

The Walloomsac Inn: A fact sheet

The Walloomsac Inn attracts much public attention due primarily to its prominent location and unkempt appearance. It is one of the most historic buildings in the picturesque village of Old Bennington. The inn, which served the public as a bed-and-breakfast as recently as 15 years ago, is now a private residence.

Due to its prominence and the public nature of this building, we have assembled this fact sheet about the inn and its history. Reports that it was built in 1764 by the first settled minister of Bennington's Old First Church, the Rev. Jedediah Dewey, for his 20-year-old son, Elijah, are exaggerated. Rev. Dewey was the builder in 1763 of the oldest frame house in Bennington, diagonally across the green from the Walloomsac Inn. In fact, the inn was built by Elijah Dewey and dates to 1771. The earliest documentation is found in a deed signed in the spring of 1771 from Moses Robinson, Bennington's biggest land owner (and future governor of Vermont as well as one of its first two U.S. Senators), to Elijah for a plot just over an acre in size.



Walloomsac Inn Postcard, 1907-1910, Printed by Raphael Tuck

A 1798 portrait of Elijah Dewey by the itinerant artist Ralph Earl includes a front view of Dewey's Tavern (Walloomsac Inn) as a two-story structure with a gambrel roof, later raised for a third story and changed to a pitched roof. Another Earl painting, a panorama of Old Bennington in 1798, shows the south and back sides of Dewey's Tavern, with a side porch and the gambrel roof. Both paintings are on permanent exhibit at the Bennington Museum.

Dewey's Tavern, along with the Catamount Tavern (Fay's Tavern), located a few yards uphill, were used by the legislature of the independent Republic of Vermont, which lasted from 1777 until statehood in 1791. The capitol of Vermont at Montpelier was not established until 1808.

The most historically prominent guests of Dewey's Inn were Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in June of 1791. Jefferson was U.S. secretary of state at the time and wished to visit the new state of Vermont. Madison accompanied him as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

After Elijah Dewey's death in 1818, his inn came into the hands of the Hicks family, and was known by that name during the best years of the stagecoach era – until trains came into this region in the early 1850s. Stagecoach travel from the Hicks Tavern to New York took four full days, 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day, through Pownal, Pittsfield, Danbury, and White Plains. The fare was nine dollars. Owner James Hicks enlarged the building in 1823, adding the third floor and installing a ballroom on the second floor. In 1848, as stagecoach travel was about to end, the inn was purchased by George Wadsworth Robinson, who changed its name from Hicks Tavern to Walloomsac House. For a few years the inn was owned by a relative, Mrs. Mary Sanford Robinson and her brother, Samuel Sanford.

In 1891 Sanford hired Walter Berry as the proprietor of the property. Berry subsequently purchased the property and added a large three-and-a-half story addition on the rear of the original building. It has been owned by the Berry family ever since.