Louise Pitman, who directed handicraft work at the school from the late 1920s until 1951, was a Columbia University graduate from South Orange, New Jersey, who learned about vegetable dyeing (for example) from Wilma Stone Viner, a Vassar graduate who had grown up in well-to-do circumstances on a Louisiana plantation and summered at Saluda in the North Carolina mountains before spending six years at Pine Mountain Settlement School, where she in turn had learned what she knew about dyeing from Katherine Pettit and others around the school.[168]

The carving enterprise may have had a slightly closer connection to local tradition. According to the oft-repeated official version of the story, Campbell noticed men whittling in front of Fred Scroggs's store, "gouging deep into the loungers' bench," and tentatively "began to direct this activity into simple carving."[169] Actual designs for the farm animals and other wooden items the carvers produced seem to have derived from some by now unchartable combination of the students' own taste, that of their folk school teachers, and market considerations. During his visits to the school in the early 1930s, Allen Eaton concluded that the designs owed more to students' own tastes than to any other factor, but it is not clear that that was the case. Indeed a school newsletter of the late 1940s reported that "most of the carvings are designed by the teacher, but if the student shows any imagination he is encouraged to use it."[170]

Even in the relatively few cases in which the teacher was native to the area, that did not necessarily guarantee that designs would reflect local tradition. Herman Estes, who claimed to be a fifth-generation descendant of Daniel Boone and whose grandfather was a maker of long rifles, taught woodworking (mostly lathe work) from 1939 to 1952. He had learned his lathe work, however, at Berea College (1911–13) and during a cabinetmaking apprenticeship in upstate New York.[171]

One of the students who showed the most imagination, and whose career was invoked over and over again as proof that a folk school could work in the North Carolina mountains, was carver Hayden Hensley—"our first boy," as he was called in a school report. Hensley was one of five children in a local farming family of modest circumstances. He disliked school and dropped out in the seventh grade. But he found the folk school to his liking, entered with the first students in 1927, and stayed three years. He danced the Danish dances, played the singing games, and along the way became the school's star carver. Later, having met and married a local Brasstown girl who was working at the school, Hensley asked for a loan from the school to buy some land, built a house on it, and "whittled

out every dime" it took to pay off the loan (twenty-five dollars every six months for ten years at 2 percent interest). After hitchhiking to the school to sell his finished pieces, he would bring back a sackful of wood and start again, glad to be making two or three dollars a day while his friends who were lucky enough to have jobs at all were making half that or less. Of the five Hensley sons and daughters, Hayden was the only one who stayed in the area; the others left for factory jobs in the big cities.[172]

If the actual product of the folk school handicraft workers was only tentatively related to local traditions, and if there were in fact precious few Hayden Hensleys among its students, the public image of the enterprise was nevertheless marketed proudly and widely. It began to achieve wide currency and credibility no more than a half-dozen years after the school opened. As early as 1932 sales of folk school handicrafts were being arranged in Boston and New York, and three years later an exhibit of southern mountain handicrafts at Rockefeller Center included John C. Campbell Folk School items.[173]

The primary mechanism for promoting the folk school version of mountain crafts, however, was the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, which Mrs. Campbell helped to found in the late 1920s. She got the idea, apparently, from a cooperative craft sales shop in Finland, and soon after her return to the mountains in 1923 she began to think seriously about the "mountain [handicraft] industries problem." She suggested that "some sort of loose federation ought to be worked out" among the schools and other crafts "producing centers" to maintain standards, help with marketing, and so forth.[174]

Just after Christmas, 1928, Campbell and others from mountain craft centers met at Penland School in western North Carolina and laid plans to form the guild; to her it seemed "a forward [step], with large possibilities."[175] From the beginning, the discussions were guided by Campbell and other craft-center leaders who had been instrumental in blending traditional mountain design and materials with ideas drawn from other cultures (especially that of Scandinavia) and frequently filtered through university or arts-and-crafts movement training: President Frost of Berea College, Allen Eaton, Mary Martin Sloop of Crossnore, Clementine Douglas of the Spinning Wheel in Asheville, Lucy Morgan of Penland, and others.

The early history of the guild shows clearly that it was tied primarily to the folk school, settlement school, and crafts revival "producing center" version of handicrafts in the mountains; that it was able to establish itself