

Backward Glances: Delancey Hall, the North Salem Town House

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*Delancey Hall is a Town of North Salem Historic Landmark and on the National Register of Historic Places.
Drawing by Michael Bonelli for the North Salem Historic Preservation Commission, 2001*

Few buildings have as many colorful stories to tell. In this 18th century Georgian-style home, Rochambeau and his officers stayed while his army camped nearby; Tories and cowboys were imprisoned; scholars lived, studied and ran a weather station; town meetings and political gatherings were held; the North Salem Free Library was created; town offices were established.

Delancey Hall was built in the 1760s by Stephen Delancey, who had inherited the western two thirds of today's North Salem through his grandfather's marriage to a Van Cortlandt. First leasing then selling parcels to settlers, Delancey decided to make his home here in what became known as Delancey Town (Salem Center). But if he actually lived in the house, it wasn't for long. A loyalist dedicated to the Church of England (he was very generous in his support of St. James Church) and to the King, Delancey was forced to flee sometime in June 1776. He had already been divorced by his patriot wife.

The house was left in the care of his friend Cornelius Steenrod, and by 1779 Delancey lost the property in the "Act of Forfeiture and Sale of the Estates of Persons who have adhered to the enemies of this state..." It is not clear what happened to the house during the remainder of the Revolutionary War except for its use as a jail and a place for Rochambeau to spend the night in 1782.

In the post-Revolutionary era, a group dedicated to providing educational opportunities beyond the common schools, bought the building and created the North Salem Academy, the first academy in Westchester County and the third in the state to be incorporated by the Board of Regents. The curriculum was rigorous for both male and female students, including Daniel T. Tompkins who went on to become Governor of New York and Vice President of the United States. Some students lived in the building, and dormers were added on the third floor for light and ventilation. The dormers were removed in the 1950s renovation. The Academy thrived for nearly 100 years until both enrollment and the condition of the building declined. In 1886 the trustees reluctantly conveyed the property to the town to be used as Town Hall.

Until 1958, town business was conducted from the homes and businesses of the officials. Then Earle Vail became the first supervisor to have an office in Delancey. In the 1990s town offices were moved from the building while it underwent a total restoration under the supervision of a preservation

architect. The architectural history of Delancey is a special story. Stop by, query sthompson@northsaalemny.org, 914 669 8459 or order copies of the three bulletins about Delancey Hall from the North Salem Historical Society nshs.info.