The New York Times

January 1, 2014

Letter Tied to Fight for Independence Is Found in Museum's Attic

By JAMES BARRON

It was lying in a drawer in the attic, a 12-page document that was not just forgotten but misfiled. Somehow it had made its way into a folder with colonial-era doctor's bills that someone in the 1970s decreed was worthless and should be thrown away.

Luckily, no one did. For when Emilie Gruchow opened the folder last summer and separated it from the doctor's bills, she recognized it as a one-of-a-kind document.

Ms. Gruchow, an archivist at the Morris-Jumel Mansion, was an intern at the museum in Upper Manhattan when she made her discovery. The mansion served as George Washington's headquarters during the Revolutionary War. She realized the document was the draft of an urgent plea for reconciliation from the Continental Congress. It was addressed to the people of Britain, not King George III and his government, and began by mentioning "the tender ties which bind us to each other" and "the glorious achievements of our common ancestors."

That was followed by a long list of complaints about the infringement of colonists' rights, the restrictions on trade and the "rigorous acts of oppression which are daily exercised in the Town of Boston."

"That once populous, flourishing, commercial Town is now Garrisoned by an army sent not to protect, but to enslave its inhabitants," the document said.

Until Ms. Gruchow found it, only the final, printed version from July 1775 had been known to exist. She consulted with Michael D. Hattem, a teaching fellow and research assistant on The Papers of Benjamin Franklin at Yale. He analyzed the handwriting on the yellowed pages of the manuscript and did textual analysis that led to an unexpected conclusion: The document was written by Robert R. Livingston, a prominent New York jurist who had been on the fence about whether to support independence for the colonies.

The following year, Congress tapped Livingston to draft the Declaration of Independence along with Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Roger Sherman. Livingston went on to swear in Washington as the first president. Other historians who have reviewed the document Ms. Gruchow found say her discovery explains why he was chosen. It could also change the perception of Livingston's role in the push for independence because it had always been assumed that the document at the mansion was the work of another prominent colonial figure, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia.

Now the museum's director and trustees have decided to sell the document at auction. The money it brings will go toward the mansion's long-term survival. The sale, being handled by Keno Auctions in Manhattan, is scheduled for Jan. 26. The estimated selling price is $100,000 to $400,000.

Carol S. Ward, the museum's director, said the museum would put the money in an endowment. "We want to have a nest egg," she said.

But she said some of the money would go toward a $350,000 exterior restoration, the first since 1991.

"We don't want to put a Band-Aid and just paint the house again," Ms. Ward said. "That means restoring the woodwork, making sure the proper sealants are in place, then painting. It's a top-to-bottom face-lift, but the exterior needs to come first. We don't want to start any interior restoration projects until the outside is squared away."

The museum conducted a fund-raising campaign on the website Indiegogo.com that raised about $25,000, she said. The museum has an annual budget of about $250,000 and ran a deficit of $30,000 in its last fiscal year, she said, adding that she expected to break even in the current fiscal year by raising admission charges for school tours and prices in the gift shop.

Ms. Ward said the museum decided to sell the manuscript after thinking about "how the document is best served."

"If it's the only existing version of the draft of this letter," she said, "it really needs to be seen by the general public and needs to be in a place like the National Archives or the Library of Congress. We'll keep a facsimile, but as a museum professional, I recognize this is so important to the founding of the country that it needs to be in a place where the country can see it."

By the time the document reached London, George III had already issued a proclamation declaring the colonies to be in rebellion and urging official repression. It is not clear whether he knew about it. Ms. Gruchow said it is believed he did not read the document in 1775 and may never have read it.

It was not widely distributed in the colonies, but she said it found an audience. James Madison raved about it shortly after it was printed — Leigh Keno, the founder and president of the auction house, said Madison wondered who had written it — and Abigail Adams also mentioned it after John Adams sent it to her.

Ms. Gruchow said it was not clear how the document had come to be at the mansion or even how long it had been there. Livingston was at the house while serving as Washington's liaison to colonial

lawmakers. In the early 19th century, Livingston worked on details of the Louisiana Purchase with Aaron Burr, who later lived at the mansion. But she said it probably arrived among papers that were donated between 1903 and 1913, when it was first mentioned in the museum's records.

At first glance, she said, "I thought it was a really good handwritten copy from the early 20th century that someone had aged really well."

"Then it dawned on me that this looks like 250-year-old paper," she added. "I started calling my co-workers and saying, 'Am I seeing what I think I'm seeing?'"

The New York Times

December 31, 2013

War Shelters, Short-Lived Yet Living On

By ALASTAIR GORDON

Camp Evans, a decommissioned Army base in Wall Township, N.J., is frozen in midcentury, its brick administration buildings and boarded-up Quonset huts on hold from World War II. Fred Carl, 59, a former high school science teacher and the unofficial keeper of the site, leads a visitor to other throwbacks from that era: a collection of corrugated metal houses with porthole windows and conical roofs. They look like alien habitations dropped from the sky.

These are the only known surviving examples of the Dymaxion Deployment Units that R. Buckminster Fuller designed as an answer to wartime housing needs. Conceived as low-cost, mass-produced shelters that could comfortably accommodate a family of four, the units, known as D.D.U.s, were manufactured in the early 1940s and distributed to military bases around the world. But the war that inspired them would eventually put them out of production.

For a long time, it seemed that the D.D.U.s had disappeared from the earth, but they are not quite extinct, and Mr. Carl, along with local politicians, preservationists and sympathetic citizens, can be thanked for that. If the Army had had its way with Camp Evans, he said, "this would all have been demolished."

The idea for the D.D.U.s came to Fuller in November 1940 while he was driving through the Midwest with a friend, the novelist Christopher Morley. The men were on a quixotic hunt for lost letters written by Edgar Allan Poe. En route, Fuller became fascinated with metal grain bins lining the Illinois roadsides. He discovered that they were made by the Butler Manufacturing Company of Kansas City, Mo.

Europe was at war, and the newspapers were filled with stories about Blitz-ravaged London. Fuller began to envision how the utilitarian structures might be converted into emergency housing. His idea was to transform Butler's galvanized steel containers ("Safe from fire, rats, weather and waste," their slogan promised) so they could be shipped anywhere in the world and assembled quickly as bombproof shelters.

Their usefulness would not end there. In peacetime, Fuller proposed, they could be sold as low-cost vacation bungalows for civilians. Butler's early advertising campaign showed a D.D.U. planted in the

woods with collapsible lounge chairs near the door; inside, a family gathered around a kidney-shaped coffee table.

By April 1941, the first D.D.U. prototype was off the Butler assembly line, and Fuller was presenting it to the Division of Defense Housing Coordination in Washington. Erected along the Potomac River, the structure was 12 feet high and 20 feet in diameter, with 10 porthole windows and 15 small skylights. Walter Sanders, an architect, agreed to "test dwell" the unit for several days with his wife.

As advertised, the unit cost $1,250 and came complete with lightweight furnishings and appliances from Montgomery Ward, including a kerosene-powered icebox and stove. Inside, the industrial rawness was softened with drapes over the portholes and a fireproof curtain weighted with tire chains designed to divide the interior into four pie-shaped rooms. Air circulated through an adjustable ventilator in the roof, and the floors were made from Masonite one-eighth of an inch thick.

Architectural Forum called the house a "dressed-up adaptation of the lowly grain bin" but praised its reasonable cost and easy assembly (a person could put a unit together in less than a day).

In October 1941, a D.D.U. was installed in the Museum of Modern Art's sculpture garden. "While not proof against a direct hit, its circular corrugated surfaces deflect bomb fragments or flying debris," stated the news release for the exhibition. The release quoted Fuller's observation that a round house was easier to camouflage from air attacks: "It coincides with nature-forms such as trees and hillocks," he said. Less than two months later, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, and the United States entered the war.

Because Butler's early records no longer exist, it is uncertain exactly how many D.D.U.s were manufactured in the end. Historians believe there may have been 100 or more. The Army Signal Corps bought a number of the units and shipped them to Mediterranean, Persian Gulf and Pacific bases, where they housed pilots, radar crews and aviation mechanics.

But soon after the war began, the government started to ration metal, and production of the D.D.U.s stopped. Fuller's dream of affordable, mass-produced shelter was halted, though only temporarily; he soon started to work on the Dymaxion Living Machine (otherwise known as Wichita House), a circular, aluminum-clad house made by the Beech Aircraft factory in Wichita, Kan.

At some time between 1941 and 1943, about 20 D.D.U.s found their way to Camp Evans, a 243-acre property that had originally been the site of a trans-Atlantic receiving station built by the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America. Later, the site was used by the military for World War I-era communications, and in 1941 it was developed for the Signal Corps's radar research program. Several important inventions came out of it, including the SCR-270 radar system, which detected Japanese aircraft over Opana Point, Hawaii, the morning of the Pearl Harbor attack.

Fred Carl knew little of this history when he bought a property in 1985 that bordered the western side of Camp Evans. But by the time the base closed, in 1993, he had learned enough to marshal resistance

to the Army's plan to demolish everything on it and sell the land. He started to speak up at public hearings.

Much of his interest centered on the wireless receiving station near the entrance to the base, known as the Marconi Hotel. Neither he nor anyone else knew what the D.D.U.s were in 1994, when he first gained access to Camp Evans. And it was not until 1996, when a historic resources study sponsored by the Defense Department was completed, that their provenance became clear. "I'd heard of Buckminster Fuller because I used to teach my students about his geodesic dome," Mr. Carl said. Still, the Army was intent on leveling the site.

"We started asking a lot of questions," said Elizabeth Merritt, deputy general counsel at the National Trust for Historic Preservation, who worked with Mr. Carl and others to protect the base. "We reminded the Army of their obligation to comply with federal historic preservation laws, and the next thing we knew they backed off."

On April 1, 2004, the military agreed to transfer 37 acres of Camp Evans, including 16 buildings, to Wall Township and Monmouth County. The site currently operates under the stewardship of Mr. Carl and other volunteers, who in 1998 established a nonprofit organization called InfoAge. They turned the Marconi Hotel into a museum, with displays of the different kinds of radar developed at Camp Evans. "It's an extraordinary success story," Ms. Merritt said.

Today, there are 12 Dymaxion units in varying states of decay around the compound. Some are banged up and rusting, with ragweed and poison ivy growing from crevices. Here and there you can see the original steel showing through. Others appear well preserved, sitting on circular concrete slabs, with their original Plexiglas in-fills now milky white and fissured like snowflakes.

As far as Mr. Carl can tell, the Camp Evans D.D.U.s were never used for human shelter, but were adapted as protected areas for workers handling risky materials. (A vintage photograph he found shows a Camp Evans worker in one of the units pouring molten aluminum.) Mr. Carl and his associates cleaned up some of the interiors and painted the exterior walls of seven D.D.U.s with a rustproof paint, a flat Army beige that he said was chosen to match original paint chips.

"We followed Department of the Interior guidelines, and it called for protecting the structures from further erosion," he said. "We were contractually obliged to hold to their standards."

And though there are contrary opinions about the best way to preserve the units, experts generally agree that the galvanized metal has to be protected in some fashion. Among them is John Warren, who has overseen the restoration of numerous Fuller artifacts, including the 50-foot-diameter Fly's Eye dome that was installed in front of Central Station in Amsterdam last month.

For Halloween, Mr. Carl and his associates tricked out some of the D.D.U.s for a party. They are also working on a plan to turn them into low-rent studios for artists. One local artist, Patricia Arroyo, has already converted a unit for that purpose. She comes in three or four times a week, depending on the weather, and works on paintings based on her childhood memories of nearby Asbury Park, N.J. Her

brother made a wood door for the entry, and she has hung the walls with brightly colored fabrics recycled from an arts festival she attended. "It's a little chilly right now, but it's wonderful," she said. "I have two electric heaters set up."

Several institutions and individuals have expressed interest in acquiring Camp Evans D.D.U.s. "They're important artifacts," said Marc Greuther, chief curator of the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich., who hopes to exhibit one of the units with Fuller's Wichita House, which is already in the collection.

"Fuller had this sense that industrialization had to benefit everyone, and he understood the poetics of production," Mr. Greuther added. "Nobody was doing that then. Fuller was trying to make everything work."