

David Pinyerd and Donald Peting

Preservation of the Pete French Round Barn



The Pete French Round Barn is a remnant of the pioneer cattle industry in Eastern Oregon. It was the creation of Pete French, a cattleman who migrated up from California. Being the only round barn to have survived to the present day in Harney County, it is the most imposing reminder of the pioneer era in the county. Presently, the barn is being restored by Oregon State Parks and is the focus of the University of Oregon's first annual Preservation Field School.

Pete French

In 1872, Pete French was a 23-year-old foreman to Dr. Hugh Glenn, a wheat baron based in Sacramento. Glenn saw Oregon as an opportunity to expand his operation, so he sent French northward with six Mexican vaqueros and 1,200 head of cattle. In the Blitzen Valley, French ran into a prospector named Porter. Porter had several head of cattle that he herded while prospecting. He had found little gold in the valley and was ready to pack it in, so Porter seized the chance and sold the herd along with his branding iron to French.

The land French settled was the drainage for the Donner und Blitzen River—cattle heaven with “grass as high as a man's stirrups,” according to one of Pete French's biographers. Until French arrived in 1872, the area had been ignored as swamp land. French worked around the problem by draining, fencing, and by keeping a careful eye on

his cattle. The P Ranch had begun—the name coming from the “P” brand that Porter had sold French.

By the mid-1870s, the P Ranch was earning a good income from its American Shorthorns. Cattle were driven to market 200 miles to the railhead at Winnemucca, Nevada. The drive of several hundred head would take about three weeks, usually taking place in the late fall.

On February 1, 1883, Peter French married Ella Glenn, Hugh Glenn's daughter. On February 17th, Hugh was shot in the head by Hiram Miller, a recently discharged bookkeeper. Glenn's estate was valued at over a million dollars; unfortunately, his debts were nearly as large. French continued to manage the Oregon operation, selling larger numbers of cattle to help with the Glenn family debts. He kept the operation going during lean times and even managed to expand it. In 1894, the Glenn heirs decided to incorporate the French-Glenn partnership into the French-Glenn Livestock Company, giving the presidency to French.

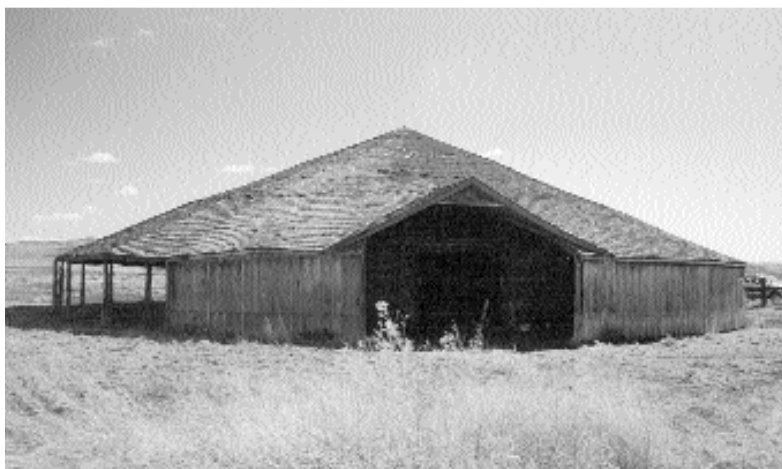
On December 26, 1897, French was shot and killed by a disgruntled settler. F.C. Lusk, secretary of the French-Glenn Livestock Company, was named executor of French's will and effectively became ranch manager. He was also the executor of Glenn's estate and he gradually paid off the debts of both estates. He also gradually sold off the assets of the company. The P and Diamond Ranches went to Oregon Senator Henry Corbett in 1906.

Part of the French-Glenn holdings was the Barton Lake Ranch, today the location of the Peter French Round Barn. The ranch was eventually bought by John Jenkins in the early 1920s. John Jenkins had found his way to Eastern Oregon from Wales as a railroad surveyor. Over time, he bought up homesteads in the area and formed the core of the present Barton Lake Ranch. Today, grandson Dick Jenkins runs the Barton Lake Ranch, operating on over 100,000 acres.

Pete French Round Barn

During his life, Pete French constructed three round “barns” on his land in Eastern Oregon. Today, only the round barn at Barton Lake remains. Its barn label is a misnomer in that the building was not built as a barn but as an indoor corral. Its

The Pete French Round Barn, 30 miles south of Burns, Oregon, was built c. 1884 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Photo by Rebecca Ossa.



The paddock area of the Pete French Round Barn. Young work horses would pull a cart around the track as a way of getting used to the tackle. The open sides at the center of the picture used to lead to outdoor corrals. Photo by David Pinyerd.

purpose was to give Pete French's vaqueros something to do during the bitterly cold winter months. The indoor corral provided a sheltered space in which to break work horses. It consists of an interior basalt stone corral 60' in diameter and 2' thick. The corral is surrounded by a paddock area 15' wide which is enclosed by an outer wall of board and batten.

Horses were penned in pie wedge stalls within the stone corral radiating out from the center post. A continuous manger ringed the inside of the stone wall. In addition to 14 windows there are two gated entrances through the masonry wall. Like the windows, the doors are framed with 6"x20" ponderosa pine.

The roof is supported at four points: a 29' tall center post, a ring of interior posts, the frame work on top of the masonry wall, and a ring of posts forming the outer wall. Knee braces radiate from all of the posts, giving the roof an umbrella-like quality. All posts are juniper; the sawn lumber is ponderosa pine.

The 2' diameter center pole doubled as a "snubbing" post with which to pull horses from their stalls and then to restrain them. The north gate leads through the stone wall, across the paddock, and outside. The gate to the east on the open side of the building once led to outdoor corrals that have long since disappeared. The roof is sheathed with over 50,000 western red cedar shingles.

Barn Management

The Jenkins family was concerned about the preservation of the round barn as it fell into disrepair. The family had been using it to store grain and hay. So, in 1969, Dick Jenkins' father and uncle gave an easement to the Oregon Historical Society (OHS). The easement was for 2.5 acres immediately surrounding the barn with the provision of no commercialization, hunting, or camping on the grounds.

In 1973, OHS put together the funds to brace the sagging roof and to replace all of the cedar shingles. Since then, lack of funds has prevented OHS from doing any maintenance on the barn. Over the past 20 years, Dick Jenkins and the Harney County Historical Society (HCHS) have been the sole source of upkeep. Volunteer work parties from the HCHS have cleaned up after tourists and hunters visiting the barn. Dick Jenkins, the owner of record and closest neighbor, is by default the caretaker of the property. During flooding in the mid-1980s, he brought his tractor over and installed a subditch in an attempt to stem the rising waters of the nearby Dry Lake Reservoir.



Back in March 1992, State Parks had identified the round barn as a "property of interest" as part of their 2010 Plan. There was quite a bit of interest in the barn—Harney County, the Department of Transportation, and the Forest Service all expressed desire to own the property. At about the same time Ron Brentano, chief field representative, and Chet Orloff, executive director, of OHS had talked about deeding the property to State Parks. State Parks had the strongest desire to receive the easement on the property, and a deal was struck. With a wary eye, before the transaction took place, State Parks had both a physical and engineering assessment performed on the structure. The State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), a division of State Parks, chipped in for the physical assessment which was performed by John Platz of the U.S. Forest Service.

With the condition ascertained, State Parks pursued the transfer. OHS was willing to convey the easement but didn't want to lose the barn altogether, so a memorandum of agreement is currently being drawn up to allow OHS to still have a hand in the interpretation of the site.

Restoration

As with most structures, shedding water is the biggest challenge to the round barn. French positioned the barn on a slight rise to keep it dry; however, the hill isn't quite high enough. (You can just make out the high water mark at waist level on the door jamb in the picture of the paddock area.) The water mark was left behind from the mid-1980s flooding that put half of Harney County underwater. The constant exposure to soil and moisture has caused the nearly impenetrable juniper posts to rot at their bases.

In May 1995, John Platz's Heritage Structures Team started work on the barn. With \$45,000 from State Parks, Platz has begun to stabilize the structure. In three six-day sessions, he plans to first stabilize the interior posts, next stabilize the exterior



Temporary bracing supports an interior post while the concrete cures below it. Photo by David Pinyerd.

posts, and finally to restore the roof. His crew, joined by six members of State Parks as trainees, has already started work. On the interior posts they raised the roof of the barn several inches, sawed off the rotten ends of the juniper posts at grade, poured concrete bases, inserted drift pins, and soaked the ends in linseed preservative. Platz then set the posts back down on the new concrete, concealed at grade.

So far the work is progressing ahead of schedule. The plan is to save the exterior ring of

juniper posts for the Preservation Field School's training workshop.

Preservation Field School

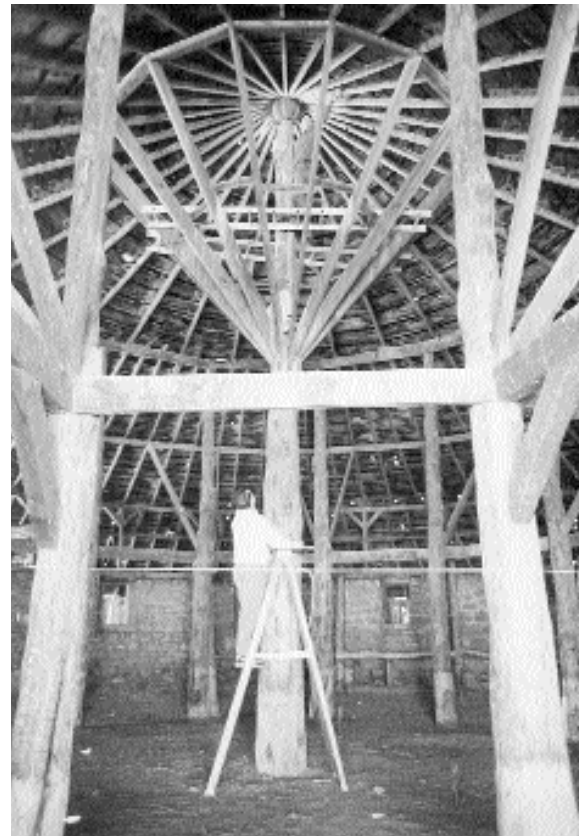
In the spring of 1994, Henry Kunowski, with the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office; John Platz; and Don Peting, Director of the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Oregon, were meeting about the organization of the 1994 Pacific Northwest Conference. The conversation drifted over to John Platz's current work on the assessment of the Pete French Round Barn and the restoration Henry Kunowski had planned. Don Peting had been kicking the idea around of a preservation field school, suggested the idea of using the round barn as a location for a field school, and just that quickly, a field school was begun.

Education is a driving force behind the State Historic Preservation Office—Kunowski had partnered with the University before on various educational projects. The SHPO had also joined with the U.S. Forest Service on three prior restoration projects. The partnering concept has now blossomed into an annual Pacific Northwest Preservation Field School that will be held each summer in various locations throughout the region. Support will continue to be provided to the University of Oregon by State Parks and the U.S. Forest Service for the field schools. This year the field school will be based at the Malheur Field Station with the Pete French Round Barn restoration as its focus. Plans are already underway for a 1996 field school at the Heceta Head Lighthouse on the Oregon Coast with the lighthouse keeper's residence as the focal point.

The field school at the round barn will consist of two two-week courses to be held from June 12 through July 9, 1995. The first course will be Masonry and Wood Technology and will be held from June 12th through 25th. The course will be a mix of classroom and hands-on training using the ongoing restoration of the round barn as a case study. Lisa Sasser, Assistant Chief Historical Architect of the National Park Service, will lead the restoration of the masonry portion of the structure during the first week. John Platz will guide the students during the second week in the restoration of the wooden structure and cladding.

The second course deals with Historic Site Issues and will be held from June 26th through July 8th. Seminars on vernacular architecture, historic archeology, and rural landscapes will be the focus. Emphasis will be on the people, places, and landscapes of the Oregon high desert region. Leland Roth and Howard Davis, professors at the University of Oregon, will hold seminars on the architecture of the region. David Brauner from Oregon State University will lead a five-day educational archeological dig at the site. Chet Orloff will discuss the interpretation of the site.

One of the wonderful aspects of forming partnerships is the opportunity for participants to spontaneously share innovative ideas that had previously been only dreams. We built upon the mutually beneficial circumstances of each partner's involvement in preservation to help preserve a structure.



David Pinyerd (above) and Don Peting measuring the "umbrella" roof structure of the Pete French Round Barn. Photo by Rebecca Ossa.

The preservation of the Pete French Round Barn has in turn served as a catalyst to produce a field school that will give students the tools to preserve other resources in the future.

References

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Donald Peting is directing the University of Oregon's first annual Summer Field School.

David Pinyerd is presently GTF (Graduate Teaching Fellow) for the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Oregon, and coordinator for the Field School.

HABS Drawings

Prior to any restoration work on the barn, it was decided that it would be a good educational exercise to document the building in an "as is" condition. Before any restoration it is appropriate to record the current condition; however, there is rarely time and money to do anything more than limited photography. Here is where university partnerships play an important role—they have the skilled labor pool, accompanied by low costs, to tackle such a job.

Armed with a \$600 grant from the SHPO, a group of eight students from the University of Oregon spent four weekends measuring every nook and cranny of the barn to the nearest 1/8"—no small task given the enormous irregularities of the vernacular structure. The group conformed to Historic American Building Survey (HABS) standards and is producing a highly accurate set of ink-on-mylar drawings. The group plans on entering them in this year's Peterson Prize competition, a contest for the best HABS drawings by a student group.

Leland M. Roth

Living Architecture Differing Native and Anglo Perceptions of Preservation



Walpi Kiva.

Historic preservation might seem straightforward—the retention, restoration, or rehabilitation of a building important to a people's culture. All too frequently, such Western values regarding preservation and restoration are assumed by those in positions of power to be absolute and universal. This has been most especially the case with regard to preservation of Native American artifacts and sites. Anglo-American society and its government officials—whether local, state, or federal—have a centuries-old tradition of assuming that they know best. Native peoples, presumed to be ignorant and uncultured, were given little or no voice in the retention and preservation of their cultural arti-

facts. The problem was that their perception of what needed to be done was entirely different from that of Anglo administrators and officials.

A person's reaction to a problem, or one's answer to a question, all depend on the person's perspective. And a person's point of view is shaped by experience, background, training, even the way a person was raised. The Native American world is not the same world as that perceived by the typical Euro-American or anyone born into and brought up in conventional Western culture. Grasping the profundity of this difference is crucial to understanding Native building traditions.

Since initial contact, Euro-Americans have vigorously and unceasingly tried to make over the Native peoples in their own image. Children six or