



Creating models of sustainability in urban places

I WAS pondering the word “sustainability” last week while working on a project near St. Louis. We had been hired to take a barn down for the Collinsville Area Recreational District (C.A.R.D.). This particular barn was probably built around 1820 and most likely remodeled extensively in the 1860s.

The original structure was hewn white oak (including all braces, joists etc); the remodel was of white pine. The older oak portion of the frame was built with small dimension timbers (nothing larger than a 6 x 8) of local origin. By contrast, some of the roof sheathing and flooring included boards up to 30 in. wide and 16 ft. long: material regularly produced from the large white pine growing in Wisconsin and Michigan, up to 750 miles away from St. Louis. Of all the old-growth pine forests in the U.S., of which there used to be almost 3,200,000 hectares (over 7.9 million acres), as much as 2,026,000 hectares were located in the upper Midwest—63% of the nation’s total old-growth white pine forests, today mostly on the endangered list due to deforestation (www.ancient-forest.org). This deforestation occurred in a relatively short time, from the mid- to the late-1800s.

Sustainability is often thought of as an attempt to provide the best outcomes for the human and natural environments both now and into the indefinite future. Or, as defined by the Brundtland Commission, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (www.sustainablemeasures.com).

What makes me think of sustainability when dismantling a barn, especially one that will be re-erected as a barn? I think of how structures can be built well enough to meet the demands of the present and the future. I also consider the materials used in structures and their impact on the local (or non-local) environment.

Last year we erected another dismantled barn for



My daughter Ari in front of the first barn we built for C.A.R.D. To the left is the herb garden. The silo is hand poured from the early 20th century, rare these days.

C.A.R.D. That structure was built in 1868, mostly of Wisconsin red and white pine in E. Peoria, Ill., where most local timber had already been cut down and the area was suffering a wood shortage. Peoria was first explored and documented in 1673 and founded in 1813. There was plenty of time for a resource-hungry population to exploit the local materials and be forced to look elsewhere (www.state.il.us/hpa).

The early-1800s barn we just dismantled for C.A.R.D. near St. Louis came from trees that may have been no older than 75 years. Like Peoria, St. Louis had been explored and documented in 1673 and founded in 1764. The barn was just a few miles from the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi and the very large Native American settlement of Cahokia Mounds (the largest earthen structure in the New World, with a peak population of 40,000).

When the barn was built, the area already had a long history of pre-European settlement and resource use by Native Americans (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cahokia).

C.A.R.D., like other community groups we have worked for, is interested in preserving local heritage. Unlike some community groups, though, they are pursuing sustainability in an area exploding with urban growth. As the 19th-century farm landscape gets swallowed up by the industrial agricultural landscape, which in turn is getting devoured by the urban landscape, C.A.R.D. attempts to preserve aspects of early 20th-century farmscapes and demonstrate how small farms as well as the barns and buildings on them can be both sustainable and self-supporting.

(For more on C.A.R.D.'s Willoughby Farm project, see www.collinsvillerec.com/Farm.html.)

Over the years, I have restored many buildings (with lots of help from too many people to list) of varying shape, purpose, and design. Often, these buildings end up in museums, act as town showpieces, or serve in adaptive re-use (such as homes). Once or twice a year, though, the opportunity for the restoration of a building occurs with the original purpose upheld. How satisfying, to see the building continue its intended purpose.

I believe that good restoration is sustainability. Even though many new materials may be used in restoration,

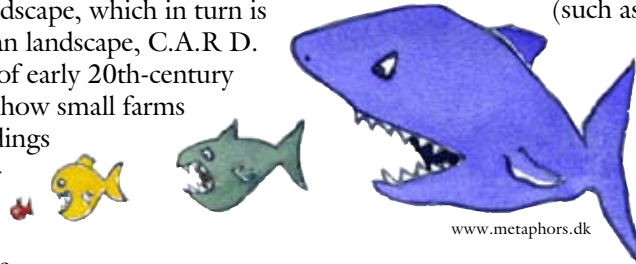
much is original. And what can be more sustainable than using labor (and fewer products rich in the use of fossil fuels) to achieve a shelter, rather than resource-heavy methods? Restoration takes a lot of labor and, if we keep it simple, local resources. We have seen the environment (and landscape) change due to civilization's needs over the last several thousand years of human habitation in the Americas, forcing people to use non-local resources

(such as white pine for the decking and flooring of our current dismantle) when local resources have been depleted.

If we are to provide "the best outcomes for the human and natural environments both now and into the future," shouldn't we remind ourselves about

both the follies and the wisdom of the past? In the U.S. and Canada, currently over 76% of the population lives in an urban area, and by 2030 as much as 84% of the population will be living in areas classified as urban areas (www.un.org/esa/population/pubsarchive/ura/wraacht1.htm).

This May 23, for the first time in human history, the earth's population was more urban than rural. This tipping point occurred in the U.S. as early as 1910 (wwwnews.ncsu.edu/releases/2007/may/104.html). With the population moving to cities and urban areas, it is clear that we need not just green spaces in urban areas but



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green spaces that remind us what sustainable living and healthy living are like.

While I certainly do not agree with current industrial agricultural practices, and I see the settlement methods that brought on the wholesale destruction of the prairies and forests during the 18th and 19th centuries as large mistakes, restoring parts of our past such as structures that endure for generations (while serving a purpose) does seem to make a lot of sense. This is living with sustainability in mind.

—Rick Collins

Maybe this year?

ARE YOU one of the people I've talked to at conferences or on the phone who said, "I meant to nominate Wilbur . . ." or "I'll bet Francine would make a great board member" but never quite got around to nominating them?

You know who you are! Well, maybe this is the year you'll finally take a minute and send in that nomination!

Without suggestions from the membership, the process of putting together a good slate of candidates is a burden at best. You can make all the difference.

It's really no big deal to take a minute to send an email to nominations@tfguild.org with your suggestions for this year's candidate. Make sure to ask Wilbur or Francine before you do, though, so it doesn't come as a surprise. With your help we can have the best slate of candidates ever for the board of directors of the Guild. Let's hear from you.

—Rudy R. Christian

A paper experiment

DID YOU check out the new paper that *Timber Framing* 84 is printed on? It's an uncoated stock (as opposed to the previous slick stuff) with 100% post-consumer content, and made right down the river from us in New Hampshire. The Board took a suggestion from publications director Ken Rower at our annual face-to-face meeting to experiment with this paper in recognition of our respect for the resource in particular and for the environment in general.

We thought the membership should have an opportunity to comment, in part because this paper is a lot more expensive than that which we have been using.

Please let me know what you think: phone me at 603/835-2077 or email joel@tfguild.org.

Welcome, Patty!



Susan (left) and Patty discuss *Scantlings* over lunch at *Cap Hansen's*, a favorite Bellingham, Washington establishment.

PATRICIA CHAMBERS, a graphic designer, writer, and editor with a scientific bent has joined the TFG to assist in the production of *Scantlings*. You can find out more about her at www.ecando.org.

I conducted an exhaustive search to fill the position and met with several talented individuals here. Patty lives in Bellingham (in fact, a moderate walk's distance away, thanks to a new park that cuts the distance in half) and has already begun work—in fact, she laid out this issue!

—Susan Witter