

# Dover students follow path of historic sojourners in hamlet

by Valerie LaRobardier  
Town of Dover Co-Historian

## TOOLS FOR DECODING THE PAST

The recent tour of the town of Dover by students will be published online on a variety of web-sites, including DCHS "Decoding Dutchess Past" webpage at [www.dchsn.org/ddp](http://www.dchsn.org/ddp)

You will also find:

- Detailed report of DCHS "28th Annual Pilgrimage" town of Dover. September 16, 1948, reported in DCHS 1948 Yearbook.
- Image from "Dutchess County Doorways," by DCHS's Helen Wilkinson Reynolds, research and writing and Helen DeMott Brown, photographer, 1931. At the above link, of Tabor-Wing House described in article.

The Dover Plains Hamlet, rich in historic buildings, provided an excellent project for Michelle Mullaly's senior honors high school art history class that focuses this year on art and architecture of the region.

Following the basic tour route established by the Town of Dover Historical Society's fourth grade Junior History Club, the students split up into teams, each researching a site. Involving Jack Zangerle, the tech support teacher, made the project into an excellent cross-discipline experience. The students did their own research and fleshed it out with photos, video and answers to questions asked on the walking tour.

At our first stop, the J.H. Ketcham Fire House, President Brian Kelly and 2nd VP Phil Race met us for a tour and a talk. The fire company is rightly proud of its collection of WPA (Works Progress Administration) Era art.

Kelly had the students' full attention telling them about the history of the fire house, the art work, and the life story of John Henry Ketcham himself.

Next, we visited the Tabor-Wing House across the street, home of the Town of Dover Historical Society. Co-Historian Caroline Reichenberg gave a talk on the house history and led a tour pointing out architectural details that were of special interest to this class.

The house, built c1810, housed generations of Wings until 1928 when it was sold out of the family. The Historical Society purchased the building in 1976 and began restoring it.

For many years it was home to the Dover Library. In 2003 the society turned the building over to the Town but continues to use it for meetings and events and raise funds for ongoing restoration work. Tabor-Wing is on the National Historic Register,

along with the Dover Stone Church and Second Baptist Church on Mill Street.

Mike Wheatley met us at the Baptist Church for a tour that included a visit to the bell tower with the students each getting a turn to ring the bell. Sloan Haughton had prepared a scavenger hunt to help teach us the church history. Plaques and other items around the church provided answers to questions. We all had fun detecting and learning with this novel approach.

Next, we had lunch at Freshco 22 in Ketcham Corners Plaza, itself another historic building. Built in the late 1940s as a state-of-the-art theater with an advanced sound system and luxury lounges, it attracted visitors from around the county. John Henry Ketcham's house once stood on this corner, now lending the name to the plaza that houses shops and apartments in addition to the restaurant.

Next, we headed for Railroad Square where we viewed the many buildings in the hamlet center that are still in excellent shape today. The stories of bygone days come alive viewing the Elliott Hotel, Losee House/Preston Hotel/Ye Olde Dover Tavern, Feeney's Furniture and Dover Plains Opera House, the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, Colligan's meat Market, Hanna and Company, the Dover Plains Bank and the Octagon House—one of only nine such unique houses in Dutchess County. Today these buildings are repurposed as apartments, offices and a thrift shop.

The bus was waiting for us at the "bank" parking lot for the short ride down Mill Street to the former home of the Dover Electric Light and Power, now lovingly preserved and retrofitted as a beautiful private home.

The electric company was established in 1895, making Dover one of the few towns with electricity that early. A wraparound porch overlooks the Ten Mile River, where you can still see the weir that housed the mill wheel.

Before the current owners bought the house, it had stood empty for a time, but the previous resident had outfitted the living room with two 500-pound wrought iron lanterns and the exterior with an iron dragon lantern that remain, purchased from the Park Savoy and Sherry-Netherland Hotels in New York City. John Davis and Kathy Gallo welcomed us in, and as always, Kathy's tales of the building's previous lives along with her historic artifacts collection and yummy cookies made the visit memorable for all.

On the way back to the high school we stopped at Old Drovers Inn for a look at the gracious building that hosted town meetings from 1807 to 1839.

The first section was built in 1750, most likely by Ebenezer Preston. The center section added in 1805 contains the dining room and the distinctive barrel-vaulted meeting room above. Ebenezer Preston's grandson John used the property as a drover's inn from the early



This 1928 photograph of the Tabor-Wing House by Helen DeMott Brown shows the intricate wood-working skills of local, Dover craftsmen circa 1810. The house is carefully preserved and home to the Dover Historical Society. Photographer Helen DeMott Brown was an early founder of the Dutchess County Historical Society. *Courtesy photo*

1800's on. His wife, Amy, was sister to Jackson Wing, who had a similar inn and tavern in Wingdale. Jackson's wife Hannah was John Preston's sister—thus the two inns are related both by family and function.

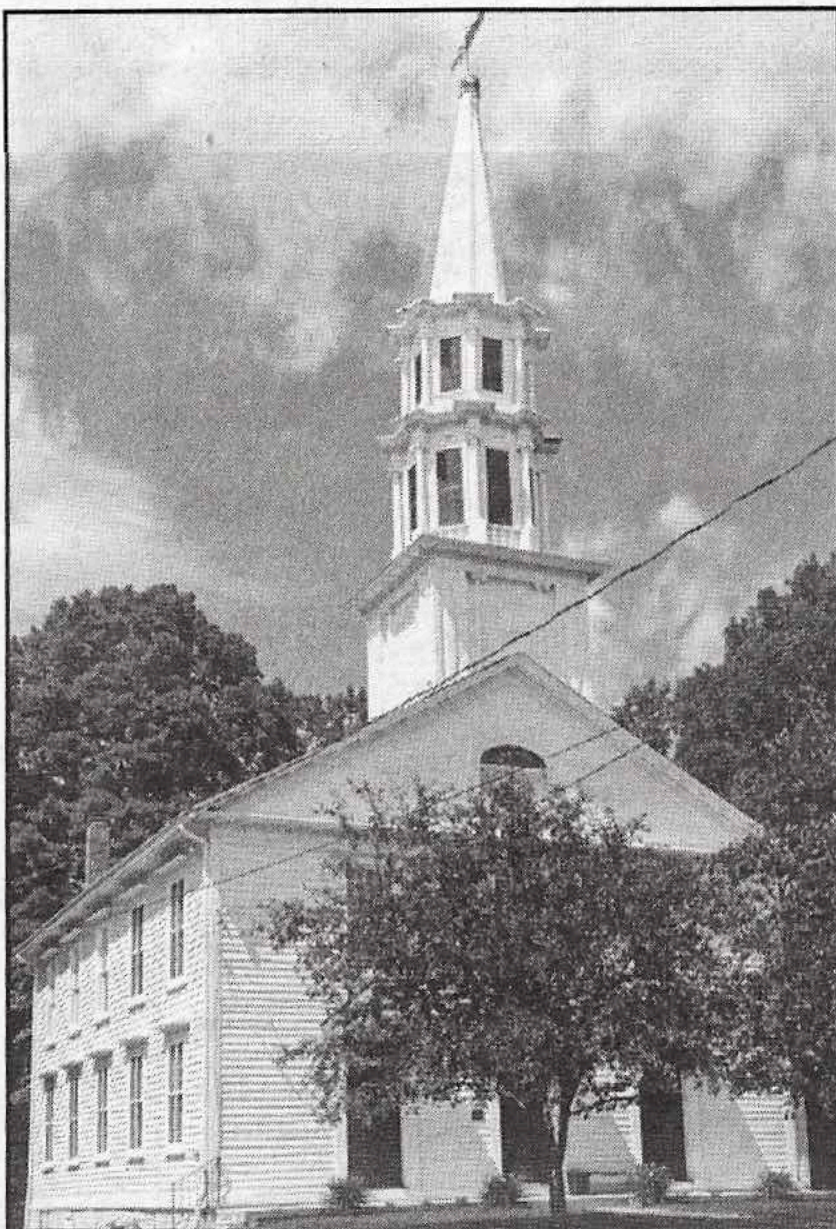
Old Drovers has had several owners in modern times and has also been closed for extended periods. It has been lovingly restored for use as an inn and event venue. The restaurant and tap room are also open on the weekends.

In the weeks following the field trip, the students have been tweaking their research and combining it with photos and video taken on the tour. Soon it will be ready to

publish on the web as a virtual reality "walking" tour.

The class sent me a beautiful thank you card, with each student adding their own message. I in turn am grateful to them—what a joy it is to see young people excited to learn about local history and proud of their town!

Valerie LaRobardier is a Town of Dover Co-historian, she is a DCHS "local" Vice President representing Dover, and professional genealogist specializing in Dutchess County and regional ancestry.



Dover's Second Baptist Church, like the Tabor-Wing House, is on the National Register of Historic Places. This recent photograph shows the intricate wood-working skills, especially visible on the steeple. *Photo courtesy of Daniel Case*