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# The Society for the Preservation of Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture

July – December 2016

## Newsletter

Vol. 19, No. 7-12



Fig. 1 – Hauver-Sleight House, Schoolhouse Rd., Clinton, ca. 1760 and later.  
Photo by Neil Larson, 2013.

## The German House Issue

The November 2016 HVVA Study Tour focused on 18th-century German houses in Clinton and Rhinebeck, Dutchess County. The first stop was made at the Hauver-Sleight House, which contains compelling evidence of a traditional two-room-plan dwelling in its central, two-story section (Fig. 1). Frederick Hauver's name is mentioned in a few records from the period, but not on deeds; he probably was a leaseholder on lands owned by patentee John Crooke of Hyde Park before they were sold-off by Crooke's heirs. A second story and wings were added to the original house in various stages after the farm was purchased by Hendrick Sleight, a Kingston native who married Mary Van Vliet of Pleasant Plains in 1792. The original two-room plan, which appears to have had end chimneys, was reconfigured with the dividing partition removed and an entrance and stair hall added to the west end (left in photo). The addition on the right contains a 19th-century kitchen; the wing on the left has a basement kitchen at grade and may have been a separate dwelling.

Another early wood frame dwelling is located on a neighboring farm that William Barber conveyed to Bastian Crasper in 1791 that contained "John Christie's house."<sup>1</sup> (Barber was the husband of Ann Crooke, the daughter and heir of patentee John Crooke) Christie was living in Clinton when the first U.S. census was taken in 1790; he was head of a household that included his wife and seven children under the age of 16 years. Ten years later he was enumerated in the Town of Beekman, suggesting that he was a tenant displaced by Bastian Crasper.<sup>2</sup> Christie's identity has receded into unknown history, but it probably is his two-room plan dwelling that remains on the periphery of a greatly enlarged residence (Fig. 2).

By most accounts, European settlement in Dutchess County developed slowly compared to other areas in the Hudson Valley.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the



Fig. 2 – Christie-Crapser House, Schoolhouse Rd., Clinton, ca. 1760 and later. Photo by Neil Larson, 2013.

17th century, Dutchess County had been partitioned into a few large patents granted by English authorities to well-positioned New York merchants, individually and in groups. One was Henry Beekman's Rhinebeck patent, located on the east side of the Hudson River and extending east to the Crum Elbow Creek. A Kingston merchant, he established a manor house near the landing in what is now Rhinecliff (the building is no longer extant), mills on the Landsman Kill, and wheat fields in the vicinity. In 1718 Beekman settled 35 German families (140 persons) from the Palatine camps on Livingston Manor (his daughter Margaret Beekman married Robert R. Livingston) on leaseholds after the English effort to place refugees from the Palatinate in labor camps farther north failed.<sup>4</sup> Lands were laid out for them initially at Pink's Corners – where Routes 9 and 9G now intersect – and Reformed and Lutheran churches were built there. These families, together with later newcomers, spread out in all directions, but particularly southeast along the fertile flood plain of the Crum Elbow Creek where they planted wheat to pay their rents and fuel the Beekman proprietary economy. A satellite community

named Wurtemberg developed at the south end of the valley, and by 1760 it had populated sufficiently to support its own Lutheran church.

When lots in the Third Division of the Great Nine Partners Patent, which adjoined Rhinebeck, were made available for sale in 1748, German families from the Rhinebeck Patent immediately migrated there, particularly those who had been leasing farms. The prevalence of German surnames in this area, now part of the town of Clinton, notably Traver, but also Schultz, Schryver, Crapser, Marquart, Burger and Miller, indicate a direct association with families on the west side of the creek. From there, German settlement spread into the Great Lots at the northern end of the town.<sup>5</sup>

Eighteenth-century German houses typically were story-and-a-half dwellings with two-room plans, a central chimney servicing both rooms and a basement kitchen (Fig. 3). They were modeled on the form and construction methods of the small dwellings introduced to the New World by the Dutch in the 17th century. This European type was fastidiously pre-



Fig. 3 – Ackert House, now Strawberry Hill, Ackert Hook Rd., Rhinebeck, ca. 1760. Historic photo, ca. 1900, Dutchess County Historical Society Collections.

served and elaborated by the Dutch throughout the 18th century to express their cultural solidarity in opposition to the English (Fig. 4). German houses exhibit subtle variations indicative of their inhabitants' lesser wealth and lifestyle. The houses

in which German families resided were plain in design and decoration, which reflected their low status in the hierarchy of New York colonial society. Having arrived in New York as impoverished refugees indentured to the English government, they entered at the lowest

Fig. 4 – Reconstructed floor plan and section of a house described in a New Amsterdam building contract, 1649. From Henk J. Zantkuyl, "The Netherlands Town House: How and Why it Works," in Roderick H. Blackburn & Nancy A. Kelley, eds., *New World Dutch Studies: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776* (Albany: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1987), 156.

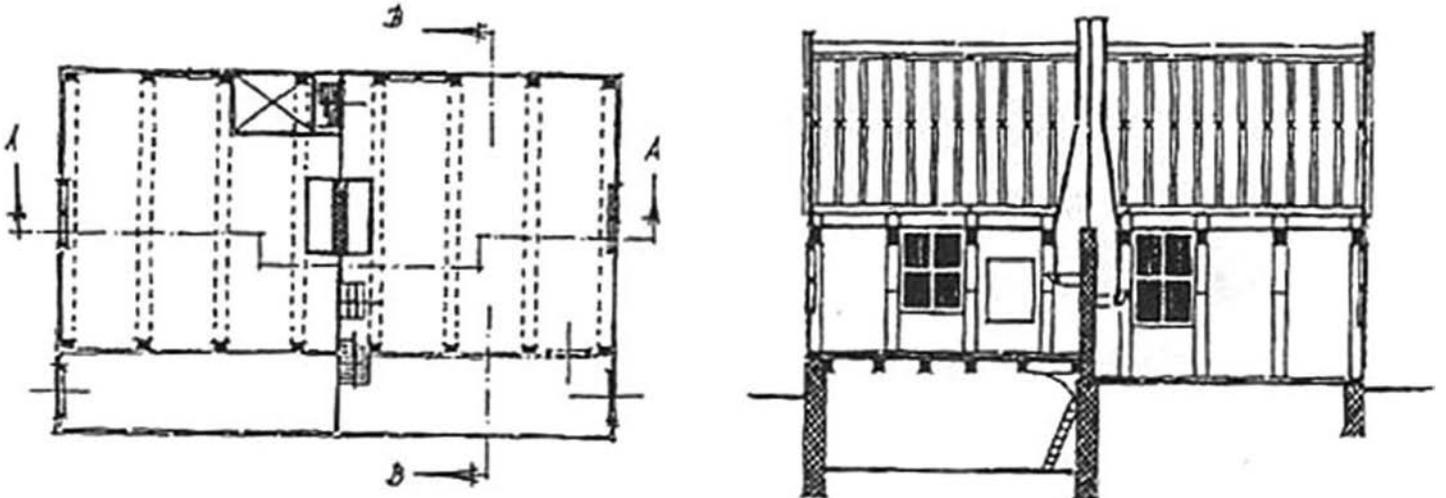




Fig. 5 – David Traver House, Stonehouse Road, Clinton, ca.1764.  
Photo by Neil Larson, 2013.

The typical 18th-century German house was built of wood and has proven to be impermanent. Stone houses, which were expensive to build, were less common in Dutchess County than in Ulster County, where they were prolific, representing the great difference in prosperity between the two places in those years. The limited number of stone houses in Rhinebeck and Clinton document the more modest lifestyles of the Germans who settled there. This fact is made plain by the fact that there was a great deal of stone exposed in the town. Yet, on both sides of the Hudson, stone houses have survived in disproportionate numbers than their wood counterparts because of their enduring materials and greater value.

Portions of 18th-century houses survive in an enclave of houses associated with the Traver family along Mountain View and Stone House roads. The house for which the latter road was named was built by David Traver around the time he acquired a 314-acre farm lot in Great Lot No. 1 from Richard Alsop of Newtown, Queens County, in 1764 moving from a leasehold in Rhinebeck. In form and plan, with its basement exposed on its westerly end, the house is a model of the German plan, although with the addition of a center passage, moving chimneys to the ends (*Fig. 5*). The porch, dormers and chimneys are recent restorations; dormers were not common features in the 18th

class of citizenship, in some eyes little better than African slaves. Once released from their servitude, the Germans endeavored to lead normal lives as farmers, but their limited financial resources and social standing relegated them to a tenant class of landholder. But owning land was the foundation of respectability. When opportunities arose to purchase land in the rugged area on the east side of the Crum Elbow in Clinton, they jumped at the chance.

Fig. 6 – Crapser House, Naylor Rd., Clinton, ca.1760. Photo by Neil Larson, 2013.



century. A similar stone house located on Naylor Road at the western limits of the town probably was built for John Crapser soon after he purchased the 160-acre hillside farm bordering on the Crum Elbow from Martin Schryver in 1759 (Fig. 6). A two-story wood frame wing was added ca.1800; a more recent two-story addition on the left is partially obscured by the tree.

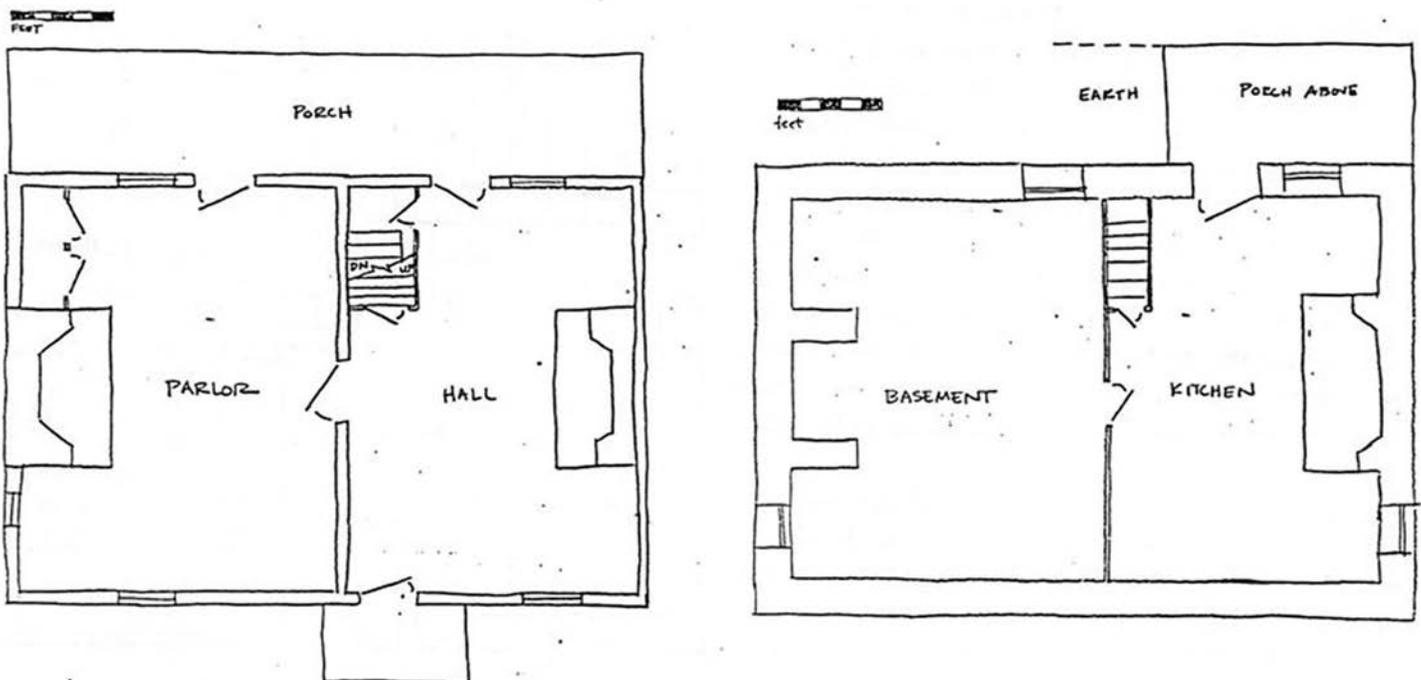


Fig. 7 – Abraham Traver House, Mountainview Rd., Clinton, ca. 1790., from southwest. Photo by Neil Larson, 1991.

David Traver's son, Abraham, built a house on his half of a 270-acre parcel he and his brother David, Jr. bought, with the help of their father, from patentee David Johnston in 1788. David Traver, Jr.'s house no longer survives, but Abraham Traver's wood frame dwelling survives at the end of a long lane on Mountain View Road, and like most other extant 18th-century dwellings, the house no longer resembles its original appearance (Fig. 7). It has been enlarged in stages and its fenestration altered, and the front of the house was shifted from its east to its west side, pictured here. An architectural analysis of the house made in 1991 found that its original floor plan followed the traditional German mode, except that by the 1780s the center chimney was replaced with chimneys on the ends and the front façade contained two entrances, one leading into each room on the principal floor.<sup>6</sup> The kitchen was located in the basement and exposed at grade on the south end of the house (Figs. 8 & 9).

Steenburgh Tavern is a well-known landmark on U.S. Rt.9 south of the village of Rhinebeck (Fig. 10). The stone house is one of a string of German tenant houses dotting the river roads running through Rhinebeck and Red Hook, representing 18th-century leaseholds occupying the river plateau before they were taken over by the "great estates." The precise history of this place remains a mystery, although the current owner

Fig. 8 – Abraham Traver House, main and basement floor plans (left to right) as built. Sketched by Neil Larson, 1991.



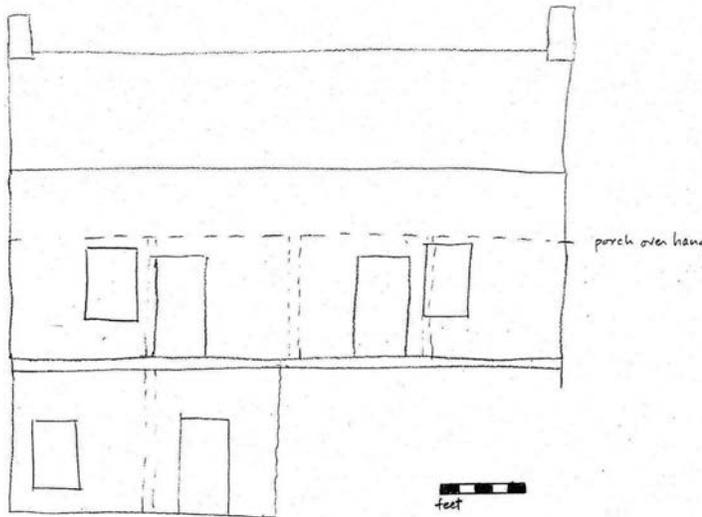


Fig. 9 – Abraham Traver House, front (east) façade as built. Sketched by Neil Larson, 1991.

has been working hard searching for documentary evidence. The house has long been associated with the name Steenburgh (or Van Steenburgh), although the actual person has not been identified. A two-room-plan dwelling with a center chimney for a jambless fireplace in the southern room and a basement kitchen with its own chimney on the northern end, the house originated with a siting not unlike the Ackert House (Fig. 3). The farmstead was absorbed into a country estate developed by Janet Livingston, widow of General Richard Montgomery, after the Revolution, known as Grasmere. It was gradually modernized with its front yard leveled. Recently the interior of the house was damaged by a leaking water pipe. Clean-up and removals of sodden plaster for mold remediation revealed historic fabric long concealed. Stay tuned for more about this house in a future newsletter.



Fig. 10 – Steenburgh Tavern, U.S. Rt.9, Rhinebeck, ca. 1740. Historic photo, ca. 1900. Dutchess County Historical Society Collections.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 DC Mortgages, 6:85, 2 January 1791
- 2 Genealogical information has been derived from name searches on Ancestry.com and Google Books, as well as in Clifford Buck & William P. McDermott's *Eighteenth Century Documents of the Nine Partners Patent* (1979) and William P. McDermott, ed., Clinton, Dutchess County, N.Y., *A History of a Town* (Clinton Historical Society, 1987).
- 3 Published histories of Dutchess County include Philip H. Smith, *General History of Dutchess County from 1609 to 1876 Inclusive* (1877); James H. Smith, *History of Dutchess County, New York* (1882); Frank Hasbrouck, ed., *History of Dutchess County, New York* (1909); Henry Noble McCracken, *Old Dutchess Forever* (NT: Hastings House, 1956); McCracken, *Blithe Dutchess* (NY: Hastings House, 1958); John Jeanneney & Mary L. Jeanneney, *Dutchess County: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk VA: The Donning Co., 1983).
- 4 Smith, *History of Dutchess County*, 254.
- 5 Unsourced references to historic properties in Clinton have been derived from a map created by William Benson in 1980 and annotated with owner information he culled from Clifford Buck & William P. McDermott's *Eighteenth Century Documents of the Nine Partners Patent* (Dutchess County Historical Society, 1979).
- 6 Neil Larson, "Abraham Traver House, A Documentary and Interpretive Report," March 1991.

# Philip Row Farmstead – Milan, New York

By Emily Majer

## Background

The Little Nine Partners Patent, comprising what are now the towns of Milan and Pine Plains in Dutchess County, was granted in 1706 to businessmen and land speculators from New York City for the purpose of settlement. English colonial governors were anxious to secure the area between Manhattan and Albany that had been left mostly vacant due to the focus of the Dutch on the fur trade, which required only a few outposts on the Hudson River. The English took over the colony permanently in 1674 and established the practice of granting large tracts of land, or “patents,” to men of wealth and influence. The expectation was that these patentees would promote and provide support for settlers in order to clear the land for agriculture. The other motive of the government was to provide a protective buffer against the French up north and the encroachment of wandering New Englanders. The first Dutchess County patent, the Rombout Patent, was granted in 1685, followed by the Pieter Schuyler Patent, Henry Beekman’s Rhinebeck Patent, the Great Nine Partners Patent, the Philipse Patent, the Beekman Patent, and finally the Little Nine Partners Patent in 1706 (Fig. 1).

The partners in the Little Nine were Sampson Broughton, Rip Van Dam, Thomas Wenham, Roger Mompesson, Peter Fauconier, Augustus Graham, Richard Sackett, Robert Lurting, and George Clark. The land was not surveyed and

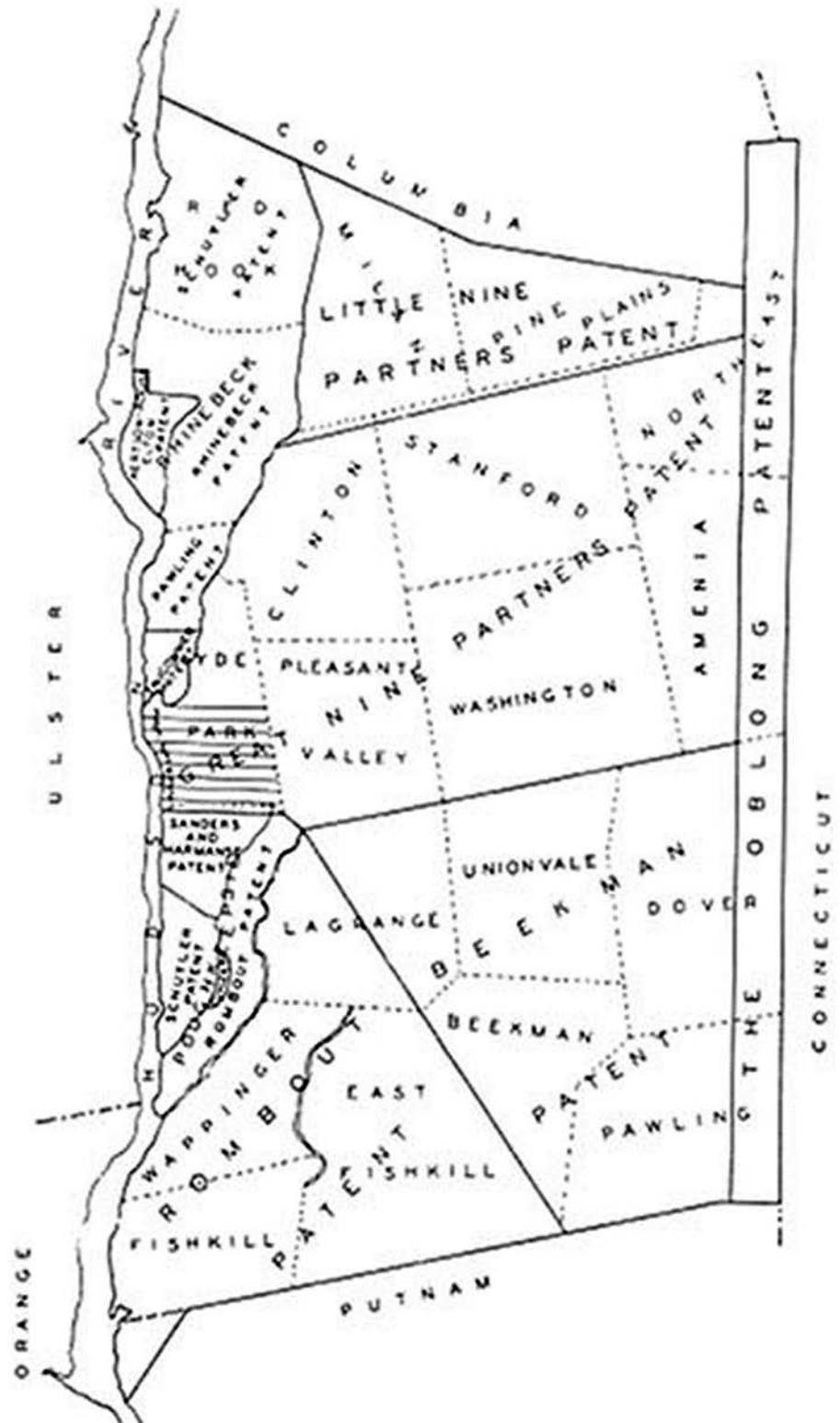


Fig. 1 – Map of Dutchess County with patent and town divisions. From Clifford Buck & William P. McDermott, *Eighteenth Century Documents of the Nine Partners Patent* (1979).



partitioned until 1734 and that survey remained unofficial until 1744. At that point, the patent was divided into 63 lots and distributed among the surviving original partners and the heirs and assigns of those who had died in the intervening 38 years (*Fig. 2*).

Lot number 22 in the south west quadrant of the Little Nine Partners Patent was one of seven lots devised to Robert Lurting, a Manhattan vendue master (auctioneer) who was a vestryman at Trinity Church in the late 1790s (*Fig. 2*). Robert Lurting served as Mayor of New York City from 1726 until his death in 1735. Lurting's shares in the patent were passed to Robert Livingston and the sons of Rip Van Dam after his death. Lot 22 was solely owned by Livingston by 1760 when he sold that 911 acre parcel to Johannes Rau, Jr. (1722-1771), son of Palatine refugees. Rau and his wife, Catherine Loescher, were married in Germantown in 1748 and moved to Lot 22 where they built the original homestead on what is now Rowe [sic] Rd. in 1766 (*Fig. 3*).



Fig. 3 – Ruins of Johannes & Catherine Rau House, 1766 (not extant). Historic American Building Survey, 1933.

Fig. 4 – View of Philip & Margaret Row Farm, Field Rd., Milan, ca. 1781, from south. Photo by Neil Larson, 2017.





Fig. 5 – View of house from southeast. Photo by Neil Larson, 2017.

Johannes Rau (Row) is credited with having brought the religious practice of Methodism with him and a church of that denomination was established near Milanville by 1790. Johannes and Catherine had four sons among whom their acreage was divided: John, Sebastian, Philip and Mark. The sons had the most valuable property in the town by far according to the federal tax records for this period.

### Philip & Margaret Row House, ca. 1781

Philip Row (1757-1835) married Margaret Stoutenberg in 1781. They settled on the land allotted to him

and proceeded to have a house and barn built. Both buildings survive (*Fig. 4*). Although altered, the house retains the form, structure and features consistent with the 18th-century Hudson Valley vernacular architecture associated with the Palatine Germans moving out from East Camp (Germantown) into neighboring areas in Livingston Manor in Columbia County and the patents in northern Dutchess County (*Fig. 5*). The barn is constructed entirely with hewn timbers and appears to have been built in the same era as the house. It is an English barn type with an early example of a swing beam (*Figs. 6 & 7*).

As with other Dutch and German wood frame houses of the mid-to-late 18th century, the Row house was constructed with a series of nine H-shaped “bents” that are lined up, one behind the next (*Fig. 8*). Massive beams connect to pairs of posts with pegged mortise-and-tenon joints to form a bent. Bents are spaced 3-1/2 ft. to and 5-1/2 ft. apart with posts mortised into sills and top plates that run the length of the house. Rafter pairs are aligned above each bent. The joint between the rafter and collar beam is a half dovetail.

The original posts and rafters appear to be chestnut. The posts have a vertical grooves cut into their sides to hold horizontal wood staves that served as a matrix

Fig. 6 – View of barn from southeast. Photo by Neil Larson, 2017.





Fig. 7 – View of barn interior and swing beam. Photo by Neil Larson, 2017.

for mud and straw, a locally common infill technique. This type of infill is still found in the walls of 18th-century houses in the region, using a variety of techniques to channel the staves, such as the Palatine Farmstead and the Matthias Progue house (1762) in Rhinebeck and the William Pitcher Farmstead (circa 1740) and the Elmendorph Inn (1760) in Red Hook. Beams supporting the first floor are hewn from oak, a practice followed to discourage rot in humid basements and crawl spaces. The bent beams appear to be tulip wood, a tree once-common in the region.

The Row house has a two-room plan, with each room having its own front door (Fig. 8). Its late-18th-century construction date is indicated by the fact that it had fireplaces on the end walls rather than a central jambless fireplace between the rooms as illustrated in Fig. 8. The end fireplaces and chimneys were removed sometime in the mid-19th century, when the house was substantially renovated. The east ell, south porch, west sunroom, north aisle addition, and shed dormer were all added later.

The beams in the west room are smoothed and beaded on the bottom edges. This detail indicates these beams were intended to be exposed in the ceiling. The beams of the east room are neither

smoothed nor beaded. Nail marks are evidence that the ceiling in this room was plastered, and as is the case in so many “restorations” the beams were exposed to create a nostalgic primitive appearance. This hierarchy of finishes reflects changing tastes occurring in the late 1700s where plaster was the better material, although the traditional wood ceiling was preserved in the lesser room.

Fig. 8 – Isometric drawing of Framing diagram of Winnie House, 1751. <https://minerdescent.com/2010/08/14/peter-winne-i/>.

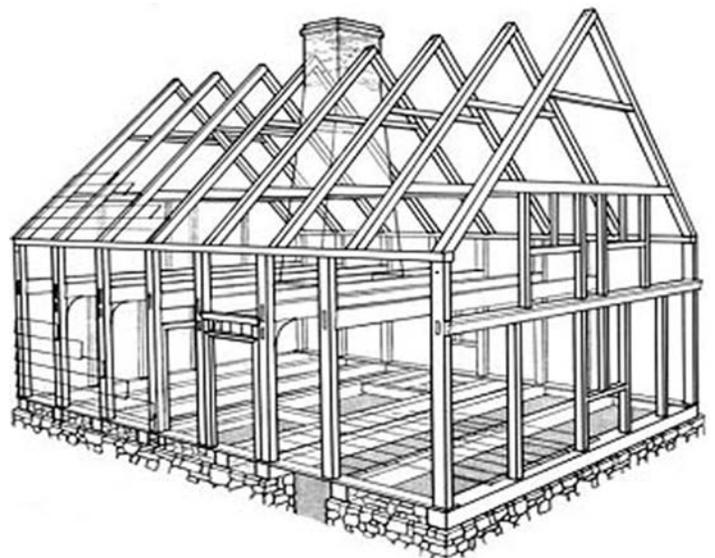




Fig. 9 – View of house from southwest. Photo by Neil Larson, 2017.

The exposed anchor beam of the wall between the east and west rooms on the main floor, as well as the anchor beams on the gable ends are not finished or beaded because they were never meant to be seen. Now that they are exposed, peg holes are visible on the end walls where there had been studs framing windows on either side of the removed fireplaces. Extant windows in the old section of the house were installed in the late 19th century. The current owner replaced the flooring in the two rooms because of the poor, unstable condition in which she found the original. Old floorboards exist on the second floor, but have been patched at the ends where the chimneys were removed.

Among Philip and Margaret Row's children were sons Philip, John, and William. In the federal tax records between 1799 and 1803, the value of Philip Row's farm increased from \$2422 to \$3257, while his personal property fluctuated between \$0 and \$618. These changes reflect the fact that in 1800, Philip Row purchased an additional 93 acres bordering his property on the south from Isaac and Charity Wilson. This property became the farm of Philip's oldest son John P. Row.

Philip Row's farm was conveyed to Henry I. Teats in a deed dated 1846 by the executors of his will: his son, William P. Row, and second cousin, Leonard Row, a founder of the Pine Plains Bank. The property –100

acres and 27 rods – is described as being bound to the north, east, and south by lands of John P. Row and to the west by Robert E. Thorn. The sale price was \$2646.80.

### Sigler Family period, 1850-1889

On May 1, 1850 the farm was purchased by Samuel Sigler of Upper Red Hook—also a Palatine descendant—for \$3300. Samuel Sigler and his wife, Hannah, arrived in Milan with their children; Susan, William, Eliza, Hannah, Henry, Mary, and Sylvester who ranged in age from 24 down to 8 years. The U.S. Census Agricultural Schedule compiled in August that year, notes that the Siglers had the following: 80 acres improved land and 20 acres unimproved land, 2 horses, 5 milk cows, 9 sheep, and 15 swine. Since arriving four month earlier, the Siglers had managed to coax from their land and livestock: 110 pounds of butter, 100 pounds of wool, 180 bushels rye, 50 bushels Indian corn, and 100 bushels oats.

Samuel Sigler died in 1854. In 1860, four of his children were living at home with his widow; the two oldest, William and Mary, and the two youngest – Mary and Sylvester. Hannah is listed as the head of household and her occupation is “farmer” while William (age 30) is a “farm laborer” with no land assets. Samuel's brother Conrad and his family had a farm just north of Hannah's.

The census of 1870 still lists Hannah (age 66) as the head of household with real estate valued at \$4000 and personal property of \$1100. William is in residence with his new wife, Margaret Davis, and his brother, Sylvester. Production on the farm in 1870 is as follows:

- 200 pounds butter
- 140 pounds wool
- 200 pounds Irish potatoes
- 20 tons hay
- 80 bushels rye
- 100 bushels Indian corn
- 200 bushels oats
- Value of animals slaughtered \$200
- Value of wages paid (including board) \$400

Hannah Sigler died in 1875 and the farm was sold to John Saulpaugh, Jr. of Red Hook by William Sigler and Lewis Saulpaugh as executors for Samuel Sigler's will of 1854. John Saulpaugh, Jr. was likely a relative of Hannah (nee Saulpaugh) Sigler. William, Margaret (nee Davis), and Sylvester Sigler continued to live in the house as tenants, but within a year of Hannah's death, Sylvester killed himself with strychnine in an Upper Red Hook boarding house. William and Margaret lived in the house until his death in 1889.

## Changes made to the house

It was during this period that the Row farmhouse, by then getting close to 100 years old, was renovated and modernized. The six-over-six windows in the gable ends appear to date to when the Siglers took over the farm in 1850 (*Fig. 9*). They indicate when the upper story of the house was partitioned into the present

plan: a central space containing the stairs flanked by two chambers centered on the ridge and four small, low rooms under the eaves. They are divided by wood partitions with remarkably wide boards. The existing stairs at the rear of the hall replace a steeper set in the same location. Their location rely on the shed addition along the rear wall of the house having been added at this time for a kitchen (*Fig. 10*). The two-over-two windows on the first floor probably were added after the Saulspaugh's bought the property in 1875. Knowing that those on the end walls are in new locations closer to the center, it is likely that the fireplaces and chimneys were removed at this time. (It is not entirely clear how the house was heated afterwards.) Other changes include the installation of the two-light doors on the south side of the house and, likely, the application of the "drop" or "cove" or "German" siding.

The chain of title after the Sigler family is as follows:

- Raymond S. and Millie Ackert
- Frank and Lena Jacoby, 4 June 1919
- May E. Geisler, 11 July 1929
- Mary E. McCaffrey and Rosemary Sherman  
(inherited), 1955
- Amanda and Mitchell Bodian 13 March 1986

## Geisler Family Period, 1929 -1986

The transformation of the old farmhouse into a Bungalow-style cottage probably was made after May E. Geisler was deeded the property in 1929. She was the wife of William Geisler, a salesman, and they owned a two-family house in Queens, New York, with a household that in 1930 included three young daughters and May's mother and brother. The Geislers used the Milan house as a summer retreat, adding a large room and bathroom in the northwest corner, a deep porch on the front, overlooking a pond created at the time, and a shed dormer in the Craftsman manner.

Two of May and William Geisler's daughters inherited the house and owned it until 1986 when the farmstead was bought by the current owners who added the kitchen ell on the east side of the house. The barn was unaltered; new siding was added recently. Within its evolved exterior envelope, this surviving 18th-century dwelling retains valuable evidence of the subtle changes that took place in the vernacular architecture of this German-American community as the generations progressed. How many more of these early wood frame dwellings are out there disguised as summer cottages and bungalows?

Fig. 10 – View of house from northeast. Photo by Neil Larson, 2017.



## Rare 18th century dwelling found in Austerlitz – Revisited

Last spring's issue of the HVVA Newsletter (Vol.1, April – June 2016) contained an article on a small timber-frame dwelling with a gambrel roof in Spencertown, Columbia County (Fig. 1). It had attracted the attention of historians there because it was framed with bents, which in the context of the area's general architectural association with New England seemed somewhat of an anomaly. Some thought it may be a rare example of Dutch or German settlers moving east, which is not unheard of in eastern New York and western Massachusetts. There also was a story passed along by owners of the house that it had originated as a kitchen ell of a large house and had been moved to its current location when that house was demolished around 1930. An inspection of the house did not fully resolve the matter. There were aspects of the dimensions, plan and evidence of a chimney having been on an end wall that were uncharacteristic of a stand-alone dwelling, and bent frame was plausible for a narrow ell or outbuilding.

Since documentation for the lost house was not at hand at the time, the article included a photograph of an

18th-century gambrel roof house in Connecticut with a ell that looked very much like the house. Austerlitz Town Historian Thomas H. Moreland began searching around for information regarding the big house and its demise. There was some sense that a predecessor in his position, Anna Rundell, had written something about it in the local paper. In a vertical file on Spencertown in the Chatham Public Library, Tom found a photocopy of an article in the 11 June 1959 issue of the *Chatham Courier* entitled "How Spencertown Lost a Landmark" written by Mrs. Frank Rundell, Sr. It included the photograph poorly reprinted here (Fig. 2).

She began lamenting that "One of the most handsome houses in the Town of Austerlitz was reduced to rubble about three decades ago" and wistfully recalling that it might have been restored. Rundell went on to provide some background on the "curb-roofed frame home" erected in 1795 by John Griswold.

John Griswold was a young woolen manufacturer from Connecticut whose carding shop was just across the

Fig. 1 – View of Austerlitz house from northwest.



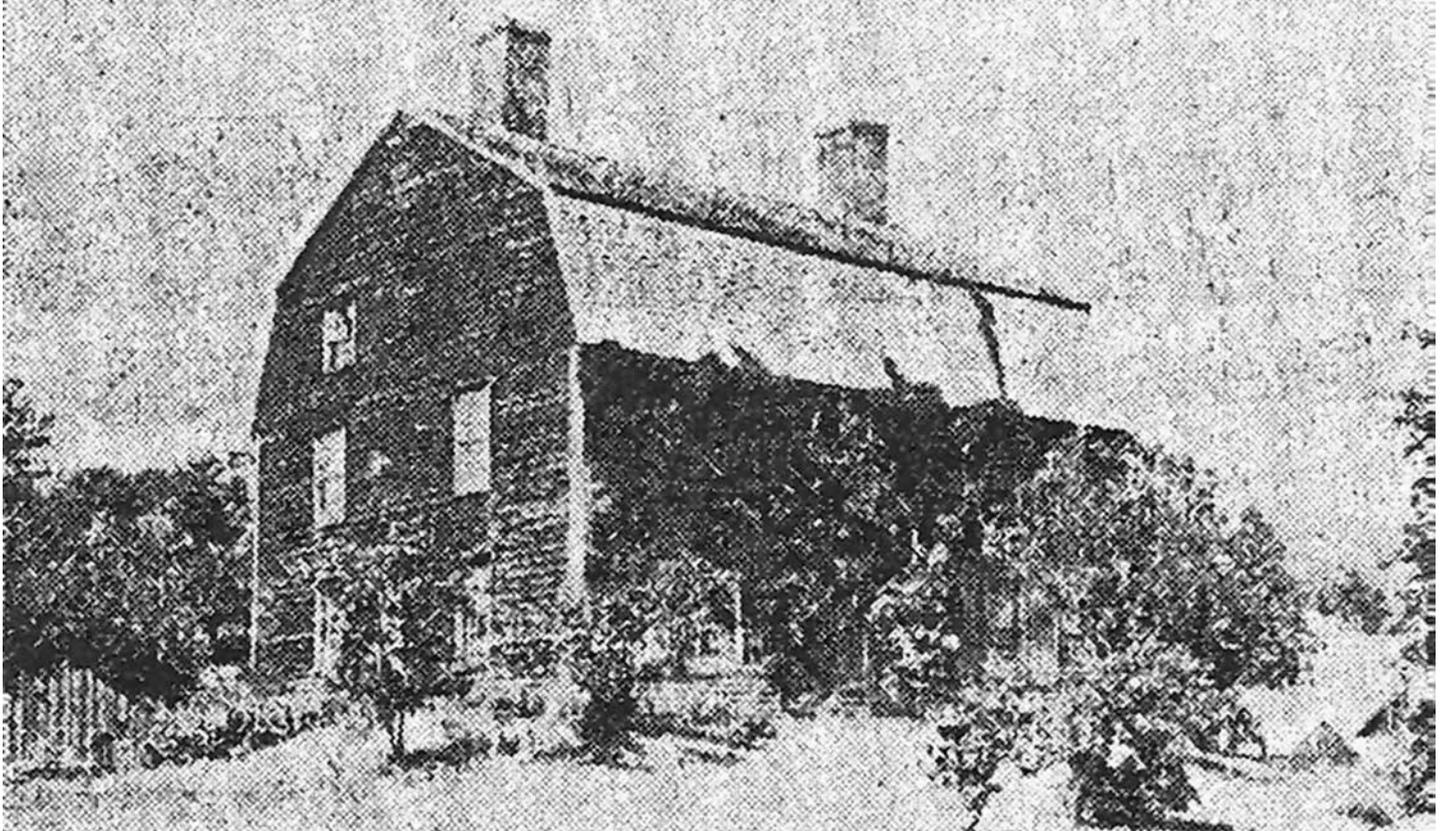


Fig. 2 – John Griswold House, Spencertown, ca. 1795, photo taken ca.1908. From Mrs. Frank Rundell, Sr., “How Spencertown Lost a Landmark,” *Chatham Courier*, 11 June 1959.

road near the ruins of the mill dam. Consider his home with a rectangular foundation 30 by 50 feet. Lay out this area into six squares 15 by 15 feet each and we have the ground plan for six rooms. The hall occupied practically all of the middle two squares, reaching from the big four-foot-wide front door with its brass knocker to the back yard.

Occupying the front square was a great ornamental cherry staircase said to have cost \$1000. It rested on three sides of the room and made a landing on a gallery in front. The staircase well extended nearly to the roof. Equidistant from the ends of the house were the mammoth brick and stone chimneys. At least thirty thousand bricks were used in the two chimneys and a nearly equal number sealing up the entire first story of the house. Two-inch pipe sheathing was then put on and covered with narrow clapboarding.\* Riveted [riven?] shingles and hand forged wrought iron nails were used.

The frame timbers [rafters?] had the natural taper. It was of course easier to follow the natural taper of the tree in scoring and hewing. A balustrade crowned the upper part of the roof while a smaller one surrounded a sight-seeing platform or “Widow’s Walk” on the peak

to which access was had by way of the garret stairs and a scuttle with a trap door. The carving on the outside under the eaves was painted with gold leaf and it is said a barrel of it was used.

The old house remained in the possession of the Griswold family for years and it was later purchased by Edward Peterson. Of course nothing remains of this gigantic home today, except that many Spencertown chimneys can proudly boast that their pink brick came from the house that John Griswold erected back in 1795.

And probably except the kitchen ell that was moved across the road. That Anna Rundell did not mention a kitchen ell leaves some unresolved ambiguity. And the photograph does not show one apparently concealed behind the house in this view. Yet, a house of this magnitude would have had a kitchen ell, and this information supports the enduring story that it survives in the form of the house that was the subject of the previous article.

\* The nature “pipe sheathing” is unknown to us. Other houses of this scale and period erected by Connecticut migrants in this town were plank construction.

### Membership info

If you have been receiving this newsletter, but your membership is not current and you wish to continue to receive the HVVA newsletter and participate in the many house-study tours offered each year, **please send in your dues.**

Membership currently pays all the HVVA bills and to keep us operating in the black. **Each of us must contribute a little.**

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Left: George Gross House, Marbletown, Ulster County, ca. 1820. Right: Wood panel in George Gross House. Photos by Neil Larson, 2016.

This past August, Ken Krabbenhoft conducted a study tour of houses in Marbletown, Ulster County. One of the properties we visited had an odd feature never-before seen in the many stone houses HVVA has visited over the years. This decorative object, measuring about 18: x 24", depicted in the photo above, has attenuated, reeded pilasters and complex base and top moldings seen on doorways and fireplaces in Ulster County constructed in the 1820s. Was it a carpenter's work sample embedded in the plaster wall of the living room at a later time? The current owner reported that the house was built by George Gross, a blacksmith, in 1797. Story was that he was related to the local Van Wagenen family and had come from Perkiomen, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. This fact was used to explain the atypical two-story house with a four-bay front façade and room configuration resembling the three-room "Continental" plan popular with the Pennsylvania Germans. Some of these Pennsylvania houses contain a small window, often originally closed by a sliding panel. These are known to German folklorists as *seelenfensters*, or spirit windows. They were opened when someone died to allow the soul of the deceased to leave the house and, then, closed to prevent it from returning. An example of a *seelenfenster* can be seen in a house known as Fort Zeller in Newmanstown, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania and recorded by HABS in 1940.

So, was this wall panel an icon symbolizing the traditional Pennsylvania German spirit window? Yet, the design of the panel reflects the a 19th-century Ulster County style, which is a provocative mutation of time and place. It also brings into question the construction date of the house. George Gross and Solomon Van Wagenen appear as neighbors on the 1797 map of Marbletown but Gross is not recorded in the 1798 Federal Direct Tax list that exists for the town indicating that his house was valued at less than \$100 and therefore probably was not a two-story stone house. George Gross died in 1820, a more likely timeframe for the house. His wife and progeny are not known (his neighbors at the corner of Rest Plaus Road, Isaac and Maria Hasbrouck had a son named George Gross Hasbrouck born in 1817), and it is unlikely that anybody but the Pennsylvania migrant himself would have memorialized architectural features from his native colony. The four window bays across the second story recall the reorganization of facade elements of Continental plan houses that took place in the 19th century. Those houses generally had two front doors in the center of the first story. Here, they are replaced by an oddly-placed, wide, single entrance opening on a corner stair hall inside. As usual, more investigation into the construction history of the house and the backgrounds of its owners is necessary.

### 2017 Upcoming Events

- March 18** Tour of Glebe House & Dutchess County Historical Society Archives, Clinton House, Poughkeepsie (Rob Sweeney)
- April 15** Tour of Hamlet of Walkkill, Ulster County
- May 20** Tour of Clermont barns with Dutch Barn Preservation Society
- June 17** Tour of Van Rensselaer house and mill, Claverack, Columbia county (Bill & Judy McMillen)
- July 8** Hurley Stone House Day & HVVA Annual Picnic (Jim Decker)