

Van Nuyse House,
~~New York City.~~

Kings Co, Brooklyn, NY

HABS No. 4-15

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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 JOHANNES VAN NUYSE HOMESTEAD
Amersfort Place, Flatbush, Long Island, New York City

Location and Date

The Van Nuyse House is located on Amersfort Place in Flatbush, a part of the borough of Kings in New York City. While the land around it was for years given to farming it is now occupied principally by large apartment houses. This house, however, is on an undeveloped portion, vacant lots where the circus pitches its tents. Undoubtedly, houses and apartments will soon be built there also and the Van Nuyse house lost.

Charles A. Ditmas, writing in 1909, relates an incident which is recorded in the annals of the Van Nuyse family-- a tradition which has been treasured as an heirloom--which is known to have occurred in this house on Sept. 10, 1806. It is the story of the infant heir to the family fortunes, who was present at a family gathering on that day, but who had been costumed in a disguise so complete that his own mother did not recognize him, but addressed him as a stranger with the words "My little man"; so that the child in shocked surprise cried "Mother! Don't you know me!" The house, which was new, was erected prior to that date, "having been constructed on its present site from timbers cut in the adjacent forest," and "it took, at that time, at least three years to finish a house of this size." (Historic Homesteads of Kings County, 1909, p. 47.)

This author also says that, "The farm of which this is the homestead originally extended to the old Kings Highway. It embraced the George Van Nuyse farm as well, and the original homestead, I believe, [of which the present homestead evidently is the successor] stood near the old road, possibly near the George Van Nuyse house." He gives his reasons for this belief, without however any ground-plan to show landmarks that

The Van Nyuse Homestead

24-BROOK,

3 -

would enable a casual stranger to-day to picture the scene except by a personal visit and an accurate guide-book.

At the time he wrote, the house was occupied by Mr. George M. Henderson, "who had the wisdom to restore it as nearly as possible to its original design." An abstract of title from the beginning to Henderson's date of possession is given in full by Ditmas; while the present appearance of the old place, its architectural design and details of construction are revealed by the accompanying photographs and drawings with the aid of the following description.

Architectural Description

"The house is at present the property of Wood, Harmon & Co. They previously developed a golf-course on the property, using the house for a club-house and placing caretakers in the rooms above the first floor after converting that portion with a complete living apartment. This necessitated the addition of a kitchen, changes to the roof by adding dormers, partitioning off the former attic space, and adding additional windows on the exterior. All the new work was built of stud partitions covered with wall-board.

"The entrance to the house was originally at what is now the rear, giving direct access to the stair from that point. This former entrance has been blocked up and the lower step covered by the new platform of the altered stair. The architectural details of both the front and rear entrances are the same; and the corner-blocks which were so extensively used at that time are used throughout the interior as well as on the exterior trim of both entrances.

"The interior is worthy of particular comment, having to its credit many worthy examples of the best work of its kind of that period. The

The Van Nuyse Homestead

24-BROK,

3-

outstanding feature is the splendid archway on the first floor between the front and rear halls, beautifully ornamented with delicate reeding. The portion above the caps was built in plaster with the portion below in wood, all delicately yet sturdily constructed, and still being in a fine state of preservation. The door and trim, and trim to the windows, of the main rooms also express this high quality of craftsmanship and design, as do also the mantels, all being well preserved and expressing to the true artist of to-day that axiom 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.'

"The plaster cornices throughout the first floor, except in the service portion, still remain in their original state; and, while the detail is a bit heavier than that in the trim, are interesting and typical of this Dutch style. The cornice in the front parlor is reeded and butts into corner blocks which are formed in the corners of the ceiling. This reeding also occurs in the other cornices.

"The overhanging cornices and roof projection on the north and south elevations give the exterior that character which immediately classifies the house with the Dutch homesteads found in this section of the country erected during this period. While the original gutters, which undoubtedly were of wood, have long since been replaced by metal gutters, the balance is still in a good state of preservation as is the exterior trim and sash to windows. The shingles on the exterior walls have been preserved by repeated coatings of paint, the vertical joints being hardly perceptible except by close inspection.

"The foundation walls above grade are of brick while those below are of stone."

The Van Nuyse Homestead

3-

(From field-notes of Frederick Keyser, Architect, N. Y. City,
made in connection with the present survey.)

Compiled, May 5, 1934, by

Thomas W. Hotchkiss

Thomas W. Hotchkiss
118 Pine St., Peekskill, N. Y.

Approved: *Allen Dewey Foster*

Addendum to:
Van Nuyse House
Brooklyn
Kings County
New York

HABS NY-4-15

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

page 5

VAN NUYSE (DITMAS) HOUSE

An Addendum to
 Van Nuyse House
 150 Amersfort Place
 Brooklyn, New York
 in HABS Catalog (1941)

HABS
 NY,
 24-BROK,
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Address: 150 Amersfort Place (corner of Campus Road),
 Brooklyn, Kings County, New York

Present Owner: Brooklyn College, Bedford Avenue and Avenue H,
 Brooklyn, New York

Present Occupant: Faculty of Brooklyn College

Present Use: Faculty House (demolished on April 20, 1961)

Statement of Significance: One of the few remaining Dutch farmhouses in the section of Brooklyn settled by the Dutch. According to Dilliard (see Part I, B, of this report), it adjoined the site of Ascot Heath, an 18th-century racing course (mentioned in Rivington's Gazette, February 12, 1781). This has not been verified.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Original and Subsequent Owners: The original owner of the land, as early as can be traced, was Jacobus Van Nuyse, who transferred it to his sons, George and Jeronimus in 1826 (see Liber Deeds w.3/151 - 1826).* Jeronimus Van Nuyse willed the property to his brother George in 1829 (see Wills 27/65 - 1829).* George Van Nuyse married Margaret Ditmars on April 12, 1827 according to the marriage register of Flatlands, Long Island Dutch Reformed Church Records V91. 2 1747-1914. Therefore, George Van Nuyse did not become owner of the property (land) until two years after his marriage. He died September 11, 1831 according to inscriptions copied from the Burying Grounds of the Protestant Reformed Dutch Church of Flatlands.

At the death of George Van Nuyse the deed to the property was transferred to Cornelia, his daughter whose children Albert H. and Margaret D. Van Brunt were deeded the land (1831 - George Van Nuyse to Cornelia Van Brunt w.33/407 - 1867 - Cornelia D. Van Brunt to Albert H. and Margaret D. Van Brunt).* They sold the house in 1902. In none of the records of the transfer of property was the house ever mentioned.

In 1935 the Greater New York Development Company sold it to the City of New York from which it was acquired by Brooklyn College in 1949. For information concerning its history after 1902, inquire at the Office of the Corporation Council.

* Record Room, Surrogate's Court, New Supreme Court Building, County of Kings, Brooklyn 1, New York.

A letter from Miss Betty Ezequelle, Assistant Curator of Maps and Prints, The New York Historical Society, to Mr. James C. Massey, Supervisory Architect, Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, of October 1, 1963, indicates the relationship of the Ditmars, Van Nuyse, and Ditmas families:

"The following information extracted from 'Historic Homesteads of Kings County' published by the compiler, Charles Andrew Ditmas, Brooklyn, N. Y., 1909, I hope will explain the reason for naming the homestead after the Ditmas family.

"The first Ditmars who resided permanently in Flatlands was Jan Ditmars who married Femmetje Voorhees in 1748. They had four children, only the eldest reached maturity. This son, born 1749, married Margriete Rapalje in 1781 and had a son John, born 1783. John Ditmars married Margaret Van Sicklen in 1802. One of their two children was Margaret Ditmars, born 1803 who married George Van Nuyse in 1827. Their only child Cornelia Ditmars Van Nuyse, born 1829, married John Van Brunt in 1849. One of their two children, Margaret Ditmars Van Brunt married Andrew Ditmas of the Flatbush branch of the family. They were the parents of the compiler who lived in the house on Amersfort Place, Flatbush, Brooklyn, now known as the Ditmas house.

"I have not attempted to establish any connection of the Ditmas family with the original Ditmars family. The similarity in spelling may be merely coincidental. The house has been known as the 'Ditmas homestead' so that for Catalog entry, this may be sufficient. Please let me know if you wish me to go further in the matter of name spellings."

- B. Date of Erection: Although most sources state that the house was built in 1827, when George Van Nuyse married, there is no documentary proof to corroborate this statement. It may be assumed that it was standing at the time of his death in 1831. It may also be assumed that it was standing at the time of his marriage

in 1827. The final conclusion concerning the period in which the house was built depends upon the architecture.

- C. Notes on Alterations and Additions: According to Dilliard, a porch and lean-to was added and the original door has been replaced with a modern one.
- D. Important Old Views: No old prints known to be in existence, only a few 20th-century photographs.
- E. Sources of Information: County Clerk's Office and the Surrogate's Court, New Supreme Court Building, Brooklyn 1, New York.

Dilliard, Maud E. Old Dutch Houses of Brooklyn. New York: Richard R. Smith, 1945. Chapter 8.

A letter dated October 23, 1963, from Arthur J. Hillary, Business Manager of Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, to Miss Ezequelle -- quotes from the Brooklyn College Curator's Report for the year 1938, page 75:

"Built in 1827 by the great-great grandfather of the late Charles A. Ditmas, founder and president of the Kings County Historical Society, the Ditmas homestead presents an attractive link to the past. Its early Dutch design is shown in the sloping roof and wide eaves and from its general appearance, it was a substantial structure in its day.

"The building faces north so that it is the back of the house that looks over the college campus, originally the farmland. The street to the east is Amersfort Place. It is said that along this road the British under Lord Cornwallis marched from Flatlands to outflank the Americans under General Washington in the battle of Long Island, the first major engagement after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Such is the background."

Mr. Hillary also indicated that "No part of the building was preserved."

Prepared by Betty Ezequelle
Assistant Curator
Maps and Prints
New York Historical Society
New York, New York

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: A late 19th-century example of "Dutch gambrel type" house construction.
2. Condition of fabric: Good (before razing).

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: Main block 30'-3 1/2" (three-bay front) x 32'-3 1/2". Side ell 30'-1" x 23'-9 1/2".
2. Foundations: Stone to just above ground level; brick above.
3. Wall construction: Apparently stud frame wall with brick infilling, except for the west end of the ell, which does not have the infilling. There are boards on the inside of the frame, and on the outside, horizontal battens to which the shingles are nailed.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: Porches in front of north and south doors of main building (small on the north, long on the south) of doubtful age; to the west of the south porch is a bulkhead with stairs leading to the cellar.
5. Chimneys: One remaining at the east end of the building; flues from north and south fireplaces on first floor join between second floor and attic.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doorways with side lights and transoms at west ends of north and south walls of main building. Blocked-up doorway with same Greek detailing on north of first side ell; less distinguished doorway, also blocked, on south wall of second side ell.
 - b. Windows: Simple frames with six-over-six-light sash.
7. Roof: "Dutch gambrel."

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: An entrance hall on the west side of the main building block leads from front to back of the building with a decorative archway in center; a large

opening (which presumably never contained doors) leads to the front southeast room; a further large opening leads to the rear northeast room. Between the rear room and the hallway there is a staircase leading up to the second floor and down to the cellar. Doors on the west wall of the hallway lead into two rooms in the first ell; from the more southern of these rooms a doorway leads to a single room in the ell addition. The room arrangement above the first floor has been altered.

2. Flooring: Only new flooring visible.
 3. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster.
 4. Doorways and doors: In the two front rooms and entrance hall, doorways and window openings have relatively elaborate frames with flutes and corner blocks. The arch at the center of the entrance hall rests on odd, deeply molded capitals. In the two front rooms and hallway, again, the lines of the window openings are continued to the floor below the windows as recessed panels. Only one original mantelpiece remains - in the northeast, ground-floor room.
 5. Hardware: Recent replacements.
 6. Lighting: Electric.
 7. Heating: Central heating; formerly fireplaces (in the cellar the first-floor southeast fireplace rests on a brick arch).
- D. Site: The building faces somewhat west of south; the side ells are attached on a line somewhat north of west. Walks are of recent origin.

Prepared by Cervin Robinson
Free-Lance Architectural Photog-
rapher
April 1961