

Town of Whately Massachusetts
COMMUNITY PRESERVATION COMMITTEE

Funding Request Form

Project Title: Yellow Cemetery Tobacco Barn restoration

Submission Date: _____

Full Name of Entity Submitting Application: Whately Historical Commission
(If submitted on behalf of an organization, please include a statement from an officer of the organization certifying organization's approval.)

Contact Person: Name: Judy Markland

Address: Box 804

Telephone(s): 413-665-4638

Email: jmarkland@lmstrategies.cc

Purpose: Please check all that apply: Open Space Community Housing
 Historic Preservation Recreation

Full Description of Project: (Attach a separate sheet if necessary.)

Restoration of the town-owned yellow tobacco barn at 215 Chestnut Plain Road to replace rotting sills.
(See attachment.)

Requested Attachments:

- Property address including Whately Assessor's Map, Lot/parcel number with current owner
- Copy of deed to Current Owner, if available
- Description of the property
- Maps if relevant
- Surveys, if available
- Appraisals and Agreements, if available;
- Budget detailing construction/maintenance costs, and funding/revenue sources, if any

Each project request must be submitted to the Community Preservation Committee using the Funding Request Form as a cover sheet. Email submissions are acceptable as long as the time of the email meets the deadline requirement.

Amount of Funding Requested: \$ 5000

Project title: Yellow tobacco barn restoration

Fiscal Year	Total Project Costs	CPC Funds Requested	Other Funding Sources (amount and source)
2025		\$5000	In-kind labor from the Highway Dept.
Total		\$5000	

Obtain quotes for project costs whenever possible. If not available, estimates may be used provided the basis of the estimate is fully explained

Time Line of Project:

Fy2025

Town Boards/Committees which reviewed the project:

- Historical Commission
- Cemetery Commission
- Highway Dept.
- _____

The relevant town board or committee must endorse the project within 60 days of submission of the application for it to proceed through the funding process.

For CPC use

Funding application received on _____ by _____
Acknowledgment of receipt mailed on _____ by _____

CPC review

Further information requested _____ by _____
Requested information received _____ by _____
Meeting with applicant _____
Final review _____
Determination _____ by _____
Applicant notified of determination _____ by _____

Warrant item approved by the Town on _____ rejected on _____

The Whately Historical Commission is recommending replacing two rotting sills on the town-owned yellow tobacco barn at 215 Chestnut Plain Road. The work is essential to maintaining the structural integrity of the building.

The Barn

Known colloquially as the Yellow Barn or the Cemetery Barn, this is one of the oldest tobacco barns in town, dating to the 1850s, with the horizontal vents typical of that period. It is a contributing building in the Whately Center National Register District and thus eligible for CPA historic preservation funding.

The barn was built along with the now-demolished hay barn, by Lauen Hayden, who operated the Whately Hotel, in the early 1850s. He sold the farm to Chester Waite, member of the Whately Board of Selectmen and of the General Court, who left it to his son Charles Waite. Charles was more interested in banking than farming and turned the farm over to his son Howard, who farmed there until his retirement in the mid-1950s. Howard bequeathed the farm to his daughter Bertha Waite Markland, who in 1996 gave the Town of Whately a 24,000 square foot parcel containing the barn for expansion of the cemetery. The town rented the barn to tobacco farmers for a while but for many years has used it for storage for the Highway Department and the Cemetery Department.

The barn's yellow color and prominence in town have made it a local icon, and it is iconic beyond Whately borders as well. *Country Living* magazine featured it in a photo montage of historic barn types in 1996 (Attachment C). The Society of Architectural Historians featured it as the prototype for a discussion of the history of tobacco farming in Franklin County (Attachment D).

The Restoration

The work required involves jacking up the northeast corner of the barn and replacing the two northeastern most sills with similar size wooden sills. Restoration carpenter Nicholas Jones has given us estimates for two approaches to the work (See attachment B). The \$4000 option would use screws and steel brackets to join the pieces. The other, for \$6500, entails all wooden fastenings such as mortise and tenon joints and wooden pegs. Jones would complete both the site preparation (jacking up) and carpentry work. The estimates assume some labor assistance from the Highway Department.

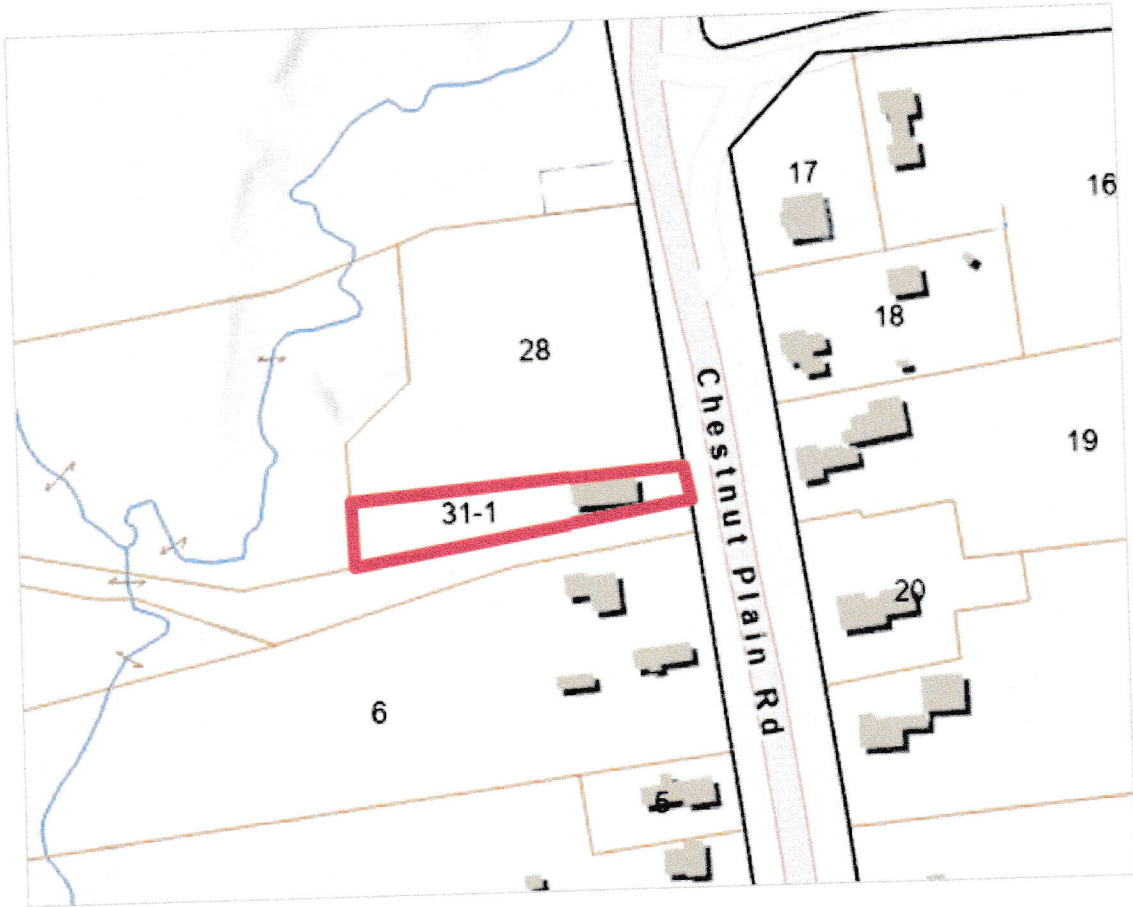
The Secretary of the Interior's Standards are quite specific about replacement with similar materials where feasible, but in general silent on the methods of assembly. The exception to the latter is when the assembly materials pose harm to the original structure as with current day mortar, which can damage old brick. As screws and metal brackets were in use when the barn was built, the Historical Commission believes that both methods meet the Secretary's Standards and have opted for the less expensive approach. Because of the age of the structure, we have added a contingency margin of \$1000, but do not anticipate needing to spend that amount in full unless unforeseen circumstances require that level of expenditure.

Attachments

- A. Site plan
- B. Construction cost estimate
- C. "American Barns" from *Country Living*, July 1996
- D. "Chestnut Plain Rd Tobacco Barn, Society of Architectural Historians, 2021
- E. Highway Department support letter
- F. Cemetery Commission support letter

Attachment A

Site Plan for 215 Chestnut Plain Road



Yellow Barn Restoration
Attachment B

Nicholas B. Jones
Carpentry & Woodworking

December 10, 2023

Proposal for repairs to yellow barn south of center cemetery

This project consists of replacing two 7"x7"x 16' sill beams on the northeast end of the barn.

The barn will need to be jacked up to remove and replace damaged beams. Along with new oak beams, the repair will include diagonal bracing and steel ell brackets to bolt the new and old work together.

My ballpark estimate for this work is \$4000. My work on this project will be billed as time (\$60/hour) and materials.

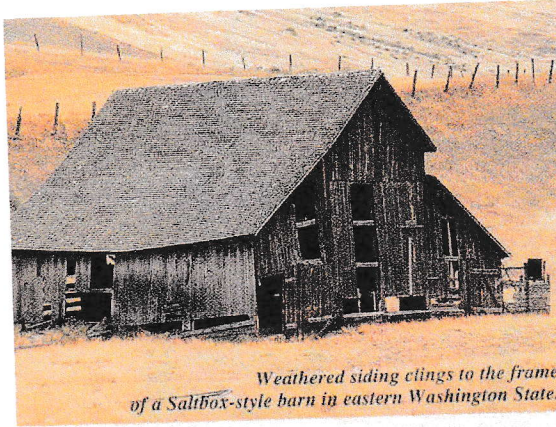
To complete this work with original techniques—mortise and tenon joinery with wooden pins—will add approximately \$2500.

The Highway Department has kindly offered to assist with some of the heavy lifting, but I expect their involvement to be limited.

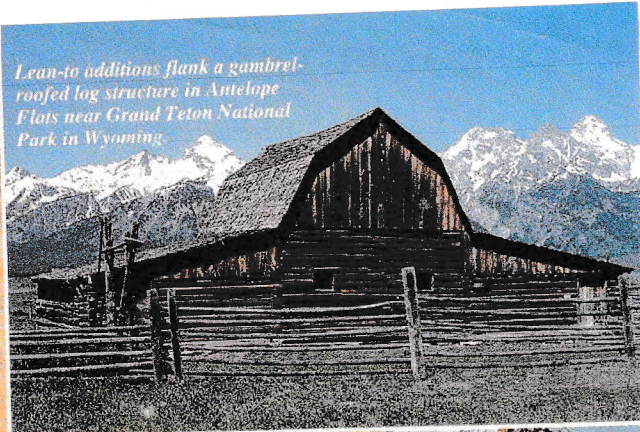
All of my work will be done with a high level of attention to detail and quality.

Nicholas Jones

P.O. Box 515
Whately, Ma 01093
413-665-7927
nbjones@comcast.net
www.nicholasbjones.com



Weathered siding clings to the frame of a Salibox-style barn in eastern Washington State.



Lean-to additions flank a gambrel-roofed log structure in Antelope Flats near Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming.

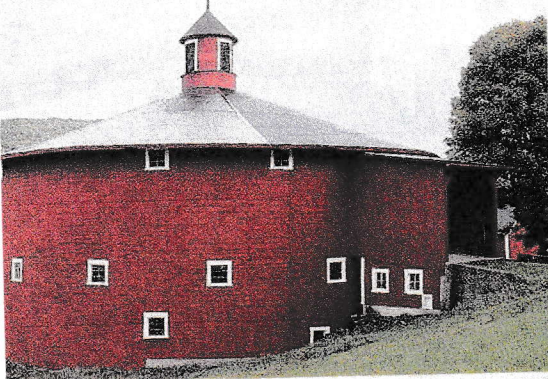


In eastern Kansas, a century-old L-shaped barn with hand-hewn beams and peg construction wears traces of its original red paint on its horizontal siding.



Hinged panels along the side of this barn in the Connecticut River Valley provide the ventilation necessary for drying tobacco.

A silo stands at the center of this round bank barn in Vermont, which has remained in one family for seven generations.



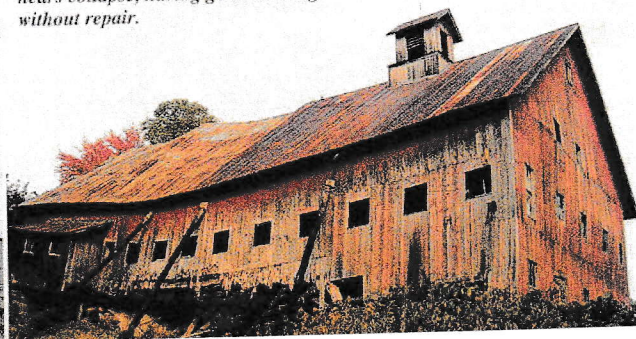
Built in 1879, this well-constructed barn located northwest of Lawrence, Kans., made excellent use of local limestone.

AMERICAN BARNNS

Sheltering livestock, equipment, and crops, these handcrafted structures once served as the center of activity on the family farm. Now many stand by roadsides vacant and decayed—silent reminders of our agricultural heritage and of a vanishing way of life.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRAN COX

Propped up temporarily by poles, this sagging giant in New England nears collapse, having gone too long without repair.



Massachusetts (<https://sah-archipedia.org/essays/MA-02>) » Franklin County (<https://sah-archipedia.org/essays/MA-02-011>) » Chestnut Plain Road Tobacco Barn

CHESTNUT PLAIN ROAD TOBACCO BARN

c. 1860. 215 Chestnut Plain Rd.

This long, simple tobacco shed (alternately called a tobacco barn) in the center of Whately, a rural town in the Connecticut River Valley, facilitated a single agricultural procedure: the drying and curing of



broadleaf and shade-grown tobacco for use in cigar wrappers and binding. This building's unassuming simplicity belies the depth of history it represents and perseveres as a rare surviving example of a once common building type in the area. From roughly the 1830s to the 1950s, tobacco cultivation occupied a central role in Whately and grew to become the dominant cash crop in a region extending from Middletown, Connecticut, to just north of Greenfield, Massachusetts. Constructed circa 1860, the Chestnut Plain Road Tobacco Shed represents a rare extant example of local craftsmanship and the development of a regional, vernacular architectural form. Through the lens of this tobacco shed, one can glimpse the development of Whately and witness the confluence of environmental conditions, economic transformations, agricultural technology, and social movements that sustained the tobacco industry in the Connecticut Valley.

Whately lies in a region with a climate and soil composition well-suited for tobacco growing. The Connecticut River, which borders Whately on the east, widens here through a valley of gently rolling hills interspersed with flat meadows known locally as "intervalles." In this same valley, retreating glaciers deposited exceptionally fertile and well-drained alluvial soil. In the nineteenth century, the intervalles also benefited from a high water table and periodic flooding, which revitalized soils. (Dams along the Connecticut River have since ended seasonal flooding.)

The Connecticut Valley's intervalles and general fecundity attracted Native Americans and, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, European colonists. Whately initially boasted small plantations beginning in the 1670s, and was incorporated as a town in 1771. These farmsteads grew a variety of vegetable crops for subsistence and export. Early on,

tobacco formed part of Whately's agricultural economy, with records showing that the town's first minister grew and sold a large crop of tobacco in 1671. Of course, tobacco, a weed-like plant indigenous to North America, had long been integral to Native Americans' religious and community-building rituals. Along the Atlantic seaboard, the crop was a crucial export for the nascent colonies. Additionally, many European colonists grew small amounts for home consumption.

In the early 1840s, farmers in Whately experimented with a new variety of tobacco called Connecticut Broadleaf. Over the next two decades, tobacco cultivation increased dramatically in Whately: from one acre sown in 1845, to 69 acres in 1855, and 303 in 1865. The Waite family, who had bought the former Morton homestead, built the Chestnut Plain Road Tobacco Shed circa 1860, during the industry's period of greatest growth. Indeed, Whately farmers had constructed 97 tobacco sheds by 1855.

The process of planting, tending, and harvesting tobacco required backbreaking work and careful attention. After starting seeds in cold frames and transplanting the small plants to the field, farmers had to pinch leaves to incite growth, hoe to remove weeds, and pull out suckers that diverted nutrients from the main growth. Moreover, tobacco plants were especially susceptible to various diseases and hail damage. Market fluctuations and periodic overproduction combined with natural vicissitudes rendered tobacco a fickle crop whose profit margin alternated widely over the course of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

Tobacco sheds served a critical role in readying tobacco for export. At harvest time, farmers picked and laid the leaves on the ground to wilt slightly. Next, workers strung the leaves onto wooden laths and brought them to the shed. Like virtually all tobacco sheds, the one on Chestnut Plain Road is a long and low single-room wooden structure with a gabled

roof and large hinged doors on the gabled ends. Workers hung the bundles of harvested leaves in rows perpendicular to the barn's long axis from two tiers of girts located in the sides and middle of the shed. These girts also tied the building's frame together and held the exterior boards in place.

The most distinctive feature of tobacco barns is their porous and flexible walls: alternating boards on the long sides could be opened to ventilate the crop. The Chestnut Plain Road Tobacco Shed displays an earlier and unusual ventilating system. Most barns had vertical boards that either hinged outward like a long door or swung out from the top of the shed. The Chestnut Plain Road Shed, on the other hand, has horizontal siding that opened much like a window blind. Vertical cleats were attached to the interspersed hinged horizontal boards, allowing a worker to open several at a time. This system allowed farmers to control carefully the rate of curing and quickly protect the harvested crop from inclement weather.

Farmers rarely hired professional builders to design and construct sheds; instead, they relied on readily available plans and traditional building practices. Economy and utility were farmers' primary concerns. Because they were used for only around two months and for a single purpose, tobacco sheds were typically light, sparse structures consisting of a transverse frame skeleton sheathed in a thin cladding of moveable boards. Local chestnut served as the primary structural material in this and many other tobacco sheds built throughout the nineteenth century. Hemlock and pine replaced chestnut as this wood became relatively scarce in the twentieth-century.

Tobacco sheds in the Connecticut Valley changed very little over the years despite significant developments in the industry. For instance, a new variety of Sumatran tobacco supplanted Connecticut Broadleaf around 1900. This plant produced a lighter shade of leaf, which cigar smokers had

begun to prefer. To produce quality wrappers from this variety, Connecticut Valley tobacco farmers had to grow the plants in shade. This required covering the entire crop with swaths of white, semi-transparent shade cloth. The intricate shading system necessitated large capital outlays, which, in turn, instigated the consolidation of small farmers into syndicates and the overall corporatization of tobacco growing in Whately and the region. By the mid-twentieth century, large companies controlled Connecticut Valley tobacco production.

Alongside the shift to Sumatran shade-grown tobacco came demographic shifts in the owners of and workers on Whately tobacco farms. Many of the original Yankee farmers left New England for more fertile farmlands in the Midwest steadily throughout the nineteenth-century. In the Connecticut Valley, Irish and Eastern Europeans—mostly second-generation immigrants—began to fill the void and became the region's predominant tobacco farmers. Later in the twentieth century, World War II created a severe shortage in agricultural laborers, and the federal government sponsored migrant worker programs that brought laborers in from the British West Indies, primarily Jamaica. In later decades of the twentieth century, many other immigrant communities, such as Puerto Ricans and Laotians, would come to harvest and prepare tobacco. Despite the changing labor force, the workers all cured tobacco leaf by hanging the crop in structures just like the mid-nineteenth-century Chestnut Plain Road barn.

Tobacco cultivation in Whately has nearly vanished, though the most prized cigar wrappers still emanate from the Connecticut Valley. Machines can now mass produce wrappers from tobacco scraps, and tobacco use in general has fallen by the wayside as its health hazards swayed cultural preferences. After the former Waite homestead was divided in the early 1990s, the Chestnut Plain Road shed transferred to town ownership. It is now used for equipment storage, though the town had until recently

seasonally leased the shed to a local tobacco grower, demonstrating the enduring value of the barn's simple yet functional design. This shed now stands as an important reminder of a vernacular cultural landscape associated with the production of tobacco that has not yet disappeared entirely in Massachusetts.

REFERENCES

O'Gorman, James F. *Connecticut Valley Vernacular: The Vanishing Landscape and Architecture of the New England Tobacco Fields*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.

Parson, Bonnie, Lori Tanner, and Elizabeth Friedberg, "Whately Center Historic District," Franklin County, Massachusetts. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2003. National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

WRITING CREDITS

Author: Aaron Ahlstrom

Coordinator: Daniel Bluestone

Attachment E

Whately Historical Commission, December 8, 2023

I want to convey the importance of the yellow barn next to the center cemetery. The highway department uses the barn for storage of many things including small equipment, mowers and implements. Many of the items like road barricades and signs would not be accessible in the winter if they were kept outside in the snow plus keeping them out of the sun and weather extends their life.

I feel the upkeep of this barn is well worth the investment to allow town departments to utilize the space. I support the historical commissions desire to have the rotted sill replaced.

Keith Bardwell

Highway & Building Superintendent

Attachment F

Cemetery Commission
Town of Whately
4 Sandy Lane
South Deerfield, MA 01373
cemetery@whately.org

November 30, 2023

Historical Commission
Town of Whately
4 Sandy Lane
South Deerfield, MA 01373

The Whately Cemetery Commission would like to express support for the rehabilitation of the sills to the 1850's yellow barn located next to the Center Cemetery. The barn is providing vital storage for our riding mower and attachments, which do not have any other viable location.

Thank you.

for the Commissioners 

Darcy Tozier

Neal Abraham

Cemetery Commissioners