

Guide to the James Dean Letters

68.10

Special Collections
Benjamin F. Feinberg Library
SUNY Plattsburgh
Plattsburgh, New York

By
Kathryn Stanley
April, 1999

Revised by
Debra Kimok
November 2007

Introduction

James Dean(e) was born in Groton Connecticut in 1748. He spent much of his adolescent years with a group of Native Americans (Oneida's) where he learned their language and became the adopted son of a woman who had lost her first son to war. James graduated from Dartmouth College in 1773 with a license to preach. He served as an Indian agent for the United States during the Revolutionary War, stationed at Fort Stanwix and Oneida Castle.

For his service to the Oneidas during the war, he was granted a tract of 2560 acres that included Wood Creek and Westmoreland. He also speculated in other lands in the new state of New York, acquiring land in Washington, later Clinton, County. James Dean was **not** the owner of Dean's Patent, a large tract of land in the North East of Clinton County. This landowner is Elkanah Dean who surveyed the land with William Gilliland in the 1760s and received his Patent in 1788. However, James Dean did own land near Champlain and Chazy and in the Third Military Tract (Peru).

In 1786, Dean married Lydia Camp, and they had six children together: four sons and two daughters. After Lydia died in 1814, Dean married Cynthia Phelps.

Dean was appointed to a judgeship of the Court of Common Pleas for Herkimer County in 1791, and was one of the first five judges in Oneida County. He was Oneida's successful Federal candidate for the New York State Assembly in 1808, and attended a convention against the War of 1812 as part of the delegation from Oneida. Retiring from political office in 1813, he resided at Westmoreland until he died in 1823.

Throughout his life, Dean kept up an avid friendship with Pliny Moore, the founding settler of Champlain. By the 1790s Dean had resolved to remain in Westmoreland and attempted to sell off his North Country properties. This process, often the subject of

letters between the two men, was slow, and Dean's family continued to own land in Clinton County until after his death.

Extensive correspondence concerning these land dealings is included in this collection, some of which is with William Beaumont, another land speculator. Beaumont acted as Dean's agent in the North Country until he committed suicide on October 14th 1807.

Dean was a respected member of his community and was well known throughout New York State; Deansville was named in his honor. One of his sons, James, followed in his footsteps and became a State Assemblyman, Judge of County Court and County Clerk of Oneida County.

Copies of Dean's letters were donated by Edward G. Hooke to Feinberg Library, Special Collections in 1968. The originals are in the possession of Sheldon Judson.

Background Sources in Special Collections

Cookinham, Henry J. *History of Oneida County, New York, Vol. 1*. Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912.

"Genealogy." McLellan Collection (83.6), series 13, folder 20. SUNY Plattsburgh Special Collections.

Hurd, Duane Hamilton. *History of Clinton and Franklin Counties, New York*. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1880, page 329.

Jones, Pomroy. *Annals and Recollections of Oneida County*. Rome: Pomroy Jones, 1851, pages 744-759.

"Pliny Moore Papers." McLellan Collection (83.6), series 2, item 5. SUNY Plattsburgh Special Collections.

Contents

The James Dean letters comprise one folder, and consist of ten documents. The letters span the period 1801-1817. They are primarily concerned with the sale of Dean's land in several areas of Clinton County, but also include references to taxes and the economic situation of the North Country, and provide sometimes lengthy commentary on the politics of the County from the Federalist viewpoint. Some of Dean's tenants are also referenced in these letters: Abijah North, the brothers Cross, Benjamin Birdsall, William Bedlam Jr., Gotlep Peter, David Colver, and the brothers Darrow (Dean's nephews).

Box 1:

Folder 1: James Dean to William Beaumont, February 21st, 1801. Land. 1 page.

2: William Beaumont to James Dean, July 26th, 1804. Land and economics. 2 pages.

- 3: William Beaumont to James Dean, January 18th, 1805. Land and taxes. 2 pages.
- 4: Pliny Moore to James Dean, January 20th, 1805. Bill for services. 1 page.
- 5: William Beaumont to James Dean, May 18th, 1806. Politics and land. 2 pages typescript, 4 pages Xeroxed.
- 6: William Beaumont to James Dean, November 15th, 1806. Taxes, surveying of Northern Turnpike and land sales. 2 pages.
- 7: William Bedlam Jr. to James Dean, October 26th, 1807. Beaumont's death mortgage repayment. 1 page.
- 8: Charles Bedlow to James Dean, July 4th, 1815. Land sale. 1 page.
- 9: Pliny Moore to James Dean, October 22nd, 1816. Land sales and death of Lydia Dean. 1 page.
- 10: Walter Darrow to James Dean, March 19th, 1817. Land sale. 1 page.