



# WHY WE SAVED OUR BARN

— BY JEFF FRIEDLEIN —

## It's big, it's round, and it's not a UFO!

I am the fourth generation Friedlein to brag about this engineering marvel. It was designed by my great grandfather, Louis Friedlein, in the early 1900's and was put into service in 1914. The barn was built by Xavier Jaeggi. Some unique things about this old barn were a silo in the middle to save steps during feeding as the cattle's heads were right by the feed. Because of the radius of a round barn, the cattle's rear would have more space between them making for a more comfortable milking.

The architecture of the round barn is quite unique with its massive

laminated rough sawn native lumber halo. It is supported by a series of beams that most of the upper rafters rest in, creating a massive clear span. The total diameter of this unique structure is 72 feet across. The old silo, which was recycled many years ago for its tongue and groove redwood, stood between the towers which support the grand circular peak. Great grandpa didn't think this design up overnight. I couldn't imagine the skill it took to build this without a crane, telehandler, or even power tools. My knees get weak just looking up at the height!



Jeff, Kari, Larry, Brandon and Margo Friedlein; Nick and Taylor Chase and their children, Levi, Maisyn, and Sylvia, stand in front of their 1914 round barn in Clayton County. The Friedleins celebrated the 150th anniversary of the farm in 2022 and were recognized at the Iowa State Fair as a Heritage Farm. Photo courtesy of Iowa Farm Bureau/Conrad Schmidt.



Roofers tackling the challenging job of removing the old shingles. Photo by Kari Friedlein

The round barn is also situated right next to a former branch of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul railroad which remained in service until 1938. The original railroad bed still skirts just below the round barn. A livestock scale was also located here and was a hub to transport product onto larger markets such as Chicago.

Now a little about myself: I grew up farming, and the round barn farmhouse was my first home. I only lived there for a couple of years before we moved to another one of our family farms. Even though we moved, my true roots are on the round barn farm. I have fond memories of the little Oliver 60 bringing loads of hay into the upstairs of the barn and driving around the silo to unload them. I graduated in 1980. My wife Kari and I have been married for 40 years and were blessed with 3 children: Derek (deceased), Brandon, and Taylor who make up the 5th generation. We also have three 6th generation grandchildren: Levi, Maisyn, and Sylvia.

My father Larry Friedlein still farms the land at age 80 and helps finance the projects around the barn. I still farm myself, but it seems my main occupation has become more of an excavating contractor. There are so many times I get called to lay a big proud old barn to rest. We have all heard the reasons why: taxes, insurance, upkeep, or it means nothing to them. To me, there is not a good equation to determine whether to save a barn or not. I believe 'not' is a bad choice. It's time to think about what old barns have done for families.



The roof replacement required over 120 4x8 sheets of plywood sheathing. Photo by Kari Friedlein

Barns provided shelter, income, and great memories. They are a valuable teaching tool for our children. The big round barn in Millville, IA is a true member of our Friedlein family. Born in 1914, it is a creation of my great-grandfather, whom I never met, but he speaks to me in his own way through this barn. I wish I could sit and talk to him for



The bank barn design allowed for wagons to be pulled through two sets of doors on the upper level with livestock access to the lower level. Photo by Dave Austin.





**The warm morning light finds its way into the haymow. The barn had multiple hay forks with straight tracks to move the loose hay off the wagons into storage. Photo by Dave Austin**

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*Editor's Note: The Friedlein Round Barn was a 2022 recipient of an Iowa Barn Foundation Restoration Grant, and it will be available for touring September 16-17 during the fall all-state tour.*

a few hours since I think we are a lot alike. This barn is not just a barn, but a trademark to the Friedlein family's heritage. It also serves as a valuable navigation point for travelers along US Highway 52.

In 2021, we decided to give the old round barn the respect it deserved. My family and I sat down and began researching grant opportunities for the much needed ~\$70,000 roof. We also decided the floor in the hay mow was very dry-rotted and replaced it in the spring of 2023. How to re-floor a round barn took some thinking as there are certainly no classes on how to complete this task. Cleaning out the old barn was also quite a task with decades of old wood, hay, and just plain old "crap". It is my hope that this barn will see many more sunrises and sunsets for generations to come.





A view of the first level before restoration showing the flooring joists supported by the ring beams. Photo by Dave Austin



A view of the second level showing the immense size of the 72 foot diameter barn. Photo by Dave Austin



As part of the restoration, a major portion of the haymow floor was replaced.



View looking up the center of the barn in the space originally held by a redwood silo. Photo by Dave Austin