

## Roger Hubert – Barn Yarns

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Barn Yarns. Those are stories about barns which tell of the historic roles that barns have played in Kansas. Today, in the conclusion of our two-part series, we'll meet a man who has helped lead a statewide effort to preserve such barns. It's today's Kansas Profile.

As we learned last week, Roger Hubert is a barn preservationist. His uncle's old barn sparked a lifelong interest in history and preservation. In 2002, Roger moved back to Kansas and eventually found an old stone farmstead which he is restoring and where he lives now, south of the rural community of Sylvan Grove, population 319 people. Now, that's rural.

Roger's concerns about the loss of historic barns were shared by others. In January 2006, Roger and other advocates of barn preservation met at the K-State College of Architecture, Planning and Design. They formed a new organization called the Kansas Barn Alliance which works to support barn preservation statewide. The organization has a Board of Directors, an annual Barn Fest, and a regular newsletter.

Roger Hubert was on the board for six years and now serves on the advisory committee for the Kansas Barn Alliance. He writes the newsletter articles called Barn Yarns. These were recently compiled into a booklet.

One Barn Yarn told of a person who had gone to one abandoned farmstead for parties as a teenager, long before its barn had been restored. The kids were in the abandoned house and decided to build a fire in the heating stove for warmth. Smoke quickly filled the rooms so they realized the chimney had been obstructed. The kids went outside, only to find that they had set fire to a raccoon's nest in the chimney. The coon himself had caught fire and was running for refuge directly toward the hay-filled barn! The kids made a mad dash after the raccoon and caught him before he could set the barn on fire. Roger wrote, "Is that called instant barn preservation?"

In another case, a freak tornado hit a barn that had just been filled with hay. The tornado lifted the barn off its foundation and deposited it next door while leaving the haystack perfectly intact. Neighbors came to view this oddity. The farm wife noticed that the visitors seemed to leave laughing. She went around to the back side of the still-stacked haybales and saw a bright row of bottles of forbidden brew, formerly hidden but now exposed to public view. It was said that another tornado hit the house, this one in the form of the housewife. "This story still brings belly laughs to the family," Roger said.

Other stories are poignant. One was about a solid oak barn built in 1916. The farmer's son brought their wooden threshing machine into the newly-built barn where he planned future harvests after serving in the Army during World War I. Tragically, the son never came home. He was a casualty in the war. The threshing machine still sits inside the abandoned barn nearly 100 years later.

Roger Hubert points out that barns are being lost at an alarming rate. "We're down to less than ten percent of the barns which used to exist in our state," Roger said.

“The first reason people give for tearing down barns is so they don’t have to pay taxes on them,” Roger said. This becomes an unintended incentive to tear barns down rather than fix them up.

“County appraisers should be able to have policies which, if you fix up the barn, then it would be taken off the tax roles,” Roger said. “That would generate work for local employment, lumberyards and hardware which would be good for the local economies. Sure, there’s no tax if the barn is destroyed,” Roger said. “Why not no tax if the barn is saved, which increases real value for the whole county?” For more information, go to [www.kansasbarnalliance.org](http://www.kansasbarnalliance.org).

Barn Yarns have been a way to share barn stories and possibilities. We salute Roger Hubert and others involved with the Kansas Barn Alliance for their work to support and preserve the historic barns of Kansas. Roger certainly knows how to wind a yarn.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.