

# The History of Milleridge



*Milleridge Inn circa 1903*

The year is 1653. The place--a spot not far from where Milleridge Inn now stands. A group of settlers, lately arrived from New England, discuss the terms of the sale of a parcel of land with Assiapum, Chief of the Matinecock Tribe. Their leader, a Welsh farmer named Robert Williams--a cousin of Roger Williams, founder of Providence, Rhode Island--seals the bargain with 50 pounds of tea, 20 knives, 6 hatchets, 6 hoes, 6 kettles, 30 awl blades, and a quantity of clothing.

Some twelve thousand acres of virgin farmland with gently rolling hills, covering what will someday be Hicksville, Plainview, Jericho, Woodbury, and part of Syosset are his. One can only imagine Robert Williams' ecstatic pleasure at such a purchase. What were his hopes and dreams of the future in a land that had the promise of great freedom, new in the history of man?

## **Thus begins the story of Milleridge.**

Some years later, in 1672, the building that is to become Milleridge is begun by Mary Willets. It is a tiny house, consisting of only two rooms and a central fireplace. (These rooms and the fireplace still stand, and may be seen ahead and slightly to the left of the present main entrance. Its construction remains virtually untouched to this day, though the house has been built up and expanded many times in the ensuing years.)

The years slip by, and the colonies grow and prosper, first under the Dutch, then the English. Meandering roads begin to wind eastward. The North Country Road (today, Northern Blvd.), the South Country Road (Merrick Road), and the Middle Country Road (Jericho Turnpike), are muddy and rutted, but they carry commerce and settlers to and from the far-flung villages. One of these villages is Jericho. Jericho is one of the so-called "Bible Towns" of Long Island. The others are Jerusalem (today Levittown and North Wantagh) and Bethpage, which still retains its original name, founded by devoutly religious Quakers.

For almost 120 years they enjoyed a religious freedom and expression they had never known before.

In Jericho, though, not all is quiet and peaceful. The Colonies are restless. One reason is the British practiced what is called, "Quartering." Records show that the owners of Milleridge were often compelled to quarter (house) Hessian and British officers. This practice contributed to the cause of the Revolution. The main cause of the America Revolution was, who is going to own the land of America, Here life is rural and peaceful. The Willets and the Seamans, early Quaker settlers, farm the lands around Jericho, and watch warily the gathering clouds of rebellion. Milleridge has grown, too, with the families that inhabit it. An upstairs is added, a scullery, and many barns and stables adorn the rolling hills. It must have been some sight sitting on the front porch overlooking the lush farm fields and forest beyond. Wild life abounded everywhere.

# The History of Milleridge (cont'd)

In 1770, a young Quaker, Elias Hicks, marries Jemima Seaman, great-grand-daughter of Mary Willets, and begins a career of dedication and service to man and God that is to span sixty years, and will leave its mark on the world to this day. His home is here in Jericho.

Finally 1775 comes, and with it the drums of war. To the Quakers, firm believers in pacifism, the times are difficult and dangerous. Pressed by both the British and the Colonial governments, they are taxed, harassed, and heavily assessed to pay the costs of war. One can imagine their sympathies were with the Colonists, the Colonists or the British monarchs. We now know the outcome of that war, but back then it did not seem possible that the Colonists could ever prevail. It is to be noted that never before in the history of man did a group of people stand up and say, "The land we live on, the land we farm, and the land we love has to belong to us!" This was a new and uncharted period of human history.

Through the war years, the farmers and merchants of Jericho watch the tides of revolution sweep by time and again. Put upon by both sides, they stick firmly to their faith, and wait patiently for the peace that does not come for eight long years. Years that brought much change and hardship to everyone, but years whose outcome changed the face of the earth and people never saw the land in the same way again. The effect of the American Revolution was so powerful around the globe that it made the hope of freedom in foreign lands possible. Had it not been for the American Revolution there would have been no French Revolution in 1789. Freedom got a foothold in America and spread and is still spreading throughout the world.

In 1783, the war finally ends, and the farmers of the sleepy village of Jericho discover their town has grown from a small crossroad to an important stopover point for weary travelers along the Jericho Road. In an effort to forestall the opening of bars, grog houses, and hotels, Elias Hicks opened his home to all travelers. The fare is simple: stews, fish, meat, and home baked bread. After dinner, travelers are invited to spread their bedrolls around the hearth to spend the night. Though the house often holds as many as twenty guests, the Hicks family graciously refuses all offers for payment. Yet the family often finds coins left in out-of-the-way places by grateful lodgers. The coins are used to help build Quaker meetinghouses throughout New England and Pennsylvania.

In 1815, a private company undertakes the improvement of the road to Jericho, and the Jericho Turnpike Company is formed. From Jamaica eastward, the road is widened and improved, and toll stations are set up along the way. Jericho, and Milleridge, continue to grow with the increase in traffic and population.

The open house tradition at the Hicks home continues for many years, as long as Jericho is an important stopover point. However, as newer roads are built, the town slips back into quieter country ways, and the tradition slowly passes, but is never forgotten by grateful travelers who were well fed and comforted by the glowing fireplaces. Hospitality and graciousness have a permanent home at Milleridge that now span over three centuries. Today Milleridge, one of the most famous restaurants in America, still maintains the traditions of its past welcoming travelers to feast on the goods of this fine earth of ours.