

An Inventory of *Pennsylvania Historic Barns*

January 2007

Photos courtesy of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.



In October 2005, the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Senate unanimously passed resolutions recognizing the importance of the state's historic barns (HR 463 and SR 190). The resolutions urged the state Department of Agriculture (PDA) and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) to inventory and catalogue historic barns in Pennsylvania.

The Center for Rural Pennsylvania assisted PDA and PHMC with the barn inventory by developing and distributing a survey and tallying the survey results.

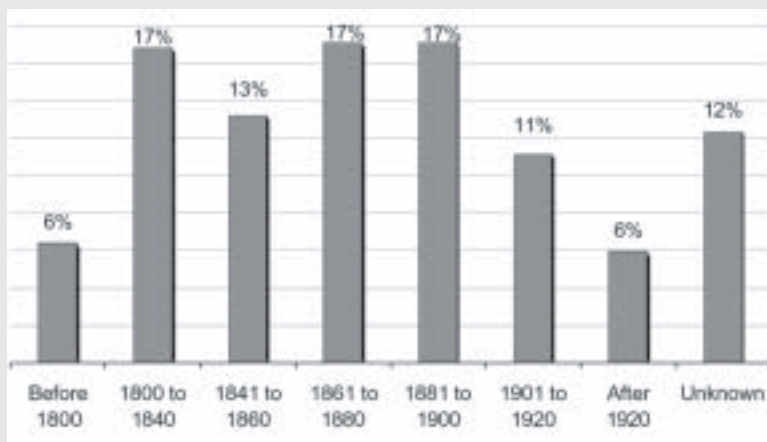
Key findings from the survey were that Pennsylvania has a wide distribution and variety of historic barns; the majority of these barns are in good condition and are being used for agriculture production; many respondents are participating in farmland protection or historic preservation programs; and respondents would strongly support a state barn preservation program.

Findings

Year the Barn was Built

Fifty-three percent of the barns in the inventory were built before 1880. Generally speaking, barns in eastern Pennsylvania were older than those in central and western Pennsylvania. Forty-six percent of the barns in eastern Pennsylvania were built before the Civil War began (1861).

Year Barn Was Built



Special Features and Barn Siding

Fifty-one percent of the barns had stone and wood siding. Less than 2 percent had all stone siding and 35 percent had all wood siding. The remaining 12 percent had a combination of wood and other types of siding, such as brick, concrete block or stucco, or a combination of stone and other siding. Barns built before 1860 were typically sided with stone and wood, while those built after 1900 were sided with wood and other materials. Seventy percent of the barns had special features, the most common being lightning rods (65 percent), ventilators (22 percent) and weather vanes (21 percent).

Types of Barns

Fifty-eight percent of the barns were Pennsylvania German bank barns, 21 percent were basement barns, 5 percent were English barns, and another 5 percent were three gable barns.

Pennsylvania German bank barns are characterized as having a second floor forebay projecting six or more feet over the front of the stable or foundation level. The foundation is built into a sloping bank (which typically rises to the rear). It is normally entered through double doors reached by the ramp created from the bank at the rear.

Condition of the Barn

Seventy-three percent of respondents characterized the overall condition of their barn as “good” to “excellent.” Twenty-three percent rated their barn as “fair,” and less than 5 percent said their barn was in “poor” to “very poor” condition. Among the respondents, there was no significant difference in the condition of the barn and its age. When asked what significant repairs will be needed over the next five years, the top three responses were roof replacement (33 percent), siding replacement (25 percent), and beam or support replacement (21 percent.) Although not a repair, 51 percent said that their barn would need to be painted within the next five years. Finally, 18 percent said their barn would need no significant repairs over the next five years.

Barn Alterations

While 45 percent of respondents indicated their barn had been significantly altered since it was originally built, 55 percent said their barn had not been altered. Among respondents, there was no statistically significant difference between the type of barn (Pennsylvania German bank barn, English barn, etc) and whether or not the barn had been altered. Similarly, there was no significant difference between the age of the barn and whether it had been altered. Among the barns that were altered, 60 percent were changed before 1986. The most prevalent types of alterations were the addition or removal of stanchions (42 percent), horse stalls (36 percent), and silos (34 percent).

Barns and Farming

Fifty-four percent of respondents said their barn is being used currently for agricultural production. The top three production uses were hay storage (82 percent), farm equipment storage (63 percent) and housing for beef cattle (28 percent). (The total does not add up to 100 percent due to multiple responses.) The average barn was located on a 91-acre farm.

Historic barns in western Pennsylvania were generally located on larger farms (128 acres) than those in eastern Pennsylvania (64 acres). Also, bigger barns were more likely to be located on a larger farm and vice versa.

There was no significant difference between the age of the barn and the size of the farm.

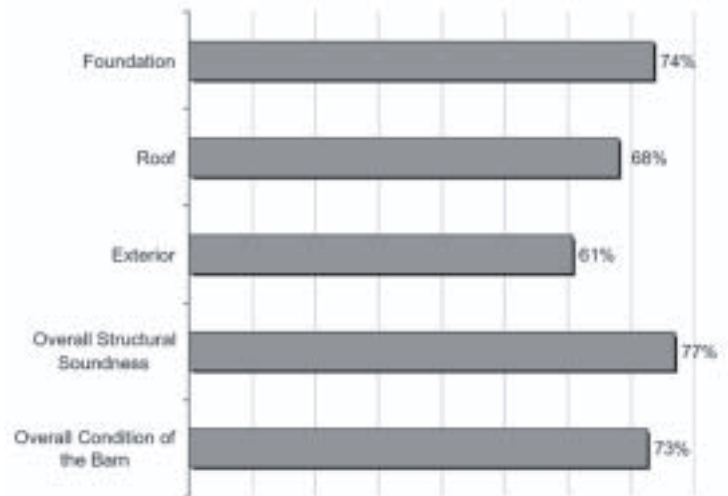
Among the 46 percent of respondents who were not using their barn for agricultural production, 81 percent were using the barn for storage.

Pennsylvania German Bank Barn



Photo courtesy of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Percent of Owners Who Rated Barn Condition as Good to Excellent



Barns That Have Been Significantly Altered by Year Built

	% Barns Altered	% Barns Not Altered	Total
Built Before 1800	53%	47%	100%
Built Between 1800 to 1840	45%	55%	100%
Built Between 1841 to 1860	52%	48%	100%
Built Between 1861 to 1880	44%	56%	100%
Built Between 1881 to 1900	40%	60%	100%
Built After 1900	42%	58%	100%

Barns and Agritourism

Approximately 33 percent of the respondents with historic barns provide some type of agritourism activity. According to a 2006 research report published by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, agritourism is most any activity conducted on a working farm for the enjoyment of visitors that generates income for the owner. Examples of agritourism include winery tours, corn mazes, and farm-stay vacations.

The most common type of activity provided by respondents were: fishing and hunting, horseback riding, and farm markets.

Barn Ownership

The average respondent took ownership of the barn in 1984. Ninety percent of owners live within one mile of the barn. Twenty percent of respondents said their principal occupation was agricultural production.

Barn/Farm Preservation

Sixty-one percent of respondents said their barn was on property enrolled in one or more farmland or historic preservation programs. Among these respondents, 89 percent were enrolled in farmland protection programs, 2 percent were enrolled in historic preservation programs, and 9 percent were enrolled in both farmland protection and historic preservation programs. Among respondents whose barns are being used for agricultural production, less than 24 percent are not enrolled in any type of farmland or historic preservation programs.

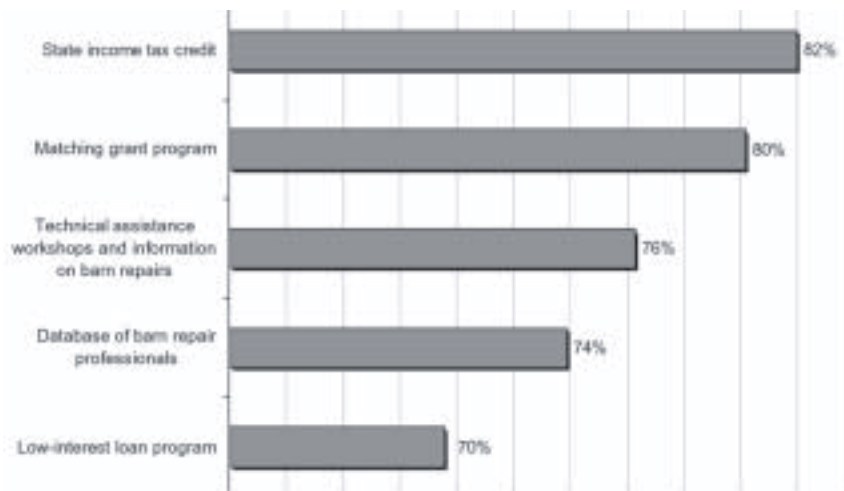
Barns on Property Enrolled in One or More Farmland or Historic Preservation Program

Enrolled in Clean and Green (Act 319)	47%
Located in Agricultural Security Area	25%
Subject of an Agricultural Conservation Easement	10%
Registered with the PDA as Century or Bicentennial Farm	6%
Listed on the National Register of Historic Places	3%
Designated as a local landmark	3%

Potential Barn Preservation Programs

Currently in Pennsylvania there are no state government programs specifically designed for barn preservation. Other states, however, have barn preservation programs that could serve as a potential model for Pennsylvania. Respondents were asked how supportive they would be of various types of barn preservation programs. Respondents were overwhelmingly supportive of programs that would offer financial support for barn preservation and provide technical assistance on barn repair.

Percent of Respondents Who Were Supportive or Very Supportive of Potential Barn Preservation Programs



Conclusions

The following five conclusions are based on the survey results.

1. Pennsylvania has a wide distribution and variety of historic barns.

Pennsylvania appears to have a wide distribution of historic barns as well as a wide variety of barn styles. Every region of the state had a sizeable number of historic barns, most of which are still in agricultural use.

2. The majority of historic barns are in good condition.

According to the survey results, 73 percent of the respondents indicated their barn was in good to excellent condition. Seventy-seven percent said their barn was structurally sound. This suggests that the majority of barns in the inventory are in generally good condition. Indeed, 18 percent of the respondents said their barn would not need any significant repairs over the next five years. And among the 82 percent who said that their barn would need to be repaired, the most cited “repair” was painting.

3. Most historic barns are still in agricultural use.

More than one-half of respondents were using their barn for agricultural production. In addition, one-in-five respondents said their principle occupation was farming and nine-out-of-10 said they lived within one mile of the barn. These findings suggest that the majority of historic barns in the inventory are not empty or idle buildings but are still being used. Data from the 2007 federal Census of Agricultural will provide more detailed information on the location and use of older barns both in Pennsylvania and across the nation.

4. Many barns are on farms that are participating in some type of farmland/historic preservation effort.

According to the survey results, 60 percent of respondents are participating in some type of state or local farmland preservation program. On one hand, this finding suggests that farms are, to varying degrees, being protected from sprawl-like development. On the other hand, these programs do not specifically preserve the barn.

5. There is strong support for a state barn preservation program.

More than 70 percent of respondents were supportive or very supportive of programs to assist barn owners in preserving their barn. Support was high for both financial programs and technical assistance in barn repair and maintenance. In addition, 84 percent of respondents were interested in finding out whether their historic farm was eligible for the National Historic Register. These findings suggest that there may be a nucleus of support for developing some type of statewide historic barn organization to provide technical assistance.

Methods and Data Limitations

Owners of historic barns were asked to participate in the survey. Barns built before 1960 were identified as “historic,” since the 2002 Federal Farm Bill (Pub. L. No. 107-171 Stat. 116 370 [2002]) previously established a similar criterion for historic barns to be about 50 years of age.

There were two phases to the Historic Barn Inventory.

• **Gathering the Names and Addresses of Historic Barn Owners.**

Beginning with the 2006 Pennsylvania Farm Show, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, PDA and PHMC distributed interest cards about the barn inventory. Barn owners were asked to provide their name and address to be included in a future survey. In addition, various statewide and local organizations and the media were used to inform barn owners about the inventory and to provide contact information to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. This process helped garner the names and addresses of 1,206 historic barn owners.

• **Survey of Historic Barn Owners.**

Working together, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, PDA, and PHMC developed a 21-question survey, which included questions about the barns’ structure and current condition; the farms in which the barns are located; the ways in the barns are being used; and the owners’ attitudes about programs on barn preservation.

The six-page questionnaire was mailed to barn owners the week of July 13, 2006. PDA and PHMC each received 200 questionnaires for distribution. By the cut-off date of September 25, 2006, 962 surveys were returned to the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. Based on a potential total distribution of 1,606 surveys, the response rate was 60 percent.

It is important to note that the methodology used to identify and survey historic barn owners had two main limitations. First, the survey sample was not representative of all historic barn owners. The persons participating in the survey were self-selected, not randomly or scientifically selected. As a result, it is impossible to determine if the results are representative of all historic barn owners. Second, the information collected in the barn inventory is cursory and self-reporting. Barn owners were asked to identify the age and style of the barn and to provide other information. No attempt was made to independently verify this information. As a consequence, it is difficult to authenticate the information.

Despite these limitations, the results presented represent the first statewide attempt to gather information on the number and type of historic barns in Pennsylvania.