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HISTORIC HOSTELRY AT HOOK CROSS ROADS – Demolition of the Union Hotel, One of the Oldest Structures of the Kind in the Country

The old Union Hotel, at the Marcus Hook cross roads, which was demolished by the proprietor, William J. McClure, Jr., to make way for a more ornate and up-to-date structure, was one of the oldest hotels in the country, and was erected, it is claimed, in the year 1728. Previous to 1736 little is known of its history, but in that year John Flower, who had kept a tavern at another location in Lower Chichester Township, presented his petition to the court setting forth that “having lived long in this county, and now unable to labor for maintenance of wife and family, hath taken an house lately erected on the main road from Chichester into the back parts of Chester County, where the same crosses the road leading from Philadelphia to New Castle,” and desired to keep a public house thereat, but the court refused to grant the license, although in the following year Flower was given the privilege to open the house.

He died in 1738 and that year his widow, Mary Flower, was granted the right to continue the business, and that the court extended its indulgence to her the following year is shown by the records of a remonstrance of residents of the township, dated August 29, 1739, against the petition of Elizabeth Bond for hotel license. The latter, on August 20, 1738, the year previous, had presented a petition in which she informed the court that she “is left a widow with a considerable charge of small children, and having no way to maintain them but by hard labor,” asked that she be permitted “to sell beer and sider.” Her application was endorsed by a number of the most substantial citizens and the justices acted favorably upon it. The following year, however, when she asked for a renewal with the statement that “having three small children to maintain, wishes to sell rum and monstrance by the residents, representing that there were already four public houses – Thomas Clayton, Mary Flower, William Weldon, and Thomas Howell – in the township and that no necessity existed for another, whereupon her application was rejected.

WIDOWS CONDUCT THE PLACE – In 1741, Humphrey Scott, who had married Mrs. Flower, was licensed at the cross roads and conducted the place until 1746, when he died, and the widow again took charge of the hotel. Three years later she married her third husband, John Rain, and he was granted a license for the hostelry. He also died while proprietor, and his widow again became landlady in 1756. In 1759 Richard Flower, a son by the first husband, was granted a license for the inn. Young Flower died in 1763, and his widow conducted the hotel until 1768, when she married John Wall and the latter assumed control.

The following year Wall was succeeded by Joseph Gribble, and the latter, in 1772, gave place to Joseph Dunlap, who named the hotel “Ship Princess Amelia,” a very odd name for a public house. David Ford followed Dunlap, who served the public only a year, and in 1776 John Taylor became landlord. The title of the tavern was then changed to “King of Prussia.” Taylor remained in charge until 1778, when he was succeeded by Jacob Coburn. The record of the hotel is a blank from that year until 1795. In the later year John Walker became the host and he was succeeded in 1798 by Henry C. Barker. The name of the hotel was again changed in 1800 to “Sign of the Leopard” by John Selah, the new proprietor.

NAME CHANGED AGAIN – In 1803 Charles Afflick was granted a license for the Leopard and was followed in 1804 by Henry C. Barker. The following six years found

Jacob D. Barker in charge, to be succeeded in 1870 by Edward Sallard, and he in turn in 1811 by Thomas Noblett, who called the house, "The United States Coat of Arms." Jacob D. Barker returned to the cross roads in 1813 and in his petition a few years later again changed its name to "The Union Inn."

Barker continued in charge of the hotel until 1824, when he sold out to George Hoskins, who held the license until 1839. John Harper was the next proprietor and in 1841 William Appleby secured control of the place, remaining in charge until his death in 1850. His widow continued the business until 1861, when her son William Appleby took charge. The latter remained as landlord of the ancient hostelry until 1866, when William Wilson became proprietor. He held the license until 1873, the year of local option. In 1876 the house was again licensed to his widow, Hannah H. Wilson, and she continued annually to receive the court's approval until 1884, when the licenses were withheld from all houses in Lower Chichester.

When the hotel was again licensed, Alfred Triggs was the proprietor and he remained in charge until his death. Andrew McClure then purchased the hotel and conducted it until he obtained a license for the Buttonwood Hotel, Darby, when he was succeeded by his son, William J. McClure, Jr., the present popular proprietor.

A LANDMARK IN HISTORY – The old Union Hotel housed under its roof many of the great men of the last generation, and was noted for its hospitality. The Post Road, on which the building faced, was opened in 1704, and was used extensively. History tells us that John Quincy Adams, riding along the road to and from Washington always stopped at the hotel that his horses might be watered and he himself refreshed. In 1814, when the militia of Pennsylvania was called out to repel the threatened invasion by the British army, close to 5,000 troops were encamped near Hook, and many of the officers entertained and were entertained at the old Union Hotel. Major General Gaines, of the regular army, also had his headquarters near Hook, and he, too, was a frequent visitor to the hostelry.

The Union Hotel, with William Appleby as proprietor, in 1842, housed the principals in the duel fought by Thomas F. Marshall, a prominent member of the Twenty-seventh Congress, and Col. James Watson Webb, editor of the Courier and Enquirer of New York City, which resulted from criticism of Marshall by the paper, and which attracted considerable attention throughout the country. The duel was arranged in Wilmington, but the authorities of that city prevented the affair taking place on Delaware soil. The duelers drove to Linwood and as a crowd of one hundred persons followed them from the Delaware metropolis, they stopped at the Union. Later as a ruse, Col. Webb was rowed across the Delaware in a small boat, and believing the duel was to be fought in New Jersey the crowd dispersed. The wily colonel later returned to the hotel, where Marshall and his friends were comfortably housed. An hour before daylight the next morning the principals left the hotel and proceeded to a spot just over the State line, where the duel was fought. Col. Webb was wounded in the knee and after the duel the party returned to the hotel where breakfast was served them and the injured man attended to.

For some years the hotel has been entirely too small to meet the increasing demands of the fast-growing borough, and although the removal of such a historic place is greatly regretted, a large and more up-to-date structure is needed and such the new hotel will be.