

Washington's Headquarters
The John Van Doren House
Millstone, Somerset County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
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Washington's Headquarters
The John Van Doren House
Millstone, Somerset County, New Jersey

Owner: Charles D. Smith

Date of Erection: About 1755 or shortly after

Architect:

Builder: John Van Doren

Present Condition: Excellent

Number of Stories: Two story house with a two story wing and a one story leanto

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - frame construction, shingles

Interior walls - plaster

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - pitch

Historical Data:

The land upon which this house now stands was originally part of a grant made about 1690 to Captain Clement Plumstead. The grant comprised a tract of land on the west side of Millstone River from Peace Brook south to Blackwell's Mills. In 1742 Clement Plumstead by deed transferred to William Plumstead 2,000 acres. Ten years later William Plumstead sold 246 acres to Christian Van Doren. These acres were located on the south side of

Amwell Road in Millstone, and the consideration was 740 pounds. The land passed from Christian to his son John in 1755.

Christian Van Doren came originally from Monmouth County; he settled in Somerset about the time of his marriage. This was in the 1720s since his birth is recorded as 1699 and his son John was born in Somerset in 1726.

The property passed from John Van Doren to Jacob his son with the exception of one lot and a house which went to William. Jacob was born in the homestead, the present house, in 1761. From Jacob, the property descended to his only son John. John had three children; he left the farm to his second son Jacob. A daughter, Catherine, married George M. Metlar, and lived in the Low House (NJ-360). The Metlars purchased the farm from the other heirs. It was their son John Van Doren Metlar who sold to the present owner about 1925.

After the Battle of Princeton in January 1777, General Washington spent the night here. He also stopped here on other occasions. In 1777 he was on his way to Pluckemin having fooled Lord Cornwallis after the Battle of Princeton. Cornwallis, who was pursuing him with about eight thousand troops, believed New Brunswick was Washington's destination. The British imprisoned Van Doren's wife, and we are told hung her up by her heels to get information. Later on the Hessians established a hospital for their sick and wounded on the farm after clearing off a large piece of woodland.

Millstone was the second county seat of Somerset County. The original county seat had been at a Six Mile Run, now Franklin Park, and when this original court house was burned in 1737-8, the site of the county seat was moved to Millstone, called Hillsboro and some-

times Somerset Court House. The court house was built in 1738, and burned in 1779 by the Tory raiders under Lieutenant Colonel Sincoe. It was at Millstone that in May 1775 the Somerset County Committee of Correspondence met and considered the question of raising troops. Here in 1777 General Dickinson and his Jersey militia were encamped. In June 1777 Lord Howe's troops were here for a short time when Howe made an attempt to draw Washington from his strong position at Middlebrook. In September 1777 Millstone was designated as one of the seats for the State's Supreme Court, the other being Burlington. Sincoe made his famous raid through the Jerseys in 1779 in an effort to destroy some fifty flat boats which were stationed at Van Veghten's Bridge. These had been built in Philadelphia and launched on the Raritan in the hopes of being used in connection with the French fleet in an attack on Manhattan which Washington never attempted. On this raid when the court house was burned, the old Dutch Church was likewise destroyed.

Bibliography:

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"The Second Somerset County Court House - Millstone" Somerset County Historical Quarters Volume I (January 1912) pages 50-58

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