

Backward Glances: A Tavern in the Town

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Photo courtesy of the Westchester County Historical Society

Built in the 1770s by James Wallace III, this old tavern served travelers and residents for at least 150 years as hotel, store, dance hall, social center, stagecoach stop and private home. It stood diagonally across from today's Vox and was gone many years before the current home was built on the property in 1950 by Joseph Vassak. The road in the foreground is Titicus Road where it meets Peach Lake Road.

The need for an inn at this spot was pressing in the 1770s, as it was the crossroads of the New York to Vermont Post Road and the main east-west road from Connecticut to the Hudson River. Many drovers took

this route to get their cattle to the Hudson for delivery by barge to New York City markets. It was a route for troop movement if needed and also an escape route for George Washington should he lose West Point and need to high tail it to a waiting ship in Long Island Sound. After the burning of Bedford, the county court met down the road in the Presbyterian Meeting House (long gone) where Titicus and Grant Roads meet, for several years. Clearly there were a lot of travelers here in Revolutionary times, including the French army that passed by the tavern twice. Did Rochambeau's officers lift a glass here or in one of the other Salem taverns on the route?

James Wallace served in the Revolutionary War and was a founder of the first Presbyterian Church in North Salem. He and many family members - including brothers Uriah, also a tavern owner (next to Delancey Hall in the 1790s) and, Abijah, the first blacksmith; and their uncle Jacob, first supervisor of Salem -- were prominent in the early days.

In 1784, Wallace sold the property to another early resident, Abraham Lockwood, who ran the hotel for many years. By 1846 Lockwood had sold to it circus entrepreneur George Fox Bailey. More than a watering hotel and stage stop, the Bailey Hotel/Tavern/store was a busy social center and meeting place for the circus crowd, including Junes, Turners, Angevines, and was popular for balls, parties and a meeting place for our 19th century militia the Salem Rangers. The hotel reportedly had a floating (suspended) dance floor.

After Bailey, there was a chain of owners including Henry Crosby, who ran the Crosby Hotel for 20 years, and more Baileys who may or may not have kept the place open as a public house. Maps and deeds don't agree, probably due to the habit of 19th century mapmakers not always doing new property owner research for each edition. The dance invitation to Charles Bloomer, above, is dated 1899, so the building was still functioning then at least as a social center. When it fell into disrepair (note broken windows in the photo) and the actual date of its demise have eluded me. If you have

more information or other photos, please share! My thanks to Jesse Goldberg, who asked about the old tavern, and to Robert Treadway who had already done a lot of the research.