



BARNNS

Country's intrepid staff descends on a historic Wisconsin housebarn for a day of hard labor (and a lot of fun).

STORY BY **LORI VANOVER**, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

FOR 20 YEARS, a dedicated group of volunteers has gathered every other Saturday from March to November to work on restoring the historic Lutze Housebarn in Cleveland, Wisconsin. Since its very beginning, *Country* has promoted the preservation of our rural heritage, so when we heard about this labor of love, we all agreed to put some muscle where our mouth is and pitch in with a day's work.

The volunteers aim to restore the housebarn to its 1880s appearance while preserving the techniques used to build it.

As I stood with the *Country* team before our workday, project director Chris Kuehnel ticked off the tasks to be completed during the next eight hours.

Split logs and chop wooden staves with an ax? Chisel notches into hardwood beams? Mix up mortar and help rebuild the barn's stone

foundation? My eyes grew wide and my mind raced. I worried that I didn't have enough muscle to do any of those jobs.

But Chris' enthusiasm was contagious, and when I saw some of my co-workers jumping right in and hammering away—along with a couple of devoted *Country* readers, J.R. and Marilyn McDonald, who traveled from their Missouri farm to help out—I felt a bit braver.

Chris told us that Sarah, a fifth-generation Lutze by marriage, would be leading a tour of the housebarn. A few of us followed her through the side entrance on the first floor.

Sarah explained that Gottlieb and Fredrika Lutze emigrated from Germany in 1848, settling in Wisconsin near other Saxon people. They were likely attracted to the area's plentiful natural resources and its resemblance to their homeland. Gottlieb purchased 80 acres and constructed this home for his growing family in 1849. Six generations of the Lutze family have now lived on this land.

We learned that housebarns were popular in northeast Germany but were rarely built in this country. Sarah said this structure is the only housebarn left standing in the United States that was built using the German form of architecture known as *fachwerk*, or half-timber construction.

Gottlieb fastened hand-hewn timbers into a framework, then filled in the spaces between them with a mixture of clay, sand and straw to form a solid wall. To position the timbers, he created a numbering system and put each piece in order. He then placed clapboard on top of the *fachwerk* to give the housebarn a more contemporary American look.

The completed housebarn provided shelter for both the family and their livestock in



ROLAND LUTZE, brother of Helen and Anita (above), married Edith Rusch in 1939. Edith recalls that the barn was used to store fruit from their orchards.

TORMING



THE LUTZE HOUSEBARN (left), built in 1849, is the only remaining structure of its type in the United States. Below, Heather Lamb chisels notches for staves into a hand-hewn beam.

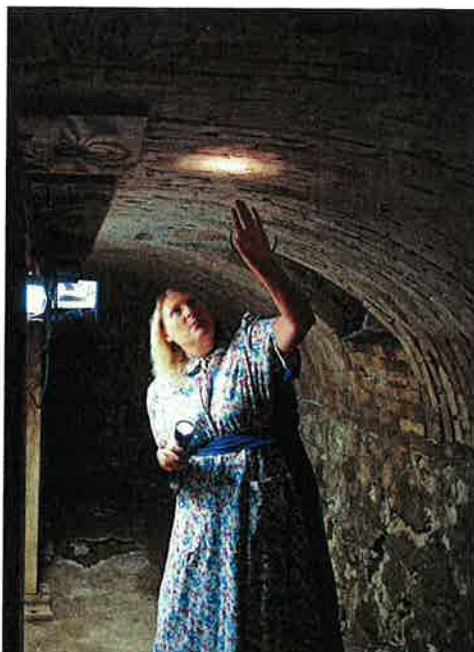


Nathaniel Shoener, Scott Schiller, J.R. McDonald and Robin Hoffman (from left) saw logs for staves.

MATTHEW ASGAR / THE MANTOWOC HERALD-TIMES REPORTER (LEFT & TOP RIGHT)

“For the pioneer Lutze family... work never stopped. But their efforts resulted in a sturdy residence, constructed out of materials gathered from the land.”

SARAH LUTZE highlights the distinctive domed ceiling in the fruit cellar (right). To build the barn's half-timbered walls, stucco is packed around wooden staves (far right).



Laundry bluing was used like paint to decorate living spaces.



A COBBLESTONE PATH (left), once excavated but lost in new weeds, emerges thanks to Deb Mulvey, Dulcie Shoener and Marija Potkonjak. Above, Lori Vanover, Lorie West and Marilyn McDonald stack foundation stones with Chris Kuehnel's guiding hand.

inclement weather. It measures 29½ feet wide and 91½ feet long. The east side includes two stories of living space, with a kitchen, living room and dining area on the first floor, four bedrooms on the second floor, and an unfinished attic for storing hay and grain. A brick fruit cellar with an arched ceiling was built underneath the southeast corner.

The west side of the barn accommodated dairy cows, oxen, pigs and goats on the first floor, with chickens and geese upstairs.

While the Lutzes' housebarn was designed with practicality in mind, the family still took time to add ornamental touches and make it feel like a home. Sarah told us church services for local residents were held in the main room, and it was apparent that this space was special. Laundry bluing was sponge-painted on the walls to tint them a pretty color, and woodwork was stained with ox blood and cream or berries and egg whites. Some of the stain was then scraped away to add

decorative details. These painting techniques were repeated throughout the housebarn.

As we continued our tour of the living quarters, Sarah pointed out many artifacts on display, including the family's first plow and planter, a sorghum cutter, nesting boxes for hens, a pigeon coop and a manger used to feed goats.

In time the barn became obsolete, and Sarah said the family moved into a newer house on the property in 1896. But while many similar structures in the area were torn down over the years, the Lutzes' housebarn survived.

Edith Lutze, the last surviving member of the fourth generation, told us the family continued to use the building's fruit cellar long after the new house was built. Decades later, the housebarn's significance was discovered, and it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984.

As I learned more about the building's history, I was struck by how difficult life must have been



for the pioneer Lutze family—moving to a new country, building a home, caring for their children and livestock, and growing food. The work never stopped. But their efforts resulted in a sturdy residence, constructed out of materials gathered from the land. Almost all of the housebarn’s original woodwork and hardware are still in place.

Before the day was over, the *Country* team accomplished more than I ever thought possible. I worked with our reader Marilyn and Editorial Assistant Lorie West to mix up mortar and position large stones to rebuild part of the foundation wall.

Chris showed us how to place the stones so they fit together tightly to support the structure. We had to work quickly before the mortar dried.

“It was the kind of day that reminded me what eyebrows are really for,” Lorie said, “although I still had sweat trickling through to my eyes.”

Editor Robin Hoffman, Art Director Scott Schiller and reader J.R. wielded saws and axes and made wooden staves out of logs. Executive Editor Heather Lamb chiseled notches into support beams so the wooden staves could be fitted to form the structure of an exterior wall.

THE COUNTRY TEAM (above) gathered before getting to work. Eight hours later, we were significantly worse for wear, after a long, hard day of sawing, chopping, weed-pulling and stone masonry—but still smiling.

Senior Editor Marija Potkonjak, Copy Chief Deb Mulvey and Copy Editor Dulcie Shoener put their archaeological skills to work and recleared a hand-laid stone path that had been completely hidden by overgrown weeds and dirt.

As we finished up our workday, Chris, Sarah and the other volunteers thanked us for helping out. But we also felt grateful for the opportunity to share in the hands-on restoration experience.

At the end of the day, we were all very sore, tired, smelly and dirty. And every one of us wanted to come back and do it again next year. 🌻

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the Lutze Housebarn, visit centvillesettlement.com. To enjoy a slideshow featuring additional photos from our workday, visit country-magazine.com. 