

dedicated a room in the White House to her craft collection, calling it the “Blue Mountain Room.”

As the Allanstand women spun and dyed fibers, warped the loom, and attended the many steps of weaving, they sang old ballads, what they called “love songs.” Originally from Scotland, Ireland, and England, these songs maintained much of their original sound and pitch, due in part to the geographic isolation of the Southern Appalachian people. In 1916, Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles began to collect this treasure trove of folk songs. Throughout the rest of his life, Sharp defended the Appalachian way of life, speaking to the dignity, courtesy, and natural grace of the people who welcomed him.

Some of his gracious hostesses included singers Aunt Polly Shelton and “Granny Banks” (Ealy Franklin Banks), and weavers Ann Minerva Haire Shelton, Louisa Payne Lamb, Elmeda McHargue Walker, and her sisters, Martha Matilda and Sarah Elizabeth McHargue Nelson.

These are ancestors of Madison County. “The people who live here are proud of their heritage,” continues Les. One resident, who visited the exhibition writes, “It’s not every day you get to see your grandmother and great grandmother featured in a museum.”

In addition to photographs, stories, and information, the museum showcases traditional instruments of the crafts—from looms to linen to lines. Items are donated from local residents, as well as from the Southern Highland Craft Guild. A visit can elicit imaginations and memories, as well as reveal the origins of the nursery rhyme, “Pop! Goes the Weasel.”

“As a museum we present objects, stories and facts as untarnished as we can, and let people find the truth in



them,” says Les. In doing so, people often discover a lost sense of place. They experience the richness that resides in these mountains, and are able to carry the stories to future generations.

The museum will host exhibitions twice a year and hopes to showcase Madison County’s railroad, tobacco industry, “beverage” industry, missions and missionaries, role in the Civil War, hooked rugs, and much more.

The Rural Life Museum is a short 20-minute drive from Asheville. It is located on Cascade Street on the campus of Mars Hill University. Open daily (except Mondays) from 1-5 p.m. and by appointment. Admission is free. For more information, call 828.689.1400 or visit mhu.edu/ramsey-center.