



We hope you find this information useful in helping to maintain and preserve your historic barn. And don't forget, we're here to help! Email barns@nhpreservation.org or call 603-224-2281 with questions.

Six Basic Steps to Preserve Your Barn

Thanks to Arron Sturgis, Preservation Timber Framing, Berwick, Maine (207-698-1695), for these barn preservation tips.

1. Document -

Step one is to document your barn. Before beginning work on your barn it is important to know what you have and what was done to the barn over time. The first part of documentation is to take photographs of its existing conditions both inside and outside. These photographs should cover the drainage conditions around the barn, the foundations, sills, siding, roof, doors, interior framing, flooring, and partitions. A complete photographic coverage of the barn will serve to gather cost estimates and to stage repairs in order of priority. The second part of documentation is to collect the history of your barn from local historical records and, if possible, from people who are familiar with its use over time and alterations that have been made. Documentation does not stop here, however. Continue to photograph what is being done to the barn throughout the preservation process.

2. Stabilize -

Step two is to stabilize the barn to give yourself time to plan and to get the right craftsperson for your barn. There are a number of important things you can do yourself to stabilize your barn. The two most important things you can do are: temporarily to divert any water that is undermining your foundations, and to put temporary patches on your roof to stop the entry of water into the barn. Next, you can seal windows and doors that are letting additional water into the building. Once properly sealed you have staved off the worst of the on-going damage.

3. Rig for Repairs -

Step three is to prepare for structural repair by rigging the building properly. This will in many cases require hiring a rigging company to evaluate the structural problems and to insert the cribbing or the bracing that will allow the restoration team to work in safety. One of the cardinal rules for those who undertake some of the rigging themselves is to know how to proceed with care and when to stop and call in professionals.

4. Repair -

Step four is the actual repair work and for the best results the principal to follow is "Be Kind and Repair in Kind". This is the time when you will be choosing the craftsperson that will be doing the work on your building. Choose someone with experience in the traditional building techniques used in your barn and is able to repair the barn using those techniques. To maintain its historic integrity and its longevity, repairing in kind the structure and its joints is essential. Using the same materials that were original to the barn is also essential to maintaining its historic integrity.

5. Finish -

The fifth step is to finish off the project balancing historical integrity and practicality. If you are rehabilitating your barn for reuse, you may be required to use new materials so make judgments that find a balance between keeping the building's material integrity yet allow it a new use. Failed foundations, for instance, may require replacement and new height dimensions, but if you are pouring new concrete foundations, you can face them with original materials such as fieldstone to maintain the character of the barn from the exterior.

6. Maintenance -

The last step is to protect your investment by drafting a maintenance schedule that will keep work up to date. Make sure you have an adequate insurance policy with fire protection, and, finally, act for the future by protecting the building from unwanted changes by placing a preservation easement on it.