

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE



LETTER

Gordon B. McKinney • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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Looking Forward

July 3-30: Swannanoa Gathering, a series of week-long workshops held on the campus of Warren Wilson College, outside Asheville, N.C. Guided by a gigantic and varied staff, this jamboree begins with dulcimer and sing and swing weeks (July 3-9), proceeds through Celtic music (July 10-16), old-time music and dance (July 17-23) and fiddle and contemporary folk (July 24-30); the fiddling is new this year. Also, Eric Garrison will conduct a performance lab (July 17-23). "The worst part about the gathering," a student once complained, "is that there are only 24 hours in the day and three of them are wasted sleeping"; gathering@warren-wilson.edu; www.swangathering.org.

July 8-10: 28th annual Uncle Dave Macon Days Old-Time Music and Dance Festival, Cannonsburgh Pioneer Village, Murfreesboro, Tenn. Picked by tourism specialists as one of the best 100 events in North America (just two per state), while maintaining its status as one of the top 20 July events in the Southeast, this family-oriented jamboree—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'll also be a blues harmonica competition honoring DeFord Bailey, the first African-American to appear on the Grand Ole Opry. There's lots more, too—as the sponsors say, something for everybody in the family, from grandparents to the stroller set. If you want overall details, get in touch with Wendy S. Bryant, P.O. Box 5016, Murfreesboro, Tenn. 37133; phone, 615/893-6565 or 800/716-7560. www.uncledavemacondays.com.

July 10-August 14: Music, crafts, dance and folklore, spread out over five theme weeks—guitar and Cajun/Creole; blues and swing; Irish, Bluegrass; dance, old-time and vocal; Augusta Heritage Center, Davis & Elkins College. Aside from the "theme weeks" workshops, you can take individual classes, including such new offerings as flintknapping, Celtic enameled jewelry and batik. There'll also be, of course, such standards as blacksmithing, basketry and quilting. You may pick your week and pick your pursuit. The summer will be capped by the three-day Augusta Festival (August 12-14), with the big craft fair on Saturday the 13th as the centerpiece. For full details, write the Augusta Heritage Center, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W.Va. 26241, or phone 304/637-1209; www.augustaheritage.com.

July 14-16: Master Musicians Festival, Somerset, Ky. During this Thursday-Saturday weekend, this town 75 miles south of Lexington will again be the scene of the eclectic extravaganza founded by Somerset native Gabrielle Gray and now carried on by dedicated local volunteers. This year, the festival's 12th, visitors will, as usual, first encounter classical performers—this time the Ceruti Chamber Players—who will open matters on Thursday evening. They will be followed on Friday and Saturday by groups of every sort and kind: Sage Knoll; Silver Arm; the Kelly Richey Band; Higher Vision; Sierra Hull and Highway 111, and many others. For details, phone 888/FUN JULY or write to page 2

Mountains Without Tops

Earlier this spring, a number of Kentucky writers, of all varieties, received a letter from Wendell Berry in which the renowned conservationist invited the recipients to take part in an April 20-21 excursion to coal country to see, firsthand, the devastation wreaked by mountain-top removal mining. (That, of course, is a subject that has received regular mention in the *Appalachian Center Newsletter*.)

When the tourists returned to the flatlands, they expressed the kind of shock that would be expected from persons who had encountered that mining moonscape for the first or even the fiftieth time. And, as hoped by Berry and his fellows in the sponsoring organization, Kentuckians For the Commonwealth, the writers, in a follow-up meeting, adopted a statement calling for the state to outlaw this method of clawing coal from the mountains.

"We are horrified that this practice is legal," declared the statement, first-drafted by Silas House. "We are angry that representatives in our own government are allowing this to happen." The whole process represents "an assault on the people, culture and land of Appalachia." While conceding the importance of coal to the state's economy, the statement declared that mining can be accomplished in "a more responsible way."

Ground Beef?

This statement represented "an emotional tirade playing fast and loose with the facts," fired back coal's official spokesman, Bill Caylor, president of the Kentucky Coal to page 2

MOUNTAINS *from page 1*

Association. "These are the same people who would be outraged if they knew where their ground beef came from."

Essentially, however, Caylor based his response on the value he ascribes to mountains once their tops have been taken away: "I truly believe having areas in Appalachia with level land will generate hubs of activity in the future."

"Presumably," responded Anne Shelby, a poet and playwright who went on the tour, "American industry, having deserted its manufacturing centers in the North, is now traversing the globe in search of flat land and will return when enough mountaintops have been removed and enough valleys filled."

LOOKING *from page 1*

Master Musicians Festival, P.O. Box 1212, Somerset, Ky. 42502; e-mail: mmfest@juno.com; mastermusiciansfestival.com.

July 15-17: 18th annual Scopes Trial Play and Festival, Dayton, Tenn. This reenactment of the famous 1925 "monkey trial" confrontation between William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow, which is sponsored by the local chamber of commerce and Bryan College, will be accompanied by various other kinds of entertainment. You can get details from the Dayton chamber of commerce at 423/775-0361.

July 17-23: Once again, it's "intergenerational week" at the John C. Campbell Folk School, with space and staff attention reserved for parents and grandparents with youngsters aged 12 to 17. The idea is for the young person and the adult to work side by side "in a place of calm amidst a hectic world" (only one youngster per attending adult). This year's classes offer the school's customary range of possibilities, from glass beadmaking and blacksmithing to "the lost art of old-time cooking" and making Shaker boxes. You can get details on these and all other activities from the school at One Folk School Road, Brasstown, N.C. 28902; phone, 800/FOLKSCH; www.folkschool.org.

July 21-24: Summer edition of the 58th annual fairs, Southern Highland Craft Guild, Asheville Civic Center, Asheville, N.C. (The fall edition will come out October 20-23.) These exhibitions present the best of the work of the organization's 900 members. You can find out more from by calling 828/298-7928; www.southern@craftguild.org.

July 31-August 5: 28th annual Appalachian Writers' Workshop, Hindman Settlement School. The list of mentors for this summer's renewal of the yearly jamboree includes the customary mixture of clever young stars and crafty veteran luminaries, including Meredith Sue Willis, Lee Maynard, Silas House and George Ella Lyon To find out more, write to the school at P.O. Box 844, Hindman, Ky. 41822, or call 606/785-5475; e-mail: jss@tgtel.com; hindmansettlement.org.

September 4-10: Third annual Scottish Heritage Week, John C. Campbell Folk School, with a sharp focus on the subject; the group of participating experts will again include the authentically Scottish Norman Kennedy, folksinger and master weaver. The week will end with participation in Saturday's Appalachian Highland Games at Recreation Park in nearby Andrews, N.C. See contact information for July 17-23.

September 30-October 2: 22nd annual Sorghum Makin',

John R. Simon's Family Farm, 8721 Pond Creek/Carey's Run Road, Portsmouth, Ohio 45663. "Lots of good music," says the proprietor, and lots of apple butter and, of course, sorghum: "Bring your lawn chair and stay all day." The number to call is 740/259-6337.

October 1-2: Annual Fall Festival, John C. Campbell Folk School, featuring more than 100 crafts creators. Besides the exhibits and demonstrations, the sponsors promise continuous live music, dance on two stages and good food. For particulars, see contact information for July 17-23.

October 8-9: Annual Fall Fair, Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen, Berea, Ky. It looks as if the fair, long identified with Indian Fort Theater in the Berea woods, has now taken up permanent residence at the city's Memorial Park in town. The work of more than 100 artists and artisans, including a number of guests, will be on display. For more details, phone 859/986-3192; e-mail, info@kyguild.org.

October 22: 32nd annual Blue Ridge Folklife Festival, billed, as always, as "the largest celebration of authentic folkways in Virginia." A must for old-car buffs (with at least 200, and probably more, on display), "Virginia's largest showcase of regional traditions" will not neglect earlier sources of power; workhorses and mules will pull and plow. And nobody should miss the Virginia coon-mule jumping championship and the coon-dog water races. Further information from Ferrum College, Ferrum, Va.; phone, 540/365-2121.

October 27-30: Old-Time Week in West Virginia—a "highly personal week of friendship and sharing"—put on every autumn by the busy bees over at Davis & Elkins. The days are filled with small-group instruction, workshops with guest master artists and, in the evenings, square dancing, shape-note singing and other such fun. The whole affair ends with the "unique and heartwarming" weekend Fiddlers' Reunion, which lures musicians from all over the U.S. and Canada. See contact information for July 10-August 14.

October 28-29: Seventh annual national conference: "The Women of Appalachia: Their Heritage and Accomplishments," sponsored by Ohio University—Zanesville. Topics of papers include everything imaginable, from the domestic to the global. Guest speakers will be Gretchen Moran Laskas, author of *The Midwife's Tale* (last year's Weatherford Award winner for fiction), and Evelyn Knight, the new director of the University of Kentucky Appalachian Center. The Website—www.zanesville.ohiou.edu/ce/wac—will keep you up to date as the time comes closer. Or you may phone 740/588-1401.

October 28-30: 31st annual presentation of the Celebration of Traditional Music, sponsored and produced by the Berea College Appalachian Center. Continuing the running theme of change in the midst of continuity, the celebration managers are offering the usual lively lineup of performers. Events begin on Friday evening with a jam session for all comers; on Saturday morning there are instrument workshops, followed by square dancing and an afternoon symposium. Musicians taking part in the whole show include Donna and Lewis Lamb, John Harrod, the Berea College String Band (no mere academic outfit), Laura Boosinger, Kentucky Wild Horse and others. On Sunday morning participants can join in the traditional hymn sing. For further details, contact Lori Briscoe at the Appalachian Center, 859/985-3257; e-mail, lori_briscoe@berea.edu.



TOPLESS TOUR:
See story, page 1

Archives: Those Were the Days

Back in the 1960s, when anyone around Berea spoke of “the council,” that meant only one thing: the Council of the Southern Mountains, an organization that had existed in Appalachia, in one form or another, since the Woodrow Wilson era. It had been created as the Conference of Southern Mountain Workers, a sort of spiritual and practical fellowship bringing together persons working in settlement schools and other institutions across the region.

By the early 1960s, under the leadership of P. F. Ayer, a Berea sociology professor, the organization had taken on a new life as a continuing body with a staff, active in regional development. Then came the famous War on Poverty, in which the council moved into the middle of the arena, taking on a variety of projects and playing an important part in developing leaders and workers in community action and other fields. The organization, like many others, also found itself involved in the mercurial and judgmental politics of the era.

The archival evidence behind all this remarkable history is contained in the council records for 1912-1970, housed in Berea’s Hutchins Library Special Collections and Archives Department and available for use by researchers. There’s more, however. After the departure of the Johnson administration and the fading of the national antipoverty impulse, the council, which in some respects had been used and then thrown aside by the government, survived in a smaller version for almost 20 further years. Now, in what’s good news for scholars, Berea has received an \$89,280 grant from the National Publications and Records Commission to complete the story by processing and making available council records for 1970-1989.

As a Berea spokesperson said, these records will “provide a unique resource for studying the shifting style, content and direction of social reform efforts in southern Appalachia during much of the 20th century.” That’s no exaggeration.

Winners

In our Winter 2005 issue, we took favorable note of the *Dictionary of Smoky Mountain English*, by Michael B. Montgomery and his late mentor, Joseph S. Hall, published by the University of Tennessee Press. Indeed, we commented that the book “looks very much like an *OED* for Appalachia—which means that it is a prime work of scholarship.”

Well, plenty of people seem to agree with us. In March, at the annual conference of the Appalachian Studies Association, Montgomery received the W. D. Weatherford Award for the most effective nonfiction book about Appalachia published in 2004. Originally administered jointly by the Berea College Appalachian Center and Hutchins Library, and now by the Appalachian Studies Association in association with the Appalachian Center, the award was established by the late Alfred H. Perrin of Berea.

The award is named for W. D. Weatherford, a pioneer in Appalachian development, youth work and race relations, and since 1997 has also honored the memory of his son, Willis D. Weatherford, Jr., president of Berea College from 1967 to 1984.

Until last year the prize consisted of a single award given for either fiction or nonfiction. Now, however, each branch of the tree gets its own recognition. The winner of the 2004 award for fiction is Ron Rash, author of *Saints at the River* (published by Henry Holt), winningly described in the *Los Angeles Times* as “equal parts vintage crime novel and Southern Gothic.” It’s a nice situation: the parents of a young girl who drowned in a wild river wish to recover the body by any means possible, but conservationists object on the grounds that the devices required to do the job will damage the riverbed, violate protective laws and set a precedent that ultimately could turn the pristine river into a replica of the now-polluted Chattahoochee. Aside from the basic situation, the protagonist, a newspaper photographer, is dealing with her own family themes.

“A classic tale of passion and tragedy,” says Lee Smith. And we add: Don’t miss lines 7-8, page 34. ■

EYE on Publications

Walking Toward the Sunset, by Wayne Winkler (Mercer University Press). For years it seemed that whenever the people called Melungeons were mentioned, the word always came with an accompanying adjective: "mysterious." Unless, that is, the defining word was "sneaky" or "disreputable."

Back in 1890 a Nashville reporter, shaking off the skepticism of his friends, set out for the far northeastern corner of Tennessee to find some Melungeons, who, if they actually existed, were supposed to be "wild, entirely unlettered and largely given to illicit distilling." It was a trip that required "superhuman" effort but it produced the desired reward: Melungeons indeed existed, and they proved to be "a most peculiar people" in a rainbow of colors—white, copper-hued, black and various mixtures of these tones. "They all drink, men, women and children," noted the reporter, "and they are all distillers."

Many of the Melungeons claimed combined "Portyghee" (Portuguese) and Cherokee descent (though how the Portuguese progenitors had arrived in the area remained a good question), and the general picture of Melungeons that has come down through the years is of swarthy, Mediterranean-looking people. But even in 1890 many of them didn't fit the picture.

Nor is the picture of the Melungeons and their background clear yet. *Walking Toward the Sunset* (the title of the book comes from an outdoor drama, *Walk Toward the Sunset*, that 40 years ago provided a great and much-needed boost for Melungeon self-esteem), is part of a five-volume series on aspects of their life and history that still does not

claim to provide a definitive explanation of Melungeon identity. More to the point, perhaps, this book offers an interesting case study of the points of conflict between a racially ordered society and mixed-race groups.

■ In *Appalachian Heritage* ...

From Editor George Brosi: The spring issue of *Appalachian Heritage* follows up on April's Kentucky authors' mountaintop removal tour. Brosi's editorial focuses on the tour, and the issue publishes the speech that Jack Spadaro, the Mine Health and Safety Administration whistle-blower, gave to the 2005 Appalachian Studies Association conference on the topic. Warren Brunner, the famous Berea photographer, who was part of the tour, is the featured photographer, providing a variety of images going all the way back to the 1960s. A memoir by Katie Fallon reinforces the environmental theme, and celebrated traditional ballad singer Sheila Kay Adams, the author of *My Old True Love*, contributes a poignant nonfiction piece on her father. The featured author for this issue is Michael McFee, whose family goes back for generations in the western North Carolina mountains. Both Robert Morgan and Michael Chitwood have contributed reminiscences of McFee for this issue, and Robert M. West offers literary criticism. Poets include Ted Olson, Katherine Smith, Billy C. Clark, Connie Jordan Green and Eric Trethewey. The short stories are by two young writers with strong ties to Eastern Kentucky: Claude Lafie Crum and Lucy Flood.

Appalachian Heritage is available (\$6 a copy, \$18 for one year, \$34 for two years, \$50 for three years) from the Appalachian Center, C.P.O. Box 2166, Berea, Ky. 40404.

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