



Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture

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Vanished Vernacular VI: Octagonal Churches

By Walter R. Wheeler

This installment of Vanished Vernacular recalls not a specific building, but a building type that has entirely disappeared from the Hudson-Mohawk vernacular landscape. Well before its popularization by Fishkill's own Orson Fowler, the octagon was among the most commonly adopted plan for the design of churches built for Dutch Reformed congregations. The origins of this preference find their home in the Netherlands, and previous to that, in the Italian Renaissance. Examples of centralized churches date back to ancient times, and octagonal forms can be found in the church designs of Brunelleschi and Leonardo da Vinci, among others.¹ The form found greater popularity throughout Europe during the sixteenth century.

The octagonal form has many symbolic connotations in Christianity, ranging from its connections to a belief in rebirth and resurrection, and a historic association with transitions. It has long been popular in the design of baptismal fonts and had traditionally been used in the design of churches which enclosed the burial site of a saint.²

The Dutch Reformed Church, founded in 1571, quickly adopted the octagonal form; this despite the Calvinist's disdain for all things mystical. The influence of the Huguenots in the adoption of this form has been speculated upon by at least one scholar.³ It may be that the centralizing nature of structures built on this plan also inspired its selection.



Figure 1. Photograph of the Willemstad church, July 1928, <https://rijksmonumenten.nl/monument/38956/koepelkerk/willemstad/> accessed 21 April 2022.

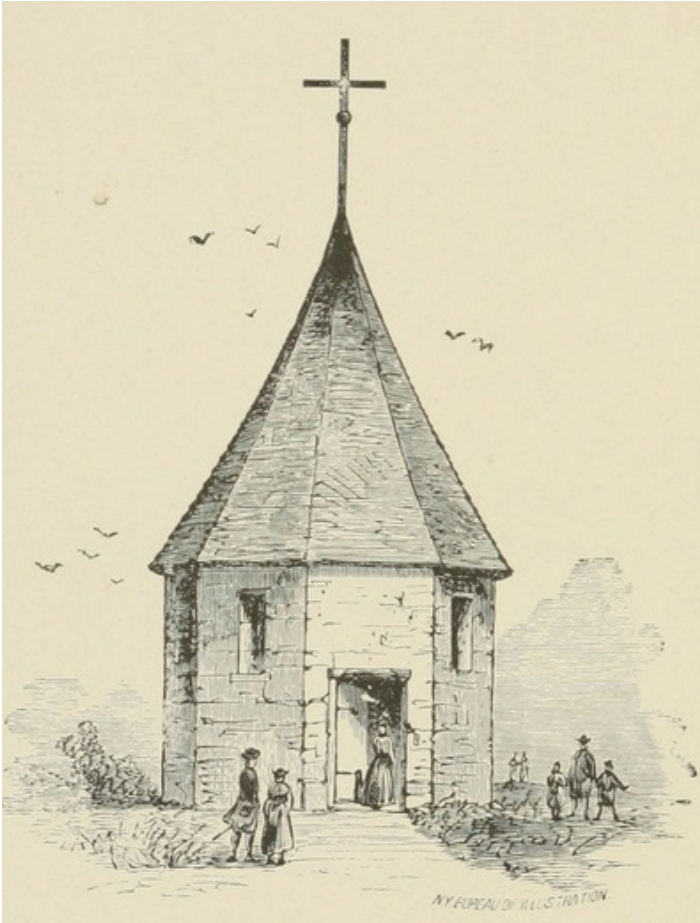


Figure 2. Bergen church (From Harriet Phillips Eaton, *Jersey City and Its Historic Sites*, 1899).

The first example constructed in the Netherlands, the Willemstad church in Noord Bramant, was built from designs by Andried de Roy and Coenraad van Horenborch and was completed in 1597 (Fig.1). Churches of this type came to be generically known as *koepelkerk* (literally “domed church”), referring to their roof form rather than their plan type.

Its continued popularity in early seventeenth century Europe made the octagon plan the design of choice for many of the earliest churches constructed in New Netherland and in areas occupied by other adherents of the Heidelberg Catechism. This may also have been in part due to the compact nature of the design, and that it optimized the number of congregants that could be accommodated within its space—an important consideration for fledgling colonial communities. Interestingly, the official history of the Reformed Church itself, written in the late-nineteenth century, betrayed a lack of knowledge of this aspect of its history, describing the form of the New Utrecht church, for example, as “doubtless a chastened and dignified copy of one of the dear old wind-mills, with the wheel left off,



Figure 3. New Utrecht church in a woodcut view reproduced in 1888 (Original source unidentified).



Figure 4. Bushwick church, a mid-nineteenth century lithograph by G. Hayward of New York, from a drawing by Cornelia T. Meeker. From *McCloskey's Manual* of 1864 (Collection Brooklyn Public Library, 54.137.7).

which the fathers may have gratefully remembered as lending a picturesque relief to the monotonous levels of the mother country.”⁴ No images are available for several of these churches because most of them were replaced during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It has been speculated that as many as 20 or so structures of this type

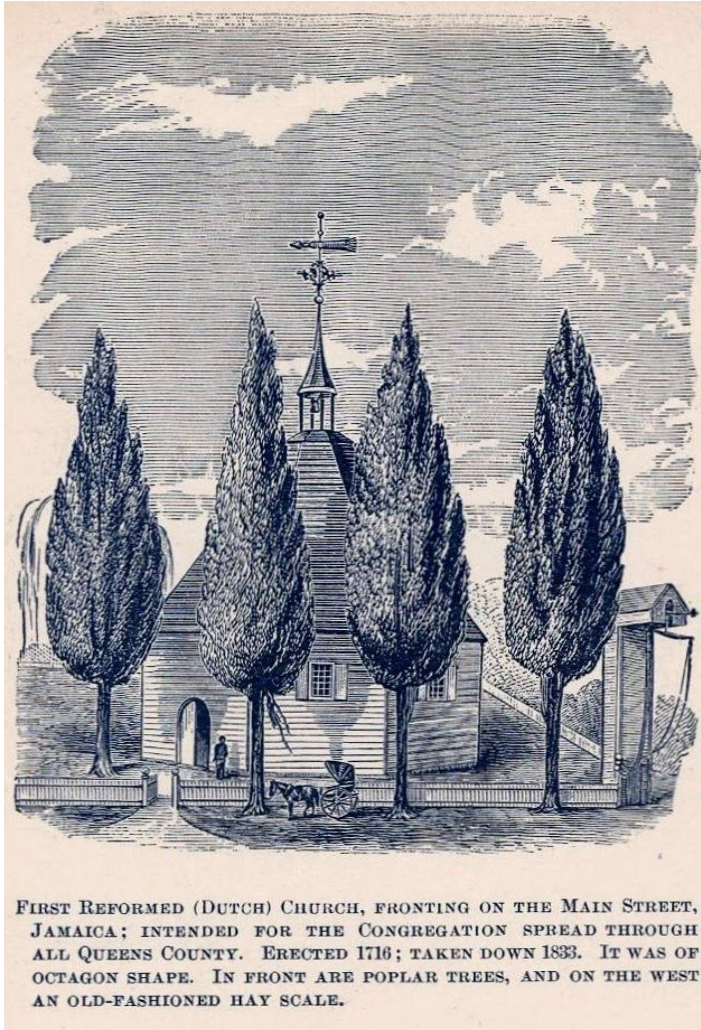


Figure 5. First Reformed Church of Jamaica, from a nineteenth century engraving (Original source unidentified).



Figure 6. Race Street church, Philadelphia (Original source unidentified).

may have been built; information documenting 11 examples has been located and is presented here.

Perhaps the first church of this type planned was sent in model form by Kiliaen van Rensselaer in August 1639. It was to be 48 feet wide and was intended to be constructed opposite Castle Island, in today's city of Rensselaer. Jan Cornelisz, a local carpenter, was appointed to be its builder in 1641.⁵ The Dutch Reformed church of Flatlands, Kings County, was built in octagonal form in 1663. It was replaced in 1794. Its first minister, Johannes Megapolensis, had previously served at the Rensselaer church.

The Bergen, New Jersey, Reformed church was constructed in 1680-81. It was built of sandstone blocks quarried locally and was erected by William Day "the English mason" on Vroom Street between Bergen and Tuers Avenues (Fig.2).

An early church history described it as having "its windows... quite high from the ground probably as much for protection from the Indians as to prevent the children from looking out during the services. The archways over the door and windows were ornamented with small bricks imported from Holland. The church was surmounted by a brass rooster used as a weathercock." Cornelis Hopper executed the iron work for the building; the total cost of construction was f1898.10st. This church was opened on 23 May 1681; it was replaced by a second church in 1773 and the vane was transferred to the new building.⁶ Above the door was the inscription "Kirk Gebouwt in Het yaer 1680" [Church Built in the year 1680]. An early minister left a description of the interior:

The bell-ringer stood in the center of the church. Pews were placed around the walls and occupied only by the men; the women sat in chairs. The



Figure 7. Sleepy Hollow church, from a stereo view dating to ca. 1865 (Collection W. R. Wheeler).

pulpit was high and reached by stairs; below and in front of the pulpit was a little pew with a book-board in front of it for the use of the Voorleezer, who had a long rod with a slit in the end which he reached up to the minister, who inserted in the slit notices to be read.”⁷

Across the Hudson, in 1693 a church was constructed on Garden Alley (now Exchange Place) in Lower Manhattan.

The new church was built of stone, with no very great pretensions to architectural beauty. It was octagonal in form, with a tower or steeple surmounting the centre of the roof. It was distinguished by having “a small organ-loft,” and being ornamented with “brass branches.” In 1776 it was enlarged and repaired, the steeple being removed to the front, and adorned with the ecclesiastical chanticleer. It fell a prey to the flames in 1791, but was rebuilt in 1807, in the substantial and convenient form in which we have so often seen it. This building was also consumed in “the Great Fire,” December 16th 1835, and the ground shortly after covered with substantial warehouses, that now mark its site in Exchange Place.⁸

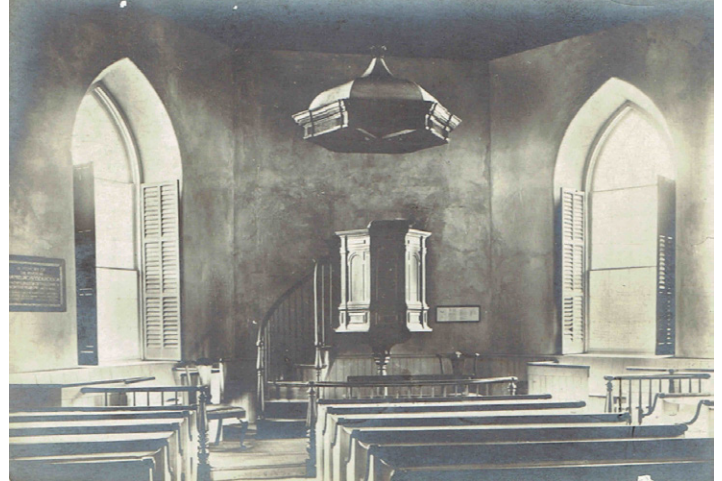


Figure 8. Sleepy Hollow church, interior, 1907 (Collection W. R. Wheeler).

As rebuilt in 1807 it was 66 feet long and 50 feet wide, suggesting that it may have had a diameter of 50 feet as originally built or as remodeled in 1776.⁹

A stone church of octagonal form was constructed in Hackensack, New Jersey, and dedicated on 15 November 1696. This structure is thought to have been between 30 and 40 feet across.¹⁰ Several decorated stones from this structure were incorporated into the east wall of the present church, located at 53 Court Street, and constructed in 1791.

The New Utrecht church was built in 1700 for a congregation that had been established in 1677 and was located in today’s Bensonhurst area of Brooklyn (Fig.3). The present structure, built in 1828, utilized the stone from the walls of the first church in its construction.¹¹ This church was described by a British officer as “built in an octagonal form tapering from bottom to top and terminating in a short belfry, the exterior appearance is so very singular and odd that...we...swore it was a haystack with a chimney to it.”¹²

The Bushwick (Brooklyn) Reformed church was constructed by a congregation of Huguenots in 1711 and was razed in 1829 (Fig.4). This church was a stone structure with open belfry. The Reformed Church of Jamaica (Queens) was constructed soon afterward (in 1715-16) on an octagonal plan; it was replaced in 1833 (Fig.5).¹³

A church of octagonal plan was constructed in Newtown (today’s Elmhurst), Queens in 1733-35. This structure, the design of which included a cupola, was taken down in 1831.

It was built of wood, and the interior featured, "a high narrow pulpit with its sounding board projecting over it, while rows of seats or chairs extended across the body of the church."¹⁴ An octagonal church was constructed in about 1747 on Sassafras (now Race) Street near Fourth Street in Philadelphia for a Palatine congregation that had been founded in 1727 and who worshipped as a Reformed church (Fig.6). It was taken down in 1772 or 1774.¹⁵

The only extant example of this group of churches is the Sleepy Hollow church, originally built in 1697-99 (Figs.7 & 8), and now modified from its original form. At present having a three-sided east end wall, it was described as having "been an irregular octagon, two sides extended to give greater space" by historian Adrian C. Leiby.¹⁶ Alteration to its present form occurred in 1837, when the west-end of the church was modified to accommodate a relocated entrance and belfry. Indications of changes to the masonry in the west end of the church suggest the outlines of its original configuration. In 1896, investigations were made that revealed additional details pertaining to the initial form of the building.

The walls of the building were pierced for windows where at present no windows exist. These windows were in the north and in the south walls, at the west end of the building. They have been filled in with masonry, but upon the inside enough remains of the plaster to indicate their original dimensions. They were five feet four inches in width, beginning at a distance three feet five inches from the west wall of the church, and seven feet two inches above the present floor. They extended to the top of the stone wall, that is, to the edge of the roof. Examination of the other windows of the structure show that they were all of the same size as those mentioned. The windows were originally square and the spaces above the Gothic tops of the existing windows are filled with stones that are not as well laid as the original stonework of the church walls.

At present there are no galleries in the building, but it has been determined that the gallery beams of the old west gallery were eight feet above the floor as it now exists. Whether tradition is correct in placing another gallery at the



Figure 9. Little Falls Union Church (Nineteenth century engraving, reproduced in Little Falls, 150 Years of Progress, 1961).

north side has not been determined. The supports of the belfry have been changed to the detriment of the strength of the building, and the statement that the original door faced southwest, where the present southwest window is, has been verified. The ceiling formerly was of wood, laid in thin, six-inch strips of oak, overlapping at the edges, and laid upon a longitudinal centrepiece of oak. From the top of the walls, north and south, oak beams crossed the building at intervals of about twelve feet, from one of which depended the rod that supported the sounding-board over the pulpit.¹⁷

Subsequent alterations introduced a gallery an organ loft at the west end of the sanctuary.

Further afield and outside of the Hudson-Mohawk region, a replica of the Vereins Kirche, originally constructed in 1847 in Frederickburg, Texas, reproduces the octagonal form of the original which is said to have been designed by "a Dr. Schubert of the Adelsverein" and was initially used by German immigrants but saw later use by multiple congregations and as a school.¹⁸

Union churches

A small group of buildings were constructed in the late-eighteenth century as "union" churches and were designed to be used by multiple congregations of various denominations simultaneously. Perhaps in response to their multivalent nature, some of these buildings adopted the octagonal form.

Two are documented as having been constructed in Albany and Herkimer counties, New York. In Little Falls, a church of octagonal form was constructed in 1793-94, and was razed in 1842 (Fig.9). Construction began on 29 July 1793, when the first lumber arrived. "Ox teams were hired to clear the ground in August and a raising bee was held" on 5 September. Most of the materials and the land were donated; total expenses as of 14 November were 99£ 89s. Contractors Isaac Roach and Mr. Burr continued construction the following year be-

ginning on 4 February 1794, and the building was completed in October of that year with the purchase of yellow paint. A subsequent purchase of 1,000 feet of oak lumber in December 1797 may have been for a gallery. The building was initially known as the Columbia Church; after 1804 it was managed by the Concord Society.¹⁹ Near Albany, the Hamilton Union Church in Guilderland was an octagonal building that was also used as a school; it was constructed in 1797 and was razed in the nineteenth century.

Originally serving as cultural landmarks in the landscape of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the early replacement or modification of all of these structures accounts for their relative obscurity today. None survived in their original form into the era of photography, and few were standing as late as 1840.

ENDNOTES

¹ Mark Reynolds. "The Octagon in Leonardo's Designs," *Nexus Network Journal* 10: 1 (2008), 51-76. Available online at <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s00004-007-0056-8.pdf>

² Martin Kuilman. *Quadratic Architecture*, "The octagonal church plan" available online at <https://quadratics.wordpress.com/3-contemplation/3-3-churches-and-tetradic-architecture/3-3-1-the-form-of-the-ground-plan/3-3-1-4-the-octagonal-church-plan/>

³ Douglas R. Giebel, "Evidences of Huguenot Worship in America," nd., np. Available at www.Academia.com.

⁴ Edward Tanjore Corwin. *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America [third edition], 1879), 153-154.

⁵ A. J. F. van Laer, ed. and trans. *Van Rensselaer Bowier Manuscripts* (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1908), 452, 454, 821; Hugh Morrison. *Early American Architecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 117.

⁶ "Brief History of Old Bergen Church: From Its Beginnings to the Present Day," January 12, 1976. Joan D. Lovero Collection, New Jersey Room, Jersey City Free Public Library, 2-3. Quoted in "A Brief History," at www.oldbergenchurch.com/text-blocks/a-brief-history/ accessed 27 April 2022; John Warner Barber and Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the State of New Jersey* (New York: S. Tuttle, 1846), 228; D. Versteeg, *Sketch of the Early History of the Reformed Dutch Church of Bergen, in Jersey City* (New York: D. Versteeg, 1889), 6-7.

⁷ Harriet Phillips Eaton. *Jersey City and its Historic Sites* (Jersey City, NJ: The Woman's Club of Jersey City, 1899), 31-32.

⁸ "City Clergy in 1775. Dutch Reformed Church," *New-York Observer*, 13 February 1851, 50.

⁹ *New York Daily Tribune*, 27 September 1852.

¹⁰ Adrian C. Leiby. *The United Churches of Hackensack & Schraalenburgh, New Jersey, 1686-1822* (Bergen County Historical Society, 1976), 45, quoted in an unpublished paper by Douglas R. Giebel, "Evidences of Huguenot Worship in America," n.d., available at www.Academia.com.

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Utrecht_Reformed_Church accessed 27 April 2022.

¹² Adrian C. Leiby quoted in Giebel.

¹³ Virginia Kurshan, "First Reformed Church of Jamaica," Landmarks Preservation Commission of New York, 30 January 1996.

¹⁴ Arthur White. "Quaint Newtown Village Already Rich in Historic Lore When Star Began in '76," *The Daily Star* (Queens), 24 March 1926, 14; Arthur White. "Historic Old Reformed Church Links Elmhurst With Early Days of Dutch-English Colonization," *The Daily Star* (Queens), 2 April 1928, 8.

¹⁵ <http://www2.hsp.org/collections/manuscripts/o/ofrc3010.htm> contains a brief history of the congregation. It misidentifies the structure as hexagonal, rather than of octagonal form, however.

¹⁶ Adrian C. Leiby quoted in Giebel.

¹⁷ "The Sleepy Hollow Church," *New York Tribune*, 28 March 1896, 16.

¹⁸ "Vereins-Kirche," <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/vereins-kirche> accessed 27 April 2022.

¹⁹ "Octagon Church," from *Little Falls, 150 Years of Progress* (1961), transcribed online at <http://threerivershms.com/lf3.htm>.

Exploring Back Streets in the Village of Rhinebeck: A Mid-Nineteenth Century Neighborhood of African Americans and Irish Immigrants

By Neil Larson

In 2020, the boundary of the Rhinebeck Village Historic District, listed on the National Register in 1976, was increased in three areas. One of these is located on the western fringe of the village on a hill behind its commercial center. It comprises a late 19th-century development of small, wood frame, working-class dwellings, mostly on Oak Street, which was excluded from the district apparently because the modest and altered character of the vernacular houses were not considered significant by registration standards applied in the 1970s. On closer examination, it was revealed that it was initially populated in the 1850s by African American as well as Irish householders.



Figure 1. Detail of 1850 Map of Dutchess County showing Oak St.



Figure 2. Detail of Rhinebeck Village inset map on 1858 Map of Dutchess County showing Oak St.

Oak Street appears to have been laid out around 1850, by Andrew J. Hermance (1807-1875), a local grandee, who built two commercial buildings on West Chestnut Street east of Oak Street and a house behind them at what now is 15 Oak Street, a small two-story, side-passage-plan dwelling with modest decoration (Figs.1 & 4). Hermance lived in the old Beekman Manor House in Rhinecliff and evidently was capitalizing on growing commercial development in the village, as well as a demand for affordable housing for the town's increasing working population. The tract likely was subdivided from the farm to the west, a Hermance property that had been conveyed to William T. Teller around this same time. If a formal plan for the Oak Street lots was filed with the county, it has yet to be found.

By the time the next map was published in 1858, with a more detailed inset map of the village, eleven dwellings and a schoolhouse had been added to the street (Fig.2). The map shows that Hermance also owned two buildings on the south side of West Market Street, one of which remains at 48 West Market Street—another two-story, side-passage-plan dwelling; a similar house across the street, at 51 West Market Street west of Oak Street, where Benjamin Noxon's blacksmith shop once was located, looks to have been part of the same development.

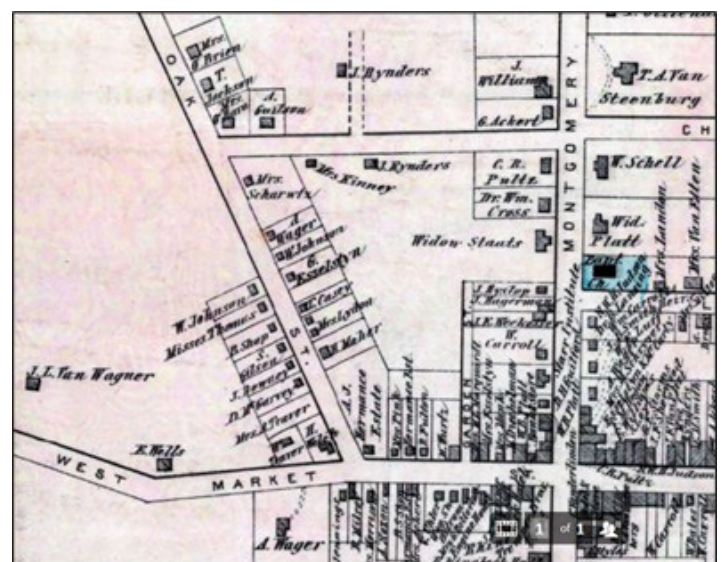


Figure 3. Detail of Rhinebeck Village map in 1876 Dutchess County Atlas showing Oak St.

In addition to the two-story vernacular townhouse form represented by the houses built for Hermance, there are a number of dwellings on Oak Street only a story-and-a-half in height, which are typical of lower-class laborers' cottages. One of them at 18 Oak Street exhibits decoration in the Greek Revival style: a tall frieze board punctuated with small windows, even though now covered with different materials. Other houses, all of which have had their exterior finishes obscured or altered, would have had some features reflecting the design taste. The mid-19th century was a transitional era and the emerging influence of popular house design and a picturesque sensibility is reflected in houses on the street. Clearly, by 1858 a significant change occurred in house design with the reorientation of gables from the sides to the front with two-story, three-bay front facades indicating the preservation of the side-passage plan (Fig.5). Houses of this class were largely undecorated, with overhanging eaves being the dominant design feature.

A story-and-a-half gable-roof house at 30 Oak Street was updated with a gable wall dormer on its façade at some point, a popular means of adapting a pre-existing building to the picturesque aesthetic (Fig.5). Another story-and-a-half dwelling at 10 Oak Street was later embellished with extended roof overhangs with scroll-sawn verge boards. One building at 16 Oak Street was designed as a full expression of the regional Gothic Revival style and has survived essentially intact (Fig.6). Constructed to serve as a one-room schoolhouse for the community, it has wood board-and-batten siding and a hipped roof with a pointed-gable wall dormer decorated with scroll-sawn verge boards and a pinnacle. Windows have peaked headers and those on the front are surmounted by label molds; a window centered in the gable dormer has a pointed-arch top. (A later enclosed porch obscures the entrance.) The building is one of a number of district schools built in Rhinebeck, as well as in the broader region, employing popular mid-century picturesque designs. In this case, it is a remarkably stylish ornament in an otherwise plain streetscape.

Initially story-and-a-half dwellings seem to have been generally inhabited by African Americans, whereas Irish immigrant families tended to live in better two-story houses. This difference reflects the distinctions in economic and social status between the two groups, even though they were comingled in the neighborhood (Fig.7). Despite exterior alterations and additions, the integrity of form and design is strong on Oak Street and adequate to evince the period and special conditions under which this marginalized community developed. The direct association of

many of these dwellings with free African Americans living independently following New York's extended period of manumission adds to the architectural significance of the street.

Andrew Jackson Hermance (1808-1875) was scion of one of Rhinebeck's early patentee families. His great uncle, Hendrikus Heermance of Kingston, married the daughter of Garrett Artsen of Kipsbergen, establishing the family line in Rhinebeck. Andrew was the son of Martin Hermance (1765-1824) and Sally Kiersted (1773-1838) of Red Hook (formerly the northern half of the town of Rhinebeck). By 1850 he owned real estate valued at \$45,000. He was unmarried and lived with four sisters, also unmarried, in the old stone manor house in Kipsbergen (Rhinecliff) that Col. Henry Beekman, Jr. purchased from Hendrick Kip in 1726. The Hermance family also owned the farm on the west side of the village now known as Elmwood (57 West Market Street); it is from this property that house lots on Oak Street were platted.

African Americans occupied most of the eleven dwellings depicted on the 1858 map (Fig.2). Theodore Thomas, a 30-year-old waiter born in Maryland, lived on the west side of the street at what is now 18 Oak Street with his wife Margaret and three young children, all born in New York (Fig.6). He owned his home, which was valued at \$700. By 1860 Margaret was a widow employed as a washerwoman, and her daughter worked out as a domestic servant. Lydia Johnson, 60, owned 30 Oak Street, valued at \$300 (Fig.5). She was born in New York, as was her boarder Eliza Sailor, 20, who had an infant son, George. William Johnson, whose relationship to Lydia Johnson is not known, lived across the street at 27 Oak Street. Prior to that, he was living as a servant in the household of Caroline Davidson on Mill Street. On the east side of Oak Street, at the extreme north end, waiter Dennis Savoy and his wife Harriete, both Maryland natives, lived with their seven children, all born in New York; it does not appear that the Savoy house is extant. Sarah Lawson, a 60-year-old black woman lived alone in a house on the corner of Oak and West Chestnut streets, perhaps what is now now 33 Oak Street (Fig.7). The home of Betsy Schoonmaker has not been identified, although she is listed among the households of other Blacks on the 1860 census schedule. Her surname, either Dutch or Palatine, and ca. 1780 birth date suggest she was a former slave; three younger persons with different surnames lived with her.

The 1860 census identifies other African American households in the cluster of inhabitants on Oak Street. Robert Williams, age 23 and born in New York, probably lived at 25 Oak Street, which



Figure 4. View north on east side of Oak Street showing 15, 17, 19 & 23 Oak St., right to left.

is labeled H. Williams on the 1858 map. His household contained his wife and two children. The 1860 census credited him with real estate valued at \$900 and personal estate at \$200; no occupation was listed. A young black coachman, Thomas P. Du-Bois was enumerated with his wife and three children; they lived in the vicinity of Oak Street. Other African American households headed by Frances Johnson, George Johnson, Thomas Jackson and Ann M. Williams were living in the neighborhood. All four owned their homes but the actual addresses are not clear.

An examination of the 1860 census population schedule for the village revealed no other cluster of African American households. A few individuals lived as servants in white households in the village. Only Jane Pierce, a 78-year-old mulatto widow employed as a dressmaker, lived independently at east end of village at the junction of East Market and South streets. Starting in slavery, African Americans had lived and worked on country seats and farms in the town, and throughout the region. After the formal end of slavery in 1827, all but some of the oldest formerly enslaved people left these farms; many were replaced by indentured Irish immigrants. From this point on, increasing numbers of Irish immigrants moved into the town of Rhinebeck



Figure 5. View north on west side of Oak Street showing 26, 30, 32-34 & 36 Oak St. left to right.

to fill laborer and domestic positions at country seats, which were growing in number and complexity. They also filled menial positions in stores, workshops, and households in the village and on the landing in Rhinecliff. Many worked in situations where African Americans had been excluded.

Gradually, the Irish displaced the small community of Blacks that had developed on Oak Street since 1850. The Irish did not face the same degree of segregation in the community, other than by economics and class, as the African Americans who appear



Figure 6. View north on west side of Oak Street showing 16, 18, 20 & 22 Oak Street, left to right.



Figure 7. View north on east side of Oak Street showing 33 Oak St and 22 & 27 W. Chestnut St., r. to l.

to have been limited to buying homes on the western margin of the village. However, it is significant that blacks and Irish mingled on Oak Street as early as 1850 and continued to do so through to the end of the century. The street was a focal point of race, ethnic, economic and class inequities, which resulted in its derogatory reputation among the local establishment as a rough-and-tumble area.

Irish names appear on the 1858 map of Oak Street along with African Americans. Irish-born John Lynch was

described a “laborer mason” in 1860 and a brick mason in 1870. He lived at 10 Oak Street, but by 1860 the dwelling, valued at \$600, was conveyed to Daniel Garvey, a laborer, and wife, both born in Ireland; their two children were born in New York. John Downey retired to the house at 12 Oak Street after years as a farm laborer boarded by his employer. A household named Gilson lived at 14 Oak Street, and while evidently Irish, his identity remains unclear. Across the street, 15 Oak Street, the house built for Andrew J. Hermance, was being rented to Henry Mayher, a laborer, and his wife, both Irish immigrants in their thirties, with an infant daughter (Fig.4).

Irish-born laborer Thomas Leyden and his wife Bridget, who arrived in New York from Liverpool in 1851, lived at 23 Oak Street in the 1850s before moving into a new, larger house at 19 Oak Street by 1860 (Fig.4). Their former residence was conveyed to laborer John Casey; his father, Thomas, headed a second household within the home. In addition to #19, the Leydens also owned a small dwelling next door at 17 Oak Street, which in 1860 was rented to a single African American washerwoman named Jane Brown. In addition to the Leyden’s property, only a few houses had appeared at the north end of >> page 12



Obituary of Roderic H. Blackburn

Roderic H. Blackburn died at the Barnwell Nursing Home in Valatie, New York, in February, although we have seen no published notice or obituary. Rod began his career as an anthropologist but made his reputation in the study of New York Dutch architecture and material culture. As Assistant Director of the Albany Institute of History and Art, he was one of the first museum professionals to revitalize the interpretation of Dutch buildings, paintings and objects in scholarly contexts. He also was Research Director at Historic Cherry Hill and Senior Research Fellow at the New York State Museum.

After settling in an old Dutch house in Kinderhook, he became a trustee and president of the Columbia County Historical Society where he collaborated with its executive director Ruth Piwonka on a number of publications on art and architecture in Columbia County, which set new standards for the presentation of local history, notably *A Visible Heritage* in 1977. Blackburn and Piwonka culminated their work in 1986 with a watershed exhibit at the Albany Institute, *Remembrance of Patria: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America 1609-1776*, producing a glossy catalog two years later, and a symposium with scholars in the growing field leading to an influential publication, *New World Dutch Studies*.

Rod also was an avid antiquarian and collector, and at the end of his life he maintained a business selling antiques and real estate. He teamed up with photographer Geoffrey Gross on Rizzoli books *Colonial Architecture: Dutch Colonial Homes in America* (2002), *Great Houses of New England* (2008), and *Old Homes of New England: Historic Houses in Clapboard, Shingle and Stone* (2010). Rod was a member of DBPS and HVVA, and contributed to both of their newsletters.

His wife, Daguerre Blackburn predeceased him.



Obituary of Shirley Wiltse Dunn

Our good friend Shirley Wiltse Dunn, of East Greenbush, died April 25, 2022, at age 93. Born in Tannersville, Shirley was the daughter of James C. and Leah Showers Wiltse. She graduated from Tannersville Central School in 1946, and from the New York State College for Teachers in Albany, in 1950. The holder of master's degrees in english and history from the College for Teachers (now SUNYA), Shirley worked as a teacher, museum interpreter, editor, and historic preservationist. She spoke frequently to historical groups and was recognized by the New Netherland Project for her contributions to Dutch studies. The author of several articles on Dutch history, she was also honored by the Holland Society of New York as a fellow. Shirley worked for the State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation as assistant site manager at Fort Crailo State Historic Site in Rensselaer until her retirement in 1992. She was a founding member of the Esquatak Historical Society in Schodack and East Greenbush. She also was a founder of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society and was its first president. An active and dogged researcher, she wrote or edited seven books, including three histories related to the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohican Nation. These well-respected studies have been recognized as significant works on the history of that group and for which the president of the Mohican Nation bestowed a tribal award recognizing her support and contributions. Other books included *Dutch Architecture near Albany* (with co-author Allison Bennett), a children's book on the Mohicans, and a popular book of her mother's stories of places and events in the Tannersville area of the Catskill Mountains titled *Pioneer Days in the Catskill High Peaks*. Her last book, on Fort Crailo and the Van Rensselaer families who lived there, was published in 2016.

Shirley will be greatly missed by all who knew her. She is survived by her husband of 72 years, Gerald E. Dunn, her children, Geoffrey O. Dunn, of East Greenbush, Janet M. Russell of Boulder Creek, Calif., James E. Dunn of Trumansburg, and Barbara E. Oswald of Herndon, Va., eight grandchildren, and two great-granddaughters. Memorial contributions may be made in Shirley's name to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the National Audubon Society, Doctors Without Borders, The Nature Conservancy, or to Amnesty International.

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

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the street by 1876 when the next village map was published. The mix of names reflected the continuing presence of both African Americans and Irish immigrants.

A public school was built on the west side of Oak Street (#16) by 1858 to educate the numerous children in the neighborhood and likely to segregate these lower-class students from those in the rest of the village (PHOTO 4). It was designed in a picturesque Gothic-Revival manner consistent with other district schools being built in the town, but far more fancy than the dwellings on the street. For unknown reasons, this school had ceased to function by 1876 when it is identified as a "B Shop," possibly a blacksmith.

By 1880 only one black household remained on the west side of the street, the northern end of which was filling in with new houses built for Irish-American families. Except for two Black families, all households were Irish on the east side of the street. Younger Black people and families tended to vacate rural parts of the Hudson Valley for better opportunities and community support systems in cities, leaving the elderly, widows, and more successful individuals behind. The Williams and Johnson families remained in Rhinebeck through the entire period; more research is needed to document their experiences. The families of Simon Deyo, a laborer in a livery, Richard Van Allen, a farm laborer, and the widows Jane Johnson and Eliza Williams were the only African Americans living on Oak Street in 1900 in what had become a sustaining Irish-American neighborhood. Only three other Black households were listed in the village: two on West Market Street in the vicinity of Oak Street and one on South Street; two teenage Black girls were recorded as servants in white households.

Twenty-four households were enumerated on Oak Street in the 1930 census; only two were African American. Paul Lee, employed as a laborer by the village, and his mother Isabell rented a house at 18 Oak Street. Truck driver John Innis [sic] lived with his family in a house he owned at 28 (30) Oak Street. Only two other African Americans lived in the village and they were employed as servants in white households.

The survival rate of original dwellings on Oak Street, and on intersecting West Chestnut Street, is remarkable. Although most of them have been altered and enlarged in various ways, they still represent the design of mid-19th-century working-class domestic architecture. Very few examples of these once common house types continue to exist in the region. Most of the smaller, story-and-a-half, gable-roof dwellings on Oak Street can be linked to African American families. Irish-Americans tend to be associated with houses with larger two-story front-gable facades, which reflect changes in village house design in the period in response to progressive design and picturesque decoration published in architectural literature. The Hudson Valley was the proving ground for these transformational ideas and Rhinebeck's wealthy landowners and merchants were quick to adopt them. These two house types suggest that economic and class differences between Irish and black were observable. It is noteworthy, however, that most of the householders, African American and Irish-American alike, owned their houses.