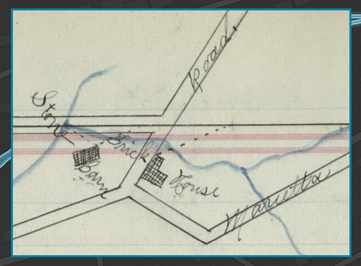
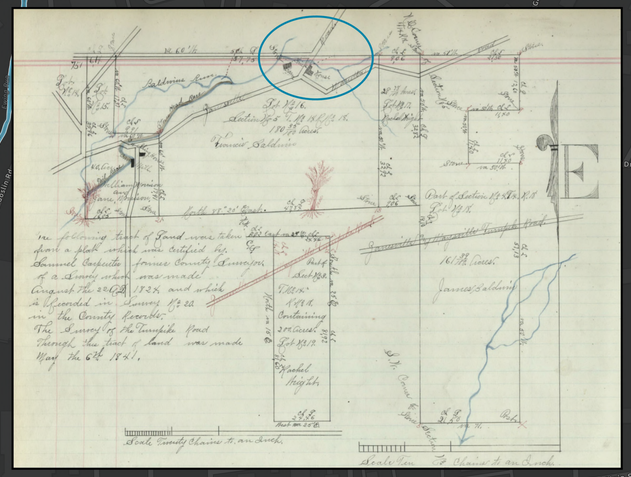
1938 Aerial Photography



1841 Survey - Book 2 Entry 748



BALDWIN INN

Lancaster Eagle-Gazette (Thursday, November 19, 1936)
The following is a portion of the article written by Lewis Cook titled:
Baldwin Hollow Once Eerie Spot; Fairfield Tavern Haunted By 'Murder' Of Proprietor

A lonely old house on the edge of a wooded hollow. Boarded windows on an incomplete "ell" of the house, staring, like the eyes of a dead man. A great stone barn built like a fort, as if to protect the house. Within the house strange sounds are heard. A rattle as of chairs, a thumping like a heavy chest being dragged downstairs, a ring as of silver coins being cast on the stone doorstep, a crash of breaking dishes, a blood-like spot that returns after washing, the tingle reminiscent of gold coins rolling across the floor. A tall, noiseless figure moving across a certain room toward the bed. The howl of a dog. Then deadly quiet. Such is the atmosphere of the old Baldwin Inn located on the Pleasantville Pike at the edge of Lancaster. Fact or fiction, folktale and greed? These are woven into the story. Zane's Trace, Ohio's first highway, passed its door. Indians, trailblazers, pioneers, packtrains, and the mail boy with his saddlebags followed this narrow woods road. Then as the trail was widened came the trains of Conestoga wagons pulled by oxen or by horses; coaches began to run with passengers and mail; cattle drivers slowly worked their herds to eastern markets, and hurried home with the proceeds in their pockets; and road agents or land pirates preyed on all.

Many of these followers of the trail stopped to be refreshed at John Baldwin's Inn. Politicians and stage coachmen, settlers and businessmen alike were to be found in his common room. Legend says that Baldwin was a pardoned pirate, one of Jean Lafitte's crew, but that made no difference to men who stopped with him. An unknown number of the pardoned men left the scenes of their piracies, changed their names and started life anew in the pioneer states. Three brothers, the legend says, changed their names; one settled in New York, one in Chillicothe and one at Lancaster. They may have been pardoned but they were still sharp. They hired an architect to draw a plan for a fine house, then each in turn used it to build his house. A year or more after the Battle of New Orleans two unusual men came to Lancaster. When directly questioned they gave the names of Baldwin and Starret, and said they were looking for purchasable land. They eventually selected and bought fifteen hundred acres north-east of the town, well-watered and wooded, with the advantage of easy transportation over the two main trails, Zane's Trace and the Marietta Road, that joined within the plot. In the subsequent division of the plot, Baldwin took the northern portion and immediately set to work building a barn. His neighbors were content with the log barns that served the double purpose of furnishing shelter for cattle and removing trees from the cleared ground. But Baldwin built of stone, quarried in a nearby hill with heavy walls as though he were making a fort to withstand attacks instead of a stable for stock. This stable became a landmark to travelers on Zane's Trace and many were the surmises as to its fortress like construction. When the barn was completed in 1818, Baldwin set to work on the stone foundation for his house. For the site, he selected the fork of the Marietta Road from Zane's Trace and across the latter from his great barn. A fine house of handmade brick with a long ell to the back. The main wing was built full two stories high, and the west side of the back ell. But for lack of funds or some other reason the east wall of the back ell was built only one story in height, with a shed roof to cap the anomalous wing. Three blind windows on the high west side stared brazenly at the traffic on the trail.

All who dealt with Baldwin found him a secretive man. He did not enter freely into the life of the community, he would not accept bank notes as payment - always demanding gold. The fluctuating value of bank notes made many fortunes and ruined many men, but Baldwin wanted gold. The neighbors wondered what he did with the coins. And from their wonder developed stories of buried treasure. A hunter was reputed to have seen Baldwin bury a bucketful of gold coins at the base of a large tree - and to have unearthed the gold later to his own benefit. A drover, returning from the eastern markets with the proceeds of his stock venture in a heavy pouch, was murdered in the upper corner room. By whom, how, and when were never known, but it was not hard to surmise why. Land pirates or robbers lay in wait along the trails. They thought nothing of murdering a traveler for his property, were it only a horse. But tavern keepers were usually careful that no major crimes were committed in their taverns. Coachmen, drovers, waggoners, and immigrants rapidly spread the bad name of a tavern known or suspected of connections with the road agents. John Baldwin died in 1840, and a nephew using the same name succeeded to the property. He tried to continue the tavern, but the building of the Zanesville-Maysville Turnpike took away his best trade and left only the drovers, die hard waggoners, and those who were not able to pay toll on the pike. The reputation of its builder, the reported murder of the drover and the question of John Baldwin's gold made the house one of conflicting repulsion and attraction. Then in 1863 two drunken neighbors infuriated by a childish quarrel, rushed into the house and attacked the owner, ill in bed. His illness and the severity of the beating killed Baldwin, and his heirs promptly moved out. This tragedy increased the countryside's awe of the Baldwin inn, and stories of ghosts haunting the site of the murders went about the neighborhood. It was a credulous age and such tales were told of many houses. The late Dr. C. C. Carter of Lancaster, in following his hobby of haunted houses, made a careful study of these stories. He found the heirs of the Baldwin estate claimed all such stories false, yet they did not care to live there after the circumstances of John Baldwin's death. We are indebted to Dr. Carter's work for this part of the legend, dealing with the ghost and reported strange sounds.

A family named Nisley eventually rented the farm, but they did as much treasure hunting as farm work. Nisley dug so much in the cellar looking for John Baldwin's gold that the foundations were weakened. He tore up the hearths, he searched the attic back of the blank windows, he searched the great stone barn, and delved behind the finish of the house. And throughout his tenancy he told stories of the ghost who visited the corner room, of many strange sounds, of a headless dog seen on moonlight nights, and of the "blood spot" in the corner room which returned no matter how hard the floor was scrubbed. The owners claimed he told these tales merely to frighten away prospective renters who might pay more than he wished to. Thus, he was allowed to make his searches for the treasure and paid but little rent. Nisley's brother, sleeping in the corner room, claimed a tall, thin, sandy-haired man appeared at his bedside. A girl hired by the Nisley's refused to work for them longer when she reported seeing the apparition. A circus hand, who offered to work for Nisley one winter, was assigned the corner room. His tale was the wildest. On the first night he slept in the room he was awakened by the tall thin man passing between the window and the bed; then suddenly all the cords of the bed were unhooked, and he fell to the floor in the bedding. There he lay, stiff with fright, until morning. Yet this quondam circus hand, when given another bedroom, stayed with the Nisley's for several years, then went West. In three years he returned, apparently wealthy, telling of prosperous horse trading. But the local wiseacres suggested that he had found some of John Baldwin's gold.

The Nisley family reported hearing crashes as of breaking dishes in the kitchen, when they were in the front of the house; and coins ringing on the doorstep, when they were in the kitchen. At nights there was a sound like heavy chairs dragging and rattling down the stairs. Or the thump, thump of a heavy chest being drawn down the stairs by a single person. Occasionally there was the sound of rolling objects in the corner, supposedly coins. Altogether the ghost was almost as active as the imaginations of the community. A succession of short-time tenants followed the Nisley family. One, after renting the farm two years, was able to purchase a fine farm in Illinois - although he had been poor before renting the Baldwin place. He was reputed to have found gold in a hollow stone of the barn's wall. Another tenant's relative, stopping for a night, claimed to have found money hidden under the eaves of the attic. Eventually the stories of the hauntings made it impossible to find a desirable renter with courage to live in the house, and for a time the sturdy old tavern stood vacant. During this period several persons tried to solve the hauntings, to catch the ghost, or to rid the house of its strange sounds. One young man set forth to "lay the ghost." He had successfully proven the ghostly sounds in the old still house at Lockville to have been the gnawing of muskrats. So, in the pride of his reputation, he took bedding into the vacant house and settled down for the night in the corner room. But the tall, thin man was no respecter of reputations; he appeared, and the young "ghost layer" departed without his bedding. At Pleasantville students in the old academy often discussed the Baldwin tavern, and wisely expressed their youthful views, made dares, and offered bets. Two boys finally determined to brave out a night in the corner room, and return the heroes of their fellows. But when their bedding was pulled from them and the tall, thin man confronted them they deserted the house, their ideas of heroism, and dashed back to Pleasantville at a speed that would have shamed Jesse Owens.

After some years of vacancy, a renter was found fearless enough to live in the house. Repairs were required. Two windows were bricked up to strengthen the wall weakened by Nisley's digging, and the blind windows in the unfinished ell were boarded up. The ghost has not walked since. Forty years have passed. Part of the barn was torn down for building material, but no gold was found. The George Baird family occupied the house for several years without being disturbed by ghosts or being enriched by the discovery of buried treasure. The old Baldwin farm is now part of Lancaster. Modern houses are being built within a short distance. The present renters have known no visitations worse than curious folk who occasionally stop to ask about the old tavern. Do ghosts "die"? Or, when the house is repaired do, they leave? People of the community do not know, but many still shake their heads at mention of the Baldwin place. They drive just a bit faster through the hollow when they pass at night, and many could not be bribed to drive down the wooded path of the old Marietta Road after dark. They have no fear of retired pirates, but their credulous and fearful imaginations give them a wholesome respect for ghosts.

Baldwin Inn was torn down in 1951 due to safety concerns.
The Stone Barn had been disassembled many years before.

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