

*THE BARN DOOR*  
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Indiana is Round Barn State

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In recent years a number of Indiana's round barns have been restored.

This could be an indication that Hoosiers are beginning to realize their heritage and that round barns are worth saving. Indiana had over 225 round and polygonal barns. There were over a thousand round and many-sided barns built in the U.S. Various people have tried to get Indiana declared the Round Barn State, but it didn't catch on. In fact, Indiana's leadership in round barns has not been recognized by the state in any way, even though efforts have been made to get round barn on the license plates and other acknowledgements.

In 1971 Fulton County, having been informed that it had more round barns than any other county in Indiana, was declared the Round Barn Capital of the World and started its annual Round Barn Festival. It is now held the second weekend of June in downtown Rochester, sponsored by the Rochester Chamber of Commerce.

In 1989 a white round barn, de-roofed by a tornado, was donated by its owner, Larry Paxton, to the Fulton County Historical Society. FCHS moved and restored it beside U.S. 31 at the Fulton County Museum four miles north of Rochester. Historic Landmarks Foundations of Indiana lent \$40,000 to FCHS but it cost \$65,000 to move and restore the Leedy/ Partridge/ Paxton round barn. It was all been paid for by donations. Now a museum, the FCHS round barn displays a 1912 Lincoln truck, buggy, sleigh, wagons, old farm implements such as a reaper, hay loader grain drill, plows, burr mills, garden tractor, and many tools, even a birch bark canoe. The round barn formed the nucleus of a Living History Village called Loyal, Indiana, which portrays 1900-1925. The Fulton County Museum and Round Barn Museum are open to the public Monday - Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. year around, closed holidays. The village is open June through August with college students as interns.

National Round Barn Center of Information

In 1990 the Fulton County Historical Society founded its National Round Barn Center of Information to keep track of the round barns in the U.S. and help save round barns. The FCHS museum has pictures of hundreds of round barns, a list of most of the round barns in the U.S. and those in Canada. When a round barn is endangered, if notified, we will try to find someone who will save it.

Amish Acres Round Barn Theater

When a round barn near Plymouth was threatened, the owner brought pictures to the Fulton County Museum and offered to give it free to whoever would move and save it. I contacted Amish Acres and suggested to the owner, Dick Pletcher, that he take it. He did and made it into the Round Barn Theater.

We haven't been so successful with other round barns, though. Several have burned or been torn down in the past ten years. Kelley Round Barn by Tipton. In 1997 the Spurgeon round barn was moved to the Kelley Agricultural History Museum on U.S. 31 by Tipton. In 2000 it was completed, making four round barns added to the rural scenery along the U.S. 31 in Indiana. The other three are the Fulton County Round Barn Museum, the Calloway round barn just south of the Miami-Fulton county line, and the Smiley-Wade white round barn at Rochester.

Another round barn rescued from oblivion was the Wideman-Gerig round barn near Akron, which was moved and rebuilt at Rochester's Lakeview Park. It serves as a pro shop in the Mill Race Golf Course, and as a community center. Someday we hope to finish the second floor for meetings, reunions and weddings. There is a snack center for golfers and people walking the Pathway from the airport, around Woodlawn Hospital and through Lakeview Park. It is operated by the Rochester City Park Department. Lilly Foundation gave \$130,000 to the project. The barn was built in 1910 by Kindig Construction for the Wideman brothers, being the second round barn built in Fulton County, the Round Barn Capital of the World.

More round barns should be saved and used for public purposes. This is Indiana's chance to preserve an important part of its history and the old barns make economical useful buildings for many uses, such as antique and specialty shops, car and motorcycle stores, garages, restaurants, offices, motels, 4-H buildings, even homes - the list is limited only by your imagination. Preserving an old building with history is more interesting than building new and conserves natural resources. It is up to the present generations to do this before the old buildings are gone.

#### New Round Barns Built in Indiana

It is impossible to know how many have been inspired to build a round barn, but at least one new round barn was built in 1990s. Nate Perry, Walkerton, built an eight-sided barn on his property at Fish Lake. Then in 2003 Dennis and Wanda Owen built a new round barn near Lafayette for a horse-training barn. It is 104 feet diameter and is the largest in Indiana.

#### A Sad Myth in U.S.

The myth that it is better to build new is an American phenomenon that has cost us a large chunk of our heritage and wasted millions of dollars. If an old building is kept in constant good repair, it will last hundreds of years. Yet most American think after a building is 40 years old, it should be replaced.

How sad! We need to do research and get all the facts and save all the old buildings that we can. And the amazing thing is - we will save money and materials when we do, plus have a stronger building with bigger beams than are used in construction today.

Indiana has more than basketball and auto racing to make it famous. Having more round barns than any other state should be acknowledged and advertised.