

CHS Landmark: 18 Hollow Rd Clinton Landmarks

by Craig Marshall



John DeWitt house, c. 1773

One of Clinton's earliest business centers was owned and operated by John DeWitt (1752-1808) at the intersection of Hollow Road and Creek Road. For more than twenty-five years, he operated a sawmill and large gristmill (c. 1775) at this site, and ran a general store ("Toad Hall") in this hamlet known as Frost Mills. About 1773, he built his first residence with nine slaves. This was a small house of somewhat primitive character, and a few years later he added another complete house across the north gable of the original, and the two parts still contain some details of their respective dates of erection. In 1855, owner John LeRoy added a wing to the east of the main part, as shown in the foreground of the photograph above. The early porch of the original home is published on the cover of "Dutch Houses in the Hudson Valley Before 1776." The early doorway is featured in "Doorways of America". In the 1920s, the ceilings were copied by the Brooklyn museum. A barn of the revolutionary era still stands on Hollow Road across from the house. Architecturally, the house successfully combines a number of diverse elements: gable-roofed dormers, a single "eyebrow" window on the east wing,

and a substantial change in the floor levels between that wing and the main section. The historic interior includes the original hearthstone fireplace, and the home has four fireplaces in all. It is situated on 12 acres of land.

Further insight into the house and property is obtained in an 1802 advertisement that John placed in the Poughkeepsie Journal when he wished to sell his house, mills, and store. Extracts from the ad include:

"...a large convenient and well furnished Dwelling House, one story and an half high, containing three large and three small rooms on the first and four on the second floor..." "...three other Dwelling Houses, one of which...has always been occupied by the sawyer." "Also a Grist Mill, with two run of stones....four stories high, and has room for several thousand bushels of grain....A Saw Mill is on the same stream..."

"...consisting of a farm of about 350 acres of good land, under excellent cultivation..." "...on said farm (is) a large orchard of bearing apple trees, chiefly grafted, with assorted summer and winter fruit. Also, a variety of the finest kinds of Pear, Peach, Plumb and other

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fruit trees..." Because of its historical significance, the home received a N.Y.S. historical plaque in 1938, and has been featured in "Landmarks of Dutchess Co. 1683-1867". In 1990, the Clinton Historical Society awarded its Landmarks plaque to current owners Marsha and Howard Zipser who have owned the property for 27 years.

John DeWitt was more than a well-known businessman. He was an active patriot and fought in the Revolutionary War, was a member of the State Assembly for several years, and served as Dutchess Co. Sheriff for two terms. He was also one of the seven county delegates who voted on ratification of the Constitution in 1788. Actually, he was elected as a delegate against ratification, but changed his vote in favor after he and other delegates received assurance that 10 amendments would be added to the Constitution. These amendments are called the Bill of Rights.

This article from M/A/M 2007 CHS newsletter