

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE



LETTER

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Vol. 29 No. 4

Fall 2000

Looking Forward

January 14-20: January is the month for advanced-level classes at the John C. Campbell Folk School, and what better to do during this middle week than join Madeline MacNeil in her Intermediate to Advanced Hammered Dulcimer course? If you sign up, you must be prepared to bring your own instrument "in playable condition" (which seems logical enough). For details, contact the school at One Folk School Road, Brasstown, N.C. 28902; phone 800/FOLKSCH; www.folkschool.org.

January 28-February 17: 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; a high school diploma or GED certificate is required. Founded in 1987 by Jane B. Stephenson, the New Opportunity School has produced 323 graduates to date. *Note:* The school is now accepting applications for the summer session, which begins on June 3; applications must be received by April 26. For full information, contact Caroline Francis at 204 Chestnut Street, Berea, Ky. 40403; phone 859/985-7200.

February 23-March 3: Nobody knows how many people in the world have ever wanted to make a Windsor chair, but if you're one of them, your opportunity has arrived. In this weekend + week class at the John C. Campbell Folk School, Julian Whitaker and Jim Coonan will teach beginners to work with the old tools, shaping wood with a drawknife and spokeshaving on a shaving horse. Beginning students will make loop-back chairs; more advanced members of the class will turn out continuous-arm chairs. Be advised, however, that the class is physically demanding and requires long hours, but if you make it through you'll have an heirloom-quality piece of furniture to take home. The instructors will repeat this class in April (20-28). See contact information for January 14-20 to find out more about the class and learn about other courses the school offers.

March 25-31: During this last week of March, the John C. Campbell Folk School is offering a writing course with a really tempting title, *The Easy Way to Write a Play*, taught by Mary E. Lynn Drew. Writers, we are told, can use "a plot maker, scene expanders and character profiles," plus ordinary conversation to make dialogue; the other members of the class will then serve as your audience. See contact information for January 14-20.

March 30-April 1: 24th annual Appalachian Studies Con-
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"It's a Mess ..."

On October 11, in a catastrophe that drew national media notice but may not have received the continuing attention it warrants across all of Appalachia, a slurry pond in Martin County, on the Big Sandy River, collapsed into an abandoned underground mine, thus dumping some 250 million gallons of coal-waste muck into a pair of creeks leading to the river.

The creeks were simply overwhelmed, and sludge as much as ten feet deep covered yards and driveways along the way. Before long the Big Sandy had become blackened for 75 miles of its length, and the leading edge of the mass of sludge had moved into the Ohio. Looking at the muck shrouding the water, J. Davitt McAteer, director of the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration, commented that "whatever is under there is dead."

Kentucky's surface-mining officials ordered the Martin County Coal Corp., a subsidiary of A. T. Massey Coal, Inc., to replace all the fish and other aquatic life killed and to rebuild roads and bridges demolished by the moving mass of gooey sludge. The job could have been even bigger, of course, since the flow of the 250 million gallons that escaped represented only a tenth of the waste stored in the pond. Nor did the collapse produce any loss of life, unlike what happened on Buffalo Creek in West Virginia in 1972, when a coal-waste impoundment broke open, producing a flood that killed 125 people and destroyed 500 houses along the valley.

No Limits

But the Martin County sludge flood was an ecological disaster of the first magnitude—one of the worst in the history of the southeastern U.S., according to various experts—and it brought to light the fact that neither federal nor state law limits the size or the capacity of slurry ponds; the Martin County impoundment was actually considered relatively small.

These things are "time bombs," cried a Kentucky legislator. Tut, tut, replied a coal-association official: "That's a very emotional statement." What could not be called emotional by anybody, however, was information from state files showing that concerns about the pond expressed several years earlier by regulators had been ignored by the authorities.

Near the end of November, some seven weeks after the collapse, a coalition of environmental groups met in Frankfort, the state capital, to protest what they called the
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ference, Snowshoe Mountain Conference Center, Snowshoe, W.Va., sponsored by the Appalachian Studies Association. This year's theme: "Standing on the Mountain, Looking to the Future." 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.

April 18-19: 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 Crystal Erwin at 859/985-3023.

April 20-21: Annual meeting, Middle Atlantic Folklife Association; University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. This year the discussions will focus, provocatively, on "subversions" in the not necessarily Edenic realm of folklife studies. For details, contact Deb Shutika at dshutika@excite.com.

April 20-22 and May 4-6: 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 studies and other diversions. See contact information for January 14-20.

April 22-28: Spring Dulcimer Week, Augusta Heritage Center, Davis & Elkins College. Rob Brereton, Steve Seiffert, Leo Kretzner and Keith Young will offer instruction in the mountain dulcimer; the list of hammered-dulcimer teachers includes Jody Marshall, Cathy Barton-Para, Sam Rizzetta and Patty Looman. You can also receive instruction on autoharp from Les Gustafsen-Zook and on guitar from Patty Looman and Dave Para. For full information, write the Augusta Heritage Center at Davis & Elkins College, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W.Va. 26241, or phone 304/637-1209; www.augustaheritage.com.

April 26-29: 14th annual Merle Fest, Wilkesboro, N.C. Headliners will include Earl Scruggs, Doc Watson and—for the very first time—Dolly Parton, who will perform numbers from what will by next April be her two new bluegrass albums. For details, phone 800/343-7857.

May 3-5: 11th annual Boxcar Pinion Memorial Bluegrass Festival, Camp Columbus, Chattanooga, Tenn. The list of featured performers includes the (metaphorically) Disembodied Tennesseans, the James King Band, Charlie Waller and the Country Gentlemen, Blue Highway and 3rd Tyme Out. You can get all the details from 706/820-2228.

May 18-20: Spring fair, Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen, Indian Fort Theater, Berea, Ky.; some 120 guild members will be displaying and selling their work. You can put this on your calendar now, and for more information you can phone 606/986-3192.

May 29-31: Old-Time Music on the Radio Conference, Mt. Airy, N.C., sponsored by the Brandywine Friends of Music. This jamboree, which returns after a year's absence, precedes the Mt. Airy Fiddlers' Convention. Along with the usual live performances and special presentations and features, the conference will include workshops in such practical areas as producing and marketing your own-label CD. You can find complete information at www.brandywinefriends.org/otr.

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slow pace of the cleanup. Just a day or two earlier, in a meeting with the president of the coal company, residents in Martin County had pointed out that the cleanup was creating problems of its own, with crews breaking natural gas and sewer lines. "We've messed up a bunch of times," the president conceded. "It's a mess. It's a disaster." In fact, some observers had earlier declared that the operations of all the earth-moving equipment had caused more damage than the flood itself had produced. And at the end of November federal and state officials said that some of the sludge will probably always remain along the creeks and rivers that conveyed it on its way.

One hopes that, at least, ecologists at local colleges have taken advantage of this major teaching and learning opportunity. One hope, also, that the Kentucky legislature, which as a result of a constitutional amendment will now hold annual sessions, will take a good look at its own past performance, which has tended to be soft on coal companies and often casual about environmental concerns.

Good Report Card for ARC

The Appalachian Regional Commission has received a generally favorable report from independent consultants hired to take a look at 99 nonhighway projects supported by the commission during the 1990s. "The investments themselves have certainly paid off in terms of job generation," declared one of the coauthors of the report.

Some 32 million ARC dollars helped build industrial parks, access roads and water and sewerage systems and also aided business incubators, which assist new companies with infrastructure and technical assistance. The result, according to the report, was the creation of 23,377 jobs, plus 20,000 more (as in service businesses that appeared near the funded projects).

The latter claim may be a bit on the optimistic side, and it's also true that, over and over again, ARC experiences its successes more in peripheral Appalachia than in the core. A water project in Rockcastle County, Ky., for instance, seems to have helped launch a local building miniboom, but this county, only a few miles from Berea, is a good distance from such high-unemployment areas as Elliott and Lawrence counties or their counterparts in other states.

On the other hand, of course, the people in the Rockcastle section served by the new project say they're happy to have running water.

Weatherford Award Recast

Over the past three decades the presentation of Berea College's W. D. Weatherford Award for effective writing about Appalachia has become a major regional event.

The brain child of the late Cincinnati and Berea philanthropist Alfred Perrin, who wished to honor Dr. W. D. Weatherford, Sr., the award was originally intended to be administered by the Council of the Southern Mountains,

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CAR TROUBLE ON TROUBLESOME CREEK: From the earliest times, creeks served explorers and settlers as natural roadways through the mountains. Most of them were at their peak of usefulness in summer and winter, when they were nearly dry, but they served year-round, wet or dry, and, as you can see, they did so well into the automobile age. When roads and railroads came to the region, they often followed the same paths, not actually in the creeks but only a few feet away.

This photo appears in the exhibition "Ridges, Rivers & Roads: Transportation in the Southern Mountains" at the Berea College Appalachian Center Gallery. The show, assembled by Christopher Miller, curator of the gallery (859-985-3373), will run through February 28.

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a Berea-based organization that had played a large part in regional affairs for many years and notably in the 1960s. But in 1970, with the award still in the planning stage, the donor transferred it to Berea College after the council underwent one of the factional upheavals that were common to organizations in those turbulent days. The award would now be administered by the newly founded Appalachian Center, in association with Hutchins Library. After the death of Willis D. Weatherford, Jr., president of Berea College from 1967 to 1984, the award became dedicated to his memory as well as to that of his father.

Looking down the honor roll of Weatherford Award winners through the past 30 years, you see that it constitutes a chronicle of Appalachian thought and achievement during these years. Since one of the editors of the *Appalachian Center Newsletter* has served as chairman of the award since it was established, we may perhaps be pardoned for noting the pleasure we have experienced every time we saw "winner of the Weatherford Award" prominently displayed on a book jacket.

Henceforth, under a new award committee, the award will be jointly sponsored by Berea College and the Appalachian Studies Association and presented during the annual meeting of the association. Has Berea thereby lost a son or gained a daughter? It's no doubt too early to tell.

EYE on Publications

The Cratis Williams Chronicles: I Come to Boone, by Cratis D. Williams; edited by David Cratis Williams and Patricia D. Beaver (Appalachian Consortium Press). In the later years of Cratis Williams's life, some of his admirers would complain, wonderingly and almost resentfully, about his spending his time on such a mundane project as a history of Appalachian State University. Anybody could produce an institutional chronicle, was the thought, but not anybody could move around the region, writing, lecturing and *being* the inimitable Cratis Williams, the bearded pixie in Appalachian academic guise. So why was he doing it?

It's a psychological question, and when Williams's dissident admirers read this book, they will have the psychological answer. The book covers just one year in Williams's life, the academic year 1942-43. That was less than 60 years ago, but the world described here—the Appalachian world and the educational world—is so different from today, in ways large and small, that it seems to belong two centuries back rather than one.

Looking back to the Summer 1995 issue of the *Appalachian Center Newsletter*, in which we took note of *I* to page 4

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Become a Teacher, an earlier book drawn from Williams's autobiographical writings (published by the Jesse Stuart Foundation), we find that we made a similar comment. Williams's description of his early days in the classroom, in 1929, "seems as remote from current educational discussions," we said, "as if the writer were describing life in another century, on another planet." We really hadn't expected 1942 to seem just as remote or even more so.

But who today could imagine a teacher in a college laboratory school so poor that he could not afford to buy a toothbrush—so poor that the disappearance of his traveling bag was not an inconvenience but a tragedy? Who would envision a teacher's being encouraged to attend an academic conference but only so long as he was willing to pay his own expenses and also pay for a substitute to take his classes while he was away? Who can imagine a teacher so lacking in any kind of safety net that he has to conceal the fact that he has moved from one state to another so that his tubercular wife will not be forced to leave a sanitarium? And so forth, and so on.

When Williams came to Boone in the autumn of 1942, he was desperately, church-mouse poor, with a wife in the hospital and a spot growing on his own lung. The high school in Boone proved to be wonderfully free of the factional politics that had dogged him in Lawrence County, Ky., and the college welcomed him, took him in, and gave him a mission and a platform. It's hardly any wonder that,

years later, he paid it back by writing its history.

What really makes this book is its abundance of detail, undramatically presented. It gives us a wonderful example of the way the story of an individual person can tell the story of a whole era. It's a book you should not miss.

Audio Note

Gems, a collection of rare concert and studio recordings by Lily May Ledford during the years 1968-1983, is now available from Cari Norris, 14806 Rehl Road, Louisville, Ky. 40299. The price is \$15 per CD, \$10 per tape, plus \$2 p/h for each item ordered.



In *Appalachian Heritage*...

This fall's *Appalachian Heritage* features new fiction by Tina Rae Collins, Bruce Greene, Silas House, Ralph Price and Charles Summers. There are also new poems from Jeff Daniel Marion, Dan Leidig, Walter Lane, Fay Picardi, Kathy Conde and others; an article from Michael Best concerning the direct marketing of pork as a strategy for small farmers in the Appalachian Region; reviews of recent literature; Lester Pross's heirloom letter about a 1947 Thanksgiving trip to Southeast Kentucky; and Dixie Thacker's reflections on changes in ages and fortune, "Fetchin' and Carryin'."

Published by
Appalachian Center/Berea College
C.P.O. Box 2166
Berea, Ky. 40404-2166

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Berea, Ky. 40404
Permit No. 19

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