



# West Virginia Historical Society

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## Armstrong Receives Virgil A. Lewis Award.



## Fred Armstrong receiving his Virgil A. Lewis Award

At the December 2, 2007, Vandalia Historical Society Meeting in Winfield, WV., the West Virginia Historical Society

presented Fred Armstrong with the Virgil A. Lewis Award for 2007. Armstrong, who was recently dismissed from his position as Director of the West Virginia Department of Archives and History, was honored for his work to preserve West Virginia's written and visual historical and cultural record. Fred was born in Newport News, VA to Kathryn and James Bryant Armstrong. Moving near Winchester, Virginia, Fred spent his formative years on his family farm where he developed his penchant for hard work milking cows, planting and harvesting crops and working in the abundant fruit orchards around Fredrick County. Fred attended John Handley High School where he was recognized as the outstanding Virginia history student in Dr. Millard K. Bushong's history class. He followed Dr. Bushong to Shepherd College where Fred received his undergraduate degree in history in 1968 and where he was recognized as Shepherd's top history student. He then pursued his masters degree at WVU followed by work on his Ph. D. on I.C. White, state geologist. Fred had completed all the work for the doctorate but the dissertation, when he accepted a job at the WV State Archives in 1978, interrupting his doctoral program.

Fred assumed the post of West Virginia State Historian and Archivist in May 1985. He is a member of the Society of American Archivists, National Association of Government Archivists and Records Administrators, American Association for State and Local History, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, the Southeastern Museums Conference, the West Virginia Historical Association and serves as secretary to the West Virginia Historical Society. He is also past President of the West Virginia Association of Museums. He has been a speaker and made presentations to numerous groups, including the National Genealogical Society, National Association of State Legislatures, Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference, Oral History in Mid-Atlantic Region Conference, and numerous state and local historical groups. Perhaps Fred's service in leadership and support of the Records Management and Preservation Board and getting that work on a firm footing may prove to be one of the most beneficial things he has done for the state. That group has been working to help counties correct woefully inadequate storage and preservation procedures for the invaluable records which counties collect and maintain.

Fred Armstrong has been instrumental in making historical collections and data relating to West Virginia available on the Archives and History web site. His efforts in utilizing technology to provide access to historical information include the creation of "Time Trail, West Virginia," a cooperative effort with West Virginia Public Radio, and the inclusion of on-line quick quizzes to allow West Virginia Studies students an interactive means of preparing for the Golden Horseshoe exam. He also served as an advisor for the West Virginia History Film Project, aided in the development of a teacher curriculum package to accompany

the project, and supervised the creation of an electronic database containing all materials relating to the project. In addition, Fred has served as a judge for Social Studies fairs, reviewed West Virginia Studies textbooks, and aided in the preparation of the Golden Horseshoe exam. A former public school teacher, Mr. Armstrong has taught at West Virginia University, Marshall University, College of Graduate Studies and West Virginia State College.

Fred has three children, Dominic Michael Armstrong of Philadelphia, an aspiring tenor; Liza Gemma Armstrong of Springfield, MO, a teacher of English as a second language; and Andrew Armstrong Neff, a freshman at Elon University in NC majoring in political science. Fred and his wife, Emily, make their home in Charleston.

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### History of Labor and West Virginia Politics

By:  
Michael K. Wilson

(Michael K. Wilson is a Clay County native who has resided in Charleston for the past several years. He earned his B.A. from Glenville State College, M.A. from Marshall University Graduate College, and did additional study at West Virginia University. He is currently the Senior Historian and Historical Services Unit Leader for the West Virginia Department of Transportation.)

To West Virginians and those who observe West Virginia politics, labor played an influential role in the state's political makeup for most of the twentieth

century. Seven decades ago the United Mine Workers of America first played a decisive role in a statewide Mountain State political contest. Since that time, the UMWA and other labor unions such as the AFL-CIO, United Steel Workers of America, and the West Virginia Education Association have not only flexed their political muscle to determine outcomes of West Virginia elections, but in some cases national races as well.

While labor may not have had significant influence at the state or national levels until the 1930s, the foundations of labor's political power were formed early in the twentieth century. This was evident by the block of Socialist voters that formed in the southern West Virginia coal fields in the decade of 1910-1920.<sup>1</sup> Despite the number of Socialist votes cast, the majority by foreign bred workers, the Socialist party in the United States never gained a foothold in West Virginia or American politics compared to the parties established in Europe. Therefore, no true "worker's party" has existed in the United States.

When John L. Lewis became president of the UMWA in 1920, union political interest was non-partisan in nature. While Lewis was friendly with Republican presidents of the decade, especially Hoover, the union supported candidates from both parties in addition to pro-labor third parties.<sup>2</sup> During the 1920s, the UMWA suffered a decline in membership. This was especially true in the southern West Virginia coal fields following the violent period of 1920-21, which included the "Matewan Massacre" and the "Battle of Blair Mountain." Between 1921 and 1924, membership in District Seventeen dropped by half, from 42,000 to 21,000. Union rolls were further depleted by the Great Depression.<sup>3</sup> With this loss in membership the UMWA political arm had little strength. Union - endorsed gubernatorial candidate, Thomas

C. Townsend, lost to Democratic nominee Herman Guy Kump by an eight percent margin.<sup>4</sup>

By 1933, the UMWA membership in West Virginia had reached a low of 16,000. In comparison, the West Virginia State Federation of Labor held its annual convention in Fairmont and could only summon eighty-nine delegates and had a financial balance of \$169.74.<sup>5</sup> Then, following Roosevelt's inauguration in 1933, Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of 1933. The NIRA was established to aid industry and labor during the depression, however, the most significant portion of the act allowed workers to undertake collective bargaining. The result was nearly immediate. In two years UMWA membership had increased to 107,000 and the State Federation of Labor had gained 106,175 members.<sup>6</sup> The 1937 Federation convention in Parkersburg drew six hundred sixty-five delegates and had a financial balance of \$4204.80.<sup>7</sup>

Organized labor was ready to enter the political arena and its influence had an immediate impact. The UMWA began an extended presence in southern West Virginia. Logan County politician, Lester "Bus" Perry said, "Prior to 1933, labor groups did not wield any power in West Virginia politics, but in the early thirties the influence of labor began to be felt in business and politics."<sup>8</sup>

The new labor political power also came from the State Federation of Labor. In their book, *From Humble Beginnings*, Evelyn Harris and Frank Krebs stated:

"This emphasis upon electing legislators friendly to labor was in keeping with the Federation's avowed objectives of being the legislative agency of all labor organizations within the state. The president of the state body was happy to report to the delegates at the 1934 convention that there

were twenty-seven recognized trade unionists aspiring to legislative seats. Vice-president J.D. Bowers told the delegates at the 1936 state meeting that in Wood County alone, fifteen of the twenty-five labor-endorsed Democratic candidates, and twelve of the twenty-five labor-endorsed Republican candidates were nominated in the primary election to run for seats in the legislature.”<sup>9</sup>



Rush D. Holt, Elected to United States Senate, 1934  
(Photo courtesy of author)

The election of 1934 was the turning point in West Virginia labor political power. While Matthew M. Neely had enjoyed labor backing in his 1930

election to the United States Senate, he had previously served there and was well known throughout the state. Therefore, his victory was not a surprise. The candidate for the Senate in 1934, endorsed by both the UMWA and the state Federation of Labor, was twenty-nine year old Rush Dew Holt of Weston. The son of a Socialist physician, Holt was an ambitious, progressive member of the state legislature. Other candidates in the crowded ten man Democratic primary were better known and far more prominent than Holt. They included Louis A. Johnson, who would serve as Harry Truman’s Defense Secretary, Charleston newspaper publisher and former Senator William E. Chilton, newspaper publisher Alfred J. Taylor, bank president and lawyer Arthur B. Koontz, and Clement L. Shaver, former chairman of the Democratic National Committee.<sup>10</sup> With labor support, Holt easily won the primary and faced incumbent Senator and former Governor Henry Hatfield in November.

The general election saw organized labor holding nothing back. Union sponsored rallies were held and well attended and “Holt bonds” were purchased by union members to finance the campaign. The support was needed as Governor Kump, who controlled the state Democratic machine, was very much against Holt, referring to him as “a threat to good government.”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Holt easily defeated Hatfield and went to the Senate where he waited until his thirtieth birthday to be sworn in because he did not meet the constitutional minimum age requirement. By 1940, organized labor discovered that Holt was not as pro-labor as thought in 1934 and withdrew their support in favor of Judge Harley Kilgore of Raleigh County. In the 1940 primary, Holt finished a distant third behind the victorious Kilgore and former Governor Kump.<sup>12</sup>

During the 1936 election, labor

decidedly shifted to the Democratic party and away from its nonpartisan stance. In doing so, labor began a long history of endorsing progressive candidates who were typically pro-labor. In 1936, labor strongly backed the reelection of Franklin D. Roosevelt. A large labor turnout, aided by the influx of immigrants over the previous decade, propelled Roosevelt to a comfortable victory over Republican challenger Wendell Wilkie. At the state level, Democrat Homer A. Holt (no relation to Rush Holt) won the gubernatorial race in a landslide.

As Holt's term progressed the West Virginia Democratic party developed a serious split. One faction, the progressive wing, was led by Senator Neely with the backing of labor. The "statehouse" wing, headed by Governor Holt, consisted of the conservative faction. The conservatives backed Democratic state chairman R. Carl Andrews to succeed Holt. In need of a progressive candidate for the 1940 primary, the UMWA pressured Neely to give up his Senate seat and enter the race for governor. With labor support, Neely easily defeated Andrews in the primary and Charleston mayor D. Boone Dawson in the general election.<sup>13</sup>

One must realize the power the UMWA possessed to be able to pressure a United States Senator with seniority to leave that body for a run for governor of a Depression-stricken state.

In Governor Neely, the unions found a pro-labor friend; however, not even Neely could stem the tide of mechanization in the coal industry. By the late 1940's, the number of miners in West Virginia peaked. In 1948, coal miners in the Mountain State numbered 117,104. By 1955, the number had dropped to 58,732 and by 1961 the total would be 42,557. Along with this drop in the number of miners, the population of the state decreased seven percent between 1950 and

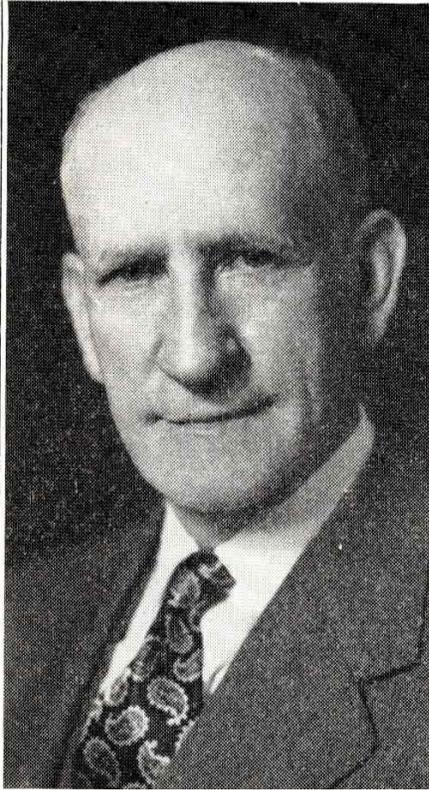
1960 and West Virginia lost a congressional seat.<sup>14</sup>

In 1946, however, labor remained a strong political force. Following difficulties between Truman and the UMWA, steel workers, and railroad unions, labor stayed home on election day in 1946. The result was horrifying for the Democrats, who lost control of both houses of Congress. The West Virginia Democratic delegation in the House of Representatives went from a five to one majority to a four to two minority overnight.<sup>15</sup> Speaking on the campaign trail two years later in Clarksburg, Truman said,

"In 1946 two-thirds of the people stayed at home on election day and forgot to vote—and they got this good-for-nothing Eightieth Congress, which is just what they deserved. Whenever you exercise your right—the right to vote—you are the Government; and when you fail to exercise it you get something like the Eightieth Congress. . . I want to urge you in your own interests to go to the polls on election day and vote for yourselves, vote for your own interests. And if you do that, if all the people vote who are entitled to vote, I am not worried in the slightest degree about what will happen. We will have a Democratic Senator from West Virginia; we'll have a Democratic Congressman from this district; and I will be in the White House another four years and won't be troubled by any housing problem."<sup>16</sup>

In the 1948 election, labor turned out again to the polls and the Democrats reclaimed both houses of Congress. The West Virginia delegation was now solidly

Democratic and Truman had won an upset reelection victory over Thomas Dewey.



Cleveland Bailey, WV Congressman 1945-47, 1949-1963 (Photo courtesy of author)

The victories were short-lived as the number of union miners and the state population continued to decrease. This is evident in GOP victories by Eisenhower and Cecil Underwood for governor in 1956.

The 1960 presidential primary brought West Virginia's economic difficulties to the national stage. The two candidates, John F. Kennedy and Hubert H. Humphrey, both had strong labor records in the Senate. The AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education had given Kennedy a pro-labor rating of 90.2 and Humphrey a rating of 99.5. Although Humphrey had a higher rating, union leaders feared that if Kennedy lost West

Virginia, and ultimately the nomination, Lyndon Johnson, who received a 62.5 rating, would be the Democratic nominee. In fact, only the Teamsters, lead by long-time Kennedy enemy James Hoffa, openly endorsed Humphrey. It was also reported that John L. Lewis was against Kennedy but stayed silent in public.<sup>17</sup>

There are some who believe that, by this time, union leader endorsements meant little. In his 1962 book, *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, Harry M. Caudill wrote,

“The pendulum has swung so far that union endorsement is now as often a hindrance as a help. . . Many miners who scrimped through long strikes in the 1940s to support the great union struggle for shorter hours, higher wages, Federal safety regulations and the Welfare Fund now view the union with aversion. They are more likely to oppose than support a candidate of the U.M.W. of A. has approved.”<sup>18</sup>

If Kennedy did not have the support of all labor leaders, it soon became apparent that he had the support of the rank and file UMWA, the AFL-CIO, which was especially strong in the Clarksburg area, and the United Auto Workers, who showed strong support for Kennedy on the Catholic issue. By cutting into Humphrey's perceived labor strength, Kennedy caused the slowing of his opponent's political machine. As the Humphrey campaign slowed, many supporters made an exit.<sup>19</sup>

In the end Kennedy won in a landslide. The margin of victory in some union dominated counties was incredibly one-sided. For example, Kennedy won McDowell County, 14,336 to 2,708, Ohio County, 9,987 to 2,755, Raleigh County, 13,085 to 6,261, Wyoming County, 6,600 to 1,789, Monongalia County, 7,826 to 3,362,

Fayette County, 11,410 to 6,179, and Harrison County, 11,803 to 7,583.<sup>20</sup> While some historians and political scientists will argue that Kennedy won the West Virginia primary with the amount of money that was poured into the state, an argument not without merit, one cannot deny that labor also played a prominent role in propelling Kennedy toward the White House. The results in counties with large labor populations were too obvious to argue otherwise.

What one begins to observe in 1960 is a transition in the behavior of the workingman. More specifically, we observe the union member becoming more independent. Only a few years previously, the union member would have voted along the endorsement line of the union heads. However, as Caudill explained, an endorsement by the leader of the union did not necessarily translate into the union voting as a block.

The 1960s also mark the beginning a weakening period of labor as a political force in West Virginia. An early indication of labor's weakening condition was the election of 1962. Following the 1960 census, the state's decreasing population required the reduction from six congressional seats to five. The districts of Republican Arch A. Moore, Jr. and longtime Democratic Congressman Cleveland M. Bailey were combined. Bailey had been a one time political protégé of Matthew Neely and a strong supporter of labor throughout his career. Despite the endorsements and support of labor, Bailey was easily defeated by Moore. Of the counties with large union populations, Bailey carried only Harrison, his home base. Moore won the strong union counties of Brooke, Hancock, and Ohio by huge majorities.<sup>21</sup>



Arch A. Moore, Jr. (Photo courtesy of author)

Likewise, the steel workers of the northern panhandle were once a powerful political force in Ohio, Brooke, and Hancock Counties. During the late 1970s, however, the large steel mills of Wheeling and Weirton decreased production or ceased production entirely. As a result, the population decreased and the union declined to a shadow of its former self.

In contrast, the West Virginia Education Association (WVEA) had become a political force in its own right. The WVEA was a key contributor in the 1980 defeat of Senate President William T. Brotherton, Jr., by political upstart Bob Wise. In 1982, the WVEA continued to work against legislators who they considered unsympathetic and contributed to the defeats of Senators Alan Susman of Raleigh County and Lafe P. Ward of Mingo County.<sup>22</sup> The WVEA was also a key player in the election of Gaston Caperton as governor in 1988.

Besides being controlled by the Democrats for most of the twentieth

century, the West Virginia Legislature has historically been well stocked with professional educators. With the rise of the WVEA as a power in West Virginia politics, this representation and influence increased. In 1961, for example, the legislature included twelve current or retired teachers or administrators.<sup>23</sup> By 1995, the number had increased to seventeen educators, with nearly as many claiming to be former educators<sup>24</sup> While this does not appear to be a significant increase, considering the number of educators traditionally serving in state government, one has to look beyond the numbers and examine the roles of the educators in the legislative branch. Many educators hold significant positions in the Senate or House. For example, the Senate Interstate Cooperation and Military Committees were chaired by educators during the 73<sup>rd</sup> legislature in 1997-98. By comparison, the House of Delegates' Agriculture and Natural Resources, Education, Enrolled Bills, and Health and Human Resources Committees were chaired by current or retired educators in 1997-98.<sup>25</sup>

In West Virginia it appears that both number of members and the influence of the blue collar unions have weakened. Nationally, however, the statistics show otherwise. The period from 1978 to 1988 shows a reduction of union membership of over five million; however, during that ten year period the number of union political action committees (PACs) increased from 280 to 401. In addition, union PAC revenue increased from \$19.5 million in 1978 to nearly \$80 million in 1988.<sup>26</sup> During the period from 1978 to 1982, PAC contributions by individual unions increased significantly. The AFL-CIO increased its PAC contributions from \$1 million in 1978 to \$1.15 million in 1982, the auto workers increased contributions from \$1.1 million to \$1.6 million over the four year span, and steel workers contributed \$600,000 in 1978 and

increased to \$715,000 by 1982. The most significant increases by national unions were machinists, who had PAC contributions of \$545,000 in 1978 compared to \$1.4 million in 1982, and the National Education Association who increased their contributions from \$450,000 to \$1.27 million over the same period.<sup>27</sup>

These statistics show the growing trend in politics. While unions were once effective with labor leader endorsements and block voting by the membership, they have grasped the concept that major elections are won with mass media advertising. Local elections can still be affected by labor block voting and especially by providing a core of volunteers, evident by the defeat of some members of the legislature in 1996, due to their support of workers compensation reform. In major elections, especially state-wide elections, however, television and radio advertising is an expensive necessity that labor unions appear willing to pay for.

For most of the twentieth century West Virginia labor was a solid political force. This is especially true since the election of 1934 and true in state Democratic politics. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, however, labor showed signs of weakening. In the span of thirty-two years, from 1968 to 2000, half of that time passed with a Republican as governor, although this statistic is somewhat skewed by the fact that Arch Moore served three terms. At one point, from 1981 to 1983, the West Virginia Delegation in the United States House of Representatives was split between two Democrats and two Republicans, the first time that West Virginia Democrats had not had a clear majority in the House since 1948. In addition, Republican Shelley Moore Capito, daughter of former congressman and governor Arch Moore, captured the 2000 and 2002 Second

District Congressional races over Democrat James F. Humphreys, who had multiple labor endorsements. In 2004, many of the same endorsements went to Capito before returning to her Democratic opponent in 2006. Capito won both elections by wide margins.

Nationally, labor has shifted its political maneuvering from the concept of smoke-filled rooms where deals were made to the modern concept of PAC contributions. While labor organizations in West Virginia have shown signs of moving with the trend, it remains to be seen if they will reclaim their role of political power.

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## BOOK CORNER

### New History of St. Albans Available

William H. Dean, professor of history at WVU Tech, has just published a history of St. Albans. This excellent book, titled *Coal, Steamboats, Timber and Trains* is available by contacting Dr. Dean directly at 304-727-9372. The book contains many photos of St. Albans and individuals who were important to the region's history. In addition, Dean has provided short, interesting biographies of numerous nineteenth century Kanawha Valley residents.

### BOOK REVIEW

*THE MAKING OF HARPERS FERRY NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK....A Devil, Two Rivers and a Dream*  
By Teresa S. Moyer and Paul A. Shackel, 264 Pgs, illustrated/4 maps, 9 in x 6 in Softbound. 2008 ISBN 978-0-7591-1066-3 \$27.95 AltaMira Press, Lanham, MD

The town of Harpers Ferry, Virginia, at the confluence of the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers, was not unknown before the uprising in 1859 of John Brown. Just 65 miles from the nation's capitol, the

events that took place in that town and its surrounding area before, during and after the raid justified the documentation of the history of the area. The close of the Civil War found the town now part of the state of West Virginia. Henry T. McDonald, president of Storer College, convinced Senator Jennings Randolph of the importance of creating a historical park to be a part of the National Park Service. Others took up the cause. Their efforts were all an uphill battle and not uncommon with the establishment of other parks in the nation. The movement involved the cooperation of the states of Maryland and Virginia in addition to West Virginia. Slowed down by the war effort and financial strains of World War II, the Harpers Ferry National Monument was finally approved by Congress on June 30, 1944.

The authors tell the story of how this park evolved and the problems that were experienced during the process. While scholars and professionals familiar with such processes can clearly see the mistakes that were made, the layman may not understand why some of the decisions were mistakes. The authors explain why. They tell of the difficulty to agree on a time frame for the historical park. Complicating the difficulties were arguments and desires of Union and Confederate veterans groups, women's groups and the black and white communities and organizations.

The book has something for the archaeologist, the historian and the student. For the scholar who likes good chapter endnotes and bibliographies, the book and its index will not be a disappointment.

Reviewed by Larry L. Legge, West Virginia Historical Society.

**FROM THE CABELL COUNTY  
PRESS, April 25, 1870**

**The Logan Mail**

**To the Editors of the Press:**

My attention was called to an editorial in the last issue of your paper (which according to my reading thereof) looks to a discontinuance of the mail route from Cabell C. H. to Logan C. H. I am not uncharitable enough to suppose that the Press would seek to injure the people of the lower portion of Logan county and Lincoln county by depriving them of the inculcable (sic) conveniences that is vouchsafed to them by the National Government, in the shape of mail facilities &c. So far as I am concerned, I feel certain that the Editor is, or was rather, unacquainted with the facts in the premises. I quote from the article referred. After noticing the fact that the mail had been received at Logan C. H., for the first time in nine weeks says, "For all the benefit the route up Guyan is to anybody it might as well be discontinued. We understand that the difficulty occurs from the fact that there are two routes to Logan, one of which is always practicable, while the other cannot be traveled more than six months in the year. The contractor having generously adopted the latter rout (sic), the people must do without their mail during the rainy season, or when the Guyandotte river is not fordable. This is not the only inconvenience to which the people of Logan C. H. are placed. The Charleston mail through Boone County only comes as far as Chapmanville, eleven miles below, to connect with the mail from this place, and when the mail fails they get neither. As this arrangement interferes seriously with the transaction of any business we think that the P. O. Department will look to it at once and remedy this evil. If the route up the Guyandotte be impracticable as claimed by the contractor, the difficulty can be obviated by extending the Charleston route from Chapmanville to Logan C. H. and our mail matter can get through that way, then the Guyandotte route can be discontinued.

It seems that the editor's remedy is to

deprive the citizens of Lincoln county, along the Guyandotte river, of all mail privileges, in order that the people of Logan C. H. may get their mail. Now, I consider the proposition unfair. The people of Logan county are no better than the people of Lincoln, and are no more entitled to mail facilities than the Lincoln people. But without going further into the subject of the editorial, I would say that the fault lies not in the people, not in the route, but in the mail carrier. If the contractor claims (as stated by Bukey who is the mail carrier) that there are two routes, he claims what is not true; there are not two routes; there is a road running up 14 Mile Creek that is traveled during the dry season of the year, the writer has frequently traveled this road and does not consider it any shorter in distance than the old and main route, up Big Ugly Creek. The following is the route as laid down by the Post Office Department:

From Cabell C. H. by Paw Paw Bottom, Bloomingdale, Fall's Mill, Ten Mile, Green Shoal, Chapmanville and White's Mills, to the Logan C. H., 54 ½ miles and back once a week. From this it will be seen that the mail carrier is compelled by law to carry the mail, when not prevented by high water, and as the Logan route and public road runs on the eastern side of the Guyandotte river, I am at a loss to know what a ford, that is impracticable at certain seasons of the year, has to do with or effect the carrying of a mail that does not cross the river at all.

I here undertake to say that the contractor has no right to claim the 14 Miles as the route laid down by the P. O. Department. The people along this route have been shamefully treated in regard to their mail, simply because they are so unfortunate as to live *up Guyan* – and it is only since the war that the trouble has originated in regard to these two routes.

I earnestly trust that the attention of the P. O. Department may be called to this important matter, and that if the present contractors cannot comply with the law, that they will make it convenient to sell it to somebody that will.

(signed) Up Guyan