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Growing Up Appalachian: In the Van Camp Community of Wetzel County, West Virginia

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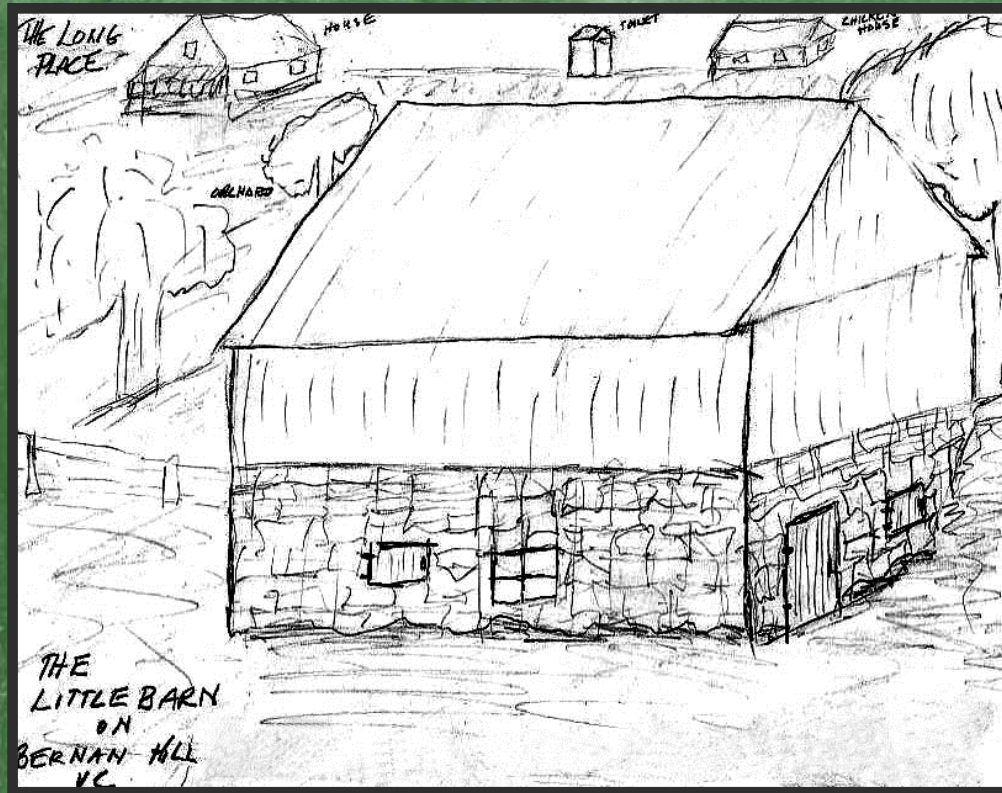
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Growing Up Appalachian

In the Van Camp Community
Of Wetzel County, West Virginia

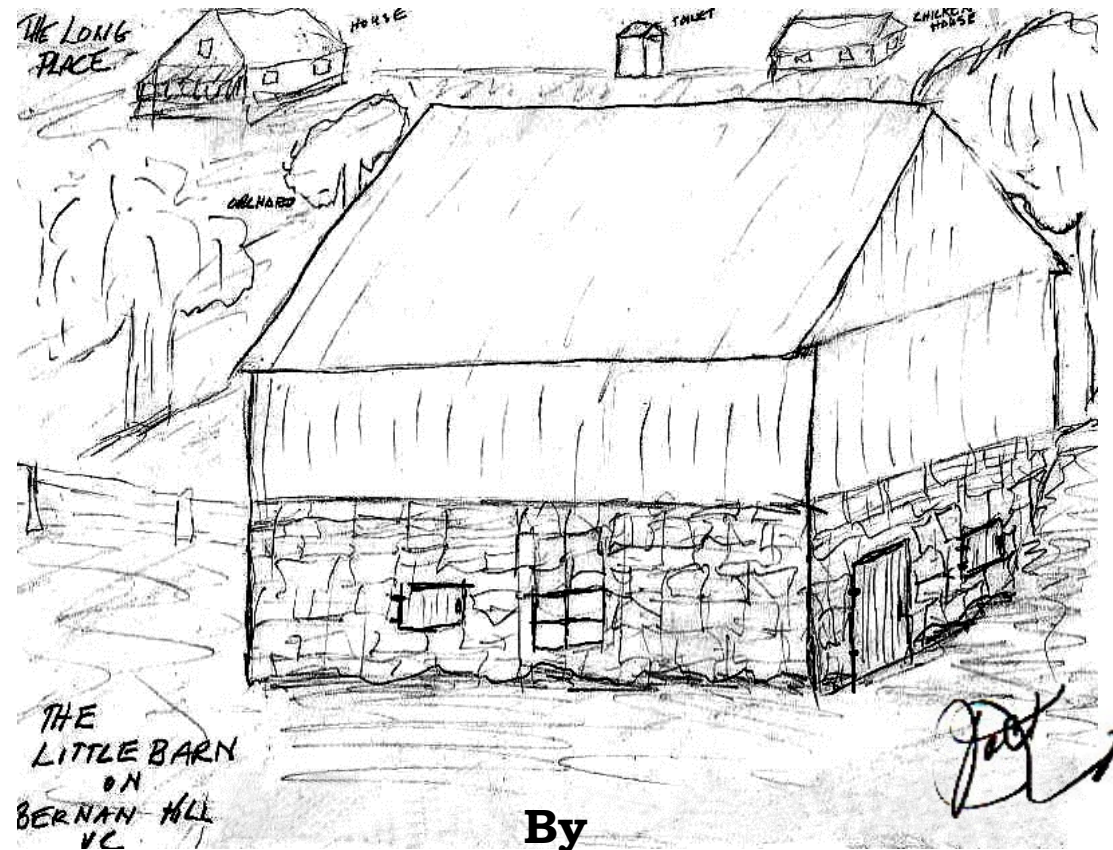


By

Jack Wayne Furbee

Growing Up Appalachian

In the Van Camp Community
Of Wetzel County, West Virginia



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2012

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Growing Up Appalachian

In the Van Camp Community Of Wetzel County, West Virginia

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A Series of Stories, Sketches and Photographs

Original Sketches by Jack W. Furbee

By
Jack Wayne Furbee
2012

About the cover

ON AUGUST 28, 2011, the cover picture was taken, the day Hurricane Irene blew over the Bernan Hill in the Van Camp Community of Wetzel County, West Virginia. Fortunately the picture captured the setting of the stories in *Growing Up Appalachian*. One can see the Long farm on the Bernan Hill as well as the Furbee farm over the hill in Pleasant Valley in the Van Camp Community where the Van Camp school, church, and post office/store once stood. The larger historical Van Camp Community extended to the right and left of this picture south into Tyler County, north toward New Martinsville, and west on Paden Fork into Paden City, West Virginia. ■

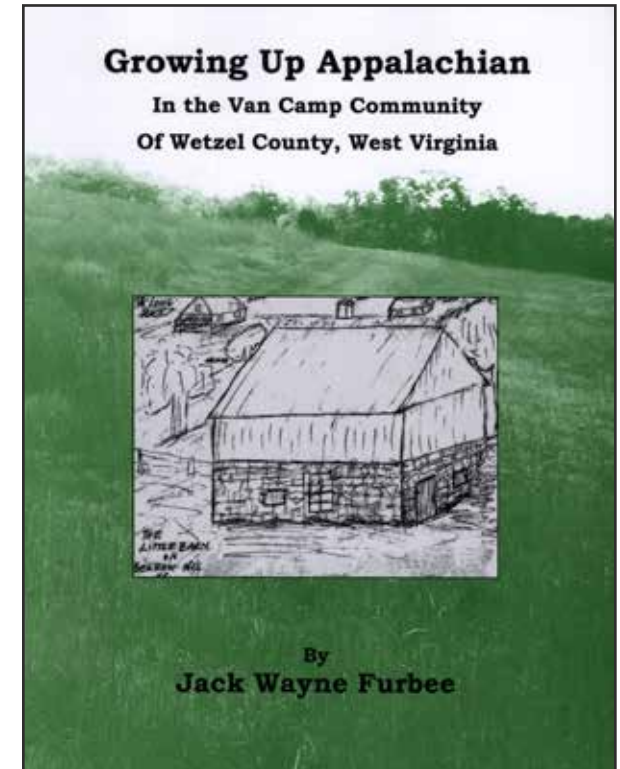


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Forward

It has been a genuine treat to be involved in this project with my newfound high school classmate, Dr. Jack W. Furbee, MHS Class of 1952. I knew Jack casually when we were students at Magnolia High in New Martinsville, W. Va. in the 1940's from where I graduated and left New Martinsville in the fall of 1949. Jack was there for a couple more years until he graduated and **"crossed the bridge to somewhere"** as he describes it so well in his story about that day he went out into the world from his childhood home. We both had that

experience; just at different times and from different locations, but the effect is the same. All high school students have that experience, and it is a different experience for each in his own way, but only in the specifics and details. The sense of accomplishment and pride of having graduated is a shared experience as is the feeling of actually being alone on the "other side of the bridge" with some measure of fright and wonderment. The world beckoned — it was time to leave the nest.

Our paths didn't cross for well over fifty years until we both became members of the "Magnolia High Classmates and Friends" website in about 2005. This website explores the memories of our days attending class at MHS and living in Wetzel County and New Martinsville.

Jack had been a website member for a short time when I joined. The website had been established by another even younger classmate, Vicki Riggensbach

Reed, MHS Class of 1964. As I recall Jack had started to write feature stories for the website, and Vicki had asked me to also write about some of my memories of the days at MHS. It soon became my unofficial responsibility to be sort of website editor and one of the administrators, so I became involved with Jack and other classmates to see that their stories got properly posted to the website. I immediately learned to appreciate Jack's talent as a writer. His stories of events in his life and about people he knew and loved are easy to read and appreciate. They often ring a bell for the reader, and one can relate to similar circumstances and events in their lives. This makes it easy to realize that we all had many similar events in our lives even though we grew up under different circumstances.

Looking back on those times, Jack was one of the "bus kids" and I was a "town kid". After the shared experience of compiling this book of Jack's stories

Forward, continued

of his growing up days in the Van Camp Community of southwestern Wetzel County, I am convinced that the perceived differences between “bus kids” and “town kids” was only one of circumstance and location. We shared the same growing up problems — relationships with parents and friends and finding our place in the social structure. The actual problems were the same, but we had to approach them from a different angle and from the environment in which we were raised and lived at that time.

Our relationship and friendship has grown over the few years we have collaborated in presenting stories of our memories for the website. In mid October 2006 we were able to spend a couple of days together in New Martinsville with an afternoon exploring the Van Camp area. In time we realized the stories Jack was generating were an historical picture of those times in the 1930’s and 1940’s, and they needed to be recorded and

preserved in a more lasting and complete compilation. Jack has composed numerous short stories telling of the details of his life on the farms — first on the Bernan hill, and later when the family moved off the hilltop to live in Pleasant Valley along the banks of Pleasant Creek. His artistic skill in making numerous sketches when photographs were not available adds an important dimension to these stories. So this compilation is a rather complete record of life on small farms in Wetzel County West Virginia, in the Van Camp Community where Jack got his growing up education in the classrooms of MHS and at home where he was deeply involved with the farm life.

The material in the book is arranged as a more or less chronology of Jack’s life after an introductory section explaining the history of the Van Camp Community. Each segment of Jack’s life is defined by the place where he lived at the time. First there was young life on the Bernan Hill,

then later the family moved off the hill and lived nearby in Pleasant Valley when Jack was in high school. The stories conclude at the time Jack went out into the world by **“crossing over the bridge”** literally in front of his Pleasant Valley home.

It has been a wonderful learning experience for me to have been involved in helping with the arrangement of the material for this work. Thanks Jack for allowing me to be part of this effort which I have enjoyed on an almost daily basis for the past months. It has been a fun project, and I hope your readers will enjoy these stories as I have. Through your written word I feel as though I have experienced life on Bernan Hill, Pleasant Valley, and Van Camp if only in a small measure.

SAM MCCOLLOCH

MHS CLASS OF 1949

SEPTEMBER 2011

Acknowledgments

My appreciation for contributions to my childhood memories goes first to all those never-to-be-forgotten dear loved ones and friends who have passed from the scene.

Second, my wife Donna has tolerated a living room full of my childhood things for months. She will be glad to get her living room back. Indeed, Donna has been my faithful helper. During editing, she

backed up the process with her skill at finding errors which I frequently missed. Thus I was fortunate to have an indispensable double edit. Her persistence kept me on task.

Third, in every project such as this there is someone without whom it would not have been possible. This indispensable person in my project is Sam McColloch whom I met while contributing to the Magnolia Friends Website. His steady hand and analytical thinking in editing, formatting and compiling was the project's compass. Herewith, I want to thank Sam for his integrity and patience. Whatever success this project genders, Sam deserves much of the credit.

Fourth, Magnolia Friends Website members of Magnolia High School in New Martinsville, West Virginia, encouraged

me in their written replies and responses whenever my stories were posted on the website. My thanks go out to those classmates from long ago. Their contributions are an important part of this compilation. They and many others encouraged me to write my stories about Van Camp, a part of Wetzel County West Virginia.

Van Camp, West Virginia, is the setting of my childhood memories. Special appreciation is extended to all past and present residents and friends of Van Camp. If I have presented anything or anyone inaccurately, I apologize. I encourage further research into Van Camp and other vanishing communities of our country.

DR. JACK W. FURBEE

Introduction with Van Camp map

Only about three miles south from the lovely Wetzel County Courthouse on Routes 2 and 180 is an almost forgotten community called Van Camp. In the nineteenth century, it flourished with a post office, store, church with cemetery, and school. My good fortune was to be born on the Bernan Hill amid the Van Camp lure so often expressed by my parents and grandparents. The hills of Van Camp were high and steep; the valleys were peaceful and inviting. Come with me into those “thrilling days of yesteryear” and enjoy your time in Van Camp.

JACK FURBEE



MAP OF THE VAN CAMP AREA

Van Camp of my childhood beginning in 1934 covered an area south from Cider Run along Point Pleasant Creek and Old Route 18 into Tyler County

and west along Paden Fork. My earliest childhood was spent on the Furbee farm, where I was born, and Long farm on the Bernan Hill. Here were the settings of stories which referred to the Big Barn on

Introduction with Van Camp map, continued

the ridge above the Long farm and the Little Barn below. It was in the Lowgap between the Knob and the Big Barn that I found the bluebird nest in an old locust post. The series of stories including my many “rides” took place on the Long farm. Farther below the Little Barn was the Point to which I referred often in the stories as a steep hill, the main access to the Long place.

From the west, Fouch Hollow and Whiskey Run flowed at the base of Bernan Hill emptying into Point Pleasant Creek. Where Fouch Hollow joined Point Pleasant Creek was the site of the John Marshall Van Camp home where my Grandmother Euna Brady Van Camp Long was born and raised. At the junction of these two streams on the east side of Point Pleasant Creek was the location of the Van Camp Methodist Episcopal Church and Cemetery; slightly north was the Van Camp School. Many stories about the history of Van Camp

had their settings here. The West Virginia Historical Marker for Van Camp was erected in this area.

Where Whiskey Run flowed into Point Pleasant Creek was the old Coy Van Camp farm to which my family moved from the Bernan Hill in 1944 after Meekers sold to them. Stories about the bridge, swimming hole, butchering, sledding, and skating in winter had their settings in this part of Van Camp. Many stories about farming took place on the Furbee farm including haying and gardening.

Slightly north of the Furbee farm was Snake Den where I spent the night with the Wayts family. Billy Wayts, my childhood friend, lived up Snake Den with his parents Clark and Anna. Somewhat hesitantly, I told the story of Billy’s riding over the edge of the Furbee bridge which crossed Point Pleasant Creek. One passed the Rolly James Van Camp place on ones way to Snake Den.

Route 18 was not so designated in

my childhood; it was simply RFD#1 to us. Point Pleasant Creek was not only a stream but also a road in early Van Camp history. The Van Camp Post Office and Store was south of the Van Camp Church on the same side of the creek.

May I please emphasize that the map indicated Van Camp scenes of my childhood, not the entire Van Camp Community which extended well north toward New Martinsville and south toward Middlebourne and Paden City, West Virginia.

Before the Civil War, Van Camp was part of Tyler County. When Wetzel County was formed in 1838 the community was somewhat divided, part in southern Wetzel and part in northern Tyler counties. Another historical note was that Van Camp was once Van Camp, Virginia, before West Virginia was formed in 1863. ■

Introduction by the Author, Jack W. Furbee



Jack Furbee as an infant in Wetzel County, West Virginia, 1934

A Van Camp Childhood

Indigenous Jack

What a pleasure to tell the story of my life in the Van Camp Community on Bernan Hill! What a tremendous place to start a life and to start a story! Bernan Hill was nestled on a hilltop about two miles east of the Ohio River as the “crow flies.” My birthplace was in a four room Appalachian farm house of my fraternal grandparents at the end of a steep country road, an extension of the appropriately named Whiskey Run Road. From there my parents moved to the Long place, my mother’s home, on the same hill. Both places were about three miles from New Martinsville, a river town dating into the early 1800’s. Here I spent the first years of my childhood enjoying the serenity of the

Introduction by the Author, Jack W. Furbee, continued

Van Camp Community, part of Pleasant Valley which ran from the top of the New Martinsville Hill along Point Pleasant Creek into Tyler County. Actually the road of my greatest familiarity started at the bottom of the New Martinsville Hill on Route 2 at the north winding up the hill and south along Point Pleasant Creek into the Van Camp Community joined by smaller streams like Cider Run, Snake Den Run, Whiskey Run, Fouch Hollow, Paden Fork Creek, and Buck Run. These streams flowed from the surrounding hollows into the creek of my childhood, Point Pleasant, which flowed into the Middle Island Creek and eventually into the Ohio River.

The picture above was the most accurate expression of my happiness in this small part of the world, Wetzel County West Virginia. From these early 1934–1935 days I wanted to express my delight at living in an area settled by the family called Van Camp. My roots grew deeply

and profusely into the soil of the hills and valleys of that pioneer area of western Virginia called West Virginia in 1863. What a pleasant place it was as my Van Camp ancestors so designated, Pleasant Valley and Point Pleasant Creek!

I wanted to tell the story of my birth and childhood in this unique setting. Readers would soon discover all the ridges, valleys, fields, buildings, fences, and creeks. Everything made my life a delightful experience. Child development was rich with learning experiences in an environment nature made especially for me! I was surrounded by adults who allowed me to roam freely knowing nature would care for me as I learned about my special part of the world. Although my family moved from the Bernan Hill to the Coy Van Camp farm along Point Pleasant Creek when I was eight years old, I was still even more indigenous to the Van Camp Community learning more and more about it every

day. Soon it came time to move on into life. Employment caused my parents to move to an area of West Virginia not far from Pittsburgh where my father followed his pottery work.

Although my family moved, my heart was still attached firmly to the beloved area of my childhood. I became a perpetual advocate of Van Camp, West Virginia as I followed my career in Ohio, Illinois, and Florida. My wife and children soon learned of Van Camp's special attraction. I was a stranger and sojourner elsewhere. Although only a vague remnant of the old community, the Van Camp Cemetery, remained at this writing, I returned often to tell present day residents about the Van Camp history of the lovely area where they now lived.

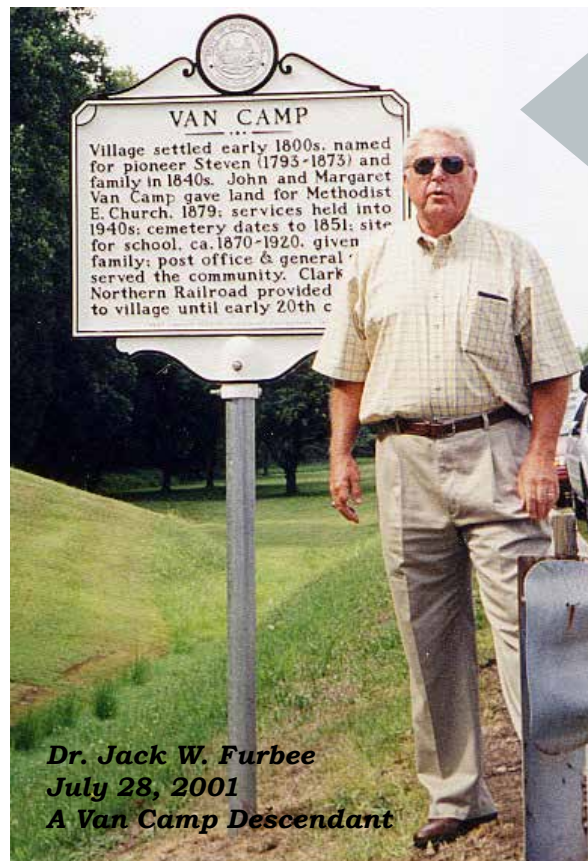
Please accept my apology for repetition since it was a part of my recall. Every memory elicited a common body of facts. When memories were repeated, it simply showed my age and my fondness for the material. ■

Van Camp: Past, Present, and Future

The Gathering near the Van Camp Historical Marker

The morning of July 28, 2001, dawned seasonally bright and warm as it may have for the first Van Camp to view Pleasant Valley. It was part of Virginia then. Pioneers claimed their land beginning at the Ohio River and extending east into what would become Wetzel County West Virginia, in 1846. As handed down by generations of Pleasant Valley farmers, an early Van Camp settler claimed his one thousand acres in the late 1700's.

During my childhood I roamed the fields, hills, and streams of Pleasant Valley and Point Pleasant Creek between Paden Fork and Cider Run. Here was where my maternal ancestors established themselves as farmers and



shepherders clearing the land for grazing and cultivation.

Although the Van Camp Community was designated on county maps, it was fast disappearing with the construction of Route 180 and many beautiful new

HISTORICAL MARKER:

VAN CAMP

Village settled early 1800s, named for pioneer Steven (1793-1829) and family in 1840s. John and Margaret Van Camp gave land for Methodist E. Church, 1879; services held into 1940s; cemetery dates to 1851; site for school, ca. 1870-1920 given by family; post office & general store served the community. Clarksburg Northern Railroad provided access to the village until early 20th century.

homes where fields of grain and hill-side pasture had been. As a Van Camp descendant, I approached Governor Cecil Underwood by letter about erecting a historical marker for this pioneer community. The governor was raised

Van Camp: Past, Present, and Future, continued

in neighboring Tyler County. My correspondence was referred to the proper office which informed me of the need for research evidence of the Van Camp Community. Over the months and years it was a “labor of love” to provide the history needed. West Virginia and Wetzel County records yielded the required data for my research. Previously a part of Tyler County Virginia, Van Camp was an early post office in Wetzel County formed in 1846. An early photograph of the post office showed a rather commodious white edifice of two stories with front porches for each level. A general store occupied part of the building. The Van Camp Post Office/General Store was located near the intersections of Paden Fork and the present Route 180 serving the people of Pleasant Valley and Paden Fork in the 1800’s.



The Van Camp Post Office and General Store
(No longer standing)

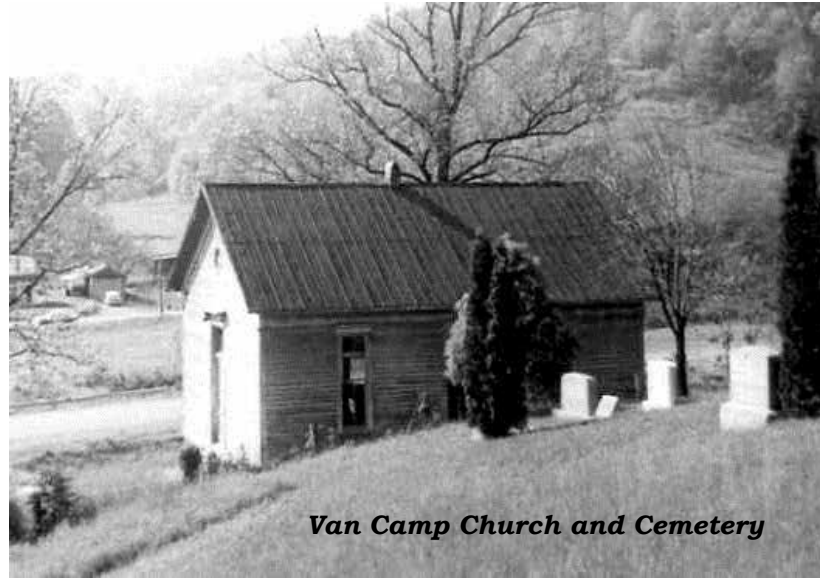
*In the above picture are neighbors from the Van Camp Community
in approximately 1888 including the familiar last names:*

*Dennis, Detrich, Givens, Grimes, Snodgrass, Stewart,
Van Camp, Watkins, and Workman.*

Van Camp School, Church, and Cemetery

My mother and grandmother told stories of Van Camp school days. Wetzel County records showed land deeded by Van Camps for school purposes as well as the names of trustees of the school. The one room Van Camp School stood about one third of a mile from Paden Fork as one travels toward New Martinsville on Route 180. While roaring with laughter, my great uncles told of pranks played on school-teachers such as “dunking” in the adjacent Point Pleasant Creek.

Grandmother Van Camp Long, an excellent speller and an artist at penmanship, learned her skills in the Van Camp School. I tested her many



times on difficult words which she spelled by “parsing” or breaking them into syllables and spelling each syllable before spelling and pronouncing the entire word. Thus the Van Camps of the early 1870s erected a place where their children could become good citizens by learning the 3-R’s.

Church for the early Van Camps was held in their homes. “Protracted” meetings were held to spread their faith in the community. Eventually, Van Camp

Church became part of the Methodist Episcopal circuit from Paden City. Many stories of their ardent, demonstrative faith and worship were part of my childhood oral tradition.

After worshipping in homes during the nineteenth century, the community built a church in

1901 midway between the post office/general store and the school with about a mile separating each. Records of the United Methodist Church at its district center in Buckhannon documented the history of the Van Camp Methodist Episcopal Church.

The only visible remnant of Van Camp is the beautiful cemetery covering a knoll just above where the church stood. A large, historic hickory tree, which could testify to the entire Van Camp history,

Van Camp: Past, Present, and Future, continued

still stands just below the church and cemetery. County records and genealogical studies show burial sites of many early Van Camps as well as other community people in the Van Camp Cemetery. Just below the cemetery and church location, my family, Van Camp descendants, and friends gathered to

dedicate the Van Camp, West Virginia, Historical Marker. On that July morning in 2001 my mind returned to a simpler time when my forebearers carved out a community in their new country, America. Impressed by the beauty of the marker, I briefly reviewed Van Camp history; prayer concluded our brief

dedication. Now my “beloved Van Camp” is adequately marked so present and future travelers of Route 180 as well as Van Camp residents will know their community has an impressive history. They can be proud of their Van Camp past as they advance into its future. ■



The Van Camp Cemetery Today

The church was located on the flattened area to the left side of the photograph beside the fence.

Five veterans of the Civil War are buried in this cemetery:

***Bradford F. Long
Melvin Van Camp
John Marshall Van Camp
Franklin Van Camp
David Crockett Shepherd***