

preservation **issues**

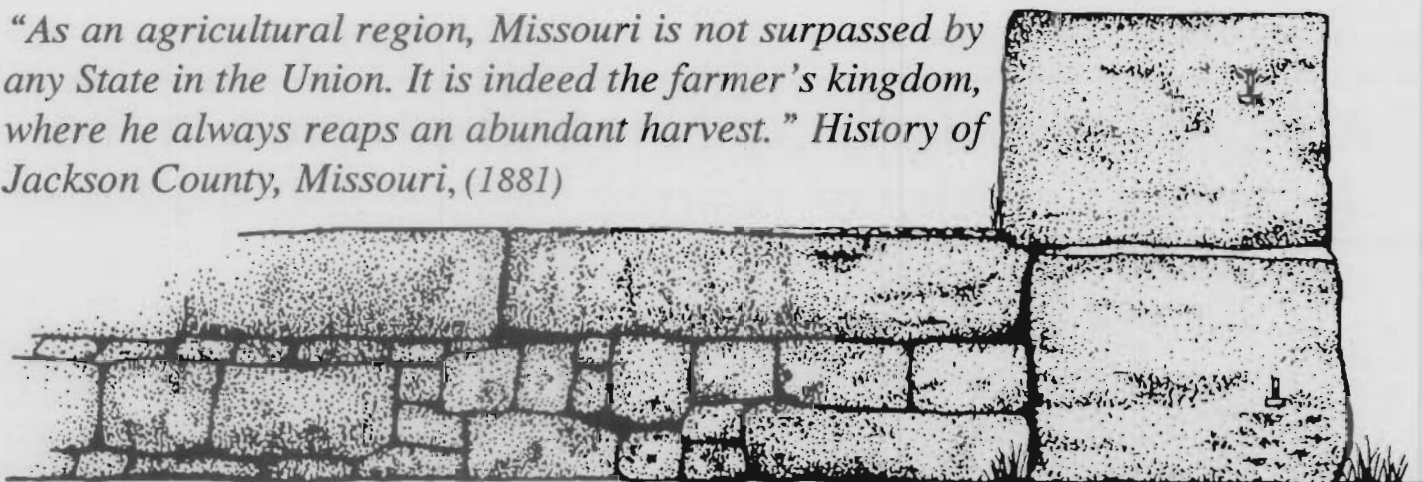
NEWS FOR THE PRESERVATION COMMUNITY

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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The Farmer's Kingdom

"As an agricultural region, Missouri is not surpassed by any State in the Union. It is indeed the farmer's kingdom, where he always reaps an abundant harvest." History of Jackson County, Missouri, (1881)



Gate detail Louis Bruce Farmstead Historic District, Debbie Sheals for HABS.

Missouri in some respects remains the farmer's kingdom. According to the 1992 Census of Agriculture, Missouri ranked second in the nation in number of farms, after Texas but ahead of states more associated in the popular imagination with agriculture, such as Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin.

Missouri's 98,082 farmsteads accounted for slightly more than five percent of the total farmsteads in the country, but that number represented a loss of 8,023 farmsteads since the last agricultural census in 1987, or a decline of seven and one-half percent. One factor in the declining numbers has been the consolidation of farms, as the average size of farms increased, and the number of small scale farms of one to nine acres in size suffered the largest decline. The average size of a Missouri farm in 1992 was 291 acres, almost 100 acres larger than it was in 1959. Acre-

age devoted to farms also declined, from 29,209,187 acres in 1987 to 28,546,875 acres in 1992, a loss of 3,888,617 acres. Since 1959, the decline in the number of farms has been even more drastic, with a loss of 70,590 farms, or a decrease of 68 percent.

In a survey and study of rural preservation programs, William Morgan Lakey Smith identified seven threats, many of which are interrelated, to rural properties: the decline in the number of small or family farms; the perception that old is bad or less useful than new; changing land use patterns as agricultural land is subsumed by suburbanization or urban sprawl; the expense of maintenance of older buildings or structures and the perceived tax burden of unutilized or underutilized properties; the burden of an aging population of buildings, which in many cases have been crippled by inappropriate altera-

tions or deferred repairs; the demolition of buildings or structures for salvageable materials, or their relocation or conversion to nonagricultural uses; and new farming technologies that make

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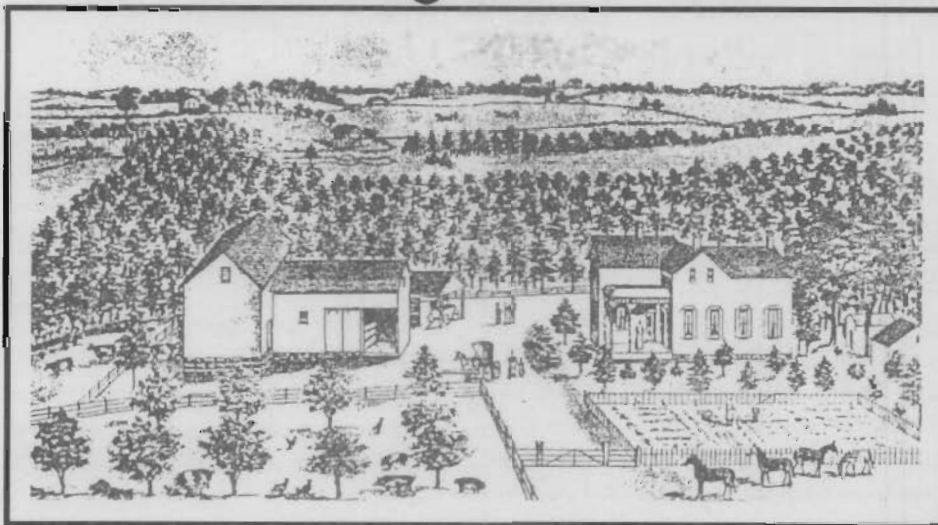
July/August 1995

Usually the first thought should be to preserve the old home, or the greater part of it. The architect is almost certain to advise demolition and the erection of a new house, asserting that the new structure will be no more expensive than the remodeling of the old, which may or may not be true. but he does not always know what is best, as he is usually unfamiliar with the farmers' needs and traditions. Sacred associations usually cluster round the old farm house; every room and door and window may be associated with some epoch in life's history. Through yonder door came the happy bride a half century ago; in yonder room the children were born; -- every nook and corner has some tale to tell, some happy association. We cross oceans and mountains to view the birthplaces and homes (which happily sometimes are preserved and held sacred) of a Burns and a Shakespeare. Then is it not well to preserve the farm houses, where possibly are the birthplaces of many "Cromwells guiltless of their country's blood."

The first thought, then, should be to save and improve the old house, not to destroy it.

Isaac Phillips Roberts from The Farmstead, 1911

Agriculturally Significant Properties Listed in The National Register of Historic Places Since 1992



John A. Adams Farmstead Historic District, Warrensburg vicinity, Johnson County. Listed 7/7/94. Although the farmstead retains a house and two barns constructed from circa 1867 to 1876, its primary significance derives from the combination erosion control and drainage system developed by Adams and installed on his farm, which served as a model for similar systems on farms throughout the Midwest.

Nelson-Pettis Farmsteads Historic District, St. Joseph, Buchanan County. Listed 5/11/95. The two farmsteads included are associated with Peter Nelson (Peder Nielsen Kaivehaven) who, in 1847, was one of the leaders of the largest group of Norwegian immigrants to settle between Texas and Wisconsin. Both Nelson's farmstead and the adjoining farmstead of his son-in-law, James Pettis, also represent the changes in agricultural practices over 145 years as the family farm was transformed from self-sufficiency to market production.



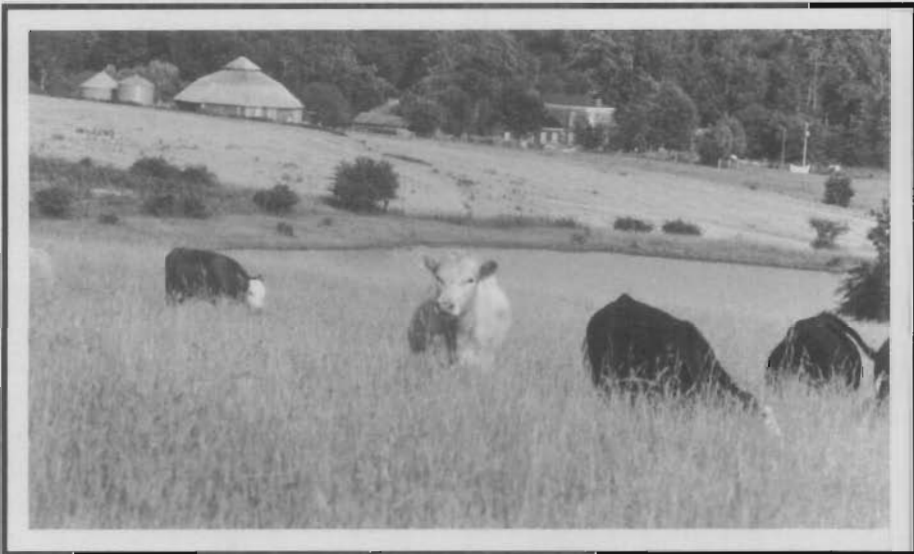
PHOTO DON WOLFENBARGER



Dulle Farmstead Historic District (above), Jefferson City vicinity, Cole County. Listed 12/30/93. The 206-acre historic district, which includes nine buildings constructed from ca 1858 to 1943, chronicles the transformation of a semi-subsistence farm to a commercial farming operation, all under the stewardship of a single family.

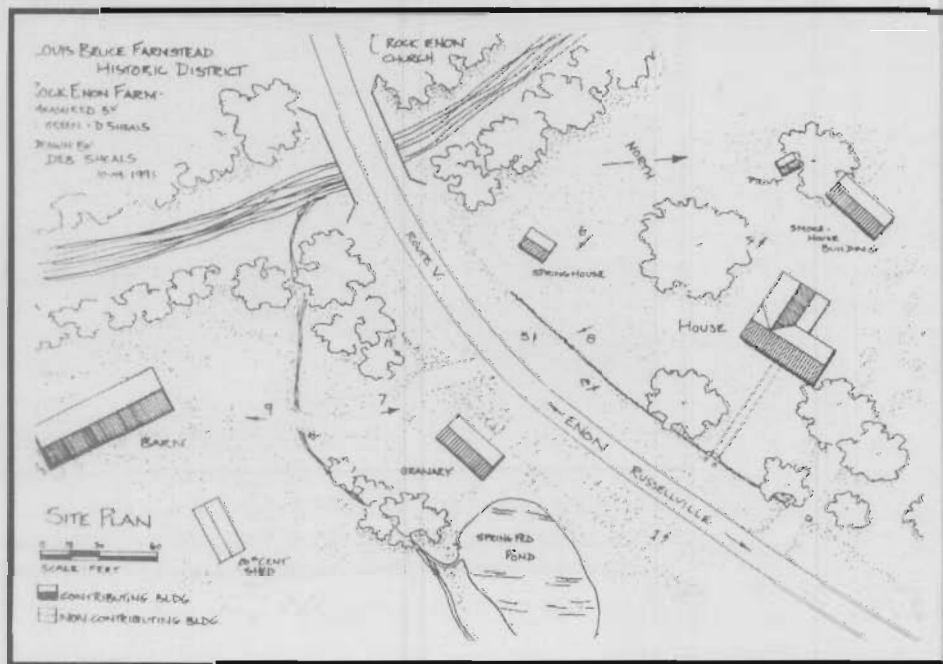


Gilmore Barn (above), Ash Grove vicinity, Greene County. Listed 4/8/94. Constructed ca 1899 by a multi-generational, pioneer farm family in a prosperous agricultural area, the stone barn presented vivid affirmation of the builders' participation in progressive, commercial agriculture.



Griffith-McCune Farmstead Historic District (left), Eolia vicinity, Pike County. Listed 8/18/92. The centerpiece of the seven-building district, which includes a circa 1870 brick I-house and smokehouse and circa 1890 frame chicken house, privy, wagon shed and feed shed, is a 1909-1910 octagonal barn and silo. The district represents the adoption of progressive farming techniques on the traditional farm.

Louis Bruce Farmstead Historic District (right), Enon vicinity, Moniteau County. Listed 1/7/92. Constructed from 1870 to 1876, the six buildings and stone retaining wall comprise a virtually intact post-Civil War farmstead representing the transition from semi-subsistence to commercial agriculture in Missouri. Five of the buildings were constructed of locally quarried limestone, including the I-house residence, a springhouse, a smokehouse, a granary and a barn.



MISSOURI

Historic Architecture

Raised Three-Gable Barn

Ca 1890-1920s

Characteristics:

- ☐ Built on three levels; basement, threshing floor and hay loft.
- ☐ Basement/foundation level is usually constructed of stone.
- ☐ Upper levels are timber-framed.
- ☐ The plan is t-shaped, with the straw-shed wing dividing the main English-style barn, giving the appearance of three wings.
- ☐ The roof consists of three prominent gables.
- ☐ A hay hood, vertical board siding and a level roof-ridge line are common.

Technological advancements in farming practices led, in the northeastern United States, to the combining of complex and expanding agricultural functions within a single farm building. The introduction of mechanical threshing machines allowed the entire grain crop to be processed at one time, creating a great quantity of straw that would decompose if not sheltered. Livestock housed in a basement or lower floor created quantities of manure that, if not sheltered, would not be as beneficial for fertilizer. The addition of a basement level and straw sheds created the three-gable style barn in the late 19th Century. – *Lee Gilleard*

PHOTO MHTD



View of the Oakes barn in Newton County showing the hay hood, vertical wood siding, stone basement, and straw wing, covering the manure storage area and livestock entrance. Not shown in this photograph is the central entrance and drive that are also common to the type.

(*FARMER*, from Page 1)

older buildings or structures less useable. An additional threat revealed by Smith's study was that most state preservation offices do not have specific programs or initiatives to address problems of rural preservation.

Traditionally, rural resources have received less attention from preservation agencies and groups, in part because most preservation advocates have been urban-based. Rural resources are also, in many respects, more difficult to assess and require a broader base of comparative data for evaluation, data that is more expensive and time-consuming to accumulate than data on more densely grouped urban resources. Contexts for the evaluation of rural properties may require the examination and synthesizing of social, political, economic, transportation and technological histories in an interdisciplinary blend that taxes the capabilities of most avocational historians.

In a survey of 100 National Register nominations, listed from 1986 to 1991, that included the word "farm" in the historic name, L. Martin Perry of the Kentucky Heritage Council noted that the problem of evaluating agricultural resources extended even to the nation's honor roll of properties most worthy of preservation. Most of the National Register nominations examined by Perry focused on architectural rather than agricultural significance, or emphasized the farmstead as either representative or unique and did not attempt a context-based justification. Given such emphases, vernacular resources that reflect complex settlement patterns associated with the changing farmstead

and that may remain in relatively large number are likely to be overlooked or under-represented.

Sufficient context exists for a broad outline of the history of Missouri's agricultural resources, as the basis for a more detailed examination of specific themes and topics. In 1926-1927, Oliver E. Baker defined the agricultural regions that are, with some variations, still employed by cultural geographers to identify farming landscapes. Missouri was included within four of the

Land of Contrasts and People of Achievements (1943), divided Missouri's agricultural history into six periods: the Primary State to 1840, in which each farmstead was essentially a self-sufficient, independent economic unit; the Period of Transition, 1840-1860, in which "the agricultural industry... was becoming a money-making business"; the Period of Rapid Development, 1860-1890, characterized by substantial increases in the value of machinery and implements and growth in the

value of agricultural products; the Period of Depression, 1891-1900, which paralleled a period of depression nationwide; the Period of Great Prosperity, 1901-1920, "marked by high land values and high prices for farm products and the spread of agricultural education"; and the Period of Depression and Adjustment, 1921-1943. With some variations - primarily to the final period, which might be extended to the immediate post-World War II years in which mechanical and productive advances again forced a redefinition of agricul-

ture - Shoemaker's periods remain a valid framework for a preliminary assessment of Missouri's agricultural history and its related cultural resources.

At the beginning of the 19th century, 90 percent of the national work force were farmers; by the end of the century, the number had declined to only 38 percent. Historically, according to cultural geographer Glenn Trewartha, farmsteads were the most ubiquitous element of the settlement landscape. As examples of a broader settlement property type, farmsteads must be evaluated on factors of landscape such as topography and setting, as well as the build-

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PHOTO STEVE MITCHELL



Front and rear doors stand open on an abandoned farmhouse in Adair County.

regions or belts, defined on the basis of factors such as rainfall, temperature, soil types and crop and livestock production: the Humid Subtropical Crops Belt and the Cotton Belt encompassed the Bootheel, while the remainder of the state was within the Corn and Winter Wheat Belt and the Corn Belt. Although each region shared certain basic property types and processes, each also would be expected to exhibit buildings, structures and other elements of the cultural landscape that were unique to the region and that served as an index to the processes that defined the agricultural practices of the region.

In addition, Floyd Calvin Shoemaker, in *Missouri and Missourians:*

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ings and structures that often are the only elements used to define the farmstead and its significance. Further complicating assessment, historic farmsteads rarely reflect a single period of production or narrowly confined period of significance. Instead, farmsteads often present an overlapping portrait of changing agricultural processes, such as the change from animal to mechanical power and the evolution from semisubsistence production to a market oriented economy.

In 1978, William H. Tishler, professor of landscape architecture at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, noted the lack of attention accorded what he referred to as "anonymous rural architecture" and urged a reassessment of farmsteads as significant elements in the settlement fabric. Although several Missouri farmsteads have in recent years been listed in the National Register of Historic Places as representative of broad trends and patterns in agriculture and for their ability to yield information about the settlement landscape, some agencies, both at the state and federal level, remain focused on significance as a quality dependant primarily on the integrity of individual buildings. This restrictive perspective is injurious to a complete understanding of Missouri's rural landscape, an understanding that incorporates the built resource, its setting and the relationship to the broader pattern of events of which it was a part. — Steve Mitchell



The skeleton of a timber frame barn in Macon County, demolished to make way for the widening of Highway 63.

PHOTOS STEVE MITCHELL



Boarded-up farmhouse and decaying outbuildings on a farmstead in Knox County.

Landmark Listings

Historic House for Sale

Originally the ca 1915 Clayton Hotel, this building was previously a bed and breakfast. This three-story historic building is on the Clay County Historical Register and has 22 bedrooms on the second and third floors. A private suite with bath plus one additional bedroom are located on the first floor. Two dining rooms, a large kitchen and two large gathering rooms round out the first floor. The front porch is perfect and the view of the yard with the flowers everywhere is unbelievable. Priced at \$195,000. For your private showing contact Suzi Beagle-Schulz, Realty Executives Area Realtors, 5500 N. Oak Trafficway, Kansas City, MO 64118, (816) 453-9100.



Barns Reflect Our Heritage – Let's Preserve Them!

Barns are an invaluable icon of our Midwest landscape – but they're much more than that, says Midwest Living magazine publisher Tom Benson.

Elijah Filley was at wit's end. He had brought his family from Illinois to southeastern Nebraska in 1867 to carve a new and better life from the wilderness. Waiting to greet him were migratory waves of grasshoppers that would arrive every summer to strip his fields and return every fall to infest what little grain they had left him to harvest.

In the spring of 1874, he took matters into his own hands, rounding up stonemasons, carpenters and local farmers desperate for work during a year when the grasshoppers ate even the wooden handles of pitchforks. Together, in just 88 days, they erected a sprawling three-story barn with limestone walls as thick as your arm is long, a magnificent structure designed to shelter the bounty of Filley's fields from the insatiable appetite of the winged plague.

As fall brought new crops, the completion of Filley's barn brought farm families from as far as 50 miles for the barn dance that welcomed it to the prairie. It was an architectural wonder, the largest limestone barn in Nebraska. Six generations later, thousands of visitors find their way each year to what's now the Elijah Filley Stone Barn. It serves today as a monument to Midwestern perseverance, saved from demolition by neglect through a sensitive, \$120,000 restoration overseen by the Gage County Historical Society.

Filley's barn is one of the survivors of a century of change in Midwestern farm life – one of too few survivors, it seems from my travels through the backroads and beanfields of the rural Midwest. Down every blacktop, over virtually every row-cropped horizon, I am sure to encounter the sagging, weathered remains of a barn, a machine shed, a granary or a farmhouse. These are the sorry reminders of once-pristine buildings that, just one generation ago, were both the

pride and the paychecks of the farm family that called them home.

Many of these abandoned or neglected farmsteads were built in the era when Midwestern farmers knew better times. The period between the Civil War and World War I was a golden era for American agriculture, a time when Corn was King and farming was as prosperous as it has ever been. Or, as an orator at the 1899 Iowa Corn Carnival put it, "Gentlemen, from the beginning of Indiana to the end of Nebraska, there is nothing but corn, cattle, and contentment."

It was an era when scientific methods brought new techniques and technologies that allowed grain and livestock farming to evolve from a primitive, pioneering exercise in self-sufficiency into a highly complex and increasingly profitable business. The prosperity swept the Midwest, with the number of farms increasing from two million in 1869 to nearly six and one-half million in 1910. In 1895, 200 bushels of corn would buy 1,000 board-feet of lumber. By 1908, when corn prices hit an unheard-of 50 cents a bushel, 2,100 bushels of corn could buy 2,000 board-feet of lumber. It was that same lumber that was used to raise many of the barns, homes and outbuildings that have since been razed by bulldozers, burned to the ground, or left to decay as grim reminders of the rapid changes taking place.

As it is worldwide, life in the Midwest is change. In Iowa, where I live, there are 35,000 fewer farmers today than there were in 1980. The statistics for other Midwestern states are equally telling. Overall, the number of people under age 25 going into farming has fallen by two-thirds. Equally sobering are the statistics on disappearing farm structures. In Nebraska, where the population of rural counties is down an average of 17 percent, there are somewhere between 5,000 and 10,000 abandoned farmsteads. South Dakota officials put the number of abandoned

farmsteads in their state at 25,000. The Wisconsin Trust for Historic Preservation estimates the Dairy State is losing 400 barns a year. It is not only a cultural crisis, but an economic one as well, given the growing importance of tourism in the Midwest.

It's hard for me to imagine the Midwest without barns. Visitors from throughout the U.S. – and from throughout the world – now route themselves through the endless acres of America's fruited plain, often to catch a glimpse of, or better yet take a ride on, the Mississippi River. It's an area rich in history, much of it rooted in agricultural history. The Midwest without barns would be like New England without lighthouses, San Francisco without the Golden Gate Bridge, or Washington, D.C. without its monuments. These barns are the icons of the Midwest, and their importance to the Midwest's sense of place cannot be overlooked.

As the 120-acre farms of the past are absorbed into the mega-acreages of the 21st century farm, what's become of these newly obsolete barns, outbuildings and farmhouses? Should we be content to watch them disappear, to write them off as relics to the price of progress? I hope not.

Though change is inevitable, how we as individuals, as communities, and as a society react and adapt to change need not be unplanned or unpredictable. As Midwesterners, we need to understand that the Midwestern values and traditions that underpin the quality of life we enjoy today didn't just happen. They are the offspring of the values and traditions of the farm and of the farmers who began taming the prairies 150 years ago. The saga of their struggles is embodied in these barns.

I'm convinced that unfounded concern about property taxes is often a major culprit in the recent wholesale destruction of historic farm buildings throughout the Midwest. Barns and

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other existing outbuildings are not being re-roofed, re-painted or otherwise maintained out of largely unfounded fears that improvements will trigger property tax hikes. Worse yet, whole farmsteads are being burned to the ground or bulldozed by owners who believe their destruction will bring property taxes down. Not so, according to most of the Midwestern governors I recently quizzed on the subject.

Economic incentives of all sorts – from federal income tax credits to local tax abatement – are needed to help encourage the preservation and restoration of an endangered species of historic structures, the farmstead. So, too, is a “if it ain’t fixed, don’t break it” public education effort that makes it clear that most often it’s less expensive to rehab an existing building, despite its age, than to tear it down to clear a building site for new construction.

The creative re-use of barns and other farm buildings shows us that as change sweeps over us, it need not sweep away our respect for an understanding of Midwestern rural tradition. As a temple of tradition, a barn, a farmhouse or a corncrib allows us to pay silent homage not to the structures

Dates to Remember

Missouri Advisory Council on Historic Preservation quarterly meeting, August 11, Clinton. For details call Maggie Barnes (314) 751-5365.

Fairgrounds Design Charrette, August 11-13, Missouri State Fairgrounds National Register Historic District, Sedalia. For more information, call David Sachs (816) 235-1726, Pat Amick (314) 635-8555 or Doris Danna (314) 822-7350.

Missouri’s 11th Annual Historic Preservation Conference, April 19-21, 1996, St. Joseph.

themselves, but to the stories they embody about where we, as Midwesterners, come from. They allow us to see and to feel our rural history where it happened, and they help us to better understand why it happened.

They teach us who we are, these barns and outbuildings. And, as they vanish, so do our opportunities to better know ourselves. – *Tom Benson*

Tom E. Benson, the publisher of Midwest Living magazine, was raised on a dairy and hog farm near Decorah, Iowa.

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