

## BOOKCASE

***Along the Norfolk and Western: Olden Days and New Ways — People, Places, Events***

By Tam Park Vannoy

Self-published, 1991. Pp. 90. \$11 postpaid, from Paperback Exchange, 5301C Williamson Road Plaza, Roanoke, VA 24012.

**N**OT a formal history, but rather a series of vignettes compose this slim volume on the Norfolk and Western. A lot has changed for the company since its inception in 1837 in Virginia, including two large mergers. The first, in 1964, put the Pittsburgh and West Virginia line into its fold along with a half-dozen other rail lines. The most recent, in 1982, joined N&W with Southern to form the Norfolk Southern, making it one of three major eastern railways (the others being CSX and Conrail).

There are many photos showing the various rolling stock, stations, yards, and personalities of the company. Long an important hauler of coal, coke, iron ore, and passengers, recent years have seen the line carrying automotive products, chemicals, and even supplies for the Gulf War, including jeeps, tanks, ambulances, and jet fuel.

***Cloud by Day: The Story of Coal and Coke and People***

By Muriel Earley Sheppard

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991 (reprint; originally published by University of North Carolina Press, 1947). Pp. 277. Illustrations, appendices, bibliography. \$34.95, \$14.95 paperback.

Beginning in the late 1800s, southwestern Pennsylvania became an immense industrial network of coal, coke, and steel. Coal was baked in beehive-shaped ovens to remove all by-products and leave carbon. The resulting coke is essential for making steel. Fayette and Westmoreland counties were marked by thousands of beehive ovens, and company towns ("patches") grew up around each oven works.

Sheppard examines both the coking process and the people, and weaves a tale of an industry that recruited immigrant miners and produced millionaire bosses. She describes the daily work routines, which could be dangerous, and home life, which could be bleak. She also recounts adventures of naturalization, mining, company stores, and the often bloody strikes.

This new addition includes 62 historical photographs. There is also a coda, a guide to further reading,

and a brief guide to historic sites, all prepared by University of Pittsburgh Press Director Fred Hetzel, a native of the coke region whose contributions make clear he hasn't forgotten his roots.

By the time Sheppard was writing, the coke industry was long past its prime — it peaked in 1909 with 579 plants and some 104,000 ovens. The industry, however, was doomed from even before then by more efficient ovens which captured the by-products. There was no sense piping the gases to the steel mills when the new by-product ovens could be conveniently installed at the mills. Today, only the decaying remnants of ovens remain to provide adventure, like a treasure hunt, for those searching out coke works. Coke is still produced, not at the old beehives, but at the mills like the USX works in Clairton.

***Dunkard Ridge***

By Norma Jean Venable

Parsons, W. Va.: McClain Printing Co., 1979. Pp. -168. Illustrations. \$4 postpaid, from the author, Route 13, Box 125, Morgantown, WV 26505-8526.

As this book begins, the author and her husband have just bought a 43 acre farm in the hills of West Virginia. Rural life is so different for her that she is frightened at first of the farm and the area, but she ventures progressively further from the farmhouse. She soon finds that the folks she thought would be hostile or eccentric have simply been raised in a world far different from hers.

This is a tale that could be placed in any part of rural America. The stories are mostly reminiscences of the older folks, but most sound suspiciously like tall tales or moral lessons.

For example, one Sam was known for always greeting both friend and stranger by nodding and saying "How de doo." After a trip to the big city of Pittsburgh, he returned with a stiff neck and a hoarse voice. End of story. And "The Irishman" was always bragging that everything in the old country was bigger and better. They put pumpkins on trees and told him they were apples, but he said Ireland's were bigger. The locals didn't give up, but rather put snapping turtles in his bed. When he exclaimed, "What are they?" the reply came, "American bedbugs."

Whether they're folk tales or based on actual events, these are stories that are still passed along in this mountain area. The book gives an interesting view of how rural life was lived, and sometimes still is.