

Mail Pouch barns threatened by highway beautification law

Ohio has been losing its enormous barn heritage to highway development and urban and rural sprawl for decades. The most recent assault on Ohio's barns targeted those with the familiar Mail Pouch icon painted on the side.

Highway departments argue that the only way to ensure economic improvement is with improved transportation access. These voices chime in with other state and regional leaders who argue that tourism and travel is the best bet for economic improvement. These same people are responsible for trotting out taxes and disincentives for residents to maintain the very attractions that tourists seek.

What do tourists pursue? Some seek theme parks, but more and more the average traveler is in search of natural and cultural history. People want to explore the scenery and local, regional and genealogical history.

The barn is a part of all of that. Besides the fields and trees, the barn is the most recognizable part of Ohio's scenic attractions. The barn is also a relic of Ohio's agricultural history. Barn frames are the final resting place of Ohio's great primeval forests. They're all that's left of Ohio's biggest and best trees. Barns were built by Ohioan's ancestors and protected the harvest that nurtured many an Ohioan. Barns are a direct link to our natural and cultural heritage.

While the state permits more and larger billboard advertisements to blight our scenic byways like litter on a stick, they also came up with the misguided notion that taxing property owners for decades-old Mail Pouch icons would be right in line with highway beautification. Such tax disincentives could have resulted in property owners finally deciding that the old barn was a nuisance and ought to be pushed over or burned down at last.

The good news is that many Ohioans weighed in against the proposal and informed the Ohio Department of Transportation of their concerns. Their voices have been heard, and this threat, at least, has passed over Ohio's barns.

Background photo: Gable-roofed Yankee barn with Mail Pouch advertisement facing SR 7 in Meigs County.

All photos by Tom O'Grady unless otherwise noted



FRIENDS OF OHIO BARNs

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The Old BARN POST

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Hocking County Bicentennial Barn demolished

The Ohio Bicentennial is over. Won't be needing those special barns with the red, white and blue logos any more. It's time to get started on the next hundred years and there is no time to waste. Out with the old and in with the new. Tricentennial logos will have to be stenciled onto the sides of gas pumps and billboards.

Hocking County leads the way in the removal of the specially designated bicentennial icons as sprawl advances down the Hocking Valley. It's a good bet that

the new gas station/convenience store that will replace the Hocking County Bicentennial Barn won't stand the test of time like its predecessor. And when the wrecking ball shows up to move it out of the way for a newer and more convenient gas station/convenience store, who will come to its defense? No one.

It's a sign of the times when it is determined to be in the best economic interests of communities pursuing the tourism dollar to tear down the

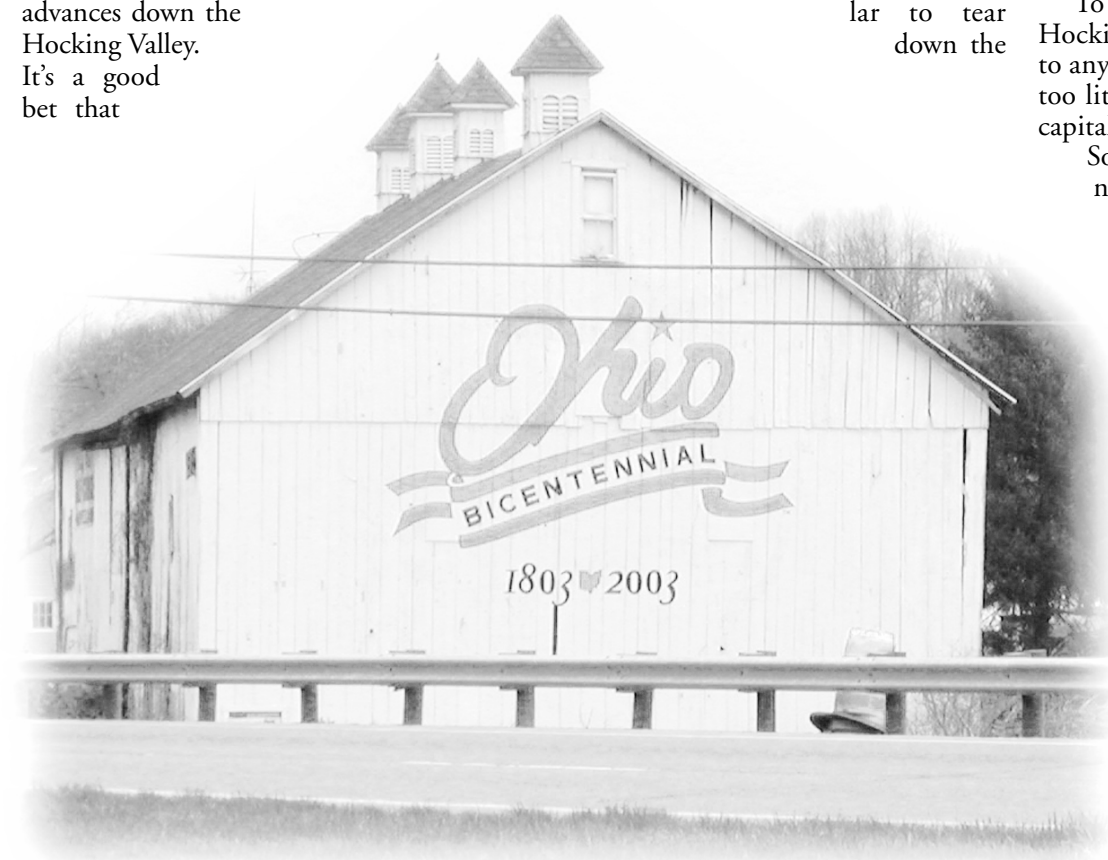
very thing a tourist would be interested in seeing and replace it with the same old thing travelers are forever trying to escape. What is scenic Ohio anyway, if it's not the trees and the fields, the hills and the valleys dotted with the historic barns of Ohio's rich heritage?

Well, it's only one barn, you say. That's the way they disappear. One at a time. Right before our eyes! Will we, at last, begin to see billboards along our thoroughfares that sport murals of our lost natural and cultural heritage?

To the credit of the developers in Hocking County, they offered the barn to any takers, free of charge. But that was too little, way too late. It takes time and capital to save a treasure like this.

Some recommend that they make the next gas station/convenience store in scenic southeast Ohio based in a part of Ohio's history. Maybe tourists would choose to buy their gas and snacks from an operator in an old barn rather than from the same ol' same ol'.

Left: The Hocking County Bicentennial Barn was lost to sprawl. The site will soon be occupied by a convenience store/gas station in the county billing itself as the "Gateway to Ohio's Scenic Wonderland." In spite of local citizen efforts to have the barn incorporated into the new development or moved, time ran out.



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Tour explores Greene County barns

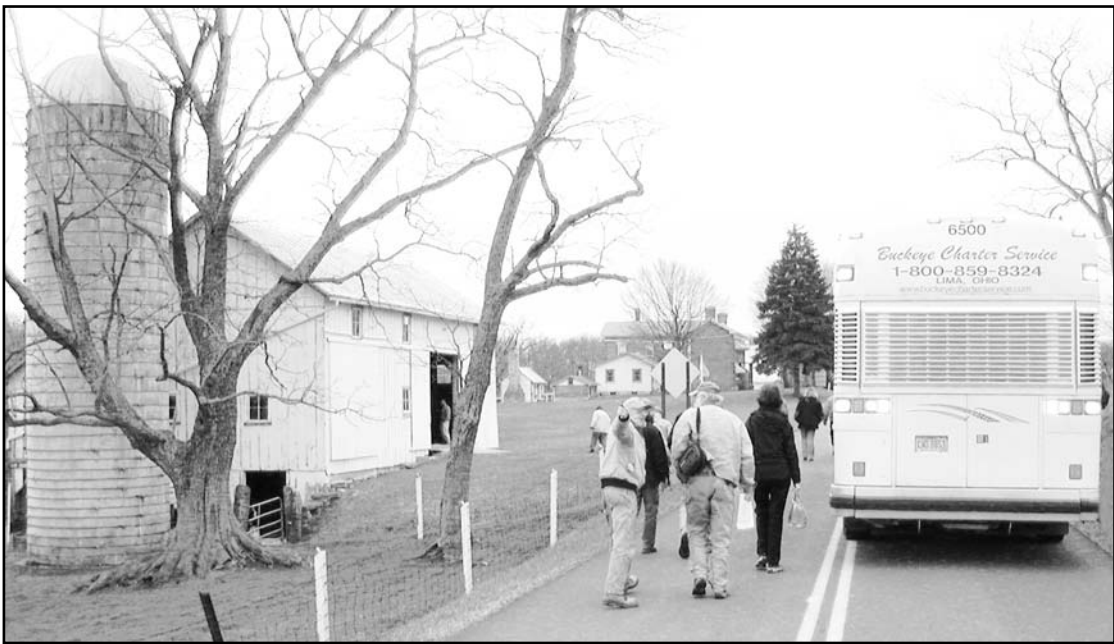
Ohio Barn Conference V began with a barn tour. A hundred people filled two buses and visited several barns around Xenia in Greene County. Each barn had its unique setting, tucked into the roll of the glaciated landscape of southwestern Ohio.

Starting with coffee and donuts in the Ankenny barn, which was retrofitted as a community center in a new housing development, the tour buses stopped at six more farms before the long day of barn exploration came to an end. After having lunch in the new timber frame barn/restaurant at Young's Dairy, the Young family hosted a tour of the old, still-operating dairy barn at their large establishment.

The Barn Detectives, Rudy Christian and Larry Sulzer, along with a few of the local barn enthusiasts from the Yellow Springs area, helped tour participants learn about the history and changing uses of the barns over time. Subtle details such as straight or curved saw marks help detectives determine the approximate age of the barn. Empty mortises, missing trunnels, and pegged flooring are all clues to the ever-changing needs and farming practices in Ohio's past.

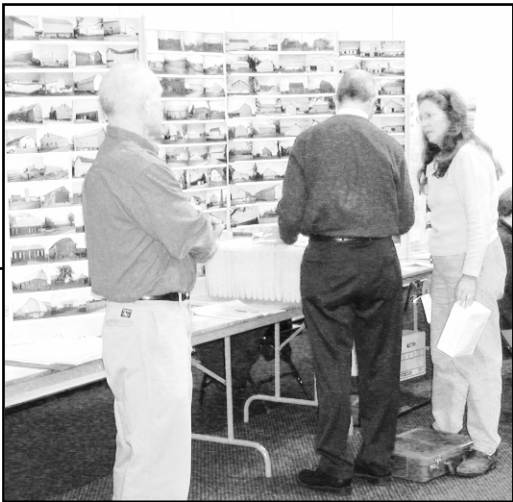
A recurring problem facing many of the barns is the result of one of these changing

technologies and farm practices. The introduction of the hay track many years after the barn was built resulted in some long-term structural problems in some barns. To make the hay track fit, sections of the top tie beams were cut out. A number of barns had cables stretched from one side to the other in an attempt to keep the weight of the roof from forcing the side walls apart. In most cases the effort to curtail the damage has kept the barn standing but was evidently not going to prevent the inevitable.



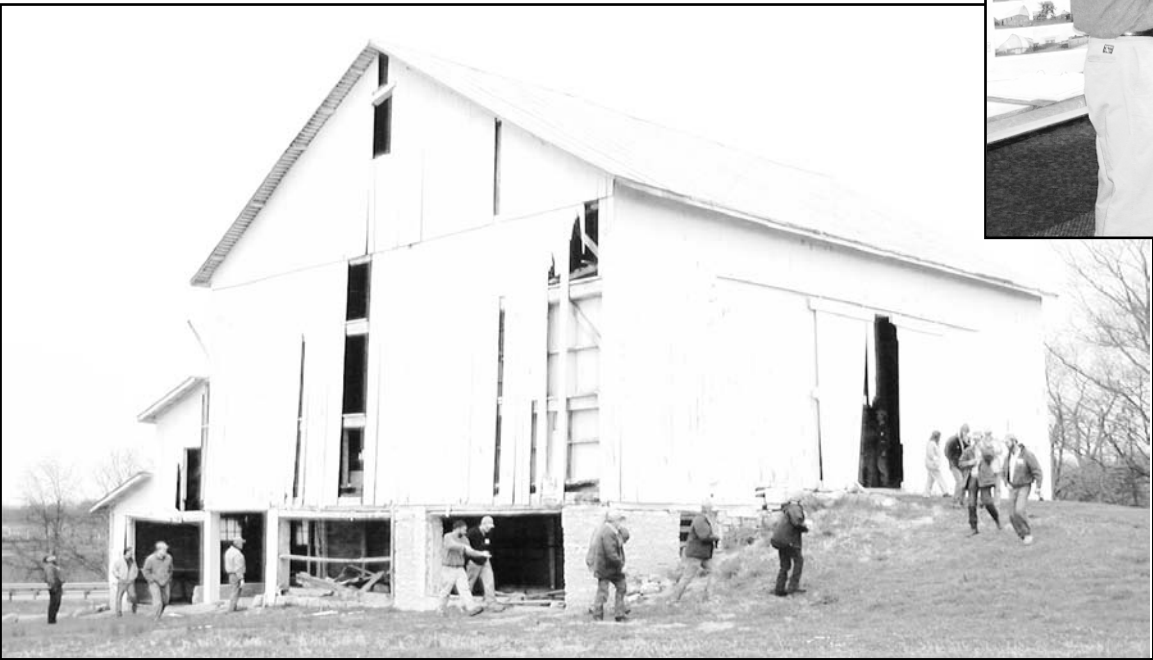
Tour members offload one of the buses at the McDonald Stone Quarry barn. This stop featured two barns, a 200-year-old cabin, a brick home built in 1839, a brick and stone root cellar, tool shop and more.

Everyone enjoyed the tour and learned more about the region's barns than they anticipated. Talk of next year's barn tour could already be heard as folks were disembarking from the buses.



Above: Bob Rowland, Noel Watson and Laura Saeger at the Ashland County Barn Survey booth.

Left: Like bees buzzing around a hive, barn tour participants delighted in crawling all over the inside and outside of the Brookmeade barn.



Improvements suggested during annual meeting

The annual member meeting was held at the Ohio Barn Conference April 3 at the Greene County Fairgrounds. Three board members had served their terms and all three will serve a second term. They are Tom O'Grady, Laura Saeger and Dan Troth. We also welcomed Bob Rowland of Ashland County to the board. Your board members are required to attend a monthly conference call or face-to-face planning session; participate in community efforts to educate the public by writing, speaking or representing the organization in interactive presentations; compile and publish our newsletter; organize the annual conference/barn tour; and share in the responsibility of running a nonprofit business. Their time is volunteered, but the rewards are great!

During the meeting, folks were asked to give suggestions for future programs or group operations. That combined with the conference evaluation sheets has given us some valuable advice from our membership. Top of the favorites list this year were the barn tour and networking with each other, followed by the Barn Detectives, barn survey information, and positive responses to presentations, displays, the book store and good food. Suggestions included more barn repair/maintenance information, more hands-on demonstrations, continued presentations on local history and the evolution of farming practices, and expanding the contractors list. Thank you for your ideas and support!

Financial report

Total income from conference fees, barn tour, raffle, exhibitors, and sale of merchandise was \$9,924.28.

Total expenses for conference, barn tour, buses, meals, assembly hall, speakers and related printing were \$7,619.77.

Balance in checking as of May 30, 2004 was \$12,271.29.

Mark your calendar for Ag Day in Downtown Wooster Saturday, July 31 from 3:30 to 8:30 p.m.

There will be tractors, farm displays, children's activities, Cedar Valley Cloggers, music, and a Friends of Ohio Barns mini-barn raising. Call (330) 262-6222 for more information.

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The Old BARN Q&A

By Rudy Christian

Q. Did farmers build their own barns?

A. No.

During most of the 1800s barns were built as timber frames. These barns were built of timbers cut from local woodlots and carefully hewn with axes or hauled to nearby mills to be sawn into timbers. The timbers were then carefully joined with mortise and tenon joints held together with wooden pegs or "treenails." Like farming, this work required skilled hands. It was done by master craftsmen known as timber framers.

Late in the 1800s and early in the 20th century barn kits became available from companies like Sears & Roebuck. It is possible some of these frames were erected by their new owners, but it is more likely that the skills of experienced carpenters were hired to put up the new barn. The same is true of the barn plans that became available from extension agents and agricultural publications which included plans for high tech plank barns that were built of rough sawn planks and spikes.

Q. Can one or two missing slates on my barn roof cause any problems?

A. YES!

Any leak in a barn roof means the end for the barn in time if it is not repaired. Water is the enemy of wooden buildings. Even though the wood dries out after a rain storm, the repeated wetting and drying will rot the timbers. Since timbers dry more rapidly on the outside, they rot from the inside out. By the time the damage is visible it is usually quite extensive, often requiring complicated and costly repairs.

The best thing you can do for your barn is to go in right after a heavy downpour (but not when lightening is striking!) with a flashlight and carefully look for wet spots or drips. If you see them, you may be able to locate the leak by turning off your light and closing the door. If you see streaks of light or what look like stars, you're looking at the sky. Tin roofs can often be fixed with a well placed and caulked patch. Slate roofs require a slate specialist since slates are fragile, but replacing a few broken slates isn't expensive. If a shingled roof is leaking, it may be time to replace it. If so, consider a metal or slate roof for your barn's sake.

First annual FOB picnic?

One of the ideas that came up during the recent conference was a plan to gather our members and have an old-fashioned covered dish picnic. This sounds like a lot of fun and a casual way for all of us to see each other in a situation that allows talking and getting to know each other better. So, we are looking for a volunteer to offer us a spot to meet. Maybe you have a barn you want to show off, a farmstead with room for tables in the yard or a special place that barn enthusiasts would appreciate. Don't worry; we will help with logistics and organization! Contact Laura at (330) 624-7282 or e-mail FriendsOhioBarns@aol.com.