



Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture

January – March 2024

Newsletter

Vol. 3, No. 1

2023—The Year in Review

Although we did not produce a newsletter in 2023, the HMVA remained busy with a full slate of tours, meetings and of course the annual Maggie MacDowell Lecture. All pix by Wally except the January meeting photo, which was taken by Paul Selzam.



Fig 1. Our Annual Meeting at the Elmendorph Inn, Red Hook, on 14 January.

For contact information please visit www.HMVArch.org



Fig 2. Bill Jeffway of the Dutchess County Historical Society presents the 2023 Maggie MacDowell lecture, "Beyond Rooflines and Plot-lines," on 18 March.



Fig 3. HMVAers listen as Marilyn Sassi talks about the history of the Schenectady Stockade, 22 April.



Fig 4. At the Beattie-Powers House, Catskill, 15 July.



Fig 5. Rob Sweeney takes a photo of the Old Dutch Parsonage in Somerville, NJ, on our 19 August tour.



Fig 6. Visiting the Crouse New World Dutch barn in New Scotland, one of three seen on 16 September.



Fig 7. Emily Majer, leader for our 21 October tour, examines a curious feature in the basement of one of the Red Hook houses we visited that day.



Fig 8. We gather at Rob and Eddy's house for our holiday meeting and dinner on 9 December!



Fig 9. More satisfied diners!



Marion F. M. Stevens, 1920-2023

We're saddened to report the death of HMVA's grand dame Marion Stevens, who passed on 7 July at the age of 103.

John has provided the following brief biography of her earlier life.

Marion Frances Moore was born on March 20, 1920, in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She had a university education, and for a time worked in her father's store in central Halifax, which had broadcasting facilities—the first in Eastern Canada. The store sold pianos and other musical instruments. Marion had contacts at the two Halifax newspapers and was assigned to interview guests to the city, like Mariane Anderson and Louis Armstrong. In about 1960 she taught school at a school in Northeastern Nova Scotia (Sherbrooke). A skiing accident at Sherbrooke forced her to give up her teaching job and she moved back to Halifax where she became the secretary to the man in charge of the Halifax Citadel National Historic Site. Here, in 1960, she met John Stevens who had come from Toronto to Halifax to become the curator of a Canadian Maritime Museum. My working space happened to be under her office and before too long they got to know one another. In 1964 they were married.



Marion and John moved to the United States in 1967 when John got a job at Old Bethpage Restoration on Long Island. They stayed there until John's retirement, when they moved to Hurley, Ulster County. Marion had lived at Golden Hill in Kingston since December 2022, where John visited her every day.

Marion was a member of several organizations, one of which was traced the lives of World War II war brides. She had a keen interest in genealogy and in Canadian history, in support of which she assembled a significant library. Marion was active in the HVA from its beginning, bringing her love of history and of people together with ebullience that endeared her to all.

Vanished Vernacular VII: Wolvenhoeck (The Douw House), East Greenbush, Rensselaer County, New York

by Walter Richard Wheeler



Fig.1: Painting depicting Wolvenhoeck, c. 1845, attributed here to Eugene Sintzenich. (Present whereabouts unknown; reproduced in *The Douw's of Albany* privately published by Morris Douw Ferris and Dorothy van Breested Douw McNally in 1973.

The Douw house, also known as "Wolvenhoeck," was constructed in the early 18th century was located on what was known for a long time as "Douw's Point," a land form used as a landmark by ship's captains as a place to avoid, due to the presence of sand bars.¹ The third of a group of significant houses that included Crailo (originally owned by the Van Rensselaer family and now a state historic site) and the Staats house (still owned by that family), all three were of masonry construction and were located on the east side of the Hudson River immediately south of Albany. Upon the death of John dePuyster Douw in 1835, Albany newspapers recorded anecdotal history of the family.

The paternal ancestor of Mr. Douw was a native of Holland, and was one of that chosen bank of patriots who with many others of our respected progenitors, estimating the value of civil and

religious liberty superior to all other blessings, in the early period of our colonial history left their homes and native land, and relinquishing the superior comforts of civilized life, sought for quiet and repose in the wilds of America. He settled on the eastern bank of the Hudson, in the present town of Greenbush, and it is worthy of remark, when we consider the vicissitudes of human life, and the uncertain changes of human destiny, that the original paternal estate has been retained in the family, descending from father to son, through the line of successive generations, for the period of one hundred and forty years [that is, since, 1695].²

Cuyler Reynolds, City of Albany historian at the turn of the 19th century, recorded the most extensive description of the property available to us today. It appears to have been

compiled from family stories collected by Mary Lanman Douw Ferris. It repeats many of the beliefs commonly held in the late-19th century, including citing the Netherlands as the source for bricks, but in many respects appears to preserve a fairly accurate picture of the house and its furnishings.

On the eastern bank of the Hudson river, about a mile below Albany, was a point of land, which was known in 1717 as Wolven Hoeck, because it was infested with packs of wolves. It was a beautiful location otherwise, covered with a heavy growth of elms and sycamores of enormous growth, and

it was there that the wolves came down to the shore to drink. Captain Petrus Douw selected this spot for the location of his home, and building a house there in 1724, named it Wolvenhoeck. His great-great-granddaughter, Mrs. Mary Lanman Douw Ferris, has made considerable research to learn all she could about the family homestead, which descended for many generations in the family, and from these discoveries one may form an excellent impression of the quaintness of the old place.

The original house was a story and a half high, and well spread out on the ground. It was built of wood, and bricks brought from Holland, it is said, as

ballast in a sailing vessel, and the roof was shingled with white fir. The top of the gable wall was notched into corbel steps, and the black fore bricks of the kiln were laid, alternating with yellow ones, to make checks on the gable fronts. The roof sloped from the ridge pole and dormer windows broke its uniformity. The heavy, wooden, outside shutters swung upon massive iron hinges, with a crescent cut near the top to admit the early light. Above the front door was a free-stone slab with the initials "P. D., A. V. R.," cut into it, they being the first letters of his own and his wife's name. The front wall was pierced at places for the use of muskets in case of a sudden emergency, for at that period there were frequent attacks at the hands of savage Indians; in fact, a particularly desperate raid was once made upon the place by what were called the River Indians, coming from below.

The front door of this house was divided into two parts across the middle. The upper half, which usually swung wide open in the summer months, had two bull's-eyes of glass, so as to light the hallway, and was graced with a heavy, brass knocker, brought from



Fig.2: Photograph of a second version of the painting, print dating to the early 20th century (Albany Institute of History and Art, Albany, NY).



Fig.3: Engraving from the painting, published in "Glimpse of an Old Dutch Town," *Harper's New Monthly*, March 1881.

Leuwarden. The lower half had a heavy latch. The great hall was to some extent a living room, and through its center was the hoist door, through which wheat was hoisted by employing a crane, for storage in the loft, for every house of any pretensions had its cock-loft within the steep roof, where house slaves slept, and also used for storage purposes. A little to one side was a staircase with a flight of steps leading to the loft. Over the front door was a shelf with steps by which it might be reached, and here was placed the tobacco box. The rooms were wainscoted to a height of about three feet, excepting the dining-room, which had a chair-board running about it. The windows were of small, diamond-shaped panes of glass, set into leaden frames. Chintz calico formed the curtains, put up without cornices. The only carpet in service was in the parlor. The chairs were stiff, straight, high-backed, covered with haircloth, similarly to the claw-footed sofa, which were all ornamented with triple rows of brass nails. These articles of furniture were of San Domingo mahogany, and reckoned of value in the present age. Very interesting were the stand with a turning top, and a small table with claw feet, holding the family Bible, in which accurate records were entered by father and son. Hanging on the whitewashed walls were oil portraits of those left in the Fatherland, some painted by Frans Hals and Gerhardus Douw. The tiles in the chimney-jamb were laid in cement, made from powdered clamshells, displaying pictorial designs of scriptural nature, brought from Leuwarden. The fireplace was so large that one might easily stand therein, and it held a hickory log eight feet long; the brass shovel and tongs standing at the corners, brought from Harlem. Over the mantel was a long glass separated in three divisions by strips of moulding, and alongside hung the bellows. On each side of the chimney was a sort of alcove with low benches. Between the front windows was a sconce. The Dutch tea-table stood in one corner, upon it spread a linen cloth, once the property of Anneke Jans, Mrs. Douw's great-grandmother. The china was of delicate texture and was valued highly, for it was brought all the way from China in the sailing vessel of Captain Stewart Dean, of Albany, on the

first journey ever made to that far country by a vessel docked at Albany. It was made to order, with initials worked into the pattern. The napkins in use were spun at home. These and other napery were kept in an oaken, iron-bound chest.

Back of the living-room was the "meister's bedroom," containing an enormous bedstead, with its four corner posts handsomely carved and an elaborate canopy above, a fringed valance to match hanging below. The sacking bottom was pierced with holes bound with linen thread, and by this means it was stretched by a stout rope to corresponding pegs in the framework. Back of this room was a small library and office, a large mahogany desk with numerous pigeon-holes and books above, being the principal piece of furniture beyond the heavy, comfortable arm-chair. Off the library was the dood kamer, or death chamber, where those of the family who died were placed until the funeral ceremony was held. These ceremonies were made events of great importance, and the little silver spoons, marked with initials, given on that occasion, are still treasured as heirlooms...

The Wolvenhoeck house was surrounded by a circular stockade. It stood twelve feet high, and was made of oak posts which had been pointed and bolted to transverse timbers, having a gate, pointed on both the upper and lower sides, which was raised by weights in a gallows frame...³

Other early references to the house repeat the belief that it was constructed in the late 17th century, although this is contradicted by Reynolds' account, which gives a more plausible date of 1724. Three images exist of the house—a mid-19th painting (presently unlocated); a poor copy of that painting (also presently unlocated), and an engraving published in 1881, apparently taken from the first painting (Figures 1, 2 and 3). It is seen in these images to have been a one-and-one-half story brick dwelling with parapet end walls, probably five bays in width with a central passage. The north gable end wall included a chimney. In these details it would have been similar to the nearby Breese house, also in East Greenbush, and to the still-extant Bradt house, in Rotterdam, Schenectady County (Figure 4). Attached to the east was a gambrel-roofed wing of one story with dormer in the lower slope of its north-facing roof.



Fig.4. The Bradt house, July 2015 (Author photo).

A smaller gambrel-roofed addition was attached to the east end of the first. Both had chimneys centered on their east end walls. The house was separated from the river road by a board fence, and from the river by a row of trees said to have been planted in 1717. Archeological excavations were conducted on part of the site of the house by Paul R. Huey in 1971, at which time 25 small fragments of Delft fireplace tile were recovered, allowing us to supplement Reynolds' description of this feature of the house. The majority of these had blue-on-white landscape designs and had "spider" corners. One fragment of a Bristol, England produced polychrome tile was found (Figure 5).

The Douw family appears to have ceased living in the house by the late 1860s. Wolvenhoeck was offered for rent in 1868, at which time it was described as located

"one mile below the city of Albany, with about five acres of land in lawn, orchard and garden, with barns, stables, greenhouse, forcing pits, and ordinary tools for the cultivation of the same," by Volkert P. Douw, its then owner.⁴ Offered again the following year, the amenities were further described as including an "orchard and garden well stocked with large and small fruits" and included hot beds with sash.⁵ Again it was offered the following year, with the notice that "the house is large, and if desired, can be divided into two separate parts for occupation by two families."⁶ The house was offered for sale in 1871 by its then-occupant William Pratt, at which time it was described as a "two-story brick Dwelling, with a nice veranda on the south and west; twelve rooms, besides closets, pantries, cellar &c.; also, carriage house and stable and large barn, fine views of the city and river and of the

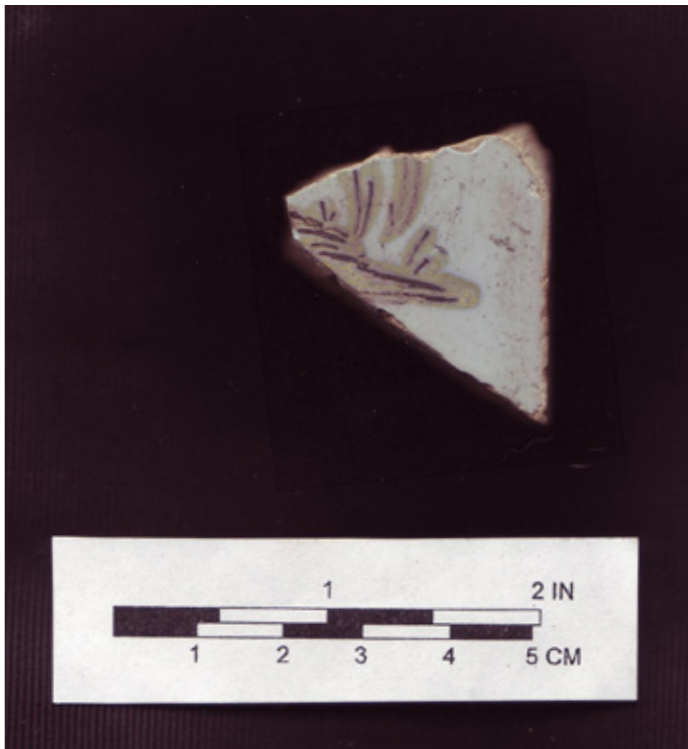


Fig.5. Polychrome Bristol tile recovered from the site of Wolvenhoeck in 1971 (New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Waterford, NY).

numerous vessels passing up and down.” (Figure 6).⁷ It did not sell at that time, and was offered at auction two years later.⁸ The house was leased to Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman as a summer retreat in 1893.⁹ Chapman was called to the Bethany Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia—said to have been the largest church in the country—in 1895, but, it was noted, “he will continue to maintain a residence at Wolvenhook...”¹⁰ The last notice we have pertaining to the house dates to 1910, when it was offered for lease once again. It was described at that time as

At Douw’s Point, the Douw mansion, recently renovated, modern plumbing, steam, nine open fire places; easily arranged for two families or for boarding house; 17 rooms; electricity, dock and new stable if desired; long lease preferred.¹¹

The development of the Port of Albany resulted in the destruction of the house in about 1929. In the previous year the Albany Port District Commission purchased numerous parcels on the Rensselaer County side of the river in order to facilitate widening of the waterway directly across from the port, and to prevent confinement of further expansion



Fig.6. Advertisement placed in the Albany Evening Journal of 8 June 1871.

to the south. The property, which included the “old Douw mansion, a frame structure and a number of frame cottages” was purchased for \$115,000 and was scheduled to be “razed when the land is to be improved.”¹² The Cuyler house, built c. 1766-67, was located on the farm immediately to the north; it was also destroyed in service of the development of the port.

Eugene Sintzenich

It is likely that the painting of Wolvenhoeck reproduced here was executed by Eugene Sintzenich, an itinerant painter and teacher. Sintzenich was born in Germany (some sources say England and that he was of Polish heritage) in 1792 and initially visited the United States in 1831 on a tour that took him to Niagara Falls and other locations which he recorded in paint. He exhibited these works in England in 1833, and emigrated to the United States in 1841, settling in New York City. He was active in Albany from at least 1844 to 1848. He advertised himself as being “formerly of London” when he settled in Rochester in 1850; he died there in 1852 during a cholera epidemic.¹³

Sintzenich specialized in landscapes and historical views, and he advertised “views of houses and grounds taken” as among the types of paintings he could provide.¹⁴ Of the latter, he is documented as having created a view of the Rensselaer manor house in 1844, which was published as a lithograph on sheet music for Oliver J. Shaw’s “The Rensselaer Grand Waltz” (Figure 7).¹⁵ He also executed a lithographed view of the skyline of the City of

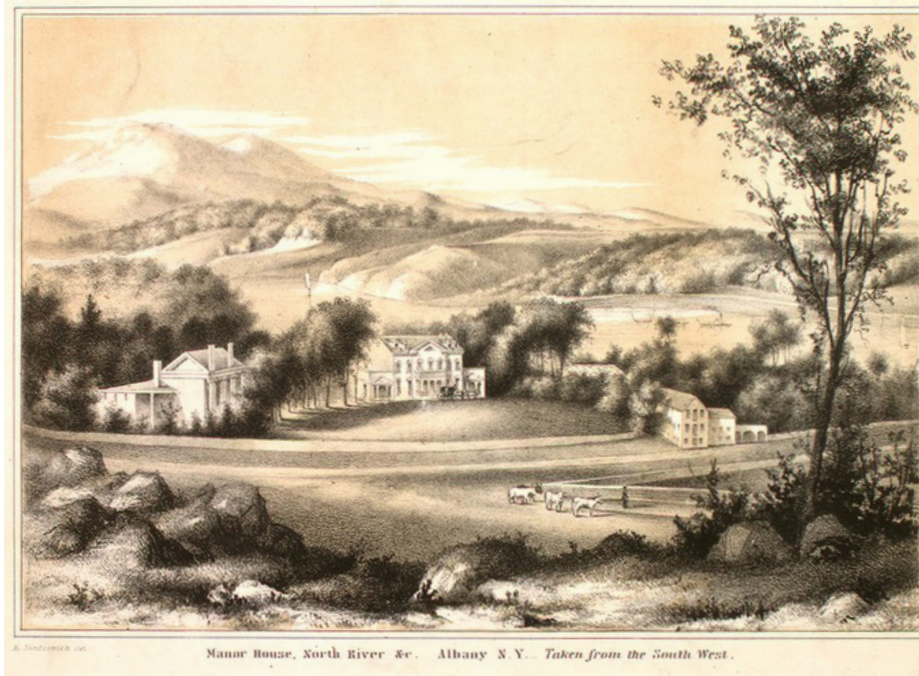


Fig.7. Title page of *The Rensselaer Grand Waltz* (1844), with Sintzenich's view of the Van Rensselaer manor house and associated outbuildings (Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

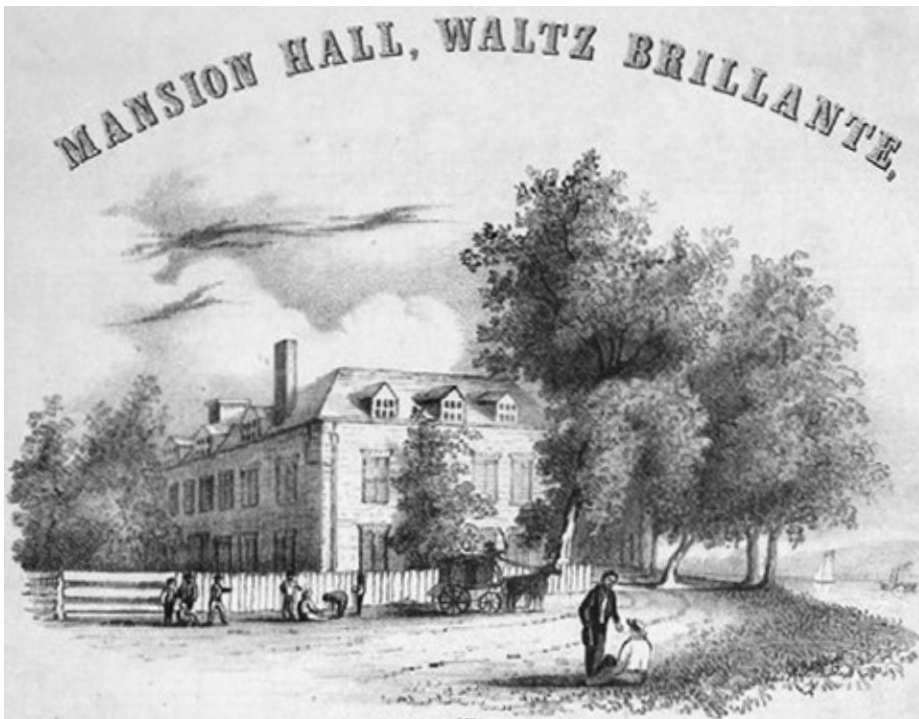


Fig.8. Detail of the title page of *Mansion Hall, Waltz Brillante* (1848), with an illustration of the Hendrick van Rensselaer house (Crailo), here attributed to Sintzenich (Library of Congress, Washington, DC).

Albany, which was warmly received, and reproduced a historical view of Broadway in Albany by James Eights as a lithograph.¹⁶

Other “views of houses and grounds” that may have been executed by him during his time in Albany include a lithographed view of the Hendrick van Rensselaer house (aka Crailo), featured on the cover of another musical work by Oliver J. Shaw, his “Mansion Hall, Waltz Brillante,” published in 1848 (Figure 8). A painting of the Lansing-Yates house in Albany may also be from his hand. This image, which was partially reproduced in Helen Wilkinson Reynolds’ *Dutch Houses* as of an unidentified house, is presently unlocated, although a c. 1860 photograph of it exists (Figure 9).¹⁷ Unlike the other images presented here, the view of the Lansing-Yates house was anachronistic at the time it was executed; the house stood well within the built-up portion of Albany by the 1840s.



Fig.9. Reproduction of a painting of the Lansing-Yates house, here attributed to Sintzenich. The photograph dates to c. 1860 (Collection of the author).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ This was the case until at least 1868. The when the construction of a dyke was proposed in 1865--see "River Improvements," *The Troy Daily Times*, 8 August 1865, 3, a request for proposals from contractors for its construction was not advertised until January 1868. See "U. S. Engineer's Office...", *The National Republican* (Washington, DC), 17 January 1868, 4.
- ² 22 February 1835. Reprinted in Joel Munsell, comp. *Annals of Albany* 10 (Albany: Munsell & Rowland, Printers, 1859), 238.
- ³ Cuyler Reynolds. *Hudson-Mohawk Genealogical and Family Memoirs* 1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1911), 387-388.
- ⁴ "To Let or Lease," *Daily Albany Argus*, 29 January 1868, 5, in an ad dated 25 January.
- ⁵ "To Let or Lease," *Daily Albany Argus*, 4 February 1869, 3, in an ad dated 3 February.
- ⁶ "To Let or Lease," *Daily Albany Argus*, 25 May 1870, 3, in an advertisement dated 31 January.
- ⁷ "For Sale of Exchange...", *Albany Evening Journal*, 8 June 1871, 4, in an ad dated 28 February.
- ⁸ "Alexander Kennedy, Auctioneer...", *Daily Albany Argus*, 15 September 1873, 1.
- ⁹ "Manna of a Day," *The Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 13 February 1893, 1.
- ¹⁰ "Called to the Largest Church," *The Schuylerville Standard*, 25 December 1895.
- ¹¹ "At Douw's Point," *The Times-Union* (Albany, NY) Extra, 25 May 1910, 3.
- ¹² "Port Group Will Close Land Deal," *Times-Union* (Albany, NY), 19 July 1929, 1. It is possible that the house was not immediately destroyed. An article published in 1937 relayed the story of a visit by actress Frances Starr, who, returning to the area, stopped "on the Castleton Road [at] an old house, the Douw mansion where she remembered visiting for a week during her childhood." See Rhoda Hathaway, "Actress Says Albany Church Appearance Was Her Real Start," *The Knickerbocker Press and Albany Evening News*, 16 July 1937, 4B. Given how quickly the Commission acted with respect to the removal of other houses it purchased, however, it seems unlikely that the Douw house survived as late as 1937.
- ¹³ "Prof. Sintzenich," *The Rochester Daily American*, 15 June 1850, 3; "Death of Prof. Sintzenich," *The Rochester Daily American*, 24 September 1852, 2.
- ¹⁴ "Prof. Sintzenich," *The Rochester Daily American*, 15 June 1850, 3.
- ¹⁵ "The Van Rensselaer Manor House," *Albany Argus*, 10 December 1844, 3.
- ¹⁶ "The State Register contains...", *The Rochester Daily American*, 27 September 1852, 2, reproducing an obituary originally published in the *State Register*; Agnes Halsey Jones. *Rediscovered Painters of Upstate New York, 1700-1875* (Utica, NY: Munson-Williams Proctor Institute, 1958), 38.
- ¹⁷ Helen Wilkinson Reynolds. *Dutch Houses in the Hudson Valley Before 1776* (New York: Payson and Clarke LTD, 1929), 157.

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"Of the building of houses at first"

by Cornelis van Tienhoven

The following text forms part of a report by Cornelis van Tienhoven, originally published for the benefit of prospective settlers in 1650. This is E. B. O'Callaghan's translation, published in 1851.—ed.

Before beginning to build, it will above all things be necessary to select a well located spot, either on some river or bay, suitable for the settlement of a village or hamlet. This is previously properly surveyed and divided into lots, with good streets according to the situation of the place. This hamlet can be fenced all round with high palisades or long boards and closed with gates, which is advantageous in case of attack by the natives who heretofore used to exhibit their insolence in new plantations.

Outside the village or hamlet other land must be laid out which can in general be fenced and prepared at the most trifling expense.

Those in New Netherland and especially New England, who have no means to build farm houses at first according to their wishes, dig a square pit in the ground, cellar fashion, 6 or 7 feet deep, as long and as broad as they think proper, case the earth inside with wood all round the wall, and line the wood with the bark of trees or something else to prevent the caving in of the earth; floor this cellar with plank and wainscot it overhead for a ceiling, raise a roof of spars clear up and cover the spars with bark or green sods, so that they can live dry and warm in these houses with their entire families for two, three and four years, it being understood that partitions are run through those cellars which are adapted to the size of the family. The wealthy and principal men in New England, in the beginning of the Colonies, commenced their first dwelling houses in this fashion for two reasons; firstly, in order not to waste time building and not to want food the next season; secondly, in order not to discourage poorer laboring people whom they brought over in numbers from Fatherland. In the course of 3 @ [sic] 4 years, when the country became adapted to agriculture, they built themselves handsome houses, spending on them several thousands.

¹ Cornelis van Tienhoven, in "Information Relative to Taking up Land in New Netherland," (1650), translated in E. B. O'Callaghan, *The Documentary History of the State of New-York*, Vol. 4 (Albany: Charles van Benthuyssen, 1851), 31-32. Also in E. B. O'Callaghan, ed. *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York* (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1856), 367-68.