

Forgotten Inns in the Lands of the Painted Post

As the years pass by, memories of long ago people and places often fade away thus being lost to history. Such is true of the very early innkeepers and inns that once were a vital part of the life on the frontier of what was then called “the lands of the painted post”.

In the years before and after the construction of Corning, NY’s well-known Benjamin Patterson Inn in 1796 there were several other taverns or inns built and opened for business by such pioneers as David Fuller, Ichabod Patterson, Thomas Corbett, Mrs. Lindsley, Major Henry McCormick, John Shoemaker and Joseph Shattuck. Although these establishments fell to the ravages of time it would not be proper to let them be forgotten as each has its own history to tell to people of today.

According to the *Early History of Painted Post and The Town of Erwin* by Chas. H. Erwin, published in 1917, it is written on page 13, “the first hotel was built of round logs, one and a half stories and containing two rooms, called the Painted Post Hotel or Tavern, early in the spring of 1790 and was located near the north end of the Conhocton Bridge. It was built by David Fuller, who was an agent and tenant of Col. Erwin and for a long time the popular landlord of the hotel.” Being situated at the north end of the bridge would, probably, place this early hotel near the present-day Water Street and Hamilton Street intersection in the village of Painted Post, NY.

The *History of Steuben County* by W. Woodford Clayton also mentions David Fuller as having built the first hotel in the spring of 1790.

Information about another early inn and its keeper in the lands of the painted post can be found in the book *History of Ancient Windsor, CT* by Henry Reed Stiles. On page 75 Mr. Stiles wrote an interesting genealogy of the Hayden family in which he listed a Jemima Hayden who married in 1785 an Ichabod Patterson, son of Ephraim and Sarah Chandler Patterson of Newington, CT. In 1790 Ichabod and Jemima Patterson moved with his parents to Painted Post, NY where Ichabod later died at age 33 in 1794 or 1796. Mr. Stiles wrote that Ichabod “kept the first tavern at Painted Post (several years before Benjamin Patterson opened his, as noticed in French’s NY Gazetteer, page 624, footnote 7) which she continued to keep some three years after his death.” (This first Patterson tavern was reportedly made of logs that had been squared off and was located near where Post Creek joins with the Tioga/Chemung.) The genealogy also reported that Jemima Hayden Patterson was the third white woman in the Painted Post town while her mother-in-law was the second and a Mrs. Calkins being the first. The widow Jemima Patterson married Nehemiah Hubbell who died in Knoxville, NY, now the north side of Corning. The Hubbell Farm may have been the location of this early Patterson inn.

Thomas Corbett, a Revolutionary War veteran, was reported by the *Historical Gazetteer of Steuben County, NY*, page 132, “that Tommy Corbitt’s tavern at Mud Creek was the only house between Bath and Painted Post” in 1794. This structure was razed

about the time when a 4-lane highway was built near Savona, NY. Thomas Corbett died in 1829 at age 76 and was buried in the Old Savona Cemetery.

After the death of her husband, Col. Eleazar Lindsley, in 1794 Mrs. Lindsley “kept a tavern in this house...the first and principal one between Williamsport and Bath.” as mentioned in *A History of Steuben County, NY and Its People*.

The book, *Lives and Legends of the Christmas Tree Ships* by Mr. Fred Neuschel, gives us some insight about another early inn in Painted Post township, present-day East Corning. Reference is made on page 66 to a Joseph McCormick who called himself “a child of the frontier” having been raised in the 1790s along the banks of the Tioga, now Chemung, River. Joseph was a son of Major Henry McCormick who was born circa 1736 in County Antrim, Ireland and who had come to America to fight with the British Army during the American Revolutionary War. Major McCormick deserted the British forces in order to fight with the American Army. The Major, several years after the war, opened an inn about 1791 at Painted Post, NY. This inn, described by “a French traveler of noble descent, served rusty bacon and coffee for dinner and provided a bed on which the sheets had already served...for some time.” This French visitor also expressed a reluctance “to sleep there even when fully dressed.”

In the book *Travels in the Years 1791 and 1792 in Pennsylvania, New York and Vermont* by John Lincklaen another reference to the early inn belonging to Major McCormick is made by the notation: “From Newtown Point 12 miles further to Major Henry McCormick’s.” Expressing how fertile were the valleys along the Tioga River, Mr. Lincklaen wrote “our host McCormick gathered 60 bushels of Indian corn from one acre.” Mr. Lincklaen also wrote “we left the Major to go to Painted Post, 6 miles, thence we traversed the Township No. 2 in the 2nd range of Col. Erwin.”

The Life of Timothy Pickering, Vol. II, Page 494, includes another reference to the inn of Major Henry McCormick. “On Tioga River 5 miles below the painted post-6-15-1797- I am now at Major McCormick’s where I have dined and presently shall proceed to the Painted Post.” Mr. Pickering negotiated a treaty with the Iroquois known as the Treaty of Painted Post.

From the several descriptions placing Major Henry McCormick’s inn approximately 5 to 7 miles from the painted post along the Tioga, now Chemung, River it appears it was located in the East Corning area probably on the south side of the old road to Big Flats along the river across from present-day Crystal Lanes bowling center and Corning Manor. Henry’s son Joseph also stated he lived near the Steuben/Chemung County line.

After Major McCormick’s death in 1812 his sons Henry Jr. and Jacob Miller McCormick sold the McCormick property to John Shoemaker, a cousin to them through their McDowell and DePuy lines. This transfer occurred before 1825. From *Letters of Uncle Jonas Lawrence*, page 94, proof is given that the now-Shoemaker Inn was the original McCormick Inn. “About the time of the establishment of the bank of Corning in the year 1839, a company erected a bridge across the Chemung River and canal about

three quarters of a mile west of the John Shoemaker or McCormick tavern stand. This bridge connected with a highway that led past the residence of the late Judge Steele, the farm now owned by Mr. Erwin.”

The “Old Journal”, author unknown, was printed in 1979 by the Big Flats Historical Society’s Newsletters, which were written by Mabel Wood, confirmed a bridge was built across the Chemung River about 3 miles from Corning. The article was from an old scrapbook during the period 1830-1872 and it placed this bridge “nearly opposite the fine country residence of Jonathan Brown, now owned by ____ Smith.” H. D. Smith owned this land previous to 1873 or 1874 as found on a map of the area. The Brown/Smith property was situated north of the bridge while the Steele property was situated south of the bridge. The “Old Journal” continued to relate “a half mile farther down the river I came to the celebrated “Shoemaker Stand”. This inn, consisting of 2 stories and resembling the Benjamin Patterson Inn, was well-known by the river men of the day. John Shoemaker and his wife Sarah were described as having a “hospitable house” and “plentiful board.”

Evidently, by the time of the construction of the Chemung Canal, Mr. Shoemaker had already moved his inn (the original Major McCormick’s inn) from the south side of the road to the north side. Describing what he saw “in passing the Shoemaker Stand”, this unknown author wrote “in front of me were the Chemung Canal, Erie Railroad, several lines of telegraph and the Chemung River.”

An important piece of local history was lost when the McCormick/Shoemaker Inn was destroyed by fire in the early 1900s. We are fortunate that a photograph of this historic inn still exists and is in the possession of the Town of Lindley, NY Historian, Kitty Pierce.

It must be mentioned that another early settler in the lands of the painted post also built an inn in the general vicinity of the McCormick/Shoemaker Inn. His name was Joseph Shattuck and he erected his place of business in 1809 per the “Gazetteer of the State of New York” by John Homer French. Its location was east of the Gorton Road, outside of Gibson, NY and west of the McCormick/Shoemaker Inn. In 1873 or 1874 the Shattuck property was owned by a Mr. Edger and his establishment was named the “Edger Hotel”.

The history of the McCormick family would be incomplete if there was no mention made of Major Henry McCormick’s biography as written in The History of Steuben County, NY by Guy McMaster. He wrote “McCormick was a British soldier and reputed to be the most powerful and expert pugilist in the Army. He deserted during the Revolutionary War and went with Arnold to Quebec. After the failure of the desperate assault on the town, McCormick, with a party of American soldiers, was standing on the ice of the St. Lawrence, when the British approached to make them prisoners. Knowing that a deserter would be hanged if taken, his comrades gathered around him in a huddle, pretending to prepare resistance. The British parlied. (parleyed) In the meantime, McCormick pulled off his shoes for “the ice was as smooth as a bottle” and ran. A

shower of bullets rattled around him but he was fortunate as to escape unhurt. Captain Silas Wheeler, of the town of Wheeler, was in that crowd and gives McCormick the credit of extraordinary briskness.” Mr. McMaster also wrote “one of the early settlers along the Chemung and Conhocton was Henry McCormick (1793).” (Mr. Lincklaen previously placed Major McCormick’s Inn in Painted Post township by 1791 or 1792.)

Preceding Major Henry McCormick in death was his son Abraham in 1810. Both are presumed buried in the Old Presbyterian Cemetery which was located off West Pulteney Street near Pritchard Avenue. The McCormick family was of Scotch-Irish ancestry and of the Presbyterian faith. The Fridley family, related to the McCormick family by marriage, also buried several of its members in this cemetery. In the late 1950s this cemetery was destroyed when a prominent businessman decided to build an apartment complex adjacent to the cemetery. Readers of a local newspaper were advised of this situation and arrangements were made to disinter the remains of ancestors and to rebury them elsewhere. Many descendants of these pioneers were notified by letter, too, and many took the necessary steps for the removals and reburials. However, not all of the pioneers were removed because many no longer had descendants in the area or their descendants didn’t know of their existence. A church later put in a paved parking lot over many of these early graves covering up any trace of these long ago early settlers in the lands of the painted post. The grave of Major Henry McCormick, Revolutionary War Veteran, may be one of them along with my ancestors, the Sticklers. (A listing of the pioneers buried in the Old Presbyterian Cemetery in Corning can be found on the Painted Hills Genealogy site <paintedhills.org/steuben.html> on the Internet.)

The rich and interesting histories of the early inns, their innkeepers and other pioneers in the lands of the painted post should not be forgotten in these modern times. They have left us a legacy by their struggles to tame a wilderness that we should remember and, for which, we should be grateful.

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