

Newsletter

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

Volume 7, Number 3

Fall 2010

The Johannes Decker Farm by Nanno Bienstock

The Johannes Decker farm in the Shawangunk Valley of Ulster County survives in an agricultural setting. This early farmstead consists of a stone house, a wooden barn and a carriage house built in the 18th century and a wooden icehouse built in the early 19th century. Its location on the alluvial flats of the Shawangunk Kill is typical of many sites settled by the Dutch, who followed the watercourses in pursuit of the richest land.

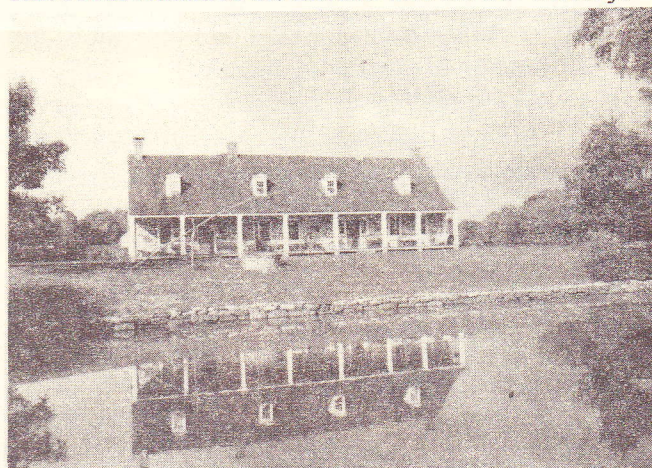
Among the Dutch immigrants who came to Kingston was the progenitor of the Deckers, Cornelius Janse Brewerson - later called Decker, (1670-1702). His name appears on the Van Camp patent of 1694 along with five other early settlers who were granted a tract of land in the Shawangunk Valley. It was his son, Johannes Cornelius Decker (1696-1742), who began the stone house in Shawangunk.

The Decker House consists of four stone sections that date from the 1720s to 1780s. The first section, originally a one-room house, was later enclosed on three sides by the later additions. Its outline can be traced as seams in masonry beneath the porch. Directly above the front door (later converted to a window) is a stone carved with the initials ICD for Jacobus Cornelius Decker. The stone carries no date, but Cornelius' first marriage in 1720 or second marriage in 1726 might have provided impetus to build the house.

The single room of the first house was finished with plaster walls and an open Dutch-style fireplace with a hood over the hearth without jambs or sidewalls. Interior doors on the ground floor were surmounted by molded cornices that resemble those on kasten, the great cupboards favored by the Dutch. This minor touch of refinement is qualified by a detail that reveals a more primitive way of life; a diagonal cut in a beam made to brace a ladder for access to the garret. The garret above contains a rare survival, shingles from the first roof that had corners clipped in imitation of tile roofs in Holland. The date 1868 was scratched into the garret's free-standing chimney when it was reduced in

size, probably the date that the Dutch-style chimney was replaced in the room below.

The date of the next addition to the west is not known, but certainly more space was needed soon, for by the time Johannes Cornelius Decker died in 1742, he had produced eight surviving children. Moreover, this second room like the first initially was built with a jambless fireplace, an early feature. In the first decades of the 18th century, the Dutch started to abandon their open fireplaces for fireplaces enclosed with side walls that were introduced by the English, which were more efficient and less drafty. Probably by mid-century the current enclosed fireplace with a bake oven had taken the place of the earlier fireplace in the second section. This room remained the kitchen into the 20th century.



The sequence of the next two additions is unclear, but both were built in the post-revolutionary era and are attributed to Johannes Cornelius Decker's eldest son, Cornelius Decker (1732-1812). The expansion to the east of the first room has a stone in the gable carved with the initials CD and the date 1787. At the same time the original front door in the first room was walled up, and its paneled double door moved to the new hall and dressed up with rudimentary sidelights. By this time houses were becoming brighter. This new addition was equipped with large windows that had sliding sash containing 12-over-12 panes. To update the façade, the windows all along the south front of the
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Letter from the Co-Presidents

Dear Members and Friends,

On September 18, Carolyn and I hosted tours at the **Persen House** in Kingston where we were proud to represent the Shawangunk/Gardiner Historical Society. Huge thanks to **Hal and Mary Lou VanAken** for Hal's great Power Point presentation of our local area throughout the day. Thanks also to **Mary Wright** and **Freda Fenn** for the Dubois artifacts and photo-albums that were displayed and explained during the day. As we guided touring guests through the house, we learned more about this tremendous preservation project ourselves. It was a great day!

Carolyn and Stewart Crowell

(continued from page one) first two sections were replaced with large sash windows to match. In the 1970s paneling with cabinets from the Daniel Deyo-Ronk house built at Ireland Corners in 1745 was installed against the fireplace wall, reworked to fit the space. In the early 19th century the dormer windows and the long porch were added.

The date of the rear addition to the north is in doubt, although surely it too was built by Cornelius Decker. Its rubble masonry exhibits less care and the rooms are smaller and lower. It may have been built as slave quarters, for census record shows that by 1790 Cornelius owned ten slaves. In the 1930s during the first wave of Colonial Revival, this back wing was dressed up by a previous owner, Edward B. Edwards, who installed fine early paneling from elsewhere and inserted bluestone sills over the windows.

Horses were stabled on one side of the threshing floor and cattle on the other. The large doors could accommodate a loaded hay wagon. The date 1750 is carved into one of the piers.

Early agriculture focused on self-sufficiency, but after the Revolutionary War, the valleys east of the Shawangunk Mountains began to shift to cash crops. Butter, cheese and grains could be transported down the Hudson River to the city markets. At some time after the end of the 18th century, the barn was enlarged for greater hay storage. The piers were extended to lift the roof, and the sidewalls were raised to meet the change in the pitch. Eventually one of the great anchor beams was dropped to a lower level to accommodate stanchions for cows in the rear of the barn.

The house and its dependencies are on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Event Highlights

On June 2, members of the Historical Society enjoyed a wonderful **summer picnic potluck** on the grounds of the **Andries DuBois House**. The weather cooperated and the event confirmed that the DuBois House lawn has potential for hosting many more pleasant events and benefits.

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Members of the Historical Society joined the **Plattekill Historical Society** on an excursion to the **Ulster County Records Center in Kingston** on Saturday June 19 where they were given a special tour by County Clerk Nina Postupack. Later that day, the group toured the **Senate House State Historic Site**.

* * * *

Fifth Annual Garden Tour. This event took place on Saturday, June 26 under the leadership of **Freda Fenn** and a dedicated group of volunteers. Participants visited the lovely gardens of Marilyn & Tony Baldo, Metsie & John Schmoll, Veronica & Ronald Utten, Kim & Frank Kosteczko's Angels at Garden Gate, and Kathy & Brad Goulden. Visitors toured the historic Andries DuBois House as well. The combination of garden tour ticket sales, raffle, plant, and bake sale benefitted the on-going restoration fund for the DuBois House by over \$1700.

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This year's **Community Yard Sale** took place on July 24 at Popp's Park. **Doris Callan** and volunteers oversaw an event that through hard work and an enthusiastic response from the public raised \$1500 for the DuBois House restoration fund. An added feature was antique appraisals: over 28 items were brought in to be appraised by Flannery's Auction Services from Pine Bush.

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On September 1, **Fritz Meier** celebrated the March publication of his Images of America book, "Around Crawford," with a presentation at the Wallkill Reformed Church. The township of Crawford includes Pine Bush, Bullville, Thompson Ridge, and Searsville.

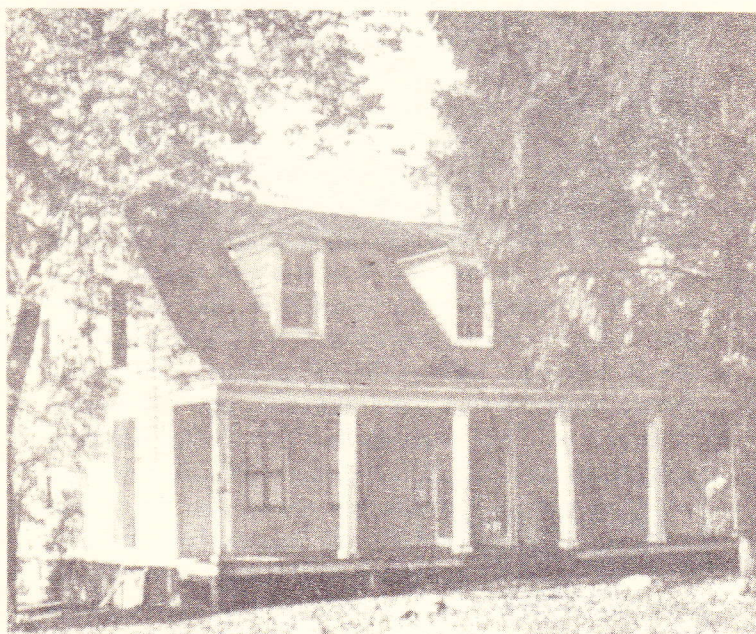
Meier entertained the audience with photos from the book, along with fascinating interviews of relatives and friends of the early families of Crawford. He quoted

an early historian of Orange County in 1846, who said, "This must be done now or never – tomorrow they are lost forever."

Photographs included churches, recreation areas, one-room schoolhouses, historic homes and their families, businesses such as the Borden factory, a distillery, fire stations, local police departments, the railroad, an army base in Bullville, sawmills, and other places of interest.

* * * *

Shawangunk Heaths took place on May 5 at the Wallkill Reformed Church. **Harold VanAiken & Al White** presented a program based on the classic history of Shawangunk, remembered by Fred Mentz, as told to Vera Seely, and originally published in the Citizen Herald. Mentz's book contains information on local houses that date back to the 1700's and 1800's. VanAiken and White showed slides of the homes of Cornelius Hasbrouck (John G. Borden House), the Phinneys (Cornelius Bruyn House), Andries DuBois, Simon P. DuBois, Gordon Hulse, the Ostrandors, Dr. Whary Home, Dr. James Graham, the Lippencotts, and the Walstein Childs. These photographs may be viewed on the web site: Historical Society of Shawangunk and Gardiner. In addition to updates by VanAiken and White, discussion was enlivened by comments from the large audience with personal knowledge of the houses and their families.



The Phinney Home (Cornelius Bruyn House) in 1965

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner Fall Programs

Wednesday, October 6 – 7:30 p.m.

Wes & Barbara Gottlock will present a digital slide show on their book, “**Lost Towns of the Hudson Valley,**” at the Wallkill Town Hall.

Wednesday, November 3 – 7:30 p.m..

Marc Fried and his latest book on “**Lake Maratanza, the Evans Patent, and the Search for Dongan’s Pond,**” at the Wallkill Town Hall.

SAVE THE DATE: Sat. November 13
(snow date, Sun. Nov.14) at the Wallkill Town Hall

A Special Winter Tea Fundraiser
2-4 p.m. Tickets: \$15

Wednesday, Dec. 1 - 6 p.m.
Pot Luck Christmas Dinner
at Wallkill Town Hall

To our members: the Historical Society programs and newsletter depend on the payment of your dues!

Individual: \$20	Business: \$50
Family \$30	Patron: \$100
Supporting: \$50	Benefactor: \$250

Checks payable: Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner. P.O. Box 570, Wallkill, NY 12589

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