

85 A New Home for the Lost Windmill

The lost has been found.

The disassembled has been reconstructed.

This tale has its roots in Blawenburg on the old Nevius/Van Zandt farm that was established in the 1740s by Peter and Altje Nevius. In the early 1800s, Bernardus Van Zandt married Sarah Sutphen and acquired the farm. This transfer to Van Zandt ownership began the long line of Van Zandts who worked the land they named Broad View Farm until they sold it in the 1990s. (See *blogs 6 and 10 for more information about how the land transferred to the Van Zandt family.*)

But this tale is not just about the Van Zandts, rather it is about an important piece of farm equipment that served the Broad View Farm for many years – their windmill. Before the days of electric power, getting water for personal and farm use was done through the use of shallow wells that required buckets, cisterns to collect rainwater, and windmills that used wind power to pump water from the earth. Most early farms had a windmill, and Broad View Farm installed their windmill in 1905. They later electrified it.



The Van Zandt windmill by Kay Seitz

In Blog 9, *The Iconic Windmill of Blawenburg*, we reported that the Broad View windmill that had been donated to the New Jersey Agriculture Museum at Rutgers University was missing, and no one seemed to know where it was. This was no David Copperfield magic trick. It had been dismantled and moved somewhere... but where?



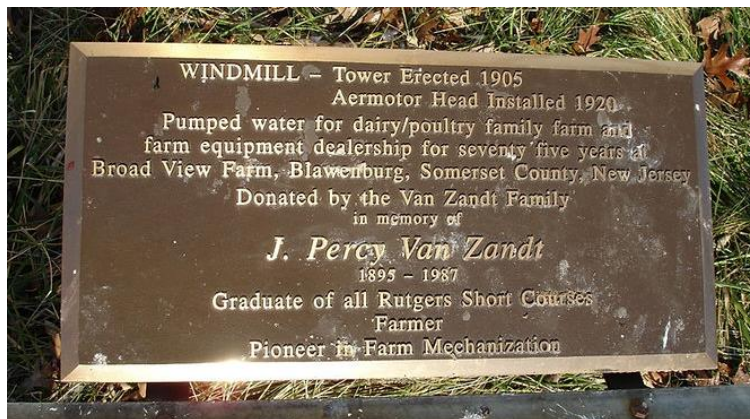
The windmill with its original wooden water tank and its owners, Hannah and Percy Van Zandt

When longtime Broad View Farm owner, J. Percy Van Zandt (aka Percy) passed away in 1987, the family sought a way to honor him for his contributions to modern agriculture. Percy had achieved notoriety for his innovative farming practices. He proved that putting electric lights in chicken coops produced more eggs. He also used railroad services to get products to urban markets faster, and he demonstrated the value of terracing farmland. (See *Blog 11, The Day 8,000 Visitors Came to Blawenburg.*) The family thought that it would be appropriate to move the windmill that had served the farm so well to a location that would be permanent and could bear signage that recognized Percy's achievements. They settled on the New Jersey Agriculture Museum on the Douglass College campus of Rutgers University.



The windmill at the museum

The windmill was disassembled and moved to New Brunswick. Ceremonies were held and a plaque honoring J. Percy was erected to tell visitors about the origin of his windmill. The Van Zandt family was happy to have this symbol of the past in a location where visitors could see it for years to come.

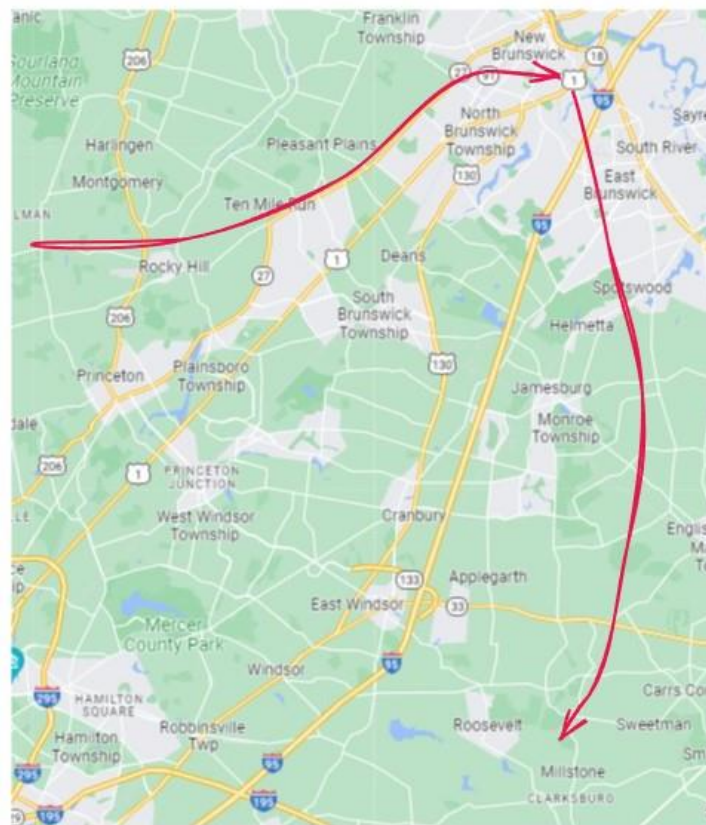


And then the unthinkable happened. The State of New Jersey decided not to fund the museum any longer, and it was closed. Members of the Van Zandt family were not contacted, and according to Percy's grandson, Dick Van Zandt, the museum sold or gave away the artifacts including the historic windmill. Worse yet, no one at Rutgers knew where the windmill was. Was

it reconstructed on another farm? Was the signage honoring Percy still associated with it? Just what was going on? It was quite a mystery for a while. (See Blog 45, Lost Windmill Found)

The Lost is Found

Eventually, the family found that the windmill was given to a non-profit group in Millstone Township, NJ, Friends of Millstone Township Historic Properties, with the understanding that they would reconstruct it at a place that would recognize the importance of farming. When the family reached the organization that had the windmill, they discovered that it was in boxes awaiting funding to reconstruct it. They considered trying to get the windmill back in Blawenburg or Montgomery Township, and they even considered purchasing it from the owners. Finally, this year, they were able to talk with the owners, who had been working on a grant to restore the windmill on a working educational farm/museum known as the Baird Farm in Millstone Township.



The path of the windmill to its new home

Disassembled, Now Reconstructed

The Friends of Millstone Township Historic Properties won its grant to reconstruct the windmill and they have followed through with step one of their plans. The windmill is standing tall once more. They plan to take it a step further than when it was at the Agriculture Museum. They want

to drill a well where the windmill is located and have it pump water again. Additionally, they plan to use a grant to build a 3,000 square foot greenhouse next to it. The windmill would supply the water to the greenhouse and provide a working model of the use of wind power to all those who visit the farm.

While the process was initially frustrating for the family, they have agreed that this solution is in keeping with the intent of their original donation. The signage recognizing Percy will be appropriately displayed, and the windmill will be rededicated to him in the Spring of 2023. A happy ending to a baffling mystery.



The windmill is erected on the Baird Farm in Millstone Township.

Epilogue

The windmill was reconstructed and erected on November 17, 2022, just a day before its last owner, John Percy Van Zandt Jr., passed away at age 98. As one of his family members said, “Pop Pop is smiling.”

Facts

1. Dick Van Zandt said that “J. Percy Van Zandt, known to all as just Percy, was not only a successful farmer, entrepreneur, and businessman, but also a leader of his church and

community. He served on the Montgomery Township's Board of Education for more than 33 years and was a long-time deacon and elder of the Blawenburg Church."



J. Percy Van Zandt



2. John Van Zandt was one of the charter members of Blawenburg Fire Department (now Montgomery Township Volunteer Fire Company No. 2), and the last founding member to pass away. Like his father, John was also an active member of Blawenburg Church and the community. You can read [John's obituary](#) online. You will find a recording of John's memorial service at https://youtu.be/xs3tKEdZ_zY

3. On behalf of the Van Zandt family, Dick Van Zandt recently said, "The Van Zandt family wishes to thank the Friends of Millstone Township Historic Properties for their interest in preserving not only this windmill, but all things related to the history of farming in New Jersey. We wish them much success in the completion of this and other projects!"

4. Friends of Millstone Township Historic Registered Properties is a 501C3 non-profit organization dedicated to furthering public interest in conservation, preservation, knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the history of Millstone Township. You can learn more about them on their website at: www.savinghistorywithfriends.org.

Sources

Information

Thanks to Dick Van Zandt for conversations and sharing his narrative of the windmill.

Windmill blogs - #9 and #45

Pictures

Windmill (Kay Seitz) – shared by the Van Zandt family

Windmill with the Van Zandts – Princeton Packet (many years ago)

Map – Google maps, altered by D. Cochran

Windmill at Baird Farm – shared by D. Van Zandt

Percy Van Zandt – shared by D. Van Zandt

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