

2011 Barn Tour: Just when you thought you knew Ohio barns ...



Tour members examine the construction of the Kohler barn, an American barn incorporating building techniques of English and German ancestry common to the Fairfield County region. Below: The Fun Bus and tour members at the Kohler barn.



The overhang on all four sides of the Pontus barn is hidden from the outside with many later additions. One must enter the basement to discover its secrets.

Barns that do not fit on their foundations seemed to be the theme of this year's Ohio Barn Tour. Three of the barns visited had floors reaching well out over the end walls of the basement. However, two barns fit their foundations just fine. The Gall barn was turned into a fine home and the Kohler barn was our first example of what Rudy Christian defined as an American barn. It had some examples of joinery and construction found in English barns and in German barns, but it wasn't a New England barn or a Pennsylvania German Barn, and it wasn't a southern barn. The overall style added up to an American barn.

Two of the Pennsylvania German barns, the Miller barn and the Mertz barn, had a forebay—times two. The barns had overhangs on two sides. This kind of barn is not common in Ohio. It appears, according to an article by Ohio geographer Hubert Wilhelm, that a number of them were built in northern Fairfield and Perry counties. The Miller barn appears to have been built of materials salvaged from an earlier barn, most likely a crib log barn, a type very common along stretches of the old Zane's Trace.

Then there was the Pontus barn. This barn didn't fit its foundation in any direction, over-

hanging on all four sides. This unique Pennsylvania barn is not obvious from the outside, as it has had a number of additions over the years. But get a busload of junior barn detectives crawling around its basement and it gives up its secrets. This barn had a fine stone foundation with overhanging timbers on all sides. In its early days it must have looked much like one of the old defensive blockhouses once built on the Ohio frontier to protect settlers from angry Native Ohioans being displaced from their homelands.

The last stop on the tour was a pure delight. Built in 1829, the Rock Mill served the region's agricultural community for seven decades. Abandoned around 1900, it stood on the cliff over the Upper Falls of the Hocking River in total neglect for nearly a century. Enlightened individuals saw the wealth of heritage and culture in this structure and have now restored the Rock Mill. It is seen now not merely from a utilitarian perspective but as a treasure in the Fairfield County landscape.

Friends of Ohio Barns and members of the 2011 tour are grateful to the Fairfield County folks who hosted the tour and those who fed the barn enthusiasts in Bremen.

—Tom O'Grady



Left: Miller barn with double overhang and ramp up to the threshing floor. Above: Interesting joinery in the Miller barn basement.



Above: The overhanging forebay on the upper side of the Mertz barn has recently been closed in with a cement block foundation.



Right: Stanley Mertz, born on the farm some time ago, chats with FOB member Keith Sommers.

Below: The Mertz barn with a double overhang hidden by the white sliding doors. The center section with windows is the foundation of the old barn.

Left: Tour members explore the summer kitchen and the springhouse beneath. The Mertz family homestead is seen in the rear.



Junior Barn Detectives

The Junior Barn Detective (JBD) arm of FOB participated in Friday's Barn Tour as well as in a well-attended breakout session during the Saturday afternoon presentations. This has been the third annual barn tour in which participants have had the opportunity to scrutinize a needy barn and identify areas in need of some TLC. The small groups were accompanied throughout the unique double forebay barn by experienced Junior Barn Detectives.

Saturday's JBD afternoon breakout session was highlighted by an active discussion led by Kendall Taylor. She explained how she and her husband Jim have been very successful in using her PowerPoint barn presentation to interest groups in the FOB message. The historical societies, churches, and civic organizations in and about Stow, Ohio, have been very receptive to her top-quality program. She has graciously offered to help other folks learn how to put together their own programs.

The design and construction characteristics of the newly completed 1/16th scale model traditional Pennsylvania forebay bank barn were explained and discussed. The completely interactive structure was then disassembled and re-raised during and after the breakout session. It was designed and constructed primarily for the purpose of determining a practical and economical method by which to produce numerous models as educational tools for use by JBDs across Ohio. The most appropriate model to produce is most likely going to be the traditional American ground thrashing barn that Randy Nash explained in his interesting presentation earlier in the day. A sturdy model of that relatively simple but quite common Ohio barn should be able to withstand the rigors of numerous raisings by children and adults alike.

—The JBD crew

Barn Conference highlights

The 2011 Ohio Barn Conference in Fairfield County featured Randy Nash from the New York State Barns grants program. He talked about identifying the oldest barns in your community. Ric Beck, FOB president, gave a recap of the barn raising at the Sunny 95 community center in Upper Arlington last autumn. Attendees got some local history from board member Tom O'Grady and Joe Steiger, a retired Extension agent who spent his career working in Fairfield County.



Carroll Neidhardt of Marion County talks about the symbols farmers incorporated into their barns to protect the barn and livestock from the misfortunes of weather, lightning, and other natural threats faced on Ohio's early frontier farms.

The Junior Barn Detectives, Paul Knoebel, Larry Sulzer, and Gary Clower, conducted a breakout session with a tabletop model of a barn to be used as an educational tool. (See related article on this page.)

Rachel Krause informed the group about federal tax credits for rehabilitating historic buildings. Those exciting Barn Detectives, Rudy Christian and Larry Sulzer (FOB board members), gave a recap of the barns visited of the previous day's tour. Bruce Babcock, representing the Fairfield County Historic Parks District, gave a very informative talk about the history, operation, and restoration of the 1829 Rock Mill.

The conference wound up with a presentation by return speaker Carroll Neidhardt, who spoke about some of the meaning and heritage behind symbols found on barns. His "Moon and Star on the Barn Door" helps one realize that such art is more than mere decoration and that by studying such glyphs we can learn more about the history and culture of the barn builders and their times.



Photo by Tom O'Grady

Joe Steiger, agricultural Extension agent with a long history in Fairfield County, talks about the agricultural heritage found in old barns of the region.

Above left: The restored Rock Mill high on the cliff above the falls. Above right: Exploring the Rock Mill, mill race, and covered bridge on the cliff. Below: The Rock Mill covered bridge straddling the upper falls of the Hocking.



Model Pennsylvania bank barn with forebay used in the JBD session at the Ohio Barn Conference.