

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** from Don Sherblom, president, The 1759 Vought House, A Revolutionary War Loyalist Homestead    Mobile: (908) 797-9900 [don@1759House.org](mailto:don@1759House.org) [www.1759House.org](http://www.1759House.org)

Title Transfer Celebration, Clinton Township Middle School, March 3, 2012 at 2 pm

Descendant of Revolutionary War loyalist accepts deed to ancestor's property from the Clinton Township School District for historic non-profit. This culminates a six-year struggle by The 1759 Vought House, Inc. to acquire and preserve this house as New Jersey first loyalist museum. U.S. Congressman Leonard Lance, County Historian Stephanie Stevens, township mayor, others to speak.

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When the Clinton Township School District purchased an old farm on Grayrock Road in 2004 to build a new middle school, a door to the past was inadvertently thrown open. The astonishing history of this farmhouse had been long forgotten, just as its architectural features had been lost under the accretions of two centuries. A two-story front porch masked the original elevation, a kitchen addition obscured a side wall, an addition on the back had reoriented the house to face Grayrock Road. The house was slated for demolition as the Middle School was being built. The Clinton Township Historic Preservation Commission dedicated the most of its small annual budget to have Michael J. Margulies and Adam Wengryn survey the structure's architecture and genealogist Fred Sisser III discover the home's origins and title history. What they discovered sparked actions by the state Historic Preservation Office, the school district and local citizens over the next several years.

Today, the Vought House is known to be the most significant Revolutionary War artifact in Hunterdon County. The Vought House is remarkable due to its architecture, the people that lived here, the historic events that happened here, and what it can teach us about 18th Century ways of life. Any one of these factors would have earned it a place on the New Jersey Register of Historic Sites and the Vought House meets all four criteria. Its four wattle-and-daub decorative plaster ceilings, similar to two installed at the Winterthur museum, have earned it a place on the National Register. It's listed as a resource by New Jersey's Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area, where the inevitable interpretation as a loyalist site gives it a unique place in New Jersey's Revolutionary War landscape.

Located at the entrance to the new Clinton Township Middle School, the Vought House also offers primary source material to educators. As curriculum director Ms. Bobbie Felip said in 2009 "The opportunity of having a historical building in partnership with our schools will afford children a unique experience in understanding a portion of the social studies curriculum. From learning about family and community in the younger grades to reinforcing more specific content in the older grades, it will help bring history to life in a much more meaningful way." Teachers at the Clinton Township Middle School have incorporated the Vought family and this house into the seventh grade social studies curriculum. A presentation in the auditorium last year, followed by a writing assignment called "If these walls could talk" yielded several outstanding essays.

On March 3, 2012 the school district will sell this property to The 1759 Vought House, A Revolutionary War Loyalist Homestead, Inc. for the historically significant sum of \$17.76. In the spring of 1776, New Jersey's Governor William Franklin, recently estranged from his father Benjamin, did everything he could to quell the rebellion in this province. In June, with thousands of British troops about to land in New York, tensions ran high throughout the Jerseys. Christopher Vought – who built

this house in 1759 – and his son John Vought were friends with their neighbor, militia captain Thomas Jones. But when the local militia company refused to turn out to prepare for the defense of New York, John Vought was blamed and New Jersey's patriot Congress demanded that he appear before them and explain the company's refusal. Instead, John led a mob of two dozen club-wielding loyalists in an attack on his neighbor, Captain Thomas Jones. This angry mob chased Jones into his house, where he hid, and his wife and children out into the yard. These loyalists were later arrested. Militia marched from Whitehouse and surrounded the Vought house late one night. When the colonel rapped on the front door with the hilt of his sword, the man they sought slipped out a window in his nightshirt and was captured. The loyalists were fined and released in early July, just as the Declaration of Independence was being read in towns across the new State of New Jersey.

By the end of 1776, after a string of defeats on Long Island, Manhattan, and in New Jersey, Washington's troops were in full retreat across New Jersey. That's when Captain Jones, Daniel Bray and members of the Hunterdon militia rounded up boats for Washington's escape across the Delaware. About the same time, early December 1776, John Vought and his father Christopher rode in the other direction with about 75 Hunterdon County loyalists to join the King's forces and fight with the New Jersey Volunteers. Those who joined the British army had their property confiscated by the patriot government. The Hunterdon County commissioners confiscated the Vought homestead in 1779 and auctioned it off –at Jones' Tavern– to help pay for the war.

Two and a quarter centuries later, when the Clinton Township School District purchased the property to build a middle school, research into the history and material culture of this house began. Among the first to raise an alarm was the County Historian, Stephanie Stevens, who called this house one of Hunterdon County's most endangered sites. The state Historic Preservation Office required the district to nominate the house for inclusion on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places and National Register. When a property is listed on the Historic Register governments, unlike private owners, have a perpetual requirement to maintain the integrity of that property. In 2006, Clinton Township resident and real estate agent Don Sherblom registered a non-profit public charity, The 1759 Vought House, A Revolutionary War Loyalist Homestead, whose trustees, advisors, and volunteers worked over the next several years to take possession of the house and promote awareness of this rich resource. Their perseverance paid off in June 2009 when the Clinton Township Board of Education voted unanimously to subdivide the property and donate the house and surrounding land to The 1759 Vought House non-profit. The school board's finance and facilities chair, Mark Kaplan and the new Superintendent Kevin Carroll brought a fresh outlook that made the donation solution possible.

On March 3rd for the second time in history a government entity will sell the Vought house, this time for a nominal \$17.76. Chris Vought, the namesake and direct descendent of the loyalist who built this house will accept title from Clinton Township Board of Education President Jim Dincuff on behalf of The 1759 Vought House non-profit. U.S. Congressman Leonard Lance will speak at this historic event, as will Preservation New Jersey President David Knights, Hunterdon County Historian Stephanie Stevens, Clinton Township Mayor Kevin Cimei and President of The 1759 Vought House non-profit, Donald Sherblom.

The New Jersey Historic Trust will hold the preservation easement which the State Historic Preservation Office required as a condition of transferring ownership of this national treasure. Don Sherblom, president of the Vought House non-profit recognizes that "the legal mandate to preserve this

property created a dilemma for the school district and a serious challenge for our community. The outcome was never certain and when a portion of one ceiling collapsed due to lack of maintenance in June 2006, it looked like ‘demolition by neglect’ would be the future. Yet on March 3, 2012 we mark a success we would not have achieved without the efforts of dedicated preservationists and local citizens who took responsibility to make it happen. In particular, The 1759 Vought House trustees, volunteers and professional advisors have moved this project forward relentlessly, finally attaining this new beginning for the Vought homestead. Board of Education members have recognized the value of an educational partnership which relieves them of a financial burden and brings resources into the school district. The February 2012 Board of Education vote to approve the final version of the sale contract was again unanimous. Now at last the fun and exciting work can begin to restore this historic house, to interpret the lives of local 18th Century people and to promote knowledge of conflicts with Britain which led some American colonists to declare independence while others remained loyal in 1776. The 1759 Vought House non-profit corporation is eager to meet this new challenge and to expand our educational partnership with the Clinton Township school district in the years ahead.”

Please join us for the celebration of this historic title transfer on Saturday March 3rd at 2 pm, at the Clinton Township Middle School, 34 Grayrock Road, Clinton NJ 08809. A reception will follow in the middle school cafeteria.

For more information, documents and pictures please visit our web site [1759House.org](http://1759House.org) or call Don Sherblom (908) 797-9900