

Date stone embedded above the doorway of the the Klock family home.

HISTORIC FORT KLOCK

LISA EVANS EXAMINES A LARGE PIECE OF HISTORY IN A SMALL-TOWN SETTING IN THE MOHAWK VALLEY OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

All photos courtesy of author

The Mohawk Valley of Central New York is a quiet area consisting of sleepy villages, small town nuances and down to earth people. It is also an area of the country that is drenched in history and sometimes overlooked and unappreciated for that significance, except to those who know where to look. Let's take a journey back a few hundred years, and visit our little corner of the world, when it was a hotbed of colonial activity.

LOCATION AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Mohawk River Valley was an area in Colonial America that was rich in agriculture, due to its proximity to the Mohawk River. There were many Native Americans who lived in this stretch of land, along

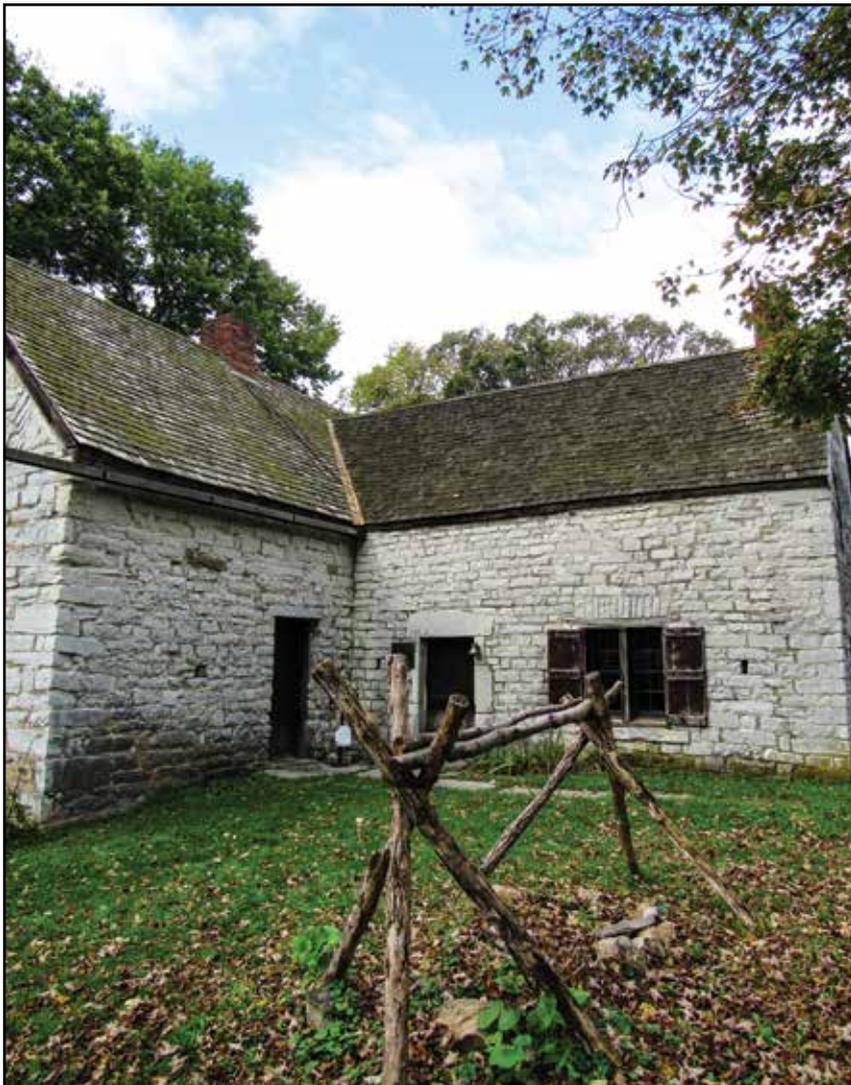
with frontier settlements of people from Europe coming to the Thirteen Colonies in search of freedom and a better life. The German Palatines were one such group, and many of them settled in the

Mohawk Valley area. There is much evidence of their influence in the area; in addition to Fort Klock, there are other nearby historical locations such as Old Palatine Church, Nellis Tavern, Stone Arabia Church just to name a few.

One traveler who made his way to the Mohawk Valley was Johannes Klock. Klock built his fortified homestead just east of the village of present-day St. Johnsville. Johannes had descended from a simple peasant family whose ancestor had rescued the daughter of a Baron and married her, hundreds of years before his birth. This affiliation connected the Klock family to a Baronial family of Europe and helped them achieve a mode of success which might not have been available to them otherwise.

Johannes built his homestead in 1750 as a frontier residence and trading post, to deal with the local Native Americans. The house also provided refuge for other settlers in the area who sought shelter from local raiders. Between 1778 and 1782, much of the area was ruined by repeated raids by Indians and Loyalists, who supported Britain before and during the Revolutionary War. Many houses, barns and crops were burned during these attacks. Klock himself was a member of the local militia and fought at the Battle of Oriskany. In 1780, the fight came much closer to home – just a couple of miles west of his home.

In the late afternoon of 19 October 1780, the Battle of Klock's Field ensued. A British detachment, including seasoned British soldiers, Indians and Colonial loyalists arrived. After decimating Stone Arabia just a few miles away, this band continued raiding homesteads along the Mohawk River.



The homestead at the Fort Klock historic site in the Mohawk Valley in Central New York.



The home that Johannes Klock built for his family in 1750.

The Battle of Klock's Field took place between this band supporting Britain and the Albany County Militia. Unlike Stone Arabia, this battle was won by the colonial militia who forced the retreat of the British and other soldiers.

Sadly, by 1781, much of the Mohawk Valley had been raided and their crops burned. Fort Klock survived and allowed the remaining residents still living in the area to survive and has remained much intact to this day. It was not affected in future conflicts – the French/Indian War and the Civil War – due much in part to the Klock family connections. The homestead remained in the Klock family until the 1950s. It was operated mostly as a dairy farm for many, many years. However, in the 1930s, the family was unable to sustain farming on the land and moved to the village of St. Johnsville. The house fell into grave disrepair.

The last direct descendent of Johannes Klock died in 1957. His widow then deeded the property to a local group intent on restoration. This group eventually became the Fort Klock Historic Restoration, who still owns it today. In 1973, Fort Klock was designated as a National Historic Landmark.

FORT KLOCK HOMESTEAD

The Fort Klock homestead is a remarkable study of a colonial fortified home. On the property is the house itself, the cheese house, the one room schoolhouse, an Old Dutch Barn and a working blacksmith shop. There are other out buildings here as well, but they are not available to the public.

The house, c. 1750, lies between the Mohawk River and the King's Highway (also referred to as the Mohawk Turnpike) and is built using 2 feet of stone walls. There are numerous loopholes in the

construction of the walls; these were used by defenders to shoot from the inside of the house during a battle. The house is an L shape, with living space and kitchen on the main floor and sleeping areas in the attic. The cellar floor is built using stones from the nearby Mohawk River. There are two chambers in the cellar – one used for storage and the other has a natural spring – still visible and bubbling. This spring always supplied the family with fresh water, without ever having to leave the house.

The front of the house faces the River. In colonial times, this would've allowed travelers on the river to notice the house. As the Klocks' were known to offer hospitality and rest to many travelers – including many notable people of the time – the path to their front door, porch and steps lead up from the river. It was also considered somewhat of a colonial status symbol to have such a visible home along the river.

The cheese house, c. 1840, is built adjacent to the house. It is quite likely the lower part of the cheese house is older than the homestead itself. It is likely where the Klock family lived while their house was being built.

Inside the house, there are many period pieces which are quite interesting to view. There is an original German design soapstone sink, which was found outside the home with flowers growing inside. There are collections of wooden tools of all kinds stored in the home: plows, ox yoke, sausage machine, various hand tools, and saddles just to name a few. Other interesting period pieces to note are quilts in the Klock colors and with the Klock Rose design as well as a soldier's uniform jacket. An interesting note is that each family had quilts and coverlets made with their own design. Many can be seen inside the home.

Another object to view is a beehive, made by the foremost authority of beekeeping at the time: Moses Quinby. Mr. Quinby is noted as the founder of practical and commercial beekeeping. He authored many books on the subject and invented the Bee Smoker with Bellows. Quinby laid the groundwork for modern day beekeeping and he was a resident of St. Johnsville for a time. Perhaps this is how the Klock family acquired this piece.

The one-room 'Little Red Schoolhouse', c. 1825, was built by the Klock family to provide education, not only for their children,

but to other children from the surrounding areas as well. It was a District 3 school that was sadly destroyed by fire. However, in the 1960s, it was completely renovated with a collection of authentic period pieces. Many of these are in evidence at the school, items such as a teacher's desk, inkwells and quills, a bell (which had been found on the property lying in the bushes), a wooden board painted black, a black slate board, an abacus, old books, dunce cap and paddle and an authentic 1857 map of the United States. The school taught children in Grades 1-8, with the youngest sitting in the



The 'Little Red Schoolhouse', built c. 1825.



Constructed in 1825, the blacksmith shop was crucial to the community's existence and survival.

front and the oldest in the back. The original red paint was found under the wainscoting in the school and was reproduced to give it an authentic feel.

There is an Old Dutch Barn on the property, dating to the late 1700s-early 1800s. This barn was brought to Fort Klock, piece by piece from a neighboring property during the restoration. The original barn had been previously destroyed by fire. The barn was used as storage for wheat and hops grown on the farm. The huge doors opened from West to East, to catch the prevailing winds to dry the hay. It was also used as a place where the family would've held large events.

The blacksmith shop is a treasure trove of history. Built by the Klocks, c. 1825, it was positioned ideally along the King's Highway. The local blacksmith would have been revered and his craft honed for him to provide everyday items

used by all members of the community. The art of ironworking was highly regarded and desperately needed during this time – the colonial way of life couldn't survive without such items as shoes for horses and oxen, flat top nails, utensils, bolts and door locks and musket balls.

The blacksmith shop has been restored at Fort Klock, but you can still see the wooden floors used for the horses to be shod, the bellows which would've been used by the apprentice, and a myriad of other tools used by the blacksmith to market his trade. Stepping inside the building takes you back to a time when the craft was highly honored and appreciated for its practical purpose for everyday living.

CONCLUSION

Fort Klock is only one of the many historical and intriguing places in the Mohawk Valley. There is so

much history in this quiet little area, history that sometimes remains unappreciated unless people – locals and beyond – take a true interest in learning and enjoying what is at the tip of their fingers. So, plan that trip. Take an interest. Appreciate. *HEM*

*"The tapestry of history
is woven of many threads."*

– Jacqueline Carey

*"We are not makers of history.
We are made by history."*

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

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