

THE BRICK TAVERN MUSEUM

The Schuyler County Historical Society acquired the Brick Tavern Museum building from the Charles C. Lattin family in 1973 after receiving a sizable bequest from the estate of Dorothy Longnecker, an accomplished pianist and music teacher from Ithaca. The Lattin's were descendents of Dr. Charles D. Clawson, who purchased the building in 1883 for use as his private residence.

Dr. Clawson, a prominent homeopathic surgeon, operated the Bethesda Sanitarium, a large hospital and spa once located on the corner of Routes 14 and 226, until his death in 1917. Before the Clawson family moved in, the building had been a tavern along the stagecoach route from Elmira to Geneva. It had also been a boarding house and a private school for



boys, counting Montour Falls native and New York Governor David B. Hill (1885-91), left, as one of its pupils. Governor Hill's main claim to

fame was that he was the first governor in the United States to use the electric chair

for a capital crime. He felt it to be more humane than hanging from a rope.



Parlor, early 1900s.

The current brick structure dates to around 1828, although deeds show that there may have been a tavern at this location as far back as the late 1790s. Deeds dated prior to 1808 were lost when the county building in Owego was lost to fire. The old deeds termed the building the "Old Brick Tavern Stand."

The Brick Tavern's architectural style is known as early Federal. The National Register of Historic Places notes that "the brick tavern is the only masonry Federal style building in the town, predating the town's many other brick buildings by thirty years." The bricks used in the building's construction are laid in the Flemish Bond pattern. They came here as ballast for the boats navigating Catharine Creek up to present day Main Street. The walls are double thick with a four-inch air gap between the inner and outer wall. The gap served as early insulation.

Originally built as a three-story structure, annual spring floods have filled in the first floor with sediment so that today there is only limited access to the current "basement." Before a flood control system was put in place in the late 1940s, the village of Montour Falls would often endure heavy flooding. It is said the whole village has filled in and risen up to 13 feet due to the floods. Parts of an old corduroy road, thought to be constructed during the Sullivan-Clinton Expedition, and the original property survey pin have been unearthed over the years 13 feet from current ground level.

The Brick Tavern has seven bedrooms, with evidence that the original partitioning may have been different. The radiator heating system has been converted from steam to hot water, with the hot water being routed to the second floor first and then gravity allowed to disperse the water to the first floor radiators. This old system makes it hard to regulate the temperature throughout the building, though keeping the second floor, where the sleeping quarters were located, warmer than the first floor.

Today there is an eclectic mix of furniture and historical items on display at the museum. Some of the furniture is left from the Clawson and Lattin families. Most items have been generously gifted to the museum from Schuyler County residents since the Society took possession of the Brick Tavern building.