



Laurel Historic Barn Tour

A 2-hour drive around Laurel Township, NC

A project of the Appalachian Barn Alliance

As we drive through the country roads of Madison County, the barns dotting the hills serve as a reminder of times past. Their design can tell the story of their use—both historic and current. More than that, though, the agricultural heritage of Madison County can be traced through its barn architecture. These reminders of the hard work of the farmers in the past are a testament to the resourcefulness of the previous generations and dedication to the land. The older 19th century barns functioned as multipurpose livestock barns until they were adapted to burley tobacco, introduced in the 1920s. This important cash crop provided the livelihood for many families until 2004 when the federal support program ended. Tobacco determined the shape and design of most 20th century barns, while many of the older barns remained full of memories of warm animals, sweet smelling haylofts, as well as secret playhouses.

1

Jesse (Jack) Allen Wallin Barn Livestock & Tobacco (circa 1910) 32 Spillcorn Rd (at corner of Big Laurel)

N35-55.704/W082-40.720

Jesse Allen “Jack” Wallin was born in 1852 and built this barn with his sons around 1910. The barn represents an important transition form in which the standard log pen stalls were instead framed with sawn lumber, including a unique center hallway



with a wooden floor. The barn has good examples of mortise and tenon joinery and, as was typical, the vertical posts are sawn, while long plates, sills, and some long beams are hewn. This is a common bank barn, the bank supported by a massive rock wall. Tier poles appear to have been added to hang Bull Face or Rockwood chewing tobacco. The original wood shingle roof was replaced with metal roofing around 1946.

For more information on the barns of the area, go to
<http://www.appalachianbarns.org>

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For information on Madison County, go to

<http://www.visitmadisoncounty.com/>

2

Richard Franklin Barn Livestock & Tobacco (late 1800s)

1045 Big Laurel Rd

N35-55.405/W82-42.257

Richard Franklin (1854 to 1914) and wife Lutecia Wallin, were a successful farm family for this remote, steep mountain landscape. The farm is on the south-facing slope of the Big Laurel Creek valley, a very isolated community within the county. The barn is a pure example of a late 19th century livestock barn illustrating some of the best craftsmanship in the Laurel area. Like most livestock



barns, it was retrofitted to hang Bull Face or burley tobacco in the 20th century. There are extensive, large hewn timbers, including floor joists. The mortise and tenon joinery is exceptional quality including a complex lap notch. Hay racks are built of angled split stake palings, also rare examples of an earlier period. This is a bank barn but the bank and ramp bridge have collapsed.

3

William “Will” Cook Barn Livestock & Burley Tobacco (circa 1920s)

On Hwy 212 1/10 mile from Hwy 208

N35-56.067/W82-44.538

This property was that of William “Will” Cook, a successful farmer and logger at this crossroads community known as Belva. Previously known as Gahagan, it was part of thousands of acres of land owned by the Gahagan family in the early 19th century.



The barn is an unusual transitional form built in the 1920's for livestock and equipment but adapted early in its history for air curing of burley tobacco. The framing lumber is exclusively hemlock, atypical for a barn. The diagonal siding boards represent a relatively new feature found in barns after this period and not only created a different look, but provided structural stability. The billboard advertisement on the wall is a rare remnant of an earlier era.

4 **Floyd Wallin Barn**
Livestock & Burley Tobacco (late 1800s)
3151 NC Hwy 212
N35 57.168/W82 43.190

This barn is the same general form as the Eason Tweed barn and very likely built by the same builder in the late 1800's. As a converted tobacco barn, the tier pole spacing in the older section may indicate it was used for Bull Face chewing tobacco. The north gable end addition was built around WWII for burley tobacco, and has the early 3-V metal roofing. The original barn is a good example of log pens with timber frame mortise and tenon joinery using pegs, wrought iron spikes and cut nails. The initials "E. G." are carved into a log with a chisel and could have been carved by the builder.



6 **Delbert Shelton Barn**
Livestock Barn (1950s)
9131 NC Hwy 212
N35-59.455/W82-39.987

In 1950 Delbert Shelton saw a barn in east Tennessee that he admired and recruited his brother Charlie and nephew Winfred to help build one like it. They made many trips back to Tennessee to note the details. This example is the barn that became the iconic 20th century American classic with the gambrel roof and red paint. Unlike most barns in Madison County, the loft was never adapted to hang burley tobacco. The hay loft and roof are uncommon local examples of a structure with no interior posts, using free-standing shallow roof trusses allowing for a larger, open loft. The rail-mounted hay fork and pulley system remain, but became obsolete when baled hay replaced loose-stacked hay.



5 **Eason Allen Tweed Barn**
Livestock Barn (late 1800s)
4505 NC Hwy 212
N35-57.530/W82-42.177

Eason Allen Tweed is believed to have built this barn in the late 1800's. It is an example of an early livestock barn never adapted for burley tobacco, leaving the loft open for hay only. It is one of several barns of this unique form in Shelton Laurel, all likely built by the same builder. It is a good example of mortise and tenon joinery with diagonal braces along the exterior wall frame. The log pens are larger than typical at 13'- 6" square. It is a bank barn but has an unusual "half" bank that is not supported by the typical rock retaining wall. The Tweeds were an early settlement family from Ireland. Eason Tweed's father, A.G., was Sheriff of Madison County and reportedly had 5,000 apple trees from which he made brandy for the U.S. Army.



7 **Rosco King Barn**
Burley Tobacco (late 1930s)
215 Kings Blvd driveway
N36 00.625/W82 38.437

This tobacco barn is from the late 1930's and is one of the earliest barns built exclusively for burley tobacco. It is a classic post and beam burley barn using hewn round logs for sills and round vertical and horizontal poles for the frame, with sawn boards for other framing. Use of lattice at the top of the walls is a hold-over from early livestock barn designs. The roof is an example of one that transitions to a very slight gambrel shape yet has no apparent reason for that shape. This barn is sided with vertical boards in such a manner as to provide long, tall vent doors of one or two boards wide on metal hinges, to be opened as needed for increased air flow for the air curing of the tobacco. This farm sits in the Big Creek valley and was part of the Gaither Shelton farm.



8

W. Gaither Shelton Barn

Livestock (late 1800s)

Past mailbox for 215 Kings Blvd.

N36 00.625/W82 38.439

W. Gaither Shelton (1855 – 1927) was a successful farmer and is said to have owned most of the Big Creek valley. He likely built this barn soon after his marriage in 1884.

This barn is a good example of one in which the roof was raised to enlarge the loft and add a side shed in the 1960's when the original wood shingles needed replacing. The timber framing is with mortise and tenon joinery, and one stall door survives with its very rare wooden hinge. Unlike most barns of this period, there is no lattice work. The hay fork is still in place, which is uncommon, as are the 19th century style hay racks with angled split palings. The Shelton family has been the influential family in the Shelton Laurel valley since the early settlement period.



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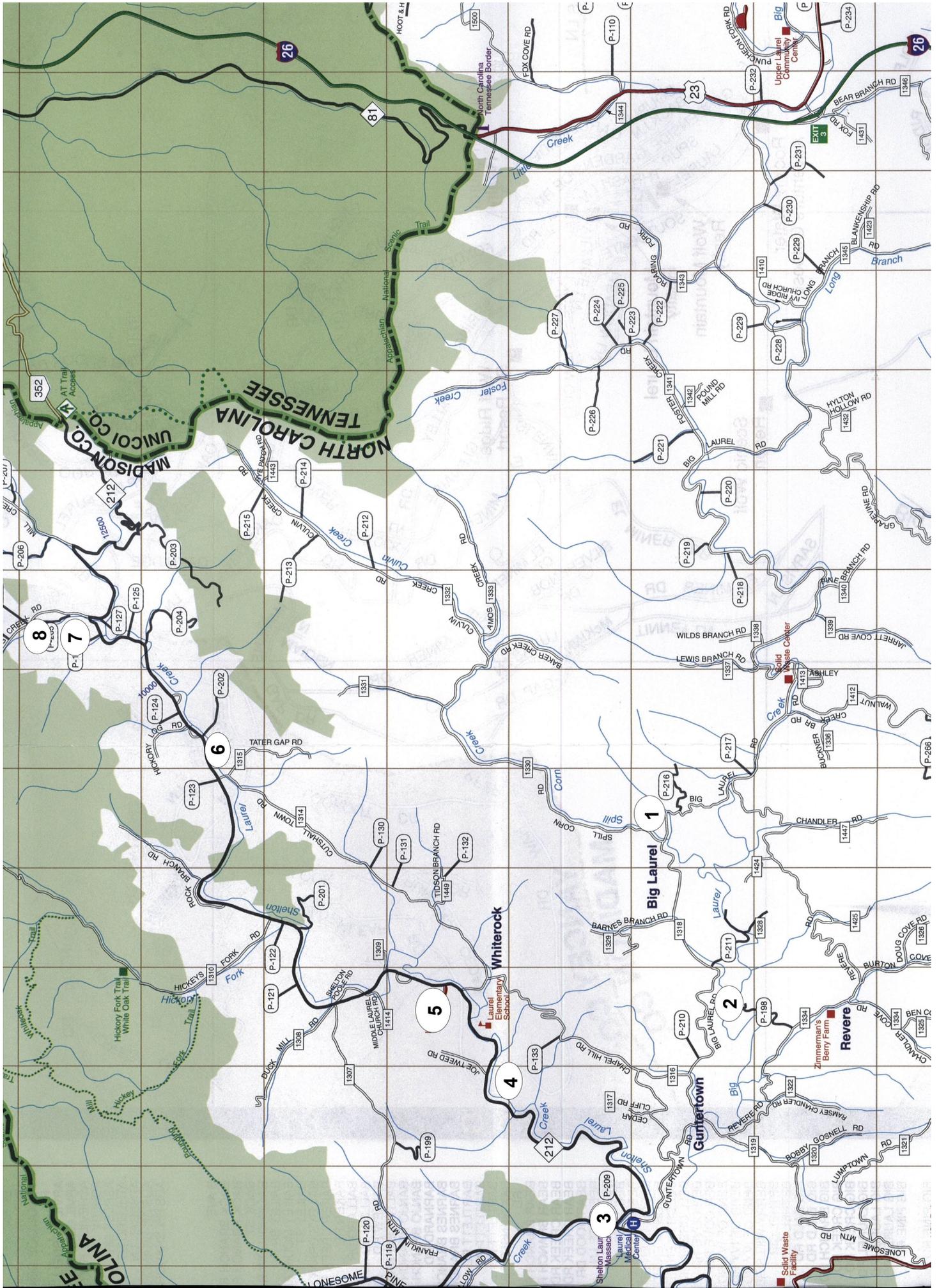
The Laurel Barns Story

The historic barns of the Big Laurel, Shelton Laurel, and Little Laurel communities quietly tell the stories of the lifestyle of the late 19th century and first half of the 20th century. Among the thousands of barns in this township, only one barn is known to have survived from before the Civil War. The barns of the late 1800's that have survived, and are visible from a main road, are typically those of higher quality construction built by the more successful farm families. Although the timber frame barn of the 19th century is nearly forgotten, barn building then consisted of hand-hewn log structures or "pens", used as animal stalls, which supported large timber-framed hay lofts above. These barns housed the livestock, workshops, equipment, and any other function to keep the farm going. Mountain subsistence farming changed dramatically with the introduction of the first commercial cash crop in 1870; the "bright leaf" or flue-cured tobacco variety which required a new, specialized wood heated barn built of logs with mud chinking. Few of these barns have survived, none that are recognizable from the road. The next major change in barn function came in the 1920's with the introduction of the burley tobacco variety. The existing livestock barns, with their large hay lofts and lattice siding were well suited for this new air-cured tobacco and were retrofitted with horizontal tier poles to allow the hanging of the green tobacco. Until the early 20th century all barns had split oak shingle roofs and, as that material began to deteriorate, they were re-roofed with the newly available sheet metal. It was this new roof technology that allowed the builder to depart from the steep A-roof and progress to the gambrel roof, or "hip barn roof", as it is known, and later to the low-pitched A-roof found on the mid-20th century burley tobacco barns that became the standard after WWII. There was a brief period of experimentation in the early 1900's with "dark" or Bull Face chewing tobacco. It was cured in a log "smoking" barn using smoldering green branches and culled apples or cherry bark added for flavor. Few of these barns have survived. The majority of barns seen while traveling the roads of the Laurels are the classic burley tobacco barns from the mid to late 20th century. But keep an eye open for the older steep-roofed barns with log bases. They are the true and rare antiques.

For more information on the barns of this area and on the

Appalachian Barn Alliance's projects, please visit

<http://appalachianbarns.org>



LAUREL BARN TOUR DRIVING DIRECTIONS

Before you drive, please remember that this is a DRIVING tour. The barn owners graciously participate but the public is NOT invited to venture onto PRIVATE PROPERTY, including driveways. While observing the barns, please pull off, stop, or slow down ONLY where you know it is safe. Use your safety flashers to alert other drivers that you are stopped or driving slowly.

Two-hour drive

Take Exit #3 from Interstate 26 and go right at the end of the ramp to intersection with Hwy 23 and turn left.

Go 0.3 miles and turn left on Big Laurel Road and go 10.3 miles and continue on Big Laurel by bearing right. Just a side note that when you enter a gorge (steep hill on the right and Big Laurel Creek on the left), you are entering the Laurel Community.

Continue to the 13.0 mile mark and turn right on Spillcorn where BARN #1 is at the intersection (Jesse Wallin)

U-turn from Spillcorn to go back to Big Laurel Rd and turn right (reset your odometer)

Travel 1.9 miles to BARN #2 (Richard Franklin) on the left at the curve. Drive past before pulling over.

Continue for 1 mile to the intersection with Chapel Hill Rd and turn left. (Chapel Hill becomes Guntertown Rd)

Travel 3.1 miles to a stop sign for NC Hwy 208, turn right & go to stop sign (reset odometer) & turn right on NC Hwy 212

Travel just 0.1 mile to BARN #3 (Winston Cook) on the left side

Go 2.8 miles & turn into the driveway at the mailbox for 3151 to BARN #4 over the creek to the right (Floyd Wallin). You can drive across the wooden bridge if there are no crops in the field and turn around.

Turn right and continue on NC Hwy 212 in the same direction for 1.3 miles to BARN #5 (Eason Tweed) on left side (4505 Hwy 212)

Stay on Hwy 212 for 4.6 miles to BARN #6 (Delbert Shelton) on the right

Continue for 1.4 miles and go left on Big Creek Rd at the Carmen Church of God

Go 0.3 miles to Kings Blvd on the left but don't drive down this private driveway. At the end of the driveway is BARN #7 (Rosco King)

Continue another 0.1 miles to BARN #8 (Gaither Shelton) on the left side

Continue until you find a driveway or road to safely turn around and go back to Hwy 212 and turn left (remember to reset the odometer)

Continue on Hwy 212 and you will cross into Tennessee at 3.2 miles and the road becomes TN Hwy 352

At 7.4 miles turn right and reset the odometer at the stop sign onto US Hwy 23 which goes through the town of Flag Pond TN

Travel 2.0 miles and turn left at Upper Higgins Creek where there is a sign indicating to Hwy 23

Watch for signs "To I-26 and Hwy 23" and take Interstate 26 east/ Hwy 23 South

Note: you are entering Interstate 26 at Exit 50 in Tennessee which is 5 miles north of the NC/TN state line