

Inn could brag Washington slept here

■The old Barr Tavern
welcomed weary travelers.

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In 1791 Barr's Tavern in Lancaster County was a stopping place for a president of the United States. Nathan Barr provided rooms and meals for the presidential party. The president probably got clean sheets but we know from old letters and journals that bed linens weren't often changed. Some customers preferred sleeping on the floor.

Early taverns, such as Barr's, were widely



Nearby
history

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spaced on the major roads of the time. George Washington preferred public accommodations to staying in private houses. Other travelers sought out ordinary homes where they might have to pay less or because they disliked sharing rooms, and even beds, with strangers.

If Washington could have seen the area 30 or 40 years later, he would undoubtedly have noted the tremendous growth.

Lancaster, which didn't exist when he passed through, had become a village and had a courthouse (not the present one and probably made of log).

In 1830, Leroy Secrest advertised his "House of Entertainment" in the village of Lancaster "at the sign of the Swan." Secrest offered large stables with a shed attached for carriages. "His house is large and roomy. . . . His table shall be furnished with the best marked affords."

In the Indian Land at the village of Belair, Washington could have stayed at Hagins Inn, a stop on the route of the Camden to Charlotte Stage and he could have mailed a letter from the Belair Post Office, which was established in 1813. (In 1791 there was no mail service except to major cities.)

The Hagins Inn lasted for at least half a century. Other inns flourished to a greater extent, especially if they happened to be near a railroad, as Belair was not.

In 1850, the Charlotte and Columbia Railroad (soon to be the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta) was laying the first cross ties up through Chester and York Districts. The railroad was to create the towns of Rock Hill and Fort Mill and give good business to enterprises along its tracks.

One of the best inns along the CC&A was "The Inn," about 6 miles south of the town of Chesterville. It was built in 1841 by Elijah Cornwell, prior to the building of the railroad.

The Inn, which was nestled in a grove of large hardwoods, had 17 rooms, 11 on the upper floor and six in the basement. The front porch had five doors opening into the house. A narrow hall in the back led to all of the bedrooms.

The largest room was the dining room. Travelers expected to be fed and ate family-style. A bell announced mealtime. The food was probably plain and produced locally. Many a traveler has written of eating boiled cabbage, corn bread, molasses and bacon (fatback with only a faint streak of lean meat). Cornwell probably served better food than most. Old records show that famous people stopped at The Inn including senator and former Vice President John C. Calhoun and Wade Hampton.

When the railroad came, The Inn was a meal stop for the passengers. Dining cars were something for the future and locomotives traveled so slowly that it might take all day to get from Columbia to Charlotte. Strategically, The Inn was well-placed to be the midday meal stop.

When the number of railroad passengers increased, hotels were built in towns. Rock Hill had its Gordon Hotel and Yorkville its Rose Hotel before the Civil War. With the rise of hotels, the role of the old country inns was diminished.

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