

'Pretty amazing handwork'

Project puts info about history of WNC crafts online

By Jess Clarke

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CULLOWHEE — An online database with hundreds of photographs, brochures and other information about the history of crafts in Western North Carolina will be available Sept. 1 in a project headed by Western Carolina University.

About 250 images will be accessible initially in a growing Internet database for the Craft Revival Project at <http://craftrevival.wcu.edu>.

The project, starting its second of three years, will

feature about a thousand images in the digital archive eventually, including letters, brochures from John C. Campbell Folk School and Penland School of Crafts, articles, photos of wood carvings and metal work and other craft-related items. The Web site will be completed in 2008.

The archived items date from 1895 to 1945, a period of Appalachian craft revival in North Carolina and other states.

The information on the database had been scattered at various crafts organizations and schools.

"The project really fills a kind of niche in that contemporary craft renaissance" in WNC now, said Anna Fariello, project

leader at WCU's Hunter Library. "The craft revival was a major movement in Western Carolina. Its legacy is evident in today's contemporary craft activity, and yet no one was really looking at it from an academic perspective."

Curriculum spinoff, preservation

Project officials this year will develop a school component with suggestions for teachers on how to integrate crafts and the history of crafts into courses, Fariello said. The Web site eventually will include photos and text on traditional crafts, craftspeople

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Bonnie Logan Hensley and her husband, Hayden, carve wood in this undated photograph by Doris Ulmann from the John C. Campbell Folk School. The Haydens were students at the Campbell school. This photo is among the images that will be accessible in an Internet database as part of the Craft Revival Project, coordinated by Western Carolina University.

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and institutions and links to related sites in North Carolina.

The project recently received a second year of funding in a federal grant of \$126,000 administered by the State Library of North Carolina.

The craft revival started after the Civil War, when people began to buy goods that before they had made for themselves, which disrupted the passing on of traditional crafts — weaving, pottery, basketry, ironwork — among generations. “You have people noticing that these skills are disappearing. There was a conscious effort to preserve these skills,” Fariello said.

The Campbell folk school and Penland school, among WCU’s partners in the project, started during the craft revival.

One goal of the WCU proj-

ect is to help craft organizations digitize their archives and educate them about preservation practices, Fariello said.

That assistance will develop for Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual, an artists’ cooperative on the Qualla Boundary in Cherokee, a database for its permanent collection. “It’ll kind of upgrade our inventory,” manager Vicki Ledford said. The cooperative will be a partner in the project.

“Crafts are in an up mode. They’re becoming more a part of things as so much is cheaply done and done overseas,” said Deborah Schillo, archivist for the Asheville-based Southern Highland Craft Guild, also a partner with WCU.

The project “helps present the image maybe that mountain people weren’t just hillbillies. They were doing some pretty amazing handwork,” Schillo said.