

## LAMB TAVERN

By Ellen Knight<sup>1</sup>

Most of the old houses built in Winchester before 1800 are gone. With them have gone many stories of the people who lived there, though some are not entirely forgotten—including the most peculiar one of the “Lamb Tavern.”

It was not a tavern at all but a private dwelling, first known as the Dean House, but one incident gave it the nickname which stuck long after the house itself was gone. At what time the Dean house was built is unknown, but it was before 1798. In that year, the house was noted in a real estate survey undertaken for tax purposes. At that time it was one of only about 35 houses which were then located within the present boundaries of Winchester.

In 1885, Oliver R. Clark gave it a passing mention in his “Reminiscences of South Woburn, 1838-39.”<sup>2</sup> Alluding to its nickname, which he thought was perhaps derisive, he mentioned only its position on Washington Street and that it was occupied by “various families” and was then “wholly extinct.”

“Why do not the historical Savans [savants] of Winchester,” asked a letter writer in 1887, “give us the story of this ‘Lamb Tavern,’ where unclothed human beings held high carnival at midnight and like Sulamandes [Sulaymans?] danced through coals of fire.”<sup>3</sup>

Why not indeed? The answer was not forthcoming until 1901, in some unsigned “Observations” printed in *The Winchester Star*.<sup>4</sup>

“The ‘Lamb Tavern’ so-called ... was not a tavern, but a small, gable-roofed house, early known as the ‘Esther Dean house.’ It stood at the corner of Washington and Walnut streets.... 70 years ago Munson Johnson lived here and made shoes in the attic.

“It got the name of ‘Lamb Tavern’ for the reason that a drunken sot lived there who worked for S. S. Richardson. One night he stole a lamb out of a flock going by and roasted it whole before an open fireplace, wool off, hide on; then leaving the house all lit up, with only underclothes on, he went through the village calling the people to come to his tavern and have a cut of roast lamb. Until it was taken down it was called ‘Lamb Tavern.’ The house was removed about 1845 by N. A. Richardson, he being paid fifteen dollars for the job.”

Another house was built on the site, according to the 1901 writer, by Mr. Lawrence, a tailor, between 1845 and 1850. The building of the house has also been credited to David N. Skillings who arrived in Winchester in 1854 and whose family lived there until it was acquired in 1886 by General John M. Corse, a distinguished officer of the Civil War. Since

his death in 1893, the house has been occupied by various families.

This house still stands at the corner of Mystic Valley Parkway and Washington Street, opposite the library, marking a site of multiple layers of history of widely different character. Each person who lived on the site has added a story to the town, the “drunken sot” who stole a lamb contributing his own unique incident.



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<sup>1</sup> This article © 2018 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Feb. 19, 1997. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

<sup>2</sup> *The Winchester Record*, Vol. I, No. 2 (April 1885), pp. 52-56.

<sup>3</sup> *The Winchester Star*, Feb. 19, 1887.

<sup>4</sup> *The Winchester Star*, Oct. 18, 1901.