

# Tobacco barn donated to Appalachian Barn Alliance

**Richard Stiles** Appalachian Barn Alliance

Genevieve and Larry Burda are longtime residents of Mars Hill and Madison County, and have recently made a significant contribution to the community's economic and community development goals.

One of their current beneficiaries is the locally based Appalachian Barn Alliance. More about this later as this story begins in 1972 when Larry was sent to Mars Hill to open Honeywell's Micro-switch plant. He was tasked with hiring 600 employees to operate this new high-tech facility.

Larry is rightly proud to tout that the Mars Hill plant outperformed "dollar-wise per employee" Honeywell's entire 39 facilities across the avionics, residential and commercial divisions.

When Honeywell moved the switch manufacturing operation to Mexico, 10 years later in 1982, it caused a major economic disruption to the county and the Burdas — they were transferred to Colorado. When Larry retired in 1985, the call of Madison County was strong and the Burdas decided to move back "home" to purchase Mars Hill Building Supply from the Phillips family. For the next 16 years, Larry and Genevieve would operate a successful small business, this time providing full-time employment for 15 people, including comprehensive health care benefits.

The 21st century dawned, and while the Burdas thought themselves retired, Larry's "serial volunteerism," as Gene-



The "Floyd Wallin" barn could someday be part of a Farmstead Museum. COURTESY

vieve calls it, launched the next chapter of their lives. They became involved in fundraising for several local initiatives including the Madison County Visitor's Center and the community's matching portion of the Hoffman Foundation's purchase of the 80-acre Smith property at the base of Bailey Mountain. They believe these efforts will be significant contributors to the county's overall economic development goals.

Equally, Genevieve and Larry believe their gifting of a Shelton Laurel tobacco barn to the Appalachian Barn Alliance will help advance the community's recreational and tourism goals. They expect the "Floyd Wallin" barn someday will be moved and reassembled on a future property dedicated to a Madison

County Heritage Farmstead Museum.

Asked why they support the Alliance, they noted the numerous volunteers and board members who have invested significant time and monies for the cause. Genevieve is also quick to compliment the Barn Alliance's president, Sandy Stevenson, for her farmstead vision, and Taylor Barnhill's skill in documenting these treasures.

Barnhill's research shows the original Wallin barn was likely built in the late 1800s as a log structure for livestock. The four stalls are of large hewn logs, the second story is timber framed construction using pegged mortise and tenon joinery, wrought iron spikes and cut nails -- all techniques of 19th century construction.



The mortise and tenon joinery inside the barn dates back to the late 1800s.

The Burdas hope the Heritage Farmstead Museum not only will help to reconnect the younger community to their agricultural roots, they hope it also will help former residents reconnect to their past. These retirees, who left for careers elsewhere, are returning to Madison County only to find both their kinfolk and their tobacco and livestock farming heritage disappearing.

The board and volunteers of the Appalachian Barn Alliance believe the county's agricultural heritage will live again through the creation of the Madison County Heritage Farmstead Museum.

*Richard Stiles is a volunteer writer and oral history recorder with the Appalachian Barn Alliance. For information about the Appalachian Barn Alliance or to share stories from your family about barns and farming in Madison County, go to [appalachianbarns.org](http://appalachianbarns.org).*