



Church Family Cow Barn

Enfield Shaker Museum



447 NH Route 4A
Enfield, NH



www.shakermuseum.org/discover/village-walking-tour/cow-barn/

What's Special About This Site

The Church Family Cow Barn at Enfield Shaker Museum is one of a group of Shaker agricultural buildings known as Great Barns. These barns were constructed in Shaker communities between the 1820s and 1880s. The most notable, and the first one built,

is the 1826 Round Barn at the Hancock Shaker Village in MA. The Shakers designed these grand barns for maximum efficiency while working with their large dairy herds, and the barns represented the significance of agriculture to the Shaker lifestyle and culture.



Photo courtesy of Ryan Cutting

Barn History and Use

Traditionally, Shaker villages were divided into groups or "families," with the Church Family unit serving as the community center. This is the setting where the Church Family Cow Barn was constructed in 1854. While there was a head herdsman who ran the barn, the building and herd of dairy cows housed within were collectively owned by the village.

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, the community updated the barn with a boiler and silos. After the building was purchased by the LaSalette Order of Catholics in 1928, four more exterior silos were added. The silos are gone, but in 2015, the barn was purchased by the Shaker Museum and is now under their stewardship.

*Exterior side photos
courtesy of the Enfield
Shaker Museum*



Continued on the next page

Architectural Features

The four-story barn rests on a stone foundation and is constructed of mortise and tenon-joined sawn timbers. The gable roof is of common rafter construction with major purlins and a central cupola. The top level of the barn is a high drive which was accessed by horse drawn carts and wagons through sliding barn doors on the south gable end, via an elevated earthen ramp.

The barn features hay mows with trap doors allowing hay to be dropped to the cows below, and scuttle doors at the tie-up level to shovel the cow waste to a manure pit below. The driving

floor contains areas to store hay, and it once held an office for the head herdsman with a chimney and fireplace. Today only the hole for the chimney shaft remains. On the floor below, the cow stalls line either side of the central aisle, with one side somewhat larger to house both cows and calves. There was once a 120-foot calf shed attached to the east side of the barn, but this is no longer extant. Some evidence remains of the root cellar and boiler, which was used to warm the barn in winter and provide steam power to the adjacent laundry building. The manure pit on the lower level of the barn has been filled in.



Historic photo of the Cow Barn with calf shed that is no longer present, courtesy of the Enfield Shaker Museum

What You Can Do Here Now

The Enfield Shaker Museum is open to the public from mid-May through October. There is a fee for entry, but admission is free for members, children under 5, and active duty military and their families. Visitors are welcome to explore some of the outdoor grounds for free during daylight hours. The Museum offers private group tours of the village

if scheduled in advance. The Museum contains informational exhibits, demonstrations of traditional Shaker practices, and hosts educational forums, workshops, and special events. Facilities are also available to rent for private events and retreats. Overnight accommodations are available by reservation.



Interior of the barn's loft and rafters, courtesy of Ryan Cutting

For Further Reading

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)