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# WHY I SAVED OUR BARN

— BY GRANT JENSEN —



A summer sunrise reflects off window of the Jansen Boys barn on the edge of Waverly



I made the decision in 2017 to restore the barn on our family farm on the edge of Waverly, known as Jensen Boys, LLC. To understand why I saved our barn, I first must tell you our family story.

In June of 1952, our family of four moved one-half mile North from the Chittennen farm to our current farmstead, which was known as the Fritschel farm (owned by siblings Martin and Anne Fritschel). I was 18 months old and my older brother, Brent, was 3 years old. Our parents were Kermit and Nancy Jensen. Brent was old enough to remember watching our Holstein dairy cattle being herded down the road. That road is now 39th St NE as Waverly annexed the area 50 years ago.

The original barn was erected in 1888 with the framing timber featuring mortise and tenon joints secured with wood pegs. The stone foundation under the milking section was quarried on the farm. The rest of this structure has a concrete foundation with flying buttresses. This same farm stone was used for the 1894 house, the 1899 corn crib, and the 1903 machine shed.

An addition was added to the barn in 1903, which featured newer construction methods that are visible in the haymow. Wood pegs gave way to nails. Large cross beams were replaced by smaller supports along the outside walls creating more open space for hay storage. There were hay chutes in the addition to drop down into the feed bunks in the cattle shed area, and another hay chute was above the feed aisle in the milking area.

In decent weather, the Holsteins were let outside after milking and had access to hay in the cattle shed. Initially, the cows went outside after each milking for water, but the addition of auto watering-cups inside the barn allowed the cows to stay in on nights when the weather was forbidding.

Our milk cans were picked up every morning by our milk hauler and taken to the Carnation Fresh Milk processing plant in Waverly. To keep our milk cool, the

cans were placed in a large stock tank in the Pump House. The pump ran during milking and the overflow drained into the large outside concrete cattle tank. Before my time, the power to pump the water was supplied by a large windmill attached the west side of the barn directly above the pump.

During the winter of 1967-1968, we had a large snowstorm blocking us in for three days. The power was out for 24 hours so Dad milked the cows by hand, and I experienced hand milking for the first time (the cows were not impressed with my milking skills). With the roads closed, we made slop with the milk and ground corn for the hogs - they loved this treat! On day three, Dad and I carried the full cans of milk nearly one fourth mile over the snow drifts to the top of the hill where the milk hauler greeted us with his truck!

In these early years, the Holsteins were somewhat wild so we were instructed to stay away from them...which was hard for me as I loved animals. The one exception was Christmas morning when we were encouraged to watch Dad complete the morning milking and got to watch the sunrise. Mom did this to get us out of the house so we weren't pestering her to open our presents! It was a treat to be part of morning milking, so I loved it!

Four calf pens were adjacent to the milking area. When I was old enough, I got to feed the calves milk using buckets. Later we changed over to milk replacer and bottles.



**Mortise and tenon joints secured with wood pegs are visible in the haymow.**



A view of the haymow over the milking area of the barn.

The large haymow has so many childhood memories for me! Brent and I played Cowboys and Indians, Stagecoach Robbers and the Sheriff and Mountain Climbers. One winter, Dad completely surprised me by building me a stagecoach using straw bales. I was a very happy boy until the area had to be cleared out before spring field work started and baling season was upon us.

To put hay in the barn, we used two large claw hay forks with a trolley so bales could be sent East and South. Dad was the only man in our haying crew who could back the hay racks into narrow unloading space inside the barn. When I was old enough, I drove the tractor that pulled the fork up and into the barn's interior. After the fork setter pulled the trip rope, my job was to get the fork back to the hay rack...wonderful summer day memories!

Dad retired in the early 1980's due to health issues, which required selling off the livestock. It was a

very sad day for our family watching the cattle being loaded into a truck headed to the local livestock auction. My parents continued to live on the farm, and the land was rented out. Dad passed away in 2000, and Mom passed in 2010.

After my brother Brent and I inherited the farm, we noticed the roof on the barn was in poor condition with many damaged and missing shingles. To prevent damage to the interior of the barn, I replaced the asphalt shingles with metal sheeting. I did the same to the corn crib and machine shed.

Brent passed away in May of 2017, and I was now on my own with the farm. I was lucky to find Jirak Construction through a Facebook post. Mike Jirak worked meticulously replacing worn out and missing battens and siding boards, and he brought in reinforcement to repair the sagging double doors. The paint picked for the project was named "Restoration Red." As soon as the



A view of the Jensen Boys farmstead from the road.

first paint strokes went on, it was as if the barn sprang back to life...a clear sign that I was doing the right thing.

While this quickly became an expensive project, it is a loving tribute in memory of Dad's hard work taking care of the farm and keeping everything in good condition as well as Mom & Brent's contributions over the years.

These old buildings have a special place in Iowa history, our family history, and my fond personal memories over the past seventy years....which is why I saved our barn.