

Connecticut Barns (<http://www.connecticutbarns.org>)

Barn Typology

Barns in Connecticut come in many shapes and sizes. There are the small barns on the hardscrabble farms of the state's rocky regions and the grand, architect-designed barns of the state's gentleman farmers. There are gable entry barns, side entry barns and even polygonal barns. There are all-purpose barns and barns made to store or process a single crop or animal. There are barns that are as simple as could be, and there are barns that are the height of fanciful design. The one unifying feature, regardless of their differences, is that they are all buildings that shelter agricultural animals or finished crops.

The wide variety in the state makes categorizing Connecticut's barns a difficult task; no single approach covers all of the many possibilities. Instead, what is offered here is a typology that organizes the buildings along three lines: their form, their purpose, and their construction. Form describes the general shape of the barn as defined by its footprint, plan, and roof type. Purpose organizes buildings by the way in which they were intended to be used. Construction categorizes structures according to the techniques used to build them.

While decorative trim is an important indicator of a farmer's view of his barn and himself, it doesn't affect the way in which a barn worked and so is not considered here. Similarly, materials are an important part of any building. In the case of this study, however, their inclusion in this study would yield far too many variations. Finally, since adaptive re-use is one of the ways that have been found to preserve barns, several of the buildings shown here are currently being used as housing.

Any barn should fit into at least one of the classifications; many will fit into several categories.

FORM



English

This barn was the main type used throughout the colonial era in Connecticut. It is characterized by a rectangular plan, a pitched roof, entry through a large door on the long side and a tri-partite plan. Traditionally, hay was stored on one side, animals on the other, with access and grain threshing taking place in the central bay.



New England

The successor to the English barn, this type relies on a gable entry. This arrangement allows for easy expansion by adding bays along the axis of

the ridge. Although it was seen by many as an improvement over the earlier side entry English Barn, the New England barn did not replace its predecessor but rather coexisted with it.



Bank

This type is characterized by the location of its main floor above grade, either through building on a hillside or by raising the building on a foundation. There are two advantages to this arrangement. Originally it provided a place under the barn for the collection and storage of precious manure generated over the winter in a barn. Later, with the addition of windows for better light and ventilation, animals were housed in the lowest level.



Connected

This type of barn is distinctive because it is part of a series of buildings linked to the main house on the farmstead. Architectural historian Thomas Hubka suggests that this is a result of agrarian reforms and prevailing fashion rather than a simple response to New England's cold winters.



Polygonal/Round

These are characterized by having a footprint other than the traditional rectangular one. While one of the earliest polygonal barns is associated with our first president (and dated 1796) neither polygonal or round barns ever captured the imagination of American farmers, even though they were repeatedly touted as being the most efficient shape for the job.



Gambrel

The introduction of gambrel roofs (and their later counterparts, the "gothic roof" and "round roof") to barns allowed for greater room in the loft spaces.

PURPOSE



Tobacco

This type of barn, or shed as they are called in the Connecticut River Valley, is one of the most distinctive of the single-crop barns. They are characterized by vented sides to regulate air flow and allow harvested tobacco to cure at the appropriate rate.



Potato

Potato houses or storage barns come in many different shapes and sizes all linked by the common goal of keeping harvested potatoes at a constant temperature and in the dark. The most traditional of these are characterized by a semi-subterranean arrangement.



Onion

In response to the specialization of local farmers in growing onions, a barn type appeared in Fairfield county and the Windsor area. While English onion sheds use a system of louvers to encourage even drying (not unlike our tobacco barns) the examples of onion barns so far located in Connecticut have not used this feature. Instead, they are called onion barns simply because they were used to store the crop.



Dairy

The term is used as early as the 18th century (along with “cow house”). Modern dairy barns are characterized by their interior arrangements of stanchions and gutters to facilitate milking and the removal of manure. In some cases this is just a few stalls in the corner of a barn, in others it can be a large barn dedicated to that single purpose. Later additions, made to satisfy more stringent sanitary regulations, include concrete floors and separate areas for processing the milk.



Poultry

Originally, poultry was raised on a small scale because of its vulnerability to cold weather and disease. In the middle of the 19th century rearing poultry became a more popular pursuit. With the increased popularity came a new building type: the chicken coop. While these originally started out as relatively small buildings, by the height of poultry production in the state large multi-story poultry barns could be seen on many farms.

Sheep

Sheep barns are rare. They often have low open sheds on the ground floor, scaled to the diminutive sheep rather than larger cows. Sometimes sheds for sheltering sheep are simply appended to larger barns. So far, the survey work behind this typology has yet to find a sheep barn in Connecticut

CONSTRUCTION



Scribe Rule Framing

This type of timber frame construction is characterized by the careful scribing of the irregularities of one timber onto another at the point of intersection so that the unique shapes of timbers can be accounted for. Its hallmark is Roman numeral marriage marks.



Square Rule

This approach relies on a more standardized approach to timber framing. Timbers are reduced to a standard shape and size at the points where they join; this results in a frame made up of interchangeable parts. This type of construction can be identified by the shallow notches near points of intersection.



Balloon Frame

This type of barn is characterized by a frame made-up of equally sized dimensional lumber. It is similar to the modern approach to building a house out of 2x4s.



Pre-Fab

This type of barn is built a long distance away from the site where it will be erected. It is then disassembled and shipped in pieces to the farm, where it is reassembled.



Pole Barn

This modern type of barn is constructed without a hay loft and is characterized by a trussed roof and open sides.