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Number 8

George Washington Really Did Dine Here



The Gilbert Dudley House

It wasn't until after the battle of Bunker Hill that newly appointed Commander-In-Chief, General George Washington, took command in Boston (July 1775). The battles raged on, but finally, General George Washington seized strategic Dorchester heights and the British gave up. All the British troops were gone by March 17, 1776.

But now General Washington had a new worry. A rumor reached him the British were re-grouping in Long Island sound. He decided to see for himself by returning to New York by way of the lower post road, along the north Shore of the sound.

The following report of Washington's journey to New York is based on his itemized expense account on record in the library of congress in Washington, D.C. The general had refused a salary for his services but requested an expense account

This account is a detailed list of his expenditures along the way and every village and town he visited on the trip from Cambridge to New York. It includes meals, some lodging, ferry charges, carriages repairs and a few sundries. In the larger towns they lodged with local dignitaries.

With his aide-de-camp, Lieutenant Colonel William Palfrey, Washington left by horse and carriage on April 4, 1776. They traveled through Dedham and Wrentham in Massachusetts. From Providence, RI, they entered Connecticut and went through Norwich, Voluntown, Plainfield and on to New London. Here Washington learned the rumor about the British fleet was false

From New London the Post Road took them all the way along the shore: Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Westbrook and Killingworth (now Clinton). They passed through without incident. Then, in East Guilford (now Madison) they stopped for noon dinner at the tavern of Gilbert Dudley. After dinner Lieutenant Colonel William Palfrey paid 2 pounds 12 pence 9 shillings for the meal and they went on to New Haven and reached New York before nightfall.

The good fortune and privilege of serving dinner to Commander-In-Chief George Washington is, to this day, still reverberating among the descendants of Gilbert Dudley. This historic incident first came to light in the catalog of relics found in the pamphlet published in 1889, at the time of the celebration of Guilford's (including East Guilford) 250th anniversary (1639-1889) when a table from the Gilbert Dudley house was displayed. On page 11 of the pamphlet appears this statement:

"loaned by Mrs. William Collins, of North Guilford.

127. Table

At which general Washington and staff ate during the Revolution. Then owned by Captain Gilbert Dudley, Tavern keeper of Madison. (April 11, 1776)"

Mrs. William Collins was the daughter of Ruth Dudley Rossiter of North Guilford. Ruth Dudley was a babe in arms of 3 weeks when General Washington stopped to dine at her father's tavern. Ruth was the last living Member of the Gilbert Dudley family and it was clear the memory of that historic happening was still alive through the presence and passing on of the historic table.

In fact over the past 225 years the table has been cared for by many Descendants—families of Rossiters, Collins, Chittendens, Potters (forty years in Hamden) and, now, in Branford since 1981 with the Potter family.

It is still a beautiful small tavern table, vintage about 1720. On it's top are two black circular stain marks—the imprints of two tankards of, perhaps, frothy ale, being enjoyed by two distinguished gentlemen. These are the constant reminders that General George Washington was there.

Directions to the Gilbert Dudley House: The house is located on the southwest corner of the intersection of the Boston Post Road and Island Avenue directly across from Memorial Town Hall.

Please Note: The house and grounds are privately owned and not open to the public.