

*The following manuscript was found among John Austin's papers. It is a report on Abraham Wing's Tavern and the famous group who stopped there in 1776 on the way to Canada. The group included John Carroll, his cousin John Carroll – a Catholic Priest, Benjamin Franklin, and Samuel Chase. It was written by Marion Chitty, a local historian who research and wrote about many events in the Glens Falls area. She prepared these papers to be read to the membership of the Glens Falls Club. Written in pencil on the left at the top of the first page is 'Re: Wyng tavern.' On the right at the top of the first page written in ink is what appears to be Miss Chitty's signature. The punctuations and spellings are as they appear in the document.*

## THE OLD WING TAVERN

All accounts agree that the old Wing Tavern stood on the north-east corner of what is now Bank Square and in probability was the first building erected in this locality. Dr. Holden says that, "at a very early period in the annals of our township a log dwelling of considerable dimensions was erected on, or near, the site now occupied by D. R. Cowles & Co., on the corner of Ridge and Warren Streets.

Others have located the site of the tavern as far down Warren Street as the present Commodore restaurant, but it is quite probable that in this wild and unsettled country, the old inn, with its stables and gardens, may have covered a good deal of ground, for it was evidently the home of Abraham Wing and his large family, and must have contained at least one large room where the annual meetings of the town officers were held and also the religious services of the little Quaker community.

Although permission had been received to hold these religious services as early as 1767, no church, or meeting house, was built till after the Revolution, Therefore the old tavern must have been the only place available, and is so designated in the Holden History.

It was, undoubtedly, a rough structure valuable only for its situation, as a real oasis, in the wilderness where food and shelter might be obtained for man and beast. The ex-soldier seeking his allotment in the wilderness, might find here in Abraham Wing's tavern, a huge roaring fire, with a repast consisting of the simple food of the country, a glass of hot toddy, perhaps, and at least a bunk on which to

sleep, while his horse – if he had one – would be sheltered and fed in the adjoining stable of logs.

Mr. Hyde remarks (p. 117) that with two mills in their neighborhood, these early structures were probably conveniently partitioned and adequately fitted. They also had one common feature, the large chimney built of the native stone, in which a constant fire was maintained not only for warmth but to cook the food of the inmates, for stoves were as yet unknown. Most of these great chimneys with their built-in ovens, have disappeared but one remains in the old Gansevoort House in Gansevoort. Another in the old Wray House in Fort Ann, and still another in the old Wells house on the border of our new Federal Air Port.

These were the firesides of which Whittier sings –

What matter how the night behaved,  
What matter how the north wind raved,  
Blow high, blow low, not all its snow  
Could quench our fireside's ruddy glow.  
And ever as a louder blast  
Shook beam and rafter as it passed,  
The merrier up its roaring draft  
The great throat of the chimney laughed.

Among all the comforts and luxuries of our modern civilization, we may well envy this cheerful feature of the old time homes, which in this case was no doubt added to by the well known good housekeeping and hospitality of the Quakers.

Dr. Holden also says that the neighboring land owners met here in Abraham Wing's tavern, and held high revel, running up bar bills of lusty proportions – Hugh Monroe, who settled at Gansevoort, the Jessups of Luzerne, and the Bradshaws of Kingsbury, were among those who transacted business here and spent a social evening.

There were probably rude sleeping accommodations, for Hugh Monroe and the Jessups lived on the other side of the river, and while there were fords, they would not have been very safe at night for a traveler who had spent a (conniveal) convivial evening.

Abraham Wing's tavern probably filled a very real need and no doubt had a constant if modest patronage. By the time the Revolution broke out, the little

settlement at Wings Corners was quite probably a prosperous and well known stand on the long route from Albany to Canada, where the traveler, at the end of his day's journey, might expect to find a welcome end such rough food as the season provided, and perhaps a jovial company.

Most of those travelers were doubtless of the common class, mixed with an occasional person of importance travelling on business to Canada, or the military posts of the north, but on one occasion the Inn had visitors of the first importance. These were the Commissioners sent by the Continental Congress to Canada in 1776 to seek the side of the French in the approaching conflict of the Revolution. These Commissioners were people of the first importance in the life of the times. They were Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase and Charles Carroll of Carrollton, Md. and his cousin John, a Catholic priest who, in addition to acting as interpreter, it was hoped would have great influence in persuading the Catholic inhabitant of Canada to join in the revolt against England.

Charles Carroll kept a journal during the entire trip and we learn from this that they set out from Philadelphia in March, 1776, and reaching New York city were entertained by Brig. Gen. Sterling and by him furnished with a sloop for the sail up the Hudson. They reached Albany, April 7 and were set and entertained by Gen. Philip Schuyler at his fine mansion still standing in the city of Albany, where they spent the night. The following day they were conveyed to Old Saratoga, now Schuylerville (the country home of Gen. Schuyler) where they spent several days on account of the inclement weather. They were accompanied by their host and hostess and by the two daughters of the house, Betsey and Peggy

The journal records that on April 16 they set off from Saratoga where the "parted with regret from the amiable family of General Schuyler". They rode from Saratoga to McNeil's Ferry, He speaks of the strong current in the river which at this time was of course in flood. They found a good large Inn at Fort Edward (The Old Fort House) where they spent the night. Their record continues – "April 17. Having breakfasted with Col. Allen, we set off from Fort Edward on our way to Lake George. We had not got a mile from Fort Edward when a messenger from Gen Schuyler met us. Lake George was not yet open and he desired us to remain at an inn kept by one Wing, seven miles from Fort Edward and as many from Lake George."

This they did. The Old Wing Tavern certainly never held more important guests and they were doubtless received with great attention and respect and

offered the best that the house could furnish in the way of food and shelter. Nevertheless this must have been a rather trying experience for these fine gentlemen.

It is true that Benjamin Franklin began life a poor boy, but prosperity had no doubt accustomed him to a refined manner of living and to the best which the colonies could furnish in the way of food and apparel. Samuel Chase was a young man of good family, already well known and later to become a Chief Justice of the United States. Charles Carroll and his cousin were aristocrats, the former a large landed proprietor of Maryland. The family had left England on account of religious persecution, but both these descendants had been sent back to Europe to be educated and had travelled widely and were accustomed to the best society. John later became the first Roman Catholic archbishop of the U. S.

It would be interesting to know how these fine gentlemen passed the night in this out post of civilization. The fact that Charles Carroll makes no comment whatever about the conditions it may be assumed that they passed a comfortable night. The journal records that Mr. Wing's tavern is situated in the town of Queensbury not more than one-quarter of a mile from the Hudson River. The party visited the falls which they very much admired and which Charles Carroll describes very minutely. He also says that they saw Mr. Wing's patent, the same which is carefully preserved at Fort Edward by the Wing family, It is not improbable that the party spent a comfortable evening in the public room of the Inn before the huge fire with some liquid refreshments and discussed the state of the country with their landlord who explained that his quit rent of 2/6 per hundred acres had never been collected.

At twelve o'clock the next day, April 18, no doubt after a late breakfast, the party continued their journey to Lake George. This is not fiction or imagination, it is history. Shortly before twelve o'clock, April 18, 179 years ago, these gentlemen emerged from Wing's tavern in what is now Bank Square, mounted their horses and with their servants and equipment started up the road to Lake George, which they reached at two o'clock. The roads were bad as might be expected at this time of year. The journal records the distance as 8 ½ miles, Fort George as ruinous as Fort Edward,

The lake was still full of ice, but a strong wind had blown it somewhat off shore so they were able to embark in a strong bateau provided by Gen. Schuyler and to proceed on their journey. They eventually arrived in Canada but their

errand was fruitless. The English parliament had passed a law in 1774 called the "Quebec Act" which insured to the Canadians, mostly Catholics, the free exercise of their and their way of life. The French peasants were grateful and considered themselves well treated, why should they rebel against such a good king? They had also, probably, had enough of war in the long conflict between France and England which they must have very well remembered.

Poor old Benjamin Franklin was at that time seventy years old and this rough journey almost killed him. In a letter written by him at this time to a friend, he states that he is writing because it seems likely he will not live to see his friend again. Immediately the result of their mission was known, he set out on the return journey accompanied by the priest. The other members of the party returned in a more leisurely manner, but as they came back by way of Fort Ann and Fort Edward, they did not again visit the Wing Tavern.

Eventually they all returned to Philadelphia where Benjamin Franklin, Samuel Chase and Charles Carrol (sic) signed the Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776. Charles Carroll died in 1832. He was mourned and honored as the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Charles Carroll gave his journal from which the above extracts are taken, to his granddaughter who in turn gave it to the Maryland Historical Society at Baltimore, Md. A printing was made of it in 1876 and copies are in all the large libraries of the country. The above extracts were made from the one in the New York City Public Library.

There have been many biographies written of the famous Benjamin Franklin, but it was not until that of Carl Van Doran was undertaken that the following letter came to light. He found it among the Schuyler papers preserved in the public library in New York City, and published it in his biography on page 545. It was addressed to Gen. Philip Schuyler who had gone on ahead to make preparations for the journey through Lake George. The letter is as follows: =

At Mr. Wyng's April 17, 76

Dear Sir:

We are all concerned to hear of your Indisposition and join in requesting you earnestly to take care of yourself. We propose (sic) staying here as you advise in your kind note of this morning. We left all well at your house. The Sergeant has a letter that I brought for you. Mrs. Schuyler requests that you would send him back

as soon as may be. I return inclos'd the Papers you favor'd us with. Our respect to Mr. Chase. I desire him to send back my ware by the sergeant. Our best wishes attend you,

I am (signature cut off)

P.S. We have sent forward Mr. Chase's Bed and Portmanteau Trunk on a supposition that he intends not to return higher.

I submit that this is a very important letter, the only one in existence, probably, written at the Old Wyng Tavern and by Benjamin Franklin. The fact that the signature is cut off would ordinarily limit its importance, so I wrote to Mr. Carl Van Doren concerning it, and the following is a copy of his answer.

18 December 1959

Dear Miss Chitty,

There can be no question that the Franklin letter from "Mr. Wyng's" is genuine. It is in his handwriting, which I know so well, and is preserved among the Schuyler papers in the New York Public Library. It amuses me to think that one of Schuyler's pretty daughters cut the signature off, for a souvenir of the great philosopher's visit, with no sense of the vandalism she was innocently committing. Of course this is pure guess-work on my part. Such things, however, were often done up to about 1850, when people began to realize that this was vandalism.

I am sorry I have no further details about the Wing tavern or the accommodations there. It is obvious that the commissioners were carrying their own beds with them, for the nights they had to spend in the woods, but Wing may have had beds for them. They had their own tea with them, and drank it in spite of the non-importation agreement. Possibly they did this at Wing's, though again I only guess.

Sincerely

Carl Van Doren