
THESE OLD BARNs

Preserving Adams County's
Agricultural Icons



by KAREN HENDRICKS II PHOTOGRAPHY by BILL DOWLING

Some of Curt Musselman's fondest childhood memories include time spent grading eggs with his grandmother or opening the gate for the sheep on his grandparents' Fairfield farm. Today, he's the seventh generation owner of the 125-acre farm with "a deep appreciation and connection to the land"—especially a picturesque barn built partially with stones cleared from the property in 1830. "The Musselman Barn—this is the reason why I've gotten involved in barn preservation," he says. Ten years after helping to found the Adams County Barn Registry, which designates the Musselman Barn as the first officially registered barn on the list, Musselman remains a driving force behind the historic preservation of barns dotting Adams County's agricultural landscape.

PLANTING *the* SEEDS OF BARN PRESERVATION

"For Adams County, barns are particularly important because they are part of the historic fabric of our community," says Musselman. "Most of them were very well built and contributed to the county's profitable agricultural foundation. Barns also provide a setting for the battlefield; a lot of them were used as hospitals at the time of the battle."

In 2003, the nonprofit organization Historic Gettysburg-Adams County (HGAC), already a leader in local historic preservation efforts, decided to tackle a new, largely ignored area of preservation—the county's estimated 1,500-2,000 barns. A \$5,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission provided seed money to launch the Adams County Barn Registry. Much more than a list of barns, the registry includes a database of information—documenting measurements, construction details and photographs. Every registered barn owner receives a metal plaque bearing the Barn Preservation Project logo and a specific number identifying that barn. Additionally, registered barns are eligible for HGAC Barn Preservation Grants and the annual HGAC Barn Preservation Award.

The registry adds 15 barns annually and has grown to 155 barns, according to Musselman, an HGAC board member and Barn Preservation Project chair. "That might be 10 percent of Adams County's barns," he estimates.

Last fall, HGAC held training workshops for 10 barn surveyors, in hopes of expanding the barn registry's numbers. In many ways, surveyors unravel a new mystery with every barn. "To date a barn, you look at the architecture and the nails for clues, and even then, you will likely date the barn within a 10-20 year window.

Once in a while there will be a stone laid with the exact date,” Musselman explains.

“No matter how many barns you’ve seen, it seems like every barn has something unique you’ve never seen before—that’s what makes it fun,” he explains. “There are variations in door latches, different types of doors, such as Dutch doors, the way the joinery is constructed, framing, posts, beams and the way they’re connected.”

While barns were constructed for agricultural purposes originally—crop storage, the housing of livestock, etc.—many Adams County barns are now iconic landmarks with adaptive uses. Musselman cites Littlestown Veterinary Hospital and the restaurant Hickory Bridge Farm as thriving businesses housed within barns.

HGAC spotlights barns several times a year by hosting unique annual events—barn tours, the Civil War Barn Dance, the BarnArt Show and a calendar sale. The events not only cultivate an appreciation for agricultural history in the public eye, but they also raise funds, which are funneled directly back into barn preservation via HGAC’s grant program.

In 2013, six barn owners applied, and after reviews based on a point system, two were awarded grants. Preference is given to pre-Civil War era barns. John and Dottie Trostle’s 1845-era York Springs barn is one such example. The couple was “happy and appreciative” to receive a \$2,000 grant.

THE BARN at MEADOW HILL: ‘FIX IT or TEAR IT DOWN’

Located off Main Street in York Springs, on a property known as Meadow Hill, the barn “looked like a basket case from the outside, but once you got inside, it was surprisingly solid,” says Musselman. The Trostles contacted him after they received a letter from code enforcement officers requesting they either fix the decaying structure or tear it down.

But the Trostles didn’t consider demolition. “The barn has been a focal point in this town forever and we could not see tearing it down,” says Dottie Trostle. “You wouldn’t believe the number of people who stop by and take pictures of the barn—it happens all the time. Now that we’re repairing it, people stop and thank us for keeping it.”

Although Trostle says the barn has outlived its agricultural purposes, the historic structure reminds her of her roots growing up on a farm outside York

Springs. Her father used to tell stories about how he enjoyed ice skating on the property at Meadow Lake. “Knowing he enjoyed spending time here also makes it worth saving everything,” she explains.

According to the Barn Registry report provided to the Trostles, the barn is an English ground barn, constructed with a fieldstone foundation. Pine Hill Woodwork of Arendtsville is reinforcing the base with concrete and strengthening the walls with new wooden planks.

Her advice to fellow barn owners? “Don’t put it off forever—preservation is the way to go. Contact HGAC and start the process because it’s worth it. Let people know your barn is part of history.”

THE BARN at BEECH SPRINGS FARM: BLUE RIBBON BARN

A “classic” Pennsylvania Barn dating back to 1867, located in Orrtanna’s rolling hills, received HGAC’s 2013 Barn Preservation Award. The barn at Beech Springs Farm was painstakingly restored over the past 10 years by owners Jayne and Bill Shord. When the couple purchased the farm in 2001, the barn was in “decent shape,” except for the floor. “There were hundreds of cherry crates in the barn—they were so heavy that the floor was caving in,” Jayne Shord explains. The crates were remnants from the barn’s history as part of Musselman’s Orchards in the 1940s.

With a laugh, Shord recalls her motivations to preserve the barn were “part insanity.” But she acknowledges great thought went into the preservation process. “The farm was well taken care of—it’s a treasure and we wanted to continue that tradition and preserve it for future generations.”

Renovation efforts ensued by a team of experts: Amish workers rebuilt the barn’s floors and roof. Fitzgerald Heavy Timber Construction of Thurmont, Maryland provided the timber framing. William M. Jacobs Remodeling & Restoration in Gettysburg relocated some of the crossbeams during interior work. Just as early settlers used whatever materials were available, Jacobs utilized a nearby hemlock tree, struck by lightning, for a barn wall.

Once again, the barn is agriculturally useful. Shord uses part of it for her flourishing Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. She also incorporated two trends into her barn’s future:

agritourism and destination weddings—the barn has become a magnet for these uses.

“Figuring out the logistics of using the barn for these purposes took a lot of thought because we didn’t want to destroy the integrity of the barn, plus it also had to be up to code and completely safe,” Shord explains.

The Gettysburg Festival’s 2010 Farm to Table Barn Dinner, attended by former Gov. Edward G. Rendell, was one of the first special events held there. Last year, the barn hosted seven weddings—pretty remarkable, Shord explains, since she has never advertised.

However, the barn at Beech Springs Farm truly shines in all of its refinished glory, Shord says, at one

special event: HGAC’s annual Civil War Barn Dance. The event “gives you the opportunity to envision what it was like to live here in the 1800s,” she explains (the Barn Dance will be on hiatus for 2014).

The Shords offered to host the dance/fundraiser in 2012 and 2013 to “give back” to HGAC. “Preservation is so important,” she says, her gesture encompassing the farm’s gardens, hillside views and a barn worthy of a blue ribbon. “We are so blessed to live here and share this with people.”

Brush up on builds of barns, barn benefits and more fascinating tidbits of history. Look for the links to the barn web-only content at celebrategettysburg.com.



(page 30) The 1830s-era Musselman Barn in Fairfield is shown. (above left) The interior of the barn at Beech Springs Farm in Orrtanna has been lovingly restored by its owners Bill and Jayne Shord. (above right) John Trostle cuts boards for new wooden planks at the site of the Trostle Barn in York Springs.