

## Colonial Taverns

“All Taverns they call ‘Ordinary’s’” (Fithian, 1773-1774)

“[O]rdinary [is] the name given to inns in America, and some justly merit that title”. (Letter from a traveler, Nov 30, 1777; Anburey)

“There is no distinction here between inns, taverns, ordinaries and public houses; they are all in one and are known by the appellation of taverns, public house or ordinary on them, which in the general acceptance of the names here are signified by terms. They are all very indifferent indeed compared to the inns in England.” (JFD Smyth, about 1765; Colonial Williamsburg)

“No People can entertain their Friends with better Cheer and Welcome; and Strangers and Travellers are here treated in the most free, plentiful, and hospitable Manner; so that a few Inns or Ordinaries on the Road are sufficient.” (Hugh Jones, 1724)

“Religion was a strong force in the lives of the Puritans. It influenced the conditions which had power upon the settlement in New England. Another trait was present which adds an element of human interest to the story. Their neighborliness was ever present and as sincere as their godliness.”

“So came the establishment of the ordinary. It was created for the entertainment of travelers and for the mutual comfort of the settlers. This was scarcely second to their providing a gathering place for the church.”

“Power was given to County Courts to oversee the running of these establishments. Consideration for the welfare of these outsiders and the desire to regulate the sale of intoxicating liquors seemed important enough reasons to enforce the opening of some kind of public house in each community.”

“[T]he General Court of Massachusetts made towns liable to a fine for not sustaining an ordinary. Great inducements were offered to persons keeping them. Land was granted, pastures to keep their cattle or exemption from church rates and school taxes.”

“The early ordinaries were not operated just for the convenience of travelers, but also for the comfort of the townspeople, exchange of news and opinions, and the sale of liquors and socializing.”

“There were many restrictions on the entertainment of strangers. Selectmen had to report on all visitors names that seemed detrimental to the community and send them out of town. They were not permitted to dance or sing inside the ordinary.”

“Drunkards were severely punished, either thrown into stocks, whipped or fined. Tobacco was considered more sinful, degrading and harmful than liquor. Both the use of and planting were forbidden. Landlords of the ordinaries were threatened with heavy fines for allowing anyone to use ‘Creature called Tobacco’ in their establishment.”

“No one could use tobacco publicly, in their homes or anywhere in front of newcomers. Two men could not smoke together. If caught smoking around the corner from the ordinary they were fined and set in the stocks and in cages”. (Historical Society of Old Yarmouth)

## Taverns

Samuel Cole opened the first tavern on March 4, 1634 in Boston. It was not long before the demand and necessity for taverns throughout the colonies was overwhelming. (Steven Struzinski) The first ordinaries were built by a town to accommodate travelers, so they offered bed and board, and sometimes drink. So, initially, they weren't exactly a tavern as we think of them as a place to go get a drink.

Taverns were traditional institutions “whose effect was to pull fledgling communities together.” “[E]arly taverns were not opened wholly for the convenience of travellers; they were for the comfort of the townspeople, for the interchange of news and opinions, the sale of solacing liquors, and the incidental sociability ... the importance of the tavern to its local neighbors was far greater than to travellers.” (Earle)

“The tavern itself was rather simply designed and coordinated. The earliest taverns were mostly independent structures, yet they could also be located within or attached to residential houses.” (Struzinski) “It was its own building with two separate floors. The upper floor was where the beds were for sleeping, and the lower floor was where the bar and tables were for eating “. (Tunis)

“The interiors of taverns were designed with different rooms, the largest room being the taproom with furnishings such as chairs, desks, the bar, and a fireplace. Certain upper-class taverns had parlors that were attached to the taproom. The taverns located in towns usually had special rooms designated for meetings of groups or, the more likely case, assemblies and court proceedings.” (Struzinski)



“The tavern served a multitude of purposes in colonial towns and countrysides. They were means of direction for travelers, as well as settings where they could eat, drink, be entertained, and spend the night. The tavern was conceived as a public institution which should provide all needed services, and which should be carefully regulated by law to prevent all usual sorts of abuses.” (Carl Bridenbaugh; Struzinski)

“Obviously the term “abuses” refers to the use of alcohol and the behaviors caused by its over-consumption. The tavern was the means by which the town assemblies controlled the distribution of alcohol. Along with alcoholic beverages, colonists could play games, enjoy entertainment, participate in discussion, and receive the latest news and debate of the time.”

“Along with being popular locations of social congress, taverns were significant for their function in town culture and society. Taverns were utilized as meeting places for assemblies and courts, destinations for refreshment and entertainment, and, most importantly, democratic venues of debate and discussion.”

“Usually the ordinary and the meeting-house were close companions. Licenses to keep houses of entertainment were granted with the condition that the tavern must be near the meeting-house”. (Earle) Early colonists adopted a practice used frequently in Europe and established taverns as a place to collect and distribute mail.

“Naturally the tavern proved the exhibition place and temporary lodging-place of all secular shows which could not be housed in the meeting-house. It contained the second assembly room in size, and often the only other large room in town save that devoted to religious gatherings.”

“Women kept ordinaries and taverns from early days. Widows abounded, for the life of the male colonists was hard, exposure was great, and many died in middle age. War also had many victims.”

“Tavern-keeping was the resort of widows of small means then .... many licenses were granted to them to keep victualling-houses, to draw wine, and make and sell beer.” (Earle)

## **Taverns in the Revolutionary War**

“The tavern has ever played an important part in social, political, and military life, has helped to make history. From the earliest days when men gathered to talk over the terrors of Indian warfare; through the renewal of these fears in the French and Indian War ... and through all the anxious but steadfast years preceding and during the Revolution, these gatherings were held in the ordinaries or taverns.” (Earle)

Arguably the taverns’ most important role in society (and American history) is the role they played in the beginning of the Revolutionary War. As anger spread throughout the colonies, many took to the tavern to discuss, argue, and debate what needed to be done. (Colleluori)

“A centre of events, a centre of alarms, the tavern in many a large city saw the most thrilling acts in our Revolutionary struggle which took place off the battlefields. The tavern was the rendezvous

for patriotic bands who listened to the stirring words of American rebels, and mixed dark treason to King George with every bowl of punch they drank.”

“These discussions soon brought decisions, and by 1768 the Sons of Liberty were organized and were holding their meetings, explaining conditions, and advocating union and action. They adopted the name given by Colonel Barre to the enemies of passive obedience in America. Soon scores of towns in the colonies had their liberty trees or liberty poles.”

“The story of our War for Independence could not be dissociated from the old taverns, they are a part of our national history; and those which still stand are among our most interesting Revolutionary relics.” (Earle)

Of meetings and discussions, John Adams wrote:

‘Within the course of the year, before the meeting of Congress in 1774, on a journey to some of our circuit courts in Massachusetts, I stopped one night at a tavern in Shrewsbury about forty miles from Boston, and as I was cold and wet, I sat down at a good fire in the bar-room to dry my great-coat and saddle-bags, till a fire could be made in my chamber.’

‘There presently came in, one after another, half a dozen, or half a score substantial yeomen of the neighborhood, who, sitting down to the fire after lighting their pipes, began a lively conversation on politics. As I believed. I was unknown to all of them, I sat in total silence to hear them.’

‘One said, ‘The people of Boston are distracted.’ Another answered, ‘No wonder the people of Boston are distracted. Oppression will make wise men mad.’ ... [another] broke out: ‘Well, it's high time for us to rebel; we must rebel some time or other, and we had better rebel now than at any time to come. If we put it off for ten or twenty years, and let them go on as they have begun, they will get a strong party among us, and plague us a great deal more than they can now.’

Paul Revere wrote:

‘In the fall of 1774 and winter of 1775, I was one of upwards of thirty men, chiefly mechanics, who formed ourselves with a Committee for the purpose of watching the movements of the British soldiers and gaining every intelligence of the movements of the Tories. We held our meetings at the Green Dragon Tavern.’

During the war, “Many [taverns] served as court-rooms when court-martials were held; others were seized for military prisons; others were fired upon; others served as barracks; some as officers' headquarters; others held secret meetings of patriots; many were used as hospitals.” (Earle)

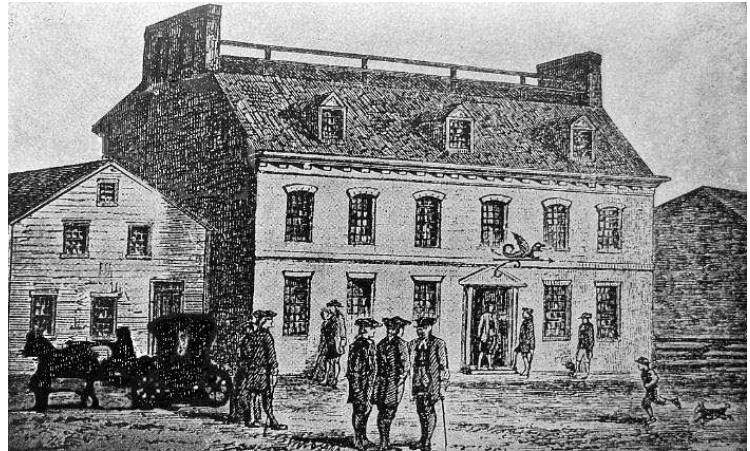
## **Green Dragon Tavern**

The Green Dragon Tavern, founded in 1654, is the oldest bar of the Revolutionary period. The basement tavern was used by several secret groups and became known as the “Headquarters of the Revolution”.



The Sons of Liberty, Boston Committee of Correspondence, and the Boston Caucus each met there. The Boston Tea Party was planned within it. (SAR Massachusetts)

When citizens began to worry that the Redcoats were going to march to Concord to look for munitions, this is where they met to organize an eavesdropping operation so that they could overhear British plans. (Paul Revere began his famous ride here.)



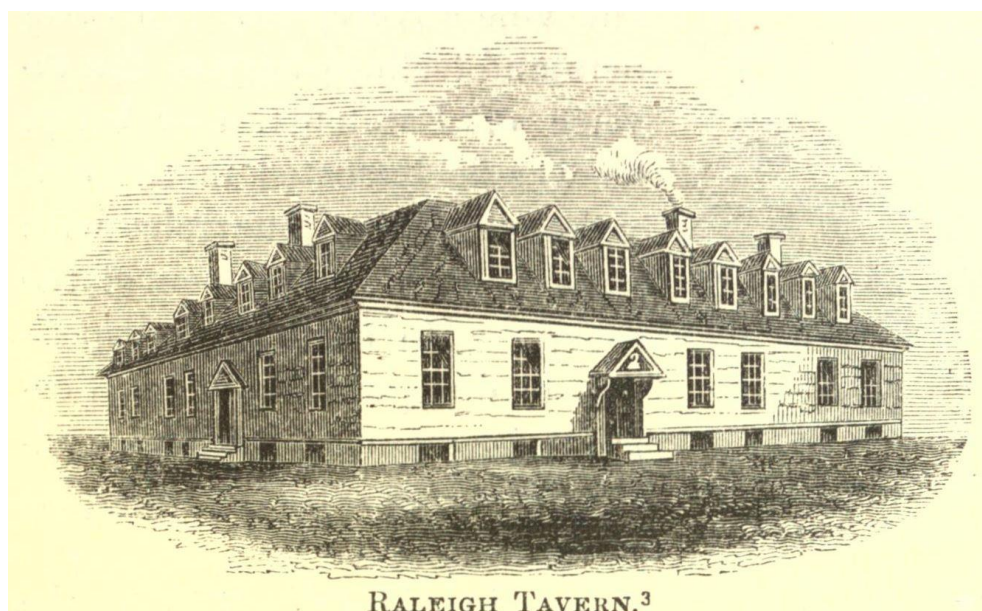
Later, in 1788, the Patriots met in this tavern to draw up a resolution to support the Federal Constitution. (SAR)

### **Raleigh Tavern**

Another notable tavern, Raleigh Tavern, established around 1717, was the stage for much of revolutionary drama. During the early stages of the American Revolution, Raleigh Tavern was one of the centers of Williamsburg's public life.

Raleigh Tavern was a one-stop shop for visitors to Williamsburg. It provided guests with lodging, food, drink, entertainment, and a stable for their horses. Those staying overnight at Raleigh Tavern slept in one of its dozens of beds, or on the floor, usually alongside other lodgers.

At moments of crisis, Virginia's colonists often gathered at Raleigh Tavern. Some of the American Revolution's most fateful conversations happened in the building's Apollo Room.



In May 1769, Governor Botetourt dissolved the House of Burgesses after its members protested taxation. No longer able to meet at the Capitol, the former Burgesses convened at Raleigh Tavern, where they agreed to limit imports from Britain until Parliament repealed its taxes. They prohibited, among other things, imported “Spirits, Wine, Cyder . . . Beer, [and] Ale.” (Colonial Williamsburg)

In March 1773, some of the radical Burgesses, including Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry, met in a private room of Raleigh Tavern; they proposed a series of resolutions, which the Burgesses enacted, to create what became the Virginia Committee of Correspondence.

A year later (1774), the governor again dissolved the House of Burgesses for passing rebellious resolutions, this time in response to Britain’s punishment of Massachusetts for the Boston Tea Party. The former Burgesses again reconvened at Raleigh Tavern the next day. They passed several new motions, including a call for what would become the Continental Congress.

### **The Tun Tavern**

The implications of The Tun Tavern go beyond just the spread of ideas. Two of our nation’s most significant institutions, the Freemasons and the United States Marine Corps, trace their origin back to the same colonial taphouse, The Tun Tavern.

As the head of the Naval Committee, John Adams and members of the Continental Congress used The Tun’s second floor meeting room to write the Articles of War that structured and organized the Continental Navy in 1775. (Tun Legacy Foundation)

According to historical records, The Tun Tavern in Philadelphia hosted the first meetings of St. John’s Lodge No. 1 (the first American lodge of the Grand Lodge of the Masonic Temple). On November 10, 1775, the tavern also became the birthplace of the United States Marine Corps.





Eventually, the tavern would play host to Washington, Jefferson, and the First Continental Congress, who would task the tavern's owner, Samuel Nicholas, "to raise the first two battalions of Marines" out of the tavern's guests. The USMC still commemorates November 10<sup>th</sup> annually, with Marines everywhere raising a glass in honor of The Tun Tavern. (Colleluori)

In 1781, toward the end of the American Revolution, The Tun Tavern had stood for nearly 100 years and was in serious disrepair from continuous use. It was torn down and another structure built. Although the structure was lost, the legacy of the historic Tun Tavern was forever engraved into the history of Philadelphia, and the founding of the United States.

Inside an ordinary (sketch by Edwin Tunis).



As written in 1732: "To avoid conversation is to Act against the Intention of nature. To live then as men we must confer with men. Conversations must be one of the greatest pleasures of life." (Passion for the Past)

Information here is primarily from Anburey, Colonial Williamsburg, Historical Society of Old Yarmouth, Earle, Tunis, Struzinski, Colleluori, Morris-Slattey, Sons of the American Revolution, Drake, and Tun Legacy Foundation.

In an effort to provide a brief, informal background summary of various people, places and events related to the American Revolution, I made this informal compilation from a variety of sources. This is not intended to be a technical reference document, nor an exhaustive review of the subject. Rather, it is an assemblage of information and images from various sources on basic background information. For ease in informal reading, in many cases, specific quotations and citations and attributions are often not included – however, sources are noted in the summary. The images and text are from various sources and are presented for personal, noncommercial and/or educational purposes. Thanks, Peter T. Young