

The Ryan Round Barn reflects Illinois' rich agricultural heritage.

Places of the Past



Story by Hal Hassen



Laurence Ryan, the barn was built for black angus cattle. The Ryan Round Barn is a true round barn—the horizontal sides have been bent into shape—distinct from polygonal barns that have identifiable sides. Rising to more than 80 feet and about 85 feet in diameter, the barn's interior consists of three levels and a 15-foot-high center silo.



Drive down any rural road in Illinois and you will encounter one of the most recognizable symbols of the state's rich agricultural heritage, the barn. From the transverse-frame/crib barns of southern Illinois to the large dairy barns of northern Illinois, barns come in all shapes and sizes and reflect a variety of uses and ethnic heritages.

Although barns remain a part of modern-day farming, older, abandoned and isolated examples often are encountered by today's traveler. An appreciation of the form, function and style reflected in barn construction brings today's urban residents closer to our agricultural past. Reading history books or going to museums are two ways to learn about the past. But seeing history is an unmatched and rewarding experience. Barn-viewing provides such an experience. Although most barns are

Completed in 1910, the Ryan Round Barn provides visitors a glimpse of a bygone era of Illinois agriculture.

privately owned, there are opportunities to explore historic barns.

One of the more interesting barns to visit is the Ryan Round Barn located at Johnson-Sauk Trail State Recreation Area just north of Kewanee and south of Interstate 80. Completed in 1910 for Dr.


To learn more

Armed with a copy of "The Old Barn Book" by Allen G. Noble and Richard K. Cleek, the curious traveler can learn much about the evolution of barns and farming in Illinois.

For a list of other round barns in Illinois visit www.dalejtravis.com/rblist/rbil.htm.

For additional information on Johnson-Sauk Trail State Recreation Area and the Ryan Round Barn, visit www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/PARKS/R1/JOHNSON.HTM.

The development of round barns was an attempt to instill more efficiency; however, they were more difficult to build and more costly than traditional rectangular barns. Because of these and other problems, round barns never replaced the more traditional barns.

The Ryan Round Barn is open to visitors. Contact Loraine Owens, president of the Friends group, at (309) 852-4262. Minimum group size is 10 for tours beyond barn hours which are May through October, on the first, third and fifth Saturdays from 1 to 4 p.m. 

Dr. Hal Hassen is the DNR cultural resource coordinator and can be reached at (217) 524-3759.