

*THE BARN DOOR*  
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Historic Barn and Farm Foundation of Pennsylvania

By Sheila Miller,  
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Historic Barns-

The metamorphosis of an idea into reality is a process that never ceases to amaze me. This week, I was thrilled when the Historic Barn and Farm Foundation of Pennsylvania was officially launched at a meeting at the Kutztown University's Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center. It was a fitting place to kick off this nonprofit organization since the site features an historic farmhouse, barn, log cabins and schoolhouse.

The idea to create this statewide fellowship of historic barn owners and enthusiasts was incubated over a period of about a year. It began after a survey of old barns was conducted by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, which I chaired at the time in my former life as a state legislator. This survey received national attention in the media, and caught the attention of Rod Scott of the National Barn Alliance.

Rod's persistence in encouraging me to get involved in what NBA was attempting to do across the country paid off. He pointed out to me that Pennsylvania, with its wealth of historic barns on historic farmsteads, did not have a statewide organization looking out for them. In the fall of 2006, I agreed to work on that void. I told Rod that my efforts would have to wait until the New Year, after my term in office ended and my non-stop schedule slowed down.

It was only a few days after I left office when I received a call from Robert Ensminger, the author of the book, *The Pennsylvania Barn*, and renowned expert on this style of architecture in the agricultural world. "You don't know me," he said, "But I share your interest in old barns and have read an article in our local paper about what you have done with the Center survey."

That brief introduction began our nine-month excursion from idea to reality as Bob lent

his knowledge and time to the effort of launching this non-profit group. In our initial conversation, however, I did correct the retired Kutztown University professor to let him know I did know who he was and had his book on my coffee table in the living room of my farm house. That began our friendship and partnership in this endeavor.

Bob's network of fellow barn authorities expanded our group immediately. We were joined by Greg Huber of Lehigh County and Jeff Marshall of Bucks County at our initial meeting which was held in March, 2007. We have been meeting once a month since then, and are delighted to have other historic experts join our group: Nadine Steinmetz of Lancaster County, Jim Lewars and Phil Pendelton of Berks County, John Moore of Northumberland County, Ken Sandri of Monroe County, and our latest addition is Eugene Wengert of Franklin County.

Like the expansion of our Commonwealth and country by early settlers, our Historic Barn and Farm Foundation of Pennsylvania is migrating from the southeast to the north and west. We are following a path similar to those traveled by our forbearers as they cleared forests to farm. Our heritage is well-marked by the hewn timbers that frame these old barns and which represent the cultures and craftsmen that built them.

Our progress in growing the "idea" into an organization of barn enthusiasts took six months. We took care of the details of creating bylaws and writing our mission statement. We have aligned ourselves with the Heritage Conservancy to expedite the paperwork needed to operate as a non-profit organization. We are finished with those tasks and are ready to get to work.

Our goal is to record and document as many of the barns that were raised in Pennsylvania prior to 1960 as we can find. We encourage people to join us in this effort by becoming members and completing our standard survey form that was officially approved and adopted at this week's meeting. We are hoping this uniform method of surveying these old barns will help us gather the information in a way that will allow barns in Erie County to be recorded in the same way as those in Bucks, Wayne, Greene or any county in between.

We hope to someday have regional representation on our Board from across the state. I am encouraged by the interest already expressed by people in wanting to save their historic barns. I appreciate their patience as we have taken this "caterpillar" idea and given it time to unfold into "butterfly" reality. We're ready to spread our wings and fly

with the help of everyone who cares about these treasures of our agrarian heritage.

For those who have contacted me in the past, I will be getting the standard survey forms to you soon. For those who are just getting involved, welcome aboard. I appreciate all the hands that are helping to raise this historic barn foundation. You are the mortise and tenon that will help preserve these farmstead treasures. Our goal is to keep them standing for many more centuries and to tell the stories of those that we can't save to future generations so they can better appreciate the architectural skills and pioneer determination that built these magnificent structures since the 1700s.

For more information about the Historic Barn and Farm Foundation of Pennsylvania, contact me by responding to this blog or by sending an e-mail to me at [deutschlandfarm@comcast.net](mailto:deutschlandfarm@comcast.net). Let me know about surveys already done by historic groups, local governments, or individuals and we will be happy to include them in our data base. Working together, we can tell the story of Pennsylvania's barns to everyone who wants learn about them and the role they have played on our farms in the past, their function in present day agriculture, and their value on farms of the future.