

THOMAS M. DEBUTTS

**IT'S AUTHENTIC.** This cabinlike structure near the Appalachian Trail in Fauquier County has been recognized as a boyhood home of Chief Justice John Marshall, whose much grander town house is in downtown Richmond.

## Site's date established

### *The Hollow has chance to recover*

BY PAUL BRADLEY

TIMES-DISPATCH STAFF WRITER

#### MARKHAM

Perhaps you've seen it from the corner of your eye as you've sped past on Interstate 66, headed west toward Front Royal and the Shenandoah National Park.

It's a one-and-a-half-story wood frame house, sitting on a knoll at the Markham exit, crowded by weeds, uninhabited for years, seemingly neglected, modest by most any standard.

For historical preservationists, however, the house is much more than a blur in the eye of passing motorists. To them, the house is "The Hollow," the boyhood home of John Marshall, the fourth chief justice of the United States and the man credited with establishing the current status of the judicial branch of American government.

#### FRIENDS

**COST:** A basic membership in the Friends of the Hollow Inc. is \$10 a year.

**MAIL:** Alexander Green, treasurer, P.O. Box 125, Markham, Va., 22643.

**INTERNET:** Look on the World Wide Web at <http://furthr.com.hollow/>

For about 15 years, the house has been recognized as a potentially important historical landmark. But it has never been granted official status as a historic site, in part because there have been doubts about the authenticity of the structure and when it was built.

But a process called dendrochronological analysis, or tree-ring dating, has found that the house was built in 1764, conforming to historical accounts and land records.

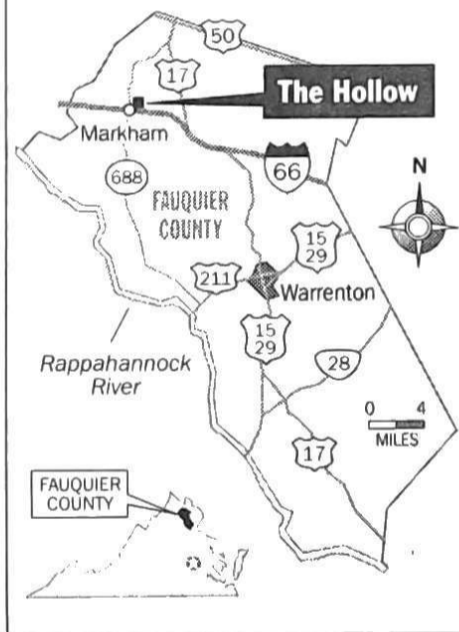
The finding is giving new life to efforts to preserve the house as a historical landmark.

"For the past 15 years, we've been working to accurately prove the authenticity of The Hollow," said Thomas Marshall deButts, president of Friends of the Hollow, a preservation group. "We now have conclusive proof that this is the Marshall home."

According to historical accounts, The Hollow was built around 1764 by Thomas Marshall, John Marshall's father. The family lived there until 1773, when Thomas Marshall bought

#### Saving The Hollow

Historical preservationists are attempting to save the boyhood home of former U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall. The age of the 232-year-old house has been authenticated using a patented tree-ring dating analysis process.



TOM ROBERTS/TIMES-DISPATCH

1,700 acres on the Fredericksburg-Winchester road, where he built his next house, Oak Hill.

John Marshall was the eldest of 15 children of Thomas Marshall and the former Mary Randolph Keith. He was born Sept. 24, 1755. Biographers have said John Marshall moved with his family to The Hollow before his 10th birthday, and lived there for about eight years.

John Marshall's place in American history is secure. The Virginian served in Congress and was secretary of state before becoming chief justice of the United States in 1801.

He is credited with increasing the then-scant power and prestige of the Supreme Court. His opinion in the case *Marbury v. Madison* established the power of the court to review a law and declare it unconstitutional.

An opponent of states' rights, he helped establish the superiority of the federal government under the Constitution. In 1807, he presided over the treason trial of Aaron Burr, the man who had killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel three years earlier. Burr was acquitted.

Marshall's historical significance demands The Hollow be preserved as a historical artifact and an example of 18th-century frontier architecture, deButts said.

"He was our most important interpreter of the Constitution," he said. "The person who hand-carved the judicial branch of government grew up there. This house stands just as it did in 1765."

The dendrochronological analysis that pinpointed the time the house was built is a process patented by Dr. Herman J. Heikkinen of Blacksburg.

"We've dated dozens of buildings in Virginia using our process," said Heikkinen, principal investigator for Dendrochronology Inc. of Blacksburg. The houses the firm has analyzed include Stratford Hall, boyhood home of Robert E. Lee.

Essentially, the process uses the growth rings on timbers to determine when they were cut and hewed. According to 10 samples examined at The Hollow, the oak timbers came from trees felled after the growing season in 1763.

Now that the structure has been dated, the nonprofit Friends of the Hollow is raising money to save it.

"The tiny structure, and the property on which it stands, is neither protected nor preserved," said John Pearce, director for the Center for Historical Preservation at Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg. "It's rare that historical references about construction dates are verified so precisely. With these facts in hand, we must work to preserve this national treasure before it is gone forever."

How much money it will take to save the building is uncertain, however. The structure and the property it is on are owned by a trust that is holding them for investment purposes. The property's proximity to I-66 makes it vulnerable to future development, deButts said.

The owners have said they would entertain offers, deButts said. That is an important point, because under Virginia law, a property owner must give consent for a property to be designated a historic landmark.

It is far from certain how much of the 340 acres held by the trust would be needed for preservation purposes. The last time the property changed hands, in 1987, the price was nearly \$1 million. DeButts hopes, however, that the building, and a smaller plot of land, can be obtained at a far lesser sum.

The dating of The Hollow has persuaded preservationists to push forward with their efforts.

"I think if we didn't get the dates, we were going to shut this effort down," he said.