

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

LETTER



Loyal Jones – Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

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Looking Forward

July 9-15: Appalachian family week, Pine Mountain Settlement School, Bledsoe, Ky. 40810. The program includes topics like early settlers in Kentucky, coal and mining, and medicinal plants, together with workshops on spinning, weaving and the like.

July 9-August 3: Augusta Heritage workshops, Davis & Elkins College, Elkins, W. Va. 26241 (304/636-1903). More than 1500 people are expected for these classes, which not only pass along West Virginia's traditions but find room for those of such distant spots as Ireland and Cajun Louisiana.

July 10-14: "Art for kids" week, Hindman Settlement School, Hindman, Ky. 41822.

July 9-15, 16-22, and 23-29: Summer craft weeks, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902. From blacksmithing to woodcarving, flight theory to weaving, with even a bit of architectural mold-making.

July 22-29: Folk music week, Pinewoods Camp, Plymouth, Mass.; British and American vocal and instrumental music. Further information from Country Dance & Song Society, 17 New South St., Northampton, Mass. 01060.

July 22-30: Quadrille workshop, with dancers and musicians from Czechoslovakia; Berea, Ky. Contact Berea College Recreation Extension, College Box 287, Berea, Ky. 40404.

July 30-August 5: 12th annual Appalachian writers' workshop, Hindman Settlement School, Hindman, Ky. 41822. George Ella Lyon, Jo Carson, Pinckney Benedict—well, practically everybody you've ever heard of will be on hand; the list, of course, includes Jim Wayne Miller, who will preside over a seminar in Appalachian literature. James Still will be around too.

July 30-August 5, August 6-12, 20-26, and August 26-September 1: August sessions, John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, N.C. 28902.

August 5-12: Family week, Pinewoods Camp, Plymouth, Mass. (see July 22-29 for contact).

August 6-13: How do chorea polonica, kujawiak, mazur and mazurka and polka-mazurka sound? You can learn these and other dances at Berea's Acton Folk Center; contact Recreation Extension, College Box 287, Berea, Ky. 40404.

October 5-7: Housing Now! Washington rally and march for affordable housing. Information from Paul Winther, 606/268-6012.

October 27-29: Berea College Celebration of Tradi-

tional Music. Information from Loyal Jones, College Box 2336, Berea, Ky. 40404.

Lee Smith, Alfred Perrin Win Weatherford Honors

One day at a yard sale in Greensboro, N.C., novelist Lee Smith saw an item she simply had to buy. "This family was selling a big old box of a whole life's work of letters from one sister to another," she says. Horrified that nobody in the family wanted the collection, she bought the letters for



Lee Smith: "I just cried and cried . . ."

75 cents, "read them all the next weekend and just cried and cried and cried." On finishing, "I felt like I had known both of those women."

The letters gave her the idea for her 1988 novel called *Fair and Tender Ladies*, written in the form of letters produced over a lifetime by a woman in Appalachian Virginia (see EYE On Publications elsewhere in this issue). In turn, the novel has earned for Ms. Smith the 19th annual W. D. Weatherford Award for outstanding writing about Appalachia. The \$500 prize was presented at a luncheon held in Berea on May 23.

A highlight of the ceremony was the honoring of Alfred
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Fresh Start for Kentucky?

In 1971 the Supreme Court of California declared the state's system of financing public schools unconstitutional. State officials were ordered to redistribute money to strengthen poorer school districts. A few years later the famous Proposition 13 cut property taxes in California but also made them uniform across the state. Thus this tax revolt helped assure equal educational funding throughout California, partly because it meant that if the schools were to maintain any respectability at all, a higher percentage of their funds must come directly from Sacramento. After various legislative battles, the state now finds itself with 95 percent of its school districts receiving funding that varies less than \$200 per pupil annually—and the state's Supreme Court declares itself satisfied that its 1971 mandate has been carried out.

State courts have also ruled against school-funding systems in seven other states, including West Virginia. Here the results have been somewhat different from those in California. Although a West Virginia judge found in 1982 that the state did not offer a "thorough and efficient" education system ("efficient" was a popular word with 19th-century constitution drafters), the state's weak economy and the public's hostility toward higher taxes have combined to keep much progress from taking place in response to the court's decision. When judges ruled that property taxes must be based on full market value, revolution threatened. Subsequent reappraisals have never been put into effect. As one judge pointed out, the courts can make decisions but they cannot raise money. Only legislatures can do that.

Entire System "Inefficient"

Agreeing with a lower court ruling that Kentucky's system of funding public education is not "efficient," that state's Supreme Court has just given the legislature the kind of challenge faced earlier by California and West Virginia. In fact, the Kentucky judges went further, declaring not only the funding system but the entire educational apparatus unconstitutional. Hence, at least in theory, the state can start all over and build a new school system from the ground up.

We have to recognize, says Thomas D. Clark, dean of Kentucky historians and professor emeritus of history at the University of Kentucky, that "education has seldom, if ever, been a major priority in Kentucky." In a rural state, politicians could get away with neglecting the constitutional mandate because citizens have always been "niggardly in their willingness to finance an efficient and effective school system."

Now, as state Superintendent of Public Instruction John Brock puts it, everything is open to question—school buildings, methods of certification of teachers, school-district boundaries, the existence of the districts them-

selves, school-bus routes, the functions of school boards, the structure of the state Department of Education. The legislature has inherited a large, rambling house, haphazardly added to over the years. Now, Brock says, the lawmakers have the opportunity to hire an architect and begin again, with a plan for the entire structure.

How is the legislature (and, of course, the governor and other officials) likely to meet the Supreme Court's challenge? The Kentucky suit was brought by 66 of the poorer districts (about half of them Appalachian), represented by former Governor Bert T. Combs, himself of Eastern Kentucky origin. Asked how he thinks state officials will respond, Combs says that while there are no guarantees, "most of the signs point to a willingness by the leadership of the state to work in good faith to carry out the mandate of the court." What is especially important, says Larry Forgy, a prominent advocate of improved education, is that "for the first time a court has said that the responsibility for an efficient system of education in this state rests in one place—138 members of the General Assembly"—not, in other words, dispersed among 177 school districts, 120 fiscal courts, and 138 individual legislators.

Tax Demagoguery

As in West Virginia and other states, of course, the legislature will find its real problems arising not so much from the clash of educational theories as from its attempts to raise the needed cash. But, at least, the governor and other officeholders can point to the Supreme Court mandate as they extricate themselves from the "no higher taxes" hook on which they had hung themselves. As Forgy observes, demagoguery about taxes has in the past haunted the careers of governors like Combs himself (who instituted a 3 percent sales tax and never recovered from the political damage it inflicted) and Louie Nunn (a later governor who saw the tax raised to 5 percent and never won another election).

The legislature has already studied every imaginable educational issue, says one observer. Now it must muster the political will to act. "Once in a great while," Combs observes, "people will rise above political intrigue and envy and selfish advancement."

Is this such a time? Perhaps. But you can imagine some of the mountain superintendents looking on with horror if the legislature starts its rebuilding at the level of school boards. Thanks to the eternal popularity of the methods by which the world acquires babies that grow up to be pupils, the school system in many a county constitutes the continuing chief industry, with the superintendent and his board exercising absolute control. Might not some of these officials need a little help in rising above "selfish advancement"?

Wild, Wild River

For some years now, we have followed with great interest the annual symposia on the New River conducted by the National Park Service and a variety of other public institutions. Experts in all sorts of disciplines—not only geography and biology but archaeology, folklore and other

scholarly pursuits—come together to discuss their studies of this unique, northward-rushing, primitive stream.

But the New River's foaming waters draw the attention of other people besides academics; bold vacationers seek whitewater thrills riding its turbulent currents. But even with these holidayers, we have just learned, science can play an important role. If it is deemed necessary, this



WEATHERFORD CELEBRATORS: Clustered around award founder Alfred Perrin (front) are (from l.) Tom Parrish (judge), prizewinner Lee Smith, Wilma Dykeman (judge), Appalachian Center director Loyal Jones, and Appalachian writer and previous Weatherford honoree James Still.

LEE SMITH *from page 1*

H. Perrin of Berea for his contributions to Appalachian writing. Perrin founded the Weatherford Award to give annual recognition to the writer (or writers) of the published work of any length that best illuminates the problems, personalities and unique qualities of the Appalachian South. Through the years the award has achieved general recognition as the mark of excellence in Appalachian thought and writing. One previous recipient wrote that his receiving the award was the high point of his life. A collection of letters from recipients was presented to Perrin.

Now administered by Berea College, and jointly sponsored by the Appalachian Center and the Hutchins Library, the award honors the memory of W. D. Weatherford, Sr., a pioneer and leading figure for many years in Appalachian

development, youth work and race relations.

The list of winning works in recent years includes *Sometimes a Shining Moment*, by Eliot Wigginton; *Last One Home*, by John Ehle; *Generations*, by John Egerton; *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers*, by Ron Eller; and last year's double winners, *Storming Heaven*, by Denise Giardina, and *Apples on the Flood*, by Rodger Cunningham.

Judges for the Weatherford Award competition are James S. Brown, emeritus University of Kentucky professor of sociology; Wilma Dykeman, author, lecturer and teacher of Appalachian literature; Thomas Parrish, writer and editor; John B. Stephenson, president of Berea College; Willis D. Weatherford, Jr., president emeritus of Berea College; and Shirley Williams, staff writer, Louisville *Courier-Journal*.

WILD *from page 2*

ancient, primitive, wild river can now be tamed, slowed down, made kinder and gentler—as it was recently for Vice President Dan Quayle, who arrived for a raft trip.

In the future, we hope, discussion of such hydraulic wonders will find a place on the always-interesting agenda of the New River symposia. Not designed for the intellectually faint-hearted, these discussions seem able to deal with anything.

at a conference on the rhetoric of the contemporary South, Lynwood Montell and the late Cratis Williams suggested to Howard Dorgan, who teaches “communication arts” at Appalachian State, that the Southern Appalachian preacher constituted a subject ripe for serious study. Agreeing, Dorgan set out, modestly enough, to look at the rhetorical practices of preachers in various denominations, but he quickly became fascinated by other aspects of the churches. Although claiming to be nothing more than a “nosy but respectful” observer writing a descriptive account, Dorgan has in fact ended up by producing a book well grounded in the history and theology of the churches he studied.

Of the 16 to 24 different Baptist groups said to exist in this country, the author chose to study six, which he calls subdenominations: Primitive Baptists, who have main-
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EYE on Publications

Giving Glory to God in Appalachia: Worship Practices of Six Baptist Subdenominations, by Howard Dorgan (University of Tennessee Press). In conversation one day

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tained their belief in absolute predestination and unconditional election and otherwise have stayed closest to Calvin; Old Regular Baptists, who are similar but, though believing in election by grace, reject particular election; Regular Baptists, who likewise believe in election by grace but are more evangelical, with a more contemporary flavor, than Old Regulars; Union Baptists, formed in the aftermath of the Civil War by pro-Unionists in North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia; Free Will Baptists, who trace their Southern origin to 1727 and who believe in universal atonement; and Missionary Baptists, mostly small independent fellowships who, like the Free Will Baptists, reject the doctrine of election and believe that all who seek the Lord may be saved.

Dorgan describes these mountain Christians with respect and appreciation; for example, he says of their preachers: "By several standards these mountain Baptist preachers are rather humble folk. As their spheres of influence and power are relatively small, they could easily be passed over as inconsequential in terms of the larger workings of the world. They believe passionately, however, in the importance of what they are doing. They tend to be the opinion leaders in their fellowships, and they often figure prominently in the broader sociopolitical structures of mountain communities as secular leaders, as arbiters of disputes, and as judges of ethics and morality."

Stories I Ain't Told Nobody Yet, by Jo Carson (Orchard Books—Franklin Watts, Inc.). An actress and writer who has been a commentator on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered," Jo Carson has for several years used the poems in this book in performances. These monologues and dialogues are pithy vernacular comments about mountain neighbors and kin, relationships, work and "what we say about ourselves"—all distilled from conversations overheard by the author, who is a dedicated eavesdropper.

One of Ms. Carson's aunts used to warn friends: "Be careful what you say; she writes things down." The result of the writing and distilling is a book with a tone and flavor like this: "My daughter got divorced/ and she and her little boy/ has moved back in with me. . . / And everything she

goes to do/ she's got a book./ Gonna cook something, she looks up in the book. . . / Then Chip put a towel down the flush commode./ and she read *The Reader's Digest Fix-it Book*/ while the damn thing flooded up the bathroom./ 'Not everything's got a book written about it,' I told her./ 'I know that, Mama, there wasn't a book written about my marriage./ I might not be here if there had a' been.'/ Now what am I supposed to say to that?"

Fair and Tender Ladies, by Lee Smith (Putnam). If, as a southern writer, you're compared to figures like Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor, you're not doing badly at all. Such a comparison was made on Lee Smith's behalf by *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* critic Alan Chuse, who credited Smith with creating "a Southland full of visionaries and dreamers whose illusions tell us enough about reality to drive us to laughter and tears."

Publishers Weekly calls *Fair and Tender Ladies*, which is Smith's sixth novel, her best work, one cast "in the old tradition of oral storytelling." Since the book comes with such praise, no one can be surprised that it has won the 19th annual W. D. Weatherford Award for outstanding writing about Appalachia—for this is not simply a southern book, it is a thoroughly mountain story, the epistolary chronicle of one Virginia Appalachian woman's life.

From the time she is a little girl, Ivy Rowe writes to *everybody*—her grandfather, a philanthropic Northern lady, a foreign pen pal, her father, a long-dead sister—*everybody!* She is intelligent, open, spontaneous, drawing on all her resources to face the variety of problems that confront her during the first three-quarters of the 20th century.

You can "feel Ivy Rowe's voice and hands wrap around your heart," says Clyde Edgerton, "and stay there long after you've read the last page."

Health in Appalachia (University of Kentucky Appalachian Center, 641 S. Limestone St., Lexington, Ky. 40506). This book is made up of selected presentations from the 1988 University of Kentucky conference having the same title. Its 20 papers (and 12 summaries) "constitute a broad theoretical and practical overview of the status of health in Appalachia." The price is \$14.00 plus \$2.00 for postage and handling.

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