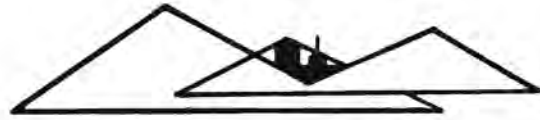


NEWS

LETTER



APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE

Loyal Jones • Thomas Parrish, Co-Editors

Vol. 5 No. 4 Fall 1976

Conferences Live Again

The CENTER NEWSLETTER's conference-goer has been at it again. In the Spring issue he reported on a snazzy affair held at Appalachian State University in honor of the celebrated Dr. Cratis Williams. On May 27 he went to Nashville for a quite different - - and perhaps even higher-powered - - gathering, and he returned with the following report, which, a bit belatedly, we pass on to you.

Conferences are coming back into style, perhaps as a result of alienation and of the failure of public policy, or maybe the lack of it. Two years ago the conferences we attended were downright dull and the speakers (if there were any) seemed to lack both style and conviction; their inspiration wattage was dismally low. But something has happened. We first noted it at the symposium for Cratis Williams, which was actually both enlightening and inspirational. Then we went to Nashville, to a regional conference on the humanities and public policy, called sweepingly, "The Peoples of the South: Heritages and Futures."

At this meeting representatives from nine southern states, as well as observers, debated issues and policies in such areas as justice, work, politics, education, land use, urbanization and health. Speakers and participants included Alexander Heard, chancellor of Vanderbilt University; Samuel DuBois Cook, president of Dillard University; Wilma Dykeman, Appalachian writer; Moon Landrieu, mayor of New Orleans; Brooks Hays, former Arkansas congressman, TVA director and assistant secretary of state; HEW Secretary David Mathews; Albert Gore, former senator from Tennessee; Frank Smith, former congressman and TVA director; and former Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, of whom one delegate observed, "I kept trying to reconcile that charismatic, intelligent, insightful, courteous man with the narrow demagogue I remembered from his days as governor of Arkansas." Most of the delegates were humanities professors, businessmen involved in public affairs, state and regional officials and writers.

It is common knowledge that southerners operate in personal ways, that they lace their talk with anecdotes

and references to spiritual matters, that they love to be inspired by rolling rhetoric. Delegates to this conference were satisfied on all points. Though Brooks Hays quoted Walter Hines Page to the effect that "next to fried foods, the South has suffered most from oratory," he went on to charm the audience with some of his choicest stories and ended up receiving a standing ovation for his evangelical call for a better life for all people. Wilma Dykeman spoke of the particular problems of mountain southerners in a region that does not recognize them as different from other southerners. Samuel DuBois Cook talked about education that would "illuminate the fundamental issues of human life . . . affect values and commitments . . . bring insight and sensitivity."

Most of what was said was similar to what one presidential candidate has put forward in less orotund style and for which he has been called sanctimonious, fuzzy and probably phony. But in Nashville the humanists responded, black and white, young and old, to visions of a future with freedom, justice, opportunity and dignity. Perhaps there is a discarding of cynicism and negativism, and a burgeoning of hope. Perhaps people really are waiting to be challenged, are looking for leadership and are seeking opportunities for positive action.

Anyway, this was the feeling in Nashville. The conference was planned by the humanities committees of the participating states and paid for by the National Endowment for the Humanities, and we'd say the money was very well spent. If you're interested in reports of the work of the various groups at the conference, you can write Jane Crater, Tennessee Committee for the Humanities, 2002 Richard Jones Road, Suite 303B, Nashville, Tenn. 37215.

Stories Wanted

In the preceding article, mention is made of the fondness of southerners for anecdotes. Mountain people, certainly, have a way of making points in conversation or argument by the use of stories - - and this brings up an idea we have here at the Appalachian Center. We'd like to begin putting together a collection of Appalachian stories and anecdotes while there is still time - - while the people who know the

stories and use them are still around to pass them on. It is not only language that tends to grow more homogeneous across the United States, it is conversational style too. But we haven't reached uniform blandness yet, and here is your chance to prove it. The following story is given as an example (and only as an example, not a model) of the kind of thing we mean. It was used by a speaker to illustrate what you might call a cultural gap.

There was this missionary who came to the mountains and went around asking people about the state of their souls. Way up a hollow he saw an old man sitting on his front porch.

"Brother, are you lost?" asked the missionary.

"Why, no," said the old man, "I've lived here 40 years."

"Well, now, what I mean is, Are you a member of the Christian Band?"

"No, but you can find Bill Christian about a mile on up the creek."

"That's not what I mean, brother. I mean, Have you found Jesus?"

"Why, I didn't know He was lost." The old man pointed upward. "The Bible says He's up yonder till he comes again."

"What I really mean, brother, is, Are you ready for the judgment day?"

"When is it?"

"Why, it might be tomorrow or it might be next month sometime."

"Well, sir, when you find out you let me know, will you? The old woman may want to go both days."

If you have a favorite point-making anecdote, write it down and send it to us. We'd rather hear them in person, of course, but since that isn't possible, we'll cheerfully settle for second best. And if you live in the Berea area, or happen to be here at any time, just drop in and let us put your tale on tape.

Festivals, etc.

The festival season has just about run its course for 1976, but the calendar shows two coming events of interest.

November 6 Meeting of the Virginia Folklore Society at Charlottesville. You can get information from Charles L. Perdue, Jr., Room 115, Wilson Hall, University of Virginia, Charlottesville 22903.

December 26 - January 1 Christmas Country Dance School, Berea College. This nationally known cultural event is back for the 39th installment. It is directed by John M. Ramsay, CPO Box 287, Berea, Ky. 40404.

By the time you read these pages, the 1976 Berea College Celebration of Traditional Music will probably have sounded its final note (it's scheduled for October 28-31). The program calls for an array of stars matching the performers of previous seasons, with many favorite musicians returning.

Special Announcement

If you missed the festival, however (or even if you didn't, for that matter), there's good news for you. The

Berea College Appalachian Center now has available a record of highlights from last year's traditional music celebration. It's available by mail; the price is \$4.00. Just write to the address on the outside of the NEWSLETTER.

EYE on Publications

The Watches of the Night, by Harry M. Caudill (Atlantic-Little, Brown). Hardly anyone who reads this NEWSLETTER will need to be told that Harry Caudill came to public attention in the early 1960s as the author of *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* (1963), a vivid, controversial, indispensable book that was one of the principal shapers of national attitudes toward Appalachia. Caudill's Appalachia was Eastern Kentucky, coal country, and his essential story was a chronicle of destruction brought about by greed.

Now, 13 years later, Caudill takes a fresh look at the Cumberlands. The period between the two books has been, he says, a "hectic, tumultuous, truly American era in which the good and the ill have run neck and neck." There have been a War on Poverty, an Appalachian Regional Commission with its highway building and other activities, a frantic coal boom, a war, upheaval and change of all kinds.

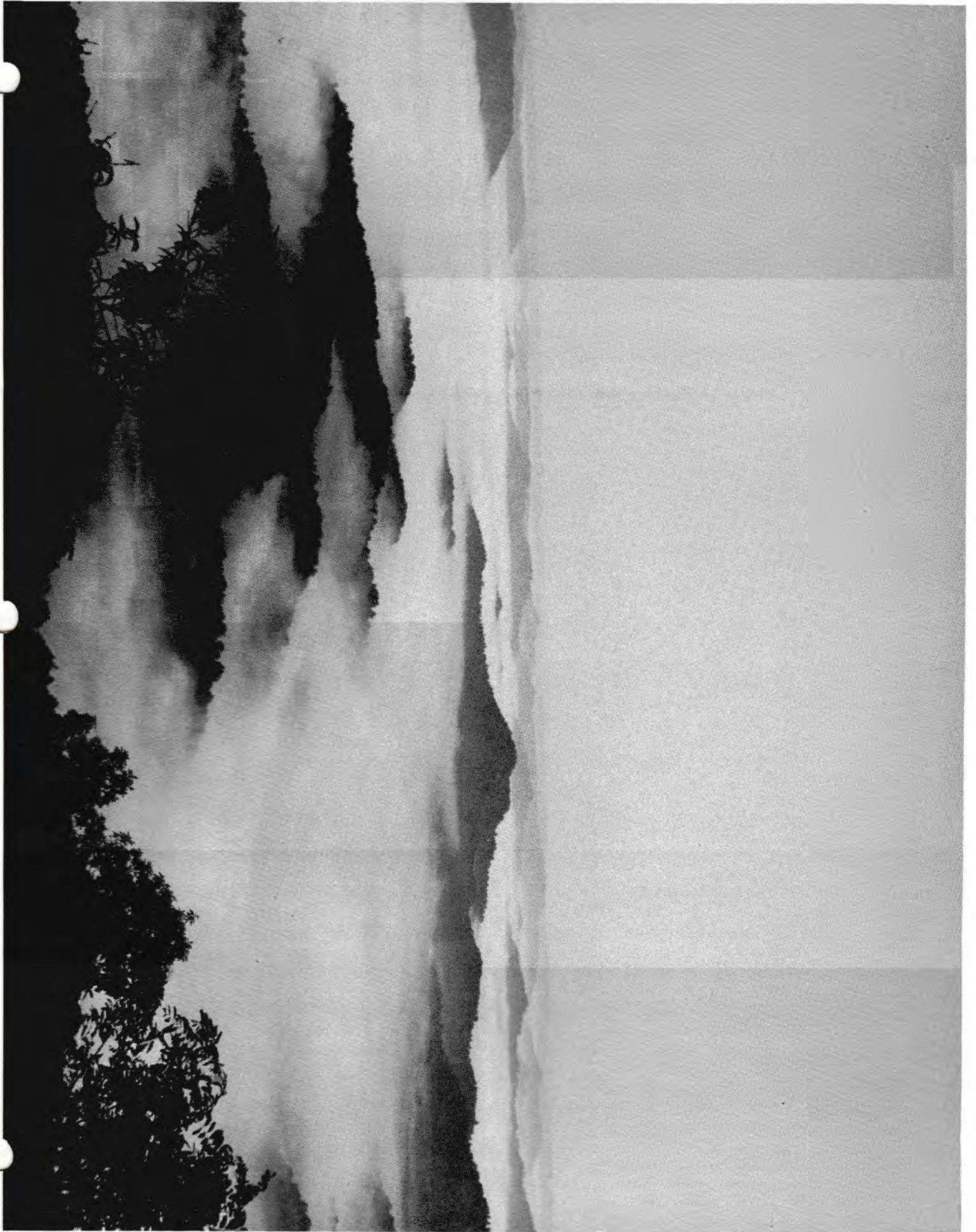
But coal is still the villain - - coal and those who lust after it. The longest by far of the six chapters of this new book is called "The Mad Reign of King Coal," and a marvelous jeremiad it is. Caudill spares no one - - the corporations, the union, governors and other malefactors, the Corps of Engineers, ordinary people. Everybody involved with coal is tainted, ipso facto. As one reads the pages of this polemic, one recalls that the author is a lawyer who has served as a prosecuting attorney, and one realizes how good at it - - and how entertaining at the same time - - he must be.

The story itself of course is somber. "The indifference to human suffering that prevails throughout the Appalachian mining industry is inexplicable," Caudill says, pointing to the casualty rates, which are much higher than those in Europe. But, as regards death and injury, coal operators have had a simple creed: "Whatever aided the extraction and profitable sale of the black mineral was esteemed; anything or anybody that hindered that process or was irrelevant to it was scorned." Anyone who has ever dodged coal trucks thundering down a torn-up road will attest to the pervasiveness of that attitude.

Speaking of coal's "chosen few," Caudill says by way of summing up their wrongdoing: "That they operated unsafe mines and burdened the countryside with cripples and orphans; that they stringently opposed equitable tax levies so that schools were hotbeds of illiteracy and incompetence; that they scarred the hills,

to page 4

OPPOSITE: In this spectacular photo you are looking from the top of Pine Mountain in Harlan County, Kentucky. The picture is the work of Dean Cadle, a writer and photographer who is a native of Middlesboro, Ky. He is librarian at the D. Hiden Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville.



EYE on Publications from page 2

polluted the streams, and reduced the land to ghastliness; that they held their employees to the lowest attainable wages while spending ostentatiously on cars and expanding girths; that these practices pursued as industrial policies had produced the conditions they deplored (i.e., unemployment, illiteracy, etc.) never glimmered even dimly into their brains."

Unfortunately, the author is doubtful that things are getting better, though the passage of a severance tax act by the Kentucky legislature has given him hope for the future. "Politicians," he observes, "love to win at the polls even more than to get rich."

He ends with an apocalyptic picture of a possible future - - a near and not remote future - - in which western Americans, having reduced their own region to a new Sahara, come back across the Mississippi to take up life in an Appalachia whose future they will hold in their hands. Appalachia could become a Switzerland but may well degenerate into an Albania instead.

There is more, much more. Even if you don't completely buy Caudill's analysis of the present or his vision of the future, you ought to read this book. Because 1976 is not 1963, it may not be taken up and talked about as *Night Comes to the Cumberlands* was. But it shouldn't be missed.

The Corrupt Kingdom, by Joseph E. Finley (Simon and Schuster). A labor lawyer's look into the history of the United Mine Workers, the monarchy built by John L. Lewis. The author is counsel to two AFL-CIO unions.

Blaming the Victim, by William Ryan (Vintage - - Random House). A reissue, with a new introduction, of the 1971 study by an activist-psychologist exploring "how and why we prefer to put the blame for poverty on its victims rather than on the inequalities of American society." Ryan, who teaches at Boston College, directs heavy fire on the kind of thinking that he sees as leading to a "terrifying sameness" in antipoverty programs.

Appalachian Ways, edited by Jill Durrance and William Shamblin (Appalachian Regional Commission). A "guidebook" to the mountains, published with the idea of making it "possible for a tourist to travel the length of Appalachia, sampling its traditions - - the music, crafts, festivals, theater, dance, food and speech." The book is mostly a series of short illustrated sketches of people, places and things to see. It's handsomely done.

Appalachian Valley, by George L. Hicks (Holt, Rinehart and Winston). This little book, one of a series of anthropological case studies, is, as the author says, "about people in one small part of Southern Appala-

chia: the Little Laurel River Valley in western North Carolina." Hicks lived in the area in 1965-67, and originally had to overcome the local rumor that he was an "FBI man," a term of special opprobrium. What he discovered overall was that neither the favorable clichés (e.g., "Mountain people are the last of the rugged individualists") nor the unfavorable ones ("fatalistic resignation," etc.) really describe life in this part of the United States.

Crafts and Craftsmen of the Tennessee Mountains, by Helen Bullard (Summit Press). This roundup of craftsmen and their activities is written by a long-time member of the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild. Her aim, she says, has been to follow in the path of Allen Eaton, who in 1937 produced the definitive *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, and her book brings the East Tennessee part of the story up to date.

The McCoy's: Their Story as Told to the Author by Eye Witnesses and Descendants, by Truda Williams McCoy; edited by Leonard Roberts (Preservation Council Press). The author, a McCoy both by birth and by marriage, spent 15 years in the 1920s and 1930s looking into the celebrated feud and writing it up, but her work is just now seeing publication for the first time, two years after her death. Many of the details, such as the "inside" story of Roseanna McCoy and Johnse Hatfield, are said to have previously been unreported. The book includes many photos never before published, and for real scholars of the subject it has a 3,000-name McCoy genealogy.

Record

The Hatfields and the McCoy's: The Great Vendetta, by Jimmy Wolford. The feud is also appearing as a kind of history in music. Wolford and two associates, Bob Stanley and Larry Johnson, have set the whole story to song, and a vivid tale it is. The record may be ordered from Wolf Productions, Inc., P. O. Box 1233, Williamson, W.Va. 25661; the price is \$6.25.

Book Note

After six years of labor, the Appalachian Consortium has brought forth its weighty (three-pound) *Bibliography of Southern Appalachia*, which is being copublished by the University of Tennessee Press. Three hundred persons worked on the book, which was produced under the general editorship of Charlotte T. Ross. It goes on general sale in late November at a price of \$72.50. You can get full particulars from the Appalachian Consortium Press, 407 East Howard St., Boone, N.C. 28607.

(If you have a problem in obtaining any item mentioned in EYE on Publications, write to the Council of Southern Mountains Bookstore, CPO Box 2307, Berea, Ky. 40403. They will be happy to supply it.)

Published by
Appalachian Center/Berea College
C.P.O. Box 2336
Berea, Kentucky 40404

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Berea, Ky. 40404
Permit No. 19