

# NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER  
BEREA COLLEGE



# LETTER

Gordon B. McKinney • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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## Looking Forward

**March 30-April 1:** 24th annual Appalachian Studies Conference, 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:** Third annual Spring Fling, Smoky Mountain Chapter, Naval Cryptologic Veterans Association; Airport Fairfield Inn, Asheville, N.C. You may raise an eyebrow or two about intelligence operations when you hear that one of the main events at this get-together is a contest to see who can tell the best lies, but, of course, a fling is simply an event dedicated to fun. Cryptologists looking for more information may call 828/684-2884 or 828/684-5004.

**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:** Bear on the Square Mountain Festival, Dahlonega, Ga., guaranteed to provide authentic old-time and bluegrass music, along with an increased array of traditional mountain crafts. The list of featured performers includes Chris Jones and the Night Drivers and Jones and Leva (a/k/a Carol Elizabeth Jones and James Leva). Music information: 706/864-7817 or pendergn@alltel.net; crafts information: 706/867-6710; accommodations: 800/231-5543. Web site: [www.dahlonega.org/bear](http://www.dahlonega.org/bear).

**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. But if you can set aside a whole week any time during the spring, you can pick up instruction in anything from traditional Appalachian basketry to marquetry to beekeeping. For details of all programs, con-

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## "It's a Mess"—II

In early February the Martin County Coal Corp. sent a chill down many an Appalachian Kentucky spine when word got around that it had asked state regulators for permission to resume storing coal waste in an impoundment that had collapsed last October 11: What could these guys be thinking of? Their failed pond had just dumped 250 million gallons of coal-waste muck into creeks leading to the Big Sandy River and ultimately to the Ohio. (The whole sad October story—"It's a Mess"—appears in the Fall 2000 issue of the *Appalachian Center Newsletter*.)

So why the request? ("It's frightening to me," said one local resident, who recalls an earlier if smaller break in the impoundment in 1994.) Acceptance of the proposal, said the company's chief engineer, would let the company's 300 employees continue working "while we seek a longer-term solution." Acceptance would also relieve Martin from having to ship raw coal by rail to another coal-cleaning plant owned by its parent company, Massey Energy.

Investigation showed that maps the company supplied to regulators contained a major error: the floor of the impoundment, separating it from an abandoned underground mine, was only 10 feet, not the 70 feet indicated on the maps. The failure of this barrier is believed to have caused the October disaster.

Hence, despite the fears, the pond didn't look like a good bet for reinstatement, and in mid-February local residents and the environmentally concerned throughout the area could take a few easy breaths. Acting in concert, the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration revoked the company's permit to operate the impoundment and the Kentucky Natural Resources Cabinet ordered it closed.

This means, happily, that we shouldn't see "It's a Mess"—III. An appeal, of course, is always possible.

## "Very Powerful and Loving"

On January 23 Eastern Kentucky lost one of its most notable figures. I. D. Back, 75, "a beloved Old Regular Baptist preacher," as his friend Loyal Jones called him, was so widely esteemed that he is said to have preached more funeral sermons in the region than any other minister, totaling several thousand services; he sometimes took part in as many as seven a week. As a good Old Regular Bap-

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tact the school at One Folk School Road, Brasstown, N.C. 28902; phone 800/FOLKSCH; www.folkschool.org.

**April 22-28:** 11th annual Spring Dulcimer Week, Augusta Heritage Center, Davis & Elkins College. Rob Brereton, Steve Seifert, Leo Kretzner and Keith Young will offer instruction in the mountain dulcimer; the list of hammered-dulcimer teachers includes Jody Marshall, Cathy Barton-Pará, 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 her two brand-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) Dis-membered Tennesseans, the James King Band, Charlie Waller and the Country Gentlemen, Blue Highway and IIIrd 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 at this very special fair, which celebrates the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the guild and will feature a look back at its work through those four decades. If you come, you will have the chance to hear Soort van Blauw, a jazzy band from the Netherlands making its American debut; an additional and continuing musical ambience will be provided by strolling bluegrass players. For more information you can phone 859/986-3192.

**May 19:** "The Germanic Legacy in Southwestern Virginia Decorative Arts," an installment in the continuing parade of enticing shows put on at Ferrum College, Ferrum, Va., begins its run. For details on this and other shows, call 540/365-4416.

**May 25-27:** Old-Time Fiddlers' and Bluegrass Festival, Fiddler's Grove Campground, Union Grove, N.C., with such entertainers as J. P. Fraley, the Cockman Family, Hal Beaver & Friends, Laura Boosinger and Ralph Blizzard. Phone: 704/539-4417; e-mail: fiddlersgrove@yadtel.net.

**May 29-31:** Old-Time Music on the Radio Conference, Mt. Airy, N.C., sponsored by the Brandywine Friends of Music. This affair, 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 address a wide range of subjects, including workshops in such practical areas as producing and marketing your own CD, organizing a tour and making the most of the opportunities offered by the Internet. You can find full information at www.brandywinefriends.org/otr.

**June 3-23:** Summer session, New Opportunity School for Women. Successful applicants (up to 14 per session) to this popular program spend three weeks learning about jobs and how to get them. The school is designed for low-

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tist, Elder Back refused any pay for his church work and supported his family by working for a packing house and a coal company.

"Friends and parishioners packed the Mount Olivet church for two evenings of visitation, preaching, singing and visitation preceding the funeral," reported Jones, who attended the services. "Elder Elwood Cornett, moderator of the Indian Bottom Association of Old Regular Baptists, said that Elder Back had had more influence on the people of Eastern Kentucky than any other minister and described his preaching as 'very powerful and loving.'"

You can hear Elder Back's singing and preaching style on an LP, "Gospel Ship: Baptist Hymns and White Spirituals from the Southern Mountains" (New World Records, 1977), from recordings made by Alan Lomax in his 1950s field work on Southern music and religious expression. Much more recently, Back was featured in the Smithsonian Folkways CD "Old Regular Baptists: Lined-out Hymnody from Southeastern Kentucky (1977), coproduced and featuring notes by Elder Cornett, the musicologist Jeff Todd Titon and the Berea religion scholar John Wallhauser.

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income women (age 30-55) who have high school diplomas or GED certificates but have not completed college. The program includes classes in computer basics, leadership development, Appalachian literature and writing, along with field trips and—all-important—workshops on building self-confidence; 337 women have now graduated from the school. For full information, contact Caroline Francis at 204 Chestnut Street, Berea, Ky. 40403; phone, 859/985-7200. (Note: The deadline for applications is April 26.)

**June 7-11:** Seedtime on the Cumberland Festival of Mountain Arts, Whitesburg, Ky., sponsored by Appalshop, 306 Madison St., Whitesburg, Ky. 41858; phone, 606/633-0108.

**June 10-15:** 24th annual Appalachian Family Folk Week, Hindman Settlement School, Forks of Troublesome Creek, Hindman, Ky. 41822. It's a total immersion in traditional music, dance and other aspects of Appalachian culture, and you can come by yourself or bring the whole family. The veteran banjo virtuoso Lee Sexton and the renowned ballad singer and all-round musician Jean Ritchie return to join musicians Rich Kirby, Cari Norris and Ron Pen and a raft of other artists; the woodcarver Minnie Adkins and the chairmaker Terry Ratliff will also be back.

For full details, write the school at P.O. Box 844, Hindman, Ky. 41822, or call 606/785-5475; e-mail: hss@tgtel.com.

**June 16:** 11th annual Mountain Arts Festival, Valley of the Winds Art Gallery, Eolia, Ky., with varied musical and verbal entertainment provided by performers with equally varied backgrounds, and there's also food. The artwork is by Sharman, Jeff and Evan Chapman-Crane. For more information call 606/633-8652.

**July 13-15:** 24th annual Uncle Dave Macon Days Old-Time Music and Dance Festival, Cannonsburgh Pioneer Village, Murfreesboro, Tenn. Heralded by the people who

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**IN EARLIER APPALACHIA**, hand-powered ferries—like this one on Troublesome Creek, Knott County, Ky.—moved people, animals and wagons across the creeks and rivers of the region. This photo, which dates from about 1910, appeared in the recent exhibition “Ridges, Rivers & Roads: Transportation in the Southern Mountains” at the Berea College Appalachian Center Gallery.

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devise such ratings as one of the top 20 July events in the Southeast, this family-oriented festival—named for the first person to be featured on the Grand Ole Opry as an individual performer—is expected to draw more than 45,000 people and offers \$5,400 in prizes; it’s the home of three national championships—old-time banjo, old-time buckdancing and old-time clogging. There’s lots more, too. If you want overall details, get in touch with Wendy S. Bryant, P.O. Box 5016, Murfreesboro, Tenn. 37133; phone, 615/893-6565; the 800 number is 716-7560.

**July 28:** 19th annual Blue Ridge Draft Horse and Mule Show, Ferrum College, Ferrum, Va.; a showcase of old-time draft animals and a demonstration of the skills involved in working them. For details, call 540/365-4416.

**July 29-August 3:** 24th annual Appalachian Writers’ Workshop, Hindman Settlement School. As always, this popular summer jamboree will star a staff of matchless literary mentors, again headed by the unchallenged dean of Appalachian writers, James Still, and this year including Linda DeRosier, Chris Holbrook, George Ella Lyon, Robert Morgan, Sharyn McCrumb, Lee Smith and many other writing types. To find out more about this long-established institution, check the contact information for June 10-15.

**August 10-12:** Augusta Festival, Elkins, W.Va., sponsored by the Augusta Heritage Center of Davis & Elkins College. This celebration, which draws thousands of people, is the capstone of the summer’s Augusta activities. This year’s participants include such remarkably named entertainers as Balfa Toujours and the Missing Person Soup Kitchen Gospel Quartet. For details of all the varied events—crafts, music, dance, folklore—

throughout the summer, see the contact information for April 22-28.

**September 8:** Annual conference, Appalachian Teachers’ Network and the Southwest Virginia Association for Multicultural Education. This event, going back 10 years, was, say the sponsors, “created for any educator, K-college, in any discipline, interested in incorporating Appalachian studies or other cultural topics into his or her classroom.” For details or a presentation proposal form, contact Jim Minick, Box 6935, Radford University, Radford, Va. 24142; 540/831-5366; [jminick@runet.edu](mailto:jminick@runet.edu).

## **EYE on Publications**

*Topsoil Road*, by Robert Morgan (Louisiana State University Press). These are the poems of a writer for whom the past lives in the present, from the Cherokee signal fires that flamed on flat rocks, to the thrush doctor (the gifted layman who could heal an inflamed throat by breathing into the mouth of the afflicted child), to the banjo maker who knocked on trees to find the right wood to produce the perfect sound.

“The homespun and the picturesque, twin imps that bedevil most efforts to filter rural experience through wryly sensibility, rarely find refuge in Morgan’s flinty lyrics,” observes a reviewer in *Poetry*. “He is no backwoods sentimentalist, no crackerbarrel philosopher. This poet’s authenticity, no less than his artfulness, grows out of his technical resources: his is a fine-grained, self-im-

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plicating intelligence that can span the intricacies of both pine resin and pantoums.”

(Pantoums? They grow not on pine trees but in the minds of poets, being verses employing a form, of Malay origin, in which *abab* becomes *bcbc*, and so on. Morgan, indeed, likes to play with forms, as you will quickly see.)

A North Caroline native, Morgan teaches English at Cornell and is the author of numerous volumes of poetry and fiction.

***Appalachians and Race***, edited by John C. Inscoe (University Press of Kentucky). Back in 1916, the pioneer black historian Carter G. Woodson wrote a landmark essay on slavery in Appalachia. This piece, says John Inscoe, represents “the first scholarly assessment of an aspect of southern mountain life and culture that, well before and well after its appearance, continued to be received as one of its most distinguishing characteristics—its racial innocence.”

Yet during the ensuing 60 or 70 years historians had little further to say about the subject. Not until the publication in 1985 of ***Blacks in Appalachia***, edited by William H. Turner and Edward J. Cabbell, did a new breakthrough come. Since then, Inscoe comments, no one has been able to argue that blacks, past or present, are invisible in the region.

The essays in ***Appalachians and Race***, focusing on the transition from slavery to segregation in the latter 19th century and mostly produced since the publication of the Turner-Cabbell book, expand on the points raised there but also reflect new concerns, notably questions about the dynamics and diversity of slave labor in the mountains—who owned slaves and how were they used?—and about the shifting demographics of the Appalachian black presence.

Actually, as is natural in such collections, the contributions reflect the particular interests of their authors and thus cover a wide variety of areas. Some examples: “Appalachian Echoes of the African Banjo” (Cecelia Conway), “Slavery in the Kanawha Salt Industry” (John E. Stealey III), “Olmsted in Appalachia: A Connecticut Yankee Encounters Slavery and Racism in the Southern Highlands, 1854 (John Inscoe; Frederick Law Olmsted’s

narratives of his travels through the South remain, as Inscoe says, probably the most valuable of all such accounts, and thus always hold special interest), “Southern Mountain Republicans and the Negro” (Gordon McKinney; this article, we are told, interestingly, was one of the first dealing with Appalachia ever to appear in the *Journal of Southern History*—suggesting or confirming that blacks did not have a monopoly on invisibility), “African American Convicts in the Coal Mines of Southern Appalachia” (Ronald L. Lewis).

The book opens with a revised version of Richard B. Drake’s well-known essay from 1986, “Slavery and Antislavery in Appalachia.” Painting with a broad brush, Drake, a (now-retired) professor of history at Berea, documents the actual extent of slavery’s presence throughout the region, and, as Inscoe observes, his article “foreshadows much of the multifaceted work on the subject that is represented” in the book.

As a whole, says the editor, the hope is that the essays here will continue the challenge to the “long-standing assumption of Appalachian distinctiveness while acknowledging the centrality of regional context” for those trying to understand how blacks and whites related to each other in the period under study. Inscoe teaches history at the University of Georgia.



**In *Appalachian Heritage*...**

Featured in the Winter 2001 *Appalachian Heritage* are Truman Fields’s family remembrance of Uncle Dock and the Civil War, Steven Salaita’s essay about Arabs in Appalachia, Bill Best’s follow-up, after twenty-five years, on a traditional mountain man and G. C. Compton’s affectionate look at Appalachian funerals. There is also new short fiction from Sidney Farr, Laura Weddle, Ralph Price, Deirdre Gage, Carl Jarrell and Betty Lee Hailey, as well as original poetry from Jeff Daniel Marion, Deborah Byrne, Dorothy Schnare, David Zaiss and others.

***Appalachian Heritage*** is available (\$6 a copy, \$18 for a year’s subscription) from the Appalachian Center, C.P.O. Box 2166, Berea, Ky. 40404.

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