

A past with a presence

Not so very long ago, most food was grown on farms just a few miles from where it was consumed.

Barns and outbuildings were essential to farming. Cows were milked in them. They stored food for people and animals. They held nourishment for the food chain—grains fed hogs, and hay that sustained cattle through the winter. Grass is a resource harvested by cattle and other animals. Grasses are the single most important plant species to human evolution.

Trees felled in local forests were hewn into timbers with hand tools and muscle to become barn skeletons. Logs were hewn from a single tree. Later, boards would be sawn.

Wood's character is etched in its gray patina. Weathered wood makes buildings look like they grew where they have stood for thousands of days.

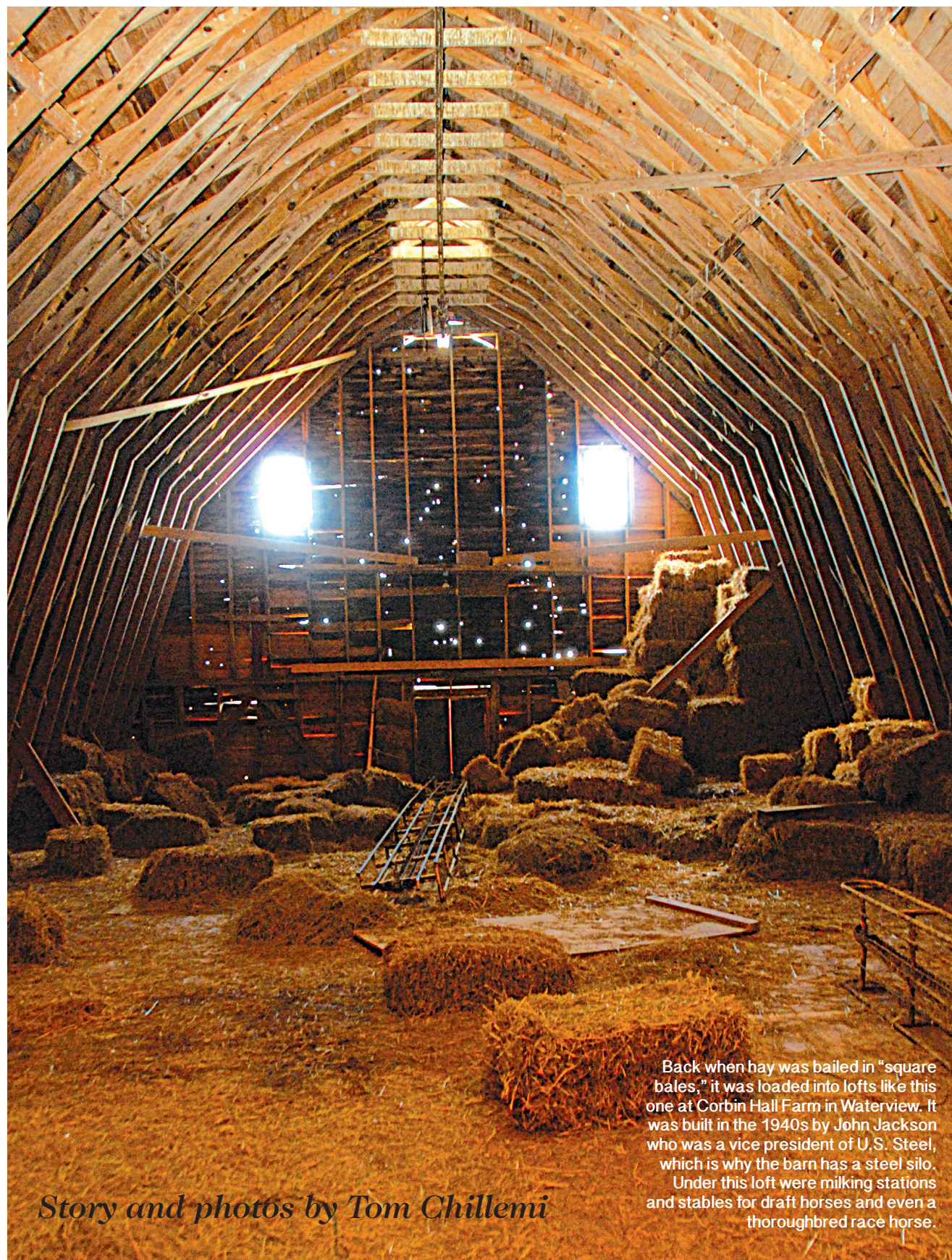
Time has claimed many relics from the last days of muscle power and most of what our forebears worked for is gone.

However, in some instances their legacy is left behind in a surviving building. Barns are getting rarer every year as they succumb to the elements, and with them go the memories of those who labored to just get enough food to eat.

A saying goes, "My grandfather had a farm, my father had a garden. I have a can opener."

These photos, collected over 15 years, are windows to our heritage.

They represent a time that won't come again.



Back when hay was baled in "square bales," it was loaded into lofts like this one at Corbin Hall Farm in Waterview. It was built in the 1940s by John Jackson who was a vice president of U.S. Steel, which is why the barn has a steel silo. Under this loft were milking stations and stables for draft horses and even a thoroughbred race horse.

Story and photos by Tom Chillemi



Invented about 1865, barbed wire was a cheaper alternative to wooden or stone fences. Sharp barbs kept cattle from breaking from pastures. Electric fences are more common today. These barbed wire strands were coiled on a leaning post in 2013 that marked the corner of a field in Locust Hill, until gravity claimed the marker.



Sickle bars like this were used to cut hay and grains. Pulled by a tractor, it's an adaptation of similar ones pulled by horses. The turning motion of the steel wheel powered the cutting blades.



Horses and draft animals cannot back up a wagon. Barns were designed so draft animals could walk through. This building, with a cedar shake roof, stood at Route 17 and Old Virginia Street until about 2010.



A steel hinge holds vintage wood.



Pea boxes like this one were used to transport pea plants to a processing shed.



Produce was processed in sheds, like this one that's still standing near Churchview. Pea plants were pulled from the field and placed in a shallow "pea box" and transported by cart to a shed where a thrashing machine would separate the peas from the shell. The peas would then be sent to Lord Mott cannery near Urbanna, and on to grocery store shelves.



This corn crib at Belle Isle State Park was a monument to farming life, until it disappeared sometime after 2004.



An all but forgotten farmhouse near Warner in Middlesex was photographed in 2003. The barn behind is no longer.



Forgotten artifacts of the era of muscle-powered farm implements stand outside of a dusty barn. Known as "singletrees," they hitched the horse to a wagon or carriage.



A tenon shaped on a cedar tree once fit into a mortise as part of a building frame.



Boat maintenance was done on a railway like Morton Clark's Railway on Locklies Creek. Travel lifts have replaced them for all but the larger boats.