



WHY WE SAVED OUR BARN



Wayne (left) and Jim (right) Frost outside the 1870s Frost Family Barn in Waterloo.



Before, during, and after photos of the Frost barn restoration project completed in the summer of 2018. An Amish construction crew from Fairbank, IA spent seven weeks working on the 88'x40'x40' barn that has been in the Frost family since 1946. The crew toiled for seven weeks taking off the old wood, replacing damaged beams/supports, and putting on all new southern yellow pine.

— BY WAYNE FROST —



A Barn Full of Restored Memories

We all have memories of our life growing up, and living on an Iowa farm created a wide array of experiences for me. As a boy, many of my earliest memories include the animals and the barn where many of them were located. I remember my Dad taking me out to the barn when I was about 5 years old as he did his morning chores. The cows were already milked, but there were still many things to do. He helped me climb the ladder to the hayloft where we tossed hay down to the milk cows. As I grew older many of the chores that my Dad did were passed from him to my older brothers and then to me. The barn is where we learned discipline and responsibility as chores needed to be done seven days a week morning and night.

The barn was also our playground. When relatives or neighbors visited this was one of the first places us kids would head for. We played cowboys and Indians, tag, building hay forts, swinging from ropes like Tarzan and jumping into the piles of hay, imitating all the early TV and radio show stars.

I took the barn for granted, as I got older it was just another building on the family farm. It wasn't until I moved away from home and then later had a chance to become co-owner of the property that I realized how important that old barn was to me. Sitting on the porch of the new house built on the old farmstead, I gazed across the road at the barn that held so many of my memories growing up and I frowned. The barn no longer matched my memories. The roof was sagging, boards were missing, rock walls crumbling and wood rotting.

Our barn was growing old, and it showed. It was built in the 1870s, and it had been in our family for over 75 years serving as a landmark for many. The last thing any of us wanted was to watch it slowly fall to the ground in ruin. Functionally, the barn had little value. My brother raised some sheep in it; however, we couldn't justify fixing it up for that reason. One particular discussion stood out in my mind. Would we still be living on the family farm of our youth if the barn was gone? Or, would we just be living in a house in the country? After much discussion, our hearts said to fix the old barn.

So, the plan to refurbish the barn came to life. The next question became — how do you find someone that works on old barns? No one builds them like this anymore. I asked several people for recommendations for a contractor, and they all recommended an Amish contractor from near Fairbank, IA.

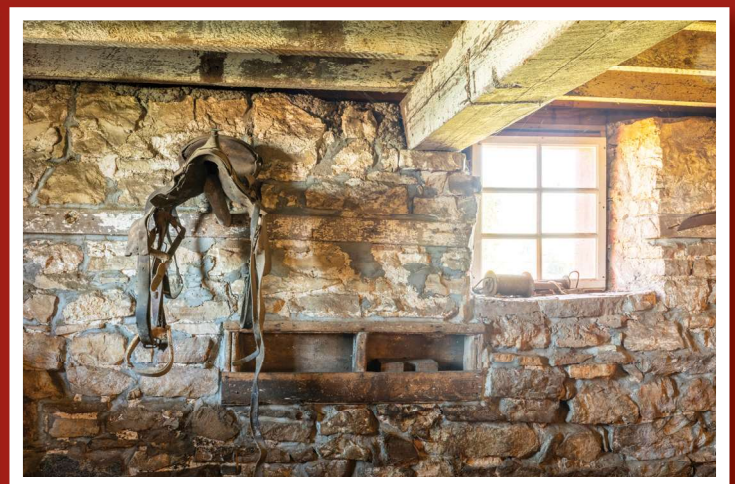
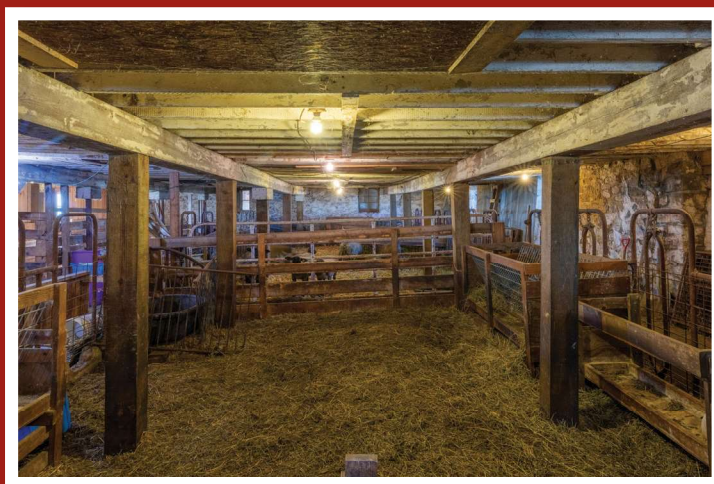
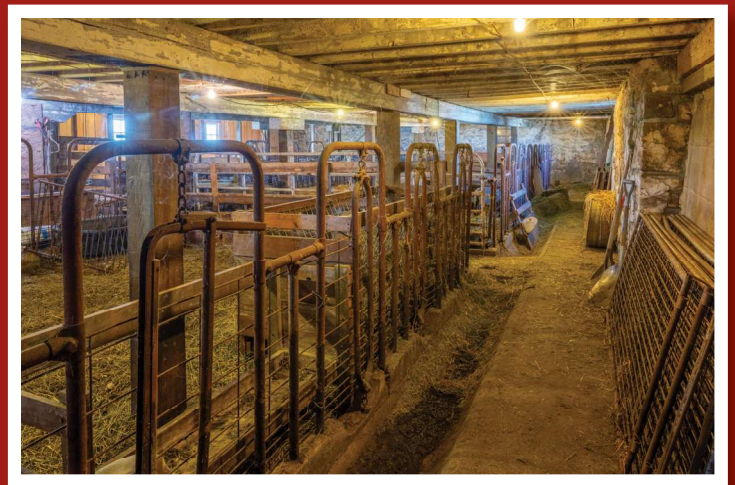
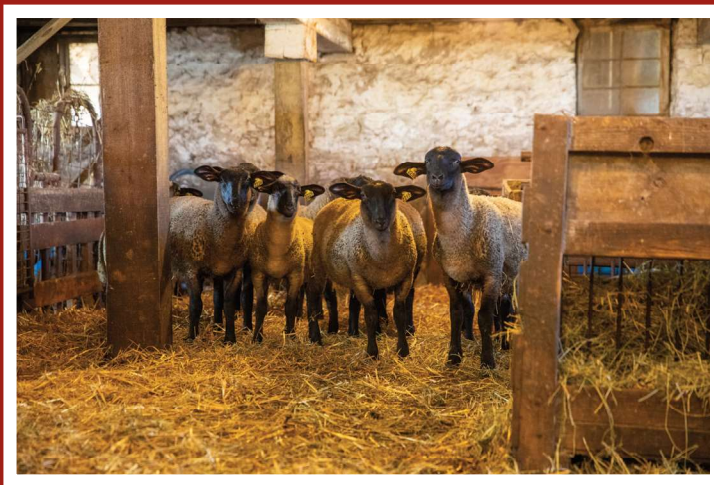
Before the contractor started, decisions had to be made on materials. I had quotes for both southern yellow pine with batting and steel. I had many discussions with friends and family over the benefits of each. If cost was the only factor, then steel would be the obvious choice. One conversation with my younger sister really stuck with me. She said, "If you put steel on the barn, you will have a very nice functional building. If you put wood on the barn, it will be just that, a very nice-looking barn!" So, it came down to either having a nice-looking building or a nice-looking barn that reminded us of all the memories we had growing up. The choice became clear.



The haymow continues to be used for storage of square bales of hay for Jim's flock of sheep.

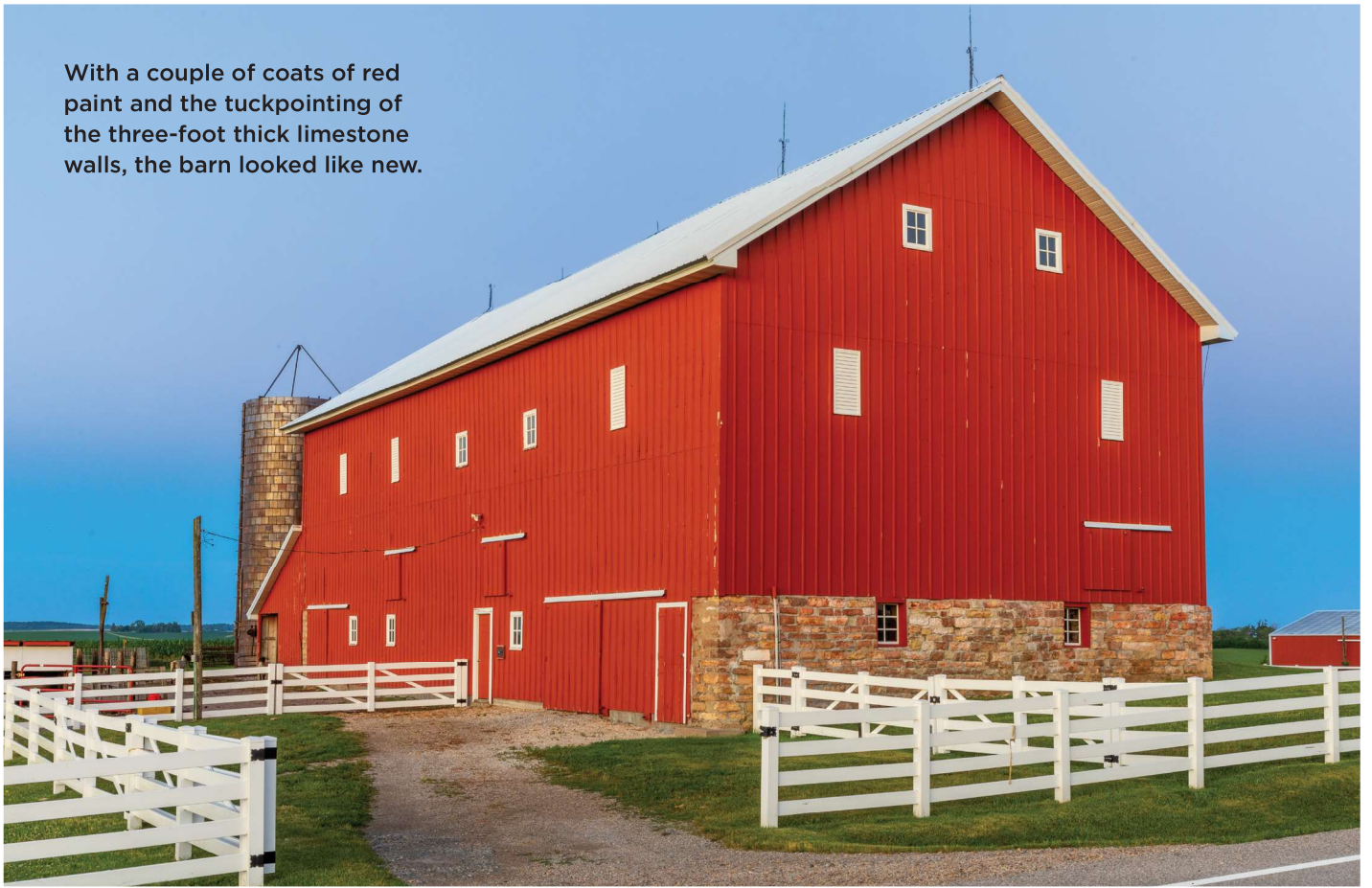


View looking up one of the haymow ladders used to get to the top stored hay when the barn is full.



The first floor of the barn has always been used for the animals and has seen changes over time. The north half of the first floor was originally used for horses, and the south half was used for milking cows and calf pens. In the late 1940's, the dirt floor was cemented and 27 new stanchions for the milk cows were installed. With tractors taking over the workload, the section for horses was switched to calf pens and a place to farrow hogs. The barn is now used to raise sheep. You can still see the original storage cutouts in the 3-foot limestone walls in the original horse area, which would have been the resting spot for a curry comb.

With a couple of coats of red paint and the tuckpointing of the three-foot thick limestone walls, the barn looked like new.



After seven weeks of work, the barn had all new wood on the sides. With two coats of red paint and the limestone walls tuckpointed it looked like new!

When you undertake a project like this, you come across a lot of memorabilia – like the old Daisy BB Gun found in a pile of hay. Did my Brother use it acting like he was Roy Rogers or Matt Dillon? Maybe it was my sister using it like Annie Oakley! Probably both, it was just a matter of who got to it first on that particular day! Digging through an old pile of lumber revealed the old hay saw used for cutting loose hay. We also found the old hay fork that carried loose hay up into the barn, which was later converted to carry up bales. Like many old items in the barn, it had been set aside when replaced by newer technology.

There were many initials and names carved in the wood, stone and cement. A few I recognized such as a couple of

hired men that worked for my Dad, one name I'm told came from an earlier owner. Three formally carved initials in a stone builders block in one of the rock walls I found through research belonged to the person that built the barn and who died in 1878. I found two planks with odd looking boards attached, in a pattern. It turns out these were part of a set of wooden stairs from the horse barn to the hayloft.

During the restoration process, the barn became the main topic at all family gatherings. Stories long since forgotten were revived and retold, revealing how central the barn was to our farm life. Each story told seemed to bring about even more memories. We never dreamed that restoring the barn would have the added benefits of restoring so many wonderful memories. Hoping that the generations that follow will start many conversations with “Do you remember

when they restored the barn”? Not only my family, but family members of previous owners, neighbors and sometimes complete strangers would stop, asking questions or reminiscing about the barn and its history. What a wonderful conversation piece the barn had become.

After the project was done, I caught myself thinking about if it was worth the time, labor and money? I was instantly reminded that I didn't just restore a barn....I restored all of my childhood memories. When I am sitting on my porch now looking across the road, I see one of the best decisions I ever made...and I can't help but smile.

I hope that as others read this story and see the pictures of our barn, they are reminded about their life growing up in farm country. Better yet, I hope it inspires others to save their barns and the memories that go with them.