

Rediscovering the Barns of Clay County, South Dakota

Introduction

Recording barns in Clay County, for the Future

After retiring in 2008 and 42 years in the retail lumber business. I started a lot of remodeling in our home, projects which had been put off for several years. This was due to the demanding schedule of my job, which was self inflicted. After our projects were finished, I did the same for our children in their respective homes.

Eventually I was looking for something more. I have always been interested in history and old buildings. I have watched the demise of many beautiful buildings at the hands of a huge backhoe or a wrecking ball. Several of these structures could have been restored and re-purposed into useful buildings. As a society we think that any building having reached the ripe old age of 50 years must be destroyed and a brand new building must be built to replace it.

I joined the Clay County Historical Preservation Commission in the spring of 2011, thinking that I could help save and preserve some of the buildings in our area. The CCHPC has been quite successful at restoring historic structures in the Vermillion area. With my back ground in retail building materials and knowledge of construction, I felt I could contribute to the mission of this organization.

May 2011 the Clay County Historical Preservation Commission and other county Historical Preservation Commissions were asked by the South Dakota Historical Society to record old barns in their respective county to preserve that information for future generations.

I have been fascinated with old barns since I was in grade school. I volunteered for this project right then. Yes, I volunteered, that means without any pay!!! I am passionate enough about old barns that I feel someone needs to do this before it is too late.

Barns have played such a great role in the development of agriculture in South Dakota and also in this great nation of America. I have observed the old barns disappearing at an alarming rate. If we do not record the barns that are left it will soon be too late. Once they are gone, they are gone forever. I am passionate enough about barns that I needed to at least try to record the barns in Clay County. I have surveyed several barns that were not standing one to two years later. Some were so

unstable they were destroyed by strong winds and others were demolished for various reasons.

I have been interested in barns since grade school. I built a model of a gambrel roof barn at the age of 7 or 8. I remember playing with this barn. My brother Ray and I would poke short twigs into the sand to form fences for our pastures. The barbed wire was imaginary. We would break corncobs into equal lengths for our cows. We could play for hours this way building our own ranch. As I grew older I was very interested in construction. With the help of my brothers we have built an attached garage, two homes, an all steel shop building, a huge addition with new roof system for the home/ addition and done extensive remodel projects.

While in the lumber business I learned a great deal on construction, materials, design and advising customers and contractors on projects. I did not realize that I would enjoy a job so much for 42 years. I still am fascinated with the construction of barns. Thus, recording the barns of Clay County, South Dakota was a task that I could do with the knowledge and enjoyed every hour doing the project.

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