

## Presentation for Tantramar Heritage Trust, for Heritage Week - 2021

By Sharon L Hicks

I was very pleased to be asked to prepare this little presentation for the Tantramar Heritage Trust, featuring some of my 'Barn Paintings', and I hope everyone who reads this will gain some added appreciation of the importance of those iconic structures which were once such a prominent part of the Tantramar marsh landscape.

### Why do I paint barns?

Having grown up in Upper Sackville in the 1950s, the marshlands figured prominently in the world of my youth. Neighbours and family members grazed cattle and horses there, and harvested prolific hay crops to feed livestock over long winters. Whether baled or loose, much of the hay was stored right there, in the numerous barns which once dotted the marsh. With doors on both sides, one could drive a wagon in from one side, load it up with hay, and then drive it out the other side. Those loads would be retrieved during winter months, as it was needed back on the farms.

Our family had a cottage down past Port Elgin, and the Highmarsh Road was our usual route to get to and from "the shore". As a result, I spent many childhood hours in the back seat of the car with my nose pressed against the window, soaking in the feeling of the marsh. I got to know every little turn in the road, all the fences, every patch of bushes, and most importantly the rows and rows of hay barns which lined the route and spread out as far as I could see. I learned later in life from an older relative that many of those barns, for which I have always felt such an affinity, were built by my great-grandfather Albion Hicks, and my grandfather Hedley Hicks.

My mother always said I was 'born with a pencil in my hand'. I'm not so sure about that, but I do know I can't remember a time when I wasn't drawing something. I moved away after high school but on my numerous visits home I would drive out onto the marsh alone, and sometimes would remember to take a few photos. I'm so glad I did, for those handfuls of photos have been very helpful in trying to recreate the barns as I knew them. Always interested in local history, over the past several decades those old barns, or more accurately the memories of those barns, have figured largely in my work.

When I moved back home 10 years ago, the marsh and all its features became even more of a focus in my work. Having worked in Oil, Acrylic, Watercolour, Pastels, and more, by that time I had become mainly a Coloured Pencil artist. Several decades of honing my skills with this medium led to the point where my finished 'drawings' actually looks like paint, and therefore they are '*Coloured Pencil Paintings*'.

### BARN PAINTINGS ...

For this presentation I selected a half dozen images, all Coloured Pencil paintings, and all depicting some of the many barns which were at one time located out on the marsh. Most of my subjects for these paintings were located along the Highmarsh Road, and each barn has its own story to tell, beginning on the next page.

Left to right, below:

1. THE OLD AND THE NEW ~
2. TWILIGHT BARNs ~
3. ANOTHER DOWN
4. GLORY DAYS ~
5. HIGHMARSH BARNs & BRIDGE 1980 ~
6. SKELETONS OF YESTERYEAR



1



2



3



4



5



6

## The barns tell their stories ...

This **first set of 3 paintings** were done shortly after I moved back home in 2011, when these were all still standing - solitary survivors which had long outlived most of their counterparts. Alas, these 3 are now also gone, so I'm very glad that I captured them when I had the chance.



### THE OLD AND THE NEW

Coloured Pencils, © Sharon L Hicks, 2011

This caught my eye during haying season late in the summer. The modern round bales juxtaposed against the discarded old hay barn just screamed at me to preserve the image.

The forlorn old barn seems to realize its days are numbered, and we can see in the right lower corner that it has already begun the process of self-destruction which comes from neglect and the ravages of time.

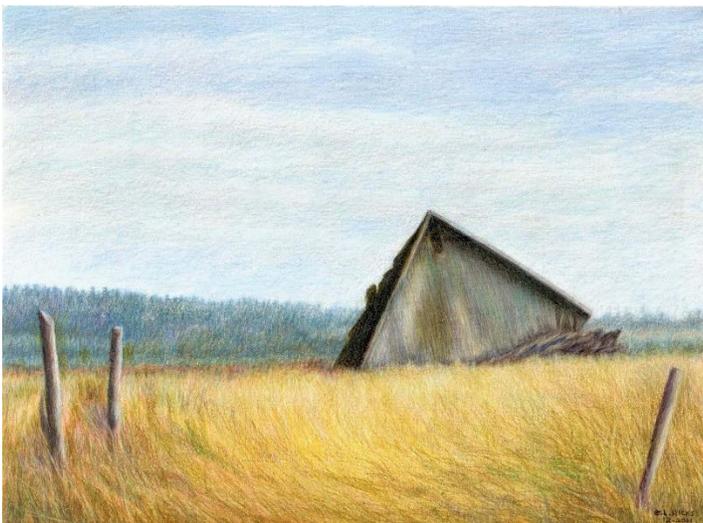


### TWILIGHT BARN

Coloured Pencils, © Sharon L Hicks, 2011

Driving home across the marsh one evening, the light was rapidly fading as I passed these two barns. The one on the right looked so 'tired', as if it was on the verge of collapse. It struck me how it was in the 'twilight days of its life', and so the theme for this piece was set. Both of these old soldiers are now gone as well, sadly.

The fading light presented the greatest challenge in this painting, but I do love a challenge.



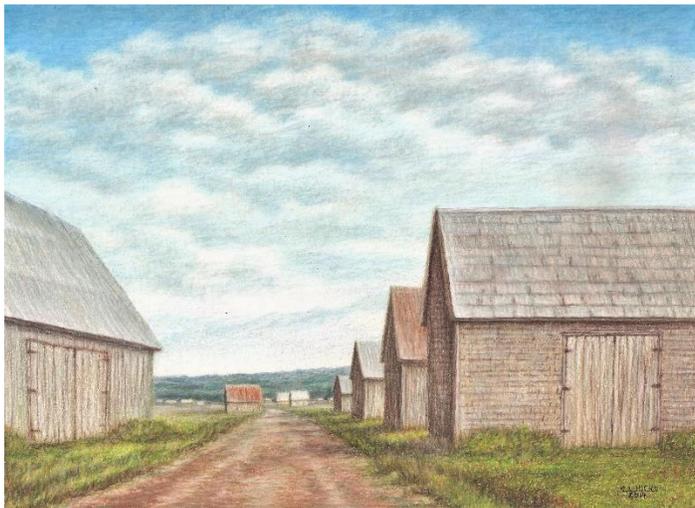
### ANOTHER DOWN

Coloured Pencils, © Sharon L Hicks, 2011

'Another one bites the dust'. This barn was on its last legs when a major windstorm blew through our area ... and brought it crashing to its knees. From the way it looked 'after the fall', it appeared to have just collapsed under its own weight, and it remained there in a heap for some time before the rest of the structure finally gave way to the force of gravity and the passage of time.

One can't even see now where it was, all traces of its existence have been obliterated. Only its memories remain, captured in this image.

**This second group of 3 paintings actually tells a 'time story'**, depicting a row of 4 barns which stood along the Highmarsh Road. Their ends all faced the road and were placed fairly close together, giving easy access during the winter for hay retrieval. The barn across the road from them was oriented the other way, facing the road, again giving easy winter access.

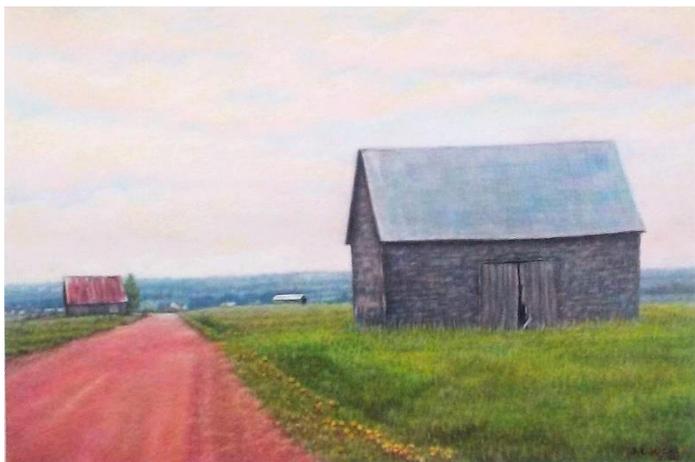


### **GLORY DAYS**

Coloured Pencils, © Sharon L Hicks, 2014

This one shows the stretch of 4 barns as I remember them from the 1950s, travelling from Jolicure toward Middle Sackville, not far from where the Covered Bridge comes into view.

This painting was done largely from memory, using one which had been done 3 years earlier as a guide to their placement. Various people have commented that it looks exactly as they remember, so I guess my memory was accurate.



### **HIGHMARSH BARN & BRIDGE 1980**

Coloured Pencils, © Sharon L Hicks, 2021

This is the most recent painting completed in this set. The barn on the right is the 3<sup>rd</sup> from the right in the previous painting (above), and is based on a photo I had taken around 1980, after some in that row had already been obliterated by time and lack of use. Without the 4<sup>th</sup> barn, the bridge becomes visible from this viewpoint.



### **SKELETONS OF YESTERYEAR**

Coloured Pencils, © Sharon L Hicks, 2011

This vantage point is some distance back from the one above, a year or so after the one above.

It shows the 2 barns remaining from the original row of 4, and the foreground one was gone by the following year when I visited again.

The second barn back is the one depicted in the previous painting (above), a year later, and you can see how it was really starting to sag.

**Note** - The red-roofed barn in all 3 of these paintings later became known as the 'leaning barn', and it will be the subject of another painting (or two) yet to be done. I have enough photo sources for another 3 or 4 barn paintings, and I'm always on the lookout for more reference materials to work from.

## **SUMMARY**

So, there it is, you now know who I am and why I paint barns, and I hope these little pictorial stories may help shed a bit of light on a portion of our local history which I feel especially tied to.

Thanks to the Tantramar Heritage Trust for giving me this opportunity, and also for all the valuable work the organization does to keep our area's history 'alive'.

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## **ABOUT THE ARTIST - Sharon L Hicks**



Born & raised in Upper Sackville, I moved back home 10 years ago (2011), having spent most of my adult years in Fredericton where I raised my daughter and two sons. I have 4 grandchildren aged 14 to 22, and now also have a step-daughter and 2 step-granddaughters aged 5 and 7. Living back in Upper Sackville with my partner Percy Best, not far from where I grew up.

As a member of the local Craft Gallery, I sell paintings and prints, as well as cards and coasters based on some of my work. I also welcome commissions for portraits and pet portraits, and since 2014 I have done the Pencil portraits for the Sackville Sports Wall of Fame, which are displayed at the Tantramar Veterans Civic Center.

I'm a member of the Sackville Art Association, and a Life Member of the Fredericton Society of Artists, which I first joined in 1980. I've taught art classes, participated in many group exhibits and a few solo exhibits, and still I continue this life-long artistic journey.

Whatever else I have done in life, from Nursing to raising a family, to running a custom clothing design business for many years, and other activities along the way, I have always drawn and painted. And after all these years, the passion is still just as strong as when I started out. If I die with a pencil in my hand, then I shall die happy. So perhaps my mother was right after all.

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