

State's first governor owned town site, as did a crony of notorious 'Boss' Tweed

By Anthony P. Musso
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The entrance to the former estate of New York's first governor, George Clinton, on Sheafe Road in the Town of Poughkeepsie. DARRYL BAUTIST

Two concrete pillars on Sheafe Road, one mile south of the Galleria mall in the Town of Poughkeepsie, along with a state historic marker, identify the entrance to a former estate that has an intriguing history. The estate was purchased in 1799 by George Clinton, New York's first governor and one of only two people to serve as vice president under two different presidents. Clinton lived there for eight years.

Clinton, elected New York's governor in 1777, held that position for 21 years, longer than anyone in history.

He built a magnificent mansion on the 300-acre property and moved there in 1804, simultaneous to being elected to national office under President Thomas Jefferson, becoming the nation's fourth vice president.

"Many people think that Clinton only lived in Kingston, but he was at the Poughkeepsie estate during his entire time as vice president," Town of Wappinger historian Mary Schmalz said. "In fact, there's speculation that some of his relatives might be buried in New Hamburg."

After Clinton's death in 1812, the estate was acquired by James Tallmadge, a New York attorney and former secretary for Gov. Clinton from 1798 to 1800. Tallmadge was born and raised in Stanfordville. He

graduated from Brown University and after being admitted to the bar in 1802, he practiced law in Poughkeepsie and New York City.

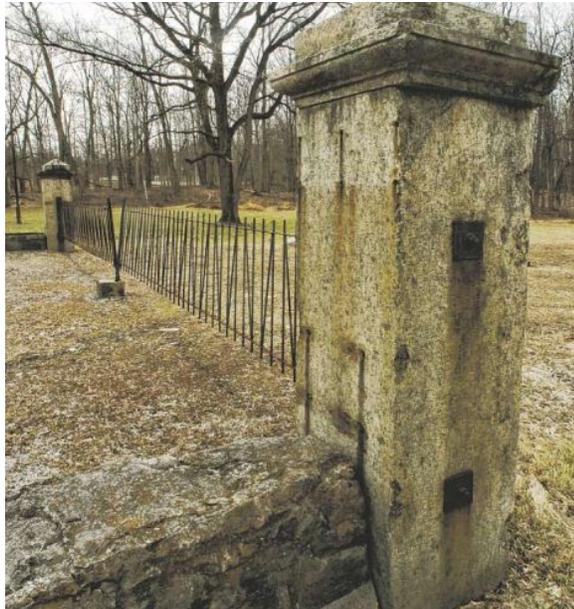
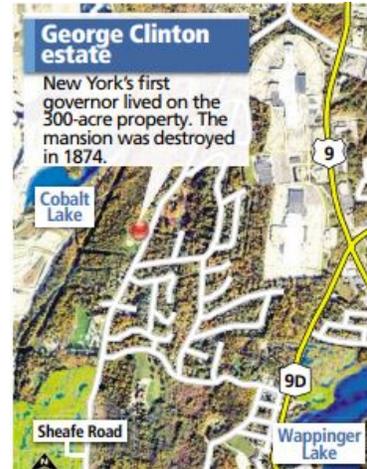
From 1804 to 1810, Tallmadge was surrogate of Dutchess County and was a member of Congress from 1817 to 1819.

“Tallmadge was very prominent and became the first president of New York University in 1830,” said historian and author John DiDomizio. “When he owned the Poughkeepsie estate, it was used as more of a summer home.”

Tallmadge’s only daughter, Mary Rebecca, married Philip S. Van Rensselaer, the third son of Stephen Van Rensselaer, an assemblyman, state senator and New York’s lieutenant governor from 1795 to 1801. Upon marrying, the couple received the deed to the estate.

During the Van Rensselaers’ ownership, formal gardens were introduced on the expansive grounds, creating an elaborate landscape.

“When her husband died in 1871, Mary Van Rensselaer decided to sell the property,” DiDomizio said. “It was purchased by James Ingersoll, who turned out to be an associate of William ‘Boss’ Tweed, head of New York City’s Tammany Hall political machine. Ingersoll was convicted of monetary crimes during the Boss Tweed scandal and was sent to prison.”



While incarcerated, Ingersoll placed the Poughkeepsie home in the care of a relative, but in 1874 it was destroyed by a massive fire. With the home in ruins and little left but a few outbuildings, the estate ceased to exist. While the property is now used as a quarry operation, limestone was discovered at the site as early as the 1700s. In fact, Clinton used limestone gathered on the estate during construction of his home.

The remnants of George Clinton’s estate on Sheafe Road in the Town of Poughkeepsie. Clinton was New York’s first governor.
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