

GEORGE WASHINGTON IN LANCASTER.

By William Frederic Worner.

In the "Proceedings" of the Lancaster County Historical Society, Vol. XXVI, No. 10, for December, 1922, is a description of George Washington's visit to Lancaster borough in 1791, at which time he witnessed the celebration of the fifteenth anniversary of American Independence. Until recently, this was thought to be the first visit of the Father of His Country to Lancaster county and borough. Since that paper was prepared, however, the diaries of George Washington, from the years 1748 to 1799, have been collected and edited by the eminent historian, John C. Fitzpatrick, A. M., assistant chief of the Division of Manuscripts in the Library of Congress; and published by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, through Houghton Mifflin Company, in 1925. From this valuable work we learn that George Washington was in Lancaster in 1773,—eighteen years earlier than the date on which, as is generally supposed, he made his first visit to the town.

In the spring of 1773, Washington made a journey to New York for the express purpose of placing Jackie (John Parke) Custis at school in King's College, now Columbia University. He left Mount Vernon May 10th, 1773, and young Custis joined him at the Calverts,' in Maryland. On the return journey, he passed through Lancaster. He was in Philadelphia in the early part of June, 1773, two years before the outbreak of the Revolution at Lexington. He returned to his home at Mount Vernon by the "back road", which passed through Lancaster, York and Baltimore.

In Vol. 2, page 114, of the "Diaries of George Washington", edited by Mr. Fitzpatrick, appear the following:

"June 3rd, 1773. Abt. 11 Oclock left Phila. dind at the Sorrel Horse 13 Miles from it, and lodgd at the Ship Tavern 34 [miles] off."

The Ship Tavern was located about a mile west of Downingtown, near the junction of the old King's Highway and the turnpike. The tavern was built by Thomas Parke, who died October 17th, 1758. The original building is still standing, and is now used as a dwelling house by Mrs. Charles McIlvaine. It ceased to be a tavern more than one hundred years ago. (See History of the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, by Judge Charles I. Landis, pages 24 and 25).

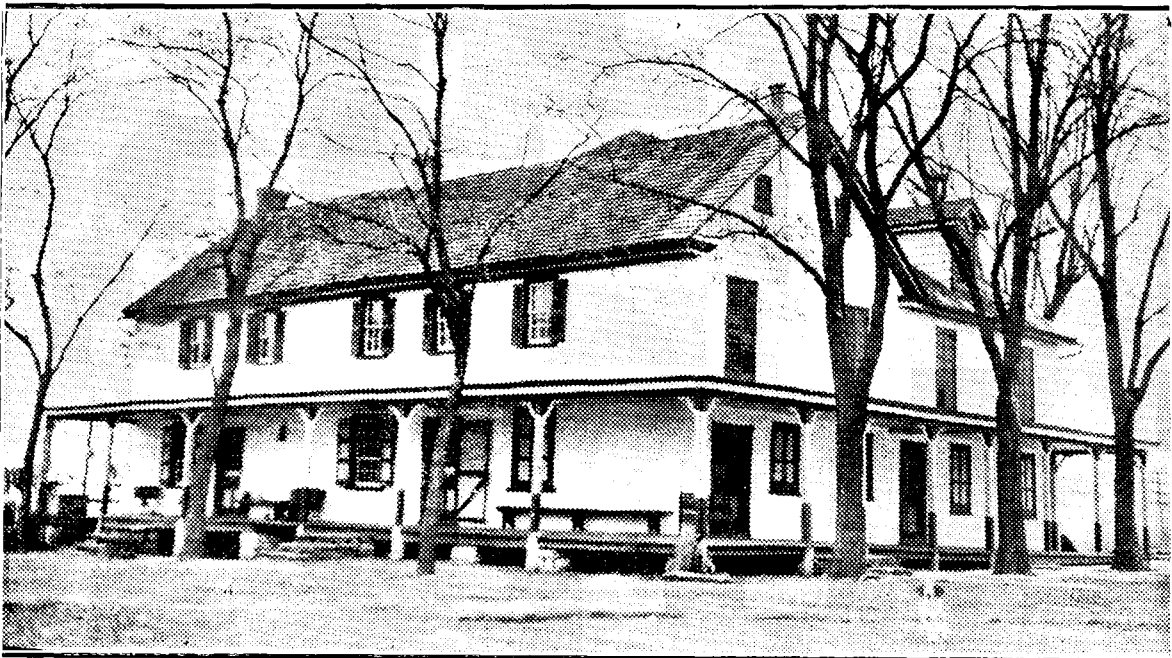
"June 4th, 1773. Breakfasted at the Sign of the Bull, 13 miles from the Ship; dind at Lancaster, 19 Miles further, and lodgd at Wright's Ferry, 10 Miles from Lancaster.

"June 5th, 1773. Breakfasted in York Town. Dind at the Sign of the Buck, 14 miles from Yk., wch is 12 Miles from Wright's Ferry, and lodgd at Sutton's, 15 M. from the Buck.

"June 8th, 1773. Reach's home [Mount Vernon] to Dinner about two Oclock."

He was nearly a month in making this journey.

The foregoing extracts prove conclusively that George Washington passed through Lancaster and Wright's Ferry, now Columbia, in 1773. The Sign of the Bull, in which he ate breakfast, was, in all probability, "Miller's Tavern", the old building of which is still standing at Compassville, a short distance east of the line that divides Chester and Lancaster counties. It was kept for many years by John Miller. In the survey of the old King's Highway made by order of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania in



The Sign of the Bull, Compassville, Chester County, Pa. George Washington ate breakfast in this old tavern on June 4, 1773.

1767, this old hostelry is designated as "Miller's Tavern" and is situated a few hundred feet east of the "English Church", which is old Saint John's Protestant Episcopal church. At the time of Washington's visit, it may have been known as "The Sign of the Bull", though it is singular that it was not marked as such on the survey.

It is to be regretted that Washington did not mention the place in which he dined in Lancaster, and the tavern in which he lodged at Wright's Ferry, as this information would be of much interest to students of local history.

The following year, Washington became a member of the First Congress, which met in Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia, September 5th, 1774; the next April came the Battle of Lexington, followed by the appointment of Washington to the leadership of the American army, and the long struggle which finally resulted in our freedom from British rule. Through this struggle and the years of peace which followed, Washington bore himself with a bravery, a firmness and a patriotism that made him in every way worthy of Henry Lee's famous ecomium: "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen".

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