

# The Oldham Era

## The Pleasure of Doing What You Can't



By John Foster

Inside a folder containing pictures of his remodeling project, Richard Smith has a strip of paper taped with the words, "The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do."

And people said he could not do this.

When Smith expanded his farmland on Cedar Point Road in 1987 to include a 700-acre plot, he also got the dilapidated overgrown buildings that came with it. There are the foundations of several old houses, the grand but run-down turn of the century barn with siding and roofing missing, a well house with water good enough to drink and a scale house falling to pieces.

The scale house at one point was used to weigh corn, soybeans and wheat in a truck bed, but by the time Smith came across it, it hadn't been in operation for a long time, he said.

The floors and walls were rotted out. Vultures were roosting in it. About the only thing still in shape was the coal stove and chimney. And the foundation was still sound. Underneath the rotting boards in front of the house were the steel beams supporting the scale.

He planned to do the project for a long time — almost 20 years, he said, but farming more than 1,000 acres of corn, tobacco and soybeans leaves little time for side projects.

"When you farm, there's always something to be done," he said.

Eventually the house was at the point of either collapsing or repair. He consulted contractors who told him to burn it down. He ignored them.

In August 2007, he started, working on it when he could find spare time.

Carol Eckler and Nancy Palmer watched the transformation where they board their horses and ride on the land. They say Smith wanted to do every bit of it himself, down to burying the electrical wires, Eckler said.

The transformation, "was just miraculous," she said.

He finished in April.

Now the cozy shack is a place to warm up after turkey or deer hunting expeditions or a cold horseback ride, to cook some lunch or respond to nature's call.

Smith said he took a trip to England and Scotland, and took note of the old buildings everywhere.

"Over there, they don't tear down their old buildings, they repair them," he said. "We need to take a lesson from them."

"It's just neat to save an old building," he said.

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