



*The Ellison Barn, Ingham County, MI*

*Photos by Jim Mulvany*

## Staying Safe and Staying in the Game

The year 2020 will undoubtedly be remembered as one of great challenge—to our collective health, our economic stability, and our social and community connectivity. As the world struggles to cope with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, we can all do our part to be supportive, creative, and positive as life goes on.

As with many businesses, organizations, and individuals, for the MBPN this spring (and now summer) has in some ways proven to be problematic. Plans for upcoming tours, appearances, workshops, and conferences are being readjusted and assessed. In-per-

son board and committee meetings have been postponed, and we've had to find other ways to channel our passion for "all things barn" into positive energy and planning.

These developments don't necessarily mean that we are abandoning the good fight for the "appreciation, preservation, and rehabilitation of Michigan barns, farmsteads, and rural communities." Quite the contrary. The Network's leadership is dedicated to a renewed focus on our mission, even during a time of social distancing

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# President's Message

## A Second Pandemic and a Second Wave



Tom Irrer

This is the second pandemic that most of our old timber framed barns have witnessed. During the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918, these barns were in their most productive years. They were busy providing food for families and income from the sale of animals and animal products. They also sheltered the horses that worked the farm and that took families to town.

These barns witnessed all sorts of events ranging from the routine work schedule to serious discussions about life and the happy times of their owners enjoying a job well done.

These old barns have many memories and, with our care, can still retain their architectural beauty. They are still appreciated by all who view them and especially by those who enter into them.

If these barns could talk, they would remind us that the rural population was largely spared from the first wave of the 1918 pandemic. It was only when people visited the outside world that some of them brought the flu back to the farm. Consequently, it was that second wave that was most serious for the rural population. This can provide a valuable lesson for us as we deal with the latest pandemic. As we reopen our state, stay safe...and beware of the second wave!

—Tom Irrer

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and statewide restrictions to flatten the curve of infection. Our website, [www.mibarn.net](http://www.mibarn.net), is chock full of useful information on our various initiatives and resources, periodic e-news blasts and our Facebook and Instagram posts are establishing a vibrant online presence for the MBPN, and this issue of the newsletter highlights inspirational efforts to preserve and repurpose historic barns.

During challenging times, we encourage you to continue your support for the MBPN, to network and urge others to become members, and to stay in the proverbial game with us so that we come out of this crisis stronger than ever. Please stay safe, take precautions when interacting with others, and let us know how we can help you in our shared goal of preservation and appreciation. As the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once noted, "Perseverance is a great element of success. If you only knock long enough and loud enough at the gate, you are sure to wake up somebody." Let's keep knocking...while staying safe and in the game!

—Keith Kehlbeck, Communications Chair

[www.mibarn.net](http://www.mibarn.net)



Scan our QR code  
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phone and visit the  
MBPN website!



Have you renewed your membership?  
Would you consider becoming a Cupola/Lifetime  
member? For more information, visit our website at:  
<https://mibarn.net/support/membership/>





Photos by Keith Kehlbeck

Attendees at the 2020 Annual Conference enjoyed the setting (and the technology) at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing.

## 2020 Annual Conference and Member Meeting Feedback Provides Useful Context

Thanks again to all who attended our Annual Conference in February, and we look forward to seeing you when we can once again gather safely. Behind the scenes, and during this travel and gathering downtime, the Program Committee is looking into what form a socially-distanced self-driving barn tour might take. Networking with other groups facing similar issues, we hope to gather ideas to implement in the spring, when we also traditionally hold our Annual Conference at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing. Possible tools might include a smartphone “app,” QR code markers, handouts, and narrated stories told by barn owners or board members. Stay tuned for more information as plans develop!

In the meantime, we would like to share some of the feedback from February’s conference, compiled by Julie Avery from dozens of surveys returned from the nearly 100 attendees of that event.

Individuals identified 43 different reasons to attend, including loyalty to our causes (MBPN, preservation, American heritage), for information, to learn, and for networking.

### Some sample responses included:

- Meeting new people with a shared interest
- Information about what the network is doing
- To make contacts
- Because I love rural America & barns & farms!
- Good information, interesting people
- Showing support for a great cause!
- Networking; learning about how others are repurposing their barns
- Learning and sharing
- To get new ideas
- To meet people & see old friends
- To network with fellow barn owners
- This conference has been the most interesting conference that I have ever attended!

### Responses for “I am a member because...” included:

- Interested in barn preservation
- Barns are important!
- Barn preservation must happen or we lose a valuable era of our history.
- I may become a member because I am very impressed with what you are doing.
- I grew up on a farm and now I work part-time fixing barns
- I love & photograph old barns
- MBPN is such a rewarding group to be a part of
- Barn education & barn preservation is a wonderful cause!
- We moved & had a barn restored. Want to encourage others to do the same.
- We have 3 barns and I learn things to help me care for them.
- We like meeting people that share our passion for barns & historic building techniques

The great majority of the attendees liked the venue and the room where we staged the conference, as well as the buffet lunch that was provided. The range of years of membership was also varied, which bodes well for the future of the organization. New members are the lifeblood of any organization (as are longtime members). We hope to utilize feedback like we received from the conference to boost our ongoing membership campaign. If you know of someone who should be a member, please encourage them to visit our website ([www.MiBarn.net](http://www.MiBarn.net)) to join. Would you consider becoming a Cupola (lifetime) member? Such support is critical as we plan for the future with our perpetual endowment. Thanks again to all who provided feedback, and we look forward to seeing you at future MBPN events.

—Vera Wiltse, Program Chair



# A Tale of Two Poor Farms: The 'Barn with 'Dandelions' and Saving Leelanau's Poor Farm Barn

You may have noted the cover page barn picture in our spring newsletter (issue #89), reprised here, that showed a spring-like setting, complete with dandelions and a handsome barn.

It is indeed the "Poor Farm" Barn featured in the Spring Tour of Barns through West Michigan in May 2016. More formally known during its long history as the Eastmanville Farm, it is now owned by the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Department. Its address is Coopersville since Eastmanville does not have its own post office. Before being decommissioned and converted into a 229-acre county park, the farmstead was a home for those who had nowhere else to go.

The day following the tour, the barn was among those recognized as Barn of the Year at MBPN's annual conference held at the Coopersville Farm Museum.

Long before the modern welfare system, Michigan's original constitution required each county to set up facilities to provide for its less fortunate residents. These farms became places where otherwise able-bodied people lived free of charge and helped raise crops and livestock. Such was the life on the Eastmanville Farm.

I vividly recall while growing up in a similar rural community, my grandparents and parents warning us that if things got any worse, we'd end up having to go to the "poor farm."

Another Poor Farm also has MBPN connections. Here are a few excerpts from a recent article in *The Ticker: Leelanau News and Events*, by Emily Tyra, entitled, "The (Almost Lost) Legacy of Leelanau County Poor Farm."

***Leelanau County's Poor Farm Barn just received approval from the Michigan History Center to receive an official Michigan Historic Marker, becoming the 44th recognized site in Leelanau County. But the landmark white barn — and its history of helping the county care for its neediest residents — was close to being lost forever. The barn was to be demolished, explains Laurel Jeris, when she along with fellow county residents Steve Stier and Barbara Siepker set out to save the structure. In November 2018, the Leelanau County board of commissioners sent out an RFP to contractors for an estimate of cost to demolish the Poor Farm Barn.***



Photo by Julie Avery

The Leelanau Poor Farm barn with summer sunflowers



Photo by Tammis Donaldson

The Eastmanville Poor Farm barn in all of its spring glory

***"I could not look away," says (MBPN's own) Stier. As a barn champion, "I knew that the barn was not in as poor structural condition as commonly believed and could be saved. I made my beliefs known publicly, and was immediately joined by Barbara and Laurel. We quickly established the Leelanau County Historic Preservation Society (LCHPS) as a nonprofit and negotiated a 6-month moratorium with the board of commissioners to develop a proposal to save the barn and rehabilitate it."***

***"If the barn had been demolished, it would be gone forever, along with the tangible evidence of a social welfare program in Leelanau County that started in 1901 and continued for 60 years."***

The LCHPS now has a 25-year lease for the barn from the county and has taken on the stewardship task of rehabilitation. Steve Stier says the crucial repairs so far included a new east basement wall, electrical power, windows repaired, and new door track and rollers installed. Next, crews will reinforce the floor load capacity to allow for future public use, then landscape and paint. Laurel Jeris says the LCHPS hopes to provide exhibits that interpret the barn and the history of the Poor Farm and to host lectures, concerts, plays, and gatherings to benefit the residents of Leelanau County.

While a public dedication ceremony to unveil the Michigan Historic Marker scheduled for June 27th was cancelled, we all look forward to a celebration when public gatherings are safe again.

—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Chair and Keith Kehlbeck, Communications Chair





Summer of 2017



Winter of 2016-2017



All photos by Jim Bowes and Jeanette Routhier  
Second day of cabin raising

## Duplicating the Walt Whitman Barn

In our last newsletter, we covered a presentation from the most recent MBPN Annual Conference, involving the restoration of a family barn by Colin Herren ("Saving Our Family Barn"). Another fascinating presentation at the conference was by Jeanette Routhier and Jim Bowes, who took on an ambitious project that provides some valuable lessons on how to create a unique living structure...literally from the ground up.

As Jim notes, sometimes big projects have small beginnings. "In 1913 Grandpa Bowes paid \$250 for 20 acres of cut-over, stump land. We still wonder why." During the Great Depression, the elder Bowes got behind on taxes like so many others during that difficult time. But after two years, he managed to pay the back taxes and keep the land in the family rather than let the land revert to the state.

Jim inherited the property in 2014 and started wondering what to do with it. He decided that he needed to do something important there to build something more than just a tarpaper hunting shack, something that would be worthy of his grandfather's dream, whatever that had been. That same year, Jim came to the MBPN annual conference with Jeanette for the first time. "The barn tour that year put a big idea in his head," says Jeanette. "He was taken with the notion of doing what others have successfully done—adopt a barn in need of a new home. And we found a lovely spot where we started clearing the land."

At the annual conference, Jim saw the MBPN's Teamwork & Timbers scale barn model, asked a lot of questions, and started thinking. What if he built a new timber frame structure on the existing basement? "We hadn't found another barn to adopt, so why not?" he says.

Jeanette had constructed a model of the Walt Whitman barn for a university project, and she showed it to Jim. He liked it, but it didn't fit the basement on the property. "He said, no sweat. Let's build one that fits," says Jeanette. And he started making drawings.

"So we now had drawings of our dream cabin in the woods. The next problem was really pretty major," says Jeanette. "Neither one of us knew what we were doing. We weren't timber framers. We knew nothing about it. We didn't know how to build this. The dream was beginning to look like a nightmare. So we stepped back, covered the basement for the winter and started educating ourselves and looking for expertise."

They were put in touch with Tillers International, and this was perfect because Tillers needed a project for their fall timber framing class and Jim and Jeanette needed a cabin. They met with the director of Tillers and came to an agreement. "Our project would be their fall timber framing class," says Jim. From their drawings they made a materials list. Then the timbers were ordered (with extras) and delivered to Tillers. All of the timbers are white pine.

During the class they learned how to use traditional timber framing equipment. During the first week of October Jim and Jeanette received four deliveries of timbers to the cabin site.

"Watching the raising of the walls was quite the sight to see, and for the first time we saw something that actually looked real. It was thrilling to see the drawing become a reality," says Jeanette. "We invited everyone who had been involved in the construction of the cabin. We invited our family, our friends and our neighbors. As they stood watching, a friend turned to Jeanette and said, 'Can I ask you a question?' 'Sure, what is it?' said Jeanette, 'I thought you were building a cabin,' said the friend. 'And I said, 'We are.' The friend put her fists on her hips and said, 'Well, it looks like a barn to me.'"

Once the first wall section was up, the rest went very quickly. In the coming days, posts and beams went up. Members of a local nature center in Midland helped cut and assemble the rafters. A 70-ton Terex crane lifted the rafters into place. Studs were installed between the posts, and a house wrap was put on. Doors, windows, and interior walls were installed and closed-cell foam insulation blown in. With those tasks completed, they applied a plastic cover over the winter in anticipation of final work.

One somewhat unique aspect of the cabin: there is no electricity or plumbing in the building. "We found the state of Michigan has a code that is for residents specifically designed for this kind of structure. We cannot have plumbing and we cannot have electricity, because we built according to this code. So it is definitely a primitive structure." The cabin isn't finished yet today, but the porch is on, and the (two) chimneys are up.

Any advice for other ambitious cabin builders? Only somewhat tongue in cheek, Jeanette says, "I would say considering everything that we've been through, don't do it. But if you should want to, our advice is to prepare, prepare, prepare, plan, plan, plan, learn, learn, learn. The next thing, educate yourself of course, and hire the experts. Don't believe you are the only one who can do it. The other thing is don't do it on the cheap. If you try to do it on the cheap, you'll get cheap." Jim adds, "Be flexible. Things are going to happen. Things are going to change. The sale of that barn is going to fall through. You're not going to be able to get all the timbers that you need. The windows don't fit. Oops. Oh no. Why did we do that? What happened here? That's going to happen."

As Jeanette notes, "The other thing is be there. We showed up about three hours late when they excavated for the basement and started putting up the block walls and we realized they had measured incorrectly. If we had been there earlier, we wouldn't have had such a short basement now. Things like that. And the last thing I want to say is, accept the 'oops factor.' And once we learned to accept that, then we were able to step back and make corrections."

Thanks to Jeanette and Jim for this informative presentation!

—Keith Kehlbeck, MBPN Newsletter Editor



# Great Michigan Barns—Upper Peninsula Style

As you know, each year we recognize exceptional barns through our Barn of the Year program. While not every barn that is submitted receives the award, all nominations are worthy of recognition for their unique characteristics and history. Here are two such barns from the 2020 nominations.

If one were to attempt to visit the two barns featured here, it'd prove to be an all-day venture. Though they are both situated in our Upper Peninsula, they reside 575 miles apart, at least a 5-hour drive across the expanse of the endless east-west M28 two-lane highway.

Though distant and very different in appearance, structure and history, they both represent the rich agricultural heritage that we so revere. Both have great stories of the people who built them, the people who toiled their lifetimes in them, and the people who have saved them for us and for our future generations.

Both of these barns are in small towns whose names most have never heard, but for the people who settled the wilderness, created the communities and farmed the land, these homesteads meant everything to them and their families who followed.



*The Messner Barn*

## Messner Barn

The Messner Barn is located in the far western UP in the small town of Chassell—about 9 miles south of the better-known Houghton and Hancock, entrance to the Keweenaw Peninsula—Copper Country. Uniquely built of Jacobville sandstone, the Messner Barn is a Copper Country landmark. It is located on a portage canal that leads to Lake Superior just a mile away. The barn, lovingly preserved, has never needed a significant restoration. Who built it and when is unknown, but it has been in the Messner family for over 120 years. Mike Messner and his children are the 4th and 5th generation of the family to reside on the homestead. Now, a 3-story historic barn, it initially had a 4th floor ball-

room that burned off. Suspicion is that a burning ember from a passing steamboat caused the conflagration. This beautiful barn is featured in the 2020 MBPN calendar as “Miss November”.



*The Hanna Barn*

*Photos provided by Keith Anderson*

## Hanna Barn

The Hanna Barn, on the far eastern point of the peninsula, is named for the first settler in 1878 who hacked a homestead from the wilderness—Richard Hanna who drove a team of oxen south from Pickford—ten miles to the north. The small town of Stalwart got its name after the citizens' first choice was rejected—Garfield (The ill-fated James Garfield was US President at the time, but there was already a Garfield, Michigan). So, the citizens chose “Stalwart” since it described their favorite Republican president's character. Garfield occupied the presidency only 6 months before he was assassinated. Stalwart is not large enough to have its own zip code.

The Hanna Barn was built in 1900. It is a 40 x 60 foot typical 3 bay style of the day. Constructed of timber framing from the wood in the area, all hand-hewn beams with mortise and tenon joints secured with hand-carved wood dowel pegs. It has a simple gable roof and plank siding. The original cedar shake shingles were replaced with the more-conventional steel in recent years. Dianne Schmitgal and her siblings are now the 5th generation owners of this very historic structure. Dianne has written for the local newspaper for many years and published her recollections of her growing up years and of the barn's being an integral part of her life's experiences.

Great Barns and Great Barn Stories. How rich we are in proud barns that survive and thrive. Every barn has a story and should be told. These are but two. Watch this spot for more!

—Keith Anderson, MBPN Award Chair

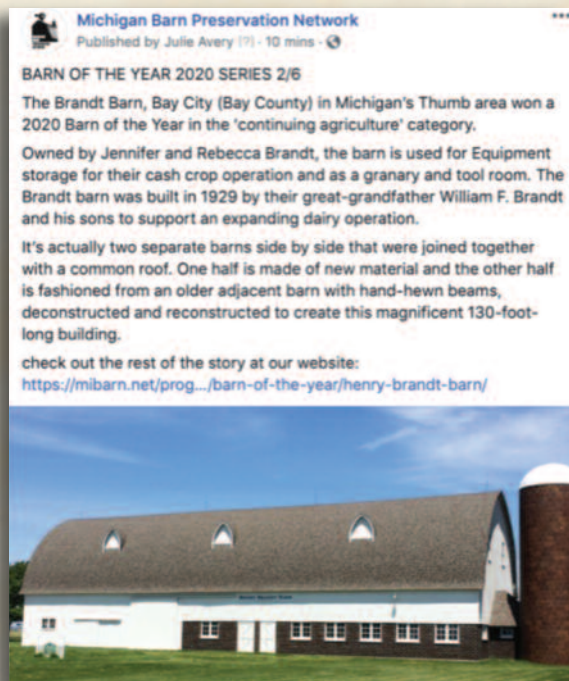




# This and That: Noteworthy Miscellanea

## Have You Visited the MBPN Website Recently?

The Michigan Barn Preservation Network website, [www.MiBarn.net](http://www.MiBarn.net), is your go-to place to find information about the organization and resources for barn preservation. Webmaster and editor Marcia Danner is continually updating and adding to the site.



## Barn of the Year Winners

Most recently, the Home and Barn of the Year pages on the website have been updated with links to stories about the six winners for 2020. We are doing a series of social media posts on these barns.



## In Memoriam

We regret to inform the MBPN that Ron Kuhl, age 81, passed away on July 16th at the Kuhl Family Homestead near Manchester. Ron was the fourth-generation to operate the farm that has been in the family since 1873. Says Steve Stier, "Ron was a faithful member and a dyed in the wool farmer and a gentleman. We will miss him."

## Contractors List

A longtime website feature in our Resources section has included listings for various contractors who do barn repair and restoration. As always, while we believe the majority of the contractors we list to be good, honest professionals, we also always urge you to use due diligence in seeking out assistance for your barn repair/renovation needs. (See also Tom Irrer's article below)

## Jan Corey Arnett Articles

We noticed another article by Jan Corey Arnett is in a recent issue of *Michigan Farmer*. Jan is a Cupola member of MBPN and was a past newsletter editor. She was also on our early committee that initially investigated the potential of an endowment.

Most recent issue of the publication have one of her articles, so you might consider saving the web address — and checking them out: <https://www.michiganfarmnews.com/search#stq=jan%20corey%20arnette>

## Cancellations During the Pandemic

The MSU Extension Office notified us that, due to the coronavirus, all face-to-face 4-H youth activities are to be cancelled until at least September 1st. This meant that we will not be taking our Teamwork & Timbers scale barn to Grandparents University or 4-H Exploration Days, both of which were cancelled.

—Keith Kehlbeck, MBPN Newsletter Editor



## Looking for Someone to Fix My Barn



There are people all across Michigan who do repair work on old barns. Our website at [www.mibarn.net](http://www.mibarn.net) maintains a list of our barn contractor members. Our annual Barn Calendar is partially supported through advertising from many of these contractors. Some do historically accurate timber frame work. Some do structural reinforcement by using cables. Some specialize in installing steel roofing and siding. Many will repair anything from foundations to cupolas. Check out these contractors and determine the level of historically correct work that you desire.

Another place to look for barn repair people is to visit your small lumberyard. Ask them who does barn repair work in the area and who buys their materials at the lumberyard. They also are likely able to tell you the location of barns that have used the lumberyard. Drive around and look at those barns and stop to tell the owners about how fine their barns look. Most barn owners are very friendly people and are very proud to show you their newly-restored barn.

Barn owners will often tell you about their experiences with their builders. They would probably like to see you fix up your barn, too, as they obviously enjoy seeing well-kept farm buildings. Estimating the cost of your job is always a challenge, but often barn owners will

share a rough idea of their expenses in order to help you get started. After you have observed the quality of the work that has been done, take the time to contact the builders directly and have them refer you to other jobs that they have completed. Through this process, you likely will get a feel for the barn repair people who you would like to hire.

There are a few barn painting contractors who come to Michigan from the South during the summer months and who paint quite a few barns. In my experience, these folks tend to paint barns at a lower cost. There may be a few more drips and over-sprays, but some barn owners are willing to accept this in order to receive the cost savings. Whether you are dealing with local builders or seasonal contractors from other regions, both are generally composed of good, honest, and fair people.

No matter where you find your barn contractor, it is very, very important to make sure that you are dealing with a reputable person. This entails getting references. Visit some of their work. Ask about insurance and licensing. This all takes time, but proper planning and selection of a competent contractor willing to work with your ideas and finances is the most important thing that you can do for your barn project.

—Tom Irrer, MBPN President





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## A New Project: An Unusual and Large Granary

We have located near Marshall what I believe is the largest wooden granary on a farm in Michigan. It also happens to be the largest mechanized wooden granary on a farm in Michigan.

Steve Stier showed me that it sits on property that looks like it was part of the 480 acres owned by Isaac Lockwood as indicated on the 1858 plat map. This granary used a steam engine for power and may have supplied grain during the Civil War.

The building can be seen at 13999 Verona Rd on Google maps. It is 250 ft. SW of the intersection of 14 Mile Rd and Verona Rd where the historic Isaac Lockwood house is located. This is about four miles West of downtown Marshall.

The building is 24 ft. square and contains four hopper bottom approximately equal sized grain bins. The total height is about 45 ft from the ground. It has timber frame sills. The walls and bins are constructed of 2 x 4s laid to provide four inch thick solid wooden walls. Additional timber framing inside the building supports the 80 tons of grain stored overhead. The concrete foundation raises the floor to about four feet above the ground and provides space for the hopper that feeds the centrally located bucket elevator held together with cut nails. The head house at the top protects the drive pulley and grain distributor that can fill



*Photo by Tom Irrer*

*Marshall-area timber grain elevator*

each of the four bins. I have not climbed the centrally located ladder to the top of the bins but I would guess that there is timber framing used to support the elevator head and grain distributor. The bucket elevator was powered by a steam engine that sat outside the building. The line shaft uses oak bearings and beveled open gears to power a vertical shaft that uses another set of beveled gears to power the head shaft. Judging by the size of the buckets, the elevator could lift up to 500 bushels per hour. It was fed by dumping two bushel 120 lb. bags of grain through a hopper that opened to the East side.

The building appears to be structurally solid and able to be moved. Do any of you know about the existence of similar structures? The building is located on an area of farmland with over 1,000 acres now under center pivot irrigation. Back when this elevator was built this farmland was considered well drained and productive. Currently the addition of irrigation makes this ground even more productive.

As I view it, this type of advanced agricultural technology and productive farmland may have provided some of the wealth to build some of the historic houses in Marshall.

I am hoping that the historically minded people of Marshall will consider saving this agricultural structure that contributed to the wealth of Marshall.

—Tom Irrer, MBPN President