

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS Colloquy

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A Gatlinburg weaver at work in her home

The “Chief Indoor Sport of Gatlinburg” WINOGENE REDDING AND THE PI BETA PHI SETTLEMENT SCHOOL’S WEAVING PROGRAM

On a sweltering September day in 1925, a tall, rather dusty woman stepped into Pi Beta Phi Settlement School Head Resident Evelyn Bishop’s office, and introduced herself as Winogene Redding, the school’s new Weaving Instructor. The trip from her home in suburban Boston, Massachusetts to Gatlinburg had been long, tiresome and, once in the mountains, more than a little dirty. Truth be told, she would have preferred taking a bath before meeting the Head Resident, but a region-wide drought had left precious little water in the school’s reservoir for washing. In any event, Redding was eager to get started, and she told Bishop as much. All she needed was for someone to point her in the right direction.

Years later, Redding would recall the conversation that followed with startling clarity: “I asked Miss Evelyn what I was to do. Her reply was a masterpiece of understatement but I have never...failed to appreciate the wisdom behind it. She...said I was to find my job and make it.” Bishop’s

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*Winogene Redding (standing) and
LaDelle Allen, Arrowcraft Director
(kneeling)*

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Pi Beta Phi Settlement School's Weaving Program, continued

RIGHT: A typical weaving family. The older girls likely assisted their mother in producing woven items.

FAR RIGHT: Izora Keener, one of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School's first weavers.

OPPOSITE: Gatlinburg weavers, 1929.

BOTTOM: A sampling of items produced by Gatlinburg weavers.

INSET: Settlement school staff members learned to weave as well. Here, girls' housemother Georgia Duffield sits at her loom.



advice was memorable, for it was at that moment that Redding learned the one hard-and-fast rule of life at the settlement school: that there were no hard-and-fast rules. The Weaving Program, like all of the other programs at the settlement school, was to be a pioneering venture. She would have to rely on her own creativity and improvisational skills—"sink or swim" so to speak—if she was to succeed at the task now assigned to her. And so Redding threw herself wholeheartedly into her work, for swimming was, in her estimation, vastly preferable to sinking.

Her first and most important task was to set program goals. Here, at least, she had some idea of how to proceed, for the settlement school staff had long been interested in reviving and marketing native Southern Appalachian handicrafts. Heretofore, the school's vocational handicrafts program had operated on an informal consignment basis. More specifically, craftspeople brought goods of varying quality to the school, the school paid cash for these items, and the items were then sold to Pi Beta Phi Alumnae Clubs on a first-come, first-serve basis. Classwork aimed at generating interest and improving craftsmanship had

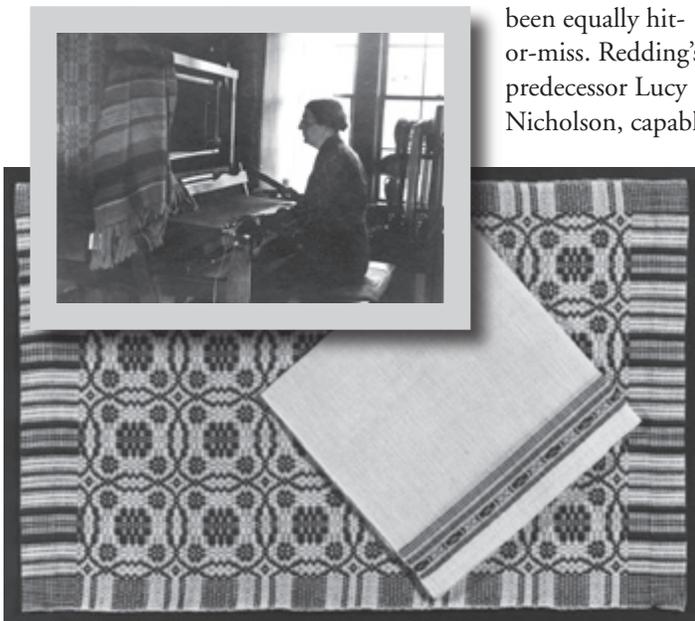
been equally hit-or-miss. Redding's predecessor Lucy Nicholson, capable

instructor though she was, had been unable to devote herself full-time to cultivating the program. It was, therefore, Evelyn Bishop's expectation that Redding would "be in school... enough to help [the weavers] with new designs, with the dyes and to plan what will be the best products to market."

With this in mind, Redding decided to revamp the entire program. First, she developed weaving classes for high school girls and adult women. These classes had the desired effect of generating interest, such that by June of 1926 there were approximately thirty mountain families weaving for the school. Second, and more importantly, she instituted a set of firm rules that weavers would have to abide by if they wished to do business with Pi Beta Phi. Gone were the days of informal consignment; weavers would instead acquire materials from the Weaving Department, use these materials to complete woven articles in their own homes, and then return the items to the school on a pre-arranged day. If the woven goods met Redding's quality standards—which were admittedly strenuous—the department would accept the goods and the weaver would be paid in cash.

Redding's attempt at standardization paid off; in two short years, the Pi Beta Phi Weaving program had grown from an informal gathering of weavers into a bustling, highly-profitable cottage industry. There were, of course, problems that needed to be solved, particularly a lack of stable markets. Thus it was that in 1927, teachers Harmo Taylor and Lois Rogers—with Evelyn Bishop's and Redding's blessing—opened a permanent handicrafts store on the settlement school campus. The store, named Arrowcraft in honor of Pi Beta Phi, served as a showroom for the woven goods, chairs, baskets, and other handicraft items produced by local craftspeople. It was, more importantly, a distribution center, from which point items were collected, boxed, and shipped to Pi Beta Phi Alumnae Clubs.

And so the weaving program continued to grow until it exceeded even Redding's most optimistic expectations. "One might call [weaving] the chief indoor sport of Gatlinburg," she quipped, "[for] one can hardly pass a house for miles





around without hearing the thump...of the beater.” The program received a tremendous boost when, in December 1929, representatives of eight Southern Appalachian craft schools (Pi Beta Phi included) met in Asheville, North Carolina to found the Southern Highland Craft Guild. Membership in this organization provided Arrowcraft artisans with increased market outlets, as well as a means to publicize their work via national and international exhibitions. Equally important was the 1934 advent of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which brought thousands of tourists, most of whom wished to purchase authentic Southern Appalachian handicrafts, to Arrowcraft’s front door.

In 1945, twenty years after her fateful first meeting with Evelyn Bishop, Winogene Redding resigned her position as the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School’s beloved “Weave Boss.” She had “found her job and made it,” and in the process helped transform Gatlinburg from a secluded, sparsely-populated mountain hamlet into one of the foremost centers for traditional Southern Appalachian handicrafts production in the United States. It was this reputation—as well as a long-standing relationship with the University of Tennessee, Knoxville’s Department of Home Economics—which would propel the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School’s Vocational Handicrafts Program towards its next pioneering venture, the University of Tennessee/Pi Beta Phi Summer Workshop in Crafts and Community Recreation.

The Summer Crafts Workshop—its origins and its evolution into the present-day Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts—will be explored in some detail in the next edition of the *Great Smoky Mountains Colloquy*.

Grant Team Visits Pi Beta Phi Headquarters

During the last week of September, 2005, the “Pi Beta Phi to Arrowmont” grant team traveled to St. Louis Missouri, where they paid a visit to the national headquarters of the Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women. The goal of the trip, to comb the fraternity’s archives in search of letters, photographs, and other primary documents related to the founding of the Pi Beta Phi Settlement School, and then to scan these items for inclusion in the final digital collection, was more than met, thanks in large part to Pi Beta Phi staff members Fran Becque and Diane Balogh. Becque, Pi Beta Phi archivist, provided the grant team with unfettered access to early fraternity documents, thereby expediting the process of discovery. Balogh, Director of Communications and *Arrow* editor, loaned her computer and scanner—in truth, her entire office—to Principal Investigator Anne Bridges and Digital Coordinator Melanie Feltner-Reichert, allowing them to complete the prodigious task of scanning and cataloging items for the collection.

All told, the grant team scanned 140 photographs, nine manuscripts (about fifty-five scanned pages), thirty-six printed-text documents (about 120 scanned pages), and one twenty-seven page scrapbook. Among these items were images of the early settlement school, correspondence between Pi Beta Phi officials and the Sevier County School Board (ca. 1910-1911), and subscription pamphlets used to solicit donations from Pi Beta Phi Alumnae Clubs. Additionally, Principal Investigator Ken Wise and Research Coordinator Steve Davis photocopied hundreds of pages of documents that, while less suitable for inclusion in the final collection than the scanned items, will provide valuable insight into the origins and philosophical goals of the settlement school. These items will be kept on file by the grant staff, and used as a supplement to materials borrowed from the archives of the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts.



Information for this article was found in the March 1916, June 1926, November 1929, February 1936, and September 1945 editions of The Arrow of Pi Beta Phi, a quarterly publication of the Pi Beta Phi Fraternity for Women. Additional information is from Evelyn Bishop’s personal correspondence, ca. 1925, and from the book Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands (1937) by Allen H. Eaton. The articles and correspondence referenced here are part of the archives of the Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, and are being digitized for inclusion in an online collection. Sample excerpts are available for viewing now at the project website: www.lib.utk.edu/arrowmont/.

Mystery Road in the Smokies

Sometime during the early 1990s, Dwight McCarter, former backcountry ranger in the Great Smoky Mountains and co-author of *Mayday! Mayday! Aircraft Crashes in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park 1920-2000*, was scouting for the wreckage of a downed airplane along the steep north slope of the main Smoky divide between Mount Collins and Mount Love when, a hundred or so yards below the track of the Appalachian Trail, McCarter stumbled across what appeared to be an old road grade. The road proved to be remarkably smooth, about five feet in width, and following the contour of the mountain face with very little gain or loss in elevation. Drill marks in the rock along the road's upper edge suggested that it was an artifact of engineered progress rather than a trace, time-worn, of mountaineers' wagons.

The road is a little more than a mile long and its upper end, now severely obliterated, is anchored to the spine of the divide near the large pull-off on the Clingmans Dome Road just below Mount Collins. The road's lower terminus ends abruptly at the side of a steep edge overlooking a patch of boulders overgrown with the usual high elevation Smoky Mountain species. The point where the road ends is remarkably insignificant in that the immediate terrain is no different from any other rough boulder-strewn topography in the Smokies. If this was intended to be its

final destination, there is no obvious clue as to why the road was built and what purpose it was to serve.

Further complicating the mystery is the fact that at the road's end McCarter found a pair of wheels connected with a twelve-inch axle. With the wheels and axle were a half-dozen large, heavy, metal "teeth" that appear to be part of some kind of excavating equipment. The teeth-like objects were about twelve inches long, six inches wide, and weighed well over five pounds each. The immediate guess is that they were used in some kind of mining operation in the vicinity. However, the road does not appear to be wide enough to support excavating equipment of this scale. Furthermore, searches in the immediate area of the road's end have failed to turn up anything resembling a mining operation.

Dwight McCarter has queried dozens of Smoky Mountain old-timers about the story of this road. So far he has encountered no one who was aware of the road's existence, who could tell him why it was built or where it was supposed to go. If anyone knows the story of this road or has a reasonable speculation as to why it was built, please drop a line to the Great Smoky Mountains Regional Project at kwise@utk.edu.



The "teeth" found at the end of the mystery road



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