

Fort Klock – Mohawk Trading Post

by Willis Barshied

Few students of American history fail to recognize the word "Mohawk" as the name of an Indian tribe of New York State. This mighty tribe, one of the Six Nations and keepers of the Eastern Gateway, had for centuries inhabited the valley which bears its name. Before the coming of the white man the Mohawk, like his aboriginal neighbors, fashioned his tools, implements and weapons from the natural materials he found about him. His culture was at a high state of development supported by his own ingenuity and craftsmanship. The white settlers pushed further westward along the banks of the Mohawk, usually in the footsteps of small bands of traders who scattered their goods among the Mohawks. Soon the traders' goods became an indispensable part of the redman's life. Judging from examples found on village sites, the traders' wares varied from iron axes, glass beads, hawk bells, sheet brass, guns, jew's harps, powder and lead, to such unusual items as ice skates, barrel spigots and brass frogs.

The same flats along the river on which the Indians had long grown corn, and the nearby fertile plateaus back from the river, became patches of wheat, corn and flax to support the frontier settlements. Some of the settlers took up the trading occupation in addition to their obvious task of wresting a livelihood from the soil. One of these families, the Klocks, settled near the present village of St. Johnsville at an early date. One of the few examples of pre-revolutionary architecture still preserved within the area is Fort Klock, the fortified farm homestead and trading post of Johannes Klock, erected in 1750.



Fort Klock as it appears today

Fort Klock, with its two-foot thick stone walls pierced by loop holes, has within its cellar a spring which enabled its occupants to get water without exposure to the elements or any enemy. The ancient building seemed destined to fall prey to the ravages of time until 1954 when a newly formed muzzle loading gun club, the Tryon County Muzzle Loaders, undertook the task of restoring the fort, largely through volunteer labor. Since that time Fort Klock has been brought back into a good state of repair, an adjacent old country school has been restored and considerable work has been done on the Fort Klock blacksmith shop also on the grounds. A small but growing collection of trade goods and pioneer relics are housed at the Fort and surrounding buildings.

The latest development to insure the future preservation of this historic site has been the creation of the Fort Klock Historic Restoration by the Muzzle Loaders. The new group, composed of the same members, is a non-profit educational institution chartered by the New York State Board of Regents, established to accept ownership of the property and operate it as a museum. For those who wish to visit the Fort it is located on New York State Route 5 about 1/2 mile east of St. Johnsville, New York and about midway between Albany and Utica. It is open from May 30 to September 15.

Editor's Note: We like to give a 21-musket salute whenever we see an outstanding effort made without fanfare. The Tryon Muzzle-Loaders have done a fine job in restoring Fort Klock to its former stature and a great deal of credit goes to Mr. Barshied. Fort Klock was cited by the Association for State and Local History several years ago. The Fort is only a few miles from the old Indian village site at Stone Arabia, New York.

Willis Barshied lives at Stone Arabia and devotes a great deal of time and energy to the preservation of Mohawk Valley history.

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