

# BARN LIGHTS

Quarterly Newsletter

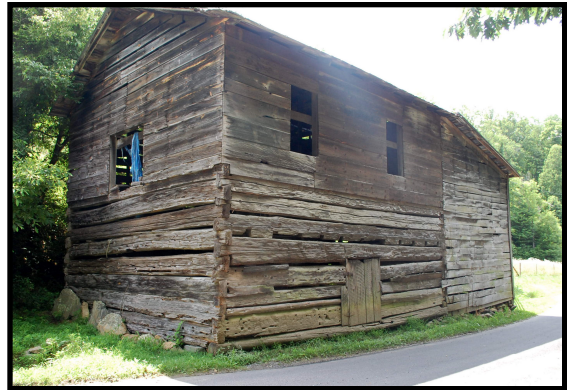
APPALACHIAN BARN ALLIANCE

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## From Log Cabin to Log Barn

It was 1985 and Bill Roberts and I were riding the roads winding up the Little Pine Creek valley, looking at historic homesteads. Bill lived at the old Presbyterian site of Kalamazoo, at the junction with Lower Paw Paw Creek Road. "Let's head up Roberts Branch, I want to show you the oldest house in this country." About a half mile up Roberts Branch we turned onto Allen Drive, continuing until we stopped at an ancient looking log barn with a pole frame addition on its south end. "Folks here on Little Pine say the hewn log part of this barn was once a log cabin built in 1819."

That conversation has remained imprinted in my mind, especially since that 1819 date became the oldest reported date attributed to an existing building that I had found in Madison County. And like many of the other "oldest" barns in the County, it began as a classic Appalachian hewn log cabin, later converted to a barn for hanging burley tobacco. Across the road from this barn is another one, with a similar log pen main section, likely built around the same period. On Little Sandy Mush Creek, another example of a twin log-pen barn, built as two log cabins by the Glance family, has the dates 1828 and 1829 carved in one of the logs.



The owner of the second barn on Allen Drive, a Roberts family descendant, is enthusiastic about telling its story and the lineage of the many generations of Robertses that used these cabins and barns. He shows me an old framed photograph taken in the early 1950's, of two log cabins just down the road from where we stand, rock chimneys still intact, which were deconstructed and moved to their current resting places, as burley tobacco barns.



The mountain homes of the period from the late 1700's to the early 1900's were predominantly log cabins. Many people living today recall their childhood years in Madison County, living in the old family cabin, built before sawn lumber and cash money were available to build that long-dreamed-of frame house. The log cabins were also the "mobile homes" of the day, often taken apart, log by log, and reconstructed elsewhere as a residence or a barn. Thankfully, they were well enough maintained so that we can enjoy and learn from them today, 200 years later.

*Two log cabins relocated to become two burley tobacco barns*

*Story & photos courtesy of Taylor Barnhill*



## *The President's Letter*

*The paraphrase of African proverb familiar to many of us—"It takes a village to raise a child"—can be reworded into an Appalachian Barn Alliance proverb: "It takes partnerships to build a Heritage Farmstead." That is what our organization has been doing over the past six years. But, more recently, we have focused on both expanding and strengthening those partnerships. Our most important partner is the Madison County Tourism Development Authority who has partnered with us from the beginning in many different arenas. The expansion this year is their sponsorship of our venture into offering guided van tours of historic barns each month, which has been quite successful. Similar to our other partnerships with the TDA, the people reached with the project are over 50% tourists and first-time visitors to Madison County. We are building our relationship with the faculty and students at Mars Hill University with Taylor Barnhill*

*as a guest lecturer in an Appalachian Oral Histories class which will be enhanced by a field trip/van tour with the students. In October, we will use the wonderful facilities of the Madison County Library at Marshall to offer a talk by a professor/folklorist on a unique barn story (see the article in this issue). To these partners and to the many others who have contributed to our success, we offer our grateful thanks for helping us. We couldn't do it without you.*

*Sandy Stevenson*

## Barns—More than just agricultural icons

In our Spring 2018 newsletter the ABA published a story uncovered by Taylor Barnhill about the debate over the authorship of the traditional song, "O Death"—a song popularized in the movie "Oh Brother, where Art Thou?" by world-famous musician Ralph Stanley. When documenting one of the Ramsey family barns in Revere, Taylor learned about related research by University of Augusta history professor John Hayes, who came to know Revere native Sue Chandler Vilcinskas and her husband Vince. Hayes is the author of *Hard, Hard Religion: The Other World of the Poor South*, which weaves together folklore, music, oral history, photography, and material culture to reconstruct the history of folk Christians in the New South era. From his extensive research and many conversations with family members, Hayes believes that the song "O Death" was likely written by Lloyd Chandler, a member of one of the premiere families of traditional music in Madison County. According to oral tradition, Chandler authored the song in 1916, inspired by a vision during which "Death" appeared to him, beseeching Chandler to mend his wicked ways.



The Appalachian Barn Alliance is pleased to bring Dr. Hayes to discuss the story of Lloyd Chandler's inspiration at a Revere barn, to the Marshall Library on Friday, October 12 at 5:30pm. We invite those who are fascinated by the rich folklore and music history of Madison County to this free lecture.



# Summer Concert



A gathering of Barn supporters and local-music lovers were treated to a private concert by our own world-renowned Susi Gott-Sequet and The Sons of Ralph, Don and Marty Lewis, on Sunday, August 12, at Broyhill Chapel in Mars Hill. For those of you who don't know, Susi is a Madison County native from a talented musical family who homesteaded up in Shelton Laurel originally in the early 60's. She went on to become not only a fiddler, songwriter, and performer, but also a proficient chef who shares her culinary prowess in cooking

schools in France, New York, California, and Asheville. One of her songs is dedicated to the subject close to our own hearts, the Appalachian barn: "Don't Let the Old Barns Disappear" or "Old Barns." The Sons of Ralph probably need no introduction to Madison County residents. Perhaps the highlight of the show was Susi's introduction of her father, Peter Gott, who performed several tunes on his banjo. Jauntily dressed in Bavarian style with his signature red suspenders, Peter stole the hearts of the audience.



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### Lunsford Festival on MHU Quad

Drop by our booth on Saturday, October 6 on the Mars Hill University quad during the Bascom Lamar Lunsford Festival. Heritage Festival same day on College Street in Mars Hill.

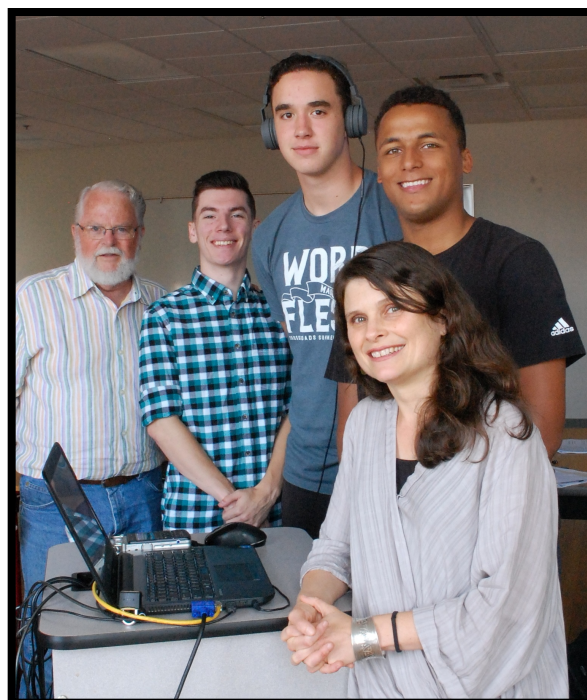
### Upcoming Van Tour Dates

Treat yourself to a 3-hour van tour of historic barns. Upcoming dates are Friday, September 21 and Friday, October 19, both at 9am. For reservations, call Sandy at 828 380-9146.

### Annual Meeting in November

Mark your calendar for the ABA Annual Meeting on Thursday, November 13 at 9am at The Lodge at Bear River. Mingle and learn about our future plans. Directions coming in November.

### COLLABORATION WITH MHU CLASS



ABA Researcher Taylor Barnhill is a guest lecturer in the MHU Appalachian Oral Histories class. After the lecture, students will take a tour of barns and interview barn owners.

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