

# HOOSIER BARN CHRONICLE

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## Grant Recipients Complete Projects

This summer two recipients of the Indiana Barn Foundation's 2019 Grant awards successfully completed their barn rehabilitation projects. Jessica House, in Economy, IN, and Anna Chambless, in Scottsburg, IN, were congratulated in the September 1, 2019, issue of this newsletter, where we presented background information on both applicants and reviewed the merits of their proposed projects.

Jessica's English bank barn with a large hayloft above originally sheltered a dairy business. Subsequent generations hosted a livestock operation and created an addition to house construction equipment. As with many barns altered over the years to accommodate changes in agricultural use, Jessica's was failing on several fronts. Part of the concrete block dairy house wall had collapsed, the main entry doors and floor



*Jessica House's English bank barn, in Economy, Indiana, was awarded a grant from IBF in September of 2019. Some of her immediate needs were to repair a concrete wall of the dairy house that had collapsed and replace hardware on the barn door so the barn could be protected from weather.*



*New support posts and a structural header were installed to rescue the integrity of the lean-to addition*



*Floorboards were replaced in the entryway*

were in need of repair, and the support posts and header on a later addition were significantly compromised. Although seemingly minor failures, these are precisely the types of problems that if left unattended for too long can accelerate greater difficulties.

Jessica was up to the task, and requested \$1500 to address the diverse array of needed repairs in her grant application. She had the concrete block walls reconstructed, new support posts and a structural header installed to rescue the integrity of the lean-to addition, and replaced entry floorboards and sliding door hardware to secure the main entry from weather.

Jessica was so pleased to have accomplished these repairs, and thankful to IBF for its help, that she placed a banner on the barn acknowledging the assistance of the Williamson Grant. Thank you, Jessica.



*New hardware on the sliding barn door ensures they'll function properly and secure the main entryway from weather*

Dear IBF Members,

Thank you for being a member of Indiana Barn Foundation!

It's community members like you who are helping IBF bring awareness to the importance of preserving and protecting Indiana barns.

Faced with the challenges of 2020, we had to cancel our annual barn tour. The tours have provided us opportunities to promote IBF and educate all people interested in heritage barns. With the cancellation, we also lost financial support that would be used to spread our mission.

Would you consider a year-end gift to Indiana Barn Foundation? Our goal is to raise \$5,000 before year end 2020. Online gifts, tracking our progress, and viewing the video can be done at <https://fundly.com/support-indiana-barn-foundation>.

You can also mail a check made out to

Indiana Barn Foundation, 1201 Central Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46202.

As always, thank you for your support to IBF. It's donors like you that are preserving Indiana history, one barn at a time.

Sincerely,

Kent Yeager  
President of the Board  
Indiana Barn Foundation  
[kentyeager@gmail.com](mailto:kentyeager@gmail.com)

P.S. In 2020 due to the COVID Relief (CARES ACT), donors who do not itemize deductions qualify for the "\$300 Universal Deduction." Consult your tax advisor should you have questions.





*The Amish crew replaced a lot of the boards beneath the tin with poplar boards we had sawed at a local sawmill. They completed the roof in one day. I think it looks great*

Anna Chambless and her son had recently accomplished several repairs to their Midwestern Three Portal barn, originally constructed to house a tobacco operation, when she applied for a \$2500 matching grant from IBF. They had straightened the walls, installed some new flooring, repaired areas of deteriorated siding, replaced broken windows and a door, and repaired parts of the foundation. The work that remained, however, replacing the metal roof, was beyond their budget, so they turned to the Barn Foundation for help.

An Amish contractor removed the deteriorating metal roof, repaired the skip sheathing and other deteriorated wood with poplar sawn at a local mill, and installed new metal roofing, all in one day, according to Anna.

The decision to assist Jessica and incentivize her barn repairs was in large part a response to her enthusiasm for resurrecting her grandfather's farm and family's legacy on the land, as well as an acknowledgement of all the work she had already accomplished on the farmhouse, landscape, and other buildings prior to applying for our grant. Similarly, the considerable time and work Anna and her son had invested in saving their barn encouraged us to assist in the completion of the rehabilitation, for without a much needed new roof, that work would have been in vain.



# Introduction to Indiana Barns

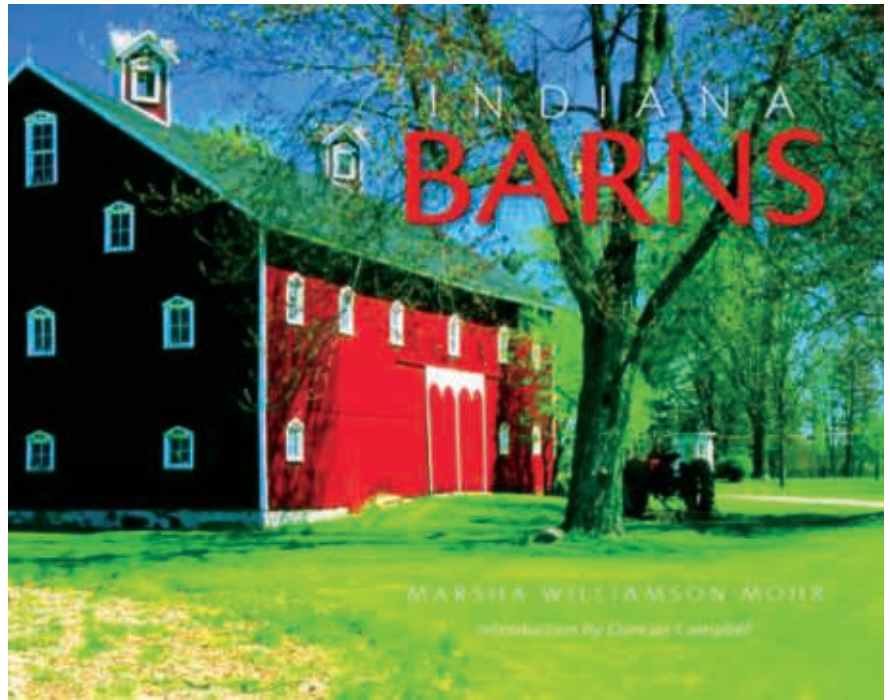
by Duncan Campbell

The following article was originally published in 2010 as the Introduction to the book *Indiana Barns* by Marsha Williamson Mohr. It is reprinted below, with permission from publisher Indiana University Press.

Few stories so well represent the history of our continent's settlement as the story of the American barn. Our barns are relatively plain buildings, but theirs is not a simple narrative, for they relate an intricate chronicle of the American agricultural experience. As a symbol of this story, the barn is as complex and varied as the tale itself, the wide-ranging result of the many influences brought to the American landscape by those who settled it. Indiana's barns are no exception, and Marsha Mohr's photographs bring a particularly satisfying display of this American icon to those familiar with the special landscapes of the state of Indiana.

Though its history has many layers, the physical simplicity of the barn is an important part of its aesthetic. It is often large, and constructed of massive timbers. Set out on the land, barns can be rather plain in aspect, combining wood and stone, often unpainted and weathered; or if painted, usually black or brown or red or white, and fading. When adorned, it is commonly with dated advertising that itself has become a convention of the roadside landscape. And too commonly, it is sadly sagging, its roofline broken, siding a sieve for sunlight or snow - a remnant, a reminder of a time and place that few people today can claim as theirs.

For me this brings a mythic quality to our barns, an implied romance written on the land by a way of life shrunk to insignificance in an altered and neglectful present. Barns speak of ethnic specialty, and relate in their designs the origins and folkways of those who brought their traditions to



America in the search for another, better life. In the same breath, American barns reflect the settler's response to the requirements and resources of a new homeland where terrain, available materials, changing husbandry, and the individual's skills and traditions mixed with those of his neighbors to reshape the barn. So the barn as we experience it today reflects the bygone traditions brought from the many countries of our origin, but is also a statement of adaptation, change, and survival in a new land - the stuff of myth.

The local barn, then, tells this story as it happened in Indiana, and is illustrated in this book by many of the most customary American barn typologies found across the country. The locations of barn types can indicate who traveled the settlement routes taken into that area, and whether they came across Virginia and up from the south, or down the Ohio River and on into the middle counties, whether across Pennsylvania and mid-Ohio into the eastern regions, or from the northeast and New York into the northern reaches of the state. Although the Indiana settler almost certainly used one of these common routes,



## Introduction to Indiana Barns *(continued)*

once here his movements are less predictable; but regardless of the route taken, the barn left behind marks the locus of his activity and is the telltale of his origins, traditions, skills, and the builder's response to the region's bounty - trees, stone, or clay for bricks. Among the most common barns found in Indiana are the English barns, brought to America by English colonists, the Transverse Frame barns, probably of German origin, and the Pennsylvania barns, also from the German tradition. A later form, the round or polygonal barn of nineteenth-century derivation, most common in the Midwest, and Indiana in particular, is also beautifully illustrated in these pages, as are a few other less common forms.

Barns from many origins have been documented across the United States, including French barns, Dutch barns, and others, but those represented here, and most commonly seen in Indiana, are primarily derivatives of the Transverse Frame, English, and Pennsylvania types. Some appear in their relatively pure forms, but numerous variations result from later additions acquired by changes in purpose, fresh farm practices and technology, the cultural influences of subsequent users, or the expansion of the particular farming operation itself. Often the barns pictured in this book have been enlarged with shed additions to accommodate tractors and other mechanical equipment for which they were not originally conceived. Other variations occur within a single style attribution, and may include very early forms. For example, it is not unusual to see an English barn constructed into a hillside as a bank barn with provision for livestock below, even though this style is thought to originate with the English Three-Bay or Threshing barn, \*originally intended just for crop storage and threshing, and not build into the slope, nor intended to house animals. Similarly, there are countless regional variations of other barns of known origin, an indication of the richness of our own heritage and the complex nature of our settlement patterns. These alterations are an important part of the barn's testament.

If recognizing barns by their source and architectural form is complicated by the variety of

adaptations, identification is aided by additional proof, many of which can point back to the barn's form, culture of origin, or time period. One of these is the means of construction. Though fewer and fewer remain, many early American barns and agricultural outbuildings were constructed of logs, a fairly quick and simple method of construction where trees were available. The techniques by which the logs were joined are indicative of the skills and traditions of the builders. Scandinavians, Germans, and the English are among European settlers who brought familiarity with these skills to America. Similarly, there are many fine examples of hand-hewn timber frame barns in Indiana, which were constructed well into the nineteenth century in the Midwest, and for which highly specialized skills were needed to lay out and assemble the complex puzzle of properly fitted joinery. These skills continued to endure into the twentieth century using sawn timbers. It is not uncommon today to see timber barns with both hewn and sawn timbers in use, indicating perhaps the overlap of technologies on the one hand, and the longevity of use on the other, as deteriorated hewn timbers were replaced with sawn, or timbers from older barns were reused in new ones. In all cases, timber frame and log barns were common to areas where mature trees were readily available and in close or immediate proximity to the building site, and where the requisite skills were available. In Indiana, the tree of choice was the virgin Tulip or Yellow Poplar, preferred for the length and straightness of its trunk, lightness and workability of its wood, and resistance to insects.

Barn origins can also be identified through a number of other means, where certain traditional patterns of design were consistently maintained, even if other, more secondary attributes were not. The patterns that are used to define and describe barn configurations include the barn's roof type (gable), entry location (gable end), floor plan (three-bay), intended crop storage (hay barn) or animal use (dairy barn), and peculiarities of shape and construction (extended gable, fore bay). As an example: The English barn in its purest form is timber framed, has a single gable roof over a single

## Introduction to Indiana Barns *(continued)*

story, few if any windows, and a slightly rectangular plan featuring three interior bays or cribs. The design was intended primarily for grain and crop storage, with the through bay for use as a threshing floor. The wagon doors are centered on the eave sides, and the threshing floor forms the central bay.

Roof styles on Indiana barns most commonly include the simple gable and broken gable, the gambrel, the round or gothic, and the shed or pent roof. There are variations of pitch for each roof configuration, and occasionally combinations of intersections of more than one type, as well as appendages such as gable or shed-roofed dormers, hay-hood projections of a variety of shapes, and roof-mounted mechanical ventilators or cupola ventilators to promote air movement. The material covering the roof is of course vulnerable to the weather, and expected to deteriorate over time. Consequently, extant material is rarely original to the structure. Exceptions can include slate, which can last a hundred years, but most barns never received such expensive applications. More typical roof coverings are wood plank, sawn wood shingles, or split wood shakes, later replaced by slate, standing seam or corrugated metal, and asphalt or fiberglass shingles.

The location of the primary entry refers to the placement of the barn's wagon doors, the largest point of entry into the barn, located either on the gable end or the eave side of the barn. In the Transverse Frame barn and Dutch barn, these doors are located on the gable end, and lead into a centrally located aisle that runs with the roof ridge, while in the English and Pennsylvania barns they occur on the eave side of the building, entering an aisle that runs at right angles to the roof ridge. Additional large openings are often seen in shed additions built along the sides or on the ends of older barns, constructed to provide space for tractors and other farm machinery, shop space, or other uses. A barn's relationship to the terrain is another way of describing its configuration, whether it is built into a slope or raised on a masonry basement, as is its size and shape, the placement of window openings, siding orientation, or the frequency and location of its ventilation

devices.

Dating the Indiana barn is not easy, for written documentation is scarce, but there are construction and finish details, as well as stylistic or period flourishes that can be helpful. One problem with establishing a construction period has been discussed - most barns have been continuously repaired, renewed, and reconstructed as long as someone had a use for them. These alterations include major additions to the structure as well as demolitions, so the more one knows about the early barn configurations, the evolution of materials, and agricultural applications, the better equipped he or she is to accurately place the barn in its historical period. Most Indiana barns constructed before World War I are timber frame construction, and the earliest are log or hewn timber. It would be extremely unlikely to find a barn in Indiana built before 1800, and rare to encounter one constructed prior to the Civil War. After 1870, most are built from sawn, dimensional lumber, although the main frame may be timber. The earliest rafters are often cut poles measuring from three to five inches in diameter and approximately twelve to fourteen feet in length, arranged in multiple runs as the roof required. Subsequent rafters are hewn or sawn dimensional lumber. The timber frame, with its top and sill plates, and intermediate girts, all horizontal members, was an ideal configuration for attaching vertical wood plank siding, which is the siding configuration most commonly seen. Usually rough sawn, these planks were often covered at their longitudinal edges by narrow wood battens, which reduced wind and rain penetration; on more finished barns, particularly those of later construction or with replacement siding, the planks are often milled with a shiplap or other fitted joint that enabled the planks to seat against one another in a manner providing a more weather resistant skin.

Most rough sawn planks bear the curved marks of the circular saw, which came into use in sawmills after 1845. Rough sawn planks bearing vertical saw marks oriented across the plank were almost certainly sawn on vertically operating (reciprocating, water powered) saws that preceded

## Introduction to Indiana Barns *(continued)*

the circular blade. This is an important telltale and can be readily determined in most barns constructed from wood by close inspection of the siding or interior planks. Vertically operating saws were relatively slow and many mills did not have carriages capable of handling logs of the length needed for barns, so vertically sawn timbers are less common. Consequently, hand hewing continued throughout the period of transition from one sawmill operation to another, and regional differences obtain[ed], making it difficult to accurately date many barns or determine when one technique left off and the other began. For this reason it is possible to encounter hand-hewn timbers and original circular-sawn siding on the same barn. Replacement siding can further confound the issue, as can the continued application and even reuse of early types of nails. Therefore, it is important to look for consistency in style, or barn type, as well as in the framing technique, the siding, and the nails, since over the years alterations have brought variations in each.

Stylistic flourishes can also inform the age of a barn, most notably those from the Victorian period - generally from 1870 to 1900. These are seen most often in the decorative details, and in Indiana it is normally safe to say that the only consistent decoration, other than painted advertising and examples of painted door arches and trim details, occurred in the Victorian period. Elsewhere, the Pennsylvania barn is most notable for decorative brickwork and painted decorative insignia, the so-called hex signs. And barns constructed of ceramic block have color as decorative accent. In these pages, look for the stylistic differences in the ventilator cupolas in particular, variety in wood shingle siding and window trim, or occasional decorative spool work similar to that seen on the porches of Victorian homes. It appears that most Indiana farmers may not have had either the money or the inclination to express these taste preferences in their barns, although it should be clear from the photographs that barns were constructed with great care, and were a significant source of pride for their builders. They were, after all, the most important buildings on the farm.

The great misfortune, and acknowledged but largely unwritten chapter, in the story of the American barn, is its gradual banishment from the countryside. Indeed, the disappearance of the rural way of life itself, or at best the transformation of the family farm to the corporate one has to bear some of the responsibility for the loss of these wonderful buildings. Indiana is no exception when it comes to our failure to protect these icons, although efforts by the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana to acknowledge farm rehabilitation successes, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Barn Again program certainly represent strides worth applauding. Moreover, the many individual labors to convert barns to new uses, move them to alternate locations, or reconstruct and rehabilitate them should not go unnoticed, but the reality is that abandonment, and the pressure to redevelop existing rural landscapes with new housing, shopping centers, and highways has long been the enemy of the historic farmstead.

I hope that this book, whose simple but poignant images speak to the beauty and saga of another era, like our barns themselves, will encourage others to recognize the cultural and historic importance of these structures. If we have had, by necessity or choice, to travel across the past century from a land of farmers to one of urban dwellers, and have, to our credit, discovered alternate methods for feeding others, and ourselves, then it follows that we can find the means to protect our rural story. It is so much more than the story of the buildings; it is our story, who we are and where we come from, what we brought with us and may no longer know. Every time we lose one barn we miss the opportunity to learn, to be reminded, to understand that one, critical part of our rural past. Once that barn is lost, articulating our history, fathoming our achievements, and evaluating our present undertakings become more difficult, until one day there are no barns, and no barn books. But we also lose the experience of the barn itself - the smells, the dark and dusty space, the filtered light, and the chance to open our imagination to the past.

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