

e, project focus on RFK's 1968 visit



Robert Baird
COALFIELD.COM WEBMASTER

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The "Links" section gives you access to Web sites on the RFK Memorial Library, an upcoming documentary, photographs taken in 1968, the war on poverty, Malpede, Appalachian studies and much, much more.

Kennedy's 1968 tour was conducted as part of a U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Manpower, Employment and Poverty study of "war on poverty" practices. The tour occurred just a few days before Kennedy announced his candidacy for U.S. president.

Kennedy visited eastern Kentucky Feb. 13-14, 1968 — landing at Lexington's Bluegrass Airport, traveling more than 200 miles in two days and ending the tour in Prestonsburg.

Kennedy's purpose for the tour was examining the outcomes of the first wave of "war on poverty" legislation with the people it most affected. He toured eastern Kentucky's coal country, the same territory where President Johnson declared the war on poverty in 1964, the Web site says. Kennedy held field hearings for the Senate subcommittee in two locations — Vortex and

Fleming-Neon, Ky.

According to the Web site, "RFK also visited individual homes, schoolhouses, and county centers during his tour, focusing on the needs of children and young people, asking questions about what they had eaten that day, and viewing for himself the effects of both poverty and the federal efforts to combat it."

"The schedule of the tour was grueling: Kennedy met dozens of people individually, spoke to thousands, and traveled over rough mountain roads, starting with a hearing in Vortex at a one-room schoolhouse whose entire student body consisted of the children of one rural family; on to another one room school in Barwick, where the teacher, Bonnie Jean Carroll cooked a hot meal for her students on a pot-bellied stove everyday; on to Hazard, where he toured the African American neighborhood, Liberty Street; to a strip mining site where he viewed for himself the physical destruction produced by surface mining; and ended day one at Alice Lloyd College near Congressman Perkins' hometown of Hindman," according to Appalshop's "RFK in EKY" Web site.

Feb. 14, 1968, started with a drive to Whitesburg, Ky., and an early morning speech from the Letcher County courthouse steps, followed by a formal hearing at the Fleming-Neon High School gym, visits with families in Hemphill and Haymond and a speech at the Fiscal Court and Library in Prestonsburg. Kennedy then flew to Louisville.

Kennedy's tour of the region was not unique, the Web site notes, and other well-known politicians have conducted "poverty tours" of eastern

Kentucky. But the region's people remember Kennedy's tour as the most meaningful, the site says. "People often cite his large family, his warmth, and his genuine concern when they talk about his effect on them, and speak of the way he brought hope, hope that was dispelled a few months later, with his assassination in June of 1968."

According to the Web site, next week's performance presents an opportunity to revisit essential questions raised by Kennedy's tour:

- ▶ the representation of marginalized populations in the national consciousness;
- ▶ the role of government in maintaining a quality-of-life safety net, plus fostering sustainable economic development and educational and vocational advancement;
- ▶ ways to stem the out-migration of rural young people and the loss of natural resources; and
- ▶ the priorities of a government administration engaged in a protracted war. The original tour occurred during the week of the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War.

"RFK in EKY, like Kennedy and those who created his tour, recognizes these questions are part of an important national dialogue for which Appalachia is only one of many possible settings," Appalshop's Web site says.

Next week's 48-hour performance recreates all aspects of Kennedy's tour, including two official hearings at Vortex and Fleming-Neon, roadside visits with individual families, walking tours of small communities and strip mine sites, stops at one-room schoolhouses and speeches at courthouses and colleges, according to the Internet site. ▲

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Web site, project focus on RFK's 1968

Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 tour of southeastern Kentucky will be revisited next week as part of a real-time, multi-site reenactment of that historic event.

"RFK in EKY," or the Robert F. Kennedy Performance Project, is a series of public conversations and activities centered around the performance that recreates Kennedy's two-day, 200-mile "poverty tour" across eastern Kentucky.

The project's official Internet site has a wealth of information and resources. To get started, visit www.appalshop.org/kennedy on the Web.

The tour will be reenacted Thursday, Sept. 9, and Friday, Sept. 10. Other events — such as speeches, festivals, discussions and exhibitions — will take place on Wednesday, Sept. 8, and Saturday, Sept. 11.

Initiated and led by artist John Malpede, RFK in EKY is a project of Appalshop Inc. in Whitesburg, Ky. Malpede, now an artist in residence at Appalshop, began developing the notion of recreating Kennedy's visit during an artist and community gathering in 2000, according to the Web site.

The Internet site provides details on the project's history, the route of the 1968 and 2004 tours, schedule of events for next week's performance, people and groups involved in this effort, how to attend and participate and links to other RFK-related resources.

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