

# The struggle of our back-alley barns to survive

**BY DICK ANGLESTEIN**  
**MIDTOWN BACK ALLEYS** — I'm a small-town, back-alley wanderer.

Originally, I got hooked on this habit while chasing red and yellow farm machinery across the country.

Whenever a weekend or the weather interfered with filming or photographing, I'd take an afternoon and wander around the town I happened to be in at the time. Most of these aimless amblings were through the back alleys, particularly those near the center of town.

These sporadic side street strolls have taken me from Middlebury, Vt., where dairy cattle graze in the shadow of the Green Mountains, to dust-choked McAllen, Tex., where if the heat and humidity don't get you in the fields the sorghum fuzz will. Or from mud-clogged coastal Swan Quarter, N.C., where combines are equipped with special flotation tires to battle sea-borne storms, to Junction City, Ore., where grass seed is the major crop.

I've found that streets and alleys are a lot like people.

To me, the main streets are like strangers. You never know exactly what you may be meeting. Main

streets change their faces every few years and you have to guess what lies beneath the new facade.

But back alleys are like old friends. There's hardly ever an artificial facade or pretense. What you see is what there is.

Now that my vocational meanderings are limited primarily to Lancaster County and close environs, I finally have a chance to practice my habit at home.

So, I picked my hometown, Litz, and nearby Manheim and went back-alley window shopping.

In both towns and only a block or two from the center of each, I found some of the finest preserved specimens of small (and large) stables and barns around.

The nearest livestock to any of them is likely a mile or more away, but I could imagine the time a horse or family milk cows peeked through the doorways, now shut tight against the current street-spawned smog and backyard barbecue atmosphere.

Like volunteer corn in the middle of a soybean field, these silent sentinels struggle to survive amidst the new environment which has grown up all around them.

Squeezed and sandwiched by yards, paved alleys, garages, utility poles and lines, these little patches of the past are examples of an agricultural oasis in an urban desert.

These isolated back-alley barns and stables stand as reminders of the agricultural roots from which the engulfing urban surroundings sprang.

There aren't too many left anymore — most have been swallowed by the surroundings. Perhaps, if an Amos Funk had been around earlier a few more would have been preserved.

I can't help wonder though whether the time will ever come when the barns and buildings of the rural countryside will similarly become choked and eventually consumed.

Both Litz and Manheim have historical districts, but they're mainly concerned with the main streets, where sand-blasted brick and repointed stone homes are the focal point.

Perhaps, it's time to start a SPMTBABS group — Society for the Preservation of Midtown Back Alley Barns and Stables.

If enough get interested, maybe their preservation zeal will expand to the

farmlands where it is truly needed.

In any event, I'm thankful for one geographical reality though. There are not too many barns and stables left in the midtown sections of

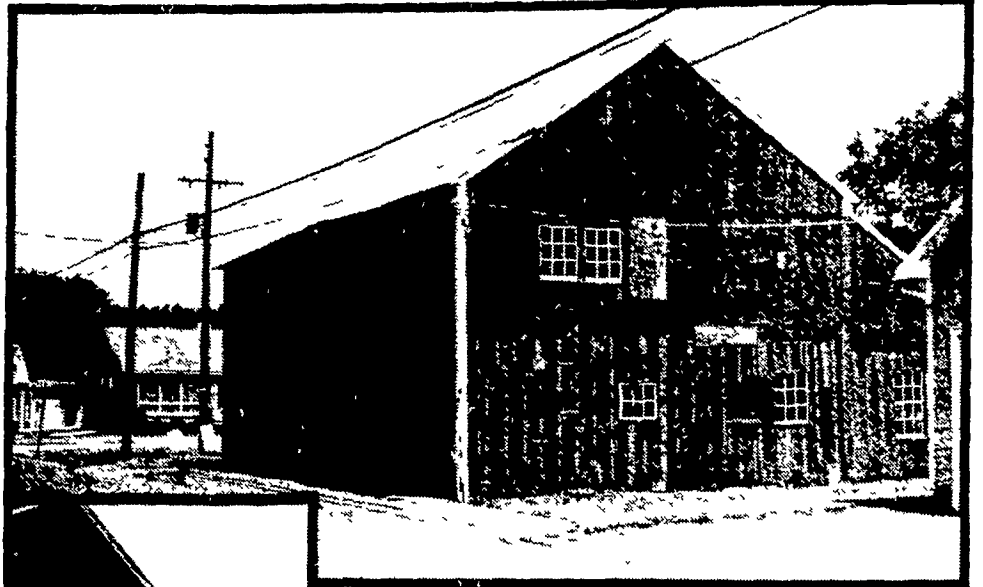
the big metropolitan areas. It's a lot safer wandering around the alleys of Litz or Manheim than Chicago or Philadelphia.

So, the next time you come to town, wherever it may be,

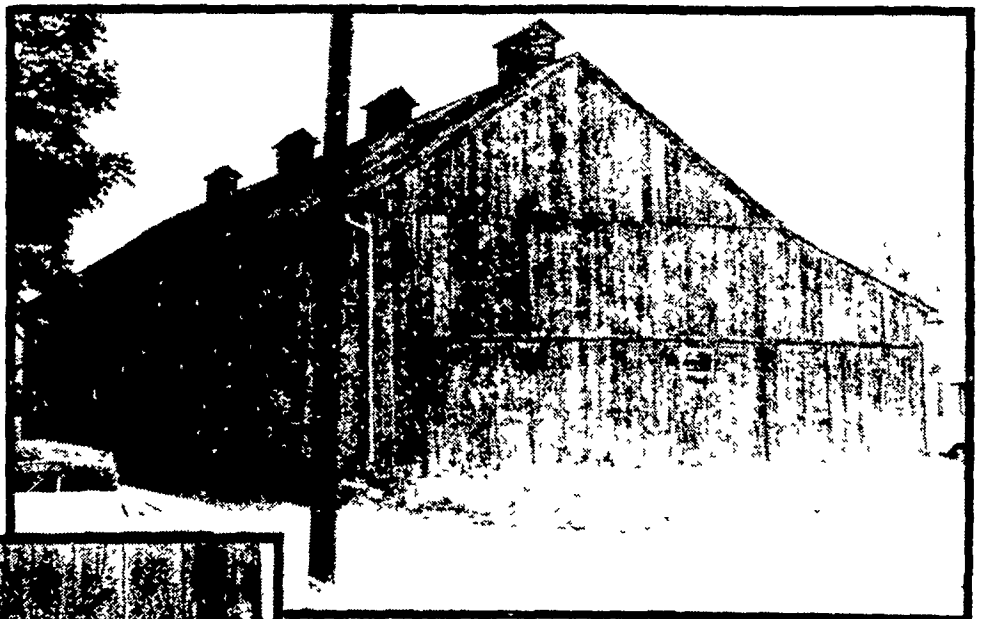
and get a little homesick for the country, take a walk down a back alley or two.

You might be surprised at what you'll find there.

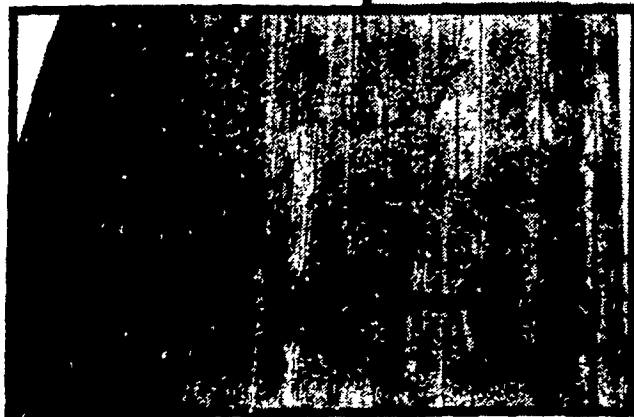
It might even be me.



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