

Basking Ridge Home Reminder Of Gen. Lee's Escapade in 1776

Sunday Call Special Service.

BASKING RIDGE, Dec. 12.—George Washington with his courageous army of 3,000 patriots did not pitch camp within three miles of here tonight as he did 155 years ago, but there are those who assert that every winter the spirits of '76 come back to these parts to relive a past adventure.

It was following defeats on Long Island and at White Plains that General Washington and his men retreated through New Jersey, hotly pursued by the British. The colonial forces stopped not far from here on the road to Morristown for the night of December 12, 1776.

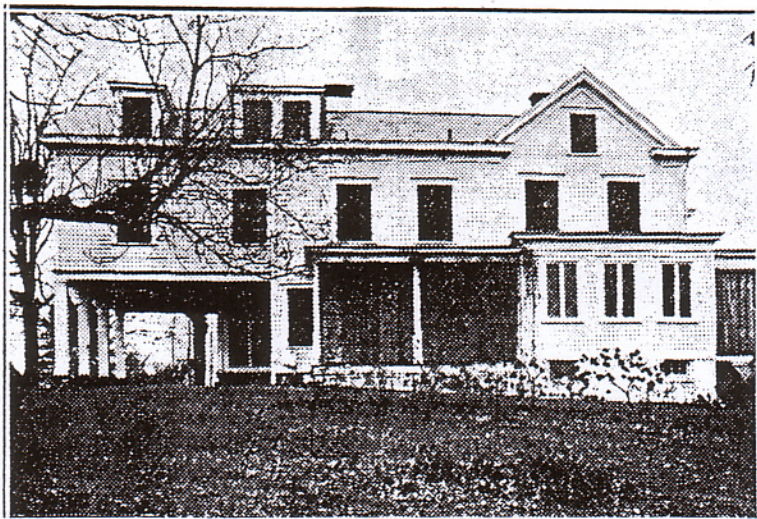
Second in command to Washington was Gen. Charles Lee, gallant and debonair to the point of indiscretion. He did not sleep in camp that night, but, tempted by his love for the charming Widow White, went to her tavern a half mile up the road from the village of Basking Ridge. The general, booted and spurred and elegantly attired, pranced through the night with a small escort of horsemen. The escapade was to be kept secret from Washington.

A Night of Gaiety.

Widow White was filled with much cheer, for she had heard that the American army was not far distant, and she knew General Lee from past encounter. So she prepared herself for a pleasant evening. Rumor has it that the barmails at this tavern were more than passing fair and that the attractions were many. There was a room full of people drinking and jolly when Lee and his men arrived. Widow White was all gracious delight.

She curtsied and said, "I have saved the room in the southeast corner for you, my general."

The general, pleasantly impressed by being anticipated, betook himself to his room and, opening a door, went down two steps to another room that boasted only a wooden tub. Barmails fetched pails of water from the well and, after heating it in the kitchen, took it to the expectant guest. Meanwhile there was revelry in the main room of the inn, so much so that the departure of a certain Tory gentleman was not observed. Lee, freshened and immaculate from bathing, came down in search of Widow White. The night was one of gaiety and quickly passed.



Folks in Basking Ridge and across the countryside are wondering whether or not the spirits of Gen. Charles Lee and Widow White came last night to this house, once her tavern, to celebrate the one hundred and fifty-fifth anniversary of an escapade of Revolutionary days.

The morning of December 13 was cold and gray, but Lee whistled as he shaved, for he had agreeable things to think on. He did not know that the rascally Tory who had slipped out the night before was even now leading a detachment of English cavalry to Widow White's Tavern to take him prisoner. Lee and his men were taken unawares a short time later and were carried off with every mark of triumph and indignity.

Washington was decidedly put out by the affair and in a letter to his brother, Augustine, dated December 18, 1776, writes: "Before this reaches you, you will no doubt have heard of the captivity of General Lee. This is an additional misfortune, and the more vexatious, as it was by his own folly and imprudence and without a view to answer any good. He was taken going three miles out of his own camp and within twenty of the enemy, to lodge."

General Lee again appears in the pages of American history in 1778, when he is dismissed by Congress for disobeying Washington's orders at the battle of Monmouth.

After the Revolution the historic inn passed into the hands of first one family, then another. The Culbertsons and

the Thompsons owned it. Franklin Conklin of Newark bought it in 1902 and that spring plans were made for adding a porch to the front of the building.

Relics Unearthed.

While digging to lay the foundation relics of all kinds were unearthed. There were sabres and pistols, bayonets and English coins dating from 1776 and earlier. Exploration in the attic also revealed mementos of earlier days.

So that persons passing through Basking Ridge would know of the historical association of the house a sign was prepared with the words "Lee Lodge." But the sign outdid itself; too many people came with intent to explore the house from top to bottom and some even demanded that tea be served.

So the sign was taken down and much of the history has been forgot. Still there are those who know the story of the past and believe that the spirits of the departed return this night each year to make merry anniversary at Widow White's Tavern. But those passing down the road and curious cannot be certain, for solid shutters keep secret all that's going on within.

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