

2007 Barn Conference

Friends of Ohio Barns' 2007 Barn Conference will be held March 30, 31, and April 1 at the Holiday Inn Hotel, Mansfield. Our theme will be "Ohio Barns Built by the Trades."

The committee has picked out some great barns for Friday's barn tour, with different styles and many unique features, starting with the 2006 barn of the year for adaptive use. We will also be seeing a number of slate roofs with the years in them during the drive. Lunch will be in a greenhouse, so we will begin to smell a hint of spring. We will also be going through the little town of Jeromesville, which has a number of historic buildings.

Saturday will feature speakers and demonstrations. Trades people will give demonstrations and answer restoration questions.

Saturday night we will have a silent auction and entertainment.

On Sunday we will be going to Malabar Farms in the morning, where we will tour three barns. Ashland County Barns and Rural Heritage Society will have a display of the 1,400-plus barns they have surveyed.

So mark your calendar for another great barn conference.

Background photo: The Byers Barn was one of the barns selected for the 2007 tour. Charles Kettering and Orville Wright spent time in this barn.

Photo by Bob Rowland



FRIENDS OF OHIO BARNs

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The Old BARN POST

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Ohio's disappearing barn owls

A ghostly apparition sweeps silently at eye level into the darkness over the pasture. His flight startles the unsuspecting farmhand and proves deadly to a meadow vole out in search of its dinner.

The fourteenth-century writer Geoffrey Chaucer described the common barn owl as "... a prophet of woe and mischance." Meadow voles, shrews, mice, and rats have good reason to agree with this. But around a farm, the more the population of these small critters is kept under control, the more of the farmer's harvest is secure—woe and mischance for rodents turn into good fortune for the farmer.

Common nearly worldwide, the barn owl detects its prey primarily by flying over open grassland. Its ability to fly silently and its extremely sensitive hearing help the owl secure its prey.

The barn owl hunts at night with the use of highly-developed auditory senses by which it detects the scurrying movements of mice and voles. Their uniquely-shaped facial disc helps gather and direct sound to their ears, which are positioned to allow sounds to reach each ear at slightly different times. Neural connections enable the brain to calculate the distance and the source of the sound. Although the barn owl can see quite well in the dark, it seldom uses its eyesight in search of prey. Eyesight is primarily used during twilight and to locate perches and roosting areas.

As Ohio's primeval forests gave way to farmland, the population of barn owls increased. By the late 1800s, the Ohio countryside was ideal barn owl habitat. Farmsteads connected by grassy meadows, hay fields, orchards, and woodlots were

interspersed with nesting sites in hollow trees, barns, silos, water towers, church steeples, and other lofty structures.

Many barns dotting the Ohio landscape sport a date or pattern beneath the eaves on the gable end. The patterns include circles, stars, diamonds and more elaborate configurations that resemble German crosses, snowflakes, and other shapes. One barn, decaying back into the land in southern Ohio, has the Masonic compass and angle cut into the barn siding below the gable. In each case there is a part of the date or the design that is large enough to allow ingress and egress of the owl and other winged critters like sparrows, doves, and bats. Although some say these carvings are the signature of the barn builder, others claim these patterns are owl holes.

By the 1930s Ohio had so many barns and so much grassland that a barn was as likely to be home to a pair of barn owls as not. The barn owl population peaked during that decade and began its decline during the next. Farmers radically decreased their use of draft animals and took to mechanized farming. Fields where draft horses grazed and mice and voles prospered were converted to crops farmed with tractors. This loss of grassland for hunting, coupled with the initiation of pesticides and more fertilizers, meant trouble for the barn owl.

By the 1960s the barn owl had disappeared from most Ohio counties. Although not listed with the endangered species, this unfortunate decline has landed the barn owl on the threatened species list in Ohio. There are currently ten to

twenty nesting pairs in nest boxes and barns across the state. Highland, Adams, and Butler counties seem to offer some refuge for these uncommon agricultural allies. They are all but non-existent in northwestern Ohio.

The barn owl suffers from predation by the great horned owl. Its nests and brood are ravaged by raccoons, skunks, opossums, and snakes. Collisions with fences, power lines, cars, trucks, and trains also take their toll on this declining species. However, habitat loss has been the owl's greatest curse.

Nest boxes, barns, silos, and hollow trees are some of the tools needed for expanding the population of barn owls. The owl also needs pasture fields maintained with wildlife-friendly agricultural practices. Small farms and family farming operations are good for barns, as well as barn owls and the many other tenants that take up residence in Ohio barns.

— Tom O'Grady

Owl holes such as the one below are typically found on the gable ends of barns beneath the eaves. Some claim

these designs are the ornate signatures of the craftsmen who built the barns. Others say they were carved to allow access for barn owls. They may be both.



Friends of Ohio Barns appoints new president

Long time board member Tim Mason, elected president of Friends of Ohio Barns at the Ohio Barn Conference VII in April, has stepped down. Tim has several demands pulling him in various directions and felt he could not provide the time and leadership necessary for the organization at this time. Recently elected vice-president Ric Beck has agreed to step into the position. Bob Rowland was elected vice-president. FOB is looking to navigate new challenges and move the organization forward with new blood at the helm.

My daily commute is about fifteen miles. I make most of it through rural areas of the county, so on nice days it is an enjoyable bicycle ride. Small changes become obvious at slower speeds, so for the past eight years I have noted the slight shifts in farms and fields, streams and highways. More traffic, a new traffic signal, more people, more homes. Farms and fields are being replaced. Fields that once grew corn and cattle now grow houses and manicured lawns.

About a year ago, one of my favorite farmsteads was forever changed. It was quite picturesque—a stately, two-story home with neatly-arranged barns and outbuildings all framed in by well-kept fields of hay and grain. A barn was being dismantled on this particular day. The barn appeared to be a typical early 1950s style machinery shed—low roofline, long and narrow, the barn we would expect to see as farming changes brought about a need to house more equipment. But when the siding was removed from the barn, a

magnificent double crib barn was revealed. Huge hand-hewn timbers told the story of the earliest settlement in the county and the challenges that faced these pioneers as they carved out a farmstead in the wild Ohio territory.

The change that I experienced the day that beautiful log structure was revealed has caused me to make some changes in the direction of my life. One of those changes includes stepping down as president and board member of Friends of Ohio Barns. Why, you might ask, as I describe this loss of another barn do I seemingly abandon the very organization that is attempting to save barns? The answer is quite simple. I can't save that fantastic double crib barn. It has found a home in another state. Truth is, I am quite powerless to save many barns, and change moves us ever forward. But what I can do is attempt to document that barn, tell its history, and preserve the memory of that farm and farm family, and hundreds like it in Licking County. So I step down from the board to tackle the task of a county barn survey.

My fall will be filled with a farmland preservation project and the planning stages of a countywide project to document barns. I did not want to shortchange Friends of Ohio Barns by being overcommitted, and so for a while I'll be a member with a different roll. I will miss the behind-the-scenes workings of Friends, but will enjoy the many friendships that being a part of Friends has afforded me.

I'll still participate and volunteer as time permits, and maybe even submit an

article or two for the newsletter now and then. Thanks to all for all your support, and I encourage you to remain supportive of Ohio's barns. See you at a barn function somewhere.

— Tim Mason

Hi, I'm Ric Beck, board member and newly appointed president of your Friends of Ohio Barns. As a board member for four years, I am acutely aware of the time commitment. I'm sure being president will ask for even more of my time. That said, I can relate to Tim Mason's desire to step away from Friends of Ohio Barns, stay closer to home, and pursue a different avenue in the quest to record the rich history of Ohio's Barns.

Tim's area of Licking County has numerous beautiful barns, some dating back to Ohio's earliest settlements. These barns, like many in Ohio, are worthy of saving, recording, and simply enjoying for as long as they are here. I should know—I just re-assembled a small barn from Licking County on my new home site in Morrow County. It will be an adaptive re-use barn with new life as a workshop and storage area.

Tim has been an integral part of Friends of Ohio Barns, and will be sorely missed. I know he will continue to champion the cause of Friends, even if it is on a smaller, more concentrated scale. So, to Tim Mason ... thanks for all you have done for Friends of Ohio Barns! We look forward to seeing you at various barn events and helping you with the Licking County barn survey.

— Ric Beck

Picnic held in Miami County

The Friends of Ohio Barns Picnic was held September 3 at Fred and Brenda Copeland's barn in Miami County. It was a great fall day for a picnic in a barn with lots of friends. Fred and Brenda did a wonderful job setting up for the event with potted mums, bales of straw donated by Fulton Farms, and lots of Brenda's own touches, including flowers on the tables, children's games, and a video of a 1929 barn raising. It you didn't attend you missed a great picnic.

Miami County Barn Survey members were there to show us their books of pictures and the survey sheets.

Each family received an Ashland County barn calendar.

Brenda then took the group of about thirty-five on a tour of the barn. She said she learned many new things about her barn with the help of Dan Troth, Paul Knoebel, Tom Kumbusky, Dane Gustafson, and Larry Sulzer.

— Nancy Rowland

Update: Chillicothe's Carlisle Building

During Ohio Barn Conference IV in Ross County in 2003, some attendees happened to be seated at the window of an establishment on Main Street across from the historic Carlisle Building when flames began to pour out of third story windows. A number of fire departments fought the blaze for several hours. Although the building sustained significant damage, reports indicated that the design of the building and its sturdy structure were instrumental in containing the fire and enabling firefighters to get it extinguished.

A lot of roofing slate, decorative stone crosses, and stone window treatments tumbled to the sidewalk during the fire. Portions of the roof were considerably compromised and the building suffered some water damage.

As it turns out, the cause was arson. Teens started the blaze in the empty building.

The building was salvaged and remains a landmark in the center of town. The Carlisle has been purchased and there are plans to get it back in service. However, it is a major undertaking.

While the main focus of FOB is the conservation and use of Ohio's barns, we are certainly supportive of all efforts to protect the heritage of Ohio's built environment.

Ask the BARN DETECTIVES

By Dan Troth

Q: I have a traditional German bank barn and some posts in the basement have rotted off or are missing and the barn floor above sags a bit in the middle. Can I borrow a barn jack and raise it so I can add more posts?

A: Maybe. This is a situation that needs to be analyzed very carefully or one can do more damage than good. Often even the pros will refuse to level the floor or attempt to raise it back to its original position.

The first consideration is safety. Correctly using even the reliable old barn jack requires some dos and don'ts. More of that in the next Q&A.

Let's address the more basic issue of how far one needs to raise the floor. More specifically, what is the location of the jacking point to the intermediate bent posts above the barn floor that support the tie beams, which in turn support the purlins and majority of the roof load. (The bent is that open wall between the barn floor and hay mows or between multiple barn floors. Depending on your barn depth there may be one or two or even more of these intermediate posts in between the front and rear walls.)

If one or more of these upper bent posts are raised too much while jacking beneath the floor, it is almost guaranteed that the tie beam immediately at the top of it will crack. The fracture will usually be in the weakest part of the tie beam, the side of the beam where its mortise houses the top of the post tenon. How much is too much? I'd say anything more than one inch. That's plenty far enough to slide a post

beneath or cut off the rotted bottom of an existing one and pour a new concrete pier beneath it.

Keep in mind that it probably took fifty to one hundred years for the tie beam to bend at this vulnerable joint as the basement post ever so slowly deteriorated and sank. To try and unbend it that much in a few minutes is not a good idea.

If the floor dips so that it requires more than one inch of raising at the bent posts, be aware of the chance of cracking the tie beam and having to live with a rather unsightly fix. It would be extremely difficult (and expensive) to replace a cracked tie beam due to its major function of holding the walls together and supporting the roof. The fix would usually involve scabbing some planks to the side of the tie beam and installing a cable or rod from front to rear walls to keep the walls from spreading. Unfortunately, the tie beam is one of the few if not only pieces of timber in the barn that is intended to be in tension and not compression. Consequently, the decision may be to simply fix the posts beneath the floor and live with a little sag.

If the sag is significant, it would probably be prudent to enlist the help of a knowledgeable barn repair professional who understands the dynamics of your particular barn layout. Doing so could bring to light other weaknesses or failures in the structure that could be contributing to the sag, or which may be compounded during what was thought to be a simple jacking attempt.

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Photo by Tom O'Grady

Friends of Ohio Barns has participated in Heritage Days at Malabar Farm in Richland County for several years with information booths, tool displays, mini barn raisings and other activities for kids. FOB was present again for this year's event September 23.

Check us out: FOB website, e-mail

Check out the Friends of Ohio Barns website at: <http://ohiobarns.osu.edu>.

Get information about membership, upcoming conferences and events, and an archive of all the previous issues of *The Old Barn Post*.

To contact FOB, send us an e-mail at friendsohiobarns@aol.com

Members and readers can feel free to submit articles and/or photos for possible inclusion in *The Old Barn Post*. Help us out. Get involved.