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OF OHIO

A tribute to the barns and their owners

BY Christina Wilkinson

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A letter to the barn owners . . .

Dear Owners,

When I decided to do a book about Ohio's Bicentennial Barns, I knew I had to begin with you. Holding the optimistic view that some of you would consent to an in-person interview, I mailed eighty-eight letters of introduction and short questionnaires. Each afternoon, I approached the mailbox with great anticipation, hoping at least some of you would respond. For days there was nothing. And then they arrived: first from counties by the Ohio River, then from those in the northeast corner of the state, and soon from all regions of Ohio ★

Your responses exceeded my wildest expectations. Acting as ambassadors for your counties, you made time for me in your busy schedules and welcomed me into your homes. You gave me permission to wander around your properties, to make friends with your pets, inspect your barns, and greet your livestock. As the work on this book nears completion, I continue to be humbled by your warmth and hospitality ★

Time flew by as each of you shared your personal, and sometimes painful, memories and related stories of your past. I was invited to view family photograph albums, prized collections of antiques, family heirlooms, and restored classic cars and tractors. You trusted me, someone previously unknown to you, to sift through the information you provided, to print what was relevant, and protect the rest ★

What I deemed too personal to reveal, will be forever kept in my heart as treasured memories of the experience of a lifetime. I have done my best to tell your story as I heard it, using words both spoken and unspoken. I hope you feel the result is worthy of your faith in me. I thank you for the time and courtesy you have shown me, and in closing, it must be said that your importance to this project cannot be overlooked. For without you, there would be no Bicentennial Barns ★

Fondly,

Chris

About this book . . .

My introduction to Bicentennial Barns came in the spring of 2002. While writing for a small, local newspaper in my home state of Ohio, I was asked to cover the recently selected barn in Lake County. Barn owners Dan and Linda Hearn were on hand to welcome me into their home, and surrounded by their dogs, Cleo and Caesar, they told their story. Later we went outside, and Dan swung open the doors to the barn. Harboring a fondness for old buildings and interesting architecture, I was enchanted by the cathedral-like interior and massive beams ★

The Hearn's' barn was dedicated at the end of June, and I returned to cover the celebration for the newspaper. I approached the Bicentennial Commission's Northeast Regional Coordinator, Jennifer Bucci, and asked if there was a book about the barns. No, she responded, but many people had asked for one. And that was the beginning ★

At Jennifer's suggestion, I adopted the project as my own. After securing licensing from the Bicentennial Commission, I mailed letters of introduction to the eighty-eight barn owners. I asked them to complete a brief questionnaire to facilitate what I was sure would become a daunting task of scheduling eighty-eight interviews in an orderly and logical sequence ★

With a swiftness that amazed me, the owners responded. Based upon their scheduling preferences, I divided the state into groups of seven to twelve counties. In the fall of 2002, I hit the road for the first time. Using Ohio's wonderful backbone of highways, I neared each region and then set off on rural back roads. During the next three months, I logged 7,400 miles, made seven multi-day trips, and fourteen one-day trips to visit each of the eighty-eight counties ★

The barn owners welcomed me into their homes and showered me with old-time country hospitality. They shared their stories, both funny and sad, and some memories that were too painful to be told without a tear. Together, we walked around their farms, while they tried to teach this city

girl about hayforks, loose hay and baled hay, threshing floors, crop rotation, and livestock management ★

Through the present owners, I was introduced to some of the former owners of the farms, who reminisced about days gone by. They recounted what farming was like when real horsepower was used, followed by the increased use of steam-driven machinery. I heard stories of a simpler time, when people didn't have to have a drivers' license; as long as they could see over the wheel, they were good to go. Childhood memories of milk cans and threshing parties and hours spent playing in the barn. They were thrilled to be asked, happy that someone was interested ★

I knew going into this project that it would be a learning experience. As a seasoned traveler, I looked forward to seeing new areas of the state and visiting small towns with quaint village greens and crisp white bandstands. I met people who were genuine and sincere. They were real people who took the time to talk to me, offer advice, and give me shortcuts to my destinations. In many cases they simply suggested that I follow them as they led the way. I was touched by their warmth ★

The lessons learned on this journey will remain with me forever. Many of my relatives, ancestors who died long before I was born, were farmers. Although I never got to meet them face-to-face, I saw images of them, heard stories and descriptions, and in some cases, read their words. But not having been raised on a farm, I never really understood their lives ★

As I made my way through rural Ohio, I felt them reach out to me. And now I understand. I know how hard they worked, and how grateful they were for an occasional day of rest. Their lives began and ended on the farm; there was no time to travel, to see the rest of the world as I have done. There was only work: chores to be done, crops to be tended, livestock to be cared for. I thank them for their hard work and perseverance ★

The Bicentennial Barn-painting project pays tribute to all of Ohio's farmers, both past and present. With the hope of building a better life, early settlers loaded wagons and journeyed long distances to the new Ohio territory. They felled hundreds of trees, creating fields for crops and pastures for their animals. To shelter their families, they quickly constructed simple log cabins and then turned their attention to building the most important structure on their property: the barn ★

This project has truly been the experience of a lifetime for me, and I am profoundly grateful. I extend my thanks to the Bicentennial Commission, including Elizabeth Cobey-Piper and Lee Yochum, who believed I had the tenacity to complete the project, and to the barn owners for their hospitality. I also wish to express my gratitude to county historians, who took time to assist with my research. And not to be forgotten, special thanks to those citizens who saved me countless minutes and incalculable miles by happily saying, "Follow me!" as they led me down narrow country roads to my destination. May everyone enjoy reading this book as much as I have enjoyed writing it ★

About the barn painting project . . .

The success of the barn-painting project lies in its appeal to all generations. Everyone, it seems, is fascinated by the old, weathered structures that nestle in valleys or cling resolutely to hillsides. They tend to evoke a sense of nostalgia, a longing for simpler times. Bicentennial Barns symbolize the perseverance of Ohio's early residents, farmers who settled the Ohio territory 200 years ago ★

Hired by the Bicentennial Commission as the southeast regional coordinator, it was Nichola Moretti's job to acquaint people in her region about the upcoming Bicentennial celebration. As a child growing up in Meigs County, Nichola passed many barns as she traveled country roads with her family. Spotting barns was a way to make the time go faster, and they became landmarks of journeys frequently taken. Because of their sheer size, barns were often used to display advertising. It occurred to her that painting the Bicentennial logo on barns would effectively communicate her message to the public ★

Nichola searched in vain for a barn painter. It appeared to be a lost art. Then she entered the Barnesville Chamber of Commerce and happened upon a copy of the local newspaper, the Barnesville Enterprise. On the first page was a photograph of a barn painted with the logo of The Ohio State University Buckeyes. It was the creation of Scott Hagan, a young man from the nearby town of Jerusalem. Nichola Moretti knew she had found her barn painter ★

In the beginning, the idea was to paint only a few barns, but soon the project expanded to include a barn in each of Ohio's eighty-eight counties. Some barn owners offered their barns as soon as they heard about the project. Others barns were submitted by the public or suggested by the regional coordinators. The decision was based on the condition of the wood, the direction the barn faced, and its location, preferably on a heavily traveled state route. In some counties it was difficult to find the ideal barn, but before the project was over, more than 2,000 people across the state had volunteered their barns ★

While it is undisputed that Nichola Moretti developed the project, Scott Hagan turned it into a reality. Only age twenty-two when he began, he completed eighty-eight barns in five years and put 65,000 miles on his truck. In 1998, the first barn painting took place in Belmont County, where Scott lived. He painted without an audience, and only a few attended the dedication ceremony. It was just the beginning ★

Using only Sherwin Williams paint, Scott painted logos on twelve barns that first year. He perfected the use of the scaffolding system and improved his painting technique. In 1999, he painted twenty barns, and people began to notice. By the millennium year, he really hit his stride. His schedule for twenty-one barns was published, and people arrived on the first day of painting. As he threw up his scaffolding, they set up their lawn chairs. With rapt attention, they watched as he tuned his radio to listen to a ball game and hoisted himself into position. Before their eyes, the twenty-by-twenty-foot logo took shape, as Scott sketched it freehand with painters' chalk. Once satisfied, the artist began to paint ★

The logos took approximately eighteen hours and seven gallons of paint. Some barns took a bit longer, especially those with tongue and groove siding. Some very weathered barns took over twenty gallons of paint. In the end, the project consumed 645 gallons of paint; there were thirty red barns, fifty-four white, four brown, and one yellow. Early barns showed the logo painted over the outline of the state; in later versions he eliminated the state. Scott was creative in his approach and tried to make each barn distinctive by details such as stars or special shading. All barns bear his signature in the lower right hand corner, along with the sequence in which they were painted ★

By 2002, Scott Hagan had a following, barn groupies as they were called. Many had been to every barn and carried scrapbooks of photographs and newspaper articles. Armed with cameras, motorcycle clubs and car enthusiasts held rallies. Schoolchildren took field trips to the barns to learn about local history and have their class picture taken in front of them.

Barn owners were staggered at the volume of people who came to view and photograph their barns. No one could have predicted it ★

The enthusiasm displayed by the public caught everyone by surprise, but the project came at a time when Americans everywhere were wearing their patriotic hearts on their sleeves. Security issues caused people travel concerns, but they still had vacation time. Instead of taking long, expensive trips, they piled the family into the car and went in search of the barns with the distinctive red, white, and blue logo. The Bicentennial Barns became not only a symbol of Ohio's 200th birthday, but a tribute to our early settlers, patriotic pioneers of a new country who carved a state out of the wilderness that was Ohio ★

A note about Scott . . .



Courtesy of Ohio Bicentennial Commission.

It all began in October of 1997, when twenty-one-year-old Scott Hagan painted The Ohio State University Buckeye logo on his father's barn. His late grandfather liked it so much that he snapped a photograph and sent it to the local newspaper, the Barnesville Enterprise. The family was thrilled when it appeared on the front page, never imagining that a grandfather's pride would launch Scott into a new career. Soon his artwork would appear on front pages all over Ohio ★

Scott Hagan grew up in the small town of Jerusalem, in Belmont County. The Hagan farm was just twenty minutes away from the home of Harley Warrick, the painter who covered the side of many a barn with the Mail Pouch Tobacco advertisement. In his youth, Scott never had the opportunity to meet the painter. Later, Harley would play an important role in Scott's life. When Scott graduated from high school, his mother prayed that he would find a job doing what he loved. And what he loved was art ★

Bicentennial Southeast Regional Coordinator Nichola Moretti saw a copy of the Barnesville Enterprise and knew that Scott Hagan was the person

she had been looking for. No one was more surprised than the artist when he received that first telephone call. A series of calls followed, including a visit to Columbus. In the end, they convinced him. Scott Hagan signed a contract with the Bicentennial Commission to paint the official logo on a few barns. With the stroke of a pen, the barn-painting project was born ★

To prepare for his new job, Scott introduced himself to Harley Warrick. Harley graciously showed him how to rig scaffolding with a rope and pulley system. The two men became good friends and enjoyed sharing barn-painting stories. Harley Warrick passed away in November of 2000 and Scott greatly misses him. Scott still stands on a plank, or "pick," the painter gave him ★

The first Bicentennial Barn was painted in the spring of 1998, in Scott's home county of Belmont. It didn't create much of a stir; few people even noticed, and the dedication was a small event. Ohio's 200th birthday was still four years away ★

Scott Hagan officially painted his last barn in September of 2002. By then he had become a celebrity. His fans were legion; they followed him from county to county, barn to barn. It was not just his talent that made Scott such a success. He was, and continues to be, quiet, soft-spoken, and unfailingly polite. The quintessential American young man, raised on a farm in small-town Ohio. The Bicentennial Commission could not have made a better choice ★

Recently married, Scott and his wife, Amanda, continue to live in Belmont County. He now has his own business and a Web site. Scott can be hired to paint logos of all sorts, as well as farm names and patriotic themes. In 2003, Scott Hagan will continue to be available to fill requests made by the Bicentennial Commission for additional painting and personal appearances. As this project draws to a close, he is hopeful new artistic opportunities will come his way. Scott Hagan can be reached at: www.barnartist.com ★

Bicentennial Barns

OF OHIO

Adams



OWNER

Jean and Charles Kirker Jr.

LOCATION

6620 State Route 136, in West Union



Kirkwood Farm sits on the crest of a hill, near the town of West Union. Surrounded by acres of farmland, the picturesque setting includes two barns and a honey-colored stone house. The present owner, Charles Kirker, was born in the house and is the fifth generation to live in the homestead. Owner of the Adams County Bicentennial Barn, he didn't need a logo on his barn to prompt him to think about the history of his farm. He lives it everyday of his life ★

The farm has been in the Kirker family since Thomas Kirker moved to Ohio in 1790. Kirker, who served two terms as the second Governor of Ohio, helped to name and design the town of West Union in 1804. A year later, he began to build a house on his farm, southwest of the city ★

The Kirker home was constructed by stonemason Thomas Metcalf, using sandstone from the property. Metcalf, who also built the Presbyterian Church in West Union, went on to become the Governor of Kentucky. The Kirkers raised thirteen children in the small house. Their youngest son, George, inherited the property upon his father's death in 1837 ★

George Kirker, perhaps remembering how cramped the house had been when he was growing up, built an addition in 1858. His next project was to construct a large bank barn to accommodate the herd of Shorthorn Cattle he had imported from Scotland. But the Civil War interfered with his plans. George was elected captain of the 141st Ohio Volunteer Infantry, and duty to his country delayed work on the barn ★