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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

The Voorlezer's House

AND/OR COMMON

The Voorlezer's House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Arthur Kill Road, Opposite Center Street

CITY, TOWN

Richmondtown

— VICINITY OF

17

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

New York

CODE

36

COUNTY

Richmondtown

CODE

85

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Staten Island Historical Society, Loring McMillan, Director

STREET & NUMBER

302 Center Street

CITY, TOWN

Richmondtown

— VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, Richmond County Courthouse
 REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Saint George

STATE

New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None

DATE

— FEDERAL — STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
 SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Voorlezer's House is a two-story clapboarded frame building, painted red, which rises two feet higher in the front than in the rear. The shingled peak roof thus has an unequal pitch. The house measures 25' along the front and rear walls and 28' in depth. The house rests on stone foundations, 2' thick, which were mortared with mud and whitewashed regularly. When the house was acquired by the Staten Island Historical Society in 1939, it was moved back 13' from the curb of Arthur Kill Road. Thus the house is now only partially situated on its original foundations.

The timbers used in the framework are oak or whitewood from nearby forests, which were hewn and shaped by broadax. The timbers were mortised and tenoned and secured by wooden pegs. The interior walls are of plastered laths, and were regularly whitewashed.

On the north-easterly end of the house is an internal brick and stone chimney. In the cellar, the chimney work is entirely of stone, with the exception of the brick oven, which opens directly into the massive kitchen fireplace with its oak lintel. There are two fireplaces on the first floor and one on the second. These are simple arched openings, devoid of any decoration except whitewash.

The cellar was originally divided into two rooms by a partition which has long been removed. The first floor was divided into two rooms; a small one in the northwest corner used as general living space by the voorlezer, and the other, larger room used probably for services. When the original steep, straight, ladderlike stairs were replaced by the present staircases with landings, the small room was partitioned into a smaller room and a hallway. The second floor was laid out in a manner similar to the first floor until 1825. The small room served as a bed chamber and the large room, with its extra set of floor beams for reinforcement, was probably the school room. About 1825, the school room was divided into two small rooms and a hallway. Above the second floor is the garret space which is relatively untouched.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
...PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
... 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
... 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
... 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
... 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
... 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES
circa 1695

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Voorlezer's House, built before 1696, is the oldest elementary school building in the United States and one of the most important surviving relics of 17th century Dutch settlement in New York.

The two-story clapboard building has been preserved with the majority of its historic features intact, including axe-hewn timbers and white pine floorboards, 14 to 16 inches wide.

Located on Arthur Kill Road, opposite Center Street, in historic Richmondtown, Staten Island, New York, the Voorlezer's House is presently maintained as a museum by the Staten Island Historical Society.

HISTORY

The Voorlezer's House was constructed by the early Dutch settlers of Richmondtown for a threefold purpose: to serve as a church, a school, and as the residence of the voorlezer. The voorlezer (or forelezer or voorleezer) was the name given to a layman chosen by the Dutch Congregation whose principal office was to assist the pastor in the church services, including the keeping of the church records. With the absence of a minister in the community, the voorlezer conducted the church services by reading from the scriptures or from a published book of sermons, for which service he earned his title ("fore-reader" or simply "reader" in English translation). As he was not an ordained minister, he could not baptise, perform the marriage ceremony, deliver an original sermon or administer communion.

In addition to his religious duties, the voorlezer often conducted a school, under the jurisdiction of the church, in which elementary reading, writing, arithmetic and religious catechism were taught. In most communities, the voorlezer's responsibilities were augmented by his roles as county clerk, court messenger and public scrivener.

Although the office of Voorlezer was common in most communities in 17th century Holland, its significance was far greater in the New World than the Old:

From the Collegiate Church of New York City to the small churches of Staten Island, Brooklyn, Bergen, Tappen, Schenectady and others, the figure of the voorlezer fills the background of their history-teaching,

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Loring McMillen, "The Story of the Voorlezer's House," (Staten Island Historical Society, Richmond, New York, 1951).
 _____, "The Voorlezer," (reprinted from the Staten Island Historian, vol. VIII, no. 3, July, 1946).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 8	5 7 2 1 2 0	4 4 1 9 1 3 6 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION Beginning at a point on the westerly curb of Arthur Kill Road at its intersection with Center Street, procede thence in a south-westerly direction along the curb line of Arthur Kill Road 60' to a point; procede thence in a northwesterly direction 60' to a point; continuing thence in a northeasterly direction in a line approximately parallel to Arthur Kill Road 60' to a point; thence in a southeasterly direction 60' to Arthur Kill Road. The Voorlezer's House is recently owned by the Staten Island Historical Society.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE Richard Greenwood, Historian, Landmark Review Task Force

ORGANIZATION Historic Sites Survey

DATE 7/17/75

STREET & NUMBER 1100 L. Street

TELEPHONE 202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN Washington

STATE D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS Designated: Nov. 5, 1961
 NATIONAL _____ STATE _____ LOCAL _____ date

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Debra J. ...
 Boundary Certified
James S. ...
 11/16/77

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Richard Greenwood

DATE

7/15/77

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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catechizing, leading the church singing and reading, keeping the vital records; seldom named, seldom praised, yet together with the minister preserving the continuity of the Reformed Dutch Church as well as the cultural well being of the community.¹

The church records of the Dutch Reformed Church indicate that from the year of the Voorlezer's House construction, circa 1695, to the year of its sale to the County Clerk in 1701, this building at Richmondtown, then Coccles Town, was the only place of worship for that denomination on Staten Island. As there was no minister on the Island either, the voorlezer conducted all of the church services within his power. Analysis of the same church records has revealed as well that for a period of time, probably 1696 to 1700, the office of voorlezer in Coccles Town was filled by Hendrick Kroesen, born circa 1666, the son of Garret Crusen, who was an early settler of Brooklyn in the New Netherlands.

In 1701, concurrent with the sale of the Voorlezer's House, the Dutch Church removed to the north shore of the Island, to the present site of Port Richmond, where the majority of the congregation then had their homes.

The Voorlezer's House continued to be used as a private residence until 1939, when it was acquired by the Staten Island Historical Society. The structure has served as the initial property in the present restoration of Richmondtown by the Staten Island Historical Society which is designed to present the evolution of an American village through the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries.

¹. Loring McMillen, The Voorlezer:
(Reprinted from the Staten Island Historian, vol. VIII, No. 3; July, 1946),
pp. 2-3.