



We started the foundation with no money. In 26 years, we have gathered small donations one-by-one and saved over 270 barns with 1,300 members that give annually to further our mission in the years to come. Please see the 2018 reprint below that highlights how it all started.

— BY JACQUELINE ANDRE SCHMEAL —

REPRINT OF ARTICLE FROM SPRING 2018 MAGAZINE
WITH UPDATED VIEWS OF OUR WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGES

2018 brings the 21st anniversary of the Iowa Barn Foundation. We thought it might be appropriate to give everyone a little background on this all-state effort and the people who have made an idea a reality.

How did the Iowa Barn Foundation Evolve?

During the “golden age of agriculture” the barn was the foundation of a farm—a place that sheltered animals and protected crops. The farmer needed the barn before he could have a livelihood.

By 1997, barns, no longer a necessity, were being neglected. Fewer and fewer barns dotted the countryside. The symbols of Iowa’s beginnings—of Iowa’s work ethic—were disappearing.

Over dinner in Ames on a 1997 winter night, a group of folks with Iowa rural roots met and discussed starting a foundation to preserve barns. It was floated as an idea. Knowing it was a big undertaking, the group decided to start a foundation which would raise money and give matching grants to owners for the restoration and/or rehabilitation of their barns.

At that time the group had no bank account, no non-profit status—just an idea. But, within a few days, members of the group had scoured Iowa looking for support, publicity, and barns that needed restoration. Neil Harl, Ames and Darrell Sunderman, Carroll, went to Des Moines to talk to legislators about the idea. Within two days, lawyer Neil Harl, put by-laws together. Don Geiger, Iowa State graduate, who had a career at DeLoitte

and Touche in Des Moines, when asked, “There aren’t many barns left.” But, he joined the effort and has kept track of all of the finances since the beginning. He communicates with all of the donors.

At the meeting Robert Harvey, professor of landscape architecture at Iowa State, suggested names for the group. His wife, Ann, offered to help with some of the detail work. Harvey and Dan Hisel, Ames architect, worked out grant application forms to folks wanting to apply for grants.

Tom Lawler, New Providence native and Parkersburg lawyer, showed interest in the foundation’s work. He joined the board and became long-term vice president—and current president—and the group’s legal expert. He has worked out all of the grant applications.

Volume 1, Number 1, a simple Iowa Barn Foundation publication was published in the spring of 1998. The lead story was focused on Ken Starek, Ackley, who, at that time, had photographed 4000

barns in Iowa. In the issue, Wendell St. Clair, Conrad, then 88, said, “You drive through the country and see the old barns falling. Some people say, ‘Let them fall.’ I say, No, this is the way it used to look.”

The Iowa Barn Foundation has tried to save this look. Board member, Steve Garst, Coon Rapids, offered his farm for a picnic, that turned out to be an annual event. While there was a good turnout, but only one person signed up for a membership. Jo Patterson, Iowa City area, was one of our original members and supporters. Bringing her physically-challenged son with her, she dutifully attended every picnic. Anne Fitzgerald, then Des Moines Register agriculture reporter, wrote articles that brought calls from folks all over the state concerned about the state of their barns and asking for grants. Jim Jordan, Boone veterinarian, and his wife,

The Iowa Barn Foundation website received a modern makeover in late 2022 and now supports online membership donations.



Pat, made a creative and important early contribution. They won a calf at a fair, fed it, gave it to the foundation. The foundation sold it and put the money toward barn restoration.

Some others who propelled the organization along in the beginning included Paul Crockett, Carl Zurborg, Charles Manatt, Wayne Northey, Jo Ella Helmers Robinson.

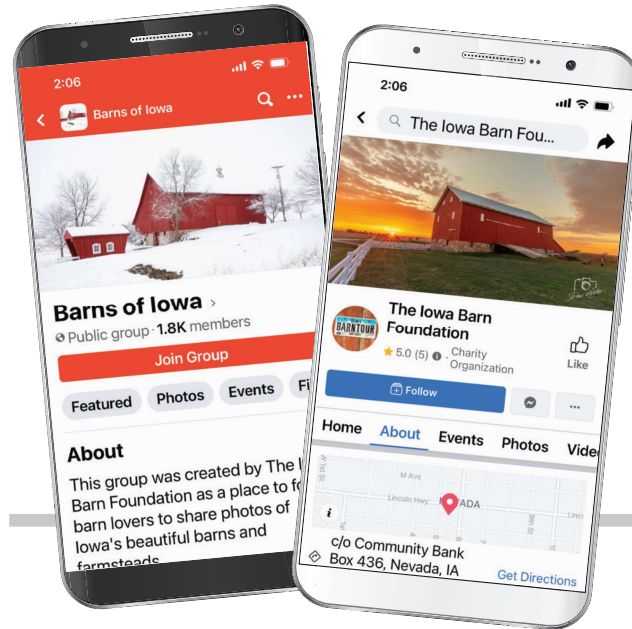
Paul Ramsey, native of Des Moines who spent summers with his aunt in Mount Ayr, read a small item about the Iowa Barn Foundation in a farm magazine. He joined the effort and restored his family barn near Mount Ayr with help from the first matching grant the group gave for barn restoration. That was the first project.

He invited Bill Krause, owner of Kum and Go and native of an Eldora farm, to join the board. Bill brought ideas to the board. His dedication was punctuated when, while very ill, drove to a barn meeting held in a cold barn near Winter set a few months before he passed. The meeting was to discuss a barn picnic in his home county.

Joe and Norma Lyon were there in the beginning days of the Iowa Barn Foundation and never left. Both had good hands-on advice after a lifetime of farming. Norma, the “butter cow lady”, known for the cows she sculpted for the Iowa State Fair, sculpted a barn for the fair one year.

Dr. Solon (Bud) Ewing, long-time distinguished professor of animal science at Iowa State, joined the board. He saw the need for a publication focusing on the history of the barns at Iowa State. He was ill, but he took on the project that took months. It is now the guide to the famous Iowa State barns. It was published in an Iowa State Barn Foundation magazine and is also on the web under Iowa State University animal science.

In the beginning were barn stalwarts like Bill Stone, Marshalltown, who was always first to get a new edition of the



2023 Facebook Updates

(Left) The newly launched Barns of Iowa FB group provides a place for you to share your Iowa barn photos and stories.

(Right) The Iowa Barn Foundation FB page helps you stay up to date with the latest news and activities.

magazine. Eleanor and Charles Ward, Marshalltown, filled in where needed for years along with Ober Anderson, Ankeny, and Don Jordahl, Des Moines. Also, Dennis Schrodt, Prole, and Maggie O'Rourke Earlham were helpful getting the endeavor launched.

Ames architect, Ken Dunker, offered to make note cards that we could sell at some of our events. Roxanne Mehlich Zearing, spent several years as an “executive assistant” helping wherever needed. She is now secretary of the foundation board. Terrence Jensen, Ames scientist, has been delivering magazines to barn owners prior to the tours for years. Boxholm native, Ray McFarland, a barber in Ames for years, has let us use his shop, All Cuts, as a “headquarters” for magazine distribution.

All of our barn photographs, which will always be beloved for their history, have been taken and given as contributions. Our photographers have included Don Poggensee, Ida Grove; Wilford Yoder, Iowa City; Ken Starek, Ackley; Ken Dunker, Ames.

Jeff Fitz-Randolph, Fairfield, creates our renowned web site, iowabarnfoundation.org. Michael Lanning, Ames, zealously volunteered to do the graphics

for our first semi-annual magazine and continued doing this for years. With the help of many, Jacqueline Andre Schmeal, has edited the Iowa Barn Foundation Magazine for 21 years.

Marlene and Duane Fenstermann, Decorah, have worked tirelessly as county representatives of the organization to make northeast Iowa renowned for its barns. Sherry Gribble, Ft. Atkinson, has also promoted barn preservation around the state. Ginnie Hargis and Ron McBroom have been organizers and writers. Recently Wayne Rimathe, Slater, has been coordinating county representatives.

Funding for grants has come from individuals and foundations. The Brown Foundation, Houston, and the Maytag Family Foundation (blue cheese), have been major funders of the effort.

This has been a major volunteer effort dedicated to preserving the history of Iowa. The list of folks from Iowa and beyond who have promoted this effort is endless.

Roy Reiman, Iowa native and owner of “Our Iowa”, appreciates barns and has been helpful to the foundation from the beginning with interest, donations, and ideas.

Editors Note by Dave Austin | I would like to personally thank Jacqueline for her 26+ years of dedication to the launch and success of the Iowa Barn Foundation. There is no single person in the state of Iowa who has done more to preserve Iowa’s agriculture history.

I was honored to be recruited by her to take over as the editor of the magazine last year. She remains as the Editor Emeritus, as I know that I will have frequent requests for guidance and advice going forward.

I would also like to thank Jeff Fitz-Randolph for his years of service to the Iowa Barn Foundation as the website editor. I worked closely with Jeff to give the website a makeover late last year, and it gave me a true appreciation for all of the time and effort Jeff put into making the site a hub for Iowa barn information.