



Lyme Historians' Barn

Lyme Historians, Inc.



15 Main Street
Lyme, NH



www.lymehistorians.wordpress.com/



Story Map

What's Special About This Site

The Lyme Historians' barn was erected circa 1820, and the house on the site was constructed around 1850. The barn was most likely moved from another location, although it is not known where or

when. Judge David Carrol Churchill originally owned the property. He practiced law, and was the town's general store shopkeeper, deputy sheriff, county judge, and Grafton County Commissioner.



Photo courtesy of Ryan Cutting

Barn History and Use

The Churchill-Melvin House, along with its barn, was the home of the owner-shopkeepers of the Country Store next door for about 100 years. Horse stalls and haylofts in the barn indicated that it was used as a stable for the farm's horses.

At one time oxen were kept in a smaller barn that was attached to the main barn structure. The attached barn was known as the Ordination Barn because the town's first pastor was ordained there. Unfortunately, one day the oxen went on a rampage and destroyed the Ordination Barn.

The barn also has a cellar with an exterior door that leads to the barnyard and may have once

housed pigs.

The property was sold in 1890 to shopkeepers George and Mary Melvin whose son Leon kept his prize sheep in the barn. In 1908 another store-keeping family, Frank and Jenny West, purchased the property and lived there for about half a century.

The Lyme Historians purchased the former residential property in 2015 to convert it into a museum for the Lyme community. In 2017 a mini-grant from the NH Preservation Alliance supported a professional assessment of the barn, which led to a rework of its original stone foundation and some reinforcement of beams in the lowest level.



Historic photo of the site, courtesy of the Lyme Historians, Inc.

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Architectural Features

The English-style, three-bay barn at the Churchill-Melvin house is located in the center of Lyme Village on the Common. Thirty-foot-long white pine beams indicate it was probably built around 1810-1820. The east side displays a swinging door and a second sliding door. Pinions on the outside reveal that the sliding door is a replacement for an earlier swinging door.

The basement of the barn has a dirt floor and newly installed gunstock posts. The foundation is made of field stones. The barn is mortise and tenon construction, and the bracing is a mixture of

sawn, hand hewn and circular sawn members. Some beams are 30 to 40 feet in length, suggesting the barn is older than the house.

The roof boards run vertically to the ridge of the barn. There are common rafters, English tying joints, gunstock posts, and evidence of the use of both scribe rule and square rule construction.

Haylofts are on both the left and right sides of the barn's interior. Hay would have been stored up in the loft and dropped down to the horses when it was time to feed them. The horses' manure would drop down into the basement where the pigs were kept. The

hay loft has raised and indented hayloft boarding, which may have been for ventilation and airflow.

There are six-over-six and four-over-four paned windows, a transom window on the main door and a window on the corner next to the small door. The roof, which would have originally been wooden shingles, has been re-roofed with metal.

The outside of the barn carries its original vertical sawn sheathing, along with the decorative touch of evenly-spaced triangular-shaped wooden pieces, probably dating from ca. 1900.

What You Can Do Here Now

The Lyme Historians offer rotating exhibits in the museum of the Churchill-Melvin House. Displayed in the barn are woodworking tools, several carriages, and a variety of farming equipment, as well as items useful for household chores such as laundry. The Historians also own

and maintain an authentic one-room schoolhouse five miles away. The museum and barn are open on Saturdays from April - October, or by appointment. Check the website for current hours. The Historians host programs and special events and publish a quarterly newsletter as a benefit of membership.



*Interior photo courtesy of
Ryan Cutting*

For Further Reading

- Historic Lyme Common: A tour of Lyme Plain Village & Lyme Common*, by Adair D. Mulligan (The Lyme Historian, Summer 2017)
- The Scoop on Our Barn* (The Lyme Historian, Summer 2017), <https://lymehistorians.files.wordpress.com/2021/02/historian-2017-03.pdf>
- Field Guide to New England Barns and Farm Buildings*, by Thomas Durant Visser (University Press of New England, 1997).
- Barns: Their History, Preservation, and Restoration*, by Charles Klamkin (Bonanza Books, 1979).
- Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn: The Connected Farm Buildings of New England*, by Thomas C. Hubka (University Press of New England, 1984).
- An Age of Barns*, by Eric Sloane (Funk and Wagnalls, 1967).
- Preserving Old Barns: Preventing the loss of a valuable resource*, by John C. Porter and Francis E. Gilman (Peter E. Randall Publisher, 2019).