

A Story of Harvey Newlin's Barns

By David K. Hobson, July 2020*

Harvey Newlin, Quaker, genealogist, carpenter and dairy farmer, was born 19 July 1888, the 6th and middle child of James Nathaniel “Jim” and Martha Elizabeth Guthrie Newlin. His birthplace was a sharecropper cabin on the Lacy Alston former slave plantation in Hickory Mountain Township between Pittsboro and Siler City in Chatham County, NC. Jim Newlin moved his young family back to Alamance County in 1892 and they soon acquired their own farm.



"The barn is a lesson in symmetry." ~ Amy Johnson

Harvey Newlin had what was an ordinary public-school education of his day, attending the crowded classrooms and short terms at Green Hill School near his home and one quarter at New Garden Boarding School (now Guilford College). He was in love with Nannie Guthrie at the time. Boarding School was far away, so he had to choose between love and education. Education lost!

Harvey and Nannie married on 20 April 1910 and they started farming on a tract of land they obtained from his parents.

While they started life together with very limited material resources, they shared cheerfully the hard work and privations necessary for the family livelihood. The limited income from the small farm had to be supplemented. Harvey engaged in several different lines of “other” work--blacksmith shop on a small scale, sawmill, cotton gin, and community telephone system maintenance—maintaining a reputation for reliability and for the quality of his work. When he turned to dairying, he introduced purebred Jersey cows to the area and was among the first in Alamance County to produce Grade A milk.

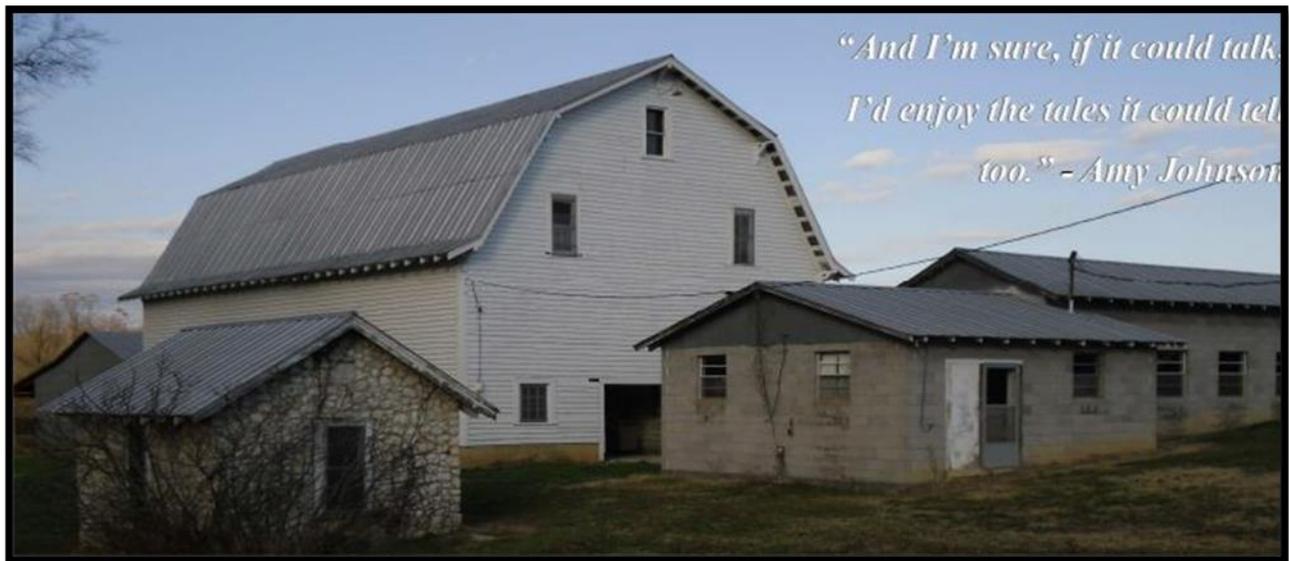
Harvey is probably best remembered for the barns he built in Alamance, Chatham, and adjoining counties. The first barn was built on his own farm in southern Alamance in the late 1920's. It has a gambrel roof and is built on a hillside, so a horse-drawn wagon could



"The tones The angles." ~ Amy Johnson

be driven into the hayloft through a large door in the side of the barn. It is still a beautiful building after standing for more than 80 years. He and a crew of farmer-carpenters built dozens of gambrel-roofed barns, several Gothic-roofed barns, pole barns as well as several dwelling houses. There were 153 barns built by Harvey and his crew before his retirement. Among those helping him were his two sons, Burton and Alfred; Walter Guthrie, Howard Braxton, Jasper Braxton, Webb Bare, Tull Buckner, Thomas Guthrie, John Guthrie, James Guthrie, Joe Bill Lindley, Newlin Shaw, Anderson McBane, and others from the community. Harvey's son, Burton, continued the barn building business until his retirement.

Harvey got into barn building by accident. His father had given him an old log house, which he moved to his farm and used for a barn. Eventually the roof started to cave in and he knew he had to build a new barn. Kerr Scott, then Alamance County Agricultural Extension Agent (and later NC Governor, then US Senator for NC), secured plans for a new barn which happened to be of the gambrel type. Harvey built the barn and moved his animals into the new structure. Two hours later the old barn's roof collapsed! Harvey built a milk house out of flint rocks picked up from his farm fields in 1932.



Harvey's first barn and milk house.

Neighbors saw the huge barn which Newlin had built and started asking if he would build them a barn. So, the Newlin-built barns started going up over the countryside in Chatham, Alamance, Orange, and two other NC counties. According to folks who owned them, no better barn could be built! In the work under Harvey's management the influence of a religious faith was obvious. Honesty and the superior quality of work, at a fair price, were never forgotten by the persons benefitted by it. This reputation was established in every community in which they worked.

Melville Dairy Fieldman, Melvin Hearn dropped by the construction of Calvin Braxton's barn in 1950 by the Newlin crew. This was the 60th Newlin barn. Hearn brought

watermelons for the break time. The problem of a knife to cut the melons was soon solved by Harvey Newlin – “Why, what’s wrong with using my saw,” he said, as he turned the toothed edge up and began cutting!



Left to right in the picture are Melville Fieldman Hearn, and Melville Producers Jasper Braxton, Charlie Richardson, Mark Braxton, Harvey Newlin, Calvin Braxton, John Guthrie, Burton Newlin, William Isham Braxton, Newlin Shaw, and Alfred Newlin. (Alfred Newlin was a charter member of Silk Hope Ruritan Club; Jasper Braxton was a grandfather of current member Mike Braxton and uncle of member Chris Braxton)

Nannie G. Newlin died on 17 March 1967, and on 5 June 1970, Harvey Newlin’s life on earth ended.

*God calls our loved ones, but we lose not wholly
What he hath given:
They live on earth, in thought and deed,
As truly as in His Heaven. (John Greenleaf Whittier)*

**David K. Hobson is a member and past president of Silk Hope Ruritan Club; past Program Book Chairman; and Pastor of the Rocky River Friends Meeting.*

This article is adapted from information provided by Helen Newlin Bowers, granddaughter of Harvey Newlin, daughter of Burton O. Newlin, from newspaper clippings and family accounts. Helen and her husband, Earle Bowers, are regular attenders at Silk Hope events. Barn photos by the author. An earlier version of this article appeared in the 2012 program for the Silk Hope Old Fashioned Farmers Day event. Quotes on the photos are from Amy Johnson's weblink: <http://shewearsmanyhats.com/2010/12/a-newlin-barn/> December 2010. Amy is Russell Johnson's daughter-in-law. Her post features a barn still standing at Russell's Epps Clark Road homeplace just a short way from downtown Silk Hope!

CCHA thanks the author and Silk Hope Ruritan for allowing us to share this article.