

# Shelton Laurel barn unlike others across Madison County

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Paula Shelton McAlister's family roots run seven generations deep, far up the creek on Highway 212 in the Shelton Laurel community of Madison County. Where does one begin to describe this history?

Possibly it is that her great, great grandmother, Sarah Waddell Haire, was a granddaughter of John Sevier, the first governor of Tennessee and a Revolutionary War hero at Kings Mountain in 1780. Or ten years later, in 1790, when Roderick Shelton and his family relocated from Patrick County, Virginia. David, Roderick's youngest son, is the progenitor of Paula's "Shelton Clan." He was born in 1776 and died shortly after Madison became a county in 1851.

Paula's family has a tragic association with the Shelton Laurel Massacre. The historical marker states, "Thirteen boys and men suspected of Unionism were killed by Confederate soldiers in early 1863." These Unionists, who just 80 years earlier were American heroes, were now at odds with a Confederate North Carolina that claimed three of Paula's kin. A young boy at the time, Grandpa Sol assisted in burying all thirteen bodies in a common grave on family property.

A couple of generations later came Paula's grandpa and grandma who lived in the Alleghany section of the valley. In the diary of his American travels, Englishman and ballad collector Cecil Sharp wrote on July 29, 1916, "Mr. and Mrs. Sol Shelton are a most delightful lot of people...walked home beaming with pleasure after so successful a day." He wrote on August 9, "Called on Sol Shelton in the afternoon and had a long talk...then taking down one song from [Paula's great aunt] Donna."

Education was very important to families in Shelton Laurel. As college-educated teachers, Paula's parents' mantra was, "You will be educated!" Her dad, Paul, boarded at the Dorland Institute in Hot Springs, and graduated from Maryville College in Tennessee. Her mom, Rena Wallin, graduated from the Asheville Normal and Teachers College for Women.

Paula graduated from UNC Chapel Hill in 1976 and in 1978 was hired by Madison County EMS. Two years later she met her future husband, Maurice McAlister, a volunteer fireman in Marshall and the county's Cooperative Extension livestock agent. They were married in 1983 and bought cousin Delbert



This true gambrel roof barn built Delbert Shelton in the 1950s is unique among the barns of Madison County.

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Shelton's farm with its red livestock barn.

Cousin Delbert built the barn in the early 1950's from lumber he sawed there in his own mill. He and his brother made multiple trips to Tennessee, wearing out his pickup, to copy a barn he liked there. A rail-mounted hayfork remains but became obsolete with the introduction of square bales. Uncommon for a Madison County barn, this is a true gambrel roof barn, the structural roof supported by shallow trusses, leaving an open loft floor with no interior columns. Also unusual, it was never retrofitted to hang burley tobacco.

Paula's pride in her family's seven generations of farming culture aligns closely with the Appalachian Barn Alliance's vision to establish a farmstead museum to connect present and future generations with their ancestral mountain roots.

*Richard Stiles is an oral history volunteer with the Appalachian Barn Alliance of Madison County. For more information go to [appalachianbarns.org](http://appalachianbarns.org)*



Shelton Laurel native Paula Shelton McAlister's family history includes stories of Revolutionary War heroism and a tragic connection to the Civil War's Shelton Laurel Massacre.

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