

These Old Barns Have A Story To Tell

BY GINGER SECRIST
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CARLISLE — Nancy Van Dolsen is a city-girl from Philadelphia that has always loved building and American History. This young lady's educated eye for architectural design and a learned love for her new home in this area are being utilized to help preserve agricultural history in Cumberland County.

Van Dolsen is the Project Director of the Cumberland County Resource Survey in conjunction with the Cumberland County Historical Society. Her work is the result of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 which requires the states to survey and research all structures built before 1940 to determine which sites might be eligible of the National Registry of Historical Places.

Work in Cumberland County started in July of 1984 and is scheduled for completion this summer. Similar work is currently being done in Clinton County. Of the 67 counties in the state, only 11 have been completed, while some project work has been done in 41 counties. The program is funded by matching grants-in-aid to the states for historical resource surveys and planning projects.

To date Van Dolsen and an assistant have surveyed over 10,000 sites in Cumberland County, of which about 1200 buildings were further researched. The type of sites included in the survey have been barns dating from 1760 to 1910, industrial sites, such as grain mills, brick kilns and even a blacksmith shop, bridges, and all 18th Century building still in tact.

While all this would seem to be distant from today's farming picture in the county, Van Dolsen stresses that the project has several benefits for the community. In documenting her work, funds donated by the Cumberland County Farm Women have been utilized to prepare a slide presentation on the farm sites, the means of construction, and agricultural practices and concerns of the day. Van Dolsen has presented these slides to groups like Farm Women, the Rotary Club, and local classrooms.

Van Dolsen has found that this has helped to heighten the community's historical awareness, stressed the need for preservation of not only the farms but the rural structures, and has stressed the importance of agriculture in the county's history.

Having already viewed 10,000 sites and just now finishing her master's degree work with the University of Delaware in American history with an emphasis on early architecture, Van Dolsen has a pretty good idea what a site might



Nancy Van Dolsen, Project Director of the Cumberland County Resource Survey points out a 13' long stone in the end of one of Cumberland County's most beautiful stone-end barns. The barn was built in 1858 by Jacob Waggoner. The stone mason, Steve Losh, carved his name in the stone. Losh was from Perry County.

date on the county records. Still, she follows a set process for each survey.

The survey's work is divided into municipalities. Working with geological maps and inserting dots and marks from previous county census, she can determine all structures built before 1952.

Van Dolsen then drives to the site and requests permission from the owner to take an exterior photo of the site. Van Dolsen stated that with the advance press releases and heightened interest in the project's work, most people have been very cooperative.

She then interviews the present owner for information on the records and dates of ownership and asks about any unusual architectural features they might be aware of. Van Dolsen notes that she has become very proficient at recognizing additions or window changes that might foretell of an earlier dating than the present owner may have realized.

Once she has determined that a site warrants further investigation, a detailed survey form is completed. This form includes such information as the date of original construction, period, style, description, significance, and bibliography. Copies of the survey are then sent to the state, the owner, the municipality, and one is retained for her file.

Finding such information on each site is no small task. Van Dolsen revealed that the 1798 Direct Tax was based on the number of windows a structure contained, so this serves as one of the benchmarks for dating a structure. Other sources she uses are deeds, tax assessment records, wills, Orphan's Court records, county newspapers, and genealogy files.

Van Dolsen lists as her most historically significant find the dis-

covery of the home of General William Thompson. Thompson, who had a colorful military career during the American Revolution, was known as an Indian Trader, and surveyor. Locating his home has attracted both local and federal interest.

She explained, "The house is very small, but is totally intact. No one even knew it was there. The property is owned by an absentee landlord. It's surprising that the building wasn't torn down by now."

Another interesting site was the discovery of a local blacksmith shop. Two generations of the same family worked there and had their names carved on the exterior of the door. When she surveyed the site she found tools that were 130 years old, all ranked in place near the forge and bellows.

Still, the sites Van Dolsen finds attracts most people's attention are the old barns in the county. These include log barns, brick-end barns, stone-end barns, and Pennsylvania frame bank barns.

The survey has found only 12-15 standing log barns in the



This shows the detailed framing of a stone barn in Monroe Township in Cumberland County. This barn has been demolished since this picture was taken.



This stone bridge located in Middlesex Township in Cumberland County is one of the few which still survive. It was built in the late 19th Century. The State wanted to tear it out and put in a newer one since it does not meet current standards. The Zelgler Families now maintain its upkeep.



This brick-end barn was built by Jacob Mumma in 1861. It is located in Monroe Township in Cumberland County. Brick-end barns are found only in central Pa and northern Maryland in this country. Historians still do not know where the designs for these barns originated.

county and most of these were on the western side. Van Dolsen feels sure there are more of these type barns standing but most have been covered with another material. These barns were the easiest to construct and expand and served a variety of purposes.

The locality's brick-end barns are the most unique architectural design in this area. Brick-end barns are found only in northern Maryland and central Pennsylvania. Stated Van Dolsen, "No one knows for sure where the patterns for the brick-end barns originated. There is a honeycomb or wheat sheath pattern found on some barns in England, but we don't know anything about the other patterns."

Stone-end barns in the county date from 1780 to 1860. The ends and foundations of these barns were constructed of limestone or field stone. The stone could be

rough or smooth cut. Van Dolsen noted that often a farmer had the end of his barn facing the road more finished than the end away from the road. Sometimes only the end facing the road was done in stone and the other end might be framed. This reveals the pride a farmer took in his barn and the good impression he hoped a handsome barn might make on passersby.

Pennsylvania frame bank barns are by far the vast majority of the barns found in the county according to Van Dolsen. These barns were erected between 1860 and 1920. They range in size from the smallest being 30' by 40' to the largest at 40' by 80'. Their style includes both English type and full Pa. bank barn lay-outs.

One site that has drawn considerable public interest is the Frederick Watts Farm located just north

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This is the Frederick Watts Farm located in North Middleton Township. This was built as a model tenant farm in the mid-1800's by the man who founded Penn State University. The 100 acre farm is scheduled to be paved over by ABF Trucking Company to put in the country's largest truck terminal.



This stone house and barn located in Middlesex Township in Cumberland County typifies the agricultural architectural design prevalent of farmsteads in south central PA.

The slide-wall and exterior framing of the Frederick Watts' PA Bank Frame Barn shows the quality of workmanship used that has kept this barn standing for over 130 years.