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Appalachian Barn Alliance unveils new history signage

Ceremony held at Smith Farm at Bailey Mountain Preserve

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MARS HILL - Many Madison county and Western North Carolina residents know about the crucial work a local nonprofit aiming to restore and renovate the region's historical barns has done since its foundation in 2012.

On Oct. 29, Appalachian Barn Alliance commemorated the organization's receipt of grant funding during a ceremony in which new signs were unveiled at three barns on the Smith property, located at the Bailey Mountain Preserve on Forest Street in Mars Hill.

ABA received grant funding from the Blue Ridge National Heritage Partner-

ship earlier this year to support and fund the creation of descriptive signs for the barns at the Smith Farm.

This would be the first step in a collaboration between the ABA and the town of Mars Hill and the Richard L. Hoffman Foundation for the ABA's role in repairing, restoring, and maintaining the barns on the 8 acres on Forest Street. That property rises another approximately 80 acres up Bailey Mountain plus another 212 acres down the other side that comprises the Bailey Mountain Preserve. The grant requires matching funds, and the ABA acquired a grant from the Madison County Community Foundation plus some money from the town of Mars Hill to hire a center to build kiosks on which to display such signs, according to ABA President Sandy Stevenson.

"This is an example of a commitment and then a collaboration of community members to create a place to preserve



Appalachian Barn Alliance President Sandy Stevenson and Madison County Center County Extension Director Ross Young unveil the new sign for the livestock bank barn during ABA's ceremony Oct. 29. COURTESY OF SANDY STEVENSON

both natural and cultural heritage for future generations right here just minutes from downtown Mars Hill," said Stevenson.

ABA researcher Taylor Barnhill wrote the narrative and chose the pictures, **See BARNES, Page 2A**

which were then placed onto the weather-resistant sign layouts by graphic artist Dana Irwin.

Barns

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Ceremony

Mars Hill Town Manager Nathan Bennett talked about the plans the town has for the 8 acres using money received from a Parks and Recreation Trust Foundation Grant.

The Richard L. Hoffman Foundation is a nonprofit founded to raise awareness of Bailey Mountain conservation. Lee Hoffman, the organization's executive director, also spoke at the ceremony.

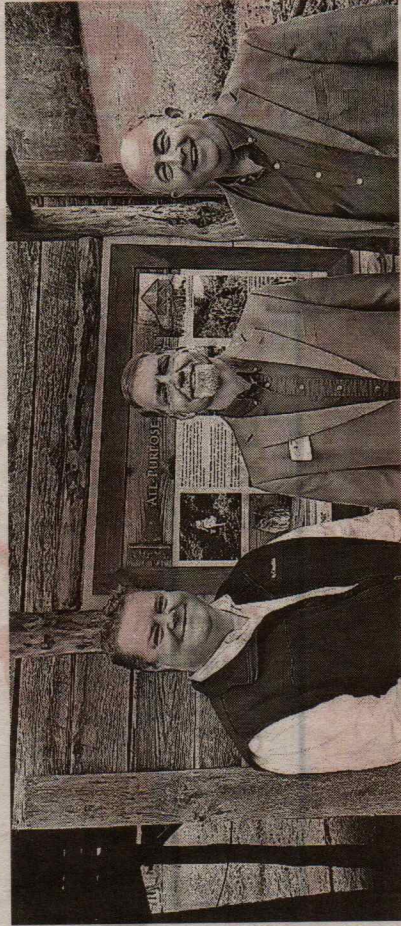
"25 years ago, my brother Will and I were walking on the southern slopes of Bailey Mountain," Hoffman said. "There was a feeling we had - and lots of others had - that Bailey Mountain really belongs to all of us, to anyone and to everyone. I am so excited that we are here today on the Smith Farm property, which is part of almost 300 acres of conservation area known as the Bailey Mountain Preserve. Through the work of hundreds of people and organizations, a large portion of Bailey Mountain is now protected and always available, and in fact it really does belong to all of us."

"From a conversation 25 years ago to today, Bailey Mountain Preserve is about creating opportunities for people to experience Bailey Mountain - to gather, to learn, and to be connected to a special place that continues to draw us back time and time again - and to make a statement about what we value as a community, that there is great value in our culture, our heritage, our history and our natural resources."

Madison County Center Extension Director Ross Young also spoke at the ceremony.

Young recalled his time growing up roughly a mile away from the Smith Farm and hunting animals nearby. He also recounted his memory of one particular conversation he had with Stevenson about the potential for a Bailey Mountain conservation project.

"I grew up here and have been blessed to have spent the last 31 years working back in Madison County for



Mars Hill Town Manager Nathan Bennett, from left, County Extension Director Ross Young and Richard L. Hoffman Executive Director Lee Hoffman at the Appalachian Barn Alliance's ceremony on Oct. 28 to celebrate the unveiling of new signage on the Smith Farm property.

COURTESY OF SANDY STEVENSON

North Carolina Cooperative Extension," he said. "One day of that work, I passed by Sandy and made a few comments, said a few simple words, not having any idea what would happen to those simple words. What I'm looking at today and what I've looked at for a really long time is a whole lot of people that have done a whole lot of raising of kids."

"I had the opportunity to drive to Hot Springs (Oct. 29) and back," Young said. "The sun was just right and the colors were beautiful, and the words that came to mind were 'vibrant, diverse and beautiful.' I don't know why those words popped into my head. That was in reference to the trees, and the county, this place that I live, and the place that I love."

"But when I reflect on the Appalachian Barn Alliance, I look at the successes, the program and the processes, but none of that happens without you. When I look at the people that have made it happen, they are very vibrant and very, very diverse. What they've created is very beautiful."

History

Barnhill described the architectural styles of the barns on the Smith Farm and their importance in the area's agricultural heritage.

ABA board member Mike Foster summarized his deed research outlining the importance of the family's

ancestors to the town of Mars Hill and Mars Hill University.

According to Foster's research, the plot was part of the 320,640 acres of the 1796 land grant to John Gray Blount. In 1866, 600 acres were purchased by Edward ("Neddie") and Clarissa Carter, who had donated 4 acres of a separate tract to what would become Mars Hill University.

In 1879, Carter deeded 100 acres of the land to his son Horace. Three years later, Horace Carter sold the tract to his brother-in-law, W. O. Connor, the first mayor of Mars Hill, elected first in 1893 - serving eight years - and elected three more times, serving a total of 22 years through 1931.

In 2018, the great-grandchildren of Connor (Smith family members) conveyed the title of 86.71 acres of this land to the town of Mars Hill. The funds to acquire the Smith Farm were raised by the Richard L. Hoffman Foundation. Those funds included grants obtained by the Foundation from the Clean Water Management Fund and the U.S. Park Service Land and Water Foundation grant funds as well as matching funds raised by the Foundation from private donors, according to Stevenson.

Eight acres of this land serve as an area to welcome people to the Bailey Mountain Preserve. The three barns and the house on the plot are being developed as the Lower Smith Farm.