

The Story of the Apple Barn

The Apple Barn, located on the grounds of the Valle Crucis Conference Center at the Historic Mission School, was built in about 1911 as the first dairy barn in the area to have a concrete floor. Dairy cows were housed in the basement and could stick their heads out the windows on the side to eat hay from stone troughs. Hay was stored in the upper floor, and cheese-making facilities were located in the basement. Cheese produced in the barn was stored in a vault with 6-inch-thick cork walls and ceiling, which was kept to a constant cool temperature. Across the road, a “tea room” owned by the Taylor family also took excess milk and turned it into ice cream, which was sold along with other goodies – and tea, of course.

Thus the Apple Barn was never actually a barn for apples. That fruit – which grew abundantly in orchards throughout the valley and surrounding hills – was graded and stored next door in the barn now known as the Bunk House. The Bunk House basement has a dirt floor and thick cork walls and ceilings, so that, like the cheese, apples could be stored at a constant temperature all year. Four large vents extend from the basement through to the roof, which could be used in conjunction with the outside vents cut in the basement walls to regulate the temperature and humidity in the basement. The apples were graded and packed for shipping in the upper floor of the Bunk House.

At peak production, over 12,000 bushels of apples were picked, packed, and shipped to Banner Elk every year. The small resort town was once a major shipping center for the apple industry through Johnson City, Tennessee.

Since the 1970s, the Apple Barn (renamed, perhaps, for its brick-red color and association with the apple storage next door), has been well-loved by many as a gathering space for square dances, contra dances, weddings and associated parties, meetings, and a wonderful performing arts venue.

Inside the Apple Barn, old church pews from the Patterson School in Lenoir are arranged along the inside walls. Genuinely “rustic chic” tables, who earned their patina and creak with proper aging, stand by. And faded photos from the past show the Apple Barn as it originally stood - a proud resource for a vibrant, working farm.