1 of 3

Limestone chim. (date? surely pre-1860) South-Gurley Al

N

for article in Al. Hist. Comm. newsletter

S.W. of Gurley, Al

c.1840 Solomon DeBow hse
See HS Book 42 for ±100 photos

N

McMullen Rd., SW of Gurley

pre Civil War house (thick studs ±2' o.c., flush eaves, log, stone chim. up to shoulders) converted to barn

N

S.W. of Gurley, McMullen Rd.

RURAL BLDGS.

Gurley, Al.
(south)
Probably a 1½ story
log hse, based
on proportions
+ stone chim.

Store,
N. of
New Hope

N

N

Barn, Big Cove, N. of New Hope

BIG COVE, MADISON CO, AL

barn, N. of New Hope

3013

barn

BIG COVE – MADISON CO. AL.
03

house trailer = most common new rural "house"

hse. trailer ↗ abandoned hse ↗

Barn – Big Cove
N. of New Hope

empty
hse

NEW
HOPE

empty
stores

5913

04

N

empty STORE

N

JEFF, AL
N.W. OF HUNTSVILLE

06

Cattle-loading ramp of shed.

05

Empty store

N

N ← barn no. 1

N ← barn no. 1

JEFF, Al.

E. Side of Store

N

N ← Scales

Vic. Hse, just N. of Jeff

JEFF, AL

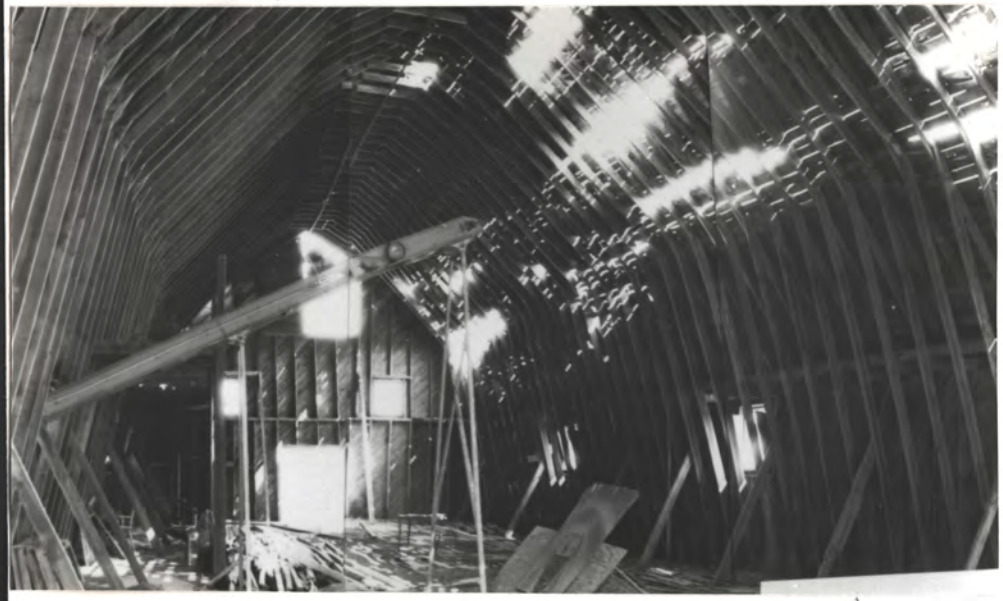
N

barn
no. 2

N

8

07



in 1983
(loft)

→ N

08

in 1988

→ N

now gone (1992)
ruins were deliberately burned

Chase Nursery Barn, Chase, Al.
(N.E. of Huntsville, Al.

9/96

U.S. 72 between Athens & H'ville. N. Shed collapsed.

N

U.S. 72, east of Athens

N

9

N

U.S. 72, east of Athens

SAME CROSS RD'S

10

US 72, east of Athens

N

11 Jy 13

U.S. 72
IN ATHENS
(EAST END)

barn 1

barn 1

barn 2

N

P.S. - collapsed 1994-HJ

barn 2

barn 2

barn 1

barn 3 ↘N 0 12

0 13

N

0 14

shed 4
barn 5

N

BARN
6
(nice)

N

12

015

N.E. Limestone County

016

N.E. Limestone Co.

Pyramidal-roof house, a once-common rural type, now rare (1992)

3 of 3

ALABAMA'S VANISHING RURAL ARCHITECTURE

Harvie P. Jones, FAIA
June 22, 1991

The huge parabolic - arched loft shown in illustration one, comparable in architectural beauty and structural logic to a cathedral, no longer exists. Like most agricultural buildings it outlived its usefulness with the advent of tractors and was abandoned to the elements in the 1960's. It is now a flattened pile of rotting boards (illustration 2). — 1915 Chase Nw. barn

For most of its history, Alabama's economy and society has been based on agriculture, and agriculture still is important to our state's livelihood. We are allowing the architectural evidence of the historical basis of our state's growth to vanish before our eyes with no known attempt to preserve this evidence, to recognize it, or even to record it in any systematic way. We have all watched rural buildings slowly settle to the ground over a period of some years of travel down a particular country road - an effect like a slow-motion film of a bud opening into a flower, only with an opposite connotation.

Some would argue that agricultural structures are purely utilitarian and are therefore not architecture and not worth preserving or recording. There are two strong counterarguments. Number one, they are historically important, as described above. Historical importance is not contingent on conventional ideas of architectural beauty. Number two, these buildings do posses beauty. The essence of architecture is space and form, not decorative gew-gaws. Farm buildings have few gew-gaws, but they frequently have beautiful spaces, forms, and proportions, as these few photographs attest.

Some states have preserved collections of farm buildings and historical machinery and tools that are open to the public. This would be desirable. A stronger effort on the part of various historical organizations at the local and state levels to record and preserve what we still have is needed. History is not solely the "pretty" things such as columned mansions. History is all of the past. It is also tenant-houses, barns, country stores, gins and all the other buildings that originally made the money to build the columned mansions. We are in danger of distorting our future citizens understanding of architectural history by allowing the working rural buildings to disappear.

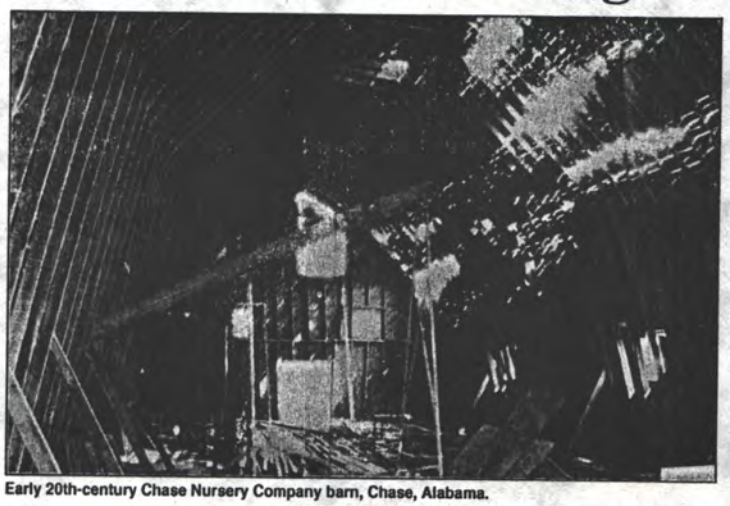
This is a plea to preserve, and at least record, some architectural reminders of how our state made its living, before it is irrevocably too late. Time is running out. A recent 4 hour tour of the back roads of Madison and Limestone counties to photograph some farm buildings visited just a decade ago found very few survivors. Farmers have no economic incentive to maintain these buildings since modern farming methods require little more than a pre-fab steel equipment shed. We may someday have to resort to collecting amateur watercolors of weathered-wood and rusty-roof rural buildings to have any idea of what they were like.

Written for Al. Hist. Commission newsletter

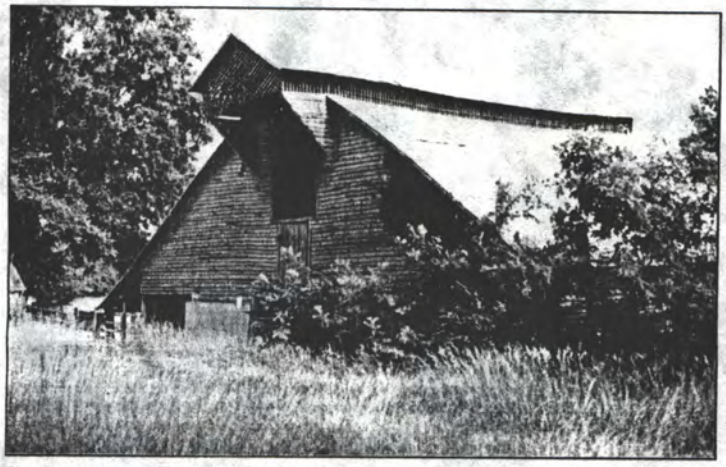
\jobs\catchall\corres\ruralarc

Editorial—

Alabama's vanishing rural architecture



Early 20th-century Chase Nursery Company barn, Chase, Alabama.



Abandoned barn, Athens, Alabama. A fine unusual example, with a continuous latticed clerestory to ventilate the hayloft. When piled deep, new hay contains enough moisture to heat to the point of spontaneous combustion, so ventilation is important to hayloffs.

by Harvie Jones

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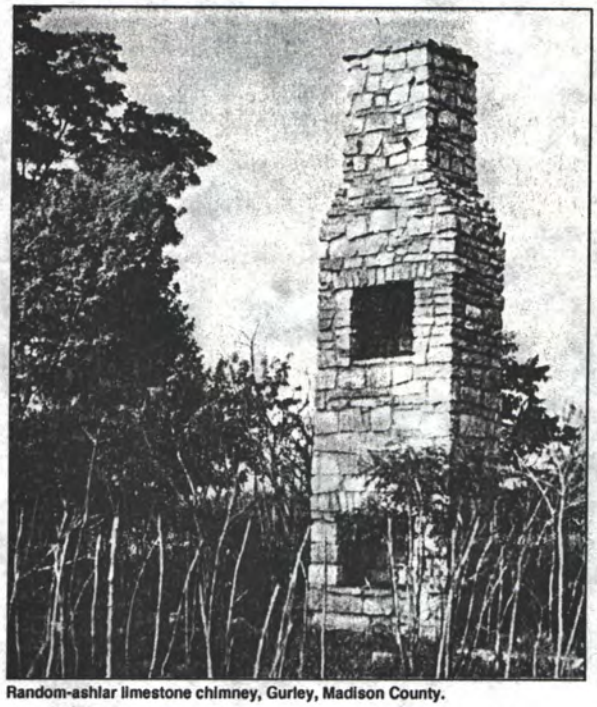
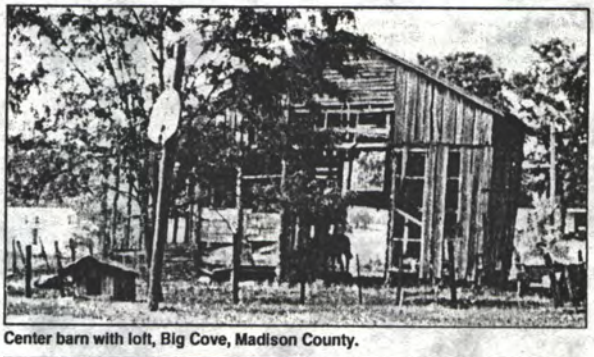
***Harvie Jones** is an architect with Jones & Herrin Architecture / Interior Design in Huntsville and serves on the AHC National Register Review Board.*



Random-ashlar limestone chimney, Gurley, Madison County.



Center barn with loft, Big Cove, Madison County.

Cattle-loading ramp and shed, Jeff, Alabama. Simple structures like these have the beauty of a quick freehand sketch, which in an architectural sense, they are.

for slide-tape program by Al. AIA & Al. Hist. Commission. DRAFT

BOX OR ENVEL. NO.

BARN INTERIORS

Several barn interiors

Some of the most beautiful interiors in American Buildings are in barns. These barns combine the elements of simple geometry with large, vaulting rib-framed spaces - dramatic in themselves - and furthur enlivened by the sparkle of daylight entering between irregular siding planks. The effect of space & light can be compared with that of medieval European churches

Slide of barn interior w/hole in roof

Too often, nowdays, barn interiors also have dramatic shafts of sunlight angling down through holes in the roof - the sign of a building that has outlived its usefulness to the farmer and has been left to the elements to rot away in visual splendor.

BARN EXTERIORS AND INTERIORS

Gabled

Most barns fall into a basic shape of either a gable

Maples Farm Limestone Co.

or a gambrel roof

French's Auction Barn Ext. & Int.

but there are exceptions such as this barrel-vaulted roofed auction barn of ca. 1940 in Athens

3 slides

slide

and there are endless variations of roof pitch, proportions, size, vents,

Ray Rd. Barn Hurricane Valley

hoods at hay-fork openings,

slide

and attached sheds.

slide

Sheds are sometimes on one side only,

slide

on both sides,

Elkmont Rural Village barn

and even on three sides.

Gilliam Farm Hurricane Valley -side view ca. 1920

This is a rare example of a jerkin-head hipped-gambrel roof barn, unusual because, having no end wall for the hay fork - - -

cont'd

BOX OR ENVEL.

BARN EXTERIORS AND INTERIORS (cont.)

Interior of Gilliam Farm Gambrel-hip barn

track to run out, hay wagons had to enter the barn's center-aisle so the hay-fork (a sort of mule-powered traveling crane) could drop down through an opening in the loft floor to pick up a load of loose hay from the wagon and transport it up into the loft.

Interior, view of hay crane

This ca. 1919 barn in Lauderdale County has a homemade crane operated by a crank, pulleys and a triangular pivoting wood frame for manually lifting a hay fork up through an opening in the loft floor.

ca. 1948 barn interior Gilliam farm at Hurricane Valley, Madison Co.

While a majority of barns had lofts, some later and larger ones did not. The hay was stacked in the high-roofed central portion of the barn, and livestock sheds directly adjoined each side so the hay could be easily forked into the livestock sheds from the center hay stack.

PLANTER VILLAGES

St. Scene

Alabama has several virtually intact 19th century Planter-Villages set in the midst of flat, rich farmland such as Gainesville, Lowndesboro, and Mooresville, which has

1816 Moore House

numerous structures dating back to the early 1800's.

House Church, Store, Post Ofc. Smokehouse Dr. Office Inn

These villages consist of properous planters' houses, churches, stores, smokehouses, offices, inns, post offices, and all the elements of a 19th century ~~town~~ village placed in an area of a few acres.

St. Scene

Picket fences and huge shade trees line the streets, making them attractive places in which to live today, as in the past.

RURAL HOUSING

BOX OR ENVEL. NO. 6

(Cathy - can this be checked?)

21 Victorian house w/ trailer beside it

Perhaps 20% of all rural housing in Alabama is now house trailers. This slide exemplifies the problem. The once-fine Victorian house sits unpainted and abandoned, while its family has moved into the house-trailer beside it, and commute to town in their sports car.

22 Tenant House

Even more endangered as a species is the Tenant House. Farms do not have tenant-farmers any more, due to its demeaning implications and to the industrialization of the state and the mechanization of its farms.

22 Window view stuffed w/ hay bales Lauderdale Co.

Some tenant houses are used for hay storage.

22 Tenant house w/ sign

Others to support advertising signs,

26 Ruin Hurricane Valley Gilliam Farm

and others are left to rot.

22 Tenant House on highway 431 North of Huntsville

Alabama should make an effort to record and preserve some of our pre-1950 farm structures - including tenant houses - so that this chapter in our social and architectural history will not be lost.

SIDINGS AND HARDWARE

The varied patterns, materials and textures on Alabamas farm buildings present a feast for the eye in their richness and variety.

+ Several slides

This irregularity is not studied, but is the result of casual utilitarian construction with economical materials. That the result is beauty instead of sloppiness gives us pause to wonder why. Perhaps it is because the buildings counterpoint elemental and stark geometric forms - simple gabled boxes - with a highly humanistic variety in their iregular siding materials; and because of their setting amidst trees, grass and fields.

+ Several slides

BOX OR ENVEL. NO.

MODERN FARM STRUCTURES

13 Belle Mina Gin

4 Barn or siding

13 Maples Farm silos Limestone Co.

Maples Farm Barn Interior

Modern farm structures such as this gin at Belle Mina are beautiful in a mechanistic way, but they probably can never inspire feelings of warmth, as does this weathered old barn, which shows the touch of human hands and the softening effects of sun, rain and time.

But in order to survive, today's farmers must be highly mechanized. Hand labor is too difficult to obtain and too expensive. This completely mechanized "feeding system" allows one man to feed several hundred cattle in about 15 minutes. This large farm is run by only two men. This farm no longer needs its barn, and it sits, slowly deteriorating.

BOX OR ENVEL. NO.

HURRICANE VALLEY
MADISON CO.

LAND PLANNING

Valley & Road

Barn

House

In narrow mountain valleys, roads and buildings were wisely placed to conserve the scarce arable bottomland. The road skirted the edge of the mountains, barns were placed on the side next to the bottomland, and the houses were placed across the road in the edge of the wooded, non-arable mountainside.

OFFICES

8 Office

8 Mooresville Dr.'s Office

7 Bone Hse. Dentists Office

Today, if you need to visit a doctor or dentist, you go to town. But in the 19th century there were many doctors and dentists who lived and practiced in rural areas, since transportation to distant towns was very time-consuming. This doctors office of the latter part of the 19th century sits beside the doctors' 1826 house in the tiny village of Mooresville, and in the 1870's this was a dentists' office in Madison County's rural Hurricane Valley.

BOX OR ENVEL. No.

LOG BUILDINGS

B/W slide of barn detail Madison Co. CA. 1818

Alabama has hundreds- probably thousands- of surviving log buildings of all types and ages. This log barn sits beside the 1818 Clopton House in Madison County, and it is probably of that same period, based on its materials and workmanship.

McCrary-Thomas smokehouse front view w/door

Many log buildings are concealed behind other sidings, such as this ca. 1820 log smokehouse covered with later vertical plank siding.

Log house w/ clapboards on Ray Rd., in Madison Co.

Many log houses with clapboards on them never had their logs exposed. The logs were merely a framework to support the clapboard siding. In these houses, the gaps between the logs are generally wider than gaps between logs meant to be exposed to the weather. We make a mistake if we "restore" these houses by removing the clapboards, for they were never meant to be without them.

Dog-trot log house between Scottsboro & Guntersville

There are few "dog-trot" log houses with their dog-trot center passage left open today. Most dog-trots have been enclosed, but a careful look at the proportions, chimneys, and window and door placements can usually reveal the original design even though the logs and dog-trot are covered.

Dog-trot closeup (if available)

The open dog-trot was ideal for hot summer days, for the narrow opening induced whatever breeze there was to speed up in crowding through the passage - a "venturi effect" recognized and used by rural builders long before it received a scientific name.

Dog-trot

However, the venturi-effect worked in winter too, and Alabamians who have lived in these houses tell of the chilly passage across the open dog-trot on cold winter nights - a reason why most are now enclosed.

Log dog-trot in Lauderdale Co.

Also, many of these dog-trot houses originally had a fireplace in only one of the two rooms. The room without a fireplace was called the "cold room" for obvious and justifiable reasons.

Modern log house (I don't have slide)

This dog-trot log house (with "cold room") was built in about 1890 in Lauderdale County. Many log houses were built as recently as the early 20th century, and in fact they are newly popular again for the middle class, being now available in pre-cut kit form with neatly turned small round logs and splined joints.