

Chapter Two. Review of Literature

Owners of public houses were held in high regard in their communities. They knew a great deal about political issues and the well being of public officials. Before town halls and other public buildings were established public houses were the places that community and government meetings were held.

License holders of the establishments were assisted by their wives and children with everyday duties and services to the patron. Frequently single and newly married couples would reside in the establishments (Yoder, 1969). Towns people, including families with private residences, frequented public houses to catch up on news and make personal contacts.

Public accommodations tended to be located on, or near, major roads where stagecoaches would stop for a night. Often drivers brought their own beds with them, and slept in the same room as the other guests (Yoder, 1969). Sometimes stagecoach drivers would receive some form of compensation for bringing patrons to their establishment. The only non-paying customers might have been traveling preachers, who received complimentary meals and lodging. Sometimes the lodging keepers would feed and lodge those patrons who were unable to pay. According to Van Hoesen (1897) travelers seeking lodging typically would enter one of two doors of the building, one door being for the travelers, and the other for the keeper of the establishment and his family. A railing or some other structure was used to separate the entrances. Walter H. Van Hoesen, author of Early Taverns and Stagecoach Days in New Jersey describes the following public house in detail:

I recall very well one of the late-eighteenth-century establishments that has lately joined the ranks of buildings altered beyond recognition. I knew it as a boy as a two

and a half story wooden framed structure with a porch that entirely encircled its main floor, which was slightly set up from the street. Seven or eight wide steps led up to the barroom, which took up most of the ground floor. At the far end of the porch a second, smaller door led to some steps up to the living quarters on the second floor. To the rear of the dimly lit barroom were several doorways leading to small rooms furnished only with a round table and several chairs. They were reserved for ladies who wanted to have a drink unseen, and for steady customers who enjoyed a card game while they were drinking. A dining room that opened off the barroom took up the rest of the first floor, except for the kitchen that occupied an extension in the rear. Upstairs, a single ballroom took up the same space as the barroom on the ground floor. Occasional meeting of fraternal and patriotic groups were held there, and it was otherwise the scene of dances on Friday and Saturday nights. The rest of the second floor was taken up by bedrooms; stairs led to the garret and several other bedrooms usually reserved for the bartender, cook, and waiter (Van Hoesen, 1897, 20).

Interiors

Typically lodgings had one large public room with a fireplace. To the side of the large public room was a dining room. Sometimes the kitchen (see Figure 2.1) would be next to the dining room (Guillet, 1956). Shelters might have been added on to the back of the lodging to serve as a kitchen and/or wood shed (Van Hoesen, 1897).

Some type of a counter was used in the public room to form a bar, typically storing barrels, bottles and jugs of spirits. Some travel accommodations had bedrooms upstairs (Guillet, 1956). If the establishment did not have bedrooms guests would have slept in the same room that served as the bar. The following is an excerpt from Paton Yoder's Taverns and Travelers describing a public house barroom in Chicago, dating May 25, 1835.



Figure 2.1. "Kitchen of an Ordinary", provided by Elise Lathrop
author of Early American Inns and Taverns

On the east and west sides of the seemingly prehistoric whitewashed walls and board partitions were the inevitable puncheon benches. Scattered around in a more informal manner was an assortment of wooden chairs. Near the north end was a bar counter useful not only to receive the drinks, but umbrellas, overcoats, whips and parcels. The west end of the bar was adorned with a large inkstand placed in a cigar box filled with No. 8 shot, in which were sticking two quill pens...at the other end of the counter were a dozen or more short pieces of tallow candles, each placed in a hole bored in a 2 x 4 block fortified by six-penny nails...Hanging in a row against the wall were large cloth and leather slippers, which the guests were expected to put on at night, that mud might not be tracked to every part of the house...There was also a collection of old fashioned, perforated tin lanterns...Above the tinder box was one of the old fashioned, square, cherry, veneered Connecticut clocks...The ablutionary arrangements were exceedingly primitive, consisting of tin wash basins, soiled towels, small mirrors and toothless combs. Several dishes of soft soap were arranged along the back of the water trough...In the middle of the room, standing in a low box filled with lake sand, was a large stove used in winter to good advantage not only for the warmth imparted to the room, but for furnishing hot water for toddies, shaving and washing as well (Yoder, 1969, 123).

Dining

Typically meals would begin in the dining room by the ringing of the bell which was mounted to the roof of the public house, or by the ringing of a hand bell. There were many differences in the menus provided in establishments across the United States. Walter Van Hoesen (1897) described a typical breakfast served in public houses located in New Jersey as being black bread and porridge (oatmeal). This fare was served well into the 1700's.

Paton Yoder (1969) described typical menu items offered in early taverns as:

- whiskey, and pig's feet pickled in vinegar
- bacon with molasses
- black bread soaked in whiskey, and milk (134).

Dining was not seen as a form of entertainment. As soon as a dinner was completed the patron immediately left the table. At Zane's Tavern in Wheeling, in western Virginia, in 1789, a patron wrote in his journal, "never sit at table more than five minutes, and sometimes not more than three" (Yoder, 1969, 138).

Sleeping accommodations

It was not unusual for travelers to share the same room for sleeping, and often the same bed. Many times the rooms held two beds, and four strangers would have slept together. If a traveler of the same sex refused to sleep with another it was regarded as unruly and rude behavior. The separation of sexes was important and acknowledged. Even though travelers were predominately males, female travelers were typically offered sleeping quarters in the drawing room (Guillet, 1956).

Due to improper behavior of some male patrons in barrooms, the ladies' parlor was developed. Men were admitted to the ladies' parlor, but only under the condition that they act accordingly. Often the ladies' parlor was the same room as the reception or lobby area (Yoder, 1969).

The amount of space available to accommodate patrons varied considerably as did the amenities. Bedrooms were often the same rooms functioning as the public living room. Sometimes public houses would have several bedrooms available for their patrons. Occasionally one-room establishments would have an attic space above that would serve as overflow sleeping areas (Yoder, 1969). Bedding material differed regionally and comprised of such things as cornhusks, feathers, and straw (Yoder, 1969) (see Figure



Figure 2.2. Sleeping accommodations.
Provided by Morgan Sincock, author of [America's Early Taverns](#).
Permission granted from Applied Arts Publishers.

2.2). Often accommodations in the South and the Midwest did not provide bed linens for the public beds. Some travelers would provide their own sheets, but often others slept directly on the unmade bed. Sometimes the beds would not be changed but once a week. In the early 1830's private rooms became more available, especially in the Midwest (Yoder, 1969).

Not until about 1850 did bathrooms become available and ordinaries and taverns began to provide each room with a towel, chamber pot, a pitcher filled with water, and a drinking cup (Yoder, 1969). When Henry Tudor noted that a pitcher and basin were supplied in his public house room near Staunton, Virginia, in 1831, he asked the servant for some water with which to wash. But the landlord informed him in no uncertain terms that typically all the guests washed in the yard (Yoder, 1969).

Travel conditions

Conditions were very challenging, both physically and mentally during the early settlement in Virginia. Travel was difficult over often muddy and rutted roads. The first railroad did not appear in Montgomery County until the late 1840's, and the first hard surfaced road was not completed in Montgomery County until sometime between 1850 and 1860. Not only was the terrain rather difficult, but the Indian threat continued. The following letter was written by Colonel William Preston to Captain William Robinson, provided in Kegley's Virginia Frontier, describing the fear of Indians during travel.

Sunday about 2 o'clock in the Morning, June 6, 1778

Sir: Yesterday three young men went from here to Palser Lybrooks on Sinking Creek, and about sunset discovered five or six Indians at Lybrooks Plantation. They also saw signs in other places where the enemy were gathering horses and seven guns were heard about the middle of the day by Martin Harless near his place. Charles Lucas came here just now with the above intelligence and in order to get

assistance to endeavor to fall in with the enemy while they are gathering horses. Eight men at least [go] from here beside the three that are there and I sent to Prices, Shulls and James Byrns's for all the men that can be spared from there to march immediately over to Lucas's to join what can be spared from the Post to go in search of the enemy; But as we do not know their number, I would be glad that some more men could be sent in the Morning to reinforce these that go from this neighborhood; and for that reason would beg of you to send all that can be raised in company, without loosing a moment over to Lucas's. There is now a fair opportunity of doing something, if the men will turn out and exert themselves with resolution; the enemy may at least be prevented from crossing the mountain and coming into settlement; but I rather think that a stroke may be made this day on the creek... [I am Sir yr Hble Servt] Wm Preston (Kegley, 1938, 642).

Another example describing the concerns about Indians was revealed in a letter from General Andrew Lewis to Colonel William Fleming:

Richfield, Virginia , June 7, 1778

Sir: There are more and more reasons to believe that there are Indians in those parts of our settlements. One was seen last Thursday near Peter Dyarely's and its certain one was seen last Friday on the Cataba. Its reported that eight made their appearance before a small fort at the Sweet Springs last Monday, and that Absolam Looney discovered six the next day on Crag Creek Mountain...Andrew Lewis (Kegley, 1938, 642).

There was a constant threat of Indians, and the terrain was rough, adding to the difficulty of travel. Passage through the area of southwestern Virginia was aided by regional surveys. In order to mark territories, county grant surveyors had to identify boundaries of the land, often using trees as boundary markers for property lines. Individual diary

inscriptions by various surveyors of Virginia were included in The Fairfax Line, written by Thomas Lewis in 1925.

An example of the manner in which boundary lines and survey by trees and mountains were recorded is follows:

[Munday] 13th Began where we left off on Saturday Thence
140 poles a pine [md] 61 miles
166 X Looneys [Creeke] head Runs to [Rt] (right)
460 a Red oak [md] 62 miles on ye side of a mountain
780 poles a Chesnut oak [md] 63 miles on the East Side of Allegany Mountain
1100 a Chesnut [md] 64 miles
1160 the top of the Allegheny Mountain
1340 poles on a marshy rocky sort of ground exceedingly full of tall timber [Chiefly] maple. Some few ash.

Our horses had very good food after we had passed the head of Looney Creek. Along the mountains prodigiously full of fallen timber and ivy as thick as it could grow. So interwoven that horse or man could hardly force his way through it. So that we had very difficult access to the top of the Allegany Mountain where was a precipice about 16 feet high and were very hard. [Set to] get a place where there was any [probeability] of our ascending when we had [gained] the Summit there was a Level as far as we could see to right and left clear of timber about a quarter of a mile wide covered with large flat rocks and marshy though on the top of the highest mountain I ever saw (Lewis, 1925, 28).

Based on this summary, it is apparent that the adventure of travel and expeditions was not one to be taken lightly. There were many risks, and minimal, if any, accommodations were provided during such excursions. Because of the increased travel along the

Wilderness Road, it can be assumed that there was a need for accommodations.

Montgomery County was the first county after Big Lick on the Wilderness Road, thus the public houses located in Montgomery County were selected for this study as an area representative of what might have been available in the southwest region of Virginia.

And finally, because these facilities offered essential food and shelter to travelers, public houses served a vital role in the western movement.