



South Marshall Township Historic Barn Tour

A 2-hour drive around Marshall Township, NC

A project of the Appalachian Barn Alliance

The Marshall Township Barns Story

The South Marshall township is a smaller, yet long township bordered by the French Broad River on the northeast, and Buncombe County on the southwest. The primary agricultural crop of burley tobacco ceased production with the end of the Tobacco Price Support Program in 2004, and as tobacco barns were no longer income-producing, the incentives to maintain them declined, leaving a farmscape of many seemingly abandoned barns. On the east end of the township, along the Rector Corner ridge, there are even fewer surviving barns. This may be attributed to changing development patterns as new, post-tobacco landowners sought the scenic views rather than farmland.

Farther west and north, the landscape changes and is comprised of five different valleys, with the ridges between, and represent classic Appalachian farmscapes, with small acreages of tillable land that demanded hard work and frugality throughout the past two centuries of mountain farming. The surviving historic barns, many now relegated for use as storage buildings, reflect those strenuous lifestyles. Many sixth and seventh-generation families remain on the original family land of the early 19th century settlement period.

The known history of these older barns varies: most have survived with few remaining family descendants to tell their stories. In general, the barns were built by the farm family with the help of neighbors and perhaps a local carpenter. Farmers were sometimes influenced by “new” barn designs borrowed from other regions, such as the #7 Loye Worley barn with its innovative monitor roof.

While very few barns of the 19th century have survived, an important exception is the now rare, flue-cured tobacco log barn. Mountain subsistence farming changed dramatically when flue-cured or “bright leaf” tobacco was introduced as a Civil War reconstruction program in the 1870s; it was the first commercial cash crop in the mountains and was called flue-cured because it required a specialized wood-fire heated barn built of logs, sealed with mud chinking to keep in the heat, and thus heat cure the tobacco.

The markets for flue-cured tobacco began to diminish by 1915, yet several of these very old log barns are still visible from the road, including the John F. Payne barn, #3.

The introduction of the burley tobacco variety in the 1920s, an air-cured tobacco hybrid, replaced the flue-cured tobacco era and brought a major change in the function and design of local barns. Prior to this time, all barns were either general purpose livestock barns, or the small, square, flue-cured log barns. With their large hay lofts and lattice siding, the livestock barns were well suited for this new air-cured tobacco and were retrofitted with horizontal tier poles to allow the hanging of the burley tobacco. The old flue-cured tobacco barns were also adapted to air cure burley tobacco by removing the mud chinking between logs to allow for better air flow. These two barn types became the first generation of barns for curing burley tobacco.

Meanwhile, builders made appropriate use of the abundant chestnut trees, the wood of which was rot and bug resistant and was often used for hewn barn foundation sills and for log barns. The chestnut blight, which made its way into Madison County by 1920, eventually killed all the chestnut trees, leaving thousands of dying or dead trees to be salvaged for all types of buildings. The log scars left from the blight fungus serve to help determine the age of a log barn: if chestnut logs do not have blight scars, the barn was likely built before 1920.

By the 1930s, the profitability of burley tobacco motivated farmers to begin building large barns exclusively for curing burley tobacco, with little or no accommodation for livestock. The Ernest Snelson burley tobacco barn #2, is a good example. Farms also saw a surge in the construction of burley tobacco barns following WWII, as veteran farmers benefitted from the GI Bill. As you drive from valley to valley, enjoy the many varieties of historic barns along the way.

For more information on the barns, go to
<http://appalachianbarns.org>
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Reynolds Foundation

1 **Elmore Snelson Barn Dairy and Livestock Barn (1917)**

*161 Ramsey Snelson Road
Marshall 28753*

Ernest Snelson liked to tell the story that, when he was six years old, his father Elmore built the dairy livestock barn.

That was 1917 and makes this barn, with its gambrel roof design, one of the earliest Madison County barns with this type of roof. Its use marked the transition from split-oak wood shingles for roofing, to the “new” sheet metal roofs. Wood shingles required a roof to have a steep pitch, to quickly shed water and snow, but the new metal allowed a lower pitched roof, and that accommodated the new gambrel roof design. This barn also features the traditional diagonal exterior board siding and lattice wood strips for ventilation of the hay loft level. Also a “bank barn”, it allows upper level access to the loft level for horse-drawn wagons, then later for tractors. It has a poured concrete foundation, an innovative change from the rock foundations of the early twentieth century. This dairy complex is a good, yet now-uncommon example of the twentieth century dairy farm, most of which are now gone.



2 **Ernest Snelson Barn Burley Tobacco Barn (1948)**

*164 Ramsey Snelson Road
Marshall 28753*

This massive burley tobacco barn was built in 1948, part of a surge in burley tobacco barn building following WWII, as men returning from the War were eager to rebuild their family’s farm economy. It was built by Ernest Snelson, son of Elmore Snelson, when he was 32 years old.

A unique technique used in its construction is the use of empty wooden nail kegs as containers for the poured concrete footings that anchor the interior

vertical posts of white pine. It has an unusually large center hallway, with massive doors, there perhaps to anticipate the coming of large farm equipment. The height of the barn accommodates seven levels of horizontal tier poles, making it an uncommonly high barn. The older traditional use of wood lattice strip siding is seen on the upper walls and serves to provide ventilation for the hanging tobacco, which was air-cured and needing ample air-flow. Many of the exterior siding boards on the end are warped, which would indicate those trees were cut at a time of the wrong “signs” or phase of the moon, according to farm traditions of the period. The use of all horizontal siding is also a more modern feature, as opposed to the traditional use of diagonal, vertical, and horizontal siding.



3 John F. Payne Barn **Flue-cured Tobacco Barn** **(Late 1800s to early 2900s)** *2225 Bailey Branch Road* *Marshall 28753*

The John F. Payne barn is a rare surviving log, flue-cured tobacco barn, eighteen feet square, and eighteen logs high. It has three additions built later in its life for the hanging of air-cured burley tobacco. Flue-cured tobacco was grown here

from 1870 to around 1920, and few barns of this type have survived. This tract of land was acquired by Anderson L. Payne in 1880, when he purchased 150 acres at county auction for \$300. Anderson Payne died in 1897, leaving the land to his son, John, who likely would have built the original flue-cured tobacco barn around the turn of the century. John's son, Roy, was bequeathed the barn tract in 1949. He and his wife Nell lived in the log cabin next to the barn, likely built by his grandfather Anderson, until they built the frame house nearby, in July 1953. The burley tobacco additions were likely built from the 1930s to the 1990s, as the need for more tobacco curing space grew. The log barn features an unusual use of square pegs driven into round holes in the tops of the logs, to hold wedged pieces of wood as backing for mud chinking between the logs, to seal the barn for heating of the flue-cured tobacco.



4 Alfred Ramsey Barn **Livestock Barn (1950s)** *1138 Turnpike Road* *Marshall 28753*

This large, well-built livestock barn is thought to have been built in the 1950s and utilizes materials and construction techniques that were becoming popular then: concrete block for the foundation, and "modern" corrugated metal roofing. Several, more traditional elements have been carried over from earlier building methods, including the use of lattice strips for ventilation under the eaves, and a corn crib that is part of the main structure. It is also a bank barn with access to the loft level provided by the high embankment that connects to the road. Little is known of the specific history of this barn, yet the Ramsey family has been on this land since 1826 when the Reverend Garrett Ramsey lived here. Ramseytown in neighboring Yancey County was named for him when, as a traveling preacher, he founded a church there before the Civil War.

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5

Allen E. Roberts Barn #1 (Early 1800s, converted mid 1950s)

*Allen Drive
Marshall 28754*

The Allen E. Roberts barns share a common history that dates to the early 1800s. Both barns are examples of log cabins that were replaced by more modern houses, then converted to burley tobacco barns in the mid-1950s, likely by Allen E. Roberts. This was a common practice, as families became prosperous and built the newer-style frame houses. Roberts family oral tradition suggests the upper log cabin was originally built in 1819, while the other cabin may be of similar age. It is not known who built these two cabins, but this area was owned by two recipients of large land grants, Mark Mitchell and Thomas Davidson, having served in the Revolutionary War. They were granted 50,000 acres by the state in 1795. This tract was purchased by Joseph J. Gudger in 1843 and became part of a massive 75,000-acre tract. The earliest record of a Roberts family purchase in this valley was in 1851. The Roberts barns are from a two-story log cabin, and a story and a half cabin, both of finely hewn logs with half-dovetail corner notches, the largest log being 19 inches high. On both barns, the height was extended, and an addition was built on the north ends in the mid- 1950s, all of which was to hang air-cured burley tobacco.



7

Loye Worley Barn Livestock Barn (1930s)

*87 Hawk's Nest Road
Marshall 28753*

The Loye Worley livestock barn is an uncommon barn type, using the innovative monitor roof with the raised vent section along the ridge, which created better airflow for drying hay and air-cured burley tobacco. The first monitor roof barn in Madison County is thought to have been built in 1917. This barn was built in the 1930s about the same time of the nearby house. This bank barn, with loft-level access from the embankment on



the right, also used materials that were innovative for the period, including a poured concrete foundation and sawn framing instead of the traditional log animal stalls. Loye and wife Addie are descendants of families that were part of the first settlement of the Upper Paw Paw valley in the early 1800s.

6

Allen E. Roberts Barn #2 (Early 1800s, converted mid 1950s)

*Allen Drive
Marshall 28754*



8 **Mont Farmer Barn Livestock Barn (1920s -1930s)**

*1655 Upper Paw Paw Road
Marshall 28753*

Family descendants believe this barn was built by their great grandfather Monteville (Mont) Whitson Farmer sometime during the period of the 1920s to the 1930s. It is a classic log crib livestock barn, with four log cribs for animal stalls, separated by hallways running in both directions. A feature that is not classic is the

gambrel roof, used here instead of the more typical gable roof of the period. Introduction of the gambrel roof likely



coincided with the availability of a new roofing material, metal sheet roofing, which began to replace the standard roofing material – split oak wood shingles, after WWI. The barn is also a quasi-bank barn with a high bank behind connected by a log bridge to the road above. The log cribs are set upon large square-hewn wood sills on field stone piers. Two additions were added at different times on the south side, as additional hanging sheds were needed for air-curing burley tobacco.

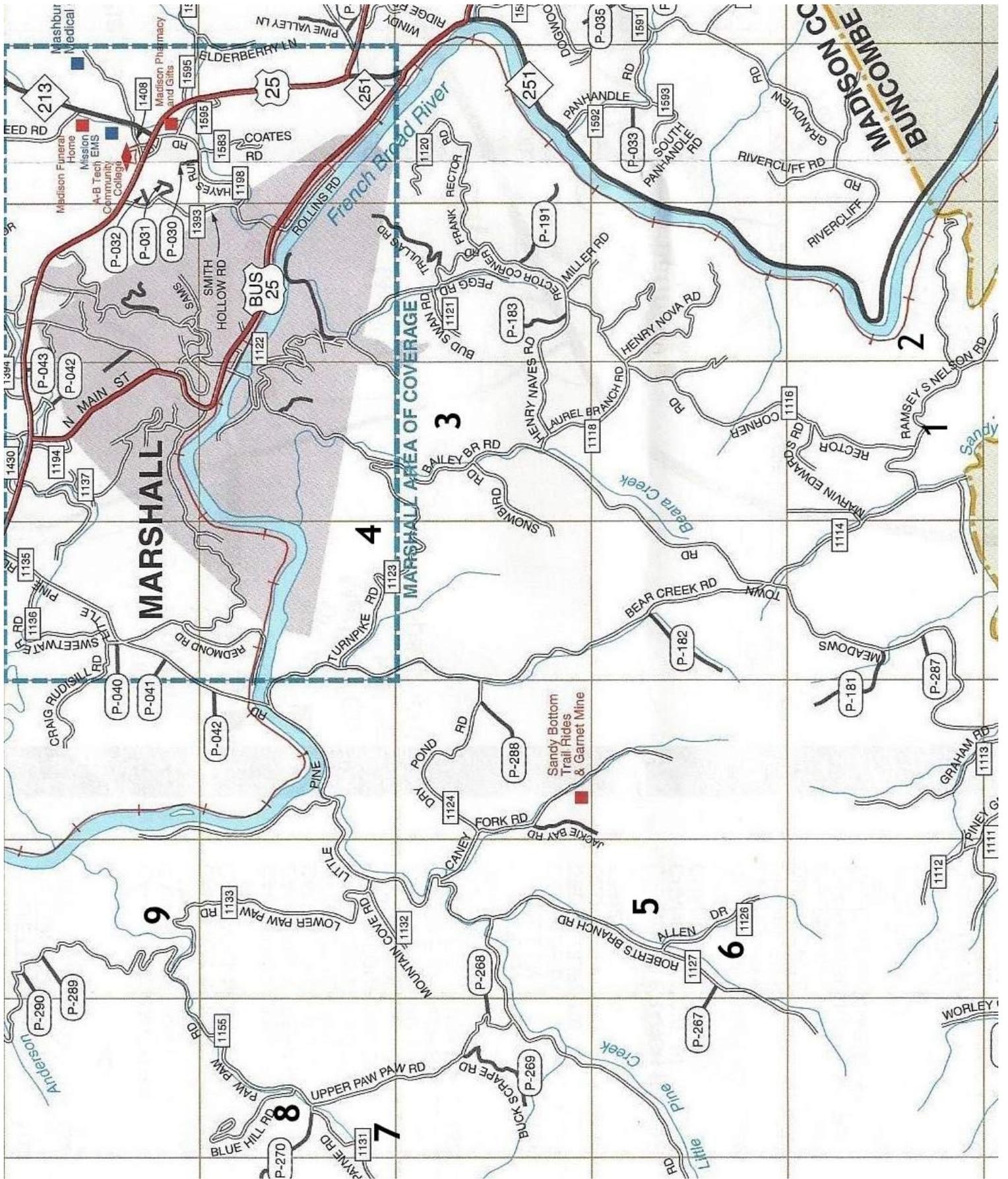
9 **Lee Roy Ramsey Barns Burley Tobacco & Livestock (1920s—1930s)**

*Lower Paw Paw at 23 Katie's Road
Marshall 28753*

The Lee Roy Ramsey barns are good examples of modest, multi-purpose livestock and burley tobacco barns and outbuildings built during the 1920s and 1930s. The roadside barn is a bank barn, with access to the upper-level hay loft directly from the road. The distant barn



across the creek is reportedly built on the site of a Cherokee family log house where Lee Roy's parents, Jim and Sarah, also lived until they built the main house in 1923. It was a grand home of the period with the floors of each room made of a different species of hardwood. Two logs, thought to be from the Cherokee cabin, have been saved and stored in the larger barn. Jim Ramsey was a son of Reverend Garrett Ramsey for whom Ramseytown, Yancey County, was named. A sawmill was located "up the holler" but was burned by Lee Roy because the copperheads there kept biting his hunting dog. A small stable stands down the road, built by son Ralph Ramsey for his mule Bob and Ginger the paint mare who had a habit of eating old Bob's feed.



IMPORTANT!! SAFE DRIVING INSTRUCTIONS:

Before you drive, please remember that this is a DRIVING tour. The barn owners graciously participate but the public is NOT invited to venture onto PRIVATE PROPERTY, including driveways. The scenic roads in the Marshall Township are narrow, winding mountain roads with many blind curves, few shoulders wide enough to drive onto, and ditches hidden by deep grass. While observing the barns, please pull off, stop, or slow down ONLY where you know it is safe. Use your safety flashers to alert other drivers that you are stopped or driving slowly. Thank you, enjoy these wonderful barns, and be safe!

DRIVING DIRECTIONS FOR THE TWO-HOUR ROUND TRIP TOUR

Starting from the traffic light at the Courthouse in downtown Marshall, drive across the French Broad River on Bailey Branch Road for a slow, winding scenic road to the first barn

At 0.4 miles turn left onto Rector Corner Road

Travel 5.7 miles to a left turn onto Ramsey Snelson Road

Continue 0.1 miles to Elmore Snelson BARN #1 on the right. This dairy barn has a silo and is across the road from the house at 161 Ramsey Snelson Road

Continue 0.1 miles and turn left into the dirt driveway before the mailbox for 365 Ramsey Snelson to view Ernest Snelson BARN #2.

Return to Rector Corner Road and continue straight through the intersection

Travel 0.8 miles to a T-intersection and turn Right at the stop sign onto Bear Creek Road

Continue 0.9 miles to a T-intersection and turn Right onto Bailey's Branch road

Continue 1.9 miles and slow down approaching a curve to John F. Payne BARN #3 on right side.

It's a flue -cured barn to the right of a log cabin.

Continue on Bailey's Branch for 0.5 miles and slow down as you watch for a left turn to Turnpike Road

This road is a challenge as it is a narrow one-lane gravel road which turns to a gravel 2-lane road

Travel 1.0 miles to the Alfred Ramsey BARN #4 on the right.

Continue for 0.9 miles to a T-intersection and turn left at the stop sign onto Bear Creek Road

Travel for 0.8 miles and Turn right onto Dry Pond Road

Travel 1.2 miles to a T-intersection and turn right at the stop sign onto Caney Fork Road

Continue 0.3 miles to a T-intersection and turn left at the stop sign onto Little Pine Road

Travel 0.38 miles and watch for Roberts Branch Road and turn left onto that

Travel 1.1 miles. Turn left onto Allen Drive.

Go 0.1 miles to the 1st Allen Roberts BARN #5 on the left

Continue for another 0.1 miles to the 2nd Allen Roberts BARN #6 on the right.

Turn around in the driveway on the right

Go back to Roberts Branch Rd Turn Right to go back to the stop sign. Turn left onto Little Pine Rd

Travel 0.6 miles and turn right onto Upper Paw Paw Road. Travel 1.4 miles and turn left onto Joe Payne Road.

At 0.3 miles the Loye Worley BARN #7 is on the left.

Go past the barn and make a left onto Hawks Nest Trail to turn around

Go back to Upper Paw Paw Road and turn left at the stop sign onto it

Travel 0.2 miles and then pull off to the left and you will be looking back on the left side at Mont Farmer BARN #8.

Continue on the road (becomes gravel at about 0.9 miles) At the fork, bear to the right onto Lower Paw Paw Road

Travel 0.1 miles to Lee Roy Ramsey BARN #9 on the left

Continue for 1.9 miles to a T-intersection and turn left at the stop sign onto Little Pine Road

Travel for 3.0 miles, cross the French Broad River and then continue to reach Hwy 25/70 at a T- Intersection

Turn right at the stop sign to go back to the Marshall bypass.

A special thanks to the kind residents of the Marshall Township for their help in the research information that made this tour possible.