



# West Virginia Historical Society

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## WEST VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING



(WVHS members hear Spangler and Hartman presentations on Hawk's Nest, October 10, 2008)

### Hawk's Nest Focus of Annual Meeting

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### Spangler and Hartman presentations detail the tragedy

The drama and tragedy of what  
many consider to be the worst industrial

disaster in the United States was the topic of the annual meeting of the West Virginia Historical Society, held on October 10, 2008 in the library at the Department of Archives and History. The Society was treated to two excellent presentations. The first featured Patricia Spangler, author of *The Hawk's Nest Tunnel, an Unabridged History*. Ms. Spangler used photographs to illustrate the construction of the tunnel and the human toll exacted by that

construction. Photos showed the route the tunnel takes underneath several ridges of the New River Gorge from the dam at Hawk's Nest to the hydroelectric plant at Gauley Bridge. The equipment and techniques used to drill, then blast, the tunnel, coupled with a lack of safety equipment, created smoke and silicone dust which directly and quickly caused silicosis among the workers. Other pictures showed the living conditions of sick and injured workers and the bodies of those who died being transported to their last resting places. Ms. Spangler's narration brought to life to the still photos used in the lecture. She utilized testimony from the Congressional investigation of the tragedy, newspapers and other documents in compiling information for her book. Pat Spangler is a Fayette County native. She has a master's degree in education from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana.

After Ms. Spangler's presentation, Richard Hartman described how he located the graves of the black workers who had been killed through exposure to silica in the construction of the Hawk's Nest Tunnel. Hartman is a historian who retired from a career with the West Virginia Department of Transportation and now teaches for the University of Charleston and Marshall University. Mr. Hartman had become interested in the graves of a number of black men who had died as a result of working on the Hawk's Nest tunnel. He called them the "disposable men" due to the manner in which their illness, death and burial was handled. The decedents who could be identified and for whom a family could be found, were usually returned to their homes for burial. However, many of the men were not identified and their burial was hastened by the company contracted to do the work on the tunnel to prevent investigation into the causes of death. For these men, Hartman used early State Department of Highways (nowDOT) maps and other documents relating to their

burial to discover that many of the men had been buried on a farm in Nicholas County. However, when Route 19 was expanded to four lanes, the graves had been moved to another location. Again using documents and DOT plat maps, which proved to be partially inaccurate, he was eventually able to find the area to which the remains had been moved. He showed photos of the site and illustrated how neglected both the site and the graves are. There are no permanent markers to identify the final resting place for an unknown number of these victims of the Hawk's Nest Tunnel industrial disaster.

Following their presentations, both Ms. Spangler and Mr. Hartman took questions from the audience.

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#### ANNUAL MEETING NOTES

The annual meeting was called to order by President Michael Shock. The first order of business was the program presented by Patricia Spangler and Richard Hartman. Following their presentation, President Shock convened the business meeting. Minutes of the previous annual meeting were approved. President Shock asked for the treasurer's report from Bill McNeel. Bill distributed a report showing the income and expenses for the Society since the 2007 annual meeting. He pointed out that while the total assets were nearly identical to those at this time last year, not all the postage for the *Quarterly* mailing nor that for the annual meeting had been billed. When those bills are received, it will reduce the balance. However, the Society still has around \$11,000 in its accounts. Bill also pointed out that the Society has not increased its membership over the past few years and, in terms of financing and members, is stagnant. The financial report was accepted by the members.

The next order of business was the nominating report presented by Ken Bailey. The following officers were nominated and elected by the members.

**PRESIDENT**

**Fredrick Armstrong**

**Vice President**

**Chad Proudfoot**

**Treasurer**

**William McNeel**

**Secretary**

**To be determined\***

**Regional Vice Presidents**

**First District**

**Margaret Brennan  
Rodney Pyles**

**Second District**

**Cheryl Withrow  
William Dean**

**Third District**

**Larry Legge  
Paul Rakes**

\*The position will be offered to the permanent Director of Archives and History when that individual has been named.

The Society is happy to welcome Chad Proudfoot and Paul Rakes as new members of the executive board. Chad works at West Virginia University from which he has received a master's degree in history and one in public administration and serves on the State Capitol Building

Commission. Paul Rakes has his doctorate in history from WVU and is a faculty member at WVU Tech in Montgomery. Both gentlemen are enthusiastic in their support of preserving the state's history.

Under new business, the Society approved a \$200.00 contribution to the Department of Archives and History to help support History Day activities.

Newly elected President, Fred Armstrong, asked the executive board to remain for a discussion of goals and objectives. He scheduled a meeting of the executive board for November 15, to coincide with the Mining Your History Foundation meeting.

Larry Legge introduced a resolution thanking Michael Shock for his leadership and work on behalf of the WVHS for the past four years. The resolution was unanimously adopted.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

**MINING YOUR HISTORY  
FOUNDATION FALL CONFERENCE**

The MYHF fall conference is scheduled for November 15 at the Cultural Center. Featured speaker is Jefferson Moak, archivist for the National Archives and Records Administration Mid-Atlantic region in Philadelphia. Mr. Moak will speak about West Virginia records in the collection. His presentation is from 9:00 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. After a lunch break, the MYHF will convene its annual meeting. Attendees will have an opportunity to spend part of the afternoon utilizing the resources of the Department of Archives and History for research into their family history. To register for the conference, contact Esther Warner, [ebw104@suddenlink.net](mailto:ebw104@suddenlink.net) or Virginia Gillespie, [vgillespie@aol.com](mailto:vgillespie@aol.com).