

## Ohio News Watch



**ROOF REPAIR:** Slate will last for decades if it is properly maintained.



**STANDING STONE:** Foundation stones are in high demand by landscapers.



**FUTURE FLOORS:** Timbers from barns are sawed into extensive oak or chestnut flooring.

# Pieces of history vanishing

## Inside Look

By TOM O'GRADY

### Key Points

- Ohio barns are being lost at an alarming rate.
- Salvage parts are sent away to benefit other economies.
- Training workers to restore barns would create jobs.

**A** NEW resource is being mined throughout the heartland: our historic barns. Barn timbers, stone foundations and slate roofs, like many of Ohio's natural resources, are being shipped out of state to enrich the economies of others.

Barns are often picked apart for their component parts and the materials are shipped elsewhere in the country. The timber frames of old barns are being disassembled and shipped out west or to New England where they are being used as frames for new homes, shops or cabins.

Scattered hither and yon, these icons of Ohio's countryside and its agricultural legacy become invisible across the land. All of it is a loss to Ohio's heritage.

### Butchering barns

This harvest is being done with varying degrees of care. Some barns are salvaged with great expertise, and some are simply destroyed. The narrower the salvage goal, the greater the waste.

Sometimes a person's interest is in the slate merely, and tons of it are being harvested from the roofs of barns and farmhouses for use elsewhere, often leaving these historic buildings standing defenseless against the weather.

A procession of wind and

rain, cold and damp, and freezing and thawing comes with long days of baking sunshine woven through. This twists the wood. It shrinks and bends, softens, and decays ancient timbers and causes unprotected foundation stones to heave and tumble.

### Resources wasted

Some of this is inevitable, but it is disheartening to many who

value the heritage of our forebears in the Ohio country to see this extraction process go on. Many of Ohio's barns are being completely lost.

Some barns are burned or bulldozed to relieve the owner of maintenance or liability concerns. Others are lost to make space for urban and suburban sprawl. Some disappear due to carelessness and some because of prohibitive repair costs or the daunting effort required to make repairs.

Many of these are slowly returning to the earth from whence they were riven. These will be of no use to anyone. That is a worse fate for these old barns; their salvageable resources go to waste.

If we really think about

Ohio's past and strongly consider a sustainable vision of our future, it might seem obvious that financial and material resources and real effort ought to be invested in agriculture and the historic infrastructure that makes up this aspect of the state's economy and its heritage.

A meaningful effort would result in more jobs, the employment of more skilled craftspeople, the use of many of the state's natural resources for lasting and durable structures, and the establishment of training programs to build a growing workforce of more skilled workers. Such investment would be a general boost to the state's economy.

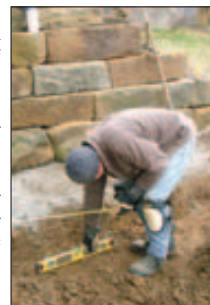
### Tourist attraction

Keeping Ohio's barns standing as useful structures and viable components of our communities is complementary to the efforts of the Ohio Department of Development in promoting tourism and travel as the large engine in today's economy, second only to agriculture.

There is no good reason to ignore the plight of our barn heritage. They are not a problem; they are an opportunity!

While we want to keep as many barns standing as pos-

**REBUILDING:** Groups like the Timber Framers Guild and Preservation Trades Network teach barn reconstruction.



sible, for some the highest and best use is salvage. It is important that there be talented salvage crews that can step in and recover these valuable materials for Ohio's future. These recovered materials flow back into the marketplace and are used to repair other

barns and historic structures.

Adaptive reuse, rehabilitation, restoration and recycling are the first steps in a sustainable economy. Ohio's barns are just one of the biggest and most visible examples of that in the rapidly changing landscape. These principles should be put to use with all historic buildings and all other material resources in our economy, right down to the last beer can.

Training more workers in the art of timber framing and masonry will be of great benefit in the restoration of barns and other historic buildings while creating a larger skilled labor force for a sustainable economy. Building that more highly skilled workforce is an important investment in sustainability.

Friends of Ohio Barns encourages the preservation and/or conservation of these heritage resources here in Ohio and offers the expertise of its members to help ensure a bright future for the farms and barns dotting our landscape.

*O'Grady is a board member of Friends of Ohio Barns and lives in Athens County.*

