

# New (and once lost) WV/Appalachian Labor Films

Compiled by Steve Fesenmaier Sept. 27, 2007

## **ASTURIAN-US 2006 52 MINS.**

The town of Arnao (Asturias province, northern Spain) grew under the wing of the Royal Mining Company. After the closure of its mine and the limitations of its factory at the beginning of the 20th century, many of its employees immigrated to similar factories located far from the sea, at the foot of the mountains of West Virginia. Several new towns were created: Spelter and Anmoore. 90% of their population was Asturians. Luis Argeo traveled from Spain in spring 2006 to document these people with the assistance of Chip Hitchcock of WBPBS. You can watch a documentary on the making of the film at this website, produced by WVPBS - [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=Luis+Argeo&search=Search](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Luis+Argeo&search=Search). Access: Luis Argeo" <[argeol@hotmail.com](mailto:argeol@hotmail.com)>

## **THE BATTLE OF LOCAL 5668 2007 54 mins. Shawn Bennett**

Shawn Bennett grew up in Parkersburg, studying film at Pittsburgh Filmmakers and studying under Julia Reichert ("Union Maids.") His father Joe worked at The Ravenswood Aluminum plant for years, and was part of the famous lock-out that took place for almost two years starting in 1990. Using historic footage, TV news broadcasts, and interviews with people who took part in one of the most important labor struggles in recent American history, he presents a compelling story of global capitalism vs. devoted workers. The United Steelworkers and fellow union members traveled around the country and world, protesting the inhumanity of the corporate leaders in a model campaign for justice. Marc Rich, an international criminal pardoned by President Clinton during his last day in office, was the man at the top. The film's website is at - [www.battleoflocal5668.com](http://www.battleoflocal5668.com). Access: [shawn@shawnbennett.net](mailto:shawn@shawnbennett.net)  
To purchase - <http://tinyurl.com/2pdqk4>

Or

<http://web.mac.com/shawnbennett1/iWeb/Battle%20of%20Local%205668%20Film%20Purchase/BuyThisFilmNow.html>.

## **CLAY COUNTY FILM**

2007 55 mins. Killer Productions

Charleston filmmaker Kelley Thompson was hired in 2006 by the Central Appalachia Empowerment Zone to interview Clay Countians, filming their memories. As he did this, he found that many recalled life in Widen, Clay County, the famous company town built by J.G. Bradley who was a national and state coal mining leader. He learned about the 1952 U.M.W.A. strike the hoped to finally organize the local coal miners. He interviewed William C. Blizzard, son of the union leader Bill Blizzard, Gordon Simmons, president of the WV Labor History Assn. and others about the strike. The film also covers other areas including the Buffalo Creek & Gauley Railroad, sports history with legendary coach Bobby Stover, and

many others. Hopefully the film will lead to a renewed interest in riding the once abandoned railroad. *Access: Central Appalachia Empowerment Zone 1-800-935-3921.*

### **COAL CAMP MEMORIES**

2006 78 mins. WV Enterprises

Well-known West Virginia actress Karen Vuranch has been performing her one-person play about the lives of women who grew up in Appalachia's coal camps during the first part of the twentieth century around the state, country, and world. In 2006 she filmed her performance at the Hulett C. Smith Theater at The Tamarack Center in Beckley, WV. Using photos from the George Bragg Collection and music by live performers, she presents the viewer with the life of Hallie Marie, first as an exuberant ten-year-old, demure teenager, young wife, and finally an old woman. Vuranch also has done presentations as novelist Pearl S. Buck, labor activist Mother Jones, humanitarian Clara Barton, Indian captive Mary Draper Ingles, Civil War soldier and spy Emma Edmunds, Irish pirate Grace O'Malley and Wild West outlaw Belle Starr. The WV Labor History Association sponsored the world premiere of the film on Feb. 3, 2007 at The La Belle Theater in South Charleston. Teacher's website at - <http://www.coalcampmemories.com/>

*Access – WV Enterprises at <http://www.wventerprises.com/>*

### **A COAL TRAIL**

2007 53 min. Cadiz/Hicks Production

Five parts. 1. A slide show with music of the National Coal Heritage Area. 2. Gordon Simmons 25 minute interview with Mr. Hicks on Simmons' cable show, "WV Author". 3. A few scenes from his proposed feature film, ["A Flaming Rock."](#) 4. Mining Reflections. 5. A slide show of Caretta and other coal camps around War, McDowell County. *Access: More info on the DVD "A Coal Trail" and the coming feature, "A Flaming Rock" can be found at the film's website - [www.aflamingrock.com](http://www.aflamingrock.com). Contact Mr. Hicks for a personal visit, etc. at - [enie31@aol.com](mailto:enie31@aol.com) 937-258-2306*

### **A FLAMING ROCK! COAL**

2007 120 mins. Cadiz/Hicks Productions

This is a second film made by Enoch Hicks and Ellery E. Cadiz. Hicks grew up in War, McDowell County where this film had its world premiere at its annual Fall Festival. The film has 15 chapters that cover everything from the origin of coal to a tribute for a miner's family servicemen. Additional short films cover a history of mining safety, a history of mining machinery, a simulated mine explosion, and a portrait of War, WV. *Access: [www.aflamingrock.com](http://www.aflamingrock.com). Contact Mr. Hicks for a personal visit, etc. at - [enie31@aol.com](mailto:enie31@aol.com) 937-258-2306*

## **FROM FIRE AND CLAY: EAST LIVERPOOL, OHIO- THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS**

2003 39 mins Phoenix Studios

This is a film about the pottery industry in East Liverpool and Chester, Ohio and its extension into West Virginia across the Ohio River. At one time it was the pottery capitol of America, founded by English potters who found a welcome home. The local clay and coal were the materials they needed. The extreme physical and mental hardships workers had to endure are presented with great historical depth. Union history is included. Counterpoising the misery, frequent floods, and fires that often burned down the kilns, examples of the exquisite products are shown.

This program was written, videotaped, and edited by Sherrill Shaw. W. Matheson Cullen composed and performed the music, using old English folk tunes as the theme. Edward Galloway served as narrator, and William Gates, from the Ohio Historical Society and author of the book "City of Hills and Kilns," was the scholarly consultant. The documentary was made possible by a grant from the Ohio Humanities Council.

*Access: Sherrill Shaw, Phoenix Studios, sshaw@goldportraits.com 309 Vine Street, East Liverpool, Ohio 43920 (330) 385-2452*

## **HILLBILLY – THE REAL STORY**

2007 120 mins. Moore Huntley Productions

The original title of this film was "Appalachia – America's First Frontier." The staff at The History Channel renamed it. It premiered on Sunday, September 23 at 8 PM on The History Channel. It takes the viewer on a 300-year journey from the violent border wars of the Scottish lowlands to the rough and tumble Appalachian stock car races of the 1950s. Billy Ray Cyrus hosts the program. It tells stories about the Battle of Kings Mountain in 1780, Tennessee when a small army of mountain men beat the British Army and turned the tide of the American Revolution; the saga of the Appalachian moonshiners' deadly war with the Federal revenueurs and the dramatic tale of the most famous American folk hero of whom you've probably never heard --moonshining outlaw Lewis Redmond; the building of the epic Clinchfield Railroad into the Appalachian mountains - one of the costliest railroads in dollars and lives ever built; **the largest civil insurrection since the Civil War -- the Battle for Blair Mountain in the violent West Virginia coalfields in 1921, when a self-proclaimed Redneck Army of 10,000 coal miners fought for their right to organize**; the First Family of stock car racing -- the Fabulous Flocks, 3 outlaw bootlegging brothers from a hell-raising family who went on to pioneer modern stock car racing; the century-long fight of the snake handling churches of Appalachia for the right to practice their deeply-held religious beliefs; the TVA Fontana Dam, whose construction by the hard working and patriotic hillfolk in 1942 helped win a World War half the world away; and Popcorn Sutton, the legendary moonshiner and mountain man who, at age 74, keeps defying the law by producing his centuries-old recipe for homemade whiskey in clandestine stills in the mountains.... and who, after 60 years of moonshining, is still paying the price for his convictions with new criminal convictions. *Access: The History Channel [http://store.aetv.com/html/home/index\\_branded.jhtml](http://store.aetv.com/html/home/index_branded.jhtml)*

## **MORRISTOWN- IN THE AIR AND SUN**

2007 55 MINS. Appalshop

In this hour-long documentary, director Ann Lewis chronicles nearly a decade of change in Morristown, Tennessee, through interviews with displaced or low-wage Southern workers, Mexican immigrants, and workers and families impacted by globalization. The film shows how working-class people in Mexico and eastern Tennessee are caught in the throes of massive economic change, challenging their assumptions about work, family, nation and community. "Morristown" is in Spanish and English with subtitles. *Access: Appalshop at [http://appalshop.org/store2/index.php?main\\_page=product\\_info&products\\_id=100](http://appalshop.org/store2/index.php?main_page=product_info&products_id=100)*

Her personal website with the most info about "Morristown" -  
[http://www.annelewis.org/morristown\\_info.html](http://www.annelewis.org/morristown_info.html)

## **A NEW BEGINNING**

**2007 5 mins. Vandalia Productions**

This is a short film on the West Virginia Public Workers Union – United Electrical Workers Local 170. State, county, and municipal workers in West Virginia brought the only union controlled by the rank and file to the state in spring 2007, marking a new chapter in organizing blue and white collar government workers. Terry Lively, a member of UE Local 170, and president of the West Virginia Filmmakers Guild, began a new film about contemporary unions in the state. *Access: Terry Lively, Vandalia Productions, <http://www.vandalia-productions.com/>*

## **PULP FICTION, POISON PROMISES**

1995 14 min.

Mimi Pickering of Appalshop was hired to direct a film about the proposed pulp mill to be built at Apple Grove, Mason County. The Affiliated Construction Trades Foundation paid for the film that explores the dangers that the pulp mill would present – to the workers and the local environment including dumping dioxin into the Ohio River. Many groups, both labor and environmental, opposed the mill, supported by Gov. Caperton and the Legislature. Eventually, the mill was not built.

The film also examines the impact that the company's pulp mill had in the area around Monroe, AL. The film was broadcast on WV television several times. See Doug Hawes-Davis' film, "Green Rolling Hills" and "Southbound" from High Plains Films. *Access: Steve Fesenmaier, WVLC, vhs only*

## **THE ROCK THAT BURNS- A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE SOUTHERN WEST VIRGINIA COALFIELDS**

1997 4 – 30 min. episodes (110 mins.) WV Documentary Consortium and Spectra Media

Dr. Stuart McGehee history professor at WV State University presents the positive aspects of the coal mining world that existed in Southern WV. McGehee is the historian for the WV Coal Association. Produced and directed by Gary Simmons, narrated by Butch McClung. This is definitely a coal industry version of WV history – vs. the many independent films about the same subject. *Access: WVLC, VHS only*

## **THE SAGO MINE DISASTER – ON THE OTHER SIDE**

2007 55 mins. Discovery Channel

This recreation of the January 2, 2006 Sago Mine Disaster in Upshur County, WV took place in Harlan County, Ky. near Lynch. The company that filmed the special, Brook Lapping Productions of London, England, was contracted by the Discovery Channel to produce the documentary, which details the explosion and its immediate aftermath, from a delayed rescue response to a miscommunication between officials. Information for the documentary was gathered from reports, interviews with rescuers and scientists, and discussions with McCloy and the families of the deceased miners. *Access: It is not available for sale from the Discovery Channel. Steve Fesenmaier has a DVD copy.*

## **WEST VIRGINIA AUTHOR – SHAWN BENNETT**

2007 25 mins. WVLC

Host Gordon Simmons interviews Shawn Bennett, the director of the new WV labor documentary, “The Battle of Local 5668.” Bennett talks about his father and family in Parkersburg. His father worked for years at the Ravenswood Aluminum plant including during the lock-out shown in his film. He also talks about spending several years making the film, commuting from his Hollywood job where he is currently trying to organize members of his profession. *Access: WVLC. Available on-line at any local public library in WV.*

## **WEST VIRGINIA STATE ARCHIVES LABOR FILMS –several mins. each**

Audio/Video Files from the West Virginia State Archives. Transferred to DVD by Richard Fauss, West Virginia State Archives film archivist

***Access: <http://www.wvculture.org/history/av.html>***

Kaiser Aluminum, 1957; Walter Reuther at the West Virginia Centennial Celebration, 1963; Hominy Falls Mine Disaster, 1968; Farmington Mine Explosion, 1968; Black Lung Rally, 1969; UMWA Presidential Candidate Arnold Miller at Miners' Rally, 1972; Dedication of the Mine Health and Safety Academy, 1976. All of the films are longer than the versions posted at the website.