

*Agricultural History*. 87:3. Summer 2013

*The Round Barn: A Biography of an American Farm*. By Jacqueline Dougan Jackson. Beloit, Wisc.: Beloit College Press, 2011. 566 pp., \$29.95, paperback, ISBN 978-1-884941-18-4.

It is commonplace knowledge that each generation of Americans becomes further removed from the agricultural roots that once sustained a significant portion of this nation's population. Farming and rural life, however, still fascinate and interest many people, so much so that books about the topic find a receptive audience among readers. Since 2000 in Wisconsin alone publishers have released more than twenty-five volumes that describe various aspects of the state's rural past. The subject of this review chronicles the history of the Dougan farm in Rock County over the years 1906 to 1972.

*The Round Barn* features a family farm, but it must be emphasized that the Dougan place was no typical agricultural operation. The people responsible for its development and management were quite extraordinary, and they produced a treasure trove of records, memorabilia and observations that Jacqueline Dougan Jackson has gathered, reviewed, and contemplated for decades. Because Dougan Jackson was raised on the farm (she is a granddaughter of the founder), the book's more than five hundred pages illuminate her own experiences, as well as the lives of family members, farmhands, friends, and neighbors.

The farm's founder, Wesson Dougan (1868-1948), was trained as a Methodist clergyman, but left the ministry at thirty-eight after experiencing a total hearing loss. Deciding that he could "continue to serve the Lord" by producing "clean, safe milk for babies," Dougan became a scientific dairy farmer (22). A voracious reader and writer, he was in frequent contact with agricultural experts employed by the University of Wisconsin's College of Agriculture. Indeed, it was legendary agricultural physics professor Frederick H. King (1848-1911), an advocate and designer of round barns, who inspired the minister-turned-farmer to build one in 1911. Dougan's son, Ronald (1902-1996), continued the progressive agricultural practices of the father until production and marketing changes led to the farm's closure in 1972.

*The Round Barn* is organized into three books that include 125 vignettes, some only one page long; each provides stories of the people, animals, and activities associated with the farm. Although other books gloss over the drudgery and difficulties of farm life—crops fail, animals die, people are injured, work never ends, and so forth—*The Round Barn* offers an honest appraisal of both its joys and hardships.

The centerpiece of this book, the Dougan's round barn, was torn down in 2012 after efforts to preserve the building proved unsuccessful; eventually, the expansion of Beloit will convert the farmland into subdivisions and commercial properties. It is therefore fortunate that skillful author such as Jacqueline Dougan Jackson has written this account of an unusual southern Wisconsin farm (two more volumes are planned). We should hope that biographies of other farms, both unique and typical, achieve such excellence.

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