

## Folklife Resources in McDowell County, North Carolina



north carolina  
folklife institute

**T**he folk and traditional arts are rooted in and reflective of the cultural life of a community. Community members may share a common ethnic heritage, language, religion, occupation, or geographic region. These vital and constantly reinvigorated artistic traditions are shaped by values and standards of excellence that are passed from generation to generation, most often within family and community, through demonstration, conversation, and practice. Genres of artistic activity include, but are not limited to, music, dance, crafts, and oral expression.

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## Introduction

On the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge, just northeast of Asheville, McDowell County lies in a region rich in folklife. The county has two municipalities, Marion and Old Fort, and is home to many craft artists, traditional musicians, and residents who keep alive heritage skills of agriculture and homesteading. With an active arts council, the McDowell Arts Council Association (MACA), and several long-running music events, venues for performance and display of traditional arts are plentiful in this rural county. Regional organizations and resources, such as the Southern Highland Craft Guild, Handmade in America, and the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area's Traditional Artists Directory, recognize the excellence of McDowell County artists and present their work to a wider public. Marion and Old Fort each has a gallery, of MACA and the Appalachian Artisan Society (TAAS), respectively, which displays the work of local craftspeople, including many from within the county.

The tradition bearers of McDowell County come from varied generations and walks of life. They range from chair maker Max Woody and his sister, chair seat weaver Margaret Woody, elder craftspeople from Marion, to Colby Laney, a young Marion fiddler currently an undergraduate at East Tennessee State University. Some tradition bearers are native to the county, like Randy Vess, a farm machinery collector who lives on his ancestral homestead, while others, like Californian Judy La Roux, a beekeeper and herbalist, were drawn to McDowell County in part by the richness of its heritage.

The region's musical traditions are showcased in an array of jam sessions and concert series. The Mountain Gateway Museum in Old Fort has hosted a summer concert series for several years, presenting some of Western North Carolina's finest bluegrass, old-time, and gospel musicians, and offering demonstrations by some of the region's excellent craftspeople. Two regular jam sessions bring musicians and audiences together to play and listen to bluegrass and old-time music, on Thursday nights at the depot in Marion, and on Friday Nights at Old Fort Mountain Music in Old Fort. The Orchard at Altapass on the Blue Ridge Parkway is also a popular music venue, offering daily concerts throughout the summer months.

The following pages contain profiles of artists and tradition bearers in McDowell County, and descriptions of venues and events that present folklife programming. All of the people profiled are available for demonstrations and performances in area programs. While not a comprehensive listing of tradition bearers and venues in the area, this report offers a glimpse of the wealth of folklife resources found in McDowell County.





## Craft Artists and Heritage Skills Demonstrators

### David and Anne Allison Spinners and weavers

PO Box 157  
Old Fort, NC 28762  
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Spinners and weavers David and Anne Allison both come from families with strong traditions of fiber arts. David, who grew up in Old Fort, is the grandson of a weaver who ran a family weaving business. Anne is the great-granddaughter of a spinner and weaver, and was taught to sew and knit as a child by her mother and grandmother.

David learned to weave as a child, helping his grandfather. He was so little at the time that his grandfather had to work the treadles for him, while David manned the shuttle. Anne has been spinning since the 1980s, a process that led her to weaving. David returned to weaving when Anne started to practice the art. The Allisons use natural fibers (some of which they dye themselves), and historic patterns from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Allisons weave at the Biltmore Estate on weekends, and have demonstrated at the Mountain Gateway Museum, Vance Birthplace (Weaverville), Hickory Ridge Homestead (Boone), Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, and Mountain State Fair. They have been members of the Village of Yesteryear, the craft section of the North Carolina State Fair, since 1997. They also participate in French and Indian and Revolutionary War reenactment events. "We enjoy sharing what we have learned," Anne has said in an interview with Mark Freed of the Watauga Arts Council, "and feel strongly that we connect the past to the future while maintaining the craftsmanship of the old ways."



Anne Allison

Michael Taylor

### Alton Blankenship Broom maker and woodcarver

4267 US 70 West  
Marion, NC 28752  
(828) 724-4362

Alton Blankenship remembers that when he was a boy in Rutherford County, his father grew broomstraw and made, sold, and traded brooms. "I didn't know you could buy a broom 'til I got to school and saw those fancy ones with the long wooden handles," he says. Though he watched his father make numerous brooms, it wasn't until Alton was in his mid-sixties, when he received a lesson from Buncombe County broom maker Marlow Gates, that he tried his hand at making his own. He now makes kitchen, whisk, hearth, and turkey wing brooms. He still has one broom that his father made in the 1930s.

Blankenship also took up woodcarving during his retirement. On a camping trip to Florida, he met a man from Indiana who was sitting outside his camper whittling a little dog out of wood. Blankenship

remembers saying, "I'd give anything in the world to be able to do that." The man gave Blankenship a dog form cut with a band saw to practice on, and told him, "Start in the corners, and anything that don't look like dog, cut it off." By the next day Blankenship had carved a dog so well that the man gave him a cut-out starter from which to carve a cowboy. "For about three days I sweated blood," he



Sarah Bryan



Sarah Bryan





says, but finally “got it looking right.” Dogs and cowboys are some of his favorite forms to carve to this day. He also makes elaborate walking sticks with snakes, ball-in-cage, and other traditional designs.

Alton Blankenship lives in Marion, in a home filled with brooms and woodcarvings. He demonstrates broom making, usually assisted by Gina Wheeler of Barnardsville, whom he taught. In addition to demonstrations, Blankenship offers lessons and classes in broom making.

Left, below and previous page, brooms, walking stick, and carvings made by Alton Blankenship



## Judy La Roux Herbalist and beekeeper

401 Bethlehem Rd.  
Old Fort, NC 28762  
(828) 668-4894

[alwaysherbs@hughes.net](mailto:alwaysherbs@hughes.net)

Old Fort resident Judy LaRoux is an herbalist, expert in the medicinal uses of wild and cultivated plants, and beekeeper. Her home-based business Always Herbs, which she operates with husband Ken and friend and partner Emily Gardner, has been producing herbal remedies for fifteen years. Previously a resident of Southern California, La Roux moved to Western North Carolina in order to pursue her interests in traditional herbal medicine and heritage agriculture. Today she maintains extensive vegetable and herb gardens at her home.

Always Herbs produces infusions, salves, creams, and other products using the essential oils she derives from lavender, yarrow, chickweed, and other plants that she raises or gathers. La Roux's herb garden encircles her house, providing abundant materials for the herbal remedies that she creates. She is also in training through Clayton College to become a naturopathic doctor.

Around six years ago, La Roux began keeping bees, learning through a program sponsored by Golden Leaf and North Carolina State University. Today she keeps four hives of Italian and Russian bees. She, Emily, and Ken bottle and sell natural, raw honey, and provide demonstrations and displays about beekeeping and honey making.

Judy La Roux is available for workshops, demonstrations, and consultations on herbal medicine and beekeeping.



Judy La Roux checking on her bees.



Judy La Roux and business partner Emily Gardner

**Jason Lonon**  
**Woodworker and blacksmith**

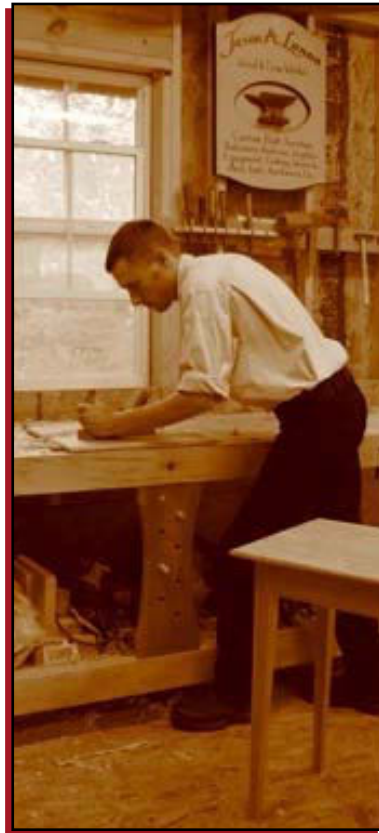
150 Persimmon Branch Dr.  
Marion, NC 28752  
(828) 724-4170

[www.jasonlonon.com](http://www.jasonlonon.com)

Jason Lonon grew up on a farm in McDowell County, and learned woodworking at an early age. For three years, beginning when he was sixteen years old, Lonon apprenticed with master furniture maker Hugh Bowman. He started his training by learning to make Windsor-, Shaker-, and early American-style furniture. He and Bowman later moved on to building instruments, particularly dulcimers and banjos. Lonon is a dulcimer player, and has recorded an album with his sister and brother.

Lonon taught himself the art of blacksmithing by borrowing and buying old equipment and checking out books on the subject. He has become a respected blacksmith, and has demonstrated the art at Western Carolina University's Mountain Heritage Day, in addition to several other festivals, historic sites, and other venues.

Jason Lonon is available to demonstrate not only blacksmithing, but dulcimer making and traditional furniture making.



[www.jasonlonon.com](http://www.jasonlonon.com)

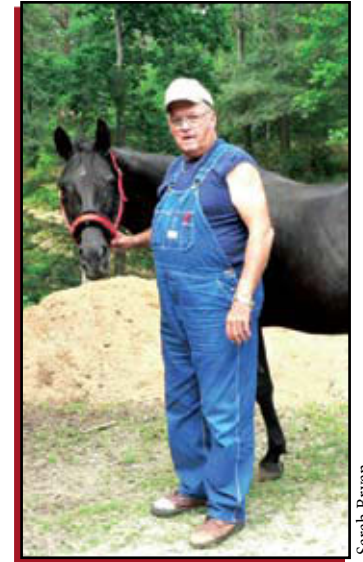
**Floyd Sims**  
**Heritage agriculture demonstrator**

PO Box 651  
Old Fort, NC  
(828) 668-7832 (home)  
(828) 442-8241 (cell)

Growing up in the Mountain Creek section of Rutherford County, Floyd Sims worked hard as a child. He remembers that at the age of ten he would get up early to plow the family's cotton and corn fields until it was time to go to school, and then after school would come home and plow again until dark. He also worked at a sawmill as a child. As a young man he worked in the cotton mill in Spindale, before embarking on what would be a forty-five-year career driving trucks.

Like so many people who could not wait to get off the farm when they were young, Sims has found in later years that he misses some aspects of the rural life of his youth. Retired now, Sims devotes much of his time and energy to taking care of his farm animals. In addition to a herd of cows and two donkeys, Sims keeps four Haflinger work horses, a breed that was introduced to the United States from Austria in the 1950s. He also has a walking horse, whose last foal, a filly, was born in June 2009.

Though he uses a tractor for most of his day-to-day work, such as mowing the 75-80 acres of hay that he grows, Sims also puts his horses to work for special events. With the Halfingers and an Oliver turning plow, he has plowed gardens and fields for the Mountain Gateway Museum and the McDowell County Saddle and Bridle Club. The Halfingers are good riding horses, he says, and he sometimes makes them available to local riding camps. Sims also demonstrates log and sled pulling with his horses, and makes them available for parades.



Floyd Sims with his walking horse Shine.

Sarah Bryan



## Susan and Mae Taylor

### Basket makers

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Old Fort, NC 28762  
(828) 668-9546  
[Sbt444@hotmail.com](mailto:Sbt444@hotmail.com)

The Taylor family's interest in basket making dates to the 1960s, when Mae Taylor, a native of Shady Spring, West Virginia, took a class to learn the art. She quickly found that she had a talent for weaving, and began to produce a variety of baskets from reeds, splints, and vines. Though Mae remembers that during her Depression-era childhood in the coal fields of Randolph County, "the only time you saw a basket was when someone brought a bushel of peaches up from Georgia," the Taylors consider their art an expression of an Appalachian tradition that is part of their heritage.

In 2002, Mae and daughter Susan both moved to Old Fort. That winter, while Mae was recovering from back surgery, she began to teach Susan how to weave baskets. Having watched her mother make baskets since she was a child, Susan found that weaving came easily to her as well, and soon she was producing solid-bottom Nantucket-style baskets, ribbed baskets, egg baskets, and baskets in a variety of other traditional forms. Susan's accomplishment in basket making has earned her membership in the Southern Highland Craft Guild. She is also a member of the National Basketry Organization, the North Carolina Basketweavers Association, the Tennessee Basketry Association, the Blue Ridge Basketmakers Guild, and the McDowell Arts Council.

In addition to basket making, Susan Taylor makes gourd birdhouses, pottery, jewelry, beadwork, and knitted and felted crafts. She teaches one or two classes every month for the McDowell Arts Council, demonstrates at the Folk Arts Center and Moses Cone Mansion, and at Marion's Oktoberfest and Honeybee Festival.



Mae and Susan Taylor

Sarah Bryan

## Randy Vess

### Farm machinery demonstrator

3380 Bat Cave Rd.  
Old Fort, NC 28762  
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Randy Vess running his World War I-era hit-and-miss engine.

Randy Vess grew up in McDowell County, in a family that kept alive many traditional occupational skills that were common in the mountains in previous generations. Vess' grandfather and great-grandfather were both millers, running a water-powered mill. His mother's parents, who lived on the land where Vess lives today, did not have their home electrified until the mid-1960s. Vess and his cousins learned first-hand how hard one had to work in the days before electricity, and heard their uncle's stories about chopping and hauling wood three times a day for the woodstove on which their grandmother cooked every meal, and for the fireplaces that heated the house.

This early exposure to the old-time ways of running a homestead led to a life-long enthusiasm. Vess continues to be fascinated by mountain farming practices, and in particular by the machinery that was in common use in his grandparents' and great-grandparents' days. He owns numerous farm machines, both hand-powered and engine-powered, some of which he inherited from his family and others that he acquired in later years.

Vess particularly enjoys demonstrating farm machinery to children. Favorite implements are his cast-iron corn sheller, a wheel-turned machine that strips a corncob of its kernels and spits out the cob; his corn grinder, which pulverizes the kernels to feed and meal of various degrees of fineness, from coarse chicken feed to fine cornmeal; a 1919 grass cutter, which works as well as a modern lawnmower; and an iron water pump, which he says children find particularly fascinating. Vess also owns a large hit-and-miss engine, which saw service during World War I.

Randy Vess is available (depending on his work schedule, and family and volunteer firefighting commitments) to demonstrate old-time machinery at festivals, schools, and other venues, for audiences of children and adults.

**Gina and Michael Wheeler**  
**Broom maker and chair maker**

222 Town Branch Rd.  
Barnardsville, NC  
(828) 724-4362

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**T**hough not residents of McDowell County, Gina and Michael Wheeler are able demonstrators who have shared their crafts throughout the region.

Gina Wheeler, a broom maker, grew up in Hendersonville in an artistic family. For the past several years she has been broom maker Alton Blankenship's apprentice, learning directly from him the art that Blankenship learned from his father in Rutherford County. Blankenship speaks admiringly of his protégé's work. She accompanies him and assists him at most of his demonstration engagements, and is available to demonstrate broom making on her own as well, as family and work commitments allow.

Michael Wheeler is the great-grandson of Lark Wheeler, a prominent Yancey and Buncombe County chair maker of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Many of Lark Wheeler's chairs have survived in the community, and Michael has assembled a large collection.

Michael uses many of the same materials and techniques that his grandfather did in assembling the chairs—including the use of green legs and dried rungs, and wooden pegs rather than nails. Michael learned to weave chair bottoms from Hunter Maney, an elderly Barnardsville resident. In June and July, as Maney taught him, Michael goes into the woods to “ross,” or strip, the bark from hickory trees, which he stores in rolls to use for chair bottoms.

Michael Wheeler is a member of the Southern Highland Craft Guild.



Sarah Bryan

Gina Wheeler with a sampling of her brooms



courtesy of Michael Wheeler

A Michael Wheeler chair, juried for the Southern Highland Craft Guild

**Max and Myron Woody**  
**Chair makers**

**Margaret Woody**  
**Chair seat weaver**

Woody's Chair Shop  
3355 US 70 W  
Marion, NC 28752-7440  
(828) 724-4158

**M**ax Woody is a sixth-generation chair maker. In 2010 he marked his sixtieth year in the family business that he learned from his grandfather and father. As a teenager, Max spent a year working at a furniture factory for sixty-five cents an hour, and saved several hundred dollars with which he bought himself a set of tools. He uses some of them today, along

with tools that have been passed down in his family. Myron Woody, Max's son, is working alongside his father in the shop, carrying the tradition into its seventh generation.

Margaret Woody, Max's sister, retired from a furniture plant nearly thirty years ago. At her brother's encouragement, she took a class, offered by the McDowell community College years ago at Woody's Chair Shop, to learn how to weave

bottoms for chairs. She learned the fundamentals of the art there, but she admits, "I mostly taught myself." Today she is an accomplished seat weaver, and works in Woody's Chair Shop bottoming Max's chairs.

Chairs made by the Woodys continue to be in-demand, and Myron Woody is now helping his father catch up on a waiting list that was once years long. Max and Myron work every day, and welcome visitors to the shop. Margaret is available to teach workshops and lessons on chair seat weaving.



Sarah Bryan



Sarah Bryan



Sarah Bryan





## Performing Artists

### Bill Carson Storyteller

PO Box 265  
Little Switzerland, NC 28749  
(828) 765-9314  
[carsonw@bellsouth.net](mailto:carsonw@bellsouth.net)



Cedric N. Chatterley

Bill Carson, the owner and director of the Orchard at Altapass on the Blue Ridge Parkway, is a native of Muncie, Indiana. He came to McDowell County upon retirement from IBM, but he dates the beginning of his storytelling to his career at IBM, during which he often had to pitch new high-tech ideas and so developed his skills as a presenter.

Carson and his wife retired to Little Switzerland, where he learned about traditional weaving. His sister bought the Orchard at Altapass, at which time Carson became its operator. During this period he worked with scholars and elder community members to learn a great deal about the history of the Orchard and Western North Carolina, including the Overmountain Victory Trail, which passes through the Orchard.

Carson draws upon his deep knowledge of the region's history and heritage to tell stories and give presentations to groups of all ages. He gives hayrides through the Orchard, during which he tells stories, and has also presented at schools and festivals.

### Clear Creek

Contact: Dr. George Ellis  
(828) 668-4151

Old Fort-based Clear Creek is bluegrass and bluegrass gospel band that plays regularly in the area. All members are from McDowell County or nearby, or have lived in the county for many years.



Susan Hester

Clear Creek on the front porch at the Mountain Gateway Museum in Old Fort

Banjo player Deales Mace is from a musical family from Cox's Creek. Guitar player Dr. George Ellis is originally from Kentucky, but moved to Old Fort more than forty years ago, and learned to play the guitar during jams at Max Woody's Chair Shop in Marion. Bass player Jim Duckworth is from nearby Burke County, and was first exposed to traditional music by his banjo-playing grandfather. Howard Bivins, mandolinist, has lived in McDowell County most of his life, and comes from a family of musicians. Marion-born Bobby Gardner comes from a musical family as well, and plays Dobro for Clear Creek.

Clear Creek plays concerts at area churches and other venues, including Old Fort Mountain Music.

### Bobby Gardner

259 S. Main St.  
Marion, NC 28752  
(828) 460-0864

Bobby Gardner was born in McDowell County into a family that included a grandfather who played the banjo, and a half-brother who played professionally in the 1950s with such country music



figures as Wade Mainer and Steve Ledford. His first instrument was the guitar, which he took up as a teenager, but as a young man he learned to play the Dobro, which has become his primary instrument.

Gardner has played professionally with Chubby Wise, Mac Wiseman, Raymond Fairchild, and other prominent bluegrass musicians. Currently he plays with the bluegrass band Clear Creek, the house band at Old Fort Mountain Music. He also performs regularly at the Orchard at Altapass with Marion guitarist Terry McKinney

In addition to performances with Clear Creek and other musicians, Bobby Gardner is available on limited basis to teach workshops or lessons.



David Holt

## Highway Bound

Contact: Gary Grindstaff  
(828) 724-4541

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Highway Bound, together since the band's younger members were in high school, is made up of members of three families. Laura Beth Poteat sings while her brother Ben and father Tim play rhythm guitars; Colby Laney plays lead guitar and sings, while his father Barte fiddles. David Grindstaff is the mandolinist, and his father Gary plays the bass. Laura Beth, Ben, David, and Colby are all undergraduates at East Tennessee State University, and play in the ETSU bluegrass band.

Highway Bound has opened for well-known bands including Mountain Heart and Newfound Road. They have appeared at the North Carolina Mountain State Fair, Bluegrass First Class, the Old Rock School in Valdese, and at numerous other regional events. The band is available, depending on the members' school schedules, to play for concerts, benefits, and other events.

Highway Bound, from BRNHA Traditional Artist Directory, [www.blueridgeheritage.com](http://www.blueridgeheritage.com)

## Jim Huskins

204 Whitson Rd.  
Marion, NC 28752  
(828) 460-7913



Jim Huskins and Ten Broeck.

Marion native Jim Huskins remembers of his childhood that "Once [I] found the banjo, all I wanted to do was play the banjo all day." He was first tried the instrument at a friend's house. When he was a boy, his parents took him to hear Flatt and Scruggs and local bluegrass bands, fueling his interest. At the age of nineteen, Huskins bought a banjo, and began to take lessons with Elizabethton, Tennessee, banjo player E. C. Miller.

Huskins, who is a minister, played in a bluegrass gospel band while living in Saint Louis, and later played with several other bluegrass bands when living in Elizabethton. His ministry has taken him all over the country, and he has played music everywhere he has traveled.

Today he leads the band Ten Broeck, named after the racehorse immortalized in the Blue Grass Boys' song "Molly and Tenbrooks." Jim Huskins and Ten Broeck play for concerts, church engagements, festivals, and other events. Huskins is also an auctioneer and emcee, and is available to teach music workshops.

## Colby Laney

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Marion, NC 28752  
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[zc43@goldmail.etsu.edu](mailto:zc43@goldmail.etsu.edu)

As a small child, Colby Laney learned to play the fiddle, influenced by his father Barte, an accomplished bluegrass musician. Sports soon captured his interest, though, and throughout elementary school, he says, he was "always chasing baseballs and basketballs"

rather than playing music. In middle school, Laney was cut from the basketball team, and was “pretty down about it.” Trying to find something else to occupy his time, he took up the guitar again at his father’s encouragement. “By the next year I didn’t even want to play basketball.” Music has been his passion ever since.

In high school Laney played with Highway Bound, with members of the Poteat and Grindstaff families. Highway Bound still plays festivals and benefits on occasion. Later he played in the Linville Ridge Band, an experience that he says “helped me more than anything I’d done . . . it made me listen a lot more.”

Now a student at East Tennessee State University, Laney plays in the ETSU bluegrass band, which has toured widely and appeared at the Carter Fold. Filling in on guitar for Mountain Heart, Laney has appeared on the Grand Ole Opry, and in the summer of 2009 has been touring with the bluegrass band Next Best Thing. He has also won the guitar contest at the Western North Carolina State Fair, and played mandolin in the Josh Goforth Band.

Colby Laney is available to play for concerts, festivals, and other engagements, depending on his school schedule, with Highway Bound, Next Best Thing, and other groups of musicians.

## Terry McKinney

32 Circle Ln.  
Marion, NC 28752  
(828) 652-3003

**S**pruce Pine-born, McDowell County-raised Terry McKinney grew up in a family that listened to the Grand Ole Opry on the radio every Saturday night. “But that was like the pre-show,” he told BRNHA Traditional Artist Directory researcher Mark Freed. “When it was over, they’d be excited and go to picking live.” McKinney’s mother was a guitar and piano player, and taught McKinney the rudiments of both instruments. A friend’s mother played guitar in the style of Maybelle Carter, and McKinney also studied with her.



Chester McMillian

Terry McKinney, from BRNHA Traditional Artist Directory, [www.blueridgeheritage.com](http://www.blueridgeheritage.com).

As a young man, Terry McKinney was invited on stage to sing with Scotty and Lula Belle Wiseman. Remembering that opportunity, he often invites younger musicians to join him on the stage today.

Terry McKinney played in the Gate City Ramblers, and then for fifteen years with Clear Creek. He also played in a family band with his brother and sister-in-law for twenty years. Today he plays with many local musicians, appearing regularly at the Orchard at Altapass.

## Bruce Moody

45 Moodytown Rd.  
Marion, NC 28752  
(828) 652-8749



Bruce Moody, from BRNHA Traditional Artist Directory, [www.blueridgeheritage.com](http://www.blueridgeheritage.com).

**B**ruce Moody has been playing the guitar since he was a young teenager, in the mid-1950s. His father was an old-time banjo player, and his uncle Clyde Moody, a fiddler, was an influential member of Bill Monroe’s Blue Grass Boys.

Moody played for many years in his uncle’s band, from 1962 to 1989. In the 1970s he did a stint playing regionally with Don Reno. He also played often with North Carolina Heritage Award recipient and fiddler Red Wilson, and with E. C. Miller in Moody and Miller and the Elk River Band.

Today Bruce Moody plays with Maggie Valley banjo player Raymond Fairchild during the summer, and with the Jones Brothers and the Log Cabin Boys. He plays with Richard Hollis, George Buckner, and Gerald Lavender as well, and is available to perform with a variety of area musicians.





courtesy of the artists

The Wind Riders from BRNHA Traditional Artist Directory, [www.blueridgeheritage.com](http://www.blueridgeheritage.com).

## Wind Riders

Contact: Gabriel Wiseman

(828) 391-0835

[gabrielwiseman@mac.com](mailto:gabrielwiseman@mac.com)

In describing their music, the Wind Riders say that, “Aiming to be a little different, [they] approach their music in an aggressive manner taking ‘traditional’ tunes and adding their own flair and twist...” The band plays progressive bluegrass, but its four members all have roots in the area’s traditional music.

Mandolinist Gabriel Wiseman is the son of bluegrass musician David Wiseman, and grandson of guitarist and banjo player Charles Wiseman. He grew up in Morganton and Marion. Wayne Sowers, the banjo player, was born in Marion, and has been playing the guitar, his other instrument, since he was eight years old. He has played with many prominent bluegrass musicians, including Bill Monroe, Josh Graves, and Clarence Greene. Steve Bradshaw, the band’s guitarist, has also been playing music since childhood, and has played with Mac Wiseman, among other bluegrass artists. Toby Watkins is the bass player, and has been playing music for more than thirty years. He has played with Roger Hicks and Michael Reno Harrell.

The Wind Riders play for concerts and festivals throughout the region.



# Organizations, Events, Projects, and Venues

## Friendship Dulcimer Club

Contact: Rev. Ernest Harris

512 Paxton Creek Rd.

Marion, NC 28752

(828) 724-1654

The Friendship Dulcimer Club is named for Friendship Baptist Church in Old Fort, at which the group was formed. The Club promotes the performance of mountain dulcimer music, giving concerts in which multiple dulcimer players perform along with an occasional guitarist or other instrumentalist. Among the venues where the Friendship Dulcimer Club has played in recent years is the Mountain Gateway Museum in Old Fort.

## Historic Carson House

Contact: Sara Bryant, Executive Director

1805 Hwy. 70 W.

Marion, NC 28752

(828) 724-4948

[www.historiccarsonhouse.com](http://www.historiccarsonhouse.com)

Construction on Carson House began in 1793, when Ulsterman Colonel John Carson built a log house on Buck Creek. His descendants added to the structure, eventually resulting in the large Lowcountry-style plantation house that exists today, an unusual architectural landmark in the highlands of North Carolina. Over the generations, Carson House has been not only a home, but McDowell County’s first courthouse, as well as a tavern and inn. Today it is a local historic landmark that is open to the public from April through November. It houses a genealogical library, as well as a collection of historic quilts, and hosts special events throughout the year including craft demonstrations and workshops, demonstrations of early farm life, lectures, and holiday festivities.

## Jam at the Marion Depot

Contact: Gene Padgett  
(828) 652-3330

**F**iddler Gene Padgett, formerly the organizer of the Old Fort Mountain Music jam, now runs a newer music gathering in his hometown of Marion. Held at the depot on Thursday nights, the informal jamming starts around 5:00, though the event officially begins at 7:00. Music is primarily bluegrass, though some attendees play country music at times too. Padgett describes the attendees as mostly senior citizens, including some who come from a long distance, as well as some children. Smoking, drinking, and off-color jokes are prohibited. The depot is often used for special events, as it has a stage, sound system, and food concessions, and seats about 200 people. June 11, 2009, marked three full years in which the jam had happened every single week—148 Thursday nights.

## Marion Livermush Festival

**T**his June event celebrates livermush, the scrapple-like meat product favored in Piedmont and Western North Carolina. The festival features a livermush cook-off, the reading of poetry about livermush, and live bluegrass music. In 2009, dancer Travis Anderegg taught buck dancing and clogging steps to the attendees before a performance by local band Gabriel Wiseman and the Wind Riders. The festival takes place in downtown Marion around the courthouse lawn.

## McDowell Arts Council Association

Contact: Susan Pyatt, Executive Director  
PO Box 1387  
Marion, NC 28752  
(828) 652-8610  
[www.mcdowellarts.org](http://www.mcdowellarts.org)

**M**ACA, McDowell County's local arts council, operates a gallery in downtown Marion that features the work of more

than thirty local craft artists. Its gallery space and craft shows also sometimes feature the work of local traditional artists. Craftspeople from the region teach classes at MACA, including courses in basket making and woodturning. MACA owns a pottery kiln, which is not currently in working order, but once it is repaired the organization hopes to offer pottery instruction as well.

## McDowell County Oral History

<http://mcdowellhistory.com>

Produced by Kim Clark and Ellen Pfirman

Contact: Ellen Pfirman, Eljapa Media Group  
(828) 442.9252

[ellen@eljapa.com](mailto:ellen@eljapa.com)

**K**im Clark and Ellen Pfirman, with support from the McDowell County Tourism Development Authority and the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, conducted an oral history and videography project that is available to the public at <http://mcdowellhistory.com>. In interviews with dozens of county residents and local history experts, Clark, Pfirman, and their crew have documented many aspects of the narrative tradition in McDowell County, as well as its music (including Old Fort Mountain Music, and an interview with bluegrass musician Terry McKinney) and craft heritage (including interviews with chair maker Max Woody and potter Bill Hendley). The site is searchable by subject and interviewee.

## Mountain Gateway Museum and Heritage Center

102 Water Street  
Old Fort, NC 28762  
(828) 668-9259

**T**he Mountain Gateway Museum and Heritage Center, dedicated to presenting the history and culture of Western North Carolina, hosts traditional arts events throughout the year. The Blue Ridge Music Summer Series presents bluegrass, old-time, and gospel musicians from Western North Carolina, as well as traditional



craft demonstrators. Community musicians gather for the Music on the Porch series, and Pioneer Days showcases traditional artists and heritage skills demonstrators.



Barbara Lau

Members of the Mountain Glory Quilters

## Mountain Glory Quilters Guild

Contact: Jean Buchanan President

[mrsbuck28762@yahoo.com](mailto:mrsbuck28762@yahoo.com)

(828) 668-9298

The Mountain Glory Quilters Guild meets at St. Mark's Methodist Church near Pleasant Garden every month. The group, which has an average of about twenty members, holds workshops and field trips throughout the year. They hold an annual quilt show, the Mountain Glory Festival, with judging and prizes, at the McDowell Arts Council Association gallery. 2010 marks the twenty-seventh year of the Mountain Glory Festival.

## Old Fort Mountain Music

Contact: Jane Baxter, (828) 668-9891

Old Fort Mountain Music, in the Rockett Building on Main Street, has been the site of music gatherings for many years, and hosts one of the oldest continually running weekly jam sessions in



Susan Hester

Summer afternoon concert in at the Mountain Gateway Museum



Cedric N. Chatterley

Jamming outside Old Fort Mountain Music

Western North Carolina. On Friday nights, bluegrass, country, and old-time bands play for dancers and listeners, while other musicians jam outside. The music begins at 7:00 and ends at 11:00, with as many as eight bands playing for half an hour each. Food concessions are available inside—coffee and soft drinks cost a quarter, and pies and cakes are sold at fifty cents a slice

## Orchard at Altapass

(888) 765-9531

[www.altapassorchard.com](http://www.altapassorchard.com)

The Orchard at Altapass, between mileposts 328 and 329 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, hosts “typical mountain music” and dancing on Wednesday through Sunday afternoons at 1:30, during the season that the orchard is open, between early May and late November. Many local artists perform, including bluegrass, old-time, country, and other musicians. Dancing is encouraged.

From late May through October, the Orchard offers storytelling hayrides, during which Bill and Skip Carson share stories of the history and folklore of McDowell County and the Altapass Orchard.



Cedric N. Chatterley

Enjoying the music at the Orchard at Altapass

### **Peaceful Valley Farm**

1200 Pine Cove Rd.  
Old Fort, NC 28762  
(828) 668-7411

The Pine Cove Road farm now known as Peaceful Valley Farm has been operated by the McEntire family for five generations. In recent years the family has begun offering educational programs, hosting fieldtrips of K-6 students, and other visitors. The milking barn has been converted into a pottery shop, and local potters sometimes offer instruction there. Every October the McEntires host a farm day festival, featuring antique farm equipment, quilters and other craftspeople, and molasses and apple butter making demonstrations.

### **Square Dancing at Geneva Hall, Little Switzerland**

Contact: Little Switzerland Community Association  
(828) 289-6745  
(828) 766.7073

Geneva Hall is adjacent to the Switzerland Inn (800-654-4026) on High Ridge Road in Little Switzerland. For more than eighty years, Geneva Hall has been the site of regular square dances in the summer months. Frank Brown calls to music provided by local bluegrass and old-time bands. Many prominent traditional musicians in the region have been regulars at Geneva Hall dances. The dances take place on Saturday nights in July and August, from 7 pm until 11 pm. Admission is charged.

### **TAAS Gallery**

48 East Main Street  
Old Fort, NC 28762  
(828) 668-1070  
[www.taasg.com](http://www.taasg.com)

The Appalachian Artisan Society (TAAS) Gallery is located in downtown Old Fort, across the street from Old Fort Mountain Music. More than seventy artists, most from Western North Carolina, are represented by TAAS, which accepts membership from throughout Southern Appalachia. Pottery, rugs, and wood carving are among the traditional arts featured in the gallery. The gallery is connected to the Catawba Vale Café, a small coffee shop and restaurant that hosts local musicians and displays paintings by local artists.

### **TRACKS**

Bacon Drive  
Old Fort  
(828) 460-8852

A club open on Friday and Saturday nights, TRACKS presents country and beach music, rock-and-roll, and some bluegrass and gospel, along with barbeque suppers. TRACKS features a large dance floor, where club-goers sometimes clog