

Historic barn had its roof raised successfully

By Ron Wilson

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Huck Boyd National Institute of
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at Kansas State University**
"Raise the roof." That sounds like something done by loud fans at a sports arena, or maybe by your teenage son's rock band. Today, in our continuing series about Kansas barns, we'll learn about a historic round barn in central Kansas which literally needed to have its roof raised. Its owners have successfully managed to raise the roof, and now they are opening the barn to the public.

Terri and Jon Reece are owners of the Round Barn Ranch in Derby. It features a round barn, built by the

eminent barn-builder Benton Steele back in 1910--the oldest remaining Benton Steele barn in Kansas.

The barn is called the Foley-Reece barn, after the original and current owners, respectively. The Foley family had it built for use as a dairy barn. It is a striking, two-story circular structure surmounted by a big dome. In 1945, another owner added two long, gable-roofed wings to the north and south. From the air, the round barn with its two long wings looks like a large red propeller. Local pilots even used the barn as a navigational landmark.

In 1960 Dr. Richard and Imogene Fleming bought the barn. The milk room in the south wing was converted into a clinic for Dr. Fleming's medical practice--for years, the only

medical facility in the area.

The rest of the south wing was converted into an antique shop and the north wing was turned into a meeting facility. The Round Barn itself was used for parties, dances and other large events. Later, the south wing and the clinic were converted to residential housing. Mrs. Fleming lived on the place for years after her husband passed away.

Meanwhile, Terri moved from California to Kansas where her family had roots. Terri's mother came from the rural community of Madison, population 862 people. Now, that's rural. Terri met and married Jon, who is an Oklahoma/Kansas boy.

The Reeces settled in Haysville, where Terri became a real estate

agent and Jon a restaurant manager. "My husband wanted to do a B&B ranch kind of thing when he retired, so I was looking for a place to do that," Terri said. "I was on my way to another property when I drove by the round barn. I said to myself, 'If I was ever to get a historic property, that would be the one I'd want. So on a wild hair, I just went door-knocking.'"

Mrs. Fleming answered the door. "She was the sweetest old lady," Terri said. "She didn't know me from Adam, but she invited me in and we talked for hours." However, Mrs. Fleming was not prepared to sell the round barn.

Terri stayed in touch, and by 2008 Mrs. Fleming was ready to sell and the Reeces bought it. What

they found was scary: The barn had suffered neglect and was at major risk.

"We brought a structural engineer in here when we first bought it," Terri said. "He said, if we get a lot of ice and snow, that roof might not last the winter." It was starting to cave in, and one side was four feet lower than the other.

It was time to raise the roof. The Reeces brought in a crew and equipment, stabilized the roof, and then embarked on a renovation. The roof renovation was completed in fall 2010. Other interior work is underway.

In October 2011, the Round Barn Ranch is opening to the public. "I love old buildings with architectural uniqueness," Terri said. "Our

goal is to preserve this magnificent structure for generations to come, while at the same time, opening the property as a unique venue for group functions and special events. We've already hosted some weddings and private parties."

For more information, go to www.roundbarn.webs.com.

"Raise the roof." No, not a rock band or sports arena, this refers to the work that was done to stabilize the dome on this historic round barn. We commend Terri and Jon Reece for making a difference by preserving this heritage so that the round barn roof is once again standing tall.

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