



Outdoors at the Blue Bell Inn

## *A Sneak Peek Into Blue Bell's Past* The Iconic And Ageless Blue Bell Inn, Established 1743

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Photos By Alex Lowy Photography, LLC

**OK, SO YOU KNOW THAT YOU LIVE IN BLUE BELL. BUT WHY IS IT CALLED BLUE BELL? AND IS THERE AN ACTUAL BLUE BELL SOMEWHERE? OH, AND DID GEORGE WASHINGTON SLEEP HERE?**

To answer these questions, we have to go back to my favorite century, the 18th. In those days, there were few roads and travel was very slow. As you may recall from the November issue, the opening of The Skippack Road meant that people and goods could travel by land between Philadelphia and the villages to its northwest. Then as now, travelers needed places to stop, rest, eat and sleep. Entrepreneurs built tavern and inns, to serve these needs, especially at the intersections of roads. Among the oldest in our area, at the important intersection of Skippack Pike and Penllyn –Blue Bell Pike (as they are now known), was the Blue Bell Inn.

Inns and taverns were critical to the lives of the developing villages. They served as village centers, the places that people went to meet and to share ideas and news (and gossip) among themselves and with travelers. They were so important that the village itself and the surrounding area often took the name of the inn. Ah, you see where this is heading. Yes, just as King of Prussia took the name of its local inn, so did Pigeontown come to be called Blue Bell, after the name of the Blue Bell Inn. Officially, this occurred in 1840, when the Pigeontown Post Office changed its name to the Blue Bell Post Office.

But where did the Blue Bell Inn get its name? Well, that is not so clear. On Revolutionary War maps, the inn was shown as the White Horse Inn. Sometime between then and 1840, an owner must have decided that he needed a more distinctive name – since White Horse was a fairly common name. Blue Bell was distinctive, easy to remember and easy to paint. And yes, the original blue bell is still prominently on display within the Blue Bell Inn.

Did George Washington sleep there? Well, legend says that he did, specifically in what was Room #6. He would certainly have met there and drunk and eaten there, during the time that his headquarters were at Dawesfield on Lewis Lane. There is a mildly saucy story that he kissed all of the young maids there after overhearing one of them say that it was her dearest wish to be kissed by General Washington. That doesn't sound much like the George Washington we know, but it makes a good story.

Much more certain is that thousands of Washington's troops marched by the Blue Bell Inn on its way to the Battle of Germantown, and then back again after their defeat. The battle was on October 4, 1777, and the defeat was so thorough that British cavalry pursued the fleeing American troops all the way to Blue Bell, where the American militia turned and drove the British back.

The Blue Bell Inn has operated continuously since 1743, making it one of the oldest continuously operating inns in the area. It has seen a lot of local history over the years, as it continued to serve as a meeting place for local residents. If the walls could speak, they would tell the stories of the many business deals, new business ventures and new civic organizations that were created there. For many years in the 20th century, it was the place where Republican candidates would gather on Election Day to wait for the returns, and then to celebrate victories and mourn losses.

But times and tastes have changed, and so have the expectations of local diners. Institutions survive for hundreds of years by changing with the times, and in 2013 the new owners of the Blue Bell Inn, Scott Dougherty, Kevin Clib and Leah Kaithern, showed great creativity and taste in re-imagining the Blue Bell Inn. They have managed to preserve the best of the old Blue Bell Inn, while designing a welcoming space for today's guests. Stop in soon, and be sure to ask to see the blue bell!



Blue Bell



Patrons at Blue Bell Inn 2015

**This is the sixth in a series of articles about local history brought to you by the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. If there is a topic you would like to propose for a future article, please contact me at [rcbellavance67@gmail.com](mailto:rcbellavance67@gmail.com). If you enjoy these articles, you may want to consider membership in the Society. To learn more, please visit [WValleyHS.org](http://WValleyHS.org).**



Dining Room at Blue Bell Inn 2015