



MI BARN

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



The White Barn Venue in Clare, Michigan, our tour stop for lunch on October 3rd.

Photo provided by the White Barn Venue



Join Us at a Fall “Barn Plus!” Tour



Now that summer is drawing to a close, what would be one of the best things to look forward to as a Michigan barn enthusiast? A barn tour, of course! And the Michigan Barn Preservation Network has scheduled just such a tour in the heart of the Lower Peninsula.

On Tuesday, October 3rd, from 9:00am to 5:00pm, you can join your fellow enthusiasts in what we’ve organized as a “Barn Plus!” tour. Isabella and Clare Counties will showcase the usual sampling of exceptional barn restorations, and we’ll also visit a steel siding manufacturing facility and two barns that now serve as event venues that you won’t want to miss.

The tour starts in Rosebush at Lifetime Metal Sales (where registered attendees will gather). You will be interested to learn why they have the name “Lifetime” and how they help barn owners around the state. After the facility tour and getting started with coffee and some Cops and Donuts treats, we will head to Tobacco Ranch in Clare. This rental property has a fascinating history which will be explained by a step-on docent who will give a brief overview of the infamous Purple Gang and their influence in the City of Clare. “What was the “Purple Gang”?” To find out, join the “Barn Plus!” Tour.

A tour always travels on its stomach, and lunch at the White Barn venue will be no exception. Our hosts at the White Barn will provide homemade sandwiches, salads, and goodies in a souvenir lunch bag. The barn owner will tell us about the journey he took to make this barn into a site for receptions, reunions, parties, and meetings.

The last portion of the day’s journey will be spent visiting three barns within three miles of each other. The first is a huge, three-storied/floored barn with a fascinating history, built of reinforced concrete and designed by a bridge builder. We have gotten special permission to get access to the inside of this structure. You won’t



Photo provided by the Thompson Family

Concordia Hills Farm in Farwell

want to miss being up close and inside of this barn! Next, we will go to Concordia Hills, a 2021 Barn of the Year Award recipient, before taking a short trip around the corner to our last barn, which is a work in progress. We often see barns that have already completed the preservation/restoration process. This will be an opportunity to view the intermediate (but essential) steps on the journey.

Space on the bus will be limited to 50 participants, so register now by visiting our website at www.mibarn.net and clicking on the link on the homepage. There, you’ll also see details of some earlier MBPN barn tours. **Please note that, for this tour, MBPN membership is required. If you’re not a current member, please visit our website at www.mibarn.net/membership to join or renew.*

—Vera Wiltse, MBPN Program Chair

See “Barn Plus!” Tour details, page 3

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MBPN website!



President's Message

Barns Inspire Awe

Driving through the countryside, we all enjoy the sight of a well-kept barn. Sometimes we are able to go a step further and experience the inside of a barn. Upon entering an unfamiliar barn, we step into an environment that almost always exceeds our expectations. We feel a state of self-diminishment and an increased sense of connectedness with those who built this barn. We feel safe and secure in this majestic building. We appreciate the construction details, some of which are common to many barns, and other details that are unique to this barn, or unique to a local area. We feel a sense of reverential respect for the barn builders of yesteryear. Many of us are reminded of a barn where we spent our childhood.



Tom Irrer

How do you get to enjoy barns? Some of us see a barn all decked out for a wedding or other important event. For others, that experience comes with a visit to the barn of a friend or relative. Perhaps those barns have been restored and refurbished for continued agricultural use—a backbone of our mission and our Michigan rural heritage. Of course, the best way to enjoy a barn is to preserve your own barn and to experience these feelings on a daily basis. By saving your piece of history, you can inspire others.

Another option is to attend a barn tour sponsored by MBPN or another organization. As you've learned in this issue of our newsletter, there happens to be just such an upcoming MBPN tour on October 3rd. We hope that you'll join us for what should be an outstanding day filled with beauty, history, creativity...and awe.

Please join our Barn Tour to be impressed by a group of Michigan Barns.

—Tom Irrer, MBPN President

**Michigan Barn
Preservation Network
Barn Tour**

Tuesday, October 3, 2023
9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Northern Isabella + Clare
Counties

\$60 per person (includes lunch +
bus transportation)

Register at: www.mibarn.net

Tour includes 5 barn sites +
Lifetime Metal Sales



2023 MBPN Fall Barn+ Bus Tour: Clare, in the middle of Michigan's lower peninsula, was chosen for this fall's bus tour, which includes Concordia Hills Farm in Farwell and Tobacco Ranch in Clare.

🍁 “Barn Plus!” Tour details: 🍁

Date and Time: Tuesday, Oct. 3, 2023, 9:00am to 5:00pm

Location: N. Isabella and Clare Counties

Cost: Member Rate – \$60* *MBPN membership is required.*

Coming into town the day before? Everyone is welcome to gather at Country Side Dinners for a traditional Amish dinner of simple fare on October 2nd. This site also has a barn you are welcome to visit. The address and location of the dinner will be given to registered guests prior to event.

Prior Evening (optional) Dinner details:

Date and Time: Monday, Oct. 2 from 5:30-7:30pm

Cost: \$20-22 *(Pay at venue, cash only)*

Retired barn workers, including multi-generational barn worker Frank Graham, will present an after-dinner program about Isabella County round roof barns, moderated by founding MBPN board member, Steve Stier.

Area lodging (for those wishing to stay overnight) is on your own, but the tour's starting and ending point is about halfway between Clare and Mt. Pleasant, and there are a number of overnight lodging choices in Mt. Pleasant.

The fall colors should be in full swing, and these unique Michigan barns (and other stops) fully justify the special name for the event: the “Barn Plus! Tour.” Don't miss what will undoubtedly be a high-



O'Grady Barn, north side

Photos provided by Vera Wiltse

light of the year for our members, with tasty food, camaraderie, and Michigan history and rural culture in full display for the day!



Parsons Barn in winter



Barn 1888 exterior

Photos by the Howarth family



Barn 1888 interior after restoration

2023 Barn of the Year Awards Honor Excellence

The MBPN's most prestigious awards, the Michigan Barn of the Year Awards, are presented annually to honor barn owners who have made the extra effort to maintain or restore historic barns. Many of you were able to join us in March for this year's awards presentations.

Featured Barn of the Year Recipient: Barn 1888

The owners of this barn in Allegan County were not able to be present to receive their award at the March Conference, but we wanted to make sure they received their award with the proper celebration. Tom Irrer and I, accompanied by our spouses Marilyn and Linda, arranged an on-site presentation on May 5th. Bryan and Danielle Howarth and their two sons did the major renovations to adapt this barn (built in 1888) into a very nice wedding venue. They were just beginning their 2nd season of events and have a full schedule of weddings throughout the summer.

Presentations like this prove that the Barn of the Year Award is a Family Affair. It was a cold wintry early March day when Barn of the Year Awards were presented at this year's annual conference in East Lansing. At this presentation, however, the day was warm and sunny on a recent beautiful spring day on-site in Hopkins in Allegan County. On this particular early May Friday, the barn was beautifully decorated and set to host one of the early weddings in what will prove to be a very busy season ahead for the newly-renovated wedding venue. Wedding venue barns have become very popular, and Barn 1888 was the choice of the Barn of the Year Committee from among five nominees in the category of commercial adaptive-use barns.

Purchased by the Howarths four years ago, the family spent nearly every day for two-and-a-half years converting the 135-year-old barn to one of the premier wedding venues in West Michigan. The new owners opted to do the renovations on their own with the aid of their two sons. "None of us are carpenters," according to Danielle, "but we're handy in many ways." When reflecting on the enormous amount of time, work, and resources that were poured into the barn's conversion, Bryan is proud of the outcome of the family's efforts. He also admits that, had he known in advance what was ahead of them, he would have been unlikely to have taken on the task. The Howarths and their sons, Tyler and Braden, all maintain full time jobs not connected with the wedding venue. Danielle is a nurse, Bryan is in tool and die, and the boys have a landscaping business in addition to attending college.



Photo by Keith Anderson

Keith Anderson (left) and Tom Irrer (right) with the Howarth family

Barn 1888 is just part of an entire farmstead that remains intact at the location. It consists of the main barn with a milk house and silo attached. At the farmstead, there is also a newly-renovated second bank barn, a windmill, chicken coop, and corn crib. The large farmhouse is available for a wedding party to reserve for a weekend wedding.

"Keeping everything as original as we could was very important," says Danielle. "We hope everyone enjoys the craftsmanship that was put into building this barn...and all of the new renovations that were done to maintain its beauty," she adds.

While recognizing awardees at the March Conference was a delight, nothing can compare with presenting the Barn of the Year Award while standing in front of the barn with the sun shining at your back.

—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Committee Chair



Photo provided by Keith Anderson

MBPN Board Member Kevin Kirk presents a Great Michigan Barn certificate to Valerie Johnson



Photo by Kristine Ranger

Kristine Ranger presents a Great Michigan Barn certificate to the Dobsons



Photo by Kristine Ranger

Eileen Bur with her Great Michigan Barn certificate

“Great Michigan Barns” Receive Recognition

Every year, many exceptional Michigan barns are nominated for the Barn of the Year Award, and 2023 was no exception. All of the nominated barns have stories...and they enrich us by telling those stories of tradition, family, diversity, and pride in our history. For those barns nominated but not awarded, we routinely recognize their exceptional stories with Certificates of Appreciation.

The Vale Royal Barn was one of the 18 barns submitted for consideration for Barn of the Year for 2023. Though not selected to receive the top award, it was, nonetheless, declared a "Great Michigan Barn" by the Michigan Barn Preservation Network. New MBPN board member Kevin Kirk personally presented a framed Certificate of Appreciation to Valerie Johnson, who also received a complimentary membership in the Network for the current year.

Vale Royal Barn is another heartwarming story of an historic barn saved from demolition. This iconic old barn, located on Old US 23 in Livingston County, was built by one of Fenton's first settlers. A large, 74-foot gambrel-roofed dairy barn, its seven bays sport all hand-hewn timber framing. The barn had been long neglected and threatened to be demolished as a safety hazard, but Valerie Johnson was able to acquire the barn in exchange for agreement to move it. The first attempts to have it moved was through a company that proved to be disreputable—a situation that nearly doomed the project and the barn. A hero—local barn restoration specialist Dave Clolek and his team (architect Liz Harrow and structural engineer Leo Sheets)—stepped up to the challenge, and they were able to disassemble the upper level of the barn, move it to a new site a mile down the road, and re-assemble it on a new foundation. To round out the project, a separate carriage house on the original location was moved and attached to the big barn. In 2016, Valerie was able to realize a long-held dream and opened the barn as Vale Royal, a commercial wedding venue.

This past cycle, we also had two barns in the Upper Peninsula that were nominated for Barn of the Year. Again, while they didn't receive that designation, we nonetheless recognize their status as "Great

Michigan Barns." Board member Kristine Ranger visited the UP to present their certificates in July. Here are their stories:

Bur's Wagon Shed (Cheboygan)

Eileen Bur is very proud for having given "new life for an old wagon shed." She says her dad, who died not long ago at a hundred years old, was quick to point out that the 125-150 year old building is "not a barn, it's a shed." Originally used as a wagon shed during the horse and wagon era, the gable-roofed wood-frame building that features five double wide wood, wagon-shed-style doors has had extensive restoration at Eileen's direction and now serves as a farm stand. During August and September each year, it is a popular stop on Riggsville Road, not far off I-75 for sweet corn, maple syrup, honey, and produce from her local garden. Despite its original use housing farm wagons, it was nonetheless designated a "Great Michigan Barn," and Eileen was presented a framed Certificate of Appreciation and thanks from MBPN for her work in restoring and preserving the historic building.

Serenity Barn (Iron River)

MBPN Board Member Kristine Ranger is given extra credit for her time and effort in driving to the far western reaches of the Upper Peninsula to personally present Tyler Dobson and his wife this framed Certificate of Appreciation. Seeing another of the UP's many old barns being saved always brings joy, and their aptly name "Serenity Barn" is no exception. Tyler and then-fiancée purchased the early 1900s barn and surrounding property in April 2021 and immediately went to fixing it. Originally, the purpose was just to save the sagging barn for historical purposes, but then decided to have their own wedding in the barn, which they did in July 2022.

We thank Kevin Kirk and Kristine Ranger for their willingness to seek out these worthy barns for their "Great Michigan Barn" presentations!

—Keith Anderson



Photo provided by Keith Anderson

Serenity barn before



Serenity after restoration



Bur's Wagon Shed



Young barn enthusiasts learn Teamwork & Timbers skills at Grandparents University

Photo by Keith Anderson

Teamwork & Timbers Remains an Important Educational Tool for the MBPN

Teamwork & Timbers (T&T) is our quarter-sized timber framed barn replica used as part of the MBPN's educational programming. It can be raised and/or put on display as a tool for learning about community, traditions, barn vocabulary, techniques, and, of course, teamwork. Volunteers are able to construct a barn frame without hammers and nails in true timber frame style...in one day, no less. No construction experience is needed.

Back in 2010, the National Barn Alliance contracted Trillium Dell Timberworks (Knoxville, IL) to design and build the model. The barn frame was first raised at the MBPN annual conference in March of that year. The Arnesby-Mawby Fund of the Battle Creek Community Foundation provided funding for construction and the development of educational approaches. An MBPN member (the late Russ Mawby) mentored and assisted this project.

Over a decade later, the Teamwork & Timbers model continues to provide educational input for barn enthusiasts, young and old.

Most recently, the T&T barn was used at Grandparents University at MSU on June 28, 2023. Two groups of students erected the barn.

Having a group of 12 and 13 year-old boys and girls learning about such items as 'purlins' and "bents" and "tie beams" and other timber framing terms in this day and age is somewhat unusual, but the youngsters in the photos took to learning them with gusto, and in the space of an hour and a half built themselves a model timber frame barn. These students were gathered to participate in Grandparents University held annually in late June at Michigan State University. Young teens, along with a grandparent or two, spent three days attending classes to explore hitherto unknown worlds and learn new skills, as well as sleep in a dorm, eat in a cafeteria, and bike-ride the massive campus.

Two sessions of Teamwork and Timbers were offered as one of the new skills to consider. For each session, 15 students pre-registered, and with some oversight by MBPN board members, Tom

Irrer, Clare Koenigsknecht, and Keith Anderson (assisted by Bill Koenigsknecht), the students, working as a team, assembled each of four bents and became literal "barn raisers" as each piece was lifted, and then pegged to keep it in place.

Whether any of the youngsters will someday take on timber framing as a career, who's to know? But, for now, gaining some insight into how these grand old structures were built 150 years ago, the tools that were used, and maybe acquiring an appreciation for our agricultural past, is quite enough. As the MBPN leaders told the students--today, few youngsters their age live on farms. One hundred years ago, however, nearly all students their age would likely have grown up with their grandparents nearby on a family farm, and that barn would have been a big part of their life. Hopefully, this provided a time for them to reflect on their lives and the lives of students before them.

MBPN's youth barn raising is a one-of-a-kind learning opportunity that provides information, exposure, and experience through a traditional community barn raising common in Michigan communities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Barn raising, like quilting bees and husking bees, brought people together to share work and pride in community. When raising this model, you can see it all happen.

Next it was used at the Thumb Octagon Barn near Gagetown on August 12th, where organizers were having a program for kids 10 years and up to erect the barn. It will stay there inside the big octagon barn through their Fall Family Days on September 9th and 10th. For more information visit their website at www.thumb-octagonbarn.org.

The barn model is also tentatively scheduled to be at the Waterloo Museum on Sunday, October 8th for their Pioneer Day. It's heartwarming (and encouraging) to see Michigan barn (and MBPN) traditions continue to inform, inspire, and educate our youth.

—Keith Anderson, Tom Irrer, and Keith Kehlbeck

Endowment Committee Continues Its Work

At the recent board meeting, the Endowment Committee—consisting of Julie Avery, Clare Koenigs knecht, Tom Irrer, Vera Wiltse, Brad Brogen, and new MBPN board member Kevin Kirk—reported that each committee member has identified six potential contributors to approach with the goal to cultivate “lead” gifts towards our overall goal of \$500,000. Eventually, the campaign will target a broader and public campaign of MBPN members and other individuals and companies that have an interest in the larger goals and mission of the MBPN. Direct gifts and/or pledges across three years are very welcome. Through the generosity of many of our members—and particularly, our Cupola Members—we have a great start to our efforts to establish an endowment for the future of the Network. If you wish to donate towards the endowment or have suggestions for a person or company who you believe would be a good candidate for a gift, please contact the MBPN Endowment Committee.

The MBPN Quarterly Board Meeting

The MBPN Board met recently for its quarterly meeting at Tom Irrer’s Mint City farm office in St. Johns. A full day’s agenda covered committee reports, strategic planning, and lively conversation and camaraderie. We also use modern tools such as Zoom to connect those board members who are unable to attend in person. As Tom noted, “It was heartwarming to see everyone. Some gave extra effort to be there. The aroma of mint was all around us. The conversation was lively, positive, frank, and optimistic. Keep the warm breezes flowing!”

What happens on a mint farm like Tom Irrer’s? The sidebar below explains a lot!

Poor Farm Barn Celebrates Progress

Previous editions of the newsletter have highlighted the important work continuing at the Leelanau County Poor Farm Barn.

In 2021, the barn received the prestigious MBPN Barn of the Year Award, as one of five recipients in various categories. The barn, owned by Leelanau County, represents a heroic



Steve Stier

Photo by Julie Avery

effort in the rehabilitation of a historic Michigan farm building.

On May 27th, Steve Stier, MBPN Past President and President of the Leelanau County Historic Preservation Society, spoke to attendees of the Celebration of Contractors, highlighting the numerous skilled tradespersons who made the Poor Farm Barn’s rehabilitation happen—from structural engineering and strengthening floor joists, to replacing lost large diagonal braces, cabling, original wood window sash restoration, barn roof and siding painting, and replication of the cupola and west shed roof...all original elements that had been lost.

MSU’s Farm & Garden section on their Surplus Store and Recycling website (<https://msusurplusstore.com/collections/farm-garden>) has a number of antique farm implements offered. Check it out if you are looking for collectibles!

A 2020 Michigan Farm News piece outlined the scope of what MBPN president Tom Irrer does on his farm. Some excerpts from that article:

That mint-flavored toothpaste and chewing gum could be in for some flavor change. Or, so that’s how national stories are portraying the mint oil industry, as a possible victim to an uncontrollable fungal disease.

Not so fast, says Tom Irrer, who grows roughly 2,000 acres of native spearmint and peppermint in St. Johns. Current comments on the mint industry’s demise or “end” because of the spread of Verticillium wilt are exaggerated, according to Irrer, who argues the fungal disease is not new.

“Mint is a minor crop; it’s a flavoring,” said Irrer, whose son Doug runs the family’s Stony Creek Essential Oils, Inc., an essential oils business located in Clinton County. “There are some acres of ground that probably won’t produce (mint) for another 20 to 50 years because of the wilt. But there’s enough other ground around that makes it not an issue at all.”

Mint oil grown commercially in Michigan is used as flavoring in baking, candy making, coffee, cocoa, and many other products. The U.S. grows peppermint, Scotch spearmint and native spearmint.

Verticillium wilt infects plants by latching onto their roots and stems, which, if spread throughout fields, will lower crop yields because a fungicide treatment to control this disease does not exist, thus making “peppermint farming unprofitable,” according to the food publication The New Food Economy.

Peppermint plants are developed by rooting cuttings from the same parent plant because the plant produces sterile seeds, said Irrer, eliminating the ability for scientists to cross-breed it with other mints to develop a wilt-resistant version. Although native

spearmint is resistant to Verticillium wilt, he said Scotch and peppermint are not.

Despite some of the concerns over Verticillium wilt, Irrer said national and statewide mint farmers have been able to avoid the disease by moving around production. He did so in 1989 following an outbreak of the disease in one of his fields. “Having Verticillium wilt in one of our fields in 1989 forced us to learn how to manage it very quickly,” Irrer added in an email to Michigan Farm News. “Quickly, in this case, means producing our own wilt-free rootstock which takes about two years (to grow), and then planting it into wilt-free fields to harvest oil for two or three years.”

Typically, Irrer said he likes to begin harvesting his spearmint crop by the Fourth of July and finish second cutting by Sept. 15. All mint oils are obtained through steam distillation.

“There are some of these fields that (Verticillium wilt) is a devastating issue for that field and that farm,” Irrer added. “But because mint is such a minor crop, there are plenty of fields that have never seen a mint plant, and by using good agronomic techniques, these fields will be able to provide all of the peppermint oil that we need.”

Michigan currently ranks fifth in the U.S. for mint production, according to Audrey Sebolt, horticulture specialist for the Michigan Farm Bureau. “Our specialty crop producers are resilient,” Sebolt said. “They see an issue like Verticillium wilt and understand the needs to be addressed. It’s no coincidence that the Irrers have been able to grow mint for 70 years.”

For a family that’s been in the mint business since 1949 and is one of the largest operations in the state, the Irrers have seen every mint disease come and stay. And Verticillium wilt is no different. “The key to handling Verticillium wilt is having clean seed stock, clean fields you plant into, and short rotations,” Irrer said. “You do that, and you’ll be fine.”



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2024 Calendars are Coming... and We Need Your Help!

One of the great successes of the Michigan Barn Preservation Network in recent years has been the annual calendar we produce each fall. The calendars, filled with iconic photos and stories of Michigan barns, provide valuable visibility and marketing for the organization. For a number of years, the late Jim Mulvany spearheaded this important effort, and board member Kristine Ranger has now assumed the mantle of producing the MBPN calendars.

We need your help as we close in on the production of the 2024 calendars, however:

Calling All Photographers!

We are completing the 2024 Barn Calendar and are still collecting Michigan barn photos for consideration. We are seeking high quality photos of barns in different phases, seasons and agricultural uses and backgrounds.

For all photos, larger is better. For those who use cameras, we need images that are at least 11.5" wide at 200 dpi.

Cell phones can be used, although, as past MBPN Webmaster Chuck Saputo notes, all cell phones will have different capabilities. Many of the newest phones will probably support the quality re-



quirements, but in most cases the camera settings will control the image size and quality. Another potential problem is transferring the images to the printer. If you use email and attach the photo, the email system may reduce the file size, and possibly image quality. The larger the image size, the better.

For our purposes, please don't do any cropping or editing of your photos. This allows our technician more leeway in terms of composition during the layout

phase. To submit your photos or suggestions, and to receive more information, please call or text Kristine Ranger at 517.974.5697 or email kmranger11@gmail.com.

If possible, we would like to have any suggested calendar photos in hand by no later than the first week of September, so please act quickly if you have a photo you wish to be considered for the calendar.

We hope that this information is useful for those who have photo-worthy Michigan barn pictures to share. Thank you in advance for your help with this important MBPN annual project and for any images you'd like to have considered for the 2024 MBPN calendar!

—Kristine Ranger, MBPN Calendar Chair and Keith Kehlbeck, MBPN Communications Chair