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**CONTACT: Nancy Bickerstaff, president
Woodlawn Board of Directors
(304) 612-6452**

Woodlawn to dedicate Mine Disaster Memorial and host Book Signing on September 3rd.

Woodlawn Cemetery Board of Directors will dedicate a monument marking the graves of Fairmont miners killed in an 1886 mine disaster at noon on Friday, September 3rd at the cemetery on Maple Avenue.

“We are honoring a family of men who were killed at the Newburg Mine in Preston County,” explained Board president Nancy Bickerstaff. “This was the first major mine disaster in our state, and we discovered that six men from Fairmont were among the victims,” she stated. The grave had been unmarked for 135 years.

The Newburg Mine Disaster on January 21, 1886, resulting in the death of 39 men and boys at the mine operated by the Orrel Coal Company. The event drew national attention from the newspapers at the time. Six of those miners were all buried at Woodlawn Cemetery on January 29, 1886, following a large turnout for their burial by Fairmont citizens. They were all from a family that came to Fairmont around 1881 from Durham County, England. The men had only been working there for three months.

The victims included Richard Birtley, aged 52, his son Nicholas, and three stepson, Joseph, Harry and Thomas Guy. The seventh victim was John Byer, Jr., who was married to Birtley’s stepdaughter. Orrel Coal bought six lots at Woodlawn, which had only been serving as a cemetery for 10 years at the time. Most likely the company decided that Fairmont had been their home longer than Newburg and arrangements were made. However no funds for a marker were provided.

For the widows, it was a tremendous loss. Richard had a wife Mary and three small children. Nicholas, his son, was only 15 years old. Harry Guy, 29, had a wife and child in England. Joseph Guy was 25 years old. His wife told reporters that the women and children had nobody to turn to here, and it was her desire to go back to England. Thomas Guy, another brother, was 19 years old and unmarried. John Byer, Jr. was 24. It is not known what became of their families though a relief fund was established based on newspaper accounts of the day.

Bickerstaff added that Woodlawn is full of history that should not be forgotten. The board of directors are working hard to preserve that heritage for future generations to discover. "If you haven't visited, come see what we have accomplished in this beautiful memorial park," she added.

Following this dedication, an open house will be held at the Marion County Visitor's Center from 1:00-3:00 p.m. There will be displays about the various historical projects underway at Woodlawn.

Woodlawn published a collection of columns written over a 30-year period by Fairmont Times editor C. E. "Ned" Smith. From 1926 through 1957, Smith wrote hundreds of columns that chronicled history, important events and colorful stories of Fairmont. The book is entitled "Good Morning."

Local historian Dr. Raymond Alvarez selected the columns and designed the publication as part of Woodlawn's preservation efforts.

"This project is relevant because not only does this tell the story of Fairmont, but we wanted to do something to celebrate our town's 200-year history," he said.

Alvarez pointed out that Smith's lineage included early pioneer families such as the Flemings, the Barns and Captain Philip Pindall, a soldier in the French and Indian War. A significant number of burials from this family are located at Woodlawn.

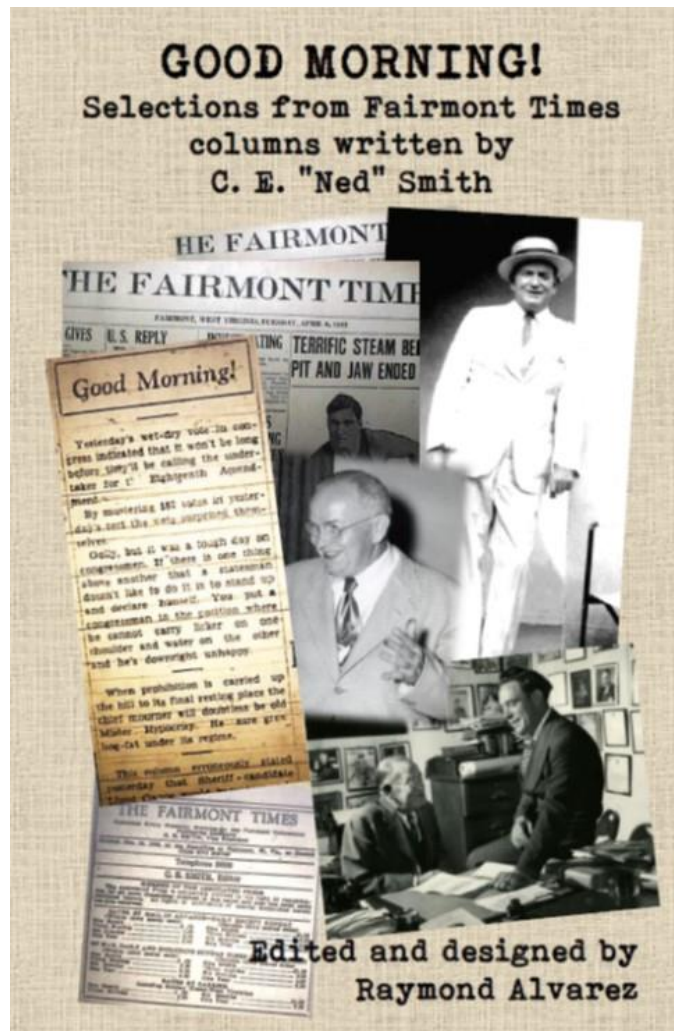
Smith's columns describe the early days of Fairmont, the rise of industrial development, provides an account of the Monongah mine disaster, and much about the WWII era. Mr. Smith's son was killed in March 1945 while commanding an infantry company attempting to secure a bridgehead across the Rhine and was buried at Margraten in the Netherlands. The death of his son was a life-changing event for Mr. Smith and his wife.

Mr. Smith's grandchildren assisted with publication of these columns. His granddaughters Lisa and Ann Rose will be at the Visitor's Center for the reception and book signing. The books are available for \$5.00, and all proceeds go to Woodlawn Cemetery's preservation efforts.

"We invite the community to participate in both events," Bickerstaff added.



Photo of monument is located at the top of the hill in the Historic District.



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“Good Morning” publication photo