

## John Van Tuyl - the Man<sup>1</sup> and the Building of Fort Van Tyle

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### John Van Tuyl – frontiersman, patriot, farmer and father

John Van Tuyl, grandson of Isaac Van Tuyl and Sarah Lakerman of Staten Island, was born about 1740-45 in either Somerset or Morris County, NJ, likely the third of four brothers (Isaac, Arthur, John and Abraham). He grew up on the New Jersey frontier in the farming family of his father John Sr, likely in the Roxbury area of Morris County.<sup>2</sup> As a youth he was undoubtedly influenced by the companionship of his older brother and avid frontiersman Isaac, about 5-7 years his senior, who served in 1757 during the French and Indian War in the Morris County, NJ militia<sup>3</sup> and during the Revolution under Captain JR Dewitt of Mamakating in the Ulster County, NY militia.<sup>4</sup> Likely an experienced hunter, after his marriage to Catherine (Terwilliger) Westfall in Sussex Co, NJ in 1761, Isaac supplemented his family income by collecting wolf bounties<sup>5</sup>, 49 pounds sterling for 14 wolves in 1768.

John Sr, his sister Gertrude and her husband John Courson, followed the same migration path from Staten Island, through Somerest and Morris counties of New Jersey into the northwest New Jersey frontier with Gertrude and John Courson settling in Sussex Co, NJ in the 1760s.<sup>6</sup> It is unclear why John Van Tuyl and his father John Sr elected to settle in Greenville, NY sometime in the decade prior to the Revolutionary War. The Neversink and Wallkill river valleys provided much more fertile farm land than the hilly, rocky soil of Greenville; however by the decade before the Revolutionary War, these more desirable areas had been settled and were being actively farmed. It has been suggested that there might have been an ongoing relationship between the Van Tuyl and Cortright families, including Hendrick Cortright, his wife Margriet Decker and their sons Moses (b 1745) and Daniel Cortright (b1743), which may have drawn John and his father to the Greenville area. The Cortright family is reported to have immigrated to New Amsterdam from Amsterdam on the same ship, the Spotted Cow (De Bonte Koe), in 1663 as did Jan Otten Van Tuyl<sup>7</sup> and his wife and child. Over the course of the next century, the Cortrights moved from Harlem into Ulster Co, NY, then into the Minisink along the Delaware River and

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<sup>1</sup> Variations in the surname exist and include Van Tuyl, Van Tuyle, Van Tyle and Van Tile. The author has elected to use the Van Tuyl form of the name with the exception of when the name appears in a direct source quotation in which the exact form of the name in the quotation is used. The contemporary spelling of the name of the stone house and road on which it sits is Fort Van Tyle and Fort Van Tyle Road.

<sup>2</sup> WK Van Tyle and ML Olson, *Staten Island to the Minisink: Following the Trail to a Missing Link in the Van Tuyl Family*, Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, 90(2), pp87-102.

<sup>3</sup> T. R. Wilson, *Muster Rolls of Forces on the Frontiers of New Jersey*, Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, January 1958, Vol. 62, no. 1, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> National Archives, NARA 602384, Revolutionary War Rolls compiled 1894-1913 documenting the period 1775-1783, record group 93, roll 78, page 21, New York, October 12, 1776.

<sup>5</sup> Freeholders Minutes, Sussex County, New Jersey, Volume I, 1754-1775; Microfilm, Family History Library, Church of Jesus Christ, Latter Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; FHL US/CAN 1024666

<sup>6</sup> Van Tuyl and Olson, pp97-98

<sup>7</sup> John Van Tuyl's great grandfather; he settled along Wall Street in New Amsterdam (New York City)

finally into Greenville<sup>8</sup>. Possibly these families met during their Atlantic crossing or after arriving in New Amsterdam and continued to share their migrations westward over the next century.

John's father, John Sr., appears to have been a well respected member of his Morris Co, NJ community around Roxbury, witnessing wills and providing administrative services for the settlement of several estates during the period 1755-1764.<sup>9</sup> Likely when John Jr. was in his late teens, his family migrated into Sussex Co, NJ and then into the disputed New Jersey-New York territory of Deerpark and Greenville, NY. In 1775, he, together with his older brother Isaac, father John Sr and uncle Arthur, signed the Association Pledge in Orange Co, NY<sup>10</sup>. He undoubtedly loved the frontier life, a love that he likely instilled in his sons. He must have been a physically powerful and respected man, being elected<sup>11</sup> in 1775 by his neighbors to be the First Lieutenant of the Minisink Company of Allison's Third Orange Regiment, together with his friend Moses Cortright who was elected Captain of the regiment. He provided leadership as lieutenant of his company of militiamen during the Revolutionary War until at least 1781. In April 1789 the first town meeting of Minisink was held at the home of John Van Tuyl in Greenville and at this meeting he was elected constable together with his good friend of many years and captain of his militia company, Moses Cortright.<sup>12</sup> The following two years he was elected commissioner of highways.<sup>13</sup> In 1780 he was a signatory (as Lieut. John Vantile), along with other community leaders including Solomon Caukendoll, Benjamin Depuy, Abram Cuddeback, representing the western portions of Orange and Ulster counties on a petition to Governor Clinton of New York seeking the deployment of military regiments into the area because of fear of increased Indian activity.<sup>14</sup>

About 1765 and likely in Orange Co, NY he married Susanna Owen, daughter of Nathaniel Owen of Wallkill, NY, a year or two before the birth of their first son Walter in 1767.<sup>15,16</sup> John Van Tuyl built his stone house in what is now the town of Greenville, NY likely sometime after his marriage and before 1778 when it was fortified by the local militia against Indian and Tory attack.<sup>17</sup> He elected to build his house of enduring stone rather than timber and to make it a substantial size for its time. Like his father and older brother Isaac before him and in the tradition of his Dutch heritage, John was a farmer, owning

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<sup>8</sup> HR Decker, *The Town of Greenville – the Land and its People*, Josten Press, State College, PA, 2006, page 114.

<sup>9</sup> WK Van Tyle and ML Olson, *Staten Island to the Minisink: Following the Trail to a Missing Link in the Van Tuyl Family*, Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, 90(2), pp87-102.

<sup>10</sup> *Signers and Non-Signers in Orange County*, American Archives, Series 4, Volume 3, Page 597

<sup>11</sup> *Return of Officers for Goshen, Orange County, New-York*. American Archives Series 4, Volume 3, Page 0851

<sup>12</sup> Ruttenber, EM and Clark, LH: *History of Orange County, New York*, Philadelphia, 1881, p48

<sup>13</sup> Ruttenber and Clark, p663

<sup>14</sup> Public Papers of George Clinton, p576. Accessed from Mocavo

<sup>15</sup> Van Tyle and Olson, *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> In the pension application of Nancy Hawkins, wife of Thomas Hawkins, Walter Van Tuyl affirms that he is very familiar with Nancy Hawkins who was "brought up by his uncle William Bodle of Wallkill" and that he is a resident of Eaton township, Wyoming county, PA and that he was born March 1, 1767. Pension W2792, page 52-53, roll 1228. Walter's mother was Susanna Owen who married John Van Tuyl and Susanna Owen's sister Sarah Owen married William Bodle. For confirmation of this statement see the will of Nathaniel Owen of Wallkill, Orange Co Wills, book B, p324, probated 3 May 1802, made 23 April 1796

<sup>17</sup> Without citing a source, the Greenville Centennial Program in 1953 stated that the house was built in 1771.

150 acres and a barn in Minisink<sup>18</sup>, registering his cattle mark in the town of Minisink, and participating with his brother-in-law William Bodle<sup>19</sup> of Wallkill, NY in the sale of beef to the military during the Revolutionary War.<sup>20</sup> In the 1798 list of qualified jurors for the town of Minisink, John Van Tuyl is listed as a “yeoman”; in the United States of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries this described a “non-slaveholding, small landowning, family farmer”<sup>21</sup>, typically a subsistence farmer who owned 50-200 acres.

The principal business of Greenville has always been agriculture. Early farms focused on subsistence farming raising sheep, chickens, pigs, goats and cows along with wheat, oats and barley. Farms had extensive gardens producing a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables including corn which was grown for food and not as a cash crop. As market access increased to New York City first by way of Newburgh and the Hudson River and then starting in the 1840s by train, the dairy industry of Greenville expanded rapidly. Prior to the rise of the dairy industry, cash crops for the farmer were animal based: the first of the year being the sale of piglets and veal calves, the second milk and cheese from summer grasses, and the third finished pork ready for slaughter in the autumn.<sup>22</sup> Hog breeding was important as a cash crop; however male pigs or boars were expensive to keep and only a few farms kept a boar. Farmers would bring their female pigs to a local farmer owning a boar and leave them housed with the boar for breeding, a service for which the owner of the boar charged a fee. The prominent Greenville resident, neighbor and diarist Increase B. Stoddard wrote in his diary on December 18, 1798, “Carried my sow to John Van Tuyls”<sup>23</sup>, breeding his sow in December for a spring litter.

Unlike his father, John Van Tuyl did not own slaves to help with farming tasks<sup>24</sup> but rather relied on his family to assist with farm work. In addition to farming, his wife Susanna is said to have operated a store from their house in the 1790s.<sup>25</sup> He likely spoke both Dutch and English as did most Dutch settlers on the frontier and was probably literate since as a lieutenant in the militia he would have been required to read and write reports and military correspondence. There are known existing written signatures for his brother Isaac and for his sons Walter and Jonathan, consistently spelling their surname Van Tuyl(e).

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<sup>18</sup> Census and assessors records of Deerpark, Minisink, Wallkill and Mamakating, New York 1776, 1790, 1798, 1803-04, FHL film #897037

<sup>19</sup> Born 1746 in Little Britain, Orange Co, NY and married Sarah Owen, daughter of Jonathan Owen of Wallkill and at the time of the Revolution was a farmer near the Wallkill River and Hamptonburgh; he was a civil magistrate and elder of the Goshen Presbyterian Church; he moved to Tompkins Co, NY in 1826 where he died in 1838. He had three brothers, Patrick, Samuel and Alexander Bodle

<sup>20</sup> Pension application of Thomas Knight, NARA M804, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Files, roll 1503, p87

<sup>21</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yeoman>, accessed 7/3/2016

<sup>22</sup> Decker, p207

<sup>23</sup> Ibid; using current addresses this journey would have been about 5 miles using the Mountain Road from Stoddard’s home at what is now 406 Mountain Road to 271 Fort Van Tuyl Road, the farm home of John Van Tuyl

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Janeway, General Store Accounts, 1735-1747, Special Collections and University Archives, Rutgers University Libraries, New Brunswick, N.J., Journal, 744, March 1737; 1790 Federal Census for New York, Town of Minisink, enumeration number 281, page 367 (or page 6)

<sup>25</sup> Anon, *Minisink – A Bicentennial History*, The Bicentennial Commission, Town of Minisink, Orange County, New York, Aloray, Inc, Goshen, New York, 1988, p67

He was the father of at least seven children born between 1767 and 1791 in likely birth order as follows: Walter, Nathaniel, Jonathan, William, Daniel, John and Julia. There is no record of the baptism of any of John's children at either the Machachameck Dutch Reformed Church in Port Jervis or at the First Presbyterian Church of Goshen where John's two sisters, Catherine and Charity, were married.<sup>26</sup> John and Susanna apparently did not follow the Dutch naming convention for their children; rather Nathaniel and Jonathan were likely named after their maternal grandfather and great-grandfather, respectively. Walter is possibly named after John's first cousin Walter Van Tuyl who died prematurely in Montague, Sussex Co, NJ in 1763 at the age of 21.<sup>27</sup> Census data shows four females in John's household suggesting he had two so far unnamed daughters older than Julia (b 1791) that were born between 1774 and 1790.<sup>28</sup> There is no evidence that John and Susanna moved from their home in Greenville and he apparently died there intestate in 1805 with letters of administration naming his son Daniel, wife Susanna and brother-in-law William Bodle.<sup>29</sup> In the 1790s he remained a loyal friend among his community of family and friends, all living within a few houses of each other in the Minisink, including his brother Isaac Van Tuyl, his brothers-in-law Alexander and Samuel Bodle, his long time friend and Captain of his Minisink company, Moses Cortright, and Moses Cortright's brother Daniel.<sup>30</sup>

### **The John Van Tuyl Stone House – Fort Van Tyle**

The earliest contemporaneous record of John Van Tuyl owning a stone house and 150 acre farm is in the 1798 Minisink farm assessment. In that assessment, John Van Tuyl was assessed for a 30x40 foot stone house next to Alexander Bodle<sup>31</sup>, his brother-in-law, and 150 acres with a 20x40 foot barn adjacent to Richard Hallock.<sup>32</sup> Later historical accounts also support John Van Tuyl's construction of a stone house in Greenville. "John Van Tuyl built a fortified stone house on Fort Tuyl road in the Greenville section of Minisink. The Van Tuyl house was the scene of the first town of Minisink annual town meeting in the spring of 1789".<sup>33</sup>

"Today, the stone house is located at 271 Fort Van Tyle Road in Greenville, NY. It sits on a slight rise and faces south overlooking an assemblage of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century barns and outbuildings, a meadow and woods and the Shawangunk Kill about 800 yards distant. It is speculated that John's 150 acre farm lay primarily to the south and west of his stone house. The then remote location of the house was adjacent

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<sup>26</sup> CC Coleman, *The Early Records of the First Presbyterian Church at Goshen, New York*, Heritage Books, Bowie, Maryland, 1989, p9

<sup>27</sup> RL Van Tuyl and JNA Groenendijk, *A Van Tuyl Chronicle -650 Years in the History of a Dutch-American Family*, Anundsen Publishing Company, Decorah, IA, p603-606

<sup>28</sup> 1790 Federal Census for New York, Town of Minisink, p367

<sup>29</sup> Orange Co Letters of Administration, Book C, p157, Surrogates Court, Goshen, NY, 1805

<sup>30</sup> 1790 Federal Census for New York, Town of Minisink, Orange County, p367-368

<sup>31</sup> Charity Van Tuyl, sister to John Van Tuyl, was born about 1755 and married Alexander Bodle 14 July 1777 at Goshen Presbyterian Church, Goshen, NY

<sup>32</sup> Census and assessors records of Deerpark, Minisink, Wallkill and Mamakating, New York 1776, 1790, 1798, 1803-04, FHL film #897037

<sup>33</sup> *Minisink – A Bicentennial History*, page 67

to an old Lenape path which ran from the Delaware River valley, across the low pass of the Shawangunk Mountains, up Fort Van Tyle Road, along the ridge past Binnewater, eventually crossing the Walkkill and ending at Plum Point on the Hudson River.”<sup>34</sup>



Contemporary 2006 photo of the John Van Tuyl stone house (note hitching post by mail box)

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<sup>34</sup> Decker page 66-67



Nineteenth Century (ca 1880) photo of John Van Tuyl stone house<sup>35</sup>



Hitching post (left, missing iron hitching ring) shown in both photos above and likely dating from 1770s; Scene from Fort Van Tyle Road (right) in front of house looking south across meadow to the tree-lined Shawangunk Kill in the distance. The contemporary barns for the property are located across Fort Van Tyle Road to the south of the stone house.

In 1778 Adonijah Middaugh was a 19 year old Orange County militia volunteer and son of Ephraim Middaugh, ensign in the Minisink Company of militia in which John Van Tuyl was First Lieutenant. In his Revolutionary War pension application, Adonijah Middaugh, stated that in February 1778 his Goshen

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<sup>35</sup> Digital photo courtesy of the Minisink Valley Historical Society

Regiment militia company<sup>36</sup> **“were then marched to Vantiles where they built a fort which was called after wards Vantiles fort, where he remained nine months as one to help garrison at the said fort. The Indians and torys was so troublesome, that there had to be a continual guard kept up to protect the well dispared (sic) inhabitants; after remaining at fort afore said nine months he was discharged and went home.”**<sup>37</sup> This 1778 recollective narrative by Adonijah Middaugh is the earliest known reference to John Van Tuyl’s stone house, later to be known as Fort Van Tyle or “Vantiles Fort”.

Historical and photographic evidence support the conclusion that Fort Van Tyle was constructed as a story and a half stone house in the period 1765-1778. Then in 1778 a militia company from the Goshen regiment, which included Adonijah Middaugh, built a log stockade around the Van Tuyl house which was then used as a fort garrisoned by militia to protect neighbors who fled to the fort during times of Indian attack. In the pension affidavit for her brother, Elizabeth (Middaugh) Bloom, sister of Adonijah Middaugh, states that **“she is well acquainted with Adonijah Middaugh... that she was with him at Vantiles fort at the time that ensign Ephraim Middaugh was killed (July 22, 1779 at the Battle of Minisink)<sup>38</sup>... that her father Ephraim Middaugh being killed, her mother with the deponent, after remaining in fort aforesaid (where they had fled for safety) for some months, removed with her family to a place called then florady (Florida) in Orange County...”**<sup>39</sup> Clearly Elizabeth Middaugh, her mother, and brother Adonijah sought safety and shelter at Fort Van Tyle for several months during 1778 and 1779. Since Fort Van Tyle was across the Shawangunk Mountains east of the historically more volatile Neversink valley, since it garrisoned local militia, and since it had a square foot capacity comparable to or larger than other fortified houses of the area, it is highly likely that it provided shelter and protection for several area families who moved into the fort for months at a time.

Standard practice in the Minisink at this time (1778) was to fortify existing structures with log stockades and a number of houses were fortified during this period along the Neversink valley from Port Jervis<sup>40</sup> to Godeffroy<sup>41</sup>. A company of militia would guard the workmen while they threw up the log stockade around the house and adjacent buildings. Palisade or picket fortification involved digging a trench three to six feet deep and placing posts vertically in the trench that were between fifteen to eighteen feet high, one foot in diameter and sharpened at one end<sup>42</sup>. Gumaer in his history of Deerpark estimates that

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<sup>36</sup> The company was likely the Minisink Company because the deponent states that officers of the company included Ephraim Middaugh, ensign and his father, who was known to be an ensign in the Minisink Company as of 1775

<sup>37</sup> Pension application of Adonijah Middaugh, R7157, New York, NARA M804, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Files, roll 1719, pp2-3

<sup>38</sup> At the Battle of Minisink

<sup>39</sup> Pension application of Adonijah Middaugh, R7157 New Jersey, NARA M804, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Files, roll 1719, p2

<sup>40</sup> Gumaer, p89

<sup>41</sup> Osborne, p50

<sup>42</sup> Osborne, p51

each of these forts were occupied by 80-120 people, including 8-12 soldiers per fort, for about 9 months of each year, excluding winter, starting in 1777-78 through the end of the Revolutionary War.<sup>43</sup>

Deed and/or tax records for the Van Tuyl stone house that indicate the exact date of its construction no longer exist. The first recorded conveyance of the property is in 1824<sup>44</sup> after it was no longer owned by the Van Tuyl family. It appears likely that Jonathan Van Tuyl either inherited or purchased the stone house from John Van Tuyl sometime during the period 1800<sup>45</sup> to 1805 and then sold it prior to his move to Wyoming Co, PA about 1820, correlating well with Jonathan's marriage to Mary Rundle about 1796. Both John and Jonathan appear in the 1800 Minisink census and are enumerated as living adjacent to each other.<sup>46</sup> Jonathan owned no land in the 1799 tax assessment but in 1800 he is listed with real estate valued at \$187 compared to John's \$1400<sup>47</sup>. He would have been about age 20 at this time and was likely establishing his own household following the birth of his first son Daniel in 1797. Jonathan's likely ownership of the stone house is supported by both Orange County histories:

"The first town meeting after the town of Minisink was organized took place at the house of John Van Tuyl, April 1, 1789. Its territory then covered the three towns and that house supposed to be the **old stone house now in Greenville on the former Jonathan Van Tuyl farm**, later the Hallock house, was a convenient place for the gathering" (Headley, History of Orange Co, p287)

"Jonathan Van Tuyl whose name appears in the cattle records of Minisink soon after the Revolution was an early settler of Greenville. He was the father of Arthur Van Tuyl. There is a stone house now standing in Clarks district and owned by Ira Hallock which is **supposed to have been built before the Revolution and known as the Van Tuyl homestead**" (Ruttenber and Clark, History of Orange Co, p692).

J. Everett Ferguson, a local Greenville historian, wrote the following for a brochure celebrating the Greenville Centennial in 1953:

"John Van Tuyle built a stone house for a fort on his property in 1771. This fort had no roof, in case of an Indian attack the refugees couldn't be burned out by shooting burning arrows in the roof. A roof was put on in 1791. Susy Van Tuyle who we presume to be his wife (or perhaps a sister) operated a store here while he cleared the land and built the building and attended the crops. She must have made some money too, since records of her lending money have been found, of such transactions, one in particular, with true Dutch prudence, she loaned money to one William Cortright and took as sureties a Mr. Borel (perhaps Bodel) and Robert P. Patrick.

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<sup>43</sup> PE Gumaer, *A History of Deerpark in Orange County, NY*, Minisink Valley Historical Society, Port Jervis Union Printing, 1890, p86-91

<sup>44</sup> Orange County Deeds, Liber Y, page 369, 27 February 1824; conveyance of Jonathan and Elizabeth Moore to Joseph Woodruff. Jonathan Moore was a near neighbor of John Van Tuyl as shown in the 1800 Federal Census for Orange Co, Minisink, page 320

<sup>45</sup> The 1798 tax assessment shows that John Van Tuyl was in possession of the Stone House at this time; John Van Tuyl died in 1805.

<sup>46</sup> 1800 Federal Census, Orange Co, Minisink, page 320, enumeration #12490

<sup>47</sup> New York Tax Assessment Rolls for Real and Personal Estates, 1799-1804, Orange Co, Minisink, 1800



The first town meeting of the Town of Minisink, which at this time comprised Wawayanda, portions of Deerpark, Mount Hope and of course Greenville, was held in this fort or house in April 1789, when they elected John Bradner, Supervisor and Jonathan Cooley, Town Clerk. Later a Silas and Maria Woodruff lived there and in 1835 they sold the property to Parker Hallock. This property is now owned by Levi Hoffman whose father Charles Hoffman repaired the stone work and modernized the interior, otherwise it is the same as 172 years ago."<sup>48</sup>

The Woodruff family owned the property from 1824 to 1835 when it was conveyed to Parker Hallock. The Hallock family owned the property, which was then 140 acres, until 1912 when it was conveyed to Charles and Anna Hoffman. In 1942 Charles Hoffman conveyed the property to Levi Hoffman. Levi Hoffman divided the 140 acre property selling off the portion containing the stone house and the property has been divided several times since. Currently the stone house sits on about one and a half acres of the original 140 acre John Van Tuyl farm. The Hallock family cemetery is located on the original 140 acre tract just south of Mullock Road and east of Fort Van Tyle Road. The current barns on the property, which have been sold off separately, were constructed during the ownership by the Hallock family and clearly represent the flourishing of dairy farming in the area during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>49</sup>

Even though the Ferguson narrative above undoubtedly represents the telling and retelling of the oral traditions of Fort Van Tyle with likely alterations and embellishments through the years, there are two dates worthy of note. First, the 1771 date of construction; the specificity of this date suggests that it has come down to us from a factual source, most likely a date recorded somewhere in the stone or timber of the house. "In building the stone houses (of the area) a custom prevailed of marking one stone of a conveniently flat surface with the date of erection or the initials of the owner or builder. The markings are found on lintels, on cornerstones, at the line of the eaves and in the middle of the walls and wherever they are placed are almost invariably reliable."<sup>50</sup> This is true for the Martines Decker (Fort Decker) house in Port Jervis. During the 1793 reconstruction Martinus Decker placed a large smooth datestone, which was made from bluestone, in the northern gable of the building. It is inscribed with the 1793 construction date, his initials (MD), his second wife's initials (MD) and "CD mason", believed to be the initials of the housewright or mason, possibly Coykendall Decker.<sup>51</sup> No date marking is currently known to exist on Fort Van Tyle; however the stone on both gable ends are now covered with siding which might obscure such a marking. Of note is the fact that the traditional 1771 construction date for the house is consistent with the historical date range of 1767-1778 established by documented events in the lives of John and Susanna Van Tuyl.

Regarding the 20 year delay in putting a roof on the structure to avoid fires from flaming Indian arrows, this seems highly improbable for factual reasons. First, Indian attacks occurred primarily in the early years of the Revolution and were confined to the Neversink valley, not the area east of the Shawangunk mountains. Of greater importance is the fact that John and Susanna had their children between 1767

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<sup>48</sup> JE Ferguson, Greenville Centennial History – 1853-1953, September 18-20

<sup>49</sup> Decker, page 69

<sup>50</sup> Reynolds, page 20

<sup>51</sup> Osborne, pp94-95

and 1791, the time in which their house was presumably “roofless”, an extremely undesirable situation with a house full of young children and the need for maximal cooking and living space. Further, the pension application statement by Adonijah Middaugh that in 1778 he participated in fortifying the VanTuyl house as a place of refuge for the local citizenry argues for the house having a roof and being habitable by that date. The roofless- structure-because-of-flaming-arrows story is most likely historical fiction. Perhaps the 19<sup>th</sup> century addition of the second story somehow evolved into the roofless flaming arrow story with 100 years of retelling.

Regarding the Ferguson statement that “This property is now owned by Levi Hoffman whose father Charles Hoffman repaired the stone work and modernized the interior, otherwise it is the same as 172 years ago”, we now know this is not completely accurate<sup>52</sup>. The raising of the roof to create a full second story was clearly done prior to the 1880 photo below. Rural two story houses in the Hudson and Delaware River valleys were unusual prior to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century so it is likely that the full second story addition to the house was done after 1800 and certainly prior to about 1880.<sup>53</sup>

Charles and Anna Hoffman purchased the stone house with its 140 acres in 1912 and recorded their ownership on a large exterior stone on the rear northeast corner of the house; a star, 1913, AUG 30, C. HOFFMAN (letters F are reversed).



This gives us an approximate dating of about 1915-1930 for the modernization of the structure including the installation of central heating, a first floor bathroom, addition of the first floor porch and changes to first and second floor windows. In support of this dating is that the present day first floor varnished pine woodwork, stairway, and west room divider between the front and rear rooms are consistent with styles used in houses built during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>52</sup> Ferguson, *ibid*

<sup>53</sup> CW Zink, *Dutch Framed Houses in New York and New Jersey*, Winterthur Portfolio, vol 22, 1987, p265; accessed online 8/21/2016, <http://cwzink.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Dutch-Framed-Houses-in-New-York-New-Jersey-Winterthur-Portfolio-CW-Zink-1987.pdf>

## Photographic and Historical Analysis of Fort Van Tyle

A photo of the Van Tuyl stone house likely taken about 1880 is pictured below. The house, in a much modified condition, still stands today in Greenville at 271 Fort Van Tyle Road.<sup>54</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century photo of the house shows that when it was built it was a story and a half structure as revealed by the height of the stone on both the front and right gable end. The front and gable end stone outline of the Van Tuyl house is clearly comparable to that of the 1793 Fort Decker house in Port Jervis which it originally resembled. It had a straight, single-slant gable roof with no overhang, with dressed or tooled stone on the front and with untooled or rubble stone on the gable end which reached



Late 19<sup>th</sup> century Van Tuyl stone house  
Courtesy of the Minisink Valley Historical Society

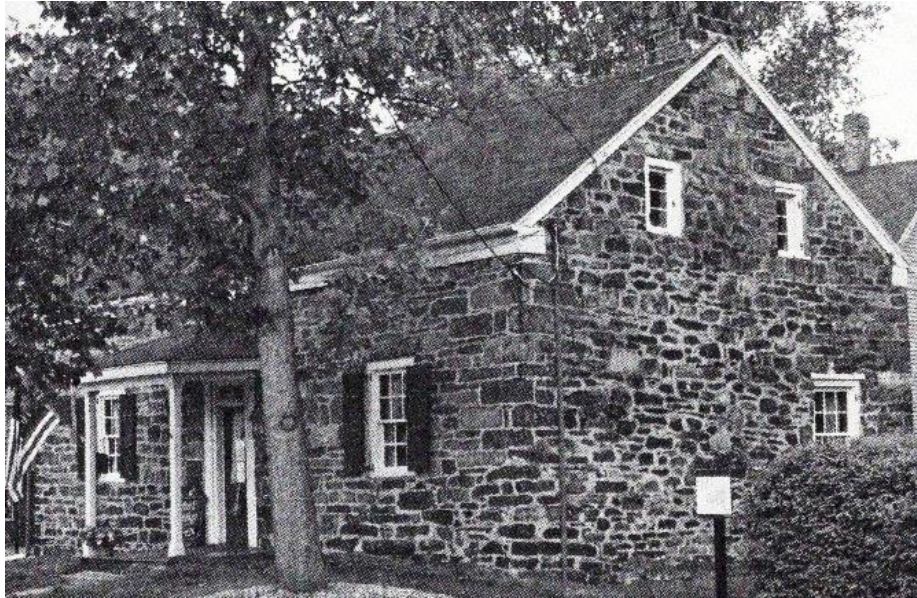
to the original roof line but which was not extended when the roof was raised. The untooled or rubble stone end can be seen more clearly in the contemporary photo of the Van Tuyl house below and represents the typical stone construction methods of the period also exemplified by the Fort Decker house.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Zillow listing for 271 Fort Van Tuyl Road, Port Jervis, NY; accessed 2/14/2016, [http://www.zillow.com/homes/for\\_sale/31819253\\_zpid/any\\_days/41.402477,-74.57375,41.399161,-74.580723\\_rect/17\\_zm/1\\_fr/](http://www.zillow.com/homes/for_sale/31819253_zpid/any_days/41.402477,-74.57375,41.399161,-74.580723_rect/17_zm/1_fr/)

<sup>55</sup> Osborne, pp 96-98

In her book on 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch houses of the Hudson Valley<sup>56</sup>, Reynolds states that “in the earlier stone-structures the pieces of field-stone incorporated in the walls were untooled. They were laid one upon another just as they were taken from the ground in sizes portable by hand or as broken off from larger units and were held together by a filling of clay or mud that was mixed with chopped straw or horsehair” and later lime as it became available. She continues that “the use of stone in house-building declined toward the end of the eighteenth century” and was replaced by brick<sup>57</sup> and frame and that “as time went on tooling increased and the stone houses ultimately consisted of blocks, carefully cut, smoothed and fitted.”<sup>58</sup>



Contemporary photo of Fort Decker, home of Martines Decker, in Port Jervis, NY showing the shaped horizontal stones on the front compared to the more untooled gable end  
Courtesy of the Minisink Valley Historical Society

At some point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century following its original construction, the roof was raised to create a full second story. Using the front door and first floor window heights as reference points, it appears that the roof was raised about 6-7 feet to the height shown in the 19<sup>th</sup> century photo. The modification of the Van Tuyl house is evident on both the front and gable end in which the original stone construction material no longer reaches to the roof level as it would have originally. On the front it appears that clapboard has been used to cover the added wall height whereas on the gable end it looks as if some sort of masonry or stucco-like material has been used above the stone as the outer wall covering.

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<sup>56</sup> HW Reynolds, *Dutch Houses in the Hudson Valley Before 1776*, Dover Publications, New York, 1965, pp18-25

<sup>57</sup> For example compare the exterior brick construction of the Increase B. Stoddard house built in 1805 and currently located at 359 Old Mountain Road, Greenville, NY

<sup>58</sup> Ibid



PLATE 153  
*Van Ness House*  
*by the Passaic River, near Fairfield*

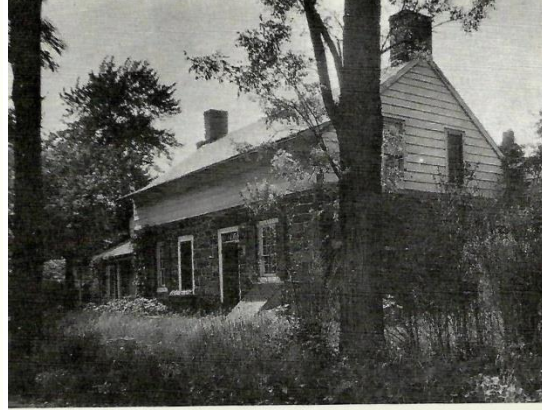


PLATE 165  
*House of Johannes Parlaman*  
*Lower Montville*

For a likely dating of the half story addition to Fort Van Tyle, we can turn to the 1930s inventory of similar prerevolutionary Dutch houses in West New Jersey having had half story additions.<sup>59</sup> Few prerevolutionary houses presently remain in the northern New Jersey or southern Orange Co areas. However, the area of west New Jersey encompassing Passaic and Essex Cos was settled by the Dutch much earlier (cf. above Van Ness house, ca 1710-20 and Parlaman house, ca 1750) as was the northwestern part of Essex Co around Fairfield. The Dutch brought to this area their traditional story and a half stone construction with gable roofs which undoubtedly influenced the design of later houses in southern Orange Co such as Fort Decker in Port Jervis (ca 1793) and Fort Van Tyle (ca 1775). The Van Ness house was built in the first quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century either by Simon Van Ness or his son. According to Bailey “the second half story of frame belongs to the early nineteenth century”.<sup>60</sup> The Parlaman House was constructed in phases between about 1730-55. According to Bailey, Johannes Parlaman’s grandson “raised the roof and added the half story of frame ... in the second quarter of the nineteenth century”.<sup>61</sup> Thus dating of the half story addition to Fort Van Tyle was likely the first or second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century reflecting social and economic changes impacting house design.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century photo of the Van Tuyl house clearly shows two symmetrical stone chimneys of identical shape and ornamentation, one on each end. The one on the visible east gable end is contained completely within the structure and centered on the ridge line as was normal for stone houses of this period. It is not clear from the 19<sup>th</sup> century photo whether the west chimney is contained within the structure, as was common for houses of this period, or if it was exterior to the gable end, as it is currently. However, in order for the west chimney to have been contained within the structure, it would require a massive support structure in the basement and this basement support is not currently present. As can be seen in the contemporary photo, the east chimney has been rebuilt and reduced in size at some point and has been repositioned to behind the roof ridge, reportedly the result of an early chimney fire.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Bailey, p493-501

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p563

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p575

<sup>62</sup> Personal communication with current owner

The Van Tuyl house is symmetrical with a centered front door and two four-pane windows on each side of the door giving it a somewhat formal appearance, the symmetry again mirrored by Fort Decker. The more formal Georgian symmetry became popular in Dutch farm houses during the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The contemporary rear view shows the grade level of the house which has a full basement or lower level with windows, one of which can be seen to the left of the rear door and is a later modification of the original basement window. The frame carriage house or barn addition to the west of the house and summer kitchen to the east are likely 19<sup>th</sup> century and postdate the original stone house. The summer kitchen on the east end of the contemporary structure is a 20<sup>th</sup> century addition. In the 1880 photo there are two basement or lower level six over six windows visible behind the fence in the front elevation showing the original lintel construction. The windows have been subsequently modified to match the grade level rear window in the contemporary structure. This front window is now covered by the front porch.



Behind the fence, basement level windows which were located in the east basement room which contained the cooking and dining area for the family and which ran the full depth of the house, approximately 30 feet. The summer kitchen in the right of the photo contained a well for water and likely represented the area for washing milk cans, with the lids drying on the fence. The hitching post in front of the fence is still present in the front yard of the contemporary house

Considerable modification of the Van Tuyl house structure, likely done in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, has resulted in the creation of a one-story front porch, windows in the gable end at both the second and attic levels, and possibly the exterior chimney on the west end. The contemporary rear view of the house reveals that the 18<sup>th</sup> century first floor front window and door symmetry have remained intact in the rear. However, the front first floor windows have been significantly modified by the addition of a bay window to the left of the front door and a triple window to the right.



Contemporary right front view of the Van Tuyl stone house



Contemporary rear view of the Van Tuyl stone house showing sloping grade level

Only rarely was a stone house built in two full stories before the Revolution. Reynolds states that “the general rule before 1776 was to build a house only a story and half high”.<sup>63</sup> As houses grew beyond one or two rooms, one common plan was to provide a hall through the center of the house with either one room or two on each side of the hall. If there were two rooms on a side, one was usually larger than the other. Photos of the contemporary interior of the stone house confirm the center hall design<sup>64</sup> with two rooms on each side of the center hall which extends through the house from front to rear. Currently the house has an open stairway to the second floor which originally would likely have been enclosed with a door to prevent heat going to the half story loft, which was not heated. The loft space was used for storing food or belongings or as sleeping quarters for children and servants. The Van Tuyl house would have been considered large for its day at about 1200 sq feet on the first floor. Osborne states that in the 1798 assessment for Deerpark, there were 49 houses, about a quarter of which were stone and having an average size of about 750 sq feet.<sup>65</sup> By comparison, the Martines Decker house (Fort Decker) was described in the same assessment as being about 936 sq ft.<sup>66</sup>



Area at the west end of the house beyond the location of the earlier carriage house addition that may have been a walled kitchen garden

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Zillow listing for 271 Fort Van Tuyl Road, Port Jervis, NY; accessed 2/14/2016, [http://www.zillow.com/homes/for\\_sale/31819253\\_zpid/any\\_days/41.402477,-74.57375,41.399161,-74.580723\\_rect/17\\_zm/1\\_fr/](http://www.zillow.com/homes/for_sale/31819253_zpid/any_days/41.402477,-74.57375,41.399161,-74.580723_rect/17_zm/1_fr/)

<sup>65</sup> Osborne, p108.

<sup>66</sup> Osborne, p109



The Van Tuyl stone house can be entered from either the basement or lower level by way of the summer kitchen or by the first floor doors at either end of the first floor central hall. The contemporary summer kitchen is of 20<sup>th</sup> century construction, has a hip shed roof which attaches to the east gable end of the house and which is supported by a stone and cement knee wall about three feet high. The east exterior stone wall of the house is exposed as the west interior wall of the summer kitchen and includes a doorway which has been closed off with stone at some earlier time. At the south end of the summer kitchen is a stone-lined well, partially filled in with stone, but which the current owner says contains water at various times of the year depending on the ground water level which he estimates to be above 30 feet. The well is covered with a large stone in which a circular opening has been cut to access the well as seen in the photo below. The first floor has been markedly altered by modernization but appears to retain its original center-hall design with two rooms on each side, the south room being the larger of the two on each side.

The basement level appears to have been originally designed to be living space with two fireplaces and multiple windows high in the walls just below beam level. As can be seen in the front and rear elevation photos above, the first floor sits about 4-5 steps above grade. The basement space is divided into three rooms by stone or rubble walls. One wall spans the space from north to south and creates a finished room and two unfinished spaces with rubble stone walls that have been whitewashed. The finished space is approximately 15 x 30 feet on the east end, originally contained a fireplace with cooking/dining area and opens to the summer kitchen and well. The west end of the space is divided by an east-west wall creating two rooms of approximately equal proportion, about 15 x 25 feet. The current owner reports there is a large void in the west wall of the south room which undoubtedly is the remnant of the second fireplace. There is no evidence of the basement or first floor west end fireplace support in the basement, suggesting the support is beyond the west basement wall which is consistent with the exterior west flue which currently exists.



Left Above– well opening and cover in summer kitchen  
 Right Above – beams in lower level kitchen and dining area which span the 30 foot space from north to south  
 Left Below – hand hewn beam in unfinished basement area showing ax or adze marks, note subfloor is not whitewashed and is not original  
 Right Below – multiple hand hewn pegs inserted in basement beams; likely used for hanging storage



### The Escape of Major John Decker to Fort Van Tyle during Brant's Raid

John Decker was a patriot and highly esteemed member of the Neversink Valley community both before and after the Revolution and a resident of the "lower neighborhood", roughly the area along both sides of the Neversink River from Huguenot to Port Jervis. In 1776 he was promoted from Second Lieutenant of the Minisink Company in which John Van Tuyl was First Lieutenant, to Second Major of the New York Third Militia Regiment under Colonel William Allison. Major Decker's house and fort near Huguenot was "of wood and with logs laid up to fortify it, or "constructed of stone and palisaded", or "built of stone ... and surrounded with wooden fortifications closed by a heavy gate".<sup>67</sup>

There are varying traditions describing the shooting of Decker by Brant's Iroquois and Tory raiders who plundered and burned much of the lower Neversink Valley in July 1779. The following seemingly credible narrative of the John Decker incident appears in the 1840 pension application affidavit<sup>68</sup> of Levi Van Etten, at the time a 22 year old eye witness to the Decker incident and member of the Minisink Company of militia: **"... the Indians made a descent upon Minisink on the 19<sup>th</sup> (20<sup>th</sup>) of July of the said year (1779) and burned several houses and barns and destroyed a great deal of property; the houses of Major Decker, Jacobus Van Fleet, Wilhelmus Westfall and Solomon Kuykendall and the barn of Daniel Van Auken were burned; this deponent (Levi Van Etten) and Major Decker were riding together from a funeral when the Indians made the attack upon Minisink and the first that they knew of the Indians being in the neighborhood was by the Indians firing upon them and wounding Major Decker in the side; Decker fell from his horse and called to this deponent to make his escape if possible; he did so and made for the mountains (presumably Shawangunk) and succeeded in reaching the same; Major Decker crawled into the bushes and thereby made his escape".**

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<sup>67</sup> Leslie, p34 footnote

<sup>68</sup> Pension application of Levi Van Etten, S28921, New Jersey, NARA M804, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Files, roll 2445, p 36-39

Although it is certain that Major Decker escaped the attack, it is not clear where he escaped to. According to John D. Carpenter, a grandson of Major Decker, “when he (Major Decker) thought the Indians were gone, he crawled out and went on across the mountain (Shawangunk) to **a place called Van Tuyl’s Fort**<sup>69</sup> .. when he got there he found his son Ben...”<sup>70</sup> Other accounts have Decker and his wife escaping to the house of James Finch of Finchville, about 5 miles over the mountain from the Decker home, or a James Green who also lived over the mountain. However, Carpenter questions the escape by Mrs. Decker to the house of James Finch saying, “I have never heard any such thing and I think common sense would show that that was not so, as Finchville was five miles from where her (Mrs. Decker) house was burned right through a wilderness country, no road nor nothing to take her there.”<sup>71</sup> By contrast Fort Van Tyle sits adjacent to an ancient Lenape footpath which leads from the Delaware River valley to the Hudson River and would likely have been more accessible to people fleeing the Neversink valley<sup>72</sup>. Brant’s raiders did not venture east of the Shawangunk mountains and there is no evidence that Fort Van Tyle was attacked. It is likely that since many houses and fortified dwellings west of the Shawangunk were destroyed by Brant, the displaced settlers would have sought shelter and safety in the forts east of the Shawangunk; these were Fort Van Tyle and Fort Gardner. The testimony above of Elizabeth (Middaugh) Bloom clearly shows that she and her mother and brother Adonijah were present at Fort Van Tyle, “where they had fled for safety”, two days after Brant’s attack and that they remained there “for some months” following the attack.<sup>73</sup>

### **And So In Conclusion**

John Van Tuyl lived a life of action and service that was admired and respected by his friends and neighbors. He was from the tradition of a frontier patriot father who was a leader in his community and a role model for his family. He and his wife Susanna built a yeoman farming life for themselves and their family on the New York frontier. They constructed a substantial stone house in Greenville, NY which was converted to a garrisoned stockade fort in 1778 by the local militia to protect the local inhabitants and which stands today as a tribute to their strength of character and perseverance. Following the War John and Susanna lived out their lives in their stone house in Greenville and were undoubtedly buried nearby, possibly in what is now called the Hallock cemetery and which is located on what was the original 150 acre John Van Tuyl farm. John died in 1805 and Susanna sometime later.

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<sup>69</sup> This would be possible because Fort Van Tuyl was built in 1778 and Major Decker was attacked in July 1779

<sup>70</sup> Leslie, p40

<sup>71</sup> Leslie, p37

<sup>72</sup> Decker, p66-67

<sup>73</sup> Pension application of Adonijah Middaugh, R7157 New Jersey, NARA M804, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Files, roll 1719, p5