



An enthusiastic overflow crowd met for this year's MBPN Annual Conference and Member Meeting in the Lincoln Room at MSU's Kellogg Center. *Photo by Steve Stier*

Our Annual Conference...WOW!

On Saturday, February 24th, Michigan barn enthusiasts gathered for the Michigan Barn Preservation Network's Annual Conference and Member Meeting at MSU's Kellogg Center in East Lansing. As one participant noted, "It was an amazing experience!"

Successful conferences don't just happen, however. It was a team effort! Vice President Julie Avery assisted at the registration table, and several volunteers took notes about the presentations,

notably Webmaster Marcia Danner, Clare Koenigsknecht, and new attendee Mary Black. Dan Creyts, Richard Harvey, and our intrepid auctioneer, Chuck Chestnut, once again helped us raise a significant amount through the annual auction benefit, with Rose Putnam and Laurie Sisco keeping up with the paperwork. Photographer Doug Martin (whose pictures are included in the latest MBPN Calendar) captured many wonderful moments and images of individuals (and thanks also to Linda Anderson, who took photos until Doug arrived). Aaron Stahl made sure that the technology worked to complement the presentations. Finally, a special thanks goes to Board member Richard Harvey, who pulled together the event theme and coordinated the exceptional speakers.

On a lighter note, we had better window shades this year...and they worked! The display of antique farm tools also added to the atmosphere.

The theme of this year's event was "Adaptive Use: Memories, Events, & Museums." As you'll see below, a quartet of exceptional presentations—all by MBPN veterans (and past Barn of the Year recipients) keyed the conference. The afternoon also featured our President's Award and the prestigious annual Barn of the Year Awards (for more information, see page 6).

Thanks again to all who helped make this Annual Conference and Member Meeting a memorable one!

— Vera Wiltse, Program Chair



Photo by Doug Martin

Shaving horse, an example of antique farm implements displayed at the conference.

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President's Message

Ya Shoulda Been There!

Our Annual Conference and Member Meeting in late February has generated the most positive comments that I have ever heard regarding our annual event. Richard Harvey arranged an excellent program. Each of our four speakers involved taking something that many people think as having no value—an old barn—and painstakingly creating a local icon.

Each of our four presenters shared the results of their barn preservation. They recounted some of the challenges that they had overcome through dedication and hard work. Nearby owners of two event barns enjoyed showing their preservation efforts and were glad to open their barns for others to appreciate. Bob Griffin donated and re-constructed a barn at the Ogemaw County Fairground. He also showed some of his other barn preservation and timber-frame projects. Pat McKay, manager of Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm, showed progress in preserving the agricultural buildings at the agricultural museum.

With Rose Putnam telling her story of the initial stages of saving the Thumb Octagon Barn from demolition, we had five accounts of saving our rural heritage. I was pleased to present Rose with the President's Award in recognition of her preservation work in this and other areas.

All of the conference presentations were heartwarming examples of Michigan barn preservation—"Adaptive Use: Memories, Events & Museums" indeed! All of the presenters had a passion for their project and illustrated the fact that the more work you put into a project, the more that you and others appreciate it. My hope is that each of these inspirational preservation stories can inspire someone to take a look at their barn and convert it to another local icon.

Many have commented that the two most recent Annual Conferences give us a high standard for future MBPN conferences. Ya Shoulda Been There! And we hope that you *will* be able to attend our next events, whether the barn tour being planned for the fall or at next year's Annual Conference.

Finally, if you've been a member of the MBPN, but haven't yet renewed your membership (and want to continue receiving our newsletter), I hope you will make that renewal commitment soon. The article on page 8 tells you how to renew using our website, www.mibarn.net. Also please consider supporting us with a lifetime Cupola membership. It's a gift that keeps on giving by helping our Endowment.

Your support is essential for our mission. Tell a friend...we need to spread the good word about the Network!



Photo by Doug Martin

Rose Putnam receives the President's Award from Tom Irrer



Presentations Make the Event Special



As indicated by comments made after the event, the four presenters at the Annual Conference each had something special to impart to attendees.

MBPN President Tom Irrer noted, “All of the presentations were heartwarming and showed the passion of the presenters. This passion is infectious and will inspire someone to save another barn.” Program Chair Vera Wiltse reported that several people stopped at the registration table to say how wonderful the speakers were. One comment related to how their presentations flowed together—each presenting different information, but related to the same topic. Vice President Julie Avery added her thoughts. “It was hard not to just sit and be amazed by the speakers—their knowledge and dedication. This kind of work—saving barns, barn reha-

bilitation, preservation, and adapted use—represents such magical experiences. The people who do the work—owners, contractors, barn wrights, hobbyists—are all seriously committed to the work and to growing their skills. While the MBPN will never be in a position to give people money to fix their barns (the scale of such a collective expenditure is too great), our challenge is to encourage and assist such work through promotion, information, workshops, and networking.”

For those who weren’t able to attend the Conference, here are some observations on the presenters and on the content of their presentations.

— Keith Kehlbeck, MBPN Communications Chair

Barn Repurpose: Bob Griffin’s Adaptive Re-use Projects

Bob Griffin, 2022 Barn of the Year awardee for “The Griffin Barn” in the category of Adaptive Reuse for a Non-Profit, presented “Barn Repurpose” featuring his award-winning barn. He also showcased his 2023 projects that included The Homestead Barn, a landmark along I-75 at Exit 212 in West Branch and his Beer Camp Barn that was moved from Sage Road in Ogemaw County to his hunting grounds in Roscommon County.

Bob introduced himself with the caveat that he is not a builder, but a beer salesman. Despite this, the audience learned how his avid woodworking skills, farming experience, and frugal principles served him well in disassembling and reconstructing multiple innovative barn projects.

Inspired by wanting to save a barn that had collapsed, he took on his first project in 2010, calling on friends to help to re-use the materials for construction of a timber frame deer blind. From there, Bob took on disassembling and reconstructing barns in locations that no longer supported a barn due to situations such as industrial growth. What pieces he could not use immediately were put in storage.



The Griffin Barn at the Ogemaw County Fairgrounds.

The Griffin Barn from the early 1900s was the centerpiece of the presentation, which served to highlight the process of the piece-by-piece disassembly process and reassembly on the Ogemaw County Fairgrounds Antique Village. Rich in descriptive details, highlights of the presentation included: recognizing the original maker marks and initials, creatively sawing 35’ beams on machinery that only accommodated 20’, working with skilled Amish builders, spacing roof boards perfectly like a ladder, ordering wooden pegs from New Hampshire versus making new ones, incorporating rustic hewn timbers and celebrating with a tree topping/keg ceremony once the beams were in place.

A lovely aerial video of the Griffin Barn closed the inspiring presentation followed by an informative dialogue with the audience. You can watch this video on the Annual Conference page of MBPN’s website: www.mibarn.net or on our YouTube channel: @MiBarnPreservationNetwork.

— Mary Black

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Photo by Doug Martin

Tom Irrer and Keith Anderson present a Certificate of Appreciation to Bob Griffin for his efforts in preserving the Griffin Homestead Barn.

Two of the presentations—by Sharon and Warren Conley (Olde Stone Porch Barn in Ionia County) and Ruth Stahl (Stahl Event Barn in Missaukee County) involved “event barns”—barns that have been restored and adapted to provide functions not traditionally related to farmsteads. Here is a summary of their presentations.

From Dairy to ‘I Do’ – Old Barns Find New Life as Event Venues

With the rise in popularity of rustic weddings, turning a barn that is no longer used for agriculture into an event space is an option many barn owners like Ruth and Ivan Stahl in Missaukee County and Sharon and Warren Conley in Ionia County have chosen. At the 2024 MBPN Annual Conference, these previous Barn of Year winners in the adaptive use category shared their barn conversion stories and what it takes to start a wedding venue business.

The Stahl’s farm in McBain near Cadillac has been in Ivan’s family since it was originally homesteaded in 1882. When it came time to discontinue dairy farming in the mid-1990s, the Stahls knew they wanted their 1901 vintage barn to have a next chapter. They started to reimagine it as a wedding venue after hosting son Mike’s wedding rehearsal dinner there in 2009 and one for a friend of son Aaron in 2011.

The vision and transformation took 10 to 15 years to take shape, but became clear in 2012 as they pursued post-dairy landscaping and had a custom gazebo with a fire pit built. They hosted two weddings in the fall of 2013 as a prelude to the official opening of Stahl Event Barn in 2014. Over the last 10 years, approximately 200 events in-



Interior wedding set-up for the Olde Stone Porch venue.

cluding retirement and anniversary parties, graduation open houses, proms, reunions, celebrations of life, fundraisers, musical events and many weddings have been held on their site.

For the Conleys, barn ownership and the wedding business is a more recent endeavor. In 2021 they purchased the landmark farmhouse on M-66 just north of Ionia that is recognized by its two-story, wrap-around stone porch. It came with a barn dating back to the 1850s that had fallen on hard times and was covered by brush and vines.

The original plan was to do basic fixes to the house, shore up the barn and then resell that portion, but retain the acreage. “We intended to make only rudimentary changes to the barn,” said Warren, “but soon we became passionate about saving it, rehabilitating it, and preserving it for future generations.”



The Stahl Event Barn in Missaukee County

Photo provided by Marcia Danner

Sharon Conley had experience as a building inspector, so she understood the process of changing the barn's use from farm to a commercial venture. Creating The Olde Stone Porch wedding venue required substantial investment and hiring barn contractors and excavators. The barn needed new footings and a new floor. During the construction period, the barn stood on posts for over a month. Thankfully, the Conleys were able to get parts and siding from a delapidated "donor barn" nearby.

The Stahls wanted to retain their barn's footprint as much as possible, but knew they had to make it practical for holding events. Although their township had no local zoning requirements, they did have to abide by local building codes and obtain building and occupancy permits.

Both venues—The Olde Stone Porch and the Stahl Event Barn—launched successfully, thanks to support and participation from the

younger generation. Family members have been an integral part of the development, maintenance, hospitality and promotion of the venues.

Both the Conleys and Stahls mentioned factors that affect the enjoyment and safety of the guests and the importance of being proactive about risk. Event venue owners have to contend with weather conditions, safety hazards, bar service issues, unwanted wildlife intrusion, and even mischievous, unsupervised children. They also have to be sensitive to concerns from neighbors about traffic and noise.

Despite the hard work and liabilities, there is immense joy in meeting new people and playing a small part in their important life moments, said Ruth Stahl. "Besides, we get to have a party at our place most weekends. We have gone from being boring to being the place to be."

— Marcia Danner, MBPN Webmaster

Finally, rounding out a day true to the event theme of "Building a Strong Foundation," Patrick McKay, Museum Manager at the Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm in Oakland County, delivered a master class on adaptation and re-use. Said Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Committee Chair, "What greater inspiration is there than the Van Hoosen Story and what you and the citizens in your community have done to preserve that wonderful piece of history? Your splendid presentation was a perfect cap to a day filled with great moments." Here is the summary of Pat's outstanding presentation.



Part of the Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm complex.

Photo by Pat McKay

A Role Model for Adaptive Re-use and Private-Public Partnerships

Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm has had a long and storied road to its current iteration. The Farm was willed to Michigan State University by Dr. Sarah Van Hoosen Jones upon her death in 1972. Dr. Jones was a renowned dairy farmer with a Masters in Animal Husbandry and a PhD in Animal Genetics and was the 5th generation of her family to run the farm - from 1927 to 1954.

This unique farm/museum is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and includes five barns, two houses, a schoolhouse and 16 acres of gardens and grounds. It opened to the public in

1979 and only featured the Van Hoosen Farmhouse. In 1989, The City of Rochester Hills acquired the Van Hoosen Farm buildings and surrounding 12 acres and for 30 years has carried out a far-sighted plan to create a local history museum complex.

With Patrick's leadership, the City of Rochester Hills has developed a 16-acre historical complex listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The city's highest priority is to protect the historic

buildings and preserve the property to serve as a local history museum for the community.

Challenges to creating just such a "higher standing" public venue included struggles with various developers for ownership of the property. The Museum had to contend with zoning ordinances, building codes, safety requirements, and, since the property overlaps jurisdictions, they had to collaborate with both Rochester Hills and Rochester.

Fundraising necessary for the long-term project included corporate funding secured from local employers Pulte and Chrysler. Additionally, Patrick tapped every business source he could, including Comcast, which had just entered the Michigan market and needed to win favor with the public. He also sought major funding from long-time generational residents who became legacy leadership donors. Finally, the Museum secured a waterways grant from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for a plan that would provide public access to Stony Creek Stream, which runs through the property.

All of which has led to a re-purposed Michigan destination that attracts more than 60,000 people annually. We should note that the Museum received the prestigious MBPN Barn of the Year Award in 2014 and 2022. As Patrick noted in his presentation, "Public buildings should be held to a higher standard." Mission accomplished, Patrick!

— Marcia Danner and Keith Kehlbeck

2024 Barn of the Year Awards

It has now been nearly 30 years that the Michigan Barn Preservation Network has been seeking out the very best in barn restoration efforts and bestowing its Barn of the Year Award. 2024 continues that tradition with the selection of two Michigan barns for the coveted award.

The annual search process highlights how rich Michigan is in proud barns that have survived and continue to thrive. In line with their mission to promote the appreciation, preservation and rehabilitation of Michigan's barns—a legacy of its rich agricultural past, the award recognizes and honors barns and their owners who have made the commitment in passion, time and resources to preserve a Michigan Barn.

In the Category of Continuing Agricultural Use

The Johnson Barn of Old Mission Peninsula
Traverse City, Michigan
Dean and Laura Johnson, Owners

This Big, Red and Very Visible barn cannot be missed as you travel straight up M37 on the middle of the finger of land that constitutes Old Mission. It is a large squarish, gable-roofed barn with a long-sloping shed roof extending down one side. Extraordinary in and of itself, it is also extraordinary in its history. Built in the 1880s by a Civil War Veteran, the barn has been passed down through the family to the current owners, the great grandson of the original owner. With the economy and culture of Old Mission having changed significantly over these past 140 years since the barn was built, so has the uses of the barn changed to reflect the times. No longer a home for dairy cows and



Photo provided by Keith Anderson

The Johnson Barn on Old Mission Peninsula

In the Category of Family Adaptive Re-Use

The Nelson Family Barn
Ada, Michigan
Michael and Tricia Nelson, Owners

This barn involves an inspiring story of the rescue and restoration of a farmstead dating to the 1850s—that's about 180 years old. The heroes of this barn story, the Nelson Family, purchased a 20 acre farm in Kent County located in a rapidly changing, rapidly developing area not far outside rapidly-growing Grand Rapids. A developer owned the land and buildings, and, at the time, was planning to remove (demolish) the 'old structures' and sell two acre lots as part of a new development. Those 'old structures' included the 180 year-old barn, milk house, hen house and other original buildings dating to the 1850s. Falling in love with



Photo provided by Keith Anderson

A portion of the restored Nelson Family Farm including the 1850s barn, the silo and milk house.

With the announcement of this year's awards at the MBPN Annual Conference in Kellogg Center, East Lansing on February 24, 2024, a total of 110 barns that best exemplify barn preservation in Michigan have been designated as Barn of the Year.

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. Photos and histories of the more than 100 barns that have been declared recipients of the Barn of the Year are found on MBPN's website at www.mibarn.net.

— Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Committee Chair



Photo by Doug Martin

Presentation of the Barn of the Year Award for the Johnson Barn of Old Mission Peninsula. From left to right—Tom Irrer, President, Michigan Barn Preservation Network, Laura Johnson, Dean Johnson, and Keith Anderson, Awards Committee Chairman.

hay storage, it is storage for spray rigs, long wooden ladders, and other equipment associated with growing and harvesting cherries.

The Johnson Barn is a survivor today, not through any miraculous restoration, but instead, by being studiously maintained through four generations of the same family and adapting as changing times require.

the farmstead and the beauty of the property, the Nelsons purchased the entirety of the proposed development and began the process to renovate the original structures. With the assistance of Chad Stitt of American Heritage Barn Preservation, the original buildings underwent extensive renovations over the past two



Photo by Doug Martin

Members of the Nelson Family and American Heritage Barn Preservation receiving the Barn of the Year Award for the Nelson Family Barn in Ada, Michigan. Left to right: Tom Irrer, President, Michigan Barn Preservation Network, Tricia Nelson, Timothy Nelson, Rebecca Nelson and four representatives of American Heritage Barn Restoration, including Chad Stitt, third from right. Far right, Keith Anderson, Chairman, Awards Committee.

Board Additions/Renewals

At the recent Annual Conference and Member Meeting, four MBPN Board members were elected to serve three-year terms. Three (Tom Irrer, Vera Wiltse, Keith Kehlbeck) were re-elected, and Laurie Sisco joined the Board as its newest elected member. Bob Griffin was elected to fill a vacancy at the Board's January meeting, and we welcome him and Laurie to the Board. Additionally, at the most recent Board meeting in March, our existing officers were unanimously re-elected. They are:

Tom Irrer, President

Julie Avery, Vice President

Clare Koenigskecht, Treasurer

Vera Wiltse, Recording Secretary

Thank you to all of these individuals, who take time from their busy personal schedules to help make a difference in the preservation of Michigan barns.

Teamwork & Timbers Updates

The Thumb Octagon Barnin Gagetown will be using the T&T barn on August 24, 2024. They will keep it there through their Fall Family Days, Sept 7-8, 2024. I am also guessing that the Waterloo Farm Museum will want it back for a Sunday in early October. On June 22nd, T&T will also be at the Isabella County Fairground for the day as part of a fun, educational event for local youth.

Sad News

Dan Creyts asked me to let the membership know that Barbara Worthington has passed away. Barb is the widow of Jack Worthington, a very dedicated founding board member of MPBN. A memorial service was held on April 6th at the MSU Alumni Chapel in East Lansing. Barb and Jack are both missed and will always be remembered for their contributions to our organization and its mission.

— Clare Koenigskecht

A Long Distance Conference Visitor

At the Annual Conference, we had a special (and somewhat unique) attendee—a timber framer from Russia! Pavel Prytup's family is currently living in Perrysburg, Ohio and is looking to find some timber framing work in the Midwest. He has five boys, and his oldest son is seeking "American experience" in the field while he is here in the U.S. Pavel's son has worked with his father and learned from him. The family has a farm in Russia, so they hope to go back home soon, after developing additional skills.

At the Conference, Pavel was introduced and talked a bit about timber framed buildings in Russia. Safe travels, Pavel!

— Vera Wiltse, Program Chair



Pavel Prytup
Photo by Doug Martin

SAVE THE DATE: Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2024 MBPN's Fall Bus Tour in Lapeer County

Stay tuned for details on what should be a great day of learning about barn styles and architecture, timber framing, and other traditional construction methods as we explore the current use of old barns and the potential for saving or repurposing old structures. The tour committee includes Melissa Jaskewicz, Laurie Sisco, and Tammis Donaldson.

And if you are wondering how to fix up your barn, you can get plenty of ideas on our barn tours. Many old barns have the same problem areas and you can talk to builders, preservationists and barn owners who have solved these problems.

MBPN membership gives you priority registration for barn bus tours.

Annual Meeting Auction Benefit— a Good Time Had by All!



Auctioneer Chuck Chestnut



Richard Harvey and Dan Creyts help with the auction.

Photos by Doug Martin



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Membership Matters!



We usually begin each year with a number of lapsed members. Often, this is simply an oversight, and these members still receive a newsletter for a short period of time, in order to allow them to “re-up” and continue their support. In 2024, we currently have over 100 such lapsed members. If you are one of those, WE MISS YOU!

Dues are for the calendar year and your expiration date appears on this newsletter mailing label. If you need to renew your membership for 2024, the easiest way for you to do so is to visit our website at www.mibarn.net/membership. You may pay for more than one year if that is convenient for you. You may also want to consider supporting the MBPN with a “pay it forward, one and done” Cupola lifetime membership. In recent

years, many of our members have used this vehicle to support our growing Endowment Fund.

Do you know someone who loves barns and who should be a member? Show them this newsletter or send them to our website for more information.

Thank you for helping us influence people to save Michigan barns. Whether you are a barn owner or a person interested in saving our rural landscape, your past participation has helped our efforts in convincing many barn owners to preserve their barn and our rural history. We hope that you will continue to support the efforts of the Michigan Barn Preservation Network to inspire one more person to save one more barn!

