



Hudson-Mohawk Vernacular Architecture

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Newsletter

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A History of the Bullock Farm¹

by Christopher Albright

Research conducted recently on graves in a small cemetery adjacent to the Whitbeck Memorial Grove nature preserve in the Town of New Scotland, Albany County has resulted in a better understanding of the history of the Bullock farm and its later subdivisions during the 19th century. The cemetery is located adjacent to the northwest corner of the preserve and has several graves of persons who died in the mid-19th century along with several headstones of members of the Pound family from the 20th and 21st centuries. A deed dated 19 April 1858 first mentions the cemetery: “...excepting and reserving out of the above described premises one quarter of an acre of land a part of which is now used as a burying ground & a right of way to the same...” It also leads us to question long-held assumptions about the historic homes on Bullock Road and the veracity of a long-standing historic marker.

Not long after the end of the Revolutionary War, the patroon Stephen Van Rensselaer III had many of the farms within the manor surveyed. The survey of the farm of John Bullock was completed about 1789.² The farm included most of today’s Bullock Road and was quite large as it contained about 350 acres. Besides showing the boundaries of the farm, the survey depicts a road which closely follows the course of Bullock Road (Figure 1). The survey also shows two houses, one at the approximate location of the stone and brick house at

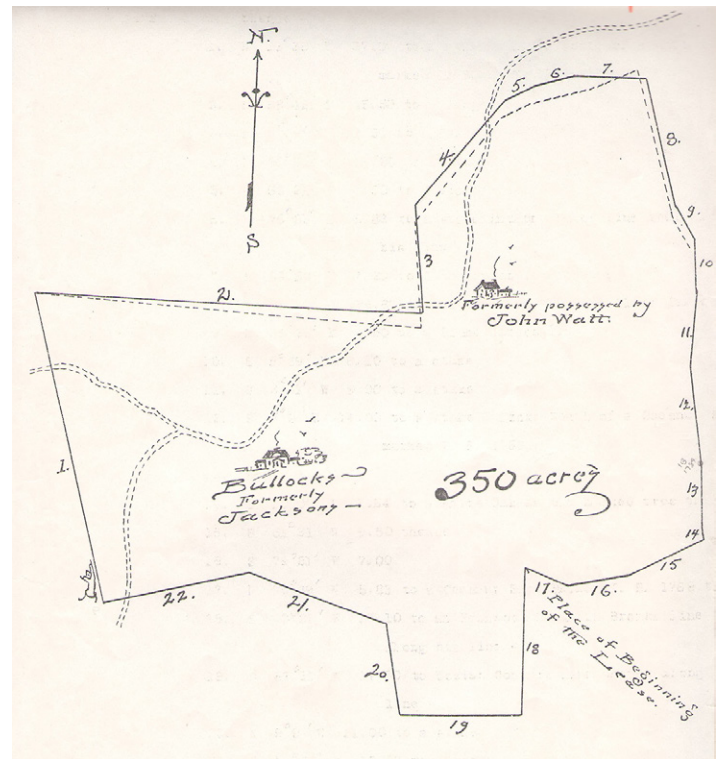


Figure 1. 1789 Farm Survey (Albany County Hall of Records, Farm Surveys, Book 19, Survey 63).

183 Bullock Road (a historical marker indicates that it is the Matthew Bullock house) and the second at about the same location as a brick Federal style house at 83 Bullock Road.

The Farms of Watt and Jackson:

Remarks in the circa 1789 survey indicate that there were two former tenants of this property: “The above bounds comprehend the farms formerly in possession of Wm. Jackson and John Watt.” The location of their houses is depicted on the survey. In his will, dated 23 September 1801, John Bullock left the “tenement formerly of Wats and Jackson and lying in the town of Bethlehem and County of Albany....” to his son, Matthew.³

John Watt: Depicted on the circa 1789 survey of John Bullock’s farm is the location of the house of John Watt. This appears to be the same location as a brick Federal style house currently at 83 Bullock Road. There was most likely an earlier structure at this location prior to the construction of the brick house. John Watt is listed as a sergeant on the militia rolls for the Colony of Rensselaerswyck, west side of Hudson’s River during the 1760s. A lease from the Manor of Rensselaerswyck to John Watt is known to have been issued on 10 July 1776.⁴

On 29 January 1781, “John Watt of New Scotland...” was listed as a bailman. In his will dated 1787, he referred to himself as “of Fleming Creek,” which is more commonly known as the Vloman Kill (the creek flows very close to this farm). He mentioned his wife, Jean Fay, and provided for her by bequeathing her

...one of the Fire Rooms in my Dwelling House during her life time if she survives me. as also at my decease I give to her a good milk cow to be pastured for her every summer and foddered every winter on my farm, a bedstead with a feather bed, both a green rug and a black one with four pair of blankets, two pots a big and small one a frying pan with one butter platter and six plates ditto a spinning wheel and at her decease to have a descent burial....

It appears that if the couple had children they did not survive into adulthood as the bulk of John’s estate was given to his nephew, Andrew, who was also listed as the executor. Court records indicate that he was living in Great Britain and that William Young was assigned as a replacement executor.

It is interesting to note that in the will of John Bullock, he left his son Matthew the farm, but stipulated that he must provide for the “...widow wats yearly annuity as it becomes due..” This suggests that John Bullock took over the care of the Widow Watt, possibly as some part of an agreement to acquire the former John Watt farm.

William Jackson: John Bullock’s circa 1789 survey also shows that William Jackson lived at the same location as the stone house at 183 Bullock Road. A William Jackson, soldier of the 55th Regiment, married Barbara Miller at the Dutch Reformed Church in Albany on 2 March 1759.⁶ He is also listed on the militia rolls from the 1760s, his name adjacent to that of John Watt. William Jackson took a lease out from the Manor of Rensselaerswyck on 10 July 1776; John Watt took a similar lease the same day.

On 9 September 1780, the Commissioners for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies took William Jackson of New Scotland along with several other individuals into custody for “...charges alleged against them...” The Commissioners were responsible for determining an individual’s loyalty to the new country. On the 23 September 1780 the Commissioners

Resolved that William Jackson be discharged from confinement on entering into a recognizance with sufficient surety for his good behavior doing his duty and appearing before any three of the Commissioners for Conspiracies when thereunto required during the continuance of the present war with Great Britain.

The minutes of the Commissioners continue on 26 September of that same year:

Lieutenant Ephraim Hudson having been cited to appear before the board in order to his being examined with respect to sundry persons living at New Scotland appeared and being examined says— That William Jackson is a person of weight & influence in the part where he lives that he is certain that the Expresses from the Enemy which pass up & down the Country lodge at his house...



Figure 2. Detail from 1851 county map (J. C. Sidney. *Map of Albany Vicinity and Troy*. Albany, NY: E. H. Pease & Co, 1851).

Again, on 17 May 1781 the Board was “informed that William Jackson of New Scotland and his wife are able to give some very material information respecting sundry transactions in that quarter it is therefore resolved that the said William Jackson and his wife be ordered forthwith to attend this board.” It would appear that Jackson was a Tory and that he was harboring individuals carrying communications between forces of the enemy. No further information could be found on William Jackson. Whether he removed to some other location after the war or died on the farm is unknown.

John Bullock and Subsequent Owners

John Bullock was born in Derbyshire, England in 1739. He was married to Ellen Johnson and had nine children. He died in 1801 and is buried at the New Scotland Presbyterian Church Cemetery. John’s original lease from the patroon is dated 28 October 1788. In his will, he left the farm to his third son, Matthew. Matthew’s wife was Susannah Moore and they had seven children. Matthew Bullock died in 1843. In his will, Matthew left the “Homestead farm” to his two youngest sons, Thomas and Andrew Moore Bullock. In 1847 the two brothers purchased the lease from the patroon, Stephen Van Rensselaer IV. The following year (March 1848) Thomas

and Andrew M. split the farm; each brother getting 196.9 acres. In the deed the house of Andrew M. Bullock was described as being in the same location as the brick Federal house at 83 Bullock Road. On 1 April 1848 Andrew sold his farm to Aaron Hotaling for \$12,200 which was quite a bit of money considering that most farms of similar size were selling for less than half that amount.

Aaron Hotaling, born 1797, married Mary (Polly) Rogers in 1826 and had five children which reached adulthood. He attained great wealth through the sale of bluestone from quarries in Reidsville in the nearby town of Berne. Polly Rogers was the

daughter of Captain Thomas Rogers who was involved in the lumber industry and who obtained his title through his river operations.⁷ Captain Rogers died in 1861 and was buried, along with his wife, Polly in the cemetery adjacent to the Whitbeck Memorial Grove Nature Preserve. Aaron Hotaling died in 1866; he and his wife, Mary were buried in the same cemetery.

Shown (Figure 2) is a portion of the 1851 Sidney map showing Bullock Road and the homes of Aaron Houghtaling (Hotaling) and Thomas Bullock. The home locations coincide with the Federal style home at 83 Bullock Road and the stone and brick house at 183 Bullock Road.

In 1853, Aaron Hotaling sold the southern portion of his farm, including the brick Federal style home at 83 Bullock Road to his son, Hiram.⁸ The deed described the house at 83 Bullock Road as “...the dwelling house of the said Aaron Houghtaling.” Aaron retained the north part of the farm until 1858 when he sold it to another son, Oscar. Aaron was recorded as living in New Scotland in the 1850 census but had moved to the city of Albany by 1855. Hiram appeared in the same census, living next to his father. In the 1855 census, Hiram is recorded as living in the brick Federal house at 83 Bullock Road and his brother, Oscar, living in a wood framed house next door. The Gould map

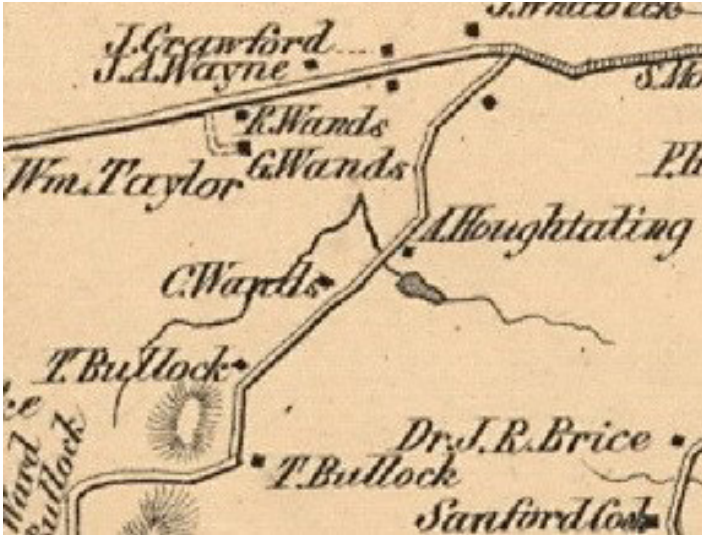


Figure 3. Detail from 1854 county map (Jay Gould. *Map of Albany County, New York*. N. p. [Albany, NY], 1854).

of 1854 depicts Aaron as still living in the Brick Federal house and Thomas Bullock at the stone and brick house at 183 Bullock Road (Figure 3). Also shown is a house near the north end of Bullock Road at the same location as the Hotaling/Pound House but with no name associated with it.

In 1863, Hiram sold his farm to George S Barton. The following year, Thomas Bullock sold his farm to George W Bender. With Thomas' sale, the Bullock family was no longer in possession of any part of the original farm leased by John Bullock in 1788. Oscar Hotaling was living on his farm at the Hotaling/Pound house. Oscar's son, Harris Aaron Hotaling, inherited the house and farm and in 1922 sold it to Arthur Pound.

The three houses of primary interest for the purpose of this article are the stone and brick house at 183 Bullock Road, the brick Federal house at 83 Bullock Road and the Greek Revival house at 1 Bullock Road.

183 Bullock Road (Photo 1) - This house is the oldest of the three houses. It has been reported in the past that the stone portion of the house was built by John Bullock in 1787 and that the brick portion was added in the 19th century. While this may be true there is a chance that it could be older. The 1789 survey shows a house at this location but it also states that it was formerly William Jackson's home. Jackson is known to have been living in New Scotland as early as 1780 and the militia rolls suggest that he was liv-



Photo 1. 183 Bullock Road (Photo by Chris Albright).



Photo 2. 83 Bullock Road (Photo by Chris Albright).

ing here in the 1760s.⁹ If Jackson did not build the present house, then there was most likely a timber framed structure on this site before the stone house was built.

83 Bullock Road (Photo 2) - The house at this location is a Federal style, center hall, three bay, two story structure with a side gable roof. The house could have been built anytime from the 1790s to the 1840s.

One account claims that the house was built between 1836 and 1838 by Matthew Bullock for his daughter. Ann Bullock (1812-?) was the wife of Robert R Hall (1810-1853). After Matthew's death in 1843, the farm came into possession of his sons, Thomas and Andrew M. and by 1848, Andrew was living in the house.¹⁰

The 1789 survey of the John Bullock farm also shows a house at this location but this house is most likely not the same one. The survey indicates that it was "formerly possessed by John Watt." There was most likely a log or timber framed structure formerly at this location.

1 Bullock Road (Photo 3) - This house is the youngest of the three houses. It is of the Greek Revival design. After Aaron Hotaling sold the southern portion of the farm to his son, Hiram in 1848, he retained the northern portion until 1858. He then sold it to his son, Oscar. The 1851 Sidney Map does not show a house at this location. The 1854 Gould map shows a house but with no name. The lack of a name may suggest that the house was uninhabited, possibly because it was under construction. It therefore seems reasonable that the house was built between 1851 and 1854. The 1855 census recorded Hiram living in the brick house at 83 Bullock Road and Oscar living next door in a framed house, presumably the house at 1 Bullock Road.

Errors on the Historical Marker at 1 Bullock Road (Photo 4) - Unfortunately recent research has revealed some errors on the historical marker at 1 Bullock Road. Captain Thomas Rogers did not build or live in that house. His connection to this site is only that his daughter married to Aaron Hotaling and that he was buried in the adjacent cemetery. It's unlikely that the house was



Photo 3. 1 Bullock Road (Photo by Chris Albright).

built as early as 1820. At that time, the property was owned by Matthew Bullock. Aaron Hotaling or his son Oscar probably had the house built. If Aaron lived in the house, it was only for a short time as he is shown on the 1854 Gould map as living at the 83 Bullock Road location and Oscar was living there by 1855. The New Scotland Historical Association has not yet made a decision on how to correct the sign.



Photo 4. Hotaling/Pound house historic plaque (Photo by Chris Albright).

ENDNOTES

¹ The article originally appeared in a slightly different form in the Summer 2024 (32:4) issue of *The Sentinel*, published by the New Scotland Historical Association.

² Albany County Hall of Records, Albany, NY. Farm Surveys, Book 19, Survey 63.

³ The Town of New Scotland was part of the Town of Bethlehem until 1832.

⁴ Victor Hugo Paltsits. *Inventory of the Rensselaerswyck Manuscripts* (New York: New York Public Library, 1924), 29.

⁵ Victor Hugo Paltsits, ed. *Minutes of the Commissioners for detecting and defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York, Albany County Sessions 1778-1781*, Volume II (Albany, NY: State of New York, 1909), 624.

⁶ *Records of the Reformed Dutch Church of Albany, New York 1683-1809*. Reprinted from the Year Books of the Holland Society of New York (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1978), xx.

⁷ Cuyler Reynolds, ed. *Hudson-Mohawk Genealogical and Family Memoirs IV* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1911), 1505.

⁸ Albany County Hall of Records, Deeds, Book 119:428.

⁹ Victor Hugo Paltsits, ed. *Minutes of the Commissioners for detecting and defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York, Albany County Sessions 1778-1781*, Volume II (Albany, NY: State of New York, 1909), 530.

¹⁰ Albany County Hall of Records, Deeds, Book 98:12-14.

Tomahawking History

by Walter Richard Wheeler

Some time ago I visited a local historic site; when we reached the staircase, the docent conducting the tour told a tale of danger involving “Indians” and a near-run-in with a tomahawk. “Wait,” I thought—“haven’t I heard this story before? At some other site?” I filed that thought away, like so many others that flutter in and out of one’s head. Sorting through files recently I came across references to that other site—as well as a third historic house—which all promulgate stories with a similar narrative, each one involving an unfortunate mahogany stair rail. That there are three such stories involving houses located less than 50 miles apart and with no other mention elsewhere in the American colonies, is certainly curious, and begs looking into.¹

Let’s review the three narratives in all their 19th century color. First, Jephtha Simms recorded a story told to him by Eleazar Wells in 1853 during a visit to Johnson Hall, in Johnstown, today’s Fulton County. Wells was then owner of the house and had purchased it in 1829.

The hand-rail upon the stair-baluster was of mahogany, and was hacked nearly its whole length, proving an interesting object to visitors, as it was merely varnished afterward. Mr. Wells gave us the tradition of this novelty. Beside the upper end of the hand-rail is a door opening into a room, in which it is said Sir John Johnson and Brant were for a time closeted, while discussing some unpalatable subject, at the time of their invasion in 1780; and on leaving the room to go below, Brant drew his tomahawk from his belt, and with it began to deal blows in rapid succession on the hand-rail, as he descended the stairs. Johnson, close upon his heels, did his best to prevent the nefarious act; first begging him to desist and then threatening him with prosecution, if he did not—but all to no purpose, the blows continued to fall. On arriving at the foot of the stairs, Sir John was very angry and still threatening legal redress, when Brant coolly turned upon him and said: “You have told me you did not want the house burnt down.” “I don’t,” replied Sir John, “nor do I want it



Figure 1. Johnson Hall stairway, ca. 1908 (Private collection). The damage to the railing appears as white spots, the cuts reflecting glancing light.

hacked to pieces, for I expect to come back and occupy it again.” “Well,” said Brant, “I have now put my mark upon it, and when the young Indians go upon the war-path, I shall tell them that the house with hacked balusters is not to be burned.” This was all the satisfaction the tory chieftain obtained, and his fond dream of again occupying the house, slipped from his grasp forever.²

An abbreviated reference to this event had been published in 1836, wherein it was related that “[i]n some assault, the stair-case of the mansion was disfigured by the tomahawk, the marks of which are still visible.”³



Figure 2. Main staircase at the Schuyler Mansion, Albany (Author photo, May 2019). The cut in the hand rail is located at the point where it begins to turn toward the newel.

Given that European-Americans as well as Native Americans both made use of the tomahawk, the lack of specific reference to Brant in this earliest version of the story is telling (Figure 1). A similar tale is told of the Schuyler Mansion in Albany, which is said to have occurred in 1781. It is first found in a journal published in 1860 (Figures 2 and 3).

At the close of a sultry day in August, the general [Philip Schuyler] and his family were sitting in the large hall of the mansion; the servants were dispersed about the premises; three of the guard were asleep in the basement, and the other three were lying upon the grass in front of the house. The night had fallen, when a servant announced that a stranger at the back gate wished to speak



Figure 3. Detail showing the wedge of wood chopped out of the Schuyler house railing (Schuyler Mansion HSR, 1977).

with the general. His errand was immediately apprehended. The doors and windows were closed and barred, the family were hastily collected in an upper room, and the general ran to his bedchamber for his arms. From the window he saw the house surrounded by armed men. For the purpose of arousing the sentinels upon the grass, and,

perhaps, alarm the town, then half a mile distant, he fired a pistol from the window. At that moment the assailants burst open the doors, and, at the same time, Mrs. Schuyler perceived that, in the confusion and alarm, in their retreat from the hall, her infant child, a few months old, had been left in a cradle in the nursery below. She was flying to the rescue of her child, when the general interposed, and prevented her. But her third daughter (who afterwards became the wife of the last Patroon of Rensselaerwyck) instantly rushed down stairs, snatched the still sleeping infant from the cradle, and bore it off in safety. One of the Indians hurled a sharp tomahawk at her as she ascended the stairs. It cut her dress within a few inches of the



Figure 4. Main staircase in the Glen-Sanders mansion, Scotia, Schenectady County (Author photo, June 2004). The gouge is seen just to the right of the ball finial of the newel post.

infant's head, and struck the stair rail at the lower turn, where the scar may be still seen. At that moment, Waltemeyer [sic, Captain Hans Walter Meyer], supposing her to be a servant, exclaimed, "Wench, wench, where is your master?" With great presence of mind, she replied, "Gone to alarm the town." The general heard her, and, throwing up the window, called out, as if to a multitude, "Come on, my brave fellows! Surround the house, and secure the villains!" The marauders were then in the dining-room, plundering the general's plate. With this, and the three guards that were in the house, and were disarmed, they made a precipitate retreat in the direction of Canada.⁴

And, finally, a third tradition, this time concerning the stair of the Glen-Sanders house in Scotia, Schenectady County, briefly records the unfortunate instance of vandalism upon its corpus (Figure 4). The earliest reference to this tale that I was able to locate was published in 1911. The following was printed at that time as a direct quote from an unidentified source:

The red man and the white man alike were wont to meet about the old house, and as usual at such gatherings in days of old with the Indian, fire water of the white man, too often had its part and too often with fatal results, but not so this time. It was a bright afternoon in summer a large party of the Mohawks were seated on the lawn,



Figure 5. Rufus Grider's documentation of Johnson Hall and the damage to its stair rail (Collection of the Fort Plain Museum).

recounting the deeds of the past and laying plans for future heroic (so called) acts, the conversation becomes personal, one becomes enraged at another, undoubtedly partly from the effect of the fire water and partly also on account of the excitement of the discussion, two spring up with but the thought of vengeance, one flees to the house and entering at the south door, conceals himself in the closet behind the door to await his adversary and strike the fatal blow from the rear.

But just at that moment Deborah Glen enters the hall through the door on the other side at the bottom of the stairs, and ascends the stairs, the concealed savage hearing the footsteps and thinking only of his adversary and his own desire for ven-

geance, springs from his hiding place with uplifted tomahawk ready to end his antagonist. He discovers his error in time to save a life, but not in time to save the stair rail. The weapon slips from the hand and the banister is marked.

The almost fatal error awakes the conscience of the Indian even. He at once forgets his grievance, he seeks forgiveness and at the same time also forgives, and his enemies of the moment before are again friends. Such is the tradition of the mark on the stairs, in the old house, a silent witness to the generations to come.⁵

A second abbreviated version of the story was published in 1925.

The Indians were great friends of the Glen family but not always of all of their guests. On the beautiful old stair rail is the gash made by a tomahawk thrown by an Indian at a retreating enemy who was trying to escape up the stairs.⁶

One thing that is clear with respect to these stories, is that they are informed by, and reflect, the developing national myth of the civilizing presence of European-Americans, a story which saw its full flowering in mid-20th century television shows and films before

being subjected to overdue critical analysis beginning in the 1960s. Furthermore, an examination of each of the stair railings reveals the derivative nature of the tales, with the earliest—that pertaining to Johnson Hall—seeming to be the only instance which might contain a grain of truth. The Glen-Sanders railing has what appears to be a gouge rather than a hack mark proper and the damage is minor in its extent. It does not appear to be the result of an axe or tomahawk. The cut in the railing at the Schuyler mansion is deep and wide, suggestive of repeated strikes in the same location (at variance to the story), but curiously the wood exposed by the damage has minimal oxidation, suggesting that it has either been “improved” over time or doesn’t date to the late 18th century at all.

The damage at Johnson Hall does indeed appear to reflect repeated strikes of a sharp instrument. Rufus Grider, documenting the house in 1886, counted “57 places more or less” where the railing was damaged, in addition to a large cut to one of the newels (Figure 5). It may be that “[i]n some assault, the stair-case of the mansion was disfigured” as the story recorded in 1836 asserts; however, the perpetrator—whether European-American or Native American—was not mentioned in that account, a curious omission which is suggestive of the not yet fully formed nature of the oral history that would later describe the damage in terms of a conflict between Native and European Americans.

If, in fact, all three of these damaged stair railings are the result of intentional actions, it is more likely that they were inflicted by people who understood the expense and rarity of mahogany in the colonies at

the time, and who valued the status that its use both represented and conferred. Thus it is more likely that intentional damage would have been the result of the actions of European-Americans, rather than Native Americans, and—at least in the case of Johnson Hall—may represent an attack on the house of a Loyalist by American soldiers after it was seized subsequent to the departure of the Johnson family for Canada in 1776. The Johnsons’ absence in fact makes them an unlikely source of information about an event that occurred during their occupancy, throwing further doubt upon the legend. Political vandalism of buildings was not uncommon in the 18th century; its expression in New England has been written about by Robert Blair St. George, and is associated by him with the popular perception of buildings as avatars, embodying absent personalities and power.⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ A recent search of online historic newspaper databases and web browsers turned up no other examples in the United States.

² Jephtha R. Simms. *The Frontiersmen of New York*, Vol. 1 (Albany, NY: Geo. C. Riggs, 1882), 249-250.

³ Thomas F. Gordon. *Gazetteer of the State of New York* (Philadelphia: The Author, 1836), 539.

⁴ Benson J. Lossing. “The Hudson, from the Wilderness to the Sea,” part VII. *The Art-Journal* (London) New Series VI (August 1860), 243. Reprinted in *The Hudson, from the Wilderness to the Sea* (New York: Virtue and Yorston, 1866), 130-132.

⁵ “Staircase in Glen-Sanders House,” *Schenectady Gazette*, 13 April 1911, 8.

⁶ “Sanders Mansion Is Opened to the Public,” *Daily Gazette* (Schenectady, NY), 24 October 1925, 10.

⁷ Robert Blair St. George. *Conversing By Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).



Unidentified house in Ulster County. Does anyone recognize it?

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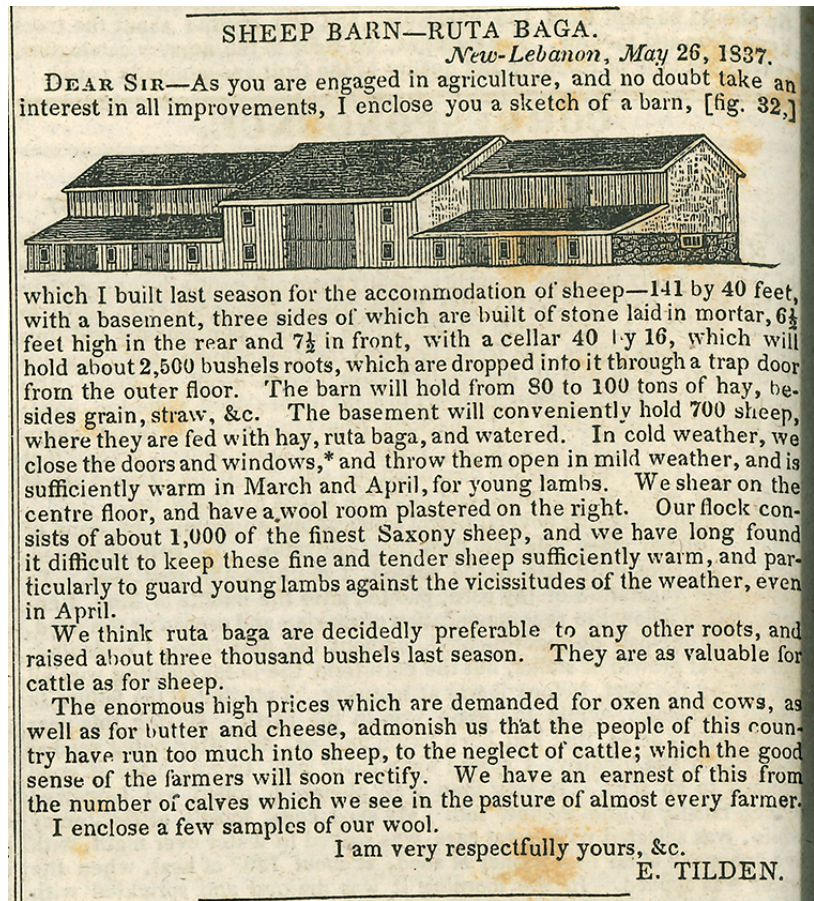


Figure 1. Tilden Sheep Barn, New Lebanon, Columbia County, NY. The Cultivator (Albany, NY), 4:5 (July 1837), 84.

2025-26 Updated Schedule of Activities

2025

21 JUNE

Mohawk Valley Tour

Judy St. Leger, host

19 JULY

Albany County Tour

Steve Riester and Chris Albright leading

16 AUGUST

New Jersey Tour

Carla Cielo, host

20 SEPTEMBER

Dutchess County Barn Tour and board meeting

Bob Hedges, host

18 OCTOBER

Catskill and Greene County Tour

Emily Majer, host

15 NOVEMBER

Schaghticoke, Rensselaer County Tour

Keith Cramer, host

13 DECEMBER

Holiday Dinner and board meeting

2026

17 JANUARY

no tour

21 FEBRUARY

Annual Meeting, Elmendorph Inn, Red Hook