

Late 1800s barn holds fond memories for Anders family

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Born 97 years ago, Mildred Anders has lived on Metcalf Creek Loop Road in the Beech Glen community of Madison County since 1955. Prior to marrying her late husband, J.B. Anders, Mildred grew up in the Indian Creek community of Yancey County.

The eldest child and only girl, Anders had chores even as a child, including washing clothes on sunny days. "My mother and I mixed red devil lye, borax, and meat fats to make laundry soap," she said, remembering a time when soap was not store bought. Laundry day began outside by heating water to a boil for two huge iron tubs. One

was for washing and one for two rinses. For the second rinse, a bluing agent, such as Mrs. Stewart's Bluing, would be used, not for bleaching, but to add a slight color to the whites.

As a young Asheville business school graduate, her life changed course when World War II began. All of her brothers went to war and Mildred came home to help her father run the family's general store. When J.B. Anders, a young returning soldier from Barnardsville, showed up one Sunday morning at Paint Gap Presbyterian Church, Mildred's life would change again. They would marry in 1949 and build a house on Metcalf Creek Loop Road in 1955.

J.B.'s great, great grandfather, Reb Jim Ray, built the original poplar log barn on the Metcalf Creek property in the late 1800s for horses and mules. Years later, Pap Ray (J.B.'s grandfather) added a hayloft. Pap Ray and his father, Cecil Anders, eventually added a front shed for air-curing burley tobacco in the 1960s.

Raising tobacco began with plowing with mules, which J.B. felt worked harder and longer than horses on mountain property. Very particular about his tobacco, J.B. meticulously hand-tied the leaves, packed them on a bottom basket and secured a top basket with sea grass strings for delivery to the Day Tobacco Warehouses in Asheville. It was hard



work loading and stacking baskets weighing hundreds of pounds using only greased poles and hog hooks.

Many called tobacco "Christmas money." On the Anders' farm it was also known as tuition money. One of Mildred's daughters, Nancy, shared her memories. "We knew we could attend college if we worked our acre of tobacco," she said. "Care was taken with all of it. No ugly tobacco was allowed to leave

daddy's farm! Also, no damp or rotting tobacco was allowed to be placed as padding in the middle of the tobacco baskets. Daddy said that if bad tobacco was ever found in your basket it would ruin our reputation as honest people. The few pounds just were not worth the loss of a good reputation as honest people."

Homework and chores kept mountain kids busy and out of trouble. It was

a good way to grow up with a healthy environment, wonderful work ethic, sense of history and healthy respect for the land. Not bad for old mountain folk.

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.



Mildred Anders smiles alongside her nephew Drew Bitzer. COURTESY PHOTO