

WISCONSIN

Annual Barn Preservation Activities Report - 2004

BRIEF HISTORY

The Wisconsin Barn Preservation Program (WBBP) 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 program builds on the strengths of four distinct agencies and organizations; the University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX), the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS), the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation (WTHP) and the most recent collaborator, Barns N.O.W! (Network of Wisconsin), a state-wide membership operating under the auspices of the WTHP as a special interest group.

2004 also saw the emergence of a new potential collaborator in the WBBP. UW-Madison's Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures (CSUMC) joined with the traditional program partners in submitting a proposal to the University's Baldwin Grant Program. The purpose of this work was to integrate ongoing attempts to survey Wisconsin's barns with qualified mentors that could provide qualified training to younger adults. This would enable them to complete the surveys and provide the appropriate level of technical data.

WORKSHOPS

The 17th in a series of regional barn preservation workshops dating back to 1994 was held on April 30 and May 1 at Schumacher Farm County Park in Waunakee. Ninety-eight participants registered for this 1.5 day program, two thirds of them residing in Dane County. Barn preservation experts from the area (including Mike Wordford from New York who does work in Wisconsin) shared their wisdom on topics ranging from deteriorating mortar, straightening, to adaptive re-use.

Program attendees were able to witness a neighboring barn moved to the site of the workshop. Unfortunately a fall wind storm later blew the barn off the flat bed truck it was resting on and destroyed it. Two unique pre-conference sessions were held. The first providing intensive counsel by an experienced barn preservationist designed to produce a detailed preservation plan for selected barn owners. The second session focused on telling and recording the many memories and stories associated with Wisconsin barns.

Over half (58.6%) of the participants stated that the workshop did "well" or "very well" in meeting their expectations. Twenty respondents (approximately 20%) of those attending reported that they will use the workshop information in taking some type of preservation action such as "fix drainage problems" or "bring in a experienced contractor to evaluate the barn's rehabilitation needs." Few suggestions for improvement were received.

PUBLICATIONS

A number of support documents are regularly updated and distributed as part of workshop materials or are available for downloading from the program's Internet website (see below). Included in this information 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.

UW-Extension initiated several years ago, a formal publications series titled "Giving Old Barns New Life." Plans are underway to produce another issue in this four publication series. Preserving windmills would be the focus of this publication.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The end of the calendar year, 2003, brought about the end of the "Year of the Barn" in Wisconsin. UW-Extension coordinated a special year-end photographic "barn raising" which asked interested parties to simply send electronic or print photographs of Wisconsin barns along with basic information about the barn. Over 1000 photographs were submitted including a number of private collections of barn images. These photographs are being slowly transferred to an online photo album posted on the WBPP website.

The University of Wisconsin Dairy Barn was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in May of 2002. A subsequent request was made by the WHS to the National Park Service to consider the property for Landmark designation. A decision is currently pending.

In response to consistent inquiries, the Wisconsin Historical Society launched its own website containing information related to barn preservation at: www.wisconsinhistory.org/hp/barns/index.asp. This site contains information of interest to barn preservationists addressing topics such as tax credits, relevant publications and what it means to have your property listed on the National and State Register of Historic Places.

MEMBERSHIP/ SUPPORT ORGANIZATION

Barns N.O.W! (Network of Wisconsin) continues to struggle with leadership issues. No single or group of individuals have emerged with an interest in rebuilding the organization. Its parent organization, the Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation is currently structuring an oversight committee to determine the future of the organization. Preliminary discussions have focused on fund-raising and the desire to model the Iowa Barn Foundation.

INTERNET SITE

In the fall of 1996, the Wisconsin Barn Preservation Program established a World Wide Web site that can be accessed at the following Internet address: <http://www.uwex.edu/lgc/barns/barns.htm> This website was recognized by "TopTenSites" as one of the most helpful websites in its area of interest.

Submitted by Chuck Law, UW-Extension's Advisor to the WBBP