

SPECIAL REPORT ON THE LANDSCAPING OF MT. WASHINGTON TAVERN

by

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History of Building -
Construction
Design
Use
Environment -

Introduction

This Report, embodying the results of a study of the history and the physical environment of Mt. Washington Tavern in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, when it was conducted as a stage house on the old Cumberland Road, is respectfully submitted with a view toward aiding in pending designs for landscaping in the proximity of the building. During the improvement of the highway (U. S. Route 40) in 1936 the old road was obliterated a distance of several hundred yards in front (North) of the structure, and excavations were made which leaves the building some 12 feet above the present grade of the concrete pavement. Subsequently the earth was partially filled in. (Refer to inset in Master Plan of Ft. Necessity State Park, July 13th, 1936) The question now involved concerns chiefly the restoration of the roadway and courtyard in front of the building to as nearly as possible the original appearance and to screen the modern concrete highway in the vista from the entrance of the Tavern. At the same time the landscaping involves the treatment of grounds immediately to the west, south and east of the building.

The project in no manner concerns the restoration and refurnishing of the Tavern and the subject matter of this Report, therefore, presumes no propositions beyond the exterior treatment above alluded to.

Historical Background

Mt. Washington Tavern was erected on a tract of 234½ acres, known as the "Great Meadows", acquired by George Washington in 1769. Here in the early summer of 1754 Washington in command of an expedition directed toward the Ohio with about 400 Colonial troops from Virginia and South Carolina established his Advance base and subsequently built a stockade which he named Ft. Necessity. On July 3, 1754, he was attacked by a large force of French and Indians, and after a defense of nine hours was obliged to capitulate. It was Washington's first major military experience and when lands in this region were opened for settlement it is not surprising that he desired the site of his initial battleground for sentimental reasons as well as for the material value of the land. He held the tract till his death and in his will directed it to be sold with other real estate held by him on the frontier, and the proceeds to go to his heirs. He thus describes the property:

"The land is valuable on account of its local location. It affords an exceeding good stand on Braddock's road* from Cumberland to Pittsburgh, and besides a fertile soil, possesses a large quantity of natural meadow, fit for the scythe. It is distinguished by the appellation of the Great Meadows, where the first action with the French, in 1754, was fought."

* It afforded a "good stand" on the Braddock Road which at the time of Washington's death in 1799 was one of the chief pioneer trails between the Atlantic seaboard and the valley of the Ohio, but no tavern stand was opened on it on the Great Meadows tract. The Braddock Road was abandoned about 1818 upon the opening of the Cumberland Road.

After passing through the hands of various owners* the property was acquired by Judge Nathaniel Ewing, a prominent resident of Fayette County. In 1818 the Cumberland Road was opened between Baltimore and the West, and at this point the highway was routed half a mile north of the old Braddock Road. Coincident with the opening of traffic Judge Ewing erected the large house near the road on the highest land on the farm and named it Mt. Washington. It was constructed of brick moulded and burnt in kilns on the farm. The house was opened as a tavern and was the first substantial building on the road between the present site of Uniontown and the Little Meadows many miles to the eastward. On account of its size and comfortable accommodations it was rated as a stage house and enjoyed good patronage. Judge Ewing sold the property to James Sampey who conducted the stand until his death in 1844. Robert Hogsett operated the house for the Sampey heirs and on the first year turned over to the representative of the estate \$4,000 as the profits for 12 months.** It was then a station on the Good Intent Stage Line and Hogsett mentions that one morning 72 passengers took breakfast at Mt. Washington. John Foster and James Moore, sons-in-law of Sampey, conducted the house until the stage lines went out of business early in the 1850s. Ellis Y. Beggs was the next owner. After a few years he sold the property to Godfrey Fazenbaker, who engaged extensively in farming and stockraising. His

* An abstract of the title was furnished the U. S. War Department when the Federal Government took over the two-acre plot at the Fort.

** "The Old Pike" by Thomas B. Searight, pp. 228.

heirs transferred it to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Fazenbaker made many improvements, enclosed the fields with board fences and erected barns and outbuildings. The latter structures were built east of the house and stables and sheds west of the house, which were used in the days of the stage lines, were altered but little.*

The accompanying photostat, taken from a photo-engraving in Thomas B. Searight's book, "The Old Pike", is from a photograph made about 1890, and shows Mt. Washington Tavern and outbuildings and in relation to the road. The sheds and stables are those that existed in stage coach days.** The view is from the northeast. The two-story frame annex has since been removed. The stables were destroyed ^{by fire}. The ground on which they stood is now owned by William Burley, one of the Fazenbaker heirs, the farm having been divided. The property line is about 30 feet west of the northwest corner of the house. The board fence, according to the best obtainable information, was built by Fazenbaker.

Present Aspect of the House

When the house was used as a tavern stage coaches and other vehicles carrying passengers drew up in front of the door, stopping within 20 feet of the house. Whether there was a pavement on which travelers could alight in order to avoid the mud in the rainy season is a matter of doubt. The surface of the ground in front and west of

* Statements of the Fazenbaker family to the writer.

** Statements of the Fazenbaker family, Kennedy Moore, an oldtime resident of the neighborhood and student of local history of Wharton Township, and others. Corroboration is furnished by McClellan Leohard, local historian of Fayette County and president of Ft. Necessity Chapter, Sons of the American Revolution.

the house during the period from 1890 to 1905 was hard and covered with stone screenings similar to that used on the surface of the pike* and it is believed that surfacing material on the road in early days served also around the tavern. At present a cut-stone pavement of machined stone in square blocks forms a pavement 12 by 49 feet in front of the door. This was added in comparatively recent years and ⁽¹⁹³²⁾ does not conform to the surroundings. It is quite certain that no such pavement existed in the days of the stage coaches. Other brick taverns, notably those in Hopwood, Uniontown and Beallsville had brick pavements about six feet wide at their dooryards. There is a possibility that Mt. Washington also had a brick pavement since there was an abundance of this paving material on the farm, but among the oldest residents none remembers anything beyond a large stone door-step which still remains.

Immediately west of the house between it and the sheds was the wagon yard. There is nothing to indicate that it was fenced on the side facing the road. On the north side of the road about 40 yards west of the house is a never failing spring which supplied water for a large wood horse trough. This was almost directly across the road from the stables. Since the highway has been improved the spring has been excavated and set back some distance. A two-inch water pipe has been laid under the concrete pavement of the road and eastward to a point within ten yards of the northwest corner of the house. The head of the spring is about 12 feet above the level of the present road. The pipe has been placed in order eventually to utilize the flow of water to the Tavern for such purposes as may be determined.

* From the writer's own observations in May, 1904.

All other outbuildings in use previous to 1920 have been removed, and there is no authentic information as to where they stood, except in the case of a barn which was 100 yards east of the house and immediately south of the highway. The barn was built by Fazenbaker and has no significance in the question of restoration. The north row of apple trees in the orchard was about 25 yards south of the house. A dooryard occupied the intervening space, but there is no information as to how the ground was improved. Doubtless outside privies were here but nothing is known as to their location. There is a tradition that a springhouse with a second floor smokehouse was situated at the head of a ravine about 30 yards east of the southeast corner of the building. This spring is now closed but the contour of the ground indicates that there had been a water course as from a spring overflow extending to the foot of the hill.

Traces of fences, if any existed prior to 1850, have disappeared. It is probable that the wagonyard was enclosed except that portion facing the road. If there were enclosures for cattle, sheep and hogs these probably were some distance from the house. Since it is remembered that Mt. Washington was a stage house and did not bid for the patronage of drovers, herders and others who usually accepted less superior accommodations at lower cost, there is no information as to any provision for this class of travelers. Worm fences constructed of split rails about eight feet long and stone walls surmounted sometimes by a stake and rider rail were first used in this region to enclose the fields. Picket fences were not uncommon in villages and to some degree were found at country dwellings, but it must be remembered that rails were expensive and were used sparingly. Worm fences were followed by the "post-and-rail", being a post set $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in the

earth and mortised to carry three to five rails. The early type of this fence came in about 1845.

Two latrines are located in the remnant of the orchard 50 yards south of the building. The structures were built of rough lumber and were installed five years ago. Both are in abominable condition and should be removed at once to give place for sanitary conveniences. If no funds are available for this purpose it would be better that there be no accommodations at all.

Suggestions

It is borne in mind that the eventual rehabilitation of Mt. Washington contemplates its restoration as a typical Cumberland Road stage house. This, it seems, would permit some latitude in the planning, as for instance, the laying of a brick pavement between the front entrance and the road.

Although there is no evidence that there was a lawn with flowers at the side of the house, and the testimony of the best informed persons is to the contrary, it appears no violation of tradition to provide a grass plot with oldfashioned flowers, such as June roses, annuals, perennials, etc., since some old taverns and nearly all private homes in this region were so adorned. Vestiges of flower gardens are still to be seen around the old buildings. Landscaping involving grass plots and flowers, however, should avoid anything formal or elaborate.

It is generally agreed that the paths leading from the parking areas at the grade of the present road and located east and west of the Tavern are to simulate to some degree the original pike. In carrying out this scheme of treatment the road should be at least 12 feet

in width and surfaced with fine limestone (screenings) well rolled in similar to old macadamed road. These roadways are each 90 feet in length, rising on the west on a six percent grade and on the east on a grade of 14 percent. It is understood, of course, that the roads will not be used for vehicles, but if it is intended to restore the semblance of the original pike, steps or risers should not be placed therein. This suggestion is made after the question was raised whether steps were not necessary in the east approach.

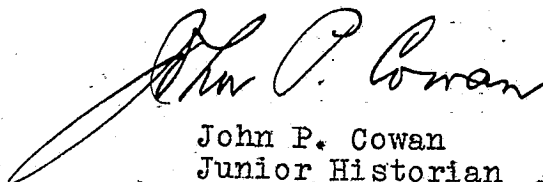
It is considered probable that a retaining wall may be required to support the terrace some 25 by 45 feet directly in front of the house, the wall to be erected at the crest of the slope (See plan) with a depth of three to four feet. The wall would be concealed by the planting on the slope facing the highway. Rustic hitching posts and rails would form a safety baluster at the top of the wall. Early hitching rails were made by mortising posts and inserting round or octagon rails about three inches in diameter, or by fitting rails over the posts. The posts were about six feet apart. Eventually a horse trough made from a hewed log could be placed on the simulated roadway and supplied by water piped from the spring north of the road.

In providing toilet facilities it seems questionable to observe absolute historical accuracy. To do so would invite condemnation by the State Department of Public Health. Moreover, it is probable that it will be desired to install modern sanitary flush closets with lavatories emptying into septic tanks. It is suggested in this regard that a small building be erected sufficiently large to provide comfortable apartments for men and women respectively. This may be a plain rectangular structure, preferably of brick, located not more than 20 yards from the rear of the Tavern. It would have the dimen-

sions and general appearance of a smokehouse. It could be screened by grape vines, lilacs or hedge plants. Grape vines should not be trained on lattice screens or elaborate arbors. Arched arbors and lattice screens were not common in this region until after 1850.

It is realized that the planting on the slope in front of the Tavern will be guided largely by utility and the effort to get the most effective screen in a comparatively small area. The use of evergreens for ornamental purposes in this locality does not date beyond 1870. One hundred years ago the people of Western Pennsylvania, and especially those in the mountain regions, were still slaughtering trees except maples and those forest trees which bore a nut crop. It was a later generation that appreciated the ornamental value of trees. Here again it seems expedient to make some sacrifice to historical accuracy.

Respectfully submitted,



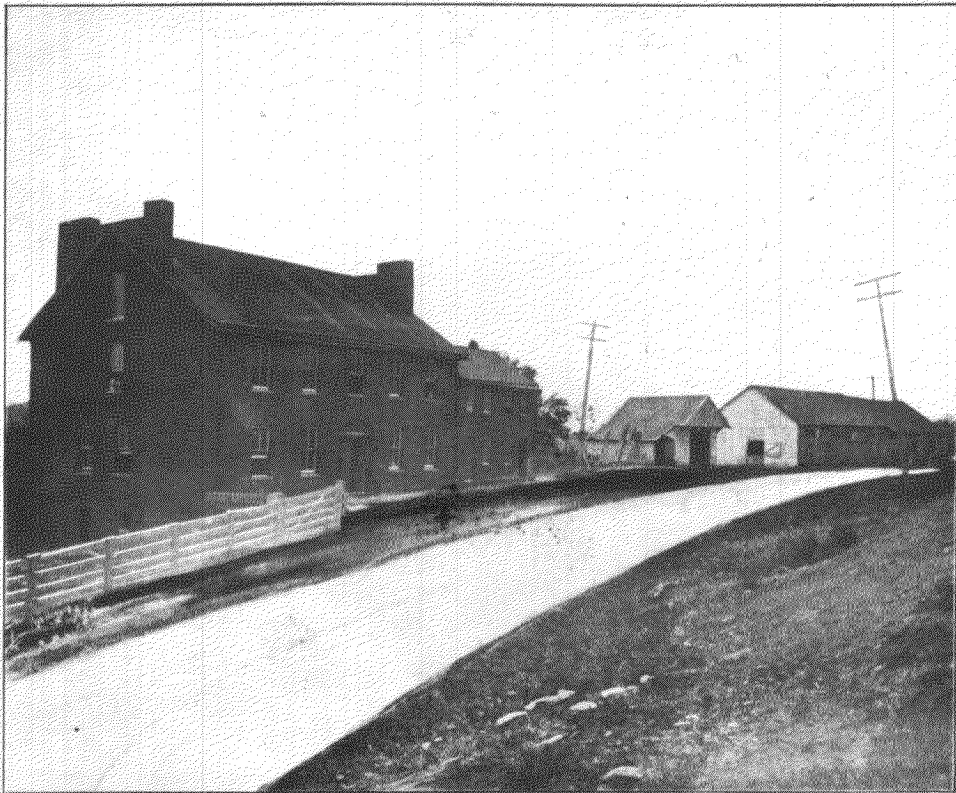
John P. Cowan
Junior Historian

cc: Washington—Mr. Spalding
Richmond—Mr. Evison; Mr. Appleman
Bronxville—Mr. Bergeson/Mr. Weig
Gettysburg—Mr. McConaghie
Mr. Diggs
Mr. Sheffield
Mr. Brooke
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STAGE HOUSE AND STABLES AT MT. WASHINGTON.

From Pictures in Benights' 'Old Pike'

RESTORATION OF THE APPLE ORCHARD, MT. WASHINGTON TAVERN,
FT. NECESSITY STATE PARK.

by
John P. Cowan,
Junior Historian.

November 1936

This is written in support of a suggestion made in a previous Report urging that the planting of forest trees immediately south of Mt. Washington Tavern be discontinued and that the project be amended to provide for the restoration of the apple orchard which covered the site.

According to the present plans it is intended to plant forest trees—oaks, maples and poplars predominating—on the entire hillside south of the Tavern building, the object being to restore the forest that surrounded the Great Meadows tract on which Ft. Necessity stood, and to screen the Tavern, a comparatively modern building, in the vista from the Fort. While the desirability of forming a perfect screen is generally admitted, there nevertheless is a conflict of purpose which is worthy of earnest consideration.

Ft. Necessity, erected in 1754, was the scene of the first major engagement in the French and Indian War. The Great Meadows, selected by Lieut. Col. George Washington for his palisade, was a treeless area about 200 yards wide and was surrounded by hills covered with virgin forest. In the plans for the restoration of the Fort and its environs it is natural that the hills be replanted to simulate the forest growth of 182 years ago.

However, in the development of Ft. Necessity State Park tentative approval has been given to a plan for the restoration of the Mt. Washington Tavern on the old National Road and to re-furnish it as a typical stage house of the period from 1820 to 1850 when the highway was thronged with traffic—Conestoga wagons carrying freight from the Atlantic seaboard to the Ohio valley region and stage coaches bearing passengers between the East and the West. The Tavern is on the south side of the highway, now known as U. S. 40, and situated about 325 yards north of Ft. Necessity stockade on a hill with an elevation about 100 feet above the Fort. It will be apparent that the work of restoring areas belonging to such widely separated historic periods will result in a clash, and to secure harmony the problem should be approached in an attitude of compromise.

When the Tavern was built shortly before the opening of the National Road the hillside below it had been cleared and the adjoining land was under cultivation. The house was built of brick moulded and burnt on the farm. Like all brick dwellings and public houses of that period it was built fronting close to the highway. In villages which grew up along the National Road during the same years the houses were flush with the highway which formed the main street through the towns. Notable examples are found in Uniontown,

Brownsville, Beallsville and Washington, Pennsylvania. Builders of brick and stone houses along the road remote from the villages adhered to the same principle and the highway for all practical purposes could be regarded as a "street". Usually a pavement or sidewalk bordered the road and extended to the front door of the house, this idea having been handed down from customs in England. Residences with a manorial atmosphere located far back from the public roads in Western Pennsylvania belong to a considerably ^{later} date than Mt. Washington Tavern.

An apple orchard was set out on the Mt. Washington property about 1830, or perhaps a few years earlier. It covered almost two acres, including an open area immediately south of the house. It contained about 40 trees, planted in five rows extending 75 yards east and west, and numbering eight trees each. The first row of trees was about 25 yards south of the south wall of the building. The width of the orchard was 55 yards, that is, extending north and south. Twelve trees remain. The gnarled trunks of several of these indicate that they are from 75 to 100 years old.

The orchard flourished within the memory of many persons residing in the neighborhood who are still living. Heirs of Louis Fazenbaker, last owner of the farm, confirm the description given above. In further confirmation it is only necessary ^{to examine} the landscape of the environs of Ft. Necessity painted by Paul Weber in 1854. Weber's picture is almost photographically exact as may be seen by comparing his canvas with existing objects. The contour of the hills, the courses of streams, the location of fences and the details of the Tavern and other remaining buildings are faithful in every respect. The orchard in 1854 was in its prime. The artist shows it in full foliage and covering the area I have described. Weber's work is well known and there are notable examples of paintings in the Academy of Fine Arts and the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington. He was born in Germany, settled in Philadelphia in 1848 and on a trip to Western Pennsylvania painted Ft. Necessity site, Braddock's Grave and the site of Braddock's defeat on the Monongahela river. In 1858 he became court painter in the Grand Duchy of Darmstadt. A photostat of Weber's Ft. Necessity from a photoengraving in "The Braddock Trail" by Dr. John Kennedy Lacock will be submitted later as part of this Report.

To complete the restoration of the orchard it would be necessary to plant only twelve trees, filling out the first and second rows nearest the house. These obviously should be the old favorite varieties of fruit, the July pippin, the Baldwin, the winesap, etc.

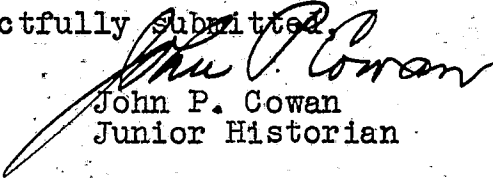
The extreme south row of trees is a few feet above the crest of the hill whence the ground slopes up gradually to the building. Below the south ^{row} extending southward, the ground recedes sharply to the Meadows, the distance being 150 yards to the border of the proposed forest planting at the north edge of the Meadows. Reference to the contour lines on the Major Plan, Ft. Necessity State Park,

indicate how matured oaks, maples and poplars on the crest would completely obscure the orchard and the Tavern in the view from the Fort. Until these trees reach maturity they would blend harmoniously with the fruit trees and the distance is so great that the different varieties would be difficult to distinguish.

Western Pennsylvania settlers were ruthless in cutting away forest trees from the proximity of their dwellings. They were sometimes considerate of a chestnut, a hickory or a walnut and occasionally allowed one or two oaks or maples to remain on account of their generous shade, but beyond a very few trees they felled those near the house to make way for cultivated fields and farmyard, or the planting of gardens and growing of fruit. They were devoted to the tradition of Johnny Appleseed. Today the sites of many pioneer houses may be traced only by a solitary apple tree that has remained even after the foundations of the old buildings have been obliterated. Within a few miles of Ft. Necessity there are still these living monuments to several homes of settlers whose names are now unknown.

In the restoration of Mt. Washington Tavern I urge that the orchard be retained. It would in no sense interfere with the proper development of the yard immediately surrounding the building, but rather would simplify that feature of landscaping. The forest planting on the hillside will dissociate the landmark on the "Old Pike" from the colonial battleground in the valley. I believe the parallel restoration affecting these two activities can be carried on without inflicting a serious clash to either.

Respectfully submitted,


John P. Cowan
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cc: Washington--Mr. Spalding
Richmond
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Gettysburg--Mr. McConaghie
Mr. Diggs
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November 19th, 1936