

MINE HOST AT THE TAVERN

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

More than a month ago, I told you of the interesting towns in Pennsylvania which had been named for the great signs that hung at the taverns along the crossroads of the State in its early days. I did want to mention the tavern keepers who were as famed as their inns in Pennsylvania--not unlike the many I have known here in today's Pennsylvania. Good, bad, popular, strong men! There was Michael Dennison in Philadelphia, a great hogshead of a man who kept the George Inn at the Sign of St. George and the Dragon at Second and Arch Streets. He was a friend of Franklin's undoubtedly, and having made a pack of money he decided to return to the old country. Lines were written in his honor; perhaps by Jefferson or Madison. "His hulk increased by ale and venison....Atlas! We soon must lose good Dennison. Although with pain, his bulk you bore. City of Penn! the loss deplore! Michael your wealth and full-spread frame shall publish Pennsylvania's fame". Perhaps he did return to Ireland and spread the fame of Pennsylvania. Here he was a much beloved tavern-keeper. Then there was Just Johnson, the giant Moravian brother, who in 1777 became landlord of the famous Sun Inn at Bethlehem. Just, like Mike Dennison, was known far and wide for his powerful build. When stories of his strength reached Christian Grubb, an iron master of Lancaster County, also notorious for his strength and prowess as a boxer,

Grubb made a pilgrimage to the Sunn Inn expressly to pick a fight with the mighty landlord, who was a religious brother. Just Johnson was grossly insulted by Grubb before finally losing his temper. He picked Grubb up, hurled him off the iron railing of the high porch to the pavement below. Then he rushed and begged forgiveness for his anger. But Grubb, shaken but unhurt, told the landlord that he had come looking for a fight and they polished off tankards together. There was the villian--half French, half Dutch, named Anthony, who was a veteran of the French Revolution and kept a tavern in Tioga County near Blossburg. He was a real thief, this one; he didn't raise oats, but charged travellers for the use of his oat-less trough. And he built a huge ravine some distance from his tavern. When pioneers coming into the Genessee Valley stopped at his place, he told them to let their cattle roam and gather them in the morning. Many of the herds got lost in the hidden ravine, and when his guests complained that they had lost cattle, he took them in another direction to look for their stock. After days of hunting, and of course, being charged for their lodging, they left for parts west. It is said he had a great storehouse of food from the cattle he thus stole claiming the meat was elk; and it was said that somehow he got his whiskey in the same manner. Good, strong or bad, each crossroad has its tavern; each its tavern-keeper and it was their hospitality that kept the wagons rolling into the western countryside of America.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.