

BARRY STILES

2. THE FOXFIRE MUSEUM AND HERITAGE CENTER

The Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center was created much in the same way as Foxfire itself – through the power of student choice and community support. The people the students were interviewing in the early years of the magazine believed so much in what the students were doing, which was preserving their culture, that they gave many of their personal belongings to the students so that the items could be preserved for future generations. The students had no real place to store or display these items, and it gave them the idea and the dream to create a museum.

This kind of dream requires money to fund it and the money came when students were given the opportunity to write *The Foxfire Book*. When the book contract was signed the intent was to use the monies generated by royalties from book sales to create the museum. In 1974 an old apple orchard on the side of Blackrock Mountain was purchased. A Gristmill, that the students had learned about when interviewing Aunt Arie, was acquired, disassembled and brought up the land and reassembled by the students. A museum was born and a dream became a reality. More buildings were brought up to the land and eventually a village was created. We now have thirty buildings that comprise The Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center. Over the years more and more items have been donated to the museum creating a substantial repository of the Appalachian culture.

What was started decades ago is still growing. Visitation has increased and infrastructure improvements have been made with even more planned. It is Foxfire's intention to have The Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center become a premier destination of the Southeast and have it be the preeminent site for the interpretation and education about the Appalachian Culture. Kindergarteners to college age students visit the museum regularly to learn more about this amazing culture. Special interpretive programs for 4th grade students have been created to fit within their curriculum. Annual Folk events are held at the Museum that promote the understanding of the Appalachian culture. Visitors from around the world come to the Museum to visit the "home" of Foxfire. Increased interpretation and greater accessibility to the Museum are high priorities in the coming years.

Along with the Museum, the students also created a substantial archive on the Appalachian culture. When students conducted the very first interview, which was with former Sheriff Luther Rickman, they found that they couldn't remember all of the details very well and that they couldn't write a very good article from their notes and recollections. They decided to interview Luther Rickman a second time

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and this time bring a reel to reel tape recorder and record the entire interview. How fortunate we are that students learned this on the very first interview. It became standard practice, and still is, to record all interviews. This has created an incredible oral history collection on the Southern Appalachian culture. Thousands of hours of interviews have been collected mostly on magnetic tape. We recently transferred these interviews to a digital format for preservation. Students have also amassed over 100,000 pictures taken over the past 50 years. They have published 194 issues of *The Foxfire Magazine* as well as 12 in the series of *Foxfire Books* and numerous companion books. Plans are being discussed for further preservation work within the archives as well as making the material easier to access by researchers.

What an incredible story: Foxfire is 50 years old and not only still going but still growing!