

White Horse Mountain and Tavern

(Information contributed by John Oester.)

White Horse Mountain is one of the beautiful sights to behold in Allegheny Township. In the autumn it is clad in all the hues of vermilion, green, and gold. The snow and ice of winter is a beauty to behold. Then comes the spring and summer with all the blossoms and deep green foliage.

At the top of Allegheny Mountain at the intersection of the old Burd Road leading from Bedford to Berlin, there stood a stone house which was a stopping place and tollhouse along the highway. This was known as "The White Horse Inn" which was located at this spot on the old Wells map of 1812. This building was relocated higher up in the mountain and was a really beautiful stone structure.

Why is this area of the Allegheny Mountain called "White Horse Mountain"? Early settlers told interesting legends about naming the old inn and hence the mountain. One version is there was an Indian raid made on a number of travelers who were crossing the mountain seeking a site for a home in the wilderness. That was many years before the present road was built.

In 1777, the whole frontier was aflame with Indian raids by the Shawnee tribes. It was about that time that the raid was perpetrated. A group of settlers had stopped their Conestoga wagons at the spring (which is still running) on the west side of the Allegheny Mountain. The spring was called "Deeter's Spring" on a level clearing at the bend of the road. There the Indians attacked! The people were scalped, their wagons were burned, and the contents plundered. The rims of the wagon wheels were taken for the iron to be used for knives, tomahawks, tools, and lance heads.

The raid took place during a hard snowstorm. All the horses were taken except one white mare that escaped and ran off into the mountain, where it lived among the wild beasts of the forest and field.

Later it was said the white mare was seen at times by travelers on mountain road. Some thought the white mare was a ghost of the animal which was hunting the area in which the raid had occurred. There were those who said the principal reason why the white mare escaped from the Indians was that there was such a blizzard at the time of the raid that they could not see the white beast against the snow.

It was related as a part of the story that an Allegheny Mountain man by the name of McGraw, and a group of his neighbors caught the mare and rebroke her into the harness as a workhorse. Thus, the mountain became known as "White Horse Mountain."

The Deeter spring was named for the man who built the White Horse Inn. It is not known what year the inn was built. History tells of George Keller's "Big Log Inn" being on the site about 1790. Some say Keller was there soon after the Revolutionary War ended, about 1783, or even by 1781, after fighting was practically over. George Keller's unpublished manuscript tells how his sons once foiled the Robber Lewis gang. Lewis did not start his operations until the War of 1812. He joined the US Army and then deserted. Seems that he was paid for joining and that he joined and deserted at least three times. When he found that he could rob the government without being caught, he became bolder and bolder until he launched his mad career of robbing on the Philadelphia-Pittsburgh Turnpike.

If that is true, then the Kellers and their "Big Log Inn" must have been there 40 or 50 years, and they might have sold out to Mr. Deeter. Then Deeter tore the log building down.

Two prominent pioneers of this area were Tobias Musser and Mr. Henry Black. They had been appointed by the governor of Pennsylvania to build a road to run through this section, extending westward from Philadelphia to the Ohio River. This road took much work, but after it was completed and used for some time, it was found to be one of the best roads in the country and became one of the most frequently traveled highways.

As travel increased, there arose the need for inns and taverns along the way. This was a desirable location for a tavern. In addition to being famous for its beautiful view, it was also a suitable stopping place for horses, wearied by their long pull up the mountain. Tobias Musser, a stonemason and farmer, was notified to bid on the contract and the construction of was begun.

The building was constructed at the top of the Allegheny Mountain along the pike previously built by Mr. Musser and Mr. Black. It was built largely of dressed stone with some framework. The tavern, which seemed very large to the people who lived in the community, contained eighteen rooms.

But alas! When the building was finished, it was found that the bid agreed upon by Mr. Musser did not cover the cost of construction. What could he do? He would have to find some way to pay his helpers, even if he himself did work for nothing. When the accounts were settled, he was able to pay all his helpers but one. What about this one? At last Mr. Musser hit upon a plan.

He consulted his helper, who agreed to accept a fine white horse as pay for his work. Mr. Musser did not wish to part with the fine steed, but he was obliged to do so. Soon it became known all over the country that the white horse had been required to meet the obligations of the contract. The travelers who stopped at the tavern received a hearty welcome and warm hospitality. Some time during their stay someone was sure to mention the story of the white horse. When the time came for the proprietor to hang up a sign bearing the name of the tavern, he decided to use the picture of the white horse of it. After that, the tavern became known far and wide as the "White Horse Tavern." Some of the innkeepers succeeding Mr. Deeter were Joseph Fleming, Samuel Jordan, and A. M. Glessner.

In the plamy days of the old road and pike this old tavern did a thriving business, and there were but few days in the year that the house was not filled with guests, the stables with horses and the pastures with cattle. All the stagecoaches stopped here and the passengers dined.

With the building of railroads and the invention of automobiles, taverns were no longer needed. When the old road was rebuilt, the tavern became an obstruction in the plans of the engineer. Half of the unoccupied half endured the summer's sun and winter's snow for many seasons. Finally it began to crumble until at last only one corner remained standing to prove the superior workmanship of the mason who built it, stone upon stone.

At the foot of the Allegheny Mountain there was a tavern that in more recent years was known as the "Hillegas Place." It was also known as Black Horse Tavern. Here a Mr. Boose, the ancestor of a family still well known in Somerset County, kept a tavern before 1800. When the turnpike was in its glory this was a noted drove and wagon stand. This was afterward known as the Henry Imhoff tavern, later kept by John Duncan, and last by Jacob B. Hillegass.

Job's Tavern was where Albert Hillegass lived. Hugh Sproat for many years kept a tavern on the George G. Walker farm.

At Mt. Zion, Samuel Walker started the construction of a tavern. He died in 1888 before it was completed. His widow lived there until her death. It was then owned by Mr. and Mrs. James Tipton, Mrs. Tipton being his daughter, It is now the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Lee Hoppert. Mrs. Hoppert is the great-granddaughter of Samuel Walker.

The taverns were all situated along the "Old Pike" on the present Route 31.

Reformatted: 21 March 2022

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