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Besley's Tavern, New Rochelle, New York 1773 - 1776

James Besly (Besley) was the grandson of four French Huguenot refugees. He was the eldest son of Oliver and Susan (Mercier) Besly, Jr. and was probably born in New Rochelle, New York. He married first, Catharina de Forest, born 17 July 1720, daughter of Barent and Catalina (Sarley) de Forest, on 13 October 1743, who died after February 1749. He married second, in 1749 or 1750 Catharina's half-sister, Cornelia de Forest, born 18 December 1728, daughter of Barent and Elizabeth (Ver Duyne) de Forest whose death date is unknown. James Besly died 29 September 1776.

James Besly probably was born in New Rochelle and seems to have lived there most of his life. He was named overseer of highways in 1753 and in 1760 and 1762 signed petitions about the French Church there. In 1757 he was identified as "vintner" when he signed the will of Amon Guion of New Rochelle.

In 1766 he purchased land in North Castle, Westchester County, and was termed "late of New Rochel". By 1771 he was recorded in the New Rochelle Census. The annual Town meetings were held "at the house of James Bayley" in April of 1773, 1774, 1775 and 1776. At all those meetings James was appointed Pound Master for the Town.

Besley's Tavern was on the old Post Road at the corner of what now is Huguenot Street and North Avenue in New Rochelle. Morgan Seacord in his "Historical Landmarks of New Rochelle" says, "This tavern was built shortly before the Revolution, and town meetings were held in it from 1773 until the coming of the British in 1776, and also after the war. Justice of the Peace trials took place here and it was a stage on the Post Road. Among the proprietors prior to the Revolution were Peter Badeaux and James Bayley (Besly). The Committee of Safety met here in 1776. Thomas Paine attempted to vote here and was refused permission by Elijah Ward, the supervisor."

-by Georganna Klass Willits #72-04

#### REFERENCES

Records of New York Dutch Church and New Rochelle Trinity Church  
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Forbes: Records of the Town of New Rochelle  
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Seacord: Historical Landmarks of New Rochelle

\* This account by Mrs. Willits corrects errors made in editing her earlier article published in F&T Vol. VI & VII, 1985 for which the editor apologizes.