

preservation issues

NEWS FOR THE PRESERVATION COMMUNITY

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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Saving the Spirit of America

"Those who seek the spirit of America might do well to look first in the countryside, for it was there that the spirit was born..." Eric Sloane, An Age of Barns.

Rural Franklin County is home to one of Missouri's most unusual rural agricultural properties, the Pelster House-Barn. A rare surviving Missouri example of a house and barn combined in one structure, the building evokes strong associations with the state's agrarian past and German ethnic heritage.

The house-barn was a building designed to house the farm family, animals, activities, equipment, and produce under one roof. A common European form, it was rarely reproduced in America. Of those built, only a dozen or so remain today, primarily built by German immigrants in the Midwest and Great Plains states.

The period between about 1832 and the mid-1850s brought a wave of German immigrants to America. The emigres sought refuge from religious persecution, economic and political turmoil, and general social unrest. Many were lured to Missouri by travel guides published by Gottfried Duden and others in the 1830s, which painted a romanticized view of life on the Mis-



PHOTO NICK DECKER

The Pelster House-Barn in rural Franklin County, ca late 1860s, was designed to house the farm family, animals, equipment, and produce under one roof.

souri frontier. Vast numbers of Germans arrived in Missouri, settling primarily in an area along the Missouri River from St. Louis west to Boonville. William Pelster was part of that wave, emigrating from Hanover with his parents and brother in 1842 and settling in Franklin County.





Pelster purchased the land in 1856 but probably did not complete the house-barn until the late 1860s, after the Civil War. In keeping with old-world traditions, he built the structure of heavy timbers in a technique known as *Fachwerkbau*, or half-timbering. Heavy white-oak timbers were squared with a broad axe and fastened with mortise and tenon joints held together with wooden pegs instead of nails. Each section of the frame was marked with a Roman numeral, designating its place in the structure.

The heavy timber frame rests on a massive stone foundation banked into a hillside. The clever siting creates a basement level that is accessible from the rear. Here are located the entrances to the stables and feeding areas for cows, mules, and horses.

Including the basement level or stables, the house-barn has four levels.

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July/August 1992

**National
Register
Historic
Places**

At its May 1992 meeting, the Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation approved the Griffith-McCune Farmstead Historic District for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, in part for the significance of McCune's octagonal barn and silo to the history of agriculture in Missouri.

John J. McCune, in 1905, deeded a 60-acre farm near Eolia in Pike County - only a part of his extensive holdings - to his son, John Hurlie McCune. The farm deeded to the younger McCune was the remaining portion of an approximately 400-acre farmstead established before 1860 by Uriel Griffith. The farm, which had been progressively reduced in size, had remained in the Griffith family until 1901, when the elder McCune purchased it.

When John Hurlie McCune acquired the farm, it retained a ca 1870 brick I-House and at least four ancillary buildings, including a privy and a chicken house. McCune continued to live in the town of Louisiana, about 15 miles northeast of the farm, where he also later served as president of a bank. In 1909-1910, McCune's tenant on the farm, Overton Broadhead McCardie, constructed a new building for McCune. McCune, who in many ways was the stereotypical gentleman farmer, had apparently seen and been impressed by an octagonal barn on his travels, and he instructed McCardie to build one with an octagonal center silo for his farm.

Although there were European and English antecedents of circular and polygonal farm buildings, the adoption of the form in the United States is generally associated with scientific or progressive farming. In 1793, one of the earliest American examples, a

polygonal brick barn, was constructed for George Washington on his Virginia farm. Washington, who advocated scientific farming, had corresponded with English experts on improved farming methods. In 1824, the Shakers, also advocates of progressive farming, constructed a circular stone barn at one of their communities in Massachusetts. This was replaced by yet another circular barn in 1865.

Polygonal and circular barns and other outbuildings were not widely known or advocated until the 1870s, however. In 1874, Elliot W. Stewart of New York replaced four barns that had burned on his farm with one 5,350-square foot, multi-use, octagonal barn. Stewart, who was also the editor of *Livestock Journal*, described his new venture enthusiastically in his journal,

and his articles were in turn reprinted and disseminated by other agricultural publications. According to Stewart, polygonal buildings were cheaper to build, stronger, had more interior space because the roofs were self-supported and, since they consolidated functions within one building that had previously been dispersed among a number of smaller buildings, had shorter lines of travel to facilitate feeding of stock.

During the 1890s, the experiments of Franklin H. King at the Wisconsin Agricultural Station in Madison demonstrated the superiority and efficiency of a true circular form and plan over the polygonal barns. Combined with a central silo (made possible by the development of elevators for loading silage) and balloon framing, the circular, or round, barn supplanted the polygonal barn as the favorite of progressive farmers.

Both round and polygonal barns continued to be built almost until the advent of World War II, but the use of both

PHOTOS MIMI STIRITZ

This rare octagonal barn, ca 1909-1910, with an octagonal silo centered inside, is in the Griffith-McCune Farmstead Historic District near Eolia in Pike County.



forms had declined by 1918 and, by the 1930s, they were regarded as peculiarities. Their demise was due in part to the changing nature of agriculture, as it became a more mechanized, centralized agribusiness. Critics cited the higher costs of construction of the non-rectangular forms and, like other historic barns of whatever shape, they were regarded as not adaptable to modern uses.

Round and polygonal barns were never constructed in large numbers. In Missouri, the Historic Preservation Program's cultural resource inventory contains information on only 11 such buildings, one of which is no longer extant. — *Steve Mitchell*

Kansas City Regional Office

The Historic Preservation Program (HPP) and the Kansas City Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) have embarked upon an innovative joint project to explore preservation options for endangered historic buildings in north-west Missouri. The Endangered Building Evaluation Team project, funded by a \$12,000 federal Historic Preservation Fund grant, will permit the assembly of a team of preservation experts to evaluate an endangered building's existing condition and make recommendations on potential new uses.

Often endangered historic buildings sit vacant or are under used because their original use is no longer economically viable. The Endangered Building Evaluation Team project will establish a mechanism to give the preservation community in northwest Missouri an opportunity to develop, in a short time frame, potential new uses for threatened historic buildings — information that could be used to market the buildings to prospective buyers or occupants.

The Firestone Building in midtown Kansas City, the first building to be studied, was built ca 1915-1916 and is an example of the early use of rein-

forced concrete construction in the city. Veneered in ornamental white terra cotta, the Fire-stone Building was built, owned, and occupied by the Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. as a regional district headquarters. The Kansas City office was the company's largest facility in the world.

The Firestone evaluation study and subsequent studies will be completed within 45 days of the starting date. A new team of experts will be assembled for each building to be studied. Depending on the project, experts from the fields of architecture, real estate, law, economics, landscape architecture, or urban planning will be included on the team. Members of the AIA and a representative from the HPP will select the appropriate team of experts and the buildings to be studied, and input will be solicited from the local historic preservation community.

Buildings to be studied must be listed or be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as well as endangered and located in a 21-county area in northwest Missouri served by the department's Kansas City Regional Office.

Historic Preservation Fund monies will be used to cover the team's expenses and to compensate each project leader. Other team members will volunteer their time. The Kansas City Chapter of the AIA will contribute one-half the cost of the project through donation of administrative costs and the services of its membership.

People interested in participating in the evaluation teams or who would like to suggest a building to be studied should call the Kansas City AIA office at (816) 221-3485. — *Beverly Fleming*

Help For Barn Owners

The following Preservation Briefs, published by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior, are available free of charge from the Historic Preservation Program (HPP). To request any or all of these publications write to the HPP at P.O. Box 176, Jefferson City, MO 65102 or call (314) 751-7860.

The Preservation of Historic Barns — Michael J. Auer

Repointing Mortar Joints in Historic Brick Buildings — Robert C. Mack, AIA, de Teel Patterson Tiller, James S. Askins

Exterior Paint Problems on Historic Woodwork — Kay D. Weeks and David W. Look, AIA

Roofing for Historic Buildings — Sarah M. Sweetser

The Repair and Replacement of Historic Wooden Shingle Roofs — Sharon K. Park, AIA

Heating, Ventilating, and Cooling Historic Buildings: Problems and Recommended Approaches — Sharon K. Park, AIA

The Preservation of Historic Signs — Michael J. Auer

Barn owners interested in converting historic barns for modern agricultural uses will want to send for **Barn Again! A Guide to Rehabilitation of Older Farm Buildings** published by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and **Successful Farming** magazine.

To receive a copy of **Barn Again!**, send \$2 for postage and handling to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 511 16th Street, Suite 700, Denver, CO 80202.

The National Trust and **Successful Farming** also offer annual cash awards for the preservation of historic agricultural resources. The **Barn Again! Farm Heritage Awards** are presented in two categories: preservation of a historic
(See *HELP*, Page 7)

Archaeology Profiles

The farm comprising what is today Watkins Woolen Mill State Historic Site was started in 1839 by Waltus Watkins, who named it Bethany. At the height of its operation in 1860, the farm encompassed about 3,400 acres and had about 37 buildings; only seven of these remain today. The site has provided archaeologists with a relatively unique opportunity to examine the outbuildings comprising what was once an important residential, agricultural, commercial, and social enterprise on the Missouri frontier.

Besides the house, church, mill, and school, only the summer kitchen, smokehouse, and fruit-drying house were constructed of brick and have survived to the present. All other buildings were log or frame and exist only as archaeological features and in historic photos. A great deal of both literature research and archaeology are just starting to complete the picture of this farm in its heyday. While some of these buildings will be reconstructed in the future, much of the original appearance of the farm will only be appreciated through exhibits in the recently opened visitors' center.

A few of the outbuildings clustered in the immediate vicinity of the house were directly related to the house and the household functions. These included the summer kitchen, the smokehouse, the ice house, and the privy. In addition, there was one shed in the immediate rear of the house, which may have been household storage. The original cabin, where the Watkins family lived until the main house was built, remained into the 20th century and was probably used for storage.

There are quite a few outbuildings that are known to have served a primarily agricultural function. These

structures are grouped mainly to the north and west of the house. Known agricultural structures include the mule barn and two sheds probably serving as chicken houses and turkey houses.

In addition, there was probably a horse barn and a carriage barn. These have not yet been located, although the site configuration argues that they were probably placed along a road due west from the rear of the house. There is a well and probably a barn foundation to the southwest of the main house as well.

Perhaps the most interesting outbuildings are the commercial structures and those secondarily associated. Waltus Watkins appears to have been involved in almost anything that conceivably could make money. As a result, there are a number of strictly commercial structures. These include a blacksmith shop, fruit-drying house, grist mill (later dismantled and moved into the woolen mill), and a sawmill.

Watkins was also in the brick-making business, but there was no formal brick kiln. There are the remains of the last firing in one of the expediently constructed kilns to the west of the main house. The firing of bricks to construct the house are still detectable to the south of the main house, but the firings to construct the mill have not yet been located.

The most impressive of the commercial structures on the property is the woolen mill itself. This structure is very important in that it is the only surviving woolen mill in the United States with its original machinery intact. Other structures associated with the mill included a wool shed where the wool was stored across the road from the mill and a scale house where

wool bought in the surrounding area was weighed. Other structures with a direct association with the mill were the water tower, engine and dyeing rooms, drying rack, and the bleach house. Secondary structures for the mill were quite numerous. There were nine or ten cabins occupied by the dyer and the weavers working in the mill. These in turn have privies and storage structures associated with them.

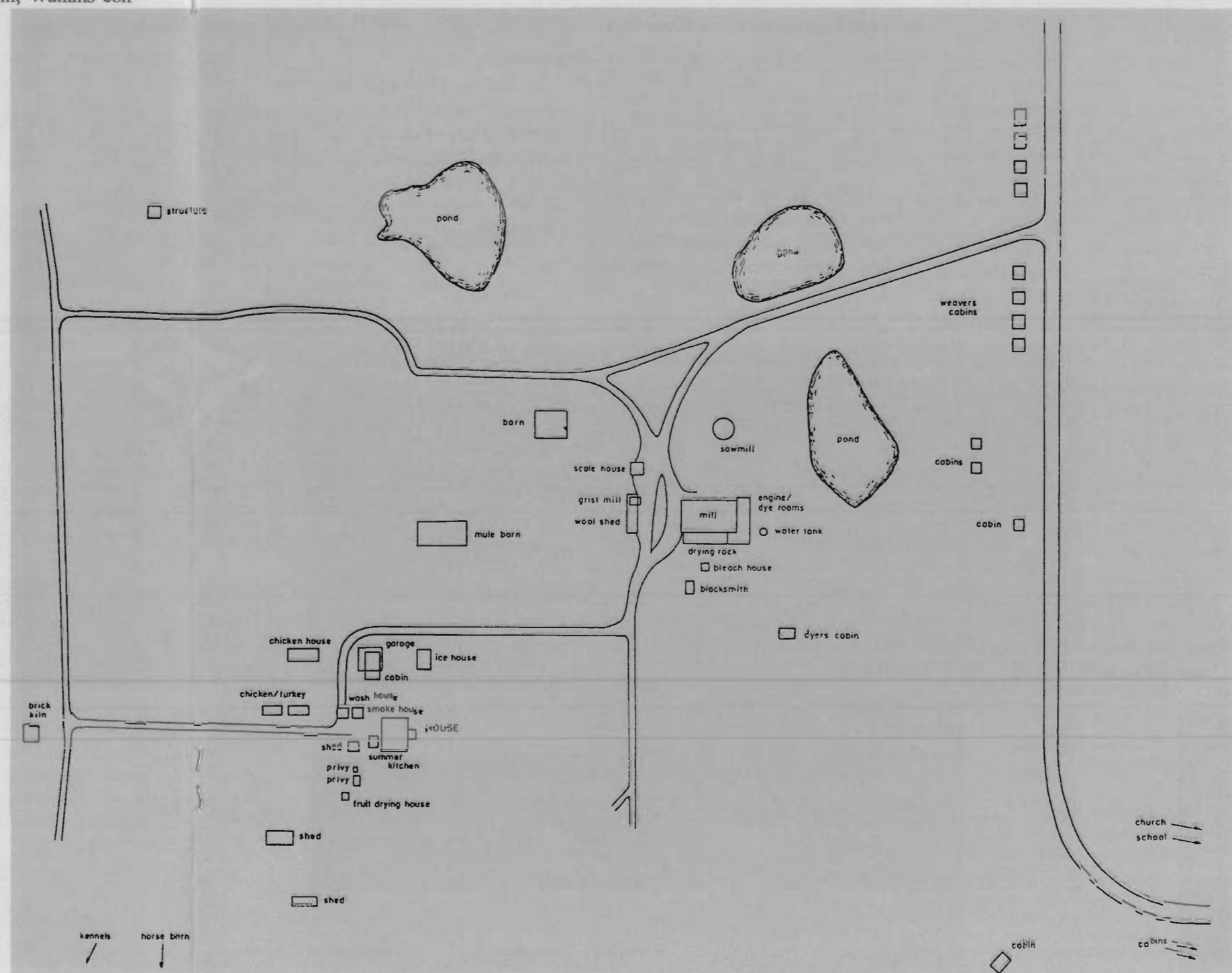
In the social realm, Watkins constructed both a church and school to the east of the core property but still on his land. Typically, these both had privies associated with them.

Bethany was one of many isolated rural hamlets in 19th-century Missouri during an era when self-sufficiency was essential for survival. Usually consisting of a mill, store, and one or more houses with associated outbuildings, these settlements have all but vanished from Missouri's rural landscape. This and future studies of the Watkins Mill site will continue to reveal important new data and add immeasurably to our understanding of Missouri's agrarian heritage. — **Larry Grantham**

Watkins Woolen Mill State Historic Site is located on Highway 69 just north of Kearney in Clay County. It is open to visitors year-round except on New Year's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

This map shows the approximate location of buildings known to have existed during the heyday of the Watkins farm in the 1860s.

Watkins Woolen Mill Site Discoveries



(SAVING, from Page 1)

The interior is divided into three sections. Family living quarters occupy one-third of the house, separating the living quarters from a complex of granaries and haylofts comprising the remaining third.

Efforts to preserve the Pelster House-Barn have been underway for over 20 years. Like many historic barns, the property had been abandoned for many years; it was preserved only by the chance of its isolated location. But in the 1970s, largely due to the influence of Charles van Ravenswaay, awareness of its significance grew. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978; in 1979, owners Harry and Jean Panhorst donated the property to the Missouri Heritage Trust (now the Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation).

As the house-barn was in dire need of repair, the group sought funding

from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In 1982, the Trust provided a short-term loan to assist in critical stabilization work. The roof was repaired, the weatherboarding was restored and painted, and the wood windows were repaired or, where too deteriorated to repair, replaced.

Despite the best efforts of the Missouri Heritage Trust (MHT) and the attention of national preservation groups, no concrete plan for preservation of the house-barn materialized. In 1990, the MHT and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources Historic Preservation Program (HPP) agreed that the best means for securing long-term protection of the Pelster House-Barn would be its acquisition by the HPP's Historic Preservation Revolving Fund. The house-barn and approximately seven acres were purchased by the Revolv-

ing Fund on March 26 with the intent of eventual resale subject to preservation covenants.

The acquisition of the Pelster House-Barn presents one of the greatest challenges yet faced by the revolving fund. The structure remains in nearly original condition, without the contemporary amenities such as plumbing or sophisticated electricity. What type of contemporary use is appropriate? Should the barn be preserved as it was originally built? Or should allowance be made for contemporary tastes?

To address these and other questions, the HPP is conducting a preservation planning study. The staff hopes that the results of this study will guide them in ultimate preservation of this unique historic property. — *Claire Blackwell*

The Pelster exhibits a building technique called Fachwerkbau or half-timbering.

Notice the wooden pegged joints and the incised Roman numerals, which designated the correct placement of each of the white-oak timbers.



PHOTO CLAIRE BLACKWELL

(HELP, from Page 2)

farm or ranch, or preservation and practical use of an older barn or other farm building. The 1992 award winner received \$500. Nominations for 1993 awards will be accepted through August 1, 1992. Call the Mountains/Plains Regional Office at (303) 623-1504 for details.

Owners of barns listed in the National Register of Historic Places may benefit from a 20 percent federal rehabilitation tax credit for owners of income producing historic properties. The Tax Credit Program is administered by the HPP. Call (314) 751-7860 for more information or an application. — *Karen Grace*

MISSOURI

Historic Architecture

English Barns

(also known as New England, Connecticut, or Yankee Barns)
Ca 1800-1950

Characteristics:

- Relatively small, rectangular-shaped with gable roof.
- Timber-framed with mortise-and-tenon joints.
- Large doors centered on the longer side elevations, and never in the gable end.
- Usually rests on a stone foundation.
- Vertical board siding is typical.
- Minimal fenestration; windows or openings in the gable ends provide ventilation for the hayloft.
- Cross-gable drive floor plan consists of a central floor area or runway with two spaces (called "mows") of roughly equal size on either side of a loft for hay above the mows.

PHOTO BEVERLY FLEMING



This English Barn was built prior to the Civil War on the farm of Greene M. Shelton. It sits on a stone basement and is held together with hickory pegs. Located in Grandview, Jackson County.

A Southern Plantation in Missouri

Missouri's southern heritage is still evident at Pleasant Green Plantation near Pilot Grove in an area of the state called Little Dixie - so named because of its settlement by old-stock Americans from Virginia. These early 19th-century settlers brought their political, social, religious, and architectural preferences with them to Missouri and left a lasting cultural legacy.

Virginia-born Anthony Winston Walker arrived in Missouri in 1818 with his wife, three sons, two slaves, and several other families. Walker immediately began the development of his new farm, named Pleasant Green after the Virginia home he left behind.

By 1824, Walker had built a small one-story Federal-style brick home for his family and several log buildings. He then donated one-and-one-half acres of his farm for a log church and cemetery called Pleasant Green Methodist.

A two-story Federal-style brick house was built in 1830 incorporating the small one-story house that was used as a postal station and office for Walker's son, Anthony Smith, who later became a judge and state legislator. The younger Walker's marriage and the arrival of five children necessitated a two-story frame addition to the house prior to the Civil War. Anthony Smith, a southern sympathizer, continued to serve in the Missouri legislature until the capitol in Jefferson City was captured by Union forces.

(See *SOUTHERN*, Page 8)

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Editor: Karen Grace
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(SOUTHERN, from Page 7)

The Civil War and its aftermath brought financial and emotional hardships to the Walker family. The development of Pleasant Green was at a standstill until 1872 when Anthony Smith's son, Anthony Addison, added more land to the estate and remodeled; exterior improvements included a Victorian porch and porte cochere.

Around the turn of the century, Addison also constructed a two-story oak hexagonal barn on the property. The barn was constructed with an upper gallery, which was used to seat bidders at hog auctions and wagerers for cockfights (a popular southern sport) held in the barn. Addison also imported red foxes from Virginia to improve the fox hunts held at the plantation.

Today, visitors to Pleasant Green Plantation can immerse themselves in more than 170 years of Missouri history. Within 200 yards of one another are the manor house, restored to its 1877 appearance; the Pleasant Green Church ca 1868; the cemetery; and the hex barn. Pleasant Green is located on Highway 135 about eight miles south of Pilot Grove in Cooper County. For tours, call Walker descendant and current owner Florence Friedrichs at (816) 834-3945. — *Karen Grace*

preservation **issues**

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
Historic Preservation Program
P.O. Box 176
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Dates to Remember

BARN AGAIN! Farm building preservation awards nomination deadline August 1. Call National Trust Mountains/Plains Regional Office at (303) 623-1504.

Great American Home Awards application deadline August 31. For an entry form write to Home Awards, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

Missouri Historic Preservation Advisory Council Meeting August 14, Jefferson City. Call Margaret Barnes for details at (314) 751-5365.

Missouri's Third Annual Route 66 Motor Tour September 12-13. Call Jim Powell for more information at (314) 982-5500.

Route 66 66th Birthday Celebration November 14, Springfield. For more information call Jim Powell at (314) 982-5500.

Barns by Mail

The Historic Preservation Program is searching for barns or other farm buildings built from a Sears, Roebuck or other mail-order catalog kit. A Sears barn has been identified in Worth County.

If you know of others in Missouri, contact Beverly Fleming at the Kansas City Regional Office, (816) 795-8655.

Note

Credit to Beverly Fleming for **How to Save a Highway**, which appeared in the May/June issue, was inadvertently omitted. The editor regrets any inconvenience this may have caused Fleming.

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