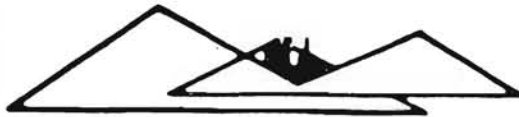


NEWS

LETTER



APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

Loyal Jones • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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Looking Forward

December 26-January 2: "The most popular and well-loved dance week of the entire year" at the John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. You'll need your tux or ballgown as well as your jeans if you want to be properly attired for the variety of dances you'll learn.

January 22-24: Winter craft weekend, John C. Campbell Folk School, including quilting, wood-carving, woodturning (bowls), basketry, knitting and blacksmithing.

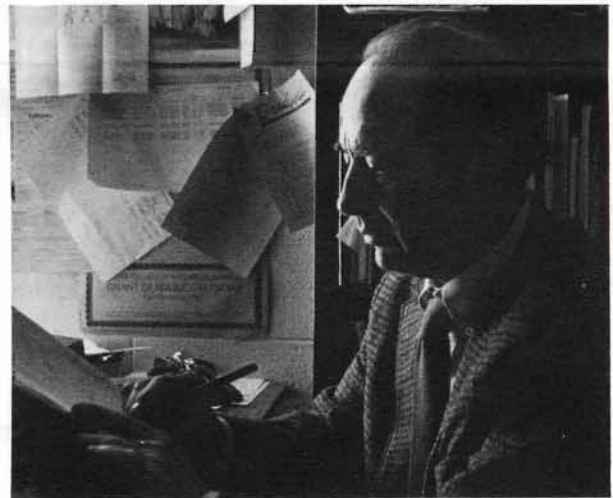
February 4-5: Jim Wayne Miller literary festival, Emory & Henry College, Emory, Va. 24327. Papers about and an interview with, together with poetry reading by, the energetic honoree who, besides writing poems and stories, teaches German at Western Kentucky University. You can get further information from John Lang of the English department at Emory & Henry.

March 18-19: Fourth annual conference on Appalachian geography, Pipestem State Park, W.Va. More information from R. T. Hill, Geography Department, Concord College, Athens, W.Va. 24712.

March 18-20: Appalachian Studies Conference, Radford University, Radford, Va. 24142. In this meeting the organization, now 11 years old, will take a look at "differences among various approaches to issues in Appalachian Studies" and some other differences as well; the thematic title is "Mountains of Experience: Interdisciplinary, Intercultural, International." If you have questions, get in touch with Parks Lanier, Box 5917, Radford University.

April 7-9: Seventh 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.); Holiday Inn, Oak Hill, W.Va. As always, this broad-gauged conference is open to everybody with a serious interest in the New River. Papers will deal with archaeology, folklore, geography and all sorts of other scientific and humanistic concerns. Direct your questions to park headquarters, whose phone number is 304/465-0508.

April 30-May 1: Watauga spring festival, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. 28607. More than 150 exhibitors take part in this annual shindig,



Jim Wayne Miller: Ready for festival

which is a combination of crafts fair and music festival and offers continuous entertainment. Further details from the Center for Appalachian Studies at ASU.

Dropouts and Grants

For more than a year now, the Appalachian Regional Commission has been placing much of its emphasis—and therefore many of its dollars—on programs aimed at diminishing Appalachia's appalling dropout rate. It's still too early for these efforts to have produced many concrete results, but participants in an ARC-sponsored November conference in Knoxville learned that things look so promising to the grantmakers that more money will go into such programs next year.

The meeting brought together representatives from many of the 110 dropout-prevention projects currently operating with ARC support; since 1985 the commission has put more than \$3.3 million into such projects (with ample reason: in many central and southern Appalachian counties the dropout rate as given in the 1980 census approached 50 percent). These projects include

to page 2

DROPOUTS *from page 1*

both professionals and others—superintendents, teachers, counselors, business leaders and volunteers who just want to help.

One unavoidable if unacknowledged problem ARC faces in such undertakings is, of course, the one presented by superintendents who're happy to get the grant money but otherwise would like to preserve the political status quo. But the commission is not without its recourses; without accusing anyone of anything, it can point to the fact that the number of applicants greatly outweighs the number of grants that can be made, and thus reject questionable applications. It also stresses community-wide participation.

As for the commission itself, it continues to show remarkable powers of survival; the present national administration set out to do it in seven years ago and hasn't succeeded yet. In fact, we're told that in the new budget ARC is penciled in for \$110 million, up \$5 million from its present funding. And for the first time in quite a while it will have the chance to present its case for life and money in Senate hearings (a development no doubt due to the Democrats' assumption of control following the last elections).

Degrees, Honors, Awards

Those who are truly serious about pursuing Appalachian studies may find Morgantown the place to

go. West Virginia University is now offering a master's and a doctor's degree in Appalachian history and culture, within the framework of the degree program in American history. There's nothing surprising about this development, of course; as the university of the most Appalachian state, WVU has long been home to a remarkable collection of Appalachian manuscripts, printed materials, photos and music. Degree candidates will very likely be able to complete their work without even leaving town.

If you're interested, you should contact Ronald L. Lewis, Department of History, Woodburn Hall, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va. 26506.

Patricia D. Beaver of Appalachian State University is the winner of the latest Thomas Wolfe award, presented by the Western North Carolina Historical Association for the best writing about that area. Her book, *Rural Community in the Appalachian South* (see CENTER NEWSLETTER, Fall 1986), is available from the Center for Appalachian Studies, Appalachian State University, University Hall, Boone, N.C. 28608. This, we might add, is one award that's really worth winning; along with the honor comes a trophy that's big enough to call for a shelf all its own.

In recognition of the growing number of Appalachian writers and creative-writing programs, the Appalachian Consortium Press has established a biennial fiction competition. The award is publication of the winning
to page 3

Adrift in a High-Tech World

Most people anywhere, in any culture, are not particularly fond of anything that sounds like criticism if it comes from somebody outside that culture. That seems to be true no matter how objective and well-meaning the critic.

Whitley County, Ky. is something of a current case in point. In 1986 the county schools ranked 177th (out of 178 school districts) in statewide tests to determine students' possession of what are called essential skills; this year the county moved up a whole notch, to 176. Visiting the county some weeks ago to take a close-up look, Neal Peirce, who is perhaps the country's sharpest watcher of state and local governments, declared in a newspaper column that "if they only knew how they're being shortchanged, the 4,600 school children of this poor rural mountain county on Kentucky's Tennessee border would sue their elders for gross malfeasance."

Talking to a reform-minded school board member, Peirce learned of a "system so shot through with nepotism and incompetence that only the brightest self-starters among its graduates have a ghost of a chance of getting far in adult life."

No. 1 Employer

As is the case in many other rural counties, the school system is Whitley's biggest employer and the superintendent the chief dispenser of patronage. Jobs are

reserved for the wives, grown children and siblings of school board members, and candidates for teaching posts likewise need political connections. Until the reform-minded board member went to court to obtain enforcement of Kentucky's open-meetings law, the school board met in a room so small that there was no space for anybody who wanted to watch.

In such a situation, more money would not solve the problem, said the local reformer. "Until the state forces superintendents to live up to their certification, to improve the system in order to keep their jobs," he told Peirce, "we'll never have a decent school system."

But a paradoxical factor, according to a state educational leader, is that in counties like Whitley the schools are doing what people want them to do—they're handing out jobs. In these counties, as he observes, the poverty level is close to 50 percent and only 40 percent of the people are high school graduates.

Yet the situation isn't hopeless, Peirce concludes. In some rural districts, he says, if citizens care enough the schools can achieve fine results. If they don't, they will turn out functional illiterates who will face only economic disaster. A high-tech world will have no room for them.

"If They Try. . ."

Curious to see how Whitley County students felt about the ranking of their schools, the Lexington *Herald-Leader* recently dispatched a reporter on an opinion-sampling mission. Although one student
to page 3



Winter study (Dean Cadle photo)

DEGREES *from page 2*

manuscript by the press. If a suitable manuscript is submitted, the first award will be made in March 1988; the deadline for submissions is December 31, 1987. Novels and collections of short stories are eligible; the only re-

quirement is that "manuscripts should deal significantly with Appalachia."

Complete manuscripts should be submitted to the Appalachian Consortium Press, University Hall, Boone, N.C. 28608.

ADRIFT *from page 2*

declared that the county high school was "just not up-to-date" and those responsible were "just not working on it," more typical responses put the burden on the students themselves. "Anyone here can get a good education here if they try," said one, who felt that his school offered as much opportunity as any other (though what he knew about other schools was not reported). Another student said that the school had no more problems than any other, and others blamed the low ranking not on the schools themselves but on lack of encouragement from parents or on students who simply "don't try." Still others pointed to the arrival this fall of a new principal, who was credited with putting the school on the right track.

"I have a lot of pride in our school," one girl declared, but a telling last word came from a boy who said the local people "always vote down tax raises that could help the schools."

Perhaps the saddest aspect of it all was that the students, instead of blaming school officials and citizens, took the responsibility for the county's low ranking on themselves—or at least their fellows. Their defense of their schools, however misguided, constituted a monument to local loyalty.

Two States

Whitley County is, of course, no isolated case. In the American educational parade Appalachia tends to loiter behind, and the same is true of Kentucky's Ap-

palachian counties with respect to the rest of the state. At a recent conference held by the Shakertown Roundtable, a continuing discussion group devoted to examining and acting on public issues, participants were told, for example, just how low Eastern Kentucky counties stand in the percentage of the population having graduated from high school. In Wolfe County the figure is only 26.8 (compared with 71.6 for Fayette County in the Bluegrass region).

Overall, the Kentucky figures are remarkable, with an amazing diversity of educational levels among counties. Of the 47 low-attainment counties (10 years of schooling or less), all except two lie in Eastern Kentucky and adjacent areas. Contrastingly, the rest of the state holds enough counties with high-attainment levels (11.6 and more years) to give Kentucky the highest percentage (outside of Florida) of such counties in the South. In general, the grimness of the Appalachian picture is demonstrated by the fact that, if the mountain areas are subtracted from the state, its educational performance ranks it No. 2 in the South, behind Florida. But with the Appalachian areas weighing it down, Kentucky sinks to the bottom of many regional tables.

Maybe, as Neal Peirce suggests, the students in Appalachia should sue their elders. Maybe it would help if the state government took a hand. It has the legal power to declare a school district bankrupt and to take over its operation. That sure would be one beautiful fight! □

EYE on Publications

Fiddlin' Georgia Crazy: Fiddlin' John Carson, His Real World, and the World of His Songs, by Gene Wiggins (University of Illinois Press). The subject of this book is said to have been the first folk musician to tap into the vast commercial potential of recorded country music. Beginning in 1923, he went on to make records that had a tremendous impact on the industry. As the author shows, Carson, despite the influences radiating from Tin Pan Alley, was basically a conservative whose music was deeply rooted in the nineteenth-century South. He was—inevitably—an important cultural figure whose life and music offer valuable insights into the world of the Georgia “woolhats” and the politicians and others who proclaimed themselves their leaders. The book is both biography and songbook.

Too Few Tomorrows: Urban Appalachians in the 1980s, edited by Phillip Obermiller and William W. Philliber (Appalachian Consortium Press). Between 1940 and 1970 some 3 million people left their Appalachian homes in search of jobs, most of them going to mid-western cities, some of them ranging as far afield as the shipyards on the West Coast. Although all of them sought a better life for themselves and their families, many found instead of a promised land a permanent residence in the urban underclass. Even those who won secure employment, blue-collar or other, did not achieve their dream without pain.

Too Few Tomorrows examines and evaluates the migration patterns of Appalachian people and the effects of the big change from a rural to an urban environment. The essays in the book deal with Appalachian civic involvement, Appalachian youth and cultural changes, the impact of the urban milieu on Appalachian families, and the effects of schools on Appalachian children in urban areas. Since much written about Appalachian migrants has been based on dated census material, this book serves the valuable function

of bringing us up to date. The authors, says Carl Ross of Appalachian State University, “address the questions and problems facing contemporary urban Appalachians with thoughtfulness and compassion.”

Storming Heaven, by Denise Giardina (Norton). The coal wars came early in the century in West Virginia. The mine operators held total control, with their hundreds of private detectives, their salaried deputy sheriffs and their ability to call on even the U.S. Army to maintain the order their level of profits required. But in a string of bloody clashes leading to the notorious battle on Blair Mountain in 1921, the miners revolted. This novel by a descendant of West Virginia and Kentucky miners tells the tale of this epic struggle. Although a political story, it is told with artistry and—all in all—an admirable restraint. Giardina creates characters who rise off the pages to command attention. The story is told by four of them, including Carrie Bishop, as appealing a woman and as sturdy a worker for justice as you are likely to meet, and Rondal Lloyd, Carrie's great love, though as a dedicated union organizer, a wandering one. The story proceeds inexorably and tragically to the battle of Blair Mountain and its aftermath, with only the fury of the survivors giving a hint that someday the beaten would rise again and triumph. Giardina writes good dialogue, and her grasp of the mountain dialect is almost total, although her characters *flail* the banjo and *toss* a “poke salad.”

Storming Heaven has won good critical attention. An alternate Book-of-the-Month Club selection, it will soon be issued in two paperback editions and Columbia Pictures has taken out an option on it. Soon only a know-nothing will be found saying “Denise Who?”

FILM: *Harriette Simpson Arnow, 1908-1986*. This new release from Appalshop presents an intimate portrait of the Kentucky-born author of *The Dollmaker* and seven other works. The author herself stars in interviews filmed not long before her death. Other footage includes public readings, the old home place, and archival material. Appalshop's address is 306 Madison St., Whitesburg, Ky. 41858.

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