

Barn of the Month

John and Mary Swartzlander Barn, Doylestown PA

The HBFF wants people to tell barn stories or just share photos of their favorite barns. The inaugural story highlights a barn in Bucks County that will be preserved as part of a residential subdivision. It will be converted into a residence. The property owner will be looking for someone to purchase the barn in the near future. If you have an interest, contact HBFF President Jeff Marshall at JMarshall@HeritageConservancy.org.

The barn is a large stone barn built in the shape of an “L”. The main barn is a predominantly stone structure of a design generally referred to as a bank barn. The barn is a bank barn in that the easterly elevation has wagon doors on the upper level and there is an earthen bank on this elevation providing access to the wagon doors. The earthen bank does not contact the barn wall. Instead there is gap spanned with a wooden bridge. The barn has a gable roof, wood frame, “bridge house” protecting the bridge. The barn has a date stone on the north gable that reads “M J & S 1814”. The upper level of the barn is divided into three major units called bays. There is a central bay used for threshing grain and equipment storage flanked by large mows where loose hay was stacked for storage until it was threshed. Functionally, this barn is referred to as a three-bay bank barn.



Bank elevation showing wooden bridge house spanning space between barn and bank

The westerly, barnyard, elevation has a frame wall above the stone stable level. The stable level has a number of doors opening into the barnyard. Generally, these frame walls are above a recessed area created by the stable wall being recessed back several feet from the front wall of the barn providing a protected area. This forms a protected work area referred to as a “closed forebay”. This pattern is distinct from the early Pennsylvania German barns, where the forebay projected out beyond the front wall of main barn. Unlike most barns of this variety, the stone wall on this elevation is flush with the exterior wall and not recessed. It is possible that the entire barn was stone and when the wing was added the remaining stone wall was taken down to the stable level to maintain stability or that it was constructed as a variant of the closed forebay form.



West elevation showing cut stone quoins and open area corresponding to wooden wall visible from exposed section of wall (left). West elevation showing stone wall at stable level below wooden wall (right).



Straw shed wing of barn



If the date stones on the house and barn are references to John and Mary Swartzlander then they are different than any other similar stones where the upper initial reflects the surname and the lower initials that of the given names of the husband and wife. To be consistent with most date stones, the “S” should be at the top and the “J” for John and “M” for Mary below it.

In 1878, the barn was described as “a large stone barn, with a floor 80 feet long, stabling for four horses and 11 cows; a stone straw shed 80 feet long and a frame stable for three horses and two carriages with hay mow above all attached to the barn”.

Attached to the westerly barnyard elevation is a full height “L” wing used functionally as a “straw shed”. Most straw sheds were later additions to traditional three-bay barns. Generally, and in this instance, the straw shed is an extension that is perpendicular to the main barn. Straw barns became popular after the advent of mechanical threshing machines. A portable steam thresher sat on the upper level barn floor and blew the straw to the rear of the barn. Later barns were built with straw sheds incorporated in the planning and this type of barn is often called a three end or three gable barn. Like many straw sheds, the upper level of this one was used to store straw and the bottom level was used to house animals and store equipment.

The ground level of the straw shed is stone and the upper level is wood frame construction. The roof extends out beyond the gable end of the wing and there is scalloped bargeboard detailing. There is a gap between the stone portion of the wing and the main barn which allows wagons to drive into the barnyard.