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Communities of Heritage — Southern Contributions

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Communities of Heritage—Southern Contributions

The diverse peoples of the South have contributed much to American culture. Oral traditions, stories, music, crafts, and cooking styles were brought over from Europe and Africa and often combined with Native American traditions. Crafts provide the most tangible evidence of early cultural exchanges and borrowings among these groups. For example, spread throughout the South are the coiled sea-grass baskets of the South Carolina and Georgia coasts, from Africa; Native American and European split-oak baskets in the Appalachians; and the alkaline-glazed stoneware tradition of Edgefield, South Carolina, from Asia.

The story of craft in the South begins with the physical landscape and the materials it provided to create utilitarian goods. The South encompasses the Appalachian mountain range, the fall-line regions with rich clay deposits and flowing streams, the wetlands and sea islands along the coast, and the cotton belt and rural communities in the Deep South. The forests provided a variety of woods for building houses, furniture, and musical instruments, along with wood for firing the pottery kiln. The hills provided kaolin and iron-rich clay and feldspar for pottery production. Oak, pine needles, river cane, willow bark, honeysuckle vine, rush, and sweet grasses were used for basket making. Also, the
land could be used to raise sheep for food and for wool and to grow crops such as cotton, flax, sorghum, corn, and other produce.

These resources were turned to good use. Food and syrups were preserved in stoneware vessels. Eggs were collected in handmade split-oak baskets. Rice was “fanned” (to separate the hull from the rice) in coiled sea-grass baskets. Coverlets and blankets were woven out of locally spun wool, cotton, and linen. Quilts were often made using strips and pieces of leftover store-bought or homespun cloth or worn-out clothes. Mothers taught daughters, and fathers taught sons these useful skills, with each adding his or her own individual style to the craft produced.

Many of these traditional crafts declined in use after the Civil War, with the change from an agrarian economy to an industrial one and the increased availability of mass-produced goods. In the early twentieth century, some crafts were revived as a source of income for the poor of Appalachia and the Sea Islands, who made woven coverlets and small handcrafted goods, some of which were sold locally while new markets began to develop in New York City and later across the nation, and catalogs were started for those interested in handcrafted items. For the first time, forces outside of the families and small communities—most of them religious missionaries or educators—began to have an important influence on the preservation not only of existing artifacts but also of the skills needed to make them. After World War II, interest in handmade arts and crafts declined again, but by the late 1960s, it was on the rise and it has been sustained ever since.

SOUTHERN TRADITIONAL POTTERY

Earthenware and stoneware forms dominate traditional southern pottery. The earliest examples are earthenware vessels produced by Native Americans using the coiling method to make utilitarian and ceremonial pots, pipes, and figures. These pieces were fired in a pit and then burnished to a high gloss, a tradition the Catawba and Cherokee Indians have continued into the twenty-first century. The Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual was established in 1949 on the Cherokee Indian Reservation as a retail outlet for their arts and crafts. The tourist trade also helped to support both the Cherokee tradition based around Asheville, North Carolina, and the Catawba group in York, South Carolina, on the border near Charlotte, North Carolina. The Catawba potters have a thriving tradition that has expanded to include male potters, many trained by the older matriarchs, who produce pots that are most stylized and individualized.

North of the Catawba reservation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is a settlement established by the Moravians, a religious sect that fled persecution in Europe in
the eighteenth century. Their European-style potteries, producing lead-glazed earthenware pieces, are also found in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia and in Montgomery and Moore Counties in North Carolina. Because the Moravian earthenware was glazed with lead, which is both poisonous and expensive, its usefulness was restricted.

The southern market for pottery was more or less cornered by potteries located around Edgefield, South Carolina, home to one of the most significant American ceramic traditions. Before the Edgefield potteries were established, utilitarian wares had to be purchased from the northern states and from England or Europe. Edgefield Pottery refers to alkaline-glazed stoneware that was produced in the Edgefield district of South Carolina during the nineteenth century. This fall-line region along the Georgia border and the Savannah River is rich in clay deposits, hardwoods and pines, and rivers and streams.

Edgefield's alkaline-glazed stoneware is a unique blend of the ceramic traditions of England, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Many of the potters were English, Irish, and Germans who contributed forms and techniques from their homelands, while enslaved Africans and African-Americans performed most of the labor-intensive tasks of digging and refining the clay, chopping wood, bringing water, loading and unloading the kiln, and taking the wares by wagon to market. According to census and mortgage records, some slaves worked as turners before the Civil War, and after, several freed African-Americans operated their own potteries.

At its peak in the 1850s, Edgefield's five pottery factories made more than 50,000 gallons of pottery a year measured by the amount of food the vessels contained. Ovoid storage jars and jugs, straight-walled churns, pitchers, plates, and cups were produced in great quantities right through the Civil War. Transported by wagon and train, they were sold in South Carolina, Georgia, and North Carolina.

The Lewis Miles factory was the most lucrative of the Edgefield potteries in the 1850s. Miles married into the Landrum family and operated his pottery at several sites between 1840 and his death in 1867. Among the fifty enslaved African-American men and women who worked for Miles was a potter named Dave Drake, who made enormous jars — some large enough to hold 40 gallons. A literate slave who signed and dated many of his works and occasionally wrote a poem on the side, Drake was one of the best and most prolific turners.

Men who worked in the Edgefield potteries, both enslaved and free, took the alkaline-glaze tradition with them as they followed the clay veins and migrated north into Buncombe County, North Carolina, and westward into Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi,
DURING his lifetime and afterward, David Drake was recognized for his magical skills as a potter and for an ability that was rare among slaves: He could read and write, allowing him to inscribe original poems, as well as his own name, on leather-hard clay before it was fired. As a result, the pottery he made must be viewed in terms of its artistic merits and its literary contribution.

Dave was born into slavery in 1800, most likely in the Edgefield district of South Carolina, where he spent more than seventy years of his life. All that is known about Dave is derived from his writing on the pots he made and from documents relating to those who owned him. For example, his name appears as collateral on a mortgage obtained in 1817 by Harvey Drake and his uncles, Amos and Abner Landrum. During this time, the Landrum family was establishing stoneware factories at Pottersville, a mile north of the Edgefield town square, and elsewhere in the area. By 1821, Dave was an established potter working for Drake.

Exactly how Dave learned to read and write is not known (it was illegal to teach slaves); he could have been taught by one of his owners or learned on his own by interacting with young white children or by teaching himself. In 1836, he wrote about other forms of chattel in the verse “Horses, mules and hogs, all our cows are in the bogs, there they shall ever stay, till the buzzards take them away.”

By 1840, Dave was owned by and worked for Lewis Miles, a man ten years his junior who had married into the Landrum family and pottery dynasty. Many of the existing vessels attributed to Dave were made at the Lewis Miles factory, some bearing the initials Lm. One jar bears the verse “Dave belongs to Mr. Miles, where the oven bakes and the pots bile.” This jar, dated 31 July 1840, is now in the collection of the Charleston Museum.

Of the thousands of jugs and jars that Dave made in the 1840s, several that survive bear poems he inscribed, including this one: “Give me silver or either gold, though they are dangerous to our soul.” The pots indicate that Dave produced pottery during every month of the year, and he may have worked every day. The peak months of production were August and October.

By the 1850s, Dave was turning jars that could hold more than twenty gallons of foodstuff, a feat not accomplished by many American potters. Several of these enormous vessels had four handles, as two people would be required to lift the pot when it was filled. The largest jars made by Dave and his assistant, Baddler, have a capacity of forty gallons and have four handles. They stand over 2 feet tall and are more than 60 inches in circumference. When wet, they weighed between 200 and 300 pounds. Glaze was poured over the sides of the jars, because they were too heavy to dip into the glaze vat. After firing, they were significantly lighter but still required two people to move. These pots would have been used on a large plantation, as most farmers would not need to store that much meat, nor could they afford to purchase a pot that cost $4.
Edgefield pottery was distributed throughout the state via wagons and railroads, sold in small stores in Columbia and Charleston, and often ordered directly by the end user.

Dave worked through the Civil War producing jars as late as 1864. The last of his known poems is from 1862: “I—made this jar all of cross, if you don’t repent you will be lost.” The lack of signed works after Emancipation and the war’s end in 1865 suggests that Dave was no longer producing pottery at the same volume, or perhaps at all. The 1870 federal census bears the listing: “David Drake—age 70—turner.” The 1880 census contains no listing for David or Dave Drake, so it is surmised that he had died by that time, leaving behind a direct line of communication via his vessels to those who bought and used them—free or slave, white or black, past or present.

OPPOSITE David Drake, Food Storage Jar, 1856, stoneware.
David Drake, a literate African-American potter working at the Lewis Miles pottery factory, turned this 2-foot-high food storage jar. It was made for Mr. John “Monday,” who owned a nearby plantation. Because of the jar’s size and weight, the alkaline glaze had to be poured over the vessel before it was fired.

As no photographic images of Dave are known to survive, artist Jonathan Green created a series of paintings inspired by Dave, his work, and the history of Edgefield pottery.
and Louisiana and as far as Texas. Many were related to the extended Landrum family, and new family-operated potteries emerged in other places.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the pottery factories in Edgefield had closed due to increasing competition from manufactured goods. However, traditional potters often became itinerant craftsmen in the early twentieth century, traveling throughout the Southeast to practice their trade.

In Cleveland, Georgia, Cheever Meaders and his children made utilitarian pots and jugs for the local community and a few for tourists traveling through the mountains. They were recognized in Allen Eaton’s seminal work, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, first published in 1937. One of the Meaders children, Lanier, became one of the best-known folk potters in America. Lanier produced straight-sided churns and kraut jars, syrup jugs that tapered gently at the bottom, and pitchers with a sharply defined shoulder and a loop or strap handle. He was best known for his face jugs with eyes made of rock and teeth made of broken crockery. All his pottery had the “Shanghai” glaze, an alkaline glaze with high wood ash content that has a drippy look and texture.

Until Lanier Meaders’s death in 1998, he continued the traditional way of making pots: digging the clay himself, using a mule-driven pug mill to grind it up, turning the pots on a treadle wheel, using an alkaline glaze, and firing the pots in a wood-burning ground-hog kiln. Lanier and his relatives, along with Burlon Craig in Vale, North Carolina, did much to sustain and then revitalize the alkaline-glazed stoneware tradition in the South. They influenced and inspired hundreds of contemporary potters, whose work shows reverence to the time-honored techniques of the traditional potters while adding their own style. Both Lanier Meaders and Burlon Craig were given the distinction of National Heritage Award winner by the National Endowment of the Arts, the equivalent of a national treasure designation for their work as traditional potters.

Today, the pottery capital of North Carolina is located in Moore County between Charlotte and Raleigh, a region rich in clay deposits and hardwoods. The landlocked community of Seagrove boasts about a hundred operating potteries. A variety of styles can be found, from utilitarian, salt-glazed stoneware that recalls the area’s nineteenth-century pottery production to contemporary vessels with experimental glazes.

Jugtown Pottery is one of the oldest shops, established in 1921 by Jacques and Juliana Busbee to produce high-quality, handmade pottery similar to the wares made in North Carolina in the late nineteenth century. Among the original ten to fifteen people who operated the pottery were Henry Chrisco, Rufus Owen, James H. Owen, and J. W. Teague—potters whose forefathers were also
North Carolina potters such as Pam and Vernon Owens at Jugtown continue to turn large salt-glazed stoneware churns and storage jars, which have been produced in North Carolina since the eighteenth century. The works are thrown on a treadle wheel and fired in a wood-burning kiln, which brings out the deep red and orange of the iron-rich local clay. As the wood ash from the kiln drops onto the churn during the firing, it creates the drippy appearance of the finished piece, similar to the alkaline-glazed tradition of Edgefield and of Chinese and Japanese wood-fired vessels.
FOR centuries, potters have been making usable ceramic vessels with anthropomorphic features. Besides expressing their creativity and emotion, the potters were often producing something they needed for everyday use, for ritual or ceremonial purposes, or just for the fun of creating. Among the ritual ceramics, for example, were Egyptian canopic jars, Nayarit figural vessels, and the German bellermine jugs. In other instances, such as Moche (Peru) and Mangbetu (Zaire) portrait vessels, the products were presented to the nobility and ruling classes. English Toby jugs were made as caricatures of the fictional town drunk, Toby Philpot. In the United States, the tradition of making jugs or pitchers with faces began around 1810 in the North with potters who were competing for a market that included English and European goods. The Remmeys of New York and Philadelphia made a small number of pitchers and jugs with applied faces for a short period of time between 1810 and 1858. After the Civil War, “face vessels” came out of Illinois, Ohio, and Kentucky. Many of these were related to the temperance movement and the evils of alcohol or “demon rum.”

However, nowhere else in the world have potters been as prolific in making face vessels as in the American South. Since the 1840s, southern potters have produced thousands of “face jugs” of all sizes, shapes, and designs. Southern face vessels, along with the alkaline glaze that covers their surface, were born in Edgefield, South Carolina. The purpose of the earliest face jugs, aside from holding liquids, is still a mystery—were they made as protests or for ritual or for holding liquor? No one has been able to explain why this tradition became so popular.

Among its practitioners was Thomas Chandler, who made harvest or “monkey” jugs—so-called because of an African tradition associating thirst with monkeys—that had sculpted features and double spouts for keeping water cool. A surviving example, stamped “Chandler Maker,” has carefully applied eyes and sophisticated African features, which leads us to believe that this was not the first time Chandler produced such a vessel. Some southern face vessels are cups for drinking. It is thought that one particularly large vessel was used as an umbrella stand.

Edwin Atlee Barber, a ceramic historian from Philadelphia, wrote that many of these face vessels—or grotesque jugs, as he called them—were made by the slaves at Col. Thomas Davies’s factory during the Civil War period, and some speculate that the work represents an African cultural contribution. The many surviving vessels are typically smaller than one gallon and bear crude, unrealistic features such as rolled kaolin eyes and rock teeth. One face jug is documented as decorating an African-American grave.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Brown family of potters, which began in Georgia, was making these jugs, occasionally inscribing them with advertising messages. One member of the Brown family recalls that his father made a face jug as a joke for an Atlanta dentist in the 1940s. In the 1970s and 1980s, the popularity of face jugs among pottery collectors grew, due partly to North Georgia potter Lanier Meaders’s artistry and his participation in the Smithsonian’s Folklife Festival. Meaders continued to work in the old-time ways and was joined by other family members over the years. Today hundreds of southern potters create face jugs, popular as a traditional form.
potters. The Busbees also hired Ben Owen and Charlie Teague as teenagers, then cultivated their artistic talents by sending them to visit museums throughout the United States. Influenced by Chinese and Japanese ceramics, the potters at Jugtown developed new forms such as the Persian Jar—a wide-mouthed jar that tapers to the shoulder and then flares again, with a rope decoration at the shoulder. They also used glazes such as Chinese Blue and Mirror Black that were patterned after the Asian ceramics. However, they respected the traditional forms of bean pots and teapots and continued to produce them. Ben Owen became the main potter at Jugtown, working there until 1952, when he opened his own shop. His grandson, Ben Owen III, has become a master potter, too, and continues the family tradition to this day.

Vernon Owens began working at Jugtown in 1959 under John Mare, then under Nancy Sweezy, director of Country Roads, finally becoming the owner of Jugtown in 1983. Vernon’s wife, Pam, is an accomplished potter herself, and their two children, Travis and Bayle, “raised in clay,” are also skilled potters.

Jugtown was not the only pottery operating during the second half of the twentieth century. The Cole families operated numerous shops, producing earthenware pitchers, bowls, Rebecca pitchers (cruses with elongated handles), and flowerpots, everything sold both locally and regionally. People on their way to Florida would stop in and purchase pieces as souvenirs. Other members of the Owen family operated potteries such as North State Pottery and Rainbow Pottery, producing pieces for other markets. Numerous Cole, Teague, Owen, and Owens potteries currently operate in the Seagrove area. By nurturing and honoring its ceramic heritage, this community has become an epicenter for potters in the United States and has attracted potters from all over the world. It is interesting to note that in many southern states, numerous potteries are owned and/or operated by multiple generations, similar to traditional potteries in England and Europe.

SOUTHERN TEXTILES: WEAVING AND QUILTING

During the late nineteenth century, hand weaving was revived in the Appalachians as a source of income for the greatly impovdered mountain people. The tradition of creating wool, cotton, and linsey-woolsey (made with linen and wool) coverlets was brought over from Ireland, Scotland, and England. Many patterns had been passed down from generation to generation on rolled-up drafts, often in enigmatic codes or series of numbers to signify the repetition. Without the handcraft revival, the South might have lost this type of hand weaving.

Berea College, Kentucky, has one of the longest-operating weaving programs. When its “Fireside Industries” were established in 1883, the purpose was to have the local people
make coverlets and blankets, along with other crafts such as furniture and brooms, which would then be sold to benefit the weavers and improve the depressed economic situation. Looms were built for local women to reproduce kiverlets based on weaving drafts that had been passed down for several generations. All materials were produced locally, from sheep to shawl. Later, other crafts were added to the curriculum at Berea, where students are required to learn practical skills as part of their formal education. Today, visitors can still purchase finely woven products there, along with handmade brooms and other small pieces of furniture.

While other crafts waxed and waned, quilting never faltered. For centuries, women have quilted or made other bed coverings out of necessity and a desire to create something beautiful. Quilts covered family beds, made wedding presents as sons and daughters left home to start their own households, and marked the arrival of babies. Patterns have varied among cultural groups and during different centuries. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, appliqué quilts and friendship quilts were fashionable, along with clearly defined patterns such as Whigs Defeat and Rose of Sharon. Crazy quilts emerged in popularity in the mid to late nineteenth century and were often sentimental, made by groups of women at quilting bees. Pieced quilts gained a stronger position in the quilters’ domain as the economic situation changed. While some used high-quality store-bought fabrics, others made do with what they had on hand.

During the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, many community-based quilting groups have sold their works as a source of income. Quilting bees or circles are a way for women to work together for a common goal while enjoying a social outlet. These groups and the resulting quilts are a source of community pride.

In the 1970s the hoopla surrounding the bicentennial marked increased awareness of quilting traditions and the benefits of sewing skills. Hundreds of elementary school chil-

**ABOVE**

APPLIQUÉD AND PIECED-COTTON FRIENDSHIP QUILT, EDGEFIELD AND LAURENS DISTRICTS, SOUTH CAROLINA, 1857. The quilt is comprised of twenty-five individual squares, each made by a different young lady from either the Edgefield or Laurens Districts of South Carolina. Floral patterns predominate the quilt. The pineapple and melon motifs are also employed along with two hearts in the center square. Only two squares have chintz fabric, which makes for an unusual piece. Each woman signed her name on the square she sewed. The second square reads, “W. C. Goodman Remembers Well and bears in mind a faithful friend.” The white squares are bordered with red strips.
Children were taught to sew and created individual quilt squares that formed school quilts, an activity that is still practiced today. By 1978, numerous quilt survey projects were undertaken throughout the country, particularly in the southern states. The American Folklife Center at the Smithsonian undertook surveys in North Carolina and West Virginia. In Mississippi the Mississippi Cultural Crossroads was started with a two-pronged purpose: to raise young people’s awareness about their diverse cultural heritage and to involve them with documenting their traditions, or “folk” culture, such as quilting. Local quilters went into the schools and taught the young people. At the same time, these quilters—
both black and white—were encouraged to share their knowledge outside the classroom at community centers. These women were not dissimilar from their contemporaries in Gee’s Bend, Alabama and Johns and James Islands, South Carolina.

As their involvement in the community increased, Mississippi quilters such as Hystercine Rankin and Gustina Atlas in Claiborne County, Mississippi, were individually and collectively recognized by the Mississippi Arts Commission. Hystercine Rankin was given a National Heritage Award, an initiative of the National Endowment of the Arts, in 1997.

Many of the quilts made by the Mississippi Cultural Crossroads group reflect the technique favored by African-American quilters—that of the strip quilt—as opposed to
the symmetrical, patterned block quilts that come out of the European tradition. The strip technique allows a quilt to be made more quickly, not requiring the same level of fastidious and exacting measuring, cutting, and piecing of many shapes. Some relate the visual patterning of strip quilts to improvisation and the jazz aesthetic. Historically, the majority of African-American quilters in the South did not have the money to purchase fancy fabrics but used the materials they had on hand to make quilts used by their family to stay warm. Many of these quilts incorporate older quilts as the backing. Another quilt type that has emerged within the African-American quilting tradition is the story quilt, which has roots in the antebellum South and which is not too dissimilar from the album quilt.

Two historic examples of the story quilt were made in the 1880s by Harriet Powers, a
woman who survived slavery in Georgia. One of her appliquéd quilts depicts fifteen individual scenes from the Bible, each block joined or bordered with a strip. Hystercine Rankin also made her own Memory quilts depicting past events in her life and those of her family members.

**BASKETRY**

The coiled sea-grass baskets made along the South Carolina coast are an outcome of the transatlantic slave trade. Thousands of enslaved Africans from the rice-growing coast of Senegal, Congo, and Angola were brought into South Carolina as early as 1708 to work the rice plantations, bringing with them their skills in sewing coiled baskets.

Fanner baskets, large circular baskets with 2- to 3-inch sides, are used to sort the rice from hulls and chaff. Baskets were also needed to hold sewing tools, food, and other goods. The type of baskets people created changed along with the economy. By the late nineteenth century, for example, fanner baskets were no longer needed as rice cultivation in South Carolina diminished with the end of the plantation system after the Civil War.

During the early twentieth century, the Penn Normal, Industrial and Agricultural School (originally the Penn School) was established in Beaufort County, South Carolina, to teach the local African-American community skills such as basket making, iron working, and net making. These crafts were still economically useful, but they were no longer being handed down from person to person as they were during the days of slavery.

During the 1920s, markets for coiled baskets were found in Charleston and nearby Mount Pleasant as Charleston experienced a renaissance that made it a tourist destination. Stands selling baskets were set up along Highway 17, the major route linking Charleston to all points north and south. Baskets and flowers were also sold at the old market and at the “four corners of law,” or Court House Square at Broad and Meeting Streets in downtown Charleston.

Essentially, tourists to the Charleston area who buy baskets have sustained the sewers who keep the tradition alive, although basket materials have fluctuated over the centuries. Bulrush, which was durable and good for fanning rice, has been largely replaced with sweetgrass, which is more aesthetically pleasing for decorative baskets. Pine needles, used in conjunction with the rush and sweetgrass,
are sewn using palmetto fronds. Recently, many sewers have been using rush again as condominiums and houses encroach on the marshlands where sweetgrass grows, reducing the supply. Along with their materials, the forms of baskets have evolved from utilitarian fan-
er and sewing baskets to highly stylized baskets made for decoration and adornment.

The craft of basketry is also prominent among Native Americans, particularly the Cherokee, who use local materials such as honeysuckle, river cane, and split oak. Different colors and textures are achieved through the use of natural dyes and physical manipulation of the materials. Thin splits are tightly woven to create beautiful and useful baskets of varying sizes and shapes.

The basket’s end purpose influences the tightness of the weaving and the form. An egg basket has thinner and smoother splits than a large fish trap or cotton hamper, for example. The Cherokee tradition was buoyed when the Qualla Arts and Crafts Mutual was established in 1946 within the Qualla Boundary, the proper name of the Cherokee Indian Reservation and principal home of the Eastern Cherokee. Its goal was to promote the culture and sell the arts and crafts, including beadwork, pottery, and carving, produced by the tribe.

In the South, European settlers and enslaved Africans adapted Native American basket-making techniques. Baskets crafted today reflect the richness of these myriad traditions, as seen in the work of Billie Ruth Sudduth—a basket maker from the South renowned for her Fibonacci baskets, named after a thirteenth-century mathematician who was a proponent of the golden mean (see page 232). In her baskets, classical mathematics proportions are combined with Native American and Appalachian materials such as split oak and reeds dyed with henna, madder, and iron oxides.

**FURNITURE**

Plain-style furniture produced in the South, including the iconic ladder-back chair from the Appalachians, was created for everyday use and with an eye for form and function. The beauty was often found in the aging of the wood, the weaving of the seat, and the graceful lines of the legs and rails. Much like Shaker furniture, this furniture was simplistic in form, and the maker or a family member was involved in all parts of the process: chopping down the tree, hewing away the bark, and splitting, planing, and shaving the wood to the appropriate size. Rather than fancy nails or glue blocks, chair construction depended on simple mortise-
and-tendon joints, capitalizing on the different shrinking characteristics of the wood. The seats were often woven by the chair maker or someone local using split oak or rush. Other furniture pieces such as sideboards and cellarets (a kind of chest) were less fancy than their high-style counterparts made in Charleston or New York, and the wood was solid cherry, poplar, heart pine, or walnut—sometimes painted—instead of highly finished mahogany and satinwood veneers. Furniture was made in small quantities, not in the vast numbers required by retail shops in the cities.
By the turn of the twentieth century, mass-produced furniture was available in most southern communities through mail-order catalogs and traveling salesmen. However, many people in the South were poor, particularly in the Appalachians and remote areas such as the Sea Islands, and so they were not consumers of mass-produced furniture, relying instead on the woodworking skills of those in their community. By the middle of the twentieth century, just a few traditional furniture makers were working. By studying and writing about community—and culture-based traditions—folklorists and scholars fostered early interest in southern handcrafted furniture. At the same time, the artists themselves joined together in the Southern Highland Craft Guild to promote the sale of their handmade goods.

**SUSTAINABILITY OF CRAFT**

While the making of pottery, textiles, baskets, and furniture met the everyday needs of southern communities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the twentieth century saw the arrival of social and missionary efforts to sustain these crafts in a world of machine-made goods. First, after the Civil War, poverty motivated some to recall the old crafts so they could make items to sell for extra income for the family. Then, schools and cooperative groups were established to teach and cultivate these skills and to provide a venue for the sale of crafts.

About the same time, proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement, along with others interested in cultural traditions among ordinary people, began to have an impact on the American South, particularly on those who lived in the Appalachian Mountains. Educators and missionaries took an interest in the people of these remote areas, surveying the land, collecting stories and songs and other aspects of the local culture. Inevitably, several schools were established throughout the South to cultivate these traditions.

These include Berea College (Kentucky), Crossnore School (North Carolina), John C. Campbell Folk School (North Carolina), Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts (Tennessee), and Penland School (North Carolina).

Starting out as a weaving center, the Penland School of Crafts later expanded to include pottery. Today, it is a world-renowned center for craft art, where ten different disciplines are taught in a beautiful area of western North Carolina. Penland has embraced creative expression while fostering traditional values and provides a haven for teachers and students to immerse themselves in their art.

In addition, many traditional arts are brought to the national stage through the Smithsonian’s Folklife Festival and documented through the national and statewide folklore and folklife programs created in the 1970s and 1980s. Continuing into the twenty-
first century, these programs conduct research into past and present traditions while cul-
tivating new and emerging ones. The National Endowment for the Arts has a Folk Arts component, and many state art agencies have similar programs designated to promote and preserve traditional arts and crafts museum exhibitions. Commercial outlets have also added to the awareness of our rich heritage.

Nurtured and sustained now by these institutions, the craft forms that took root in the South, blending the cultures of three continents, have an assured future. Their history will be preserved, and new generations will not only come to appreciate the arts of their ancestors but will also learn to employ the same techniques for their own pleasure. A dynamic new era is under way.

★★★