891 Main St. The Ship Tavern

The next house to be built in Darby was on what is now the NE corner of 9th and Main Streets, on which site there have been four buildings. In the old Darby Township book it is recorded that John Test settled in 1711. January 6, 1713 John Test and wife Margaret bought a lot from Joseph Wood and Francisca of New Castle Delaware. The deed says 60 feet along the street 123 perches of Woods Mount reaching back to Edward Philpot’s land. In 1713 Philpot had bought a large part of Woods Mount. John Test seems to have built a house and kept a tavern until his death in 1717 and his widow Margaret until after him. John was constable of Darby in 1714. His tavern is the first on record in Darby. In 1715 the township meeting passed the following resolution: “That travelers having nothing to pay their charges at the public inn shall be allowed 10 pence a night if they are first allowed by the XXXX. It was evidently at Test’s Inn they got the entertainment.

In early times there were 2 or 3 John Tests in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. I am inclined to identify Test of Darby with “John Test late of London but now of Delaware, merchant”. Records of Upland Court November 27, 1679. Juran Keen transferred in court land and block house to John Test of London, merchant. In 1681 he was appointed sheriff of Upland Court. After William Penn came and laid out his three counties, John Test became the first sheriff of Philadelphia County. As already said he came to Darby in 1711, where he died in 1718.

1In 1720 Edward Smute succeeded Test at the tavern. He was followed by Thomas Patterson 1724. Patterson got into debt and sold the property to Isaac Norris of Northern Liberties by a sheriff deed of 1730. From this date until 1783 the Norris family owned the land and drew a ground rent. A number of tavern keepers followed. In 1735 Benjamin Davis got a license for the tavern. In 1737 William Thomas having purchased the dwelling house in Darby where Benjamin Davis lately dwelt which had been a public house several years, petitioned for a license. He was followed in 1744 by William Donalson, who was followed in 1760 by John Wilkenson and he in 1770 by John Mitchell when tavern was called “The Ship”. Then followed John Richards, his widow Ann, and 1782 Agnus Brice followed by John Brice.

The ownership of the land passed to several of the Norris family and to George Logan who deeded to Samuel Smith November 6, 1783 “Messuage and two and a half acres of land. Smith was followed as tavern keeper by his widow. At her death in 1803 the 6 children deeded the property to Sidney Smith and to Tacey the wife of Roland Smith. Tacey died in 1835 and willed her half of the property to Sidney. February 23, 1837 Sidney Smith sold the property to Hugh Lloyd who had opened New or 9th Street through his property that year. Sidney built a house on the rear of the lot.

Ashmead tells a story worth repeating. During the war of 1812-14 some men and boys battered down with stones the old tavern sign on which was painted a ship bearing the British flag. It has swung unmolested all through the revolution, but now the spirit of even Quaker Darby had changed. The proprietors put up a new sign having an American frigate in full sail carrying an American flag.

Hugh P. Lloyd owned the property for many years leasing the tavern and keeping a store in the other side. In 1838 John Smith closed the Market Wagon in Darby and came to the Ship which he renamed “Darby Village Inn”. In 1840 Norris Hannum became landlord and Edward Ingram made the inn the depot for a line of stages to Philadelphia, which had been started by John Smith. 1848 Sarah Hannum changed the name of the tavern to “Farmers and Merchants Hotel”. In 1853 William Russell Jr. had the tavern and called it “The Plank Road House”. The Philadelphia and Darby Plank Road had been laid in 1848. In 1856 Franklin Thornton got the licensee. About 1863 the old house was destroyed by fire at night. James Standring bought the property and built a three story brick building which he called The Philadelphia House. In XXXX The Home Protective Society bought him out and that ended a tavern on the site. XXXX to 1923 Harlan Cloud had his drug store in the corner of the building and it was called “Cloud’s Corner”.

The First National Bank of Darby bought the property and in 1923 moved into a beautiful modern bank building which they erected on the site. After the bank failed Charles Martin bought the building and reconstructed it for a furniture store. In 1943 the Darby Post Office was in the rear end of the bank building until the new post office was built at Ridge Avenue.