

A Heritage Jewell

*The Mansonville Round Barn  
Potton Township*

1912-2020



Photo : Edith Smeesters, 2019

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**for the** Potton Municipal Volunteer Group (GBMP)  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Mansonville Round Barn	3
Other round barns in Potton & the Eastern Townships	4
Unique and functional architecture	5
The end of an era	7
A barn worth saving	8
The challenges in preserving and protecting the round barn	9
La place de la Grange-Ronde	10
The centenary of the Round Barn	12
The restoration 2018-2019	12
The situation in 2020	18
Annex 1 – Other round barns of Potton	19
Sources	21

## The Mansonville Round Barn

The township of Potton has the enviable privilege of having a century-old round barn situated in the heart of the village of Mansonville. Robert E. Jersey had the Mansonville round barn built in 1912.

Subsequently, several successive owners operated a dairy farm there. We can mention Alfred Marcoux, then his son Lionel and the last farmer, Charles-Eugène Labbé, who sold it to the Giroux family in 1990. In 2010, Jean-François Giroux donated the round barn to the Municipality of the Township of Potton.



The Round Barn, around 1968

The builder of the Mansonville round barn was Robert Eckels Jersey, who was born in Potton in 1872 and who died on November 2, 1944, at the age of 72. He was the youngest of nine children of borne to William Jersey and Philura Jenkins. The Jersey family, who arrived in Canada in 1842, settled in Potton in 1854. On May 1, 1920, Robert E. Jersey married Eva Malinda Angier and they continued to live in Mansonville. The couple had no children. Robert E. Jersey began construction of his round barn in 1911, which was reported in the **Sherbrooke Daily Record for June 10, 1911: "Mr. Robert Jersey is laying the wall for a round barn."** The barn was completed in 1912.

The Mansonville Round Barn, by its successive owners, testifies to the diverse origins of the citizens of Potton. Alfred Marcoux, born in 1903, moved to Potton with his family in 1920 and bought the round

barn and his land in the same year. He died in 1991, at the age of 88. His son Lionel took over the farm. Note the fact that this family has been in Potton for six generations. Alfred Marcoux is the grandfather of Jacques Marcoux, elected mayor of Potton in 1989, 2009 and 2017. Louis-Philippe Labbé bought the barn from Lionel Marcoux in 1960 and his son Charles-Eugène, takes over in 1966.

The last private owner of the barn, Jean-François Giroux, is the second son of Pierre Giroux and Suzette St-Onge. The Giroux family has been established in Potton since 1918 and now counts six generations. The contribution to the social, political and economic life of Potton of the Giroux family is considerable and continuous since its arrival in the township. Pierre Giroux bought the round barn and the land in 1990 and subsequently used the building as a warehouse. This is the end of its agricultural vocation. However, aware of the heritage value of the building, Pierre Giroux maintains it as it is.

In 2010, Jean-François Giroux donated the round barn and its land to the Municipality of the Township of Potton in exchange for a tax receipt of \$ 60,500 - the amount of the assessment determined by expert evaluators.

Mansonville's round barn measures approximately 21 m (70 feet) in diameter. Its walls are 6 m (20 feet) high, and its total height, up to the turret serving as a ventilation shaft, reaches 15 m (50 feet). The interior of the building offers an architectural appeal that reflects the work of seasoned craftsmen. In particular, the vast space above the third floor is impressive. The roof, supported by a hundred joists that converge on the ventilation shaft, is reminiscent of the vaults of ancient cathedrals.

### The other Round Barns in Potton and Eastern Townships

There were at least four other round barns in the Township of Potton, which have long since disappeared from our landscape. In Highwater, in the south western quadrant of the township, stood one erected by Bill Gendron. It withstood the cyclone of 1913 as well as the flood of November 1927, which devastated the Missisquoi Valley and part of New England. A second barn, of which the Potton Heritage Association records no photographs, was located on Miltimore Road, southwest of the village of Mansonville. Two others stood beside Route 243 north of Mansonville. Leon Eldridge's barn, to the north of the Village and that of Joseph Messier' at the intersection of Traver Road. The latter

collapsed in a terrible storm in 1974. The reader will find photos of some of these barns in Annex 1.

The Mansonville barn, a jewel of the township's built heritage, piques the curiosity of visitors with its circular shape, especially as there are only six remain in the Eastern Townships. Here is the list of these six round barns that have survived the test of time:

- the Sheard barn (1901), in Barnston-Ouest (Coaticook);
- the Dufresne barn (1907), in Austin, restored and classified as a historic monument by the Quebec Ministry of Cultural Affairs, in 1984;
- the Stanley Holmes barn (1907), in Barnston-Ouest (Coaticook), the only round barn still used in agriculture, classified as a historic monument by the Quebec Ministry of Culture and Communications, in 2002;
- the Tremblay barn (1909), in Barnston (Coaticook), whose agricultural use ceased in 2009;
- the Mansonville round barn (1912), in Potton, cited as a historic monument by the Municipality of the Township of Potton, in 2009;
- the Stierli barn (1915-1916), in West Brome (Lac-Brome), restored.

Pictures of all these barns, and other round barns that have now disappeared, can be found in the chapter "The Real Round Barn" in *The Heart of the Farm*, by Louise Abbott and Niels Jensen. Note that the Mansonville's barn is the only round barn in the Eastern Townships that is publicly owned and generally accessible to visitors, during summer and fall.

### A unique and functional architecture

The Round Barn represents a farm building style typical of New England from the second half of the 19th century and then from the southern Eastern Townships. It bears witness to the strong links that then existed between these two regions.

American Orson Fowler is generally credited with designing the architecture of the Round Barn. He is the author of a book, published in 1848, which held that the circle the perfect shape in architecture to bring joy, health and motivation to work.

But it was the Shakers, a dissident Quaker sect for whom the circle was a symbol of perfection, who built the first round barn in 1826, in Hancock, Massachusetts. It is a large circular barn, made of stone, which is accessible to the public. Besides the symbolism of the circle among the Shakers, there was a popular **belief that the devil couldn't** hide in corners! But, beyond the symbolism and the myth, this type of

barn turns out to be very functional and this is what explains its popularity at one time.

In the second half of the 19th century, many American publications presented plans and models for the construction of round barns. The construction of these barns then spread to New England, then, at the turn of the 20th century, to southern Quebec, where around thirty round barns were built between 1901 and 1916, mostly along the border with Vermont. The popularity of the round barn can be explained by the search for efficiency and productivity demanded by the rise of the dairy industry at the turn of the 20th century.

To understand the efficiency of a round barn, let us examine the architecture of that of Mansonville, which has three levels: the top floor or the battery, in the middle, the hayloft or the tamp, and, at ground level, the stable.

The top floor is a mezzanine 11 m (37 feet) in diameter, accessed by a ramp, which overlooks the hayloft. In summer, it receives the wagons that transport the hay to the barn, while in winter, it is used to store some of the farm machinery. During the harvest, the horse-drawn hay wagons ascend to the top floor via a wooden access bridge protected from the weather by a roof similar to that of a covered bridge. The farmers pitch hay over the ramp of the top floor to store it in the hayloft, where four hatches in the floor then allow it to be transferred to the stable, located below.



The Round Barn Stable

At ground level is the stable where the herd of around 50 cows, is housed in stalls arranged in a circle around small enclosures reserved for calves. Originally, the space reserved for calves was occupied by a silo, where grain was stored. This ingenious arrangement reduces the labor required both to feed the animals and to clean the barn. The manure is removed by means of a chain driven scraper actuated in the gutter, found at the rear of the perimeter animal stalls. This system was removed during the recent restoration of the Mansonville barn.

"The round barn has many advantages", remarks Michel Harnois, president of the Société d'Histoire de Sherbrooke. First, after unloading the horse drawn hay wagon onto the hayloft, the team advances around and out of the top floor without having to back up, as would be in the case in rectangular barns, a difficult manoeuver in a confined space. Pitching hay from the middle floor through a hatchway onto the floor below is labour efficient for feeding cattle in stanchions with their heads facing the center of the building; one way among many to simplify the task of farmers at a time when the mechanization of agricultural work was virtually non-existent. In addition, a round barn provided "better air circulation - a benefit for the health of the animals - and provided more natural light, thanks to the many windows around the stable" Finally, the circular shape of these buildings withstood high winds better than the rectangular or square shape of other barns.

#### The end of an era

Despite its indisputable advantages, the round barn is an exception in our rural landscape. Indeed, the reign of the round barn was short-lived in North America, twenty years at most per region. Logic quickly takes over. Building a circular building is more complex and expensive than a square or rectangular building: you have to pay for the services of a qualified architect or carpenter, provide more wood and, in addition, particularly long planks. We also note that the circle is less conducive to enlargements than the rectangle. Appearing at the turn of the 20th century in southern Quebec, the round barn was abandoned there around 1916.

In addition, the round barn comes quite late in the history of Quebec and at a time when the rural population is already beginning to decline, due to an exodus to urban centers. To add to the farmers' difficulties, large agricultural companies in the Montreal region became more competitive, and the train, essential for the rapid transport of milk to dairies, disappeared from the Missisquoi North valley in 1936.

## A Barn to save

The Mansonville Round Barn is the jewel of the built heritage of the Township of Potton. In a 1982 study, a specialist, Mr. Yvon Provost, **qualifies it as "... exceptional site, one of the best examples of a round barn-stable"**

This is why the Municipality of the Township of Potton cited the round barn as a historic monument on July 7, 2009, then entrusted the management and financing of its restoration to the Municipal Volunteer Group of Potton, which was created in 2010 and composed of volunteers as its name indicates.

Like all old abandoned buildings, the round barn has suffered the ravages of time and requires extensive work. Aware of its mission to protect and enhance the built heritage, the Potton Heritage Association attaches great importance to safeguarding the round barn and has invested time and money in it since 2010.



The Round Barn, before restoration

The restoration and enhancement of the round barn are intended to make it an interpretation center for the history and agricultural, built and landscaped heritage of the Township of Potton. From 2012 to 2016, before the restoration of the building, the Association presented heritage themed exhibitions there during the summer.

The importance of safeguarding the Round Barn rests, among other arguments, on the fact that it represents a symbol of social continuity. It takes us back to the days when pioneers settled in Potton Township, lived and prospered there, and created the beautiful rural landscape that elicits the admiration of residents and visitors. It is a witness to the lives of the Jersey, Marcoux, Labbé, Giroux families and many other inhabitants who transmitted to the people of Potton the pride of having been born or having chosen to live in the Township of Potton.

However, the restoration of the Mansonville Round Barn will not only benefit the Potton citizens, but also the surrounding municipalities, as it is of interest to the entire region and is the only round barn accessible to the public. As tourism is a prime contributor to the region's economy, the heritage interpretation center that the barn will become will undoubtedly be an asset to the local and regional tourism boom.

### The challenge of safeguarding and enhancing the round barn

The recognition of the historic value of the round barn through the citation of the building by the Municipality of the Township of Potton in 2009 was only the beginning. It was in 2010 that the Municipality, under the direction of Mayor Jacques Marcoux, launched the first work to enhance the barn by creating the Place de la Grange-Ronde. This work will be carried out in 2011-2012, with the collaboration of the newly created Municipal Volunteer Group of Potton. Ambitious projects which included the purchase and demolition of the Labbé house (without heritage value and very dilapidated), named after the last farmer of the barn, the creation of the public market, the increase in visibility and accessibility of the round barn, a first major cleaning of the interior of the building and a temporary consolidation of its structure to prevent its collapse.



The round barn, to which view was obstructed by the Labbé house before its demolition in 2011-2012

The report submitted on March 31, 2012 to the manager of the Rural Pact of the Memphremagog MRC shows that the development of the barn has begun. More than \$ 145,000 was invested in this first phase of work, including \$ 35,000 from the MRC's Rural Pact and \$ 10,000 from the Potton Heritage Association (APPHA). These expenses include studies - in particular the interpretation and enhancement plan for the round barn prepared by Blitz Culture et Patrimoine, and the business plan produced by Imagination - engineering plans (Pascal Fortin, Grayson Inc., CG Beaulieu) and architect (Michel Bastien) and a promotional video for the fundraising campaign.

### Place de la Grange-Ronde

The 2011-2012 work enabled the Municipality to set up the public market in Place de la Grange-Ronde and the Potton Heritage Association to hold exhibitions in the barn.



### Public market

Designed by architect Michel Bastien, the market kiosks welcomed their first market gardeners in summer 2012. As an initiative of the La Locomotive cooperative, a farmer's market was set up at Place Manson. In 2012, this market moved into its new facilities, at the Place de la Grange-Ronde. Immediately, the residents of Potton and the visitors to the area adopted it. Late the Locomotive is dissolved and the GBMP takes over to administer the market. Currently managed by Gwynne Basen, member of the GBMP board of directors, the public market receives an annual grant from the Municipality to animate the Place de la Grange-Ronde (musicians and entertainment) and to finance advertising.

### Exhibitions

The Potton Heritage Association (APPHA) began presenting bilingual exhibits at the Round Barn in 2012. The Digital Library hosted on this organization's website ([patrimoinepotton.org](http://patrimoinepotton.org)) has virtual archives: in 2012, Agricultural and Forestry Equipment; in 2013, Archeology in Potton, prepared by Gérard Leduc; in 2014, The Landscapes of Potton, prepared by Hans Walser; in 2015, Round Barns, prepared by Hans Walser; in 2016, The Covered Bridges of the Eastern Townships, prepared by Jean-Louis Bertrand, with the collaboration of Louise Abbott.



Gérard Leduc, project manager of the exhibition on archeology, in 2013

However, the deterioration of the barn is accelerating and, in 2017, the Municipality is obliged to forbid public access for safety reasons, on the recommendation of an engineer. In 2017 and 2018, the APP presented its exhibits at St. Paul's Anglican Church.

#### Community garden

A space is reserved for a community garden as soon as the Place de la Grange-Ronde opened. The garden was run by volunteers, first Karen Tinker, then Christine Baudinet and now Marie Joly.

#### The centenary of the round barn

The creation of the Place de la Grange-Ronde made it possible to celebrate the centenary of the barn in surroundings befitting the occasion. The celebration took place on September 29, 2012 and began with an address by Mayor Jacques Marcoux on the front steps of Saint-Cajetan church, at 11:45 a.m., in the presence of Potton residents, local and regional political figures and representatives of community organizations. A memorable occasion which anchored the new public place and the round barn within the community.

#### The restoration of the round barn in 2018-2019

The restoration of the Mansonville round barn is an ambitious project, which includes the following elements: replacement of the badly deteriorated foundation that risk causing the building to collapse, straightening and re-inforcing the structure, repair of the exterior siding, doors and windows, and repair of the roof, all with the aim of conserving this heritage building for future generations.



The cracked foundations of the round barn

The following information on the sources of funding for the restoration project is not exhaustive, but recognizes the contribution of major donors over the years.

The restoration of the round barn requires significant sums. As of 2010, the Potton Heritage Association (APPHA) began to raise funds for this purpose from its members. Then, in accordance with its mandate, the Potton Municipal Volunteer Group (GBMP) assumed the fundraising campaign. The closure of the barn for security reasons in 2017 rekindled the need for these defenders of heritage to do everything in their power to proceed with its restoration.

The GBMP has conducted several fundraising campaigns among the general population and businesses.

YEAR	ORGANISM	AMOUNT	EXPLANATIONS
2011	Caisse Desjardins du Lac-Memphrémagog	5 000 \$	A \$10 000 grant, however the GBMP will receive only half since restoration was not begun within the delays fixed by the contract with the CDLM.
2013	Association du patrimoine	40 000 \$	Gala Supper and silent auction in September

	de Potton (APP)		
2016	Caisse Desjardins du Lac-Memphrémagog  NexKemia	5 000 \$  7 500 \$	See note relating to 2011 above  Commits to a contribution of \$1,500 per year for 5 years
2017-2018	General Population but mostly members of the APP and GBMP	43 000 \$	Wine and Cheese, in October
2019-2023	GoFundMe Social media platform  Patrons from Potton, MRC	50 000 \$  Nearly 350 000 \$	Generous contributions from <b>the founder of Owl's Head</b> Ski and Golf, Mr. Fred Korman, and two of the new proprietors of Destination <b>Owl's Head, Messers David Bensadoun and Michael Zakuta, Giroux' Hardware</b> from Mansonville, as well as Messers Jean-Guy Desjardins and Paul Desmarais, Jr., the Bannerman Foundation, Jean-Pierre and Clare Léger Foundation and the Caisse Populaire de Memphrémagog. Certain donations will be received annually until 2023.

However, the restoration of the round barn cannot be achieved without the contribution of public funds. This is why the GBMP submitted, between 2011 and 2018, several grant applications to public bodies and various levels of government, some of which were fortunately successful.

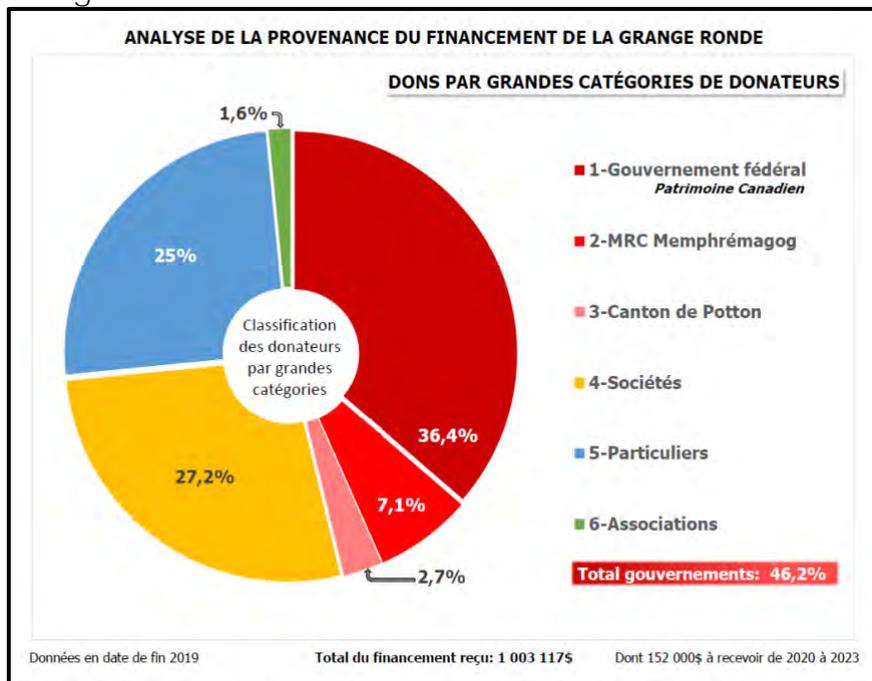
YEAR	MINISTER OR ORGANISM	AMOUNT	EXPLANATIONS
2011	Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec	300 000 \$	Refusal of the grant request
2016	Ministère de la Culture et des Communications - Update of the 2011 request.	50 000 \$	Refused; <b>Programme's</b> limited funds will not permit financing buildings which have been cited as historic monuments, which is the case for the Round Barn.
2017	Municipality Township of Potton	30 000 \$	Resolution of municipal Council municipal; contribution is received in 2020
2017	MRC de Memphrémagog	40 000 \$	Grant - Fonds de développement des territoires.
2018	Ministère du Patrimoine canadien	210 000 \$ <u>176 500 \$</u>  386 500 \$ total	The grant funds received from Canadian Heritage for cultural spaces is practically doubled since the beginning of restoration works.

It is the much-hoped-for support from Canadian Heritage in August 2018 that will immediately kick-start the restoration work on the Mansonville round barn. Because the funds granted must be *spent* before March 31, 2019, the date of the end of the federal government's 2018-2019 fiscal year. But the grant also comes with the obligation for the Municipality and the GBMP to double the stake, as is the case with all grants awarded by public bodies. However, the funds raised from various sources since 2010 are not enough. It is for this reason that, as of the end of 2018, the GBMP is getting down to the

task of preparing the massive 2019 fundraising campaign that will bring in almost \$ 400,000, which was discussed above.

The Municipality of the Township of Potton, owner of the round barn, therefore launched, in October 2018, the restoration work of the building thanks to the grant received from Canadian Heritage and by building on the anticipated success of the 2019 fundraising campaign. They have hired the project manager, Mr. Richard Lebel, president of Gespoc.

The reader will find below a graph showing the distribution of funds used for the restoration of the round barn among the different categories of donors.

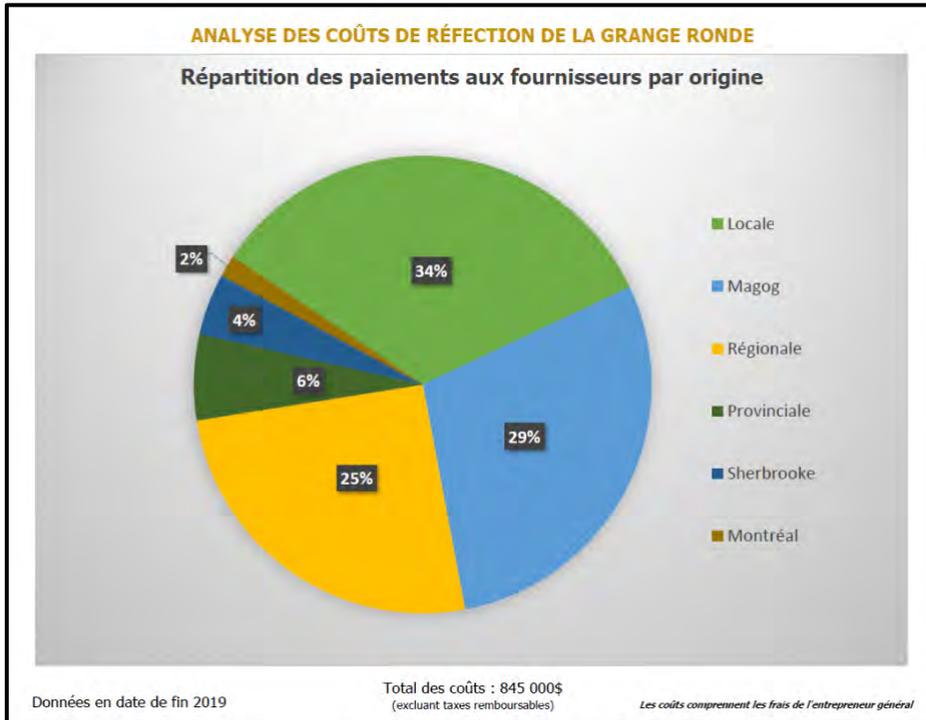


The respect of the schedule and the close follow-up by the president of the GBMP, Mr. Hans Walser, allowed the restoration of the barn to be completed quickly. However, the age and condition of the building, the fact that the obligation to spend funds granted by Canadian Heritage before March 31, 2019 forced the Municipality to launch calls for tenders in the fall, a period when few contractors are available, which drives up prices. Add to that, the fact that the work was carried out during a particularly harsh winter caused unforeseen events and additional costs.



Raising of the round barn to put in place the new foundation

Begun in October 2018, the restoration of the structures will be completed in the spring of 2019 and will have cost \$ 845,000 for the following work: new foundations and insulation of the stable, straightening and reinforcement of the walls, complete replacement of the exterior facing (not planned), new windows in the stable, renovation of the doors, installation of drains around the foundations, leveling of the land. Now, here is a graph showing the distribution by geographic region of costs (contracts) for the restoration of the round barn in 2018-201



## Situation in 2020

Significant work remains to be done, including roof repairs, postponed due to lack of funds, and interior fittings, such as lighting and stairs. It is to provide for this that the 2019-2023 fundraising campaign is continuing.

In the summer or fall of 2020, if the health crisis of COVID-19 allows it, if not in 2021, the Municipality of the Township of Potton will be able to launch the heritage interpretation center by presenting a thematic exhibition and a start of the permanent exhibition, with the contribution of the Potton Heritage Association.

Remember that in the spring of 2020, the Municipal Council of the Township of Potton decided that the Municipality will take over the management of the Place de la Grange-Ronde, which includes the round barn itself, in September 2020. It is without doubt the end of the role of the GBMP (Municipal Volunteer Group of Potton), but not essential volunteers to support the work of the professionals who will be hired to complete the restoration of the barn and implement the programming of activities, in the coming years.

The future of the Mansonville Round Barn is now secured thanks to an enormous collective effort, the generosity of many donors and the unwavering commitment of the members of the Heritage Association and the GBMP (Municipal Volunteer Group) as well as the municipal councils of the Canton of Potton who succeeded from 2009 to 2020, particularly the mayors Jacques Marcoux and Louis Veillon.

## ANNEX 1– Round Barns in Potton

1. The Mansonville Round Barn, before restoration



2. The Benjamin or Mathews Round Barn, on chemin Miltimore (collapsed)

No photo. Testimony from Ernest Tomuschat and Garth Clark.

3. The Messier Round Barn, route de Mansonville at corner of chemin Traver (collapsed)



4. The Leon Eldridge Round Barn, route de Mansonville (collapsed)

No photo in archives. Testimony of Sandra Jewett.

5. The Bill Gendron Round Barn in Highwater (collapsed)



Photo from Ernest Tomuschat

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Municipalité du Canton de Pottton



Canadian  
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Groupe bénévole municipal de Pottton



Association du patrimoine de Pottton  
Pottton Heritage Association