



Letters to the Editor

Editor's note: Eastern Washington University reserves the right to edit letters for space, content and material of a potentially offensive nature.

More To The Story

My husband and I were heartsick and I, his wife, was somewhat taken aback when reading the article about the Red Barn in Eastern magazine. It would appear that nothing happened of consequence to that building until the Police Department occupied it.

In 1975 the Barn was saved from demolition. One day, my husband, Horace Simms, professor of biology, passed the old Sutton Mansion and saw that it was being torn down. He spoke to a workman who said, "Yes, this is coming down and the old barn goes next!" At that point, Dr. Simms marched directly to then College President Emerson Shuck's office and convinced the administration to defer the demise of the Barn. In 1976, the building was revived physically. The Barn was cleaned, painted and a new roof installed. Coinciding with the Bicentennial Celebration of the Founding of the United States of America, my husband organized the teaching program called the "Red Barn Project." This program featured a return to some of the earlier practices of the country, e.g. organic gardening, composting, food preservation and home arts. The project utilized the help of the older citizens of Cheney and the vicinity. No mechanical power was used in this project – all work was done by hand. Incidentally, it received a sendoff by David Brower, former president to the Sierra Club, by visiting our campus and speaking to the student body. The concepts carried out in this educational program were in advance of what is currently being promoted by today's environmentalists. This should be the REAL story of the Red Barn, pointing up the accomplishments of the faculty members and students who participated in it.



Sincerely,
Katherine Simms

Saving The Red Barn

Linda Hagen Miller's history of the Red Barn (spring/summer Eastern magazine, 2007) did not include the dramatic story of the saving of the barn. We have the Red Barn today principally because of the efforts of one biology professor who rallied support to reverse administrative plans. We wish to add our observations to the record.

The Sutton farmhouse and barn were slated for demolition in the early 1970s. Dr. Horace (Dode) Simms saw the house being bulldozed, and called one of us at home. Together we went to the site, interrupted the razing and talked with the driver. He told us that he had instructions to knock down just the house at that time, but expected orders to destroy the barn shortly.

Dr. Simms had long admired the quality and craftsmanship of both buildings, and immediately set to work to save the barn. He reconstructed its history, organized grassroots support and made numerous presentations to college and community organizations. He succeeded in getting a reprieve for the barn.

The early 1970s were a time of severe gasoline shortages, and older alumni will remember the national concern about our over-reliance on cheap energy. Dr. Simms made the Red Barn the centerpiece for an experimental program using the old skills, knowledge and crafts from the days before mechanized, chemically dependent agriculture. We recall students planting an organic garden near the barn, and courses teaching the practice and science of mulching, composting and biological pest control. The Cheney recycling program started here.

When the urgency of the oil shortage abated after a few years, interest in the program gradually waned. But by this time, concern for the preservation of historic buildings had grown. The barn had a new roof, a coat of red paint and other repairs. The Campus Police needed bigger quarters, and it was remodeled for their use. The Red Barn was there for them because of Dode Simms' vision and hard work.

Ray Hamel, professor of computer science
Judy Hamel, community and environmental activist
Bruce Lang, professor emeritus of biology
Ken Swedberg, professor emeritus of biology
Lee Swedberg, Womens Studies Program, director 1983-1998

