

The Pennsylvania Land Trust Association (PALTA) recently had its annual conference in Gettysburg. One of the sessions was entitled “Protecting the fields around the barns...and the barns in the fields”. By the fact that I am an inherent “do gooder” at heart, I currently serve as the president of both the Historic Barn and Farm Foundation (HBFF) and PALTA boards of directors, as well as being on the board of NBA. The idea is that land trusts and state agricultural preservation programs might be induced to preserve historic resources, especially barns, or at least address this issue, as part of their respective programs.

However, as a barn guy, I could not drive in and around Adams County without stopping to photograph barns. Besides the fact that there were beautiful barns virtually around every corner, what impressed me was the fact almost everyone I encountered as I stopped unannounced and uninvited at their barn thresholds, was how happy people were to share stories of their barns. One man invited me into his barn to see a date painted inside the door of an integral corn crib; another man showed me the improvements he and his father made to accommodate the fruit growing industry and one woman explained why her nineteenth century barn had a date of 2008 in the gable.

There are several features of Pennsylvania barns found in the Adams County and surrounding region that our not found very often in southeastern Pennsylvania where I live¹. Most of the barns are what we refer to as Pennsylvania Standard Barns. They are two-level bank barns (having a ramp in the back of the barn leading to the loft and threshing floor level) with projecting forebays to shelter the barnyard stable doors. The majority of the barns in and around Gettysburg battlefield² have stone stable levels surmounted by frame superstructures. Unlike earlier Sweitzer barns that have a saltbox appearance, these barns have a symmetrical appearance when viewed from the gable end.



Both barns are Standard Pennsylvania barns that were noted in contemporary literature as “frame barns, stone stable high”. The barn shown above left has a date of 2008 at the peak of the gable.

¹ For an excellent context see Sally McMurry’s study of the Adams County – York County region which is part of sixteen individual regional studies entitled “Agricultural Resources of Pennsylvania, c. 1700-1960” on the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission’s website

http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pennsylvania%27s_agricultural_history/2584

² There are numerous websites from HABS and the NPS that chronicle almost 20 barns on the battlefield as well as some other sites such as <http://gettysburg.stonesentinels.com/battlefield-farms/>

The barn shown above right shows how these barns often had doors in the gable end to facilitate loading and unloading. Both barn owners came out and were proud to talk about their barns

One of the most obvious is the wonderful variety of cupolas and louvered openings found on the wooden superstructure of the barn. The variety of detail and ornamentation of these features is amazing.



This three gable barn has a large central cupola and flanking smaller ones on the main barn and "L". You can also see the machine bay on the south and north elevations. This barn is located less than a mile from the round barn just off Route 33W.



Examples of the variety of louvers found in the area.

A less obvious, but prevalent, feature of these barns is an integral wagon or machinery bay for the protection of wagons and other farm machinery. These bays are often is open on both the barnyard and rear elevations. While many terminate with the gable wall, a large number of a corn crib incorporated on the outside wall of these bays.



Note the large opening next to the forebay for machinery. There is a integral corncrib along the gable wall which has the date of 1893 painted on it.

According to the owner of this barn, many of these barns have windlasses to raise a wagon bed from its chassis. There were hooks for pulleys on the beams above the wagon bay. In other instances windlasses were actually suspended between the beams forming the floor of the loft.



The owner of this barn (dated 1882 in the semicircle above the gable window) removed the exterior wall and integral corncrib. The windlasses (above right) are obscured by the farm equipment in the overall photo.



On the barn above left the wagon bay is being repaired. Note that there is a stone stable-high wall visible on what was the inside wall of the wagon bay. On the barn above right the wagon bay is not incorporated within the main barn, but in a shed wing. Note the spaced slats of the corncrib in the outside wall. This barn was one of the few seen with open swallow hole ventilators in the peak.

One really can't discuss barns of the Gettysburg area without mentioning the round barn located about eight miles west of Gettysburg. According to their brochure, this 1914 barn has a circumference of 282 feet and a diameter of over 87 feet, with a central silo measuring 60 feet high and 12 feet wide. The barn is "truly an awesome structure to behold!"

