

July 25, 1899 – SEVEN STARS TAVERN – Anniversary of the Battle of Brandywine Creek – An Anecdote of Farragut

In the northwest angle, made by the crossing of Marcus Hook and Concord Roads at village Green, Delaware County, is located "The Seven Stars," a tavern which has been a public house since Colonial days. In the middle of the last century the prosperous Sarum Forge from Works were a Glen Mills and the ore there melted was conveyed by wagons from Marcus Hook, then an active shipping place. The manufactured bars were in turn carted to Marcus Hook, where they were loaded on vessels for transportation to Philadelphia.

The number of teamsters thus employed as well as the general heavy travel to the then "backwoods," required the location of an inn at an intermediate point and "The Seven Stars" was the outgrowth of this public need. Thy the tavern was so called is not certainly known, but tradition tells that its name was bestowed in honor of the Ursus Major, the beauty of whose seven stars had excited the admiration of an astronomical student, closely connected in sentiment or in with one of its earlier proprietors.

The records show that prior to the Revolutionary War it bore that title. The reason the little hamlet which has grown about it was known as Village Green is lost. Our information goes no further than the fact that it went by that name early in Colonial times.

IN REVOLUTIONARY DAYS – More than a century has elapsed since the battle of Brandywine but the incidents of that eventful period at Village Green are yet the glory of "The Seven Stars". It was a sultry morning that Thursday, September 11, 1777, and a thick fog hung to the earth, shutting out the autumnal landscape. The children of the neighborhood had gathered at the school, for while the matured dread and dismay came with the news of the approach of the British Army and the certainty that the crash of arms between it and the Continental forces, which then lay at Chadd's Ford, only ten miles away, could not be long averted, it likewise lessened the ardor of the urchins' play in the school yard.

Yet even the youngest pupil noticed that the aged teacher, James Rigby, appeared depressed, and with difficulty could follow the numbing scholars in their recitations. So merged was this impression that Thomas Dutton, the centenarian, then a lad of 8 years, remarked the circumstances. Shortly after 10 o'clock when the fog lifted, disclosing a cloudless sky, the distant booming of a cannon startled the master and pupils. Colonel Proctor, of the Pennsylvania Artillery, at Chadd's Ford, had opened fire on Knyphausen's advance.

The reverberations had hardly died away when another booming sound followed, which was followed in quick succession by others. James Rigby for a short time strove to continue the usual exercises, but the excitement of the hour was so intense that finally he said: "Go home children, I can't keep school today."

All that afternoon stragglers from the field of battle hastened along the highway to Chester, but when the American army was driven backward by the English advance, many of the Continental troops lost all company organization and fled, each intent only on personal safety. When Knyphausen forced the passage of the Brandywine compelling Wayne to retire from Chadd's Ford, the Pennsylvania militia, under General Armstrong, although it had taken no active part in the contest, broke in a body and joined the demoralized throng that well nigh choked the Concord road with a struggling mass of panic-stricken men, hastening wildly in the direction of Chester.

The artillery jolted and surged onward as rapidly as the weary horses, under the goading lash, could be forced to move, while the baggage wagons crowded to the front, compelling the foot-sore men to make room for them to pass. The oaths of the teamsters and the soldiers clearly indicated that the army in Flanders was not alone given to profanity. Fortunately the early evening was still and clear, and

the moon looked down kindly on the defeated troops, who, jaded with their long march, had recovered in a measure from their panic e're they reached the Seven Stars. When General Greene's division, which had acted as a rear guard of the army, marched by the ancient tavern shortly after midnight it was in order such as became the brave soldiers who that day had proved themselves to be on the heights of Brandywine.

CORNWALLIS WAS THERE – Two days later at 4 o'clock on the afternoon of Saturday, September 13, Lord Cornwallis and his staff reached Village Green, where they drew rein before the side porch of "The Stars", James Fennell, the landlord, despite his political bias, hid his chagrin with a host's smile and watched with interest the unusual spectacle. Cornwallis naturally was the center of attraction. His tall stately form, his rich musket coat loaded with gold lace and decorations, his white sheepskin britches, tog boots and his superior horsemanship all combined to render him a figure never to be forgotten by those who envy the able soldier on that occasion.

The urchins gazed with open-eyed amazement as the group of grandly equipped officers and listened with awe to the tingling of their swords and spurs and the chomping of the bits by the horses as the men dismounted at the tavern door that raw autumn day. His lordship stood on the porch and watched the soldiers of the Second Battalion of British Infantry, Second Battalion of Grenadiers, which accompanied him and the first and second Brigades under General Grant, as they entered the fields, south of the Concord Road, their left resting at Mount Hope and their right extending a short distance east of the road leading to Marcus Hook.

The few Hessians, not the advance, were objects of the utmost curiosity to the rural lookers on, for they, for the first time, saw those men who "were their beards on their upper lips." In the dusk of the evening the campfire stretched in a semi-circle more than half a mile. That night Cornwallis slept at "The Seven Stars," and early next morning accompanied the advance to Thaw's Mill – now Upland, where he seized a large amount of flour, which he forwarded, under guard to the headquarters of the army.

On Sunday evening, September 16, three soldiers who had been of a party of foragers, straying away from the main body and crossing Chester Creek above Dutton's mill, entered the dwelling of Jonathan Martin, where they plundered the family of many articles of value, among these, some personal trinkets belonging to his daughter, Mary Martin. The latter was a lass of 18, who fearlessly upbraided the men for their dishonest and cowardly acts. One of the soldiers became enraged at the girl, angrily struck at her with his bayonet, inflicting a slight wound on the hand, with which she had attempted to ward off the blow.

The men the same evening went to the residence of Mr. Cox, nearly a mile distant, where they committed similar acts of pillage, among the articles stolen being a silver watch. Miss Cox was about the same age as Miss Martin and early next morning the two girls in company repaired to the British headquarters where they had an interview with General Howe, just as the latter was about to visit Cornwallis' extreme outpost at Upland.

It chanced that the troops encamped at Village Green were mustered for inspection and Howe stated to the young women that if they could recognize the men who had been guilty of the theft they should be punished as prescribed in his general order. The commander-in-chief- with the girls at his side, walked in front of the lines its entire length and the women pointed out three men whom they declared were the culprits. That there should be no mistake the officers were instructed to march the troops by a given point, and again the girls selected the same men, and a third trial resulted in their recognition out of the three or four thousand soldiers then assembled. Howe ordered the men searched, and some of the stolen articles were found secreted on their persons.

They were immediately tried by court martial and as the evidence was direct and uncontradicted, they were found guilty and sentenced to death, but only two of the three were hanged, the third was required to act as executioner for his companions. The one who should do service as Jack

Ketch was determined by lot. That evening after General Howe and his escort of dragoons returned from Upland, the sentence of the court was complied with. An apple tree near the roadside was used for the gallows in full sight of the officers who stood on the porch of the tavern watching the ghastly sight. Tuesday morning the British army broke camp and marched away. General Grant, who four days thereafter, perpetuated the massacre at Paoli, gave no attention to the dread case and their lifeless bodies were left dangling from the limb, fearful silhouettes outlined against the leaden sky.

On the porch of the Seven Stars, in 1817, David Glascoe Farragut, then a young midshipman on leave, whiled many an hour during the intervals of study, for he was then a student under Joseph Weef, a Frenchman, who established a school in Philadelphia founded on the system in vogue at the noted Pestalozzi in Switzerland, which he subsequently removed to Village Green. The future admiral homely in face and diminutive in stature, at that day carried himself very erect and wore an ample neckerchief to stiffen his head, because as he frequently declared, he could ill afford to lose a fraction of an inch in his height. An elderly lady of striking physique, even in her declining years, who died nearly twenty years ago, told the writer that on one occasion at a sleighing party at the Seven Stars she danced with Farragut, and they were the target of the would-be wits. But when the boy midshipman in after years became one of the giants of the world the fact that she had been his partner in that dance was the proudest memory of her life.

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