Meet the Ramsey Center Staff

Karen Paar, Ph.D. - Director/Archivist

Dr. Karen Paar comes to the Liston B. Ramsey Center from a position in the Special Collections Research Center of the North Carolina State University Libraries. She has a Master of Library Science degree from North Carolina Central University and a master's degree and doctorate in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Paar began work at Mars Hill College in March 2008.

Leslie Burrell Smith, M.A. - Program Coordinator

Leslie Smith, a native of East Tennessee, joined the Ramsey Center staff this past June. She holds a master's degree in Appalachian Studies and a bachelor's degree in Geography from East Tennessee State University. While at ETSU she was involved in the old-time, bluegrass, and country music program. Before coming to western North Carolina, Smith worked for Tennessee State Parks as a full-time park ranger and a seasonal naturalist for ten years.

Peggy Harmon - Special Collections Supervisor

Peggy Harmon has worked for Mars Hill College for over twenty-six years, and she recently received recognition for her long service to the college. Throughout the years, Harmon has devoted her time and talents to preserving the history of this region through work in the archives and the Rural Life Museum. Harmon is a native of Madison County and a long-time resident of the Grapevine community.

Kathryn Newfont, Ph.D. – Faculty Chair

Dr. Kathy Newfont is an Associate Professor of History at Mars Hill College and the Faculty Chair for the Ramsey Center. She also currently serves as the Project Director for the Ramsey Center’s National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant. Besides advocating for programming and preservation of archival materials related to regional studies at Mars Hill College, Newfont teaches courses in this field, including “Appalachian Oral History,” and she pursues her own research in the field of Appalachian forest history.
National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Challenge Grant

These are exciting and important times for the Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies. We are now in the midst of creating our future, with numerous opportunities unfolding before us.

Among the most significant of these opportunities is the chance to create an endowment that will provide permanent funding for the college’s archives. The Southern Appalachian Archives is home to rich collections pertaining to the history and culture of this region and to Appalachia as a whole. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) recognized the significance of the Southern Appalachian Archives in 2007 with the award of a challenge grant to Mars Hill College to create an endowment that will support a professional archivist position and establish a preservation and programming fund for the archives. With this prestigious award, the NEH has offered Mars Hill College the maximum possible grant. Over the next three years, the college can draw a total of $500,000 from the NEH if we reach certain targets on the way to raising the $1.5 million match. Thanks to generous contributions from the Steele-Reese Foundation and others, Ramsey Center staff were able to raise funds to cover the bridging period of the grant. These bridging period funds allowed us to hire Dr. Karen Paar and begin important work in the archives, even as the college labors to meet the NEH match. Each year of the bridging period will focus on one of the key collections of the Southern Appalachian Archives for preservation and access efforts, such as creating finding aids and digitizing some of the materials so that they are available online. Each year will also fund a research team consisting of a Mars Hill College faculty member and student that will explore the featured collection and create curriculum materials for use in a related course. The Ramsey Center will then offer a year of programs around themes highlighted in the featured collection for both the campus and the wider community. This model is designed to raise awareness at Mars Hill College and beyond of the holdings of the Southern Appalachian Archives, even as we preserve and provide access to materials according to the best practices prescribed by the archival profession. Our NEH Challenge Grant bridging period has gotten off to a strong start during the fall semester of the 2008-2009 academic year. For this first year, the featured collection is the Gertrude M. Ruskin Collection of Cherokee artifacts and materials. Work has begun this fall to rehouse the collection in proper storage containers; learn about the items and create a finding aid for them; and place images of some of the items in a digital display. The fall semester also saw an active start to the programming component of the grant’s approach to these collections, as reported in the following pages. As part of this focus on the Cherokee, the Ramsey Center brought speakers to campus, and we took a busload of students and faculty in the “Civic Life” and “Introduction to Regional Studies” classes to Cherokee, North Carolina to visit the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and Oconaluftee Indian Village. Dr. Phyllis Smith and senior History major Tyler Greene worked with the Ruskin collection, as well as with materials in other Southern Appalachian Archives collections, to create curriculum resources for the Cherokee unit of the “Civic Life” course at Mars Hill College. “Civic Life” is a core course required of all Mars Hill College sophomores. Other activities are planned for this spring. Year two of the bridging period will focus on the James G.K. McClure Farmers Federation Collection, and year three will highlight the Bascom Lamar Lunsford Collection. Challenge Grant fundraising is off to a successful start, but upcoming targets are large. During this year, we must raise $330,000 in order to draw the full match for the year from the NEH. Thanks to generous contributions, we have so far raised $95,100 toward this year’s goal. If you can make a contribution, please join us in our quest to meet this important challenge presented by the National Endowment for the Humanities by sending a check, payable to Mars Hill College, with “Ramsey Center NEH Challenge Grant” in the memo line. In any event, please join us as we explore the Ruskin Collection and other treasures of the Southern Appalachian Archives through attending our programs and watching our web site for our ongoing efforts to make finding aids and digitized materials available online.
Ramsey Center Begins Cherokee Programming Year

The Ramsey Center kicked off the first bridging year of the NEH Challenge Grant with a host of activities related to our Cherokee theme. This theme reflects the 2008-2009 academic year focus on the Gertrude M. Ruskin Collection of Cherokee artifacts in the Southern Appalachian Archives.

Road Scholars Lectures

In September 2008, the Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies hosted two North Carolina Humanities Council Road Scholars programs. The lectures focused on the Cherokee, in keeping with this year’s Challenge Grant theme. Both Road Scholars programs were well-attended by “Civic Life” and the “Introduction to Regional members of the wider community. On September 9th, Western Carolina University, kicked off the Ramsey Americans and their Use of the Environment.” Dr. and mineral resources, explaining changes that 23rd, Dr. William Anderson, Professor Emeritus of History at Western Carolina University, spoke on “The Cherokee Removal” and detailed the major political events leading up to the removal. Both speakers engaged their audiences and answered numerous questions at the lectures’ conclusions.

Students and Faculty Visit Cherokee

On September 30, 2008, the Ramsey Center took forty-four students and faculty members to Cherokee, North Carolina on a visit funded by the NEH Challenge Grant. Ramsey Center Faculty Chair, Dr. Kathy Newfont, led the trip that took “Civic Life” students and faculty members, as well as students from the “Introduction to Regional Studies” course, to the Museum of the Cherokee Indian and Oconaluftee Indian Village. Taking a large group of students to Cherokee had long been a dream for Dr. Newfont, but this dream only came true this year as a result of the Challenge Grant’s preservation and programming funding. Students and faculty members alike found that touring the museum and visiting Oconaluftee—where Davy Arch and Eddie Bushyhead were our excellent guides—greatly enhanced their interest in and understanding of the Cherokee units in their courses.

Together We Read Event

On October 30, 2008, the Ramsey Center joined with Together We Read, western North Carolina’s reading and discussion program; Renfro Library; and Mars Hill College’s Visiting Artists and Lecturers Series to host the visit of Robert Morgan, author of Boone, and Barbara Duncan, Director of Education for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, to the Mars Hill College campus. That afternoon, Robert Morgan addressed the “Introduction to Regional Studies” class, while Barbara Duncan discussed resources for teaching about Cherokee history and culture with several “Civic Life” faculty members, whose course includes a unit on the Cherokee. Afterwards, both authors joined a group that included President and Mrs. Lunsford, as well as faculty, students, and members of the wider community for a dinner at which several regional studies students shared their impressions of the book, Boone. Later that evening, some two hundred people gathered in Broyhill Chapel for the program entitled, “A Tale of Two Peoples: Indian and Settler Relations in Southern Appalachia.” Daniel Bigay opened the evening with a performance of Cherokee flute music. Mars Hill College Assistant Professor of History John Gripentrog then offered an introduction and served as moderator for a discussion between Robert Morgan and Barbara Duncan. A book signing and reception followed in the chapel's fellowship hall.

Faculty/Student Team Creates Curriculum Resources

Ramsey Center staff members were very pleased to have Dr. Phyllis Smith, Chair of the History Department, and Tyler Greene, a senior History major in his final semester, serve as the first faculty/student team to work with Southern Appalachian Archives materials under the NEH Challenge Grant. Smith and Greene directed their efforts toward creating curriculum resources for the Cherokee unit of Mars Hill College’s “Civic Life” course by drawing, not only on the artifacts in the Gertrude M. Ruskin Collection, but also on photographs in the James G.K. McClure Farmers Federation Collection and articles and photographs in the oversized scrapbook in the Bascom Lamar Lunsford Collection. The team will present these curriculum resources and discuss their experiences as researchers in the Southern Appalachian Archives in a program on Wednesday, February 18, 2009 at 3:30 p.m. in the Ramsey Center.
The Ramsey Center and the Lunsford Festival Board are quite proud to announce the resounding success of the 2008 Festival. Many have told us that it was the best festival in years and quite reminiscent of early festival days. Invoking the early years and recreating long-lost traditions is just what festival planners set out to do. As in the old days, we made this year’s festival an all-day event. We heard stories of how musicians used to arrive early in the morning and enjoy sausage biscuits baked in a wood cookstove. Thanks to David Burrell and David Smith, Festival Director Leslie Smith’s father and husband, the stove that belonged to Karen Paar’s grandmother traveled from Raleigh to Mars Hill in time to recreate this memory for festival participants. Another way the festival resembled its early years was the way musicians shared their music with one another, carrying out the festival’s theme of “passing it on.” Passing the music on took place throughout the day in main stage performances, workshops, and guitar circles, as well as at the very successful ballad and story swap emceed by Dr. Ted Olson of East Tennessee State University. Joe Penland helped greatly to make this event rewarding for the audience and performers alike. Amateur and professional musicians gathered on homemade benches in front of the Heritage Cabin to play music and jam with one another. The main stage was the center of attention all day as western North Carolina’s own John Roten from WPEK, “The Peak,” livened up the event with his fantastic stage presence and wonderful radio voice. In the evening, all festival activities moved inside to their traditional location in Moore Auditorium. Richard Hurley led the ceremonies as emcee, as the audience was treated to the sounds of many of Appalachia’s best traditional musicians. Sons of Ralph, Whitewater Bluegrass, Phil and Gaye Johnson, Yodeling Ramblers, Trantham Family, Stoney Creek Boys (house band), Tipton Hill Boys, Betty Smith, Roger Howell and Friends, and a new festival attendee from the coal fields of southwest Virginia, Jim Lloyd, were all huge hits. The national champion Bailey Mountain Cloggers, Green Valley Cloggers, and the young and talented Cole Mountain Cloggers represented Bascom Lamar Lunsford’s legacy of dance traditions throughout the evening. Banjo player and singer Laura Boosinger was the deserving winner of the 2008 Minstrel of the Appalachians Award, given at the Lunsford Festival each year for significant contributions to the folk traditions of the southern mountains. These were only a few of the wonderful performers and individuals who shared their time and talents and made this event possible.
# Ramsey Center Spring 2009 Programs

With the success of the fall behind us, the Ramsey Center is looking forward to this spring with much anticipation! We are in the process of making preparations for a very busy and exciting semester. The following are programs we are in the process of planning for our Spring 2009 Series:

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Program Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 18, 2009</td>
<td>3:30 PM</td>
<td>“Unveiling Our Treasures: The Cherokee Collections of the Southern Appalachian Archives, Mars Hill College”</td>
<td>Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies, Mars Hill College (located in Renfro Library)</td>
<td>This program will focus on the work and the findings of Dr. Phyllis Smith, Chair of the Mars Hill College History Department, and History major Tyler Greene during their research in the Ruskin Collection and other collections with Cherokee materials in the Southern Appalachian Archives. Smith and Greene will describe how these resources can be utilized as powerful teaching aids, particularly for the Cherokee unit of Mars Hill College’s “Civic Life” course.</td>
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<td>March 3, 2009</td>
<td>6:30 PM</td>
<td>“The Function of Narrative in Appalachian Society” a North Carolina Humanities Council Road Scholars Program,</td>
<td>Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies, Mars Hill College (located in Renfro Library)</td>
<td>Dr. Charlotte Ross, freelance folklorist and adjunct professor in the Department of Communications at Appalachian State University, will speak on Appalachian women as storytellers in this program sponsored by the Ramsey Center and the Mars Hill College Women’s Studies Program in honor of Women’s History Month. This program is made possible through the North Carolina Humanities Council’s Road Scholars Program. The North Carolina Humanities Council is a nonprofit foundation and a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.</td>
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<td>April 18, 2009</td>
<td>7:00 PM</td>
<td>“Cherokee Night at Mars Hill College”</td>
<td>Moore Auditorium, Mars Hill College</td>
<td>In this performance featuring Walker Calhoun and the Raven Rock Dancers, flute player Eddie Bushyhead, and storyteller Freeman Owle, Mars Hill College and the Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies pay tribute to the culture and history of the Cherokee people in an evening of traditional storytelling, music, and dance. Doors to Moore Auditorium will open at 6:00 p.m. for craft demonstrations, to be held in the lobby, and the performances will begin at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are $10 for adults, $5 for children 12 and under, and MHC students receive free admission. Cherokee elder Walker Calhoun is the evening’s guest of honor. Walker Calhoun is responsible for keeping the Stomp Dance tradition of his people alive. The songs and dances were passed down to him when he was a boy growing up in the Big Cove community by his half-uncle, Will West Long. A medicine man of vast knowledge of Cherokee culture, history, letters, and language, Will West Long died in 1947 at the age of 77. His elders were the men and women who had hidden from the soldiers during the Cherokee Removal. The Raven Rock Dancers is a group of Walker Calhoun’s immediate family members, who value the very important dance and song traditions of the Cherokee. They share their social dance traditions but reserve their sacred dances for ceremonies held only within the confines of sacred Cherokee dance grounds. We are honored that Walker Calhoun and the Raven Rock Dancers have agreed to share their social dances and songs with us.</td>
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CHEROKEE NIGHT
AT
MARS HILL COLLEGE

Featuring:
Cherokee Elder and Spiritual Leader Walker Calhoun and The Raven Rock Dancers
Flutist Eddie Bushyhead and Storyteller Freeman Owle

April 18, 2009, Moore Auditorium, Mars Hill College

Doors Open at 6:00 PM for Craft Demonstrations, 7:00 PM Show Begins, $10 Adults, $5 Children, MHC Students Free

Sponsored by the Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities

Contact: Leslie Smith (828) 689-3571 or lsmith@mhc.edu

Photo of Walker Calhoun courtesy of Rob Aubrey
The Ramsey Center and the Lunsford Festival Board would like to say a very special thanks to Mr. Roger Howell, who contributed many hours to help coordinate the event. We are also grateful to Mars Hill College Bonner scholar, Kayla McCurry, for painting the beautiful mural that served as a backdrop for the performances. Finally, we would like to thank Dream Films and Creations (www.dreamfilmsandcreations.com) for filming the festival, as well as designing/producing the Lunsford Festival Evening Concert 4-DVD Set. Please contact Leslie Smith if you would like to purchase an evening concert 4-DVD set for $15, plus $4 shipping and handling. Please make checks payable to Mars Hill College and include in memo area Ramsey Center/Lunsford Festival. All proceeds from DVD sales go to future Lunsford Festivals. Plans are underway to make the 42nd annual Lunsford Festival on Saturday, October 3, 2009 even better. If you would like to be a part of this event or need information about it, please contact Festival Director Leslie Smith at (828) 689-1571, lsmith@mhc.edu, Mars Hill College Box 6706 Mars Hill, NC 28754.

The Madison County Heritage Festival was held on the same day as the Bascom Lamar Lunsford Minstrel of the Appalachians Festival, October 4, 2008, on the campus of Mars Hill College and throughout the downtown area of Mars Hill. We estimate that both events together drew around 2,000 to the little town of Mars Hill. The Ramsey Center organized traditional crafts and coordinated with the Madison County 4-H for the events that took place on the campus’s upper quad. Among the traditional skills and crafts included were: beekeeping, goat milking, a 4-H Fair, blacksmithing, spinning, quilting, chair making, and corn shuck doll making. We would like to thank all the fine people involved for their participation and work in helping to preserve this region’s heritage and share it with others.
Gary Carden Play Comes to Mars Hill College
On November 9, 2008, the Ramsey Center presented “Birdell” in Broyhill Chapel on the Mars Hill College campus. The play is a one-woman monologue written by Waynesville author and playwright, Gary Carden. Bobbie J. Curtis starred as “Birdell,” the 83-year-old character whose story is at the center of the play. “Birdell” blends history with fiction in telling of the character’s loss of her treasured home to the Fontana Dam during the time when large amounts of farmland was condemned and then flooded by the Tennessee Valley Authority. A small but attentive audience attended Bobbie Curtis’s moving performance, including several Regional Studies students and members of the wider Mars Hill community.

Ramsey Center Advisory Council Formed
Ramsey Center staff members received encouragement and inspiration on September 18, 2008, as a group of community members with a strong interest in regional studies gathered at Dr. Dan Lunsford’s invitation to form the Ramsey Center Advisory Council. Represented at this meeting were many who, in one form or another, work to preserve and promote the history and culture of the region at Mars Hill College and beyond. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Challenge Grant was the initial impetus for forming this group, as the college seeks to raise the large amount of money required for this grant’s match. A fundraising subcommittee has now been formed from the Ramsey Center Advisory Council, but this group’s role goes beyond fundraising to assisting the Center’s staff with advocacy, advice, and promotion to the wider community. The group will meet twice a year for an update on Ramsey Center projects and discussion, and Advisory Council members will take on additional projects as they choose. The Ramsey Center staff is very grateful to this group of experienced and talented community members who have seen fit to make this commitment to our work.

Ballad Singer and Appalachian Music Scholar Betty Smith Receives Honorary Doctorate
On December 19, 2008, at the fall graduation ceremony, Ramsey Center Advisory Council member Betty Smith received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Mars Hill College. A more deserving recipient could not be found! Long-time Hot Springs resident Betty Smith has spent much of her career helping preserve Appalachian culture through her teaching, research, and writing, as well as by performing and helping to organize music festivals. Betty Smith is donating her papers to the Ramsey Center’s Southern Appalachian Archives. The Ramsey Center congratulates Betty Smith on receiving this degree, and we thank her for her friendship and support for our work.

Four Students Awarded James H. Montgomery Regional Studies Scholarships
James H. Montgomery of Austin, Texas, a native of North Carolina, established a scholarship at Mars Hill College for Regional Studies minors to “encourage students to broaden their understanding of and appreciation for the environment region.” This major gift has helped Studies program at Mars Hill College, the first to receive this prestigious assistance and requires service to the works to enhance the Southern are Savannah Garrison from Marshall; Breanna Mason from Brevard, all in Osaka, Japan is the fourth to declare the Regional Studies minor following her participation in the trip to Cherokee sponsored by the Ramsey Center. The Regional Studies Program and the Ramsey Center will host a reception for the Montgomery Scholars during the spring semester.
Ramsey Center Receives Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Grant for Museum Exhibits

In June 2008, the Ramsey Center received a grant extension from the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area for exhibits in the Rural Life Museum. The grant will provide $25,000 in funds to help the Ramsey Center create new exhibits for the museum, which is currently under renovation. The funding is being used to design and create exhibits drawing from two key collections of the Southern Appalachian Archives. These collections are the Gertrude M. Ruskin Collection that consists mainly of Cherokee artifacts and the James G. K. McClure Farmers Federation Collection that contains more than 3,000 photographs of western North Carolina agricultural life from 1919 to 1959, as well as other documents and publications relating to this organization. The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area grant has allowed the Ramsey Center to seek professional advice as we prepare these exhibits. On October 20, 2008, archaeologists Brett Riggs, a leading expert on Cherokee archaeology, and George Stuart, former archaeology editor for National Geographic and current Ramsey Center Advisory Council member, brought their expertise to the Center. They spent the day exploring the Ruskin collection and providing information and advice on the exhibition of its artifacts. The Ramsey Center has hired Lynne Caldwell as the consultant to design these exhibits and construct the exhibit on the Cherokee. Recent Mars Hill College graduate Tyler Greene will provide research services for the content of these exhibits, in particular the one on the Farmers Federation.

Ramsey Center’s Rural Life Museum to Host Smithsonian Exhibit in 2010

The North Carolina Humanities Council has designated Mars Hill College as one of the six sites across the state that will host the “New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music” exhibit when it comes to North Carolina in 2010. This traveling exhibit, part of the Smithsonian Institution’s Museum on Main Street Program will visit Mars Hill College from September to November of 2010, during the third year of our NEH Challenge Grant bridging period when we focus on the Bascom Lamar Lunsford Collection of handwritten ballads, photographs, instruments, and scrapbooks. The exhibit will be on campus during the Bascom Lamar Lunsford Festival, held the first Saturday in October each year. While the Ramsey Center is coordinating the visit of “New Harmonies” to Mars Hill, several community organizations have already agreed to partner with the Center for this project. The Big Ivy Community Center, the Big Ivy Historical Society, the Wolf Laurel Historical Society, and the Dry Ridge Historical Museum all wrote letters of support for the Ramsey Center’s application to host this exhibit, and we look forward to working with these groups to promote the “New Harmonies” exhibit and plan related events throughout the community during its visit to our region.

Ramsey Center Granted Conservation Bookshelf Award

Treasured objects and artifacts held by the Ramsey Center’s Southern Appalachian Archives will be preserved for future generations with help from the “Connecting to Collections” Bookshelf, a core set of conservation books, DVDs, and online resources donated by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies was one of the twelve North Carolina recipients of the collection. The Bookshelf includes an essential set of books and other resources that can profoundly affect the ability of small institutions to care for their collections. The Ramsey Center received the award based on an application describing its needs and plans to care for its collections. The holdings of the Southern Appalachian Archives and the Rural Life Museum include photographs, manuscripts, sound recordings, and artifacts that document aspects of mountain life and culture.
A COMMITMENT...

How can you help Mars Hill College meet the National Endowment for the Humanities challenge for Stewardship of the Southern Appalachian Archives?

Tell your friends!
Send a check to the address below, payable to Mars Hill College, with "Ramsey Center NEH Challenge Grant" in the memo line.
Participate in Liston B. Ramsey Center for Regional Studies programs & events.

Send in the form below to sign up to receive our free newsletter & other publicity.

Name _________________________________________________________
Address _______________________________________________________
City _____________________________State_______Zip Code____________
E-mail address ___________________________________________________
Phone (________________)_________________-______________________
Information Requested ____________________________________________
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How I Can Help! ________________________________________________
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