

45 Lost Windmill Found



The Broad View Farm windmill

Some months ago, we reported that that windmill that was on Broad View Farm in Blawenburg was missing. (See Blog 9.) At least, we weren't sure where it was. It's hard to lose a windmill, but when you hear the turn of events, you can understand what happened.

Broad View Farm, which straddled the north and south sides of Georgetown Franklin Turnpike (County Route 518) just west of the crossroad in Blawenburg, was originally settled by the Nevius family in 1737. In 1811, the Van Zandt family became owners of the farm when Bernardus Van Zandt married Sarah Sutphin, who was related to the Nevius family. (See Blog 7.)

The Van Zandts owned, expanded, and improved the farm, making it a showpiece for farmers around the State of New Jersey. People traveled from all over the state to see the latest farming techniques in action. They drew over 8,000 people to one of their expositions in 1950. (See Blog 11.)

One of these innovations was a windmill which was installed in 1905 to pump water for use on the farm. In 1920, as J. Percy Van Zandt was building his farm equipment business, he added an Aeromotor to the well to supplement wind power. The windmill served its purpose for many years, and Percy was still climbing the windmill to fine tune its parts well into his 80s.

In the 1990s, much of the farm was sold to build a housing development on the west side of the farm on the north side of Georgetown Franklin Turnpike. At the same time, developers purchased the Broad View property on the south side of the Turnpike along with Woodacres Farm and other properties to build Cherry Valley Country Club and residential homes.

Having little use for the old windmill, the family decided to donate it to the New Jersey Agricultural Museum that had been built at Rutgers University. The windmill was dismantled in Blawenburg and re-erected on the Cook College campus at Rutgers. A plaque was placed next to it honoring Percy Van Zandt for his contributions to agriculture in New Jersey.



The plaque that was near the windmill

About five years ago, the State was having financial problems and decided to stop funding the museum. It closed, and its contents were disbursed. Rutgers found that it was a lot easier to get rid of some hand tools and tractors than it was a large windmill.

They sent many of the artifacts in the museum back to their original donors, but it was learned later that they were unable to locate the Van Zandts. Edgar Van Zandt and John Van Zandt were the contacts, since their names were on the document transferring the windmill to Rutgers. Edgar did most of the work on the transfer, but he had since passed away. John lives in North Carolina,

but Rutgers didn't know that. It was unlikely that they would know other family members to contact.



The Don Quixote Quest

I became interested in what might have happened to the windmill when I wanted to take a picture of it for a blog and discovered that it was no longer at Rutgers. I talked with Dick Van Zandt, John Van Zandt's son and Percy's grandson, who grew up on the farm. He had no idea where it went either. I called a couple people from the Van Harlingen Historical Society who led me people who could only come up with the name Millstone as a possible location and Millstone Valley Preservation Coalition as a possible group who received the windmill.

Like in a true whodunnit, Millstone was only a partial lead on where it was. You might call it a partial red herring since it led us way off the track. Fortunately, there was no murder in this whodunnit. I checked with the Millstone Valley Preservation Coalition, who didn't know anything about the windmill and said they didn't possess it. They were gracious enough to check with people who they thought might know the whereabouts of the windmill, but no one was really in the know. One person said that there was more than one historical society in Millstone, but I could never find another one. I was led to Rutgers by one of the contacts, and despite the contact's effort, this, too, led me back to Millstone.

The more dead ends I reached, the more interested Dick Van Zandt became. He talked with his cousin, David Van Zandt, who knew the President of the Board of Trustees at Rutgers. The board president talked to a few people in the know and finally found the person who helped dispose of the windmill. Progress!



The Broad View Farm windmill at the New Jersey Agricultural Museum at Rutgers

It turns out that the windmill is still in its original crates in a storage area not in Millstone, a town in Somerset County, but in Millstone Township in Monmouth County. A historical group in Millstone Township, known as the Friends of Millstone Historic Registered Properties, owns the windmill and 400 artifacts from the defunct museum. They received grants to remove the windmill from Rutgers in 2016. They have plans to erect it next to their community agricultural museum and connect it to a well so that it can serve as a working educational demonstration project. The Millstone Township group also has the plaque that honors Percy.

Projects like this take time and money to complete, so it is unclear if or when the Broad View Farm windmill will be working again. Our hope is that when it is working, the plaque will be installed to show where it was originally housed.

Of course, there are some who would like to see the windmill relocated to its home township again, either in its original location or another more prominent location such as the agricultural museum being curated by the Van Harlingen Historical Society on Montgomery Road near Stonebridge at Montgomery retirement community.

There are still a lot of “maybes” connected to the project. Maybe the windmill will be restored in Millstone Township. Maybe the plaque will be posted with it. Maybe it will end up back in Blawenburg someday. Since maybe means no that could possibly change to yes, we can hope that someday we will be able to visit the Van Zandt windmill working in a historical location.

Meanwhile, the windmill is one mystery that’s somewhat solved. Now we must press on to find John Blaw Sr.’s final resting place. Perhaps we’ll find it, maybe!



The windmill on Broad View Farm in springtime

Blawenburg Facts

1. You can still see a windmill near Blawenburg. The old windmill at the top of Mountain View Road has been restored and serves as a reminder of our past (or perhaps our future).



The windmill at the top of Mountain View Road south of Greenflash Farm

2. Millstone Township is along I-195 northeast of Jackson Township, NJ near Six Flags Great Adventure.
3. You may be wondering what they did with extra pump parts on the Broad View Farm. Well, that may not be the most pressing thing you're thinking about, but Dick Van Zandt and his buddies had an idea. Dick asked his grandfather if he could have the 15 food sections of pipe that were stored in the barn (now the Elks Club). Percy gave him permission, and the boys scrounged some chicken wire and made a large backstop for a baseball diamond in Dick's backyard. Dick said it stood there for many years.
4. We still don't know where John Blaw, Sr. is buried. Let us know if you find out where he is.

Sources

Information for this blog came from earlier blogs and from Dick Van Zandt

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Mountain View Road windmill – David Cochran

All other pictures were shared by Dick Van Zandt.

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