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).

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 lighting 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.
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.

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
**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 which 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.