

Subject Files BUSINESS-  
CHIMNEY SWEEPS

Saturating Atlanta's Suburbs  
**NEIGHBOR**  
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# Fire Made Howards Aware Of

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If you kiss a chimney sweep, legend says it will bring you good luck.

Chimney sweep Eve Howard of south Dekalb won't offer you any kisses, but she will give you a lucky hand shake.

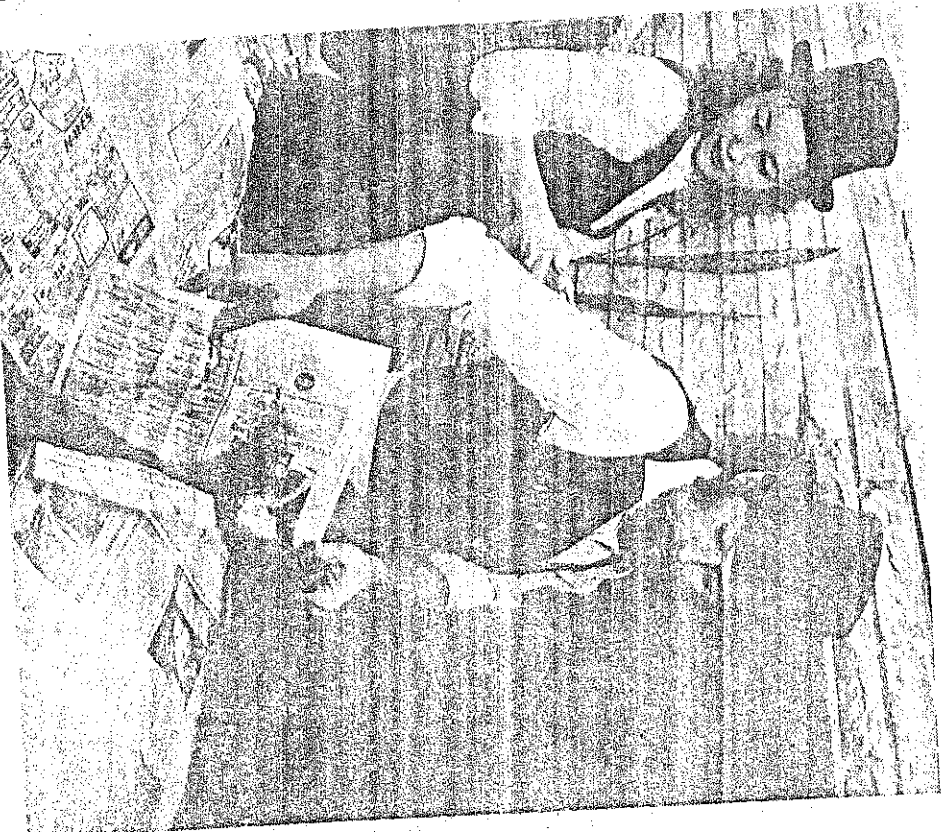
If you give a room full of kids the task of writing an essay on "what I want to do when I grow up," chances are they will not include chimney sweeping as a choice — but it must be an ideal job from a child's eye view. You are not stuck behind a desk, you can work in the great outdoors, you get to do something that saves people's lives — and you can get as dirty as all get out.

The Howards did not deliberately plan to become sweeps, but got into the profession by chance and happenstance. The husband/wife team have been sweeps for 15 years, first in their native West Virginia and now in Dekalb County.

**When a chimney fire starts, take these precautions:**

1. Close the dampers to the chimney; this limits the air supply to the fire.
2. Remove the family from the premises.
3. Call the fire department if the fire doesn't go out immediately.
4. Wet down the roof and other outside areas to prevent fires started by shocking sparks and flames.
5. Keep a close watch on all surfaces near the chimney.

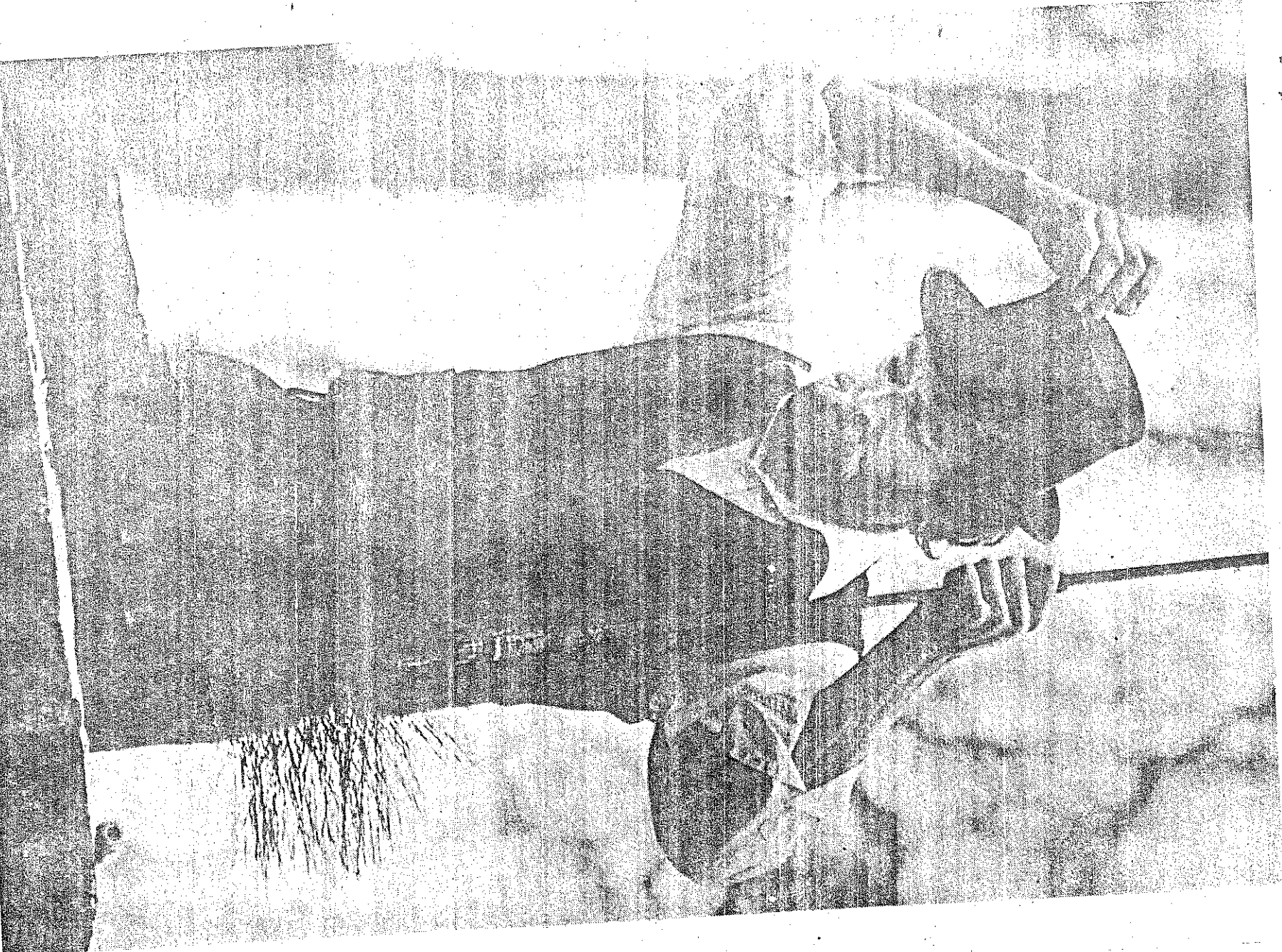
Source: Dekalb Extension Service



Staff Photo By Paul Eiland

**CHIMNEY SWEEPING IS AN OLD AND HONORED PROFESSION**  
Howards Remove Ash From Chimney After Brushing Deposits Loose

## Need For Chimney Sweeps



Staff Photo By Paul Ethand  
**RUSS HOWARD BEGINS DRY SCRUBBING THE CHIMNEY AFTER TAPING THE FIREPLACE CLOSED**  
Wearing His Top Hat On Roof Is Supposed To Prevent Unfortunate Falls According To Sweep Lore

The tragedy of losing their own home because of a fire ingrained in them permanently the dangers of letting creosote accumulate dangerously in a chimney.

Top that off with trying to sell some wolf cubs for \$150 each and a new career, "Magic Hat Chimney Sweeps," was born.

"We were living in West Virginia and, thanks to an amorous wolf that

shed with our pet German Shepherd, we acquired those pups.

We were trying to sell them for \$150 apiece when a strange looking man

came to our door, wearing a top hat and a black suit," she recalled. A

European, the man was working as a sweep and, believing in the barter

method of transaction, offered to teach the Howards how to sweep in

return for a pup. He also threw in four customers in the bargain. The

Howards were now in business.

"Even though we had had the misfortune of losing a house, we

were lucky that all five of our kids were rescued. Russ has an uncle

who was not so lucky — he lost two children in a fire several years

earlier," she said.

Because of the tragedy and the near-tragedy, the Howards joined

the small, but growing, number of chimney sweeps.

In Europe, chimney sweeps are hired by the government and, as a

safety measure, they go door to door cleaning chimneys on a regular basis. The sweeps go through a

"We clean by hand, not by machine or chemicals," Mrs. Howard explains. "This job we do is an

arduous training period, from apprentice to master. In the United States, the chimney sweeping profession fell by the wayside when the use of wood and coal burning stoves declined. But, with a new resurgence of interest in these cheap and brushes for square chimneys and brushes for round chimneys. Replace openings are secured with newspaper and tape to prevent the fine dust from filtering down into the room. Russ Howard then crawls up on the roof and dry scrubs the chimney from above.

There are many superstitions regarding this profession. "We wear

art — never expect a machine to do what a hand craftsman will do," she explained.

**MAGIC HAT CHIMNEY SWEEPS WEAR TRADITIONAL CLOTHING**  
Staff Photo By Paul Elland



our top hat for good luck — and the story goes that if you climb up on a roof without it, you'll fall." Superstition or not, that very thing happened to Russ Howard several years ago. He did not wear his hat as legend dictates and he fell and broke his back.

It is also supposed to be lucky for the sweep to wear cast off clothing; also supposed to be lucky to kiss or shake hands with a chimney sweep. If you see a black cat, hold your buttons until you see a sweep and

you'll avoid bad luck.

And, superstition or not, it is definitely bad luck not to clean your chimneys on a regular basis. Creosote deposits collect and can easily catch fire. Sparks can fly onto the roof, or flame can seep into attic crevices, undetected until too late. A fire can smolder several days before being detected; by the time smoke fills your house, it may be too late, Eve Howard said.

She advises that you look at your own chimney and if you see black deposits inside or on the outside of

the chimney, call a sweep for advice. This is a free service, she said. "Pine is the worst culprit for leaving creosote deposits. A chimney that has had pine usage for just one month — not a whole season (as is applicable for hard woods) — should be checked," she said. The Howards charge \$45 to \$75 to sweep a chimney and can take from one and a half hours to five or six, depending on the job. The Howards have been known to turn down jobs due to such a large, old accumulation of creosote.