

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE



LETTER

Loyal Jones – Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

Vol. 21 No. 4 Fall 1992

Looking Forward

January 2-10: Adirondack ski trip, University of North Carolina-Charlotte; open to anyone. Call 704/547-2521.

January 4-25: Aerobics, dulcimer, contra and square dancing, spinning (to Feb. 28); John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902; telephone, 1/800/FOLK SCH.

January 5-26: Instruction in banjo and dance, John C. Campbell Folk School.

January 31-February 20: New Opportunity School for Women, Berea College. This popular program is now appearing in a winter as well as a summer version; successful applicants spend three weeks learning about jobs and how to get them. For information about future sessions, contact Jane Stephenson, C.P.O. Box 2276, Berea, Ky. 40404; phone, 606/986-9341, ext. 6676.

February 28-March 3: White-oak basketry, blacksmithing and a variety of other activities, John C. Campbell Folk School. For full information on all programs, contact the school.

March 7-13: Spinning and dyeing, weaving, Shaker boxes, other crafts; John C. Campbell Folk School.

March 19-21: Appalachian Studies Association annual conference; East Tennessee State University. This year's theme: "Appalachian Adaptations to a Changing World." The deadline for submissions of proposals has passed, except for students who wish to enter the Carl A. Ross student-paper competition; they have until January 15 to submit their papers. For information about any aspect of the conference, get in touch with Norma Myers, Archives of Appalachia, Box 70665, ETSU, Johnson City, Tenn. 37614.

March 26-28: Spring dance weekend, John C. Campbell Folk School.

April 15-17: New River Symposium, sponsored by the New River Gorge National River and the West Virginia Department of Culture and History, with discussions of all kinds of subjects having to do with this unique river and its valley—natural history, folklore, archaeology, geography and so forth. But the timing is tentative; for up-to-date information, call park headquarters—304/465-0508. If the meeting takes place as scheduled, it will be held in Wytheville, Va., with the local community college as cosponsor.

June 7-25: 19th annual course on Appalachian history and literature, Berea College; further information in the next issue.

June 20-26: Appalachian Celebration, Morehead State

University, Morehead, Ky. This large-scale jamboree is a long way off yet, but you may want to put it on your calendar. For information, call 1/800/354-2090 or, in-state, 606/783-2077.

(If you'd like to see your event listed in this column, write or telephone with details, giving as much lead time as possible.)

Funds and Fecundity

Although during the past 20 years the South has increasingly integrated itself into the country as a whole, some regrettable trends continue to set the region at least somewhat apart from the rest of the nation. As the Southern Regional Council observes, "Any listing of the 'worst states' according to current measurements of poverty, health care, housing, workers' climate, concern for the environment and general quality of life continues to be disproportionately southern."

One disturbing set of figures comes from a report produced for a project of the Southern Governors Association and the Southern Legislative Conference. According to this study, a marked increase in teen-age birth rates is taking a heavy toll on taxpayers' pockets—not to mention its direct social costs. In 17 southern states, public expenditures associated with early childbearing leaped from \$3.6 billion in 1987 to \$5.7 billion in 1991—a remarkable 60 percent increase.

One governor told reporters that some \$110 million was spent in the South during the past year on primary prevention of adolescent pregnancy. "That's roughly two cents' work of prevention for every dollar spent on families started by adolescents," he said. "We are most definitely paying for the pound of cure."

And, he might have asked, how effective is the cure?

Scholar and Gunman: Is Anybody Listening?

During 1992 two very different kinds of Appalachian confrontations turned hot—one with words, the other with bullets. Each scene was a study in frustration and each seemed to have its symbolic meaning. Together they illustrate two sides of the Appalachian dilemma.

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In the verbal encounter, an Appalachian Regional Commission economist became embroiled with members of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA). Reporting to a CORA conference in Washington, Richard Couto of CORA called the 1980s "a decade of severe setbacks." Some coal-mining counties, he said, reported very large declines in per capita income—more than 20 percent.

Nonsense, declared Monroe Newman, according to CORA reports, which say that the visiting economist denounced Couto's figures and conclusions but declined to offer any alternatives. What particularly angered the CORA commissioners was Newman's suggestion that the best solution for low-income people is to "ease their transition" out of the mountains.

"Disposable Communities"

This idea, which seemed to make dollar sense to the economist, prompted one panelist to declare that "when we talk about disposable communities we're talking about disposable people." What specific suggestions this panelist offered were not reported, but in any case CORA and the ARC were talking past each other, neither hearing nor being heard.

The more violent of the two confrontations took place on a farm outside of Lattimore, N.C., when a group of local residents entered the property to take water samples. No ordinary piece of rural land, the place is a "soil farm" run by a company called Soil Technologies. A soil farm (also called a land farm), is not, it seems, a place where soil is

nurtured; it is literally a dumping ground, in this case a disposal point for oil-soaked earth.

As a result of this activity, local residents say, their ground water has become contaminated with benzene and lead. Company officials had assured the residents that their fears were groundless, because evaporation and the planting of cover crops would prevent the development of any problems.

"Fired Two Shots"

Oddly enough, the residents remained skeptical, and they decided to collect their own samples from the farm. An eminently respectable group, including a manufacturer and a pharmacist, the delegation arrived at about 9:30 one evening. As described in the *Appalachian Reader*, the ensuing confrontation was brief indeed. "A truck drove up," said one of the residents. "We thought it was another member of our group. A man got out and fired two shots right at us. He didn't shoot over our heads." Then, as if he hadn't made his point, the man informed the people that they were trespassing.

That was that, though the enforcer was charged with several counts of assault with a deadly weapon.

No one, of course, would liken this gunman to a scholarly ARC economist, but in neither of the cases did words or bullets cause the two sides to listen to each other or bring any approach to a resolution. The people who pollute the earth can at least be fought in court and in the legislature. But, an observer may well ask, what about the ARC and various citizen groups? Is virtue all on one side? Is any kind of resolution possible here?

Wanted: Center Director

Since Loyal Jones will be retiring at the end of the summer of 1993, Berea College is looking for a successor as director of the Appalachian Center. The center—the first of its kind—was established in 1970 to pull together the Appalachian commitments of the college. Center activities consist of student outreach, a program for low-income women, a community leadership and development program, courses relating to the region, a newsletter, and a research fellowship program. The director administers the program and teaches two or three courses per year. He also represents the college at numerous functions and fills many speaking engagements.

Requirements include experience in the Appalachian region, credentials for faculty appointment, and administrative experience.

To apply, send a résumé and a letter of application, including salary requirements, to Martin D. May, Personnel Director, Berea College, Berea, Ky. 40404.

(The preceding words are merely a personnel announcement—necessary, of course, but not sufficient to the subject. In a later issue of the APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER, we'll take a more adequate look at the work of the Appalachian Center over the past 22 years. —T.P.)

Have Enthusiasm, Need Cash

In the years since the publication of Eliot Wigginton's book *Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience*, a number of Foxfire teacher networks have sprung up around the country, all of them seeking to bring the now-famous Foxfire approach to classrooms in their area. This approach puts emphasis on learning by doing and on interacting with the community in ways that have real content and value.

"I was scared to death," said one member of the Eastern Kentucky Teachers Network. "I didn't know how far I could go with it and yet keep everything above board and get the skills covered if you did a project. But by doing what these children have done, everything is covered." In fact, she said, "I'm just one person and I needed to be fifty different people to listen to everyone's enthusiasm."

The Eastern Kentucky group consists of more than 80 members, most of them classroom teachers, who work with the youngsters to produce books, periodicals, videotapes and all sorts of craft objects. But despite all the enthusiasm, the EKTN finds itself in trouble. Though since 1987 it has enjoyed generous financial support from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the Ford Foundation and other donors, EKTN is now running short of money. During the past year, the group says, "unproductive attempts have been made to find funding for self-support and/or an institutional affiliation."

Any interested donors or institutions out there?



MONSTERS, SAINTS and other wonders played a large part in this fall's major exhibition of folk art at the Morlan Gallery of Transylvania University, Lexington, Ky. Called "The Appalachian Spirit: Objects and Values," this remarkable show featured more than 100 works, including Donnie Tolson's "Baptism of Christ" (painted wood) and Minnie Black's "Critter" (painted gourd).

Appeal: Books for Lower Price Hill School

If, as we hope, you're a regular reader of the APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER (and why shouldn't you be? James Still, for one, calls it the "quintessential NEWSLETTER—a publication for which there is no substitute"), you'll be aware that from time to time we tell you what's going on at Cincinnati's Lower Price Hill Community School, the locally based educational center of an extended mountain migrant neighborhood.

What's going on currently is, as usual, lots of work based on limited funding—in other words, a lot of product for the money involved. But we aren't asking here for cash donations, though the people at Lower Price Hill would certainly be happy to get any contributions you care to send them. Specifically, we're suggesting that you look around for any Appalachian books you might have that you could donate to the Lower Price Hill library. The address is 2104 St. Michael St., Cincinnati, Ohio 45204.

Of course, a check would be fine too.

"Native and Fine" For Sure

In 1925, seeking to bring Scandinavian methods of rural education and development to the Appalachian South, Olive Dame Campbell founded the John C. Campbell Folk School.

But, as one writer recently observed, "much to Mrs. Campbell's credit, she valued the local culture and sought to incorporate 'all that is native and fine' in the school's various educational programs." As you no doubt recognize, that internally quoted phrase took on considerable notoriety in later years as folk schools, like every other

Appalachian institution, became the subject of much debate and dissent.

Anyway, the school has flourished for decades now as a national center for craft instruction—its offerings get full attention in our "Looking Forward" column—and during the past four years the school's Folklife section has created a folklore program that is tying the JCCFS closely to the local community and culture.

The school's new director, Jan Davidson, who took over last spring, is firmly in the folklore tradition. Previously curator of the Western Carolina University Mountain Heritage Center, he produced an exhibition on mountain coverlets that toured the country under the auspices of the Smithsonian, and he's said to be quite a performer on several musical instruments. He also has one of the most useful of Appalachian assets—he's a native of the area—and thus comes to his new job with an intuitive understanding of what's native and fine.

EYE on Publications

Appalachian Frontiers, edited by Robert D. Mitchell (University Press of Kentucky). In 1985 two Virginia institutions, James Madison University and Mary Baldwin College, hosted a conference devoted to the settlement and development of Appalachia in the preindustrial era. This book, including added essays by other scholars, represents the results of the meeting—and hence, says the editor, "the first interdisciplinary attempt to evaluate the settlement and developmental experiences of the Appalachian region prior to the onset of large-scale industrialization during the 1880s."

As such, it is boldly and explicitly revisionist. Neither
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Appalachia—the one before the 1880s dividing line or the one that came after—has been properly understood, the editor tells us. The emphasis that writers have put on linking the region's plight in the 20th century to externally induced capital investment and industrialization has drawn our attention away from the "formative influences of the preindustrial period."

And, instead of being properly understood, that early period has been the subject of stereotypes—"romanticized notions of isolated, rural, homogeneous populations" outside the American mainstream (though, since the publication of *Appalachian Frontiers*, some corrective to this standard view has been offered by Crandall Shifflett in his book *Coal Towns*—see APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWS-LETTER, Winter 1992 and Spring 1992).

In general, Mitchell and his colleagues maintain that the settling of Appalachia consisted of a long series of frontier experiences instead of, as is conventionally said, the establishing of an immobile and unchanging frontier line. Related to this point is the idea that the most important Appalachian distinction is not the familiar north-south but east-west.

As you might expect, the essays in *Appalachian Frontiers* cover quite a variety of specific topics—from religious pluralism to the cattle trade in western Virginia to log-house construction in Tennessee. But the underlying thesis really appears in the title, with its plural noun.

Un'Altra America, edited by A. Accardo, C. Mattiello, A. Portelli and A. Scannavini (Bulzoni, 14 Via dei Liburni, Rome 00185). Founded some ten years ago, the Appalachian Project of the University of Rome has sent a number of visitors to its cooperating U.S. institutions, the University of Kentucky and Berea College. Now these scholars have produced a collection of essays presenting their version of the "other America"; the book is subtitled "literature

and culture of Southern Appalachia."

The book opens with John Stephenson's overview, written in flawless Italian (anyway, no translator is mentioned), of the Appalachian identity. Other essays discuss religion, the 1931-32 coal-mine wars, ballads, Gurney Norman and James Still and other topics that are certainly familiar but yet are seen here from a fresh point of view.

The Bitter Berry: The Life of Byron Herbert Reece, by Bettie Sellers (Georgia Humanities Council, Atlanta, Ga. 30322). "Hub" Reece, as he was known to family and friends, lived, farmed and wrote his poetry and fiction in the hills of northern Georgia.

His life story as presented in this book (which is the printed version of a prize-winning documentary video) could well earn him the title "the last romantic poet"; he is much like a 20th-century Keats, even to the tuberculosis. However, unable to wait for death, Reece at the age of 40 put a bullet through his rotted lungs.

Continuingly preoccupied with death, Reece won extraordinary praise during his short life. After encountering one of Reece's poems in *Prairie Schooner*, Jesse Stuart took up the Georgian's cause, persuading his own publisher to produce Reece's first book. An early commentator credited Reece with "some of the most beautiful lyric poetry . . . being written today." A later critic declared that "with the exception of Robert Frost, Reece is our greatest living poet." Indeed, the critic added, "even Frost is not so pure a lyricist, nor as strong and lonely a voice."

As his health permitted, Reece did some university teaching. One such experience, early in his career, proved disillusioning. Memorably, he wrote a friend about his disappointment in "intellectuals who scorn anything simply stated." These persons, he said, "have no belief in anything to pull themselves together."

The author of this book is herself a Georgia poet and was author and coproducer of the video on which it is based.

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