



Haverford Township Historical Society



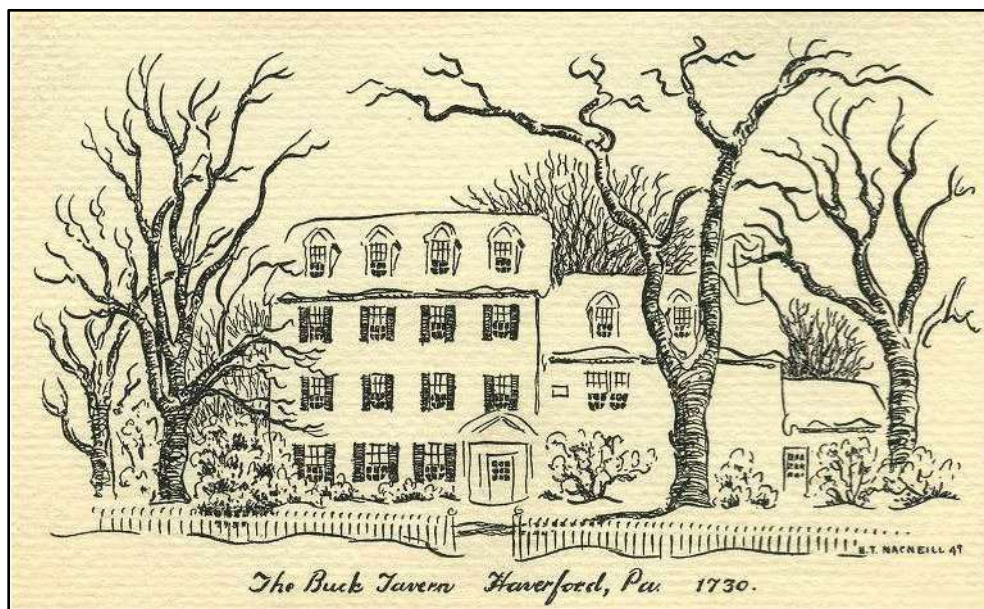
GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEPT HERE – IN HAVERFORD THE BUCK TAVERN

By Richard D. Kerr

The claim “George Washington slept here” has long been a popular one for inns seeking bookings, towns or regions seeking tourists, and numerous others. Sometimes it seems like one person could not have had enough nights within one lifetime to slumber in all the places that make this claim. That having been stated, there is documentary evidence that George Washington did in fact sleep here in Haverford Township, and that evidence comes from no less an authority than George himself.

In the summer of 1777, English troops were on the offensive, under Lord Cornwallis, and General Washington’s forces were on the retreat from New Jersey. The young Congress was packing for a hasty retreat before the total loss of control of Philadelphia, the declared capitol of the upstart United States of America. By mid-summer, Washington was being pressed westward by British troops sweeping through southeastern Pennsylvania, to the cheers of the Loyalists, the concern of the neutralists, and the dismay of the rebellious.

“The Lancaster Road” stretched westward from Philadelphia into the Pennsylvania countryside. Spaced along it was a succession of inns and taverns that acted as “stages” where stagecoaches and travelers could rest overnight before continuing their journeys. In the short stretch of the Lancaster road that cut through the very northeastern corner of Haverford Township, there stood the Buck Tavern, one such place. Although it has been claimed that the tavern was built by Thomas Penn (William’s son), another source indicates it was built by the Miller family in 1739. The tavern was located just west of milestone 11 of the Lancaster road. In 1777 “The Buck” was being run by Mary Miller, the widow of proprietor Joseph Miller. With the drums of war so close, she probably had never seen the Lancaster road so busy.

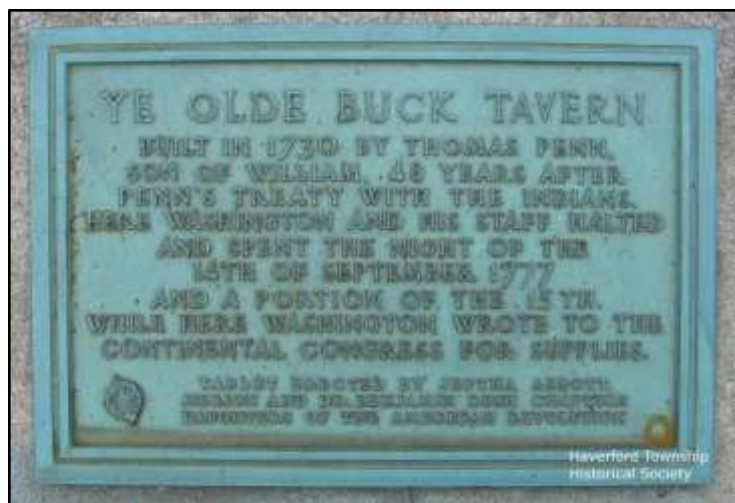


On Sunday, September 14, 1777, General George Washington and his headquarters staff arrived at the Buck Tavern. They would stay overnight there, while his Revolutionary Army of about 10,000 men would camp along the Lancaster road from Milestone 8 (near the Merion Meeting) past Milestone 14 (near the Radnor meeting). The Continental troops were hoping to regroup farther west and then re-engage the English army. So it was that “George Washington slept here” in Haverford Township that night.

The Continental Army pressed onward early the next day. While staying at the “Sign of the Buck,” Washington penned several letters, noting his present location as “at Buck Tavern.” He wrote to General Smallwood on the afternoon of September 14th, and to John Hancock the following morning before departing. He asked Hancock, the President of Congress, for an immediate supply of blankets, including many that he had heard were held in private hands, for his troops.

Following the departure of the Continental Army, the British forces came through Haverford Township. While there was no “Battle of Haverford,” both armies ransacked the countryside in search of provisions and supplies. Howe’s troops were in Haverford for this purpose for four days. While people’s allegiances were mixed, many also had a propensity to sell their farm products and supplies to the highest bidder. In any case, they did not like it when the armies simply helped themselves while passing through.

The old Buck Tavern continued in business for a long period thereafter. By one account, the Miller family expanded the building in 1780. In 1797 Joshua Humphreys instructed the War Department that any mail for him should be sent to the Buck Tavern, Mr. Miller proprietor, on Turnpike Road. In 1817 the tavern was officially designated to serve as a post office, the first in Haverford Township. It was bought in 1845 by wealthy mill operator Dennis Kelly, at which time it probably ceased to be a hotel. The property then went to Dennis Kelly’s daughter Anna M. Kelly, who married William J. Martin, and their son Dennis C. Martin was living there in 1904. The building was later converted into apartments. It was eventually torn down in 1964, amid the protests of neighbors and the historically-minded. The property, between present-day Old Buck Road and Martin’s Lane, later hosted a Hot Shoppes family restaurant, followed by another restaurant named Al E. Gator’s, followed in turn by the present Wilkie Lexus automobile dealership. An historical marker originally placed on the old tavern building by three chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution has been preserved and stands in front of the Wilkie dealership building to mark this place in history.



“The Buck” originally stood in an advantageous position in the angled fork between the old “Lancaster road” and the later Lancaster turnpike. The first short stretch of the old Lancaster road to the southwest

of both the turnpike and the Buck Tavern fell into disrepair quite early on, and people took to continuing a short way northwest up the turnpike (present-day Lancaster Avenue, U.S. 30) and then making a later left turn to rejoin the old road. This alignment of Old Lancaster Road is still in use today. The unused section was officially vacated in 1858 by Delaware County Court. The northeast boundary of the Polo Field property marks the old road alignment.

Explore for More... George Washington Slept Here – In Haverford

For a more detailed account of Washington's stay at the Buck Tavern and related troop movements, see the first chapters of Thomas J. McGuire's excellent book, *Battle of Paoli*, published in 2006. Selections can be found online here (click on "View Sample" near the upper left):

<http://books.google.com/books?id=yNNjGIs-3xUC>

Read more about the Buck Tavern in Barbara Alyce Farrow's *The History of Bryn Mawr 1683-1900*, published in 1962, starting after page 34:

http://repository.brynmawr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=bmc_books

Here's a retrospective newspaper account (Haverford is mentioned about halfway down):

http://articles.philly.com/1991-07-04/news/25785280_1_battle-lines-biggest-battle-sir-william-howe

More information on the Buck Tavern, from our friends at the Lower Merion Historical Society (scan about halfway down to "The Buck Inn"):

<http://lowermerionhistory.org/texts/first300/part07.html>

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