

Barn lovers form alliance; meet for 'Barnalogue'

By Janet Carman

In the spring of 2006 my husband and I retired and moved from Dallas, Texas, to the farm that great-grandfather Fred Waters established at the turn of the century. On this farm, we have a barn. This both intrigues and dismays us.

On one hand there is the sentiment attached to owning a barn that was built by our great-grandfather over 100 years ago. On the other hand there is the reality attached to owning a barn built by our great-grandfather over 100 years ago.

What are we going to do with it? The picturesque barn was built in 1904 and stories are told about the times when Great-Grandpa Fred and Grandma Lizzie sat behind the barn doors in the buggy with Fred's favorite, spirited horses snorting impatiently, waiting for one of the boys to open them so they could burst out and race to town.

The doors stand shut today. The old barn needs work just to keep it standing. This will take money, which is not rolling out of our pockets.

We realized that we probably were not the only people with this dilemma. We began to ask questions about grants and other financial incentives available to help people like us restore our old barns. In our quest, we heard about a Barnalogue Conference, the first of its kind, sponsored by the newly formed Kansas Barn Alliance. With questions about "money-for-old barns" on our minds, we drove to Beloit, on Friday, Sept. 22.

Twenty-one barn-lovers from around the state gathered that weekend for a barn dialogue or "Barnalogue". The purpose was to brainstorm ways to keep Kansas barns as a useful part of our rural

landscape.

Kyle Peterson, director of the Mitchell County Historical Museum, and host for the event, opened the Friday evening session. Participants introduced themselves by explaining why they loved barns. Before the evening ended, all 21 of us felt connected by our nostalgic memories of the old barns in our lives.

The next morning, events began with breakfast served at the restaurant on the first floor of the restored Porter House Hotel. At 9 a.m., the group moved to the old courtroom at the Mitchell County Courthouse.

There, Bob Marsh, Kansas Barn Alliance president, welcomed participants, introduced guests and sponsors, and gave an overview of the day's sessions and discussion topics.

The first session's topic was: "If I had the opportunity and resources...this is what I'd do with my old barn."

Questions for the second session were: "What constitutes a barn as significantly historic or scenic?" "What do old barns want to tell us and how can we see barns with new eyes?" "Where do you go to learn how Grandpa and Grandma did things on the farm—and does it matter?" A big question was saved for session three: "How can my barn make money for me?"

Session four centered on these topics: "Where do you find barn help and who do you recommend?" "Wouldn't it be cool to have a sesquicentennial logo on at least one barn in each county?"

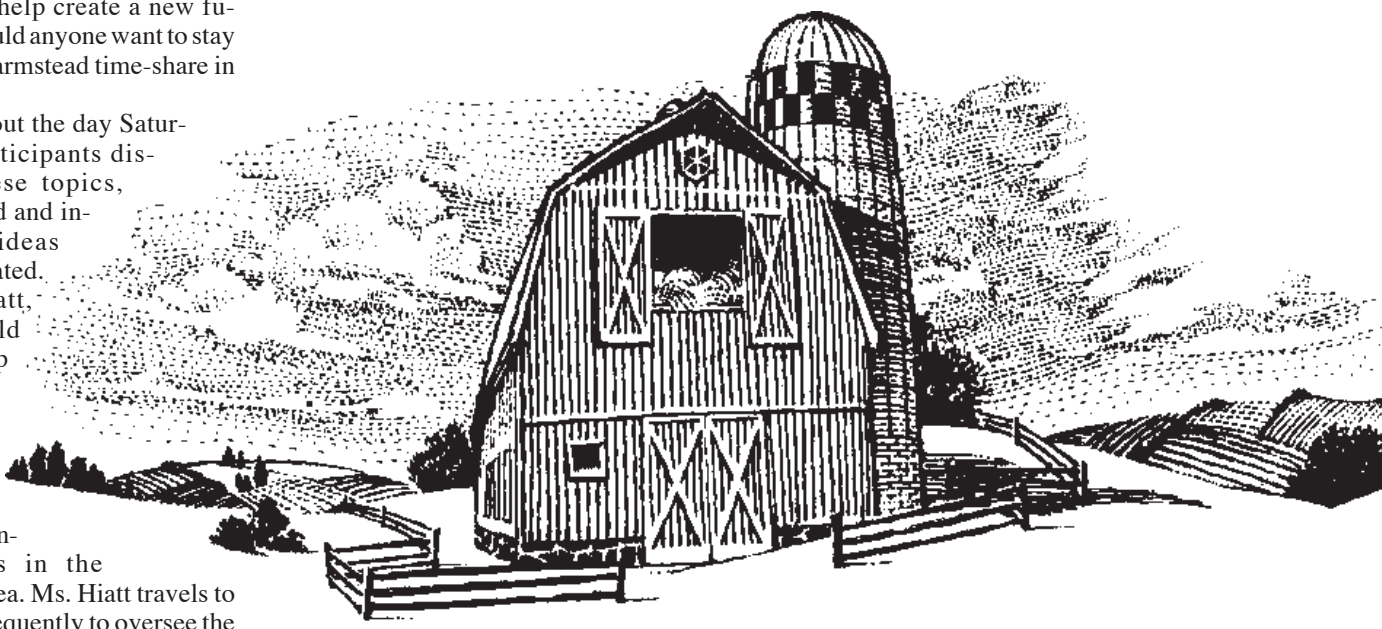
The last session of the day included these questions: "Kansas needs an inventory of barns." "How can we do this?" "What about tax appraisal on repaired barns and tax credits for repairs." "Are there any grants for the preservation of

barns?" "Can old-fashioned farm methods be a new trend?" "Can 10-acre farms help create a new future?" "Would anyone want to stay at a 1950s farmstead time-share in Kansas?"

Throughout the day Saturday, as participants discussed these topics, many varied and interesting ideas were generated.

Loretta Hiatt, Denver, told the group how her old family farm is being restored to meet 21st-century needs in the Atchison area. Ms. Hiatt travels to Atchison frequently to oversee the operation of a day facility for developmentally disabled adults who learn job skills as they work on her organic produce farm. Her barn is being restored and will be put to use as a doggie-day care center, which will also employ developmentally disabled adults. She said that a Manhattan businessman liked the idea so much that he is helping fund the restoration.

The idea of using our old barns for education was introduced by Kyle Peterson, Mitchell County historian. He told about a pilot program in the history program that incorporates local history. Junior and senior high school students are involved in authentic, hands-on experiences learning about the history of farming in their communities. Students who have become personally connected in this way, do not take the "story" of their communities for granted. The hope is that these students will be motivated to keep their communities alive and viable and



will pursue careers related to rural development.

The education aspect was again the focus when the possibility of converting an old barn into a Living History Museum to attract tourists to a community was discussed. Gary Satter, Resource, Conservation and Development director from the Glacial Hills Region in northeast Kansas, encouraged us to look at our old barns as agritourism destinations that would attract travelers to the agricultural areas of our state. According to Mr. Satter, "It's all about entertainment!" He emphasized that people really will pay to be entertained. We just have to figure out how to entertain them on our farms.

Editor of "Grass and Grain," Heather Poore from Alton, told how her farm is used annually to lodge hunters from around the country. This idea led to another lodging idea, where horses would be the lodgers, not humans. Horse owners look for places to board their animals when they need to travel across the country. What better place than a restored old barn?

Barn lovers agreed that the needs of our communities must be the primary consideration when planning barn restoration and conversion. One community need might be a meeting place or conference center that was just a little rustic and out of the ordinary, not exactly like the public library or the high school au-

ditorium. As an example of this, the artists of Blue Rapids used a restored barn to feature local paintings, photography, pottery, ceramics and stained glass at their "Art in the Barn Sale." Susie Haver of Concordia has kept her barn alive without extensive restoration and uses it for small community gatherings.

Where will the restoration money come from and how can my barn make money were big questions. At this Barnalogue session, we learned that it is necessary to have a business-like approach before seeking any funding. It would be okay to have a restoration idea that we are passionate about, but we had better have market surveys done first to see if the idea could succeed.

Local community college business departments can help with that. After the market survey, consulting an expert to set up a business plan is the next critical step.

Before the conference ended Saturday afternoon, Bob Marsh spoke on the importance of each county forming a network of barn lovers. This group could collect stories about old county barns. When doing this, take into consideration materials used, craftsmanship, design, function and history, Marsh suggested. These stories, along with photos could be published as a brochure, with a map outlining a tour of county barns.

In conclusion, thoughts and visions were shared. Chairman of the Kansas Sampler Foundation, Marci

Penner, encouraged us to see Kansas with new eyes. "Pay attention to what we have," urged Roger Hubert, Kansas Barn Alliance board member, and owner of "The Stone Farm" in Lincoln County. "The result could be the realization that there is much more here than we originally thought. We need to change the way we see things. Look at our old barns as historical artifacts. View them through the eyes of an archaeologist. Stop. Listen to this piece of our history. Listen as it tells its story," concludes Hubert.

The Barnalogue was great fun. The creative ideas discussed opened our minds to varied possibilities. We made friends and contacts who will help us in our quest. But....we didn't meet anyone handing out checks or hundred dollar bills so that our dreams could be transformed into reality.

Funding and grants are scarce. We will continue with research and questions. When our research is complete and we have a firm plan on paper, we plan to pack up the papers in our portfolio, take our "hats in hand" and hit the trail looking for money. Hopefully one day soon our dilemma about what to do with our 100-year-old barn will be answered.

For more information on the Kansas Barn Alliance, contact Bob Marsh, bmarsh2@sbcglobal.net or Sally Hatcher, vice president at sdhatcher@kcr.com.

Book Review

Book review from St. Francis Public Library

The Cottage

By Danielle Steel

A gleaming Rolls-Royce pulls through the gates of the magnificent Bel Air estate known as The Cottage. The man behind the wheel is Hollywood's ageless wonder, Cooper Winslow. A star of the silver screen for or decades, a man whose allure to women is legendary, Cooper exudes old-fashioned glamour. But Cooper is broke. And with no major roles coming his way, he is faced with the prospect of selling his be-

loved home, or at least renting out parts of it.

His new tenants, Mark Friedman and Jimmy O'Connor, are coping with their own problems. Mark's wife just walked out, and Jimmy recently lost his own wife to illness. But amid the chaos, three men are becoming unlikely friends...and each finds himself changing. Cooper most of all. Because beneath the dazzle and the bravado is a man trying to keep control of his carefully ordered world. A scandal threatens Cooper's romance with a wealthy debutante...A devastat-

ing accident almost claims the life of one of the housemates...The Cottage welcomes a new house guest who will change Cooper's life in unexpected ways. Among the people who now share his life, Cooper Winslow may find a chance to build a happiness he could never have dreamed of, and to become the kind of human being he has never been.

Against a glittering backdrop, Danielle Steel tells a deeper story, of the choices and unexpected turns of fate that can shape characters and lives.

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WOW! CRAZY

for Summer Produce

Top: Steve Danielski's zucchini resembled a duck while (left) Merlyn Yonkey felt his squash look like a big bunch of bananas;

(bottom) WOW! That's a lot of pumpkin pies! Hailey Weber, 8 years old and Elle Weber 4 years old, of Akron, Colo., show off their masterpiece pumpkins weighing 139 lbs., 125 lbs., 117 lbs. Mike Weber is Hailey and Elle's dad and grandparents are Bennie and Kathy Weber, St. Francis.

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