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ABRAHAM VAN HORN 1699 - 1759

White House Tavern, White House, N.J., 1750 - c.1776

Abraham Van Horn, son of Matthys Cornelissen and Fytie Brouwer, his wife who was the widow of Evert Hendricks Van Gelder, was baptized in the Dutch Reformed Church, Brooklyn, on 15 January 1699;<sup>1</sup> died at White House, N.J. in November 1759.<sup>2</sup> He married<sup>3</sup> at Freehold, N.J. in 1719 Antje Covenhoven, daughter of Cornelius W. and Margaretta (Schenck) Covenhoven, born in Middletown, N.J. c. 1702. She died at White House, N.J. on 12 December 1759.<sup>4</sup>

Matthys Cornelissen was a land owner in Brooklyn who purchased 223 acres of land in Middletown Township, Monmouth County, N.J. from Obadiah Bowne, son of Capt. John Bowne of the famous Monmouth Patent.<sup>4</sup> He deeded one half of the Middletown land to each of his two sons. This may have been the reason Abraham, his brother Cornelius and their half-sister Sarah moved to Monmouth County about 1718.

In 1722 Abraham sold his half of the property and purchased 490 acres of land in Readington Township, Hunterdon County, through which ran Rockaway Creek. Here he developed a grist mill and saw mill on the banks of the Creek.<sup>5</sup>

About 1750 Abraham Van Horn built the first tavern<sup>6</sup> in the area. It was on the road from Clinton to Somerville where it crossed Rockaway Creek (now Route 22). Because the building had white plastered walls it became known as the "White House," the name also given to the village which sprang up around the tavern. Its location on this early trail immediately led to its being a favorite stopping place for travellers, and later for stagecoaches of the Easton-New Brunswick Turnpike. By the time of the Revolution its popularity had been well established.

The homestead built c. 1757 by Abraham Van Horn is about one hundred yards farther down Rockaway Creek from the site of the Tavern, and is still occupied.

After conducting Antje Van Horn's funeral service, Rev. Muhlenberg made this note:<sup>2</sup> "17 December 1759 Had to bury the deceased wife of Abraham van Horn, who himself died only recently. Both

died of a contagious kind of pox. The youngest son, his wife, and his negroes are still sick with the pox. I preached at the home in English on Psalm 90:12 and read the customary prayers in English at the grave. I also prayed for the sick in the home."<sup>2</sup>

Abraham Van Horn, Jr. operated the tavern after his father's death, probably through 1776. His "Petition to keep a Tavern" dated May 1776 with its long list of witnesses required by law to prove a properly run establishment, is preserved in the New Jersey Archives in Trenton.

#### REFERENCES

- 1 "First Book of Records of the Dutch Reformed Church of Brooklyn" in Holland Society Year Book, 1897, p. 173
- 2 The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, Philadelphia, 1942. Vol. 3:424
- 3 Holland Society Year Book, 1897, p. 173
- 4 Paul E. Van Horn. "The Fascinating Story of a 1722 Deed", in DE HALVE MAEN, April 1976
- 5 Map of Readington Township land owners, Hunterdon County, N.J. at Princeton University
- 6 Charles S. Boyer. Old Inns and Taverns of New Jersey

- by Paul E. Van Horn  
75-43

"The oldest house and landmark in Whitehouse is a complete wreck. In Whitehouse proper there used to stand a curious-looking old building which was noticed by every stranger who visited the town. The structure tumbled down Wednesday and is now a heap of bricks. The house was known as "Washington's headquarters," for the General once stopped there over night for entertainment. An aged citizen who died some forty years ago, left a journal, in which was an account of his staying there the same night that General Washington was there. Stage coaches were then in vogue and some thirty or forty persons were accommodated that night and the time was spent very pleasantly at dancing, etc. The house was painted white and gave the name Whitehouse to the town. It was owned by O.T. Stryker. It was near the Rockaway River." - from the Hunterdon County Democrat, 1 November 1893

Stones from the tavern's foundation are said to be in the retaining wall about the old cemetery located not too far from the tavern's original site.

- by Fred Sisser III