



A barn on the Wyatt homeplace features chestnut log floor joists.

Every barn has a story

Appalachian Barn Alliance oral history project highlights the Wyatt family

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As newlyweds, while David and Willa Wyatt were driving up South Main Street in Mars Hill on their way home for Christmas vacation in 1967, David said to Willa “Let’s buy this farm while we’re home.” David’s granddad called it the poorest, overgrown farm in Madison County, but they bought it. Seven years later, they returned to Madison County from Lincolnton, where they both worked as educators.

The Wyatts seemed predestined to careers in education. David’s father, Auburn, graduated from Mars Hill and Western Carolina Teachers’ College and became an educator in Madison County. Willa’s mother, Reva, graduated from Asheville Normal Teachers’ College and was also an educator in Madison County.

In 1974, following in his dad’s footsteps, David became principal of Walnut Elementary while Willa worked as a counselor at Madison High School. Later, David served as principal at Hot Springs Elementary and Madison High School. He ultimately rose to lead Madison County Schools as superintendent, while Willa became director of student support services. Willa also served as principal of Madison Middle and Walnut Elementary.

Willa has fond memories of growing up on Shelton Laurel near her grandparents, especially of her grandma’s pretty flowers and sweeping the dirt yard and

barn’s driveways.

“I wasn’t good at milking or hoeing but I loved watching my daddy, Buster, work Bill and Bob, our team of horses,” she said.

David grew up on Shake Rag Road - now Cody Road - near Petersburg next to his grandparents. He remembers helping his dad and mother, Zula, garden, grow tobacco and raise cattle. In 1952, while teaching full time, his dad built a barn that was used for hanging tobacco, feeding cattle and storing hay that was hauled on a sled. David said, “The young people’s job was to jump on the loose hay and get it packed before the next load came.”

He recalls gathering black walnuts to sell at the Farmer’s Federation in Marshall for \$13—enough to buy his first bike, a second-hand Schwinn.

Today, 45 years later, the “poorest farm in Madison County” has more than doubled in acreage into a beautiful homestead and cattle farm, along South Main Street. After such a full and rewarding life, you might expect the Wyatt’s to be loafing in retirement, but farm activities and their Madison County roots keep them engaged in the community. Since 2010, Willa has served as chair of the Mars Hill Anderson Rosenwald School Rehabilitation project, now on the National Registry of Historic Places and soon to serve as a community cultural center and interpretive museum.

In his spare time, David serves on the



A rock and log family pack house stands at the Wyatt homeplace. COURTESY PHOTOS



A 1920 log-crib livestock barn at the Wyatt homeplace sits along Cody Road.

board of the Appalachian Barn Alliance. Along with his cousin, Sheila, David is restoring the old home place his grandparents bought in 1919. It has a “transition barn” with log stables and a hay-mow adapted to hang burley tobacco, a smokehouse, a log spring house, pack house and other log outbuildings. His other passion is collecting and preserv-

ing horse drawn farm implements.

Richard Stiles is a volunteer writer and oral history recorder with the Appalachian Barn Alliance. For information about the Appalachian Barn Alliance, upcoming events, or to share stories from your family about barns and farming in Madison County go to appalachianbarns.org.