NEWSLETTER

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

Loyal Jones – Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors | Vol. 20 No. 2 | Spring 1991

Looking Forward

June 30-July 6, 7-13, 14-20, 21-26: Summer craft weeks, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. Bobbin lace, enameling, bookbinding, bowl turning–you'll find expert instruction in just about anything that interests you. Check with the school to make sure of the timing.

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 7-August 9: Augusta Heritage arts workshops, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, W.Va. 26241. Crafts, folklore, dance, music (of all kinds from Irish to Cajun to blues and swing), ending with the Augusta Festival weekend August 9-11. For information, write the college or phone Doug Hill at 304/636-1903.

July 12-14: Berea craft festival, featuring the many studios, galleries and shops that help make Berea the official craft capital of Kentucky. More information from 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 (see July 6-13) by the Country Dance and Song Society.

July 28-August 3, 4-10, 11-16, 18-24, 25-31: August sessions, John C. Campbell Folk School.

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. Chet Atkins, called the most-recorded instrumental soloist of all time, will be a special guest and performer. For more information call Wheeler at 704/686-5009 or write to P.O. Box 7, Swannanoa, N.C. 28778.

August 4-10: 14th annual Appalachian writers' workshop for aspiring writers, Hindman Settlement School, Hindman, Ky. 41822; phone, 606/785-5024. The usual luminaries will, of course, be on hand.

September 1-7, 8-14, 15-21 and **22-28:** Fall craft sessions, John C. Campbell Folk School.

September 15: Deadline for proposals from authors and performers who wish to appear at the 1992 national conference of the Sonneck Society for American Music. Contact Frederick Crane, School of Music, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Ia. 52242.

October 9-13: 12th annual Tennessee fall homecoming, sponsored by and held at John Rice Irwin's Museum of Appalachia, P.O. Box 359, Norris, Tenn. 37828.

October 10-11: Charles Wright festival, with a reading by Wright; Emory & Henry College, Emory, Va. 24327; David Young, Robert Morgan, Stephen Cushman and Mike Chitwood will take part. Write John Lang at Emory & Henry or phone him at 703/944-3121.

Balladeer Barbara Edwards: In Berea in October

October 25-27: 18th annual Berea College Celebration of Traditional Music, sponsored by the Appalachian Center and featuring a variety of top performers. For more information, contact Loyal Jones at the NEWSLETTER address or phone him at 606/986-9341, extension 5140.

November 6-7: Sixth annual University of Kentucky conference on Appalachia. (*See separate story.*)

Remembering the Past, Winning an Award

The town of Ivanhoe, Va., felt that it was in danger of disappearing from the map. Having lost 800 jobs when two of the area's biggest industries closed up, town leaders decided to begin fighting decline and "deindustrialization" by taking a thorough look at Ivanhoe's past. The result was a book that started out as an oral history but turned out to be a great deal more–a complete coming to terms with Ivanhoe's past, through reminiscences, photos and even poetry.

On May 6, *Remembering Our Past, Building Our Future*–the book Ivanhoe produced–won Berea College's W. D. Weatherford Award for the best writing about Appalachia in 1990. The $500 prize was presented at a luncheon held in Berea.

A book of this kind does not arise spontaneously, of course. As we commented in our review (APPALA-

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A Question of Killing

Recent newspaper stories have pointed up the high murder rate in some of Kentucky's mountain counties. In the most striking example, Leslie County during the 1980's produced homicides at a pace above that of New York, Chicago or Los Angeles–28 per 100,000.

Should strangers going into the area feel concerned for their safety? "Only if you are related to somebody," says Jane Bagby of the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center. It is generally agreed that random attacks on strangers, one of the worst aspects of city life, are rare in Appalachia.

Pressures of the cyclical coal economy, post-Civil War turbulence, unemployment, isolation–scholars have advanced numerous explanations for mountain violence. In the current Appalachian mystery novel *Jordon's Wager*, by Frank C. Strunk, a character muses about "bloody confrontations between willful men over a property line, or a bet, or a woman, or plain mountain man-pride."

Lynwood Montell, retired folklorist at Western Kentucky University, has offered an interesting sidelight on the issue. Persons he interviewed, he discovered, did not often speak of "murder." It was too strong a term for them. "Killing" seemed to them more proper, even when a premeditated homicide was being discussed. Such killings, people seemed to feel, sometimes were justified.

The conclusion drawn by some observers is simply that in those high-violence counties, as compared with other areas of the state, the culture tends to accept violence as a way of resolving problems. Sometimes the differences are quite sharp even between neighboring mountain counties.

Surely there's a good study here for the taking. Or, if one has already been conducted, we'd like to see it.

Report From Lower Price Hill

Since the early 1970s, the Lower Price Hill Community School has been serving its neighborhood, a low-income area west of downtown Cincinnati populated chiefly by migrant families from Kentucky, Tennessee and the Virginias. Dropouts and older students work at their own pace, and in the past 13 years more than 300 of them have won the GED certificate.

It isn't an easy life for the staff, of course, but the director, Jake Kroger, is surely one of the more philosophical educators you'll ever meet. Reporting recently that the school's financial problems had eased in comparison with the situation last year, he observed that, to be sure, "financial struggles go with the territory. It is a difficult and ongoing effort to operate a free school in a poor inner-city neighborhood."

But the effort doesn't go unappreciated. One of this spring's GED graduates says that "this is the place to be. The people that make the school are the most caring, helpful and friendly people I know."

Even if the financial situation has improved, the Lower Price Hill School is not exactly on easy street. If you'd like to make a contribution, you might consider giving some of the following items (or the money to buy them): general furniture, magazines (used as well as new), a vacuum cleaner, children's books, wooden blocks for the baby room, coffee (it costs the school $120 a year), food, general textbooks. You can write to the school at 2104 St. Michael St., Cincinnati, Ohio 45204.

Appalachia's Colleges: How Well Do They Serve?

For six years now, the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center has been producing a series of major fall conferences on aspects of Appalachian life. This year's gathering, to be held November 6-7, will take a thorough look at higher education in the region. The principal question: How well do universities and colleges serve the social and economic needs of the region?

This broad question includes such topics as the role of private colleges, the changing mission of land-grant institutions, the obligations of university medical centers and the growth of community colleges.

For detailed information on the conference, write to the Appalachian Center, University of Kentucky, 641 S. Limestone St., Lexington, Ky. 40506, or phone 606/257-4852.

(Proceedings of last year's conference–*Children in Appalachia*–are now available. If you'd like a copy, send a check for $15.00 payable to the Appalachian Center, to the above address.)

EYE on Publications

Sense of Place: American Regional Cultures, edited by Barbara Allen and Thomas J. Schlereth (University Press of Kentucky). Although enterprising scholars have created as many as 41 definitions of *region*, students of the subject agree that the idea of *place* is fundamental to the concept. Along with this notion go the *people* who live in this place and their evolution through time–their *history*. In addition, a region isn't a region unless it possesses special characteristics–a *distinctiveness* that sets it off from everywhere else.

The resulting sense of identity, said the eminent sociologist Louis Wirth of the University of Chicago, causes regions to "develop a conception of themselves and acquire a more or less stereotyped conception in the minds of others who think about them or have relations with them." This observation will certainly not startle anyone familiar with Appalachia.

What the present book does–and in an extremely interesting way–is to demonstrate the part played by place in the evolution of regional folklore. For many years scholars treated American folklore as a collection of Old World phenomena transplanted to New World soil. But, increasingly, folklorists are taking a different view. Instead of devoting themselves simply to collecting historical artifacts from obscure corners of the general culture, scholars

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REMEMBERING *from page 1*

CHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER, Winter 1991), *Remembering Our Past* is the result of a pragmatic bargain between the Ivanhoe Civic League, which was formed in 1986, 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. If the sociologist would help them with the history they wanted to produce, Civic League members said, then they would cooperate with her study. Lewis agreed, and soon recruited a friend, Suzanna O'Donnell of the Appalachian Film Workshop, to help edit the book.

Events took a dramatic turn during the award luncheon, after Maxine Waller, president of the Ivanhoe Civic League, declared that the book had been "God's project," carried out by a "bunch of poor people in a poor community in Appalachia." In fact, she said, the league needed some $10,000 just to finance a second printing, much needed since only a handful of copies of the book remained in stock.

Almost immediately she had in hand a promise of $5,000, the pledge coming from Berea President John B. Stephenson, who also heads the college's Appalachian Fund, and Judy Stammer, director of the fund. Since the award was announced, orders have come in from around the country, making the need for the new printing even more urgent.

The Ivanhoe Civic League has published a second book–*Telling Our Stories, Sharing Our Lives*–containing the oral histories on which much of *Remembering Our Past* was based.

Now sponsored by the Berea College Appalachian Center and Hutchins Library, the Weatherford Award was established, and supported for 17 years, by A. H. Perrin, retired publications director of Procter and Gamble in Cincinnati. The award honors the memory of W. D. Weatherford, Sr., a pioneer and leading figure for many years in Appalachian development, youth work and race relations. The judges are charged with choosing the published work of any length that best illuminates the problems, personalities and unique qualities of the Appalachian South.

Prizewinning editors of "Remembering Our Past": Suzanna O'Donnell, Helen Lewis

Berea College Public Relations

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are looking at regions as seedbeds for folk culture–that is, regarding folk culture is something that goes on happening, developing, taking new forms.

Not at all deterred by the seeming homogenization of contemporary American life, the editors of *Sense of Place* give us ten folklorists who describe and interpret a variety of current regional cultures, their common aim being to show "how people construct a sense of place, of region, for themselves through cultural expression."

Demonstrating, for instance, how environmental conditions can show up in regional folk expressions, Kansans produce a variety of tornado stories, which have as a characteristic feature an emphasis on everyday items left undisturbed in the midst of overwhelming chaos–a vase of cut flowers found intact on a table in the ruins of a farmhouse, a crate of eggs flung hundreds of yards through the air and dropped to the ground so gently that not a single shell is cracked.

As you might expect, regional consciousness bears no relationship to governmental boundaries, nor does it limit itself by ethnic, class or economic barriers, and highly educated people seem to be as regionalistic as the unlettered. A "folk region" thus has an existence as definite as a geographic or political region. Inhabitants of Maryland's Eastern Shore, for example, tend to look on persons from the state's largest city as "Baltimorons" and delight in discussing ways to blow up the Bay Bridge that connects the peninsula with the detested Western Shore. Beneath such talk lies a firm belief that Shoremen (as both men and women of the Eastern Shore call themselves) are born, not made: the only way to be one is literally to be a native. Those who go away to work yearn to come back, and when they retire many do so (anything sound familiar here?).

Another expectation you might have will not be disappointed either–kinship patterns in Appalachia and neighboring areas come in for full (and amusing) discussion. The editors also present us with insights into what one contributor calls "creative constraints" in the folk arts of Appalachia, and how persons like the chairmaker Chester Cornett have broken free of certain social curbs on artistic expression.

All in all, the editors, who teach at Notre Dame, have produced a fascinating and valuable book.

Appalachian White Oak Basketmaking, by Rachel Nash

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EYE *from page 3*
Law and Cynthia W. Taylor, with illustrations by Alison Bruce Wieboldt (University of Tennessee Press). As is often the case when one is writing a book, the authors of *Appalachian White Oak Basketmaking* found that, as their research progressed, their point of view changed. Originally seeing baskets as the products of a series of techniques ("we were mainly object-oriented," they say), Law and Taylor increasingly came to appreciate regional differences in styles and traditions and hence gave greater attention to the basketmakers themselves.

The book surveys white oak basketmaking in Central Appalachia and neighboring areas–white oak because that is the material most widely used in the area. The authors analyze the basket's basic construction, its structural details, and relationships between these features and particular geographical locations (thus making this book a study in regionalism of the kind discussed in the note above on *Sense of Place*). As makers used techniques or construction features that were continued by descendants, a regional style developed.

Many of these techniques are in use today, and they appear to be culturally determined, not consciously employed. Often basketmakers simply could not explain why they make baskets the way they do.

Law and Taylor have clearly produced the definitive book on white oak basketmaking–a "valuable book," says Loyal Jones, "for collectors, students of folklife, and those who appreciate skilled, intricate, and beautiful crafts."

(During their research and writing, Law and Taylor received support from an Appalachian Studies Fellowship awarded by Berea College. Both have varied experience as teachers and craftspersons.)

God's Plenty: Modern Kentucky Writers, edited by Lillie D. Chaffin, Glenn O. Carey and Harry N. Brown (Penkevill Publishing Co., P.O. Box 212, Greenwood, Fla. 32443). "The Kentuckians may be called the Irish of America," said a visitor from England, partly because these people "are the only Americans who can understand a joke." They also, commented another observer, "are a high-minded people and possess the stamina of a noble character." True enough, according to still another traveler, who found Kentuckians distinguished by "chivalrous notions of honor and justice."

Kentuckians might smugly accept all these opinions, but what can be said about the visitor who noted that with Kentuckians "the passion for gaming and spiritous liquors are (*sic*) carried to excess, which frequently terminates in quarrels degrading to human nature"?

However contemporary these judgments may sound, they actually were delivered almost 200 years ago, during the state's early days. They were dug up by Thomas D. Clark, Kentucky's laureate historian, for use in his sketch, "The Kentucky Personality," one of the essays appearing in *God's Plenty*. Clark adds his own comment: "The population of no other state in the Union is perhaps so overwhelmingly independent yet so inconsistent in its personality as that of Kentucky."

Certainly one of the best ways to become acquainted with the personality of any society is to see what its writers say, what they value, what they seem to take for granted. In the case of Kentucky, one has a great range of possibilities to choose from; as Jim Wayne Miller has observed, "For such a rural state with a relatively small population, Kentucky is a decidedly 'writerly' state."

For this collection of essays, stories and poetry, the editors have drawn on 56 Kentucky writers, most of them of such merit that you will find yourself rewarded by reading their contributions, even if you have no interest whatever in the personality of Kentucky. In fact, the editors seem to have made their choices primarily on the basis of literary quality rather than on considerations of outlook, ideology, local pride or any other extraliterary points.

A few names will give you the idea: Robert Penn Warren, James Still, Guy Davenport, Wendell Berry, Harriette Simpson Arnow. Not all of the 56 are of this caliber, of course, but the book contains some delightful surprises along with the many foreseeable pleasures.

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