

# Front & Center



The Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium Dedication

*A special edition of  
Lunch With Books at the Ohio County Public Library  
December 10, 2024*

# Harold E. Vitalie

## Auditorium Dedication

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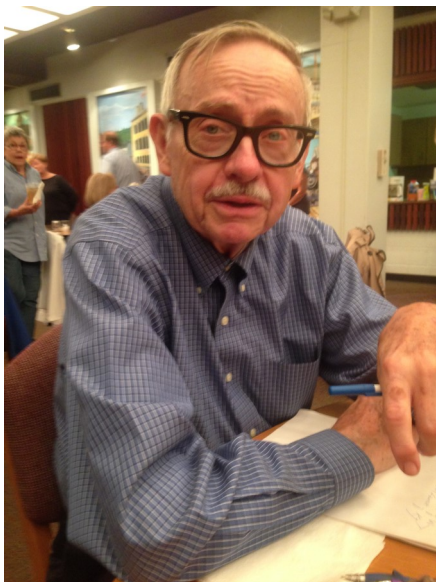


Photo by Mary Ann Duffy

*Harold E. Vitalie* (b. December 22, 1937, in Clinton, Indiana, d. June 1, 2023, in Wheeling, WV) was a cherished, long-time patron of the Ohio County Public Library and particularly of its Lunch With Books program. He consistently arrived early so that he could reserve his preferred seat at the first **middle table** (thus, “**Front and Center**”). He typically donned a fedora, so if you saw a fedora and a raincoat on a chair, you knew Harold was in the building. A long-time history teacher at John Mar-

shall High School, he was a master of trivia, and loved to show that off, pontificating in his booming voice and asking presenters challenging questions or simply commenting on factoids they might have omitted. He took meticulous notes (where are those notes?), and routinely gifted the programming director with various shark-themed gifts he picked up at his beloved flea markets and yard sales. When he passed, he left the Library a generous gift. And now, the auditorium **he spent so much time in will be dubbed, the “Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium” at the Ohio County Public Library.** Today we honor our friend Harold, officially dedicating the room, hearing from former students and friends who knew him best, observing Chester Greenwood Day, sharing food (Harold was always first in line when there was food) and memories of this quirky gentleman and eloquent curmudgeon, who sometimes stressed us out, often made us laugh, and always put his own unique spin on the library programming experience.



Last known photo of Harold at an OCPL program, taken May 16, 2023, Japan Outreach: Japanese book reading, *Mottainai Grandma* with Manami Kawazoe.

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## Watch Programs Online

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Subscribe to the **Lunch With Books Youtube Channel** and never miss a program!

<https://tiny.cc/LWB-YouTube>

## *Program*

12:00 PM: Opening Remarks and Introduction

12:10 PM: Let's Eat (Food by Midge's Kitchen)

- Summer Rolls with Sesame Butter Sauce
- Chicken with Waffle Sliders
- Deviled Eggs
- Mixed Green Salad
- Moxie (IYKYK)



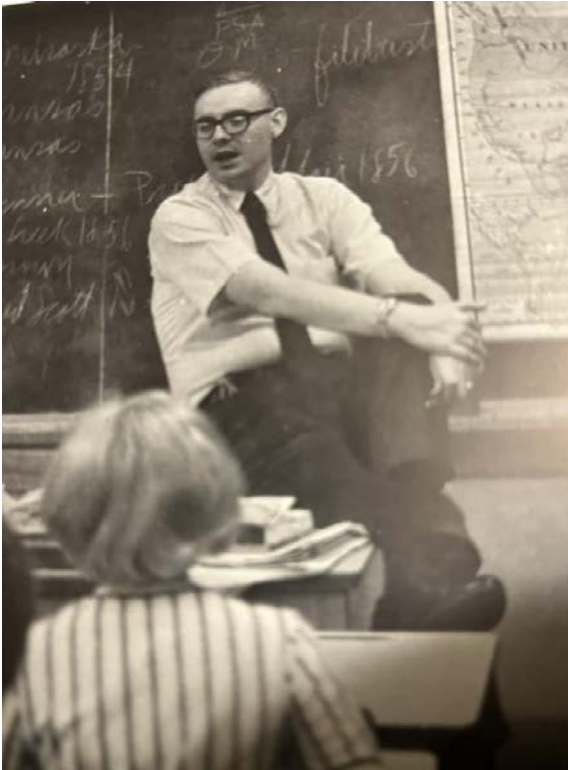
12:20 PM: Memory Sharing

12:45 PM: Chester Greenwood Day

12: 55 PM: Unveiling of the Harold E. Vitalie Dedication Plaques

1:00 PM: Closing Remarks

## A few facts about our friend Harold...



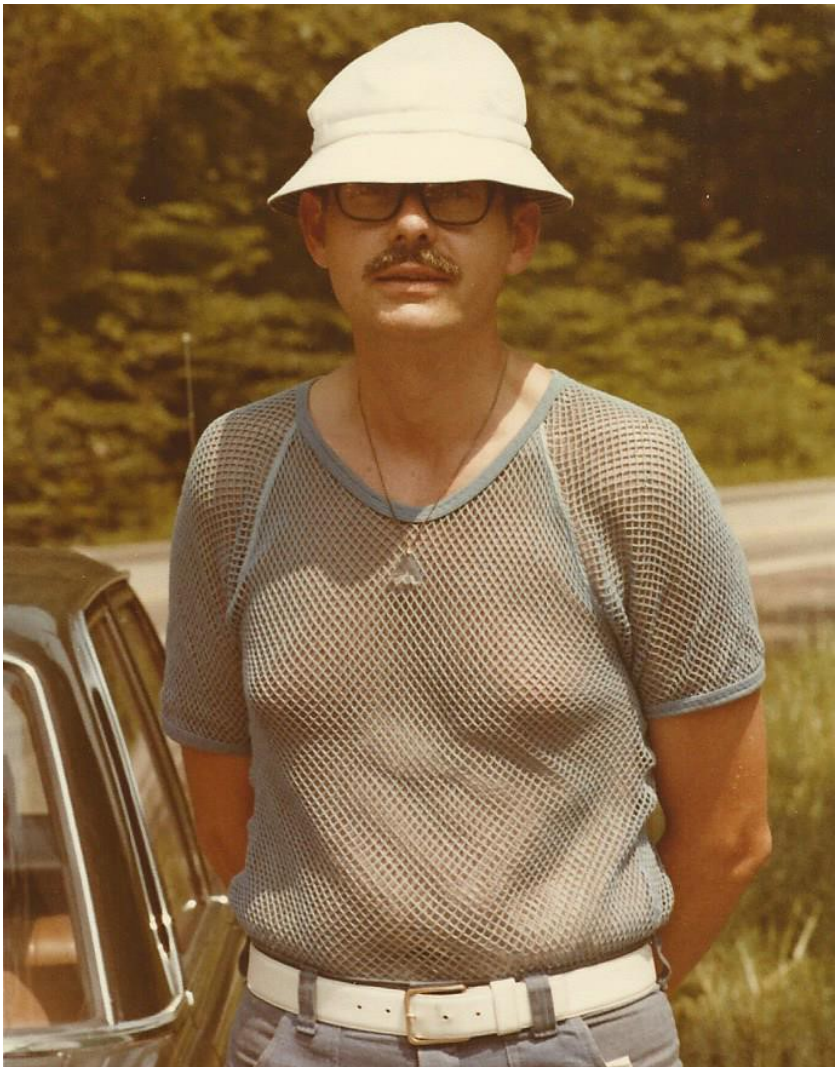
He taught history to three generations.

**Vickie Kamlowsky**

When JM first opened, the auditorium wasn't finished so lecture classes could not meet there. Consequently, big lectures, like social studies, were held in the also unfinished shop classes on the first floor. We sat on metal folding chairs (you know, the ones that numbed your butt after about 15 minutes) and tried to take notes. This, too, was a challenge since there were no swing up desk services on these chairs.

It was Mr. Vitalie's turn to lecture on Emperial Russia. That man brought that era as alive as if I were watching it as a movie. I did not take one note . Didn't need to. I remember rushing to that classroom to get a seat in front ( I am a last row dweller usually.) At no time in my many many years of classroom lectures have I hung on the words like I did for that lecture series. His next lecture series was just as mesmerizing. When he retired and subbed in my building, he told me to call him "Harold." I never did. He deserved way more respect than that from me. I know this comes off as gushing, but the guy was a master at his craft.

Rest in eternal peace, Mr. Vitalie.



He possessed an innate sense of style.

(#InfluencerBeforeItWasCool)

1980 photo by Dick Joltes, who wrote:

“[We] encountered him selling corn from the back of a battered pickup truck one Summer (we have no idea why...he was probably just bored). (Edit: you'll also note that the car on the left is a Mercedes, and I just recalled that along with the mesh shirt and ‘Gilligan’ hat H was wearing Gucci running shoes...)”



He lectured General Ulysses S. Grant on military strategy.

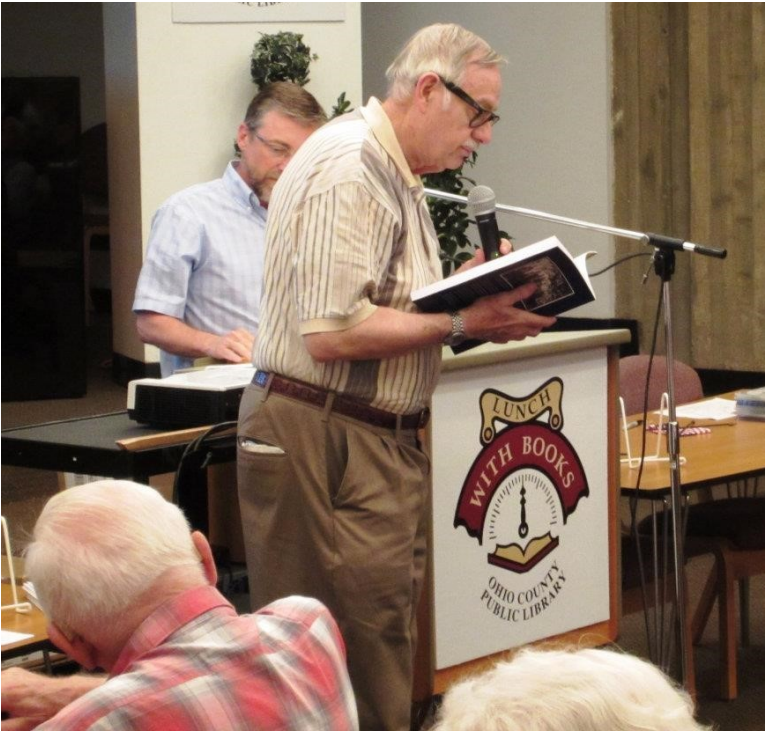


He lectured Jackie Robinson on hitting.



He lectured this Viking on how best to raid and pillage.





He lectured all of us about everything.





(Especially the Titanic.)



*Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium Dedication 12-10-24 - 7*



He took copious notes on everything.



Especially when Mother Jones spoke. (Suspected Communist)



Or President Lincoln. (Suspected RINO.)

(Again, where are those notes??)



[Note also the multi-pack of pens and pencils]



He was a noted critic of music and the arts.



*Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium Dedication 12-10-24 - 10*



Yet, he was not above to howling at the moon.



Harold's hand is inside the werewolf mask.

Or pretending to be a werewolf for our Halloween video.



And, though never overly demonstrative about it.



He loved the OCPL.

(#RightBackatYaBuddy)

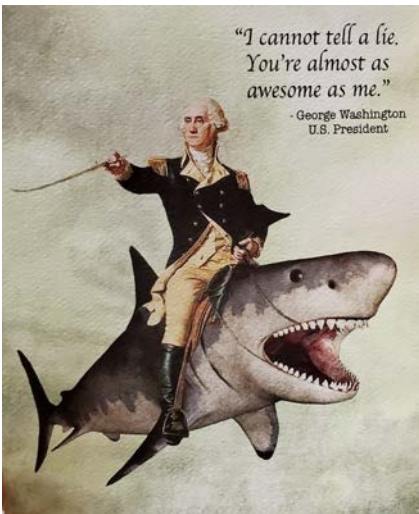
*Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium Dedication 12-10-24 - 13*



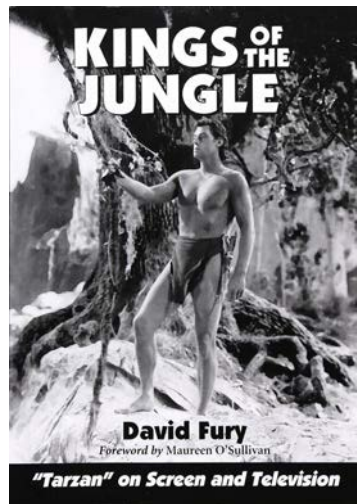
He was a Giver of Gifts



Perhaps to compensate for bugging the programming guy during complex tech setups, he freely gave the gift of sharks.

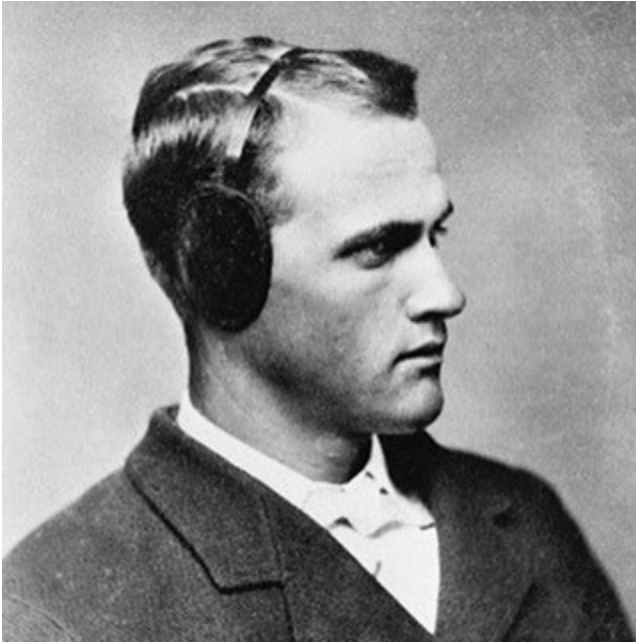


A birthday card from Harold.



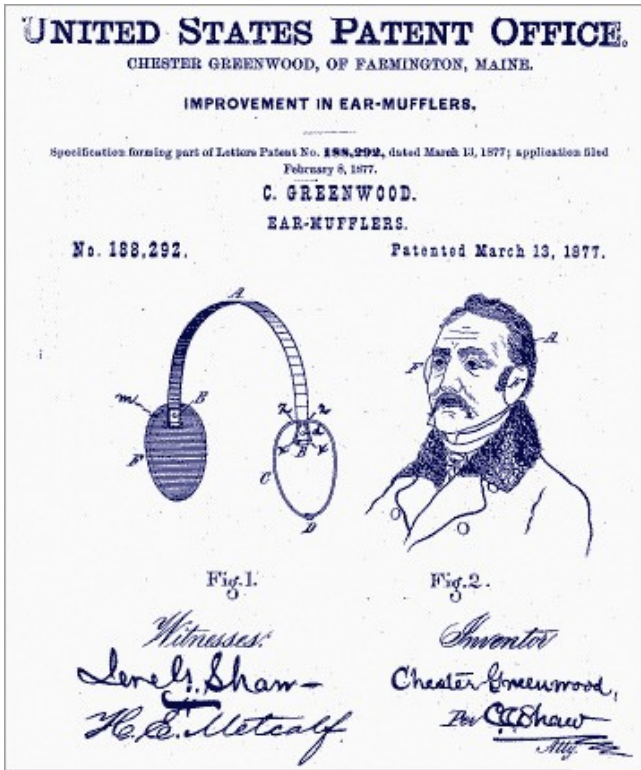
A flea-market find he loaned me when I said I read all of the Tarzan books as a kid.

And he introduced all of us to a  
genius named Chester Greenwood.



*Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium Dedication 12-10-24 - 15*

# Inventor of the Ear Muff



According to Wikipedia, “Chester Greenwood (4 December 1858 – 5 July 1937) was an American engineer and inventor, known for inventing the  **earmuffs**  in 1873. He reportedly came up with the idea while ice skating and he asked his grandmother to sew tufts of fur between loops of wire. His patent was for improved ear protectors. He manufactured these ear protectors, providing jobs for people in the Farmington Maine area for nearly 60 years.

According to Harold’s student Dick Joltes, the mysterious words “keep December 21st!” started appearing daily on the blackboard. One day he announced that the students were all new members of the “Chester Greenwood Club” and handed out actual membership cards (see upper right).

He later mailed former students annual copies of “Muffled Drums” -- a mimeographed (later Xeroxed) newsletter he’d type out on his antique Underwood manual typewriter. Each edition would include stories about goings-on in his life, history-related articles, news clippings, and notes about other members he’d heard from during the year.

Harold also got in touch with Greenwood’s widow, Ruby Greenwood, and told her about the club. She became an honorary member.

# The Chester Greenwood Club

John Joltes is hereby duly registered  
 a life member in good standing of **The  
 Chester Greenwood Club**. Said member  
 vows to faithfully keep December 21st.

Given under my hand and seal on the  
 twenty-first day of December in the year of  
1978.

Harold E. Vitalie

Scribe

“NEXT YEAR IN FARMINGTON!”

Above: Mr. Joltes’s CGC membership card, signed by Harold.



## **A Eulogy by Dick Joltes:**

“Last night I learned that former teacher and old friend Harold Vitale, who taught history at my old high school for decades, had passed. He was a huge character -- always impeccably dressed, had an immense font of knowledge at the ready, a scathing sense of humor (he once laughed that I was ‘liberal arts cannon fodder’ for majoring in history), and a penchant for collecting nearly everything he found interesting.

Starting in early December of our senior year, the mysterious words ‘keep December 21st!’ started appearing daily on the blackboard. We’d ask, he’d smile, and nothing would be said...until that day, when he announced we were all new members of the Chester Greenwood Club and handed out actual membership cards... Ours was the first class to receive the honor, which was accompanied by a lecture on The Man himself (he was from Farmington, ME, invented earmuffs and many other things, and his birthday was indeed Dec 21st).

‘H’ always wore a tie, and eschewed the typical Windsor knot. His ties seemed to begin magically at the base of his neck, with no visible means of support. I asked how they worked, and he told me it was just a usual Windsor but the ‘drop’ wasn’t tucked into the knot -- it just sat there. From that day forward, this became known as the ‘Vitale Knot.’

On the last day of his class, Mark Robert Arthur showed up with a bag of party poppers and distributed them to various folks. When H ended the lecture, Mark stood up and said ‘Mr. Vitale, we honor you with an eight-popper salute!’ H, of course, said ‘don’t you dare, Mr. Arthur!’ at which the rest of us stood up and fired. The room was strewn with confetti, and when H later sent out a note with our final grades he mentioned that they’d been completed despite ‘a desperate last minute assassination attempt by eight gunmen armed with antique weapons of Oriental design.’

Several of us started visiting him after graduation, and discovered even more of his unique personality. He lived with his aging mother (Harold never married and I don’t think he was interested in any sort of relationship), who loved having us visit since I don’t believe many other people turned up. Their house was a vast cabinet of curiosities, since H haunted every odd antique and/or bookshop in the area and collected all sorts of stuff. He loved Indiana Jones and collected many Fedoras, along with at least one whip and a leather jacket to match. ‘A Christmas Story’ reminded him of his youth in Indiana, so he became a collector of related items and

watched the movie every year, sometimes twice. He was incredibly happy when he found (and of course bought) a Red Ryder BB gun of the type used in the film. I'm sure it had that thing in the stock that tells time, too.

He even had a miniature (about 2' high) version of the Sweeney Punch Bowl -- the original is in a museum and weighs 225lb -- sitting on his mantle, but you had to negotiate your way around piles of other memorabilia to access it. He'd found it in some curio shop and had to have it, after all...it probably dated from the early 1900s.

Then there were the books and papers -- he was an inveterate collector of printed material, much of it history related. When I became involved with Land Rovers in the early 2000s, he sent an authentic Aussie bush hat and a small box of books related to the subject and grilled me for photos and other info on my restoration project.

When, as an undergrad, I started upping my sartorial game and adopted sport coats as a standard item of apparel, he noted this and made the off-the-cuff query 'you're what, a 38 short?' Next visit, he produced a bag and said 'here, Merry Christmas and try these on.' Inside were three Harris Tweed coats in perfect condition, all of which fit. My Mom was first impressed, then freaked when I said they came from Goodwill because that meant they had to be 'full of bugs' -- all three were dry cleaned immediately, and I wore them for many years.

One year I recall him showing us a box of what appeared to be brass coat buttons. He said they were a present to himself, so I asked for details. He'd been in Goodwill, spotted a coat that wasn't his size but had these buttons attached, and checked. They were Tiffany, and solid gold so he bought the coat for \$5. Then he snipped off the buttons, replaced them with plastic equivalents, and took the coat back.

That was HEV.

The Chester Greenwood thing never went away, either. Following graduation many of us in his class started receiving annual copies of 'Muffled Drums'-- a mimeographed (later xeroxed) newsletter he'd type out on his antique Underwood manual typewriter. Each edition would include stories about goings-on in his life, history related articles, news clippings, and notes about other members he'd heard from during the year. Many of us wrote letters to him at least annually and

would receive replies within a few weeks at best. ..

I'll never forget when H first learned about Moxie, the New England based soft drink. This was in the late '80s after I'd moved to Boston, and I received a terse note that said "if visiting Wheeling this holiday season, please try to find and bring Moxie -- we wish to try this New England concoction." I bought a six-pack and took it to him, which produced the tradition of the Annual Moxie Tasting. I happened across a huge display of Moxie-themed items at a store in NH about a decade ago, so I took photos and bought him a long-sleeved shirt. He adored it. We decided to have fun with the photos, so I had several blown up to 16x20' and we made up a poster about 'Farmer Harold.' It was presented as a series of surveillance photos taken by the CIA of a shifty character pretending to sell corn while secretly monitoring citizens, and one day we took it to the high school where H taught. We showed it to the librarians, who laughed and said they'd handle it...so they put it in a display case facing the main hallway. When classes changed, a huge gaggle was seen clustered around this area. We were visiting with H, who got curious and walked over to see what it was all about. He saw the photos, laughed, and said 'oh, I want that when you're done with it. Now take it down.' We gave it to him, and are not sure whether it's sitting in a place of honor in his house or if it was incinerated (probably the former).

H was an excellent educator, a unique and authentic guy, and a good friend. He'll be missed.

*Illegitimi Non Carborundum, H.*

~Dick Joltes”



WTOV9.COM

**John Marshall High School legend Harold Vitalie bequests \$1.5m to local charities**

A million-and-a-half dollars has been allocated to four local charities in honor of the longtime J...

***Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium Dedication 12-10-24 - 20***



## FARM WIRE

A poem by:

Chris  
Foley

Chester Greenwood had all-American ears:

turning chalk white, beet red, then  
deep blue, in that order, when  
the land and sea breezes  
raced over the Maine border once again:  
down the mountains, past the piers,  
to see who freezes  
the pits and ponds first.

Worst often comes to worst,  
and there would be Chester  
practicing math on his skates,  
tracing zeros and figure eights  
his ears turning motley-colored like a jester.  
He'd whirl and twirl as the winds did swirl,  
and every boy and every girl  
had an ear-stinging tease that they would hurl.

Chester, ears burning, packed up his pride,  
and stalked home his patriotic ears to hide.

As he warmed himself by the fireside  
he fiddled and fussed with a bit of farm wire.

Invested with inventiveness and desire,

Chester toiled with that coil  
to form a frame to spoil  
the cold's coloring his ears.





## FARM WIRE

In all her long years,  
his grandmother had never heard such a plan  
from a woman or a man,  
to fashion, knit and fit a shield to stop harmful winds and names.

But she did as she was asked, and sewed  
A little beaver fur fast around the wire frames.  
Chester tested the fit and, satisfied, awaited the vindication he was owed,  
as the temperature sank lower and lower as it snowed.

The next day was no day for fun,  
it was like there had never been a sun,  
arctic air clung all around,  
frost heaves swelled the rising ground  
as Chester shouldered his skates along,  
ears tightly covered, nothing in the slightest wrong.  
Upon his arrival the chapped lips of the skaters gaped in awe,  
their watering eyes couldn't believe what they saw.

Chester strapped on his skates and stayed  
on the ice all day, while the other skaters were far less bold, waylaid  
by the wind and cold, lasting a short while only to file home hastily to get warm.  
He frolicked and laughed good-naturedly as he braved the storm,  
and the others marveled as they inspected the device,  
for underneath was his normal-colored ear, free from ice.  
Word spread like wildfire; people had to hear,  
thanks to Chester they no longer had to fear the frost gnawing at their ear.



# FARM WIRE

Flatterers sincerely imitate when the idea is right,  
and soon there were all manner of ear coverings in sight.  
Though none had the right fit, none stayed right in place.  
One here fell off the ear, one there flipped over the face.

All this enthusiasm for his invention told Chester what he had to do,  
when he applied for and received, at the age of 18, US patent number 188,292.  
Next, Chester identified, engaged, and persuaded each investor and, by the age of 23,  
had opened the doors of the first Champion Ear Protectors factory.



“Farmington, Maine celebrated Chester Greenwood Day on December 3 this year. However, for those of us who had Honors History at John Marshall HS (Glen Dale, WV), December 21st will always be the day to celebrate Chester Greenwood and sip a Moxie, thanks to Harold E. Vitale! So, to my friends . . . CHEERS! “~Wendy Amrhein Cain



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“[Harold and I] first met years ago when he was looking at the book pile in my arms in the aisles of Salvation Army. He had comments on each of the books and would regale me with stories of the book treasures he had found. I knew him as an expert and formidable book-buying adversary - often making a game out of it showing off what we had found before the other had gotten there. We would run into each other regularly at the auctions and thrift shops of Wheeling over the past 16 years - all in pursuit of the dusty old tomes.” ~Rebekah Karelis

“Mr. Vitale was a wonderful teacher. He gave up his lunch hour 3 days a week to give me one-on-one lectures in History Honors because it wouldn't fit in my schedule. That gave me the GPA boost I needed to graduate first in my class. I didn't fully appreciate at the time what a selfless gesture that was.”

~Jennifer Buzzard Adkins



Harold had a lot of moxie.

Photo courtesy Susan Haddad.



*Harold E. Vitalie Auditorium Dedication 12-10-24 - 26*



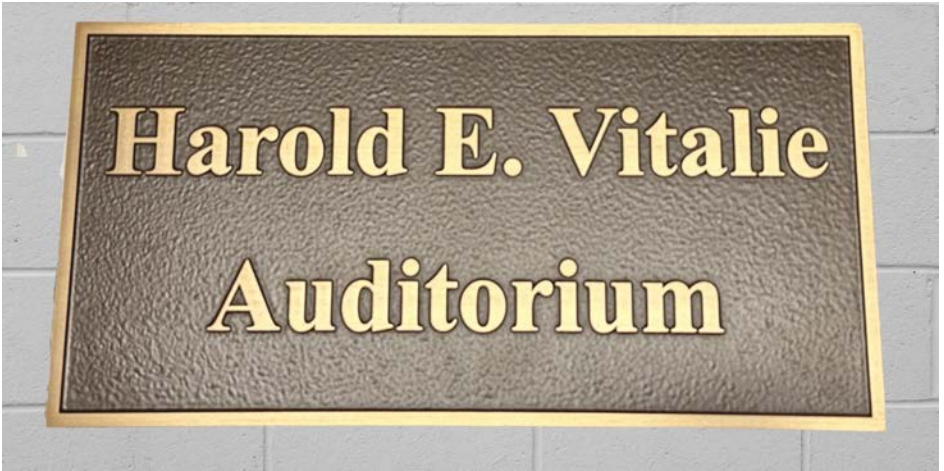
Pops was also a local legend!

Caption: Wheeling, WV a 3/14/49: Outside mine foreman Harold "Lard" Vitalie" of the Valley Camp coal company mine number 5, here, gives off with a big yawn, expressing his sentiments of the inactivity at the mine. The miners in this area left the pits Friday night due to the scheduled no working shift over the weekend and expect to return Monday morning, March 28. (Acme Telephoto)

### Don Clegg

Sorry to hear of his passing. One of my favorite teachers. His father - also named Harold but he went by "Lard" - coached Wheeling Post 1 American Legion baseball for years and won 4 state legion championships. John Beilein was a student teacher for him the year after I graduated from JMHS. Said Mr. Vitale was one of the most intelligent people he ever met. RIP, Mr. Vitale. You impacted a lot of lives.

*\*Drumroll \**  
So let it be written...



So let it be done...



Forever Front & Center.



So long Harold, until we meet again.

*Illegitimi non carborundum*



[www.ohiocountylibrary.org](http://www.ohiocountylibrary.org)