

*a national trust publication*

# Protecting Older and Historic Barns through Barn Preservation Programs

*by Jennifer Goodman and Bill Kimball*



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Jennifer Goodman and Bill Kimball

In communities across the country, older and historic barns are taking on new life, thanks to innovative programs that encourage owners to preserve their historic farm buildings. At least 11 states have developed barn programs to draw attention to historic barns and to help owners find ways to reuse and rehabilitate them. Two national programs have assisted this movement with information, guidance, and networking support. Hundreds of barn owners from all 50 states have benefited from these efforts. And countless rehabilitated barns dot the landscape thanks to these special initiatives.

How do these barn preservation programs work? Would it be possible to develop such a program in your state, region, or county? This publication is designed to help individuals and state and local preservation organizations get started in developing a barn preservation program. It will also help existing barn preservation programs fine-tune or expand their efforts.

## Threats to Older and Historic Barns

Even though many barns are being upgraded, travel in any region of the country will reveal numerous barns in disuse and deterioration. The roofs are sagging, the siding is loose or missing, and the foundations are crumbling. A variety of factors—from changing agricultural practices to urban sprawl—are contributing to the demise of older barns.

## Changing Agricultural Practices

Today, almost any discussion with a farmer about his or her deteriorating barn will elicit the following response: "That barn just doesn't fit anymore since we've changed our operations." The operation changes usually involve a different method of feed handling or a different kind of housing for the livestock. In the Midwest where a large number of barns were built for dairying, the practice of baling hay (instead of putting it up loose) means there is no need for the huge, high dairy barns. In addition, there has been a substantial shift from dairying to cash crop production, which requires a different kind of building. Similar changes have taken place in the Northeast and other dairy strongholds. Many tobacco barns in the Southeast, which were designed with slatted sides for air curing tobacco, are no longer in use as result of less demand for tobacco products.

## Consolidation of Farms

A second major factor contributing to barn deterioration is the consolidation of farms. Mechanization has made it possible for many more acres to be farmed at the same time. Thus several farms are combined or consolidated to make a larger unit. As a result, scattered farmsteads are abandoned or sold for non-farm residential purposes. In either case the barns involved are often seriously neglected.



*Barn preservation enthusiasts visit the Houston Barn in Contoocook, N.H., during a tour sponsored by the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.*

— Photo courtesy of the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.

## Quest for the Newest and Latest

Another factor contributing to the disrepair and disuse of old barns is the overwhelming tendency of Americans for wanting something new instead of using or adapting the old. In agriculture, farmers have built pole-barns or new low-framed structures instead of making changes to the older barn. Across the country these low,

*Cover: The Poore Farmstead in northern New Hampshire operates as a nonprofit museum as part of an ongoing effort to save and interpret historic farm buildings.*

— Photo courtesy of the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.





*In 2004 the National Trust listed the tobacco barns of Southern Maryland on its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. Scores of tobacco barns now stand unused and deteriorating as a result of Maryland's 2001 "tobacco buy-out" state policy, which encouraged farmers to stop cultivating tobacco.*

— Photo courtesy of the Maryland Historical Trust.

often brightly-colored metal-sided buildings have replaced or stand in front of older farm buildings.

### **Complexities in Barn Maintenance**

It required skilled workers and high quality materials to build barns that have lasted for many years. The artisans and craftsmen who built these structures have gradually disappeared and very few replacements have been trained. Barn owners often have to search far and wide for good stonemasons to repair old foundations, timber framers to repair beams, and competent roofers who can handle high steep roofs. Understandably, such skilled tradespeople are somewhat costly. The materials for barn maintenance and repairs often have to be custom made, further adding to the cost. The equipment for handling the heavy loads and great heights is also expensive. During times of economic uncertainty and declining farm incomes, it is easy to understand why many farmers

have put off barn maintenance and repairs. The situation is not greatly different for non-farm barn owners in rural areas.

### **Threats of Urban Sprawl**

As cities expand outward, barns face increasing threats as new housing and commercial developments crop up on what was formerly rural or agricultural land. The various building codes and zoning restrictions often make it difficult to find a new use for barns in these mushrooming areas. Furthermore, barn owners frequently hesitate to undertake barn maintenance if they feel that urban sprawl and the resulting development is inevitable where they live.

### **The Importance of Barns**

Some people may ask: "Why all this attention to old barns? Why not just let them go or replace them with modern buildings?" There are at least three important

reasons—economic, symbolic, and aesthetic—for rehabilitating older and historic barns.

### **Economic Reasons**

There can be real financial pay-off in repairing a barn and keeping it in use. Spending a little time reviewing the barn deterioration problems, considering adaptations, and finding the right contractors to do the rehabilitation can bring surprising results. If a building owner believes that it is cheaper to tear the old one down and build anew, a careful consideration of the following costs most often leads to a different conclusion:

- The cost of razing the old building.
- The cost of materials for a new building.
- The cost of actual construction.
- The cost of insurance for a new building.
- The cost of taxes for a new building.

The economic savings in rehabilitating old barns for agricultural purposes have been well documented. Publications and case studies illustrating examples of barn rehabilitations for agricultural purposes and including cost comparisons with new buildings have been prepared by the BARN AGAIN! program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (See resources, page 15). The examples were drawn from the annual winners of the National BARN AGAIN! Farm Heritage Awards.

### **Symbolic Value**

Another reason for keeping old barns is their symbolic value. Preserving a community's agricultural heritage is important to many people. One farmer expressed it this way: "It just wouldn't be our farm without that barn. Nor would it be our community without the old barns." Another farmer said: "I just want my kids and grandkids to have some idea of how it was over time." Attendees at a public meeting in Michigan summarized their beliefs this way: "The barns are the largest, most visible symbol of the importance of agriculture in this area. We ought to make a real effort to keep them—at least some of them." A rural, non-farm barn owner stated: "We bought this place because of the whole farmstead. The barn is a key part of it. We want to keep it, and put it to the best use possible so it can continue to be an essential part of our farmstead."

### **Aesthetic Appeal**

For many people, especially visitors, the attractiveness of barns and their aesthetic appeal is a prime consideration in saving old barns. The mix of geometric shapes, the range of designs and colors and the variety of colors and

materials are pleasing to residents and visitors alike. In addition, barns provide an appealing textural experience of sight, touch, and smell with their abundance of natural materials. Their appeal is often central for many state tourism promotion programs, especially in New York, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

### **Barn Preservation Programs: The National Landscape**

In 2001, the National Trust conducted an assessment of barn preservation programs across the country. The resulting report, *The Assessment of Barn Preservation in the United States*, noted that, "barn preservation has gone from an idea to a movement." (To request a copy of the report, e-mail [mpro@nthp.org](mailto:mpro@nthp.org).) This movement has led to federal legislation, media attention, statewide incentive programs, and innovative funding programs for older and historic barns.

Two key national initiatives—BARN AGAIN! and the National Barn Alliance—offer models as well as networking and direct assistance for both new and established barn preservation programs.

### **BARN AGAIN!**

In 1987 staff in the National Trust Mountains/Plains office began to identify trends and attitudes associated with the loss of rural historic resources. From this research, the National Trust developed the BARN AGAIN! program in partnership with *Successful Farming* magazine to make a case for the continued use of historic farm buildings in modern agriculture.

The program assists barn owners in a number of ways. BARN AGAIN! has published six book-

## **Alternative Uses for Barns**

The great majority of working barns continue in agriculture, serving a wide range of uses. When there is a switch of agricultural enterprises on a farm the barn use usually changes too. The conversion of a dairy barn to a hog-farrowing barn is a good example. The conversion of a dairy hay barn for the storage of cash crops or seeds is another.

Barns are also frequently adapted for commercial uses, most often for retailing of agricultural products. Urban and suburban dwellers flock to weekend farm markets in large old barns. Barns have also been converted into agricultural supply centers where farmers can purchase feed, equipment, and repair parts. Many barns are used for storage, especially for large items such as vehicles and boats; others have been adapted to antique outlets, studios for production and sales of art and crafts, restaurants and bars, lodging, and meeting places.

Some barns have been converted for residential use, although such adaptations can be difficult and costly. Odors and residues from livestock housing and the use of pesticides can be a potential hazard and need to be handled appropriately. In one publicized incident, a large dairy barn was converted into apartments. When the heat came on in the fall, the odors were highly offensive. A health department check uncovered serious pesticide residues, and the barn/residence was declared uninhabitable.

Barns have also been adapted for public uses such as community recreation facilities, golf clubhouses, summer theaters, park pavilions, exhibit halls, or as storage for park maintenance supplies and equipment. A number of barns have been converted to public meeting halls and conference centers.





*Not all barns are located in rural areas. Preservationists need to advocate for the protection of agricultural structures located in towns, such as this barn in Harrisville, N.H.*

— Photo courtesy of the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.

lets on different aspects of barn preservation, including a guide to rehabilitation, and has sponsored four barn rehabilitation projects with funding provided by John Deere and Pioneer Hi-Bred International. These demonstration projects documented the methods and costs for converting barns to a new agricultural use and were later written up as case studies and published in *BARN AGAIN!, A Guide to the Rehabilitation of Older Farm Buildings*.

An ongoing annual award program for the best examples of barn preservation draws national attention to the efforts of barn owners. This program resulted in the identification of hundreds of new ideas on how farmers are adapting and using their old barns.

*Successful Farming* magazine highlights BARN AGAIN! award winners and publishes several articles each year on barn rehabilitation projects. The magazine editor notes that stories on barn preservation rank among the top 10 favorite articles among readers.

The BARN AGAIN! web site ([www.barnagain.org](http://www.barnagain.org)) serves as a clearinghouse for barn preservation information, articles, referrals, and provides an interactive forum. Partnerships with Nebraska TV and the Smithsonian have resulted in popular and effective educational products such as a one-hour television program and a traveling exhibit on barn history and preservation.

BARN AGAIN! also responds to 1,200 callers per year through its hotline, answering questions about making repairs, finding contractors and funding, and providing advice on how to save an endangered barn.

### **National Barn Alliance**

While BARN AGAIN! has positioned itself as a national advocate and a clearinghouse of information on barn preservation practices and techniques, the National Barn Alliance (NBA) serves primarily as an informal association of state and local barn preservation programs that pro-

vides assistance to emerging and established groups. Although it does not maintain a formal membership, its leaders encourage representatives from state historic preservation offices, statewide historic preservation organizations, state extension offices, and the National Trust to participate in meetings and activities.

### **State and Local Barn Preservation Programs**

Over the past decade, 11 states—Colorado, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Vermont, and Wisconsin—have established statewide barn preservation programs. In addition, the Dutch Barn Preservation Society of New York focuses on preserving a specific barn type, and at least three Illinois counties, Kane County, McHenry County, and McLean County, have local barn programs. While their services, administration, and funding may vary, program staff work with barn owners, advocates, and decision-makers to help save old barns.

According to the 2001 *Assessment of Barn Preservation in the United States*, most state barn preservation programs are organized as partnerships of one or more organizations with one agency serving as the leader. The Ohio BARN AGAIN! Program is housed at the Ohio State University with the state historic preservation office serving as an important partner. Vermont's program is an informal association among the statewide historic preservation nonprofit organization, the state historic preservation office, and the state department of agriculture. Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin have statewide nonprofit organizations specifically dedicated to barn preservation.

The state and local barn programs carry out numerous activities to build awareness about the need for and the opportunity to save older barns and to help barn owners rehabilitate and/or find new uses for their structures. Programs vary in the services they provide, but most offer education and technical assistance, recognition programs, and, in some cases, financial assistance. Many also conduct survey programs and advocate for barn preservation. This work can take many forms: workshops, tours, publications, media relations, and networking. Let's look at how some of these programs work.

### **Educational Programs**

At every level—national, state, county, or local—public meetings are a popular way to educate people about the need to save barns. “Barn people,” as they are often dubbed, are enthusiastic participants in such educational events. The audiences vary, ranging from Americana buffs to barn owners looking for practical solutions to their barn problems. Participant counts in the Midwest regularly indicate the audiences are surprising mixtures of rural and urban dwellers, farmers and non-farmers, barn owners, and those who wished they owned barns.

An evening lecture at a local library, school, or community meeting place is perhaps the most common educational event. The topics at such presentations are usually quite general, for example “Understanding Our Area Barns,” or “The Background to Barns in Our Community.” Speakers may be local history buffs who use slides to reinforce their ideas. The lectures may be a part of an adult education series sponsored by a school, library, social organization, or historical society.



Sometimes program sponsors are able to get backing from state organizations such as the state humanities council.

### **Technical Assistance**

Barn owners regularly seek information and training on various aspects of barn rehabilitation, ranging from roofs to foundations. Hands-on workshops held at local barns have proven very effective. Such workshops may cover a single subject in barn repair or several. County extension offices of land grant universities commonly arrange and participate in the training. Historic preservation and barn interest groups also serve as sponsors. The training usually takes place at a barn that needs repairs. Experienced craftspeople examine the problem and discuss the solution. Attendees may also be given an opportunity to handle tools and materials and actually do some repair work. For example a workshop on foundation repair might have participants examine the mortar constituents and

equipment, select the replacement fieldstone, mix the mortar, and then actually put a replacement stone in place.

Hands-on workshops are more successful on location, but simulations in public meeting places have also been well received. Such a workshop on foundation repair was conducted in Michigan where a small mock wall was actually created in a community meeting room. At another session, held in a conference room, participants had the chance to examine roofing materials and then cut and make standing seam roofs.

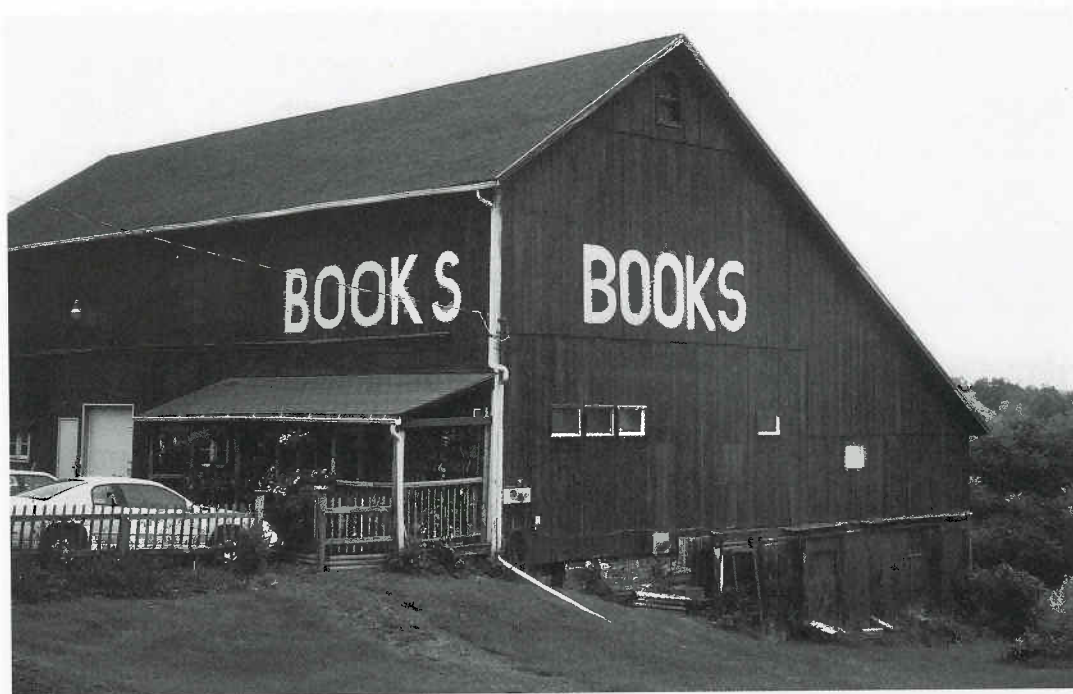
### **Barn Tours**

Barn tours are a popular activity for those interested in barn rehabilitation. The tour sites might include barns that are in exemplary condition—good construction and well maintained—and barns that are in various states of disrepair which need to be rehabilitated. Tour planners, often the local historical society, should obtain visitation permission

*In Gagetown, Mich., the Octagonal Barn Festival helped to raise money for the barn's restoration.*

*—Photo by Bill Kimball.*





*Many barns have been successfully converted to new uses such as antique and craft shops. This barn in New York State has been converted to a used book store.*

*Photo by Bill Kimball.*

from the barn owners and design the tour so that a car caravan or busses make scheduled stops at each barn. At each stop the owners and barn contractors walk participants through the barn, discuss its condition, and answer questions. The usual barn tour is an all-day event with a lunch stop en route. Maps and directories are available to guide the tours. In several Illinois counties, detailed directories of barns have been printed so that interested individuals can tour at their own pace. In 2001 and 2002, the Iowa Barn Foundation produced statewide barn tour directories for independent visits to rehabilitated barns that had received grants from the foundation.

If your organization is planning to hold a tour or workshop, you should contact your insurance provider about obtaining a special event liability policy to cover the time period of the tour or workshop and the type of activities you will be doing. You may need to identify the barn owner(s) as

an additionally insured party. The cost of obtaining this type of policy depends on a variety of factors, including the length and limits of coverage and the type of activities that will take place during the tour or workshop.

### ***Barn Rehabilitation Conferences and Workshops***

Many state barn programs have had real success in scheduling conferences and workshops devoted to barn preservation. These events are usually locally or regionally oriented and are coordinated by a team, which may include representatives from the statewide preservation organization, the land grant university extension service, the state historic preservation office, and the National Trust regional office. These conferences or workshops are often scheduled on Saturdays and held at the local school, town hall, or fairgrounds. They are planned well in advance with considerable promotion in local newspapers

and the sponsoring organization's newsletter. Pre-registration with limited enrollment (75 participants or fewer) makes it possible to plan ahead for space and lunches, and helps to maximize interaction. Participant packets should include information on the sponsoring organizations, background on barns, and information on barn rehabilitation. Participant registration fees—ranging from \$15 to \$60—help to cover the cost of the meeting place, packets, lunches, and speaker fees. Some organizations arrange a Friday evening dinner and program.

The popular appeal of the local workshops has led several states to hold statewide conferences on barn rehabilitation. The overall format for the statewide conference is very similar to regional or local events but with the possible addition of simultaneous sessions on various subjects and exhibit space for artists, photographers, publishers, building material and equipment suppliers, and any individual or group wanting to promote their barn-oriented products.

### ***Youth Programs***

Young people have been involved in a number of barn preservation activities ranging from art contests to building surveys. Two special activities involving rural youth are worth highlighting.

In 1999 the Indiana Soybean Board designed an art contest and invited members of the Four-H Club to submit crayon drawings of "Beautiful Barns of Indiana." Numerous excellent renditions were submitted and prizes were awarded in three categories: Junior (Grades 3-5), Intermediate (Grades 6-9) and Senior (Grades 10-12). The first, second, and third prizes in each category plus

three honorable mentions were printed in a calendar which was widely distributed in the Midwest.

Members of the Four-H Club and Future Farmers of America have also participated in a Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey. Since 1993 study teams throughout the state have been conducting "windshield-surveys" of Michigan farmsteads, recording the information on standard forms, taking pictures of the buildings, and assembling the information for reference. The surveys are generally undertaken township by township and the results are kept with local sponsoring organizations or local libraries. In addition, copies are filed at Michigan State University's museum. Members of Four-H and Future Farmers carry out much of the actual survey work, which was designed to heighten awareness of farm buildings and their decline, as well as providing a statewide database.

### **Newsletters, Publications, and Videos**

Several of the state barn organizations have launched their own newsletters, which makes it possible for them to get information to members and stakeholders, such as related groups, governmental offices, and legislators—on a regular basis. One excellent example is the *Iowa Barn Foundation Magazine* published semi-annually.

A few state and local barn organizations have produced videotapes about local barns and events. The video, *BARN AGAIN!: Celebrating the Restoration of Historic Farm Buildings*, which was produced in 1991 by the Nebraska Education Television Network/University of Nebraska-Lincoln Television, is an excellent example of what can be done. It remains widely used, especially

by local television stations. See Resources on page 15 for information on how to obtain a copy.

In Illinois, the McHenry County Historical Barn Preservation Association produced a motivational videotape in 2000, entitled *This Old Barn: A Historical Perspective*, which discussed the origin of McHenry barns and the problems they face.

Some organizations and agencies that promote the reuse of older barns have also found it useful to publish materials to help understand and guide barn rehabilitations. Many of these are listed in the resource section found at the end of this booklet.

### **Websites for Barn Information**

Most barn organizations have developed websites to make it easier for barn owners to learn about their programs and services. The websites generally include brief descriptions of the organization and its mission, program summaries, periodic newsletters, photo galleries, contractor and consultant lists, and membership lists for member use. For a list of websites, refer to the resource section at the end of this booklet.

### **Barn Recognition Programs: Exhibits, Special Events, and Award Programs**

Barn exhibits or booths at county fairs, public meetings, or conventions help inform the public about historic barns and farmsteads. Staffed exhibits make it possible to engage in informal discussions, answer questions, and distribute informational materials. The use of colorful signage, enlarged photos, historic artifacts, and background sound recordings of farm life enhance

## Sample Agenda for a Barn Workshop

8:30AM	Registration and distribution of participant packets
9:00AM	Welcome by local officials and state coordinating committee representative
9:15AM	Overview of the status of barn preservation in the state and the area (Presented by a representative of the state historic preservation office or statewide preservation organization)
10:00AM	Break
10:30AM	Opportunities for the adapted and continued use of historic barns (presented by extension agent with help from historic preservation agency or group)
11:15AM	Fundamentals of barn rehabilitation (Presented by a contractor)
12:00	Lunch
1:00PM	Barn rehabilitation case studies (Presented by barn owners and their rehabilitation contractors.)
2:30PM	Questions and answers period (A panel of all presenters)
3:00PM	Bus or car tour of two or more local barns (Viewing a successful barn rehabilitation with its contractor and a barn needing rehabilitation with a contractor and participants making suggestions)
5:00PM	Return to meeting place. Collect workshop evaluations.





*Some barns have been dismantled and moved to a new location, such as this Indiana barn which was moved to the State Fair grounds in Indianapolis.*

— Photo by Bill Kimball.

exhibits. Some organizations have developed portable displays that can be used repeatedly.

Many state and local barn preservation efforts have been bolstered by hosting the Smithsonian traveling exhibition: “BARN AGAIN! Celebrating an American Icon” This exhibit, which was originally developed by the National Trust and the National Building Museum, has been in 138 communities in 17 states since 1997 and is booked through 2004. The exhibit places the barn in the context of American history and the evolution of American agriculture. The program is designed to foster collaboration between cultural and governmental organizations in developing community programming to complement the exhibit, such as oral history projects, guest lectures, films, school projects, dramatizations, and exhibits of local barns. “BARN AGAIN! Celebrating an American Icon” is one of four touring exhibits in the Museum on Main Street Programs of the Smithsonian

Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. State Humanities Councils are the central sponsoring organization in each state where the program is conducted. More information about the exhibit can be obtained by going to [www.museumonmainstreet.org](http://www.museumonmainstreet.org)

Earliest records of American rural life include numerous references to social events that occurred in barns, such as harvest parties, husking bees, barn dances, and barn raising celebrations. Today many of these community activities are being brought back.

Barn organizations have found barn dances a good way to draw attention to barns and bring rural and urban people together for wholesome entertainment. They are also good fundraisers for furthering barn preservation efforts. A barn dance may be part of a series of events scheduled over a weekend or a longer period to maximize participation and media attention on barn rehabilitation. Barn dances are often included as part of the Smithsonian “BARN AGAIN! Celebrating an American Icon” program.

In mid-summer when stored crops are “used up” and machinery is easily moved out, barns can be swept clean for neighborhood potluck picnics. The attractive old interior framing and the huge space under cover give such events a distinctive advantage over other buildings or outdoor alternatives.

Even weddings are taking place in barns these days. Young people planning careers in agriculture find it logical and exciting to begin their life together with a barn wedding.

Barn organizations are careful to remind the sponsors of barn social activities that additional cautions are necessary. The need for extra steps for accident and fire-prevention and special insurance are essential.

Many state barn organizations sponsor contests and awards programs to bring attention to barn preservation efforts. In the very first year of the BARN AGAIN! award program, there were more than 500 entries from throughout the U.S. The yearly award program has continued with the top winner receiving a cash award of \$1,000. Every year the winning entries are featured in an article in *Successful Farming* magazine, which co-sponsors the contest.

State and local barn organizations have also developed award and recognition programs to help promote their efforts. As with the national program, cash and special prizes along with media coverage recognize outstanding barn rehabilitations. These awards are often features of annual barn conferences.

In Michigan one exemplary barn is chosen annually for depiction on coffee mugs, which the Michigan Barn Preservation Network sells at the annual barn conference and throughout the year.

## Endangered Lists

Identifying a barn as threatened also draws attention to the issue. In 2002 the National Trust listed the Miller Purdue barn in Grant County, Ind., on its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. This listing has resulted in extensive media coverage and special efforts to find an alternate use and rehabilitation for the barn. Several state barn programs are developing endangered lists to further barn preservation efforts.

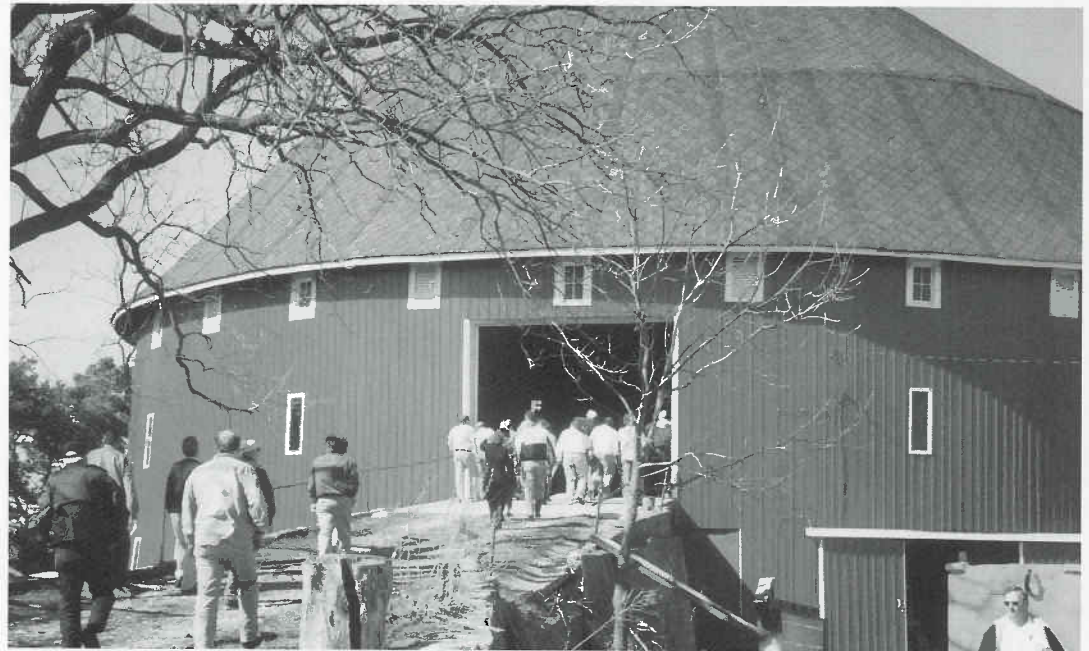
## Involving Media in Barn Programs

Barn organizations have used the media extensively in order to draw attention to older and historic barns. One popular way to attract coverage has been to invite reporters to barn rehabilitation events. The stories that result highlight the project, recognize the individual barn owners, and publicize practical rehabilitation techniques. Feature articles on the unique barns of an area in successive issues of the local newspaper have been very effective. The organization, the individual barn owners, the rehabilitation contractors, and the public all benefit by such exposure.

## Financial Assistance

Barn preservation groups throughout the country have identified the pressing need for financial assistance to help barn owners stabilize, repair, or re-use barns. A few states have secured funds to provide grant programs. Recognizing that even a substantial grant program will never meet the huge need for this type of assistance, barn preservation advocates have also developed other kinds of financial assistance.

Several states, including Iowa, Maine, New York, New Hampshire, and Vermont, offer competitive grants for barn preservation



projects. The nonprofit Iowa Barn Foundation, for example, has awarded half a million dollars in matching grants since its founding in 1997. The matching grants, which range from \$1,500 to \$20,000, are used for the restoration or rehabilitation of historic barns by property owners. Individuals, corporations, and foundations donate the funds, and volunteers provide the organization with legal, financial, and secretarial assistance. Property owners receiving grants must sign a perpetual easement, keep the barn in agricultural use, and open their barns to the public two days per year. The grants, together with tours featuring barns restored with the grants, a semi-annual publication, and plaque program have been very effective in raising public awareness and saving barns, according to Jacqueline Andre Schmeal, president of the Iowa Barn Foundation. "We've accomplished our goal of making barns status symbols in Iowa," she said.

Other barns have benefited

from general preservation grant programs available from state historic preservation offices. Vermont's program averages \$150,000 a year, and New York has enjoyed the highest appropriation—\$6 million over 3 fiscal years. Maine's New Century Community Program offered \$40,000 of matching grants to barn owners in 1999. New Hampshire pledged federal Historic Preservation Fund monies for its program in 2001-2002.

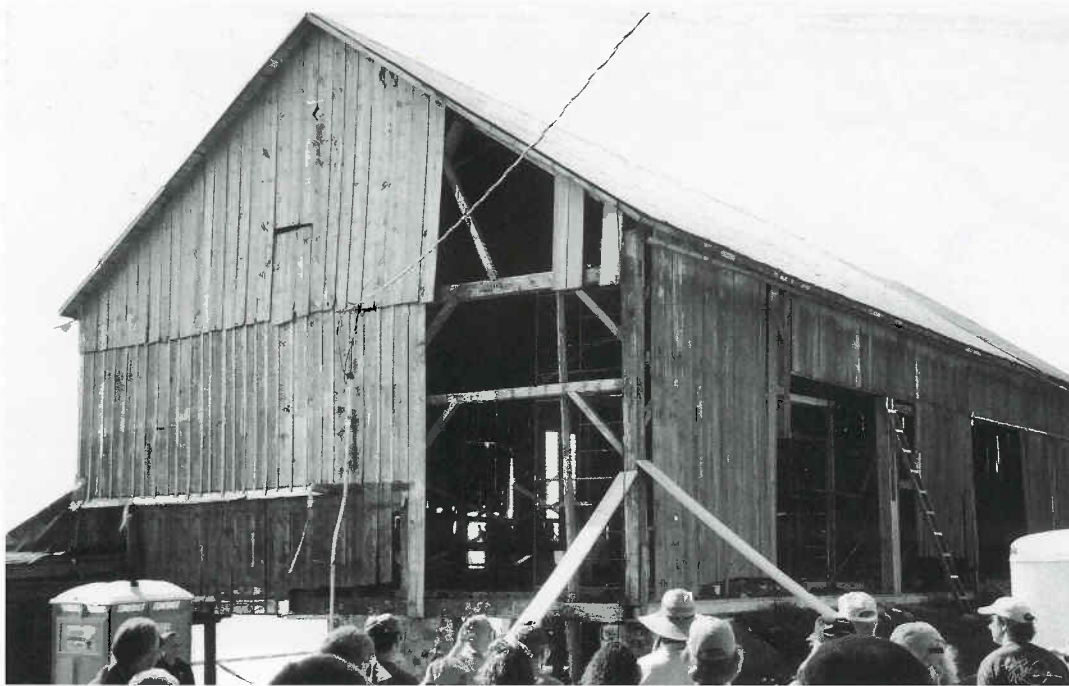
Criteria for these grant programs traditionally include the significance of the property, threat to structure, future plans, community support for preservation, and likelihood of success. Matching grants have leveraged substantial private contributions of cash, labor, and materials, and most programs require a 10-to-20-year term preservation easement or restriction to protect the public investment. Grants typically range from \$5,000 to \$20,000.

The largest challenge for these

*Barn tour participants visit a round barn in Indiana.*

*— Photo by Bill Kimball.*





*Participants observe repair work at a barn workshop in Wisconsin.*

— Photo by Bill Kimball.

grant programs is in administration. Current and past managers of barn grant programs emphasize the need for grant management resources for the programs to succeed. Adequate staff or consultant assistance is necessary to manage the overall program as well as individual grants, especially when laypeople are involved as applicants and grant winners.

A planning “mini-grant” is a popular complement or alternative to construction or repair grant programs. The Preservation Trust of Vermont launched its mini-grants in the 1980s and the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance adopted a similar program in 1999. These grants cover the expenses of a preservation contractor or other experienced professional to assess a barn’s condition, determine priorities for the treatment and repair, assist with project phasing and budgeting and, as appropriate, suggest reuse ideas. “The reports are road maps for barn owners who felt overwhelmed by a deteri-

orating structure or an enormous estimate from a contractor that was either unfounded or lacked specifics,” explains Paul Bruhn, executive director of the Preservation Trust of Vermont.

The criteria for these programs are similar to those listed above for construction grants. Grantees are required to select a contractor from a list of approved professionals, and the grantor pays the consultant upon receipt of a report that meets program standards.

Recommendations suggested by organizers of these planning grants include:

- Keep the application process simple, and respond to requests quickly to maximize effectiveness of the program.
- Applications should contain clear photos or slides including ones that reveal context or setting.
- Cultivate a list of experienced preservation contractors who support the program goals and communicate well with clients.

## ***Barn Surveys and Historic Designation***

Surveys and historic designation can be valuable tools for barn preservation planning, education, and advocacy, and several states have targeted agricultural buildings as part of their survey work.

Surveys offer opportunities to document significant building types and gain a clearer record of the agricultural heritage of an area. They also help pinpoint current threats and articulate what has been lost. This information can be used to educate decision-makers, barn owners, and the general public regarding barn preservation issues.

Surveys also provide background information for historic designation and listing in local, state, or national registers of historic places, which, in turn, may lead to regulatory and promotional advantages as well as eligibility for incentive programs. Local ordinances often have strong controls, preventing unnecessary demolitions and inappropriate alterations. Federal and state laws are designed to mitigate negative impacts of public undertakings on historic resources listed in, or eligible for, historic registers.

Historic designation can also trigger financial incentives. Many historic preservation-related grant programs use historic designation as one of the eligibility criteria. National Register status allows the use of the 20 percent federal investment tax credit, and several states have complementary tax incentive programs.

At the very least, a listing in a local, state or national historic register offers promotional opportunities. Official historic status captures the attention of decision-makers, the media, and the general public. The Michigan

## Tax Incentives for Rehabilitating Older Barns

Those involved with state barn programs should make sure that barn owners understand the various types of tax incentives that can help reduce the costs of rehabilitating barns. Tax credits that encourage rehabilitation exist at the federal level and in some states. A percentage of rehabilitation costs can be used as an income tax credit. A 20 percent income tax credit is available for the certified rehabilitation of buildings listed in, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Places. A 10 percent federal income tax credit is available for buildings constructed before 1936 that are not listed in the National Register. To qualify for either credit, a building must be used for income-producing purposes and the rehabilitation costs must be greater than \$5,000 or the adjusted cost basis for the building. To find out more about the 20 percent credit contact your state historic preservation office. For more information about the 10 percent tax credit, request Form #3468 Investment Credit from the Internal Revenue Service.

Unfortunately, only a few barn owners have taken advantage of the historic rehabilitation tax credits to date. This is true even in New York, which offers a state rehabilitation tax credit for barns on agricultural properties. Those who administer the program believe that

many barn owners are not aware of the availability of the tax credits, find the application process too daunting, or do not have sufficient income to take advantage of the benefits.

A second type of incentive relates to property tax. Many states enjoy historic preservation incentive programs that freeze property taxes for a specific term when certain guidelines are met. Thus owners are not discouraged from investing in their historic properties by the real or perceived threat of increased valuation.

In New Hampshire, a state lacking an income or sales tax and which relies heavily on property tax, legislators went a step further. A voluntary program was established in 2002 that allows barn owners to apply to their local governing body for a property tax assessment reduction of up to 75 percent on their barn in exchange for agreeing to maintain the barn. The reduced assessment value remains in effect for at least the 10-year easement period, and it can be renewed. "The law is designed to leave some extra money in the pockets of barn owners that they will use for maintenance or repair, and to remove the disincentive of rising taxes after a rehabilitation," said Carl Schmidt, chair of the New Hampshire Historic Agricultural Structures Advisory Committee.



*Workshop participants listen as a contractor explains how to open up more space by moving barn beams.*

— Photo by Bill Kimball.





*The New Hampshire Preservation Alliance sponsors a biennial Old Home and Barn Expo that includes a timber framing demonstration by the Timber Framers Guild.*

— Photo courtesy of the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.

Barn and Farmstead survey, for example, helped draw attention to farm buildings and their decline.

The Vermont state historic preservation office developed a 150-page agricultural study as part of aggressive thematic survey and planning work in the 1980s. Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Eric Gilbertson reports that it is a useful tool, especially in combination with community surveys, for understanding broad historic themes and evaluating structures for environmental compliance work, designating sites for the National Register, or evaluating projects for its grant program.

In New Hampshire, the staff of the state historic preservation office streamlined their standard individual inventory form to create a less technical farm reconnaissance inventory form for use by barn owners. "Although the form now includes less analysis of a resource's significance and context, the survey's effect as a consciousness-raising tool has been a

far greater benefit," said Elizabeth Muzzey, the state's survey coordinator. "The response has been tremendous and continues into its third year." The state's challenge now is to mesh the survey's raw data into a historical context statement that will inform ongoing identification and designation efforts.

In New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance has promoted the collection of survey data in several ways. To date, individuals who are required to complete a survey form as part of their application for financial assistance have generated approximately half of the forms. The others have volunteered the information after learning about the effort at a workshop or by reading press reports. The program has captured individuals' interest and pride; barn owners often share photographs, repair information, and personal anecdotes over and above the information requested on the form.

The Alliance has also encouraged local historical societies, historic district commissions, and other groups to conduct town-wide surveys. Documentation of existing agricultural structures, with accompanying information about what has been lost or saved in a given time span, provides important case studies for barn preservation, planning, and advocacy work. "We'll probably never have solid data on the whole state, but offering varied 'snapshots' of the state provides good planning information and good stories for the public, media and legislators," said Gabrielle DiPerri, project coordinator for the Alliance's barn program.

Advocates note that there are several important considerations in conducting a survey of historic barns. To fairly evaluate the his-

toric resource, surveyors should analyze other buildings, the context or setting of the buildings, and the interrelationship of the buildings on the site.

Surveyors should keep in mind that the barn may have been moved from another site or reconstructed on the foundation of an earlier structure. In addition, surveyors should look beyond the architecture for interior features (often removable) which may be important components of the building's historic significance. Examples include cow stanchions, doors, windows, hay forks, ladders, braces, supply and medicine cabinets, bird nesting units, grain boxes and stall dividers, as well as evidence such as crop records written on the wall and boards and beams with initials and dates.

## Establishing a Barn Preservation Program

As with any effective project identifying needs and setting objectives will help to get a program off to a good start. In many places, the loss of barns is apparent. You can't drive down a rural road or interstate without seeing a sagging barn. The evolving nature of agriculture and changing land-use patterns described at the beginning of this booklet are major trends that threaten the future of barns. But what is happening in your community? What is being lost and why? Who cares, and who wants to help?

In addition to collecting anecdotal evidence from colleagues, constituents, and friends, experts recommend that leaders of emerging programs talk to key stakeholders. They may include preservationists, historians, and contractors as well as representa-

tives of rural and agricultural development programs or county extension agents.

Important data should also be gathered from barn owners to help shape a program. There are several simple ways to start. A story or a simple questionnaire in a local newspaper or agricultural bulletin can ask for responses to key issues. A group gathered for a workshop on the history of barns or barn repair is a logical audience for a discussion of barn preservation needs and opportunities. Program organizers should also keep a log of the kinds of questions they receive in the field, on the phone, or at forums to help focus their planning.

### **Identify and Include Partners**

Partners in a barn preservation effort may provide general advice and new networks or specific technical or financial assistance. Organizers should be creative with their selections, look for motivated individuals and agencies, and keep program goals in mind as they select partners.

Potential partners for barn preservation programs include:

- Preservation organizations, nonprofit education and advocacy organizations, government agencies, historical societies, building trades people, preservation or barn contractors, barn owners
- Agricultural agencies, state departments of agriculture, U.S.D.A., Farm Bureau, the Grange, active agriculturalists
- Land Grant University Extension services
- American Farmland Trust
- Nature Conservancy
- Conservation organizations



- Tourism and economic development agencies
- Media
- Funding organizations such as foundations or corporations.

Advisory assistance and new networks can be invaluable to the success of a barn preservation program. For example, in many cases, barn preservation programs have offered new opportunities for preservation organizations to work with agricultural agencies that they have not worked with in the past.

As with any partnership, program organizers must be clear with initial goals. Often a brainstorming meeting with potential stakeholders early in the program's development will reveal significant interests and perspectives and establish a sound collaborative spirit. If individuals or agencies are brought in later in the project's development, organizers should take the time to understand the needs and perspectives of the partner and be clear about the newcomer's role.

Partners should also remember to evaluate their relationships and future expectations on a regular basis. In New Hampshire,

the statewide nonprofit historic preservation organization and the state historic preservation office produce a yearly work plan with assignments.

### **Developing Barn Preservation Programs and Policies**

Another important role for barn preservation programs is to advocate for barn preservation, which is much the same as advocating for the preservation of any special building type. Recommendations—such as public funding for repair grants or legislation for tax incentives—for advancing a barn preservation cause can be drawn from preservation initiatives with similar goals.

To develop barn preservation programs and policies consider the following suggestions:

- Make sure your audience knows why you are focusing on barns and not other building types or preservation issues.
- Define barns. Are you including other types of agricultural outbuildings?
- Think about in-town structures. Although most people focus on rural structures, many commu-

*Workmen construct new barn doors as participants watch during a barn workshop.*

— Photo by Vera Wiltse.



## Preservation Strategies for Saving Historic Barns

Educational and financial assistance programs are important, proactive methods for saving barns. But what do you do when you hear that a barn down the street, or across the state, is about to be burned or demolished? Building and implementing a strategy for barn preservation is no different than any other historic preservation effort; here are some key features:

Learn about the significance of structure. How important is the barn? Is it unusual? An important representative of a type of barn? An architectural or visual landmark?

Understand specific threats to the barn and the motivation of the owner. Typical obstacles include safety concerns, financial issues, and change of ownership. If the owner is uncooperative or unavailable, collect what information you can from neighbors, colleagues, and other likely sources.

Analyze the viability of structure. Barns are often demolished if they are vacant and under-used and if repair

seems too expensive. Try to work with the owner to get an independent assessment of the barn's condition and to explore reuse alternatives.

Identify and secure appropriate preservation tools. Do local regulations such as zoning or preservation regulations affect the current property or a future adaptive use? What financial or technical incentives are available that could help save the barn?

Gauge community support. What is the current, or potential, support for the preservation of this structure? Who are the stakeholders, how can they help, and what are they willing to do? How could a VIP or media attention help your case? Talking to the owner, assisting with repairs, finding a new owner, and providing expert consultations or financial assistance are some of the ways that community members can help save a barn.

Be practical and consistent. Look for "win-win" solutions, and use this information to implement an effective strategy.

nities include carriage barns or other structures that supported family-scale operations.

- Draw in new partners and new supporters in agriculture and economic development.
- Make a strong fiscal argument. Barns are, or seem, more economically obsolete than many other property types. Tie your argument to facts such as farming trends, heritage tourism statistics, information on barn repair, labor or supplies, and dollars contributing to local economies.
- Use tours, images, and personal stories. Barns are popular, and people admire them for their associations with values of hard work, stewardship, and community building.

### How Will You Fund Your Organization?

The majority of the barn preservation programs do not have dedicated funding for barn initiatives. Instead, organizations rely on membership dues, foundation support, and corporate sponsorships to help fund the program.

Fees and memberships, or other "pay-as-you-go" systems, can help underwrite basic communications and programs. For example, a volunteer group whose mission is to promote barn preservation through education and public awareness could use membership dues to cover basic printing and mailing costs of informational materials and registration fees to cover workshop expenses.

Foundations can provide support. Requests for start-up money to develop programs or special policy initiatives to help solve systemic problems are often more likely to be funded than requests for general operating support.

For example, the Samuel P. Pardoe Foundation has supported the formation and early phases of the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance's barn assessment grant program and promotion of the state's tax incentive for barn preservation.

Projects with tangible products and sponsorship recognition potential may be candidates for corporate support. The Kansas Electric Cooperative helped sponsor a major project of the Kansas Historic Barn Preservation Alliance. *Barns of Kansas: A Pictorial History* is a coffee table book that has helped the group promote barn preservation. Preservation contractors frequently sponsor workshops for the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.

Advocates should remember to look to partners and non-traditional funding sources such as tourism promotion or agricultural education programs.

### How to Sustain a Barn Preservation Effort

Like all organizations, barn preservation groups go through organizational changes. A 2003 update of the *2001 Assessment of Barn Preservation in the United States* revealed several dormant programs and at least two that had changed their leadership structure. Contributing forces include changing priorities and competition for funds and volunteers. Programs that remain strong exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- Dedicated individuals
- Organizational or institutional support

- Regular events that provide effective services and give the program visibility and stature
- Effective media coverage
- Regular program evaluations
- Managers who are flexible and adapt to meet new needs and try new solutions
- Sustainable funding base.

## Conclusion

Barn preservation programs across the country have been successful in their efforts to protect older barns by drawing attention to these national treasures and by working with owners to find new uses for their barns. By enlisting support from barn enthusiasts and partnering with statewide preservation organizations and university extension services, these programs are providing much needed technical advice, training, and support for barn owners across the country. These efforts are critical as more and more rural buildings are lost to urban sprawl or to simple neglect. Barns have dotted the American countryside for almost 400 years and with the help of statewide and local programs, these buildings—from Maryland's tobacco barns to the Midwest's dairy barns—should enjoy continued use for decades to come.

## Resources

### Websites:

**BARN AGAIN! In Indiana**  
[www.historiclandmarks.org](http://www.historiclandmarks.org)

**Kansas Historic Barn Preservation Alliance**  
[www.kansassampler.org](http://www.kansassampler.org)

**New Century Community Program, Maine**  
[www.state.me.us/mhpc/histbarns](http://www.state.me.us/mhpc/histbarns)



**Michigan Barn Preservation Network**  
[www.mibarn.net](http://www.mibarn.net)

**Historic Barn Preservation Project, New Hampshire**  
[www.nhpreservation.org](http://www.nhpreservation.org)  
[www.nh.gov/nhdhr/barn](http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr/barn)

**Iowa Barn Foundation**  
[www.iowabarnfoundation.org](http://www.iowabarnfoundation.org)

**New York State Barn Coalition**  
[www.barncoalition.com](http://www.barncoalition.com)

**BARN AGAIN! In Ohio**  
<http://barnagain.osu.edu>

**Wisconsin Barn Preservation Initiative**  
[www.uwex.edu/lgc/barns/network.htm](http://www.uwex.edu/lgc/barns/network.htm)

**McHenry County Historical Barn Preservation Association (Illinois)**  
[www.mchenrycountybarns.org](http://www.mchenrycountybarns.org)

*At a barn preservation conference in Michigan, craftsmen demonstrate the construction of standing seams for metal roofing.*

— Photo by Vera Wiltse.

On the national level the National Trust for Historic Preservation and *Successful Farming* magazine jointly maintain the BARN AGAIN! website ([www.barnagain.org](http://www.barnagain.org)), which focuses on agricultural uses of barns.

An additional national source of information on barn rehabilitation is provided by the George and Matilda Neyer Leik Foundation of Michigan in a website entitled *The Barn Journal* ([www.thebarnjournal.org](http://www.thebarnjournal.org)). This site makes it possible for barn owners to share detailed information on their barn rehabilitation projects.

### Publications

The National Trust's Preservation Books series offers a number of how-to booklets for nonprofit organizations. Topics include fund raising, special events, public relations, board and staff develop-



ment and conference planning. The series also includes titles on barn preservation. For more information call (202) 588-6296 or view the catalog online at [www.preservationbooks.org](http://www.preservationbooks.org).

Other useful publications include:

BARN AGAIN! *Barn Preservation Information Handbook: A Guide for Individuals and Organizations*. Denver: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Mountains/Plains Office, 1992.

Auer, Michael J. "The Preservation of Historic Barns." *Preservation Briefs* 20. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Preservation Assistance Division. October, 1989.

Beedle, Peggy Lee and Geoffery M. Gyrisco. *Barns and Barn Preservation — A Bibliography*. University of Wisconsin Extension, 1999.

Goodall, Harrison. *Log Structures: Preservation and Problem Solving*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1980.

Herron, John and Andrew Kirk. *Barn Aid Series Number 2: New Spaces for Old Spaces*. Denver: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Mountains/Plains Office, 1996.

Humstone, Mary. *BARN AGAIN!: A Guide to Rehabilitation of Older Farm Buildings*. Meredith Corporation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1988.

Humstone, Mary and Dexter W. Johnson *Using Old Farm Buildings*. Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2000.

Kirk, Andrew. *Barn Aid Series Number 1: Barn Foundations*. Denver: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Mountains/Plains Office, 1996.

Kirk, Andrew. *Barn Aid Series Number 3: Barn Exteriors and Painting*. Denver: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Mountains/Plains Office, 1996.

Noble, Allen G. and Cleek, Richard K.: *A Field Guide to North American Barns and Other Farm Structures*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, N.J., 1995.

Papritan, James C., Ann Christy and Margaret Owens. *Barn Aid Series Number 4: Barn Roofs*. Denver: National Trust for Historic Preservation, Mountains/Plains Office, 1998.

Poll, Christine. *That Darn Barn: A Facelift After 80 Years*. Kane County, Ill.: The Kane County Department, 1992.

Porter, John C. and Francis E. Gilman. *Preserving Old Barns: Preventing the Loss of a Valuable Resource*. Cooperative Extension, University of New Hampshire, Durham, N.H., 2001.

Stier, Steve. *Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey Manual*. East Lansing, Mich.: Michigan State University Museum, 2000.

Stokes, Samuel and A. Elizabeth Watson and Shelley S. Mastran. *Saving America's Countryside: A Guide to Rural Conservation*. Second Edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

Visser, Thomas D. *Field Guide to New England Barns and Farm Buildings*. Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1997.

Whitaker, James H. *Agricultural Buildings and Structures*. Reston, Va.: Reston Publishing Co., 1979.

## Videos

"Barn Again!: Celebrating the Restoration of Historic Farm Buildings." Available from GPN, P.O. Box 80669, Lincoln, Neb., 68501. 1-800-228-4630.

"The Barn Builders: Pennsylvania Settlers in Ohio." Available from Hubert Wilhelm, Dept. of Geography, Porter Hall, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701. (614) 593-1148.

"This Old Barn: A Historical Perspective." McHenry County Historical Barn Preservation Association. c/o Dean Rowe, 8313 Stewart Road, Hebron, Ill. (815) 648-4848.

"Timber Frame: Barn Raising 1929: Dramatic Archival Footage. A Tradition Remembered." Available from Lofty Branch Book Store, 3 Kent Drive, Victor, N.Y., 14564. (716) 924-7831.

## About the Authors

Jennifer Goodman is the director of the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance and a leader in barn preservation programs in that state.

Bill Kimball has assisted in organizing barn programs and barn workshops in the U.S. and Canada. He assisted in organizing the Michigan Barn Preservation Network and the National Barn Alliance and serves on both boards. He is an advisor emeritus of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.