History in West Caln Township – Part 4

Mariner's Compass (aka Sign of the Compass)

In a series of articles, The West Caln Township Historical Commission is presenting a brief portrayal of history in the Township. This fourth article is about Compass located at the western –most edge of our township. The time frame of this portrayal is during the Revolutionary War period.

> Situated at the intersection of The King's Highway (route 340) and the Octorara Trail (route 10), this location was and still is a major crossroad for travelers. According to local lore, both the inn and the village of Compassville got their names because William Penn stopped there in 1701 to get a compass bearing. In the years immediately prior to the Revolutionary War, the Inn was owned by the Culbertson family. John Culbertson was an early member of the Continental Association. During the era of the Revolution, while Ben Wallace was the innkeeper, at least two notable incidents occurred in the village. In April 1776, John Steed, a soldier in a Provincial Musketry Battalion, used a rest stop by his unit at the Inn as an opportunity to desert. A five dollar reward was offered for his capture. Two years later, Henry Skiles and a few of his Loyalist friends started an altercation with some Continental Officers at the Inn. One of the officers, Lt. Benjamin Hammon, was shot and killed. Skiles eluded the authorities but his mates were captured; they pointed to Skiles as the killer. General George Washington himself expressed the hope that the "unhappy dispute" would be "looked upon as an accidental matter," but the Radical-controlled Executive Council had other ideas. It offered a 200 Pound reward for the capture of the perpetrator of the "cruel and barbarous murder." Skiles fled to Nova Scotia, where he remained until the end of the war.

The Mariners Inn is still standing and located on the southwest corner of the intersection adjacent the convenience market. It has been a private residence for many years.