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# Vanishing Stouffville and area barns illustrated in Historical Society talk

by Mark Cox

Unlike Europe, Canada has no ruins of castles, cathedrals or abbeys to mark the landscape. But we do have barns, and they play much the same kind of symbolic role in defining the landscape and connecting the past to modern experience in the view of Markham heritage and conservation planner George Duncan.

At a recent Whitchurch-Stouffville Historical Society meeting, Mr. Duncan gave a presentation on the cultural significance to this region of barns, and their modern decline. His slide show was complemented by a room filled with artwork featuring barns painted by several local artists, as well as historic photographs of area barns

supplied by the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum.

Mr. Duncan illustrated the considerable variety in the types of barns which stood in the region, and in some cases still stand. He also pointed out design features, such as decorative cut-outs in the gables in barns built before approximately 1890, which were partly decorative and partly the result of superstition, being designed to allow barn swallows to enter and exit in the belief that their presence in the barn would keep lightning away.

On a similar note, he noted that many old barns in the region were painted red because iron oxide -- reddish brown in colour -- was common and cheap in this area, and so was used as a pigment, mixed with linseed oil and turpentine. Some of the barns featured in the presentation have either been demolished or dismantled and re-erected elsewhere, with the United States being a popular destination. Development is an obvious cause of the vanishing barns, which are harder to preserve than homes because unlike old

houses, they don't fit into a subdivision.

But the demise of barns can also be attributed to the changes in technology that have accompanied changes in farming. Today's large-scale farms tend to use more modern types of bin storage, so that even on many working farms, barns have become antiques. New uses have been found for some of those which do remain and Mr. Duncan showed examples of barns which have been converted to retail establishments, a winery and maintenance buildings.

**LETTERS**

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## Letters

### Heart and soul of cultural community

To the Editor:

Now that the town hall theatre is a real possibility, I would like to reiterate some remarks I made last year.

First and foremost was that this is our community arts and cultural centre and as such, is the heart and soul of our town. It should therefore be representative of the arts and creativity of local artists and artisans. This goes back to the idea of a guild house or local town hall in the European tradition. We should involve our stained glass workers, metal workers, sculptors, local architects and engineers, plumbers and electricians to enhance the building. All designs could be part of a contest around established parameters such as size, etc. with local people benefitting. We could open it up to people living in a certain radius of the town with the emphasis on local artists.

I also suggested the idea of a millennium mosaic-style square, with individual sections designed by the various service, sports, church and other groups in town. This idea was originally for the old IGA parking lot but could be incorporated in the Clock Tower square and the back parking lot, our "Theatre Park square", at the very least.

Some other ideas:

A balcony on the front adjacent to a small interior bar/refreshment area. This would give a lovely view over the Clock Tower square

Glassed in office or studio or cafe space along the east side

A folding awning along the west side for a summer stage utilizing the old IGA parking lot

A check for structural requirements to explore the possibility of a basement. This would be especially helpful in the area of the stage for props, change rooms etc., giving us the much-needed room that we desire. There was talk of raising the roof of the first floor. Perhaps it would be better to lower the floor to give us that space.

These design ideas, and others, can be seen on my web site at [www.Stouffville.org](http://www.Stouffville.org).

Come on Stouffville, this is our chance to showcase our creative talents and the fact that we are a town that cares about the health of our minds and souls as well as cherishing 'our story'. Let your imagination run free!

Randy Mole  
Stouffville

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