The Buttonwood

The land on which the Buttonwood now stands has gone through many changes. It was part of the 9 acres which Joseph XXX sold to John Bethel 1695 and on which the Darby Mills were built. Old deeds and surveys show that Bethel lived on the north side of the race and his son, John on the western line where an old house stood until late in 1800’s. Isaac Norris had 3 lots of land on the plot from which he drew rents. The road to the creek from Kings Road was called Water Street. Norris leased two lots to Benjamin Pearson. In 1732 the land and mills were deeded by John Bethel Jr. to Obediah Bonsall, married to John’s sister, Sarah Bethel, and Obediah lived in the house. His son, Joseph had land on the other side of Water Street. Joseph got the mills in 1734. He sold them to Richard Lloyd in 17XX.

There were two lots and houses on Water Street leased to Benjamin Pearson by Norris. They came to Thomas Pearson about 1733. On the site of the Buttonwood Tavern was a house which in 1734 Thomas Pearson leased or sold to Benjamin Lobb. It was a stone house 2.5 stories with a balcony around the second floor. A large Buttonwood leaned perilously near the door until it was cut down. Beneath the tree was a pump and trough for the watering of horses. The tree was supported by a brick column but had to be cut down in 1860. Thomas Leiper would never tie his team beneath it declaring that it would someday fall and do damage. It is claimed that Washington was entertained in the old tavern and that the citizens of Darby presented him with a fine horse. (No proof of this has been found). But its location makes it very possible that Washington stopped for refreshments more than once in his 45 trips through trips through Darby. The old building was torn down in 1879 and the present brick house erected in its place. Andrew W. McClure and family had owned it since 1896. The tavern has played a prominent past in the politics of Delaware County and the life of Darby.

Thomas Pearson and wife Hannah sold the house in 1734 to Benjamin Lobb and Lobb sold it 1-1-1742 to George Wood. George Wood and wife, Hannah from Bonsall in Darbyshire settled in 1682. His son, George was the first death in Darby 7-10-1683 for whom a burying place had to be made. Father died 1705. He had a son, George who married Hannah Hood, daughter of Thomas Hood of Darby August 28, 1739. George Wood petitioned for a license to keep a tavern in the house belonging to Benjamin Lobb. He stated that age and infirmity made it impossible for him to farm his plantation. After his death his widow kept the tavern. In 1776 Isaac Serrill owned the house and had the license for the tavern and for the first time it received a name, “The Mariners Compass”. In 1769 Henry Hayes, first clerk of Darby Fire Company 1775, was the tavern keeper. In 1773 Sarah Pearson kept the tavern. Followed by Isaac Pearson in 1775. He seems to have been the owner of the property. In 1778 Henry Hayes again had the license and continued until 1786 when Isaac Serrill again became landlord and during his time Washington was entertained as above stated. It is said that the door was so low, or Washington was so tall that he had to stoop to enter.

In 1790 after the formation of Delaware County, Samuel Ash kept the tavern till old age in 1820 compelled him to give it up. Delaware County was erected from Chester County September 26, 1789. Stephen Howe followed Ash and changed the name of the tavern to “The Dove”. In 1833 Samuel R Lamplugh took the tavern and called it “The Compass”. The same year L. ittenger ran a line of stages to Philadelphia from the compass. December 1833 he sold to J. Tomlinson who put into service two large omnibuses one of them called “The William Penn” drawn by 4 black horses.

In 1835 William Russel had the license and restored the old name Mariner’s Compass. In 1844 he was succeeded by his son, William Jr. and he in 1849 by Evan E. Russell. About 1846 the name was changed to Buttonwood. In 1855 James (ducky) Malin became landlord and put out a sign on Main Street, “Girard Hotel”. In 1871 Malin was followed by James H. Lloyd, The old building was torn down in 1879. In 1884 Thomas H. Boyd kept the new tavern. From 1887 to 1895 due to the activity of the Home Protective Society of Darby, there was no licensed tavern in Darby. Then in the face of large remonstrance’s, Judge Clayton relicensed the Buttonwood and it continued until the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution closed all taverns. Later the amendment was revoked and the tavern which had been converted into stores was reopened. Several parties kept it. In 1900 the McClure’s got the property and have it ever since. It was a great center of gathering of the citizens of Darby. At one time a proprietor made home-made ice cream and neighbors were seen going with their dishes to buy it. Notably, Henry McAllister, tax-collector from his home on 9th Street, the old Tacey Smith House.