

THE MUSIC BARN
By
Lynn Hensley

FOLKLIFE ARCHIVES
KENTUCKY BUILDING
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY
BOWLING GREEN, KY 42101

When driving down Nashville Road there is a big building called the Music Barn. An appropriate name for a building shaped like a barn. What could be inside a building shaped like a barn? First of all there is a big stage and lots of chairs. Then there is a man at the door, a tall man with gray hair and a big grin on his face, greeting everyone who comes in. My what a warm welcome feeling this old barn gives.

The man at the door, who is there every Saturday at 8 o'clock, is named Joe Marshall. This is a good place to begin with this history. Joe has lived here in Warren County all his life. He was raised on a dairy farm here in Bowling Green. He was married in 1963 and has two children, a girl and a boy. His occupation is contractor and he and his wife, Jenny, publish the Vine, which is a local paper.

When asked how long he'd been playing music he replied, "I started when I was down in the grades." He was a senior in high school before he started playing with a real band. In 1941 he formed The Roving Ramblers and they are still together.

The mandolin was his first instrument, but he never played it again after he began playing the fiddle. The only instrument he plays is the fiddle. He learned from a family, in the early 1930's, called the Gainus Brothers. "They came to the Baptist church in the Greenwood community and held a music school one night a week."

The idea for the Music Barn came from Joe's love for country music. "Kinda all my life I wanted a down to earth program in a place like a barn. In the early days they use to have entertain-

ment in the barn. So I've just kinda always had that idea in the back of my mind. So three years ago I was brave enough to try it."

The Roving Ramblers have been together since 1941 and began by playing at things like ice cream suppers, grade schools, pie suppers, coon hunts, etc.

The first Music Barn was on Dishmire Lane and the building really was a barn. They were in a barn loft that they fixed up. They moved to the building on Nashville Road because it was bigger and had better parking facilities.

The new building has been leased from a stock-holding company in Louisville. The building now has been remodeled to look like a barn. Joe has taken the low ceiling out and replaced it with trusses to make it look more like a barn. He used unfinished poplar on the walls. He did all the carpentry work himself with some help from the band. The lease runs out at the end of the year with the option of renewing.

The Music Barn is to keep real old fashioned country music alive. He wants to avoid the country music of today and stick to the old, original down-to-earth country music. There is a regular band that performs and then they have guests. They pick up new talent along the way to add some variety to the program. They don't have any ballroom dances, as Joe would say. There are spotlights down front in case anyone in the audience gets the urge to clog or buckwing!

The furniture for the barn came from different places as did the decorative items. The theater seats in the audience came from Oakland Elementary school. They were going to destroy the 275 theater

seats and he said, "I'll come and get them!" An old upright piano in the corner belongs to one of the members of the band. It was given to him as payment for tuning another piano. He brought it to the Barn in boxes. The decorations on stage each have a story. The old banjo came from someone in Joe's family. The mandolin and guitar belong to someone and he told Joe he could have them as long as he remembered where he got them! The pulpit came from the prayer meetings they used to have in the building. All the equipment used by the band belongs to Joe.

The barn is to give the band a place to go and play that isn't a bar. "This is why we did this so we could have a clean place where we could play." The Barn is for them because they love their music. As for being a commercial venture, Joe says it's mainly because he loves music and likes to play with the boys. He naturally expects to make a little money, but the main purpose of the barn is to give the band a place of their own to come to and play.

When asked how long he thought the Barn and what it stands for will last Joe said, "It'll last on and on!" He hopes to someday build a barn of his own with better facilities and more parking so they won't have to infringe on the people around them for parking.

Joe said his goal with the Barn has been achieved as far as it being successful and being what they wanted to do with it. His life has been full of music and will always be. The Music Barn is the place where people like Joe, who really love "good ole country music," can go. Joe's life has been full of music along with many other things. He and his brother promoted wrestling all over the state of Kentucky, but that's another story.