

C. EDGAR PATIENCE BLACK DIAMOND SCULPTOR

WHEN?
1906-1972

WHERE?
Wyoming Valley



VOCABULARY
Anthracite coal
Black diamond
Coachman
teamster
whittling

EVENT
Patience was
the premier
sculptor of
coal

Sculptors work with many different mediums to create their works of art. C. Edgar Patience of West Pittston worked with one of the rarest mediums-- anthracite coal—the “black diamond”. His love and skill for the art became legendary. His work was shown in Canada by request and Barbados used his work for its official seal when the country became independent in 1966 (Times Leader 2015). His work was also exhibited at the Smithsonian Institute in



Washington, D.C., and in the lobby of the United Mine Workers headquarters in the same city (Moss 106). According to Moss, Daniel J. Flood, Congressman, purchased pieces of art and gave every president from Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Richard Nixon a piece of work by Patience. Queen Juliana of the Netherlands received a jeweled clock and necklace made by Patience from veterans of the 101st Airborne on the 25th anniversary celebration of liberation from Nazi occupation.

Born in 1906 in West Pittston, he watched his father Harry, a former breaker boy in West Pittston breakers, working on coal jewelry and other small pieces such as necklaces and bracelets. Harry had watched his father, Crowder, whittle pieces from coal. Crowder, a former slave who fought in the Civil War with the 103rd Pennsylvania Infantry, lived in West Pittston and worked as a coachman and teamster (Moss 102). Apparently, he enjoyed whittling and showed his sons how to work with anthracite. Harry Patience had a shop at 34 Washington Street in West Pittston where his six sons learned the basics of the art. So, given his family influence perhaps it was not unusual that Edgar began to carve coal too.

He and two of his brothers, Harold and older brother Kenneth, carried on the coal sculptor business when their father passed away in 1926. They had already been making hearts and charms but began to expand into other items such as ashtrays, lamp holders, desk nameplates, clock cases and other items (times leader 2015). During the World War II invasion of Italy at Anzio, Harold unfortunately lost part of his right hand in the fighting (Times Leader 2015). Then, in 1951, Charles Edgar (known as Edgar) moved to Wilkes-Barre with his second wife, Alice M. Patterson. She helped to support the family as a manager at Blue Cross so he could pursue his art (Moss 105).



Edgar decided to teach himself how to sculpt and began to visit many museums and art galleries and studied a variety of books on sculpture techniques. He experimented with ways to work with coal learning how to look for flaws and faults in the various pieces. He developed



delicate tools for carving and polishing along with lifts to utilize with his heavier pieces (Capwell-Fox n.d.)

Moss reports that Edgar carved the “Mack bulldog” for Mack trucks which was placed in the trophy room of the company president. Edgar carved a bust of George Washington, and a bust of John F. Kennedy (which he had worked on for about 9 months), and created an exhibit titled “Coaltown, U.S.A.”. Out of a very large block of anthracite coal he worked for 17 years in his spare time on the piece that has homes, streets, breakers, coal cars, miners and a company store (Capwell-Fox n.d.). Now at the State Museum in Harrisburg, it had traveled to many places in Pennsylvania. His sculpture of Kennedy was shown at the 1967 Expo in Montreal, Canada, as one of five invited American folk artists. Lady Bird Johnson, First Lady to husband President Lyndon Johnson, had a clock and bookends in the White House (Times Leader 2015). Moss also states, “It is no wonder that *Ebony* magazine referred to him as “America’s most unusual Sculptor” in their March 1970 issue.” He was named in *Who’s Who in the World* in 1972 (Moss 107).

One of his largest works is an altar made from a single piece of coal that was placed in King’s College chapel. It is estimated to weigh between 4,000 and 4,800 pounds. There is also an altar of anthracite bricks that he produced for St. Peter’s Lutheran Church in Hanover Township (Times Leader 2015).

He passed away in 1972 at age 65 due to pneumonia complicated from working with the anthracite and inhaling the dust.



ONLINE RESOURCES

[The Patience of Edgar](#) Times Leader 2015

[National Canal Museum Revealing the Black Beauty of Anthracite Coal: Charles Edgar Patience 1906-1972](#)
[Martha Capwell-Fox](#)

[Patience on Youtube](#)

PRINT RESOURCES

Moss, Emerson. *African Americans in the Wyoming Valley 1778— 1990*. Wilkes-Barre: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society and the Wilkes University Free Press. 1992.