

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE



LETTER

Loyal Jones – Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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Summer 1991

Looking Forward

October 4-5: Appalachian Development Projects Assembly, Cedar Lakes, Ripley, W.Va. A get-together, with music, poetry, workshops and discussion, sponsored by the Commission on Religion in Appalachia, P.O. Box 10867, Knoxville, Tenn. 37939.

October 9-13: 12th annual Tennessee fall homecoming, sponsored by and held at John Rice Irwin's Museum of Appalachia, which has been validly described as "the most authentic and complete replica of pioneer Appalachian life in the world." The homecoming will feature more than 175 varied activities—crafts demonstrations, music, artists at work, special events. The museum's address is 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.

October 18-20: 10th-anniversary meeting, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Ky. Write KFTC, P.O. Box 874, Prestonsburg, Ky. 41653, or phone 606/886-0043.

October 20-26: Fall dance week, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902.

October 25-27: Fiddlers' reunion and old-time music festival, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, W.Va. Phone 304/636-1903.

October 25-27: 18th annual Berea College Celebration of Traditional Music, sponsored by the Appalachian Center. (See separate story.)

October 26: Blue Ridge folklife festival, Ferrum, Va. 24088. Contact Roddy Moore, Blue Ridge Institute, Ferrum College. The phone number is 703/365-4415.

October 27-November 2, November 3-9, 10-15: Fall craft weeks, John C. Campbell Folk School; backstrap weaving, clogging, enameling and a variety of other activities (not all are offered each week).

October 30-November 3: Interfest international convention and expo for organizers of folk, jazz and other festivals; record companies; artists' representatives; media types, etc.; a one-stop showcase and clearinghouse; New Orleans, La. Write Interfest '91, 27 Hope St., Liverpool L1 9BQ, England.

November 1-2: "Women, Technology and Ethics: Defining the Issues for the Twenty-first Century"; Morehead State University, Morehead, Ky. 40351. To find out

more, write Donna Spangler at MSU or phone her—606/783-2077.

November 2-3: Berea Chamber of Commerce antique show and sale; Acton Folk Center, Berea, Ky. Contact Mildred Cummins at 606/986-9760.

November 6-7: Sixth annual University of Kentucky conference on Appalachia. This one will examine how well institutions of higher education serve the social, educational and economic needs of the region. For more information, write the university's Appalachian Center, 641 S. Limestone St., Lexington, Ky. 40506, or phone 606/257-4852.

December 26-January 1: Winter dance week, John C. Campbell Folk School.

December 26-January 1: Berea College Country Dance School. Now 53 years old, this famous dance leadership course for adults and some select teenagers gives participants what the organizers call a "practical means of teaching or learning history, social skills, geometry, music and much more." It's always highly popular, so early booking is advised. Contact Berea College Recreation Extension, College Box 287, Berea, Ky. 40404; the phone number is 606/986-9341, extension 5143.

"Celebration" headliner: West Virginia's Phoebe Parsons (see p. 2)



Gerry Milnes

“Crowd Pleasers”? You Bet!

When it made its first appearance in 1974, the Berea College Celebration of Traditional Music was devoted to one special purpose. “We feel,” said Appalachian Center Director Loyal Jones, “that the old styles traditional to the mountains are not heard so much any more, and we want to encourage them.”

Since 1974, those “old styles” have increasingly been heard throughout the region—thanks in good part to the Berea celebration’s programs and workshops. One place you can hear them during the October 25-27 weekend is the Berea campus, when the celebration returns for its 18th annual run.

The big weekend begins at 7:30 on Friday evening, with a concert by festival musicians. The usual stellar group of performers will be on hand, this time including Nat Reese, Barbara Edwards, Whitey and Hogan and the Briarhoppers, Matokie Slaughter and Alice Gerrard, Joseph Fulaytar, Kinney Rorrer and Kirk Sutphin, Phoeba Parsons, Harry Cagle and Jan Davidson, and Chet and Don, the Ware Brothers.

The daylight hours of Saturday, October 26, will be devoted to instrumental workshops and miniconcerts, together with a special event at 2:00 p.m.—a symposium, “Banjo Styles of Virginia and North Carolina,” led by Kinney Rorrer, who wrote *Rambling Blues: The Life and Songs of Charlie Poole*.

Saturday evening will see another gala session with all the headliners. Both big concerts will be followed by square dancing. And if all that activity isn’t enough for you, you can take part in a Sunday-morning hymn sing along with festival musicians.

Some persons you may not find at the celebration are any representatives of the National Endowment for the Arts, which this year decided not to offer financial help. Why not? Well, for one thing, said an NEA panelist, “you only have one bluesman.” But this is Appalachia. We have few black folk musicians, though the celebration has always sought black musicians. “Well, yes, you do have some diversity”—that is, persons who are old, young, female and so on—“but you don’t seem to have any philosophy guiding your use of these people.”

Philosophy, eh? Yes, the celebration is guilty of presenting “crowd pleasers.” Well, the planners can certainly plead guilty here—the crowds have always seemed to be pleased, ever since 1974, and nobody has ever raised many questions about the guiding philosophy.

If you like, you can ponder such issues while listening to the unmatched music. If you need any further information, write the Appalachian Center (see page 4 of this issue) or phone us at 606/986-9341, extension 5140.

ARC + TVA =

Something brand-new in the world of coordination and cooperation is an agreement just signed between two federal bodies that have a great impact on the Appalachian

South. The Tennessee Valley Authority and the Appalachian Regional Commission have decided to work together on a wide variety of economic-development ventures.

Although TVA and the ARC have inevitably been involved with each other through the years, they have never until now worked together within a formal administrative structure. The two agencies will, we are told, cooperate on such projects as small-town revitalization, development of tourism, encouragement of small business through technical assistance and enhancement of the programs of community colleges.

ARC, of course, has roots and branches throughout the region. TVA, says the memorandum of agreement, will bring to the new arrangement its special expertise in engineering, construction and environmental matters.

Environmental expertise? Certainly TVA has not always been immune to criticism in this area. We’re speaking, of course, of the agency’s relationship to the coal industry. The new arrangement may well be a good idea—elimination of overlapping efforts certainly constitutes a laudable goal—but we think this new consortium will bear watching. For that matter, what agencies don’t?

Educational Reform: Sweet Reason, Big Stick

Is educational reform succeeding in Kentucky?

It’s been a little more than two years since the state’s Supreme Court not only struck down the way the school system was financed but went on to throw out the system itself. This decision was followed by the passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990, widely regarded as the most sweeping and perhaps most intelligent such legislation adopted anywhere in the country.

The legal side of the story began in the mid-1980s when a number of the poorer school districts formed an alliance, with the legal inspiration and direction of former Governor Bert T. Combs, to sue the state government. Because of the general interest in the subject (Virginia, for example, is experiencing the same tremors right now), the APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER has followed developments since the early days.

During the past two years, says Robert F. Sexton, an influential education activist, the larger meaning of Kentucky’s school reform has become clear. “We Kentuckians are trying to do something that just isn’t done very often in this country. We’re trying to solve a complex and long-term problem with a complex and long-term solution. We’ve passed up the quick fix and decided to try the big fix.”

“Failure to Communicate”

A California school executive, Thomas C. Boysen, was brought in to fill the new post of commissioner of education, his primary task being nothing less than supervising the creation of a—theoretically, at least—new school system, with such features as “site-based management” and strong curbs on nepotism.

How have such ideas gone down in Appalachian Ken-
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tucky? One mountain superintendent recently told the state Board of Education that yes indeed, school-based management is fine but that there've been some problems. Like the prison warden in *Cool Hand Luke*, this superintendent sees the cause of the problems as "a failure to communicate."

Nonsense, says a newspaper columnist. This particular superintendent "has as much interest in school-based management as a dog has in broccoli." In fact, the columnist says, the superintendent and his board have gagged council members, clammed up on information about the budget, and driven away a principal who favored the new approach.

New to the Game

Boysen is, of course, new to the ways of Appalachian educator-politicians, many of whom could give lessons in tenacity to pit bulls. In various counties, it appears, superintendents and school boards are stonewalling people who want to learn what's going on in the schools. Some

questioners say they fear retaliation by school-board members.

Although the new law gives Boysen the power to deal with all such problems, he has begun, perhaps naturally, by trying to employ sweet reason rather than the big stick. But most observers believe that, sooner rather than later, the commissioner will have to start swinging that stick.

People facing great change, says Boysen, often resist it, "primarily out of apprehension about an uncertain future." With some of the Eastern Kentucky superintendents, however, such apprehension is only the beginning of the new commissioner's difficulties.

In spite of these problems and controversies, says Robert Sexton, "Kentucky stands today in a spot where no one would have predicted it to be just two years ago." The reform movement is healthy and, far from waning, is gaining strength. It took a decade of hard work to bring the reform act into being, Sexton says, and "ten more years to make it work right isn't too much to expect."

Country dancing can liven up your professional work, say staff members of Berea's Christmas Country Dance School, but besides that, it's fun. This year's session begins on December 26



Berea College Public Relations

More on Killing

The following letter comments on an article, "A Question of Killing," that appeared in the Spring 1991 issue of the *APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER*. The writer was formerly professor of sociology and director of the Center for Developmental Change at the University of Kentucky.

TO THE EDITORS:

... My analysis confirms the high incidence of homicides in Eastern Kentucky. I used a five-year average for the period 1985-1989 in order to smooth out the erratic fluctuations of annual rates. Leslie County (as your article suggested) had the highest rate for that period—24 per 100,000. Whitley County, with a rate of 23, was close behind, although it recorded only six homicides during the period. The rates for both counties were more than triple the state average rate of seven. Five other Eastern Kentucky counties had rates at least double the state rate. Of the 26 Appalachian counties I looked at, only six had homicide rates below the state rate.

Since accidental deaths present another aspect of violence, I checked them as well. The Kentucky death rate

from accidents, which averaged 45 per 100,000 for 1985-89, is well above the national rate (but the state homicide rate, perhaps surprisingly, is below the national rate). Only three of the 26 Eastern Kentucky counties I looked at had accidental death rates below that of the state.

Obviously the high rate of accidental deaths can be explained by factors other than a culture of violence, such as hazardous occupations, poor roads and the like. (However, in most of Eastern Kentucky the proportion of accidental deaths attributed to motor vehicles is pretty close to the state figure of 50-55 percent.) It's harder to find alternative explanations for homicides.

THOMAS R. FORD

Lexington, Ky.

EYE on Publications

Southern Quilts: A New View, by Bets Ramsey and Gail Andrews Trechsel (EPM Publications, Inc., 1003 Turkey Run Road, McLean, Va. 22101). How do you come by a "new view" of quilts? If you have the kind of background

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possessed by the editors of this book (Bets Ramsey, in particular, is a veteran curator and organizer of exhibitions), you simply invite a number of artists to take part in a show of quilts—but not just any quilts. We're talking here about works called art quilts or studio quilts that bear little resemblance to those traditional roses and trees of life found on many a bed across the South.

The concept of the studio quilt artist, we learn, was a product of the 1970s. Although the kinds of works produced by these artists draw inspiration from the traditional bed quilts, they bear the stamp of the artists' own experiences and vision. For the exhibition having the same title as this book, the curators stipulated only that the pieces were to be layered and fastened together in some way. No restrictions were placed on materials.

The result is an elegant show—and book—that will make anybody think twice about the meaning of the word *quilt*. What we have here, in pieces like "Midnight Conversations" and "The Fat Lady Sings," is an exhibition that looks as if it had been put together to be hung on the walls of the Museum of Modern Art. The quilt has certainly evolved from its horizontal past into a richly vertical present.

Jordon's Wager, by Frank C. Strunk (Walker). Period detail from the 1930s, insights into Appalachian people, a murder to be solved—this book gives the reader plenty to think about and enjoy. A crime novel can be set in Appalachia as well as anywhere else, to be sure, and the person doing the setting here knows his subject from the inside out. Frank Strunk is a native of McCreary County, Kentucky, and once edited a weekly newspaper in Mount Vernon, down the road a piece from Berea.

The background would not be of much importance, however, unless the characters engaged our interest—as indeed they do. The book is not only a good mystery but an effective novel—a historical novel, really—in which the author captures the Depression-era atmosphere of a camp town in the mountains.

Foxfire: 25 Years, edited by Eliot Wigginton and His Students (Anchor Books/Doubleday). What can you say about Foxfire? A publication, a program, a movement—all

these things, but beyond them, a phenomenon. We remember when a little, almost mysterious magazine showed up on our desk one day, back in the late 1960s. Where had it come from? Who was behind it?

Now, a quarter of a century and nine Foxfire books later, millions of readers know the answers to those questions. Certainly it is fair to say that nobody could have foreseen how Eliot Wigginton's approach to teaching would ignite the imaginations of educators and students everywhere.

With this book, Foxfire reaches what is perhaps the ultimate stage—it studies itself. A 25th year, says Wigginton, "seems as good a time as any to reflect, to take stock." What was it like to be a 14-year-old student and help create the magazine and all those books? Where are those youngsters now? After all, as Wigginton observes, when you've been teaching for 25 years, that's time for your earlier students to present you with a new senior class largely made up of their children.

In this book the present Foxfire staffers interview their predecessors. From the beginnings of the magazine through the publication of the first Foxfire book to the shaping of the Broadway play, they tell us what was going on behind the scenes—and, in so doing, they become part of the culture being preserved by the current Foxfire generation.

Making History: The First Ten Years of KFTC (Kentuckians For the Commonwealth, P.O. Box 864, Prestonsburg, Ky. 41653). Although we haven't seen this book, we know enough about it to tell you that it describes how this very successful activist group (originally the Kentucky Fair Tax Coalition) was formed and how it has gone about its work. KFTC is best known for its efforts in the successful campaign for the broad-form-deed constitutional amendment.

Jobs and Economic Development: Meeting the Needs of Appalachian People, by William Keesler (Appalachian Civic Leadership Project). Designed to be used in discussion groups, this booklet focuses on Eastern Kentucky, but its principles are highly portable and should be of value throughout the region. You can obtain copies (at \$2 each) from the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center, 641 South Limestone St., Lexington, Ky. 40506.

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