

### ***SITE #12: THE CHATFIELD PROPERTY***

The Chatfield place was the most extensive homestead in Black Rock Forest.<sup>1</sup> The stone house still standing on the property was constructed in 1833 (the year etched above the front door) by John Kronkite. The Kronkites occupied the house and owned two-hundred and twenty acres of the surrounding countryside for three generations, with the property finally passing to John Kronkite's grandson sometime before 1875. By that year William Chatfield had bought the house and much, if not all, of the adjacent land.<sup>2</sup> The Chatfields appear to have occupied the stone house until 1889, when the James Babcock family moved in and worked this land until 1913. Shortly thereafter the property was acquired by a Mr. Thomas Taft who in turn sold it to the Stillmans.<sup>3</sup> It was immediately after the Babcocks moved out that the stone house was destroyed by fire, only to be rebuilt in 1932 by Black Rock Forest employees. The Black Rock garage, located across Continental Road from the stone house, was the site of the homestead's barn.<sup>4</sup>

The Chatfield homestead was comprised of nearly a dozen fields lining either side of Continental Road. The eastern portion of the farm between Continental Road and Arthur's Pond is divided into approximately six fields, each of which is bordered by stone walls. The stones in these walls, which vary in size and include many smaller rocks most probably uprooted by plowing, indicate that all these lands were used for agriculture. The pile of stones in the field adjacent to the present-day Black Rock garage, also the result of plowing, is by far the largest such pile to be found in the forest and suggests that these fields were also farmed over an extended period of time. A second somewhat smaller pile of stones located near Tamarack Pond also indicates that the fields adjacent to the stone house were extensively cultivated. Although the fields to the west of Continental Road are less clearly demarcated by stone walls, they too show signs of cultivation.<sup>5</sup> In all but one of these former fields, Black Rock Forest has planted pine trees.

Those families living in the Chatfield house supplemented their agricultural income with woodcutting.<sup>6</sup> The lack of an extensive stone wall system in the fields to the west of Continental Road suggests that this area might have been less intensively farmed than others, and therefore could have served as a woodlot instead. The hill descending from what is today the Black Rock fire tower would have been a prime area for skidding logs down to Continental Road, which at the time was the main transportation network throughout this mountain region.

During the mid-1800s the Continental Road, which bisects the Chatfield homestead, was in fact the only existing transportation route over the mountains between West Point and Newburgh.

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<sup>1</sup> The location of the Chatfield homestead is noted on Black Rock Forest Compartment X Map, Black Rock Forest Archives, Cornwall, New York.

<sup>2</sup> A description of this journey was printed in Cornwall paper in 1875 and reprinted by *The Cornwall Local* (Cornwall, New York), January 10, 1957, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Black Rock Forest director Jack Karnig, Chatfield Property File, Black Rock Forest Archives, Cornwall, New York.

<sup>4</sup> Babcock, interview with author, 20 May 1995.

<sup>5</sup> According to Beach, the Chatfield farm extended on either side of Continental Road. Lewis Beach, *Cornwall* (Newburgh, New York: E.M. Ruttenber Publisher, 1873), 108.

<sup>6</sup> Black Rock Forest director Jack Karnig, Chatfield Property File, Black Rock Forest Archives, Cornwall, New York.

Although the construction in 1868 of Old West Point Road led to the gradual abandonment of the Continental Road, the occupants of the Chatfield place nevertheless continued to witness a steady stream of travelers passing through their property. In 1875, for instance, a Cornwall woman journeying by carriage with her family to West Point published an account of her trip in the local newspaper. "We came to the house of Mr. Wm. Chatfield," she wrote. "The house was built of fine large granite split out of the rock on which the house is built." After enjoying a lunch of ham and eggs, with coffee and wild strawberries for desert, the travelers from Cornwall asked the Chatfields if many other people stopped at this mountain home for meals. "Why, you know I am a farmer, and not a hotel-keeper," William Chatfield is reported to have said. "Yet we are willing to accommodate any genteel people who come to view our mountains, with such plain fare as a farmhouse affords."<sup>7</sup> Those living in the Chatfield place, therefore, also supplemented their income from farming and woodcutting by providing board and perhaps sometimes rooms to travelers.

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<sup>7</sup> Anonymous article in the Cornwall papers, 1875, reprinted in *The Cornwall Local* (Cornwall, New York), January 10, 1957, p.14.

