

Ned Miller Remembers Hampshire County, WV

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Ned Miller knows Hampshire County, West Virginia. His time in the county can be marked from 1924, the year he was born and an era much different than today. Ned is generous with memories and shares them with folks who have an interest in historical events. Through the sharing of Ned's past, we can develop an appreciation and understanding of how Hampshire County has changed over the years.

Learning the family orchard business where peaches, apples, plums, and cherries were nurtured engaged Ned's early years. In those days most Hampshire County orchards were family owned and required that everyone do their fair share of work. In addition to cultivating the land, Ned excelled in Romney schools where he earned a diploma in the spring of 1942.

Ned decided to move from rural West Virginia to the Upper Valley region of New Hampshire and the ivy covered buildings of Dartmouth College where he pursued a degree in economics. In the spring of 1948 with a college degree in hand, Ned ventured on a one-way journey to Alaska in search of employment. A phone conversation with his father upon arrival in Fairbanks caused Ned to change plans and return to Hampshire County where he has happily resided for more than six decades.



Today, Ned enjoys full time retirement and watching the world go by from his home near Romney.

The events that Ned has witnessed in Hampshire County are highlights of national and local history since the Great Depression. How many residents can recall the Bonus Army's march on Washington in 1932? Ned can because he watched part of the army pass by his grandmother's house along Main Street in Romney.

As he recalls, Romney firemen dressed in uniforms to present a police-like presence, so the marchers would believe the town was well protected from possible rowdiness. The unemployed marchers were veterans seeking cash payments for military service rendered during World War I before the promised date of 1945; they intended to present their case to Congress in Washington, DC. The Bonus Army march proved to be unsuccessful because President Hoover ordered the veterans to be

removed from campsites, and General Douglas McArthur, supported by infantry and tank units, subsequently drove the marchers and their families from the capital city.

Unemployment caused by the Great Depression affected one-third of all workers, so many men became transient laborers who were often called hobos. Ned's grandmother's house was apparently marked because hobos often called on the family for the purposes of finding work and food. "She rarely had work for them but at least she gave these poor indigent souls something to eat before they went on. Being little children, we were always a bit leery of these fellows. We had no idea which ones might be outlaws. In actual practice, I think very few of them were."

On a lighter note, President Hoover's promise to have a chicken in every pot worried young Ned. "I wasn't too wild about chicken, then or now, but my mother had several pots, and I got to thinking if there was a chicken in every pot, what else were we going to eat?"

President Hoover's prediction that prosperity was just around the corner also caused concern. Ned wondered, "If I go around the corner and run into prosperity, how am I going to recognize it and what does it look like?"

The federally initiated Daylight Saving Time practice endorsed by President Franklin Roosevelt is generally accepted today, but that was not always the case. Residents of rural areas, including Hampshire County, didn't see any need for messing around with "The Lord's Time" because it affected work that was completed in daylight, particularly farming. Ned's neighbor made a profound declaration about DST during World War II: "Be damned if I'm going to turn my watch up and run the guts out of it."

Ned remembers cattle being driven through the town of Romney. "It was a lot easier to drive livestock than it was to haul it in those days. People would take cattle to the depot or Vanderlip." Trucks were too small for large livestock loads and expensive to purchase.

Residents of Romney and the outlying areas also used to dress up for Saturday night socializing. "All the country people would take their weekly bath. They would build a fire in their kitchen stove or their wash house, heat the water, bathe, dress up in their best clothes, and come to town to see what was going on. They'd stand along Main

Street and watch people go by and see what their neighbors were up to."

Dress styles have changed over the years, particularly the wearing of hats. According to Ned, "Men wore hats all the time. I don't remember ever seeing my father outdoors without a hat or indoors with one." This fashion statement lasted into the 1950s and ended with President John Kennedy. "President Kennedy liked to go bareheaded, and he was such a charismatic character that many people followed him, especially in a nice Democratic community like Romney."

During Ned's youth all the men and boys carried pocket knives that were often stored in high top boots. The knives proved to be useful in daily life and for playing mumblety-peg, a popular game. A contest involving knives or even the possession of knives is viewed differently today by grownups and authorities.

Not all customs and practices from the past seem quaint today. Going "green" and recycling was a way of life for families. "We had no problem in those days with 'recycling.' I maintain our mother did as good a job back then as we do today in recycling because of the way people lived. We didn't have plastic jugs or bottles. All liquids were handled in glass containers and in small quantities or occasionally in steel or wooden barrels. The sort of stuff we find ourselves inundated with today, plastic this and plastic that, just didn't exist."

Noteworthy buildings from Ned's youth that are no longer standing include the New Century, Parker, and Colonial Hotels on Main Street. Ned's grandfather, G.P. Miller, was president of the company that built the New Century Hotel in 1915. Most businesses in those days were locally owned and operated. Romney, like other small towns, has since experienced a change from family to corporate ownership of the retail trade.

The stories of buildings, businesses, colorful characters, and historical events of Hampshire County can be found in Ned Miller's published account of Romney and Hampshire County, *The Corner of Main and High*. It is available at Anderson's Corner on Main Street in downtown Romney, WV.

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