In the mid- to late 1700s, Montgomery County was part of the western frontier of the future United States. Area forts were necessary as fighting between Indians and Colonial settlers still occurred. Civilization moved ever westward with the opening of the Wilderness Trail into the eastern Kentucky and Tennessee regions in the late 1700s. Finally, in 1776 Montgomery County was established out of the very large Fincastle County, and the towns of Christiansburg and Blacksburg were established in 1792 and 1798 respectively. About this time, Lewis Miller, was born in York, Pennsylvania.

The Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center is proud to own original Miller artwork. The art center is named for Miller because of his connection to the area through his brother, who was a physician in Christiansburg. His niece married into the Craig family of Christiansburg and his nephew was a local minister.

In addition to the works at the Montgomery Museum, additional examples of his Virginia work are located at the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center in Williamsburg, Virginia, and at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, Virginia. Many other works can be found at the Historical Society of York County, York, Pennsylvania; the New York Historical Society in New York City; and the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

Lewis Miller
Carpenter and Folk Artist
1796 - 1882

Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center
300 Pepper Street, SE
Christiansburg, Virginia 24073
(540) 382-5644
Tuesday – Saturday 10:30-4:30
Family friends recalled that young Lewis Miller liked to sketch and draw as a child. As a teenager, Miller learned carpentry from his brother and worked at that craft for over 40 years constructing both buildings and furniture. He was also a talented sculptor and artist as well as an avid traveler who could communicate in four languages. Miller recorded the world around him in sketches and notes leaving beautiful, complex works of art that are rich in historic detail of the daily life in a variety of places.

In 1831, at the age of 35, he made his first trip to Christiansburg. He made at least fourteen more trips to the Montgomery County seat before he moved here permanently in the 1870s. Though he produced many of his water colored drawings while living in his native York, Pennsylvania, the inspiration that he gathered from his southern journeys resulted in approximately 200 works of art with scenes of Montgomery County and many neighboring counties, cities, and towns. The remaining sketches and drawings of the 2000 that he created cover the town of York and other cities, his travels to Europe, religion, botanical subjects, love, and nature.

Miller’s art, generally categorized as folk art, is an unusual combination of artistic imagery and written commentary. Few other folk artists documented so much information about the scene and the people depicted directly on their works of art. It is this commentary that makes his work unique and valuable to the history researcher today since much of Lewis Miller’s art was created at a time that predated the wide use of photography. As a result, Miller’s art contributes significantly to our understanding of Southwest Virginia during the early and mid-nineteenth century.

Lewis Miller died on September 15, 1882 in Christiansburg at the age of 86. He is buried in the Craig Cemetery in the same town. The Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center maintains this historic cemetery.

The Montgomery Museum and Lewis Miller Regional Art Center is pleased to help preserve and share Lewis Miller's view of the history of our region through both original and reproductions of his sketches of Southwest Virginia's people, their homes and farms, their adventures and activities, and the mountains and streams that make the area so beautiful and distinctive.