

The Barn Door



From Mining to Farming: Park City, Utah's Iconic McPolin Barn

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While dairy barns are a fairly common feature of the rural landscape in many parts of the country, they are less prevalent in the Wasatch mountains of Utah where settlements largely sprang up in response to mining claims and cattle ranching was more suitable to the short growing seasons and rugged terrain. The large white McPolin Barn, with its tall gambrel roof and neatly painted outbuildings, has become a symbol of Park City, Utah, the focal point of the City's entry corridor along SR 224, and one of the most photographed sites in the region.

Located approximately 32 miles southeast of Salt Lake City, Park City is known today as the home of two world-class ski resorts; however, it had much humbler beginnings a century ago. Colonel Patrick Conner's troops were sent to Utah to suppress the Mormon Rebellion in 1858, but began prospecting in 1862 with the intent of attracting newcomers to Utah and diluting the Mormon population. In October 1868, their prospecting paid off when they crossed over Big Cottonwood Canyon and discovered silver in the Park City area. A bandana on a stake marked the silver vein that was renamed the Flagstaff Mine upon their return in the spring; it was the first mine to ship silver from Park City, but in time, over 300 mine claims would be established.

Patrick McPolin was among the miners that would seek their fortune in Park City's mining industry. Born ca. 1861 in Cork County, Ireland, McPolin's career as a miner was short-lived. After a mining accident in 1890 injured his hands and face, Dan and his wife Isabelle McPolin became successful entrepreneurs, owning and operating a number of Park City businesses including the Bank Saloon, a hotel, restaurant, Park City bottling Works, a confectionary, lumberyard, coal yard, and boarding house. In 1896, Dan McPolin also managed a meat market on Main Street, which may have prompted him to purchase land from the old Harris P. McLane homestead to raise livestock.

The end of the settlement period, Park City's growing population, and increased demands for dairy products likely influenced McPolin's transition from cattle ranching to dairying in the early 1920s.



McPolin Barn -- elevation of the barn as it exists today.

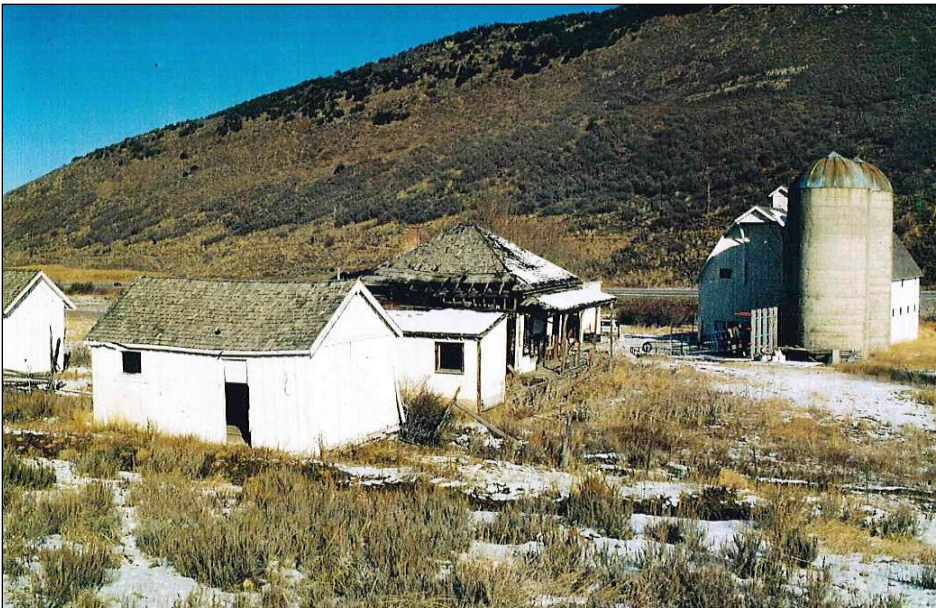
Park City, Utah's Iconic McPolin Barn (Continued on Page 3)

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The short growing season, limited arable land, and variable stream flows made dairying difficult for farmers, yet the McPolins built one of the largest dairy barns in Summit County, Utah. The barn was completed in 1922 and reflected the latest Improvement Era (c. 1910-1940) scientific methods such as combined hay storage, livestock, and dairy operations.

It was not uncommon for mines to sell their assets as technology advanced, mines consolidated, or mine claims were abandoned altogether, and the McPolins made use of the availability of second-hand materials. The 7,468 square foot barn and c.1930 milk house were constructed of salvaged mine timbers, in addition to lumber from the Briggs Mill and McPolin's own lumberyard. Similarly, the farmhouse's originated as the main office for the Grasselli Mill, but was cut into two pieces and moved by wagon to the McPolin Farm in 1923.

Dan McPolin died of gastrointestinal cancer in 1922, however, his son Patrick continued to operate the dairy farm for over twenty years. In 1947, Patrick sold the farm and its twenty-two dairy cows to Salt Lake veterinarian Dr. D.A. Osguthorpe for \$35,000. Osguthorpe continued to expand operations and improve the farm's efficiency. Demands of the growing dairy herd led to the construction of two new forty-foot tall concrete silos on the southwest side of the barn in 1953. Osguthorpe also constructed a second milk house and milking parlor, totaling 1,500 square feet, on the northeast side of McPolin's Barn in 1954. Following a fire in 1955 that severely damaged and destroyed the farmhouse, Osguthorpe abandoned the McPolin Farm site and built a new farm site.



McPolin Farm, c. 1990 – The farm was in poor condition when the City purchased it in 1990. The farmhouse was fire-damaged, outbuildings suffered from deferred maintenance, and the barn was in need of stabilization.

The McPolin farm had largely deteriorated by the time Park City Municipal Corporation (PCMC) purchased the site for \$4.4 million dollars in 1990. The City immediately demolished the newer Osguthorpe farm structures, except for an open-air shed on the east side of SR 224. In 1992, the City installed a new internal bracing system consisting of steel cables to stabilize the barn. Historic windows had been lost and the remaining window openings were boarded. Other efforts included restoring outbuildings and reconstructing the burned farmhouse, salvaging useable remains.

City staff also spent two years conducting public outreach and meeting with boards and commissions to determine uses; in the end, it was determined that the Farm would only be used by the City-sponsored Friends of the Farm volunteer group for fundraising events. The site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2004. Today, the 123 acres of open space around the barn is safeguarded by a conservation easement the City granted to the Summit Land Conservancy in 2007, which permanently protects the land's natural, agricultural, wildlife, and recreational values while prohibiting residential and commercial development.

Park City, Utah's Iconic McPolin Barn (Continued on Page 4)

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In January 2016, Park City Municipal Corporation and SWCA Environmental Consulting completed the McPolin Farm Historic Preservation Plan, a multidisciplinary planning tool and framework for considering short- and long-term goals for the site. With the support of the Friends of the Farm, the City is currently developing a stabilization plan for the historic McPolin barn. While the cable system installed in 1992 has stabilized the barn, it has had a negative impact on views of interior spaces and made public access impossible.

The City is currently reviewing plans to incorporate steel structural members and new seismic shear walls to ensure the future stabilization of the barn, while also allowing tours of up to 50 people through the iconic space. Additionally, new wood windows will be reconstructed based on photographic and physical evidence, allowing greater light into the barn. The Friends of the Farm currently use a reception center on-site for their annual fundraising events; however, the group is excited for additional interpretive opportunities to share the history of the farm with the public during their events. Construction is scheduled to begin in June and will be completed by August 2016.

McPolin Farm Farmyard (2 photos) –Today, the original farmyard provides a public gathering space. In 1999, Osguthorpe’s open-air shed was demolished and a new event space was constructed in its location adjacent to the farmyard.

