

The Tavern's Role in American History

Daniel Webster called America's colonial taverns "The headquarters of the Revolution." Patrons of this tavern knew it as "The listening post of the Revolution"; they knew that Washington made his headquarters at that building of like vintage just across the creek. Actually, this tavern's colonial patrons called it simply Mabie's, for its tavern keeper. Our history shows all colonial taverns could as well have been called midwives of the Revolution, such was their critical role at America's birth.

Sam Adams plotted that timely Tea Party at Boston's Green Dragon Tavern. Thomas Jefferson drafted elements of the Declaration of Independence at a tavern, the Indian Queen in Philadelphia. George Washington bade an emotional farewell to his officer corps at Fraunces Tavern in Manhattan. Patrick Henry and Virginia's restless patriots pledged their lives to liberty or death at the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, the first building of that colonial town's restoration.

Across the colonies, taverns were where town folk and country folk kept in touch, one with another, where they got the news and the gossip. Taverns - public houses - served public needs. They were the mail drops before the days of post offices. At a critical time in American history they served as a web of national unity connecting Committees of Correspondence in the 13 colonies. Tavern to tavern, from Providence to Savannah, the Committees stirred the fires of independence.

New York's Committee met in this venerable building. At its meeting on July 4, 1774 - two years to the day before the Declaration of Independence and in prophetically similar language - the committee passed the Orangetown Resolutions. Orangetown, the municipality for the hamlet of Tappan, was then the County seat. It was where the County Supervisors met and where the Committee of Correspondence met. The Resolutions gave respectful notice to King George III that enough was enough. Patriots throughout the colony replied amen.

Casparus Mabie owned the tavern and shared its operation with his brother Yoast. The Mabies were among Tappan's founding families. Precisely when this building was built is unknown; records show that Casparus expanded it to tavern-size when he bought it in 1754. It is of similar architecture as the house of another founder just across the creek, the DeWint House, on which the date 1700 is impressed in the facade. Both are national landmarks. Original sections of this house are unchanged and it remains today, as then, a welcoming haven for wayfarers.

The most celebrated episode in '76 House history was when the sturdy tavern served as the place of Major John André's confinement. André was the British spy who plotted with the arch traitor Benedict Arnold for the surrender of West Point, the linchpin of America's control of the Hudson River. Militiamen caught André red handed and brought him as a prisoner to Tappan.

Washington used the DeWint house as his headquarters, Mabie's Tavern as André's prison, and the nearby Dutch church as a courtroom to give André a fair trial. Found guilty, two days later at high noon on Oct. 2, 1780, a crowd of about 1,500 soldiers and onlookers witnessed the hanging of Major John André on the hilltop behind the tavern. A monument marks the spot.