

2017 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

Ryan's Round Barn

Johnson-Sauk Trail State Recreation Area, Henry County



Credit: Landmarks Illinois

Situated among the rolling hills of the Johnson-Sauk Trail State Recreation Area, Ryan's Round Barn provides visitors with a tangible connection to Illinois' disappearing agricultural heritage. Built in 1910 and listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Ryan's Round Barn is managed by the Friends of Johnson Park Foundation and owned by the State of Illinois, Department of Natural Resources. As a result of the state budget crisis, efforts to replace the rapidly deteriorating roof have been put on hold indefinitely, allowing water to infiltrate the interior of the iconic barn.

For decades, Ryan's Round Barn has attracted visitors looking to experience its notable size and complex engineering. With wood bent to give the barn its truly round shape, Ryan's Round Barn is 85 feet in diameter and rises to more than 80 feet in height. The center silo and exterior walls provide structural stability, eliminating the need for any interior posts. Costly to build because of the complex shape, round barns attempted to bring increased efficiency to farming practices.

Ryan's Round Barn originated on the farm of Dr. Laurence Ryan, built as a retreat from his work as surgeon and chief of the medical staff at St. Anthony Hospital in Chicago. Influenced by the Pennsylvania Dutch, Ryan developed plans for the round barn to house 50 purebred Black Angus cattle. After Dr. Ryan died in 1932, tenant farmers used the barn until it was sold to the State of Illinois in 1968.

The Friends of Johnson Park Foundation, established in 1984, performs general maintenance for the barn and open it for tours as an agricultural museum. With the roof deteriorating, the State of Illinois sought bids for a new roof several years ago but the project has been put on hold. Now with visible holes, the roof requires replacement in the near future to avoid increased damage – and more costly repairs – to the historic structure and interior.

What you can do:

- Visit and support the barn: <http://www.visithenrycounty.com/organizer/johnson-park-foundation-group/>
- Donate to the Friends of Johnson Park Foundation by contacting Steve Christian, President, at 309-721-0305

Additional Links:

- “Farm history at Ryan’s Round Barn,” *Illinois Times*, Aug. 25, 2016:
<http://illinoistimes.com/article-17600-farm-history-at-ryan%E2%80%99s-round-barn.html>
- DNR Handout:
<https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/NaturalResources/cultural/Documents/RyanRoundBarn.pdf>
- National Register Listing: <http://gis.hpa.state.il.us/pdfs/200820.pdf>