

Stories

and photos

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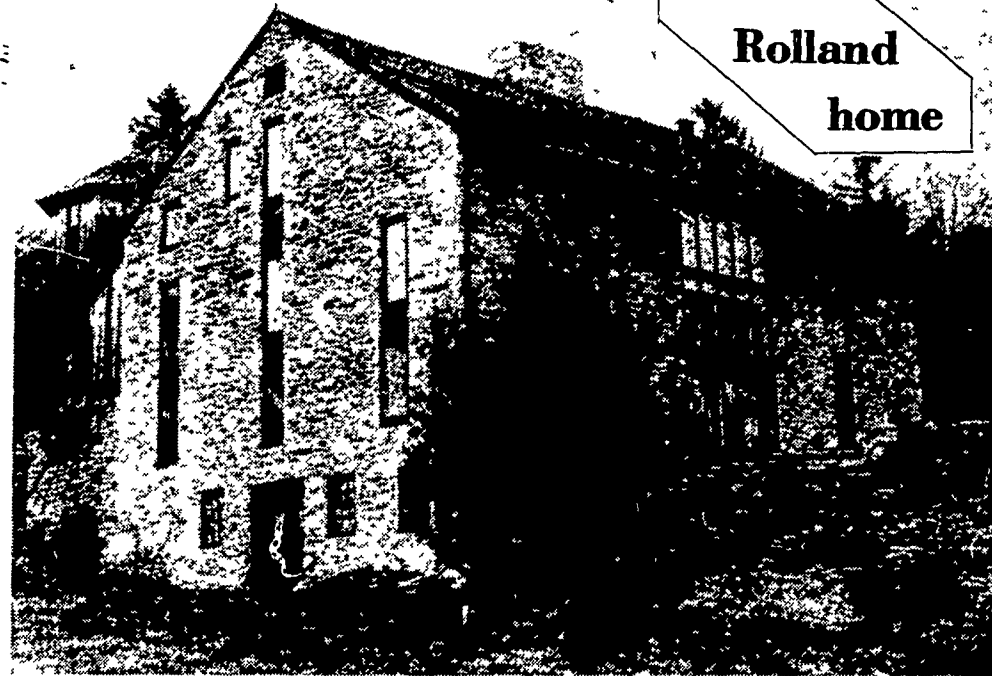
What ever happened to Chester County barns?

WEST CHESTER, Pa. - In the 1800's when Europeans "jolly well" went to "see what that place America," the farmer was king, and barns were the palaces of the states. At that time Chester County, Pennsylvania, was a key tourist attraction with its "great stone barns" as they have been referred to. These impressive edifices with their 25-inch thick stone walls, have lasted through the centuries and are, today, still standing as markers of ages gone by. Unfortunately, most of the farms that accompanied these buildings have been enveloped by suburbia.

This growth in population and diminishing of farmlands has meant either razing the barns and out-buildings or coming up with an adaptive use for the existing structure. And, made as they were for an era passed, the great stone barns of the county did not lend themselves to adaptation for modern farming.

Fortunately for Chester County, many of the barns have been saved and remodeled to fit a modern need. Some have become restaurants, supper clubs, theaters, or small, special museums. One or two have even become factories, craft centers, or artists' studios.

And, one especially popular use has been turning the barns into homes. The families who choose this method generally have a



The
Rolland
home

special attachment to the history of their particular building. One family has even said that on calm, cool Chester County nights, they can faintly hear the cattle lowing.

Not everyone has an imagination quite that active, however, and most individuals are content to just enjoy the uniqueness of their dwellings. And, unique, they are.

William and Donna Rolland, West Chester, and their sons are one such family who have come to reside in what could be termed their "dream

house." In six months they took a double decker barn (a type described in a previous story printed in Lancaster Farming on April 16) which had also been an ox driven or sweep-power grist mill, and made it into a comfortable dwelling which is also a conversation piece. And, while many barns in the county have been made into houses, this home has the distinction of incorporating the silo in the finished product, as well.

Of course, the early silos constructed at the turn of the century weren't the huge blue silos we have today. The

Rolland's is an octagonal shaped structure which measures 16 feet, flat to flat. They kept the original structure and added vertical windows, a door, and spruce siding. The children's bedroom is located on the fourth level of the one-time five story silo which also contains a family room on the third level, a darkroom on the second, and an unused room at the base of the former wooden silage container. Another eight feet of enclosed space lies below that, although the Rollands filled it with debris created when a passage was made

between the barn and silo.

"The family room and the boys' bedroom are really dedicated to the children," Mrs. Rolland explained. Because of this, she chose to paint the original wood on the interior of the family room with yellow paint and to install orange carpet. The wooden beams are purple.

"It's time to renovate again," stated Mrs. Rolland with a grin. After seven years of living with the same color room and the same interior decorated home, she feels she'd like a change.

What gave them the idea to use the silo for bedrooms, family room, and more? Mrs. Rolland explained, in her own words, "It was here, it was unusual, and it was relatively intact." It was also a "nice shell to work with." So, they put it to good use, and today it is the part of the home that gets the most wear.

The barn, itself, which housed a dairy operation along with a grist mill at one time, was perfect for the design of large, spacious rooms in the upper decks. The dimensions are 40 feet by 60 feet by 45 feet (at the peak).

All existing exposed beams were left to serve as room or area dividers which allowed the original architecture to dominate the remodeling. As a result, the house is basically laid out in

[Continued on Page 50]

WEST CHESTER, Pa. - For the Dennis Wilsons, West Chester, turning a barn into a home for their family represented a challenge which they couldn't resist.

After first considering building a home of their own, their thoughts changed to coming up with their dwelling by some other method.

After scouting around for all the various possibilities, Mrs. Wilson called her husband one day, and asked, "How's a barn sound to you?"

"Great!" was the reply, which plunged them both into a major renovating job.

The most notable feature of the Wilson home is the great amount of glass on the southern exposure.

"We wanted the light prominently," stated Wilson, then noted that heating was a second consideration. While many barns remodeled into homes are hard to heat, the Wilson's only has a five per cent



The
Wilson
home

heating loss. To create the appearance their abode now has, they cut

back part of the barn roof and added thermopane glass in its place wherever the

glass went into the interior of the house. "We were also working

with three walls of stone on the East, West, and North sides, so doing this to the southern exposure was the natural choice," he pointed out.

Why did they choose a barn to remodel?

"That's like asking why a person climbs Mount Everest," replied Wilson. "It was just there."

After a few minutes of consideration, he explained that although the barn is part of a housing development, it is located far enough from the road to be private, and yet close enough to other people not to be totally secluded.

At present, the Wilsons are still landscaping the grounds and installing a pool. Although they have finished the horse stables connected to the south wall of the home, Wilson joked that so far only a "spayed kitten" has made its home there.

[Continued on Page 54]