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James Anson

Where they occur at all, barns in Texas tend to be inconspicuous and indifferently assembled. The barns along Farm-to-Market Road 346 in Cherokee County (near Tyler in East Texas) do little to suggest otherwise. More shed than barn, they are mostly examples of the "cat-slide" approach to outbuilding — a gable roof flanked by one or two shallow-pitch roofs. A mile south of Teaselville, though, one finds an unexpectedly striking pair of barns built by James Anson Blow (1859–1914) at the end of the last century.

In its prime, Blow's spread was something of a show place among small farms of the red-loamed Neches River watershed, where cotton and corn were the predominant cash crops. Blow took out newspaper ads offering fancy registered Poland China hogs, Barred Plymouth Rock chickens, mules, peas, white corn, and watermelons raised on the premises. Between 1906 and 1913, Blow's corn was a perennial sweepstakes winner at state fairs, prompting the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1908 to ask to inspect the farm and buy seed corn as it "is certainly quite distinct from any of the other native varieties."

Blow's two unusual barns were built in 1897 and 1898 near the shoulder of a low, flat-topped hill. Even though large-scaled, both barns are smallish, almost domestic-sized structures of light-timber construction erected with pine lumber purchased from sawmills in and around Tyler. They stand close to each other, with long sides parallel. Small-gabled entry bays, aligned together, mark transverse, central pass-throughs on the long north and south elevations. Neither barn was built with doors at the pass-through points, and the south faces of both were also left essentially open.

The first barn is a cantilevered, drive-through derivative of the enclosed, double-crib type, except that livestock stalls take the place of one of the cribs, stretching the barn slightly on one end. In plan it is approximately 38 x 53 feet with cantilevers 8-1/2 feet deep on the long sides; the roof is about 25 feet high at the ridge point. The sill-plates rest on native ironstone footings spaced at 6-foot intervals;

the crib is raised approximately 18 inches above ground to keep grain dry and permit cats to hunt rodents underneath. Exterior walls are covered in board-and-batten siding; the original wood roof shakes have been replaced by galvanized sheet-metal.

The distinguishing feature of the second barn is its gable-on-hip roof, a form occasionally found in central Texas that can be traced back to the tithe barns of Essex County, England. The second barn is bilaterally symmetrical and follows a two-crib, drive-through layout with no livestock stalls. Ten-foot-wide animal runs surround the cribs on three sides, enclosing space that was only canopied along the perimeter of the first barn. Although the framing is somewhat lighter, the dimensions in plan are expanded to 40 x 66 feet, with the roof



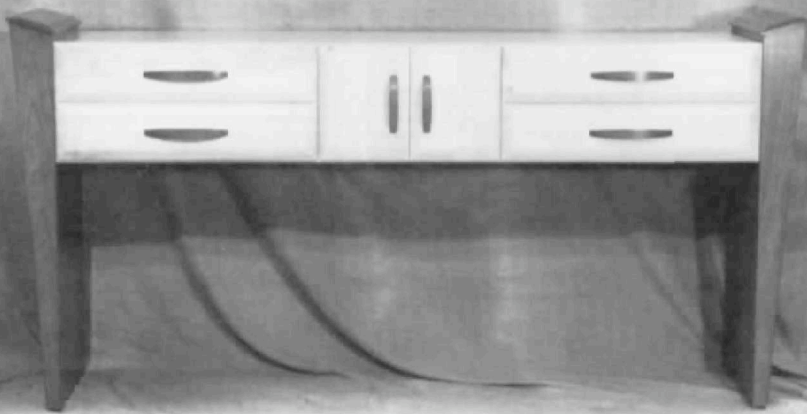
Barn 2, end view.



Barn 2, looking northeast.

rising to a height of 30 feet. Despite its increased size, the second barn is less imposing than its predecessor, the top-heavy, sharply raking end elevation of which can be counted among the happier by-products of agriculture in Cherokee County. ■

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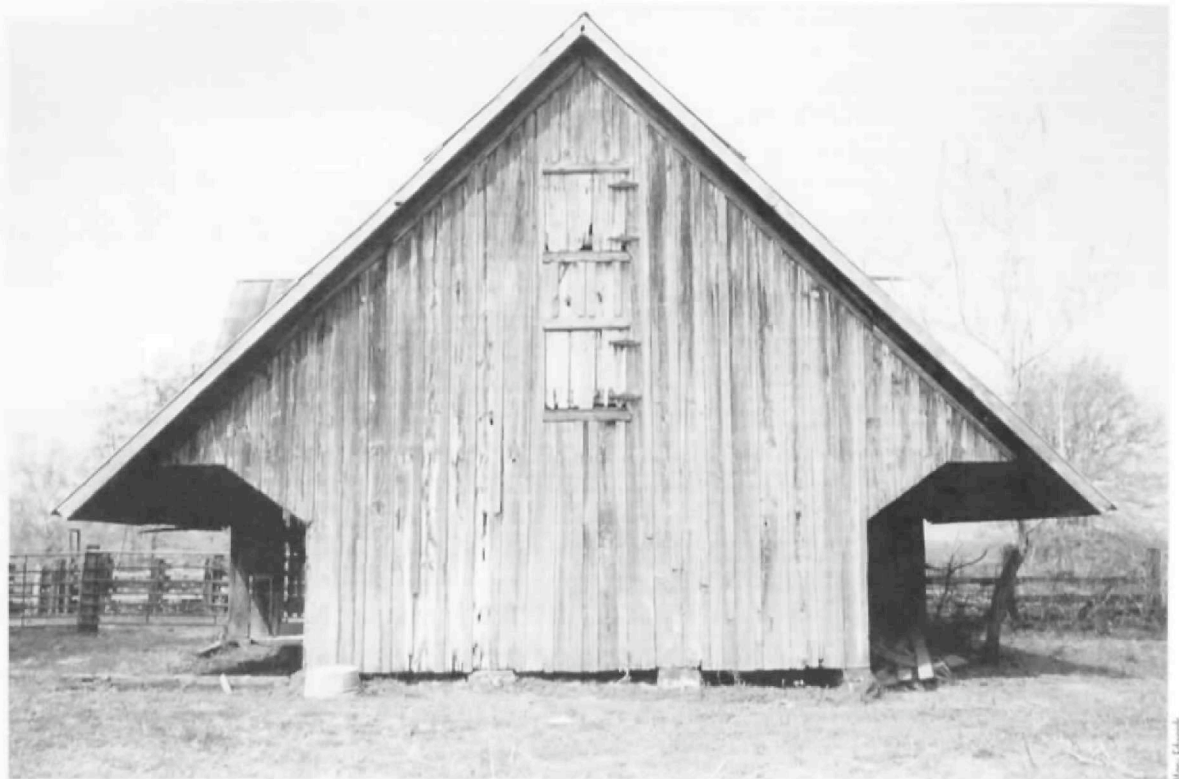
Mary Edwards



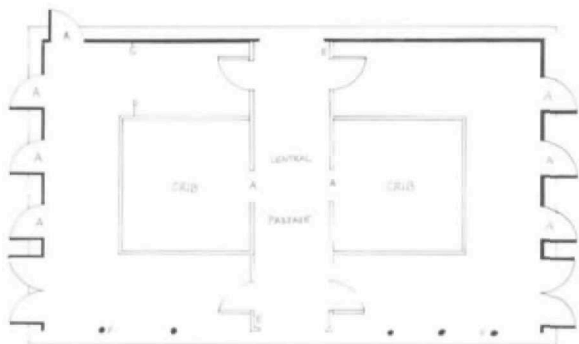
Barns designed and built by James Anson Blow. Left to right: Barn 2 (1898) and Barn 1 (1897).



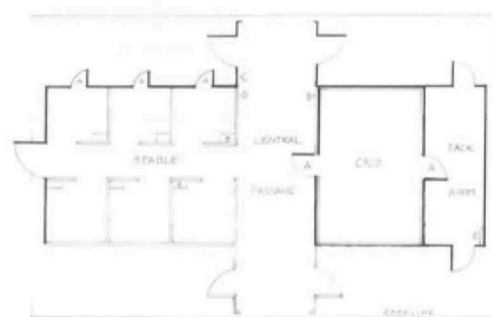
Barn 1, pass-through.



Barn 1, west elevation.



Barn 2, plan.



Barn 1, plan.



Barn 1, ironstone footing.

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