

# New Collection Brings Old Materials Into Sharp Focus at Library



Sally Cathey instructs two people in the arts of wood carving and basket-making in this image from the Special Collections at Western's Hunter Library, part of an online Craft Revival project now under way.

Working with four heritage partners, Western's Hunter Library is creating a virtual collection of objects, documents, letters, photos and oral histories that tell the story of an effort to revive mountain crafts during the late 1800s and early 1900s. That movement generated widespread interest in mountain culture and continues to influence Western North Carolina tourism and economic development more than 100 years after the revival began.

"The Craft Revival at the turn of the 20th century helped to shape a strong, ongoing interest in crafts and tourism throughout the region," said Anna

Fariello, visiting associate professor who is leading the project for Hunter Library. "I think it is exciting that the latest digital technology is bringing together hundreds of widely scattered handmade items and photographs from the past via the Internet while the original local collections will be preserved, intact."

Beginning around 1890, the Craft Revival highlighted the home-based skills of mountain pioneers who had made their own woven fabrics, carvings, baskets, pots, metal implements, toys, chairs and other items required for survival and comfort in their isolated mountain farms and villages. The early

*continued on page 2*

## **Collection** *continued from page 1*

settlers passed those skills from generation to generation until innovations in machinery, rising prosperity and the spread of towns and stores in Western North Carolina made it possible for families to buy most of the things they needed, ready-made.

Just when it seemed that the traditional handcrafting skills were dying out, regional economic development, tourism and an interest in preserving the past were coming alive, Fariello said. Those forces sparked the Craft Revival, with its emphasis on encouraging mountain people to continue making items by hand, not only for their own use but also for sale, and to pass those skills along. The revival in turn triggered the growth of handcraft guilds, weaving centers and folk schools; attracted tourists, scholars and artisans to the region; helped to promote the sale of traditional mountain crafts; and shaped the development of new ones.

Hunter Library is working on the Craft Revival project with four partners—the John C. Campbell Folk School, Penland School of Crafts, Western's Mountain Heritage Center and the library's Special Collections section—and three advisers—the North Carolina Center for the Advancement of Teaching; the Center for Crafts, Creativity and Design; and Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual.

Fariello recently organized a workshop on digital imaging equipment set-up and operation. Over the next year, the partners will digitize images from the schools' collections in Mitchell and Clay counties, as well as items from various smaller repositories in museums and local historical societies throughout the region. The completed Web-based collection will be available online.

Western's Craft Revival Project is funded in part by a grant of \$85,000, renewable for three years for a potential total of \$250,000, from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, through the North Carolina State Library. Western received the only Heritage Partners Grant awarded by the State Library in 2005.

—by Leila Tvedt