

# NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER  
BEREA COLLEGE



# LETTER

Gordon B. McKinney • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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Fall 1999

## Looking Forward

**January 9-15:** If you're an aspiring weaver, you can learn to make something really extraordinary—fabric favored by Viking chieftains—during the first of three advanced-level weeks at the John C. Campbell Folk School. Or Bill Fiorini, over in blacksmithing, will teach you pattern-welded steel. You'll also find raku and a variety of other crafts and skills for the taking. You can get details from the school at One Folk School Road, Brasstown, N.C. 28902-9603; phone 800/FOLKSCH.

**January 16-22:** This advanced-level week at Brasstown ought to be dedicated to knitters, because you'll have the rare chance to learn Russian-style lace knitting using fibers from Ural Mountain goats—not your everyday kind of knitting at all. You can also learn how to shape sterling silver into tableware and other utensils.

**January 23-29:** During the third of the John C. Campbell School's advanced-classes weeks, you can polish up your wood-turning techniques or devote yourself to cloisonné. For all three weeks you'll find plenty of other choices, too, of course. See contact information for January 9-15.

**January 30-February 19:** Winter session, New Opportunity School for Women. Successful applicants (up to 14 per session) to this popular program for low-income women 30-55 spend three weeks learning about jobs and how to get them; high school diploma or GED certificate is required. Founded in 1987 by Jane B. Stephenson, the New Opportunity School has produced 288 graduates to date. *Note:* The school is now accepting applications for the summer session, which begins on June 4; the application deadline is April 16. For full information, contact Caroline Francis at 204 Chestnut Street, Berea, Ky. 40403; phone 606/985-7200.

**February 24-25:** 19th annual GROW Conference for (mostly Kentucky) Women Researchers. You're likely to encounter all manner of things here, because the field's wide open: those taking part may be faculty members, students or even persons outside of the academy altogether, and the original study may have been conducted in any subject-matter area. To find out more, call Connie Callahan at 606/622-2166; e-mail, EADCALLA@ACS.EKU.edu.

**March 24-26:** 23rd annual Appalachian Studies Conference, Knoxville Convention Center, sponsored by the Appalachian Studies Association. This year's theme: "Regional Stewardship for the Millennium: Integrating Cultural, Social and Scientific Development in Appalachia." The keynoter will be Robb Turner, executive director of  
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## "No Better Than Barbarians"

Half a century ago, one of the towering figures in the entire intellectual world was Arnold J. Toynbee, author of the multivolume *Study of History*, which, in a one-volume abridged form, ran up huge sales for the Book-of-the-Month Club. The author's views on the rise and fall of civilizations were quoted, it almost seemed, in every barber shop.

One day a young Appalachian scholar who had thought himself familiar with the great British historian's work found himself noticing a certain passage for the first time. After speaking of the origins of Appalachian culture in northern Ireland, Toynbee observed: "The modern Appalachian has not only not improved on the Ulsterman; he has failed to hold his ground and has gone downhill in a most disconcerting fashion. In fact, the Appalachian 'mountain people' to-day are no better than barbarians."

Gasping, the young American (a native of Pike County, Ky.) read on: "They have relapsed into illiteracy and witchcraft. They suffer from poverty, squalor and ill-health. They are the American counterparts of the latter-day White barbarians of the Old World—Rifis, Albanians, Kurds, Pathans and Hairy Ainus; but whereas these latter are belated survivals of an ancient barbarism, the Appalachians present the melancholy spectacle of a people who have  
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## Puh-leeze!

From time to time we tell you how much we appreciate your interest in the APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWS-LETTER and we remind you that, since we come out only four times a year, the timing of your contributions to Looking Forward is of special importance. We want to publicize your activity, but often we can't do it because we get the news too late; for instance, we'll receive a folder in October announcing an event in November—too late for the issue that goes to press in September, and history by the time of the following issue.

Now we have a new idea: Don't wait till you have that fine full-color brochure in hand before you get in touch with us. Just phone us or send us a postcard as soon as you have the particulars of your festival, meeting or other event, and let the brochure follow in due course. And you may contact us by e-mail: genevieve\_reynolds@bera.edu.

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Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere (a cooperative made up of 11 federal agencies and the states of Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina); SAMAB has recently completed a monumental project, the Southern Appalachian Assessment, an inventory of natural-resource and socioeconomic data designed to provide resource managers with decision-making information.

As an added attraction, the conference coincides with Laurel Theater's Jubilee Festival, which means that there'll be lots of music to go along with all the talk. For full details, write to the Appalachian Studies Association, P.O. Box 6825, West Virginia University, Morgantown, W.Va. 26506. The phone number is 304/293-8541, but e-mail may be a better bet: [rriasa@wvu.edu](mailto:rriasa@wvu.edu).

**April 5-6:** Berea College Appalachian Fund Affiliates Conference; Alumni Building, Berea College. Representatives of all the organizations helped by the fund will report on their activities, and members of the public are especially invited to attend. If you would like more information, call Brenda Davenport Harris at 606/986-9341, ext. 5023.

**April 7-9:** Second annual Blue Ridge Symposium, Virginia's Explore Park, Roanoke. In the interest of establishing an ongoing dialogue involving the academic, museum and public school communities, say the sponsors, the park is bringing together representatives of these communities in this symposium, which is, indeed, titled "Between Friends: Culture, Classroom, and Muscum." Topics will include everything from history to religion and

tourism. For details, write to Shannon Brooks, Virginia's Explore Park, P.O. Box 8508, Roanoke, Va. 24014; phone, 540/427-1800; e-mail, [Jebsyb@aol.com](mailto:Jebsyb@aol.com).

**April 9-15:** Spring Dulcimer Week, Augusta Heritage Center. Neal Walters, Tull Glazener, Janetta Baker and Keith Young will offer instruction in the mountain dulcimer; the list of hammered-dulcimer teachers includes Jody Marshall, Karen Ashbrook, Steve Schneider and Patty Looman. This year's program will include two new workshops—autoharp (Karen Mueller) and songs and stories (Kate Long). For full information, write the center at Davis & Elkins College, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W.Va. 26241, or phone 304/637-1209.

**April 28-30 and May 5-7:** For those who don't have a week's getaway time, the John C. Campbell Folk School is offering weekend classes in crafts, music, nature study and other diversions. See contact information for January 9-15.

**May 12-14:** Annual meeting, Middle Atlantic Folklife Association; Johnstown, Pa. This year the focus will be on the "rivers of steel" in the area. For details, phone Michael Miller at 302/739-4413.

**May 12-14:** Celebration of Traditional Music, sponsored by the Berea College Appalachian Center. Let this note serve as your reminder that, beginning last year, the celebration, which since its founding in 1974 has been an autumnal event, has moved to May. You can get full information from the Appalachian Center at 606/986-9341, ext. 5140; C.P.O. Box 2166, Berea, Ky. 40404; e-mail, [genevieve\\_reynolds@bereda.edu](mailto:genevieve_reynolds@bereda.edu).

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## More Than the FBI

You always have to think of Senator Robert Byrd when you drive into northern West Virginia on I-79, as you encounter signs telling you that an FBI operation is located nearby. You know that the G-men came here not because they had grown tired of working in Washington and were yearning for open country but because the state's senior senator used his considerable clout to compel the move. (Some accounts even say that only supremely strenuous measures thwarted the senator's desire to transport the FBI headquarters, director and all, to the West Virginia hills.)

As Byrd made plain with relation to the FBI, the issue of jobs for his constituents ranks high among his concerns. That sometimes seems to be true regardless of any other considerations, as was suggested this November when the senator—invoking Adam and Eve, Loretta Lynn and his own childhood in the coalfields—threatened a filibuster in order to overturn a judge's ban on dumping mine waste into West Virginia streams. For now, however, he had to settle for a merely symbolic vote of support from his colleagues.

The judge's decision focused on mountain-top-removal mining, one of today's hot-button questions, but coal-industry spokesmen express fears that stiffened regulations could shut down some mining operations entirely. "Head-in-the-clouds individuals," said Byrd, don't seem to realize that without the mines, "tables will go bare." (The judge had said, trenchantly, that "no effect on related environ-

mental values is more adverse than obliteration." Head in the clouds?) Others countered that, aside from environmental considerations, mountaintop-mining technology eliminates as many jobs as it creates.

During the fall, the Office of Surface Mining has been accepting public comments on draft guidelines for "allowable postmining land uses"; these guidelines specifically address mountaintop removal and "steep slope" operations where operators want the original-contour requirement waived.

All in all, the OSM and related agencies seem to find themselves on a tightrope. Just reflect on the fact that every month the OSM must report to the West Virginia Congressional delegation on "the status of pending West Virginia surface coal mining permit applications containing plans to construct valley fills."

Then, perhaps, download (or obtain otherwise) a very carefully worded document called "Memorandum of Understanding Among the U.S. Office of Surface Mining, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection for the Purpose of Providing Effective Coordination in the Evaluation of Surface Coal Mining Operations Resulting in Placement of Excess Spoil Fills in the Waters of the United States." The very title suggests the care and caution that went into the document itself.

Then you might marvel at the continued existence of any environment at all.



**As a young scholar and devoted Appalachian, James Brown took on the illustrious Arnold Toynbee.**

**"NO BETTER" from page 1**

acquired civilization and then lost it."

Well! After "a slow burn of several months," this American wrote a letter "on the whole, temperate" to Toynbee to ask what sources the great professor had consulted in developing his ideas about Appalachia. Toynbee replied promptly, saying that he had a friend in Central Kentucky, had made two visits to Berea College (hmmm!), and "had been up into the mountains themselves once or twice." He conceded that this was "rather slight acquaintance" on which to base such conclusions. The young scholar, James S. Brown of the University of Kentucky, had no trouble agreeing with that point. "It behooves us all," he said much later, "to recognize our responsibility to present conclusions based upon adequate data as well as to question such generalizations as Toynbee's and to

expose them for what they are, even when made by such eminent scholars." Brown also raised another question: Were any of Toynbee's other views as shaky as his conclusions about Appalachia?

Brown's carrying of the fight to the enemy would not have surprised anybody who knew him. A thorough scholar and a man of strong opinions, he expressed himself freely and firmly when he felt himself in the presence of error. A graduate of Berea College with a Ph.D. from Harvard, he taught sociology at the University of Kentucky from 1946 until his retirement in 1982. A pioneer in the intensive study of communities, he produced the classic *Beech Creek*, which inspired a generation of such studies, and he was considered perhaps the leading student of migration patterns.

James Brown died in October at the age of 83.

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## "Crones and Mentors"?

One of the liveliest jamborees to come to our attention lately is the annual Ironwood Festival, sponsored by the Appalachian Women's Alliance, headquartered over in Floyd County, Va.

A "celebration of the courageous lives and regional leadership of Appalachian women," as the organizers describe it, this year's festival addressed—through music, dance and the spoken word—endemic issues of poverty, racism and violence.

The Reel World String Band sang of an "Appalachian wind" moving through the mountains, while novelist (and West Virginia gubernatorial candidate Denise Giardina) urged her listeners to fight the desecration of the land caused by coal miners shearing off mountaintops. Linda Parris Bailey, a performance artist, asked the members of the audience to call forth their "crones and mentors" by conjuring up a wise woman from her past.

Nothing, however, topped this autobiographical contribution from Patricia Johnson, a southwest Virginia poet:

*They killed G.P. and the kink fell out of my hair*

*He was my cousin, blood brother, bond of felicity  
They said, "Another nigger dead, white folks  
don't care."*

All in all, an unusual event. Next year's is scheduled for September 9 at the Appalachian South Folklife Center in Pipestem, W.Va. For more information about the Appalachian Women's Alliance, call 540/745-5345; e-mail, [awa@swva.net](mailto:awa@swva.net).

## MORE Beans?

TO THE EDITORS:

I write in response to a few lines on page 4 of the Summer 1999 issue of the **NEWSLETTER**, in which you pass along a tip: discard the overnight-soaking water from beans and use fresh for cooking so the beans won't repeat on you.

In my experience, and my friends', this is untrue. As someone versed in bean-lore—I've grown dry beans for some 20 years in the state of Maine, which proclaims itself to represent "life in the slow lane"—I've run across  
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**MORE** from page 3

this hopeful homily in a number of publications. The only way I know of to minimize bean gas is to eat them often and get the digestive system used to them.

Some varieties seem to be gassier than others. A Maine heirloom called Jacob's Cattle Gasless was the result of experimentation by Sumner Pike of Lubec, who in the 1950s crossed the Jacob's Cattle with the Mexican Black Turtle bean. Said to be the least offensive variety, it can be obtained through the Seed Savers Exchange, 3076 North Winn Road, Decorah, Iowa 52101. Bill Best might also have some; at the last Appalachian Studies conference he gave a presentation on growing heirloom vegetable varieties.

JEFF TITON  
Brown University  
Providence, R.I.

*(How about it, Bill? Are you prepared to help all those bean sufferers out there?—EDITORS.)*

## EYE on Publications

*The Balm of Gilead Tree*, by Robert Morgan (Gnomon Press, P.O. Box 475, Frankfort, Ky. 40602). Professor of English at Cornell, the author is still a western North Carolinian at heart, as the stories in this collection make plain. The book holds 17 stories in all, seven from earlier collections and 10 appearing here in book form for the first time. As the publisher points out, the stories are arranged chronologically—a point more significant with Morgan than it would be with many another writer, since he writes as freely and familiarly about the 16th or 18th century as about our own day, with no straining for any kind of historical effect. (Our own favorite, for instance, was "Kuykendall's Gold," in which the despised federal

administration is that of President Adams.)

Morgan's stories have been praised as "tales rich with native detail and character, told in language as plain and deep as the hills ..." Those in the present book measure up to that judgment.

### Video Note

*The Breaks of the Mountain, the Russell Fork Gorge*, a new half-hour documentary about the challenges a coalmining community faces while developing a tourist economy around a river gorge, is available from Appalshop. The setting is the Russell Fork of the Big Sandy River as it flows from Haysi, Va., to Elkhorn City, Ky. One of the big questions: Can the famous Breaks Interstate Park, the surrounding area, resist intense pressure to open up wild areas for development?

Directed by Tom Hansell, this video is available for purchase for \$150 or rental for \$60 from Appalshop, 91SLP Madison Avenue, Whitesburg, Ky. 41858.



### In *Appalachian Heritage* ...

Among the important features in the Fall 1999 issue of *Appalachian Heritage* are Loyal Jones's interview with author and outgoing *AH* editor Sidney Saylor Farr—"I Jumped at the Chance"; Jamie Griggs Tevis's reminiscence on quilts and the women who made them—"Stories Told Around the Quilting Frame"; botanist Elmer Gray's discussion of Central Appalachia's role in preserving genetic diversity among the world's food crops—"Preservation of Appalachian Crop Germ Plasm"; new fiction and poetry; reviews, including Harriette Arnow's recently published *Between the Flowers* and Cynthia Duncan's study of poverty in rural America, *Worlds Apart*. This is the first issue of *Appalachian Heritage* under the editorship of Jim Gage.

You can obtain *Appalachian Heritage* (\$6.00 a copy, \$18 for a year's subscription) by writing to C.P.O. Box 2166, Berea, Ky. 40404.

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