FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Travel

Barns of Wisconsin
Jerry Apps
Wisconsin Historical Society Press
978-0-87020-453-1

In these eco-conscious times, taking the family on a gas-guzzling road trip verges on sacrilege. But Jerry Apps, author of the new edition of *Barns of Wisconsin*, entices readers to indulge in touring the still rural parts of the state to contemplate its barns: the architecture brought by families from Germany, Finland, and England; the woodwork and whitewash; and even the weather vanes and other ornaments that gussy them up. No ageist, Apps covers the oldest stone barns, built in the 1800s, as well as the modern steel and canvas structures of contemporary dairies. But old barns have become an endangered species: many featured in the original edition, published in 1977, have since been razed to accommodate parking lots and malls. Preserving the ones that remain seems as self-evident a need as dusting the Sistine Chapel. Noticing barns celebrates a time in America when hard work was edifying and neighbors were sources of free labor.

Accompanying Apps's idyllic depiction of rural life is a chaotic, colorful history of con artists and cash crops gone bust. During the 1850s, an itinerant phrenologist evangelized about the virtues of octagonal barns; others promoted round barn construction, leaving Vernon County with ten circular barns that can be seen today. Meanwhile, farmers struggled to adapt their fields and equipment to alien crops. Wheat, the original cash crop, ruined Wisconsin farmers long before ruining the farmers of the dust bowl during the 1930s. Farmers took up the next cash crop, tobacco, and then potatoes. Finally, they turned to tending the icon of Wisconsin, the dairy cow, a difficult enterprise that industrialized farms and reduced farmers to suppliers of milk for cheese factories. Though it is rarely mentioned, Wisconsin certainly had its own *Grapes of Wrath* epic.

Jerry Apps, a professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, has also written *Old Farm: A History and Horse-Drawn Days: A Century of Farming with Horses.* His son, photographer Steve Apps, is an award-winning photographer with the *Wisconsin State Journal*. The *Places Along the Way* book series, of which this book is a part, represents a

renaissance in writing about Wisconsin; written to encourage tourism, these books celebrate Wisconsin's history and culture. In addition to the plethora (140) of vivid color photos, Apps has provided a map of Wisconsin barns for readers making the scenic driving tour.

Apps, a rebel against the looming urban sprawl that threatens barns, exhorts readers and tourists to espouse the preservation of farm history. What he has created is not quite *Motorcycle Diaries*, but perhaps *Motorcycling to Dairies*.

Korina Cornish