 to the present. The division's museum staff has carefully searched through more than 60,000 artifacts in the state museum collection to select items for the exhibit.

The sesquicentennial exhibit, called West Virginia 150, will be located in the Theater and Balcony galleries of the West Virginia Culture Center at the State Capitol Complex and will focus on 150 people, places and things that helped shape West Virginia during the last 150 years.



The exhibit begins with the 1863-1880 period, the early years of statehood, which are also one of the most turbulent times in any state's history. This 17-year period focuses on President Abraham Lincoln's decision to establish West Virginia as the country's 35th state. The exhibit will also feature other new beginnings such as the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad, which linked Huntington to White Sulphur Springs, and the invention of the first bricklaying process in Charleston.

In the 1880-1890 portion of the exhibit, visitors will take a look at those who guided West Virginia's development as well as the progress that came with the construction of the lock and dam system that influenced travel on the Kanawha, Ohio, Monongahela, Little Kanawha and Big Sandy rivers. The

Hatfields and McCoys make an appearance with an artifact from their infamous feud, and guests will learn the story behind the opening of Oakhurst Links in White Sulphur Springs, the first organized golf club in the United States.



The decade of 1890-1900 focuses on business growth, West Virginia's leadership role in the Spanish-American War, the first rural free mail delivery in Jefferson County and the opening of the West Virginia State Museum by Governor William MacCorkle. One of the items of particular interest in this section is an artifact from the original museum about Andrew Rowan's role in the Spanish-American War. Rowan is often referred to as the man who carried the message to Garcia.



Photo provided by West Virginia State Archives

The period of 1900-1910 ushers in a new century and a booming economy. Fenton Art Glass in Williamstown, Meadow River Lumber Company in Rainelle, Bloch Brothers Tobacco Company in Wheeling and Kelly Axe in Charleston played leadership roles in their industries. This decade also produced

celebrations we still honor today. The first Mother's Day service was held in Grafton, and it was during this time that the Pinch Reunion, the longest continuous reunion in the country, was established. Artifacts and documents of West Virginia's many traditions and milestones are preserved in the state archives, which opened in 1905.



In the years of 1910-1920, Libbey Owens opened in Kanawha City, becoming the largest plate glass plant in the world. In 1915, Benjamin Franklin Gravely built the first motorized plow and the first Gravely tractors in Dunbar. This period also marks the organization of the West Virginia State Police and the Paint Creek/Cabin Creek mining strike.



In the 1920s, West Virginia coal miners were among the first to eat that West Virginia invention known as the pepperoni roll when Giuseppe "Joseph" Argiro began baking them in his Country Club Bakery in Fairmont. The Battle of Blair Mountain in Logan County pitted coal miners against mine

owners. Union Carbide established the first ethylene plant in Clendenin, marking the beginning of the petrochemical industry. The nation recognized the state's contributions to its national defense when the USS West Virginia was commissioned in 1923. In 1928, Minnie Buckingham Harper of Welch became the first African-American woman to serve in a legislative body in the United States.



The 1930s, which followed the Great Depression, was a time of celebration in West Virginia. A beautiful marble and gold-domed capitol was built in Charleston to house government following the fiery destruction of the 1885 Victorian capitol. During this era, Eureka became Blenko Glass Company in Milton, a name still known internationally for its glass creations.

The 1940s features two of West Virginia's greatest athletes. Parkersburg's Alfred "Greasy" Neale played professional football and baseball and coached the NFL Philadelphia Eagles from 1941-1950, leading them to two world championships. He is credited with introducing the naked reverse, five-man defensive



line and the man-to-man pass defense. George Smith King of Charleston began his career at Morris Harvey College, where he led the nation in scoring in 1949 and 1950. His 31.2 game average in 1950 was the first 30-plus point average in college basketball history. The 1940s also saw the completion of Camp Washington Carver at Clifftop and its dedication as the first 4-H camp for African-American youth.



In the 1950s, the West Virginia Turnpike connected Southern West Virginia to the capitol city. Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corps, now Century Aluminum Company, opened in Ravenswood and became the largest fully integrated aluminum works company. Mister Bee Potato Chip Company was founded in Parkersburg by Leo and Sara Klein.

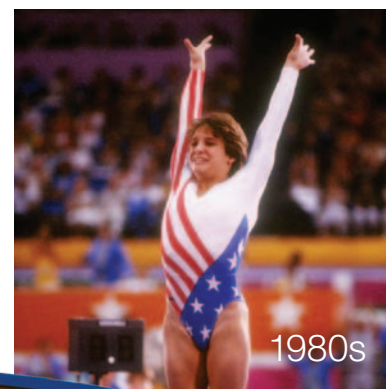


The 1960s saw Don Knotts of Morgantown starring on "The Andy Griffith Show" and Huntington native Peter Marshall hosting "Hollywood Squares." The state celebrated its centennial with the showboat Rhododendron and the melodrama "East Lynne," written in 1863.

The Rhododendron transported the University of Pittsburgh's Panthers to Morgantown to play West Virginia University, duplicating the first football game between the two schools in 1891 when the Mountaineers traveled to Pittsburgh by steamboat. While not publicly known, a 112,000-square-foot bunker was completed beneath America's resort, The Greenbrier.



The 1970s showcased the preservation of our culture and history and the expansion of our exceptional natural resources for tourism. The Canaan Valley Resort and State Park fostered the beginning of West Virginia's ski industry while the New River Gorge Bridge in Fayette County was dedicated and called the eighth wonder of the world. It is also the decade when West Virginia's favorite son, Jerry West, led the Los Angeles Lakers to the NBA Championship. His image lives on as the NBA logo.



In the 1980s, West Virginians broke records all over the world. Mary Lou Retton of Fairmont took home the gold medal for gymnastics during the Olympic Games. Kathy Mattea of Cross Lanes became the Country Music Association's Female Vocalist of the Year. Jon McBride of Beckley piloted the STS 41-G, which launched from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida above the orbiter Challenger.



In the 1990s, West Virginia hit the big screen with "Patch Adams," the story of Dr. Hunter "Patch" Adams, a holistic doctor who founded Gesundheit! Institute in Hillsboro, and with "October Sky," a film adaptation of Coalwood native Homer Hickam's memoir, "Rocket Boys."



Moving into the 21st century, West Virginia remained in the spotlight. Universal Pictures released the film "A Beautiful Mind," a fact-based account of Bluefield native John Nash, Jr., the 1994 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in Economics. Jennifer Garner of Charleston won the Golden Globe for her television series "Alias," and Wheeling native John Corbett's career thrived with on-camera appearances in "Sex and the City," "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" and many others. In the political arena, U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd became the longest-serving lawmaker in Congressional history.



From 2010-2012, West Virginia has continued to make records and achieve success. The film "Super 8," with footage from Weirton, New Cumberland, New Manchester, Follansbee and the Wheeling-Ohio County Airport, became a hit. Brad Paisley of Glen Dale won every country music award imaginable and Landau Eugene Murphy Jr. of Logan won "America's Got Talent." The West Virginia University Mountaineers recorded the most points scored in college bowl history with its 70-33 win over Clemson in the Orange Bowl.

Yes, West Virginia has certainly caught the attention of the nation and the world since its beginnings. Please join in the many celebrations in 2013 that will salute these achievements of yesterday. ■

