

THE BRICK SCULPTURES AT THE  
EARL E. AND DOROTHY J. DELLINGER  
LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER



MOTHER EARTH:  
A TALE OF PAINTLICK MOUNTAIN



# EVOLUTION OF THE SCULPTURES



In 2002, the voters of the Commonwealth of Virginia approved funding for a new Learning Resources Center to be constructed on the campus of Southwest Virginia Community College. Immediately following this approval, both Johnny Hagerman, brick sculptor, and Dr. Bob Sutherland, SWCC faculty member, began an open dialogue on how best the building could enhance the aesthetic environment of the SWCC campus, while at the same time capturing the unique history of the region.

After countless hours of collaboration and hard work, Mr. Hagerman designed an elaborate brick and stone sculpture that would accentuate the college, as well as replicate the historical Native American pictographs located on Paint Lick Mountain. This mountain is visible from the SWCC campus.

The first major hurdle for the proposed project was to obtain approval from the Art and Architecture Review Board (AARB) in Richmond. There was some apprehension regarding the project in that the request included constructing a fireplace as well as an indoor waterfall. This was certainly not the normal request presented to the AARB; however, their board not only approved the project, but encouraged other institutions to also consider such design features in the future.

The next challenge was to pull together a team of trained craftsmen that could bring this unique project to fruition.



# THE TEAM

Johnny Hagerman, a native Southwest Virginian, is a graduate of SWCC and Radford University. He taught art in the Buchanan County School System for twelve years before being introduced to the art of brick sculpturing by David Leonard, an architect from Kingsport, Tennessee. This project was a dream fulfilled and a turning point in Johnny's career.

With a passion for his newly acquired skill as a brick sculptor, Johnny rapidly ascended to the top of his profession by creating such outstanding works as the brick sculptured entry into the Opryland Hotel, a major archaeologist preservation project in Gray, Tennessee, as well as the beautiful Jack Tales wall inside the Community Center at SWCC.

Even though Johnny's extensive number of projects have all been rewarding, he frequently comments that the LRC project for SWCC has been the most challenging and gratifying. He is particularly pleased with the level of expertise and workmanship shown by the following superb tradesmen who made up the Dream Team:

John Lawson- a builder with an impeccable reputation. John took on the full responsibility for constructing the form, pouring the concrete, as well as designing the unique water feature that provides a peaceful and natural water flow. John's expertise is readily recognized and in demand throughout the entire region.

Doug Burks- with an eye for detail and pride in his work, Doug is recognized by his peers as the best of the best. Doug's old school approach to his work brought forth the true beauty of this special project.

Ryan Kausch- is an extremely talented stone mason who has the unique gift to work with field stone as if he is being directed by Mother Nature herself. Even though this project was very grueling, Ryan always went the extra mile to help produce this masterpiece.

**A very unique aspect of this particular project is the fact that all the master craftsmen involved are native Southwest Virginians, residing within ten minutes of historic Paintlick Mountain and the SWCC campus. This gives a whole new meaning to the term "Home Grown."**

## A special thanks to the following:

Dr. J. Mark Estep for his leadership in overseeing the continued growth of the college.

Dr. Bob Sutherland for his ongoing leadership and perseverance in making the LRC building become a reality.

Ken Henderson as contributing writer, for his insightful reflections on Paintlick Mountain and its pictographs and wildlife.

Garren and Debbie McGlothlin for their generous donation of field stone, the natural treasure of the waterfall.

Karmon Bennett for supplying the wormy chestnut oak mantle.

Charlie Lawson for designing and building the wormy chestnut oak mantle.

Thomas Hagerman as part of the mason artist team.

General Shale for their cooperative spirit, as well as providing outstanding material and expertise for this major undertaking.

Arthur "Smiley" Ratliff and the Ratcliffe Foundation for their generous support in providing SWCC students, community residents, and visitors with the opportunity to share in the rich history of Southwest Virginia.

The LRC Staff for their commitment and devotion in making this endeavor a reality.





## LITTLE RIVER

Little River, which begins at Maiden Springs and runs through the valley beside Paintlick Mountain, is unique in that it is the only river in Virginia that begins as a full-blown river. Its icy-cold water gushes forth from a cave near the location of the fort built by Rees Bowen in the 1700's. The river eventually flows into the Clinch River at Black's Ford, nearly twenty miles west of Maiden Springs.

It was along the banks of the Little River that the Cherokees camped before ascending Paintlick Mountain to hold their ceremonies. Evidence of the old camping site can still be found on the river if you know where to look.



*Above, a trumpeting elk breaks the silence of the forest in Johnny Hagerman's depiction of this magnificent beast.*



## ANIMAL LIFE IN THE AREA



*A rendition in brick of the Great Blue Heron created in the display above by artist Johnny Hagerman. This magnificent bird was native to the area and could be seen stalking small fish along the river.*

In the wildlife-rich area surrounding Paintlick Mountain, the Indians traveled from their homeland to hunt and fish. Teeming with elk, whitetail deer, black bear, buffalo and many other smaller game species, the Native Americans enjoyed a bountiful harvest to help sustain their tribe through the cold mountain winters. Elk Garden, about ten miles south of the mountain, hosted a large hunting camp where the Cherokees killed and prepared the meat of elk, deer, and buffalo to take back to their homes at the end of the hunting season.

Fish in the local streams were caught, sun-dried and packed. Evidence of the Indian-made weirs (fish traps) still exist along areas of the Clinch River, Little River and Big Cedar Creek where abundant amounts of smallmouth bass, rock bass (redeyes), shad and freshwater clams, mussels and turtles were taken.

Predatory animals such as mountain lions, wolves, foxes and black panthers also roamed the rich hunting grounds. The American eagle, golden eagles, and numerous species of hawks flew in the skies over the mountains and valleys. Blue herons, white egrets and many kinds of ducks used the waterways that flowed through the area.





## THE STORY OF PAINTLICK MOUNTAIN

Located in the beautiful Appalachian Mountains of Southwest Virginia, Paintlick Mountain stands as a silent sentinel just north of Southwest Virginia Community College. Once called "Painted Mountain" by the Cherokee who inhabited the area, it represented the boundary between the Shawnee Nation to the north and the Cherokee Nation to the south. Today, Paintlick Mountain still holds many secrets as it hosts the ancient Native American pictographs that adorn its southernmost limestone cliffs.

According to the Cherokees, the mountain played an important part in their religious ceremonial activities. Each year, the various clans of the Cherokee Nation, in their pilgrimage to the mountain to pay homage to the Great Spirit, made the trek from locations in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Kentucky to assemble at the mountain on the summer solstice. Dressed in their finery and cloaks of brilliantly colored feathers, chiefs and shamans then climbed to the top of the mountain, where the religious ceremonies took place in the Medicine Wheel (Circle of Stones).

Since the mountain represented the boundary between the Shawnees and Cherokees, many battles were fought over the rights to hunt and fish in the areas surrounding Paintlick Mountain. There were no permanent Native American settlements within a hundred miles of the boundary and so encroachment by both tribes became widespread, resulting in conflict between hunting parties.

The last battle between the Shawnees and Cherokees took place just north of Paintlick Mountain near the Fort Crab Orchard Museum on the 21st of June, 1760. Four hundred Shawnee warriors fought against a smaller force of about 200 Cherokees. The Cherokees were able to defend themselves and repel the stronger Shawnee force, thus retaining the rights to their sacred "Painted Mountain." This was the last time these two tribes met in an organized struggle, however, incidents of small conflicts between hunting parties continued until the area became inhabited by white settlers.

The pilgrimages to the mountain were abandoned by the Cherokee after the white man began to settle in this area. The mountain had become desecrated with the discovery of the sacred meeting place. Many of the Cherokees today still refer to the mountain as their most "sacred mountain."

The story of the discovery of the ancient pictographs by white settlers is attributed to Reese Bowen, who in 1769, was searching along the mountainside for berries to make clothing dye. He came across the series of ancient symbols on the sides of the cliffs on the south side of the mountain. The Bowens had settled in the Maiden Spring section of the headwaters of the Little River.

Some of the beautiful pictures left by the early inhabitants of this area are still visible on the side of Paintlick Mountain. However, many of the original pictographs have faded away, leaving only faint smudges. The medium used by these ancient artists was bear grease and iron oxide, which have kept the paintings well preserved. One day in the near future the artwork that we have enjoyed will be gone forever.





*Johnny Hagerman's rendering of the limestone cliffs show some of the symbols depicting a two-headed thunderbird, a single eagle, a small bird and a footed symbol.*

## THE PICTOGRAPHS OF PAINTLICK MOUNTAIN

Near the top of Paintlick Mountain, ancient Native American art spread along the south side of the limestone cliffs is still visible, although many of the original paintings have long-since disappeared. Discovered by Rees Bowen in the 1700's, the paintings lingered, untouched for centuries until the elements, lifespan of the painting medium, and acid rain had taken a toll on the beautiful artwork.

Working from small paint pots (made from halves of geodes), Native American artists painted the symbols and scenes with a mixture of iron oxide and bear grease, using their fingers to apply the medium to the limestone. The bear grease is credited for having properties which have preserved the paintings through the centuries. Several paint pots have been found on the mountain near the site.

In the 1950's, fifty or more of the paintings were visible, including clan symbols of the Cherokee tribe, but a present-day account leaves less than twenty of the recognizable pictographs. Early photographs of the artwork, taken during the 1930's and later, can still be viewed at the Fort Crab Orchard Museum near Tazewell, VA.

Several of the symbols are recognizable as paintings of animal life such as deer, mountain lions, birds, eagles, and turtles. Two representations of a two-headed eagle (thunderbird) are still visible. The two-headed eagle, according to the Cherokees, represents a warning for trespassers to keep out; that they are on sacred ground. Other artworks include depictions of the sun, canoes, human forms and various sacred symbols; their meanings known only to the Native Americans who put them there.

In past years, there have been visits by representatives of the Smithsonian Institute to see the artwork and to study whether the paintings could be preserved. Since the site is remote and the pictographs spread over several of the cliffs on the mountain, it was concluded that preservation was not feasible. The last visit by a group of Native Americans from the new Museum of Native Americans, part of the Smithsonian, suggested that it would not be the "Indian Way" to try to save the paintings, but let them naturally fade as time takes them away.

Representations of the artwork can still be enjoyed by existing photographs and the wonderful displays by Mr. Johnny Hagerman in the new Learning Resources Building at Southwest Virginia Community College. Years after the paintings have disappeared, people will still be able to visit SWCC and see what the Native Americans left on top of their beautiful "Painted Mountain."





**A limited number of these unique works of art are available for purchase at the  
Appalachian Arts Center:**

Located in the old Archie Helton store on Rt. 19, 2 1/2 miles south of Claypool Hill  
2157 Steelsburg Highway, Cedar Bluff, VA 24609

For more information, call 276.596.9188 or email [appartsinfo@sw.edu](mailto:appartsinfo@sw.edu).