

# A Conversation with Fred Huff

by Mark Hamilton  
March 2010



March 2010, by M. Hamilton

Fred Huff first joined The Ohio Valley Camera Club in 1992, a year noted as historic because of the release of the first internet browser that would display a photograph. In a way, that bit of technological progress marked the beginning of the biggest change that the club would ever see. In fact, these changes and how to handle them are still the basis of many conversations held during meetings and over dinners.

With this interview, we not only discuss these changes but we also learn about Fred and his life, his photography style, a little about a few key members in the history of OVCC, and the important story about how the club came to dissolve and then be reformed again.

Fred is an exceptionally polite member that you can find sitting quietly at most meetings but always willing to help or participate in engaging conversations. Most members, however, have little idea of the many years that Fred has devoted to the club. It's not a stretch at all to say that the OVCC would not exist today without the efforts of Fred Huff. Because of his key role in this part of OVCC history, we'll touch some on what went right or wrong back then, what could have been done differently, and then touch a bit on the possibilities of the future.

Fred served as an officer and Executive Board member for many years now, choosing to step down after the end of 2009. He is an accomplished photographer, having gained Advanced status in Projected Images with his expertise in slide/film photography. Because of all of this, Fred is chosen as the subject of our March Spotlight.

**Mark: Welcome and thank you for devoting time for this interview. Could you briefly tell us a little about your life?**

**Fred:** I was born in Kenova and have lived my entire life in the Huntington area, except for two years active duty with the Navy. Graduated from Buffalo High School (Wayne County) and Marshall University. I am retired after 30+ years with the Corps of Engineers. I have one daughter and a brother who lives in Australia. My father still lives in the house where I grew up.

**Mark: What other hobbies or activities are you interested in?**

**Fred:** I have enjoyed bowling since junior high school days. I play golf most Sunday mornings when the weather permits with three high school friends I have known forever. I have also been involved in ballroom dance since about 1995.

**Mark: Tell us how you became interested in photography.**

**Fred:** I did semi-serious photography while in the Navy. My ship went on a “Med Cruise” in 1969. My parents got me a Kodak Instamatic camera, the kind that used 126 film cartridges. I took a lot of slides while on that cruise. We were overseas from mid-May to mid-December and visited a lot of places; Naples, Malta, Gulf Juan (France), Malaga (Spain), Athens. It was the



Rowboat at Lake Vesuvius, by F. Huff

experience of a lifetime. A former supervisor at the Corps of Engineers got me interested in 35mm around 1980. I dabbled for a while, and then I took a class at the old Cabell County Vocational School in 1982. That’s where I learned to process B&W film and make enlargements in the darkroom. I had a small darkroom at one point, and still have most of the equipment. Unfortunately, my current house does not have a space suitable for a permanent darkroom.

**Mark: Do you have a certain style of photography that you prefer?**

**Fred:** I never thought I had a “style.” After I joined OVCC in 1992, I shot slide film exclusively. Most of my photography fell into the “outdoor/travel” genre. It was and is hard for me to shoot with a theme in mind. I shoot whatever appeals to me from an aesthetic point of view. I’m not comfortable photographing people, but I admire those who do and do it well. I have a written list of photo ideas that have occurred to me over the years. I have even tried a few of them, but have never gotten results that matched my vision.

**Mark:** I agree with you about the difficulty of shooting for themes, it is tough but helps to stretch the mind. Do you have any favorite locations or subject matter to photograph?

**Fred:** I enjoy night photography after a rain, when the wet streets in the city act as a giant reflector. The water bounces the ambient lighting around and opens up the shadows to reveal some great detail in the images. Digital does have an advantage in this genre. Snow scenes in daylight are appealing. I also enjoy scenes in fog, which is low contrast lighting.

I don't have any favorite locations. There are areas I have visited during various weather conditions and at different times of year, but none stands out. My "style" consists of seeing a scene that appeals to me and taking the photo, much like your "photo walks." Advance planning rarely works out for me. Maybe I just don't know how.



Art Deco Marquee, by F. Huff

**Mark:** What artists do you admire and why?

**Fred:** Well, Ansel Adams is obviously first on the list, although I have never been tempted to try large format photography. And I am not inspired to devote as much time to the craft as did Ansel. Wegee was a noted news photographer in New York City. His prints had large amounts of contrast. They told stories about the people in them. *Lenswork* profiles the work of various B&W photographers, both film and digital, some of whose work is really compelling.

**Mark:** Wegee sure had some shocking crime scene photographs; I once read that he slept in his car beside a police radio, that's some dedication. Which photography related magazines or websites do you read?

**Fred:** *Lenswork* is my favorite magazine. I currently subscribe to *Shutterbug* and *Outdoor Photographer*, but I will not renew when they expire. I regularly read Ken Rockwell's website. He uses and reviews digital gear but prefers 4x5 film for his serious photography. He has spent the last few months reviewing film gear, even though all of it is now vintage. He recently stated on his blog that many professional photographers are returning to film.

**Mark: I know you are one of a select few of the members who come from a serious film background. Could you share some of your history in regards to your equipment and film?**

**Fred:** My first 35mm camera was a Pentax K1000 with a 50mm f2.0 normal lens. I still have it, but the hot shoe is loose and I'm not sure about the meter. That camera really forced me to learn about photography since it was entirely manual. The class I took required everyone to use Kodak Tri-X 400 B&W film.. I love the tonality of Tri-X; it's so good that even the grain in enlargements is not a distraction. I don't believe digital will ever equal the results you get when you make a silver print from a good Tri-X negative. For slides I used Kodak's Ektachrome Elite family of films, 100 ISO. I never used the original Velvia; its 50 ISO rating was too slow for me. I now prefer the Velvia 100 Professional films; "black" blacks and clean highlights. I gradually



**Fred in the HMOA Willis Cook Darkroom, by M. Hamilton**

adopted more automated cameras since the matrix metering was so reliable; this was a real plus with slide film. As my vision got worse, I came to appreciate autofocus. I bought a Nikon N80 as my "retirement" camera. Less than a year later, Nikon essentially abandoned the production of film cameras. Last fall, I purchased a 4x5 pinhole camera and two used 4x5 film holders. I hope to use B&W enlarging paper in lieu of film. I won't need a darkroom; a changing bag will do to load and unload the film holders. I can process the paper negatives in a small processing drum.

**Mark: Fred, you said you joined the OVCC in 1992. Can you share a little about the club, as it was in the 1990s?**

**Fred:** The club operated very much as it does today. We met on Fridays at 7:30 instead of Thursdays at 7:00. We competed in B&W Prints, Color Prints, and Slides. Print competitions were held during the first monthly meeting, slide competitions during the second. Programs were offered after the slide competitions. Various members volunteered to provide refreshments at each meeting. Some of those turned out to quite a spread! We had the occasional outing (Canaan Valley, Dolly Sods, Blennerhassett Island) and a photographic scavenger hunt now and then. A

few of us once attended a two-day seminar in Dayton, OH sponsored by *Outdoor Photographer*. George Lepp and Dewitt Jones made the presentations. Canon was there with their latest bodies and lenses. Truly great!

Once a year we held a joint meeting with Charleston Camera Club (CCC), usually in October. The clubs took turns hosting. We held joint competitions in B&W Prints, Color Prints, and Slides. The photographer with the first place image in each area received one of three “traveling trophies.” They would

have their names engraved on the back and hold the trophy until the next joint meeting. The last joint meeting was held in 2001. Della Lewis won Color Print of the Year; Phil Pelfrey won Color Slide of the Year (I believe). Della gave me her trophy to hold in the event joint meetings are rekindled. I made sure her name was engraved on the back.



5th Avenue Cafe, by F. Huff

**Mark:** The trophies had an engraved plate with information on it? Other than Della’s trophy, would you know what happened to them?

**Fred:** Yes, the traveling trophies had a metal plate on the back on which the year, club, and winning photographer’s name were engraved. The list on the back of Della’s trophy goes back to 1988. If there were joint competitions before then, there are other trophies out there somewhere. . I assume Phil has the trophy for Color Slide of the Year. Someone from CCC probably has the trophy for B&W Print of the Year.

**Mark:** Could you tell us a bit about the members who were the “movers and shakers” during the 1990s? What was their style?

**Fred:** Willis Cook shot mostly B&W using medium format cameras and some slides using 35mm. He was allergic to the chemistry used for color film and print processing. He did landscapes, cityscapes, and the occasional portrait.

Dewey Sanderson did much the same, including some very excellent still life. He had a number of exhibitions featuring his work. He also had a collection of slides taken during summer field trips to the west with his geology students at MU.

Lloyd Moore was known for his “ego shots.” He was often invited to formal gatherings where a number of celebrities were also present. He would take his own photo with them using a 24mm wide angle lens on a Minolta Maxxim held at arm’s length. One of his photos was with Mohammed Ali. Lloyd also used large format cameras to make some beautiful B&W prints of people that went through the Lawrence County, OH legal system. His subjects included vagrants, drunks, the homeless, etc. The images were very striking, quite a departure from the pretty pictures most of us take. I believe Lloyd is one of a handful of American photographers to be inducted into the Royal Photographic Society (England).



**Bill's Garage**, by F. Huff

Larry Rees was also very talented, especially in his darkroom work. I can still remember some of his best images. He managed the Camera Dept. at Mack & Dave’s for years, and club members always got a discount. His personality grated on some, but he was very knowledgeable and willing to share that knowledge.

Mike Gerber had his own color darkroom and did beautiful work. The rest were pretty much like me, except most had a far better “eye” for photos than I ever had.

**Mark: If you had to name one club member who most influenced photography within the club, who would that be and why?**

**Fred:** I would have to say that was Willis [Cook]. He was the only charter member still with the club. He had studied at the Brooks Institute. He taught the first photography classes the museum offered. He could be blunt with his critique, but at least you understood where your weaknesses were. His programs on B&W photography were outstanding.

**Mark: I'm interested in hearing about any of our other past members, their shooting style and a bit about their personalities and images.**

**Fred:** Jim Franklin and his wife owned a local travel agency at one time. They were always visiting exotic locations that most of us could only dream of. His images were from places like Hawaii, Ireland, Mexico, etc. Jim was a good fellow, but he had suffered a fall, and the head trauma affected his memory. He and his wife built a home at the Woodlands. Through their efforts, the club had some of its Annual Banquets there.

Nancy Hite had several images that earned awards from the annual Kodak International Snapshot Awards (KINSA). One of them was on display for a year in the Kodak pavilion at Disney World. She also won the only Special Creativity Award I ever saw.

Joyce Saunders "apprenticed" with a professional photographer in Ashland. She also attended seminars at a women-only photo organization in Chicago (WINONA?). I believe she and Larry were two of the prime movers in the Joe Rukse Memorial Photo Competition, a contest held by the club designed to get local middle school and high school students interested in the hobby. Joyce would like to be active in the club today, but her work precludes her attending Thursday meetings. I think Joyce, more than anyone, enjoyed the social side of the club.

Dana Rukse was another creative photographer. Some of his interpretations of competition themes were very unique. He worked for years at Kramer's Photo Supply and eventually became a photographer for Monongahela Power Company. His father, Joe Rukse, had been involved in photography since his teenage years in Wyoming County. Joe would develop and print film for his neighbors, saving them a trip to town. Joe had a nostalgic attraction for old wooden buildings. He almost always had one of those images in each Open slide competition. Willis would fuss and ask, "Why in the world did you even take that photo, Joe?" Joe would just smile and then enter another one like it the following Open month.

We had one member who attended an occasional meeting, driving up and back from Williamson, WV. He shot a lot of photos of road kill that he had posed with flowers and other objects. Still Life's From Hell – I'm sure he had that genre all to himself!

I remember others, such as Nancy Yates and Cora Ross, but not their work. All these are the members that I can remember being in the club when I joined.

**Mark:** You mentioned that Nancy Hite won a Special Creativity Award. Can you elaborate on this some?

**Fred:** This was a special award made on rare occasions by the Creative Committee (Willis and Dewey). If they saw an image in a competition that stood head and shoulders above others in terms of creativity, they would single it out for the award. Sometimes images so recognized hadn't done well in the competition that evening. There were no points with the award; it was just an honor that everyone coveted. I believe Nancy's image was of a roof under construction on some commercial building.

She had framed the various slopes of the roof, the contrast between finished roofing, partially finished roofing, and the blue sky into a geometric composition. This was the signature of much of Nancy's work. She had an eye for geometric composition.



Crane and Kettle, by F. Huff

**Mark:** You mentioned Joe Rukse, I remember when he joined the club during my previous membership in the 1980s. He was a great guy; I remember that he lightened up the meetings a lot. Do you have anything else to add about the Joe Rukse Memorial Photo Competition?

**Fred:** I don't remember many details about it. I was not attending meetings very often then. I believe we did the competition for two years. One of the problems was that some schools didn't go out of their way to support the competition. In some cases, I don't think they took the time to even distribute the fliers we provided. Winners were given US savings bonds. I don't remember the other awards, but I'm sure Larry saw to it that some small photo accessories were donated by Mack & Dave's as prizes.

**Mark: What would you say was the biggest success or strongest point of the OVCC during the 1990s?**

**Fred:** The strength of the club was in the depth of experience of the older members. They were always giving out information on such topics as shooting under difficult lighting, composition, film processing, etc. Their suggestions on how we could improve our own images were invaluable. We also exchanged ideas with each other. There was also more social interaction then. Willis and Dewey had breakfast together most Saturday mornings.

**Mark: What would you say was the biggest failure during that same time period?**

**Fred:** The biggest failure was not attracting new members, especially in the late 1990's. New members are the life blood of any organization. However, Huntington is a "small market," and I think photography had reached a saturation point here. Using film in manual cameras did not appeal to many people. As more sophisticated cameras emerged, more people became involved, but not in the numbers that digital has produced. And we were not alone. At one time, CCC was down to something like eight members.

**Mark: Some of us know that the club went inactive for a few years, but only very few know much about what happened, who was involved, and what might have been the points that led up to the hiatus. Could you share some stories about that time period?**

**Fred:** There was an uneasy relationship between the club and HMOA [Huntington Museum of Art] in those days. Larry says that the first members of the club were people at the upper level of local society; doctors, attorneys, businessmen, etc. They were better able to afford the hobby. Once that group moved on, the club was largely made up of ordinary people. Larry feels the museum did not welcome this middle class "rabble."

There were disputes over the use of the darkroom in Studio 3 and the ownership of photo equipment that had been donated to the club and stored in the studio. Certain items disappeared, and the club was judged responsible. Then the museum no longer allowed the club to have a key to the studio. We had to pick up a key during business hours the day of each meeting and return it the following day. Finally, they remodeled the studio building and removed the heavy drapes that once covered the windows. Once those drapes were gone, it was impossible to hold a slide competition during the months of daylight savings time. You just couldn't get the room dark enough. We took the hint and left. The Ohio Valley Astronomical Society had been evicted earlier but in a more direct manner. Willis arranged for OVCC to meet in a SS classroom at the Enslow Park Presbyterian Church where he was a member. The church didn't seem to be a

popular meeting place, but I'm not sure why. The room was adequate, we were allowed to store our slide projector and screen there, and we were allowed to use the kitchen for our refreshments. Maybe some felt the ceiling was going to fall on them

A few members grew tired of the hassle and got into other activities. Dewey started playing the hammered dulcimer in a band. Dave Tolley got into astronomy. I myself got involved in ballroom dance. Others quit or moved away for reasons of jobs, marriage, etc. Sadly, a few started having serious health problems; a few passed away. With no new members coming into the club, the end was inevitable.

**Mark: Approximately what year did the OVCC stop meeting?**

**Fred:** I would guess it was in 2002, since the last meeting with CCC took place in 2001. I don't think the club was dormant for long. Herb would know for sure. He was treasurer then and would remember when the club disbursed its remaining funds to HMOA.



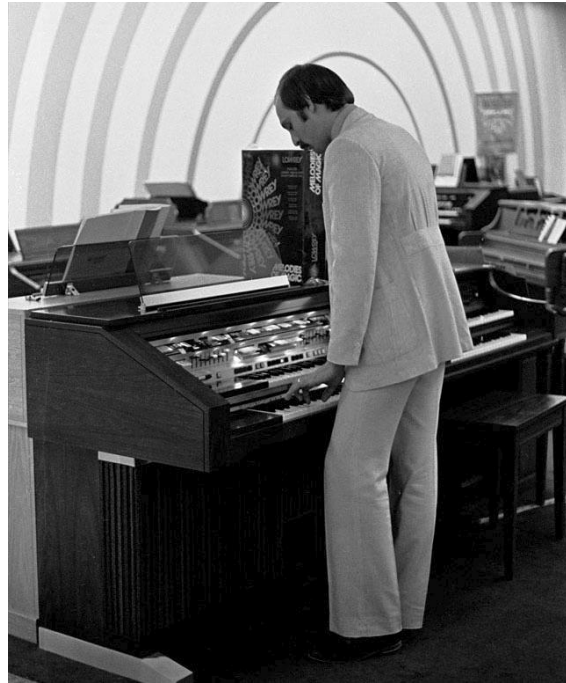
Fred speaking at an OVCC meeting, by M. Hamilton

**Mark: It's not generally known by the membership that you are the person responsible for the OVCC as it stands today. I've been told that it was your idea to reform the club and that you did most, if not all, of the work in the reorganization. For that, we owe you a debt of thanks. Can you share some words about the steps involved and how you were able to build the club from the ashes of the previous organization?**

**Fred:** After I retired in 2004, I decided to give photography another try (mistake #1). I attended a meeting of CCC and happened to see Dave Tolley there. We discussed the possibility of getting OVCC going again (mistake #2). I contacted all the former members I could find and found about 15 that were interested, a good nucleus. We held some meetings in late 2005 to plan the restart. I filed paperwork with the IRS and state of WV to get the club non-profit status. Larry offered the use of a room at the rear of Huntington Photo Lab. We held meetings there starting in Jan 2006. I served as president for the first two years (mistake #3). One curiosity: of the 15 or so former members that had shown interest in restarting the club, only four are members today; Linda, Herb, Phil, and me.

**Mark:** This is sort of an unfair question, but in the previous answer you list 3 mistakes which might have been tongue-in-cheek comments. Can you elaborate some about this; do you have some regrets with this direction?

**Fred:** I made the “mistake” comments a bit tongue-in-cheek. I don’t regret getting the club going again, and I am happy to see it thrive. Two terms as president, though, was probably one and a half too many. I didn’t have the vision to do anything but structure the club as I remembered it. Mike Adkins is the champ when it comes to a vision for the club. Getting things going again was a lot of work. I was retired and certainly had the time, but it was a mentally draining process. I remember the work involved in drafting and approving a constitution, by-laws, rules of competition, and trying to incorporate digital. That’s both funny and sad; now we would have to figure out how to incorporate film.



**Mall Organist, by F. Huff**

**Mark:** I think it always helps to reflect on how things could have been done differently. If you had to pick some issues that you wished you had changed what would that be and why?

**Fred:** In hindsight, I would have tried to steer the club away from competitions; viewing and critique only. Judging any form of art is just too subjective, and the membership has always had a decided preference for scenic images, sometimes at the expense of some really creative work. Since we stayed with competitions, I would now prefer that everyone start at zero, even former members like me who had significant points from previous years. Two former members had earned but never received certificates of achievement. I would have awarded those, but that is all. I’m sure I would have been laughed out of the room on both counts.

Finally, I believe we should have made an annual contribution to the museum. We did this in the old days, even when our annual cash flow was small. We did recently donate a photography book to the museum’s library, but that was a one-time gesture to honor the late Willis Cook. The new HMOA administration has made us welcome, even if the arrangements are awkward at times. We had reached the capacity of the back room at Huntington Photo Lab. And since that enterprise no longer exists, we would have needed a new meeting place even if our membership had not grown.

**Mark:** I've observed that the members really love the competition, but I agree with you that creative photographs are often ignored in the winner's circle. Do you have any ideas on a system that would reward very creative photographs that are perhaps not of the type or subject matter that many of us would want to hang in our living rooms?

**Fred:** Sorry, but I really don't. It's going to take a better brain than mine to solve this problem; sometimes it seems intractable. We tend to fall in love at first sight with pretty pictures. But the world has its share of ugliness, too, and ugliness is just as legitimate a subject for photography. Getting those photos involves a great deal more creativity than getting a pretty picture of some fall color. Look at Lloyd Moore's images of our local society's downtrodden. Look at Dorothea Lange's image of the mother in a migrant worker family during the Great Depression/Dust Bowl era. Scenic, no; riveting, YES! Such a photo would have little chance in one of our competitions. I doubt very many of the Pulitzer Prize winners would be appreciated in our club. Good photos are scenic, pretty, etc. GREAT photos really tell a story. That is something I have never achieved.



Portsmouth Bridge, by F. Huff

**Mark:** Let's go back to your comments about critique and voting: For me, I would prefer to see the club approach scoring a little differently, first by giving more weight to the emotional value rather than mostly focusing on the technical points of the photograph. Do you think we're critical enough in our scoring?

**Fred:** We're neither critical nor flexible enough. We have some very talented photographers in the club, and some nights, it's just plain hard to identify the "best" image(s). It's too subjective, which is why I would, in hindsight, not have competitions. A systematic approach to judging and scoring may help. Have the members evaluate each image against our 4 or 5 judging criteria. We

don't pay nearly enough attention to the "Idea Content" criterion. That's why the highest scoring images are nearly always scenic's and why we have so many ties in the voting. Part of the problem stems from having so many members that are relatively new to the hobby and so few with any real depth of experience. The drawback is that judging time would increase significantly.



RR Bridge near Barboursville, by F. Huff

**Mark:** I've come to wonder if part of the problem is devoting a large portion of the programs to technical aspects and rarely to art appreciation. You often find 2 opinions that are equally applicable to writing books and making photographs: those who think you should study the work and ideas of others in order to improve yourself and then the opposite camp who feel that by studying others, you will somehow contaminate your own work (or worse, still, become an unsuspecting copycat). Do you think we should have more programs on art appreciation and the history of significant photographs, or should we just accept that our strength lies in finding pleasing and scenic scenes of the area? Any ideas?

**Fred:** Mark, you have raised an excellent point. Most of our programs address the technical side of photography and ignore the creative side. This was true in the days of film and even more so now with digital. Perhaps digital makes us so conscious of the technical, the creative gets ignored. But we do have some very creative members in the club, people that see ordinary subjects in ways that most of us don't.

One of Susan Sontag's essays puts forth the idea that everything that can be photographed has been photographed. If that is true, maybe the idea of "original" as it relates to photography is an illusion.

I believe people are generally creative or not, left-brained or right-brained. I explored this in an online website that gave several test questions and, from the responses, decided where in the range of creativity you fell. It also identified a famous photographer with whom you were most comparable. I believe it compared me to Ansel Adams and said I fell somewhere in the middle

between the technical and the creative. That conclusion makes me a bit suspicious of its validity. Galen Rowell once observed that engineers generally made the worst photographers. I'm not sure creativity can be taught. I do believe whatever degree of creativity one naturally possesses can be developed. I have always felt I have little creative vision. But, I still occasionally took a good photo. And the more photos I took, the better I "saw." I'm sure that's my biggest problem now; I just don't shoot enough. The more you practice creativity, the better you will become at it.



Whitewater at Summerville Lake, by F. Huff

Appreciating creativity may be a different animal altogether.

Your suggestion that the club have programs to teach the creative side of photography has real merit. But I don't think you could do much in a one-half hour session. Perhaps a class in creative writing as you suggested or in painting, as Ken Rockwell suggested. At one time, the vocational schools offered adult education classes in

these areas. Now, they offer career programs instead of single classes. Barbara Delligatti of the Upstairs Gallery offers watercolor classes. There is an art school, Davis Galleries, listed in the local yellow pages. The TSAA may be able to identify others. Perhaps arrangements could be made with Ms. Delligatti or another art instructor whereby they would offer a class at the museum for club members, focused on creativity. There would be a cost for such a class, obviously. As to classes on creative writing, I don't know.

Perhaps all this is so much B.S. and there are no real answers. The late Bill Jay advised us:

“Beware of these two fallacies of photographic appreciation:

- 1) You like a photograph because you think/have been told it is good.
- 2) You think a photograph is good because you like it.”

**Mark:** I love that Bill Jay quote, thanks for sharing it. While we're on the subject of judging photographs, would you mind to elaborate on what would make up your ideal image? How do you approach scoring? When you look at an image how do you determine if it scores 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5?

**Fred:** What makes an ideal image for me? For me, this question has no answer. There are images I like that others do not, and vice versa. Sorry for the cop-out, but I really don't have an answer.

When I **TRY** to evaluate a photograph, the **FIRST** thing I focus on is its Idea Content (originality). If it is a well-done image, but of something we have seen many times before or that has likely been photographed many times (that same view of the Babcock Mill or Blackwater Falls), I won't give it any higher than a 4. If it is unique, then I will start at 5. Then I will look at the composition, the technical elements (exposure, focus, depth of field, etc.). Then I will look at how well the print is presented (bubbles in the print, dust spots, finger prints, sloppy mounting/matting). As I find problems in these areas, I reduce the score. Average images will get a 3, perhaps a 2. Below average images get a 1. Out of category gets a 0. All this is tough to do with a lot of prints to evaluate in a fairly small amount of time.

My scale could be described as follows:

- 5 – **GREAT** image
- 4 – Good image
- 3 – Fair (average) image
- 2 – So-so image
- 1 – Poor (lousy) image
- 0 – Out of category



**Chimney Sweep**, by F. Huff

**Mark:** That type of scoring certainly has logic to it and makes sense. Fred, as the club evolves, what direction would you like to see the OVCC go in the next few years?

**Fred:** Well, the club should be whatever the majority of the membership wants. However, the club's current ambitions are far beyond what I envisioned. There's nothing wrong with that, but it makes the club seem less like the friendly, inviting group I once knew.

Now, I am going to offer a few "selfish" suggestions. I would like to see a "subset" of the club that was more involved with film. We could share our knowledge of film with anyone that was

interested. We could display our images at meetings and wouldn't even have to enter the competitions. But that probably will never happen.

Maybe I could start a separate club for film users. Call it OFCC (Old Farts Camera Club). We would have no officers and pay no dues. Our meetings would be primarily outings. We would allow film only, one lens only, and the filters of your choice. We could occasionally get together and use the Willis Cook darkroom at HMOA. Everyone would bring paper and chemicals and have at it. We could meet at a local watering hole now and then to compare and discuss our work, have a little food, drink a lot of beer.

**Mark: Speaking of the Willis Cook darkroom, I remember Willis very well from my time in the club during the 1980s; his critique could make you want to crawl under the table but he was largely the reason a lot of us brought our images to the club. Rarely do you get an honest opinion in life, but Willis didn't mind giving one. Based on all you've seen within the club (then and now), do you have any ideas on what could make the critique better, more interesting, and more constructive for the club members?**

**Fred:** Unlike Willis, we hesitate to offer critiques out of fear we will offend someone. Willis had no such qualms; that's why those he critiqued learned and improved. The club today also lacks the depth of experience that Willis, Dewey, and Larry possessed. When they offered a critique, it carried some real weight. We should get back to giving honest critiques: honest, but not insulting. If someone feels offended, tough noogies. Otherwise you will never improve. In the past, I have heard real carping from some when their images were critiqued. And they had brought those images to the meeting for the purpose of being critiqued. If you can't take some



Fred at the HMOA Studio 3, by M. Hamilton

honest criticism that is intended to help you improve your photography, then as Larry or Willis might have said, "Get the hell out. You have no business being in the club!" This may be one of the club's worst shortcomings. Our primary method of promoting the hobby should be by helping others improve. Otherwise, the competitions are just an excuse to show off. Now, I like to show off my work just as much as the next member, but I am no longer consumed with competitions. I've become jaded by the whole process, I guess.

**Mark:** We both come from the film-era and we have spoken privately about the trials and tribulations that we both have had during the jump into the digital age. Can you elaborate some about your difficulty in moving from film to digital imaging?

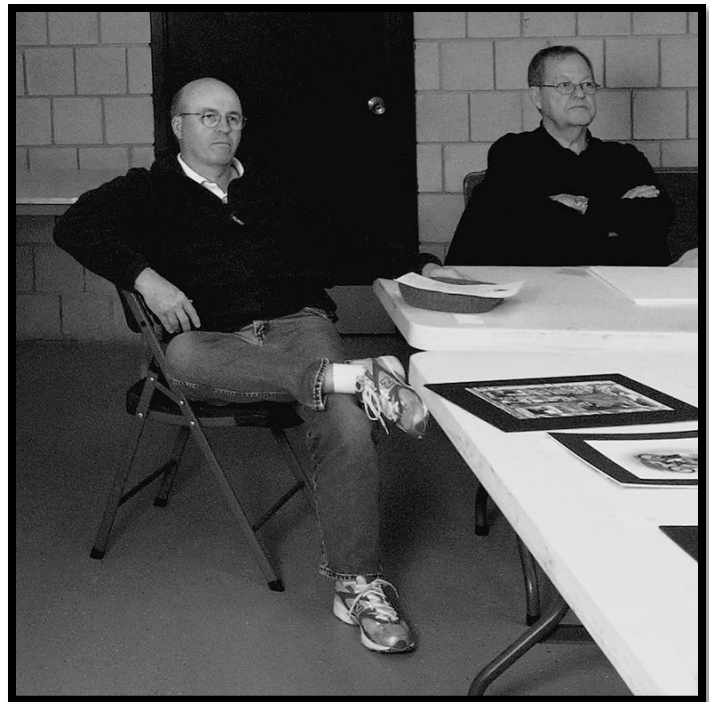
**Fred:** To me, film is just superior for image quality. Part of that is because I often have trouble getting good results out of the digital workflow. Digital is certainly more convenient and is probably “good enough” in quality for most commercial needs. To me slide film was easier. You made your composition in the viewfinder and bracketed 3 exposures, which was easy with the more sophisticated film cameras. When you got your film back from processing, you threw the slides on a lightbox and picked out the best exposure. And when you projected those slides, the colors would POP!! I haven’t seen anything in digital to compare.

Digital is so complex. My Pentax DSLR’s have the easiest control and menu systems I have found, but they are still a handful. I use Photoshop Elements instead of CS4, but I will never learn to use it to its full capacity. Books are limited. To really learn, you have to attend a school for which you generally pay. The club’s expertise in film was always free.

Finally, film was just more fun, at least for me. There is a real satisfaction in making an exposure and knowing you nailed it without having to look at an image on a small screen, making adjustments, and trying again. With film, you learned technique and trusted it. It seldom let you down.

**Mark:** Velvia and Kodachrome (though less saturated) had nice characteristic color to the images, that’s for certain. How about black & white photographs?

**Fred:** I have seen some good digital B&W, but silver-based B&W photography has a tonality that digital will never equal.



Fred at an OVCC print meeting, by M. Hamilton

**Mark:** Could you compare the cost of digital vs film, based on your experience in using both for club competitions?

**Fred:** Digital is less costly from the standpoint of never paying for film and processing. It is more costly in terms of the equipment. And it doesn't stop with a DSLR and a lens. You need a PC, software, printer, ink, paper and a lot of time and patience to learn the craft. Cameras go obsolete in record time. They will serve well beyond the day the manufacturer drops the model, but as firmware and such continues to be improved, at some point you will certainly be at least tempted to upgrade. Nikon's generation 2 cameras (D3, D700, D90 et al) now have firmware that corrects for fringing and other digital artifacts that are extremely difficult to correct in post-processing.

**Mark:** I have several film cameras that I'd love to use for club entries. What would be the barriers to overcome for those members who wish to continue with film for our competitions?

**Fred:** Could one compete in the club with film today? Yes, but you will have to send everything snail-mail to have it processed. Slides may take around 3-4 weeks. The turnaround for color print film used to be as little as one hour; three days if you didn't want to pay extra for 1-hour service. Now, I can't think of any place locally that has a film mini-lab. I know for sure that Wal-Mart no longer handles film. I couldn't tell you where to get a color enlargement today. You will have to go through the digital domain at some point, and will have to pay a separate fee just to have a negative or slide scanned to digital. B&W has to be done at home, and I no longer have a suitable darkroom space.



**Final Sprint**, by F. Huff

**Mark: What other changes have you observed during the conversion of the world from analog to digital imaging?**

**Fred:** I think digital has created a new type of amateur. Film photography was a process that required time and patience. Today, we have little patience. We want results now, and digital fills that requirement. Today's amateurs tend to be younger and/or more at home with technology; gadgets, computers and such. They don't mind taking time to work an image for hours in post-processing until they get it just right. I wonder how many amateur photographers have made an easy transition to digital if they had an extensive background with film.. When you consider how few former members are still active in the club, I think that says something.

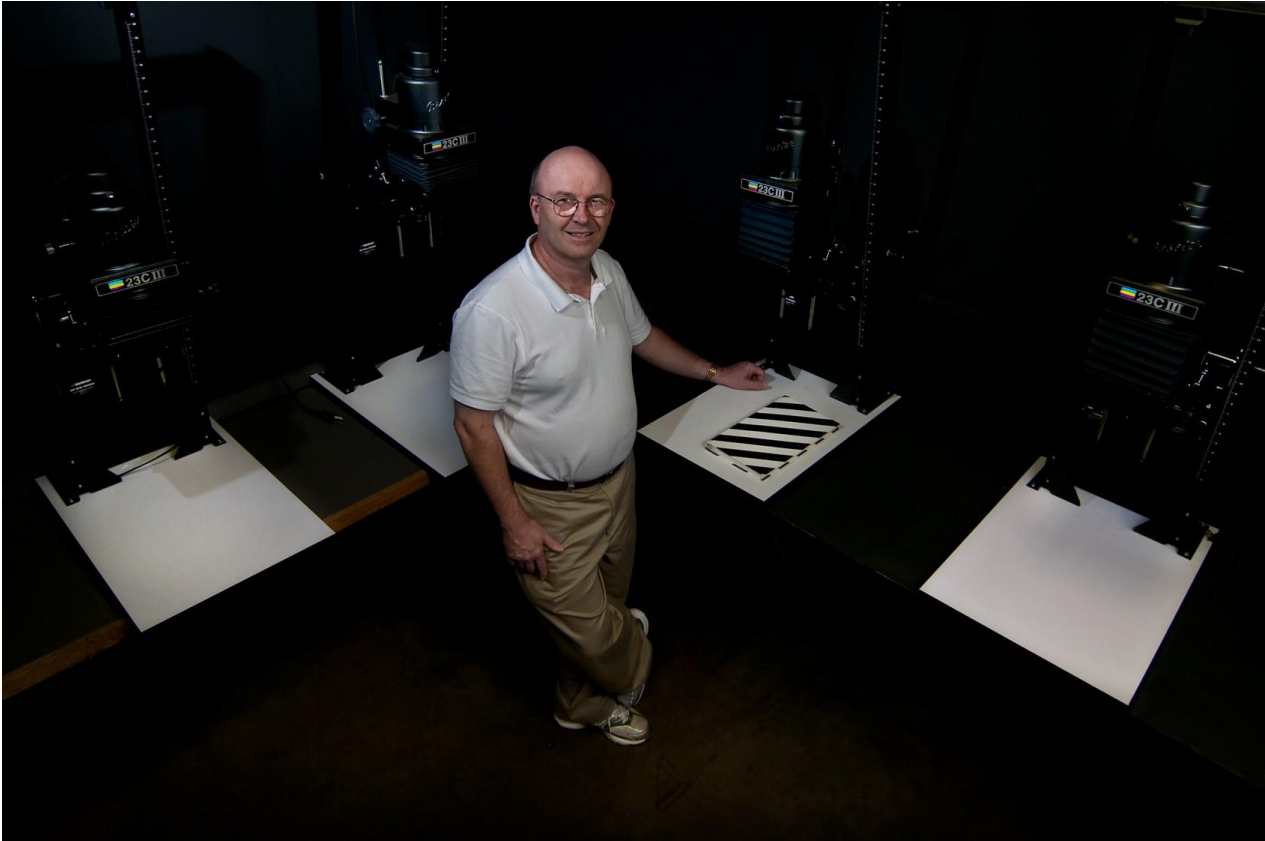
Digital allows such manipulation of images that much of what passes for photography today is really the creation of illustrations. Back in the mid-1800's, photographers attempted to emulate the work of painters in order to be accepted as fine art. Then around 1900, Alfred Stieglitz started "Photo-Secession," a movement whose goal was to champion photography as a fine art on its own terms: well-composed images with a wealth of tones and detail and without any attempts to copy the look of painting. Now with digital, the pendulum is swinging back to more impressionistic or abstract images.

**Mark: I've always viewed Ansel Adams as being a superb manipulator of his images. I know we see extreme manipulation today, both in-the-camera with toy camera film imaging and with digital that is all around us every day. Are we handling things correctly within the OVCC or should we set more guidelines for the competitions? I guess what I'm asking is where do you draw the line between fine art photography and the point where a photograph is no longer photography?**

**Fred:** Back in the first year of the "new" OVCC, Jessica St. James, staff photographer for the *Ironton Tribune*, made a presentation to the club. One of the issues she discussed was the amount of manipulation permitted to a news photo. AP guidelines say that "photographs" can only be altered digitally in a minimal fashion: you can alter contrast, brightness, and make those changes that were normally done in traditional darkrooms. If an image has had more in-depth modification, it is considered an "illustration" rather than a photograph. One of her news photographer friends was required to surrender some AP awards when it was found that he had altered the digital file more than was permitted under AP guidelines. We use similar guidelines in the club for our Enhanced Photographic Art (that's too long; why don't we call the category "Illustrations"?).

I am not qualified to even say what fine art is and is not. But I agree with the basic tenants of the Photo Secession. They altered contrast using graded photo papers and lighting by dodging and burning. Ansel Adams was the undisputed master of these techniques. But, they did not add or remove anything that was not in the original scene, other than touching out the occasional dust

spot. The digital photographers I admire most today are those who use the same idea. They do not make drastic changes to their images. They take the time to compose the final image in the viewfinder and only fine-tune the results on the PC.



Fred in the HMOA Willis Cook Darkroom, by M. Hamilton

**Mark:** Would you like to give any words of advice to OVCC photographers who want to improve their photography?

**Fred:** Read. There are a number of books with advice that is of value to both film and digital. One of the best is *Learning to See Creatively* by Brian Peterson. It looks at design, color, and composition. Look at books about the great photographers from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Aperture Masters of Photography series is outstanding. Much of their work is in B&W, but study how they used the light. Many great photographers actually had degrees in art. Artists learn to create their lighting; photographers have to find theirs.

Workshops are good, but most of them seem to focus more on the technology of digital rather than the artistic side of making good images. And there are few that cater to film shooters.

**Mark: What would be your dream photographic trip? Where would you go, what would you do, what equipment (if any) would you want to have in order to accomplish this photo trip of a lifetime?**

**Fred:** I have about all the equipment I need. I would take several bricks of Fuji Velvia 100 film and prepaid mailers. I would like to visit the Celtic lands, Ireland and Scotland, or perhaps the Atlantic provinces of Canada: Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. I would take Pamela Anderson along as my photo assistant. She would rub my back and feet whenever I was tired from carrying my camera bag

**Mark: Would you mind sharing with us a bit about your upcoming plans and where the direction of your future photography might take you?**

**Fred:** My plans are to get away from photography for now. Actually, that's what I have been doing for the last few years. When I first detected my "staleness," I looked for some other genre to explore, starting with astrophotography. I abandoned that idea when I realized that the equipment needed to do it well would pay for a rather nice car. I am currently researching the history of bowling in the Huntington area. It's mostly for my own curiosity, but maybe it will get published locally. It's a slow process with a lot of research required. I will probably take a few photos and scan some provided by others to illustrate the work. Otherwise, photography will likely be a secondary activity, something useful to document vacations, family and friends, etc.

**Mark: Fred, I appreciate the time that you've devoted to the OVCC over the years. Do you have any final words of advice to members?**

**Fred:** Take your time and enjoy the hobby. Focus more on learning and improving. Use the competitions as a tool to track your improvement; don't just show up to show off. Get involved in the operation of the club. If you continue to elect the same officers year after year, you will burn those people out. THEN you will HAVE to get involved without having any prior experience. It will be either fish or cut bait. Without the support of ALL the membership, the club will fail once more. And then I will come looking for you!

*(Mark Hamilton resides in Russell, Kentucky where he mows grass in fair weather and torments the family year-around with his camera. You can find his photography blog at [4x6photo](#). He also occasionally writes for the [Ohio Valley Camera Club](#).)*