

The Washington House Inn

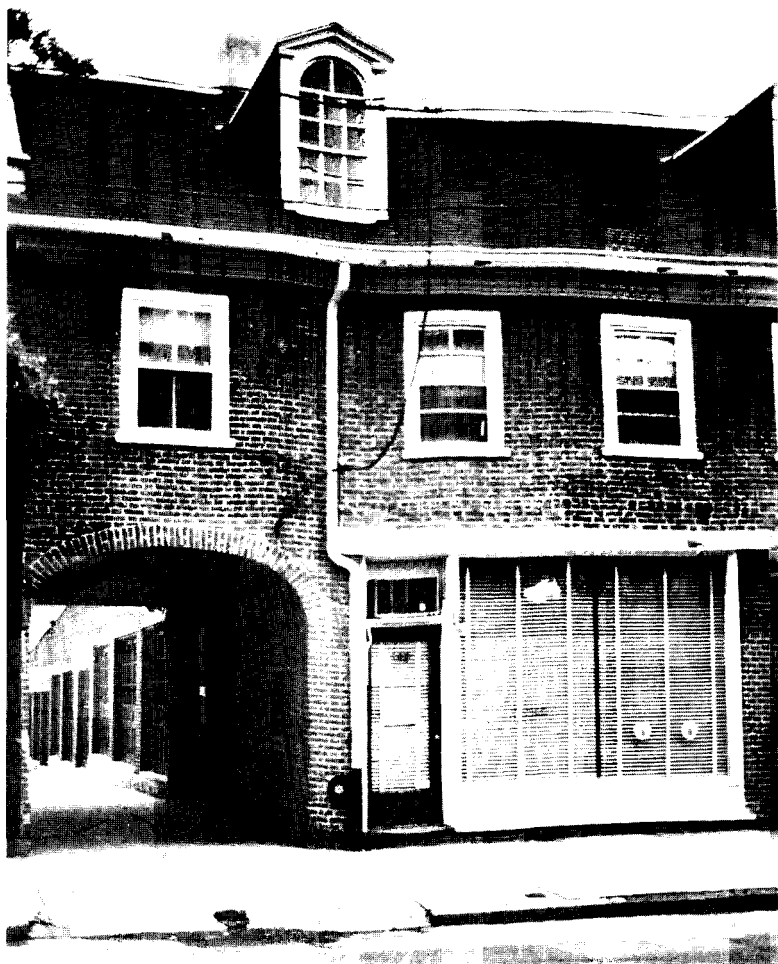
By Jean Miller DeChant

*T*he Washington House Inn, currently the home of the Lancaster Storage Company, can speak imaginatively about the Inn's history from its inception for use as a hostelry in approximately 1887-1892, through a recent owner's extensive description of the building's interior and exterior. Records of the site's various usages date back to 1799 when it was a section of Hamilton Lot 145, which later was used as a dwelling before becoming a stopover for weary travellers.

Mr. Walter C. Miller's interior description and available historical usage hints both speak specifically about this "old inn's" Federal period staircase, for instance.

Before launching into the building's facets inside, it creates human interest to realize that Jacob Sherer built his two-story, brick residence for \$1,000, its unfinished value, according to the Lancaster Borough tax list of 1808. Jacob Sherer, distiller, sold his home to Lewis Hartman, coachmaker, in 1831. \$1,600 was its sales price then.

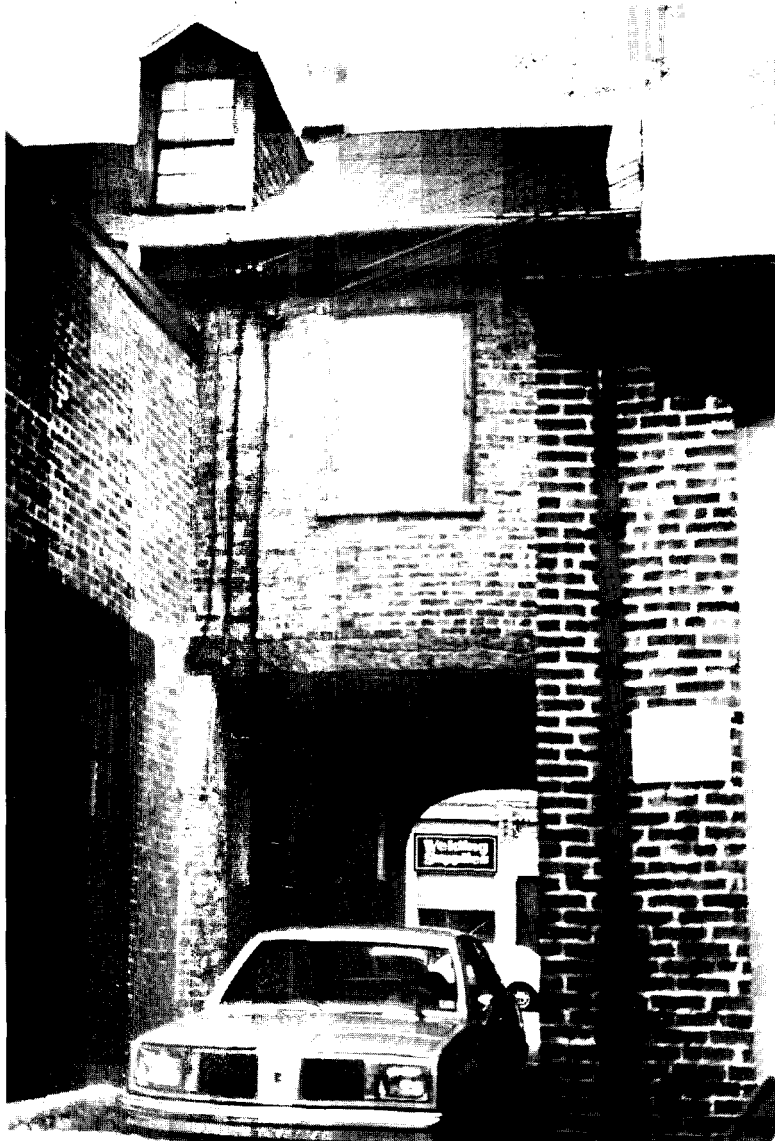
Briefly, changes from use as a private home to those of wayside stopovers for weary travelers would have begun at the Washington House Inn's new use, now a commercial one, during the 1800s. And



Contemporary view of the George Washington Inn, now the offices of the Lancaster Storage Co., Inc., 342 North Queen Street, Lancaster. The wagon entrance is at the left side. Copyright by Jean Miller DeChant.

it's certain that its historical associations as pertaining to the history of the largest inland city in the colonies, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, can keep historians—amateur and professional—awake into the night, delving into archives, digesting anecdotes.

An interested amateur historian in his own right was Mr. Walter C. Miller, former owner and President of the Lancaster Storage Company. The Company is current owner of the building formerly known as the Washington House Inn, using its numerous rooms as offices.



Rear of wagon entrance. Large doors to the left are a modern addition. Copyright by Jean Miller DeChant.

Its Board of Directors conscientiously watches over the "old inn's" restorations and uses, preserving its historical value, and yet scrupulously living up to an adaptive image, business-practices, of these "high tech" 1980s



View of the entire front of the George Washington Inn as it appears today. For the benefit of readers in the twenty-first century, the light-colored "line" or cable crossing the photos above the roof cornice and eave is a cable television distribution line. The George Washington Inn did not have television in each room, however! (Nor radio, telephone or electricity). Copyright by Jean Miller DeChant.

Mr. Miller wrote a description of the Washington House Inn for me, at my request, when I was researching Lancaster of the 1790s for a juvenile novel that I'd been working on in 1978.

I would like to share Mr. Miller's (Dad's) letter's description with you:

... in the 300 block of North Queen Street. The entrance door was in the south corner of the building, a three story, brick building with dormers on the third floor, fronting on Queen Street. The entrance door opened on the common room where one could register for the night at the desk to the rear of the room. To the right of the counter (register desk) was the stairway to the second floor. To the right of the counter and stairway was a long bar paralleling the front facing Queen Street where one could slake his thirst with all sorts of drinks, either at the bar or at the tables in front of the bar where food was served after it was brought from the kitchen behind the bar.

There were no lodging rooms on the first floor but about twenty rooms equally divided between the second and third floors. The hallway led from the top of the stairs north and south, paralleling the Queen Street front, and another hallway ran to a long extension of the building to the rear.

As written above, there were ten rooms on the second and third floor—I neglected to mention a stairway to the third floor—a continuation of the stairwell from the first to the second floor.

On the outside hung over the entrance door, a wooden sign containing a painted facsimile of George Washington's head—with the name 'George Washington Tavern' appearing thereon.

Outside, to the left of the entrance, was an arched wagon entrance which lead to a wagon parking lot in the rear and a barn where horses could be fed and kept for the night.

Many positive-approach owners of the North Queen Street area continue to recognize Lancaster's long, respected place in America's early history by actively calling upon, soliciting advice from, the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County. The Trust's research and advice can help ensure building's investment values, through helpful, accurate architectural hints. And, maybe owners will surprise themselves, personally, by developing, increasing their knowledge of varying skills, products and uses which their buildings have had in the past. And, that personal development could present a "commercial shifting-of-gears development" in current-day owners' thinking about their property *and* its projections for services, products and use in the 1980s into the 1990s.

For today? A "tip of the hat" to the Washington House Inn. And to its place in the life and commerce of Lancastrians and its guests.

Bibliography:

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- Susquehanna* monthly magazine. January, 1982. Marietta, Pa. Article by John J. Snyder, Jr.
- Letter*. Sunday, Sep't. 11, 1977. Walter C. Miller. Property of Jean Miller DeChant.

About the Contributor

Jean Miller DeChant, daughter of the late Walter C. Miller for many years the executive secretary of the Lancaster Manufacturers Association, is a freelance writer and photographer.