

## HISTORY OF THE DUTCH NECK INN

Jan. 27, 2022

*A house standing at 212-214 South Mill Road in the West Windsor, NJ community of Dutch Neck may look unassuming but is in fact one of the town's most historically-significant sites. Formerly an inn, it was frequently the site of town meetings and its history parallels that of West Windsor.*

- **1600s/earlier:** Land inhabited by the indigenous Lenni Lenape. They had settled here thousands of years prior some time following the end of the last ice age as the Wisconsin Glacier retreated north around 13,000 B.C.E.
- **1695:** Andrew Hamilton (governor of New Jersey) purchases 4,500+ acres from the Proprietors of East New Jersey. This included most of the land in present-day West Windsor north of the Assunpink Creek and east of Penn-Lyle Road.
- **1697:** David Lyell (English goldsmith and one of the Proprietors of East New Jersey) purchases Hamilton's 1695 tract. Like Hamilton before him, he and his family are absentee landowners who never lived in West Windsor. "Penn-Lyle Road" (constructed in the mid-1860s) is partially named after him - it runs along the historical division line between his tract and a 6,500+ acre property owned by William Penn & his family from 1693-1737.
- **1725:** David Lyell dies.
- **1731:** David Lyell's "Great Tract" is split into 7 equally-valuable parts and given to his heirs (wife & children).
- **1730s-50s:** The Lyell Family sells their land to some of the area's original settlers - including the Updikes, Voorhees, Perrines, etc. A community named "Dutch Neck" starts to coalesce around a c. 1754 route linking Allentown to Princeton (which includes Village Road East & South Mill Road). Village Road West also very likely dates to the mid-late 1700s. The division lines between the 7 sub-tracts of Lyell's "Great Tract" form the basis for some of West Windsor's oldest roads - including Edinburg Road, South Mill Road, Village Road East, and Princeton-Hightstown Road. "Neck" means "tract of land" in Dutch.
- **1762:** Preachers from the Cranbury Presbyterian Church start holding services in Dutch Neck - possibly contributing to community growth. At the time, this land was part of "Windsor Township" - a municipality informally created c. 1730/1, formally organized in 1751, and dissolved in 1797 when it split into East Windsor & West Windsor. It's possible (but completely unconfirmed) that Windsor Township meetings were held in Dutch Neck due to its central location in Windsor.
- **1764:** An English colonist named Thomas Hooper reputedly sets up a tavern some place around Dutch Neck. This may or may not be Bergen's inn - more research is needed to confirm or disprove this.
- **XXXX-1795:** By this point (if not much earlier), Jacob Bergen's inn has been constructed directly across the road from the "Neck Meetng House" (the predecessor to the current Dutch Neck Presbyterian Church) roughly where the dead-end portion of South Mill Road intersects Village Roads East/West (See Figure A). The inn is owned by three individuals - Robert Hancock, John Harper, & William Shaw. However, it seems likely that Jacob Bergen (1745-1805) is managing the inn by this point, per an 1800 tavern license declaring that he had run it "for many years" (See Figure B). Jacob is an American Revolution veteran who fought for colonial

independence from the British. He also seems to be in possession of a tavern in Princeton (which he had run since at least 1779) and at some point also ran a tavern in Trenton. Much more research is needed to expand on this - will likely yield interesting information.

- **1795:** The Bergen/Hancock/Harper/Shaw tavern is seized by the High Sheriff of Mercer County. They apparently owed over 200 pounds in debt to a "William Bell" and the tavern later is auctioned off to pay for this debt. Concurrently, Robert Hancock and Mercer County were in a lot more trouble. In 1794, they, alongside Joseph and Margaret Price, had been apprehended in Lancaster, PA under charges of running a counterfeiting scheme. Robert had apparently visited his homeland of England and returned with bank notes that could be altered to mimic American currency, and the group circulated the money. The United States hadn't fully standardized its currency and its economy was vulnerable to instability, so counterfeiting was deemed a heinous crime. Robert, William, & Joseph were sentenced to 15-16 years in prison and fined \$300 each; Margaret 4 years and \$50. On the way to interrogation, Robert was even found with some of the counterfeit bills on him! It's unknown if any of this counterfeiting was ever conducted in West Windsor, let alone their Dutch Neck inn. John Harper is not known to have been connected to the counterfeiting scheme.
- **September 9, 1795:** Jacob Bergen purchases the inn at the auction.
- **February 9, 1797:** Windsor Township splits into East Windsor & West Windsor
- **April 8, 1797:** West Windsor Township holds its first meeting & elects its first officers at Jacob Bergen's inn (see Figure C). Almost all town meetings are held here for the next 11 years.
- **1805:** Jacob Bergen dies and is buried in the cemetery across the street. Elizabeth Covenhoven, his wife, assumes management of the inn & continues to host town meetings here.
- **1808:** Town meetings begin to rotate to other locations in West Windsor. For the next 83 years, they will be held in a variety of inns and houses around town - most frequently in Dutch Neck, but also often in the communities of Penns Neck & Clarksville.
- **1815:** Peter G. Bergen is granted a tavern license for the same building. Elizabeth still owns the building by this point. According to "Old Princeton Neighbors" (1939, Federal Writer's Project) he was the innkeeper from 1811-1816. Note that "Old Princeton's Neighbors" is a secondary source - not a primary source.
- **1816:** The newly-organized Dutch Neck Presbyterian Church constructs its current house of worship on the site of the older "Neck Meeting House."
- **1821-2:** Town meetings are held at John Probasco's inn near the "Neck Meeting House." This was likely the Bergen inn.
- **1823-6:** Nathaniel Labaw runs the Dutch Neck inn at this point, per township meeting minutes.
- **1827:** Eli Rogers runs the Dutch Neck inn at this point.
- **1832:** Elizabeth (Covenhoven) Bergen sells the tavern to Eli Rogers, making him both the manager and owner.
- **1852:** Josiah & Rebecca Taylor purchase the inn.
- **1861:** Enoch W. & Lucinda Hart purchase the inn and almost immediately afterward deed it to Peter Hart.
- **1861-1880:** An unknown succession of owners and managers maintain and operate the inn. It's possible it was entirely owned and managed by Enoch W. Hart up to this point, or it's possible that he deeded it to someone else and/or someone was managing it while he owned it. We are simply

uncertain. Major E. M. Woodward and John F. Hageman's "History of Burlington and Mercer Counties" (1883) mentions that John Griggs was the last landlord during this period. Town meeting minutes from 1875 show a "John W. Griggs" hosting the township meetings in his house in Dutch Neck - this is likely the inn, suggesting that the municipal government met here as recently as then, if not a few years even more recent. The 1883 Woodward/Hageman book mentions that this tavern had been kept for "fully one hundred years" although this has yet to be confirmed.

- **1879/80 (approx):** George M. Hart, et. al. file a complaint against Mary A. Bowers, et. al. This suit results in Barker Gummere, the "Special Masters in Chancery of the State of New Jersey," auctioning off the property. John D. Rue and his wife purchase the property for \$900. Rue was a New Jersey State Senator and held other political offices during his lifetime - click [HERE](#) for more info. Rue divides the property & sells much of it to the Dutch Neck Presbyterian Church, who construct a chapel (now the WWP Board of Education building) in 1882.
- **1880:** William Updike purchases the property, which by this point has fully shut down as an inn and will never again operate as such.
- **1882 (approx):** William Updike's wife (likely named "Mary") is deeded the property after her husband dies.
- **XXXX:** Levi Updike is granted the property from his mother - again, William's wife.
- **1891:** Township meetings again return to Dutch Neck permanently, albeit now hosted in an existing "election building" and occasionally the township Clerk's house. The actual location and identity of either building is unknown.
- **1892:** Levi Updike sells the old Dutch Neck inn property to Hiram A. Cook, who may have lived in the house for a few years. Hiram operated a heating/plumbing/farm equipment business behind his house he built at 413 Village Road East in 1907. He also served as Township Clerk for most of the years between 1893 & 1932, and was the founding President of the Dutch Neck Volunteer Fire Co. (1921) He remained heavily involved in the community until shortly before his death in 1933.
- **1912:** A formal Town Hall is constructed to house municipal functions. It stands directly to the right (west) of the old Dutch Neck inn, centered on the present-day World War II memorial, which was originally located much closer to the road.
- **1913-1930s:** Dutch Neck inn likely relocated several hundred feet south from its original position to its current location at 212-214 South Mill Road.
- **1939:** Frederick S. & Carrie S. & Reba Cook acquire the property.
- **1961:** Joseph K. Wright Jr. & Elizabeth B. Write purchase the property.
- **1971:** Joseph K. Wright Sr. acquires the property.
- **1977:** Old Town Hall is demolished 65 years after it opens and the current municipal building on Clarksville/North Post Roads fully replaces it.
- **1984:** Darryl D. & Nancy MacPherson acquire the property.
- **2000:** Property is acquired by its current owners.
- **2022:** West Windsor turns 225 years old and the Dutch Neck inn - now at least 227 years old, if not older - still stands as a private residence at 212-214 South Mill Road, a memorial to West Windsor history. The Historical Society of West Windsor executes a years' worth of events in celebration of the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary - click [HERE](#) for more info.

APPENDIX - IMAGES



*Figure A: View down Village Road West, early-mid 1900s. From the Danser Family. Dutch Neck inn is the leftmost building. To its right is the old Town Hall (1912-1977). Beyond that is the house currently at 216 S Mill Rd, beyond that is the Dutch Neck chapel (1882), now the WWP Board of Ed building, and beyond that is 509 Village Road West. Note the cemetery fence to the right.*

To the Honourable the Judges & the Justices of the Inferior  
Court of Common Pleas in and for the County of Middlesex now  
Held at the City of New Brunswick in June Term 1800

The Petition of Jacob G. Bergen Humbly Sheweth  
that whereas he has kept the Tavern where he now lives at the  
Neck Meeting house in West Windsor Township in said County  
for many Years Past & is Desirous to keep the same as such  
for the Ensuing Year he prays the Court to Grant him Licence  
for the same &c &c

Jacob G. Bergen

We the Subscribers Inhabitants of said Township do Du-  
moument the said Jacob G. Bergen & family to be well Calculated  
to keep a Tavern and provided with every thing necessary for  
the Law Directs for keeping the same we therefore pray the  
Court to will Grant him Licence for keeping the same for  
the Ensuing Year June 11<sup>th</sup> 1800

Coast Vorkies, Com<sup>rs</sup> of the  
Joseph Stout

E. Beatty  
Thomas Clarke  
Elijah Vorkies

Figure B: 1800 petition by Jacob Bergen to maintain his Dutch Neck residence as an inn.

At a Town Meeting held at the House of Jacob  
G. Bergen's on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup> Day of April 1797  
The following officers were elected for the ensuing  
Year for the Township of West Windsor

Moderator & Judge of Elections Court Voorhies Senr  
Clerk . . . . . George G. Bergen -

Commissioners } John Tindall & Thomas Clark. (Sworn)  
for Laying Roads

Freeholders . . . . . Ezek. Smith & Joseph Elden

Committee . . . . . Garret Schenck & John Tindall

Assessor . . . . . William Tindall - - -

Collector . . . . . Abel Slayback - -

Commissioners } John Schenck. Court Voorhies. J<sup>r</sup>. Bergen  
of Appeal - - -

Constable Jacob Skilman - -

Overseers of the } Ezek. Anderson, Ezek. Rodgers  
Highways - - - } John Davis, James Hilgard  
Joseph Stott Thomas Elden Senr.  
James M. Galyard Jacob Hawk  
Daniel Mershon

Figure C: First West Windsor Township meeting minutes - April 8, 1797 - held at Jacob Bergen's tavern.



Figure D: Dutch Neck in 1849. Note "E. Rogers" and the location of the schoolhouse next door.

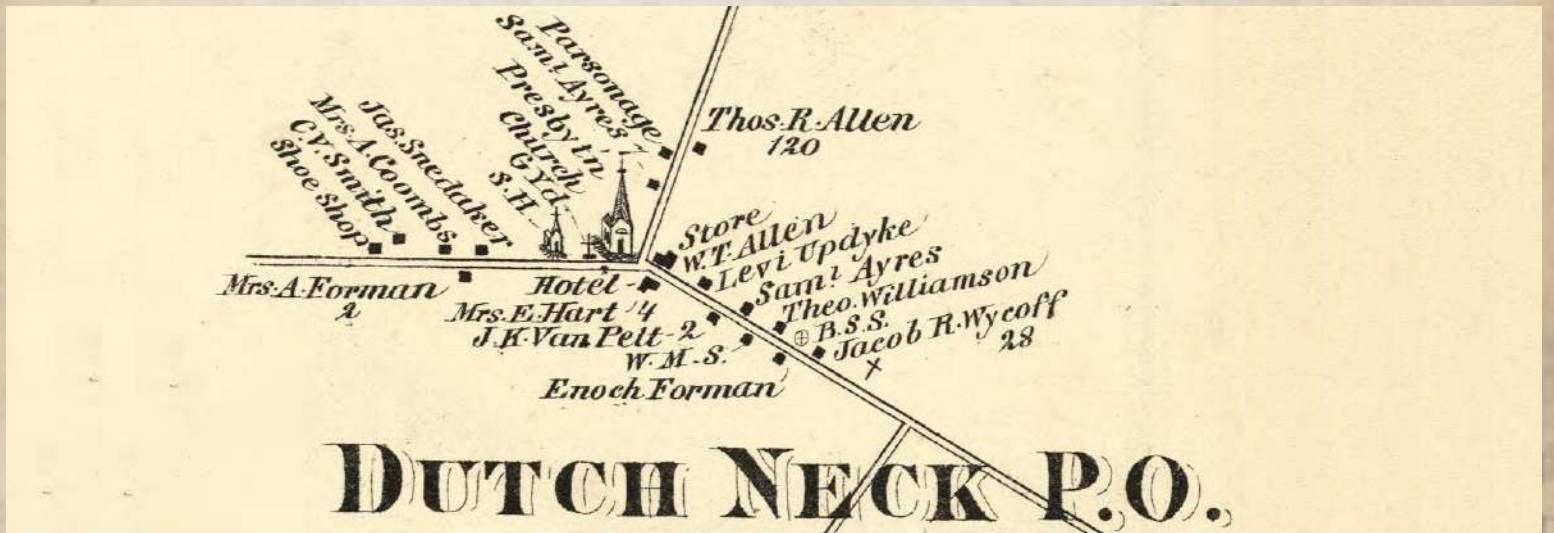


Figure E: Dutch Neck in 1875. Note the words "Hotel" and "Mrs. E. Hart."