

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

LETTER



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Looking Forward

October 3: "Visioning Kentucky's Future," a conference that will discuss strategic planning for the 21st century, sponsored by the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center; Lexington Center, Lexington, Ky.; the Democratic and Republican gubernatorial aspirants have been invited to lunch. This conference follows a series of public forums held around the state. You can write the sponsors at 1024 Capital Center Drive., Suite 310, Frankfort, Ky. 40601 or phone them at 502/573-2851 or 800/853-2851.

October 5-7: "Telling Our Story," the 30th-anniversary celebration of CORA (Commission on Religion in Appalachia). This reunion, which is open to all, will be held at Cedar Lakes, Ripley, W.Va., and will include worship, workshops, fellowship and fun. CORA's address is P.O. Box 52910, Knoxville, Tenn. 37950-2910.

October 6-8: 57th National Folk Festival, which this year ends a three-year run in downtown Chattanooga. Billed as "the country's longest-running, most diverse celebration of American traditional music, dance and crafts," the festival certainly offers something for everybody who's even minimally folk-oriented. For music, you'll get zydeco, Tex-Mex, Irish, Chinese, Eskimo, Plains Indian, blues, bluegrass, gospel, jazz, polka and rockabilly; you'll also find ethnic food to match the music, plus tribal art, crafts, parades, dancing. Contact Douglas Day at 423/756-2787.

October 7-8: John C. Campbell Folk School folk festival. Write the school at Route 1, Box 14A, Brasstown, N.C. 28902 or phone 800/FOLK SCH.

October 12-15: 16th annual Tennessee Fall Homecoming, sponsored by and held at John Rice Irwin's Museum of Appalachia, which has been accurately described as "the most authentic and complete replica of pioneer Appalachian life in the world." The event will feature the usual endless array of art, craft and entertainment; Bill Monroe, John Hartford and other luminaries will be on hand. The museum's address is P.O. Box 0318, Norris, Tenn. 37828; phone, 615/494-7680 or 615/494-0514.

October 13-15: Black Mountain Folk Festival, Black Mountain, N.C. For details, phone 704/669-6813.

October 13-15: Annual fall fair, Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen; Indian Fort Theater, Berea, Ky. An unusual highlight will be the appearance of a traditional leatherworker, Douglas Rowe, who will make shoes. For more information, phone 606/986-3192.

October 27-29: Celebration of Traditional Music, Berea College. (See separate story.)



Berea College Public Relations

Weatherford prizewinner Henry Louis Gates, Jr., speaks at the June 27 award ceremony in Berea. (More award photos on page 3.)

John D. Whisman 1921-1995

If any single person could accurately be called the father of the Appalachian Regional Commission, the title would belong to John Whisman, a Kentuckian who died this past June 27. Whisman, declared former Kentucky Governor Ned Breathitt, "was the architect of Appalachian development from the late '50s until the time of his death." Another former governor, the late Bert T. Combs, put the same point more colorfully. Whisman, Combs said, "was absolutely dedicated. His first wife walked off and left him, saying he loved Appalachia more than he loved her."

Whisman, who pioneered development ideas during the 1950s, saw his efforts achieve remarkable success with the establishment, in 1965, of the Appalachian Regional Commission. He served for 11 years as the representative of the 13 states represented in the ARC—a post that made him in effect the commission's general manager.

Anyone who knew him can testify to the 24-hour-a-day intensity with which Whisman lived and breathed development. A remark he made in later years about the ARC was characteristic: "Instead of giving people welfare, it gave them opportunities." ■

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October 27-29: Fall dance weekend, John C. Campbell Folk School.

November 1: Deadline for submitting articles for the "Conserving Appalachia" issue of East Tennessee State's *Now & Then*, to appear in spring 1996. Articles dealing with the heritage of the region may be sent to *Now & Then*, ETSU, Box 70556, Johnson City, Tenn. 37614-0556. You can phone the editors at 615/929-5348.

November 6-12: American Music Week, sponsored by the Sonneck Society for American Music—not a single event but a range of activities that will be announced on the American Music Network, accessible through ArtsWire on the Internet. If you have an event that should be listed, contact Marjorie Mackay Shapiro at 212/249-6498; fax, 212/935-1775, or William Everett at the Department of Music, Washburn University, Topeka, Kans. 66621.

December 26-31: Christmas Country Dance School, Berea College, directed this year by Susan Spalding, Berea's new coordinator of dance. For details call 606/986-9341, ext. 5142.

January 28-February 17: New Opportunity School for Women, Berea College. This free three-week chance to explore educational and career possibilities (for women 30-55) is taking applications for the winter session. *The deadline for applications is November 22.* Contact the New Opportunity School for Women, College P.O. Box 2276, Berea, Ky. 40404; phone, 606/986-9341, ext. 6676.

Toxic Ash, Toxic Votes

A number of people in Harrison County, W.Va. (Clarksburg is the county seat), are upset with both state and federal governments. In both cases, environmentalists in the county see looming behind the governments the "political power and clout," as one reporter put it, of large companies like Monongahela Power.

It seems to be a fairly typical story. Mon Power, as it's known, requested permission to dump out-of-state ash and sludge at a landfill it owns in Harrison County. Protesters called for a public hearing—a formal session with the proceedings recorded. Moving deftly, Mon Power induced state officials to transform the proposed session into a much less formal public "meeting," which proceeded without the notification of interested parties.

In any case, how toxic are the ash and the sludge in question? Do these materials contain high levels of arsenic and lead that could contaminate the ground water in the area? Well, said the state, that's a tough question. Officials in charge of approving such applications are not required to undertake any independent investigations but are simply supposed to review the information furnished by the applicant—in this case, Mon Power. And Mon Power supplied no data suggesting that the ash could be toxic. The state's answer failed to satisfy at least one state senator, who wondered "just who the state's Environmental Protection Agency actually protects." The local Harrison County Solid Waste Authority is moving to undertake its own study.

As for problems with the federal government, local environmentalists expressed concern at the vote of their Congressman to weaken the authority of the federal EPA.

The Shinnston News & Harrison County Journal noted sadly that the legislation in question, sponsored by the Republican majority in the House of Representatives, received the support of Congressman Alan Mollohan, a Democrat—but one "deeply aligned with the Monongahela Power Company."

Still Traditional, Still Celebrating

Launched back in 1974, the Berea College Appalachian Center Celebration of Traditional Music turns 21 this October as it makes its 22nd appearance (October 27-29).

The underlying idea of the celebration, said its founder, Loyal Jones, was to "feature strictly old-time traditional music." Bluegrass and other newer forms were fine, Jones said, but "we feel that the old styles traditional to the mountains are not heard so much any more, and so we want to encourage them." Encouragement, preservation—whatever you want to call it—the celebration has through the years stuck to Jones's proclaimed purpose and in the process has become an Appalachian regional institution.

As is customary, a stellar group of performers will be on hand for this year's run. The list includes (in alphabetical order) J. P. and Annadeene Fraley, John Hartford, Ginny Hawker and Kay Justice, Walter McNew, Northern Kentucky Brotherhood, the Rabbit Hash String Band, Carl Rutherford, Kimberly Treece and Kathy Bullock, and Roberta Voyles and Furman Lunsford. These performers will appear in concert on Friday and Saturday evenings, beginning at 7:30, and both of these gala sessions will be followed by square dancing led by Joe Tarter, with the Rabbit Hash String band providing the music.

The daylight hours of Saturday will be devoted to instrumental workshops and informal performances, highlighted at two o'clock by a symposium, "Legendary Fiddler Ed Haley," led by John Hartford. If you survive all the activity, you can take part in a Sunday-morning hymn sing with festival musicians.

If you need further details, write to College P.O. Box 2336, Berea, Ky. 40404 or phone 606/986-9341, ext. 5140.

EYE on Publications

Taking Up Serpents, by David Kimbrough (University of North Carolina Press). Last March a 77-year-old Pentecostal minister, Kale Saylor, died in a Pineville, Ky., hospital three days after being bitten by a rattlesnake. This tragic event represented a loss not only to the preacher's family and members of his congregation but to David Kimbrough, an Indiana resident (of Appalachian background) for whom Saylor had served as a mentor through 10 years of doctoral research. Declaring that Saylor died while practicing "what he believed in," Kimbrough called the preacher one of the "wisest people I ever met."

Unquestionably—as Kimbrough hardly needs to tell

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“Fellow Appalachian” Honored

“Thank you for honoring me as a fellow Appalachian,” Harvard’s Henry Louis Gates, Jr. told his Berea audience in accepting the Weatherford award for best writing about Appalachia in 1994. A native of Piedmont, W.Va., Gates is professor of English and director of Afro-American studies at Harvard. Above: The winner signs his prizewinning book *Colored People* for an admirer; top l., Shirley Williams, one of the Weatherford judges, presents the award; below, novelist and historian Willma Dykeman also speaks during the ceremony.

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us—his serpent-handling friends are true believers; indeed, it’s hard to imagine a stronger proof of sincerity than the willingness to witness for your faith by letting a rattlesnake twist itself around your arm or drape itself around your neck as snugly as a scarf. But, Kimbrough complains, the media have been cruel to persons like Saylor and his followers, ignoring their beliefs; reporters have “sensationalized events such as snakebites.”

To most of the world, however, voluntary submission to snakebite and consequent possible death is in fact a sensational event, whatever the beliefs involved. Of course there’s a logic behind the practice not only of handling snakes but of drinking poisons like strychnine and battery acid. It comes from a passage in Mark in which Jesus says that believers “shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.” These modern fundamentalists declare that they are only seeking to emulate Jesus, who must have been a serpent handler himself, because “He wouldn’t tell you to do something he didn’t do himself.”

But among the serpent handlers pictured in *Taking Up Serpents* is the author himself, who is shown in close contact with a couple of healthy-looking rattlesnakes, though he is not a member of any of the congregations he describes. Indeed, he came to these services seeking not salvation but a Ph.D. from Indiana University. Neither IU

nor any other school, however, requires doctoral candidates to expose themselves to hazards beyond those normally posed by orals and the production of a dissertation. Apparently Kimbrough just likes to fool around with snakes.

Communities in Motion, edited by Susan Eike Spalding and Jane Harris Woodside (Greenwood Press). You can get a pretty good idea of this book’s scope from its subtitle: “Dance, Community, and Tradition in America’s Southeast and Beyond.”

Communities in Motion, however, is not simply a group of essays all talking in various ways about dance. Instead we have a structure of case studies that, the editors tell us, “attempt to establish an emic point of view.” “Emic”? It’s been a while since we were in school, so we turned to our Webster and found that this clipped and shorn little word actually carries a great weight of meaning—“of, relating to, or involving analysis of linguistic or behavioral phenomena in terms of the internal structural or functional elements of a particular system.” If, on the other hand, the editors had said *etic*, they would then have been telling us, it seems, that they were looking at dances in themselves, without regard to deeper considerations.

So we have here an intellectual book—a study (or group of studies) concerned not only with dance but with the psychology and sociology of those who do the dancing. The book has four main divisions: “Continuity and Change,”

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"Conserving Tradition," "Inventing Traditions" and "Practical Suggestions for the Documentation of Dance." The opposition (if it can be so called) between the conservers and the inventors of traditions (a nice concept) is particularly provocative: historical reconstructionists, revivalists, "genuine" as against other kinds of participants in the traditional process all believe that they're doing good. But exactly what good are they doing? Here the editors and the contributors have their own ideas.

Woodside is assistant director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State. Spalding, who holds the marvelous distinction of being a "certified movement analyst" and is president of the Congress on Research in Dance, has recently come to Berea College as coordinator of dance activities.

I Become a Teacher, by Cratis D. Williams (Jesse Stuart Foundation, P.O. Box 391, Ashland, Ky. 41114). In the introduction to this book, James M. Gifford talks about his first meeting with Cratis Williams, which occurred at the 1977 Berea College summer workshop. "I had heard of him long before I met him," Gifford says, "but, unlike many living legends, he measured up to his reputation. He enthralled audiences with his knowledge, and he captivated individuals with his charm."

Gifford puts it well. If you never knew Cratis Williams or heard him speak, one can only sympathize with you. A pixie in Appalachian academic form, he was entertainer and wit as well as scholar—and for years, indeed, he was the leading American scholar on Appalachia.

Not long before his death, in 1985, Williams entrusted the manuscript of *I Become a Teacher* to Gifford, who has served as the editor. In the book Williams looks all the way back to 1929 and his first teaching job, in a one-room school in Lawrence County, Ky.—a position he got even though "only eighteen years old and small for my age"; he had just finished his freshman year at Cumberland College.

Possible disciplinary problems in his new classroom did not concern Williams. "I assumed that all thirty-three of

the children were capable, eager, and industrious," he writes, and as it turned out, his expectations helped produce the desired results. The mustache he decided to grow probably helped as well; at least, it made him look older, if not much. His foundation stones, he says, were good will and tolerance.

The world Williams presents in this charmer of a book seems as remote from current educational discussions as if the writer were describing life in another century, on another planet. In a way, that remoteness represents one of the book's greatest contributions. A good teacher, Williams shows us, represents something truly universal.

Book Note

√To commemorate 45 years of publishing folk music, *Sing Out!* has produced a reprint of its very first issue—May 1950. If you'd like to go back to the days of Pete Seeger, Paul Robeson, Alan Lomax and their associates, just send a \$2.00 check (what else can you get for \$2.00 nowadays?) to Sing Out! Reprint, P.O. Box 5253, Bethlehem, Pa. 18015.

Sound Notes

√Performances taken from field recordings made across West Virginia between 1976 and 1994 appear in a new cassette, *Folk Music & Lore of the Civil War* (AHR 014), available from the Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, W. Va.; \$10.00 plus s/h. Call 304/636-1903.

√Newest release from the Berea College Appalachian Center is *Rocky Island*, in which Rev. Philip Kazee plays and sings ballads, mountain blues and banjo songs in the style of his father, Rev. Buell Kazee. In the accompanying notes, Loyal Jones tells us that Phil Kazee is one of the many "middle class" mountaineers who have often been overlooked by authenticity-driven folklorists. Perhaps this cassette will help remedy that situation. It's \$8.00 plus \$1.25 s/h from the Appalachian Center, College P.O. Box 2336, Berea, Ky. 40404.

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