

CLARK'S FERRY AND TAVERN

GATEWAY TO THE JUNIATA VALLEY

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ABSTRACT: The evolution of the transportation history of the Commonwealth can be viewed at the confluence of the Susquehanna and Juniata rivers where in 1790 John Clark built a tavern and a ferry to transport travelers across the rivers. While the ferry system has been replaced by the current Clark's Ferry Bridge, the 1790 wood and stone tavern structure remains as one of the oldest buildings in the town of Duncannon. Archaeological and historical information can be gleaned from this important structure, which retains a vast amount of its 1790–1800 integrity. It stands as a reminder of the days of the packhorse, stagecoach, Conestoga wagon, canal boats, railroads, and automobiles at the entrance to the Juniata Valley.

KEYWORDS: transportation, ferries, Juniata River, Susquehanna River, early American taverns

PRELUDE

In present-day eastern Perry County, the Susquehanna River makes an abrupt southeastward bend around the end of Peter's Mountain. Here, just northwest of this mountain, many millions of years ago the Juniata River joined the Susquehanna. Over time an alluvial flood plain, as well as several large islands, formed from the yearly spring freshets that accompanied the winter snows, spring rains, and summer storms. The riffles or shallows near where the two rivers met became a logical crossing-point for westward travel from prehistoric to modern times. Standing just south of the confluence of the Susquehanna and Juniata rivers, on the west bank of the Susquehanna

and in the shadow of the current Clark's Ferry Bridge, sits the old Clark's Ferry Tavern. At this tavern site, one can view the evolution of America's transportation history in a nearly continuous arc. Here, centuries of passers-by made their way in all directions along both rivers and followed the Juniata to its source deep in the Pennsylvania hinterland. Early traders and pack-horses headed westward, as well as settlers on horseback and later coach and wagon. Eventually a ferry, stagecoach line, canal, and bridges would span the river here, followed by railroads and, finally, concrete ribbons of highway carrying automobiles. The importance of this particular tavern in tracing the commonwealth's transportation history is indeed significant as both an archaeological and historic site. According to noted preservationist Steve Smith, "walking into the front room of the tavern it is as if you are stepping back in time to 1798. All of the basic elements of a late eighteenth century tavern remain intact."¹ As a result, studying the architecture, history and archaeology of Clark's Ferry Tavern is useful in understanding Pennsylvania's federal period transportation systems and the westward movement. The building itself is worthy of preservation, standing as one of the most historic structures in Perry County and the oldest remaining structure in the borough of Duncannon.

It was at the site of the tavern that John Fanning Watson noted that the Indians had a crossing known as "Queenashawakee."² Though Watson had the location of "Queenashawakee" wrong, there was a crossing at the confluence of these two rivers dating to prehistoric times. This was well documented by many of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century chroniclers of county and regional history, including Wright, Ellis, and Hain. An early, albeit biased, eyewitness account of a European American's encounter within the area comes from the journal kept by Reverend David Brainerd, a Presbyterian missionary. In 1745 and 1746, well before the area was officially opened to settlement, Brainerd visited "Juneauta Island" (now Duncan's Island), which lies at the tip of land formed at the junction of the Susquehanna and Juniata rivers. Though this account is perhaps what one may expect from a zealous missionary attempting to "Christianize" Native Americans, it does provide an interesting early account of an Indian village that existed near the tavern site before European settlement.³

Possibly the earliest recorded European Americans in the vicinity of present-day Clark's Ferry Tavern were Marcus Hulings, William Baskins, Francis Ellis, and traders Thomas McKee and Jack Armstrong. In 1744

several Delaware Indians murdered Armstrong, along with two of his men, at what is known today as "Jack's Narrows" on the Juniata.⁴ Hulings, Baskins, Ellis, and McKee are mentioned in a sworn affidavit given by them when they went to bury Armstrong. Hulings settled on Duncan's Island possibly as early as 1735. Later, a 1762 land draft names George Clark (not a known relative of the Clarks of Clark's Ferry), John Baskins, James Reed, a Mr. Neave, and William Kerl as early settlers in the area.⁵

Several sources suggest that Marcus Hulings operated a ferry across the Susquehanna, as his property in Middle Paxton Township was called "Hulings's Landing," and that the Baskins family operated one at the mouth of the Juniata River.⁶ These ferries, along with Harris's and Simpson's ferries to the south and Reed's, Bachman's, and Montgomery's ferries to the north, may have been in operation as early as the 1760s to accommodate packhorse and foot traffic, the only means to navigate the still narrow trails or often rain-swollen rivers. In 1774, just prior to the American Revolution, the land south of William Baskins at the mouth of the Juniata was granted via proprietors John and Thomas Penn to Samuel Goudy. Goudy had petitioned and surveyed the land in 1766 (see fig. 1).⁷ He must have been in the vicinity during the French and Indian War as he is listed in 1757–58 as one of a number of "battoe men" who transported goods upriver to Fort Augusta (present-day Sunbury).⁸ In 1786 he appeared on a Cumberland County tax list. We know with some degree of certainty that Goudy, with his wife Sarah and several children, lived upon and improved his 215 acres of land, which he called "Silver Spring." That same year Goudy was taxed sixty pounds for his acreage in Rye Township and twenty pounds for two horses and four cows.⁹ Though no archaeological evidence has been uncovered yet, a December 27, 1785, "To Be Sold" advertisement by Samuel Goudy, and a deed in which Goudy sells John Clark the property, corroborate that Goudy and his wife did have "two small dwelling houses," at what would later become Clark's Ferry and Tavern.¹⁰ Goudy's advertisement does not mention the type of construction of the two houses, but they were likely made of wood, that is, probably log during that time period.¹¹ It is also probable that the Hulings, Goudy, or Baskins families kept or co-operated some type of ferry system across the Juniata and Susquehanna, as rafts were already being used at Baskins's residence as early as 1767.¹² Travelers and passersby could find food or lodging with one of the families, while others could have made camp on their properties before or after their river crossing.

FORM No. 1.

A Draught of a Tract of Land situate in Rye Township in the County of Cumberland Containing two hundred and fifteen Acres and thirty eight Perches and an Allowance of Six p. Cent. for Roads Survey'd March 9th 1768 for Samuel Goudy in pursuance of an Order of Survey Dated August 19th 1766 N^o 901.

To John Lukens Esq^r }
 Surveyor General } John Armstrong
 D.S.

IN TESTIMONY that the above is a copy of the original remaining on file in the Department of Internal Affairs of Pennsylvania, made conformably to an Act of Assembly approved the 16th day of February, 1833, I have hereunto set my Hand and caused the Seal of said Department to be affixed at Harrisburg, this fourth day of November 1904.

James D. Bress
 Secretary of Internal Affairs

FIGURE 1 The survey for Samuel Goudy's land, Survey Book C-58-161, RG-17, Pennsylvania State Archives.

JOHN CLARK ACQUIRES THE PROPERTY FOR HIS FERRY AND TAVERN

John Clark was the namesake and founder of what would be known as Clark's Ferry and Clark's Tavern. He purchased the property on which these enterprises were built from Samuel Goudy and his wife, Sarah, on January 23, 1787.¹³ In the December 27, 1785, edition of the *Carlisle Gazette*, Samuel Goudy offered for sale a "Valuable Plantation, situated on the bank of the Susquehannah, about a mile from the mouth of the Juniata, in Cumberland county." In the advertisement, Goudy states that the property contains 269 acres, although his original warrant was for 200 acres. He must have acquired some additional acreage, as two years later he sells John Clark 215 acres and thirteen perches.¹⁴ Goudy's advertisement is also significant in that it documents the type of land and what was on it: about forty of the acres are "upland cleared," and the land also includes "a small piece of meadow cleared, a considerable more may be made." He goes on to state that there is an excellent site for a mill on a "standing stream" (known as Clark's Run today). Notably, Samuel states that there are about "100 bearing apple trees." One can surmise that the street running behind the tavern today, Apple Tree Alley, was named this from the nearby orchard. Besides the orchard, the advertisement bears another important piece of evidence: the property had "two small dwelling houses" (see fig. 2).¹⁵

TO BE SOLD

A Valuable Plantation, situated on the bank of Susquehannah, about a mile from the mouth of Juniata, in Cumberland county, containing 269 acres, with the usual allowance; about 40 acres upland cleared, a small piece of meadow cleared, a considerable more may be made; an excellent mill seat on a standing stream, about 100 bearing apple trees, two small dwelling houses. Time will be given for one half of the purchase money; and terms may be known by applying to the subscriber, living adjoining the premises.

† SAMUEL GOUDY.
Dec. 27, 1785.

FIGURE 2 Goudy's December 27, 1785, advertisement in the *Carlisle Gazette and the Western Repository of Knowledge*.

JOHN ESTABLISHES HIS FERRY AND TAVERN

Sometime in the late 1700s, John and his oldest son, Daniel, established a ferry route across the Susquehanna River from the end of Peter's Mountain in Dauphin County to the site of Clark's Tavern in what was then Cumberland County, now Perry (fig. 3).¹⁶ This became known as the upper ferry. At some later date, the Clarks started another ferry south of the upper ferry. This ferry crossed at the mouth of Sherman's Creek where it empties into the Susquehanna and became known as the lower ferry.¹⁷

The year when the upper ferry was started by John and Daniel is uncertain but is usually given in sources as 1788, calculated from a statement Daniel Clark wrote in a July 1800 advertisement in Harrisburg's *Oracle of Dauphin*.¹⁸ In this statement, Daniel Clark has a war of words with another ferry owner, Mathias Flam, over ferry rights. In the advertisement, Daniel states that he "has conducted this Ferry for twelve years past." This is the only indirect evidence as to when Clark's Ferry began. This date is problematic, as in both the 1788 and 1789 Cumberland County tax assessments John is taxed for 200 acres and livestock, but no ferry, and tax records for Cumberland County are missing for 1790, 1791, and 1792. In the 1793 tax record, John is assessed for 200 acres, two horses, three cows, and one ferry.¹⁹ This is the first primary government source mentioning the ferry. Given that counties



FIGURE 3 Detail, Melish-Whiteside Map of Dauphin and Lebanon Counties, 1818. Courtesy Pennsylvania State Archives (MG-II, no. 82).

assessed properties for taxes in the fall of the year before they were listed, the ferry could have begun anytime between late fall 1788 and late fall of 1792. Hopefully further research will reconcile this discrepancy and eventually uncover a definite year for the ferry's establishment.²⁰

As previously noted, when John Clark purchased the Goudy property there were "two small dwelling houses."²¹ One of these dwellings was possibly used later as the wooden part of Clark's Tavern. Oral lore within the Smith family, who lived in Clark's Tavern from 1880 until 1974, is that the earliest part of the tavern was log.²² No historic or archaeological evidence has been found to substantiate this, but given the early time period when Goudy's houses were constructed, it does seem probable that they would have been simple log structures.

We know that by 1798 John had built a stone addition onto an earlier wooden structure. The earliest historic document describing the "wood and stone" building is the US Direct Tax of 1798 (more commonly known as the "Glass Tax"). The tax lists the owner as John Clark, but does not specifically state that the building was a tavern.²³ Also the assessment states the building is made of "wood and stone," measuring 46 × 22 feet, and two stories tall, with twelve windows and 144 windowpanes.²⁴ The dimensions of this original "wood and stone" structure are similar to the footprint of the section of the tavern facing North Market Street today.

The first documented record of the building being "a house of public entertainment" (i.e., a tavern) does not appear until 1801. That August, John's son Robert applied for and received a tavern license.²⁵ It is not known if his father applied for a license before Robert. John's license may have been lost or he may have been running an illegal tavern known as a tippling house. There was a considerable government fee for running a licensed tavern. As a result, despite the possibility of a fine, illegal taverns or tippling houses were widespread.²⁶ The only evidence showing that John ran a tavern, legally or illegally, is found in his estate inventory. When John died of unknown causes in 1800, among the items listed in the inventory is "China Delft & Queens Ware in Bar."²⁷ Bars in taverns during that time period were wooden cages used to keep and serve liquor.²⁸

A GLIMPSE OF LIFE AT JOHN CLARK'S TAVERN, CIRCA 1800

Combining information from the 1798 US Direct Tax, Clark's Estate Inventory of 1800, the federal census of 1800, and an examination of the

interior of the tavern's original stone structure, a glimpse of life in the tavern around 1800 can be envisioned.²⁹ In the federal census, there are ten Clark family members living at the tavern. Males listed are as follows: two from ages ten to sixteen, two from sixteen to twenty-six, one from twenty-six to forty-five, and one forty-five and over. Presumably, John was the male over age forty-five. Females are listed as one from ten to sixteen, two from sixteen to twenty-six, and one from twenty-six to forty-five.³⁰ With this many family members, as well as traveling guests and visiting local people, life in the tavern must have been at times crowded and chaotic. Travelers stopping to eat and/or stay overnight, as well as local people visiting the public room to pick up mail, play games, catch up on the latest news, socialize, and enjoy an alcoholic beverage may all have been in the tavern at the same time. In most taverns the public room was the main gathering place for activities where both "meals and services" were offered.³¹ For reasons discussed later, it is believed the original public room in Clark's Tavern was located in the small wooden/log section of the structure. Because of its small size, some tavern services must have also been provided in the stone part of the tavern.

Today, the early wooden/log section of the tavern in which the public room was located is no longer present. It is believed to have collapsed sometime in the mid-1800s.³² It was replaced shortly afterward with the current balloon-frame wooden structure. The first floor of today's frame structure is divided into two rooms. One small room faces North Market Street while a smaller entry hall behind it faces Clark Street. The size of the living space of the two rooms combined is 19 × 11 feet or 209 square feet. Since the small footprint of the present-day frame structure is similar to the original wooden/log building, the first floor of the original structure most likely had only one room. This room would have been used as the public room.

Adjoining today's frame structure is the original stone section of the tavern. An early board wall divides the first floor of the stone section into two rooms, a larger room containing a fireplace and a smaller stair hallway. The dimensions of the large room are 19 × 19 feet and the stair hallway is 8 × 19 feet. Adding about one foot for the width of the beaded board wall, the total square footage of both rooms combined is 608 square feet. Based on an architectural study of the first floor large room and stair hallway, we believe that the present first-floor plan is basically the same as the original.³³

The question arises as to what activities were conducted in the first-floor rooms of the stone and wooden/log sections of the building. The answer can be found by examining the construction of the original stone part of the

building and John Clark's two-page estate inventory of 1800. In reading parts of this enlightening inventory, there is a sense the reader is walking through the tavern room by room, for items are grouped according to the areas in which they were found.³⁴ Looking at these groupings, along with the type of fireplace found on the first floor of the stone part of the tavern, we have some understanding of how the stone and wooden/log sections of the tavern were used.

Most of the first page of John Clark's inventory is dedicated to recording his exterior possessions: animals, crops, and tools, as well as materials used for his ferry business. The last section of page 1 begins to list the tavern furnishings, beginning with furnishings that might be expected in a "dinning room." These include three large tables: "1 dinning table," "1 mahogany breakfast table," and "1 walnut breakfast table." In addition, the inventory lists "2 small walnut tables" as well as "18 Windsor chairs." Most of the tables and chairs must have been used for dining in the large room on the first floor of the stone part of the tavern. The two smaller tables and some of the chairs might have been used in the smaller first-floor room of the wooden/log section. The stone fireplace in the dining room is designed only for warmth, not for cooking. This eliminates this room as a possible kitchen for the tavern.³⁵

On the second page, after a list of beds (presumably on the second floor), are listed items found in a food preparation area, that is, the kitchen.³⁶ Kitchen items in the inventory include "1 Old Walnut Table & Dough Tray, 1 Dresser [hutch/cupboard] & Kitchen Furniture." These items were, of course, for preparing meals, done using a large walk-in fireplace. Additional items grouped together were for serving. They included "China Delft & Queens Ware in Bar & Cupboards, 1 Half Dozen Silver Tea Spoons & Silver Tea Tongs, 4 Servers & Knives and Forks and Brass Candlesticks."³⁷ Because there was not a cooking fireplace in the stone addition and the cooking and serving items were listed together with the tavern's bar, it would appear that both the kitchen and the bar for the tavern were in the first-floor room of the small wooden/log section of the tavern. Since the cooking was done in this room and the beverages served, this would have been the public room of the tavern. An excellent visual representation of what the public room inside Clark's Tavern might have looked like can be seen in John Lewis Krimmel's 1814 painting, *Village Tavern* (see fig. 4).³⁸ Although small, this room was probably where most activities except dining, sleeping, and larger events such as weddings and dances took place.



FIGURE 4 John Lewis Krimmel, *Village Tavern*, 1814, oil painting.

If the public room and dining room on the first floor were crowded and chaotic, the second-floor bedrooms at night were likely not much better. The rooms on the second floor of the stone part of the tavern replicate the first-floor rooms with a stair hallway and one large room. A beaded board wall, however, divided the large room into two rooms of unequal size. Only the larger of the two was heated with a fireplace. It is not known how many rooms were above the kitchen/public room in the wooden/log section of the tavern. Given the small size of the building, it was probably just one or possibly two rooms. In 1800, in taverns such as Clark's, "sleeping had not yet become the intimate and private act it is today . . . and customers shared the rooms of the tavern keeper's family." Such an arrangement must have been extremely crowded and uncomfortable for everyone. Most eighteenth-century taverns were furnished with from six to eight beds. This would allow the tavern to sleep twelve to sixteen men. Before 1800, women travelers were uncommon. If they did travel, they would have experienced the same rudimentary conditions as men.³⁹

The inventory lists seven bedsteads—six of them feather beds and one a chaff bed. Of these beds, four had curtains.⁴⁰ "Bed curtains were used, perhaps as a concession to privacy." With two persons to a bed, Clark's seven beds would have been enough to accommodate fourteen adults. If five of these beds were used for Clark's ten family members, only the two remaining beds would have been available for four guests. Although there were no Clark children under ten years old at that time, if two of the younger children were small, they might have slept across the foot of a bed, thus freeing up another

bed for guests.⁴¹ While the peak of their tavern business did not come until after an addition was added to the rear of the building, there must have been times when there were more guests than beds.⁴² If so, where did they sleep? In reality, travelers staying overnight in a tavern slept wherever they could find a spot. Perhaps some of John Clark's family members were evicted for the night and their beds used for customers. It is just as likely, however, that guests slept on a pile of straw with a blanket on the floor of the public room, stair hallway, or dining room.⁴³

A DIFFICULT YEAR FOR THE CLARK FAMILY

In April 1800 John Clark died, leaving his son Robert as his executor. The following December, John's eldest son Daniel, of whom the *Oracle of Dauphin* stated was "in the prime of life," passed away after a short illness, leaving his brother Robert to manage his affairs as well. There is no will on record for either John or Daniel Clark. A look into how successful John Clark had been as a businessman can be found by again examining the first page of his estate inventory. His personal property was valued at 313 pounds, a considerable sum for the time, and included four horses, several cows, pigs, and sheep, as well as the three "flats" or rafts, with which to operate the ferry. John was a successful ferryman, farmer, and tavern owner. Outside of his land and buildings, about 46 percent of his wealth was invested in farming, 24 percent in ferrying, and 30 percent in the tavern.⁴⁴ Robert Clark inherited the ferry, tavern, and farmland, as well as a number of debts owed to both his father and brother, and inherited them at a commercially opportune time.⁴⁵

ROBERT BUILDS ON HIS FATHER'S SUCCESS

In the early 1800s, the Conestoga wagon was a main transportation vehicle for heavy land commerce, made to transport freight over rugged roads.⁴⁶ Being pulled by four to six large Conestoga horses, a local variation of a draft horse, or oxen, the wagons moved farm products from rural areas to towns and cities, then returned to outlying areas carrying manufactured commodities.⁴⁷ By the time Robert inherited his father's ferry, the Conestoga wagon was a major means for transporting agricultural and manufactured goods back and forth across the Susquehanna River. "It was not uncommon to see fifteen or twenty of these large wagons, drawn by six or eight horses each, in the old [Clark's Ferry] inn-yard and along the road nearby, waiting their turn for the ferryboats."⁴⁸

With a steady increase in demand for ferry service in the early 1800s came an equal need for tavern service. As a result, sometime after 1800, it was probably Robert who added a stone wing to the rear of the original wood/log and stone sections of the building. This was the third stage in the building's development and the second stage for the tavern. This new section of the tavern consisted of a stone wing running perpendicular to the earlier wooden/log and stone sections giving the tavern an "L" shape (see fig. 5).⁴⁹

The tavern's front now faced south towards Clark's Run and what is today Clark Street, instead of being oriented toward North Market Street, and was larger than both of the earlier two sections of the tavern combined, containing about 952 square feet. It had four rooms on the first floor and three or four rooms on the second. It was built in a five-bay Georgian style with a balance of rooms on either side of a central stairway and a chimney at either end of the building. The authors believe that with the new addition John's earlier stone structure became a private family residence for the Clarks, the

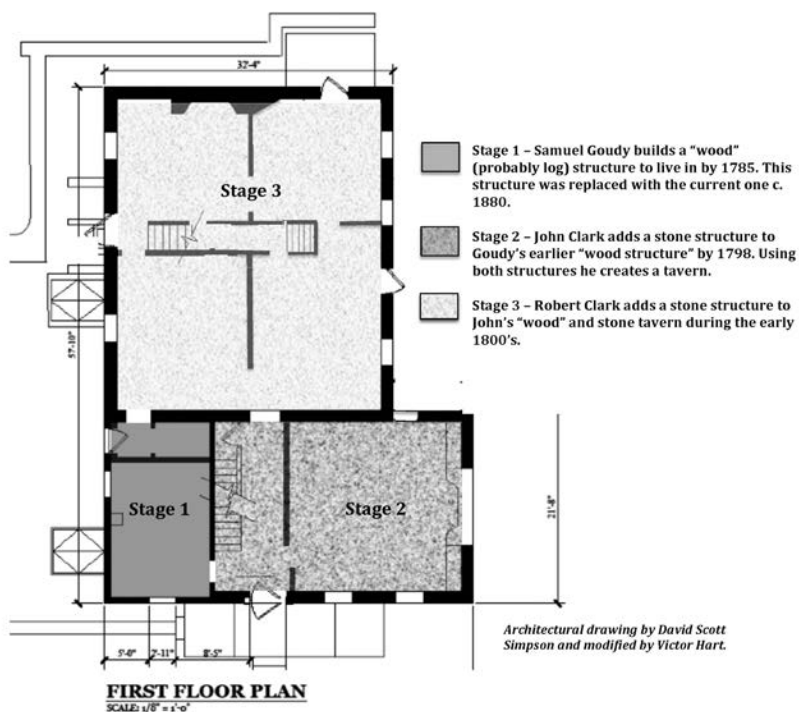


FIGURE 5 The three building stages of the tavern. Floor plan by Victor Hart.

first since the tavern opened. It is not known how the earlier wooden part of the tavern was used after the addition was built.⁵⁰

From the successful ferry and tavern business, Robert began investing surplus capital in other ventures. He purchased numerous tracts of land and early industries in both Cumberland (later Perry), and Dauphin counties, and profits eventually allowed him to partner in establishing a stage line.⁵¹ Indications of his holdings are given in a description of his properties advertised for rent in the November 1827 issue of the *Oracle of Dauphin*. In the advertisement, Clark offers for lease: a merchant mill in Petersburg, Perry County, with house and barn; a complete sawmill at the mouth of Little Juniata Creek; another farm in Petersburg with 216 acres, house, and barn; a farm and ferry at the mouth of Sherman's Creek; a farm adjoining Clark's Ferry, containing 120 acres; and a tavern opposite the mouth of the Juniata in Dauphin County, with a large dwelling house, still, and fifty acres of land (see fig. 6).⁵²

Robert Clark's first wife, Mary Stuart (or Stewart), died in 1806 and it appears he would not marry again until late in life.⁵³ In 1808 Robert, together with numerous tavern and innkeepers along the river, formed the Juniata Mail Stage Company.⁵⁴ This initial stage line presaged the route of the commonwealth's Main Line of Public Works (the Pennsylvania canal system) some fifteen years before its establishment, and would later evolve into part of the old William Penn Highway (US routes 22/322). As an entrepreneur and businessman, it seems that Robert Clark, with both tavern and ferry to help travelers cross the river, was uniquely positioned to profit doubly from the stage line.


At Clark's Ferry on November 28, 1811, Robert's sister Jane married John Boden, the high sheriff of Cumberland County. Earlier in 1800, Boden had taken charge of the tavern for a short time after his future father-in-law John Clark died.⁵⁵ There is no reason to believe the marriage between John Boden and Jane Clark was arranged, but records show that Boden and Robert Clark were partners in several business ventures. Perhaps the most significant was a gristmill operation that later became the Duncannon Flouring Mill on Little Juniata Creek. William Ramsey (Carlisle attorney and future US Representative) started the mill in partnership with Clark and Boden. John Boden also held a commission as a brigadier in the Pennsylvania State Militia. In 1821 he built the elegant brick tavern building still standing on the Harrisburg Pike east of Carlisle. It was known as the "Sign of the Rising Sun." He was the tavern's owner from 1821 to 1823.⁵⁶

VALUABLE PROPERTY
For Rent.

PROPOSALS

Will be received from this date until *Saturday the 22d day of December next*, (inclusive) for Renting for one or more years, the following described valuable property, to wit:


THAT WELL KNOWN

TAVERN  STAND, FARM &  FERRY HOUSE.

called Clark's Ferry, now in the occupancy of John Boden, Esq. situate on the Perry side of the Susquehanna river. The farm contains *Two Hundred and Fifty Acres* of first-rate land; one half of which is cleared.

ALSO:

One other Farm, containing 150 acres, about one half of which is cleared, having thereon erected a full **Patent Distillery,** in complete operation.

Also—One other Farm, Situate in Wheatfield township, Perry county, bounded by lands of Frederick Speck, Esq. and others, containing 300 acres, more or less, about 8 acres of which are cleared, on which is erected a good **HOUSE and BARN, a  **Crist Mill**  AND SAW MILL,** in good repair.

Also—One other small Farm, & Ferry in said township, situate at the mouth of Sherman's creek, with a comfortable Dwelling House and Barn thereon.

Also—One other Farm of 500 Acres, One hundred acres, more or less of which are cleared, situate in said township, with a House and Barn thereon erected.

ALSO—the

Tavern Stand & Ferry now in the occupancy of Mr. James MARSH, on the Dauphin side of the Susquehanna river. As most of this property is well known to the public, further description is deemed unnecessary.

ROBERT CLARK.

Clark's Ferry, Nov. 27, 1827.

FIGURE 6 Valuable properties listed for rent by Robert Clark, November 27, 1827, issue of the *Oracle of Dauphin*.

During the War of 1812 Robert Clark enlisted in Co. C of the Second Pennsylvania militia under Capt. J. S. Smith, and mustered out with the rank of sergeant, serving from August 7, 1814, until February 17, 1815.⁵⁷ In his absence, Joseph Robinson ran the tavern. Robinson was granted a license to run the tavern in August of 1814.⁵⁸

An interesting account of a trip on Clark's Ferry also occurred in 1814. Benjamin Long, five years of age, crossed the Susquehanna on the ferry with his family, on their way to their newly purchased farm in Pfoutz Valley near Millerstown, Perry County. At the time of the crossing, it was storming and the Susquehanna River was at flood stage. To compensate for the river current, raftsmen used horses to haul rafts far up the Dauphin County side of the river. The Long family had two wagons, and a late day thunderstorm separated each of them on opposite sides of the river. Benjamin Long's account describes how he had made it across the river on the ferry with his mother and the first wagon. His father and the second wagon, however, remained stranded on the eastern shore of the river. Benjamin described the relief he felt the next morning when the wagon with his father safely made it to the western side of the river and they continued on to their new farmstead.⁵⁹ The story is interesting not only because it describes an early river crossing, but also that ferrymen continued to operate the rafts during high water.

The Pennsylvania General Assembly established Perry County in 1820 from the northern part of Cumberland County. Clark's Ferry vied for the distinction of being selected as a potential site for a new county seat, being listed as the tenth potential location by a board of commissioners selected by the governor. The location was fully eliminated in a second round. Two years prior, in 1818, the Commonwealth determined that a canal bridge across the Susquehanna would be built near the site of Clark's upper ferry landing at the tavern or below the lower ferry at Sherman's Creek. As a result, Robert Clark began to diversify his interests in anticipation of new business opportunities. In 1822 he began establishing new stage lines westward to Landisburg, Blain, and Concord, in Franklin County.⁶⁰

By April of 1825, Robert had joined John Blair and Company in "running their Stages three times a week . . . in less than four days" between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. The "fare for the whole distance" was \$10.00. If you traveled only part of the way, the fare was "six cents per mile." Ever the shrewd businessmen, Robert and John, in their advertising for the stage line used the disclaimer, "All baggage at the risk of the owners" (fig. 7).⁶¹ Also in 1825,

Stage fare reduced on the Northern Route turnpike road from Harrisburg to Pittsburg.



THE Stage proprietors on the above route have determined on running their Stages three times a week, to run through in less than four days, leave Harrisburg and Pittsburg respectively every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday mornings.

Fare for the whole distance \$10 00
 Way Passengers six cents per mile
 All Baggage at the risk of the owners.

By the above arrangement passengers going to or from Baltimore or to or from Philadelphia either by the Lancaster or Reading route will be certain of passing on without delay or disappointment. In addition to a connexion with the Baltimore and Philadelphia line of Stages at Harrisburg our line will connect at Pittsburg with the Washington, Beaver and Erie Stages, which will accommodate travellers to any part of the western country. The Bellefonte and Erie stage leaves Harrisburg every Tuesday and Saturday mornings.

**John Blair & Co.
 &
 Robert Clark.**

* * * The Printers who have formerly inserted advertisements for this line of Stages will be so good as to insert this.

FIGURE 7 "Stage Fare Reduced," classified advertisement, April 23, 1825, issue of the *Oracle of Dauphin*.

Robert began a route to Bloomfield (the new county seat of Perry County), and the new town of Ickesburg. This route was quickly abandoned, most likely due to fiscal concerns.

DECLINE OF THE FERRY AND TAVERN ENTERPRISES

By 1828, the Commonwealth's covered bridge across the Susquehanna was completed. Although called Clark's Ferry Bridge, the bridge was not

CLARK'S FERRY AND TAVERN

constructed directly at either Clark's upper or lower ferry. Because of cheaper construction costs, the bridge was built from Duncan's Island to a small point on the Dauphin County side. The bridge was to connect the new Juniata Division of the Pennsylvania Canal to the Susquehanna Division. Robert Clark had purchased eight parcels of land in Dauphin County. Five of these were directly in the route where the canal would pass (fig. 8).⁶² When the canal was built through his properties, Robert's natural resources were used and some of his property destroyed. Along with these losses, Robert knew that the new bridge would ruin his ferry business. In response to this potential loss, Robert tried to halt progress on canal construction.

A meeting was held on August 11, 1827, at Clark's Tavern to sell contracts for building the canal and a dam that would allow canal boats to cross the Susquehanna. Robert Clark tried to stop or at least cover his losses by personally placing in the hand of Charles Mowery, the Canal Commissioner, the following note, "Sir: TAKE NOTICE, That I will prosecute all and every person or persons, who shall be found on my premises, erecting any dam or dams, for the purpose of injuring any of my ferries on the Susquehanna River, or

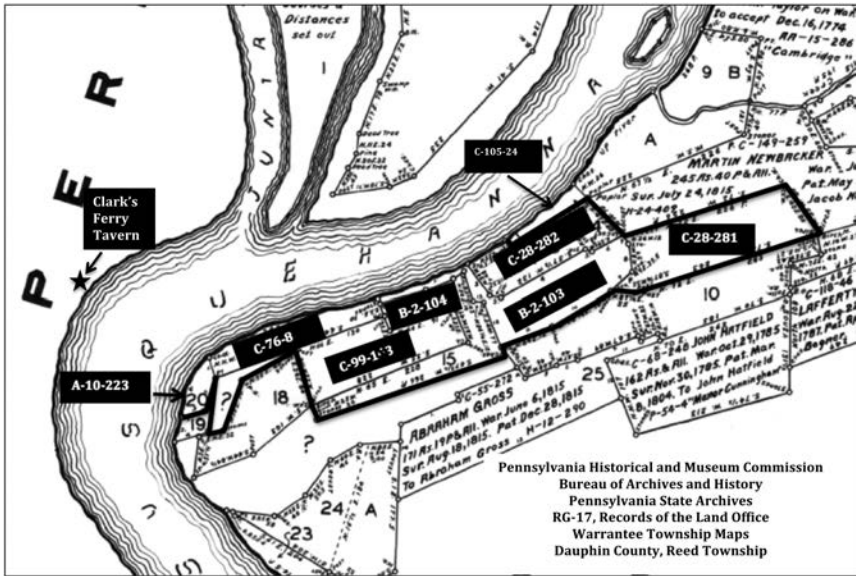


FIGURE 8 Composite map of Dauphin County properties acquired by Robert Clark across from Clark's Ferry Tavern. Compiled and modified by Victor Hart from Pennsylvania State Archives Land Records, Survey Books and Pages, B-2-103, C-28-281, C-28-282, B-2-104 and A-10-223.

injuring any other of my property, bordering on said river.” To no avail, he posted a similar note on the wall of his barroom. As stated in the annual reports of the Canal Commissioners, despite Robert’s protest, contracts were awarded by Commissioner Mowery for both canal and dam construction by the end of the meeting.⁶³

After the dam and canal were built, not without some merit, Robert Clark petitioned the Canal Commission stating that the building of the canal had caused approximately \$43,650 in damages. The most critical damage he assessed was the ruin of his ferry business, which he valued at \$30,000.⁶⁴ The commonwealth agreed to pay \$500 to Robert Clark for the destruction of his stables at his ferry landing in Dauphin County. On appeal, he was awarded \$2,100, nowhere near the initial amount he claimed the new bridge cost him.⁶⁵

The new bridge would not only allow wagon and pedestrian traffic a year-round river crossing, but also facilitate a towpath for the Pennsylvania Canal in the early 1830s. The Pennsylvania Canal was part of the broader Philadelphia to Pittsburgh to Ohio Valley connection. Its ultimate competition was with the Erie Canal to the north and the soon-to-be named Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to the south.

This first Clark’s Ferry Bridge was somewhat unique. A Burr-arch covered bridge, it had double decks, with one lane atop another instead of having two lanes on one deck. Traveling on the bridge was famously described in 1842 by Charles Dickens in his *American Notes*. Dickens was on his way to Pittsburgh via the Pennsylvania Canal. He wrote after leaving Harrisburg on a canal packet:

As night came on, and we drew in sight of the first range of hills, which are the outposts of the Alleghany Mountains, the scenery, which had been uninteresting hitherto, became more bold and striking. The wet ground reeked and smoked, after the heavy fall of rain, and the croaking of the frogs (whose noise in these parts is almost incredible) sounded as though a million of fairy teams with bells were travelling through the air, and keeping pace with us. The night was cloudy yet, but moonlight too: and when we crossed the Susquehanna river—over which there is an extraordinary wooden bridge with two galleries, one above the other, so that even there, two boat teams meeting, may pass without confusion—it was wild and grand.⁶⁶

It is telling to note that Dickens makes no mention of Clark's Tavern. When crossing the Susquehanna, he used the sleeping accommodations available on the canal boat rather than stopping at a local facility. The dynamics of traveling west were changing.

As a result of the new bridge, Robert Clark sold most of his interests in the stage business to Calder and Wilson Company of Harrisburg. It is believed, though not substantiated, that he kept the tavern, leasing it out until his death April 4, 1855. After his death, his second wife, Margaretta Bovard, inherited it. He had married Margaretta around 1836 and along with her relocated to Saviile Township, Perry County, where he is listed on both the 1840 and 1850 census. In his last will and testament, dated October 10, 1842, he states that he is "Robert Clark of Clark's Ferry Perry County."⁶⁷ Robert was buried at the old Duncannon Presbyterian Church Cemetery above the ferry and tavern that he ran for so long. Margaretta would remarry, to Zachariah Rice, one of the principal operators of stage lines in the state in the mid-1800s. She died in 1874 and is buried in Landisburg Cemetery, Tyrone Township, Perry County.

H. H. Hain, in his 1922 *History of Perry County*, lists two other innkeepers for Clark's Tavern, Henry Lemon and William Wilson.⁶⁸ Little information has been found regarding who they were and when they kept the facility. By the start of the Civil War in 1861, the building was known as the Topley Hotel, and served as both the post office and mustering location for Company B of the Thirteenth Pennsylvania Reserves, part of the famed Pennsylvania Bucktails.⁶⁹ The company, raised in Perry County, was known as the "Morgan Rifles."

In March of 1865 the tavern structure survived a devastating flood by the combined Juniata and Susquehanna rivers. Newspaper accounts report the rivers were twenty-two feet above low water stage and most houses had five feet of water inside them: "Surrounding the old stone tavern were two barns and some other buildings. When the water receded the old stone tavern was found to be the only remaining structure."⁷⁰ It is possible that this flood rendered the structure unlivable as it was purportedly used as a storage facility for hay or straw around this time. On March 17, 1880, it was seized by the county sheriff, advertised for sheriff sale, and sold to Michael and Enos Smith on April 4, 1880.⁷¹ When the Smiths bought it, the building had already been converted "for rental of four different families with necessary outbuildings."⁷² It remained in the Smith family as three apartments for almost a century

until 1974, when Max Smith sold it.⁷³ The building then passed through several different owners.

Due to be razed or condemned, the building was saved from the wrecking ball when the Borough of Duncannon purchased it in 2012. Since that time Victor Hart, Tom Prescott, and numerous volunteers with the Historical Society of Perry County have conducted archaeological research uncovering thousands of artifacts from both prehistoric and historic time periods. Although in need of repairs and a comprehensive plan of restoration, much of the building's historic early federal (1790–1810) fabric remains intact and is well worth preserving. At the beginning of 2016, the borough of Duncannon transferred ownership to the Historical Society of Perry County, who plans to restore and preserve the oldest parts of the tavern and adaptively reuse portions as community meeting rooms.

With the construction of the first Clark's Ferry Bridge in 1828–29, Clark's ferry business was effectively destroyed. The Northern Turnpike, of which it was a part, and later subsequent Clark's Ferry covered bridges, all fueled the importance of what would become in 1926 the automotive route to the west, the William Penn Highway, or US Route 22. The first concrete Clark's Ferry Bridge was completed in 1925 by the firm of Modjeski and Masters of Harrisburg, and the second and current concrete structure in 1986 by PennDOT.⁷⁴

Though modern changes rendered the ferry and tavern obsolete, both hold significance on a local, state, and national level in terms of what they reveal not only about the early federal period, but moreover the American transportation revolution from 1750 to the advent of the automobile. Taverns were built at locales and crossroads, but few others occupy such a centrally propitious locale along the junction of two major river routes, as does the Clark's Ferry tavern. Standing at the confluence, one can imagine foot traffic along well-worn Indian paths, pack horses carrying the first traders, large rafts ferrying Conestoga wagons and eventually stagecoaches crossing the river, the building of the first massive Burr-arch covered bridge at the site, the towpath for the Pennsylvania Canal boats, the rise in the late 1840s of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and finally the paving and widening of the roadway and new bridge of the William Penn Highway and US routes 22/322. The tavern and ferry built and run by John, Daniel, and Robert Clark, at the gateway to the Juniata Valley, serves as an important and worthy reminder of the evolution of state and national transportation history—a history worthy of further interpretation, archaeological investigation, and preservation.

CLARK'S FERRY AND TAVERN

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NOTES

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1. Steve Smith, personal communication with the authors, September 13, 2015.
2. This place name is an error on the part of Watson and repeated by later compilers such as Ellis and Hungerford, and Hain. The Indians did cross at present-day Duncannon, but Queenashawakee is west of Williamsport where Quenshukeny Run meets the Susquehanna
3. Henry H. Hain, *History of Perry County, Pennsylvania: Including Descriptions of Indian and Pioneer Life from the Time of Earliest Settlement* (Harrisburg, PA: Hain-Moore Company, 1922), 123–26; Jonathan Edwards, ed., *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd, With a Biographical Sketch of the Life and Work of Jonathan Edwards by Philip E. Howard, Jr.*, 10th printing (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2001).
4. David Hsing, "Death on the Juniata: Delawares, Iroquois and Pennsylvanians in a Colonial Whodunit," *Pennsylvania History* 65, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 445–77.
5. Hain, *History of Perry County*, 122.

6. Ibid., 120.
7. Cumberland County, PA, Deeds, Title Transfer, "Samuel Goudy and Wife, January 23, 1787 to John Clark," Books H and I, 1787-1791, vol. 1, microfilm roll 2-3, Cumberland County Historical Society (hereafter "Title transfer, Goudy to Clark").
8. Thomas Lynch Montgomery, ed., *Pennsylvania Archives*, 5th ser., vol. 1 (Harrisburg, PA: State Printer, 1906), 100.
9. Cumberland County, PA, Tax Rates, Rye Township, 1786, microfilm roll 150, Cumberland County Historical Society.
10. Samuel Goudy, "Advertisement of land to be sold," *Carlisle Gazette*, December 27, 1785.
11. A reading of the title transfer between Samuel Goudy and John Clark uses the archaic word *messuages* meaning "a dwelling house together with its outbuildings, curtilage, and the adjacent land appropriated to its use."
12. Hain, *History of Perry County*, 395-96.
13. Title transfer, Goudy to Clark.
14. Ibid.
15. *Carlisle Gazette*, December 27, 1785.
16. John Melish and Sam Harrison, *Map of Dauphin and Lebanon Counties*. Constructed by virtue of an Act of the Legislature of Pennsylvania passed 19th March 1816, printed Philadelphia, 1818, Manuscript Group 11, no. 82, Pennsylvania State Archives; available online at <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/117-534WhitesideMaps/1017-534WhitesideMapInterface.htm>.
17. Frank M. Masters, "Notes and Data Relative to the Building of the Bridge Across the Susquehanna River at Clark's Ferry," 1925, unpublished manuscript, Historical Society of Perry County, 28, 30, 35, 38, 39.
18. *Oracle of Dauphin*, July 14 and 21, 1800.
19. 1788, 1793 Cumberland County tax records, available at the Cumberland County Historical Society.
20. John C. Fralish Jr., e-mail to authors, August 8, 2015.
21. *Carlisle Gazette*, December 27, 1785.
22. Max Smith, e-mail to authors, February 19, 2015.
23. US Direct Tax of 1798 for Cumberland County, available at the Cumberland County Historical Society.
24. Ibid.
25. Cumberland County Tavern License Application, 1801, available online at http://records.ccpa.net/webblink_public_print/DocView.aspx?id=502700&dbid=7.
26. Kym S. Rice, *Early American Taverns: For the Entertainment of Friends and Strangers* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1983), 64-65.
27. Cumberland County Register of Wills, Estate Inventories: Clark, John, Folder C-93, Cumberland County Archives, Carlisle, PA, May 7, 1800 hereafter "John Clark Inventory").

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28. Rice, *Early American Taverns*, 96.
29. Victor Hart, "2012–2015 Archaeological and Architectural Study of Clark's Ferry Tavern," in possession of the author.
30. Federal Census of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, 1790–1910.
31. Rice, *Early American Taverns*, 94–102.
32. Undated news article. "Clark's Ferry File," The Perry Historians, Harry Lenig Genealogical Library, Newport, PA.
33. Hart, "Archaeological and Architectural Study."
34. John Clark Estate Inventory, May 7, 1800, Estate Records, Cumberland County Archives, accessed through microfilm at the Cumberland County Historical Society.
35. Ibid.
36. Hart, "Archaeological and Architectural Study."
37. John Clark Estate Inventory.
38. Krimmel, John Lewis, *Village Tavern, 1814*. Toledo Museum of Art.
39. Rice, *Early American Taverns*, 102, 103, 105.
40. John Clark Estate Inventory.
41. Rice, *Early American Taverns*, 103–4, 105.
42. Unfortunately, no registers or ledgers of accounts have been found for Clark's Tavern to date.
43. Rice, *Early American Taverns*, 102–3.
44. John Clark Estate Inventory.
45. A request by Robert Clark for settlement of the debts owed to John Clark's estate and/or monies owed from Clark to others was published in the *Oracle of Dauphin*, October 6, 1800.
46. "The Conestoga Wagon," Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/things/4280/conestoga_wagon/478210; William Shank, *The Amazing Pennsylvania Canals* (York, PA: American Canal and Transportation Center, 1981), 5.
47. Colleen Moran, "Conestoga," *Manifest Destiny: The Trails*, available online at <http://manifestdestinytrails.weebly.com/conestoga-wagons.html>
48. F. Ellis and A. N. Hungerford, *History of That Part of the Susquehanna and Juniata Valleys Embraced in the Counties of Mifflin, Juniata, Perry, Union and Snyder, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Everts, Peck and Richards, 1886), 1074.
49. Hart, "Archaeological and Architectural Study."
50. Ibid.
51. *Oracle of Dauphin*, April 23, 1825.
52. Advertisement, "Valuable Property for Rent" *Oracle of Dauphin*, November 27, 1827.
53. Uncorroborated sources state that Mary Stuart was Robert's first wife, and lived from 1770 until 1806. Together they had at least five children, Margaret,

- James, George, Maria and Lucinda. Available online at http://www.ancestry.com/genealogy/records/robert-clark_27834868.
54. Ellis and Hungerford, *History*, 429.
 55. Ebersole Collection, Boden Family File, The Perry Historians, Newport, PA.
 56. Merri Lou Scribner Schaumann, *Taverns of Cumberland County Pennsylvania, 1750–1840* (Carlisle, PA: Cumberland County Historical Society, 1994), 104.
 57. Record of Burial Place of Veteran, Perry County, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Military Affairs, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, PA, *Pennsylvania Veterans Burial Cards, 1929–1990*; RG-19 Series Number 1.
 58. Cumberland County Pennsylvania Tavern License Applications, available at <http://www.ccpa.net/2566/Archives>.
 59. Theodore K. Long, “Forty Letters to Carson Long,” Carson Long Institute, New Bloomfield, 1931, 12–13.
 60. Hain, *History of Perry County*, 222–23, 366–67.
 61. *Oracle of Dauphin*, April 23, 1825.
 62. Pennsylvania State Archives Land Records, Survey Book, Subseries and Pages: B-2-103, C-28-281, C-28-282, B-2-104 and A-10-223, <http://www.phmc.pa.gov/>.
 63. Masters, “Notes and Data,” 60.
 64. Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners, Journal of the House of Representatives, 1830–31, 318–19.
 65. Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners, Journal of the House of Representatives, 1830–31, 318–19, 477.
 66. Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, chap. 10, <http://www.online-literature.com/dickens/americannotes/11/>.
 67. Robert Clark, Last Will and Testament, dated October 10, 1842. Folder C–85, The Perry Historians, Newport, PA.
 68. Hain, *History of Perry County*, 953.
 69. Osmund Rhodes, Howard Thomson and William H Rauch, *History of the “Bucktails,” Kane Rifle Regiment of the Pennsylvania Reserve Corps* (Philadelphia: Electric Printing Company, 1906), 19.
 70. Hain, *History of Perry County*, 389.
 71. David and Enos were unable to pay either taxes or mortgage on the property and it went to sheriff’s sale, where it was bought back by Enos and either his father or brother Michael (both were named Michael), for Enos and David. *Perry County Democrat*, March 31, 1880.
 72. *Perry County Democrat*, March 31, 1880.
 73. Max Smith, telephone communication with the author, March 13, 2015.
 74. Ernest H. Coleman, “American Canals,” *American Canal Society* 44, no. 1 (1983). Though somewhat confusing there were a total of five covered bridges built at Clark’s Ferry during the nineteenth century, and two concrete bridges in the twentieth, making seven bridges in total.