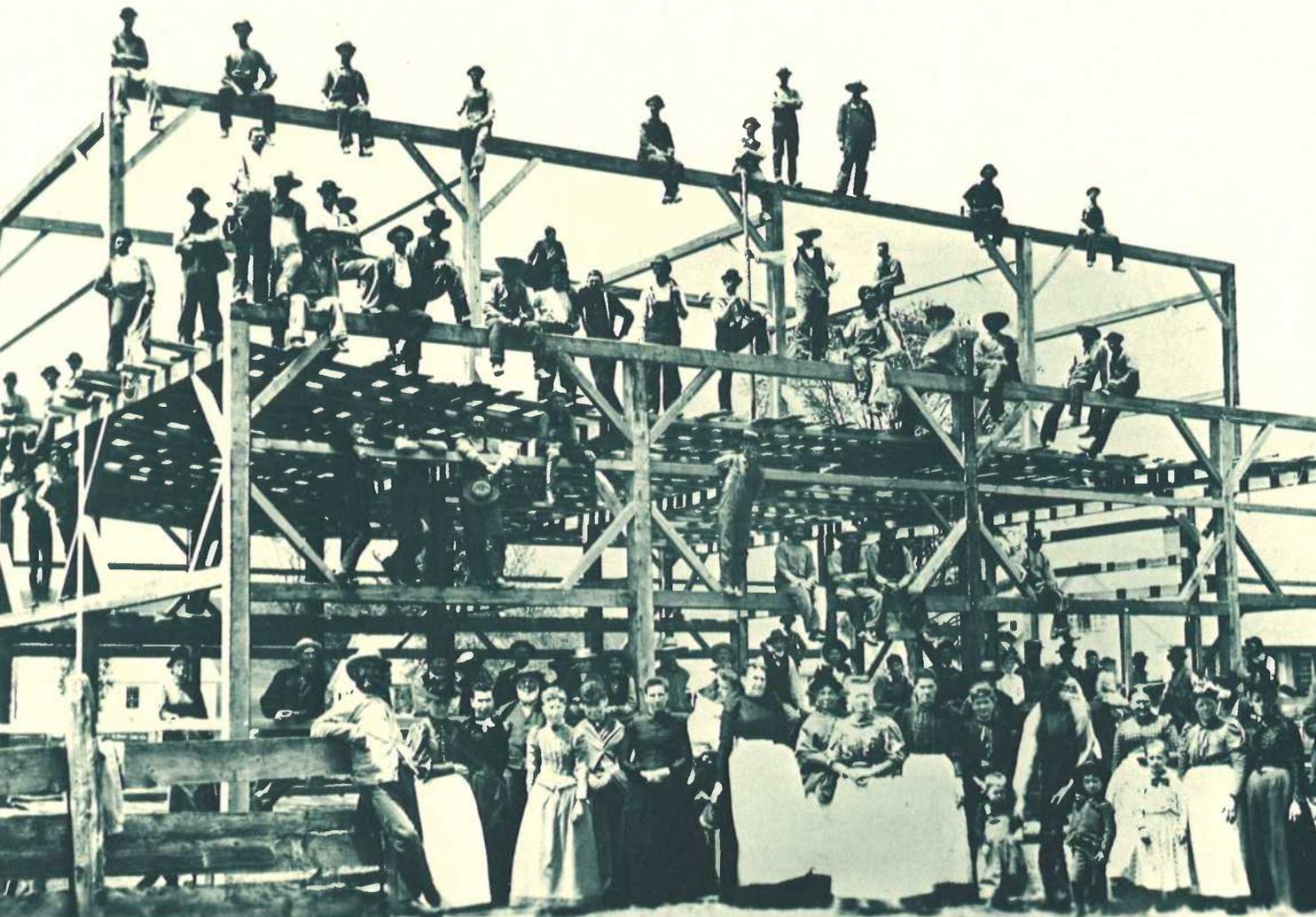


THE GREEN MOUNTAINEER



SPRING 1984

BARN RAISINGS

What are all those people in the picture on the cover doing? What would bring so many people together? It is a barn raising. In earlier times friends and neighbors from all around came to help a farmer in need of a new barn. Besides being a lot of hard work, barn raisings were also a chance for men, women, and children to visit, exchange news and share good food. Horace Warden of Barnet wrote in his diary in 1882 that eighty people helped him raise his barn and then joined him for dinner.

First men cut and assembled the framed sections of the barn on the ground. These sections were called bents. Then they raised the bents into place with the help of pulleys and oxen, or long poles called pikes. Once the bents were up, the group worked to place the roof rafters. Next they nailed on the roof boards and roofing shingles, then the siding, flooring, and doors. When all was done huge meals and barrels of cider were laid out to feed and quench the thirst of the hungry crowd.

Dorothy Churchill of West Barnet recalls a barn raising from her youth.

“In my town a big barn was struck by lightning just after the farmer put his hay in. It burned down, hay and all. All the men in the town got together and put the [new] barn up in three days. They built the sides laid down. They took oxen or horses and pulled these sides up with pulleys. They fastened them in place. Then they [put] the rafters in place and put all of the roof of the barn up. Men all got together in times like that to help. Each of the men of the town donated one ton of hay to help this man out because he did not have any hay for the winter.”*

* Excerpt from **Shunpike Folk**, p.128

The results of many a raising are with us today dotting the Vermont landscape in every town in the state. The barns are large and small, square, rectangular, and round. Some are attached to homes, others sit by themselves. Red was (and still is) the most popular color to paint a barn partly because it was a color that farmers could make themselves using old iron filings and sometimes even blood from butchered cows. Others were painted yellow, white, grey and blue.



Round barn near Irasburg

Vermont’s earliest barns were constructed of heavy hand-hewn timbers cut with primitive tools from trees cleared from the settler’s land. Metal nails were seldom used. Instead, wooden pegs held the early barns together. Floors more often than not were earth and the windows were simply open slots left in the walls.

Today’s barns are built from store bought lumber, metal hardware, cement. Windows are of glass and floors are usually of wood. Seldom do we get together with a neighbor in need to help raise a barn as our forefathers did. Nevertheless, many of these old barns have stood the test of time and are still standing today to remind us of the days when neighbors gathered and worked to build a structure of function and beauty.