

Barns of the West County: The McNaught Barn



by David McGregor

If you've ever driven south from Beaverlodge on Highway 722, you've no doubt noticed the well-manicured grounds of the McNaught homestead and the beautiful old barn that looks out onto the highway.

Each year this homestead is host to the Euphemia McNaught Festival, which celebrates the life and legacy of Euphemia "Betty" McNaught, one of the Peace Region's most celebrated visual artists. The McNaught barn holds a special significance in light of Euphemia's interest in horses as subjects in her paintings.

Standing in an open grass area, the McNaught Barn was once nestled next to a second barn and fed into a network of corrals. Though the barn housed milk cows and workhorses, the family also kept thoroughbred saddle horses. According to Peter Martin, president of the McNaught Homestead Preservation Society and great-nephew to Euphemia's older brother John McNaught, the McNaughts were avid riders and Euphemia and her sisters rode well into their 60s. It would have been this barn where Euphemia's horse was kept.

The barn was built in 1948 while John McNaught was overseeing the farm. According to Martin, John had been a schoolteacher but was gassed in the First World War and was unable to continue working in a classroom. Martin himself spent a lot of time in the barn and yard as a kid, and remembers that his great uncle was always outside. "He couldn't stay inside very long because of his lungs. He was always out in the yard or in the barn."

John worked with teams of draft horses, keeping a team until the early 1960s.

"His lungs might be one of the reasons that he kept the team so long. It was clean and there was no exhaust. The last team of horses were called Jock and Duncan. They were big draft horses."

Frequent visitors to the homestead are probably most familiar with the barn as a central part of the annual Halloween ghost walk. A stuffed bear and an all-white cow are players in the ghost walk and permanent residents in two of the stalls on the ground floor.

Though the barn now stands as an integral part

of the homestead and the most visible marker on the landscape, it nearly didn't survive. Until recent decades there had been a second straw-roof structure adjacent. It was this second barn that began to lean on the current building and ultimately threatened to topple both buildings. Because jointed beams hold the barn together and the structure was slanting, the straightening process became more risky.

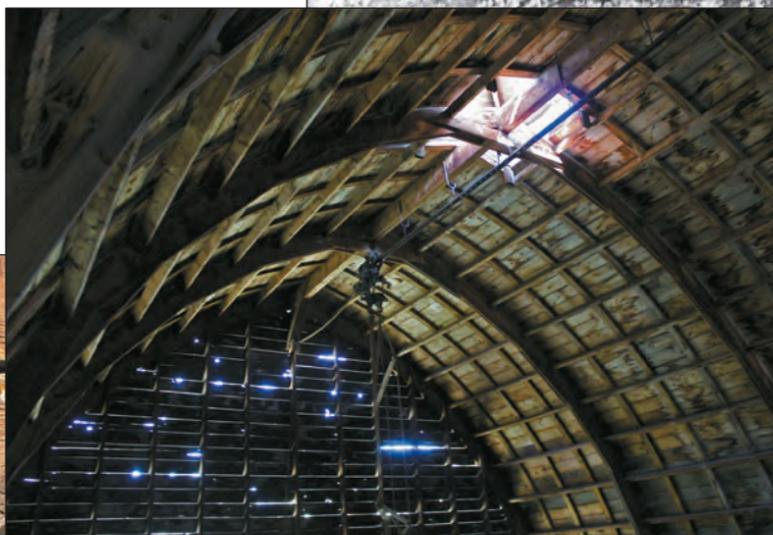
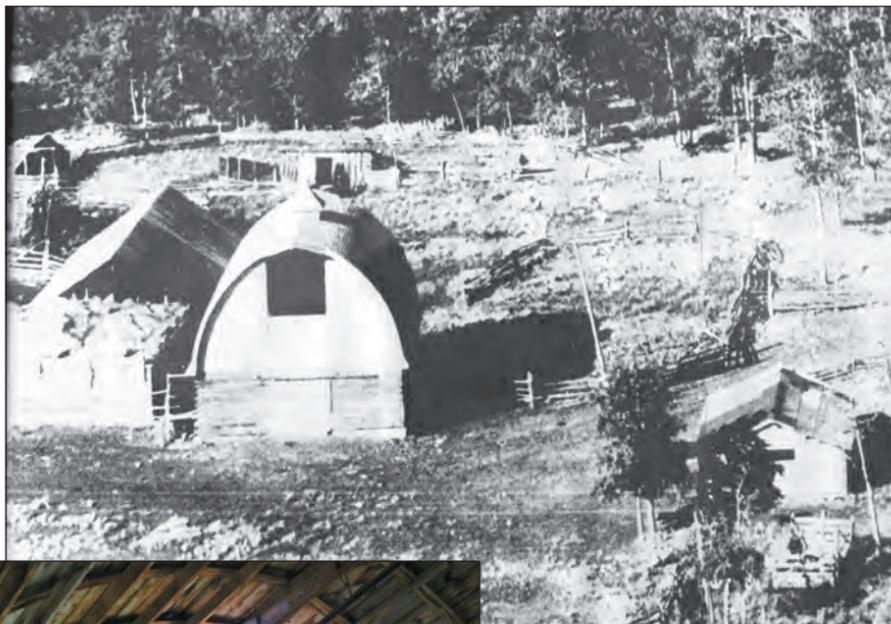
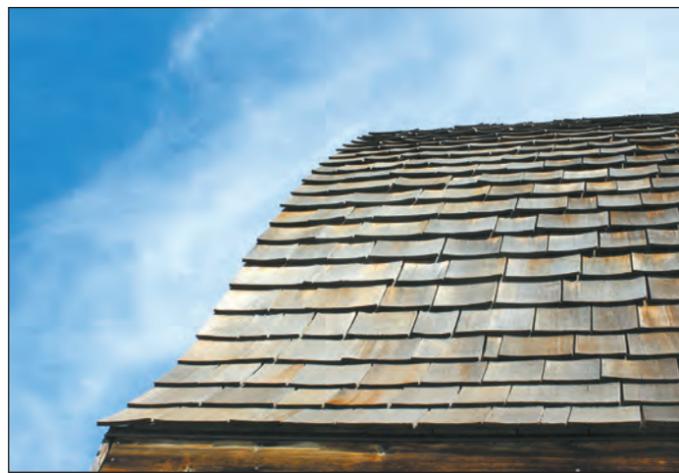
"There were no pins keeping it in place," explains Martin. "There were a couple of times that they were scared that it would come down."

Once the structure was secure, much of the restoration, carried out by local carpenter Larry Sanregret, focused on replacing damaged timber and boards that were beyond saving. New beams and boards are recognizable only through difference in colour and preserve the barn without losing the original look of a building. Three years ago the barn was topped with cedar shakes, which also helps to maintain the old-wood look of the structure.

While the McNaught Homestead Society is always busy working toward developing the grounds and activities offered on them, Martin hopes to find a way to make the property more of a working farm again. "It'd be nice down the road to have cows, chickens, and horses again."

If you are interested in touring the homestead, joining the Preservation Society, or making a donation to help maintain the site visit their website:

www.mcnaught-homestead-heritage.com.



(Photos by David McGregor)

Above Right: The resident Black Bear that terrorizes patrons of the annual ghost walk at the McNaught Homestead.

Above: An aerial photograph of the McNaught homestead circa 1950 shows the second barn and corrals in the original yard.

The jointed corners holding strong after 67 years. The loft still has the original pulleys and hay-sling suspended from the roof.