

NEWS LETTER

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

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Lynch, Ky., July 1, 1920: This new "model town" in the coalfields would provide unusual opportunities for both blacks and whites. The story is told in *African American Miners and Migrants: The Eastern Kentucky Social Club*. (See p. 3.)

Appalachian Archive, Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College



Looking Forward

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. Who could stay away? For particulars, contact the school at One Folk School Road, Brasstown, N.C. 28902; phone, 800/FOLKSCH; www.folkschool.org.

October 7-16: Georgia Mountain Fair Fall Festival, Hiawassee, Ga.—"ten great days" of music galore, and there's even a flower show. Phone, 706/896-4191; e-mail: gamtfair@alltel.net.

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 20-23: Fall edition of the 58th annual fairs, Southern Highland Craft Guild, Asheville Civic Center, Asheville, N.C. (The summer edition took place in July.) These exhibitions present the best of the work of the organization's 900 members, accompanied by demonstrations and music. You can find out more from by calling 828/298-7928; www.southern@craftguild.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. For specific details, write the Augusta

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Heritage Center, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W. Va. 26241; phone, 304/637-1209; www.augustaheritage.com.

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. Phone 740/588-1401; e-mail, ouzconted@ohio.edu.

October 28-30: 31st annual presentation of the Celebration of Traditional Music, sponsored and produced by the Berea College Appalachian Center. (See separate story.)

November 15: 12th annual conference, Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center, Louisville International Convention Center. Those in attendance will discuss "Prescription for Change: Findings from the Kentucky Health Insurance Research Project." Full information from the sponsors at 800/853-2851; e-mail: info@kltprc.net.

December 26-January 1: Christmas Country Dance School, Berea College, directed by Joe Tarter. Devoted to the practice and enjoyment of authentic folk material, this famous school, which goes back to 1938, helps everyone

find usable materials for recreation programs, teaching situations or personal benefit. You can participate in a variety of classes, including (but by no means limited to) Appalachian clogging, border morris, Kentucky set running and the latest thing in Toronto (and perhaps the oldest thing in Yorkshire), Haxby longsword. This year's special attraction is Danish folk dancing, taught by Svend and Anna Hamborg (back for the first time in five years). If you're interested, act now—registration with deposit is due by November 1. To find out more, call 859/985-3431; e-mail: ccds@berea.edu.

February 5-25: 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, and also about themselves and what they can do. "If you are a woman in a period of transition in your life, or if you wish to clarify your personal strengths and aspirations," says Kim Short, the school's director, NOWS may be for you. The school, which recently produced its 468th graduate, offers career counseling throughout the year and also puts on a number of workshops open to anybody. Though the winter session itself is still months off, the deadline for applications is December 15; a high school diploma or GED certificate is required. For full information, write to Kim Short, New Opportunity School, 204 Chestnut Street, Berea, Ky. 40403, or phone 859/985-7200.

Trucks vs. Trains?

What do you do when you have a highway that's choked with three times the amount of traffic it was designed to carry? Well, some say, the obvious solution is to slap on more lanes to take care of the load. And that solution is exactly what the Virginia Department of Transportation is proposing for more than 300 miles of overcrowded I-81 stretching northeast to southwest through the state's western border country. Some of the new lanes would be intended just for truck traffic, which constitutes much of the load.

People who have observed such situations in Virginia and elsewhere, however, have often concluded that adding lanes and more lanes is not really anything more than a temporary solution, because creating more room for traffic brings more traffic to fill up that room, and somewhere paving has to stop.

Such reasoning seems to animate a citizen group called RAIL Solution, which proposes the construction of high-speed rail lines to carry cargo through the I-81 corridor. As pointed out in *Mountain Promise*, the publication of Berea's Brushy Fork Institute, supplementing the highway with train service would offer immediate practical advantages, not the least of which would be the avoidance of the greatly increased air and noise pollution that bigger numbers of semis would produce; not only would there be more trucks, in fact, they would be bigger and bigger. A fleet of triple trailers on the highway, RAIL Solution comments, would amount of a catastrophic accident just waiting to happen.

The most obvious advantages the rail solution offers

would be its cost, estimated at only about half that of carrying out the highway proposals. Besides, the trains would use some 50 millions gallons of oil less than the trucks would require.

An idea worth seriously considering? Of course, but the highway empire is a mighty force indeed, in Washington and in state capitals, in both executive and legislative branches of government. RAIL Solution may be worth keeping an eye on, however: www.railsolution.org.

Hands On

The people in charge at the Foothills Community Action Partnership, based in Richmond, Ky., and serving four counties, recently had a novel idea.

The organization conducts an active Affordable Housing Program, which assists low- and moderate-income families to become homeowners, and one day it occurred to somebody that administrators who work in such programs rarely get the chance to go out to a housing site and swing a hammer on the actual job. The result was the hosting of a "homeownership workfest" at what will soon be the home of a Foothills client in Clay City, Ky.

Much aid from many sources goes into the realization of such a home project; in this case, cash comes from the Federal Home Loan Bank of Cincinnati through the Whitaker Bank of Powell County, USDA Rural Development, Kentucky Housing Corporation Affordable Housing Trust Fund, HOME Funds, and the Appalachian Regional Commission. To this complex package the Foothills staff and staffers from USDA Rural Development have now added their contribution of sweat equity.

Celebration Time

Back in 1974, in announcing the establishment of Berea's Celebration of Traditional Music, then-Appalachian Center director Loyal Jones described the underlying idea as being to "feature strictly old-time traditional music." There was nothing wrong with Bluegrass and other newer forms, 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."

Though the celebration has faithfully stuck to these aims through the past three decades, encouragement and preservation have proved compatible with a good measure of freshness and even innovation; the formula has been described as "change in the midst of continuity." This year the celebration managers are continuing to sound this theme with a varied and lively lineup of performers. Events begin on Friday evening, October 28, 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 celebration details, contact Lori Briscoe at the Appalachian Center, 859/985-3257; e-mail, lori_briscoe@berea.edu.

EYE on Publications

African American Miners and Migrants, by Thomas E. Wagner and Phillip J. Obermiller (University of Illinois Press). For the last 50 years or so, most people have believed that the essential truth about mountain coal towns was revealed by Merle Travis and Tennessee Ernie Ford in the song "Sixteen Tons": it was a life of hopeless peonage in which you owed your soul to the company store.

But wait just a minute, say Tom Wagner and Phil Obermiller; there's a little more to the story than that. Certainly, a great many miners lived in bleak desperation under the cruel and capricious rule of dictatorial companies and owners, whose will was often enforced by uniformed thugs. Mother Jones declared that when she arrived in heaven, she would call God's attention to the misdeeds of the coal barons. And here and there today, the remains of coal camps offer evidence of the bleakness of the lives that would have been lived in them.

If life in coal towns was so bad, however, why would anybody who had escaped from them look back with fondness on those days? When, in the course of their work as students of Appalachian migrants, Wagner and Obermiller (both of the University of Cincinnati) encountered members of the Eastern Kentucky Social Club in Cleveland, Detroit and other cities, they were "intrigued" to hear these people reminisce with warmth and enthusiasm about the places they had left behind in the mountains.

These black migrants, the authors learned, had devoted a great deal of effort to building and maintaining their organization, with chapters throughout the Middle West, in Kentucky and West Virginia and as far away as Los



A former teacher called the Lynch black high school "the pride of the community." Students studied English, math, foreign languages and science and also took domestic courses, as above.

Angeles. Why? Hadn't their old homes had been places of segregation, of sometime violence against black people and of rigid control of everybody's daily life, and wasn't coal mining a dangerous job you were lucky to be out of?

That didn't seem to be the way the club members felt. And in finding the answers to their questions about the Eastern Kentucky Social Club (whose name supplies the subtitle of this book), the authors encountered their real subject. It was told in a tale of two cities, Benham and Lynch—two Harlan County, Ky., coal towns that were established not by saints but by corporations in dedicated pursuit of the Yankee dollar but that nevertheless had their own particular and important virtues.

Like most other phenomena, coal towns underwent a chronological evolution, in this case from the original primitive camps—the basic source of the public's images of life in coal towns—to towns built by larger companies to "model" towns, products of the Progressive era (1900-1920), like Benham, founded by International Harvester in 1910, and Lynch, established seven years later by U.S. Steel, to meet the demand for coke for the companies' steel furnaces.

Explicitly created as model towns, the two were presented to the world wrapped in the contemporaneous corporate rhetoric of "sociological work" with expressed concern for the well-being of miners and for attracting the best men as company employees. Medical services, entertainment, athletics—all would be provided, both to whites and to blacks—and for almost all families the towns would indeed provide far better lives than they had previously known. The price, of course, was living under paternalistic control; for the company a healthy and orderly work force ensured social serenity and steady profits. Like a good international treaty, the arrangement offered benefits to both sides, and both had to pay for them.

But there was one special benefit the miners received, black as well as white. These towns had good schools, the best in the area, with genuinely well qualified teachers. Some of the black teachers, for instance, did summer work

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at the University of Chicago, the University of Wisconsin and Columbia—hardly the norm for a coal county 80 years ago. Nor was the tone of the community typical—the relatively classless and in some ways color-blind existence that characterized the two towns.

William H. Turner says in the afterword that, although old-style coal mining has disappeared from Harlan County, most of the people have “taken the values they learned and the communal life they lived there to other places, affecting and transmitting that lifestyle far removed from coal camps.”

It was the education they received at home that made it possible for so many to find success at the end of their journeys.

You'll like this book.

The Planting of New Virginia, by Warren R. Hofstra (Johns Hopkins University Press). In the late autumn of 1742 a party of 30 Indians departed their homelands in western New York, heading south for the Carolinas to raid their old enemies, the Catawbas. Their journey would take them through the Great Valley of Virginia, abandoned by Indian tribes a century or so earlier, because of constant conflicts, and sparsely inhabited by European settlers.

Beginning with the details of this long journey, the author, who teaches history at Shenandoah University in Winchester, Va., introduces us to the remarkable ideas and processes involved in moving and “planting” a civilization. Settlers did not simply move west, clear some land and start raising crops, as one might imagine; or, if they did, they carried on these activities in response to the dictates of the particular environment, to which they also adapted their notions of town and country and the relationship between the two.

The term *New Virginia* referred to the region west of the Blue Ridge, in contrast to *Old Virginia* to the east. It thus, as the 18th century moved into the 19th, distinguished the world of the farmer from that of the planter, an area with numerous small towns from one with few towns, livestock production from tobacco culture and a free-labor society from one based on slave labor.

Beyond its obvious purposes, the development of New Virginia and other western areas served political and strategic aims for colonial governors and for the British government away in London. Trends in international trade also brought demands to these new economies. Beyond all that, of course, the Great Valley funneled Scots-Irish, German and other migrants from Pennsylvania down to the Cumberland Gap and so to Kentucky and the West.

This is a serious and thorough book—“a life's work,” says one of the author's fellow Virginia historians—and it deserves close attention. The reader could wish, however, that the editors at Hopkins had insisted on the inclusion of a free-standing and hence easily usable bibliography instead of burying the details of sources in the notes. That practice, like the frequently encountered and dreaded bibliographic essay, is popular nowadays, but we can comfort ourselves, perhaps, by remembering that all trends pass.

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In Appalachian Heritage ...

From Editor George Brosi: The current issue presents an exciting mix of today's writing and a focus on our literary heritage. Gurney Norman is the featured author, and readers will love the photos, all by former Kentucky Poet Laureate James Baker Hall. Wendell Berry's essay about his connection with Gurney linking the mouth and the headwaters of the Kentucky River is complemented by a reminiscence by Gurney's good friend Ed McClanahan and literary criticism by Leah Bayens. The section also includes reprinted poems by Hall, Frank X Walker and Gurney himself; highlight of the section is a brand-new story from Gurney. Tim Homans presents outstanding nature writing and Scott Loring Sanders contributes a short story. There's an abundance of poetry, Chris Green's critical look at *No Lonesome Road: The Prose and Poetry of Don West* by Jeff Biggers and George Brosi, and a review essay by Thomas E. Douglass on an important out-of-print book, *Voices of Glory* by Davis Grubb.

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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