

# BARN PRESERVATION PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES (WISCONSIN)

**Brief History:** The Wisconsin Barn Preservation Initiative began in the fall of 1993, as the result of an invited presentation by Bill Kimball to a number of individuals representing UW-Extension, the SHPO Office, WI Ag-Tourism representatives, agri-business and heritage tourism organizations. The focus of this presentation was on the various and ongoing barn preservation activities in the state of Michigan.

**Program Focus:** Modeled after Michigan's successful program, the focus of the Wisconsin Initiative is as follows: 1) to build public awareness and interest in preserving and protecting historic farmstead structures, 2) to provide technical education workshops where barn owners can interact with other barn owners and seek advice from technical experts, 3) to provide support materials that can assist the barn owner with a preservation project, and 4) to develop an organizational and program infrastructure that can carry out a strong barn preservation program.

**Program Collaborators:** The Wisconsin Initiative takes the strengths of four distinct organizations; the University of Wisconsin-Extension, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation. The Initiative combines them in such a way that the efforts are significant. A more recent contributor to these activities is a state-wide membership organization known as Barns N.O.W! (Network of Wisconsin)/ (see below), which is administratively affiliated with the Wisconsin Trust as a special interest group.

**Workshops:** Seven educational workshops, each held in different locations have occurred to date and more are scheduled each fall and spring for the next several years. Each of these day-long workshops have been oversubscribed and evaluations and responses have been overwhelmingly positive. Recent workshops have experimented with a concurrent session format to expand the number of topics that can be addressed. These workshops generally conclude with a tour of area barns. Currently workshops are planned for April 22, 1999 at Lake Geneva and fall 1999 in Ashland. In fall 1998, historic preservation and particularly rural preservation were major themes of the Governor's Cultural Congress, providing a vehicle to present rural preservation to a broad audience. Planning is also underway to initiate an annual statewide conference aimed at addressing rural preservation issues.

**Publications:** A number of support documents have been prepared and are distributed as part of the workshop materials. These materials are also available for downloading from the program's Internet site (see below) or are mailed for a fee of \$5.00. Included in this packet is a listing of contractors and consultants that are experienced in barn preservation work, a summary of the costs generally associated with rehabilitation work, a bibliography of

barn literature, and a summary of adaptive reuse projects involving barns.

Two new publications are being developed for distribution in the series initiated last year titled "Giving Old Barns New Life". Through a generous grant from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the first publication will offer a typology of Wisconsin silos while the second is an abbreviated and annotated bibliography of literature on barns. As with the first two publications in the series, these documents will be available for a small fee from the UW-Extension Publications Unit. More publications are being planned and will be added to the series as additional funding is secured.

**Other Activities:** The State Historical Society of Wisconsin is developing a full-color barn poster to be distributed to promote barn preservation. In addition, some interest has been developing to produce local inventories of historic agricultural structures. The Barn Preservation Initiative also has provided encouragement to a variety of other barn preservation projects, including converting the U.W. Dairy Barn into a science museum and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection's efforts to develop an Adopt-A-Barn program.

**Membership/ Support Organization:** Barns N.O.W! (Network of Wisconsin) has expanded its membership to 156. Membership is on a fee basis. Three formal meetings of this organization have occurred and the Executive Board now meets regularly by conference call. Barns N.O.W! is in the process of publishing a newsletter and is focusing its energies on how best to promote itself. In conjunction with the state-wide preservation conference, it will host the principal evening activity of the conference at Old World Wisconsin.

**Grants/Fund-raising:** (see also Legislative section) As mentioned above, funds were solicited from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin to help produce two new publications.

**Legislation:** As of February 1999, two principal pieces of legislation are being drafted. One is for a bond-funded \$20 million Wisconsin Heritage Trust Program, at least part of which would be administered by the Wisconsin Trust. Among the many uses of the funds would be matching grants to private non-profit organizations which could be used to seed revolving funds that could be used for barn preservation. A second piece of legislation would provide for a 25% state tax credit for the rehabilitation of historic barns, with a minimum investment of \$10,000 in a qualifying project. The barns would have to date to before 1950, but would not have to be eligible for listing in the National Register. The State Historical Society would administer the program, charging a 1% fee to cover the costs of hiring additional staff and consultants to administer the program.

**Internet Site:** In the fall of 1996, the Wisconsin Barn Preservation Initiative established a World Wide Web site that can be accessed at the following Internet address: <http://www.uwex.edu/lgc/barns/barns.htm>.