

Press Release for Upcoming Book Presentation at Weirton Area Museum & Cultural Center:

On Thursday, April 7 at 6 p.m. at the Weirton Area Museum & Cultural Center, Dr. Lou Martin will be presenting his new history of Hancock County workers titled *Smokestacks in the Hills: Rural-Industrial Workers in West Virginia*.

Martin, a graduate of Oak Glen High School, began the project by interviewing retired steel and pottery workers more than a decade ago. Those interviews along with extensive archival research became his doctoral dissertation at West Virginia University. After earning his Ph.D. in 2008, he turned the dissertation into a book published by the University of Illinois Press.

Martin weaves the narrative of how the relocation of steel and pottery factories to Hancock County, West Virginia, created a rural and small-town working class in the early 1900s—and what that meant for communities and for labor over the twentieth century.

As Martin shows, access to land in and around steel and pottery towns allowed residents to preserve rural habits and culture. Workers in these places valued place and local community. Because of their belief in localism, an individualistic ethic of “making do,” and company loyalty, they often worked to place limits on union influence.

“For my work, I needed to write this book to be acceptable to an academic press,” Martin said, “but I also hope it is enjoyable to a general audience.”

Martin is now an associate professor of history at Chatham University in Pittsburgh and a board member of the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum in Matewan. His mother and stepfather, Jeanne and Bill Barrett, still live in New Manchester, and Martin and his wife Krista live in Daistyown, PA.

