

The Preservationist

Volume IV, Issue I

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Points of Interest

- Smith Barn, Limestone Township
- Kankakee County's Survey of Pilot Township

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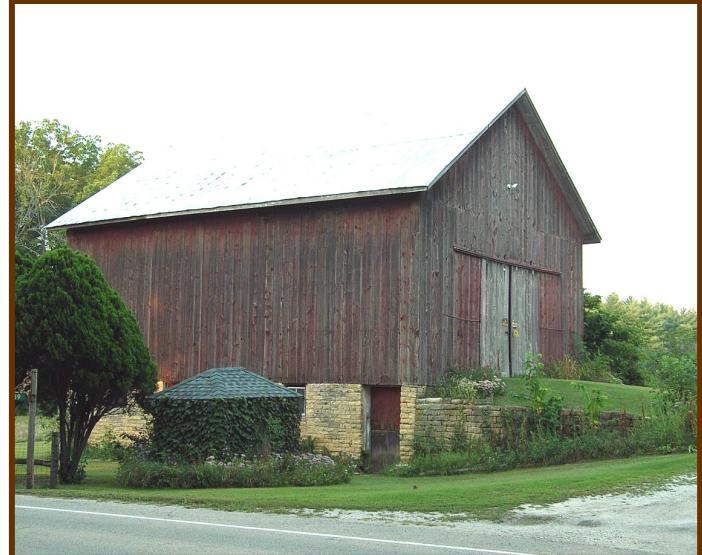
Newsletter edited by:
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Smith Barn, Limestone Township

research courtesy of Linda Willibey

It was on June 21, 1877, a letter was published in the Kankakee Gazette entitled "An Old Man's Work." The writer, R.A.L., was informing the newspaper editor that on June 16, 1877, a new building was erected in Kankakee County.

About fifty neighbors and friends of Thomas Holmes Allen Smith helped in the raising of his barn. According to the article the barn measures 36 x 46 feet, has 18-foot posts that stand on a basement wall eight foot high. The wall was built by a Mr. Richards of Kankakee. The frame consists of 100 braces and, to the amazement of the writer, was

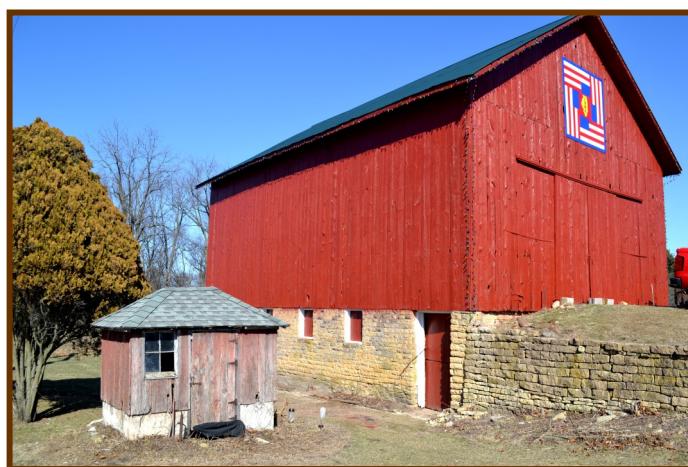


built by a 72-year-old man, John Duncan of Salina Township.

Thomas H. A. Smith (1836 -1877) was the son of George (1806-1878) and Delania (1814-1892)

Smith, both natives of Massachusetts. The Smiths had ten children: Edwin, Thomas H.A, Lucy, Sarah M., Albert G., Mary, Ella, Harriet, Marion, and Julia.

In October 1867, Thomas H. A. Smith purchased 10 acres of land in Section 30 of Limestone Township from a John Michaels. Mr. Michaels was the first private citizen to own these 10 acres of land, which was only a tiny portion of an estimated 2,046,720 acres in Illinois once granted to the Illinois Central Railroad for the construction of a railroad from Chicago to Cairo,



The barn and milk house as they appear today

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Smith Barn, Limestone Township

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Illinois.

It was on this 10-acre narrow stretch of land where THA Smith built his barn. Unfortunately, in September 1877, just three short months after the raising of the barn, Mr. Smith died at the early age of 41 years. His obituary states the cause of death as bronchial consumption.

At the time of his death, Mr. Smith owned land in section 25 and 26 of Salina Township and across the road in section 30 in Limestone Township. The road that divided the two townships is today known as Warner Bridge Road or N 7000W road.

In his will Mr. Smith left his widow, Sarah Louise (Noteman) Smith (1838-1898), 40 acres in Salina Township and the 10 acres in Limestone Township. The remaining land he owned was left to his children. Both Thomas and Sarah (Noteman) Smith are buried in Shreffler Cemetery, located along Warner Bridge Road.

The Smith family members kept the property in the family for some years. The property was sold as a unit several times but it wasn't until c.1950 that it was divided. It was also

about this time that Warner Bridge Road was black topped and became a highly traveled road.

In February 1959, Ernest & Rosella Riegel purchased the 10 acre strip of land. Their daughter Melba, her husband and their family moved to the property in March 1959. The Riegels gifted the property to Dale and Melba Rieke in 1976. Following the deaths of Mr. & Mrs. Rieke, the property was inherited by their children, the third generation: Linda Willobey, Cindy Colston, Larry Rieke and Alan Rieke. It was sold in 2017 to settle their mother's estate.



Upper floor with banked entrance amount in Canada. In the United States the Bank Barn was popular in the 19th century, sometimes referred to as a "basement barn." It was the early German settlers that began to build Bank Barns in Pennsylvania.

It is a style distinguished for its accessibility at two separate levels. It was almost always built into a hill or bank so that both the upper and lower floors were accessible from the ground level. When that wasn't

possible, as in the case of the Smith barn, an incline or ramp was built leading to the upper floor.



Side and rear view of the barn showing lower level entries

The barn is designed for livestock on the ground (lower) floor, and since the upper level is accessible by wagons, it would normally be used for feed and grain storage. In the winter, implements not in use

Smith Barn, Limestone Township

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would be stored on this level.

Most large barns in the U.S. date back to the early 1900s. So, the Smith barn is quite tall for a barn of the 1870s, even without the stone wall under it.

The Banked Barn features a division of the upper floor into galleries (aisles) and a central space (nave). This division is a significant architectural feature formed by massive posts forming bays.

The south or front of the barn is universally of wood frame construction, roofs are covered w/shingle, slate or metal, and the end walls are best known for the beauty of brick-work, or stone.

This barn's carpenter, stone mason, and the Smith family all came to Kankakee County from the East Coast where there were very large barns by this time in the 1870s. This Bank Barn is a rare example of architecture in Kankakee County due to the flat agricultural prairie land on which it was built.

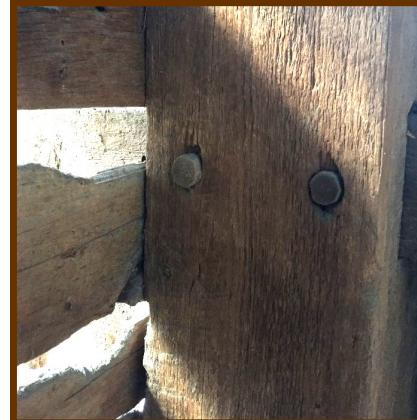
Its size may have been a result of it being a "family barn," constructed with financial assistance from other family members. Stated on maps in the 1883 Atlas for Kankakee County; Thomas, his brother Albert and their father George owned nearly 400 acres of land in sections 24, 25 and 26 of Salina Township and section 30 of Limestone Township. Those families were all farming a great deal of land for that time period and may have shared the barn.



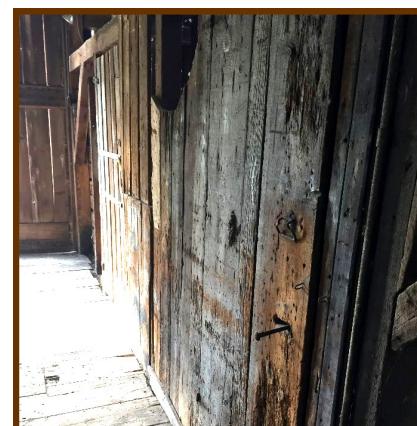
Upper level used for feed, grain and implement storage



Lower level used for livestock



Pegs holding the timbers together



Door and door locks to the basement



Some of the many braces



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Kankakee County's Survey of Pilot Township

In 2017, the Kankakee County Historic Preservation Commission (KCHPC) received a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant for \$21,700 to perform an intensive-level survey of Pilot Township. The grant is part of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency's (IHPA) CLG Grant Program and is federally funded through the Department of the Interior's National Park Service.

CLG Grants are awarded on a matching basis with the federal share being 70% and the local share being 30%. The local share is supplied by in-kind (volunteer) services, a local sponsor, or contributions from non-federal third parties. The local match for this grant amounts to \$9,300.

Following the completion of Kankakee County's Preservation Plan, financed by a CLG grant in 2016, the KCHPC is now focusing on the first goal developed in the Preservation Plan: "To Identify and Protect Historic Resources." The unincorporated areas to be surveyed in Pilot Township include: notable farmsteads, one-room schools, churches, and cemeteries.

This grant will provide a benefit to IHPA and the public by increasing awareness of the rural heritage

of Kankakee County, and the results of the survey will play a critical role in Kankakee County's current and long-range planning efforts.



Through this survey the Commission seeks to identify:

- Historically and architecturally significant properties and/or sites over 50 years of age not previously identified in earlier surveys;
- Identify the present condition, integrity, architectural style and features, construction date and obvious alterations and/or additions of the most historically significant properties;
- Produce recommendations of the most noteworthy properties for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and/or as a Local Landmark.

By ordinance, the Com-

mission has purview over the unincorporated, rural portions of the county. But, as the only active historic preservation commission in Kankakee County, the Commission also seeks to reach Intergovernmental Agreements with the municipalities in the county, as has already been done for the City of Kankakee and the Village of Bourbonnais. Once Intergovernmental Agreements are in effect for the municipalities of the county, these residential areas will also be included in the activities of the commission.

The work of this survey project will be divided between an outside consulting firm engaged by the county and volunteers recruited by the commission. The survey project will be led and organized by Kenneth Itle of Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates. The field survey work will be conducted by two-person teams, typically one WJE professional architectural history staff person and one volunteer. Historical research has already been completed by WJE and KCHPC volunteers, supported by the collections and knowledgeable members of the Herscher Area Historical Society, various other organizations, and local historic publications and authors. The data compilation and report writing will be performed by WJE.