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A Gem of a Bookstore
at Cranberry Mountain Nature Center, Page 8

Get a Behind-the Scenes Look
at the Green Bank Observatory, Page 14

‘Wet Your Whistle’
Early American Expressions, Page 23

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Local favorites and international guests at the Opera House

**The Bing Brothers –
Saturday, March 1
7 p.m.**

The Bing Brothers, alongside fiddler Jake Krack, are set to deliver an electrifying performance at the Pocahontas County Opera House Saturday night, March 1, beginning at 7 p.m. For those who crave the authentic strains of old-time, bluegrass, and traditional Irish tunes, this event is not to be missed.

This annual performance has become a local tradition, offering a unique opportunity to witness the legendary Bing Brothers Band in their element. Known for their hard-driving string band music, the band has taken their sound from the hollows of West Virginia to the international stage, captivating audiences as far afield as Australia and Ireland. Despite such global acclaim, the Bing Brothers have remained



The Bing Brothers with Jake Krack

loyal to their West Virginia mountain heritage, crafting a sound both distinct and dynamic.

Leading the charge is Mike Bing on mandolin, whose enduring passion has kept the band on the road for more than 40 years. With Bob Leving on guitar, Tim Corbett on bass, and Tim Bing, a multi-time West Virginia

State Champion, on banjo, the ensemble is one of formidable talent. Jake Krack, a multiple award-winning fiddler, rounds out the

group, adding his own old-time flair to the mix.

The evening also serves as a preview for the band's latest studio album, "Just Jammin' with Friends, Vol. 1." Fans can expect a taste of their newest musical endeavors alongside cherished classics.

Integral to the West Virginia music scene, all key members of the Bing Brothers play pivotal roles in hosting Allegheny Echoes. This annual celebration of Appalachian culture brings together students and seasoned performers for a week of learning and fun amidst the scenic beauty of Pocahontas County.

**The State Birds
Saturday, March 15
7 p.m.**

As part of the ongoing celebrations for the 25th season of performances at the Pocahontas County Opera House, the stage will soon come alive with the enchanting sounds of traditional mountain music blended with a modern flair, brought to you by The State Birds. On Saturday night, March 15, at 7 p.m., this renowned collective of West Virginia musicians promises an evening of "some of the best mountain music from the mountain state."

See **HOUSE**, page 5

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Cover: The world's largest fully-steerable radio telescope is right here in Pocahontas County at the Green Bank Observatory. The High Tech Tour gives a glimpse at how the telescope is maintained and operated. Green Bank Observatory photo

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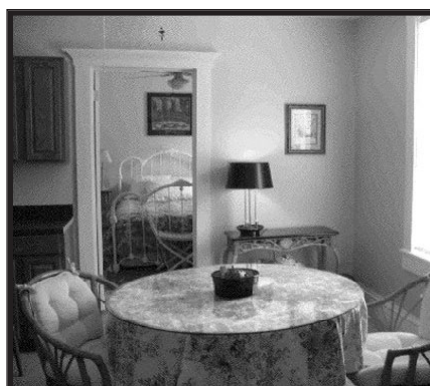
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gether a diverse range of instrument.

The State Birds boasts an impressive list of accolades, including multiple first-place state fiddle and banjo wins and a Grammy, courtesy of Chance McCoy's tenure with Old Crow Medicine Show. Their performances honor the traditions handed down to them while boldly forging new paths in the genre.

Adding to the excitement, this performance coincides with the 2025 Mountain State Maple Days weekend, offering not only winter outdoor adventures but also the sweet experience of sugar camp tours, special restaura-

trant maple menus, and more.

Bruce Molsky
Saturday, April 5
7 p.m.

The Pocahontas County Opera House is thrilled to announce an extraordinary evening of music with the Grammy-nominated virtuoso Bruce Molsky. Described as "an absolute master" by No Depression, Molsky will take the stage Saturday night, April 5, at 7 p.m., promising to transport you to another time and place with his authentic and personal interpretations of Southern Appalachian rarities and global musical traditions.

Molsky, best known for his work on the fiddle, also captivates with his magical performances on the banjo and guitar, coupled with his powerful and distinctive vocals. His ability to blend technical virtuosity with relaxed, conversational wit transforms concert halls into intimate front porch gatherings, making his performances a memorable experience.

In his illustrious career,



The State Birds

Molsky has collaborated with some of the world's most respected players across genres. He is a notable guest on rocker Mark Knopfler's album "Tracker" and achieved significant success with his project "1865: Songs of Hope & Home" with Anonymous 4, which was featured in Billboard's top 10.

Molsky's talent has earned him appearances on BBC TV's "Transatlantic Sessions" with Aly Bain and Jerry Douglas, and on PBS's "David Holt's State of Music."

Bruce Molsky is also acclaimed for his educational contributions as the Visiting Scholar in the American Roots Music Program at Berklee College of Music, inspiring the next generation of



Bruce Molsky

roots musicians.

Glen Shelton
Saturday, April 19
7 p.m.

The Pocahontas County Opera House will welcome a special performance by country music sensation Glen Shelton on Saturday

night, April 19, at 7 p.m. Glen Shelton, a native of Central Virginia, has captivated audiences with his blend of mainstream and traditional country music, steeped in classic American values. Known for his engaging, family-friendly, and high-energy performances, Shelton's shows are guaranteed to leave audiences inspired and entertained.

The past year has been particularly momentous for Shelton, who signed with Jordash Records of Nashville, Tennessee. His recent releases, "Writing You a Love Song" and "I'm All In," have consistently

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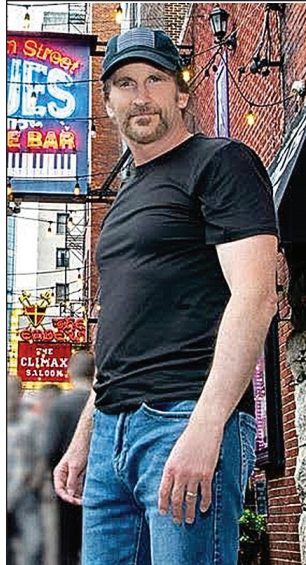
HOUSE from pg 5

climbed various music charts, establishing him as a formidable presence in the country music scene.

Shelton's impressive career includes sharing the stage with legendary country artists such as Randy Travis, Joe Nichols and Darryl Worley. Most recently, he performed with David Lee Murphy, who will soon be inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame.

**Nora Jane Struthers &
The Party Line**
Friday, May 2
7 p.m.

Join us on Friday, May 2, at 7 p.m. at the Pocahontas County Opera House for an electrifying performance by Nora Jane



Glen Shelton

Struthers & The Party Line. Struthers, known for her compelling storytelling and energetic shows, returns with her new album, "Back to Cast



Nora Jane Struthers & The Party Line

Iron," that encompasses themes of resilience and the balance of motherhood and musicianship.

After the pandemic interrupted her 2020 tour,

Struthers turned her experiences into the upbeat tracks of her latest album. She maintains an engag-

ing presence with fans through her Patreon ac-

count, ensuring a close connection with her audience.

Her album, produced by Neilson Hubbard and featuring her husband, Joe

Overton, showcases a mix of rock, honky-tonk and soul in songs like "Carhenge," "Children They Need You (All Of The Time)," and the title track, "Back On The Road."

Hailing from Virginia and New Jersey, Struthers was inspired by her father's banjo playing and the Telluride Bluegrass Festival to pursue a musical career in Nashville. There, she formed The Bootleggers and later, The Party Line, creating a significant impact in the Americana genre.

Andes Manta
Saturday, May 17
7p.m.

The Pocahontas County Opera House is pleased to

See **HOUSE**, page 7



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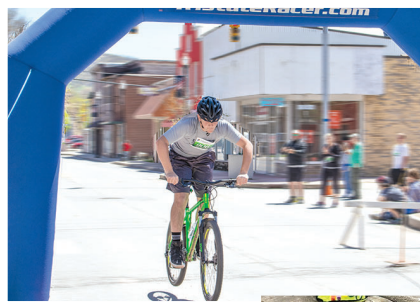
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announce that Andes Manta will be performing Saturday night, May 17, at 7 p.m. This concert will offer a rare and vibrant cultural experience in the sounds of traditional Andean music.

Andes Manta, comprised of the four Lopez brothers – Fernando, Luis, Bolivar and Jorge – have dedicated their lives to preserving and sharing the ancient musical heritage of the Ecuadorian Andes.

Their performances serve as a musical bridge, fostering cultural understanding between South America and North America.

The Andean music performed by Andes Manta has roots that stretch back thousands of years, although its earliest origins remain shrouded in mystery. This rich and powerful tradition is one of the few ancient cultural forms to survive the five centuries of European colonization unscathed. It is widely believed among in-

digenous South Americans that this music preserves the heart and soul of their ancestors. Far from being somber, their music is a joyous celebration of life, marked by ceremonies and festivals celebrating milestones from the blessing of a house to the birth of a child.

Using more than 35 traditional instruments, Andes Manta brings the vibrant Andean culture to life. From the piccolo and panpipes to drums and guitars, their music captures the essence of their homeland, blending pre-Colombian and Catholic rituals in energetic performances that have captivated audiences across the globe.

"We are thrilled to host Andes Manta and bring the magic of the Andes to our community," said Brynn Kusic, Executive Director of the Pocahontas



Andes Manta

County Opera House. "Their genuine artistry and extraordinary performances will offer our audience an unforgettable evening."

Andes Manta has performed in esteemed ven-

ues such as Carnegie Hall, the National Cathedral, and Lincoln Center, and their concerts have consistently garnered standing ovations. As Stephanie Kobrov of SUNY New Paltz remarked, "The crowd

would not let them stop; these guys are magic."

Tickets for these highly anticipated performances are \$10 for adults, while young music lovers 17 and younger can attend for free. Advance tickets are available at the 4th Avenue Gallery and online at pocahontasoperahouse.org as well as at the door the night of the show.

The Opera House Performance Series is proudly supported by grants from the West Virginia Division of Culture and History and the West Virginia Commission on the Arts. Additional support comes from Pocahontas County Dramas, Fairs and Festivals and the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, reflecting the community's dedication to preserving and promoting its cultural heritage.

With a 250-seat capacity, the historic Pocahontas County Opera House in Marlinton offers a cozy, family-friendly atmosphere that is also accessible to those with disabilities.

Pocahontas County Opera House is located at 818 Third Avenue in Marlinton.



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Suzanne Stewart
Staff Writer

I am a bonafide book nerd. I love to read, and I love to collect books.

When I'm planning a trip, I find out where the bookstores are and make sure to visit not only the chain stores, but the independents stores, as well.

For the longest time, I didn't realize that one of the best sources for books in Pocahontas County was the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center.

Visitors to the center will not be surprised to see information about the forest and Cranberry Glades, pamphlets for local attractions and souvenirs in all shapes and sizes.

They aren't even sur-

prised to see the collection of snakes that call the center home.

But, if they are like me, they will be surprised to see the vast collection of books for sale.

The book section is a treasure trove of history, nature guides and fun books for the kiddos.

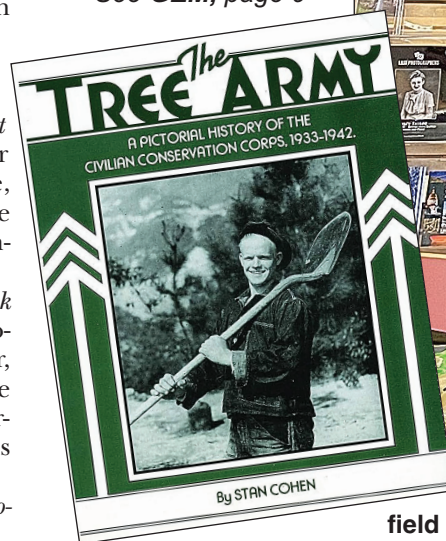
Some of my favorite finds include:

- *Fireside Folklore of West Virginia* – a series of four books featuring folklore, ghost stories and strange occurrences in the Mountain State.

- *Last Photographers Book Series* – which features photographs by Finley Taylor, who documented the lives of Appalachians during the logging and rails era.

- *The Tree Army – A Pictorial History of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942*, which shares photos and stories from the CCC camps across the country and the camps established right here in Pocahontas County.

See GEM, page 9



The Cranberry Mountain Nature Center is filled with exhibits and souvenirs and it also offers a wonderful collection of books ranging from field guides to history and a selection of children's books.



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There are even more books about the Civil War and books by local authors such as G.D. McNeill and Bill McNeel.

For nature fans, there are field guides for every type of critter – insects, spiders, bats, mammals and birds, and guides for wildflowers, wild edibles and mushrooms.

The youth section has

informative books with eye catching titles like “Nature’s Yucky!” and “Get the Scoop on Animal Poop!” Mixed among the non-fiction are fun fiction tales featuring wildlife and fun adventures in the great outdoors.

Every time I make a trek to the nature center, I make sure to check out the book shelves to see what’s new. I’m never dis-



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Next time you visit the Cranberry Mountain Nature Center, take time to browse the book section where you will find an array of field guides as well as fun and informative books for the kiddos.

appointed with what I find. Thursday through Monday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., mid-April to mid-October. It is located at the junction of Route 150 and Routes 39/55, 16 miles from Marlinton and 22 miles from

I have a feeling, you won't be disappointed either.

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Spring is in the air

Cara Rose
Contributing Writer

No matter which season might be your favorite, there is simply no denying the pleasure one feels the first day a Robin is seen in the backyard and coltsfoot is spotted blooming alongside the highway. For those of us living in a four-season region, these are sure signs that spring has arrived.

In the mountains of Pocahontas County several other signs signal the arrival of spring, too.

In spring, many folks head out to their secret spots to dig ramps – those wild onions with a distinct flavor and lasting aroma. These edibles are somewhat unique since they grow only in the wild and are typically easiest to find in the spring when their bright green tops peek out above the snow or brown

ground making them easier to spot. Until recently, these wild onions only graced household dinner tables, but in the past few years, ramps have found their way onto the culinary scene among restaurants along the east coast including New York City.

Digging sassafras root was one of my favorite “spring things” when I was young. Identifying the small tree can be challenging but the reward is a uniquely flavored root that, when boiled in water, creates a tea with “spring tonic” qualities. Be careful to sip lightly on this elixir, too much of a good thing can be unhealthy.

Tapping maple trees is another regional favorite. Early spring creates the ideal temperature variances in the higher elevations that make this process possible. When

See **SPRING**, page 11



Coltsfoot, above right, is the first harbinger of spring. It's always exciting to spot the first one along the road. Next up is another spring staple and regional favorite – the aromatic and flavorful ramp.



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syrup! That's a lot of sap and equally a lot of work but well worth it when you pair it with buckwheat cakes.

An excerpt from *The Milk-Weed Ladies – Green-up Time* by Louise McNeill-Pease says it all in just a few words: "...In the late winter season of freezing nights and thawing days, when water began to sing under the ice, and patches of bare ground opened on the south slope, we had "sugar makin" in the Woodland-up-the Hollow."....

Springtime also brings with it melting snow and swiftly flowing rivers.

As outdoor enthusiasts are getting in the last ski runs of the year at Snowshoe Mountain Resort, others are planning their first trips down the river to fish or just relax.

Spring is the time of year visitors and local folks alike take to the rivers for fishing and boating. There is nothing more enjoyable than putting a kayak or canoe on the Greenbrier River for the first time in the spring. Pick a

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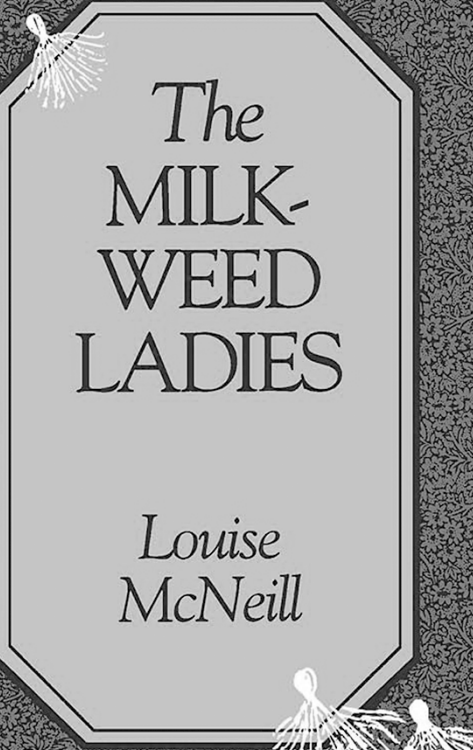
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The MILK-WEED LADIES

Louise McNeill



bright sunny, blue-sky day and add a group of friends to make an unforgettable adventure exploring the river, maneuvering the fast currents and absorbing the warm spring sunshine.

Spring is indeed a special time of year, a time that represents the end of winter and new beginnings. From watching lambs dashing around the fields to foraging the forests to enjoying the great outdoors; the weather warms, and spring renews our senses and reminds us of the many pleasures Mother Nature brings to the mountains we call home.

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A Little Droop Mountain History

Calvin W. Price, Editor
March 23, 1950

The inquiry comes as to the origin of the name of Droop Mountain. I can only reply that the older people used to tell me it was because this great landmark presented the appearance of overhanging or drooping over Greenbrier River.

There are a few place names of French origin still sticking here in the Greenbrier Valley like Gauley, from Gaule, the ancient name of France; Ronceverte, or interpretation, being briar green; St. Lawrence and probably Cheat.

There is the French word drupe meaning a pulpy stone fruit such as the wild cherry. Well, the black cherry did and does grow in profusion on Droop Mountain.

However, I still hold with the ancient people that Droop does present the appearance of overhanging Greenbrier River. This is the west end of the mountain so plainly seen from the Big Levels of Greenbrier County. During depression years, I had occasion as member of the State Historic Marker Commission to visit the county of Raleigh up on the Flat Top Peneplain. There had been no fires of industry for years to smoke up the atmosphere. On that clear autumn day, just out of the City of Beckley, Droop showed startling plain. At a guess the distance is 50 miles. Of course, I know the distance by road is about 90 miles. Never before, nor since, have I been able to make out Droop from Beckley nor Beckley from Droop. Perhaps if the present labor troubles continue in the coal regions, the air might clear up again. I will say if I had my druthers, I would druther the work would go on in

spite of the hazy atmosphere.

Speaking of the blue or rather purple tint of these Endless Mountains, years ago engineers of the geodetic survey spent a week or more in this county, awaiting a south wind to blow the blue haze out of the sky. They said it was smoke from the Pittsburgh industrial area. Finally, the wind did change, and one fine fall morning the air was clean and clear; the engineers were able to cast the desired lines for miles and miles. I recall how plainly the white church on Top of Alleghany Battlefield showed from Lone Tree Knob at Marlinton.

Getting back to Droop, the earliest date I recall having seen it mentioned is in the records of old Botetourt County. In the proceedings of a term of court in the year 1775, notation is made that Charles Kennison is excused from his call for jury service, as he lived beyond Droop Mountain. It was entirely too inconvenient to reach him with a summon by reason of the distance to be traveled.

The line between Botetourt and Augusta counties had not then been surveyed through what is now West Virginia – only projected. The line was established 10 years later as between Greenbrier and Harrison counties from Alleghany Mountain to the Ohio River, below Parkersburg. The line crossed Greenbrier River at the Buckley Rocks, just above the mouth of Swago. Yes, the Buckley family had been there then a dozen years, and they are still there. Another call on the Harrison county line is the falls of Williams River.

Droop Mountain is known in history as the site of the battle in the War Between the States. Here Averell won a victory for the Union,

though General Echols was able to escape with his army. This battle broke the strength of the Confederacy in these mountains.

The battlefield is properly set aside as a State Park. It is a most attractive and popular place for outdoor recreation.

The other battle was between Indians and pioneer settlers away back in the latter days of the American Revolution. The site was on the Warrior's Road or the Greenbrier Trace at Beartown, overhanging Greenbrier River. There were soldiers home from the Army to do their bit at crop planting, and word came of a war party of a score or so of Indians on a raid, traveling the Greenbrier Trace up Little Creek and down Spice Run. The Indians were ambushed about where the trail topped Droop at Beartown. The veteran soldiers inflicted terrible slaughter on the Indians – few if any escaping.

There is tradition, too, of a housewife killing an Indian on Droop. This, too, was about the time of the Revolution. The young woman was about her work in her cabin home and became aware of an Indian watching her through the window

opening. She paid no apparent mind; casually working her way around to where the gun was kept. As the Indian raised his head to peep through the window again, he met a fatal charge of shot. I have been told the grave of this Indian is on the McClure place, marked by a pile of stones and a thicket of berry briars.

To the scientists, Droop Mountain is known as the place where the Droop sandstone is found. This is a good glass sand of peculiar fine crystals. I never have been able to get the glass people interested. Dr. Paul H. Price is the scientist who made known this sand and named it Droop.

Talking about stones, Beartown is unusual in that for acres the rock has eroded, leaving high towers, with alleys and byways between.

Not far from Beartown, on the opposite face of the Mountain north, are massive rocks too, with an ice cave. After a hard winter, ice may be found well along in the summer.

Speaking of Droop Mountain, the late William Coulter once told me that his grandfather had seen in the year 1810 a herd of about 100

buffalo wallowing in Greenbrier River near the mouth of Spice Run at the foot of Droop.

On Droop, not so far from Beartown, is the Cutlip Healing Spring. This has a small flow of remarkably pure water. The people of olden time set considerable store by its curative qualities. In settling up the estate a generation back there were seven heirs, one desired the spring with a few acres, rather than a lot of land and no spring. With wisdom worthy of a Solomon, the family lawyer suggested that the land be plotted out in seven parcels of equal size of about 30-acres; all centering at the spring. I remember seeing the plat with the lines running out from the common starting point like spokes from a wagon hub.

Seems like I have mentioned about everything of interest I could think of. I am now down to the ghost of Droop Mountain. It was known to appear in various forms. At one home, it took possession of a calf skin rug upon the floor. Said rug would stand upon its feet and bawl and then walk through the side of the house.

At another home, rocks

would hurl themselves at the house, some going into the house and through the house, but leaving no holes in walls, windows or doors.

At another home, the kitchen wood jumped out of the box and off the porch.

There was the unusual number of bewitched livestock and a number of things possessed where a ghost is running at large.

The old people said that when the only person who could be this ghost moved out west, the spirits ceased to trouble, and for a century now the mountain has known no ghost.

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See **TOUR**, page 16

TOUR from pg 15

Digital processing is also a large portion of the work done by Ray and his colleagues. The department uses circuit boards designed by the University of California and can change the software for each specific project on the GBT.

"The heart of it is underneath this fan," Ray said, holding the circuit board. "It's called the FPBA. That stands for Field Programmable Gate Array. You can think of it as a blank slate of digital logic. It saves you from having all these circuit boards and wires and interconnects. You can just have it programmed on this little chip."

The circuit boards form a spectrometer called VEGAS – Versatile Green Bank Astronomical Spectrometer. It has eight circuit boards and replaces the GBT spectrometer

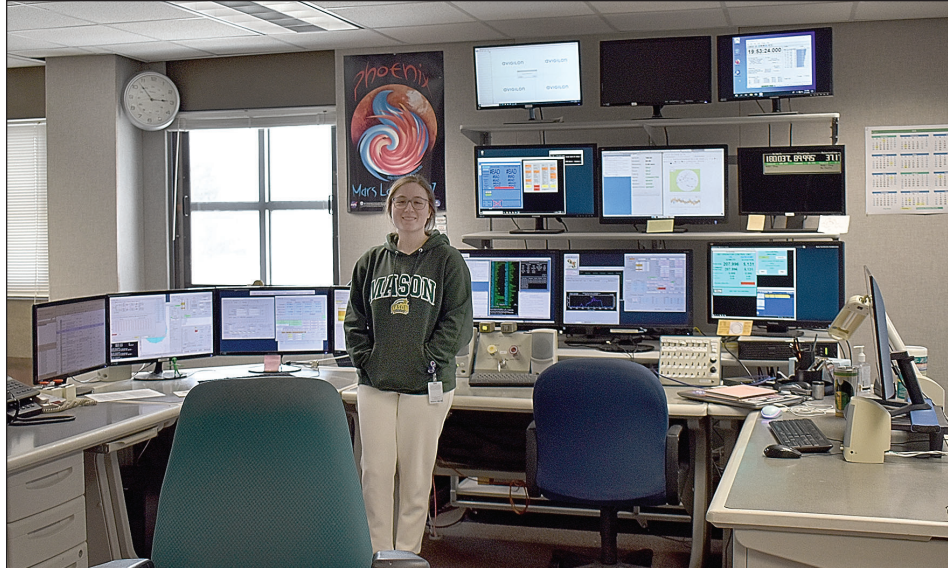


Photo by Suzanne Stewart

The Green Bank Observatory high-tech tour ends in the control room of the Green Bank Telescope, where visitors can talk to a telescope operator about the many, many screens they have to monitor. Catherine Tounzen has been a telescope operator for a year now and she said she hopes to do some high frequency observations – she is usually on duty during low frequency observations.

which had 100 circuit boards.

"That's just how versatile this chip allows us to be," Ray said. "When we

process signals, we channelize them into a number of channels, basically. If you want really fine resolution, you'll use some-

thing that has a million channels. It will break something down into a million increments.

"If you'd like to get

fastest data rates, for instance, you may only have sixteen channels instead of a million," he continued. "We have designs for these that range from sixteen channels up to a million in every increment to the power of two."

Ray was the one who wrote the personalities that go into creating those channels.

"Then, of course, you do

all that processing, and you transmit the results over to a computer, and then they can process them further there or just store the results on a disc," he said.

Ray is a native of Pocahontas County and, like Simon, his interest in electronics was sparked by his dad.

See **TOUR**, page 17



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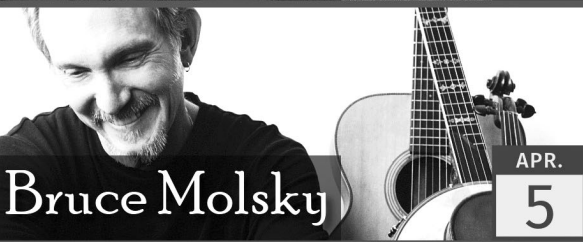
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TOUR from pg 16

“My dad worked for the phone company for forever, so he was always tinkering on electronic stuff at home,” he said. “That kind of made me interested in it. Then when I got in the high school, they had electronics class with Mr. [Gary] Beverage, and I took that.”

Ray went on to get a degree in electrical engineering and was lucky to come back home for his career.

“I didn’t really have expectations that I would end up here because I wasn’t sure – it didn’t seem like a lot of jobs were available back then,” he said. “But the timing was right for another engineer to retire right when I was graduating, so I ended up filling his position and I’ve been here ever since.”

There are a total of eight engineers in the electronics division at the GBO.

On to the control room

After the engineer takes the group through the electronics department, they head upstairs to the GBT control room, where the telescope operators monitor more than a dozen screens as they collect data from the tele-



The engineering department and Green Bank Telescope control room are both located in the Jansky Building at the Green Bank Observatory. The high-tech tour starts at the Science Center and then the engineer leading the tour will take visitors to the Jansky Building for the behind-the-scenes look at operations.

scope.

Catherine Tounzen has been a telescope operator for a year now and first learned about the observatory when she was in college. The physics department does an annual spring trip to use the 40-foot educational telescope.

“I came here twice, and I never really thought about working here, but after I graduated, I just so happened to look through the listings and here I am.”

There are times when

an operator is in the control room when the tour arrives and visitors can learn more about their positions, as well. If the room is empty, the engineer leading the tour will explain what the control room does.

“We talk about the signals and where they come from the GBT on the fiber into the computers,” Ray said. “It’s also good with an operator up here so they can always talk about what’s going on and what they’re observing.”

Each High Tech Tour is different because each engineer has their own way of explaining things and their own personal experiences to share. Simon said

he lets the tour participants help lead his discussion and welcomes lots of questions when he’s the guide.

The tour is a more intimate and interactive way to see a part of the observatory that is usually not on display. It takes place on the second Thursday of each month, 3:30 to 5 p.m. and is open to up to 15 people.

The tour costs \$25 per person and requires advance booking on the observatory website.

For more information on the tour or to book your ticket, visit <https://greenbankobservatory.org/events/high-tech-tour-441/>

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Feed the Birds

Laura Dean Bennett
Staff Writer

"Feeding the birds is also a form of prayer." Pope Pius XII

After a long, hard winter, we're not the only ones looking forward to the warmth of spring.

Many of the birds who survive winter, may have done so with the help of the 59 million Americans who kept their bird feeders full.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that Americans put out more than a billion pounds of bird feed each year.

We spend somewhere in the region of \$4 billion annually on bird food, feeders, binoculars, field guides and bird watching.

Bird watching is now thought to be the second most popular hobby in

America, with gardening coming in at number one.

The National Audubon Society tells us that West Virginia has more than nine and a half million acres of bird habitat.

Some birds, like mourning doves, stay all year. But most of songbirds come and go with the seasons.

In the summer, West Virginia hosts more than 170 species, not including raptors and waterfowl.

In the winter, there are about 50 species here.

It's good that we've made strides in reducing the use of pesticides that were threatening so many species and are recognizing the threat of habitat destruction.

Birds face a lot of challenges. Research shows that wild bird populations are down by almost a third since 1970.

In 1994, Congressman

John Porter (R-IL.) spearheaded the effort to proclaim February as National Bird Feeding Month.

It was established to encourage bird feeding during the most dangerous time of year for our feathered friends.

There's a theme chosen for National Bird Feeding Month every year. The theme for 2025 is "Be a Hero- #Feed the Birds."

Humans have always been fascinated by birds. We've been putting food out for them and taming them by hand feeding since ancient times.

Saint Serf, a 6th century Scottish monk who studied flora and fauna, recorded his practice of feeding wild birds.

Henry David Thoreau may have been the first famous American feeder of birds. In 1845 he wrote about feeding crushed



Photo courtesy of National Bird Feeding Month
A male cardinal enjoys a seed as he rests on the stoop of a bird feeder.

corn to his avian visitors at Walden Pond.

Wild birds need proper food to generate the large quantities of energy needed for migration, successful parenting and, in winter, maintaining body warmth.

By now, most people have heard that uncooked rice is dangerous for birds,

and we've learned to throw bird seed at the bride and groom instead of uncooked rice. Dried rice or dried coconut can be fatal when it swells inside their stomachs.

We've also learned that bread isn't good for birds – it's junk food for birds. They will fill up on it, but it doesn't provide the nu-

trients that they need. Birds should not be offered milk or salt, which they can't metabolize.

Wild bird seed blends are specifically designed to provide the nutrients – the fat, protein and calories that birds need.

Excellent food choices for wild birds include

See **BIRDS**, page 19

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black-oil sunflower seeds, cracked corn, chopped or crushed peanuts, safflower seeds, white proso millet, nyjer (thistle) seeds and suet.

Mealworms are widely available and make a good source of protein for meat-loving birds.

Many bird species – orioles, woodpeckers, tanagers, catbirds, robins, house finches and rose-

breasted grosbeaks, and others – will be drawn to jelly and orange halves at fruit feeders.

In the winter when temperatures stay below freezing for long periods of time, our bird visitors will also appreciate having a heated source of water.

Once birds come to depend on your feeder, it's important to stay consistent with the feeding.

A little housekeeping around feeders will go a



Photo courtesy of National Bird Feeding Month
Consider a heated birdbath so birds can have access to a fresh source of water during freezing temperatures.

long way to reducing the risk of disease.

Routinely clean bird feeders and birdbaths at least once every two weeks in summer, and once a

month in winter.

Of course, if you spot any mold, immediately empty the feeder, discard any remaining food and give the feeder a thorough



Photo courtesy of Pixabay
It's a good practice to clean your hummingbird feeder every time you refill it or every three to five days to make sure the feeders aren't clogged.

scrubbing with soap and water.

A soak in vinegar or a weak bleach solution will kill any germs that may remain. Always finish with several rinses with clear water. Be sure that the feeder is completely dry before refilling it with seeds.

These days, there are some feeders made to be washed in the dishwasher – yay!

Hummingbird feeders should ideally be cleaned before every refill or, at least, every three to five days.

Windows can present danger to birds as they sometimes can fly into them and sometimes their injuries can be serious, or even fatal.

If you are present when a bird crashes into a window, watch to see that it recovers and can fly away. If it is alive but remains on the ground, it's at risk of being spotted by a predator. Gently scoop it up in a cloth, bring it in and place it in a small, loosely covered box.

If left alone in a dark, quiet place, it may recover.

See *BIRDS*, page 20

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BIRDS from pg 19

Hopping around and testing its wings is a sign that it may be able to fly and can be successfully released.

Just the stress of being close to a human may cause panic in a bird. Never touch it or interact with it more than necessary and release it as soon as possible.

To release a bird, cradle it carefully in a soft cloth and carry it to an elevated surface on your porch or in your yard away from



Photo by Laura Dean Bennett
Kelli Hatcher, left, braves the blowing snow and freezing temperature to make her appointed winter rounds to the bird feeders at her home. Year-round bird watching is yet another gift of Nature's Mountain Playground.

people and pets. Set it down gently, walk away and hope for the best.

When setting up a feeder, you can minimize the chances of bird crashes.

Feeders situated 15 to 30 feet from a window pose the greatest hazard.

Place feeders within three feet of windows to pose the least risk of a crash. You can also cover windows with decals or screens.

When you bring large numbers of birds to a feeder, remember that predators may take note, among them, cats.

You may have to rethink having a feeder if outdoor cats visit your yard. It's estimated that cats kill more than 2.5 billion birds a

year in North America.

In recent years, there's been a new threat to birds – avian influenza.

Since 2022, bird flu has been found in domestic poultry, waterfowl, raptors, shore birds and even some wild mammals.

The virus is shed in the saliva, mucus and feces of infected birds. It's transmitted via ingestion or inhalation.

Fortunately, The Centers for Disease Control studies indicate that trans-

BIRDS from pg 21

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mission to humans is rare.

Bird flu has been found in domestic poultry in several states and a new strain has recently jumped from birds to dairy cattle.

To protect it from bird flu, sequester all poultry from wild birds and other wild animals.

Fortunately, studies show that songbirds are less likely than other birds to become infected. And they are less likely to shed large amounts of virus – meaning they do not transmit the disease easily – so a widespread outbreak among songbirds would be unlikely.

But we should be on the lookout for any sick birds in your yard or at your feeders. If you see birds who may be ill, remove feeders and do not replace them until the birds have left the area.

The latest word from the federal National Wildlife Disease Program is that, as of now, there's no reason to take down bird feeders – unless they may also attract domestic poultry.

Winter bird watching gives us an ever – changing tableau of beauty – and proof of the resilience of life in a frozen, snow-covered landscape.

My cats love watching their “bird TV,” too, probably as much as I do. Every morning, we look forward to the next episode of “As the Birds Feed.”

It's “appointment TV” for the whole family – and no satellite dish needed.

It is recommended that we continue to feed our

birds until late April or May, when natural foods – such as berries and insects become more abundant for them.

Landscaping for the Birds

We can make our yards more bird-friendly by planting trees, shrubs, vines and flowers that naturally produce food and habitat for our feathered friends.

All trees are good for birds, but some are particularly beneficial. The fatty fruits of dogwood, spicebush, sassafras and magnolia, which ripen in the fall, provide excellent nutrition for birds.

Evergreens, including holly, pine and spruce provide protective year-round habitat – and good food.

Oaks yield acorns, which are not only edible themselves, but the host

See **BIRDS**, page 22



Photo by Laura Dean Bennett
Humans aren't alone in their fascination for bird watching. It's “appointment TV” for house cats like Romeo, who spends hours every day observing the action at his “bird TV.”



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acorn weevils, a favorite form of protein for birds such as bluejays and certain woodpeckers.

Of course, fruit trees are always excellent bird attractants.

I remember watching a flock of about three dozen cedar waxwings settle onto a crabapple tree and devour hundreds of the tiny crabapples in the space of a day.

Sunflower seeds are well-known favorites of many birds.

Asters feed blue jays, cardinals and goldfinches from late summer through

early fall.

Finches and other birds appreciate coneflowers, black-eyed susans, cornflowers, marigolds, zinnias and scarlet sage – and some will nibble on their petals.

Grapes and berries are like bird candy and the nutritious red berries of the serviceberry ripen in summertime, when new bird parents are busy feeding their young.

In the fall, viburnum's bright red berries don't just feed birds, but they can also make jelly and jam.

Beautyberry's purple berries add an extra pop

of fall color to your yard and in the fall and can last long enough to provide bird food into early winter.

The chokeberry shrub's edible white blossoms evolve into berries – some red and some purple – which also ripen in the fall. The purple berries can be mistaken for huckleberries, which often grow in the same terrain. Both make excellent food for birds.

The blossoms of button-bush, like butterfly bush, feed butterflies and other pollinators in the spring and summer and their berries also provide food for birds.

Honeysuckle, lilac, Rose of Sharon, hibiscus and weigela are also hummingbird favorites.

Nature lovers have learned that sometimes less is more when it comes to maintaining our lawns and gardens.

The perfect "weed-free" look may be impressive on the cover of a magazine but accomplishing it via the use of herbicides and pesticides is the equivalent of welcoming guests to a dining table laid with poison.

Using natural pest and weed deterrents is a much

safer and healthier way to go – not just for birds, wildlife and pets, but for us, as well. And sometimes, weeds can have their place.

For instance, dandelion seeds are gold finches' favorite food.

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Laura Dean Bennett
Staff Writer

Imagine Early American colonists sitting in on a 21st century conversation.

A lot of our modern lingo would undoubtedly be Greek to them – but not all of it. After all, we still use many expressions which would have been heard in the colony of Virginia in the 18th century.

Some come from venerable English literature.

Many of us have remarked, “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” The self-explanatory phrase was first published in *The Book of Husbandry*, in 1534 by John Fitzherbert.

Shakespeare’s plays gave us “mum’s the word,” “break the ice,” “faint-hearted,” “wild goose chase,” “in a pickle,” “the world is my oyster,” “heart of gold,” “good riddance” and many others.

In Othello, he was first to refer to jealousy as a “green eyed monster.”

Lots more of our common expressions from the Middle Ages were included in the works of Chaucer, like “pig in a poke.”

This term referred to the habit of unscrupulous merchants substituting an animal

of lesser value and selling it, unseen, in a sack or “poke.”

“Piping hot,” first appeared in *The Canterbury Tales* in 1392. It was a descriptive phrase referring to food so hot that it comes off of the hearth making a hissing or piping sound.

Also from *The Canterbury Tales*: “busy bee,” (someone as industrious as a honey-bee), “strike while the iron is hot,” (as a blacksmith would strike hot iron to mold it) and “as dark as pitch” (pitch meaning tar) – this gives us our modern expression, “pitch dark.”

Early English and colonial “publick” houses provided much terminology still in use in the vernacular.

“Pub” was abbreviation for “publick house” – which was a tavern, inn or a coach stop where travelers could find food, drink and accom-



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modations.

Public houses served ale and cider in half pints, pints and quarts and both innkeepers and customers were wise to keep a good count of consumption.

Patrons often drank from ceramic mugs made with a whistle baked into the rim or the handle.

Come time for a refill, they used the whistle to call for service. Hence, the expression, “wet your whistle” which now means, “have a drink.”

Some expressions came from the Bible, like “man after my own heart,” which is from Samuel 13:14, where it says that the Lord “sought Him a man after His own heart.”

There are dozens and dozens of words and expressions which “hail from” England’s nautical history.

Until the 1800s, when Morse Code was invented, seafaring vessels communicated by “hailing” one another

using a loud voice or flag signals.

During the Battle of Copenhagen, when his ship was hailed by his superior, England’s naval hero, Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson “turned a blind eye” to his orders. He purposely put his telescope up to his blind eye, so he couldn’t see the signal instructing him not to attack.

He did attack, by the way, and was victorious. And the English populace began using the expression.

Sailing ship lingo gave us lots of colorful expressions.

“Going to the head” comes from the fact that the “head” was the designated place for a ship’s crew to relieve themselves. It was located all the way forward, on either side of the bowsprit, to which the figurehead was attached.

Sailing ships also gave us “learning the ropes,” “down in the doldrums” and “as the crow flies.”

See *OLDE*, page 24

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“Learning the ropes” refers to sailors having to learn the names and purpose of the many ropes on the ship.

Being caught “down in the doldrums” could do more than cause sailors to be depressed.

The Doldrums lie along the equator in the Atlantic Ocean (now known as the Intertropical Front) where the winds could die down completely, stranding ships for weeks on end – often with fatal consequences.

Before modern navigational equipment, sailing ships carried crows. Helmsmen would set course “as the crow flies” because, when released, the ship’s crow would invariably fly towards land.

When the crew was called to assemble in a straight line, they would “toe the line” by putting their toes on the seam of the deck.



Like office workers gathering at the water fountain to exchange the latest gossip, sailors gathered around the ship’s drinking water – in a barrel called “the scuttlebutt.”

Stories of bloodthirsty pirates swinging from their

ship’s rigging with knives clenched in their teeth inspired the 17th century expression, “armed to the teeth.”

It’s not hard to guess the original meaning of old hunting terms like “loaded for bear,” “barking up the



At left, most people know the term “blockhead” because of the Peanuts comic strip in which Lucy van Pelt often calls Charlie Brown by that name. Above, the term “bigwig” not only refers to the large wigs of days gone by, it was also slang for a person of importance.

wrong tree, “in the bag,” “hounded to death,” “sitting duck” and “give it your best shot.”

They mean the same thing today as they did three hundred years ago.

The wearing of wigs by both men and women in Europe and England seeded wig-related terms into the

English language. After a successful two hundred year run during the 17th and 18th centuries, wigs fell out of favor.

But the expressions they gave our language had taken root and are still in use today.

We now know “powder room” as a polite substitution for the word, restroom.

But originally, it referred to a small room where wigs were kept, dressed and powdered.

More than 500 years before Lucy van Pelt began calling Charlie Brown a blockhead in the Peanuts comic strip, English speaking people were using the term, with exactly the same meaning.

The wooden head-shaped blocks used to hold wigs became the foundation for “blockhead.” It was a popular English insult – a term meaning “idiot” – someone so stupid that their head might as well be made of wood.

“Bigwig” means exactly the same thing now as it did in the 1700s. It’s an impertinent slang name for a person of importance or authority.

These days, “being caught red-handed” still refers to proof of guilt – although not necessarily of a capital

See **OLDE**, page 25



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crime. It's easy to understand its evolution from its origin in Scotland when it referred to capturing a poacher or a murderer.

Colonists soon learned many Native American customs when they arrived on

the North American continent. They began using the term "bury the hatchet" to describe the ending of hostilities as a reflection of the Native custom of burying weapons to seal a peace treaty.

In modern America, we still use the euphemism to

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What a sight it would be to see pigs fly. Of course the saying is a way to say that something is highly unlikely to happen. At right, the art of dyeing wool different colors led to the saying of being "true blue."

indicate making up after a fight.

"Down in the dumps" is a commonplace expression used in exactly the same way today as it was in the 1500s. It is thought to come from the Dutch word "domp" (meaning mental haze or dullness) or the German word "dumpf" (meaning heavy, oppressive or gloomy).

In Elizabethan England, "dumps" were slow, mournful songs and dances and Shakespeare used the expression "in the dumps" to mean "in low spirits."

When smallpox was run-

ning rampant in the 1700s, it was common for aristocratic ladies and gentlemen to use wax to fill the pock marks. When sitting too close to the hearth, the wax might melt but it was an awkward proposition to tell someone that their makeup was melting... hence, "mind your own beeswax," meaning "keep it to yourself."

Both "saving face" or "losing face" came from exactly the same era and the same circumstances. Melting makeup made for potential embarrassment.

The art of dying cloth gave us two expression which has



been with us since the 1600s.

A woolen garment which was dyed before the wool was spun into yarn, would be unlikely to fade or discolor. The saying, "dyed in the wool," began to refer to opinions or allegiances formed early in life, and highly unlikely to change.

In the 17th century, Coventry, England, became famous for the beautiful blue cloth made by its skilled artisans who developed a blue dye that was color fast. Its

color remained "true." The expression, "true blue" captured the English imagination. Soon a person who remained true to their principles could be described as "true blue."

The expression "given the third degree" originated with the practices of the Freemasons, a charitable organization formed in the 18th century with roots in the Medieval stonemason guilds.

See *OLDE*, page 26

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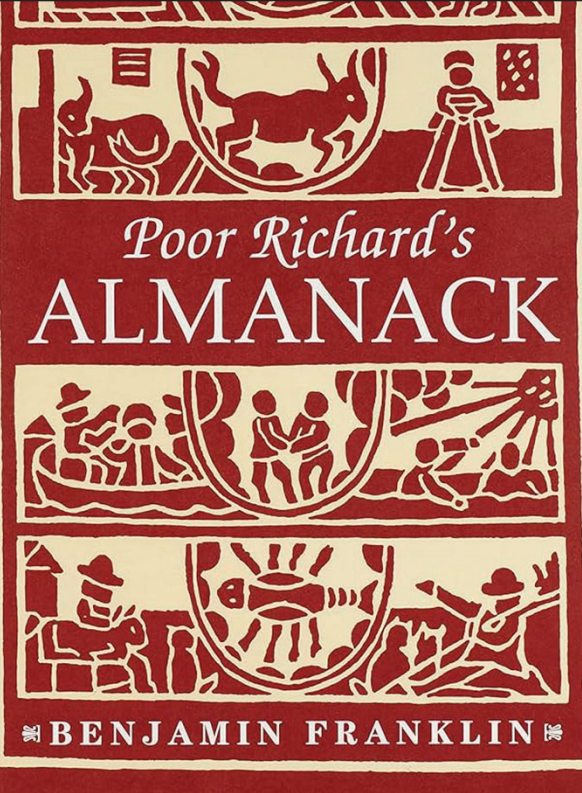


OLDE from pg 25

Applicant had to undergo three difficult tests to become a full-fledged member. Interrogation for the third degree was the final and most rigorous, hence, to be "given the third degree" in common parlance came to mean to undergo a rigorous interrogation.

"In the nick of time" refers to money lenders who for hundreds of years, even until the 18th century, kept track of loans and when they came due by carving notches (nicks) on a "tally stick." If a debtor arrived just before the next nick was carved, he could save the next increment of interest.

"Black ball" means to reject someone from membership to a certain social circle, or private club. It refers to



It is believed by historians that Benjamin Franklin was inspired to write "Poor Richard's Almanack" by the book of common wisdom called *Gnomologia*, which was published in 1732 by Thomas Fuller.

the practice of exclusive 18th century men's clubs deciding membership by secret ballot.

In one famous method, the vote to accept or reject a new member was taken by each member casting their vote by putting either a red or a black ball in a box. A red ball was

a vote to accept, a black ball was a vote to reject the applicant. It only took one black ball to reject a new member.

"Get off your high horse," meaning to stop being so arrogant, is an old expression harkening back to Medieval England when knights and the nobility rode heavy charges in tournaments and in battle and a person's rank indicated what size horse he rode.

In the 14th century John Wyclif (English philosopher, writer and religious scholar), recorded a pageant in which

cardinals and important persons rode on "high horses." In 2025, we still say "when pigs fly," sarcastically referencing something that is a huge improbability. It started out as an old Scottish proverb a century ago.

A phrase much like it, "that is as likely as to see an hog fly" was included in a book of "common wisdom" called *Gnomologia*, published in 1732 by Thomas Fuller. Some historians believe that book inspired Benjamin Franklin to write *Poor Richard's Almanack*.

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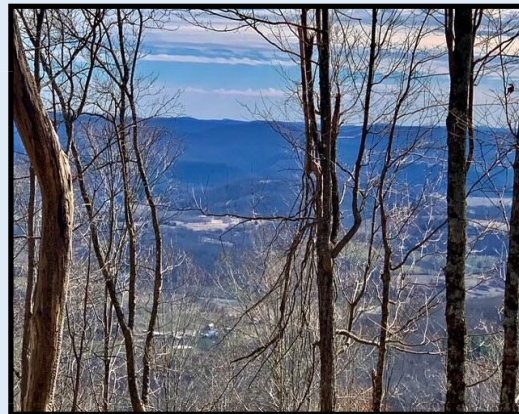
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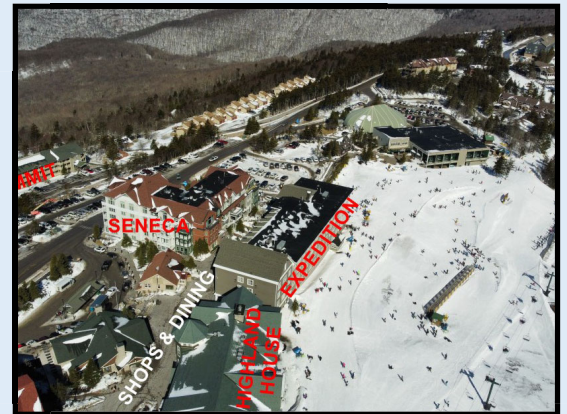
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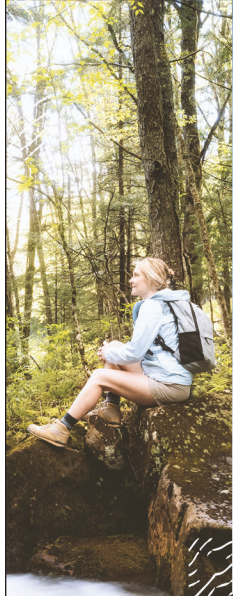
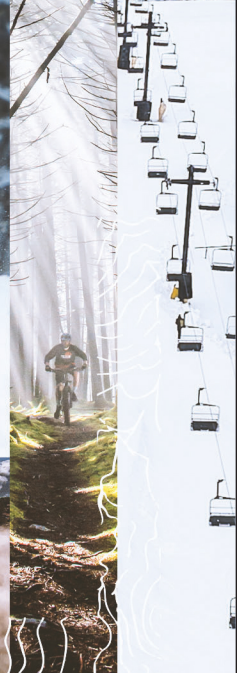
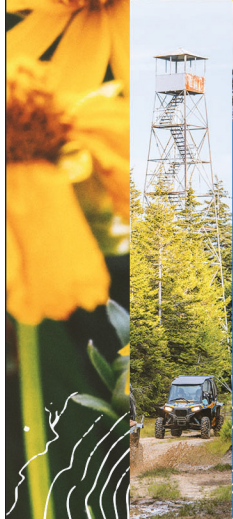
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