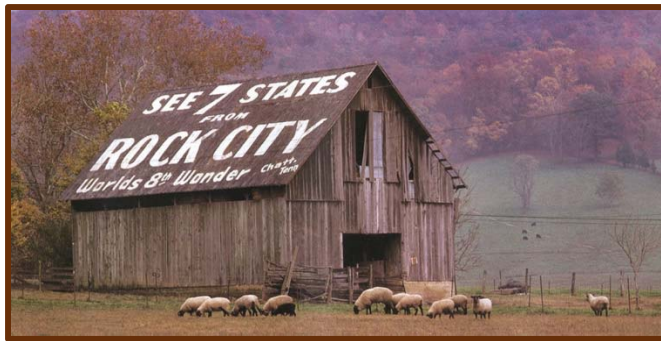


The Appeal of Old Barns

Old barns tug at my heart. And they can be seen dotting the rural landscape all across America.

Some are precariously leaning. Some have paint that is peeling away. Some have missing boards. But they all have a certain charm.

In the South, and 18 other states, barns have been painted with the message of Rock City, a tourist attraction near Chattanooga. The bold white-on-black signs compelled both snowbirds and Sunday drivers to come to the mountain overlooking Chattanooga and “See Rock City” or “See 7 States from Rock City, World’s 8th Wonder.”



The marketing brainstorm began in 1935 when Rock City founder Garnet Carter turned country barns into billboards that spread the word about the attraction’s appeal. The idea worked because old barns invite attention. They are part of Americana.

And rightly so. For me, they bring back visions of personal history and the culture I grew up in. The first six years of my life were on a farm, with a farmhouse and a huge barn a short distance from it. It was a place where a small boy could ...

- Retreat to the solitude of a structure to dream of what a grown-up world might be.
- Observe his father carefully and lovingly curry the horses.
- Roll around in the new mown hay with its distinctive smell.
- Watch my mother as she milked the cows and, when given the chance, unsuccessfully tried my hand at it.
- Stare through planks in the walls as a golden moon rose above the trees around the freshwater pond nearby.
- Sit in the door of the hayloft and listen to the soulful sound of a whippoorwill deep in the woods.

For me, the old barn was a happy place. And today, as the miles of a trip roll by and the old barns along the way appear, I wonder about the families they sheltered as a workplace during sunny days and amid the storms that came their way. Were they, too, happy, and growing, and learning? Or was there misery and heartache and disunity within?

The walls of old barns might tell some interesting stories.

The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to
(Deuteronomy 28:8 NIV).

– Beecher Hunter