

### ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY AUGUST 9



Don Chafin and deputies in front of Logan County courthouse

**Former Logan County sheriff Don Chafin died in Huntington on August 9, 1954.**

**CSO: SS.8.6 & SS.8.7**

**Investigate the Document: (Huntington *Herald Dispatch*, August 10, 1954)**

1. Where was Don Chafin born?
2. When was Don Chafin first elected sheriff?

**Think Critically:** Does this obituary for Don Chafin carry pro-union sentiment or anti-union sentiment in its recounting of the Mine Wars?

# The Herald-Dispatch

The Tri-State's Leading Newspaper

HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA, TUESDAY MORNING, AUGUST 10, 1954

## Funeral Rites Thursday For Colorful Don Chafin

Funeral rites for Don Chafin, 67, of the Guaranty Building penthouse, who died yesterday morning in a Huntington hospital, will be conducted at 2 P. M. Thursday at the Klingel-Carpenter Mortuary. Burial will follow in Woodmere Cemetery.

Death came to the colorful and dynamic former sheriff of Logan County following surgery performed several days ago. Physicians believed Sunday night that he was making a satisfactory recovery, but he took a sudden turn for the worse at 5 A. M. yesterday and died an hour and 15 minutes later.

Mr. Chafin, believed to have been one of Huntington's wealthiest men, had made his home here since 1936.

It was after Mr. Chafin's election to his second term as sheriff in 1920 that he gained fame as the spearhead of a drive to prevent invasions by union men seeking to organize the coal mine employes of the county.

In 1921 he mobilized a force of men to resist an armed march of union men. The defenders blocked the advance of the invaders, who never got past the ridges of Blair Mountain on the Boone-Logan line.

Mr. Chafin had extensive real estate holdings in Logan and Huntington, including the Guaranty Building here, and headed the Chafin Coal Co., the Chafin Land Co.

Friends may call at the mortuary after noon today.

(See CHAFIN, Page 2)



**DON CHAFIN**  
*Dies After Surgery*

2—The Herald - Dispatch—Tuesday, August 10, 1954 •

## Chafin Death Marks End Of Long, Colorful Career

(See Page One Story)

Don Chafin, 67, of the Guaranty Building penthouse, died yesterday in a Huntington hospital.

The end of the colorful career of the dynamic former sheriff of Logan County brought back memories to West Virginians and others concerning the highlights of his law enforcement activities in the early 1920's.

But for contemporary Huntingtonians, Mr. Chafin had continued as colorful in his way of life as he had been as sheriff in the Logan County era which preceded good roads and means of rapid transportation other than the railroads.

### FAMILIAR FIGURE

Before the penthouse was placed on the Guaranty Building as a residence for Mr. Chafin, he made his home at the Hotel Governor Cabell.

He had an easy chair outside the Ninth Street entrance of the hotel, and could be seen daily feeding the pigeons peanuts he bought for the purpose.

After moving to the penthouse, he kept an easy chair outside the bank building entrance, and there, after business hours, exchanged views with those who passed by and paused for a chat.

Mr. Chafin owned the Guaranty Building.

In recent years, he had taken up a new hobby—the buying and training of coon dogs, and he would travel throughout the nation looking for new ones.

### HAD HEART AILMENT

Mr. Chafin had suffered two severe heart attacks in recent years, and friends and relatives were anxious that he not over-do, but his temperament was not such as to permit the heeding of the warnings.

A chair-type elevator was installed to carry him from the last floor on the bank building served by the main elevator to his penthouse. This was perhaps one of the few concessions he made to the state of his health.

The man referred to during his tenure as sheriff as Logan's County's best known citizen and public official was born June 26, 1887 in the Marrowbone section of Logan County, (the section is now in Mingo) a son of the late Francis Marion and Esther Brewer Chafin. At the age of 17, following his father's death, he joined the staff of what is now the Logan Mercantile Co. He was elected assessor of Logan County in 1908, sheriff in 1912, county clerk in

1916, and sheriff again in 1920. He was a Democrat.

### RESISTED UNION

In 1921, he mobilized a small army of deputies—later formally organized into the militia by order of the governor—which met the union organizers in skirmishes at Blair Mountain on the Boone-Logan county border and in the Crooked Creek section. Thousands of shots were fired and much blood shed but there were relatively few casualties. One source says 47 were killed and more than 100 injured.

Mingo County then the center of organizing activity, was under martial law. Union miners in Kanawha heard rumors that their comrades to the south were being mistreated. That started their march south through Boone and Logan. On their way they planned to break down Chafin's non-union stronghold. Their favorite marching song was "Hang Don Chafin to a Sour Apple Tree."

Eventually federal troops were called in, disarmed both sides and restored order.

Chafin was a prominent figure in a series of trials, held in various counties, in which various union men were charged with the deaths of three deputies, killed in one of the few face-to-face clashes between the two forces. Out of more than 1,000 indictments, there were three convictions. The rest of the cases were dropped.

Chafin himself was shot during the early days of the United Mine Workers' organizing drive in Logan County.

The story goes that the sheriff went to headquarters of District 17 near the statehouse in Charleston and in no uncertain terms told Bill Petry, district vice president, his organizers were a nuisance and to keep them out of Logan County. Chafin is said to have told Petry that if they didn't stop coming in, he would do something about it.

Petry said, "Why wait, Don. We can shoot, too."

Both Petry and Chafin went for their revolvers. Petry beat the sheriff to the draw and shot him above the heart. Chafin, holding one hand over the wound, and without firing a shot, walked to a hospital.

Union organizers had a rougher time in Logan County after that. Every incoming passenger train was checked by Chafin's deputies. Any who didn't pass inspection was told to get on the next train leaving town.

Mr. Chafin was a contributor to the First Christian Church of Logan. He was a graduate of Marshall College and attended the

Mountain State Business College.

In 1905 he married Miss Mary Mounts, a native of Mingo County, who survives. Also surviving are four sons, Arthur, Marion and John C. Chafin of Huntington and William A. Chafin of Logan; four daughters, Miss Hazel Chafin of Miami Beach, Fla., Mrs. Alvin Volker of Morgantown, Mrs. L. J. Schradin of Cincinnati and Mrs. James Gilmore of Jackson, O.; 13 grandchildren; a great-grandchild; a brother, William Chafin of Huntington, and three sisters, Mrs. R. R. Burchett of Huntington, Mrs. Esther McClure of Texas, and Mrs. Mary Brandon of Montana.

The body is at the Klingel-Carpenter Mortuary.