Jesse A. Bloch – *Public Service*

Jesse A. Bloch was the second-generation son of a German immigrant family who came to the United States in the mid-19th century. Born to Samuel and Bertha Bloch in 1879, he attended Wheeling public schools and Linsly and earned degrees from Phillips-Exeter and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He joined Bloch Brothers Tobacco Co., the business founded by his father and his Uncle Aaron, in 1900. He later became the company's vice president, and from 1937-47, held the office of president.

Bloch Brothers, a unionized company, enjoyed positive relationships with its workers, something exemplary for this period in American history. The fair labor practices of the Bloch company had a profound influence on Jesse after he entered the political world in West Virginia's House of Delegates and the state Senate.

During his first House term (1912-14) he advanced a bill, written by Wheeling's central labor body, the Ohio Valley Trades and Labor Assembly, dealing with workman's compensation. House Bill No. 9 became known as the Bloch Bill. Watered down by the state's insurance companies and its coal barons, it was "the foundation of which to build" and, according to labor historians, one of the greatest labor victories before World War I.

When Bloch moved to the state Senate, he found himself embroiled in one of the nation's social issues– women's suffrage. Female suffrage failed in a statewide vote in 1916 with 70% voting no. In 1920, there was a new push for suffrage in the form of an amendment to the United States Constitution. With 36 states needed for this amendment to pass, West Virginia's approval was crucial, but the Senate was deadlocked at 14 to 14. Bloch supported suffrage, but he was in California when the special session of the Senate convened. Alerted to this deadlock, Bloch returned to Charleston by train, taking three days to make the trip. His affirmative vote broke the tie, and West Virginia approved what became the 19th Amendment. His role in this political drama was celebrated in the state on the 100th anniversary of its passage.

As a community leader, he played leadership roles with the Wheeling Housing Authority, the Ohio Valley General Hospital, the Boy Scouts, the Ohio County Anti-Tuberculosis League, and, during World War I, the Liberty Loan program.

In May 1940, he and his siblings donated their parents' home, Elmhurst, to the Home for Aged Women. Given in honor of their mother, the home, since enlarged, continues to serve retired area residents.

Jesse married Jessie Thornton Moffat. Along with their two children, they joined the Vance Memorial Church, close to their home in Pleasant Valley. Jesse is the third member of his family to be added to the Wheeling Hall of Fame, joining his father, Samuel, and a grandson, Stuart.

Bloch died in his home on January 17, 1951, and is buried in Wheeling's Greenwood Cemetery.