

THE STAGE HOUSE VILLAGE AND INN Park Avenue, #9

The town meeting place for over 227 years the old historic inn occupies a convenient site at the corner of Front Street and Park Avenue. The heart of Scotch Plains began to beat in 1737 with the laying of the hearth in the inn or tavern of John Sutton.

A complete restoration was given to it in 1961 by Charles Detwiler and Glen Smyth, and the old time air still clings about its exterior. Inside are the original hearths, and hand-hewn beams in low-ceilinged rooms. The central portion of the present restaurant, under the management of Peter Koolouris, is even older than the outer room with its dated iron fireback, and may be one of the early homes of the 1690s.



Not everybody could be a taverner. A 1735 license designated at least two spare beds and a horse room for those who came not as footmen. The taverner himself came needing at least ten respectable freeholders to guarantee him a reputation for honesty and temperance and an understanding that he might neither game himself nor suffer any person to game for money on the premises.

Prior to 1750 irregular stages ran between Scotch Plains and Philadelphia, passing each way three times a week. Called the "Swift-Sure Line," the coaches were soon extended to New York. Their stop in Scotch Plains was the old Inn, and a triple treat that issued forth upon their arrival was the firing of the mail cannon. Some ran all the way from Plainfield for their letters.

If only the old hearth could talk! It might tell of Revolutionary days when the Inn took on added importance by being the chief meeting place for troop messengers and officers. What stories it could give us of its owner with unusual name of Col. Recompense Stanbery II, who had joined Jedidiah Swan's company of local men, after he had already been wounded in the August Battle of Long Island.

The Colonel's father, the first Recompense Stanbery, was living in this vicinity before 1747, and had been a shopkeeper and organizer of the Church. The hearth could tell of the day when Lafayette and his aides stopped at the hotel, when Washington was encamped near here. The old dining room table, at which Lafayette is said to have eaten, was in the possession of the Paff family for many years.

Col. Stanbery ran the Inn until it was given to his son Jacob in 1799. The public house continued to be well-known throughout the country. By July in the year 1801, one could go from New York to Philadelphia on five dollars and carrying 14 pounds of baggage, and many stopped at the summer boarding house and inn to spend a few weeks in the country.

When Sanford Hicks owned the tavern in 1819 it was referred to as on "Darby Road." In Civil War days it was DeBoud's Hotel on Martine Avenue, and in the 1950's it was "Ye Olde Tavern" on Front Street. Today's "Stage House Village and Inn," with the official address of Park Avenue, is composed of several historical buildings. The 1683 Tempe House and the 1760 Duell Barn are from "the other end of town." The 1810 home of Thomas Paff, who was proprietor in 1879, was moved intact from Forest Road and Westfield Avenue and placed in the courtyard of the village.

The tavern keeper in 1831 was Peter B. Davis, who was involved in the murder of Baltus Roll, but was convicted of a lesser crime and soon pardoned out of prison.

Herman Frowery was proprietor in 1911, when his daughter, Frances, who still lives in Scotch Plains, was the first child born in the Inn in 100 years.

The kitchen, or keeping room, served as the post office, public lounging room and poor man's dining room. To the north was the respectable end of the building where the Ladies' Entrance had welcomed the female stagecoach guests in the mid-1700s.

Among the seven rooms of the present Inn is the characteristic Long Room, the scene of town meetings for many years. The secession of Scotch Plains from the township of Westfield was formulated here in 1794. In two of the upstairs rooms Mrs. William P. Elliott has reproduced the stencil work of the period which was the forerunner of wallpaper. The stylized pineapples were a symbol of good luck and were quite a popular tavern decoration. The murals in the Entry Hall, done by the well-known artist Maxwell Simpson, depict various episodes of Scotch Plains history.