

The Dutch Farm Survey

A Survey of New World Dutch Cultural Resources

The First Two Years, February 2006 - December 2007

Ned Pratt, with contributions by Steve Jones

Although New England's Puritans have received more press, the history of the United States as a multicultural entity virtually began with the Dutch and their New Netherland settlement. Their legacy lives on, not only through our culture and Constitution, but in their built environment. Hundreds of farmhouses and barns remain, scattered across our countryside. They are largely ignored, often disfigured, and ever in danger of disappearing through neglect, relocation, or demolition.

The Survey of New World Dutch Cultural Resources (“the Survey”) highlights farm buildings, but it includes all buildings whose construction indicates a Dutch cultural influence, in New Netherland and surrounding areas. It originated from efforts of the Dutch Barn Preservation Society (DBPS) and the Society for the Preservation of Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture (HVVA).

We are interested in much more than just architectural data: our purpose is to create an extensive grassroots network of people — especially young people — to record, preserve, and enjoy the precious surviving structures which recall our New Netherland heritage. Since the Survey began in 2006 it has brought these buildings, and the need to record them, to the attention of communities in the Capital Region of New York State, and has developed numerous educational projects to encourage teachers to incorporate New World Dutch agriculture and architecture into grade-school curricula. It has enlisted professional and nonprofessional volunteers from both New York and New Jersey. Not incidentally, it has assembled an ever-growing catalog and computer database of (to date) roughly nine hundred structures.

Many of the buildings identified by the Survey have until now remained unknown outside their local town or county. In the example of the Fry-Grattan barn in Waterford, the owner received confirmation 40 years ago from Dr. John Fitchen that his was a New World Dutch barn, but local historians remained unaware of it. On two recent occasions I have visited sites whose owners had maintained their barns for years, but didn't know they had Dutch barns.

The Survey has received substantial support, most notably in the form of generous grants from the Kellogg Foundation. This enabled us to hire part-time consultants to get the Survey moving. Additional support has been received from Hartgen Archeological Associates, and in the form of countless volunteer hours by DBPS and HVVA members, local historians, and enthusiasts.

Survey Goals

The goals of the Survey are:

(1) to build public understanding and appreciation for this vernacular architecture through publicity, educational programs, and membership development in our organizations;

(2) to target youth as future volunteers and preservationists through attractive and enjoyable education projects, particularly those incorporated in school programs; and

(3) to build a detailed database of all extant and documented New World Dutch cultural resources for use by researchers worldwide.

An implicit goal of the DBPS and the HVVA, the Survey's sponsoring organizations, is the preservation of these resources and the unique historical data they contain. This goal can only be achieved by establishing a broad base of enthusiasts and support for preservation into the future, and by locating and publicizing threatened structures. The Survey has been designed to address all of these tasks.

Beginnings

The Survey began operation in February 2006 with the design of the computer database for compiling field data. This was funded by Hartgen Archeological Associates, and initially guided by a committee including Peter Sinclair, Paul Huey, Keith Cramer, Ned Pratt, Neil Larson, and Walter (Wally) Wheeler, board members of the HVVA and the DBPS. The field forms were designed by Wally, but much of the credit for setting up the database itself goes to Justin Divirgilio of Hartgen. Wally and Justin have been refining and tweaking the database almost constantly since then.

A series of mailings informed county historians about the project, and asked them to serve as our county coordinators. While many of these historians supported our survey, many were very busy with their own projects, and few volunteered to help coordinate our effort. Initially all survey work was done by volunteers, and it moved quite slowly.

A breakthrough in getting the effort moving more rapidly was the Kellogg grant, which allowed us to hire part-time consultants. In June 2006, we appointed a part-time Survey Coordinator to design and coordinate publicity, educational projects, and volunteer activities. Over the course of the project we have had two Coordinators: Stephen D. Jones, PhD, RPA, an anthropologist, archaeologist, and adjunct professor at Union College, with teaching experience at elementary, middle, and high school levels; and Chris Templin, a historian and re-enactor.

By the end of the summer of 2006, we had retained two part-time consultants/interns, also funded primarily through the Kellogg grant. Emily Hart, a graduate student in the history department at the University at Albany, has a hands-on background in historic preservation through her work at the Mabee Farm, just outside of Schenectady; she also has had experience working as an intern with the New York State Assembly. The other intern, Marieke Leeverink, has studied and recorded historic structures for the municipality of Deventer, the Dutch National Monument Preservation Office (*Rijksdienst Momumentenzorg*), and the Institute for Historic Farm Research (SHBO); she has degrees in architectural engineering and urban planning. Since our interns are student-age, their hiring immediately reinforced the intergenerational component of the Survey. Often an intern accompanied a retired historian in field surveys, and worked side by side with more senior professionals and volunteers in combing the archives.

We are now promoting the Survey county by county. In each county a training session is arranged. Several weeks before the meeting, press releases are sent to local periodicals, and letters are sent to local historians, societies, and other interested people.

Lectures and Exhibits

The Survey training sessions have been presented in the New York counties of Albany, Delaware, Greene, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Schenectady, Saratoga, and Ulster. We have also promoted the Survey with lectures, presentations, and exhibits at the national and state barn conferences, and at regional historians' conferences. Past venues have included exhibit tables at the Clarksville Heritage Day in August 2006 (Albany County), at Crailo State Historic Site (Rensselaer County) and the Stockade Walkabout in Schenectady in September 2006, at the Schenectady Colonial Festival in February 2008 and the Mohican-Algonquin People's Seminar in Albany in March 2008; two lectures in Niskayuna (Schenectady County) in November 2006; a results-to-date presentation to a packed joint DBPS/HVVA meeting in Saugerties (Ulster County) in November 2006; and programs by Ned Pratt in 2007 in Pittstown, Greenbush, and Troy (Rensselaer County).

In 2008 we have been slated to present or have tables at almost a dozen events, and the number should increase before the year ends.

Educational Outreach

While young people have been our most important target audience, many are not old enough to participate in the Survey by driving around the countryside in search of New World Dutch structures. Therefore we have devoted much effort to devising and producing entertaining educational materials, and to discussing lecture and workshop opportunities with teachers, historians, and museum personnel.

The approaching 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage to the "New World" presents a unique opportunity, since it will bring nation-wide attention and appreciation to the history of the region. Students at every level will be learning more about the history of European settlement of our area and the seminal influence of the Dutch settlers. The required curriculum in New York State already includes segments on New Netherland for 4th and 7th graders, but we can enhance the learning experience and increase appreciation for historic sites through teaching packets combining texts and activities, workshops, lectures, and possibly fieldtrips.

We have designed our first packets for 2nd and 4th graders. Second graders are being introduced to New Netherland buildings and history at a formative stage of their education. The packet produced for 4th graders will enliven those students' New Netherland studies. We are also preparing materials for the 7th grade level.

Teacher-Education Programs

A number of teacher-education packets have already been developed, and we are working to present the materials to teachers as well as to give them a background in New World Dutch

colonial farming and culture. Such presentations can include in-person workshops, or take the form of publications, such as the book developed for the Half Moon Museum, or the booklet written for the Mabee Farm Historic Site by DBPS secretary Ned Pratt. The Greater Capital Region Teacher's Center has shown an interest in promoting our packets and programs once they are finished and tested.

Survey Status

Through the work of our interns and volunteers we have covered most of Schenectady and Albany Counties and have begun work on more than a dozen more counties in New York and New Jersey. Many buildings and other resources have been identified and recorded using existing studies and histories, with trips into the field to verify the information. We have also collected information on New World Dutch structures from the National Register and the New York State archives, as well as from town and county archives in Rensselaer and Schenectady counties. We now have people signed on as County Coordinators in Albany, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Schenectady, Saratoga, Schoharie, and Ulster counties in New York State, as well as Hunterdon, Monmouth, and Morris counties in New Jersey, and Berkshire County in Massachusetts.

We have so far assembled a catalog and database of roughly 900 structures or sites which evidence New World Dutch cultural influence. These are located throughout the territory formerly encompassed by New Netherland, even though the comprehensive field surveys have yet to begin in most counties. For the first time there will be a central source for all parts of the region, and researchers will have a resource for a variety of inquiries into the distribution and location of landscape patterns, architectural styles, construction methods, and materials.

The Future

The Survey fieldwork has only just begun. Training sessions and other recruitment efforts will be expanded to the lower Hudson region, Long Island, and other states during 2008. The year 2009 will be devoted to filling in gaps in our coverage.