

Roger Hubert – Barn preservation

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

Can a barn be reborn? Today we'll meet a man who believes strongly that barns are a vital element of our history and that they should be utilized and preserved. His personal journey in barn preservation has led him to rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Roger Hubert is a barn preservationist. He grew up in Johnson County. His grandparents farmed near Topeka.

One of his uncles had a large limestone barn and house on a farm near Alma where Roger spent his summers. "I was mesmerized by it," Roger said. He was fascinated by the shape, scale and history of the old stone barn which had been constructed by a Civil War veteran.

Roger was especially interested in history. "My granddad would be diggin' post holes for fence when I was a kid," Roger said. "But I wasn't much help 'cause I was looking for arrowheads in the dirt."

Roger attended the University of Kansas where he studied architecture, art history, and archaeology. He went on archaeological digs in Italy, Greece, Egypt, and Central America. He always was interested in saving and restoring old buildings. While in New Mexico, he found he could make an income from saving and selling old, historic structures.

One day, in an antique store in Lincoln County, New Mexico, he saw a nice painting of a small farmstead silhouetted in a sunset. He bought the painting for five dollars, took it home, hung it up, and said, "There's my dream house."

Meanwhile, a large, rundown ranch named Los Luceros was up for sale in New Mexico. Roger outbid a developer and found a way to buy the ranch and restore its historic buildings. That ranch is now part of the state's museum and park system. "I'm glad I was able to save Los Luceros," he said.

His ultimate goal was to find and restore a genuine stone farmstead in an undeveloped area of the Kansas prairie. He made lots of trips back to Kansas and eventually moved back, but couldn't find just the right place to restore. "I had lots of goose chases," he said. "There were stone houses without barns and barns without houses. Some were too far gone, and some were too close to a highway for me," Roger said.

One day, Roger stopped in at an antique store in the rural community of Wilson, population 791 people. Now, that's rural. As he had done at countless locations before, Roger asked the store owner if he knew of any limestone farmsteads for sale in the area. Directions were given to one possible place so Roger drove out to see. Unfortunately, there had been a house fire and the barn had fallen down. It was yet another dead end.

Roger ventured on down the dirt road a ways and then something caught his eye. It was a small stone house, barn, and pond with cattle grazing around it. No other development was in sight. To Roger, it looked just right. "The farm found me," Roger said.

But there were a couple of problems: First, the buildings were very run down, and second, the place was not for sale. "There were six brothers and sisters who had

inherited the place, plus their spouses, and they hadn't thought on selling anything," Roger said.

It was time-consuming but Roger persisted. Eventually he bought the farmstead. One day he was taking pictures there as the sun was setting. When he saw the photos and shadowed house, he realized that they literally matched the scene in the five dollar painting he had purchased years before which depicted his "dream home." Roger is restoring the home and barn while living there.

"That painting was my road map from Lincoln County, New Mexico to Lincoln County, Kansas," Roger mused, as it gave him his own stone barn to rescue.

Can a barn be reborn? Yes, and saving the barn can save the homestead, Roger believes. We commend Roger Hubert for making a difference with his passion for preserving old barns.

And there's more. His heart for saving barns has extended into a statewide organization. We'll learn about that next week.

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