

Rural Residences and Farmsteads

Best Practices for Preservation and Design



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Front cover photograph: Julie Riesenweber



RURAL RESIDENCES AND FARMSTEADS



Farmsteads – collections of work buildings and at least one dwelling – are the signature feature of Kentucky's agricultural landscapes. Without farmsteads, there is simply land, perhaps beautiful in its own right but without a focus that represents the people who live on and work with the land. Most farms may not be directly engaged in rural heritage pursuits, but they are important to maintaining the rural quality of place. Many rural heritage activities, whether educational or commercial, take place on farmsteads and adapting these properties with thoughtfulness for their traditional character is essential to the success of rural heritage development.

Farmsteads are continually evolving along with agricultural technology and the expectations that farm families have for their living space. Changes in agricultural practices

can make certain kinds of farm buildings obsolete, or at least change their use. These same changes create the need for new kinds of buildings. One example is the shift from small square hay bales to large round bales. Loose hay was originally stored in the lofts of general purpose barns. When haying was mechanized in the early to mid-twentieth century, lofts were equally useful for storing small square bales. Many farmers have now switched to large round bales that cannot be stored in elevated lofts. The lofts are often unused on those farms. The round bales are usually stored outside, but farmers are also using a new kind of barn – the hoop barn – to store the large bales under cover. Economic uses for old barns and the placement of new barns are both important to the preservation of traditional character in rural areas.

Farm families, like all families, make individual decisions about the kinds of houses in which they choose to live. As much as tourists might like it, not all farm families want to live in a house that is a century or more in age. The creative remodeling or expansion of old houses is an important component to farmstead preservation, as are the design and positioning of new houses.

New heritage and agricultural tourism enterprises such as orchards, produce farms, wineries, and inns often convert existing farmsteads into these new uses. Thoughtful design can accommodate new enterprises on existing farmsteads in ways that maintain the sense of place that attracts visitors while creating practical facilities.



Changing farm technologies create changing needs for buildings and create new functions in the landscape.



The massing of new barns (in the background) may be similar to traditional forms, but the colors and materials contrast sharply.



Farm clusters often have a linear arrangement with the house close to the road and work buildings in a loose string behind it.



Traditional clusters are often set far from adjacent roads and even though the house is the closest building, it may not be prominent.

Landscape and architectural characteristics of farmsteads

Building clusters, internal landscape arrangement, and open space context. Most traditional rural residences are part of a group of buildings. At the larger scale, this group of buildings might be the cluster of house, barns, and other outbuildings that are the center of a large farm operation. At the smallest scale, a house may be clustered with a small barn, a garage, and other outbuildings to form a part-time farming operation or a hobby farm. No matter what size, a rural farmstead is a cluster whose entire arrangement is as important as the individual character of the house.

Rural building clusters express hierarchies of size and placement related to building function. Houses are not as large as barns, but are positioned in the most prominently viewed locations because of their prime importance in the building hierarchy. One or more barns may be the largest buildings in a farm cluster, but their position is usually behind the house. They are often set significantly away from the house, and may not be within the same view. Secondary work buildings for specific functions are smaller. These are organized so that they serve the working needs of the farm while allowing the house its prominent position.

Modern building technology allows the construction of very large buildings very inexpensively. These new larger buildings include multi-vehicle garages, large equipment



When large new barns are set behind older parts of a farm complex, its historic integrity is retained.



Hoop barns mingled into a cluster of original barns create some intrusion into its character.

sheds, and hoop barns for sheltering hay and livestock. These useful but large structures can overwhelm traditional farm buildings with their sheer size. Their size makes the position of new modern buildings important. Several strategies for positioning new buildings could be used to preserve the visual character and internal landscape arrangements of traditional clusters: locating them in the background of other buildings, using topography or existing tree lines as partial screens, or creating a new cluster of modern farm buildings separate from the traditional cluster.

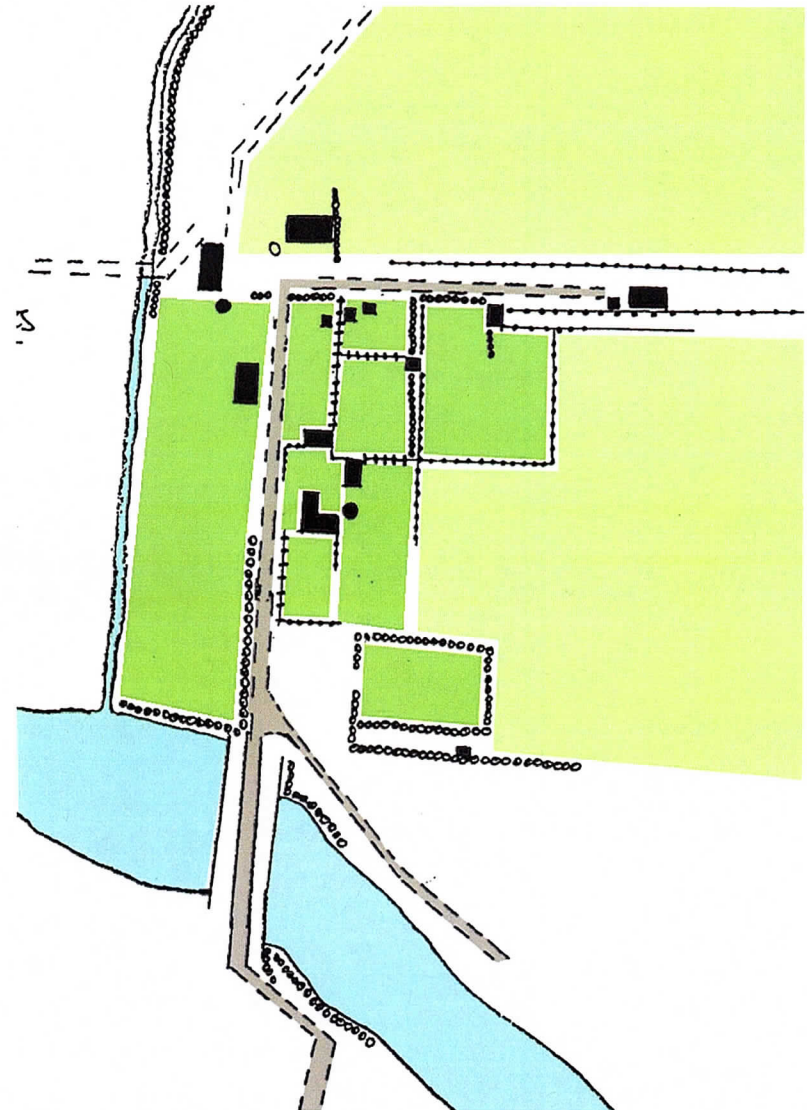
The arrangement of buildings, fences, trees, and other landscape features defines an internal landscape arrangement on a farmstead. The major open spaces within farmsteads include the traditional front yard, working farmyard space, vegetable gardens, orchards, and other open areas. Buildings, fences, drives, and trees enclose these open spaces and separate them from each other. The complex landscape created by buildings, open spaces, and other features distinguishes farmsteads from the more open spaces of their surroundings. When distinctive landscapes deteriorate and become ill-defined because of the loss of fences and trees that enclose them, the remaining buildings lose their connection also. Successful rural heritage preservation relies on maintenance of the landscape fabric that binds the farmstead together as one unit.



A farm's internal arrangement is often not very clear from a distance.



Buildings and small enclosed areas together form the arrangement of a farmstead. Photograph: Julie Riesenweber.



The center of a farmstead is a composition of small enclosures. Modified from a plan by Julie Riesenweber.



Farm clusters and rural residences exist within larger settings that make up an open space context for them. These settings sometimes consist of topographic forms into which a farmstead is situated. Farmhouses in valleys with a backdrop of hills or near a stream are examples. Other elements of settings are formed around the farmstead or house: fence and tree lines, driveways, arrangements of fields, and other

Photograph: Julie Riesenweber



features. Topographic features and the arrangement of landscape features together create a “zone of influence” whose integrity is critical to the historic design character of a property. When new construction is sited so that it fits well within its setting, the character of the rural landscape is respected and the new buildings become “part of the place.”

Architectural character: preservation, additions, and new construction. Rural houses in the Kentucky Crossroads region vary in age, size, materials, plan type, and style. This variety is partly the result of houses remaining from many different time periods from the long history of agricultural settlement of the region. Houses in the eight counties represent a 230 year time span and a variety of building forms. It is important when considering new house construction to observe the traditional house types found in the surrounding area. Even within a local area, there will likely be considerable variety. Along with variety, there are some common themes in regional house architecture. These include dominant horizontal lines in roof forms, simple building forms made up one or multiple rectangular masses, regularly spaced and consistently proportioned window openings, the presence of porches, and a generally unpretentious nature. An excellent description of the architectural types found in the region is given in the Kentucky Heritage Council's publication *A Survey of Historic Sites in Rural Marion and Washington Counties, Kentucky*.

Preserving old houses and other buildings is one of the best ways to maintain the interesting variety of the rural landscape. The choice is often made to demolish or abandon an old house in favor a new one because of antiquated plumbing, wiring, or heating and cooling systems. Additions to houses that incorporate modern kitchens, bathrooms, and utility space can be the solution to these issues. A skillfully built addition allows the original house to maintain its prominence while bringing new character into a setting.



High style historic houses are important features, but relatively rare in the Kentucky Crossroads region.



Preserving a wide variety of everyday houses is essential to the rural character of the region.



Houses that are designed and sited like suburban homes inevitably transform rural places into low density suburban places.



Traditional farms contain multiple outbuildings that result from the many kinds of work involved in diversified agriculture.

Locating and building new houses in rural areas so that they are compatible with traditional patterns is also important. If new houses are either similar in form to existing rural houses, or boldly contemporary but responsive to their context, they enhance landscape character. When they are located and built on lots as versions of suburban house types, however, they continue the slow transformation of rural places into very low density suburban places.

Some farmhouses in the Kentucky Crossroads region simply will not last indefinitely. In these situations, a new house built to fit into a traditional farm or residential setting in a way that preserves open space patterns and the arrangement of work buildings and landscape features can be a sympathetic approach.

Site features. Farms in the Crossroads Region contain an astounding variety of outbuildings. Rachel Kennedy and William McIntire list the following types in *Agricultural and Domestic Outbuildings in Central and Western Kentucky, 1800-1865*: slave/servant quarters, backhouses, kitchens, cellars, smokehouses and meathouses, ice houses, springhouses and dairies, privies, multi-purpose barns, corn cribs, granaries, hemp houses, threshing barns, tobacco barns, stables, chicken houses, carriage houses, and shops. They were studying the period up to 1865 and since that time, new forms of outbuildings have come and many have disappeared from most farms.

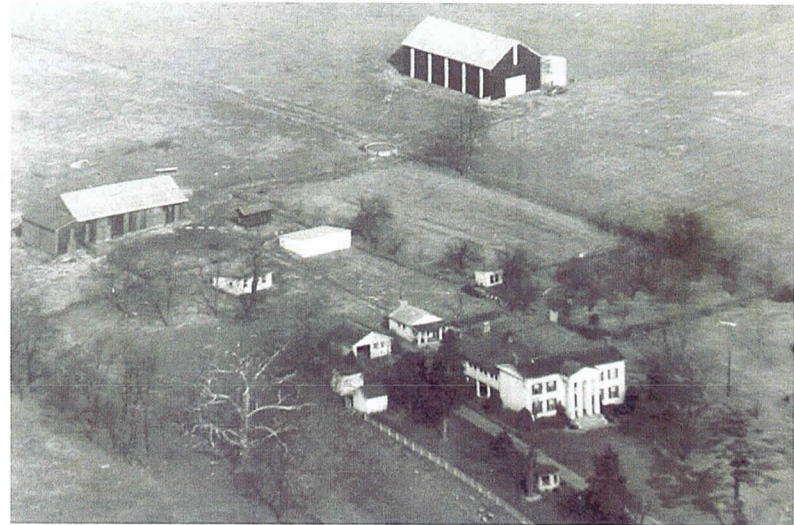
Barns and other outbuildings are simple structures compared to houses. They mostly consist of a foundation, structural frame, cladding material, and roof material. The wood frame and cladding materials are still widely available in Kentucky from sawmills within the state. There are few mechanical systems to care for, and interior finishes are nearly nonexistent. The most frequent causes of building failure are leaking roofs and uncorrected site drainage problems. These are not expensive problems in the abstract – but they are if a building is of no use to its owner. Continued use of outbuildings and barns is, then, a major issue for rural preservation.

Enclosure is one of the most significant characteristics of the Kentucky Crossroads region's rural landscape. The eight counties are not a land of wide open space; instead the landscape is divided into working spaces by fences and walls. Across the region, the scale of enclosures varies with the types of agriculture. In general, the size of enclosed fields is larger in the eastern end of the region where there are greater expanses of level pasturelands for horses and cattle. In the western part of the region, farms are more generalized and include more varied field sizes that correspond with the greater irregularity of the terrain.

On individual farms, enclosures are smaller nearer houses and work buildings and are larger further away. The expectation as one approaches a farmhouse is that the



When roofs and siding no longer prevent water entry, barn structures will fail rapidly.



Clusters of buildings and the division of spaces around them can create an organization similar to a small village.



The fences and trees that enclose a house yard set it clearly apart in the agricultural landscape.



Shade trees are the backbone of the traditional farmhouse setting.

landscape will become more complex with smaller and more clustered enclosures, along with more trees, buildings, and other landscape features. Fences and walls that are more refined than those that enclose fields further away often define the enclosures near houses. Wire fences may give way to plank fences or rock fences, or they may be screened with ornamental plant material.

Shade trees form the backbone of landscape plantings on farmsteads. Trees are long lived, provide shade and visual structure, and require less care relative to their benefits than do other types of plant material. Many of the tree species planted in farm yards in our region are the same ones commonly found in our woodlands. Flowers and vegetable gardens also enliven the landscape of farmsteads. Highly formalized shrub plantings and intentionally designed gardens are not common on farms.

Design practices for farmsteads

Plan the size and placement of new buildings carefully so that they do not visually overwhelm existing buildings on a farmstead.

- Place larger new buildings far enough behind smaller traditional buildings that they will be less dominant in the most important views of a farm.
- Use terrain or areas with existing trees to screen large

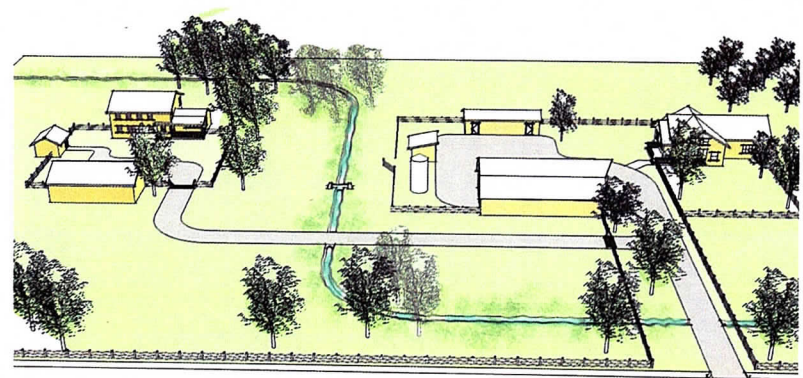
new buildings, or plant new trees to reduce their visual impact.

New construction should respect the internal open space arrangements on traditional rural properties.

- Preserve buildings, tree rows, fences, and other landscape features that define open spaces and yards on traditional properties.
- New buildings or building additions should be designed to define, but not encroach on front yards, farmyards, and other internal open spaces.

Homesites or other new construction built near existing farmsteads should be designed and located to preserve the character and configuration of a property's open space context.

- Position new homesites or other construction outside of the open space that forms the context for a traditional farmstead – in effect, create a new cluster that is separated from and independent of the existing cluster.
- Site new buildings, drives, or other new features to retain existing open space, trees, and other parts of the context.
- If new lots are subdivided from an existing property, locate the new property lines in such a way that the complete context of the historic property is retained.



When new structures are built on an existing farmstead, they should form a new cluster that respects the independent integrity of the existing farmstead. Modified from a drawing by Winter and Company.



Porches are often have the highest level of ornamental detail and contrast with the main mass of the house.



Windows are essential elements of the composition of houses.

Traditional houses should maintained with consideration for the integrity of the design, materials, and history of the entire building.

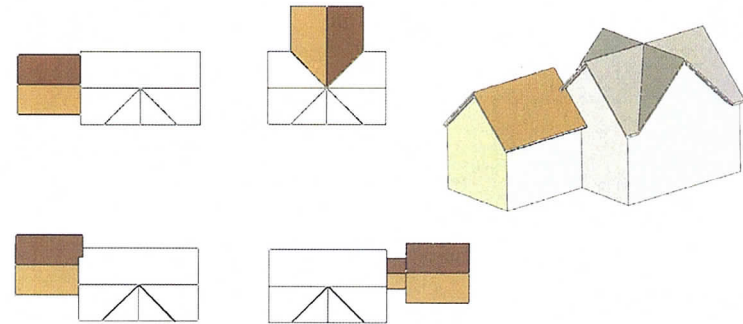
- Cladding and other exterior materials provide textural character and evidence of the craftsmanship needed to construct traditional houses. Cladding and exterior details should be preserved as they are essential to the integrity of historic character.
- Avoid covering over original building materials.
- Porches are a consistent element of traditional house forms in the region and existing porches should be preserved. Beyond the useful space that they create, porches make the composition of a house more interesting because their smaller size contrasts with the mass of the house. Traditional details, and especially the architectural form of porch posts or columns, should be retained.
- The proportions of windows and doors work with the overall forms of houses to create the compositions of a building's different facades. Windows and doors should not be covered over, reduced or enlarged in size, or otherwise manipulated in ways that destroy the integrity of the original design.

Additions to houses should respect the character of the original building in placement, scale, form, and materials. Additions should be clearly distinct modules with their own character, even as they are compatible with the original building.

- Placement of additions should be to the rear of the original building mass or should at least be set back from the front so that the character of the original building is most prominent.
- Scale of additions should be smaller than the original building mass. When larger additions are needed, they can be designed as smaller modules that do not overwhelm the original house. Original and functional sections of houses should not be demolished to be replaced by additions.
- Roof shape of additions should relate to the roof shape and slope of the original house.
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- Materials of additions may duplicate or creatively contrast with original building materials. When new materials are used, they should not be applied to the original building.

New houses should be designed with an eye to the types found in the surrounding area.

- Many house forms that are popular in suburban areas are very unlike the rural house forms of the Kentucky



Additions can be offset from existing building masses in a variety of ways that respect the integrity of the original building.



A bridge-like connection joins an original building and an addition so that they are functionally linked, but visually separated.



An addition set back from the older building mass yields to its original composition. Photograph: Prajna Design.



New houses with large functional porches continue a tradition in which porches are significant visual elements. Photograph: Prajna Design.

Crossroads region. These incompatible house types should be avoided if one is concerned about maintaining traditional patterns. Compatible house types do not need to duplicate historic forms but their design should consider building proportions, roof forms, and window and door proportions.

- Porches and additions are common on most of the different historic house forms in the region. New house porches should be designed as functional spaces with a scale that is large enough to form a significant part of the building composition.

The placement of a house and the way its site is developed is as important as building form to its effect on the character of a rural area. There are several design moves that can help new houses fit with their environment.

- New houses sited on very open yards and abutting adjacent roads will appear to be separated from the surrounding rural landscape and will create much more drastic change than those house sites that are configured more like traditional house sites and farmsteads with layers of fencing or vegetation and with more irregular yard edges. Planting, fencing, and driveways can all be manipulated in ways that are compatible with traditional rural settings.

- Houses sited on tops of hills or rises can appear starkly out of place. Positioning them lower on a slope or at the base of a rise can help them nestle into the terrain.
- Un-mowed vegetation, fences, ditches, crops, or trees usually border rural roads. Maintaining the continuity of these features at the edges of roads will help create foregrounds for house settings that connect them with their surroundings.

Additional Considerations for Rural Commercial Centers in the Kentucky Crossroads Region

Preservation Techniques. For more guidance on preservation techniques or advice on implementation please see the National Park Service Technical Preservation Service's *Preservation Briefs Series* <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/briefs/presbhom.htm> and *Interpreting the Standards Bulletins* <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/ITS/itshome.htm>.

Tax Credits. Properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as part of a district, qualify for state and federal rehabilitation tax credits. State credits may be used for owner occupied residential properties or income-producing properties. Credits may apply for up to 30 percent of qualifying expenses for residential properties and



New houses placed on the crest of a slope contrast sharply with traditional methods for siting rural houses.



Rural houses usually exist within a foreground of agricultural features such as fences, fields, or drainageways.

20 percent for other properties.

Federal tax credits may be used only for income-producing properties. Credits may apply for up to 20 percent of qualifying expenses. When state and federal credits are used together, up to 40 percent of expenses may be credited. For more information on state and federal tax credits, see the Kentucky Heritage Council website at <http://heritage.ky.gov/incentives/>.

Historic Districts and Scenic Highways. Tax credits are only applicable to properties on the National Register or deemed eligible for the National Register. It is advantageous for rural districts and individual historic properties to be listed so that they are in essence pre-qualified for tax credits and for other preservation assistance. There is one National Scenic Byway - the Lincoln Trail, and one state-designated scenic byway - US 68 in the crossroads region. These highway designations qualify the counties and communities through which they pass for federal financial assistance with heritage tourism development.