

Kid's KOrner

Artisans Strive To Preserve Nation's Historic Barns

DEDHAM, Mass. — America's old barns are crumbling away, but people like Richard W. Babcock are trying to save as many of them as possible.

Babcock, owner of a barn museum at Hancock, Mass., has developed powerful arms and shoulders from 30 years of hefting huge wooden beams in restoring, rehabilitating, and rejuvenating ancient barns from New England and New York.

He's a zealous missionary who tells anyone who will listen, "The original barn is a priceless antique." Using fastidiously maintained, old-fashioned tools such as adzes and hewing axes, he has rebuilt about 75 barns.

Objects Of Nostalgia

Babcock has considerable company throughout the United States. Old barns of all kinds are objects of nostalgia, relics of our agrarian past, and reminders of simpler times.

Every section of the country has distinctive traditional barns, many of them decaying. New barns tend to be look-alike metal sheds, functional but devoid of romance.

Most of Babcock's restored barns have been moved from their original sites. Many have become the core of expensive homes with high, peaked ceilings and interior frames of massive, hand-hewn oak beams. In what Babcock views as his crowning achievement, he moved two 18th-century barns

from upstate New York to suburban Vienna, Va., where they are now the Barns of Wolf Trap, an acoustically exemplary performing-arts center.

Here in Dedham, a Boston suburb, Babcock, 52, and his small crew of artisans are putting the finishing touches on a pre-revolutionary barn belonging to the Animal Rescue League of Boston. Babcock calls the project "a fusion of history with modern methods for the treatment of animals."

History is critical to all of Babcock's projects. "I've become a nut about it," he says. He spends hours in courthouses, diligently tracking down details, the barns he preserves. Sometimes he writes brief histories of the barns.

From his assiduous research he has learned, among other things, that pre-revolutionary New England plantation owners had many black slaves. He has found — and dismantled — what he thinks is a barn built by French settlers near Hoosick, N.Y., in the mid-16th century, long before most historians have recorded their presence.

"I'm concerned that too many people are looking at barns for profit, and they're really not much interested in the history," Babcock says. "A little of that may be good, but maybe too much of it is terribly bad, because we lose some wonderful history."



Richard W. Babcock stands before the pre-revolutionary barn that he has rehabilitated at the Pine Ridge Animal Center in Dedham, Mass. He calls the project "a fusion of history with modern methods for the treatment of animals." Babcock, who devotes his life to the preservation of old barns, conducts exhaustive research on their history, then uses old-fashioned tools to rebuild them. "The original barn is a priceless antique," he says.

Quakers' Stone Barns

A few states away, in Pennsylvania, Dale Lehmer quit his job as a social worker 10 years ago and turned to full-time barn rehabilitation in Chester County, home of many stone barns built by Quaker farmers in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Lehmer, now 42, specializes in barn conversions, often to houses or additions. "I don't want barns to vanish," he says. "They have a certain artistic quality about them. They put people in touch with their history." In ages past, he says, "The amount of work people put into barns — and love and commit-

ment — matches what went into churches."

Martha Leigh Wolf, historic preservation specialist at the Brandywine Conservancy's Environmental Management Center in Chadds Ford, in Chester County, sharply distinguishes between restoration — actually restoring a barn to its original condition — and rehabilitation, or "adaptive reuse," for another purpose, such as a house.

Many rehabilitations bother her. "So many barns are handsome buildings," she says, "but they lose their barnness, so to speak."

Babcock argues that a rehabili-

tation, when don right, preserves the integrity of the original barn.

"It's an effective means of preservation, too," he says. "It isn't just robbing a barn off the land. It's actually even doing more with it."

Barclay and Lucy Tittmann and their family live in a spacious house in Concord, Mass., that Babcock rehabilitated from an 18th-century New York barn. "It's very much a way of life," says Mrs. Tittmann. "It's hard to imagine living in another kind of house after this."

Although barn rehabilitation may be concentrated in the North-

(Turn to Page B12)

COLOR THIS!

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. PINK | 6. LT. GREY |
| 2. RED | 7. GREEN |
| 3. DK. GREY | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

SEALS: ALL SEALS HAVE THE SAME GENERAL SHAPE, BUT THEY VARY IN SIZE FROM THE HARBOR SEAL TO THE GREAT ELEPHANT SEAL. THE USUAL COLORS ARE GRAYS AND BROWNS. SOME ARE SPOTTED OR HAVE BANDS AND RINGS OF A DARKER COLOR. THEIR PUPS ARE BORN ON THE POLAR ICE PACK.

