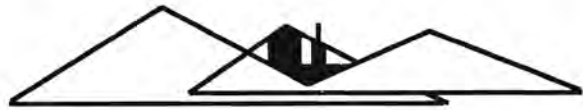


NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

LETTER



Loyal Jones – Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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Spring 1992

Looking Forward

June 29-July 4: New River Gorge Festival, Fayetteville, W.Va.; all the usual—crafts, music, food, plus fireworks. Phone 304-574-0700 for more information.

July 4-5: Old-Time Anvil Shoot, Museum of Appalachia. Museum founder John Rice Irwin does nothing by halves; five times each day real gunpowder will hurl a real anvil some 75 feet in the air, all in celebration of American independence. The museum is one mile off I-75 (Exit 122) at Norris, Tenn.

July 5-August 7: Augusta Heritage Arts Workshops, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, W.Va. 26241. It's the 20th anniversary of Augusta, and this series of week-long classes will spotlight folk-arts traditions from the U.S. and around the world. Why "Augusta"? It was the 18th-century name for what's now West Virginia.

July 5-11, 12-17, 19-25, 26-August 1: Craft sessions, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. Since subjects and subspecialties vary from week to week (kitchen smithin', for instance, is only taught during one session), you may wish to make sure when your particular need will be met.

July 7-31: Appalachian/Scottish Studies Program, East Tennessee State University. For information contact the Center for Appalachian Studies, ETSU; 615/929-5348.

July 10-12: Berea Craft Festival, Indian Fort Theater, Berea, Ky., featuring the many studios, galleries and shops that help make Berea the official craft capital of Kentucky. Contact Richard and Lila Bellando, 606/986-1585.

July 10-12: Uncle Dave Macon Days, an arts-and-crafts celebration honoring Rutherford County, Tenn.'s "Dixie Dewdrop." Write to P.O. Box 5016, Murfreesboro, Tenn. 37133, or phone 615/893-6565.

July 27-August 2: The Great Smokies Song Chase, directed by songwriter-playwright Billy Edd Wheeler, is back for its third year. Nationally recognized staffers will work with songwriters and performers. Write Jim Magill, Warren Wilson College, 701 Warren Wilson Road, Swannanoa, N.C. 28778, or call 704/298-5099.

August 2-8: 15th annual Appalachian writers' workshop, Hindman Settlement School, Hindman, Ky. 41822. Write to the school at P.O. Box 844 or telephone 606/785-5475.

August 2-8, 9-14, 16-22, 23-29: Summer craft weeks, John C. Campbell Folk School.

September 4-6: Labor Day Family Music and Dance Weekend, John C. Campbell Folk School.

October 23-25: Celebration of Traditional Music at
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Berea College Public Relations

Winner Shifflett speaks to luncheon audience

"Coal Towns" Cops Weatherford Award

When he began his study of life in Southern Appalachian coal towns, Crandall Shifflett expected to document the melancholy story of a "hapless, helpless and hopeless laboring population living a cradle-to-grave existence in a dark and lonely mountain hollow" under the domination of rapacious coal operators. But as he studied oral histories and coal-company records, Shifflett began to have his doubts. Certainly he found evidence of repression—evictions, blacklisting, the use of armed guards—but the oral histories had their prominent bright side too.

The result was that Shifflett, who teaches history at Virginia Tech, went on to produce *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960*, a thoroughly revisionist view of his subject, and on May 26 this book earned for its author the 22nd annual W. D. Weatherford Award for outstanding writing about Appalachia. The \$500 prize, sponsored by the Berea College Appalachian Center and Hutchins Library, was presented at a luncheon in Berea.

As we commented in our review of *Coal Towns* (APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER, Winter 1992), Shifflett takes a "fresh and bold look at one of the most firmly established ideas in Appalachian scholarship—the belief that in exchanging subsistence farming for life in coal
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"COAL TOWNS" from page 1

towns, Appalachian coal-mining families were moving from a Jeffersonian Eden into a corporation-created hell."

But, as he explained to the luncheon audience, Shifflett intended no whitewash of coal corporations. He was neither "pro-labor, pro-management, nor pro-miner" but sought to produce a balanced account showing the complexity of coal-town life. The book is illustrated with photos not only of company towns and miners but of meeting announcements, building plans, contracts and other artifacts.

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 work published anywhere in the United States that best illuminates the problems, personalities and unique qualities of the Appalachian South.

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

In Memory: Jeanne Rasmussen

We take note of the death on January 30, 1992, of Jeanne M. Rasmussen, a long-time Appalachian writer and photographer who in the 1960s contributed to *Mountain Life & Work* and also appeared in many other publications. A West Virginian, she kept in close professional and personal touch with problems and controversies in the coalfields, working with the Association of Disabled Miners and Widows and other groups.

East Tennessee State University, which has custody of the Rasmussen papers and photographs, is planning an exhibition of her work.

Appalachian Gap

U.S. Department of Commerce statistics recently analyzed by Richard A. Couto of the University of Richmond contain some grim news for Central Appalachia. Of the 10 poorest counties in all of Appalachia, from New York to Mississippi, nine are in either Kentucky or West Virginia, and Kentucky has the top (or bottom) four, all of them small and intensely rural, far from a city of any size at all.

The poorest of these counties, McCreary, averages only 38.9 percent of the national per capita income. What is particularly disturbing is that after improving its ratio to the national figure by 9.9 percent in the 1969-79 decade, McCreary fell back by 2.4 percent from 1979 to 1989. During this same decade Clay County, W.Va., declined by

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Berea College. More information in the next issue, or call 606/986-9341, Ext. 5140.

November 5-7: Seventh annual University of Kentucky conference on Appalachia. Participants in this year's gathering will discuss the state of the arts in Appalachia. For more information write to the university's Appalachian Center, 641 S. Limestone St., Lexington, Ky. 40506 or phone 606/257-4852.

a very substantial 12.9 percent in relation to the national per capita figure.

These figures actually reflect a national trend for the 1980s, a period in which the bottom 20 percent of U.S. households saw average income (not ratio but dollars) shrink 5.2 percent—and, quite significantly, this is an after-tax figure. This figure contrasts dazzlingly with the way things went during the 1980s for the top 20 percent of the income pyramid. These families made 32.5 percent more in 1990 than they did in 1980. And those at the head of the parade, the leading 5 percent? In 1980 they cleared \$100,000 per household (in 1990 dollars). In 1990 they made \$51,000 more, giving them a rise for the decade of slightly more than 50 percent. Not bad!

The specific factor affecting the relative rise and fall of the Kentucky and West Virginia counties was the coal boom of the 1970s—remember the energy crisis?—and the consequent coal bust of the 1980s.

Where is the Appalachian South expanding the most? Around cities, particularly Atlanta. Counties in this area show incomes slightly higher than the national average.

EYE on Publications

Appalachian Valley, by George L. Hicks (Waveland Press, Inc., P.O. Box 400, Prospect Heights, Ill. 60070).

Rural Community in the Appalachian South, by Patricia Duane Beaver (Waveland Press).

A monograph is a piece of academic writing that focuses on a single point or area, like Sherlock Holmes's studies of cigar ashes and bloodstains, or like the two books listed above—each of which, however, has a more human approach than Holmes allowed himself in his professional writing.

These books are reprints (with some bibliographic updating) of monographs originally published, respectively, in 1976 and 1986. Both deal with western North Carolina, Hicks focusing on a valley he calls the Little Laurel, with its 1,300 inhabitants, Beaver on three small communities, one each from Yancey, Watauga and Ashe counties.

Since Hicks conducted his fieldwork some 25 years ago, *Appalachian Valley* is, as he observes, a historical document, a description of the subject valley "as understood by one ethnographer at a particular moment in the valley's history." This does not at all mean, of course, that the book lacks interest or value. It is, in fact, an engaging piece of work, offering useful insights into its much-written-about subject—that is, the Appalachian South. The



AT THE WEATHERFORD CEREMONY: Screen and TV actor Bob Hannah (l.), who reminisced about Dr. Weatherford, chatted with Tom Kirk.



Berea College Public Relations

Loyal Jones (l.), director of the Berea Appalachian Center, which with Hutchins Library cosponsors the award, talked with Crandall Shifflett.

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brief discussion called "Skirmishes in the War on Poverty" is a good example.

Hicks went to the Little Laurel Valley, he tells us, to acquire material for a Ph.D. dissertation. He originally intended to study not the natives of the area but a group of transplanted urbanites who had established a cooperative community, but soon found himself interested in the true locals. In very much the same way, Patricia Beaver was led to the first of her three communities by, as she puts it, her "quest for a doctorate and a profession in anthropology." Her point of entry was also provided by transplants, in this case husband-and-wife "hippies" who were friends of friends.

Though, like Hicks, she is writing about a culture that has been held up to the light a good many times in the past 25 years—with its kinship ties, its particular sex roles, its ways of relating to newcomers, its religion—Beaver still has things to tell us. Her depiction of urban transplants in Appalachia, and her reaction to them, is of special interest.

These two books appear to be the opening titles in a new reprint series. If so, the publishers are to be encouraged.

The Kentucky Encyclopedia, John E. Kleber, editor in chief (University Press of Kentucky). This is such a good idea that you wonder about reports that in some quarters the project was regarded as controversial, unlikely to interest many people. Perhaps these reports were exaggerated. In any case, the first printing (5,000 copies) apparently sold out as fast as customers could get to the bookstores.

These buyers will certainly not be disappointed. This book is exactly what its title suggests; what you see is what you get—a comprehensive A-Z reference work that weighs almost as much as a leg of lamb. People, places, entities of all kinds, events all appear in their proper alphabetical spots, from Irvin Abell (a Louisville surgeon) and Actors Theatre to Youth Orchestras and Felix Zollicoffer (a Confederate general). As an important bonus, the reader gets a 15-page historical overview of the Commonwealth contributed by Kentucky's laureate historian, Thomas D. Clark. And it was Clark, according to the editor, who persuaded the Kentucky Bicentennial Commission to mark the state's 200th birthday by sponsoring the *Encyclopedia*.

Any large reference work, especially the first edition,

can be criticized on grounds of inclusions, omissions, relative lengths of entries and so on. That's all part of the game, and nobody's quibbles will be the same as someone else's. The one point we might make is a stylistic one that may deserve attention when revisions are considered—the recurring use of "most well" for "best," as in "Kentucky boasts many of the most well-known . . . farms to be found in the world."

As we say, a quibble.

The Poetics of Appalachian Space, edited by Parks Lanier, Jr. (University of Tennessee Press). One critic has said of the essays in this book that they "unfold a contour map of literary Appalachia," revealing the "endless, enriching traffic between the world we think and the world out there." Another reviewer found these same essays "diffuse, discursive, intellectually loose, persistently cerebral and often clotted in language with esoteric terms"—overall, "French" as opposed to "Appalachian."

The French quality here, whatever you may think of it, comes from the fact that the writers were inspired by Gaston Bachelard, a scientist and philosopher who died in 1962. French but no Cartesian, Bachelard believed that reason and experience reinforce each other in a sort of dialectical progression (reminiscent of Hegel) and that imagination and daydreaming are likewise involved in knowing. Thus baldly stated, these notions seem reasonably unexceptionable in the modern world, but of course much depends on how they are handled and what use is made of them. The particular work that inspired the Appalachian writers here was Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, published in 1958.

If you readily think about persons like James Still in such terms as *oneiric* and *eidetic*, then this may be the book for you. (*Oneiric* isn't as bad as it sounds—it simply means having to do with dreams; *eidetic* may be a little more complicated.) Certainly the book offers many interesting observations about a variety of Appalachian writers. But sometimes you may worry that a poem or a story is just too fragile to bear the weight of such *recherché* analysis.

Classics of Civil War Fiction, edited by David Madden and Peggy Bach (University Press of Mississippi). Why is

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there no great novel about the greatest American experience, the Civil War? Well, you say, what about *The Red Badge of Courage*? The problem with that, according to the editors of this new anthology, is that this famous novel deals more with war in general than with the Civil War. And in any case, Louis Rubin, Jr., has commented, the South has no *War and Peace*: "All we have is *Gone With the Wind*."

To look into this question, the editors invited 14 writers and scholars to contribute essays about Civil War novelists and novels they find of special interest. These contributors make up a notable group, including Robert Penn Warren, Tom Wicker, Mary Lee Settle, Ishmael Reed and others who have produced important work of their own. As you read through their essays, you find that many of them strongly believe that we have a number of near-great Civil War novels even if no single consensus masterpiece.

The curious point is that though everybody talks about the Civil War, very little critical attention has been paid to fiction about it. According to the editors, *Classics of Civil War Fiction* is only the *second* book to be devoted exclusively to the subject. The book succeeds wonderfully in giving fresh appeal to half-forgotten names and one-time favorites that have fallen out of fashion and to resurrecting some works that never won much fame. In short, it makes you want to go to the library or the second-hand bookstore. In addition, as a study of a number of different writers who deal with the same theme, it makes an interesting contrast with *The Poetics of Appalachian Space*.

Snowbird Cherokees: People of Persistence, by Charlotte Neely (University of Georgia Press). The 400 Cherokees of Snowbird, N.C., are, we are told, simultaneously the most traditional and the most adaptive members of their entire tribe. More isolated than other Indian communities in the area, Snowbird has nevertheless cultivated close ties both with local whites and with Oklahoma Cherokees.

The author, who teaches anthropology at Northern

Kentucky University, set out to examine this paradox, expecting to focus on relations between Indians and whites. But the complexity of relations within the Cherokee community ("intraethnic") demanded equal time. The Eastern Band of Cherokees, the author found, do not see themselves as a homogeneous group. They speak of fullbloods, white Indians and other subcategories, and they are divided into political factions as well.

The Snowbird community has the highest percentage of fullbloods in the East, but its success is due even more to the relative unimportance of white Indians—those who prefer assimilation into the outside culture to what the author terms "traditionalist adaptation." Possessing a positive image of itself, the community refers to whites almost exclusively as "non-Indians." But for the last century, says the author, it is not the whites from outside but the white Indians from inside who have posed the chief threat to Cherokee traditionalism. Hence her study of "adaptive strategies" focuses on both interethnic and intraethnic relations. At Snowbird, she discovered, adaptation and tradition go hand in hand.

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We're happy to announce the publication by the Berea College Press of *Southern Mountain Speech*, a collection of the late Cratis Williams's lectures on Appalachian speech and his articles on the subject in *Mountain Life & Work*, the *North Carolina Historical Review* and elsewhere. The book was compiled and edited by Jim Wayne Miller and Loyal Jones, and it includes an introduction by Miller and a 62-page glossary of mountain words and phrases gleaned from Williams's work, from other writers and practitioners of mountain speech and from the editors' marvelously retentive memories. A bibliography and several photos of Williams in characteristic lively action round out the book, which you can obtain (for \$8.95 plus \$1.00 postage) from the Appalachian Center, C.P.O. Box 2336, Berea, Ky. 40404.

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