Ruppenthal was boyhood weather recorder for National Weather Service

by Kate Shunney

Henry Ruppenthal III, formerly of Berkeley Springs and now a resident of Wheeling, gained fame at the age of 11 when he became the youngest cooperative weather observer for the National Weather Service in 1948. Some of that notoriety has returned, as Goldenseal magazine featured Ruppenthal's story in its Winter 2014 issue.

The story about his exploits as a Morgan County weather observer, written by Carl Feathers, talks about the seriousness the young man lent to his daily task of taking temperature and precipitation measurements at a weather station set up by the National Weather Service on his family's farm along U.S. 522.

His data didn't just go to the government weather agency, but to WCST, the local radio station, and area newspapers, plus The Morgan Messenger.

Ruppenthal's post was announced just below the masthead of the October 28, 1948 issue of the Messenger under the headline:

"Henry Ruppenthal Named Weather Observer"

Henry M. Ruppenthal, III, has been named cooperative weather observer for Berkeley Springs, according to an announcement by Victor T. Horn, section director, of Parkersburg.

Equipment for the work was set up Friday by Town Sergeant A.B. Dyche and Charles Waugh, under the direction of Mr. Horn, at the home of Ruppenthal's father.

A record of the instruments recordings will be kept from day to day and each week a report of rain fall, temperatures, etc., will appear in this

Right away, his weather reports were spread to local audiences. On Nov. 11 1948, the Messenger carried this

"Low of 29 Recorded": According to Henry M. Ruppenthal, III, local cooperative weather observer, the lowest temperature for the period November 4, to 9, inclusive, was 29 degrees on the morning of November 8. Highest for the period was 75 on November 6. One sunny day was noted, the rest being cloudy or rainy. During the period .95 of an inch of rain was recorded.

In Feathers' story, Ruppenthal noted that it was his father – Henry Ruppenthal Jr. — who told him about the opportunity to become an official weather observer. The elder Ruppenthal was a local well-known professional photographer. The young weatherman was one of four Ruppenthal children. The others are Virgil Ruppenthal, Ronnie Sue Childers and Judy

Downpour of attention

Taking on such a responsibility at his age brought the young Ruppenthal much attention. His post was mentioned in publications from the New York Times to American Farm Youth. He was even featured in a cartoon news item by Stookie Allen under the title of "Teen-Age Triumphs." The item, distributed by the Associated Press, showed a sketch of Ruppenthal, along with this copy:

"His boss at the Parkersburg weather bureau says his reports are 'almost perfect.' It's an important job for Henry!'

Ruppenthal kept on taking weather measurements into adulthood, though not all by



Henry Ruppenthal III is pictured with his youngest grandchild, Genevieve, on the occasion of her first birthday in January 2015. photo courtesy of Henry Ruppenthal

himself, Feathers wrote.

"Henry remained the observer of record during that time, although his siblings and father were actually making the observations. Henry returned to Morgan County, and, while living at his parents' farm with his wife, continued his observation work while earning his degree at Shepherd College. He also kept up with the observation work while teaching in a oneroom school at Cherry Run, Morgan County."

Ruppenthal went on to teach at the local high school, and then left the schoolroom to be a child welfare worker locally. That job took him away from Morgan County.

He worked for 25 years in the West Virginia Department

of Welfare (now the DHHR), retired from that agency in 1988, and then began another career as an information technology professional, Ruppenthal told The Morgan Messenger. That career took him across New England for 20 years.

He and his wife Jean retired to Clearview, a suburb of Wheeling, ten years ago.

They have five children, 17 grandchildren, and 10 great grandchildren.

Ruppenthal still has 18 years worth of official weather data in his possession. He says that six decades later, meteorological matters still interest him.

"I do watch the weather and I am often more accurate than those computer models," he



Goldenseal magazine reprinted this 1948 cartoon showing Morgan County boy Henry Ruppenthal III in his role as a weather observer.

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