

Panoramic Ohio



PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS R. SCHIFF

Our Old Bookcase, April 6, 2017, Preserving Mercer County & Ohio's big old barns

Photo caption: Ohio's Barns were highlighted during Ohio's Bicentennial in 2003. This image is the cover of the book, "Panoramic Ohio," with photographs by Thomas R. Schiff.

OUR OLD BOOK CASE

By Joyce L. Alig, President, Mercer County Historical Society

In cooperation with Ohio's Bicentennial celebration, the Cincinnati Art Museum published Thomas R. Schiff's photographs, using a Hulcherama 360 Panoramic Camera of 75 images across the State of Ohio. In Mercer County, Schiff photographed the Annual Amphicar Owners Club Swim In, at Celina's Lake Festival and the Mercer County Fair. In Auglaize County, he photographed Wapa Theatre, Wapakoneta.

Our daughter Colleen Linhart, who lives at Westerville with her family, sent me a notice about a project at the Westerville Schools, attended by her sons. The Students from the Westerville City Schools' Gifted Education Program wanted to emphasize the importance of preserving the many historic barns dotting Ohio's Countryside. The Students took their idea to Republican Representative Ann Gonzales of suburban Columbus. As a result, the Ohio House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill designating the barn as the Official Historical Architectural Structure of Ohio. Gonzales stated that this bill honors Ohio's agricultural heritage and legacy of farm production.

Westerville Students who testified at the Statehouse reminded Ohioans that many of Ohio's Bicentennial 2003 painted barns are still standing across Ohio.

When Colleen talked with me about this, she asked about the Mercer County Historical Society's book, *"Those Magnificent Big Barns of Mercer County, of Western Ohio."* I photographed over 2000 big old barns in Mercer County, for that project, 1990-1993. Over a thousand of those barns were placed in this book. The farmers also shared old photographs of their barns, as well as shared the history of those big old barns. Most of those big old barns are still standing today in Mercer County.

However, two large historic preservation construction companies are approaching local farmers about taking down their big old barns and then re-constructing them at historic sites, outside of Mercer County. I feel bad enough when any of those big old barns are destroyed by fire, or are dismantled and/or destroyed in Mercer County. However, when I see that other Ohio Counties and other States value Mercer County's historic big old barns enough to preserve Mercer County's big old barns, to relocate these barns to their Ohio Counties or to other States of the Union, my heart hurts. I wonder why Mercer and Auglaize Counties spend money on tourism but somehow see no relationship about spending money to preserve historic sites, and/or to preserve the museums in both counties to attract tourists. Other Ohioans and other States' citizens value Mercer County's barns more than Mercer Countians do. As a business venture, it is cost-prohibitive for farmers to maintain these big old barns. Are there not other uses which Mercer Countians can create, to save these big old barns and keep them in Mercer County? Maybe Government can offer property tax credit for people who preserve these historic barns?

Allen Bernard recently published a book, *"Lost Treasures of Granville and Marion Townships, Mercer County, Ohio. . . When It's Gone. . . It's Gone."* Bernard is alerting Mercer Countians to wake up.

When the big old barns in Mercer and Auglaize Counties are gone. . . they will be gone. The efforts which I have made to preserve Mercer County's Agricultural and Architectural History by photographing over 2000 big old Mercer County Barns and preserving their history, and publishing this book through the Mercer County Historical Society, apparently are appreciated by the many people who thank me for my work. That makes me proud to serve the public with the Mercer County Historical Society, Inc.

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