

**“EVERY PLACE HAD A BARN”: THE BARN AS A SYMBOL OF THE  
FAMILY FARM IN SOUTHERN SASKATCHEWAN**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The barn in southern Saskatchewan is a structure which symbolizes the family farm. By analyzing the barn as a functioning building through to its current marginal status, it is possible to trace the changes in agriculture over the past century, namely: the profound impact of the mechanization of agriculture, continually evolving technologies, especially pertaining to hay production, and the gradual lessening of reliance upon livestock. Such changes rendered the barn nearly obsolete as a working structure and, as such, it has become instead a symbol of the family farm in the cultural landscape of the region. By examining the meaning the barn holds through the lens of critical nostalgia, it is possible to speculate on a potential future for the barn in Saskatchewan. A comparative study with barns in Essex, England will demonstrate, that in the UK, barns have been repurposed. There is potential for a similar undertaking in Saskatchewan on a smaller scale. The success of farmstead surveys in Michigan and Pennsylvania, and barn preservation groups in the United States, present a model for such programmes to be implemented in Saskatchewan.

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## Chapter One

### The Barn Hunter: An Introduction

*“Every place had a barn, so there’s been a lot of them gone over the years.”*

- Roland Carles, November 21, 2013.

On Highway 6 between the U.S. border and Regina, Saskatchewan, there are several barns. A severe thunderstorm on August 8, 2014 produced a plough wind<sup>1</sup> which destroyed two barns on that 167 kilometre stretch between the international border and Regina. People who live in the rural municipalities (usually abbreviated as “R.M.s”) of The Gap No. 39 and Laurier No. 38 are very familiar with that highway, since it is the one that takes them to Regina, the capital of the province and the nearest large city. The news that these two barns had been destroyed spread quickly through social media and by word of mouth. I heard people talking about it in the waiting room of the doctor’s clinic and at the grocery store. I saw Facebook statuses devoted to the destroyed barns. People who knew about my project sent me photos of the wrecked buildings.

The two barns are not in the immediate vicinity of the rural municipalities of The Gap and Laurier. They are far enough away that no one in the area knows the people who owned them. And yet, with just a bit of explanation, the barns were immediately recognized. This is because barns are a notable feature in the Saskatchewan landscape. On that stretch of highway, the topography is treeless plains. Barns are not hidden by

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<sup>1</sup> A plough wind, also known as a straight-line wind or a downburst, is produced in severe thunderstorms and can cause damage comparable to that caused by tornadoes.

trees or tucked behind hills. They are prominently on display, with all of their weathering, or restoration, clear for anyone to observe. And when they fall down, or are torn down, or are destroyed by freak winds, people talk about it.

This storm and the two barns it took with it occurred nearly a year after I began researching barns in southern Saskatchewan. The event served to reinforce the basic findings that resulted from my study. People in Saskatchewan care a lot about barns. Barns represent something about rural Saskatchewan life that is meaningful. When they are destroyed, strangers lament their loss. When I began my barn study, I had little idea how significant they are in the landscape, both the physical and the landscape of memory.

My own experience with barns began with memories I heard from my father about the barn on our farm, which burned down in 1976 after being struck by lightning, and of the barn located on the “Sidehill,” a piece of my father’s land located a few miles south of our farm. This barn had passed on from its original purpose by the time my dad bought the land in the early 1970s. It was a picturesque building I enjoyed photographing, but until my research began, I had never so much as stepped foot inside it, never mind inquired about its origins or considered its architectural features. It was, in my mind, “just a barn.” Now, post-research, it has taken on a new personal significance for me. My study has also resurrected my father’s interest in the building, and is actually leading to positive change for the deteriorating structure in terms of restorative work.

This newfound appreciation for and understanding of barns was the result of several months of field research, starting with a six-week project in Essex, England and culminating in the body of data I collected after four months of fieldwork in southern Saskatchewan. If I knew little about barns when I began, and appreciated them mostly as

a means to an end (as the subject material for my thesis), my viewpoint was changed completely by the end. I realized early on in my research that the topic I had chosen was truly worthwhile, not just for my own academic requirements, but because barns are a significant aspect of Saskatchewan's cultural history. The initial approach I took to my research morphed into something else entirely. I have learned that a barn is much more than a farm building. I got the material I needed for my thesis and more than that, I came to a much more thorough understanding of the cultural heritage of the rural landscape to which I belong.

This thesis is about barns and the memories associated with them which reveal much about the evolution of life on the family farm. In rural Saskatchewan, as almost everywhere, buildings evoke memories. They stimulate nostalgia which in turn leads to commentary on the present state of society. Buildings which reflect rural life, such as the grain elevator, the country school, and the country church, are particularly evocative. But it is the barn, more than any other building, which symbolizes the family farm. Barns speak to its past, they reflect the present in their restored or decaying state, and so too do they ask questions of the future.

I began my research

intending to write a thesis about vernacular architecture. I planned to document every



*Figure 1: The barn and the family farm in the Rural Municipality of the Gap. South of Ceylon. September 14, 2013.*

extant barn I could in my study region, complete detailed scale drawings of representative examples, and conduct interviews to supplement the information I expected to glean from the buildings themselves. By the conclusion of my research, I had turned my original plan on its head. I did survey my region and measure barns, but in the end, the ethnographic interviews had become the focus, with the tangible documentation serving as the supplementary material. In the process of concentrated research in the fall of 2013, I realized that the barn was much more than just a building, and that its meaning is more significant when it is considered as a *symbol* of the family farm. Nevertheless, it was the buildings themselves that served as my gateway into an ethnographic study of the family farm in southern Saskatchewan. The barns were the first point of study, and so vernacular architecture is the foundation of this thesis.

The study of vernacular architecture is useful for understanding a particular place, since, “structures have a way of showing us things about ourselves that we may feel are too mundane to mention but which nevertheless articulate routines essential for our survival” (Carter and Cromley 2005, xxi). The barn, more than any other structure on the family farm, was exactly that: a centre of “routines essential for our survival.” It was in the barn that the cows were milked every morning and every evening – the milk produced provided not only for the family’s own needs, but its sale resulted in a vital cash income. It was in the barn that the hay was stored to keep those milk cows provided for, as well as the beef cattle and, in the earliest decades, the work horses and oxen – the power behind the farm. It was in the barn that rural people socialized, whether in the everyday routine of chores, or in the form of highly anticipated community barn dances. The barn was the first place the farmer went in the morning, the last place he went before bed. In the words

of one of my research participants, Roy Levee, “the old barn was the hub of activity here on the farm.” Now, at best, barns have moved to the fringes of the farm. At worst, they have disappeared entirely.

Since the barn was the centre of the family farm, its purpose in being built and the uses to which it was put reveal much about the folkways of rural Saskatchewan. The barns themselves contain information in their layout, their materials, and their adaptations, as well as the artifacts left in them. As agricultural practices changed, so too did the barn’s function. Thus it becomes a tool to track these changes and their effects on the lives of the people who built and worked in them.

The study of the barn offers an entrée into a particular cultural landscape and its folk life. Accordingly, it is important to hear from the people who know their barns intimately. Analysis of the structure itself does not provide a thorough understanding of its multivocality. It is only through “peopling” the barn that its full story emerges (Szarkowski 1997; Ohman and Weaver 2004). To this end, I employ ethnographic strategies, combining both emic and etic perspectives to interpret the data I have collected (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater 2007, 16). From ethnographic interviews, the barn’s vitality emerges. All of my research participants agreed that the barn was the site of the means of production for the farm. It housed horses that worked the land, milk cows that fed the family, and perhaps most important, it held the hay which was, in the words of one of my research participants, “your livelihood” (Allan Ayotte, November 26, 2013).

Studying the barn ethnographically necessitates venturing outward from the structure: into the farm, the community, the larger societal forces that influence agriculture, and ultimately, the experiences of life on the rural prairie. Since some of my

research participants are second-generation farmers, born of settler parents, their memories provide a link with the settler past. Accordingly, this thesis will cover over a century of time, from the earliest settlement in the area beginning in 1904 until the present day. The data is not presented chronologically, but rather set on a thematic framework. Nevertheless, I will demonstrate how the barn's use and form has changed over time as farming in southern Saskatchewan has evolved due to new technologies and agricultural practices. The value of this thesis lies not only in its interpretative and theoretical analyses of the barn, but also in the documentation itself. No similar undertaking has ever been attempted in Saskatchewan to date.

In this research, the barn structure is the first site of analysis and interpretation. As Thomas Carter states, "Buildings and building landscapes encode in tangible form deeply held and often otherwise unstated cultural, social, and economic values" (1997, 3-4). He continues, "In vernacular architecture studies we are looking for the connections between people and place, between people and *their* place" (1997, 13). Therefore, before I interviewed my research participants, I had distilled the barn's meaning to several themes based on my observations of the structures and their place in the landscape.

Barns are a landmark in the southern Saskatchewan landscape, both because of their impressive structural size and aesthetic appeal, and the emotional responses they evoke as symbols of the family farm. But they are also an historical artifact, as Cynthia Falk explains, "Barns, as very large objects, visually and tactilely embody the culture of the time period in which they were built through their plan, materials, and construction, as

well as through their style” (2012, 14). Following from this, the analysis of a barn’s use through time, and its changes in form to accommodate new uses, demonstrates the process of change (Carter 1997, 13).

I analyze the built structure of the barn upon a



*Figure 2: The state of barns reflects the fate of the farm of which it was once part. R.M. of the Gap No. 39, west of Ceylon. October 30, 2013.*

framework of form, construction and use (Glassie 1974). Overlaid on this foundation is the ethnographic narrative in which the voices of the people who live beside and worked inside their barns will emerge (Bishop 1999; Hammersly and Atkinson 2007; Ohman and Weaver 2004; Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater 2006). As barns in the region continue to decline and disappear from the landscape, the intangible heritage associated with them is also in danger, and herein lies the value of the ethnographic approach since, “an ethnography becomes a representation of the lived experience of a convened culture” (Bishop 1999, 3).

The combination of vernacular architecture and the ethnography surrounding it creates a compelling and multi-faceted narrative of a particular place told by the people who inhabit that place (Dandekar 2010; Ginsburg 2011; Williams 1991). Using the building as a starting point, the narrative moves from the story contained within floor plans, to those told by photographs of trusses and posts, to the voices of the research

participants who tell the stories of the barn in their own words. Since “there is no narration without interpretation” (Walker 2006, 2), the ethnographic interviews will include not just a recounting of the experiences of my research participants, but also the *meanings* they ascribe to those experiences.

Throughout the course of my research, common themes emerged, overlaid with what I identified as critical nostalgia (Cashman 2006). The most notable of these themes are: the importance of the cream check to the family’s cash income, the vital role of the barn in hay storage, the importance of relationships between farm families and nature, including the animals which provided their livelihood, and a sense of loss of community as the barn’s function has changed over time. The barn was the centre of the farm’s work, but it was also sometimes a site of recreation as well. Several of the barns I documented were used in the past for barn dances; one barn was even built with a reinforced loft floor to that end. The barn was such an important building that several barns were moved, intact and cross-country, from one farm to another.

However, starting in the 1960s, the barn’s function became less and less vital to family farming operations. This was due mostly to changes in haying technology (from loose hay to bales, which are stored outside) and the closure of local creameries (with markets further away and reduced rail service, most families gave up on selling cream). Now, many barns have become no more than storage buildings, or are abandoned.

With barns now diminished in functional importance, I was interested to find during my research that many people view their barns as places that “can be essential for evaluating the present through contrast with the past...” (Cashman 2006, 137). This is not nostalgia, but “critical nostalgia” - the impetus for renegotiating a practical and useful

function for the object or place in question. Such a process can “grant seemingly obsolete objects new life as symbols necessary for inspiring critical thought that may lead to positive social change” (Cashman 2006, 137). In collecting people’s memories related to their barns, I explore their meaning and what effect it might have on the future of the barn, and of the family farm itself.

Why study barns in southern Saskatchewan? Perhaps most simply, because no one ever has through a folkloric lens. There have been a few non-academic works on barns (Aldous 1995; Hainstock 1985). These are generalized accounts, with Hainstock’s focus on western Canadian barns as a whole. Aldous outlines the common types of barns in Saskatchewan, with a particular focus on exceptional types (such as the round barn). His study includes personal narratives from various people across the province. Hainstock’s study is a general overview of barn types in western Canada, with a focus on exceptional barns. His work provided a useful listing of the predominant roof styles in use in western Canada which I adapted for my survey.

Folkloric research generally has been minimal and sporadic in Saskatchewan. Edith Fowke, born and raised in Lumsden, Saskatchewan did some work on vernacular sayings and games in her early years before moving to Ontario where she made her most significant contributions to the field<sup>2</sup>. In the 1980s and ‘90s, Michael Taft completed the most significant folklore research in the province to date, culminating in *Discovering Saskatchewan Folklore* in 1983.<sup>3</sup> There has been plenty of ethnographic and cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Some of Fowke’s work on Saskatchewan folklore is documented in *Canadian Folklore*.

<sup>3</sup> Taft conducted fieldwork in Saskatchewan in the 1980s-1990s. *Discovering Saskatchewan Folklore* presents three diverse case studies of examples of Saskatchewan folklore: Saskatchewan storytelling, an annual religious pilgrimage in St. Laurent, and lace making as a traditional craft within a northern Saskatchewan family. Taft also published some articles on aspects of Saskatchewan folklore, such as Halloween mummering tradition in Saskatchewan (1994). Taft’s work demonstrated the wealth of folklore in the province, but there has been little other folklore fieldwork done in the province to date.

heritage work done in the province in the disciplines of indigenous studies, cultural studies, history, and anthropology, but there is very little published work identified within the discipline of folklore. Vernacular architecture and material culture studies related to the settler population and their descendants has been particularly sparse. Study of the past in Saskatchewan is often political/economic in nature (Anderson 2013; Archer 1980; Francis 2007; Marchildon 2011; Whitcomb 2005), or uses oral history and/or personal memoir to either promote or undermine a mythologized version of the pioneer past. While these histories are valuable and necessary, they tell only a partial story about Saskatchewan's people and past.

The barn and its position on the family farm is another part of the story, one which has not been investigated in thorough detail. The family farm was the nucleus of agriculture in Saskatchewan and the barn was the nucleus of the family farm. Barns, I believe, more than any other structure, reflect the realities of life on the family farm in rural Saskatchewan. From the barn radiated all the work of the farm, both agricultural and domestic. The products of the barn were processed in the kitchen – the cream separated from the milk and taken to market, the leftovers churned into butter for the family. The workhorses were fed and rested in the barn, from where they moved out to the fields to pull the machinery necessary for crop production. The hay was grown and cut in the sloughs and fields around the farm, but laboriously transported to the barn for shelter. It was a continuous cycle of movement between the barn and the fields and houses and other outbuildings of the farm. Therefore, the barn is worthy of study as both an historic object and as a repository of traditional knowledge.

The barn's important status is not unique to this region, nor to Saskatchewan, nor western Canada, the country, or even the continent. The barn commands a unique position in all architectural studies of farms (Barnwell 2005; Brunskill 2007; Dandekar 2010; Hart 1998; Herman 1987; Hubka 1984; Martins and Carter 1987; McIlwraith 1997; McMurry 2001; McMurry and Garrison 2011). Studies devoted exclusively to barns command a small but significant niche within vernacular architecture literature (Apps 2010; Arthur and Witney 1972; Ensminger 1992; Falk 2012; Glassie 1974, 1975; Halsted 1977; Jiusto et al 2011; Noble and Cleek 1995; Noble and Willhelm 1995; Ohman and Weaver 2004; Sloane 1974; Triumpho 2004; Vlach 2003). For as many as have been studied, there are countless other regions which have not. This thesis is one attempt to fill a gap in the literature: the barns of the Canadian prairies. My study region is a small one, and it does not represent all Saskatchewan farms, nor all prairie farms. However, at its core are themes which emerge in all studies of rural communities and family farms: the attachment to place, the ingenuity and innovation which characterizes rural life, and the sense of community (Dandekar 2011; Osterud 2012; Pocius 1991; Walker 2006; Williams 1991). It is a representative example of Saskatchewan rural life.

Saskatchewan is one of western Canada's three prairie provinces. However, though a prairie province, it is actually only one-third grassland. Most of the province's landmass is covered by boreal forest as part of the Precambrian Shield (Widdis 2006). But the vast majority of its inhabitants live in the southern prairie region, part of the Great Plains which encompass a huge portion of the continent's landmass, from the Northwest Territories to eastern Mexico. The prairie region of Saskatchewan is further divided into

four ecoregions: moist mixed grassland, mixed grassland, aspen parkland, and cypress upland (Secoy 2006).

These geographical variances result in necessarily different adaptations for agriculture. For instance, much of the aspen parkland, characterized by numerous stands of aspen groves, had to be cleared from the central region of the province to allow for intensive agriculture. This region is sometimes colloquially referred to as “the bush.” In the western portion of the province, much of which falls into the semi-arid mixed grassland category, traditional farming practices were unsuitable. Not only was lack of moisture an issue, but the topography is often too rugged to permit crop farming. Thus, ranching predominates in these areas. In the flatter regions of the province, particularly

around Regina, there has historically been more adequate rainfall, the land itself was more fertile, and the

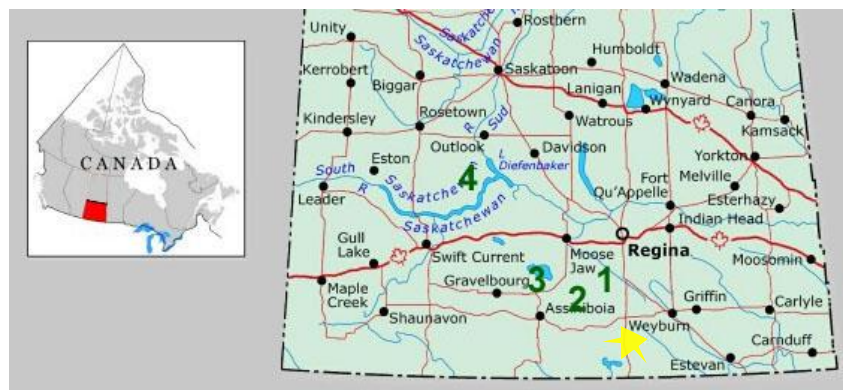


Figure 3: Southern and Central Saskatchewan (Map courtesy of <http://www.geospectra.net/kite/saskatch/saskatch.htm>).

level topography made farming easier (Widdis 2006). In this part of the province, farming could be much more lucrative. This is evident in buildings. Even a casual passenger in a vehicle whizzing down one of Saskatchewan’s highways would notice a difference in the size of barns and houses from one area of the province to the other.



easier than in the aspen parkland, but the area is more susceptible to drought (Secoy 2006). Both the Gap and Laurier are located in the rolling hills of the Missouri Coteau escarpment, a glacial moraine composed of knob and kettle topography.<sup>6</sup> The northern reaches are generally flat and possess high acidity in the soil; locally this region is known as “the burnouts.”

Soil quality varies in both municipalities, but, generally speaking, the areas within the immediate vicinities of the town of Radville and village of Ceylon are the most productive for crop agriculture.<sup>7</sup> The further south one goes in the Gap and Laurier, the more rugged the country becomes. There the hills make grain farming difficult due to the steep inclines for machinery to traverse, as well as poorer soil quality. In this area, there is still native, unbroken prairie grass.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in the far southern reaches of the study region, ranching was historically, and continues to be, the mainstay of rural life.

The R.M. of Laurier’s first European settlement began in 1904; settlement in the Gap started in 1905. The demographics of the region are varied, but are of predominately European origin. Many settlers came to the region from eastern Canada and the United States; others came directly from Europe. There are concentrated pockets of ethnic settlement in the region. For example, there was a large settlement of French and Québécois in Laurier. In the Gap, there was a substantial Belgian settlement. There were also many settlers of Scandinavian background, and many of British origin, including Scots and Irish.

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<sup>6</sup> Knob and kettle topography is characterized by “knobs” or hummocks of raised ground left behind by glaciers, while “kettles” are the depressions formed by retreating glaciers which, in years with sufficient precipitation, fill with water to create wetlands and marshes, typically referred to locally as “sloughs.”

<sup>7</sup> This is an example of my local knowledge at work. However, comparing the land assessment values printed on the official Rural Municipality maps supports this claim.

<sup>8</sup> In the province as a whole, it is estimated that only between 17-21% of native grassland remains (Prairie Conservation Action Plan [www.pcap-sk.org](http://www.pcap-sk.org)).

The 2011 Census showed 551 inhabitants in the Gap and Laurier combined (not including the village of Ceylon and the town of Radville)<sup>9</sup> living on 147 occupied farms (as demonstrated by the 2011 maps issued by each rural municipality). There are two centres in the district. Radville, population approximately 900, the commercial hub of the outlying region, is located in Laurier. Ceylon, located in the Gap, is home to just under 100 inhabitants.

This is the place where this research was conducted, and I must place myself within it as a researcher. All researchers are subject to biases and preconceptions. It is impossible to write a completely objective accounting of any topic, but I must account for my own particular position within this research. I chose my immediate area for two simple reasons: it was most convenient (both time-wise and financially), and because I am personally connected to it. For the former, I chose two rural municipalities because the municipal boundaries are clearly delineated by maps, making it simpler to contain the study area. Additionally, rural municipalities are small enough to represent a pocket of culture, but large enough to represent diversity within that culture. For the latter, I desired to highlight this region using an academic approach, and begin to draw out its complex and fascinating past with a methodological and theoretical foundation. I wanted to delve deeper into the place that has moulded and shaped my identity as a westerner, a prairie person, a rural dweller, and a descendant of pioneers. Thus, I am not an unbiased observer. However, as I quickly found throughout the course of my research, neither am I a true “insider” of this culture.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

I grew up on a family farm, one that was settled by my great-great grandfather in 1905. I was raised to be proud of my pioneer roots, of the fact that my ancestors were one of the very first families to come to this region and attempt to tame its “wildness.” But by the time I was born, agriculture had evolved to such an extent that the farm I grew up on, geographically the same as the one my grandfather grew up on, was unrecognizable from its founding years. I was born during the dry decade of the 1980s, perhaps even more severe than the 1930s, but its effects were less devastating due to the measures that had been implemented post-Depression to alleviate the effects of drought.<sup>10</sup> Farming was not lucrative in those years. I grew up in an era of rural depopulation, of low grain prices, of closing schools and hospitals, and the “deaths” of many towns. Throughout my lifetime, grain elevators have been torn down one by one, railroad tracks have become overgrown from disuse, and the rural countryside has been slowly drained of inhabitants.

Also by the time I was born, the barn had mostly passed from its former functions. We had a “barn” when I was growing up – but it is a rigid-frame structure erected after the original barn burned down. It does not physically resemble the barns that form the basis of this study. The new barn’s only claim to the name was a coat of red paint,<sup>11</sup> and the fact that it served some animal husbandry purpose. It was used for calving, and to shelter our two hobby horses, and for a short while we had some pigs. But by the time I was eleven years old, our cattle and all other livestock had been sold, and our family farming operation had become strictly grain oriented.

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<sup>10</sup> Measures such as the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration were enacted to address issues of water conservation, soil conservation and drought management. See [http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/prairie\\_farm\\_rehabilitation\\_administration\\_pfra.html](http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/prairie_farm_rehabilitation_administration_pfra.html).

<sup>11</sup> The vast majority of barns in this region are painted red. According to David Stephens, the popularity of red paint was mostly based on the ready availability of cheap iron oxide and linseed oil. However, by the time of settlement in Saskatchewan, the practice of painting barns red had become a cultural norm as well (1995).

And so if I thought I already knew a lot about my topic when I began my research, I was very quickly proven wrong. I soon discovered that I actually knew next to nothing about barns, nor about the life my parents had lived as children, nor about the everyday reality of my grandparents' lives. I knew snippets here and there: milking cows, hay in the loft, using horses for work, daily chores. But these were just brief retellings of a romanticized but hardworking past that had little bearing on my concept of "family farm" and rural life. I knew nothing about the cream check. I had never heard of a hay sling. I would not have been able to milk a cow. But as my research progressed, I came to learn that these things had once been a vital component of people's daily lives, that they had, in fact, informed their identities as rural people in this particular place.

Throughout my research, then, I was in the unique position of insider-outsider. I can confidently claim to bring both an esoteric and an exoteric perspective to this work. I knew the landscape and I understood the culture, but because of the generational divide between me and my research participants, I was also able to approach the research as an outsider. I could ask questions that people from my parents' and grandparents' generations likely would never have thought to ask, simply because the answers were so obvious (to them). Because of my status as "belonging" to the community, I could much more easily gain access into people's lives and confidences. Because I am of a rural background and people know my father and knew my grandparents, I was not treated with suspicion or distrust, as outsiders can be. Perhaps in part because of this unique perspective, the research soon took on a much larger role in my life than merely that of fulfilling an academic requirement.

Early on in my research, I started a blog to share what I was learning about the area and about barns with the local community. People were particularly interested in my photographs, and since I was taking thousands, I thought a blog was a good way to share some of them. I chose the name “The Barn Hunter” for the blog title, a moniker which has stuck with me. The community response to the blog was very positive, and began to attract a much larger audience than I had anticipated. A couple of months after the blog began, I was contacted by CBC Radio in Regina asking to interview me about my work. On October 22, 2013, I was interviewed by both CBC Radio’s the Morning Edition in Regina, and Saskatoon Morning. The interview with Saskatoon Morning was later broadcast on The Story from Here, meaning that it was heard across Canada.

Soon after, I received letters, phone calls and emails from barn enthusiasts across the province and the country. My blog also connected me with barn lovers in the United States, including Steven Stier, the author of the *Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey*. Additionally, the *Western Producer*, western Canada’s leading agricultural publication, published a full-page editorial on my work on December 5, 2013. I continue to receive calls and emails from people interested in my research. Sometimes these people want to share with me their own barn research; often they want me to go and look at a particular barn. In a few cases, all they want to say is they are glad I am doing this work and they believe it is worth doing. The media interest in my research confirmed what I was experiencing in my everyday fieldwork. People care about barns, people are interested in barns. Barns mean something in people’s lives.

As a barn “hunter,” I was determined to document every single surviving barn in my area. It became almost a personal mission to at least acknowledge the existence of

these buildings, so many of them neglected and nearly forgotten about, and to record them in a basic way. Some received no more attention than a photograph from the road and some basic notes. Others were pored over in detail, every stud measured, every stall analyzed. Many barns' stories have been lost. Those that stand abandoned in fields, their owners long since passed away or moved on. Some barns' stories are still cherished and told and retold, and have now been told to me and so documented. What is certain about all barns is that they did have stories. Perhaps they are simple ones, like the time the milk cow kicked the pail over and all the kittens drank the milk off the floor; perhaps they are dramatic ones like a fire or a tornado. These stories are not just amusing anecdotes, though they can serve that purpose as well. They, like the landscapes and buildings around them, "reveal lives" (Adams 2001, 151). The memories of barns contain truths about the way people lived and worked, about the nature of life on a family farm. They reflect larger forces which affect the farm, and they aid in the construction of rural identities. They are a record of life.

The survey which began my research was an integral aspect of this work. It enabled me to understand the landscape on an intimate level, for as John Fraser Hart writes, "The only proper way to learn about and understand the landscape is to live in it, look at it, think about it, explore it, ask questions about it, contemplate it, and speculate about it" (1998, 1). In recording every barn I could find, I created a database of all the extant barns in this region and classified them according to their condition, their roof type, and their dimensions. From this data, I extracted common themes which were used to inform my ethnographic interviews later in the research.

The survey was the most time consuming segment of my research. It involved driving every road in both Laurier and the Gap, each of which is 18 sections in size. A section of land contains 640 acres and is a mile square. Each rural municipality, then, contains a total of 324 square miles, or 521 square kilometers. My total study area was 648 square miles or 1043 square kilometres in size. I measured every barn I could access. By the end, I had become proficient at accurately “eyeballing” barn measurements – a trick my father taught me: to count the spaces between the studs, which are generally two feet. It was an exhausting effort, but an essential one, for the process forced me to fully engage with the buildings and the landscape. I can now confidently report that the highest percentage of barns in the area had a standard measurement of 28’ X 40’ because I have looked at every single barn in this region. I can make generalizations and posit theories because I know exactly what is out there.

I surveyed and documented 123 barns in the region. From this pool, I studied in more detail three samples, completing three detailed floor plans in total. I spent an average of two full days at each of the sample barns. This field analysis included: measuring, scale drawings, extensive photography, and informal interviews with the barn owners. Each of these owners was in turn interviewed formally. Finally, I formally interviewed sixteen research participants. These ranged in age from senior citizens in their late 80s who worked in barns much of their lives, to a couple in their 50s who own a barn and are consciously repurposing it.

The farms and barns and people of this study are uniquely situated in their particular region. As such, they have been shaped by the environment around them. They are individuals with their own stories. But considered together, and compared to other

rural studies, these stories become universal stories in the canon of family farm narratives.

I heard many stories throughout my research. Many came while I was “barn hunting” in the field, and as such, were hastily scribbled in my field notes. Others were recorded in a formal interview setting. Most of the research participants contacted me in response to an ad I placed in the local weekly newspaper, *The Radville Star*. Accordingly, these people have a personal interest in barns, a factor I acknowledged as a bias when I analyzed and interpreted the interview material. Most of them currently live on family farms, and most have invested time and money to maintain their barns. I solicited a few of the participants for interviews after meeting them during the survey. I chose interviewees based on their interest in the subject and their willingness to be interviewed.

Since most the research participants elected to be part of this study, it must be acknowledged that they do not necessarily represent the experiences of all farm families. Most of the participants still live on their family farms and are from a segment of the rural Saskatchewan population which has prospered. Since several of them have invested money into their barns, they are perhaps more affluent than most. Therefore, the stories of those barns which are deteriorating on abandoned homesteads, or even on occupied homesteads, are not included here.

People who are apathetic about barns or who regard them as unsightly eyesores also do not contribute their voices to this study. However, I would argue, based on my extensive survey which included speaking to over 100 people on “cold visits,” that there are very few people who fall into that category. I found, to my surprise, an overwhelmingly positive response to my work, and amongst all generations. Even young

farm families who do not have many or any personal experiences with barns were interested in what I was doing. I was never turned away from a farm; no one ever told me they thought barns were useless and not worth studying. This general reaction has accordingly informed many of my ideas about the barn in this region.

My research participants were the most significant contributors to this work. Their various personal narratives and any necessary contextual information will appear throughout the following chapters. Some of the interviews were with one individual; several were with couples or small groups of people – always either married or related, or both.<sup>12</sup> All of the interviews were conducted at the research participants' homes, usually seated at their kitchen tables.

- Nora Atcheson, b. 1946. Nora contacted me after hearing my interview on CBC Radio. She grew up in the R.M. of the Gap with her father, Hermann Vermeulen. She moved away as a young woman and was married and moved to a farm north of Regina. She still owns the land on which her family's barn is located, but it is rented to her cousins who farm in the area.
- Edith and Allan Ayotte, b. 1949 and 1946. They were married in 1970. Allan was born and raised in the R.M. of the Gap on a family farm; Edith was also raised on a family farm. They still lived on their farm at the time of the interview, but it had been sold and they were in the process of moving to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, a small city about 150 kilometres away.

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<sup>12</sup> As a general note of interest, typically the husband would contact me initially and I would organize the interview with him. Upon arrival to his home, I found that his wife was almost always present in the same room. The first time this happened, I felt it would be rude to ask her to leave. As she contributed throughout the course of the interview, I realized that her insights were as valuable as her husband's and certainly deserved a place in my research. Thereafter, I usually asked that both spouses participate in the interview.

- Tracy Bain and Kim Levee, b. 1965 and 1960. Kim was born and raised on the Levee family farm in the R.M. of Laurier. He continues to farm with his father, Roy, who was also interviewed for this project. Tracy was born and raised in Regina, Saskatchewan. She married Kim and moved to the farm in 2004. She is also involved with the farming operation.
- Roland Carles, b. 1946. Roland was born and raised on a family farm in the R.M. of Laurier. He continues to operate a grain farm with his son. He and his wife, Darlene, still live on the original farm.
- Roy Levee, b. 1935. Roy was born and raised on the Levee family farm in the R.M. of Laurier. He is semi-retired, but continues to operate the farming operation with his son, Kim, who was also interviewed for this project. Roy and his wife, Beth, still live on the family farm.
- Murray and Selina McGillivray, b. 1941 and 1945. Murray was born and raised in the Weyburn district, about sixty kilometres east of his current ranching operation. He and his wife moved to the R.M. of the Gap in 1968 and operated a cattle ranch in the R.M. of the Gap until 2014.
- Stafford McGrath, b. 1942. Stafford was born and raised on a family farm in the R.M. of the Gap. He farmed independently for several decades, retiring in 2012. He has since relocated to the village of Ceylon, but commutes to his farm every day to check on his horses and cats.
- François (Frank) and Eveline Porte, b. 1932 and 1937. Frank was born and raised on a family farm in the R.M. of Laurier, as was Eveline. Once married in 1955,

they farmed together on Frank's family farm. They retired from farming in 2005, sold their farm and moved to the city of Weyburn.

- Eileen Sorensen b. 1935. Eileen was born and raised on a farm in northern Saskatchewan. In 1952 she moved to the R.M. of the Gap when she was married to William, now deceased. She continues to live on the family farm.
- Arvid and Levonne Thue, b. 1925 and 1930. Arvid was born and raised on a family farm in the R.M. of Laurier. He has lived and farmed in the immediate area his entire life. Levonne was born and raised on a farm in western Saskatchewan. They continue to live on the family farm.
- Alexina Verot, b. 1927. Alexina was born and raised on a family farm in the R.M. of Laurier. She was married to Peter Verot (deceased) in 1946 at which time she moved to his family farm. They lived and farmed there until the 1980s when they retired to the town of Radville. Alexina lives in Radville.
- David (Dave) and Sharon Verot, b. 1956 and 1958. Dave is Alexina Verot's son. He was born and raised on the Verot family farm in the R.M. of Laurier. Sharon was born and raised on a family farm just north of Radville, in the R.M. of Brokenshell. She and Dave were married in 1980, at which time they began farming together on the Verot family farm. They continue to farm, and live on the family farm most of the year.

The personal experience narratives of these research participants will appear throughout the thesis to illustrate the theories in each chapter. A few of them (Arvid and Levonne Thue, Tracy Bain and Kim Levee) will be the focus of case studies (in Chapters Three and Five). Though only a small percentage of the interview material I gathered is

presented as it was recorded in this thesis, it played a large role in shaping my ideas and conclusions about the nature and meaning of the barn in this region.

The barns themselves will reveal their stories through their present conditions, the material culture contained within them, their changing uses over the years, and/or their neglect. The stories people tell about their barns reveal the meaning of these buildings and provide commentary on the way of life on farms in southern Saskatchewan, and how this has changed and continues to change over time. I use Cashman's theory of critical nostalgia to analyze the meanings extracted from memories related to the barn, and discuss its potential as a tool for negotiating a different future for barns in this province.

In Chapter Two, I lay the foundation for the later chapters by defining the Saskatchewan barn, placing it in the context of barn research and literature in other places, and analyze the physical structure itself – its form. I also explore the barn's original function and how its function has been adapted over time, reflecting changes in agriculture.

Chapter Three is a case study of the “last living barn” in my study region. This is the only barn which still functions in the way it was meant to when it was first built. The case study provides a transition between the physical building as defined in Chapter Two and the symbolic barn which is defined in Chapter Four. It is a bridge between the past and present, between the everyday reality of farm life and the memories of past reality as remembered by my research participants.

Chapter Four delves deeper into the barn's meaning, moving beyond the physical space of the structures themselves to explore the space they hold in people's memories, and the place they hold in the landscape as symbols of a past way of life. I explore the

prevalent themes I discovered during my research, including a discussion of the gendered barn. I also discuss critical nostalgia and the part it plays in the interpretation of memories and the actions undertaken to preserve barns.

Chapter Five concludes the study by examining the barn's current place in the Saskatchewan countryside and the possibilities for its future. This includes a comparative study between Essex, England, where there is a defined future for barns and southern Saskatchewan, where general opinion holds that there is not. I discuss reasons for this view and suggest possible alternatives. This chapter also includes a case study of the only barn in the study region which has been adapted for reuse.

Throughout the course of my research, when talking to people about barns, they often wanted to discuss exceptional barns – such as the 96-foot barn, the largest in the area, which was moved twenty miles cross-country in the 1990s, or barns with unique defining characteristics such as cupolas or weather vanes. This was not surprising, since rarity always commands attention. However, for the purposes of this study, I am not particularly interested in the exceptional (except in two cases, but what is interesting is not the structure themselves, rather the uses to which they are being put). As John Fraser Hart has argued, “it is far too easy to be distracted by exceptions and to take the norm for granted...Students of the landscape must learn to focus on the norms” (1998. 13). In general, I am interested in the ordinary and the commonplace. I am searching for meaning in the everyday barn structure. I am not so much interested in how these barns were built, but more about how they were used. I am not overly concerned with the dimensional allocation of space (form), but I *am* concerned with how the farm family moved and worked within that space. The barn, in this thesis, becomes a symbol – one

which represents the changeable nature and the changing reality of life on the family farm in southern Saskatchewan.

## Chapter Two

### Form and Function: The Barn

*“The barn was a great need at one time, and now...”*

- Edith Ayotte, November 26, 2013.

*“The horses were the main breadwinners of the farm, and the milk cows.”*

- Frank Porte, November 20, 2013.

This chapter concerns construction, form and use. In it, I define the southern Saskatchewan barn, briefly detail its materials and construction methods, and examine the form of the barn and the most common barn styles. I place the Saskatchewan barn within the context of barns from elsewhere. I also examine the space within the barn and what that reveals about its use/function. Furthermore, I introduce two of the key themes of this thesis: the importance of hay and of the “cream check” (the income generated by selling cream), and how these both contributed to the evolution and eventual disuse of the barn over time. Finally, I trace the changes of the barn, revealing the innovation and creativity of farmers in repurposing their barns as agricultural practices changed. The use of floor plan diagrams demonstrates the most common allocations of space in the Saskatchewan barn and how they defined its function.

“Barn” does not mean the same thing in every place. In England, where the word originated,<sup>13</sup> a barn was a processing centre as well as a storage space; it was the site of the transformation of harvested sheaves into grain. Prior to the industrialization of

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<sup>13</sup> The word “barn” comes from the Old English *bere* (barley) and *ern* (house/place) [*Oxford English Dictionary Online* [www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)].

agriculture, grain was laboriously threshed there by flailing it.<sup>14</sup> Medieval barns, like churches, were often aisled. The aisles, or bays, were almost always about 16 feet wide, which became a standard measurement. The bays were divided by the weight-bearing roof trusses. The central bay was usually the threshing floor with bays on either side for storage, though sometimes the threshing floor was set to one side to provide a larger integrated storage space (Lake 1989).

The English-style barn was transported across the Atlantic to North America where it served the same purpose in New England, in the Maritimes, and in Ontario (Glassie 1975; St. George 1982). Its layout echoed that of the medieval English barn; it was composed of bays, typically three. In the New World, the barn took on a new use in addition to its threshing and grain storage functions: housing livestock. This new function resulted in the common usage of “barn” in North America today. However, by the time Saskatchewan was opened for settlement in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the threshing floor had disappeared, replaced by mechanized methods of threshing which took place in the field rather than the barn. The word “barn” had come to mean something different again. This was an era of agricultural improvement, a plethora of farm journals, guidelines from government agencies, and ready-to-build barn plans (Harper and Gordon 1995).

The oldest barn I documented in my study region was built in 1909. The heyday of barn-building in the area was approximately 1910-1930. These decades were an era of unprecedented growth in agricultural production in the United States and Canada, coinciding with an influx of settlement to the Great Plains region of the continent. The

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<sup>14</sup> Flailing refers to the process whereby the sheaves of grain were beaten with a flail, a wooden implement composed of a handle and a beater joined by a leather thong. The flail was beaten upon the sheaves, shaking the grains loose (Wade Martins and Carter 1987, 52).

farming improvements developed in more settled areas such as the American Midwest, including agricultural architecture, were promptly adopted by settlers in areas newly opened to farming (Harper and Gordon 1995; Marchildon 2011). The southern Saskatchewan barn was built on the model of what Glenn Harper and Steve Gordon called the “modern Midwest barn.”

During my survey, I struggled to define what a barn is in my study region. In the beginning, I counted newer buildings, typically referred to as cattle sheds, as barns. I eventually omitted these as I came to a better understanding of what the term “barn” means. By the end of my survey, I had devised a working definition of what I call the southern Saskatchewan barn: a building constructed prior to 1960 which was intended to house livestock and store hay. I chose circa 1960 as the cut-off date because I found that few barns were built after that time. Newer buildings, whether wooden rigid frame structures from the 1970s and ‘80s, or modern steel buildings which are used for livestock, are not considered barns in this study for a few reasons. First, no one refers to them as barns.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, they are buildings used intermittently – sometimes only in the winter. Thirdly, they do not store hay. Hay bales may be brought to them for feeding, but they are not meant to store it long-term. Finally, they are not viewed with the same nostalgia as the older barns.

With the southern Saskatchewan barn thus defined, it is possible to begin to “read” the building as an object of material culture. As Michael Ann Williams states, “If we are

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<sup>15</sup> There are, as always, exceptions. “PMU Barns” (pregnant mare urine used in the manufacture of hormone replacement medications) were once a fairly common feature on the landscape. These were sometimes older gambrel or gable barns adapted (and usually added onto for their size was generally not large enough), but more often they were newly constructed buildings. PMU Barns were large scale commercial enterprises. Though several family farms in the area did raise mares for this purpose, I do not consider these barns to be in the same category as the general barn I am discussing here.

to ‘read’ buildings as cultural artifacts, we need to understand as fully as possible the complex relationship of how buildings are used, socially and symbolically, and how buildings are physically constructed, altered, preserved, or destroyed” (Williams 1991, 3). Henry Glassie argues that, in studying vernacular architecture, it is essential to consider the form, construction and use of buildings and their interdependence. He writes that buildings “present a simultaneous impression of form, construction, and use – these aspects of the architectural system being separable only through the abstract thinking of the builder and the scholar” (1975, 182).

### **Construction and Form**

Form refers to the design of the barn, its layout, and the types of framing used. Construction refers to the building materials and methods – how the raw materials were rendered into the final form. Finally, use constitutes the very reason why it was constructed into its form. Thus, construction, form and use are dependent on each other. However, in this study, the first two categories are merely the background information to serve a much more thorough examination of the third. The use, the function of the barn, is what I am most interested in.

Unlike the timber-framed barns of eastern Canada and the United States, the plank-framed modern barns of Saskatchewan did not require a “barn bee” for construction. Plank-framed barns could be, and generally were, built by a small crew of men (Harper and Gordon 1995). Usually a farmer hired a skilled carpenter with barn building experience. The carpenter might have a helper or two, and the rest of the labour was provided by the farmer and his family members and/or friends and neighbours.

In southern Saskatchewan, the lack of native timber necessitated importing it from

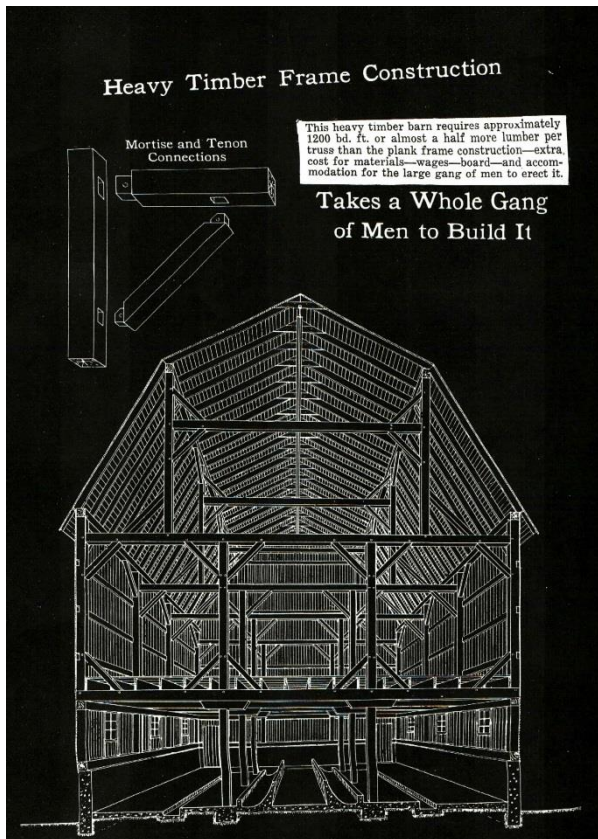


Figure 6: Timber-framed construction. (Photo from *Beatty Barn Book*, 1937, Beatty Bros. Ltd.)

elsewhere, usually British Columbia.

Farmers typically ordered the timber (often fir) from a local lumber yard, or, they could order a full barn package from a catalogue such as Eaton's or the Beatty Brothers Company, or even the Canadian Pacific Railway (Hainstock 1995). In my area, several barns were ordered in this fashion, including the Verot barn which came from Eaton's. In these readymade packages, everything needed for the barn's construction, down to the last nail, was sent by rail. A farmer collected the

materials and hauled them to his farm where they were assembled on site.



Figure 7: A barn with two lean-tos. R.M. of the Gap No. 39, east of Ceylon. November 1, 2013.

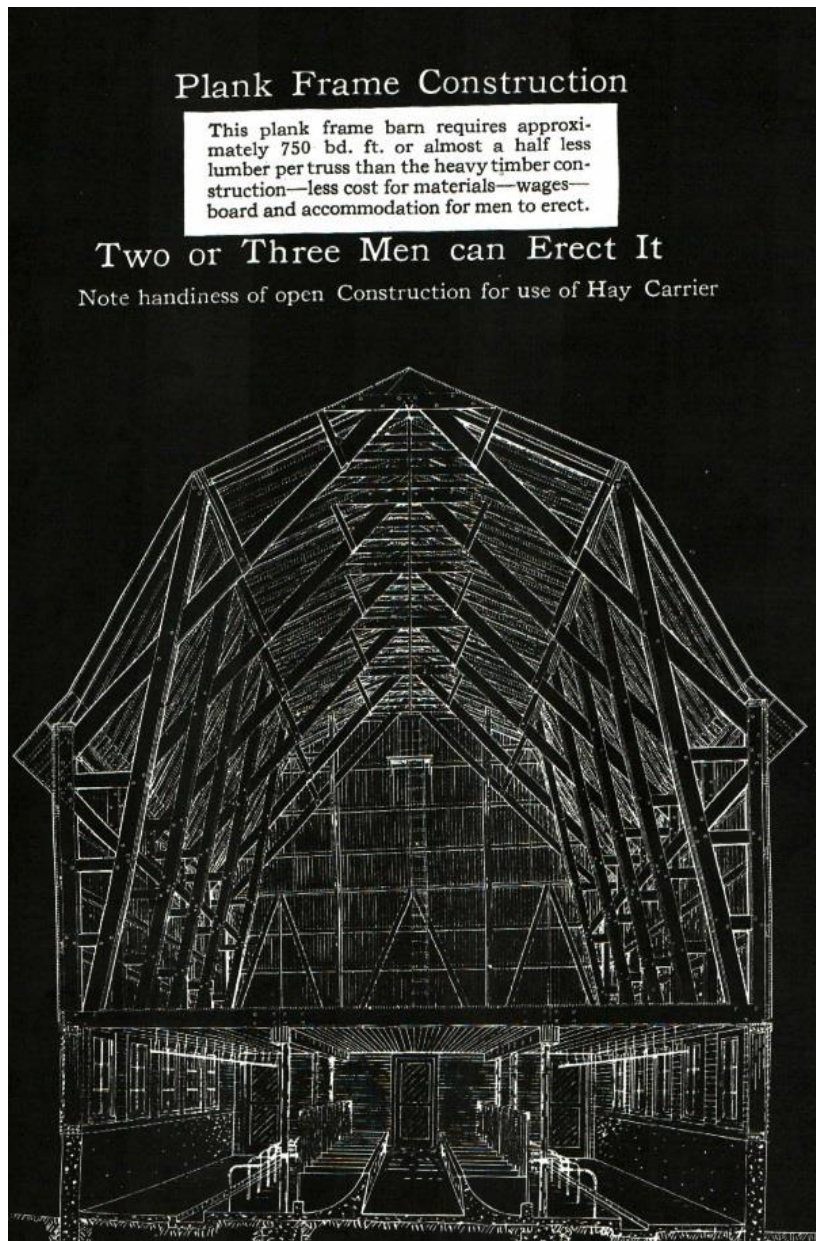


Figure 8: The plank-framed gambrel-roofed barn prevalent in Southern Saskatchewan. (Photo from *Beatty Barn Book*, 1937, Beatty Bros. Ltd.)

the animal stalls” (Vlach 2003, 388). The remaining 12 percent are of the monitor barn or “raised centre aisle” plan. These are characterized by central hay storage with sheds containing stalls for livestock on each side (Apps 2010). Monitor barn styles also have the doors in the gable ends.

The construction of a structure results in its form. In my study region, all the barns are of plank-frame construction. Their foundations are cement or fieldstone and they are held together by nails. They are one of two basic types of floor plan. The vast majority (88 percent) utilize the transverse-crib plan, which is defined as “a gable-entrance barn with two rows of stalls arranged on either side of a central passageway; a large hay loft stands over

Within each floor plan there are variations in the number of stalls and the placement of various features like the stud/box stalls, double stalls, and the feed bin,<sup>16</sup> but the basic layout remained the same. The number of stalls was determined by the overall dimensions of the barn. In the study area, the most common size of barn was 28' X 40.' Many barns also had either one "lean-to" (commonly shortened to just "lean") or two. The leans, which were additions to the barn's ground level, were usually the same length as the main barn and between 12' and 16' wide. The leans often housed the milk cows in the earlier decades while the main barn was for the horses. There are variations according to each farmer's particular needs, but generally the barns in this area conform to these basic plans. Their layout closely resembles barn plans advertised in *The Beatty Barn Book* from 1937, which demonstrates the conformity of barns in this region to the most popular barn

plans of the era.

Stafford  
McGrath's barn in the  
R.M. of the Gap is  
typical of the most  
common barn layouts  
in my study region –  
the transverse-crib. It  
is an ideal

representative sample

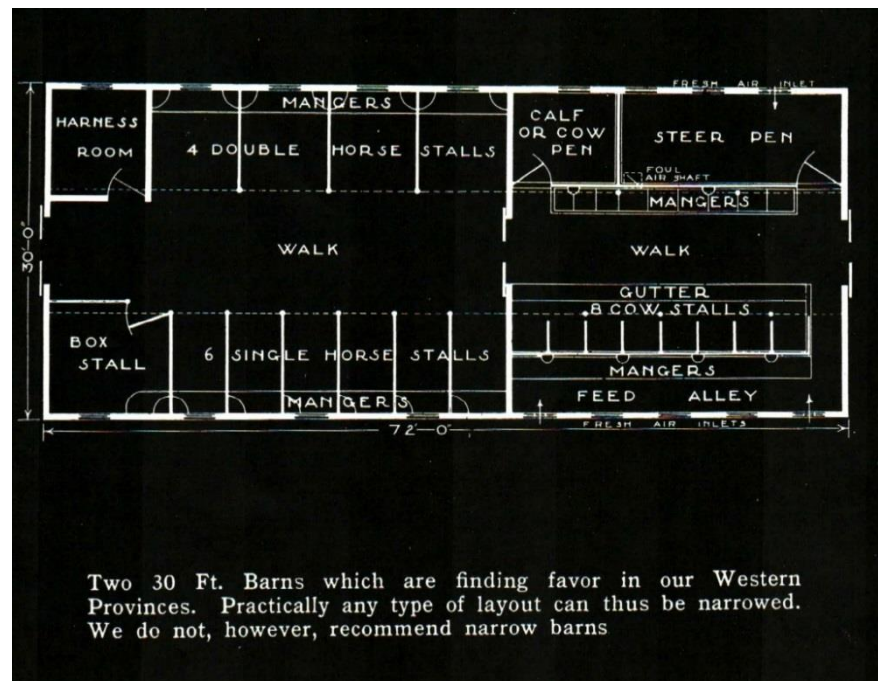


Figure 9: This layout, of the transverse-crib type, from *The Beatty Barn Book*, 1937, is very similar to layouts I observed during my fieldwork (in those barns which still bore evidence of the original floor plans). The above barn, at 72 feet long, is much larger than the average barn in my region, but the basic layout conforms to the majority of barns in my area.

<sup>16</sup> Known locally as the "chop bin" for this is where oats were "chopped" into feed for livestock.

because its size (28'X40') is the most common size of barns in the area, its layout has not been altered much since it was built in 1912, and yet it still contains physical evidence of adaptations over time which reflect changes in barn function. I measured this barn with Stacy Mackenzie over two days, on September 24 and October 1, 2013. While the barn's exterior has been clad in tin and the building has been straightened and re-nailed to preserve its structural integrity, the interior is almost original.

The practice of drawing the barn to scale necessitated spending a lot of time understanding the allocation of space within a barn. By the time I interviewed Stafford a couple of months after we had measured and drawn his barn's layout, I already had a good idea of how it functioned. The main entrance is on the south side, which leads into the corrals. The single stalls on the west side



*Figure 10: Stafford McGrath's barn. R.M. of the Gap, west of Ceylon. September 24, 2013.*

originally housed saddle horses and milk cows. The double stalls on the east side were for the teams of horses. That there are four stalls suggested room for at least three teams. This was verified by Stafford who said, "Every farm had to have at least a six-horse hitch." The extra stall could be used for milk cows or foals depending on the need at the time. Each stall has a built-in manger for hay, with a smaller trough on one or both sides for grain.

The chute leading from the enclosed space in the southwest corner was evidence of a grain bin, or “chop bin” as they were often known. We identified the closed space in the northwest corner as a box stall, assuming that it had been meant to house a stud horse. These were also often called stud stalls for that reason. However, when I interviewed Stafford, he said that it had actually been a stall for mares and newborn foals, since they did not own their own stallion. Stud horses were often travelled around the countryside, but some farm families kept their own, in which case a stud stall was necessary.

The open pen in the southwest corner is now a storage area of sorts for tack and bales, but in years past Stafford said it was used for calves. The lean on the west side bears evidence of alteration over time. The interior of the main barn is constructed almost wholly of wooden posts and boards, but the lean is open space with more modern, moveable metal gates. Stafford said that at various times in the barn’s history it was used for calves and pigs.

The second most common type of floor plan in my region, the “monitor barn,” differed from the above in that it has central, ground

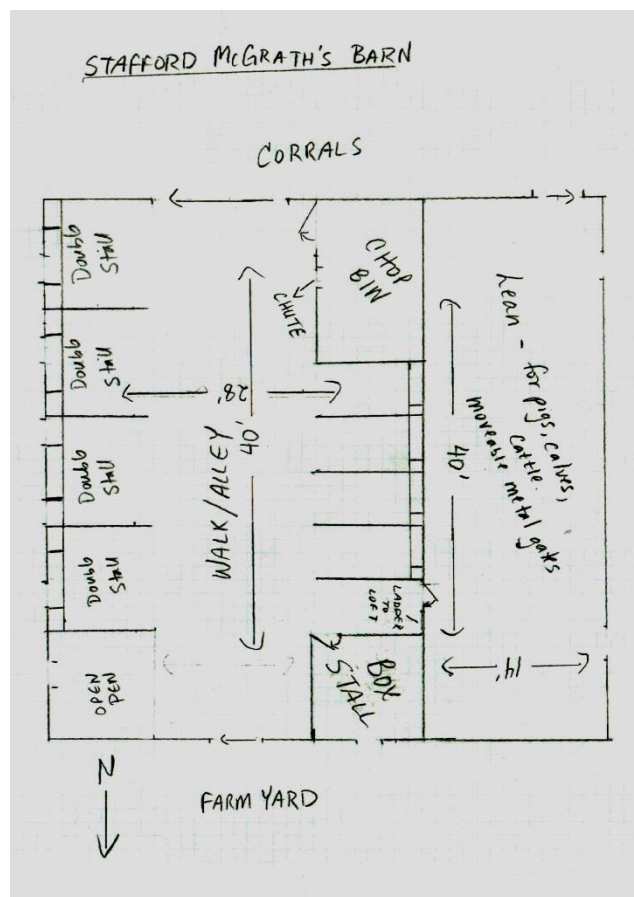


Figure 11: This drawing has been adapted from the original site drawing for clarity. Originally drawn by Kristin Catherwood and Stacy Mackenzie on September 24 and October 1, 2013. Scale: 1/8" = 1 foot.

hayloft. The two different layouts are determined by the roof style, which will be discussed further. Arvid Thue's barn, is the representative floor plan for central hay storage barns in my area. Like Stafford's barn, it is close to the original inside, though it was built a few decades later than Stafford's, perhaps in the early 1940s by Arvid's recollection.

This floor plan is characterized by the large, open space in the centre of the barn. Locals tend to refer to this as a hay loft, though I refer to it as a hay mow to differentiate it from the usual usage of the former term. The space in the northern section of the barn is

open also, though with some portable metal gates. This is the calving pen.

On the southern side is the stall space. In barns with haylofts, there are typically cut-outs in the loft floor to the stalls below which enabled the easy "forking down" of hay. In this barn,

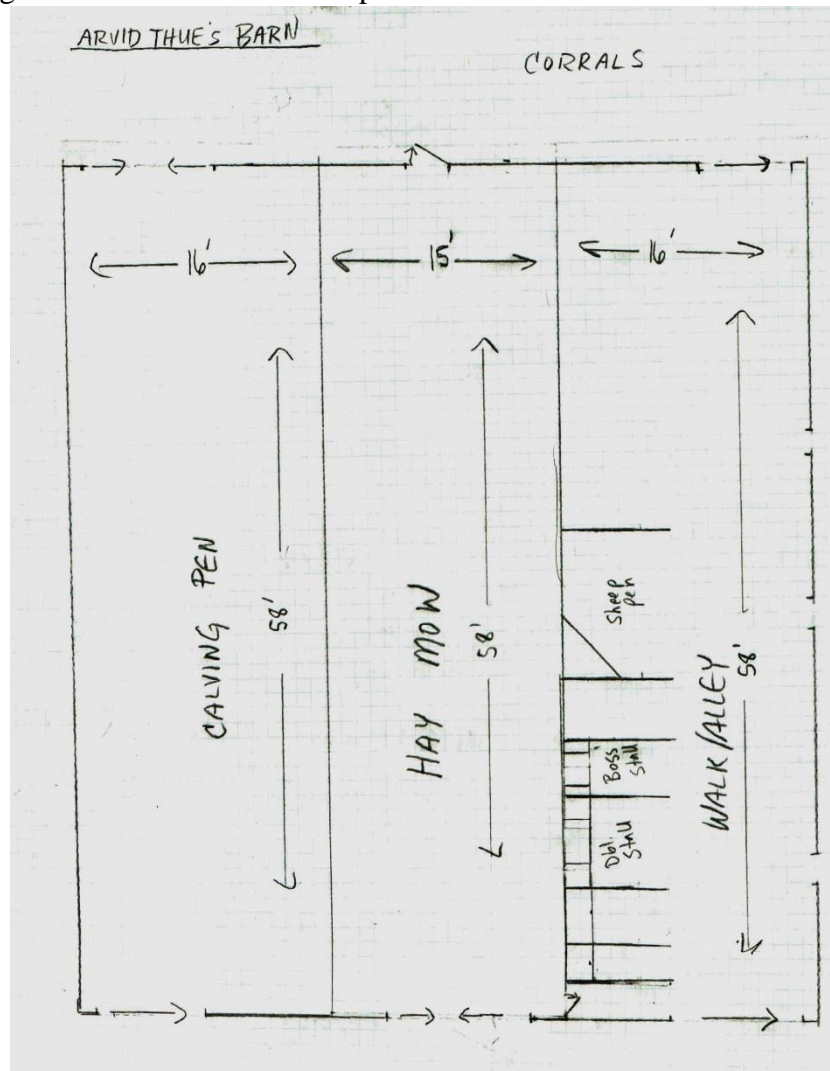


Figure 12: This drawing of "the monitor barn" has been adapted from the original site drawing for clarity. Originally drawn by Kristin Catherwood and Stacy Mackenzie on October 15, 2013. Scale: 1/8" = 1 foot. Barn faces west (towards the farm yard).

there are cut-outs in the wall between the stalls and the hay mow to serve the same purpose. Like Stafford's barn, the Thue barn also shows evidence of alterations through time. The original stalls on the eastern end have been removed or modified to be used for sheep. This barn, unlike Stafford's, is still in use every day. This particular barn and how it functions will be explored in detail in Chapter Three.

As mentioned earlier, an important aspect of the southern Saskatchewan barn is its roof style. The transverse-crib layout may have either a gambrel or a gable roof; the monitor type always has a gabled roofline. I found during my survey that in the Gap and Laurier, the barn roof is of utmost importance. The "hip



*Figure 13: The standard gambrel-roofed barn, locally referred to as "hip-roofed." The R.M. of the Gap No. 39, southwest of Ceylon. October 29, 2013.*

roof" barn is considered the king of barns.<sup>17</sup> In fact, some would go so far as to say that a hip roof barn is the only legitimate barn at all. "It's just a peaked roof, that's not a real barn"<sup>18</sup> one of the farmers I spoke to said dismissively when I entered his yard one October afternoon. As my survey progressed, I sensed a hierarchy of barns was emerging. When Murray McGillivray described his barns to me, he made the comment, "I have two

<sup>17</sup> "Hip-roof" is how locals refer to the gambrel style roof. I could not trace the origin of this vernacular usage, but it is not limited to just Saskatchewan. It is also used in Wisconsin and probably in other regions as well (Apps 2010).

<sup>18</sup> Just as locals refer to gambrel roofs as "hip roofs," so do they refer to gable roofs as "peaked roofs."

barns. One is a poor man's barn, the other is a Cadillac of barns" (December 18, 2013). I



Figure 14: The gable-roofed barn, referred to locally as a "peaked roof." The R.M. of the Gap No. 39, north of Ceylon. October 31, 2013.

heard similar statements again and again. In my interview with the Ayottes, Edith referred to the barn on her childhood farm: "It wasn't a hip roof, it was just a peaked one."

The main difference between the gambrel roof

and the gable roof with a transverse-crib floor plan is loft space. The truss structure of the gambrel roof allowed more space for hay storage, indeed this was the primary function of its design (Harper and Gordon 1995).

Gambrel roofs are characterized by self-supporting trusses or purlins (which are supported by self-supporting trusses), thus eliminating the



Figure 15: The "peaked-gambrel" roof. The R.M. of the Gap No. 39, southwest of Ceylon. October 13, 2013.

tie beam and cross beams of timber framed barns (Harper and Gordon 1995). They allow



*Figure 16: The Gothic-arched roof. The R.M. of Laurier No. 38, southeast of Radville. October 7, 2013.*

for more hay and straw storage and more efficient use of hay carriers and grapple forks (locally called hay slings).<sup>19</sup>

Within the gambrel style, there are a couple of other classifications in my region. Many gambrel roofs were equipped with tracks for hay slings. This is usually indicated by a “hay hood” at the roof apex. Bob Hainstock referred to these roofs as “peaked gambrel” (1995, 38). Some gambrel roofs had tracks for hay slings, but no hay hood. Another sub-type of the gambrel roof style is the Gothic-arched gambrel, locally referred to as a “round roof.”

These were designed to maximize the hay storage capacity and reduce the amount of lumber since they incorporated laminated bents and glued arches (Harper and Gordon 1995). The Gothic design also produced an aesthetically pleasing roofline. In my study region, only 12% of all gambrel roofs were of this design, and nearly all of them were

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<sup>19</sup> This is a system of ropes which move along a track with pulley which operate the hay carrier, which can be lowered to the ground, loaded with hay, and lifted back into the loft. It was a modern agricultural improvement which drastically reduced the amount of labour needed to fill a hayloft. Horses or a tractor provided the power to operate the pulley system.

further demarcated by non-functional design features, suggesting that farmers who chose to erect this type of barn were consciously making a statement.

The gambrel roof required more lumber and was thus more expensive to build than its



*Figure 17: The exposed trusses of a gambrel-roofed barn displays the plank- framing construction method that was exclusively used in my study region. R.M. of the Gap, east of Ceylon. September 9, 2013.*

gable roof counterparts. The gable roofline had a limited capacity for hay storage compared to the gambrel roof, thus perhaps implying that

the farmer was less prosperous. They were also more impressive aesthetically than the gable roof. These are possible reasons for the dismissive opinion many people hold for “peaked” roof barns in this area. Still, they are not marginally represented; 36 percent of surveyed barns had gable roofs. The remaining 64 percent were gambrel style, encompassing the different sub-types.

## **Function**

Michael Ann Williams writes, “the structure is not just a tangible object, it is an ordering of empty space” (Williams 1991, 145). With the form in place, the barn’s use, or

function, emerges. This ordering of empty space was individualistic. Use is the purpose of any building's existence, and it is this that I am most interested in understanding.

A barn contained a myriad of functions, but in this region, its two main functions



*Figure 18: William "Bill" Blackmore with a full load of hay, circa 1947. Photo courtesy of Allan and Edith Ayotte.*

can be distilled down to two tangible products: hay and cream. After four months of fieldwork, this is my succinct reply to the question: what were the most important functions of the barn? If one were to ask why barns were no longer in use, I would provide a much longer, more detailed response, but at the centre of it would be hay and cream. If I were to be further asked what most surprised me about the results of my research, I would likely return to my first answer: hay and cream.

As discussed in the previous chapter, my position in my field research was as both insider and outsider. What I formerly knew about barns was, I understand now, fairly basic. Many of the ideas I had about barn use came from literature and popular culture, as well as being informed by stories I had heard from my parents growing up. Barns were where cows and horses and cats lived, was my basic understanding. If pressed further, I could probably have summoned the answer that barns also held hay, they needed to be

cleaned a lot, and milk came from them. But I was unaware how directly both the barn's existence, and its eventual demise, was linked to hay and cream.

The original, universally agreed-upon function for a Saskatchewan barn, its *raison d'être*, was to house the workhorses. Before the combustion engine revolutionized agriculture, the horse was the muscle and the stamina that powered the farm work, from sowing to reaping and the incalculable tasks in between. As such, their health and wellbeing was of vital importance. The necessity of strong, well-fed horses demanded a structure to cater to their caretaking. This was the barn. It could take different forms, as will be discussed further, but its basic function, no matter what shape it took, was to provide for the horses. This included sturdy shelter from the elements as well as a storehouse for the fuel which fed the hardworking horses: hay.

However, just as barns were being built in this area to house horses, technology was already beginning to replace them. As early as 1911, when the very first large gambrel-roofed barns were being constructed in the Gap and Laurier, Saskatchewan's Deputy Minister of Agriculture, A.F. Mantle, penned the following argument, a certain death-knell for the Saskatchewan barn:

We do not relish the thought of horseless farms but welcome the advent of the tractor that will relieve our horses of the slavish part of their park, permit us to reduce their numbers, and enable us...to plow our summerfallow deeper and better...In threshing operations man was displaced by the horse – and has never regretted it (at least those of us who have ever swung the flail have no regret!); the horse in turn was displaced by the steam traction engine – and neither the horse nor man regret it now the steam engine is being largely displaced by the gasoline tractor – and no fireman regrets it; perhaps soon the tractor will give place to the electric motor! Why then need there be any sentimental regrets or doubts about displacing the horse as a source of power for breaking sod and plowing summerfallow? (Shepard 2011, 172).

In this passage, it is interesting to note that his statement about the horse replacing the hand flail was one of the major reasons for the redundancy of British barns, just as the tractor contributed dramatically to the redundancy of Saskatchewan barns. Almost as soon as they were built, they were becoming obsolete. The “sentimental regrets” Mantle disparages eventually, I argue, morphed into nostalgia. This shift to mechanization and the consequences it had for the barn and the family farm in terms of critical nostalgia will be explored in Chapter Four.

When the horses were replaced by the tractor, the barn, as it was originally intended to function, became redundant. However, the barn’s function evolved. Though



Figure 19: An advertisement from The Western Producer, October 3, 1929.

tractors did the major fieldwork starting from the 1930s and had replaced horses almost totally by the 1950s, many farmers still held onto some horses for lighter work. Additionally, most farms had several milk cows, and thus there was still a need for plenty of hay. The importance of the “cream check” was a significant factor in this. The importance of hay was always foremost in my mind as I went about my research, but the importance of the cream check took a bit longer to emerge. My father said to me one day, as we talked about the barn on our farm, “Mother raised us on the cream check.” Once I

began my interviews, I realized that cream was universally important to farm families in this region.

Farm families in Saskatchewan have always had to contend with fluctuating finances. In decades past, the milk cows produced a form of stable income – the cream check. The milk produced from the barn was separated, the excess cream stored in five gallon metal cans. These were delivered to the nearest rail station once or twice a week, tags tied to the handles identifying the families. The cream was then transported to creameries in nearby larger centres. Checks were mailed out to the families, and this was a vital source of income throughout the year. Most creameries closed down in the late 1960s as larger, specialized dairies edged out farm families.

Nearly coinciding with the end of the cream check, the evolution of hay is one of the most significant reasons for the barn's lack of purpose. It was in the late 1950s and early 1960s that square bales (machine produced tightly compacted bundles) began to replace loose hay. As more families phased out milk cows, the barn's position deteriorated further. Now there were no daily chores as there had been before, no reason to go out to the barn every morning and evening. Since the cows did not live in the barn, there was no need to replenish the hay in the loft. Some families continued to store square bales in the loft, but if there were no longer animals living there, it made just as much sense to



*Figure 20: Stacks of round bales have replaced full haylofts. The R.M. of Laurier No. 38, south of Radville. October 23, 2014.*

erect temporary shelter and stack the bales underneath it in a location closer to the pasture where beef cattle lived.

The introduction of the round bale truly spelled the end for the barn in the early 1970s. Large round bales shed water and thus do not need shelter, plus their weight is too much of a load for lofts. With this development, the barn truly lost its purpose. Now farmers were faced with the dilemma of what to do with their redundant barns.

Gillian Darley argues that, “it is important to consider the barn as a flexible element of the farmstead, turned by the farmer to whatever use seemed appropriate” (1981, 72). The Saskatchewan barn is a good example of this. Once the original functions of the barn had ceased to exist, farmers devised new functions for the large buildings. Several gambrel-roof barns were “cut down” – that is, the ground level was removed, leaving the roofline and loft intact on the ground. These were then put to use as machine sheds or shops. Six percent of barns surveyed had been cut down in this fashion. Several other barns were used for grain storage, including the Carles barn and the Levee barn. This was usually indicated by cables running the width of the barn to brace the structure



*Figure 21: A cut-down gambrel-roofed barn. The R.M. of the Gap, north of Ceylon. October 24, 2013.*

against the pressure of the grain’s weight. This was apparently a common practice in the 1970s and 1980s, but none of the barns I surveyed were being used for grain storage

anymore.<sup>20</sup> As discussed earlier in this chapter, such changes in function necessitated altering the layout of the barn, its form. Most commonly, this resulted in the removal of the stalls, leaving the interior a wide open space. Barns which are still used intermittently for livestock usually have the stalls and other original interior features removed, and have installed temporary metal gates and pens in their place. Many of the barns in my study region are no longer in use at all, or if they are, it is a very marginal use, such as a repository for farm miscellanea, in essence, a glorified storage shed. The fate of barns fallen into disuse will be examined in more detail in Chapter Five.

This chapter has demonstrated the interdependence of construction, form and use. However, as the function of the barn changed, so too did its form. Is a barn still a barn, as defined in this chapter, when it is no longer functioning as it was originally intended? I argue that as a living building, no. But as a symbol of the past and of the farm general, yes, as will be discussed in Chapter Four. In my entire study region, there is just one barn that still functions in part the way it was built for. It is the last living link between the barn of the past, a working building, and the barn as it has become in the present: a symbol of a past way of life.

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<sup>20</sup> I would argue this is because steel grain bins have become popular due to the ease with which grain can be removed from them using augurs and grain vacuums. Also, the use of portable, disposable grain bags, which can be left in the field, is much more convenient.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **A Day in the Life of the “Last Living Barn”**

*“I done chores all my life.”*

- Arvid Thue, December 6, 2013.

*“That’s his hobby: chores.”*

- Levonne Thue, December 6, 2013.

Most barns in my region, in fact all but one, have passed out of their former function. The Thue barn is a bridge between past and present, between a living building and memory. As such, it commands its own chapter. In it, I present a case study of Arvid and Levonne Thue’s working barn and discuss at length the daily work that was once done inside all barns: chores.

About vernacular buildings, Carl Lounsbury wrote:

Yet even as prosaic objects, they have the power to connect the present with the past for they are places where the repetition of everyday activities can become charged with significance...We have tactile and physiological responses to the physical characteristics of buildings – the feel of materials or the sense of space. There are spaces of intimacy and immensity that are both of the moment and transcendent (2010, 485).

When I first walked into Arvid Thue's barn in September, 2013, I had a different response to the building than all the other barns I had been in. It truly had the power to "connect the present with the past," in part



*Figure 22: The Thue barn. September 24, 2013. .*

because the past was still alive. The "repetition of everyday activities" had not ceased there as it had in every other barn I had entered. What I experienced was this: A Jersey cow was nursing her newborn calf in one of the stalls, which was heaped high with fresh straw. The cow munched contentedly on hay, shifting her weight from hoof to hoof, rustling the straw. The calf sucked his mother's teats with loud smacking and slurping sounds. Kittens mewled and milled about our feet, torn between their desire to heckle the calf, and to investigate the



*Figure 23: A Jersey cow and her newborn calf in the Thue barn. October 9, 2013.*

strangers in their midst. The barn smelled *ripe* of sweet, fresh hay and of recently deposited manure. There was a warmth in the Thue barn which lacked from most barns I

visited, as well as a sense of movement. The air was not stagnant as in so many other barns. I knew in that moment that this barn and this farm were worthy of special consideration in my research.

Nearly two months after my first experience at the Thue farm, one of my research participants, Nora Atcheson remarked during our interview, “I always thought a farm was dead when you didn’t have animals around anymore” (November 29, 2013). If the majority of farms I visited during the survey were “dead,” farms like the Thues’ stuck out because they were very much “alive.” Of all the farms I visited, only a handful had animals (besides the usual farm dogs and ubiquitous barn cats). Those that did were special, and difficult to leave. The experience of seeing animals living in and around barns restored some sense of the original purpose to the barn. These buildings were meant to house livestock. Arvid Thue’s was the only barn in the entire region that still did so in a way that resembled the barn’s original purpose. It is the only barn whose occupants still necessitate the daily trek from house to barn to complete the chores.

Several of the other barns may host calves in the spring, or sick beef cattle on occasion, but the Thue barn is unique in the region in that it housed two milk cows. The barn is still stocked with fresh hay, in bale form, rather than the musty loose leftover hay in many barns. In this barn, there is a sensory experience: the sharp scent of fresh manure, the munching and crunching of the cow eating her hay, the sucking of her newborn calf and its rich, velvety brown eyes staring warily as my research assistant Stacy and I tramped into her home. This was a glimpse of the past. This was *use*.

The original function of the southern Saskatchewan barn was, as I have already discussed, to house horses and milk cows, and to store the hay and straw needed to feed

and bed them. The proper functioning of a barn, then, depended on work. This was the daily chores. The barn, and the work done both within and outside its walls, reveal much about the daily lives of the people who worked on their farms. In this case study, I will introduce Arvid Thue and his wife Levonne. I first met them on September 24, 2013. I was barn hunting with my friend Stacy and her two young sons. We had already documented several barns south of Radville, and then meandered through a pasture to track down any hidden barns. Once we emerged from the pasture on to Highway 28, we bumped along for several miles south until we came to the very last farm on that highway which still fell within the boundaries of the R.M. of Laurier.

The red gable-roofed, monitor type barn greeted us as soon as we drove into the yard, situated at its eastern edge, its front facing the yard. Its layout with Arvid and Levonne's house kitty corner to the northwest, and some smaller outbuildings to the southwest, created an aesthetic which reminded me of the courtyard style of British farm yards. Before we reached the barn, however, we stopped at a modern bungalow on the western edge of the farm. The door was answered by a friendly middle-aged woman, and upon my questions about the barn, she directed me to the other house where I should speak to "Grandpa," for he would know far more than she did.

There was no answer to our knock at the other door, which we had expected since the daughter-in-law had said "Grandpa" might be napping. But we had permission to explore the barn. It was a barn that was clearly still in use. There were well tended animals all over the farm.

I returned three more times that fall and winter to the Thue farm and came to know the barn well. The first time Stacy and I arrived to measure the building on a bright

and sunny October day, I discovered I had forgotten my scale. The Thue farm was more than thirty miles away from my own, too far to go back for the scale. So, instead, we decided to complete some survey in the southwestern region of the R.M. of Laurier to make use of the day, and rescheduled to come back to measure another time. However, before we left, Arvid showed us a brand new calf that had been born the day before to one of his Jersey milk cows. It was during this hour we spent with him that I realized I was witnessing a sort of representation of what life was like on the farm in days past.

We returned twice more in October to measure the barn, during which time Stacy and I got to know the Jersey milk cow and her new calf, as well as the barn itself. I

returned again to conduct a long, formal interview with Arvid and Levonne on a frigid day in December during which he outlined his typical daily chores routine. However, a month later in St. John's,



*Figure 24: Arvid and Levonne Thue. Their home in the R.M. of Laurier No. 38, south of Radville. October 23, 2014.*

Newfoundland when I started to organize my research materials and construct the outline for this thesis, I realized I had missed something important in my field work. Despite the importance of chores to a barn's function, I had never witnessed any being done. I resolved to undertake one last bit of fieldwork for my thesis once I returned to Saskatchewan.

In May, 2014 I contacted the Thues once again to ask if I could watch Arvid milk a cow. There was only one problem. “The cow’s already gone out to pasture,” Levonne informed me. The cow was also in calf, so they wouldn’t be milking her anyway. “Just let me know when you bring her back in,” I replied. I called once every month throughout the summer, just to check in and remind them that I wanted to see the cow milked. Finally, in late October, dangerously close to the American Folklore Society conference at which I intended to present on this particular research, as well as the deadline for thesis submission, I got the long-anticipated call from Levonne. But there was another problem. “We don’t know what to do,” Levonne told me. “This cow is drying up. We just weaned her, and now she’s only giving a quart a day. Arvid’s been milking only in the morning.”

Not only did I need to watch this milking to write a conference paper and fill in a gap in my thesis research, but now time was of the essence. Such unexpected challenges are par for the course in folklore fieldwork, and in farm life for that matter. So, I rearranged my schedule and two days later, on October 23, 2014, I drove down to the Thue farm to observe barn chores, the final stage of my fieldwork. This is my account of that day from my field notes.

### **Barn Chores<sup>21</sup>**

It is a Thursday morning in October. The air has a distinct chill as I step out into the early morning light to begin the thirty mile or so drive east and south of my farm. While I drive to the Thue farm, the prairie landscape a mixed palette of golden, dun and the last vestiges of green in the late autumn, I reflect on the circumstances which brought

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<sup>21</sup> This section is adapted from a conference paper I gave, entitled “A Day in the Life of a Barn,” at the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico on November 8, 2014.

me to make such a hasty journey – the impending American Folklore Society conference at which I will be presenting on this event, but also the possibility of the milk cow not providing. The vagaries of weather, animal health, and machinery breakdowns are an expected part of farm life, and farmers must be adaptable. This, I believe, is part of the reason why the barn holds such a prominent place in the memories of farm families in southern Saskatchewan. The barn, and the work done inside of it, was an island of solidity amongst the constant uncertainties of agricultural life. The round of daily chores provided a reliable buttress against the hectic challenges that might fill the rest of the day.

After the rough journey on the crumbling pavement of Highway 28, I finally arrive at the Thue farm. Arvid and Levonne greet me at their front door, as they have twice before during my fieldwork excursions to their home. Arvid is already dressed and ready to go out to the barn. I am sure they have been waiting for me to arrive, though I am a few minutes early of the 9:00 time they set. We exchange greetings and pleasantries, and then out to the barn we go, Arvid and I. Levonne remains inside the house. For me, it is a long anticipated event and something to be observed and recorded in meticulous detail. Accordingly, I am equipped with audio recorder, camera, and notebook. For Arvid, it is just another day with chores to be done, merely punctuated by my ogling presence.

Arvid Thue is 89 years old. He was born and raised in the immediate area, the son of Norwegian immigrants via the Dakotas. He bought this particular farm nestled in the rolling hills of the Missouri Coteau about twenty years ago, but has lived in the immediate region his entire life. Throughout that life of farming and raising a family, chores have rounded out his daily routine. “I don’t know, but I just like doing chores,” he tells me. His seven children have all urged him to give up on his chores, sell his milk cow and his

chickens and sheep and pigs, but Arvid says that doing chores gives him something to wake up for, something to give meaning to his day.

Arvid's knee has been bothering him, evinced by the brace he wears. Just outside the front door of his house is his ATV, loaded with the shiny metal milk pail and the other accoutrements he needs for chores. He drives the 500 or so feet from his front door to the barn while I follow behind on foot. Once inside



*Figure 25: Arvid prepares to do the morning chores. October 23, 2014.*

the barn, he travels to the opposite end through the row of stalls and brings in the Jersey milk cow. She is called Boss. She ambles in eagerly, but stops short once she sees me, a stranger in her familiar surroundings. We aren't actually strangers. I met Boss and her newborn calf last fall when I drew a scale diagram of this barn. But still, my presence unnerves the cow for a mere moment before the knowledge of fresh, sweet hay waiting in the manger wins out and she makes her way resolutely to the proper stall. She knows which one as well as Arvid does. He follows behind, chatting with me all the while.

When I first arrived to do research on his farm last autumn, Arvid and his wife were bewildered by my curiosity in their everyday life. But they are now accustomed to my camera, my recorder, and my questions, and so Arvid chats on comfortably as I alternate between taking photos and furiously scribbling in my notebook. The audio

recorder, placed carefully on top of the stall wall, betrays its recording presence only by its static red light.

As Boss munches contentedly, Arvid slips a chain over her neck and ties her to the manger. He then moves a battered metal chair to her right side and settles in to the



*Figure 26: Arvid milks Boss. October 23, 2014.*

milking posture. Boss' teats have gotten dry in the past few weeks as the season turns toward winter, and so before Arvid gets down to the milking, he massages them with some lard – a product of their own

pigs which they butchered themselves last year. Finally, the milking begins. Arvid is apologetic when he tells me that this milking “isn’t as it should be. She’s not letting it down – the milk should be frothing up in the pail.” It was apparently taking a lot longer than usual, too. Arvid’s hands move rhythmically, apply a gentle pressure to Boss’ teats in squeezing motions with his fingers pressing each teat into the palm of his hand. There is no pulling motion, like is so common in miming imitations of the procedure. It takes about ten minutes in total to half-fill the milk pail, when Arvid tells me it would normally take less than half that amount of time. I am frankly glad that Boss is being a bit withholding – it is giving me time to properly photograph and make notes of the procedure.

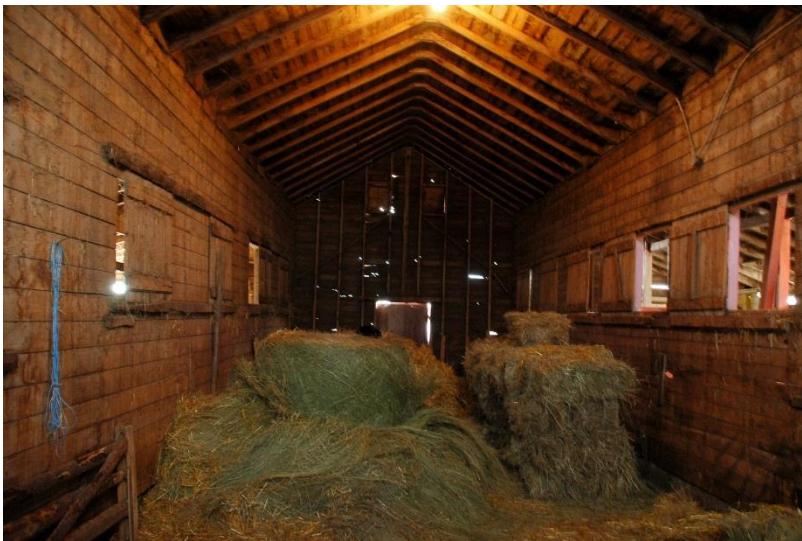
The farm dog, Sparky, and one of the ubiquitous barn cats have taken up front row seats to observe the familiar proceedings. After some time, the cat audaciously makes its way to the milk pail, stands up and props its front paws on the rim, peering into it intently. Arvid just laughs and relates stories about how, when cows are letting down their milk properly, you can shoot a stream of milk straight into cats' waiting mouths. This is a common narrative I heard over and over again during my interviews last year.

In fact, this whole procedure, though foreign to me in practice, is very familiar. I have heard it described so many times. Chores constituted the bulk of the work done in barns. They were done twice a day – early morning just before or after breakfast, and in the evening after supper. In many families, the chores were done only by the man and sons. In some, daughters were also involved. In a few families, women also helped with the chores. Even if a woman did not go out to the barn to do the chores, she usually had to deal with the production from the barn – the milk separating was often a woman's job. This is the case on the Thue farm, where Levonne has stayed inside while Arvid does the barn work. Her kitchen window faces the barn so she can keep an eye on him. She knows how much time it generally takes, and as Arvid and I are out there, she is getting her tools ready to deal with the milk once he has brought it inside.

When the milking is complete, Arvid unties Boss. It takes him a while. His hands were burned some years ago and they are painful and stiff much of the time. Once he gets the chain untied, he leads Boss outside into her pen. She is staying outside until the weather turns. This cuts down on Arvid's work in the barn – he doesn't have to clean up her manure as often. In the past, the daily cleaning of the barn was a necessary part of the chores. In previous decades, when barns had multiple milk cows – sometimes as many as

ten for a single family – as well as several work horses, this was a big job. Manure and soiled straw were forked on to a stone boat, a homemade, wooden, sled-like contraption. These were all purpose hauling conveyances on Saskatchewan farms, and were even sometimes used for human transport. But nearly every barn used one to clear away the manure. Nowadays, with so few animals in the barn, a wheelbarrow and fork do the job. Once or twice a year, a big clean is done with a front-end loader tractor.

I have also missed the procedure of forking hay from the “loft” into Boss’ manger. There are cut-outs to make this an easy job. Arvid’s mow, though he calls it a loft, is one of the very few in my study region that has fresh hay and straw in it. Many



*Figure 27: Fresh hay and straw fills the Thue hay mow. October 23, 2014.*

barns I visited during my survey still had hay in their lofts – sometimes it had been there for 50 years or more. Arvid’s loft smells noticeably different, of fresh, sweet hay, some of it still

green, as opposed to the

musty, stale scent of the pale yellow hay of other barns I have visited. Also in the mow is a clump of cornstalks. These were harvested from the garden and are kept to be used as feed for the cows on Christmas Day – a special gift for them. “They like it,” Arvid says simply. And of course, there are the cats. In a majority of the barns I visited, cats are the

only visible residents (there are certainly many smaller critters and insects that did not make their presences known).

Once we are finished in the barn, Arvid carefully places the milk pail in the back of his ATV, and then we make our way to some of the other outbuildings in the vicinity – the sheds where he keeps his potbelly pigs and the chicken coop. In the coop, Arvid feeds the eager chickens and then collects the few eggs that have been laid this morning. “There will be more at about noon,” he tells me as his hands reach in to the spots he knows the hens generally lay. He finds five eggs which he places in an old coffee can. I am entrusted with transporting them to the house. Though the egg collecting and chicken feeding do not technically happen within the barn itself, they are still an important part of everyday chores and are another rare activity to witness in these parts in these times.

Together we go to the house where Levonne is waiting for us with hot cups of coffee (prepared the old-fashioned way, boiled on the stovetop with the grounds falling to



*Figure 28: Levonne strains the milk recently procured from Boss. October 23, 2014.*

the bottom of the cup. “It tastes better this way,” Arvid tells me. I find that I agree). While we take off our coats and get settled at the kitchen table, Levonne is busy pouring coffee. She offers me cream for it, cream which came from Boss the day before.

Meanwhile, she has already placed out a jug covered with a tea towel. She strains the contents of the milk pail into this container. With that done, she takes the jug to the

counter where she lets it sit for a few minutes so that the cream can rise to the top. Once it is ready, I go with her to watch the process. It is an ancient technique – she ladles the cream into a separate container by hand. In decades



*Figure 29: Levonne separates the cream by hand. October 23, 2014.*

past, she explains, they used cream separators for this job. But now with just the one cow, the quantity simply is not worth the fuss of using the separator and cleaning it every day. With the cream separated, she adds the small container to two others which are sitting on the counter. The milk goes into the fridge. Levonne also shows me the homemade butter she makes from the cream. I have just watched another bit of the past in the present: the practice of women processing a product of the barn in the house.

In this region, the once commonplace has become exceptional. What I am witnessing this morning, or some form of it, was once the daily routine on every family farm in this region, since they all had a barn at one time. They were the core of the farm operation. But now, Arvid Thue's barn is the only one which offers a glimpse into the building's original function. On this October morning, near the end of more than a year of barn research, I know that this last-minute trip was necessary. It is moments like these which make it possible to confidently construct a narrative about barns in this area. Through the sensory experiences of actually being there did I truly come to understand the barn – to move beyond just “reading” a building to actually experiencing it. It is this

morning, just an hour or so, that has fully rounded out my understanding of the barns in this region. After measuring and photographing barns, interviewing people about barns, and researching them historically, it is this particular moment that has tied it all together.

Chores have been the focus of this chapter and indeed they always held a prominent place in all my interviews with people who had ever worked in barns. Chores gave meaning to each day, dictated its rhythm. I asked each of my research participants to describe the daily chores routine. Each family did it a bit differently: some had breakfast before chores, other waited until after chores. For children, chores had to be done before school. Sometimes evening chores were just before supper or else just after. In some families, chores were done by men and boys only, in others girls and women helped. In all of these discussions of chores, a common routine emerged, as outlined in Figure 29 (p. 61).

While each day was given order by the barn chores, so too did the seasons produce their rhythms. Cows were milked for nine or ten months a year. The other two or three months, they did not produce much milk, if any, as they prepared to give birth in the late winter/early spring. The cows spent this time snugly in the barn where they were fed and cleaned up after and watched carefully for signs of poor health which may threaten their impending labour. Once their calves came, the cows were “fresh” with new milk. This is when they produced the most, their supply slackening off throughout the year. In the spring and summer, they were often let out of the barn to graze in nearby pastures during the day.

In barns which housed horses, there was more work to be done every morning and evening. The horses had to be fed both grain and hay, same as the cows. They needed to

be watered, cleaned up after, and given fresh bedding at night. Horses also needed to be groomed and carefully inspected for any sores which could be rubbed by harness or saddle. Their hooves were checked for any signs of loose shoes or soreness. All of these could affect their ability to perform the tasks that were necessary to keep the farm in good working order. The horses' tack needed to be cleaned and hung up properly so that it could be quickly and efficiently taken down the next morning, ready to be fitted to the horses so they could go to work.

The following table is a typical day in a barn, circa 1960, as narrated to me by my father, Ken Catherwood (December 20, 2013). These are his memories of the working barn in that era, though his account is very similar to those of all my research participants. The daily chores constituted part of the defining feature of all barns and all family farms: work. In the next chapter, the importance of work will be discussed as related to issues of identity and meaning bound up in the barn and family farm. Arvid is the only one still doing daily chores in a barn in my study region, but at one time it was so commonplace as to be not even worth mentioning, much less studying. But now, chores, and work generally, take on a new meaning in the memories of my research participants. The barn without work ceases to be a functioning building and becomes a symbol of what once was but is no longer.

<b>Morning Chores</b>	<b>Evening Chores</b>
After breakfast, before school about 7 a.m.: Go to the barn. Put “kickers” on cows’ ankles so they couldn’t lift their feet and kick or knock the milk pail over. There was a place on the kickers to put the tail in so they wouldn’t swat you in the face with it. Milk three cows: Bossy, Nanny and Lulabelle. Mother milked Nanny, Father milked Bossy, who was a hard milker.	After supper, about 7 p.m.: Go to the barn and milk the cows again. If cows were out grazing the yard, cows had to be chased into the barn. They knew their own stalls and Bossy was the lead cow.
Feed pigs “chop” and scraps	Feed pigs. Clean out pigpen and fork in new straw bedding.
Carry full milk pails to the house. Mother and two sisters dealt with the cream separating and milk processing. Separator parts had to be cleaned thoroughly every day.	Carry milk pails to the house for processing.
Clean the barn with shovel and fork. Manure went on stone boat pulled by John Deere D tractor. Manure was spread in different areas in the fields.	Clean the barn.
A gallon pail of chop to each cow and a forkful of hay in the manger. Taken from square bales in the loft. Bales brought down from loft since no cut-outs to drop it down. Chop came from oats and barley in the chop bin which were chopped with a tractor-powered hammer mill.	Feed the cows
Feed calves in the corral (attached to the barn). They were fed chop to fatten them up for sale.	Feed calves.
Feed range cows (beef cattle) out in the yard with bales.	Feed range cows.

*Figure 30: Chores at the Catherwood farm, circa 1960.*

## Chapter Four

### Memory and Meaning

*“My mom used to always say, ‘you can tell, driving around the country, who was the boss in the family. If they had a big barn and a small house, the man was the boss, and if you had a big house and a small barn, the woman was the boss.’”*

- Stafford McGrath, November 25, 2013.

*“You learn about life and death in barns.”*

- Frank Porte, November 20, 2013.

Most barns are not like the Thue barn, as discussed in the previous chapter. Its exceptional status in my study region bridges the gap between the past and the present, between the barn as a working building and the barn as a repository of memory. In Chapter Two, I conceptualized the barn as a structure in the southern Saskatchewan agricultural landscape. In this chapter, I will define the barn as a symbol in the cultural landscape of this region. As a symbol, it represents nostalgia, community pride, work, play, change, life and death, gender, and prosperity or failure. It also reflects common values, such as: hard work, relationships with animals, community socialization and respect for the past. Paul Groth writes, "cultural landscape studies focus most on the history of how people have used everyday space - buildings, rooms, streets, fields, or yards - to establish their identity, articulate their social relations, and derive cultural meaning" (1997, 1). I have condensed these varied subjects within three broad themes: work and play, people, and place. These three themes are the crux of this chapter and for clarity's sake, I will cluster the related discussions within them.

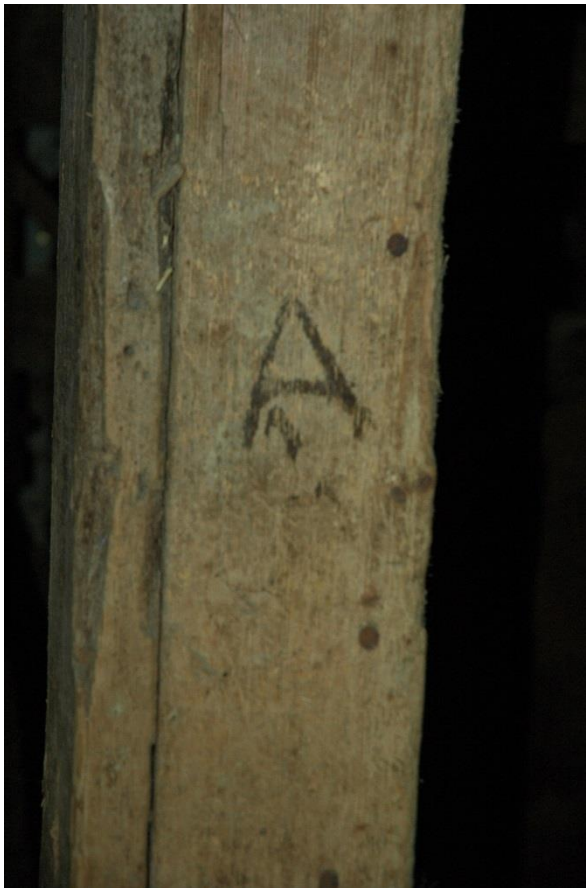
Barns are the products of the landscape in which they were built; they then in turn become part of that landscape. The barn is in itself a place, but more significantly in this chapter, the barn is the symbol of a larger place or places: the farmstead, the immediate area, the municipality, southern Saskatchewan, the prairies, the rural countryside. The barn belongs to a particular place, a particular cultural landscape. This chapter will explore the meaning of place in the Gap and Laurier and how people articulate this meaning through memory.

Michael Ann Williams claims, in reference to vernacular houses of North Carolina, “by focusing on the intangible as well as the tangible aspects of the folk house, oral testimony allows us to examine the complex relationship between people and their dwellings” (1991, 1). This statement is applicable to barns as well. I found, as Hemalata Dandekar did during her study of farm buildings in Michigan, that while the interview component of my research began as a way to learn about the structures themselves, it became much deeper than that, that my research participants “communicated landscapes of the heart, of sentiment and memory, not just those of mind, economy, and practicality” (2010, 5). The ways in which people talk about barns and the larger rural cultural landscape of which they are a part, exposed deep held values, such as: hard work, respect for animals and nature, and the importance of local community. In short, the way people talked about barns as symbols of place revealed their sense of identity as shaped by that place.

Additionally, the way people discussed barns revealed nostalgia, not “mere nostalgia” as may be expected, but also “critical nostalgia.” Nostalgia, “enables people to generate meaning in the present through selective visions of the past” (Cashman 2006,

138). Building upon this, critical nostalgia, as Ray Cashman defines it, “extends beyond the realm of imagination as a structure of feeling into the realm of action or practice” (2006, 138). Several of my research participants have expended significant amounts of money and time to maintain and preserve their barns despite their serving no useful purpose. As Cashman and others have demonstrated, these instances of critical nostalgia may be a reaction to the present. (Behlmer 2000; Boym 2001) In fact, they may be “a strategy for coping with change, loss, or anomie” (Behlmer 2000, 7). The concept of critical nostalgia will be explored further in relation to people’s memories of their barns, and if it does, in fact, translate into “action or practice.”

The barn as a functioning structure is now mostly a place of memory in the



*Figure 31: Marks left behind. The North Star barn, R.M. of the Gap, south of Ceylon. October 18, 2013.*

southern Saskatchewan landscape. The physical building may still be intact, may even be in use as a cattle shed or a place to store machinery, but its lifetime as the centre of the farm has passed away. In my interviews, much of what was discussed concerned memories of the past, either direct memories of the research participants themselves, or memories passed down to them from previous generations. Thus, much of the meaning of the barn resides within memory.

Memories do not exist just in the minds of my research participants, but have been left in tangible form within the structures themselves, too. I call this “barn graffiti” - initials, cattle brands, signatures, figures inscribed on barn walls. Nearly every barn I entered had some form of markings left behind by previous owners or hired men. Such markings are a statement: “I was here,” and were put in a barn perhaps out of boredom, or because it was workaday building (one probably would not carve initials into the dining room wall), but also perhaps because there was the feeling that the barn was a permanent structure, a place where markings would live on after the person.<sup>22</sup>

In the intangible realm, meaning has been distilled through memories, creating a distance which allows narrators to be more objective about their experiences. Melissa Walker writes, “The very act of telling stories about the past is a way of making meaning - of interpreting and explaining” (Walker 2006, 2). Furthermore, Grey Osterud argues, “People’s recollections and interpretations of the past are shaped by their present circumstances as well as by their life experiences and deeply held values.” (Osterud 2012, 8). Accordingly, I will demonstrate how my research participants’ values are reflected in the narratives they chose to share with me.

A place’s meaning is ascribed to it by the people who live there. Each individual has a different idea about what a place means, but what can be confidently argued is that each place does, in fact, have meaning. Kent Ryden states, “A place - any place - is much more than a chunk of geography. That geography is thickly layered with significance - the sense of place as revealed by folklore” (1993, 95). John Fraser Hart claims that, “the rural landscape is constantly changing. It is always in a state of becoming. We must

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<sup>22</sup> I wrote a blog post about barn graffiti which includes several examples.  
<http://www.thebarnhunter.blogspot.ca/2013/12/branding-barn-graffiti-and-such.html>.

understand what it was in order to understand and appreciate what it is and what it will become” (1998, 381). My research participants all talked about how the landscape has and continues to change; these changes parallel those that have occurred in the barn over time, as was outlined in Chapter Two.

### **Place**

The landscape is imprinted in the minds and memories of my research participants. In every interview, the conversation inevitably meandered into discussion about other barns, other farms in the area. This always included descriptions of certain pieces of land, calculated always in miles, never the metric system which has never really taken hold in this place. The same was true during the survey. I asked every person I came across if they knew of any barns in the area. It often took a bit of translation work to understand their directions because of the ways in which they referred to landscape markers. For instance, the practice of referring to pieces of land by their previous owners is common. Landmarks are curves in the road (relatively rare), memorable buildings (often barns or schoolhouses), bodies of water (also relatively rare), hills (not as rare as the Saskatchewan “flat” stereotype would suggest), and junctions of roads.

The connection to place and landscape was evident in every interview, but was perhaps most apparent in my interview with Roland Carles, a 67-year-old farmer who has lived on his family farm his entire life. Roland answered my questions thoughtfully, but in a straightforward manner and rarely deviated from the topic at hand. However, when discussing the countryside, Roland became much wordier. He spoke almost as if drawing a map from his memory, describing the countryside as it was in the past, the people who used to live on different pieces of land, where barns used to be, certain activities he

remembered, such as playing as a child in a former neighbour's barn that has since disappeared from the landscape. The cultural landscape which Roland described was much more populated than it is today, much livelier in terms of a community, and it is still alive in Roland's memory, though he is very much a progressive man of the present.

After our interview, Roland invited me to stay for a cup of tea and showed me around his log house, filled with historical photographs of ancestors and the farm of days gone by. He even showed me a brochure from the Caribbean island where he and his wife Darlene vacation in the



*Figure 32: Roland Carles in his home in the R.M. of the Gap No. 39, southwest of Radville. November 21, 2013.*

wintertime. This curious mix of preoccupation with and nostalgia for the past, and the relative ease of the affluent lifestyle of the present, is not uncommon in this region. In my interview with Alexina Verot, I asked her what she and her husband did with the cattle when they went away during the early years of their marriage, to which she replied, "Oh we never went anywhere." Meanwhile, her son and daughter-in-law, Dave and Sharon, who contacted me about their barn and are currently fixing it up, now spend their winters at their house in Phoenix, Arizona.

When I drove into Stafford McGrath's farmyard, one of the first things I saw was his Century Family Farm sign displayed on a buggy – the very same buggy, I would later learn, that Stafford and his siblings drove to school in the 1940s. Though he is retired

now from farming and lives in the village of Ceylon, Stafford still drives out to his farm each day. He showed me many photos and pieces of memorabilia related to his family history while I was over, but we also discussed his recent holiday to Ireland. This blending of nostalgia for the past and enjoyment of the conveniences of 21<sup>st</sup> century life which I observed is similar to what Cashman found during his study in Northern Ireland (2006). Though people speak fondly and romantically of the past, few would willingly go back.

With people firmly rooted in place, the symbolism of the barn and its connections to this place emerge. In the cultural landscape of rural southern Saskatchewan, barns were more than just workaday buildings. They were a statement - an indicator of prosperity, and also a communication of values. Building a large, gambrel-roof barn was a way to demonstrate that one was a successful farmer with plans to maintain the farm in the future. It showed that the farmer was modern and progressive, since gambrel-roofed barns were the most innovative barn design of the early twentieth century, and it demonstrated his intention to set down roots in this particular place. The glamour of the gambrel-roofed barn has still not been dispelled, as I discussed in Chapter Two. To have a big gambrel-roof barn meant more than just having a lot of storage space for hay.

Frank Porte, in response to my question of whether he and his father had been proud of their gambrel roof-barn, replied, "A hip-roof barn - that was something." In my conversation with the Verots about why they felt such an attachment to their barn, Sharon distilled it down to one word: pride. According to Alexina's account of her late husband, Peter, pride in owning a gambrel-roofed barn was a motivating factor in his decision to

purchase the current Verot farm in the mid-1940s. Pride has been an ongoing factor in the existence of that particular barn ever since.

In 1947, just a couple of years after Peter bought the farm from his uncle, the barn was destroyed in a thunderstorm, either by a tornado or a plough wind.<sup>23</sup> Alexina and



Figure 33: The destroyed Verot barn. Photo courtesy of Alexina Verot.

Peter were newly married. Alexina recalls the night, nearly seventy years ago, with vivid detail. It was a huge blow to the young couple. They had no insurance and were just getting started in farming, so the financial

burden was enormous. By this time, horses were being replaced by the tractor and so the original purpose of large gambrel-roofed barns was already obsolescing. Like most farm families, the Verots had milk cows, however, with fewer horses, they could have rebuilt the barn on a smaller scale. But Peter had bought the farm in large part because of the beautiful barn, one which he had admired as a young boy growing up on a farm just south, and he was determined to rebuild it exactly as it had been.

With limited funds available, the Verots improvised, salvaging lumber from an older, disused barn in the area, and managed to rebuild the barn within a year. It was an event that could have been financially ruinous for them. Yes, they needed a barn for the farm. They still had a team of horses, and milk cows. They still used the barn daily. But it

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<sup>23</sup> Alexina's oral account of the incident, as well as a slideshow of photos of the Verot, is accessible at [http://www.thebarnhunter.blogspot.ca/2014\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.thebarnhunter.blogspot.ca/2014_02_01_archive.html)

was more than practicality which impelled Peter to go to such effort to rebuild it. For him, it would seem, the barn was a symbol. Alexina spoke eloquently of her husband as a young boy, dreaming about owning a farm as prosperous as his uncle's. To him, the barn symbolized that prosperity. I would argue that the *idea*, the symbol the barn represents, was just as significant as the structure itself.

The barn, a seemingly permanent structure, rooted a farm in a particular place. The pride in building or owning a farm with a large barn reflected the desire to be well-regarded in the area. Since a barn was such a visible symbol of prosperity, it was an effective way to communicate values. Such values were based in place, in the cultural landscape of which the farm and the barn were part.

### **Work and Play**

The barn as a symbol endures even if the structure itself does not. The barn was the first place a farmer went in the morning, the last place he left in the evening. The daily round of chores framed the farm family's days, and the bulk of these chores occurred inside or in the vicinity of the barn. I asked each informant to describe these chores. We have already glimpsed a day in the life of a barn through observing Arvid Thue's chores, though these were of the present day. While they evoke a sense of the past, they cannot replicate it. Arvid's chores are not in the domain of memory, they are still part of the everyday reality of his life. The description of chores as related from memories of tasks that have not been done for years, oftentimes decades, reveals much about people's concepts of meaning in the barn.

Throughout my research, especially the interviews, a common pattern emerged. My research participants would begin answering my questions with some perplexity,

sometimes chuckling at the simplicity of them. When I asked how to do chores, some of them were surprised, having never articulated such an ordinary, everyday activity before. But once their narrative began, memory took over and the details flowed into a pattern of movement and activity: from house to barn, from ground floor to loft, from stall to stall. And from here, commentary usually followed. During my interview with the Ayottes, after Allan had described the daily chores in detail, Edith suddenly broke in. Her voice, captured on the audio recorder, takes on a thoughtful, somewhat pensive tone, “The barns have really changed, haven’t they?”

From there, our conversation moved outward from the barn to talk about changes in agriculture generally and how that has affected life in the rural countryside. In every interview, memories evoked commentary on the present and sometimes speculation about the future. Nora Atcheson’s memories, filtered through several decades of distance between her adult life and her childhood living on the farm as an only child raised by her father, almost romanticize the daily work ritual. She moved away from the area as a young woman, but her memories of the barn from more than fifty years ago were meaningful enough to her to contact me to participate in this study, “I would be out in the barn most of the time...I spent hours out there.” Doing chores in the barn gave meaning to her everyday life, and that meaning has persisted half a century on. She finished her account on a wistful note, “But...everything changes.”

Beyond the daily round of chores was the seasonal round of tasks. Summer was haying time, and “putting up” the hay for winter was a hugely important job. Then there was harvest, and the straw which needed to be collected from the reaped fields and also put in the loft or stacked outside. In the winter, chores took on more difficulty as water

had to be hauled, sometimes ice had to be broken through. Surplus hay was often stacked outside where it froze solid and had to be cut. Saskatchewan oral history is rife with stories of people tying a rope between the house and the barn so they would not get lost outside in a blizzard.

One thing that surprised me about these narratives was the commonness of enjoyment of the chores. Chores were hard work; especially considered from the a 21<sup>st</sup> century viewpoint, however, they were such a common, mundane part of life that the idea of them being “hard” was not really considered. In this everyday milieu of moving from the house to the barn to the field or to town (perhaps with cream cans for market) to the yard, to the barn again and back to the house, the rhythms of life inexorably continued on. And the ways in which my research participants spoke of chores revealed a common value: hard work. Without hard work, a farm would cease to function. A prosperous farm meant people who worked hard.

At the centre of chores was animal husbandry. Farm families were intimately connected with animals. They provided labour, food, income, and companionship. Every research participant had stories that concerned relationships with animals. Many of these interactions with animals, both domesticated and wild, were recounted with much amusement. A few of my research participants went into great detail discussing the hierarchy of animals – of milk cows, especially. There was always a “boss” cow, the one who would lead the rest. There were many stories of “hard milkers” – cows who were reluctant to “let down” their milk, or who insisted on kicking the pail over, or who would only permit being milked by a certain person. Interactions between humans and animals were not insignificant, or else people would not bother to recount them in such vivid

detail, even decades after incidents occurred. These bonds between humans and animals added a depth to the everyday work which dictated their interactions.

As most folklorists know, much of the best information from research participants comes out when the recorder is off, when the camera is put away. In spontaneous situations when the research participant is going about his or her business, values are revealed. A farmer stands framed in his barn door, having just chased a Jersey cow and her newborn calf into a corral outside. This is Arvid Thue, who was the subject of Chapter Three. During my second visit to his farm, he said, “I don’t know, but I still like doing the chores. I’ve always liked doing the chores.” When I asked why, he was not really sure. I prodded him a bit - “Do you like the animals, their personalities?” He agreed that yes that was part of it.

More than a year later, when I returned to watch Arvid milk a cow, I saw this myself firsthand. I observed Arvid’s interaction with his cow, Boss, how well he knew her form, her behaviour, and how she in turn knew the space of the barn intimately, knew what to expect from Arvid. Though Arvid did not articulate the depth of his connection with animals, it was evident in the way he interacted with Boss. He has spent his entire life working with animals on a daily basis.

Nora Atcheson’s narrative was imbued with her love and respect for animals. It was the theme that she returned to again and again during our interview. She recounted incidents with great laughter, the vocabulary she used evoking rich imagery: “My dad and that pony danced”; the horses “thundered through the yard”; the “munching and crunching” of horses and cows at their mangers. Her words brought her barn, and all

barns, to rich, detailed life. She remembers, “It was just the most calm, calm thing to sit there and listen to that [animals eating]. It just seemed like it was the way life should be.”

Frank Porte, near the end of our interview and all the memories and questions it dredged up, reflected, “You learn about life and death in barns.” He had earlier recounted a story, with laughter, of watching a mare being bred. Allan Ayotte went into detail about butchering, an activity that was done in and around the barn. He stopped midway through a description of butchering a pig to ask, “Are you sure you want to hear this?” When I said yes, he continued to explain the process, saying, “You’re so mad you could just about shoot it” – implying that, although butchering was an annual and necessary task, it did not mean it was easy to kill an animal, one whose birth and growth and characteristics had been witnessed intimately on a daily basis.

Stafford McGrath remembered that when his father sold a six-horse hitch for a tractor in the 1930s, “there were tears in his eyes.” He did not go into detail, but it is simple to understand that his father had an emotional connection to these animals. They were work horses, not saddle horses. Their existence was to provide the power for the farm. But daily interaction with them created a bond, and not a shallow one.

To return to Frank Porte’s statement – one does learn about life and death on a farm, in a barn. These meaningful relationships between human and animals is reflective of a larger theme: the connection of rural people to nature. This deep, but often unspoken, connection to nature that rural people experience in their daily lives, the work they must do to operate a farm, is explored in great detail by author Sharon Butala in her memoir *The Perfection of the Morning* (1994) and in the socio-historical *Lilac Moon* (2005). Throughout my research, I observed the same thing that she found: that though people

will not always articulate what they feel about the natural world because it is so deeply a part of who they are that it does not need to be said aloud. That is, unless someone asks.

At the very end of my interview with the Portes, I asked Frank if there was anything more he had to say about barns. After a moment's reflection, he said, "the trouble we had with the barn was pigeons...worse, besides the pigeons, was the sparrows." He went on to describe the mess pigeons and sparrows made, and the various methods he and his father devised to get rid of them. Though not a desired interaction, it was a meeting of the wild and the domesticated in the Porte barn, and I daresay, most other barns. The barn was a social space, not just for people – in the daily camaraderie of chores, in the rare and highly anticipated barn dances – but also a place where socialization occurred between animals and between animals and humans.

Alongside the inevitable work associated with a barn, there was also play. There were the small moments, most lost to time, of play – the common image of mewling cats being sprayed with a stream of milk from the cow's udder, jokes told and tunes whistled or hummed to pass the time as hay was forked, manure scraped and horses harnessed. There were no doubt practical jokes played – common implements purposely moved from their time honoured spots, horses switched in their stalls. Dave Verot had many stories of practical jokes exchanged between his family and a neighbour over the years. There were children's games in the barn, playing in the lofts, shooting at pigeons, killing rats. Though necessary tasks, they were nonetheless activities that often elicited a few moments of fun as well. In the barns which resided on farms with large families, chores were rarely done alone. The barn became a place of chat, of gossip, perhaps of secret-

sharing or tale-telling. Thus, the barn was not just a workspace, but also a social space, as most communal workspaces are.

Some barns on some occasions took on a more formal social role, and this is where the barn takes on an even more nostalgic mien. Few stories about barns were as eagerly shared as those which concerned barn dances. Barns that had held dances take on a special significance in the landscape. During my field survey, people would often refer me to the same barns, those that had held dances. Such barns were famous in the area. Sometimes dances were held in a brand new barn, just after it had been raised, a sort of christening. Frank Porte recalled, “In them days, when somebody built a barn, they’d have a dance to break it in.” Other barns held dances annually.

“When they built the barn, they intended to use it for barn dances,” was one of the first things

Nora Atcheson

told me during our interview.

The barn had

been built

specifically with

a reinforced

floor for the



*Figure 34: The Vermeulen barn, famous for its dances in the 1930s. The R.M. of the Gap No. 39, south of Ceylon. October 18, 2013.*

purpose of holding dances. To that end, it also had a staircase installed instead of ladders, for easier access to the loft. These events were full weekend affairs. Though they happened before Nora was born, the memory of these dances was something she grew up

hearing about, and something which still holds interest now. Perhaps of all barn memories, the dance recalls the most romantic visions.

### **People and Gender**

At a barn dance, people of all ages and both genders would be present. However, it was not just at dances that women and girls interacted with the barn. Like any other artifact or building, it cannot be studied without a reference to gender. The barn is a gendered structure, but I came to no definitive conclusion in my study regarding this complex topic. On some farms, women spent as much time in the barn as men. In others, women rarely set foot in the barn – their “place” was in the house.

The comment which opened this chapter was heard in different variations on more than one occasion. Generally speaking, it seems that, from the road at least, the barn was viewed as a masculine structure, the house as a feminine one. The joke that one could tell who the “boss” in a family was by the farm buildings in the yard reveals underlying beliefs and assumptions about the nature of gender roles in farm families. Though this joke seems to imply the assumption that, as Gerald Pocius found in his study (1991) of an outport Newfoundland community, males claim domain over an outdoor space (in that case, the woods and the sea) while women claim domain over the domestic space, I found that in terms of the barn in my study region, women’s experiences with barn work were not universal. When I asked Eveline Porte if she ever did barn chores, she replied, “I didn’t need to.” Stafford McGrath noted that his mother and sisters never did barn chores. But several of the women I spoke to took on an active role in the barn as well as in the house. And whether a woman ever stepped foot in the barn or not, she still dealt with production from the barn.

While it is true that some farms, for instance Stafford McGrath's, were run by single men, there are very few instances of farms being run by single women – though it is not completely unheard of. However, the majority of farms in the district, and in my sample of research participants, were nuclear family farms. Frank Porte, though his wife never did barn chores, related a story about his father's extended search to find a suitable wife in the late 1920s. One of his criteria was that she needed to be able to work in the barn.

It seems, then, that a woman's work in the barn was contingent upon the availability of male labour within the family (in a family with no sons, daughters may have had to do barn chores), the attitudes of families about gendered work, and the individual's willingness to work in the barn or not. Eileen Sorensen stated that she far preferred barn chores and outdoor work to her domestic duties; like most women, she could not do one or the other, but either did the domestic work solely, or both domestic *and* outdoor work (December 3, 2013).

Alexina Verot was married at age 19 in 1947. She spent the first several decades of her married life working alongside her husband in the barn, in the yard, and working by herself or with children underfoot in the house. Edith Ayotte also helped her husband with chores in the barn, though she had no childhood experience with barn chores, since in her family, it was not the practice for women to work in the barn. There is no common thread it seems. Either a particular family believed that women could and should do barn work, or did they did not. The cultural and societal norms that underlie such beliefs are beyond the scope of this work, but through my research I learned one thing for certain: women, whether they did actual barn chores or not, were nevertheless concerned with the

functioning of the barn. It was often the women who were responsible for the cream check. Levonne explains:

We separated the milk, and saved the cream. The cream went into a five-gallon cream can and then we shipped that away. And what we got for that cream – we pretty well shipped a can of cream a week – and that pretty well paid for our groceries. Because we had our own milk, our own cream, our own butter, and we made our own bread. So the staples that we needed to buy, the shipping cream pretty well paid for it. (December 6, 2013).



*Figure 35: Alexina Verot poses with a cream can. The name stamp is still visible. October 28, 2013.*

In my own family, my grandmother helped with the milking. Once the milk was transported to the house, my grandmother separated it with the help of her two daughters. Then came the most arduous task of all: cleaning the individual parts of the separator. It was usually women and girls who separated it, prepared it for market, and it was often into a woman's hands that the cream check was entrusted.

It was used to pay for things like necessities for the running of the household, clothing, supplies

for school, a bit might be saved from it each month to help pay for Christmas presents, for fabric for sewing, for shoes and hats, for small treats.

The cream check was generally not substantial enough to go back into the running of the farm, but it was sufficient to keep the household running, to see the family through times of financial stress. If the harvest failed, if the grain would not sell, the cream check, as long as milk was coming from the barn, could be relied upon.

I came to no general conclusion about gender and the barn during my research. As Thomas Hubka found, “it is important not to overemphasize sharp distinctions between work roles of men and women” (1984, 150). What is clear is that, as Hubka discussed, the success of the family farm depended on the shared work of men and women. They had their own very distinct roles, but there was also “a complex sharing and overlapping of activities” (1984, 150) which resulted from a variety of fluctuating circumstances.

However these roles were defined, or not, on different family farms, there is no doubt that farm women did as much, if not more, work than their husbands. They were an integral part of the functioning and prosperity of farm families. Women were nearly equal to men in participation in my study, and I found that interviewing couples together added a depth to the narratives that I had not anticipated. Interviewed together, husbands and wives compared childhood experiences, jogged each other’s memories, and sometimes “corrected” or amended memories. This often led to commentary on present society.

Walker states, “The way narrators frame stories about the past tells us much about the way they view the world they live in today and the things they feel have been lost in the wake of modernization and change.” (2006, 15). The most common “loss” I observed was the sense of community that has diminished over the decades in the rural countryside. At one time, farms were located in school districts, which created tightly knit communities within the larger community of the towns, villages, and rural municipalities as a whole. Country schools were often the site of much of the social activity, whether dances, meals, meetings and so on. As discussed, barns could also serve a social role in local community. Most country schools closed by the 1950s in this area (*Radville-Laurier: The Yesteryears* 1983; *Builders of a Great Land* 1980). The only

school left in the entire study region is in the town of Radville now. And with farms becoming fewer and further in between, there is less socialization amongst neighbours than there used to be.

This diminishing of local community came up in almost every interview. Eileen Sorensen spoke about barn dances of the past and school districts closing (December 3, 2013). She reminisced about previous decades and the socializing that was constant between neighbours. At the end of our interview, we had this exchange:

KC: “You’ve seen farming change a lot.”

ES: “Oh yes, yeah.”

KC: “And the way of living in rural areas.”

ES: “Oh yes, everything has changed so much. Some things have been lost along the way, it really has.” [Pause].

KC: “Like what?”

ES: [Pause]. Socializing for one thing, is lost. I mean, there’s such big farms now. Everyone is busy, busy, busy, in a hurry, hurry, hurry. You don’t go to your neighbour and visit, get together, like they did. And...[pause]. I don’t know how to explain, or what else to say. You don’t have family ties like you did. I don’t know, I don’t know. Instead of going to the neighbour to visit or go to your town and do things, they’re just *off*. They’re gone.

Ray Cashman’s article is a response to writers who dismissed nostalgia as “universal modern malaise” (2006, 137), a compulsion to hoard “useless” relics from the past as a coping mechanism to deal with the alleged “sense of exile from the past as a once familiar but now foreign country” (2006, 137), which has resulted from modernity and post-modernity. Perhaps Eileen’s desire to hold on to her barn is a coping mechanism to deal with the changes she has seen throughout her lifetime, particularly, the loss of

community. Perhaps the barn as a symbol in the countryside is an example of critical nostalgia, a response to the dizzying array of changes in technology, global economics and agricultural practices which have decimated the rural countryside and virtually obliterated a former way of life.

### **Memory and Critical Nostalgia**

The sense of critical nostalgia was not just present in my interviews, but also in my fieldwork as I made cold visits to hundreds of farms, several of them now inhabited by young people. My expectations of disinterest were quickly disproven as I found that the majority of young people (in the age range of early twenties to mid-forties) were enthusiastic about my project. They had stories they had heard from parents or grandparents, or wanted to know if I knew stories of their farm or family's past. For them, too the barn is a powerful symbol. In talking about their barns and retrieving memories about the family farm of the past, I connected with people in the present. I created relationships and friendships through the act of asking about barns. Is that critical nostalgia in motion? Does the creation of a discourse about these buildings stimulate the impetus for positive change of which Cashman writes (2006)?

The barn's current status does not bode well for the future, but the interest in it is indicative of a pattern of thinking. People find value in the past, in their connections to the family farm, in the stories of where they came from and how their ancestors built a home in this particular place. This is nothing new, as demonstrated by the abundance of family and community histories. However, the barn is almost revered, as evinced by the willingness of some to bear the great expense to maintain them. This implies a value for the past and for a former way of life that is not always evident otherwise. Roland Carles'

sparing speech did not contain much sentimentality. When I asked him why he fixed up his barn, his reply was sparse: “It’s a good barn. It’s a keepsake. Otherwise it would be falling down like most of them are. Pretty soon there won’t be any of them.”

When I pressed him further on his feelings toward the barn, he answered, “It’s just always been there since I can remember, just a building.” However, his tone of voice belies the dismissiveness of his words. Though he calls it “just a building,” it seems that for him, it is just as much a part of the landscape as a creek or a coulee. Also, his actions speak for themselves: the great expense in time and money that he has put in to keeping the barn standing is indicative of his depth of feeling for the building itself, and perhaps, for what it represents: the hard work of his ancestors. In fact, it is when talking about the trials of his parents and grandparents that Roland’s narrative is most animated and detailed. Roland, the Portes, Stafford McGrath, and the Verots have all put a lot of money into these structures to preserve them. This is critical nostalgia at work – positive change in the present to honour the past.

Throughout the history of Saskatchewan agriculture, the only constant has been change. Is keeping a barn which no longer serves any practical purpose a sort of “voluntary museumification?” (Cashman 2006, 146). If so, what are people trying to preserve? People like the aesthetics of barns, as evidenced by the plethora of barn calendars, framed photos of barns, coffee table books of barn photos I have seen in people’s home during my fieldwork, and also outside of my fieldwork. But it is certainly more than just the visual appeal that make barns so meaningful to people. Since there is no use for most barns anymore, they “take on a second life as symbols of display” (Cashman 2006, 146). These symbols reflect the past, the family farm, and the sense of

identity people equate with what the barn represents. The barn is more than just a building, it is a timeline of the family farm and of life in the rural prairie. I found this in each interview, in each farm yard.

Through the memories of my research participants, the narrative spun outward from the barn to encompass the history, the remembered history, of the family farm in this region. Virgin grassland was replaced by cultivated fields, painstakingly broken by men, oxen, horses and the cumbersome early steam tractors. The barns were erected at great time and expense – some never even paid theirs off since they were built just on the eve of the Depression. The dusty years of the 1930s drought came, but most people persevered, mostly self-sufficient. Those who did not left the region. The gas- and diesel-powered tractors replaced horsepower and the barns' use dwindled. The cream check kept families fed and clothed, and the hay was still moved into the lofts to feed the milk cows. The country schools closed one by one as children were sent further distances to school; they had no time to do chores anymore. Then the balers came in, the creameries closed. The barn fell out of use, was put to new uses, perhaps to store machinery. But then the machinery grew bigger, the farms grew bigger, people moved away, the towns began to die out.<sup>24</sup>

The history of the family farm in Saskatchewan is not a long one, comparatively. But it did not take long for those who came to make it home, to become so rooted that no other place could be home. Not all farms survived. Many continue to decline. The future of rural life is uncertain. This place has long been known as “next year country” – a

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<sup>24</sup> This paragraph is reflective of the “pioneer myth” upon which the identity of Saskatchewan people from settler backgrounds is built. It historically discounted the indigenous peoples who lived on this land for millennia before European colonialization. However, it remains a powerful image and, despite the damage done to the natural environment and to aboriginal culture, it does also reflect the reality of homesteading.

reference to the promise of next year, of the elusive bumper crop that will end financial difficulties and uncertainties once and for all. For every good year, it seems that there are at least a few bad ones; such is the reality of dryland farming. But amongst all these uncertainties, the barn is a symbol of solidity. While many barns disintegrate in abandoned yards, perhaps reflecting the fate of the family farm, others are determinedly and proudly maintained.

The barn stimulates memories and meaning. These memories reveal deeply held values which constitute the identities of the people living in this rural cultural landscape: hard work, a bond with nature, a sense of community. My findings are not unique to my region. In her study of southern American family farmers, Melissa Walker found that “Farm people constructed a community of memory around particular remembered characteristics of life on the land: self-sufficiency, a rural work ethic, persistence through hard times, a commitment to mutual aid, an attachment to the land and the local community, and the relative equality of rural folk” (2006, 223-24). Other studies of rural life came to similar conclusions (Dandekar 2011; Hart 1998; Osterud 2012).

The few themes which I explored in this chapter do not reflect the entire story of the barn, nor of the family farm, nor of rural life generally. They have merely demonstrated the depth of human experience embedded intangibly within the structure of the barn. I only touched upon gender, for example, but there is much more to be explored in terms of how men and women experienced life on the family farm. The social and community aspect of rural life cannot be underestimated, and the brief introduction here does not fully explore how important it was in people’s lives, nor how much its lack is felt in the present. If critical nostalgia is “essential for evaluating the present through

contrast with the past and for reasserting the ideal of community” (Cashman 2006, 137), perhaps there is the potential for the barn to be used as a symbol to help recreate community in the rural landscape. The possibilities for this will be examined in Chapter Five. Cashman’s discussion was related to the religious and political situation in Ireland in the twentieth century. In Saskatchewan, my interpretation of critical nostalgia is related to family ties, connection to the land, and the return of young people to a rural way of life, one which is more sustainable. With the barn as a symbol rooted firmly in the past, what does its present condition prophesy for its future?

## Chapter Five

### The Barn Today and Tomorrow

*“It was a building I never wanted to destroy.”*

- Kim Levee, December 9, 2013.

*“It’s a new world. There’s no need for a barn. None at all.”*

- Roy Levee, November 21, 2013.

This closing chapter will discuss the varying conditions of the barns in my study area, the opinions of my research participants about the future of their barns, and the steps, if any, they have taken to secure said future. I make comparisons between barn preservation in Essex, England and southern Saskatchewan, and speculate about future possibilities for Saskatchewan barns. I expand upon the discussion of critical nostalgia in the previous chapter to speculate if it could have a lasting impact on the future of barns in this



Figure 36: The fate of many barns. The R.M. of the Gap No. 39, west of Ceylon. October 30, 2013.

province. I also present the case for the necessity of a provincial barn survey, similar to the models initiated in Michigan and other states. Finally, I close the chapter with a case study of the only repurposed barn in my study region.

When I told property owners my purpose for driving into their yards during my survey, I was frequently met with statements such as: “Not many barns around anymore.” It seems that people in the area have reached the consensus that barns are an endangered species. I was of the same opinion when I began my research, and I certainly have no claim to disprove it now. A common question I received was, “Just how many are left?” As I prepared to begin my research, I had no idea how many barns there were going to be. If I had known how many, I might have decided to survey only one rural municipality instead of two. As mentioned previously, I documented 123 extant barns, subject to revision due to human error, further deterioration, and misidentification.

At the beginning of my research, my uninformed estimate was that there were perhaps 70 barns left in the Gap and Laurier. That there are still more than 100 left in the area was a positive surprise. However, this number is certainly low compared to how many barns there used to be. As Roland Carles stated, “Every place [farm] used to have a barn.” This was certainly the case in the earliest decades of settlement in the region, since horses were universally used for farm work. It is impossible to know how many barns there were in Laurier and the Gap at the peak of habitation.

Explorations at the provincial archives, the municipal offices and Canadian census data proved fruitless for such a quest. However, going by Roland Carles’ statement that

“every place had a barn,”<sup>25</sup> and using the typical settlement pattern of homesteaders in southern Saskatchewan, I have done some guesswork. Typically, homesteaders filed a claim on a quarter section of land. Once they had “proved up” this land,<sup>26</sup> homesteaders would often “take out” a pre-emption, that is, buy the adjoining quarter section of land for a reduced rate. There were 360 quarters in a rural municipality; a certain number of these were claimed for school districts, the Hudson’s Bay Company, and the railroad. If ten percent were claimed, or 36 quarters, that left 324 quarters available for settlement. Assuming half of these were claimed as pre-emptions, that left 162 quarters which could have had homesteads on them. To allow for error, I will estimate that, at the peak of habitation (circa 1950) there were 150 inhabited farms in each municipality, and 300 inhabited farms in the entire study region. The current number of inhabited farms (as of 2012) is 147.<sup>27</sup> Thus, I can claim with a good degree of confidence that there are about half as many occupied farms as there were in the mid-twentieth-century. Furthermore, I can claim that the current number of extant barns (123) is less than half as many as there probably were in circa 1950.<sup>28</sup> This estimate matches up with the common conception of locals, particularly seniors, who often say things like “there used to be a family every mile” or “there was a farm on every half-section.”

As of 2012, there were 147 inhabited farms in the Gap and Laurier. This does not count the number of farms that are still in use but have no current inhabitants. Some

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<sup>25</sup> This statement is almost certainly true. In the settlement era (1904-ca. 1910), all farms used horses and would have needed a structure for them. What form these barns took is not possible to know with confidence. But what is certain is that every farm would have had some sort of barn at some point.

<sup>26</sup> “Proving up” is the vernacular term for fulfilling all obligations to claim a homestead. This included breaking ten acres a year for three years, living on the land for six months a year, and erecting buildings. (Source).

<sup>27</sup> I came up with this number from the 2012 versions of the R.M. maps produced by the Gap and Laurier.

<sup>28</sup> I chose this date because by then, very few new barns were built in the region, most farms no longer used horses for work, but most barns were probably still in use for milk cows.

farmers in the region live in Ceylon or Radville and commute to their farms. During my survey, I classified each barn's condition on a scale which I devised.

1 – Very poor. In a state beyond repair; roof collapsed; building collapsed; irreparable structural damage (7 percent of barns).

2 – Poor. Visible structural damage; partially collapsed roof; moderately severe “lean” (25 percent of barns).

3 – Fair. A roof that has not been upgraded from cedar shingles; slight lean; evidence of rotting boards; paint is still visible (33 percent of barns).

4 – Good. Roof may have been upgraded to asphalt (not tin), or original cedar shingles are in good condition; no visible lean; boards appear straight and sturdy; evidence of recent paint job within approximately ten years (20 percent of barns).

5 – Excellent and/or restored. Roof has been maintained, either with asphalt or tin; exterior may have been clad in tin or steel; freshly painted; may have been straightened (14 percent of barns).

From my observations, I believe that barns graded as #1 or #2 on this scale are past the point of restoration. Barns in the #3 category have generally weathered the decades better, but have had little work put into them. If they were to be maintained, they have a better chance of survival. Barns in the #4 and #5 category have had work put into them and stand a good chance of surviving for several more decades.

As for use, based on the results of my survey, 20 percent of barns are still being used for some sort of livestock. This is usually seasonal, such as when beef cattle are calving in the spring. Twenty-five percent of the barns were being used in some subsidiary capacity as either general storage or as shops. The remaining barns were either neglected

completely, were situated on abandoned farmsteads, or their use was unverifiable. As discussed in Chapter Three, there is only one barn in the study region that is being used in part the way it was meant when it was built: the Thue farm.

Of those barns that remain, their future is uncertain, just as the future of the family farm is uncertain. The current trends in agriculture do not anticipate a future for barns, nor have they for several decades. “The advance of mechanization increased the capital cost of maintaining or acquiring a farm. The emergence of the 800-acre farm (the average size of a prairie farm today) and the drastic reduction of the number of family farms are direct consequences of mechanization” (Lewis 2011, 20). Though the average farm is 800 acres, that number is deceiving, particularly in this area. My own family farms approximately 2,500 acres, which is considered a “small farm” compared to some of the operations in the area which farm as many as 10,000 acres. Not all of this land is owned; much of it is rented. Nevertheless, the 800-acre farm is simply not sustainable in the current environment of agri-business. And there is no place at all for a barn on a 10,000 acre operation.

Roy Levee, now semi-retired, has built up a several-thousand-acre farming operation with his son, Kim. Following from Lewis’ argument, Roy stated, in response to my question of what future there was for barns: “Not much really, is there? A place to keep stuff in...They’re not needed anymore. Even the livestock people don’t have barns...It’s a new world. There’s no need for a barn. None at all.” Further on in the chapter, I will present a case study of Roy’s family barn and how it has a future, though Roy believes barns generally have none.

My research participants were mostly of the opinion that barns have no future, even those who have put money into maintaining them. As Roland Carles states, “It’s expensive to upkeep, getting very little use out of it.” When I asked him why he chose to do it anyway, he responded, “It’s a good barn, it’s just kind of a keepsake.” Roland’s casual, non-sentimental speech is belied by the gleaming new tin roof on his barn, representing thousands of dollars of investment into a building that no longer serves any practical function on his farm.

My conversation with the Portes about the future of barns was typical.

KC: “What do you think the future is for the big old hip-roof barns generally?”

FP: “Well I can see them going down. Because if they’re not taken care of, they’re not gonna last forever.”

KC: “Do you find that to be kind of sad? Or is it just the way it is?”

FP: “Yep, Well, the way it is.”

Eveline breaks in: “I would say it’s sad. Cause that’s what makes a farm.”

KC: “Why do you say that?”

EP: “I don’t know, it just looks nice to have a hip-roof barn.”

FP: “Well, you know, you come into the yard and you see that barn, you know?

Like us, we’d see the barn before we’d see the house.”

This conversation revisits some of the themes discussed in Chapter Four, namely the role nostalgia plays in barn preservation. The Portes painted the barn not long before they sold their farm, and Frank mentioned that he was considering giving the new owner money to paint it again. Even though he no longer owns it, he is still emotionally invested in it to the extent that he may financially invest in its maintenance.

The Verot family is currently in the process of restoring their barn. They have already clad the south side in red tin, and plan to do the same to the rest of the structure. The Verots spend about half the year living on their farm since they spend the winters in



*Figure 37: The Verot barn has been clad in red tin on the south side; the north side awaits the same treatment. The R.M. of Laurier No. 38, southeast of Radville. November 15, 2013.*

Phoenix, Arizona. Their three children have all moved from the farm. The barn is full of storage items, and is clearly serving no real

other use on the farm. I asked the Verots why they were going to the effort and expense to maintain the barn. Dave replied, “It would just break my heart to see that barn go away” (October 28, 2013). Alexina reiterated how fond her late husband, Peter, had been of the barn, and Sharon said, “Uncle Paul, it would just break his heart, too.”

At this point, Dave shows me a photo of the Verot century farm celebration in 2004. Peter Verot and his siblings pose in front of the barn. Alexina then recounts the story of Peter’s childhood. He had grown up on a farm a mile south of the current Verot farm, which was then owned by his uncle. Alexina related that Peter had always loved that particular barn, and it was a primary factor in his decision to purchase his uncle’s farm. As discussed in the previous chapter, it was clear that the Verots’ decision to maintain their barn was motivated almost entirely by nostalgia and pride

I found that the decision to fix up a barn is a personal one that is almost always motivated by a respect for the past, and usually a very personal past – this is a building that an ancestor built. This is why Roland Carles and Stafford McGrath went to great expense to repair their barns. And this is only because they had the financial means to do so. Eileen Sorensen revealed her wish to fix up her barn, but cited the prohibitive expense as a barrier. I spoke to many people during the survey who expressed the same sentiment. One farmer had clad the ground floor of his barn in tin, but could not afford to do the loft level, so it remains in its wooden state, vulnerable to the elements. This particular man was very vocal in his frustration that there is no funding available for people who want to fix up their barns. It seems that fixing up a barn, like building them in the first place, is a statement of affluence. In this way, the barn still represents something of what it did when it was first built: “I am prosperous. I am putting down roots here.”

When I asked Eileen Sorensen what she thought the future of the barn was, she sighed, then paused for a long moment before replying, “Some of them are just more or less novelties, just to have them. ‘Cause nobody has a milk cow, nobody has pigs...there’s none of that anymore. So they don’t use the barn.” Her final statement brings us back to the reason why barns have been deteriorating for so long: use, or disuse. Thus, adaptive reuse, or repurposing, is one of the only truly viable options for saving barns.

As I thought about the future of Saskatchewan barns, I could not help but draw comparisons with what I had observed during my research on barns in Essex, England in the summer of 2013. I wondered if there were lessons to be learned from there, and if any of the models I had observed in Essex could be put into practice in southern

Saskatchewan. The practice of adaptive re-use of barns and other agricultural buildings in Essex has been common since the 1980s, and shows no sign of abating. I will use my personal experience doing fieldwork on barns in England to make some basic observations about the similarities and differences, and to speculate on the possibility for a future for barns in Saskatchewan following the English model. The purpose of this comparison is to demonstrate a potential option for the future of Saskatchewan barns.

One thing both Saskatchewan and Essex barn owners share in common is the financial burden of their upkeep. The problem with barns today is that farmers are often saddled with the responsibility of their upkeep, but if a barn is no longer useful on a working farm, it becomes nothing more than a giant, burdensome money drain. Adaptive re-use is controversial in England due to the changes it necessarily imposes on the building structure, but many believe that it is a necessary and natural process of a building's evolution.

In England, I spoke to an architectural expert, Bill Hardy, who has been involved in barn repurposing. Upon hearing that I was from western Canada, he remarked "You've got the doors in the wrong side there."<sup>29</sup> Bill had lived for a few years in Saskatchewan during the 1970s, and so knew the differences between English barns and western Canadian barns. His comment was a telling one. The purpose of English barns, many built centuries ago, is completely different from that of the barn in Saskatchewan. In attempting to define a barn in the introduction, some of this has already been discussed. The British barn, built centuries ago, was primarily intended for threshing and storage of grain. Thus, while many British barns were facing redundancy in the early twentieth-

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<sup>29</sup> English barns have the doors in the long side; Saskatchewan barns have the doors at the gable ends.

century, new barns were being built in Saskatchewan. These served a different purpose, but like their British cousins, they were soon to face redundancy.

Though young in comparison to their British counterparts, Saskatchewan barns have perhaps fared worse. The Essex barns, built of massive timbers held together by wooden joints, have stood the test of time, and though always in danger of deterioration, have a

much more

solid

demeanour

than their

Saskatchewan

counterparts

which, in truth,

seem rather

flimsy in



*Figure 38: Despite the addition of asphalt shingles at some point in its history, this barn is being steadily worn away by the elements. The ruins of a wagon in the forefront speak eloquently of the homesteading era. The R.M. of the Gap No. 39, southwest of Ceylon. October 22, 2013.*

comparison. The Saskatchewan barns, built of sawn lumber and held together by nails, are very susceptible to the elements, especially if they are not diligently maintained.

While the form and function of British and Saskatchewan barns are very different, their status as nostalgic symbols of a previous way of life are very much the same. The word “barn” may conjure totally different images on either side of the Atlantic, but the pangs of nostalgia are, I would argue, very similar. Essex, a county in the UK, and Saskatchewan are very different. And yet, there are some commonalities. Even the population size is similar. Essex, as of the 2011 census, is home to 1.4 million people within an area 3,464 square kilometres. Saskatchewan, as of the 2011 census, has a

population of 1 million. Essex reports more than 14,000 listed buildings (Essex County Council 2014) in contrast to Saskatchewan's list of 800 designated heritage properties – 50 of them at the provincial level, and 750 at the municipal level (Government of Saskatchewan 2012).

In Essex and throughout England, the availability of funding to maintain and/or restore listed structures is extremely limited and competitive. In England, my impression was that many property owners felt that the restrictions imposed by English Heritage were a burden, and yet were resigned to them. There are ways and means of getting around many of the impositions of English Heritage. However, none of my research participants questioned the value of keeping the buildings. In Saskatchewan, the value of old buildings is not as embedded within general attitudes toward heritage as in Essex.

Municipal heritage properties in Saskatchewan are typically designated through the efforts of the owners themselves. However, the guidelines are much less strict than in England. The Municipal Heritage Property Designation guide, published by the Heritage Resources Branch of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Culture and Sport, lists that municipal designation (in abbreviated form): publicly and formally recognizes a property's heritage value, legally protects the property's heritage value (which protects it from unauthorized changes and unauthorized demolition), encourages good stewardship, and makes a property eligible for financial assistance (2013). However, the document is careful to assure property owners that they still have full property rights to the building.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> A sidebar located immediately beside the benefits of designations includes this statement: "There's nothing wrong with change...as long as it is sensitive change. On-going use of heritage buildings is important to their long-term viability. A heritage building that is being used is a heritage building that is being saved. This may mean continuing to use the building as it was originally intended, or adapting the property to a new, contemporary use. What is important is that the heritage elements that make the property significant are maintained and incorporated into the new use."

The arguments I observed during my fieldwork in England, where conservation enthusiasts and business minded owners clashed over the details of a building – whether or not “too much” wood was showing, whether the windows had been “sensitively placed” or not, simply do not exist in Saskatchewan, or at least, not in my region. In Saskatchewan, I would argue that many would be thrilled to see barns being put to any use at all, so long as they were not being left to moulder away. The reality is, the heritage consciousness in Saskatchewan is generally low. The small number of designated structures, the tendency to tear down the old in favour of the new, and the resistance or inability to finance restorations, all work against older structures like the barn. That a large number of people feel nostalgia for the barns is without question. Whether or not that will translate to positive change in any but a few, scattered exceptional cases is impossible to determine.

The reality is that financial means determines the fate of barns. Whether in the UK or in Saskatchewan, it takes a great deal of money to keep up such large buildings. The major difference I have observed is attitude towards heritage. In England, people are willing to sacrifice some property rights to maintain a heritage landscape which they deem valuable. In much of North America, people refuse to give up individual property rights. England has built its identity upon the foundation of thousands of years of recorded history. The maintenance of heritage buildings is in keeping with this identity. In North America, the descendants of immigrant settlers have been raised with an identity of claiming space for their own and having the right to do with it what they want. This is the great pioneer narrative, which is also embedded within state institutions, the taming of the frontier and the belief in an abundance of resources. In the UK, buildings were often

kept as they were because the cost of replacing them was exorbitant. In North America, buildings were often built quickly, with the thought that they could be rebuilt at any time. These attitudes are pervasive and are, I believe, the largest detriment to protecting old buildings in this part of the world. Perhaps this view is beginning to change, but it is impossible to know if future generations will value heritage.

In Essex, barns have a future. Due to the ever-increasing need for housing in England, and the proximity of Essex to London, barn owners have the option of converting them to some other use, and this often brings in rental income. I talked to people who lamented such a future, believing that adaptive reuse damages the integrity of the structures. Others were resigned to the reality, were glad they are being saved at all, and determined that they be maintained as rigorously as possible. Still others see it as a marketing opportunity, a way to make money. Whatever the motivations and opinions, the fact remains that barns in England are not falling down like they are in Saskatchewan.

The Gap and Laurier are not close enough to any major centres to draw large numbers of people looking to set up shop in a former barn or convert it into a dwelling. However, there is the possibility that a few barns will be saved by people relocating to the country who are interested in saving heritage structures. A few of my research participants

mentioned this possibility. If a barn has been kept up, its aesthetic appeal is valuable.

The Ayottes sold their farm to an investment firm from British Columbia which bought

their land for

purely

economic

reasons. The

people who

bought it do not

even live in

Saskatchewan

and have little

to do with the



*Figure 39: The Ayotte barn, aka the North Star Barn. The R.M. of the Gap No. 39, south of Ceylon. October 18, 2013.*

day-to-day maintenance of the land – it is rented out to local farmers. However, the

beautifully maintained barn on the property apparently drew the eye of the city dwelling

investors. As we discussed the sale of the farm, Edith broke in:

Do you know what really, really sold this farm? They were walking up the street in Weyburn, and they were looking for investments, and they seen [*sic*] a picture – the barn...She [the real estate agent] took a picture from up there on the hill...and they had it in the window [of the real estate office] and this one man was very – the barn.

AA: “They came, they didn’t know much about farmland I don’t think.”

EA: “But they loved it. The barn sold it.”

The aesthetic appeal of barns and the nostalgia they stimulate cannot be underestimated.

While the future may seem bleak for barns generally in Saskatchewan, there is a good

probability that at least some of them will be saved because of their looks alone.

Those in England who wish to repurpose farm buildings are subject to strict protocols and limitations set down by English Heritage, depending on the status of the building. In Saskatchewan, no such protocols exist, in part because few designations exist. Of the nearly 300 provincially designated heritage buildings in Saskatchewan, just eight are barns. All of these eight barns are exceptional in some way – round barns, stone barns, and log barns. This small sample of designated Saskatchewan barns in no way reflects the enormous part the structures played in the development of farm life in the province. Canada generally lags behind Britain and the United States in building conservation and preservation, particularly those that could be defined as vernacular.

For example, in the United States there are dozens of organizations devoted to barn awareness and preservation. There is the National Barn Alliance and dozens of state and county barn preservation groups. In Canada, I have found no counterparts. I can only speculate on the reasons for this, however, I do not think lack of interest is one of them. Judging from the response to my work, both in the immediate area and the communications I received from people across the country in response to my blog and radio interviews, I know that there are many people out there who are very passionate about barns. I believe that Saskatchewan is ready for some sort of similar organization. I think that a province-wide survey of barns and farmstead buildings is a necessary goal.

One major deterrent to understanding the current state of barns in Saskatchewan and their possible future is the difficulty in ascertaining exactly what is out there. I have done a thorough survey of one small portion of the province but, to date, there has been no similar undertaking anywhere else in Saskatchewan, and there is certainly no large overriding provincial survey, or national survey for that matter. A necessary step is

implementing some sort of barn and farmstead survey. Such undertakings have had success in the United States where, judging by the numbers of barn preservation organizations,<sup>31</sup> public awareness of the heritage value of barns is much higher than in Canada. For example, there is the Michigan Barn and Farmstead Survey, an initiative developed through a series of collaborations between the University of Michigan, various Michigan historic preservation groups and 4-H. Its listed purposes are:

- Identify and document rural buildings and farmsteads that contribute significantly to the unique character of a community or illustrate its agricultural development
- Heighten awareness of the rapid decline of traditional farm buildings as a first step toward the development of a preservation plan
- Help participants and others in the community gain a greater appreciation for the value of agricultural structures and the heritage they represent
- Create a standard nomenclature that describes and classifies historic vernacular agricultural structures
- Put into use a method of field documentation for agricultural vernacular structures that can replicated throughout Michigan
- Establish a database of information about Michigan agricultural buildings (Stier 2000, 6)

The database is available online, and interested members of the public are encouraged to survey their own regions while following the standard procedures of the guide.

If such a programme were to be coordinated in Saskatchewan, it would no doubt raise the profile of barns as heritage structures worth preserving. It would also provide valuable information, help heritage planners make more informed decisions, and involve the interested public-at-large who are passionate about barns. It could even potentially spark enough interest to institute some sort of funding programme for barn preservation. I believe the time is ripe for such an endeavour in Saskatchewan based on the public

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<sup>31</sup> For example, the National Barn Alliance (<http://barnalliance.org/>) has a substantial list on its website of local barn preservation groups, state historic barn preservation organizations, and available grants and tax credits for barn restorations.

reception I observed during my research and the media attention it received. Because Saskatchewan, as a province within the country of Canada, was founded by the family farm, the history of the family farm is vital to understanding the history of the province at large, and to directing its future. Farmstead buildings, particularly barns, contain valuable information that contributes an important piece of the social history of the province.

Until such an undertaking, or something similar, takes place at a provincial level, the fate of most barns will continue to rest in the hands of private property owners. Fortunately, there are people out there who are willing to invest their time and money in conserving and/or preserving these structures. In my study area, there was much evidence of property owners attempting to preserve their barns. Of the barns rated in my ranking system as 5s, in excellent condition, nearly all of those have had some improvements made to specifically keep the barn standing – most often an asphalt shingle or tin roof, and in some cases, a full exterior cladding of tin, a recent paint job, straightening, and even re-nailing the structure. However, with the exception of just one single barn in the entire pool of barns, all those that have had work done to keep them were for, as I have argued, purely nostalgic reasons.

## Case Study: A Barn Full of Christmas Trees



*Figure 40: The Levee barn has been refurbished for its new purpose. The R.M. of Laurier No. 38, north of Radville. November 5, 2013.*

The Levee barn is the only structure in my study which has been renovated and re-purposed. It is not a barn conversion in the way the British would define it, but it is certainly an example of adaptive re-use. Kim Levee and Tracy Bain have a future vision for their barn, one that incorporates the past. The Levee barn was originally a lumber shed for a business in the ghost town of Brooking. In 1911, Brooking was a boom town with a hotel, banks, residences, and several businesses. The building boom was based on the assumption that the railroad was planning to build a roundhouse on the site of the new town. But the Canadian Northern Railway decided at the last minute to relocate the divisional point to Radville. Almost overnight, Brooking's prospects plummeted.

Many of the businessmen who had hoped to make their fortune catering to a town full of railroad employees took up stakes and left, setting up shop in Radville or turning their sights to even brighter horizons (*Radville-Laurier: The Yesteryears*, 1983, 148-151).

Brooking remained a local centre for farmers, but with its position in between the larger towns of Ceylon and Radville, it was eventually squeezed out, like so many other prairie towns with promising starts. Some buildings stand there still, others have disappeared with time, and some were moved to other locations, such as the Rodgers Lumber Company building, which was moved about ten miles away to be used as a dairy barn. That farm, which belonged to the Anderson family at the time of the move in the late “teens” or early 1920s, now belongs to the Levee family.

Roy Levee was one of the first people to contact me after my ad requesting research participants was placed in the local newspaper:

Hi Kristen [sic]:

Don’t really know if this is the kind of information that you are seeking, but here goes!

Our old barn started out as a Lumber Yard storage building in the metropolis of Brooking. My Dad told me that when Brooking fell apart after CNR decided to locate the R.R. divisional point and roundhouse in Radville (sometime in the early teens or the 1920’s) the building was moved to our farm and turned into a barn. This move occurred before our family owned the farm. When I was a youngster, if the sun was just right, you could make out a faded sign “RODGERS LUMBER COMPANY” that was painted on the roof. When I was growing up the barn was used as a dairy barn. Over the years it has housed cattle, pigs & horses. It was also used a granary in the ‘50s and ‘60’s. Last year Kim and Tracy fixed it up with new siding and roofing. The barn was even used for a wedding reception last summer. Currently it is being used as a garage and a place to store our “stuff.”

You are welcome to visit any time.

Regards, Roy Levee (Email to the author, August 2, 2013).

Levee Farms is a large farming operation, a model of the corporate farming practices that are quickly taking hold in Saskatchewan and edging smaller farms out. As has been discussed, this is contributing to the depopulation of the rural countryside and

possibly adversely affecting the survival of the Saskatchewan barn. Nevertheless, Levee Farms is still owned and operated by father and son Roy and Kim. And, as will be demonstrated, Levee Farms is also a possible model for a brighter future for some barns.

I was in contact with Roy a few times throughout the fall, but no concrete plans were made for an interview, and I had not yet been out to their farm to investigate it. The time finally came, on a very cold October day when I was doing my survey in the region of the Levee farm north of Radville. I met with Roy's son, Kim. He showed me around the barn. At some point, Roy showed up and the two pointed out various features – the graffiti in the old tack room (including some Roy had created as a boy in the 1940s), the haysling ropes, the cream cans and horse harnesses displayed on the walls. At the time, the barn was mostly empty. Roy showed me where the milk cows used to live, on the west side of the barn, and the cement gutter behind their former stalls. He showed me the holes that had been cut into the walls to make feeding the animals easier from the central hay "loft." Roy knew with the certainty of memory what functions had been performed where in the past. Kim was not as sure about the former layout of the barn, having never seen it in its heyday as a dairy barn.

I learned during this informal visit that Roy had officially sold the barn to his son Kim for the tidy sum of \$1.00 – though, as Kim joked, he only had a "toonie" (two-dollar coin) at the time and told his father to keep the change. I observed the new tin siding and the cleanliness of the barn. Kim talked about some of the work he and his wife Tracy

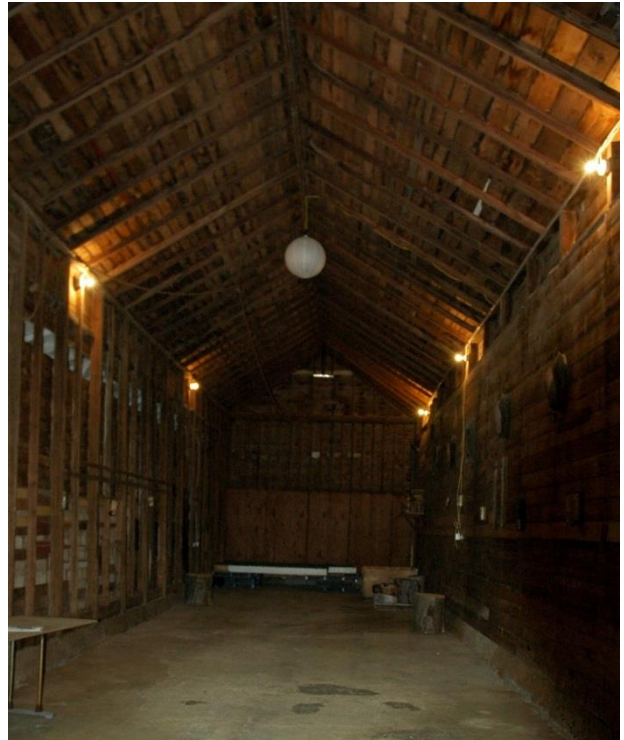
had done to fix up the barn for their daughter's wedding the year before. I knew I would need to interview both Roy and Kim to begin to unravel the full story of this barn. I also realized that this was the only barn I had seen in my region that was undergoing adaptive reuse in the vein of what I had seen in Essex.

Roy grew up working in the barn when it was the centre of his family's dairy farm operation. By the time his son Kim was born, the dairy was a thing of

the past. In fact, Kim said, "I never remember an animal being in the barn...it was a place for junk. Go put it in the barn – that was the famous saying – 'go put it in the barn!'" And so the barn sat in the yard, its previous function a distant memory

During our interview, Roy said, "I was ready to tear it down." But Kim was adamant that would not happen.

He recalled that he knew Roy thought they were "silly" for putting so much money into saving the barn, that for all the money they were spending on saving the old structure, they



*Figure 41: The Levee barn's former hay mow has been cleared out in preparation for its new life as a Christmas tree store. Horse collars are hung along the walls to represent the heritage of the building. November 5, 2013.*



*Figure 42: Nostalgia on display in the Levee barn. These cream cans are displayed, along with the horse collars mentioned in Figure 33, to consciously evoke a sense of heritage in the building for its visitors. November 5, 2013.*

could build a new one. Kim's response to this is indicative of why he and his wife were willing to do it anyway: "It hasn't got the nostalgia when you're done [a new building] either, and that's worth something."

Kim Levee and his wife Tracy Bain have spent \$80,000 on this building to



Figure 43: The Levee barn under construction. Photo courtesy Kim Levee and Tracy Bain.

transform it into a Christmas tree store. A vital aspect of adaptive reuse or repurposing barns is the *purpose*. It is much easier to spend money on something

when there is a purpose for

it. Though Kim and Tracy have no expectations that their Christmas tree business will ever pay for the work they put into the barn, there is still a purpose for it. They have found a new function for the barn, one that will hopefully keep it standing for decades to come.

Kim made a telling statement, "My dad called you first," meaning Roy had contacted me about the barn despite having little to do with it now. Different generations, different interpretations, and different interactions with the same barn, and yet it has found a new purpose in the younger generation, from the son who had no memories of actually working in the barn. Though we did not discuss this in the interviews, I speculate that the prosperity of the large corporate farming model of Levee Farms was a

contributing factor in the decision to save the barn. The Levees had the means to repurpose the barn; many farmers in the area do not.

The dichotomy between father and son – between generations, was apparent. Roy was ready to tear the barn down, feeling it no longer served a useful purpose. Kim, of a younger generation, and who never experienced the barn in its original state, decided it was worth saving. This is just one example, but is indicative of a larger, burgeoning trend I noticed. Some young people are interested in barns, even if they had no direct experience with them.

For Kim and Tracy, the value of the barn lies in its heritage. Tracy explained, “When we sell a tree, we’re not really selling a Christmas tree. We’re selling an experience, and I think the barn is a big part of that.” Kim and Tracy believe that people are willing to purchase an experience – a certain feeling, and that being in an old building decorated with pieces of the past is a large part of that experience.



*Figure 44: A medieval barn in Coggeshall, Essex, UK is decorated for a wedding. Is such a future possible for some Saskatchewan barns? July 11, 2013.*

This longing for experience appears to be a growing trend. People want to look at barns, but people also want to experience something in a barn.

In Essex, many barns have found a new purpose in this way. National Trust properties

like Coggeshall Grange Barn earn an extra income by renting out the barn space for weddings and other social functions. When I visited Coggeshall in July, 2013, the barn was still decorated with streamers and pennants from a wedding that had been held over the weekend.

Perhaps there is potential for a similar model to develop in Saskatchewan. In fact, a wedding provided the catalyst for Kim and Tracy to clean out and refurbish their barn. In the summer of 2012, their daughter wanted to have her wedding dance in the barn. This provided the impetus to finally clean the barn out, a daunting task, but one which enabled the development of their plans to repurpose the barn.

The wedding dance held in the Levee barn is perhaps an isolated example of the barn coming full circle. In the early days, many barns were the site of barn dances as discussed in Chapter Four. The current interest in using barns as sites for social events, particularly weddings, perhaps indicates another possible avenue for the adaptive reuse of Saskatchewan barns. The neighbourly, informal dances of decades past have been replaced by impeccably decorated spaces, the need for bathroom facilities, clearly marked fire exits, etc. In my interview with



*Figure 45: The rebuilt Bell Barn is an example of a rare barn type in Saskatchewan: the round barn, constructed of local fieldstone. Indian Head. September 1, 2013.*

*Figure 46: The interior of the Bell Barn has become an interpretive centre on the ground floor and a social space on the second floor. Though it is entirely rebuilt rather than preserved, it is nonetheless an example of the potential for readapting barns in Saskatchewan. September 1, 2013. Figure 45: The rebuilt Bell Barn is an example of a rare barn type in Saskatchewan: the round barn, constructed of local fieldstone. Indian Head. September 1, 2013.*

the Verots, they mentioned that their daughter wanted to be married in their barn as well. These two examples from my own area demonstrate that some interest is there. If farm owners are willing to put the time and expense into renovating their barn for such a purpose, a few more could potentially be saved.

Within the province, though outside my study region, there are other examples. Near Indian Head, there was a huge community effort to rebuild the historic Bell Barn, a round barn constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Bell Barn is now an interpreted historic attraction which also provides space for community functions, including barn dances. In the summer of 2014, I happened upon a barn repurposing in progress in the tiny hamlet of Melaval. It has been converted into a social/recreation space, with plans to use it for functions such as concerts and weddings in the future. Undoubtedly, there are



*Figure 46: The interior of the Bell Barn has become an interpretive centre on the ground floor and a social space on the second floor. Though it is entirely rebuilt rather than preserved, it is nonetheless an example of the potential for readapting barns in Saskatchewan. September 1, 2013.*

several more such examples in the province of which I am not yet aware.

Thus, though Essex and Saskatchewan barns structurally have more differences than similarities, the sense of nostalgia associated with them is very

similar. The contexts of Essex and Saskatchewan are also very different, but there are still some lessons to be learned from the English model of adaptive reuse. If similar ideas

were applied in Saskatchewan, perhaps some barns could have a future beyond slow decay.

Also, if some sort of provincial barn survey were implemented on the model of similar programmes initiated in the United States, heritage planners and policymakers would have better information at their disposal in which to possibly strengthen existing protection for barns and increase the number of designated barns. Such a survey would also enable the general public to engage in barn “hunting” and therefore further raise the profile of barns’ importance to the Saskatchewan heritage landscape. While most of my research participants were pessimistic about the future of the barn in this province, I believe that there can be a tomorrow for some of Saskatchewan’s barns.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Conclusion**

When I began the research for this thesis, my first question was: what is the Saskatchewan barn? My second question was: why is the Saskatchewan barn meaningful? Finally, I asked: what is the current state of the barn in southern Saskatchewan, and what is its potential future? The barn is a workaday farm building which has become firmly ensconced in the imagination as a symbol of a romanticized rural way of life. For some people, the barn and the farm are not romantic visions, but rather they are home, work, livelihood. Agricultural and post-modern societal shifts have wrought dramatic changes in the rural Saskatchewan countryside, and these changes are especially evident in its farm buildings, particularly barns. However, over the past century or so of settlement in my region, change has been, in fact, the only constant. The barn's changing function reflects that continual evolution. The barn has receded from its former primary role on the farm to a marginal existence.

In this thesis, the barn has been conceptualized as both a structure and a symbol of the family farm in southern Saskatchewan. It has been demonstrated that through the study of vernacular architecture, a larger story about people, place and the past emerges. The barn exists in tangible and intangible forms. Michael Ann Williams writes, "All items of material culture have intangible aspects of use and meaning, but few have the power to physically order human perception and behavior while at the same time serving as a visual symbol and a functional object" (1991, 145).

This has been a study of regional folklore. Kent Ryden writes, “Regional folklore encapsulates and transmits the intimate and otherwise unrecorded history of a place; it reveals the meaning of a place to be in large part a deeply known and felt awareness of the things that happened there” (1993, 63). Throughout my field survey and my interviews, I discovered this to be true, particularly in the meanings people ascribe to their memories and their commentary on the past. Though their experiences are similar to those of family farmers experienced throughout North America (Dandekar 2011; Osterud 2012; Walker 2006), they are still very much rooted in the particular landscape they call home. Their reflections interpreted the past, raised questions about the present, and speculated about the future. With these findings, the questions I now ask are: what will happen to the barns in this particular region, and will this research make any positive impact on their futures?

The future of barn structures in this region is uncertain. Most definitely, the majority of them will be lost to time. However, as demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five, as long as there are people who feel a sense of connection and nostalgia rooted in their home place, and providing there is the necessary financial security to do so, some will take it upon themselves to preserve their barns, as the Levees, the Carles, and Stafford McGrath, amongst many others, have done. If the family farm continues to decline, the barn’s future may as well. But, as the case study from England showed, and the sale of the Ayotte farm, there is the possibility of urban people interested in the aesthetics of barns taking them on as projects.

In terms of positive change, the proposed outcome of Cashman’s theory of critical nostalgia, I have seen it happen since I began this project. I know in at least a few cases

that it was the direct result of my research. My father has ordered cedar shingles and red oil-based paint for our barn. Though the barn was not built by our family, it still symbolizes something to my father, and to me as well. It was built in the 1940s and my dad purchased it in the 1970s. It is a “bank barn,” built into the side of a hill, with a cement foundation. The loft floor has been removed to allow for machinery storage. Now it sits mostly empty. It has no use on our farm and its location is remote, several miles from our farmstead. But my father is determined to fix it up, and to do it as close to the original as possible. Hence the expensive cedar shingles, and the paint, which is not sold in Canada anymore and must be purchased either in the United States or tracked down in hardware stores with old stock. This is the barn of which I spoke in Chapter One. Before this research, I had hardly stepped foot in it. I appreciated its aesthetic appeal, but it had little meaning for me. That has changed. Something that was once ordinary and nondescript has become important.

My research was the impetus for this move on the part of my father. I have also observed how my presence as a researcher on farms and my interest in their barns may have compelled other people in my region to do some work on their barns. When the Verots showed me their barn, Sharon remarked upon her embarrassment at the mess and stated her resolve to clean out the barn. Roland Carles made a point to tell me, nearly a year after I first visited his farm, that they had finished tinning the roof of their barn. I spoke to the new owner of the Porte barn who had seen a photo of the barn on my blog. She remarked that she and her husband were embarrassed by its condition and now are planning to paint and fix up the barn. It is also being used again, for chickens and horses.



*Figure 47: The Sidehill barn, once a neglected building on my father's farm, is now awaiting new shingles and a paint job. The R.M. of the Gap, east of Ceylon. September 25, 2011.*

Furthermore, the media interest in my work demonstrates that there is a desire in Saskatchewan to preserve barns and that their importance as a symbol of the Saskatchewan family farm extends beyond the limits of my small study region. There is, perhaps, the potential for the concept of critical nostalgia as impetus for positive change to be put into practice. There is the opportunity to expand the barn's profile by implementing a provincial barn survey on the model of successful precedents like the Michigan Barn and Farmstead survey.

The contacts I have made from my research, my blog, and the resulting media coverage, have already created potential opportunities for further research on barns in Saskatchewan and for folkloric research as a whole. I have been asked to write about the importance of the barn for Heritage Saskatchewan, and I have written about it for the magazine *Folklore* published by the Saskatchewan Heritage and Folklore society (2013). Perhaps this thesis was just the beginning of my work in this province to raise the profile

of barns, but more than that, to present an alternative view of Saskatchewan's family farm and the important role it has played in the historical and continuing development of Saskatchewan's cultural landscape.

By conducting thorough studies of particular regions and places, and through the exploration of ethnographic narratives, there is the potential to examine a variety of Saskatchewan structures, whether tangible or intangible. Through the use of folkloric principles, theories and methodologies, it is conceivable to write a new history of Saskatchewan, one in which the voices of its people are heard and the stories embedded within its structures revealed in a way previously neglected.

Melissa Walker states, "By exploring how ordinary people remember the past, historians can better understand what social reality felt like to those who lived it" (2006, 9). Barns, and the way people talk about them, establish identities as rural people, who are family farm raised, have roots in a particular place, and whose experiences are shaped by knowledge of what has come before. This study has sought to demonstrate that the memories associated with the barn tell a story that has hitherto gone unrecorded. Through the study of a building, we can begin to understand the story of a people in a particular place.

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