

# NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER  
BEREA COLLEGE



# LETTER

Gordon B. McKinney • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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## Looking Forward

**September 23-24:** Tenth annual Ohio Appalachian Conference, sponsored by Ohio State University Extension; Sunday session at the extension center, Monday at Canter's Cave 4-H Camp Lodge, both in Jackson, Ohio. The theme "Values, Visions and Voices" will be addressed by a variety of speakers, including Roberta Campbell, University of Cincinnati; Howard Dorgan, Appalachian State University; and Jake Bapst, Rio Grande University. For more information, contact Deanna L. Tribe or Lois Campbell at 740/286-2177.

**September 25:** "Promoting Economic Prosperity and a Healthy Environment in Kentucky," a public meeting sponsored by the state's Environmental Quality Commission; Capitol Annex, Frankfort, Ky. During the last decade, Kentucky developed its land more rapidly per capita than any other state except Pennsylvania and West Virginia; therefore, say the sponsors of the meeting, citizens need to concern themselves with preserving Kentucky's unique character while promoting prosperity. (Maybe somebody can produce a concise definition of "smart growth"; we already seem to have a pretty good idea of the dumb kind.) Details from 502/564-2150, extension 149 or 194.

**October 3-6:** Sixth annual Stringbean Music and Folklife Festival, Jackson County, Ky. Dedicated to the memory of David "Stringbean" Akemon, the festival this year continues last year's innovation of folklife demonstrations (rail splitting, molasses making and other gerundial activities) while presenting the usual variety of musicians, this time including the Lonesome River Band, Larry Cordle and Lonesome Standard Time, Larry Sigmon and Barbara Poole, the Lynn Morris Band and a raft of others. Phone 606/287-0600.

**October 5-7:** 20th annual Sorghum Makin', John R. Simon's Family Farm, 8721 Pond Creek/Carey's Run Road, Portsmouth, Ohio 45663. If you've ever wanted to play around with a sorghum evaporator or you maybe have a yen for apple butter, this could be the place for you to spend the weekend. All the eating (or, no doubt, eatin') will be accompanied by acoustical music, while butter gets churned and soap gets made. The number to call is 740/259-6337.

**October 6-7:** 22nd annual Autumn Jubilee, Dan Nicholas Park, Salisbury, N.C., with more than 125 craftspersons from around the Southeast; as usual, the clogging barn will have two days of Appalachian freestyle, precision and line dancing. Sunday afternoon gospel headliners will be

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## Tradition Is Back

After flirting with springtime dates, the Berea College Appalachian Center Celebration of Traditional Music has returned to its fall roots and will appear October 26-28 in its 27th annual incarnation

The underlying idea of the celebration, said its founder, then-Appalachian Center director Loyal Jones, back in 1974, 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 and preservation haven't ruled out freshness and innovation, but in the main the celebration has through the years stuck closely to Jones's proclaimed purpose and in the process has become an Appalachian regional institution.

As usual, a stellar and varied group of performers will be on hand for this year's jamboree. The list includes the Haywood County Ramblers, the Dowden sisters, Sparky Rucker, the Last Old Man (Tracy Schwarz, Jim Costa and Larry Rader), Ed Cabbell, Ginny Hawker, Tricia Kilby and Donovan Cain, and Ora Watson, Mary Green and Cecil Greganis. These artists will appear in concert on Friday and Saturday evenings, beginning at 7:30, and both of these gala sessions will be followed by dancing (square Friday, contra Saturday).

The daylight hours of Saturday will see more performances, highlighted at two o'clock by a symposium, "Fiddle Tunes of the Old Frontier," presented by Alan Jabbour. The farewell event will be a concert of religious music on Sunday morning at nine o'clock.

If you need further details, write to the Berea College Appalachian Center, College Box 2166, Berea, Ky. 40404-2166, or phone 606/985-3140.

## "It's a Mess"—III

Let's start with a little review: Last October 11, as reported in the Fall 2000 issue of the APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER, a coal-waste impoundment in Martin County, Ky., collapsed, dumping some 250 million gallons of muck into a pair of creeks and thence into Big Sandy River. It turned out to be the biggest blackwater spill in history, and it put the river on the list of most-endangered streams in the United States.

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the celebrated Fox Brothers. You'll also find adult games (log sawing), children's games and magic. To learn more, phone 704/636-2089.

**October 6-7:** Celebration of Fine Crafts, Chattanooga, produced by the Tennessee Association of Craft Artists. Some 100 craftspersons will display their work in Coolidge Park, just across the river from the arts section of town, and there'll be activities to beguile any children you may bring along; food, too. Call 615/665-0502.

**October 6-7:** 28th annual Fall Festival, John C. Campbell Folk School, with music, dance, food, crafts—to be sure—and special activities for children. Write for more information to the school at One Folk School Road, Brasstown, N.C. 28902, or phone 800/FOLKSCH; [www.folk-school.org](http://www.folk-school.org).

**October 11-14:** 22nd 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." This top-20 event will feature the long-established bountiful serving of art, crafts and entertainment, with performers Doc Watson, Ralph Stanley, Ramona Jones, Doyle Lawson, Sparky Rucker, Raymond Fairchild (five-time world champion banjo player) and a couple of hundred more. You can even attend Doc Randall's old-time traveling medicine show or listen to Abe Lincoln look-alike Gerald Bestrom talk about his "days as president." The museum's address is P.O. Box 1189, Norris, Tenn. 37828; phone 865/494-7680.

**October 12-14:** Annual Fall Fair, Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen, Indian Fort Theater, Berea, Ky., continuing the guild's 40th-anniversary celebration; 125 exhibitors will be on hand. The list of musicians for this edition of the fair includes Wishing Chair, Tom Minton, Eastern Blend and Homer Ledford, and there'll be food—soup, nuts and fudge—and activities for children, especially on Friday. For more details, phone 859/986-3192.

**October 18-21:** Fall edition of the Craft Fair of the Southern Highlands; Asheville, N.C. Full information from the guild at 828/298-7928.

**October 21-28:** Old-Time Week and Fiddlers' Reunion, an autumn treat from the busy bunch over at Davis & Elkins. As usual, a lineup of experienced teachers and guest master artists (Melvin Wine, J. P. Fraley and others) will be on hand to guide participants toward mastery or at least progress in old-time fiddle, banjo, guitar and hammered dulcimer, and the reunion will bring together such veterans as Lester McCumbers, Elmer Rich and Woody Simmons; the Sunday evening concert will feature John Morris, Dwight Diller and the Yahoos. Those who don't pluck or otherwise play can choose between classes in basketry and Appalachian folk culture. For details write the Augusta Heritage Center, Davis & Elkins College, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W.Va. 26241; [augusta@augustaheritage.com](mailto:augusta@augustaheritage.com); phone 304/637-1209.

**October 26-28:** 27th annual Celebration of Traditional Music, Berea College. (See separate story.)

**October 27:** 28th annual Blue Ridge Folklife Festival, billed as "the largest celebration of authentic folkways in Virginia." It's one of the top 20 October events in the Southeast, say the event raters at the Southeast Tourism Society. Ferrum College, Ferrum, Va.; phone 540/365-2121.

**October 27:** Sixth annual Genealogy Fair, Asheville Mall, 3 South Tunnel Road, Asheville, N.C., sponsored by the Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society. At this all-day affair (10 to 9), forebear-seekers may visit ancestor surname booths and should bring family information to exchange and enter into a computerized ancestor chart; vendors of genealogical items are welcome. You can get some additional information from the society at 828/253-1894; [www.OBCGS.com](http://www.OBCGS.com); e-mail: [OBCGS@buncombe.main.nc.us](mailto:OBCGS@buncombe.main.nc.us).

**November 14:** "State and Local Tax Modernization" will be the theme of the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center's eighth annual conference, which will take place at the Capital Plaza Holiday Inn in Frankfort; assessing the fairness of the present system will be a central concern. Among the speakers and panelists will be William Fox of the University of Tennessee, who is serving as the state legislature's consultant on tax policy; Charles Martie of the governor's Office for Policy Research; David Wildason and Merle Hackbart of the University of Kentucky; and Larry Lynch of Transylvania University. More information is available from the center at 800/853-2851 or its Web site: [www.kltprc.net](http://www.kltprc.net)

**December 26-January 1:** Christmas Country Dance School, Berea College, directed this year by Joe Tarter. Participants may participate in a variety of classes, including (but not limited to) English clog, country and morris dance, rapper, Ontario step dance, Appalachian clogging and square dance, and contra. Act now—the *deadline for early registration is December 1*. To find out more, call 859/985-3000, ext. 3431 or 3789.

**December 26-January 1:** Winter Dance Week, John C. Campbell Folk School, with American contras and squares, English country dancing, couple dances, shaped-note singing, jam sessions and still more, plus a New Year's Eve party. See contact information for October 6-7.

**January 27-February 16:** 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. Though the session itself is still months off, *the deadline for applications is November 14*; a high school diploma or GED certificate is required. For full information, contact Caroline Francis or Kim Short at 204 Chestnut Street, Berea, Ky. 40403; phone 859/985-7200.

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As quickly became clear, the cleanup posed its own problems. In a meeting with the president of the coal company, county residents pointed out that work crews were compounding the damage, 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."

## Act of Whom?

Investigation showed that the company had supplied state regulators with a map containing a vital error. In reality, only 10 feet, not 70, separated the pond from an abandoned mine beneath it, and the collapse of this floor was deemed to have caused the disaster. Yet in February, to the horror of local people, the company asked the state for



The improved roads in the 1920s brought the beginnings of a new kind of activity in the mountains—tourism. Here's the ancestor of one of today's tour buses.

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permission to resume storing coal waste in the impoundment.

Were they serious? Indeed they were. The president had decided that, while human error or deficiency might be involved in the cleanup, no such failing had caused the muck flood itself—it was an act of God, like a hurricane or an earthquake, and therefore, after precautions, the operation could proceed as before. To the relief of local residents, however, federal and state regulators didn't buy the president's shift of the blame from human to divine causes.

After six months of taking the heat for the spill, the president announced his resignation, saying that he needed a change (no doubt a fair point) and that he wanted to spend some time with his family (an explanation that ranks right up there with "the check's in the mail" and "of course I'll still respect you in the morning").

So why do we give you "It's a Mess"—III"? Well, the inevitable lawsuit has now made its way into the courts, and the president has had to confront the inevitable question: Did he really think God was the culprit?

"Are you asking me from a religious perspective?" he inquired of the plaintiffs' attorney. Although trying to shade his answer—maybe, after all, there was some kind of earthquake or something—he admitted, "I don't think God did that, if that's what you're asking me."

No report on the disaster has yet appeared. Internal wrangling in the Mine Safety and Health Administration (finger-pointing? whitewash?) now seems to be the culprit. But, as a local mayor said, at least God's off the hook.

And there's one more thing. Another company, Coastal Coal, has asked regulators for permission to build a slurry impoundment a half-mile upstream from the North Fork of the Kentucky River—and near abandoned mines. A di-

saster here would foul waterways for many miles, sending sludge downstream to a number of cities, notably including Lexington—which has already begun to fight back. So a truly never ending war goes on.

## EYE on Publications

*Country People in the New South*, by Jeanette Keith (University of North Carolina Press). In Tennessee they used to tell a story about a prospective teacher appearing for an interview with a local school board. "Before we get into any details, son," said one old member, "we'd like to know what you're planning to teach about evolution." Without hesitating, the young fellow replied, "I can teach anything you want."

If that school board had been sitting in one of the eleven Upper Cumberland counties Jeanette Keith writes about in *Country People*, the interviewee would have learned very quickly just what the local people wanted. As J. W. Butler of Macon County put it, the theory of evolution was a menace to civilization. This was because the teaching of scientific theories that caused children to doubt the Bible threatened domestic harmony and hence the stability of the family.

It was also true, Butler maintained, that to cast doubt on the Bible was to undermine the foundations of the state, since the success of a republic depended on the morality derived from biblical authority. As a Tennessee state representative, he decided, he could do something about these threats to his world, and in 1925 he proceeded to write the piece of legislation that would soon become

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famous as the Monkey Law. The bill proved popular all over the state and was passed with large majorities; in signing it, Governor Austin Peay inveighed against the "irreligious tendency to exalt so-called science and deny the Bible." The law led directly to the media circus in Dayton, Tenn., remembered as the Scopes or monkey trial: evolution vs. the Bible, the agnostic Clarence Darrow vs. the Scripture-brandishing William Jennings Bryan. (In fact, local businessmen dreamed up this test case as a publicity ploy for their town, never dreaming that the resulting proceedings would forever brand them as benighted yokels.)

This book deals with much more than the trial, which, however, plays an important symbolic role in the author's depiction of conservatives fighting change of all kinds. What she does is to ask the reader to see the story, and its surrounding world, not as the big-city reporters and the social critics saw it but as it appeared to Butler and his neighbors in the Upper Cumberland. She observes that support for the Monkey Law allowed Butler and his constituents to unite in affirming religious values at a time when politics, economics and social change were increasingly dividing the people of the region.

Quite neatly, the author shows how local people managed to thwart, co-opt, or ignore supposedly progressive reforms, such as state control of public schools. Upper Cumberland people didn't want their children to learn from the new textbooks that urban life was the standard and that success lay in acquiring money and status rather than in maintaining independence. So, to reaffirm their loyalty to place and family, they simply kept the kids away, or they used their influence to further such actions as the Monkey Law.

Thus, ironically, the reformers made it possible for Butler and his neighbors to affect education not only across the state but throughout the country. Textbook publishers, never a notably bold group, hurried to protect sales by removing discussion of Darwin from their offerings.

And what do we find three-quarters of a century later? Creationism, the Ten Commandments—these issues seem

to be in the news more than ever. Butler and Bryan would find themselves right at home on Larry King Live tonight.

## Book Notes

*Pattern of a Man*, James Still's 1976 collection of 11 short stories, has just been reissued by Gnomon Press, and it now comes with an afterword by Wendell Berry. Commenting on the mountain master (who died this past April—see Spring 2001 APPALACHIAN CENTER NEWSLETTER), Berry pays him a unique tribute: "I think that up there in Knott County, well off the beaten path, he became a nearly perfect writer." You can get *Pattern of a Man* at bookstores or from Gnomon Press, P.O. Box 475, Frankfort, Ky. 40602; \$13.50.

If you live in the Asheville area or have ancestral ties to it, you may want to order *Old Buncombe County Heritage* (vols. I and II), fat books full of family histories and photos. They're available from the Old Buncombe County Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 2122, Asheville, N.C. 18802-2122. Vol. I is \$60, II is \$55, and for each there's a \$4 p/h charge and 6 percent North Carolina sales tax.



## In *Appalachian Heritage* ...

With the summer issue, *Appalachian Heritage* brings its readers three papers that explore the novels of Elizabeth Madox Roberts, whose work Cratis Williams considered at "the vanguard of the new realism destined to stimulate a new way of looking at the mountaineer and his problems." The issue also has new essays by Dixie Thacker and Dianna Hart, new poetry from Jeff Daniel Marion, Pia Seagrave, Norman Minnick and others, five new short stories, reviews of recent literature, and photography from around the region, including this summer's International Dance Festival in Haywood County, N.C.

*Appalachian Heritage* is available (\$6 a copy, \$18.00 for a year's subscription) from the Appalachian Center, C.P.O. Box 2166, Berea, Ky. 40404.

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