



# ***Mars Hill Township Historic Barn Tour***

***A 1-hour drive around Mars Hill Township, NC***

***A project of the Appalachian Barn Alliance***

## **The Mars Hill Township Barns Story**

The Mars Hill township is large and sprawling and, on first glance, it may appear to be less rural than the more remote and mountainous townships in Madison county. Its proximity to Asheville and larger highways has also given it a more modern feel, and many of its barns appear newer and more actively used. A closer look, however, will reveal some of the oldest and most interesting barns in Madison County. All these historic barns quietly embody the stories of farm families who have lived here over the past two centuries. The detailed histories of the older barns are rarely known however, as there are few family descendants remaining to tell their stories.

Our mountain region did not become formally open to white settlement until 1792, and homesteads of the day included a type of barn that remained unchanged for eighty years: the Appalachian log livestock barn. It had log crib enclosures for animal stalls on the ground level, and a large hay loft on the upper level, also used for threshing grain. The (#1) Jim Phillips barn is a good example. Most Appalachian livestock barns were also “bank barns” with an embankment to access the upper loft level, represented by the (#4) John Wesley Roberts barn and the (#5) William Washington White barn. It was not until 1870 that a new type of barn was introduced to the mountain region: the flue-cured tobacco barn, a specialized log barn built to heat-cure Bright Leaf tobacco. The Mars Hill township has several good examples of this old barn type. Unfortunately, they are not visible from a road and the driving tour.

The introduction of the new burley tobacco variety around 1918 replaced the flue-cured Bright Leaf 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 flue-cured log barns. Burley tobacco was air-cured and required the flue-cured tobacco barns to be adapted to burley tobacco by the removal of the mud chinking to allow for better air flow. Thus, these became the first generation of burley tobacco barns. As the burley tobacco market grew, the livestock barns, with their well-ventilated hay lofts with lattice siding, were retrofitted with horizontal tier poles to allow the hanging and air-curing of the burley tobacco.

As in all mountain townships, barn builders made appropriate use of the abundant chestnut trees, the wood of which was resistant to bugs and rot. The chestnut blight, which made its way into Madison County in the 1920s, eventually killed all the chestnut trees. The log scars left from the blight fungus serve as a way to determine the age of a log barn: if chestnut logs do not have blight scars, the barn was likely built before 1920.

As you drive the roads of the Mars Hill township you will see dozens of these barns, each with its own story, examples of mountain farming traditions spanning two hundred years.

The next major change in barn design began around 1915 when metal roofing became available, and the gambrel barn roof appeared. The (#2) Jeter Robinson main barn is an example of a gambrel roof. Prior to the introduction of metal roofing, the roofs of all farm buildings were covered in split oak shingles, and were very steep to shed water and snow quickly. The upper section of the new gambrel roof has a shallow pitch, requiring the use of metal roofing. Metal roofing also allowed builders to continue building the gable or “A” roof, yet with a lower roof pitch, as in the (#2) Jeter Robinson burley barn, and the (#8) Joseph Bascomb Huff barn.

Another new and distinctive barn type in this township is the monitor roof barn. While found in other areas, the Mars Hill township has many of this type. The (#3) Samuel Moore barn is one of the earliest, from the 1930’s, built exclusively for air-curing burley tobacco barn. The (#7) Woods Ammons barns are good examples of monitor roof barns that became popular after WWII. Like the gambrel roof, the monitor roof barn was an “imported” design and was introduced to improve ventilation for the air-curing process.

As you drive the roads of the Mars Hill township you will see dozens of these barns, each with its own story, examples of mountain farming traditions spanning two hundred years.

**For more information on the barns, go to**  
**<http://appalachianbarns.org>**  
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**National Trust for**  
**Historic Preservation™**

# 1

## **James Phillips Barn Log Crib Livestock Barn (late 1800s)**

*418 Stone Cottage Lane  
Mars Hill 28754*

This log crib livestock barn is a classic nineteenth century Appalachian barn that pre-dates the era of tobacco in the mountains. Its classic features include hewn log animal stalls with lattice siding on the upper hay loft level. Two of the surviving stall doors have



the original hand-made wood hinges. As was common with most early livestock barns, the hay loft was later adapted to air-cure burley tobacco. The farmstead was built by James L. Phillips in the late 1800s; the builder of the house was paid \$1 a day for 180 days, plus a mule. James' son, Samuel Lafayette Phillips, divided the land among his seven children by a lottery. Samuel Phillips' oldest son Dewey, was a self-taught horticulturalist who grafted new grape and apple tree varieties, many still found throughout the community. He named his grape varieties simply as "red, white, and blue" grapes. Dewey was in the Guinness Book of Records in 1972 for the longest gourd ever grown. He grew dipper gourds and magically tied the necks into knots, and also attempted to cure the chestnut trees of the chestnut blight by grafting. One of his grape vines still climbs the log barn's wall, having provided grapes for more than a century.

# 2

## **Jeter Robinson Barns Gambrel Roof Livestock Barn and Early Burley Tobacco Barn (1933-34)**

*7174 NC Highway 213  
Mars Hill 28754*

Jeter Pritchard Robinson was born in 1892 of a large, influential family in the Mars Hill area. He was named after Jeter Conley Pritchard, a well-known late 19<sup>th</sup> century US Senator and judge from Madison County.



This farmstead has good examples of several barns and outbuildings still in use today. The main gambrel roof livestock barn was built in 1933. It is a bank barn that allows trucks and tractors to drive into the loft level. The loft floor was also used for threshing wheat until the 1950s. Like most barns of this period, it was once painted red. A unique feature is the use of wrought iron wagon wheel tires for door hinges.

The burley tobacco barn was built in 1934 in the "Kentucky style". It is a typical pole barn constructed of vertical white pine poles and horizontal tier poles, with framed lumber exterior walls on chestnut sills.

The casing house, also a canning house and granary, was built in the late 1930s, using hand-made pressed concrete block. The box forms are still in the possession of the owner. The produce shed was built in 2004. Robinson was also an early user of barbed wire, then known as "WWI barbed wire".

3

### **Samuel Moore Barn Early Monitor Roof Burley Tobacco Barn (1930s)**

*Approximately 300 Hazel Brook Road*

*Mars Hill 28754*



**ATTENTION: DO NOT ENTER DRIVEWAY**

The Samuel Moore burley tobacco barn is known by family members to be the earliest monitor roof barn in eastern Madison County. It was built exclusively

for air-curing burley tobacco, and was an innovative design for its day.

The barn accommodates seven tier pole levels within its great height, for hanging tobacco, and is

said to hold three acres of tobacco. The rock piers supporting the pole-frame walls were set by the builder according to the signs of Zodiac and moon phase so that they would not heave during freezing weather. As reported by grandson Gordon Moore, "It was his creation, that type of barn (monitor roof), first one in the area of that roof type. His brother helped build it, and asked him when they finished, 'Sam, is that what you had in mind for that barn?' Sam said, 'Well, if it warn't, I'da tore it down and started over.'" The earliest known monitor roof barn in Madison County is in the Big Pine community built by Claude Wild in 1918.



4

### **John Wesley Roberts Barn Log Crib Livestock Barn (Late 1800s) and Carson Roberts Broiler Chicken House (1954)**

*548 Bend of Ivy Road*

*Mars Hill 28754*

This farm represents good examples of many of the out-buildings and barns that were integral to successful farming in Madison County up to the present time. Sur-

viving outbuildings include a log woodshed, corncrib, casing house and granary, broiler chicken house, hog shed, two flue-cured tobacco barns, equipment shed,



and springhouse. The centerpiece is a large, log crib livestock barn typical of the late 1800s. It is a bank barn built into the hillside, allowing access to the second floor loft level. The shed addition was built around 1924 by the owner's grandfather, with help from his mother. Notable other barns not visible from the road are two rare, surviving log flue-cured tobacco barns. The most recent farm building is an exemplary wood-framed and pine-sided "broiler house" built in 1954 for raising broiler chickens, built by John's son, Carson Roberts. This farmstead is in a relatively narrow valley along either side of a small branch, with relatively little tillable land, yet the family has maintained a successful and well-maintained farm for several generations

## 5 William Washington White Barn Log Crib Livestock Barn (1890s)

*Across from 3172 Windswept Ridge Road  
Mars Hill 28754*

The William Washington White log crib livestock barn is another classic Appalachian bank barn, likely built in the late 1800s. It

is a roughly built barn, surprising since White was a prominent landowner and county leader. The family home across the road, however,



is an example of a well-built two-story house of the period, with interesting vernacular carpentry details. The barn also had an attached corn crib, while the canning house and spring house were conveniently located next to the main house. White served in both the Union and the Confederate armies, joining at age sixteen. It was common for mountain men to serve on both sides during the Civil War, in their desperate efforts to stay alive and to support their families. The property also has a traditional “box-framed” house, a rare surviving early 20<sup>th</sup> century house type, up the hollow behind the barn.

## 6 Jacob Carson Tilson Barn Log & Frame Livestock Barn (Late 1800s)

*1541 Silvers Mill Road  
Mars Hill 28754*

This barn consists of a central log section built of large, slightly hewn, round logs. The center section dimensions of 18 feet by 22 feet, and 18 feet high,

indicate that it could have originally been built as a flue-cured tobacco barn, yet there is no evidence of mud chinking be-



tween the logs, or that it was ever used to heat cure tobacco. The shed roof additions on all four sides appear to have been built early in the existence of the central log section. There are no log crib animal stalls, except for the one large crib on the ground level. The second floor has been used as a hay loft, and likely a grain threshing floor, over its lifetime.

The barn and farmstead were built on land received from a grant to Captain Allen White during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. White served as a Union officer during the Civil War, and was part of an influential Marshall family. His daughter Eliza married Dr. Jacob Carson Tilson in 1887, a member of a prominent family from Flag Pond, TN. The large family home sat across the road among the surviving boxwoods, and near the old springhouse.

### **After you leave Barn #7 , take note of the following**

At about 0.7 mile from Hwy 213 as you drive out Gabriel’s Creek Road, you will begin to see a large valley to your left. The rolling fields below are part of an original landholding of 200 acres that was part of an early speculative development in the 1830’s, obtained by Gabriel Keith and John Allen. Much of that original land remains in the Allen family today. Keith and Allen migrated from Philadelphia by way of Roanoke, Virginia, as land speculators, a common business practice of the early development period in the region. An original log house built in 1855 still stands on the property. Descendants of Allen and Keith include Colonel Lawrence Allen and Lieutenant James Keith, commanding Confederate officers in the infamous Shelton Laurel Massacre of 1863. Thomas Allen, whose barn is visible below, also served in the Confederate Army as a Lieutenant.



# 7

## **Woods Ammons Barns** **Burley Tobacco Barns (Mid 1930s)** *1889 Lower Gabriel's Creek Road* *Mars Hill 28754*

These barns are situated at the lower end of the valley of Gabriel's Creek on what was once part of a much larger farm. They were built at the close of WWII when many men were returning from the war and the burley tobacco market was growing. Woods Ammons was one of the largest growers of burley tobacco in eastern Madison County and was known for his use of up-to-date farming practices, including better ventilation by way of the monitor roof and window vent shutters. His two monitor roof barns were well constructed and maintained, using oak boards and timbers throughout. These barns represent the best of the tobacco barns that supported the growing burley industry in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



The first and larger barn was built for both livestock and burley tobacco. It is also a bank barn in which the bank is retained by a poured concrete wall. This wall is also part of a large concrete room which stayed cool and damp, used for "handing" the dried tobacco when it was "in case," or damp and soft enough to bundle onto baskets for carrying to market. This lower level also held animal stalls. Above, the second floor level or loft, was used for storing hay through the winter and air-curing burley tobacco during the late summer and fall. Ammons incorporated many hinged doors or window shutters in the exterior wall to increase air flow, and provide easy access for loading hay and tobacco. The tier poles are an unusual 60 inches apart vertically, the more common separation being 48 to 54 inches. This variation is likely due to Ammons' anticipating and growing taller tobacco plants with improved farming practices.

NEXT COLUMN FOR SECOND BARN DESCRIPTION

## **#7 Description Continued**

The second barn is a standard burley tobacco pole barn, but with a monitor roof for increased ventilation for the air-cured tobacco. As found in the Samuel Moore barn, the monitor roof creates a "chimney effect," naturally drawing air from below and up through the roof ridge vent structure. Adequate air flow was necessary for the proper curing of the tobacco, and to reduce the unwanted growing of mold.

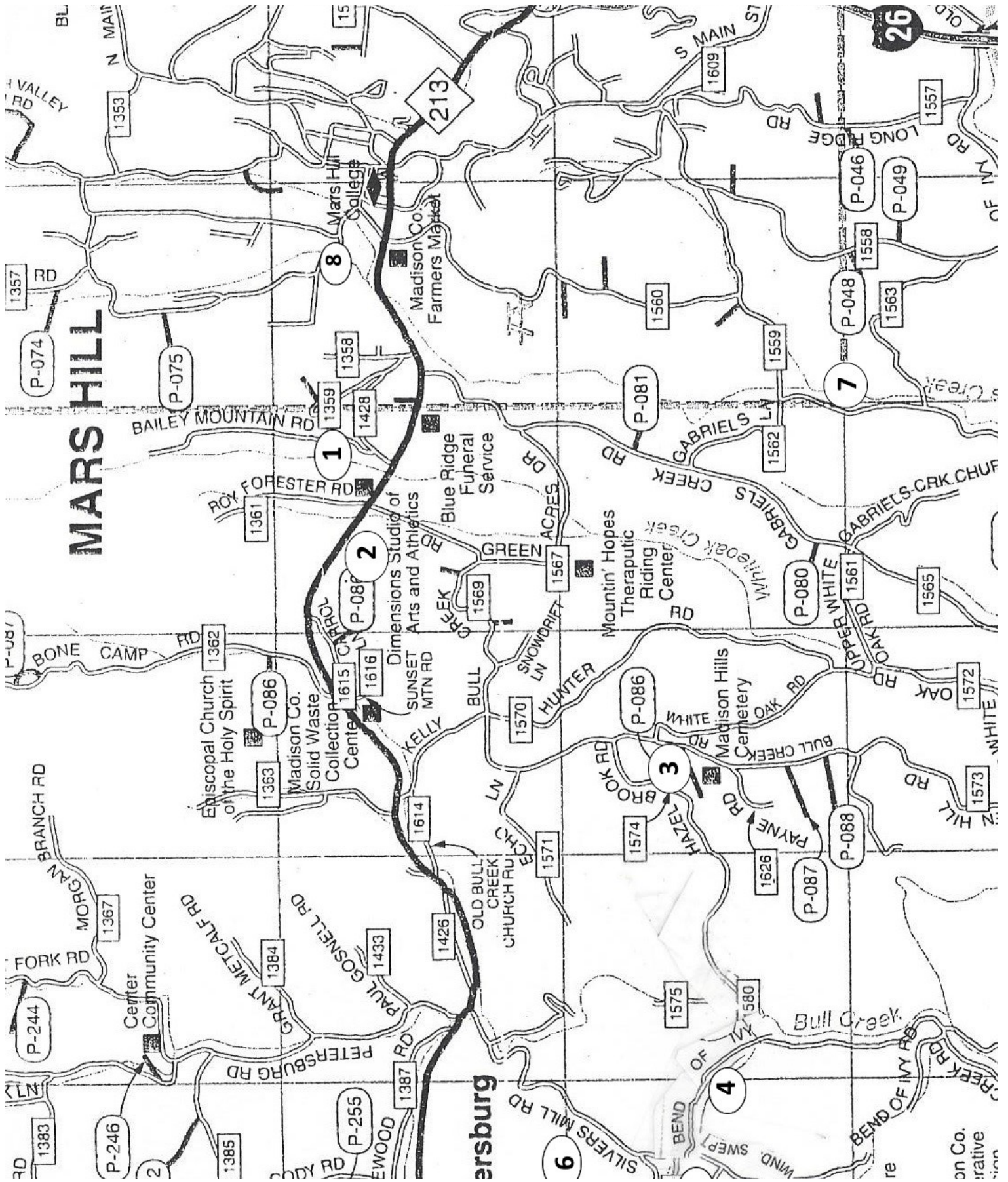
# 8

## **Joseph Bascomb Huff Barn** **Burley Tobacco & Livestock (1930s)** *Across from 136 Hickory Drive* *Mars Hill 28754*

This historic farm is in the rolling hills on the edge of Mars Hill, next to residential areas and the Mars Hill University campus. The farm has been in the ownership of the Carter and Huff family for six generations. Edward Carter donated the four acres on which Mars Hill College was founded in 1856. Ownership originated in a deed from his father Daniel, in 1815, for land totaling over 660 acres. Many Huff family members held leadership roles in the college. Family oral tradition includes a common story about a mountain lion, or panther, once seen in the big oak tree nearby, next to the road up the hill.



Likely built in the 1930s as burley tobacco grew in popularity, this barn reflects the transition from old log barns and livestock barn lofts for air-curing burley tobacco. The sawn 2 x 6 lumber stud framing was carefully planned to accommodate the four-foot spacing of horizontal tier poles. This is also a bank barn with the embankment being held back by a thick concrete wall. This concrete wall provided part of an enclosure for a tobacco casing room, which needed to be kept cool and damp for handling the delicate tobacco leaves after curing. A large addition was built later on the back of the main barn, for hanging burley tobacco.





## **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 Mars Hill 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 ONE-HOUR ROUND TRIP TOUR**

Begin at the Visitor Center (56 S. Main Street) in downtown Mars Hill. Addresses are all Mars Hill  
Travel west on Hwy 213 (toward Marshall) for 1.3 miles to the second Stone Cottage

Road (it's a loop) which is immediately after the Exxon Station on the right

Turn right on Stone Cottage Road and Go 0.2 miles and the Sam Phillips Barn #1 will be on the left

Continue on Stone Cottage Road (looping) back to Hwy 213 (approximately 0.4 miles)

Turn right onto Hwy 213 and Go 0.8 miles and

Pull off the road on the right at the mailboxes for the Joe Robinson Barn #2 on the left

Continue on Hwy 213 for 1.2 miles and Turn left onto Kelly Hunter Road (after the Buckner Oil signs)

Go 0.5 miles to the T-intersection stop sign and

Turn right onto Bull Creek Road (there is no street sign here to identify the road)

Continue on Bull Creek Road for 0.7 miles

Turn right on Hazel Brook Road (just after the Bull Creek Church which has the original  
hewn-log church and just before the abandoned old Rice Country Store)

Travel 0.2 miles to the Sam Moore Barn #3 on the right up the hill (Please don't turn into driveway)

Continue on the road for 1.6 miles to the John Wesley Roberts Barn #4 and outbuildings on the  
left (the road changed names to Bend of Ivy)

Go 0.2 more miles and Turn left onto Windswept Road (no street sign here to identify the road)

Travel 0.1 miles to the William Washington White Barn #5 on the left side of the road.

Turn into Laurel Branch Cemetery Road (just past the house) to turn around. Return to  
the stop sign and turn left (there is no street sign here to identify the road)

Travel 0.2 miles to the stop sign and turn right onto Silvers Mill Road (there is no street  
sign here to identify the road). You will see Laurel Branch Baptist Church on the left

Travel 0.1 miles to the Jacob Carson Tilson Barn #6 on the left. Pull off to the right to view the  
barn. Note: This barn has a quilt square on it.

Continue on Silvers Mill Road for 0.9 miles to return to Hwy 213

Turn right on Hwy 213 toward Mars Hill and Continue 2.9 miles on Hwy 213 and

Turn right onto Gabriel's Creek Road

(Note: at 0.7 miles down Gabriel's Creek Road, the valley to the left is the old Colonel  
Allen property with a few hard-to see barns)

After a total of 1.2 miles, turn left onto Gabriel's Lane

Travel 0.6 miles and then Turn right onto Lower Gabriel's Creek

Drive 0.2 miles and the Woods Ammons Barns #7 will be on the left side. The South

Barn is the one closest to the house. Pull off to the right to view the barns. Back into the driveway on the right side of  
the road across from the barns to make a U-turn to return to Gabriel's Lane.

At the stop sign, turn right and Continue for 1.5 miles to a stop sign and

Turn left (After 1 mile, this will take you back to downtown Mars Hill)

This is the starting point of the tour (the Visitor Center). Travel less than 0.1 miles to the  
next turn by continuing through that traffic light and through the next traffic light

(Make the next left turn onto Bailey Street (just before the Mars Hill Baptist Church).

Drive 0.2 miles to the bottom of the hill just after the Chambers Gym building, turn an  
angled left onto Hickory Drive

After 0.1 miles, go past the small house on the right, and at the low point where you will

see a mowed driveway on the right, pull over to view the Joseph Bascomb Huff Barn #8 on the left side of the road.

Continue on Hickory Drive for 0.2 miles to an abandoned industrial to turn around and then return to  
downtown Mars Hill by backtracking on Hickory Drive to Bailey Street up to Main Street.