

THE SPY HOUSE

I was fascinated to receive a brochure from William Kyle Whitlock on The Spy House Museum, the home of Thomas Whitlock (1620?-1703) of Monmouth, New Jersey.

The house was build and changed over many years but the original part was constructed by Thomas Whitlock about 1663. Thomas appears to have alternately lived in Shoal Harbour, Port Monmouth, New Jersey and Westchester Town or Gravesend, New York. By 1666 Thomas appears to have returned to Gravesend but was back at Shoal Harbour from 1673 to 1678 when he is shown living at Westchester. Returning to Shoal Harbour in 1686 he lived there until his death in 1703. Thomas is recorded as the first permanent settler of New Jersey so the fact his cabin still exists is of historical importance to the area.

The middle portion of the house was built during Thomas' absence between 1676 and 1680 by Daniel Seabrook the son of Thomas' second wife, Mary and following Thomas' death in 1703 the house became the Seabrook's. The third and last section of the house was moved from the east lot by Thomas Seabrook, Sr. in the 1700s and he added the second and third floors. In the 1880s William Wilson raised the roof in the middle section to match the section built by Thomas Seabrook Sr. William Wilson was married to Lydia Seabrook and after her death her sister Martha.

The house gets its name from the Revolutionary period when its strategic location overlooking New York Bay made it an ideal location from which to watch the movements of the British ships. The Seabrooks had converted the house to an Inn at this time which prevented it from being plundered and burned by the British. Amazingly the house has survived five fires including one set by the British troops who had also broken all the buckets to prevent drawing water to douse it. The story goes that the Seabrook women used the wet laundry soaking in the sheds to smother the flames.

Gertrude Neidlinger, the curator of the Museum has all sorts of fascinating information about the house and surrounding area and I am sure any of you travelling to this part of the coast would be intrigued by a visit. Bill Whitlock will also be exploring ways we can assist in the upkeep of the museum and there will be more about this in future Newsletters.

Sources: R668; X399/73-77