



HVVA is a not-for-profit corporation formed to study and preserve the vernacular architecture and material culture of the Hudson Valley

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HVVA Visits Red Mills in Claverack, Columbia County

Thanks to the efforts of Bill and Judy McMillan and the hospitality of Jeremiah Rusconi, the group at long last got the opportunity to tour this extraordinary historic industrial building, with parts intact to the 18th century, as well as the J.R. Van Rensselaer House, one of the most fabulous Neo-classical mansions in the Hudson Valley... or anywhere. If that wasn't enough, Jeremiah also arranged for us to tour the nearby "Lower Manor House" allow the group to finally sort out the mystery of this odd place. June 17, 2017... What a day!



Plantation Houses in the Hudson Valley

By Neil Larson



Fig.1 – Detail from reprint of Sauthier’s Map of the Province of New York, 1779. See “Haskell” printed in center just west of “New Windsor” and east of “Coldenham.” The outline suggests that Haskell’s plantation ran in a narrow strip from Coldenham (the location of Cadwallader Colden’s plantation) to New Windsor where it was one mile from the river. Also note the pattern of small patents of 1000 acres or so resulting from the break-up of the huge Evans Patent in the early 1700s. Many of these comprised plantations.

Part 1 – The Plantation

“I am now about building a large stone dwelling house on the plantation on which I now live...”

Statement from Frederick Van Cortlandt’s will, 2 October 1749.

The complicated and cumbersome English land system finally began to be implemented in the 1720s more than a generation after the Hudson Valley was carved up into large manors and patents at the end of the 17th century. Patentees were hampered by the time and expense of surveying land grants often containing tens of thousands of acres. To configure these expanses to

a network of farm lots that could be sold or leased was a daunting undertaking, especially in what were still, in many cases, wilderness areas. Most of the original patentees were long in their graves before settlement began; yet, many of them had made this investment in the first place to pass the value on to their heirs.

Usually the first settlement on a patent was made by the proprietor himself. Before any land was surveyed and distributed to settlers, the owner defined a plantation of a few hundred to a few thousand acres for his own use. In this way an annual income could be derived from agricultural production while plans for the rest of the patent

were being developed. It also created a country seat for the proprietor, which was an important asset for a city merchant or trader with the growing social sophistication of the New York aristocracy. This was all consistent with and imitative of European – particularly English – models of elite lifestyles. At the same time this was happening in America, the expansion and distribution of wealth in England stimulated the construction of scores of new town houses and country seats by the *nouveau riche* there. The design of plantation houses and landscapes codified in England was reflected in what was being built and laid out in New York.

By the 1730s advertisements for the sale of patent lands began appearing in New York newspapers, and they provide descriptions that provide valuable clues to the appearance and functional organization of these rural properties. On 9 September 1734 the following advertisement appeared in the *New-York Weekly Journal*.

There is to be sold a Tract of Land near the South Branch of Raraton River, in the Province of East New-Jersey, and in the County of Somerset, containing about 550 Acres, now in Possession of Aart Aarsen, whereof there is about 80 Acres clear Land, with about 8 or 10 Acres of low Land which bears good English Grass; there is upon it a good Grist Mill, a large new Barn, and a good dwelling House; it lies about 18 Miles above New-Brunswick.

As also another Tract of Land adjoining to it, containing about 2500 Acres, upon which are 5 German Families settled and have cleared good Part of it.

There is also a fine Farm near Mill-stone River now in Possession of Hendrick Weaver, about 13 Miles from New-Brunswick containing about 550 Acres whereof a good Quantity is cleared, there is upon it a fine large dwelling House and Barn, with a large Orchard bearing several Sorts of Fruit: All the above Lands belong to the Estate of Isaac Gouverneur, deceased. Whoever has a mind to purchase any Part of the above-mentioned Lands, may apply to Lewis Morris junr. or Nicholas Gouverneur in New York, or Cornelius Low on Raraton Landing.¹

Somerset County was a rich agricultural district in eastern New Jersey close to Manhattan that was developed early. Isaac Gouverneur was a New York merchant. Lewis Morris, Jr. was the son of Lewis Morris, the proprietor of Morrisania in Westchester (now The Bronx), chief justice of the supreme court of the province of New York (1715), and Governor of New Jersey (1738). He was later married to Sarah H. Gouverneur.

According to the advertisement, Isaac Gouverneur's land in New Jersey amounted to more than 3,500 acres, which already had been surveyed with parts leased to a Dutch miller and German farmers. Only 80 of 550 acres of Aart Aarsen's land had cleared indicating that agriculture was only partially established in the area. Of specific value were the "low Land which bears good English Grass" on the Aarsen farm and the "large Orchard bearing several Sorts of Fruit" on Hendrick Weaver's place. Wetlands were a desirable component of 18th-century farms, and fruit was a valuable marketable commodity with cider a product most in demand. Dwelling houses, both "fine" and "good," are mentioned, although those occupied by the five German families warranted no description, all of which reflects the hierarchy of house quality (and social status) in the 18th century. Barns, new, large or otherwise, merited notice, as is the grist mill present on Aarsen's farm. From the abbreviated descriptions, a potential buyer could get a good sense of the relative values (and potential) of the parcels.

The same kind of property is described in an advertisement published a few months later by the widow Catherine Symes of New York for the sale of "A Plantation lying in the Precinct of Haverstraw, in the County of Orange, known by the Name of Symesbury, containing 2000 Acres of Land and upwards, whereon is a good dwelling House, Barn, Grist-Mill, and Orchard containing 10 Acres. 150 Acres of said Land is cleared and improved; there is about 20 Acres of low Land: The whole has very good Conveniencies for a Stock of Cattle, and lies about 2 Miles from Hudsons River.² Unlike the Gouverneur property, which was leased, Symesbury was regarded as a plantation because the owner occupied it. (Lancaster Symes, apparently the widow's son, was residing there at the time the advertisement was placed.)

In 1739 a farm a little further upriver was advertised in great detail.

To be sold the Farm belonging to Mr. John Haskell at the Highlands in the County of Ulster, containing two-thousand Acres joining on the Land of Mr. Ellis, Mr. Alsop, and Will. Chambers Esq; at the distance of one Mile from Hudson's River, and extends thence westward about two miles and a half on the Walekill Roade, it is well Water'd and Timber'd has vast quantity's of Nute Wood and Coopers Timber, near good Roads whith leads to the Landings at the River, there is more then, three hundred Acres of rich Meadow and Swamp, great part of which is Ditch'd and Drain'd, and as much of it cleared and

fenced as yearly produces eighty loads of excellent good Hay, the inclosed Pasture is very Healthy for Sheep, and has generally a flock of one hundred and fifty on it and is sufficient for double that Number, the Woods are excellent Pasture for Dairy or fattening Cattle, there is a Pond of sixty Acres, thirty foot deep well stored with a variety of fine Fish, there is a good House 55 foot long and 24 wide two stories high with sash Windows and a Cellar the whole length of the House, in the Front is an open Gallery 25 foot long, from whence (and all the Front Windows) there is a pleasant Prospect of the River and Hills, and Settlements dispers'd thro the neighboring Woods, on the back of the house is a Lintow of 10 feet wide, and a separate Stone Building for Servants, 24 foot long and 20 wide with a very large Barn, Stables, Sheep House, Baricks, and many other Buildings necessary on a Farm; with large Orchards of fine Fruits, Sider House Mill and Press, and a cool Vault for keeping Sider: There has for several Years past been sold of the Produce of the Farm from one hundred to one hundred and Fifty Pounds per ann. besides the maintainance of a large Family. It will be sold very Cheap, the Owner designing to return soon to England, inquire of James Alexander, Esq: at New-York, or the said Haskell at the Highlands.³

John Haskell was an English military officer who served as a steward for governors Robert Hunter and William Burnet. In return, he received a patent to 2,000 acres in the Highlands in 1721. The farm he advertised evolved in the 18 years he owned the land. In 1739 it was sold to Evan Jones, a physician. The house survived into the 1980s, and it was recorded in 1978 with measured drawings and photographs for the Historic American Building Survey.⁴ (More will be said about the house and its architecture in Part 2 of this article.)

The lengthy description of John Haskell's 2,000-acre plantation provides a comprehensive inventory of its buildings and land features. Early emphasis on 300 acres of "rich Meadow and Swamp" indicates the importance of hay in 18th-century husbandry. Fencing was an important improvement and a measure of a property's value. Haskell's sheep pasture was enclosed in an effort to confine the flock and protect his crops from them. Sheep were permitted to roam through fields after harvest to clean up what was left of the plants and deposit their manure for fertilizer. Otherwise, the woods were a suitable pasture for cattle and swine. In addition to "large Orchards of fine Fruits," an interesting, genteel amenity was a pond stocked with fish. Along with a

"very large Barn," there were stables, a sheep house, barracks, "and many other Buildings necessary on a Farm," including a mill to press cider and a "cool Vault" in which to store it.

The advertisement describes Haskell's dwelling in remarkable detail, and it provides an indication of what was considered a "good" plantation house. The two-story scale and refined features noted, such as "an open Gallery 25 foot long, from whence (and all the Front Windows) there is a pleasant prospect of the River and Hills, and Settlements dispers'd thro the neighboring Woods," are key criteria. (This is one of the earliest references to a gallery or porch in the region.) Full cellars and sash windows were also elements of a finely finished house of the period. A lean-to (Lintow) was connected to the rear of the house. If not the location of a kitchen, it was clearly meant to be a service area. A kitchen could have been found in the "Stone Building for Servants 24 foot long and 20 wide," another definitive component of plantations.

Another plantation nearby was advertised the next year. It announced:

TO BE SOLD,

A Tract of Land containing 1400 Acres lying on the West-Side of Hudsons River, six Miles above New borch one Hundred Acres of which is clear'd and in good Fence about 20 Acres of the same being a fine Meadow. There is a good Sash window'd House with a very large Barn, out Kitchin, Brew House, and malting, with two Cellars; all in good repair... The stock on the Farm consisting of between 40 and 50 Horses Mares and Colts with about 15 Horn'd Beast, and all Utensils for Husbandry are to be sold... N.B. A fine Trout Stream, runs through the said farm.⁵

A repeating pattern of development and description emerges from the newspaper items, and it serves to define the characteristics that went into the conception of a plantation. A well-known patent was advertised for sale in the *New-York Weekly Journal* on 31 May 1741.⁶

TO BE SOLD

By Henry Ludlow, a Neck of Land containing about 3 Thousand Acres of Up-Land, Salt Meadow, Fresh Meadow, and Low-Land, in the County of Orange, in the Province of New-York, about 20 Miles distant from New York, bounded on the East of Hudsons River, the said Neck of Land is 5 Miles Long, and 2 Broad, and can be inclosed with 50 Pannels of

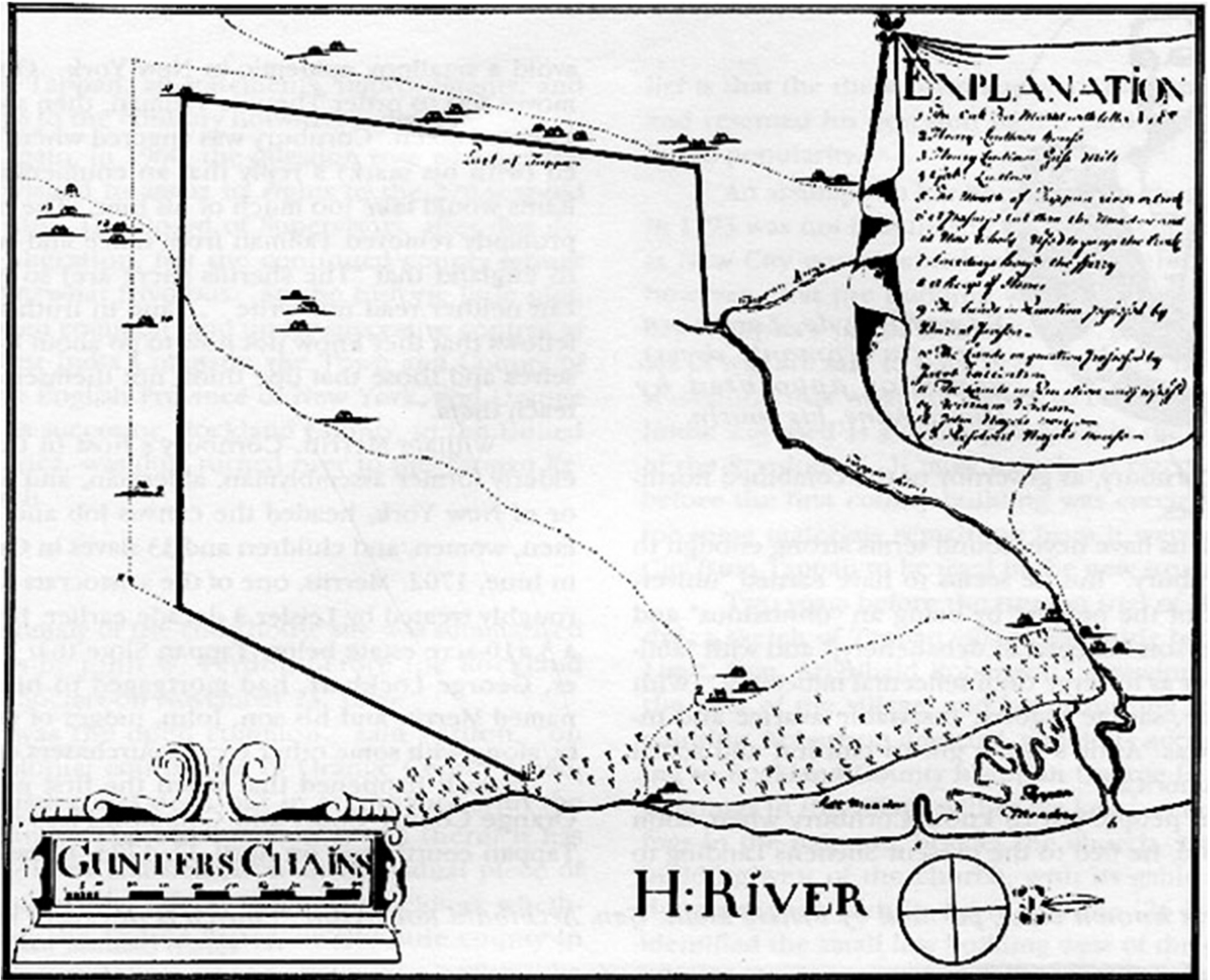


Fig. 2 – Map of George Lockhart Patent, 1745, Philip Verplanck, surveyor. Lockhart sold the patent to John Corbett; Henry Ludlow married Corbett's daughter, which resulted in his obtaining title to the parcel. <http://www.rockleigh.org/History/atlas.htm>.

Fence, two Miles distant from Tappan Church, and joining to a grist Mill; there is on the said Tract 9 Farms improved, with Houses, Barns, and Orchards, and about 12 Hundred Acres of clear Land. The Farm where the said Ludlow lives on, is a New Stone-House of 50 foot long, 32 wide, a Store[y] and half high, with Sash Lights, 4 Rooms on a Floore, an Entry 10 foot wide, with a New Stone Kitchen adjoining to the said Dwelling House of 20 foot Square, and a Cellor from one end to the other, there is a good out House of 18 foot Square, a new Barn of 61 foot long, and 41 wide with an Oak Plank Floore, a new large Sider Mill, with Press and Screws, an Orchard of about 7 Hundred baring Appel Trees, which produces yearly 100 Barrels of Sider, and some

Years 200 Barrels so that some Years there has been sold of said Farm above 100 Barrels of Sider, 70 Hogs, 14 Head of Horne Beaste, and 7 Hundred Bushels of Winter Grain. The Land belonging to the great Farm is fenced in with 34 Thousand new rails, the most part Chestnut, besides 130 Panel of Stone Fence, there being a range of 8 Miles long and 1 Mile broad next adjoining the said Land which can't be improved by reason it is so rough, every Field watered in the greatest Droughth, a Salt Meadow, of 80 Acres ditch's from the up Land, of half Mile long, a Ferry, with a House and Orchard, with 40 Acres of clear Land; a great plenty of Chestnut Wood, Walnut, White and Black Oak, abundance of white Wood, Beach and Bolsted plentiful

60 Acres of low land. 60 Acres of Fresh Meadow which affords an early Pasture. The other 8 Farms being improved with Houses, Barns, Orchards, as aforesaid, the said Tract or Neck of land being very Convenient Stock and Grain, as also a grist Mill well frequented by the Bolters with about 250 Acres of upland, and salt Meadow, conveniently situated so that a Boat can come up to it.

Whosoever inclines to Purchase the whole or part may apply to the said Ludlow, who lives on the Premises, where they may be informed of the Conditions of Sale.

The dimensions of the Ludlow plantation, originally created as the Lockhart Patent, are shown in a survey of the property in 1745 (*Figs. 2 & 3*). The house and farm buildings are located in the center of the lower portion of the map just above a band depicted as forest that represents the steep slope on the river shore. (The cliffs of the Palisades terminate just south of this point.) The ferry house is located on the river's edge where a road from the house reaches the landing. On the far right, the Tappan River forms the northern boundary of the tract. The group of buildings illustrated there includes the grist mill mentioned in the advertisement, which is shown linked to the house via a road and, according to the advertisement, was accessible to boats from the river. Tenant farms are depicted farther west along another road leading towards the interior. Ludlow's mill and landing would have serviced farms both inside and outside the map.

The description of improvements to the land, particularly rail and stone fencing indicates the rapidity and intensity by which plantations were brought into production in the early decades of the 18th century. Ludlow's 3,000-acre tract contained all the components of an ideal English colonial plantation, whether in North or South America, the Caribbean, or Ireland. The standard products are mentioned or inferred: wheat and flour, beef, pork, hay, and cider. The social hierarchy is evident in the landscape with the patentee ensconced in a prime agricultural and scenic setting that established his prestige. Surrounded by a collection of farm and domestic dependencies and connected by roads to the mill and landing, it was also the focal point of all local activity. His control of milling and shipping brought a far wider area into his domain and a larger population under his control. The Hudson River connected him to the city where his position was created. The plantation did not exist outside of the context of the city. It functioned as a component of the social and economic system of traders and merchants.

Most plantation owners considered themselves Gentlemen. Slavery and white servitude were crucial factors in the economic success of the plantation; it was by this labor that the large-scale, commercialized farm operation was feasible. On 24 June 1742 the plantation the late of Mr. William Chambers was sold at public Vendue. The farm consisted "of about 450 Acres of Arable, Wood, and Meadow Land... pleasantly Scituated..."

[It] has on it a good Dwelling House, Negro House, Barn, Orchard, and other Conveniencies, a Grist Mill standing within 40 Rod of Hudsons River, with a good stream and is convenient for a Gentleman, Storekeeper or Farmer. At the same time and place will be likewise exposed to Sale several likely Negroes, Men, Women, Boys & Girls, Cattle, Horses, Household Furniture, and utensils of Husbandry all for ready Money, or upon Credit giving good security to the Satisfaction of the Seller.⁷

Although seldom so explicitly stated, enslaved African males, who would have made up the majority of the plantation work force, are now understood to have been housed in separate dormitory buildings, here called a "Negro House." Many of these were also described simply as outbuildings or, perhaps, out-kitchens, as these were part of the slaves' workplace. Female slaves and children would have been, for the most part, kept in the owner's dwelling house as they worked as domestics.

It was wheat and flour that drove the economy. Grist mills are a predominant subject of early 18th-century real estate advertisements. Agricultural development and production was booming in this period throughout the rich low lands of New York and New Jersey. Mills allowed a proprietor to capitalize on the product of his tenants and neighboring freeholders more than once. And in rural areas where wealth was not represented in currency, wheat was the preferred method of payment. Rents were collected in wheat, milling and bolting charges were paid in wheat or flour, storehouse and shipping fees were levied in the same terms, and when the proprietor returned from the city with provisions and domestic goods to sell in his store, accounts were settled with the exchange of wheat. The amount of development suggested in these newspaper entries for the 1740s provides insight into how and why the Hudson Valley was considered the breadbasket of the American colonies at the time of the Revolutionary War.⁸

TWO Grist Mills, together with the Dwelling-House and thirty five Acres of good Land, now belonging to Joseph Bonney: The said Mills are in very good

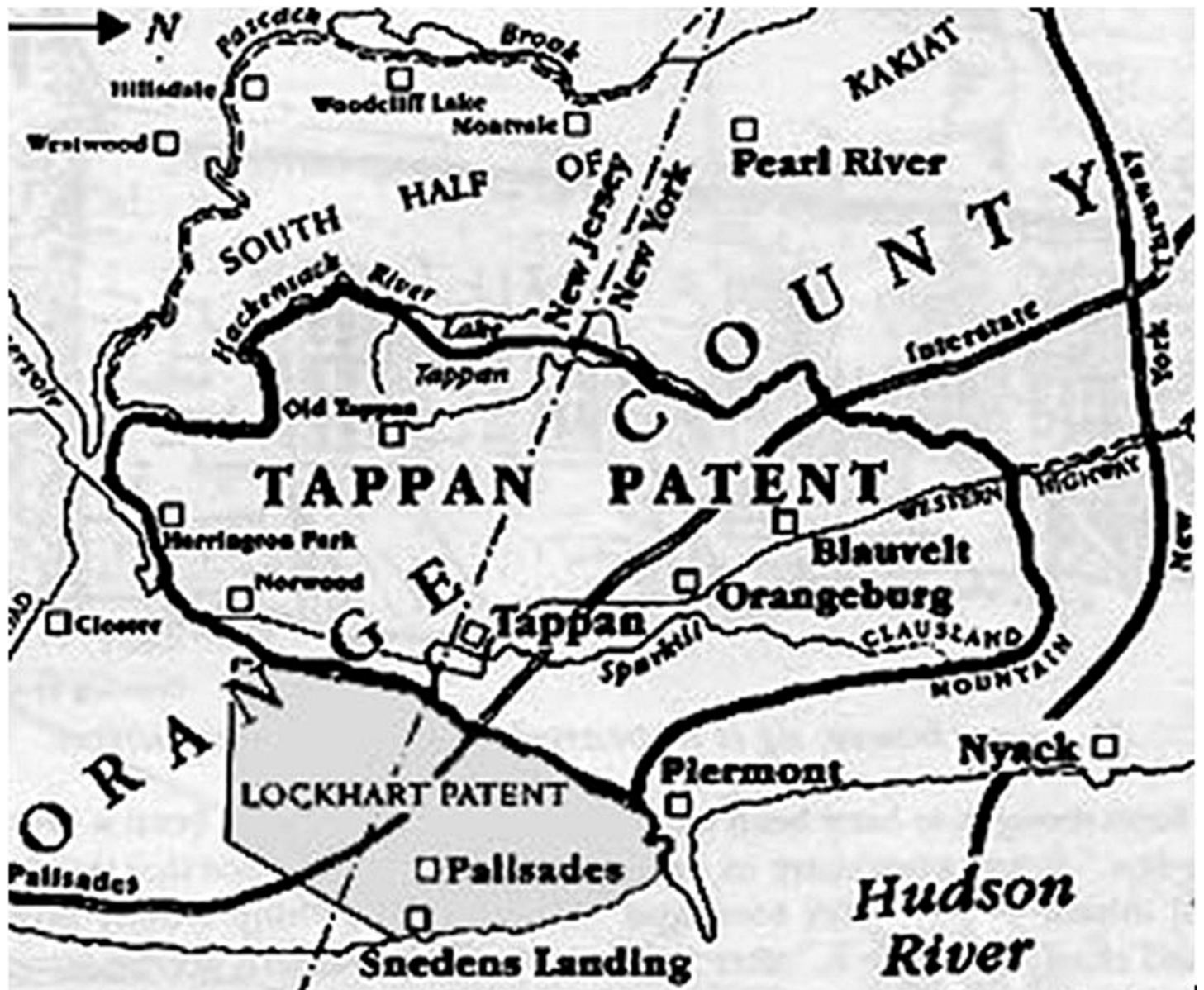


Fig. 3 – Detail map of Rockland County showing location of Lockhart Patent (bottom) in relation of other patents and current communities.

Order, and built upon a large and convenient Stream that never wants for plenty of Water in all seasons of the Year; also a large, strong, well built Mill-House three Stories and a Half high, being 33 Feet in Length, and 28 in Breadth, with an Addition; also sundry large Rooms with good Conveniences for storing several thousand Bushels of Wheat, with sufficient room to store the Flour of two thousand Bushels when packt: Also three very good Bolting Mills, whereof two goes by Water, with an advantage to hoise all the Flour by Water, which is a great ease, together with many other good Conveniences thereunto belonging... The said Premises is situate and lying in the County of Somerset, in East-New-Jersey, and adjoining to Rariton River, and in the

Center of a large County that produces an abundance of Wheat and other Grain yearly; and in the midst of a very thick settled Neighbourhood, about 10 Miles from Piscataway Landing.⁹

Prominently sited at the mouth of the Nepperhan, or Saw Mill, River, the Philipse mansion and mills were the showplaces of the most productive plantation development in the colony (Fig. 4). So extensive was the Philipse operation that it was augmented by a second plantation at the northern end of the manor, known as the Upper Mills. At both places there were large wheat farms operated by the proprietor with slave labor, as well as a network of numerous tenant farms.



Fig. 4 – View of Phillipse Manor, 1784. Collections of Historic Hudson Valley. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nywestch/manors/philipse1.htm>

The Lower Mills are depicted in 1784 with three water wheels, which would have powered a greater number of grind stones and bolters. The Upper Mill has been restored with a single wheel powering it. The Tarrytown site includes a bake house where breads were made completing the vertical integration of the wheat-based enterprise from seed to sea biscuit. This also was likely the case in Yonkers, where everything similarly occurred except on a larger scale, as this was the seat of the family's agricultural empire. Although he did not mention the Philipse Manor by name, during naturalist Peter Kalm's trip up the Hudson River in 1750, he observed, "As we proceeded we found the eastern banks of the river very much cultivated, and a number of pretty farms surrounded with orchards, and fine plowed fields presented themselves to our view." He also noted that, "All afternoon we kept seeing a whole fleet of little boats returning from New York, whither they had brought other goods for sale, which on account of the extensive commerce of this town and the great number of its inhabitants find a good market."¹⁰

The plantation was a significant property type in New York's colonial cultural landscape, and it represents an important chapter in the region's agricultural and cultural history. It can be defined in terms of its architecture, landscape features, cultural geography, farm production, and its functional and symbolic place in the social

and economic frameworks imposed by the English in the late 17th century. Our understanding of the complex characteristics of the plantation would benefit from more detailed research and analysis of heretofore untapped documentary and material sources, the surface of which is only scratched here.

In Part 2 the plantation house will be examined in greater detail.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The source for this and subsequent excerpts is *Early American Newspapers (1690-1876)*, American Antiquarian Society, www.americanantiquarian.org.
- 2 *New-York Weekly Journal*, 12 Jan. 1735, CXIV:4.
- 3 *New-York Weekly Journal*, 22 Oct 1739, 306:4.
- 4 Haskell House HABS NY,36 –NEW1, 1-. http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/habs_haer/.
- 5 *New-York Weekly Journal*, 8 Sept 1740, 353:4.
- 6 391:4.
- 7 *New-York Weekly Journal*, 17 May 1742, 442:4. The plantation was "scituate on the West Side of Hudson's River, near that formerly of William Sunderland, now Mr. Thomas Ellisons, above the Highlands in the County of Ulster..."
- 8 Wermuth, *Rip Van Winkle's Neighbors* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 2001).
- 9 *New-York Gazette*, 12 Sept 1748, 295:6.
- 10 Kalm, *Travels in North America* (1937; rpt. NY: Dover, 1966), I: 326.

Vernacular Documents IX: Itinerant Farm Survey Photographs – The Northern Survey Company

By Walter Richard Wheeler



Fig. 1 – Photograph of unidentified small factory, believed to be in Albany, NY, ca. 1870, by E. W. Cook (author's collection).

Introduction

Among the earliest of photographic subjects, because of their inherent tolerance of the long exposure times attending early photographic processes, were buildings. Limitations of interior lighting technologies in the nineteenth century meant that photography by natural light was preferred from the start, and so exterior subjects were among the most popular.

Its perhaps not surprising that as camera equipment became smaller (and thus more portable) and its processes became both less toxic and less expensive, that the result would be the expansion into the field of itinerant photography, with crews of field technicians transporting equipment and portable laboratories throughout the countryside in search of clients. In so doing, these teams of photographic artists were following the footsteps of itinerant portrait painters, who had plied places like the Hudson Valley as early as the late seventeenth century and up to the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

By the 1860s, field photographers, such as E. W. Cook of Albany and S. Marksville of New York, advertised themselves as “architectural, mechanical, marine and landscape” photographers. They provided views of buildings – frequently with people assembled in front of them – pasted to cabinet cards, typically about 6½” x 4” in size (*Fig. 1*). These were usually produced by the ambrotype process, a photographic method in which an egg and salt-based emulsion is activated on paper using a glass-plate negative. The process is sometimes known as the “dry plate collodion process” to distinguish it from a similar process which generated photographic positives on glass, without creating a negative. The advantage of this process was its reproducibility. Thus, Cook and others like him advertised that customer’s negatives would be retained and any number of copies could be generated. File numbers were indicated on the back of each card provided to the client, by which additional copies could be ordered ostensibly at any time.



Fig. 2 – An unidentified sawmill, photograph by A. M. Slocum in St. Albans, VT, ca. 1895, for the Northern Survey Co. (author's collection).
Fig. 3 – Example of the work of the Empire View Co., of Rondout, NY, ca. 1890. Unidentified subject (author's collection).





Fig. 4 – Tentatively identified as the Patton family home, unknown location believed to be in Columbia County, NY, ca. 1885 (author's collection).

The Northern Survey Company

The Homestead View Division No. 1 of the Northern Survey Company of Albany, New York was established in 1878. Corydon Waterman Higgins (ca. 1847-1904) was the founder and manager. Higgins was born in Ringville, Mass., and after spending his young adulthood in the mid-west, he returned to Massachusetts where he opened a photographic studio in North Adams in the 1870s. With the business prospering, he relocated to Albany, establishing the business which became the Northern Survey Company in that city.¹

Although headquartered in Albany, the Northern Survey Company's itinerant photographers canvassed a large area extending across the entirety of New York State, western New England, and New Jersey. By 1885 they had pressed as far west as Lowville, New York, and by 1887, as far north as Potsdam, New York.² At least one division had its own field office. Images back-stamped with locations in Burlington, Montpelier, and St. Albans, Vermont are all identified as produced by Division Manager A. M. Slocum, and so these secondary offices likely changed locations over time. Slocum's photographs are the only ones so-far found among the Northern Survey photographs that feature back-stamps (*Fig. 2*).

The firm was in Orwell, Vermont in September 1896.³ The Northern Survey Company worked in Connecticut and Massachusetts as well; a survey team was in Conway, Massachusetts in July 1890.⁴ Photographs bearing the name "Homestead View Company" with offices at Springfield, Massachusetts, are believed to represent the work of a branch of the firm that did much of the New England work. At its peak, the Northern Survey Company also did field photography in New Hampshire and Indiana.⁵

There were other, smaller, contemporary firms who conducted this work, such as the Empire View Company, which had branches in Rondout and Elmira, New York and Cochranon, Pennsylvania (and probably other places, too) active in the 1890s, and the Keystone View Company, of Allentown, Pennsylvania (*Fig. 3*). None were so long-lived, or had as extensive a coverage area as the Northern Survey Company. The large survey area, the quality of the work, and subjects chosen lend the firm's productions a special interest of the scholar of vernacular architecture of our region.

Field survey methods

Teams of field representatives canvassed targeted regions during the warm weather months. Subjects



Fig. 5 – Photo taken by Bame, unidentified subject in the Nassau, NY area, ca. 1890 (author's collection).

were selected based on specific requests from clients, but a large amount of speculative work was undertaken as well. The photographers of Northern Survey Company exposed their images on “Higgins Celebrated Dry Plates”.⁶ These were manufactured in Albany by the firm.⁷

The duration of a regional survey would vary; but the example of Charles E. Side, who conducted the field work from an office in Gloversville, Warren County, is illustrative. Side was in that city from the middle of March until the first week of April 1890.⁸ A pair of surveyors was stationed in Pulaski, New York for two months, starting their work at the beginning of October 1887.⁹ Smaller communities were visited more briefly; in June 1885, a survey team spent just one day in Hanover (Oneida County) during which time they “obtained photographs of several houses, also of the school house and the scholars.”¹⁰ Spencertown, Columbia County, was visited in April and early May 1893, when “pictures of dwelling houses” were taken by Lincoln Lasher (*Fig. 4*).¹¹ Other identified photographers for the firm included Jesse L. Bame of Schodack, Rensselaer County (active in the 1880s and 1890s), A. J. Burley and Mr. Fuday (both active in 1887),¹² Elmer J. Seever (active in 1889), H. Arthur Brown (working out of Batavia, NY from 1893 into the late 1890s), and A. M. Slocum and Walter F. Brown (both active in 1898). The firm made “a great many negatives” in South Schodack during the second week of May in

1884; it is likely that a larger number of unsolicited photos were taken in locales close to the homes of the field photographers, such as Bame (*Fig. 5*). It was noted that among those negatives created at that time, that “some of our people have availed themselves of the opportunity to get photographs of their homes” suggesting only a percentage of the subjects of the photographs became, in fact, customers.¹³ The subjects sought by the firm included “Views of Houses, Farms, Public Buildings, & c.... [and] especially...the negatives of all Old Homesteads and Good Residences.”¹⁴

The typical team of field surveyors and photographers appears to have consisted of two or three people, although in some cases a single photographer conducted the work.¹⁵ Turnaround was “about two weeks” according to a contemporary source, at which time the company’s representative would call, offering copies of the developed negatives.¹⁶

Processing

A description of Higgins’ processing facilities in Albany survives:

The walls were all covered with muslin – even to the ceiling – to eliminate dust [they would have caused spots on the pictures]. Mr. Higgins discovered that the organisms in the water were bad for the emulsion. So he distilled the water.

The place looked like a lab, with all the glass funnels and filter paper, etc. He manufactured the paper on which the picture was printed, from the negative. He had the top floor of 56 State Street (Keeler's) 2 top floors. The top floor was the silver room- where the paper was silvered and where the workers had yellow finger nails from the material. Higgins got the idea of using the plates over and over. He gave them lye baths. Dark rooms with red ruby lights were used for a lot of their work.¹⁷

Higgins' habit of reusing the glass plates is confirmed by an account in 1891 in which he indicated that he did not retain the negative for an image taken two years prior.¹⁸ This practice runs counter to the more general practice of photographers of the period, who counted on income from return customers.

The images printed by the Northern Survey Company and its competitors are of a larger size than those produced a generation earlier, reflecting both the decreasing costs of materials, and popular taste for images which could be hung in parlors. The typical size of these photographs is 6 ¾" x 8 ½"; they are usually, but not always, horizontally oriented, and are mounted on an 11" x 14" card (*Figs. 6-8*). They are stamped with double borders in one of several designs, simulating fancy matting. The name and location of the firm's offices are prominently stamped below the image, between the borders. It's common to find these cards cut down to fit frames of various sizes; sometimes this process has removed the identity of the photographers.

Selling the images

It was the job of salesmen, not necessarily the same individuals who had executed the field photography, to close the deal once prints were made. No public advertising, except word of mouth and the distribution of handbills, was undertaken. No newspaper or journal advertisements for the firm's work have been found. Higgins's son recalled that "...The pictures were developed and salesmen were sent out to farms to sell the pictures. They cost 10 dollars for twelve pictures. It was a time when boys were leaving the farms to live in the cities, and the salesmen suggested that the farmers buy the pictures and send them to their sons far away from home."¹⁹

A handbill, dating to ca. 1890 indicates further details of their sales strategy:

A sample photograph from each negative will be shown to the owners of property taken, and to

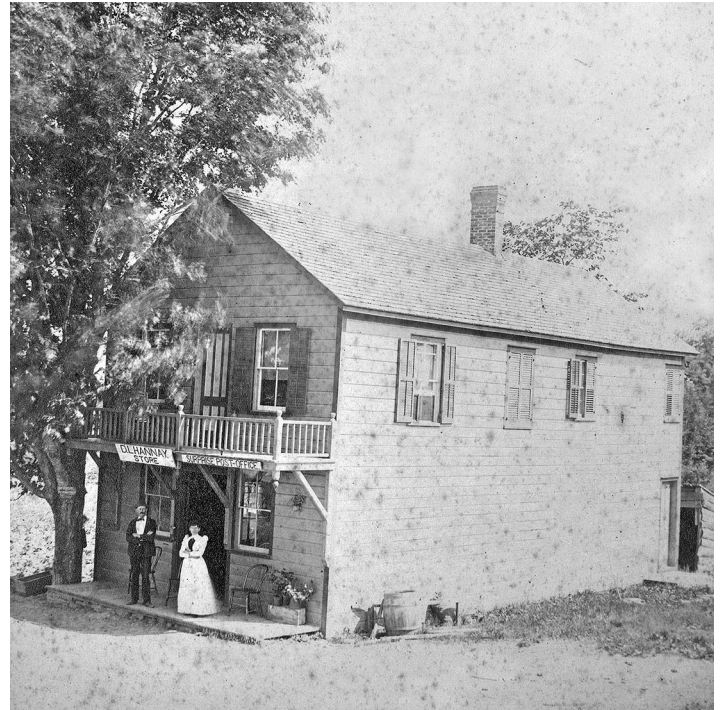


Fig. 6 – The D. L. Hannay store and post office, Surprise, NY (Greene County), ca. 1885 (author's collection).

anyone interested. If the work is satisfactory, we shall be pleased to furnish you with all you may require. Prices will be \$2 for one, \$3 for two, and \$6 for six. Prints are made to fit 11 x 14 frames. All orders for prints must be given to Agents, as 25c. extra will be charged for prints sold from [the] office....No person is under any obligation to buy....No frames are furnished.²⁰

A second handbill, dating to approximately the same period, encourages the customer to "Count up your friends to whom you wish to present a picture of your home, and give the order to the Agent when he calls, for at these low prices we can call but once." (*Fig. 9*).

The subjects

Although the principal subjects were houses, usually with family members posed in front of them, other types of photographs were taken. Public buildings, particularly schools and students—as noted above—and prominent businesses and institutions were also documented.²¹ Contemporary sources indicate that "public gatherings" were photographed as well.²² Saw mills, post offices, and a steam locomotive are among known subjects of the firm's work (*Fig. 2 & 6*).

As noted, the principal work of the Northern Survey Company was photography of farmhouses, and it is this work that draws the attention of the student of vernacular architecture. Because of their early and distant distribution, many if not most of



Fig. 7 – Unidentified house, believed to be located in Montgomery County, NY, ca. 1885 (author's collection).

Fig. 8 – The Hallock homestead, Orange County, NY. Sitters identified as "Ebenezer Hallock, his wife Ann Mary Hallock, their son Charles Hallock and their daughter Emma Hallock" (author's collection).



ESTABLISHED 1878.

HOMESTEAD VIEW DIVISION No. 1,
Northern Survey Co.
 ALBANY, N. Y.

This Division of the Survey Company is engaged exclusively in making PHOTOGRAPHIC VIEWS of Houses, Farms, Public Buildings, &c. We especially want the negatives of all Old Homesteads and Good Residences.

A sample photograph from each negative will be shown to the owners of property taken and to any one interested. If the work is satisfactory, we shall be pleased to furnish you with all you may require.

PRINTS ARE MADE TO FIT 11x14 FRAMES.

Prices will be \$2 for one, \$3 for two and \$6 for six.

Count up your friends to whom you wish to present a picture of your home, and give the order to the Agent when he calls, for at these low prices we can call but once.

All orders for Prints must be given to Agents, as 25c extra will be charged for Prints sold from Office.

Remember we employ the best artists we can get: make our work from the best double gloss paper. Negatives made on HIGGINS' CELEBRATED DRY PLATES, and we charge no more than the so-called "View Companies."

NO PERSON IS UNDER ANY OBLIGATION TO BUY, but if in want of this work your orders will be promptly attended to. For this division address

J. L. BAME,

Box 58, ALBANY, N. Y.

No Frames are Furnished.

Fig. 9 – Handbill, ca. 1890 (private collection).

these photographs have become disassociated from their subject site. While a number of them retain notations added by the purchasers or their family of the identities of the sitters occupying the foregrounds, few indicate the place where the photograph was taken. This is regrettable, but enough of the firm's work retains some level of identification to make it valuable as a source for the nineteenth century appearance of the region's farmsteads, rural landscape and vernacular architecture. Those examples where the exact location is unknown at present can frequently be associated with specific regions, if not exact locales, based on construction techniques evident in the photograph or other evidence.

The end of an era

Itinerant field photography came to an abrupt end in 1900, when introduction of the Brownie camera put photography into the hands of the masses for the

first time. Coupled with an economic downturn in the late 1890s, these two factors spelled the end of itinerant view companies like the Northern Survey Company. There was, however, a resurgence of farmstead photography in the 1930s, this time in the form of aerial photography. Fairchild Aerial Surveys (from at least the 1940s up to 1965), Aerial Surveys (Henry DeWolf, active ca. 1950-1978) and the USDA's Farm Service Agency were all servicing our region. These later photographs also provide valuable evidence of the continuing evolution of the region's vernacular architecture, farmsteads, and agriculture.

ENDNOTES

- 1 "Corydon Waterman Higgins," accessed online at <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Higgins-3616> on 28 January 2017. This quote, and other material from this website is a transcript of "a conversation between Frank A. Higgins and his daughter. Compiled by Corydon's granddaughter." They are the recollections of Corydon's son, Frank Andrew Higgins.
- 2 "The Journal and Republican (Lowville, NY), 15 October 1885, 3; "Fort Jackson," *Courier and Freeman* (Potsdam, NY), 30 November 1887, 2.
- 3 "In Other States," *Troy Daily Times*, 19 September 1896.
- 4 "Conway," *Gazette and Courier* (Greenfield, MA), 12 July 1890, 4.
- 5 "Corydon Waterman Higgins," accessed online at <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Higgins-3616> on 28 January 2017.
- 6 "Miscellaneous," *Albany Morning Express*, 17 February 1887, 1.
- 7 In the summer of 1886, L. S. Gurley of Utica was noted as going to Albany to produce these plates for the firm. "Personal," *The Utica Daily Observer*, 19 March 1886.
- 8 *The Daily Leader* (Gloversville, NY), 31 March 1890.
- 9 *The Pulaski Democrat*, 6 October 1887, 3; *The Pulaski Democrat*, 1 December 1887, 3.
- 10 "Hanover," *Times* (Waterville, NY), undated clipping dating to June 1885 from internal evidence.
- 11 "Spencertown," *The Chatham Courier*, 3 May 1893.
- 12 See handbill reproduced as Figure 9 in this article; "Pulver's Corners," *The Register* (Pine Plains, NY), undated clipping from December 1891; *The Pulaski Democrat*, 6 October 1887, 3; *The Pulaski Democrat*, 1 December 1887, 3; "South Canisteo," *Canisteo Times*, 13 June 1889; "Holland Patent," *The Utica Sunday Journal*, 31 May 1896; "South Trenton," *The Utica Daily Press*, unknown date in early May 1898; *The Arcadian Weekly Gazette* (Newark, NY), 16 February 1898, 3.
- 13 "South Schodack," *The Chatham Courier*, 14 May 1884, 8.
- 14 Undated handbill, ca. 1890, author's collection.
- 15 A team of two are mentioned as passing through the vicinity of Brookfield (Madison County), NY in July 1892. "Deferred," *Brookfield Courier*, 20 July 1892; *Rome Daily Sentinel*, 14 January 1886.
- 16 *The Journal and Republican* (Lowville, NY), 15 October 1885, 3.
- 17 "Corydon Waterman Higgins," accessed online at <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Higgins-3616> on 28 January 2017.
- 18 "A Spirit Photograph," *Albany Evening Times*, 25 May 1891.
- 19 "Corydon Waterman Higgins," accessed online at <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Higgins-3616> on 28 January 2017.
- 20 Undated handbill, ca. 1890, author's collection.
- 21 C. W. Higgins visited the Chatham Union school in late April or early May 1883, and "made group photographs of the pupils belonging to the several departments." "Local Record," *The Chatham Republican*, 3 May 1893.
- 22 "South Canisteo," *Canisteo Times*, 13 June 1889.

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.**

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

Membership dues remains at a low \$25 per year (\$15 for Students). So if you haven't sent in your dues or given a tax deductible donation to the HVVA mission, **please consider doing so now.**



Yes, I would like to renew my membership in the amount of \$

Yes, I would like to make a tax deductible contribution to help the effort of preserving the Hudson Valley's Architectural Heritage. Enclosed please find my donation in the amount of \$

Name

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Please mail checks to:

HVVA
P.O. Box 202, West Hurley, NY 12491

FOR SALE,

That well known farm in the town of Rhinebeck, whereon the subscriber now lives, containing, by a late survey, two hundred and sixty-five acres, about eighty of which is excellent wood, the residue pleasantly divided into meadow and plough land. On the premises is a large and commodious stone dwelling house with wings—a large Dutch barn lately built, a new farm house and sundry outhouses. The place is about a mile from the river, and on the main road to Judge Cantine's landing. Terms will be made very easy to the purchaser, and an indisputable title given by

Feb. 1, 1803. JANE GRIER.

Jane Grier's farm...

Donna Brown sent this old advertisement in recently. It is for the house in Tivoli that she and HVVA trustee Elliot Bristol have been restoring. (See HVVA Newsletter 2014, No.4.) You may recall the stone house was built in the mid-18th century, probably by Petrus Hoffman, and was updated by his son Zacharias's widow, Jane, sometime after she married Tivoli merchant John Grier around 1790. John Grier died in 1897, which evidently led her to put the farm up for sale in 1803. But, she was not successful or changed her mind because she died there in 1809 and passed the property on to her five children.

Upcoming Events

- August 19** Wally Wheeler to setup Intensive Study Tour
- September 16** Greene County Tour by Don Hanzel
- October 7** Bus trip to Old Bethpage Village, Long Island
- November 18** Marbletown and more by Ken Krabbenhoft
- December 9** Kingston House Tour by Rob Sweeney / Holiday Luncheon, Ulster Co.

For more information, please check www.HVVA.org