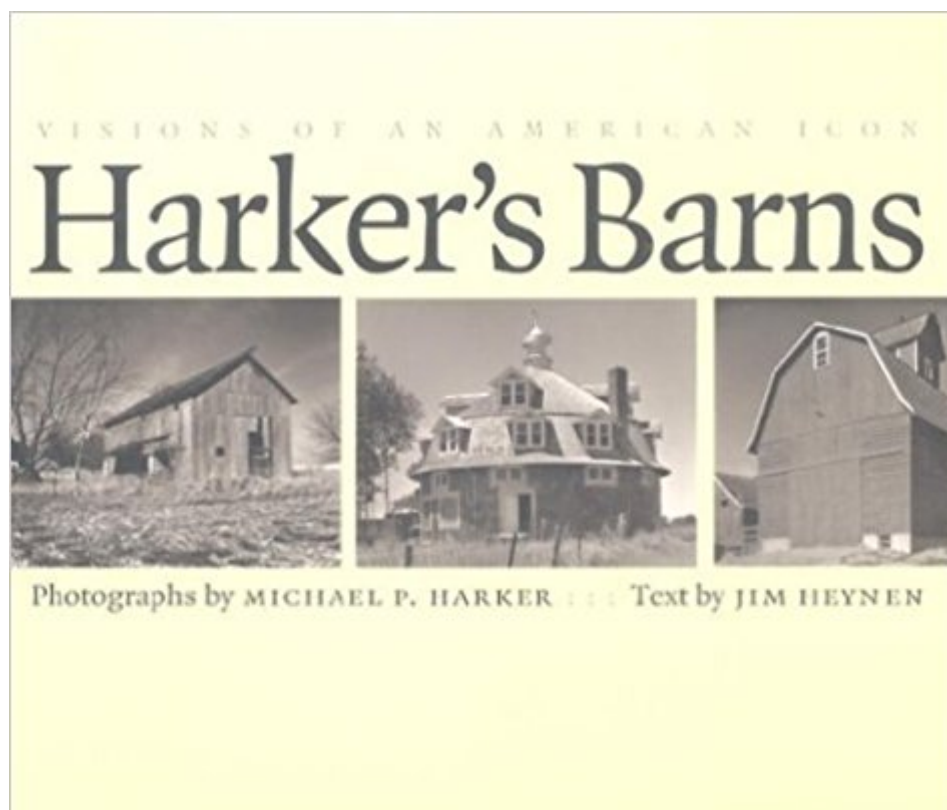


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# Harker's Barns: Visions Of An American Icon (Bur Oak Book)



## Synopsis

Michael Harker drove past old barns on gravel roads and blacktop highways for years. He generally dismissed them as obsolete outbuildings until November 1993, when he felt compelled to photograph a windmill in Clutier, Iowa. This single photograph launched him on a seven-and-a-half-year mission to document Iowa's barns and all they represent. The result is Harker's *Barns: Visions of an American Icon*. Each of the seventy-five black-and-white images featured in Harker's *Barns* beautifully and heartbreakingly captures the glory and ultimate demise of one of rural America's most enduring icons. From square to round, wood to brick, Dutch to Swedish, occupied or abandoned, the barns documented in this stunning collection are a testament to a passing way of life that was once the lifeblood of Iowa and the Midwest. Complementing Harker's photographs are vignettes by poet and writer Jim Heynen. Both whimsical and endearing, each vignette treats barns as organic and intelligent entities, reflecting the living history that can be found inside each rural structure. Iowa's barns are disappearing and with them a way of life; Harker's *Barns* brilliantly documents their heritage for future generations. As Jim Heynen says, "A good photograph can maintain an old barn through blizzards and hail storms and tornadoes. It is the best support beam and wood preservative an old barn can have."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A book with Jim Heynen's name on it is pretty much mandatory reading for lovers of rural literature

and American humor. Couple Heynen's farm fantasias (e.g., "Tired Barns" and "What They Were Probably Wondering When They Built the Barn") with Harker's photographs of the crowning glories of Iowa's farms, and you have some flat-out lovely Americana. Before displaying his barn portraits, Harker imparts that the barn is now an endangered artifact; every year Iowa loses about a thousand, he says, "to decay, fire, storms, and corporate indifference to the past." Indeed, several of the nonworking barns he presents range in looks from ramshackle to wraithlike--if you want to get personal with them, better hurry. Oh, most seem sound, especially the stone and brick ones, but could we ever see them as well as Harker? After finding the right point of view, he seldom made more than two exposures. This rather blows one away, for his barns are as gorgeous as those painted by American precisionist master Charles Sheeler or even Cezanne. Ray Olson

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"Harker's Barns, with sensitively written text by Jim Heynen, tells a poignant story of Iowa's barns. And the photographs, an homage and memorial to these barns, ensure that they will never be forgotten. Harker's Barns is a keepsake for young and old who want an understanding of America's rural heritage."

• Jacqueline Andre Schmeal, president, Iowa Barn Foundation

Thank you.

Thank whatever gods you worship for university presses. They undertake the publication of books, not because they expect them to be profitable, but because the books need to be published. "Harker's Barns" is such a book. It will never make a profit. It would probably have been too expensive for its creators to have self-published. And yet it deserves to be published, not just for what it tells us about barns or a vanishing agrarian society or even about the ways of photography, but for what it tells us about love. The book consists of seventy-five black and white pictures of barns and other farm buildings. Those who care about black and white photography will admire the edge between peeling paint and dry wood and the texture of sun and wind bleached wood. They will also admire the sense of time hidden in some of the pictures. I am thinking of a photograph of a barn, obviously taken at the smallest possible f/stop, to get the depth of field needed to have the barn etched sharply from front to rear. And yet as a result of the long exposure necessary with this small opening, the weeds in front of the barn, blown about by a passing wind, are a blur. This is a book about love, make no mistake. It is about the love of the photographer for his subject and what it

represents in his mind, and it is about the death of a loved one. And it's about the love that many of the people who helped in the project must have felt for the subject, and perhaps for the vision of the photographer. And of course, it is about the love, perhaps unspoken and unacknowledged, of the farmer for his farm. The photographer laments the gradual loss of the small family farm and expresses his hope that this book can somehow preserve it. And yet the photographer must know that this is a fatal economic disease from which there is no hope of recovery. The small Iowa farm that the author loves makes little economic sense in a modern society that requires efficiency in everything it consumes. Who of us will pay twice as much for a tomato from a merchant who tells us that such a price will support the farmer who continues to till the land in a way that makes no sense in an industrial society, but does so because that farmer wants to follow his heart rather than his reason? Normally the text that accompanies a book of photographs is an unnecessary garnish, designed to fill space. But Jim Heynen is a poet, and his words are short and pithy and help us to look at the subject from a slightly different viewpoint. For example, he says "Windows in a round barn follow the light of the seasons, thus giving a sense of agreement with nature." Even if you don't like black and white photography, even if you don't like farms, the very idea of this book may appeal to you. For it is clearly a work of love, and perhaps the reader can learn to love like the photographer.

The ophthalmology department at the University of Iowa is full of talented individuals. One of the ophthalmic photographers in our department is a historical photographer. Visit his website at [...] to learn more about this outstanding artist who is preserving Iowa's history on film. Harker states: The images showcased here represent my philosophy as a citizen of Iowa and as a photographer. I am a documentary photographer whose main goal is to record Iowa's historically significant architecture from the 1800's before it disappears forever. My subjects are barns, one-room schools, courthouses, rural churches, banks, and houses from rural areas and small towns. I work in large format black and white utilizing the scientific technique of Ansel Adams' Zone System to create images of outstanding technical quality. I draw my artistic abilities from my more than thirty year career as a professional photographer. I intend to leave a lasting legacy in the annals of American Photography through my dedication to the people of Iowa - to visually preserve the early citizens' quality craftsmanship when they built these "cathedrals" of wood and stone. My images are little time machines carrying forward to future generations of Iowans the dedication of their forbearers. People born a century from now will be able to look back in time to what was once glorious and real.

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