

## **The Appalachian Women's Museum: Background, The Present, The Future, Why it Matters**

By preserving, occupying, and operating the Monteith Farmstead in the mountains of western North Carolina, the Appalachian Women's Museum (AWM) will accomplish a variety of far-reaching goals while also improving the quality of life for our region's citizens.

### **Background**

In 1908, Elias Brendle Monteith and Mary Magdalene Carson Monteith built their farmhouse on a 16-acre tract of land along Scotts Creek in Dillsboro, NC. There they raised their two daughters, Edna and Edith, who lived on the farmstead their entire lives. Neither Edna nor Edith left an heir.

Upon the death of the last daughter in 2001, the farmstead was left to Dr. Cliff Faull who subsequently sold the property to the Town of Dillsboro. The town was able to stabilize the acreage through monies from Duke Energy and the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF). Thoughtful of both economic stimuli and public opinion, the town organized and supported a separate 501(c)(3), the Appalachian Women's Museum, to preserve the Monteith Farmstead as a Heritage Tourism Site. Farmstead cleanup and artifact rescue began.

In 2006, the creation of a master plan to guide the restoration and adaptive re-use of the existing structures on the Monteith Farmstead was authorized. In 2008, with a \$15,000.00 Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Grant, and matching funding provided by the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina (\$7,000.00), the Dillsboro Town Board (\$7,000.00), and Jackson County (\$2,500.00), the master plan was created by Mathews Architecture of Asheville, NC. The selection of Mathews Architecture was based on their expertise in working on historic buildings, their background in landscape design, and also on their commitment to furthering environmentally responsible building practices wherever possible.

Also in 2008, the Monteith Farmstead was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Additional restoration assistance was provided by a Preservation North Carolina Steadman Incentive Grant (\$5,000.00) and a grant award from the Appalachian Regional Commission's ***Gems of Appalachia Initiative*** (\$17,500.00). Steadman Grants assist with the rescue and stabilization of historically and architecturally significant properties. The site's Flower House was restored in 2009 and the Canning House Kitchen was restored in 2010. With a \$3,000.00 Jackson County Municipal Award, a series of programs, demonstrations, and hands-on activities focusing on women's history "***Women's Work: Preserving the Past, Educating the Future***" was created.

Citing the worsening economic environment, in 2010 the Town of Dillsboro withdrew from all planning and cooperation with the Appalachian Women's Museum in regards to the Monteith Farmstead.

In 2012, the Appalachian Women's Museum was invited by the Town of Dillsboro to reopen negotiations over the possibility of the Monteith Farmstead (after acquisition and restoration) becoming a Heritage Tourism Site and the future home of the Appalachian Women's Museum.

In 2013, the Appalachian Women's Museum and the Town of Dillsboro entered into a binding arrangement specifying that the historic Monteith farmhouse (upon restoration) and several outbuildings will be gifted to the AWM and that a long-term lease of approximately three contiguous acres of adjacent creek-side, farmstead property will be included with the gift. The remaining farmstead acreage (approximately twelve acres) is under North Carolina PARTF restrictions and is required to remain available to the public for non-commercial, recreational use.

## **The Present**

Preparing to transition from a "museum without walls" to one with, the Appalachian Women's Museum held a Strategic Planning Workshop facilitated by Jill Jones of the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area and Jeff Futch of the NC Department of Cultural Resources. Out of that workshop emerged a reworked Mission Statement, a clearly-defined Vision, and a list of Immediate Goals.

### **Mission Statement**

The Mission of the Appalachian Women's Museum is to gather, preserve, and share the stories of the women of Southern Appalachia.

### **Vision**

To become a recognized and respected home for the history of the women of Southern Appalachia that is a resource and repository for the artifacts, archives, and other research materials that tells the stories of these women and of the people whose lives they touched.

### **Goals:**

The immediate goals for the organization include:

- Cultivate and establish a diverse and professional board
- Update the Museum's comprehensive governing guidelines
- Attain sustainable human and financial resources
- Develop and implement efficient and effective communication tools
- Build community involvement
- Develop partnerships with museums, schools, and regional organizations

Throughout the first half of 2013, the Appalachian Women's Museum focused on both governance and organization. This focus led to increased community awareness and to the development of a strong Board of Directors, a skilled Advisory Committee, and a diverse group of Volunteers.

With these components in place and the historic Monteith Farmstead successfully designated as its future home, the Appalachian Women's Museum is preparing for the future, actively identifying its next steps. Accordingly, the necessary and immediate goal is to secure sustainable financial resources.

## **The Future**

To realize its vision of becoming a resource that collects and shares the stories of the women of Southern Appalachia, the Appalachian Women's Museum has approved four essential tasks to begin without pause.

They include:

- Raise public awareness while initiating a local fundraising campaign
- Identify and seek funding through appropriate grant programs
- Continue the preservation and restoration of the Monteith Farmstead

## **Why it Matters: The Monteith Farmstead; The Community; The Museum**

### **The Monteith Farmstead**

The 16-acre Monteith Farmstead is nestled within a rolling meadow adjacent to a densely wooded border with Scotts Creek and immediately below US-23 in Jackson County, N.C.

Just east of the town of Dillsboro, the farmstead is one of the most visible historic properties in western North Carolina. The Monteith family, who owned, occupied, and worked the farmstead from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until 2001, were concurrently farmers, civic employees, homemakers, and merchants.

The Monteiths witnessed and experienced the cultural impact the 20<sup>th</sup> century had on their community. The railroad came and went, public work supplemented and then replaced an agrarian existence, education became a right instead of a luxury, prosperity displaced poverty, and increased mobility brought the outside world to Appalachia. Furthermore, women from various backgrounds joined men, frequently assuming prominent roles within these social snapshots of change.

## **The Community**

Present-day, the Monteith family is gone and the surrounding built-environment is showing the negative effects of time and the hesitancy that accompanies economic uncertainty. The vitality of tomorrow's community now becomes the responsibility of today's citizens. In that spirit, the Appalachian Women's Museum is committed to providing not only an educational and cultural resource, but also to making a significant contribution to the economy of the region.

The heavily traveled Highway 441 corridor linking Atlanta and the mountains of Appalachia is less than one mile from the Monteith Farmstead. We are confident a restored and working Monteith Farmstead operating as the Appalachian Women's Museum will not only attract and serve visitors, it will also improve the quality of life for the area's residents. It will at once include and encourage natural, cultural, historic, and economic activity.

The National Trust defines Heritage Tourism as "traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past," and studies have consistently shown that heritage travelers stay longer and spend more money than other kinds of travelers. Without question, by generating a steadily-increasing stream of Heritage Tourism, the Appalachian Women's Museum will be a valuable component within a broader economic revitalization strategy.

## **The Museum**

The Appalachian Women's Museum will provide a resource that recognizes, preserves, and shares the contributions of women in the cultural and natural history of the Appalachian region. It will also provide something unique: a forum for the understanding of historical events from the perspectives of these women.

The original Appalachian women were Native American. Native American social structure was matriarchal, with the woman's family-line clearly identified as the relevant influence within a nation of clans. For matters of tribal affairs, women had a role equal to that of men. Native Americans clustered in small communities along fertile river valleys and relied on agriculture, hunting, and trading for provision.

The arrival of Europeans changed forever the traditions of the first Appalachian women. Engagement between the two worlds, between natives and settlers, produced a merging of cultures heavily weighted in favor of the Europeans. One way of life disappeared as another thrived. Within a few centuries, the designation "Appalachian Women" was redefined; African, Asian, Latino, European, and Native American ethnicities blended – and not only had the story changed, but also the storytellers.

Log cabins, rutted roads, scattered families, hillside farms, and quiet nights characterized the existence of many Appalachian women until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Eventually, many joined an emerging middle-class, in a world of increasing opportunity and mobility. However, whether it be in the presence of adversity or advantage, mountain women found themselves making decisions that not only affected their homes and their families, but also their communities. Sometimes apparent, sometimes hidden, sometimes prevalent, sometimes subtle, these women assumed a variety of activities that helped shape the cultural landscape of today's Appalachian region.

At the Monteith Farmstead, the Appalachian Women's Museum will feature artifacts and permanent exhibits that illustrate both local and regional heritage. Educational programs, both indoors and outdoors, will guide present and future generations as they explore the past. Visitors will learn the stories of women who were leaders in their families and in their communities – who both lost and gained. The museum will note women who excelled in business, education, arts & crafts, agriculture, skilled labor, medicine, dentistry, and as elected officials. The museum will also uncover the oft-neglected efforts of women who sacrificed formal schooling, health, careers, and dreams in order to provide for others.

The Appalachian Women's Museum will provide a unique history: one whose value we are growing to understand, and through our efforts, one that we will ensure is preserved for future generations. From the Native Americans to the present day, we take pride in those represented here, for their story is a part of everyone's story.

*Much more information is available. Please contact us at:*

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