

First Reformed Dutch Church,  
Fishkill, Dutchess County,  
New York.

HABS No. 4-202

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4  
Southern New York State

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,  
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

THE FIRST REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH  
Fishkill, Dutchess County, N.Y.

Location, Date and History

This church stands on the north side of the Main Street, just west of the Albany Post road in the Village of Fishkill, Dutchess County, N. Y. On the east side of the Post Road, south of the Main Street, is Trinity (Protestant Episcopal) Church, drawings of which are also included in the Historic American Buildings Survey.

The Rev. Francis M. Kip, D. D., who preached the sermon on Sept. 12, 1866, at the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Dutch Reformed Church, was pastor from 1836 to 1870. In that sermon he said that the records of the church, with the exception of a volume in the Dutch language, covering the period from 1728 to about 1766, were lost and probably beyond recovery. The only records then in possession of the church since 1766, with the exception of some occasional consistorial minutes, were those commenced by his immediate predecessor as pastor, the Rev. Geo. H. Fisher, in 1830. For the intervening 62 years from 1766 to 1830, reliance must be had, he said upon "the printed minutes of Synod," upon the findings of other historians of Fishkill, and upon tradition. He gives special credit to the researches of the Rev. Oliver E. Cobb, of Hopewell, one of his contemporaries.

He reviews the early titles to the land at Fishkill, from the Kambout Patent of 1685 down to the founding of this Church in 1716, when the Reformed Dutch Churches of both Poughkeepsie and Fishkill were organized. They formed one collegiate charge, being served by one pastor and having some of their property in common. This continued until 1772. In 1790, however, the Fishkill church disposed of



its interest in the glebe at Doughkeepsie.

The petition of the officers of this Church to Governor Montgomery on June 21, 1731, for license to collect subscriptions to build a church, is recorded in the Documentary Hist. of N. Y., Vol. III, p. 974. In 1736, the edifice had been built, says Mr. Rip, but the Church was not yet incorporated.

"The first church was built of stone," he says, "with porticoes in the wall. The roof came up from each side to the centre of the building. The window sashes were made of iron, or some kind of metal, the panes of glass being very small. A small cupola was on the top of the building in which the bell was hung.

"When this bell became unserviceable is not known. My informant remembers seeing it during her childhood in the lower part of the present church building...About 1822 a bell was purchased, which was the first ever hung in the steeple of the present building. In 1839 this became unserviceable, and the bell since and now used was purchased and hung in its place.

"The first church fronted on the street, and when it became necessary to erect a larger and more commodious edifice, and the present edifice was reared, as much as could be was retained of the original walls."

The churches of Doughkeepsie and Fishkill were organized by the Rev. Petrus Was in the year 1716. Doctor Rip gives brief biographies of him and his successors. Their names are also set forth on one of the several tablets in the church.

Particularly important historically is Rip's review of the history of the village during the Revolution. Fishkill was the chief repository for the military and hospital stores of the Northern divisions



of Washington's army, and the army barracks were extensive. The 2  
Village was also the scene of the Convention of delegates appointed to  
transact government business for New York State before the State Con-  
stitution was formulated. A review of events in this connection is  
fitting.

On Thursday, Aug. 29, 1776, the Provincial Convention, in session  
at White Plains, resolved to meet "in the English church at Fish Kills  
on Monday next Sept. 2. at 9 o'clock." It was also ordered "That the  
Treasurer of State and the Secretaries of the Convention do immediately  
remove with the treasury and records of this State to Fish Kills, in  
Duches county, and that they there join the Convention at 9 o'clock on  
Monday next" (Sept 2). (See the Journals of the Provincial Congress,  
Provincial Convention, Committee of Safety and Council of Safety of the  
State of New York, printed at Albany, 1842.)

In that two-volume work the vital transactions relating to our  
defences, movements of troops, supplies, etc. are detailed in resolutions,  
orders and correspondence. We find it recorded in Vol. I, p. 609, that  
the Convention met "in the Episcopal church at Fishkill" on Sept. 5, 1776,  
as ordered; but the first business mentioned under that date is: "This  
church being very foul with the dung of doves and fowls, without any  
benches, seats or other conveniences whatever, which renders it unfit for  
the use of this Convention. Therefore they unanimously agreed to ad-  
journ to the Dutch church in this village, and adjourned to the same  
accordingly.

"The Convention met at the Dutch church at Fish Kill pursuant to  
the above adjournment."

The transactions of the Representatives of the People of the State  
of New York from Aug. 29, 1776, to Feb. 11, 1777, inclusive, were con-  
ducted in the Dutch Church (Ibid, pp. 599 to 802-3). Then the conven-  
tion moved to Kingston. (Ibid., p. 803.)

The resolution passed in Fishkill regarding this intended move  
stated that Fishkill was "too small to afford proper accommodations for  
the Convention and those who have business with the public." Also, it  
was ordered that the members should "write letters to the committees of  
their respective counties enclosing copies of this resolution, and  
inform them that it is the intention of the House as soon as they meet  
in Kingston, to proceed to the business of forming a plan of government,  
requesting them to notify the members thereof, and requesting their  
attendance."

After the Constitution had been adopted at Kingston on April 20,  
1777, it was necessary to bring it to Fishkill to be printed; for only  
in that village could be found a press on which to print their first great  
fundamental law of representative government. The printing was done by  
Samuel Loudon, a Whig editor and printer of New York City who had retired  
with his press to Fishkill when the British approached New York.



Washington's sword now in the National Museum (and formerly in the Patent Office) was made by "J. Bailey, Fishkill". Mr. Bailey was a member of this church.

Officers' headquarters were in the dwelling known to readers of "The Spy" as the Wharton House. Trinity Church and later the Presbyterian Church were used as hospitals.

"In our old church," continues Mr. Kip, "the Tory and other prisoners were confined, and from this building tradition teaches us that Harvey Birch (Enoch Crosby), having been arrested as a spy, effected his escape."

Both Lafayette and Washington were in Fishkill.

The Rev. Isaac Kysdyck, a learned theologian, who was installed as pastor in Sept., 1765, continued his ministry at the Fishkill church during the Revolution and until his death in 1790.

#### Building the Church

Mr. Kip said that he could not learn the precise time of the erection of the present church edifice, but from information derived years before from aged members he had reason to think it was "immediately after the close of the revolutionary war, about the year 1784." A tablet placed during the 175th anniversary says 1786.

When this enlargement of the building took place, the burial plot of Madam Catharyna Brett, widow of Lieut. Roger Brett and daughter of Francis Rombout, a grantee of the Rombout Presinct, was covered by the extension. She owned the ground-title of a large part of northern Dutchess County under the Rombout Patent, and died in Fishkill in 1764. Her remains and those of some of her descendants now repose underneath the present edifice.

The labor of rebuilding was performed gratuitously by the congregation, who turned out in force with horses, oxen, carts and negro



slaves to haul timber, stone, lime, shingles, etc., to the site.

(Smith, Hist. of Dutchess Co., 1877).

Reverting to Kip's discourse: "At a meeting of the Consistory, held May 12, 1790, 'a committee was appointed to investigate the accounts of the subscription list for the building of the Low Dutch Church at Fishkill Town,' and a contract was entered into for finishing the church, according to written articles, Oct. 27, 1790. It was resolved that pews in the church should be exposed to sale on Monday, Nov. 8.

"On Dec. 12, 1790, the Consistory asked of Mr. Barnes his account for work done by him in rearing the spire of the church. On June 25, 1793, the Consistory took measures for finishing the steeple.

"On June 1, 1795, the bill for finishing the new pulpit, amounting to about \$75, was presented to the Consistory. On Dec. 26, 1795, the treasurer records payment for a spindle ball, etc., for the steeple of £ 46, 14 s, 2 d. On Aug. 17, 1796, the Consistory examined the accounts rendered for finishing of the church." (Ibid., pp. 46-47.)

"Various alterations were made at different times in the interior of the church building. [A commemorative tablet in the church says 1806-1820-1854-1882.] The iron rods by which the galleries had been fastened to the walls were removed and wooden pillars placed underneath to sustain them. The pulpit, which originally stood in the middle of the northern side, was transferred to the rear of the church, and the door of entrance on the opposite side opening directly on the street was closed [1820], a door being opened on the front immediately under the spire. This change necessarily effected a change in the position of the pews on the ground floor.

"In 1854 the internal arrangement of the building was entirely



altered....The old high and uncomfortable pews were removed and replaced by others much more convenient for the occupants. The galleries were narrowed and lowered. The venerable old pulpit, with its high soundingboard (oftentimes to strangers the occasion of fear lest it might suddenly fall on the preacher), was taken out, and the rear wall of the church having been partially removed, a new pulpit was placed in the recess some eight or ten feet back of the site of the old, giving us a wide aisle in front of the desk and an additional row of pews.

"A furnace was placed beneath the church, and thus the room formerly occupied by the stoves became available. By the changes thus made some fifteen or eighteen pews were added". (Ibid., p. 48).

When the 200th anniversary of the Church was held, during the four days beginning on Sunday, Oct. 22, 1916, the old communion service, which had been in the custody of the Metropolitan Museum of New York for two years, was taken to Fishkill. The inscription on the tankard is as follows:

"Presented by Samuel Verplanck, Esq., To the First Reformed Dutch Church in the Town of Fishkill= To Commemorate Mr. Egbert Huff, by birth a Norwegian, in his life time attached to the Life Guards of the Prince of Orange (afterwards King William III of England), he resided for a number of years in this country and died with unblemished reputation at Fishkill, 21 March, 1765, Aged 128 Years.= Fishkill January 1820."

(22d Ann. Report, Am. Scenic & Historic Preservation Soc., 1917, pp. 297-98.) A notice of the death of this remarkable man was published in the Gentleman's Magazine, London, for March, 1765, with further particulars of his career. When a boy of twelve, he heard the news that Charles the First had just been beheaded (Jan. 30, 1649).



Architectural Features

The church is built of stone with brick quoins at the corners and around the openings; the stone is covered with stucco, which, contrasting with the red brick, gives a most pleasing effect. Judging from the Victorian character of the main cornice there can be little doubt that it was changed from the original, probably at some time in the 80's or early 90's when the roof was being renewed.

A curious feature of the exterior is the tower supporting the belfry and spire. While the stone and brick construction is carried for the tower to the height where the gable breaks against it, above this line it is continued in wood--siding and corner boards--following the lines below. Whether this was done because of the difficulty of supporting the masonry wall at the back or for some other reason is a question.

From the thinness of the walls as compared to the main walls, it seems probable that the two flat-roofed vestibules were added at a later date and that originally there was only the one main entrance through the tower.

On the south facade there was a side entrance but this was changed later when the heating system was installed and a new chimney was built against the north wall. At that time the side entrance was used to give access by a stair down to the boiler room in the cellar. This was accomplished very ingeniously within the limits of the exterior wall by forming a bulkhead to line with the existing window sills, putting up fixed shutters on the inside to conceal the discrepancy, and leaving the doors on the outside exactly as they were. When the one door is opened, one is faced with a cramped entrance--about two and a half feet high--to the cellar, and it is accessible only from the exterior, but the





architectural appearance remains unharmed. This stair is shown in 2-  
detailed drawing on Sheet #8.

The framing for the roof and for the spire and belfry is interesting. The roof trusses, spaced only 3'-8" on centers, present the appearance of a forest; they undoubtedly were spaced so closely because they originally carried the balcony which was hung from the ceiling. The present posts and ornate wood brackets at present under the balcony were added later. Smith (previously cited) says that the original level balcony was so high above the floor that the minister could not see the occupants from the pulpit, and during the 1854 alterations it was reconstructed to the present plan.

The fine cornices of the belfry and tower make one hope that some day the main cornice may be restored to its original condition and the building regain more of its original beauty. (From field-notes of the architects of the present survey.)

Written, May 30, 1934, by  
*Thomas W. Hotchkiss*

Thomas W. Hotchkiss  
118 Pipe Street, Fishkill, N.Y.

Approved: *Allen Stuey Miller*

