



# Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture

January – March 2021

## Newsletter

Vol. 1, No.1

### From the President: Welcome Every Friendly Guest

#### Greetings fellow HMVAers!

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture Newsletter. In it, we will continue the tradition established by our two founding organizations, the Dutch Barn Preservation Society and Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture, of publishing informative and interesting articles for our membership. We intend to publish the Newsletter on a quarterly schedule, and welcome contributions from our members and others interested in the history of the built culture of our region.

Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture was granted an amended charter by the New York State Board of Regents on behalf of the New York State Education Department at their meeting on 3 March 2020, held just before the shut down due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This charter amends that received by the Dutch Barn Preservation Society on 19 June 1987, and joins the HVVA and DBPS under one banner. I've presented the background and progress of this process in installments of "From the President" printed in issues 21:4, 22:1 and 22:3 of the HVVA Newsletter, published in 2018 and 2019 (these can all be found online on the HMVA website, [www.hmvarch.org](http://www.hmvarch.org)).

Although we were able to meet as a group for events subsequent to our merger vote in November 2019, including our Annual Meeting in January 2020 (see photo), and the Maggie MacDowell lecture in February, all remaining events for the year had to be postponed, as I'm sure you know.



First joint business meeting held at the Elmdorph Inn in Red Hook on 18 January 2020. Photo by Paul Selzam.

We look forward to rescheduling the anticipated house tours, annual picnic and other events as soon as it becomes safe to do so. Meanwhile, it has become clear that the HMVA has an opportunity to incorporate other ways of facilitating communication and education among its membership, possibly including online meetings or lectures, social media and website content. More on this hopefully soon!

In December, we learned with great sadness of the untimely passing of Sheryl Griffin. Sheryl served as webmaster for both the HVVA and the DBPS since early 2018, and, with Donna Brown, navigated the transfer of our old website data to a new domain earlier this year. Please see page 2 for a remembrance of her.

***continued on Page 2***

## Obituary of Sheryl E. Griffith

### June 23, 1945 – November 8, 2020

Dedicated HMVA member Sheryl E. Griffith died tragically in an automobile accident in Tivoli on Sunday, November 8, 2020. Born in Atascadero, California, she was the daughter of the late Ralph and Esther (Monro) Vaniman. Sheryl graduated with honors in art from Scripps College in 1966 in Claremont. After studying at the Rhode Island School of Design, she later earned a Masters of Library Science at the State University of New York at Albany.

Sheryl was the Head Librarian at the FDR Library and Museum in Hyde Park, New York for over twenty years. She also worked for a number of years at the National Archives and the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C. In Red Hook, Sheryl was instrumental in creating the town's recycling center and worked at both the Red Hook and Tivoli libraries.

Sheryl travelled widely and was an avid reader. And she was a talented carpenter and boatbuilder, prolific seamstress, avid gardener, enthusiastic dancer, and outstanding cook. She volunteered her computer skills to updating HVVA's web site and creating a new one for Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture when HVVA and the Dutch Barn Preservation Society merged in 2020.



Sheryl is survived by her sons Joel Griffith of Tivoli and Jesse Griffith of Minneapolis, Minnesota, as well as countless friends, colleagues and HMVA members. She will be missed.

### President's letter continued from Page 1

Sadly, just before going to press we received news of the passing—on New Year's Day—of Peter Sinclair, founder of HVVA and long-time board member of the DBPS. Peter's legacy is substantial; our next Newsletter will collect appreciations of his life and contributions to the study of vernacular architecture and culture. Please send your recollections and pictures to our editor, Neil Larson, at neillarson8@gmail.com for inclusion in that issue.

Our masthead reproduces part of a paper cutout once owned by a member of the Ten Broeck family, illustrating the farm known as the Ten Broeck Bouwerie in the Town of Clermont, Columbia County. The still-extant gambrel-roofed house built for the Ten Broecks in 1762 is shown, together with outbuildings that were on the farm when the silhouette was made ca. 1795.

The phrase below the image, "Welcome Every Friendly Guest" is the refrain of a song most commonly called

"The Invitation" which was popular in England and North America beginning in the late 18th century. Written by John Danby (alternately attributed, with slightly different lyrics, to "Mr. Collett"), the song is an invitation to abandon worldly differences, and to share conviviality and community in service of a common cause. The first verse in Danby's version enjoins:

*Come, ye party-jangling swains,  
Leave your flocks, and quit the plains;  
Friends to country, or to court,  
Nothing here shall spoil your sport.  
Ever welcome to our feast,  
Welcome ev'ry friendly guest.*

Welcome every friendly guest, to our continuing feast on the riches of the Hudson and Mohawk valleys!

*Wally*

Walter R. Wheeler

## A Palatine House built in 1760 in Hillsdale, Columbia County

By Neil Larson



Fig.1: View from SW. The window to the right of the door originated as a second entrance. The double window on the west end replaced a doorway linking the house to a previous wing; windows in the upper story of the front façade are mid-19th-century additions. Photos by W. R. Wheeler, 2019.

In the autumn of 2019, I made a visit to a large 19th-century farmhouse in Hillsdale, Columbia County, to consult with the owners about its construction history. At the end of the visit, they took me to see a rundown tenant house on the property that they were in the process of renovating into a more habitable dwelling. Entering the house, which had been gutted of 20th-century alterations down to its wall framing, it was immediately clear that it was an 18th-century timber frame building. Wally Wheeler and I spent a day measuring the building and determining its construction history. Jack Sobon, who had discovered a similar house in Hillsdale more than thirty years earlier, contributed his observations (he has been hired to complete the “restoration”). The owners were persuaded to have a dendrochronological study done by the Columbia Lamont Doherty tree ring lab; the results dated the house to 1760.

The deed history could be traced only back to 1822 when Andrew A. and Elizabeth Sharts sold their farm to David Wheeler, a miller, of Amenia. (Eighteenth-century deeds are notoriously absent in Columbia County.) The Shartses were of Palatine ancestry and descended from families arriving in East Camp (Germantown) on Livingston Manor in Columbia County in 1710. They were part of an enclave of Palatine families, many of them with the Sharts surname, that settled in Hillsdale by the mid-1700s after the Livingston camps were broken up. Towns along the contested boundary with New England in southeastern Columbia County and

northeastern Dutchess County were destinations for many of them. The old house and its two-acre parcel were absorbed into (or restored to) the adjoining farm 1902 when John B. Bristol of New York City, a well-regarded landscape painter, sold his childhood home to Henry L. Coon, the farm’s owner. A postcard image of the house from that time shows it boarded up and in poor condition. (No deed has been found, which documents when or how Abner and Lydia Bristol acquired the house, but they are enumerated in the 1820 U.S. Census for Hillsdale.)

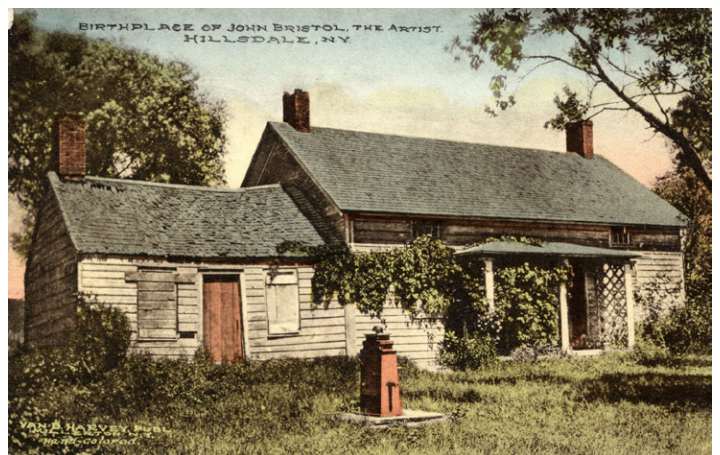


Fig.3: Postcard view of Bristol House (Sharts House), ca. 1900. The kitchen wing, no longer extant, was added in the early 1800s along with half-story windows in the house. The house apparently maintained this appearance until the end of the 1900s.



Fig.4: View looking south on east side of house showing remains of wall framing for window and door (see Fig. 5). Photo by N. Larson, 2019.

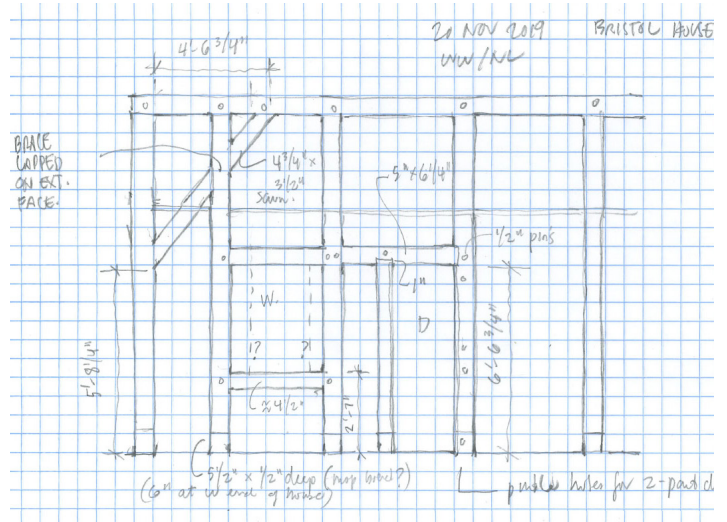


Fig.5: Drawing of framing for door and window on east side of south wall (see Fig. 4). Drawing by Walter R. Wheeler & Neil Larson, 2019.

A physical analysis of the house revealed that it was constructed using a post-and-beam bent system associated with the Dutch building tradition in the region. Some type of infill existed between the posts covered with weatherboards on the exterior and plaster on the interior leaving the interior faces of the posts exposed. Ceiling beams were planed smooth, as were the board ceilings; evidence of paint is extant. The house had a two-room plan with a central dividing partition. Each room contained a door and window on the front façade and one on each end; no windows were present on the rear wall. There were jambless fireplaces on the ends. The location of original stairs to the basement and attic garret is not clear, although there is evidence for an earlier stair on one side of the medial partition where the current stairs are located. At least half of the garret was finished as a chamber. The basement may have been only a crawl space because of the high water table.

In a later stage, the fireplaces were removed and replaced with stove flues. The current fireplace on the west end appears to have been added still later. Ceiling beams were hacked to increase headroom and level them for the addition of lath-and-plaster ceilings; lath and plaster were added to the exterior walls as well. This renovation coincides with the early 19th-century period the Bristol family lived in the house. The ca. 1900 postcard image of the house shows a wing on the west end that was likely added about the same time. The current fireplace on the west end was shifted off-center to the rear to make room for a doorway cut in the front



Fig.6: Detail of window frame on west wall. Photo by W. R. Wheeler, 2019.

of the wall connecting the two sections. Upper-story windows on the front and rear walls also are additions. The roof eaves were also extended at that time.



Fig.7: View looking northeast showing ceiling beams with original paint, hacking for addition of lath and plaster, and evidence for later ceiling with stained beams and gypsum board ceiling covering floorboards. Photo by N. Larson, 2019.



Fig.8: View of west end of basement showing stone base for chimney replacing original jambless hearth. Brick chimney is a later addition when room above was divided. Photo by W. R. Wheeler, 2019.



Fig.9 View of east end of attic showing where rear portion of roof was raised; original front rafters visible on right. Photo by W. R. Wheeler, 2019.

The Bristols sold the house to Henry L. Coon in 1902 in the poor condition indicated in the postcard image. If his son Fred lived there as family history attests, improvements were made of necessity. To what extent changes were made is not obvious. The house was radically renovated by Weir Stewart, Jr. after he bought the farm in 1976 concealing historic fabric and removing previous alterations. Recent rehabilitation work for the current owners has exposed the original framing and provided historic features for analysis. In the process of documenting the building, other dwellings of similar form in the vicinity have been identified that offer the potential for a broader study of early domestic architecture in Hillsdale and an early Palatine presence.

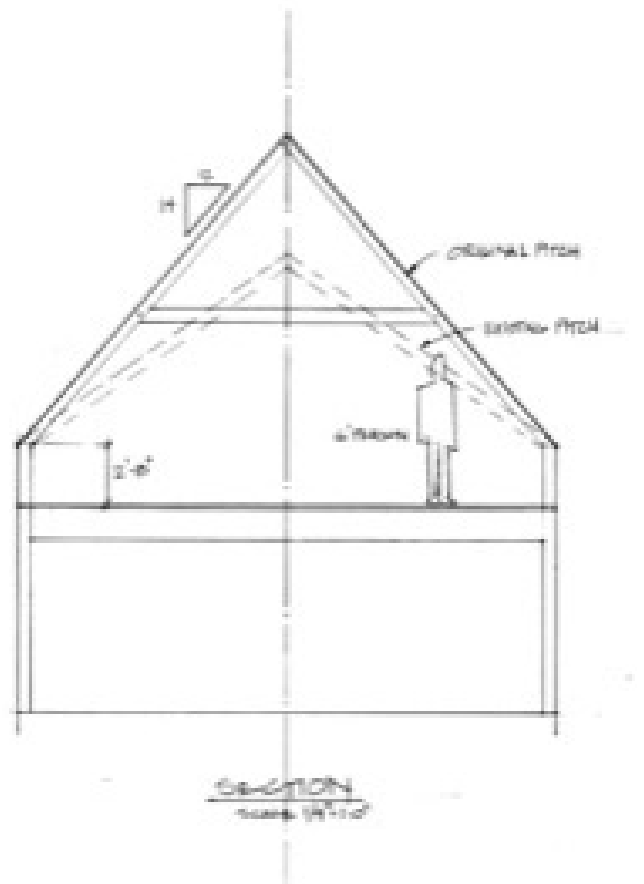


Fig.10: Section of house showing alterations made to roof based on collar angles. Drawing by Jack Sobon, 2019.



Fig.1: Interior of Eldred barn indicating H bents. Far wall is north wall. Photo by John Cannon.

## The Eldred Barn: A New World Dutch Barn

By Ted Hilscher

The Eldred barn was one of the tour stops for a joint gathering of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society and Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture in Coxsackie and New Baltimore, Greene County, on October 26, 2019. The barn was full of hay at that time. John Cannon and Alta Turner and I met the owner, Howard "Corky" Eldred, Jr. on June 6, 2020 when the previous year's hay had all been sold, and took pictures and measurements. I went back and Mr. Eldred and I looked around some more on June 26, 2020. The barn was on its way to being filled again with the first cutting of the year.

The Eldred barn is located in Coxsackie, south of the Medway Four Corners. Twins Ernest and Arthur Eldred, born in 1880, purchased a neighboring farm in 1908, where Ernest's son Howard and daughter Minnie, born 1909 and 1916 respectively, were raised. Arthur had no children. In 1931 Ernest bought the farm on which is located the subject barn. In addition to farming, the Eldred brothers and later Howard hired themselves and their equipment out to local farms. Often Ernest and Howard worked in tandem, Ernest operating the threshing machine and Howard pressing the straw with his stationary baler. Ernest went farm-to-farm threshing through the last autumn of his life prior to his death in 1955.

The Eldred barn is not included in *The New World Dutch Barn: The Evolution, Forms and Structure of a Disappearing Icon* by Fitchen/Huber, thus joining the Overbaugh barn in Catskill and Angle/DeRose barn in Lexington in that regard among Dutch barns in Greene County. The Eldred barn and the recently "discovered" Angle/DeRose barn bring the number of known extant Dutch barns in the county to five.

In its current state, the Eldred barn is not typical of Dutch barns. There is no entrance on a gable end of the barn, as is customary with Dutch barns. The barn sits into a bank, with a basement beneath, so that the east side of the main floor is about seven feet above the ground. There are two sets of doors on sliding hinges that open onto the main floor, on the west side, between the second and third bents, and the third and fourth bents (Fig. 1).

The original barn was 36 feet wide on the west and east elevations, and 45 feet deep on the north and south gable ends. The barn has been added to at least three times, with a cow barn wing on the east side, perpendicular to the rest of the structure (Fig. 2).



Fig.2: Eldred barn as seen looking west from Greene County Route 51, Town of Coxsackie. The original Dutch barn has the highest roof line. The cow barn addition is perpendicular to the rest of the structure. Photo by Ted Hilscher.

Because of the unusual orientation, investigation is required to determine whether the barn was moved and lifted onto a basement level, and the wagon entrance moved from beneath one of the gables to the west side.

We will designate the northernmost bent as number 1, the second bent from the north end number 2, and so on.

Perhaps most indicative that the wagon entrance is not in its original location is a mortise for a middle-post in the soffit of the anchor beam in bent number one. The middle-post is a removable post to which the wagon doors were hooked when closed. The mortise is exactly midway between the two posts. This is evidence that wagon doors were once located under the gable on what is now the north elevation.

None of the eight bent posts extend into the basement. The flooring runs parallel to the roof ridge and three sleeper beams perpendicular to the roof ridge as you usually find in an English barn.. However, the flooring and sleeper beams could date from the time of reorientation. There are ten "mini-sleepers," beams that support the floor but do not run the entire depth of the building from the west wall to the east wall. Some of the core structural members may have originated in different barns. There are marriage marks on bent three, but we could see no marriage marks on any other bents. On each of the eight bent posts, there appear to be raising holes in exactly the same position, about 18 inches below the purlin, drilled through each post. Fitchin believes

raising holes were used for scaffolding on which the men stood in the placement of purlins during the barn raising. Huber thinks pins inserted into the raising holes were used in lifting the bents with a gin pole during the barn raising.

Bents 1 (Fig. 3) and 3 (Fig. 4) each have or had two anchor beams. The lower anchorbeam in bent three has been removed.

The soffits of the lower anchor beam in bent one and the anchorbeam in bent two are about ten feet off the floor, while the mortises for the lower anchorbeam in bent three and the sole anchorbeam in bent four are 78 inches off the floor.

Anchorbeams only 78 inches from the floor precludes the possibility that the barn, in its original state, was a drive-through with wagon doors at both ends. Anchorbeams ten feet high allowed a wagon to enter and be unloaded between the first and third bent. Saplings were placed on the anchorbeams, creating a floor upon which crops were then placed. Lower anchorbeams at bents three and four would have provided greater storage capacity. (Howard Eldred Sr. kept rye overhead between bents two and three.)

All bent posts appear to be pine, with the exception of the western post of bent four which appears to be oak.

The dimensions of bent one are smaller than the rest: the posts are 10.5 inches x 7 inches, and the lower anchor beam is 12 x 8.5. In bent two, the posts are 11.5 x 8 and the

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

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Fig. 3: North wall bent, with two anchorbeams. Photo by John Cannon.



Fig. 4: Bent three, with mortises indicating a second anchorbeam. Photo by Ted Hilscher.

anchor beam is 14 x 10.5 inches. At bent one, from outside of post to outside of post measures 24 feet. Anchorbeam tenon ends, which extend through the post in all instances, are rectangular and appear to be chamfered.

Bank barns, which provided a basement for livestock and full dedication to hay or straw storage on the main floor, appeared in New Baltimore, just to the north, by the mid-nineteenth century. The Lisk bank barn on Roberts Hill was built in 1853. A second option was the construction of a basement barn on level terrain with a stone ramp to the main floor, such as the Van Slyke barn on Dean's Mill Road. In 1870 at the Vanderzee farm on the New Baltimore/Coeymans line, the Dutch barn was torn down and a new barn erected with a basement and a ramp to the main floor.

For farmers who wanted a modern barn but also wanted to make use of what they already had, the re-orientation of the wagon door from beneath the gable was an option. Probably before the end of the nineteenth century, the Eldred barn was moved, set into the hill so as to provide a basement, and had its wagon doors (and floorplan) re-oriented. For the Dutch barn on the current grounds of the Greene County Historical Society in Coxsackie, wagon doors were added to the west and east sides and the original wagon door on the south side was kept, so the barn now has a dual orientation. Until its demise about 25 years ago, there was a Dutch barn on the east side of Route 9W on the Coxsackie/New Baltimore line in which the wagon door was placed in the side wall and a people door inserted beneath the gable. These last two barns were never raised above a basement. In those instances, the farmers regarded the re-orientation or addition of wagon doors to the side walls, in and of itself, as a benefit. Much of what once was the center threshing floor could be used for hay storage, as is now the case with the Eldred barn.