

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

LETTER



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Looking Forward

April 7-13, 14-20 and 28-May 4: Spring craft weeks, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. Clogging, creative spinning, backstrap weaving, you name it—it's here in one of these sessions. Check with the school to make sure of the timing.

April 11-12: Annual meeting, Berea College Appalachian Fund Affiliates, Berea College. Theme: "The Environment and Health." The afternoon session on April 11 and the morning session on the 12th are open to the public. Call Julia Stammer, 606/986-9341, ext. 5022.

April 12-13: Virginia Humanities Conference, Mountain Lake, Va., sponsored by New River Community College. Theme: "The Transcendentalist Spirit: Fronting the Essentials." These "essentials" will be "fronted" in a beautiful resort setting, which is a very good reason for getting more information from Lewis Martin, New River Community College, P.O. Drawer 1127, Dublin, Va. 24084.

April 12-14: New River Symposium (back after a year's absence), a nonspecialized conference featuring natural history, folklore, archaeology and a barrelful of other subjects; it's for everybody, professional or hobbyist, interested in this unique waterway. The place: Pipestem Resort State Park, W.Va. For more information, call 304/465-0508, headquarters of the New River Gorge National River, National Park Service.

April 13: Appalachian art festival and auction, Immaculate Conception Church, 414 W. Vine Ave., Knoxville, Tenn. This is a benefit for the Tennessee Hunger Coalition and Emergency Food Helpers. Call the coalition at 615/378-4297.

May 3-5: "In Praise of Mountain Women," a meeting of women from Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina to begin working on issues affecting them. More information from Mountain Women Gathering, Box 993, Abingdon, Va. 24210.

May 5-11, 12-18, 19-24, and 26-June 1: May craft weeks, John C. Campbell Folk School.

May 30-31: Seedtime on the Cumberland, fifth annual celebration of Appalachian arts, Whitesburg, Ky. Contact Appalshop, 306 Madison St., Whitesburg, Ky. 41858; phone, 606/633-0108.

June 2-8, 9-15, and 23-28: June craft sessions, John C. Campbell Folk School.

June 8: Annual spring picnic, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Cave Run Lake, Morehead, Ky. This one celebrates the organization's 10th anniversary. Call 606/886-0043.

June 21-22: U.S.-Canadian conference, University of

Kentucky (cosponsored by Northern Kentucky University). The title of this conclave, and an imposing one it is, is "Two North American Regions in Stress: A Conference on Common Development Issues and Strategies in the Atlantic Provinces and in Appalachia." Information from the UK Appalachian Center, 641 South Limestone St., Lexington, Ky. 40506; phone, 606/257-4852.

June 23-29: 15th annual Appalachian Celebration, Morehead State University, Morehead, Ky. 40351.

July 6-13: Family week, Buffalo Gap Camp, Capon Bridge, W.Va., produced and directed by the Country Dance and Song Society, 17 New South St., Northampton, Mass. 01060; phone, 413/584-9913.

July 12-14: Berea craft festival, featuring the many studios, galleries and shops that help make Berea the official craft capital of Kentucky. For full information, get in touch with the Berea Tourism Commission, Berea, Ky. 40403; phone, 606/986-2540.

July 13-20: English and American dance week at Buffalo Gap Camp, also sponsored by the Country Dance and Song Society.

July 30-August 4: The Great Smokies Song Chase, produced by songwriter-playwright Billy Edd Wheeler, is back for its third year; Warren Wilson College, Swannanoa, N.C. This camp is concerned with almost all

**Chet Atkins:
"Most-recorded" star
will guest
at Swannanoa**



Melodie Gimple

aspects of the creative and business sides of music; performing-artist workshops will be directed by Ewel Cornett and Linda Dotson; Chet Atkins, called the most-recorded instrumental soloist of all time, will be a special guest and performer. For more information call Billy Edd Wheeler at 704/686-5009 or write the GSSC at P.O. Box 7, Swannanoa, N.C. 28778.

Feuding—A Bad Rap?

That famous unpleasantness between the Hatfield and the McCoy clans, we have recently learned, was something
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more than merely a feud. It was also a dispute among conflicting groups, which sounds like a higher-level affair altogether. Stereotyped newspaper accounts of such conflicts, say two University of Kentucky sociologists, have given feuding a worse name than it deserves.

These two scholars have just received a grant to study a 70-year feud (1840 to 1910) in Clay County, Ky., their aim being to explore the community conditions under which violent disputes develop and to study the effects of social and other changes on "dispute resolution among conflicting groups." The investigators, Dwight Billings and Kathleen Blee, say they hope to show that many disputes involved litigation, in contrast to "popular myths" that feuding families preferred to settle disagreements violently.

Perhaps so—but we have at hand a recent issue of the Breathitt County Historical Society *Record*, which suggests that at least in this county neighboring Clay, all disputes were not matters of sweetness and lawing. A reprinted 1949 story by the famous Allan M. Trout of the Louisville *Courier-Journal* chronicles the career of a local doctor who during a long career dealt with his share of feudists. A November 1, 1921, gun battle makes particularly lively reading.

Bigger ACF Grants

From time to time we've commented on the activities of the Appalachian Community Fund, which was established several years ago to support organizations run by low- and middle-income people in the four states of Central Appalachia.

Early in the game, it became evident that ACF help, even in small amounts, could make a significant difference in the work of these groups in a number of fields—economic development, worker health and safety, protection of the environment, civil rights and others.

Although, as foundations go, the ACF can't lay claim to being a heavyweight, it has recently decided to raise the maximum size of its grants from \$5,000 to \$7,500 and to experiment with two-year awards (instead of confining itself to annual grants). New guidelines are currently being formulated, and when they're available you can get them from ACF at 517 Union Avenue, Suite 206, Knoxville, Tenn. 37902.

Gus Meade 1932-1991

Noted fiddler and scholar of country music Gus Meade died on February 9. He had just moved to a farm near Frankfort, Ky.; for some years he had devoted much of his time to compiling a discography of early country music, which was almost finished at the time of his death. This work divides 14,500 recordings of 3,500 songs into four sections—ballads, religious songs, instrumentals and novelty numbers. Meade's widow, Mary, has said that she will see this important project through publication.

As a fellow student of fiddle music has commented, fans of old-time music should be familiar with Meade's

work. One rarely finds a book on old music that doesn't list him as a source. Much of the information we have on old-time fiddlers like Clark Kessinger and Hoyt Ming comes from Meade's interviews and his searches through documents. Fittingly enough, his funeral was attended by friends from all over the country, who sang hymns and played old-time fiddle music.

Farmers Probe Researchers

Everybody praises the concept of the American family farm, but in reality this hallowed Jeffersonian institution keeps on slipping away from us. Appalachia is still said to have the highest concentration of small farms in the country, but the overall figures dramatize the national decline. Tennessee, for instance, currently has about 89,000 small farms, compared with 127,000 just 20 years ago. In case you don't want to make your own calculation, we'll tell you that this number represents a 30 percent drop.

"There are not a lot of young people getting out there these days," says a Tennessee extension agent. "It's going to be a skeleton group once their daddies get out." As prices continue to rise for trucks, tractors and equipment of all kinds, many farmers see no choice but to sell out and try something else.

But some dedicated farmers are trying another approach. The Community Farm Alliance, a Kentucky-based organization of small farmers who are determined to preserve their way of life, is wondering whether its members are receiving the kind of governmental help to which they're entitled. Hence the CFA has joined with Tennessee's Highlander Center to take a look at the current research being sponsored by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture. Does this work meet the needs of small farmers or is it oriented toward bigger interests—the tobacco companies and agribusiness in general? And there's another question too: Regardless of what the researchers are currently doing, what new projects can they undertake to meet the needs of the small farmers?

No answers yet, but these are the kinds of issues that Highlander's interns, in cooperation with the CFA, will seek to clarify.

EYE on Publications

The Invention of Appalachia, by Allen W. Batteau (University of Arizona Press). As we've all heard countless times, Appalachia through the years has been characterized by any number of stereotypes, from moonshiners to country music stars, or from sturdy Anglo-Saxon lovers of freedom to degenerate feudists. As Allen Batteau sees this phenomenon, "Appalachia is a creature of the urban imagination." This is not a new thesis, of course. The idea that, for a variety of reasons, non-natives created their own definitions of Appalachia was advanced some years ago by Henry Shapiro in his *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in the American Consciousness*.

Shapiro's account stopped at 1920. In the present
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Earl Palmer, the famous "roamin' cameraman" of the Blue Ridge mountains, caught this spring action scene during his travels. He not only photographs Appalachia, Palmer says, he "conjures" it.

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book, Batteau takes the thesis in new directions and into the 1990s. In the 1960s, he says, the American mind received two indelible Appalachian images from Harry M. Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (1963) and from a 1964 CBS TV documentary, *Christmas in Appalachia*, narrated by Charles Kuralt. According to Batteau, works of this kind yield "archetypes" that simplify the contradictions of reality. Earlier archetypes included those presented by the novelist John Fox, Jr., and William G. Frost, president of Berea College, both of whom saw mountaineers as strong, intelligent "natural" people.

A somewhat contrasting characterization appeared in a 1921 *New York Times* editorial, which spoke of mountain people as "often good-natured folk" who were, "save for their primitive ferocities, probably not essentially worse than most other people."

Appalachia, says Batteau, has been a commodity—material for fiction and drama—but, of course, this point could be made about many other groups and subcultures as they have appeared in books and movies and on TV, nor should we forget minstrel shows. Certainly Appalachia has provided a powerful set of images, and they will not be forgotten.

Vein of Words, by Jim Wayne Miller (Seven Buffaloes Press, Box 249, Big Timber, Mont. 59011). "Try to think of your first draft as a creek/in flood time, roaring out of banks." What have we here—two lines of poetry or an excerpt from a lecture to a group of aspiring poets? Well, actually, it's both. In this book, the fifth collection of his poems, the unflaggingly inventive Jim Wayne Miller draws on his experience as a poet and director of poetry

workshops to give his readers an extended lesson in his craft. So what do you do with your first draft? As it follows its turbulent course, "now you work with it until it drops/ every tin can and bottle and runs clear/ again between its banks." Even though this isn't really a textbook, it will hold special interest for anybody interested in writing.

Hardly Working, by Richard Thorman (Louisiana State University Press). Rural western Virginia provides the setting for these six stories, which are all about poor (or, at least, not-wealthy) farmers and workers but lack the drab and bleak quality you might expect to find. The stories also possess the great merit of not being self-consciously Appalachian; they make no effort either to transmit an image or to create one. Essentially, they come off as stories about southern country people, the unity in the collection being provided by the kinds of lessons the characters learn—and in each story, somebody *does* learn a specific lesson about life and human behavior. Thorman has a quiet and engaging sense of humor, and if his stories have a weakness, it is perhaps that the lessons the characters derive from their experiences are sometimes made a little too explicit, as though the reader couldn't be trusted to draw the right conclusions. But the author didn't need to worry about that.

The Long Haul, by Myles Horton, with Judith Kohl and Herbert Kohl (Doubleday). When Myles Horton died a year ago, at the age of 84, we said in the NEWSLETTER that "he will be remembered not simply for his usefulness, great as it was, but for his personality—zestful, forward-looking, overflowing with words and ideas." Fortunately, he can also be remembered now directly through his own words, as recorded and edited by his collaborators.

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Horton founded the Highlander Folk School in 1932, a time when few could have understood what he meant by declaring that poor working-class people could learn to take charge of their lives and circumstances. "He's been beaten up, locked up, put upon and railed against by racists, toughs, demagogues, and governors," Bill Moyers declares in the preface of the book, but "for more than fifty years now, he has gone on with his special kind of teaching—helping people to discover within themselves the courage and ability to confront reality and change it."

Perhaps the most appealing aspect of the book is the way it reveals Horton's mind at work. As a high school football player, he was lighter than most of his peers and therefore, instead of depending on weight and power, he "had to figure out other angles." He went on figuring out the angles all of his life, basing his actions on the principle that "you learn what you do, not what you talk about." Disagreeing with people about their ideas is pointless, he decided. Instead, "what you need to do is get them into a situation where they'll have to act on ideas, not argue about them."

In the earlier years, Horton focused Highlander's efforts on union organizing; in the 1950s the emphasis turned to civil rights, and in view of his approach to problem solving it is easy to see why he attracted Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, Julian Bond and other black leaders. It is also easy to see the effects of his teaching in the evolution of the civil rights movement.

Confronting injustice, Horton said, "I had to turn my anger into a slow-burning fire, instead of a consuming fire. You don't want the fire to go out," but "you don't want it to burn you up." What you need, he said, is "a good backlog going all the time." He was preparing himself for the long haul—all those years during which he became one of the foremost leaders of southern change.

Remembering Our Past, Building Our Future, edited and compiled by Helen M. Lewis and Suzanna O'Donnell

(Ivanhoe Civic League, P.O. Box 201, Ivanhoe, Va. 24350). This big text-and-photo book is the history of Ivanhoe, a small community in Virginia's Blue Ridge mountains. As the introduction tells us, the book presents the story "of how one community was settled, industrialized, 'developed' and then de-industrialized, of how it 'ran down' and is now being revitalized."

Remembering Our Past is the result of a pragmatic bargain between some Ivanhoe residents and one of the editors, Helen Lewis, a sociologist who came to the town to produce a case study of a rural community that was trying to change itself. The local people wanted to do a history, and they agreed to cooperate with the study if its author would help them with the history.

Not surprisingly, much of the book is based on oral histories contributed by residents, who also make another major contribution—old photos of all kinds that really make Ivanhoe come alive. If the town had a single community coffee table, *Remembering Our Past* would be the family album sitting proudly in the center.

FROM THE APPALACHIAN CENTER: Two previously published books are now available again. You may order them from the address on the outside of the NEWS-LETTER.

Coon Creek Girl is an autobiographical account by Lily May Ledford, who died in 1985. The book was originally published in 1980, when its author was a folk artist in residence at Berea College. (32 pp., \$3.95 postpaid.)

Seeking a People Partnership—eleven speeches by Perley Ayer, edited by Alfred H. Perrin—is a revised edition of the collection originally published in 1969 by the Council of the Southern Mountains, of which Ayer was the long-time executive director. The book appears through the financial support of Stuart Faber of Cincinnati. (36 pp., \$3.95 postpaid.)

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