

Barn Structure

Conly Greer built the barn at River View Farm around 1937, using wood that he cut from trees at River View Farm. Oral history from James Bulter, who worked with Greer and succeeded him as extension agent, tells us that Greer brought a portable sawmill to the farm and milled the lumber on site. The barn was built using plans he would likely have obtained through the Soil Conservation or Extension Service which was then run out of Virginia State, Greer's alma mater. The barn was to serve the farm's needs, replacing a previous structure. It was also to be a demonstration building that would serve as a teaching tool for Greer to demonstrate best practices to the African American farmers in Albemarle County. The Extension Service granted one day a week for Extension Agents to work on their own farms, recognizing the demonstration value these spaces provided.



Many features of the building emphasize the Extension Service's focus on cleanliness. The building is whitewashed. It has a concrete floor which could be washed down, unlike the dirt floors in most barns. The trench by the milking station collected the cows' waste. This would have been shoveled out and the valuable manure used on the farm for fertilizer. The wide, flat-ended shovel hanging on the wall exactly fits into the trench for this purpose.

There is a durable tin roof and ventilating cupolas. The profusion of glass windows allowed light to fill the barn.

The barn had sliding doors to separate the area housing the horses from the milking area in accordance with best sanitary practices. The metal stanchions held the cows in place while they were milked.



The granary was lined with galvanized steel to prevent rodents from eating the grain. The door to the guides' closet was once one of the granary doors. The granary was originally divided in two sections and this division may be seen on its ceiling.

Originally the barn had no stairs. Entry to the loft was up the boards nailed to the walls beneath the hay chutes.

The central aisle of the barn is wide so wagons could drive through it.

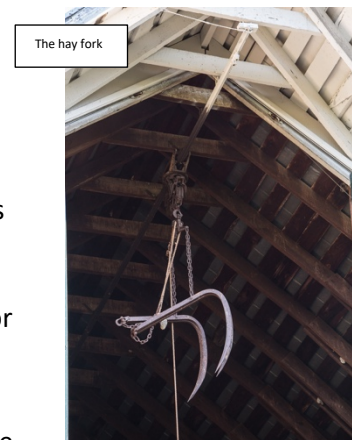


The immense, vaulted loft was used to store hay. The metal track that runs along the length of the loft forms the backbone of the innovative hay-transport system that got the hay up and into the second story of the barn. First, a horse would pull on a rope to hoist a loaded “iron claw” hayfork. Pulleys amplified the pull of the horses and lifted the hay. (The hayfork can be seen on the roof ridge by the visitor stairs. The pulleys are now on display as part of the collection of

tools in the stanchion area.) When the barn was first in use, the hay would have been loose. It may have been baled into square bales in later times. The hayfork could have held four bales of hay at a time. A trolley on the overhead metal track took the loaded fork the length of the loft. One farm hand in the loft of the barn would call down when the hay was in the right position to be released, and the farmer below would pull on a trip rope to release the load. Once the hay was deposited, a frame of boards kept the hay from the sides of the barn. This allowed the air to circulate and to prevent fires.

When the stored hay was needed for the animals, it was pitched down the hay “holes” or “chutes” to the troughs below in the barn. These hay chutes can be seen on the sides of the barn about half-way down the length.

There are thin strips of wood hammered over the places that the wide floor boards in the loft meet. These strips covered the gaps and kept chaff and dust from falling into the barn area below. The area of the loft over the granary does not have these strips of wood because the metal ceiling of the granary is impermeable.



The farrowing pen is not original to Conly Greer’s barn, but dates from about 30 years later. Mary Carr Greer rented out the, by then unused, barn to a family friend, Horace Miller, Jr., for his sows and their litters. The benches around one of the pens are reconstructions of a possible sheltered area where piglets could flee to be safe from accidental crushing when the sow turned over.

Conly Greer’s pigs were kept below the barn.

The barn was renovated in the 1970’s to keep it from collapsing. The old photo of the barn on a panel near the granary shows this tilt. There are now many replacement beams which are not always positioned where the original beams would have been. Look at the cement floor to see where the original beams were.

In 2020, River View Farm was listed on the National Register for Historic Places and the Virginia Landmark Registry of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources. The barn is a rare example of a surviving structure exemplifying best agricultural practices of the day. It is also a glimpse into the heart of this farm and the family that lived here.