

This site is a classic early twentieth century family commercial and living setting where the family lived in the gas station/store and ran the business while operating basic farm activities with chickens, draft horses, garden and some crops. This family business began as an earlier gas station and store, down the hill from the barn, on the original Burnsville Highway built in 1922 as part of the US/NC highway expansion to accommodate the new automobile age. It is a good example of the progression over time of the changes in highway location and its dominance of the landscape, replacing farmland and home sites. The early road (1922) ran primarily following the old horse and wagon road that closely followed the creek (Little Ivy Creek) with many crossings at fords. The second generation road, built circa 1950 was located uphill skirting the hillsides and cutting through other land uses. The last generation of road is the current I-26 built higher up the valley and cutting through entire hillsides.

Thurman Briggs was born Nov 31, 1914, deceased Jan 21st, 1992, and is buried at the Mars Hill town cemetery. Surviving family members believe the barn was built between 1954-56 following the construction of Briggs' new store and gas station, adjacent to the barn. The gas station was built for Briggs by Esso Oil Co. and is a good example of the mid-20th century rural highway gas station and country store. The barn was reportedly built by Briggs' cousin Stanley Marshbanks and his brother-in-law Kyle Jamerson. They also worked on the store construction.

The Briggs family is also representative of a typical extended family living within a common valley, including in this example the Willis', Marshbanks, Andersons, and Briggs, all of which had close associations with Mars Hill College. Thurman Briggs frequently employed one of the nearby African American families, the Briscoes, as tenant farmers and workers. The Briscoes are the primary family associated with the historic Rosenwald School located on the ridge above the Willis and Briggs property.

Thurman Briggs' daughter, Barbara Willard, remembers many stories from her childhood living at the store and barn, including seeing a "panther", or cougar, perched up in the tier poles of the barn after raiding the chicken coop. She also recounts visits by gypsy caravans, the women dressed in traditional gypsy dresses of long billowing skirts with loose blouses into which they would hide shoplifted food from the store.