

IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Edwin T. “Chip” Arnold

Introduction by Thomas McLaughlin

Thomas McLaughlin is an Emeritus Professor in the English Department at Appalachian State University. He taught with Chip Arnold from 1977 to 2008.

Chip Arnold had a long and brilliant career as a professor in the English Department at Appalachian State University. Not long enough, of course, because it was cut short by a stroke he suffered at the end of 2008, just after he completed his great book, *What Virtue There Is in Fire: Cultural Memory and the Lynching of Sam Hose* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), an account of a lynching that took place in and around Hogansville, Georgia, where Chip grew up. It was the last major project of a career dedicated to exploring American culture and literature, especially in the South and in Appalachia.

He did all the tasks a literary scholar could do—he wrote books and articles, gave papers at conferences, reviewed books, edited manuscripts, organized essay collections and SAMLA panels and special issues of journals, ran scholarly organizations, supported the careers of writers he admired, and enhanced our understanding of American literature in general and Appalachian literature in particular. All these projects connected him to communities of scholars and writers. I mean, Chip was *connected*. He seemed to know everyone at every conference. He corresponded with colleagues all over the world. He knew personally many of the writers he studied.

I think his most important contributions to Appalachian Studies were as a distinctively *literary* scholar. He knew what great writing is. He began his career as a Faulkner scholar, and he loved all the classic works of American literature. So with this grounding in the tradition, he was able to recognize the greatness in Appalachian writers like Cormac McCarthy, Donald Harington, John Foster West, Jim Wayne Miller, Lee Smith, Robert Morgan, Silas House, and Gurney Norman. He was one of the first literary scholars to draw serious attention to Cormac McCarthy, and he wanted people to remember that McCarthy's career started in Appalachia. He loved McCarthy's western novels, especially *Blood Meridian*, but he championed the earlier novels set in the mountains, like *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, and *Suttree*. One of the things I admire about Appalachian Studies is its commitment to interdisciplinarity, integrating the works of political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, folklorists, economists, and experts in music and popular culture.



Edwin T. "Chip" Arnold. Photo credit: Elizabeth Hull

What Chip brought to that effort was the gravitas of a scholar steeped in the classic tradition of great American literature. If he saw quality in a book or a writer, it mattered. As two of our contributors tell us, he also inspired students and young scholars by bringing his scholarly knowledge into the classroom and expanding their understanding of literary studies.

Other contributors to this memorial attest to Chip's practical and institutional contributions to the field of Appalachian Studies on campus and in the region. He directed the academic program at ASU and edited the *Appalachian Journal*. He compiled indexes and edited manuscripts. He reviewed books for publishers and mentored younger scholars. He fought for resources and recognition for the field. All this, while serving as an assistant dean, leading the AAUP chapter on campus, and being at the center of faculty governance. He knew how to make things happen, and he brought that kind of campus street smarts to the projects in Appalachian Studies he organized.

The field of Appalachian Studies was enriched by his contributions. People who worked closely with Chip and were influenced by his example give us some insights into that contribution.

From Thomas McGowan, English Department faculty at Appalachian State University from 1972 to 2011, now Emeritus Professor, and editor of the North Carolina Folklore Journal for 20 years

Like Cratis Williams, besides his excellence in teaching and scholarship, Chip Arnold also distinguished himself in administrative service to Appalachian State University. He served on many committees in the English Department where his common sense, intelligence, kind collaboration, and commitment to students contributed to the good working of the Department for 33 years. And he was a discerning and supportive adviser to numerous English students. His former student Chris Cox expressed the importance of Chip's encouragement in a recent article in the *Smoky Mountain News*: "Chip Arnold ... appeared when I needed him most. He revealed a thrilling new world and then convinced me I could live there" ("A tribute to Dr. Arnold, a true teacher," 10 Sept. 2023). Chip was a favorite director of MA and honors theses in English and Appalachian Studies, prodding students to do effective research and good writing.

From 1988 to 1994 Chip Arnold served as an assistant dean in Appalachian's College of Arts and Sciences. He represented the values and needs of the humanities well while working with deans who were a physicist and a chemist. At the College's graduation ceremonies, he was an ongoing presence on the stage, carefully checking the pronunciation of names, and relentlessly, clearly announcing the names of the graduates. A highlight of his time in the College of Arts and Sciences was his arranging for Lee Smith to be the College's commencement speaker. He influenced the support of regional studies and scholarship: both the Center for Appalachian Studies and *Appalachian Journal* were under the supervision of the College.

Chip also served in the administration of the Center for Appalachian Studies as Program Director from 2007 to 2009. His work in the Center again exhibited his special attention to students. He recognized individual interests and strengths in proposing courses and recommending programs of study. He matched graduate assistants to faculty members to take advantage of the interests and skills of the students. He assigned Kehren Barbour to assist Orville Hicks and me in a large undergraduate course, and her firm responsibility and creativity freed Orville and me from many quotidian tasks and gave us helpful observations on curriculum and classes.

From Jay Watson, Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Mississippi, Howry Professor of Faulkner Studies, and since 2011, Director of the annual Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha conference

Chip Arnold never knew this, but he chaired the panel for the first presentation I ever gave at an out-of-town academic conference in 1991. But our

relationship deepened beyond that of professional colleagues into a more meaningful friendship as a result of one unforgettable afternoon and evening in San Francisco in 2008.

We were both in town for the American Literature Association conference but decided to play hooky one afternoon and explore the Golden Gate Park and Haight-Ashbury areas. Disembarking from a crosstown bus at an entrance to the Park, we set out walking. And we walked. And walked. For hours. The ramble took us all the way through the park to the seaside, then up the coastal highway to the legendary Anchor Steam Brewery (just in time for cocktail hour), then back through the park, and finally to an Ethiopian restaurant near Haight for a late dinner before catching an even later bus back to the Embarcadero.

Along the way, we talked about anything and everything under the sun: Faulkner and McCarthy, as one might expect given our scholarly interests, but also family, music, the Summer of Love (how could you not?), teaching, our experiences at the University of Georgia (Chip's in the late 1960s, mine in the early 1980s), good beer, the Sam Hose lynching (very much on his mind at the time), and on and on. Sometimes, with friendships you make later in life, you remember the exact moment when you bonded, and what you were bonding over. With Chip, this was my moment, and I have always treasured it.

I am also grateful for the nonplussed way he continued to nurture our friendship after his stroke—how he remained his outgoing, curious self and refused to let the slight aphasia impede his correspondence. He was usually the one to keep things moving forward, prompting long, newsy emails from me in return. The remark of his I will remember longest was his response to an update I had sent along about my two kids. "Katherine and Judson," he wrote. "Brilliant!" The big-heartedness radiating through the beautiful simplicity. What a generous, joyful person, all the way to the end. I'm so happy to have known him.

From Patricia Beaver, Professor Emerita of anthropology and founding Director of the Center for Appalachian Studies at Appalachian State University

I met Chip in 1978 when he was associate editor of *Appalachian Journal*, a post he held off and on for the next decade. I was the new director of the new Center for Appalachian Studies, and was allocated a lovely office adjoining the *Appalachian Journal* offices in the old Belk library, with its tall windows and vaulted ceilings. Chip, along with editor Jerry Williamson, embraced my energy for our overlapping journeys through the interdisciplinary field of Appalachian Studies. Chip was generous, kind, and supportive of my new work.

In 1994-1995 Chip went to Chiba, Japan, to spend a year teaching and exploring. He traveled to the south of France in 1997, where he taught for a semester at Universite Paul Valery, in Montpellier, as a visiting professor of

literature of the U.S. South. Meanwhile, I had stepped away from being Center director and traveled to China in 1983 and again in 1990.

In the mid-2000s, Chip's path and my own converged within the Center for Appalachian Studies. By 1997, I had again become Director of the Center and was working with the faculty to strengthen our graduate curriculum. That fall, Chip began teaching Appalachian literature at a senior and graduate level. I was delighted that Appalachian Studies students had the chance to study with Chip and become acquainted with him as an exceptional, productive scholar whose scholarship invigorated his classrooms. He was a rigorous and popular teacher, infusing his classes with the newest voices in regional literature.

In 2007, Chip agreed to be Program Director for Appalachian Studies. Although the Center was established with both academic and scholarly missions connecting with local communities, we were under university pressure to split the academic program from the Center. So Chip's appointment was the perfect solution. He took on student recruitment and advising. He was a strong advocate for the academic program and effective at recruiting students, some from his own Appalachian literature classes. Chip was an informed, engaging, and thoughtful advisor to the students who came through his door.

Chip was also a great collaborator and colleague. Together, we made plans! Those years in Appalachian Studies were filled with heady collegiality and collaborative efforts among the faculty and students, the *Appalachian Journal*, the Appalachian Collection of Belk Library, and the Center for Appalachian Studies. But as was the case in many universities, considerable turnovers in administration regularly resulted in new challenges—as our interdisciplinary structure, community projects, and off-campus partnerships did not fit neatly within the university's pigeonholes, silos, and spreadsheets. I started thinking about phased retirement and dreamed of Chip's transition to Center director. We thought this would be an elegant solution to the forces challenging Appalachian Studies, and we were both excited about the future under Chip's leadership.

Chip's stroke on New Year's Eve, 2008, changed everything. As Chip began his arduous physical therapy, a great salve to his spirit was the publication of his book *What Virtue There Is in Fire* in 2010. His constant sources of encouragement, love, and help on every level, including morale and laughs, were his family and friends. Ellen, his wife, was there for every day of these challenging years, revising her own personal and professional plans, shifting to online teaching and channeling her expertise and scholarship on Indigenous literature to her students while maintaining a radically altered household schedule of doctors' appointments and therapies to accommodate Chip's needs and their shared hopes for his recovery.

From Georgia and the Carolinas to Japan and France, and back home again to the Appalachian Mountains, Chip taught us for decades about the South and Southern Appalachia, about literature and writers he admired, and about joy, supportive friendships, and resilience in the face of everything.

From Jerry Wayne Williamson, founding editor of Appalachian Journal

Chip was more than merely my good friend. He was a collaborator and a co-conspirator through two tenures as associate editor of the *Appalachian Journal* and then through more years of not always productive star-gazing about projects we should but would never complete, like a book we actually gathered materials for on "Independent Appalachian Filmmakers; Or, How Bad Could It Be?"

Among the onerous tasks he took on as my partner in the *AppalJ* enterprise, complaining but little and always with a sense of humor, was the painstaking two-reader proofing we gave each and every issue, reading aloud text-to-typeset proof and "calling" every capital letter, every mark of punctuation, every hiccup. It's the only way I know to guarantee an error-free printed sheet, and we collated every issue twice, once before it went to typesetting and again afterward. It took hours. We got hoarse reading all that material aloud to one another.

I determined in 1979 that the first seven volumes of *AppalJ* needed to be indexed and pitched that herculean task to Chip, who actually had some knowledge of the art of indexing. We bought huge Rolodex wheels that held thousands of cards each, and like galley slaves picking up our oars, we went through all those volumes and noted every name and topic, an index that eventually ran to 175 printed pages in double columns that we published as Volume 7 Number 4. That job was sufficiently traumatizing that Chip left his associate editorship soon after for other opportunities not involving papercuts.

I talked him into coming back to *AppalJ* in the late '80s, just in time to help me with the second index we ever did, covering every name and topic from Volume 8 through Volume 18 (eventually published as Volume 18, Number 4). But by then we had outgrown Rolodexes and could build our index on computer. That's when I learned about "fictitious entries" and how Chip had entertained himself through all that tedium. It's apparently something of a tradition among people who do indexes to secretly install a fake entry as a private joke. I found out that Chip had slipped into the index an entry ripped from the headlines of 1991: "Reagan, Nancy ... *See under Frank Sinatra.*"

I never found editorial work boring, and I never found editorial work with Chip Arnold anything but enlightening, enlivening, and incidentally hilarious. He was supportive of the entire Appalachian Studies project. He contributed interviews and articles to the *Journal* that increased the sum total of our knowledge and contributed to our delight in the art and cultures of the region. Chip did interviews with John Foster West, Lee Smith, Donald Harington, and Lou Crabtree. He wrote a series of articles of fine analytic insight about the work of Al Capp and his Li'l Abner character, broadening an appreciation of Appalachia's mythic presence in American pop culture while also satisfying

his almost subrosa fascination with cartoonists and their art. Chip regularly reviewed new books by new writers and pretty much single-handedly extended *AppalJ's* coverage to the Ozarks.

His great and crowning work was undoubtedly his historical unpacking of a lynching that happened in his hometown in Georgia, *What Virtue There Is in Fire*, a seering cultural portrait of the equivocations and evasions of the white folk who participated or silently approved and whose very memories become fodder for understanding our twisted history of race in America. It was my privilege to have read this amazing book in manuscript. It was published soon after Chip suffered his debilitating stroke, and it's got to be a small tragedy that he never got to go on the book tour he had earned and so richly deserved.

I loved the man and honor his memory.

From Meredith McCarroll, writer, teacher, and scholar from Western North Carolina; author of Unwhite: Appalachia, Race, and Film (2018) and co-editor of Appalachian Reckoning: A Region Responds to Hillbilly Elegy (2019), which won an American Book Award in 2020

In my final year of graduate school, I had my first big job interview at a national conference. I bought a suit and new impractical shoes to wear in snowy Chicago. I was nervous and excited. I called my former teacher and mentor Chip Arnold and arranged a visit in Boone as I prepared for the interview.

As my teacher, Chip had been charismatic, witty, kind, and really, really smart. I was a first-generation college student falling in love with the idea of building a life around books and writing. He directed my honors thesis, then my MA thesis in English, and guided me to think with more complexity about gender and place. As I was wrapping up a PhD, I sought his advice as a steady, familiar teacher who was engaging at a high level in his scholarship and teaching. I wanted to be the way that I saw him being when he hosted the Faulkner conference in Boone one summer. I wanted to command rooms like he could—confidently but quietly.

We met that December at a restaurant and talked easily about how Boone had changed, how the field of American literature had changed, and how to prepare for the interview. After allowing me to fret about all the possible questions that might somehow reveal the imposter I felt that I was, Chip told me to do something that I hadn't considered. "Have fun with it," he said. Have fun at this terrifying MLA interview, where my entire life hinged on others' decisions? Yes. Enjoy the conversation. We don't often get to talk about our work, imagine future classes, and be the center of attention. It was good advice that allowed me to stop trying to memorize the perfect responses. It was a reminder to show up as myself. To have fun with it.

The next day, I flew to Chicago. The next day, Chip suffered a life-changing stroke.

Chip and I stayed in touch. He remained communicative, through the tools of communication available to him. He emailed me every birthday. He wrote to me when my mother died. He celebrated my academic successes. His messages haikued into something that cut to the heart of the matter, like good haiku. My last birthday message from Chip read: "Dear Meredith, Trust your instincts and kindness. And gracious manner! Happy Birthday."

In my MA program, I worked as Chip's research assistant, in what will probably be the coolest job I'll ever have. As a preeminent scholar on Cormac McCarthy, he had gained access to the original manuscripts of the Border Trilogy (*All the Pretty Horses*, 1992; *The Crossing*, 1994; *Cities of the Plain*, 1998). He had funding to review and compare the unpublished and published versions to see how McCarthy revised. So each week, we sat in Chip's office and read these books aloud. We read in a style meant to note any minor edit. He held one version, I held the other. We announced capitalization and punctuation. It was clunky, but we got pretty good at it. What I most remember from that time, though, was that despite the time constraints—trying to get through more than 1000 pages in the time allotted and funded—Chip sometimes would slow us down. Just to experience the beauty of the language. After we'd made it through a close collated reading of a passage, he might look up—excited grin and bright eyes—and say, "Let's just read that part straight." And we would, just for the beauty of it.

I can't recall exactly which parts Chip slowed us down to re-read. But as I re-read those books now, this passage from *The Crossing* jumped out as if sent to me: "It was the nature of his profession that his experience with death should be greater than for most and he said that while it was true that time heals bereavement it does so only at the cost of the slow extinction of those loved ones from the heart's memory which is the sole place of their abode then or now. Faces fade, voices dim. Seize them back, whispered the sepulturero. Speak with them. Call their names. Do this and do not let sorrow die for it is the sweetening of every gift."

Let us speak with Chip and call his name. Let us hold a space in our heart's memory and taste the sweetening that accompanies the sorrow.