

Alleghany Historical-Genealogical Society, Inc.

Preserving Alleghany's Heritage Since 1979

President Roy Hunt
Vice-President J.M. Sturgill
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Dave Sturgill Fiddle with intricate mother-of-pearl inlay.

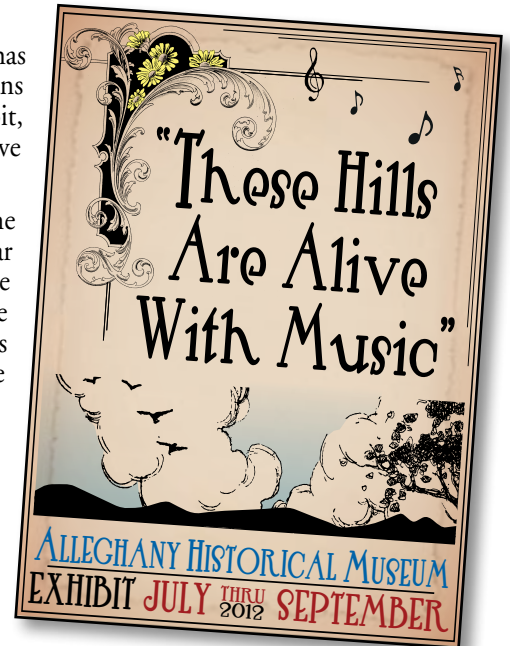


Instrument Company in 1970 and built handcrafted musical instruments for years until he closed in 1993 after Hurricane Hugo damaged the shop. Dave Sturgill passed away in April of 2004.

The Museum has featured local musicians and music in the exhibit, "These Hills Are Alive With Music."

It has been one of our most popular themes yet and we've included some of the photos and stories in this edition of the newsletter.

At left is Dave and Marie Sturgill of Piney Creek. Mr. Sturgill founded Skyland Musical



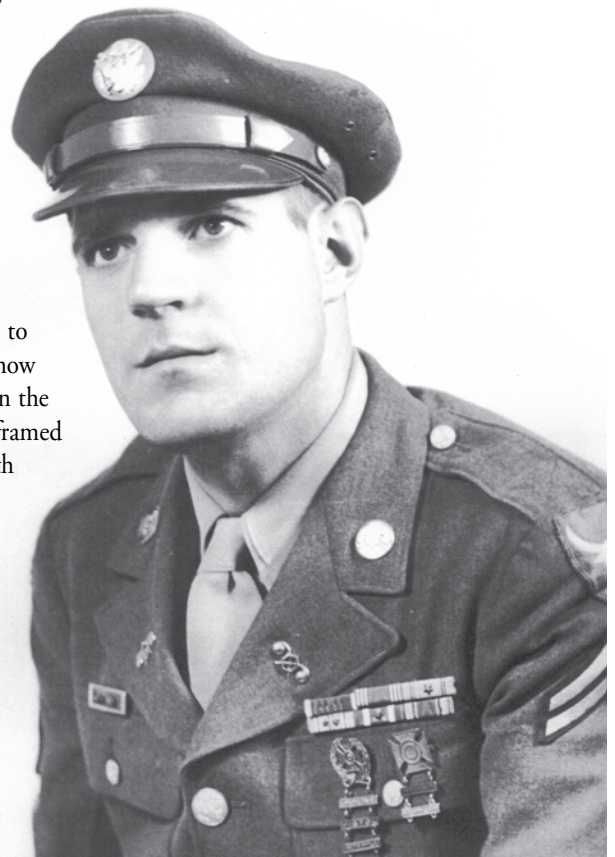
Alleghany's Only WWII Pacific POW

Other than two or three brief downpours that slowed travel for less than 5 minutes each, the drive up U.S. 21 early on Memorial Day was pleasant enough. The idea was to talk with an elderly man about his experiences as a prisoner during World War II and snap a photo or two. If all went according to plan, part of the day off might be salvaged.

Many reporters secretly dread these sorts of interviews. The passage of time tends to erode memories, and details -- names, places, dates -- can become fuzzy. You never know what you might hear. Neat piles of papers and pamphlets saved from a career spent in the U.S. Air Force indicated that 89-year-old Walter Bell might be a little different. A framed letter signed by Harry S. Truman on the mantle hinted that he would be well worth hearing. "My filing system looks a little messy, but I know where everything is," Bell said. "Sit down here next to me. I've got a story to tell."

We wound up in Walter Bell's living room through the intervention of a relative by marriage, a retired U.S. Army officer who had left a voice mail several weeks ago after reading about a guy who had participated in a memorial run dedicated to the men who endured the Bataan Death March.

"One of the guys who survived Bataan still lives up here in Alleghany County," said Hugh Halsey of Glade Valley. "I visited with him over the weekend and think he'd agree to talk if you made it up here." Anybody who's ever sat through a U.S. history class knows a little about the march. In spring 1942, the Japanese forcibly



Continued on page 4- Walter Bell

Photo by Thelma Davis.

From the President

Fall of the year is upon us already, the leaves on the trees have changed colors. The one thing you can look forward to is cleaning up all of the pine needles and leaves as they fall to the ground.

The docents and the committee members have been hard at work running the Museum. And the Museum has been looking good because of all their hard work. As we grow, folks in this county have been very helpful in bringing items for the displays. We feel the Museum is successful because of the way people come in to share their items. And the board also feels the success of the Museum is due to the cooperation between our volunteers and the Museum Committee. It takes a lot of good communication from everyone.

Thanks folks!

Respectfully,
Roy K. Hunt



*Soldier's Cross
type "Memorial for the Fallen"
from the Marine League.*

Projects at the Museum

Marine Memorial

Marine Corps League Walter Frank Osborne Jr. Detachment 1298 has loaned a memorial display to the Alleghany Historical Museum. The display, which features an M1 with combat boots and helmet, honors Marines and League members with ties to the county who have passed away.

The base was built by John Wayne Edwards from antique, 12" cherry planks donated by Clive Edwards and are estimated to be as much as 200 years old. The boots have been polished and are maintained by John Irwin. The rifle has also been restored and hanging from the gun sight are dog tags, bearing the names of the deceased members of the Marine Corps League.

The Memorial will remain on display in the museum when it isn't being used by the Marines for ceremonies or funerals. While in our care, the Memorial will be protected by a special case built by AHGS Vice-President J.M. Sturgill and Quincy Glasco. The case will be made with antique cherry wood donated by Thelma Davis and Chip and Sharon Hamilton.

AHGS is honored to be entrusted with the care of this display that commemorates the lives and service of these individuals.



Alleghany Library Cataloging Project

We're starting a new cataloging project with Alleghany Public Library. AHGS has a growing collection of historical, genealogical, rare or antique books. Titles in the AHGS collection will be added to the Northwestern Regional Library's online, searchable database. While the books will not be available for check out, they will eventually be available to researchers and genealogists, here, in the museum.

The Books 'N Friends bookstore, operated by the Friends of the Library, has donated many books of local or historical interest over the years, so they're already a valuable partner. We appreciate Alleghany Public Library's expertise and collaboration in this important effort.



Allegheny Historical Museum Needs Your Support

If you're thinking about charitable giving this year, consider the Allegheny Historical-Genealogical Society and the Allegheny Historical Museum. The Society is a 501(c)(3) organization and donations are tax-deductible.

Our book sales and member dues cannot alone pay for the expenses and maintenance of our Museum and collections. Our long-term financial plans include grant campaigns, a museum gift shop, book sales and aggressive fund raising drives. We are working to move to a larger facility that will allow us room to operate a gift shop where we will sell locally produced items that have a connection to area history. We also plan to have space for historical and genealogical research and resources like the projects described on page 2.

Below is a chart outlining new giving levels and benefits for donations to the Society.

AHGS truly needs your financial support. We urge you to follow the example of our ancestors who came together to build schools and churches that benefitted the entire community. With your help, we can ensure that future generations have an accurate picture of life- the traditions, the values and the history of those who lived along the New River and in the Blue Ridge Mountain region.

As we grow, AHGS archival projects will serve the citizens of our county and will provide an incalculable resource for historians and genealogists. We ask that you consider a donation of your time, talent or financial resources to help preserve this rich and unique heritage.

	CORPORATE				STUDENT		INDIVIDUAL					
	Small Business	New River	Blue Ridge	Sponsor of Allegheny Memories	Student Member	Student Historian	Member	Historian	Patriot	Pioneer	Mountaineer	Mary Harless Society
Membership Card							X	X	X	X	X	
Student Card					X	X						
Newsletter	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Book Discount of 10%					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Christmas Discount										X	X	X
Certificate	X	X	X					X	X	X	X	X
List in Annual Report in Newsletter						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
List as Donor on Website (ahgs.org)	X	X	X					X	X	X	X	X
Logo on ahgs.org			X	X								
Link on ahgs.org	X	X	X	X								
Listed on Allegheny Memories				X								
Listed on Sponsor Board in the Museum		X	X						X	X	X	X
Mary Harless Society Card												X
Private Event at Museum			X								X	X
Special Recognition for Quarter										X	X	X
Donation Amount	\$100-499	\$500-2499	\$2500+	\$200 per episode	\$15	\$20	\$20	\$100-499	\$500-999	\$1000-4999	\$5000-84999	\$85000+

Please Note: Giving levels and benefits listed above are for annual amounts. Donors listed on the Museum Sponsor Board will be listed at their cumulative total. So, a donor who gives \$100 per year will be listed on the Sponsor Board at the Patriot level after 5 years and at the Pioneer Level after ten years of consistent giving.

Find all our books online at: www.spartastore.com

Or contact the Allegheny Historical-Genealogical Society:

Allegheny Historical-Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 817, Sparta, NC 28675.

info@ahgs.org

336-372-2115

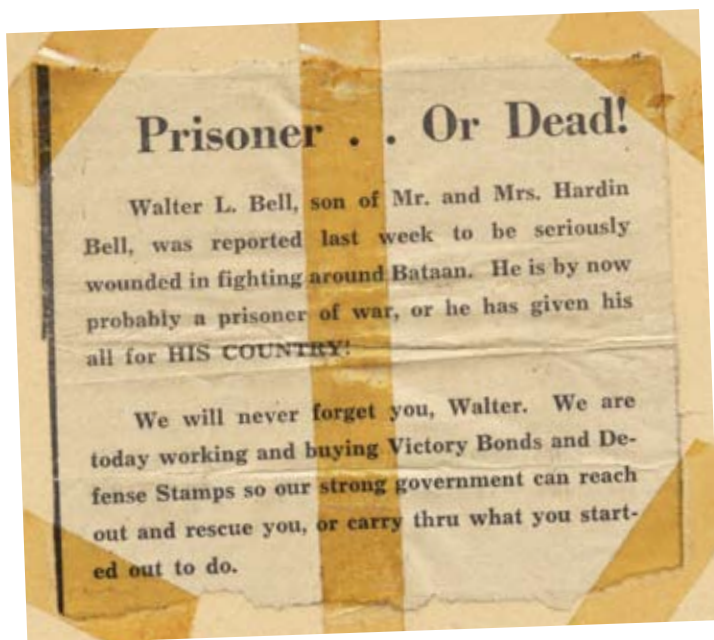
www.ahgs.org

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AHGS Newsletter June 2012 **3**

Walter Bell

Continued from Page 1



marched about 75,000 Filipino and U.S. prisoners 80 miles across the Bataan peninsula after the fall of the Philippines.

As many as 20,000 died along the way. The sick, the weak and the stragglers were shot, beheaded or left to die in roadside ditches. Men were run over by jeeps and tanks. Beatings, starvation and illness were constant threats.

Interviewing survivors of such atrocities is difficult. Some offer their memories freely, without hesitation. Others are more reluctant. Every man is different, and so questions often must be gentle. "I think about it, yeah, I sure do," said Bell, when asked how often he stops to remember.

His voice trailed off. The faraway look that clouded his face spoke louder than any words he might have offered. You don't want to ask a man to step too far into a past in which he suffered greatly and witnessed friends die.

"Some of it is just unexplainable," Bell said after a few moments of silence. "There are internal injuries that are difficult to describe. That's just part of it."

Rather than launching into a point-by-point recitation, Bell told his story through the documents and scrapbooks he keeps nearby. A bound volume published by the Air Force briefly recounts the facts of Bell's 1,253 days as a Japanese prisoner of war. He'd been stationed in the Philippines with the U.S. Army Air Corps, the precursor to the Air Force, for two years before the war started in 1941.

On April 2, 1942, U.S. Gen. Ned King Jr. surrendered the Philippines. About 12,000 American troops were taken prisoner and forced to undergo a six-day march inland to POW camps. Many of the survivors were sent to Japan on "hell ships" to live in forced-labor camps. Bell was one of those. He went to Osaka. To help illustrate his time in Japan, Bell pulled out a few carefully preserved postcards mailed by the Red Cross to his parents. Each prisoner was allowed to write 50 words twice a year. Every man had to sign the card and check a box to rate his health: Excellent, Fair or Poor. "You didn't check 'poor,' even if it was," Bell said.

In an easy chair across the room, Bell's younger sister, Georgia Higgins,

dabbed at a lone tear as she listened to her brother speak. "It was a year before we even knew if he was dead or alive," Higgins said.

Bell then turned to a few black-and-white photos in a scrapbook. In one, a skeletal young man peered deep into the lens. Suddenly, Bell recited his POW number in pitch-perfect Japanese. "Some things you just don't forget," he said by way of explanation. "I weighed less than 100 pounds when I got home, just skin and bones under my head. "There's a fine line between life and death. I had at least one foot on either side of that line."

The question you want answered most -- How does a man summon the will to survive day after day after day? -- Bell answered simply. "My faith in God," he said.

Bell is justifiably proud of the POW medal and a note he received from Sen. Jesse Helms after Congress commissioned the POW medal in 1985. It depicts a bald eagle surrounded by barbed wire and bayonet points.

Other than the photos, perhaps Bell's most cherished keepsake is the letter he received from President Truman in October 1945 after he was liberated. "A great, great man. Him dropping those two bombs saved my life," Bell said, referring to the nuclear blasts that ended the war after they leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Unprompted, Bell then offers a hard-earned truth I've heard uttered many times by other old soldiers who have made their peace with the past. "I have no quarrel with the Japanese," he said. "None. That's done. We went over

Pfc. Walter Bell Liberated From Japanese Prison

Alleghany Man Has Been A
Prisoner Of War More
Than Three Years

News of the liberation of Pfc. Walter L. Bell from a Japanese prison was received here this week by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Hardin Bell, of Whitehead. The message from the Red Cross read as follows:

"The Secretary of War has asked me to inform you that your son, Pfc. Bell, Walter L., has returned to military control 17 September, 1945, and is being returned to the United States, within the near future. He will be given an opportunity to communicate with you upon his arrival if he has not already done so. The following message was received in the war department from your son, 'Good health, be home soon,' Walter."

Pfc. Bell was Alleghany county's only prisoner of war of the Japanese and many friends throughout the county had been anxiously awaiting news of his liberation after the fall of Japan.

Captured with General Wainwright at the fall of Bataan, he had been a prisoner for more than three years. Pfc. Bell was also wounded in action before he was taken prisoner. Thus, one of Alleghany's first men to be wounded in action in this war as well as the county's only prisoner of the Japanese, is being returned home.

there and did what we had to do and then came home to America."

Just like that, a fascinating (and educational) morning had flown by.

On the drive back down U.S. 21, I couldn't help but feel ashamed of my internal grumbling about giving up one day off to visit an elderly man who'd sacrificed more than three years of his life. These World War II veterans won't be around much longer. When they want to talk, we owe it to them to listen.

By Scott Sexton

Originally printed in the Winston Salem JOURNAL, May 31, 2009



Prisoner
of War Medal
Get more info at:
axpow.org


Mr. Bell, now 93, is the subject of the latest episode of our television project, *Alleghany Memories*. In his interview, Mr. Bell shares information on life and work in the Army and Air Force, as well as his life after retirement. Jeff Halsey, Charlie Scott of Alleghany Community Television, recently visited Mr. Bell and his daughter, Judy Billings, and filmed the interview currently airing on ACTV.

Alleghany Memories is an award winning project that records stories of older Alleghanians for broadcast and archive. Individuals or organizations can sponsor interviews for a nominal cost. DVD sales of the interviews raise money for the Society.

Interviews can take place in the ACTV studio or virtually anywhere the subject is comfortable. Interviewers can be anyone- a friend, a family member or we can provide a volunteer. Our conversational interviews are meant to be informal and comfortable for the interviewee and the viewer.

In the coming months, we will be sharing stories of four members of Marine Corps League, Walter Frank Osborne Jr. Detachment 1298. We appreciate their support of the project and look forward to working with them.

If you or your organization would like to sponsor a video interview, please contact committee chairperson, Reba Evans at 336-372-4866.

Newspaper clippings from Mr. Bell's scrapbook originally printed in the *Alleghany News*. Used by permission. 

Paul Miles and His Red Fox Chasers

The *Red Fox Chasers* were a string band that formed in 1927 and were together until around 1931. Members included vocalist and guitar player, A. P. Thompson; vocalist and harmonica player, Bob Cranford; vocalist and banjo player, Paul Miles and fiddler, Guy Brooks.



The band was first formed at the 1927 Union Grove Fiddler's Convention. A.P. Thompson and Bob Cranford had grown up together in Surry County and had learned to sing from shape note song books at church. Paul Miles and Guy Brooks also grew up together, playing for square dances in Alleghany County. Reportedly, Miles learned to play banjo at age 5, "using a homemade instrument crafted from a meal sifter and a groundhog hide."

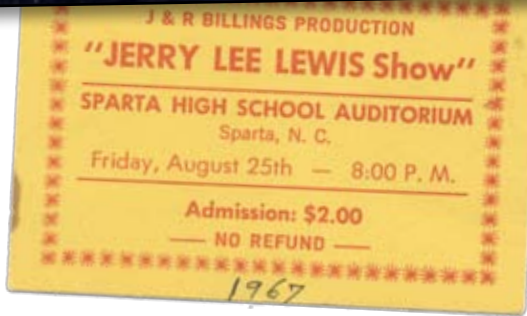
Group leader, Paul Miles came up with the name, *Red Fox Chasers*, and he arranged for their first recordings for Gennett Records in April 1928. After the *Chasers* broke up, Paul recorded for the Library of Congress in the late 1930s. In 1967, County Records issued a retrospective of the band's best work.

Go online to www.ahgs.org to listen to recordings of Paul Miles and his Red Fox Chasers.





Left-to-Right-
James Billings,
Jerry Lee Lewis,
Monty Carter
and Ray Billings,
August 25, 1967
at the Sparta
Auditorium



The Higgins family,
above, clockwise from upper left- David, Mabel,
James and J.D. Higgins.



Above, J.D. Higgins (Mr. Country Gold) on stage
at the Blue Ridge Dinner Theater. J.D. can
be heard weekly on WBRF radio.
Photo by Kim Hadley.



Homer William Reeves, (1912-2002) brother to Del and Cleo.
(see page 7)



Sydney Warren Sturgill, with a banjo
he made. Sydney was brother to Dave
Sturgill (see page 1) and a long-time
member of AHGS.





What's ~~New?~~
Old



Listen to Ephraim Woodie sing "Chased Old Satan" online, at: www.abgs.org

Ephraim Woodie born in a log cabin on Scott's Branch near Scottville, North Carolina. The Henpecked Husbands were "Eef" Woodie, his two brothers, Dale and Lawton Woodie, Clay Reed, and Edison Nuckolls but, according to information online, the recording of "Chased Old Satan" is "by Eef and his older brother William Lawton Woodie (1900-67), who played the harmonica, and it was made in Charlotte, NC, in May 1931."



Alleghany native, Franklin Delano Reeves, above, left with his mother, Laura Rector Reeves and wife, Ellen- home for Del Reeves Scholarship Show. (He was injured riding a horse.) Del's brother, Cleo Reeves, is at center and at right is an early "head shot" of Del.

"Cleo tells of the time he left home to join the Army and gave his guitar to Del, then 12 years old, and told him to learn to play it while he was away. When Cleo returned home, Del could play it very well and the rest is country music history."

- Dr. Timothy Reeves, from interviews with Cleo H. Reeves and Faye Richardson Reeves. From Alleghany County Heritage.



Alleghany Historical Museum recently joined *Museums In Partnership*, a group of museums located in Western North Carolina. At our first meeting, Matt Edwards, executive director of Mount Airy Museum of Regional History, shared information on John Campbell of Pilot Mountain. Mr. Campbell is retired from a department store chain and has a TON of old store displays and accessories. We contacted him and for a *very* reasonable price Mr. Campbell sold us several mannequins, jewelry displays, six large display tables (four unused and still in the box!), display shelving, glass shelves and many other items that will benefit the museum for years to come.

Thank you to Mr. Campbell, Mr. Edwards, Museums In Partnership, and all our friends and donors!



One of the great mannequins we brought home from Pilot Mountain.



Well-built and nicely finished Dockers™ displays re-purposed for the Museum.



The exhibit through January is entitled, *Country Stores, the heart of our communities.*

Do you have items, displays, photos or anything pertaining to good old country stores from our area? We'd love to display them.

Got an idea for the Museum or Newsletter? Add your suggestions to these projects! Send or bring in your old photos, stories or items for loan.

Remembering Alleghany for Over Thirty Years