

The Dyckman Farmhouse: An Architectural Analysis

Jonathan Safier

Art 1630H: American Architecture

Yeshiva College

Spring 2022



The Dyckman Farmhouse: An Architectural Analysis

The Dyckman farmhouse, located at 4881 Broadway in Inwood, is the oldest remaining farmhouse on Manhattan Island. The house was built in 1784 by William Dyckman and restored in 1919 when it was donated to the city of New York (Docent). To the average person, the house is an anomalous sight - an old-looking house surrounded by tall buildings and busy streets. The farmhouse thereby serves as an excellent example of Dutch colonial architecture, and as a reminder of how the city used to be.

Due to the scarcity of materials, William Dyckman used whatever he could find to build the house (Docent). Despite not being a professional architect or builder, he built a home for his family and slaves, where they lived for 84 years. As the surrounding area began to urbanize, the family sold the house. In 1919, the descendants of William Dyckman returned to restore the house and donate it to the city of New York. Today, like many other Dutch farmhouses in the tristate area, the house serves as a museum and is open to the public.

The Dyckman farmhouse is situated roughly five feet above the street, requiring one to ascend a flight of stairs to reach the property (Figure 1). As can be seen in the picture, the farmhouse towers over the street, as if having traveled in time from the past. The stone, white-washed brick, and wood two-story house (with a full



Figure 1: The house sits high above the street



Figure 2: The gambrel roof and identical porch

basement) seems out of place in a sea of red- and brown-brick buildings.

The front of the house features a wide, wooden porch which spans the main portion of the house. The wooden steps leading to the porch - as well as the porch itself - are slanted, tilted forwards after many years of use. The main section of the house is five bays wide, with two windows flanking either side of the door. Six wooden piers highlight the five bays and support the overhanging porch roof.

The gambrel roof covering the farmhouse is shingled (Roth 49). The two sides converge at the top of the house and flare outwards. This offers the front porch, as well as the back porch, which is identical to the front porch, protection (Figure 2).

William Dyckman primarily used brick, stone, and wood to build the farmhouse. The front of the house is made of white-washed red brick, while the back is stone. Windows along the front and rear feature green shutters with crescent moon cutouts (Panetta 398) (Figure 3).

Double-flue chimneys located on either ends of the roof are made of brick. The side walls are made of random fieldstones with heavy mortar joints, and the side walls below the roof are finished with wood overlapping clapboards (Figure 4).



Figure 3: The white-washed red brick and green shutters



Figure 4: Fieldstone and clapboard walls



Figure 5: The interior of the walls



Figure 6: The pink walls of a room

Interior materials and finishes also conform to the late eighteenth-century Dutch model. Wooden lath, horsehair, and straw comprise the walls which are painted a pinkish color (Figures 5 and 6). Dado rails painted white, run along the walls. The floors are made of wide pine boards, while the ceiling is covered in plaster (Heintzelman) (Figure 7).



Figure 7: The pine floor

The Dyckman farmhouse relies on a wood frame to support its floors and roof. In the basement, large, exposed wooden beams run the length of the room (Figure 8). The boulder upon which the house was built also provides some structure and support (Comstock 330) (Figure 9). This boulder can be seen when descending the stairs leading to the basement.



Figure 8: The beams in the basement

The floorplan of the farmhouse features four rooms on the first and second stories with a central hallway. The Dyckman farmhouse has three floors: a basement, a main floor, and an upper floor (Figure 10). The basement once served as quarters for the slaves, and also as the winter kitchen, which simultaneously provided heat in the winter (Figure 11). The main floor once held a dining room, living room, and two bedrooms (Docent) (Figure 12). On the upper floor, the rooms served as bedrooms where either the slaves or the family slept (Figure 13). Between the



Figure 9: The boulder

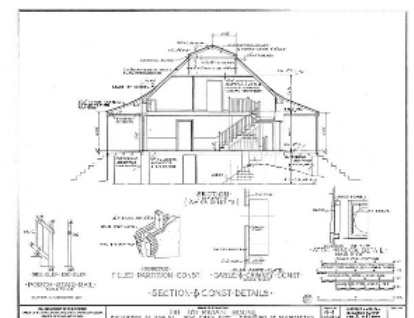


Figure 10: Elevation

floors are staircases, all constructed of wood with unornamented, square balusters. The staircase to the second floor is situated centrally against the south wall of the hall while the staircase to the basement is in the pantry.

In addition to the gambrel roof, the Dyckman farmhouse features several characteristics typical of Dutch farmhouses. One such feature is the Dutch barn doors, situated in front and back of the house, directly aligned with each other (Figure 14). These doors are split into top and bottom halves which can swing independently. In the summer, this design allows for a cross breeze to travel through the house, while leaving the bottom halves of the doors closed. A cupboard sits in the corner of the room (Figure 15). The front looks like a normal cabinet, but instead of a rectangular build, its back is rectangular and fits snugly against two walls.

Other Dutch features can be found throughout. The fireplaces on the upper two floors feature pilasters and dentil cornices. One fireplace, located on the main floor, has Delft Blue (Dutch) tiles, which look very similar to China tiles, surrounding it (Figures 16 and 17). The tiles are blue on white, and depict people doing various activities, like congregating in the city. The fireplace in the basement lacks any ornamentation, is made entirely of brick, and has a flat arch (Figure 18). Furnishings in the house

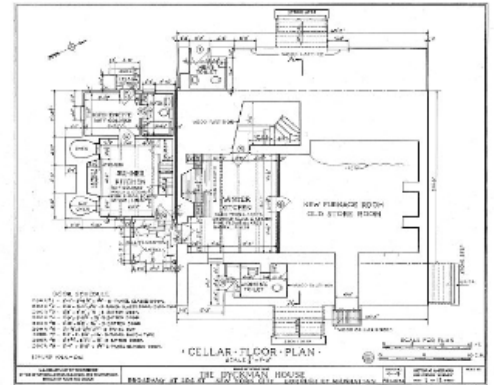


Figure 11: Basement

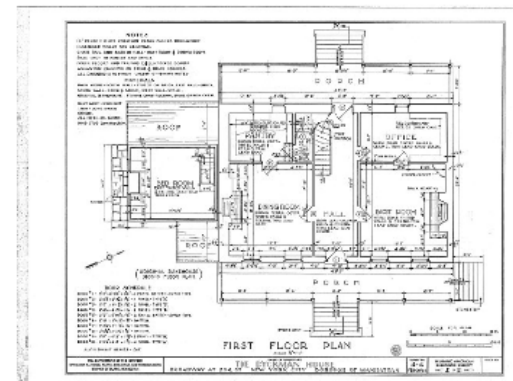


Figure 12: Main floor

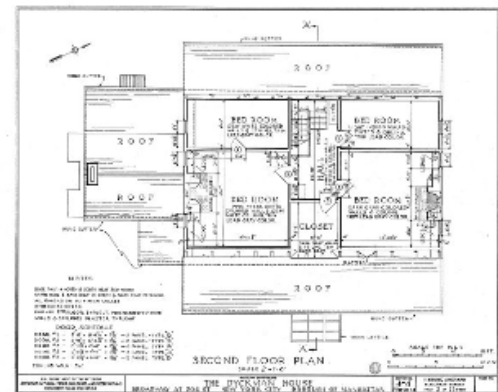


Figure 13: Upper floor

date from the time period of Queen Anne to the Greek Revival period (Panetta 399). Additionally, rag carpets, and sheer curtains and valances line the floors and walls.

The tristate area features many examples of Dutch colonial architecture. The Wyckoff House in Brooklyn, like the Dyckman farmhouse, features a gambrel roof, shuttered windows, and additions to the house located on the side though not at the back (Figure 19). The Dyckman house, for example, once featured a summer kitchen on the south side, as well as a section on the north side, about which not much is known since it burnt down. Both houses have side walls made of clapboards, wood shingles, and brick chimneys on opposite ends of the house

(Landmarks Preservation Commission). When comparing the floorplans, one can see that both houses feature a main central hallway and Dutch barn doors at the front (Figures 20 and 21). The Wyckoff House is smaller, and therefore has fewer rooms. Nevertheless, like in the Dyckman farmhouse, the bottom floor looks the same as the upper floor.

The Dyckman Farmhouse includes several prominent features which are characteristic of Dutch colonial architecture, such as the gambrel roof and barn doors. The house still stands today and is an excellent relic



Figure 14: Barn doors

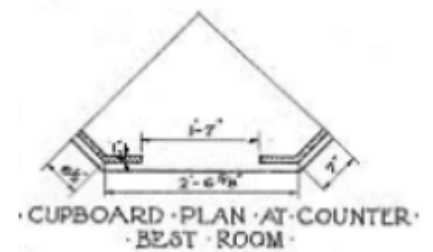


Figure 15: Corner cupboard



Figure 16: The fireplace and Figure 17: Close-up of the Dutch China

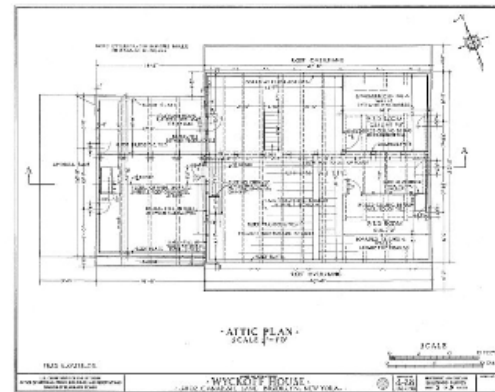
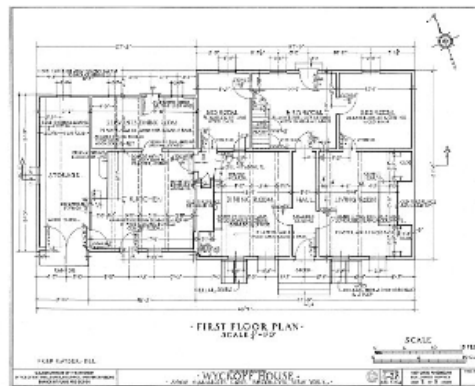


Figure 18: The winter / brick fireplace

from a time when Manhattan was a much more rural environment.



Figure 19: The Peter Wyckoff House



Figures 20 and 21: Wyckoff house floorplans

Works Cited

Comstock, Helen. "History in Houses. The Dyckman House in New York." *Antiques*, Jan. 1961, pp. 330–333. This article discusses the history of the farmhouse.

Docent from Dyckman Farmhouse. Interview. Conducted by Jonathan Safier. 03 Mar 2022. The docent provided a detailed history of the Dyckman family and farmhouse.

Heintzelman, Patricia. *National Register of Historic Places Inventory--Nomination Form: Dyckman House*, United States Department of the Interior, 14 Oct. 1975. This source discusses the history and architecture of the Dyckman farmhouse.

Landmarks Preservation Commission. *Dyckman House*, 12 July 1967. This source discusses a brief history of the house and designates the property as a landmark.

Panetta, Roger. "Displaying the Dutch." *Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture*, New York: Hudson River Museum / Fordham University Press, 2009, pp. 377–384. This book provided a history and description of the Dyckman farmhouse.

"Prints and Photographs Online Catalog" *Library of Congress*, The Dyckman Farmhouse <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=Drawing%3A%2Bny0361&fi=number&op=PHRASE&va=exact&co%2B=hh&st=gallery&sg%2B=%2Btrue>. Accessed 3 April 2022. The source provided the floorplans and elevations of the Dyckman farmhouse.

"Prints and Photographs Online Catalog" *Library of Congress*, The Peter Wyckoff Farmhouse <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=Drawing:%20ny0257&fi=number&op=PHRASE&va=exact&co%20=hh&st=gallery&sg%20=%20true>. Accessed 3 April 2022. The source provided the floorplans and elevations of the Peter Wyckoff farmhouse.

Roth, Leland M., and Amanda C. Roth Clark. *American Architecture: A History*. New York: Routledge, 2018, p. 49. This source shows the Dyckman farmhouse and an antecedent, highlighting their uses of gambrel roofs.