



THE BARNs OF NORTHWEST ILLINOIS

Today's barns are generally industrial buildings made of steel and erected quickly with the help of a few men and machines. In contrast, yesterday's barns were hand-made wooden structures often with stone or sometimes brick foundations. Most were of utilitarian, simple designs, while some were round or built for a specific purpose, other times simply mirroring an owner's individuality.

As a state abounding with broad farmlands, Illinois has depended heavily on its barns for almost two centuries. The barns of Illinois evolved from simply a place to store equipment and livestock to become gathering places for friends and family and a focal point of local communities, an enduring link between the present day and the traditions of the past. With these iconic structures as our guideposts, we find our way across the open landscape and the history of the Midwest.

Today, many regional collections of barn photos have been published as books. Most of these provide portraits of the structures but little information or details on their interiors or content. Few of these old barns are open to the public, since those which have survived are still in use for everyday farm activities.

Here in Whiteside County, the County Farm Bureau has been organizing the annual Whiteside County Barn Tour since 2008, providing a unique opportunity to visit 10 barns each year and experience a little of the old "country life". The Bureau divided the county into six regions and each year has featured barns in one area; after nine years of Barn Tours, only two barns have been repeats. While the Tours have remained primarily in Whiteside, some of its chosen barns have spilled over into neighboring counties.

Linnea Koch, a local Graphic Designer and Photographer, has covered every Barn Tour. While she includes the traditional "Barn Portrait", her work features many of the easily missed details: architectural details, windows, latches, hooks, baskets, bins, locks, hand pegged timbers, along with tractor and equipment collections, as well as cows, chickens, goats and other farm animals to illustrate farm life. Over the last several years, Linnea has published four DVDs documenting the Whiteside County Barn Tours and is currently working on #5 for the most recent tour. She collaborated with singer-songwriter Pete Jonsson who provided original music with a rural, folk style that complements the photography. All of the DVDs contain musical accompaniment; three of them are narrated and also contain other features such as segments on "Lost Barns", other regional barns and croplands, and a comparison with farm structures in Europe. Each DVD contains over 200 photos.

Whiteside Co. Barn Tours 2008-13 — 31 minutes

Portraits and details of the 57 barns from the 2008-13 tours are included on this DVD. This photo trip which covers the region. As this is a retrospective tour, only music accompanies the photos.

Whiteside Co. Barn Tour 2014 — 21 minutes

The 2014 Tour explores the northeast corner of the county. Narration includes information and stories about the farms from the farmers, as well as comments from the visitors.

Whiteside Co. Barn Tour 2015 — 27 minutes

The 2015 Tour covers the north central area. The narration covers information about the barns as well as Linnea's personal perspective of "suburban girl" moving out to farm country.



Whiteside Co. Barn Tour 2016 — *25 minutes*

The 2016 Tour includes the farms and barns of the western edge of the north east corner of the county. The narration includes details about the farms and discusses the differences and similarities between barns in the Midwest and their European ancestors.

Whiteside & Lee Co. Barn Tour 2017 — *34 minutes*

The 2017 Tour includes the farms and barns of the eastern edge of the county and western edge of Lee County. The narration discusses not only the farms on the tour, but the rebirth of old barns as new spaces for entertaining and commerce.

Linnea provides presentations of the **Barns of Northwest Illinois** varying in length between 25 minutes to two hours. Topics are organized along the individual DVDs above and may consist of material from any individual DVD or a combination of two or more.

Linnea Koch, the daughter of an artist, has worked in many different media, from painting and sculpture to etching and weaving. While she had fun with a simple camera during childhood, photography really became interesting when she received her first SLR camera in high school, a used early Exa (Exakta). That camera kept her looking for unusual subject matter, creating a new way of seeing common place subjects. From the beaches on Lake Michigan to travels around the country, as well as explorations in Europe, she has searched for intriguing subjects to photograph. Her photos have been published in corporate publications, calendars, books, including covers of nautical chart books, and have been exhibited throughout the region. She has owned and operated a graphic design studio for over three decades, is an Illinois Master Gardener with a special interest in native shade plants, and has given many talks on local landmarks, shade gardening and some of the wonderful gardens here and in Europe.