

AROUND & ABOUT

By Cassie Horner

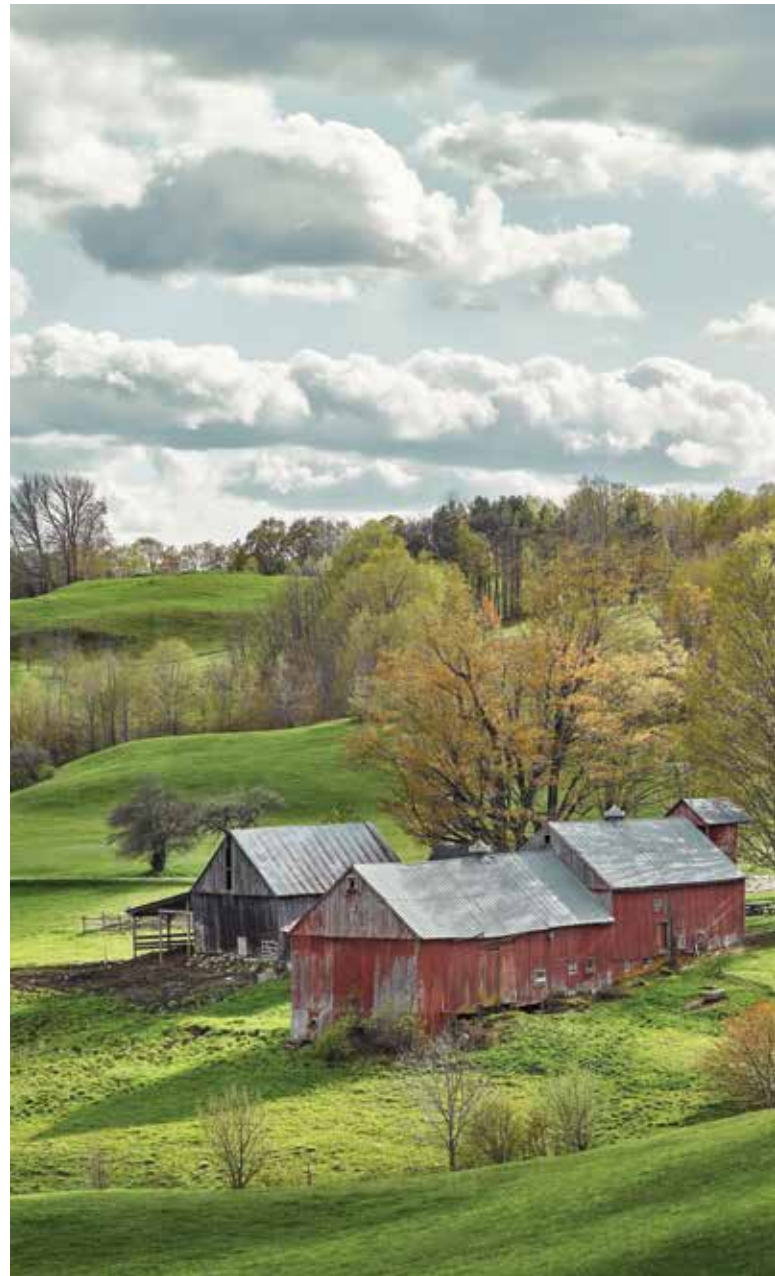


Powder House #1, Pony, Montana. The building was used at the turn of the 20th century to store dynamite for the nearby gold and silver mines.

Jim Westphalen Film

The rural New England landscape is historically defined by its architecture of farmhouses, barns, and steepled churches. But change is an ongoing part of life, and more and more of these structures are abandoned to their fate in nature. Jim Westphalen, a career fine-art photographer who once specialized in architectural photography, began noticing these buildings and how they were rapidly changing when he moved to Vermont about 25 years ago.

“When I came here, I was immediately enamored of old structures and I soon recognized that they are disappearing,” he says. As he



Above: *Red Barn #5*, Charlotte, Vermont. Built early 1800s, this barn sits on the land that was once the Thomas Chittenden Orchard, the largest apple orchard in New England at the time. The structure was used as an apple processing barn.

Right: *Windsor Barn #4*, Windsor, Vermont. This dairy barn built in the early 1900s was once part of the largest dairy farm in Windsor County.





Above: *Jenne Farm*, Reading, Vermont. With structures that date back as far as 1813, the farm is still active and producing maple syrup.

Left: *Outbuilding #6*, Blooming Valley, Pennsylvania.





Above: *Collins Schoolhouse*, Collins, Montana. This one-room schoolhouse was built in 1913.

Left: *Norton Barn*, Bozeman, Montana. Built late 1800s, this is the last remaining structure of the 240-acre Norton family ranch.



records their tenuous existence using a large-format camera, he realizes that, not only in New England but across the country, people truly care about what is being lost. Three years ago, he retired from his commercial work to focus full time on his fine-art photography and on creating a film that shows the amazing character of vanishing buildings while featuring people reflecting on the history and changes that have left the structures empty or in decay.

The result is *Vanish: Disappearing Icons of a Rural America*, a powerful documentary moving between Vermont barns, farmhouses, a three-story chicken coop, and a railway depot to Montana farm buildings and a prairie church. The film blends art, history, anthropology, and storm chasing.

“Of course, there is an obvious melancholy to what we are losing,” Jim says. “But these icons and my mission are much



The Pink Church, Harlem, Montana, was built in 1931 by the Jesuit sect and abandoned in 1964.

more than that. My number-one goal is to make people sit up and take notice of the beauty of these structures in their current state. A beauty that comes only with age. The second goal is to recognize not just the aesthetics but, in talking to people associated with the structures, the rich history that is disappearing as well. The old-timers associated with them are disappearing too.”

Although there is loss, this is also a story of hope. The film celebrates the rehabilitation of four connected barns (dating back to the 1700s) and the restoration and relocation of a railroad depot as well as the rescuing of a historic one-room schoolhouse.

The completion of the film is just part of Jim’s mission to heighten people’s awareness of the beauty and importance of what is vanishing in their landscapes. “My quest is ongoing,” he says. “For as long as I can carry my big, heavy camera.”

Vanish: Disappearing Icons of a Rural America is showing at the Woodstock Town Hall Theatre on Saturday, October 7 at 7:30pm. For more information about the film and Jim, visit jimwestphalenfineart.com. 📺

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