

Memories on the move

The Deacon Andrew Hetfield House, commonly dubbed the "Dutch Oven," took a historical ride Saturday from its former location at 1260 Route 22 West to a site adjacent to the Mountainside Public Library. The house stood in the former spot since 1755.

(Photo by John Boutsikaris)



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This is the house that Hetfield built!

House's two-century history 'moves' on

By SHAWN EVANS

For 230 years, the Deacon Andrew Hetfield House stood in the same general location — 1260 U.S. Highway 22 West.

That in itself added to the structure's historical significance when so few antiquated monuments remain in the same location.

Few will argue that nothing could compare with such a historical event as the moving of the Georgian colonial-style house commonly known as the "Dutch Oven."

On Saturday — a day which will undoubtedly go down in history among preservationists throughout the state — the two-and-a-half story clapboard house, with its cable roof and two-end brick chimneys, was carefully moved half a mile away to a new location near the Mountainside Public Library.

The borough was filled with excitement as hundreds of residents and visiting onlookers witnessed the move, which took some two hours and 57 minutes.

Several hundred balloons, blown and distributed by the Mountainside Volunteer Rescue Squad, were released into the skies as teary-eyed and reminiscent citizens stood back marveling at the joyous event.

Borough Administrator Jim Roberts described

the move as "excellent," not marked by any complications.

Last Thursday, contractors with the firm of R. Welsh and Son of Florham Park, erected the foundation — made of cement over cinderblock — onto a mobile crib, or platform. There it remained for an additional day, as if to announce to the thousands of highway travelers to behold this splendid site one last time on that soil.

At its new location, the house will be buffered from the street by trees, facing the court area near the library parking lot, officials said.

Welsh, who has supervised the moving of several other historic houses, was awarded the contract to move the house in May by the Mountainside Borough Council, after Mountainside Historical Preservation Committee members effortlessly campaigned to save the house from being destroyed.

The house could have met its fate by being razed, as the new property owner Walter Kuczynski plans to use the site (next to Dasti's Mountainside Inn) to manufacture electronic components.

The house, purchased last June by Kuczynski, formerly belonged to a family who lived there for the past 50 years.

The distinguished Hetfield family house is recorded as having been built in 1755. According to

an architectural description, the house appears to have been built in three sections, with a small, two-bay, one-and-a-half story section, and then a three-bay section added to create the full Georgian five-bay facade.

The structure was moved back from Route 22 around 1929 when the highway was widened and made one way going west. The house stood on the same property from the time that the highway had been known as Springfield Road.

According to Fern Hyde, president of the Mountainside Historic Preservation Committee, the house was built by a distinguished minister, Deacon Andrew Hetfield (1740-1829).

His grave rests to the right of the entrances to the Presbyterian Church Cemetery on Mountain Avenue in Westfield and is marked with an American flag to indicate Hetfield was a soldier and patriot in the American Revolutionary War.

He served, according to Hyde, in the Essex County Militia.

It is thought that his father, Isaac, who was described as "a founder of Westfield," built the first portion of the house which was called the Dutch Oven.

The Hetfields were known as a prominent family, originally from Yorkshire, England. They came to Elizabeth in the early 1600s.

Records further indicate that Matthia Hetfield owned the "most pretentious house in Elizabeth at the foot of Pearl Street and the Elizabeth River," where Indian councils and peace treaties took place.

His first son, Isaac, (father of Deacon Andrew Hetfield) and his daughter Sarah, became the wife of Abraham Clark, a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

He married Mary Winans in 1762. The couple's children were Sarah, born in 1763; Jacob, born in 1765; Mary, born in 1767; Phebe, born in 1768; Andrew, born in 1773 and Elizabeth, born in 1776.

Hyde said the preservation committee is making a study of the ownership of the gracious Georgian house after it left the Hetfields' hands.

The Rosenerantz family bought the house in the early 1940s and operated an antique business there until June 1984.

In June, Kuczynski purchased the house and property for his business purposes. He is donating the home to the borough, which has indicated that future plans for the structure may include using it as a cultural center.

The history of the house will continue to live in Mountainside — for residents of the borough and throughout the state to be proud of.