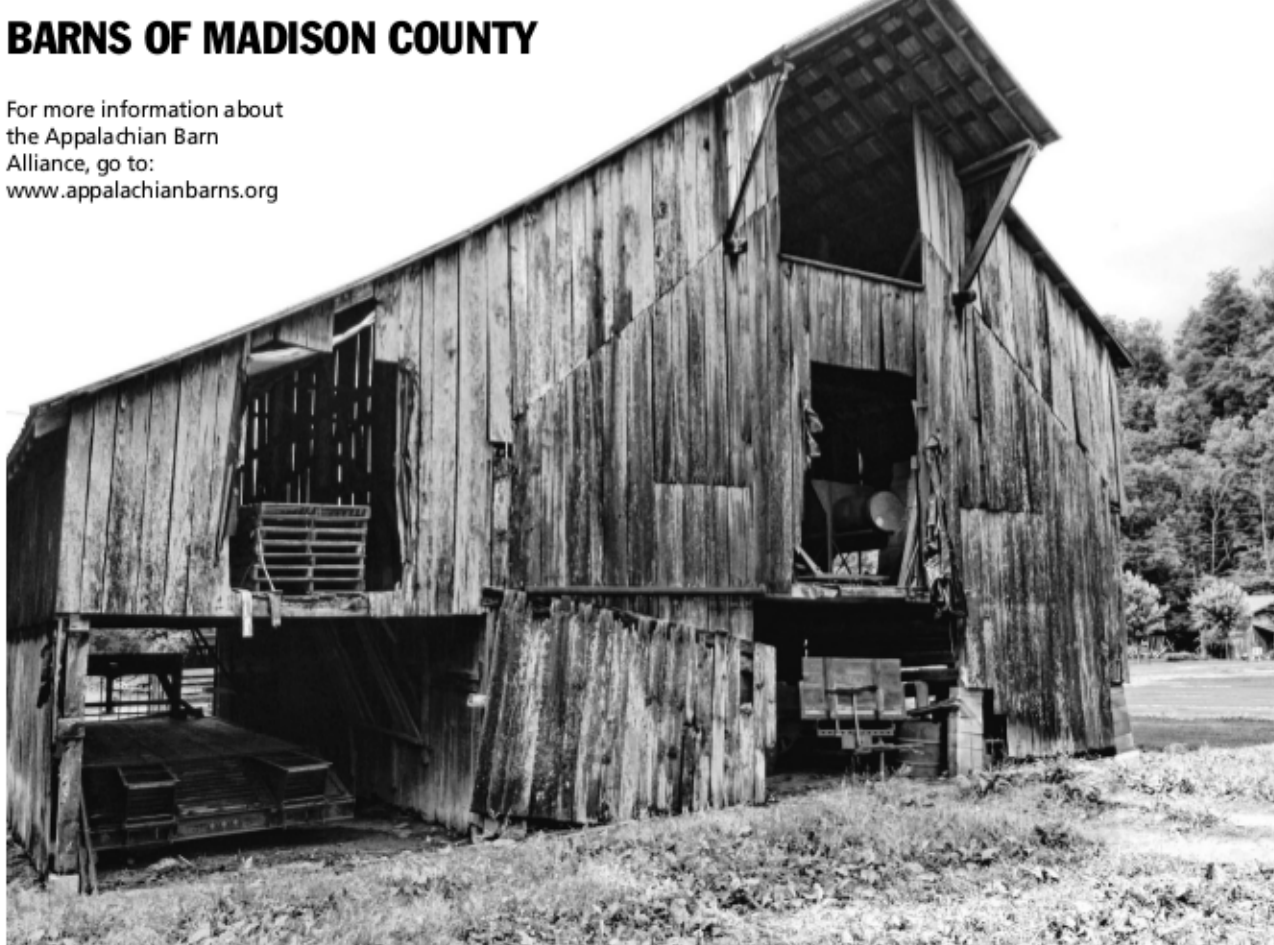


BARNs OF MADISON COUNTY

For more information about the Appalachian Barn Alliance, go to: www.appalachianbarns.org



The first level of this barn was likely built in the 1880s or early 1890s. SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-RECORD & SENTINEL

Standing strong

The King barn likely dates back more than 125 years

By Jim Murphy

Special to the News Record & Sentinel

The first thing you notice about the King barn is it appears to be two-toned. The bottom half is weathered into a deep brown. The top of the barn and sliding down to one side, the color shows a soft gray tone. The different colors spell out a bit of history: Old and older.

"My father added that top level and the side addition around 1954, maybe '55," says Carson King as he points out the newer gray area. "I don't know how old the bottom is. It's been there as long as I can remember. It probably dates back to the 1800s."

Taylor Barnhill, who is charting significant barns for the Appalachian Barn Alliance, supports Carson's age estimate.

"W. Gaither Shelton 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 when the original wood shingles needed replacing."

The lower level housed livestock in four

stalls built of interlocking logs, and up above was a storage area for hay. Carson says the barn was home to as many as 10 animals at a time.

"We always had a horse and a milk cow," he says. The rest of the winter residents were beef cattle. There are no crossbeams to hang tobacco; this was strictly a livestock barn. "It was built before tobacco was the main crop around here," Carson explains.

Hanging from the pitched roof is a giant four-pronged claw on an ingenious pulley device that an operator could lower to a hay wagon outside the barn. The claw would grab a load of hay, much like those confounding games at highway food stops that never quite latch on to the stuffed animal you're trying to snag.

The barn claw — Carson calls it a hay fork — had more success than the game claw. It would grab the loose hay, lift it up to the top level inside the barn and drop it there. Then the hay could be forked down to the animals in their stalls below.

The old barn sits quietly now beside King's Boulevard in Shelton

Laurel, just a couple of miles from the Tennessee line. Walking through his tomato fields, Carson points out the homes where his sister, a cousin and other family members live. It's easy to understand why the street is named King's Boulevard. It's part of the family.

And so is the barn. Standing in the top level, Carson looks up at the rafters.

"I can remember as a kid climbing up there and jumping into the hay," Carson says. "I was up there many, many times."

The memory triggers another old thought. "My father used to worry that the boys would climb up there so they could smoke cigarettes. With all that hay up there, the barn could have burned to the ground."

The history of this old barn is wound tightly with Carson's family history, which reads like a roster of Madison County founders and elders. He easily lists Gaither, Shelton, Hensley, Franklin and Cutshall as ancestors dating back many generations and a couple of centuries.

And Carson has a link to a sad moment in coun-

ty history. "My great grandmother was married to Ellison King, who was one of the victims in the Shelton Laurel massacre," he says. "A little while later she married William 'Bill' Hensley, who was my great grandfather."

Now the family property is home to a thriving commercial business that includes 25 acres of tomatoes and three large greenhouses filled with flats of tomato plants. "We sell 1/2 to 2 million plants a year," Carson says. "And about 300,000 pepper plants."

The old barn at the edge of the tomato field is long retired from its working life. Now it holds a couple of field wagons and a few pieces of random equipment. Its stall doors hang just a bit crooked on their hinges; some of the boards show ragged ends, perhaps chewed by an anxious horse many decades ago.

The wood siding shows occasional spaces where a board has come loose and fallen away. But the barn still looks strong, still looks useful. Who knows? It might even stand for another century.