



The Society for the Preservation of Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture

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Newsletter

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The Society for the Preservation of
**Hudson Valley
Vernacular Architecture**
is a not-for-profit corporation formed
to study and preserve vernacular
architecture and material culture.

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From the Editor:

“Times they are a changin.” But are they really? As someone who studies enjoys the study of our past it seems to me that there is some truth to be found in the phrase, “the more things change the more they stay the same.” What also stands out in my mind is how much of the whole story of the human condition is a repeat, like some big roulette wheel we are all too dumb to stop betting on! Oh yes, the times and technologies change and sometimes the names too, but in general the same ideas – mostly related to problems – keep recurring throughout all times. I think that’s why so many of us are attracted to old houses and barns, for they speak of the past and somehow engage us in their dialog by just our very listening. But as we look to the past we are also confronted with the reality that no time in history is truly better than what we call the present. As humans we are somehow cursed with the notion the past was always better – it wasn’t! Lets face the fact – we live in the golden age simply because we live! It’s kind of a mixed blessing that we do not so easily remember all the horrors of the past – memory is kind to us in that aspect but it also mislead us to believe things were just lovely way back then, which simply isn’t true. Or is it that the past only seems better because we have survived it? Its funny how memory works. So what should be done with our collective memory, our history? Shall we heave over the great traditions of past generations? No, for that is impossible, for it is the very seeds from which we grow. We are instead called to build upon the past, by studying it from all sides, scrutinizing its every detail, and after discerning each bit’s worth, create from it something new for our times.

There is no greater homage shown to our past than to use it to build a better future. Only when we use our history to serve our current lives, being very careful we don’t become enslaved by our past, can we move forward. As our own organization faces the future let us all be mindful of our rich past, but let us not seek so much for our past as to sacrifice our future. Presently we are going through some organizational changes and new ideas and goals are expressing themselves. This is a good thing! We all need to change if we are to stay alive. We may hit a few bumps along the way but alas, let us remember that the greatness of HVVA is derived from the strengths of its members. Without out all of us working together our organization simply wouldn’t exist. The best part of this group is its welcoming spirit – its what keeps us alive. It’s that spirit that makes us want to open our homes, document building together, sit around for hours discussing tiresome topics, and keeps us debating the meaning of “vernacular.” Really, who else would put up with us? We are all called to this cause of preservation so let us persevere. As we move along the path of progress, moving out of history, stepping from present into future and returning back to history, I encourage everyone to keep up the good work, keep up the spirit of kindness and acceptance (which we have become know for) and especially keep up that inquisitive spirit that keeps all of you searching the past for things that make for a brighter future.

Rob Sweeney – HVVA's sheepdog

Around the Neighborhood

By Ken Walton (photos by author unless otherwise noted)



The Benjamin [a.k.a. Cornelius] Hasbrouck house after the devastating fire that occurred on Dec. 29th, 2009. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner.

More Hasbroucks: I am a bit embarrassed that I had omitted from the article on the Hasbrouck family houses a fairly prominent house. This house was nearly lost by a fire on Dec. 29th, 2009. Known over the years as the Cornelius B. Hasbrouck house just southeast of the village of Wallkill, it was built by his father, Benjamin, accepting 1771 as the year it was built is correct. Cornelius was only three years old in that year. Benjamin purchased a 636 acre parcel in 1750 which was one of the six subdivisions of the Rip Van Dam patent. This eventually became the John B. Borden estate in 1881. Borden was the son of the inventor of condensed milk. John refined the manufacturing process and chose Wallkill (then known as the Basin) to construct his first factory. It is believed that an even older house (perhaps the original Hasbrouck house) referred to as the South House existed on the property and was used as slave quarters after the 1771 house was built. Unfortunately, John Borden's daughter (Marion) razed the older house to build the Borden mansion on its site. The good news is that the owners are reconstructing the house to its configuration prior to the fire, despite all the aggravation the insurance company is giving them. If you wish to keep tabs on the clean up, deconstruction, and reconstruction in progress, visit the

website of the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner (referred to as HSoS&G for the remainder of this article) at <http://hvanaken.com/wallkill>. During the deconstruction phase, it was discovered that the interior plastering was done with hand split lath work.

In the Neighborhood

The Rip Van Dam patent was shaped like a parallelogram, with the Wallkill River as its western border. The six subdivisions, each of 590+ acres, were stacked one on top of the other, from north to south, as narrow strips running from the river along the full width to the eastern border of the patent – approximately where a stretch of Route 300 turns south at its intersection with Orchard Road. Today the south and east borders of the patent have been incorporated into the county boundary line between Orange and Ulster. The northern border coincides with the southernmost section of Birch Road – which also happens to be the southern boundary of the Wallkill Correctional Facility – and extends straight back to the Wallkill River. The previously mentioned Benjamin Hasbrouck bought the southern most subdivision of the patent.

The adjacent lot to the north was purchased by the Bruyn family. The

Bruyn-Phinney house was situated right on the Wallkill River in the village of Wallkill, which did not spring up around it until nearly a century later. As mentioned in Helen Reynolds' book, *Dutch Houses in Hudson Valley before 1776*, there is a lot of uncertainty about its origins as its history is based on oral tradition. Reynolds relates the family tradition that the house was built by Severyn Bruyn in 1766 based on an iron fireback that was in the house at the time she wrote. Another source states the house was built by Cornelius Bruyn in 1776. By the 1870's, the property ceased being a farm. The house was sold and rented for villagers to reside in. Some worked for the paper mill, which later became a hat factory. A blacksmith shop was set up in the horse barn around 1900, then was a boys' club, and eventually converted into a residence which was torn down in 2004. The family's descendants returned to the house when Catherine Bruyn, wife of Dr. Leander B. Phinney, purchased the house in the early 20th century. It remained in the family until 1950, when it was sold to the Wallkill Valley Federal Savings and Loan Association. They built the bank which remains today between the house site and the Wallkill Avenue frontage. The bank tore down the historic house in 1964 to expand its parking lot. The landmark had more in common with houses in Dutchess County than those in Ulster. It was a one-and-a-half story building of timber-framed

Andries DuBois house in the village of Wallkill.



construction with clapboard sheathing on a stone foundation. It featured a gambrel roof with gabled dormers and overhanging eaves and full width porches with simple square posts in both front and back and had a chimney at each gable end. A photograph of the place can be seen in Helen Reynolds' book or the HSoS&G website.

The owner of the next subdivision to the north was Andries DuBois. His house built in 1769 still stands at 75 Wallkill Avenue and is now considered to be the oldest house in the village of Wallkill. After a fire in the late 1700s, the house was remodeled in the Federal style, circa 1815. Some Greek Revival renovations were done around 1845 according to the historical marker nearby. Current theory is that the existing building was constructed circa 1815 on the original foundation of the house built circa 1769 by Andries DuBois. It is of timber-frame construction on a stone foundation with the south and east (front) walls veneered in brick and the other two walls covered with clapboard sheathing. It has brick nogging between its posts. The gables at both ends of the gambrel roof are sheathed in clapboard as well. The cellar has a dirt floor and at one time had a spring in one corner which supplied drinking water and was used to keep milk cool, but when the sewer line was laid the spring vanished. It has been, since 2003, owned by HSoS&G. They have completed the stabilization of the foundation and have removed the deteriorated front porch erected in 1981. They are currently attempting to

Jacob T. Walden house in the village of Walden.



Justus Banks house just up the street from the DuBois house, however you will not see the stone section from the road.

raise funds to repair the chimneys and put on a new roof. For more information, you can visit their website mentioned earlier. As it turns out this house has much in common with the Jacob T. Walden house which the HVVA toured just on Feb. 19th. It is located at 34 N. Montgomery Street (State Rte 52) in the village of Walden in Orange County, New York, and is owned by Historical Society of Walden & the Wallkill Valley. Except for the obvious difference between the two (the DuBois is timber framed, Walden house is of stone construction), both were rebuilt at about the same time (c.1815) and are comparatively close in construction techniques, materials and style.

Continuing in a northward direction, in 1772, Justus Banks built his house on the subdivision adjacent to Andries Dubois. It still exists at 116 River Road (It is the same road as Wallkill Avenue, but a little further north and on the east side of the road), but later additions hide most of the original stone house when viewed from the road; the early section is relegated to the back. The main addition that converted the home into a south-oriented house was done prior to 1874. The house was hard used throughout the 20th century, serving as a boarding house from the 1940s until 1967. It was briefly abandoned from 1975 to 1979, when it



Jacob Ostrander house in the only photograph I know of the place. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner.

was purchased and lovingly restored by the present owners.

The deeds for the next and last two most northern subdivision have not been found yet, but the stone house built by Jacob Ostrander built in 1775 was positioned firmly within the subdivision above Justus Banks' parcel and would be an excellent candidate for the first settler on this lot. Sadly, this house was taken down in 1973. It is much more difficult to make an educated guess regarding the earliest settler of the northernmost subdivision as I am not aware of any known 18th century farmstead that existed within its boundaries. The oldest house within this claim is situated in the extreme southwest corner. Just when this house was built and who built it is not known. However, on a roadlist made in 1817, Dr. David M. Whary appears as owner of the house.



A roadlist showed this house belonging to Dr. David M. Whary in 1817. By 1855, it belonged to David D. DuBois and stayed within the family for nearly 150 years. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner.

The house is of timber frame construction with clapboard sheathing, and today looks nothing like its original configuration. It started out as a one-and-a-half story house with a stone-walled basement kitchen. In 1896, the roof was raised to convert it into two full stories with a center gable. By then, it was in the DuBois family and they operated a farm whose existing fields do lie within the original subdivision borders.

The fireplace in the current living room has an iron casting incorporated into it bearing the date 1816 which appears to be a patent date. This in and of itself has no direct bearing on the age of the house for as we know fireplaces back in the day were rebuilt as readily as we would replace a furnace today. It does suggest, however, that this particular fireplace has not seen any major alterations in nearly two hundred years and that if Dr. Whary is not the builder of the house, he at least made some upgrades to its heating system shortly after moving in.

While not on the Van Dam patent, the Mulford-Childs-Birdsall house (more commonly known as the Walstein Childs house) is only about a mile away to the north. It is a noteworthy stone house whose long term future is uncertain. According to a deed still in the possession of the family in 1988, David Mulford was granted this tract of land on June 27, 1776. However, mystery comes into play as there is

a slender horizontal stone on the front elevation of the house with the year 1763 carved into it. Was Mulford the first to settle this land or did he purchase an existing farmstead? Descendants of the family (the last being Elias Mulford Birdsall) held the property up to the year 2000; at that time the Walkill Correctional Facility acquired it to board retired race horses. Sadly, when the prison allowed Elias' daughter – who had grown up in the house – access to the place a couple of years ago, she found that the prison was using the structure to store horse feed.

This article would not have come together if it were not for the assistance of Harold Van Aken – a trustee of the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner. Please take a worthwhile trip to their website as it is loaded with gems of historical trivia.

Mulford-Childs-Birdsall house (more commonly known as Walstein Childs) now owned by the Walkill Correctional Facility – this telephoto shot is as close as you can get from the road.



The Nosy Neighbor

This just in... In my last article, I mentioned that while poking around the Ruby area, once called Dutch Settlement, I found only one old stone house. A member quickly responded back to inform me that there is at least one more. Sure enough, at 240 South Road, on the inside of where the road takes a ninety degree bend to the west sits a quaint one-and-a-half story stone house with a gable roof with no dormers. The front fenestration consists of a pair of windows on the left side and a door and window on the right. Hopefully, the wooden pineapple hanging by the front door is a true invite to learn more about its story.

Corrections: Lem Boice's granddaughter wrote to inform me I got a couple of the dates incorrect in mentioning his (and now her) house in the last issue. The date stone above the south windows reads "May 12th, 1805" and the year her grandfather purchased the place was either 1908 or 1909. The backgrounds on these old homes are fuzzy enough to make any historian's hair turn gray within days without me muddying up the waters any further. My apologies for not getting it right the first time; it was stated correctly in the HVVA article I used as the source. ■

I have not tested to see if the pineapple hanging next to the door is an open invitation to become more acquainted with this quaint stone house found by an HVVA member's tip.



For more information about most of these houses, go to www.HVVA.org and click on the "Mapping History" tab. Anyone that can add more information to any of the houses mentioned there, or has any other comments they wish to send, please drop me a line by email at kaw9862@optonline.net or by snail mail: Ken Walton, 12 Orchard Drive, 2nd Fl., Gardiner, NY 12525. On the subject line of the email, please include 'HVVA,' so I can expedite a response. Until next time... happy hunting!

Building a Stone House in Ulster County, New York in 1751

By Neil Larson



Figure 1. *Bevier House, Marletown, New York. Current conditions reflecting additions and alterations made in the nineteenth century. The house is owned by the Ulster County Historical Society (Photograph by Neil Larson, 2005).*

(Adapted from a presentation made at the Second International Congress on Construction History. Queens College, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, March 29, 2006.)

On April 9, 1751, in the Town of Marbletown, about six miles east of Kingston, New York, Johannes Vandermerke, Cornelius Conner, and Barent and Petrus Markel began digging the cellar for a new stone house to be constructed for Louis Bevier, Jr. By the middle of the month, a team of three masons, headed by Louis' cousin, Johannis Bevier, began laying up the basement walls. In May, once the walls were high enough and door and window openings began to take shape, carpenter Levi Pawling began installing their wood frames. Hendrick Bush had rough cut them in the pine woods in March when trees were felled and squared into beams and rafters. The rafters were raised on May 23 by Augustenis and Abraham Vandermerke, and Benjamin Krom and Augustus and Frederick Keator covered the roof with wood shingles the following week. In the span of two months the stone house had been erected and roofed. After a slowdown

in June and July when Bevier, his hired workmen, and his crew of slaves and laborers shifted their attention to the wheat harvest, work resumed to complete the job. The masons came back to plaster the interior walls and finish the chimney and hearth. The carpenter returned to complete his work on doors and windows. Augustenis Vandermerke and Abraham Konstapel and his man, Andre, spent two and one-half days at "finishing," which were the final tasks Louis Bevier, Jr. recorded in his building accounts on 30 October 1751, almost seven months after construction began. Another stone house was added to Ulster County's growing inventory.

Ulster County's historic stone houses have been the subjects of numerous inventories and publications, but few of these have concerned themselves with architectural questions beyond gross matters of age, form, dimensions and materials. A serious obstacle to more detailed analysis and broader interpretation has been a persistent absence of any useful documentation concerning the construction of these houses and the people involved in it.

Building contracts for seventeenth-century houses have been preserved in New York's Dutch-language court records, but they are very rare after the English Conquest of 1664. Apparently, whatever legal practices the Dutch followed were not required by the English regime, particularly as the population increased and spread out into the countryside. So when a detailed accounting for the labor of constructing a stone house in 1751 was discovered in a collection of family papers recently donated to the Huguenot Historical Society (HHS) in New Paltz, New York, it was a notable event. Another such record has not known to exist. Better still, the accounting is detailed with numerous categories of work that are associated with the names of the men who completed the tasks, the dates on which their work took place, their rates of pay, and means of payment.

Unfortunately, this stone dwelling has not survived in the form and plan in which it was constructed. Louis Bevier, Jr.'s house was destroyed by fire in the 1800s, and later reconstruction and expansion have made it nearly impossible to distinguish it in the existing Bevier homestead. (*fig. 1*)



Figure 2. Hypothetical drawing of Louis Bevier, Jr. House, drawn by Myron J. Teller, 1953. This conceptualization purports to illustrate what the house looked like after construction of the “new house” (A Marbletown Album (1977), 17).

According to a description in a 1798 tax assessment, the pre-fire house measured 64 feet in length and 29 feet in breadth, one story in height, and contained five windows. (HHS Town Records Collection) Its length indicates that it had a three-room interior plan (parlor-hall-kitchen) typical of the better stone houses of the period. (figs.2 & 3) Louis Bevier, Jr.’s account book also has entries dated in the spring and summer of 1752 for work on “my old house,” which apparently became a component of the new house as was often the case. Thus the new house built in 1751 probably amounted to only a one-room component of the house recorded in 1798.

The evolution of stone houses in Ulster County

The typical eighteenth-century stone house with its long, low front façade, with multiple entrances and vague symmetry, evolved from the seventeenth-century Dutch prototype house that had its front façade on a gable end in the urban tradition. (fig.4) These houses were introduced to the New World when the Dutch West India Company began building their trading settlements in New Amsterdam (New York City), Beverwyck (Albany), and, later, Wiltwyck (Kingston). The prototype house had side walls one-and-one-half stories in height with a steep gable roof. Initially there were two rooms, with a public work or shop space in front (*voorhuis*) and

a private room (*kamer*) in the rear where the family congregated for meals and rest. Attic space was devoted largely to storage of goods and foodstuffs, but it also could contain unheated work or sleeping areas. By the eighteenth century, a second private room in the rear of the house became common where the heads of household could retreat for greater privacy or entertainment. A separate kitchen space was often created in the basements or at the rears of houses, particularly if slaves were part of the households.

Population in the colony steadily increased in the seventeenth century, and new towns began to appear outside of the three Hudson River trading centers. Settlers began by building wood frame dwellings in village settings following the conventional Dutch manner. By 1700, more prosperous farmers began to build this enduring house form using masonry materials so that their homes were more commodious and permanent. When their children reached adulthood, villages could not accommodate new houses for them, and they spread out in the surrounding countryside on independent farmsteads. Many of those established in Ulster County had stone houses at their core. At first, house design remained the same, but the front gable orientation was abandoned once the physical and cultural constraints of urban planning were removed, making entrances on the long side facades more directly accessible. (figs. 2 & 3) Room designations changed

in the shift from urban to rural applications. The *voorhuis* was no longer a practical designation. On farms, the kitchen was the work space where laborers, slaves, and family commingled. Next to the kitchen was the *kamer* where most of the family’s daily activities occurred. A best room (*groot kamer*) was at the opposite end of the house, isolated and protected from the clamor of the kitchen. This room was reserved for the family and their best things. Although use was restricted, it contained beds for sleeping, as did the other rooms in the house.

The attic was unpartitioned and continued to be used for storage of the family’s food supply. A basement extended under most or all of the rooms, and food reserves requiring the cool, dark conditions were stored here. Although there were three levels in these large, long houses, family habitation was concentrated in the middle or ground level. This was primarily due to the presence of hearths in the ground floor rooms. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch heated their rooms with and cooked their meals in jambless fireplaces. These were large hearths, embedded in floors, without sides, that vented into chimneys built on the floors of attics. Though considered inefficient when compared to jambed, or English, fireplaces, the Dutch preserved this Old World feature as a symbol of their cultural identity in America.

Louis Bevier, Jr.

This was the architectural environment of which Louis Bevier, Jr. was familiar. His grandfather and namesake was one of the original proprietors of the 38,000-acre New Paltz Patent in Ulster County, south of Kingston, granted to twelve Huguenot families in 1677. Along with his other French-speaking, Protestant kinsmen, he had come to America following a brief sojourn in the Palatinate region of today's Germany. Louis Bevier established a homestead in the village of New Paltz where he built a stone house in the Dutch manner. (fig. 4) All the New Paltz patentee families were affluent, but on a 1712 tax list, Louis Bevier was ranked the wealthiest (LeFevre, 89).

As with the others, much of Bevier's wealth was invested in land he had acquired to be able to establish his male heirs on productive farms. He acquired large tracts in the Rondout Valley west of New Paltz and south of Kingston. (The Dutch were attracted to flood plains by nature, and they quickly dominated low-land areas throughout the Hudson Valley.) Of his four able-bodied sons, two – Jean and Abraham – were given a large tract of land in Wawarsing to divide. This area was south of Marbletown where the patentee had acquired lands for his son, Louis. The fourth son, Samuel, inherited his father's New Paltz lands. (fig. 5)

The second Louis Bevier (1684-1753) moved to his Marbletown lands in 1715 after he married Elizabeth Hasbrouck, daughter of Jean Hasbrouck, another New Paltz patentee. Only one child of theirs, known as Louis Bevier, Jr., survived to adulthood. The family is said to have resided in a dwelling built by the previous

owner of the land, Peter Van Leuvan. The "old house" referenced in the building accounts may have comprised this house and/or a smaller stone house where Louis Bevier, Jr. (1717-1772) resided with his family after he married Esther DuBois in 1745. Their first child, David, was born in 1746. The birth of a daughter, Elizabeth, occurred in 1749. Before their second son, Philip, was born on 28 December 1751, they had completed the "new house."

Building the new house, 1751

Louis Bevier's detailed accounts provide an understanding of the construction process of an eighteenth-century stone house. In some cases, they confirm what has been imagined to have occurred such as the obvious sequence of steps from digging the cellar to shingling the roof; but in others they provide valuable insight into the scope of the project, which employed at least eighteen men over a period of eight months. Bevier carefully kept record of the time – in fractions of days – each workman spent at his task, indicating the amount of work each construction component required. A cost was assigned to these tasks, ranging from four shillings six pence per day (4/6) for the master mason and the carpenter to three shillings a day (3/0) for the laborers digging the cellar, hauling and breaking stone, "rough cutting" timbers, burning lime, and "tending the masons," giving a sense of the value placed on certain skills and nature of the local economy in which they participated. The skilled workers were paid in cash, while the laborers were compensated with a combination of currency, farm produce, and consumer goods. In a number of instances, Bevier paid a laborer's share of the minister's salary. Some of these men

performed other chores on Bevier's farm, such as making fence rails, cutting fire wood, mowing hay, and planting corn, for the same 3/0 daily rate, sometimes more.

Many of these people have left faint footprints on the documentary trail. As might be expected, the owner of the stone house is the best known, with the master craftsmen having equal importance. Louis Bevier, Jr. was a farmer and a surveyor and a peer of his mason (his first cousin) and his carpenter, who were both leaders in their localities. The account book provides a list of occupations for a group of anonymous men who labored on farms and construction projects in the town. The identification and interaction of these men give a sense of the social organization in colonial communities. One important source of labor in eighteenth-century Ulster County was its large slave population. Louis Bevier, Jr. is known to have owned four slaves in 1755, who would have surely been employed in the construction of his house. However, the extent to which these slaves participated in the project is not recorded in the accounts because Bevier did not have to pay them.

October 1750

The first entries in the account book are for Barent Markill and Jacob Middagh on 12 and 13 October 1750. Both these men resided in Marbletown and their names can be found in church records as parents or sponsors at baptisms (Brink 1905-14). Jacob Middagh was destined for great notoriety. In 1777 he would be hanged as a Tory actively recruiting his neighbors in support of the English (Brink 1906, 308-10). Markill was paid 3/0 for one day rough cutting beams. (This charge was credited to a debt of 19/0 he had with Bevier for the "exchange of a gun.") Middagh worked two days "squaring" beams. For this work he was paid 9/0 in currency or 4/6 per day. This rate was at the high end of the range indicating that this was a skilled task and represented creating the smooth, planed finish on the large pine beams displayed in the ceilings of the main rooms in the house.

Based on the payments, hewing beams was considered "rough" work, and Markill received only a laborer's wage for it. Both the pine beams displayed in the ceiling of the main floor that Middagh planed smooth on three sides and an equivalent number of unfinished oak beams supporting the floor would have been rough cut. Three large finished beams would have been

Figure 3. Floor plan of Daniel Hasbrouck House, New Paltz, N.Y. A typical example of the three-room linear plan of better stone houses in the eighteenth century. (Larson & Barricklo, 2003)

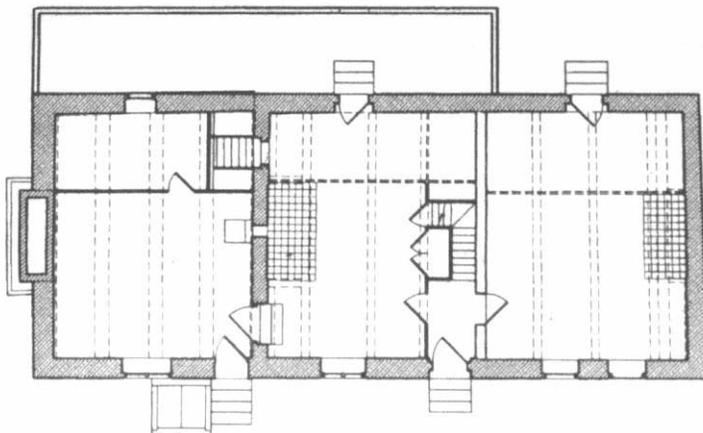




Figure 4. Bevier-Elting House, New Paltz, New York. One of a very few houses surviving in New York with its front gable façade intact. (Photograph by Neil Larson, 2004)

needed for each room in the new house along with two smaller ledger beams embedded in the walls to support the ends of attic floor boards. If Middagh worked only the two days recorded, then the new house may have contained but one room. However, additional work done prior to October 1750 may have been recorded in an earlier account book. Other preliminary steps, like felling trees, are not noted in the accounts either.

March 1751

No other work relating to the house was recorded until March 1751. Early in the month, Barent Markill and Johannes Vandermerke were paid for one and one-half days of cutting wood for the lime kiln. The town of Marbletown was named for the exposed seams of limestone that characterized the local landscape. The stone was used both as a building material and as the source of lime for mortar. The lime was burned in a stone kiln or simply a pyre on Bevier's property. An entry for "riding lime" – i.e. loading the lime on a wagon and delivering it to the construction site – suggests the limestone was burned at its source rather than at the house site.

Immediately afterwards Markill and Hendrick Bush were assigned to rough cutting wood for rafters and door cases. (Barent Markill had already worked on March 2nd rough cutting door cases.) Bush was working "in the pine woods" on March 12 and 13, and on March 14 both men were rough cutting at the house where they were assisting Jacob Middagh who was there squaring the rafters into

their final tapered shape and cutting the lap or fork joints in their tops. Two days later, all three men were back in the woods working on cutting and shaping rafters. Presumably more were needed. The rough-cut door cases would wait until May before the carpenter arrived to "square" them.

By March 18, Markill, Vandermerke, and Bush had shifted their attention to "riding stones." Bush was one of Bevier's monthly wage laborers, and his time accounted for six of the nine and one-quarter days needed for the task. Like the others, he was compensated at the usual rate of 3/0 per day in a combination of cash, grains, and goods, including "one tinder Horn & a Schoot Bagg Strop."

April 1751

Johannes Vandermerke and Barent Markill transported lime to the construction site on 6 April 1751. In a few days Vandermerke began digging the cellar hole with the help of Cornelius Conuater and Petrus Markel. According to the recorded accounts, it took the three men only three days to complete the excavation, suggesting that animal power and/or slave labor also may have been used (or it may have been started the year before). The masons began work on 12 April. Head mason, Johannis Bevier, brought two others to the job: John Kittle and Isaac Low. They worked for 11 days during the last half of April. They were paid 4/6, 4/0, and 1/6, respectively, illustrating a hierarchy within the team. With such a low wage – one half the rate received by the laborers – Isaac Low was probably an

apprentice. Johannes Vandermerke and Barent Markill stayed on the payroll "tending the masons," and Petrus Markel was paid for "carrying stones" for one day.

Johannes Bevier (1724-1797) was the son of Louis's uncle, Abraham Bevier, who settled in Wawarsing, 10 miles south of Marbletown. Johannis's marriage to Rachel Lefevre in 1747 was the first recorded in Wawarsing. He would become active in the militia during the Revolutionary War and, later, in town government and the Reformed Dutch Church. While Johannis Bevier may have been directly involved in the construction of the stone church in Wawarsing in 1742, but there is no written reference to him ever having been a stone mason (Bevier, 1916, 78-81). John Kittle was also a resident of Wawarsing. He would be killed and scalped during an Indian raid that occurred there on 12 August 1781 (Brink, 1913, 236).

May 1751

April ended with the cellar walls essentially completed. During the first two weeks of May, Petrus Markel worked six days "breaking stone" for the exposed upper walls of the house. Whether stones were collected in the surrounding fields or were limestone split from nearby exposed seams, they were roughly dressed so that a flat face could be oriented to the exterior and interior facades. The walls of stone houses are generally 20 inches thick with separate sections laid up on outside and inside faces and a mix of clay, straw, and rubble filling the center. (This method is also used in the construction of brick masonry walls, and in both cases, the exterior and interior wall sections are tied together with occasional pieces that span the internal space.) On May 13th Markel was assisted by Stephen Nottingham's "Negro [named] pitt." Evidently, Nottingham was paying off a debt owed to Bevier, perhaps for surveying, with his slave's labor.

The masons and their tenders appear to have completed the bulk of their work by the end of the third week of May. On May 13 and 14, carpenter Levi Pawling was on site "making door & window cases." These would have amounted to no more than two doors and four windows. The cases were heavy, four-sided oak frames joined at the corners and notched on their inside faces with stops for doors and window sashes. They were a structural part of the exterior face of the wall and would have been installed in the openings created by the masons before the tops of the walls were

completed over them. No payments to Pawling are recorded, but he would have received the craftsman's 4/6 rate.

Levi Pawling was the grandson of Henry Pawling, an officer in the English garrison established at Kingston in 1664. After the militia disbanded, he remained in Hurley where he was appointed Officer in Charge of Indian Affairs (Fried, 1975, 130). Levi inherited property in Marbletown from his uncle, Albert Pawling, who was member of the Provincial Assembly. This land probably originated with his grandfather who was among the English soldiers receiving grants there in lieu of back pay. Although English, Levi Pawling would be commissioned a colonel leading the Third Regiment of the Ulster County Militia during the Revolution and a delegate to the Provincial Congress in 1775. After the war, he would be appointed the first judge of the Ulster County Court of Common Pleas.

On May 21, 1751, Augustenin Vandermerke cut a "neck spar" as the first step in raising the roof. Stone houses do not have ridge poles, but the spar may have been used to hold the rafters erect prior to the application of roof boards, which would have stabilized them. Augustenin and Abraham Vandermerke saw to "raising the house" (roof) on May 23. Prior to this Augustenin spent three days "when the masons was at work" [sic] probably overseeing the laying of beams, and plates in the walls, although this important step was not specifically mentioned in Bevier's accounts. Starting on May 24, Benjamin Krom, Augustus Keator, and Frederick Keator began trimming wood shingles and making the roof. Each roofer worked from two to five days for a combined total of 11 days in May and were paid the top rate of 4/6 per day.

June and July 1751

The roofers came back for the first week of June spending five days to complete their work. When that was done, work on the house was suspended for two months so Louis Bevier and his workmen could concentrate on the annual harvest. (The wheat the local Dutch preferred was planted in the late fall and matured early. The first cutting of hay was also harvested.) Augustenin Vandermerke worked on the first day in July laying the floor. The account book is silent as to from where or from whom the floor boards came. Then at the end of the month, Barent Markill worked three days cutting wood and "making the lime kill."

August 1751

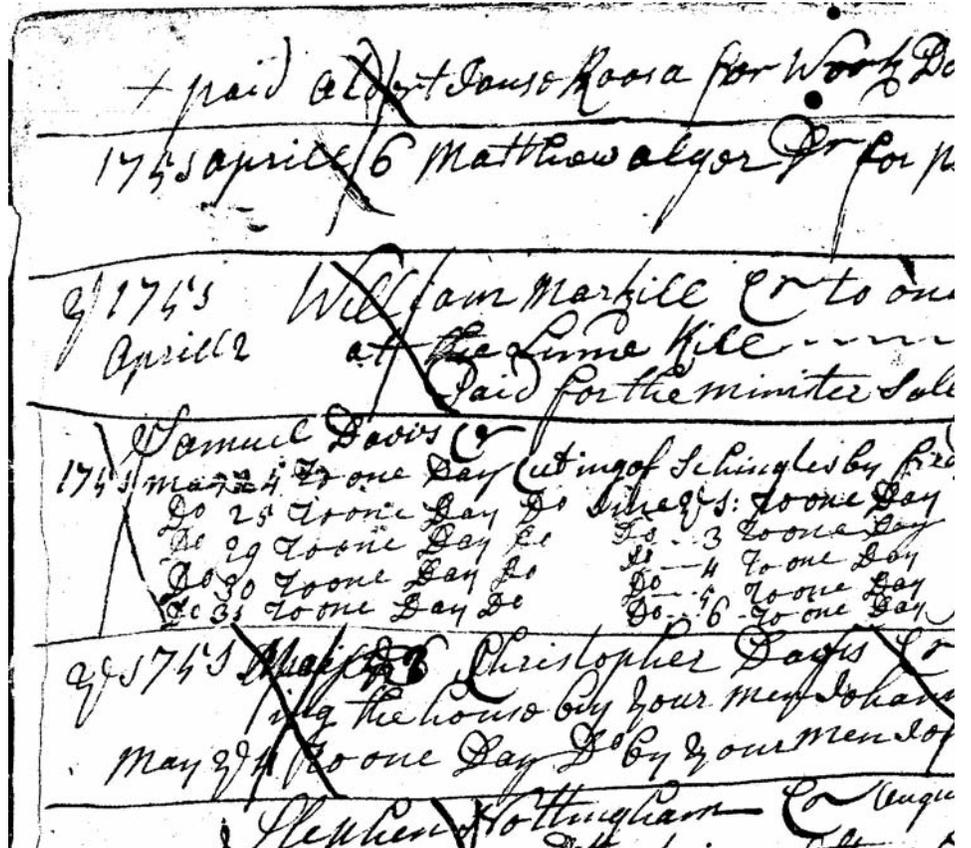
Work resumed in earnest in mid-August when the exterior of the house was finished. Jacob Middagh spent a day-and-a-half "making the [wood] gutters." Barent Markill dedicated another two days to "breaking & riding of stones" on August 12 and 13. The next day he spent riding lime. The three masons and their tenders (Markill and Markel) came back for a 14-day stint. The walls of stone houses were laid with a clay and straw binder with a protective lime mortar pointing applied to the exterior. Perhaps the pointing was left to the end, helping to account for the 42 total man-days the masons were at work in August. Levi Pawling returned for four days at the end of the month to work on doors and windows. Interior work was also underway. Some of the mason's time would have been dedicated to plastering the interior walls. Pawling would have constructed the two or three interior doors, too.

Louis Bevier, Jr. recorded that "After Harvest Abraham Konstapel and Andre his man worked at my house" 17 days in August, but did not specify what they did. In October their jobs were described as "finishing," indicating they were completing

the interior. This could have included woodworking for partitions, enclosures, and board facings for the deep door and window jambs in the stone walls. In this section of the account book, there is a list of paints bought of Nicholas Vanderline of Kingston, New York. (Vanderline was the latest in a long line of Kingston house and portrait painters and father of renowned nineteenth-century artist John Vanderlyn, the first American painter to study in France.) Without a "painter" identified, the location of the "finish" work in the sequence of accounts indicates that Konstapel filled that role.

The materials list contains a large amount (25 pounds) of white lead, most of which would have been used on exterior wood surfaces, including windows, and Spanish Brown, which was the color of most interior woodwork of stone houses in the period. Yellow paint was also on the list. Interior doors were painted yellow with blue (or the green noted on the list?) highlights. Recent paint studies have shown that yellow became a fashionable color for beams in the second half of the eighteenth century. Floor boards were not painted, but base boards were colored black. Plaster

A page fragment from the original Bevier ledger.



Books



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walls were whitewashed, another application for the stockpiled lime (Larson & Bartlett, 2003 & 2004).

September & October 1751

There was another intermission in September and October, probably related to continuing harvest work needed at the workmen's homesteads. In the first week of the month the masons spent two-and-one-quarter days to complete their plastering. Abraham Konstapel and his man, worked until 10 September, and Levi Pawling spent five more days "making door & window cases."

The workmen returned during last week of October to complete the entire project. The three masons arrived on 23 October to finish the chimney and lay the hearth. It would have been a jambless fireplace with which a Dutch mason like Johannis Bevier would have been well familiar. Barent Markill had broken the hearth stones on October 2; roofer Benjamin Krom returned for part of a day to "tack" the roof around the chimney. Augustetin Vandermerke and Abraham Konstapel used one-and-one-half days "closing the garet," presumably on the end where the chimney was built, and another two-and-one-half more days "finishing." Work on Louis Bevier, Jr.'s new house officially was completed on 30 October 1751, eight months after it was begun.

Renovations to the old house, 1752

Louis Bevier, Jr.'s new house was actually an addition attached to an existing house that he and his family occupied. Once the new house was completed, the masons and the carpenter were brought back to upgrade this old section. Levi Pawling spent one day in April and five and three-quarter days in May 1752 "making door and window cases" suggesting that the old windows were upgraded to match those in the new section. By the 1740s, the casement windows typical in early Dutch houses, was being replaced by the more fashionable vertical sliding sash windows in both new construction and the alteration of existing houses. This renovation would have required both a mason and a carpenter, because new window frames were smaller and different in overall dimension than the casements they replaced and the stone opening had to be altered. The locations or characteristics of the doorways in the old house may have been changed as well.

In early July, the masons spent two days "finishing the old house." As before, the term "finishing" implies interior work, such as plastering where changes had been made in the exterior walls, repairing or adding woodwork, and painting. According to the accounts, Johannis Bevier charged 10% more for "finishing" than for "masoning" (5/0 v. 4/6). John Kittle received an additional 0/6 for finishing work (20% increase in his case), and the apprentice Isaac Low's pay increased from 1/6 to 4/0. In September 1752, Levi Pawling worked for 6 days "making the soffet." This was probably an extension of the front or rear eave of the roof of the old house, which was where the kitchen was located. This was the final construction-related entry found in the account book.

Labor & Compensation

The construction schedule followed the annual progression of the farm and the seasons. Trees were felled, rough-cut, and squared in the winter months when farm work was at an ebb and timbers could be more easily transported over frozen ground. The oak and pine timbers were shaped immediately into beams, rafters, and casings while the wood was still green. Other preparatory jobs were undertaken, such as collecting and hauling stone to the site and making lime. The cellar hole was dug in April once the ground thawed, and as soon as it was completed masons quickly began erecting the basement walls. The upper walls were completed in time to build a roof on the house before the workers took a break in June and July to begin the summer harvest. There was a brief time in late August and early September where work on the house resumed to complete unfinished tasks on the exterior and begin finishing rooms on the interior. Another break was taken in September and October to complete the harvest. When that was over, there was time to put the finishing touches of the project before winter came and the cycle for the next construction season began anew.

The stone house represented hundreds of hours of labor for what may have been only a single room (only one chimney was reported to have been built). The three masons worked for a combined total of 142½ days, and 58¾ days were expended by their two tenders, Barent Markill (41 days) and Johannes Vandermerke (17¾ days). Levi Pawling was paid for 23½ days making door and window cases. Jacob Middaugh worked 5½ days squaring

beams & rafters. Augustenis Vandermerke worked for 15¼ days raising the roof, laying floors, and other carpentry work. The three roofers – Benjamin Krom, and Augustenis and Frederick Keator – spent a total of 26 man-days on the job.

The masons' total bill amounted to 26 Pounds, 5 Shillings, and 10½ pence. Louis Bevier, Jr. paid them 15 Pounds on 24 October 1751, when the work on the new house was completed, and the balance on 8 July 1752 after the renovations were made to the old house. Levi Pawling's account was not settled until 1753, although the method of payment is not recorded. Some of Jacob Middagh's wages were paid in cash, with 8/0 deducted as his share of the minister's salary, which Bevier paid on 6 April 1751. The balance of Middagh's account was satisfied with schepfels of Indian corn and lime. Johannes and Augustenis Vandermerke received most of their payments in cash with the balance coming in schepfels of corn, rye, and bran. Their contributions to the minister's salary was deducted also. It was a similar case with the roofers, although there is no record of them paying for the minister.

Barent Markill led the list of laborers with 59 days spent on a wide variety of jobs ranging from rough cutting timbers, making and riding lime, digging the cellar and tending to the masons, which accounted for 70 percent of that time. He was also one of Louis Bevier Jr.'s farm laborers. For his work on the house, he was paid the laborer's rate of 3/0 per day, but Bevier paid him 4/6 per day for mowing work during the harvest. Among Markill's payments were an "ABC Book," an evangelist book, two Els [yards] of coarse lining, and a share of the minister's salary. Hendrick Bush worked for 10 days on the new house rough cutting wood and riding stones. The accounts include payments for a month's worth of unspecified work in February 1751 and February and April 1752. Either Bush did not work full time for Bevier or he was paid less for the privilege of steady work and other benefits, such as a dwelling, since his monthly pay of 1/10/3 divided by his daily wage of 3/0 computes to only 11 days of labor.

A rough sum of the time recorded for the abovementioned workmen totals just over 400 days for which Louis Bevier, Jr. would have expended around 75 Pounds of currency, services, foodstuffs, and goods. His use of slave labor would have alleviated

some additional costs, but the detailed accounts represent a significant proportion of the work. Materials and fixtures would have increased this figure by a figure of two or three (more than four Pounds was spent on paint, alone).

Conclusion

The terse entries in Louis Bevier Jr.'s account book give a multi-dimensional perspective on the construction of stone houses in Ulster County during the mid-eighteenth century. It identifies most of the tasks involved in the project and puts them in seasonal, temporal, labor, and social contexts. The construction schedule was carefully planned by Bevier so that work progressed smoothly and that craftsmen and laborers were engaged at the proper time. Most of the 18 workers employed for the tasks had set timeframes in which to complete their jobs. Only a few were hired for brief periods and these may have been brought in to address immediate needs to keep the project moving ahead.

The ethnic duality that made New York material culture unique in America is illustrated in the construction team. Johannis Bevier, the stone mason, was descended from Huguenots who settled the New Paltz Patent, which associated him with the Dutch faction in Ulster County society. As such, he would have been familiar with the design traditions that had evolved from Dutch houses and served to express the cultural identity of his clients. The rectangular, one-and-one-half-story, gable roof house was an iconographic form for these people, and they conscientiously preserved it along with interiors with massive ceiling beams and jambless fireplaces. The English portion of the community (Marbletown had an unusually large English population due to some of its land having been granted to English soldiers in the seventeenth century) built fundamentally different houses. Their rooms were stacked in two-story houses and arranged around a single chimney stack rather than stretched out in a line. This dichotomy persisted until the English colony was dissolved in 1783, and European identity was no longer a determining issue. Both groups built stone houses, which were an expression of wealth and class, not ethnicity. Carpenter/joiner Levi Pawling's ancestry was English, but both his grandfather and father married daughters of Dutch families prominent in Kingston's early history. His role in the construction of the stone house was limited, but he may have been a factor in the introduction of vertical

sliding sash windows into the design. Casement windows were becoming obsolete in both Dutch and English houses, but an English carpenter may have been more proficient in their construction since the Dutch in Ulster County were reluctant to adopt new or English features.

Louis Bevier, Jr. conveyed the homestead to his eldest son, David (1746-1822) in his will. From David, the house was passed down through a series of heirs, most named Louis, until the seventh generation of the Marbletown branch of the family gave it to the Ulster County Historical Society in 1938. By this time, Louis Bevier, Jr.'s house had gone through many changes, including those caused by a fire in the early 1800s, and had been incorporated into the existing large, two-story house. ■



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From Carl's Scrapbook: The Black Horse Inn

Isaac and Maria Hallenbeck house, Town of Athens, Greene County, New York

By Walter Richard Wheeler

Introduction

With this issue of the *Newsletter* I'm initiating a short series of articles that are based upon documentation collected by my friend and neighbor Carl Erickson. Carl was a youth with a precocious love of history in the 1950s, and traveled with his parents on Sunday drives throughout the Hudson Valley, stopping at various historic sites. Lucky for us, his parents nurtured this interest, and allowed him to linger long enough to take photographs with his Ansco "Clack" camera and to explore a number of these sites. Returning home, Carl drew up plans and did additional research on the buildings.¹ A number of these structures were abandoned at the time and are now gone, or have been substantially altered.

Carl's method of documenting these structures typically included a location map, photographs, and a sketch plan.

Brief descriptive text served as captions for the photographs. Related materials such as newspaper articles were later pasted onto the pages if the building was subsequently in the news.

Carl appears to have maintained the scrapbook throughout the 1950s, with some additions dating to as late as the late 1960s. He recently recovered it from his parent's attic and has graciously allowed me to copy a number of its pages, giving me permission to share these materials with our members. It is perhaps not surprising that Carl grew from a fledgling preservationist into an adult who has been at the forefront of preservation in Troy for at least 35 years.

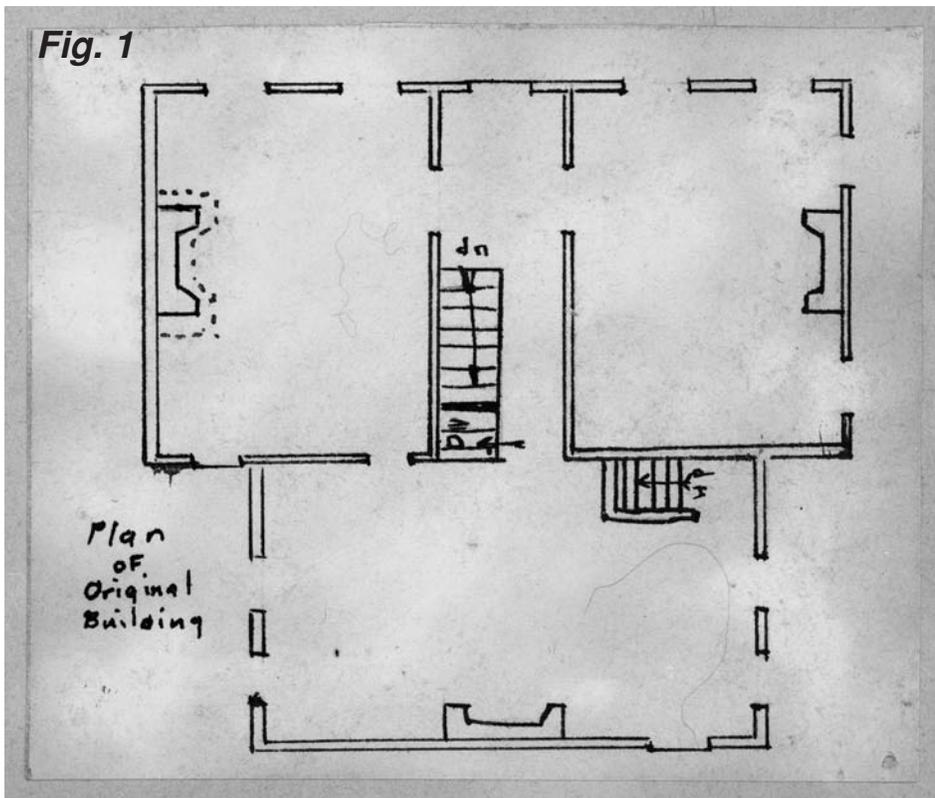
The Isaac and Maria Hallenbeck house

Carl and his parents visited this house, also known as the Black Horse Inn, on a Sunday in September 1956.

The building was an abandoned ruin at the time and stood on the east side of Route 9W, on a part of the road that had formerly been the King's Highway. Carl took three photographs and sketched out the plan (*Fig. 1, north is to the right*). He has shown the basement kitchen fireplace on the left, by indicating its location with dashed lines. The first photograph is an exterior view, looking northeast, showing the south gable end of the building (*Photo 1*). The second view was taken from the east, looking west at the south end of the house, its wing and wood-framed leanto (*Photo 2*). The third image Carl identified as the fireplace in the original basement kitchen (*Photo 3*).

Carl pasted a newspaper article from an unidentified journal (probably the *Albany Times-Union* or the *Troy Record*) from 19 October, 1956 on the same page as the rest of the documentation. The article records the destruction of the building by fire just one month after Carl's visit. "The 204-year-old Black Horse Inn, in Coxsackie (sic), used to quarter Continental troopers (sic) on their way to the Battle of Saratoga, was leveled by fire today. Police said the blaze in the abandoned building, erected in 1752, was believed started by a tramp. No one was injured." The source of the 1752 construction date is not known. Carl recorded it as having been built in 1791, and nineteenth century histories seem to bear this out.

The house appears to have been built by Isaac Hallenbeck, who was described in 1884 as "In youth exceptionally bright, and as a man wise to plan and quick to execute, with a keen, large appetite for business and a strong grasp of success, beginning life with scant means and a small grocery, his career until he became the processor of a fine estate and the founder in 1791 of the celebrated Black Horse Inn, known from Canada to Maryland.



Located on the King's road, this noted hostelry was a frequent stopping place for the distinguished Gov. Geo. Clinton, who on one occasion, said that in all his travels he had met with no farmer so intelligent and well-read as the subject under consideration. Honest, unflecked with a single stain of ill-gotten gain, highly respected by all who knew him, diligent in business to a remarkable degree, Isaac H. died in 1833 at the ripe old age of 84, leaving behind him an untarnished name and a bright, stimulating memory."²

Another account, also published in 1884, described the building, then occupied by one of Isaac and Maria's grandsons, Prentiss W. Hallenbeck, as "built near the Site of the once famous Black Horse Inn. It is built of stone, and bears, in front, the inscription, "June ye 10th 1791. I. H. B. M. H. B.," standing for Isaac Hallenbeck and Maria Hallenbeck."³ A lithograph of the carved stone was reproduced together with a portrait of Mr. Hallenbeck. In contrast to the identification of the Hallenbeck house as merely "near the Site of the....Black Horse Inn," the 1884 newspaper article previously cited described Prentiss' house as "the old Hallenbeck homestead built by his grandfather Isaac in 1791 on the old King's road leading from Albany to Jersey City and known as the once famous Black Horse Inn."⁴

No other photographs of the building are known at present. A New York State education department plaque marks the site formerly occupied by the Hallenbeck house, about three miles from the village of Athens on Route 9W.



¹ Personal conversation with Carl Erickson, 8 February 2011.

² "The Hallenbecks of Athens," by "An Athenian." Originally published in the Examiner on 21 June 1884. Transcribed by Sidney S. Castle. Accessed online at rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nygreen2/the_hallenbecks_of_athens.htm on 8 February 2011.

³ J. B. Beers. *History of Greene County, New York*. (New York: J. B. Beers and Co., 1884), 187.

⁴ "The Hallenbecks of Athens," op. cit.

Vernacular Documents IV

“It would be better to leave them bare,” or The Ethics of a Good Paint Job

By *Walter Richard Wheeler*

The media revolution of the 1830s (yes, ours is not the first) was fueled by the availability of cheap paper and stereotyping, and put publishing into the hands of the masses. With the coeval widespread availability of inexpensive coloring agents, it was inevitable that public discourse would turn its attention to the debate over the ethics of a good paint job. That the choice exercised in painting ones house would have moral implications in addition to being a reflection of ones taste is a collateral result of the spirit of the day, which was focused on the purification and perfection of America through social and religious causes. It is through the lens of “refinement,” in this case of taste – that the following articles from the popular press should be read.

Journal articles addressing the need to think more carefully about the color one painted the exterior of a building began to appear in regional media in the early 1840s. Unspoken but behind the argument was the divide between vernacular building practice, and proponents of “styled” (what the Brits call “polite”) architecture – the latter advocating for Italianate and Gothic style rural dwellings painted in muted earth tones. This approach was proposed for a built environment which was previously overwhelmingly painted white. White, Red and brown lead paints were used, to be sure, but whitewash was the cheapest exterior finish available. Yellows, oranges and blues were used but more expensive and frequently not available, and so the color of one’s house became wrapped up in the popular imagination with economic status. In the course of their arguments, each of the following three texts make mention of the old style of painting houses white, and offer various opinions as to why it became popular and why it was thought to be inappropriate among a people of enlightened taste. Given the connection between paint color and economic status, the argument against the use of white paint was in no small way implicitly classist in nature.

This first article was published in a journal intended for circulation among mechanics, particularly among the building trades, in Albany. It is interesting for its advocacy of the use of earth tones in painting the exterior of buildings, even as it implicates the classist background of the argument and sees worth in the continued use of the old style of painting.

There is no art in which a fine taste can be better displayed than in that of painting. Color, position, form, altitude, situation and the moral quality of association, or what is call[ed] the “beautiful and

sublime.” This will apply to painting, not only as a fine art, but to the most common plain painting of buildings. If from the universality of painting, we are to judge of the taste of painters, we might be led to exclaim, “oh whither has fled the poetry of the pencil,” but when we consider that the choice of coloring is what the artist has generally no control over, the false taste, or rather the want of taste so often to be seen, cannot be laid to the blame of him. During the past year our city has undergone a most fashionable change in the style of painting. Dark brown, sir, is a fashionable color. But, sir, no such a thing as fashion ought to be bound on the noble art of painting. It knows no such rule as “the aristocracy of fashion.” There are laws so plain, which distinguish the art, that he who runneth may read; there are others so fine, that the superior artist and practical, or those who have a superior fine taste, only can discern or appreciate.

The painting or rather the color of the Episcopal Chapel, [St. Peter’s Church] in State Street [Albany], is correct and appropriate (Fig. 1). Fine outlines against a clear blue sky are always best exhibited in the dark style of architecture. Fine outlines (I refer only to elevated constructions, such as spires), of white against a clear sky, look always bleached and skeleton like. A single line of white, such as a tall column of white marble, if well proportioned, is in the style of the beautiful, but the effect is altogether different, when many fine lines comingle.

Buildings fronting the north should always be painted some warm color. Any sombre or blue shade gives an exceedingly cold and cheerless aspect to buildings in such a situation and looking at some of the buildings in our city, lately fashioned, we shall become convinced of this fact. We do not wish to point to this, or that one, lest the owners should become dissatisfied with what they have done, but three years at most, will end the reign of universal brown. Our clear atmosphere needs no dark coloring on our buildings to nullify the effect of coal smoke. The light painting so national and once so common in our cities and villages, gave them such a clean and cheerful appearance that the effect upon strangers visiting our country was always pleasing, and our national taste and cleanliness were always praised. We shall lose these flattering characteristics, if the present gloomy style be persisted in....Great judgment ought also to be



Fig. 1 *St. Peter's Church in Albany, NY, constructed in 1802-1803 and razed in the late 1850s.*

exercised in regard to the surface that is to be painted; for [in] the old red style, when the lines of white are struck, a very indifferent piece of mason work might pass unnoticed, whereas in a single color, when there is no highly reflective lines, the least unevenness of brick, or aysler¹, is perfectly glaring. This is caused by the eye being unable to detect the inequalities of surface, when the lines of a highly reflective color cross each other, presenting a great number of centres upon a less reflective ground.

Houses of worship, except when they are massive plain structures, ought to be painted some dark color, as it gives them an antique appearance, and this is connected with the moral associations. Cottages embowered in trees ought to be painted some light cheerful color – in some situations, we have seen yellow exceedingly appropriate, and the want of taste will be plainly discerned by any person looking from the lower island to a cottage on the other bank of the river, lately fashioned.

We once saw a building in Monroe County painted in alternate squares of white, yellow, and light blue, it had a most pantomimic appearance,

but we shall expose our ignorance of the Harlequin style by an attempt at *critique* (Fig. 2). Great judgment and taste must govern in regard to situation and position, and the color according to the style of architecture. Mr. Rathbone's country seat at Kenwood, displays both taste and judgment, as the *association* has been studied, and that with success....² (Fig. 3).

What this author calls "the old red style" was the long-founded practice of painting brick buildings with a semi-transparent mixture of linseed (or other plant) oil and iron oxide, after which the joints would be struck with white lead paint for emphasis. In more elaborate examples, the joints would be "penciled" – usually in combination with "vining." This technique incorporated scoring of the joints with a narrow center groove (vining), then returning after highlighting the joint with white paint to fill the narrow furrow with contrasting black paint (penciling).³ Alternately, penciling of the mortar joints with white paint alone and without vining was sometimes used. Execution of this system of painting was very time consuming, and thus expensive. It was applied to the most pretentious houses constructed in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Fig. 4).

A. J. Downing wrote of the subject in the *Horticulturalist*, the agricultural newspaper he edited and published from Albany. He later presented his thoughts in a chapter in his *Architecture of Country Houses*:

The color of the outside of a house in the country is of more importance than is usually supposed, since, next to the form itself, the color is the first impression which the eye receives in approaching it; and, in some cases, the color makes its impression, even before we fully comprehend the form of the building.

The greater number of all country houses in the United States have been hitherto painted white – partly because white-lead is supposed to be a better preservative than other colors (though the white paint generally used is one of the worst in this respect), and partly from its giving an appearance of especial newness to a house, which, with many persons, is in itself a recommendation.

No person of taste, who gives the subject the least consideration, is, however, guilty of the mistake of painting or coloring country houses white. And yet there are so many who have never given the subject a moment's thought, that we must urge upon them a few arguments against so great a breach of good taste.

Our first objection to white is, that it is too glaring and conspicuous. We scarcely know any thing more uncomfortable to the eye, than to approach the sunny side of a house in one of our brilliant mid-summer days, when it revels in the fashionable purity of its color. It is absolutely painful. Nature,



Fig. 2 "Wilkinson Clothing Hall," a commercial building on River Street in Troy, NY, painted in the 'harlequin' or 'particolored' style in 1850.

full of kindness for man, has covered most of the surface that meets his eye in the country, with a soft green hue – at once the most refreshing and most grateful to the eye. Many of our country houses appear to be colored on the very opposite principle, and one needs, in broad sunshine, to turn his eyes away from them, to relieve them by a glimpse of the soft and refreshing shades that everywhere pervade the trees, the grass, and the surface of the earth.

Our second objection to white is, that it does not harmonize with the country, and thereby mars the effect of rural landscapes. Much of the beauty of landscapes depends on what painters call *breadth of tone* – which is caused by broad masses of colors that harmonize and blend agreeably together. Nothing tends to destroy breadth of tone so much as any object of considerable size, and of a brilliant white. It stands harshly apart from all the soft shades of the scene. Hence, landscape painters always studiously avoid the introduction of white in their buildings, and give them, instead, some neutral tint – a tint which unites or contrasts agreeably with the color of trees and grass, and which seems to blend into other parts of natural landscape, instead of being a discordant note in the general harmony....

No one is successful in rural improvements, who does not study nature, and take her for the basis of his practice. Now, in natural landscape, any thing like strong and bright colors is seldom seen, except in very minute portions, and least of all pure white – chiefly appearing in small objects like flowers. The practical rule which should be deduced from this is, to avoid all those colors which nature avoids. In buildings, we should copy those that she

offers chiefly to the eye – such as those of the soil, rocks, wood, and the bark of trees, – the materials of which houses are built. These materials offer us the best and most natural study from which harmonious colors for the houses themselves should be taken.

Wordsworth...remarks that the objections to white as a color, in large spots or masses, in landscapes, are insurmountable. He says it destroys the *gradations* of distances, haunts the eye, and disturbs the repose of nature. To leave some little consolation to the lovers of white-lead, we will add that there is one position in which their favorite color may not only be tolerated, but often has a happy effect. We mean in the case of a country house or cottage, deeply embowered in trees. Surrounded by such a mass of foliage as Spenser describes,

In whose *inclosed shadow* there was set,
A fair pavilion, *scarcely to be seen*,

a white building often has a magical effect. But a landscape painter would quickly answer, if he were asked the reason of this exception to the rule, "it is because the building does not appear white." In other words, in the shadow of the foliage by which it is half concealed, it loses all the harshness and offensiveness of a white house in an open site. We have, indeed, often felt, in looking at examples of the latter, set upon a bald hill, that the building itself would, if possible, cry out,

"Hide me from day's *garish eye*."

We may also add, that while few objects are more disagreeable than bare and tame villages – so there are, on the other hand, few which give more pleasure to the eye than the contrast of a few white cottages surrounded by foliage, and set in a wide landscape, where only the universal green of woods and meadows is to be seen.

Having entered our protest against the general use of white in country edifices, we are bound to point out what we consider suitable shades of color. We have said that one should look to nature for hints in color. This gives us, apparently, a wide choice of shades; but as we ought properly to employ modified shades, taken from the colors of the materials of which houses are constructed, the number of objects is brought within a moderate compass. Houses are not built of grass or leaves, and there is, therefore, not much propriety in painting a dwelling green. Earth, stone, bricks, and wood, are the substances that enter mostly into the structure of our houses, and from these we would accordingly take suggestions for painting them.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was full of artistic feeling for the union of a house with its surrounding



Fig. 3 Rathbone's house, "Kenwood" from an early woodcut taken from a drawing by A. J. Davis.

scenery, once said, "If you would fix upon the best color for your house, turn up a stone, or pluck up a handful of grass by the roots, and see what is the color of the soil where the house is to stand, and let that be your choice." This rule was not probably intended to be exactly carried into general practice, but the feeling that prompted it was the same that we are endeavoring to illustrate – the necessity of a unity of color in the house and the country about it.

We think, in the beginning, that the color of all buildings in the country, should be of those *soft and quiet shades* called neutral tints, such as fawn, drab, gray, brown, etc., and that all positive colors, such as white, yellow, red, blue, black, etc., should always be avoided; neutral tints being those drawn from nature, and harmonizing best with her, and positive colors being most discordant when introduced into rural scenery.

In the second place, we would adapt the shade of color, as far as possible, to the expression, style, or character of the house itself. Thus, a large mansion may very properly receive a somewhat sober

hue, expressive of dignity; while a country house of moderate size demands a lighter and more pleasant, but still quiet tone; and a small cottage should, we think, always have a cheerful and lively tint. Country houses, thickly surrounded by trees, should always be painted of a lighter shade than those standing exposed. And a new house, entirely unrelieved by foliage, as it is rendered conspicuous by the very nakedness of its position, should be painted several shades darker than the same building, if placed in a well-wooded site. *In proportion as a house is exposed to view, let its hue be darker, and where it is much concealed by foliage, a very light shade of color is to be preferred.*

...Th[e] color, which Wordsworth recommends for general use, is the hue of the English freestone, called *Portland stone* – a *quiet fawn* color, to which we are strongly partial, and which harmonizes perhaps more completely with all situations in the country than any other that can be named. Next to this, we like a *warm gray*, that is, a gray mixed with

a very little red, and some yellow. *Browns* and *dark grays* are suitable for barns, stables, and outbuildings, which it is desirable to render inconspicuous – but for dwellings, unless very light shades of these latter colors are used, they are apt to give a dull and heavy effect in the country.

A very slight admixture of a darker color is sufficient to remove the objections to white paint, by destroying the *glare of white*, the only color which reflects all the sun's rays. We would advise the use of soft shades, not much removed from white, for small cottages, which should not be painted of too dark a shade, since that would give them an aspect of gloom, rather worse than glare. It is the more necessary to make this suggestion, since we have lately observed that some persons newly awakened to the bad effects of white, have rushed into the opposite extreme, and colored their country houses of such a sombre hue, that they give a melancholy character to the whole neighborhood around them.

A species of monotony is also produced by using the same neutral tint for every part of the exterior of a country house. Now there are features, such as window facings, blinds, cornices, etc., which confer the same kind of expression on a house that the eyes, eyebrows, lips, etc., of a face, do upon the human countenance. To paint the whole house plain drab, gives it very much the same dull and insipid effect that colorless features (white hair, pale eye-brows, lips, etc., etc.) do the face. A certain sprightliness is therefore always bestowed on a dwelling in a neutral tint, by painting the bolder projecting features of a different shade. The simplest practical rule that we can suggest for effecting this, in the most satisfactory and agreeable manner, is the following: Choose paint of some neutral tint that is quite satisfactory, and, if the tint is a *light* one, let the facings of the windows, cornices, etc., be painted several *shades* darker, of the same color. The blinds may either be a still darker shade than the facings, or else the darkest green. This variety of shades will give a building a cheerful effect, when, if but one of the shades were employed, there would be a dullness and heaviness in the appearance of its exterior.

If, on the other hand, the tint chosen is a dark one, then let the window dressings, etc., be painted of a much lighter shade of the same color.

Anyone who will follow the principles we have suggested cannot, at least, fail to avoid the gross blunders in taste which we have so long been in the habit of committing in the practice of painting country houses.

Uvedale Price justly remarked, that many people have a sort of *callus* over their organs of sight, as others over those of hearing; and as the callous

hearers feel nothing in music but kettle-drums and trombones, so the callous seers can only be moved by strong opposition of black and white, or by fiery reds. There are, we may add, some few house painters who appear to be equally benumbed to any delicate sensations in *shades* of color. They judge of the beauty of colors upon houses as they do in the raw pigment, and, we verily believe, would be more gratified to paint every thing chrome yellow, indigo blue, pure white, vermilion red, and the like, than with the most fitting and delicate mingling of shades to be found under the wide canopy of heaven. Fortunately *fashion*, a more powerful teacher of the multitude than the press or the schools, is now setting in the right direction. A few men of taste and judgment, in city and country, have set the example by casting off all connection with harsh colors. What a few leaders do at the first, from a nice sense of harmony in colors, the many will do afterwards, when they see the superior beauty of neutral tints supported and enforced by the example of those who build and inhabit the most attractive and agreeable houses; and we trust, at no very distant time, one may have the pleasure of travelling over our whole country, without meeting with a single habitation of glaring and offensive color, but see everywhere something of harmony and beauty."⁴

It is interesting to read both of these authors' attempt to bolster their positions by quoting eminent writers, thus tacitly suggesting that they are among the learned and that their opinion is based upon widely-accepted rules of taste. The third author appears to have read Downing's articles in the *Horticulturalist*.

The best way, in painting a house, is not to attempt to imitate any particular material, but to beautify it by giving it a cheerful and pleasing appearance. For this purpose, some light and bright colors are necessary; such as will wear best should have the preference. A pure white, relieved with green blinds, at one time was almost universal, but the effect is too glaring when new, and when weather-stained and old it has a very shabby and cheerless look. A slight tinge of green, yellow, or red, produces the pleasantest tints for country houses. Lead [?] color is very objectionable for a house, as it almost neutralizes the effects of shadows, without which their [sic] can be nothing picturesque in the appearance of a building. That part of a house which remains in shadow should always be painted a warm bright tint, let the other parts of it be colored as they may. As a dwelling house should always be made to wear a cheerful and comfortable aspect, this matter of color is of much greater importance than, at the first glance, may generally be supposed the case; and therefore,



Fig. 4 Photograph of remaining fragments of original vining and penciling at the Payne house in Fort Miller, Washington County, New York. Jehiel Robbins was the brick mason for the house, constructed in 1786-1787.

those who have not the faculty of distinguishing colors, and are consequently indifferent to their effects, should not venture to exercise their own judgments, but seek professional advice in such matters. A dark green is an extremely pleasant color to the eye when we look upon a meadow or a forest, but a house painted such a color would be hideously ugly; yet a house covered with ivy, or any other green vine, is one of the pleasantest sights that the eye can rest upon. It is not, therefore, the color that is objectionable, but the fault is in the pigment and the evenness of surface which the smooth paint presents. When a house is covered with green leaves, the surface is broken up by an infinite number of shadows and glancing lights, which prevents the glare occasioned by a broad unvaried surface. For the same reason any other bright positive color, would be equally objectionable. A soft neutral tint will always be found the most grateful to the eye when it is spread over a broad smooth surface.

The interior of a house should always be painted of a warm, neutral tint. Pure white is too cold and cheerless for a dwelling room and is, moreover, so liable to stain, that its appearance of purity and cleanliness, which is a great recommendation with neat house-keepers, very soon wears off. But we shall reserve our remarks on the painting and decorating of the interiors of houses for a separate chapter.

The purity of our atmosphere, and the absence of coal smoke, admit of houses being painted a pure white, and where lead and oil are alone used in the open air, the color will grow white from exposure; but in the interior of a house it will become a dingy yellow from being deprived of light and air. White lead improves by age, and should not be used for wood work, unless at least a year old; linseed oil also becomes purer and better from age, and should be at least two years manufactured

before used. Much harm results from the employment of incompetent workmen in the painting of houses, as from their inexperience in mixing paints, and their inability to distinguish between good and bad materials, the employer often throws away his money, and defaces the appearance of his house in the attempt to beautify it by a coat of paint....

Rudely constructed country houses, whether or stone or wood, and barns and other out-houses, may be greatly improved in appearance by a coat of white-wash, which has the double effect of preserving the wood while it beautifies it; a very pleasant tint may be produced by mixing a little yellow ochre in the white-wash. But unless buildings are white-washed, at least once a year, it would be better to leave them bare, for nothing can look more neglectful and shabby than a building with the white-wash half peeled off.

It is difficult to give particular directions on a point like that of the color houses which is, after all, a matter of taste, and we offer these hints not for the benefit of those who have nay taste of their own, but for those who have not, who, we believe, form a very large class of the people. In such matters that which pleases best is the best, and we would advise every one to think more of pleasing himself in the decoration of his house than of conforming to the fashion, or to the dicta of any self-established arbiter in the art of living.⁵

This third author adds to the argument the explicit description of the use of whitewash as appropriate for houses of the rural poor (“rudely constructed country houses”, which are equated to “barns and other out-houses”), with the admonition that even that treatment should be avoided if they can’t be painted on an annual basis—“It would be better to leave them bare.”

Later nineteenth century romantic notions associated with the Colonial Revival reversed some of these ideas and returned to the argument touched upon in the first critique, that “The light painting so national and once so common in our cities and villages, gave them such a clean and cheerful appearance that the effect upon strangers visiting our country was always pleasing, and our national taste and cleanliness were always praised.”

¹ That is, ashlar, a type of stonework.

² M. U. [author unidentified] “Fashionable Painting,” in *The Mechanics’ Mirror* (Albany), 1:1 (January 1846), 14-15.

³ The technique is sometimes called “grapevining”, which (typically, adding to the confusion of terminology) is a term also applied to joints which project between adjacent bricks or stones having a semi-circular profile.

⁴ Alexander Jackson Downing, “Exterior Color of Country Houses,” in *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1852), 198-206. Parts of this chapter were originally published in the *Horticulturalist* in the late 1840s.

⁵ “Painting Houses in Town & Country,” in *The Trenton State Gazette*, 2 May 1849, 1.

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.**

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A look back



Pictured above is a postcard circa 1900 of the **Cornell House** (aka the Rutsen-Hardenberg House). The house – supposedly dating from the late 17th century (more likely, however, from the period 1705-1750) – it was an interesting example of the clipped gable end type. Destroyed by a lightning strike on July 5, 1911. The house was located in the vicinity of Rosendale in Ulster County, New York.

Calendar

Greene County Gathering

Saturday, June 18, 2011 – 10:00AM

This will be a combined Greene County study tour and board meeting.

Tour to begin at the Bronck House other houses to follow.

Directions to the Bronck Museum as follows:

- From Thruway Exit 21B, Coxsackie: South on 9W 3¾ miles; at RED BARN turn right on Pieter Bronck Road.
- From Traffic Light at 9W and 81: South on 9W 1½ miles; at RED BARN turn right on Pieter Bronck Road.
- From Catskill: North on 9W; then left on County Rt. 42

Stone House Day Hurley

Saturday, July 10, 2010 – 10:00 AM

As tradition now has it the HVVA's picnic will be folded into the same day we gather to showcase the work of our organization at Hurley's Annual Stone House Day. The potluck picnic will begin at about 4:30 in back of the Elmendorf House on Main Street. Please let us know if you are willing to volunteer at the display table during the day.

Email to: Gallusguy@msn.com

Northern Ulster Outing

Saturday, August 20, 2011 -10:00 AM

Some special places are being scouted, meeting place to be determined. Please check the website as the date nears.