

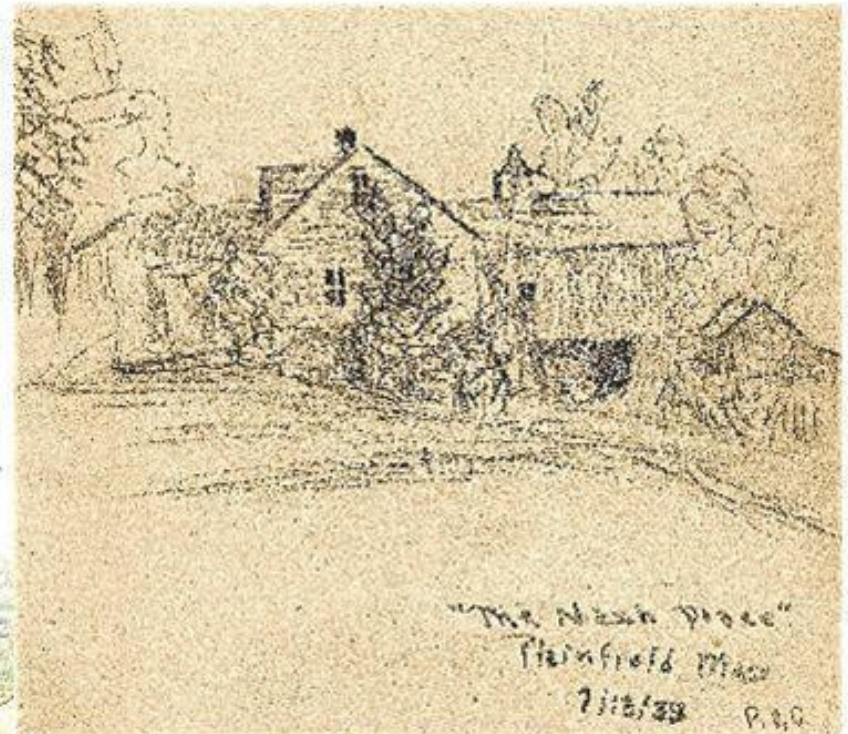
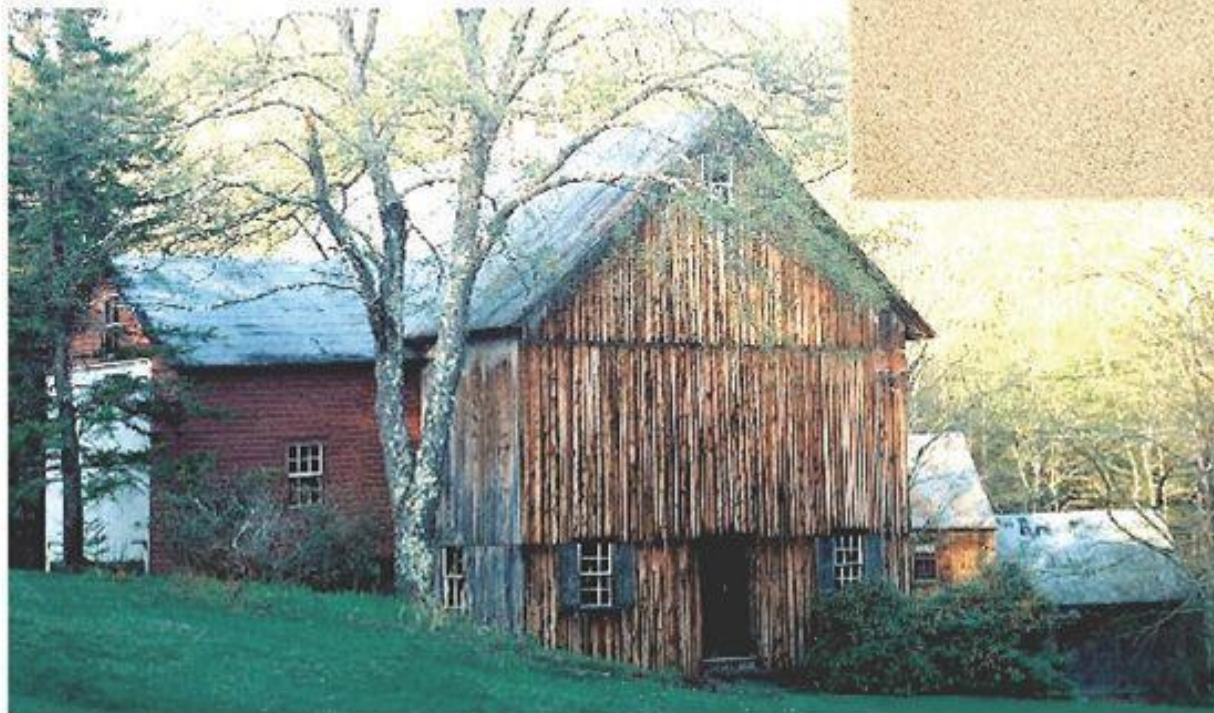


PLAINFIELD
BARN

2010

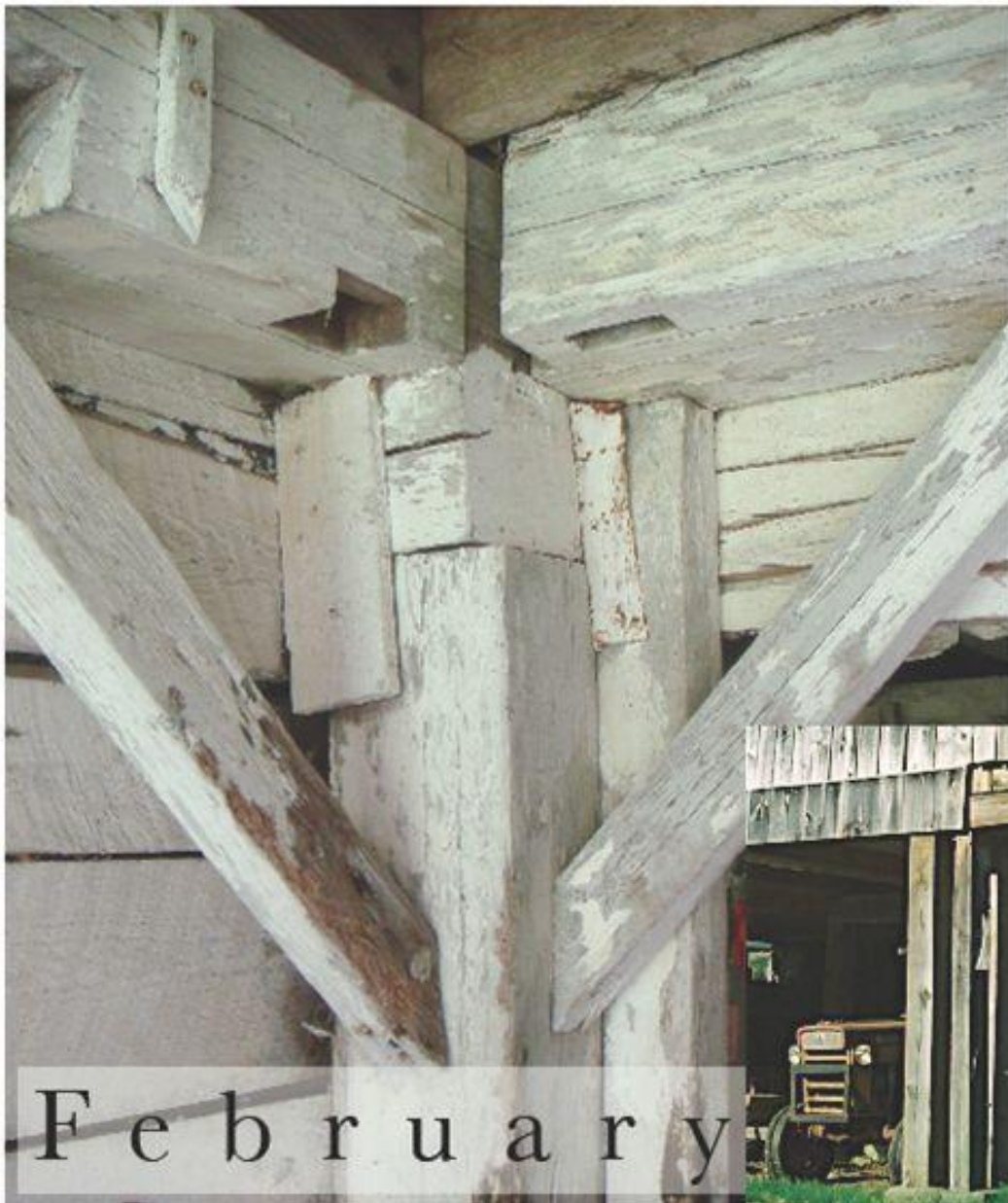
PLAINFIELD 4M

With the mill across the road (just visible to the right in the photo), this barn forms one of the most complete working complexes still standing and in good repair in Plainfield. The mill (the Wilcutt Mill) was in use until well into the twentieth century, which may partly explain its condition. In technical terms, this is a high drive or side hill English barn, "English" denoting that it is built with the main entrance in the eaves' end. The very similar looking house-barn complex Priscilla (Dyer) Allen drew in 1939 (?) fared less well. Its foundations can be seen just across and down the road at the Plainfield Historical Society's Mill site on River Road. Both barns have a ventilation cupola -- though it is hard to say whether these were added as decoration or served to ventilate the barn for the health of the cattle housed in them. A good guide to the architecture of Hilltown barns is Bonnie Parsons' *Barns in the Highland Communities*. It can be downloaded from the Web site of the Highland Communities Initiative of the Trustees of Reservations -- www.highlandcommunities.org



Drawing by Priscilla C. Allen. Used by permission

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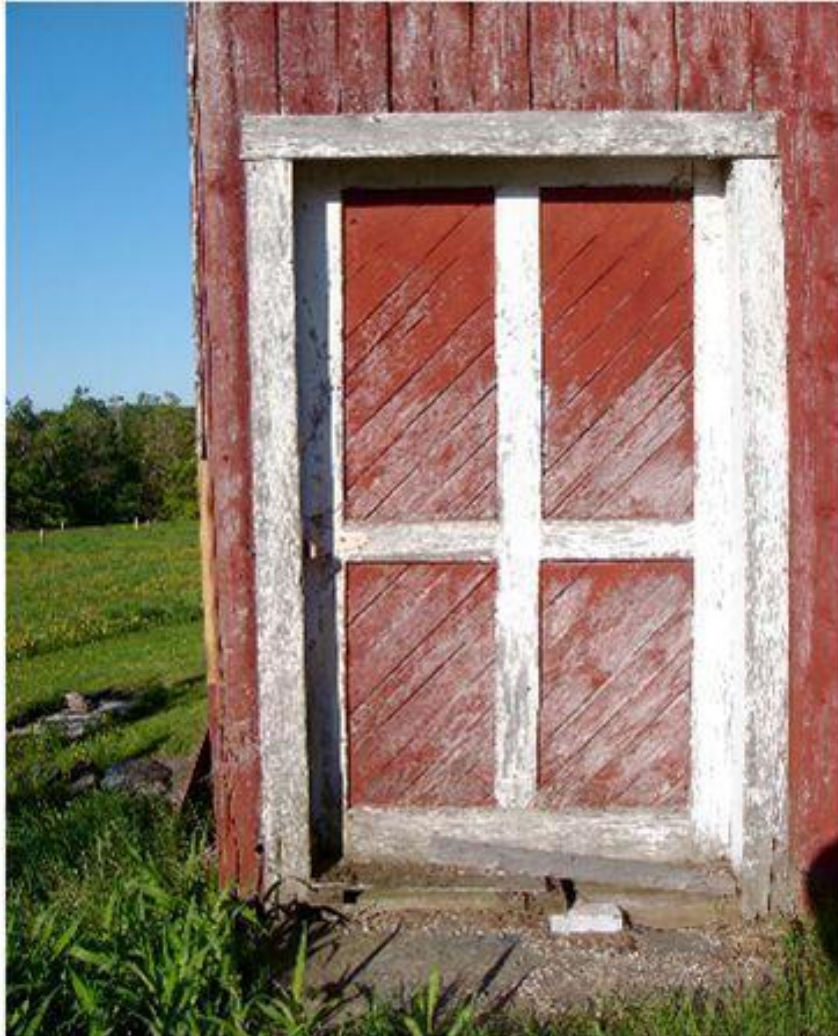
The massive joinery of this English-style side drive barn – we here see only the underside – shows signs of earlier use. There are mortises (pockets) for timbers that have disappeared. Pieces have been scabbed onto various face of the joints, probably to provide a more even nailing surface for a board or divider. The wood is whitewashed, which suggests that it was used for cattle or horses at some point, since the two venerable workhorses currently in residence probably do not require this luxury. One winter, this barn housed three sheep and a ram around the corner out on an adventure, and hemmed in by early snow. Try as he might with hay and encouraging words, the owner could persuade neither sheep nor ram to follow him home. The sheep would hesitatingly follow the latter-day piper but, realizing the ram wasn't buying into the icy trek, quickly ran back into the safety of their whitewashed hidey-hole. Eventually, the sheep were pushed and pulled onto a truck, but the ram stayed, with periodic provisioning, until well into mud season. He then left of his own accord, herded part of the way by a passerby on horse with dog. Ornery until the end, he threatened the dog and took a beeline across the powerline right of way back to his own barn.



F e b r u a r y

New England barns are red. Every child knows this. The history of the red barn is full of myth and speculation about medieval origins and biological paints of farm origin. However, barns were not painted in this area until the second half of the nineteenth century, though houses were painted earlier. A researcher at Historic Deerfield says that "one finds iron oxide red washes on the backs of early nineteenth-century painted houses as a less expensive way to protect less public sides" and this is likely what was put on barns. The "wash" consisted of linseed oil, iron oxide, and red lead as a drier, whereby the iron possibly acted as an anti-fungal and antibacterial agent. No ox blood or milk paint, alas. Personal communication, William Flynt, Historic Deerfield.

M a r c h





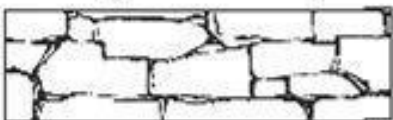
I was too light to plow so got elected to pick stones on land plowed the previous year. After it was plowed I got to pick them again. I got so sick of stones I swore when I got big enough to refuse I would never touch a stone that was too big to shoot in a sling shot. I have been building stone walls for over fifty years since. That is making a liar out of yourself the hard way.

— Howard Hathaway,
*Memoirs of
Howard N.
Hathaway
Plainfield, Mass*



Plainfield's Schist splits into flat, angular pieces, perfect for stable house and barn foundations. It is one major reason so many old structures are

still standing.
Makes nice
walls, too.



Round or irregular stones don't like to stay on top of each other. Gravity — it's the law.

April



A great barn is a magnificent canvas. The very utility of the building's construction turns it into a playground, whether used for serious work or not. All that expanse of wood simply aches for a sign, a piece of iron, anything a nail can hang. Around Plainfield, the careful observer will find collections of old road signs, "found" iron from generations past, elegant garden catalog tidbits, door hinges and handles, even the doors and windows themselves, all used to greater effect against a backdrop of rough and weathered boards. Plantings frame doorways much as doorways frame handmade doors, great and small. A barn allows us the kind of freedom the neatly painted house never will. Anyone can do it: boards don't have to fit as nicely, who cares about a nail hole here or there. After all, no one would consider keeping a pair of South American llamas in the house, but they do add a touch of elegance to the barn.





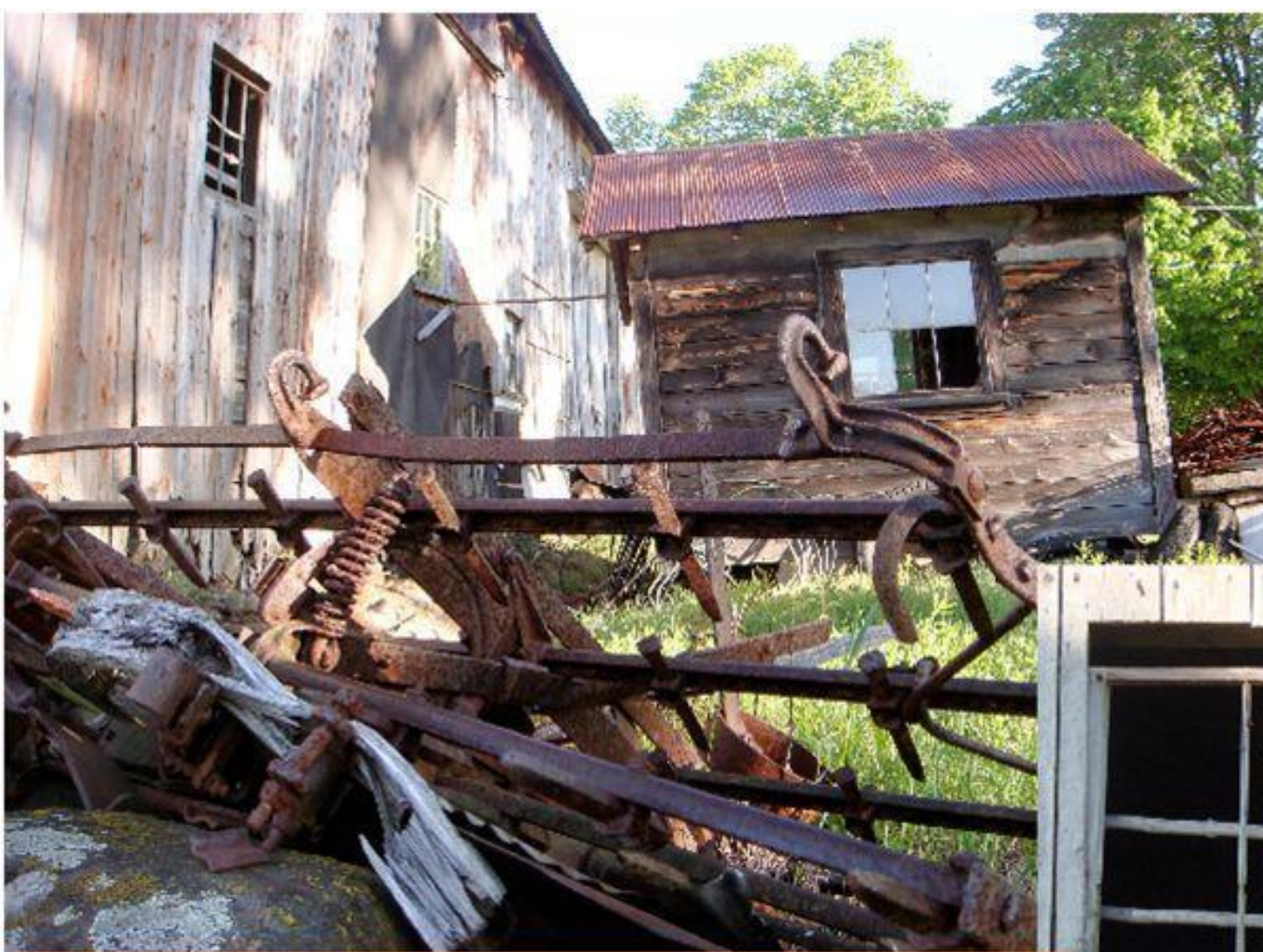
June



When barns were built, plumb and level were all the rage. The early barns, like this one (English style barn on level ground) had no windows, which allowed later generations to use old sashes to shed light where it was needed. The sashes themselves hail from across the centuries. Today one finds some of the oldest sashes in barns. The largest panes of glass that could be made in the early 1700s were 6x8, and later up to 10x12, which is the reason for *divided light* windows. Double hung windows changed accordingly, from 12 over 12, as they are commonly known, down to 2 over 2 or 2 over 1 by 1900.

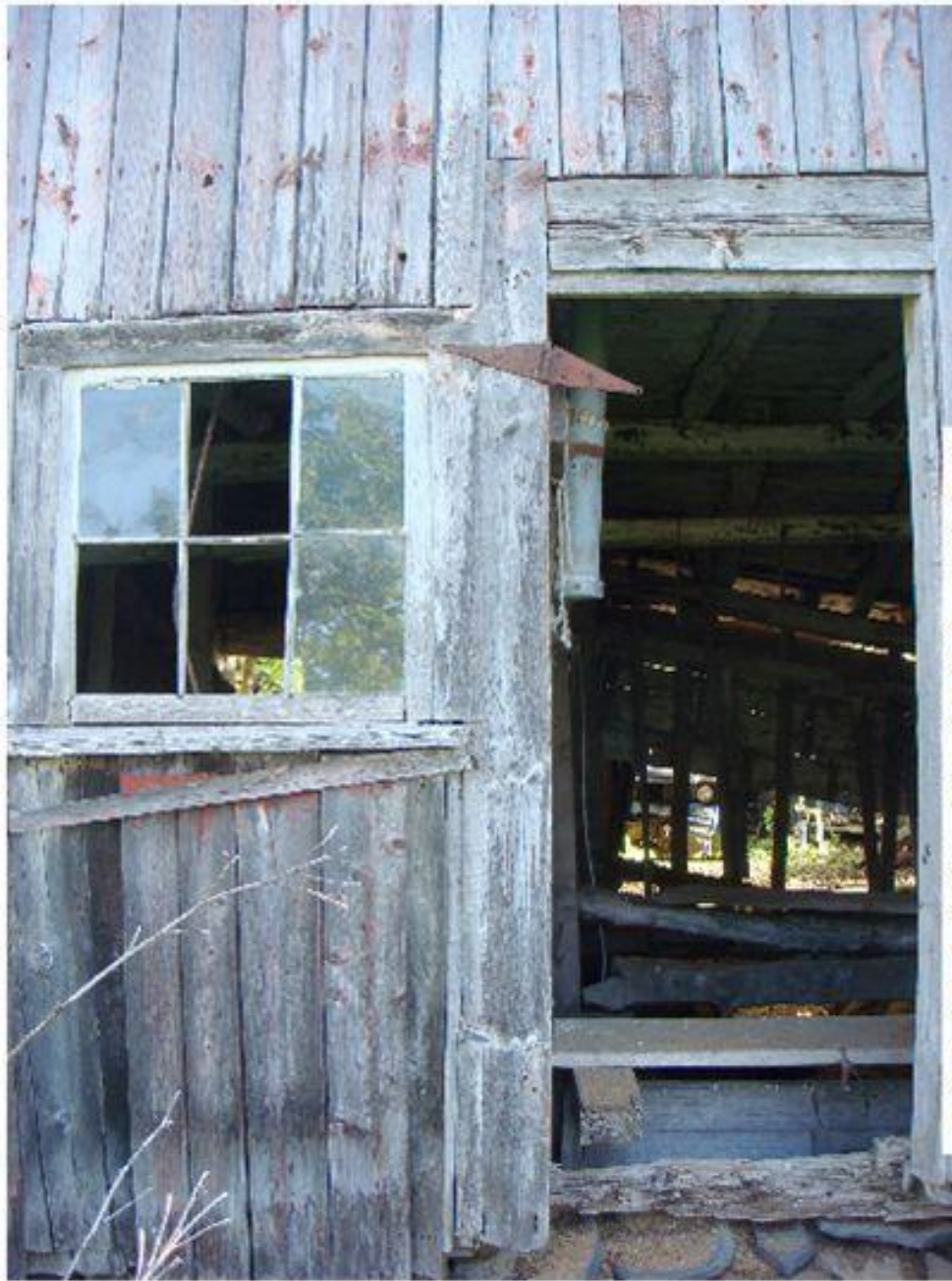


July



Barns are work horses. Some say the hilltown barnscape has been preserved by poverty and thrift. Poverty prevents people from taking down big old barns that rot, leak, and otherwise create a lot of work, and replace them with new, functional buildings that need less maintenance. But it also causes us to lose those same barns at an incredible rate. Everywhere you look, much-repaired buildings are sagging into the ground. A sad but picturesque process that by definition can't be preserved. Fortunately necessity also is the mother of thrift and invention. Why throw away a perfectly good piece of metal when you might use it later? Why get a slat from a mill when the woods are full of them? This barn is part of a protected property, and one hopes the caretakers will find a way to preserve it "as is."





Plainfield's landscape is its history, its treasure, its ace in the hole. Barns play a key role in that landscape. We live in a place that is a place in and of itself, grown out of its own very particular history and with its own very particular character.

Because we treasure living in a real place, we snuck around all over town to make this calendar of barns. And we are grateful to everyone who let us do it, whether they knew it or not.



A u g u s t

Big house-little house-back house-BARN.

Between 1800 and 1900, many New England farmers built a linear connected house and barn system like the Plainfield back houses and barns on this page. Priscilla Allen's drawing, probably from the early 1950's, shows that this format was prevalent in Plainfield. Eighteenth-century New England houses and barns were built separate from each other, curtailing fire danger and giving both access to road and southern exposure. Plainfield was settled (late 1700s) just as farming was becoming less and less feasible in New England, with its hilly terrain, rocky soils, and inadequate transportation networks. In response,



Plainfield farmers mixed farming and home industry to survive – and over time created the *continuous architecture* of big house (newer house), little house (first house), back house (shop), and barn. It held, with less and less success, for about a century. With her sister Arvilla Dyer – whose first extant drawing of the houses in Plainfield “Village” dates to 1945 – Priscilla Allen caught it as it disappeared. See Thomas C. Hubka, *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn* (Dartmouth: University Press of New England, 1984).

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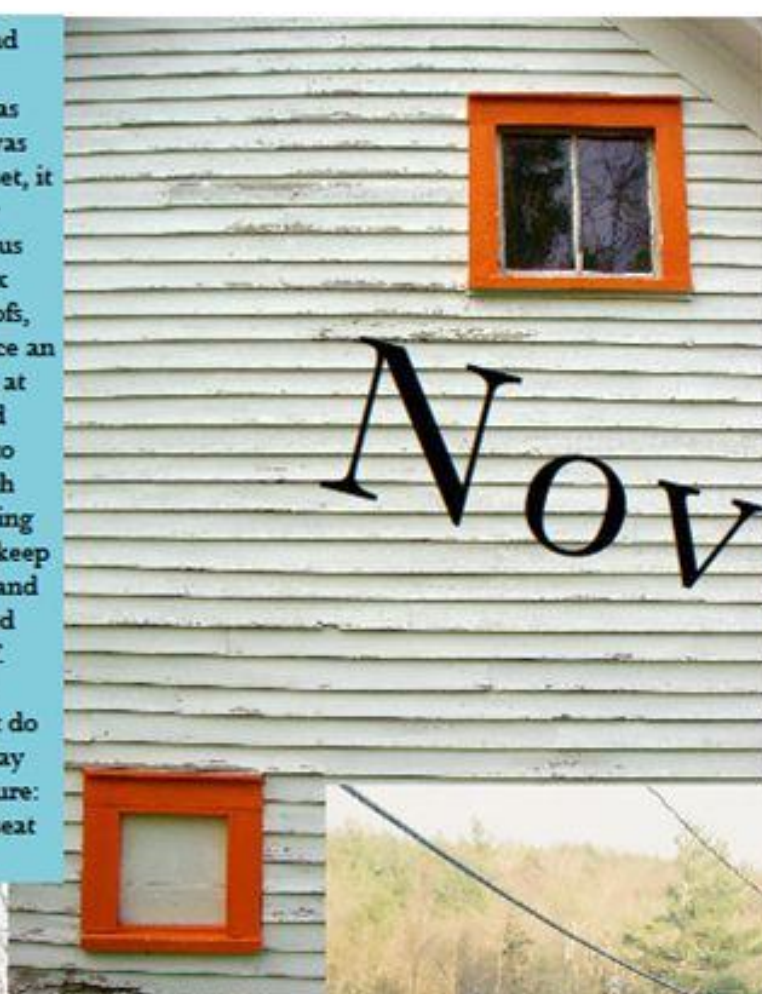


Tom Packard[']s father was an old type carpenter [who] came to work for my father one winter repairing a barn that the ground timbers had rotted out. They cut the logs and my father dragged them to the barn with a horse where he and Tom's father hewed them. My father scored them which means striking in with an axe every 6 or 8 inches on the side to be hewed. A chalk line has been made to hew to. Tom's father would follow with a broad axe and hew the chips off, following the chalk line. They put new timbers under the whole barn. It was all done in the winter time. — Howard Hathaway



O c t o b e r

Barns are our dearest possessions and greatest headaches. The barns on this page form no exception, and we chose them because of their grace as they slowly keel over or sink to their knees. Not only was the barn the farmer's single largest investment and asset, it was then and is now a maintenance headache. If only because of its size, these wood structures face enormous challenges in our climate. Few have the resources to fix rotted boards, reglaze ancient windows, paint high roofs, and replace massive timbers. But barns in our time face an extra challenge, which becomes visible when you look at old photographs. Barns that used to sit neighborly and hospitably at the side of the road now seem to sink into the landscape. The automobile is our lifeline, but much more demanding than horse and wagon in road building and maintenance. No longer can each neighborhood keep its roads open in the winter by rolling a heavy weight and compacting the snow. We have raised our roads to shed water and snow, and we salt them so we don't slide off. Water and salt tackle sills and foundations in an ever-accelerating cycle. Advice to barn owners: if you can't do anything else, try to keep the water out of, off, and away from your barn interiors and foundations. Full disclosure: the author owns a dilapidated barn that takes a back seat to house upkeep.



November





December

We love nature, but most of us can see it better when it isn't out there all by itself. On our barns, we find the shadows of trees in the early spring, the incredible play of light in early morning, the harsh abstract shadows of a summer afternoon, the announcement of winter in the most seductive light of early fall. The strong angularity of a large building "just right" for its landscape points out the puffy clouds of summer, the emergence of a huge gibbous moon, rolling hills. A red barn in the morning may be pinkish in the afternoon, and a white barn is only as white as the moment, which could just as easily be blue.



GLOYD AND SOUTH STS



WEST MAIN ST



OLD SOUTH STREET



MOUNTAIN ROAD



PLEASANT STREET



WEST MAIN STREET



BLUFF STREET



NEW SOUTH STREET



WEST HILL ROAD



NORTH CENTRAL STREET



PLEASANT STREET



E. MAIN AND BOW STS



SOUTH CENTRAL STREET



SOUTH CENTRAL STREET



WEST HILL ROAD



WEST MAIN STREET



SUMMIT STREET



WEST MAIN STREET



STETSON ROAD



WEST MAIN STREET



NORTH UNION STREET



WEST HILL ROAD

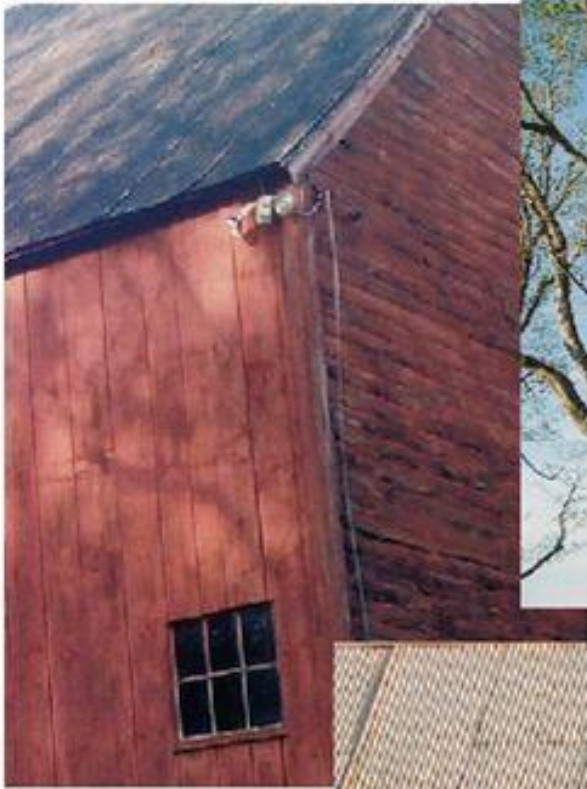


SOUTH UNION STREET

PLAINFIELD BARNs

2010

dedicated to Priscilla C. Allen



TUT'S
BARN



W CUMMINGTON 3