

Kind traveller come rest
your shins at this, the
peer of all the inns.
— Author Unknown

Stage House Inn entry hall in
Scotch Plains.

Stage House Inn Continues

By LILLIAN DUGGAN
Specially Written for Our Towns

To provide comfort and rest to strangers and travelers has been the aim of the Stage House Inn for most of its 260 years. Even as far back in history as the 10th century, the piece of land at

the corner of Park Avenue and Front Street

was part of a temporary campground for Lenni-Lenape Indians making their way between mountain and ocean hunting spots.

The birth of the Colonial New Jersey tavern took place around 1668, when the first New Jersey "ordinary" was opened in Newark. Establishments that today are known as bars and pubs were first dubbed ordinaries, then taverns, and later inns or houses.

The people of Newark were rather anxious to have an ordinary at their disposal. According to the New Jersey Historical Society's "Records of the Town of Newark 1666-1836," when the town chose Henry Lyon on May 16, 1666 "to keep an Ordinary for the Entertainment of Travellers and Strangers," they desired that he "prepare for it as soon as possible."

Lyon's ordinary seemed to be such a good idea that the East Jersey General Assembly ordered in 1668 that "in consideration of the inconveniences that do arise for want of an Ordinary in every town within this province, every town shall provide an Ordinary."

In later years, inns and taverns were bound by the government to offer respite to weary travelers. An 1800 charter to one of the Stage House's future innkeepers outlined that he must "find and provide good, wholesome, and sufficient lodging, diet, and entertainment for man, and stabling and provender for horse."

In 1737, about 53 years after the first settlers arrived in what is now Scotch Plains, John Sutton answered the 1668 call of the General Assembly by opening what historians have referred to as "The Corner Tavern," "John Sutton's Hotel," "Johnny Sutton's House" and "John Sutton's Tavern."

Sutton opened the inn "at the meeting of the 'Road to the Mountain' and the 'Road to Raway (sic),'" according to Marion Nicholl Rawson's "Under the Blue Hills," which is considered to be the definitive record of Scotch Plains history. As Mrs. Rawson poses, "What better place for an inn ... where you could eat and sleep travelers aplenty?"

A fireplace emblazoned with the year 1737 verifies the age of at least a portion of the building. Many believe that the center section, however, was one of six original homes built in Scotch Plains in the year 1684. Indeed, original ceiling beams in that section

distinguish it from the rest of the structure.

Mr. Sutton's tavern became the cornerstone of a burgeoning village. Aside from offering drink and shelter, the tavern was an important meeting place. As the village grew, private and government business was conducted there. The tavern remained the center of social activity in the village for years afterward.

The Stage House Inn's place in local history was sealed in 1769 when it became a stop on a stagecoach line called the Swiftsure Stage Line.

This line served those traveling between Philadelphia and New York "by the shortest, cheapest, safest, and most pleasant road, through Newark, Springfield, Scotch Plains" (probably the same route as today's Route 22) and on through western New Jersey to Philadelphia, according to an 1801 newspaper ad.

As horses had to be changed or refreshed every 12 miles, frequent stops were necessary. The stage also carried mail, and the inn became an official post office. Townspeople were notified of the arrival of the coach when the innkeeper fired a small cannon.

Around the beginning of the Revolutionary War period, the inn changed hands. Now run by Peter Marselis, it was called the "Marseillious" or "Marselis." Battles and troop movement through the "Plains" became commonplace, and taverns were important centers of political activity.

Marselis's tavern is indicated on a map prepared by General George Washington's cartographer, Robert Erskine.

Mrs. Rawson claims in her book that "Probably no other publick (sic)-house in the colony entertained more generals and important men than did the 'Marselis'" because of its proximity to what was considered a "dangerous pass" during the Revolutionary War. The tavern was also probably visited by troops moving between New York and Philadelphia.

Some believe it's likely that General Washington himself appeared at the inn. The proximity of Washington Rock, a lookout from which Washington observed enemy troops, and the troop movement that likely occurred along what is today Route 22 during the Battle of the Short Hills, suggest the general may have used the inn as a rest stop and possibly a



HISTORY WAS MADE HERE... For 260 years, the Stage House Inn in Scotch Plains has been a gathering spot for political and social occasions and was visited by prominent figures during the Revolutionary War. On display in front of the landmark is a captured German cannon, given to Scotch Plains as a gift from the United States government. To the right, not pictured, is a monument. Both honor contributions made by the Scotch Plains community during World War I.

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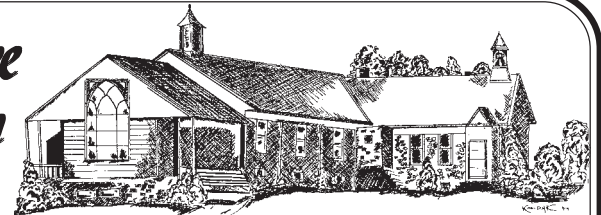


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