

Potton : Yours to discover

The Mansonville Round Barn



A heritage jewel to be preserved



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The Mansonville Round Barn

At one time, round barns were scattered across the southern part of the Eastern Townships. Mansonville's iconic century-old barn is a priceless community asset because only seven remain, and no other is located in a town!

According to registry office records, our barn was built in 1912 for Potton-born Robert Jersey, (1874-1944). Subsequent owners were Alfred Marcoux and son, Lionel. When Charles-Eugène Labbé retired from farming in 1990, he sold the property to the Giroux family. In 2010 Jean-François Giroux donated the barn to the Municipality of the Township of Potton.

The round barn concept

The construction of round barns is associated with the Shaker sect of New England who pioneered round barn design in 1826. To the Shakers, the circle symbolized perfection, not to mention that circular buildings had no corners in which the Devil could hide!



Messier's Barn on route 243 north

In truth, the industrious Shakers likely valued a round barn for reasons of functional utility in terms of useable area and labour-saving efficiency. Evenly spaced windows around the barn's perimeter maximized available natural light. Round barns were no more difficult to build than a traditional barn and needed no trussing for structural stability. Ventilation was said to be better; and these barns withstood high winds very well. The circular configuration made the twice daily milking, feeding and watering of animals far less labour intensive since workers moved in a continuous direction.

In barns of similar dimension to ours, around fifty animals, facing inward, could be accommodated in stanchions around perimeter of the ground floor. A stable cleaner in our barn, added after construction, allowed for the efficient removal of manure to an exterior pit. Hay, stored in the loft above the stable, was easily fed through a central opening in the floor to the manger below.

The third floor, accessed by the exterior ramp, permitted horse drawn haywagons to be unloaded easily to the floor below, allowing the teams to exit without having to back up. This floor also served to store equipment and excess fodder during the winter.

Three other round barns were known to have existed in Potton. One, that resisted the hurricane of 1913 as well as the devastating flood of November 1927, was built in Highwater, while two other barns were located on Route 243 north.

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Our barn measures about 70 feet (21m) in diameter, with walls measuring 20 feet (6m). The overall height to the cupola reaches about 50 feet (15m). Twenty-two windows provide light to the stable. The upper floor allows one to view the skeletal structure of the roof, four dormer windows and its crowning cupola. About one hundred girders converge toward the central ventilation shaft, forming a canopy as primitively beautiful in its rude construction as the finely ribbed vaulting of ancient European cathedrals! Remember that these barns were built in the era where strong and skilled arms wielded rudimentary equipment like hammers, axes and saws. The laser level was unheard of!



The beautiful skeletal structure of the roof

The end of an era

Although round barns here were few, and now all but one are gone, round barns are indicative of the agrarian society that once existed in Potton. The failure of the round barn to gain in popularity is attributed largely to the advent of mechanized equipment, and the replacement of horses by tractors.

Round barns came rather late to Potton's history. The small family farm, no competition for large dairy farms closer to urban areas, had already begun to decline. Sadly, local train service essential for the fast delivery of milk to urban dairies, ceased in 1936. Only one dairy farm remains in Potton.

The future of our Round Barn

The Round Barn in Mansonville is an inspiring piece of unique architecture, and a heritage landmark that enhances the natural beauty surrounding it. On July 7 2009 Potton's municipal council formally cited the Round Barn as an historic site, thus formally recognizing its value to our community. Supervision of the barn's renovation was entrusted to the Groupe Benévole Municipale de Potton (GBMP) in 2011. A fund raising campaign, begun in 2012, continues.

In a 1982 study by barn specialist Yvon Provost, the site was qualified as "...exceptional and one of the best examples of a round stable-barn". Now some 30 years on, with no substantial repair in the interim, our Round Barn is showing her age. Although still majestic in her beauty, her structural condition needs attention.



Exhibition in the barn - The Landscapes of Potton
– Hans Walser, manager

The development of the Round Barn for the promotion of Potton's heritage while preserving the integrity of its unique structure is a priority for our Association. Since tourism is key to the health of our local economy, we are convinced that the development of our round barn as a focal point of regional interest is an achievable goal. Our efforts to preserve the barn are persistent.

To breathe new life and purpose to the round barn is to respect the past and an almost forgotten way of life, when days were labour intensive and leisure elusive. The determination, ingenuity and sheer hard work of our early farmers sculpted the open spaces we so enjoy, built our churches and schools and shaped a community through co-operation. Together they tamed a frontier the likes of which we can now scarcely imagine. Succeeding generations, and many who have chosen Potton for their home, continue the task. Though we live in far different times from that of our forefathers, we must preserve and re-purpose this magnificent witness to our past as a living testimonial to those bygone days.

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