Tallgrass Prairie

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve
Strong City, KS

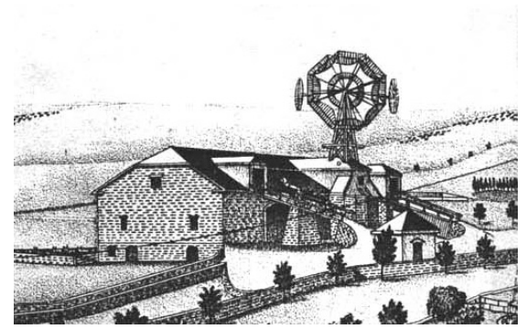
Spring Hill Farm and Stock Ranch Barn

The massive barn of the Spring Hill Farm and Stock Ranch stands as an impressive example of form following function. Completed in early 1882, the barn stands as the working center of the ranch. Its multiple functions of hay, grain, and farm equipment storage and animal keeping have given it a beautiful working form that has stood up beautifully to many decades of use and varied activity.

Spring Hill Ranch Barn Introduction

Costing approximately $15,000 to construct, the large limestone barn is the focal point of the ranch's cattle activities. The barn remains one of the largest historic limestone barns in Kansas, 60 feet wide by 110 feet long, containing approximately 19,000 square feet of floor space over three floors. The lower floor was set up as stables for cattle and horses. The main floor stored wagons and other equipment. The upper floor was used for hay and grain storage and was large enough to accommodate entire teams of horses and wagons. These wagons entered the upper floor by driving up one ramp and could exit by driving out either ramp.

A large 2-head, 30-foot diameter windmill was at one time attached to the barn and could generate up to 12 horsepower to grind grain and drive other equipment. However, high Kansas winds threatened to tear it down, forcing Stephen to permanently dismantle it in 1884. An artist's rendering of the Spring Hill Ranch done in 1887, draws the windmill back into its original place between the two upper level ramps.



Detail of Spring Hill Farm and Stock Ranch lithograph, ca. 1887. Note the windmill attached to the barn.

Main Floor

The main floor of the barn was used to store wagons, harnesses, and other equipment and vehicles useful on the Spring Hill Ranch. In the 1940s the barn was modified to accommodate modern uses. On the western side of the barn, a large auger was installed to move grain and feed into four 1000 bushel bins on the upper floor. On the eastern side of the barn, steel I-beams were installed to strengthen and support the upper floor and these new storage bins. Smaller augers were installed to move grain into feed trucks that would back into the barn through the eastern door. The flooring of the main floor was also strengthened to support these heavier vehicles.

Stone Corrals

Stone corral walls enclose space to the south and west of the barn to contain cattle during roundups. These walls were reconstructed to an original appearance by stone masons from Lexington, Kentucky using traditional dry stone building methods and techniques. No mortar is used to adhere the stones to one another. Only the sheer weight and friction between the thousands of stones holds the walls together.

Animal Stables on Lower Floor

The lower floor of the Spring Hill Ranch barn was a stable area and could accommodate cattle, horses, and other livestock. The hopper for the large modern grain auger is also on the lower floor.

Upper Floor Activities and Uses

The upper floor of the barn was used by Stephen to store hay and grain. Later ranch owners would also use the upper floor for storage. In the 1940s, four 1000 bushel grain and feed bins were installed in the upper floor. Remnants of the former windmill can also be seen in the rafters of the barn's roof.

For More Information

Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve is a public/private partnership between the National Park Service (the primary land manager) and The Nature Conservancy (the primary land owner).

The historic Spring Hill Ranch house and barn are open daily 9:00 am to 4:30 p.m., except Thanksgiving Day, December 25, and January 1. All hiking trails and all outdoor areas are open 24 hours. No camping is permitted.

To learn more, please contact the preserve at:

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