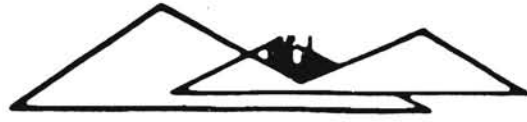


NEWS

LETTER



APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

Loyal Jones • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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Looking Forward

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 any late questions, get in touch with Helen Roseberry, 615/929-4392, or the Appalachian Consortium office, 704/262-2064.

March 27-29: First annual conference in Northern Appalachian studies (inspired by the organization mentioned above?), East Stroudsburg University, East Stroudsburg, Pa. 18301. The theme of the meeting is "Relinking the Appalachian Chain," and the sponsors hope for attendance by "nonaffiliated professionals" as well as academics and persons working in the public sector. Information by telephone from 717/424-3387.

April 7-9: Southern Quilt Symposium, Hunter Museum of Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee. For more information, call Bets Ramsey, 615/265-4300.

April 9-11: Sixth annual New River symposium, sponsored by the New River Gorge National River of the National Park Service and other organizations and institutions; Broyhill Inn and Conference Center, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. One of the aims of this multidisciplinary conference, which is open to everybody with a professional or amateur interest in the New River, is "to break down the barriers between disciplines through a fuller sharing of information," the overall goal being a wider understanding of this remarkable river. More information from park headquarters, 304/465-0508.

April 30-May 1: Conference on southern museums and southern music, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tenn. 38501. Meetings will be on campus and at the Appalachian Center for Crafts. Your best bet for information would be James E. Akenson in the host school's department of curriculum and instruction.

June 8-26: A course in Appalachian Literature and Music, Berea College (*see separate story*).

June 22-27 and June 28-July 3: Appalachian regional school for church leaders, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va. 26506; you can go for one or both weeks. For fuller information, get in touch

with Rev. Lee Hicks, 239 Fourth Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa. 15222; phone: 412/288-4020.

July 17-18: Second Festival of Appalachian Humor, Berea College (*see separate story*).

September 9-10: "Parkways: Past, Present, Future," sponsored by the Appalachian Consortium, the River Foundation and the Blue Ridge Parkway; papers are invited (the deadline is March 27, however); topics will range from economic development to recreation to art and literature. The venue will be the Marriott Inn at the Roanoke airport; find out more from Barry Buxton, University Hall, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. 28608.

Grants from ACF

Founded in mid-1986, the Appalachian Community Fund was established to support organizations run for and by low- and moderate-income Appalachian people, and organizations that are concerned with the underlying causes of social problems and work for fundamental change. Grants will be made in the Appalachian counties of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

In the first grant cycle the fund will give away \$20,000 in awards of up to \$3,000 each. Proposals for this cycle were due on March 16, 1987, and the grants
to page 2

Coming . . . in Earl Palmer's Appalachia (*see p. 3*)



GRANTS *from page 1*

will be decided on June 15. Copies of the grant guidelines are available from the ACF office, 517 Union Ave., Suite 206, Knoxville, Tenn. 37902. If you're not familiar with writing proposals (a condition that probably applies to very few of the readers of this NEWSLETTER), ACF offers a free handbook.

There's another side of the coin, too. As a non-endowed foundation, ACF must raise the money it gives away. Various foundations helped to launch it, and the hope now is that individual donors will provide continuing support. If you're interested in making a contribution, ACF will send you a guide that explains various ways to give and outlines the tax advantages to be derived from certain types of gifts.

Encore for Humor

The stage is set for the Festival of Appalachian Humor, July 17-18 at Berea College, hosted by Billy Edd Wheeler and Loyal Jones. Sage and thoughtful comments on humor will be supplied by Dr. Nat T. Winston, Jr., no slouch at humor himself, on the subject of humor as a coping strength, and by Michael O. Lofaro, of the Department of English at the University of Tennessee, on the image of women in frontier humor. Humorists who have signed on are Roy Blount, Jr., author of *Crackers* and a veteran of *A Prairie Home Companion* and the CBS Morning Program; Carl Hurley, Kentucky humorist, called "America's funniest professor"; Hannah McConnell, Tennessee story teller; Dr. Tim Stivers, Kentucky podiatrist and humorist; Jan Davidson, North Carolina musician and story teller; Jim Comstock, editor of *The West Virginia Hillbilly*; and "Old Joe" Clark, musician and comic from the Renfro Valley Barn Dance. Another important part of the festival, to ensure audience participation, will be a humor contest with prizes of \$75, \$50 and \$25 going to the persons with the best material in several categories, such as jokes, humorous stories, longer tales and songs. First-prize winners will be part of the Saturday evening show. For more information write Loyal Jones at the *Newsletter* address or call 606/986-9341, Extension 5141.

Of Markets and Growth

"Markets tend to be built out of adversity," says Jack Byrd, of the Center for Entrepreneurial Studies and Development at West Virginia University. The vacuum cleaner, for example, was invented by a janitor who was allergic to dust.

Speaking at a conference convened by the Appalachian Regional Commission, Byrd offered a variety of other observations about entrepreneurs and growth. Among them:

- Good ideas create growth. A student at Yale submitted a paper outlining a plan for an overnight delivery service. Although the professor gave him only a C- on the paper, the student nevertheless decided to go ahead with his idea.

The result was the "phenomenally successful" Federal Express.

- Every industry has some growth segment. If you have the right product, there's room for growth even if the industry as a whole is not a growth industry.

- The initial market for products tends to be different from what the entrepreneur expected. The zipper, for instance, was intended for use on tobacco and mail pouches. When it made its first appearance, it was rejected by the clothing industry.

- All sorts of trends and problems offer market opportunities. In the area of recreation, Byrd notes, a group of electrical-engineering students came up with the idea of implanting a sensor device in a football, to detect when the ball was carried or thrown out of bounds. In the environmental realm, clean-coal technology is wide open, as is waste and material recovery technology. Even the insurance crisis opens up new fields; a device now on the market warns manual workers when they are performing a task that's likely to cause injury.

Overall, Byrd says, the public sector should become involved in new business development in several areas—education (teaching young people to be aware of business opportunities), market assessment (a much-neglected aspect of development), the establishment of innovation centers (where people can literally try out new ideas). Finally, attention should be paid to setting up networks whereby people with business ideas can find people who have a need for those ideas.

Dykeman, Malone Offer Summer Special

Berea's Appalachian Center will offer a course in Appalachian Literature and Music, June 8-26, taught by Wilma Dykeman, novelist, biographer and historian, Bill C. Malone, professor of history at Tulane University and author of the definitive book, *Country Music U.S.A.*, and Alan DeYoung, associate professor, Department of Social and Philosophical Studies, University of Kentucky. The cost is \$150 for students and educators, \$450 for others, to cover room, board, tuition and books. Three hours of graduate or undergraduate credit is available through the University of Kentucky College of Education. For more information and an application, write us, or call 606/986-9341, Ext. 5140.

"Economic Crisis"

In a recently released study on the "Appalachian economic crisis," the Commission on Religion in Appalachian documents the erosion over the past five years of economic gains said to have been made as a result of the War on Poverty. The study, which took a year to

to page 3



On Monday, June 15, an exhibition of Appalachian photos by Earl Palmer, the "roving photographer" from Christianburg, Va., will open

at Berea's Hutchins Library. The photos on page 1 and above are from the extensive collection given by Palmer to Berea.

from page 2

compile, lays down a challenge to CORA itself—to develop programs in the areas of self-organization and community empowerment, public policy and political action, economic development and congregational economic ministry. For a copy, get in touch with CORA at 615/584-6133.

EYE on Publications

Unseen Danger, by David DeKok (University of Pennsylvania Press). Tragedies, the author reminds us, often begin with the best intentions. His case in point is Centralia, Pennsylvania, where in May 1962 the village elders voted to turn an old strip-mine pit into a landfill. Already used as an illegal dumping ground, the pit was full of refuse that, unfortunately, concealed a fissure leading into an abandoned underground mine. To clean up the new dump for Memorial Day, the author asserts, the town council ordered it set afire (a forbidden but not unusual proceeding); local volunteer firemen poured water on the blaze, and everyone went home believing that much refuse had been burned and the fire was out. But it was not; in fact, it's been burning ever since, and it came to international attention in 1981 when a local twelve-year-old tumbled down a subsidence hole that had suddenly appeared and was almost asphyxiated by noxious gases and steam. Plucked from the hole by an older cousin, he was able in a few minutes to run across the street and describe his adventure to what, by an incredible coincidence, was a gathering of federal and state officials who had come to town to take a look at the problem.

During all the years since 1962, the fire had raged

through the network of underground corridors underlying the area, and public officials at all levels, passing the buck to and fro and to again, had failed to take any kind of effective steps to stop its spread. In a masterly bit of bureaucratic action, the state health department had made its own special contribution to the welfare of the citizens—it devised its own standards for tolerable exposure to the carbon monoxide that seeped from the ground, standards that were much slacker than the prevailing national norm. "To think that they are deliberately fudging data," said a local woman, "is just so hard to take."

Even after the twelve-year-old boy suffered the tumble heard round the world, the fight was far from over. In a slick piece of maneuvering, Interior Secretary James Watt pressed the financial buck firmly into the reluctant hands of Governor Dick Thornburgh. Actually, it was only after a group of local citizens banded together and lobbied for government funding to cover the cost of relocation that anything very effective happened. It was too late to save Centralia, but a new village would be built a few miles away for those who cared to move to it. And the fire itself? As of last winter, when the book was finished, the state still hadn't decided what to do about it.

The Hawk's Nest Incident, by Martin Cherniack, M.D., M.P.H. (Yale University Press). The great Hawk's Nest tunnel at Gauley Bridge, W. Va., built in the 1930s, remains today a marvel of engineering achievement. For 50 years the power complex of which it is a key part has provided continuous electrical energy at a minimal cost for maintenance and overhead; within nine years of being completed, the project had more than repaid the initial investment. But the cost in

to page 4

EYE from page 3

human terms is a different matter. As early as 1936, witnesses before a congressional committee declared that within only a few years 476 men had died from lung disease incurred from work on the tunnel.

Gauley Mountain, through which the tunnel carrying the New River was driven, seems to have been composed mainly of sandstone with a very high silica content. The company for which the tunnel was built was no less an enterprise than Union Carbide, and what questioners wanted to know was how much had the company known about the composition of the mountain and the consequent threat to the workers. Were safety measures taken, as the company argued, or were they neglected for the sake of speed, as many workers maintained? And what about charges that, after workmen began refusing to go into the tunnel head, foremen often clubbed them on? Senator Rush Holt of West Virginia had little doubt, calling the whole business "the most barbaric example of industrial construction that ever happened in this world." It was also the greatest occupational health disaster in American history, with more casualties than resulted from the Triangle Shirt Waist fire, the Sunshine Mine disaster and the Farmington Mine disaster combined. In this book Dr. Cherniack, who was formerly with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and now teaches at Yale, traces the story of the building of the tunnel and its terrible consequences. It is a cautionary tale, if not for the United States then for Third World countries where conditions are similar to those prevailing in West Virginia 50 years ago.

The only odd thing about this book is the title. A tragedy of such dimensions, extending over a period of many months, strikes one as considerably more than an "incident." Indeed, the fact that it all was ongoing and cumulative, in the face of mounting evidence of harm, is one of the most telling indictments of those who were in charge.

Laughter in Appalachia, compiled and written by Loyal Jones and Billy Edd Wheeler (August House, Inc., P.O. Box 3223, Little Rock, Ark. 72203). One day

a preacher began his statement with a modest disclaimer: "You know, I'm just a poor country preacher." "I know," responded an elderly woman. "I've heard you preach." Like that bit of dry and direct Appalachian humor? How about this one, also on religion: A man was plowing his corn when his son came out and said, "The preacher wants to see you." "Which preacher?" the man asked. "I don't know," answered his son. "Well," the man said, "it'll take me about ten minutes to finish up here. You go back and find out which preacher it is. If it's the Methodist, lock up the chickens. If it's the Presbyterian, lock up the liquor. And if it's the Baptist, you go get in your mother's lap and you sit there till I come."

"If we are to survive," the authors of this book assert, "we must laugh whenever we can." And Appalachian people, who have had their share of problems, have indeed done their share of laughing. Some of the best laugh inducers are the stories collected in this book, many of them coming from the festival of Appalachian humor held at Berea in July 1983 and co-hosted by the authors of this book. The stories are presented in categories; besides religion, you'll find doctors and lawyers, Jesse James Bailey (a word of explanation here: Bailey, a sheriff renowned as one of the most colorful men in western North Carolina, was the source of many stories in the book), alcohol, longevity, and dogs and hunting. This listing itself constitutes an important insight into the people from whom the stories come—but, no doubt fortunately, this book is devoted not to important insights but to sheer fun. However, "to ensure a thoughtful look at humor, befitting a college," the authors say, they do present two talks on humor from the 1983 festival.

By way of conclusion, a short note on weather: When a group of loafers around an Appalachian country store heard the news of the Normandy invasion, they sat in silence for a few minutes, and then one fellow looked up at the sky, which was clear and blue, and observed, "They shore picked a good day for it."

And remember, whatever you do, don't ever hit a man who's chewing tobacco.

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