

# Barn Memories - The Meadows barn at Spring Creek

## Remembering When The Tier Poles of Tobacco Fell

*Only the Tim Barnwell photo below was taken on the Meadows farm. Other photos are for reference to better understand the hard work that is required in “getting in” a crop of burley tobacco.*

Hanging tobacco in a high-pitched barn was never for the faint of heart. Ethel Meadows Kirkpatrick, born in 1948 and raised at the Meadows' homeplace in Spring Creek, recalls a story told her by the son of a tenant farmer in the 1960s or '70s in which things went upsidedown pretty fast.



The Meadows barn filled with burley tobacco. Photo taken by Tim Barnwell in 2004.

The crew had unloaded maybe four, maybe six, trailers of tobacco and succeeded in placing the heavy sticks, each holding five or six stalks of tobacco, on horizontal tier poles high in the loft.

As they stood outside her grandfather's barn, built in 1920, celebrating the end of a very long day, they began to hear cracking and popping sounds. In a nanosecond, four tier poles collapsed onto the upper floor!

Back up into the loft they climbed to clean up the mess and clear some space to handle their next task. They had to locate replacement poles, put them in position, and then rehang all the tobacco.

Bear in mind: This barn was 36 feet high at the ridge line, also 36 feet wide, and 62 feet long. The loft had two levels, the outer levels at nine feet, six inches above the ground, the upper center level at 12 feet above the ground, allowing a full 12 feet of height in the center hall.

Needless to say, some very tired workers probably began to think that there must be an easier way to earn a living than to hang tobacco!



A field of tobacco after several days of wilting and ready for loading on a wagon and to be hung in the barn. Each plant is cut and speared by hand onto the tobacco stick, usually 6 stalks per stick.





A wagon load of tobacco headed for hanging on tier poles inside the barn.

After the federal government ceased awarding farmers a subsidy to cultivate tobacco in 2004, the Meadows barn, like so many others, fell into disuse, suffered insults from the weather, and finally collapsed in a fierce storm on March 27, 2021.



Workers balance spread-eagle on tier poles as sticks of harvested burley tobacco are passed along from the loaded wagon to the workers above them. This process is repeated until the barn is full.

The tier poles are about 48" wide and it's 5-6 ft to the one above.



Sticks of tobacco being passed from the loaded wagon on the right across the barn and up to the next man standing on the tier pole. This process is repeated until the barn is full.



A young woman is proudly showing stalks of burley tobacco that have been speared on a tobacco stick, ready for hanging in the barn.

James G.K. McClure, Jr. Collection, Southern Appalachian Archives, Mars Hill University