

1600 - 6a

From: Steven Mann <smann2@hvc.rr.com>  
To: Nancy Kelly, Wint Aldrich  
Subject: The Libby Townsend House -- An important gem!  
Date: Apr 9, 2006 8:49 AM

I went yesterday to meet Dr. & Mrs. Gurland who bought Libby Townsend's house on Willow Brook Drive off of Route 9 in Red Hook. They have been to the Museum and QRC and are very impressed with what we are doing. They were fascinated by the stenciling and other special attributes of the Quitman House. They are also very interested in the Palatine House. I have encouraged them to join Egbert Benson. They are going to be on the DCHS silver ribbon tour. It took me 1 1/2 hours to go through the house, and I did not see every room. I was there from 1:45-4 PM.

They have had experts like Rod Blackburn, retired Director of the Albany Institute of History and Art, at the house. Dr. Blackburn was absolutely fascinated. He dates the house c 1760, and feels it might be even older. He was completely amazed by the stairs leading up to the bedrooms. He told them that they were one of the most beautiful pair of stairs he had ever seen in a house of that age. They are in terrific condition. You can see in the one part of the house the old main support as to where the original house ended. They believe the addition was put on c 1790. One special trait of the house is an incredibly charming small beehive oven and the gentleman's fireplace which is now part of the kitchen fireplace. When going in the basement one can see the back of the oven projecting out. As well, there is a small wall in the basement which also helps to delineate the original footplan. They have repaired walls, replastered, and had a gentleman who was able to reconstruct the old plaster method so that it is quite similar to the original plaster that was not disturbed when taking out all the cabinets and other things. In addition, the fireplaces have been repointed. When doing the work, the craftsman had to pipe in the plaster using something like a pastry chef bag. They called experts in New York City, Albany, and throughout the Northeast in planning the work. After eight years, they are nearly done.

What they have done to Libby's house is absolutely incredible. They have done the impossible, restoring the house to 90 percent of its original. The one thing they did was add a dormer in one room upstairs so that from the road the house is more balanced. Other than that, not much change on the outside except new roof and paint. The floor boards upstairs, which are about a 10-12" across, even have the old red paint. The person Libs bought from in 1951, Mr. Coffyn from NYC, had put in built in cabinets in the front rooms which distracted from its originality and had put up paneling which they have taken down. In addition, when you walk in, they took down a faux wall and you can now see the original front of the house, all in stone, which has been enclosed with a front porch and bar for at least 60 years. That they left on because of prudency for winter weather.

In addition, Libs left them a lovely collection of wrought iron, including swing arms in the fireplaces, pots and ladles and forks, and gorgeous andirons. In addition, they purchased from Andy who was at the Antique Center Annex on E. Market St. a beautiful bench which had been part of Libs' antiques collection and that has been brought back to the house and put in the same spot as she had it. They have a lovely collection of European and American antiques and art which compliment the house well. As a matter of fact, they said Libs had given them a lot of verbal information and guidance about the house and that her input was very helpful.

They would like to know more about that house. I believe that I heard it said that this house was associated with the early Palatine architecture. They would like to know more, and would be very grateful for our help. They have come to the conclusion that the house might have been built by a Dutchman as inside it has a lot of those features. The Oakleigh Cookingham house as you know was the house built by the Martin son, while their house is the Martin father. They would like to get together with you, Wint, me, and Mr. Cookingham who has a lot of original documents related to both properties and see what we can come up with. In addition, they told me that the landscaping to the rear of the house was done c 1940s by the same woman who worked on landscaping the Taconic Parkway. Of particular note is the beautifully walled garden around the back of the house and the lovely pond beyond, with the charming stables that Libby had built for her daughters. They are done in a style which actually works very well with the house.

They would also, now that they are done, like to put the house on the National Register and need some guidance as to how that process would begin. That might be something for Marilyn to help them with if we can't. They feel that they are complete with any external construction and when I explained some of the limitations on construction with such a house on the Register, they were very agreeable and thought they could live with those limitations.

They will be in London 5/8-29. Would it be possible to meet with them some time after the Silver Ribbon Tour on June 10 in order to try to put these pieces together? Given that Red Hook was part of Rhinebeck Precinct, I think the Museum has a stake in this, as would the Egbert Benson Society. I wonder if the land was part of Hoffman's. In exploring the land, Dr. Gurland has a hypothesis that the flow of the Saw Kill, which runs through their land, has changed greatly over the years. In some places he has seen where it has carved out quite differently from what he has seen on Oakleigh's maps/deeds. He feels also that the house once had a terrific view of the Catskill escarpment before all the trees grew in, which given other houses in that area which are closer to Tivoli, I would think is probably correct.

An interesting aside is the fact that they know Mr. Jennerett, they know Mike Pelletier, Mr. J's restoration expert and he, his wife, and mother-in-law in particular are close friends of ours, and they know Kathy Hammer from the Ferncliff Casino. For

people who have been here such a short time, they certainly have made the rounds! They are extremely interested in Hudson Valley/Dutchess County history and want to become supportive of the community. I think it would be worth our while to lend some assistance.

Could the both of you be able to give me some dates on the weekends preferably when they are definitely in the country so that we could get together and see what we can come up with? I think it would be an effort well worth the time. Many thanks!