

# BETHLEHEM PIKE INNS

Bethlehem Pike, alternatively known as the "Kings Highway" or the "Great Road" was petitioned for in 1694 and opened in 1703. Over the next thirty years, the road was expanded from the Germantown Pike in Chestnut Hill to the Moravian settlement in Bethlehem.

By 1763, a stagecoach line opened providing transportation between Philadelphia and Bethlehem and by 1820 rival stage lines traveled through Pottsville daily bringing a marked increase in the number of travelers who passed through Springfield Township. Pottsville's location just east of Bethlehem from the city, made this stretch a logical route as horses had to be rested or changed every 10 miles or so. Bethlehem Pike became a toll road in 1804 and continued as such into the early 1800s. Turnpikes replaced the stagecoaches in 1901 and ran along the Pike until 1926 when automobile traffic rendered the turnpikes unprofitable.

Bethlehem Pike became a prosperous commercial center lined with blacksmiths, wheelwrights and business makers, all eager to serve the growing number of travelers. Over this road, local lime was carried to the city and grain was transported from the farms in the outlying region to be ground at the mills along the nearby Minnetonka Creek. There were also numerous accommodations with eight inns and taverns along the 1-1/2 mile stretch of Bethlehem Pike that runs through Springfield Township. Locals called Christopher Reiv, Christopher Mason, Nicholas King, John Gettino, Nicholas Shoemaker and Charles Gerhart, were all well known innkeepers in the area. Inns and taverns did not operate wholly for the convenience of the traveler, they served local residents as a gathering place to share news, argue politics, plan events, transact business and imbibe beer and spirits. Well into the 20th century, the inns and taverns were the center of community life in Springfield Township.

## Central/Wheelump Inn

In 1715, William Harmer purchased the land on which the Wheelump stands from William Penn. Around 1720 the building was constructed, likely as a dwelling, and in 1742 a license was granted for its operation as a tavern. Local tax collector and overseer of the poor, Jacob Neff, was innkeeper at the time of the Revolution. The 1798 Direct Tax records indicate that at the time this building was a 2-story, 50' x 30' stone structure with a frame barn. Neff then sold the inn to the Reiv family until 1824 when it was sold to William Rex. Rex then sold the inn to Abraham Houdrick, Jr., who operated the building as a shop and hotel. Upon Houdrick's death in 1866, the inn was sold for \$8,050 to Anthony J. Sapp who renamed it the Washington Hotel. In 1877 Sapp sold the inn to Robert Gordon who remained owner until the 1900s when the Liberty City Amusement Park was operating nearby. In 1904, longtime Wheelump tavernkeeper J. Nelson Youm, purchased the inn. After a prohibition raid in 1920, the tavern remained closed for a number of years. The Wheelump continued in use as a restaurant and tavern until recent years.

## Ottenger's

In 1712, Christopher Ottenger purchased five acres from Reyor Tyson on Bethlehem Pike and built a house and inn the following year. Ottenger's house still stands on the corner of Chesser Lane. It remains uncertain as to whether the extant building served as the house and inn or whether the inn stood in close proximity and at some point was demolished.

## Wagon & Horses

The Wagon & Horses was built in 1765 and was first operated as an inn by Christopher Reiv. At the time of the Revolution, Christopher Reiv was the operator. It was later known as Kline's Tavern after Nicholas Kline, Pottsville's postmaster during the early 1800s century, who operated the inn for forty years. The 1798 Direct Tax record noted that the building was a 2 1/2 story stone building at that time measuring 20' x 20' with a stone barn measuring 52' x 22'. Nicholas Chesser was the innkeeper in the mid-19th century, followed by Jesse Benson and then John R. Reitz who operated the inn under the name, Farmers and Citizens Hotel. Reitz sold the inn to Harry Schmitt in 1912 and around that time the inn was renamed the LeBarre Inn. Other names for the inn included the Central Inn and the Black and Chaevar.

## Springfield Hotel / Green Tree

The inn hotel to be built in Springfield, the Green Tree, was constructed by John Bittling in 1811 on land that he had purchased nearly a decade earlier. Bittling operated the inn until 1850 when his son, Thomas, took over and continued as operator until 1885 when it was sold to Charles Schaeper, who then renamed it the Springfield Hotel. Later proprietors of the inn included Jacob Stainkecker and the brothers Edwin and Oliver Ruckert.



Black Horse Inn



Wheelump Inn



Bethlehem Pike Toll Booth



Bethlehem Pike Toll Booth



Wagon & Horses



Green Tree Inn