

The Barn—An Ag Icon

By Meagan Moellers

While its style and function have evolved drastically over the years, the barn remains the most important building on most farms. Those built in the late 1800's and early 1900's have the aesthetic appeal that evokes nostalgic memories of "the way we were."

Because so many of these traditional barns have already disappeared, a non-profit organization called the Iowa Barn Foundation was formed to preserve this rich part of our agricultural heritage. Each September they host self guided tours of barns across the state that allows the public to enjoy not only an up close look, but also to hear the barn's individual story.

These barns found within Hawkeye's service territory were featured this year. While

some of these barns are being utilized in the traditional way, others have found new life in changing times.



The power of human connections...

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“Sherrydale Farm”

Sherry Gribble, great granddaughter of the original owners of this barn, and her husband Dale always dreamed of renovating the old barn and farmhouse to help revitalize her family heritage. The Gribble dream became a reality in 2003 when Sherry finished the renovation.

The original owners of the barn were Mary and Joseph Puffer, whose son Michael and wife Rose, built the wooden barn and six surrounding buildings from 1900-1905. The Gribble’s felt it was important to keep the original barn structure but had to make improvements to create a stable foundation that will last for another 100 years. The cement floor in the basement was replaced and the wooden floor in the loft was renewed. The original stairway to the loft was retained.

Many of these old barns hosted community dances before they were put to use. Knowing the “Gribble” barn is once again fit for the task, Sherry has held a dance every spring in honor of her husband, who passed away unexpectedly during the construction.

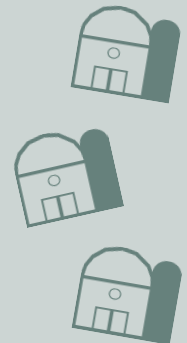


Photo by Marlene Fenstermann



“Hutchinson Barn & Campground”

Tim and Dixie Hutchinson and their family of rural Decorah have showcased their working barn on the All-State Barn Tour for the past several years. This barn, built by Dixie’s family in 1929, no longer houses the dairy cows for which it was designed. Now, 18 quarter horses are raised and trained in this historic barn. Tim and Dixie not only care for their horses and beef cattle after working their other jobs; they also operate a campground as well as a bed & breakfast in their farm home. They are located on the banks of the Upper Iowa River only 10 minutes from Decorah. You can visit www.bluffcountry.com/hutchinson.htm for more information about their campground and B & B. They also give free guided tours of their farm.



“Ellingson Family Farm”

Preserving an old barn is more than just about the physical structure. It is also about the preservation of heritage and family history. In the case of the Randy & Laura Ellingson barn, their passion for such preservation is apparent. During the recent open house, their 12 year-old son Reid’s enthusiasm and knowledge of just what goes into restoring a barn was also obvious. He knows not only the farm’s history (both Laura and Randy’s respective grandparents operated this farm at different times through the years) but also just how the barn,



including the steel cupola and cow weather vane, were renovated. Reid’s interest demonstrates that future generations are going to appreciate the effort and expense of preserving these “ag icons”.

Owen Ellingson is getting a real working knowledge of a barn’s usefulness as he feeds and cares for the bottle calves his family raises in the restored barn.



Laura, Randy, Owen and Reid Ellingson.

“Chase the Adventure” Licensed Hunt and Gun Club

Sometimes the ultimate use of a barn is not as a “barn”. Such is the case of a renovated structure which was not on this year’s tour, but is part of a thriving business called “Chase the Adventure.” Not only can you hunt, fish or train dogs, but a unique lodging experience is available in one of the five outdoor themed rooms that have been created in Dale and Julie Hogenson’s barn.

This rural Decorah structure was built by Dale’s ancestors in 1889. Dale continued to milk cows in the basement of the barn until just seven months before the renovation was completed in 2001. Preserving the old beams and timbers as they were originally used, while utilizing materials from five other old barns, has resulted in a truly unique structure. “Chase the Adventure” hosts meetings, parties and even dances in the lodge. It is worth a trip to see how versatile an old barn really is when creativity sets in.



Have an interesting story about your family farm? Or unique business that you would like to be featured, please contact the REC office.

