



# Maynesboro and Thompson Barns

## Berlin & Coos County Historical Society



137 E Milan Road  
Berlin, NH



[www.berlinnhhistoricalsociety.org](http://www.berlinnhhistoricalsociety.org)



Story Map

### What's Special About This Site

These two barns provide tangible links to Berlin's past as home of the Brown Company paper mill, and William Robinson Brown's enormous and renowned horse breeding operations. Today, the barns are owned and operated as a museum by the Berlin & Coos County Historical Society, ensuring that the public can continue to learn and benefit from the preservation of these historic agricultural structures.



ARABIANS AT MAYNESBORO IN WINTER.

*Contemporary photos courtesy of Ryan Cutting. Historic photo courtesy of the Berlin and Coos County Historical Society.*



### Barn History and Use

The Berlin & Coos County Historical Society owns two barns at this site. The Maynesboro Stud Barn was built circa 1910 by William Robinson Brown. It served as one of the three locations for W. R. Brown's prized Arabian horses, numbering 240 head in total. The horses were originally sold to the military, primarily used for show. After World War I the use of horses in the military waned and the Arabians were then sold commercially. The barn was used for this operation until the paper mill declared bankruptcy in the 1940s.

The much older Thompson Barn, named after its original owner, was

built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and was sold to the Brown Company in 1891. This structure housed draft horses for logging operations. Around 50 were here at one time, with additional work horses kept in the barns of other farmers in the area. By 1915 the herd was reduced, as logging was contracted out to people who brought their own horses. Prior to Brown ownership, the Thompson barn housed various livestock such as chickens, cows, and goats.

In 1947 the Maynesboro Stud Barn was moved to its current location alongside the Thompson Barn. In 1970 the barns and the land around

them were acquired by the city of Berlin. The site was used only sporadically, with theatrical plays, such as Jesus Christ Superstar, occurring in the Maynesboro barn from 1974 to 1990. The barns fell into disrepair, and in 2003 the property was deeded to the nonprofit Berlin & Coos County Historical Society from the Berlin Industrial Development and Park Authority. The Maynesboro Stud Barn was then repaired and has been used for a variety of activities since 2003.

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## Architectural Features

The Thompson barn is unique because it had a covered hayloft with slots to feed horses in their stall from the upper part of the barn. The Maynesboro Stud Barn and the Thompson Barn are both classic New England-style “Yankee” barns with gable fronts, drive-in center alleys, and cupolas for ventilation. Both barns’ timber frames are built with mortise and tenon joints. One is sheathed in clapboards, and the other with cedar shingles.

The Maynesboro barn currently has a steel roof, whereas originally it featured cedar shingles. The foundation of the Maynesboro Stud Barn is poured concrete dating from 1947 when the barn was moved to its current location. The original foundation would have been stone. The foundation is unusual because it is *battered*, meaning it is slightly angled to prevent tipping or crumbling over time. The barn is made from sawn timbers. The back gable end has no door, whereas the front door is 12 feet by 12 feet. There is a flying scaffold that runs down the center of the barn and a hay fork and track that runs the length of the building. The basement was where the horses were housed, and there are 36 windows providing light and ventilation that would have been barred to prevent the horses from breaking the glass.

The older Thompson barn has no basement, the rear of the structure is supported by posts, and the front has a rock foundation. This barn has front and back doors, with a hay loft on both sides, where hay was forked into individual stalls by small troughs from above. The front portion is original, and the back portion was added in 1901. The timbers in the original part are mostly hand-hewn with some sawn pieces added in when the Brown Company acquired it later. More windows were added for the many horses who resided here. Currently there are 55 windows in the barn. The barn has common rafters and major purlins and the roof boards run horizontally along the length of the barn. The Thompson barn is presently sheathed in clapboards on all its sides, and has asphalt shingles on the roof.

The barns fell into disrepair after many years of infrequent use. Since acquiring the property in 2003, the Berlin Historical Society has undertaken extensive renovations and repairs, with additional grant funding provided by New Hampshire’s Land and Community Heritage Program (LCHIP), the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund, and the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.

## What You Can Do Here Now

The barns are open in the summer for barn sales, where people can buy items that are donated from the community to help raise money for the Historical Society. The Maynesboro Barn has exhibits about the Brown Company workers and the implements they used at the paper mill.

The Berlin Historical Society also owns several nearby

properties where exhibits are on display. The Moffett House has a northern sports exhibit covering the history of Berlin’s local winter sports, and a reading room that contains a library of books written by local Berlin-area authors. The museum has a gift shop with books and souvenirs for sale. Small group tours of Dr. Moffett’s Office can be arranged by special request.

## 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).