



The Dr. William Robinson Plantation

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Pictures courtesy Trish Plummer

Every so often, a vestige of New Jersey's past manages to have survived the onslaught of development and change. One such gem is the Dr. William Robinson Plantation, tucked away in a residential section of Clark, NJ. Amazingly, this neat old house survived from around 1690!

The story of the house began with Dr. William Robinson, a physician and surgeon who came to North America in June of 1684. Finding East Jersey a promising location, he bought up 40 acres with 7.5 acres of meadow on the Rahway River and went home to fetch his family in 1686. He added another 700 acres to the meadowland, on which he built the house around 1690. He had heard of the New World's promise thanks to advertisements extolling the area's virtues in an effort to attract settlers. Robinson was taken enough by Jersey that he was

found to be signing up families to emigrate from the Edinburgh port town of Leith.

The Doctor settled in with his family, which included a daughter, Ann, born of his first wife, and William, Elizabeth and Mary by his second. Mary was born in America. Unfortunately, Dr. Robinson would not live to enjoy his new home for very long, dying in 1693. Fortunately for historians, however, a law required a detailed inventory be made of his property and estate, which survives today.

The house was occupied by various owners until 1973, the original 1690 structure enveloped in additions, its walls punctured by new windows and its roof by a dormer. Recognizing, however, that at its heart was still a rare example of 17th century architecture, Clark Township bought the 100'x400' plot and house and leased it to the Clark Historical

Society, who began an extensive restoration. They stripped away the modern layers to return it to its original form, including the extra overhang of the east roof—known as a “Garrison Overhang,” it was designed to protect occupants from arrows or other missiles if they came under attack.

Not all the original elements survived, but care was taken to reconstruct them in what was most likely the same style. The fireplace, for example, was replicated using loose bricks found on the property and the mantle came from a beam in a period barn in Flemington.

The house is listed on both the New Jersey and National Register of Historic Places.

The archeological digs conducted around the house turned up some of the artifacts now on display, including medicine bottles. Dr. Robinson would have made use of natural herbs in his practice. The museum staff maintain a modern herb garden in the back that includes the kinds of plants that would have been known for medicinal as well as cooking needs in Robinson’s day.

Out back stands a corn crib, used to store corn after harvest, along with a barn and potting shed—home to the resident groundhog! Also preserved is a pony-drawn milk wagon from the Sunshine Dairy of Bayonne, NJ.



The reconstructed fireplace.

The Dr. William Robinson Plantation and Museum

remains one of the oldest farm houses of its type open to the public. It is open every third Sunday of the month from 12:00pm to 4:00pm, all year except in July. Private tours are available by appointment.

There are also a variety of special events. On the weekend of June 7-6, they hosted a Civil War encampment as part of their Living History events series that drew a sizeable crowd (see pictures here).

It’s wonderful that this unique piece of New Jersey history has not only survived, but taken on new life thanks to the hard work of the Clark Historical Society!



Barn and old milk wagon.



ABOVE: The herb garden grows many of the plants Dr. Robinson might have used as a physician in the 17th century.



LEFT: Abraham Lincoln greets a visitor to the Civil War encampment put on as part of the Living History events hosted by the museum.