

## **Historic Barns: The Great Disappearing Act**

### **Eagle Barns**

As Eagle grows and the old family acreages disappear, the prominent roof lines seen across the Valley no longer belong to old barns and silos. The large family home now prevails, some of them as large as the old barns themselves, but the history of barns is as varied as the structures themselves.

In the early farming days, barns were needed to store hay for horses and cattle, as well as shelter for the animals. A 1908 stock plan for a typical family-farm barn was designed to house five horses, 10 cows, 50 chickens, and two breeding sows. As the work horses were retired, tractors and other mechanical equipment replaced them and barns were then used for storing the machinery.

### **Why Red?**

In early 18th-century bridges and barns went unpainted. It seems the right wood in the right place needed no paint. Even houses in the earliest settlements were not painted. To paint the barn would have been viewed not only as excessive, but indecent and showy. However, by the late 1700s, the art of artificial preservation of barns caught on. In Pennsylvania, the Dutch settlements latched on to the custom of red bricks, red barns, and even red geraniums, brought from colors of their homeland. When a Pennsylvania Dutch farmer added big ornate designs to barns, “just for luck,” he was accused of designing a hex sign to scare off the devil. But color caught on. Any farmer could mix his own paint or stain. A mixture of skimmed milk, lime, red iron oxide and linseed oil was the concoction of choice. This paint was found to keep the wood from becoming brittle with age and weather. Thus the American “barn red” was born. It came into being through function and utility, rather than decor or superstition. It was soon discovered that the red barn color was warmer in winter since it absorbed the sun’s rays.

### **Preserving Our Heritage**

The images of the old barns dotting the countryside can evoke a feeling of nostalgia for many, and although barns are becoming extinct, some have been recognized for their historic significance; receiving a place on the National Register of Historic Places.

This last year a historical survey was done to recognize any historical barns left in Eagle. A professional historian hired by the Eagle Historic Preservation Commission analyzed the area of Eagle and surrounding vicinity. She was able to uncover 40 regional barns that are of local historical interest, and 5 that would be eligible to earn a place on the National Register.

The Preservation Commission is currently taking the next steps to see that Eagle’s barns are given a place in history.

The pictures seen here are from the 2006 and 2015 Windshield Surveys of Agricultural Properties.

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