The Mountain Heritage Day festival has lost one of its most ardent supporters and contributors, R.O. Wilson, who died Wednesday, Nov. 22.

Wilson, the quintessential mountain man, was 84. He was a constant presence at Mountain Heritage Days through the years and was presented the 2015 Mountain Heritage Award for his community service. Born in Depression-era Jackson County, he was widely recognized as a talented craftsman in Southern Appalachian handicrafts, able to construct a hand-hewn log cabin, run an authentic moonshine still, shape hand-split wooden shingles and sharpen crosscut saws. He held true to regional traditions of cemetery decoration days, ginseng digging, planting by the signs, and hunting and fishing, and was quick to share the legacy with others.

A timberman for half-a-century, Wilson was once aptly described as a “tall, lanky individual with a distinctive handlebar mustache” who lived on the same homestead in Cullowhee that his ancestors established in the 1830s.

R.O. Wilson made his mark and Mountain Heritage Day organizers express condolences for his loss. He will be missed.

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