

# RHS: Winter 2012

**Friday, November 30, 7:30pm, at the Rhinebeck Methodist Church**

Historian Marilyn Hatch will speak on the history of the Rhinebeck United Methodist Church. This is the next program in our multiyear study of the churches of Rhinebeck.

Refreshments will be served.

SAVE THESE DATES

## President's Message Winter 2012

It has been a wonderful fall season in Rhinebeck and, as the holidays approach, I wanted to wish you and your families a wonderful holiday season and a very Happy New Year.

We had two well attended events in October and November; Tony Musso's talk about his new book "*Hidden Treasurers of the Hudson Valley*" and my lecture on "*The History of Albany Post Road and Mail Delivery in Rhinebeck*". Also in October Nancy Kelly and I had a workshop for the town and village boards titled "*Marketing, Identifying & Permitting Historic Property in Rhinebeck*".

Historians Marilyn Hatch and Nancy Kelly, on behalf of the Consortium of Rhinebeck History, have been working this year to recertify the Historic District of the Village of Rhinebeck. They were able to borrow the original forms and photographs that were used in the 1970's to create the 388 property Historic District. Using these forms as a start Marilyn and intern Krista Miller walked the village this spring reviewing changes that have taken place to each of the 388 properties and taking new pictures of them. Although we have lost 7 of the houses over the past 30 years we were all impressed with the number of positive renovations/restorations that have taken place to many of the houses.

I am pleased to report that all of us now have access to this data. Consortium IT person, Steve Hubbert, spent the summer loading the information onto the Consortium database and it is now up on the web. You can view all of the houses in the district by clicking on 'list all' or you can search for a specific address. Once you bring up the property you can view the original 1970's form and pictures and the new evaluation and photographs from 2012. All you have to do is click on the 'Rhinebeck Historic District Information' link near the bottom of the list of searchable databases at:

<http://www.rhinebeckhistory.org/>

Just last month we completed a project involving our copies of the Gazette Advertiser which has given us access to a treasure trove of information about the history of Rhinebeck. Our archives, at the Starr Library, have copies of the Gazette Advertiser that run from 1846 until 2007. In 1991 a project was undertaken to microfilm all of the Gazettes. Copies were made for the state archives, Bard College and the RHS. For over 20 years people have been heavily using our copy for research, but the lack of index made locating information difficult. In order to find information on a subject, you need the date of the event to find that issue of the newspaper. Thanks, to a wonderful gentleman in Fulton New York named Tom Tryniski, who has been scanning old newspapers and putting them up on the web, our problem is solved. He offered to scan our Gazette microfilm and put them up on the web at no cost to us. This summer we sent Tom the first rolls of microfilm dating from 1846 to 1960. We want to thank Bard College for sending their lightly used copy to Tom so that we would get better results. The amazing thing is that, in addition to converting the microfilm to PDF's for the web, Tom has software that scanned the PDF's and created an index. Last month they came up on the web and it has opened up the history of Rhinebeck. A slight error was made during the conversion that left out the 'h' from Rhinebeck. This will be corrected in January when Tom's database is restructured, but it works! If you type in Landsmans Kill Rinebeck or Rhinebeck Aerodrome Rinebeck or A. Lee Stickle Rinebeck, all of the articles ever written about the topic come up as a PDF page of the newspaper. Please check out the website and try searching. It takes a while to figure how to ask the questions that get the best results but it works brilliantly. I warn you that reading 100 year old newspapers can become quite addictive and time passes rapidly. We just sent out the next batch of microfilm taking us up to 1988. Here is the website:

<http://www.Fultonhistory.com>

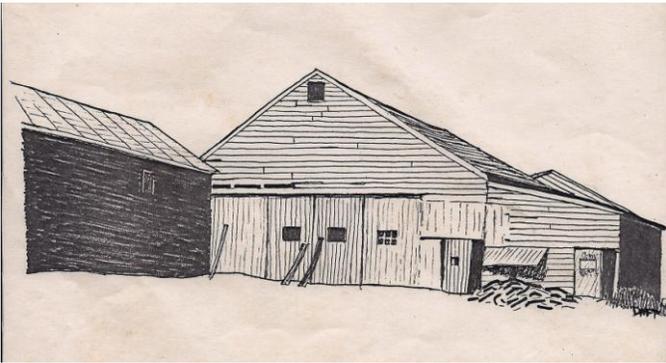
Lastly, please check out the flyer inside for information about our RHS Holiday Party at the Rhinecliff on December 14.

**David Miller, President**

## Rhinebeck Vernacular By Don McTernan

"Reading" a rural cultural landscape can be an exciting and satisfying pastime. Did you know that all buildings, fences, and field patterns are materialized ideas? They are part of our material culture; that is, they are material things created by humans. As a Chinese proverb states, "The pot is not separate from the mind of the potter." This truism holds for most human-made things.

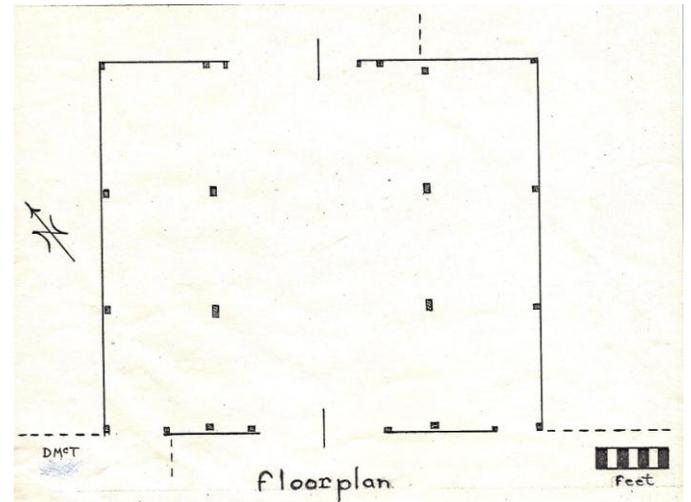
As one feature of a cultural landscape, old barns are important because, as utilitarian structures, they were not subject to the tides of changing fashion as most dwellings were. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Americans altered their houses to keep up-to-date, but not their barns - at least not until the late 1800's, when scientific farm journals became popular. Many pre-1900 barns which survive are relics of ancient European culture transplanted to America. These vernacular, or "folk" buildings, are material expressions of ideas which had been passed down from father to son over many generations in a tradition. Folk tradition is a way of doing or making things that are produced out of ideas which are old to the maker and are out of style with the popular fashions of the time.



The most distinctive and widely distributed feature of local traditional material culture is the Dutch barn, of which there are many examples extant in Dutch/German settlement areas of the Hudson Valley, albeit their number is growing smaller each year. The roots of this vernacular building lie in iron-age Saxony. In its ancient form, humans, animals, tools, and produce were sheltered under one roof. The roughly square floor plan and picture are of a Dutch type barn with additions in the Wurtemberg section of Rhinebeck. In its New-World form, the barn's rustic apartment for humans has been eliminated, but the traditional tripartite, one-level arrangement of space preserved. The wide, central runway with large double wagon doors at each end served as a threshing floor and wagon shelter. Cows and horses were stabled in side aisle stalls facing into the center. New-World Dutch barns were constructed of broadaxe-hewn and sawn wood. The only stone used served to keep the sills up off the ground.

Originally, these structures had wide, lapped weatherboard siding and wood-shingled roofs. Hay was stored upon poles which rested on massive horizontal overhead beams.

The barn floorplan displays the spacing of its posts. Each pair of posts support a horizontal "anchor" beam which has through-tenons which are wedged and pegged. This framing unit is called a "bent" or truss. These bents have an "H" configuration, although the anchor beam is slightly higher than the middle of the posts. The Wurtemberg barn has four bents, creating three bays or intervals between bents. There are purlin plates on top of the bent posts which support the roof rafters. The lower ends of the rafters are supported by the plates at the top of the side walls. The central aisle floor is of wide, thick planks which are secured with pegs. As described above, this is where threshing of grain took place.



Based on extant evidence, this circa early 1800s barn's two pairs of large, gable-end doors originally had wooden hinges. All of the major timbers in the frame of this barn are of hewn oak. All of its mortise tenon and other joints were hand-cut. Obviously, this barn was constructed by skilled barnwrights, who understood well the form and function of this important agricultural component.

It is a proven fact that the cultural landscape can yield more objective information about eighteenth and nineteenth century American life than the history generated by the few - the written record. Human life has never been simple, although we tend to romanticize the past, having fantasies about simple folk who lived in quaint houses and led relatively care-free lives. Undoubtedly, the "good old days" exist only in our troubled-times minds. Even a "primitive" barn, which has become a nostalgic icon in contemporary American thought, is in reality a complex, cultural survivor, capable of speaking to us of past human needs, skills, and aspirations.