

Great stone barns of Chester County

by JOANNESPAHR
WEST CHESTER, Pa. — The Chester County countryside is a scenic wonderland engulfed in history. Beautifully preserved and restored stone barns dot the gently rolling hillsides and elegant horsemen in their traditional liveries chase the proverbial fox over hill and dale, creating a languid atmosphere seemingly right

out of a Currier and Ives print.

For a visitor more concerned with barn structures than with quaint, picturesque scenes, one type of Chester County barn would be of interest. Known as a "double decker," this three-story structure is set up in a practical fashion.

"Banked a-hill with stone to weather", or constructed

with the north side of the barn built into a protecting hillside, the barnyards in these buildings are south oriented for maximum use of the sun, and with the stone materials holding in the warmth, are maximizers of solar energy.

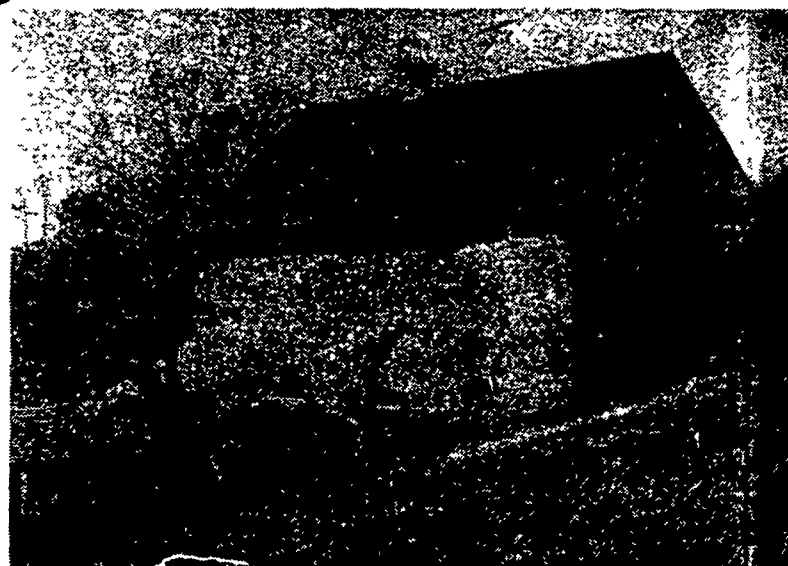
In a double-decker, a ramp leads to the barnfloor, or top floor in the building. This top level is raised from six to ten

feet above the ceiling of the stable, which is on the ground level. Sandwiched in between the stables and the barn floor is a granary, and on either side of the centrally located grain bins are hay mows. These mows begin at the ceiling of the stables and reach to the barn roof.

This type of construction was of great convenience for the farmers of 1800's because they could pull their wagons to the top floor, thresh their wheat, and let gravity do the rest of the work.

After the wheat was threshed, the grain fell into the granary through slits in the barn floor, and the straw was easily thrown into the straw mows at the front of the barn.

About the time of the Civil War, the threshing machine was invented and more wheat was produced. When this happened, the farmers needed more room to store the straw, and the architecture of the barns changed. Those who had a barn from a Civil War era just built wide wooden forebays over the barnyard to serve as straw sheds. They then knocked an archway through the stone walls and blew their excess straw into the newly added areas. These forebays extended as much as 20 feet,



One unique barn in the county has a ramp leading to the top floors, but entering from a different side than usual.

and the barn foundation could not support the additional weight, so supports were developed. The style of the supports which the Chester Countians adopted has become typical of the barns in the county. The shape of the supports was conical, and they were made from waste stones hedd in place with mortar. The entire column was also plastered smooth and whitewashed.

Many of these conical-

shaped supports can be found in Chester County today, as well as a few, full-round pillars. The full-round supports lack the lightness and grace of the tapered columns.

Grace was also added to the barns through the use of archways between the stables as portals. The materials used to construct the double deckers also was an asset to the beauty.

One particularly lovely type of stone was serpentine,

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This great stone barn has been preserved and refurbished. The sleek, white conical supports under the forebay are typical of the ap-

pearance of the barns back in the 1800's when farmers were kings in the county.

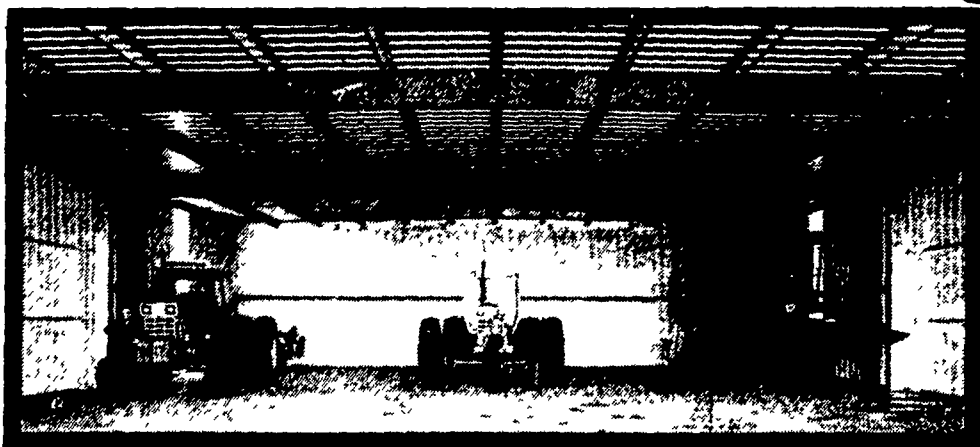
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