

Own a Piece of the Universe Moody Barn

By John Schwoch

I was a corps member in the Minnesota Conservation Corps in mid-winter of 2001 when our crew took on the task of checking wildlife food plots for the Division of Wildlife. The plots had been planted by private citizens in return for a small payment from the DNR. Our job required physically visiting each patch of corn to verify that it had been planted, had not been harvested, and was of sufficient quality to benefit wildlife.

Late in the day we turned down a country road south of Chisago City. As we came over a rise we saw a blue-gray round barn standing sentinel on a low hill close to the road. The address markers indicated that the barn belonged to the next stop on our inspection list. The house sat in a grove of trees across the road from the barn.

Standing outdoors in a brisk winter wind, we visited with the older gentleman and inquired about his food plot. He gestured to the west where we could see cornstalks sticking up through the snow. A few new houses dotted the rolling land beyond the corn. The man went on to tell us about his family and about farming the land, which had been in his family for more than a century. He lamented the recent sale to developers.

Though the barn looked unused and had begun to de-

teriorate, it still dominated the landscape. We commented to him about its unusual nature. He told us that a photographer had been by recently. The photographer was working on a book about barns, and had come to learn about the round barn and take pictures.

Our visit was brief, and we travelled on to check more plots. In the bustle of work, I forgot the man's name, but the barn had made an impression on me and I wanted to see it again. Over the next few years I tried a handful of times to find it but I couldn't remember all the turns we had taken.

A few years ago, photographer and historian Doug Ohman delivered a presentation on rural schools at the Barnum High School auditorium. Ohman has travelled to every corner of Minnesota to photograph historic buildings for a series of books published by the Minnesota Historical Society. I learned that his newest book, *Barns of Minnesota*, would be coming out soon. The wheels turned and something clicked in the back of my mind. I remembered the old man with the round barn and wondered if Ohman might be the man who had come to photograph it.

As soon as the book came out I went to the bookstore. I didn't even make it to the register before finding the Moody Barn on page 48. It looked much as it did the

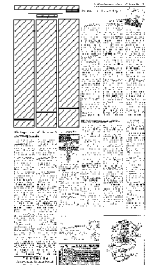
day I first saw it. I looked up the name Moody in the proper phone book, but met with failure. Time had passed and something had changed, but what? I could probably have found out by asking around, but I enjoyed the mystery of finding the place on my own.

Looking in an old plat book of Chisago County, I found the name Moody, Warren in the index. The plat map showed a small pond called Moody Lake across the road from the house. I knew I had solved the mystery.

Early on the morning of Christmas Eve day a couple of years ago, we loaded the dogs in the car along with a thermos of coffee, the old plat map and a camera, and went to find the Moody Barn. I spotted it in the distance as we crested that rise once again. I looked for his house in the trees as we approached but it was gone. A broad new road covered the old driveway and led into a housing development. To my relief, the old house hadn't gone far. It sat across the road united with the barn as part of a county park that includes Moody Lake.

The Moody Barn is on the National Register of Historic Sites. The Chisago County Historical Society (www.chisagocountyhistory.org) manages both the house and the barn, and has completed some restoration work on both buildings.

In the last couple of years,



we've gone to see the barn a few more times. We may go again soon.

Considering the true origins of the holiday, I find the prospect of taking a pilgrimage to an old barn on Christmas Eve to be quite appropriate.