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A Simple Way to Help Date Your Barn

by Ed Pape

A feature of your barn that tells a lot about its age and yet is easy to identify is the presence or absence of the English tying joint. This joint is a solution to the intersection at the eave of four pieces of the frame: the top of the outside wall post, the top plate of the wall, the tying beam that runs from eave to eave, and the foot of the rafter (Figure 1). Cutting the joint is relatively difficult but the result is sound and attractive. This particular solution came to America from England and was used until about 1840 when a simplified approach became popular. This new configuration is referred to as the dropped plate (Figure 2) and really takes the plate out of the joint and inserts it lower down on the post. The result is an easier job of cutting. It also lends itself to a large soffit along the eaves which could be taken as evidence of its presence.

So, if you have the dropped plate arrangement your barn was probably built after 1840. The presence of the English tying joint suggests a date before 1840 but doesn't guarantee it since some builders would have continued to use their traditional techniques. Other dating clues have to be examined in this case.

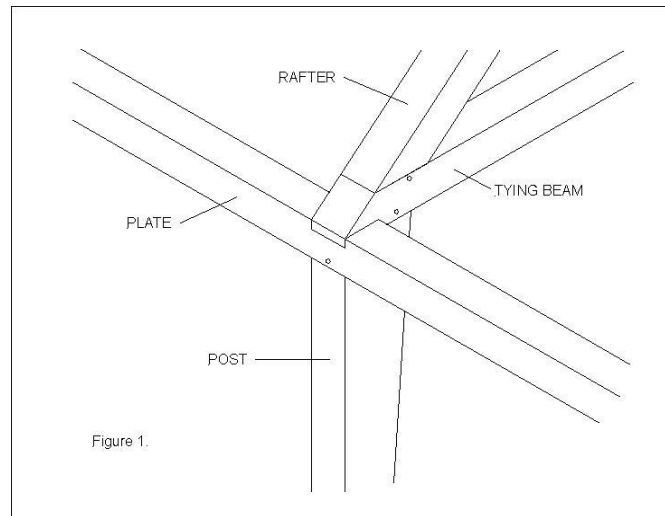


Figure 1

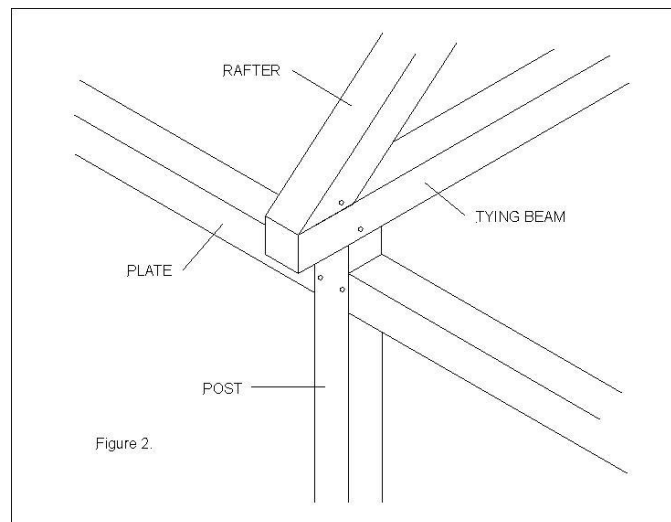


Figure 2