

## 114 ~ The Sherman House

*Over the past eight years, I have shared information about the houses, people, and historical features in and around the Village of Blawenburg. I have used the information approved by the National and State Registers of Historic Places as my guide for some blogs, but I also wrote about many other aspects of the village, too.*

*The southern section of Montgomery Township had Dutch farms for over 70 years before there was a village. Ironically, the Blaws, for whom the village is named, had moved away by the time the first village house was built. The Covenhoven family owned most of the land on which the village stands—from Blawenburg crossroads east to Mountain View Road.*

*The first farms (Covenhoven, Blaw, and Nevius/Van Zandt) were built from 1730 to 1755. The first house in the village, Griggs Tavern, was not built until 1818 (see Blog 15), while the last house of the early period where Mrs. Mary and Sarah Q. Voorhees lived, was built in 1870 (see Blog 80). Very little construction took place from 1870 until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1898, the State Village for Epileptics was built on land adjacent to Blawenburg on its north side. As the State Village grew, there was a need for additional housing to accommodate local people working there. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a few more “modern” houses and cottages were built in the village. Few houses have been built since.*

*While I have written many other tales about the village, this blog discusses one property in the original village that I have not written about, the Sherman House. There are still more tales to tell, but this blog marks a milestone in my quest to tell the history of Blawenburg.*

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*William Sherman House*

### **An Original Village**

If you visit the Colonial Village in Williamsburg, VA or Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge, MA, you see homes, shops, and other buildings of a similar architectural style from the same period in history. This is because these tourist attractions were created from original buildings brought from many locations to tell a story about the colonial era in America.

The Village of Blawenburg is not a re-creation, and its buildings and other properties were not built at the same time. The original village was built in the 52-year time span between 1818 and 1870. As a result, the houses are of different styles. The original house, Griggs Tavern, reflects the Georgian architectural style of a farmhouse—rectangular shape, chimneys on each end, and windowpanes. Just a few years later in 1830, Blawenburg Church was built, reflecting a Federal and Georgian architectural style. The old parsonage across the street is from the same era (1832) and has similar features.



*Griggs Tavern was built as a stagecoach stop  
on the new Georgetown Franklin Turnpike.*

Other buildings, such as the Sherman House (1856) are from a different time and thus of a different architectural style. According to Ursula Brecknell, primary author of the application for the State and National Register of Historic Places, "Sherman's house reflects its date in late Greek Revival features, with an overlay of Italianate." Some houses ended up being a blend of old and new styles. For example, in the late 1800s, Victorian styles were very popular. During this time, some of the Georgian/Federal style homes added front porches, which were not in their original design.

The last house built in the original village was the home of Mrs. Mary Voorhees and her daughter, Sarah Q. Voorhees. It had an urban look, resembling a city townhouse.





*The Mrs. Mary Voorhees house as it looked in 1988.*

### **Origins of the Sherman House**

The Sherman property is immediately east of Judge Cornelius Stryker's store at the crossroads of Georgetown Franklin Turnpike and Great Road. To the east of the Sherman property is the Whitenack's 1838 blacksmith and wheelwright shop. Across the turnpike on the north side is Griggs Tavern.

In 1833, John A. Voorhees purchased the land where Sherman would build his house two decades later. Voorhees was the owner of the Burnt Hill Road farm northeast of Blawenburg known as Maplewood (see Blog 108). He was also a land broker, having bought and sold several properties in and around the village. Voorhees didn't develop the Sherman property. He held the property for a while, and then sold it in 1842 to a local resident, John Dean. It is unclear when William Sherman purchased the property, but he likely built the house in 1856. Today the house bears a sign *Circa 1860*. Sherman's name appears as the owner of the house on an 1860 map.

### **House Changes**

The Sherman House has undergone changes over the years. What once was a single-family dwelling, is now a duplex. When additional space was needed, a wing was added to the back of the house. This may have occurred when it was divided into two dwellings. The front of the house originally had a Tuscan portico, likely with substantial columns and an Italian-style terracotta roof. Sometime after 1907, the current

pedimented one-bay front porch replaced the Tuscan portico. While both styles look similar, the pedimented porch has a triangular feature above its columns supporting its roof.

J. A. Voorhees, the grandson of the original landowner, purchased the property from William Sherman in 1865. He had purchased and resold the farmland behind the church parsonage owned by Rev. Henry Heermance, the first pastor of Blawenburg Church (1832 -1835). Voorhees used these funds to repurchase the now-developed Sherman property. He willed the property to Sarah Voorhees, his daughter. Upon his death in 1876, she inherited the property. Additional Victorian features were added to the stairway and front door.

“The Sherman House introduced to the village still another then current choice in architectural features, making the streetscape a documentary of the wide range of taste found in a rural area.” Ursula Brecknell

## **FACTS**

1. When you look into the history of a house or person, many questions are raised. In this case, I wonder if the Sarah Voorhees, who inherited the Sherman house, was the Sarah Q. Voorhees who built a small house in Blawenburg. In 1870, she moved into the new house with her widowed mother, Mary, just across from the old Blawenburg School (now Homestead). See Blog 80.
2. The prolific Voorhees family populated Blawenburg and surrounding villages. Blawenburg Cemetery has 73 residents named Voorhees and many others who are descendants of Voorhees.
3. As far as we know, William Sherman is not William Tecumseh Sherman, the American Civil War general who became General of the Army after the Civil War.
4. While several other houses were built in Blawenburg from 1920 to 1940, the village has maintained its original look and feel.

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## **SOURCES**

### **Information**

National Historic Register

### **Pictures**

Sherman House – Zeete, Creative Commons License

Tavern – D. Cochran, Blog 15

Mrs. Voorhees' house – Clem Fiori, 1988, from *State and National Register of Historic Places* application

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