

NEWS

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LETTER

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

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Roving Correspondent Meets Appalachia/America

On a Friday in the latter part of March, our roving conference-goer set off for Johnson City, Tenn., where East Tennessee State University was playing host to the third annual Appalachian Studies Conference (somewhat confusingly, this is the name given both to the meeting itself and to the organization sponsoring it; cosponsors were the host university and the Appalachian Consortium, Inc.). Our correspondent was armed with a brochure which declared that the theme of the meeting was to be "Appalachia/America"; it expressed the hope that the meeting would "encourage the exploration of Appalachian issues and problems in a national and international context." Notebook in hand, full indeed of hope but with no precise expectations, our correspondent arrived on the campus of ETSU, from which this report was filed. It is presented unedited.

Our first discovery was that in spite of all the academic talk the conference wasn't opening on campus at all. Everybody was downtown, in the darkest bar we've ever stumbled into, listening to a couple of guys tootle away in the background while somebody who, as nearly as we could tell, looked very much like Jim Wayne Miller was declaiming poetry. We heard somebody (probably a Berean) ask naively whether this was a bar. The beer drinkers into whose midst he had blundered assured him that it was.

After this promising beginning, the conference participants—your correspondent included—flowed up the hill to a large concrete object, purportedly a building, called the D.P. Culp University Center. Its mazelike qualities, its starkness, its unpredictable spaces and slopes and hollow places, made it seem more a found object, the creation of natural forces, than something deliberately built by human beings. The heating bill must be catastrophic. We failed to discover who this Culp was and why the university wanted to take revenge on him by naming the place after him.

By dinner time the crowd had really picked up. It looked like maybe 300 people, many of them familiar to anybody who's spent much time in

to page 2

"New River" Nets Weatherford Award

Thomas J. Schoenbaum, an environmental law specialist at the University of North Carolina, received the tenth annual \$500 W.D. Weatherford Award for outstanding writing about Appalachia for his book *The New River Controversy*. The presentation was made at the annual luncheon, held in Berea on May 12.

Also honored at the ceremony was Cratis Williams, the godfather of Appalachian studies, who received a \$200 Special Weatherford Award for the body of his



Thomas J. Schoenbaum speaks at luncheon

writings, including his landmark Ph.D. thesis, *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*. Williams is special assistant to the chancellor of Appalachian State University and former dean of the graduate school and professor of English.

The Weatherford Award is jointly sponsored by Berea College's Appalachian Center and Hutchins Library and is given each year to the writer of the published work that best illuminates the problems, personalities and unique qualities of the Appalachian South. The regular and special prizes are donated by Alfred H. Perrin of Berea in memory of the late W.D. Weatherford, Sr., a pioneer and leading figure for

to page 2

WEATHERFORD AWARDS *from page 1*

many years in Appalachian development, youth work and race relations.

Schoenbaum's book is, as one of the award judges remarked, a "success story," recounting the 14-year battle of residents of the New River valley, joined by the North Carolina state government, against the Appalachian Power Company (a subsidiary of the giant holding company American Electric Power) and the Federal Power Commission to prevent the damming of the New River which, despite its name, is the oldest river on the continent and the second-oldest in the world. Allied with the power company and the Federal Power Commission were the national AFL-CIO and the governors of Virginia and West Virginia, even though the Blue Ridge Project, as the damming enterprise was called, would not only flood thousands of acres of land and displace hundreds of families but would consume four units of power for every three it would produce—the purpose being to provide peak-load power to cities far from the valley. *The New River Controversy* tells the absorbing and complex story of the creation of the conservationist coalition and the tactics it evolved during the long struggle.

In his remarks at the award luncheon, Schoenbaum observed that a key element in the New River victory was the coalition's awareness of the importance of pressing major issues and of avoiding claims that could be readily satirized by opponents. If there were any snail darters in the New River, the conservationists took pains not to mention them in public. Schoenbaum's expert knowledge of the coalition's tactics came from his involvement in the litigation. Indeed, the coalition was not exactly an exclusive alliance of the downtrodden: the friends of the New River included North Carolina Governor James Holshouser, Jr.; Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr.; Rufus Edmisten, also of Watergate fame; and Representative Wilmer ("Vinegar Bend") Mizell, whom baseball fans with long memories will recall as a lefthander with the St. Louis Cardinals.

APPALACHIA | AMERICA *from page 1*

Appalachian activities. As usual, talk with these friends and acquaintances constituted the second of the two meetings going on, the first meeting being, of course, the one that appears in the printed program, with its list of topics and meeting rooms.

The dinner speaker was Darrell McGraw, a West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals justice. We listened with special interest, since we'd been told that he is both a populist and a rising political figure. After his speech, which did indeed have a populist ring to it, someone expressed surprise that anyone having such sentiments had managed to be elected to high office in West Virginia, the implication being that such a feat ought to be impossible in a state that's a wholly owned subsidiary of the great coal companies. However that may be, we got the feeling that the judge makes no secret of his views in West Virginia or anywhere else.

Speaking of speakers, let's skip ahead for the

moment to the Saturday lunchtime session, in which we were regaled with jokes from *Hee-Haw* and other sources by a stand-up comic said to be an ETSU professor named Robert J. Higgs. His subject was the value of punch and pith and mordancy in humor—the humor of the wise fool—as exemplified by the 19th-century fictional character Sut Lovingood, created by George Washington Harris. The point was well taken, though it was somewhat muffled in the readings from Harris because of the archaism and turgidity of his writing. Higgs's 20th-century jokes got a lot more laughs.

The Friday-night entertainment, provided by Appalshop, the media people from Whitesburg, Ky., rates an A- (the minus because the show ran a bit long)—vigorous tale-telling plus two highly professional films, one a quiet portrait of a basketmaker-musician, the other an effective and unsoapbox examination of strip mining. The latter film introduced to the world a new media star, Gene Mooney, former Kentucky commissioner of natural resources, whose comments framed the action. The basketmaker flick was as detailed as a how-to TV program on gardening or cooking. If you'd like to learn how to make your own baskets, rent or buy the film from Appalshop.

On Saturday we were present at a show called *Horsepower: An Electric Fable*, put on by a local troupe called The Road Company. The show, energetically performed, seemed to be concerned with Prometheus and the fates and so on, and how people of the present day are defying the gods with electricity the way Prometheus did with fire. At least, this point was made numerous times; we know, because we sat through both acts. We also heard, in lobby chitchat, that the lighting of this indictment of modern electric man/woman requires a walloping jolt of juice—some 2,000 volts. No further comment, we suppose.

At other times during the weekend, conference-goers could see movies on snake-handling and gandy dancers, and there was also a film, "Controlling Interests," sponsored by the Highlander Research and Educational Center.

The bulk of the time went to concurrent meetings or sessions on all kinds of topics, practical, abstract, organizational, whatnot. Since even your NEWSLETTER correspondent can only go to one meeting at a time, we sought the help of other conference-goers in an attempt to get an overall impression. There's nothing scientific about what we learned, of course, but we cannot conceal from the reader of this truthful account our conclusion that people preferred the meetings in the halls and the dining room to those in the meeting rooms. Okay, you say, that's not surprising; that's the name of the conference game. Perhaps, but we think more may be involved. The organization is called the Appalachian Studies Conference. It has the chance, if it wishes to take it, to operate on a high plane, to explore "Appalachian issues and problems" not only in a "national and international context" but on a



Left: Hutchins Library archivist Gerald Roberts presents Thomas Schoenbaum with the Weatherford Award for 1979. Right: Special Award winner Cratis Williams with Loyal Jones, director of the Appalachian Center; Berea President Willis Weatherford, Jr.; and donor Alfred H. Perrin.

high level, as a genuine intellectual enterprise—one that fires and excites Appalachian scholars. We didn't see much of that.

Part of the problem may be the limited time into which some of the presenters were squeezed; perhaps there were too many competing sessions. But, in any case, we heard more dogmatism than reasoned discussion, and you don't have to go to Johnson City to find dogmatism; it's available anywhere, any time. Of course, it's also true that reasoned discussion is pretty hard to come by anywhere—but if a regional studies conference doesn't encourage it, who will?

ARC — The Next Five Years

Meeting in late May, members of the Appalachian Regional Commission charted the course of commission spending through the 1985 fiscal year—the kind of giant step that is likely to surprise many persons accustomed to seeing government agencies set up and discard priorities from year to year. The commission voted priority funding, in amounts equal to 30 percent of each state's allocation for Appalachian Area Development Programs, to four program areas: reduction of infant mortality; development of basic education skills; energy; and housing. (The information in the immediately preceding sentence came from the ARC, but now that we reread it we're not sure what it means; if it puzzles you, you may obtain further information, and perhaps clarification, from the ARC, 1666 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20235.)

In a separate action the commission approved highway planning allocations for fiscal years 1981-1985. The idea is to enable the states to establish specific priorities for work on the Appalachian development highway system.

The new states' cochairman of the commission is Tennessee Governor Lamar Alexander. He joins federal cochairman Albert P. Smith, Jr., at the head of ARC.

The Sludge Solution

Up at Penn State, a pair of scholars named William Sopper and Sonja Kerr are completing a manuscript that may have the title of the year if not the idea of the year: *Criteria for Revegetation of Mined Land Using Municipal Sludge*. The researchers have been working with that abundant Appalachian laboratory tool, the abandoned strip-mine spoil bank. When they applied sludge to properly treated sites, they report, vegetation practically leaped from the ground.

Sopper and Kerr say their work suggests that municipal sewage sludge can be used to reclaim mine land where commercial fertilizers have failed, and with no observed detrimental effects. Sludge appears to release soil nutrients slower than commercial fertilizers, and one application should last for at least three years. This ultimate bit of recycling also provides an environmentally acceptable way to get rid of municipal sludge.

If you're in a hurry to find out more, you can call Sopper at 814/863-0291. The mailing address is Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa. 16802.

Crafts/Thirteen States

Starting in July an exhibition called Appalachian Crafts/Thirteen States—made up of furniture, sculpture, and other works of art and craft—will begin a two-year tour of the region. Put together by the Appalachian Center for Crafts, near Cookeville, Tenn., the exhibition will travel to any Appalachian community that wants it, from big city to no-stoplight village. The only requirement is that the community pay the cost of shipping the show one way.

If you're interested in obtaining the exhibition, write Barry Geise at the Appalachian Center for Crafts, Tennessee Technological University, Cookeville, Tenn. 38501.

Coming Up

Festivals, fairs and other events bloom all across Appalachia in the summertime. There are far too many for us to list here, but we've selected a few to call to your attention (and we've included one notable non-Appalachian event). The information given includes dates, places and contacts.

July 6-August 9 Heritage Arts Workshop/Augusta Festival, Elkins, W.Va. 26241. Workshops in arts, dance, etc., musical entertainment. Contact Marion Harless, P.O. Box 1725V.

July 10-September 11 Appalachian Folkways (Thursday evenings, 7-8:30), Oak Ridge, Tenn. 37830. Lectures, films, tales, songs. Contact Jim Stokely, Children's Museum.

July 11-13 42nd National Folk Festival, Wolf Trap Farm Park, Vienna, Va. America's oldest multicultural festival. Contact NCTA, #1118, 1346 Connecticut Ave., Washington, D.C. 20036.

July 15-19 Annual Guild Fair, Asheville, N.C. 28805. Crafts demonstrations and exhibits, entertainment. Contact James Gentry, P.O. Box 9545.

August 3-9 Appalachian Writers Workshop, Hindman, Ky. 41822. The staff includes leading mountain writers. Contact Hindman Settlement School.

August 7-9 Annual Mountain Dance and Folk Festival, Asheville, N.C. 28803. The event founded by Bascom Lamar Lunsford. Contact Mrs. Jackie Ward, P.O. Box 1011.

August 8-9 Tennessee Mountain Bluegrass Festival, Church Hill, Tenn. (near Kingsport). Contact Lance LeRoy, Box 22225, Nashville, Tenn. 37202.

August 15-17 McLain Family Band Festival, Berea, Ky. 40404. Bluegrass plus. Contact Raymond McLain, College Box 1322.

August 22-24 Appalachian Arts & Crafts Festival, Beckley, W.Va. 25801. Contact Robert L. McKeand, P.O. Box 1798.

August 30-September 1 Virginia Mountain Crafts Guild Fair, Claytor State Park, Dublin, Va. Contact Dorothy Mahoney, 777 Paragon Ave., Salem, Va. 24153.

September 26-28 Fifth Fall Mountain Heritage Arts & Crafts Festival, Charles Town, W.Va. 25414. A big event. Contact George E. Vickers, P.O. Box 430.

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A QUICK REMINDER: The conference on private efforts in Appalachia for the 1980s, sponsored by the Appalachian Fund and Berea College (see CENTER NEWSLETTER, Winter 1980), is being held on the Berea campus June 26-27. The keynote speaker is Dr. Harvey Sloane, president of the Kentucky Rural Housing and Development Foundation and former mayor of Louisville.

EYE on Publications

In this issue we depart from our usual practice to call your attention to publications produced by the National Rural Center, whose address is 1828 L Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036.

The center publishes three free newsletters, each of which appears four to six times a year. *Rural Community Development* is concerned with general principles and facts; *Rural Public Transportation* and *Rural Health Newsletter* are technical publications written for specialized audiences.

A look at some NRC books:

The Rural Stake in Public Assistance: Information and Analysis to Guide Public Policy (\$5). A 166-page soft-cover publication that defines the rural poor, compares public-assistance programs in rural and urban areas, and analyzes the significance of public-assistance programs to rural people.

A Directory of Rural Organizations (free). A 57-page soft-cover listing, including a short description of each group and mention of the special interests of each.

Private Funding for Rural Programs, by Barbara Stephens (free). A 64-page soft-cover book including profiles of foundations and other private sources of funds.

A Beginning Assessment of the Justice System in Rural Areas, edited by Shanler D. Cronk (\$5). A joint production of the NRC and the American Bar Association, this 140-page soft-cover report, published in 1977, is the write-up of the Conference on Justice and Legal Assistance in Rural America. The concern: How well does the system of justice serve people in rural areas?