

## **SAHS's Dickerson Barn**

The first American settlers of Salem were John Dickerson, Joseph Dickerson and Mrs. Amy Dickerson, all natives of New York, who left Seneca County in 1825, and located lands on sections 13 and 14, in the fall of that year. About the same period Elkanah Pratt, better known as Dr. Pratt, met John Dickerson in the forest and claimed him as a neighbor, so that for a long period the question, "Who is the first bonafide settler?" was discussed. Now, however, it is conceded that the honor belongs to the Dickersons, as they preceded Dr. Pratt by a few days. In 1827, Dickerson built the first log barn ever erected in the township, and three years later (1830) constructed the first frame barn to store his equipment and hay.<sup>1</sup> This is the Dickerson Barn that stood just south of Six Mile Road and east of Chubb Road and is the barn described in this report.<sup>2</sup> John Dickerson was the Supervisor in Salem Township in 1838 and 1849 and Township Assessor in 1834, 1835 and 1838.<sup>3</sup>

The barn's main frame is 4 bay, 4 bent (truss structure) which makes up the basic timber framing. The 8 x 8 timbers are white oak. There is a chestnut center cross beam (the swing beam). The roof rafters are tamarack poles. Tamarack, which grew in the surrounding swamps, grew tall and slender and is strong. The roof was originally  $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick black walnut of varying widths (10 to 18" wide) because the wood was prevalent in the area. It grows straight and is relatively soft when young.

Over the years the Dickerson Barn was covered with metal and converted to Office and Storage space and was used by Salem RV Storage, now named All American Storage.

In 1999, Salem Township approved a permit to level the Dickerson Barn,<sup>4</sup> but the owner Brett Hensley was willing to work with the Salem Area Historical Society (SAHS) to save the barn.<sup>5</sup> Through the efforts of Salem Area Historical Society, led by Mrs. Meroë Allen Kaericher, the Dickerson Barn was donated to the SAHS. A group of SAHS volunteers followed a plan and methodically dismantled the barn in 1999 and stored it in local barns until SAHS began the relocation effort. For the next six years, Don Riddering and Gilbert Terry kept the SAHS focused on procuring the needed funds to reassemble the barn. In the summer of 2006, the SAHS completed the foundation for the barn in the Northwest corner of their property at 7991 North Territorial Road. The new foundation is 42" deep and is concrete. Above the concrete, about one foot of rock has been added to give the impression of a stone foundation. In the winter of 2006-7, the Salem

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<sup>1</sup> Chapman, Chas. C. & Co., History of Washtenaw County, Michigan (Chas. C. Chapman & Co., 1881): 599

<sup>2</sup> Salem Township 1874 Map

<sup>3</sup> Chapman, Chas. C. & Co., History of Washtenaw County, Michigan (Chas. C. Chapman & Co., 1881): 608-9

<sup>4</sup> Cloutier, Katie, *South Lyon Herald*, "Then & Now", December 17, 1998

<sup>5</sup> Olander, Valerie, *Plymouth (MI) Observer*, "Historical society sets sights on 1830s barn", March 21, 1999: A3

Area Historical Society hired Ken Brock and Associates, Inc. to reassemble the Dickerson Barn (a.k.a. Windy Acres, which had been painted on the wood siding behind the metal siding) on top of this new foundation. The actual barn restoration work began in February 2007.<sup>6</sup> Brock said the barn contains a unique design element - a "swing beam" instead of a center post, which he has seen in other older barns in southeast Michigan. The swing beam was designed so a team of horses could be driven into the barn and turned around, Brock said. The 32-foot-by-42-foot barn has a "timber frame truss beam" design, with removable pins for assembly, Brock said. The walls are 15 feet high with an additional 10 feet of height on two sides for the gable roof. There are double swing doors in the east and west walls.

During restoration, the chestnut center cross beam (the swing beam) was replaced with white oak and a few (2 or 3) of the original tamarack rafters were replaced. The grain room is in the same position; however, it is slightly smaller than in the original barn. The original siding had been wide plank boards. However, during the reconstruction, battens were added over the siding board butt-joints to prevent the weather from deteriorating the wood. Originally, the openings between the joints provided air for circulation, which was desired for the grain. A small entry door, not original to the barn, was added to meet current fire exit regulations. On June 10, 2007 all the structure beams had been fitted and were ready to stand up. The wall structure was raised on June 12, 2007. The siding is Michigan White Pine (1"x12"x14'). The roof is Red Cedar shingles. Ash trees from the Fishbeck farm were been cut and used for flooring in the loft.

A split rail fence was added in 2010 (as part of Steven Walega's Eagle Scout Project). It is in two sections. One goes north from the northeast corner of the barn and the other goes west from the southwest corner of the barn.<sup>7</sup>

In June of 2011, SAHS started the process of designating its property on North Territorial Road in Salem Township a Washtenaw County Historic District. The property's has three main structures; the South Salem Stone School, The Dickerson Barn, and a shed. Later that year, a Local Historic District Study Committee was formed and approved. On November 1, 2012, the LHD Study Committee officially transmitted its report to the township government, WCHDC, SHPO, Michigan Historical Commission and State Review Board. On Jan. 10, 2013, the LHD Study Committee held a public hearing on its report. On May 1, 2013, the Final Report<sup>8</sup> was completed by the LHD Study Committee and Washtenaw County Historic District Commission accepted the final report and recommended approval of the Jarvis Stone School Local

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<sup>6</sup> Thurtell, Joel, *Detroit Free Press*, "177-year-old barn is rise again", Feb. 2007

<sup>7</sup> *Spirit of Salem*, Volume XXV, Issue 2, August 2009

<sup>8</sup> Jarvis Stone School Historic District Study Committee Report, May 1, 2013

Historic District to the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioner. At the June 5th Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners' Meeting, the Washtenaw County Ordinance to make the Jarvis Stone School the 13th Washtenaw County Local Historic District was unanimously passed by the WCBOC.<sup>9</sup>

In 2015, Lee Holland offered to make a donation to the Salem Area historical Society to cover the cost of creating and installing murals at the Jarvis Stone School Historic District. On Wednesday, October 29<sup>th</sup> of 2015, the Salem Area Historical Society, owners of the Jarvis Stone School Local Historic District, hosted the dedication of the Dickerson Barn Mural.<sup>10</sup> The mural was made possible by a donation from Lee Holland and the artistry of Gregg Bugala. The Dickerson Barn Mural consists of four panels recalling the 1824 to 1900 era of Salem and honors Meroë Allen Kaericher who led the acquisition of the Dickerson Barn by The Salem Area Historical Society in 1997 and Gilbert Terry who led the team that relocated the barn to SAHS's property in 2007-8. The panels depict the Salem Train Depot, the Salem Hotel, the Salem churches, the Salem schools and the Dickerson Barn. More than thirty people attended this dedication including friends and family members of Meroë Allen Kaericher and Gilbert Terry.<sup>11</sup>

In June of 2016, the Dickerson Barn got a fresh coat of Sherwin-Williams Red Barn paint.

Salem Area Historical Society partnered with the Eastern Michigan University Historic Preservation Department to have their grad student, Jonathon Bennett, research the farming families of Salem Township and create an exhibit plan. The Salem Farming History Project was completed and presented by Jonathon Bennett to the SAHS at its May 2018 meeting. The project created the content for the displays to be in this exhibit on farmers and farming in Salem Township from 1825 to 1940. In September 2020, the Salem Area Historical Society was awarded the Washtenaw County Historical Society's Pauline Walters Memorial Award for its Farming Stories Project, as it supports the WCHS's mission to educate and inspire our community to engage in the preservation and presentation of area history. This award will be used to acquire and install the displays of the Salem Farming History Project into the Dickerson Barn.

The Dickerson Barn Murals and the Salem Farming History Project are part of the effort by the Salem Area Historical Society to use the Dickerson Barn to accomplish its mission "to preserve, archive and inform others on the history of Salem Township Michigan" by "Preserving the Past for the Future."

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<sup>9</sup> *South Lyon Herald*, "Salem one room school house named historic district", June 27, 2013: Page A3

<sup>10</sup> *South Lyon Herald*, "Salem Area Historical society hosts Dickerson barn mural dedication", November 26, 2015

<sup>11</sup> *Spirit of Salem*, Volume XXXI, Issue 3, November 2015