

CROSS KEYS TAVERN

Woodbridge, New Jersey

*George Washington's Visit and Inauguration as
First President of the United States*

By Donald Johnstone Peck

On April 16, 1789, George Washington and his entourage departed Mount Vernon, Virginia and traveled 225 miles to spend the last night before his inauguration in New Jersey at the Cross Keys Tavern, Woodbridge. New Jersey had become a second home to Washington, as he fought more battles on its soil and spent more time in New Jersey than anywhere else, more than four and a half years of the eight year American Revolutionary War.



The Cross Keys Tavern had been a cradle of revolt. It was the Sons of Liberty headquarters for revolution in Woodbridge where colonists had criticized their king, merchants had voiced protest over harsh British trade restrictions, petitions were drawn up and signed, tea boycotts organized, and militia units had been formed. Situated on the Old Dutch or Upper Road, it was a popular stopover for travelers from New York to Philadelphia.

Here Washington was given a tumultuous reception by a large military company and civilian contingent, including the first New Jersey State Governor, William Livingston, Brigadier General Nathaniel Heard who had commanded the militia who had arrested Royal Governor William Franklin and many other distinguished officers as well as members of the rank and file.

The morning of April 23, 1789, Washington left Woodbridge traveling to Elizabethtown Point and boarded an “elegantly adorned” crimson-canopied, forty-seven-foot barge crossing Newark and Lower New York Bay. He landed to a stupendous ovation at lower Manhattan, where he was inaugurated on April 30. “All ranks and professions,” ran one newspaper account, “expressed their feelings in loud acclamations, and with rapture hailed the arrival of the Father of His Country.”