

BARN RAISING Accomplished!
“Tale of Two Barns” Progressing ~ IOTD Grant Motivates

The reconstruction of a hay press barn at the Thiebaud farmstead was completed in the fall of 2016, realizing a fourteen year old dream. The Switzerland County Historical Society had been awarded a Destination Development grant from the Indiana Office of Tourism Development (IOTD) in the amount of \$75,000. This grant, funded through state appropriated dollars, is for the development of the *Tale of Two Barns* “to increase awareness among leisure travelers and enhance the marketing and promotion effectiveness of the Switzerland County Historical Society and Indiana tourism.”

Tale of Two Barns partners the efforts of two historic organizations in Switzerland County, each with a farmstead property listed on the National Historic Register, both operating as museum sites. The Switzerland County Historical Society has the Thiebaud Farmstead, located three miles west of Vevay on St. Rt. 156. It focuses on the second generation of a Swiss immigrant family and the economic impact of the haypress barn on the agriculture of the region. Musee de Venoge, located one mile north of Vevay on St. Rt. 129, captures life of early French Swiss emigrants before Indiana statehood.

Both organizations succeeded in restoring their houses and now, thanks to the IOTD grant, barns that were essential to their farms’ original successes are making a return to their landscape. The addition of the barns will greatly increase the ability to conduct meaningful events, classes and programming for the general public and schools.

Hay press barns were once a common sight on the rural landscape of Switzerland County. What became known as the Mormon hay press is a three story animal-powered machine patented in Switzerland County in 1843 by Allensville resident Samuel Hewitt. Powered by horses or mules, the machine used a pulley system to turn a massive iron screw, pressing the large approximately 300 pound bales. When one of the few remaining presses out of an originally estimated 200 came up for sale, our historical society purchased it, had it dismantled and moved, leading to the ongoing development of the Thiebaud Farmstead. Please refer to Agriculture Center in the navigation bar for details.

The Switzerland County Historical Society and Musee de Venoge have been partnering on events since 2012, resulting in better events made stronger by collaboration. When the Switzerland County Tourism Commission shared information about the grant and developing destination-based tourism, they became a third partner in pursuing the grant from IOTD.

Musée de Venoge will construct a building similar to the 19th century barn originally on their site. The inside will be devoted to an exhibit/program area, modern facilities, a small shop area, storage space for docent apparel and a reference library. The exhibit area will introduce the history of Indiana, Switzerland County, the Venoge cottage itself and the first Swiss occupants. The barn will complement the existing c.1814 cottage.

For those interested in construction details on the hay press barn at the Thiebaud Farmstead, continue reading.

“It was like organized chaos at the Thiebaud farmstead, or so it seemed to a novice bystander. There were barn timbers of varying sizes and groups of assembled timbers, and equipment ranging from a Bobcat to a crane able to lift over 10,000 pounds.

Working from a detailed inventory, Herschel Brichto’s Erjo Construction crew repaired and replaced timbers when necessary, and assembled 150+ year old beams into bents. A bent is a cross-section of a timber frame building, composed of structural pieces that define the shape and character of a structure. The reconstructed hay press barn has five bents that form a four bay barn.

When Erjo Construction dismantled the hay press barn from McCreary’s Ridge fourteen years ago, numbered and lettered metal tags were nailed into the beams and then catalogued. They were essential to solving the puzzle of parts and guided the reconstruction.

A concrete foundation had previously been poured (Thanks to a grant from the Vevay-Switzerland County Foundation) and the bents were ready and in position to be raised into place. The crane from Muck’s Crane and Contracting in Edinburgh, Indiana arrived Wednesday morning, August 3rd and the three day event commenced.

Probably the heaviest because of needed replacement of some major beams, the first bent weighed 6,000 pounds (3 tons). Ash trees were milled and replaced deteriorated beams. Slowly lifted and held above the east facing sill beam, it was carefully lowered into place. Someone was ready at each mortise-and-tenon joint to guide and make final adjustments. Temporary structural supports were put in place and three more bents went up that day.

Several facets of the project were accomplished on Thursday. The fifth bent was set in place and then the first purlin. Purlins are horizontal beams that connect the bents and will later support the roof. The longest original beam from the barn, a 58 foot and one inch long purlin, connected the five bents along the south side.

The crane, a man-lift and two immense extension ladders were all in play as the purlin was fitted into place. The efficiency of the crew was a pleasure to watch. Safety of the workers and respect for the old barn were always observed. Thursday also saw the moving of the hay press from the parking lot to the barn site.

Friday started with the placement of more purlins and the vertical queen posts, all essential to the roof. Short beams that support the hay press had been removed to facilitate the moving of the press and were now reattached.

The strapping and rigging was deftly handled by a knowledgeable crew. Finally all was ready to lift the 8,000 pound press. Relief and tension were mingled as the crane lifted the massive press. The finesse of crane operator Ross Marks was spellbinding to watch as the hay press was maneuvered between the bents, the top rising above the timber frame structure and then was turned and lowered into position. “Like threading a needle,” I heard Laura Helt mumble.

The intuitive crew had been amazing to watch over the three days. Knowledge, experience and respect melded together to arrive at the point where all would see if the reassembled barn timbers would once again support the massive press.

Herschel Brichto and Wayne Martin had worked together back in 2002 to dismantle the barn. Wayne came back from Morgantown, Indiana to be part of reassembling the timber frame barn and setting the hay press. Laura Helt is still on the job from the original crew. Oscar Garcia, Steve “Luke” Luking and Ken Boyer are part of the present Erjo Construction crew. Derrick McFadden was also on the crew part of the time. Victor and Tracey Ohl from Flat Rock, Illinois were part of the volunteer crew, having first seen the barn when visiting cousin Wayne when the

barn was dismantled. Mark Helt volunteered time towards the project as well. The work of each and every one contributed to the amazing accomplishments of the three days.

Indeed, the old barn timbers seemed to welcome the press. No strain was witnessed as the strapping was relaxed and the timbers once again bore the weight. Now visible from the road as you drive by on Highway 56 heading west, the beautiful timber frame with the massive press can be seen. As Tracey stated as the press was set in place, "The heart is back in the barn."

This long awaited moment is due to the generous financial support and confidence extended from funders for the *Tale of Two Barns* projects at the Thiebaud Farmstead and Musee de Venoge. The Indiana Office of Tourism Development grant for \$75,000 was matched with funds from Switzerland County Tourism, the Vevay-Switzerland County Foundation, the Paul Ogle Foundation, Switzerland County Council, the Community Foundation of Switzerland County, Sw. Co. Economic Development, Musee de Venoge and the Switzerland County Historical Society.

We are greatly appreciative of our giving members and community in their patience and support shown as we have pursued this monumental project." *Martha Bladen*