



Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture

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Newsletter

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The Crocheron Barn, Staten Island, Richmond County, NY

by William McMillen

Editor's note: Bill was a long-term member of the DBPS, served on the board of the HVVA, and was a member of HMVA until his death in 2022. He sent me this short article and drawings for potential inclusion in the *Dutch Barn Preservation Society Newsletter*, which I edited, in 2010. I had felt at the time that it needed some additional context in order to fit into the *DBPS Newsletter*, and so set it aside until Bill was able to provide additional text.

Some of Bill's observations with respect to English and swing beam barns have been significantly refined or supplanted by the work of others, particularly Bill Krattinger, who wrote on these subjects for the *DBPS Newsletter* in 2015 and the *HMVA Newsletter* in 2018.

Unfortunately, although the barn was initially dismantled for planned reconstruction at Historic Richmond Town, that never happened, and all but one of its component parts were destroyed, leaving Bill's documentation the only record of this example of a rare building type. We are pleased to publish this article and the associated drawings and text which are based on field notes Bill collected in 1966, and which he finished drawing in 2002. His work on this project over a 44-year period is a testament to his dedication to the cultural resources of Staten Island and to Historic Richmond Town.

--WRW

The English barn is the name given to a type of barn that is found in all New England, New York, New Jersey and other places as its design and type spread west after the Revolutionary War. This naming or designation comes from its direct similarity and use to its predecessor in England. The entrance into these barns is on the side of it as opposed to an entrance on the gable end. There are really two distinct different types in this country and this is apparent in their construction methods, mostly in their timber framing. This all comes about because of the background and customs of the builders in their areas. The first type is found in all New England and with a few that have crept into the bordering states. The timber framing of these barns follows closely the same methods used in the framing of New England houses. The one telling sign is that the bent post, the post girt, or anchor beam and the top or roof plate is all incorporated into one complicated mortised and tenoned joint. This puts the girt and plate at the same level.

The second type is found in all the areas that the New World Dutch barn is found and into western New York State. This is where the big difference is as the timber framing methods follow closely the same practices that were used in framing the houses in these "Dutch" settled areas. In these barns you will find an H-framed bent with the top or roof plate mortised into the top of the bent post. The girt or anchor beam is placed lower down the bent post a few feet, sometimes as much as six feet and produces much less complicated joints.

Both barn types are usually built in three bays, with four bents. The middle bay is used as a drive through for wagons and a thrashing floor. The two side bays are used to store straw and grain that has yet to be thrashed, hay, and in many of the barns also house cows and horses.

In some of the barns found in the "Dutch" settled areas there is an adaptation found on one of the interior bents. This is a large anchor beam called a "swing-beam" placed below the upper anchor beam with a space between them of about two feet. This would leave a clear space below the large swing-beam of about seven or eight feet, and it was free from any posts under it. This produced a large open space consisting of two full bays of which a farmer could thrash his grain using a horse walking in a circle from under the center of the swing-beam. The horse hoofs doing the thrashing. This extra swing-beam helped support all the weight of the straw and or hay stored above in the bay.

I am not sure of how much, if any of this swing-beam barn was used in the New England areas. However, it did move into western New York after the Revolutionary War with the soldiers receiving bounty lands and into Upper Canada with the displaced loyalists. The areas that many of these settlers came from, was the "Dutch" settled areas of New Jersey and New York.

The areas of Europe where most of these folks (or their parents) originally came from is the lowlands in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany; with them came their traditional building traditions. We now collectively call this type of traditional house and barn architecture, simply "Dutch".

The drawings of the 1820 Crocheron swing-beam barn show the distinct building traditions of the "Dutch" settled areas, of which Staten Island is part of. I for one consider this barn as much a "Dutch" barn as any New World Dutch barn.

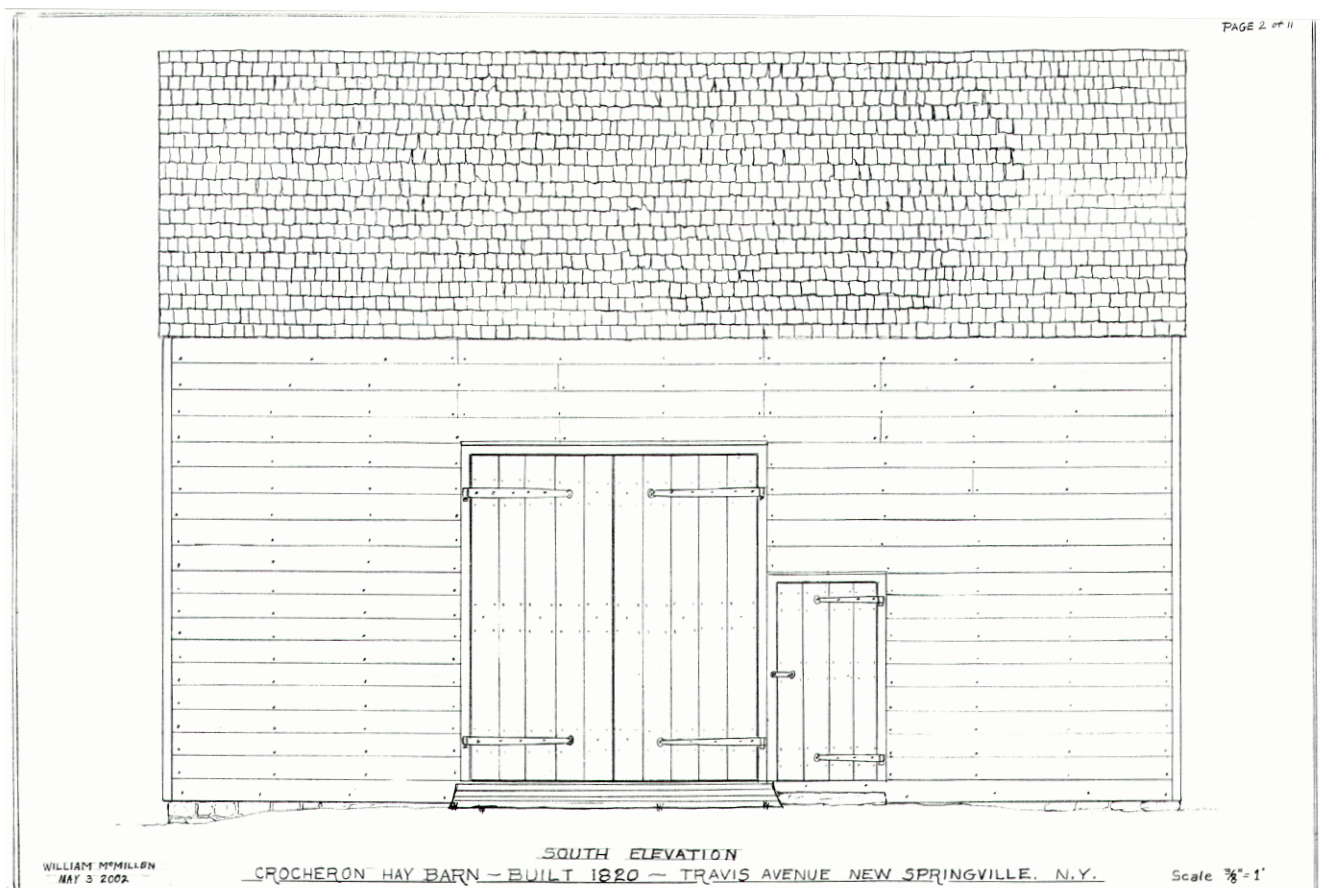
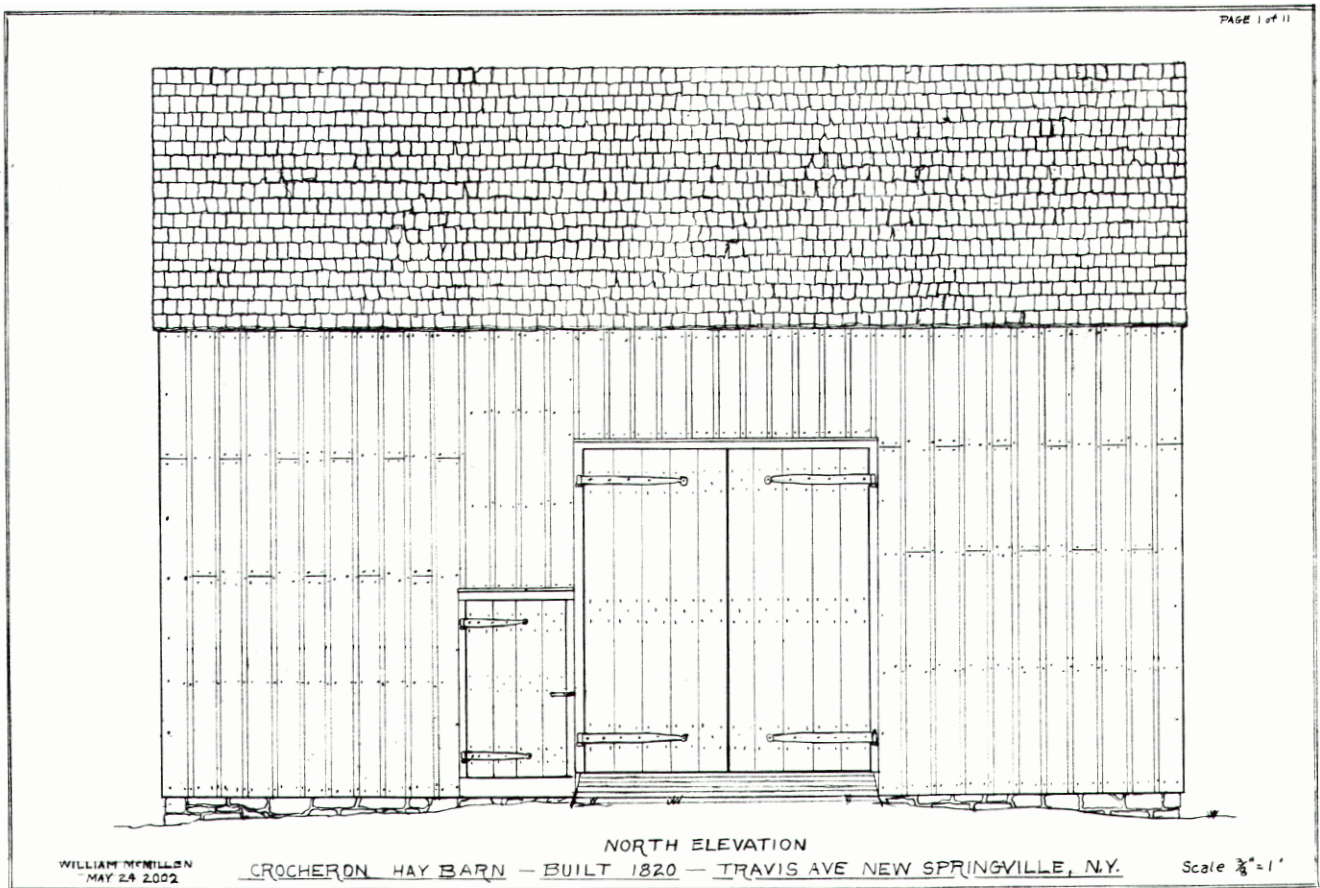
CROCHERON BARN BUILT 1820

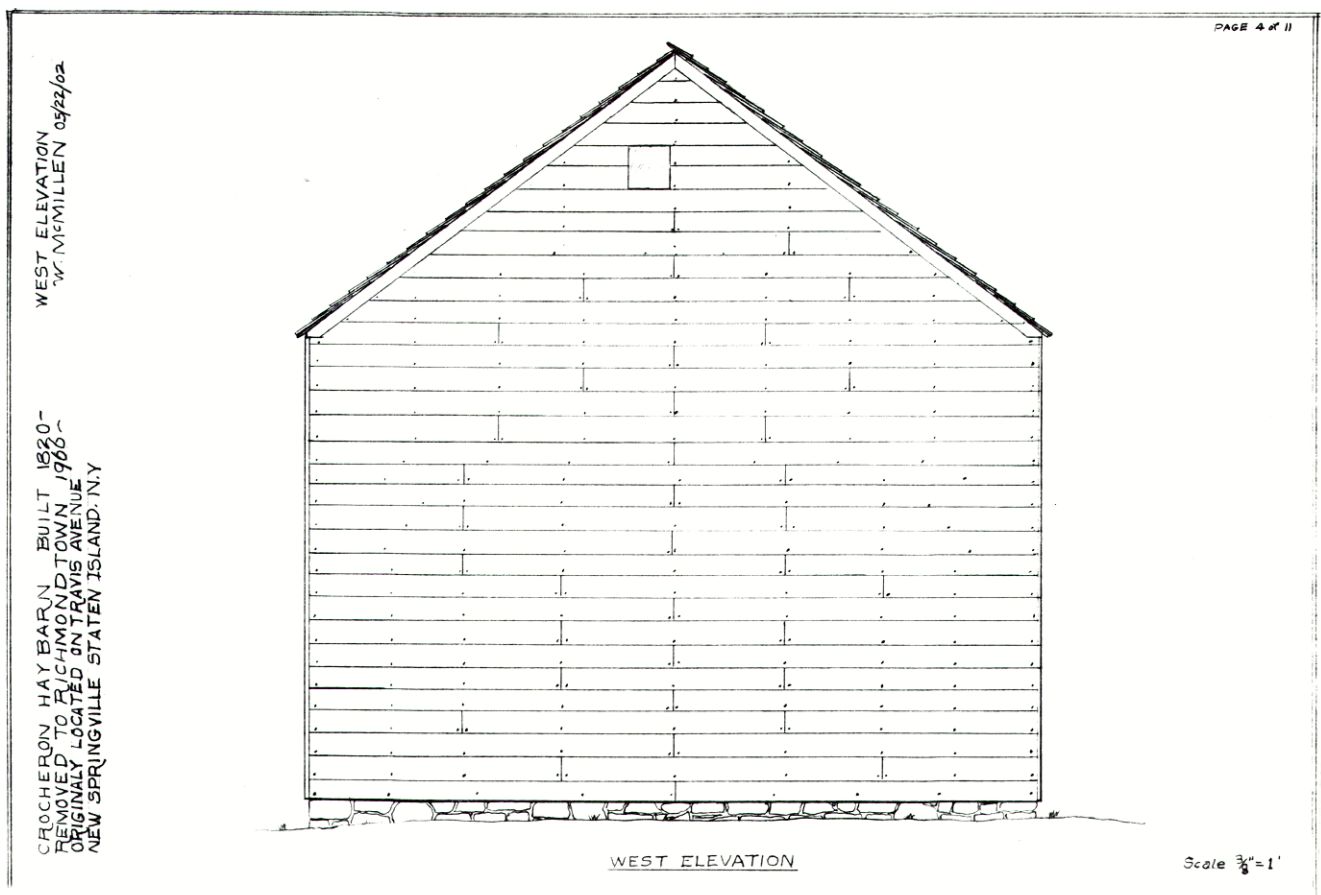
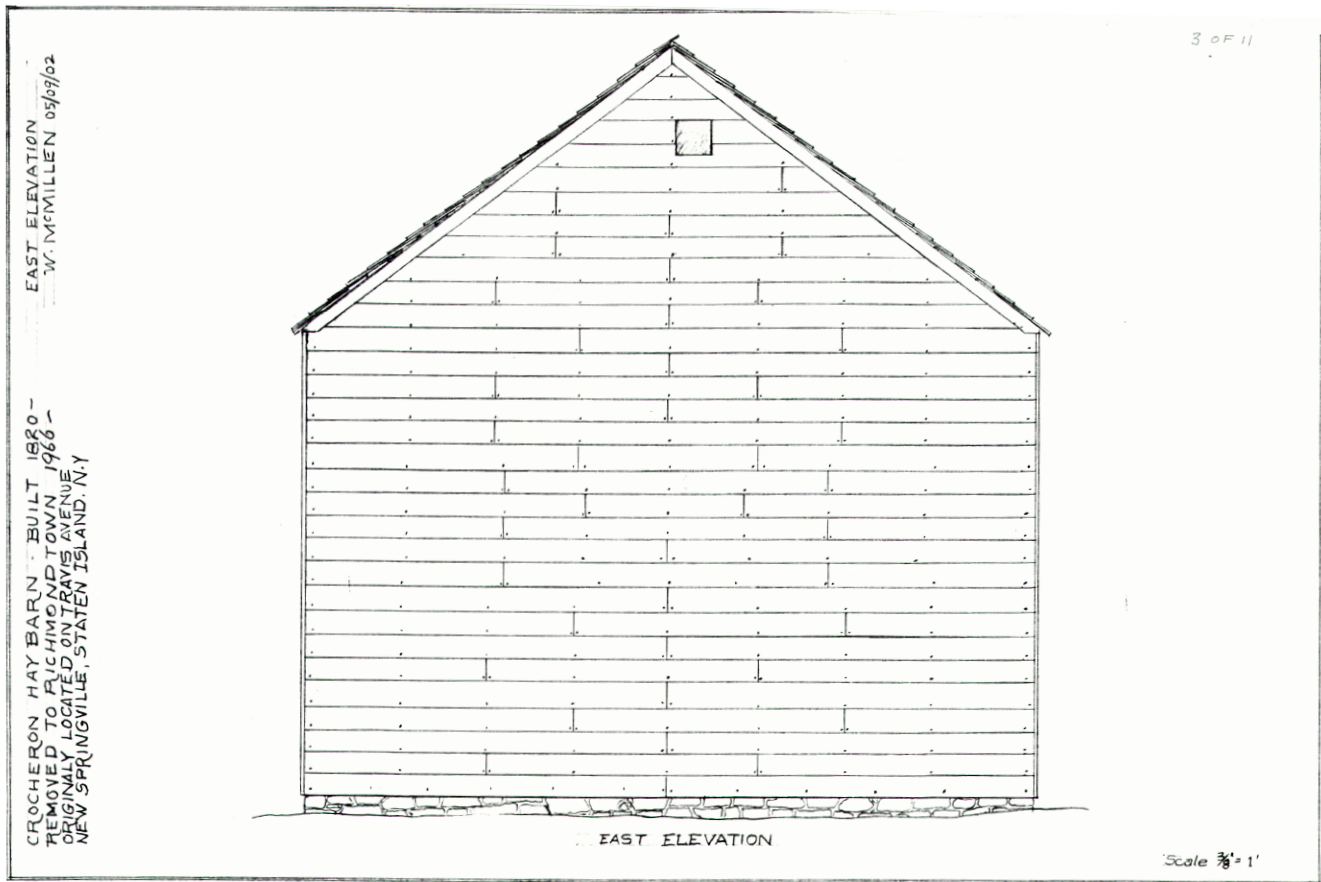
FOR HAY STORAGE and GRAIN THRESHING

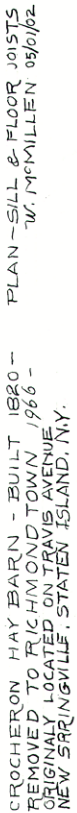
THE CROCHERON BARN ALONG WITH A CROCHERON HOUSE ALSO BUILT AND DATED 1820 STOOD THREE HUNDRED YARDS WEST OF RICHMOND AVENUE ON THE NORTH SIDE OF TRAVIS AVENUE, NEW SPRINGVILLE, STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK. THE BARN WAS DISMANTLED, RECORDED AND MOVED TO HISTORIC RICHMOND TOWN IN SEPTEMBER 1966. A FOUNDATION WAS BUILT A SOME NEW REPLACEMENT TIMBER WAS PURCHASED, BUT NO RESTORATION WORK WAS STARTED. IN THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS THE PARTS DETERIORATED BEYOND USE AND ALL WAS DISPOSED OF EXCEPT FOR ONE 10'4" LONG INTERIOR BEAM AND THE CARVED IN 1820 DATE CUT FROM THE LARGE SWING BEAM.

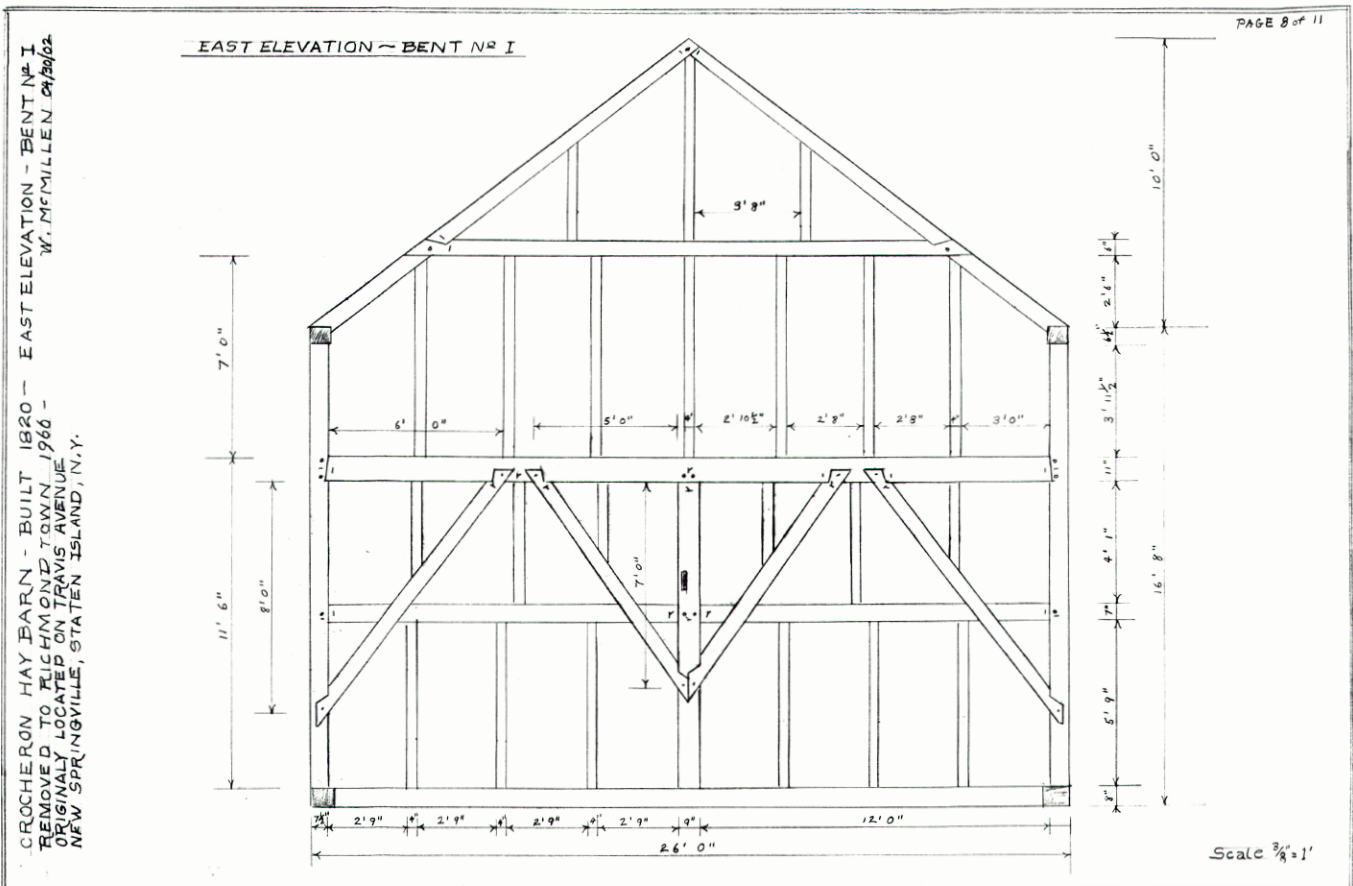
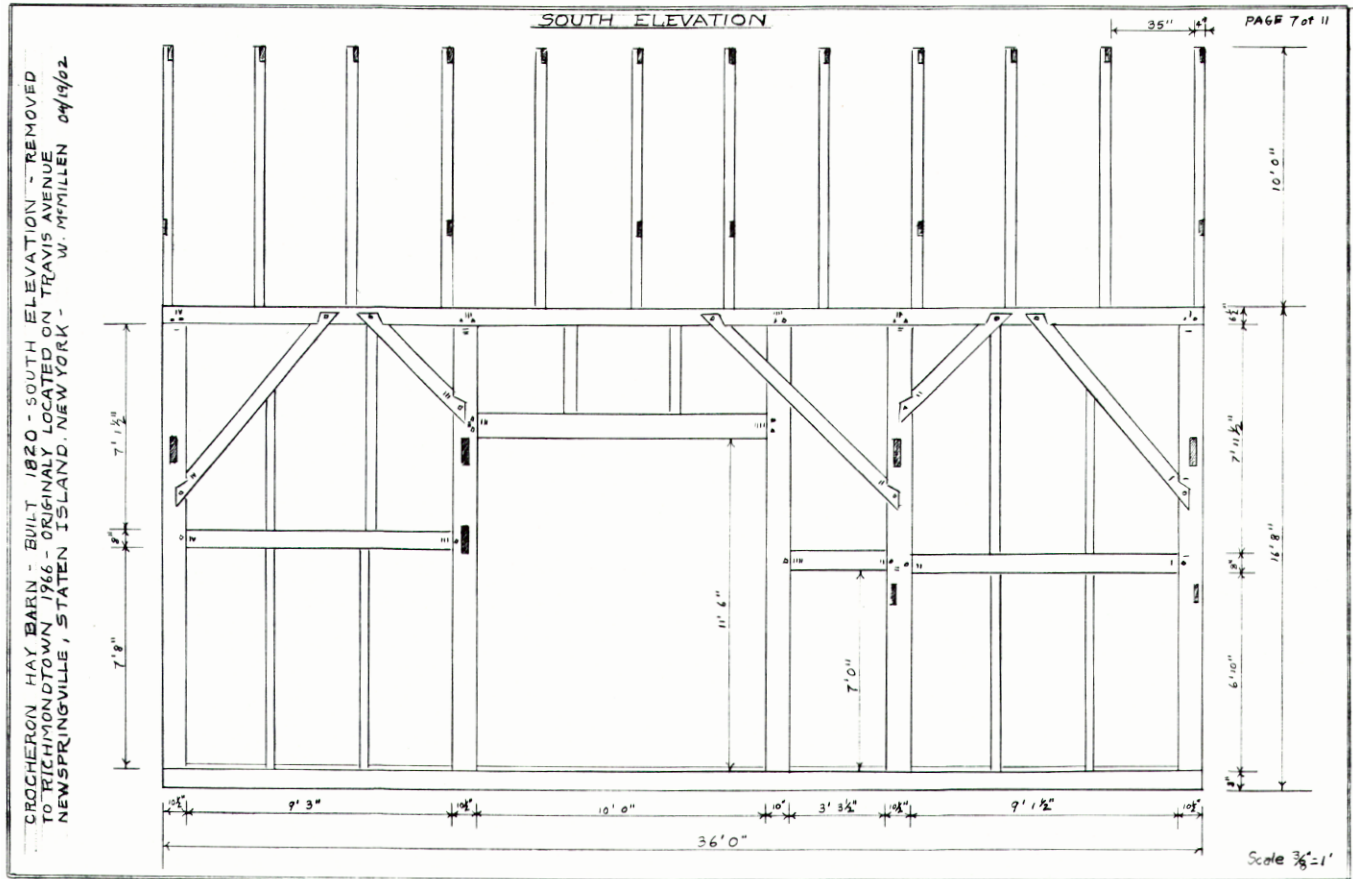
STATEN ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY-HISTORIC RICHMOND TOWN

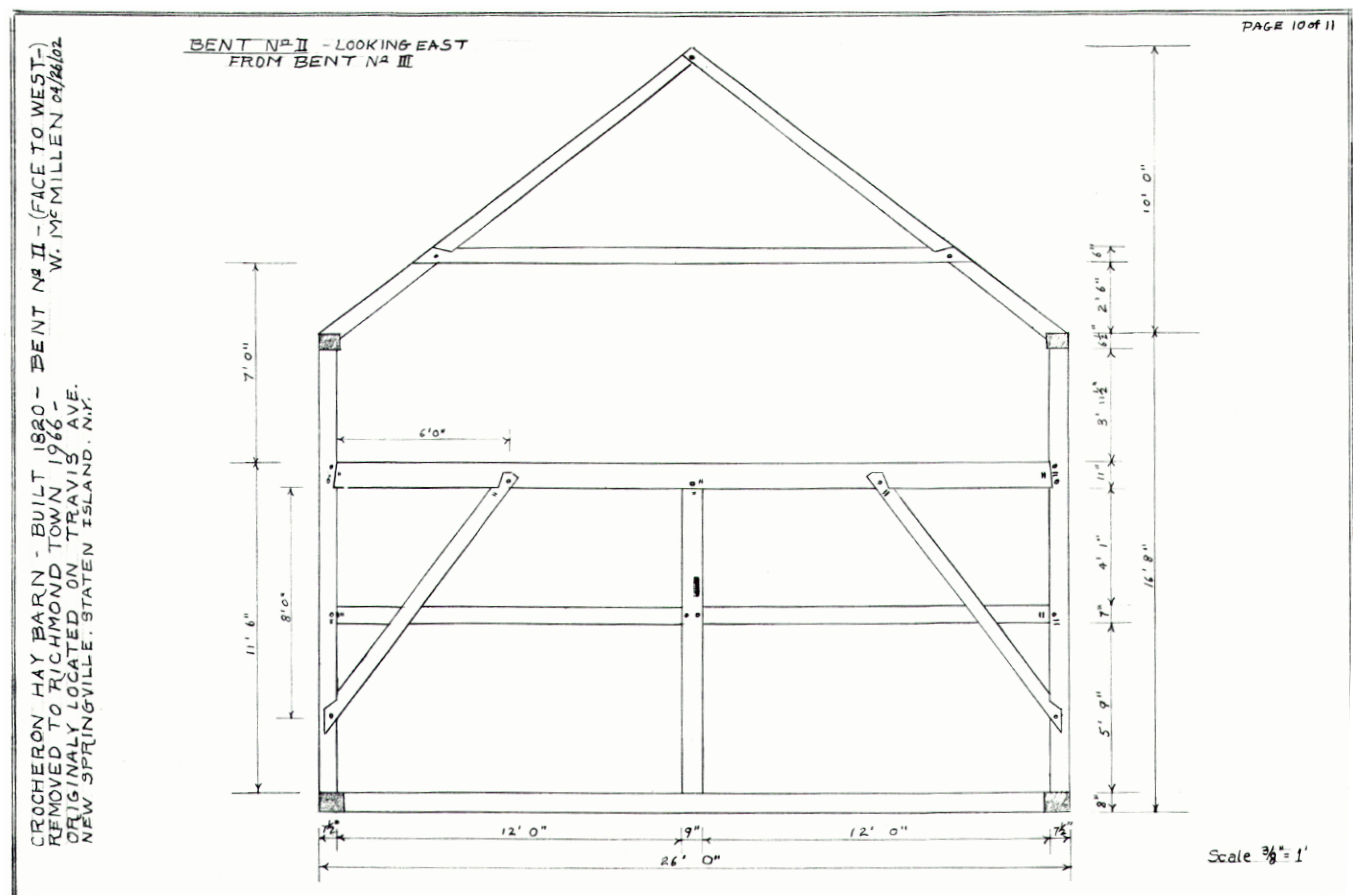
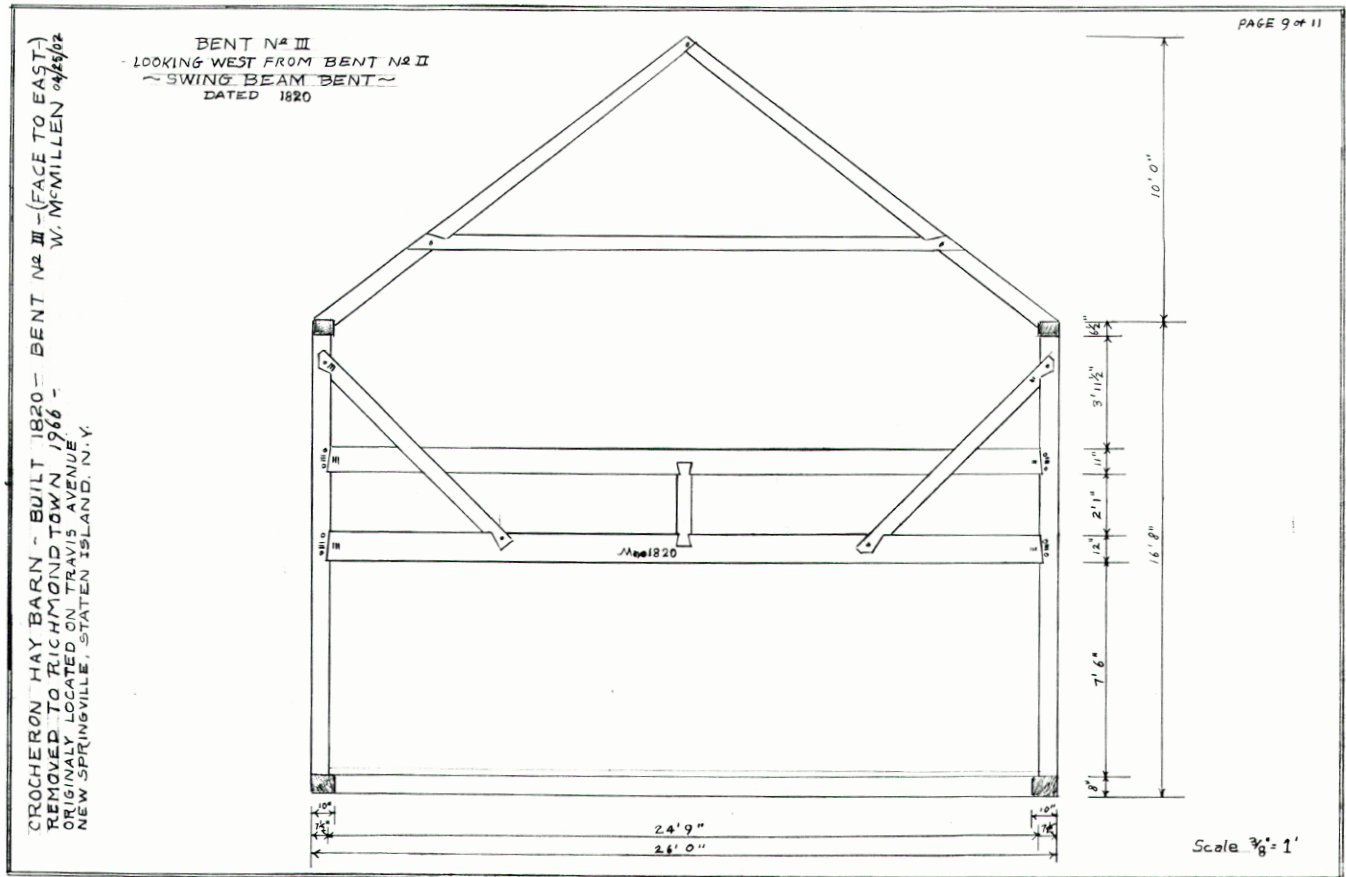
DISMANTLED, RECORDED 1966 and DRAWN 2002 BY WILLIAM MCMILLEN

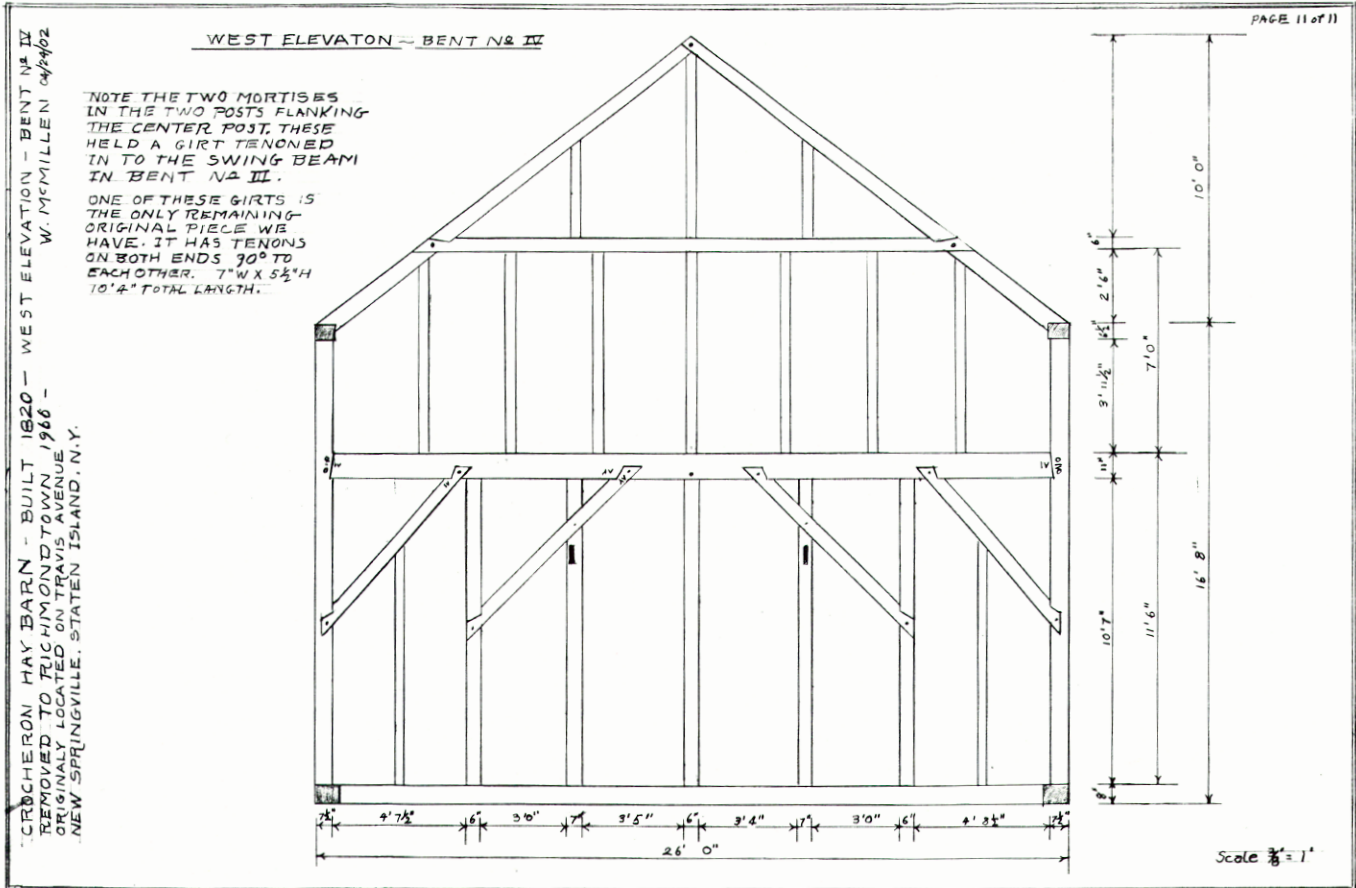












CROCHERON BARN - BILL OF MATERIAL - AS CONSTRUCTED
IN 1820.

OAK - POPLAR - WHITE PINE.

HEWN = CUT WITH A BROAD AXE — SAWN = CUT WITH A VERTICAL SAW BLADE.

GROUND SILLS		SIZE	LENGTH	
N.&S.	2	8" X 10"	36' 0"	HEWN
E.&W.	2	8" X 10"	26' 0"	HEWN
CENTER	2	10" X 10"	26' 0"	HEWN
E-W. CENTER	2	10" X 10"	10' 4"	HEWN
E-W. CENTER	1	10" X 10"	15' 0"	HEWN
JOISTS	22	6" X 8"	12' 6"	1/2 HEWN
BENTS				
POSTS	8	7 1/2" X 10 1/2"	16' 3"	HEWN
ANCHOR BEAMS	4	9" X 11"	26' 0"	HEWN
SWING BEAM	1	10" X 13"	26' 0"	HEWN
PLATES				
NORTH & SOUTH	2	6 1/2" X 8 1/2"	36' 0"	HEWN
POSTS				
DOOR POSTS	2	4 1/2" X 10"	16' 3"	SAWN
BENT N ^o I POST	1	7" X 9"	11' 2"	HEWN
BENT N ^o II POST	1	7" X 9"	11' 2"	HEWN
BENT N ^o III POSTS	2	6" X 7"	11' 2"	SAWN
BENT N ^o IV POSTS	3	6" X 6"	11' 2"	SAWN
GIRTS				
OVER DOORS N.&S.	2	4 1/2" X 10"	10' 8"	SAWN
OVER SMALL DOORS	2	4" X 7"	4' 0"	SAWN
N.&S. GIRTS	4	5" X 8"	10' 0"	SAWN
N. GIRTS	4	5" X 7"	10' 0"	SAWN
TIE-BENT N ^o I-II	1	5" X 8"	10' 0"	SAWN
TIE-BENT N ^o III-IV	2	5" X 7"	10' 0"	SAWN
BRACES				
BENT N ^o I	2	4" X 6"	11' 0"	SAWN
BENT N ^o II	2	4" X 6"	9' 9"	SAWN
BENT N ^o III	2	5" X 6"	11' 2"	SAWN
BENT N ^o IV	2	4" X 6"	9' 6"	SAWN
NORTH SIDE	2	4" X 6"	7' 8"	SAWN
SOUTH SIDE	2	4" X 6"	8' 9"	SAWN
STUDS CUT TO FIT				
LOWER WALLS	15	4" X 5"	8' 0"	SAWN
UPPER WALLS	5	4" X 5"	8' 0"	SAWN
ROOF				
RAFTERS (TAPERED)	24	4" X 7" - 5"	17' 0"	HEWN
COLLAR TIES	6	4" X 6"	19' 6"	HEWN
FIRING	100	1 1/2" X 3"	16' 0"	SAWN
SHINGLES	14 SQ.	5/8" X 4" - 9"	2' 6"	SPLIT
SIDEING & DOORS				
CLAP BOARDS	2700	SQ. FT.	1" X 12" RANDOM	SAWN
DOORS	300	SQ. FT.	1" X 12" RANDOM	SAWN
FLOORING	300	SQ. FT.	2" X 12" - 11' 0"	SAWN
	300	SQ. FT.	2 1/2" X 12" - 15' 0"	SAWN
	400	SQ. FT.	2 1/2" X 12" - 11' 0"	SAWN
PINS				
	132	1" X 1"	1' 0"	SPLIT
	20	1 1/2" X 1 1/2"	1' 0"	SPLIT

Vernacular Documents XI: Plans for a "Public Hotel for The Country as a Summer Resort"

by Walter Richard Wheeler

Two drawings in the Ludlow Family Papers at the Albany Institute of History and Art have long resisted definitive identification. They are lodged in a subset of the family papers, catalogued as "Livingston Family Papers" (the Ludlows were later related to the Livingstons by marriage), but without any further identification¹. It is possible that the drawings may have been commissioned by a member of the Ludlow family or by one of the Livingstons. The Ludlows lived in Claverack, Columbia County, and had extensive landholdings in both Columbia and Saratoga counties. The Livingstons held property throughout the Hudson Valley and elsewhere.

A possible clue to the intended location of this building is found on the back of the first-floor plan in a text that reads "Plot of a Public Hotel for The Country as a Summer Resort 160 ft by 60 on the ground 1 ½ Story High." If originating with the Ludlow family, these drawings could have been intended for a site in Lebanon Springs, New Lebanon, Columbia County, or in Ballston Spa or perhaps Saratoga Springs in Saratoga County, which were all sites of established resorts at the time the drawings were executed, probably c. 1790-1810, and where the family held property. The drawings do not appear to be the work of a trained architect, but rather were probably drafted by a carpenter/builder or by the client.

The case for a potential Lebanon Springs site for the building is suggested by the similarities between the Elisha Gilbert house (1794) in New Lebanon and the drawings presented here (Figures 1 thru 3). Both structures feature

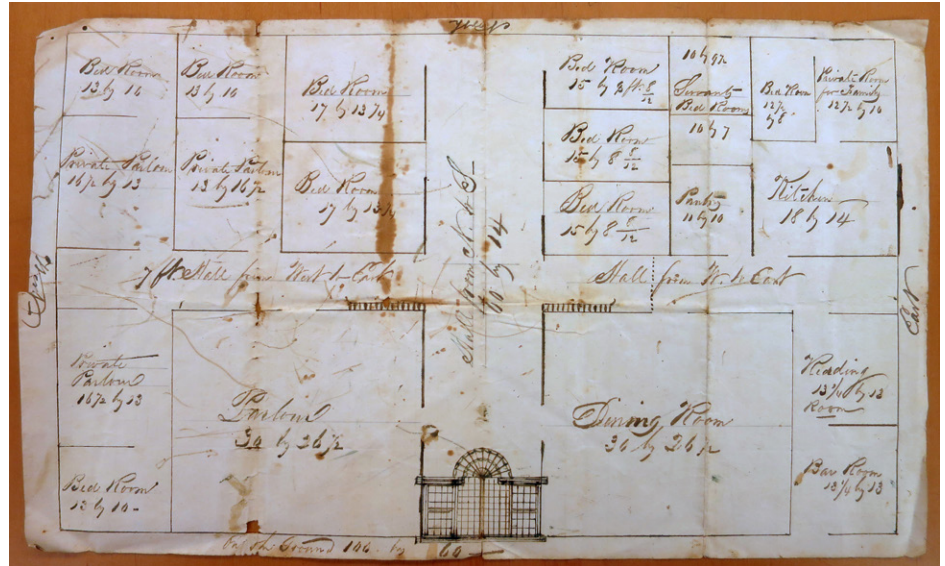


Figure 1. First floor plan of "a Public Hotel for The Country as a Summer Resort" (Ludlow Family Papers, FH 810, 1743-1929. Albany Institute of History and Art Library, Albany, NY). The draftsman has indicated a Palladian window in the center of the south elevation.

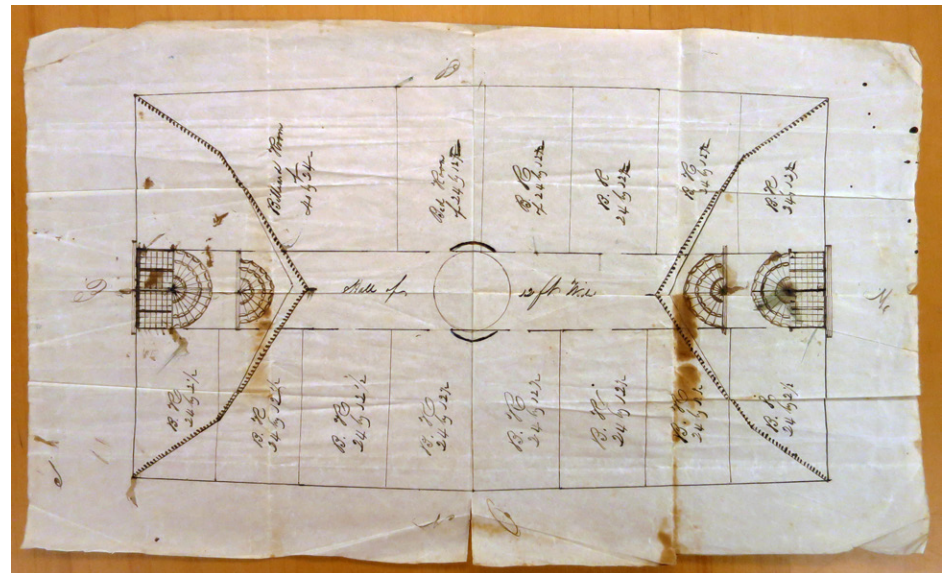


Figure 2. Second floor plan (Ludlow Family Papers, FH 810, 1743-1929. Albany Institute of History and Art Library, Albany, NY). The upper parts of the gable end walls are shown overlaying the plan.

a large Palladian window centered on their long facades, and both have gambrel roofs of similar form. The hotel drawings show a bank of three windows topped by a large fanlight over which is a second fanlight of the same size in each of the two gable end walls. Small dashes under the

¹ Ludlow Family Papers, FH 810, 1743-1929. Albany Institute of History and Art Library, Albany, NY.

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roofline indicate a cornice of similar design to that which is featured on the eaves walls of the Gilbert house. Despite these similarities, there remains insufficient evidence to associate these drawings to the Gilbert house's builder or to a site in the Town of New Lebanon. Comparison of the two buildings does support a near-contemporary design date for them, however. The builder or client appears to have been familiar with the Gilbert house or similar structures.

An interesting feature of the hotel drawings is the placement of a circle in the center of the second-floor plan, which the north and south walls curve around. It seems likely that this is intended to represent an opening to the first floor, which would have facilitated the daylighting of the center of the building via a skylight centered on the roof. Two staircases are indicated along the south side of the central hall on the first floor but are not shown on the second-floor plan. Several rooms appear to lack windows altogether including the interior rooms on the first floor and many of the rooms on the second floor, although the latter may have been lit by dormers. Aside from the major windows no fenestration is indicated on the plans.

The hotel would have, if constructed, had generous proportions, being 160 by 60 feet in size. The great depth of the building would have necessitated specialized framing; no indication of this is found on the drawings, however. Faults in the planning, including locating the 40 by 24-foot billiard room adjacent to the second-floor eaves wall and the large size (24'-0" x 12'-6"!) of the second-floor guest rooms while the first floor rooms were projected to be of diminutive size, may be an indication that these drawings were drafted by an amateur and that they represent an incomplete thought experiment, rather than a set of plans from which to build.



Figure 3. The Elisha Gilbert house (1794), New Lebanon, Columbia County, NY (Author photograph, 2017).