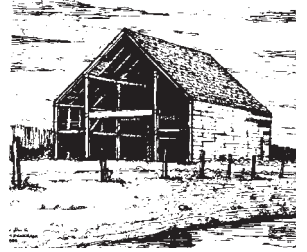


DUTCH BARN PRESERVATION SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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The Tarbox Farm, 1533 Route 7, Brunswick, Rensselaer County, New York

Ned Pratt



Photo 1. A view of the farm from the south. The four-bay New World Dutch barn is in the center, behind a smaller English Barn. The farmhouse is in the trees to the left; in the center of the barn complex is the barnyard. Behind the silo to the right is another long, low cow barn used for heifers. The silos date to 1916, 1975, and 1977.

One of the most prominent farms in Brunswick, Rensselaer County is the Tarbox Farm, sitting on busy NYS Route 7, between Troy and Pittstown. It is a large complex of structures, housing a dairy and farm stand operation, built over a number of years. Hidden in the center of this complex is a New World Dutch barn; it is hard to spot as you drive by, but once identified, the characteristic shape stands out (Photos 1 and 2). The Dutch Barn Preservation Society toured the barn in June 2009.

History of Ownership

The earliest known owner of the farm was John Melchior File, who moved to Brunswick in 1761 with his wife, Elizabeth Rickert Hunsinger, and rented a farm of 232 acres, the core of which forms the present Tarbox farm. The town was a part of the patroonship of Rensselaerswyck, so in the early years the land was leased. In 1761, this area was still part of Albany County; Rensselaer County was created in 1791.

File's dwelling is thought to have been sited just east of the Tarbox's Greek revival house, and may form a part



Photo 2. The barns seen from the southwest. The Dutch barn is behind the 1916 tile silo. The barn closest to the road dates to the later nineteenth century.

of it. File was a German immigrant and fought on the British side at the battle of Saratoga, but unlike many loyalists he remained here after the revolution. Upstate New York's history seems full of canny individuals who managed to hold on to their properties, and even prosper, through various political climates. While many, if not most, Tory sympathizers moved to Nova Scotia after the revolution, Mr. File stayed on.¹

John M. File received an indenture for the original farm from Steven Van Rensselaer in 1791. He split the farm between his sons David and Adam on 27 April 1824. Adam File got the portion which is occupied by the Tarbox Farm. This land was sold at a foreclosure sale in 1843 or 1844. Ownership is unclear from 1844 to 1910, when Mr. Charles Sherman bought it. The Shermans ran the farm until 1942, when Charles passed away.

The farm passed through another owner, a Mr. Quimby, before Mr. John Tarbox's father, George Fessden Tarbox, bought it in 1944. The George Tarbox family had lived in Troy, and George worked for General Electric (GE). During World War II, they had a garden

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The Tarbox Farm (continued from page 1)



Photo 3. The *Esso Farm* news published an article on the Tarboxes and their farm in 1956, using them as an example of a modern farm. Here is a picture from that article.

and raised chickens at their home in Troy. Mrs. Tarbox had always wanted a farm, as her father had a large farm near Fairhaven; his main business was hostelry.

George Tarbox was laid off from GE in 1945, and acquired some cows. His father, Frank Walker Tarbox, was a cattle dealer in western New York. They had about 24 cows and perhaps 500 chickens initially. This wasn't enough to make a good living, however, and George Tarbox also sold a variety of farm related machines. He started out selling Perfection milking machines, then later chain saws for a friend, Ham Harris, who was a John Deere retailer. Tarbox also sold freezers, and when Westinghouse decided to have rural dealers, he became a Westinghouse dealer. Eventually he went back to work for GE, but kept the farm going. His son, John Tarbox, studied at Morrisville College in 1947-48, and then when his father went back to GE, John came home to run the farm. He purchased it from his father in 1959 (Photos 3 thru 5).

The farm, now a large complex, has grown substantially in the last 50 years. The Dutch barn, attached



Photo 4. A second image from the 1956 article on the Tarbox farm.



Photo 5. David and John Tarbox in May 2010.

English barn, corn crib, and farmhouse date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; many of the out-buildings cannot be dated precisely. John Tarbox can provide dates for buildings constructed from the 1950s on: "We kept getting more cows, opening up the horse barn section so we could change the cows to milk them. We built a free stall barn in 1975, put up a silo in 1975, and a second silo in 1977. We built half of the heifer barn in 1978 and the other half in 1984. A milking parlor was added in 1985. The trench silo was built in 1990, and a second section in 2002. A machinery shed and shop was built in 1995 and a calf barn in 2006. We have kept adding cows until we have gotten to 85 milkers, mostly Holsteins." (Figure 1)

John's son David now runs the dairy operation. David, a Cornell graduate, lives with his family just west of the main farm. In addition to the milkers they have another 70 cows of young stock. They also have a farm stand operation begun about 10 years ago by John's wife Joanne. Joanne was the Rensselaer County Coordinator for several programs of the Cornell Cooperative Extension. The farm stand is housed in an historic corn crib; a plaque dates it to 1830 (Photo 6). About five acres are kept under cultivation to support the farm

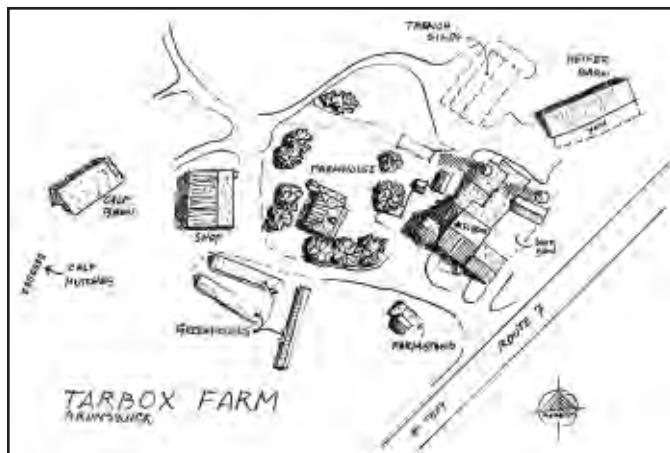


Figure 1. Site plan. The complex of barns, ranging from the eighteenth century Dutch barn to a c.1830 corn crib now used as a part of a roadside farm stand, to several recent greenhouses, built within the last five years (Ned Pratt).

stand—four acres in sweet corn and one in vegetables. They also sell cut flowers.

It is hard to make a living on a small farm today, and most farmers in Rensselaer County have a sideline or two, or members of the family also have outside jobs; while we call this a sign of the times, it seems to have been this way for much of the County's history.



Photo 6. The c. 1830 corn crib.

The Dutch Barn

The core of the four-bay scribe rule New World Dutch barn is relatively intact, but the barn has been expanded and remodeled several times. The posts were extended between six and eight feet to make more room for hay storage in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Light dimensional lumber was used for this work, and the braces appear to be nailed. Each side has also been added to, again for more storage (Photos 7 and 8, Figure 2). Later modifications strengthened the structure; double sets of 2" by 10" braces and steel angle braces were added probably in the middle decades of the twentieth century.

There is now a mow floor underneath the anchor beams and cows are housed below. Each anchor beam measures 1'-3 1/2" by 8", with a tenon protruding 1'-1 1/2". The span of the anchor beams, from inside post to inside post, is about 18'-11 1/2". There is evidence of long sway beams on the end bent posts; a mortise 8'-2" down from the top of the post was observed. It is a little difficult to determine the original floor level, as a concrete floor has been poured, but the bottom of the anchor beam is about 10'-8 1/2" from the current floor. From the top of the anchor beam to the base of the original purlin measures 9'-0". The posts are 8 3/4" by 10 1/2". The anchor beam tenons are centered on the post, which is unusual; it is more typical to see them offset toward the layout face.² (Photos 9 and 10)

Like many Rensselaer county barns, this barn at one point had a side ramp, which came into a floor in the



Photo 7. Interior view of barn, showing later framing.



Photo 8. A second interior view.

second bay back from the road. There is a cutout in the anchor beams to hold a floor at this point. This detail has been observed in the Herrington's Dutch barn, the Wagner barn (both since taken down) and a third barn, all in Brunswick, and the Stanley Lord barn and one other in Poestenkill.³ (Photos 9 thru 12, Figure 3)

Mr. Tarbox closed up the barn door at the rear of the barn when he moved another small barn up against it. Underneath the anchor beam, however, can be found the holes for pintles which once held doors hung on wooden hinges. We have seen evidence of wood-

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The Tarbox Farm (continued from page 3)

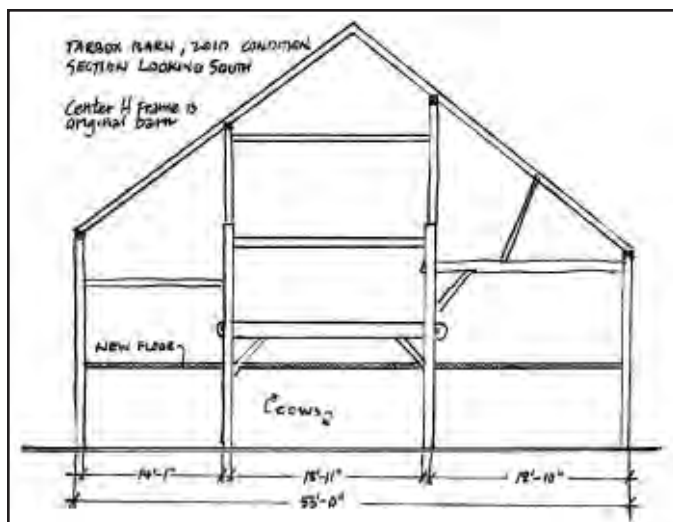


Figure 2. Section, looking south (Ned Pratt).

hinged doors in several other Rensselaer county barns, such as the H. Phillips (owner in 1876) NW Dutch barn, also in Brunswick; and at the Nipmoose farm in Buskirk. This feature has also been noted in barns located in Dutchess, Ulster, Schoharie, Schenectady, and Albany counties.



Photo 9. The anchor beams are both pegged and wedged. Unusually, the anchor beam tenons are centered on the posts, as seen in this view. Note the cutouts in the anchor beams, forming a ledge which held the floor of the second level. This detail can also be seen in Photo 10.

The presence of scribe rule markings and pegged and wedged anchor beams suggests an early date; evidence that the main barn doors were wooden-hinged also supports this interpretation. A few DBPS members tended to think the barn was quite early, and perhaps the first built by File in c.1761. The presence of long sway braces certainly suggests a construction date before 1800. However, the posts extend perhaps nine feet above the anchor beams, suggesting a c.1800 or later construction date; although this is not an exact indicator, it would seem to point to a date some time later than 1760. The



Photo 10. The open mortises cut into the face of the post seen here may have held the supports for the ramp.



Photo 11. Details of the end anchor beams. At the front end you can see the end of one of the pence support beams is still in place.

construction date of this barn is perhaps 1790-1800, but like most of the barns we see, we must note that this is just an estimate.

- 1 Mr. Tarbox gave me the information about the ownership history; the details about Mr. File are from Sharon Zankel, *Brunswick* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 1998), pp. 35 and 110.
- 2 Bob Hedges commented during the DBPS tour at the site in June 2009 that this feature is more typical of French framing techniques.

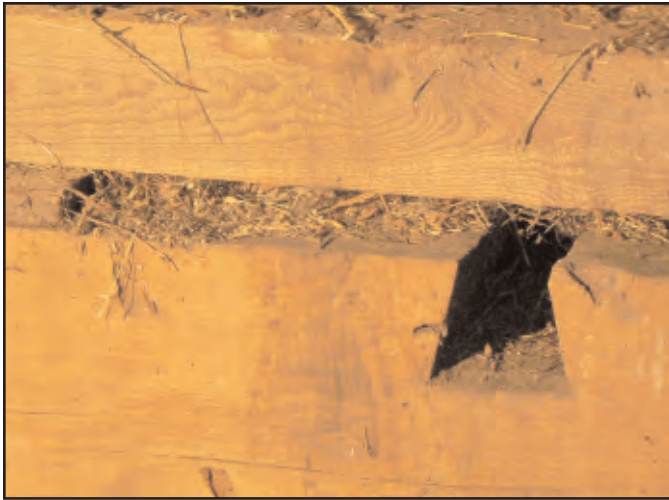


Photo 12. A detail of the mortise on the back anchor beam.

- 3 This detail was noted by Greg Huber in his article on the Wagner barn in the Fall 1994 *DBPS Newsletter*.
- 4 Editor's note: See the *DBPS Newsletter* 7:1 (Spring 1994) for the Dellemont/Wemple barn, Rotterdam, Schenectady County; *DBPS Newsletter* 9:2 (Fall 1996) for the Frederick barn, Guiderland, Albany County; *HVVA Newsletter* 1:5 (August 1999) for the Oliver NWDB, Marletown, Ulster County; *HVVA Newsletter* 1:6 (October 1999) for the Beebee-Roy NWDB in Rhinebeck, Dutchess County; *HVVA Newsletter* 2:2 (June 2000), for the Southert Barn, Middleburg vicinity, Schoharie County; and the *HVVA Newsletter* 5:11 (December 2003), for the Bogart NWDB, Marletown, Ulster County.

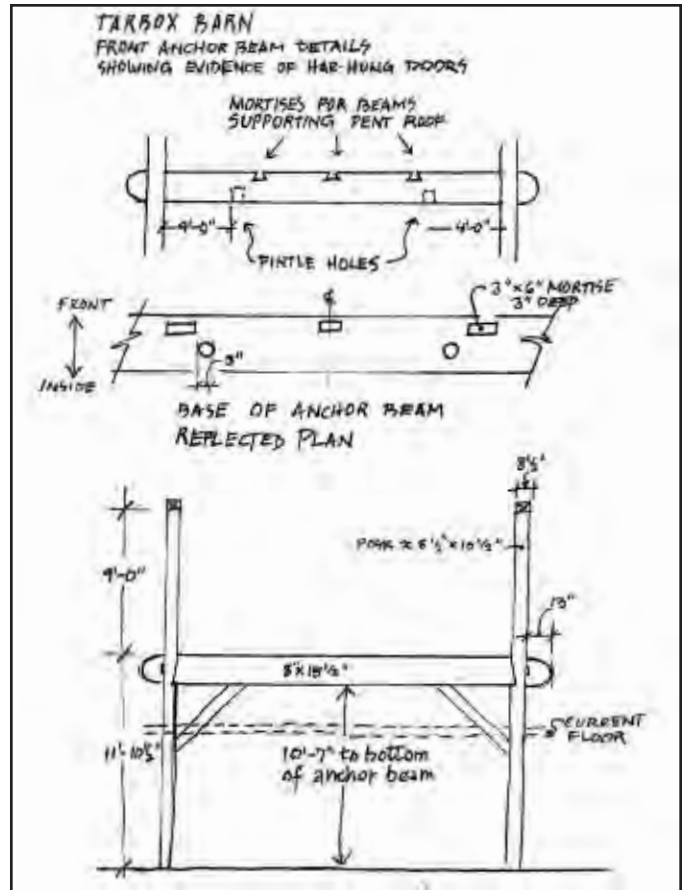


Figure 3. Anchor beam details, and section, showing H-bent (Ned Pratt).

A Parting Glance at a Stone Arabia Barn

Keith Cramer



Photo 1. Aerial view looking east of the farmstead before removal of the New World Dutch barn.

This Mohawk Valley barn was in a pile and being loaded for the trip to its future home in Texas, when I was allowed to take some quick photos; as long as I did not take pictures of the members of the Amish family that owns the farm. Although it is just off Route 10, adjoined to the cluster we refer to as Stone Arabia barns in



Photo 2. A second aerial view, looking south.

the Town of Palatine in Montgomery County, it was on Turn Hill Road which is a few hundred feet into the Fulton County Town of Ephratah (Photos 1 and 2).

The barn was reconstructed at least once. The upper structure appears to be from the not-too-early 1800s with both sawn and hewn pieces. It is a four-bay barn,

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Photo 3. The anchor beams.

measuring 46'-1" deep by 47'-4" wide, with a 26 foot wide center aisle, 10'-8" side aisles, 24 foot high purlin plate and 18 foot high sidewalls. It has 3 1/2"-thick floor planks, with some that are 20" wide. It has the classic Mohawk Valley anchor beams; 1'-7" by 1'-0" with big round protruding tenons with two wedges (Photo 3). These go into stout 1'-0" by 1'-2" posts and are locked together with very nicely made 6" by 1'-0" braces (Photo 4).

It seemed to me that the floor system has unusually large timbers. The center sill rivals the anchor beams in size; it measures 12" high by 18" wide. The purlin line sills are 12" by 16" wide, gable sills are 12" by 14" wide,



Photo 4. The braces.

and the south wall sill is 12" by 12" (Figure 1). Only the north wall sill is a 'normal' size, 10" by 11" wide. This north sill is the only sill that sits on a stone foundation. The other three walls are on posts or smaller framing that creates a full eight-foot high basement.

One may speculate that the last reconstruction added a new floor system that would be strong enough for longer spans so that a basement with some open, usable work space could be created. There are some other details that seem to support this idea. The full stone wall on north/uphill side looks old enough to be original to the last reconstruction; if so, this would explain why the north sill did not have to be as large as the others. There are empty mortises in the underside of one purlin line sill. The undersides of the main sills and subsills have square corners and are nicely finished, far more than those in a typically unseen crawlspace. They are very smooth; they may even be sawn, but the many layers of crusty whitewash make this difficult to determine. Also, they look like they were never in the dirt. Some decay is inevitable if 200-year-old sills were ever close to the ground. Another clue suggesting a reconstruction is the existence of two types of side aisle loft girts. The barn has normal hewn through-tenon girts, but it also has some sawn oak 8" by 3" girts with half-dovetail ends.

Even in a pile this barn was good looking and intriguing. It is being saved and rebuilt; hopefully the new owners will continue to research it and share their findings.

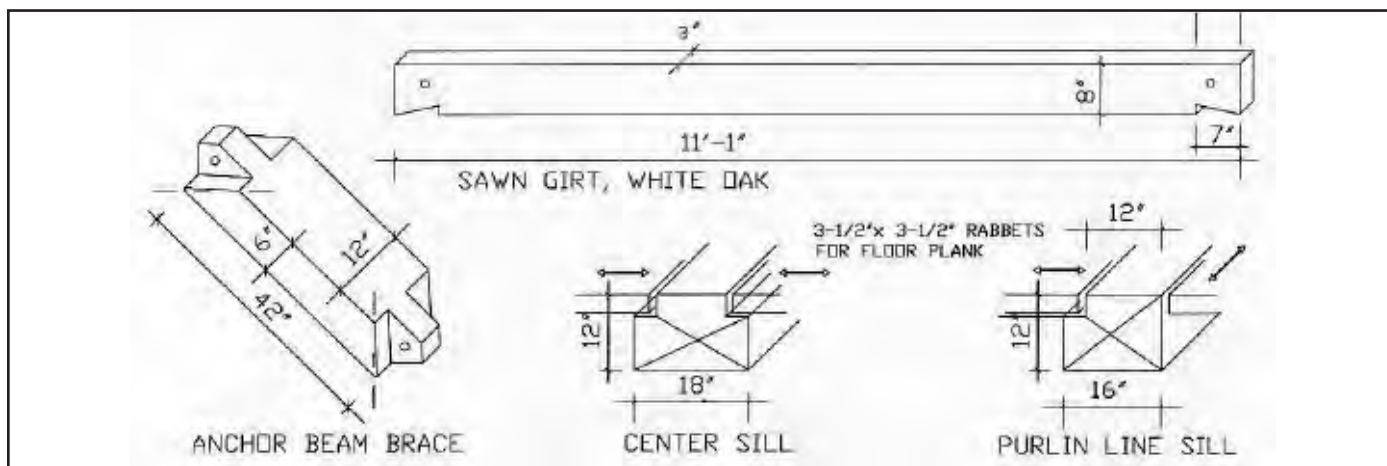


Figure 1. Sill, girt and brace details (K. Cramer).

Study Those Odd & Reused Building Parts

Keith Cramer and Walter Richard Wheeler



Photo 1. Reused post with "No 3 South" inscribed on its face (L. Lawler).

Almost every old barn has timbers, boards, doors or hardware from an even older barn, house or hay barrack. Look closely at these pieces; they can help to complete the history of the farmstead. Sometimes they hold vital clues to the construction methods of our barns and other buildings.

We thought all those old-time barn craftsmen knew how to read chiseled Roman numerals, but this photo may show a rare surviving written label to aid the assembly of an H-bent (Photo 1). It is on an old post, inside an anchor beam mortise. It is hard to read, but it appears to say "No 3 South".

This post is reused as a loft beam in a large 1870-90 hay barn near Athens, NY. It was discovered during restoration work by Lex Lawler. The writing can only be seen by going under the beam and looking up. There is a late 1700s Dutch frame house on the property.

Another example of this type of marking was discovered during the disassembly of the Jacob and Christina Houck house in the Town of Florida, Montgomery



Photo 2. General view of the Houck house, looking southeast, showing the kitchen and woodshed wing at left (W. Wheeler).



Photo 3. Post with "East II" inscribed in red chalk. Each post was marked similarly, on the outside face (W. Wheeler).

County, in November 2005 (Photo 2). Each of the posts in the H-bent framed kitchen and wagon shed addition, dating to c.1850-90, bore red chalk marks indicating their position in the structure (Photo 3).



Photo 4. Inscriptions left by J. Dingman and Benjamin Baird in the Houck house kitchen and woodshed wing.

Additional pencil inscriptions on planks attached to the outside walls of the wing are likely contemporary to these chalk marks, and appear to identify two of the builders. One inscription read "Benjamin Baird Buld this House/Amsterdam, N.Y." Baird or someone else overwrote the last two letters of "House" with "ck," cleverly transforming it to the owner's last name (Photo 4, bottom). This inscription was found on a planked surface on the inside of the west wall of the kitchen wing during the course of the house's disassembly.

Although definite information regarding Benjamin Baird has proven elusive, a man of that name was living in nearby Port Jackson, and owned a 210 acre farm in 1869. A Benjamin Baird is described in the nineteenth

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The Dutch Barn Preservation Society
Mabee Farm Historic Site
1080 Main Street Route 5S
Rotterdam Junction, NY 12150

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Editor: Walter R. Wheeler

(518) 283-0534 • wwheeler@hartgen.com

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The Dutch Barn Preservation Society

Mabee Farm Historic Site

1080 Main Street Route 5S

Rotterdam Junction, NY 12150

www.dutchbarns.org

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Study Building Parts *(continued from page 7)*

century county history as being born in New Jersey, having moved to Charleston, Montgomery County in 1794 with his father, and then relocated to Port Jackson in 1867, where he lived until his death, c.1874. Another Benjamin Baird—possibly a descendant of the first—was a farmer with 85 acres in Johnstown in 1939. If the wing was built after 1874, it may have been this Benjamin who helped in its construction.

A second inscription, apparently contemporary with that by Baird, read “J. Dingman” and was located on the inside side of a plank surface attached to the east wall (Photo 4, top). Dingman may have been a partner or an apprentice of Benjamin Baird. A James Dingman was listed in the 1888 and 1889 city directories for Amsterdam, New York as a turner. A John Dingman, a carpenter, lived in Gloversville, New York in 1890.¹ It seems more likely that this second fellow was one of the builders.

Two examples don’t constitute a large enough sample size to say anything definitive, but we can speculate. Perhaps these builders could not read Roman numerals, or maybe they wanted to use a system which didn’t generate confusion. The latter would have been the case if the building parts were being reused and already had marriage marks on them, but were not being used in the same configuration. It’s not too uncommon to encounter timbers which have been reused twice before; sometimes this is indicated by the presence of two sets of marriage marks, neither of which relate to the timber’s current use. There must have been many other builders who wrote notes or signatures on timbers. When doing your surveys or restorations, take a close look into those mortises and newly exposed wood surfaces. The builder may have left a clue for you.

¹ Walter Richard Wheeler. *HABS Level II Documentation: The Jacob and Christina Houck House, Hirschfeld Road, Town of Florida, Montgomery County, New York* (Rensselaer, NY: Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc., 2008), pp. 2-3.