

Extension Activity #3 Preserving Our Barns

This lesson plan is courtesy of the National Barn Survey

NATIONAL BARN SURVEY INSTRUCTIONS

The exceedingly prosperous decade of the 1990's and the subsequent years following have witnessed an explosive growth of suburban and exurban development to many parts of America. Subdivisions, shopping centers and golf courses are leapfrogging far into the countryside, extending the rural-urban fringe beyond anything heretofore experienced in the nation. The loss of farms and their barns is a nationwide occurrence. The traditional family farm with its farmstead consisting of dwelling, one or more barns and outbuildings is at risk.

The landscape images we associate with the traditional family farm in rural America were largely forged in the nineteenth century. Paramount in this bucolic imagery is the barn. During the colonial period, barns were, for the most part, modest in scale. Typical was the one-story-with-loft, three bay New England threshing barn. In the nineteenth century, increasing farm productivity associated with evolving farm mechanization encouraged the building of much larger barns. The nineteenth century became America's great era of barn building. As agricultural land was largely developed by the twentieth century, the great era of barn building gradually receded.

The currents of history - whether from economic constraints, the lower cost of pole barns or urban expansion - are forcing change upon the agricultural sector. Preservationists know that not all buildings of historic merit can be saved, particularly vernacular buildings like farmhouses and barns. Therefore, we fight to save as many representative examples in their original form so that present and future generations can visually experience these buildings and the ways they represent. We also seek out appropriate forms of adaptive use. Finally, when all other forms of preservation fail, we practice mitigation. Mitigation consists of surveying and documenting buildings in order to preserve a record of their existence and their visual character.

Surveying and documenting can also serve purposes other than mitigation. The first step in preserving the built environment is finding out what we have. To preserve buildings and to evaluate the historical significance of those buildings requires a database upon which to develop comparative evaluative criteria.

Because of the importance of a survey to create a database, this publication, The National Barn Survey, produced by the National Trust for Historic Preservation-BARN AGAIN! and the National Barn Alliance, has been created. It outlines common survey criteria and a method of survey that can be used by a variety of Americans using grass roots efforts to accomplish. The survey data can then be compiled at the State Historic Preservation Office and shared nationwide to help establish a picture of the number and condition of America's barns.

PLANNING YOUR SURVEY

RECRUITING SURVEYORS

Establish a survey team of five to twenty individuals. Contact the active organizations in your area that share an interest in rural heritage. Consider your county Extension office and 4-H youth program, local schools, civic groups, local historical society and Future Farmers of America.

Advertise your project in the local media, and hold an informational meeting for those interested. Break the group into survey teams of two-three people each. One survey team can be expected to survey one, two or three sections of a township. Divide your group in such a way that drivers and good photographers are evenly distributed. Describe the type and style of photographs expected to be collected.

BUDGETING AND FUNDING YOUR PROJECT

The survey involves taking approximately two to five photographs for each survey site documented. Consequently, photography can be the largest expense for the project. Include in your budget archival safe, clear notebook sheets in which to store the photographs, negatives and survey forms. Contact local businesses, agencies and individuals who might contribute funds or supplies for photographic film, developing, maps, copying, notebooks, archival pages and other supplies. Plan your budget on the number of townships or sites within the township you expect to survey.

DECIDING WHERE TO SURVEY

The key to conducting this survey is to be consistent and thorough within a defined geographic area. Choose one township or other geographical area, define the boundaries on a map and find all the farmsteads within the boundaries. The survey teams should cover all roads within the defined survey area.

Look at a plat map to see how sections are the building blocks of townships. A section is one mile by one mile in size. A township is six sections by six sections. There are thirty-six sections in most townships. Do not try to cover too large an area. A good rule of thumb is to use one group of twenty to cover an entire township, or one survey team to cover two to six sections.

DECIDING WHEN TO SURVEY

Plan your survey for early spring or fall if possible. Foliage that obstructs the view of buildings is minimal at these times. Winter snow can cause glare in photos and hide roofs and other structural details.

Conduct the survey over a single short period - for example, on one weekend or during one month. Choose a day that is not too sunny, but during good weather. The morning or late afternoons are best times of day, when the sun is not at its peak.

DECIDING WHERE TO KEEP YOUR SURVEY

By the end of the survey, your group will have compiled an impressive amount of information about your community. Keeping one copy in a local archive, library or historical society is an important way to make this valuable information accessible to community members. Another copy should go to your State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). This is the repository for all surveyed properties in your state, categorized by county. To locate your SHPO go to www.nshpo.org.

SAFETY ISSUES

Some property owners may be suspicious or wary of your group while you are conducting your survey. Publicize your project several weeks in advance so that farmstead owners know you are surveying their properties. Also, let local law enforcement know about your project. This will provide your surveyors with credibility and references as they collect information. Provide each survey team with a letter of introduction from the project leader explaining the purpose of the project. The team can use this letter as a handout to explain the project and answer any questions or concerns regarding its use or purpose. Respect the property owners' rights not to participate in the survey. If asked or ordered to cease survey activities on a farmstead, do so immediately and without argument.

Child protection is also an important concern. Youth/minor participants should have signed permission forms allowing them to participate in the project. Adult participants working with youth should work through youth agencies (4-H, Future Farmers of America, scouts, schools or other youth groups) to meet their requirements for working with young people.

A rule of thumb is youth should not be alone with an adult in a survey team. An ideal survey team consists of two or three youth and one or more adults.

RESEARCHING YOUR COMMUNITIES AGRICULTURAL HISTORY

This survey is intended to be a field based activity, the first step in recording the existence of historic farmsteads in a community. Having background information on the agricultural history of your area is very helpful before your team heads out to the field. Your local library and historical society as well as the State Historical Library/Archives are valuable resources. What county local histories have been published? Has there been an intensive survey conducted as part of a highway development project? Are there historic pictures of farmsteads in the collection? Is there a clipping file about noteworthy historic buildings? Is there a local historian in your area whom you can invite to speak to your group at an orientation meeting?

Some questions that local history sources will answer are: What crops were grown in this area during different time periods? What kinds of livestock were raised? What other kinds of agricultural activities, such as maple sugaring, bee keeping or hemp raising is the area well known for? What are the names of the largest farms? Which ethnic groups settled the area and where? How did agriculture develop in your area? How did local communities grow and change? How did events (arrival of the railroad, electricity, Great Depression, wars, etc) affect agriculture in your community?

Gather the information you have found and share it with all survey team members.

The Rural Property Inventory. In the late 1930's the federal government's Works Progress Administration (WPA) surveyed rural properties in many agricultural states. The inventory provided detailed descriptions of all farmland in rural areas and includes sketches of the farmstead, building descriptions and other data. You may want to locate a copy of this inventory and any other previous surveys of historic sites in your area. Check with your State Historic Archives, which is usually located near and or within the State Historic Preservation Office.

TRAINING YOUR GROUP

In the weeks before you conduct the survey, hold a training session for your group. An orientation for all of your surveyors prepares everyone for what they will see in the field; how they can recognize the parts of a farmstead, how to use this guide to identify the types of architectural features (types of roof shapes, type of roof materials, etc.), how to take good photographs of buildings and other logistical information you will want to share. The orientation will also help your group standardize the information collected during the survey.

Training session: suggested agenda

- Welcome and introductions
- Overview of project
- History of the area to be surveyed
- Power point presentation on barn features
- Photography instruction
- Practice survey (on site at nearby farmstead)

WHAT YOUR SURVEY TEAMS WILL NEED

Be sure the surveyors understand the purpose of the survey. It may be the same purpose stated in this manual or your own purpose, but everyone should know and be able to articulate the purpose.

Obtain good local road maps with as much detail as possible for your surveyors. Contact your county government office to see what free maps are available. Provide a road map for each survey team. Be careful not to violate copyright laws by making illegal photocopies of maps. US Geological Survey topographic maps show rural roadways, elevation and building in relation to landforms and bodies of water. Road maps name even small roads. Plat maps made by private companies show property boundaries and identify landowners but not necessarily current residents. You may refer to a plat map at your County Extension office or library, or purchase one for your reference, but do not violate copyright laws for this project.

Survey teams should plan travel routes that systematically cover all property in the survey area. Make sure everyone has a copy of the travel plan so duplication is eliminated.

Supply each survey team with:

- A notebook or clipboard
- Plenty of blank survey forms
- Photo log form

- Film/camera (the new disposable color camera which supplies a CD/rom disk with developing is a good way to go)
- Pencils
- Maps of the survey area
- Written description of the geographic area to be surveyed
- Travel plan
- Letter of introduction
- This manual

Each team will also need:

- Transportation

Helpful supplies:

- Sunscreen
- Sunglasses
- Compass
- Cellular phone
- Binoculars

CONDUCTING YOUR SURVEY

Use this guide to identify and document the barns and farmsteads in your defined area of study.

Surveyors should work in pairs or teams of three or four. Never survey alone. Each team can divide up the tasks:

- Driving the car
- Locating and marking the farmstead on a map
- Taking photographs
- Filling out the survey form
- Drawing a site map

Caution! Be careful of traffic while you are walking and crossing roads, and while driving. Pull off to the side of the road to a safe location when stopping to survey a site. It is best to get out of the automobile to document and photograph the site. Take one color photograph (print) of each farm that shows all the buildings on the property. If possible, take additional photographs of each farmstead structure, including residences, large barns and smaller outbuildings on the property. Avoid aiming directly into the sun. If you are interested in making a separate set of photographs for other purposes, consider using black-and-white film, a digital camera or color slide film.

Use the following criteria to determine which properties to survey. Identify and record:

- All barns that are fifty years old or older
- All sites that are identifiable as farmsteads, even if mostly ruins
- Barns meeting the previous criteria within a predetermined geographic area (county, township)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING SURVEY FORMS

Fill out the information on the form using the following directions. The visual glossary on the next pages describes the parts of the farmstead. In general, use one form for each property documented. For properties that have more than one large barn or any buildings not named on the survey form, use a new form to describe the additional structures.

PROPERTY#: Assign each property surveyed a unique number using a numbering system for your whole group. Each team may number properties in numerical order beginning with the number 1. Then re-number the entire group's forms with a new number system. In State and National Historic Preservation each State has a unique number and each County in that state has a unique number. Make sure to contact your state Historic Preservation Office to inquire about these numbers before you begin your survey. The staff these offices are very willing to assist effort such as this. Your State Historic preservation Office can be located at: www.ncshpo.org.

SURVEYOR: Give the full name of each person in the survey team. Example: John Smith and Mary Hernandez.

DATE: Give the exact date that the property was surveyed. Spell out the entire month and use numerals for the date and the four-digit year. Example: June 1, 2001.

COUNTY; Give the name and number of the county in which the property is located. See examples of county numbering system.

TOWNSHIP: Give the name of the township in which the property is located.

SECTION: Give the section number of the township that the property is located. Refer to a county plat map to identify the section number.

ADDRESS: Give the mailing/universal 911 address of the property, including the number, or box number and street name. If a number cannot be determined, give at least the name of the street and a crossroad direction description, i.e. Property is on 150th St. west of intersection with M Road.

OWNERS NAME: If known, give the owner's name.

OWNERS ADDRESS: If known, record the owner's mailing address if different from the property address. If it is the same as the property address, write "same".

COMMON NAME: Indicate if the farmstead or barn is known locally by a specific name, or if there is a name painted on the barn or other building. Examples: The Fuerst Farm, or the Mail Pouch Barn.

CONDITION: Indicate the condition of each building, using the following guide:

- Good - The roof covering appears to be in weather-tight condition and the structure has no apparent broken or missing elements. No visible structural problems. Vegetation is under control.
- Fair – Shows some signs of deterioration, evidence of minor roof leaks, some missing or broken parts.
- Poor – Obvious major roof leaks, evidence of major structural problems, extensive broken or missing parts. Extensive, unwanted vegetation.
- Altered – Visibly obvious that a building has been partially removed, added to, or changed.
- Ruins – Ranging from faint evidence that a structure had existed (such as foundation walls or a few timbers) to a complete standing structure far beyond repair. Evidence of long-time neglect with excessive vegetation. In danger of falling down.

BARN SECTION: Use this section to describe the largest barn. If there is more than one barn, use additional forms. Refer to the Visual Glossary to identify architectural features. Use the check boxes to record the condition, roof shape, roof covering, siding materials, foundation type and foundation materials. Note the existence of any other architectural features. Indicate whether or not the barn is painted. If painted, indicate the color(s) of paint. If any names, dates or decorations appear on the barn, write them here.

FARMHOUSE SECTION: Describe the main residence by recording the condition, roof shape, roof covering, siding materials and paint color(s). Note any other architectural features you think are important.

OTHER FARMSTEAD STRUCTURES: For each existing structure, check the appropriate box to indicate condition. Then, using the Visual Glossary, describe the types of roof, siding, and foundation. Comment on any additional features such as paint color, windows, number of dormers and any interesting or unusual feature about the building. If such a structure does not exist, check the N/A (not applicable) box.

SKETCH: Draw a simple line drawing of the layout of the farmstead, as though looking at it from above, showing the farmstead structures in relation to each other. Draw and label the road. Draw outline boxes for each farmstead building. For the barn, draw the plan or “footprint” of the building. Refer to the Visual Glossary for typical barn plans. Draw an arrow indicating north.

We gratefully acknowledge those who have preceded us in this survey area and provided the foundation documents that we have used to create this new National Historic Farmstead/Barn Survey. Providing foundation documents for this new survey were: Steve Stier; Michigan Barn Preservation Network, Michigan State University and Ashland County, Ohio.