

# Casselman Inn

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**



**The Casselman Inn showing historic markers at the roadside along U.S. Rt. 40, Grantsville, MD.**

The Casselman Inn has its origins in a time period when travelers made their way west along the National Pike, the most important national corridor during the early 19th century. Emigrants, livestock, carts, and Conestoga wagons filled the pike for decades, and the Casselman Inn became part of the westward movement as it witnessed the steady stream of traffic that helped to define the nation's cultural identity. While the historic structure maintains a special place in regional history, it is by no means a historical footnote because the inn continues to prosper in its traditional role as a hospitality center. The Casselman

Inn's past provides for an interesting story that is closely linked to regional and national events.

The property on which the Casselman Inn sits was part of a tract purchased by Solomon Sterner (also found as Starner) in 1833 and referred to as "Cornucopia," a 308 acre parcel that included much of present day Grantsville, Maryland. Mr. Sterner also owned property in nearby Pennsylvania that he apparently sold or leased when the Cornucopia purchase transpired. It is unclear whether the Casselman Inn was built by Mr. Sterner or Daniel Grant, namesake for Grantsville. Also uncertain



is the precise date of the Inn's construction on the north side of the National Road although evidence seems to suggest it was built in 1842. Bricks for the structure were reportedly hand-made on the Cornucopia tract. Solomon Sterner's business provided accommodations for both travelers and livestock while operating under the names of Drover's Inn and Sterner's Tavern.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Mr. Sterner proved to be a colorful and successful innkeeper. A glimpse into his motivation for opening the inn and subsequent eccentric business practices was provided by Jacob Brown, a Cumberland resident and historian who penned a personal recollection of the innkeeper in 1896.

"He (Mr. Sterner) was overtaken with the then prevalent passion for hotel life. He went to work in 1842, and built his brick house which still remains intact

and which he conducted in person till his death." Mr. Sterner's hotel was known as the "Drover's Inn" and "Sterner's Tavern."

The National Pike generated prosperity and hoteliers quickly seized the opportunities provided by weary travelers requesting services. Apparently, Mr. Sterner was caught up in the hospitality fever of the time period. Mr. Brown further noted that Solomon Sterner "had more than his share of business... His table was always crowded with substantial and rich edibles, and granaries, and stables with an abundance of provender."

Mr. Sterner's eccentric management practices must have provided for many interesting and colorful conversations. "He (Sterner) was entirely without education and kept no clerk. His business was carried on mentally.

This can be done successfully sometimes, and he was an instance for some years, but in time his old Pennsylvania steady habits gave way, and he and his prosperous business suffered alike. In the morning dozens of patrons would have bills to pay. ...Mr. Sterner scarcely ever asked any questions as to the validity of proffered money. He took it as it came. ... In those times it is safe to say one fourth of the currency was spurious, - 'bogus' as it was called."

Despite the shortcomings, Mr. Sterner apparently managed a profitable enterprise until his death on the last day of 1851. Upon Sterner's passing, the inn, Cornucopia plantation, and all personal property were conveyed to his son, Archibald. Little is known of Archibald Sterner's ownership of the inn although major changes in transportation technology negatively influenced Grantsville.

The National Road's status as the most efficient way to travel west was eventually surpassed by rail service. In some instances, railroads followed the National Road and served the same towns. In many other instances, however, the railroads bypassed towns thereby leaving them commercially isolated. National rail service never approached the small town along the Casselman River, and old wagons couldn't compete with new iron horses. It would not be until a second wave of technological innovations occurred that the Casselman Inn would once again return to the pathway of "America's Road."

In 1866 or 1868, the tavern passed from the Sterner family to Joel B. Miller. The inn remained in the Miller family

until 1892 when the hotel and 8-1/2 acres were conveyed to William R. Getty. A succession of owners followed the Getty family including Charles and Emma Bender (1898), Elizabeth O’Hanley (also 1898), Daniel and Margaret Dorsey (1902), Wilda and Joseph Fahey (1925), and Ivan and Della Miller (1964). In 1980, the Miller family formed a family corporation that included their ten children as shareholders. The six who survive—David, Miriam, Joanna, Ruth, Dorcas, and Stephen—are current owners. In addition to property owners, there were a number of families who served as innkeeper although a complete accounting is unavailable. Collectively, the owners and innkeepers witnessed an amazing series of changes in American life from their front porches.

Just as technology contributed to the National Road’s decline in the latter half of the 19th century, it caused a revival in the early 20th century when automobiles forever changed America’s landscape. Increased motor vehicle traffic led to the Rural Roads Act of 1916 which made funds available to rebuild sections of the National Road, so they would accommodate the heavy traffic caused by automobiles. In 1925, the rejuvenated pike sported the new name of United States Route 40, and the town of Granstville once again prospered as motorists driving buses, cars, and trucks sought services. The more recent construction of Interstate 68 that parallels United States Route 40 has continued to bring guests to the Casselman Inn.

The Casselman Inn’s heritage also includes stories from past days when drovers herded cattle, pigs, and sheep into the nearby enclosed lot while the bartender stood ready to pour liquid refreshments for the road weary travelers. According to an article appearing in

the *Glades Star*, a National Pike drover could get lodging, oats for his horse and a jigger of whiskey for himself for the sum of 50 cents. Before contemporary readers remark about the great deal the drover enjoyed, it must be remembered that few beds were provided and that as many guests as could find floor space were assigned to each room.



**Top: The rustic dining room and fireplace provide for a comfortable dining atmosphere with homestyle cooking.**

**Above: Just off the restaurant, the downstairs living room offers a friendly place to sit and chat for a while.**

A recent uncovering of wallpaper in the front parlor also reveals notations possibly made by workers during construction of the building or by the innkeeper or guests during the early tavern days. The unique marks are neatly framed behind glass and available for viewing.



**A wide variety of home made bakery goods and canned goodies are available for take out.**

The Casselman Inn has always met the needs of its guests and continues to do so in the present. The Miller siblings have made several improvements since acquiring the business from their parents in 2004, including hiring a manager to handle the day-to-day operations. The manager is Merv Brenneman, a Garrett County native. According to current co-owner David Miller, “Merv manages the business and makes things work.”

All restoration work was accomplished with the intention of retaining the Inn’s ambiance. According to co-owner Joanna Miller, “The old structure is important to us, and we keep it in mind as we update. Recently when we uncovered wallpaper and old layers of paint we were pleased to learn the historical color chosen for the wall echoed the predominate color in the bottom layer of wallpaper. That original color is what we used to paint the hallway.”

Additional updating included the entrance and dining areas. “We recently spent a great deal of time and money redecorating the hallway and dining room. We think it is good for business and in keeping with our responsibility to be good stewards of the Inn’s tradition,” stated David Miller. A memorial garden dedicated to the late Philip Miller, brother of the current owners, is the most recent addition to the grounds.



**All of the guest rooms are furnished and decorated in period furnishings.**

The contemporary Casselman Inn offers a variety of lodging accommodations including the two-room Dorsey suite complete with antique furnishings. Additional rooms are available complete with private baths. The Casselman Motor Inn located directly behind the original structure offers 40 rooms.

The Casselman Inn is noted for its fine country dining that includes homemade bread, cakes, and pies prepared on site in the downstairs bakery. The country dining fare draws customers from around the region, including Morgantown, Chambersburg, Frostburg, and Cumberland. According to Manager Merv Brenneman, “We have lots of regular customers; a few will visit with us three times a day. Our business serves as a community center for those customers.” The restaurant is open from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

The Casselman Inn is easily located on Main Street in downtown Grantsville. Take Exit 19 from Interstate 68. The Inn, restaurant, and gift shops are closed Sundays. The Inn remains open seven days for lodging. The restaurant phone number is 301-895-5266 and the lodging number is 301-895-5055. ***Please see our ads on pages 19 & 27.***

*The author expresses appreciation to Joanna and David Miller, “The Casselman Chronicles,” and “Glades Star” for information used in preparing the article.*