John Henry
The Legend Lives On

STACY FORD
WV State University Extension
Talcott, WV

- Located in Summers County
- Population of SC around 12,900
- Talcott is an unincorporated community with around 600 people
Expansion of the C &O Line

• After the Civil War Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Railroad Expansion formed and began working on the expansion

• After merging with Virginia Central Railway Co. The new C&O; interested millionaire Collis P. Huntington in the project. With his financial backing, construction resumed in 1869.

• During construction of the railroad the C&O; used laborers, wielding picks and shovels.

• Many workers were newly freed black slaves or immigrants

• The Big Bend is the curve of the Greenbrier River which literally bends to get around the Big Bend Mountain.

• Had the C&O; followed this river bend, it would have involved an additional eight-mile section of railway. Management avoided this lengthy curve by tunneling through the mountain.
Construction of the Great Bend Tunnel

- Tunnel construction began in 1870
- It was a difficult undertaking. The mountain, composed of hard, faulted shale, resisted drilling and crumbling into pieces when exposed to the air.
- Cutting the Great Bend Tunnel through the Big Bend Mountain proved one of the most difficult projects.
- In 1872, the first train passed through the tunnel.
• Workers faced horrible working conditions
• Reports indicate over 1000 men died during construction
• Using hand tools and explosives, with horses and mules helping with the heaviest loads, these men literally carved the pathway for the railroad through the rugged mountains by hand.

• Work continued until 1873 & in February of 1873, the first through freight train passed through the tunnel.
• When completed, it was the longest tunnel on the C&O mainline. The tunnel is about 1.5 miles long
The Steel Driver

John Henry was the working man's champion in a contest to defend the pride and livelihood of his co-workers as they faced the threat of competition from machines at their work.

The C & O in an effort to save time and money brought in a steam powered drilling machines to replace the human drilling teams- Burleigh Steam Drill

The railroad staged a contest at the Great Bend Tunnel. Chosen for their skill and speed to compete against the machine, John Henry and his shaker (history does not record his name, although legend sometimes calls him "Little Bill") faced off side by side with the steam drill and won, drilling farther and faster
The Legend Lives On

• Celebrating John Henry
  • Unknown workers who died during construction
  • Everyday struggle of working man
  • Strength and determination
  • Immigrants workers and ex slaves who helped build our area
John Henry Park
• 1960’s-Hilldale-Talcott Ruritan Club
• 1972-Statue was erected
• Land leased from CSX
John Henry Arrives
Dream Continues

- 1990’s-committee began trying to develop park idea
- 2004-Partnership with Summers County Commission. Purchased 21 acres from CSX
- 2005-plans began, engineering firm began drawings
John Henry Work

- Workers and Volunteers grow tired
- Excitement wears down
- Project gets new volunteers and life after purchase in about 2013
Statue is Restored and Relocated
John Henry Returns & Work Continues
Partnerships Formed

• Local University-trail maps
• WVU Extension Economic Development Agent-Rick Moorefield-Steering Committee
• National Coal Heritage Authority
• Boy Scouts
• National Park Service
• Retired volunteers
• Local Historians
Park starts looking like a park
Work Continues with local donations
Using Local Resources
Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
When the dream becomes “REAL”

- Volunteers grow old
- Trails have to be maintained
- Park upkeep and maintenance
- Bathrooms are constructed
- Small County=small staff, small budget
- Day to day operations
- Not everyone shares the same dream
John Henry Museum

- Started off in small room in a local store with mainly some framed pictures and a few magazines
- Grew to separate location
- 2013-JH Historical Society was gifted a building built in 1907
- Community members and JH Historical Society restored first floor of building
- Opened in May of 2013
2013-Just the building
Making Progress
Looking more like an actual Museum
Working with what you have
Partnerships and very little resources

**Partnerships**
- WV State University Communication Department
- National Coal Heritage Area
- Culture and History
- Preservation WV
- Retired English teacher
- C&O Historical Society
- Authors
- Local artist

**Making it work**
- Museum more than just John Henry-working conditions
- Local history
  - History of building, store, Masonic Temple
- Railroad history
- Local oral history
- Greenbrier River
- Depend on gift shop to operate
Simple displays can work too
So you have a building..........

• Volunteers are not always dependable
• Go to person
• Who makes the decision about building
• Heating?
• Building maintenance and expenses
  • Upkeep
  • Utilities
  • Insurance
  • Taxes
Lessons learned from Museum

• Verbal agreements-don’t do it
• Volunteers are not always dependable
• Staffing
• Don’t just have one story teller or advocate
• Who’s in charge of museum operations
• Establish donation criteria and form immediately
• Connect with younger generation
• Try and use history departments if available
• Americorps are great in theory
John Henry Days

• 1996 postage stamp ceremony
• Small festival has now grown to 3 day festival
• Celebrating 22 years!
• Free events
• Talcott celebrates and is a “homecoming” for those who have moved away
• Great way to pull in local volunteers
**John Henry Days**

**FRIDAY, JULY 7**
1:00 pm - GRAND OPENING & RIBBON CUTTING of the John Henry Historical Park at the Great Bend Tunnel
7:00 pm - LIVE MUSIC & FOOD VENDORS at the tunnel featuring MICHAEL CHRISTOPHER

**PLEASE PLAN TO VISIT THE JOHN HENRY MUSEUM & GIFT SHOP**
25 Pat Ball Road, Talbot
Friday 11 am - 4 pm
Saturday 8 am - 4 pm
Sunday 11 am - 4 pm
John Henry Exhibits, Rubber Duck Tickets, T-shirts, John Henry Memorabilia, WV Arts and Crafts, etc.

**SATURDAY, JULY 8**
7:30-10:00 am - BREAKFAST at Trinity United Methodist Church
8:00 am - 4 MILE RUN-WWW.runwiretire.com/john-henrydays-4-mile-run-4-mile-run-walk-tickets-
3000FUNDRAISER - Registration at Scott Bridge @ 7am
3 MILE RUN WALK - Immediately after run starts
8:00 am - CRAFT & FOOD VENDORS throughout Talbot
11:00 am - GRAND PARADE - 2017 Parade Marshall Larry and Dolores Meehan
1:00 pm - Trophies will be awarded at the Post Office
5:00 pm - GUTLAW CORNHOLE TOURNAMENT at Great Bend Tunnel. Registration @ 4:30 pm
$20 per team. Music by DJ RON GORE
7:00 pm - LIVE MUSIC at tunnel featuring GLEN SHELTON

**INTERMISSION ENTERTAINMENT**
Blue Ridge Dance featuring Blue Ridge Mountain Singers & Back Porch Singers
Bring a lawn chair & enjoy the evening
Entertainment is FREE-Donations Appreciated!
3:00 pm FIREWORKS following the band
**NO ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES**
Schedule of Events Sponsored by:
J.L. Masse Insurance Agency, Inc. Hinton, WV
P.T. Rogers Oil Company, Inc. Hinton, WV

**SUNDAY, JULY 9**
9:30 am - CHURCH AT THE TUNNEL with Rev. Bryan Copey. Bring a lawn chair. In case of rain, church service will be held at Trinity Methodist Church.
11:00 am - 4 pm - CRAFT AND FOOD VENDORS at John Henry Park and throughout Talbot
12:00-6:00 pm - CAR SHOW at John Henry Park. Registration will begin at 11:00 am following church service. Music by DJ RON GORE
**No entrance or car show registration during church service (10:00 - 10:30 am)**

**SUNDAY, JULY 16**
4:00 pm - RUBBER DUCK RACE at Talbot Bridge.

**SAVE THE DATES:**
John Henry Days 2018
July 13, 14, & 15
Festivals are Fun........

- Outdoor festivals - weather depending
- Back up plans
- A lot of fundraising and begging
- Expensive
  - Insurance
  - Fireworks
  - Emergency Staff
- Planning year round

- You can’t fire volunteers
- Advertising
- Can’t please everyone
- Parking
- Letting new volunteers in
- Never enough volunteers

- You hear lots of laughs and see lots of smiles!!!
This is what’s it all about
Questions?