



MI BARN

PROMOTING APPRECIATION, PRESERVATION, AND REHABILITATION OF MICHIGAN BARN, FARMSTEADS, AND RURAL COMMUNITIES



A winter barn scene: the Cady barn in Ingham County was built in the late 19th century.

Photo by Jim Mulvany

— A Winter Like No Other —

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to impact all segments of society, and the winter of 2020-21 remains a challenging time for individuals and for organizations such as ours. The MBPN continues to adapt to that reality and embraces the hope that we soon will again be able to gather in safety to celebrate our love for “all things barn-related.”

In the meantime, we are pursuing our usual programs such as the Barn of the Year awards, we are planning for a fall Annual Conference and Barn Tour (stay tuned for updates), and are utilizing tools like Zoom and e-newsletters to keep in touch with our membership.

As articles in this quarter’s newsletter indicate, our Board members are making virtual presentations, we are raising money for our Endowment, and we are paying special attention to barn owners who have gone the extra distance when it comes to preserving their unique structures. While we look back with pride in all that we’ve accomplished despite the pandemic, we also are looking forward—with renewed purpose and with a continuity of effort—and we are persevering in our mission. Thank you for your continued support as we make it through these times...together.

Be safe, and we hope to see you in person this year!
—Keith Kehlbeck, Communications Chair

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MBPN website!



President's Message

Too Late Smart



Tom Irrer

As my 12 year old grandson enjoys exploring our barn, he probably doesn't realize that he is the sixth generation of our family to enter the building. I am guessing that the family who sold the farm to my great-grandfather in 1890 also had a couple of generations that spent many hours in this barn.

Growing up on the farm, I never had much appreciation for its history, local history, or history in general. On our farm was a structure that my father and grandfather called the "Old House." Part of the building had a wood floor that was about one foot above ground level. Remnants of wallpaper covered the cracks in the wooden walls, and an impossibly steep stairway led to the head-bumping upper level. On both levels of the wooden floor was stored "Farm Stuff." Perhaps the item that I remember most as a kid was the dynamite stored on the upstairs level! On the lower level, an area twice the size of the wood floor area had an earthen floor and was used to park farm machinery.

It wasn't until my involvement with the Michigan Barn Preservation Network that I began to appreciate this old building. I now believe that this "Old House" was the very first building erected on the farm. After arriving on the property, the new owners would have needed a place to shelter themselves and the few animals necessary for their livelihood. The construction deadline would have been the onset of winter. I feel that the first family to live there must have used both levels of this 16 square foot area as their home for the first few years. Their horses and other animals probably had about the same amount of space on the dirt floor. Over time, however, many things have changed. By the time that my great-grandfather purchased this farm in 1890, it sported a 36 x 50 foot barn, a farmhouse with Victorian trim, and a full set of farm buildings.

I mention this because I feel what I would call "Too Late Smart." Had I earlier recognized the significance of this building, I could have made an effort to better preserve it (or at least provide more documentation of its existence).

During this time of pandemic, when we can't travel, I believe it is a good time to look inward at what we already have. I urge all of us to take a look at the buildings that we can save. If we do that we won't be sorry. I have never met a person who regretted spending money to keep up their barn or farm buildings.

What's in a Logo?

The now-iconic MBPN logo has graced our newsletter for a number of years now. But where did the logo come from? Past president Steve Stier remembers that Joanne Rasmussen—whose barn was featured in last quarter's newsletter—was a member of the steering committee that created the logo. The particular barn (and farm) that inspired the logo is located just off I-69 in Potterville. Joanne was also an early member of the MBPN and created the organization's first newsletter. Thanks, Joanne!



Photo by Joanne Rasmussen

Photo that inspired a logo.

USPS Issues Barn Stamps

The U.S. Postal Service has issued four new postcard stamps that celebrate the beauty and history of American barns.

(Source: www.usps.com)

Each stamp reflects one of four seasons: a round barn surrounded by the hazy light and warm colors of fall; a gambrel-roofed barn in summer; a forebay barn in an early spring countryside; and a Western barn on a winter's night.

The artist for the stamps created digital paintings of four types of barns found in the rural American landscape. With differing qualities of light and color, each piece also reflects one of the four seasons.

There is something about barns that appeals to almost everyone, evoking nostalgia for a lost way of life—an imagined simpler time—in even the most devoted city dweller. Barns have deep roots in American culture, reflecting the heritage of generations who worked the land. (Emphasis added)

The construction of many older barns required individuals with the skills to lay the foundation to cut the timbers, to raise the frame, and to sheath and roof the structures. Build to last, these historic farm buildings still dot our rural landscape.

Today, there are ongoing efforts to preserve barns in America, from national and state organizations to local groups working to save specific buildings. Many barns are being maintained or adapted to continue their original purpose of housing animals and equipment and for storage. Others are finding new life as houses, offices, entertainment spaces, or even as wedding venues.

Whatever their modern function might be, historic barns represent America's heritage. From the timber frames to the stone foundations, the materials and craftsmanship that went into constructing these barns tell the story of the importance of agriculture in building our country.



U.S. Postal Service postcard stamps celebrate barns...and the four seasons.

Ashley Walton designed the stamps with original artwork by Kim Johnson. Greg Breeding was the art director. The word "POSTCARD" on the stamps indicates their usage value. Like a Forever® stamp, these stamps will always be valued for the rate printed on them.

Visit the usps.com postal store for more information on these limited edition postcard stamps.

—Keith Kehlbeck, Communications Chair

Endowment Update: Preserving our Heritage – Investing in our Future

During 2020, our Endowment Fund has more than doubled! Since our last quarterly reports to the Board, our MBPN Endowment Fund has increased to a current total of **\$78,436!**

After each newsletter this year, the MBPN has received at least one new Cupola/lifetime membership; these are the foundation of our Endowment! We are also seeing a regular increase in small donations and 'endowment' dedicated contributions! AND, three members of our Board of Directors have each given gifts of \$10,000 for the Endowment Fund! This is amazing—thank you all!

The Covid19 pandemic delayed MBPN's intentions of moving into a more formal campaign. We worked with John Cauley, an experienced financial and endowment consultant, to conduct a Feasibility Study in January and February. This was completed last March, just in time to have to cancel the in-person Board Meeting where John was planning to review his findings and make formal recommendations.



The MBPN has continued to raise awareness about the Endowment, but has put off mounting a public campaign until we can really meet together and have one-on-one meetings with members and donors!

Again, thank you for your Cupola memberships! We are all looking forward to the time when we can meet and have adventures together! And, please think about your own interests in supporting MBPN through your memberships and our Endowment! If you haven't already renewed your membership for this year, please do so today! Having trouble remembering to pay your dues? Become a Cupola member, and your dues are paid for life! For more information, visit us online at www.mibarn.net.

—Julie Avery, MBPN Vice President and Endowment Chair

Clare Koenigsnecht, Treasurer, past president, and Cupola member: "The joy and wonder of giving is endless!"



Celebrating Great Michigan Barns



This is another in our series highlighting barns submitted for consideration through our quest for exceptional barns through our Barn of the Year program. While not every barn that is submitted receives the award, all nominees are worthy of recognition for their unique characteristics and history. In this issue of our newsletter, we focus on a number of those “Great Michigan Barns.”

Our search process highlights again and again how rich we are in proud barns that survive and thrive. We are rich in barns and so rich in barn stories. Every barn has a story—fascinating tales of tradition, of family, determination, rugged work ethic, diversity, and pride in our past.

While all barns are part of our great agricultural heritage, we find great diversity today in how they look and what they are used for. Generally, they are either still used for what they were originally intended—agriculture—or, increasingly so, they’ve been adapted to other uses.

Keeping it the Ag Family

Nearly all barns started out with a similar purpose during Michigan’s great agricultural era which existed from the mid-1800s to about the mid-1900s (1950)—as part of small (40 to 80 acres) family-owned subsistence farms. In this parlance, subsistence meant primarily raising livestock and crops enough to feed the family. While agriculture has changed significantly since the heyday of family farms, here are two great examples of barns whose purpose remain rooted in agriculture, just as they began—a century and a half ago.



Photos provided by Keith Anderson and Mara Braspeninn

Goose Lake Barn...a ‘modest little barn with a special place in my heart.

Goose Lake Barn—Lapeer, Michigan

Debra Gardner purchased the farm on which her barn sits in 1979. Initially, only basic repairs were made to the old barn (built sometime between the mid to late 1800s in three separate sections). The barn’s stone foundation was reinforced, and cables and a new roof were installed. The owners were busy with importing and breeding Arabian horses, and that growing hobby required the building of a new pole building with eight stalls and an indoor riding arena. The old barn sat, largely unused.

Recognizing that, in recent years, the barn was becoming very weather-worn, Debra needed to make the decision (in her words), “to bury it or restore it. To be honest, not one person thought I should restore it. But my modest little 60 x 30 foot barn had a very special place in my heart, so I decided to start restoring it two years ago.” Finding that there are few barn restoration specialists on the eastern side of Michigan, she managed to find Levi Shetler, who had an “arsenal of

knowledge on historic barns and did the project (while) keeping the original integrity of the barn.” The restoration included removing a section of the barn that had no foundation and using the weathered wood to fill the opening. With the added replacement of a damaged support beam and a new metal roof, Debra says she is delighted with the outcome.

This is a modest barn, but very much representative of the architecture of that area for the time period in which it was built. It has been suggested that this historically significant barn “should be part of Lapeer County for at least another 100 years.”

Oh, about the name? The back side of Debra’s property backs up to the Lapeer State Game and Wildlife Refuge. Not long ago, its lakes were one of the largest Geese migratories in Michigan. Hence, the name of her farm—Goose Lake Farm.



Ruby Ellen Barn in winter, with quilt trail decoration on silos.

Ruby Ellen Barn—Traverse City, Michigan

Why is this barn named Ruby Ellen? It was Ruby Ellen who saved the third-generation family farm after it had been seized by the Federal Land Bank during the economic hard times of the Great Depression. Ruby Ellen (born in 1903) and her husband Harvey Dobson returned to the farm that had been founded by her grandparents in 1865 and bought the farm back from the Federal Land Bank, naming the property the Ruby Ellen Farm. When he was mustered out of the Union Army at the end of the Civil War, Ruby’s grandfather, William Core (with his wife Margaret) homesteaded the property on which the barn stands. The original timber frame barn was constructed in 1882 of hand-hewn timber harvested from the property’s old growth forest.

Under Ruby Ellen’s stewardship, the farm and property continued to improve and prosper, growing and transitioning from a subsistence farm to include field crops, cherries, and cattle production. A pole building extension was attached to the original barn in the 1950s.

Ruby Ellen’s son, Rex Dobson, was frequently approached by developers who envisioned planting houses, not crops, on the property. In 1999, Rex became the first person in Leelanau County to enter into a conservation easement with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, thus protecting his farm from development—forever. In 2005, Ruby Ellen Farm was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Rex Dobson passed away in 2011. Today, a non-profit foundation founded in 2002 maintains the Ruby Ellen barn and farm. The MBPN has conducted two repair workshops at the barn as part of the foundation’s commitment to preserving the iconic structure.

The Rex Dobson/Ruby Ellen Farm Foundation has as its mission the use of the farm and barn as resources for “educating and inspiring stewardship, self-sufficiency, and balanced relationships with nature and our community.” Among numerous community events are demonstrations and activities such as rope making, cider pressing, blacksmithing, wood turning, museum/building tours, and scavenger hunts.

Re-Purpose to Re-Use

Not to dismiss the fact that some barn lovers save a barn purely for sentimental or nostalgic reasons, the fact is that most barns will continue to exist only if they have a purpose—only if they are useful. That is why a key goal of barn preservation is to adapt to new uses barns that were nearly all built for the purpose of livestock and crop storage. Here are two diverse examples:



Covered Bridge Farm as completed.

Covered Bridge Farm—Centreville, Michigan

Jaymes D. MacDonald, Director of Parks & Recreation for St. Joseph County, states, “The 1870 barn has become a point of pride for our residents. The County invested a significant amount of money in this structure to preserve it for future generations. It has become the gem of St. Joseph County.”

Covered Bridge Farm was originally settled by the Culbertsons in the mid-1800s. The farmhouse, which is still on the property, was built in 1856. The original barn was constructed in approximately 1870. After 140 years in the Culbertson family, the farm changed ownership, and the County purchased the property in 2015 and began park development and the barn rehabilitation project in 2017.

The barn had been neglected for decades, but the County was determined to rehabilitate the building and to make it the centerpiece of St. Joseph County park system. The project proved to be a daunting task, requiring close to half a million dollars to achieve the goal. The exterior of the barn was not salvageable, and the siding was stripped off and replaced with ponderosa pine. The barn was lifted to remove the failing foundation and a new concrete foundation was poured and covered with the original fieldstone as a façade. Thankfully, the original pine frame of the barn was still intact. The hand-hewn tulip timbers had been floated down the St. Joseph River from the nearby community of Mendon. Inside the barn, which is now used for public and private events is an open fireplace, along with the original hay track that runs the entirety of the roof’s 80-foot length. The area that originally held the livestock stalls was converted into a mezzanine.

With a backdrop of the Langley Covered Bridge and the St. Joseph River, the Covered Bridge Farm (with its 1870 barn) provides an idyllic setting for local events. According to Mr. MacDonald, the community is justly proud of the work completed to preserve the cultural history of St. Joseph County.



The Melody Hill (Stinson) Barn restoration was led by Mark Stitt’s Barn Preservation.

Melody Hill, Stinson Barn—Kalamazoo, Michigan

Though we are not clear as to the musical moniker attached to this restored jewel, it may have something to do with its occasional use as a practice studio for an Indy Band, *Joe Hertler and the Rainbow Seekers*. The barn’s current usage also includes weekly yoga sessions, photo shoots, music concerts, and farm-to-table dinners, as well as weddings and family gatherings.

Margie Stinson and her husband Ed purchased the property in 2013. They have traced ownership of the land on which the 40 x 30 foot gable roofed barn sits to 1837, with the barn having been built about 1870. Based on the fact its cement foundations were unusual for the period, it is believed that the barn was either raised up to a higher level at some juncture, or perhaps was even relocated to its present site. The adjoining silo probably dates to the 1920s.

In the 2015 remodel, a ramp was added to provide access to the upper floor of the barn. A captivating feature of that level is the 20 x 15 foot deck with sliding doors added to the back of the barn during the restoration. Inside, the barn is framed with hand-hewn white oak timbers, and the roof is framed with pole rafters and with wood plank-ing. The inside vertical plank boards of the barn are mostly original, giving a truly “old barn” feel to the three-bay barn. The hay track is still present, but the gable end-loading door is visible only from the inside, due to the new rough-sawn pine siding covering it on the outside.

The major rehabilitation project was led by and completed by Mark Stitt’s Barn Preservation in the Fall of 2015. Ed and Margie admired Mark and his skills, and they mourned his loss when Mark tragically lost his life in a 2019 accident.

Each summer, Ed and Margie host a community vegetable, herb, and flower garden, grow wildflowers on the property, and provide a Monarch Butterfly way station for that increasingly threatened species (the milkweed plant is essential for the Monarch’s egg-laying).

Whether for original/continued agricultural usage or through adaptation for new uses, barns such as these are worthy of recognition. Stay tuned in future newsletters for additional stories celebrating “Great Michigan Barns!”

—Keith Anderson, Chairman Awards Committee



Barns: Preserving Agricultural Heritage on exhibit through July 25, 2021

Photo courtesy of Ella Sharp Museum

Ella Sharp Museum Showcases Barns

From December 12, 2020 through July 25, 2021, the Ella Sharp Museum in Jackson, Michigan is hosting an exhibit entitled, “Barns: Preserving Agricultural Heritage.”

Barns are iconic features in our rural landscape. If you live in Jackson County, or any part of the Midwest, you might be so accustomed to barns that you may no longer notice them. But there are some who have never stopped looking at and appreciating their unique architecture and histories. These artists, historic preservationists, and multi-generational farmers are dedicated to documenting and sharing their stories. This exhibition highlights some of the organizations, artists, and methods focused on capturing the unique beauty and history of these agricultural icons.

The exhibition was developed in collaboration with:

- The Clint Barrett Memorial South Central Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey Project
- Doug Jones, Project Manager of the Clint Barrett Memorial South Central Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey Project
- Barrett Insurance, in memory of Clint Barrett
- Julie Avery PhD retired Curator Rural Life & Culture, MSU Museum

With assistance from the Michigan Barn Preservation Network

- Community Artists:
Coley Kennedy
Mary Tallman
Cornell Sample II

The museum’s new Hours of Operation are:

Mon – Tues: Closed
Wed – Sat: 10am – 5pm
Sun: 12pm – 5pm
*Wed – Sat: closed 12 – 12:30 for cleaning

As Covid precautions are lessened, I hope that our Board can hold one of its meetings at Ella Sharp, as well as assist with public programs.

For more information, visit the museum’s website:

<https://ellasharpmuseum.org>

—Julie Avery, MBPN Vice President and Communications Committee



Quick (Virtual) Takes

Jim Mulvany Talks Barns.

On Tuesday, January 5, 2021, MBPN Board Member Jim Mulvany conducted a "History Hounds" program for the Historical Society of Michigan entitled, "Raising the Roof on Michigan's Barn Heritage." With Jim's guidance, on-line participants discovered early barn construction and how agricultural development actually changed barn architecture. Through photographs of various barns, including three 1860-built barns in Ingham County, attendees learned how to recognize various architectural types and how construction varies. The program also brought into focus what barns are like today and why.



Jim Mulvany

Jim's subject and presentation attracted such attention that the audience numbers broke all records for attendance for the Historical Society of Michigan's History Hounds Series. 197+ individuals were in attendance. Jim's presentation captured the audience's attention with both his history lessons and stories as well as details of barns and barn development.

History Hounds programs are FREE for members of the Historical Society of Michigan . . . AND also free for HSM's member organizations (like the MBPN).

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Side note: Another upcoming program that MBPNs Steve Stier will be doing on April 22 will be a presentation on barn preservation given to the Historical Society of Michigan's "Michigan History Alliance Group" (a group of Michigan history focused organizations brought together by HSM.)

MBPN is increasingly being sought out as a resource for presentations on barn restoration by a number of other Michigan organizations. Opportunities often come in via our MBPN communications, such as questions to our Facebook page, inquiries on our website, or phone-in calls to the number on the MBPN website. Each of these avenues is monitored and responded to, thanks to our Communications team.

E-News Helps Maintain Member Contact

MBPN Vice President Julie Avery heads up our e-newsletter project, which provides valuable exposure through online blasts to members. The Communications team had made the decision to produce our e-newsletters more often, averaging perhaps two in between print newsletter issues. We expect this approach to continue, given the special need to connect with members during the pandemic. MBPN members and fans were greeted on January 1st with an e-news blast from us!

Recent e-news blasts we have done include the Self-Driving Thumb Tour, Barn School 101, Barn of the Year program, the Mulvany "History Hounds" presentation, and reminders of Barn School YouTube link and a Membership renewal reminder. We continue to have a strong open rate for our e-news, which is a good indication of its reach. The latest open rate reported was 51%--an above-average number.

Virtual Barn School 101

The MBPN "Barn School, Part 1," focusing on barn exteriors, was presented to the Michigan Historic Preservation Network on December 10, 2020. This was a Zoom program, presented to an audience of nearly 100 people by Stephanie White, Tammis Donaldson, and Steve Stier, and it followed the Barn School/curriculum/outline. Under the offering of

the MHPN, our team did a grand job, and the audience evaluations were very positive. Many questions came in and were addressed by the MBPN crew. They are beginning to plan to do a Virtual Barn School 102 focusing on barn interiors. Barn School 101 was taped and is available free from the MHPN's YouTube site.

Webinar Recording:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldhEmWzgJuo>

Discussions about trying Barn School in virtual mode grew out of a joint Communications/Program meeting which began last year at the Irer Farm Office and continued with planning via Zoom.

MBPN Board "Zooms" to Meeting



Undaunted by travel and gathering restrictions due to the pandemic, the MBPN Board met virtually in early January to discuss ongoing programs and to begin planning for what we hope will be a fall conference and tour. Here's to seeing all of your smiling faces in person sometime soon!



In Memoriam

The MBPN regrets to inform that longtime MBPN member and supporter John F. West, recently passed away at the age of 99 after a short battle with Covid. His daughter Judy West-Wing notes that he was proud of remaining on the 138-year Centennial Family Farm in Clayton Township, living in the farm house in which he was born. He also was honored to have his 100-year barn selected as Barn of the Year in 2011. Rest in Peace, John.



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Share, reuse, recycle this newsletter

Barn of the Year Applications Now Being Evaluated

February 1st was the deadline for this year's Barn of the Year applications, and the MBPN Awards Committee is eagerly evaluating the submissions for the 2021 awards.

This cycle, there was again a three-month period for accepting applications, beginning on November 1, 2020. We were pleased that the media in various locations recognized the process this year. The Barn of the Year Call for Submissions was covered in the *Adrian Daily Telegraph*, *Holland Sentinel*, *Macomb Daily*, *Ionia Sentinel Standard*, *Michigan Farm News*, *Oakland Press*, *Sturgis Journal*, and *Tuscola Today*,

Each year, Michigan barns and their owners have been recognized for their efforts in preserving icons of our state's agricultural heritage. The barns these individuals have saved inspire others throughout the state to also become barn stewards, and we thank all of those who participated in this year's Barn of the Year program. Stay tuned for news regarding the 2021 recipients of this coveted award!



Don Buck and his brother Gerald accepting the award for the Buck Barn in Ludington.