Earl Wilson Jr.  
(1929 – 2018)

Earl passed away September 16, 2018, at age 89. He grew up in Beason (Ritchie County) before moving to Virginia, where he taught agriculture (receiving a National Honorary American Farmer Award from the FFA in 1984), managed a yarn-manufacturing plant, was a masonry contractor, and built stone walls and fireplaces. About a decade ago, he returned to his childhood home in Beason to live out his remaining years. Read more about Earl’s life in Carole Jones’ article in our Spring 2019 issue. –ed.

Lois Silverstein Kaufman  
(1921 – 2019)

Lois passed away on May 3 in Charleston at age 97. A graduate of Charleston’s Mason School of Music, she taught piano and led the Charleston Community Music Association, which her father, Harry Silverstein, had founded in the 1930s. She had a keen wit, played the piano beautifully, loved the company of friends and family, and was a lifetime member of Temple Israel. You can learn more about Lois and her father in Patricia McClure’s article in our Winter 2018 issue. –ed.

Raymond D. Jarrell Jr.  
(1959 – 2019)

Raymond, known to his good friends as “Brass,” of Naoma (Raleigh County) passed away on August 10. He ran Jarrells / Backwoods Towing for 38 years, drove school buses in Raleigh County for 28 years, and was the scorekeeper for the Liberty High Raiders basketball team. He also was the five-time World Marbles Champion. A member of Naoma Methodist Church, he leaves behind his wife of 35 years, Kimberly Brown-Jarrell. He was featured in Richard Ramella’s “Champions with Dirty Knuckles: Marbles in the Mountain State” in our Summer 1993 issue. –ed.

Judson Wallace  
(1929 – 2019)

Judson Wallace, whose many accomplishments included singing bass with the United Gospel Singers, died on March 29 at age 89. He and his wife, Bertha, who died in 2014, sang with their a cappella quintet in churches all over West Virginia beginning in 1959. They began singing informally with their cousins Donald White and his wife, Suerida, and Legirtha Radford after family dinners on Sunday afternoons.

“I had no intention of ever singing in public with the women,” Judson said. “I used to think males shouldn’t get together with females to sing. I thought their voices didn’t go together.” That changed soon after he had a dream of “singing to an extent you wouldn’t believe.” He said one night not too long after the dream, “we all got together and were just singing,
and the Holy Spirit got into that song, and I had the same feeling that I had had in my dream. So that’s how the group began.”

They sang for the first time in public at the West Virginia Baptist Quartet Convention, and before long, “we were being asked to sing all over the place,” Judson recalled. They sang for black and white churches, in hospitals, for homebound patients, and often on Montgomery’s local radio station. In 2007, the group was featured on opening night of the Vandalia Gathering and at the Hulett C. Smith Theater at Tamarack.

A beloved Fayette County community leader, Judson owned Wallace Market in Mount Carbon for 26 years. In his long career, he was a deputy sheriff, president of the former Upper Kanawha Valley Community Center, and chief assistant to the state Senate’s sergeant of arms. He was a deacon, trustee, and Sunday School teacher at the Eagle Central Baptist Church and was president of the Quartet Convention. In 2003, he was named Fayette County Democrat of the Year and, in 2015, was recognized by the Fayette County Commission for more than a half-century of public service to the county and its residents.

His influence will be felt for many years to come in the Armstrong-Deepwater Public Service District. Beginning in 1992, he dedicated years to bringing clean water to small communities in western Fayette County. One of his last projects was skillfully securing $1.5 million in funds to build a new 150,000-gallon water tank and upgrade water lines. The grant was awarded a month after his death.

At the 2015 event honoring Judson, Fayette County Commission President Denise Scalp said, “Working with him . . . has truly been an honor and a pleasure. He is nothing less than a hero for many of us.” You can read Rebecca’s article about Judson and the United Gospel Singers in our Winter 2012 issue.

REBECCA KIMMONS is one-third of the a cappella trio Bare Bones and is well-known at music festivals and other events. Her fiction is included in the 2019 anthology Fearless: Women’s Journeys to Self Empowerment. She lives in Charleston.

John Veasey
(1936 - 2019)
By Stan Bumgardner

John Veasey passed away on April 9 at age 82. A legendary journalist, he began as a sports reporter on October 3, 1958, for the Fairmont Times (now Times West Virginian). He worked fulltime for 58 years, retiring in 2015, but continued to write a regular Sunday column. In his job, he got an eyewitness view of athletic history—from the football exploits of Joe Manchin III and Nick Saban at Farmington High School, to the great Fairmont State College (now University) basketball teams coached by Joe Retton (who we lost last year), to the gymnastic magic of Mary Lou Retton.

He later added the role of news editor for The West Virginian, Fairmont’s afternoon newspaper. This job thrust him into the middle of one of our state’s most tragic events: the Farmington #9 Mine Disaster. John had just arrived at The West Virginian office in the early morning hours of November 20, 1968, when a call came in that #9 had blown. John was one of the first reporters on site and quickly realized the situation was dire. He took some photos—as did Bob Campione—spoke with anxious relatives at the local company store, and headed back to the office to prepare the afternoon paper.

He recalled the chaotic scene as the national press descended upon Marion County. As he wrote in an article for our Fall 2018 issue, “I couldn’t get over the way some of the ‘big city media’ would pick out the grieving relatives, mostly women, that they believed might break into tears during interviews and ‘go after them.’”

John Veasey was an old-school reporter whose work spanned six decades and who was involved in virtually every good community cause that came around. I might add he was extremely kind to a relatively new Goldenseal editor who was more than thrilled to meet an icon of West Virginia journalism.

STAN BUMGARDNER is the editor of Goldenseal.
Phyllis Marks
(1927 – 2019)
By Gerald Milnes

Sand Fork (Gilmer County) native Phyllis Marks of Glenville passed away on June 22. Those who love the old-time folklore, traditional songs, and folk wisdom of West Virginia lost a great friend and true bearer of those traditions. Phyllis didn’t have an easy life, as she struggled with vision problems at a young age and was totally blind in her senior years. She also outlived many of her offspring, which brought her sadness. Through it all, she was quick to offer a humorous anecdote, an old-time saying, a joke, or a proverbial gem when any situation arose.

To those who appreciate and are proponents of old-time ballads, folksongs, poems, and ditties, her repertoire seemed unmatched. From some of the oldest ballads known in the Western World to humorous topical songs of the 19th century, her recall and delivery entertained many. Phyllis was a mainstay at the West Virginia State Folk Festival in Glenville; she also performed at the Augusta Heritage Center in Elkins, the Celebration of Traditional Music in Kentucky, and the Folksong Society of Washington, D.C., among other venues. She participated in three films produced by the Augusta Heritage Center about traditional folklore in our state.

She will be remembered for her sharp wit. Once, while in Ohio receiving vision treatment, she was kidded about her “hillbilly ways.” She quickly replied with her definition of a buckeye—“a worthless nut!” She told many stories about ghosts, about humorous situations in her community, and even the “Little Girl and the Snake,” which was among more than 200 classic stories collected in mid-19th-century Europe by the Brothers Grimm.

Phyllis’ many contributions to the great body of West Virginia folklore, her ability to face hardship with courage and resolve, and her graciousness and generosity in accepting those who knocked on her door seeking her talents will be fondly remembered by many. You can read Gerald’s article about Phyllis in our Spring 2015 issue. Also, her delightful story about “The Case of the Traveling Dress” appeared in our Winter 2017 edition.

GERALD MILNES is the retired Folk Arts Coordinator at the Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College. An author, musician, and folklorist, he makes his home in Elkins. He has written more than 20 articles for GOLDENSEAL and was the 2013 recipient of the Vandalia Award, our state’s highest folklife honor.

Wetzel “Sundown” Sanders
(1923 – 2019)
By Patricia Richards McClure

On August 19, a day after Wetzel’s death, both Governor Jim Justice and Senator Joe Manchin paid tribute to the Lincoln Countian. “Sundown” Sanders was our state’s next-to-last survivor of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the state’s most public face of the event.

It’s likely that Wetzel didn’t finish all the tasks he’d planned for his time on earth. He anticipated going back to Pearl Harbor for the 80th anniversary of the attack in 2021.

Wetzel was a go-getter, full of energy, and an optimist. He wasn’t quite 18 when he joined the U.S. Army, tired of working in his father’s hardscrabble coal-mining business. After the war, he joined the
Marines for another tour. He eventually worked for the Division of Highways; retiring from his “real job,” he drove a bus for Tri-County Transit until he was 89, when he declared he was the nation’s oldest transit driver.

The epitome of self-sufficiency, Wetzel lived in his home into his 90s, cooking his meals, doing his laundry, and raising a garden. His independent spirit wasn’t wholly welcomed by his daughters; he reported one as saying, “Daddy’s up on the mountain again on the four-wheeler!” He was generous to a fault and took it upon himself to see that his younger brother Howard was well cared for.

He was modest, mostly, about his many accomplishments, but he was determined to receive the Purple Heart the government bureaucracy had overlooked. He got it—finally—in 2017!

As president of the West Virginia Pearl Harbor Survivors’ Association, he kept track of his comrades-in-arms. Though he wasn’t personally acquainted with Henry Sloan of Greenbrier County, once he became aware of Henry’s existence, the two became great friends. They were polar opposites; quiet Henry, who also survived the Pearl Harbor attack, dutifully served in the Pacific and then came home and mined coal. Outgoing Wetzel worked his day job and then some. In retirement, Wetzel drove veterans to their appointments at the Huntington VA Hospital and worked tirelessly for them until the last year of his life.

Wetzel, you and your iconic red truck will be missed! You can read Patricia’s articles about Wetzel in our Winter 2016 and Spring 2018 issues.

PATRICIA RICHARDS MCCLURE has lived in West Virginia for more than 40 years. A graduate of Baldwin-Wallace College and Ohio University, she retired from West Virginia State University, where she was an associate professor of English. For nine years, she has been writing biographies of veterans as part of the West Virginia Veterans Memorial project, a task that has become a lifetime commitment.

Vernon Burky
(1925 – 2019)
By Alan Byer

Born to Swiss immigrants who spoke mostly German at home, Vernon didn’t learn English until he attended the Haslebacher School, near Helvetia (Randolph County), as a child. Later, in 1944, he graduated from Pickens High School. At a time when many of his peers were playing brass instruments for traditional Swiss marching bands, Vernon decided to learn traditional tunes on the fiddle. Seems he was visiting his grandparents, and they were playing a recording of “When It’s Springtime in the Rockies.” Vernon turned to his sister Irene and said, “I’m going to learn that song on the fiddle,” and that began his lifelong love of fiddle music.

Though his signature tune was “The Helvetia Polka,” which he played for every dance in town, his repertoire was a mixture of Swiss and Appalachian folksongs.

Vernon passed away on August 30 at age 93. During his life, he helped organize The Helvetia Star Band, which plays for the town’s monthly square dances at the Star Band Hall, and was featured in the Augusta Heritage Center documentary Helvetia: The Swiss of West Virginia. Most of all, Vernon was a quiet, generous man who, in the words of granddaughter Kadra Casseday, “[had an] impact on generations of traditional old-time musicians in our area.”

ALAN BYER is a South Charleston native who earned an English degree from WVU. His writing has appeared in Trains, Wonderful West Virginia, and Classic Trains. He’s written several articles for GOLDENSEAL, including two about the Balli sisters of Helvetia in our Summer 2010 and Winter 2015 issues.