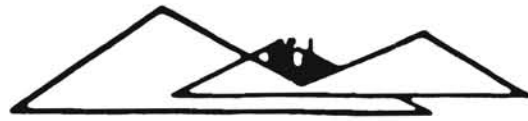


NEWS

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LETTER

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

Loyal Jones • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

Vol. 15 No. 4

Fall 1986

Looking Forward

January 4-9 and 11-17: Winter Augusta workshops, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, W. Va. 26241. A wintry "immersion" in a variety of cultural traditions—American, Irish, English, Canadian—with singers, dancers, fiddlers, others. If you wish to telephone for more information, call 304/636-1903.

January 19-29: More Augusta, this time a two-week session on the documentation of folk culture (oral history, if you prefer).

March 27-29: Appalachian Studies Conference, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tenn. 37614. The meeting will celebrate the tenth anniversary of this organization of persons who care about Appalachia; "Remembrance, Reunion and Revival" is the thematic title. If you have questions, get in touch with Helen Roseberry, 615/929-4392, or the Appalachian Consortium office, 704/262-2064.

April 9-11: Sixth annual New River symposium, sponsored by the New River Gorge National River of the National Park Service and the New River State Park (N.C.); Broyhill Continuing Education Center, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. This conference is for persons, either professionals or amateurs, who have a serious interest in the New River; papers will deal with all sorts of scientific and humanistic topics. Information from park headquarters, 304/465-0508.

July 17-18: The second Festival of Appalachian Humor (the first one was in July 1983), co-hosted by Billy Edd Wheeler, musician, composer and playwright, and Loyal Jones, director of the Appalachian Center; Berea College. Humorists on the invitation list include Roy Blount, Jr., Carl Hurley, Roni Stoneman, Jan Davidson, Jim Comstock, Rev. Donald Davis and Hannah McConnell; prizes will be given for the best jokes, tales, songs, etc. Respectability will be ensured by the presentation of two papers—humor as a coping strength, by Dr. Nat T. Winston, Jr., executive vice president of the American Healthcare Corp. and former mental health commissioner of Tennessee; and the image of women in frontier humor, by Michael A Lofaro, a University of Tennessee English professor and editor of recent books on Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett (see CENTER NEWSLETTER, Spring 1986). Information from the address on page 4 of the NEWSLETTER.



Chuck Perry

VICTIM, ROASTER . . . see page 3

Coal: Who Mines, Who Buys?

During the past two decades the structure of the U.S. coal industry has undergone increasing change. So heavily involved in mining are top chemical, mineral and oil companies that the coal industry cannot really be discussed apart from consideration of the overall energy industry. As is pointed out in a study produced by the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, the acquisitions and mergers of the 1960s and early 1970s have reduced many coal companies to relatively modest positions within parent corporations, which means that decisions about coal production have become subordinate to the policy requirements of the giants.

A close look at the picture in Kentucky, the nation's most prolific coal producer, confirms this general pattern. Unlike state listings, which show production by individual coal companies, the Kentucky Fair Tax Coalition's figures are given according to corporate ownership. Whereas, for example, Star Fire Coal, Lost Mountain Mining, Straight Creek Coal and others would appear independently on most lists, KFTC combines them under their corporate papa, Standard Oil of Indiana. The KFTC figures show that in 1985 just 20 companies—among them such familiar giants as
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Peabody Coal, Occidental Petroleum, Chevron and Sun—controlled nearly 50 percent of Kentucky's production. Only four of the top companies were based in Kentucky. Peabody, a joint venture of Bechtel Corp., Newmont Mining, Boeing, the Williams companies and Equitable Life, mined a very impressive 16.5 million tons, nearly 10 percent of the total. In the No. 2 spot was Arch Minerals, owned by Ashland Oil and the famous Texas Hunt family. Third was Massey Coal, whose corporate parents are Royal Dutch Shell and the Fluor Corp. Except for Ashland's share of Arch, none of the top 10 are based in Kentucky, though they accounted for almost 40 percent of the state's production. (A limited number of copies of the latest study—at \$50 a copy—is available from KFTC, Box 864, Prestonsburg, Ky. 41653.)

Not only do the oil companies, in particular, have large domestic coal holdings, they own mines in foreign countries. The coal produced on these sites from Australia to Colombia to South Africa competes directly with Appalachian coal—not only overseas but in the U.S. An Exxon project in Colombia is, as the CORA paper observes, "courting utilities along the Eastern Seaboard and the Gulf Coast," and its chances of a successful conclusion of the courtship are high because shipping costs from Colombia are only \$8 a ton, compared with \$18-\$20 a ton charged by railroads to move coal from Kentucky to the East Coast.

The strangest wrinkle of all is that the Colombia project is being financed by the U.S. government, through the Export-Import Bank. Here's one occasion where nobody can complain about unfair foreign competition, since the U.S. is competing with itself. One wonders who will win.

Quality Hall of Fame

Not satisfied with having assembled one of the most remarkable collections of artifacts on the North American continent, the Museum of Appalachia's founder, John Rice Irwin, is now launching an Appalachian Hall of Fame, to be headquartered along with the museum in Norris, Tenn.

The philosophy behind the museum, Irwin says, was to recognize "the true breed of old-time Southern Appalachian mountain folk" and to "illustrate and dramatize all that was good and noble about them." They were "characterized by resourcefulness, honesty, integrity, color, humor, unselfishness and an empathic attitude and a genuine warmth toward their fellow man." The resulting museum is all well and good, according to Irwin—in actual fact, it comes about as close as anything could to bringing the past back to life—but he intends now to take a different, supplementary tack. "There were," Irwin says, "certain outstanding traits, as well as certain outstanding people, that needed to be singled out for special acknowledgment and recognition"—so the new hall of fame will be, most unusually, a hall of *qualities*, featuring "outstanding and commendable traits of the region." Some of the traits Irwin has in mind are loyalty, ingenuity, longevity, bravery, "quareness," nonconformity and reclusiveness, along

with more standard badges of greatness such as statesmanship, musical achievement and educational accomplishment.

The candidates exemplifying these traits are a varied group. Ingenuity, for example, might be represented by one Melville Murrell, an East Tennessean who is supposed to have invented the airplane in 1877, some 26 years before the Wright brothers got around to it, or perhaps by Enoch Williams, a man who with only a fourth-grade education devised his own telescopes in order to study the heavens. Sgt. Alvin C. York is an obvious possibility for bravery, and as for "quareness," Irwin says that there are several good candidates.

The project is still in its formative stages, and NEWSLETTER readers can be among those who have an impact on it. Irwin tells us that "any and all suggestions will be appreciated."

Appalachia's Older People: At a Disadvantage

Elderly people in Central and Southern Appalachia do not live as well as the overall U.S. elderly population, says Graham D. Rowles in an Appalachian Data Bank report recently released by the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center and the university's Multidisciplinary Center of Gerontology. This conclusion is not in itself surprising, but the report details the ways in which the Appalachian elderly fall well below national averages for income, access to transportation, availability of telephones, and access to such resources as long-term-care facilities.

Nationally, some 15 percent of the elderly live below the poverty level; the Appalachian figure is "alarmingly worse," more than 25 percent. "Unable to take advantage of already scarce public transportation because of health conditions and further isolated because of lack of access to a telephone, the elderly in Central and Southern Appalachia are often at a disadvantage. Nor do they have access to group living situations." Nevertheless, Rowles says, program planners should move carefully. Since some features of Appalachian family organization, culture and lifestyle may compensate for "objective" disadvantages, these strengths ought not to be jeopardized.

EYE on Publications

Killings, by William Lynwood Montell (University Press of Kentucky). The "State Line Country" is a rugged area of some 90 square miles on the Kentucky-Tennessee border, traditionally characterized by farming, logging and sawmilling—and by a homicide rate more than 10 times the national average. What, the author wondered, created this violent culture—a culture in which killing was done not by hardened criminals but by moral, God-fearing individuals who held and retained full social status within the community? The answer, Montell felt, might yield some understanding of the often-noted phenomenon of southern violence in general, and it might show that



VICTIM: Caudill, as usual, found plenty to say in his own defense. (Photo on p.1 is indeed what it seems—a handshake between Caudill and Bert Combs.)



ROASTERS: Possibly plotting their remarks were two distinguished speakers, UK President Otis Singletary (l.) and former Kentucky Governor Bert Combs.

A Roast to Remember

If any modern book could be called an Appalachian landmark, it is certainly Harry M. Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s, which in the early 1960s did as much as a single book could to bring Appalachia into the forefront of the national consciousness.

Now, a quarter of a century later, the University of Kentucky has conducted a conference (October 30-31) focused on the current status of many of the issues raised by Caudill, including land use, the environment and economic development. There were talks by academics and grassroots representatives, by government officials and literary types.

And, to make sure that everything stayed in perspec-

tive, there was also a roast, with Caudill as the honored occupant of the spit. Roasters included University of Kentucky President Otis Singletary; Ron Eller, director of the university's Appalachian Center; Loyal Jones, director of the Berea College Appalachian Center; Louisville *Courier-Journal* columnist John Ed Pearce; Kentucky Secretary of Labor John Calhoun Wells, who served as roastmaster; Edward T. Breathitt, Jr., representing his father, a former Kentucky governor; and another former Kentucky governor, Bert T. Combs, who of all the roasters was probably the funniest and who seemed to derive the most enjoyment from applying sizzle to the honoree on the spit.

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such violence is not all of a piece from Richmond to Houston and Louisville to Miami; the State Line area might have distinctive characteristics of its own.

In describing his early life, one man Montell spoke with "verged on bitterness, reflecting a resentment against his early physical and cultural environment," partly explaining why he grew up to be a part of the troublemaking element.

But why was this troublemaking element so potent? Before the Civil War, it appears, the State Line society was not notable for lethal violence. But the breakdown of social control during the Civil War, followed in 1873 by the passing of a federal alcohol-control law, led to cultural change: "a people torn asunder by guerrilla warfare and placed constantly on the defensive against threats to their very existence were not ready to surrender to federal agents whose presence threatened their economic and social structure." Even the drinking patterns changed, consumption becoming periodic but heavier as production moved from homes to hollows and caves.

The result was to produce an anti-law and anti-police

sentiment that remains strong today. In 1979 a first-class troublemaker—attempted first-degree murder, bank robbery, attempted burglary, assault and battery and so forth—ignored a shouted order to surrender and was shot and killed by an FBI agent. In the State Line area the man was eulogized as "a good old country boy who would give you the shirt off his back," and one person explained away the miscreant's misdeeds by saying "they got him on the run and he had to do things when they got him that way." This respect for violence, Montell suggests, stems from a "fatal code" subscribed to by State Line residents. He further suggests that other case studies be undertaken elsewhere in the South, in order to learn what other codes are and where they came from.

Rural Community in the Appalachian South, by Patricia Duane Beaver (University Press of Kentucky). The author, a professor of anthropology at Appalachian State, sets out to analyze the elements that go to make up the sense of community in southern Appalachia. Certainly few persons are more dissatisfied away from "home" than are people from Appalachia. Close iden-

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tification with place—with a very particular place—and close ties with people are Appalachian characteristics familiar to everybody, and despite all the changes in the region in the past 20 years this sense of belonging is still a potent force.

Much of the material, happily, is presented not abstractly but through the doings of named characters. Thus we learn, for instance, that when Cicero Woody's brother-in-law (all names are pseudonyms) got federal contracts to rebuild bridges destroyed by flooding, he began raising his prices when he heard that other contractors were charging double the fair amount and getting it—"he felt a little guilty about it at first, but since the federal people seemed such fools . . . he figured they might as well give it to them as to the big-time outfits." Perhaps, having taken this first step, the brother-in-law ended up doing business with the Pentagon, and made himself some big easy bucks.

The Man Who Wanted Seven Wives, by Katie Letcher Lyle (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, P.O. Box 2225, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27515). In January 1897, in Greenbrier County, W. Va., a young woman married three months was found dead by a neighbor child, apparently of natural causes. But within a few weeks of her death her ghost appeared several times at the bedside of her mother with some startling information—the bride had been murdered by her husband. On the mother's insistence, the body was exhumed and the ghost's evidence confirmed, and in due course the husband was convicted of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

No, we're not talking about a novel here. This was an actual real-life murder—as the historical marker near U.S. Route 60 says, the "only known case in which testimony from ghost helped convict a murderer." Fascinated by this story, and somewhat dubious about the soundness of spectral evidence, the author set out to discover what actually happened. She interviewed descendants of the convicted man, talked to other residents of the area, and dug into old court records and newspaper files. The locals, she discovered, don't

believe in ghosts nowadays, but on the other hand they would say things like "but how else could she have known?"

Does the author solve the mystery? She believes she has, through a piece of circumstantial evidence she discovered during her research. She has also given us a vivid picture of a world of almost a century ago, a world in some ways like our own, in other ways startlingly different. As a bonus, she throws in a hilarious account of some of the unexpected perils of doing research among the elderly. Don't miss Appendix VII!

Kentucky's Traditional Arts and Crafts: A Bibliography by Charles E. Martin is available as Volume 31 of the *Kentucky Folklore Record*. In addition to the fifty-eight page list of titles, the bibliography has an introduction, a subject index, a chronological index of articles, a chronological list of main subject areas index, and photographs. Send \$10.50 to Kentucky Folklore Record, Box U169, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky. 42101.

From Friends to Subscribers

From time to time during our decade and a half of existence, we've published notes suggesting that some readers of the CENTER NEWSLETTER might wish to become volunteer subscribers, and each time we've brought up the subject we've received a heartening response—for which we're truly grateful. It's been quite a while now since we asked for subscribers (that is, check-writing subscribers; we have thousands of regular readers), and we hope you will respond again as you have in the past. The contribution we suggest is \$3.00. Like everybody else, we have expenses, but whether or not you're able to become a paying subscriber we'll do our best to see that you continue to receive our Appalachian book reviews, economic news, features and other information on the region. A couple of years ago a reader wrote that the CENTER NEWSLETTER is "without doubt the clearest, best-done, most interesting" such publication she has ever read. If you agree with her at all, please let us hear from you.

Published by
Appalachian Center/Berea College
C.P.O. Box 2336
Berea, Ky. 40404

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Berea, Ky. 40404
Permit No. 19