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Miners’ Hospital Records Document Coalfield Healthcare

West Virginia's early coalfields have been described as "the most dangerous and diseased working environment of the modern world." Such claims are not difficult to believe considering the treacherous conditions West Virginia coal miners still face today. Indeed, despite the remarkable strides in mine health and safety that have occurred over the past century, coal mining remains among the state and nation's most hazardous occupations.

The spate of recent mine calamities in West Virginia and elsewhere has triggered a renewed effort to better understand and address the continuing dilemma of mine safety as well as a renewed interest in studying the checkered history of mining and medicine. Such inquiries make the West Virginia Collection's recent acquisition of a group of early 20th century medical records from the New River coalfields particularly timely. Generated by the Miners' Hospital No. 2, at McKendree, West Virginia, the records contain an extraordinary wealth of information regarding occupational health and safety and community medicine deep in the heart of West Virginia coal country nearly a century ago.

The McKendree Hospital was one of three "miners' hospitals" established by an act of the West Virginia legislature in 1899. Their purpose was to provide free health care to mine workers and other laborers in rural parts of the Mountain State where industrial accidents were rampant and medical facilities were few to non-existent.

The hospitals' inception has often been credited to the sustained lobbying efforts of coalfield doctor and future governor, Henry D. Hatfield. A native of Logan County, Hatfield began campaigning for the establishment of coalfield hospitals soon after commencing his medical practice in Logan County in 1893 at the tender age of 18. Noting that miners and other laborers requiring hospitalization often failed to survive long and difficult journeys to distant hospitals, Dr. Hatfield first tried to sell his idea to coal and railroad executives. When his appeals fell on deaf ears, he turned his attention to state legislators who proved to be a more receptive audience.

Miners' Hospital No. 1 opened at Welch, McDowell County, in January 1902. Hatfield himself was appointed to serve as the institution's first president, physician and chief surgeon. A modest structure with 25 beds, the hospital served a total of 280 patients during its first year including 146 miners and 38 railroad men. Additional victims of injuries and non-infectious ills unrelated to workplace were also admitted as "paying customers."

Hospitals No. 2 and No. 3 were situated in Fayette County and Marion County respectively. Despite the
implication of its name, Hospital No. 3, located in Fairmont, was actually the first of the trio to commence operation, opening its doors on October 1, 1901. According to its first superintendent, Dr. J.W. McDonald, Hospital No. 3 filled a tremendous void being the only hospital in a region that stretched "from Cumberland to Wheeling, from Clarksburg to Connellsville."2

The opening of Hospital No. 2 appears to have followed closely on the heels of No. 3.3 Situated on a hillside with a picturesque view of the New River Valley, its location was as idyllic as it was isolated. Unfortunately, the detriments of the latter characteristic would prove time and again to far outweigh the merits of the former.

Composed of fewer than 100 souls, the tiny host community of McKendree had little to offer the institution and its employees -- no school, no church, no social life, not even a fitting populace upon which the hospital could turn for service and staff. Obtaining clean water proved to be problematic, as did the availability of heat and electricity. And though the town was accessible via slow speed local rail service, avenues of transportation throughout the region were by and large primitive.

After grappling with these and other problems during the hospital's initial year, the members of Hospital No. 2's board were convinced that the institution's placement in McKendree had been a terrible mistake. So earnest were they in this judgment that their first annual report concluded with the recommendation that the facility be "disposed of...or abandoned entirely."4

Despite its rocky start, however, the McKendree Hospital would survive for nearly a half century, providing care to more than 40,000 patients. The record books recently acquired by the West Virginia Collection contain a wealth of information about the nature of that care as well as the day to day operation of the hospital between the years 1909 and 1917. Included are volumes containing institutional correspondence and patient case histories along with supply requisitions and purchase orders.

As one might expect, the latter volumes reveal that the hospital consumed liberal quantities of surgical gloves, gauzes, plasters, and cat and "silk worm" gut suturing filaments. Rubber tubing of varying sorts and gauges was also in high demand as were Lane Bone Plates and Screws, Bergmann's Chisels, assorted forceps and other instruments as well as chemicals like alcohol and formaldehyde. Medications in common use included an assortment of sedatives, purgatives and herbal compounds -- paregoric, calomel, cascara, "rubarb elixir" -- as well as an arsenal of pain medications ranging from morphine to opium.

Six volumes in the collection preserve detailed information regarding the several thousand patients who were treated at the facility during the period covered by the record volumes. Included is detailed personal data of great value to comprehending the social composition and history of labor in the New River coalfields at the time. Records for each patient include birth information, parentage, nationality, race, religion, marital status, employer and more. The records also contain narratives of the history and treatment of every case.

While miners and their families represented the vast majority of patients seen at the hospital, other common visitors included lumbermen, railroad workers, farmers and general laborers. Less frequently seen were bartenders, lawmen and ministers among others. The nature of maladies treated at the hospital varied widely. The words "slate fall," however, appear over and over in the patient record books. Unfortunately, the extent of the injuries associated with this common mishap was often severe. Accidents relating to trains, coal cars and other conveyances were also both frequent and serious. Injuries suffered during "leisure" hours included gunshots, stabblings, "beer bottle" concussions and "baseball" wounds.
Nurses of Miners' Hospital No. 2, circa 1914. In order to provide for its own nursing needs, a nursing school was established at the hospital in 1910.

The death rate at the McKendree Hospital during the period sampled seems to have averaged around 5%. The vast majority of patients were pronounced "cured" and discharged after stays of varying periods of days, weeks, or in some cases, months.

Perhaps due in part to factors mentioned previously in this article, the McKendree Hospital was the first of the three miners' hospitals to close. The facility was transformed into a "Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Men and Women" in 1943 and served in that capacity for about a decade before being abandoned during the 1950s and eventually demolished. Visitors to this once again wild and picturesque site overlooking the New River will find little evidence today that Miners' Hospital No. 2 ever existed. Yet, its tale survives in the archives of the West Virginia and Regional History Collection.

Notes:

3 The hospital's official opening date is unclear. The institution's first annual report suggests that the first patients may have been treated prior to the initial date (December 1, 1901) represented in the superintendent's first report. See *Report of Miners' Hospital No. 2, McKendree, Fayette County, W.V.A.*, p. 4.
4 This site was selected at the behest of local coal operator Col. J.C. Beury who donated the land upon the institution was built. Ibid, p. 5.

Over the Mountains and Down the Valleys of Virginia-The Memoirs of an Ohio Volunteer

"A dense fog hanging like an impenetrable gloom over valley and hill, from the Kanawha to the Elk rivers, completely shut out from view the surrounding world...On this morning commenced a march which for distance, difficulty and daring, has not been surpassed by the march of any other army since the war began."

Thus begins a colorful Civil War narrative by an Ohio Volunteer that was recently acquired by the West Virginia Collection. Titled *Over the Mountains and Down the Valleys of Virginia*, the 73-page manuscript chronicles the spring 1864 expedition of the 8th Ohio Volunteer Cavalry (O.V.C.) Regiment from Charleston to Staunton, Virginia where the unit joined Union General David Hunter's infamous Shenandoah Valley campaign. Penned by Cavalryman Frank Zeller, the account is both well-written and insightful.

Departing on May 29, Zeller and company spent approximately a week trekking across southeastern West Virginia. Zeller traces their progress up the Kanawha Valley to Gauley Bridge and over the mountains to Lewisburg, along a path roughly parallel to present day Route 60. Passing through White Sulphur Springs, a mecca of "sporting" and "debauchery," rather than a genuine health spa in Zeller's opinion, the army pressed on for several days, despite the perils of mountain terrain and "those notorious heathens, known as Bushwackers," before descending into Staunton on June 8th.

Joining a force that Zeller estimated at 30,000, the 8th Ohio spent the next two days marching to Lexington. The author noted the wide swath of devastation that followed in the wake of this "vast body of men and horses" which consumed, appropriated, or destroyed nearly everything in its path.

Meeting little resistance at Lexington, Zeller and company witnessed the sacking of the town from a distance. He commented at length on the destruction of the Virginia Military Institute and other monuments, observing that "thick clouds of dark curling smoke, accompanied by loud explosions...spreading out over the face of the heavens, hung like a pall over the conquered town."

The army next turned its attention to Lynchburg, a city of much strategic importance owing to its rail and canal lines. This time the Union advance encountered stiff Confederate resistance under General Jubal Early. As Zeller's unit approached the town on June 17, he found the conditions...
"dry and very warm; horses and men almost suffocated by thick clouds of hot dust stirred up by the thousands of hoofs that trod the road...."

Skirmishing continued in our front. About 4 O'clock our center came upon the Rebels near Lynchburg. "Charged them and drove them about one mile, with small loss to our Command. Darkness put an end to the conflict, and we encamped for the night near the scene of action, awaiting the dawning of another day to renew the battle; the 8th O.V.C. supported the 1st Ohio Battery, suffering no loss, although the shells fell thick and fast around us. Col. Moore, my Colonel, was knocked down by a piece of shell, but not seriously hurt; also Harry McCool, my special chum, had his canteen shot off.

June 18th The sun arose bright and beautiful over the scene of conflict; no sooner had his red lights streaked the Eastern horizon than the spiteful report of musketry in different quarters indicated to us that our skirmish lines had already commenced the work of death. Soon we were startled by the cannon's deafening roar bursting like a clap of thunder from the heavens above. The 8th O.V.C. partook of a hasty breakfast and were ordered into "Line;" here we prepared to fight on foot," that is, the 1st, 2nd and 3rd dismount, the 4th remaining mounted, and holding the horses of the three dismounted. We advanced some distance and awaited orders. Shortly we were ordered back to our horses; mounted, and marched forward and took position in a cornfield. The booming of artillery on our right, left and center (where our regiment was posted) was almost constant until about 11 O'clock when the enemy appeared in numbers on our center. The firing of artillery now became more rapid; Soon loud shouts indicated that a charge was being made. The roaring cannon, the bursting of shells, the cracking of musketry, accompanied by the rattling of armor, the clatter of hoofs, and the shouts of combatants, as Regiment rushed forward to the field of slaughter, constituted a scene terrific in the extreme. Soon thick clouds of smoke and dust obscured the fatal field; while grapeshot rattled in the timber, and angry shells came screaming over our heads, wounding and killing many; every few minutes some poor fellow could be seen staggering back to the rear; either alone, or assisted by some comrade in arms, according as his wound was more or less severe; while others more mangled were borne away on army stretchers, painting the rough canvass with the ruddy fluid of life as they were fast completing the last scene in "War's bloody Drama." Finally the enemy was beaten back about one and a quarter miles, when the battle ceased except, by artillery at "Long Range. "The enemy being strongly reinforced by the arrival of General Ewell's Corps from the vicinity of Richmond, a hasty retreat was ordered by Gen. Hunter, which commenced at Sun-set.

Though the Battle of Lynchburg was over, the fighting was even hotter the next day for Zeller and his comrades who were assigned to the rear guard protecting the Federal retreat. At 4 pm, the 8th Ohio was ordered to fall back and engage the enemy. Battle raged with losses on both sides until the 8th Ohio finally ran out of ammunition. According to Zeller, a "last desperate charge with empty guns caused the rebels to fall back" long enough for the unit to retire from the field "leaving dead and wounded behind."

Zeller and his comrades spent the next eight days traversing the Appalachian Mountains once again on the return trip to the Kanawha Valley. Their arrival in Charleston on July 2 brought to an end an arduous and perilous "thirty days in the saddle."

Finding Your Civil War Ancestor at the West Virginia and Regional History Collection

Residing in a state that was literally torn in half by the Civil War, western Virginians were deeply divided in their loyalties and in the paths of military service they chose during the conflict. For this reason, locating the service records of West Virginia soldiers can sometimes be difficult. Fortunately, several key research resources available at the West Virginia and Regional History Collection can often help.

An important initial step in locating your Civil War ancestor rests in determining whether your relative served in the Union or Confederate army. If one is unsure, it is perhaps best to consult Union records first as they are more accessible and better organized than Confederate records.

Union Records

The primary sources of information about West Virginians who served in the Union Army are the West Virginia Adjutant General's Office, Annual Reports for 1864 and 1865. The indices to these two volumes comprise a comprehensive list of West Virginia Union soldiers. Page numbers in the indices refer the researcher to relevant information in the body of the Reports in
which servicemen are listed by regiment and company. Brief histories of all West Virginia regiments are also included which note the military engagements in which each regiment participated. Researchers might also wish to consult the Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served in Organizations from the State of West Virginia (A&M 3059) which is available on microfilm. Arranged by regiment, the service records for each soldier are listed alphabetically. Included here is information regarding rank, hospitalizations, leave records, discharge records and more.

Confederate Records

The first place to look for your Confederate West Virginia ancestor is the Civil War-West Virginia Military Records (A&M 1194) which is also available on microfilm. Compiled by former State Historian, Clifford Myers, this collection enumerates Confederate soldiers by counties as well as by regiments. The Virginia Court Records, also on microfilm, are another important resource, containing information including rank, regiment, engagements as well as locations where each soldier joined the army.

Other Resources

Whether your Civil War soldier was Union or Confederate, you will want to find out more information about his service. Again, the West Virginia and Regional History Collection and the WVU Libraries have extensive resources that will help you locate this information. The Guide to Archives and Manuscripts at the West Virginia and Regional History Collection will lead you to letters, diaries, and personal accounts from Civil War soldiers, both Union and Confederate. You may find something written by a member of your ancestor's regiment, or, with a little luck, by your ancestor.

Check out Mountainlynx, WVU Libraries' online catalog, for published resources such as: regimental histories, community histories, accounts of battles, and biographies of soldiers and commanders. In addition, the WVU Libraries has a complete set of The War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, commonly known as the "Official Record."

And don't miss the Libraries' collection of historic West Virginia and national newspapers for contemporary accounts of the war. Period West Virginia newspapers are invaluable for capturing the local sentiments during the war.

Finally, the WVU Libraries subscribe to a number of online databases that will help you with your research. In online databases of Civil War newspapers, historical journals, genealogy collections and local histories, you may well find a treasure trove of information about your Civil War ancestor.

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Selected Recent Accessories

Scrapbook (8 1/2 in. x 11 1/2 in. x 1 in.) regarding the glass industry, John L. Arbogast, the Pittsburg [Pittsburgh] Seamless Bottle Co., and the Arbogast family. Includes mostly clippings with some photographs and stationary.


Records regarding Mary Behner and her work as a missionary in the coal mining community of Scotts Run, Monongalia County, and as first director of "The Shack" community center in nearby Pursglove. Records include letters reminiscing about Mary Behner and Scotts Run, and photographs of students and teachers of Scotts Run, including Mary Behner and Anna Santore. There is also a short autobiography, letter, and historical outline of Scotts Run by Mary Behner.

Scrapbook of Anna Santore DeLancy (1911-2001), WVU student, class of 1934, and social worker at "The Shack" in Pursglove. Scrapbook includes: WVU Student Fee Card; WVU Freshman Handbook published by the Women's Student Government Association; advertisement for Non-Fraternity Student Body President; unidentified cyanotype; programs from the Nixon Theater, Pittsburgh, PA; WVU commencement program, 1934; WVU commencement invitation, 1932; autographs of Morgantown and Pursglove residents; dance cards; year booklet of the Delta Chapter of Phi Chi Delta, 1933-1934; WVU freshman week programs; WVU May Festival program, 1932; program for Kiwanis Midnight Minstrels Charity Show at the Warner Theatre; WVU ephemera (sports schedule card, 1933, varsity football schedule, 1931, student activity book, 1930-1931); two photographs of group portraits of fellow students; candid photographs of Mary Behner with others; Fairmont College student directory, 1930; contralto Sigrid Onegin recital program, signed "Onegin," 1934; clippings regarding the YWCA; and other items. Anna DeLancy was a Sunday School teacher at The Shack, a Presbyterian neighborhood house still operating in Pursglove. She founded the Beautiful Homes Club there, and was the recreation director after the founder Mary Behner Christopher left in 1938. She spent most of her life as a librarian in New York City.


Account ledger (7 in. x 12 in.; 360 pp.) for general store in Purgitsville, Hampshire County, 10/1886-10/1887. Entries are chronological for each day of business. Each transaction record includes personal name, items purchased, and cost of items purchased. Goods sold include bacon, candy, coffee, onions, rice, sugar, snuff, tobacco; hats, shirts, pants, socks, women's shoes; and washboards and horse shoes, as well as other items.


Records of Miners Hospital No. 2, McKendree, West Virginia, Fayette County. Established 1901, closed 1941. Patient Log Book ("Book 7", 472 pp., 6/10/1909-7/13/1910); Patient Log Book ("Book 11", 600 pp., 9/8/1913-7/16/1914). Patient Log Book ("Book 14", 600 pp., 1/28/1916-7/16/1916); Patient Log Book ("Book 15", 542 pp., 10/3/1916-7/30/1917). Patients' Register (record of 2048 admissions, 10/1/1912-11/9/1915); Correspondence Register (between McKendree Hospital and the State Board of Control, Charleston, West Virginia, 1913-1916). Correspondence and Purchase Order Register (between McKendree and Board of Control, 1909-1913); Purchase Order Register (1913-1916); two Cirkut photos of facilities, nurses, and staff. Patient Log Books include: name, location of residence, gender, race, age, marital status, occupation, religious affiliation, name of doctor, diagnosis, treatment log, and account information. Patients' Register includes: name, address, date admitted, admitting diagnosis, examiner name, remarks, religion, birth place and date, gender, race, years of residence, marital status, occupation, father's name, nationality, mother's name, employer's name and address, name of relative or friend, "pay or free" designation, and discharge diagnosis and date.


Records of the Present Day Club of Morgantown, West Virginia. Includes five scrapbooks containing programs, clippings, photographs, and historical information regarding membership and activities. The Present Day Club was a group whose members would read and study matters of current interest and then discuss them together. There are normally around 12 to 15 members; membership is by invitation only.


Facsimiles of images and transcriptions of text found on the cell walls of the West Virginia Penitentiary at
Moundsville, WV. Includes booklet, two compact discs, and computer print-outs.


Manuscript letter-press copy-book documenting the diverse but related activities of the Northern & Southern West Virginia Railroad Company and the Little Kanawha & Elk River Petroleum & Mining Company. Dr. Willard Parker of New York held both companies' Presidencies. These companies sought to construct a 160-mile railroad from Charleston to Clarksburg and develop the timber, coal, and iron resources in the surrounding Elk River region. There are 235 letters on 500 pages dating from 1876-1879 documenting efforts to entice investors, and pertaining to legal, title and tax matters. Most letters from 1876 are authored by the Manager J.M. Morgan; after that most letters are by Vice-President William B. Hotchkiss.


Thirteen 8 in. x 10 in. photographic prints of West Virginia University, including scenes of Woodburn Hall (6 images, including office spaces and the Law School), science classrooms (3 images), a student choir in Reynolds Hall, students studying or performing music in a classroom, and an unidentified faculty member in his office surrounded by books and maps.


Photograph album (11 1/2 in. x 7 1/4 in.) of George Orlando Smith (nickname "Red Smith") as student and basketball player, including family, friends, and activities; contains 280 photos in album, plus 61 loose photos. Subjects include: portraits of Marietta College, Ohio, basketball team, 1919-1920; Devols Dam, Muskingum River, Ohio; U.S. Army infantry parading in Marietta, Ohio for Fifth Liberty Loan; two-winged airplanes (biplanes) stunt flying for Fifth Liberty Loan; circuit Redpath Chautauqua, including the Webster Male Quartet, the Althea Chorus, the "Chocolate Soldier" Company, and others (Smith was a member of the crew; locations in Pennsylvania and Ohio are identified), summer 1919; portrait of West Virginia Wesleyan basketball team, 1921-1922; portrait of two women at Beechwood School, Clarksburg, WV; and group portraits posed in front of Ladies Hall and Science Hall, WV Wesleyan. Pages 65-74 appear to contain all or mostly pictures taken during his time as a student at Stills College of Osteopathy at Des Moines, Iowa, where he also played basketball. Also includes a few clippings regarding his basketball activities, and Iota Tau Sigma memorabilia (3 items, including medal attached to blue ribbon).


Twelve 5 in. x 7 in. glass plate negatives: 1) steel bridge, 2) Parsons reunion at Holly Meadows, 3) Douglas Falls, 4) reunion of Hendricks girls at McNeely home, 5) A.G. Fansler family (1928), 6) Nellie Viola Fansler at age 16 (1929), 7) Helmick reunion, 8) Homer Floyd Fansler at age 27 (1928), 9) group portrait, 10) A.G. Fansler Family (1926), 11) Moses Callahan, 12) Pulp Mill Water Tank at Parsons; ca. 1910-1930.


Scrapbook of football team of West Virginia University. Includes 45 photographs formatted as prints or picture postcards. There are postcards of the game between WVU and Washington and Jefferson College with the score of 7-0 in evidence, and one of WVU and Carlisle, indicating the 1917 season. Includes numerous identified portraits of players. There is one group portrait of the 1916 team.


Records of the West Virginia University chapter of the Sigma Xi fraternity. Includes minutes book (1930-1936);
constitution, by-laws, and minutes (1940-1964); conference packet (1982); manual of procedures (1984); photographs of awards ceremony (1971).


Series of four registers of the Western Maryland Railway Company (WMRC) from 1919 titled "Lands Owned or Used For Purposes of a Common Carrier". These registers document WMRC lands in the City of Baltimore; the Maryland counties of Baltimore, Carroll, Allegany, and Garrett; and contiguous land in three Pennsylvania and eight West Virginia counties. Includes names of land grantors, locations of parcels, original transaction dates from 1856-1919, prices, methods of conveyance (usually by deed), and financial appraisals compiled for the Interstate Commerce Commission. There are 55 sections which detail properties at various WMRC termini and junctions, including names of larger and smaller railroads.


Manuscript copy of a Civil War diary authored by Frank Zeller of Company L, Eighth Regiment, Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, describing his unit's march from Charleston, West Virginia to Lewisburg, West Virginia from May 29 to June 28, 1864. The narrative is interesting and at times dramatic, including unit action. Also includes, at the end, a four page poem about being released from Libby Prison, and another eight page poem titled "Night on Shiloh." The diary is 8 in. x 9 1/2 in. with hard black cover and red spine, bound with black lace, and with the narrative occupying 73 pages.

West Virginia and Regional History Collection NEWSLETTER
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McKendree Miners' Hospital.
See story Page 1.