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Secret Life of a Museum

By Linda Anders

The Transylvania Heritage Museum will re-open on Saturday, March 2, 10 am-5 pm, featuring its new exhibit, “Secret Life of a Museum”, which will run through May 18. The Museum, located at 189 West Main Street, Brevard in the old Patton house, is open Wednesdays-Saturdays. Come see why a Heritage Museum is important and how it relates to life today.

The Museum collects artifacts and documents to illustrate the stories of our county and the people who lived here. It recounts them through exhibits and programming both on and off site, not only for the past and present, but also for the future. Historic objects are tangible traces of the past, and the stories associated with them are part of our heritage. These things together help us understand the world of our ancestors, their day-to-day lives, and their values. In the process, we also learn something about ourselves.

Even though the Museum has been closed to visitors during the winter, it is still a busy place. Old exhibits have been removed; artifacts have been collected, catalogued and stored; plans for 2013 have been laid out; special presentations have been made to groups; and new exhibits have been created, with assistance from the Mountain Heritage Center at Western Carolina University. The Teaching Trunk Program is on-going at local schools. The Transylvania Genealogical Society’s Research Room is prepared to open again on Wednesdays from 10 am – 4:30 pm or by appointment. Heritage Gifts shop has been restocked, too.

One example of the exhibits on display is Frank Guest's model train which was designed after an actual Carr Lumber Company switchback once located in Pisgah National Forest. Another example, the Phyllis Beeson Collection of miscellaneous artifacts, although not from Transylvania County, represents items which would have been used here during the late 19th or early 20th centuries and help paint a picture of various aspects of our county's history and heritage.

The Nora Ross Wilson Collection contains letters and documents relating to the Selica/Cathey's Creek Community of Transylvania County. Nora was born in Transylvania County in 1896, and her correspondence chronicles the events and activities of the Cathey's Creek Community. Part of this collection also contains documents belonging to the Wilson family dating back to 1812. One special jewel is the document from the Postmaster General of the United States establishing Benjamin Wilson as Postmaster of Cathey's Creek in 1827. This collection is an example of how important a box of "old papers" truly can be.

The Museum has a large collection of artifacts, photographs and documents relating to Ecusta Paper Company. Established in 1939 by Harry Straus, Ecusta was not only a driving force in the economy of Transylvania County, but also built a strong relationship between its workers and the community. Items belonging to the Ecusta Collection have arrived from many different sources, and the collection continues to expand as the years pass.

By preserving and researching collections and making them accessible to the public, the Museum ensures each generation can search for its own answers to the questions of history. Keeping a close watch on and documenting current events and activities is also important for our county's future generations.

The Museum cannot fulfill its mission without help from the community-- become a member, volunteer time and talent, or donate artifacts to the Museum's

collection. Together we can continue to fulfill the mission of the Museum, to “Connect Community, History, and Life” in Transylvania County. For more information, contact: 884-2347 or heritage@comporium.net.