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A Glimmer of Light in the Great Depression:
Women's Agency at the Southern Highland Craft Guild in the 1930s and 1940s

A Senior Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Department of History
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts in History

Submitted by:
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12 April 2018

Abstract

During the Great Depression southern women's economic opportunities were mainly limited to farm work or mill labor, with little to no economic equality or security. The Southern Highland Craft Guild of the Appalachian region was a unique entity made up of individual craft producing centers that hired women equally alongside men. Interest in this area stems from the overlooking of the guild in the southern economic narrative. By examining individual accounts of women working within the guild, this paper explores the experiences of rural women who were able to use this organization to achieve independence through craftwork and contributed to a widespread cultural movement throughout Appalachia.

As one of the main craft centers in the United States, with tourists still flocking to the region year after year to examine the local artwork associated with the area, Appalachia's cultural and economic development owes a great deal to the Appalachian craft movement. From weaving classes held in rural high schools, to small weaving companies, and to large-scale industrial mills, many men and women supported their families through the creation and selling of crafts from the early 19th Century to the mid 20th Century, when the revival of Appalachian craft culture spread throughout the mountain range. Among these new crafting establishments was the Southern Highland Craft Guild. Created as an alternative to factory and mill work between 1928 and 1930, the guild was an entity that respected their artists, both male and female. These guild members produced beautifully unique pieces of art that best represented the Appalachian culture to urban consumers and reflected their personal view of the region. Women were placed on equal footing with their male counterparts and had the freedom to work with whichever crafting medium they chose, as long as the products they created were marketable. This unique situation for the guild's women crafters was a stark contrast to the economic realities of most women in the United States throughout the 1930s. For most working women, the luxury to create their own products and earn the full price of their labor was not available to them at all. In a southern economic culture dominated by factories and mills, the Southern Highland Craft Guild was the ideal alternative for women craft workers. The guild allowed women to operate equally within the workplace without an inherent division of labor based on gender, to maintain agency over their products and profits, and to willingly negotiate in the marketing of their crafts to consumers. When scholars discuss and write about the Southern Highland Craft Guild, they often neglect the perspectives of individual crafters in the guild, including women. Without these experiences about craftwork in the Southern Highland Craft Guild, the narrative is incomplete.

Historiography

In order to study the handicraft movement of Appalachia, David E. Whisnat believes that one must first understand the wider cultural revival of the Appalachian mountain peoples, which he says led to the Appalachian craft movement. In his 1983 book, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, Whisnat argues that the development of a specifically Appalachian cultural identity was intentional, and the Appalachian craft movement was no different.¹ An example that Whisnat cites is the development of the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC. Established by Olive Dame Campbell, she modeled the school after rural Danish crafting schools, which formed under a similar crafting counter-culture that was developing in Appalachia in the early 20th Century.² Founded in 1925, the story behind the school involved a reaction against the growing consumerism creeping into the post-Civil War southern states. Campbell had traveled to the Nordic countries in order to study the folk schools that championed rural life and values, and she believed that such a school in Appalachia would revive the southern highlander traditional values and prevent the Appalachian culture from being erased by industrial giants.³ Furthermore, Whistnat argues that the success and continued involvement with the John C. Campbell folk school came from the support of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, which had its hands in many crafting establishments throughout Appalachia, and the relative freedom of the men and women who participated.⁴ The students had autonomy in their designs and were viewed as essential parts of the economy for the school.

¹ David E. Whisnat, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), xiii.

² Whisnat, 129-139.

³ Whisnat, 130-140.

⁴ Whisnat, 160-161.

However, while Whisnat does argue that the Southern Highland Craft Guild's help was not always so innocent, he praises the school for allowing the students to craft what they chose with very little financial risk on their end.⁵ It was a place rooted in community, where artistic passions were encouraged.

Discussing both the craft shop and industrial production organizations in her 1989 article, "Craft Shops or Sweatshops? The Uses and Abuses of Craftsmanship in Twentieth Century America," Eileen Boris examines the trend of handicraft organizations quickly turning to cheap labor and away from their impoverished employees. Boris cites, in addition to Appalachia, the sweatshops throughout the rural and urban Northern states and Native American reservations as proof that the handicraft traditions do not economically hold up for very long to a consumerist market.⁶ The concept of "homeworking" women, or women whose labor is paid and valued less due to their crafting being accomplished at home, is one of the concepts that Boris cites to explain the gendered reality of the arts and crafts movement throughout the United States.⁷ Crafting skills being passed down through the family, especially for women, were viewed as unworthy of proper respect and contributed to increasingly long hours and short payments for women's crafting work. Boris claims that this exploitation was not unusual even in companies associated with the guild. The Tennessee Valley Authority, which worked closely with the Southern Highland Craft Guild, often valued the work of their men more than their women.⁸ While this issue between the Tennessee Valley Authority and the guild was solved in the 1940s,

⁵ Whisnat, 161-162.

⁶ Eileen Boris, "Craft Shops or Sweatshops? The Uses and Abuses of Craftsmanship in Twentieth Century America," in *Journal of Design History* 2, no. 2/3 (1989): 176, accessed 16 March 2018.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1315807>

⁷ Boris, 180-183.

⁸ Boris, 184.

women who labored under other circumstances still had to bend to gendered divisions of labor and continued to lack agency within factories and mills.

In contrast, Garry Barker focuses almost entirely Southern Highland Craft Guild in his 1991 book, *The Handcraft Revival in Southern Appalachia*. Barker uses most of his book to show the progress of the Appalachian craft movement after the late 1930s, using the context of an author who worked with the Southern Highland Craft Guild during their creation, Allen H. Eaton.⁹ However, in terms of women within the guild, Barker only mentions that many of the positions of power early in the guild were held by women, and therefore the guild was a better support for women crafters.¹⁰ Barker focuses much more on addressing the Southern Highland Craft Guild riding the fence between more economically elitist and traditionally inclined methodologies, even during the 1930s and 40s, than he gives attention to women workers and leaders.

In Jane S. Becker's 1998 book, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk*, she takes a similar stance to Whisnat, but also acknowledges the point of view made by Barker. Becker's main focus of her book is to examine the view of "mountain culture" from outside eyes and how, oftentimes, the culture of Appalachia was adapted to become more marketable to urban consumers of Appalachian craft products.¹¹ In terms of women, however, she claims the same opinion of Barker, that women were valued and had a voice within a guild, therefore, the benefit of a woman joining the guild was much higher than attempting to work in an industry. Becker also suspects the Southern Highland Craft Guild, and other similar

⁹ Garry Barker, *The Handcraft Revival in Southern Appalachia, 1930-1990* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), xxiii.

¹⁰ Barker, *The Handcraft Revival in Southern Appalachia*, 18.

¹¹ Jane S. Becker, *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998): 9-13.

organizations, of caring too much for the middle-class consumers instead of the handicraft worker. However, she also addresses the fact that women relied on the guild and individual craft shops and clubs in order to make a living - financial securities which other crafting establishments couldn't consistently give women until the 1940s or 50s and mills couldn't promise women at all.¹² In Becker's mind, regardless of any practices that could be perceived as controversial, their stance on hiring women saved them from becoming the factories and industrial giants who devalued women's labor.¹³

While these scholars frequently discuss the morality and effectiveness of the Southern Highland Craft Guild in terms of affecting the economic state of Appalachia or changing the image of the Appalachian people, the focus of the argument is generally on the guild's practices as a whole. The lack of the narrative from the specific workers of the 1930s and 40s, at the peak of the craft guild's early marketing and production period, fails to tell us the particular agencies of Appalachian crafters. Focusing on women crafters, this paper will address the opinions of those who worked within the Southern Highland Craft Guild and how different their experiences were from other women throughout the United States.

The Craft Revival in Appalachia

The Appalachian region prior to the Appalachian craft movement (also known as the handicraft revival) was a land dominated by self-sustaining pioneers. The Highlanders made their living by working off the land, with crops and livestock, and creating products to sell to local markets or trade for desired goods.¹⁴ It was a life not entirely different from those living

¹² Becker, 17, 130-132.

¹³ Becker, 187-188.

¹⁴ Allen H. Eaton, *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, rev. ed. (1937; repr., New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1973): 45.

closer to the east coast in the decades following the American Revolution.¹⁵ Clothing and crafts, such as woven blankets, carved furniture, and pottery, were made in the home as means of providing basic necessities to the family.¹⁶ This Highlander handicraft tradition, however, was not a stable one. During the mid to late 19th Century, in the antebellum and Civil War periods, crafting began to fall out of practice within many Appalachian homes, with industries moving out further west to settle along the mountain range and claiming many Highlanders as employees. However, the traditional techniques and crafts had not been completely lost to Appalachia, and there were many local communities scattered throughout the mountains who wished to see their traditions come alive once again, often independently of one another at first.¹⁷ Locally owned crafting schools and community companies individually developed to contribute to the growing revival of crafting culture in Appalachia, each entity having its own set of practices and techniques. In turn, large corporations were born out of some of these smaller establishments, such as the Biltmore Industries around 1901, while others came into being as factories or mills, such as the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills in 1916.¹⁸ Through this work, the identity of the Appalachian folk and their distinctly Appalachian crafts began to take shape.

The crafting market which would institute a continued cultural association with the Appalachian region, started with humble, practical beginnings. Yet, this handicraft revival gradually developed into a multicultural melting pot of products and companies that appealed to both local and urban markets, reaching its peak in the 1930s with the Southern Mountain Handicraft Guild. The name of the guild later changed in 1933 to the Southern Highland

¹⁵ Eaton, 45.

¹⁶ Eaton, 54-56.

¹⁷ Eaton, 59-60.

¹⁸ Eaton, 69, 76; Kathleen Curtis Wilson, "Fabric and Fiction: The Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, 1890-1950," *Journal of the Appalachian Studied Association* 7 (1995): 50, accessed 17 March 2018.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41445679>

Handicraft Guild and again in 1990 to the Southern Highland Craft Guild. While the guild was not the first gathering of crafters to capitalize and celebrate the cultural crafting history of Appalachia, they were the most successful at uniting the scattered smaller crafting entities throughout the region and establishing a standard among these establishments for craft quality, craft marketing, and workplace equality.

The creation of the guild during this time was, in many ways, remarkably surprising due to the economic status of the United States during the late 1920s and the 1930s. The Great Depression had just begun to set in throughout the country, with widespread poverty becoming commonplace. The southern United States hadn't truly recovered from the financial slump of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, with most families struggling to maintain household farms or being forced to move into mill villages to make money.¹⁹ Women were in a particularly rough position during this time. Their labor was needed to secure the household finances, yet the lack of jobs and a societal adherence to traditional gender roles pressured women to relinquish their wage positions in favor of giving them to men.²⁰ When southern women could find work, particularly within factories and mills, they were often placed in unsafe environments for limited pay. Men were frequently placed in safer positions and made more money in comparison to female workers.²¹ Discrepancies in treatment and pay, even between fellow women, were contributions to strikes led by women workers and the rise of the Women's Bureau in the late 1930s.²² Issues of economic stability affected the whole of Appalachia, but the establishment of

¹⁹ Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002): 49-51; Ailene Walser, "Marriage, Motherhood, and Work: Ailene Walser," in *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls: Personal Histories of Womanhood and Poverty in the South*, ed. Victoria Byerly (Ithaca: Cornell University's ILR Press, 1986): 81-83

²⁰ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 250-251.

²¹ Walser, 83.

²² Margaret Bowen, "Statement of Miss Margaret Bowen, Secretary of Local No. 1630, Textile Workers of Elizabethton, Tenn.," *Hearing before the Committee on Manufactures: Working Conditions of the Textile Industry in*

the Southern Highland Craft Guild, and their associated crafting establishments, defiantly challenged the necessity of factories and mills for southern economic stability. Based in artistic traditional values and a desire to market handcrafted products to urban customers, the Southern Highland Craft Guild broke away from the restrictive and dangerous formulas of the factories and mills in favor of individual crafting autonomy per guild member. This idea may have appeared to be a wild fantasy for artistic crafters and women who desired authority over their own work, equal representation, and proper pay, but the guild was a resounding success that continues to influence Appalachian artistic and economic culture to this day.

The Southern Highland Craft Guild

Gathering together a few days after Christmas in 1928, representatives from eleven handicraft companies and centers throughout the Appalachian Mountains came together to discuss the craft revival that was taking place and what challenges each crafting entity was facing.²³ It took a whole year for the establishing of a guild to actually happen, but the roots were placed down within the meetings between 1928 and 1929: a communal center for handicrafts was needed to ensure that crafters were given assistance to market their products, that duplicate products between multiple crafters were avoided, and that companies could have a lifeline in case they were in financial jeopardy.²⁴ However, while the representatives knew that this guild would be an invaluable addition to the crafting culture of Appalachia, they were firm in their belief that the individual crafting entities throughout the region should continue to have operating autonomy that was not dictated by the guild's standards, and each establishment should

North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, S. Res. 49, 71st Cong., 2nd sess., May 9, 1929, 79-80, accessed 13 March 2018, [https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:2577368\\$1i](https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:2577368$1i).

²³ Eaton, 237-239, 242.

²⁴ Eaton, 241-243.

continue to operate in the manner that best suited themselves.²⁵ In this balance between community and independence, crafters could choose which standards to follow, would have autonomy over their own designs for the most part, and could either work entirely independently or go to the guild for assistance in marketing and selling their products inside and outside of Appalachia.

With the guild officially chartered in 1930 as the Southern Mountain Handicraft Guild, the next step was to set down the representation of powers within the guild. These hierarchies including individual positions, the role crafting entities throughout Appalachia had in terms of guild decisions, and the matters of accepting new guild members. During the first exhibition of the craft guild, in the spring of 1930, the individual roles were assigned to members of the guild: a president, a vice president, a secretary-treasurer, and five individuals to the Board of Directors.²⁶ Including the president and vice president who also served on the Board of Directors, all of these roles, save for one, were given to women.²⁷ This decision recognized the importance of women crafters in Appalachia, as many of the women who were given these roles owned their own craft shops or craft schools. Crafting entities that had already pledged themselves to the guild prior to the official chartering were considered the “charter members,” and each establishment would require one representative to participate as a voting member of the guild for internal decisions and for adding new members and crafting centers into the guild.²⁸ New members would be voted upon by the guild leaders and the voting representatives for entry. Accepted applicants would pay a fee depending on their status as a member: a dollar for individual crafters, five dollars for non-crafters who wished to contribute their resources to the

²⁵ Eaton, 241.

²⁶ Eaton, 243-244.

²⁷ Eaton, 244.

²⁸ Eaton, 243.

guild, and ten dollars for crafting establishments.²⁹ Each crafter and company would be judged on the work they produced and their potential for contributing to the growing catalogue of products that the Southern Highland Craft Guild collected as authentic Appalachian craftwork, and nothing less.

A Departure from “Gendered Work”

Crafters who became members of the Southern Highland Craft Guild and those who worked for a company or school that was associated with the guild were largely given the freedom to work with whatever medium they desired. This was a departure from the traditional gendered work that was often associated with crafting. While the Southern Highland Craft Guild did not force their members into particular crafting categories, these crafting traditions had not entirely disappeared either. Men tended to work with heavier, harder materials such as wood, and women often worked with daintier, lighter materials, such as cloth.³⁰ Shaped by earlier days of crafting in Appalachia, where men would make wooden furniture and the women would make clothing, blankets, and other decorations for their families, it was a tradition that rose out of material needs for the household. This separation of crafting work could be seen in rural Appalachian households, where women’s work was viewed as less valuable than men’s. Frances Goodrich, one of the craft revival’s pioneers, often heard these opinions about women’s work from the crafting women she interacted with. One of the women she spoke to, who was gathering walnut roots to dye jeans for her sons, explained why the men in her family wouldn’t help her with her crafting tasks: “A body might think that with all them boys of mine I’d not have to do such as this, but they’re mighty trifling and fergetful when it comes to anythin’ they ‘low is work

²⁹ Eaton, 243.

³⁰ Eaton, 54-55.

for weemin. I'd full as soon do it myself as to be quarrelin' at 'em about it."³¹ This attitude for women's labor was far from unusual.

Generations of passing on certain crafts from parent to child led to particular expectations within crafting based on gender. As men were seen as breadwinners for the household income, who left the home to provide for the family, the various tasks that women were assigned to do for the sake of their families became less valued, including craftwork. Gender divisions of crafting and craft labor were commonplace in mills and factories, where women were unable to work with heavier materials or weren't even allowed to create the crafts the company was selling.³² Women who were hired for crafting positions in manufacturing establishments often had to complete additional "home work," crafting tasks that could be accomplished at home for little or no pay, to assist in the manufacturing of products in the mill or factory.³³ Notable examples of home work in the Appalachian region included carding (sewing buttons onto cards), hand stitching and detailing cotton garments – particularly dresses, and hand weaving wooden chair seats.³⁴ Owners of these manufacturing plants assigned these tasks to women to avoid paying them "on the clock", as they considered these tasks traditional women's work. If women were hired to factories or mills, they were usually forced to put in more time and effort into their tasks than their male counterparts, and still wouldn't receive equal payment.

Even Biltmore Industries, not quite a mill or factory, explicitly refused to hire women as loom workers during the 1920s and 1930s, when the entrepreneur and son-in-law to E.W. Grove,

³¹ Frances Louisa Goodrich, in *Mountain Homespun*, ed. Jan Davidson (1931; Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010): 65-66.

³² Fred L. Seely and Mrs. Henry Douglas Colton, "Letters between Fred Seely and Mrs. Douglas Colton [October 1918]," *Blomberg, Patton, & Grimes Biltmore Industries Collection*, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC.

³³ Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labour, *The Commercialization of the Home Through Industrial Home Work*, by Frances Perkins and Mary Anderson, Bulletin of the Women's Bureau, no. 135 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935), v, 1-2.

³⁴ Women's Bureau, 4, 9-10.

Fred Seely, took charge of the company from the Vanderbilts.³⁵ Women of the Biltmore Industries were assigned to positions within the Homespun Shop, where weaving orders were placed, or as secretaries and tour guides for guests and customers.³⁶ Only very few women were granted the privilege of working as a crafter within Biltmore, and often had to fight to maintain their jobs with proper pay. One woman who worked as woodcarver at Biltmore Industries, Edith Arthur, refused to let Fred Seely undervalue her labor and quit after he would not pay her the amount she needed to maintain the quality of her craft.³⁷ The Biltmore Industries only began to massively hire women as craft workers during the mid-1930s, when the Works Progress Administration, or the WPA, under the Roosevelt administration was founded.³⁸ Women's labor, however, continued to be a point of contestation within factories and mills, where continued strikes may have led to better pay, but the genders were still divided in jobs and treatment.

Women becoming involved within the crafting market was a subject frequently discussed by founding members of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, especially the women who ran their own schools and craft shops. Refusing to remain content with the private sphere, many of these women contributed to the Appalachian craft movement for the sake of breaking away from gendered divisions of labor and to help lead their fellow women into the public sphere.

Admittedly, while craftwork was a far less controversial contribution to the public sphere than other goals women worked for in the 1930s, it still allowed women to take charge of their

³⁵ Seely and Colton, "Letters".

³⁶ Richard and Anne Parham, interview by Dorothy Joynes, "Interview of Richard and Anne Parham [April 23, 1993]," Voices of Asheville Project, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville.

³⁷ Fred L. Seely and Edith Arthur, "Letters between Fred Seely and Edith Arthur [1918]," *Blomberg, Patton, & Grimes Biltmore Industries Collection*, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC.

³⁸ Helen G. Potts, "Letter of Appeal for Work at Biltmore Industries [1948]," *Blomberg, Patton, & Grimes Biltmore Industries Collection*, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC.

household's finances and sell products to consumers in urban cities. Frances Goodrich established her crafting company, Allenstand Industries, to provide local women an activity to break from their monotonous lives at home: "As the enterprise developed it was a satisfaction to find that the three purposes that had been in mind from the start were in a way to fulfilment; to save the old arts from extinction; to give paying work to women too far from market to find it for themselves; and, more important than all, to bring interest into their lives, the joy of making useful and beautiful things."³⁹ Workplace equality was not explicitly discussed between guild members, but the idea permeated throughout the establishments under the Southern Highland Craft Guild. Other women blatantly remarked on the need for women to craft for their financial benefit, especially during the Depression years, when wage work barely paid anything. Clementine Douglas, an early organizer of the guild and the owner of the Spinning Wheel crafting establishment, wanted something better for Appalachian women in the 1930s:

The women there needed to earn. One that I met had gotten really lame hoeing a steep hillside all summer for a dollar a day. I thought that there ought to be something better than that. And I thought weaving might help. Others in the isolated schools scattered throughout the mountains were thinking the same thing. The Guild eventually sprang from this thinking, you know... So when Wilmer Viner, whom I'd met down there in the mountains, asked me to join up with her in Saluda, North Carolina, where she'd settled, I did. She taught me vegetable dyeing and I taught her to weave, and we did quite a bit with hooked rugs too, helping the neighborhood women to improve their designs and colors... Later I came to Asheville and had my own cabin shop, and loom room where neighborhood girls came to weave. *They* needed money too.⁴⁰

Money was one of the main reasons that women began to craft during the Appalachian craft movement, but it wasn't the only reason they stayed. Women enjoyed inhabiting public spheres in craft shops and finding an equal place alongside male crafters. Whether the work was done at

³⁹ Goodrich, *Mountain Homespun*, 25.

⁴⁰ Clementine Douglas, "Clementine Douglas: Teacher-Craftsman; Asheville, North Carolina; *1893-1967," in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 116.

home or in a producing center, school, or shop, women were allowed to create the crafts that worked best for them.

This fight for equal workplace status and the freedom to pursue whichever job and craft a woman could choose was hardly an issue within the Southern Highland Craft Guild. Craftwork was valued by the quality of the crafted item, rather than the identity of crafter.⁴¹ As long as the crafting woman could provide valued products to the craft market, it didn't matter what sort of craft they did. The crafting economy of the Southern Highland Craft Guild and their producing centers was based on the crafts themselves, not on hourly wages or divisions of labor. Women frequently contributed a great amount to their household incomes, or simply carried the household on the money they made from their products.⁴² Additionally, concepts such as home work did not apply to crafters, as crafting was seen as an activity that did not interfere or interrupt the daily work of the household.⁴³ It was a financially sound art form that liberated women from having to devote hours upon hours of their day to particular tasks for wage work. Women weren't required to force themselves to work long nights unless they chose to do so for their craft. Some women didn't break out of these gendered divisions, continuing to do the crafts that they had been taught by their elders or continuing the crafts they learned within schools. However, becoming part of the guild allowed for women to learn and work with new crafting skills that they otherwise may have never known.

⁴¹ Marian G. Heard, *Report of an Exploratory Study Looking Toward a Craft Education Project in the Southern Highlands*, Southern Highland Craft Guild Papers (1945): 23.

⁴² Sue McClure, interview by Edward L. DuPuy, "Interview with Sue McClure, woodcarver [February 3, 1965]," *Hunter Library Digital Collections*, accessed 15 March 2018.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4008coll2/id/3002/rec/1>

⁴³ Heard, 6-7.

Newfound Agency and Autonomy

For a woman who worked in mills or factories, personal autonomy was sacrificed for the sake of a consistent paycheck and boarding for the worker and her family. Women crafters of Appalachia who entered these workplaces had to relinquish their personal contributions to the products they made, as art had no place in a manufacturing plant. All the profit and marketing of crafting products made within mills and factories went back to the mill itself, not toward the individual workers who created the product.⁴⁴ Employers could easily take advantage of their workers, cheating them out of proper pay for long hours, even without commonly assigned home work for female laborers.⁴⁵ Women were simply the tools in which crafting products were made to fulfill orders, with no agency to call their own.

In contrast, crafters at the Southern Highland Craft Guild were rewarded for their individual efforts with recognition at exhibits and stories within news articles. A particular coverlet pattern, for example, would become associated with one crafter, whom customers would specifically request to create similar products.⁴⁶ This autonomy over the products the crafters made gave them a sense of pride for their accomplishments: a product and a value to their work that they alone earned. Creating something unique and marketable put money in the hands of women who would have never made such an amount in a factory wage job or simply crafting for household necessities.⁴⁷ Lucy Morgan, one of the pioneers of the craft revival and the founder of the Penland School of Crafts, frequently discussed how liberating the craft market was for local women in Appalachia:

⁴⁴ Women's Bureau, 33.

⁴⁵ Women's Bureau, 33.

⁴⁶ P.B., "Looking at the Crafts: Crafts in the Southern Mountains," ed. Marjorie B. Ames, *The Handicrafter* (November-December 1930): 41-44.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth McCausland, 1939, "Our Growing American Handicrafts," *Independent Woman*, November, 367.

When Mrs. Willis finished that warp with rugs, she sent them over on mule-back by her husband and we gave him her check, for twenty-three dollars and some cents. In those days a woman working at home didn't make money like that. She told us later that by the time Mr. Willis got home with that check, the whole settlement knew how much it was. The next morning, before we got up, there were people at our door asking for lessons.⁴⁸

Autonomy and recognition for one's craft led to women being placed on equal footing with their husbands and other men in the family. The female crafter could produce products that could make a great difference in the family finances, even if it was only a part-time effort on her part. Women became their own bosses if they were individual crafters, or their experiences within crafting could lead them to opening their own shops for other crafters to work at. The Southern Highland Craft Guild often called upon many of their women crafters to teach new students, young or old, as they had proven their skills within their own establishments.⁴⁹ Famous crafters, such as Frances Goodrich, often had their crafts shipped throughout the country or even overseas for exhibits and displays, their name following after the students they taught and the crafting styles they influenced.⁵⁰ Every member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild was considered uniquely creative.⁵¹ Distinction for their individual crafts made it much easier for Appalachian women to make money for themselves and prove their skills in the competitive local crafting market.

For crafters, the ability to maintain full ownership of their crafting products encouraged specialization and uniqueness within different types of craftwork, a healthy economic competition between aesthetics and marketability of similar products.⁵² This kept the craft

⁴⁸ Lucy Morgan, "Lucy Morgan: Teacher-Craftsman; Webster, North Carolina," in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 118.

⁴⁹ Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver, *Artisans of the Appalachians* (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 116, 118, 119, 121.

⁵⁰ J. B. Hicklin, "Mountain Art Will Go Across the Ocean: Homespun Coverlet and Bureau Scarf that Will Grace the North Carolina Room at Florence Nightingale Nurses' School, Bordeaux, France, Are Truly Representative of Western Caroline Handicraft," *Greensboro Daily News*, January 15, 1933.

⁵¹ Mrs. Charles L. Larew, "Handicraft Guild Brought Group of Enterprising People to U.T.," *Knoxville Journal*, April 5, 1934.

⁵² P.B., 44.

market alive, with new crafters, male and female, experimenting with their crafting medium to create new designs and products that still appealed to an urban market.

However, some critics of the Southern Highland Craft Guild's competitive environment felt that the guild members' standards were often unreasonably high and harsh towards crafters. The Southern Highland Craft Guild was an entity that was made up of individual producing centers, who marketed their products out to eastern metropolitan areas, and thus, a mass of businesses. Crafts that were not well-made or not uniquely different from similar crafts were often not marketed at all to consumers.⁵³ For the sake of keeping autonomy over one's craft, however, competition needed to thrive between individual craftsmen. While it was a gamble to present one's craft to the guild for evaluation and consideration in order to earn a place within guild and individual shop catalogues, the reward for great work often meant a career of working on passion projects for cash. Other critics, such as Ruth South, a weaver who previously worked with the guild during the 1940s, often point to the guild's practice of taking a percentage of profits made from guild member's products. She explained in an interview about the process of fees that went into marketing with the Southern Highland Craft Guild, and how finding better options was sometimes necessary: "Fifty percent...That's big used to most of the shops only took forty, they gave you sixty and that was a lot better...Now Mr. Carlson is really good about mamma. He pays mamma a lot better percentage than she gets when I send her stuff to the guild."⁵⁴ Ruth South, however, was a craftswoman who gained local recognition for her work, earned consistent orders during the prime of her crafting career, and did not think of the Southern Highland Craft Guild as a corrupted entity. She questioned the nature of the money pocketing, as

⁵³ Eaton, 270.

⁵⁴ Ruth South, interview by Wade Hyder and Deloris Proffit, "Interview with Ruth South [January 10, 1976]," *Appalachian State University Collections*, accessed 17 March 2018.
<http://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/37320>

the guild often sold themselves as a non-profit establishment, but she did not regret her time working with the guild.⁵⁵

Without the guild, and the crafters who led efforts to teach their fellow Highlanders how to craft and sell their products, the Appalachian region would have been far less culturally vibrant than it was and still is. Teaching women to have autonomy and marketability over their products saved many women from suffering in the impoverished South by granting them competitive skills to sell their individual products. Frances Goodrich remarked on such a need for women to gain autonomy and authority over their own crafts in one of her early pamphlets, an opinion that she held throughout her life: “Only a little has been done, but enough to show that the products are salable, and that the work thus given to the women in their homes is the best help, in material ways, that could be given.”⁵⁶ Since such skills were taught to female, and male, crafters, it proved that the guild and its leaders truly cared for their guild members and craft workers, and wanted them to succeed.

Being able to have autonomy over individual products and the freedom to sell them could never be found in a mill or factory, where the fruits of the labor were reaped by the owners of the establishment and not by the workers. While some women could not afford to go into this lifestyle, requiring the necessities that mill villages supplied to women and their families, shifting from a guild-centered crafting career to a mill was not a popular change.⁵⁷ Women risked losing a career that did not require them to toil for long hours within factories, did not ask them to sacrifice their agency for a paycheck, and did not cut ties with the locals who actually

⁵⁵ South, “Interview”.

⁵⁶ Frances Louisa Goodrich, “Hand-Weaving in North Carolina,” *Pratt Institute Monthly* (June 1898), *Hunter Library Digital Collections*, accessed 15 March 2018.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4008coll2/id/1293/rec/3>

⁵⁷ Annie Viola Fries, “From Farm to Factory: Annie Viola Fries,” in *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls: Personal Histories of Womanhood and Poverty in the South*, ed. Victoria Byerly (Ithaca: Cornell University’s ILR Press, 1986): 18-25.

supported their crafting efforts. Marketing may have been trickier to do as an individual craftsman, something that didn't concern factory workers, but it was a game that a crafter could master if they learned what customers desired from Appalachian products.

Marketing and Selling Nostalgia from Appalachia

Appalachian craft products drew customers in with feelings of nostalgia and simplicity. Hand-made products of wood and cloth were not commonly found along the east coast, where factories and manufacturing plants dominated the markets with mass-produced goods, and often the value was found in that quality alone.⁵⁸ Craft products purchased and ordered from Appalachia were often reminiscent of family heirlooms - old blankets and knickknacks that came from grandparents and prior generations. Crafters recognized this desire within customers for products that reminded them of simpler times and neighborly care, ideas that seemed to be long gone in urban centers, that they worked their products around these concepts to successfully sell them and bring in new orders.⁵⁹ Certain groups remarked on the appeal and marketing of craftwork as something “primitive,” merely an escapism tool for urban dwellers who were afraid of technological progressivism, created by “simple” people and nothing more.⁶⁰ However, for most customers who frequented the exhibits and marketplaces for Appalachian crafts, from regular citizens to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, the products and the marketing techniques of the crafters left them spellbound.⁶¹

⁵⁸ “Southern Mountain Folk Selling Handicraft at Rockefeller Center,” *Rutherford Republican*, December 5, 1935.

⁵⁹ Virginia Lathrop, “Hand-Made Gifts Highly Endorsed: North Carolina Handicraft on Mrs. Roosevelt Christmas Shopping List [1933],” Southern Highland Craft Guild Archives, Folk Art Center, Asheville, NC.

⁶⁰ “Exhibit of Revived Folk Arts,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 4, 1937.

⁶¹ Lathrop, “Hand-Made Gifts Highly Endorsed.”

For women crafters, the trick of the trade was to learn what their customers wanted in a product and then sell the version of Appalachia reflected in the craft. Often, this meant that designs women wove into coverlets or carved into wooden bowls were not entirely original to the crafter. While uniqueness existed between different crafters, many of the patterns used in guild craftwork were often reminiscent of older designs and traditions.⁶² These designs were often adjusted in a few small ways to be distinguished between crafters, such as color and specific ornamentations, but they still had roots in a recognizable design. The Southern Highland Craft Guild relied on this approach to appeal to new customers who wanted to have old products with a new sense of modern life, as reflected in *The Handicrafter* in 1931: “The mountain craftsmen, by expressing contemporary arts with their slant, can do their share towards erecting a rural art culture. It will embody the summations of the past, it will be colored by the present trends in taste and needs.”⁶³ For example, many of the women weavers who worked for the guild wove coverlets with variations of the “Whig Rose” pattern. This traditional design was a staple of old American nostalgia, a beautiful flower design that had buds and leaves stemming from the center rose. Each weaver had a unique version of the pattern, but the pattern was still familiar to new customers.⁶⁴ There was no shame in this form of pattern sharing between weavers, as customers came to recognize the patterns and specifically request them from their preferred crafter.⁶⁵ Sarah Dougherty, a descendant of one of the craft revival’s pioneers and a crafter herself, remarked about the patterns she used in an interview: “We do mostly table mats now: *Whig Rose*, *King’s Flower*, and *Jefferson’s Liberty* that I copied at Mt. Vernon … We once did a

⁶² “A Meeting of the Southern Mountain Handicraft Guild,” *The Handicrafter* (May-June 1931): 43.

⁶³ “A Meeting of the Southern Mountain Handicraft Guild,” 43.

⁶⁴ South, “Interview.”

⁶⁵ Cora Morton, “Mrs. Cora Morton: Weaver; Gatlinburg, Tennessee,” in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 82.

coverlet for somebody to give to Mrs. Roosevelt, and we furnished Mary Pickford [the film star] with a rose-colored silk one.”⁶⁶ Without the old marketable designs, women crafters would have struggled to sell their products to consumers who weren’t familiar with new designs. A community of women allowing one another to share and alter designs to benefit the entire group was fairly exclusive to the Appalachian craft movement, who were able to collectively market nostalgia.

However, there was more to interacting with the market than simply modifying nostalgic designs. When working at large crafting exhibitions, women often sold themselves as stereotypes of Appalachian Highlanders to appeal to the internal assumptions of their urban consumers. Women normally dressed in hand-made dresses to play up the idyllic “simple life” of the Appalachia, even progressive crafting leaders such as Lucy Morgan.⁶⁷ While these acts may have sold the people of Appalachia as something beyond the truth, they succeeded in drawing in customers by appealing to the stereotypes rather than defying them. One modern scholar, Kathleen Curtis Wilson, did not agree with this concept of giving into false narratives for the sake of sales. In a newspaper article from the *Knoxville Journal* in 1930, she aimed to demonstrate how these ideas hurt the image of Appalachia and its people:

In 1930 Mrs. Riley Fox, Mrs. Finley Mast, and Mrs. Owenby traveled by train to Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Cincinnati, and Chicago on a tour of major department stores. All three were native mountain women with long family weaving traditions. ... The women traveled with an ancient hand loom, spinning wheels, handmade furniture, and coverlets to illustrate various patterns. In the store they set up a display representing a “typical” mountain cabin. Dressed in homespun and weaving in their stocking feet, these women gave the impression that handwoven coverlets were still abundantly available throughout the Southern Appalachians. ... The onlookers perceived

⁶⁶ Sarah Dougherty, “Miss Sarah Dougherty: Weaver; Russellville, Tennessee,” in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 78.

⁶⁷ “Handicraft Show Thrills Hundreds: Southern Highland Exhibits Shown at ‘Ashland Farm.’ Leaders Praise Work of Guild in Perpetuating Handicraft – Allen Eaton Speaks,” *Chattanooga Times*, October 1935.

that mountain life was still as simple and backward as it had been a hundred years before and they were determined to furnish their homes with this quaint handmade weaving.⁶⁸

Wilson juxtaposed this situation with a controversy between the Clinch Valley Blanket Mills and Rosemont Industries, a producing center under the Southern Highland Craft Guild, who bought machine-made coverlets and sold them as hand-woven to customers.⁶⁹ However, while the Southern Highland Craft Guild was not always consistent in their marketing, the actions of the touring women should not be faulted. With their demonstrations, they stirred curiosity with northern consumers for southern products. While many of those customers likely went to the mills and factories for their orders, many others still contributed to the local markets and local craftsmen of the Southern Highland Craft Guild.

Without the advertisement and marketing of craft products, especially displays that appealed to northern ideas on Appalachian Highlanders, the craft market would have remained inside of the Appalachian region. Another scholar with a differing opinion, Garry Barker, instead recognizes that women relied on these kind of shows to make money and didn't mind if the much-needed cash correlated with a false narrative:

In regards to making what the market wants, little has changed. Like so many other native Appalachians who have learned to perform for pay - the Cherokees who pose in Comanche warbonnets for tourist dollars, the local musicians who learn to play the dulcimer and sing folksongs to have a chance at the contest cash prize, or Garry Barker slipping in and out of the East Kentucky dialect to earn his fee as after-dinner entertainment - the craftspeople have learned to give 'em what they want and laugh all the way to the bank.⁷⁰

Women crafters who fed into stereotypes with their displays and worked with nostalgic designs for their craftwork were often handsomely rewarded. In the Great Depression, there was little negotiating with a genuine narrative over making money to afford necessities and put one's kids

⁶⁸ Wilson, 53.

⁶⁹ Wilson, 53-54.

⁷⁰ Garry Barker, "The Mountain Crafts: Romancing the Marketplace," *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association* 5 (1993): 23, accessed 11 February 2018. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41445639>

through school.⁷¹ Teachers from the Southern Highland Craft Guild made sure that their students knew this before attempting to market their life's work, that knowing the customer's ideas about Appalachia was key to making a sale and establishing a consistent customer-base. Isadora Williams, one of these teachers, prided herself as a master marketer for the guild: "But what I really am is a marketing specialist. I have always told those women: 'If you are going to sell it, you must make it like the person who buys it likes it, and that means you must study a great deal about color and design, and what people want.'"⁷² Manipulating and communicating with the marketplace was a great advantage to women crafters in the Southern Highland Craft Guild. They gained agency and experience to aid them in bringing in new customers to keep themselves financially afloat.

While factory women didn't have to concern themselves with selling themselves and their products to customers, they had no form of agency at all in the marketplace.⁷³ As Wilson mentioned before, the mills and factories could sell themselves to customers in whatever way they chose and the lives of the individual workers were often hidden behind false narratives.⁷⁴ In contrast, guild crafters had the power to choose whether or not to engage with stereotypes to sell their crafts and save themselves from falling into poverty during the Great Depression. Considering the dire economic situation women crafters were living in, it is not surprising why many put on a show for their customers to bring in more money to their households.

⁷¹ Mrs. Edd Higgins, "Mrs. Edd Higgins: Rugmaker; Burnsville, North Carolina," in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 66.

⁷² Isadora Williams, "Isadora Williams: Teacher-Craftsman; Knoxville, Tennessee," in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 121.

⁷³ Women's Bureau, 32-33.

⁷⁴ Wilson, 52-54.

Further Contributions to Female Satisfaction in the Guild

With a new economic opportunity for women in Appalachia, it was fairly obvious what benefits came with women joining the Southern Highland Craft Guild in the first place. However, most crafters had one reason or another to remain in the guild and continue to contribute their unique products to the cultural exchange from Appalachia to the eastern markets. Crafting was a rewarding career for Appalachian women, especially during the Great Depression. The ability to create crafts for oneself or for a generated market was not an option to many women elsewhere in the country, and many of those women outside of Appalachia did not have the Southern Highland Craft Guild to assist them in their goals. Despite the struggling economy throughout the United States, crafters within the guild often found themselves successfully swamped with orders to fill and plenty of money to bring into their households.⁷⁵ Having security and continued patronage throughout the subsequent decades during the 1940s and onwards kept the crafters working for the guild throughout their long lives. Wilmer Stone Viner, one of the earliest of the crafting pioneers, continued to remain an active part of the crafting community as she grew older: “I’ve made pieces for three museums in the past year, and for forty years I’ve supplied the Guild shop. But then, I’m part of the Guild, along with the Morgans and Clem Douglas and Miss Dingman in Berea and Mag Bidstrup in Brasstown. I’ve forgotten the rest of them but we were the beginners.”⁷⁶ Some crafters chose to stay for the loyalty built up between themselves and their customers. One crafter, Mrs. Edd Higgins, expressed great pride about the craftwork she created and her desire to please her customers: “I

⁷⁵ Bessie Lee Blauvelt, “Survey: Bessie Lee Blauvelt [February 25, 1943],” Hunter Library Digital Collections, accessed 19 February 2018.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4008coll2/id/2225/rec/55>

⁷⁶ Wilmer Stone Viner, “Wilmer Stone Viner: Wool dyer; Tryon, North Carolina,” in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 108.

use only linen thread; it costs twenty-one dollars for enough to sew a nine-by-twelve, but when anybody puts the price and money in a rug that they have to pay for these, they want something to last. When a rug leaves my work table I want to be happy about that rug ... We receive orders from all over and they trust me.”⁷⁷ Other crafters were unable to keep up with all the orders, but were grateful for the assistance from the guild nonetheless for the marketing and the customers, such as crafter Elizabeth Edens, who said, “A young man at the University has knit three sweaters from my yarn ... I have a great many orders, but I just don’t fill them.”⁷⁸ Regardless of the path that women took once they became established guild crafters, it seemed clear that their memories of the guild were ones of fondness.

Crafters also chose to remain in the guild to continue their family traditions, as many female crafters were taught from their mothers and grandmothers. Women who joined early in the guild’s life used these traditions to lift their families up from poverty, and later passed their skills further down to their children to keep the traditions alive.⁷⁹ Notably, the Dougherty household continued to pass on their weaving skills down the generations towards the modern day: “My great-nieces are the sixth generation, not only of weavers, I want to make that clear, but of weavers whose work we actually have samples of, right *here*... Mother wove beautiful coverlets and counterpanes, because she loved to. She was in the vanguard of the revival fifty years ago ... Other people quit, but we didn’t; there’s never been a gap...”⁸⁰ These skills were often passed on with the hope that their children would join the guild later in their lives or to give

⁷⁷ Higgins, 66.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Edens, “Elizabeth Edens: Spinner; Greeneville, Tennessee,” in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 72.

⁷⁹ C. G. Hodges, interview by Edward L. DuPuy and Clifford Hotchkiss, “Interview with Mrs. C. G. Hodges [May 6, 1965]” in “Member File: Mrs. C. G. Hodges, knotwork,” *Hunter Library Digital Collections*, accessed 19 February 2018.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4008coll2/id/2889/rec/40>

⁸⁰ Dougherty, 78.

them the experience needed to assist their mothers and grandmothers with craft orders. Teaching others also contributed to the new generation of women crafters and provided additional options for women in the crafting career.

The importance of the community, outside of the family, was also a major reason that women chose to remain within the craft guild. Craft teachers taught young and old women of their own communities how to craft, and these teachers could watch their communities improve culturally and economically. Virginia Dare Strother, one of these teachers, was pleasantly surprised to teach crafting alongside her trained subject, science:

The principal – he and I grew up together – wanted me to teach science and also a course in industrial art ... Well, it turned out he wanted me to teach weaving, which I was very happy to do, and we found in time that we were filling a very great need, and the State Vocational Director insisted I open a class for adults as well as high school students. Mostly it was the parents who came; the fathers liked the heavier weaving, such as rugs and suit materials.⁸¹

Personal fulfillment and entertainment, especially with the community of crafters surrounding oneself in the Southern Highland Craft Guild, were valuable contributions to women remaining with the guild for a long time.

Aside from community neighbors, rural women were normally unable to interact with other people for their own leisure and entertainment during the 1930s. Joining crafting establishments allowed for women to have a circle of friends while working on craft products, many of which the women were already familiar with.⁸² Along with gaining many invaluable friendships out of the process of crafting, strictly out of a need for socialization, other women gained skills for running their own crafting industries and acting as important members of the guild's hierarchy. The actions of these women shaped how future women crafters were treated at

⁸¹ Virginia Dare Strother, "Virginia Dare Strother: Weaver; Sugar Grove, North Carolina," in *Artisans of the Appalachians*, ed. Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver (Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967): 84.

⁸² Goodrich, *Mountain Homespun*, 22-25.

the guild and the direction the guild took to help their crafters and develop economically.⁸³ Their equality within the workplace and the value of their input fulfilled a need for women to take part in the local and national economy, and translated the very gendered women's work to respectable professions that were treated the same as male crafting work. Factory and mill work simply could not compare.

Conclusion

There was a true sense of pride that came from working within the Southern Highland Craft Guild, an entity that allowed women crafters to work equally alongside men, respected the autonomy of their crafters over their products, and gave them the power to interact with their marketplace in methods that benefitted themselves and their fellow crafters. In an economic slump such as the Great Depression, there were very few options for women to work with to contribute to her household finances that had the same progressive benefits that the guild provided for women. Indeed, the Southern Highland Craft Guild was a beacon of hope for Appalachian crafting women in the 1930s and 1940s. In granting them equal footing and agency within the guild, women were able to thrive through working within a crafting establishment, teaching fellow crafters techniques to design and sell products, and creating beautiful craftwork that reflected their internal passion for the art form. It was a miracle that women crafters had the Southern Highland Craft Guild during the Great Depression, to liberate them from the harsh factory and mill worlds that claimed so many other women and their families. Even in our

⁸³ Louise Pitman, interview by Edward L. DuPuy and Clifford Hotchkiss, "Interview with Miss Louise Pitman [January 11, 1965]," in "Member file: Louise Pitman, natural dyer, administrator," *Hunter Library Digital Collections*, accessed 15 March 2018.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4008coll2/id/2941/rec/38>

contemporary world, the Southern Highland Craft Guild remains a representative of the cultural and economic history of the Appalachian Mountains, who continues to influence the current generation of crafters and who will likely remain for many generations to come.

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Blauvelt, Bessie Lee. “Survey: Bessie Lee Blauvelt [February 25, 1943].” *Hunter Library Digital Collections*. Accessed 14 March 2018.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4008coll2/id/225/rec/55>

Surveyed as part of the guild’s efforts to improve the livelihoods of their crafters and learn about any issues that were occurring with the members of their guilds, Bessie Lee Blauvelt’s overwhelming positive response to the guild’s assistance in marketing her products are an example of the guild’s contributions to their crafters.

Bowen, Margaret. “Statement of Miss Margaret Bowen, Secretary of Local No. 1630, Textile Workers of Elizabethton, Tenn.” *Hearing before the Committee on Manufactures: Working Conditions of the Textile Industry in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. S. Res. 49. 71st Congress. 2nd session. May 9, 1929. 77-91. Accessed 13 March 2018.* [https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:2577368\\$1i](https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:2577368$1i)

Margaret Bowen was a woman who represents countless factory women throughout the southern United States during the Great Depression, who struggled against their employers for better treatment. Her appeal to Congress on the working conditions of her factory in Elizabethton provides context for factory/mill workers and a juxtaposition against women who crafted for the Southern Highland Craft Guild in the 1930s.

Dougherty, Sarah. “Miss Sarah Dougherty: Weaver; Russellville, Tennessee.” In *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

Sarah Dougherty’s narrative of her family’s crafting history is valuable to learning about the economic realities of women in Appalachia who crafted for the guild, and how crafting carried on through the generations. Although it was her mother, and not her, who was crafting in the 1930s, her story is still relevant to the Southern Highland Craft Guild’s early history.

Eaton, Allen H. *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*. 1937. Rev. ed. New York: Dover Publications, 1973.

Allen H. Eaton was one of the pioneers of the Appalachian craft movement during the early 1930s, who assisted in opening facilities alongside other men and women crafters. Eaton’s book examines the Southern Highland Craft Guild in the 1930s, along with the foundations and the motivations behind the guild and their affiliated companies. He discusses both male and female contributions to the craft movement, and many later scholars reference his work.

Edens, Elizabeth. “Elizabeth Edens: Spinner; Greeneville, Tennessee.” In *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

Elizabeth Eden’s section in DuPuy’s book of crafters from the Southern Highland Craft Guild contributes to the larger narrative of crafting women, while also giving some of her unique experiences. She is one of the women who, while continuing to demonstrate her work to the craft guild and crafting exhibitions, was more cavalier the amount of orders she had for her work.

Douglas, Clementine. “Clementine Douglas: Teacher-Craftsman; Asheville, North Carolina; *1893-1967.” In *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

Clementine Douglas is an extremely important contributor to the narrative of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, as she is one of the founders of the guild. As an owner of a producing center as well, her experiences and opinions about the status of Appalachian women prior to and during the guild’s creation are valuable.

Fries, Annie Viola. “From Farm to Factory: Annie Viola Fries.” In *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls: Personal Histories of Womanhood and Poverty in the South*. Edited by Victoria Byerly. Ithaca: Cornell University’s ILR Press, 1986.

Annie Viola Fries was a woman who experienced mill factory life within North Carolina, who recounts the story of her own mother’s experiences. Growing up within a mill town and raising a new generation within these towns were the more common experiences that women had for work in the southern United States. Having her account of mill towns provides necessary context for the contrast in work between mills and the Southern Highland Craft Guild.

Goodrich, Frances Louisa. “Hand-Weaving in North Carolina.” *Pratt Institute Monthly*. (June 1898). *Hunter Library Digital Collections*. Accessed 15 March 2018.
<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4008coll2/id/1293/rec/3>

Goodrich, the founder of Allanstand Cottage Industries, discusses in her article of the Pratt Institute Monthly about the pros and cons of hand weaving in Appalachia. She discusses her intentions to teach crafting housewives how to market their products to gain financial autonomy. Goodrich critiques industrial crafting, believing it not to be true crafting, and that her industry is far better at keeping to traditions. This source presents the intentions of the Southern Highland Craft Guild’s practices in terms of marketing and workplace equality.

Goodrich, Frances Louisa and Jan Davidson. *Mountain Homespun*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010. Accessed 23 November 2017. <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/1353>.

This is a reprint of Goodrich’s 1931 memoir, in which she discusses the types of crafts, industries, and people made up the Appalachian Craft Movement from the late 1890s to the 1930s. The second chapter of the first half of the book goes into detail about the beginnings of the Allanstand Cottage Industries and the Biltmore Industries, two companies that influenced the Southern Highland Craft Guild’s creation and setup.

Heard, Marian G. *Report of an Exploratory Study Looking Toward a Craft Education Project in the Southern Highlands.* Asheville: Southern Highland Craft Guild Papers. 1945.

Marian Heard was an individual who worked with the Southern Highland Craft Guild to survey the Appalachian craft movement and its crafters throughout the region. She investigated the lifestyles, incomes, and crafting methods of a wide variety of crafters – to the end of determining how to set up a crafting education program throughout Appalachia. She provides insight into commonalities between different crafters and how they worked crafting into their everyday lives.

Hicklin, J. B. “Mountain Art Will Go Across the Ocean: Homespun Coverlet and Bureau Scarf that Will Grace the North Carolina Room at Florence Nightingale Nurses’ School, Bordeaux, France, Are Truly Representative of Western Caroline Handicraft.” *Greensboro Daily News.* January 15, 1933.

This newspaper article details the achievements of Frances Goodrich and her crafters, whose work was sent to France to be displayed in a nursing school. The article demonstrates how notable crafters could become beyond Appalachia.

Higgins, Mrs. Edd. “Mrs. Edd Higgins: Rugmaker; Burnsville, North Carolina.” In *Artisans of the Appalachians.* Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

One of the accounts from DuPuy’s book, Mrs. Edd Higgins details her personal experiences working with the Southern Highland Craft Guild. She is unique in describing the pride in her work, particularly with the relationship between herself and her customers.

Hodges, C. G. Interviewed by Edward L. DuPuy and Clifford Hotchkiss. “Interview with Mrs. C. G. Hodges [May 6, 1965]” in “Member File: Mrs. C. G. Hodges, knotwork.” *Hunter Library Digital Collections.* Accessed 23 November 2017.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4008coll2/id/2889/rec/40>

C. G. Hodges demonstrates a strong familial connection with her craft in her interview with DuPuy. For many craftswomen who chose to avoid the large industries, Hodges seems to imply that working independently or choosing to join the guild stems from wanting to keep family traditions alive.

Larew, Mrs. Charles L. “Handicraft Guild Brought Group of Enterprising People to U.T.” *Knoxville Journal.* April 5, 1934.

Larew’s article describes a meeting of the Southern Highland Craft Guild members for an exhibition, but furthermore, contributes to the argument about the individuality of different crafters within the guild. Instead of being seen as a mass group, Larew is clear to say that each crafter is distinctly different.

Lathrop, Virginia. “Hand-Made Gifts Highly Endorsed: North Carolina Handicraft on Mrs. Roosevelt Christmas Shopping List [1933].” Southern Highland Craft Guild Archives. Folk Art Center. Asheville, NC.

Virginia Lathrop’s article pertains to the increasing popularity of Appalachian handicrafts with urban markets, using Eleanor Roosevelt as an example of curious urban consumers. This article is important to understanding how customers viewed Appalachian crafters and why they were eager to purchase their products.

McCausland, Elizabeth. 1939. “Our Growing American Handicrafts.” *Independent Woman*. November.

Elizabeth McCausland’s magazine article describes the different cultures across the United States who are involved with crafting, but she focuses particular attention on Appalachian crafters. She finds that the situation in Appalachia was more unique and inspiring than other cases, with Appalachian women working with the market to earn cash that she could never earn otherwise. Her opinion supports the ideas generated by the artists of Appalachia themselves, which is often unique in outside perspectives.

McClure, Sue. Interviewed by Edward L. DuPuy. “Interview with Sue McClure, woodcarver [February 3, 1965].” *Hunter Library Digital Collections*. Accessed 15 March 2018.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4008coll2/id/3002/rec/1>

Sue McClure’s account on crafting throughout her life is less focused on the guild, and more focused on the personal fulfillment that crafting has brought her and her family. She discusses how important the money she gained from selling crafts has helped furnish her household and send her children to school, as well as serving as an activity to distract her from her personal health issues. This personal narrative on crafting helps readers understand how crafters viewed crafting in a strictly personal way.

Morgan, Lucy. “Lucy Morgan: Teacher-Craftsman; Webster, North Carolina.” In *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

Lucy Morgan is the founder of the Penland School of Crafts, who later joined the the Southern Highland Craft Guild. She carries the same opinion as other guild women: wanting the traditions of Appalachian craft culture to persist despite the increasing industrialization and milling of “craftwork”. Morgan’s experiences link the relationship between crafting schools, and their students and employees, with the overarching leadership of the craft guild.

Morton, Cora. “Mrs. Cora Morton: Weaver; Gatlinburg, Tennessee.” In *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

Cora Morton is among the primary accounts interviewed by DuPuy, though her opinions are more subdued than other women. She discusses the sharing of craftwork designs, but also mentions that these designs were assigned to her. Her account provides insight into the marketing system of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, and how this network of sharing designs was often necessary for the success of women crafters.

Parham, Richard and Anne Parham. Interview by Dorothy Joynes. “Interview of Richard and Anne Parham [April 23, 1993].” Voices of Asheville Project. D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections. University of North Carolina at Asheville. Accessed 22 September 2017.

http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/oralhistory/VOA/documents/parham_transcript.pdf

In the interview, while Richard Parham was working on as a laborer within the Biltmore Industries, at least at the time that Seely owned the facility, his wife Anna was only a guide for the tourists. This reflects the work experiences that many of the women in Biltmore Industries had prior to the WPA, where they could sell the products, make woodcrafts for the shops, and work in the businesses, but they weren’t allowed to weave at the looms.

P.B. “Looking at the Crafts: Crafts in the Southern Mountains.” Edited by Marjorie B. Ames. *The Handicrafter*. November-December 1930.

This author, known only as P.B. in the article, describes their travels to the major crafting establishments under the Southern Highland Craft Guild’s umbrella. Although they discuss many different producing centers, they take the time to stop and detail the particular members of these establishments and their unique contributions to the craft market. This demonstrates the continued perspective of individual craftsmen as distinct individuals, rather than a massive group all contributing to one market.

Pitman, Louise. Interviewed by Edward L. DuPuy and Clifford Hotchkiss. “Interview with Miss Louise Pitman [January 11, 1965]” in “Member File: Louise Pitman, natural dyer, administrator.” *Hunter Library Digital Collections*. Accessed 15 March 2018.

<http://wcudigitalcollection.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p4008coll2/id/2941/rec/38>

In Pitman’s interview, she provides an interesting perspective on the guild life. She was a teacher and crafter, but she was also the Executive Director of the guild later in life. She discusses the tasks she completed while she was at the guild, and while it appears that not every task was to her liking, she recognized the impact she had on the guild itself.

Potts, Helen G. "Letter of Appeal for Work at Biltmore Industries [1948]." *Blomberg, Patton, & Grimes Biltmore Industries Collection. D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections. University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC.*

While there isn't much to this letter written by Helen G. Potts, she is appealing to work during 1948, after the Work Progress Administration had gone into effect through the New Deal. This source provides context to the 1940s of the Appalachian craft movement, where women were gaining ground in fighting for equality in factories, mills, and industrial giants.

Seely, Fred L., and Edith Arthur. "Letters between Fred Seely and Edith Arthur [1918]." *Blomberg, Patton, & Grimes Biltmore Industries Collection. D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections. University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC.*

Between Edith Arthur, Fred Seely, and another party named "Julia", Arthur is bargaining with Seely for woodcarving work that offers better hours for better pay at the Biltmore Industries. Seely appears to be frustrated with Arthur for asking for such during the first World War, but not enough to discredit her woodwork or to refuse her a job. Seely offers a job for Arthur, \$50 per month at a steady rate, but she turns this offer down. Her letter serves as an example to early instances of women demanding equal treatment in industrial workplaces.

Seely, Fred L., and Mrs. Henry Douglas Colton. "Letters between Fred Seely and Mrs. Douglas Colton [October 1918]." *Blomberg, Patton, & Grimes Biltmore Industries Collection. D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections. University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC.*

These letters between Seely and Colton explicitly demonstrates that Seely chose not to hire female weavers in his industry at the time of his administration. While there were female crafters at the Biltmore Industries, they were ones who filled up the shops, took the orders, and did secretarial work for Seely. These letters provide context to industries and their opinions on women's labor prior to the 1940s.

South, Ruth. Interview by Wade Hyder and Deloris Proffit. "Interview with Ruth South [January 10, 1976]." *Appalachian State University Collections. Accessed 23 November 2017.* <http://omeka.library.appstate.edu/items/show/37320>

Ruth South's interview gives personal insight into the life of women in Appalachia who were involved in the craft movement through various means, choosing to address those who worked in privately owned shops, weaving schools and camps, and guilds. Her interview is an important resource to understand the relationship between the home and the workplace for crafters and understanding about the financial terms of the Southern Highland Craft Guild. She specifically discusses some of the rates in which the Southern Highland Craft Guild sold products from their crafters.

Strother, Virginia Dare. “**Virginia Dare Strother: Weaver; Sugar Grove, North Carolina.**” In *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

Virginia Dare Strother details her life as a crafter for the Southern Highland Craft Guild as well as her experiences as a weaving teacher for a local high school. While she may not have been as involved in the guild as many other guild crafting women, her account on her contributions to newer crafters in Appalachia is valuable.

Viner, Wilmer Stone. “**Wilmer Stone Viner: Wool dyer; Tryon, North Carolina.**” In *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

As one of the early pioneers and founders of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, Wilmer Stone Viner’s account elaborates on the principles that the guild was founded on. She is one of the earliest members that continued to contribute heavily to the movement, rather than completely retire.

Walser, Ailene. “**Marriage, Motherhood, and Work: Ailene Walser.**” In *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls: Personal Histories of Womanhood and Poverty in the South*. Edited by Victoria Byerly. Ithaca: Cornell University’s ILR Press, 1986.

Another account from the *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls* book, Walser’s account details how often she benefitted from the mill’s tight-knit community. She serves as an example that the crafting life was not universally available to all women within the south.

Williams, Isadora. “**Isadora Williams: Teacher-Craftsman; Knoxville, Tennessee.**” In *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Edited by Edward DuPuy and Emma Weaver. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

Isadora Williams was one of the earlier members of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, and one of the only members who worked mostly with the marketing process. Her account provide insight into the marketing techniques that the guild followed, as well as explaining how women in the guild were taught to market their products to customers.

Women’s Bureau. U.S. Department of Labour. *The Commercialization of the Home Through Industrial Home Work*. By Frances Perkins and Mary Anderson. Bulletin of the Women’s Bureau, no. 135. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1935.

This booklet was written by the Women’s Bureau and the U.S. Department of Labor to investigate into home work, a concept that involved women throughout the United States being forced to complete menial tasks for their factory jobs at home. They completed this work during their off hours and weren’t paid for the work because it was viewed to be “women’s work”, and thus, valued less. This bulletin provides information about a common aspect of women’s experiences within factories or mills prior to and during the 1930s.

“A Meeting of the Southern Mountain Handicraft Guild.” *The Handicrafter*. May-June 1931.

This magazine article details a marketing meeting of the Southern Highland Craft Guild, discussing how to sell their products to urban customers. The author provides insight into the future plans of the craft guild to take nostalgic designs of the past and recreate them to sell to customers without simply copying the old products.

“Exhibit of Revived Folk Arts.” *Christian Science Monitor*. December 4, 1937.

This newspaper article is one of the few that intentionally looked down on Appalachian crafters, viewing them to be simple people who are sustaining a primitive practice for foolish customers. While other articles romanticized the crafters and their products, the author of the *Christian Science Monitor*’s article seems to think that the practice is more harmful to a progressive American society than helpful.

“Handicraft Show Thrills Hundreds: Southern Highland Exhibits Shown at ‘Ashland Farm.’ Leaders Praise Work of Guild in Perpetuating Handicraft – Allen Eaton Speaks.” *Chattanooga Times*. October 1935.

For most of the article, the author is addressing the crafters and their exhibit as well as reporting on the ideas generated by Allen Eaton. However, this article is important due to its brief attention to the marketing tactics of crafters to entice customers to their booths and exhibits, namely, wearing hand-made clothing. This account is important to showing the agency of women crafters within the guild, who made use of a particular narrative to put on a show to their customers.

“Letters Regarding the Position of Cloth Inspector in the Homespun Industry [February 1919].” *Blomberg, Patton, & Grimes Biltmore Industries Collection*. D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections. University of North Carolina at Asheville, Asheville, NC.

While Fred Seely didn’t hire women as the weavers for Homespun, he allowed women to be part of sales and as cloth handlers and inspectors. The actual goods were not made by them. These letters provide context to industries and their opinions on women’s labor prior to the 1940s.

“Southern Mountain Folk Selling Handicraft at Rockefeller Center.” *Rutherford Republican*. December 5, 1935.

Along with other articles, the author of this article describes the appeal of Appalachian crafts to urban customers. Specifically, the author believes that the beauty of these products is due to the hand-made nature of the crafts, who represent a return to a nostalgic past that many urban citizens want. They pinpoint the anxiety and constant presence of machinery in cities to be the reason urban customers want Appalachian crafts.

Secondary

Barker, Garry. *The Handcraft Revival in Southern Appalachia, 1930-1990*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991.

Barker's approach to examining the craft movement of Appalachia is in direct response to the work done by Allen H. Eaton in the 1930s. He uses Eaton's work as a frame to examine how the industries and craft guilds operated during Eaton's time, but expands on the work to demonstrate the growth and fall of facilities associated with either the craft guild or corporate industries throughout the subsequent decades and how the crafts these shops, industries, and guild marketplaces produced still affect the Appalachian region today.

Becker, Jane S. *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Folk, 1930-1940*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Becker chooses to approach the Appalachian craft movement through the years of establishing various industries and guilds - addressing the earliest traditions and practices that developed these types of establishments, but overall focusing on the 1930s and 40s. While Becker addresses the question of benefits between industrial craftwork and homemaking craftwork, she also has an entire chapter dedicated to the Southern Highland Craft Guild's practices.

Boris, Eileen. "Craft Shops or Sweatshops? The Uses and Abuses of Craftsmanship in Twentieth Century America." *Journal of Design History* 2, no. 2/3 (1989): 175-192. Accessed 23 November 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1315807>

Boris approaches the Southern Highland Craft Guild in a way that is very similar to craft industries, that both are manipulative and often do not convey the "true story" that they sell to customers. Boris cites that one of the largest ironies in the guild's practices are that they did not address the Tennessee Valley Authority's, one of their associated companies, preference to male workers over female ones. Her harsh opinion on the practices of the craft guild, favoring profits over workers, is a stark contrast to many opinions of women who worked at the guild in the 1930s and 1940s.

Dupuy, Edward and Emma Weaver. *Artisans of the Appalachians*. Asheville: Miller Print Co., 1967.

DuPuy and Weaver are the editors behind this book of personal accounts from various members of the Southern Highland Craft Guild during the 1960s. They interviewed members who were there during the guild's founding to those who were newer guild crafters. They provide some insight that the personal accounts miss, such as the attention to certain roles that particular members of the guild filled during their time there.

Jones, Lu Ann. *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Lu Ann Jones's book, partially based on personal accounts from women who lived during the Great Depression, details the lifestyles of farm women and how they survived and made money during the 1930s. Although these women did not craft, they still found many ways to utilize their resources to keep their households financially afloat.

Kessler-Harris, Alice. *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Examining the history of women wage work in the United States, Alice Kessler-Harris details the changes and adjustments women went through to stay in wage labor from the American Revolution to after the second World War. Her information on women factory workers during the Great Depression gives context to the lives of the majority of working women throughout the United States, as opposed to the progressive opportunity the Southern Highland Craft Guild built for Appalachian women.

Whisnat, David E. *All that is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.

Although his contributions to the discussion of the Appalachian craft movement are less than those of Barker and Becker, Whisnat approaches the examination of the Appalachian craft movement in the 1930s from the contributions of Olive Dame Campbell, a folklorist who established the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC. His work claims that the Southern Highland Craft Guild's involvement with the school ensured the survival of the institution and the profitability of the students' work.

Wilson, Kathleen Curtis. "Fabric and Fiction: The Clinch Valley Blanket Mills, 1890-1950." *Journal of Appalachian Studies Association* 7 (1995): 50-56. Accessed 23 November 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41445679>

In Curtis's journal article, she uncovers the dynamics between the conditions of craft mills, specifically using Clinch Valley Blanket Mill, and the capitalist sales pitches that are made to the consumers of Appalachian crafts. Curtis makes a point that the mills and factories were not there for the workers benefit, and explains that for many families around the mill, there was no chance of another "financially successful" life outside of mill work. Additionally, she also pins the "false narratives" sold by the Southern Highland Craft Guild as harmful to the guild workers.