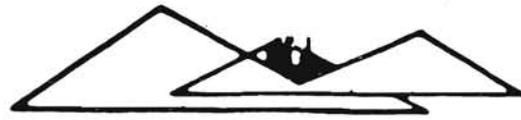


NEWS

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APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

LETTER

Loyal Jones • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

Vol. 14 No. 4

Fall 1985

Looking Forward

February 21-23: Folk music weekend, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. Fiddle, dulcimer, banjo, hammered dulcimer, mountain music.

March 1-2: Crafts weekend, John C. Campbell Folk School. Photography, spinning and dyeing, weaving, wood carving, wood turning, pottery-glaze technique. Followed by

March 7-9: enameling, blacksmithing, wood carving, oil marbling, quilting, calligraphy, and by

March 14-16: blacksmithing, lap quilting, wood carving, weaving, batik, woodworking.

March 21-23: Appalachian Studies Conference, Center for Continuing Education, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. 28608.

April 10-12: Fifth annual New River symposium, sponsored by the New River Gorge National River of the National Park Service, joined this year by the Wytheville Community College and the West Virginia Department of Culture and History; Wytheville Holiday Inn, Wytheville, Va. You don't have to be a professional to attend this conference, but if you don't have a serious interest in the New River you probably wouldn't feel at home; papers will cover everything from geology to folklore. Information from William E. Cox, P.O. Box 1189, Oak Hill, W.Va. 25901. The proceedings of the four previous symposia are available (at \$12.50 each) from the same address.

Wolfe Winner

Loyal Jones, director of the Berea College Appalachian Center, has received the Thomas Wolfe Literary Award for his book *Minstrel of the Appalachians: The Story of Bascom Lamar Lunsford* (see CENTER NEWSLETTER, Winter 1985). The book was published by the Appalachian Consortium Press. This biography of the ballad singer, folklorist and founder of the Mountain Dance and Folk Festival follows the author's study of another musician, radio's Bradley Kincaid.

The award is signaled by a dazzling, bucket-sized silver trophy. It is presented by the Western North Carolina Historical Association.



CELEBRATOR
(see page 3)

AF and ARC

We've been keeping something of an eye on the fledgling Appalachian Foundation, the private-sector successor to the moribund but still-fighting Appalachian Regional Commission, and we can now report that the new organization has chosen a president, Carolyn Doppelt Gray. A native of Fort Wayne, Ind., Ms. Gray joined the Reagan Administration in 1981 as director of the Office of Women's Business Ownership at the Small Business Administration. Previously she was in advertising and served as president of a juvenile-furniture manufacturer, as well as practicing law.

Although the new foundation has nothing like the money that was at the disposal of the ARC, it nevertheless has already gone into the grant-making business; during the current school year it will award more than \$1 million to support innovative dropout-reduction efforts at the local level (as they say). This program is being conducted in conjunction with the ARC. Close ties with the ARC are also demonstrated by the fact that ARC Federal Co-Chairman Winifred Pizzano serves as vice chairman of the Appalachian Foundation. Where all this will end, we don't quite know.

In October, Ms. Pizzano announced ARC's own grant of \$782,750 to Kentucky for a comprehensive program aimed at reducing what is perhaps the highest state dropout rate in the country. The money, to be combined with local and other funds, including \$40,000 from the Appalachian Foundation (you can see the smaller scale on which the private-sector operation

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AF from page 1

functions), will be used for special counseling, alternative-education classes, special teachers and tutors and computerized basic-skills instruction in 24 of Kentucky's 49 Appalachian counties. The bleak fact is that eight of the 11 states with the highest dropout rates are in Appalachia. No one could quarrel with Ms. Pizzano's conclusion that "these statistics must be changed."

In other news along the general ARC front, those with special interest in energy matters may recall Coal Summit I, a meeting held in Lexington, Ky., last April, for which a series of background papers on the environment, export markets, transportation and fuel choice were prepared with funding from the ARC. Now these papers, together with a summary of the summit, are available from the Kentucky Energy Cabinet, P.O. Box 11888, Ironworks Pike, Lexington, Ky. 40578.

John Lair 1894-1985

"He was the only person I ever knew who lived out his boyhood dream and continued living it until the end"—that was that parting observation made by one Renfro Valley musician about John Lair, creator of the Renfro Valley Barn dance, who died in November at the age of 91.

The development of Renfro Valley, in Rockcastle County, Ky., as a country music center represented the return to home of a native who earlier had given Appalachian music to the nation through his work on radio station WLS in Chicago, beginning in the 1920s. Dissatisfied with the local country musicians appearing on the station, Lair made a recruiting trip back to Kentucky and returned to Chicago with several musicians from the Renfro Valley area, who became the nucleus of the National Barn Dance, broadcast on Saturday nights. In the 1930s, Lair and a group of performers moved to WLW in Cincinnati, a big step closer to home, and in 1939 the final move was made with the homecoming to the Renfro Valley complex.

A protean figure in the country-music field, Lair was a composer, a finder of talent (among his discoveries, Red Foley, Lily May Pennington, Homer and Jethro), a collector of songs, a producer and entrepreneur. Perhaps most important, he consistently fought to preserve traditional music first against the pop-style western swing of 50 and 60 years ago and later against rock and the glitz and hokum of Nashville (he bridled at the sight of gaudily dressed performers and at the sounds that erupted from their electric/electronic instruments).

The only thing that seemed missing from John Lair's country-music dream life was election to the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville. Perhaps, posthumously, that omission will be rectified.

Where To Find It

Since books constitute the theme of this issue of the CENTER NEWSLETTER, it seems appropriate to talk about a new publication called *Archives in Appalachia:*

A Directory, which should be just what the researcher ordered. This guide describes 181 repositories in seven Appalachian heartland states which hold historical records documenting the political, social, cultural and economic history of the region. You can find the size of the holdings, the type of material, the subject-matter areas it covers, even the working hours of the repository. The directory was compiled by the Appalachian Consortium, with support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. It's available for \$2.00 from the consortium, University Hall, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. 28608.

EYE on Publications

Doris Ulmann. American Portraits, by David Featherstone (University of New Mexico Press). It is certainly long past time for a full-dress biography of the New York portrait photographer who first visited the Appalachian South some 60 years ago to take pictures of rural people from all walks of life—and who returned every summer for several years to continue producing her extraordinary photographic document, embodied in more than 3,000 glass-plate negatives. And in some important respects, this book fills the bill; Featherstone provides new biographical information and sets up a critical framework in which to place Doris Ulmann's *oeuvre*. The author sees the artist as working between two contrasting photographic trends—the romantic pictorialism of the 1920s and the attempts at documentary realism of the 1930s; you will find many of her pictures beautifully reproduced here. On the debit side, however, we must report that the author and the editors show limited concern for factual accuracy with respect to such matters as names and places. One would suppose that the University of New Mexico Press possesses among its reference books an atlas that lists "Gatlinburg" (not "Gatlinberg"), Tennessee; and somebody should have taken the trouble to find out that John C. Campbell was not "Joseph G." Other errors, such as the misspellings of the names of several of Doris Ulmann's subjects, are frequent. Too bad—because these lapses, some of them inexplicable, keep us from giving the book the "A" it might otherwise deserve.

Portraits and Dreams, by Wendy Ewald (Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc.; distributed by Norton). The author—perhaps "editor" would be a more appropriate designation—began teaching school in Letcher County, Ky., in 1975. She was not a conventional teacher, however; what she did was to create her own project, involving cameras and students at various schools in the area. Some of the results are now preserved in this collection of "photographs and stories by children of the Appalachians"; earlier, these pictures were exhibited in galleries in Chicago and New York. An afterword makes the point that Ewald shares Sylvia Ashton-Warner's belief that "children can become eloquent in an unfamiliar medium if they are asked to tell us about what they know intimately and about what crucially affects them." But this particular form of eloquence seemed to grow silent with the arrival of puberty; the students quit school and got married, joined the Army, went to work at the Pizza Hut. One day not long



Berea College



CELEBRATORS: At the 12th annual Celebration of Traditional Music, held in Berea in October, pioneer radio star Bradley Kincaid (l., above) received a special tribute. With him here are two other celebration performers, "Bashful Joe" Troyan (center) and Grandpa Jones. The three played together for several years in the 1930s, mostly over station WBZ, Boston. Ramona Jones, fiddler and singer, was also on hand for the celebration (left). Page 1 photo shows Bobby McMillon.

EYE *continued*

ago, one of these former child photographers came by to show his new wife the darkroom and tell her "about the time they used to take pictures." A striking—indeed, fascinating—book.

The Dollmaker, by Harriette Simpson Arnow (University Press of Kentucky). A reissue, of course, of the classic 1954 novel, originally published by Macmillan—and with the original rather than the TV ending. Reviewers certainly weren't caught napping when *The Dollmaker* made its first appearance; "a novel of extraordinary power," said the *New York Herald Tribune*; a "superb work," with "glowing richness of character and scene," agreed the *Times*. Since those days *The Dollmaker* has become acknowledged as one of the finest novels ever to come out of Appalachia.

Fire in the Hole, by Curtis Selzer (University Press of Kentucky). "Fire in the hole!" was a warning shouted by miners a few seconds before they started blasting coal loose from the earth of which it had been a part for millions of years. The author sees the phrase as being

equally useful in describing the relationship over the years between labor and management in this turbulent industry. The approach here is in fact historical, the author showing how market forces have victimized both coal suppliers and their workers for most of this century, as demand has shifted to other fuels, and how producers have responded to problems by adopting policies leading to strikes, inefficiency and continuing turmoil. Though they were often captives of forces they did not control, the author observes, operators nevertheless "concocted their own mean twists." And they had something else besides coal sales going for them: "the company store system was so lucrative that mine operators often paid their workers to mine coal even when it sold for no gain." The author is described as a writer and energy consultant.

Blacks in Appalachia, edited by William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell (University Press of Kentucky). An anthology dedicated to the idea that blacks in the Appalachian region are "neither invisible nor insignificant." Blacks have, in fact, lived in southern Ap-

palachia from early times, some hollows and coal camps having been almost exclusively black settlements. The editors express the hope that the book will "provide some direction and impetus to new research into, and policymaking for, blacks in Appalachia and their migrant brothers and sisters."

Blacks in Appalachia is divided into topical sections, dealing with the early history of blacks in the region, with studies of black communities, with relations between blacks and whites, with blacks as coal miners, and with local politics. Also included are oral accounts of black life and a discussion of black Appalachian demography. In choosing the selections, the editors say, they were guided by the aim of prompting reexamination of "the idea that the absorption of blacks into the mainstream of middle America is evident or inevitable." Perhaps, they say in line with current trends in sociological thought, such absorption is not even desirable; a coherent black community need be no more un-American than is any other self-aware ethnic group.

The editors are, respectively, chairman, Department of Social Science at Winston-Salem State University and director of the John Henry Memorial Foundation in West Virginia.

The Uneven Ground, edited by Rudy Thomas (Kentucky Imprints, Berea, Ky. 40403). Several years ago, it seems, a Kentucky high school teacher was particularly struck by a dictum once uttered by Jim Wayne Miller: "Education in Appalachia could set itself no better goal than helping Appalachian children define who they are." Inspired by the thought, Rudy Thomas put together a collection of essays, poetry and fiction "in the hope that regional material, dealing with Appalachia and designed for a particular group, students in the Clinton County High School Phase English Program, and a particular place, Albany, Kentucky, a rural community at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, might enhance the group's understanding that the roles and values of a region are building blocks that are laid up with the mortar of other influences in the

construction of individuals." The hope now is that this material, in published form, will be used by other high school teachers seeking to accomplish the same enhancement. Appalachia, says Jim Wayne Miller in a foreword, "is in many ways a region waking up to an awareness of itself." Many of the writers collected by Thomas express that awakening.

Sometimes a Shining Moment, by Eliot Wigginton (Anchor Press/Doubleday). We remember the day, perhaps 17 years ago, when there arrived in our office a strange little magazine, full of superstitions and remedies and reminiscences and ways of doing old things. It purported to be written by high school students, and its name was evocative: *Foxfire*. We were immediately interested, but we had no idea of what we were seeing—an early step on the path to one of the publishing and educational triumphs of our time. In this book, subtitled "The Foxfire Experience," the father of that experience tells his tale, but not really as a chronicle of success. What he aims at is, as a teacher, to tell us what the *Foxfire* phenomenon has taught him; the audience is teachers, the kinds of teachers who have asked him questions like, "Given our limited resources and our sometimes medieval working environment, how can we do a better job without pushing ourselves into a state of nervous exhaustion in the process?"

Refreshingly, Wigginton is not a fanatic evangelist for the particular activity that made his project famous. Although in one section of the book he sets out to show his educational philosophy at work, "the directions for producing a magazine like *Foxfire* are not there, for that is a specific activity that only a minority of teachers will find useful." His concern is to suggest ways to bring the content of various courses in line with a philosophy "that is like an overarching umbrella, beneath which hundreds of expressions—among them the production of a magazine—are equally valid." This is, says Wigginton, "the book I wish I had had twenty years ago." Readers may well express the same wish.

NOTE: The University of North Carolina Press has recently issued a paperback edition of *All That Is Native and Fine*, by David E. Whisnant.

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