

No Room at the Inn

by Diane Martell

Across from the former Brookfield Inn on West Main Street (Route 9), is a memorial that designates this part of the road as the George Washington Memorial Highway. In 1789, our first President traveled through five of the New England states. (Rhode Island had not yet ratified the US Constitution.) This tour has become the basis for all of the "George Washington slept here" claims, and was his last visit to New England.

I recently found a copy of President Washington's itinerary compiled by Charles E. Claghorn and published by the Florida Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. Mr. Claghorn abstracted this timeline from six volumes of Washington's diaries and 39 volumes of his writings.

From this work, we know that the President had breakfast at the tavern of William Scott in Palmer on October 22, had dinner at the Hitchcock tavern in West Brookfield, now know as Ye Old Tavern. He fed his horses in Brookfield, and spent the night at the tavern of Isaac Jenks in Spencer. It seems the party would have spent the night in Brookfield except for an unfortunate incident.

In 1889, Spencer celebrated the 100th anniversary of the night the President stopped by and the following poem was written, detailing the events of that day in 1789 when George Washington did not sleep here.

A kitchen and an L beside
But you've all seen just a house
There's one just like it on the hill;
As Washington then saw it,
You can see it standing still.
But I am traveling on too fast;
His chariot wheels we see
Are drawing near to Brookfield -
I think there then were three.
He cam to Brookfield own
Hoping to pass the night;

But good old Mrs. Bannister
Was in a sorry plight;
She had a dreadful headache,
The landlord was from home,
She thought 'twas from a college,
A president had come.
And so without inquiry
She sent the message down
She "could not well accommodate,
He must go to the next town."
But when a little later
And he had passed from sight,
She heard 'twas General Washington
Who wished to pass the night -
With sorrow and dismay
And great chagrin she said
"Bless me! One look at that good man
Would have cured my aching head"
We thank old lady Bannister
And will prize her memory
For letting our first President
Try Spencer's hospitality.

Mrs. Upham
Spencer, 1889

(This is one of Those historic accounts that we spoke of in my Folding Corner last month. This will be processed to the town website, along with whatever pictures we can "dig" up. Thanks, Diane. Ed.)