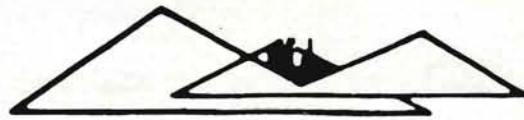


# NEWS

# LETTER



APPALACHIAN CENTER  
BEREA COLLEGE

Loyal Jones • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

Vol. 16 No. 2

Spring 1987

## Looking Forward

**July 3-September 17:** Drama, comedy, classics, new plays—you'll find a mixture at the Horse Cave (Ky.) Theatre. Write to Box 215, Horse Cave, Ky. 42749 or call 502/786-2177.

**July 5-18:** Summer Craft Session I, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. Blacksmithing, basketry, pottery, woodcarving.

**July 11-September 6:** The Kentuckians 1987; this exhibition, featuring the works of 52 Kentucky painters and sculptors, resident and expatriate, will be presented at the Owensboro (Ky.) Museum of Fine Art after having earlier premiered at the National Arts Club, New York.

**July 17-18:** Festival of Appalachian humor, Berea College, hosted by Billy Edd Wheeler and Loyal Jones. Information from Loyal Jones at the NEWSLETTER address (or phone 606/986-9341, Extension 5141).

**July 17-19:** Kentucky Art and Craft Celebration, the Water Tower, Louisville, Ky.; the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen is among the sponsors. For more information call 502/896-2146.

**July 19-August 1:** Summer Craft Session II, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. Woodcarving, moldmaking, fabric collage.

**July 31-August 8:** NIBROC festival, Corbin, Ky. Arts and crafts, plus a beauty pageant, pig roasts, etc.

**August 2-8:** Tenth annual Appalachian Writers Workshop, Hindman Settlement School, Forks of Troublesome Creek, Hindman, Ky. 41822. If you were to bet that old reliables James Still, Jim Wayne Miller and Gurney Norman were going to be on hand, you would find no knowledgeable takers; they'll be joined this year by George Ella Lyon, Robert R. Morgan and others.

**August 16-29:** Summer Craft Session III, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. This time it's knifemaking, spinning and dyeing, Windsor chairmaking and pottery.

**October 23-24:** Second annual conference on Appalachia, University of Kentucky; the subject will be education in Appalachia. For more information write the Appalachian Center, 641 South Limestone St., University of Kentucky, Lexington, Ky. 40506-0333.

**November 12:** "In the Tradition," the fifth national

festival of black storytelling, Berea College; cosponsors are the Kentucky Humanities Council and the Association of Black Storytellers; you'll hear stories and lectures about them as well. More information from Andrew Baskin, Black Cultural Center, CPO 134, Berea, Ky. 40404; telephone, 606/986-9341, ext. 6515.

## "Hawk's Nest Incident" Wins Weatherford Award

The great Hawk's Nest tunnel, carrying the New River through West Virginia's Gauley Mountain, was a triumph of engineering—but one achieved at the cost of hundreds of workers' lives. The story of this 1930s disaster, the greatest occupational health tragedy in American history, is told in *The Hawk's Nest Incident* by Dr. Martin Cherniack, winner of the 17th annual W. D. Weatherford Award for outstanding writing about Appalachia. The \$500 prize was presented at a luncheon held in Berea on May 26.

The tunnel, built for the Union Carbide Corporation, was completed in the remarkable time of two years, but it wasn't long before many of the workers were fatally ill with silicosis. The company argued that safety measures had been taken, but workers said that precautions had been neglected for the sake of speed. As we pointed out in our review of the book (CENTER NEWSLETTER, Winter 1987), congressional witnesses were declaring as early as 1936 that 476 men had already died from lung disease incurred on the job.

Cherniack, who was formerly with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and now teaches at Yale, says that his figures show that probably more than 700 men died within five years of the completion of the tunnel.

The Weatherford Award is jointly sponsored by Berea College's Appalachian Center and Hutchins Library and is given every year to the writer of the published work of any kind or length that best illuminates the problems, personalities and unique qualities of the Appalachian South. The award, founded by Alfred H. Perrin of Berea and now administered by Berea College, is a tribute to the memory

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### HAWK'S NEST *from page 1*

of W. D. Weatherford, Sr., a pioneer and leading figure for many years in Appalachian development, youth work and race relations. The list of winning works in recent years includes Eliot Wigginton's *Sometimes a Shining Moment*; John Ehle's *Last One Home*; John Egerton's *Generations*; Ron Eller's *Miners, Millhands and Mountaineers*; and John Gaventa's *Power and Powerlessness*.

Judges for the Weatherford Award competition are James S. Brown, retired University of Kentucky professor of sociology; Wilma Dykeman, author, lecturer and teacher of Appalachian literature; Thomas Parrish, writer and editor; Willis D. Weatherford, Jr., president emeritus of Berea College; Shirley Williams, staff writer, *Louisville Courier-Journal*; and John B. Stephenson, president of Berea College.

## Time for a New Survey?

The 1962 *Southern Appalachian Region: A Survey* was a landmark study from any point of view. Inspired and pushed to realization by the late W. D. Weatherford (see accompanying story), who wrested the supporting funds from the Ford Foundation, the *Survey* provided facts and figures that served as a basis for the War on Poverty and other governmental activities of the Kennedy-Johnson era.

But, says University of Kentucky sociologist Thomas R. Ford, who served as editor of the *Survey*, helping Appalachia remains "a largely unfinished task." Speaking at the Weatherford Award luncheon in Berea, Ford pointed to continuing problems in the Appalachian South, including a "distressingly low" educational level.

The fact that the Appalachian economic and educational lag continues means, says Ronald D. Eller, director of the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center, that it's time for a new survey, which would note instances of progress but would provide thorough data on such current problems as unemployment in the coal-fields, the decline of the textile industry and the disappearance of many small farms. The proposed new study will be needed, Eller told the Weatherford Award audience, to provide data for the 1990s and beyond.

Agreeing with the other speakers, Berea President John B. Stephenson expressed the feeling that the Appalachian South has ceased to make relative progress and is beginning to slip into a "swampy depression."

This same kind of concern is expressed by Richard Couto, director of the Center for Health Services at Vanderbilt. As he points out in the center's current *Newsletter*, the Appalachian economic crisis is occurring "at a time when public programs are declining. These programs were never adequate to eliminate the poverty and hardship of the region and without them matters are simply worse. We have testified before Congress on the hunger reported to us. We are seeing basic health services cut back or eliminated. And we are seeing chronically economically depressed communities bargaining for economic activity with high environmental risks for the sake of scarce

jobs. There are few silver linings to report..."

A new *Survey*, then, would seem to be a much-needed step—only a first one, of course, but an essential one.

## ARC: Focus on Dropouts

In any discussion of educational problems in Appalachia, the question of high school dropouts is one of the first to arise—and with abundant reason. Although dropout rates for all the 397 counties within the jurisdiction of the Appalachian Regional Commission are only slightly higher than the national average (23.9 percent in the U.S. vs. 25.1 percent in Appalachia—but remember, these 397 counties are the oversize political, congressional Appalachia, not the real region), the rates in many central and southern Appalachian counties are *twice as great*—up to 50 percent. These are the hard-core Appalachian figures.

In recognition of the problem, the ARC has declared what it calls "dropout reduction" to be a top priority for commission action in the region. "Economically and socially, entire communities feel the impact of the dropout problem," says ARC Federal Co-Chairman Winifred Pizzano, "and entire communities—including employers, civic groups, and community service organizations—will have to tackle it together if we're going to keep more of our young people in school."

Supporting this declaration, the commission recently granted some \$700,000 to dropout-reduction programs in 37 counties, bringing to 85 the number of such projects to which it has awarded a total of more than \$2 million in the past two years.

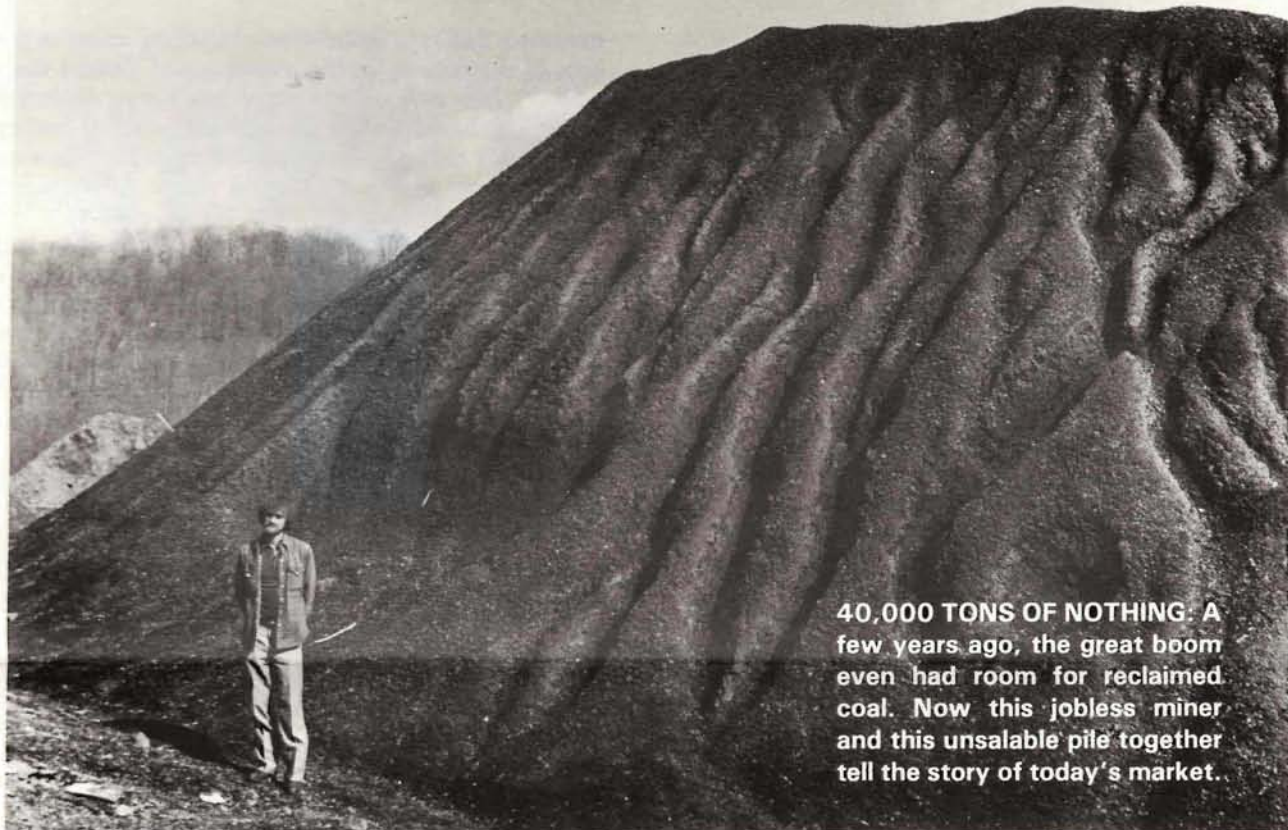
The ARC itself ought to be an inspiring example to those fighting the dropout problem. For six years now the commission has successfully beaten off the attacks of those who have sought to force it to drop out of the Washington scene; at least, it's still in business and still making grants. Perhaps dropout workshops could make use of ARC staff members, who could demonstrate by example the effectiveness of tenacity and staying power.

## Forward in the Fifth

Remarkable things are stirring in southeastern Kentucky's fifth congressional district, the area having the state's—and Appalachia's—highest school-dropout rates and accompanying educational and economic statistics of equal drabness. Thanks largely to the drive and determination of Earl Wallace, a retired investment banker who is a native of the district and who has been involved in a number of philanthropic activities (notably, the restoration of the famous Shaker village near Lexington), a new organization called Forward in the Fifth has been formed to bring about greater community involvement in support of local schools.

The basis of Forward in the Fifth is the belief that persons lacking at least a high school education have no economic future in the technological world to which the

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**40,000 TONS OF NOTHING:** A few years ago, the great boom even had room for reclaimed coal. Now this jobless miner and this unsalable pile together tell the story of today's market.

#### **FORWARD** from page 2

fifth district belongs as surely as does any other section of the country. The current thrust of the organization is the establishment of local affiliates in each school district by the end of 1987. To encourage the development of these affiliates, Forward in the Fifth is matching, up to \$1,500, money raised by local groups in each district. Thus each local organization will have up to \$3,000 with which to establish a mini-grant, business partnership, attendance-improvement or other school-improvement program.

For information on these plans and other activities, write Forward in the Fifth, 210 Center Street, Berea, Ky. 40403.

## **EYE on Publications**

*A Taste of Kentucky*, by Janet Alm Anderson (University Press of Kentucky). If you're having a problem getting a case of measles to break out, you should know that help is as close as the nearest sheep. Just get some sheep manure, boil it, strain the mixture and chug it right down; this "tea" will bring the measles out immediately. (It may produce a few other results too, but what medicine is wholly free of side effects?) Something else you'll find useful is knowledge of the key role played by nutmeg in curing boils. These are only two of the many valuable medical tips contained in *A Taste of Kentucky*.

Actually, however, the book—although sprinkled with anecdotes, lore and sayings of various kinds—is primarily a compendium of recipes for Kentucky dishes

from country ham to buttermilk pie. The author's primary interest would appear to be folklore, since we're told that she searched the records of more than 30 years of fieldwork in the Western Kentucky University Folklife Archives, of which she was formerly head—and along with all her lore she managed to dig up some fine old pictures. In any case, the recipes certainly are appetizing, for the most part, and how many other cookbooks not only tell you how to create a pie but warn you against eating the point of it first?

*Slow Burn*, photographs and text by Renee Jacobs (University of Pennsylvania Press). This "photodocument" is a companion book to *Unseen Danger* (reviewed in the CENTER NEWSLETTER, Winter 1987), which describes the running 25-year battle between the town of Centralia, Pa., and a fire raging in an abandoned underground coal mine. The leitmotiv being played throughout *Unseen Danger* was the way public officials at all levels passed the buck back and forth and thus failed to take any kind of effective steps to stop the spread of the fire; the state health department bureaucrats even went so far as to declare that the carbon monoxide seeping from the ground wasn't as deadly as people had always thought CO to be. Now, in *Slow Burn*, we're given pictures of local residents and local scenes, with accompanying text.

One non-local person prominently presented is Lois Gibbs, who had won fame as the leading activist in the Love Canal affair in New York and served as an adviser to embattled Centralia citizens. In such situations, declares Ms. Gibbs, don't waste your time hiring hydrologists and toxicologists, to prove to governments that damage is being done: "these are not scientific issues, but political issues." At Love Canal, "it wasn't

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**EYE** from page 3

the fact that 56 percent of our babies were born birth-defected that initiated our evacuation. It was an election campaign. That's the way the system works." Originally a self-described housewife, Ms. Gibbs is now an expert in her own right, as executive director of the Citizens' Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste. If you have such a problem, you might talk with her about it.

*Mountain Passage*, by Garry Barker (Kentucke Imprints, Berea, Ky. 40403). This collection of stories is, says the author, "a typeset documentation of about a four-year struggle with the writing process.... I've become less of a tall tale teller. I write short, never tell you what a character is thinking, and carry the story with dialogue and action." Many of the stories trace the life of the Watts family of northeastern Kentucky over a 65-year period. The Wattses, as you might imagine, are not wholly made up; the stories mix fact and fiction so freely, Barker says, "that even I sometimes forget which is which." The novelist Lee Smith says of these stories that they "linger in your mind like your own memories."

*The Great Appalachian Sperm Bank*, by Bill Best (Kentucke Imprints, Berea, Ky. 40403). In this book Bill Best gets even with the many present and past toilers in the Appalachian vineyard who have irritated him over the years. In the title piece, he satirizes a coalfield lawyer who became a best-selling author, settlement school people, outside do-gooders and organizers of dubious uplift ventures. It is a not-so-subtle satire that introduces such characters as Miss Hybrowski, Miss Vassersmith and Dr. Bunson Burnout as well as a magazine entitled *Appalachian Jargon*. Other essays deal mostly with education and Appalachian identity. Interesting and amusing is an introduction by the wily Harry Caudill, who pretends that he and Best are engaged in the same enterprise.

*Mountain Rising*, by Darrell C. Richardson (Oneida Mountaineer Press, Oneida, Ky. 40972). This book is summed up well by Bert Combs, former governor of Kentucky: "An absorbing story of how a semi-illiterate

mountain feudist...established a boarding school at the turn of the century in the mountains of Eastern Kentucky." This man, whose name was James Anderson Burns, "believed he was divinely inspired. His ability to keep his school alive by private donations, against overwhelming odds, contributed to the local legend that he had supernatural powers." The account of "his ability to mesmerize audiences across the country and cause tight-fisted businessmen to send money to his school makes for enthralling reading." The school was the Oneida Baptist Institute, founded in 1899 and flourishing today. This biography of the founder was actually written some 35 years ago, and languished in manuscript form until dug out by Oneida's current president, Barkley Moore. The author is a minister who has the unusual if not unique distinction of holding five earned master's degrees; he has written numerous other books.

*Songs of a Mountain Plowman*, by Jesse Stuart (The Jesse Stuart Foundation—P.O. Box 391, Ashland, Ky. 41114—and Morehead State University's Appalachian Development Center). For many years it was generally believed that *Man With a Bull-Tongue Plow* (1934) was Jesse Stuart's first book of poems. Then, in 1964, the Council of the Southern Mountains produced a reprint of the little-known *Harvest of Youth*, originally published in 1930. Now, edited by the untiring Jim Wayne Miller, comes *Songs of a Mountain Plowman*, a collection of 139 poems written in the years 1929-31 and making a very belated appearance. These poems, the editor suggests, "allow the reader to appreciate for the first time the long preparation that led to *Man With a Bull-Tongue Plow*"; they are "indispensable for an informed appreciation and understanding" of Stuart's development as a poet." They "should be welcomed not only as an expression of a particular time and place; not only for the way in which they anticipate Stuart's subsequent work; but also, in many instances, as poems with their own inherent interest and value, illuminating the recent American past while at the same time possessing a peculiar contemporaneity."

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