



The Big Pine barn of Claude Wild is shown above. This year marks the 100-year anniversary of this once unique Appalachian barn, thought to be the first of its kind in Madison County. COURTESY PHOTOS

THE MODERN BARN OF A CENTURY AGO

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On the upper end of Big Pine Creek, above the junction of South Fork and North Fork, as you begin the climb to Troublesome Gap, you will pass an old barn on your left. Upon first glance you may notice it only because of the way it clings to the outside of a sharp curve in the road. If you look more closely, you will notice the distinctive roof line of a "monk roof" barn. This year marks the 100-year anniversary of this once unique Appalachian barn, thought to be the first of its kind in Madison County.

The barn was built in 1918 by Claude Wild, the son of George Washington Wild who was an innovative Big Pine farmer and mountain politician of the latter 19th century. Claude became a peddler, or drummer as they were called locally. His route ran from Big Pine over Troublesome Gap to Newport, Tennessee, then to Asheville, and back home to Big Pine. His income from one circuit was said to average \$75, quite a lot of cash for the period. Claude was frugal, however, and did not want to buy food along his trip, so his wife Katie made ham biscuits for him to eat on his jour-



This spring box represented modern plumbing at Claude Wild's farm.

ney. As his clientele became established, he purchased the first truck in the Big Pine valley: an REO "Speed Wagon."

The REO Motor Car Company was founded by Ransom Eli Olds, father of the Oldsmobile. Quite a luxury, Claude Wild's exotic new truck was specially equipped for peddling. A family story describes one of Claude's discoveries along his route: sets of blueprint drawings for a "modern" 20th century barn. From those plans he built the innovative monk roof barn, with its ridgepole roof vent, designed to create a chimney effect to draw air from the lower level, up through the hay loft level. As the new

air-cured burley tobacco began to replace flue-cured tobacco, this type of ventilated structure became the barn of the future in the minds of some farmers. Monk roof barns spread throughout the Big Pine valley, including the one built by Rubin Caldwell in 1924, which retained the use of traditional log cribs on the ground level. By the early 1990's, monk roof barns began to appear in other areas of Madison County.

Claude's new barn also had the latest in plumbing with its own water pipe and spring head for watering the livestock, circulating spring water through a concrete spring box on the roadside. Claude's initials and date carved into the concrete can still be seen today: "C. J. W. 1918". Its water continues to flow into the horses' water trough, 100 years later.

The Appalachian Barn Alliance welcomes historic information and stories about barns and farms in Madison County, with the goal of documenting the county's barns, and creating an educational Heritage Farmstead. For information about the Appalachian Barn Alliance go to appalachianbarns.org or call 828-390-5146.