

"If they want to clean up something, clean up these junk cars, not tear down what North Carolina was known for its first 100 years."

JoAnn Simmons
Farm Owner

WHILE IT'S USEFULNESS has lessened with the years, this wide-skirted barn in the Shallotte Point area still retains its dignity.



STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

Abandoned Farm Buildings Won't Go Without A Fight

BY SUSAN USHER

From Maceo to Hickman's Crossroads, the old barns and sheds remain, posing for the occasional artist or photographer.

Some still earn their keep, sheltering farm equipment, housing family keepsakes, evoking memories. Others stand in the summer heat like impoverished genteel old ladies, with skirts slightly askew and tin roofs mottled with rust, their dignity strained but intact.

Neglected, abandoned, others are glimpsed only through a tangled canopy of encroaching vines and trees. Rusting farm implements find little shelter beneath their wings.

Tucked into woodland edging, or standing tall amid a field, these tumbling tobacco barns and packhouse sheds are nostalgic symbols of a fast-disappearing way of life. Scurrying mice and chirping wrens and swallows have replaced the chatter of women and teenagers laughing and singing as they tie and hand the sticks of tobacco. The aroma of the bright leaf lingers only in the imagination.

To most area residents interviewed, such as JoAnn Simmons, the old sheds and barns are picturesque, offering a different perspective of time and place. But others, such as the Eastern North Carolina Chamber of

Commerce, view them as unsightly, a potential safety hazard and a hindrance to tourism and economic development, and have launched a campaign to get rid of them.

For Simmons, the old barns represent tradition, and spark recollections of a busy, happy childhood. Simmons remembers making "crow's feet" from tobacco twine, lying on a bench beneath the barn in the mid-afternoon heat, waiting for the next load of tobacco from the field, and sharing a huge meal spread for workers at dinnertime.

She started off standing on a drink crate and handing tobacco for 50 cents a day, and was glad," she said, "when I got big enough I could string for \$2 a day."

"The old tobacco barns should be preserved; they're a tradition in North Carolina. They have been with us too long. I don't think the roadside should be cleared of them," she said. "I don't like to see them falling in, but still the rustic look is there."

"If they want to clean up something, clean up these junk cars, not try to tear down what North Carolina was known for its first 100 years."

Buildings Targeted

The Greenville-based chamber, which represents 43 counties in eastern North Carolina, is promoting for-

mation of county committees to coordinate its long-range "3-C" or "Carolina Clean Countryside" Campaign in which dilapidated barns and other "abandoned" buildings would be targeted for destruction, restoration or recycling.

The Eastern Chamber's efforts have already met with staunch opposition and controversy in some other eastern counties. In Brunswick County the local Agricultural Extension Service Advisory Council has delayed formation of a steering committee, said Extension Chairman Milton Coleman, with more of its members "anti" than "pro" the project. Coleman said the committee wants to see 1) what budget action the county commissioners take regarding establishment of a Clean County office; and 2) what successful approaches other counties develop.

"If the commissioners want support for that (the Clean County program), then we'll come back and look

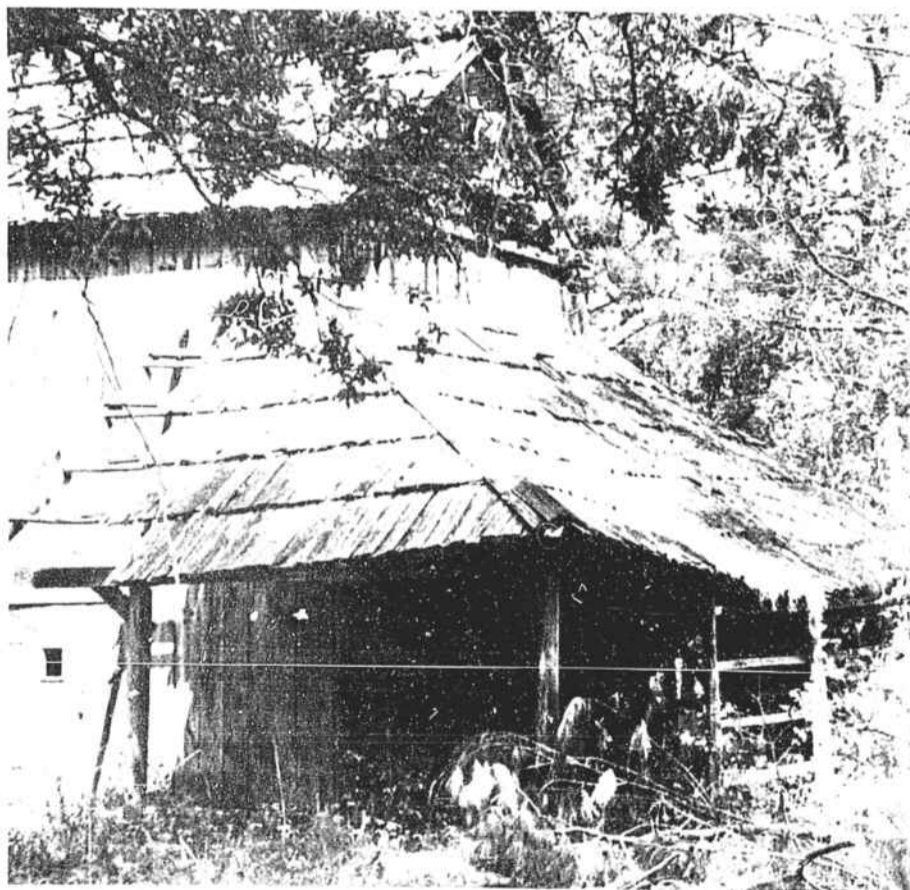
at it again," said Coleman, noting that at recent meetings a good number of advisory council members were concerned about interfering with management of private property.

However, if the county launches an anti-litter campaign, he added, "side effects" will probably include removal of junk cars and some abandoned structures.

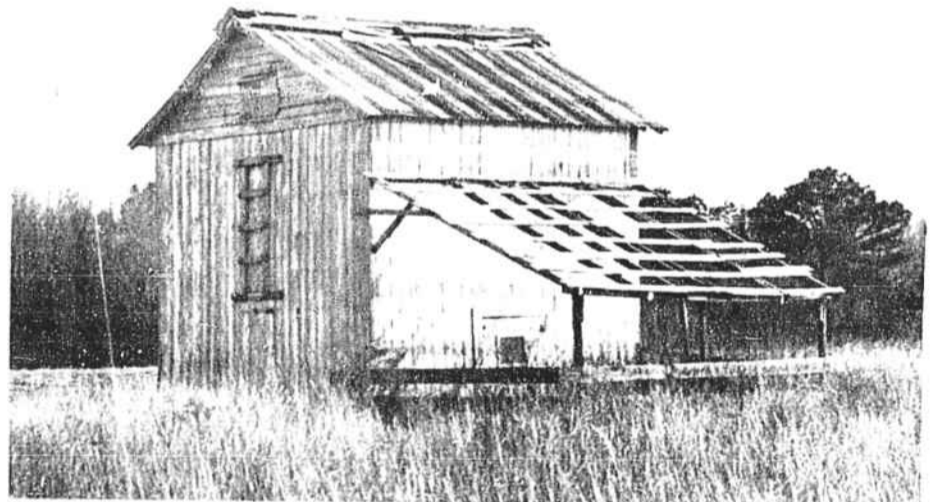
There are "a few folks" in the county either rebuilding abandoned farm structures or tearing them down and recycling the lumber, he said.

While some area residents search out such materials from other property owners, when one of the barns on her family's farm had to be torn down to make room for new "bulk" barns, Simmons salvaged the lumber to use in the living room of her new home.

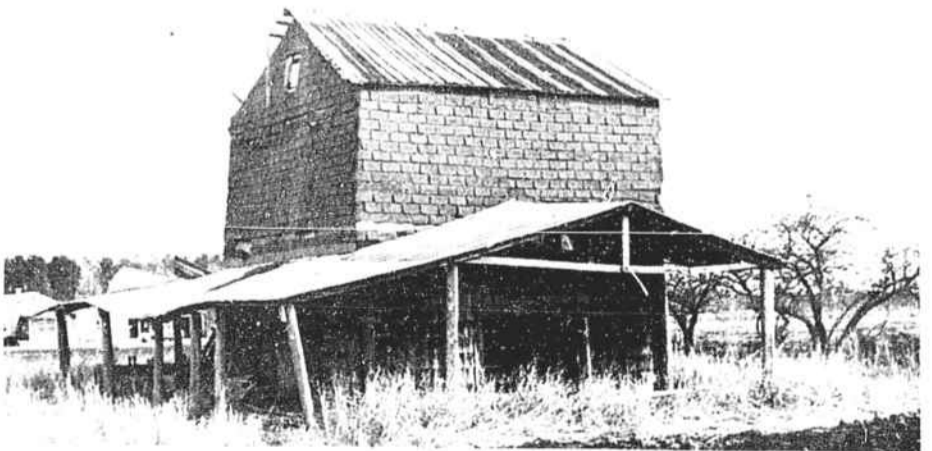
Of the Eastern Chamber's campaign, Coleman said, "The folks basically had a good idea, but were a little head strong."



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