


# Settlers of the Beekman Patent in 18th-Century Dutchess County, New York


By Frank J. Doherty

 The Beekman Patent in Southeastern Dutchess County, New York, was settled early in the eighteenth century by Germans, Dutch, and New Englanders, plus a smattering of others from Spain, Italy, Ireland, and elsewhere. Dutchess County is located about sixty miles north of New York City, between the state of Connecticut and the Hudson River. While genealogical records in New York can be scarce,[1] an unusual amount of genealogical material can be found about the thirteen hundred or so families who came to the Beekman Patent in the eighteenth century.


## The patents

The Beekman Patent, and other land grants, were a direct result of concerns by the British Crown that their newly acquired provinces in the New World were about to be taken over by the French. On August 27, 1664, the English overthrew the Dutch in New Amsterdam and renamed the city New York, and on September 24, 1664, Fort Orange was renamed Albany. The governor of New York established twelve counties on November 1, 1683, including Dutchess. Just a few years later, on February 8 and 9, 1690, the French and Indians staged a raid against the Dutch and English settlers in Schenectady and killed approximately sixty people, including ten women and twelve children. The English realized that to keep their land they had to establish a presence in the new colony and began awarding large land grants, called patents, to entrepreneurs who would develop the land and establish farms. The first such patent in Dutchess County was actually granted before the county was established. On February 8, 1682, Francis Rombout and Gulian Ver Planck received a patent for eighty-five thousand acres of land that today comprise the towns of Fishkill, Wappingers, East Fishkill, and parts of Poughkeepsie. This acreage became the Rombout Patent. Other patents were granted as early as April 22, 1697, and as late as April 10, 1706. The Philipse Patent was granted June 16, 1697, to Adolph Philipse and today is Putnam County. The boundaries and locations of the Beekman and Philipse Patents were the cause of significant problems in the mid to late eighteenth century.

*Above: Map of Dutchess County, New York, showing boundaries of the original patents and the current townships that were erected from them.*

On April 22, 1697, patents were issued to Col. Henry Beekman for two tracts of land in Dutchess  County. Because the boundaries of the smaller patent in the Rhinebeck area were vague, new patents were issued June 25, 1703. The Beekman Patent, the subject of this article, was located in the southeast corner of present Dutchess County and was bounded on the south by the Philipse Patent, on the east by the Oblong (which includes Quaker Hill), on the north by the Great Nine Partners Patent, and on the west by the Rombout Patent. It was about fifteen miles from north to south, and about fifteen miles wide on the north and five and one-half miles wide on the south — a total of about 100,800 acres of land.

Col. Henry Beekman died in 1716. At that time there were few, if any, settlers in the Beekman Patent, called the “back lots.” However, after about 1713 a number of Palatines and others had started to settle in his Rhinebeck Patent. Within ten or eleven years after his father’s death, Henry Beekman, Jr., son of the patentee, encouraged some of these families to move into the larger Beekman Patent, at first mostly into the Clove Valley area which his father had given him on May 6, 1713. The first to settle were the Emighs and the Uhles, both Palatines. The stone house built by Nicholas Emigh still stands today as a memorial to the earliest farmers in the Beekman Patent.

After the death of Col. Henry Beekman, Sr., and his wife Johanna Loper,[2] the patent was divided into  twenty-three lots among his three surviving children: Col. Henry Beekman, Jr.; Catherine, who married first Cornelis Exveen, second John Rutsen, and third Albert Pawling (the town of Pawling is named in her honor); and Cornelia, who married Gilbert R. Livingston. A map of the division was drawn about 1738 and helps in locating where the early settlers established their farms (see map above). In the same year the several patents in the county were converted into precincts, and the Beekman Patent became Beekman Precinct. The present towns of Beekman, Dover, Pawling, Union Vale, and about one-half of LaGrange were erected from the Beekman Precinct.[3]

## **Tenancy**

Henry Beekman sold land to the very earliest settlers, including the Emighs, Uhles, and a few others, but by 1740 he and his sisters (and their husbands) began leasing all the farms and collecting rents in the form of “good sweet merchantable winter wheat,” “live fat hens,” and, usually, “a day’s work with plow or sleigh.” The annual rent for the average farm of two hundred acres was twenty bushels of wheat and two hens, plus a day’s work. The writer lives on a part of one of the smaller farms, originally sixty acres, that called for rent of only two fat hens, but the tenant, a poor Palatine, rarely made his rent payments.[4] Several writers have noted that the leasehold system was very beneficial to a poor emigrant farmer starting out. He was able to acquire wealth without any initial capital except his own labor and could sell his farm, excepting the dung heap and less a ten percent fee to the landlord, and move to another tenant farm or (as happened frequently after about 1762) north to Halfmoon or other land near Albany to purchase a farm.

The lease system, while negating the existence of deeds and mortgages for most of the eighteenth century, turned out to be a boon for genealogists because of the threelife leases. Henry Beekman and his siblings leased almost all land with a three-life lease, frequently with provision for an extra life to be added upon payment of £10. Each lease would include the names, and often the ages, of at least three members of the family.[5] Usually the lease would be for the lives of the husband and his wife and a child (frequently a very young child), but leases were also given for the lives of brothers, of a man and his wife and her brother, or of seemingly unrelated people. By inserting the name of a very young child, the tenant attempted to preserve the family farm for as many years as possible. We have found one lease for 999 years, but in practice most tenants gave up the lease in less than twenty years and moved on. Locating original lease ledgers kept by the three landlords for much of the property in the patent has provided a wealth of genealogical information for an otherwise difficult area of study.

Gilbert R. Livingston kept a record of his tenants in “The Rhinebeck Rent Book,” which has been preserved in the manuscript division of The New-York Historical Society in New York City. His lots are noted on the plat as “C. Livingston” for his wife Cornelia (Beekman) Livingston. Catherine Beekman kept a less expansive record of her tenants in the Dutch language and very few actual leases have been located for these families. Col. Henry Beekman, Jr., kept very extensive records of his tenants, not only in Beekman but also elsewhere in New York, and these ancient ledgers were deposited about fifteen years ago in the Firestone Library at Princeton University.[6]

## **The Quakers and the Oblong**

The Oblong is a tract of land the boundaries of which were disputed between the colonies of Connecticut and New York for many years — until a settlement was reached at the Treaty of Dover on May 14, 1731. As a result of this treaty, the eastern bounds of Dutchess County were extended one mile and three-quarters and twenty rods on December 17, 1743, and the later towns of Dover and Pawling are larger than the original patent would indicate. The land in the Oblong could be purchased from the developers, and many Quakers from Dartmouth and Rhode Island began settlement as early as 1740 and established meeting houses on the Oblong and in the Patent. Nathan Birdsall, a Quaker from Long Island, New York, was one of the first settlers on the Oblong, but most settlers came from New England. One of the earliest meetings in the Patent itself was in the present town of Union Vale and the area was called Oswego, which has led to considerable confusion. The Quakers (Friends) kept extensive records of births, marriages, removals (to another meeting), and often deaths as well.

## **Baptists and other denominations**

The Baptists were another large group of settlers from New England, many from the Swansea, Massachusetts, area, and they established a church in Pawling by 1758. The records of several local Baptist churches have survived. While these records do not include infant baptisms, they may contain much personal detail about local residents. Any parishioner who made the slightest transgression was brought up on charges at the monthly meetings and many neighbors would present evidence for and against the accused. Dismissal from the church was a common punishment.

Some of the earliest settlers were Palatines, almost all Lutheran in the early years. A Lutheran church was established in the Beekman Patent by 1750, after Henry Beekman sold two acres and eight perches of land to six members of the Lutheran congregation for the nominal sum of ten shillings. Prior to the establishment of this church, local Lutherans

had been ministered to by clergy from New York City. No records exist specifically for the church in Beekman, but Lutheran ministers from New York City and Athens in Greene County recorded baptisms and marriages that they performed at the local church.

The Dutch were the earliest settlers of Dutchess County, and Reformed Dutch churches were established in Poughkeepsie and Fishkill by 1716 and 1731, respectively. Many Lutherans had children baptized in the Reformed Church, probably because of the infrequent visits by Lutheran ministers. There were no early Reformed churches in the Beekman Patent, save for a brief existence in the Dover area about 1775. There were Presbyterian churches in Poughkeepsie and Rombout (Fishkill) as early as 1749 and in the Nine Partners beginning about 1743 (all not far from the western edge of the Beekman Patent line), and many tenants attended. Another Presbyterian church in Amenia in the Nine Partners Patent served the Dover community. There were Episcopal churches prior to the Revolution, but they were not reestablished until some years after the war ended. A 1772 attempt in the Dover area and another in the present town of Beekman in June 1793 both failed. Unfortunately very few of these churches have complete records; Presbyterian such for Rombout and Poughkeepsie, for example, include no baptisms or marriages from 1774 to 1822.

### **The Gore, rent wars, and loyalism in Beekman**

The southern bounds of the Beekman Patent were challenged by the heirs of Adolph Philipse and as a result the Beekmans ceded a large part of the southeast corner of the Patent to his heirs on January 15, 1754. This area was known as the “Gore,” and actions taken by the new owners, Beverley Robinson, Philip Philipse, and Roger Morris, resulted in the famous “Rent Wars” in early Dutchess County. Roger Morris served as a captain and quartermaster in the French and Indian Wars and met several Scots who served with him. After the conflict ended Robinson sold these newly-retired officers some of the best farms he had recently acquired in the Gore area south of the village of Pawling. Unfortunately, he disregarded the interests of the Beekman tenants who had been settled on the farms for twenty years or more. Beekman had been fairly lenient in his lease terms and allowed tenants to post bonds when they were unable to pay rents, extended leases when there was hardship, and even forgave rents when there was a bad crop year or a family tragedy. Robinson was not as generous and ordered the tenants off the farms. The Sheriff would remove the tenants one day and a gang of neighbors would re-install them the next day. This pattern continued for some time until the militia was requested and one soldier, George Henry, was shot and died on August 1, 1766.

The problems associated with the retired British officers who bought Robinson’s land did not end in 1766. These officers were retired on half-pay and were subject to call up when needed. In 1776 the British Crown ordered them to raise companies to defend the colony. As a result Captains Archibald Campbell and Duncan Campbell (brothers), and Captains James Grant and Alexander Grant actively recruited residents in the Pawling/Dover area to join them in their new Loyalist companies. They were quite successful in convincing the young locals to join their companies and go to New York, but two of the captains were killed in battles during the war, Archibald Campbell on March 16, 1777, at a battle at Ward’s house in White Plains, Westchester County, and Alexander Grant on October 6, 1777, at the storming of Forts Clinton and Montgomery near West Point on the Hudson River.[7]

Other resources for Beekman residents Despite the lack of vital records and (often poor) church records in New York, other data, especially military records, often fill many gaps. During the French and Indian Wars, 1755–1764, the Colony of New York constantly raised companies of troops and many muster records for Dutchess County have survived. These last provide the soldier’s name, place of birth and age, occupation, height, color of hair and eyes, and complexion. They also state his date of enlistment, the captain who enlisted him, and in whose company he had served.[8] During the Revolution, captains also kept similar musters, but almost all of the original records were destroyed in a fire at the Albany capitol in 1911. By sheer happenstance we discovered that the rolls of nine companies of Dutchess County Minutemen had been copied in 1896 and were available from the National Archives. The information in these musters was very helpful in placing local soldiers.[9] Revolutionary War pension applications are another excellent source of genealogical data.

The activities of the Loyalist captains also contributed significantly to our knowledge. The minutes of the local Commission for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York were published by The New- York Historical Society in 1924 and 1925, and there are hundreds of references to Beekman residents who participated as

Patriots and/or Loyalists (many switched sides). The lists of signers and non-signers of the Articles of Association in 1775 have survived for Beekman but not Pawling. These lists give an early indication of men's loyalties at the time. A significant number of Beekman and Pawling men were Loyalists and information on their families has been found in Canada.

After the British occupied New York City in 1776, two of the newspapers published in the city moved to Dutchess County. Samuel Loudon published *New York Packet and American Advertiser* at Fishkill from 1777 through 1783, and John Holt published *New York Journal and General Advertiser* at Poughkeepsie from 1777 to 1782. Both papers carried many articles and notices about people in Beekman and other parts of the county.

for the eighteenth century and also provide information on the people in each precinct, Beekman and Pawling included. Many individuals are named and relationships are often specified.

There were a number of stores in early Dutchess, and some of the most complete records are for those in Beekman. The writer has located ledger books for over sixty stores from 1740 through 1820, and has filmed these records and prepared annotated indexes. Many of these records note family relationships; "Israel Howland's son John, his son Daniel, his dau. Sarah," are in the Merritt store book for 1767–1771. There are few early school records but one for 1796 lists the names of all scholars, the names of their parents, and the number of days they attended.

Tax lists exist for the Beekman Patent area from 1717 through 1779, with the exception of lost records for the years 1749 through 1752, 1764, and 1776, which were not recorded. Most tenants in Beekman were assessed at £1. Some, like the Emighs and John Kane, a prosperous merchant in Pawling at whose home Washington established headquarters (and who later joined the Loyalists), were assessed as high as £18 to £20. The county is blessed with over fifteen thousand "Ancient Documents," mostly early court records, and ten thousand or so have been indexed. Most early road dedications have been recorded and they usually list the names of residents who lived along the roads. These, in addition to a number of eighteenth-century maps, show who lived next to whom — and men did marry the girl next door.

In summary, when all the various resources are combined, a good quantity of information can be found on the settlers of the Beekman Patent and surrounding area. The vast majority of these people came from New England and usually can be placed in their respective families there.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Donald Lines Jacobus was quoted as calling Dutchess County the "graveyard of genealogy" (*Genealogical Research: Methods and Sources*, 2 vols. [Washington, DC: American Society of Genealogists, 1980–83], 1:192). See the recent articles on New York by Richard H. Benson: "Colonial New England and New York Research: The Sources Are Different," *New England Ancestors* 4:3 (summer 2003), 23–25, and "Upstate New York Research: Still Difficult But Getting Easier," in this issue.

<sup>2</sup> Col. Henry Beekman's widow was still alive in September 1728 but was dead by 1736.

<sup>3</sup> Pawling was divided from Beekman Precinct in 1769 and constituted the eastern half of the precinct. Dover was erected from the north half of Pawling February 20, 1807. The town of LaGrange was erected from part of Beekman and part of Fishkill February 9, 1821, and the town of Union Vale was erected from Beekman March 1, 1827.

<sup>4</sup> Much has been written about tenancy in New York; for a detailed analysis see Sung Bok Kim, *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664–1775* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> See our article on a number of these leases in *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* 117 (1986):146–52.

<sup>6</sup> *Edward Livingston Papers, Delafield Collections*, #CO280.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Settlers of the Beekman Patent*, vols. I, III, and V for more detail on the Revolutionary War in Dutchess

County and the lives of the Campbells and Grants.

<sup>8</sup> These musters were published by The New-York Historical Society in 1892 and also by the New York Secretary of State in 1897–98, with slight differences.

<sup>9</sup> Our findings on these Minute Companies were published in *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record* beginning in volume 120 (April 1989).

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