

FEATURED AUTHOR—ALBERT STEWART

Appalachian Heritage: The Life of a Magazine

Bill Weinberg

Many people know that Al Stewart was the heart and soul of the *Appalachian Heritage* magazine. Only a few people know the events surrounding the birth and continued existence of the magazine over time in its earlier years before landing at Berea College.

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In July 1971, I arrived in Pippa Passes, Kentucky, fresh from two years at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, comparing the problems of economic development in Central Appalachia to those of other lesser developed areas of industrialized countries such as the Massif Central in France. I had been hired by President Will Hayes to teach political science and be Director of the Appalachian Oral History Project at Alice Lloyd College.

The College was in the midst of a financial crunch and shortly after my arrival, it was decided that I would write a grant for the National Endowment for the Humanities aimed at both supplementing the College's ongoing programs and at the same time establishing a new Appalachian emphasis for the College, building on the oral history program. The result was a three year grant from NEH that created an Appalachian emphasis program called the Appalachian Learning Laboratory. The grant provided funding for the Appalachian Oral History Project, an extensive Appalachian collection in the College's library, Appalachian summer theatre and the *Appalachian Heritage* magazine.

Appalachian Heritage had been a long-time dream of Al Stewart's, and he was happy to be its editor, although he was far less enamored with the idea of a young whippersnapper like me being his supervisor. Of course, as all who knew him can attest, supervision was for Al an oxymoron. It was no coincidence that Al's initial editorial comments in the magazine appear under the heading: "From the Kingdom at Yellow Mountain."

The first issue of *Appalachian Heritage* was published in 1973 and it has been published on a quarterly basis ever since. Al's Advisory and Contributing Editors would have made any editor proud: Harriet Arnow,

Dean Cadle, Billy C. Clark, David Madden, Jane Mayhall, Edward Morris, Jean Ritchie, Kiffin Rockwell, Bennie Lee Sinclair, James Still, Hollis Summers and Eliot Wigginton. (Al later persuaded Fred Chappell and Jim Wayne Miller to serve on his Advisory Board.)

Soon after the magazine's publication, the *Library Journal* reviewed it:

While concerned with the Appalachian region in terms of history, folklore, crafts, music, etc, [*Appalachian Heritage*] has broad appeal to be almost a general magazine in the category of *Yankee* or in the same area as *Foxfire*. It has an intrinsic honesty, unusual for regional magazines, which are understandably concerned with advertising the area rather than pointing up its defects....It is particularly valuable, entertaining, and highly informative, though, for recollections and local history, e.g., death and burial customs and sketches of the mountain people. This aspect makes it a worthy addition for any library.

Al edited *Appalachian Heritage* faithfully for Alice Lloyd College for more than ten years, even after retiring from the Alice Lloyd faculty. He seldom departed from the magazine's quarterly schedule, and then only to publish a double or special issue. But the College had a new President, Jerry Davis, and, in Spring 1982, Davis decided to withdraw the College's financial support of the magazine. The last issue published by the College was a double issue—Winter/Spring 1982—printed in May 1982 and, if the College thought it would contain any mention of the changes ahead, it hadn't learned Al Stewart after all those years.

In March 1982, Davis told reporter Lee Mueller that economics dictated his decision. "It was costing us several thousand dollars a year, and that was even with Al donating his time." (Al worked on the magazine for six years without being paid by the College.) Mueller's article, entitled "Death waits for Alice Lloyd magazine: Money shortage means the death of noted magazine," stirred up a groundswell of support for the continuation of *Appalachian Heritage*.

A new corporation, Appalachian Heritage, Inc., was formed in May 1982, with a Board of concerned citizens including Al Perrin, Will Hayes, Ron Daley, Paul Allen, Gary Conley, Kathy Sloane, G.B. Johnson, Jr., Mayor Bill Gorman, Al, myself, Mike Mullins, Nash Cox, Richard Spears and John Stephenson. I was chairman and Al was secretary-treasurer. In June 1982, an agreement was signed with the

College transferring the magazine to Appalachian Heritage, Inc. and Al was provided offices at the Hindman Settlement School to work on the magazine.

Amazingly, Al got the Summer issue of Appalachian Heritage out on time, the first of eleven issues that would be published under the auspices of Appalachian Heritage, Inc. Freed from any obligation to the College, Al had his say. Entitled "What You Might Want To Know About *Appalachian Heritage* Magazine (and might ask if you had the chance)," Al had his fun:

What gives with *Appalachian Heritage* anyway? I have heard during the last few years that the editor was retiring and that the magazine would fade gently away. I have also heard recently that it was to suspend publication for lack of support from some place I can't even remember. Then more recently I heard that it was to continue under new sponsors. What's the story on all this? Is it to be a "new" *Appalachian Heritage*? Is it going to have a new hill-side slant? Is it going to belabor the Philistines?

Whew! Let me catch my breath and I will try to answer these questions.

A new APPALACHIAN HERITAGE? Not really. No. Rather a continuation of the magazine in its growth over the past ten years. The new sponsors did not want a "change" in the magazine except the move from unwilling hands to those of willing and supporting hands. No change in policy, they wanted it TO CONTINUE PUBLICATION. Their word: It was too good, too valuable, a voice for our region and people to let the Philistines kill it. So there you are!

Yes, there were rumors of my complete retirement—rumors from myself and others. I wanted to move back to the farm. I had visions of starting a new, more relaxed, lifestyle with more freedom to read, write, garden, maybe for woodcarving and dulcimer making, to travel and look around carefully about me in the world for all the simple riches available. But then along would come a letter praising the magazine for its goodness and its service to the region and I would

resolve to hold out a little longer, hoping for the break, some way of keeping the magazine going beyond my time. (Yes, I often thought, too, how good it would be to have the magazine moved to a more congenial place, more literate, more culturally and artistically aware and oriented and Appalachian oriented as well.) Finally the break came, slipping in at the back door (patience, persistence, integrity, now seem mighty good words).

From May 1982 until Summer 1984, Al and the new Board struggled to finance *Appalachian Heritage*. I got involved in a run for Attorney-General and was absent during 1982 and the first half of 1983. When I returned to active participation on the Board, it was apparent that changes had to occur if the magazine was to survive. Yearly fund-raising is a hard way to finance any magazine but, most importantly, Al had done his due. He was pushing seventy and had put the relaxation of retirement on hold with no remuneration. If *Appalachian Heritage* was to survive, it had to have a new home and a new editor.

The Berea connection had been an underlying fabric of Appalachian Heritage, Inc. John Stephenson, then Director of the University of Kentucky's Appalachian Center, was soon to become Berea's new President. Al Perrin was patron of the special collections area of Berea's library and a close friend of President Willis Weatherford. Ron Daley and Mike Mullins, the Director of the Hindman Settlement School, were Berea alumni. In late 1983, Mullins began talking with President Weatherford about Berea taking over *Appalachian Heritage*.

In August 1984, the Board of Appalachian Heritage, Inc., unanimously approved the transfer of the magazine to Berea College effective January 1985. The Berea College Trustees voted to accept responsibility for the publication of *Appalachian Heritage* for at least a two-year period at their October 1984 meeting, with new President John Stephenson accepting the task of raising the necessary funds to underwrite the magazine's publication.

The Fall 1984 issue was the last one published by Appalachian Heritage, Inc. For only the third time in his twelve years of publication, Al Stewart, a man of carefully chosen words, spoke out. In doing so, he used President John F. Kennedy as his spokesman, quoting extensively from Kennedy's speech at Amherst College honoring Robert Frost:

When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows

the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and the diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.

For art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstones of our judgment. The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state.

The great artist is then a solitary figure. He has, as Frost said, "a lover's quarrel with the world." In pursuing his perceptions of reality he must often sail against the currents of his time. This is not a popular role.

But AI also reprinted his comments from the first issue of *Appalachian Heritage*—"What's It All About".

Appalachian Heritage is about the people of Southern Appalachia and the land they cling to.

It is about the land that limits their vision to narrow sky-space and near earth—and imprisons them (the hill-haunted) with a deep, buried sense of place and home—and shapes them individually to its contours—and often haunts their dreams with irrational beauty and longing—when they are away.

It is about those who live so far back in the hollows they have to break daylight with a club, use hoot owls for alarm clocks and possums for watchdogs.

It is about those who have moved out along the new highways in little scatterings of helter-skelter suburbias, and those who live in a half-way land of modern conveniences and old customs.

It is about those who live in little mining camps with odd place names and under the shadow of coal tipples and slag piles.

It is about those who have moved up to splendid, electrically-heated homes—sterilized, insulated, insured against time, weather and accidents....

But most of all, it is about individuals and their

humanity; for the typical mountaineer does not exist and never has. The people of Appalachia have shared in their individual ways, and many still do, a heritage of customs, attitudes, manners, that has come to be known as the Appalachian life-style. To present this humanness and this life-style is a central aim of *Appalachian Heritage*.

The 1985 Winter/Spring issue of *Appalachian Heritage* was published by Berea College, as has every issue since that date. Sidney Saylor Farr became the second editor the magazine had ever had. John Stephenson wrote "A Transitional Word," committing to "honoring the high standard of taste and creativity set by Al Stewart," declaring that the magazine would remain "unashamedly regional in scope" and concluding that "*Appalachian Heritage* has now found a home at Berea College."

The issue began with a picture of Al and an accompanying poem, "Passage."