Edward Abbey’s Appalachian Roots in
THE FIRST PART of this article, in the Fall 1996 Pittsburgh History, began with an outline of Abbey's career as an author. Edward Abbey attracted popular and critical acclaim throughout the world — particularly in the Southwest, where he was buried at an unknown site in the desert following his death in March 1989 — but he was comparatively neglected, ironically, in his native Western Pennsylvania. Abbey was a very successful and influential novelist, essayist, environmentalist, and anarchist, the author of Desert Solitaire, Appalachian Wilderness, The Monkey Wrench Gang, The Fool's Progress, and more than 20 other books. Drawing from extensive interviews with Abbey's relatives and friends, as well as from research in the Abbey Archives at the University of Arizona, James Cahalan set forth for the first time the true particulars of Abbey's early life: his birth at Indiana Hospital in January 1927; his upbringing during the Depression at various residences in Indiana County, especially in and around the village of Home; and the formative influences of his remarkable parents, Mildred, a schoolteacher, housewife, church organist, artist, and endless volunteer, and Paul, a farmer, logger, salesman, schoolbus driver, rock-shop proprietor, and a committed socialist in a very conservative county.

In this final part of the article, the focus is on Abbey's schooling and first writings in Indiana County, his first trip west, and his returns from the West to his native place both in person and in his writings.

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"The foothills of Appalachia at last. Now we're getting somewhere.... My people."
— Edward Abbey,
The Fool's Progress (459-60)
Indiana County Education and First Writings

Edward Abbey attended the Rayne Township Consolidated School (1934-41), Marion Center High School (1941-42), Indiana High School (1942-45), and Indiana University of Pennsylvania (1947) before leaving for Albuquerque and the University of New Mexico, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in philosophy.

Howard Abbey remembers that he and his brother started school as first-graders in 1934, when there was no kindergarten, and that soon thereafter Ed was skipped ahead to second grade. Ed, says his brother, always remained very self-assured and certain of his superiority over his peers. Ed was recalled by others as a shy, studious schoolboy. In fact, from people who knew him at various stages of his life, one learns that the real Ed Abbey was quite different than the image of him created by characters such as the wild Hayduke in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* or Henry Lightcap in *The Fool’s Progress*. Abbey himself was aware of the dichotomy, “The Edward Abbey of my books,” he wrote in his journal, “is largely a fictional creation: the true adventures of an imaginary person. The real Edward Abbey? I think I hardly know him. A shy, retiring, very timid fellow, obviously. Somewhat of a recluse, emerging rarely from his fictional den only when lured by money, vice, the prospect of applause.”

Abbey clearly developed a persona in his books and as a public speaker that was not the same as his private demeanor. He remarked in an interview that the “character I create in my journalism is perhaps a person I would like to be: bold, brash, daring.... I guess some people mistake the creation for the author, but that’s their problem.”

His relatives and high school classmates agree. Sister Nancy Abbey says that as a boy, Ed “was too shy to be much of a cut-up.... He was a very, very complex person.” An aunt, Betty George, notes that “I never saw him trying to be funny.” I had gone to Ed Abbey’s 50th high school reunion — he was posthumously honored as a distinguished alumnus, with clippings about him displayed on a bulletin board — expecting to hear from his Indiana High School classmates that he was an unforgettable character and perhaps a practical joker. Instead, the word that I heard most frequently from his classmates was “loner.” Judy Moorhead recalls that “he wasn’t a part of a group. Part of that was because he lived in the country and he would ride the schoolbus home.” Eugene Bence concurs: “He lived a little ways away. And he didn’t get to many of the social activities that were going on.” But Abbey was not afraid to stand out, Bence adds. “He was kind of like the hippie of his day: having work shoes and just dressing a little more down. I recall his hair as always being askew — like under no control whatsoever. He didn’t care.” Leonard Abrams says, “I can still remember Ed Abbey wearing Norman Thomas buttons to school.”

Abbey had switched from Marion Center High School to Indiana High for several reasons. Longtime friend Ed Mears says that Abbey didn’t like walking to Marion Center and could get a ride to Indiana High. Nancy Abbey expects that her brother would have preferred the increased cultural stimulation of Indiana.

Clarke Cartwright Abbey, his widow, remembers him saying that he switched high schools in order to get more writing classes.

Abbey’s double distance as a country boy coming in from 8 miles away to Indiana, and his remarkable intellect even at a relatively early age, increased his alienation. “I don’t think anybody in our class,” says Gene Bence, “ever got to know Ed Abbey really well. And I think it’s because, intellectually, he was on a plane above us.” Judy Moorhead recalls: “The one statement I remember Ed Abbey making was in a science class. We were talking about atoms; in those days no high school students heard very much about atoms. And Ed said, ‘If anybody can ever split the atom, they’ll unleash all kinds of power.’ He was aware of these things before the rest of his classmates.”

Abbey wrote in his journal in 1954: “High school — Indiana, Pennsylvania; four years of intellectual adventure and social misery” (Confessions, 118). Actually, he attended Indiana High for three years, having transferred after a year at Marion Center, which was closer to the family home (dubbed by them as the “Old Lonesome Briar Patch”). His reputation at Marion Center High was much the same. “He was pretty much a loner,” Ed Mears comments. “He didn’t mingle a lot. He wasn’t an enemy of anybody. But he didn’t have a lot of friends.” Adds Ivan McGee, a year ahead of Abbey at Marion Center (and now the executive director of the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County): “I always felt him sort of an intellectual student. I mean bright, intelligent — probably did not fit in too well with a lot of his classmates.”

Abbey’s future career and interest in writing began during high school. His first known publications appeared when he was 14 and 15 years old: an anti-Hitler editorial, “America and the Future,” in the Marion Center Independent in December 1941, and “Another Patriot,” a short story in a spring 1942 Marion Center High School compendium of student writings and news. Both are unforgettable boyhood wartime writings, though “Another Patriot” is early evidence of Abbey’s flair for the dramatic, with his protagonist diving into the ocean in front of an oncoming German torpedo to sacrifice himself and save his ship.

Actually, Abbey had “published” at an even earlier age, charging his siblings a penny to read “this wonderful comic series of ‘The Adventures of Lucky Stevens,’” recounts Nancy Abbey. Lucky Stevens “was born this baby that cracked open whiskey bottles with his teeth and drank it down, and he decided to leave home at an early age. I remember there was this one hobo king who had a thumbnail that was like a dagger. Lucky Stevens had to fight to the death with him.”

The Attraction of the West and Abbey’s Summer 1944 Trip

Like most boys of his generation, Ed Abbey played cowboys and Indians and loved watching Western movies; the difference was that he took them seriously enough that he eventually moved west and devoted much of his life to writing about the West. Abbey told Publishers Weekly in 1975, just after *The Monkey Wrench Gang* hit the shelves, “I'd always been strongly
The Abbey family, c. 1957: seated (left to right) are Rita Deanin (Ed Abbey's second wife) with his sister-in-law Iva and sister Nancy; mother Mildred stands in the middle holding Joshua, Ed and Rita's first son; behind Mildred are father Paul and brothers Ed, Bill, John, and Howard.
drawn by the Western landscape, mostly because of the movies." Ed Mears remarks, "We had those in high school and he loved them." A majority of the movies listed in the High Arrow, Indiana High's newspaper, during Abbey's years there were titles such as "Wagon Track West," "Frontier Badmen," "Ride, Tenderfoot," "Canyon City," "Call of the Rockies," "Light of Sante Fe," and "Sagebrush Heroes." As Abbey wrote in The Fool's Progress (1988), "What I always really wanted to be, like most American boys, was a free-lance cowboy ... a movie-type cowboy" (69).

Howard Abbey remembers going to Westerns in Indiana with his brother: "They had two or three features every weekend, the Ritz. I remember Ken Maynard and Buck Jones and Tex Ritter." Tom Mix, one of the cowboy screen icons whose films convinced Abbey that he had to go west, was also from Western Pennsylvania.

Much later, in a 1985 lecture at the University of Montana, Abbey admitted that for awhile after he moved west as a young man, he remained brainwashed by the movies: "Like most new arrivals in the West, I could imagine nothing more romantic than becoming a cowboy — nothing more glorious than owning my own little genuine working cattle outfit." In the same lecture, Abbey had the audacity to attack the cattle industry while speaking deep in its geographical heart, showing that the author of The Brave Cowboy (1956) had developed a different attitude: "Cowboys do it better," they like to say. And that's true — ask any cow. I know some of you resent that remark, but I don't hear anybody denying it. I can testify from my own boyhood on an Appalachian farm that country boys are a weird species."

The episode from his life most frequently repeated in Abbey's writings was his hitch-hiking and rail-riding trip west during the summer of 1944, between his junior and senior years at Indiana High. In a great many different places in his writings and in interviews, Abbey cited this as the key formative experience of his life: "I became a Westerner at the age of 17, in the summer of 1944, while hitchhiking around the USA. For me it was love at first sight — a total passion which has never left me." Perhaps his best known essay about this experience is "Hallelujah on the Bum" in The Journey Home: "In the summer of 1944 ... I hitchhiked from Pennsylvania to Seattle.... On the Western horizon, under a hot, clear sky, sixty miles away, crowned with snow (in July), was a magical vision, a legend come true: the front range of the Rocky Mountains. An impossible beauty, like a boy's first sight of an undressed girl, the image of those mountains struck a fundamental chord in my imagination that has sounded ever since." He saw the beautiful red-rock desert and canyon country of the Southwest for the first time while riding the rails with hobos. He got arrested in Flagstaff, and finally abandoned the rails in Albuquerque in favor of a bus ticket home.

Hitch-hiking west was an Abbey family tradition that had begun with his father, who gave Ed $20 and wished him well on his journey. "The thing about this heading west business," Bill Abbey explains, is that "my dad did that. Then Ed did that hitch-hiking, railroading thing. Then Howard did it, I guess a year after Ed did it. I'm pretty sure my brother John did it. I did it, when I was in high school, too — hitch-hiked across the country one summer. Nancy, of course, couldn't do such a thing. But every one of us boys did that. It had to be something about how our father did it, so we have to do it — sort of a rite." Adds Nancy Abbey: "I

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Some Downtown Indiana Places of the 1940s
1 Stewart's Hardware Store, owned by Jimmy Stewart's father (now S & T Bank)
2 The Moore Hotel (R. B. Shannon and Associates today)
3 Henry Hall's stationery store
4 G. C. Murphy's Five-and-Ten store (now the Atrium complex)
5 The Dairy Dell (now Culpepper's bar)
6 Indiana Theatre
7 The Plaza poolroom, below the theatre
8 The Campus Grill
9 Anderson's Shoes (now American General Finance)
10 Ford Sales and Service (now a parking lot)
11 Waxler's Department Store (now First Commonwealth Trust)
12 The old Indiana County courthouse (now National Bank of the Commonwealth)
13 The Blue Star Restaurant (now the Coventry Inn)
14 The Ritz (later Manos) Theatre (now Indiana County Head Start)
15 The American Legion

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168 Pittsburgh History, Winter 1996/97
envied my brothers so much. To me that would have just been the most exhilarating experience. And I didn’t have the nerve to do it on my own." After he returned to Indiana High, Judy Moorhead stresses, Abbey "really had a claim to fame because he hitch-hiked out West and was back in class in September."

Abbey also had a claim to fame at Indiana High because he wrote about his trip in a striking series of seven articles in the *High Arrow* during his senior year. Abbey liked to recall later that he had flunked his journalism class twice in high school, explaining that "I couldn’t get basketball scores right."40 It’s true that all of his Indiana County transcripts — elementary through high school and his year at IUP — list high grades in English but spottier performances in other areas such as math and science, including "C”s in botany and zoology at IUP. This perhaps confirms Abbey’s later insistence that he was no “naturalist,” despite frequent critical pegging of his books as such. Abbey began his junior year as *High Arrow* features editor, but lasted only two months. His 1944-45 *High Arrow* accounts of his trip west show that from an early age he was a better writer than editorial journalist, and they are particularly exciting to compare with the World War II pieces from three years earlier, for the *High Arrow* articles show a writer in the process of finding his true subject and voice. "Abbey Walks 8,000 Miles By Adroit Use of Thumb” announced the first headline:

Around the last of July I began to feel an itchiness in my feet that could not be diagnosed either as athlete’s foot or abstinence from soap and water. It was the wanderlust, pure and simple. So I decided to act, and promptly, for in a month the gaping jaws of free education would be demanding their annual sacrifice. Two days later I packed a toothbrush and a notebook in a small grip, walked a few blocks out the western end of Philadelphia street, and began hitch-hiking in the general direction of Seattle, Washington.41

Abbey’s articles recount such episodes as swimming in the Mississippi River in the middle of the night, explaining to the governor of South Dakota that he was from Home, harvesting wheat with Indians, listening to a cougar’s growl while hitch-hiking at night near Yellowstone, and playing cards while riding the rails. They also show a good ear for dialogue:

“You boys wanta play a little game of poker or somethin’?”

"Sure,” said “New York,” pulling out a pack of cards. At the same time “Bleary-Eyes” pulled out his pack, the greasiest, dirtiest, most wrinkled and pock-marked set of cards I have ever seen.

Bleary-Eyes glared at New York and spoke in the low, ominous tone men use when they are not sure of themselves.

"What’s matter boy, don’t yuh like mah cahds?”

"No,” said New York and he started to deal.

Trying to change the subject, I motioned toward the Negro, now awake and looking at us. “What about him?” I said. “Maybe he would like to play.”

“That’s a nigger,” said Bleary-Eyes, “an’ I ain’t playin’ cards with no nigger. Besides, this is thuh white section of thuh boxcar an’ I don’t allow no niggers here. He gotta stay where he is.”

I stared in disbelief at the man and couldn’t speak. The words from his pitiful little brain hung in the dusty air between us and separated me from him."42
"I had a couple of good teachers in high school," Abbey recalled late in life to Jack Loeffler, "who introduced me to Hemingway, Thomas Woolf, Sinclair Lewis. I read a lot. I read and read and read probably hundreds of books during my teenage years." Those teachers included Raymond Munnel at Marion Center High and Mary McGregor and James Nix at Indiana High. Feathersmith, the teacher who tries to guide Abbey's autobiographical protagonist in Jonathan Troy, was probably modelled on both Munnel and Nix.

IUP, Abbey's Indiana Novels, and Indiana People and Places

The caption to Abbey's photo in his senior yearbook, L'Indien, seems apt enough: "EDWARD ABBEY . . . General College ... Dramatic and Speech Clubs ... hobbies are politics, writing, and hitch-hiking... favorite course is English." Following graduation in 1945, he spent a couple of years in the Army in Italy. At one point, much to his surprise, he was visited there by his father, who had sailed to Europe on an epic post-war trip involving the shipment of horses to regions devastated by Hitler's forces. Then, in 1947, Abbey continued his education at IUP (then known as Indiana State Teachers College), where he took writing classes from English department chairman Rhodes Stabley and published his first adult short story, 'A Fugue in Time,' a rather Joycean stream of consciousness experiment, in the 1948 compendium The Indiana Student Writes.

The FBI started its file on Abbey after he posted a letter against the draft at IUP. His two-year hitch in the Army had broadened his experience of the world, helped open up his personality, and increased his interest in political issues. He seems to have continued to come out of his shell at IUP, as his classmate and friend John Watta remembers:

All of a sudden Ed Abbey came there in a blue workshirt, no necktie, jeans when it wasn't fashionable. And you'd swear he'd just walked in off the farm and he didn't give a damn. There'd be a bunch of guys standing around talking, and Ed would sort of edge up to the back and, eventually, he'd squeeze himself into the front and before very long people were listening to Ed. There were some really hot discussions out there. I loved to be outside Leonard Hall in those days because they would almost lead to fisticuffs in many cases. A lot of them were returning GIs, like I was, and a lot older than the average college freshman. Of course, Ed was too.

Adds Sam Furgiuele, another classmate and veteran: "Ed was a teaser. He said a lot of things tongue in cheek. He would say things, I think, to get a reaction. And he would upset people." Abbey and his friends frequented such downtown Indiana places as the Campus Grill and the Indiana Theatre.

Later, in his journal, Abbey would recall "Indiana, Pa.: campaigning at Teachers College I admitted that Wallace might not win but confidently asserted that at least he would get more votes than Truman. Nasty argument with old English teacher Nicholson." Art Nicholson had been one of Abbey's teachers at
Indiana High School, and in 1954 he reviewed Abbey’s first novel, Jonathan Troy, in the Indiana Gazette: “The fact that the author found much of his material in this area may add something to the book for the local reader. Or it might cause dismay. Reactions should be interesting.”46 Nicholson’s instinct was right. Nancy Abbey remembers that in Indiana “a lot of people were very upset” by Jonathan Troy. Ed Abbey, while crediting the publication of the novel with giving him encouragement to continue his career as a writer, came to despise it. But “at the same time it’s here,” as John Watta notes, as a record of life in Indiana, Pennsylvania, in the middle of this century. “I loved that because he talks about the way adolescents behave — and this area in particular.”

Jonathan Troy is Abbey’s only book set entirely in Indiana, which is only very thinly disguised as “Powhatan”; Abbey generally preferred specific Native American names to the generalized, Anglo-imposed “Indiana.” In his journal, Abbey drew a map of Powhatan and the places in his novel, many of whose names were those of actual Indiana businesses in the 1940s, when he was in high school. Jonathan Troy and his father live in an apartment above the Blue Bell Bar (modelled on the Blue Star Restaurant), and Jonathan looks out his window and sees, among other places, such actual Indiana establishments of the period as the “Hotel Moore,” “Ford Sales and Service,” the “Dairy Dell,” and “G. C. Murphy’s Five and Ten.”47 Abbey describes the Dairy Dell with particular fondness: “They wheeled into the cool darkness of the drugstore and sat down on the red stools by the yellow-stained marble counter. The Fountain” (26). We read that “The lights went out over the Dairy Dell … over Anderson’s Shoe Store and Stewart’s Hardware and B. G. Troutman’s Department Store and Henry Howell’s Bookstore” (123), with Abbey oddly changing the real “Henry Hall” to “Henry Howell” while leaving the others unchanged. (See map p. 168) He also interspersed newspaper clippings in the novel — containing listings, for example, of a meeting at “the Powhatan American Legion Home” with “an interesting talk by Mr. J. V. Bradford, feature editor of the Powhatan Gazette, on the topic ‘Is Communism Infiltrating Our Schools?’” (60)

In Jonathan Troy, Abbey took many more liberties with his own family life than with the geography of Indiana and the outlying countryside. Jonathan’s mother is dead, and he shares an apartment in town with his father, who leads a labor demonstration at “McGlaflin’s Tire and Rubber Works” (McCready’s, in real life); none of these particulars were true of Abbey and his parents. But Jonathan does think back to another home and an earlier life in the countryside, which were the Abbey’s actual ones: “way up the hollow in the vine-covered hills … the old farm which nobody wanted any more and which nearly everybody had forgotten except the boy” (243). And Abbey introduces a character who recurs much later in The Fool’s Progress: Red Ginter, who ambushed Jonathan at his school bus stop and chased him, as Jonathan remembers in a flashback. Earl “Red” Ginter was the name of an actual classmate at Rayne Township Consolidated School who was several years older than Ed but was always far behind his age group in school.

Ed Mears tells the story of how Red Ginter and his family died in a fire at their house in 1982: they got out safely at first, but then went back in to try to retrieve all of their money, which they had stored in tin cans. Mears’ account of an earlier attempt by the Ginters to bury their beloved family horse is almost Faulkneresque. They couldn’t get the hole wide enough to fit the horse, its legs fully extended in rigor mortis. Mears stopped by and suggested that they cut the legs off, but they’d hear nothing of that. So he had to go get a big farm machine and force the horse into its grave.

Abbey apparently combined Red Ginter with Red Hankinson, who “lived in Chambersville,” according to Howard Abbey, “a great big guy three or four years older than we were. He had the great sport of beating up on little kids.” The Fool’s Progress describes an unforgettable boyhood baseball game that ends when Red Ginter hits a home run but refuses to run the bases. This later, greater novel also contains a great many other actual Indiana County family names. Henry Lightcap sees the names on markers in the graveyard, as if Abbey were making sure to memorialize “the Hintons, the Fettermans, the Lingenfelters, … the Gatlins, … the Taits, the Ginters, the Adamses,” before he arrives “at the site reserved for Lightcaps” (320).

In April 1986, Abbey took a road trip home to research places for The Fool’s Progress, taking notes on Sutton, West Virginia, as a model for the book’s principal town of Shawnee. For example, he copied down names from the Sutton war memorials for use in the novel, when Henry Lightcap walks past such memorials (497-98). However, in the typescript of the novel, Abbey crossed out some of the names he had copied down in Sutton and substituted several he had known growing up in Home and Tanoma: Fetterman, Ginter, and Tait, for example.48 Such was his attachment to his native place.

Abbey’s Visits Home

Indeed, while he spent most of his life in the West after 1947, Edward Abbey returned home in person — not only in his writings — on many occasions. In his journal on his 25th birthday in 1952, while studying on a Fulbright scholarship in Edinburgh, he wrote of “returning home, climbing the green hill through fields and over wild places of grass and briars and down the hill through the heavy green woods and across the little stream of water from the pasture and under the great maple tree and through the kitchen’s open door to the final triumph and tragedy that has never failed me and will never fail me — returning home” (Confessions, 18). The home he remembered was the Old Lonesome Briar Patch, and he seemed to much prefer his earlier visits there to his later visits at the much smaller house that his parents moved into in 1967, along the busy highway through Home. In October 1952, back at the Briar Patch, he could write poetically about how “the proud immortal American autumn seems finished — the gold and death-fire of leaves is gone — all is black, drab lusterless brown, gray, under a bleak smoky sky” (Confessions, 102). Seventeen years later, in October 1969, while visiting his parents’ little house along the busy highway, his impressions were different:

Back home, where you can’t go, said Wolfe. Why not? says
Left to right: John Watta, Abbey, Bill Betts, and Sam Furgiuele during Abbey's 1976 visit to IUP. Betts, Watta, and Furgiuele are former IUP English professors who still live in Indiana County. The latter two were also college classmates of Abbey's.
Wendell Berry. I’m with Wolfe. To me, this town, this place, this area is nothing. I feel nothing, no emotion whatever. Might as well be visiting Fargo ND for all it means to me.

Everything has changed. No, not everything — but much. The town is now three times bigger. Pittsburgh is much closer; only an hour’s drive away, with Indiana now practically a suburb. New houses all over the hills outside town — devastated farmland — hills dismembered to make room for highway interchanges — new factories and coal-burning power plants — the old teachers’ college is now ten times grown and called a “university” — schools and children everywhere.

The post-war baby boom has exploded on us now. All the old-style general farms are gone; the only serious farmers now are specialists: dairy, beef, pigs, truck, Christmas trees, cabbages. Most work their farms only on weekends; work in stores or factories the rest of the time. A dismal scene, man. (Confessions, 223-24)

Ed Mears remarks, concerning his old friend’s visits, that “he expected this to be the same as it was when he left. And I kept saying, ‘Ned, everybody and everything changes. When you’re away from here eight to ten years, the people here change.’ Well, he was disappointed because the people had changed and I said, ‘Well we’ve all changed. You’ve changed.’ And it seemed like it bothered him that this area had changed.” Concerning the various forms of “development” that he saw, Abbey told Mears, “Well, it’s all right to do it back here, but we don’t want anything west of the Mississippi.” He said, “They should’ve put a barricade up when we got to the Mississippi. Nobody would’ve gone west of that.” That was his theory.

On December 5, 1969, the year after Desert Solitaire had been published, Abbey was presented with an “Ambassador Award” by the Indiana County Tourist Promotion Bureau at a banquet at the Rustic Lodge. Sam Furgiuele was there:

When they gave him the plaque, he stood up, a kind of imposing guy, and looked at the plaque, turned it around, grinned, turned it around and looked at it the other way as if to make it very clear that this didn’t mean a thing to him. Then, literally, he simply tossed it the way you would do a magazine or a card onto the table. His first words were, “You must know I don’t believe in professional tourism.” He said in effect that there should be no need for a professional tourist bureau or tourism if you did the things in a community that you ought to do. And he went through and he named some things that he thought should be done in Indiana. For example, he said, “Make it beautiful. Make it beautiful and people will come to it.” He said, “Get that goddamn traffic off main street and build a parkway down there,” which was a tremendous idea. “Put some benches in there; plant some trees.” Well, some of the guys we know were extremely upset with his abrasiveness in his attack on the community leaders and on the Chamber of Commerce. They were saying they’re giving him this recognition and he should have been gracious enough to accept it like a gentleman. Well, you know, I respected Ed for what he did because what he was saying was true.

I got to see the plaque that was presented to Abbey, because it ended up in his brother Howard’s basement; Ed didn’t bother to take it home, back west, with him.

His visit to the home of IUP English professor Raymona Hull, to speak to her class during the same December 1969 trip, was no more of a popular success. She told me that the students were overawed, Abbey seemed ill at ease, and afterwards when she asked if he would like some refreshment, he requested a beer; she had none to offer since it was a freshman class, and finally an older student took Abbey out to a bar. “I think the whole interview was a disaster … I felt as if there was a universal sigh of relief when he left.”

Abbey’s old friend John Watta took the lead in bringing Abbey back to IUP to speak on several occasions during the 1970s and early 1980s:

I’d have to drive to Pittsburgh to pick him up at the airport and then, of course, lots of stops along the road, where we would slake our thirst. I got the impression all the time that I was with him that he was a vicious, nasty sort. And then that was all done away with in that one thing when I drove him home, to his parents’ home there, and I was trying to get the car turned around and he walked inside and then through the window I saw him and his mother, embracing. There’s that tough guy. And my heart went out to him because there was a different Edward Abbey.

Really rather shy by nature, Abbey developed a quite different, strong persona as a public speaker during these years. This was the case not only because he was the sort who was determined to speak the truth (more or less), but also because he got more and more requests to speak and carefully wrote out his lectures before giving them. In January 1968, Abbey could complain in his journal of being “America’s most famous unknown author” (Confessions, 211), but by November 1976, after the publication of Desert Solitaire (1968) and The Monkey Wrench Gang (1975), he wrote about “becoming a ‘cult hero’” (Confessions, 246).

On December 9, 1976, Abbey lectured at IUP to an audience that included his parents. Here are a few of the most remarkable highlights from the manuscript of his lecture in the University of Arizona archive:

Last time I gave a talk in Indiana was seven years ago, 1969, before a gathering of some of Indiana’s most distinguished citizens. They said they were making me Indiana County’s ambassador to the world … It was a very moving little speech — about half the audience wanted to move right out of the hall … I was born and raised near Home, Pa., ten miles north of here on Highway 119. Home — population 110, not counting dogs and chickens. My parents still live there; God bless them, where they always wanted to live, in a little house by the side of the road … Where is home? What is home? Thomas Wolfe said you can’t go there again. Typical displaced romantic — like myself…. A writer down in Kentucky named Wendell Berry asks why can’t you go home again? He has done it and found his place. Others say home is where you have your roots … But I too have found my home. And I define it thus: home is where you have found your happiness … There are some — many — who never make this discovery for themselves, who spend their entire lives in the search for a home …. Such people are not hard to identify: they are the ones who will sell their native
for easy money; who will strip-mine and clear-cut and flood with dams the place where they were born. ... We know the type; they generally run things ... Though I've lived most of my life so far in the red and gold of the American Southwest, and think of myself as a desert rat and a Southerner, I'll never get the green of Appalachia out of my heart. Nor ever want to. These misty hills will always be a part of my life, the source of my earliest inspiration. And I want to take this opportunity — I may never get another — to pay tribute, publicly, not only to this place, but to certain people in this place, who taught me so much, to whom I shall always be in debt. I mean certain teachers — Ray Munnel of Marion Center High, Lambert Joseph and Mary McGregor and Art Nicholson of Indiana High, Rhodes Stables of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, then called ISTC. Most of all I want to pay homage to my mother, Mildred Abbey, who taught me to love music, and art, and poetry, and to my father, Paul Revere Abbey, who taught me to hate injustice, to defy the powerful, to speak for the voiceless.

Abbey has not yet been given sufficient recognition in his native county. In April 1983, he was honored as one of four "IUP Ambassadors," but notice of this award in the Indiana Gazette got lost in local media feeding frenzy surrounding the special day of another local — Jimmy Stewart, whose 75th birthday party included the unveiling of a larger-than-life-size statue in front of the Indiana County Courthouse. The contrast between Abbey's reputation out west versus his reputation in his native county is underscored by the fact that after his death in 1989, the Tucson Weekly devoted a magazine supplement to Abbey, while the Indiana Gazette limited itself to a single obituary.

Appalachian Themes

Even those who knew Abbey only out west have recognized, as his fellow Western writer and friend Chuck Bowden put it, that "he was basically a hillbilly from Appalachia who knew how to write, who wanted to restore some hollow up in the mountains." Ken Sanders agrees that "Ed was a hillbilly at heart." Abbey's close friend Ken Sleight, the river guide who was the model for the character Seldom Seen Smith in The Monkey Wrench Gang, tells me that Abbey "had a fond memory of his childhood right on up .... He was returning to his roots, so to speak, when he bought some property here in Pack Creek," near Moab, Utah. At Pack Creek, he wanted to live on the land, as the Abbey family had back home at the Old Lonesome Briar Patch, and he wanted "a place for his family. He'd always think of his family. He really liked families," Sleight adds. Another close friend, the painter John Depuy, notes that Abbey "really loved ... village society especially. He grew up in a village. He was at heart — he and his family were at heart — Appalachians." Yet another good friend, the writer Terry Tempest Williams, agrees: "I think he always had a nostalgia for Home. Home, Pa. Appalachia. Because I think Edward Abbey was a man of Home ultimately." Clarke Cartwright Abbey similarly tells me, He never really forgot who he was and where he grew up. He said a lot of times that he was an Appalachian hillbilly who grew up in a very poor family. And I don't think that part of his life ever left him, and he never wanted it to. He never forgot it. He was always looking for someone back east, in Pennsylvania, that he had known as a child. He craved a contact from college or high school back east and was always very excited when he would get a letter. I think he got a letter from a schoolteacher of his. That meant a lot to him.

It is striking how frequently Abbey refers to his Western Pennsylvanian background not only when he is writing directly about it, but even in writings set in the West that have been considered only in the contexts of Western and environmental literature. He could be as far away as Norway, writing in his journal in 1952 during his Fulbright year, when a scene reminded him of home: "Green grass, black cows, board fences, big shiny milk cans by the road in front of every farmhouse, just like rural Pennsylvania. In fact, from what I've seen so far, Norway looks amazingly like parts of Pennsylvania.... When the train stops you can smell the manure — strong powerful stuff, makes me nostalgic. Must be planting time in Pennsylvania. The folks there must be busy, perhaps hopeful, emerging from dreary winter" (Confessions, 61).

He remarked that seeing a swan fly in England was "as likely an event as an Allegheny pig-iron barge taking off for a spin over the Triangle around three o'clock in the afternoon on Mother's Day" (Confessions, 88). Writing in his journal while sailing in the North Sea, he wrote of "the source, where the earth is dark and fruitful, and the hills green, and where love began and must always return. Not where I now belong, but where I am always welcomed, no matter how evil I become; not where I choose to live, but where I must continually return, if I am anything at all. Far from there, long away, I easily remember my home. Yes, yes, I think of home, I think of Home" (Confessions, 77-78).

Such an attachment was not merely the homesick diary writing of a young man, but a lifelong theme in all of his works. As Doc Sarvis remarks in The Monkey Wrench Gang, "The best men, like the best wines, come from the hills." When Sandy tells Will Gatlin, the protagonist of his novel Black Sun, "Gatlin sounds like a hillbilly name," he agrees: "It is, it is." In Desert Solitaire, it takes little to shift Abbey's mind from Utah back to Western Pennsylvania: "Raised in the backwoods of the Allegheny Mountains, I remember clearly how we used to chop blocks of ice out of Crooked Creek, haul them with team and wagon about a mile up the hill to the farmhouse and store them away in sawdust for use in the summer." On the very first page of that book, Abbey affirms that while the area around Moab is one of the most beautiful places on earth, others include "a gray gothic farmhouse two stories high at the end of a red dog road in the Allegheny Mountains" and "a view down Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn." When asked about being pegged as a Western writer, Abbey remarked in 1977 that instead of producing more Western novels, "I'm trying to write an Eastern."
Parents Paul and Mildred with Abbey during his December 1976 appearance at IUP, where he paid special tribute to them for their equal but radically different influences.
early 1960s in Hoboken and Jersey City, New Jersey, trying to write, working in a welfare office, and living with his second wife, Rita Dealin, a native of the area. He appears to have been nearly as attached to "Hoboken" as a place name as he was to Home, Pennsylvania, and Oracle, Arizona. This wilderness writer surprises the reader in the essay "Freedom and Wilderness": "When I lived in Hoboken, just across the lacquered Hudson from Manhattan, we had all the wilderness we needed." 59 In a poem entitled "Manhattan at Twilight, Seen from the Palisades," he asked: "Who would believe the city could be so lovely?" 60

Gurney Norman, a novelist from Kentucky, tells me, "I don't think that it's ultimately fruitful to try to set up an opposition between the Appalachian region of Abbey's boyhood and the far West of his later life. It isn't that there is a contest. It's about completing a picture rather than starting a fight. There is no split; it's just that the linkages have not been made manifest." I agree with him. Norman grew up in Hazard, lived in California for quite a few years, and eventually resettled in Lexington, where he teaches at the University of Kentucky. He is one of the Appalachian writers and thinkers who see "Appalachian" as a term applicable not merely to the mountain region running from northern Georgia up through Western Pennsylvania, but also as descriptive of frontier modes of thinking that link, not separate, the Appalachian East and the wild Southwest. After all, Western Pennsylvania was once our frontier. Our rivers run west. Scholars of the far West's literature identify as the first Western novel a book set and published in Pittsburgh: Philadelphia native Hugh Henry Brackenridge's Modern Chivalry, serialized in the Pittsburgh Gazette beginning in 1781. 61 And Abbey had long been preceded as a Western Pennsylvanian pioneer to the West by much earlier explorers who followed the rivers west as described, for example, by botanist and geologist Edwin James in his Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains, performed in the Years 1819 and '20, under the Command of Major Stephen H. Long (1823). 62

Abbey was himself such a trans-Appalachian, pioneering thinker and writer, and the son of an Indiana County woodman who had worked on a ranch in Montana. He uses the words "Appalachia" and "Appalachian" much more frequently than "Pennsylvania" and "Pennsylvanian" in his writings, according to the thinking he expressed in a 1985 interview: "I prefer to think in terms of bioregional rather than political boundaries. Arbitrary lines drawn on a map don't mean much to me." 63 In many ways, Indiana, Pennsylvania, has much more in common with Morgantown, West Virginia, than it does with York or Allentown. Abbey recognized this bioregional and socioeconomic fact when he set The Fool's Progress in West Virginia as his thin disguise for his native Western Pennsylvania. Both his 1986 notes on his trip through West Virginia and the version of them that made it into The Fool's Progress show that he was attached to Appalachia, but felt no need to romanticize it. Here's the full context for the quotation that I've borrowed for the title of this article: "The foothills of Appalachia at last. Now we're getting somewhere.... A lounging sullen homicidal primitive in every doorway. My people.

Each backyard sports a clothesline strung with the honest tattered garments of the poor" (459, 460). Gurney Norman reacted to this passage as follows:

That's totally fair. Think of a Native American novelist like Scott Momaday. He's perfectly free to say that "I drove back onto the reservation and in every doorway there was a drunk, mean, violent Indian. My people." He's free to say that. Black people use the word "nigger" all the time. And it's legitimate. It's within the culture. It's what people do. It's in the social competition of the mainstream that more tender sensibilities exist. That same set of words could be used to exploit you.

Abbey tried to rediscover his Appalachian roots by buying land at Pack Creek, Utah, and elsewhere in the West, and he had a cabin built, behind his home just outside of Tucson, in which he did all of the most important writing of his later years and in which he chose to die. In The Poetics of Appalachian Space, Lanier Parks emphasizes the Appalachian cabin as a key to Appalachian identity. 64 Reviewing the history of his native region in Appalachian Wilderness, Abbey stressed that "each householder built his own home.... Such cabins, when properly built, would last for a century" (75). He disclaimed the "immobilized mobile homes" that he saw people living in in Indiana County during his visits back home. Hayduke exclaims in The Monkey Wrench Gang, "Let them build houses that will last a while, say for a hundred years, like my great-granpappy's cabin back in Pennsylvania." (210). Indeed, Bill Abbey hypothesizes that his brother may have named Hayduke partly after the Duke family of Home. There is one actual "Hayduke" in the Pittsburgh telephone directory, and several people in Western Pennsylvania with the name "Hayduke."

This article has only scratched the surfaces of the deep, extensive roots of Edward Abbey's life and works in Western Pennsylvania. And we have only begun to appreciate Abbey as an important writer and thinker. He had a great sense of humor; the comic vein in his writing endears him to me. But Abbey was also the author of a master's thesis on philosophical anarchism, and he was dead serious in his life and writings.
about defending the wilderness. “Keep it like it was,” he wrote in *The Journey Home* (145) — encapsulating both his comic and serious sides, as he often did, in a single pithy statement. Clarity is one of the strongest, best qualities of his writing, which has gathered quite a following of readers and admirers throughout the West and around the world. Here in Western Pennsylvania, it’s time for more people to read Abbey’s books, recognize his achievement, and understand and take pride in how thoroughly rooted he was in his native region. In the process, we can learn much about ourselves, as residents of Appalachia (rather than just Pennsylvania) who are connected to the rest of the world — especially the natural world.

Notes
(Numbers 1:30 followed Part I in the Fall 1996 issue.)


33 My thanks go to Ivan McGee, executive director of the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County and a contemporary of Abbey at Marion Center High School, for lending me these two articles.


35 Wagon Track West was advertised in the 29 Sept. 1943 issue of the High Arrow on p. 4; Frontier Badmen, 10 Nov. 1943, 6; Ride, Tenderfoot, Ride, 17 Nov. 1943, 4; Canyon City, 12 Jan. 1944, 4; Call of the Rockies, 22 Nov. 1944, 4; Light of Santa Fe, 20 Dec. 1944, 3; and Sage Brush Heroes, 28 March 1945, 4. I am grateful to Darlene Marco, Indiana Senior High School librarian, for making back issues of the High Arrow available to me.


37 Abbey, lecture at the University of Montana, 1 May 1985, Abbey collection, University of Arizona Special Collections, Tucson, box 27, tape 6. I am grateful to Clarke Cartwright Abbey for her permission to study, copy, and quote from the Abbey collection, and also to Roger Myers, Peter Steere, and their assistants in the Special Collections Department of the University of Arizona Library for all of their invaluable and copious assistance.


40 Abbey, lecture at IUP 9 Dec 1976, Abbey collection, box 8, folder 2.

41 “Abbey Walks 8,000 Miles By Adroit Use of Thumb,” *High Arrow*, 8 Nov. 1944, 4.

42 “Abbey Finally Arrives Home,” *High Arrow*, 10 May 1945, 3. The other articles in this *High Arrow* series were “Ambitious Aching Arm Aids Abbey’s Ambusculation,” 22 Nov. 1944, 2; “Vagabond Lover Has Drink With Governor,” 20 Dec. 1944, 2; “Cougar Toys With Gastronomic Picture of Footstool Ed Abbey,” 28 March 1945, 2; “Abbey Hitch-Hikes to Jail After Viewing Blue Pacific,” 11 April 1945, 3; and “Abbey On Last Lap Towards Home,” 25 April 1945, 2, 4.


44 My thanks go to Evelyn Booth, secretary at the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, and a contemporary of Abbey at Indiana High School, for locating and copying this item for me.


48 Abbey collection, box 15, folder 1, 880. Bill Abbey reports (in a letter to me of 19 April 1996) that the use of the name “Tait” was his brother’s disguised tribute to Chuck Streams, son of Tait Streams, the Abbeys’ next-door neighbors when they lived in Home. A great athlete and a couple of years older than Ed, Chuck Streams was killed in pilot-training in Texas at the end of World War II, shaking up the Abbeys and the whole town of Home. The “best player and one genuine athlete” on Henry Lightcap’s baseball team is Chuck Tait (Fool’s Progress, 86).

49 Abbey was one of the four IUP alumni ambassadors honored in April 1983; the Gazette did run a front-page photo on April 29 with the caption “IUP Ambassador — Writer Edward Abbey, back at IUP to be designated an IUP Alumni Association Ambassador this weekend is shown reading some of his materials and talking to a group of students last evening in Pratt Hall.” (“IUP Ambassador,” *Indiana Gazette*, 29 April 1983, 1) But then he got lost in front-page coverage of “Stewart/Indiana Delegation at Statue Unveiling,” *Indiana Gazette*, 2 May 1983, 1; one has to turn to p. 15 of that issue to find passing mention of Abbey’s honor, and even there Abbey is merely listed among 14 other IUP students, as a “distinguished author” (“Outstanding Alumni, Two Seniors Honored at IUP Alumni Weekend,” *Indiana Gazette*, 2 May 1983, 15, 26). Abbey got one phrase about his visit; Stewart, most of the front page, before his visit had even occurred. The Gazette then devoted almost daily coverage to Stewart from May 12 through his visit on May 20, including a full-page spread on a Stewart film festival (“Relive Jimmy’s Classic Movie Career at Film Festival,” *Indiana Gazette*, 16 May 1983, 14) and a 40-page insert on May 19 dedicated to his whole life (“It’s a Wonderful Life,” *Indiana Gazette*, 19 May 1983, insert 1-40). After all the fuss over Stewart finally began to quiet down, the Gazette did finally run three belated articles in the following month: “Faculty Names Abbey Alumni Ambassador” (10) on 14 June and, on 18 June 1983, “Edward Abbey Returns Home” and “Paul and Mildred Keep Up the Pace” (n.p.).


51 Interview with Eric Temple, April 1992. I am grateful to Mr. Temple for sending me a copy of this interview and the others cited below. His videos, Edward Abbey: A Voice in the Wilderness (1993), is an excellent resource and is available from Back of Beyond Bookstore in Moab, Utah, whose manager, José Knighten, has also been very helpful.

52 Temple interview, April 1992.


54 See my article, “Edward Abbey, Appalachian Easterner,” in Western American Literature 31.3 (Nov. 1996), 237-61, in which I examine Abbey’s writing in more detail.


56 Abbey, Black Sun (1971; Santa Barbara, 1990), 60.


THE WOLVERINE SUPPLY and Manufacturing Co. metal refrigerator (c. 1947; 13.5 inches tall, 8" wide, 5.25" deep) came fully stocked with plastic food for the holidays when the Historical Society acquired it for its museum collection. For more than a half-century, beginning in 1903, Wolverine made toys in Pittsburgh at its factory on Western Avenue near present-day Three Rivers Stadium. The company left town for Arkansas in 1970. Named for the city in Michigan where the company founder grew up, Wolverine manufactured a line of “Sandy Andy” beach toys, transportation toys such as tanks and tractor-trailers, and a range of appliances. (The Historical Society also has a Wolverine Panama Pile Driver and a stove from the 1950s.)

By continually adding to its toy collection, the Society can infuse some variety into its annual “Toy Bop” exhibition. This year’s edition continues through January 5, 1997. — By Curator Anne Madarasz. Photograph by Curatorial Assistant Jen Smith.