

## THE PETER DEBAUN HOUSE: A HISTORY



*Photo, above, from the DeBaun family album, showing the Peter DeBaun House, circa 1880s, with front porch and well. Today it is owned by American Legion Post 269 and is greatly remodeled. (Photo courtesy of Amy DeBaun.)*

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Historic Preservation Commission of the Borough of Emerson is indebted to the following for helping to make this history possible: Amy DeBaun and John Kinabrew, for photos, research and other information, and Alberta Bieling Crum, for family

photos, personal recollections and her father's history of the house. Other essential sources include "Background History of the Borough of Emerson" by Howard I. Durie; "A Dutch Family in the Middle Colonies, 1660-1800," by Firth Haring Fabend; "Genealogy of the DeBaun Family" by William H. Wallace; "Record of Officers and Men of New Jersey in the Civil War, 1861-1865," by William S. Stryker, "The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1790 – 1840," by Jack Larkin, and U.S. Census records from 1830 to 1930.

## INTRODUCTION

It is a summer day in 1779, and Peter DeBaun is up before dawn, another strenuous workday about to begin. Demanding his attention are acres of farmland – fields of various grains, like buckwheat and rye, rows of garden crops such as potatoes and turnips, and orchards of apples and other fruit trees. To the west, below his barn and outbuildings, is low-lying swampland; a little farther west, on higher ground, are other large farms hugging the edge of Kinderkamack Road. But there's nothing unusual about this; you'll find the same rural, agricultural landscape throughout the county, almost all of it owned and maintained by Jersey Dutch farmers like Peter DeBaun.

Today, it takes considerable effort to imagine what this area once looked like. The little that's left of the old farms is rapidly disappearing – the soil, worked by generations, now covered by concrete or asphalt; the buildings, long since demolished. But, fortunately, not all is gone. Here and there, often hidden behind remodeled facades, some homes have managed to survive. One, sitting on a hill above Main Street in eastern Emerson, was the residence of Peter DeBaun.

Few people in Emerson know the building by this name. The DeBaun House, built sometime in the late 1760s or 1770s (the exact date's uncertain), is familiar to most residents as the headquarters of American Legion Post 269. But its story begins long ago, when it was part of the Jersey Dutch community known as Old Hook.

## THE COMMUNITY OF OLD HOOK

Rivers and streams have always been natural choices for identifying a parcel of land, and such was the case for the community that came to be known as Old Hook. The name itself derives from the Dutch word "hoek," meaning "angle" or "corner," and refers to the corner of land circumscribed by three connecting waterways: the Musquapsink Brook, the Pascack Brook and the Hackensack River.

Like most of New Jersey, the Old Hook area had been tribal territory of the Lenape Indians, but they were gone by the time the first non-natives came looking for property. In the eighteenth century there was a set procedure for acquiring unclaimed land in what was then East New Jersey. At the time, a group known as the Twenty-four Proprietors, one of whom was William Penn, controlled most of the colony. The Proprietors owned the land in common, and if one of them wished to sell a parcel of property, he was required to apply to the others for a grant.



*In the summer of 1780, George Washington's troops were encamped in Kinderkamack, and it was the job of the general's official mapmaker, Robert Erskine, to record the local routes and landmarks. His map, above, shows the area of Old Hook, created by the boundaries of the Pascack Brook (just north of Old Hook Road on the map) and the Hackensack River, running from the top right to the bottom left. Here Erskine depicts the home of Peter's brother, Jacob, along Old Hook Road. (Map reprinted from Howard Durie's "Background History of the Borough of Emerson".)*

In the Old Hook area it was Proprietor Peter Sonmans who acquired two major shares. Sonmans sold one large parcel, which today lies mostly in Westwood, to David Demarest sometime in the 1720s or 1730s. Its northern boundary was the Pascack Brook and its southern terminus was an east-west line running roughly identical to what later became Old Hook Road. Demarest, the great-grandson of his family's patriarch, David

Des Marets, the founder of the so-called French Patent on the east side of the Hackensack River, probably never settled on the property. But not long thereafter he purchased another share farther east, where his son Pieter would build his home. After more than two centuries, the land is still cultivated as the Old Hook Farm.

Sonmans' second share was just south of the Demarest tract. In 1727 he sold it to two partners, James (Jacques) Laroe and John (Jean) Alyea, French immigrants who had acquired the Indian title in the 1680s. The pair later added a third partner, Nicholas Lozier (also a Frenchman), and they divided the property amongst them: Alyea took the western portion, Lozier the middle, and Laroe the eastern part, which bordered on what was then the Hackensack River (later enlarged to form the Oradell Reservoir). Descendants of Laroe and Alyea settled on their properties, but neither Nicholas Lozier nor his offspring made a home on his. It would be the task of another family to turn that wilderness into productive land.



*The photo, above, shows the DeBaun house and farm as it appeared sometime in the 1880s. It is the only picture known to exist showing the barns and other outbuildings at the rear of the property. The fence in the foreground was located on the east side of Main Street. (Photo courtesy of Amy DeBaun.)*

## EARLY HISTORY OF THE DEBAUN FAMILY

Peter and Jacob were not the first DeBauns to live in the New World. The brothers and their siblings were second generation Americans, descended from their grandfather, Joost DeBaun and his wife, Elizabeth Drabbe. Like many in the Jersey Dutch community, Joost was not Dutch at all, but French (*Joost* not being his given name). He was born in Beaune, Cote D'Or, in the region of Burgundy, in approximately 1642, his surname likely derived from his place of birth (de Beaune – of Beaune – becoming DeBaun).

As Protestant Huguenots in Catholic France, the DeBauns were vulnerable to religious persecution. This is the likely reason for Joost departing for Flanders, Belgium in 1670. Here he met his first wife, but she died young, leaving him a widower. From Flanders he moved to Holland, where he changed his first name to Joost, and married his second wife, Elizabeth Drabbe. It's not known whether he intended to settle in Holland or, like many expatriate Huguenots, simply used this as a stopover before heading to America. But in 1683 he arrived in Bushwick, New York, with his wife and young son, Jacobus.

DeBaun became something of a wanderer, but wherever he went, he became actively involved in his community's public and religious life. He worked as a town clerk in Bushwick, and served in the same capacity, as well as a local schoolmaster, when he moved to the Dutch village of New Utrecht (now part of Brooklyn) soon afterward. In New Utrecht he became a reader (*vorleser*) in the Dutch Reformed Church, an institution that would play a central role in his life and the lives of his children and grandchildren.

In 1698, DeBaun found himself on the wrong side of a popular uprising known as Leisler's Rebellion. Although the revolt was short lived, Joost and his family were forced to move again, this time to New Rochelle, New York, where he continued his vocation of schoolmaster. In 1702 he relocated to Rockland County and two years later, to his final destination, in Hackensack. Here he became an elder and church master in the Dutch Reformed Church, and died sometime between the years of 1718 and 1722.

Surprisingly, more is known about the life of Joost DeBaun than that of his son, Carel, the father of Peter and Jacob. Carel was born in 1692, while the family was living in New Utrecht, New York. His young wife, Jannetje Haring, was only sixteen when he married her on February 14, 1714, in Tappan, New York. How long the young couple

remained in Tappan is uncertain, but it must have been for at least several years, as their son Peter was born there in 1718.

It is through their mother, Jannetje, that Peter and Jacob can trace their lineage to the Harings, one of the most prominent Dutch families in Rockland and Bergen Counties. Jannetje's father, Pieter Haring, served for many years as Orange County's delegate to the New York Assembly. But Peter DeBaun may have inherited his pioneering spirit from another ancestor, Jan Pietersen Haring, Pieter Haring's father.

As Firth Haring Fabend notes in her book, "A Dutch Family in the Middle Colonies, 1660-1800," there were primarily three ways in which a Dutch farmer could rise economically and socially in New Amsterdam: by farming; by perfecting a second occupation, such as blacksmith or tanner; or through the acquisition of property. The last was pursued not only to become self-sufficient, but to improve one's financial status and the family's social standing. It was this purpose that most likely motivated Jan Pietersen Haring's desire to leave his first home in the New World.

Jan Haring immigrated from The Netherlands in the mid-seventeenth century and established a prosperous farm, or *bouwerie*, in Manhattan. Not entirely satisfied, he went looking for greater opportunity and a new home for his family. He found it in 1681, when he and two of his neighbors signed a deed to purchase a large tract of land from the Tappan Indians, which would later be known as the Tappan Patent. Haring was the driving force in what was admittedly a risky venture, but it ended up paying off handsomely for the patentees and their families.

But not for Jan Haring. Sadly, he would not live to see his dream materialize; he would die in 1683, before the move across the Hudson. Nevertheless, the Tappan Patent became one of the largest single purchases of land in the New York area. Consisting of 16,000 acres, much of it fertile farmland, it extended seven miles from north to south, from present day Nyack to where Harrington Park exists today.

After leaving Tappan, Peter and Jacob's parents eventually settled in the Jersey Dutch community of Schraalenburgh, where Carel became an elder in the Dutch Reformed Church. It was while living here, in 1748, that he purchased approximately 300 acres in the Old Hook area from Nicholas Lozier, which the latter had acquired from Peter Sonmans. Although one late-nineteenth century historian has stated that Carel may have settled here, there are no reliable sources to support this. When he passed away in 1765, the land became the property of sons Peter and Jacob.



*Shown above is a photo of the Wortendyke Barn in Park Ridge, New Jersey. This large structure was typical of the barns built by the Jersey Dutch, and the DeBauns most likely had one that looked similar. (Photo by Kenneth Hoffman.)*

### PETER DEBAUN AND HIS HOME

It's a fair guess that when Peter and Jacob DeBaun gained title to their father's land, the property was essentially wilderness. There are no records of anyone else settling there, and if there had been any previous Indian activity, the forest had long since erased it. In his will, Carel DeBaun showed no favoritism to either son, each receiving half of the 300 acres. Jacob built his home near Old Hook Road, on the present site of the Shop Rite supermarket. Although his and Peter's farms were contiguous, where the boundaries lay is not known.

The third oldest of eleven siblings, Peter was born October 9, 1719, in Tappan, New York, and was probably named for his maternal grandfather, Pieter Haring. On August 5, 1743 he married 21 year old Maritie (Maria) Banta at the Dutch Reformed Church in Schraalenburgh, New Jersey (where Bergenfield, Dumont and Haworth are today). With the possible exception of his youngest son, also named Peter, all of DeBaun's six children were born in the community of Schraalenburgh. Three were girls (including the two oldest siblings) and three were boys.

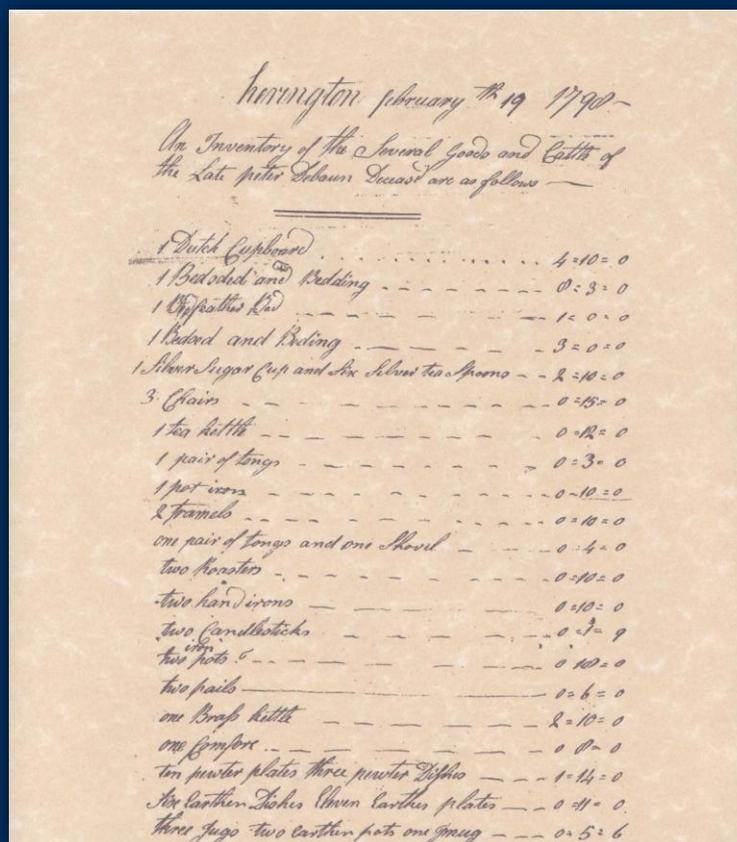
There's no way of knowing exactly when Peter DeBaun built his home in Old Hook, but it was after he inherited the property in 1765, and no later than 1779, when he appears on a tax assessment list. Like most homes built by eighteenth century families of modest means, the wood frame DeBaun house consisted of one first floor room, which presently serves as the building's south wing. All meals were cooked in the large fireplace, which provided light in the evening and warmth during the colder months. The upstairs garret or attic offered a place for storage and perhaps a sleeping location for a member or members of the family.

The tax assessment also reveals what some today may be surprised to learn: the DeBauns owned a slave. This was not unusual for Dutch-American families of the middle class, although most had few slaves. The gender isn't mentioned, but either way, that individual would have endured a hard life, with few amenities and almost no rights to speak of. If a male, he would have spent most days doing heavy-duty work in the fields. If a female, she would have devoted most of her time doing chores around the house but also would have done fieldwork when needed. He or she might have slept in the same room with the family, or perhaps in the garret. Elsewhere in Old Hook, where families owned more than one slave, simple living quarters were often built for them, separate from the master's house.



*Detail from a 1732 mantelpiece, showing a typical Dutch wagon, the most common form of transportation for rural Dutch Americans of that period. It was used for many purposes, such as carting farm products to market or taking the family to Sunday church services. (Detail from the Van Bergen Overmantel, Cooperstown, New York.)*

Unfortunately, no one in the Peter DeBaun family left a diary, nor have any letters or other writings been found, so much is left to speculation. One clue to their lifestyle was the estate inventory taken in 1798, after Peter's death the previous December. Such inventories were a normal practice at that time, in order to determine the value of the deceased's estate, and little of even minor worth was omitted. Peter's inventory reflects a typical Jersey Dutch family of moderate means, certainly not wealthy but clearly self-sufficient. The DeBauns grew all the important grain crops, including buckwheat, corn and rye, as well as hay for the livestock. They had pigs and chickens, and cows for milk and other dairy products. Peter also owned all the usual implements required for an eighteenth century farmer, including siths and mathooks, common Dutch tools used to harvest wheat and other grains.



Shown above is a copy of the first page of the 1798 inventory of Peter DeBaun's estate, with the introductory first line "An Inventory of the Several Goods and Cattle of the Late Peter DeBaun Deceased [sic] are as follows – "(Copy courtesy of Amy DeBaun and John Kinabrew. See inventory list in the appendix).

One of the necessary crops for farmers during this period was not for consumption, but for the production of cloth and clothing: flax. Peter DeBaun's inventory records the existence of a half bushel of flax seed, used for sowing, and 50 pounds of the harvested plant. Before commercially-sold cloth became readily available in the early nineteenth century, families like the DeBauns had to make all their clothing from scratch. Flax was used for the creation of linen, a long process with up to twenty steps, from the growing and harvesting of the plants to the final weaving of the material. The DeBauns were also involved in the making of wool, since they owned at least two of the basic requirements: sheep and a wool wheel. This process was not as lengthy as the making of linen, and even children played a part, separating out impurities from the woolen fibers. But the making of cloth was almost exclusively women's work, including the use of the spinning wheel and the loom. Along with cooking and caring for the children, wives and older daughters stayed busy throughout the year, even during the winter months, when, with fieldwork finished, the men of the household had a little free time.

If the constant demands of running their farms weren't enough, the DeBauns and their neighbors had to contend with the intrusions of the Revolutionary War. It's not known where Peter and Maria's sympathies lay, but there's no record of loyalist behavior, as was the case with Johannes Myers, whose farm was just to the south of the DeBauns'. For his Tory activities, Myers had his property confiscated after the war. But even for the Jersey Dutch who stayed cautiously neutral, there was a price to pay. Many of the farmers of Bergen County traded their excess goods across the Hudson, in New York City. Since the British occupied Manhattan for most of the war, this market was off limits for all, except for those brave (or desperate) enough to risk being caught.

Bergen County was not devoid of military action during the war, but most was concentrated to the south and east. Other than the infamous Baylor Massacre in what is today River Vale, violent encounters in the Pascack Valley were extremely rare. More common was foraging by both British and Continental troops, although the latter were by far the more frequent culprits. The farmers of Kinderkamack and Old Hook experienced the most serious depredations in September of 1780, when George Washington's troops encamped along the slope north of Soldier Hill Road and west of Kinderkamack Road. In claims against the Continentals, Peter DeBaun included "20 bushels of buckwheat, the same of corn, 5 sheep, a heifer, a pig and 16 fowls," all valued at 14 pounds, 13 shillings. His brother, Jacob, lost "a mare 3 years old, 9 sheep, 3 beehives and 2 shoats" whose estimated worth was 23 pounds, 9 shillings. The theft of the beehives may seem surprising, but it shouldn't, since honey in the eighteenth century was a common sweetener. All told, losses to the residents in Old Hook and Kinderkamack were considerable, and the items were almost always taken without the

owner's consent. As one of Washington's officers confessed in his private journal, "we call this foraging, but it is only a gentle name for *plundering*." When the troops moved on later in the month, the locals, whatever their sympathies, must have felt relieved.

After the war, the DeBauns continued to run a successful farm. On December 28, 1797, Peter DeBaun's life ended at the age of seventy-eight, the cause of his passing unknown. His widow, Maria, outlived him by about three years, dying in January of 1801, also at the age of seventy-eight.

### OWNERSHIP UNDER PETER'S DESCENDANTS

When Peter DeBaun died in 1797, his estate was inherited by his three sons, Charles, Jacob and Peter, the last of whom would gain title to the home and about 80 acres of land. (In 1830 he would sell 14 acres to John R. Blauvelt, leaving him with about 65 acres at the time of his death.) As was then the custom, women were rarely allowed to own property, but Maria was given the right to live out the rest of her days at the farm, provided she didn't remarry.

Peter was thirty years old when he acquired his father's estate. The youngest of Peter and Maria's children, he was married twice, first to Effie Westervelt and, after her death, to Magdalena Van Voorhees, whom he wed in 1794 at the Dutch Reformed Church in Schraalenburgh. Magdalena was the daughter of Hendrick Van Voorhees, who owned a home and farm along Kinderkamack Road in what is presently Emerson, where a senior housing development exists today. It is believed that the younger Peter was the builder of what now serves as the large central portion of the house. Its most noteworthy feature is its gambrel, or double, roof, which was characteristic of Jersey Dutch homes in the New World, and is the only historic example found in Emerson.

Little is known about the life of the younger Peter, except that he continued to maintain his father's farm. He and Magdalena had four children, all of whom were baptized at the Hackensack Dutch Reformed Church – Lavinia, or Wybetje, was the youngest, born in January, 1802; Peter, born in December, 1799; Effie, born in September, 1797; and Hendrick, the oldest, born on November 28, 1795. Henry, as he was more commonly called, was probably named after his maternal grandfather. All the siblings could claim an ancestral connection, through their maternal grandmother, Wybreg Laroe, to her grandfather, the aforementioned Jacques LaRoe, one of the three original purchasers of the Old Hook Patent.

In addition to the immediate family, the 1830 U.S. Census records a female slave, between the ages of 36 and 54, living with the DeBauns, as well as a “free man of color,” between the ages of 10 and 24, who was likely her son. Although 1830 appears to be a late date for an individual to be enslaved in the North, New Jersey didn’t completely abolish this loathsome practice until 1846, one of the last Northern states to do so. Nor were the DeBauns the only family in the Old Hook-Kinderkamack area to still embrace slavery; the 1830 Census records John Ackerman, of Kinderkamack, owning ten slaves.

On December 8, 1839 Peter DeBaun died, without leaving a will. On January 13 of the following year, his heirs appointed John R. Blauvelt as the estate’s administrator. Peter was so deeply in debt when he passed away, that not even the sale of his personal belongings could satisfy his creditors. As a result, it became necessary to sell his property, as well as the home where he and his family had lived. Ironically, this meant that his eldest son, Henry, at the time living in New York, had to buy back what should have been his natural inheritance. As it turned out, Henry submitted the highest bid when the estate was sold at auction – \$2,950 – a substantial amount of money for that time.



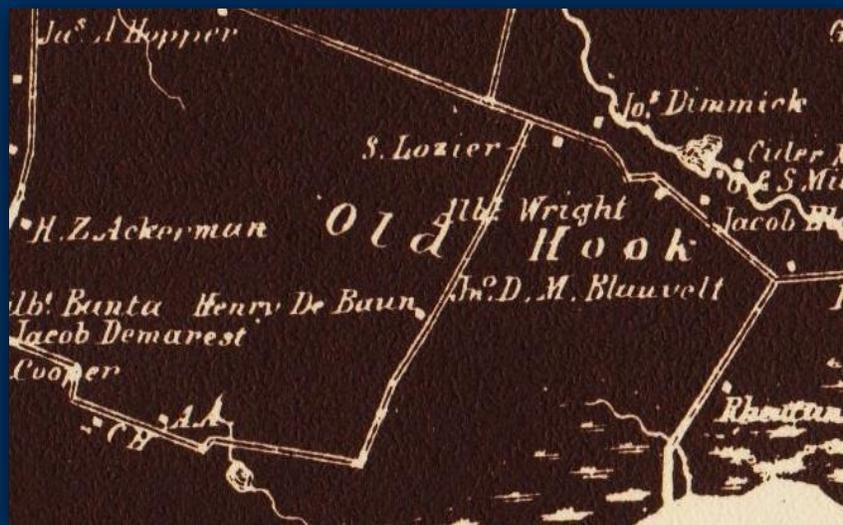
*Photo, above, of the decorative mantel above the fireplace in the central room of the DeBaun House, estimated to have been built sometime prior to the Civil War. (Photo by Kenneth Hoffman.)*

When Henry DeBaun moved back to his childhood home in Old Hook, accompanying him were his wife, Effie Cole, and his children, all of whom had been born in New York City. Henry left behind his carpenter’s business in Manhattan to resume the job of maintaining the DeBaun farm. About ten years later, in 1850, the census reflects that only his two youngest children were living with him – Hannah, who was sixteen, and Henry, who was eight. The real estate was valued just slightly higher than its purchase price, at \$3,000, but apparently the farm was successful, with nothing to suggest that he was suffering the same debt problems his father had. In 1856, Henry was instrumental, along with other neighbors, in having Main Street officially laid out as a public road. For years it had served as a simple farm lane running from Old Hook

Road through the DeBaun farms to the Myers farm to the south. It is also believed that it was Henry who had the decorative wooden fire place built in the central room of the house, one of the finest features of the home's interior, still preserved to this day.

Despite occurring miles away, and not virtually on their doorstep like the Revolution had, the Civil War had an impact upon the DeBauns and their neighbors. Of the four known natives of the Kinderkamack/Old Hook communities who served in the war, two were Henry's sons, Abraham and Jacob Henry. The latter enlisted as a corporal in Company F of New Jersey's Eighth Infantry Regiment on October 10, 1861. Although the Eighth Regiment saw action on the Virginia Peninsula in 1864, Jacob was not there to see it, having received a disability discharge in January of 1862. In September of that same year, Abraham enlisted as a private in Company I of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, composed mainly of Pascack Valley residents. Although the 22<sup>nd</sup> saw no real fighting, doing the bulk of its duty guarding trains, Abraham did not survive the war; he succumbed to typhoid fever on February 22, 1863, the only known Civil War fatality from the area that is today Emerson.

On April 19, 1868, Henry DeBaun passed away at the age of 72. He left behind a widow, Hannah Hendricks DeBaun, whom he had married sometime after the death of his first wife, Effie, in 1864. There is some question regarding his residence at the time of



*The above is a detail from an 1861 map, showing the location of Henry DeBaun's home, next to his name. The entire length of Main Street can be seen on this map, having been laid out as a public thoroughfare by DeBaun and others five years earlier. (Map from Howard Durie's "Background History of the Borough of Emerson".)*

his passing. Some sources have him listed at the Old Hook homestead, but the 1860 U.S. Census has him living in Hackensack with his first wife. That census instead shows his son, Jacob Henry, as the head of the Old Hook household, with his wife Maria and young daughter, Evanna, just two years old. Also living with them is an African-American laborer, George Thompson. Maria is pregnant with son David Henry DeBaun, who will be born later that year. Nowhere is there any mention of Henry or his wife Effie, so it is presumed that the census entry for Hackensack is correct. Why they moved out of the Main Street home isn't known, nor whether Henry returned before he died. But the house and property nevertheless remained in his name.

The 1870 U.S. Census lists only Henry's widow and second wife, Hannah, and her 23 year old daughter, Jane Hendricks, (from her first marriage) living at the Old Hook estate. Jacob Henry has apparently moved on, perhaps back to New York City, where he appears in the 1880 census. When Henry made out his will in 1850, he chose his wife Effie and son Abraham as executors of the estate. But since both had preceded him in death, his son-in-law, Abraham Wortendyke, husband of daughter Hannah, was appointed as the Administrator C.T.A. (*cum testamento annexo*) to handle the will. In 1872, Henry DeBaun's remaining heirs (including, presumably, son Jacob Henry and daughter Hannah) sold his home and farm, totaling 65 acres, plus adjacent land he had also acquired, to Henry Bick for \$10,000. For the first time since Carel DeBaun had purchased the property in 1748, a period of over 120 years, a DeBaun did not own it.



Shown above is a detail from the Walker Atlas of 1876, with the DeBaun house on Main Street, purchased four years earlier by Henry Bick. The atlas incorrectly identifies him as "Jas. Bick."

## HOME AND PROPERTY AFTER THE DEBAUNS

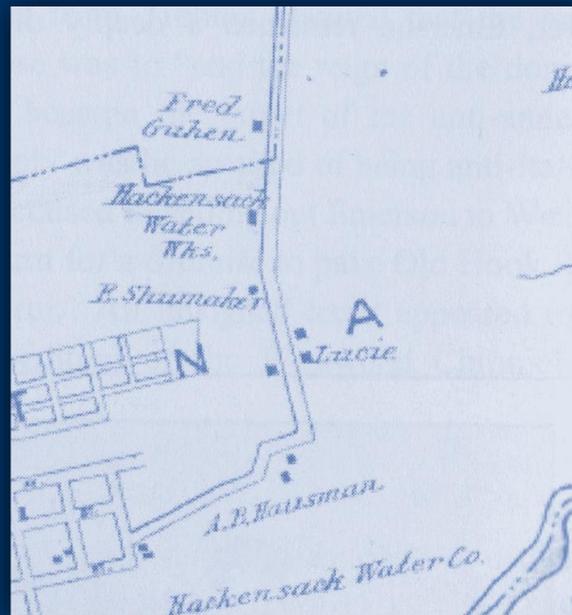
In his history of the DeBaun House, Alfred Bieling, an owner himself after 1943, identifies each of the purchasers after the DeBauns. Other than Amelia Frederick, who had family ties to the Old Hook area, little is known about the residents. Henry Bick, who bought the house and property from the DeBaun estate in 1872 and who apparently lived there until his death on May 27, 1887, is a bit of a mystery. He is absent from the 1880 U.S. Census, and he leaves no wife or children. As a result, Cornelius Van Saun is appointed to represent his heirs, some of whom live in Germany. As Bieling relates, James Van Valen, the well-known ex-judge, is selected as a special master to settle a complicated dispute between the heirs. The lawsuit is finally settled on January 3, 1889, when the three parcels of land acquired by Henry Bick are sold to Amelia Frederick for just \$3,600, considerably less than what Bick had originally paid.

Even before the purchase, Frederick was probably familiar with the area. Her mother was the sister of Christina Kuhn Heck, who lived nearby on the site of the old Jacob DeBaun farm. Amelia is representative of a change in the ethnic make-up of the Kinderkamack and Old Hook communities. Like Joseph Dimmick, who moved to his home and farm on Old Hook Road in 1851, and Daniel and Christina Heck, who arrived in 1862, Amelia was born in Germany. Most of these German immigrants continued the practice of farming, but brought their own customs and institutions to their new home. Amelia, for example, became an active member of the Union Chapel, erected on Linwood Avenue in 1900 mainly for the benefit of the growing German Protestant community. By the late nineteenth century, the dominance of the Jersey Dutch was just about over.

In the 1900 U.S. Census (the 1890 census having been destroyed by fire), Amelia Frederick is listed under her maiden name as the head of her household, and her occupation as farmer. No husband is recorded, but the letter *M*, for married, (not *W* for widow) follows her name. If the census is correct, 51-year old Amelia has given birth to twelve children, seven of whom are still living, including two at home: Amelia, age 22, and Katie, age 18. Among the members of the household is a nine year old granddaughter, also named Katie, but the whereabouts of her parents are unknown. Also living at the homestead were two male farm laborers, both of Polish birth and recent immigrants.

Amelia Frederick is not recorded in the 1910 U.S. Census, but her daughter, Amelia, is listed as living nearby, in the home of her brother-in-law, Albert Richter. On December 28 of that year, the elder Amelia sold the home and property to John S.

Mabon, who apparently had no intention to reside there. Less than three months later, on March 13, 1911, Mabon sold the estate to the Pascack Land Company, a subsidiary of the Hackensack Water Company. In 1921, the Water Company will embark on a major expansion of the Oradell Reservoir, dredging out riparian land along the Hackensack River, back into the towns of Emerson and Harrington Park. In preparation for the project, the company was purchasing adjacent property to serve as a natural buffer to protect the new water supply. Some of this included parts of the old Peter DeBaun farm.



*Pictured, above, is a detail from a 1913 Bergen County atlas showing the DeBaun House under the ownership of the Hackensack Water Company (cited here as "Hackensack Water Wks."). To the south, and across the road on former DeBaun farm property, is the Lucia home, incorrectly labeled as "Lucie."*

Apparently not needing all of the property, on December 31, 1925, the Pascack Land Company sold about 21 acres, including the DeBaun house, to an entity known as the Lucia Land Company. As Alfred Bieling notes in his history, this is the first time since the younger Peter DeBaun inherited the homestead farm that the estate has been divided. Who exactly constituted the Lucia Land Company isn't clear, but the 1920 U.S. Census had already recorded two Lucia families living on Main Street (although it mistakenly lists it as Old Hook Road), and a 1913 Bergen County atlas shows a Lucia family (incorrectly written as "Lucie") on the eastern side of the road, a little south of

the DeBaun House. Still remaining on that spot today, on land now owned by the Borough of Emerson, is an old foundation and well.

On July 29, 1927, a corporation known as Calta Realty purchased a one acre parcel of land on the west side of Main Street that included the DeBaun home. What the realty company did or intended to do with this property isn't certain, and the 1930 U.S. Census offers no insight into its residency. On April 14, 1931, Calta Realty sold the home and property to Marie Dieling, who lived there for over twelve years, until Alfred and Winifred Bieling assumed ownership on July 15, 1943.



*Photo, above, of the DeBaun House, not long after it was purchased by the Bielings. The original wing, to the south, is mostly obscured in the picture, the front porch is still intact, and the north wing has yet to be constructed. (Photo courtesy of Alberta Bieling Crum.)*

Alfred Bieling obviously had a great respect for the home's history and, accordingly, a commitment to keeping it preserved. It's through his daughter, Alberta, that we know how it looked when her father bought it, and the changes he made while he lived there. In order to keep the house as consistent as possible with its colonial-era construction, Bieling removed the wrap-around porch, which, though attractive, was not an original feature. As a rule, Jersey Dutch homes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries didn't include porches; these were generally Victorian add-ons that gave some ornamentation to what were essentially plain and practical farmhouses. Despite his desire for historic authenticity, Bieling added a third wing on the north side of the house, for use as a garage. He tempered this by using vintage nails and wood to mimic

the appearance of age, and oriented the closed side to the front of the structure, disguising the fact that it was a modern garage, and not an old room of the house.



*The DeBaun house in the 1940s, with the north (garage) wing under construction. (Photo courtesy of Alberta Bieling Crum.)*

*The DeBaun house, shown in winter, after the north (garage) wing has been added, seen at the far right in the picture. (Photo courtesy of Alberta Bieling Crum.)*



During the period that the Bielings were in residence, the land surrounding what was left of the historic property was undergoing drastic change. Although sections of the old farm had already been subdivided and built upon, the parcels were fairly large and the new homes few. But in 1953, the Eagle Construction Company began work on a large development of ranch houses in the mostly swampy area to the west of the Bielings' property, as well as to the north and the south. The old home, once a focal point of the landscape, was engulfed by the suburb sprawling out around it. At the same time, the old farmland across the road, now owned by the Hackensack Water Company, was returning to forest.

In 1960, the home's history as a private residence ended, when Post 269 of the American Legion purchased the building and property. On June 26, 1961, The Record newspaper covered the dedication ceremony of the post's new headquarters. Citing the

historic importance of the structure, the article stated that “during renovation by [American] Legion members, evidence of the antiquity of the house was given by hand-hewn beams, wooden pegs and insulation of mud and straw.” Members at the time noted that one of the reasons for choosing the house as its new headquarters was to ensure its preservation.

For over fifty years, the DeBaun House served as the meeting place for Post 269 of the American Legion. The new owners enclosed the old garage that Alfred Bieling had built, transforming it into a bar room. But they kept the in-ground swimming pool in the back, which Bieling had constructed where the old barn and outbuildings once stood. But as the years went by, and some members passed away while others grew older, the costs of maintenance placed pressure on the post’s resources. In 2013, the remaining members voted to sell the old house and land, placing its future in doubt.



*Photo, above, of the DeBaun House after its purchase by American Legion Post 269. At this point, the front door is still visible, although it will later be entirely covered by siding. Date of photo unknown.*

### **EPILOGUE: FUTURE OF THE DEBAUN HOUSE**

When the DeBaun House and property were put up for sale in 2013, there was genuine concern that a developer might buy the estate and demolish the home. Amy DeBaun, a descendant of Peter DeBaun, started an online petition to garner public support for the home’s preservation, but no one stepped forward with a desire to

purchase and save it. Then, in an article published in the December 23 issue of The Record, the newspaper reported that the American Legion post and the Bergen County Housing Authority had agreed upon a potential solution, one that would satisfy multiple interests. As the article stated, the Legion was finalizing paperwork to lease the entire 1.6 acre property, including the home, to the Housing Development Commission (the non-profit arm of the Bergen County Housing Authority) for \$1 per year, for 99 years. In return, the Commission would build housing for at least seven disabled veterans somewhere on the property. And, as part of the deal, the DeBaun House would be saved.

Initially, there was no intention to preserve the eighteenth century structure. But the Housing Authority, upon being informed of the building's history, hired an architect to do an inspection. He concluded that restoration was feasible, and as a result, the Authority took a new approach, planning to do everything possible not only to save the home, but, according to an article in the Pascack Valley Community Life, to make "renovations [that] will unearth the colonial looks ... that may have been lost with time."

As part of the restoration project, which will include an application for historic preservation grants, the Housing Authority expects to get the DeBaun House listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places. According to the state's web site, the register is "the official list of New Jersey's historic resources of local, state, and national interest." If successful, the home would be the first site in Emerson placed on the register, a recognition well-deserved and long overdue.

### APPENDIX: 1798 INVENTORY OF PETER DEBAUN

The following is a listing of the items that appeared in the February 19, 1798 estate inventory of Peter DeBaun (which was filed at the Bergen County Courthouse on June 13, 1798). Inventories such as these were commonly done to determine the value of the deceased's belongings, of particular importance if debts were owed. The county court appointed appraisers, who were usually local men (in this case, John Ackerman and Derrick Cooper), to look at the estate and estimate its worth. Eighteenth century inventories consisted of a wide range of personal possessions, including clothing, cooking implements, farmers' tools, wagons and plows, cash and bonds, and even livestock. Although left out here, barns and other outbuildings were often included (an unfortunate omission, since it would have provided a better picture of the DeBaun farm). Depending on the appraiser, items might be described simply or in detail.

Inventories were normally undertaken within thirty days after a death, and those with a longer time lapse usually indicate that the estate was contested.

The following listing appears as on the original document, without the correction of any anachronistic wordings or misspellings. Not included is the estimated monetary value for each item, which was part of all such inventories. A brief glossary has been added afterward to describe some of the less well known implements, although the meaning of some (such as "comfore," "stafe," "piggon" and "kieler") is unknown.

---

Herington February 19 1798 –

An Inventory of the Several Goods and Cattle of the Late Peter DeBaun  
Decease [sic] are as follows –

1 Dutch cupboard  
1 Bedsted and beding  
1 Feather bed  
1 Bedsted and beding  
1 Silver sugar cup and 6 silver tea spoons  
3 Chairs  
1 Tea kettle  
1 Pair of tongs  
1 Iron pot  
2 Tramels  
1 Pair of tongs and 1 shovel  
2 Roasters  
2 Hand irons  
2 Candlesticks  
2 Iron pots  
2 Pails  
1 Brass kettle  
1 Comfore  
10 Pewter plates, 3 pewter dishes  
6 Earthen dishes, 11 earthen plates  
3 Jugs, 2 earthen pots, 1 mug  
2 Jugs, 1 lanthor, 1 hour glass  
1 Skillet, 1 pair of bellows, 7 bottles  
1 Auger  
5 Earthen cups, 2 glasses, 2 viols, 1 pepper box  
2 Tea pots, 2 tea canisters and 1 milk pot  
Scales and weight, 1 brush  
1 Pair of Smoothen irons, writeing box  
1 Slate, 1 pound weight, 1 pincher

2 Spoon cases and 12 spoons  
1 Small cupboard, 1 pair of sizsars  
1 Looking glass  
1 Dresser, 1 large chair, 6 old chairs  
1 Fowling piece, 7 powder horns  
2 Tables and a chest  
1 Hatchel, 2 earthen pots, 1 test & stafe  
Grindstone, 1 sheep share, bullet mole  
7 Knives, 8 forks  
2 Dung forks, 2 pitch forks, 1 course hatchel  
1 Iron bound waggon  
1 Old chaise  
1 Slay  
Plough and harrow  
Timber and lather  
Fannel mill  
1 Cask and barrel  
Gears and harness  
2 hogs  
1 Milk cow  
1 Milk cow  
1 Calf  
8 Fowels  
1 Sheep  
2 Load of hay  
Old boards and sundries  
Cask and kieler  
1 Barrel and cask  
Half hogshed and 2 dieing casks  
1 Cask, trowel and sundries  
3 Piggons, churn and 2 killers  
Tub and kiellers  
Dutch bible  
Frying pan and griddle  
2 Sythes and 2 mathhookes and tray  
Loom, spooling wheel, reed and gears  
Warping loom and 15 big spools  
2 Spining wheels  
Cradle and 2 sythes  
Wool wheel  
Half bushel of flaxseed  
7 Beehives, 1 cask, 1 half barrel of vinegar  
2 Sifts and sundries  
Saw and jointer  
Brush hook, bark and bolts

Neck yoke, auger and sundries  
5 Sythes, rings and wedges  
Post ax, narrow ax, canteen  
2 Chests and tray, 4 pound of wool  
2 Casks and brand basket  
1 Rope  
Gears and sundries  
Smoke beef, gamman and shoulder  
15 Bushel and ½ buckwheat at 3/p. bus.  
27 Bushel of rye at 5/p. bus.  
10 Bushel of Indian corn  
4 Bushel and ½ sowing rye  
Dutch books  
Stubing hoe, spade, clevers, hoe  
Tar bucket  
1 Cradle and small chair and trunk  
1 Bond bearing date October 1, 1795  
1 Bond bearing date August 7, 1797  
1 Bond bearing date May 1, 1797  
1 Bond bearing date May 1, 1797  
1 Bond bearing date May 1, 1797  
1 Note bearing date June 2, 1797  
200 Weight busquit meal  
4 Bags  
Sundries  
50 Pound of flax at 15 p. pd.  
5 Bushel of potatoes  
1 Raw hide

---

## Glossary

brush hook – a tool with a curved blade and long handle to cut bushes and undergrowth.

chaise – a light, horse-drawn vehicle, usually for one or two persons.

cradle – a form of a scythe, with an arrangement of fingers attached to the handle, which is used to harvest grain.

fowling piece – a shotgun commonly used for shooting birds or small animals.

hatchel – a comb formed with long iron teeth set in a board for separating flax fibers.

lanthor (usu. lanthorn) – a lantern.

mathook – a tool with a long wooden handle and short iron hook at the end, used with a sith for cutting wheat and other grain crops.

neck yoke – a wooden bar or frame by which two draft animals are joined at the necks for working together.

pepper box – a small cylindrical box with a perforated top used for sprinkling pepper on food.

smoothen irons (usu. smoothing irons) – an iron with a flat metal base which, when heated, is used to smooth cloth.

trammel (usu. trammel) – an adjustable pothook for a fireplace crane.

writing box (usu. writing box) – a hinged wooden box for holding writing paper, ink wells and quills and usually, when opened, creates a sloped surface for writing.

Shown, at right, is a copy of the last page of the Peter DeBaun inventory, with the signatures of the two appraisers and the total estimated value of the deceased's belongings. (Copy courtesy of Amy DeBaun and John Kinabrew.)

Shubinghoe Spade Cleverer hoe — 0=9=0  
tar Receipt — 0=1=0  
1 Grade and Small Chair Stool — 0=10=0  
one Bond Bearing Date October 11<sup>th</sup> 1796 0=0=0  
one Bond Bearing Date August 11<sup>th</sup> 1797 0=0=0  
one Bond Bearing Date May 11<sup>th</sup> 1797 -- 10=0=0  
one Bond Bearing Date May 11<sup>th</sup> 1797 = 20=0=0  
one Bond Bearing Date May 11<sup>th</sup> 1797 = 20=0=0  
one Note Bearing Date June 11<sup>th</sup> 1797 10=0=0  
two hundred Weight Buckwheat meal — 1=0=0  
four Bags — 0=12=0  
£ 100=13=0

Jurrick McCoin } appraisers  
An Ackerman }  
to Sundries — 0=6=0  
fifty pounds of flax at 15 s. 1. 1. 2. — 3=2=6  
5 Bushel of potatoes — 0=9=0  
1 Shaw Pipe — 0=17=0  
£ 100=13=0  
£ 58=4