



# *Laurel Historic Barn Tour*

*A 2-hour drive around Laurel Township, NC*

*A project of the Appalachian Barn Alliance*

As we drive through the country roads of Madison County, the historic barns of the Laurel communities quietly tell the stories of the lifestyle of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The barns of the late 1800's that have survived are typically those of higher quality construction built by the more successful farm families. Although the "timber frame" barn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is nearly forgotten, barn building then consisted of hand-hewn log structures or "cribs" used as animal stalls, supporting large timber-framed structures above to store hay and, in some barns, to thresh and store grain. Earlier timber-framed structures utilized mortise and tenon joinery locked together with wooden pegs, as metal nails and iron spikes were not the traditional fasteners or were not readily available or affordable. By the post-Civil War period, mortise and tenon joinery was itself becoming rare, with simpler connections made with nails and spikes. Very few timber-framed barns have survived to the present day, with the Eason Allen Tweed barn representing the best example. The Floyd Wallin and Gaither Shelton barns also used some of this traditional framing. These barns are the classic Appalachian barns that housed the livestock, equipment, and any other function needed to support the farm.

Mountain subsistence farming changed dramatically when "bright leaf" or heat-cured tobacco was introduced in 1870 as part of an economic stabilization plan following the Civil War. The first commercial cash crop, flue-cured tobacco required a specialized wood-fire, heated barn built of logs with the spaces between sealed with mud chinking or daubing. This was the first new type of barn to be introduced into the mountains since the colonial settlement period. During the period of 1870 to 1920, Madison County was one of the mountain region's largest producers of flue-cured tobacco. Now rare, none of these barns are visible from the road on this tour.

By the 1920's a new type of tobacco had made its way into the region: an air-cured tobacco called burley. The existing flue-cured barns were adapted by the removal of the mud chinking, allowing better air flow. Eventually livestock barns, with their large hay lofts and open lattice siding, were also adapted for burley tobacco and were retrofitted with horizontal tier poles to allow the hanging of the green tobacco. It was not until the early 1930s that farmers began building a new type of barn exclusively for air-curing burley tobacco, represented by the Jimmie Joe Shelton barn & the Rosco King barn. The majority of barns seen while traveling the roads of the Laurels are this classic burley tobacco barn from the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

REVISED APRIL 2021

Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, virtually all mountain buildings had roofs covered in split-oak wood shingles. By 1910, metal roofing became available and, as farmers could afford it, slowly became the standard. It was this new roofing that allowed the builder to depart from the steep, wood-shingle A-roof, that shed water quickly, to the two-sloped gambrel roof, locally called the hip roof or barn roof. The Delbert Shelton barn is a good example of this new gambrel roof type. Metal roofing, although expensive itself, saved hundreds of labor hours required to fell oak trees, hand split and trim the shingles, and attach them to the roofs, which required thousands of shingles to cover. But keep an eye open for the older steep-roofed barns with log bases. They are the true and rare Appalachian antique barns.

## **1 Thomas Wallin Barn Livestock & Tobacco (circa 1900) 2727 Big Laurel Rd Marshall 28753**

This large livestock and burley tobacco barn, more recently known as the Emery Wallin barn, was likely built around 1900 by Thomas Wallin, a second generation of Wallins living on this farm purchased in 1880. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of transition for livestock barn building, when the tradition of using hewn log-crib stalls on the lower level began to change, to one using all locally sawn lumber throughout. This change would indicate that the community had an active sawmill nearby, and that Thomas Wallin was able to purchase or trade for the lumber used. It is a solidly built barn framed in large timbers with extensive diagonal bracing throughout. The outline of the steep roof of the original livestock barn can be seen in the angled lines on the center end wall. The additions on each side were likely built in the 1930s for air-curing burley tobacco. The addition of the left side was also used for "fire curing" chewing tobacco, when the hanging tobacco was smoked with a smoldering fire built on the dirt floor of the barn, with cherry bark or apples often used to flavor the chewing tobacco. The farm has remained in the Wallin family for 139 years.



For information on the SIDE TRIP about the Shelton Laurel Massacre, see page 3

## 2 Delbert Shelton Barn Livestock Barn (1950s) 9131 NC Hwy 212

In 1950 Delbert Shelton saw a barn in east Tennessee that he admired and recruited his brother Charlie and nephew Winfred to help build one like it. They made many trips back to Tennessee to note the details. This example is the barn that became the iconic 20<sup>th</sup> century American classic with the gambrel roof and red paint. Unlike most barns in Madison County, the loft was never adapted to hang burley tobacco. The hay loft and roof are uncommon local examples of a structure with no interior posts, using free-standing shallow roof trusses allowing for a larger, open loft. The rail-mounted hay fork and pulley system remain, but became obsolete when baled hay replaced loose-stacked hay.



## 3 Rosco King Barn Burley Tobacco (late 1930s) 215 Kings Blvd driveway Marshall 28753

This tobacco barn is from the late 1930's and is one of the earliest barns built exclusively for burley tobacco. It is a classic post and beam burley barn using hewn round logs for sills and round vertical and horizontal poles for the frame, with sawn boards for other framing. Use of lattice at the top of the walls is a hold-over from early livestock barn designs. The roof is an example of one that transitions to a very slight gambrel shape yet has no apparent reason for that shape. This barn is sided with vertical boards in such a manner as to provide long, tall vent doors of one or two boards wide on metal hinges, to be opened as needed for increased air flow for the air curing of the tobacco. This farm sits in the Big Creek valley and was part of the Gaither Shelton farm.



## 4 W. Gaither Shelton Barn Livestock (late 1800s) Past mailbox for 215 Kings Blvd. Marshall 28753

W. Gaither Shelton (1855 – 1927) was a successful farmer and is said to have owned most of the Big Creek valley. He likely built this barn soon after his marriage in 1884. This barn is a good example of one in which the roof was raised to enlarge the loft and add a side shed in the 1960's when the original wood shingles needed replacing. The timber framing is with mortise and tenon joinery, and one stall door survives with its very rare wooden hinge. Unlike most barns of this period, there is no lattice work. The hay fork is still in place, which is uncommon, as are the 19<sup>th</sup> century style hay racks with angled split palings. The Shelton family has been the influential family in the Shelton Laurel valley since the early settlement period.



## 5 Jimmie Joe Shelton Barn Burley Tobacco (1930s) 6282 NC Hwy 212 Marshall 28753

This barn, currently known as the Jimmie Joe barn, was built by Lance Wallin, Lawrence Cutshall and his brother in the 1930s, during the early history of burley tobacco cultivation. While this is not a very old barn, it was one of the first of this new barn type built exclusively for air curing burley tobacco. Previously, burley tobacco was air-cured in the old flue-cured tobacco barns, or in the haylofts of livestock barns. It is a classic post and beam burley barn using hewn round logs for sills and round vertical and horizontal poles for the frame, with sawn boards for other framing. The addition on the west end was built in 1962 by Lawrence and his son Billy, who scratched his initials and the date in the wet mortar of one of the rock foundation piers. Jimmie Joe Shelton was an industrious farmer in the Shelton Laurel valley, where many of this barn type were built during the peak of the burley production era. Shelton was also a pilot and flew from a pasture airstrip across the road from the barn. The same pasture bottomland is the site of the infamous Shelton Laurel massacre committed during the Civil War in 1863.



For more information on the barns of the area, go to  
<http://www.appalachianbarns.org>  
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For information on Madison County, go to  
<http://www.visitmadisoncounty.com/>

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## Eason Allen Tweed Barn Livestock Barn (late 1800s)

4505 NC Hwy 212

Marshall 28753

Eason Allen Tweed is believed to have built this barn in the late 1800's. It is an example of an early livestock barn never adapted for burley tobacco, leaving the loft open for hay only.

It is one of several barns of this unique form in Shelton Laurel, all likely built by the same builder. It is a good example of mortise and tenon joinery with diagonal braces along the exterior wall frame. The log pens are larger than typical at 13'-6"



square. It is a bank barn but has an unusual "half" bank that is not supported by the typical rock retaining wall. The Tweeds were an early settlement family from Ireland. Eason Tweed's father, A.G., was Sheriff of Madison County and reportedly had 5,000 apple trees from which he made brandy for the U.S. Army.

For information on the SIDE "STOP" about the Gahagan Family, see the next column

## The Shelton Laurel Massacre

On a frigid day in late January 1863, a tragedy of the Civil War left its legacy on the farm families of the valley known as Shelton Laurel. Unable to relate to the Confederate causes of slavery and secession, many of these families supported the Union. Yet, the War rationing of salt, critical for curing meat and survival, was controlled through the Confederate county seat of Marshall. Confederate troops had conscripted the Unionist men of Shelton Laurel, taken their horses and food stores, and sometimes assaulted the women. When the farmers were again denied salt during this cold January, a group of them rode into Marshall to demand their share. Tempers flared and buildings were burned or looted, including the home of Colonel Lawrence Allen, the 64<sup>th</sup> Confederate Regiment leader. His young children were there, sick with scarlet fever, and later died. Allen and his second in command, Lt. Col. James Keith, swore justice and rounded up any Shelton Laurel male they could capture. Several prisoners escaped and a frustrated Keith ordered the remaining 13 men and boys to kneel, where they were executed. Three of the boys were 13, 14, and 15 years of age. Their bodies were thrown into a shallow ditch, barely covered and left vulnerable to free-ranging hogs. The aunt of two of those killed, known as Granny Judy, along with her children, loaded the damaged remains on an ox sled and carried them to a Shelton cemetery two miles up the valley, where they now lie in a mass grave on this lonely hilltop.

## Gahagan 1845 Homestead

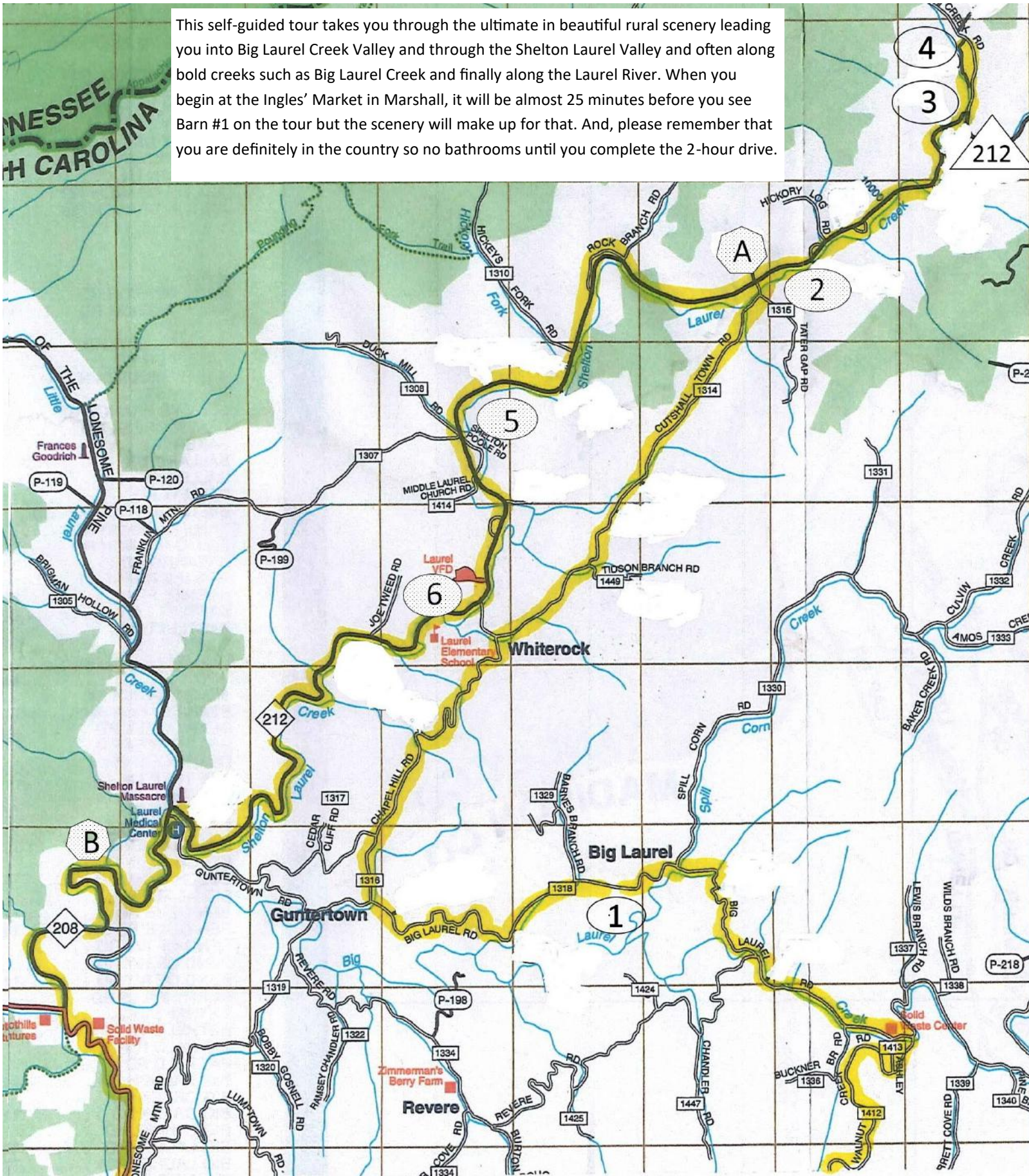
The farm you can see to your right is that of George Robert Washington Gahagan, born in 1802 in Edgefield, SC to Irish immigrant parents. He first lived in this valley sometime after 1815 on Little Laurel Creek. In 1835 Gahagan purchased 4994 acres from the Blount family and began developing his homestead that can be seen today in this large bend of Laurel River. His lands eventually totaled 10,000 acres. He also contracted with the state to build a spur of the Buncombe Turnpike from Walnut to the Tennessee state line, a distance of 15 miles through rugged mountains. Half of the original barn, along with the roof of the 1845 house, can be seen from the road, and was once the largest hewn-log barn in Madison County.

For more information on the barns of this area and on the Appalachian Barn Alliance's projects, please visit

<http://appalachianbarns.org>

*These self-guided tours are a sampling of historic barns in the area. We encourage you to join one of our expert-guided tours offered monthly to explore several barns, inside and out. While these barns showcase the charm of rural farm life, many of these venerable old structures are suffering from time and weather. They are chosen as classic examples of rural architecture in the southern Appalachian Mountains.*

This self-guided tour takes you through the ultimate in beautiful rural scenery leading you into Big Laurel Creek Valley and through the Shelton Laurel Valley and often along bold creeks such as Big Laurel Creek and finally along the Laurel River. When you begin at the Ingles' Market in Marshall, it will be almost 25 minutes before you see Barn #1 on the tour but the scenery will make up for that. And, please remember that you are definitely in the country so no bathrooms until you complete the 2-hour drive.



Before you drive, please remember that this is a DRIVING tour. The barn owners graciously participate but, although you may get out of your car for pictures, please do not go onto PRIVATE PROPERTY. Watch for blind curves when stopping, Take care that the shoulders are wide enough to drive onto and watch for ditches that may be hidden by deep grass. Here are some suggestions to ensure your safety: 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!

## **LAUREL BARN TOUR DRIVING DIRECTIONS — Two-hour drive**

Begin at the Ingles' on Hwy 25/70 bypass in Marshall

Turn right onto 25N/70W towards Hot Springs for 0.4 miles to a traffic light & turn right on Walnut Creek Road

Travel 6.1 miles to the top of the mountain (the first 5 miles are a valley before you begin the ascent. The top is marked by a sign "Leaving Walnut Community) and then drive down 2.5 miles into the Big Laurel Creek Valley and watch for a church on the corner on the left.

Turn left on Big Laurel Road (at the Big Laurel Baptist Church). Reset the odometer

Along the way, you will have the Big Laurel Creek on your left and then on your right.

At 2.8 miles from the turn, BARN #1 the Thomas Wallin barn will be on the left side

Pull off the road just after the mailbox onto the shoulder perpendicular to the driveway at 2727 Big Laurel Creek for easy viewing. Note the old-time church below & to the left of the barn.

Continue for 2.5 miles on Big Laurel Road to a stop sign

Turn right onto Chapel Hill Road. (Chapel Hill Road derived its name from a man named Chapel Tweed)

Continue another 2.6 miles and turn right onto Cutshall Town Road

Stay on Cutshall Town Road for 3.5 miles and then at the stop sign turn right onto NC 212 or continue straight for a side trip (see below)

SIDE TRIP: Shelton Laurel Civil War Massacre Story. Continue straight onto a private road, Allegeny Lane for 0.1 mi past a rock chimney on your left, to a grassy turn-off on the left to pull in & park. At the upper end of the grassy area is a narrow trail (marked with an arrow) to take you thru the woods to the old cemetery on the hill. See SHELTON LAUREL MASSACRE sidebar on page 3 for details. A "B" on the map. Drive back to NC 212 and turn left

After driving for 0.1 miles, BARN #2 the Delbert Shelton barn will be on the right. Pull over safely for better viewing options.

Continue on NC 212 for 1.8 miles and turn left onto Big Creek Road at Carmen Church of God.

Go 0.3 miles to Kings Blvd on the left, but don't drive down this private driveway. At the end of the driveway is BARN #3 the Rosco King barn

Continue another 0.1 miles to BARN #4 the Gaither Shelton barn on the left side

Continue until you find a driveway or road to safely turn around and go back to Hwy 212 and turn left (remember to reset the odometer at the Yield sign)

Turn right on NC 212 (you are going back the way you came) so you will go by the BARN #2 again.

Continue through the Shelton Laurel Valley

At 4.5 miles, pull onto the shoulder to view BARN #5 the Jimmy Joe Shelton barn on the left

Reset the odometer

Continue on NC 212 for 1.6 miles to BARN #6 the Eason Allen Tweed Barn on the right side.

Continue for another 4.1 miles.

Turn left onto NC 208 South. As you drive, the Laurel River is on your right. At 1.4 miles, pull over onto the gravel parking area, stopping safely at the far end. Across the highway, back to your left, you will see a log barn & the roof of an old house. This is the original homeplace of George Robert Washington Gahagan, 1802 to 1870, an Irish immigrant. See GAHAGAN STORY sidebar on page 3 for details. Indicated by an A on the map.

Continue on NC 208 for 1.9 miles and turn right onto NC Hwy 25/70 to the Laurel River Store on the left corner. Stop if you wish for mountain crafts, snacks, coffee, soft drinks. Back toward Marshall is the parking lot for the trailhead to the Laurel River Trail

From here, you could go 5 miles to the town of Hot Springs by turning left from the Laurel River Store parking lot. Or, turn right and immediately turn right onto Hwy 25/70 to return to Marshall Ingles which is 9.8 miles on another beautiful drive through our rural county.