

Plan On It

A Dutchess County Planning Federation eNewsletter



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Revisiting the Story of Dutchess County's Historic Resource Survey

In Remembrance of Stephanie Woods Mauri, 1936-2022

Original 2011 article by Senior GIS Project Coordinator Robert Wills (retired)

2023 update by Devin Rigolino, Senior GIS Project Coordinator

Long before computers were the standard, mapping required a different kind of hand-eye coordination — instead of a mouse, drafting skills and artistic sensibility were necessary to create the visual communication tool that is a map. Maps are more accurate these days, and analysis is easier and more legitimate as the computer allows us to work with very accurate data visible as superimposed layers, revealing relationships difficult to see in the “old days.”

Transforming the original Historic Resource Survey (HRS) from a set of paper maps into a publicly accessible electronic map layer has given us the opportunity to blend the beauty and personality of “old” maps with the accuracy of new.

What is the Historic Resource Survey?

The Historic Resource Survey was conducted in the 1980s and resulted in a set of paper maps, photos, and detailed documentation of historic resources such as buildings, structures, landscapes, and objects. Compiled by Stephanie Woods Mauri from the Dutchess County Historical Society, John Clarke from the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, and other architectural historians, these maps were the product of a comprehensive field survey of almost every road in the County. Cultural sites, working landscapes, and historic architecture were documented, with even Franklin Delano Roosevelt's favorite roadside view being mapped. Voluminous in detail, quaint in description, and beautifully colored, the original maps included many subjective notes about the structures and natural features observed. In addition, an extensive architectural inventory included photographs and formal descriptions of each resource.

What We're Reading

Ever wonder what your friendly county planners are reading, watching, and listening to these days? We created this segment to share interesting books, podcasts, and more to further spark your interest in the how's and why's of placemaking. We hope you find it inspiring!

Heather's ARTICLE / BLOG / WEBSITE

Reviews about: **Street Trees**



Some people love them, be it for the shade they provide or the beauty they impart. Others don't, whether for the hassle of leaf pickup or the power-outage threat posed by limbs during a storm. Many people probably just don't give them much thought. But whichever camp you're in, **street trees** are proven to benefit communities in a variety of ways, including:

- **Cool and Clean:**

The difference between walking along a sunbaked stretch of sidewalk or a shade-dappled one is not only an issue of comfort, it can also be an issue of social justice. And trees can lower electricity bills, capture more rainwater, and improve air quality: see [The Magic of Street Trees](#) and [Why Street Trees are so Essential for our Cities](#) (Strong Towns)

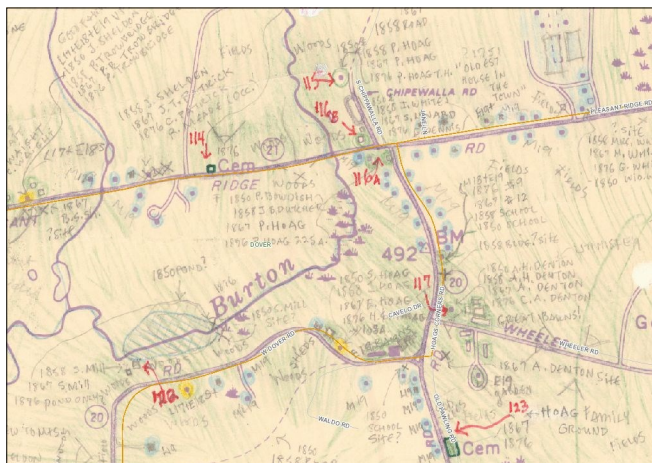
- **Economic Gains:**

Street trees can improve the local economy by increasing sales in commercial areas and increasing property values in residential neighborhoods: see [The Wealth of Street Trees](#) (Gould Evans Blog)...

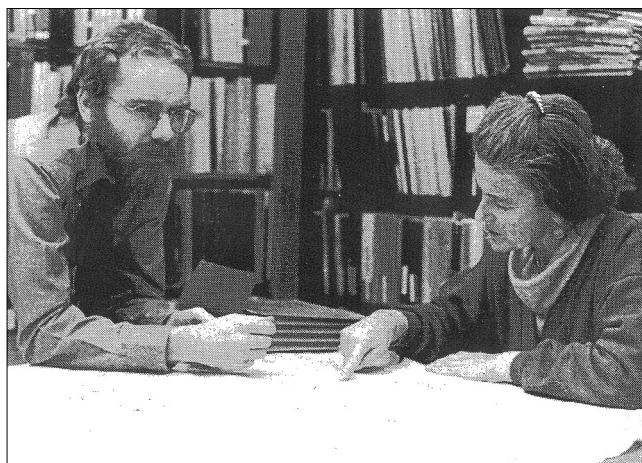
The Historic Resource Survey, which differs from the Federal and State historic registers, was the product of an agreement between the County Planning Department and the State Historic Preservation Office (part of NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation). It was originally meant to streamline the requirement for historic review of all projects proposed in the Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG), as cross-checking against the inventory was a way to assure that CDBG monies did not negatively affect historic resources. It now represents a unique, point-in-time look at our historic resources as the HRS is not updated with new listings.

The thing about street trees is that many people don't notice the benefits until they're gone. The loss or removal of street trees creates an immediate, stark change to a street. And since cultivating a healthy street tree canopy can literally take decades, communities should plan ahead for the continued maintenance and replacement of existing street trees, and give thought to areas without that could benefit from the installation of regularly-spaced street trees of varied species: [Cornell Urban Horticulture Institute](https://www.cornell.edu/urbanhorticulture/)

Photos: Left – Daniel Jeffries. Right – Sarah Kobos.



An example of notations on the original Historic Resource Survey maps.



John Clarke (l) and Stephanie Woods Mauri (r) work on the original Historic Resource Survey (1985)

Beyond regulation, the maps also had special value in communicating the importance of our historic settlements. At the time of the survey, former Planning Commissioner Roger Akeley stated:

"There can be no argument that the cultural landscape of Dutchess County is seriously threatened by the adverse effects of growth and changing land-use and development decisions that are ignorant of or insensitive to historic preservation. This survey....will be useable in local and county planning, contributing directly to the preservation of historic resources."

Making Old Maps New Again

A robust historic county inventory serves many purposes. It helps to build an appreciation of Dutchess County's rich historical heritage, it aids communities in protecting their legacies, and it provides initial information to help nominate properties to the National Register of Historic Places. With these goals in mind, the HRS was digitized and an [interactive mapping application](#) built and hosted on the County website to make the survey more accessible to the public. Just this year, the HRS application was updated with a newly added legend that provides additional information about the various colored highlights that can be seen on the original maps. Importantly, overlaying history with current parcels makes for a rich educational experience, while the artistic beauty of the original maps still engages the viewer as originally intended.

Project Challenges

Several challenges initially confronted the team of planners, geographic information system (GIS) professionals, and web developers as they began the process of transforming the paper maps into a digital product. The maps were large and in fragile condition. The first task was to stabilize them in preparation for large format full color scanning. Once scanned, GIS tools enabled the overlay of these images with other county data layers, specifically current county tax parcel boundaries.

Summer interns then completed the tedious task of scanning the supporting documentation for each site, which included thousands of pages of forms and photographs. The goal was to enrich the user experience by having a direct link between the map and these ancillary documents. This was achieved by creating a GIS point at each historic site, upon which a viewer can click to see the site documents. The original maps also included symbols indicating the location and direction of significant views. These too were digitally recreated by building a new "Viewpoints" layer.

Using the New Maps Online

Today, the [Historic Resource Survey Viewer](#) allows the public to examine the digitized version of the original Historic Resource Survey. This application offers the same beauty and detailed notes found on the original maps while also overlaying other current data like road names and parcel lines for simultaneous viewing. By selecting on any of the Survey Points of Interest that are also displayed, one can focus on specific information about a property or landscape feature.

Residents and local officials can apply historical knowledge of properties and communities to assist with land use decision-making, or to contribute directly to the preservation of historic resources. Seeing the historic context of a site can foster a sense of preservation. Designers can better understand original intent, allowing for a greater sensitivity to scale of the original when designing additions to structures.

Viewshed Analysis, based in part on the Historic Resource Survey, has been used by several municipalities to develop open space plans, design ridgeline protection zones, and review the visual effects of proposed cell towers. With visibility determined, corresponding areas of protection or greater scrutiny can be developed. On a County level, the Community Development program uses this digital resource to check grant applications against historic properties, while the Department of Public Works uses the HRS Viewer to identify historic areas before conducting road work.

An example of the Historic Site Documentation. Many of these also include photos of the related structures.



Curious about President Roosevelt's favorite roadside view we mentioned earlier? It's Charlie Hill Road in the Town of North East, looking west towards the Catskills.



*Stephanie Woods Mauri, 1936-2022
(Dutchess County Historical Society)*

In Remembrance

We wish to end this article about the Dutchess County Historic Resource Survey where it first began – with the people who first poured themselves into these records. In particular, we wish to express our gratitude to the late Stephanie Woods Mauri, who was an avid historian dedicated to researching and recording the history of Dutchess County for the benefit of future generations.

*"Perhaps nobody has changed the course of history as much as the historians."
–Franklin P. Jones, American journalist (1908-1980)*

More Information

[Dutchess County Historic Resource Survey](#)

[NYS Cultural Resource Information System \(CRIS\)](#)

[National Register of Historic Places](#)

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This newsletter was developed by the Dutchess County Department of Planning and Development, in conjunction with the Dutchess County Planning Federation.

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