



Bark Siding at Grandfather Mountain is a Portal to the Past

It is called the "Linville Style" and the history of squared bark shingle siding is inextricably entwined with the history of Grandfather Mountain.

Donald MacRae of Wilmington, NC was among the first investors in the Linville Improvement Company, founded in 1888 to develop 16,000 acres that stretched from Grandfather Mountain to Sugar Mountain.



At the same time an up-and-coming young architect named Henry Bacon, who grew up across the street from the MacRae family in Wilmington, was off to spend two years studying architecture in Europe on the prestigious Roth Traveling Scholarship. It would be 1895 before the MacRae's would succeed in getting their friend to Linville.

When Bacon arrived in Linville there was much activity centered around the harvesting of the Great American Chestnut tree. One in four trees on Grandfather and its surrounds were Chestnuts. Its tall straight growth habit made excellent lumber while its tannin-rich bark was much in demand at the tanning mill in Old Fort.

Bacon, a believer in the use of site-available materials, was the first to specify that Chestnut bark be squared into rectangular pieces and applied as siding - on a house he was designing for Donald MacRae, Jr. Linville's first bark covered house, Strathshiel, set the style for all Linville buildings that followed until the Chestnut blight reached the High Country in the 1930s.

Linvillites grieved, believing that the demise of the Chestnut tree meant that there would never be another bark-covered building. Then in the early 1990s, Morganton native Marty McCurry discovered that poplar bark could be used to fashion squared off, Linville-style shingles. McCurry founded Highland Craftsmen, Inc. and began experimenting with best practices for how to harvest and cure poplar bark shingles.

"Bark siding on our entrance booths is a great way for the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation to keep in touch with the heritage of this place," said Penn Dameron, Executive Director of the Foundation. "It is a wonderful reminder of the history of the mountain and how important it is for us to protect and preserve its resources."

And to finish the story about that architect, Henry Bacon. He went on to receive a gold medal from the American Institute of Architects for his lifetime of contributions to American architecture, which culminated in his monument to our 16th president, the Lincoln Memorial.

(Image provided by Grandfather Mountain.)

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