



Tour of North Greenbush, Rensselaer County, New York
19 August 2017

The tour begins at 10am; please meet at 1744 Washington Avenue Extension, Rensselaer, NY (the John E. and Anne Freyenmoet van Alen house) for carpooling to the first site. We will be leaving at 9:50am. If you are interested in seeing the Van Alen house (which has been on our tours in the past), it will be open from 9:30am. All the sites we are visiting today are within the Town of North Greenbush; because there is no post office with that name, mailing addresses are shared with neighboring cities of Troy, Rensselaer, and the Village of Wynantskill. It can be confusing.

Today we will visit three homes of the founding families of this part of the larger town formerly known as Greenbush. Within the Rensselaer Manor, farms in the part of the patroon's lands were opened for settlement in the early 18th century. Among the earliest European-American families to settle here were descendants of older Hudson Valley Dutch families and recently-arrived Palatines. The DeFreests, for whom the hamlet of DeFreestville was named, established a number of farms along the principal north-south road in this part of the county, today's Route 4. Road straightening in the 1930s alienated some segments of this road; in the town these pieces are generally known as Bloomingrove Drive.

DeFreest farms could, at one time, be found from south of the intersection with the military road (the Albany-Boston highway, now called Washington Avenue Extension), at the south, extending about 2.5 miles northward. Their neighbors to the north were the Van Den Burghs, who settled in the area in about 1710. Portions of the earliest remaining Van Den Burgh house were standing until last year.

The Rysdorph house is an example of dwellings built by second generation Palatine immigrants. It shares with the Sharpe house (not on today's tour) many construction details, including the use of bent frames with corbelled braces, and trenched posts to receive sticking. This latter feature is frequently encountered in southern Columbia and Northern Dutchess counties, areas where settlers of East Camp (Germantown) moved into during the course of the 18th century.

The Rysedorph house, Mammoth Spring Road, Wynantskill



Figure 1. The Rysedorph house (W. Wheeler, 2009)

From the exterior, this house looks like a rather conventional upright-and-wing Greek Revival dwelling from the middle of the 19th century. What those alterations conceal is an early dwelling with corbelled bent frame and grooved posts, and a late-18th century wing.

Among the most interesting features in the house is the hearth cradle in the basement.

The Juria Sharpe house, 44 Laura Lane, North Greenbush—**Visit to this site cancelled**

This house, although extensively remodeled, still retains many early features. The frame consists of 10 bents, unequally spaced. The post-to-anchorbeam joints were secured with curved corbels, some of which survive. The sides of the posts were trenched for receiving sticking, or sapling laths, to which mud daubing was originally applied. When a small wing was removed in 1982, a pair of shutters—enclosed behind a wall since at least the 1850s if not much earlier—were discovered. The shutters retained their original paint surface, and are now part of the collections of the New York State Museum.

The first floor beams are laid so that their broader face is horizontal; this is frequently an indication of an early date of construction.



Figure 2 View of the Sharpe house after the removal of a small wing, exposing original shutters (Photograph by Sam Swanson, 1982).

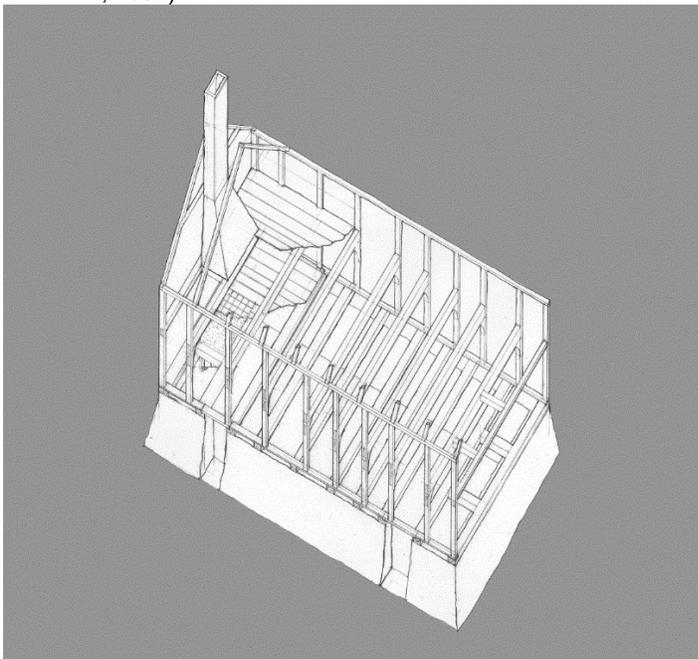
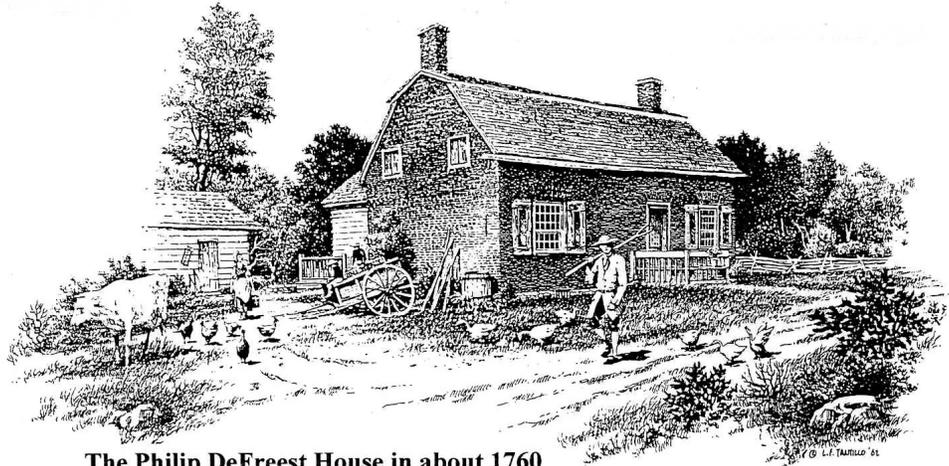


Figure 3. Axonometric framing drawing (W. Wheeler, 2003).

The Philip DeFrest house, DeFrest Drive, North Greenbush

A small wood-frame dwelling with brick veneer, the Philip DeFrest house has a wood-frame wing which appears represent—or retain portions of—an earlier house. Compare the structural details of the wing with those of the Rysedorph house. The DeFrest family had as many as three farmsteads in the immediate area by 1767. This gambrel-roofed house should be compared with that built by his brother, David, next on the tour. The two houses are listed together, as a National Register district.



**The Philip DeFreest House in about 1760
Rensselaer County, NY by L.F.Tantillo, 1982**

Figure 4. Although the above caption (from an HVVA newsletter) attributes a construction date of c. 1760 to the house, it is probable that the gambrel-roofed section was built closer to 1770 (Len Tantillo 1982).

The David DeFreest house, Jordan Road, North Greenbush

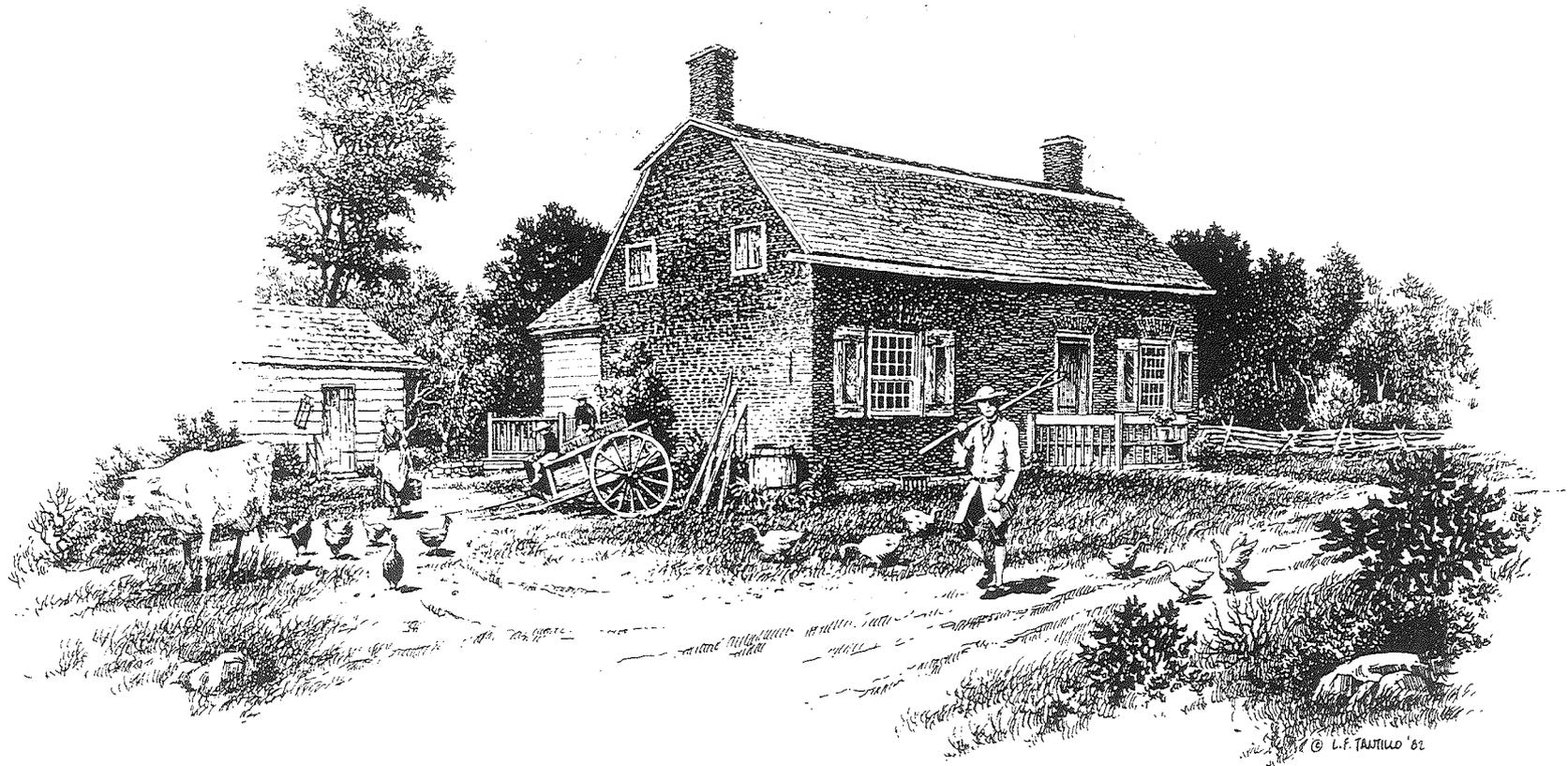
The earlier (brick-faced) portion of this house has been dendrodated to 1771 (see a copy of the report on the HVVA website). The wood-frame portion of the house was built at an unknown date, but appears to incorporate some early framing. The house was divided into a two-generation home by the mid-19th century, when it was occupied by the Jordan family. Karen and Chuck Fisher purchased the house from the Jordans in the 1970s.

Be sure to investigate the hearth supports in the basement. Upstairs contains a warren of rooms—don't get lost!

The creation of present-day Route 4 to the west of the house alienated it from the rest of Jordan Road, separating it from the Philip DeFreest farmstead. The creation of Route 4 also had a direct impact on the David DeFreest farmstead; the New World Dutch Barn associated with the house, which was located on the new road's alignment, was razed. Recent clearing of the lot to the west has revealed the concrete base for a silo once attached to this barn. A modern gambrel-roofed barn was constructed to the east of the house, to replace it.



Figure 5. View looking southeast at the David DeFreest house.



THE PHILIP DEFREEST HOUSE

Constructed between 1720 & 1760, is one of the oldest surviving examples of early Dutch architecture in the Upper Hudson Valley.

After major fire damage, the building was restored as headquarters for the Rensselaer Technology Park in North Greenbush, New York.

This project funded by a generous gift from Mrs. Patricia Roberts.

THE LAND

In approximately 1630, Killian Van Rensselaer was granted authority by the Dutch West India Company to develop Rensselaers Wick. The patroonship, initially granted for the west side of the Hudson River, gradually expanded during the 1600's to include most of what is now Rensselaer and Albany Counties outside the City of Albany. Rensselaers Wick was the only one of the early patroonships which survived and prospered through the English colonial period into the early years of the American Republic.

The patroonship was a quasi-feudal land development scheme. Settlers leased their land for settlement and productive use from the patroon who retained ownership. In exchange for the lease, the settler was obligated to pay the patroon an annual rent. David DeFreest and his three sons, Philip, Martin and Jacob, all became settlers of the Van Rensselaer Patroon. All three sons raised huge families, were leaders in the community and became patriots in the Revolution. The hamlet of Defreestville, located in the Town of North Greenbush, was named after the family.

The anti-rent wars of the early 19th century expressed the revolt of independent local American farmers to the perpetual obligation to a wealthy landowner. In response to the anti-rent controversy, the New York State legislature forced an end to the lease holdings by 1850.

By the early 1900's the property of the descendants of Philip DeFreest had passed into the Jordan family, which continued to occupy and farm the land until 1940. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) acquired this land in 1969. The original plans of RPI, to move their campus to the site, were abandoned when additional land became available near their present location in the City of Troy. After considering a number of possible uses for the land, RPI announced plans to develop it into a high-technology park in 1981.

The Structure

Historians speculate that Philip DeFreest built his home about the time of his marriage in 1740. It is possible that the frame portion was constructed by Philip's father, David, as early as 1720. The DeFreest House is strategically located on a wooded triangle of land overlooking a stream and the Hudson River Valley. Within its walls and foundations are priceless clues to the lives and personalities of the early Dutch settlers of the Valley.

The Defreest homestead was one of the early Rensselaers Wick farms and is a rare surviving example of 18th century Dutch architecture of the region. This building (along with a companion homestead - the David DeFreest House - which is privately owned on nearby land)

retains many of the elements of its original construction, which dates from a period when each and every building was an individual production of elements laboriously made by hand.

The main portion of the house is a gambrel-roofed structure, one and a half stories high, of brick laid up in Flemish bond. The rear wing is a gable-roofed addition, also one and a half stories in height. Both the gambrel-roofed design and a number of architectural details, such as the exposed knee brace, smooth planed beams and ceiling planks, rooflines that are flush with the gable ends, plain wrought iron beam anchors and some splayed brick lintels, were characteristic of homes built in the Hudson Valley during this period. Of particular note is the use of small, handmade, unevenly fired bricks, which provide outstanding testimony to the individual labor which went into the building materials as well as the general construction. The excellent condition of these materials and the house itself speak well for the workmanship of the Philip DeFreest family.

The DeFreest house, along with the adjoining land passed from the DeFreest family to the Jordan family, which continued to use it as a residence until 1940. By the time RPI took ownership of the property, the building had been vacant for a number of years. In 1977, through the efforts of RPI and local historical societies, the Philip DeFreest homestead (and the nearby David DeFreest homestead) were listed on the "National Register of Historic Places". RPI began efforts to help preserve the building. However, in 1979 a tragic fire severely damaged the interior of the Philip DeFreest house.

1 STABILIZE EXISTING FIREPLACE STRUCTURE.

2 EXTEND FIR FLOORING TO MATCH EXISTING. REFRESH ALL EXISTING WOOD FLOORS TO BE EXPOSED.

3 REMOVE ALL INTERIOR FINISHES, EXPOSE EXISTING WALLS AND INSULATE WITH R-15 FIBERGLASS AND R-4 THERMAX.

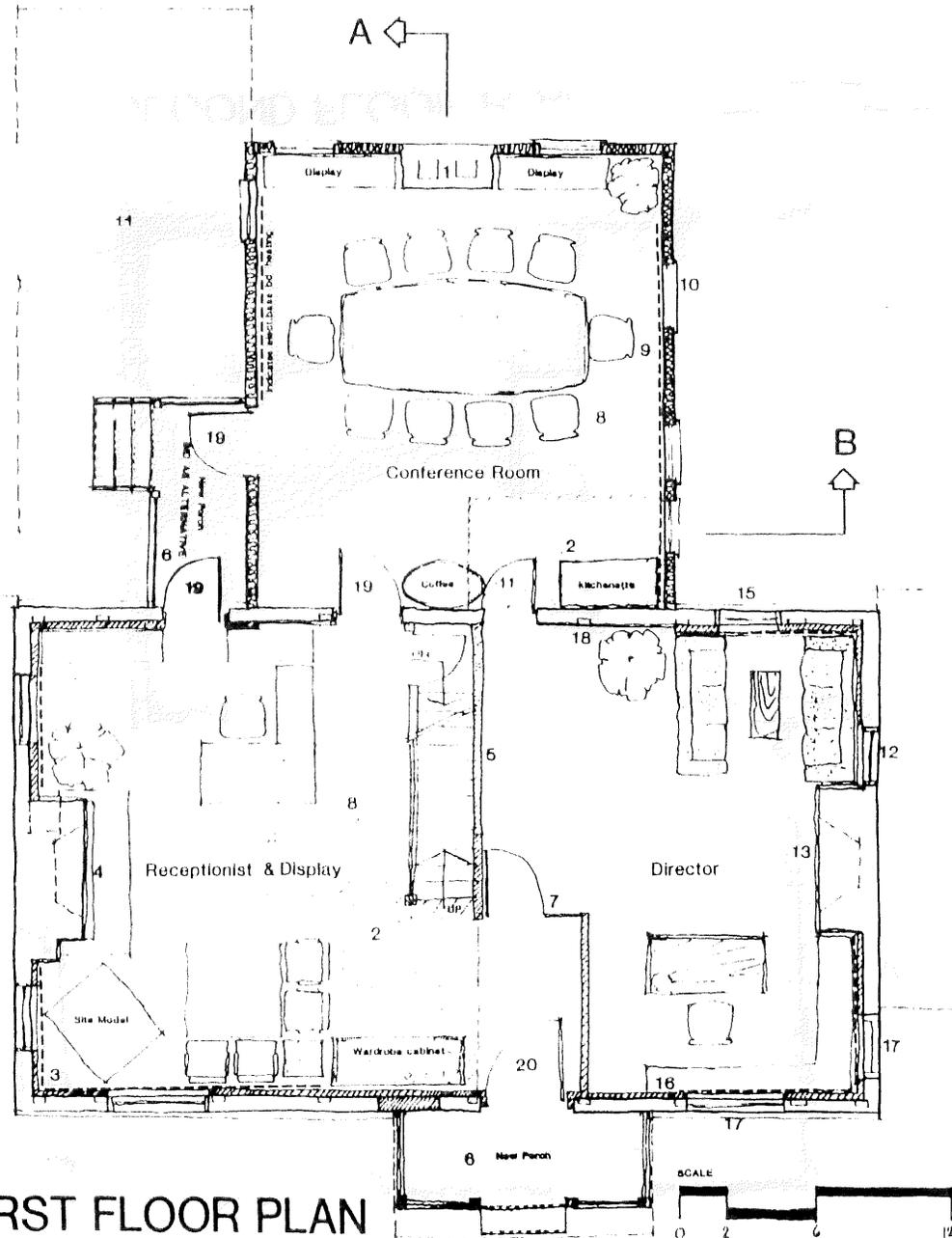
4 RESTORE EXISTING WOODEN FIREPLACE MANTLE AND PROVIDE GLASS DOORS. BELIEVE FLOOR TO MAKE FIREPLACE USABLE (WED AS ALTERNATIVE).

5 CONSTRUCT NEW INTERIOR PARTITIONS.

6 CONSTRUCT NEW PORCH.

7 PROVIDE NEW GLASS OFFICE ENTRY.

FIRST FLOOR PLAN



8 CLEAN ALL EXISTING CEILINGS AND WOODEN BEAMS (PRESSURIZED WALNUT SHEELS).

9 REMOVE ALL EXISTING WALLBOARD, INSULATE AND PROVIDE NEW GYPSUM WALLBOARD.

10 SCRAP, REFINISH, RE-GLAZE AND REPAIR EXISTING WINDOW UNITS TO BE REUSED (TYPICAL)

CLEAN, REPAIR, SCRAP, RE-SEAL AND REPAINT ALL EXISTING WOOD SIDING AND TRIM.

CLEAN ALL EXTERIOR BRICK AND STONE, ROUTE OUT JOINTS AND REPOINT WITH MORTAR TO MATCH EXISTING IN COLOR, TEXTURE, HARDNESS AND TOOLING.

11 CLEAN AND REUSE EXISTING DOOR AND FRAME.

12 BRICK UP EXISTING OPENING, BRICK AND MORTAR TO MATCH EXISTING. OPTION INSTALL SALVAGED WINDOW UNIT.

13 PROVIDE NEW WOODEN FIREPLACE MANTLE AND GLASS DOORS TO MATCH MANTLE IN RECEPTION AREA.

14 REMOVE EXISTING ADDITION. SAVE ALL WINDOW UNITS, TRIM AND DOORS.

15 PROVIDE NEW STORM WINDOWS FOR ALL WINDOW OPENINGS.

16 PROVIDE NEW GYPSUM WALLBOARD INTERIOR WITH PAINT AND WALL PAPER FINISH.

17 PROVIDE NEW SASH AND FRAME.

18 EXPOSE ALL STRUCTURAL WOOD BENTS & TREAT FOR INSECT DAMAGE. REPLACE ALL DETERIORATED PARTS

19 REUSE SALVAGED DOOR IF POSSIBLE. PROVIDE NEW WOOD PANEL DOOR IF NECESSARY

20 PROVIDE NEW ENTRY DOOR & FRAME USING PERIOD DETAILS

NEW GUTTERS & DOWN SPOUTS
EXIST MASONRY

3/4" ROEK GLASS BAY INSL
1" THERMAX RIGID INSL
1/2" THERMAX RIGID INSL
3/4" FIBER GLASS
1/2" S.W.B.(D.P.)
WP BASE BO

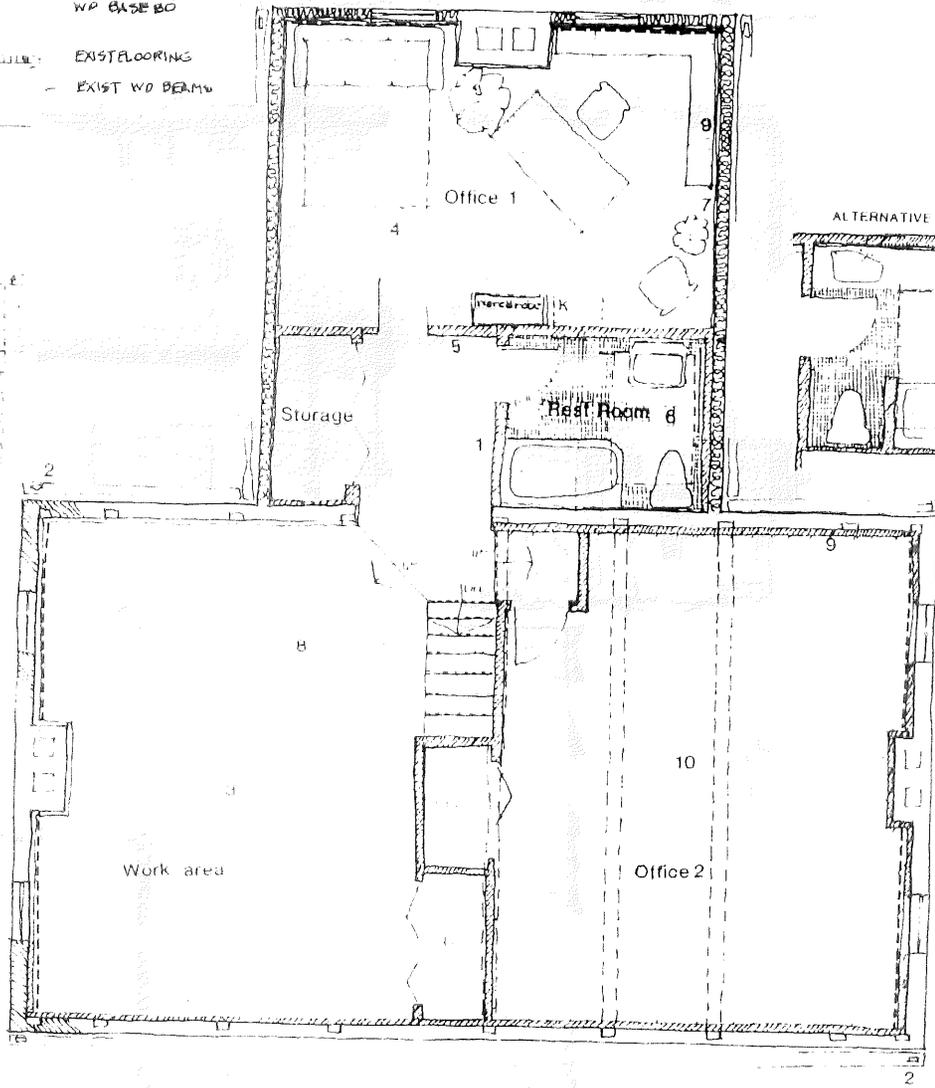
EXIST FLOORING
EXIST WD BEAM

1 LAYER OF FLOORING TO MATCH EXISTING. REFER TO EXISTING WOOD FLOOR FOR FINISH.

WALL SECTION
3/4" 1'-0"

2 INCREASE GUTTERS AND DOWN SPOUTS

3) NAIL SHEATH OVER ALL SAVED EXISTING FLOOR



4 REFINISH EXISTING PLANK FLOORING.

5 CONSTRUCT NEW INTERIOR PARTITIONS AS SHOWN.

6 PROVIDE NEW KIST FACILITIES SKYLIGHT REQUIRED FOR HEAD ROOM.

7 PROVIDE NEW G/PSUM WALLBOARD INTERIOR SURFACE WITH PAINT FINISH.

8 INSULATE EXISTING ROOF TRUSS SYSTEM WITH 1 1/2" FIBERGLASS AND 1/2" THERMAX SHEATHING ALL CEILINGS.

9 REMOVE ALL INTERIOR FINISHES, FURK EXISTING WALLS AND INSULATE WITH 1 1/2" FIBERGLASS AND 1/2" THERMAX.

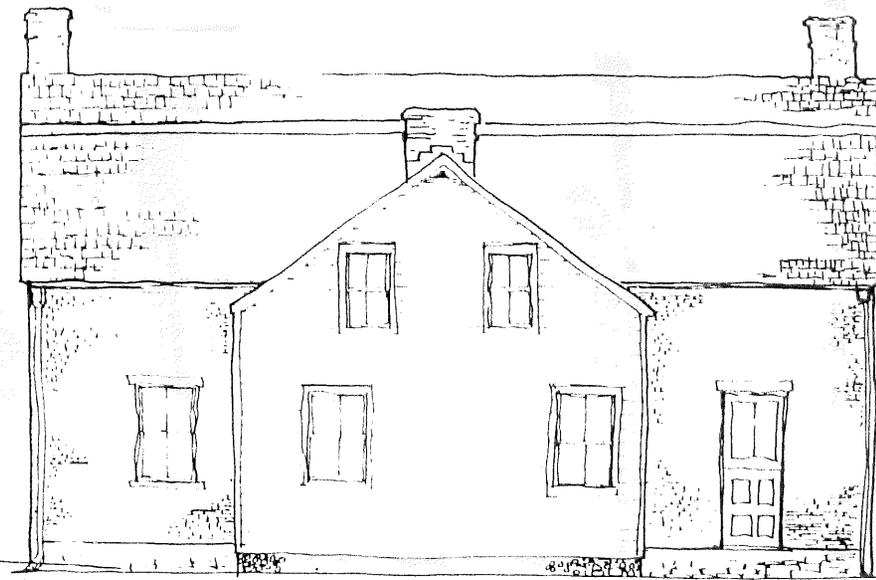
10 REPLACE EXISTING BURNED-OUT FLOOR BEAMS. PROVIDE NEW PLANK FLOOR.

SECOND FLOOR PLAN





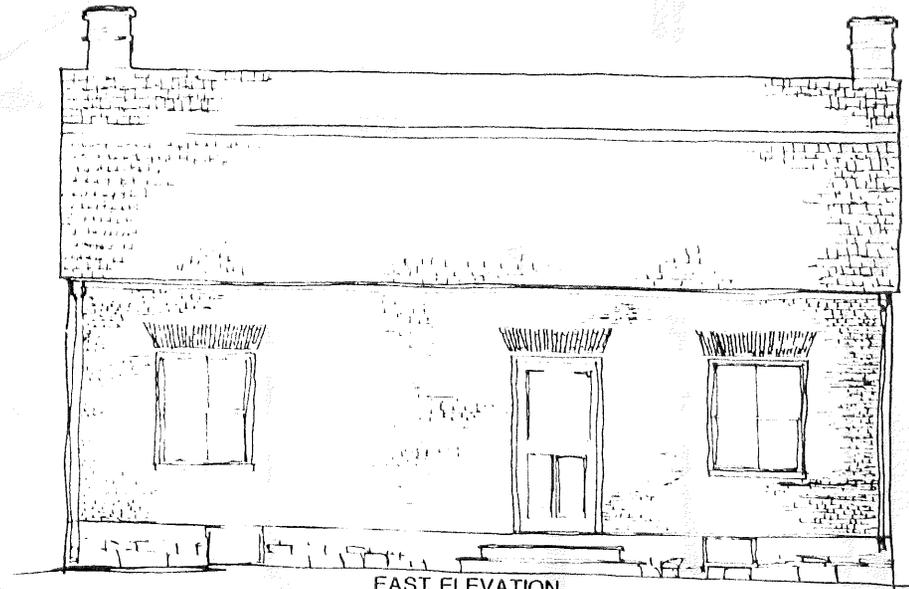
SOUTH ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION



EAST ELEVATION

5

RENOVATION OF THE DEFREEST HOUSE

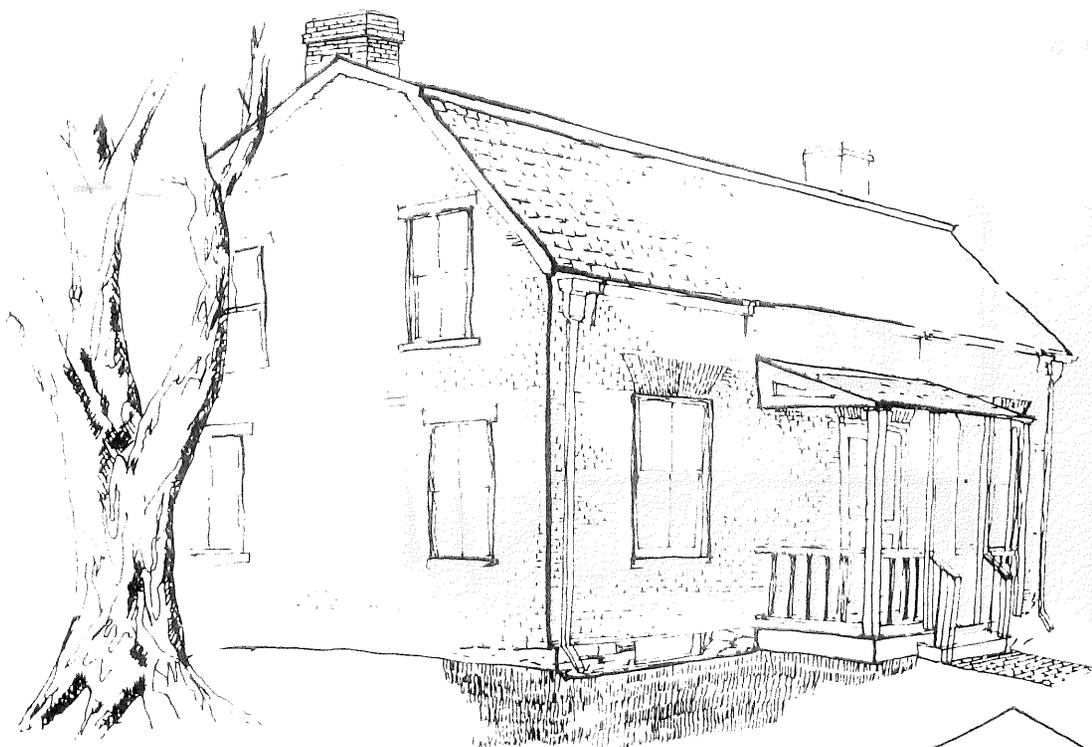
Rensselaer Technology Center
Lepera, Goergen & Ward, P.C.

Architects

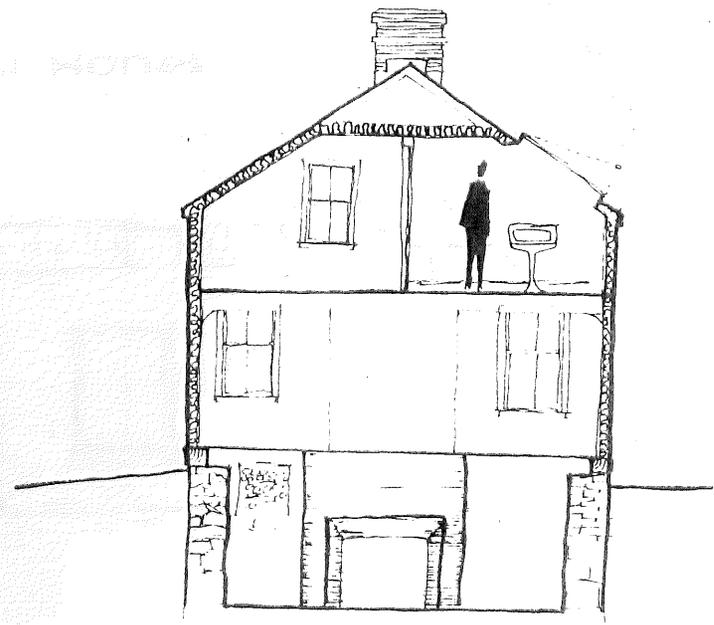
DESIGN PHASE DEC. 1, 1981

North Greenbush, New York

Troy, New York



PERSPECTIVE



SECTION B



SECTION A

The DeFreest House

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute is involved in bold new initiatives for the future that will ensure its position among the leading technological universities of the world.

One of the most significant of these initiatives is the development of the Rensselaer Technology Center on 1,200 acres of land owned by the Institute in the Town of North Greenbush, a fifteen-minute drive from the campus.

The Center will provide an environment where technological enterprises can develop and flourish through creative interaction with RPI's faculty and students. It will be patterned on similar successful ventures that have sprung up near other major technological universities, specifically, the Route 128 developments around Boston and associated with MIT; the Silicon Valley developments associated with Stanford; and the research park at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. While the fundamental purpose of the new technology center will be to enhance teaching and research opportunities for RPI's faculty and students, it will also produce substantial economic benefits to business and commerce in the Capital District, the State of New York, and the Northeast.

This impressive parcel of land, which presents such exciting prospects for the future, includes among its resources a valuable and irreplaceable link with the area's past. This is the Philip DeFreest House, an all-too-rare example of the type of 18th Century Dutch homestead that formerly dotted these hills and valleys. RPI's Board of Trustees is convinced that this building is eminently worthy of preservation for the benefit and enrichment of future generations.

The DeFreest House is strategically located on a wooded triangle of land at the very entrance to the new Technology Center. It commands a gentle ridge overlooking a brook and the Hudson Valley beyond. Within its walls and foundations are priceless clues to the lives and personalities of the early Dutch settlers of the mid-Hudson River Valley.

The main portion of the house is a gambrel-roofed structure, one and a half stories high, of brick laid up in Flemish bond (see Appendix A). The rear wing is a gable-roofed addition, also one and half stories in height.

Both the gambrel-roofed section and its clapboarded wing show signs of an early date of construction. These include the use of small, handmade unevenly fired bricks, rooflines that are flush with the gable ends, plain wrought iron beam anchors and some splayed brick lintels.

On the interior of the house, the cellar fireplace is intact, though bricked up. The first floor of the gambrel-roofed section has two fireplaces, both bricked up, one of which has an old mantel. Several large Dutch planed beams are visible.

According to information supplied by Chester A. Jordan - who lived in the house from 1905 to 1940 -- the first floor was originally divided into two large rooms with a fireplace at each end. Access to the upper floor was by means of a ladder until 1880 when a local carpenter, Peter Van Acker, built a staircase. The clapboard wing, which has brick insulation in the walls, served as the kitchen.

About 1920, the Jordan family installed electricity, hot water, heat, and a bathroom, and made other alterations in order to create two apartments.

The entire homestead consists not only of this brick farmhouse with a clapboard wing, but also a Dutch barn and a grouping of small sheds and barns. From the technical standpoint, the brick farmhouse and the Dutch barn are rare survivals of a time when each and every building was an individual production of elements laboriously made by hand. This 18th century building (along with a companion homestead--the David DeFreest House--privately owned and not on university land) are among the oldest still extant in the mid-Hudson Valley that retain considerable integrity. In addition, members of the DeFreest family played noteworthy roles in the history of the locality.

Philip DeFreest was a captain in the Albany County Militia in 1775 and later became a major in Col. Stephen J. Schuyler's battalion. For many generations, members of this family farmed and served in public capacities, such as Town Supervisor and Justice of the Peace.

Interesting as the early history of the DeFreest house is, its significance and that of the barn lies equally in the fact that examples of these structures are fast becoming lost due to their location on the lands most vulnerable to progress.