



Foxfire News

2012

It's About Preserving the Past

Since 1966, interested students attending school in northeast Georgia's Rabun County have been going out into the Southern Appalachian Mountains for one specific purpose: to talk to their elders, neighbors, and friends, and collect the stories and knowledge of those who came before them. In order to preserve the information they gathered, these students recorded their interviews with the contacts. In the late 1960s, bulky reel-to-reel audio tape equipment was lugged around and set up for these conversations, often requiring AC electrical power—in an era when home electricity was still referred to as “new-fangled” by the last generation of folks to grow up without it. In the 1970s audio cassette tapes became the standard, offering very portable equipment that could operate from battery power when needed and tape that was protected by a hard plastic enclosure and less susceptible to damage during transport. Use of these basic audio cassettes endured until very late in the 2000s, when digital audio recorders became dependable, versatile, and affordable enough to finally oust cassette tapes—a technology many elementary students today have probably never encountered.

Foxfire students have been recording their unique heritage through these interviews for over 45 years, and the bulk of this irreplaceable material exists solely on thin, varying-quality strips of plastic (audio tape) that is stored in the only climate-controlled building on the grounds of the Foxfire Museum (the Carnesville House). Over the years, various efforts have been made to duplicate and therefore preserve these recordings, but complications in funding or logistics have prevented the completion of any comprehensive duplication of the archive recordings. Paper transcripts of the interviews do exist, but the actual spoken words from the people who shared their stories with Foxfire are priceless.

Unfortunately, these recordings are beginning to physically degrade, some rapidly, so Foxfire curator Barry Stiles began work last year on a new effort to duplicate the many hundreds of audio



This year's summer students, Emily Thurmond and Ethan Phillips, spent six weeks in the archive, digitally duplicating interview recordings from the 1970s.

cassettes and reel-to-reel tapes before they degrade further. Last summer, volunteer Eliza Newland spent a few weeks digitally duplicating interview recordings. This summer, Barry was able to hire two willing and capable *Foxfire Magazine* students to spend six weeks of their vacation in the archive, digitizing reels and cassettes into uncompressed computer audio files. With one week left to go, Emily Thurmond and Ethan Phillips, with some help from former student/staff member and frequent volunteer Kaye Carver Collins, have produced almost 80GB of digitized audio, duplicating roughly 175 hours of interviews from the early 1970s, helping preserve those pieces of the past—those people's stories—for generations to come.

The Foxfire Fund, Inc.

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Giving Back—Julia Fleet/Foxfire Scholarships

For over 35 years, Rabun County high school students involved in Foxfire programs have received scholarship assistance from The Foxfire Fund, Inc. These scholarships are currently funded through an endowment established by philanthropist Julia B. Fleet, who came to Foxfire looking for a way to express her affinity for the mountains of north Georgia and the people she met here.

To receive a Julia Fleet/Foxfire scholarship, students must have participated in *The Foxfire Magazine* program at Rabun County High School. Consideration is given to quantity and quality of participation—Foxfire classes taken, number of articles written, leadership positions held, and involvement with any special projects, events, or committees. Scholarship recipients are encouraged to maintain active volunteer involvement with Foxfire. Volunteerism is promoted as a way to help the students maintain ties to Foxfire itself, and, more importantly, to maintain ties to their home community.

Scholarship awards are based on five criteria, including participation in the *Magazine* program, financial need, volunteerism (outside the classroom) for Foxfire, and with emphasis on potential for success and academic achievement. Beginning this year, for new applicants, the pool gets narrowed down to no more than 5 candidates, and in-person interviews with members of the Scholarship Committee help determine final award levels. Each new scholarship recipient will receive a fixed award amount for four contiguous years of college, assuming they maintain full-time student status and a minimum 2.5 GPA.

Community Board members Emma Chastain, Danny Flory, Ramey Henslee, Nicole Queen, and Juanita Shope served as this year's Scholarship Committee.

In the scholarship program's 36 years, 315 local students have been awarded a total of approximately \$859,000. For the 2012–2013 academic year, two new scholarships were awarded to Alyssa

LaManna (attending Florida Gulf Coast University) and Gil Fountain (attending North Georgia Technical College). Eight other Rabun County students are continuing their higher education this fall with the assistance of the Julia Fleet/Foxfire Scholarship program: Casi Best, Christina Dills, Brad Jordan, Jennifer Mitcham, Alex Owens, Anna Phillips, Samantha Fountain Ramey, and Shanda Speed. Together, these 10 students were awarded a total of almost \$25,000 in support for continuing their educations.

Having just celebrated its 45th anniversary last year, Foxfire continues its tradition of giving back to Rabun County through the documentation of our local heritage in *The Foxfire Magazine*, preservation of the Southern Appalachian way of life at The Foxfire Museum & Heritage Center in Mountain City, and helping our students further their education through the Julia Fleet/Foxfire Scholarship program.



The newest recipients of Julia Fleet/Foxfire Scholarships, receiving awards for the 2012–2013 academic year: Alyssa LaManna and Gil Fountain

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Lee Carpenter, *Foxfire News*, P.O. Box 541, Mountain City, GA 30562; Phone: 706-746-5828; FAX: 706-746-5829; news@foxfire.org; www.foxfire.org
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Old Meets New—Single-Topic eBook Series

It's not often that modern electronic marvels like "iPad" or "Kindle" get mentioned in this newsletter, so fans of these handy gadgets should listen up now!

Anchor Books is the division of publishing giant Random House that currently holds the rights to the *Foxfire* series. In conjunction with last year's release of *The Foxfire 45th Anniversary Book*, Anchor produced a series of short, single-topic ebooks, collectively known as The Foxfire Americana Library. Each title in the series focuses on one particular topic or theme, gathering some of the best and most useful information about each topic directly from the original *Foxfire* series volumes. The result is a convenient, affordable reference collection representing an even dozen of the most popular and/or entertaining facets of Southern Appalachian heritage that have been documented by *Foxfire* students over the 45-year-plus history of the classroom program.

Half of the Americana titles focus on the number one priority of every day in the life of those hardy souls who settled the Southern Appalachian Mountains—food. Foraging the mountains for sustenance is discussed in *Meats and Small Game*, *Wild Spring Plant Foods*, and *Wild Summer/Fall Plant Foods*. *Planting by The Signs* talks about establishing a productive garden, and then *Pickling and Preserving* tells how the harvest bounty was prepared and stored for the winter months. *Traditional Baking* covers all of the tasty stuff to come off of the fire or out of the oven, from basic staple breads to

scrumptious cakes and puddings.

The other half of the Americana series runs the gamut from forms of entertainment to practical skills and knowledge. *Boogers, Witches, and Haints* contains a sampling of regional ghost stories, *Blowguns and Bouncing Pigs* gives stories of and instructions for making traditional toys, and *Mountain Music Fills the Air* explains the construction of two of the region's most popular instruments. *Moonshining as a Fine Art* gives tales, diagrams, and definitions for the most (in)famous of mountain-made beverages, while *Household Crafts and Tips* and *Mountain Folk Remedies* offer a plethora of useful anecdotes and solutions for common occurrences of everyday life.

The Americana Library ebooks are available through Amazon.com (Kindle), Barnes and Noble (Nook), iBookstore/iTunes (iPhone and iPad), and several other popular ebook outlets, for many different ebook devices and applications. Each title is priced at either \$2.99 or \$3.99. While these ebooks do not contain any new material, they do provide all of the convenience of portability associated with ebooks and the various reader devices, for those who already own the full-length *Foxfire* books. Also, these ebooks also provide a great, quick introduction to the world of *Foxfire*—the people of Southern Appalachia and the work of the students who gathered these stories for their high school magazine—to help new readers assess their own interest in the series before purchasing the full-length printed series books.



Meats and Small Game – An illustrated wealth of information from Appalachian experts on how to dress and cook meats and small game, including fish, hog, raccoon, rabbit, squirrel, turtle, and deer.

Wild Spring Plant Foods – A handy illustrated guide to the edible plant life available in Appalachia and other temperate areas during the spring.

Wild Summer and Fall Plant Foods – A handy illustrated guide to the edible plant life available in Appalachia and surrounding areas during the summer and fall seasons.

Planting by the Signs: Mountain Gardening – Tips for clearing land and growing vegetables from the people who originally pioneered the art through hard work (and a little bit of luck).

Pickling and Preserving – A warmhearted collection of tried-and-true methods for pickling and preserving fruits and vegetables.

Traditional Baking – Back-to-basics recipes for breads, cornbreads, puddings, cakes, and pies that are just as easily baked on a modern oven as the traditional Appalachian woodstoves where they began.

Boogers, Witches, and Haints: Appalachian Ghost Stories – Whether they tell of faucets that drip blood or monster catfish that lurk at the bottom of quarries, these stories will make you question what you believe.

Blowguns and Bouncing Pigs: Traditional Toymaking – Step back to the good ol' days with simple, classic toys that can be made at home.

Mountain Music Fills the Air: Banjos and Dulcimers – Appalachian musicians share the history of the instruments and show how they are constructed, piece by piece, with photos and diagrams.

Moonshining as a Fine Art – Time-honored methods of making (and occasionally hiding) safe, successful stills.

Household Crafts and Tips – The domestic arts are celebrated with traditional advice on soapmaking and quilting, as well as in-depth instructions for making baskets, hampers, cornhusk brooms, and more.

Mountain Folk Remedies – Historic remedies ranging from the practical (burdock tea will help aching feet) to the magical (carrying a buckeye in your pocket will help lessen arthritis).

A Busy Season of Heritage Programs at t

The Foxfire Museum & Heritage Center has been exceptionally busy this spring and summer, with a lengthy roster of events, each sharing different aspects of Southern Appalachia and its heritage with visitors from across the United States and abroad.

The fifth Living History Days event was held on Friday and Saturday, April 13 and 14, with local families and skilled craftsfolk again bringing the Museum to life with the sights, sounds, and smells of the 1800s. The event's 800+ visitors were able to observe potters, blacksmiths, woodworkers, homemakers, and more at work—and at play, with families and children's games also a part of the day.

This year's series of Children's Heritage Days included five dates in July and early August and continued offering favorite activities like blacksmithing, woodworking, candlemaking, and weaving, while also adding new fun with activities like soapmaking, folk art painting, tin punching, and cornshuck doll construction.

An unique addition to this year's line-up, a seatweaving workshop was held on July 21. Richard G. Hall of Palmetto, GA, instructed a group on the intricacies of weaving seats from flat reed or other traditional materials. Participants were allowed to bring their own chairs or to assemble a brand new stool to use in learning the basics of seatweaving. Most participants left with a completed chair or stool, and, more importantly, the basic knowledge and skill necessary to continue the craft with more of their own seatweaving projects in the future.

Most notably this year, though, was the addition of Folk on the Mountain, a two-day celebration of the limitless variety of folk art to be found throughout the southern U.S. region, produced by not-formally-trained artists using whatever materials are easily at hand. Nearly thirty artists were spread around the Museum grounds on Friday and Saturday, July 6-7, displaying all manner of practical and fantastical pottery, sculptures and assemblages made of *everything* (copper, wood, dog hair, old books, a car, etc.), and an amazing array of painting styles rendered on everything from scrap lumber to old windows to canvas, wood, and used roofing tin. No matter the medium or method, every piece on display for the event shared one common trait—imagination.

This first Folk on the Mountain event was dedicated to the memory of "Mr. Imagination" himself, Atlanta-based folk artist Gregory Warmack, who had planned to take part in the event, but passed away the week before.

Living History Days—(left) TJ Stevens and son Moses of Blairville, GA, talked to visitors as TJ turned lumps of clay into functional or fanciful pottery on his self-powered kick wheel. (left, bottom) Visitors to the 1820s Savannah House were greeted with a crackling fire and a table full of tasty, traditional, fireplace-cooked goodness. Children's Heritage Days—(below, left) Angelina puts together an elaborately-dressed cornshuck doll during the July 28 event. (below, right) Grant embraced imagination for the folk art painting activity with a very patriotic flag during the July 6 event. Seatweaving Workshop—(right, top) Seatweaving instructor Richard Hall explains the differing top and bottom surfaces of the flat reed material used for this workshop. (right, middle) A finished chair seat is washed with fire to remove loose reed fibers.



The Museum



Folk on the Mountain (above and left), a brand-new event this year, spread nearly 30 regional folk artists around the Museum grounds with their wares, which included paintings, sculptures, folk pottery, and countless other imaginative creations, and brought over 500 visitors to the Museum over the event's two days.

Other Museum Happenings, Improvements

Those of who have visited the Foxfire Museum in the past are familiar with Foxfire Lane, the moderately narrow, twisting driveway that accessed the Museum. Over the years since moving the gift shop to the Museum property, this road has been often cited as the least-favorite part of visitors' Foxfire experience. Well, here is some good news for the next trip to visit the museum: There is an all-new Foxfire Lane. In late 2011, after attempts at finding grant funding for the project were unsuccessful, Foxfire's Board of Directors approved the use of endowment funds to grade in a completely new driveway from Cross Street. The new driveway is 0.2 miles closer to Black Rock Mountain Parkway, with an added elevation benefit as well—the new Foxfire Lane is much shorter and flatter, making one gentle climb from Cross Street before running level the rest of the way to the new parking area just below the gift shop—additional parking which made accommodating the crowds attending Living History Days and Folk on the Mountain a much less trying experience for all parties involved. A generous two-lane width and one sweeping curve make the new driveway easily navigable for buses and RVs as well (although Black Rock Mountain Parkway and Cross Street are still challenging for drivers without mountain- and back-road experience).

Thanks are in order for Charles and his crew at Hunnicutt Grading for the fine job of clearing, grading, and finishing the new driveway, and especially to civil engineer and former Foxfire student Chet Welch for donating his services in planning the project.

The fenced-in garden area between the gristmill and the archive building was put back into service this season, with a group of Foxfire's friends planting and tending several traditional and heirloom vegetables varieties. Museum artists/demonstrators Sharon Grist and Carole Morse also got in on the fun, growing native dye plants and broom corn in the garden as well.

An unused former garden area near the top of the Museum facility has been reconfigured to serve as parking area for folks



The new Foxfire Lane—a wider, flatter, friendlier driveway than the original—which hopefully will make its way into public mapping/GPS data eventually.



The additional parking added with the Museum's new driveway made for much smoother access and traffic flow during this year's bigger Museum events.

using the conference room and/or sleeping space of the Long House and Guest House cabins, and a wheelchair-accessible ramp from this parking area to the Long House has been constructed. Over the last year, these two cabins have hosted two week-long Foxfire Course for Teachers sessions facilitated by Piedmont College, various Foxfire meetings and classes offered by partners in the local community, and even one fun-filled guided tour/workshop marathon/sleepover-style field trip for a group of Atlanta-area students from The Howard School, who were able to experience very nearly *everything* Foxfire has to offer (and a few new things, as well) in spite of the normally-prohibitive travel time from their school.

While curator Barry Stiles has found himself involved in several roof- and chimney-related projects around the Museum this year, one in particular needs special note. In order to expand the capacity of the Long House's meeting space, the large stacked-rock fireplace and chimney that separated the conference room from the kitchen area was *removed* from the building. Barry and a few extra pairs of hands carried out the involved operation, working on the roof, among the cramped rafters overhead, inside the building, and finally underneath the floor—working with hammers, chisels, prybars, and even a small jackhammer when space allowed. The result is a much more versatile, open meeting space that has already been put to good use during this summer's workshops and courses at the Museum.

The Beck Barn, a huge four-pen/crossed hall structure that has been mentioned in this newsletter several times, continues its journey toward becoming part of the Museum. The barn has been fully disassembled and transported to the Museum grounds. A large flat area, uphill from the Bungalow, has been graded in preparation for the Barn's re-construction, which hopefully will begin later this year, once a proper foundation is in place and suitable logs are located for some vital repair work during the assembly process.

Saving Hemlock Trees from the Woolly Adelgid

There's one other improvement to the Museum of special note that took place late last year. We have mentioned in past newsletters that the Museum has lost some of the largest hemlock trees on the grounds, victims of the hemlock woolly adelgid, a tiny bug that feeds of hemlock sap and weakens the trees to the point that they die within a very few years from the initial infestation. A fortunate convergence occurred between Foxfire, two other non-profit organizations, and one intrepid Boy Scout. The Lake Rabun Association (www.lakerabun.org), a local community group, has been offering assistance to area residents who are looking for a way to treat their dying hemlock trees. Save Georgia's Hemlocks (savegeorgiashemlocks.org) had begun working on a plan, with LRA support, to treat the hundreds of infested hemlocks covering the mountainside grounds of the Museum. Then, fortuitously, Eagle Scout candidate John Touchstone learned of the plan from SGH's Donna Shearer, saw a great opportunity for a leadership service project, and took on organizing the treatment of the Museum's hemlocks with the aid of his troop, Troop 62 of Cumming, GA.

After months of planning, John brought his troop and several parent volunteers to Mountain City on a cold mid-November morning, where they received training from SGH's Bob Pledger and Donna, and then teams fanned out in "police lines" and thoroughly covered the Museum grounds, treating several hundred trees.

This summer, the Foxfire Museum has been a little bit greener

than it was last year, as the treated hemlocks work to recover. Please join us in thanking John Touchstone, his family, and the hardy fellows of Troop 62 for their hard work.



(above) John Touchstone (center) goes over his Museum map and action plan with the Troop. (below) The circumference of the hemlock's trunk is used to calculate pesticide dosage. (bottom) Scouts learn how to operate the injectors used to administer the pesticide that will be absorbed by the hemlocks' roots.



Scouts and parents of Troop 62—back row (all standing): Scott Fischer, Tyler Dees, Nick Fischer, Chase McFarling, Greg McFarling, Paul Cromer, Avery Hagle, James Auger, Matt Zimmerman, Michael Zimmerman, Ralph Cromer, Mike Touchstone; middle row: Kell Berliner, Zachary Frederick, Anthony DiTaranto (hidden), Austin Auger, Karsten Koerner, Robert Green, Ari Berliner; front row: Will Touchstone, Austin Hall, John Touchstone



Saturday, October 6, 2012



School's back in, summer memories are fading, and everyone is looking for just a little more fun. In just a few weeks, on October 6, Foxfire and the Mountaineer Festival will offer their third combined **Foxfire Mountaineer Festival**—a celebration of Southern Appalachia held at the Rabun County Civic Center in Clayton, Georgia. The Festival brings together a spectacular mix of arts, crafts, music, food, and fun, while honoring the people who carved our homes from the Appalachian wilderness, the skills and crafts that helped them survive, the traditional music they kept alive, and the good times they enjoyed when the day's work was done.

Quilters, broom-makers, woodworkers, potters, knitters, metalsmiths, weavers, candlemakers, luthiers, and more—the folks who still keep the skills and crafts of Southern Appalachia alive—will fill the Civic Center and surrounding grounds. Visitors can browse these folks' handiwork, observe some creating their goods, and possibly get the chance to try their own hands at a few of these tasks that Appalachian settlers performed every day. Great regional Bluegrass and gospel music will fill the air throughout the day, and this year's Miss Foxfire Mountaineer pageant will be held the day of the event, on the stage at City Hall (the old Clayton Elementary lunchroom).

Arts, crafts, and music make for a fun-filled day, but for those with a more energetic bent, show up in some comfortable, stainable clothes, and get ready for some traditional non-electronic fun from days gone by. See how long it takes to saw through a log with a two-man crosscut saw—a traditional tool most commonly seen today decorating walls or camouflaged with scenic paintings. Test steadiness and focus in the archery competition. Demonstrate strength in the pole climb. Prove coordination in the three-legged race. Let the kids see what it's like to chase after their dinner in the greased-pig chases (don't worry, the pigs leave happy at the end of the day). Ribbons, trophies, and/or prizes will be offered for most field events.

Plenty of good mountain food will be available at the Festival, along with animals, field events, mountain crafts, an auction and raffle featuring items donated by local and regional businesses, and so much more. Join the fun in downtown Clayton, GA, at the Rabun County Civic Center on Saturday, October 6, from 10am until 6pm. Admission is \$5, kids 5 & under get in free, and there is a maximum charge of \$20 per family. Visit www.foxfiremountaineer.org for more information, driving directions, and current exhibitor, music, and field-event listings.

@ Rabun County Civic Center in Clayton, GA
www.foxfiremountaineer.org for more info

The Foxfire Mountaineer Festival is produced by the Mountaineer Festival committee and Foxfire's Community Board, and is funded in part by donations from local businesses. Some event proceeds support Foxfire's local programs, helping our local high school students grow stronger ties to their community and their rich mountain heritage.

