

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE



LETTER

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Looking Forward

January 20-26: January, the big month for advanced-level classes at the John C. Campbell Folk School, offers a variety of possibilities, from making a twig chair to creating mosaic cloth to turning out homemade paper—and all in this one week. You can get full details on this and other weeks from the school at One Folk School Road, Brasstown, N.C. 28902; phone 800/FOLKSCH; www.folkschool.org.

January 26: Hardee's Americana music series, Wilkes Community College, Wilkesboro, N.C., opens with the John Cowan Band. This and succeeding events on February 1 (Blue Highway and Rhonda Vincent and the Rage), February 22 (Gold City [Southern gospel music]) and February 27 (Nickel Creek) lead up to the 15th annual MerleFest (see April 25-28). For more information phone 800/343-7857.

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; a high school diploma or GED certificate is required. Founded in 1987 by Jane B. Stephenson, the New Opportunity School has produced more than 351 graduates to date; 70 percent of them are now working, in school or both. **Note:** The school is now accepting applications for the summer session, which begins on June 2; *your application must be in by April 26.* For full information, contact Caroline Francis or Kim Short at 204 Chestnut Street, Berea, Ky. 40403; phone 859/985-7200.

February 22-March 2: As we observed a year ago, 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 again. In this weekend + week class at the John C. Campbell Folk School, Tommy Boyd and Walter Fuller will help you turn out a loop-back chair using both traditional hand tools and modern power tools. You'll construct an heirloom (for future generations) that has warmth and character, but the school warns you that this is a physically demanding class with long hours. Though beginning students will make loop-back chairs, more advanced members of the class will turn out continuous-arm chairs. See contact information for January 20-26 to find out more about the class.

March 2-3: "Kentucky Crafted: The Market," a jumbo 20th-anniversary show, for the general public and trade buyers, with more than 300 exhibitors of traditional, folk and contemporary crafts, two-dimensional visual art, mu-

sical recordings, books, videos and food products, along with entertainment and craft activities for children 4-12; Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, Louisville. For more information, consult the Kentucky Craft Marketing Program: 502/564-3757 or 800/592-7238, ext. 4801; *to page 2*

To Have or Have Not

As people are always rediscovering, there are many Appalachias. A recent report from the Appalachian Regional Commission makes the point clearly:

- While population in the overall region (i.e., Congressionally mandated Appalachia, north and south) grew 9.1 percent in the 1990s (compared with a national increase of 13.2 percent), an Atlanta exurban county, Forsyth, grew almost 225 percent. During the decade, on the other hand, Harlan County, Ky., lost about 11 percent of its population.

- Nine out of 10 of the fastest growing counties were in Georgia (so, traffic woes or no, the area around Atlanta continued to boom).

- Seven of 10 counties that lost population faster than others were in West Virginia; two were in Kentucky, one in Virginia.

The mixture's the same as before, in other words: Central Appalachia remains the big trouble spot. Areas near growing cities are flourishing, the more remote counties continue to battle poverty and lose residents.

"Appalachia has gone from a region of almost uniform distress to one of contrasts," said Jesse White, the ARC's federal co-chairman.

The ARC has recently begun to take a close look at health care in the region. One major project will identify and analyze county-level data on mortality rates, incidence of disease and other factors, including kinds of behavior that may be, as the government likes to say, hazardous to your health.

The ARC is also creating a standardized database to analyze the financial condition of hospitals, clinics and nursing homes and to note the economic impact such institutions have on local communities.

Overall, during the life of the commission (almost 40 years now), the number of counties classified as "distressed" has declined, falling from 219 to 114.

"We're halfway home," noted an ARC spokesperson, "but we still have a long way to go."

Yup. ■

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www.kycraft.org; kycraft@mail.state.ky.us.

March 15-17: 25th annual Appalachian Studies Conference, Unicoi State Park, Helen, Ga., sponsored by the Appalachian Studies Association. This year's theme: "Voices From the Margins: Living on the Fringe." For full details, contact Pat Beaver at Appalachian State: 828/262-4089; www.appalachianstudies.org.

April 10-11: 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 14-20: Spring Dulcimer Week, Augusta Heritage Center, Davis & Elkins College. Anna Duff, Guy George, Patty Looman and Steve Schneider will offer instruction in the hammered dulcimer; the list of mountain-dulcimer teachers includes Phyllis Gaskins, Tull Glazener, Anne Lough and Steve Seifert. You can also receive tutelage on the autoharp from Karen Mueller and Maddy MacNeil. For full information, write the Augusta Heritage Center, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W.Va. 26241, or phone 304/637-1209; www.augustaheritage.com.

April 25-28: 15th annual MerleFest, Wilkes Community College, Wilkesboro, N.C. The festival is celebrating its 15th anniversary with a tribute to the lives and music of Doc and Merle Watson. Besides Doc and Richard Watson, the list of performers includes Earl Scruggs and Friends, Patty Loveless, Alison Krauss and Union Station, and other notables. For details, phone 800/343/7857; www.merlefest.org.

May 2-4: 12th annual Boxcar Pinion Memorial Bluegrass Festival, Raccoon Mountain Campground (just off I-24), Chattanooga, Tenn. Among the performers on hand will be Norman and Nancy Blake, the very busy Rhonda Vincent and the Rage, Mountain Heart, Lonesome River, Ronnie Reno and the Reno Tradition. You can get all the details from 706/820-2228.

May 17-19: 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 make a note of the date now, and for more information you can phone 859/986-3192.

Final Devotion

A couple of years ago, in noting the death of James S. Brown (*Appalachian Center Newsletter*, Fall 1999), we described this University of Kentucky sociologist as a thorough scholar and a man of strong opinions. We made those comments in describing Brown's chastising of Arnold J. Toynbee half a century ago for carelessly describing Appalachians as "a people who have acquired civilization and then lost it" and as the modern-day counterparts of the Hairy Ainu and other barbarians.

Brown mounted his counterattack when he was a young sociology teacher and Toynbee reigned throughout the civilized world not so much as a historian as a philosopher of history. Toynbee's generalizations about the rise and fall of civilizations, as presented in his famous work

A Study of History, no longer command the attention they once received, but Brown's feistiness and his devotion to scholarship endured. And as a scholar and a pioneer in the study of migration patterns, he earned such praise as Gordon McKinney's description of him as "in many ways the founder of Appalachian sociology."

In this newsletter we don't normally talk about the workings of our publisher, the Appalachian Center, but we cannot resist passing on the news that Brown, a modest-living bachelor, expressed his final devotion to matters Appalachian by willing the center \$300,000 to continue its work on behalf of the region.

In expressing his gratitude for this handsome legacy, McKinney, the center director, said that it will begin working right away in support of such activities as a program in entrepreneurship for the public good.

EYE on Publications

A Social Contract for the Coal Fields, by Richard P. Mulcahy (University of Tennessee Press). With his weighty and evangelistic speech and his implausible black eyebrows as bushy as squirrel tails, John L. Lewis stood from the 1930s to the 1950s as a mighty and almost primordial figure on the American labor scene. He became president of the United Mine Workers in 1919 and from then on reigned as dictator of the union until his resignation 40 years later.

Even after stepping down, however, Lewis kept his position as chairman of the trustees of the Welfare and Retirement Fund, the organization whose history is the subject of this book. Nobody held a neutral view of Lewis. He took controversy with him wherever he went, so much so that Wendell Willkie, the 1940 Republican presidential candidate, termed Lewis's declaration of support "the kiss of death."

For a number of reasons, the more-or-less middle years of Lewis's presidency, from the early 1930s to the early 1950s, represented his period of greatest influence. In his early years, factionalism in the union limited his power and, besides, the coal bust and the general weakness of labor in the '20s meant that there was very little pie to share. All this changed with the coming of the New Deal, and within two years Lewis had led in the founding of the CIO, which organized workers on an industry-wide basis rather than by crafts, the standard approach of the AFL.

By the early '50s coal had gone into another great decline, and with it came the lessening of Lewis's national influence. But in the latter phase of his heyday he had created the Welfare and Retirement Fund, a development that depended on his previous efforts to rationalize the boom-and-bust industry but that came in part as an answer to the post-World War II expectations of union members.

Some historians have looked on Lewis simply as a successful opportunist, but Mulcahy sees his primary motivation as recognition of the need to stabilize the industry. In essence, he sought to "level out the business cycle and end the related problems of overproduction and unemployment.

After winning victories in these areas in the 1930s, the
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IT WASN'T EASY: In the last issue, we showed you a mountain tour bus. This time we offer something of more fundamental importance. But, as you can see, the coming of school buses didn't solve all attendance problems.

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union then faced the problems relating to health care and retirement benefits. The author tells a complex story here, one with many players and no angels, but for a long time Lewis appeared to have succeeded in creating a successful labor-management alliance. The end result of all the action was, however, the collapse of the health-care program, though, fortunately, the pension program survives.

On the bright side, the author notes such legacies of the fund's medical activities as group-practice clinics and Appalachian Regional Health Care.

The story has much more to it than this partial summary suggests, and it deserves close reading. With some regret, however, we must make a point we have pondered in the past concerning other books but, frankly, have shied away from; namely, this book, like many other current books—including, disturbingly, books from university presses—is marred by numerous editing and proofreading lapses. The particular offenders here are misspellings of various proper names, confusion of *principal* and *principle* and shaky punctuation (apostrophes appear everywhere except where they belong). To be fair about it, we'll also tell you that another fine book we recently reviewed, Richard Drake's *History of Appalachia* (University Press of Kentucky), suffered from similar blemishes and from others as well. Typos are typos, and sometimes one has to live with a few of them, but can persistent editing lapses really be considered an unavoidable evil?

Far Appalachia, by Noah Adams (Delacorte Press). "If you stand by the river and look up 140 feet to the dual

span that is the Interstate 77 bridge, you relate it best to the movies," says the author as he arrives at Jackson's Ferry in West Virginia, working his way along the New River. "The bridge crosses the valley at an angle that bears no relation to the landscape, and gives off a moody, unrelenting roar."

As for the drivers moving across this towering bridge, they "can only have a glance for the river below"—unlike Adams, who is down on the ground looking up at these remote speeders in the course of his journey from the headwaters of the New River in North Carolina to its mouth at its meeting with the Gauley, near Charleston.

A native of northeastern Kentucky, the soft-voiced co-host of National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" took a year off, not to pursue any quest, he says, but simply to "understand more about this part of the country and my family's past." Combining the experiences of a number of shorter trips into a continuous narrative, Adams describes his travels on foot, by mountain bike, by canoe and by whitewater raft, introducing us to the people he meets, the troubles he encounters and the state of the landscape—sometimes virgin and unspoiled, sometimes scarred by the ravages of mining and the depredations of industry.

Along with characters of various kinds, the author presents us with engaging bits of lore: how hillbillies are so called because Ulstermen were followers of King Billy—William of Orange—and closeups in vignette, like his portrait of the community of Ivanhoe.

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So here, from Three Forks past Mouth of Wilson and Eggleston Cliffs to Hawks Nest and Gauley Bridge, is the New River. He could have paddled on downstream, Adams says, past the mills and chemical plants of the Kanawha valley, turned left on reaching the Ohio, proceeded on to Ashland and walked "five blocks up the hill to the white frame house where [he] grew up."



Book Notes

•*Voices from the Hills: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, the widely used textbook edited by Robert J. Higgs and Ambrose Manning, has been republished in a 25th-anniversary edition by Kendall-Hunt of Dubuque, Iowa. The editors, now professors emeriti at East Tennessee State, contribute a new foreword, and there's an afterword by the late Jim Wayne Miller. If you want a copy, the people at ETSU can probably help you get one; phone 423/439-4317.

•*Sporty Creek*, James Still's collection of stories about a coal miner and his family during the Depression, is available from the Jesse Stuart Foundation, which not only publishes books but sells those of other publishers (softcover, \$9.95). The foundation's address is P.O. Box 669, Ashland, Ky. 41105; phone, 606/326-1667.

•The foundation has also just published, in softcover (\$15), a reprint of what's probably the most famous book ever written about any part of Appalachia, Harry M. Caudill's *Night Comes to the Cumberland*s, which originally appeared almost 40 years ago now.

This edition contains a new afterword by the author's son, James K. Caudill, that brings us up to date on development in the coal country in later decades and is itself worth the price of admission. Sample: "New roads have been built and old roads have been improved, to be sure, but few of the benefits expected from them are apparent. The highways run from one listless little town to another, each with its WalMart, shopping center and cluster of fast food outlets on its outskirts and hardly a soul to be seen

downtown. ... The flood control lakes built by the Corps of Engineers never attracted the hordes of tourists and fishermen that were expected. Many are already partly filled with silt and unable to sustain fish in significant numbers." That's a voice we've heard before.

Disc Note

Revisit a banjo tradition that has almost vanished in "George Gibson—Last Possum Up the Tree," a CD from June Appal, in which the veteran Kentucky player presents rare songs in rare styles. Information from Appalshop, 606/633-1009.

Poetry Note

March 1 is the deadline for entries in the Appalachian poetry competition (\$500 first prize) sponsored by *Now & Then* magazine, published by the Center for Appalachian Studies at East Tennessee State; Michael McFee of the University of North Carolina is the sole juror. You can get complete guidelines by phoning the sponsor at 423/439-5348; e-mail: woodsidj@etsu.edu.



In *Appalachian Heritage* ...

With the fall issue, *Appalachian Heritage* is pleased to bring readers new fiction, poetry, articles and essays from throughout the region, as well as Marianne Worthington's interview with rising Appalachian writer Silas House. The staff of *Appalachian Heritage* are also delighted to include with this issue, as a holiday gift for *AH* readers, a compact disc of music compiled from Berea College's Celebration of Traditional Music, held annually since 1974 on the last weekend in October. This is our way of thanking our readers for supporting our efforts to publish the very best writing from and about the Appalachian Region.

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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