Barns are economic resources and symbols of our agriculture heritage. They are attractive images on the landscape. The Michigan Barn Preservation Network is committed to rehabilitation of barns for agricultural, commercial, residential, and public uses. MBPN membership supports efforts to establish knowledge and resources for barn rehabilitation and to establish an endowment for barn rehabilitation.

The Michigan Barn Preservation Network is an active state-wide organization of barn owners and enthusiasts. MBPN fosters sharing of barn experiences, hosts an annual conference, publishes a regular newsletter, recognizes barn rehabilitation and education successes, helps identify speakers for programs, and assists in identifying rehabilitation information.

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MBPN is a member of:
- National Barn Alliance (NBA)
- Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN)
- National Trust for Historic Preservation

From “The People, Yes,” by Carl Sandburg:

For sixty years the pine lumber barn had held cows, horses, hay, harness, tools, junk amid the prairie winds... and the corn crops came and went, plows and wagon and hands milked, hands husked and harnessed and held the leather reins of horse teams in dust and dog days, in late fall sleet 'til the work was done that fall. And the barn was a witness, stood and saw it all.
Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey

Steven Stier, Michigan Barn Preservation Network

We are witnessing an explosive growth of suburban and exurban development in many parts of Michigan. Subdivisions, shopping centers, and golf courses are leapfrogging far into the countryside, extending the depth and scale of the rural-urban fringe. The loss of farms and their stately barns in Michigan mirrors a nationwide process. While preservationists recognize that not all buildings of historic merit can be saved, we fight to save representative examples so that present and future generations can visually experience these buildings and the life ways they represent.

The Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey provides Michigan communities with an opportunity to engage in the preservation process and learn about architectural survey methods in an enjoyable community-service experience. It is important to survey and document buildings in order to preserve a record of their existence and their visual character.

Identifying historic and cultural resources also can be the first step toward preservation. Participating in the barn survey can help community members take the next steps toward preserving and using the barns in their area for continued agricultural use, educational activities, business and tourism opportunities, and other purposes.

The Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey provides a standard survey method and a common nomenclature for Michigan barn architectural features that can be expanded for use elsewhere. Already, surveys in other states are adapting the Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey as the basis of their own state surveys.

The Michigan State University Museum, MATRIX: The Center for Humane Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences Online, the National Barn Alliance and other preservation programs are beginning a project to collaborate with barn survey efforts across the country to build an national online barn and farmstead database.

From “A Barn is More Than a Building. It is a Shrine to Our Agrarian Past,”
by Jim Doherty, Smithsonian Magazine, August 1989

The first thing you notice is the tremendous amount of space. A barn feels a lot like a church inside. Even a small one seems big because when you stand between the haylofts and look up, your view of the roof is unobstructed, save for the massive timbers that support it.

The next thing you notice is the smell—hay and manure, for sure, and perhaps, depending on the time of year, a whiff of apples or freshly split cordwood.

Something happens to the quality of light in a barn. Remember? It becomes softer, richer; it takes on the warmth of the beams.

If there are horses or cattle in the building, you can hear them moving around and sense their alert presence. On a clear winter night, with moonlight flooding in through the open doors, you may also sense the presence of others who have been in the barn before you, the generations of families who worked in it and cherished it, the neighbors and craftsman who helped raise it a century or more ago.
Ypsilanti’s village barns and carriage houses recognized for their historical significance

The first Heritage Foundation markers for barns were awarded in 1984; another in 1998. Since then, barns have been awarded markers in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011.

For many years, the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation has annually awarded Historic Structure markers to owners of significant houses and commercial buildings. The number of those markers in the community is now well over 100.

In 1990, the Foundation issued its 15th annual engagement calendar, which featured 12 village barns and carriage houses. The cover of that calendar stated: “In the back yards and lanes of Ypsilanti is still to be found a fascinating collection of village barns and carriage houses. They contribute to the historic character of Ypsilanti in a way no other buildings can. Now is the time to appreciate and preserve those remaining.”

The Heritage Foundation wishes to bring attention to these significant structures, to further the community’s appreciation of the contribution they make to our architectural history, and to encourage their preservation.

At its 2011 annual marker awards dinner, the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation recognized some of those historical and architectural treasures still found in out-of-the-way places where, if you listened carefully, one could still hear the sound of horses’ hooves and the rumble of wagon wheels. The Heritage Foundation was pleased to award Historic Structure markers to the owners of several significant village barns and carriage houses.

How you gonna keep ‘em Down on the Farm
After they’ve heard gags like these?

• Why do chicken coops always have two doors? If they had four doors, they’d be chickenSEDANS!

• Farmers earn a meager celery, home beet and just want to read the pepper, turn-ip the covers, en-dive into bed!

Unique historic Michigan barns saved

The Thumb Octagon Barn Agricultural Museum is located in Tuscola County near the Village of Gagetown. The vision for restoration began in the minds of a few neighbors who did not want to see such an awesome structure and piece of agricultural history destroyed. And so began the Friends of the Thumb Octagon Barn organization.

Richard and Linda Mueller’s Loeb Barn at Charlevoix received the Outstanding Preservation Practices award in 2009.

The 1923 Haven Hill Barn at the former Edsel Ford estate in Highland Recreation Area, White Lake Township. Ford’s plan was to construct a self-sufficient retreat as a diversion from the hustle and bustle of city life - a retreat that was more convenient than a lengthy drive north. It has served as a ski resort, conference center, and concert venue. Friends of the Highland Recreation Area (FOHRA) are actively committed to restoring the giant barn.

“Carriage houses and wagon sheds were once as commonly encountered in the country and villages as garages are today. Even in the city, there had to be a place to store the buggy or delivery wagon. Such buildings were commonly set apart from the house and were roomy enough to provide stabling for horses and storage for harnesses and feed. The buildings varied greatly in execution, from the humble open wagon shed to elegant quarters for stylish carriages intended only for the transport of people. Most rural and village buildings were of simple wood-frame construction and greatly resembled cow barns, although built on a smaller scale. Ample provision was usually made for turn-around space, and running water was often piped in so that vehicles could be washed down after heavy use. The everyday farmer or mechanic wanted only a utilitarian space and often used it for storing grain or equipment as well. Gentlemen farmers and more affluent city dwellers frequently built brick, stone, or fanciful wood carriage houses of considerable distinction.”

- Lawrence Grow, ‘Country Architecture’
A collection of farm buildings clustered by Plymouth Road gleams in the early summer sun with fresh red paint, newly leveled floors and sparkling trim. At a glance, you might never know the barns and outbuildings of the historic Staebler Farm are a century or more old.

That’s because the buildings have just been extensively rehabilitated and restored in order to preserve them for use teaching the public about regional agricultural history.

They were purchased by the Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Department for an agricultural interpretive center and working farm.

“This will be an example of Michigan’s agricultural heritage, one people don’t get to see as much any more,” said Bob Tetens, director of the parks department, as he watched workers put the finishing touches on the buildings early last month.

The extensive work to preserve the buildings, performed by barn preservationist Ken Brock, is increasingly an exception to the typical fate of the iconic agricultural structures that smatter the southeastern Michigan landscape, especially in growth areas such as Ann Arbor.

Once a victim of development pressures, old farm buildings are now falling prey to neglect, decay and age. Increasingly, they’re located on parcels that have been subdivided, where new owners have no use for the structures or can’t afford to maintain an aging building with a massive roof. In other cases, say historic barn preservationists, farmers have replaced barns with newer, lower maintenance pole barns and left the big gambrel-roofed classics to the weeds and rain.

“It’s hard for farmers,” said Tim Wiles of Howell, who restores barns. “If it isn’t being used and it costs money to maintain, there are other priorities.”

Brock, of Brock and Associates of Plymouth, said that while the work is painstaking and the barns are disappearing, he gets plenty of work from people anxious to preserve their buildings. He’s done $2 million worth of work in the last several years, he said.

“This is a big thing right now, to save these barns,” Brock said.

It’s difficult to quantify how many historic farm buildings have been lost, and how many still exist.

The question is the subject of an ongoing, township-by-township survey by the Michigan State University Museum.

“Most people will recognize there is a trend, and a decline,” said LuAnne Kozma, survey coordinator. “We are losing so many farmstead buildings. The survey’s purpose is to document what we have right now, so communities can be better prepared to save the ones they have.”

The value of cataloging these classic barns -- usually painted red because paint with ferrous oxide, or red tint, was the least expensive back in the day -- lies in the connection to community roots and traditional food-raising practices, something that may well attract more interest in the local food movement and community-supported agriculture.

“They have been disappearing at an alarming rate,” said Kathy Holtz of Ann Arbor, who serves on the board of the Michigan Barn Preservation Network. The network and similar organizations offer tips and informational resources for those who want to save their barn.

Some owners have found ways to adapt barns for storage or party space; others have turned barns into homes.

“There is quite an effort going on out there,” Holtz said. “The main problem, of course, is the money.”

Don Staebler, the last of the Staebler family to run the farm and live there, is 99 and still lives on site under the terms of a lifelong lease the county arranged when it bought the 100-acre property in 2000. The county is gathering video recordings of interviews with him about the history of the farm and buildings, and how they were used. The farm was established in 1835.

The collection of buildings dates from between the late 19th century and the mid- to early-20th century, and includes a hay barn, a pig house, a large two-story dairy barn, a corn crib, horse barn, well house, milk house and silo.

The county will also utilize the fields and ponds on the property for recreation, and will establish a historic marker where American Indian artifacts were found in a back field.

“The Michigan Barn Preservation Network is delighted with (the project),” said Holtz, noting that the Plymouth Road area is a historic corridor with a number of landmark buildings.

“That option to sell the property to the county and make it a beautiful working farm where people can learn is great.”

“The barns themselves I consider beautiful,” she added. “And they’re a statement to our agricultural past. It’s sad to see that go away. Kids don’t know where our food comes from.”
The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s BARN AGAIN! Program helps farmers and ranchers find ways to maintain and use historic barns and agricultural buildings as part of modern agricultural production. Created and managed in partnership with Successful Farming magazine, the BARN AGAIN! Program offers publications on technical issues, organized educational workshops and recognized good stewardship through an Awards Program.

The BARN AGAIN! Program...
- Promotes the preservation and practical use of older barns for today’s farming needs
- Provides practical, up-to-date information and technical assistance to barn owners
- Presents annual awards for excellence in barn rehabilitation and farm and ranch preservation
- Demonstrates that preserving sturdy old farm buildings can be very economical when compared to new construction
- Assists local groups in planning BARN AGAIN! workshops and training sessions
- Works with large and small acreage owners to more effectively use their older farm buildings
- Advocates for barn preservation funding on the federal, state and local level
- Becomes a national resource for thousands of people concerned with the future of America’s rural heritage

How many historic barns are there?
The data is in. For the first time ever, the official U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture included a question that asked farm and ranch owners across the country: do you have a barn that was built prior to 1960? According to results released earlier this year, a total of 664,264 farm and ranch owners said “yes.” That’s about a third of all agricultural producers.

Which states have the most old barns?
The results of the recent Census of Agriculture include some surprises about where older barns are located. For example, the state with the most farms reporting pre-1960 barns is not Iowa, nor Wisconsin, nor Pennsylvania. It is Texas. (OK, maybe this isn’t really a surprise.)

Below is a ranking of the top ten states where the most farmers or ranchers said they have a barn built prior to 1960.

- **Texas**: 51,236 farms or ranches reporting at least one barn built before 1960
- **Missouri**: 36,007
- **Wisconsin**: 35,386
- **Kentucky**: 35,224
- **Iowa**: 34,224
- **Ohio**: 33,762
- **Pennsylvania**: 29,321
- **Tennessee**: 27,555
- **Minnesota**: 27,165
- **Illinois**: 25,767

Looking at these statistics, one might argue that larger states will always come out on top of the list. What about a top ten list that takes into account total land area? Here’s a ranking of states when the results are calculated by the number of agricultural properties with barns built before 1960 per square mile.

- **Kentucky**: 0.89 farms or ranches with pre-1960 barns, for every square mile
- **Ohio**: 0.82
- **Tennessee**: 0.67
- **Pennsylvania**: 0.65
- **Wisconsin**: 0.65
- **Indiana**: 0.63
- **Iowa**: 0.61
- **Maryland**: 0.53
- **Missouri**: 0.52
- **Illinois**: 0.46

From National Trust for Historic Preservation: Census of Historic Barns in the United States

With this ranking in mind, it is particularly appropriate that Kentucky was the site of this year’s national Heritage Barn Conference, organized by the National Barn Alliance in partnership with local hosts Preservation Kentucky and the Kentucky Heritage Council.
It was eleven o’clock when I at last took my bag and some blankets and started for the barn with the boys. Their mother came to the door with us, and we tarried for a moment to look out at the white slope of the corral and the two ponds asleep in the moonlight, and the long sweep of the pasture under the star-sprinkled sky.

The boys told me to choose my own place in the haymow, and I lay down before a big window, left open in warm weather, that looked out into the stars. Ambrosch and Leo cuddled up in a hay-cave, back under the eaves, and lay giggling and whispering. They tickled each other and tossed and tumbled in the hay; and then, all at once, as if they had been shot, they were still. There was hardly a minute between giggles and bland slumber.

I lay awake for a long while, until the slow-moving moon passed my window on its way up the heavens. I was thinking about Antonia and her children; about Anna’s solicitude for her, Ambrosch’s grave affection, Leo’s jealous, animal little love. That moment, when they all came tumbling out of the cave into the light, was a sight any man might have come far to see. Antonia had always been one to leave images in the mind that did not fade — that grew stronger with time...

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Facebook is abuzz over vintage Ypsi postcards

Visit Ypsilanti began posting on its Facebook page back in May. Historic and iconic images like the Edison Office Building delight and excite the history buffs as well as the novice and spark conversations of days past in our fair City. Every Wednesday morning, a new postcard is shared with details (if they are available) of the post date, person who sent it, and the message. More than 45 vintage Ypsilanti postcards have been posted so far and they have become one of the most anticipated features on the Visit Ypsilanti Facebook page. A few local collectors including Bill Nickels and Lisa Mills Walters have shared their personal collections with Visit Ypsilanti. As an Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation member, you’ll want to check out Visit Ypsilanti and see the historic places you recognize and love from another time. -Ypsilanti CVB

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The Farmer’s Daughter?

Who remembers Dinah Shore’s “Sweet Violets”?

There once was a farmer who took a young miss
In back of the barn where he gave her a lecture
On horses and chickens and eggs
And told her that she had such beautiful
Manners that suited a girl of her charms
A girl that he wanted to take in his
Washing and ironing and then if she did
They could get married and raise lots of
Sweet violets
Sweeter than the roses
Covered all over from head to toe
Covered all over with sweet violets

---

Become a Member

The Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation encourages both private and public preservation efforts.

Join today and learn about what we have to offer!

Visit the website at www.yhf.org to enter your name and address.
Mail it along with a check for the appropriate amount to our treasurer.
Our membership year runs from January-December.
Make checks payable to: Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation
c/o Claudia Pettit
945 Sheridan
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Annual Membership Categories
Students & Seniors $5
Individual $10
Family $20
(2 or more @ same address)
Contributing $50
Supporting $50
Sustaining $100
Lifetime $1000
The barn stood for shelter on squared corners with a tight roof until the wind sucked it up and spit it out in a sham-bles of splintered boards. I tried to salvage the ruins. While I pulled the nails and sorted out split studding, citizens of the barnyard clustered around—pigeons fluttered where once the ridge pole hung, sparrows frisked through broken window frames—let me sweat over the collapse of order. I lit my pipe and tossed the match toward the tumbled hay and let chance decide if it lived or went out. The flame caught, winked among the stems, then tongued the air until the draft formed a chimney and the fire went mad.

I leaned against a corner post, the roar of the fire like music, the lunge of its appetite now beyond control.


Historic Barns: Working Assets for Sustainable Farms, is available from the National Trust. Written by Michigan small farmer and author Edward Hoogterp, this publication describes how older and historic barns can provide practical benefits to one of the most exciting and fastest-growing segments of the rural economy—sustainable agriculture. Using several case studies, the publication explains how historic barns can meet important functional, economic and marketing needs of sustainable producers.

Tour the barns in Bridgewater, Manchester, and Sharon Townships

Washtenaw County’s Award-Winning Heritage Tours!

The Washtenaw County Heritage Tourism Map Project offers four distinct themed driving routes to guide visitors and locals through the County’s cities, villages, and rural areas. The project serves to celebrate the region’s rich heritage and highlights a variety of historic and cultural resources.

On the German Heritage Tour, tourists may venture onto the back roads of Freedom, Lodi, and Scio townships to witness a landscape dotted with traditional farms associated with the State’s largest and first German settlement. They may follow the Historic Barns Tour through Bridgewater, Manchester, and Sharon townships to see examples of nineteenth and twentieth century structures associated with one of the region’s strongest industries: agriculture. Those interested in Greek Revival Architecture may choose from the North Tour, South Tour, or selected stops in western Washtenaw County to view the style as expressed through a range of building materials (from fired and adobe brick to wood siding to cobblestone) and a variety of forms typical from the early settlement through the post-Civil War periods. Finally, those interested in the local history of northeastern Washtenaw County may enjoy the Esek Pray Trail along Ann Arbor-Plymouth Road as it travels through Superior Township. This tour features a variety of exceptional nineteenth century residences, one-room schoolhouses, and other resources all tied to the family of Esek Pray, a founding leader of the State of Michigan, and his contemporaries.

The Heritage Tourism Map Project is funded in part by a Certified Local Government grant from the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office and supported by several local partners, including the Ann Arbor Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Ypsilanti Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Saline Chamber of Commerce, Saline Area Historical Society, Washtenaw County Historical Consortium, and the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County. For more information, please contact Melissa Milton-Pung, Washtenaw County Project Manager, at miltonpungm@ewashtenaw.org or (734) 222-6878.

Fourteen photogs showed up at Manchester High School on November 10 for a Michigan Photo Adventures historic barn tour. Their artistic record of the event and the barns can be seen at www.meetup.com/Michigan-Photo-Adventures/events/89972852/

The tour took them to two dozen historic barns, with particular interest in the barn quilts in the Manchester area. The tour was limited to just eighteen photographers in six vehicles.

With sufficient interest, the club will plan future tours of historic barns and quilts in Alcona and Osceola Counties in Michigan, as well as Kankakee County Illinois.

See their web site at meetup.com/ Michigan-Photo-Adventures


The barn stood for shelter on squared corners with a tight roof until the wind sucked it up and spit it out in a shambles of splintered boards. I tried to salvage the ruins. While I pulled the nails and sorted out split studding, citizens of the barnyard clustered around—pigeons fluttered where once the ridge pole hung, sparrows frisked through broken window frames—let me sweat over the collapse of order.

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I leaned against a corner post, the roar of the fire like music, the lunge of its appetite now beyond control.

Michigan’s biggest barn was once in Ypsilanti, where the Paint Creek Crossing shopping center now stands on Whittaker Road. What is purported to be the largest barn extant in Washtenaw County has been pin-pointed on Michigan Avenue, just east of Rustic Glen Golf Club, near Clinton at Willow Road.
Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation

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Dedicated to the belief that one of Ypsilanti's greatest resources is its historic architecture

See you at the General Meeting - Wednesday, 23 January, at 7:30 p.m.

Heritage News is the newsletter of the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation. It is published five times a year: September, November, January, March, and May; and distributed, free of charge to the membership by mail, and made available to the public at City Hall, Farmers’ Market, and various business locations in the three business districts in the City.

2012/2013 SCHEDULE
Meetings are held at the Ladies’ Literary Club,

23 JANUARY
Steve Stier, president, Michigan Barn Preservation Network

20 MARCH
TBA

22 MAY
Annual Marker Awards Banquet

Langford & Lydia Sutherland’s 1834 barn, 797 Textile Road, Ann Arbor, MI

Michigan Barn of the Year Award 2007
The Sutherland-Wilson Farm Museum was the first property listed in the Pittsfield Charter Township Historic District Ordinance created in 2012.