

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE



LETTER

Thomas Parrish, Editor

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Winter 2006

Looking Forward

April 27-30: 19th annual MerleFest, Wilkes Community College, Wilkesboro, N.C. An acoustic jamboree featuring the Doc Watson guitar championship and the Merle Watson bluegrass banjo and mandolin contests, along with numerous other events, in which everybody seems to be at least a superstar; the list of performers includes Pete Seeger, Emmylou Harris, Bela Fleck, John Prine and an array of other notables, including, to be sure, Doc Watson himself. For details, phone 800/343-7857; www.merlefest.org.

May 4-6: 16th annual Boxcar Pinion Memorial Bluegrass Festival, Raccoon Mountain Campground (just off I-24), Chattanooga, Tenn. Since this is a campground, you might want to bring your sleeping bag and get in the spirit of the occasion. Festival musicians will perform all three days from midday to ten or eleven o'clock; the lineup includes Tim Graves and Cherokee, the Country Gentlemen, Cherryholmes, Illrd Tyme Out and other notables; the memorable Dismembered Tennesseans will of course pull themselves together and be on hand. You can get full details from Cindy Pinion at 706/820-2228.

May 12-14: 37th annual Appalachian Festival, Coney Island, Cincinnati, sponsored by the Appalachian Community Development Association. There's a small admission fee: \$7. Along with music, dancing, storytelling and crafts, you'll find a "living history" village. To participate, or just to find out more, call 513/251-3378.

May 20-21: Spring fair, Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen. After more than three decades at Indian Fort Theater near Berea, the fair is now moving permanently, spring and fall, into town and settling down at the Acton Folk Center on West Jefferson St. Some 120 guild members will display their work, which will of course be available for purchase. A highlight again this year will be the Japanese pavilion, featuring several artists from Japan. You can get more information from the guild direct office: 859/986-3192; info@kyguild.org.

May 26-28: Old-Time Fiddlers and Bluegrass Festival, Fiddler's Grove Campground, Union Grove, N.C. Held every year during Memorial Day weekend, the festival, which dates back to the 1920s, is the oldest event of the kind in North America. It's also a colossal affair, bringing together some 80 old-time and bluegrass bands. This year will see the usual competitions, involving more than 50 old-time bands, and in the grand finale, artists will vie for the title "Fiddler of the Festival." If you show up a day early, you'll find jam sessions already going on. Information: 704/539-4417; Website: www.fiddlersgrove.com; fiddlersgrove@yadtel.net.

June 7-10: Appalshop's Seedtime on the Cumberland Festival of Mountain Arts, Whitesburg, Ky., featuring a variety of performing artists (Hazel Dickens, Mike Seeger, Lee Sexton, Zoe Speaks). A special attraction will be the showing of films from the Appalshop archive. Find out more from Appalshop, 306 Madison St., Whitesburg, Ky. 41858; phone, 606/633-0108; www.appalshop.org.

June 11-17: 29th Appalachian Family Folk Week at the Hindman Settlement School. As always, this year's session will be a total immersion in traditional music, dance and other aspects of Appalachian culture, and you can come by yourself or bring the whole family. Jean Ritchie, Lee Sexton, Ron Pen, Ray Slone, Rich Kirby, Don Pedi, Rhonda Rucker, Sparky Rucker, Tom Bledsoe and Deborah Thompson will be among those providing entertainment and enlightenment; the chairmaker Terry Ratliff, broom maker Gerald Allen and basket maker Darvin Messer will pass on their secrets; also, the kids won't want to miss Randy Wilson, the "pied piper of children."

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

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Mine Aftermath

The January tragedies at the Sago and Aracoma mines in West Virginia, together with other mine accidents in Kentucky, have produced much heat, some light and a measure of action.

As one of the results of the January explosions, a new emergency safety rule went into effect on March 9: coal mines must be stocked with spare air masks to protect workers from poisonous gases. An official of the federal Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) observed that, had this and other new requirements been in place in January, as had been proposed in the latter part of the Clinton administration, most of the miners killed in January would have survived. Unfortunately, however, Bush administration officials had rejected the recommendation (along with 17 other proposed safety rules).

In Kentucky, the legislature failed to heed calls for mines to provide tracking equipment for workers. Previously, Bill Caylor, president of the Kentucky Coal Association, had brought up the difficulty of communicating with people a mile underground, shielded by solid rock. His cell phone, he said, doesn't even work in the state capitol annex in Frankfort; governors and legislators therefore must not make false

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June 18-23: Seventh annual Mountain Dulcimer Week, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, N.C. This is the show of which one participant said a couple of years ago: "If you can go to only one mountain dulcimer workshop, this is the one." Those who come to learn have access to more than 25 course instructors—including Dulcimer Week founder Lois Hornbostel, Stephen Seifert, Karen Mueller, Janita Baker, John Huron (who has invented one or two "folk" instruments) and many others, all of whom deal with pretty much everything having to do with dulcimers. High points are the evening concerts. Contact the university at 828/227-7397; Web page: cess.wcu.edu/dulcimer.

June 19-July 28: 25th annual Hindman Settlement School summer tutorial program for "children with learning differences/dyslexia." The program accepts 50-55 students, in recent years including a limited number from outside the school's service area; scholarship assistance is available. See Hindman contact information for June 11-17.

July 7-9: 29th annual Uncle Dave Macon Days Old-Time Music and Dance Festival, Cannonsburgh Pioneer Village, Murfreesboro, Tenn. Picked by the American Bus Association 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—draws more than 45,000 people and offers \$6,500 in prizes; by action of the U.S. House of Representatives it's the home of three national championships—old-time banjo, old-time buckdancing and old-time clogging. There's lots more, too—as the sponsors say, something for everybody in the family, from grandparents to the stroller set (and there's no admission charge). 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 9-August 12: Swannanoa Gathering, a series of week-long workshops (now expanded to five weeks) 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 9-15), proceeds through Celtic music (July 16-22), old-time music and dance (July 23-29), guitar and contemporary folk (July 30-August 5) and fiddle (August 6-12). Also, Eric Garrison will again conduct a performance lab—the kind of thing that educators might term "professional development" (July 23-29). "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 9-August 13: 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 offerings as accordion repair, Celtic design and lettering and gourd banjo construction. There'll also be such standards as blacksmithing and basketry. You may pick your week and pick your pursuit (from the more than 300 possibilities). The summer will be capped by the three-day Augusta Festival (August 11-13), with dancing, family-style festivities and a full-bore concert on Saturday

evening. For full information, write the Augusta Heritage Center, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W.Va. 26241 or phone 304/637-1209; www.augustaheritage.com; e-mail: augusta@augustaheritage.com.

July 14-16: 19th annual Scopes Trial Play and Festival, Dayton, Tenn. This reenactment of the famous 1925 "monkey trial" confrontation between William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow is right up there with today's headlines; the production, 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 20-23: Summer edition of the 59th annual fair, Southern Highland Craft Guild, Asheville Civic Center, Asheville, N.C. (The fall edition will come out October 19-22.) These exhibitions present the best of the work of the organization's 900 members, who offer demonstrations in all media. You can find out more from 828/298-7928; www.southernguild.org.

July 30-August 4: 29th annual Appalachian Writers' Workshop, Hindman Settlement School. You always find the best on tap here, as this year's collection of luminaries proves once again. You can listen to, talk with and learn from such Appalachian figures as Lisa Alther, Crystal Wilkinson, Silas House and George Ella Lyon. To find out more, check the contact information for Hindman, June 11-17.

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promises in their haste to improve the situation. (A point, it would seem, to be investigated and proved, one way or the other; as essentially a public relations practitioner, Caylor, of course, has the job of finding flaws in other people and organizations, not in coal-mine proprietors.)

One striking fact: during the previous year, the MSHA had cited the International Coal Group 165 times for problems at Sago, but none of the fines had exceeded \$1,000; 43 other violations had been noted but not yet assigned an amount. (After the disasters, the MSHA decided that \$100,000 would be appropriate.) Certainly, as the *Appalachian News-Express* (Pikeville, Ky.) put it, the MSHA could start enforcing the laws already on the books, noting that for years companies have been allowed to accrue fines they don't bother to pay. Enough, said the *News-Express*: shut the mines down until they pay up, or simply refuse to issue the scofflaws any more mining permits until they make good. A telling point in this context is the fact that the number of mines referred to the Justice Department for criminal prosecution dropped from 38 in 2000, the last Clinton year, to 12 in 2005.

"If it's your time"

Despite the recent tragedies with their 21 deaths, training classes for beginning miners are staying full across the coalfields. As many observers note, where else in the area can you start at \$15 an hour, with the reasonable expectation of rising quickly to the \$50,000-\$60,000 level? One young man soothed himself with a bit of philosophy: "If it's your time, the good Lord's going to take you anyways." Comparative probabilities did not appear to concern him; certainly they didn't weigh as heavily with him as cash.

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Spring Fair In Berea

Interaction will highlight the Kentucky Guild of Artists & Craftsmen's spring fair at the Acton Folk Center May 20-21.

Potter Bill Whitt will be encouraging children of all ages to give the wheel a try. In addition to Bill, workers in other media will offer demonstrations, with plenty of opportunity to get your hands dirty. The fair's special guests will be members of the Kentucky Storytellers Association.



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Nor, perhaps, was he perturbed by the kind of thinking exemplified in an edict issued last fall by Massey Energy's CEO, Don Blankenship: employees are not to spend time building roof supports and other such structures; their job is to "run coal," because "coal pays the bills."

In any case, governmental and industry responses to the winter's tragedies represent, at very best, a mixed bag, and zeal for change is fading day by day.

On Another Front

In March, following attention drawn to deaths from retreat mining (demolishing of posts as miners withdraw from a mine), a Kentucky state panel recommended changes in this controversial practice (including the development of greater "geologic awareness" on the part of miners themselves) but not its abandonment. In any case, the deadline had passed for the question to receive any legislative consideration in 2006.

Curiously, according to the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, overweight coal trucks kill more people on mountain roads than are killed in the mines underlying the mountains. For a time this winter, this slaughter seemed likely to get worse. With Kentucky law already allowing coal trucks to haul 23 tons more than any other vehicles, a sharp-eyed student of state statutes discovered a loophole whereby trucks with extra axles could carry at least 26,000 additional pounds. "Does this mean they can just keep adding axles?" mused a puzzled state legislator. "It has to be the big coal operators pushing this," said a garage owner, "because surely to goodness we've got smarter people than this down at the statehouse." The ever resourceful Bill Caylor offered an answer to such consternation. Spreading the weight over more axles, he said, reduces damage to roads and adds more braking power. But the complaints carried the day: a public outcry caused the state to plug the loophole.

Seniors Losing Out?

Beginning some decades ago, the word "commodities" became a familiar term in the mountains. But the supply of these monthly boxes of cheese, peanut butter, beef stew and various other, well, commodities may be about to dry up, because the Commodities Supplemental Food Program, to give it its proper name, does not appear in the Bush administration's proposed budget for 2007.

The CSFP, said a White House official, duplicates two other programs, food stamps and WIC (Women, Infants and Children). Not so fast, says the Kentucky Department of Agriculture, which is lobbying to keep the program intact. WIC doesn't even relate to seniors, who are likely to suffer, says agriculture commissioner Richie Farmer, one-time basketball star, if the funding is not restored.

EYE on Publications

Zeb Vance, by Gordon B. McKinney (University of North Carolina Press). Some states were notably fortunate in the political figures with whom they became identified early in their history; Ben Franklin is clearly Mr. Pennsylvania forever, and Kentucky can proudly point to the statue of Henry Clay that graces the national capitol. In many ways, Zebulon Vance has occupied a similar place in the psyche of North Carolina.

A rising mountain politician in the run-up to the Civil War, Vance went off to Washington, where as a congressman he attempted to stand up for the Union and fend off civil war. In the developing crisis he showed considerable imagination in his advocacy of a border-state confederation that would cool off hotheads both North and the South.

When all compromise failed, however, Vance took up the Confederate cause and soon found himself a colonel. Through charisma more than military knowledge or skill,

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he acquired something of a battlefield legend; his fame enabled him to sweep to victory in the gubernatorial election of 1862 and later to win reelection.

As governor during the war, Vance faced problems that can hardly be imagined nowadays. For one thing, a number of the state's eastern counties were occupied by enemy troops. Conscription was a major issue, the agricultural economy was disrupted, imports were choked off. Vance proved to be an activist governor, demonstrating marked concern for the plight of families left behind on the home front with a pioneering welfare system. And as the Confederacy unraveled, Vance made sure that the public knew he had done his best for the cause.

Later, from 1878 until his death in 1894, Vance represented North Carolina in the Senate. Universally acknowledged as the state's representative figure and chief spokesman, he won that status officially in 1916, when his image was placed in statuary hall in the national capitol. A North Carolina congressman said, "None other approaches him."

But the present author does not see this icon quite that way. In a book that combines the scholarship of recent decades with his own thorough research, McKinney presents a revised picture in which Vance's early liberalism fades in the Gilded Age. In particular, in a bluntly pragmatic way, Vance saw soon after the war the unifying possibilities of race as an issue versus the Republicans, and it was the race card that he played. The long-term effect was to pit poor blacks against poor whites—a legacy hardly befitting an icon.

Book Note

For a number of years now, the *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* has been the talk of regional academic (and other) circles.

All the labor (much of it volunteer) put in by its devoted staff has now come to notable fruition: this landmark work is making its debut appearance at the Appalachian Studies Association meeting in Dayton; Jean Haskell and Rudy Abramson are the coeditors. The publisher is the University of Tennessee Press, the price is \$79.95.

More later...

In *Appalachian Heritage*...

From Editor George Brosi: The featured author for the spring issue of *Appalachian Heritage* is Crystal Wilkinson, the author of *Blackberries*, *Blackberries* and *Water Street*. The issue also includes a story by one of her students, Jeff Wallace. Silas House, Nikky Finney and Theresa L. Burris supply commentary on Wilkinson, and George Brosi does the biographical piece. The issue provides reflections not only on the Sago mine disaster by Anna Sale of West Virginia Public Radio but also on the PBS special "Country Boys" by two writers, Tim Skeen and Floyd D. Davis, with strong ties to Floyd County, Kentucky, where the special was filmed. Dexter Collett writes on the "Music of the Mine Wars" and Sidney Saylor Farr provides her usual enjoyable recipes and recollections. A third story is the first print publication by a writer for the TV show, *Smallville*, Holly Harold. Poets are Wendell Berry, Charles Wright, Barbara Wade, Katherine Smith, Lynn Powell, Robert Morgan, Thorpe Moeckel, Jeanne Larson, Jeff Daniel Marion and George Ella Lyon. Book reviewers are Shawn Holliday and Katherine Ledford.

The magazine is enlivened throughout with gorgeous photographs by James Archambeault; his cover shots in full-color are dazzling.

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

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