

A Story of her Dad—delivered by Elaine Ray Thomas

At the October 26, 2017 celebration of the Beginning of the Deconstruction

On behalf of our family, David , Megan , Caleb and I want to welcome you to my Dad, Hughie Ray's farm. This will be the last time a group gathers around this old barn on this farm, but it is far from the first. Dad had many groups here over the years....Lions Club (charter member) came for programs, his Sunday School class came regularly, and most importantly to Dad, each year he brought all the Kindergarten children from Mars Hill Elementary School over here for a field day to feed his baby sheep and calves and pigs. Hundreds upon hundreds of school children have played here, as well as me and my brother, Jim, as children, and our six children and all of their friends as they were growing up. There is no better place to grow up in this world than right here, playing in an old barn, looking for chicken or guinea nests, being warned not to fall through a hole in the hay loft or get on a snake. This was a working barn, but it was also a playing barn.

Dad grew up on Paint Fork, one of 8 children, graduated from Beech Glen High School the same year as my mother, Lena Buckner. He and Otis Duck went to Wake Forest College together, two country boys with cardboard suitcases hitchhiking down the country to go to school. He graduated from Wake Forest with a degree in history and came back home to teach, and worked 30+ years as a school principal here in the county. He loved to farm and he was renowned as a story-teller, often invited to tell one or two of his old stories at the Lunsford Festival here in Mars Hill and Herbert Hayes Festival in Asheville. My Dad was a card, and he could tell a story that would keep you awake for a year!

This structure was the only one on this piece of land when my Dad bought it around 1950. He said his team of mules couldn't begin to tear this old log barn down so he just started building around it. First a large connecting barn with hay loft, corn crib, stalls for cattle, sheep and pigs. Later he added another big shed on the side to hang tobacco and store equipment. But this little log barn was at its center and served as the delivery room when a cow was calving or the pig was having a litter and needed to be isolated. David and I and our whole family have also spent many a long hour hanging and working tobacco in here, because it was air tight enough to serve as a casing house and keep us from freezing to death.

My Dad died in 1989 and the barn was not used again, then a tornado blew through here a few years ago, completely destroyed the two big barn additions Dad had added on, tore up 75-year-old trees by the roots here in the woods behind us. But this little log barn stood. It was jarred. It was picked up whole and moved down the hill, but it stood. We just couldn't ever bring ourselves to tear it down after that.

When Taylor Barnhill approached me about this barn, I knew without a doubt that Dad would want it to be preserved, and to be used as an educational tool for people to know what we are all about around here, and where we came from. That's what this barn is to me, a testament of where I came from.

And so, this is a gift from my Dad, Hughie Ray and my mother, Lena Ray, to the people of Madison County. People they dearly loved, and that I dearly love. Appalachian Barn Alliance, thank you, thank you, thank you for taking good care of it for them!

The ceremony with Bill Ricker, O'Neal Shelton, Ross Young and Norris Gentry in the back row.
Thomas family in the front: daughter Megan, grandson Caleb and Elaine Ray Thomas & Dave Thomas

