

HUDSON VALLEY VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

a society for the study and preservation of traditional architecture and material culture
Box 202, West Hurley, NY 12491

(845) 338-0257

Monday, January 14, 2002

To whom it may concern:

Hudson Valley Vernacular Architecture (HVVA) has expressed its interest in the future of the Losee property in Rhinebeck, Dutchess County. We are a not-for-profit organization active for 3 years and granted a provisional charter by the NYS Department of Education one-year ago. We are supported entirely by the membership which is presently 200. About 65% are from Ulster, Columbia and Dutchess Counties in New York, the area of our primary focus. 15% are from the northeast. 20% from other parts of North America and Europe.

The board of trustees and the active membership of HVVA, that we estimate at 40, are an important network of knowledgeable people, writers, curators and historians; people who are actively documenting and preserving vernacular architecture, genealogy and material culture. Many HVVA members are restoration carpenters and masons who share a hands-on knowledge of historic buildings. Many enjoy the fellowship of learning and demonstrating their craft.

HVVA has begun to document and study the site. This preliminary historic structure report will eventually include a site plan, measured drawings of the buildings with descriptions and interpretations from John Stevens, Bill McMillan, Conrad Fingado and others.

Because of the un-modernized state of the Losee house, HVVA would like to preserve the building rather than restore it with a modern kitchen, furnace and bathrooms. We would consider some alternative technologies for making the site compliant with local codes for public use and would preserve as much of its present state as is possible and practical.

The Losee farm would eventually serve as a place to study and interpret the regions historic vernacular architecture, family history and the early Palatine German immigration to Rhinebeck. It would also maintain itself as an active site with demonstrations and workshops on traditional crafts, historic agriculture, food and music. We hope to work in cooperation with other groups and individuals with shared interests.

A great deal of information about our recent pre-industrial agriculture has been forgotten and gone unrecorded. Some still remains in the memory of older people and some can be recovered by studying the architecture and tools of the region. HVVA is especially interested in the re-enactment of an historic Rhinebeck grain harvest using the sith and mathook and of building a hay-barrack with a thatched roof.

Sincerely,



Peter Sinclair, President

Examination of the Losee house, Rhinebeck

Thursday, January 10, 20002 With Roger and Todd Scheff and Dale Mountan, we examined and measured the Losee house (Dut-Rhi-20). From this initial inspection it seems that the history of the structure has gone through three major stages.

In about 1750 a 4-bay one-room Dutch/American frame house was built with a jambless fireplace. The roof ridge ran east-west, 90-degrees from the present roof line. The evidence of this house survives in the cellar and perhaps in some of the reused timbers and doors. 6-feet of the original 8-foot long stone corbel in the east wall of the cellar is in place. It supported the hearth of the fireplace above. This hearth support was either an arch of brick or an angled cradle of timbers resting against the hearth-beam. The outside measurements of the house were probably 24-foot wide and 20-foot deep. There is no indication of where the door was placed but likely on a side wall. The cellar batten door and frame may be from the original house as well as the re-used false-panel door on the back of the present house. Its iron handle has a Germanic style.

In about 1790 the original one-room 5-bent house was taken down and the present 9-bent Dutch frame house was built in its place. It had two-rooms and a wide center-hall. It was built on the original cellar without enlarging or changing it. The carpentry work of the new frame is excellent but the wide spacing of bents and the use of scabbed and re-used wood indicates that the family wanted the maximum space for the small resources it had at that time. The front of the new house had a symmetrical up to date Georgian look but its classic four-window plan dictated they build two 3-bay rooms rather than the old 4-bay room plan.

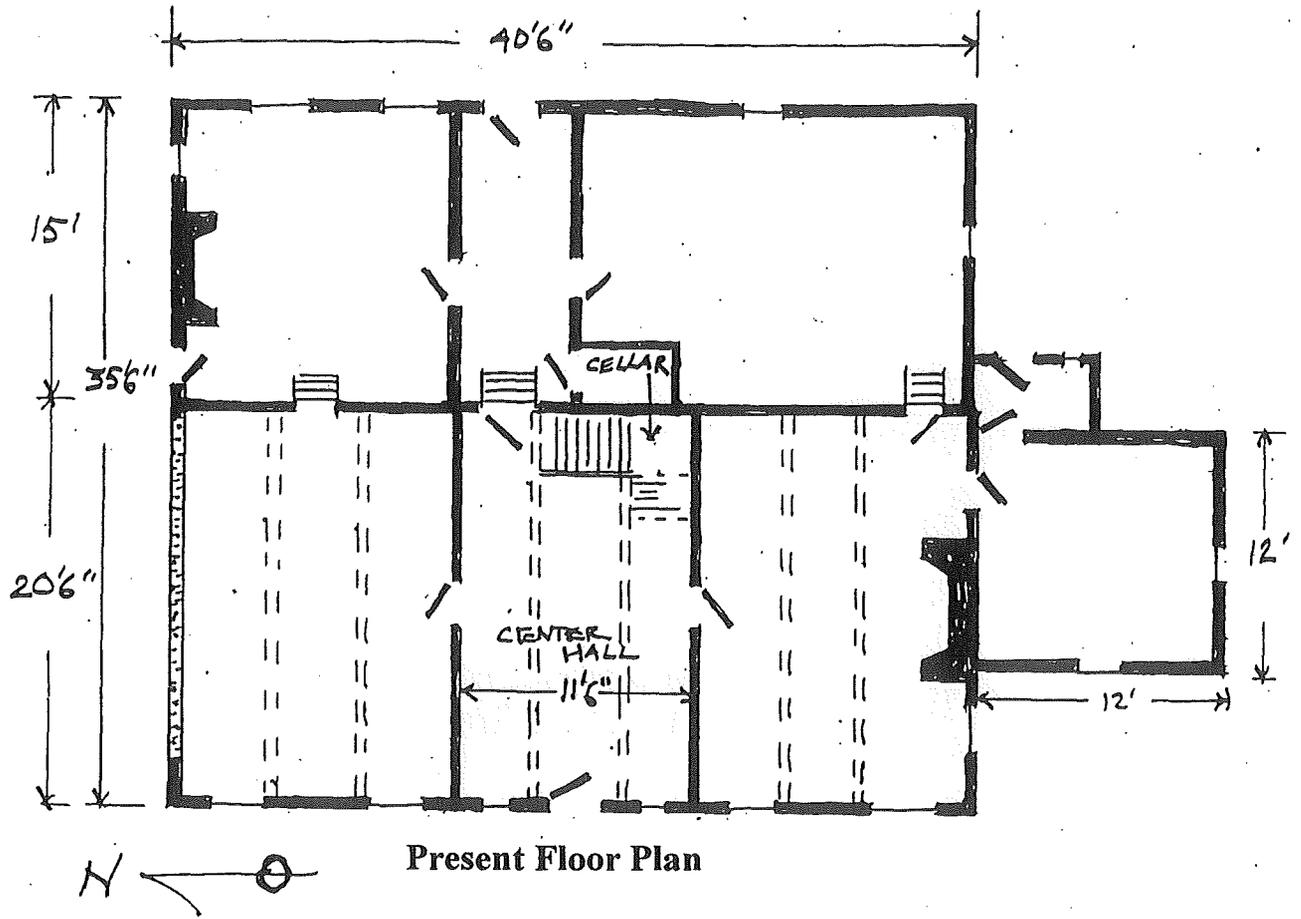
The new house had two English style jambed fireplaces and so no use for a hood beam. The two internal beams of these three-bay rooms were light, 4-inches thick in one room, but their strength was well judged as they show little or no sag. The fireplace in the room over the old cellar was at first supported by an unusual construction. Perhaps an experiment that didn't work, because it was later replaced with the more typical fireplace support, a pair of stone columns bridged with wooden beams. In more refined examples the beams are replaced with a brick arch and today these are often mistaken for cellar fireplaces.

The cellar support system in the Losee house needs further study, but it seems that the 1790 fireplace hearth was supported by a corbelled stone arch at the top of the cellar wall, probably resting against the hearth beam. This is a method sometimes used on Dutch fireplaces where brick was not available. The unusual feature in the loseee house, that might again be the result of frugality or stubborn native habits, is the unique design of the support for the fireplace jambs and chimney. It seems that they originally somehow rested on the hearth-beam that was supported by two posts mortised to its soffit.

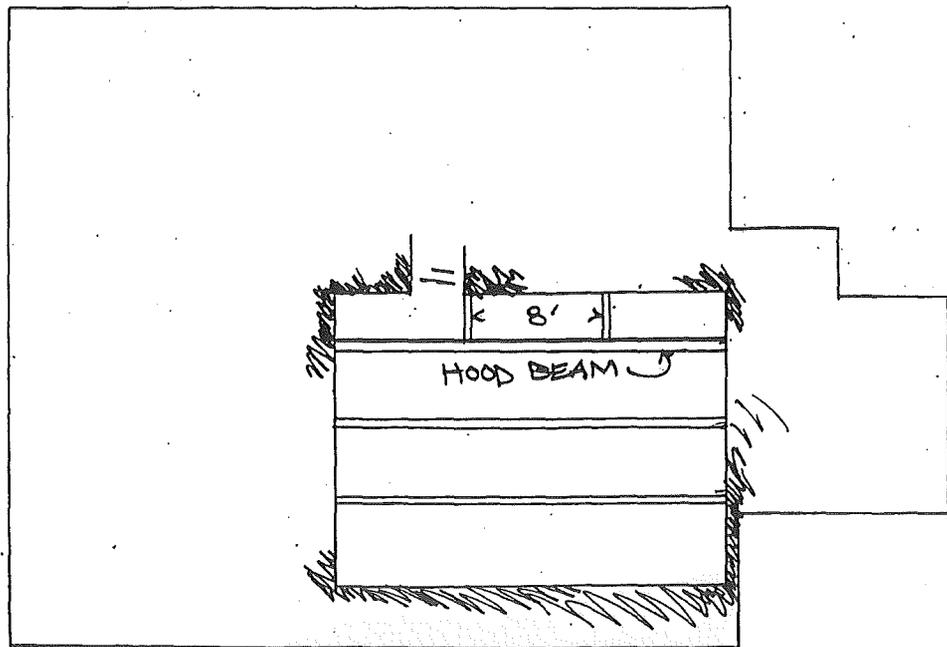
The 15-foot wide aisle (lean-to) on the back of the house shows evidence of being built in two stages. Unlike the aisle of a Dutch frame house where its external wall is held by a strut (beam) joined to the H-bent post, this wide side aisle of the Losee house has an independent frame set against the house. In the crawl space of the aisle loft there is no evidence that the house was ever sided above the first floor, indicating that the aisle addition was planned for the new house and built soon after.

In about 1830 major changes were made to the house. Exposed ceiling beams were hidden behind plaster. The front entrance was remodeled with a flush panel door and side lights added. The formal 1790 center-hall-stairway was moved from the right partition wall on the back wall of the hall and the paneling and banister reused. This new stairway necessitated cutting one of the two center-hall beams. Evidence of these changes is also seen in the mixture of 18th century and Greek Revival moldings

Losee House, Rhinebeck, Dutchess County, NY



Present Floor Plan



Outline of the present house and location of the 1750 cellar hole with an east entrance and the probable arrangement of the three internal beams of the original one-room 4-bay Dutch/American frame house.

4.

Conclusions

The Losee house contains a complex record of change with many intriguing reused timbers and, aside from the recent fire damage to the north end-wall, it contains a great deal of original and early fabric. Since the house was never modernized it is an excellent building for study and preservation rather than restoration. This can be accomplished best and at less cost, we believe, through a slow and careful process that utilizes local resources. We believe that HVVA has an available membership with the expertise and experience necessary to guide such a project.

The Losee house is in stable condition except for the 6.5-foot high back wall that receives run-off water from the roof. Its sills are gone and its plate also in bad condition. There should be immediate work done to keep the water from the back wall with some temporary flashing at the roof edge or a gutter and the two early doors should be temporarily removed and kept in a drier place.

The site is important historically by being close to the original settlement of Rhinebeck. As a museum site what historic or pre-historic evidence there is below-ground is as important as the buildings and the artifacts above ground. They should be examined together.

Examination of the Losee Dutch barn, Rhinebeck

Saturday, December 1, 2001 with Roger and Todd Scheff, Alvin Sheffer, Conrad Fingado, Bill McDermot, Art Cady and myself we toured four Dutch barns in the towns of Rhinebeck and Red Hook, Dutchess County, these were the Denegen/Mosher (RH-18), Losee (Rhi-20), Fulton (RH-19) and Trever/Patti (Rhi-21).

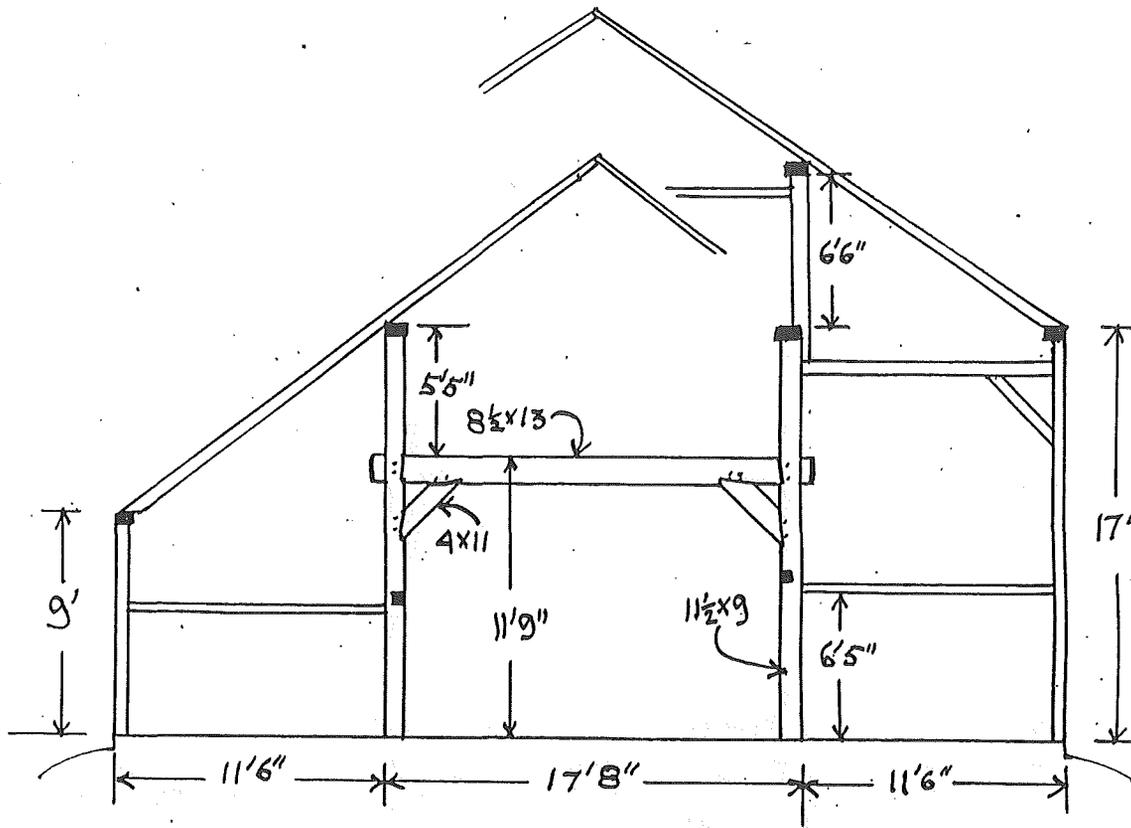
The Mosher barn is a 3-bay Dutch barn with an added bay. Its long 6x4-inch purlin braces, with 5-foot legs, are matched to the columns with gouged marriage-marks, cups on the north side and Cs on the south. Its columns were later extended 6'6" and taller side walls replaced the original ones. The anchorbeam-tenons extend but are not wedged.

Only the center aisle of the Losee barn survives and the columns have been cut down level near the tops of the anchorbeams. It is dated "MD1770" on the first internal anchorbeam. Despite the present differences in the proportions of the Losee and Mosher barns, they were originally twins probably made about the same time by the same carpenters who used many unusual features, such as; the 4x11-inch anchorbeam braces and the 11'6" side aisles. The Losee barn originally had har-hung wagon doors on the front and key-hinged wagon doors on the back.

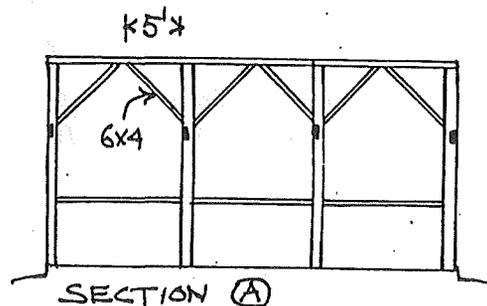
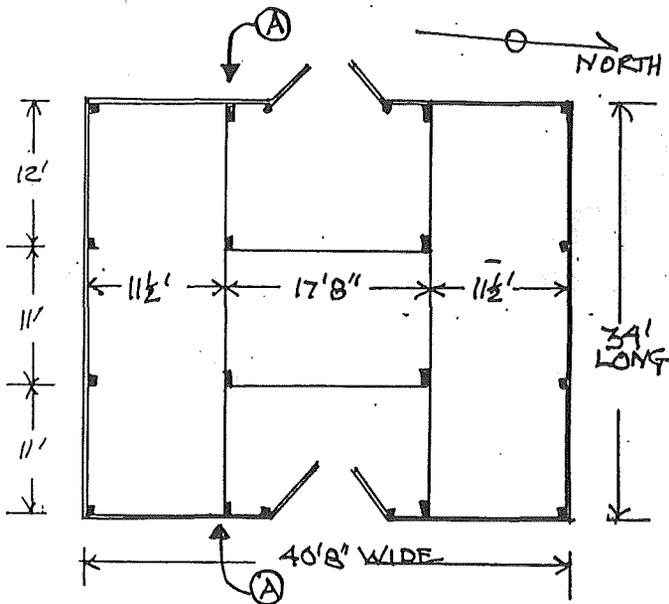
We did not examine the frame house at the Losee farm, but from outside appearance it is closer to 1800. The site is in an area of early Palatine settlement and is probably not the original house. The buildings are interesting because they have not been modernized and they may be available for a museum

Conclusions

The original form of the Losee barn could be reconstructed using the measurements of the Mosher Dutch barn



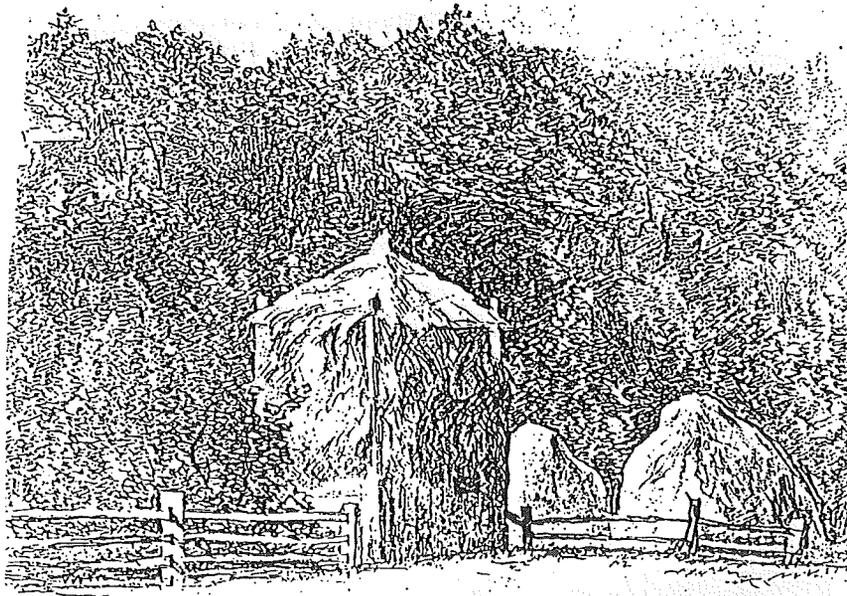
Internal Bent, Plan and Section A.
Mosher (Dut-RH-18)
and Losee (Dut-Rhi-20)
3-bay Scribe-rule True-form Dutch Barns
circa 1770,



The right side of the top drawing shows the Mosher barn with its columns extended and higher side walls replacing the original. The left is a conjecture of the two barns' original form. The barns seem to have been almost identical but since none of the original side walls survive, that we could see, it is a conjecture. The plan shows the outward swinging key-hinge wagon doors on the west end and the har-hung doors on the front end. No har-hung wagon doors have survived in place but it seems they would swing in like wooden-hinged wagon doors.



The Sith (zicht) and Matthook



The Hay Barrack (berg)

