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Appalink

Appalachian Studies Association

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P R E S I D E N T ' S M E S S A G E

"Shared Community -- Shared Wealth"

By Rebecca Hancock

Having just returned on June 13 with the Appalkids and their co-advisor, Theresa Wheeling, from the Hindman Settlement School's Family Folk Week, I was thoroughly chagrined when John Inscoe called to diplomatically ask: "Becky, do you have a message for me?" Once I realized what message he meant and that it had been promised to him by June 1, I began my assurances that he would have it in two days, all the while my mind racing and my stomach churning in anticipation of the topic of this first message to the Association membership. Yet when I sat down to brainstorm ideas, I didn't have to think too long to settle on what I wanted to say. One idea had been floating around in my head since the conference in Asheville and, after a week of immersion in music, folk arts, and conversation at Hindman, it quickly resurfaced--the concept of shared community.

The Association's statement of belief and goals that appears on the first page of each conference program speaks to this idea: "...shared community has been and will continue to be important to those writing, researching, and teaching about Appalachia," with the conference itself having "several purposes: to share work in progress, to foster cooperation between disciplines, and to stimulate new work of significance." I applaud these goals, but I do have a concern. It lies in the exclusion of another verb from the series "writing, researching, and teaching." That verb, which I believe to be the essence of any shared experience, is "learning," for how can successful sharing take place without some measure of learning as a result, and how can learning take place if such an omission should become manifest in a way that may discourage the participation of those who aren't "writing, researching, and teaching" about the region?

Though I am a native of Appalachia, my initial involvement in studies of the region came about only in 1984, when I attended and co-presented at the Berea conference with my then-instructor Grace Toney Edwards. My experience isn't unique, for I am only one of hundreds who, after having

studied with this master teacher, received the call to spread the news about the region. But I am as certain as this summer's rain that my writing this message as president of the ASA is a direct result of her influence and of the influence of the shared communities with which I have been involved since that first Berea conference nearly 10 years ago.

Some of these communities have been sharing experiences in name only, while others have been successful in varying degrees at achieving the idealistic goal of bringing together like minds in meetings of the intellect and the creative spirit. Yet, after returning from a fourth visit to Family Folk Week, I realize that this event--this was its fifteenth year also--comes as close as any endeavor I have encountered to actually achieving this concept of shared community.

On paper, anything can sound good if the write knows the latest educational or grant-inspired jargon; but it is another matter to implement the plans for sharing, and it is yet another and most critical matter to bring about the closure of any organized episode of shared community on a note of both individual and group success.

What then are the components of this success? I believe that one vital factor lies in the ability of the leadership to provide an atmosphere in which community members feel comfortable in coming together--no matter their occupations, their levels of talent, their educational backgrounds, their fields of interest, or their ages--to share not only what they do best, but also to learn more about those areas in which they have less experience or knowledge.

A second factor in a successful shared community lies in the opportunities for self-expression. For many, this expression may be achieved by plenary meetings, round table discussions, or research, study, and publication; while for others it may lie in creative writing, poetry readings, or photo and film exhibits. On the other hand, many achieve self-expression through such forms as music, dance, and folk art. Whatever the means, the opportunities for self-expression are vital to any community, but it is the atmosphere, as typified by the Hindman experience, that in my experience encourages the ultimate in sharing.

A third factor vital to a meaningful shared community, as well as to any other significant endeavor, is the degree of commitment on the part of each member of the community. Members must continually strive for the betterment of the community and should often ask themselves such self-examining questions as: Are we growing? Are we changing? Are we pleased with what we've become?

As I close this message, my thoughts return to the beliefs and goals set down in 1977 by a wise group of scholars, teachers, and regional activists who believed strongly in a shared community sustained by cooperative endeavors. The Association owes them its gratitude for their vision; may each of us continue its repayment with a renewed commitment to sharing the wealth of the community of Appalachia.

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THE ASA'S FOUNDERS:

LOYAL JONES AND RICHARD DRAKE SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In anticipation of celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of our association at the conference in Asheville this past March, the last issue of Appalink (Winter 1992) carried an overview of its history that included a list of former association presidents. Loyal Jones takes issue with the his designation as the "chairman" of the initial steering committee, and has provided the following letter to the editor to correct that misconception. To shed further light on our origins and for the interest of current members, Loyal's letter is followed by the very revealing remarks made by Richard Drake at the plenary session of past presidents that opened the conference in Asheville. We are grateful to both of these Bereans and former presidents--Drake in 1984-85, Jones in 1988-89--for their crucial roles as founding fathers and for enlightening us now a decade and a half later on the circumstances from which our organization emerged and the way in which it came to take the form in which it thrives today.

LOYAL JONES:

A list of presidents of the Appalachian Studies Conference (Association) was mailed out to members recently listing me as head of the steering committee which planned the first conference held in 1978. As much as I enjoy the honor that someone's erroneous memory bestowed on me, I must set the record straight. The person who did chair that first planning session was Richard B. Drake, professor of history at Berea, who also developed and taught the first Appalachian history course here.

In 1976, Appalachian State University held a successful symposium in honor of Cratis D. Williams who was retiring after being professor of English, dean of the graduate school and acting chancellor. It was such a fine affair that Dick Drake and others decided to call a meeting at Berea to explore the idea of forming an annual Appalachian studies conference. Dick subsequently presided over a meeting of 29 people representing various institutions or themselves. [See list that follows] This group laid the framework for the first Appalachian Studies Conference which was held at Berea College on March 10-11, 1978. Stephen Fisher was chairman of the program committee, and I was the on-site coordinator. Others on the program committee were Joan Moser, Patricia Beaver, Charles Counts, Mike Mullins, and William Plumley. It was a good conference and well-attended.

Without Dick Drake's insight and persistence, this conference would not have become a reality, at least at the time it did. Dick has correctly noted that the Cratis Williams symposium had filled a vacuum left by the change in focus of the annual conference of the Council of Southern Mountain Workers. He thought that the excellence and enthusiasm of the Williams symposium could be captured in an annual conference. He deserves our thanks.

Participants in 1977 Organizing Session
for the Appalachian Studies Conference

Donald Anderson	Mars Hill College	Joan Moser	University of NC, Asheville
Billy F. Best	Berea College	Jim Wayne Miller	Western Kentucky University
Philip Conn	Morehead State University	Mike Mullins	Alice Lloyd College
Charles Counts	Rising Fawn, Georgia	William Plumley	Morris Harvey College
Richard Drake	Berea College	John Ramsay	Berea College
James Gage	Berea College	Gary Sykes	Berea College
Stephen Fisher	Emory & Henry College	John B. Stephenson	University of Kentucky
James Gifford	Western Carolina University	John B. Tallent	East Tennessee State University
Henry Herzog	University of Tennessee	William Tallmadge	Berea College (ret. SUNY-Buffalo)
Richard Humphrey	Appalachian State University	William Tydeman	Mars Hill College
Sarah Evelyn Jackson	Georgia Tech	David Walls	University of Kentucky
Loyal Jones	Berea College	Willis D. Weatherford	Berea College
Michael Maloney	Urban Appalachian Council	Cratis Williams	Appalachian State University
B.B. Maurer	West Virginia University	J.W. Williamson	Appalachian State University
Borden Mace	Appalachian Consortium		

RICHARD DRAKE:

Roberta Herrin, in her president's message in the last Appalink, notes that the fifteen years of the ASA's history has been a rather long time. She also claims that when we met for the second time at Jackson's Mill, West Virginia, we had little sense of history. As one who was both in on the founding meetings and at the Jackson's Mill conference, I need, I think, to do some recollecting in order "to set the record straight." In fact, our Appalachian Conversation with all of its diversity, has a much longer history than the foundation of this Association. Our larger Appalachian conversation began, I think, in 1913 with the formation of the Council of Southern Mountain Workers in Atlanta.

John C. Campbell and thirty-four others were at that Atlanta meeting, most of them church workers, teachers, and medical persons. By 1926, the 175 attending the Annual Convention represented twelve denominations, four regional colleges, women's groups and five different state agencies. Over time this conversation became much broader--to include businessmen, craft persons, folklorists, many more colleges and action-oriented reformers--anyone interested in and concerned about the region. In 1925 the Council began publishing Mountain Life and Work, our first genuine region-oriented periodical.

By the time I attended my first Council meeting at the Andrew Johnson Hotel in Knoxville in 1966, and listened to persons on that program as varied as Paul Goodman, Dr. Robert Theobald and the strip-miner, William Sturgill, the Council was attracting nearly everyone interested in the region. Already in 1966, many of those attending were Appalachian Volunteers, VISTA's, and Community Organizers--the soldiers of the War on Poverty. The Appalachian Volunteers, in fact, were then under the fiscal guardianship of the Council itself. The explosive Huntington meeting a year later ended that relationship, and the A.V.'s went off on their own, with the blessing of the Council.

The last three meetings of the "greater" Council were increasingly explosive: first the Lexington meeting in 1968, then the Fontana meeting in 1969, and finally Lake Junaluska in 1970, which tore the Council apart. At Lake Junaluska, frustrated War on Poverty warriors descended upon the Annual Meeting and captured the Council for their own good purposes. What had before been a broad, umbrella agency--a locus of a diverse Appalachian Conversation, became the rather narrowly defined advocacy agency. The Executive Director of the Council, Loyal Jones, was driven from office, and those not in full sympathy with those then "in control" were alienated as well.

So the Appalachian Conversation was fractured for five long years, from 1971 to 1976. These were bleak years for those of us concerned with the broader Appalachian Conversation. And we searched rather frantically for our voice. With Mountain Life and Work gone, we spawned new journals --Appalachian Notes, Appalachian Journal and Appalachian Heritage, as well as a quarterly published by Appalshop. We even sought a broad multi-university Appalachian Consortium, but failed to construct a region-wide consortium, though a narrower Consortium in the North Carolina-Tennessee area was begun, and still exists.

Finally a most promising direction developed from the Cratis Williams Retirement Symposium at Boone in 1976. We had such a good time at this "gathering of the clan" that a committee was established to organize a similar meeting sometime in the future.

So we met at Berea in 1978 and formed the Appalachian Studies Conference. We "academics" from Berea, Boone, Mars Hill, the University of Tennessee, the University of Kentucky, West Virginia University, Virginia Tech, Emory and Henry, Clinch Valley, etc. clearly had the "inside track." But early on we took a risk and appointed Mike Clark, director of the Highlander Center, as chairman of the Nominating Committee. His slate of officers led us that first year. We early became neither academic nor reformist, but both. Many who some then called "radicals" used the annual meetings of the ASC to organize and promote the Land Ownership Study, that remarkable project that developed a wide cooperation between community-based reformers and academics.

Over the years the Appalachian Studies Conference--since 1988 the Appalachian Studies Association--has drawn in secondary teachers, community leaders and politicians, high school and college students, literary people. The diverse Appalachian Conversation has been re-established and today is alive and well.

Our continuity then, stretches across 64 more years than the 15 years of the Appalachian Studies Association. And it encompasses a remarkable diversity of perceptions and concerns about our region. Our only unifying ideal is a love of and a concern for this beautiful and often misunderstood region.

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A N N O U N C E M E N T S

After nine years as director of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services (CASS) at East Tennessee State University, Dr. Richard Blaustein is giving up that position to become a Research Fellow of the Center on July 1. A search is currently underway for a new director for CASS, which entails a joint appointment at associate or full professor status in an academic department at ETSU. For a full description of the position and qualifications for consideration, contact John Ostheimer, Dean, Box 24400A, Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-0002.

The W. D. Weatherford Award for 1992 was presented to Crandall A. Shiflett for his book Coal Towns: Life, Work and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960, which was published by the University of Tennessee Press in 1991. Shiflett, an associate professor of history at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, challenges a number of assumptions regarding the hardships and bleak living conditions of coal mining communities. The Weatherford Award, with a \$500 stipend, is presented annually by the Appalachian Center and Hutchins Library of Berea College to the writer of the work, fiction or non-fiction, that more effectively addresses the problems, personalities, and unique qualities of the Appalachian South.

ALCA, the Assembly on the Literature and Culture of Appalachia, now over a year and half old, continues to seek new members. As an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English, ALCA was formed to promote communication, cooperation, research, and experimentation among teachers and other scholars of Appalachian literature and culture and to promote more visibility and recognition of Appalachia at NCTE conventions. ALCA is well on its way to achieving its goals, as laid out in its newsletter "Alca-Lines." It encourages greater participation and exchange of ideas through an even broader membership base. To join, send \$10.00 to ALCA's chair, Grace Toney Edwards, Appalachian Studies Program, Radford University, Radford, VA 24142.

The Forest History Society announces the availability of Alfred D. Bell, Jr. Travel Grants for 1992. Scholars or students wishing to study at the Society's library and archives in Durham, N.C. may receive up to \$750 in support of travel and lodging expenses. For information on the Society's holdings and application procedures, write to Bell Travel Grants, Forest History Society, 701 Vickers Ave., Durham, NC 27701; or phone (919) 682-9319.

The Appalachian Scottish Studies Program was established in 1989 as a jointly sponsored project of the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services (CASS) at East Tennessee State University and the School of Scottish Studies at the University of Edinburgh. This summer program of lectures, performances, and field trips alternates between the ETSU campus (in even-numbered years) and the University of Edinburgh (in odd-numbered years). For more information on the program or to apply to it, contact the Appalachian-Scottish Studies Program, CASS, ETSU, P.O. Box 70-556, Johnson City, TN 37614-0556.

The second annual conference of the Appalachian Teachers Network, an organization of teachers in Southwest Virginia, will meet at Radford University on October 3, 1992. Its purpose is to enable teachers from all levels to incorporate Appalachian studies into their classrooms and curricula. Sessions will cover a variety of topics, from Storytelling and Folklore for Teachers, Appalachian Literature, The Folklore of Games, Local History, Geology, Dialect Study, and many more. For more information about the conference and pre-registration materials, contact Jim Minick, Box 6935, English Department, Radford University, Radford, VA 24142; phone (703) 831-6154.

As a member of the membership committee of the Southern Historical Association this year, the editor of Appalink is taking advantage of this space to invite anyone interested in southern history to join the association. For those of us doing Appalachian history, the Journal of Southern History has become a significant outlet for cutting edge scholarship on our region. The SHA's annual meeting, held in early November, has in recent years featured sessions on Appalachian history that provide a useful and stimulating means of contact and interchange between historians of both the highland and the lowland South. This year's meeting will be in Atlanta on November 4-7, 1992.

Membership in the Association is one of the best bargains in the profession, a mere \$20 annually for regular membership, and \$8 for students with proof of current enrollment. To join, write Will Holmes, Secretary-Treasurer, Southern Historical Association, Department of History, University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602.

The next issue of APPALINK will appear in mid-September.
Deadline for submissions or ads: August 31, 1992.

Submit to: John Inscoe, Appalink Editor
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