

Travels With Bob

TAPPAN'S '76 HOUSE, HISTORY AND SPIRITS

By Bob Nesoff

With the danger of the pandemic coming to a close, try planning day trips to get back in the swing of traveling again. You would do well to consider a drive up to Tappan, NY and its amazing historic district. One must see spot here is the Old '76 House.

Tappan's Old '76 House could claim the title of being one of the oldest taverns in the New Jersey/New York corridor, but few can dispute the fact that it was the location for events that could have altered the Revolution and had us all pledging allegiance to Queen Elizabeth.

And it has the ghosts to prove it.

Today it serves not only fine modern food, but also boasts the ghosts of a woman, man and two children of undetermined origin that have served as an exciting addition to a peaceful meal. Robb Norden, who has owned the establishment for 35 years, has seen the spectral figures, as have any number of people there for a meal. One, a woman, appears at a window table in the south end of the dining room, while a male visits diners at the opposite end.

Speculation is that the male ghost seen at a corner table might be that of infamous British spy Maj. John André, hung on the hill behind the tavern. He simply appears, moves around the west end of the dining room and then goes back to wherever ghosts go.

"The only ones that bother me," Norden, commented, "are the two children. They only appear on the second floor. Seeing, as I have, the ghosts of two young children, a boy and girl, is bothersome. I don't know who they are or what their story is."

And there is proof. Norden produces a photo that has a spectral being in it.

"A young couple had their wedding reception here some time back. After they left, I received a call from the bride asking me who the lady in a blue dress was that photo-bombed a picture. When I saw the photo, it took me aback. It was the female ghost

who was the uninvited guest at the reception."

Although it's known as the Old '76 House, the tavern was first built in 1686 by Caspares Mabie as a home and tavern. Mabie was a local merchant turned inn keeper and the tavern was known originally as "Mabie's Inn."

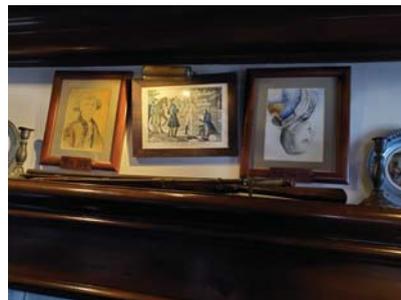
The Old '76 House lays claim to have been built in 1668. During and before the Revolution, the tavern was host to patriots planning the separation from England. It was considered a safe ground and meeting place for the Revolutionaries. It came into ever-lasting prominence following the most notorious act of deceit and infamy in American history...the calumny of Benedict Arnold.

Gen. Arnold had been posted to command of the fort at West Point, a strategic position atop the Palisades overlooking the Hudson River. Should a British fleet manage to move beyond that point, it could have meant disaster for the nascent revolution. Embittered because he felt he had been downplayed and not given the high honors and position he felt he deserved, Arnold conspired with the British command to turn over the plans for the defense of Fort West Point. Arnold's contact was a young British officer, Maj. John André. He was considered a charming and handsome young man who was adjutant general to General Sir Henry Clinton, commander-in-chief of British forces in North America. Arnold was a brilliant and respected general and a close friend of Washington. But he had been reprimanded by congress and even made to stand before a court martial.

Arnold met with André and gave him drawing of the fortifications and other pertinent information that would have led to the collapse of the American strong point. The British officer mounted his horse and made his way through the lines. His movement raised suspicions of several American troops and they stopped and searched him. In his boot were the plans for West Point's defense. André was



A happy young couple poses for the camera with a spectral being seeming to float past.



A painting of Benedict Arnold still hangs upside down on the wall of the Old '76 House.

taken to the tavern, now the Old '76 House, following his trial at the old Dutch church, a block away. He had been apprehended in civilian clothing, and as a result was tried, convicted of spying and sentenced to hang. André requested to be executed by firing squad as befitted his position. Hanging was for common criminals and lower caste people. The request was turned down by Washington and the Major was hanged near the '76 House. A local woman threw a handful of peach pits into the shallow grave in a sign of disparagement to the spy.

Today several documents dictated by André and then signed by him, hang on the walls of the Old '76 House.

So, taken by the young officer, Washington commented: "He was more unfortunate than criminal. An accomplished and gallant officer." An amazing tribute to an enemy soldier. Today he is a hero in England and respected in the

United States. Arnold was disrespected on both sides of the Atlantic and died a despised man.

George Washington used the tavern for his headquarters while in the area and many of the Continental's battle plans were drawn up there. One day while Washington was at lunch he looked up and saw a picture of his former friend-turned-traitor, Benedict Arnold, hanging over the fireplace. Incensed, Washington rose, went to the fireplace and turned the drawing upside down. It remains in the position to this day and his name still stands for treachery.

Sitting in the tavern, you can feel the history and, if you try hard enough, see the spirits of the founding fathers meeting there to plot independence. And that might not be just your imagination. In 2012 a group of paranormal investigators looked into alleged happenings there. Their decision was that spirits inhabit the Old '76 House. Could it be Maj. André seeking redemption? Could it be George Washington planning to meet with his officer to discuss coming battle plans? Is that man in Colonial garb and white wig a reenactor or a spirit of the past? If you are adventurous, request a seat at Table #2. That's where most paranormal incidents are alleged to have taken place. Try placing an order for yourself and your guests...and whomever else might suddenly appear. You decide.