

**Great Care Taken to Preserve a Rare Barn Type in Ohio:
The Testimonial of Reid Curtis**

I have been a city guy my entire life: Seattle, San Francisco, Boston, Columbus. But I grew up country: camping, farming, and square dancing. My father had a job with the government. He worked in downtown Seattle and wore a suit each day (a suit with a cowboy hat and cowboy boots). So inherently, as I have grown older, my urge to return to my country roots has gotten stronger and stronger.



Northwest oblique of Curtis' barn before rehabilitation, Somerset, OH. All photographs by author.

About 2 years ago, I had an itch to find a weekend retreat. Somewhere to escape from my hectic week at my corporate job with Limited Brands. I searched high and low for my dream property. I drove for hours on end each weekend, looking at properties I had found online. I was a firm believer that the property would find me versus I finding it. And then it happened. I was meeting with my financial advisor (seeking his thumbs up on my dream purchase), and as I described what I was looking for, he started smiling. Just the day before, another client of his had told him about a property that he had just listed: 7 acres in Somerset, Ohio, which is about 45 miles outside of Columbus. On the property was a stone farmhouse built in 1803 and a huge barn of some sort. I knew nothing about barns. I was more excited about the house and the land. He sent me the link that afternoon and I knew it was the right place for me. I drove out the next day to look at the property from the street. I grew more excited. I immediately called the realtor and arranged a walkthrough for the following day. Even more excited. Within 24 hours, an offer was made and accepted. It was mine, finally.

What I realized quickly was that although the home was in remarkable condition, the barn was not. Its foundation was crumbling, the roof was rusted. No drainage. In fact the entire barn was wired up to several trees (apparently trying to keep it from falling down the hill). Over the years, previous owners had "band-aided" its issues. It was such a beautiful, historic piece of architecture, and I loved taking guests inside of it. To me, it felt like I was entering Noah's Ark. The logs were so giant. All hand hewn. Grand in every way. Safety was a giant concern of mine. I didn't want it to collapse while friends and family were inside of it. And to all that entered, it certainly felt like that moment of collapse was moments away. I had a new goal: save this barn. I had options. Tear it down, sell the logs, and make some money on it. But my gut told me that this wasn't the right thing to do. It needed to be preserved. It needed to look the way it did when it was built. The estimates of its "birthday" ranged from 1793 to 1836. I haven't been able to confirm that date.



At left, southwest oblique of barn before rehabilitation and, at right, interior view of crib and threshing floor.



View of southwest corner during work..

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Before I made my ultimate decision to restore, I needed to do some research. What type of barn was this? How may it have been used? How long had it existed? As I mentioned before, still haven't landed the exact year it was built. What I did learn after reading through nearly every barn book out there, is that it is a Pennsylvania Double Crib Sweitzer Barn. It is even shown in the book, "Pennsylvania Bank Barns" by Robert Ensminger.

The barn is massive in size. A stone foundation, built into the hill with a dramatic cantilevered forebay. Threshing and storage took place on the main floor with animals stored below. The original mangers still existed. Only 2 of the original barn doors were still intact and they were in bad shape. Unfortunately, due to poor maintenance of the water drainage systems (none), the foundation was crumbling or missing in about 20% of the perimeter. Through my reading, I learned that keeping water off the foundation and the logs was the number one priority in barn sustainment. I had no drainage. My roof was rusted and missing portions, and the foundation a mess.

I had worked with Matt Wolf from Centennial Preservation, based in Columbus, on some stone work that needed to be fixed on the house. He was so easy to work with, he understood historical preservation, and his quote was a lot more digestible than some of the others I had received. We came up with a plan in October of 2012 and began the execution of that plan in November. For the next 9 months, through snow, ice, rain, sun, his team worked tirelessly to complete the job. On the list of "to-do's" was: Foundation repair, new roof, new drainage, and new siding. Replacement of all doors (11 in total, 2 of which are 660 pounds each).

There is no intent for the barn other than to preserve it for others to explore and enjoy. I have no farm animals and I don't grow wheat or hay. My only goal for the bottom floor, where the animals were once held, is to clear it out. Years and years of past owners doing baseline work to keep the barn from collapse. Makeshift support columns were everywhere. At the end of the day, I wanted as much cleared out of the basement as possible to allow space to store for firewood, my lawnmowers, and a car potentially. Matt was able to execute all of the above. I struggled with the decision on barn color for some time. Go red, or leave as is? Ultimately, I have decided to leave as is. I would like it to weather naturally. Electricity may be added in 2014, but it is not a priority right now.

I am so happy with the work that Matt and his team did. A big undertaking and an amazing outcome. It is truly a historical showpiece.

There isn't a weekend when a local stranger doesn't drive up the driveway to check out the progress, to compliment the work, or to just say thank you for preserving a piece of Somerset history; well worth the time and dollars put into the project!



View of southeast oblique of barn after rehabilitation work was complete.