

# Willow Lane Farmhouse Receives Landmark Designation

by Paul and Lisa Thomas

The modest cluster of farm buildings we named Rusty Tractor Farm has hugged the side of this quiet, one-lane road since the first half of the 19th century. Willow Lane is home to several old farmhouses with large acreage, and it appears that Rusty Tractor Farm was cut from one of these larger properties sometime between 1830 and 1840.

The property was originally part of a working farm owned by Michael J. Maybee. A Michael Maybee (also spelled Mabie and Maybe) first appears as a Clinton resident in the census of 1840 and he and his family (wife Mary and children Jerusha, Clinton, Sylvester and Margaret) are also shown in the 1850 census. Their adult son Michael J. Maybee, born in 1824, also appears in the 1850 census and is listed as a laborer with the Wing family. The Wings owned several nearby properties at the time. By 1860, Michael Maybee (Senior) and his remaining family had moved to Rhinebeck leaving Michael J. Maybee residing in Clinton with his Irish wife Mary and their three-year-old daughter Sarah.

Michael and Mary remained in Clinton for another 38 years until they died in 1898. The house appears on the Clinton Township Map of 1876 with the name Maybee. Sarah married into the Nelson family and died in 1901. All are buried in Friend's Upton Lake Cemetery, where their gravestones may be seen today.

It appears that the property was used by various owners as a farm with animals into the 1990s. The property is ringed by rubblestone stone walls and more recent wire fencing. In 2002 the house was bought by a producer of cooking shows for the Food Network and used as the set for *Semi-Homemade with Sandra Lee* until legal issues forced him to cease and desist. We were happy to benefit from this untidy legal situation, and purchased the property in 2004.

The original structure of the main house appears to have once been a barn itself, perhaps an outbuilding for one of

the larger farms on the road and converted to living quarters. The main structure was built into the side of a slope reflecting the shallow layer of bedrock in the area. Several older stone



*The Thomas house on Willow Lane, part of Rusty Tractor Farm*



foundations, now serving as garden terraces, are adjacent to the house and may have been additional barns or outbuildings. The outhouse foundation also remains, now used as an outdoor fire pit. The original house was only two rooms and still retains the post and beams with which it was constructed. Several of these beams have markings indicating the order in which they were to be attached to the posts.

As with most early farmhouses, additions were made to the house many times to increase its size and incorporate new amenities like plumbing and an indoor kitchen. What is now the basement housing modern mechanicals was once a kitchen and root cellar, with access from the outside only.

A "real" kitchen was added to the back of the house, probably in the early 20th century, and enlarged and renovated several times since. Throughout the house are pieces of history mixed with modern updates. Old floor boards abut new sheetrock walls, and new windows sit happily in original beam framing and plaster. In an effort to retain the original aesthetic of the house's exterior, we have restored damaged wood trim and siding, replaced damaged windows, and added a standing-seam metal roof. Similar work has been done to the outbuildings.

Several owners of the property must have spent a great deal of time and money on landscaping. The house is surrounded by deep perennial beds and old plantings of lilac, forsythia and hydrangea. A large, stately apple tree is the focal point of the back yard, and we have added apple, pear, nectarine, peach, and cherry trees to the property. A fenced kitchen garden and an herb garden and patio have also been added. Rusty Tractor Farm is no longer a working farm, but its history can be seen and felt in the old chestnut posts and beams, the stone walls encircling the fields, and the colorful chickens running around the yard. ☺