

OPENING OLD DOORS

The Barns of Rockbridge County



July through December 2019

Campbell House, Lexington, Virginia

Headquarters of the Rockbridge Historical Society



HISTORIC LEXINGTON FOUNDATION

2019

THE BARN AT BUFFALO FORGE REMINISCES WITH POGUE RUN

My dear ol' creek! I cannot remember exactly when we met, but I think old William Weaver had me built perhaps 180 years ago. I do know that you have been beside me for all those years. The gentle sound of your flowing waters is so soothing, but after a heavy rain I hear the sound of thunder as you cascade 15 feet into the ol' Buffalo.

I do vaguely remember Mr. Weaver during his lifetime when he owned Mount Pleasant and Buffalo Forge below. But it was the workers on the property that I remember the most. As a horse barn, I knew those who worked in the fields. But I admired most those who worked the iron: Tooler, Sam Williams, Henry Towles, Henry Matthews, Henry Hunt and Garland Thompson.

In 1861, we learned that Virginia was at war. All of a sudden there was a great demand placed on the forge to hammer out horseshoes. So ironically, Tooler, Towles and the others were working to provide horseshoes to an army fighting another army whose aim was to free them. Things changed even more when in 1863 Mr. Weaver died and was buried in the cemetery at nearby Falling Spring. With war's end in 1865, the freedmen ultimately left the plantation and built a log church to the south. I can still remember the sounds of their hymns on Sundays.

But all that has changed. The old home Mount Pleasant looks as lovely as ever. But our friend, the old stone mill along your bank, has lost its roof and is in danger of falling to the ground. My dear creek, I also note that your steep bank is coming ever closer. That gives me concern.

THE OL' BARN AT HICKORY HILL TELLS HIS STORY TO THE BARN SWALLOWS

My dear feathered friends! I am glad you have settled into your nests in my rafters. You grace my old bones, and for that I am grateful. Maybe you would be interested in my story and how I came to be here for you as a sanctuary.

I am rather old, so may at times become confused by the details. But I remember that my construction began sometime after 1824 when Captain Reuben Grigsby had completed his nearby brick home. Perhaps there was another structure here at the time, as there is a stone on one side of me that is inscribed "Wilson 1800."

Life was good under Captain Grigsby. Thanks to him my interior is constructed of massive hand-hewn timber joined by wooden pegs. Before you swallows, I remember that I had cattle and other farm animals as my occupants. I enjoyed their company and especially their many sounds.

In the summer of 1864, word spread from barn to barn that the Union Army under the command of General David Hunter had shelled the Virginia Military Institute and that his army was now on its way toward Lynchburg and might be passing this way. Farms in the Valley of Virginia fed Confederate forces, and, consequently, General Hunter was destroying crops, barns and other farm structures. But he did not come this way.

Mr. Grigsby died in 1863. His son lost the farm after the Civil War, and I have seen many owners come and go since then. One of them, Admiral Benjamin Day, was said to have been at Ford's Theater the night President Lincoln was assassinated. I also remember the McCormick cousins, who purchased the farm right before the Great Depression of 1929. Robert, the owner of the *Chicago Tribune*, was one. His grandmother was a Grigsby, who was born in the big brick house. The other cousin, Chauncey, was president of the Harvester Company, a company which had its origin in Rockbridge not far from here.

Well, I go on for too long. My feathered friends, I still have my wonderful interior. Sometime ago, I lost the cupola-type structures on my roof. Maybe one day a new owner will have them rebuilt. That would make me very happy.

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A catalogue accompanying the exhibition
organized by Historic Lexington Foundation



July – December 2019

at the
Campbell House, Lexington, Virginia

In cooperation with the Rockbridge Historical Society



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Curator

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Contributors to the Catalogue

Robert S. Keefe
Editor

LEXINGTON
2019

OPENING OLD DOORS

The Barns of Rockbridge County

WELCOME to “Opening Old Doors: The Barns of Rockbridge.” Please join Historic Lexington Foundation as we reflect on historic barns, those iconic symbols of our agricultural landscape.

Our barns tell an important story of our region’s development from the 18th through the early 20th centuries. Erected by hand, with simple materials and unselfconscious design, barns were a practical expression of a people, their way of life, and the land on which they lived. The barn was, quite simply, the heart of the family farm — a functional, multipurpose building that sheltered crops, livestock, and tools.

Today barns are an “endangered species,” a victim of changes in technology, economic shifts, and development pressures. And yet, we still find them evocative and worth preserving, for we believe that wise stewardship of our past enriches our future.

SUZANNE BARKSDALE RICE, President

AS FAR BACK AS 700 B.C. the Greek philosopher Hesiod issued this sound advice: “It will not always be summer; build your barns.”

That wisdom of so long ago has perhaps been the foundation for centuries of barn building. Barns have been a centerpiece for the safekeeping of animals, crops, supplies, necessary farming tools, and at times people. Many a worker has found a bed of hay when there was nowhere else to sleep. Over time, however, the value and beauty of barns may have slipped into a “taken for granted” resource. Thus it is the business of those of us who care to bring into awareness the potential of loss of these very important structures. Here in the Shenandoah Valley, our historic barns have been placed on an endangered list, warning us to take action for their safekeeping.

So it is the purpose of this exhibition to bring that awareness to all ages, to all who value these treasures. Their stories are worthy of our hearing and their purpose deserves our caring. It is our hope that “Opening Old Doors” will bring back memories and instill concern.

BEVERLY TUCKER, Curator

IMPORTANT ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY BARNs: A SAMPLE

By J. Daniel Pezzoni

Historic Lexington Foundation

ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY is blessed with a rich legacy of historic agricultural structures. The insurance policies of the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, incorporated in 1794, provide clues to the appearance of the county’s early farm buildings.

Some barns of the first two decades of the nineteenth century were large. Hugh Weir’s Mount Hill Farm had a two-story wooden barn that measured 66 by 20 feet. Joseph Gilmore’s two-story barn at View Mont Farm was comparable in size — 60 by 29 feet — with a stone first story and a wooden upper story. The elongated forms of the Weir barn and others suggest they were constructed with center drive-through threshing floors into which wagons could be driven to offload hay into the mows on the sides and where grain could be threshed to remove the chaff. The fact that some barns were described as two stories with stone lower stories suggests they were bank barns, a type of barn built into a bank so that both the upper and lower levels could be accessed from ground level. The bank barn



Barn, Denmark vicinity (Rockbridge County).

Dan Pezzoni

This article is adapted from *The Architecture of Historic Rockbridge*, by J. D. Pezzoni, published by Historic Lexington Foundation (2015), from which the photographs are also reproduced. Text citations and a bibliography can also be found there. Dan Pezzoni is an architectural historian, preservation consultant and the author of a dozen books.



Courtesy of Lorna A. Smith

The former bank barn at Chapel Hill.

form was ultimately German or Swiss in origin and in fact was referred to as a “swisher barn” on at least one occasion in the county. Some barns had sheds on one or more sides to serve as work areas or to shelter livestock and farm equipment. An 1860 Lexington newspaper advertisement for the Rock Castle Farm touted its

“large Shedd Barn [with] stable room for 9 or 10 horses.”

Two wooden barns, one belonging to John McKee and the other to John McClure, were “covered with straw” when they were recorded for the Mutual Assurance Society: in other words, they had thatched roofs. The thatching seems likely to have been a survival of the common old-world British roofing technique. Around the turn of the twentieth century an anonymous photographer snapped a picture of a barn somewhere in the county with what appears to be a thatched “loafing shed” or cattle shelter extending from its side. The structure, which was supported by log posts, was similar in form to the brush arbors of the era (impermanent brush-roofed structures favored for outdoor preaching), and the thatch appears to have been held in place with poles similar to the weight poles of some forms of board roofing. The McKee and McClure barns are also interesting for their long dimensions,

respectively 60 by 22 feet and 63 by 22 feet. The McKee barn was notable for having an L-shaped form with a wood-shingled wing longer than the thatched wing, and the barn also appears



Dan Pezzoni

A Fairfield vicinity bank barn with a cantilevered forebay.

An unidentified county barn with what may be a thatch-roofed loafing shed.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress and Special Collections, Washington and Lee University Library

in a second declaration dated 1817 in which the wings are portrayed as almost abutting separate buildings.

Among the county’s largest early farm buildings are the barns at Hickory Hill and Buffalo Forge. The Hickory Hill barn is a superb example of heavy timber frame construction. A double row of massive hewn posts extends the length of the interior, each post rising to a complicated mortise-and-tenon joint at the equally massive cross beams. Joints are pinned with stout wooden spikes. In the haymow above, angled struts of sawn, cut-nailed wood spring from the hewn structure to support the roof. The sawn structure may be a nineteenth-century replacement of the original roof members, or it may be that lighter nailed construction was considered adequate to carry roof loads without the need for the heavy hewn framing used below. The barn has a cornerstone with the crudely pecked inscription “Wilson 1800” followed by what may

The lower level of the Hickory Hill barn.



Dan Pezzoni



H. E. Ravenhorst

Horse barn, Buffalo Forge.

be the initials WRS. Although it is possible the barn dates to such an early date, reuse of the cornerstone from another structure, perhaps an earlier barn on the farm, seems more likely, and construction of the Hickory Hill barn contemporaneous with the house (1823–24) seems plausible, although detailed examination of tax records might turn up an increase that could be interpreted as construction of the barn at another time.

The barn at Buffalo Forge is unusual in that it has a brick lower level and a frame upper haymow level that projects to create a wraparound sheltered work area on two sides. These characteristics may relate to the building's apparent use as a horse barn. The projection is supported by an assortment of posts, including one heavy chamfered upright, but the original supports, which are mortise-and-tenoned to the plates that span above them, are round log sections with tapered lower ends. The haymow shares with the Hickory Hill barn angled roof supports but in a different configuration, and whereas many of the long beams of the Hickory Hill barn are continuous members, the long hewn beams of the Buffalo Forge barn are shorter sections joined by pegged scarf joints. The barn's doors are hung on strap hinges with spade-form ends; these and other hardware items were presumably made at the farm's renowned forge.

At the opposite end of the size spectrum are the county's numerous small frame and log barns. Many early settlers favored log construction for farm buildings for the same reasons they built their dwellings from logs: ease and cheapness of construction. Unchinked log construction had the added advantage of providing ample ventilation for hay storage. Log "crib"

barns were well suited for expansion into the form known as the double-crib barn: two log cribs separated by a center drive-through or threshing floor, the whole contained under a single roof.

Mountain View Farm, the Davidson-Hotinger Farm at the foot of Hogback Mountain, has a double-crib barn of v-notched log construction that may date to the ca. 1854 period of the present farmhouse or may be up to a half century older. Some of the logs extend to tie into the structure of surrounding cowsheds, a feature that in combination with the mortise-and-tenon frame construction of the sheds suggests they also date to before the Civil War. The Brownsburg-area Mulberry Grove farm has a v-notched double-crib log barn that may date to the first half of the nineteenth century. It too has surrounding sheds as well as half-lapped and pegged rafters.

Log barns were probably built in the county into the early twentieth century, but for the most part barn construction shifted to light frame construction. Rockbridge County's farm landscape continued to evolve in the twentieth century and the beginning years of the twenty-first. HL

The center drive-through is readily apparent in this view of a barn off Robinson Lane west of Lexington.



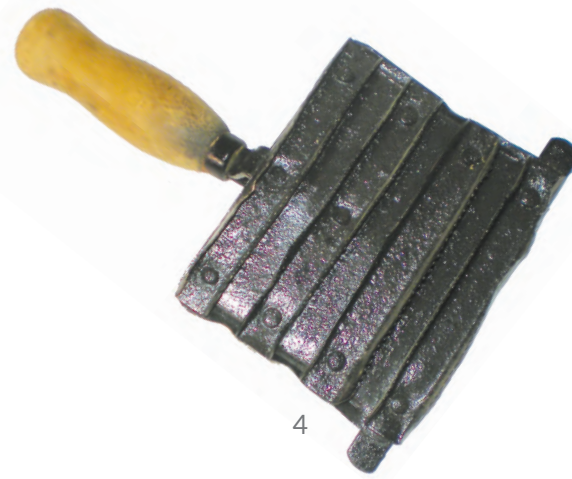
Dan Pezzoni

BARN TOOLS

These implements were used in Rockbridge barns in the years, approximately, 1800 to 1920.



1



4



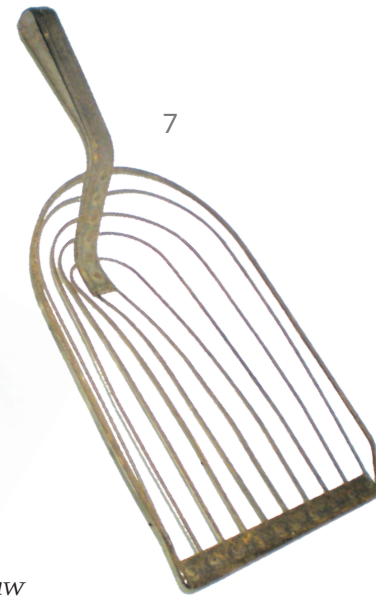
5

2

3



6



7



8

- 1 "Single tree" horse-wagon yoke
- 2 Hay-bale clamp
- 3 Hayloft door

- 4 Pig scraper
- 5 Milk jug
- 6 Firewood buck saw
- 7 Manure scoop
- 8 Broad ax

Anne McClung



Small yoke

Steel animal trap

Scales

Horseshoe

Clippers

Horse mouth bit

Corn dish

Tongs

Corn cutter

Dipper

BARNS OF ROCKBRIDGE

Through Artists' Eyes

Paintings by Beverly Tucker

Inside looking out



"Bed Time"

11 in. x 14 in.

Beverly Tucker, whose paintings appear on pages 10 through 18, is curator of this exhibition and president emeritus of Historic Lexington Foundation. She has a Ph.D. in social psychology and completed postdoctoral training in psychotherapy. She is the author of several books, including *The House on Fuller Street*, a history of Lexington's African American community.



Top: "Center Piece" 16 in. x 20 in.



Below: "Main Hall" 24 in. x 30 in.



Opposite, top: "What's Left" 16 in. x 20 in.

Opposite, below: "Spring Rolls" (Hickory Hill Barn) 16 in. x 20 in.

Above: "Going Up" 11 in. x 14 in.

Outside looking in



Above: "Imagination" 11 in. x 14 in.



Opposite, top: "Sugar Maple Road" 14 in. x 14 in.

Opposite, below: "An Elegant Barn and
Corn Crib" (Hickory Hill) 16 in. x 20 in.





Opposite, top: "Almost Gone" 14 in. x 14 in.

Opposite, below: "Hickory Hill Barn"

30 in. x 40 in.



Right and on the front and back covers:

"Surprise on 81" 30 in. x 40 in.

"The
Moore
Barn"
(U.S. 60
West)

18 in x 24 in.

*Moved,
2018, for
reconstruction
elsewhere in
Rockbridge*



"Possum
Hollow"

18 in. x 24 in.





"Complex
in Red"
11 in. x 14 in.



"Three
Barns"
30 in. x 24 in.
*Actually, two
barns and two
silos; c. 1900;
located south
of Lexington on
Blue Grass Trail
(farm estate
of the William
Harris family)*



"Hanging
On"
16 in. x 20 in.



"Holland's Pig Barn"
25 in. x 25 in.
*Just off U.S. 60, after the I-81
interchange, owned by Keith
Holland. What it once was I
don't know. When I explored,
I found in the front about a
dozen pigs, happy and sociable.*

The paintings on this page and the next are by Bruce Macdonald, a longtime Historic Lexington Foundation board member who has been honored in New York, Chicago and London for his artwork.



"Shaggy Barn"

24 in x 18 in.

Just off Hays Creek Road, north of Brownsburg. I don't know whose barn or farm it is; probably it is a stock barn for a small farm operation.



"Spring"

40 in. x 30 in.

Just south of Brownsburg on the Turnpike Road.



"Distant Barn"

18 in. x 34 in.

South of Brownsburg, off the Brownsburg Turnpike. I'm pretty sure this was a horse farm, as there were horses coming in and out of it while I was there.

SO YOU THOUGHT A BARN WAS JUST A BARN? 😂

By Donald J. Hasfurther

Executive Director, Historic Lexington Foundation

Corn Cribs

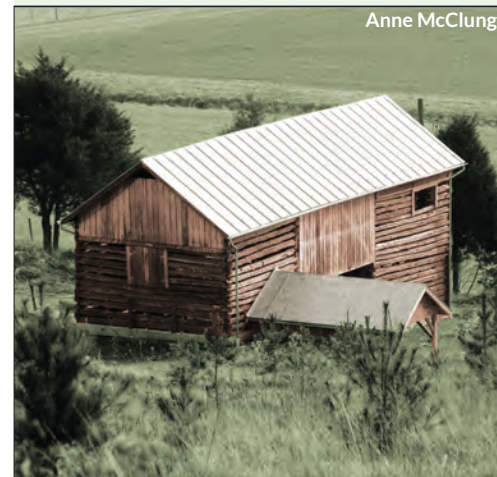
*Early log corn cribs often started in other roles, either as dwellings or small barns. As larger structures were constructed, the smaller ones sometimes were converted to corn cribs. Early settlers to the area that is now Rockbridge depended on corn to feed humans and livestock alike. As noted in Eric Sloane's *An Age of Barns*, the corn crib was thus of major importance, and it developed before the larger barn did. This corn crib is located in southern Rockbridge County off Plank Road. (More on page 24.)*



Anne McClung

Log Crib Barns

As early settlers entered the Valley of Virginia from Pennsylvania or westward over the Blue Ridge, they found a wealth of timber. Early homes, barns, and other outbuildings were constructed with round or hewn logs. Log barns for cattle or hay were usually left unchinked for better ventilation. This log crib barn is on Bethany Road. (More on pages 24–25.)



Anne McClung

Descriptions are approximately in chronological order of development.

Double-Bay Drive-Through Barns



As farming needs grew in the Valley of Virginia, so did barn dimensions, often with the addition of a second bay and a center drive-through all under the same roof. The drive-through was often used as a threshing floor. The barn here is located west of Lexington by Whistle Creek. The earliest section is log and the later section of frame construction. (More on page 26.)

Smokehouses

Smokehouses played an ancillary role to barns as a means to preserve and prolong the shelf life of meats. Early smokehouses, such as those at c. 1821 Cedar Hill and c. 1820 Rose Hill, were generally of log construction built to carry the heavy weight of the meat suspended from their structures. Fancier smokehouses are of brick, a material that added fire resistance and durability. The smokehouse at Herring Hall (c. 1812 Clover Hill) is shown here. (More on page 25.)



Horse Barns

Work horses were an important part of farm life in 19th-century Rockbridge County. Stables were generally situated below, with work areas above. This example at Buffalo Forge is of heavy timber with mortised joinery. The brick used for the foundation and lower level was fired on the property. A frame upper haymow level projects out to create a wrap-around sheltered work area on two sides. (More on pages 26–27.)

Bank Barns

Bank barns were built into a hillside or had an earth-ramped side so that both upper and lower levels are accessible from ground level. Livestock was generally housed on the lower level. The bank barn form was ultimately German or Swiss in origin and referred to as a “Swisher” or “Sweitzer” barn. This barn is above Buffalo Creek on Collierstown Road, not far from Murat. (More on page 27.)



Timber Frame Barns

Timber frame post-and-beam construction allowed for a larger barn to meet expanded farming needs. This barn at Camp Maxwellton in the Rockbridge Baths section of the county was built in the early 20th century. It is noteworthy for its interior space. (More on page 28.)



Dairy Barns

Commercial dairy farming got under way in the county after 1900 with peak production in the 1940s and 1950s. Perhaps as many as 50 dairy farms were in operation in the county during the century. Sunnyside on the western edge of Lexington was a thriving dairy farm during this period. The dairy farm here is still in operation near Fairfield. (More on page 28.)

SOME ROCKBRIDGE BARNs



Dan Pezzoni

Corn crib
Fruit Hill, lower Buffalo Creek



Corn crib
At Whitehall,
near Brownsburg



Log barn
At Whitehall,
near Brownsburg

Photographs by Donald J. Hasfurther except where noted

Log barn
near Whistle Creek,
west of Lexington



Smokehouse
At Cedar Hill,
on Forge Road



Smokehouse
Rose Hill, on
U.S. 11 north of
Buffalo Creek



Double-bay
drive-through
barn

*Hickory Hill,
off Forge Road*



Horse barn

*Stables beneath
carriage house
at Hickory Hill,
off Forge Road*



Double-bay
drive-through
barn

*On Sallings
Mountain
Road*

Bank barn

*Off
Possum
Hollow
Road*



Horse
barn

*On Gilmore
Lane, off
Wesley
Chapel
Road*

Bank barn

*Near
Rockbridge Baths*





Timber frame barn

*On Pogue Lane,
off Forge Road*



Dairy barn

*Milking barn on
Bares Wood Lane,
off East Midland
Trail (U.S. 60)*



Former dairy farm

*On Old Farm Road,
southeast of Lexington*