



# MI BARN

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



*Have you ever wondered what the inside of a silo looks like? Here's the interior of one, taken by photographer and barn enthusiast John Cole (see article on page 5). On March 15th, learn more about Michigan silos from presenter Ina Hanel-Gerdenich at our Annual Conference and Member Meeting (page 4).*

## Join Us for the 2025 Annual Conference and Member Meeting!

Happy New Year! With the holidays now behind us, 2025 is in full swing, and that means it is nearly time for members to celebrate another year of barn preservation.

On Saturday, March 15th, Michigan barn enthusiasts will gather for the Michigan Barn Preservation Network's Annual Conference and Member Meeting. This year, the conference will be held at the AgroLiquid Conference Center in St. Johns, which was the site of our 2018 conference. For those of you who have enjoyed recent conferences at the Kellogg Center in East Lansing, the MSU College of Agriculture and Natural Resources has retired the annual ANR Week and no longer hosts agricultural organizations at Kellogg Center.

The AgroLiquid Conference Center is conveniently located in mid-Michigan about 20 miles north of Lansing and has up-to-date technology and amenities. It even has an interactive museum devoted to agricultural history, innovation and exploration.

As previous conference attendees will attest, the day will be filled with camaraderie, informative presentations, awards, and inspiration—reinforcing the MBPN's mission of “promoting the appreciation, preservation, and rehabilitation of Michigan barns, farmsteads, and rural communities.”

The Network is primed to build on its three-decade track record with a strong lineup for what has become an annual “must attend” day of shared enthusiasm for our cause. To that end, we have three excellent speakers lined up, all of whom bring valuable perspective and experience to their presentations. Their bios—as well as the agenda for the day—are found on pages 3 and 4. The afternoon will also feature the prestigious annual Barn of the Year Awards (for more information, see page 7).

We hope you can join us!  
—Richard Harvey and Keith Kehlbeck

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## President's Message

# Life is an Adventure

I continue to have great adventures with the Michigan Barn Preservation Network. Meeting and working with people who care about saving our rural character is most enjoyable. Having a purpose to travel to other parts of Michigan has given me the opportunity to observe ideas and accomplishments on a statewide basis. Delivering calendars or Barn of the Year plaques has led me to a number of farm history museums or barns where I stayed longer than I had expected.



Tom Irrer

My wife says that I talk too much. I say that I am enjoying myself hearing about barn success stories. I am amazed at the large number of "Under the Radar" barn restoration projects. For example, recently I came across three different Carriage House restoration projects, a 36x90 barn moved to become an event center, and many barns upgraded with new roofs.

We all feel that one of the greatest rewards in life is to use our time and talents for a greater good—in our case, to preserve our rural legacy. If you would like to add some adventure to your life, please consider helping MBPN as a volunteer. This volunteer service can be for one of our many projects listed on our website or for the general administration that every organization needs. We currently are three members short on our twelve-member board. Please contact any of our board members if you have an interest.

I would like to thank board member Laurie Sisco, MBPN member Melissa Jaskiewicz, emeritus board member Tammis Donaldson for organizing a very successful barn tour in the Lapeer area this past October.

Saving our history is a continuous process. Our Barn of the Year program and the annual Barn Calendar project continue to showcase many Michigan barns. Our quarterly newsletter, website, and Annual Conference provide examples and resources to assist barn owners with their own projects. In 2018, we established an endowment to allow those who appreciate our goal of preserving rural history a means to provide financial support. The earnings from this endowment—currently at \$250,000 and growing—will be available to help support the viability of MBPN and its goals forever.

Our aim is to inspire barn owners to save one more barn. To do this, we will continue to use and improve existing programs and explore new opportunities to convince barn owners of the importance of saving their own pieces of history. Saving our history will always be a continuous process. Please think about how you can do your part.

The most recent Annual Conferences have been outstanding! This one should keep up our reputation. I hope to see you there March 15th as we celebrate our 30th anniversary.

Happy New Year! Wishing you the best in 2025.

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



Scan our QR code with your smart phone and visit the MBPN website!



## Calling Potential Board Members!

Are you a Michigan barn enthusiast who loves to promote preservation, history, and rural heritage? We are looking for a few good people to join on our Board of Directors. Interested? Contact Nominations Chair Steve Rademacher to discuss: rademachersteve22@yahoo.com or (517) 202-1443,

# Silos: Iconic Sentinels of the American Agricultural Landscape

If you missed Ina Hanel-Gerdenich's outstanding article on Michigan silos in the 2025 MBPN calendar, we reprise selected parts of her piece here. Ina's article is probably the most in-depth assessment of Michigan silo history that we've seen, and it complements her presentation at the Conference, as well as silo images from photographers like John Cole. Kudos, as well, to Tammis Donaldson, MBPN Emeritus Board Member and current member of the Communications Team, for her original idea some years ago that encouraged the evolving and expanding silo research by Ina and others.

There are few things more iconic on the 20th century American landscape than the red-painted gambrel barn and its nearby companion, the silo. With the increasing loss of 19th and 20th century farm buildings, it is not uncommon for the silo to serve as a surviving totem representing what once was an active dairy farm.

The modern silo traces its roots back to the second half of the 19th century, when scientific experimenters in Europe and at the Illinois Industrial University (now the University of Illinois) studied the long-term effects of storing wet silage material in pit silos. The benefit of using wet silage was that it enabled the storage of green plant material without spoilage while maintaining the moisture critical to dairy cow nutrition for year-round milk production.

Experimentation with pit and early tower silos was very successful both in Michigan and in other northeastern states. The re-

sults spread quickly across the states during the 1870s and 1880s. Information on the new technology was disseminated to the public using newspaper articles, agricultural publications, agricultural club meetings, personal testimonials, and eventually direct marketing. The silos were such an economic success that dairy farmers from Wisconsin and Michigan east to southern New England were readily persuaded to adopt the new technology. In Michigan alone, 1,683 farm silos were built by 1904.<sup>1</sup> By 1924, the number of silos in Michigan reached 49,000, which was the third highest number behind Wisconsin (100,060) and New York (53,300).<sup>2</sup>

By the mid-20th century, silos popped up everywhere in the dairy belt, creating a visual association with the landscape and our cultural heritage that continues to this day. However, the tower silo appears to have run its course. Its functionality is being replaced by bunker (a larger version of the pit silo) or flat ensilage piles. Farms have taken to storing excess silage in air-tight polyethylene storage sleeves that, when filled, lie as extended white sausages or elongated mounds in the fields. The tower silo, anchoring a cluster of farm buildings like a church steeple in a village, made a large impact on the American agricultural landscape when it was first developed at the end of the 19th century. Its loss will again significantly impact our relationship with the cultural landscape during the 21st century.

—Ina Hanel-Gerdenich

*For more, join us on March 15th to hear Ina's presentation on Tower Silos...*

## MBPN Annual Conference & Member Meeting Saturday, March 15, 2025 AgroLiquid Conference Center, St. Johns

### Tentative Schedule

- 9:00 Welcome and Announcements (Coffee and Donuts)
- 9:10 Annual Membership Business Meeting
- 10:15 Presentation – Ina Hanel-Gerdenich: The Birth and Evolution of a 20th-century Icon: the Tower Silo
- 11:15 Presentation – Dr. Deron Nelson: Building a Timber-framed Barn, Part 1
- 12:15 Lunchtime for fun and networking, the President's Award, and the MBPN Annual Auction Benefit
- 1:30 2025 Barn of the Year Presentations
- 2:15 Presentation – Dr. Deron Nelson: Building a Timber-framed Barn, Part 2
- 3:15 Presentation – Kathleen Adams: From Dairy Barn to Wine Tasting
- 4:15 Wrap-Up

To register for this year's Annual Conference and Member Meeting, please copy and fill out the following form and send with your check (or go to our website, [www.mibarn.net](http://www.mibarn.net) to register and pay via PayPal.)

Note: For those who wish to stay overnight for the conference, previous MBPN conference attendees have used the Sleep Inn Dewitt-Lansing North at 1101 Commerce Park Drive, DeWitt. The phone number for the Inn is 517-669-8823. It is located on the East side of old US 27 one-mile North of I-69.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Attendees \_\_\_\_\_  
(\$60 per member, \$100 non-member)

**Registrations must be received no later than March 7, 2025.**

Dietary Restrictions? \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail registrations  
(must be received by February 22nd) to:

MBPN  
PO Box 614  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48804-0614.

*Checks should be payable to MBPN. Registrations may also be made on our website, [www.mibarn.net](http://www.mibarn.net) (using PayPal).*



Photo provided by AgriLiquid Conference Center

The AgriLiquid Conference Center in St. Johns, site of this year's Annual Conference, includes an interactive museum devoted to agricultural history, innovation, and exploration.

## Conference Presenters Provide Perspective on Preservation and Adaptation

The presenters at this year's Annual Conference are steeped in the agricultural heritage traditions so important to the Michigan Barn Preservation Network. We are thrilled to have their thought-provoking and entertaining presentations scheduled for the event. Here's a bit about their backgrounds...



**Ina Hanel-Gerdenich**, Mirka Productions, LLC, has worked in the preservation field for over thirty years, specializing in historic resources associated with rural agriculture. A consultant in historic preservation, she served as co-author and editor of "The Agricultural Landscape of Michigan: an Historic Context for the Theme of Agriculture" (MSU Michigan Agricultural Heritage Project, funded by MDOT, 2004), a multi-disciplined

study of the history of agriculture in Michigan as seen on the landscape. She has conducted many surveys of farmsteads and farm buildings, as well as other properties, both as a private consultant and as an architectural historian for the Washtenaw County, Michigan government. Ms. Hanel-Gerdenich is member of the Michigan Barn Preservation Network. She has assisted with the organization of hands-on barn preservation workshops and currently serves as a member of the MBPN Awards Committee. Ms. Hanel-Gerdenich obtained an M.S. degree in Historic Preservation from Eastern Michigan University.



**Deron Nelson** is a large animal veterinarian in Coopersville, Michigan. He has a strong interest in horses and has six Norwegian Fjord horses, three of which he has bred and trained, that he uses for light farming and recreational uses. His interests extend beyond traditional agricultural practices using horses and into traditional timber-frame structures. In 2012, he built his first timber-frame, a 32'x48' horse barn with a full loft

that was featured in the 2016 barn tour. He has since been in-

involved in the construction and design of several other timber frames, including a 30' x 45' picnic pavilion constructed with all-volunteer labor at Sheridan Park in Coopersville. His most recent project will be the topic for presentation at the 2025 MBPN Annual Conference.

The Nelson Hay Barn is a 36'x48' salt box timber-frame with a two-level loft featuring a large cupola and a porch. The frame was cut and raised in the fall of 2023 and was completed in the summer of 2024. Deron will be presenting on design considerations, the process of cutting the members and joinery, assembly, raising the frame by hand, and finishes. He is passionate about maintaining traditional methods of timber-frame construction in ways that are aesthetically pleasing, practical, and sustainable for present day agricultural uses.

Because of its scope, his session will be divided into two parts, before and after lunch and various presentations.



**Greg, Kathy and Blain Adams** are the owners and operators of Stone House Vinyards in Evart, Michigan. Greg is the great-grandson of Ralph Hinkley, the founder of their farm. Their farm was established in 1910 as a dairy farm operation. Now in its sixth generation of family, the farm has been re-imagined and turned into a fruit farm and winery complete with a tasting room for the public to come and experience wine tastings.

The Stone House Barn construction project began as a facility to house a Tasting Room for Stone House Vinyards which was established in 2018 by Greg, Kathy, and Blain Adams of Evart. The barn was an addition project to an existing barn. Grand Traverse Timber and Frame in Traverse City, Michigan was the supplier of the timber and frame for the project.

The Adamses' presentation will show the evolution of the barn on the farm from a dairy production barn to a winery tasting room. It will also showcase the construction project that took place in 2022 through 2023 in order to build the new facility.

# A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

The old adage that “a picture is worth a thousand words” is certainly true when it comes to rural Michigan. It helps to have someone who both enjoys taking pictures and who has the skill (and eye) to appreciate what Michigan has to offer.

John Cole likes to take photographs of farms—in all of their distinctiveness and variations. If you enjoyed the colorful and eye-catching picture of the Wild Pumpkin Farm barn and silo on the cover of the 2025 MBPN Calendar, you’ve seen some of his work! Having posted the same image on social media, John reports an astounding number of “likes” subsequent to the post—as many as 90,000 likes, to be exact. “Something different...that’s what I look for,” says John.

Originally from Utah, John moved with his family to Coleman in Midland County and is now retired, but he hasn’t stopped pursuing his great avocation—photography. “I’ve always enjoyed photography,” he says, and we are fortunate that he finds Michigan farmsteads a fascinating and fruitful environment for his hobby. And you may find his approach to his photography both clever and creative...

Realizing that a single person approaching a farmhouse might prove somewhat unsettling, he often takes along one or more of his children, who are more than happy to accompany their father on his wanderings in search of photo opportunities. “I always look forward to talking to people,” he says, “and folks tend to open up more when

they see the children. They often invite me to take pictures, and the kids enjoy cookies and talking to the farm owners.”

Silos, in particular, often catch his eye—in all of their diversity and grandeur. Different styles, different caps, wood, cement, plain, fancy, steel-wrapped...the diversity of silo construction is breathtaking. He particularly enjoys going inside silos and taking pictures from that perspective. A few of his more dramatic images are included below.

And silos aren’t the only thing that attracts this photographer’s attention. Farmsteads and the buildings on those properties feature other architectural and equipment elements that are photogenic. Many farmers proudly display their old tractors. Weathervanes adorn many structures. And, of course, the ubiquitous windmills dot the Michigan rural countryside.

Speaking to John Cole, one instantly understands his deep appreciation for and attraction to Michigan’s rural heritage. We are fortunate to be able to share his vision of that heritage through his exceptional photography.

—Keith Kehlbeck, MBPN Newsletter Editor

More of John Cole’s photographs are featured on the following pages, providing visual context to the article by Steve Stier on page 6 (“90 Old Tractors”).



*A few of the iconic rural landscape features encountered by John Cole in his photographic adventures.*

*Photos by John Cole*



# 90 Old Tractors



Who has 90 old tractors?

Steven Brown, owner of "Trails End Farm" in rural Kalkaska does. But why? Well, it all started eight years ago with his newly acquired run-down barn that he wanted to fix up. Steve says the barn seemed like a forever project with major improvements occurring in 2015, 2017, and 2022. As he was collecting repair parts and pieces from fallen down barns, he began to see more and more old tractors and farm machinery setting behind the barns and in fence rows nearly covered with brush and weeds. Most people would see them as junk, but Steve saw them as stories, human stories. As the barn was slowly rehabilitated, Steve began to adopt the tractors he saw to put in the barn. Along with collecting the tractors, he collected the human stories that went with them.

For example, there is the story of the 1921 Fordson tractor that hauled draft horses off Mackinac Island when ice froze over in Lake Huron. And the one about the 1947 1 1/2 ton Studebaker truck that hauled produce from truck farms to market. Steve loved hearing the stories and retelling them to folks who would stop by his place to marvel at his collection. These people love to tell Steve their own stories reminiscing about their own experiences of "back in the day" with similar tractors.

These days, the barn is completely renovated and is overflowing with tractors and other farm equipment that Steve loves to show off to visitors. It has been his recovery from three tours of duty in Iraq. Who says old tractors don't have value?

—Steve Stier, MBPN Past President and Technical Committee Chair



Photos by Steve Stier

Steve Brown at his renovated barn at Trails End Farm

## A few of the tractors encountered by John Cole at farms around Michigan.



The red tractor with the large fenders is an old Farmall tractor that is designed to work in Apple orchards. On the side of it, it says ORCHARD. The farmer that owns it did restore it. He just had to drive it out of his barn to show me, and he has a few more other tractors there to that he restored.





# 2025 Barn of the Year Awards



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

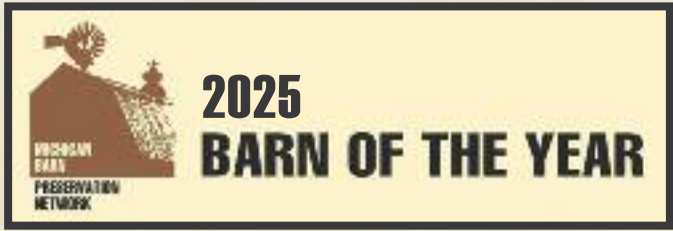
Submissions for the 2025 Barn of the Year Awards were accepted for a period of three months, ending January 31, 2025. Promotional activities dominated the first several weeks of the submission period, including press releases, quarterly newsletter, e-news blasts, announcements accompanying the 2025 barn calendar, as well as a radio interview and print articles.

**I am pleased to report that this year, we had a healthy nominating "class" of 13 barns, pictures of which are included below.** Nominated barns come from areas throughout the state.

Prior to the conference, the Barn of the Year Committee will have spent many hours evaluating submissions for this year's awards. As in years past, their diligent work and input result in the finalized awards to be presented at the Conference.

### The Barn of the Year Committee consists of:

- |                      |                |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Ina Hanel-Gerdenich  | Keith Kehlbeck |
| Tom Nehil            | Pat McKay      |
| Bill and Rose Putnam | Mara Lancaster |
| Nichole Van Blaricum |                |



Their review, analysis and appraisal of the nominees is critical to making this another successful year for this important Awards task. No other program brings attention to and impacts the mission of MBPN like the Barn of the Year. The committee's loyal participation in the process is gratefully acknowledged and deeply appreciated.

Every year, many exceptional Michigan barns are nominated for the Barn of the Year Award, and 2024-2025 was no exception. All 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 recognize their exceptional stories with Certificates of Appreciation as "Great Michigan Barns."

Despite the fact that Michigan's barns, symbols of our great agricultural heritage, are disappearing at an alarming rate, there is reason to be optimistic—a reason to celebrate. The prestigious Barn of the Year Award is highly sought after by barn owners who have made the extra effort to save a Michigan Barn. Join us on March 15th to honor those awardees who, every year, make us proud!  
—Keith Anderson, MBPN Awards Committee Chair

Photos by Keith Anderson



Trails End  
(Kalkaska County)



Kucharek Barn  
(Livingston County)



Somerville Barn  
(Ingham County)



Nelson Hay Barn  
(Ottawa County)



Bell Family Farm Barn  
(Tuscola County)



Green Meadow Farm Barn  
(Clinton County)



Lessiter Barn  
(Oakland County)



The Barn House  
(Kalamazoo County)



Gaslor Barn  
(Livingston County)



Hanish Homestead Barn  
(Livingston County)



B&B Heartwoods, Inc.  
(Washtenaw County)



Flywheelers (Stephenson)  
Barn (Van Buren County)



Fisk Farm Barn (Oakland County)



Photo by Doug Martin

Laura and Dean Johnson receive the 2024 Barn of the Year Award for their barn in Old Mission Peninsula.



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**Pre-Conference 2025, No. 108**

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## 2025 Calendars a Big Success

By now, you should have received the critically-acclaimed 2025 MBPN Calendar. With silos as the theme, the 2025 calendar features Wild Pumpkin Farm in Gladwin County on the cover. Its barn has two concrete stave silos with whimsical murals by artist Zach Curtis (and photographed by John Cole). Inside the calendar is the complete article by architectural historian Ina Hanel-Gerdenich about the history of silos on Michigan farms (excerpted in this newsletter).

Thanks again to our loyal, longtime advertisers, Cupola members, and new advertisers who supported the printing of our 2025 calendar!

—Kristine Ranger

## MBPN Endowment Receives Benefits from Matching Fund Challenge

One of our members suggested a matching fund challenge. As a result, MBPN received a \$25,000 matching fund challenge gift for our endowment that ended 12-31-24. This means that the next \$25,000 in endowment gifts will be matched up to \$25,000. The results are in. The matching fund gift was first announced on our October bus tour. It was also announced in the fall newsletter, e-newsletter, and personal visits. As a result, we received \$20,000 toward the matching funds, which when matched, equal \$40,000. And then, most recently, we received a check for \$5,000. The addition of these funds has boosted our current balance. Our fund is now over \$250,000 and headed for \$300,000!

The matching fund project was a heartwarming and inspirational experience. Thank you to everyone who contributed time, talent or treasure toward this MBPN endowment effort!

—Clare Koenigs knecht, Treasurer and  
Finance Committee Chair

**Consider supporting the MBPN with a Cupola lifetime membership, which benefits our Endowment Fund. Contact Treasurer Clare Koenigs knecht to find out how.**