The Burning Springs

And Other Tales Of the Little Kanawha

By Howard B. Lee

Former Attorney General
of West Virginia
(1925-1933)

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To the memory of
Val Rathbone
Johnson N. Camden
General Sherman P. Karns
West Virginia's First Pioneers
In The Oil Industry

FOREWORD

In the preparation of this book, I have had three objectives in mind: first, to create in the minds of appropriate State and Federal authorities an active interest in the recreational potentialities of the too-long neglected Little Kanawha River and its valley; secondly, to rescue from historical oblivion the memory of both the State's first oil field and the once oil-rich city of Burning Springs—a town that once boasted of its 6,000 population; and, lastly, to encourage the creation, at public expense, of an on-the-site fitting memorial to commemorate the great oil discovery at the site of that now extinct city.

Historians say that the Burning Springs petroleum deposit was the richest shallow oil pool the world has ever known. It was discovered in the spring of 1860 at Burning Springs Run, in Wirt County, 38 miles up the Little Kanawha River from Parkersburg. It was the most far-reaching and spectacular natural discovery ever made in the State and one of the important finds in world history.

The river and its valley are eternal and speak eloquently in their own behalf; but little has been written about either the great oil field or the extinct city, and few people are now living who saw them, even in their dying hours. Therefore, first-hand information concerning them is extremely difficult to come by.

In all likelihood, this paucity of information is the reason why the writers of several histories of West Virginia dismissed Burning Springs and its oil field with a few lines of highly erroneous statements. If those writers had been able to interview a few "old-timers" who worked in the field from its beginning until it died, a few of whom lived in the town until well after the turn of this century; or, if they had read the one-page article in the August 14, 1865, issue of the *New York Herald* (from which I have freely quoted in these pages), or, if they had understood why, when, and by whom

the four lower locks and dams in the Little Kanawha River were built; they would not have made such erroneous statements in their books as (a) there were only 12 people (one author said 20) living in the village of Burning Springs when oil was discovered there in 1860; or (b) that the gas pressure was so strong in the first well (Rathbone Well) that it blew the tools out of the hole; or (c) that "for all practical purposes the Rebel invasion and fire of May 9, 1863, marked the end of the Burning Springs oil field and the town itself."

My knowledge of the great oil field and early oil-boom city comes from four sources: (a) incidents related to me by my grandfather, Joshua Lee, who first saw the actual burning springs in June, 1828, and maintained a law office in the town from the spring of 1861 until he retired in 1885, except for the two years immediately following the Rebel invasion on May 9, 1863; (b) stories told to me by my father, Stephen Lee, who was employed in the field by the Rathbone-Camden oil interests from the spring of 1868 until the fall of 1875; (c) the experiences of a number of aged former workers in the field which they related to me in the summer of 1900, while I was attending a summer school in Burning Springs; and (d) my personal observations in and around the dying city during the decade from 1890 to 1900.

I was 21 years old when grandfather passed away in 1900, age 95 years. Father died in 1937, age 89 years. I heard them tell the exciting tales of the oil field and its oil-rich city so often that many of their stories became indelibly stamped upon my memory. I have included a few of their more highly interesting narratives in this volume, just as they were related to me, without enlargement or embellishment. I believe them to be true.

The book, however, goes beyond the oil fields, and tells how the early pioneers made their settlements in the valley, how they lived, and how their descendants sold their "birthright" in standing timber for a "mess of pottage"; and how the purchasers, called "timber hogs" by the natives, cut and slashed through the majestic forests so as to destroy all the

smaller growth. It also tells of the great fleets of timber that passed slowly down the river and through the locks to the giant lumber mills at Parkersburg. It describes, too, the picturesque locks, cascading dams, and the beauty of the limpid pools above the dams. Nor does it omit to tell how our Federal Government, through its inexcusable neglect of its own installations, permitted those dams to be washed away and those pools—unsurpassed recreational facilities—to be lost to the people.

There are tales, too, of the justly famed criminal lawyer, Charley Caldwell, and brief reviews of a few cases in which he appeared as counsel.

In a word, this book tells true "Tales of the Little Kanawha."

It is with a deep sense of appreciation that I acknowledge the assistance of many people in the preparation of this book.

For much of the historical data used I am indebted to Dr. Boyd B. Stutler, of Charleston, our foremost authority on West Virginia history; and also to Hon. Louis Reed, attorney at law, retired, Elizabeth, Wirt County, our recognized authority on the early history of the lower Little Kanawha Valley. They have been of incalculable assistance to me in this endeavor.

I am also indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Louis R. Roberts, of Burning Springs, for their assistance. Mr. Roberts' family has been identified with the place for more than a century. His grandfather, David A. Roberts, moved from near Baltimore to the Springs about 1860, and became a successful oil producer. Upon his death his sons, Louis R. Roberts, Sr., and James A. Roberts, took over the business, and they were even more successful than their father.

To give their children better school advantages, the brothers moved to Parkersburg, but kept their business office at the Springs. In 1905 they purchased the original 800-acre oil tract from the Rathbones; and by continuing to pump some old wells and drilling a few new ones they recovered a great

deal of oil from the worked-over land—enough to make them rich, but not enough to restore life to the dead town.

Louis loaned me a photostat copy of a full-page article from the *New York Herald* of August 14, 1865, which told the story of the Burning Springs oil field, as it looked to a New York reporter at that time. I have quoted extensively from it. Mrs. Roberts has written a semi-historical novel about the region, entitled *Full of Thy Riches,* which climaxes with the destruction of the oil field by the Rebels on May 9, 1863.

The U. S. Corps of Engineers at Huntington, West Virginia, in whose District the Little Kanawha River is located, has been most cooperative and helpful in supplying data concerning the locks and dams in the river—information necessary in the preparation of Chapter Seven.

Also, Mr. William E. Pyne, Director of Public Relations, Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, Baltimore, Maryland, has provided all available material respecting the construction, operation, and discontinuance of the Little Kanawha railroad, a branch of the Baltimore and Ohio.

My gratitude also goes to Mr. John Menefee, who was my guide when I visited Burning Springs Run on August 17, 1966 (See Chapter Nine). His grandfather came to the Springs in 1866 from Culpeper, Virginia; both John and his father were born and raised on the Run, and John still lives there. He said that he had heard both his father and grandfather describe a number of the incidents referred to in these pages.

I am deeply appreciative of the assistance of Mr. Frank Powers, of Charleston, a student of the early oil history of West Virginia, who aided materially in the undertaking by way of research and suggestions.

I am especially indebted to Rev. Clifford M. Lewis, S.J., Assistant to the President of Wheeling College, Wheeling, West Virginia, who so painstakingly edited the manuscript.

I am also grateful to the following individuals who either furnished, or assisted me in procuring, the illustrative pictures used in the book, as listed after their names:

Dr. Boyd B. Stutler, Charleston—Sketch of Val Rathbone,

Johnson N. Camden, and General Sherman P. Karns at Burning Springs, by Artist J. H. Diss DeBar.

I also owe much to Mrs. Helen Marsh (Mrs. Gordon) White of Lowell, Ohio, staff writer on a Parkersburg paper. She is a granddaughter of David A. Roberts, an early oil producer who came to Burning Springs from near Baltimore in 1860. Mrs. White contributed the following pictures: Original Rathbone Well, Well No. 206 Drilled at Burning Springs in 1864, Store of A. T. Gay, McConaughey Brothers' Gas Well, and L. C. Rogers' Early Plat of Burning Springs Area. An explanatory legend accompanies each picture.

Also, Mrs. Ruth Morgan of Elizabeth, staff writer for the *Parkersburg Sentinel,* generously donated the picture of the large gas well drilled in Burning Springs on March 1, 1968.

My brother, Russell V. Lee, Charleston, Lock and Dam No. 5, at the mouth of Vincent Run, two miles above Burning Springs; gasoline boat "Edith H."; and the Last Train on Little Kanawha Railroad.

Mr. Harry Righter, Sanoma, gasoline boat "Dove."

My sister, Mrs. Grace Lee Rawling, Delray Beach, Florida, Logs Behind West Fork Boom, at Creston. And to her husband, Dr. F. G. Rawling, must go the credit for making the original Detail Map of Burning Springs Early Oil Field; and also the tracing of the Map Recorded With Rathbone Heirs' Partition Deed. From these, Artist Robert G. Smith, Jr., French Creek, W. Va., made the exquisite maps appearing in the text.

Mrs. Lena Williams, Elizabeth, who procured from Elizabeth Museum, Rafting Logs at Creston and Ice Gorge in Little Kanawha.

State Department of Archives and History, Charleston, Johnson N. Camden and Charles T. Caldwell.

State Department of Commerce, Charleston, Early Drilling Apparatus.

Duane Spencer, Elizabeth, Looking Down Burning Springs Run; Wharf Boat at Creston; Devil's Tea Table at Creston; and Owensport.

Rev. Clifford M. Lewis, S.J., Wheeling College, Ruble Church; Rader Hotel; Armstrong Store; Tree Used as a Derrick; and Drilling One of River Bank Wells.

Von Young, Elizabeth, Present Day Ruins of Vincent Run Lock and Dam; and Present Day River Below Mouth of Burning Springs Run.

Mrs. William A. Botts, 1829 East North Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Sam Rathbone's Steamboat "Oneida."

Mrs. Botts found this ancient picture among the belongings of her late mother, Mrs. Lena Mills Thompson, who was born in Wirt County in 1875 and died in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, in April, 1967. She and her husband, Mark, migrated to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) in the late 1880's.

Howard B. Lee

Charleston, West Virginia
Stuart, Florida

January 1, 1968.

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Chapter One

PROLOGUE

The Little Kanawha River, 167 miles in length, rises in the southern part of Upshur County, near the Randolph County line, meanders in a generally northwesterly direction through Upshur, Braxton, Gilmer, Calhoun, Wirt, and Wood Counties, and empties into the Ohio River at Parkersburg. Here, however, I am concerned only with that portion of the river from the village of Creston to its mouth—a distance of 48 miles.

The first settlers in this lower valley came from eastern Virginia.[1] Their purpose was to find cheaper and more productive lands than were available in their home communities. They crossed the Appalachians through mountain gaps and followed the Tygart Valley, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers to the mouth of the Little Kanawha, where they founded a settlement about 1783 (exact date is uncertain) and named it Newport. In 1810, however, its name was changed to Parkersburg, in honor of Alexander Parker, whose daughter, after his death, gave the lands for the site of the courthouse and other county buildings.

Settlers continued to arrive. Some remained in the village, others fanned out up the valley into a virgin forest—a forest that had replanted itself through countless centuries of an unbroken cycle of nature. Buffalo, elk, deer, moose, bear, and smaller game were everywhere in abundance; myriads of birds of every hue and size swarmed overhead in the trees; and the streams teemed with fish. It was a wilderness paradise.

Those early home seekers selected their lands, acquired title thereto from the Commonwealth, and built their cabin homes along the waterways.

Some authorities say that no settlements were made in the lower Little Kanawha Valley until after the Revolution. The evidence is conclusive, however, that Richard Lee migrated to

[1] A few of those early settlers came down the Ohio River from Western Pennsylvania.

the valley in 1774, and made a permanent settlement the following year, 1775, at or near the site of the present village of Newark, in Wirt County.[2]

Shortly after the Revolution, Richard was joined by a younger brother, Jesse Lee—my great-grandfather—who had served two years (1777-1779) in the patriot army. Later, Jesse married Hannah Darnell, who had crossed the mountains with her family and settled on Hughes River, a nearby tributary of the Little Kanawha. The young couple also settled on a "plantation" on Hughes River, near its confluence with the Little Kanawha, where they raised a family of four sons and four daughters—among whom was my grandfather, Joshua Lee (1805-1900).[3]

Richard remained at his original settlement, "proved up" on his lands, and on April 6, 1789, he was given a patent or grant (same as a deed) by the Commonwealth of Virginia, signed by Governor Beverly Randolph, for 350 acres.[4] The patent described the lands by "metes and bounds," and then added these words: "Including his settlement made in 1775."[5] In 1795, however, Richard[6] sold 80 acres off his farm to Thomas Pribble.[7] Deed recorded in Harrison County.

Those pioneers were a classless society. They came from the same region, spoke the same language, lived in the same kind of houses, ate the same kind of food, endured the same

[2]See Appendix I.

[3]See Appendix I.

[4]This patent or grant is set out in full in Appendix I, and is of record in Virginia State Library, Archives Division, Richmond, Virginia, in

Grants 20—1788-1789

Reel 86—page 253

[5]This settlement of Richard Lee and other settlements in the area were only 20 miles from the hostile Indian territory across the Ohio River. How those early settlers escaped being massacred is one of the enigmas of our early pioneer history.

[6]AUTHOR'S NOTE: This Richard Lee, older brother of Jesse Lee, was the uncle of my grandfather Joshua Lee (son of Jesse), great-uncle of my father Stephen Lee (son of Joshua), and the great-great-uncle of the writer (son of Stephen).

[7]See Appendix I for reference to Thomas Pribble.

kind of hardships, shared the same kind of joys and sorrows, and were animated by the same hopes. Also, for mutual protection and assistance, they migrated in groups. One man working alone could not clear the land for crop raising, or erect a house, or build a barn. Therefore, they had "log rollings," "house raisings," and "barn raisings," when a dozen or more men joined in a collective effort to assist neighbors in such undertakings. Of course such workers were not paid, and no pay was expected.

To raise food, settlers first had to clear the land. The undergrowth presented no problem, and they had two methods of disposing of trees: felling and cutting them into easy-to-handle lengths, so workers could roll them into heaps for burning; and chopping rings around the tree trunks about three feet from the ground, which killed the tree and let the sunshine reach the growing crops. Of course, each method was a great waste of timber, but the settlers could not eat timber.

On April 29, 1826, Joshua married Nancy Davis (1807-1899), who, with her family came from Opequon Creek, near Winchester, Frederick County, Virginia, when Nancy was twelve years old. The young couple pushed farther up the river, and acquired lands in the big horseshoe bend in Spring Creek, two miles from its junction with the Little Kanawha. They lived at that one spot until Nancy's death, September 2, 1899, at the age of 92 years—75 years after her marriage. After her death, Joshua made his home with his widowed daughter, Sidney Lee White, a mile further down the creek, until the following March 25, 1900, when he passed away—age 95 years.[8]

That the reader may at least get a vague idea of how those early settlers lived in their homes, and how they preserved and prepared their food, I have chosen to describe the home and home surroundings of my grandfather, Joshua Lee. I selected his home because it was typical of other pioneer

[8]Joshua and Nancy were the parents of ten children—three daughters and seven sons. All except one reached old age. My father, Stephen (1848-1937), was the youngest. See last item in Appendix I.

homes in the valley; and was the only home, except my own, to which I had unrestricted access as a child—beginning 80 years ago.

The first home of Joshua and Nancy was constructed of hewed logs, but shortly after the Civil War it was replaced by an eight-room frame structure with a one-story kitchen and dining area in the rear. But like other old homes in the valley, it disappeared long ago.

The house stood in a grove of large oak, beech, sugar, and cedar trees; and a few yards from the rear door, in another large group of trees, a sizeable vein of pure, cool water came from under a ledge. A wooden conduit carried it into a large spring-basin, cut into a block of sandstone, which supplied the household with water. In summer the water passed into a large milk chest and flowed around crocks of milk, cream, cottage cheese, butter, eggs, etc., and thence into a large trough that served as a drinking place for farm animals.

Of course, not every home had a "spring-cooling system." Some had a small room called a cellar dug under the house. Others had a "cellar-house" built into the hillside, with the roof covered with a layer of earth three to four feet in thickness. And some homes placed the butter, cream, cottage cheese, eggs, etc., in a large basket or bucket, tied a rope to the handle or bail and lowered the container into the water well. This last method, however, was most inconvenient, as the container had to be pulled up before, and lowered after, a bucket of water was drawn.

Like all pioneers, during the cold winter months, Joshua and Nancy cooked their food in an open wood-burning fireplace; and in summer they used an outside cooking facility. The large living room had ample space for a sizeable drop-leaf dining table, and on cold winter days Grandmother preferred to use the fireplace for cooking, and the family dined in the large living room.

At the right side of the fireplace was an upright steel shaft, brought from the log house, securely fastened at both top and bottom. Three swinging metal arms, called "cranes," of different lengths were attached to it, one above the other.

Each crane was capable of supporting a large pot and its contents. The pot bails also were of different lengths, so when each crane carried its proper pot their bottoms were at the same level over the fire. When not in use, the cranes were swung around against the wall.

Grandmother also had a skillet-like utensil she called a "dutch oven." It had four-inch legs and a lid with a one-inch rim around the edge. She would place a quantity of red-hot coals on the hearth, put a chunk of butter in the oven and set it on the coals to heat. At the proper time she would pour her cornmeal mix into it, replace the lid and cover it with coals. The finished product was the world's best-tasting corn pone.

A dozen steps from the backdoor of the residence was the smokehouse—a tightly built log structure about 12 by 18 feet. After the hogs were killed in the fall, the meat was salted and hung on crossbeams in this house for smoking. A smouldering fire of hickory and sassafras woods mixed with corncobs was kept burning under the meat for at least 48 hours. This process gave it that delectable flavor so characteristic of good country hams.

But, when it came to the preparation and preservation of food, the pioneer women of the Little Kanawha Valley, and possibly elsewhere, possessed skills that were not given to mere men. For example: They engineered a preparation called headcheese made from ground-up heads and feet of hogs, cooked and seasoned, and forming when cold a jellied mass or loaf. When sliced, heated, and put between pieces of buttered hot pone it made a sandwich that was a gourmet's delight. They also rendered the leaf fat of hogs into lard which they used in cooking and also as a perfect sealer. The headcheese, cooked sausage, backbones, and spareribs were put in jars and the hot lard poured around and over them until they were completely sealed. This food was then stored for use during the long winter months.

Every fall the pioneer women of the valley also canned quantities of fruits, and sun-dried a variety of foods for winter use, such as green beans (called "leather breeches"), ap-

ples, peaches, pumpkin, squash, and corn (cut at the roasting ear peak). In addition, such staple fruits and vegetables as "winter-keeping" apples, potatoes, beets, carrots, and turnips were buried in specially prepared places in the garden at sufficient depth to prevent freezing. Also, there were always on hand quantities of little white navy beans. Then, too, there were the jellies, jams, and butters made from wild plums, grapes, blackberries, and huckleberries that grew in great profusion in every community. Also, there were the pickled products—beans, kraut, corn, cabbage, etc., usually preserved in homemade kegs and small barrels. Sorghum cane was not introduced in the valley until just before the Civil War; and the pioneers relied on maple sugar and syrup, and honey for "long sweetening."

There were not many differences from family to family in the living standards of the early settlers. Bread was the only food item that presented a problem. For many years, the only bread the pioneers knew was made of corn; and they made their own meal by rubbing ears of corn over a grater, an instrument made on the order of today's nutmeg grater, but on a much larger scale. The meal was sifted to remove the husk, or rough outer covering of the kernel.

"In the early 1850's," said Grandfather, "a millwright from Eastern Virginia proposed to the settlers that if they would donate the labor and materials he would construct a six-foot high dam across Spring Creek and build a water-powered mill that would process both wheat and corn into flour and meal. The mill was to become his property, but to be used for the benefit of the general public, on a toll basis."

The proposal was accepted by the settlers, and in due time the mill was in operation. The north end of the dam was about 100 yards from my grandfather's house, but the mill was located across the creek at the other end of the dam.

At the age of eight years (1887), I rode horseback behind father on my first trip to that mill. Father led a second horse that carried a grist and my ten-year-old brother. While our corn was being ground, father took my brother and me down under the mill and showed us the large jet, that came from

above the dam at creek bottom level, striking the water turbine with such force that it ran the whole mill machinery.

The mill operated successfully until the spring of 1890, when a flood swept the dam away. In the meantime similar mills had been built in adjacent communities, and the dam was never rebuilt.

A few years after his marriage, Grandfather obtained a copy of the Virginia Code of Laws, a set of her Supreme Court Reports (decisions), a *Digest of Virginia Laws*, a couple of form books, and began to study law. In the course of time he was admitted to the bar.[9] Later, he opened a law office in the town of Elizabeth; but people were few in number and the volume of his business did not require his presence in his office more than one day a week, except at court time. In the early spring of 1861, however, he opened a branch office in the developing town of Burning Springs,[10] about three miles from his home.

The late Charley Caldwell was probably the most noted, certainly the most colorful, criminal lawyer in the history of the Little Kanawha Valley. In talking with me in Elizabeth in the summer of 1900, shortly before Grandfather's death, he remarked:

"Did you know that your grandfather was largely responsible for my taking up the legal profession?"

"No," I answered, "Tell me about it."

"In April, 1869, shortly after I was 22 years old," said Senator Caldwell, "I left my job as a clerk on an Ohio River steamboat and journeyed up the Little Kanawha River on a hack to see the fabulous Burning Springs oil field. Three days

[9]In that early day there were two ways by which one could become a lawyer: (1) "read law" in a lawyer's office until he became "well grounded in the law"; and (2) attain the same proficiency by home study. In either case, however, the applicant had to have a lawyer-friend appear before the Circuit Judge and "vouch" for his good character and period of study, and move for his admission to the bar. And since all lawyers and jurists entered the profession in like manner, few applicants were rejected. This practice was continued in West Virginia until a few years after the turn of the present century.

[10]AUTHOR'S NOTE: My grandfather's legal profession is referred to here to explain the reasons for his presence in, and knowledge of, the oil-boom town of Burning Springs, subsequently discussed in Chapters Two through Eight.

later, on my return trip, I stopped at this little village of Elizabeth—intending to stay overnight. I stayed ten years.

"Then as now, in the center of the town was an entire city block, called 'Courthouse Square,' with the county courthouse in its center. During my second afternoon in the village I wandered into the courtroom. Court was in session, and your grandfather was trying a jury case. He was a strikingly handsome man and persuasively eloquent. His argument to the jury both fascinated and captivated me, and right there I determined to be a lawyer. Once before I left my job and 'read law' for two months in the office of a Portsmouth, Ohio, law firm, but gave it up. But this time I decided to let nothing deter me.

"When court adjourned I followed Mr. Lee to his office," continued the Senator, "and told him of my determination. I was even bold enough to ask him if I might 'read law' in his office, and he agreed. Two months later, however, he decided to close his Elizabeth office and maintain only his office at Burning Springs, as it was near his home. In the meantime, I had become acquainted with a very able young lawyer named D. H. Leonard, and he invited me to continue my studies in his office. Twelve months later I was admitted to the bar."[11]

In the same conversation I told the Senator that I planned to study law, and he invited me to visit him at his Parkersburg office. Two of those visits are discussed in Chapter Fourteen.

[11] For a more complete story of the life of Senator Caldwell, a discussion of two of his most sensational murder trials, and a description of a few of his misdemeanor cases, see Chapter Fourteen.

Chapter Two

OIL IN THE VALLEY

Oil was the first commodity to be shipped in any quantity down the Little Kanawha River. It came from what some historians say was the richest shallow oil pool the world has ever known, discovered in 1860 at Burning Springs, Wirt County, 38 miles up the river from Parkersburg.

The town of Burning Springs and Burning Springs Run that bisected it derived their names from two actual burning springs located on the run bank, probably 100 yards from the river. One spring, however, was much smaller in volume than the other and is not considered here. Also, oil and gas bubbled up from a sizeable underwater spring in the nearby river.

For many centuries, no doubt, oil and gas from the shallow underground oil pool had followed the water veins feeding the springs. The oil collected as a black scum on the surface of the land springs, and when ignited the gas at the larger spring would burn until extinguished by a strong gust of wind. The spring water had a sulphur-saltish taste and was generally thought to possess great curative properties for certain human ailments.

The name of the first permanent settler on Burning Springs Run is unknown. Probably the first white men to see it were Henry Neal, William Triplett, and Daniel Powell. In 1792, while hunting buffalo near its mouth, they were attacked by Indians. Neal and Triplett were killed, but Powell escaped.[1]

But other historians, possibly more reliable, say that 20 years earlier, 1772, the brothers Jesse and Elias Hughes, accompanied by Col. William Lowther, explored the lower Little Kanawha Valley, found and named the burning springs, and also explored and gave their name to Hughes River, a branch of the Little Kanawha.

Attracted, no doubt, by the reputed healing properties of

[1] See Withers' *Chronicles of Border Warfare*, pp. 411-12.

the springs' mineral waters, and the mystery of a "spring that burned," settlers began to arrive on the run. They not only believed in the marvelous curative virtues of the black "medicine" that collected on the springs' surface, but declared it to be "God's greatest gift to suffering humanity."

My grandfather, Joshua Lee, said that he first visited the village in June 1828, and that it was then called "Burning Springs." It contained 20 or 25 dwellings, constructed of round logs, with clapboard roofs and puncheon floors, and housed possibly 100 people—mostly adult health seekers. Connected with each house was a very productive-looking garden.

Grandfather made the village his headquarters for a few days while he looked around for a suitable home site for himself and young wife.[2] "At that time," he said, "the larger spring was burning and a thick black scum (oil) covered the waters of both springs."

The village had neither a church building nor a preacher; but every Sunday morning during the summer months, beneath a great oak near the burning spring, the people held what they called an "open air worship service."

Grandfather attended one of those meetings. "It was conducted," he said, "by a sincere but woefully ignorant villager, who reminded his audience that we are still living in an age of miracles. This burning spring is as much a miracle to us as the burning bush was to Moses. Moses saw a fire in the bush, but the bush was not burned. That was a miracle. Today we see the fire in the spring where there is nothing visible to burn. That, too, is a miracle; and miracles show the power of God.' "

"The audience voiced its agreement," commented Grandfather, "by such audible exclamations as: 'Amen! Amen!'

"Those early settlers," said Grandfather, "regarded the oil as 'nature's wonder cure' for many maladies, especially rheumatism; and sufferers from that ailment journeyed long dis-

[2]The home site selected by Grandfather is described in Chapter One, and was three miles from Burning Springs.

tances for a small quantity of the precious fluid to rub on their rheumatic joints.

THE OLD RUBLE CHURCH

This old church still stands on the hill at the head of Burning Springs Run. It is the oldest structure in the area, probably the oldest in the Little Kanawha Valley. It was built about 1835 by Aaron S. Ruble, and used by the early settlers on Burning Springs Run, Nettle Run, Chestnut Run, and Two Run (each of these small streams has its source near this church) as a church and schoolhouse. It is maintained by the community. Occasionally, a church service is held.

"The owner of the spring was a great promoter," continued Grandfather. "He sold the 'medicine' for fifty cents a quart, describing the oil as 'God's greatest gift to suffering humanity,' and told people of the marvelous cures he had seen effected by its use.

"Although it was wholly untrue, the owner also told the ailing that George Washington once visited the spring and had been greatly benefitted from bathing his rheumatic knee joints with the fluid, and that was why he had named the spring the 'Washington Spring.' "[3]

In 1840, the wealthy William Palmer Rathbone of New

[3]When I was a small boy the spring was still referred to as the "Washington Spring" by the older people.

York and New Jersey, a former sea captain, began buying lands at Burning Springs; and the following year he and his two oldest sons, John Valleau and John Castello, or Castelli, known as "Val" and "Cass," and their families, and the youngest son, William Van Allen, unmarried, arrived at the village of Burning Springs.

In the meantime all public lands in the valley had been "taken up," or patented, by earlier settlers; and the Rathbones had to purchase their lands from individual owners. They first bought a tract of 800 acres lying along the river and on Burning Springs Run, which included the burning springs. Later purchases increased their holdings in the immediate vicinity to 10,000 acres.[4] Their lands, however, were not in one contiguous block, but were interspersed here and there by a number of small farms and village lots, owned by divers people.

The Rathbones started a thriving "medicine" business soon after their arrival at the Springs. In the river near their home, when the stream was low, gas and oil bubbled up through the quiet waters, and the oil collected as a thick scum on the surface. They obtained this oil by spreading a blanket over the water, and when it became soaked, they wrung the oil out into a tub. They also skimmed the oil from the burning springs as fast as it accumulated.[5]

A small pottery in Parkersburg made the attractively flowered quart-size jugs[6] used by the Rathbones in marketing

[4]The Rathbone family, however, including the son-in-law, Peter G. Van Winkle, of Parkersburg, purchased lands in other sections until their holdings in Wirt County totaled more than 21,000 acres, as shown by the County Land Books for the year 1848.

[5]For a brief sketch of the early Rathbone family, see Appendix II.

[6]In the 1890's there were at least a dozen of those small jugs on a shelf in my grandfather's smokehouse. Each jug bore a printed label which read about as follows:

RATHBONES' ROCK OIL

NATURE'S WONDER CURE

For rheumatism and muscular neuralgia rub the joints and affected areas frequently and vigorously with the fluid.

For consumption, coughs, colds, croup, asthma, bronchitis, and other respiratory ailments, take one tablespoonful morning and evening, as needed.

their *elixir vitae,* which was called "rock oil" because it came from a porous rock.[7] It had a wide distribution, and sold locally for fifty cents a quart; elsewhere, for a dollar.[8]

In 1849, a post office named "Burning Springs" was established in the settlement with Val Rathbone as postmaster. On April 2, 1861, however, the Post Office Department changed its name to "Rathbone," and a few months later the General Assembly of Virginia incorporated the town and gave it the same name. In 1863 the Legislature of the new State of West Virginia retained the town's corporate status and identified it as "Rathbone City." But in 1868 the Department changed the name of the post office back to "Burning Springs," and the town soon reverted to the same original name.[9]

Some West Virginia histories say that in addition to their "medicine" business, the Rathbones established a general store, a steam-powered sawmill and a steam-powered gristmill, where they cut lumber and ground cornmeal for the settlers; that they also operated a "boatyard at the Burning Springs Riffle," and engaged in timber cutting for their sawmill.

One authority also says that when oil was found at Burning Springs in 1860 the village had a population of 12 people; another says 20. These figures are gross historical inaccuracies. There were probably more than a dozen Rathbones, adults and children. In the 20 years since their arrival, their small store had grown into a modest department store. And, if the Rathbones operated all the enterprises mentioned by other historians, they had to employ a number of men, and that meant a good sized village. By that time, too, the surrounding country was well settled with farmers, and the Springs was their "shopping center." Both my father and

[7]Later, oil was given the more dignified name of "petroleum," derived from two Latin words—"petra," meaning rock, and "oleum," oil.

[8]Mr. John Menefee, mentioned in Chapter Nine as my guide, said that his grandfather miqrated to Burning Springs in 1866 from Culpeper, in Eastern Virginia; and he had heard him say many times that during the 1850's "Rathbones' Rock Oil" in quart jugs was sold in his home town for a dollar a quart.

[9]These historical facts were supplied by Mr. Louis Reed.

grandfather said that at the time of the oil strike, Burning Springs was a "sizeable village."

Moreover, in 1860, Burning Springs was still regarded as a great "health resort," and every month many ailing persons came to drink the nauseous waters and bathe their "jints" with the oily fluid, which many people still regarded as "God's greatest gift to suffering humanity."

In the middle 1850's, the Rathbones also decided to add salt manufacturing to their various enterprises, provided sufficient salt brine could be found.

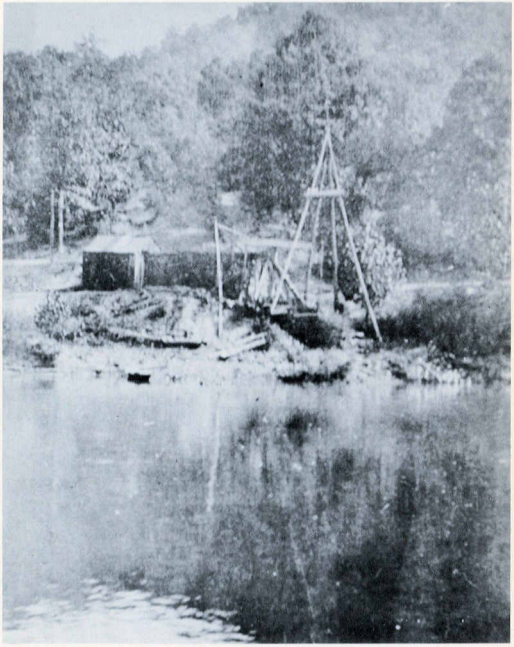
On lands owned by Cass Rathbone was an abandoned well that had been drilled in 1832 to a depth of 200 feet for salt brine. Two experienced spring pole drillers were brought from Malden salt works in Kanawha County to revive the old well. They cleaned it out, and then drilled it to a depth of nearly 300 feet, when they tapped a strong vein of salt brine, but it was so impregnated with oil that it could not be used, and the project was abandoned.

On August 27, 1859, near Titusville, Pennsylvania, Col. Edwin L. Drake drilled the first oil-producing well, drilled exclusively for oil, in world history. It began flowing oil at a depth of 59½ feet. That discovery caused much speculation in and about Burning Springs, and in February, 1860, General Sherman P. Karns[10] leased the old salt-brine well from Cass Rathbone. The lease included the use of a steam-powered pump on the premises. The pump was set to work, and after pumping salt water for a week, the well began producing oil at the rate of seven barrels a day, which sold for $20 a barrel.

The oil fever ran high in Burning Springs; and the Rathbones, with Johnson N. Camden[11] and a few other associates from Parkersburg, began drilling a well just below the mouth of Burning Springs Run on lands owned by the elder Rath-

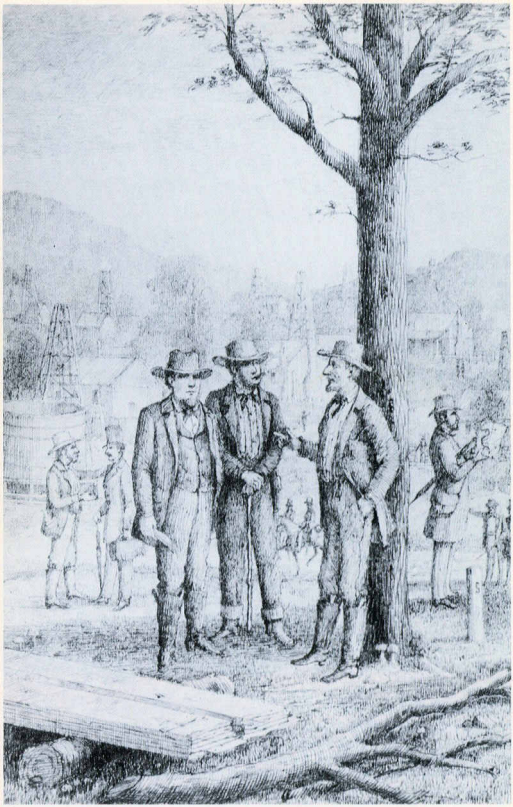
[10] General Karns was a legendary figure around Burning Springs—a man who had been "everywhere." In the lease he signed with Cass Rathbone he described himself as a resident of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. He also spelled his name "Karns," but Dr. Thoenen, in his *History of the Oil and Gas Industry in West Virginia*, spells it "Karnes."

[11] See Appendix III for a brief sketch of the life of Johnson N. Camden.



THE ORIGINAL RATHBONE WELL

David A. Roberts came from near Baltimore to Burning Springs in 1860 and became a successful oil producer. He passed this picture on to his children. It is now owned by his granddaughter, Mrs. Helen Marsh (Mrs. Gordon) White of Lowell, Ohio. Mrs. White is the daughter of the late Senator Harvey Marsh and his late wife, Mrs. Kate Roberts Marsh, of Parkersburg. Note the small walking beam. No spring pole. Standing on the opposite side of the river, with this picture in hand, one is able to locate almost the exact site of that ancient well by the sloping contour of the hilltop in the background.



BURNING SPRINGS—Sketch by Artist J. H. Diss Bebar
Johnson N. Camden leaning against tree. First on his right, General Sherman P. Karns. Next to Karns is John V. (Val) Rathbone. Man on right of tree is William Harkness, a speculator from Philadelphia.

bone. It was begun, says the State's roadside marker, "in 1859, completed in May, 1860." But Thoenen's *History of the Oil and Gas Industry,* etc., page 13, says:

> In April the Rathbones started their well, and in July 1860, after reaching a depth of 303 feet, they struck oil. Their efforts were generously rewarded, for the well produced 100 barrels a day for a period of four months before the production gradually declined.[12]

Grandfather always said that this first well was drilled on the edge of the great oil pool, and after six months it ceased to produce and was abandoned.

The well was first called "Rathbone's Flowing Well," but later the name was shortened to "Rathbone Well." It was the second oil-producing well in world history, drilled solely for oil. It must not be confused with the "Karns Well," which was drilled for salt brine, and previously described in this chapter.[13]

The statement on the roadside marker at the mouth of Burning Springs Run that the Rathbone Well was drilled with a spring pole is, I am convinced, an historical inaccuracy.[14] Neither my grandfather, Joshua Lee, nor any of the old-timers with whom I talked in 1900,[15] all of whom saw the well while drilling operations were in progress, ever mentioned to me that it was drilled with a spring pole.

There was no necessity for the Rathbones to use a spring pole. They were accustomed to the use of steam-powered machinery. For years they had operated both their sawmill and gristmill with steam boilers and engines, and had leased a steam-powered pump to General Karns.[16] Moreover, the accompanying photograph shows a small walking beam and not a spring pole.

[12] This discrepancy in dates is unimportant. The main thing is *the well was drilled.*

[13] For a full discussion of this Rathbone Well, its location, etc., see Chapter Eight.

[14] This roadside marker is set out in full in Chapter Eight.

[15] See "Reminiscences" at the end of Chapter Four.

[16] During the Civil War, because of the scarcity of materials, some producers did have to use a spring pole in drilling, but not the Rathbone-Camden interests.

On page 13 of Thoenen's *History of the Oil and Gas Industry in West Virginia* it is said that when the Rathbones decided to drill for oil, John C. (Cass) Rathbone "took one of their boats and went to Malden to get a steam engine to power their drilling operations."

It was the plan of the well owners to go down 300 feet—the depth of the old salt-brine well that was then producing oil—and if oil was not found at that depth, the project was to be abandoned.[17]

"One morning in May or July (whichever date we accept), 1860, the drillers announced that they had stopped the evening before at a depth of 298½ feet, and should reach the 300-foot goal by mid-afternoon the next day. By one o'clock practically everybody in the village and surrounding countryside, including Grandfather who lived only three miles distant, were grouped around the well—anxiously waiting.

"Shortly after noon, the Rathbones, Mr. Camden, General Karns, and I, stood near the well—Mr. Camden biting his underlip as was his custom when nervous. They were tense, nervous, anxious. And well they might be for either wealth or poverty for some of them was in the balance. Local people, too, were greatly agitated for they knew if oil was found they would share indirectly in the wealth.

"The drillers worked steadily. Finally, the 300-foot mark on the drill rope was reached. We all moved closer to the well. The silence was oppressive. The 301-foot mark appeared, the 302-foot mark, next 302½-foot mark came up. All this covered a period of more than five hours, and the suspense was maddening. Just as hope was about to give way to despair, and as the 303-foot mark on the rope was reached, about five o'clock, a loud hissing sound came from the well, and the air was rank with the odor of gas. Next, oil in a sizeable stream began to pour from the casing onto the floor. The crowd went wild with joy. Even Mr. Camden forgot his dignity and began slapping Val Rathbone on the back.

[17] I heard Grandfather tell this exciting story so many times that I almost memorized it. From here on it is his story, as I remember it. Therefore, I have enclosed it in quotation marks.

"The drillers took no time out, but quickly pulled the tools from the well, attached an el (L)-shaped valve to the casing and diverted the oil into a barrel. When it was full another was set in place, and so on until five barrels were filled. The valve was then closed. The average time required to fill a barrel was fifteen minutes, which indicated a daily production of approximately 100 barrels.

"There followed a wild celebration. In fact it was a wild never-to-be-forgotten night. Mr. Camden sent a messenger on a fast horse to Parkersburg to notify his wife and business associates of the great strike, and then joined in the revelry that lasted until well toward morning.

"The merrymaking over, people sat around in groups speculating on the size and extent of the oil pool, and what effect its discovery would have on the life of the community. But not even in their wildest imaginings could they visualize the size of the oil pool, or picture the actual future impact that oil was to have on their own lives and upon the lives of the people in the valley.

"Telegraph wires soon carried the news of the rich strike to every part of the country, and newspapers in several large cities sent their own reporters to the scene to get the story first-hand. Thus Burning Springs was well launched on its road to wealth and infamy."[18]

William Palmer Rathbone did not live long after the great oil discovery on his lands.[19] A newspaper reporter for the *New York Herald* visited the Springs in July, 1865, and on August 14, following, he published in his paper a full page article concerning the oil industry in the area. In reference to the Rathbones, he said:

> Rathbone paid from one to five dollars per acre for his tract, and his heirs have realized splendid fortunes from it. At the time of his death, the property was not

[18] One West Virginia history says that when this first well tapped the oil pool, the gas pressure blew the tools out of the hole. This is inaccurate. Only one well in the Burning Springs field, said the old-timers, blew the tools out of the hole—the Jones Well, described in Chapter Five.

[19] He died in Parkersburg in 1862 and is buried in Riverview Cemetery at the foot of 13th Street in that city, as are his wife, his son Val, and other members of his family.

so valuable; . . . In addition to the valuable tract, Rathbone purchased largely in other places to the amount of eight or ten thousand acres. Upon the division of his estate the two eldest sons obtained a deed to a part of the lands upon which oil had not been discovered. After its discovery they disposed of leases to different parties for from one to two thousand dollars (one acre in each lease)—altogether realizing about one million dollars. The other members of the Rathbone family have handsome fortunes, independent of their interest in tracts of land as yet undeveloped.[20]

[20]For use in the preparation of this book, Mr. Louis R. Roberts, of Burning Springs, loaned me his photostat copy of this *New York Herald* article.

The "two eldest sons" referred to were John Valleau and John Castelli, commonly called "Val" and "Cass."

Apparently, the reporter forgot that he was in the new State of West Virginia, for he dated his article: "Parkersburg, Va., July 31, 1865."

Chapter Three

THE STAMPEDE[1]

Immediately after the first well came in, Camden and Val Rathbone formed a partnership[2] and began drilling two additional wells, located about one and two hundred yards, respectively, up the run from the river. The wide publicity given the first well set the country agog. But when wells Nos. 2 and 3 came in, each with a daily production in excess of 600 barrels, they started a "wild rush" to Burning Springs comparable to the stampedes to the "gold strikes" of the early West. In fact, so great was the influx of people that within a few months the village had mushroomed into a city of 6,000 population—with people living in huts, shanties, tents, or any place that afforded shelter from the elements.

How and where to house that growing multitude became an acute problem. For several years the Rathbones had operated a sawmill on the run and cut lumber for local use. To meet the immediate housing needs, however, they added a second and much larger mill, and both plants operated at full capacity. Landlords hastily erected hundreds of cheap up-and-down houses out of rough lumber, with wooden strips nailed over the cracks in outside walls to keep out the cold. Later, the Rathbones erected a large planing mill for smoothing and a kiln for seasoning lumber, and thereafter houses were of somewhat better construction.

The first arrivals at the Spring, after the big strike, were speculators from Philadelphia, New York, and other points in the East. They came with big bankrolls, determined to profit in some way from the "black gold rush."

The Rathbones leased much of their lands in one-acre blocks to these speculators for an advance bonus payment of

[1] This chapter is based upon incidents related to me by my grandfather; and, also, upon conversations I had during the summer school in 1900 with a number of aged former workers in the Burning Springs oil field.

[2] This partnership was dissolved only by the death of Val Rathbone in 1897. See Appendix II.

$1,000 in cash and a royalty of one-fourth of all oil found under the leased premises, delivered to them "at the river in solid iron-bound barrels of forty gallons capacity." Of course, the barrels had to be purchased from the Rathbones' cooperage, which also netted them a nice profit.

Notwithstanding that first oil strike, there were a few landowners who thought it was only a bubble and leased their lands, or sold the mineral rights, for mere pittances—only to regret it bitterly later. In his article, the *New York Herald* reporter told of one such owner:

> About the time of the oil discovery one of the Pettys [John F.] leased his whole interest in certain oil territory for ten dollars, and subsequently became so chagrined at his error that he spent most of his time cogitating as to the best manner of putting an end to his existence—whether by shooting, drowning, or cutting his throat. The successful purchaser finally presented him with twelve thousand dollars as a donation, upon which he is now living near Point Pleasant, Ohio. Another of the family by marriage [W. R. Buffington who married one of the Petty girls] did better. He held on to his portion of the estate until after the discovery of oil, and realized some fifty thousand dollars.

In the meantime, Camden had constructed an oil refinery at Parkersburg, and was ready to purchase all the oil produced in the field.

Grandfather said that following the speculators, came the bulk of the town's population. All classes came—rich and poor, workers and idlers, promoters and gamblers, bootleggers and pickpockets. And, of course, the denizens of the underworld preyed upon the workers. Killers, too, came; and it was nothing unusual for a murder to occur every few days, and very little was done about it.

The county had never had a licensed saloon, and at first the bootleggers operated covertly. Soon, however, they began to pass bribe money to the officials, and the "speakeasies" became open saloons with gambling rooms attached.

EARLY DRILLING APPARATUS

Type of early drilling apparatus used at Burning Springs. Note upright shaft with cleats that was used for a derrick, and the nearby walking beam and Bull wheel.

On the hillside, near where the present highway leaves the river and turns up the run, a group of speculators built the first notorious "Chicago House"—a twenty-room combination hotel, saloon, gambling joint, and whorehouse, where they kept a half-dozen girls for the entertainment of their male guests. The tough "Old Madams" also moved into town and set up a half-dozen brothels, with from six to ten girls in each house.

In short, Burning Springs became a Sodom of sin, anointed with oil.

But the Chicago House, emporium of vice, was burned in the great Rebel conflagration of May 9, 1863 (See Chapter Four). In 1865, however, a new forty-room, more luxurious

and more infamous, Chicago House was built on top of the hill just above the old site. It operated until the late 1870's when it, too, burned. It was never rebuilt.[3]

But the town had its brighter side. Reputable business men also came, and in time the place boasted of four large department stores and several smaller shops, two churches—Methodist and Baptist—with resident pastors, two small but decent hotels—the Pierpont and Shaw—and many primitive boarding houses.

Not long after the Rathbone-Camden interests brought in wells Nos. 2 and 3, a number of new operators moved in with steam-powered drilling outfits, which greatly increased production and added to the oil storage problem.

There were then no tanks or pipe lines for the storage and transportation of oil, and where to store this huge overflow now became a critical question. To meet this situation the Rathbone-Camden partners constructed a couple of dams across Burning Springs Run so as to form large storage basins for oil. Oil, being lighter, floats on the surface of water. Each dam had a sluice-gate that could be raised and lowered in slots. The bottoms of the gates were kept just under the bottom oil level, which permitted the water to escape, but retained the oil.

To transport oil to his Parkersburg refinery, Camden purchased all available barges on the river. Each barge held about 2,000 barrels, and to prevent the liquid from rushing to the front and spilling over, should the barge strike an obstruction, he built strong crosswise partitions in them at about twelve-foot intervals. The barges were decked over with heavy lumber, with vents or openings in each compartment for loading and to permit the escape of gas generated by the oil. Each barge carried a large oar, or sweep, on both bow and stern, to enable the pilot and two crewmen to keep it in the channel.[4] V-shaped wooden conduits carried the oil from the

[3] AUTHOR'S NOTE: Grandfather said that this second Chicago House was built on the spot from which he and a number of others watched the great Rebel fire described in Chapter Four.

[4] See Chapter Five for details of barge running.

WELL NO. 206 DRILLED AT BURNING SPRINGS IN 1864

This picture was taken by Dr. John K. Roberts. It is now owned by Mrs. Elizabeth Roberts Peeker of Williamstown, West Virginia. It was made available by her cousin Mrs. Helen Marsh (Mrs. Gordon) White of Lowell, Ohio.

Note the pipe that carried the oil from the well to the wooden tank.

storage basins to the barges moored in the river nearby; and many teams were used to haul oil in barrels from "up the run" to the barges. Once at the refinery, the oil was pumped from the barges into large storage tanks, and the empty barges were pushed back up the river by a small flat-bottomed steamboat.

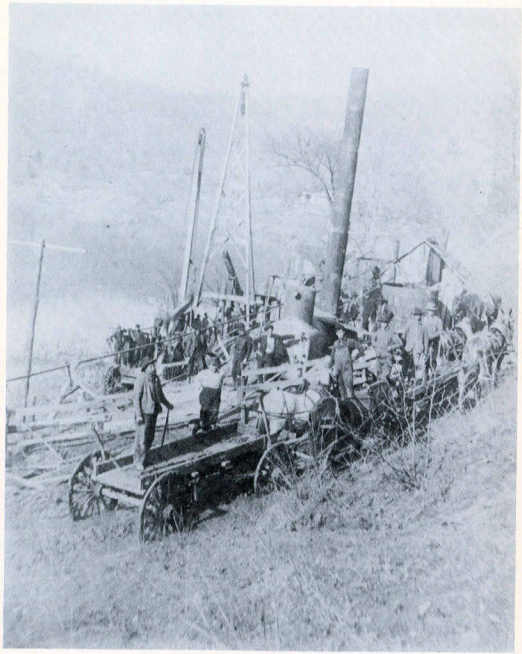
"When the first barge was loaded and ready for the 'run' to Parkersburg," said Grandfather, "Mr. Camden announced that he and two volunteers would make the trip. 'I want to see first-hand,' said he, 'just what dangers, if any, the men will encounter on such trips,' The trip was made safely and without any apparent danger."

Loaded oil barges could make the run to Parkersburg only when there was at least a four-foot rise in the river. Between high waters oil had to be stored in the field, and the run basin facilities frequently were filled to overflowing. To meet this emergency the Rathbones installed two tube saws in their sawmills—one for cutting barrel staves, the other for cutting larger staves for oil storage tanks. They also erected a large cooperage and employed a dozen coopers to make barrels and tanks. Still they could not keep pace with production.

"In October, 1861," said Grandfather, "two wells came in—first, the 'Eternal Center,' so named by drillers because they thought it had tapped the center of the oil pool and would last forever. Second, the 'Llewellyn,' named in honor of the owner. Each well produced about 1,500 barrels a day, the largest in the field up to that time."[5]

In the *New York Herald*, August 14, 1865, its reporter, who had visited the Burning Springs oil field, thus describes the "Eternal Center" well:

[5] In the summer of 1900, when I was in school at Burning Springs (See Chapter Four), probably a dozen of the old wells, including the "Eternal Center" and "Llewellyn," as pointed out by old-timers, were still being pumped for an hour twice a week. Each well produced from two to four barrels of oil at a pumping. Eventually, however, they ceased to produce, and their locations were forgotten.



DRILLING ONE OF THE RIVER BANK WELLS
(The original of this picture had to be made in the summer of 1860.)

> Among the most prominent wells struck . . . was the Eternal Center, the most famous of all oil wells in West Virginia. The oil burst forth in huge quantities at a depth of only one hundred and thirty-nine feet, and the well regularly produced for a long time at seven hundred to one thousand barrels per day, sometimes two thousand. It now produces twenty-five barrels per day, and has been sunk to a depth of three hundred and eighty feet.

In the same article the reporter stated that there were two Llewellyn wells–"Big Llewellyn" and "Little Llewellyn":

> . . . the Big Llewellyn flowed two thousand barrels per day when first struck. It could not be collected or barrelled until it reduced to about fourteen hundred. Oil was struck in the Little Llewellyn about January, 1861, flowed until March, then pumped from three hundred to five hundred barrels per day to December, 1861. In cleaning out the well the working parties got some tools fast, and were still trying to get them out when Sam Jones [sic] made his raid in June, 1862 [sic][6] and all business of course was suspended. The last day it was pumped it produced five hundred and forty barrels in six working hours. There is oil now in it at the depth of forty feet, and from ten to fifteen barrels obtained per day.

The "oil fever" now assumed epidemic proportions among both land owners and speculators. The Rathbones raised the cash bonus for a one-acre lease from one to two thousand dollars, and the oil royalty from one-fourth to one-third. Many speculators paid the increase, and the boom continued to mushroom.

A few developers, however, rejected the increase, secured cheaper leases on Nettle Run, the next branch below Burning Springs Run, and drilled a few wells there–mostly "dry holes." This group soon became known as the "Dry Well

[6]The Confederate General who destroyed the oil at Burning Springs was William E. Jones, not "Sam Jones." The date was May 9, 1863, not "June, 1862." See Chapter Four.

LOOKING DOWN BURNING SPRINGS RUN DURING OIL BOOM

(The original of this picture must have been made shortly before the Rebel invasion of May 9, 1863.)

Club," and a local wag suggested this bit of doggerel for their "hymn of praise":

Now, sons of Lazarus, gather round,
And sink your wells deep in the ground;
Bend on your ropes and sharp your bits,
And give the liquid Ophir fits.

Come all lame ducks, the fun's begun,
But don't lay eggs on Nettle Run;
For if you do you'll all get fleeced,
The Dry Well Club have got it leased.[7]

The "Dry Well Club" members, however, drilled too near the mouth of the run. A few years later scores of heavily producing wells were drilled near the headwaters of Nettle

[7]Taken from the article in the *New York Herald* of August 14, 1865, first mentioned at the end of Chapter Two.

Run, and they were classified as being in the Burning Springs Field.

But across the political horizon the shadow of disaster loomed large. In April, 1861, the hatreds that had been building up for years between the peoples of the southern and northern sections of our country suddenly burst into the flaming Civil War, and Burning Springs did not escape its fury.

When war finally broke upon the bewildered Nation the political differences among the people of the border town of Burning Springs became intense. Not infrequently an argument between a Rebel sympathizer and a Union adherent ended in death for one of the disputants. If the Rebel survived he hurriedly fled the town to escape mob violence. If the Union supporter prevailed he was regarded by many as a public benefactor.[8]

[8]That bitterness was reflected in the following letter written by Jacob Henry, Burning Springs, Virginia, to Friend Hailey (no address). It is from the collection of Mr. H. E. Matheny, of Akron, Ohio, and made available through the courtesy of Dr. Boyd B. Stutler:

Burning Springs, Va. May 19, 1861

Friend Hailey sir i embrace this favorable opportunity of informing you that i am well at present but sorry to inform you that George Teasdale was shot on a boarding boat fiver [sic] miles above this place. he was shot this day one week ago and died on Monday evening at nine o clock his last request was to be buried beside his first wife and i made arrangements to take him there but by the time i got everything ready to remove him he was mortified so bad that it was impossible to do so he was shot on Sunday evening about five o clock and i know nothing about it until monday at ten o clock the man that shot him was named Mat Tucker he was arrested and confined in jail it is the opinion of every person that he will be hung as he had no just cause to shoot him the quarrel was started in a political discussion in regard to the union when i found that i could not take him home i used my utmost exertion to buiry him respectively and i think i got it done he was buired in Dupughs grave yard [De Pue cemetery at Creston] Wirt County Va at West Fork. You will do me a favor by informing his friends at Hartley's as i would like to have them come and see me about it i have got his clothes with me and his pocket book also when he went to that place he had about twenty dollars in his pocket but when his pocket was taken by the young man that went with him it only had two Dollars along with some papers the young man who took his purse was from

Pittsburgh his name was Frank M. Work he has some money coming to him for work done in this place and i think it would be necessary for his Friends to come and see about it.

times is very dull here at present but i have got a pretty good chance of a well to bore by the foot and if i get it i will be here some time if not i will be home in a few days

i will now close by adding that i hope these few lines may find you enjoying good health along with the rest of my friends

no more at present but remain your friend through life

Jacob Henry

Address Jacob Henry Burning Springs Wirt County Va

Chapter Four

THE REBEL INVASION[1]

In the spring of 1863 General Robert E. Lee sent two small task forces, commanded by Generals John D. Imboden and William E. Jones, into western Virginia (now West Virginia) to destroy a section of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad that carried supplies from the West to the Union armies, and to "collect" horses, cattle, and other supplies for the Rebel troops.

On April 7, 1863, Lee wrote Imboden and Jones similar letters, in part as follows:

> . . . the *collection* of horses, cattle, provisions, etc., is of primary importance—as much so as the destruction of the railroad. I request, therefore, that nothing be neglected on your part to *obtain* as large a supply as possible. [Italics supplied.]

On April 11, 1863, General Sam Jones (not related to above named William), Headquarters, Department Western Virginia, advised the invading Generals of

> . . . the importance of *gathering* all beef and stock cattle, and if bacon or salt beef is *obtainable* . . . wagons and carts should be impressed to draw the captured supplies. . . . [Italics supplied.][2]

Of course, the main purpose of the undertaking was *to steal,* but the southern generals seemed strangely reluctant to use the ugly word "steal." To Lee it was the "collection" of horses, cattle, etc. To Sam Jones it was "gathering" and "obtaining" such animals and supplies; and wagons were to be "impressed" to haul the loot. But despite the niceties of the generals' language, it was still a pillaging expedition.

The two forces moved westward through different moun-

[1]Except where otherwise indicated, the facts stated and incidents related in this chapter were told to me by my grandfather, Joshua Lee.

[2]The above quoted excerpts are taken from Thoenen's *History of the Oil and Gas Industry in West Virginia,* p. 20.

tain gaps; and, after a circuitous march through several northern counties, Jones joined Imboden at the town of Buckhannon. There it was decided that Jones and his troops should proceed northward and destroy the railroad, while Imboden and his command should "collect" horses, cattle, and other supplies in the more eastern countries.

Jones hit the railroad a few miles west of Clarksburg and moved rapidly westward, burning railroad bridges, blowing up tunnels, and tearing up track as far as Cairo—a stretch of forty miles. Also, he captured and destroyed two eastbound freight trains loaded with supplies for the Union Army.

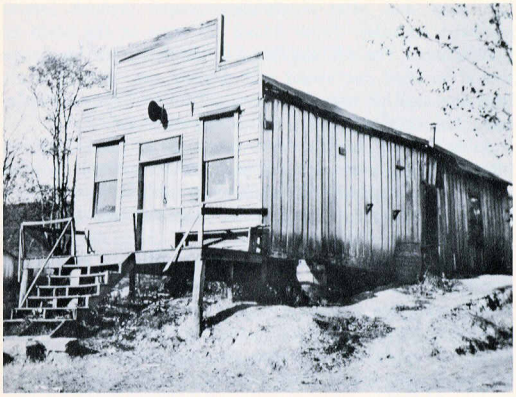
At Cairo, Jones turned southward toward the oil field at Burning Springs, which he called "Oiltown." Fortunately, the townspeople had about three hours' advance warning of his approach. At seven o'clock in the morning a lone rider galloped into town with the news that the Rebels were on the way to destroy the oil field, and were stealing all the horses they could find.

The teamsters quickly got ready to flee with their horses and wagons. The saloon keepers wanted to save their whiskey, which averaged about three barrels to the saloon. A deal was quickly made for the teamsters to take the whiskey. The barrels were hurriedly loaded in the wagons, and the caravan took off up Burning Springs Run on the double-quick—two hours before the Rebels arrived.[3]

The fleeing group crossed the divide and passed down onto the next run, stopping here and there to hide a barrel of whiskey in the woods. When the last barrel was hidden, the teamsters drove a few miles further, hiding their wagons along the road, and then rode their horses deep into the forest.[4] The Rebels, however, made no attempt to follow them.

When news of the impending invasion first broke, a few teamsters were so anxious to save their horses that they forgot their wagons—just grabbed their harness and rode

[3] All stocks of beer were dumped on the ground.
[4] See "Reminiscences" at the end of this Chapter.



ANCIENT STORE BUILDINGS AT BURNING SPRINGS

Top: Store of A. T. Gay, said to be the first new store established after the boom began. Original picture owned by Mrs. Helen Marsh (Mrs. Gordon) White of Lowell, Ohio.

Bottom: A more modern store building built about 1885. Both structures were still standing in 1900.

away. Of course, their wagons were either seized or destroyed by the Rebels.

Jones left their stolen horses and other plunder in a field near Cherry Ford, three miles below Burning Springs, and seized the farmer's hay and corn to feed the animals. Leaving a few troops behind to guard the loot, he pushed on up the river and arrived at the Springs about ten o'clock in the forenoon.

In the meantime, in the spring of 1861, Grandfather set up a branch of his Elizabeth law office at the Springs; and on that fateful morning, May 9, 1863, while riding to his office, he met a man riding at a gallop who stopped long enough to say: "Hide your horse quick. The Rebels have taken over the town and are stealing all the horses they can find. I am riding out to warn the farmers."

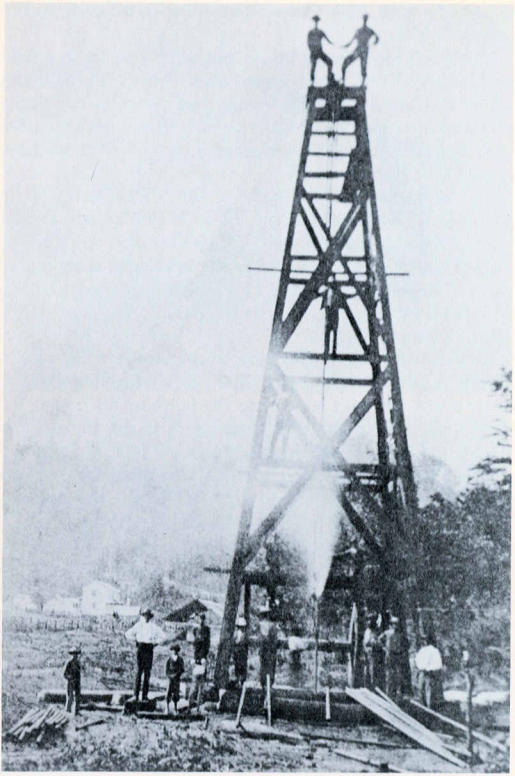
Grandfather rode his horse some distance into the woods, tied it to a tree, walked into town, and found Rebel troops everywhere. He went straight to the home of his friend, Val Rathbone, and found him dickering with the Rebel Commander on a proposition to ransom the oil field.

But Rathbone had no money. Jones knew that Union troops would soon be hot on his trail, and he dare not wait for ransom money to be brought from Parkersburg.

"At eleven o'clock in the morning," said Grandfather, "Jones gave the order, and the troops fanned out up the run and over the hillsides and applied the torch to the oil storage basins in the run, derricks, engine houses, sawmills, lumber, cooperage, and everything that would burn, including five fully loaded barges and a half-filled one tied to the mooring. Installations that would not burn, like engines and boilers, were blown up with dynamite."

Grandfather said that he watched the fires from a high point on the hill just below the junction of the run and river; and from that vantage point he could see for a mile up the run and two miles along the river.[5]

[5] I heard Grandfather tell the story of that terrifying holocaust so often that it became indelibly implanted in my memory. Therefore, I consider the following description as his story, and have enclosed it in quotation marks.



THE McCONAUGHEY BROTHERS' GAS WELL

This is another of the David A. Roberts pictures and was contributed by his granddaughter, Mrs. Helen Marsh (Mrs. Gordon) White.

The brothers are shaking hands on top of the derrick. At that time gas was a useless by-product, and was permitted to escape into the air until the well blew itself out.

"The fires were an awesome sight. The surface of the run storage basins was a sheet of flame that rose a hundred feet into the air, and hundreds of smaller fires from burning tanks, derricks, engine houses, and homes dotted the valley from the mouth of the run to its source—a distance of two miles. Billows of jet black smoke rose a mile high, creating myriads of fantastic silhouettes against the sky.

"Some local citizens cut the ropes that held the burning barges against the river bank and pushed them into mid-stream. Burning furiously they floated slowly down the river. One by one their compartments exploded with loud reports, the burning oil poured out onto the water, and the river was soon aflame from bank to bank.

"The wooden storage dams across the run soon burned away and turned thousands of additional barrels of flaming oil into the river. An hour later the volume of burning oil was further increased by the torrents of burning oil that came down the run from the exploded tanks along its banks; and eventually the river became a sheet of flame as far as the town of Elizabeth—13 miles below. So intense was the heat from the river fire that most of the trees and vegetation along the banks for 25 or 30 yards from the water were killed.[6]

"Night came, and the scene was even more terrifying. No words can describe it—everywhere a raging inferno of fire and smoke. It looked like hell had been brought to earth. People, fearing for their safety, fled from the lowland to the hills. Around me were a hundred or more men, women, and children—the men, stolid, silent, impassive, sat or stood staring at the fires; the women, some hysterical, some silent, all frightened; the children, uncertain, scared, crying.

"But as the night of horror passed, the fires began to die down, and by noon the next day they had gone out. The smoke cleared, and there before us lay a valley of desolation and ruin."

In his report to General Lee, General Jones thus described the destruction:

[6]When I was a lad, scores of those charred snags were still standing along the river banks below Burning Springs.

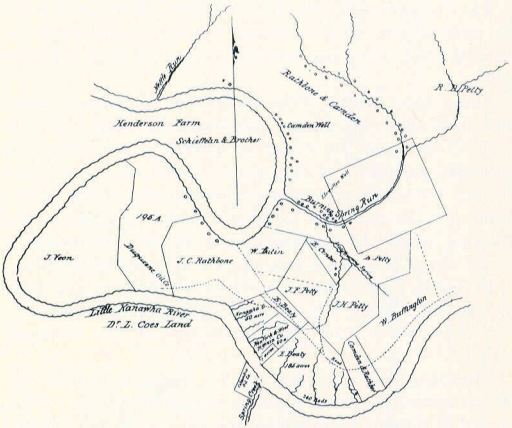
> From here [Cairo] we marched on Oiltown [Burning Springs], where we arrived May 9. The wells were owned mainly by Southern men, now driven from their homes and their property appropriated, either by the Federal Government or Northern men. This oil is used extensively as a lubricator of machinery and for illumination. All the oil, the tanks, barrels, engines for pumping, engine houses and wagons, in a word, everything used in raising, holding or sending it off was burned. The boats, filled with oil in bulk, burst with a report almost equaling artillery, and spread the burning fluid over the river. Before night high columns of ebony smoke marked the meanderings of the stream as far as the eye could reach. By dusk the oil from the tanks on the burning creek had reached the river, and the whole stream became a sheet of fire. A burning stream carrying destruction to our merciless enemy, was a scene of magnificence that might well carry joy to every patriotic heart. Men of experience estimated the oil destroyed at 150,000 barrels. It will be many months before a large supply can be had from this source, as it can only be boated down the Little Kanawha when the water is high.[7]

"When the Rebels came," said Grandfather, "there was no shooting, no refugee problem, and no wilful and systematic destruction of property, other than the oil and field installations. But numerous business places, the two churches (Methodist and Baptist), the notorious Chicago House, and an uncertain number of homes, some said as many as 400, caught fire from the burning oil, and were totally destroyed.

"The troops were wholly ignorant of the explosive and inflammable properties of the oil and gas, but they soon learned about them the hard way," continued Grandfather. "At the outset they suffered five casualties—due wholly to their ignorance. The quintet approached a large oil-storage tank that was probably one-third full of oil, while its upper portion was surcharged with gas generated by the oil. Four

[7]Taken from Thoenen's *History of the Gas and Oil Industry in West Virginia*, p. 27.

men stood nearby while the fifth climbed the ladder and dropped a flaming torch into the tank. The explosion burst the tank and threw great quantities of burning oil over them—they died instantly. Their comrades buried their bodies in a common grave on the run bank, but left no identifying marker at the spot.



PLAT OF EARLY BURNING SPRINGS OIL FIELD
AND SURROUNDING FARM AREA

This plat was made by L. C. Rogers, the first surveyor in Wirt County. Its date is uncertain, but the fact that it shows the Llewellyn Well and not the famous Jones Well drilled in the spring of 1866 indicates that it was made prior to that date. It designates the Rathbone Well as the Camden Well. The small circular dots represent oil wells. The original of the plat is owned by Mrs. Helen Marsh (Mrs. Gordon) White of Lowell, Ohio.

"Thereafter, the troops chopped holes in the tanks or shattered them with dynamite and let the oil out on the ground before igniting it."

I once asked Grandfather why there were no reported casualties among the residents of the town.

"News of the approach of the Rebels," said he, "reached the town about three hours before the troops arrived, and it was quickly passed from house to house. The residents hurriedly grabbed a few possessions, locked their doors, took the children, climbed the hillsides into the forests, and were soon beyond the reach of the fires. They returned the next afternoon, and many found their homes in smoking ruins."

The troops watched the fires for a time and departed down the river to their camp at Cherry. But from Jones' report to General Lee it seems that he watched the fires until well after dark.

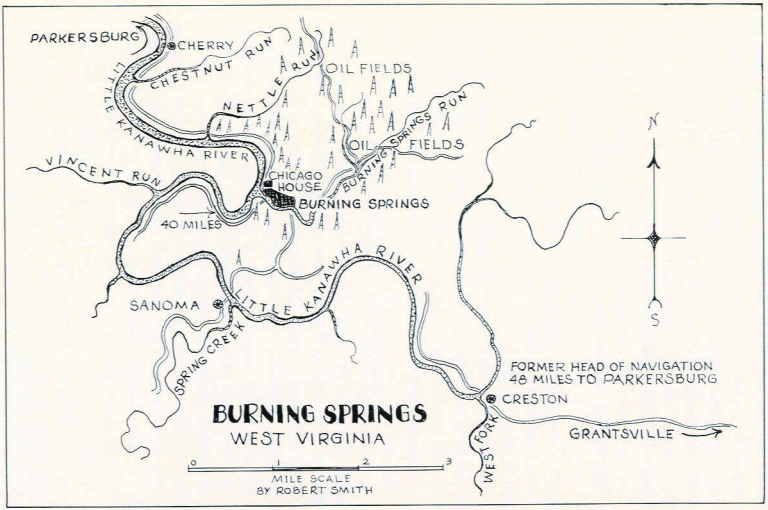
About noon, the day after the fire, the Rebels broke camp and made their way up the valley past the mouth of West Fork Creek (now the village of Creston), Grantsville, and Glenville, plundering as they went.[8] Eventually, they joined General Imboden's command at Summersville, on the Gauley River, and the combined forces with their booty then moved leisurely across the mountains into Virginia. According to Jones' report to General Lee, his loot included 1,500 horses, 1,000 cattle, hundreds of wagons loaded with hay and grain to feed the animals, and scores of other wagons loaded with provisions stolen from the smokehouses of the mountain people.[9]

Historians have not agreed on the amount of oil destroyed by the raiders. A roadside marker erected by the State at the mouth of Burning Springs Run puts the loss at 300,000 barrels. General Jones in his report to Lee estimates it at 150,000 barrels. Some history books say 100,000. Grandfather estimated the loss at about 200,000 barrels.

The oil producers and the townspeople were stunned by the catastrophe, especially by the loss of the field installations. "In a few days," said Grandfather, "Mr. Camden and the Rathbones called a conference of producers and land-

[8]As soon as the Rebels disappeared, Grandfather went to his half-famished horse that he had left tied in the woods the morning before, fed and watered it, and rode to his home.

[9]This report of General Jones to General Lee does not include the enormous loot stolen by General Imboden. See Dr. Boyd B. Stutler's *West Virginia in the Civil War*, 2nd edition, pp. 208-9.



DETAIL MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF BURNING SPRINGS EARLY OIL FIELD

owners to decide on a common course of action. It was well known that future incursions by Rebel forces were not only possible, but highly probable. It was equally well known that the town was a hotbed of a small but violent group of rabid Rebel sympathizers some of whom would gladly burn the oil, or even the town, if they thought it would help the Rebel cause. Then, too, the demands of war made it next to impossible to purchase drilling equipment.

"In view of these things," continued Grandfather,[10] "it was agreed not to resume production until after the danger from war was over, and Burning Springs died in a night. The workers, denizens of the underworld, and business men, left town in that order, and the city soon reverted to a country village in population.

"But the great fire was not without its compensations," observed Grandfather. "The luxurious and infamous Chicago House was burned; but, unfortunately, it was rebuilt early in 1865, and soon became more notorious than before."

A FEW INVASION REMINISCENCES

In the summer of 1900 I attended a school for teachers taught by Prof. Rufus King in the Burning Springs old four-room schoolhouse. Living in the town at the time were a score of old men who had worked in the early oil field and had witnessed the Rebel invasion and fire in 1863. Also, near my boarding place, lived two former teamsters who had helped haul away the barrels of whiskey.

Nearby, too, was the store of Louis D. and Harry Wheaton—the community forum.[11] Of an evening, the old-timers would meet in the store, in a kind of neighborhood round table, and talk over the old days. Many evenings I was an interested, attentive, and questioning listener; and encouraged by my questions most of them talked freely.

[10] Grandfather closed his Burning Springs office, but reopened it with the resumption of oil production in the summer of 1865. He retired in 1885.

[11] The Wheaton brothers, and many of the old-timers who collected in their store, were eyewitnesses to the great fire. Their collective stories differed not at all from the descriptions related by my grandfather.

Everett Schoolcraft was a laborer in the early oil field. He said that an hour before the Rebels arrived, he joined a group of about fifty greatly disturbed people who crossed the river in rowboats and hid their boats and themselves in the woods. They were afraid the Rebels would carry them away as war prisoners. From their place of safety they watched the great fires through the afternoon and night—and until they burned themselves out the next day. In the afternoon they recrossed the river to their homes, or to where their homes had been.

"As we sat and watched the awful sight," said Schoolcraft, "a man turned to me and said:

" 'You know, I think hell must look like that.' "

George Conley operated two teams in the field. He drove one and his driver the other. "On the morning of the invasion," he narrated, "we loaded three barrels of whiskey into each wagon and took off up the run at 8:30 o'clock, two hours ahead of the Rebels.[12]

"When we were across the divide, we attempted to hide our loads, but the first barrel slipped through our nervous hands and went crashing down the hillside, struck a tree near the foot of the hill, and whiskey and barrel staves flew in every direction. The odor of whiskey filled the air, and would have been a dead give-a-way to pursuers. Therefore, we drove a mile farther and hid our remaining barrels in a large clump of blackberry briers."

Ed Ball also operated two teams in the field, but on that "fateful day" he was using only one. While a saloon keeper and his assistant were tying two barrels of whiskey on his wagon, Ball rushed to his nearby home, threw the harness on the other horses, put his twelve-year-old daughter on one, handed her the halter strap of the other, and told her to follow him up the run.

"As I neared the head of the run," said Ball, "another teamster, with three barrels of whiskey on his wagon, passed me at a rapid pace. Apparently, he was too scared to stop and

[12]Mr. Conley said that the teamsters left their horses tied in the forest and walked back to the hills overlooking the run valley and watched the great fires until they burned out. He and a few others followed the ridges to a point where they saw the whole river on fire.

hide his load. He never returned to Burning Springs, and the saloon man lost his whiskey."

Alf Greathouse lived near Wheatons' store. He said that he and another seventeen-year-old boy were on a store porch when they first saw the Rebels approaching. His companion ran away, but he remained. An officer began to question him, but Alf pointed to his ears and mouth and shook his head from side to side to indicate that he was both deaf and dumb.

"As they rode away," said Alf, "I heard one rider say to another:

" 'Now there is a typical Goddamned Yankee for you. They can see a little, but they are all as dumb as hell.' "

With the exception of the three stolen barrels and the wrecked one, the saloon keepers recovered all their whiskey. But the town was dead and the saloons did not reopen. Eventually, the whiskey was shipped to Parkersburg on a flatboat.

Chapter Five

THE BURNING SPRINGS ELDORADO

It has been said by some historians that "for all practical purposes the Rebel invasion and fire of May 9, 1863, marked the end of the Burning Springs oil field and the town itself." This is an historical inaccuracy. Grandfather and all the old-time workers said that at the time of the great fire hardly a beginning had been made in taking the oil from the great pool.

Mr. Camden leased the Little Kanawha River below Burning Springs from the Federal Government and built the four lower locks and dams in it solely to transport oil to his refinery in Parkersburg.[1] They were not finished until the summer of 1874. The lock chambers were 23' X 125'–just large enough to accommodate an oil barge. If the great fire had ended oil production in the field, would Mr. Camden have spent $200,000, possibly more, to construct these facilities? The fact is, oil production did not start to decline until about 1885, and then it declined gradually until 1890, when death finally overtook the industry and the town.

By midsummer, 1864, the failing fortunes of the Confederacy strongly indicated that its end was in sight. At least, it was now certain that the Rebels would never again be able to stage another invasion of the oil region. The Camden-Rathbone interests, and other producers, began to reopen their old wells and to bring in highly producing new ones.

Lee's surrender, April 9, 1865, brought peace; the oil industry was "born again"; Burning Springs sprang into renewed life; and Grandfather reopened his law office. "Empty houses were soon reoccupied and vacant storerooms stocked with goods," said he. "The Rathbones set up two new sawmills and soon hundreds of new homes and many business places were built. They also constructed a new cooperage and imported a dozen coopers to make barrels and storage tanks

[1] See Chapter Seven.

for oil, and by mid-fall the town had regained most of its former population of 6,000.

"But the new town soon reverted to its old way," continued Grandfather. "The saloons and gambling dives resumed operations in their old locations; the bawdy houses went back in business in their former stands; and the gamblers fleeced the unwary; the newly rebuilt, but still infamous, 'Chicago House' was opened; and a few wild, armed, drunken gunmen walked the roads ready to kill. In a word, the new town was as tough, even tougher, than the old one.

"There were still no pipelines for the transportation of oil, and the sawmills and cooperage could not supply sufficient barrels and storage tanks to care for the increased production. Therefore, the dams across the run were rebuilt, and in some places large and deep pits were dug in the ground and filled with oil. The V-shaped wooden conduits again were used to carry oil from some wells to the storage facilities, and thence to the barges. Also, scores of teams were used to haul oil from many wells farther up the run to the moorings."

About this time, too, Mr. Camden incorporated his Parkersburg refinery, took in W. P. Thompson and W. S. Chancellor as shareholders, and greatly enlarged the plant.[2]

Apparently, the churches were slow in reopening and the preachers a "wee bit" tardy in returning to the revived town. The *New York Herald* reporter, in his article of August 14, 1865, observed:

> Although there are no churches in Rathbone City, incense in the shape of petroleum is constantly floating upward, and a spirit seems to stalk among the ravines and upon the tips of the impending landslides, giving forth the first lines of an appropriate hymn:
>
> Fee, fi, fo, fum–
> I smell the smell of petroleum
> High or low, I will have some.

But the restoration of peace in 1865 brought renewed life

[2]See Thoenen's *History of the Oil and Gas Industry in West Virginia*, p. 33.

and hope in the Burning Springs oil field. In the above mentioned *New York Herald* article, the reporter stated:

> A million and a half of dollars will be spent this season in the development of oil territory on Burning Springs Run and vicinity.

In the meantime, while the boom was on, the Rathbones had the foresight to make their future secure by selling a portion of their Burning Springs land for cash. In the *New York Herald* article it is said:

> Messrs Foster & Thompson, of New York (William Wainright, cashier) last fall bought the Rathbone tract on Burning Springs for four hundred and ten thousand dollars.[3]

But in the spring of 1866 the oil field was struck by a second disastrous fire.[4] A speculator from New York, named Jones, brought in the famous "Jones Well." It was located on a town lot about a half mile up the run from the river. It was generally thought at the time that it had tapped the top or center of the great pool. The tremendous gas pressure blew the tools out of the hole and tore away the upper third of the derrick. An oil stream the size of the casing shot 100 feet or more into the air.

The gas pressure was so great that the well was completely uncontrollable, and for five days and nights it spewed out its liquid treasure at a rate estimated by the town "guessers" at anywhere from 5,000 to 30,000 barrels a day. The oil overflowed the run basins, ran into the river and spread six inches

[3]For more comprehensive excerpts from the above cited *New York Herald* article, see Appendix III.

[4]The story of that second fire is told here just as I heard Grandfather tell it many times. And during the summer school in 1900 (referred to in Chapter Four), I heard the story confirmed in detail by a few old-timers who saw both fires. Also, in August, 1966, Mr. John Menefee, my guide on a tour of Burning Springs Run, related the same story to me as it had come down to him from his grandfather, who witnessed the second fire.

thick on the water for a distance of ten miles below the town. Also, the air was so saturated with gas that people fled from the area and no fires were allowed in the vicinity.

But in the evening of the fifth day a man carrying a lighted kerosene-burning lantern, probably unaware of the danger, started to cross a footlog spanning the run not far from the well. Whether he slipped from the oil-soaked log into the run and his lantern set the oil afire, or the lantern blaze ignited the gaseous air, is uncertain. But suddenly there was a blinding flash, and the well and oil in the run were ablaze.

Fortunately, there had been a heavy run of oil barges a few days before, which greatly reduced the fire volume. But both run basins soon caught fire, the wooden dams were quickly consumed, and the burning torrent reached the river and raced downstream with such incredible speed that soon the whole river was aflame for miles. The heat was so intense that trees and other vegetation along the river banks, that had escaped the great Rebel conflagration of three years earlier (May 9, 1863), were destroyed for a distance of 75 feet back from the water's edge.

The run and river fires soon burned out, but the well continued to burn, shooting flames one hundred feet into the air. A lantern and a few charred human bones were found in the run after the fire.

There was no fire fighting equipment available, and Jones had to rely upon man power and his own ingenuity to extinguish the blaze. He hired teamsters to haul large quantities of dirt and dump it as near the well as the heat would permit. Next, he employed men to construct an earthen embankment twelve feet high and forty feet long as a shield against the intense heat. They began shoveling the dirt from the bottom of the pile, tossing it over the top toward the fire, thus moving the shield closer and closer to the well. But even with the protection of the embankment, the heat was so intense that workers could remain only a few minutes until they had to run away to cool, and other men took their places for equally short periods.

When the shield was in the right position, a large empty steel oil-storage tank and a quantity of heavy cribbing tim-

bers was brought to the site. The tank was placed on a four-foot crib and filled with tons of mud. It was then raised by jacks, and the crib built up under it until it was in the desired position. Then one side of the tank was raised by jacks until it tipped upside down on the well, and the mud snuffed out the fire. The well was then brought under control. Finally, it lost its gas pressure, and simmered down to pumping 200 barrels of oil a day.

Beginning in the fall of 1868, when he was twenty years old and continuing until 1875, Father was employed in the oil field by the Rathbone-Camden interests. When there was sufficient water in the river, he was one of a crew that ran oil barges to the Camden refinery at Parkersburg. These crews were made up of a pilot, who knew the location of and how to avoid every danger spot in the river, and two crewmen who manned the oars. The barges left their moorings at daylight and usually arrived at the refinery about three to four o'clock in the afternoon.

After supper the crews filled their kerosene-burning lanterns, procured a supply of whiskey to cheer them along the trail, and began the 25-mile beeline walk back to the Springs. If the river remained high enough, a few crews might make a second run on the same rise—depending on the supply of oil in storage. And where a rise followed an extended dry spell, sometimes as many as a dozen barges would leave the moorings at ten- to fifteen-minute intervals. Father said that pilots received $15 and crew members $10 a trip.

Between runs on the river, Father worked in the field and lived in town. And some of his observations and experiences, as he related them to us children, as told here and in the next chapter, are worth passing on as pages in the unsavory history of the notorious Burning Springs of a century ago.

The following incident is related here in the first person, just as Father told it to us children:

"The town had two peace officers, an aged town sergeant

and a resident deputy sheriff named Hopkins,[5] who, because of a red birthmark on the side of his face, bore the nickname of 'Spot.' Spot was a fearless officer and a crack shot with a pistol. Both officers, however, were told by their superiors that their only duty was to preserve law and order, and they were not to interfere with any profitable activities of the citizens.

"One afternoon as I came out of a store I heard pistol shots, and looked in the direction from which they came. I saw a man firing directly at officer Spot from a distance of 30 feet. I also saw Spot draw his gun and fire one shot at his assailant, killing him instantly.

"It developed that the dead man had shot and wounded a man in a poker game in the gambling room of the Red Bird Saloon. Spot had tried to arrest him, but he jerked loose, ran a short distance, turned and began firing at the officer.

"A bystander suggested that the preacher be called to give the dead man a 'Christian burial.'

"But a big brusque well-driller countered:

" 'Hell's fire, that's a waste of time. Let's dig a hole and throw the varmint in it, and cover him up.'

"His suggestion was approved by the crowd. A couple of volunteers borrowed a mattock and a couple of shovels from a nearby store; two others took the dead body by the feet and dragged it across the narrow bottom to the foot of the hill. A hole was dug, and after taking seven dollars from the dead man's pockets, they rolled the body into the pit. Someone threw the dead man's pistol into the hole, and the grave was filled. The tools were returned to the store, the volunteer

[5] "Spot" Hopkins was deputy sheriff at Burning Springs before and for several years after the Rebel invasion, and the guardian of the law and morals of the notorious town. Eventually, he became as much of a legend in and around the Springs as was "Wild Bill" Hickok in the lawless old West.

Attorney Louis Reed, of Elizabeth, wrote me that in 1935 he interviewed Uncle Bee Hopkins, an aged lawyer in Grantsville, who told him that Spot Hopkins of Burning Springs fame was his uncle, and that both he and Spot were born on the old Hopkins farm on West Fork Creek, near Creston.

There was a legend around Burning Springs that after the town died Spot went West, hoping to became a peace officer in one of its wild towns. He was never heard from.

threw the seven dollars on the bar and ordered drinks for the crowd, and that closed the incident. But that was just one of many bloody scenes in the Burning Springs Eldorado."

Long before the "Vigilantes" tamed the bad men of the old West, a few citizens of Burning Springs organized themselves into a group known as the "Committee." It was a secret organization, its members known only to each other. Its purpose was to assist the officers in ridding the town of the gunmen and other undesirables. After the Rebel invasion in 1863, however, it ceased to function, but with the resumption of oil production in 1865, it was reorganized and became very active.

Father always said that this Committee did a lot of good. His only complaint against it was that it was too limited in its scope. It made no attempt to suppress the unlawful saloons, or the crooked gambling, or the notorious brothels. "But the undercover facts were," said father, "some members of the Committee owned a number of the buildings in which these illegal activities were conducted and collected enormous rents from the occupants."

Chapter Six

THE COMMITTEE IN ACTION

The Committee was first organized in 1861, and grew out of the necessity created by the Civil War. The Wirt County records[1] show that in December, 1860, Judge Gideon Draper Camden held a special term of the circuit court at Elizabeth and disposed of 75 cases, most of them for offenses committed at Burning Springs. In April, 1861, he began another term, but when the news came that Fort Sumter had been fired upon by the Rebels, he hastily adjourned court and headed south to join the Confederate Army.[2]

No other term of court was held in the county until April, 1863, when Judge Arthur I. Boreman convened a term of the circuit court under the authority of the Restored Government of Virginia, then established at Wheeling. Three months later, however, Judge Boreman became the first Governor of the newly created State of West Virginia, and the new State took over all authority.

In that two-year interval, between April, 1861, and April, 1863, the only law that Burning Springs knew was Spot's "six-gun" and the orders of the Committee.[3]

Father said that within the next few days after Spot ended the career of the outlaw (described in the preceding chapter) there were three killings in the town by drunken gunmen—two in gambling joints and one in a brothel. Also, that two drunken "gun toters" took a few shots at each other in the town's main road—it had no paved streets. Unfortunately, each missed his target, but a stray bullet slightly wounded a

[1] This county record data was supplied by Attorney Louis Reed, of Elizabeth.

[2] At the end of the war, Judge Camden returned to Clarksburg where he practiced law until his death in the mid-1890's. On June 24, 1897, his widow, Mrs. Myra Horner Camden, became the second wife of Governor George Wesley Atkinson, four months after he was inaugurated Governor of West Virginia.

[3] From the many stories I heard Grandfather, Father, and old-timers relate about the notorious Burning Springs during the oil-boom years, I have selected the few set forth in this Chapter Six as being the most typical of the roaring town.

man fifty yards away. These incidents spurred the Committee into vigorous action.

Spot was directed by the Committee to post notices in the hotel lobbies, saloons, gambling rooms, and boarding houses to the effect that "gunmen" were not wanted, and would no longer be tolerated in the town. "If you have a gun leave it in your room, or leave town with it."

In the meantime a makeshift road had been hacked and partially graded through the wilderness from the Springs down the river to Parkersburg. Each morning at seven o'clock, a four seated, two-horse-drawn hack (sometimes four horses) left the hotel for that city. When the Committee decided that an individual was an undesirable, a couple of armed and masked men handed him a notice "to take the hack" the next morning.

After Father began work in the field, the first man to incur the displeasure of the Committee was a professional gambler named Nick Woods, who had the gambling concession in the Green Tree Saloon. He was caught using marked cards, and to the honest gambler (if such there be) that is a crime that ranks along with murder. Besides, Nick was under an additional cloud. He had killed a man in his poker room a couple of months earlier, but was excused on the grounds of self-defense. The deceased was known to have had a few hundred dollars on his person, but Spot found no money in the dead man's pockets. Nick explained this by saying that the man had lost his money gambling and then attacked him, and he shot only in self-defense. While he was excused, he was under great suspicion, and the marked cards made him a "marked man."

Two masked and armed men handed Nick the notice "to take the hack" the next morning. Nick cursed and raved. "I have two damn good guns, and I know how to use them," he said, "and no damn tin-horn Committee is going to run me out of town." A couple of days later Nick disappeared from his old haunts. Also, two of his close associates were gone.

A week later two boys fishing in the river from a johnboat found Nick's body floating in the water. They towed it to the

bank and notified Spot. He came, viewed the body, and, notwithstanding two gaping bullet holes in the head, pronounced it "a plain case of suicide by drowning." Volunteers buried the body on the river bank.

But Father said that the Committee had nothing to do with Nick's demise. He was robbed and murdered by two of his own gang. They tossed his body in the river because they knew that it would sink and not come to the surface for a week or more, and by that time they would be beyond reach.

Spot was quick to see, however, that involving the Committee in Nick's death would add greatly to its prestige by showing its determination to resort to extreme measures to enforce its orders. His strategy worked, for no one ever failed "to take the hack" when ordered to do so by the Committee.

One night a denizen of a bawdy house accused another girl of trying to "cut in" on one of her regular customers. In the fight that followed, a lighted kerosene lamp was overturned and exploded. The fire destroyed the house and set the clothing of both girls on fire. One died the following morning, and the other a few days later.

In discussing the incident with Officer Spot the tough old "Madam" remarked:

"The thing that concerns me is where can I find a house to carry on business."

"Don't you have any concern for those burned girls?" asked Spot.

"No," she replied. "The damn stupid idiots brought it on themselves. I have no sympathy for them."

An hour later two masked men handed her a notice "to take the hack" in the morning.

"We don't object to her business," said Spot, "but we do condemn her heartlessness."

She "took the hack."

Another "Madam" made the mistake of recruiting a local farmer's daughter as a permanent member of her establishment. The farmer entered the house, seized the girl and was forcibly taking her out when the "Madam" suddenly appeared with a loaded pistol in her hand. Pointing it directly at

the farmer she ordered him to release the girl and leave her house. He slapped the pistol from her hand, knocked her down, and gave her such a vicious kick in the face with his heavy boot that he knocked out a number of her teeth. He then pocketed the pistol and walked out with his daughter.

An hour after the incident, two masked and armed men handed the "Madam" a notice "to take the hack" in the morning.

She didn't wait till morning, but hired a conveyance and left for Parkersburg sometime during the night.

Today we associate hijacking with the lawless days of the Prohibition era. But Father told of a loaded oil barge that was hijacked by river pirates, and also of an attempt to hijack his barge and probably murder him, his helper, and their pilot.

In the spring of 1873, a few miles above Parkersburg, four armed men rowed out to and boarded one of Mr. Camden's loaded oil barges. At pistol point two of them took over the barge. The other two forced the crew into the rowboat and rowed them to the bank. There they were blindfolded, walked for a few hours, and lodged in a shack on the outskirts of Parkersburg, their captors taking turns guarding them.

In the meantime, a small oil refinery had been built at Marietta, Ohio, a few miles above Parkersburg on the Ohio River. Two days before the barge theft two of the criminals approached its manager, represented themselves to be new producers in the Burning Springs area, and sold him a barge load of oil to be delivered in two days. They also arranged with the captain of a local towboat to push the barge up the Ohio River from Parkersburg to Marietta.

The stolen barge arrived in Parkersburg at dusk. The towboat hooked on to it and pushed it up to the Marietta refinery the same evening. The next morning the deal was closed, and the purchase price paid to the pirates. They rejoined their confederates in Parkersburg, released the prisoners, and the quartet disappeared. They were never apprehended.

Father always believed that he, his fellow crewman, and

their pilot narrowly missed having a barge hijacked, and that they just as narrowly escaped being murdered by four young thugs. Father's fellow crewman, on nearly all his runs, was a boyhood companion and friend named Nobel Hunter (called "Nobe" for short).[4] He was over six feet tall, weighed 220 pounds, and possessed great strength and courage.

Early one morning Father and Nobe were getting their barge ready for the run. Their pilot had not yet arrived. Suddenly, four tough looking men came up. Their apparent leader, nearly as large as Nobe, brusquely said:

"How about a ride to Parkersburg on your barge?"

"Against the rules," said father.

"To hell with the rules," he replied. "We are armed and we are going to ride this barge, and there is nothing you and this big dumbbell can do about it."

In a flash Nobe grabbed him by the collar, jerked him closer, struck him two terrific blows full in the face, tossed his limp form into the road, and started for the other three.

If they were armed, they forgot about their guns and took off so fast that Nobe could not catch them. While Nobe was chasing the three, Father lifted a 38-caliber pistol from an under-arm holster on the inert figure lying in the road.

Father and Nobe then went up town to advise Spot of the incident. In a few minutes two masked and armed men were on their way to notify the thugs to "take the hack." But they could not be found, and some early risers said they saw four men running down the river road. They were never seen again in Burning Springs.[5]

The Wheaton brothers, Louis and Harry, were lifelong residents of the Springs. As young lads, they saw the first well drilled and later became clerks in one of the large stores. They witnessed the great Rebel holocaust, saw the industry

[4] When I was a lad, Nobe Hunter was a frequent visitor to our home. Always, I was fascinated by their stories as he and Father relived many of their experiences in the Burning Springs oil field.

[5] After this incident, all barge-runners carried loaded rifles on their barges and were instructed to shoot any person who attempted to board a barge, after being warned.

spring into renewed life, watched the resurrection of the town, and saw it taken over by the criminal element. Also, they helped organize, and were members of, the Committee that restored a semblance of law and order in the community.

When oil production began to fail, and the large stores started leaving, the Wheaton brothers opened a small store in the dying town. My parents traded with them, and in the decade of the 1890's, when my older brother and I took over the minor family shopping, we, too, went to the Wheaton store. During those years I became well acquainted with the brothers.

While attending the summer school at the Springs in 1900, I had many conversations with the Wheatons about the early oil field, particularly about the Committee.

"What was the reason for the secrecy of the Committee about its personnel and numbers?" I asked Louis Wheaton.

"Purely psychological," he replied. "Most criminals have minds even below mediocrity, and they have a superstitious fear of the unknown. If the crooks had known the names of the Committee members, and that they numbered fewer than forty, they would have had no fear, and the Committee's orders would have been ignored."

"Over the years, about how many undesirables were given notice to 'take the hack'?" I next asked.

"Probably, not more than 25 or 30," replied Mr. Louis. "But here again the influence of the Committee was psychological. Many crooks, no doubt, heard about it and remained away. Others learned about it after they arrived in town, and left immediately.

"In no instance," continued Mr. Louis, "did the Committee resort to force or violence to enforce its decrees; and in no instance did a crook who was notified to 'take the hack' fail to do so. At the bottom of all notices given undesirables, written in red ink, were the words: 'Remember Nick Woods.' And those were magic words to inspire fear."

I once asked Father how all that lawlessness and corruption could go on in Burning Springs for so many years.

"Where were the sheriffs and prosecuting attorneys?" I inquired.

"During those years," said Father, "prosecuting attorneys in Wirt County were paid very low salaries—never over $300 a year. Sheriffs were elected for four years, and could not succeed themselves in office. They received five percent commission on all taxes collected and retained all fees for serving legal papers. But tax collections were small, and there were few legal papers to be served. Consequently, the income of sheriffs was meager. But, notwithstanding their low incomes, those officials were comparatively wealthy when they left their respective offices. This, I think, answers your question.

"It was generally understood," continued Father, "that deputy sheriff Spot was the collector and distributor of the 'graft.' But the general public expected the officers to collect it, and those engaged in the unlawful pursuits expected to pay it, so nobody complained. In fact, it would have been extremely dangerous for anybody who did complain."

Chapter Seven

A PRIVATE RIVER

To make the barge runs to Parkersburg with safety, there had to be at least a four-foot rise in the river. Hence, during prolonged dry spells, oil could not be shipped; the refinery was closed, and storage facilities had to be provided at the wells.

To insure a constant flow of oil to his refinery, Mr. Camden conceived the bold plan to canalize the river by building a series of four locks and dams in it between Burning Springs and Parkersburg. Such an innovation would enable him to use small steam towboats for the movement of oil barges, and thus deliver a steady supply of oil to his refinery.

In furtherance of this plan the General Assembly of the Restored Government of Virginia, sitting at Wheeling, on February 4, 1863, passed a special Act incorporating the Little Kanawha Navigation Company, with an authorized capital stock of $100,000, "for the purpose of improving the naviga-

GOVERNMENT LOCK AND DAM AT VINCENT RUN

tion of the Little Kanawha River."[1] And as incredible as it now seems, the Federal Government leased to this company the Little Kanawha River from Burning Springs to its mouth.

After many delays, caused by the Civil War, labor shortages, and government red tape, the four locks and dams were completed, and Mr. Camden's private river canal was opened to all traffic on a toll basis in 1874. Thereafter, steam towboats moved the empty and loaded oil barges up and down the river. The lock chambers were 125 feet long and 23 feet wide—just large enough to accommodate an oil barge.

The upper, or Lock and Dam No. 4, was located at the village of Palestine, and it put the head of slack water three miles above Burning Springs. In 1891, however, the Federal Government completed Lock and Dam No. 5, at the mouth of Vincent Run two miles above the Springs, and it extended slack water ten miles farther up the river to a point two miles above the village of Creston.[2]

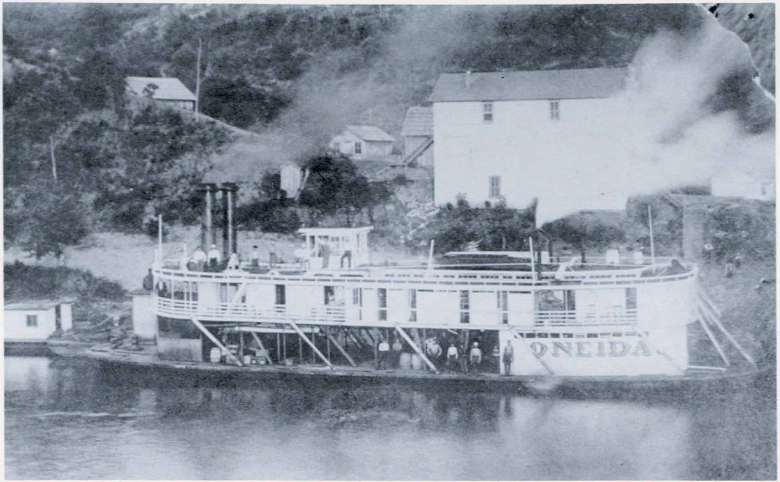
All five locks and dams were built on the same general pattern. The dams were of the "fixed type of stone-filled timber-crib construction," and the locks were built "of stone-masonry work, with hand-operated mitered gates," the cheapest kind of dam and lock construction.

[1] See Acts of the General Assembly, Restored Government of Virginia, 1863, Chapter 77.

The incorporators of this company, as named in the Act, were J. N. Camden, John V. (Val) Rathbone, Peter G. Van Winkle, James Cook, Moses Kinchelo, Daniel Wilkinson, E. G. Hopkins, Jonathan Weaver, Charles Chadock, John Weir, and James A. Wilkinson, all of Parkersburg, except Val Rathbone who had not yet moved from the Springs.

[2] LITTLE KANAWHA DAM STATISTICS
(Dimensions in Feet)

No.	Miles From Mouth	Dam Height	Lock Size	Dam Length	Year Completed
1	3.8	18.6	23 X 125	281	1874
2	14.9	15.7	23 X 125	274	1874
3	25.3	16.0	23 X 125	289	1874
4	30.7	16.0	23 X 125	282	1874
5	41.2	16.4	23.5 X 125	285	1891



SAM RATHBONE'S STEAMBOAT "ONEIDA"
(Named for a New York Indian tribe)

Prior to the completion of Lock No. 5 all steamboats unloaded their up-the-river freight at Burning Springs. After this facility was opened they extended their runs to Creston. Shortly after the turn of the century, however, the faster and less expensive to operate gasoline boats took over the river traffic and the steamboats disappeared.

On May 12, 1875, Camden and Val Rathbone joined John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Trust and exchanged their Parkersburg refinery and certain of their other properties for stock in the company.[3] About 1900, the Standard closed the Camden refinery at Parkersburg as surplus. In 1892, the Courts ordered the Trust dissolved, and in the reorganization Camden and Rathbone became stockholders in the newly organized Standard Oil Company of New Jersey.

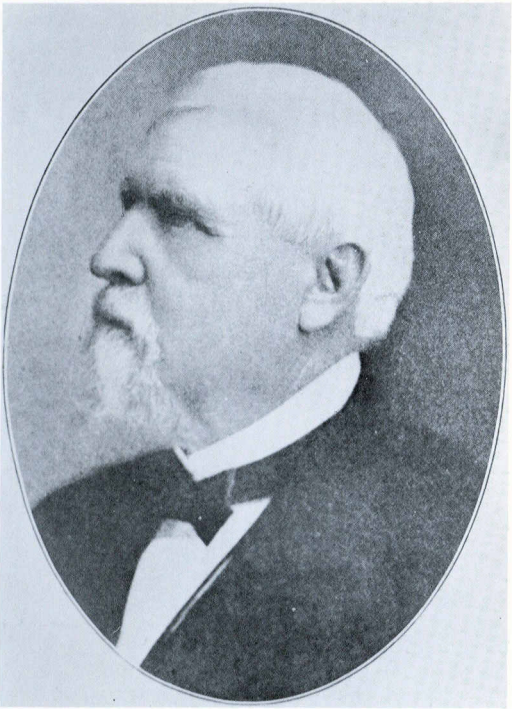
After this merger with Standard Oil, Mr. Camden had more leisure time and decided to try his hand at politics; and in December, 1880, he announced his candidacy for the United States Senate. At that time senators were elected by state legislatures, and in January, 1881, the West Virginia Legislature elected him to the Senate for a full term of six years. Due to an inter-party fight, he was not re-elected. In 1893, however, Governor William A. MacCorkle appointed him to serve the last two years of the unexpired term of Senator John E. Kenna, who died in office.

The Little Kanawha Locks and Dams were not included in the Standard Oil deal. Camden's Navigation Company continued to operate them on a toll basis until 1905, when they were purchased by the Federal Government. That transaction, however, gave rise to much unfavorable local comment. At that time river traffic had decreased sixty percent from its peak, and was rapidly disappearing. In a few years, the navigation company would have been forced to abandon its installations for lack of business.

"Why," asked many people, "did the Federal Government buy those decaying and dying installations?" The question was never answered. Local Republican leaders, however, openly charged that the deal "reeked with corrupt politics" and was a political "pay-off." But old "Uncle Sam" took the loss.[4]

[3] The Rathbones reserved from this deal their original 800-acre oil tract at Burning Springs, and later sold it to the Roberts Brothers. See Chapter Eight.

[4] After the Federal Government took over these installations, as one ascends the river, it designated them as Dams Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. But the natives knew them only as Shacktown (so named because of the large number of shanties around the site when it was built), Leachtown, Wells (or Elizabeth), Palestine, and Government Dam.



JOHNSON NEWLON CAMDEN
(When a Senator)

Senator Camden's son, Johnson N. Camden, Jr., was born in Parkersburg in 1865, and became a business associate with his father. In 1896, he moved to Versailles, Kentucky, where he became active in stock raising, mining, and other industries. Eventually, he became a United States Senator from his adopted State. He died in Versailles in 1942.

The Federal Government continued to operate the installations, toll free, as long as there was any river traffic. Eventually, all such traffic disappeared, the railroad died in 1933 (See Chapter Thirteen), the Government ceased to maintain and in 1938 abandoned the locks and dams altogether, and high waters soon washed them out.

In 1966, a Federal engineer wrote me that with the exception of Dam No. 1, which was leased and maintained by a private industry as its source of water, "the structures were in an advanced stage of disrepair." But that was an understatement. The truth is, that through the government's neglect of its own installations some of the finest fishing and recreational water facilities have been lost to the people.

A few years ago, I asked a government engineer why his department had permitted the locks and dams on the Little Kanawha to be washed away.

"During the erosion period," he said, "every vestige of freight on the river had disappeared, and we saw no further use for them. But, if we had had the vision to foresee the future development of the outboard and inboard motors, the marvelous growth of the boat industry, and the tremendous demand for water recreational facilities, we would have tried hard to preserve them."

"A perfect illustration," I replied, "of what wise old Solomon meant when he said:

'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' "

At each lock and dam site the government owned a few acres of land on which were two or three residences for lock tenders, a machine shop, barn, and other outbuildings. In 1958 and 1960, the Federal Government sold these dam sites and adjacent real estate and buildings, as follows: Dam No. 1

Monroe Jackson Rathbone

I have been unable to find a photograph of Val Rathbone to go with the picture of his business associate, Johnson N. Camden. Therefore, I have included this picture of his great-grandson, Hon. Monroe Jackson Rathbone of New York, and a brief sketch of his spectacular rise to eminence in the oil world.

Mr. Rathbone—"Jack" to his associates—was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, March 1, 1900. He graduated in chemical engineering from Lehigh University when he was twenty-one years old. His great-grandfather, Val Rathbone, helped John D. Rockefeller organize the Standard Oil Trust, and his father was employed in its Parkersburg refinery for twenty-five years. It was natural, therefore, for young Jack to take a job with the Standard Oil interests. His rise in the industry was phenomenal. Through successive promotions he became President of the Standard Oil Company of Louisiana; President of the Esso Standard Oil Company; President and chief executive officer of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey, and was its board chairman when he retired March 1, 1965. He is now a member of the board of directors of a number of the nation's largest corporations.

Mr. Rathbone has been awarded honorary degrees from a dozen universities and colleges, and has been the recipient of numerous other citations and awards. He gave Mr. Louis R. Roberts the photostat of the *New York Herald* article on early Burning Springs from which I have quoted extensively in these pages. He and his wife are the parents of a son and a daughter, and have eight grandchildren. The family home is at 10 Glendale Road, Summit, New Jersey.

HON. MONROE JACKSON RATHBONE

PRESENT-DAY RUINS OF VINCENT RUN
LOCK AND DAM

to the American Viscose Corporation; Dams Nos. 2, 3, and 4 to the State of West Virginia;[5] Dam No. 5 to Wirt County.[6]

[5]Not long after Dam No. 3, just below the town of Elizabeth, was washed away the water table in the low lands of the area began to drop, and soon the town's water supply was endangered. Before title to this dam site was passed to the State, Senator Chapman Revercomb and Congressman Cleveland Bailey introduced identical bills in both Houses for the reconstruction of the dam, without the lock, by the Federal Government. Attorney Louis Reed, of Elizabeth, Senator Revercomb's Executive Assistant, appeared before the Committees (the only witness) and explained the necessity for the dam. The bill passed, and the Government completed the dam in 1959, and Elizabeth's water supply was saved. The dam is eleven feet and five inches high, and backs the water up to the village of Palestine—5.4 miles.

[6]Wirt County has sold Dam site No. 5, real estate and buildings, to two private individuals.

Chapter Eight

A CITY DIES

At the time of the Burning Springs oil boom the State was young, the oil industry new, and there were no laws that required oil producers to report to the State the number of wells drilled or barrels of oil produced by them. Therefore, there are no authentic figures as to the number of wells drilled in, or barrels of oil obtained from, the Burning Springs oil field.

A few old-timers with whom I talked during the summer school in 1900[1] estimated that from 1860 to the end of 1885, when most of the drilling stopped, there were "around 2,000 wells, 'dry holes' and producers," drilled in the Burning Springs area. "The whole countryside," they said, "was a forest of wooden derricks.

"Over those years," continued the old-timers, "a derrick was erected and a well drilled on the back end of practically every town lot, on nearly every acre of the Rathbones' 800-acre tract, and on the lands of every farmer in the community.

"When once erected," declared the old workers, "a derrick stood until it rotted down." If the well was a producer, the derrick was needed in pumping operations. If it was a "dry hole," it was cheaper to buy lumber and build a new derrick than to dismantle an old one, haul the lumber to a new site, and rebuild it.

The old-timers were of the opinion, however, that at no one time did the number of producing wells in the field exceed 300. When an old well played out, a new one came into production to take its place.

But none of those old workers had any idea how much oil had been produced in that Burning Springs field. With the exception, however, of the two years immediately following

[1] See "Reminiscences" at end of Chapter Four.

the Rebel invasion of May 9, 1863, the field operated at maximum production for 25 years and must have produced many millions of barrels of oil.

About 1885, oil production in the field began a slow decline; and by 1890, death had overtaken the industry and the city.

The unemployed workers were the first to leave. Next, the denizens of underworld—prostitutes, gamblers, and saloon keepers—left for greener pastures. Then, one by one the merchants, large and small, departed; and soon all were gone, except those who had no place to go. And a city that once boasted of its 6,000 population became a wilderness of empty houses—a ghost town, filled with ghostly memories.

I, too, saw the city in its death throes.

It was our trading center, and in the decade of the 1890's my oldest brother and I went shopping in the town at least twice a month. In 1900, when I attended the summer school in the town (referred in the "Reminiscences" in Chapter Four), it had only about 250 occupied homes, and probably an equal number of old deserted houses in various stages of disrepair. The whole town was nothing but bitter scars of disaster and decrepitude—a crumbling relic where hundreds of vacant buildings ravaged by weather and time were slowly rotting away, but still bore mute testimony of the thriving community that once was.

Also, many hundreds of house foundations dotted the run bottoms and hillsides where the structures had been torn down and carried away for firewood. In every direction the landscape was marred by dilapidated old oil derricks, rusty old boilers broken engines, great piles of rotten rope, and other debris that had been used in drilling operations.

The entire run basin, for a distance of two miles, was an unfenced, open, treeless, and grassless common. Worst of all, the ground was soaked with oil which destroyed it for agricultural uses—some people said, forever. Even the old oil-storage pits in the ground remained unfilled holes. In short, everything told the tragic story of a dead industry, a dying town, and a forlorn people.

Several years ago, Pennsylvania included the site of the world's first oil well in the beautiful. "Drake Well Memorial Park," near Titusville, and also erected at his grave, in the town's "Woodlawn Cemetery," an imposing monument to Col. Edwin L. Drake, who drilled that first well.

But to commemorate the world's second oil well and the great oil strike at Burning Springs, the State of West Virginia has hung a conventional and incorrect marker on a steel post beside the highway, near the mouth of Burning Springs Run, that reads:

RATHBONE WELL

The first well in West Virginia drilled solely for petroleum was located near the mouth of Burning Springs Run. The well was drilled with a "spring pole" by the Rathbones and others from Parkersburg, began in 1859, completed in May, 1860. Produced at the rate of 100 barrels per day. In 1863 General Jones commanding Confederate forces set fire to the oil stored in tanks, barrels and boats destroying in a day an estimated 300,000 barrels of oil.

In the summer of 1900, when I attended school at the Springs, there were only two producing wells along the river below the mouth of Burning Springs Run. Both wells were located about a quarter of a mile below where the road leaves the river and turns up the Run. One well was out in the river, probably 40 feet from the bank, and surrounded by a three-cornered log crib, filled with rocks. The second well was on the river bank, about 200 feet from the cribbed well. When I left the Springs in the fall of 1900, both wells were being pumped twice a week.

But even in 1900, I heard considerable discussion among old-timers over the pinpoint location of the Rathbone Well. At the time it was drilled, said one group, there was a small bottom, probably a quarter of a mile long, just below the point where the road turns up the Run. It ranged in width from a few feet at either end to about 200 feet in the middle. The Rathbone Well, said this group, was at the upper end of

the bottom; but after six months it ceased to produce.[2] In the meantime a heavy producing well had been drilled at the lower end of the bottom.

In the early 1880's, said this group, there was quite a flood in the river, and a huge ice gorge diverted the swift current against that small bottom. When the high water subsided much of the bottom was gone, including the two well sites. The river kept to its new channel and continued to dig into the bottom until most of it was washed away.

Since it had ceased to produce, no effort was made to reclaim the site of the Rathbone Well. But the site of the producing well at the lower end of the bottom was reclaimed. First, the well casing was extended upright to a point well above high-water mark. Next, a three-cornered crib of heavy logs, securely bolted together, was built around it level with the top of the casing, the sharp end pointing up-stream. The pen was filled with scores of tons of rocks from the river bed, which secured it against future flood pressures. The structure was covered with a floor of heavy lumber, on which a heavy-duty pump was installed to lift the oil to the surface, and a pipe line carried it from the pump to a storage tank on the river bank. But neither of these wells, said this group of old-timers, was the Rathbone Well.

And, if the statements of the historians and the contentions of this group are true, and the Rathbone Well did cease to produce six months after it was drilled, then neither the cribbed well nor the one on the river bank could be the Rathbone Well, for those wells continued to produce for a few years after the turn of this century.

But even as far back as 1900, there was another group of old-timers who asserted that either the cribbed well or the one on the river bank (they did not know which one) was the original Rathbone Well. They probably did not know it at the time, but there was strong record evidence to support their position.

In a deed dated September 22, 1864, recorded in Wirt

[2]This contention is supported by Thoenen's *History of the Oil and Gas Industry in West Virginia*, p.13.

County Clerk's Office in Deed Book 4, page 494, in which William Van Allen Rathbone, and his wife Ellen, conveyed to J. N. Camden their undivided interests in several tracts of land in the vicinity of Burning Springs, one tract is thus described:

> Also the one undivided third part of the tract known as the oil lot upon which is situated the Rathbone Well said lot lays on the river and contains three acres more or less.

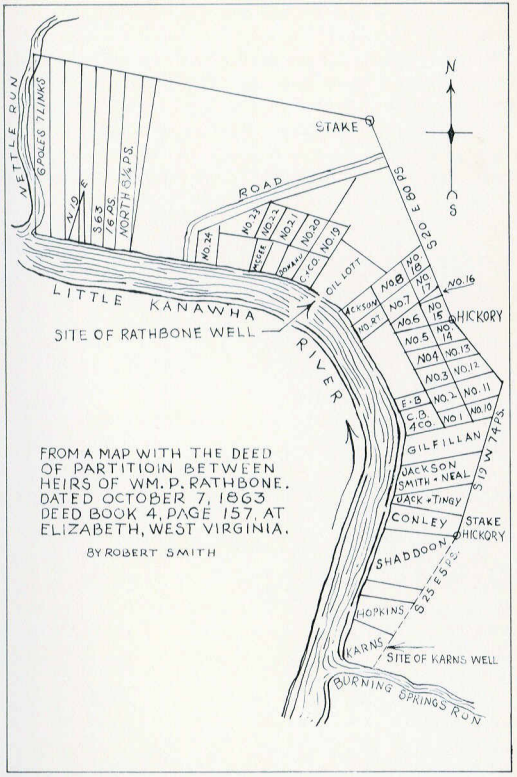
Also, in the partition deed dated October 7, 1863, recorded in the same Clerk's Office in Deed Book 4, page 157, the heirs of the elder Rathbone divided his lands among themselves; and on a map of the lands, made a part of the deed, the "oil Lot" is shown to be very close to the locations of the cribbed well and its sister well on the nearby river bank.

In 1905, the Rathbones sold their original Burning Springs oil lands to the brothers Louis R. Roberts, Sr.[3] and James A. Roberts, who continued oil operations on the land for a score of years—pumping old wells and drilling a few new ones. They recovered sufficient oil to make themselves independently wealthy, but not enough to bring back even a semblance of the town's glory and infamy that was.

The Grow family, of New Jersey, now owns much of the old Rathbone lands, including the sites of the cribbed well and the one on the river bank nearby. Recently, the upright casing of an old well has been found not far from the locations of these two wells; and it is now thought by many people that it is the site of the Rathbone Well.

In the summer of 1967, I visited this newly discovered old well site, and I am certain that it is at least 200 yards from the location of the cribbed well and the one on the nearby river bank. Evidently, it was a third well drilled in that immediate area, and both the record evidence and circumstances

[3]This Louis R. Roberts, Sr., was the father of the Louis R. Roberts, of Burning Springs, who loaned me the photostat of the *New York Herald*, from which I have freely quoted in these pages.



MAP RECORDED WITH RATHBONE HEIRS' PARTITION DEED

The original map shows the "Oil Lot" site of the Rathbone Well, and also designates the location of the Karns Leased land on which the salt-brine well was drilled. The arrows pointing to location of each well have been added.

strongly indicate that it is the site of the historic Rathbone Well.

But the pinpoint location of that Rathbone Well, the exact date of its completion, whether it was drilled with a spring pole or by steam power, how long it continued to produce, whether its exact site is now known or unknown, are of no consequence. The historically important facts are: The well was drilled at Burning Springs in 1860; it tapped probably the world's richest shallow oil pool; it was the first oil-producing well in West Virginia and the second such well, drilled solely for oil, in the history of the world; and it was the small beginning of what became, and still is, a great industry in West Virginia.

Chapter Nine

BURNING SPRINGS AFTER SIXTY YEARS

Before closing the Burning Springs story, I decided to revisit the site of that once roaring town and see what changes had taken place since I last saw it at the close of the summer school in 1900.

In the summer of 1966, as I stood beside the roadside marker previously described, I was amazed by the rugged beauty of the surroundings. Across the road, a high and heavily wooded hill slopes precipitously down to the very edge of the highway. On the side of this hill, directly across the road from the marker, stood the first notorious Chicago House; and, just above, on the top of the hill, was the second and more luxurious Chicago House.[1]

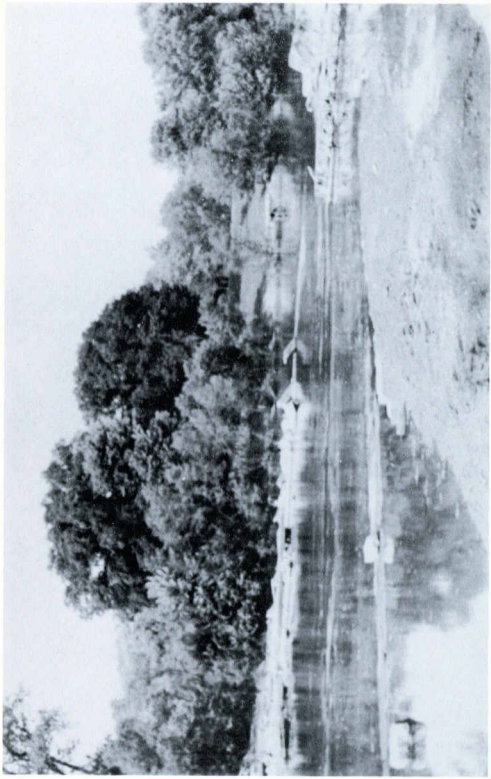
On my left was the picturesque old Rader Hotel, built about 1890. Just beyond it was the river, but its limpid pools are gone.[2] The water was low and hundreds of rocks, large and small, reared their stone heads above the surface. Here and there along the shores, patient fishermen, probably a half dozen in all, were hopefully casting their baited hooks and deceptive lures into the silvery waters.

But the real beauty of the place lay behind me, where the waters of the run flow through a deep, narrow glen. When the run is high its waters fairly leap from its mouth into the river. A rustic bridge now spans the gorge and carries a county road that leads to "somewhere" within the five-mile bend in the river. The dams that once stored the great lakes of oil were built in this canyon.

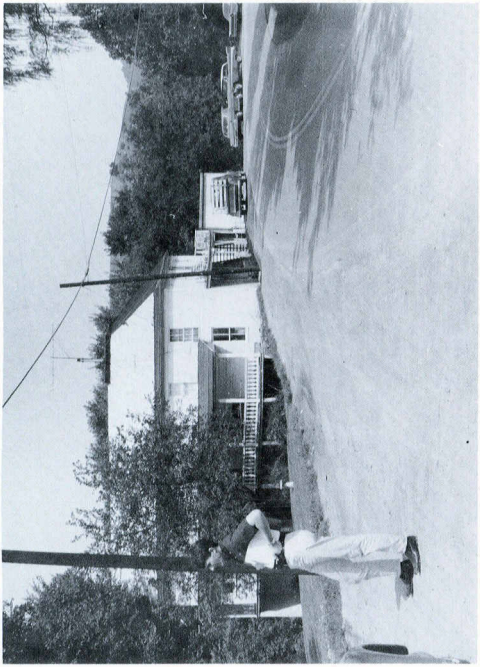
In the meantime, I had previously written Mr. John Menefee and asked him to be my guide on a tour of the run. His grandfather came to the Springs from Culpeper, Virginia, in 1866. Both John and his father were born on the run, and

[1] See Chapter Three for further reference to the two Chicago Houses.

[2] See Chapter Twelve for a description of those river pools.



PRESENT-DAY RIVER BELOW MOUTH OF BURNING SPRINGS RUN



THE RADER HOTEL

The old hotel stands on the river bank a few yards below the mouth of Burning Springs Run. Between it and the run was the site of the Karns salt-brine oil-producing well described in Chapter Two. The young man in the picture is Mr. Frank Powers, mentioned in the Foreword.

John still lives there. He is steeped in the lore and legends of that early oil field.

My guide arrived, and we drove the two miles up Burning Springs Run to its forks, and returned. Of the dozen occupied but dilapidated houses along the run banks, I recognized one—the old rundown home of Harry Wheaton, who, with his brother "L. D.," operated the Wheaton store. We passed two old wells with their rusty pumps still in place on decaying derrick platforms, but the derricks had rotted away years ago.

My guide also pointed out other historical spots, as they had been pointed out to him by his father, grandfather, and old-timers, including the locations of the three largest producing wells—Eternal Center, Llewellyn, and Jones.

John's grandfather arrived at the Springs a few days before the great Jones-well-fire. And John's graphic description of that fire, as told to him by his grandfather, did not differ one whit from my grandfather's version of the same incident, which is recorded in Chapter Five.

But everything had changed since 1900, except the contour of the surrounding hills. So complete had been those changes that I was unable to locate the once familiar site of either the old schoolhouse or the Wheaton store, but my guide pointed them out to me. The waters of the old burning spring still flow, but no oil collects on its surface and its fire has gone out forever.

Most of the run bottoms and adjacent hillsides are still open commons, but the piles of debris that once marred the landscape are gone. Also, the once oil-soaked, treeless and grassless terrain is now covered with large trees, dense undergrowth, and lush grass.

The old dust and mud road of my youth is now a paved highway that passes up the run for nearly a mile, cuts across the hill to the river above the five-mile bend, and thence up the stream past Creston, through Grantsville, and on to Glenville, where it joins U. S. Highways 119 and 33—a marvelously scenic drive.

A TREE USED AS A DERRICK

Picture made in the summer of 1967 of the ruins of an ancient well and pump on Burning Springs Run. The closeness of the well to, and the cleats nailed on, the leaning tree indicates that it may have been used as a derrick.

Beside the paved road, probably a half mile up the run from the river, the "new" strangely mingles with memories of the "old." Nestling in a graceful setting among the trees is a beautiful little snow-white church (Methodist) and community building. Church services are held in it every Sunday, but where the worshippers come from in that sparsely inhabited neighborhood I do not know, but they come from somewhere.

The area around the mouth of Burning Springs Run is a fitting site for, and its historical background justifies the creation of a State-built, State-owned, and State-maintained roadside memorial park equipped to accommodate campers,

tourists, and fishermen; and dominated by a granite shaft, properly inscribed with historical data, and bearing the names of John V. (Val) Rathbone, Johnson N. Camden, and General Sherman P. Karns.[3]

ONLY RUINS REMAIN

[3]In 1965 the West Virginia Legislature created an Antiquities Commission whose duties are "to locate, identify and recommend for acquisition historic sites, and to direct the . . . development of such sites, . . ."

This Commission now (July, 1967) has under study ways and means to commemorate the place where the State's first oil-producing well, drilled exclusively for oil, was located. I commend my suggestion to the thoughtful consideration of the members of that Commission.

Chapter Ten

BURNING SPRINGS LIVES AGAIN

A distance of a mile and a half and a low-lying hill separates the Burning Springs Run community from the site of the now extinct river village and post office of Sanoma. For the first three months of 1968, the few remaining residents of the two neighborhoods watched with apathetic indifference the drilling of a well across the hill from the once great oil-producing run basin and in sight of Sanoma.

The lack of interest of these local people in this enterprise is easily understood. They knew that this well was being drilled in territory that was worked over a hundred years ago, and had been test drilled without success at least twice during the last century. They were sure that nothing new or worthwhile in the way of oil and gas could ever again happen in the area.

The methods used in drilling this new well, however, differed widely from those used in boring both the 300-foot wells on the run in the 1860's and the 1,700-foot test wells of the later period. Modern drilling equipment made it possible to sink this well deeper into the bosom of Mother Earth than was ever dreamed of by the most optimistic of those early developers.

On March 1, 1968, at a depth of 6,574 feet, the deepest boring ever made in Wirt County, in what is known to the trade as the Newburg sand, this new well drilled into a vast deposit of natural gas with an estimated daily production of over 50,000,000 cubic feet.

When the historic Rathbone Well drilled into the oil pool in the spring of 1860, all the Burning Springs villagers turned out to see the epoch-making event. But when this record-breaking new well climaxed and gas shot from the hole with a roar that was heard for miles and hurled dirt, pieces of rock, and gaseous mist nearly three hundred feet into the air, only the well crew was present to witness the great spectacle.

The Parkersburg radio and television stations, however,

were not long in spreading the news of the great strike, and soon the roads were crowded with hundreds of automobiles carrying thousands of sightseers to the well. In all such cases, fire is the great and ever-present danger, and visitors were not permitted to approach closer than half a mile to the well site, and no smoking was allowed even at that distance.

The gas pressure was so great that the crew was unable to cap the well, and a million dollars in the form of gas shot into the atmosphere every day. A hurried call was sent to Texas for "Red" Adair, the world-famous "well-tamer," to come and get the well under control.

Adair and his crew flew to Parkersburg on Sunday, March 3 and were taken directly to the well. There they were joined by a crew of fifty additional men, with twenty pieces of equipment, from the well service firm of Halliburton, Inc., of Charleston, West Virginia. The united crews, under Adair's direction, began the task of harnessing the great well and by noon the following Thursday it had been capped and brought under complete control.[1]

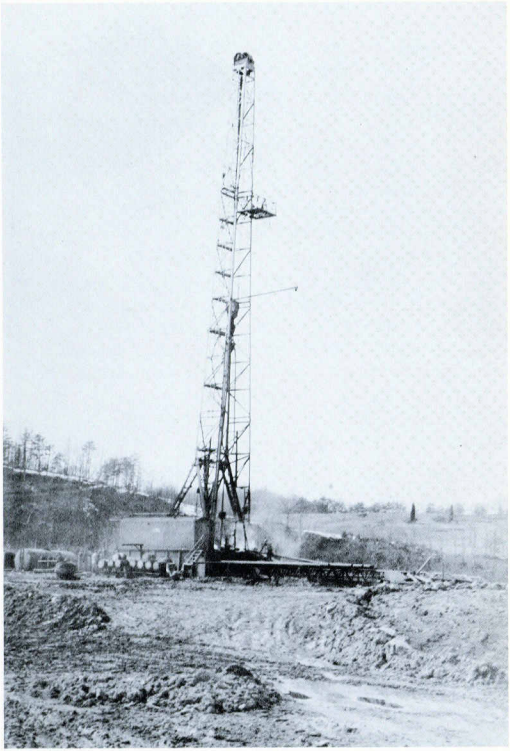
With the big well secure, the trio of producing companies[2] immediately began drilling a second well on lands owned by the Grow family located on Burning Springs Run a quarter of a mile from its mouth, a mile and a quarter from the site of the first or Bell Well, about a half mile from the site of the old Rathbone Well.[3]

This big well brought many people besides sightseers to the area. Scores of agents of the large oil and gas companies, along with hundreds of speculators, many from Texas, rushed to the county looking for unleased lands. The postmistress at Burning Springs observed that at one time it looked like "half of Texas population was in Burning Springs."

[1]This well is on the farm of Bruce Bell, Jr., and will be known as the "Bell No. 1 Well."

[2]At present, the development of this area is the joint undertaking of Weva Oil Corporation of Boston; Jet Petroleum Company of Chicago; and Belco Petroleum Company of New York.

[3]In writing of this second well, a few reporters have referred to the old Rathbone Well as "still pumping." This is an error. That well ceased to produce six months after it was drilled, and even its site was lost for a century. See Chapter Eight.



THE 140-FOOT-HIGH STEEL TOWER OR DERRICK USED
IN DRILLING BELL WELL NO. 1

When they found little free land available, both company agents and speculators began buying leases from local leaseholders. Prices soon skyrocketed from one dollar to twenty, fifty, and even as high as seventy-five dollars an acre.

The big gasser was the result of the first attempt to reach the deep oil and gas sands in the Burning Springs area. Its owners, of course, hoped to bring in a good producer, but they never anticipated the monster that they uncorked. It soon developed that the well's casing was too light to withstand the tremendous gas pressure from the great well. Finally, during the last week in March, 1968, the well was plugged.

Drilling operations on the Grow Well on Burning Springs Run continued until a depth of 6,630 feet was reached, about 60 feet deeper than the Bell Well, but no Newburg sand was found. The owners of the well, however, ordered drilling extended to what is known as the Keifer sand. It, too, was "dry," and at a depth of 7,030 feet the well was plugged and abandoned.

At first, a spokesman for the three participating oil companies said: "Of course, we are disappointed, but we are not discouraged. Such temporary setbacks are common in this business. We now know that gas in huge quantities is down there, and we are going after it. Our next well, no doubt, will be one to replace the now plugged Bell Well. Then another test well a mile further up the river, probably, will be drilled."

A week later, without a word of explanation all drilling equipment from both the Bell Well and the Grow Well was moved away and Burning Springs experienced a second death.

The people who are the most sorely disappointed over the turn of events, however, are those who still cling to Burning Springs. "All is not lost," said a hopeful old-timer. "We still have that huge gas deposit at the Bell Well, within a mile of us. There is too much money down there to let it remain idle for long. They'll drill another well beside that big gasser, and

when they learn the direction that the Newburg sand structure takes from it, other big gassers will be found."

Hope springs eternal in the human breast;
Man never *is*, but always *to be* blest.

Pope—*Essay on Man.*

LATER

(June 25, 1968)

The old-timer was right. "There is too much money down there to let it lie idle for long." Early in May, 1968, the three oil companies that drilled Bell No. 1 Well moved in a large drilling apparatus and began sinking a second well about 600 feet from the site of the abandoned one.

Meanwhile, Glen W. Roberts, a local oil and gas developer, began drilling on a lease owned by him about a mile from the Bell Wells. At a depth of 3,100 feet, he struck what he described as a "good oil producer" and decided to go no deeper at present.

On Friday afternoon, June 21, 1968, at a depth of 6,566 feet, the Newburg Sand was reached, and Bell No. 2 Well "blew in" with a mighty roar and an estimated daily gas production of 25,000,000 cubic feet. This time, however, every necessary precaution had been taken to prevent a repetition of the former catastrophe, and the new well was soon securely capped.

Roberts and the three companies are making new locations and planning to sink new wells.

Excitement runs high.

Is Burning Springs to be born again?

Is the little village of Sanoma to have a new life?

Wait! Time alone will tell.

Chapter Eleven

THE LUMBER MILLS

About 1875, the descendants of the early settlers in the lower Little Kanawha Valley began to sell their standing timber to divers large lumber companies. Immediately, the new owners began the exploitation, despoliation, and destruction of the vast timber resources of the area.

Those early "timber hogs," as they were called by the natives, knew nothing of "scientific timber harvesting" so as to preserve the smaller growth. Consequently, they cut, slashed, and felled trees so haphazardly and recklessly that most of the young trees were destroyed. From the lower river, the destructive forces gradually moved upstream, destroying as they went; and, in three decades, the entire Little Kanawha basin was completely denuded of its forests.

In addition to the numerous small portable sawmills in the valley and the still larger ones in Parkersburg, there were four very large plants between that city and the village of Creston.

THE SHIRTZVILLE MILL.

This was probably the first large lumber operation in the Little Kanawha Valley. The promoter was Myron H. Shirtz,[1] owner of a large general store in Burning Springs and also of the standing timber in the Fish Run basin. The mill was located on a sizeable bottom, just below the mouth of Fish Run and across Spring Creek from the home of grandfather, Joshua Lee. Mr. Shirtz also purchased logs from up-the-creek suppliers, and used the slack-water above the nearby milldam[2] as a millpond and storage basin for his logs.

Beginning in the fall of 1875, this mill operated six years. Its finished products were lumber, crossties, and white oak

[1] See Appendix IV.

[2] This milldam is discussed in Chapter One.

staves—the latter used almost exclusively in the manufacture of whiskey barrels.

The establishment also included 50 or more company-owned houses for married workers, a large boarding and rooming house for single employees, a company store, and a post office named "Shirtzville," in honor of the owner of the plant.

My father left Burning Springs oil field in the fall of 1875 to work in this new industry because it was near his home. A year later, December 17, 1876, he and my mother were married and began housekeeping in one of those company-owned houses. Their three older children, one older and one younger than I, were born there. But the camp disappeared before I was old enough to form a mental picture of it, and what I learned about it later was told to me by my father.

The crossties were floated down the creek to a boom across its mouth, two miles distant; but the staves and lumber were hauled in horse-drawn wagons to the same point. There, all products were loaded into barges and sent down the river to Parkersburg.

In the spring of 1882, Father and his family left Shirtzville and located on a farm two miles farther up the creek, opposite the mouth of Horse Run and a mile below the mouth of Lost Run. That was my first childhood home of which I have any recollection.

Apparently, the Shirtzville woodsmen set the pattern that for three decades was followed by the exploiters in other sections of the valley. They cut, slashed, and destroyed without any regard for the preservation of the smaller trees and undergrowth. Twenty-five years later, I hunted squirrels throughout the same Fish Run basin. Even at that late date, nature had not produced a sufficient stand of second growth timber to hide the ugly scars left by those early destroyers.

THE LOST RUN MILL

The Lost Run mill was built by Pennsylvania interests at the forks of the run and a mile from my first childhood

home. My father was employed at this mill at different times, and on a few occasions he took my older brother and me through it. It had two band or up-and-down saws, two circular saws, and a tube saw for cutting barrel staves.

To house its married workers and their families, the company constructed about fifty, possibly more, cheap houses near the mill site, built a large rooming and boarding house for the accommodation of unmarried employees, and established a good-sized company store.

To get the logs to the mill, the company laid a tramway to the head of each fork of the run—about two miles in length on the left fork and three and a half miles on the right fork. Trees were felled on the hillsides and back ridges, the logs skidded down slopes, loaded on tramcars, and hauled by ox-teams down the streams to the mill.

All finished products, except crossties, were hauled in wagons to the mouth of Spring Creek, five miles distant, loaded into barges and sent down the river to Parkersburg. The crossties were floated down the creek and lodged behind the boom at its mouth.[3]

For six years the despoilers hacked, chopped, hewed, and sawed in that one locality, until the land was stripped clean. The chestnut oak and red oak trees were cut in summer when the sap was up; the bark, called tanbark, was peeled, dried, and shipped to tanneries for use in tanning leather. Trees too small for lumber were made into railroad ties, the still smaller growth was taken for rafting poles, and even the hickory withes were cut and made into barrel hoops. In short, nothing was left of those once majestic forests but tens of thousands of decaying treetops. "To make it easier for settlers," said the destroyers, they applied the torch in scores of places on the cut-over lands, and the fires raged for weeks—until only "scorched earth remained." At times, the smoke was so dense that the sun was a mere blur in the sky.

The "settlers" never came, and the Lost Run country and much of the adjacent territory were truly "LOST"—a vast

[3]See Chapter Thirteen.

uninhabited and desolate region. In the past few years, however, the entire area has been purchased and reseeded by a large paper manufacturing company, and will be held as a pulpwood reserve.

THE ELIZABETH MILL

Attorney Louis Reed of Elizabeth says that because of a family relationship there is a legend in his family that this Elizabeth mill was started by one Joseph Hale, who was sheriff of Wirt County from 1873 to 1877. In the beginning, however, the mill was called the Elizabeth Bung Factory, presumably because it made bungs for whiskey barrels and beer kegs.

But, later, the plant came into the hands of the Badger family, who enlarged it until it became one of the largest lumber mills in the valley. Unlike its sister mills at Shirtzville and Lost Run, however, its owners possessed no forests, but bought their logs from suppliers on Tuckers Creek and the upper Little Kanawha.

In the summer of 1899, I attended a summer school in Elizabeth taught by Professors Edgar Heermans, Edward V. Black,[4] and Rufus King. By arrangement with the manager, Professor Black took his civics class through this mill. The manager explained how the mill was in a highly favorable location. Its workers lived in their own homes, which relieved the company of the expense of providing housing. Also, the location of the mill on the point just above the junction of Tuckers Creek with the river provided an excellent millpond in the slack water of the creek. The logs were drawn up an incline to the mill level by a steam hoist, which saved the expense of teams to haul them to the saw position. "But the greatest saving," said the manager, "was effected by the presence of a railroad siding that came right into the mill yard, so freight cars could be loaded without any haulage expense."

[4] Professor Black was an uncle of Attorney Louis Reed of Elizabeth, who has assisted me a great deal in the preparation of this book. Later, Professor Black became a Presbyterian minister. He died in 1946.

THE NICOLETT MILL

This mill was on the north side of the Little Kanawha, about eight miles above and east of Parkersburg. It was a large operation, and worked in excess of two hundred men, most of whom lived in company houses around the plant. It, too, was fortunately located. On one side was the river that brought in its raw materials, and on the other side was the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad that hauled away its finished products.

The river also served as a perfect millpond. A half-mile-long boom, that floated 60 feet from the shore, paralleled the bank in front of the mill; and behind that barrier was kept a constant supply of thousands of logs.

Like the Elizabeth mill, this operation owned no forests, but purchased its logs from dealers along the upper river. But, like the other mills, it died with the exhaustion of the timber.

Chapter Twelve

THE WATERWAYS

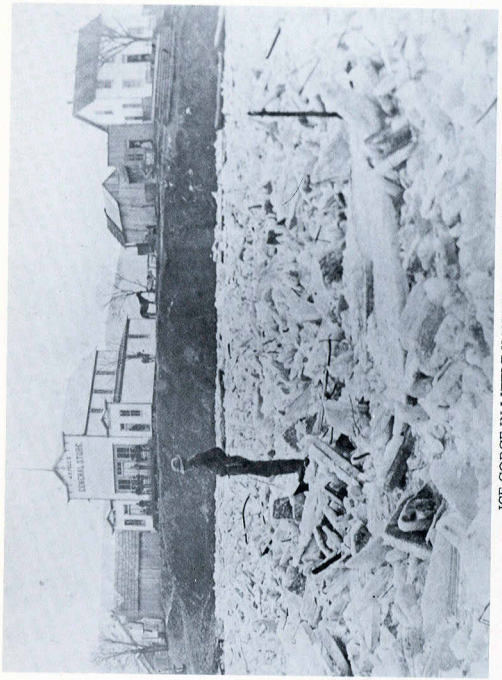
The waterways supplied the most convenient and economical means of transporting logs to the Parkersburg mills. In the lowlands, the trees were felled, cut into saw log lengths of about twenty-five feet, branded with the identifying marks of the owners, and teams of four yoke of oxen dragged them into creek beds to await the coming of the high waters.

But getting logs from the uplands to the waterways presented a different problem. In many places, strips of land about two hundred feet wide were cleared from the creeks to the top of the escarpments, the logs cut to the proper lengths, branded with the owner's mark, dragged by ox-teams to the head of the rollways, and sent crashing down the inclines into the creeks.

When the high waters came, "loggers" armed with spiked poles and cant hooks traveled downstream with the logs, breaking jams, and keeping them floating until they reached the booms that blocked the mouths of the creeks.

My second childhood home was also on Spring Creek, three miles from its mouth and four miles from the village of Creston, that still nestles among the hills at the mouth of West Fork Creek. These two streams parallel each other, extend 30 miles back into the hills from the Little Kanawha River, and drain large sections of Wirt, Roane, and Calhoun counties.

My second home was at the edge of a large forest and near a sizeable logging center. During the 1890's my oldest brother and I (ages 13 and 11) were awed and fascinated by two phases of the timber industry: the thunderous roar of the large trees as they were cut and crashed through the undergrowth to the ground; and the logs tumbling down a 300-yard-long rollway with terrific speed and landing with a mighty splash in the creek—which we watched from the hillside across the creek from the rollway.



ICE GORGE IN LITTLE KANAWHA AT CRESTON

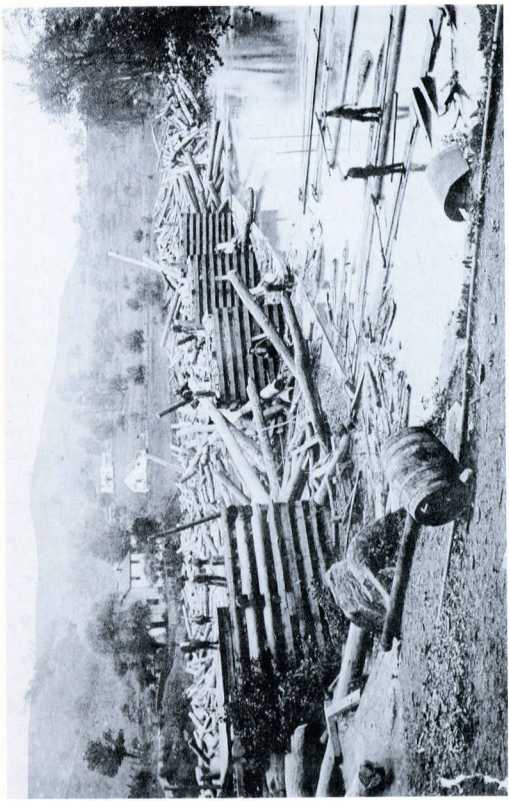
A boom blocked the mouth of both Spring Creek and West Fork Creek to keep logs from passing out into the river. When these booms were installed is uncertain. My first visit to Creston was in 1890, and the West Fork boom was then in operation. Also, I had seen and walked across the Spring Creek boom before that time.

After a rise in these creeks each boom held thousands of logs, and prior to the completion of Dam No. 5 (1891), until the river rose higher than the creeks, there was no slack-water in either creek to reduce the tremendous pressure of water and logs against the booms. Occasionally, a boom broke and spilled the logs into the river; but they were caught by river-men at a cost to the owners of 25 cents a log.

To guard against such incidents, the owners of the Spring Creek boom simply increased the number of supporting wire cables. But the owners of the West Fork boom built four 15-foot-square log cribs, at intervals of a few yards, across the creek as a part of the boom. With their logs securely bolted together, these enclosures rested on the creek bottom and were filled with hundreds of tons of rocks.

The location of the West Fork boom tended to reduce the pressure against it. Coming down a straightaway for a half mile the creek waters collided squarely with a large hill and then made an abrupt turn to the left. The boom was located at the lower edge of the turn, and logs coming down the straightaway piled up against the hill. But the completion of Dam No. 5 sent slack-water up these creeks to the extent that pressure was completely eliminated against the Spring Creek boom and greatly reduced against the one at the mouth of West Fork Creek.

The log owners paid the boom companies a flat fee of 25 cents for each log impounded. After the high waters receded, scores of men were employed at each boom in sorting and rafting logs according to ownership brands for the "runs" down the river to the lumber mills at Parkersburg. For easy



LOGS BEHIND WEST FORK BOOM AT CRESTON

passage through the lock chambers, all rafts were made approximately 21 feet wide and 120 feet long.

To bind the logs together, poles three to four inches in diameter were laid crosswise on the rafts about every 10 feet and chains 12 inches long with an iron wedge at each end, called "dogs," were placed across the poles and the wedges driven into the logs. For use in emergencies, each raft carried a 100-foot-long, one-and-a-quarter-inch Manila hemp rope, and also had a large oar, called a "sweep," mounted at one end.

My first experience as a school teacher was at Creston—winter of 1899-1900. The timber industry was then at its height, and during periods of high water in West Fork Creek it was both fascinating and frightening to watch the powerful current toss logs into huge piles above the boom.

Assembling the logs into rafts began immediately after the high water had subsided. Usually, the logs were pulled from the great mass by two gasoline-powered donkey engines anchored to a raft that was tied to trees just below the boom. Rafting the logs was extremely hazardous work—a slight misstep might, and sometimes did, result in death by drowning in the turbid water.

One evening after school, as I stood on the river bank watching workers put a raft together, I saw a young man named Schoolcraft fall into the water. The current sucked him under a newly completed raft, and he did not emerge. His fellow workers were stunned, but helpless. A week later the body was found floating in the river by the operator of the ferry at the mouth of Spring Creek, five miles down the river.

For the "runs" down the river to Parkersburg, thirty to fifty rafts were brought together into a "fleet." To give the large mass flexibility in turning bends in the river, the rafts were loosely lashed together with ropes. As an aid in guiding the fleet, two large oars were mounted on both its bow and stern. For the accommodation of the crew, a shanty, equipped with a kerosene-burning cook stove, necessary

kitchen utensils, tableware, chairs, and bunks for the men, was built on a raft which was placed near the center of the fleet.

The "runs" began in the spring and ended in the fall before ice blocked the river. To avoid the danger of a fleet going over a dam, they were made when the river was low. The fleets simply drifted with the lazy slack-water current at about two miles a day. In the evening, they were tied to trees and warning lanterns hung on their ends and riverside.

On those runs, one saw close at hand and had time to enjoy the unsurpassed beauty of the river, and to observe and listen to the wildlife along its banks. And, those who never saw the river when the locks and dams were in use cannot visualize the beauty of those limpid pools, picturesque lock chambers, and cascading dams. Nor can one who never went down the river on a fleet comprehend the restful sleep and peace of mind that came to one during a night spent on its quiet waters.

With the fleet halted for the night and supper over, the rivermen sat in front of the bunkhouse talking and awaiting bedtime. Then came the radiant beauty of a river sunset—equalled only by the glory of a river sunrise. Twilight fell, and the dormant world suddenly came to life. From everywhere came nature's music, sung in the language of the night.

Here and there a fish leaped from the water; the whippoorwills began their eerie song; myriads of fireflies emerged from the grass and weeds on the river banks, took wing and set the air aglow with their flashing lights; hosts of katydids began screaming accusations that "Katydid"; thousands of crickets chirped their approval of the charges against poor "Katy"; small frogs put on their evening choir practice on both banks of the river; big green-hooded bullfrogs, in their deep bass voices, began calling for a "jug-o-rum"; high on the wooded hillsides the great horned owl began his weird cry of "Who, Who," and on moonlit nights one could sometimes see the great bird's form silhouetted against the sky as it flew low on silent wings, scanning the ground for a possible supper; and

RAFTING LOGS AT CRESTON

occasionally an old mother coon with her family of two or three cubs clambered from the shore onto the fleet and cautiously approached the bunkhouse, looking for a handout—which she always got.

Finally, all was quiet.

Then sleep, peaceful sleep, came to the rivermen.

I know. I was there.[1]

When a lock was reached, the fleet was tied up to trees, and one by one the rafts were put through the lock chamber, reassembled a short distance below the dam, and the journey resumed. Under lock rules, boats took precedence over rafts, and when boat traffic was heavy it sometimes took two days, or even longer, to get a fleet through a lock. On the average, it required three weeks to make the 48-mile "run" from Creston to Parkersburg.

At their destination the fleets were tied to the mill moorings, and the cook stove, all kitchen utensils, tableware, leftovers, spiked poles, large oars or sweeps, and emergency

[1] See Chapter Thirteen.

ropes were assembled and shipped by boat back up the river to Creston, to be used on the next run.

A rise in the upper river brought down to slack-water at Creston scores of rafts as single units, and thousands of loose logs. Those rafts had a large oar mounted on each end and carried a two-man crew to man the oars and keep the rafts in the channel. At night they were tied up to trees and the journey resumed the next morning. At slack-water, the rafts were incorporated into the fleets, and the logs caught in a boom a mile below the mouth of Spring Creek.

That was not a conventional boom that simply spanned the river. It paralleled the river bank for nearly a mile, floated about sixty-five feet from shore, and was held in place by wire cables tied to trees. Its lower end was anchored to the bank, while the upper end was open to receive the logs.

On the opposite side of the river, about three hundred feet above the boom's opening, was a 250-foot-long boom extension called an "apron." Its upper end was anchored to the bank, and it extended into the river at a 45-degree angle, with its lower end just above the opening of the main boom. It, too, was held in position by wire cables tied to trees. Logs floating down the river struck this apron, glanced off and entered the boom.

The owners of this boom received the usual fee of 25 cents for each log impounded. When the high waters receded, workers separated the logs and rafted them as the ownership brands indicated, and sent the rafts down the river to the lumber mills at Parkersburg.

But the owners of that mile-long boom had no monopoly on retrieving logs from the river. Logs floating loose in its wild waters were fair game for all who wanted to risk their lives to impound them. Below that boom a few smaller streams sent their loose logs into the river, and they had to be retrieved before they reached the Ohio.

During a rise in the Little Kanawha, many farmers living along its banks between Creston and Parkersburg engaged in the work of retrieving logs from its waters. Their method of operation was simple. First, they made a boom by fastening a

few logs together end-to-end with "dogs" (described earlier in this chapter), floating it parallel with and about thirty feet from the river bank, and securing it with wire cables tied to trees. Next, two men in a skiff, one at the oars and the other in the stern with a tie-pick in hand, would row a short distance up stream and swing into the swift current. The rear man would sink his pick into a log and the oarsman would steer both boat and log behind the boom. This action was repeated again and again as long as logs were running. A good team would impound as many as two hundred logs during a single rise in the river.

This was extremely perilous work—certainly no place for one who was not an excellent swimmer. Over the years, however, I knew of only two deaths by drowning among such workers—both non-swimmers.

When the high waters subsided, each log owner sent his agent with a crew of four or five men down the river to redeem his logs at a cost of 25 cents each and put them into rafts. When a raft was completed it was definitely marked with the owner's name and tied to a tree, to be picked up by the next passing fleet. The agent and his crew moved on down the river to pick up more logs and construct more rafts.

Chapter Thirteen

MY "RUNS" DOWN THE RIVER

On Sunday afternoon, April 18, 1897, at the age of 18 years, I joined the river crew of Tom Alex Hopkins, fleet contractor, for my first "run" down the Little Kanawha to Parkersburg. His fleet of 48 rafts was tied up a mile below Creston. It was three rafts (63 feet) wide, and 16 rafts (about 1,900 feet) long. The crew, including Hopkins, numbered six men.

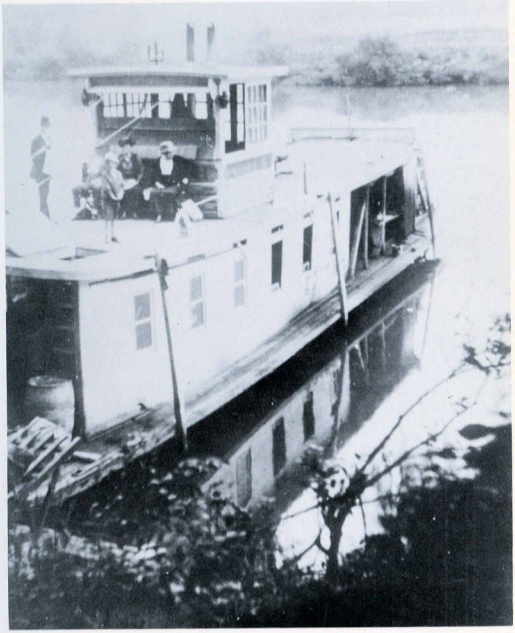
The boss designated me as cook, handed me a cookbook, and said:

"Follow its directions and you can't go wrong and we won't starve. We will shove off at daylight in the morning, and have a ham and egg breakfast after we get started."

The well-stocked larder indicated that the rivermen fared sumptuously. In addition to a bounteous supply of staple groceries on the shelves, there were five dozen eggs, a large delectably flavored country ham, and a five-gallon can full of wholesome water.

Our fleet carried a small rowboat tied to its side (as did all fleets), and when opposite certain farm houses, which the boss knew from past experiences, he would take one of the men and the water tank and row ashore. Soon they would return with a tank full of fresh water from the farmer's well, a supply of fresh eggs, and a couple of dressed fryers. Almost daily, too, the boss would row out to a passing up-the-river boat and purchase a block of ice for our old Leonard ice box. Also, when the crew wanted a change in the meat diet, they would take a couple of rods and reels, make a few casts into the river, and bring in a mess of fine fish.

The main work of the crew was to keep the fleet floating in the channel. In straightaways that was no problem; but in sharp bends in the river it required the combined efforts of the entire crew, some using the large oars and others long push poles, to turn the fleet's bow to the new direction. That



THE "EDITH H."

accomplished, one man was left at the front to man an oar, while the others went to the stern to keep that end from swinging onto the under-water rocks on the outside bank of the bend.

I made four runs during the spring and summer. The first three were monotonous to the point of boredom. But there were enough thrills, excitement, and danger crammed into two hours near the end of my fourth and last run to suffice for a lifetime.

The last raft went through the next to the last lock at sundown, and we decided to spend the night where we were tied up—just below the dam. For days our region had been rainless, but further up the river there had been heavy rains and flash floods. There were no telephones along the river, and we had no knowledge of those flood conditions. At daybreak the next morning the boss yelled: "Boys, jump! The river is raisin' hell!" We were out in seconds. There was a four-foot rise in the river and it was rising a foot an hour.

We heard a series of sharp, crackling noises, and glanced up the river. Two rafts had been torn loose in the upper pool and were breaking up as they came over the dam. It was frightening to see those huge logs tossed about like chips in the boils below the dam.

Before we could put out additional lines our fleet broke its moorings and we were adrift in the current, with another dam eleven miles below which meant certain death to go over.

We quickly unfleeted the rafts so each one would float as a single unit. We then became three two-man crews, and each crew began to maneuver rafts to the banks and tie them to trees, using the 100-foot-long rope carried on each raft. One man used the large oar to direct the raft to the bank, while the other, rope in hand, leaped ashore, took a couple of turns around a tree and gradually eased the raft to a stop and securely tied it. Both men then jumped into the water, swam to the nearest raft and landed it the same way. Only one raft went over the last dam, but its logs were caught in the lower river.

THE "DOVE" MOORED AT CRESTON

The buildings on the right in the picture are now gone, and the upper end of a modern highway bridge hits the river bank about where they stood.

It was all over in less than two hours—hours crowded with danger and excitement. But the water was warm, we were all good swimmers, worked barefooted, and in our undershorts, which greatly lessened the danger. We suffered only one casualty—the boss lost his undershorts and had to work in the nude. But that did not impair his efficiency.

The excitement over, there was a decided reaction in some of the men. Exhausted, we threw ourselves down on the grass on the river bank. Suddenly, one man sat bolt upright and said:

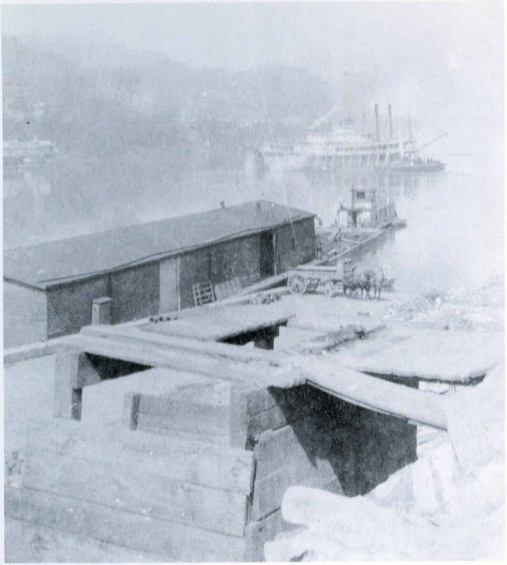
"We are a bunch of Goddamned fools to risk our lives this way for a few damned old logs. Why in the hell didn't we let the whole damn fleet go over the dam? The logs would have been caught in the lower river at a cost to the owners of only twenty-five cents a log. We are just a bunch of damn fools!"

The man was cold and shaking from head to feet, beads of sweat stood out all over him, and he began vomiting. Whiskey was the riverman's remedy for everything from a mashed thumb to a broken leg. The boss had a quart in his first-aid kit, but the bunkhouse raft was tied to a tree three miles up the river.

With two men assisting the sick man we finally reached the bunkhouse raft. The patient was given a strong drink of whiskey and put to bed. The next morning he was completely recovered. He still maintained, however, that his estimate of our intelligence was correct—there was no dissent.

Two days later the high water had receded. We reassembled the fleet, and completed our run to Parkersburg. But that trip ended my career as a riverman.

Railroad ties, commonly called "crossties," were also a very important item of commerce on the Little Kanawha and its tributaries. Scores of small protable sawmills operated in those valleys, cut timber for local use, and also cut tens of thousands of crossties. At the same time, other tens of thousands were chopped and hewed out by hand in the same area.



CRESTON WHARF BOAT AND STEAMBOAT TURNING IN THE RIVER

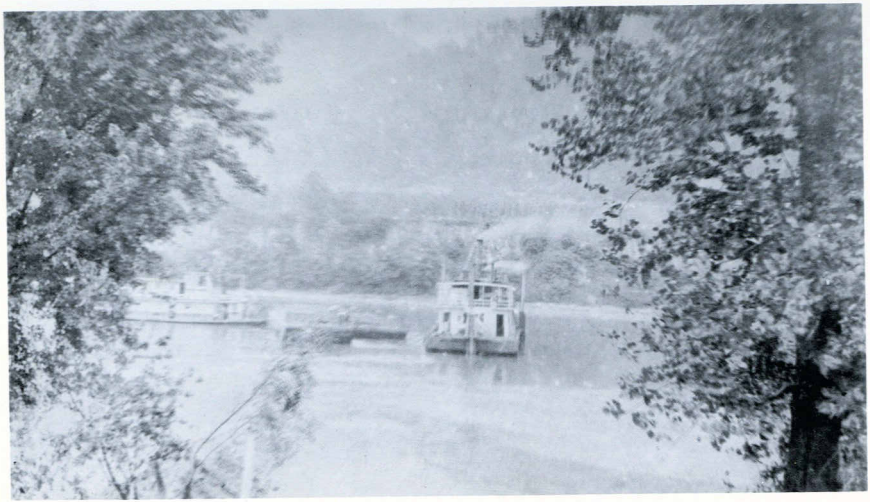
Creston was the head of navigation in the Little Kanawha. The steamboat, probably the "French," is shown turning for its down-the-river trip to Parkersburg. A few of the river packets were three stories high with a pilothouse atop.

These products were floated down runs and creeks and lodged behind the booms along with the logs. They, too, were rafted, fleeted, and floated down the river to Parkersburg. But in 1898 the Little Kanawha Railroad Company completed its thirty-mile railroad from Parkersburg to Owensport, a half mile above the village of Palestine. Thereafter, ties from up the river were loaded into freight cars at the Port and shipped to their destination.

The railroad company also caused to be operated a small gasoline propelled boat that carried passengers, freight, and mail up and down the river between Creston and Owensport. The first boat in the trade was the "Leone," but after a few years it was succeeded by the "Edith H.," which continued the run until the railroad was abandoned in 1933.

Through the years, however, the railroad had to compete with a fast passenger-and-freight-carrying boat called the "Dove." It made three round trips a week between Creston

DEVIL'S TEA TABLE ON RIVER NEAR CRESTON



OWENSPORT—End of Little Kanawha Railroad. Gasoline Boats Tied to Moorings.

and Parkersburg—leaving the former village on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and making the return trips on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. But this service, too, died along with the railroad.

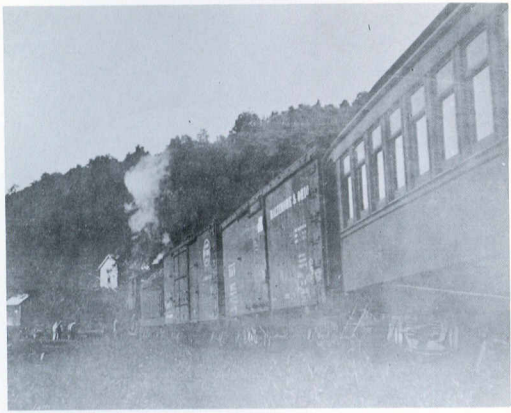
On May 1, 1908, the Little Kanawha Railroad Company sold its road and equipment to the Baltimore and Ohio. In a few years, however, the crosstie freight revenue disappeared and other freight income dribbled to a trickle. In a futile effort to save the road, service was cut to a twice-a-week mixed train, but finally it died; and T-Model Ford cars and trucks took over what little freight and passenger business remained.

On October 10, 1933, the Interstate Commerce Commission authorized the railroad company to discontinue all service on the line, and shortly thereafter the rails were removed. Probably the last train on the road was run October 10, 1933.

This Little Kanawha River rises among the State's highest mountains, and for some distance it flows between mountain ridges. It then courses its way among high foothills, and on through lowlands to the Ohio. By air-line it is possibly 90 miles from its source to its mouth; but its graceful curves and large and sharp bends add 77 miles to that distance, and also make it one of the most crooked rivers in the world. It is these curves and bends, however, that make the valley of the Little Kanawha one of the most beautiful areas in America.

Today the Little Kanawha flows unhampered and undisturbed among the hills. The oil, timber, railroad, and locks and dams are gone; and the priceless pools that once lay above the dams are lost to the people as recreational facilities.

But the potential of this little river as a future fishing and water recreational stream is unsurpassed; and the valley is served its entire length by good roads and bridges, and crossed by two Interstate Highways (I-77 and I-79). It is also within less than a day's drive of such population centers as Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and Washington. Its people—the purest English stock and the most



LAST TRAIN ON LITTLE KANAWHA
(October 10, 1933)

hospitable folk to be found anywhere in America—are there to welcome visitors.

These advantages lead many people to hope that some day, within the reasonable future, the State will commemorate the great oil strike and the now extinct city by an appropriate state park at the mouth of Burning Springs Run. We also hope that we may be able to persuade our Federal authorities to divert just a few of our tax dollars from the ratholes of the world and use them to develop recreational facilities in the valley of the Little Kanawha for the benefit and enjoyment of our own people.

Chapter Fourteen

"OLD CHARLEY"

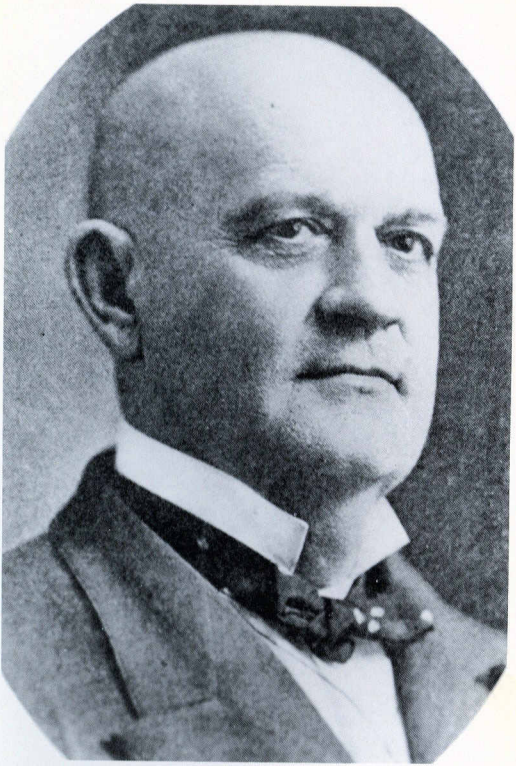
Even in his own lifetime, Charles Thomas Caldwell ("Charley" to those who knew him) was a legend in the Little Kanawha Valley; and no story of the region would be complete without more than a passing reference to him. Nature endowed him with all the attributes of genius—high intelligence, handsome visage, princely bearing, dynamic personality, great affability and congeniality, and a gift of eloquence that stirred men's souls. In his latter years he was affectionately called "Old Charley" by his hosts of friends.

In his book, *Recollections of Fifty Years,* former Governor William A. MacCorkle, who knew Senator Caldwell[1] intimately for many years, thus describes him:

> He was a magnificent looking man, full of wit and humor and real eloquence. He had the ability, which so few possess, of making people listen to him whenever he opened his mouth. As I say, he was a magnificent looking man, along the Websterian style. His head was bald as a billiard ball. There was not one hair on his head. Whenever he got up before an audience, everybody stopped and gave him their entire attention, and however long he spoke, people still remained.

In Senator Caldwell's day, lawyers were not specialists, and while he practiced in all fields of the law, it was in the criminal side of the profession that he found the greatest opportunity to display his superb forensic talents. And for nearly four decades he was engaged in practically every important criminal trial in the lower Little Kanawha Valley and adjacent counties. A few of those trials, for both felonies and

[1]He served two terms in West Virginia State Senate, 1872-73 from Wirt County; and 1903-05 from Wood County.



CHARLES THOMAS CALDWELL

misdemeanors, are discussed in this chapter to show the versatility of that enigmatic genius.[2]

Senator Caldwell was born on a farm at Letart Falls, Meigs County, Ohio, December 23, 1847. He attended two three-month terms of a country school; ran away from home at 16, joined the Union Army and served in the regiment commanded by Major William McKinley, later President McKinley. After the war, he worked as a roustabout on steamboats until he came to Elizabeth, Wirt County, West Virginia, in the spring of 1869. In 1882, he moved his law office to Parkersburg, but continued to practice at Elizabeth. In 1888, he was converted to the Christian faith, united with the Southern Methodist Church, and was licensed as a local preacher by that body. He was a deeply religious man.

Once, during a visit to his office in Parkersburg, I said to him:

"Senator, you have an unexcelled vocabulary, plus the faculty of weaving words into sentences of great force as well as rare beauty. With your limited schooling, how did you acquire such skills?"

"A young chaplain in the army had the first dictionary I ever saw," replied the Senator. "He taught me the intricacies of the diacritical marks and their uses. He also pointed out the rules of punctuation in the back of the book, which I copied and committed to memory. The young minister also told me that, aside from its religious significance, the Bible contained the wisest epigrams of the ages; and, if I had ambitions to become a public speaker, I should study it assiduously.

"When I left the army," continued the Senator, "my first purchases were a Bible, a dictionary, and a notebook. The last, I always kept with me; and when I heard an unfamiliar word in conversation, or found such a word in my reading, I wrote it down in my notebook. In my room, I took my

[2]There are two brief biographical sketches of Senator Caldwell in the State's Department of Archives and History, Charleston: *Prominent Men in West Virginia*, p. 767, printed in 1890; and *Progressive West Virginians*, p. 11, printed in 1905.

dictionary and learned how to spell it, and got its correct pronunciation and meaning. I then used that word over and over until it became a part of me. I still follow that practice."

The two most sensational murder cases in Wirt County's history were the Sheppard Case and the Whiteman Case. In the first, Sam Sheppard murdered his wife and her seven-year-old illegitimate son by crushing their skulls with an ax while they slept in their beds. The deceased woman's relatives employed Senator Caldwell to assist in Sheppard's prosecution, and the way he crushed a wilful perjurer during the trial illustrates his daring and resourcefulness.

In the second case, Mrs. Hannah Whiteman was charged with the fatal shotgun killing of one Ed Deever, and Senator Caldwell was her chief counsel. The trial was held at Elizabeth in the spring of 1906, and it is reviewed here to show the emotional effect of the Senator's powerful and dramatic oratory upon the Judge, the jury, and the audience.

And finally, three cases are described which show the humorous side of that extraordinary genius of the Little Kanawha.

THE SHEPPARD CASE

Sheppard's defense was an "alibi"—that is, he was not at home when the crimes were committed; and, therefore, he could not have committed them. His story was that on that fateful day, after he had eaten breakfast with his wife and her son, he went to his brother's home, a mile and a half down the road, to help him dig a cellar; that he spent that night with his brother and worked through the next day, and spent that second night with his father, who lived a half mile further down the road; and that when he reached his own home about nine o'clock the third morning, he found the two mutilated bodies.

The theory of the prosecution was that Sheppard committed the murders before he left his house that first morning. The doctor, who examined the bodies at noon the day they were found, supported that theory. The condition of the

bodies, said he, showed that death had taken place from 48 to 60 hours earlier.[3]

To expedite the case, the Court held a few night sessions. Electricity had not yet come to the valley and the courtroom was lighted by kerosene-burning lamps, some with tin reflectors on the side.

The last defense witness was a near neighbor of Sheppard. He testified that about eleven o'clock in the morning of the first day Sheppard worked for his brother, the witness went to the Sheppard home to see if he could get "Sam" to work for him a few days; that at that time he saw the child playing in the yard; and also saw and talked with Mrs. Sheppard, and she told him that "Sam" had gone to help his brother dig a cellar.

Senator Caldwell rose from his chair, picked up a reflector-lamp, walked slowly over to the witness chair, held the lamp so that the reflector threw the light squarely into the face of the witness, gazed at him a few seconds, then suddenly roared at him:

"What did Sam Sheppard say he would give you for swearing this lie?"

Quickly, before defense lawyers could object, the now thoroughly frightened witness blurted out:

"He didn't say what he would give me, but he said he would see me well paid."

Thus was Sheppard's alibi exploded and his fate decided.

The jury returned a verdict of guilty of first degree murder, without a recommendation of "mercy," and that meant death by hanging. Dignified Circuit Judge Louis N. Tavner promptly overruled all defense motions for a new trial, and told Sheppard to "stand up."

The defendant rose and began beating a tune with his fingers on the table in front of him. The Judge began an eloquent discourse on the enormity of his crimes and the jus-

[3]The winter of 1900-01 I taught school on Flint Run, a half-dozen miles from Elizabeth. On Thursday evening, I adjourned school for the week and went to Elizabeth to attend the last hours of the Sheppard trial, and get my first lesson in criminal law.

tice of the jury's verdict. With a sneer on his face, Sheppard looked up at him and said:

"Ah! Cut out that Goddamned B. S. (He used the actual words) and sentence me."

Without the slightest indication that he had heard the remark, the Judge continued:

"It is the judgment of the Court that you are guilty as charged, and as the jury has found. You are, therefore, remanded to the custody of the Sheriff of Wirt County, who will keep you confined in the jail of said County until the Warden of the Penitentiary can conveniently send guards for you; that you be taken from the jail of said County to the Penitentiary of this State and therein confined until Friday the (I have forgotten the date), and on that day, between the hours of sunrise and sunset, the said Warden shall cause you to be hanged by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead; and may God Almighty have mercy on your soul."

Sheppard had killed a man a few years earlier, and, to "show his inclination to kill," the prosecution introduced evidence of that prior homicide. The Supreme Court said that was "prejudicial error," and ordered a new trial for the accused. The second jury also found Sheppard guilty of first degree murder, but recommended "mercy" and he was sentenced to life imprisonment.[4]

THE WHITEMAN CASE

The trial of Mrs. Hannah Whiteman in the spring of 1906 for the shotgun-slaying of one Ed Deever was the most sensational murder trial in Wirt County's history. It was also the highlight in the brilliant legal career of Senator Charley Caldwell.

[4] For additional details of that bizarre killing, see *State* vs. *Sheppard*, 49 W. Va. 599, 39 S. E. 676.

Mrs. June Hudson, present (1967) Clerk of the Circuit Court of Wirt County, has supplied the following information concerning Sam Sheppard:

About 1913, Governor H. D. Hatfield pardoned him. He went to Akron, Ohio, and worked in a rubber factory for a few years; drifted to Pasadena, California, and for 18 years he was employed by a power company. He died in San Francisco in 1953, age 81 years. The Wirt County people never heard of his having another brush with the law.

I was unable to attend the trial, but I had more than a passing interest in its outcome, for I knew, personally, all those in any way involved in the homicide.

The Whiteman family was a peaceful, quiet, happy, farm household composed of the father, Robert A.; Hannah, his wife; two sons, Jesse and Simon; and two younger daughters, Jane and Alice. All the children went to school to me in the winter of 1900-01; and Alice, the youngest, was then about 13 years old.

Also, I knew Ed Deever, the victim, for at least ten years prior to his death. He was a large man, of low mentality, irascible, violent, and brutish in disposition—a man who delighted in "whurpping" anyone who crossed him. He was especially violent when drinking, which was most of the time. In the light of present-day knowledge, it may be said with assurance that he was a moronic madman, who should have been confined in an institution for the criminally insane before tragedy overtook him.

When the youngest Whiteman girl was 17 years old, Ed Deever, more than twice her age, began paying her serious attention. The family objected because of the difference in age and Deever's well known vicious tendencies.

These objections greatly disturbed Deever's warped mind, and he began making threats to kill all the Whitemans, especially the mother. He was forbidden to come on the Whiteman premises, but he continued to come, always armed with a pistol. On one occasion he broke into the Whiteman home and threatened to kill the invalid father if he made any further objections to his attentions to the daughter; he beat and choked one of the sons because of his objections; he also brutally beat and kicked a much smaller man, named McCauley, for the sole reason that he was a former suitor of the girl.

On the fateful day, Deever had been out with the girl and when they returned, Mrs. Whiteman ordered him to leave her premises.

In a rage, he shouted at her: "Old woman, unless you want to die, get back in that house and stay there.

Mrs. Whiteman went back into the house, but came out immediately with a shotgun which she fired point-blank at Deever, at close range. The full charge struck him in the neck and nearly severed his head from his body.

Senator Caldwell's address to the jury was the highlight of the trial that followed. The local paper said that an hour before the arguments to the jury were to begin, the courtroom was filled with both men and women, and scores were turned away. The men came to hear "Charley's speech," while the women came to lend moral support to the defendant.

The local paper had the court reporter take in shorthand and transcribe the Senator's speech, and printed extensive excerpts from it in its next issue.

"Our Charley," as the people of Elizabeth affectionately called the Senator, did not disappoint his admirers. "For an hour and forty minutes," said the paper,[5] "Senator Caldwell, in the greatest address of his entire career, pleaded for the acquittal of that troubled and distraught mother. At times Judge Moss' eyes were suffused with tears. Strong men, both in the jury box and in the audience, wept openly. Women, too, wept, and a few became so emotionally hysterical that they had to be assisted from the courtroom."

Of course, the jury's verdict was "Not Guilty."

Two months after the trial, in discussing the case in his Parkersburg office, Senator Caldwell told me that the jury returned its "Not Guilty" verdict in seventeen minutes—probably a record for brevity in a homicide case.

A MISDEMEANOR CASE

Charley Caldwell was gentle, but if need be he could be fierce, towering, dominant, overpowering. His sense of humor was boundless, and sometimes he greatly annoyed presiding judges by his ability and willingness to turn a solemn occasion into a comedy, if that would better serve his purpose.

[5] For more than fifty years I kept a copy of that newspaper in my scrapbook—until it crumbled into dust.

Attorney Louis Reed, of Elizabeth, contributes this story that illustrates the Senator's humorous side. It was told to him by his uncle, Lon Reed, who was a member of the jury when the incident occurred.

As a general rule, Senator Caldwell did not accept misdemeanor cases.[6] But somehow he became involved in this one. The proof of his client's guilt was overwhelming. Nevertheless, he said that he "desired to make a few remarks to the jury in behalf of his client." But in those remarks he neither discussed the evidence nor mentioned his client's name.

Immediately, he launched into a lecture on the beauties of the valley of Jehoshaphat[7] in which he used about all the descriptive adjectives in the language, and always in the superlative degree. "It was pure poetry," said Mr. Lon Reed, "and jurors and spectators alike were swept away by his eloquence."

But after fifteen or twenty minutes, the Judge interrupted to say:

"Senator Caldwell, the Court is unable to see any possible connection between the guilt or innocence of your client and the Valley of Jehoshaphat."

Whereupon, the Senator, with an expression of utter astonishment and injured innocence, turned to the jury and said:

"Gentlemen, you see, I am now obliged to leave you here, stranded, right in the middle of the Valley of Jehoshaphat."

"In appreciation of the fine show 'Old Charley' had put on," said Mr. Lon Reed, "the jury promptly acquitted his client on the first ballot."

The two following stories concerning Senator Caldwell are taken, in condensed form, from former Governor MacCorkle's book, *Recollections of Fifty Years.*

[6] A misdemeanor is the least of offenses, and is punished by a fine or jail sentence, or both, in the discretion of the trial court.

[7] The *People's Bible Encyclopedia* says that the Valley of Jehoshaphat lies between the City of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. It was used by the Jews as a "burying ground." It possesses no particular beauty.

THE ITALIAN'S CASE

Judge Dayton, of the United States District Court, once assigned Senator Caldwell to represent a supposedly indigent Italian, charged with a felony. The Government's evidence was very weak, and Charley asked for a directed verdict of *not guilty*. The motion was sustained, and the Senator explained to the Italian that he was free and might go home.

The Italian took his lawyer into the hallway, pulled a big roll of bills from his pocket, and said:

"How much I owe you?"

"Oh! About fifty dollars," answered Charley.

The Italian peeled off five ten-dollar bills and handed them to the Senator, and said:

"How much I owe your partner, the big a fella up on the high place?" Referring, of course, to Judge Dayton.

"Oh! About the same amount," replied Charley.

Whereupon, the Italian peeled off five more ten-dollar bills and handed them to the Senator.

Charley pocketed the money, but it was too good a joke to keep, and he told his fellow lawyers.

Judge Dayton heard about it, but made no comment.

THE DELLA HAZELET CASE

Della, of Charleston, was injured while a passenger on the Ohio River Railroad (later the Baltimore and Ohio from Wheeling to Huntington). She engaged Senator Caldwell as her attorney and signed a contract in which she agreed to pay him one-half of any amount recovered. He instituted a suit in the Circuit Court at Parkersburg for $10,000 damages.

On trial day, without the knowledge of her attorney, Della settled with the railroad claim agent for $4,000, and returned to Charleston with the cash. The Senator followed her and tried to collect his share, but Della refused to give him any part of the money. He then instituted proceedings in the Circuit Court of Kanawha County to compel her to disgorge his share of the sum paid her.

Della employed former Governor Emanuel Willis (Windy) Wilson to represent her. He and Caldwell disliked each other politically and socially. The Senator was a large man, without one single hair on his head, while Windy, a pugnacious little fellow, weighed about 130 pounds, and had a great shock of long, reddish-brown hair. The hearing lasted two or three days, and during much of that time the Sheriff had to stand between the two antagonists to keep the peace.

First, the Court ordered Della to disclose where she had put the money. She pulled up her skirt and pointed to a somewhat enlarged circle around her leg, and said: "It is right there, and there's where it is going to stay." But the Court ordered her to dislodge the money and pay Senator Caldwell his share. After much haggling, Della reluctantly obeyed, and the Senator got his money.

In the meantime, goaded by the Senator's sarcastic witticisms, Windy challenged him to a duel. The Senator asked permission to address the Court on the subject of dueling. The Judge, confident that Charley would turn the incident into a comedy, told him to proceed. With great eloquence he reviewed the history of dueling and stressed its evils. "But, throughout the long history of the custom," he said, "the challenged party has had the right to name the time and place of combat, and to select the weapons to be used."

Slowly, the Senator removed his coat, rolled up his sleeves, and turning toward Windy, said: "Mr. Wilson I accept your challenge to mortal combat. The time, sir, is now. The place, sir, is this courtroom. The weapons, sir, are pulling hair. Make ready, sir."

With that, the Senator assumed a hideous grimace, extended his arms, spread wide his fingers, and rushed at Windy; but again the Sheriff stepped between them.

As he left the courtroom, Windy was heard to remark, as if to himself:

"Pullin' hair! Hell."

"That," said former Governor MacCorkle, "was the most amusing incident I ever saw in a courtroom."

The date of Senator Caldwell's death is not recorded, but his will was probated in Wood County, West Virginia, March 4, 1909.

TO "OLD CHARLEY"

His life was gentle, and the elements
So mix'd in him that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, *This was a man.*

(Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar. Act V.)*

APPENDIXES

I. Richard Lee's Settlement and Land Grant in the Little Kanawha Valley.

II. Historical Sketch of the Rathbone Family and its Connection With the Burning Springs Oil Field and the now Extinct Town.

III. Quotations from the *New York Herald*, issue of August 14, 1865.

IV. Sketch of Myron H. Shirtz, Founder of the now Extinct Town and Post Office of Shirtzville.

Appendix I

RICHARD LEE'S SETTLEMENT IN THE LITTLE KANAWHA VALLEY

I remember a notation in Grandfather Joshua Lee's Bible, dated 1830,[1] which stated that his uncle, Richard Lee, came to the Little Kanawha Valley in 1774, from Westmoreland County (Virginia), and made a permanent settlement the following year at the site of the present village of Newark.[2] A few years later, said the notation, he was joined by his younger brother Jesse, "a patriot of the Revolution," also from Westmoreland County. Later, Jesse married Hannah Darnell, of Hughes River, but the date was illegible. They settled on Hughes River, near its junction with the Little Kanawha, where they raised a family of eight children, four sons and four daughters. The order of their births is unknown, but my grandfather, Joshua Lee, was born in 1805.

In 1779, the Virginia Assembly passed an Act awarding 400 acres to all persons who could prove that they had settled west of the mountains and developed their lands.

Richard Lee "proved-up" on his lands, and on April 6, 1789, he was granted a patent (same as a deed) by the Commonwealth of Virginia for 350 acres, "Including his settlement made in the year 1775." The instrument was beautifully written, but without any punctuation. It reads:

> Beverly Randolph Esquire Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia to all to whom these presents shall come Greetings Know ye that by virture of a certificate in right of settlement given by the Commissioners for

[1] The last time I saw Grandfather Lee's Bible was in 1910. It was then in the possession of his niece, Mollie Eagle. She and her children have been gone for years, and I assume that the Bible is lost.

[2] It appears that Richard Lee's settlement at what is now Newark, made in 1775, was the first permanent settlement in the Little Kanawha Valley. At least, I have been unable to find any record of an earlier permanent establishment in the valley.

adjusting the titles to unpatented lands in the district of Monongalia Yohogania and Ohio and in Consideration of the ancient Composition of one pound fifteen shillings sterling paid by Richard Lee into the Treasury of this Commonwealth There is granted by the said Commonwealth unto the said Richard Lee a certain tract or parcel of land Containing three hundred and fifty acres by survey bearing date of the Sixth day of July one thousand seven hundred and eightyfive Lying and being in the County of Harrison[3] on the lower side of the Little Kenhawa Including his settlement made in the year 1775 and bounded as follows Beginning at a Beech on the bank of said Kenhawa River and running thence North sixtyfive Degrees West one hundred and sixtysix poles to a hickory North twenty Degrees West one hundred and twentyfour poles to a sugar tree North thirtyfive Degrees West fortyeight poles to a Beech North eighty Degrees East one hundred and forty poles to a white oak North sixtyfive Degrees East one hundred and sixty poles to a Beech on the River bank South ten and a half degrees West three hundred and twentythree poles up said river to the beginning with its appurtenances to have and to hold the said tract or parcel of land with its appurtenances to said Richard Lee and his heirs forever In witness whereof the said Beverly Randolph Esquire Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia hath hereunto set his hand and caused the lesser Seal of the said Commonwealth to be affixed at Richmond on Sixth day of April in the year of our lord one thousand seven hundred & Eighty nine and of the Commonwealth the thirteenth.

B. Randolph

Attorney Louis Reed, retired, of Elizabeth, our foremost authority on the early history of the lower Little Kanawha Valley, supplied this supporting evidence as to the date Richard Lee settled in the valley:

"The Memoirs of Hiram Pribble (1793-1897), now in my possession, contain these statements:

[3]These lands are now in Wirt County. Wood County was cut off from Harrison in 1798, and Wirt County was cut off from Wood in 1848.

> Henry Enoch was given a certificate for 400 acres of land for service in the Revolutionary War by the Commissioner of Unpatented Lands of Virginia in 1783. On April 7, 1789, he received a surveyed patent for 350 acres of land on the Little Kanawha River in Harrison County [now Wirt County], signed by Governor Beverly Randolph. In 1795 Henry Enoch and Thomas Pribble, his son-in-law, came to the Little Kanawha and visited the Enoch settlement. At that time Thomas Pribble purchased the Richard Lee settlement, made in 1774, . . . which contained lands, a house, well, orchard, etc."[4]

Jesse Lee, was Richard's younger brother and the author's great-grandfather. The date of his birth is unknown, but the approximate date of his death is indicated by his will, which was probated in Wood County, now West Virginia, at the June Term of Court, 1823, and is recorded in Will Book 2, p. 113.

Colonel Raymond A. Lee of Athens, Ohio, grandson of James M. Lee, great-grandson of Joshua Lee, and a great-great-grandson of Jesse Lee, contributes the following information concerning Jesse:

> The *Historical Register of Virginians in the Revolution,* by John Gathmey, states that Jesse Lee was a member of the "2nd Virginia State Regiment." The National Archives Records show that Jesse Lee of the 2nd Virginia Regiment "enlisted in March 1777 and was mustered out at Philadelphia in December, 1779." The National Archives Records also show that Jesse Lee of Westmoreland County, Virginia, and of the 2nd Virginia Regiment, received Land Warrant No. 3388, Military District of Ohio in 1784.

CHILDREN OF JESSE AND HANNAH DARNELL LEE

Joshua Lee, born September 27, 1805. Married Nancy

[4]The deed from Richard Lee and his wife, Tabitha, to Hiram Pribble (of record in Harrison County) conveyed only 80 acres of Richard's original grant. Richard also acquired 227 acres on the opposite side of the river (Harrison County records), and named the small stream that flowed through those lands "Lee Run," a name it still carries.

Davis April 29, 1826. Died March 24, 1900.

Anna Lee, (also called Nancy). Birth and death dates unknown. She married David Cazad November 13, 1826.

Josiah Lee, born in 1811. Died March 22, 1877. Married Rebecca Ann Whaley.

Cynthia Lee, birth and death dates unknown. Married George Lewis May 30, 1828.

Peter Lee, born August 1, 1815. Maiden name of wife unknown. She died January 24, 1902. Her gravestone, at Petroleum, West Virginia, gives her first name as Lydia.

Sarah Lee, sometimes called "Sally." Birth, marriage, and death dates unknown. She married Samuel Cullums.

Hannah Lee, birth, marriage, and death dates unknown. She is mentioned in her mother's will.[5]

Jesse Lee, the youngest. Birth and death dates unknown. He was a Union soldier. Bureau of Pensions Records, Certificate No. 114082. His military discharge is recorded in Elizabeth. He, too, is mentioned in his mother's will.[5]

CHILDREN OF JOSHUA LEE
AND NANCY DAVIS LEE

Jesse Lee, 1827-1903. Also a Union soldier. Bureau of Pensions Records, Certificate No. 440312. His military discharge is recorded in Elizabeth.

Sidney Lee Enoch-White, 1828-1911.[6]

[5]The will of Hannah Darnell Lee was presented in Wood County Court for probate at the December Term 1834, Will Book 3, page 251. But action was deferred for further proof. Ten years later the will was finally probated, and recorded in Will Book 10, page 21.

[6]Sidney was married twice. Her first husband was William Enoch, and her second, James White.

Pardon Lee, 1831-1903.
Elizabeth Lee Dulin, 1833-1870.
Samuel Lee, 1836-1923.
William H. Lee, 1838-1909.
Nancy Lee Leach, 1840-1904.
James M. Lee, 1843-1938.
Robert E. Lee, 1846-1923.
Stephen S. Lee, 1848-1937.

The *Elizabeth Messenger,* edited by Harry H. Holmes and published at Elizabeth, on April 6, 1900, carried the following obituary of Joshua Lee:

> Joshua Lee, probably the oldest citizen of Wirt County, died at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Sidney White, on Spring Creek, March 29, 1900. He was born in Wood County September 29, 1805. He was the father of 10 children, 9 of whom are now living. His descendants number 59 grandchildren, 139 great-grandchildren, and 17 great-great-grandchildren—a total of 225 descendants.

Appendix II

HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE RATHBONE FAMILY, ETC.

In the *New York Herald* article of August 14, 1865, heretofore referred to, the reporter gives the following brief sketch of the Rathbone family:

> As the name Rathbone is more intimately associated with the oil regions of West Virginia than any other, a little further reference to the family may not be uninteresting. The elder Rathbone had four sons and three daughters. The sons are named John V., John C., Samuel B., and William Van Allen. One daughter married Peter G. Van Winkle, now representing the State of West Virginia in the United States Senate. Another married Colonel Frost, of Virginia, who sacrificed his life in the cause of his country in the Shenandoah Valley. The third married Mr. J. P. Atkinson, a respected citizen of New York. The widow of Col. Frost survives, residing in Parkersburg, and is the only daughter living.

Also, from information supplied by Mr. Louis Reed of Elizabeth, and Dr. Boyd B. Stutler of Charleston, I am able to formulate this further brief sketch of the Rathbone family.[1]

The elder Rathbone possessed considerable wealth and owned an estate in New Jersey and a town house in New York City. He had also achieved some political prominence, and had served as an alderman in New York.

Sometime before the family left New York, daughter Juliet married Peter G. Van Winkle, a young New York lawyer. They migrated to Parkersburg, Virginia, where Peter began his law practice. Later, he was active in the creation of the new State of West Virginia, and became one of its first two United States Senators.

The elder Rathbone's wife and their youngest son, William

[1] See, also, Thoenen's *History of the Oil and Gas Industry in West Virginia.*

Van Allen, were in poor health. The son-in-law, Peter G. Van Winkle, was a firm believer in the healing properties of the saltish-sulphur tasting waters of the burning springs on the Little Kanawha; and he and his wife, no doubt, played an important role in persuading the family to migrate to the Springs.

At the end of the family migration a fourth son, Samuel Brown, resided in Portland, Maine. He, too, followed the sea; and at the beginning of the Civil War he became a captain in the United States Navy. At the close of the war he moved to Wirt County, collected $90,000 from his father's estate, lost it in unwise investments, and earned his livelihood by operating a steamboat, the "Oneida," on the Little Kanawha River. He was familiarly known as "Captain Sam"; and from 1892 to 1896 he served as Sheriff of Wirt County.[2] The Wirt County Rathbones are his descendants.

The partnership association between Val Rathbone and Johnson N. Camden lasted until the former's death in 1897. While oil production was at its peak, Val moved to Parkersburg and he and Camden organized the Union Trust and Deposit Company, the largest bank in the city, and Val served as its President until his death.[3]

Cass was said to be the wealthiest member of the Rathbone family. Early in the Civil War he organized and for a time commanded the 11th West Virginia Volunteer Infantry, with the rank of Colonel. On September 2, 1862, however, he surrendered the town of Spencer, without resistance, to a smaller Rebel force commanded by General Albert Gallatin Jenkins,[4] and was permitted to resign his command. He retired to private life in Parkersburg, and later moved to Kansas where he died at the age of 92 years. His body was returned to Parkersburg for burial.

[2]I remember "Captain Sam" very well. He was a very personable individual.

[3]In 1900, when I attended summer school in Burning Springs, there was a legend among the old-timers that at one time Camden, the Rathbones, and others had a bank in the Springs, but I have not been able to establish it as a fact.

[4]General Jenkins was from Cabell County, West Virginia. He was killed in the battle of Cloyd's Mountain, near Dublin, Virginia, May 9, 1864.

Appendix III

QUOTATIONS FROM THE *NEW YORK HERALD*, AUGUST 14, 1865

By midsummer, 1865, the virulence of the oil fever began to spread. With the hope of selling them at still higher prices, speculators paid immense sums for the lands as far up the river as the mouth of the West Fork. The *New York Herald* sent a reporter to investigate the field, and the following are some of his comments as published in the August 14, 1865, issue of that paper, supplied by Mr. Louis R. Roberts:

> Going from Rathbone City south, it is best to go on horseback. I secured an old United States Trooper, with ominous "C"–condemned–branded on his fore-shoulder. His name was "Gossamer," and a true beast he proved, for he carried me safely all through the precipitous ravines and turbulent streams to be encountered on the way.
>
> On the way one of our company alighted from his horse. and, calling my attention to what he was about to do, took a stick and pushed it into the ground. In less than a minute he withdrew the stick and oil and gas followed it, clothing the pool of water around it with the bright prismatic hues of petroleum.
>
> . . . we came to a point which forms the junction of the West Fork with the Little Kanawha where we found a schoolhouse, and a very eligible site for a town. The land is high and lies at the junction of two considerable streams, like, on a miniature scale, the battery end of New York City. The Douglas brothers, of New York, and Mr. Shaw, of Philadelphia, are making preparations to erect a sawmill, machine shop, store &c., at the point, and as the tendency of the oil interests is now further up in the interior than hitherto, the enterprise is likely to meet with success. The new town to be laid out on this site is to be called "Shaw City,"[1] after one of the

[1] "Shaw City" did not materialize. Instead the village that finally occupied the site was named "Creston."

most untiring and public spirited citizens in these regions.

We next stopped at the Depue[2] farm, where we found a very buxom, genial and hospitable old lady at the spinning wheel, who invited us to partake of refreshments from the old iron-bound bucket, as well as from her larder. The Depues are of French descent. The head of the family emigrated from France to the State of New Jersey, and thence to Virginia many years ago. The present elder Depue, who was born in Greenbrier County, Virginia, came in from sheep-shearing as we were lunching, and was quite talkative. He said the farmers thereabouts had quit raising grain and were now spending the money they received for their lands from oil speculators. Mr. Depue receives thirty-three thousand dollars for his farm.

He has a son ten years old who is a natural orator and philosopher—a youthful oil Montesquieu. He was educated at the Point (not West Point, but West Fork), where the daughter of Madam Depue teaches the young idea gratuitously.[3] Young Depue has a wonderful faculty for elocution. He picks up stray stamps and pennies by reciting pieces at grocery stores and other places. What a queer position for a scion of the house of the philosopher Montesquieu. But he is an oil philosopher, although of a miniature pattern, and the classic stores of ancient "Greece" ought to be at his fingers' ends. His title to "royalty"[4] is beyond question, but from present appearance he will be satisfied with the successorship to the "Dewdrop Inn." I observed in passing that the school was quite full of children, of both sexes, and that

[2]The name is properly spelled "De Pue," but some members of the family have shortened it to "DePue."

[3]Miss De Pue's gratuitous teaching service was due to the fact that the new State had not had time to develop its "free school system."

[4]The "royalty" referred to by the *Herald* reporter was to the descent of the De Pues from Baron Charles Louis Montesquieu, the great French writer and philosopher.

everything was quite neat and orderly.[5] Madam Depue seemed very capable and happy. There is no wonder that her son is a wit and a genius.

All the way up from the mouth of West Fork for a distance of ten miles the surface indications of oil are apparent. How much farther they extend I am not personally cognizant, for I was already satisfied with my day's investigations, and we were soon afterwards on our way back to Oil Town, Burning Springs, or Rathbone City—as it is indifferently called, the latter being the proper post office designation.

[5] Forty-four years later (winter of 1899-1900), I taught this same school. Unlike Miss De Pue, however, I was callous and mercenary enough to accept the munificent sum of thirty dollars a month from the public till.

Appendix IV

SKETCH OF MYRON H. SHIRTZ

Myron H. Shirtz was born in 1838 in Wayne County, New York. In September, 1865, shortly after his discharge from the Union Army, he and his young wife Ellen migrated to Elizabeth, Wirt County, where they made their home. He opened a large department store in the oil-boom town of Burning Springs. A few years later he also installed and operated a large lumber mill at Shirtzville on Spring Creek, about two miles from its mouth. He also secured a post office for the community, named "Shirtzville."

Mr. Shirtz was a very prominent and useful citizen. He was an active member of the Elizabeth Methodist Church and superintendent of its Sunday School. He also represented the county in the State Legislature, sessions of 1877 and 1883. In 1890 he sold his store in the dying town of Burning Springs to John R. Pell, who moved the stock of goods to the village of Creston, at the mouth of West Fork Creek. The same year Shirtz and his family returned to their old home in Wayne County, New York.[1]

[1] Data supplied by Dr. Boyd B. Stutler, and taken from *Hardesty's Historical and Geographical Encyclopedia, Jackson, Wirt, and Calhoun Counties,* Wirt County section, page 19, published in 1883.

LOUIS REED

Addendum

COMMENTS OF

MR. LOUIS REED

ON

TALES OF THE LITTLE KANAWHA

It is impossible for me to comment on this book without introducing some autobiography. The effort is an illustration of the dictum that history is that part of human activity that someone writes down.

I happen to live on Lee Creek, which empties into the Little Kanawha River opposite the Lee settlement at Newark, the name of which appears on maps as early as 1802. Lee Creek must have been named for Richard Lee.

The Lees preceded the Reeds in Wirt County by two or three generations, though one of my great-grandfathers, George Heck, appears to have been born in what is now Wirt County in 1815. Since frontiersmen generally had large families, and through succeeding generations there have been many marriages, I find today that I am related to some Lees, but I do not discover any relationship by blood with Howard B. Lee. As a matter of fact, I never met him until he became Attorney General of West Virginia in 1925.

I mention these circumstances because I know from legend and from such historical documents as have survived that the Lees were among the very first settlers in the Little Kanawha Valley. Richard Lee's settlement at Newark in present Wirt County was made in 1775, according to his patent, but I have a private memoir by Hiram Pribble, whose father bought the Lee lands in 1795, which gives the date of the settlement as 1774.

It is worthy of note that Newark is approximately twenty miles by water from the Ohio River and the Ohio Indians.

This settlement, which has been ignored by historians, was closer to the Indians than Boonesborough, Kentucky. In my correspondence with Mr. Lee, I have raised the questions: How did Richard Lee and the other settlers of the Little Kanawha Valley survive? Why is it that Daniel Boone has consistently been pictured as the hero of the settlements west of the Alleghenies, while Richard Lee and others have been forgotten? When Mr. H. B. Lee writes of his ancestors in western Virginia, he is writing of people who were not only contemporaries of Daniel Boone but who also lived closer to the Ohio Indians than Daniel Boone ever did.

Another item of consequence is the legendary town of Burning Springs. I use the term legendary advisedly because I started gathering materials for a history of Burning Springs in 1935, and I soon ran into a Civil War mystery. Burning Springs is not mentioned under that name anywhere in the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, though the main oil field and a part or all of the town, depending on who is telling the story, were unquestionably destroyed by Confederate Cavalry Raiders under General Jones on May 9, 1863. We know of the destruction from the report General Jones himself made to General Robert E. Lee, though he does not mention buildings. He speaks of burning the oil field at a place he (or his editors) called "Oiltown"[1] on the Little Kanawha River. The report is included in the Official Records of the Confederates, but no Union report on the same subject can be found today in the Archives of the United States. At least I have failed to find such a report, and I have been advised by the archivist, Mr. Wayne E. Grover, that his staff has been unable to locate it.[2]

[1]It is suggested by Mr. Lee that the last paragraph of the *New York Herald* article (Appendix III) shows conclusively that "Oil Town" and "Burning Springs" and "Rathbone City" were one and the same place. After writing of his ten-mile trip up the West Fork Creek, the reporter said:

> . . . we were soon afterwards on our way back to Oil Town, Burning Springs, or Rathbone City, as it is indifferently called,. . . .

[2]Mr. Lee also suggests that the reason there was no Union report of the destruction of the Burning Springs oil field was because General Jones met with no military resistance, fought no engagements, and saw only a few Union soldiers home on furlough, and consequently there was no union officer who could make such a report.

To compound the confusion the post office at Burning Springs had three different names and three different sets of postmasters, as follows: (1) A post office named Burning Spring, Virginia, was established in 1849, with John V. Rathbone as the first postmaster—the same man that Mr. Lee calls Val Rathbone in his book. (2) In 1861 the name of the post office was changed to Rathbone, Virginia, and a new postmaster appointed. (3) On June 20, 1863, when West Virginia was admitted to the Union, the post office became Rathbone, West Virginia, and so remained until 1868 when it was changed again to Burning Springs, West Virginia. This was the original name with a plural added.

Locally, the place has always been known as Burning Springs. Alexander Withers in his *Chronicles of Border Warfare* published in 1831, speaks of Burning Springs Run. Officially, during the Civil War and for three years afterwards, it was known as Rathbone. General Jones in his official report called it Oiltown. But there is not now, and never has been, to my knowledge, any town on the Little Kanawha River called Oiltown. These differences in nomenclature have contributed to the fabulous and legendary aspects of Burning Springs.

I have never published my own book because I have been unable to prove from records what I strongly suspect, namely, that there was some skullduggery, possibly of a treasonable nature, in the destruction of the Burning Springs oil field. It is worthy of note that there were but two oil fields in the country when the Civil War began—one near Titusville, Pennsylvania and the other at Burning Springs. Of the two, Burning Springs may have been the larger. All I have been able to prove is the following: (1) The Rathbones owned one 800-acre tract of land at Burning Springs and other smaller tracts, upon which oil had been discovered many years before 1860. (2) In February, 1860, only a few months after the Drake well was drilled at Titusville, the Rathbones leased one acre upon which the "Salt Well" was located, together with steam engine, buildings and other fixtures, and also a loosely defined strip of land along the water front, to General Sam-

uel D. Karns and members of his family, with rights of exploration. Karns, who is still a legend in Wirt County, gave his address in the lease as Allegheny County, Pennsylvania (Pittsburg). Later, in February, 1861, the loosely defined strip of land was surveyed and all matters in dispute between the Rathbones and the Karns family were settled by a new compromise lease.

These circumstances are of record in the office of the Clerk of the County Court of Wirt County, West Virginia, and the three leases involved have been reproduced by me in an article called "First Oil Leases South of the Mason and Dixon Line," published by *West Virginia History* in January, 1964.

It was not until I read Mr. Lee's manuscript in which he describes the small jugs in his grandfather's smokehouse bearing the label *Rathbone Rock Oil* that I first understood the purpose of the steam engine at the "Salt Well" leased to Karns. In the days before kerosene, Rock Oil, otherwise known as Seneca Oil, was used as a liniment, and the Rathbones apparently used their unfruitful "Salt Well" to produce the so-called liniment. Since the "Salt Well" was unquestionably a well and not a pond or other receptacle where oil rose to the surface, it has a claim to being the first oil well in the world.

After the Civil War, northern capitalists invested millions of dollars in Wirt County lands. I shall never forget my astonishment in 1935, when I was running an abstract of title on a farm near Burning Springs, and discovered that the farm which was selling for $1,500 in 1935 had been purchased by a group of Philadelphia men in 1865 for $300,000. Sad to relate that those people lost their money. The farm, which was "off the structure," never produced a drop of oil.

Mr. Lee belongs to a generation older than my own and therefore was much closer to the destruction of Burning Springs. The only person I ever talked to, who claimed to have been an eyewitness to the great holocaust, was Mrs. Harry Wheaton. This was in 1935, a full 70 years after the Civil War ended. There were, of course, many eyewitnesses

living when Mr. Lee was a young man, and I think his narrative deserves special consideration for that reason.

It is a curious circumstance that the destruction of Burning Springs was not reported in the press at the time it occurred, though there was a telegraph office at Parkersburg, only 30 miles distant by road and many newspaper reporters were in that city to cover the Convention, called to elect officers of the New State of West Virginia. There was also a concentration of soldiers and gunboats in the nearby Ohio and Little Kanawha Rivers to protect the Convention. The telegraph, no doubt, was under the control of the military and, for some reason, the destruction of the oil field was not released to the public.

Burning Springs has the distinction of being the first military oil objective in the history of warfare, but it is also one of the best kept secrets in the Nation's history. Even today the great bulk of the American people do not know that a Confederate Army destroyed one of the two oil fields in the United States in 1863.

Elizabeth, West Virginia
September 1, 1967
Louis Reed.