

The BARN

at Ivy Creek



The barn at the Ivy Creek Natural Area was built in the early 1930s by the Conley Greer family as a modern, up-to-date facility. It housed horses, cows, pigs, and the winter food supply necessary for successful livestock farming. Conley Greer was Albemarle County's first African-American agricultural extension agent and he used his farm as a model for other farmers in the area. The barn's construction was unique in part because trees growing on the farm, sawn into lumber by a portable sawmill, provided the building material. The barn has been restored to resemble what we believe is its original design, while maintaining openness and room for an office and a classroom.

As you approach the barn, you will see large doors that open to reveal a wide center aisle, leading to another set of doors at the opposite end. This new barn design allowed horses to pull wagons the entire length of the barn, thereby eliminating the need to use wheelbarrows for the heavy work of cleaning and maintaining the barn. (thumbnail picture)

The *stalls* on the left, housed the five horses that provided power for farm work. When not

working in the fields, the horses were tied to the front partitions of the stalls. They ate hay from the floor of the *feed aisle*, which can be found below the windows. Feed boxes at the front of each stall held grain. Straw raised on the farm softened the floor. Traditionally, horses on farms had names. Maude, Topsy, Duke, Haile Selassie, and Queen of Sheba were some of the horses that lived on this farm.

Just inside the door on the right is the old *granary*, originally used to store oats, corn, and wheat to feed the animals during the year. It is now used for Ivy Creek Foundation guides.

Next to the granary is the *farrowing pen*, where sows were kept while giving birth to and raising their baby pigs. Access to the trough from the aisle made it possible to feed them grain, skim milk, and water without entering the pen. The rails inside helped to prevent the sow from crushing and smothering the baby pigs when she lay down. The door in the front of the pen opened for cleaning. The side door made it possible to transfer the weaned pigs to the next pen without chasing them into the wide center aisle.

The second pen served many purposes. Sometimes it housed weaned pigs while they grew old enough and strong enough to live on their own. They could go outside for fresh air and exercise by using the ramp to reach the small door under the window. At other times the ramp was stored against the wall and cows put in the pen for calving, or calves would be kept there while they grew older and stronger. The sides of this pen are taller to keep the cows from trying to jump over them.

At the far end of the barn are the *stanchions*, *stalls*, *gutters*, and *feed troughs*, where the milk cows were kept. The cows were confined to the stalls with their heads through the stanchions. They ate from the feed trough, rested on the platform, and used the gutter as their bathroom. They stayed in these stalls the entire day during the winter except to go outside once or twice a day for water and exercise. Morning and evening, they were fed grain from the granary. hay from the hayloft was fed three or four times a day.



Barn inside

The cows were milked by hand morning and evening. A mechanical separator behind the cows separated the cream from the milk. The cream was placed into containers and promptly cooled by water from the spring and later sold to a creamery. The skim milk, while still warm, was poured into the pig trough for the sows and baby pigs.

Across the aisle from the milk cows, where the seats for the classroom are now located, was a series of pens used to house growing calves, heifers, steers, and bulls. Cows preparing to give birth were also kept there. The animals in the pens were fed hay and grain in the aisle near the windows. The upright boards near the feed aisle functioned to provide feeding stations for the calves as they ate and prevented dominant animals from crowding hungry neighbors away.

Between the stanchions and the utility pen is evidence of a solid partition that went across the barn. Health regulations of the time required that milking cows be separated from other animals in the same barn. Calves, heifers, steers, and bulls could be kept with the cows or with horses and pigs, but the cows producing milk could be housed only by themselves or with other cattle.

Opstairs is a large hayloft. Hay grown in the fields was hauled to the end of the barn on horse-drawn hay wagons. Horses then helped lift the hay from the wagon into the loft with a series of ropes and pulleys. It is still possible to see the track and two pulleys in the peak of the loft. The hay holes on either side of the loft allowed hay and straw to be thrown down into the barn when needed.

While this barn as reconstructed would not lend itself to modern livestock farming, it was innovative, useful, and state of the art when constructed. It is a good example of how livestock was housed and fed in the early to mid-1900s.

Bob Hammond, author and renovator