

Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey Manual Online

By Steve Stier and Vera Wiltse

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Introduction

Historians and preservationists are giving increasing attention to vernacular architecture and buildings related to agriculture. Some people have long been interested in barns and are saddened to realize how quickly they are disappearing from the rural landscape.

The Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey began in 1992 when a series of barn rehabilitation workshops were organized by Michigan State University Museum, Michigan Historic Preservation Network, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Michigan State University Extension, and Michigan Humanities Council. The events attracted a large, diverse, and enthusiastic group of people who had serious personal interests in preserving their barns. They agreed that traditional Michigan barns are marvelous structures, have great value, and are disappearing at an alarming rate.

Moving from individual enthusiasm and isolated efforts to developing a wider preservation endeavor requires basic current information. At the beginning of the 1990s, virtually no factual information existed about the number and general condition of structures still standing on Michigan's rapidly dwindling farmsteads.

The initial versions of Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey were piloted in 1993 in Isabella County and since then successfully tested in several Michigan communities. The Michigan Barn Preservation Network was established in 1995, to give a collective voice to citizens with a common interest in the preservation of barns, farmsteads, and the rural community. The Network's mission is "to promote appreciation and preservation of Michigan's barns, farmsteads, and rural communities."

Michigan 4-H Youth Development (part of Michigan State University Extension) and Michigan State University Museum were also solidly behind the Barn Survey and established a project area within the 4-H FOLKPATTERNS category for 4-H youth interested in cultural heritage. The MSU Museum published the first edition of Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey Manual (by Steve Stier) in 2000.

The www.michiganbarns.org website was launched in 2008. On the website you can register to volunteer to conduct the survey, view which townships are already surveyed, obtain training materials (through this manual, power points and other media presentations), and download survey forms. As the data is submitted to the MSU Museum, the survey is entered into the website's database. There you can view the photos, sketch maps and survey data for barns and farmsteads already documented.

We hope that this newest, online edition of the Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey Manual will continue to generate interest in, and enthusiasm for, barns and other farm buildings.

You and your group can add significantly to our knowledge and understanding of barns and farmsteads in Michigan. It is our wish that participants, young and old alike, will develop a deeper appreciation of traditional farm buildings and the rich agricultural and community heritage they represent.

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Purposes of the Survey

- Identify and document rural buildings and farmsteads that contribute significantly to the unique character of a community or illustrate its agricultural development.
- Heighten awareness of the rapid decline of traditional farm buildings as a first step toward the development of a preservation plan.
- Help participants and others in the community gain a greater appreciation for the value of agricultural structures and the heritage they represent.
- Create a standard nomenclature that describes and classifies historic vernacular agricultural structures.
- Put into use a method of field documentation for agricultural vernacular structures that can be replicated throughout Michigan.
- Establish a database of information about Michigan agricultural buildings.

Planning Your Survey

Deciding Who Will Do the Survey

You can register for the barn survey as an individual or small group or team. It is possible for those who want to conduct the survey individually to do so as a lone individual. This has proven to be a successful method of completing the survey, although it's recommended for safety reasons to have a person focused on the driving. A small team or larger group can also do the survey. You may choose to establish a survey team of three to twenty individuals. Contact the active organizations in your area that share an interest in rural heritage. Consider your county Extension office and 4-H youth program, local schools, civic groups, local historical society, Future Farmers of America, and scouts. 4-H'ers can register their involvement in this survey with their county 4-H staff in the FOLKPATTERNS* project area and as a photography project.

(* FOLKPATTERNS is a program for 4-Hers that have them document and experience folklife--the "passing on of valued knowledge, skills, and traditions within family, ethnic, occupational, religious, or regional groups, such as belief, custom, ritual, technical skill, foodways, handicraft, and architecture.)

-Divide the group into survey teams of two or three people. One survey team can be expected to survey one, two, or three sections of a township. Match up drivers and good photographers with each survey team.

Advertise your project in the local media, and hold an informational meeting for those interested.

Deciding Where to Survey

The key to conducting this survey is to be consistent and thorough in a defined geographic area. Choose one township or other geographic area, such as the boundaries of a city even if the boundaries extend into different townships. Define the boundaries on a map. The goal of the survey is to find and document all the farmsteads within the boundaries. The survey teams should cover all roads within the defined survey area.

There are various kinds of maps to use for the survey. You might look at a plat map to see how sections are the building blocks of townships. A section is one mile by one mile in size. A township is six sections by six sections. There are thirty-six sections in most townships. Do not try to cover too large an area.

Deciding When to Survey

Plan to survey in early spring or fall if possible. Foliage that obstructs the view of buildings is minimal at these times. Winter snow can cause glare in photos and hide roofs and other structural details. Conduct the survey over a single short period--for example, on one weekend or during one month. Choose a day that is not too sunny, but during good weather. The heat is less in the morning and afternoon but the shadows are greater. Mid-day is probably the best time for photography. Of course an overcast day would eliminate shadows but white roofs blend in with the hazy sky.

What You Will Need

Be sure the surveyors understand the purpose of the survey. It may be the same purpose stated in this manual and some of your own, local purposes, but everyone should know and be able to state the purpose of your barn survey.

Obtain good local road **maps** with as much detail as possible for your surveyors. Contact your county government office to see what free maps are available. Provide a road map for each survey team. Be careful not to violate copyright laws by making illegal photocopies of maps. U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps show rural roadways, elevation, and buildings in relation to landforms and bodies of water. Road maps name even small roads. Plat maps made by private companies show property boundaries and identify landowners but not necessarily current residents. You may refer to a plat map at your county Extension office or library, or purchase one for your reference. Survey teams should plan travel routes that systematically cover all property in the survey area. Make sure everyone has a copy of the travel plan so duplication is eliminated.

Supply List

Notebook or clipboard Plenty of blank survey forms Photo log forms Camera (digital preferred) Camera batteries Camera memory card(s) CD's for storage of digital photos Pencils and/or pens Maps of the survey area Travel plan Letter of introduction A copy of this manual Drinking water

Other helpful items

GPS (Global Positioning Unit) Sunscreen Sunglasses Compass Cell phone Binoculars

Budgeting and Funding Your Project

The survey involves taking approximately two to five photographs for each survey site documented. Consequently, photography can be the largest expense for the project, unless digital photography is used. Digital photo files can be shared electronically and stored on CD's. Include in your budget archivally-safe clear notebook sheets in which to store the printed photographs and survey forms. Contact local businesses, agencies, and individuals who might contribute funds or supplies for photography supplies and printing, maps, copying, notebooks, archival pages, and other supplies. Plan your budget based on the number of townships or sites within the township you expect to survey.

Deciding on a Project Format

The recommended format for the completed survey forms and photographs is a loose-leaf notebook that can serve as both a display book and container for the original data. Make one copy with the original survey forms and color print photographs for your local library or historical society. Make a legible duplicate set of the survey forms and digital files of the photographs for submittal to the Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey database to the MSU Museum. You might consider making another version for your local survey group or yourself that is a scrapbook of your group's entire effort. Include the posters, letters, news clippings, photographs of your group doing the project, and other memorabilia you collected and created during the course of the survey.

Geocoding Farm Sites

A new feature of the survey is to include the location of the site using a GPS device (Global Positioning System). This device gives the coordinates of the exact location on the globe of that particular farmstead with latitude and longitude. This can be determined in two ways: in the field while using a GPS handheld unit or GPS in your vehicle; or later when you return from the field, by entering the address of the farmstead site using a geocoding website (such as: www.gpsvisualizer.com) and then recording the coordinate numbers on the survey form. This step is optional for those who do not wish to do this step in the survey.

Where To Keep Your Survey Locally

By the end of the survey, your group will have compiled an impressive amount of information about your community. Keep one copy in a local archive, library, or historical society to make sure this valuable resource is accessible to community members.

Sending Survey Results to the MSU Museum

Send your completed survey results to the Michigan State University Museum for entering in the www.michiganbarns.org website database. See the section at the end of this Manual for format and mailing instructions for this last, important step of the survey.

Safety Issues

Some property owners may be suspicious of, or may question, your group while you are conducting the survey. Publicizing your project several weeks in advance of the time you start your survey will help make farmstead owners aware of the project. Also letting local law enforcement and governmental authorities, such as the township office, know about your project will help. This will provide your surveyors with credibility and references as they collect information. Another possibility is to provide each survey team with a letter of introduction from the project leader explaining the purpose of the survey. The team can use this letter as a handout to explain the project and answer any questions or concerns regarding its use or purpose. Respect the property owners' rights not to participate in the survey. If asked or ordered to cease survey activities on a farmstead, do so immediately and without argument. Child protection is an important concern. Youth participants should have signed permission forms allowing them participate in the project. Adult participants working with youth should work through youth agencies (4-H, Future Farmers of America, scouts, schools, or other youth groups) to meet their requirements for working with young people. A rule of thumb is youth should not be alone with an adult in a survey team. An ideal survey team consists of two or three youth and one or more adults.

Researching Your Community's Agricultural History

This survey is intended to be a field-based activity, the first step in recording the existence of historic farmsteads in a community. Having background information on the agricultural history of your area is very helpful before your team heads out to the field. Your local library and historical society are valuable resources. What county local histories have been published? Are there historic photographs of farmsteads in their collections? Is there a clipping file about noteworthy historic buildings? Is there a local historian in your area whom you can invite to speak with your group at an orientation meeting? Some questions that local history sources will answer are: What crops were grown in the area during different time periods? What kinds of livestock were raised? What other kinds of agricultural activities, such as maple sugaring or beekeeping, is the area well known for? What were the names of some of the largest farms? Which ethnic groups settled the area? Who are the local native communities? How did agriculture develop and change locally? How did local communities grow and change? How did events (the coming of a railroad, electricity, the Great Depression, wars) affect agriculture in your community? Gather the information you have found and share it with all survey team members.

In the late 1930s the federal government's Works Progress Administration (WPA) surveyed rural properties in Michigan and other states. The inventory provides detailed descriptions of all farmland in rural Michigan (except Wayne County) and includes sketches of the farmstead, building descriptions, and other data. You may want to locate a copy of this inventory and any other previous surveys of historic sites in your area. Check your local library or county government office to see if a copy of the Rural Property Inventory exists in your county. If not, see the [references](#) section of this guide and contact the [State Archives of Michigan](#).

Training

In the weeks before you conduct the survey, read this manual, view the Visual Glossary power point, and become familiar with the survey forms, your camera, maps, and GPS unit (if you will use one). If you are conducting the survey as part of a group, hold a training session for all surveyors. An orientation prepares everyone for what they will see in the field, how they will fill out survey forms, how to recognize the parts of a farmstead, how to use this guide to identify the types of architectural features (types of roof shapes, types of roof materials, etc.), how to take good photographs of buildings, and other logistical information you will want to share. The orientation will also help your group standardize the information collected during the survey. A [power point of the Visual Glossary](#) is available on this website and may be shown to your group, or downloaded and used as a handout. You may also contact the Michigan Barn and Farmstead Coordinator at the MSU Museum to see if a presenter is available to talk to your group about the barn survey. See a [suggested agenda for an Orientation Meeting](#).

Conducting the Survey

Use this guide to identify and document the barns and farmsteads in your defined survey area. Surveyors should work in pairs or small teams. It's recommended to not survey alone. Each team can divide up the tasks of driving the car, locating and marking the farmstead on a map, taking photographs, filling out the survey form, using a GPS device, and drawing a site map. Caution! Be careful of traffic while you are walking and crossing roads and while driving. Pull off to the side of the road to a safe location when stopping to survey a site. It is best to get out of the car to document and photograph the site. Take one color photograph of each farm that shows all the buildings on the property. Take additional photographs of each farmstead structure, including residences, large barns, and smaller outbuildings. If you are able to, make a separate set of photographs for the MSU Museum, and a separate copy for your local archive. Use the following criteria to determine which properties to survey. Identify and record: (1) all barns that are fifty years old or older; (2) all sites that are identifiable as farmsteads, even if they are mostly ruins, and (3) barns meeting the previous criteria within a predetermined geographic area (country, township).

Instructions for Completing Survey Forms

Fill out the information on the form using the following directions. The Visual Glossary, below, describes the parts of the farmstead.

Use one form for each property documented. For properties that have more than one large barn or any buildings not named on the survey, use a new form to describe the additional structures.

PROPERTY #: Assign each site surveyed a unique number using a numbering system for your whole group. Each team may number properties in numerical order beginning with the number

1. Then re-number the entire group's forms with a new number.

SURVEYOR: Give the full name of each person surveying the site.

DATE: Give the exact date on which the property was surveyed. Spell out the entire month and use numerals for the date and the four-digit year. Example: June 1, 2010.

COUNTY: List the name of the county in which the property is located.

TOWNSHIP: List the name of the township in which the property is located.

SECTION (optional): Give the section number of the township in which the property is located. Refer to a county plat map or topographic map to identify the section number.

ADDRESS: Give the address of the property, including house number or box number, and street name. If a number cannot be determined, give at least the name of the street.

GIS COORDINATES (Geographic Information System): With a GPS (Global Positioning System) unit, if you are using one, list the GIS coordinates for the site. If you do not have a GPS unit in the field, when you return, you may look up the GIS coordinate by using an Internet site (such as www.gpsvisualizer.com) that provides the coordinates based on the address.

OWNER'S NAME: If known, give the owner's name.

OWNER'S ADDRESS: If known, record the owner's mailing address, if different than the property address. If it is the same as the property address, write 'same.'

COMMON NAME: Indicate if the farmstead or barn is known locally by a specific name, or if there is a name painted on a barn or other building.

CONDITION: Indicate the condition of each building, using the following guide:
Good—The roof covering appears to be in weather-tight condition and the structure has no apparent broken or missing elements. No visible structural problems. Vegetation is under control. *Fair*—Shows some signs of deterioration, evidence of minor roof leaks, some missing or broken parts. *Poor*—Obvious major roof leaks, evidence of major structural problems, extensive broken or missing parts. Extensive, unwanted vegetation. *Altered*—Visibly obvious that a building has been partially removed, added to, or changed. *Ruins*—Ranging from faint evidence that a structure had existed (such as foundation walls or a few timbers) to complete standing structure far beyond repair. Evidence of long-time neglect with excessive vegetation. In danger of falling down. BARN

SECTION: Use this section to describe the largest barn. If there is more than one barn, use additional forms. Refer to the Visual Glossary to identify architectural features. Use the check boxes to record the condition, roof shape, roof covering, siding materials, foundation type, and foundation materials. Note the existence of any other architectural features. Indicate whether or not the barn is painted. If painted, indicate the color of the paint. If any names, dates, or decorations appear on the barn, write them here.

FARMHOUSE SECTION: Describe the main residence by recording the condition, roof shape, roof covering, siding materials, foundation materials, and paint color. Note any other architectural features you think are important.

OTHER FARMSTEAD STRUCTURES: For each existing structure, check the appropriate box to indicate condition. Then, using the Visual Glossary, describe the types of roof, siding, and foundation. Comment on any additional features such as paint color, windows, number of dormers, and any interesting or unusual feature about the building. If such a structure does not exist, check the N/A (*not applicable*) box.

SKETCH: Draw a simple line drawing of the layout of the farmstead, as though looking at it from above, showing the farmstead structures in relation to each other. Draw and label the road. Draw outline boxes for each farmstead building. For the barn, draw the plan or 'footprint' of the building. Refer to the Visual Glossary for typical barn plans. Draw an arrow indicating north.

Organizing Your Data

When finished with your survey, collect the photographs and survey forms from all surveyors and organize the survey forms and photos into loose-leaf notebooks. Print out photographs of each site and attach the photos to, or place next to, the original survey forms in sheet protectors. (Sheet protectors can be purchased at office supply stores. Be sure to avoid vinyl. Polypropylene is best.) Re-number the sites consecutively if more than one team conducted the survey and there are more than one numbering system. Label the front of your notebook with the County and Township surveyed. Be sure to include maps, photo logs, names of surveyors, and a contact person's address, phone and email address. Digital photographs should be stored and submitted to MSU Museum digitally on CD's. Back up your digital files in different locations (computer hard drives, jump drives, etc). Number each photographic file (JPEGs are best) with the same number to correspond with the property number, and then an additional identification number to distinguish each photograph separately. Alternatively, you may keep the file names of the original photographs and on the survey forms, list which photographs correspond to that site. The main idea is to connect your photographs for each site to the survey form. Sketch maps are hand-drawn on the survey forms. If you wish, you may scan and digitize these maps as separate files and submit these along with your photo CD's. This step is a necessary one for entering into the www.michiganbarns.org website; however the MSU Museum will scan all sketch maps that are provided in hardcopy format if surveyors cannot provide digitized sketch maps. Sharing the results of your survey locally can be done in many different ways. As described earlier, the original survey forms should be donated to your local museum, library, archive or historical society. Presentational formats can take many different forms, from Power Point presentations, to old-fashioned slide shows, to video slide shows, to websites. As a standard format, a display notebook remains a low-tech way of sharing the results of your survey to a wider public, and serves as a reference book.

Sending Survey Results to the MSU Museum

The second step is to send your completed survey results to the Michigan State University Museum for entering in the www.michiganbarns.org website database. We prefer digital copies of the photographs, and hardcopy originals of the survey forms (containing the sketch maps). If sketch maps are digitized, submit those on CD as well. Indicate on the copy you submit if the materials are to be returned to you, or kept at the Museum. All hardcopies of the survey results will be kept by the MSU Museum unless you make other arrangements.

**Send to: Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey Coordinator MSU Museum West
Circle Drive East Lansing, MI 48824**

FIELD GUIDE TO FARMSTEAD FEATURES General Terms BARN A structure used to store a harvested crop or shelter livestock. The word is likely derived from the Old English words bere for barley and ern for place (barley place), or the British word byre meaning a cattle shed, or from both. FARMHOUSE The dwelling used by people who lived on the farmstead. Sites may have more than one dwelling. Residences for hired farm workers might also exist. Occasionally the original farmhouse is reused as a granary, chicken coop, or other building after a new farmhouse was built. FARMSTEAD All the structures making up a farm site, including the residences, barns, silos, and other outbuildings and structures.

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The Survey. With this Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey Manual, you and your group can add significantly to our knowledge and understanding of barns and farmsteads in Michigan. It is our wish that participants, young and old alike, will develop a deeper appreciation of traditional farm buildings and the rich agricultural and community heritage they represent.