

Historic Farm and Archaeological Site Saved



Samels Family Heritage Society maintains “living history” farm and barn display in Williamsburg, Mich.

In 1889 Frank and Mary Samels bought 64 acres on Skegemog Point near Traverse City, Mich. from a lumber company that had harvested the timber. Left with the stumps to remove, it took seven years before Frank and his four sons – Amos, Dennis, Ben and Rob – could get around to building the barn.

In 1909, they built a second barn to the north leaving a 12-foot space between the two. The sons were skilled handymen and did significant barn restoration work in the 1930s and 1960s, including connecting the two barns. They continued to farm the land and maintain the barn until the last two retired to a nursing home in 1996.

The Samels family collected Native American artifacts they found on their land. Excavations by archaeologists revealed evidence that a large Woodland village had occupied the peninsula for thousands of years. The brothers placed the farm in trust with The Archaeological Conservancy and received listing from the National Register of Historic Places.

The Samels Family Heritage Society was formed in 2002 by neighbors who wanted to continue the Samels’ dream to keep the farm intact and preserve it for educational purposes.

Along with programs for the community, the Society partners with the Elk Rapids school system to introduce students to the barn, house and gardens, blacksmith and woodworking shops and granary, as well as the site’s archaeological significance.

“The Samels brothers would be very proud to have this Barn of the Year recognition. Their wish was for the farmstead to be preserved intact for educational purposes. The Samels Family Heritage Society is carrying out their mission by providing visitors with a living history experience.”

--Susan Hall, Board Secretary
