

Our organization, known as M.A.R.C.H. , will be celebrating it's 30th anniversary this year. We thought it might be informative and fun to repeat some of the past columns from previous newsletters. We will start off this selection in June, 1993, the year that M.A.R.C.H. took over the Foster Armstrong House, with an article by Bruce Farquhar, who was the MARCH historian at that time.

The Foster-Armstrong House, submitted by Bruce Farquhar, MARCH Historian, June, 1993

Our American heritage has often linked name of friends or partners together. Names like Mason and Dixon, Lewis and Clark and Currier and Ives come immediately to mind. For those of us who live in the narrow but fertile valley along the Delaware that the original people, the Lenni Lenape, called the Minisink and that we ancestors of the Dutch and British settlers renamed Montague, a beautiful old farmhouse has, from the beginning, joined the names of two of the earliest settlers. The Foster-Armstrong house stands along the edge of the Old Mine Road, perhaps America's oldest highway of any length. This clapboard and stone farmhouse with its distinctive Dutch gambrel roof and its beehive oven has charmed and intrigued travelers for over two centuries.

Julius Foster, a millwright from Long Island, came to Montague about 1790. He was undoubtedly familiar with traditional Dutch construction techniques and many of those details were incorporated into the fine home that he erected. From the outside, the most obvious are the gambrel roof with flared eaves and the exposed back of the large end chimney on the north side of the house. On the inside the corner fireplaces in each of the main rooms are reminders of the early homes of New York and northern New Jersey.

From what we can tell the house was used as an inn or tavern almost from the beginning. The logging trade was a major enterprise along the Delaware, the huge log rafts being lashed together all the way along the river from Narrowsburg, New York, to Montague and floated down the river to the fall at Trenton, there to be cut apart and sent to the sawmills at our growing state capital.

Early in the 19th century James B. Armstrong came to Montague. A shoemaker by trade, Armstrong married Foster's daughter in about 1812. At about the same time the large stone kitchen wing on the south side of the house was added. Because of its more rustic appearance many people have assumed that this rubble stone addition was the original structure, but close examination during restoration work made it clear that the clapboard part is indeed the original structure. The wonderful beehive oven in the kitchen wing that had been covered up for years is once again exposed, giving the kitchen the feel of the original room.

James Armstrong joined his father-in-law in operating a ferry from the banks of the Delaware directly in back of the house across to Milford, Pennsylvania. This was an important link connecting the Deckertown Turnpike, which ran from just south of the now-named Foster-Armstrong house through Deckertown (now the town of Sussex) and on to Jersey City. By now the river was busy with lumbermen traveling down the river on their rafts and passengers of the ferry plying their way back and forth from Pennsylvania. The ferry ran until about 1835. Competition from the Brick House Hotel, just a mile south of the Foster-Armstrong house led Foster and his son-in-law into several other business enterprises. Foster continued his career as a miller, operating a sawmill with his neighbor Abram Shimer, and later a gristmill just north of the house. Meanwhile Armstrong was the area's postmaster for a time. They also tried their hands at running a general store, a blacksmith's shop, a cider press, and a distillery. The foundations of some of these enterprises can still be seen today.

The Armstrong family occupations may have changed as the times and the needs of the community changed, but the family remained in the house down through succeeding generations until the home was purchased by the Federal Government as part of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area in the 1970's. Now MARCH (Montague Association for the Restoration of Community History) looks forward to leasing the Foster-Armstrong House from the Park Service and opening the home to the public, happy in the knowledge that soon a new generation of visitors – perhaps not logger or ferry passengers – but interested travelers, none the less, will be

able to enjoy the hospitality of the house and again tread the board of this unique and beautiful example of Montague's rich heritage."

From the same newsletter, June, 1993, page 3:

"Dear Readers:

On a happy day in May, the 28th to be exact, MARCH officers and trustees met with National Park Service officials in Bushkill, Pennsylvania and signed a Memorandum of Understanding for occupancy of the Foster-Armstrong House. Shortly thereafter, the keys were officially turned over to us. What a thrill! After so many years of hoping, wishing and dreaming, it almost seems too good to be true.

Now that the house is officially ours, the fun really begins and the planning, and the work. Over the coming months we will keep you informed of the latest developments, as we prepare to open the house to the public on a regular basis. If you happen to be driving by and see us there working, stop by and say hello. Take a peak at what we're up to – you're always welcome. "
Barbara Reischel, Editor

From December, 1993, page 3 :

"In late May MARCH signed an agreement with the National Park Service, thereby gaining control of the Foster-Armstrong House for development into a Museum. During the summer we conducted numerous tours of the house for senior and guests alike. An audio tape was made on the history of the house and a video of the interior completed. An official House Opening Committee was formed and a Grand Opening is being planned for early next summer."

From Spring, 1994, page 2:

"Preparations are underway for a Grand Opening Celebration at the Historic Foster-Armstrong House. It will be held in September and we're planning many activities including a parade, craft demonstrations, a short musical program, tours of the house and an official ribbon cutting ceremony. ... Inside the house, plans and work have continued throughout the winter. The large kitchen wing will be converted into an old-fashioned general store, which will be used as our gift shop and meeting room. The four rooms downstairs will be used as a restored/living room (circa 1800), a library/research room and two exhibit rooms. Upstairs the five main rooms will contain a weaving, spinning and quilting studio, and there will also be a small office for MARCH. Everyone is quite excited with the progress that's been made and although all the rooms will not be completely ready for the Grand Opening, we are confident that most of the house will be ready "for company". Barbara Reischel Editor

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1994FOSTER-ARMSTRONG HOUSE

GRAND OPENING PICNIC DON'T FORGET TO MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

From the Winter, 1994 issue, pages 2 and 3:

"Starting in June the men worked every Monday and Wednesday morning at the Foster-Armstrong House – the parking lot has been partially graded, we now have a sink and running water in the basement, and the front of the house has a new coat of paint. Carpentry, painting, wiring, etc. are on-going projects and we are lucky to have so many dedicated workers. ... New promotional brochures, featuring both houses, have been printed. ... After spending all year fixing, planning, building and furnishing the Foster-Armstrong House, we at last have had our Grand Opening the September. It was so gratifying to see so many friends touring the house and enjoying refreshments. We had King's Kids with Chris Thompson singing. Maria Rath and Phil Lid opened the ceremony with patriotic songs. Roger Rector of the National Park Service made a speech and Paul Armstrong honored us with a few words of appreciation. Your President aided in the ribbon-cutting. During the afternoon there were spinning and weaving demonstrations on the porch and an Indian story teller inside the house, which fascinated us

all. Even the weather cooperated. Our Holiday Weekends will be celebrated in our new larger home this year. Santa will be there and the Christmas bazaar will be bigger and better, with goodies, mulled cider ... We plan to hold all our monthly meeting, year-round, at the Foster Armstrong House. Both houses will be open next summer, please volunteer to help us at least one weekend. It is fun and informative, and we need you. ... It's been a great year, thank you all."

Evelyn Dickson, MARCH President