

New and Once Lost Films, Web Movies/Audios and Audio Books on WV and Appalachia 2008

September 2007 by Steve Fesenmaier

About access: The biggest problem for WV libraries ordering independent videos, audio books, and other items is finding a vendor that sells them. All of the filmmakers directly sell their films. The following sources sell some of the new items –

1. Frog Creek Books - Mike Sublette has changed his used book store into a leading source of WV/Appalachian items, particularly videos, audio books, and music. He sells more films by WV's filmmakers than any other organization. Visit his website at - <http://www.frogcreekbookswv.com/>. Farmers Market, Charleston.
2. WV Book Company – The largest distributor of books by WV's authors. DVDs include – “October Sky,” “Coal Camp Memories,” “Ashes to Glory,” “Matewan” and “The Appalachians.” <http://www.wvbookco.com/> Charleston.
3. MountainMade – They sell several videos produced by the Augusta Heritage Center, “The Appalachians” and B.J. Gudmundsson's “Out of the Storm.” <http://stores.homestead.com/MMade/StoreFront.bok>. Thomas.
4. Tamarack Center – This center is best-known for selling WV products. They also sell WV books and films. Only a few are shown on-line – they actually sell many more. Visit their website or call them directly. <http://www.tamarackwv.com/catalog/category/category,150.aspx>. Beckley.
5. WVPBS has created many great films during the last 30 years. Hopefully I will get a list of what films are available. In the meanwhile, contact - Debbie Oleksa West Virginia Public Broadcasting, Morgantown, 1- 888-596-9729.

THE BITUMINOUS COAL QUEENS OF PENNSYLVANIA

2005 89 mins.

Hollywood actress Sarah Rush returns to her hometown of Carmichaels, Pa, in southwestern Pa. She won the local "Coal Queens" pageant at age 16. The 50th anniversary of the Coal Queen Pageant and King Coal Festival in 2003. 14 different high schools send their competitors to the finale held at the State Theater in Uniontown. Working coal miners are also interviewed, facing the end of their occupation. *Access: Amazon, etc.*

Official website - <http://www.coalqueens.com/>.

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 BLACK VOICES

2003 56 min. Media Working Group

Features the work of the Affrilachian Poets, an ensemble of African-American and minority writers from Appalachia and the South who challenge the notions of an all-white region and culture and celebrate their African heritage and rural roots while encompassing themes of racism and black identity.

Frank X Walker, consulting producer on this film, is a writer and founding member of the Affrilachian Poets. His photographs, poetry, short stories and essays have been featured in numerous publications, including "The Appalachian Journal," and "Spirit and Flame: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry." He has recently published his first book of poems by Old Cove Press called "Affrilachia." He coined the

term “Affrilachian.” Film website with study guides and place to purchase DVD - <http://www.mwg.org/production/documentary/voices/>. (Available on-line also.)
Frank X. Walker’s website - <http://www.frankxwalker.com/index.htm>.

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. Contact Mr. Hicks for a personal visit, etc. at - enie31@aol.com 937-258-2306*

FIDDLIN’ WAYNE STRAWDERMAN

2005 28 min. Real Earth Productions

Wayne Strawderman has been entertaining folks with his fiddle and mandolin playing for over 50 years. This film tells about his early life growing up in Mathias, WV, the musical influences in his life, and the “good home fellowship” that characterizes him and his music. The film contains archival photographs, excerpts of Wayne Strawderman playing fiddle tunes at the Lost River Museum and with his popular band The Trout Pond Pickers, and commentary from his good friend and band mate Ralph Hill. *Access: Real Earth Productions, <http://realearthproductions.com/>*

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 Contact Mr. Hicks for a personal visit, etc. at - enie31@aol.com 937-258-2306*

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 revenuers 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.

ICY MOUNTAIN- THE QUIRKY FIDDLING OF LELAND HALL

2007 36 mins. Augusta Heritage Center

Solo Fiddling from Central West Virginia. Leland Hall plays tunes and comments on his sources and inspirations through a 36-minute film. Ten tunes are also presented in slow motion, standard pitch, for learning purposes. Produced and directed by Gerald Milnes. *Access – Augusta Heritage Center Store - <http://www.augustaheritage.com/store.html>.*

KATHY METTEA ON MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL MINING*

2007 5 mins. Charleston Gazette

In July 2007 Kathy Mattea, a native of Cross Lanes and graduate of Nitro High School, returned to her native West Virginia from Nashville where she has become an award-winning country-western singer celebrity. She visited Larry Gibson at Kayford Mountain, and flew over mountaintop removal sites. The scenes brought her to tears. On Tuesday, July 10th, during a cloudburst on the steps of the West Virginia State Capitol Building, she held a press conference along with the Sierra Club to tell the press what

she felt after seeing the effects of MTR on the land and people. Many anti-MTR activists were present including Congressman Ken Hechler, Bill Price, Regina Hendricks, Larry Gibson, Maria Gunnoe, Judy Bonds, Denise Giardina, Mary Ellen O'Farrell, Vivian Stockman, and others. Mattea has been working on a new album called "Coal" that would focus on the history of coalmining in Appalachia. She has been active in Al Gore's "The Climate Project." Official website - <http://www.mattea.com/KathyMatteaHome.html>. To view the Gazette footage - <http://media.cnpapers.com:80/mattea/>

THE LAST SIN EATER

2007 117 mins. Fox Faith Productions

A film adaptation of Francine Rivers' novel about a 10-year old girl living in Appalachia in 1850 who must face her greatest fear to overcome her feelings of guilt. This tale of Welsh immigrants uses the concept of the "sin eater" to contrast with the forgiveness offered by a Christian preacher who finds his way to their "cove." Louise Fletcher and Henry Thomas star in this tale about the harsh truth of white settlement. Filmed actually in Utah, the mountain landscapes are gorgeous and the story poignant about old ways giving way to the new. Directed by Michael Landon Jr. *Access – Amazon.com, etc.*

ONE EARTH: MAKUTANO ON KILIMANJARO

2006 25 mins. Kevin Carpenter

This MFA thesis film by Kevin Carpenter strives to explore the idea that life can sometimes mirror art. During production of West Virginia State University Professor Daniel Boyd's feature film, *Makutano*, the film crew experienced numerous physical and mental challenges that, by production's end, echoed themes which were hauntingly similar to those expressed in Boyd's film. The film also examines the impact of these life-threatening situations on the crew, and how this adversity enhanced an awareness of bi-cultural similarities between Appalachia and Africa.

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*

THE ROAD TO OPPORTUNITY – 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE WV TURNPIKE

2004 45 mins. WV Dept. of Transportation

The West Virginia Department of Transportation in association with the West Virginia Parkways, Economic Development & Tourism Authority produced this tribute to the largest construction project in the history of the state. After being a “road to nowhere,” it became a model for highway construction around the country and world, completing the link between the Great Lakes and Florida. Vintage documentary footage of the construction and opening celebration of the Turnpike are mixed with contemporary interviews with WV leaders including Senators Byrd and Rockefeller, many WV governors including Okie Patterson who was instrumental in starting the project despite vast obstacles. Classic automobile commercials from the 1950s add some context of the importance of this highway before the Interstate system began under President Eisenhower in 1954.

The West Virginia Turnpike is a four-lane toll highway, 88 miles in length, between Princeton and Charleston, West Virginia. The entire length of the Turnpike carries Interstate 77; Interstate 64 is carried from Charleston to south of City of Beckley. Described as “an engineering achievement of heroic proportion,” the Turnpike traverses mountainous terrain that required grades of up to five percent and the movement of 70 million cubic yards of earth. The Turnpike climbs from an elevation of 600 feet at Charleston to an elevation of 3400 feet at

Flat Top Mountain. The Turnpike has 116 bridges - more than one every mile. Three of its major bridges were named for native West Virginia military heroes - two Congressional Medal of Honor winners, Sergeant Cornelius Charlton and Sergeant Stanley Bender, and one noted aviation pioneer, Brigadier General Charles E. (Chuck) Yeager, the first to penetrate the sound barrier. In addition to providing the traveler with the most direct route south from the Great Lakes and regions of Canada, the Turnpike carries Interstate 64 to south of Beckley, where it provides a much needed east-west route as well. Nature’s vistas - the view from Flat Top Mountain, the Bluestone Gorge, spring’s buds and blossoms and fall’s panoply of color - add aesthetics to the list of conventional values of economy and time found on the Turnpike. *Access: WV DOT - Todd Gambill at 558-9231 or David Marcum at 558-9229.*

The DVD includes the dedication and turnpike progress report from 1954.

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.*

THE TOWN THAT WAS

2007 71 mins.

Centralia, Pennsylvania became a front-page story when its underground coal started on fire in 1962. This documentary profiles the few remaining residents of the once thriving coal town, going in to the history of the people, the town, and the coal way of life.

Official website - <http://www.thetownthatwas.com/>.

TRAILER TRASH – A FILM JOURNAL

2007 53 mins.

West Virginia native Don Diego Ramirez was raised near the race track in Charles Town, Jefferson County. This autobiographical tale talks about his life in a trailer home without electricity or running water, and how he overcame his upbringing by studying art at Shepherd University. His grandmother dies from cancer, he has a baby with severe medical problems, and his sister is accused of murdering his Louisiana-based grandfather. Other family members including his deceased mother have problems with drugs and the law. Using exactly the right style of film – super 8 mm, video, etc, he narrates his thoughts and feelings about the super-intense life he lead for nearly a three year period between May 11, 2004 and January 6, 2007. The court case still has not been completed so the film is still evolving. Original music and audio by Ben Townsend, editing: David Wanger. Produced, filmed and directed by Don Diego Ramirez. Website - <http://www.trailertrashfilmjournal.com/>. Access: Don D. Ramirez, P.O. Box 31, Shenandoah Junction, WV 25442. kramirez0528@aol.com.

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.

WEST VIRGINIA STATE ARCHIVES LABOR FILMS

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.

General Websites:

Steve’s AppLit website listing hundreds of films on WV/Appalachia –
<http://www.wvla.org/springfling/index.html>

Steve’s Charleston Gazette Gazz – WVFilm – website -
<http://www.thegazz.com/gblogs/wvfilm/>

Steve’s list of films on mountaintop removal mining at OVEC –
http://www.ohvec.org/links/mountaintop_removal/documentaries.html

West Virginia Filmmakers Film Festival –
<http://www.landmarkstudio.org/wvfff/index.html>

West Virginia Film Series at the South Charleston Museum –
http://www.geocities.com/scmuseum/WV_Film_Series.html

WV Film Office –
<http://www.wvtourism.com/spec.aspx?pgid=22>

