

Fort Savannah Fine Arts and Crafts Shop

Plans for the Fort Savannah...

A DREAM MATERIALIZES

On November 8, 1961, a steam-powered mill which had been in operation for over a century in Lewisburg, West Virginia, was devastated by flames. Stockholders in the corporation of the Old Red Mill viewed the tragedy constructively, and their various energies gave birth to a wonderful plan: to erect a replica of life in Colonial America during the 18th Century on the site of the burned mill.

The bowl-shaped valley in which had stood the Old Red Mill was already steeped in history. Andrew Lewis had erected the Fort Savannah on this site in 1755; it was here that soldiers assembled for the Battle of Point Pleasant on the Ohio River. On September 11, 1755, General Lewis and his 1100 men began the 160 mile march to the battle which took place almost exactly one month later, on October 10th. The site in Lewisburg was, therefore, an apt spot for a restoration.

By March of 1963 the plans for the reconstruction were in full swing. A sketch drawn by Mrs. James E. Arbaugh illustrated the plan for a central log building to serve as a "tourist information center" surrounded by six or more smaller log structures which would be used to house craftspeople of the area for their work. The central building was to have been divided into two sections above ground with a fireproof museum in the basement to house "priceless relics of previous centuries." It was hoped that the six or seven smaller structures would contain a West Virginia handmade glass shop, a hand-weaving shop, a blacksmith shop, a one-room school, a restaurant, a general handicraft shop of the period and a furniture-making shop.

The logs and some of the stones for the central building were taken from the old Gwinn farm at Lowell, below Pence Springs in Summers County. These logs date

back to the 1700's and the Quinn farm had actually served as a fort for citizens of the locality during days when Indians frequented the area. The building, erected on the original foundation of the Old Red Mill was larger than originally envisioned, so fewer smaller structures were obtained for the restoration.

As it stands today, the Fort Savannah in Lewisburg is an impressive log structure with two large stone fireplaces connecting in a common chimney. The upper floor of the building contains a formal restaurant while the basement has for years housed the museum pieces collected by board members of the Old Red Mill. The four smaller log structures behind the main building are empty, the dreams for their use as crafts shops never having been fulfilled.

However, almost 15 years after these dreams were conceived, the works of area craftspeople have finally been introduced to the Fort Savannah. After a very successful pre-Christmas show and sale last December on the upper floor of the Fort Savannah, the then newly-founded Greenbrier Valley Artisans' Guild went forward with plans to open a Fine Arts and Crafts Shop in the basement of the building. The museum was moved to a newly-restored building a block away, and after weeks of building displays and organizing materials, the shop opened on April 3, 1976, with a gala party.

- Moonshadow



Drawing of the Fort Savannah by Dawn Millet.

Greenbrier Valley Artisans' Guild

A LETTER ABOUT WHO WE ARE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

June 21, 1976

Dear Friends,

During the past six months the cooperation of over 50 people has given birth to this long-needed organization. The Greenbrier Valley Artisans' Guild has come together to focus attention and provide an outlet for the work of West Virginia artists and craftspeople who heretofore had to seek recognition and markets for their work outside this area. Finally, with the help of friends, our dream has been realized.

With the opening of our store and the publication of this quarterly, we hope to bring to you a substantial representation of West Virginia's finest artists and craftspeople. We hope that Handmade will present images and stories of past craftspeople as well as insights into the direction of contemporary artists and their work together with information concerning the Guild, special shows, classes and announcements.

Since we are a cooperative, all of what you see here in and in our shop is the product of all of our members. But we cannot do it alone. We need your interest as well as your financial support. We offer a sponsoring membership for a minimum of \$25 which provides numerous benefits such as reduced prices in the shop and for classes as well as receiving personal recognition and this quarterly.

We sincerely appreciate your interest and assistance and hope that our combined efforts will provide a growing appreciation of the arts in West Virginia.

With wishes for a fruitful summer,
Mark Sincerely,

Mark Blumenstein, Chairman