

**NJS Presents****Research Notes**

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*In this issue, we bring you the fifth edition of “Research Notes,” inaugurated to allow scholars to share their works in progress and solicit feedback from others in the NJ History community. All are welcome to contribute- simply send submissions for inclusion in future issues to the editor ( [mziobro@monmouth.edu](mailto:mziobro@monmouth.edu) ).*

**Paradoxical Paradise: Asbury Park (An African American Oral History and Mapping Project)** is a multiyear initiative currently germinating at Monmouth University in West Long Branch. The project seeks to explore the largely untold experiences of African Americans in Asbury Park, New Jersey from the founding of the city in the 1870s to the present. Asbury Park is well-known as a site of urban rebellion, but it has also been a pivotal center of black settlement, Jim Crow-era segregation, American music culture, and social justice. In many respects, the story of African Americans in Asbury Park provides us with a window into the larger history of African Americans in the United States. Phase I of the project addresses the outsized role that the 1970 riots have played in the public’s perception of Asbury Park. The team hopes to explore the existing archives and historiography, and conduct oral history interviews with as many willing narrators as possible. Findings will be accessible to the public via the web, where an interactive map will deliver oral history narratives and primary sources linked to places. A companion monograph or brick-and-mortar exhibit are both distinct possibilities. Collaborating with community members and constituencies will be key, and the team hopes that its work will become a larger platform for conversations about social equality and restorative justice in Asbury Park, New Jersey. Project members include: Christopher DeRosa, Brooke

Nappi, Katherine Parkin, Karen Schmelzkopf, Geoffrey Fouad, Richard Veit, Hettie Williams, and Melissa Ziobro.

Since 2012 **Janet L. Sheridan, Principal Cultural Heritage Specialist, Down Jersey Heritage Research, LLC**, has been studying agricultural complexes and outbuildings in Salem County, the one in the southwestern corner of the state. She writes:

My approach (that of vernacular architecture historians) is to record the buildings with scaled drawings, photographs, narrative architectural description, link them to archival documents to flesh out their human history, and compare and contrast them with such buildings documented in other regions of the state and country. It is a material culture approach, one that sees buildings and landscapes as primary historical data that have the power to convey the details of everyday life in the past and trends that connect to broader historical themes. The purpose is to understand history through surviving buildings and landscape features.

My first subjects were three farmsteads (Figures 1-3) in two townships: Mannington and Alloway, which differ somewhat in settlement history. Mannington was settled earlier than Alloway. The former abuts the town of Salem and the great inland tidal flat called Mannington Meadow, and was peopled principally by English Quaker farmers. Alloway, to its east, occupied a higher, rolling topography, enjoyed many streams with enough fall to drive mills, was fairly wooded through the nineteenth century, and was peopled more heavily by Baptists and Methodists.

Among the farmhouses I found variations in form, size, material, and style, perhaps related to socio-economic status or cultural origin. I found farm and domestic outbuildings of similar types, but always varying somehow farm to farm, showing individualized innovations on common themes of traditional building.



**Figure 1.** The John & Rachel Watson Farm, Alloway Township, Salem County, was established circa 1790. It was a dairy farm from the late 19th century up until 2010. See Figure 5. Photo by the author.



**Figure 2.** The Caspar & Rebecca Wistar Farm, Mannington Township, features one of the finest Federal-style houses in the county, and retains a nineteenth-century wagon house and carriage shed. See Figures 8 and 11. Photo by the author.



**Figure 3. The John & Charlotte Wistar Farm, Mannington Township, retains a late eighteenth-century frame house, a dairy barn that combined an early three-bay ground threshing barn (background) and adjacent animal barn, and a early nineteenth-century, two-drive bay wagon house with loft and cellar (foreground). Photo by the author.**

My second project focused solely on outbuildings, because they are in more peril of disappearing. Many older outbuildings—threshing/hay barns, corn cribs, wagon houses, carriage barns, smokehouses, machine sheds, etc.—are not particularly useful for modern farming, so they become altered for new uses, or they stand without a use or maintenance, and eventually fall down, are taken down, or burn down. With that, irreplaceable data on farming history is lost.

I have recorded a number of barns that could be called English, threshing, or ground barns (Figures 4 and 5) with both three and four bays, and others that were built exclusively to house animals (Figure 5), built from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. I have identified others that exemplify the bank barns and forebay barns generally known as

Pennsylvanian. And certainly the Wisconsin dairy barn, a national standardized type, appeared in the twentieth century. One, one-off innovation I found was a gable-fronted type designed for milking, animal stalling and hay storage built in 1895 that expressed a radical experimental departure from traditional barn design (Figure 6).



**Figure 4. The Bassett-Allen-Waldac Farm, Mannington Township, features a dairy barn composed of three, four-bay threshing barns. The first one (situated in the middle) is dated 1792 and is flanked by two others built before 1848 and before circa 1860. They were strung together and widened for expanded diarying and fodder storage. The loft was also used for ballroom dances. Photo by the author.**



**Figure 5.** Watson Farm milking barn (left) expanded from a three-bay threshing barn built in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, and horse barn (right) built in the early twentieth century in response to the state's prohibition on cows and horses stalling in the same barn. Photo by the author.



**Figure 6.** Henry and Elizabeth Freas farm, Alloway Township. This 1895 barn replaced one destroyed by fire. This gable-fronted barn has four bays accessed via sliding doors. Left to right: a wagon drive-through, a feeding aisle, a milking aisle with wood stalls, and an open forebay on posts. Hay mows above. Photo by the author.

One distinctive and pervasive type is the wagon house or crib barn, a multi-purpose gable-fronted building that normally stands very close to the farmhouse, and which may contain a granary, corn cribs, a cellar, a meat room, a butchering hoist, and two or three drive bays for wagons and other implements (Figures 7, 8 and 9). One might mistake one sub-type (Figure 7) for a New Jersey Dutch Barn (a well-known type in the northeastern part of the state) from its outward appearance, but a close study of its structure and features proves that it is neither structurally nor functionally a Dutch-American barn. It differs in that it is not the main barn where threshing takes place or where animals are stabled and their fodder is stored. Rather, it is a multi-purpose, secured storage building for the products of the farm. Because its contents are valuable, these buildings are always found very near the farmhouse, probably for surveillance, and often have locked spaces. Another variation has broken roof slopes and accrued to the well-known shape from a single-bay building with the addition of side-aisles (Figures 8 and 9). The two examples below differ still in that one began as a pentagonal drive-through corn crib (Figure 8) and the other was a granary (Figure 9). Still another, uncommon, variation has a two-drive bay design, built of-a-piece (Figure 3).



**Figure 7. The Zerns-Wright Farm, Mannington Township. This 1851 wagon house, a type built all at once with continuous roof slopes, resembles the Dutch-American barn of northern New Jersey. This one has a full cellar under the center bay for potatoes and orchard crops, a loft that may have stored grain, and had corn cribs in the center and left-hand bays. Photo by the author.**



**Figure 8. Caspar & Rebecca Wistar Wagon House illustrating the broken roof slope type which accrued over time. This one began as a pentagonal or keystone-shaped drive-through corn crib. Shed additions were later attached, first below the main eaves, then raised to meet the upper roof slope. Here, there is no cellar or loft. Photo by the author.**



**Figure 9. The Stretch-Mulford Farmstead, Mannington Township. This wagon house began as circa 1840 one-story granary that was raised to expand grain storage to a loft, then expanded frontward, lowering the floor to serve as a wagon house. The side aisles were added at different times, and the left side contains a twentieth-century corn crib. The building, situated close to the farm house, was originally clad with board and batten siding. Having been a granary, there is no cellar. Photo by the author.**

Other farmstead building types I have recorded are the less-common carriage barn (Figure 10) and the lowly and ubiquitous three-sided shed (Figure 11). The carriage barn is like a small, two-bay version of a ground barn, with a carriage bay, a bay for horse stalls, and a hay loft. These are more commonly seen in towns and may have been an upscale alternative to the three-sided shed, which could park a carriage, but did not function as stable.



**Figure 10. Stretch-Mulford carriage barn. This farm was on the border of Salem City, so may be showing an urban influence. Both the carriage barn and the wagon house were clad in matching board and batten siding. This carriage barn evolved into an equestrian stable, then to a chicken house. Photo by the author.**

Three-sided sheds were used for storage of horse-drawn wheeled vehicles such as carriages and farm implements, and whatever else required easy access but could stand some weathering. This type was also common on church properties, for parishioners' horses and carriages. The automobile age made them obsolete for carriages, so they were adapted to other uses.



**Figure 11. Casper & Rebecca Wistar three-sided shed. On this farm, it was known as the carriage shed, and was moved from a location near the farmhouse to one closer to the barn and expanded, suggesting a change from a domestic use (carriages) to a farm use (farming implements and other storage). Photo by the author.**

A common thread in evidence among the buildings I have studied is that farmers adapted older buildings to shifting agricultural markets, technologies, and state regulations. For example, farmers often strung older barns together, end to end, and inserted hay tracks and trolleys under the roof ridge to accommodate a larger dairy herd and their fodder, in response to the expanding urban fluid milk market after the Civil War and the development of labor-saving devices for loading hay into barns.

Despite many losses, there is a surprising number left (over 300 in Salem County), even examples from the pre-industrial age (when timbers were hand-hewn and assembled with cut

joints). There is something to learn from each one about building traditions and how farmers worked and thought, but recording is needed.

My study of agricultural buildings will be ongoing. My reports (Salem County Farms Recording Projects I & II) are found [here](#) and [here](#). They are also archived at Rutgers University Library Special Collections, the Salem Community College Library, and the Salem County Historical Society. Two farms from Volume I were subsequently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and those nomination forms can be accessed [here](#) and [here](#). They contain more information and analysis than the reports.

I would like to get a better handle on the literature of the built agricultural heritage of New Jersey, and who has done or is doing research. There are some familiar books on barns that celebrate the big, main, threshing and hay barns that are such a familiar and nostalgic sight on the landscape, but few deal with the gamut of agricultural buildings or assemblages of buildings. No doubt there is harder-to-find gray literature hiding in architectural offices, historical societies, archives, libraries, and preservation agencies around the state. I propose a crowd-sourced bibliography project for farm buildings and associated landscape features. Think of reports, drawings, National Register nominations, architectural and photographic surveys, local newsletter articles, etc. I plan to make this bibliography publicly accessible on my web site and elsewhere. I invite readers to contribute sources that they know of to a New Jersey Historical Agricultural Buildings and Landscapes Bibliography at [janet@downjerseyheritage.com](mailto:janet@downjerseyheritage.com). Much appreciated!

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