

# HISTORIC EAST CHESTER

## Ancient Colonial Tavern Where Washington Was Entertained.

### FAMOUS OLD VINCENT MANSION

#### It Was for a Time the Home of President John Adams — Recent Discovery of Interesting Old Relics.

Precious historic treasures abound in the quaint, sequestered little hamlet of East Chester, situated at the northernmost point of the territory recently annexed to "Greater New-York." The locality is only seven miles from the Harlem River, but the surroundings are almost as primitive as they were during the periods of Colonial and Revolutionary "times that tried men's souls." There, within the radius of a half mile, are relics, landmarks, and mementos of the far-away past, teeming with deeper interest than pertains to any other place in this part of the country. It is a typical rural hamlet, hitherto undisturbed by the invasion of speculators and unchanged by the progress of suburban improvements. A little cluster of humble dwellings, an old-time general country store, a little church, a blacksmith's shop, and a tavern is the sum total descriptive of this tiny centre of dormant life.

The most recent discovery of interesting relics occurred during the latter part of September, when a party of laborers engaged on the roadway near the new bridge to be built over the East Chester Creek were suddenly precipitated into an excavation which proved to be the ancient Vincent family vault. Many years ago it had been abandoned, the bodies that it contained were removed elsewhere, and the surface soil accumulated until all traces of the slab entrance bearing the inscription: "Vincent, 1748," were obliterated. The

obsure and quiet hamlet experienced a most remarkable transformation with the influx of famous visitors.

There are many peculiarly fascinating reminiscences interwoven with the history of this ancient tavern, which has always been pre-eminent for cleanliness, superior fare, and spotless reputation. At one period the host was a mature maiden, Miss Hannah Fisher. Her personal appearance was peculiar. Over 6 feet in height, gaunt, brawny, but with comeliness and genial expression, the striking oddity of quite a luxuriant growth of hair on her face—almost as thick as the beard of a man—she was a picturesque figure. Her strength was phenomenal; she could lift a barrel of ale with ease, and her management of spirited horses was remarkable. Her prowess in quelling disorder among unruly guests of the tavern bar was widely known and had wholesome effect. On one occasion, when a trio of jolly roysterers became noisy and impudent, after due warning on her part, she suddenly seized two of them, whirled them out through the door, and sent them spinning upon the ground before they could realize what had happened. Then springing at the third and most defiant bully, she grasped him by the coat collar and nether part of his garments, carried him out in spite of his struggles, and plunged him into the ice-cold water in the huge horse trough, dousing him repeatedly, until he roared for mercy.

Another interesting reminiscence about her is vividly suggested by the sight of a large, old-fashioned copper kettle, polished to its most brilliant sheen, that hangs on the big iron crane swinging in the broad fireplace in the ancient kitchen. A deep indentation is noticeable on the lower rounding of the kettle, and therewith is connected a peculiar story. During the Revolutionary period Westchester County was infested with rival gangs of bushwhacking bandits, known as the "Skinners" and the "cowboys." One day several of the former made a sudden onslaught upon the tavern. Miss Fisher, who was taken by surprise, seized this kettle as the nearest available weapon, and, swinging it with dreadful force right and left, drove the marauders out. Then, reinforced by servants and guests with guns, the giantess vanquished the outlaws, two of whom were left dead upon the ground. The dent in the kettle is said to be the counterpart of a dent in the skull of one of the attacking party.

The oldest surviving native of East Chester is "Aunt Mary Treadwell," who is now in the ninetieth year of her age. She is a fair mulatto, with bright, kindly eyes, comely features, cheery voice, and an altogether picturesque personality. But for her almost snow-white hair, she would not be thought to be beyond the age of sixty, and her sprightly grace in walking not less than the animated intelligence of her conversation contribute to the concealment of her advanced age. With her well-educated, prepossessing niece she occupies a little unpainted, weatherbeaten cottage situated at the edge of East Chester Creek, almost in the shadow of old St. Paul's Church. This old homestead of her family, built over a century ago, is among the interesting curiosities of its kind in that vicinity.

"Aunt Mary's" mother, who was known throughout that region as "Aunt Beckey Turner," had been a slave in early life, and her certificate of manumission by her owner, Daniel Franklin, is among the numerous relics now in the possession of the Rev. Dr. Coffey, rector of St. Paul's. For many years she was a famous cook in service at Gulon's Tavern, and died years ago at the advanced age of 112. Among the heirlooms treasured by her daughter, Aunt Mary, is a shawl that was presented to her mother by Gen. Washington in token of his appreciation of the services she rendered during his illness. Her recollections, narrated with characteristic simplicity, and reproduced by one of the neighbors who is yet surviving, are very interesting. This is the story in her own words:

"Gin'rl Washington, he war taken powerful sick at the old tavern. He had information in his bowels, and he had it awful bad, too Oh, my! how he did groan. One doctor come to him from White Plains; then another one come, he was a sojer's doctor, a surgum they said, I sot up workin' hard all one night a makin' hot mustard plasters and fillin' bottles with hot water for him. Uncle Jake (my husband) he help too, 'cause we all knew if the Gin'rl died everything would go to the debbin' less than no time, shuah! Then I made him broth and soup. Bime-by he got so he could eat peas. He war powerful fond of green peas, and could eat three sassers of 'em at a meal; green apple pie, too; he war just as fond of that; and he done say that I did just make de bestest apple pies he ever did eat.

"He was a beautiful man, with such good eyes and good face, and spoke so kind to everybody round him. I did like to look at him, and would often peek through the crack of the door. Well, when he went away everybody went out to see him off. He had somefin' to say to every one of us, and, what do you think! he just took hold of my brack hand, and says he: 'Becky, I thank you, too.' He gave Missus Gulon money for to buy me a shawl—this same shawl I'se got on now. (the Lord bless him!) Then the last thing, he done kiss Missus on her forred, and she always did say that kiss made her feel more good as when she first 'sperienced religion. (cause we all thought the Gin'rl was like an angel.) Then he got on his horse, and, oh! what a beautiful big white horse; I never see one like him afore or since, and then he took off his hat and bowed to us all as he rode away with his officers. I never forgit it; never, never!"

The old tavern, after passing through several hands, came into the possession of Stephen Odell about forty years ago. Since then some additions and alterations have changed its exterior appearance, but the old part is as it was. At the present time it is generally known as Odell's Hotel.

It is of interest to mention that among the relics treasured in St. Paul's rectory is a document found between the shingles when workmen were repairing the roof of the old tavern:

Permit the bearer hereof, William Thompson, a private Soldier Independent Company of British Fusiliers, posted at Fort York, to pass and repass about his lawful occasions to from the date hereof until the twenty-third day of April, He behaving himself as becometh. And then to return to his Command to the aforesaid Fort or Garrison. Under my hand, in New York, this twenty-fifth day of December, 1778.

HUBERT MARSHALL.

To the officers, Civil and Military, whom these may concern.

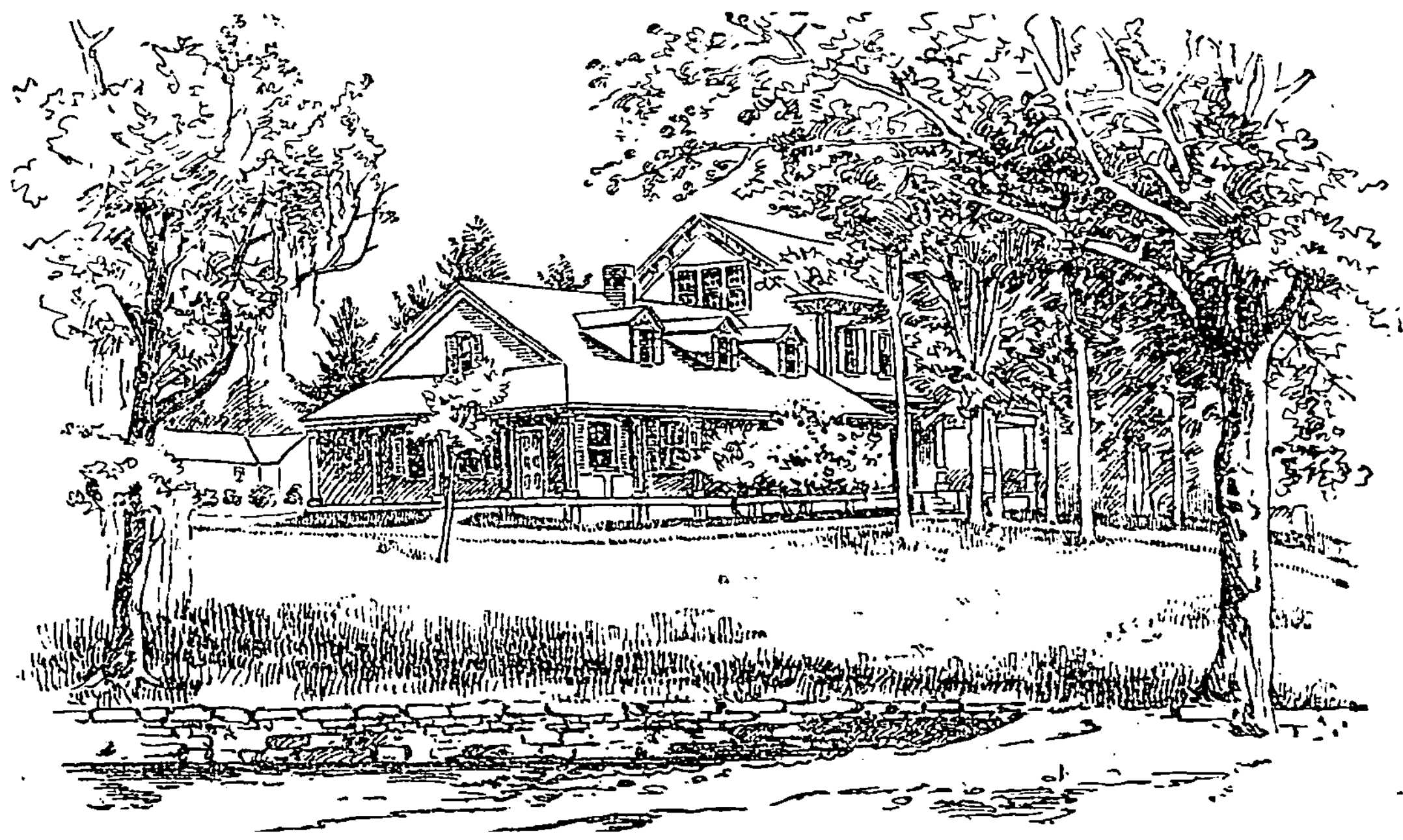
While repairing a part of the kitchen wall, some years ago, there was found a strong

tumbling of the laborers stirred up a nest of blacksnakes, nineteen of them being killed.

In the debris within were crumbling fragments of oaken coffins and a corroded brass plate of ancient style, inscribed: "Adam Vincent, born Aug. 9, 1694, died Oct. 20, 1751." About thirty feet beyond this tomb were unearched portions of two skeletons. Among the bones were gathered several buttons and other rusty metal remnants of military accoutrements, which indicated the identity of the remains to be those of two British soldiers who were hanged for desertion in 1778 on a gibbet that for many years stood in front of the ancient tavern, at that time an outpost headquarters of British troops investing Westchester. These remains were reinterred in Beechwood Cemetery.

By far the most interesting landmark is the old Colonial tavern just referred to. It was originally built in 1614, its site being at the convergence of several crossroads. It is one of the oldest and most famous wayside inns in the United States, although repairs and additions have somewhat altered its appearance. The massive oak timbers in the original structure are seasoned almost to the hardness of lignum-vitae, and seem almost indestructible. From earliest times this has been a popular hostelry, and it has always been considered the best public house on the post road between New-York and Boston. Few hotels of early periods entertained as many distinguished guests as those resorting there in its halcyon days.

In 1780, while traveling from West Point to New-York, Gen. Washington was taken ill and obliged to remain there nearly two weeks. Upon his departure he expressed grateful appreciation for the attention be-



Home of President John Adams in 1796 and 1797. East Chester, N. Y.

stowed on him, and particularly for the kindness of Mrs. Gulon, the wife of Charles Gulon, then landlord of the house. In recognition of Mrs. Gulon's goodness he requested of her husband the privilege of kissing her as a farewell token of respect.

Tradition says that Mr. Gulon declared that the place on her forehead where "the Father of his country had imprinted a reverent kiss should never thereafter be washed, also that the bed whereon he slept should never be occupied by any other person. To the present day that bedding has never been changed, and with the furniture of the room remains intact, as Washington left it, more than a century ago.

In 1790 leading citizens of Westchester County entertained Gen. Lafayette and staff with a banquet and ball at this house. For more than forty years the lodge room of the first Masonic organization in that region occupied a hall in the upper part of this tavern.

During the period that yellow fever raged in Philadelphia, then the seat of the National Government, President John Adams and family fled from the plague and made a temporary home at the house of his son-in-law, in East Chester, Col. William H. Smith. During his stay many brilliant entertainments were given and numerous persons of great distinction were guests at the old tavern. Among these were members of the Cabinet, heads of Government departments, Senators, Congressmen, military and naval officers, and several representatives of foreign powers. In those days of stage coach transportation this little ordinarily

oaken box containing over \$600 worth of English money of ancient coinage, evidently hidden there during the Revolutionary period. Soon after another box containing about \$1,200 worth of similar coins was unearthed on the premises of Beekman Van Gasbeck.

A few rods beyond the old tavern stands the grand old mansion temporarily occupied by President John Adams. It is one of the most ancient landmarks in that region, having been built by the Vincent family in Colonial times. In the cellar is a secret vault, where the communion vessels, bell, and books of St. Paul's Church were concealed during the Revolutionary War. Many anecdotes of historic and traditional interest have made the place locally famous. The original structure remains unchanged, although extensive additions have been made, and the surroundings are very beautiful. The only railway that has penetrated the seclusion of this place is a branch of the "Huckleberry" system, from the Mount Vernon Station of the New-Haven and Harlem Railroads.