



The Van Allen House

“Oakland’s Contribution to America’s Heritage”

Franklin Avenue and Ramapo Valley Road, Oakland, New Jersey

At the close of the seventeenth century, a burgher of Rotterdam, Holland, decided to seek his fortune in the New World and settled on the east bank of the Saddle River in the area then known as New Barbadoes. Peter Garretse Van Allen put down roots, acquired property, built a home and in 1706 married Trintje, a daughter of the prominent Hopper clan. His fortunes continued to grow, when in 1711, a large parcel of New Barbadoes land passed into his hands upon the death of his father-in-law, Hendrik Hopper. In 1736, Peter swapped this for a piece of land nestling near Campgaw Mountain which had belonged to Isaac Bogert. In still another swap, the Campgaw land was exchanged for property in Pompton Plains.

Peter and Trintje were blessed with twelve children. The eldest, Hendrik, who was undoubtedly named for his maternal grandfather was baptized in the Dutch Church at Hackensack on June 2, 1707.

In time Hendrik married Elizabeth Doremus and moved to the recently acquired family holdings in Pompton Plains. There in 1738 they joined the Dutch Church, ministered by Pastor John Van Driesen, and there the baptisms of five children were recorded in the church records.

In the spring of 1748, Hendrik Van Allen and his family moved to the head of the Yawpaw Valley into the area then called “The Ponds” (Oakland). He is noted as an Elder of Ponds Church on August 21, 1748, in a “call” for Benjamin Vander Linde to serve as the new pastor of the church. At this point in history the Dutch Church was being pulled in two directions: those who looked to the old country for policy direction and those who believed that this new world should share in the administrative programs of its particular religious persuasion. Hendrik and his colleagues were of the new world or Coetus branch. When trouble later developed with Mother England, the Coetus party would associate their position with the rebel cause, and the other party would emphasize with the Royal government across the sea. In time, this would become a matter of importance. The Yawpaw Valley and The Ponds would stand solidly with the rebel Whigs, not a Tory among them, when war came.

However, before the long struggle began, the Van Allens organized their holdings and “became gentle” as the old expression goes, upon their land. That first spring, perhaps, they made do with a one-room log house. Fieldstone came later, and then a smaller addition in the repetitive Jersey Dutch manner; room to house the large and still-growing family. And the Van Allens were something to be reckoned with. Hendrik was an Elder of the church, a most important man in the almost-frontier settlement that was The Ponds in the early days of the eighteenth century.

With the outbreak of war, the Van Allen house occupied a highly strategic position. The valley road to its right (Route 202) was a segment of the most important supply artery in the colonies, a highway protected on its eastern flank by mountains, which slipped along valley floor and bridged mountain streams to join New England with the south. Whole armies, countless troop detachments, wagon trains and post riders continually trekked this valley way throughout the war.

Before the house, forming a T with the valley road, lay the Paramus road (Franklin Avenue). Unimposing as it may seem today, at the time of the Revolution, it was one of the six passes which breached the Watchung Mountain chain. A power move by the British in New York against Morristown or even Albany, might roll across its road bed.

By mid-summer 1777, General Howe’s British forces concentrated in and around New York City. A move was evident. Then came the shattering news that Burgoyne’s Britons and Germans had swept down from Canada capturing Fort Ticonderoga and perhaps destroying the American Northern Army. Washington collected his troops, left Morristown and headed north on the valley road; destination Suffern, where he might equally guard against a move by Howe toward the American capitol at Philadelphia or a thrust northward to join Burgoyne. By Monday afternoon, July 14, the Americans had reached The Ponds where Washington called a halt due to the muddy conditions of the roads. Washington had just established headquarters in the Hendrik Van Allen house, when the joyous word came that General St. Clair and the American Northern Army had escaped from Ticonderoga and were still in the field. Washington remained at Van Allens’ another day and then pushed on to Suffern.

It is highly probable that because of its strategic placement and because this was safe Whig territory, the Hendrik Van Allen house served as headquarters for many Allied military formations during the war years. In the case of Washington’s stay, July 14-15, 1777, the occupation is verified by two dispatches composed by Washington which specifically set down the date and place in the heading of each.