

Barn and Storm Clouds

Grandview, WV

1995

The old weathered barn caught my eye in the early 1970s, and I began to photograph it. My first attempts were with a 35mm camera, but the quality and detail were not what I envisioned. The negative was too small to capture the grain and texture of the wood. I knew I would need a large format view camera to take this photograph and achieve the detail I wanted.

I purchased my first 4x5 view camera in 1974. I had been trained in its use while serving in the US Navy. As the years passed, I visited the old barn numerous times and photographed it in many different lighting conditions. I photographed it on bright sunny days as well as days with beautiful, white, billowing clouds. The photographs were nice, but looked too much like postcard pictures. I wanted something much more dramatic that captured the hard life the old barn had endured.

Sometime around the year 1995, Beckley, West Virginia experienced a violent summer thunderstorm. After the storm passed on toward the east, the sun came out. I was standing in our kitchen, looking east, marveling how black and dramatic the sky looked, when it dawned on me -- these are the conditions I have been waiting more than twenty years for, to photograph the barn in. The front of the old barn faced west and the black clouds would be directly behind it.

The barn was located about five miles away at Grandview, WV. I rushed to gather my 4x5 view camera, tri-pod, and black and white film, and I headed toward Grandview. I arrived about 15 minutes later, and the scene gave me goose bumps. The sun was shining directly against the front of the barn with the black sky behind it. I quickly set up my camera and composed the scene. I metered the scene with my handheld light meter, set my shutter, and took the photograph. I knew that I had accomplished what I had set out to do over twenty years ago.

The old barn stood for several more years, but eventually succumbed to the elements and neglect. The roof fell in, and the remaining shell was removed.

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