



The Dutchess County Poorhouse | 1864-1998

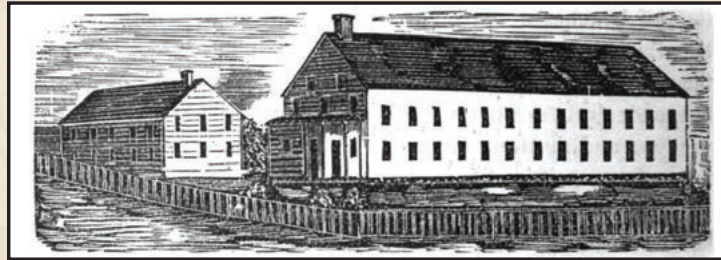
The Dutchess County Poorhouse, later known as the almshouse, home, and infirmary, operated here from 1864 to 1998. It provided residential care for the destitute, ill, and abandoned residents of the county and transients. The nearby Brier Hill Cemetery is the final resting place for some of these individuals.

What was a Poorhouse and a Pauper?

In the 1820s, the New York State Assembly passed a series of laws requiring counties to create special facilities, called poorhouses or homes, to support impoverished residents. Regulations distinguished between "paupers," who were victims of circumstances beyond their control and deserving of support, and the "indolent," who were lazy and did not merit aid. In 1830, Dutchess County and the City of Poughkeepsie built a joint poorhouse on the north end of the city to care for paupers.

THE DUTCHESS COUNTY POORHOUSE, CIRCA 1877

In 1863, the Dutchess County Board of Supervisors voted to relocate the county's paupers from Poughkeepsie to a new site in the town of Washington. A special board committee purchased a working farm and contracted for the construction of buildings to house the poor, insane, and infirm. The new county poorhouse opened in October 1864.



Source: *A General History of Dutchess County*, Philip H. Smith, 1877



Photo Credit: National Archives Photo No. 165-C-692

ROBERT SCOFIELD

Born in New York City in 1818, Scofield moved to Fishkill Landing (now Beacon, NY, in 1846. He served with the 26th US Colored Infantry (pictured above at Riker's Island, NY) during the Civil War, receiving a bayonet wound at the Battle of Johns Island, SC, in July 1864. Scofield moved to the county poorhouse in February 1894, where he died in March. Records indicate that he was interred at the nearby Brier Hill Cemetery, though the exact location of his grave is not known.

THE DUTCHESS COUNTY INFIRMARY, CIRCA 1950

From the 1870s until the 1930s, government reports documented the continuing struggle to provide adequate care for poorhouse residents. Attempts to upgrade the facilities culminated in the renovation of the East Wing (on the left in the image to the right) of the poorhouse into an infirmary in 1938. Intended to provide in-patient care for ill or injured residents of the poorhouse, the infirmary swiftly became a nursing home for county residents who could not afford care elsewhere.



Credit: Dutchess County Department of History



HOME OF LOCAL HISTORIANS: LOUISE TOMPKINS (1907-1991) AND HILDA BAUER (1900-1988)

Louise Tompkins, one of Dutchess County's most prolific historians, resided at the infirmary from 1939 until her death in 1991. Struck with osteoarthritis at the age of 19 in 1927, Tompkins was bedridden for most of her life. With the help of her loyal friend Hilda Bauer, Louise produced voluminous scholarship, served as the Town of Washington Historian, and officiated as the grand marshal at Dutchess County's tercentenary parade in 1983.

THE NEW WING, FEBRUARY 1961

In February 1961, the county completed work on a new 60-bed wing for the infirmary, which included updated medical equipment and office space. This facility closed in November 1998 and today houses the Eastern Dutchess Government Center.



Credit: Dutchess County Department of History