

Ownership History of the Gudger Barn

Located on the River Highlands OA Property
South Marshall Township
Madison County, NC

The Gudger barn is located in a tract of land currently owned by the River Highlands Owner's Association, itself located along the Madison-Buncombe County line in the South Marshall Township of Madison County (Figure 1). The property, and barn, are located on Highland Creek Road, just west of Bear Creek Road. The barn has been dated to around 1900, though the associated farmhouse, located across the street, is believed to date from the 1880s. During the late 19th Century this area was known as Trail Branch and included a mill, a general store, a blacksmith shop and a post office, all located on historic NC 20 (which followed Bear Creek Road until just south of the county line.) The history of the area was known generally, though this report was prepared to better document the detailed ownership history of the property. The farm house, specifically, may qualify for a National Register Designation with the State Historic Preservation Office.

Public records from both the Madison and Buncombe County deed offices were used, along with genealogical records, to trace the ownership history of the tract on which the barn is currently located. Though the house is currently located on a different tract, as defined by the Madison County Tax Department, the property history mimics that of the barn up until 2011 when the developer for River Highlands sold the house tract as a separate lot. Figure 2 outlines the history of the barn property from 1795 until present.

The history of the barn tract was traced all the way back to 1795 when Mark Mitchell and Thomas Davidson were granted a 50,000-acre tract from the State of North Carolina for "thirty shillings per 100 acres". This large tract located west of the French Broad River, extended from near Hot Springs (then Warm Springs) southward to just past Alexander in Buncombe County (green outline in Figure 3). The tract was retained by Mitchell and Davidson until 1840 when the heirs of Davidson sold their portion to Henry Penland for \$25, who sold it three years later to Joseph J. Gudger. Just a month earlier, in March 1843, Gudger bought Mitchell's share from the Sheriff of Buncombe County after Mitchell failed to pay his taxes and lost the land. Though not part of the lineage of the Gudger barn property, it is interesting to note that 19 years later J.J. Gudger bought another huge tract (magenta outline in Figure 3) complementing the earlier purchase. These two tracts totaled over 75,000 acres, making the Gudger family one of the most important land owners in this area in the mid-19th Century. Other possible acquisitions were not pursued. Be that as it may, Gudger sold most of his

property over the next 28 years (and his heirs followed suit thereafter), undoubtedly making a handsome profit. Gudger had married and had five children (Figure 4) and at the time of his death in 1890, bequeathed a one-quarter undivided interest in a 500-acre tract along Sandy Mush Creek (Figure 5) to his four surviving children (his wife, Sarah, and eldest son, John, having preceded him in death). Since the barn is dated around 1900 it is unknown who exactly built the barn. Around that time both of his sons, James and Hezekiah, were prominent, middle aged politicians. His remaining sons-in-laws or grandsons were either elderly and/or held professional positions (postmaster, minister, lawyer, physician), mostly in Asheville. So the 'Gudger' barn may not have been actually built by or for a Gudger.

Soon after the turn of the Century, starting in 1903, Robert S. Ramsey began purchasing the interests in the Sandy Mush tract from the Gudger heirs, believing to have completed his acquisitions in 1908. It is interesting to note that in many of these early 20th-Century deeds, the property descriptions do include the phrase "being the old J.J. Gudger Sandy Mush farm and mill, and including the Edith Teague place". The significance of 'including the Edith Teague place' is unknown. Teague is the maiden name of Ramsey's mother, Sylvania, though a direct connection between her and 'Edith' could not be located in the records. If the barn was constructed around 1907-1908, it could have been built by Ramsey. Though listed as a sheriff in Marshall in 1900, he was listed as a farmer living in Sandy Mush in the 1910 census.

The barn property remained in the Ramsey family for over 100 years, through four generations (see Figures 2 and 6). The property was owned by John and Kathryn Ditmore, Robert's great grandson and great grand daughter-in-law, until 2005 when they sold the 208-acre tract north of Sandy Mush Creek to Charles and Troylyn Ball, who, in turn, sold the tract to Mid-Atlantic Land Partners in 2007. The River Highlands subdivision was subsequently developed and though the historic home was included in one of the subdivision lots in 2011, the barn itself is currently located on a common lot, turned over to the River Highlands Owner's association in 2016.

Though the history of the Trail Branch area is well known in the local community, the detailed ownership of the historic properties had not been described in detail. And though it appears the historic home, dating to the 1880s was indeed built by J.J. Gudger, the circa-1900 era barn, was most likely built by the Ramsey family who acquired this acreage beginning in 1903.

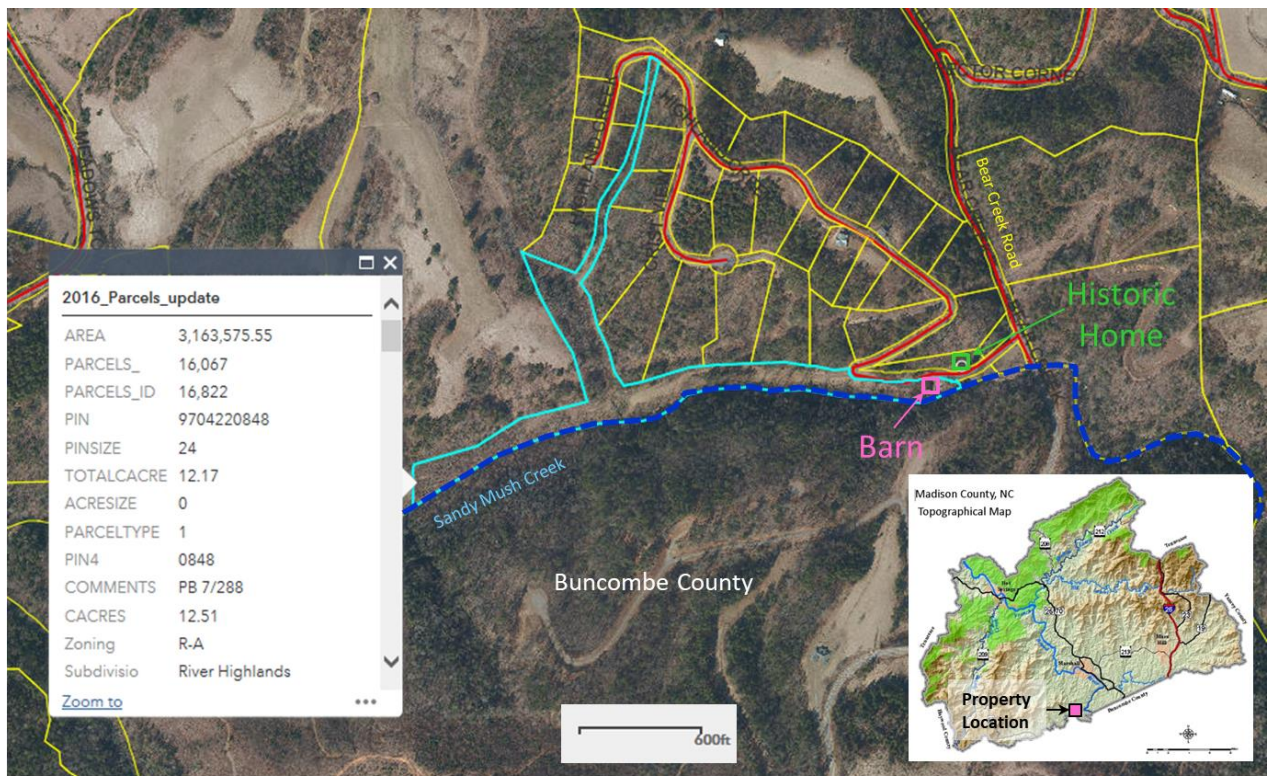
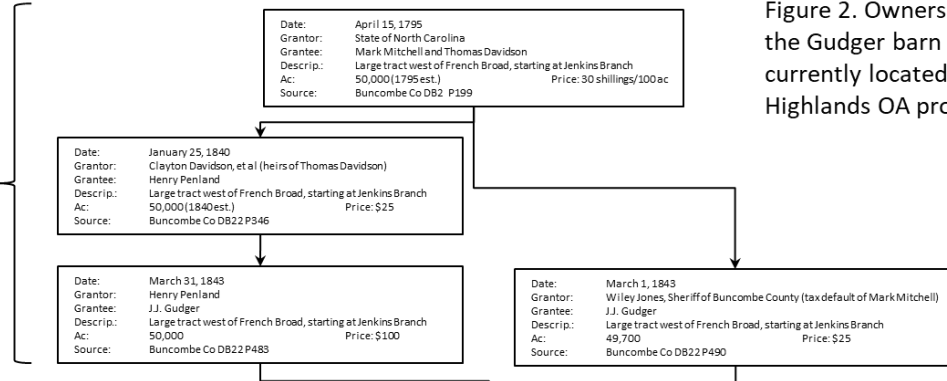


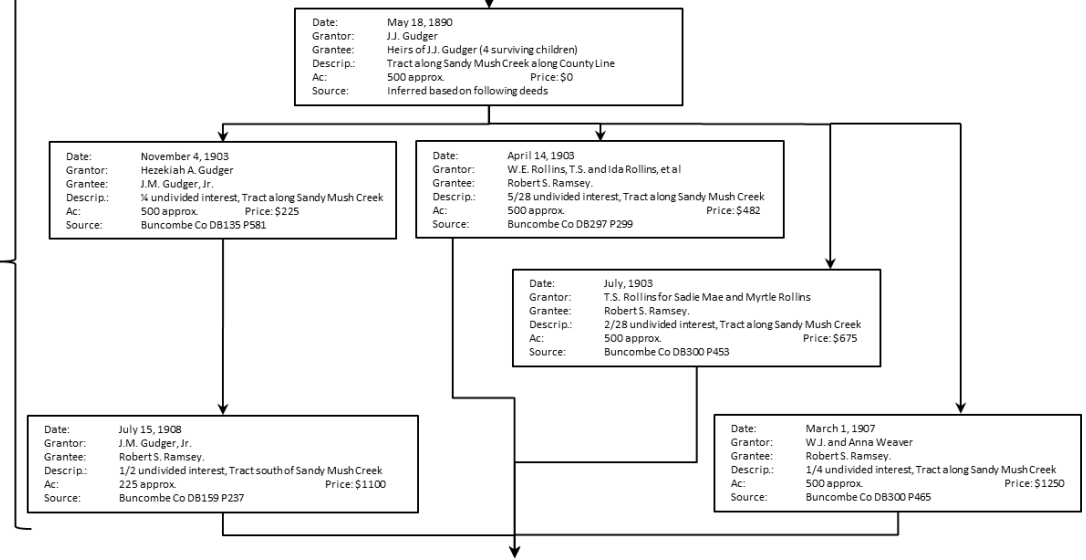
Figure 1. The River Highlands Owner's Association property, as outlined and described by the Madison County Tax Dept. as of 2016 (cyan). The tract lies along the Madison-Buncombe County lines just west of Bear Creek Road in the South Marshall township. The barn-of-interest, the Gudger barn, indicated, is located at the extreme eastern edge of the tract. The historic Gudger home is located across Highland Creek Drive, just northeast of the barn. Sandy Mush Creek, which defines the county line in this area, is indicated by a dark blue dashed line. The location of the property, within Madison County, is shown by the index map to the lower right.

Figure 2. Ownership history of the Gudger barn tract, currently located on the River Highlands OA property.

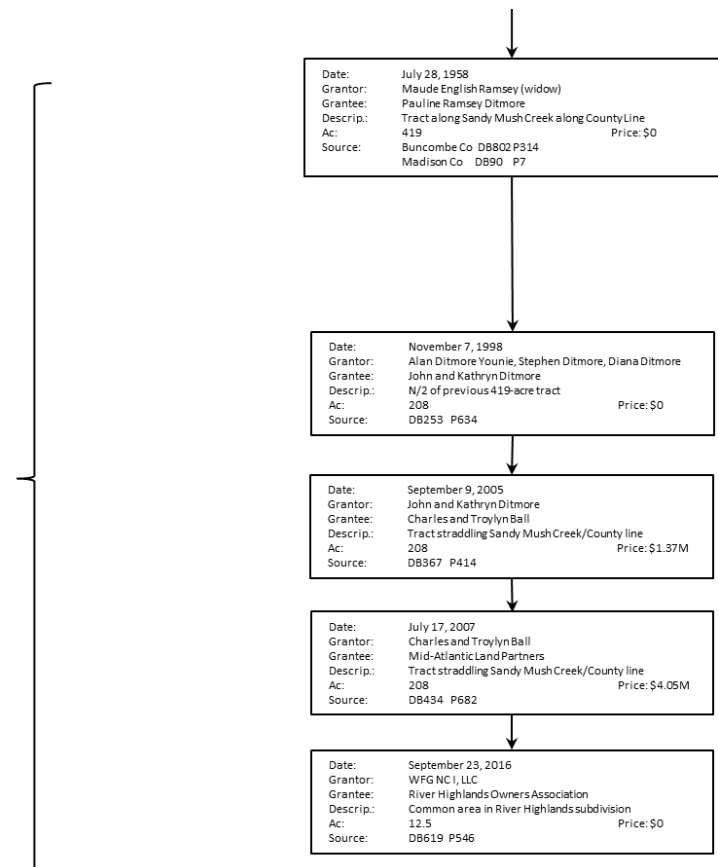
1795 to 1843
Original land grant and subsequent purchase of 50,000 acre tract, in two transactions, by J.J. Gudger



1890 to 1908
Upon his death in 1890, J.J. Gudger leaves a 500-acre tract along Sandy Mush Creek to his 4 surviving children. From 1903 until 1908 R.S. Ramsey purchases the various undivided interests in this tract. Note that all of the deeds accounting for 100% of the interest to Ramsey were not identified.



1958 to present
The 208-acre tract remained in the Ramsey/Ditmore family from 1908 until 2005, when it was purchased by the Ball family and, in turn, by Mid-Atlantic Land Partners in 2007. The tract containing the barn was turned over to the River Highland Owners Association in 2016.



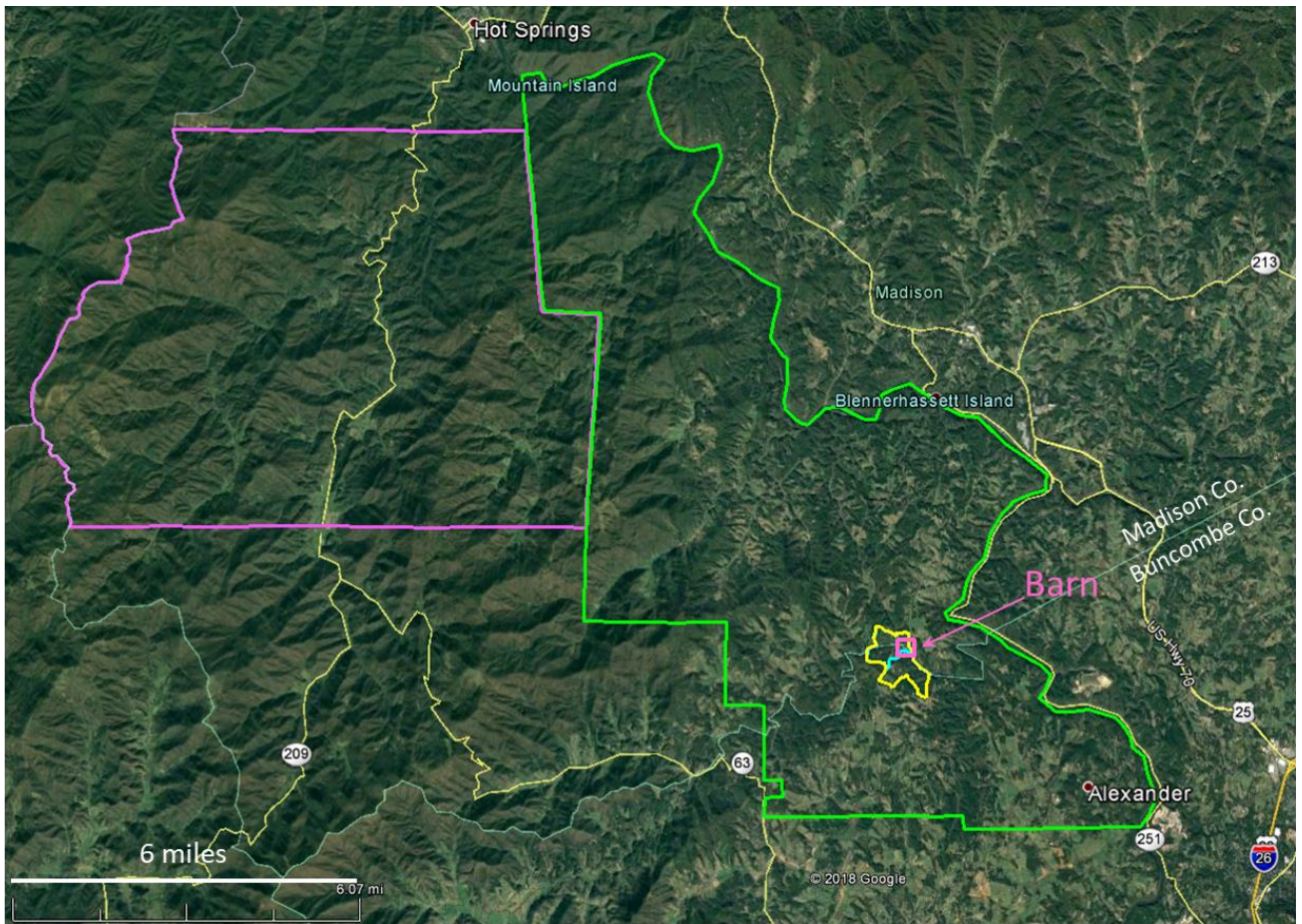


Figure 3. Google Earth image showing two of J.J. Gudger's huge land acquisitions in the middle part of the 19th century. The green outline shows his 1843 purchase of 50,000 acres straddling the Madison/Buncombe County line (all in Buncombe County at the time). The magenta outline is a later (1862) purchase in western Madison County. Both tracts were originally land grants issued around 1795. The location of the Gudger barn, built around 1900, is indicated. The smaller, yellow outline is described in Figure 5.

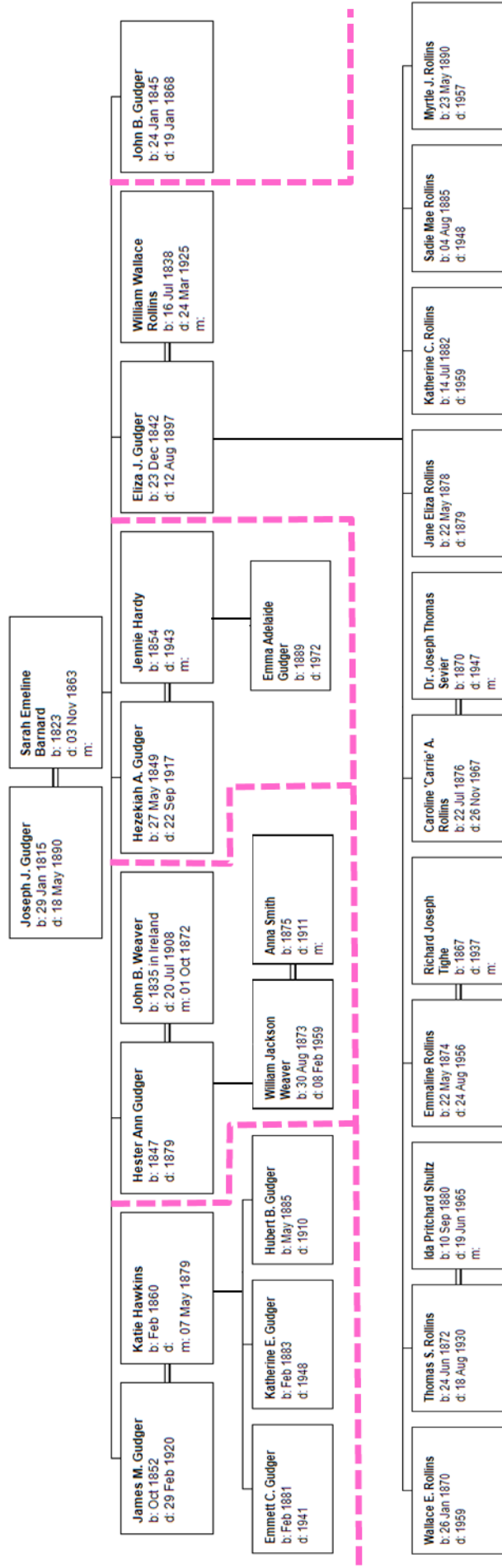


Figure 4. Descendant chart of Joseph J. Gudger, showing the three generations that were important in the ownership history of the Gudger barn property. J.J. Gudger and his wife, Sarah, had five children. Upon his death in 1890, he left the 500-acre tract shown in Figure 5, to his four surviving children (his wife and eldest son, John, preceding him in death). Each child received $\frac{1}{4}$ undivided interest in the property, further subdivided to their respective children. The pink dashed lines separate the families of J.J.'s children. Eliza's children are shown in a separate line, below their cousins, to maintain readability of the chart.

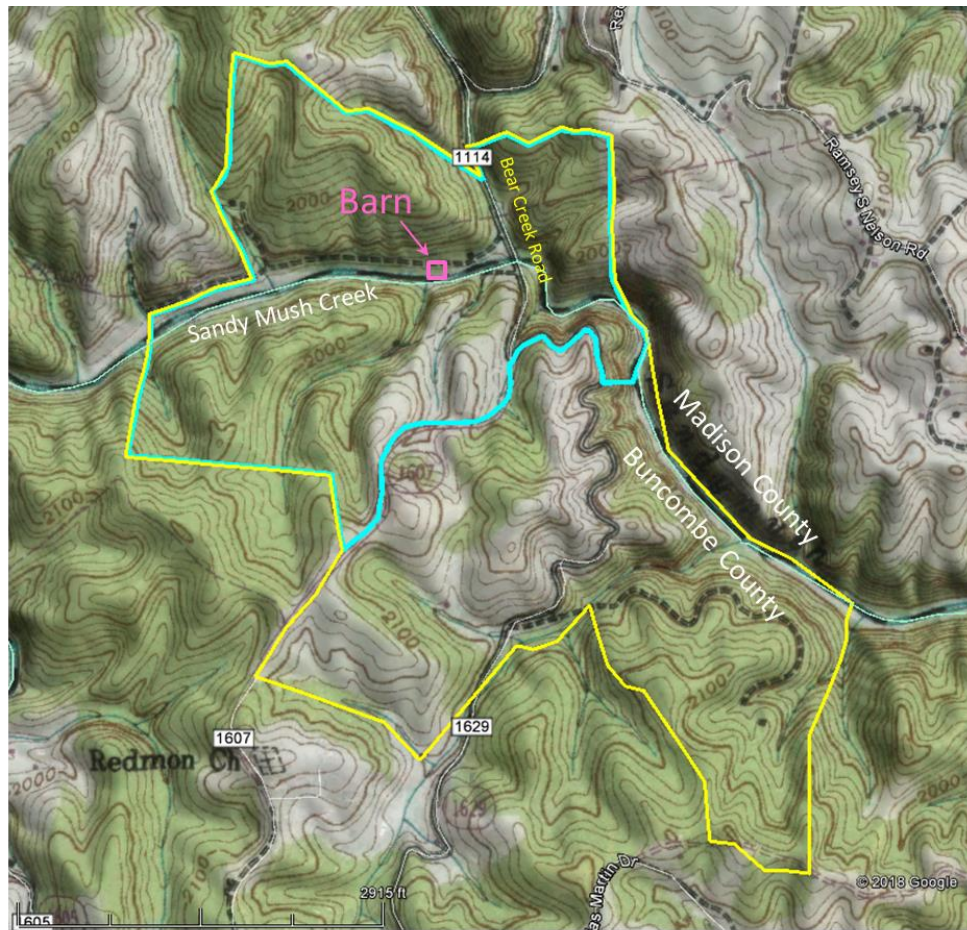


Figure 5. Two of the later property outlines in the ownership history of the Gudger barn. The yellow outline defines the roughly 500-acre tract that J.J. Gudger passed onto his children at the time of his death in 1890. In the early 1900's this tract was sold by the Gudger heirs to R.S. Ramsey and was maintained until 1998 when the northern half, outlined in cyan, was passed on to John and Kathryn Ditmore. John was the great grandson of R.S. Ramsey. That tract, about 208 acres, was eventually sold to Mid-Atlantic Land Partners in 2007, later developing the River Highlands subdivision north of Sandy Mush Creek (see Figure 1).

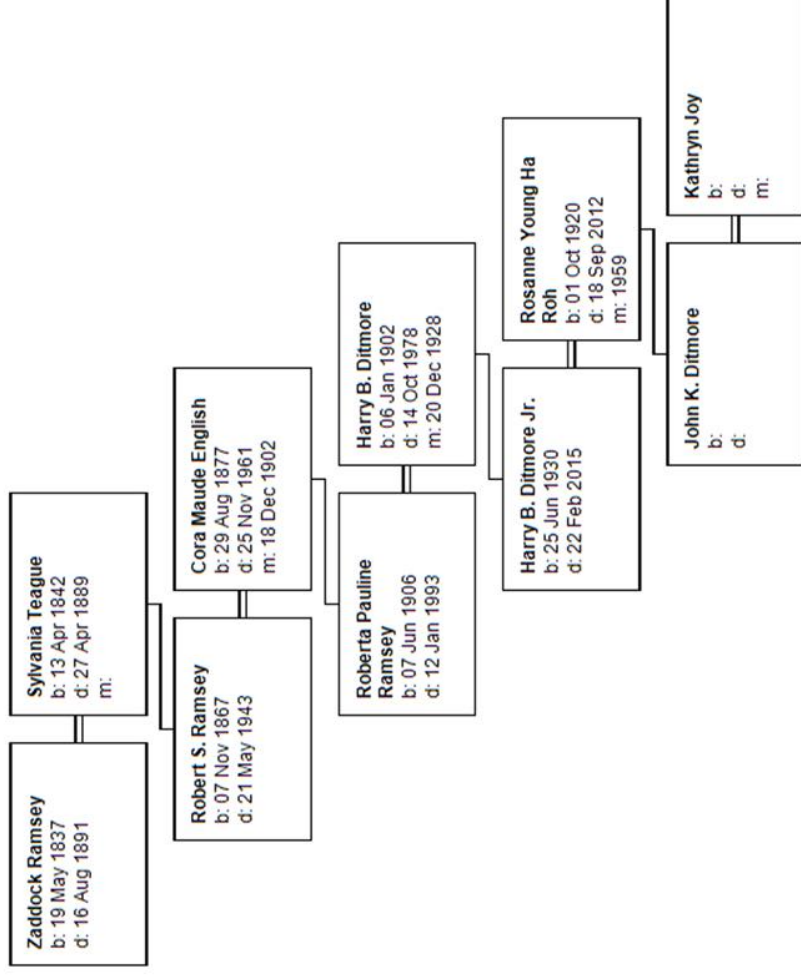


Figure 6. Selected descendant chart of Zaddock Ramsey, showing the relationships that are instrumental in understanding the ownership history of the Gudger barn tract from the turn of the 20th Century until 2005. The property was acquired by Robert Ramsey via several purchases (see Figure 2), though his parents are shown since the property was described in the 1903 deeds as “including the Edith Teague place”. Since Robert’s mother’s maiden name is Teague, it was assumed Edith was a relative, though a quick genealogical search did not reveal an obvious direct relationship.