



STEPPING INTO HENCO'S PAST AT MCNAIR FARM

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Henderson County history buffs, rejoice. Just outside of Loop 7 in Athens, hidden from traffic by native piney woods and a lake, sits a farm with an interesting tidbit of local history.



McNair Farm, a beautiful new wedding and event venue set to open this month, is a difficult place to describe. Sometimes, words simply cannot do a place justice.



That is definitely the case here.

Owned and operated by Donnie Lewis, who purchased the property in 1994, McNair Farm is absolutely beautiful. Picturesque woods, open fields, and a serene lake grace these eight acres just south of town.

But it is a small shack standing near the entrance that has seen its share of rough and tumble history. Roughly fifteen feet

square, this rustic shack has held its share of our county's criminals, drunks, and thieves.

McNair Farm is the home of Henderson County's original jailhouse.



Dubbed a "log caboose" by early newspaper articles, the original Henderson County jail was built in 1873. It stood just off of the downtown square until the new jail (which most of us refer to now as the "old jail") was built.

It was relocated to its current site on what would become McNair Farm in 1923 and was used as a storage barn. Apart from the addition of porches

on each side to help with stabilization, the old jail stands much as it did then, rusty metal bars and all.

The old jail is not the only interesting feature on the McNair Farm by far. Near the lake



stands a tall, majestic oak tree named the “Heart Oak.” Formed during a blizzard long ago, the heart was shaped when a large limb gave away from the weight of the ice and fell. This heart shape left in the tree is now a popular photo destination for love-birds.



Another unique feature found at McNair Farm would be its honeybee hives. Housed in an elaborate, church-like frame, the tiny occupants of “Bee Church” work tirelessly to churn out local honey, which is then sold in the McNair Farm gift shop. Right now some of their honeybees are currently on adventures to California and other states, where they are being cross-pollinated for a wider variety of honey.



While the idea of hosting a party or shin-dig in something called the Dairy Barn might sound strange, it is one of the most beautiful structures in this area. While its name tells you pretty much

everything you need to know about its past, the Dairy Barn covers a whopping 6,000 square feet and includes a full size commercial kitchen, a bar stocked with glassware, an open space with fireplace, several sitting areas, restrooms, and the McNair gift shop.

“Built in nineteen sixty, the dairy barn was used exclusively to milk dairy cows, feed them, and process the milk for sale,” explained Emily McGraw, Venue Director at McNair Farm. “Now, it has been remodeled for the indoor event space, retail area, conference room, dressing rooms, restrooms, storage, and prep rooms.”

Work is underway to expand McNair Farms, including a five-bedroom inn where guests can spend the night. But rest assured, the folks at McNair Farms are all about preserving the beauty of the land and all of its history. We hear they are currently looking into a historical marker or plaque for the old jail.

From their historical buildings and picturesque woods to the rustic churches and barns, McNair Farm is sure to become a local treasure. Just don’t get too rowdy or they may have to utilize that old jail.

