

APPENDIX B

The Barn: Epicenter of the Farm-Park

With the acquisition of the "Cholet tract" by Skippack Township, the question arose as to what purpose it may offer the community. Guaranteeing that the twenty-six acres remain open space is quite a benefit considering the current rate of development already undertaken. Therefore, it should be considered that the land be used as a park to benefit all. Since the creation of Palmer Park less than a thousand feet away, it would be unnecessary to carbon copy that establishment. So in response to the question of what to do, it became of the opinion of many Skippack/Creamery Historical Society members, and general neighbors, that the best use of the Cholet farm is a farm-park.

Much like Peter Wentz Farmstead, Pennypacker Mills, and Heckler Plains, a farm-park is a collection of restored farm buildings with appropriate space dedicated to offer the community an example of a period farm. The park may host historical events/activities or offer a place to walk, picnic, etc. The preservation and maintenance is funded by state, local, and fund-raising sources.

Why is the Cholet Farm a good candidate for a farm-park?

A farm-park needs two essential characteristics for its creation. One is a collection of farm buildings that can be restored and preserved. The second, a large tract of land to give a farm appearance. A farm park hardly works in the middle of a sub-development, which is why the twenty-six acres of the tract can provide the suitable fields necessary for surroundings. Even though the buildings are near Creamery Road and Creamery Tire, trees and shrubbery shield the farm from modernity and one of the few places in sight (and closest) is a brick Victorian home just as old as the farmhouse. When one is there, there is a sense of solitude.



Photo of barn complex while owned by the Allebach family. Photo probably taken sometime before 1950. View up Creamery Road towards Creamery.

The barn is the keystone of the farm-park.

With the adequate amount of land present, the second condition is the farm buildings. A lovely five bedroom Victorian farmhouse, possibly built 1879, lies two hundred feet off Creamery Road. It is a great candidate for preservation, with its mostly original interior and rare outside bread oven. As charming as the house is, it's the barn that is the key to the farm-park. Many people have restored farmhouses and live in them today still, however, a drive through the country will yield many farmhouses with no barn in sight. Because a house is useful to people after a farm discontinues, and a barn is not, many barns become neglected and eventually lost to the elements. Recent amounts of developing have taken the toll of many barns. For example, Creamery has lost half of its remaining barns in the last ten years (five left).

Although there are still some fine examples left, barns are becoming a rarity in Skippack Township (and many other townships as well). The remaining barns should be preserved as monuments of our agricultural heritage. The Cholet tract has less than a hundred feet from the farmhouse a fine example of a Pennsylvania bank-barn.

Under layers of shingles is a good specimen of the numerous barns that once inhabited our region. Without a barn, there is no farm, and therefore a farm-park proposition is redundant. It would be a loss to the community if it was razed, because it is a survivor amongst the few, and it gives the main ingredient for the farm-park that Skippack Township is yet to have.

The functions of a barn.

The following is a list that generally summarizes how a farm-park depends on a barn's existence and what functions the barn itself contributes to the park.

1. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the barn is the sight of it being there. Many barns have been destroyed, made into apartments/offices, or modernized with siding and asphalt shingles. A restored 19th Century barn will give the visitor a pleasing example of the woodwork, paint, and cedar shake that a barn of the time exhibited. It's a great attraction for those who enjoy earlier architecture or have an affinity to farms and barns.
2. Education may equal the first point in importance. With many of us removed from the days of farms and field work, the knowledge of farming is lost. A preserved barn serves as an example to explain the fact that the barn was the business end of the farm, for it stored the harvests of the field and sheltered the animals. The Cholet barn is a great specimen since many of the stalls and grain bins are still present and in decent shape. Just a step inside can give the visitor how a barn was constructed by hand and assembled. And since this barn is a Pennsylvania bank-barn, the structure could promote what exactly that is and how it was a characteristic of our region.
3. Using the barn for events and functions may be the best example of how it would be directly used. Imagine the fun a community could have with a re-enactment, a harvest festival, haunted hayride/house, or a good old fashioned barn dance? These are just a few of the potential events that a barn could serve. In fact, with a preserved farm-park in Skippack Township, Perkiomen Valley elementary students would no longer have to visit Lower Salford's Heckler Plains because our township would have its own farm-park for field trip uses. A fall festival could be just as successful as Harleysville's own Apple Butter Frolic, and perhaps a re-enactment could attract the attention that Pennypacker Mills enjoys.
4. If a true farm-park is to exist with animals, a barn is needless to say essential. Animals live in the ground floor of the barn, and make a favorite attraction for children. Worcester's Merry Meade Farm gathers much attention with its ability to offer visitors a farm-zoo appearance. If animals were to live there, the barn's second function would apply; storing the fodder that feeds the animals.
5. Perhaps the least exciting function of the barn, although practical and necessary, is storage. A farm-park requires space to store the necessary equipment needed for maintenance. Shelter is also needed for storing field antiques and display dioramas that cannot be situated in the house or outside.



Haying on Cholet Farm