

# A Tale of Three Taverns *by Bob Haigis*

What would you say if I told you that on the night of November 6th, President George W. was in Uxbridge? Not only was he here, but he also spent the night at 87 Sutton Street, with friends. If you don't believe me, ask Charles Eugene Claghorn III.

I guess I should tell you the "rest of the story", right?

Mr. George W. is of course, President George Washington, and he was here in November 1789, spending the night with Samuel Taft and his large family. Back then, the road was called the Middle Post Road which was the connecting "highway" between Hartford and Boston. Eighty seven Sutton Street was - at that time - known as the Taft Tavern.

The above named Mr. Claghorn is a historian that recorded for prosperity the travels of our first president on a tour of New England barely six months after his inauguration.

The fifty seven year old Chief Executive embarked from New York in mid October. Little imagination is needed to visualize what a difficult and dangerous journey it must have been, much of it through wilderness and traveling over dirt trails, with no bridges in many places.

We all know first hand what the Blackstone River can look like in flood stage, to say nothing about the West and Mumford rivers. Was 1789 similar to 2005's flooding? Of course, there were dozens of other streams to cross and dirt paths to challenge George Washington's entourage.

To be sure, The President was riding in the semi-comfort of a stagecoach or wagon. There is much supporting documentation that he rode in a white coach, made especially for him. However, most of the retinue was in the saddle.

Besides having to contend with nature, bandits and steadfast Loyalists might also have created threats along the way.

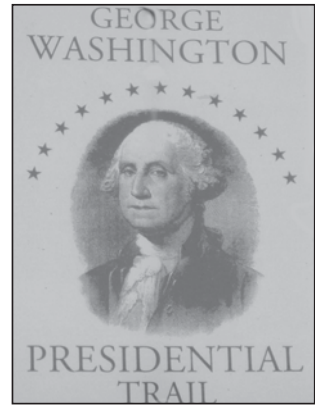
Washington headed northeast with plans to visit the four states which had ratified the Constitution - Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and Maine. Passing through western Massachusetts in late October, he arrived in Kittery, Maine on November 3rd before heading south. The approaching winter weather was certainly a consideration as he traveled south towards his historical stop in Uxbridge. It appears that on his trip home, Washington was taken ill and

thus, was in a hurry to get home. The President, along with his accompanying assemblage, left Watertown, MA early on the morning of Friday, November 6th, 1789, heading west after spending the night at Coolidge Tavern.

Arriving in Mendon, exhausted, hungry and cold, he had visions of spending the night at the Ammidon Tavern, owned and operated by retired Colonel Phillip Ammidon, a fellow soldier from the Revolutionary War. For reasons that are not quite clear, the pilgrims were turned away and continued towards Uxbridge. There are several versions of the story here, but it appears that neither the Colonel nor his wife were in residence when President Washington arrived. Apparently, a servant turned Washington and his party away when Ammidon was not home.

With no other options available in Mendon, his advisors told him that the next stop would be a little town just to the west called Uxbridge. Realizing how arduous the trip had been from Watertown to Mendon, especially in early November, the hour

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One of the signs for the local Presidential Trail

Below: The former Ammidon Tavern, now an Antique shop in Mendon. Note: Colonel Phillip Ammidon of the Revolutionary War was also Mendon's first Postmaster.



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# The Tale of Three Taverns, *continued*

or so trip was likely unpleasant, cold and in the dark.

Following the Middle Turnpike west, their first stop in Uxbridge was near Rice City Pond at the Solomon Wood Tavern. Here, the weary travelers were turned away again. The tavern was closed due to a death or illness in the family. Most likely, the entourage was given directions to the Taft Tavern, just over the "mountain".

Roads were configured somewhat differently in 1789. Where Sutton Street now passes in front of the former Tavern, was originally part of the Middle Post Road. This road headed off in another direction to get up and over Quarry Hill.

The Middle Post Road, eventually becoming the Boston Hartford Turnpike and then Hartford Ave East and West, did not align with the present route in all places. The roadway crossed the Blackstone River at different points depending on seasonal access over hills and crossing sometimes swollen streams and rivers.

Arriving at the Taft residence and Taft Tavern, George, along with his entourage, must have been totally exhausted. However, in true New England and especially Uxbridge hos-

pitality, the President was waited on graciously by the Taft family, particularly by two of their daughters, Patty and Polly.

No mention is made of the rest of the Taft family in research except that the Tafts had 22 children! Looking at the home today certainly arouses one's curiosity as to where everyone slept.

The President was waited on by the two girls so well that Washington was very pleased and grateful for their attention. He sent the girls, along with a letter of appreciation, thirty yards of the highly valued chintz cloth and some coins.

However pleased Washington may have been with the Taft family, he did note in his diary for that day that "though people were obliging, the entertainment was not very inviting". Yet, the President graciously sent a letter, part of which stated:

*"Dear Mr. Samuel Taft. Innkeeper. Being informed that you have given my name to one your sons and called another after Mrs. Washington's family, and being moreover much pleased with the modest and innocent looks of your two daughters, Patty and Polly, I do for these reasons send each of these*

*girls a piece of chintz. I wish you and your family well, and am your humble servant."* **George Washington, President of the United States**

A legend suggests that after returning home and hearing that his friend had come and left Mendon, ex-colonel Ammidon saddled up and rode to Uxbridge to meet the former commander-in-chief at the Taft Tavern. Yet, there is no mention of this in Washington's diary, so the truth of this story is in question.

The following morning, President Washington and his cortege mounted up and headed west into Connecticut, passing through the primitive roads of Douglas that were mentioned disparagingly in his diary, before going through Thompson and Pomfret. He stopped in Ashford at Perkins Place where he stayed for two nights. The extra overnight was due to the state's laws forbidding travel on Sunday.

For years, it has been a standing joke about George Washington and the many places he slept. However, it is recorded fact that he spent at least one night of his exciting life here in Uxbridge and was treated very well, though modestly. This is a fact Uxbridge can be proud of, and should

## The Haunted Tavern

A tale of a haunting outside Taft Tavern was well-known two centuries ago. After playing on the "Plain" with neighboring boys and then heading home, young Willard Taft witnessed a funeral procession, with men in uniform and several mourners surrounding the grey pall marching along. He quickly ran home to tell his Mother who looked out, seeing the procession pass by stiffly with the uniformed soldiers gazing forward without any emotion. Something was very strange about it, they reported.

The next day, they made inquiries of everyone nearby, but no one ever saw anything of this apparition. Soon, the Revolutionary War broke out. Many thought this was a foreboding warning of that.

This strange tale was passed down through generations of the Taft family, finally being recorded in the 1934 Worcester County Narrative History by the American Historical Society..

never be forgotten.

*POSTSCRIPT: In researching facts for this article, several accounts were conflicting and even confusing. The material presented here has been presented as truthfully and factually as can be determined. Email :grbob@charter.net*



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