

# OLD TIME GHOSTS OF BALMVILLE

Some Remarks Concerning Them and  
Other Matters.

Balmville is said to have had its ghosts in the olden time. Places amounting to anything generally did have them, and Balmville considered itself of some importance, more than a century ago. Did not two rival sloops sail weekly from its shores for New York; though the exact time of departure was a little uncertain, the owners prudently inserting in their advertisements the proviso, "wind and weather permitting." So if a traveler intended making the journey it was well to be on hand early, or perhaps the day before, and equally prepared to wait until the day after. And does not that ancient chronicler, Mr. Donnelly, tell us there were only three wagons in Newburgh in Revolutionary times, but he adds with a touch of pride, "Captain Coleman, up at the brook, had a Nantucket calash." The sturdy Captain lived near where Judge Brown now resides. So Balmville set the pace for stylish turnouts in the days that tried men's souls. And later did not the hamlet boast of its crack military company of Light Artillery. A company which received high praise from the Governor, Daniel Tompkins, as it marched through New York City in 1812 to guard the forts at Staten Island. No doubt they made a gallant show in their uniforms of dark blue with red facings. On many a Summer day they assembled near the big tree and blazed away at a target on the hill where now stands the Misses Gordon's residence. The writer never quite believed a story told of the last meeting of the company for target practice. On that occasion it is said a gunner who had been indulging rather freely and playfully turned his piece around until it pointed directly at the company. Now the gun was loaded, the lighted match dangerously near, and the situation entirely unsatisfactory to the men in the ranks. A moment they stood firm and then with a yell broke for the woods. Finally the piece was discharged, the ball knocking a sign off the hotel which stood hard by. If the gunner mistook that hotel sign for a target, he scored a bullseye. However, this is only an idle tale, and besides is said to have happened, or happen it did, long after the company's headquarters was removed from Balmville.

But enough has been shown of the importance of the hamlet in ancient times. The stories of its ghostly visitors are so sadly mixed and fragmentary that it is impossible at this late day to even describe their appearance by proper and unimpeachable evidence. It is unknown whether ghosts were in the habit of strolling around when the first settlers, the Palatines, came here. But it is known that these first settlers for some reason became dissatisfied with the locality and sold

their farms. And does not Knickerbocker's History show the whole Hudson River country to have been infested with hobgoblins of all sorts. Perhaps the German settlers may have met without formal introduction some of these mischievous imps. So we can imagine the Palatines telling thrilling stories of them when gathered around their rude firesides in the dismal forest and striving to cheer each other with songs and tales of the Fatherland.

"The songs they still are singing  
Who dress the hills of vine,  
The tales that haunt the Brocken  
And whisper down the Rhine."

After the Revolution when Balmville began to look up in the world, tradition says that sometimes late roysterers returning homeward along the old road, were frightened almost into fits and frequently chased by a woman in white until haply they reached Bloomer's bridge, near the present residence of Mr. Bush-Brown. Once across this bridge they were safe, for it is well known that no ghost will ever pass over running water. And there is a story that more than a century ago Balmville developed another ghost, the ghost of a dog. One Demott kept a tavern just east of the big tree, and when in the course of time his faithful dog died, its spirit lingered in the neighborhood. In dark places along the road, midnight wayfarers, it is said, were sometimes attacked by this ghostly animal. A well directed kick seemed to go directly through the dog's body, but if its jaws closed on the victim's leg he yelled with pain, though, strange to say, no trace of a bite could afterwards be found.

The good old times are past and gone. The ghost of the white lady and of Demott's dog no longer haunt the ancient King's Highway. Sic transit gloria mundi. D. B.

Balmville, November, 1906.

## AVOCA, THE VALE.

A Historical Reminiscence of the Old Toll Gate.

In the current number of the Record and the Guide, republished in the Newburgh Journal, Nov. 21, 1906, is a contribution by Mr. L. S. Sterrit relating recollections of the old toll gate on the Newburgh and New Windsor Turnpike, at the bridge crossing Quassaick Creek. Referring to them Mr. Sterrit writes:

It seems but a few years since we used to enter the town of New Windsor from Newburgh through a covered toll-gate on the river road, standing a few yards south of the Quassaick Creek. The gate itself was a plain, hemlock pole about eight feet long, from which the bark and knots had been removed, and suspended like an iron crane, to swing to and fro across the turnpike. The keeper's house was a small affair, with but little more than two rooms and an attic. The clap-boards and joists of the gate were always neatly whitewashed—doubtless at the expense of the Turnpike Company—and doves flitted in and out of a cote fastened under its rafters.

Whatever may have been the form of the original bridge, it was not "covered" in my recollection. A new bridge was constructed in the early '40's under an act of the Legislature. By the terms of the law it was required to be a draw-bridge. It was not covered. Four posts resting on piers, equipped with the necessary machinery, raised the centre planking like a couple of great doors, one on each side of the centre, through which sloops could pass. In early days the stream was navigable for some distance above its junction with the river. The construction of docks at Newburgh and the change in the current of the Hudson threw the wash upon the New Windsor flats and formed a bar at the mouth of the stream, effectually destroying navigation. I have myself seen a sloop, west of the bridge loading with flour at the mill. If the publication "Picturesque America" by the Appletons some years ago, did no other service, it would deserve preservation from the engraving which it gave of the old toll-gate and bridge, the latter with the draw removed. The gate was covered and the toll-keeper's dwelling adjoined it. The picture is substantially correct. "When I was a boy," Mr. James Rainey was the gate-keeper—"a good old soul" generally speaking, but not popular with the boys because he required them, as well as all foot passengers, to pay one-cent toll, unless it was on Sunday, when no toll was charged, by order of the Rev. Doct. Brown, President of the Company, if the passenger was going to church, that is to the New Windsor Episcopal Church or to old St. George's in Newburgh, of both of which churches Doct. Brown was rector. To "beat" the gate-keeper the boys were wont to go up the Quassaick on the north side and cross over on the stones in the bed of the creek where the old highway bridge had been before the construction of the toll bridge. Their objective point generally was a certain orchard west of the abandoned pond of the ancient Schultz grist-mill, the site of which was the later wire-works, now the felt mill. There were some good apples in that orchard.

Vale of Avoca

from  
Undated  
Scrapbook  
c.1909 at  
Crawford  
House  
or  
c.1906

Toll  
gate  
described

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