A witness of Revolution survives

Marshall House’s owner to host up to 4 dozen people for family reunion this weekend

By Wendy Liberatore

For years, David Bullard has admitted strangers into his home on the hill. People stop by to stare at the blood stains on the floor or peer into the stone basement to see where Revolutionary War soldiers died on the then-dirt floor.

And this weekend, the owner of the Marshall House will be welcoming more than three to four dozen for a family reunion that celebrates both the turning point in the war and generations of Marshalls who once lived there. The weekend will coincide with the village’s annual Turning Point Days, a weekend-long celebration of colonial times and the War for Independence in which the Marshall House played a pivotal role.

“It’s a surviving witness to the Battle of Saratoga,” Bullard said of the home he shares with his wife, composer Hilary Tann. “It’s where Baroness Frederika Riedesel sheltered with her three young daughters during the battle and where many of the British and mercenary German soldiers died.”

Bullard, who has given countless tours of the historic property, said that on Oct. 19, 1777, British General John Burgoyne was losing to the Americans. He was running out of food, ammunition and the weather was turning cold. Seeing this, Friedrich Adolf Riedesel, who was commanding the German mercenary soldiers, sent his wife and children to shelter just north of the village in the then-abandoned farm house, owned by the Lansings of Albany. Wives of other military leaders followed.

The Americans, across the Hudson River at Clark’s Mills, spied the activity there and started to rain cannonballs down on the house — one of which
"more dead than alive." A week later, Bullock surrendered to the Americans. He was thereafter imprisoned in Georgia and later released.

Bullock is familiar with the details of the working class lifestyle on Marshall House because his Aunt kept a diary, which he said "made you hate stand straight up." He shared some of the passages:

"Like cannon balls went through the house and we could plainly hear the creaking over our heads," she wrote. "We were all in the next room, where they were about to amputate, having been laid upon the table for this purpose, had the other leg taken off by a cannon ball in the very middle of the operation." She also penned passages about people "dying in anguish, crying breathless." "The horrible story" and stories of those who were not. 

"The town is on fire," Bullock said. "The town is on fire." He continued: "I don't know how many of them are dead and gone, but the soldiers are all destroyed and with the town." 

Bullock told of the destruction of the town and the burning of the homes. "We've had a lot of people come and want to check the area," Bullock said. 

But a visit from the Marshall House, where Bullock said he "had a strong feeling of actors," makes for a special occasion. They plan to open in 2013 for the first time. They are returning for the 200th anniversary of the house's purchase from the Bushes. 

"It's interesting because some of them aren't covered," Bullock said. "The house has been in my family for over 30 years. All the Marshalls that were here..."