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# Brewing Identity: The Tavern's Imprint on the American Revolution

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**Brewing Identity**  
**The Tavern's Imprint on the American Revolution**

by  
**Cailin Edgar**  
**HIS 490 History Honors Thesis**

**Department of History**  
**Providence College**  
**Fall 2015**



*For Mom and Dad, who have always supported me,  
And for Charlie, who never let me quit.*

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1. LANDSCAPE & TOPOGRAPHY: EARLY TAVERNS IN BOSTON .....	7
Collapsing into “Rhode Islandism” .....	9
Location, Location, Location .....	19
“The Commonness of the Tavern” .....	25
CHAPTER 2. TAVERN TALK: PRINT AND COMMUNICATION .....	47
Going Postal .....	49
“This Is To Inform the Publick” .....	59
A Toast! .....	62
“Revolutionary Reading Places” .....	73
Declarations of Common Sense .....	76
Networks and the Making of One Nation United .....	83
CONCLUSION .....	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	86

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\* \* \*

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Thank you always,  
Cailin Patricia

## INTRODUCTION

### LIKE *HAMLET* WITHOUT THE GHOST

New World pioneers, tasked with transforming a strange and hostile wilderness into a home, looked to the familiar tavern setting as a place to start. The intrinsic attraction to the tavern was so strong that upon their arrival in Pennsylvania, for example, the inhabitants of a Moravian settlement appealed to their elders to raise a tavern before work was even begun on building a church. The foundation of their request was grounded in the opinion that a community without a public house was like *Hamlet* “without the ghost.”<sup>1</sup> This sentiment was not unique to Pennsylvania or to the Moravians. In fact, this feeling was rather common throughout the colonies long before they began to imagine themselves as a unified nation.

It was thus “the commonness of the tavern” that, according to Huey Long, “enhanced its availability as a social intuition with an educational dimension.”<sup>2</sup> In many cases, it was in the tavern alone that people could gather without social stigma, to gain access to print materials, and to warm themselves by the fire, the bottle, and in the company of others. It was in the tavern especially that the dullest embers of entitlement, the fledgling sparks of discontent, and the first kindling of colonial resistance were ignited, until each became engulfed by the decisive blaze of a national Revolutionary network.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch & Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 3. Cited in [William C. Reichel], *A Red Rose from the Olden Time: Or, A Ramble through the Annals of the Rose Inn and the Barony of Nazareth, in the Days of the Province, 1752-1772*, ed. John W. Jordan (Bethlehem, Pa., 1883), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Huey B. Long, “Taverns and Coffee Houses: Adult Educational Institutions In Colonial America,” *Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years*, January 1981, 16.

Colonial Boston saw her fair share of shifty dealings in the shadows of her landscape's seedy underbelly.<sup>3</sup> The people were often swept up by the drama, and whether ridiculous or gruesome, inconsequential or catastrophic, these episodes captivated public audiences. Ministers and printers alike found in these moments the opportunity to spread the message, while each applying their respective moral lessons or satirical approach in educating the people about and against the various misdeeds. For the larger population, the local commotion sparked gossip, discussion, and debate in and about taverns, which entertained and educated the community and the various audiences throughout the colonies and abroad to which the news eventually made its way.<sup>4</sup>

It is my aim henceforth to reveal the many ways in which the tavern was intimately tied up in the very lifeblood of this historic port city. It will be through in-depth discussion of the communication networks and the birth of a community sentiment that I will show the tavern as being the vehicle through which print materials saw their fullest potential and were able to reach a widespread audience. As a result of this print and tavern cultural union, the American Revolution was ignited. Furthermore, the following chapters aim to illuminate the intricacies of a prevailing, pervasive dependency between the most influential institutions involved in shaping the nation: the public and the press. Despite the existence of other potential sites for socializing and discussing public affairs, it was most consistently and passionately to the tavern that the

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<sup>3</sup> Body politics, for example, was not uncommon in the tavern as seen in: *The Boston Gazette, or Weekly Journal*, February 19, 1751, 2; *New England Weekly Journal*, October 4, 1737, 2; *The Boston Post-Boy & Advertiser*, September 10, 1764, 2; "London," *The Newport Mercury*, December 16, 1763, which reads: "On Monday evening a bricklayer's labourer sold his wife to a journeyman shoemaker, at a public house in Petty France, Westminster, for two pots of porter, a tankard of gin, and a shilling, and the woman went contentedly home with the purchaser." For more on crime see: "Philadelphia, Octob. 16," *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 3, 1760; "Boston, April 16," *The Weekly Rehearsal*, April 16, 1733; "By the Hartford Post. New-York, August 21," *The Massachusetts Gazette And Boston News-Letter*, August 28, 1766, 3; "John Searson to the Public," *The New-York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury*, December 25, 1769. See also: Sharon V. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 57.

<sup>4</sup> D. Brenton Simons, *Witches, Rakes, and Rogues: True Stories of Scam, Scandal, Murder, and Mayhem in Boston, 1630-1775* (Beverly, MA: Commonwealth Editions, 2005), 106.



people flocked. Examples of tavern encounters were recorded throughout the growing network of colonial and international newspapers, demonstrating that the tavern was clearly the preferred public space. This being just one of the many ways the two worlds collided, print culture was quick to reveal itself as being a necessary variable in tavern life. I found this to be especially true as I focused my attention on Boston, whose Revolutionary history tells a bold, brazen, and lively narrative of print politics and popular mobilization.

It is my objective to show how this print-tavern alliance strengthened the colonies by giving them a voice, a forum for social interactions, discussion, and debate. Were it not for these social discursive spaces, made so powerful by the introduction of print materials into the environment, a shared identity could not have circulated throughout the colonies as it did. Reflective of Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" theory, the tavern created connections across space and time, in a world where information was slow to travel, and effectively allowed the colonists opportunities to discuss and debate the news. Such interaction could inevitably lead to disagreements; however, for really the first time, a more wide-reaching population of the colonists were exposed to the same material and found themselves undergoing a common intellectual experience. Anderson writes,

In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.<sup>5</sup>

Printed materials accessed through the tavern allowed people to swap stories, giving most often white men, regardless of social class, the opportunity to participate in the social world. Acting as a unit with a common goal allowed the colonists to imagine selves in the world beyond their

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<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, England: Verso, 1991), 5–6.

respectively small town. Further, such networks gave stationary people without the means to travel an opportunity to participate in the larger world, which proved to be an important way of mobilizing common people for Revolution.

Boston has been the stage of several pivotal moments in history, but these affairs could not have been efficient without the planning, provisions, and pep talks in the wings before the main event. To get the clearest idea of the reality of this backstage environment, I conclude my argument by looking into the American Revolution. In doing so, I aim to pull back the curtain – to look beyond the battle and confrontations and the romanticism sometimes woven into popular histories – to reveal the stories of the people of Boston.

Scholars have tirelessly poured over questions left by the Revolution. The quest for answers can be traced as far back as John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, even in the decades after the Early American Republic was well underway. In 1815, Adams wrote to Jefferson, “The most essential documents, the debates & deliberations in Congress from 1774 to 1783 were all in secret, and are now lost forever... The Orators, while I was in Congress from 1774 to 1778 appeared to me very universally extemporaneous, & I have never heard of any committed to writing before or after delivery.” Adams was prompted to reach out to Jefferson on the matter after being inspired by a magazine article declaring a new publication to be “the best history of the revolution that ever has been written.” While he agreed, “A splendid morcell of oratory it is,” he hesitantly continued, “how faithful, you can judge.”<sup>6</sup> In the coming weeks Jefferson authored the following response:

On the subject of the history of the American revolution, you ask Who shall write

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<sup>6</sup> “John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 30 July 1815,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-08-02-0507> [last update: 2015-09-29]). Source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 8, *1 October 1814 to 31 August 1815*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 625–626.

it? who can write it? and who ever will be able to write it? nobody; except merely it's external facts. all it's councils, designs and discussions, having been conducted by Congress with closed doors, and no member, as far as I know, having even made notes of them. these, which are the life and soul of history must for ever be unknown.<sup>7</sup>

I present this exchange before by argument as an introduction to my approach to and frame of reference for the American Revolution. I thus offer a brief explanation of how I understand the Revolution – what caused this shift in attitude, how it unraveled, and finally, informed the fate of the colonies and the foundation of America – as a reading supplement to orient the reader to the viewpoint from which I came about my conclusion. My interpretation of the events leading up to and during this period necessarily shaped the ways I addressed the above questions, and most importantly, how I present my argument.

As I said, many scholars have offered research and analyses of the American Revolution, and have done so in far greater detail than I have here. Studying their work provided me with a hearty foundation upon which I conducted my own research and therefore built my own analysis. These specialists are noted throughout the piece should the reader wish to explore their contributions further. Despite the significant number of contributions to this field of study, I intend to posit a new account of the Revolution: one advanced almost entirely through the lens of the tavern. The enduring allure to the public house is indescribable. Firstly, there are far too many variables and attitudes woven into the fabric of the institution for any one person to comprehensively present within the bounds of a thesis. And similarly, the attraction to the tavern was at times indiscernible by the people themselves whose daily lives were so deeply rooted in

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<sup>7</sup> “Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 10 August 1815,” Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-08-02-0533> [last update: 2015-09-29]). Source: *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, vol. 8, *1 October 1814 to 31 August 1815*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 656–659.

and around this public space. It might very well be that one can never put to words the full extent and implications of this irrefutable magnetism to and fascination with the tavern, at least not in a way that is wholly authentic to an experience so far-removed from our own. Nevertheless, I intend to present just a fraction of the evidence that can be used to argue that the mysterious motive behind generations of tavern-goers lies in the relationship between the printing press and the public house. The roots of each are deep and resilient in their own rights, yet in studying one, I have found it impossible to avoid the other, their roots having been interlaced over centuries. Moreover, as it relates to my research specifically, in studying the tavern interactions had by the people of the colonies on the road to Revolution, I relied heavily on the extensive print world they produced for each other, and subsequently, for their posterity.

It is in these tales, imprinted in the newspapers, embedded within the tavern walls, and etched on the heart of the nation that I have found the most authentic account of the people. My goal is to present a narrative that is not entirely dependent upon the collective memory of American history. Instead, I look to zoom in on the press, the people, their public houses, and ultimately, at the many ways they all had to come into contact with one another in order for the Revolution to develop and to do so successfully. The first chapter looks to do so by specifically discussing the evolution of the tavern since settlement, as well as by considering the location and the cultural landscape of the tavern. Chapter two takes the argument a step further by concentrating on the intersection of tavern culture and the print world to reveal the ways in which the tavern served as a platform for print, a relationship without which the Revolutionary spirit of the colonies would not have spread as productively as it did. At the heart of this work, I intend to present the intricate ways these factors worked together to pave the way for the inception and physical manifestation of an independent and united American nation.

**CHAPTER 1**  
**LANDSCAPE & TOPOGRAPHY**  
**EARLY TAVERNS IN BOSTON**

The Massachusetts Bay Colony, established in 1628 and settled by a wave of Puritan migrants in the 1630s, quickly became a leading force in British American economic endeavors. The first Puritan colonists quickly transformed early Boston into the religious, political, academic, economic, and mercantile heart of New England. Being the ideal environment in which to accommodate both the local and roving populations of this burgeoning port city, the tavern quickly came to serve as many functions as possible, and where one tavern could not provide for all, another picked up the slack.

A number of the earliest taverns in Boston were known to encourage excessive drinking and gambling, both of which led to episodes of violence. Taverns have indeed been linked to lechery and vice, as reflected in the large body of legislation passed by the General Court of Massachusetts in an effort to bar such misconduct. The history of the public house in Boston, however, is not seeped solely in sin. The tavern also functioned as a venue for attending or hosting banquets, honorary balls, formal events, celebrations, end-of-the-work-day unwinding, meetings and impromptu assemblies, public auctions, and so much more.<sup>8</sup> Above all of its roles,

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<sup>8</sup> See also: Dorothy Denneen Volo and James M. Volo, *Daily Life During the American Revolution* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2003), 281. This selection reads: “The prominence of these places and their convenience to travelers made them obvious choices for public auctions, meetings, and political rallies.”

the tavern stood as an imperative means of articulating information be it about the prices of goods or the season's harvest to local emergencies or transatlantic politics.

Noted as the first tavern in Boston is the establishment opened by Samuel Cole in the spring of 1630. Early taverns like Cole's were sometimes referred to as "ordinaries." Located on Merchant's Row near Dock Square, one can imagine its success in attracting clientele from all walks of life who were drawn to the docks. This ordinary would later be referred to as Ship Tavern. In the coming decades of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Boston's landscape developed significantly and was soon teeming with taverns, so much so that Cotton Mather said that they had indeed become so numerous that it was as though every other house in Boston was a tavern.<sup>9</sup> A century later, this sentiment would be echoed still, only this time by Governor Powell. In fact, they might not have been terribly far off. In many cases, the public and private house were so malleable that a given structure could flip between the two, or often double as both a public house and family home at the same time.<sup>10</sup> The abundance of newspaper advertisements taken out over the years in the interest of selling or renting land, or to inform the public of a newly opened or relocated tavern (which typically noted the prior uses of the property) suggest flux and flexibility, as well as demonstrate the popularity of the tavern. Taking out an ad in the newspaper for such purposes was sure to reach a wide audience, and would not be worth the time and money were the keeper not certain of the esteem bestowed upon the institution of the tavern within the community.

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<sup>9</sup> Gavin Nathan, *Historic Taverns of Boston: 370 Years of Tavern History in One Definitive Guide* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc., 2006), 4; Samuel Adams Drake, and Walter Kendall Watkins, *Old Boston Taverns and Tavern Clubs* (Boston: W.A. Butterfield, 1917).

<sup>10</sup> "A Place of Reading: Revolutionary Taverns," Fig. 3.1, American Antiquarian Society Online Exhibition, <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Exhibitions/Reading/revolutionary.htm> (accessed March 11, 2016). Examples of homes being opened as taverns include, but are most certainly not limited to: the Buckman and Munroe Taverns of Lexington, and the How/Howe Tavern of Sudbury. See also: Salinger, 54. Salinger writes, "Proprietors often converted their own houses into ordinaries merely by posting a sign, serving liquor, and setting up additional beds for guests."

There was a certain faith in the effectiveness of the print process to disseminate one's message and to an interested readership, comprised of fellow members of the community and those outsiders who might find themselves in the area, all of whom were intimately invested in the state and status of their public sphere.

### **Collapsing into "Rhode Islandism"**

***"Drink is in itself a good creature of God, and to be received with thankfulness, but the abuse of drink is from Satan, the wine is from God, but the Drunkard is from the Devil."***

**Increase Mather, "Wo to Drunkards"<sup>11</sup>**

Public houses have undoubtedly endured a reputation as the most wretched hives of scum and villainy.<sup>12</sup> These spaces were often perceived as ones of sin, overindulgence, and debauchery. Gambling and the many other enchantments of the tavern became the target of early magisterial prohibitions as they received complaints of disorder "in and about Houses of Common entertainment, whereby much precious time is spent unprofitably, and much waste of Wine and Beer occasioned." The Puritan power elite had long considered such activity sinful, and many took to print in their efforts to convince the public of their egregious ways.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Increase Mather, *Wo to Drunkards. Two Sermons Testifying against the Sin of Drunkenness: Wherein the Woffulness of That Evil, and the Misery of All That Are Addicted to It, Is Discovered from the Word of God.* / By Increase Mather, D.D. (Boston: Printed and sold by Timothy Green, at the lower end of Middle-Street, 1712), 7.

<sup>12</sup> George Lucas, *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*, directed by George Lucas (San Francisco: Lucasfilm Ltd./Los Angeles: Twentieth Century Fox, 1977), Film. The Mos Eisley scene exhibited features commonly associated with colonial or Revolutionary era taverns.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to Increase Mather's *Wo to Drunkards*, see: *A serious address to those who unnecessarily frequent the tavern, and often spend the evening in publick houses. By several ministers. To which is added, a private letter on the subject, by the late Rev. Dr. Increase Mather* (Boston: Gerrish, 1726). See also: "Readers and Writers in Early New England," David D. Hall in Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds., *A History of the Book in America: Volume 1: The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007). In fact, "printed sermons were a public means of carrying the gospel to places where preaching did not reach," and "thousands of persons in New England read certain books, especially the Bible, repeatedly.... No book was read more often or in so many different ways: privately in silence, aloud in households... and in church services," (117). Further, probate records demonstrate that Bibles were almost universally owned. "The importance of the Bible in this culture is suggested by the fact that no other book appears in probate inventories in multiple

Moreover, despite the voices of opposition, the prevention of such activities proved difficult to suppress.<sup>14</sup> There was an increased consciousness and concern over “the great sin of Gaming within this Jurisdiction, to the great dishonor of God, the corrupting of youth, and expending of much precious time and estate.”<sup>15</sup> This immorality of gaming was intimately enmeshed with the wicked nature of taverns, both of which were often motivated by excessive drinking.

The drinking culture in taverns was a dominant contributing factor to this perception of the institution and reinforced the reputation public houses bore as being the centers of idleness, drunkenness, vice, and a lack of morals and restraint. It was true that many a tavern housed crimes of murder, dueling, prostitution, gambling, and drinking one’s self to death.<sup>16</sup> Surely there were concerns surrounding the affairs of the tavern, predominantly in regard to drinking to excess and those who “drank for drinking’s sake.”<sup>17</sup> Consider the following record summary of a Massachusetts court order:

General Court Order Directing That Limits Be Imposed On The Number Of Taverns In Each Town Of The Colony In An Effort To Reduce The Sin Of Excessive Drinking. Consented To By The Deputies. Not Consented By The Magistrates.<sup>18</sup>

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copies or was willed, as Bibles often were, explicitly to other members of the family,” and was “in a number of households, the only book that people had at hand,” (124).

<sup>14</sup> George Francis Dow, *Every Day Life in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 110–111. Also cited in this text are examples of particular individuals whose behavior supports the claims made here about the difficulties of enforcement, despite the fact that laws were repeatedly established in an effort to maintain order and virtue in the colonies. These measures became necessary in the eyes of the law as associated events of disorder became an unwanted commonplace.

<sup>15</sup> *Laws and Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony*, Cambridge, 1672 as cited in Dow, 111.

<sup>16</sup> For an example of drinking one’s self to death in a tavern see: “Philadelphia, April 10,” *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 10, 1766, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Long, “Taverns and Coffeehouses,” 16.

<sup>18</sup> “General court order directing that limits be imposed on the number of taverns in each town of the colony in an effort to reduce the sin of excessive drinking. Consented to by the deputies. Not consented by the magistrates,” October 31, 1679, Volume Number: 112, Page: 307A, The Massachusetts Archives Collections (1629-1799). Especially as the colonies develop further, this concern about the number of taverns in a given community or region will continue to pop up. For further examples of similar petitions, I found the following most useful: “See



This state record is just one of many that reflect a continued concern within the colonies and of the crown regarding the toxicity of taverns in the community. Analyzing petitions of this nature uncovers an enduring concern about and attempts to prevent such unbecoming behavior as excessive drinking and the encouragement of sin, lewdness, gambling, and vice. County courts even fined tavern keepers who permitted these amusements in their public houses.<sup>19</sup> Legislative efforts seem to reflect an objective “directed against indulgence in gaiety and human weakness in and about a public tavern.”<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, efforts to thwart this kind of behavior went beyond measures concerning the institution as a whole. Specific members of the community were also targeted in an effort to reduce unwanted behavior:

Attested Copy Of The Judgment Of A Presbytery Of Ministers Rebuking Steward Southgate For Libel, Warning John Harvey Against Drunkenness, And Absolving John Moore And James McClellan For Fornication.<sup>21</sup>

Community attempts such as the above, which highlighted the misdeeds of particular individuals, further emphasized the attention given to encouraging “piety and virtue and preventing and punishing vice and prophaneness and immorality.”<sup>22</sup> Records of New England’s early years provide several examples that underline the destructive behavior of persons concerning liquor

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Resolves 1696-1697, Explanatory Chapters, Pages 537-540,” June 12, 1696, The Massachusetts Archives Collections (1629-1799); “See The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay,” October 25, 1692, The Massachusetts Archives Collections (1629-1799); “See The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay,” December 23, 1727, The Massachusetts Archives Collections (1629-1799); “See: Transcripts Of Public Documents, Series 161X, V. 3, Pages 189-191,” The Massachusetts Archives Collections (1629-1799).

<sup>19</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Albions Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 148. Further noted, “The General Court decreed in 1631 that ‘all persons whatsoever that have cards, dice or tables in their houses shall make away with them before the next Court, under pain of punishment.’”

<sup>20</sup> Dow, 111.

<sup>21</sup> “See The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay. See pages 65-79, 82-91, 94-101, and 109-110,” June 6, 1739, The Massachusetts Archives Collections (1629-1799).

<sup>22</sup> “See: Transcripts Of Public Documents, Series 161X, V. 3, Pages 189-191,” The Massachusetts Archives Collections (1629-1799).

sales and taverns. For example, port towns were often afforded advantageous access to imported alcohol as a result of their location along the water. These spirits could then be distributed at their local tavern, but as one historic port town learned, the desire for such substances could lead to the most unfortunate and “a most perverse interpretation and abuse of the law.” For colonial New Haven, local resident Robert the Drummer exposed this reality. Despite not having a tavern license, Robert managed to procure a large quantity of liquor. Upon learning of this, his friends from the shipyard took advantage of his ready supply, appearing one night on his doorstep, thirsty and with cash in hand. Unable to turn down the potential profit, but conflicted by wanting to obey the law, Robert apparently saw his next actions as an appropriate compromise. He convinced himself that although he had no license to serve “small quantities,” he knew not of a law against his “sale of liquor in *large* quantities.”<sup>23</sup> The result of such manipulation of the rules was a loud brawl through the quiet, sleeping streets of Connecticut and a series of fines. This was not the only instance of unlicensed tavern brawls in New England. In fact, one such event in Salem helped provoke the anti-tavern crusade of minister John Higginson, who warned of the “sin of drunkenness and the excessive number of drinking houses” in the area. Additionally, a contemporary and scandalous surge of robberies along the King’s Highway, which was later revealed to be in connection with three young locals who had filled themselves with cider at a tavern nearby just before committing their last act of banditry, fueled Higginson’s vehement fight against the evils of the tavern. At the time, Salem had a total of fourteen – licensed and unlicensed – in addition to at least four new petitions for tavern licenses.<sup>24</sup> He implored the court to terminate all taverns but those most necessary for entertaining travelers, doing so in the name

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<sup>23</sup> Diane Rapaport, *The Naked Quaker: True Crimes and Controversies from the Courts of Colonial New England* (Beverly, Mass: Commonwealth Editions, 2007), chap. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

of the good “church members, freemen and sober people of Salem.” Although drunkenness was not uncommon, Salem did seem to be among the top ranks of spirituous settlements in New England. Salem, port cities, and other towns with maritime economics saw a more prominent tavern base, as it was necessary to accommodate the men come ashore “with time and money on their hands.” In addition to the transients of the sea, locals were likewise prone to end their hardworking days with a dram or a mug. Surviving court records “paint a picture of boozy, smoke-filled rooms and disorderly behavior” at the heart of the most volatile institution of the seventeenth century. These episodes contributed to the “polite order” issued by the court a year later in response to Higginson’s petition, which recommended the renewal of licenses for only “the Ancientest, most suitable and most orderly houses and ordinary keepers.”<sup>25</sup> Regulating tavern behavior seemed like an appropriate way to encourage and enforce good moral behavior throughout the community as these public houses had such a central and influential role in the everyday lives of the people.<sup>26</sup>

The morality and good nature of those granted a tavern license was a reoccurring theme in colonial American society. To further supplement attempts at regulating tavern behavior, restrictions were also put in place regarding who could open and operate a tavern. It was believed that if the magistrates could regulate the taverns by insuring only those of the most

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<sup>25</sup> Rapaport, chap. 4. Similarly, in 1705, the General Court of Massachusetts ruled that new tavern licenses were to be granted only “to those of good repute, with convenient houses and at least 2 beds to entertain strangers and ability to provide ‘pennyworths’ (fixed price beer).” See also: Nathan, 11, which reveals additionally that applicants had to secure the endorsement of the Treasurer to be considered. Further see: *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 26, 1776, 2.

<sup>26</sup> For an example of how discussions about tavern regulations remained the foci of numerous newspaper articles almost one hundred years later, especially with the explosion of city populations, see: “The following is Inserted by Request. from the Pennsylvania Packet,” *The Providence Gazette; and Country Journal*, November 21, 1772. Perhaps even more significant is the title of this piece, which reveals the crucial system of colonial cross-communication in educating or otherwise reaching the public, as well as the way in which a sort of imagined community, according to Anderson’s philosophy, had begun to develop throughout the colonies. That is to say that, for example, someone in Providence read the Pennsylvania paper and, finding resonance with their sentiment, requested it be reprinted in the *Gazette* to inform the colonists of Rhode Island.

upstanding character were approved, they could in turn keep the community as virtuous as possible.<sup>27</sup> Frequenting such a popular venue was believed to influence the mindset and actions of the patrons, and being that the owners set the tone for their establishments, this seemed the most efficient approach to maintaining morality. However, by virtue of being a *public* house of entertainment, the tavern was, understandably, unpredictable, and indulging one's vices came along with the territory.

While it is clear that tavern interiors saw their fair share of scandals and scams, it is also important to consider that these accounts of indecency come to us from a time when Puritan values in early New England were pervasive and foundational. This was a time when, according to historian Benjamin Carp, “pastors and magistrates kept a stern eye on the people they saw as their charges.”<sup>28</sup> Despite their best efforts to promote piety and cultivate complaisance, a maelstrom of ambition and desire to prosper had already begun its path of chaos through the colonies. This perceived threat involved a far more deeply rooted insecurity that went back to Old England, and Puritans felt compelled to stamp out lewdness, corruption, sin, and immorality at every turn. There was perhaps no more menacing a source of this wickedness than the tavern.<sup>29</sup>

Both the White Horse and Sun taverns of Boston in 1728, for example, facilitated the manifestation of a major duel on the Boston Common, and consequently, served as first aid

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<sup>27</sup> Even after the nation had entered the period of the Early American Republic, attempts at keeping publicans honest continued. This is reflective of the pervasive regulation of the keepers of public houses, which so consumed the acts of early magisterial assertions of power and maintenance of virtue. For an example article see James Benezet and John Hart, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 22, 1780.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin L. Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots: The Boston Tea Party & The Making of America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), 31.

<sup>29</sup> For further insight into the Puritan mindset and influence, see Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture*, 1st New edition, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); see also: Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century*, Revised ed. (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1979).

quarters for the wounded rivals. This was perhaps the result of two men who, being in disagreement, were propelled by liquid courage to take action.<sup>30</sup> Decades later, in Charlestown, South Carolina, duels and taverns would still find themselves attached, when an article reprinted in the *Massachusetts-Gazette and Boston News-Letter* reported, “a Duel was fought with Pistols, in a Room in Mr. Holliday’s Tavern on the Bay... which unhappily ended in the immediate Death of Mr. Delancey.”<sup>31</sup> More in step with the abovementioned efforts to ascribe virtue in the community by regulating who could keep legal public houses of entertainment are the accounts of men who visited disreputable taverns. These were public houses owned by people “of questionable morals” which “their more virtuous neighbors” felt compelled to keep a watchful eye on. Cotton Mather, for example, noted in his 1713 diary that he had composed a “catalogue of young men, who visit wicked houses,” and he planned to castigate these individuals for their indiscretions. Known haunts of this nature included those of Alice Thomas and Hannah Dilley, both convicted “madams” of Boston. Thomas, twice-widowed, kept a “house of entertainment” at the King’s Arms Tavern in Boston’s North End. Serving beer and accommodating guests by day, Thomas, in addition to a host of other criminal deeds, was known to flip her tavern into a brothel by night. She was noted as providing “frequent, secret, and unseasonable entertainment in her house to lewd, lascivious, and notorious persons of both sexes, giving them opportunity to commit carnal wickedness, and by common fame, she is a common baud.”<sup>32</sup> Boston also saw the closing of one of its most infamous whorehouses in 1753 when Hannah Dilley was found

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<sup>30</sup> Simons, 96–116; even though the account is of a Virginian’s secret diary, for further examples of taverns used as houses of sin, see Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 300-302. Herein is an account of a particularly promiscuous individual who, on more than one occasion, “picked up a whore and carried her to a tavern... and afterwards... committed uncleanness for which God forgave.”

<sup>31</sup> “Charlestown, South-Carolina, Aug. 19,” *The Massachusetts-Gazette, and Boston News-Letter*, September 19, 1771.

<sup>32</sup> Simons, 98–100.

guilty of operating a house “where men were entertained for the purposes of ‘lechery’ and ‘fornication,’” and where she “enticed men to the house in order ‘to carnally lie with whores’ she procured.” Both women were subjected to public punishments for their moral depravity.<sup>33</sup>

It should be noted that while the anti-tavern crusade was a vocal constituent, over time it was more likely the community was in favor of taverns. Often it was the case that even though unlicensed taverns existed, “the law turned a blind eye until trouble broke out.”<sup>34</sup> That is to say that the rallying cry was not to demolish all taverns, rather the focus of its opponents was more about reforming it and keeping the peace and virtue of the community intact. Nathan includes examples of these kinds of attempts such as an English visitor in Boston in 1663 who complained:

At houses of entertainment into which a stranger went, he was presently followed by one appointed to that office, who would thrust himself into the company uninvited, and if he called for more drink than the officer thought in his judgment he could soberly bear away, he would presently countermand it, and appoint the proportion, beyond which he could not get one drop.

Church officials were so afraid of the wasteful offenses that accompanied tavern entertainment that petitions to the court yielded laws regulating the amount of time that could be spent in a tavern during any one visit. This was accompanied by a closing-time curfew upon the arrival of which all were expected to head home.<sup>35</sup> However, they realized that forcing these limitations on the community admittedly did little for their reputation. “Coupled with the fact that taverns had become big business” and laws against them began to affect influential people, tavern regulations became increasingly difficult to pass.<sup>36</sup> These rulings threatened the nature of

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<sup>33</sup> Simons, 98-100.

<sup>34</sup> Nathan, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

the tavern upon which a number of inhabitants depended. Ultimately popular support helped the tavern retain its status as the central communication and information hub of the people. In short, religious agenda and conviction seemingly tainted the image of tavern landscape. In understanding the way religious and legislative forces attempted to regulate the character of the community by regulating the character of the tavern, however, it is evident that taverns were still regarded as fundamental facilities. They could not altogether do away with the institution because of its necessary position in society, but they certainly tried to restrict tavern keepers and modes of entertainment therein instead.

It was propagated that disruptive and destructive behavior was bred within the walls of the tavern. This outlook, often informed by religion, permeated the various stages of colonial development associated with the rapid changes that had occurred since settlement. Confronted by a growing secularity in New England and also with the realities of commercial trade expansion and associated disputes and litigiousness, the Puritans feared that New England was collapsing into “Rhode Islandism.”<sup>37</sup> That is to say that as the ethos of the mercantile commercial communities of New England shifted, “its guiding principles were [no longer] social stability, order and the discipline of the senses, but mobility, growth, and the enjoyment of life.”<sup>38</sup> The Puritan traditions at the foundation of this New World settlement were no longer enough to maintain community cooperation and consensus as the colonies developed and diversified.

Mercantilism came to be at the heart of port cities such as Boston. Exchange networks radiated out from the docks, lacing the city to inter-colonial and international ports throughout

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<sup>37</sup> Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, as cited in Joseph A. Conforti, *Imagining New England: Explorations of Regional Identity from the Pilgrims to the Mid-Twentieth Century*, 1st edition (Chapel Hill, NC and London, England: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 40.

<sup>38</sup> Bailyn, 139–142, as cited in Greene, 64.

the Atlantic. The growth of the merchant community had a marked influence on the economic, physical, and social evolution of Boston. As merchants prominently reigned over their Atlantic domain, the tides of Puritan favor swiftly shifted, and New England saw devotional declension, a fractured ecclesiastic community, and the erosion of church authority. The Puritans saw the emergence of what they deemed “the profane,” or secularity in pursuing economic ends, and the sort of corrosive behavior they had associated with the so called “Isle of Errors, that ‘sewer of New England,’” the infamous colony of Rhode Island. New England had long been an asylum for the profane, but with the expansion of trade and the development of the ports in the seventeenth century the “highly visible concentrations of New Englanders who resided, often boastfully, outside the Puritan fold” wholly manifested.<sup>39</sup> This population of “the profane” replaced the upright meetinghouse with the malignant tavern. As the seventeenth century approached its end, it was the case in many port cities that “taverns far outnumbered meetinghouses.”<sup>40</sup> Before the turn of the century, Bostonians supported forty-five taverns, and as “‘New England’ rum – a by-product of trade with the West Indies where molasses was produced – had already begun to replace beer and ale as the drink of choice,” drunkenness in the city and those ports cities like it saw a marked upsurge. As could be expected, “drunkenness was added to acquisitiveness, contentiousness, and a perceived growth of religious indifference as evidence of Puritan New England’s declension and nascent Rhode Islandism.” Colonial development and their cultural detachment from the mother country contributed in tandem to the deepening of their “regional self-consciousness and official apprehension that New England’s distinctive moral identity was threatened by the corrosive forces of economic ambition” alive in

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<sup>39</sup> Conforti, 40.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. See also: “Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village,” [http://resources.osv.org/explore\\_learn/document\\_viewer.php?DocID=631](http://resources.osv.org/explore_learn/document_viewer.php?DocID=631) (accessed January 16, 2016).



the taverns.<sup>41</sup> As Puritans began to feel their values slipping away from the minds of the people, – a result of the advancements in mercantile communities, which in turn opened doors to greater opportunities – the moral leaders viewed the tavern, the central hub that accommodated the many functions of daily life, as an incubator of vice.

### **Location, Location, Location**

*“Located at the center of the community and welcome to all (well nearly all), taverns were an institution of the common folk as much as the privileged and wealthy.”<sup>42</sup>*

**Gavin R. Nathan**

The location of a tavern in a colonial community was important. Turning to the advertisement section of their newspapers almost always revealed at least one announcement of land on the market or in use as a tavern. As was the case in the aforementioned Massachusetts Archives Record Summaries, advertisements for tracts of land across decades and even centuries tended toward a time-honored jargon. While not absolute, there was a noticeable inclination to employ certain turns of phrase or to emphasize particular features of the property. Commonly this was done by advertising the place as being well situated for use as a tavern, specifically noting its convenient placement, commodiousness, and close proximity to the post roads and public venues. Often care was taken to highlight the tavern’s value as a suitable stop for travelers or its position in or near the town center. John Murray, for example, looking to sell his house, placed an advertisement in his local newspaper, describing his land as having been “‘improved for several Years past as a Tavern, being well situated upon the public Road for that Business.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Conforti, 40. See also: David W. Conroy, *In Public Houses: Drink and the Revolution of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts*, 1 edition (Chapel Hill, N.C: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 49-56.

<sup>42</sup> Nathan, 7.

<sup>43</sup> *Supplement to the Boston Evening-Post*, December 30, 1765.

Murray was in good company when it came to listing houses for sale in this way. A central location, situated on a main street or road, often made taverns ideal gathering places for an assortment of affairs, especially those of religious or political groups.<sup>44</sup> The following example further emphasizes the impact of location and quality service on operating a successful tavern:

PUBLIC Notice is hereby given, that the Subscriber has lately set up an Inn, or public House of Entertainment, in the said Town, at the Sign of King George the Third, near the Court House, on the North Side of Penn-street, and East Side of Callowhill-Street, being a good Stand, and an old accustomed Tavern; where he has good Accommodations, for the Reception of Gentlemen Travellers, &c. And as he purposes to use his utmost Endeavours to oblige all Persons who favour him with their Custom, he hopes to meet with such Encouragement from the Public as his Merit deserves.... situate on the South Side of Penn-street, the fourth Lot from the Court-house in the Centre Square, very convenient for a Store, Tavern, or private Family....



JAMES WHITEHEAD, jun.<sup>45</sup>

This example includes several key features in one advertisement. First, Whitehead acknowledges he has opened a public house of entertainment at the Sign of King George the Third. Signboards were required by law in Massachusetts for example since 1647, and were used to signal to passersby not only that there was a tavern in sight, but also, especially as they became more politicized over time, what type of tavern it was.<sup>46</sup> This could include anything from advertising the available amenities to the establishment's political affiliation. In fact, before

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<sup>44</sup> For further examples of tavern advertisements emphasizing their location, refer to: *The Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, March 30, 1776; *United States Chronicle*, May 1, 1800; James Greenleaf, *Sales at Auction. On Tuesday the Third Day of February next ... at the City-Tavern in Albany, Will Be Sold, the Undermentioned Well Situated Tracts of Land, in the State of New-York* (Albany: --Printed by John Barber, 1807). See also David A. D'Apice, *Billerica*, 47. In this text, Billerica's town center and the proximity of Solomon Pollard Tavern in the distance to it is shown.

<sup>45</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 14, 1768. See also: *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 11, 1766. For another example suggestive of a growing refinement or politicization within the tavern, see: *Supplement to the Boston-Gazette, &c.*, April 2, 1770, 4.

<sup>46</sup> "Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village," which reads: "Massachusetts decreed that every establishment 'shall have some inoffensive sign, obvious, for the direction of strangers' posted within three months of the tavern's licensing."

the Revolution, many public houses bore names in tribute to the crown, which were then reflected in their signboards. As tensions mounted, establishments such as the King's Arms for example, often "changed their names to less politically charged ones... in order not to alienate any patrons."<sup>47</sup> One article from 1776 supports this fact reading: "Within a few days past, the sign of the British Union Flag, which had been a Tavern sign at a house in this town, near half a century, was taken down, and on Friday last the sign of *the flag of the Thirteen United States of America* was put up in the place thereof, by the patriotic owner of the house, who certainly deserves every reasonable encouragement of his countrymen."<sup>48</sup> A number of Tory taverns, however, remained obvious as they retained the British names and signboard symbols, which "generally advertised the politics of the patrons who frequented the establishment."<sup>49</sup>

Whitehead further mentions in his advertisement that the tavern is near the courthouse, which reveals its place in the town center, as well as the kinds of clientele likely to frequent the establishment. Whitehead goes on to write that he has good accommodations for gentlemen travelers. He also makes a declaration of his commitment to entertain his customers to the best of his ability and writes that he hopes to earn the public's favor.<sup>50</sup> The colonial use of the word "entertainment" does not always fall in line with the modern employment. Often, this word was used simply to refer to the baseline accommodations provided during one's stay.<sup>51</sup> Whitehead's

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<sup>47</sup> Volo and Volo, 281.

<sup>48</sup> "Extract of a Letter from Philadelphia, Aug. 10," *The Newport Mercury*, August 19, 1776.

<sup>49</sup> Volo and Volo, 281. For more on signboards see: Kym S. Rice, *Early American Taverns: For the Entertainment of Friends and Strangers* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1983), 74.

<sup>50</sup> For more on the hospitality of tavern keepers: Rice, 78. See also: Thompson, 87.

<sup>51</sup> More conventional perceptions of entertainment were also offered in the tavern, and often tended toward the spectacular, claiming to exhibit the occasional scientific wonder. For examples see: Pool, *Mr. Pool, the First American That Ever Exhibited the Following Equestrian Feats of Horsemanship on the Continent, Intends Performing on Saturday Afternoon Next, near the Powder-House the Performance to Begin at Half Past Four O'clock in the Afternoon (If the Weather Will Permit, If Not, the First Fair Day after Sunday). Tickets to Be Had at*

article was written in March of 1767, yet it was printed in the January 1768 issue of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. This is likely reflective of the common practice of subscribers to take out ads that were to run in each issue over a period of time. By having this advertisement for his tavern run continuously, or even intermittently, for a period of just under a year, Whitehead likely drew in a number of customers.

A tavern's convenience and accommodations, whether best suited for transients, townspeople, or both, likewise reflect the nature of the news to be circulated in and around the tavern, which was crucial in such a thinly settled environment. This vocabulary, used to signal ideal public house sites, speaks to the values of the colonists, as well as to the fundamental influence that a tavern's location had on its primary functions, regular crowd, and especially on the means and sorts of communication and information facilitated in and disseminated through the institution itself. For example, the most direct route to Boston by land was through the town of Medford, which in the early days of the colonies was described by a visitor as being little more than "a small Village consisting of a few Houses," with "there being nothing remarkable to be seen" there.<sup>52</sup> With Boston being the most prominent city in Massachusetts, Medford saw a great deal of traffic, which required, relative to the size and status of the town, a particularly large number of tavern accommodations. The earliest record of an established public house here

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*Mr. Gordon's Tavern, Price Two Shillings Each. There Will Be Seats Provided for the Ladies and Gentlemen. A Clown Will Entertain the Ladies and Gentlemen between the Feats. ...* (Providence: Printed by John Carter, 1786); Citizen Cressin, "Exhibitions, comic and experimental.... November 18, 1796," (Providence, 1796), Broadside; *The Colonial Scene*, annotated list of books, broadsides, prints, and maps, April, 1950, American Antiquarian Society and the John Carter Brown Library; *The Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, October 5, 1767, 3, which describes the various balancing acts of the subscriber, who is set to perform nearly every day during his stay at the Royal Exchange Tavern in Boston. See also: "Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village." Another example of an entertainment can be found in Richard D. Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 40, which describes "the infamous mock sermon episode of February 19, 1712," wherein a tavern-goer dressed up like a priest, delivered a "Mock-Sermon full of Monstrous profaneness and obscenity," and was such a hit with the rest of the patrons that it was later printed and distributed.

<sup>52</sup> John H. Hooper, "The taverns of Medford" [Read before the Medford Historical Society, November 21, 1904], Medford Historical Society Papers, Volume 8, 1-2.

comes from 1686, and it seems as though a tavern were present in every corner of Medford, and in various kinds of regions. This goes to show that location affected function, patronage, and thus communication. Those taverns on the road into the city were likely privy to guests of some official capacity, or with important social, political, and economic news perhaps. That which was kept at the present site of City Hall or on the corner of Main Street may well have been at the center of the colonial town, and thus favorite haunts of market goers, parish members, and those associated with other central public establishments. The tavern near the dock was likely situated by the wharf at which “vessels were cleared for sea at an early date,” granting the patrons access to mercantile news.<sup>53</sup> All of this is to say that taverns had a number of places in the community, each with its own unique history, but all of which contributed in some way to the overarching narrative of the community, the colony, and the nation at large.

Furthermore, taverns positioned in close proximity to places like the meeting house and the courthouse ascribed communication methods that were then dependent upon their immediacy to these other public spaces; “in fact the positioning of taverns was a strategic decision for local government.”<sup>54</sup> As a result, taverns were prime locations for attracting customers after religious services and court sessions, especially during the winter months when the tavern offered the solace of heat unavailable in other buildings. At Lexington’s Buckman Tavern, for example, the Buckman’s provided personal foot warmers. Buckman Tavern was located right in the center of town, almost on the green itself, so it was the natural second location in times when New England weather made worship in the unheated meetinghouse next door impossible.<sup>55</sup> In fact,

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<sup>53</sup> Hooper, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Nathan, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Buckman Tavern: self-paced audio tour, Lexington, Massachusetts, July 2, 2015.

according to Gavin Nathan, the centuries long entangled relationship “between the religious and the non-religious types of ‘meetinghouse’ in New England” is particularly revealing.<sup>56</sup> In 1651, for example, John Vyall of the Ship Tavern was permitted to open an ordinary, so long as he “keepe it near the new meeting house.”<sup>57</sup> Taverns were often positioned in this way specifically for the convenience of churchgoers in need of refreshment, a tactic that eventually backfired. Sunday services and the tavern were the two most common places for the thinly settled colonists to congregate publically, so their connection was logical. However, as parishioners convened for their noon break from worship, “men wore a path between the tavern and the meetinghouse,” and stopping in for a warm mug of flip or hard cider could result in people becoming so relaxed that they were incapacitated for the remainder of the day’s services.<sup>58</sup> According to Nathan, as “the warmth and good spirit of the tavern” threatened the “often cold and uncomfortable environment of the church,” the campaign was launched to keep colonists “on church pews and not tavern stools.”<sup>59</sup> Overwhelmingly, tavern growth had “more than kept the pace” with that of Boston’s population so that soon, as political and commercial interests overpowered the authority of the church, local taverns were perceived as necessary evils: “essential for sailors and travelers but not essential for local residents.”<sup>60</sup> Yet the legal prohibitions imposed upon the tavern failed to stifle its popular fascination, a phenomenon that endured into and far beyond the Revolution.

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<sup>56</sup> Nathan, 11.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. N.B. the Ship Tavern noted here is not the same public house referred to by the same name earlier in the chapter, highlighting one of the many challenges to keeping track of colonial taverns: many were known by the same or similar names, throughout the town, the colonies, and even abroad.

<sup>58</sup> “Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village,” [http://resources.osv.org/explore\\_learn/document\\_viewer.php?DocID=1887](http://resources.osv.org/explore_learn/document_viewer.php?DocID=1887) (accessed January 16, 2016). For more on the effects of drinking to excess, see: Salinger, especially 67-71.

<sup>59</sup> Nathan, 8. Interestingly, taverns did not often feature much seating, which further encouraged communication amongst patrons. For more information see: Conroy, 47-49.

<sup>60</sup> Nathan, 9.

Location not only influenced the character and functions of the tavern, it also impacted the news discussed while parishioners, justices, merchants, and travelers rubbed elbows, raised a pint, and unwound while recounting the events of the day. To further encapsulate the many values of location, Nathan claims: “taverns were so woven into the attitudes, traditions and landscapes of America they deserve the title of institution.”<sup>61</sup> These institutions were shaped to accommodate transients and townspeople alike. Most importantly, in providing the public with a convenient and accessible venue, the tavern offered a social forum based on exchange and sociability. This setting was far less restricted than other popular public spaces like the church, which allowed for more open discussions and debates “that helped reinforce social norms in a young and rapidly growing community.”<sup>62</sup> Tavern location affected the development of communication networks that were essential in the cultivation of community identity.

**“The Commonness of the Tavern”**<sup>63</sup>

***“There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn.”***

**Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)**<sup>64</sup>

The location of the tavern was essential in advertising the facilities’ best qualities and attracting various clienteles. A simple hanging sign served as a relatively good indication to weary travelers of where they could stop for entertainment, as well as what type of

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<sup>61</sup> Nathan, 7. For supplementary works on the impact of the tavern, see Thompson, Salinger, and Conroy.

<sup>62</sup> Nathan, 3, 7.

<sup>63</sup> Long, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Nathan, sec. Front Matter.

accommodations the establishment might offer.<sup>65</sup> For example, signs featuring the image of a horse were quite common as this meant that stables were available on the property. The pictures displayed on their signs, much like the location of the taverns themselves, could advertise the type of business they dealt with most.<sup>66</sup> As was true of many Boston taverns, establishments near the docks with a sign depicting an anchor or a lighthouse could reasonably be taken as a public house tied to the shipping industry.<sup>67</sup> This practice was especially useful early on while illiteracy was more common; however, as literacy increased, words were also incorporated onto the signs.<sup>68</sup>

Travelers nevertheless had to always be alert when stopping for the night. Being dispersed at such great distances from each other, transients did not always have the luxury of being choosy about their lodgings, a reality that could at times put individuals in precarious positions. One such misadventure was coming upon inadequate or unconventional sleeping arrangements. In essence, the nightly amenities offered by colonial taverns varied. Often, however, one sought out not a room for the night, but rather physical space enough for their body and few possessions alone.<sup>69</sup> Pursuing suitable accommodations on the road “was like a game of

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<sup>65</sup> To see an example of the way in which these signboards have their own story of the tavern to tell, see: Hooper, 9, which discusses the sign of the Royal Oak Tavern in Medford, dated 1769.

<sup>66</sup> Rice, 74; Nathan, 16-17.

<sup>67</sup> Nathan, 75. In fact, the Lighthouse and Anchor Tavern in Boston, built in 1763, was an actual tavern near the Old North Meeting House, accommodating local boatmen and dockworkers especially. The Lighthouse and Anchor also upped their status with a print and transportation double threat: the stagecoach. The “Portsmouth Flying Stage” began its route here in 1763, travelling to Portsmouth or Newport.

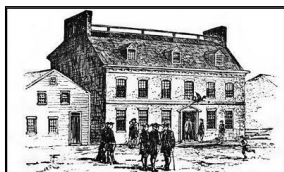
<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17; Rice, 74; “Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village.”

<sup>69</sup> One such misfortune was inadequate or unconventional sleeping arrangements. In essence, the nightly amenities offered by colonial taverns varied. Often, however, one sought out not a room for the night, but rather physical space enough for their body and few possessions alone. For further insight into this particular element of the tavern, see: *The Wayside Inn: self-guided tour*, Sudbury, Massachusetts, August 8, 2015; Salinger, chap. 7; *Volo and Volo*, 280.



chance in which the odds were most often stacked against” the traveler. To venture outside of one’s familiar setting could reduce most colonists to lament their fates at unknown taverns, as it was impossible to know the quality of dwellings one would stumble upon in the course of their trip. Often one would only have the advice of locals to go on, but much beyond that, the nature of colonial travel left many “at the mercy of the unpredictable roadside accommodations.”<sup>70</sup> One of the only other saving graces to both locals and visitors alike was the newspapers warning against or praising a particular establishment. Take the following for example:

PUBLICK Notice is hereby given to all Gentlemen Travellers, and others, that the Subscriber, at the Sign of the White Horse, near the Nottingham Iron Works, in Baltimore County, Maryland, on the Post Road from Philadelphia to Annapolis and Virginia, hath kept Tavern better than two Years in a very commodious neat Stone House, two Stories high, being purposely built for a Tavern, consisting of several Apartments, proper for entertaining separate Companies: And whereas a certain near Neighbour (distant near a Quarter of a Mile North side of said Subscriber’s Tavern) living in a small old wooden House, hath lately opened an Ordinary, and also set up the Sign of the White Horse, alias Mare, in imitation of the Subscriber’s Sign, and in Opposition to him, with a Design to decoy Travellers and Strangers coming from the Northward, who are directed to the Subscriber’s Tavern. This therefore serves to caution all Gentlemen Travellers, and others, traveling from Philadelphia to the Southward, from being deceived or imposed on by the Counterfeit White Horse, alias Mare, at the old wooden House, (the Falacy being obvious) as the true original White Horse Tavern is but less than a Quarter of a Mile Southward from the Counterfeit; where all Travellers, and others, may depend on good Entertainment, and king Usage, from their humble servant, RICHARD CHEYNE.<sup>71</sup>



Above is another demonstration of a local resident taking to the newspaper to get a message out to his community and passersby. Cheyne put this advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* to warn readers looking to visit his tavern at the Sign of the White Horse. The white horse was a common identifier chosen by tavern keepers to designate to their establishment, yet in this case,

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<sup>70</sup> Salinger, 211; Rice, 74.

<sup>71</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, October 11, 1759.

the duplicate Sign of the White Horse nearby was a deliberate imitation of his own. Situated on the Post Road, Cheyne's tavern likely welcomed a steady flow of customers in search of refreshment and entertainment on their journeys. The opening of an oppositional tavern by the same name just a few miles away on the same busy road surely confused travelers and ensnared a number of the original White Horse's clientele. Cheyne took advantage of the efficiency of print materials to disseminate his message broadly. Employing this medium he was able to caution all those traveling this road of the tavern imposter, careful to emphasize the difference between the two in terms of their placements along the route. True to the style of many publican advertisements, he is sure to include his promise to provide quality services to all who favor his tavern with their company.

Travel troubles like difficulty locating or distinguishing between taverns were not uncommon. Most people did not tend to travel beyond their hometown. By modern standards, such an adventure would be more akin to traveling to a foreign country.<sup>72</sup> Travel in the colonies was often dangerous, uncertain, tedious and exhausting.<sup>73</sup> It was also easy to get lost. Often taverns were intentionally established outside of town to "be Serviceable to those who on long Journies are in want of Necessary Refreshmt," and yet as a result, taverns could be the only landmarks noted for miles.<sup>74</sup> Established in town centers or on the outskirts, along the most frequented roads, intersections, docks, and throughout the rural countryside, weary travelers often measured their journeys in the distances between taverns.<sup>75</sup> Although by modern standards

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<sup>72</sup> Leisurely travel for amusement was rarity until after the 1820s. For more information see Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1790-1840*, Reprint edition (New York: Harper Perennial, 1989), 221.

<sup>73</sup> Rice, 74.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. See also: Salinger, 63.

<sup>75</sup> Rice, 74.

this may not seem the most reliable method of measurement, it is important to consider that in a time when there were far fewer public buildings, it was logical to direct a foreigner by pointing out the most prominent surroundings. In colonial communities, the numerous and multifunctional taverns were among the most prominent buildings, and therefore effective landmarks, by virtue of their popularity and frequent use.<sup>76</sup>

The social landscape would be subject to change over time, especially as tensions mounted during the decade leading up to the Revolution. The tavern became increasingly politicized in contrast to the interior prior, which was often one of mixed company. In 1760, John Adams found himself in such a setting when he ventured from his favorite tavern haunts of Boston to meet friends at Thayer's in Weymouth. As the door swung open and Adams began to take in the scene before him, he found the public house was indeed packed by the public: "Negroes with a fiddle, young fellows and girls dancing in the chamber as if they would kick the floor thru... fiddling and dancing of both sexes and all ages, in the lower room, singing, dancing, fiddling, drinking flip and toddy, and drams."<sup>77</sup> Appealing to some as it may be (and it certainly was), this type of public house of entertainment was simply not his scene. Yet it is the very possibility for such assemblies, wherein the likes of future president of the United States John Adams might "rub elbows with, drink with, and shout over the noise of a greater variety of the people of Massachusetts than was his habit," that made a sense of community possible.<sup>78</sup> The landscape of the tavern, by its very nature as a *public* house, became an unprecedented platform

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<sup>76</sup> Rice, 74.

<sup>77</sup> Salinger, 234, and David McCullough, *John Adams*, 1st Touchstone edition (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 49.

<sup>78</sup> Salinger, 234.

upon which communication networks, communal sentiments, and revolutionary identity developed and transformed the colonies.

Taverns incubated scores of clubs, societies, political parties, and other specialized groups over the course of colonial social life's development.<sup>79</sup> Taverns absorbed the role of headquarters into its multifaceted nature, a function that would morph along with the increased politicization of the tavern and the nation during and after the Revolution. That is to say that the tavern served as headquarters to number of societies simultaneously, as well as over time. Politicized or otherwise, however, this public space was often the most ideal and logical meeting ground because of its prime locations and roles in colonial daily life. In particular, the taverns situated near the church, along the docks, and around the courthouse provide useful insight into their role as secular meetinghouses.

Boston was a city founded along the waterline, an advantage for the colonists as they engaged in the modes of transatlantic commerce from which the majority of their settlement's early prominence was derived. Seaport settlements relied on nearby taverns as venues for mercantile business, to scout for or be recruited to maritime occupations, to receive news from incoming mariners and ship's masters who often hung their mailbags in taverns before the post office, and to post or read notices and the latest gossip from abroad. The number of Boston's oldest public houses established along docks and harbors reveals and reflects the way in which the city was built up around maritime economics. The extension of the dock into wharves and piers further enabled vessels to approach the tavern to unload. A majority of the transportation between the colonies in their earliest stages depended on the sea, rendering the port the busiest place in all of Boston. Wharves radiated out in various directions and records of the

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<sup>79</sup> "Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village."

concentration of houses, businesses, and ships along the waterline are indicative of the thriving transatlantic role of the city.<sup>80</sup> In the same vein, as cargo was unpacked just outside the tavern, it became the natural venue for merchants' sales. The wharves and their taverns "were the key centers of information in port towns."<sup>81</sup> In the mercantile world, having access to the most up-to-date information "was as much a necessity as capital, credit, or the ability to calculate." Merchants, while supporters of the newspapers "as subscribers and as advertisers," and finding value in print materials, had to further keep themselves informed by "depend[ing] first and foremost on face-to-face socializing in their urban locations, wharves, [and] the taverns."<sup>82</sup> These information exchanges were a daily occurrence. Additionally, being that Boston was a "[seat] of government as well as trade, political news was current and available."<sup>83</sup> As the site upon which social, political, cultural, and commercial avenues converged, and likewise from which the city would expand, it is no wonder publicans vied for a spot by the sea. In fact, as historian David Conroy argues, "Drinksellers jealously watched prime locations so as to make that move that might increase slightly the narrow profit margins in an ever more competitive trade."<sup>84</sup> The Crown Tavern for instance, was established "at the Head of Scarlet's Wharff the North End of *Boston*."<sup>85</sup> Moreover, these taverns not only offered a gathering place for a

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<sup>80</sup> See Drake; Nathan; and Carp, *Defiance of the Patriots*, chapter 1.

<sup>81</sup> Brown, 114.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 112. Further, "Early knowledge of any news that could affect prices and markets could make a man rich in a hurry. Chiefly for this reason, among merchants the speed and privacy of face-to-face communication gave it priority. ... In conversations they could actively and critically appraise information – checking its reliability and freshness, while comparing their own assessments to those of others involved in trade and shipping." However, especially in terms of attaining overseas news, merchants did rely on correspondence, a print source often distributed within the tavern.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Conroy, 131.

<sup>85</sup> *New England Weekly Journal*, October 4, 1737, 2.

specific group and region, informed largely by way of those debarking with news from overseas, these taverns also played a significant role in the dissemination of information. The Royal Exchange Tavern, for example, was built in 1697 with “the market on its doorstep” and being next to the side street leading down to the docks. Positioned in this way, the Exchange was home to “the young, wealthy, and trendy.”<sup>86</sup> The tavern would later attract newly arrived British troops and was across from the site of the Boston Massacre at the Custom House. The first stagecoaches to New York would also depart from the Exchange. The role of the Exchange as a site for multiple historical events was a product of its location, situated in a prime spot between the market and the sea.<sup>87</sup> While places like the Exchange operated as commercial centers, taverns served other judicial and social functions as well.

Regardless of the content discussed or the organization of the attendees present at these meetings, consensus was often reached about having their agenda, resolutions, resolves, or minutes printed for the benefit of and to generally inform the community. For example:

**REASONS OF THE GRAND JURORS FOR REFUSING TO BE SWORN.**

The Freeman who were returned to serve as Grand Jurors at the Superiour Court, for this term, made their appearance in the Court House yesterday; and, before a numerous assembly, (*Peter Oliver, Edmund Trowbridge, Foster Hutchinson, William Cushing, and Wm` Brown, Esquires,* sitting on the bench as Judges,) they all, to the number of twenty-two, declined acting as Jurors, for reasons which they had previously drawn up in writing, and signed, and appointed to be read there by their Chairman; but the above said Judges, refusing to hear the same openly read, desired to have the reading of it to themselves, which being complied with, the Jurymen withdrew from the Court House to the Exchange Tavern, where they unanimously voted that, in order to justify their refusal to the world, their aforementioned reasons should be printed in the publick papers.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Nathan, 62. For more on the use of the Royal Exchange Tavern, see: Plymouth Company, “Advertisement. This is to Notify all the Proprietors.... [Sept. 1, 1752.]” (Boston, 1752), Broadside.

<sup>87</sup> Nathan, 62.

<sup>88</sup> To read their reasoning see: “Reasons of the Grand Jurors for Refusing to Be Sworn,” August 30, 1774, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776.

Despite the exclusivity of being appointed to the Grand Jury, the individuals were still members of the greater community, and it was therefore their opinion that the public should be privy to the motivations behind their actions. The jurors had adjourned to the tavern where they unanimously decided to have their reasons printed in the newspapers. A meeting of merchants at the King's Arms Tavern took a similar action. The article submitted by their chairman reads: "It was also Resolved, 'That the Minutes of this Meeting be inserted in the public Morning and Evening papers, signed by the Chairman.'"<sup>89</sup> Decisions like these were often printed and reprinted in newspapers throughout the colonies and abroad, depending on their saliency. These notices were then read aloud in taverns for example, further enhancing the efficiency of disseminating the message to the broadest audience. To include the public in this way helped to create and nurture the community identity espoused in the tavern, as well as the imagined identity Anderson advocates for. That is to say that articles such as the ones above could be reprinted and circulated beyond the colony in which the event occurred so that an otherwise detached tavern audience colonies away could hear the article read aloud, relate to it, and develop a sense of kinship with their fellow colonists. For example, a meeting of two to three hundred of the "respectable Inhabitants of the City of *Philadelphia*" was called to the City Tavern to appoint a committee "to correspond with our sister Colonies." The committee was then directed to write to the people of

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<sup>89</sup> Thomas Lane, "King's Arms Tavern, Cornhill, Jan. 4, 1775," *The Boston Evening-Post*, March 20, 1775; "Meeting of the Merchants and Others Concerned in the American Commerce, at the King's Arms Tavern," January 4, 1775, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776. Likewise, it is important to note that the meeting minutes were recorded in January, yet they are published in a March issue of the paper. This was likely the result of the slow transatlantic information exchange. The meeting had been conducted in London, meaning that this account had travelled a number of weeks across the Atlantic before being printed in the Boston newspaper to inform the colonists. Further evidence of the decision to publish the resolution can be found in, "Letter from London. Account of the Meeting of the American Merchants, at the King's Arms Tavern," January 6, 1775, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "A circumstantial account of the Proceedings of the North American Merchants, held at the King's Arms Tavern, Cornhill, London," January 11, 1775, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "Meeting of Merchants, Traders, and others, concerned in the American Commerce, at the King's Arms Tavern, London. Petitions to Parliament adopted, and ordered to be presented," January 11, 1775, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776.

Boston who were under military rule as a result of the Boston Port Bill. The reason given for reaching out to Bostonians was as such: “that we truly feel for their unhappy situation. That we consider them as suffering in the general cause... and that we shall continue to evince our firm adherence to the cause of *American* liberty.” In the decade leading up to the Revolution, this sense of the “general cause,” a shared American oppression, was undoubtedly strengthened by both the tavern and print materials.<sup>90</sup>

Additionally, in the early years, court proceedings were usually out in the open, publicly announced in the newspapers and other print materials. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, court sessions were held in the public sphere in places such as taverns in the towns’ commercial centers. Historian Martha J. McNamara cites a description of how some of these proceedings may have been carried out:

We have very pleasant times here, at the trials... there is a good deal of pleasant conversation... Here, too is the remnant of the old style in which the Courts used to be received. The sheriff with a long white rod comes to the tavern & stands by the door & precedes the judge on his way to Court & into his seat... This is all that is left of the old pomp & parade of court week, - two plain citizens [*sic*] walking through the mud together, one with a long white rod, & the other without.<sup>91</sup>

Court proceedings were largely a public affair. Whether the trial was held in the townhouse or the tavern, court day was one that drew crowds from across the colony. This event served as one of the colonists’ main sources of entertainment. Besides the church and the tavern, court day was one of the only social gatherings for which residents would travel great distances to attend. Even if the trials were not conducted within the tavern itself, the crowd this event drew into town

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<sup>90</sup> “Meeting of the Inhabitants of Philadelphia. -- Committee of Correspondence Appointed,” May 20, 1774. This example is further evidence of a growing national identity.

<sup>91</sup> Martha J. McNamara, *From Tavern to Courthouse: Architecture & Ritual in American Law, 1658-1860*, Creating the North American Landscape (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), sec. Front Matter.



brought the taverns great business. The public house in Ipswich kept by Samuel Adams for example, “overflowed on court and election days” to the point where in the course of a single day “he served breakfast to 25 and dinner to 60.”<sup>92</sup> In the public house, justices and audience members adjourned during recesses to refresh, discuss and deliberate, and traveling juries, justices, and viewers rented spaces to stay in overnight.<sup>93</sup> Entries in the noted diaries of Samuel Sewall are prime examples of his attendance at taverns for the purpose of meeting with his judicial and business associates.<sup>94</sup> The tavern was also a more convenient choice of venue for holding court, or simply to pass the time in on court days, because of the level of comfort offered therein as compared to the unheated meetinghouse for instance. The public house, being one of commercial, social, and comfortable activity, took on the role of courthouse as the multidimensionality of the tavern continued to expand, or at least adapted to the growing demands of the town. The Suffolk County Bar, for instance, held its early meetings at the Bunch of Grapes Tavern in Boston.<sup>95</sup> Perkin’s Tavern in Essex County likewise accommodated regular sessions of the county’s Quarterly Courts. The people would occasionally refer to Perkin’s as a “court house,” and the tavern bore the symbolic “King’s arms” to represent its royal authority.<sup>96</sup> The presence of the court in and around the tavern “placed emphasis on the magistrates – their social and political prestige – as symbols of legal authority. Moreover, since courts routinely sat in taverns... that also housed merchants’ exchanges, this authority was densely intertwined with

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<sup>92</sup> Rice, 86.

<sup>93</sup> For more on court days and taverns, see Conroy, 44.

<sup>94</sup> Rice, 88.

<sup>95</sup> McNamara, chap. 2.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

the colony's commercial activity."<sup>97</sup> At the end of the eighteenth century, however, there was a marked shift away from the tavern as lawyers sought to distinguish themselves and their profession "from commercial activities that bore the stigma of self-interest and pursuit of material gain."<sup>98</sup> Of course the intimacy of the public house and the courthouse revealed itself to be problematic from time to time. In 1786 for example, the defense counsel in a homicide case attempted to overturn their client's conviction on the grounds that the jurors' actions were corrupt. As usual, the jurors had gathered in the near by tavern to deliberate and eventually reached a verdict. Before returning to the hearing, however, the jurors dispersed and wandered about the tavern asking for the opinions of the other patrons.<sup>99</sup> Regardless of practicality, the existence of the judicial proceedings within the setting of the tavern further emphasizes the necessity of the institution and its central place in the community. General orders were also given to assemble at the tavern for court-martial hearings:

A General Court-Martial to sit tomorrow morning, at eleven, at *Pomeroy's Tavern*, in *Cambridge*, to try such prisoners as shall be brought before them. All evidences and persons concerned to attend the Court.<sup>100</sup>

The seventeenth and early eighteenth century tavern was a multifunctional space home to commercial, governmental, judicial, political, and social affairs.

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<sup>97</sup> McNamara, chap. 2.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>100</sup> Anonymous, "General Orders," February 19, 1776, S4-V4-P01-sp33-D0041, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776. For more examples of similar documents, see: "General Orders, from April 16 to April 19," April 16, 1776, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "Court Martial on Caleb Green," December 25, 1776, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "July 14," July 14, 1776, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "Sentence of General Court-Martial," December 5, 1776, S5-V3-P03-sp01-D0133, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "Report of the proceedings of the general court martial held at the King's Arms Tavern in Albany, April 4, 1776," *Colonial North American Project at Harvard* (accessed March 4, 2016).

The judicial element of the tavern, in fact, was reflective of the sociability of the atmosphere. This is evidenced by the fact that the taverns' judicial features extended beyond just court day, but also to function in ways that brought more intimacy to the establishment and within the community. Consider the following advertisement in *The New-England Chronicle: Or, The Essex Gazette*:

PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given, that it is intended a court for the Probate of Wills, &c. shall be held at Concord, in the said county, at the public house kept by Mr. Taylor, at the sign of the Elephant, on the last Tuesday of December instant; and, if that day should not be sufficient, on the day following; and the like in each of the following months, until public notice is given to the contrary.<sup>101</sup>

Holding probate courts reveals yet another community-minded feature of the tavern. The probate process is an intimate one, which essentially prepares one's assets to be dispersed and dealt with upon the individual's decease. The business of organizing wills is one that was advertised openly to the community as available at the tavern, and if the designated day were insufficient to meet the peoples' needs, services would be available again the next day and in the months to come. This kind of private accommodation offered within the confines of a public space contributed to the personal nature of the tavern and strengthened its place at the heart of the community.

Fellow tavern patrons often got quite an earful by eavesdropping on court martial hearings, but these were just one of the many kinds of public meetings held in the public house.<sup>102</sup> Also included, for example, were the meetings and discussions of various societies and clubs such as the Mechanics and Sons of Liberty. In fact, according to historian Alfred F. Young,

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<sup>101</sup> *The New-England Chronicle: Or, the Essex Gazette*, December 30, 1775.

<sup>102</sup> For an example of how perhaps eavesdropping, gossiping, and "indiscreetly mention[ing]" information were detrimental in certain tavern companies, see: "Annapolis, December 6," *The Massachusetts Gazette, and the Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, December 24, 1770, 4.

“in the cities, debates raged in taverns... and not only in pamphlets and newspapers.”<sup>103</sup> Most communication in the colonies was oral, and conversations could be heard on everything from the latest gossip to discussions of imperial policies. Indeed, as historian Richard D. Brown describes it, “talking about individuals and their particular affairs, and passing news of the province and the town in public places like the street or in the... taverns, virtually invited others to overhear.”<sup>104</sup> Further, “people felt free to listen to the conversations of others and to enter into them with questions and comments.”<sup>105</sup> Yet the value of conversation continually overruled the potential for eavesdropping. A contemporary English etiquette book, for example, reads: “All the world must acknowledge that it is conversation which contributes to render men sociable and makes up the greatest commerce of our lives.”<sup>106</sup> This opinion seems to have resonated with Bostonians in particular according to this article from *The Weekly Rehearsal*: “Conversation is an Advantage no less peculiar to Men than Reason itself.... To avoid Conversation is to act against the Intention of Nature.... To live then as Men we must confer with Men; Conversation must be one of the greatest Pleasures of Life.”<sup>107</sup> The colonists knew the power of conversing with each other, and the tavern was one of the only places in which they could do so. For example, the Moravians of Salem reportedly, “gather[ed] in the Tavern or in front of, in order to discuss certain topics with strangers.”<sup>108</sup> One traveler expressed a similar sentiment assuring that “it was the Pleasures of Conversation, more than of the Glass, that Induc’d [him] [to the tavern].”

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<sup>103</sup> Alfred F. Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 61.

<sup>104</sup> Brown, 30; see also Rice, 78-79.

<sup>105</sup> Brown, 177.

<sup>106</sup> A “contemporary English etiquette book,” as cited in Rice, 78-79.

<sup>107</sup> “Conversation,” *The Weekly Rehearsal*, October 4, 1731. See also: Rice, 79.

<sup>108</sup> Rice, 79.

He went on to say that what he observed in such company within one hour taught him more about the people and the place he had stumbled upon than even a week-long observation “Sauntering up and down the City could produce; besides numberless other Advantages which is to be gather’d from the conversation of a Polite company, which brings many helps to the understanding of a Person, who otherwise has his sight limited to the length of his nose.”<sup>109</sup> Conversations were “the key[s] to understanding people and society.”<sup>110</sup> Clearly colonial society was one that hungered for information and only in tavern companies could their cravings be satiated.<sup>111</sup>

Conversation and tavern going were likewise important to endeavors political in nature. Lawyers and politicians used tavern companies to court popular favor. Public officials dined in mixed tavern companies, and in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when “virtually all Massachusetts lawyers lived in Boston where they met together daily in... taverns as well as at court... routinely [mixed] with the leading officials and merchants of the province.”<sup>112</sup> Initiations to the bar were followed “customarily... by inviting the members... to a tavern ‘to drink some Punch,’” and the individuals were thus officially ushered into the world of practicing attorneys.<sup>113</sup> Young legal hopeful John Adams understood the way in which taverns could assist him in achieving “the crucial importance of recognition for his career.” He knew that “townspeople must recognize him as the person with whom they felt comfortable and confident

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<sup>109</sup> Rice, 79.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>111</sup> For more on the convergence of travelers and public gatherings at the tavern in regard to the transmission of news, see Conroy, especially 43-47.

<sup>112</sup> Brown, 90.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

when it came to legal questions,” and thus, to “pursu[e] local visibility, Adams made himself known ‘as a knowing as well as familiar young fellow’ to local officials... as well as to the ordinary men and women whose gossip, smiles, and frowns could make or break his reputation.” He set about to “‘speak and shake Hands,’ ... to ‘mix with the Croud in a Tavern’... The objective was ‘to sett the Tongues of old and young Men and Women a prating in ones favour.’”<sup>114</sup> Lawyers were forced into mixed company at tavern dinners while on the circuit, and were thus able to gather information about what was happening, as well as “how people in all walks of life perceived events.”<sup>115</sup>

Indeed, there was plenty to be learned in the tavern amidst companies of friends and strangers.<sup>116</sup> Such companies included Paul Revere and the Masonic Lodge, who often assembled at the Green Dragon Tavern in Boston; the North Caucus Club, a political organization of artisans, ships’ captains, and the like who met at the Salutation Tavern; and as previously mentioned, the Mechanics, a volunteer association that likewise frequented the Green Dragon, and which coalesced in order to monitor British soldiers and gather intelligence on enemy movements.<sup>117</sup> In fact, the Green Dragon was considered a “‘hotbed’ meeting place for Boston Revolutionaries,” and was deemed “the headquarters of the Revolution” by Samuel Adams, Daniel Webster, and Paul Revere. In addition to the Masons and the Mechanics, the Green Dragon was also a favorite haunt of the Sons of Liberty who held meetings therein to plan their resistance to the tyranny of the Crown. This was likewise the setting for the planning of

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<sup>114</sup> Brown, 94.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 103. Further, traveling lawyers were able to cultivate frequent and diverse contacts beyond their own communities, garnering the “latest political gossip” over the course of their time on the road.

<sup>116</sup> For more on conversation in tavern company, see: Rice, 78-79.

<sup>117</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere’s Ride* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 20, 51.

Paul Revere's ride, uncovering the British plots to capture Samuel Adams and John Hancock and to seize the powder at Concord, as well as the site in which the Mechanics ratified the Constitution.<sup>118</sup>

The tavern was also a popular meeting place for the militia. These men were often called upon to assemble at the tavern for exercise, training days, or especially during the Revolution, to prepare for battle. Additionally, men on both sides of the war had their haunts, and when they occasionally found themselves in mixed company or simply emboldened by alcohol, liquid courage was sure to have a hand in ensuing confrontations. These encounters were particularly fierce in the years surrounding the Stamp Act and later the Revolutionary War. For example, in July 1766, Bostonians were horrified to learn from the local newspapers that a brawl had recently erupted. Sparked by four British officers, clearly under the influence as they wove out of a tavern en route to their barracks. Along the way they amused themselves by shattering street lamps, which prompted a local tavern keeper to reprimand them from his doorstep. Overcome by the fury that had been mounting over conflicts with the colonials and the effects of the liquor, these four British officers assailed the man. Wielding their swords they wounded the man before raiding the public house wherein they "terrified the family and lodgers, some of whom they pulled from their beds." Eventually they grew tired of this entertainment and commenced smashing street lamps, now accompanied by two more soldiers. The damage amassed was thirty-four lamps before the six British soldiers came upon four Boston watchmen, a meeting that would end with several of the watchmen stabbed, two officers "knock'd down," one captured,

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<sup>118</sup> The Green Dragon Tavern: Placemat, "A Note of History," Boston, Massachusetts, August 2015. For more on the Green Dragon as a meeting place for patriot agitators, see Volo and Volo, 280.

and the remaining escaped.<sup>119</sup> Military activity in the tavern was not, however, always violent. For example, the Artillery Company in Providence, Rhode Island assembled in 1776 at Lindsey's Tavern, where they drank thirteen toasts, and "the whole was conducted with great order and decency."<sup>120</sup> Likewise, in wartime, publicans were called upon to supply militiamen with the necessary provisions as they marched along the roads into battle or on their way home.<sup>121</sup> Taverns were also convenient places for men to hide in when deserting their post, to gather intelligence on the enemy, or for holding prisoners of war.<sup>122</sup> Taverns were intimately involved in wartime, as well as when the militia participated in general training exercises. In fact, the intimate relationship of the two institutions was responsible for the raising of the United States Marine Corp at Philadelphia's Tun Tavern in 1775, where the tavern keeper, Robert Mullan, was named as one of the captains.<sup>123</sup> The tavern was thus inevitably associated further with the colonial fight for liberty.

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<sup>119</sup> Richard Archer, *As If an Enemy's Country: The British Occupation of Boston and the Origins of Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 58. Those who evaded the watchmen gathered a dozen comrades to free those held captive. Two of these men would be arrested the next day, but would be released after posting bail.

<sup>120</sup> "Declaration of Independence Proclaimed at Providence, Rhode Island," July 27, 1776, S5-V1-P01-sp06-D0638, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776.

<sup>121</sup> For examples see: "Orders," July 11, 1775, S4-V2-P01-sp40-D0065, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "Committee to Take into Consideration the Removal of the Inhabitants from Boston, Neighbouring Towns Required to Send One-Half of Their Militia to Cambridge and Roxbury, Expresses to Press as Many Horses as They Have Occasion For, General Ward to Appl," April 29, 1775, S4-V2-P01-sp30-D0018, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "July 4, 1775," July 4, 1775, S4-V2-P01-sp40-D0052, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "Provisions," S4-V2-P01-sp30-D0038, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776.

<sup>122</sup> For desertion see: "Examination of Several Prisoners," November 23, 1776, S5-V3-P01-sp20-D0507, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776. For prisoners held in taverns, see: "Aug 22," August 22, 1776, S5-V1-P01-sp16-D0059, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776; "Joseph Trumbull to General Washington," December 13, 1776, S5-V3-P03-sp01-D0421, American Archives: Documents of the American Revolutionary Period, 1774-1776.

<sup>123</sup> "Final Phase of Construction at NMMC Proceeding on Schedule," *Marines Mobile*, <http://www.marines.mil/News/NewsDisplay/tabid/3258/Article/621644/final-phase-of-construction-at-nmmc-proceeding-on-schedule.aspx> (accessed March 5, 2016); Volo and Volo, 316.



Meetings were called at the tavern for various reasons, as it was an easily accessible, comfortable, and social location. Being a public space, and occasionally the headquarters of Revolutionaries, militiamen meeting grounds, or sites of popular political mobilization efforts, influenced by readings of news articles or listening to orations, the tavern was often closely associated with measures of celebrating and asserting liberty as well. For example, in response to the “alarming and arbitrary impositions” of Parliament upon the town of Boston, the following was decided in Georgia:

It is therefore requested, that all persons within the limits of this Province do attend at the Liberty Pole at *Fondee' s* Tavern, in *Savannah*, on *Wednesday*, the 27th instant, in order that the said matters may be taken under consideration; and such other constitutional measures pursued as may then appear to be most eligible.<sup>124</sup>

The public house was also the peoples’ house, and liberty was a concern of many of the people, making the tavern a logical and convenient site for discussion and debate on the matter. It was also one of the few places colonists could gather, depending on the tavern keeper, beyond the purview of the church, and later the military occupation of the British.<sup>125</sup> The Stamp Act period was a time wherein the use of taverns for popular mobilization in this way flourished. For example, the bustling ports of New England saw their fair share of maritime traffic. On a February day in 1766 in Plymouth, Massachusetts, however, news of one such vessel’s arrival into port from Annapolis Royal set in motion a chain of gossip regarding the ship’s navigator,

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<sup>124</sup> “Meeting of the Inhabitants of the Province of Georgia Called, to Be Held at the Liberty Pole, at Savannah, on the 27th,” July 14, 1774. For more on the significance and role of the Liberty Pole, see Young. Samuel Adams likewise confirmed that Boston was supported by the entire nation: “I think I may assure you that America will make a point of supporting Boston to the utmost,” from John Harris, “Lexington-Concord Alarm: Our Revolutionary War Begins,” *The Boston Globe* (Boston: Globe Newspaper Co., 1975), 14.

<sup>125</sup> Conroy, 226.

John Staples.<sup>126</sup> It spread through town that the man had with him a stamped clearance. When this information made its way to the famed Sons of Liberty, they assembled to the number of four hundred to five hundred men.<sup>127</sup> They marched from the Tree of Liberty to the ship's wharf, accompanied by the beating of drums and the flying of banners. It was upon their arrival at the ship in question that "they demanded the detestable object of their resentment." The master readily handed it over and they carried on in procession, parading through town, displaying the clearance on a pole, and arrived at the town's decorated Tree of Liberty. Huddled around a bonfire, retiring comfortably after the events of the day, the crowd "consumed therein the badge of slavery," gave three cheers, and went their separate ways.<sup>128</sup> For the gentlemen of the town, the post-bonfire destination was a local public house wherein "several loyal toasts were drank; the whole being conducted with great decency and decorum."<sup>129</sup> As they are not specifically listed, it is uncertain what was declared in the contents of these toasts. Nevertheless, it is evident that for many British colonists, resistance to the Stamp Act was their first participation in public protest and popular mobilization.<sup>130</sup> Historian Ray Raphael writes, "Most frequently, at informal

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<sup>126</sup> Tim Hebert, "Acadian-Cajun Genealogy & History: Exile Destination: The Exile: Massachusetts," *Acadian-Cajun Genealogy & History*, 2009 1997; Yvon L. Cyr, "Acadian Genealogy Homepage; Acadian Deportation Orders," *Acadian Genealogy Homepage*, 2011; Lucie LeBlanc Consentino, "Chronology of the Deportations & Migrations of the Acadians 1755-1816 by Paul Delaney," *Acadian & French-Canadian Ancestral Home*, September 2005.

<sup>127</sup> At the time, the colonial environment was particularly charged; emotions ran high and fury fermented as the British government continued to assert its authority over the fledging nation. These imperial impositions, in the port-dependent Massachusetts Bay Colony especially, were highly contested. In this case, inhabitants were reacting to a feature of the 1765 Stamp Act.

<sup>128</sup> For an example of the Sons of Liberty burning stamped paper at a coffeehouse, see: "Extract of a Letter from Philadelphia, Dated Last Thursday," *Supplement to the Boston-Gazette, &c.*, April 14, 1766.

<sup>129</sup> "Plymouth, (in Massachusetts Province) Feb. 17," *The Newport Mercury*, March 24, 1766. It is revealing, to an extent, to read that most of the men went their own way, except for those *gentlemen* who headed to the tavern to toast, to celebrate, and to be merry.

<sup>130</sup> For more on the Stamp Act and the Liberty Tree, see: Young. See also: Alfred F. Young, Ray Raphael, and Gary Nash, *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation* (New York:

gatherings in taverns, hardworking men shed traditional constraints while downing a mug of hard cider or a shot of whiskey. In Boston or other cities, citizens might meet and talk at... some other central venue, but country folk had no public place to come together on a daily basis.” It was thus in the tavern that these inhabitants joined forces and were able to discuss, debate, plan, and plot.<sup>131</sup> The fact that in Worcester County for example, “there was a tavern for every forty to fifty adult males...” cemented the public house at the heart of the community so that “these served as important venues for discourse on public affairs.”<sup>132</sup> The people in the colonies still identified as English subjects until the point they were no longer treated as such, and even then the colonists remained hopeful that reconciliation could be reached. Yet stripped of one identity, it seems the disparate settlers of the New World grew closer to one another. In the tavern and by reading cross-colonial newspaper accounts of the British tyranny and patriot demonstrations, the people began to recognize their common discontent and desires. Their demonstrations and celebrations filled the columns of newspapers week after week, and often described events that concluded at the tavern for a series of loyal toasts. It was thus the Stamp Act that sparked the propulsion of the partnership of print and public house cultures. As the first opportunity for many to participate in the public sphere this was a revolutionary moment that ignited a wildfire capable of destroying and transforming the colonial landscape for decades to come. Printing the accounts of citizen celebrations and demonstrations “embodied and emboldened a nationalist ideology that made consensus the basis of patriotism” and aided in the development of an inter-colonial

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Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011); “Hanover Square,” Supplement to the *Boston-Gazette, &c.*, February 24, 1766, 4-5.

<sup>131</sup> For more on plans and plots hatched in the tavern, see “[Madrid; Antonio; Spanish; Captain Lored; St. James; Council],” *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 28, 1765, 2.

<sup>132</sup> Raphael, *Revolutionary Founders*, 46.

resistance movement.<sup>133</sup> Newspaper reports, resolutions, declarations, odes, and artistic representations from all over the world during the colonial era – Boston, New York, Philadelphia, London, and beyond – were passed from hand to hand, as well as interpreted orally and carried on by word of mouth in an effort to spread the news about and the sentiment brought on by the Stamp Act. The press helped to illustrate the kind of public sentiment brewing throughout Massachusetts, circulating from tavern to tavern. News managed to reach each colony and across the ocean to the mother country. So successful was this colonial communication process that the emotions produced by the series of royal taxes imposed upon them were fostered and enhanced until finally manifesting in the form of American Revolution, at which point historian David Waldstreicher argues “the local came to represent the national while the present gave proof, not of the past, but of the future.”<sup>134</sup> The necessary revolutionary fervor was born out of this tavern-press communication system, which was thrust into overdrive by the popular mobilization of the Stamp Act period. This dual-institution alliance proved significant not only to individual communities or colonies, but to the fledgling nation as a whole, and was a necessary vehicle for the first embers of discontent to develop into the blaze of Revolution.

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<sup>133</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*, First Edition edition (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

**CHAPTER 2**  
**TAVERN TALK**  
**PRINT AND COMMUNICATION**

Tavern location, crucial in defining its atmosphere, worked hand in hand with the types and methods of communication available. In this way, location dictated the kind of information each tavern received. As communication became easier and the news became more accessible, however, taverns became the ultimate wellspring of knowledge, without which the Revolution could never have occurred. While the nature, contents, and advances in the print world were influential to this collective moment of the people the full force of print politics could not have been achieved without the institution of the tavern.

Communication in the colonies was contingent upon the location of taverns across the diverse landscape of the nation. The multidimensionality of the tavern, namely the types and methods of communication possible therein considering the limitations of the time period and the vast distances between colonial settlements, offered an ideal setting for myriad gatherings. Regardless of the tavern's location, it was clear that communication occurred on a level not otherwise possible without the institution, which "had always been [the center] of face-to-face communication and hence agencies for the diffusion of information."<sup>135</sup> The colonists were educated, often informally and indirectly, in the tavern atmosphere. Attendance became a necessary thread of their social fabric, the source for residents and transients, derelicts and the prosperous alike, to eat, drink, gossip, trade, hear latest news, post and read notices, meet with

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<sup>135</sup> Brown, 18.

club members, be entertained by playing games, cards, billiards, or attending theatrical or dance performances. Strangers or visiting politicians could reside or take their meals in city taverns. Justices and court officials could likewise take their break in the tavern during court adjournments. Furthermore, as historian David W. Conroy points out, “taverns provided a forum for discussion and argument outside the purview of ministers,” promoting a freeness of speech not otherwise available.<sup>136</sup> Although other public spaces existed, the opportunities to participate afforded by the tavern were unprecedented in terms of accessibility, sociability, and conversation.

The particulars of the discussions had in these discursive public spaces were largely influenced and dictated by, or were in opposition to, the types of information received and circulated in the tavern and by tavern keepers and goers. The print materials in the tavern likewise informed the manner in which their meetings were held and their individual and collective opinions on the matters at hand. That is to say that in the years of the mounting tensions associated with the Revolution, and for years after, the patronage and news sources, such as the newspapers available in each establishment, grew highly politicized and the taverns themselves evolved into spaces intimately linked and affiliated with their political leanings.

The role of taverns and related public spaces in facilitating the Revolution, in fostering a people and a nation, cannot be underestimated. The tavern was more than a place of business and vice. These public houses were institutions that promoted sociability and cultivated communication, connections, education, and the overall enhancement of knowledge and development of opinions on matters at home and abroad. The people came to depend upon the tavern as their means to interact, to learn, and to voice their opinions, often loudly and with libations in hand, but an opportunity to be heard just the same. Being that a variety of needs

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<sup>136</sup> Conroy, 226.

could be met in the confines of this single civic space, the tavern provided a forum for meetings of all types across a broad cross section of American society.

### **Going Postal**

***“Boston has opened and kept more turnpikes that lead straight to free thought and free speech and free deeds than any other city of live or dead men.”***<sup>137</sup>

**Oliver Wendell Holmes**

By 1639, the town had already established its first postal service, just nine years after the Puritans’ arrival. This fledgling postal system was made available in the tavern of Richard Fairbanks. As previously discussed, settlers of the New World looked to familiar English traditions in their efforts to make this frontier feel more like home. In keeping with such practice, mail was often dropped off at the local tavern.<sup>138</sup> It is clear that the post, the papers, and the public sphere were entangled in the makings of America, even at this formative stage.<sup>139</sup>

The English Atlantic community was developed and designed to facilitate the necessary communication between the Old and New Worlds. A closer look into the particulars of this news transmission system illuminates the various methods involved, and likewise suggests the objectives each side sought in establishing it.<sup>140</sup> The British colonies started as disparate coastal settlements, and “settlers were more eager for news of their families and homelands overseas than for news from other colonies,” while the crown sought a reliable communication system to

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<sup>137</sup> Allan Forbes and Ralph M. Eastman, *Taverns and Stagecoaches of New England*, vol. 2 (Boston: State Street Trust Company, 1954), n11.

<sup>138</sup> For example, the 1813 oil painting entitled *Interior of an American Inn* by John Lewis Krimmel, as cited in Rice, 89, features what appears to be the arrival of the mail and a stagecoach just pulling away from the inn. Newspapers are available for public use, and one gentleman is seen perusing the latest news.

<sup>139</sup> D’Apice, *Billerica*, 7; Jim Vrabel, Bostonian Society, and Thomas H. O’Connor, *When in Boston: A Time Line & Almanac* (Boston: Northeastern, 2004), 29.

<sup>140</sup> “Colonies and the Mail,” <http://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/current/binding-the-nation/starting-the-system/colonies-and-the-mail.html> (accessed March 8, 2016).

deliver official messages to colonial governors.<sup>141</sup> As transatlantic travel developed and improved, the ports of British America were flooded with ever more mariners, merchants, travelers, and settlers who carried information by word of mouth, often directly to the tavern. The colonists maintained a largely aural culture and true to their nature, they wasted no time in satisfying their curiosities by interrogating these strangers just passing through or newly arrived in town. Often times this meant that, “the spoken word had greater import than the written word... [and] what people heard mattered more than what they read.”<sup>142</sup> Letters from abroad, however, provided news with more accuracy and availability in the sense that a written document eliminated the risk of not repeating the facts exactly and could likewise be recurrently and thoroughly assessed over time as desired.<sup>143</sup>

When the colonists heard that a ship had arrived in port, the masses, desperate for the latest news, scrambled to the taverns. At a time when the population of the colonies was small and the frontier thinly settled, it was not easy for members of the community to casually gather at a neighbor’s house for tea, or to pop over for a quick visit and swapping of gossip. Houses could be upwards of a half-mile apart, and often the demands of the farm and the hassle of traveling such great distances into town isolated the colonists from one another much of the time.<sup>144</sup> Craving more social activity, communities looked to the tavern for a variety of services. Inhabitants no doubt eagerly awaited each arrival into port, and after weeks of confinement on

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<sup>141</sup>“Colonies and the Mail”; “Benjamin Franklin,” <http://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/current/binding-the-nation/starting-the-system/benjamin-franklin.html> (accessed March 8, 2016).

<sup>142</sup> Rice, 79. See also: Conroy, 45.

<sup>143</sup> Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1986), 113–131.

<sup>144</sup> Dow, 118.



the high seas, the ships' passengers were probably just as desperate for a drink and entertainment. The tavern was thus the ultimate point of convergence for all parties.

It was in this setting that one could often expect to find the recently debarked shipmasters or mariners in charge of the mailbags.<sup>145</sup> These men were inclined to head for the tavern where they would hang their mailbags by the door before resting and refreshing themselves from their arduous Atlantic voyage. This gesture served to encourage members of the community to write letters they wished to send abroad. The contents of this powerful bag could be carried from the mother country or the multitude of Caribbean islands, bypassing the cost of official postage much to the disadvantage of the British government.<sup>146</sup> Being a rare opportunity to communicate over such distances in the early days of America, correspondents jumped at the chance and had to compose their letters quickly to catch these transient messengers. Most often it was to these merchant shipmasters, motivated to sail across the Atlantic by a greater force than simply to ensure the safe and speedy transportation of the mail, that the people entrusted with their private relations.<sup>147</sup> As mercantile interests and endeavors expanded, correspondents were able to write more frequently and with confidence in the steady flow of vessels in and out of the ports. This in turn allowed correspondence and transcontinental communication to flourish, and consequently encouraged the swell of political tension pivotal to the coming of the Revolution.

Tavern keeper Richard Fairbanks opened British North America's first post office in 1639. In 1673, the postal service was further expanded by the first delivery of mail from New York to Boston by way of the Boston Post Road. This began a regular postal service, involving

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<sup>145</sup> For more on mailbags see: "Mailbag from Packet Ship Crane | National Maritime Museum Cornwall | Falmouth, Cornwall," Text (accessed March 8, 2016).

<sup>146</sup> "Colonies and the Mail."

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

the completion of a roughly 250-mile trip on horseback in two weeks. The service would be interrupted during wartime, resuming in 1685, and becoming weekly by 1711.<sup>148</sup> In times of national insecurity or during periods of increased postal rates, the system also saw noteworthy interference in correspondence, as well as the militarization and screening of mail. Ultimately, however, the postal system grew exponentially and played a significant role in the development of the country, as well as the greater global community, as a fundamental step in integrating the English Atlantic.<sup>149</sup>

Despite attempted monopolies on the Post Office on both sides of the Atlantic, the circulation of mail, and of news in general, revealed the demands for greater levels of exchange, as well as the determination of the people to achieve it. Internally, the port cities received the bulk of the international news, brought in on various ships and packet boats, while rural areas garnered local information.<sup>150</sup> This is a generalization of course as there was certainly information overlap. Port cities, as scholars have pointed out, were also privy to the affairs of the town center, and rural villages hosted foreign travelers.<sup>151</sup> Here one can see one of the most decisive roles taverns played in the dissemination of the news throughout the colonies. In port city taverns ship's passengers and crew were attended to in the same space as members of the

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<sup>148</sup> D'Apice, 7; Vrabel, 12, 29; Alice Morse Earle, *Home Life in Colonial Days* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1898), 332–333.

<sup>149</sup> See Steele.

<sup>150</sup> Timothy Carr and Debra Shumate, "Postal Service in Colonial America A Bibliography of Material in the Smithsonian Institution Libraries National Postal Museum Branch," *Smithsonian Libraries*, March 16, 2015. Cited in Alan William Robertson, *The Maritime Postal History of London 1766-1960* (London: Robson Lowe, 1960). While this is a source intended to cover the history of the post in London, it is important to consider the role of English histories in discussing those of the United States, which began as colonies of the Crown, and were thus, in their formative stages, beholden to many of the same rules and systems as were in place in the mother country.

<sup>151</sup> For example, Carp specifically discusses Boston's ports, docks, wharves, and the like in Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*, 1st edition (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Further, Thompson, Salinger, Conroy, Nathan, and Drake have written excellent histories of the tavern, which look into the complexities of the clientele and the institution's inherent multidimensionality.

community who repaired to the public house after a long day of work, court hearings, or worshipping at church. Likewise, the tavern accommodated those farmers and residents of more remote settlements who retired there and travelers from abroad who sought entertainment along their often-arduous journeys. It was impossible to know precisely where anyone was at a given time, especially in the case of high-profile leaders like John Adams for example, who would often be traveling for business. Thus the tavern offered a common, public location to send and pick up letters and packages. It was also such a well-attended place that one would be notified of their mail's arrival at the tavern, or that someone would volunteer to deliver it to the recipient. Early on, the correspondence was usually from England, but with the improvements of roads and native trails, inter-colonial communication methods were upgraded. This was a period wherein exchanging mail from town to town was an ordeal, and trying to sustain transatlantic communications was a feat that often proved fatal. Thus the tavern was a necessary cog in the inter-colonial exchange of information, and as Historian David Conroy describes it, "The exchange of news and information at taverns invested every new arrival, however humble, with the potential of being a news-carrier."<sup>152</sup> Without the institution of the tavern, print in the colonies could not have seen its full potential in reaching, motivating, and mobilizing the people. Printers and authors alike realized and capitalized on the platform offered them by the tavern, and in this way, the nation saw an explosive period of print material, communication, public discussion and debate, and thus the birth of a national identity.

Essential in this proliferation of communication in the colonies were the main post roads, advanced throughout the New World to link the countryside and the cities, and later, the colonies themselves. The Boston Post Road, for example, developed along a well-established Native

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<sup>152</sup> Conroy, 48.

American pathway from New York to Boston as a system of mail-delivery routes.<sup>153</sup> It was a slow evolution from colonial wilderness to regulated postal system, and the journey required a rotation of well-rested horses, overnight accommodations, and the perseverance of the lone rider through the dangers of weather, terrain, and the open road.<sup>154</sup> For longer distances, post-riders would meet where one main road ended and another began to swap the contents of their mailbags, and each rider would turn around, picking up where the other left off. For example:



This publick is hereby desired to take notice that the *Hampton* rider will arrive in *Williamsburg* every *Tuesday* and *Saturday* at noon, coming through *York* town, and return to *Hampton* the same evening... arrive at *Fredericksburg*... where he exchanges mails with the Northern rider and returns to *Hanover* town every *Thursday*.<sup>155</sup>

Although the process had become more reliable than ever before, there was still always the risk one's letter would not reach its destination.<sup>156</sup> Especially in the winter season, when post-riders were resigned to duty on foot, the task became increasingly dangerous and unappealing, and often resulted in added irregularity in the post schedule. The roads were so desolate in the earliest days of post-riding that some men had to use axes "to make a slash on trees along the trail, marking the way for those who would follow them."<sup>157</sup> Needless to say, the

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<sup>153</sup> Carr and Shumate, "Postal Service in Colonial America A Bibliography of Material in the Smithsonian Institution Libraries National Postal Museum Branch."

<sup>154</sup> For more information see: "Travel, Mail, and Newspapers in Colonial America," <http://www.usahistory.info/colonial/newspapers.html> (accessed February 2, 2016); see also Earle.

<sup>155</sup> John Dixon, *Virginia Gazette*, March 21, 1766.

<sup>156</sup> Earle, 334; similarly, mail transported across the ocean had another dimension of danger and uncertainty in it; for example, see "Boston, February 5," *The Massachusetts Gazette; and the Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, February 5, 1770.

<sup>157</sup> "Colonies and the Mail."

position of post-rider does not seem especially desirable, but there are indeed advertisements for individuals willing to make the grueling journey.<sup>158</sup>

Post-riders, carrying letters and parcels on horseback, initially used the Boston Post Road, which enabled them to observe and report on the state of colonial affairs encountered along the way. The post-riders, and express riders employed specifically to travel with time-sensitive or crucial messages, stopped in taverns along their routes to share important news, and often the local patrons would quickly spread the message about the town by word of mouth or print.<sup>159</sup> Initially, the mail system was a slow and arduous one, which made deliveries at irregular intervals. The post-riders would deposit the mail on a table in the tavern, leaving it unguarded and available for all inquiring minds to peruse. Letters were often brought to a port city tavern to be spread out on a table and picked through by eager recipients. Especially in times of bad weather or rampant disease, or if postmasters were careless, they would simply throw down mail on the tavern table, and it may not be forwarded for days. Patrons could not only collect their own mail in the tavern, but also could walk out with someone else's mail. Letters at the tavern could remain uncollected, for all to scan at their leisure, until the recipient happened upon them and laid their claim, or a stranger did.<sup>160</sup> These sealed letters were even opened, "resealed in transit," and sometimes the opener added a postscript to it.<sup>161</sup> This practice not only offered the community a common post office, but also gave anyone the opportunity to look over

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<sup>158</sup> For an example, see next section, or *The Boston Evening-Post*, July 23, 1750.

<sup>159</sup> Brown, 249-258.

<sup>160</sup> Steele, 123; Earle, chap. XIV. The reception of letters could be influenced by variables such as the recipient having moved, died, or even refused their letters. Refusal to accept letters could be limited by one's level of literacy, or more often by the cost associated with the post. See also the letters between Abigail and John Adams wherein he asks her to send him a list of all the letters she's recently received from him so he knows if any have gone missing or been taken in the process; "Colonies and the Mail."

<sup>161</sup> Steele, 177.

all the letters, including those not addressed to them. Should letters remain unclaimed in the tavern that needed to be taken a further distance to the addressed party, their fates rested in the hands of hired post-riders, or weary travelers headed in the general direction of the letter's destination. This open access to the news and private correspondence alike strengthened the level of communication, regardless of its representation of gossip or fact. Additionally, the role of taverns in the development and maintenance of the postal system was secured by the fact that often times the tavern-keeper was also the appointed or volunteer postmaster in town. In this way, publicans not only opened and operated the vital tavern establishment, but also contributed in an integral, central way by virtue of their second position as postmaster.<sup>162</sup> As will later be the case with newspapers, the tavern served as a distribution site for not only the mail, but also for print materials.

The Boston Post Road was often the first advanced road in the area, attracting the construction of new homes, public spaces, and especially taverns. Archaeologists, for example, have been able to reconstruct the narrative of Sampson's Tavern by studying the site itself, in addition to the rich documentary record of the tavern's evolution. Although the property had a scenic view of the lakes, it was the roads that gave this tavern its prominence. Located near the main route between Boston and New Bedford, the tavern was in the middle of an enduring, "steady supply of hungry and thirsty travelers," where it had been established since the mid

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<sup>162</sup> "The Post and the Press," <http://postalmuseum.si.edu/exhibits/current/binding-the-nation/the-post-and-the-press.html> (accessed March 8, 2016). Likewise, "Printers vied for the postmaster's job, knowing they would get news first and could mail their newspapers for free and refuse competing papers. As deputy postmaster general, Benjamin Franklin insisted on cheap, impartial delivery of all newspapers. . . . The 1792 Post Office Act let newspaper editors exchange their papers by mail without charge so that each could print the other's news. Newspapers and magazines still enjoy special rates, based on the revolutionary conviction that knowledge is power, not to be taxed."

1700s.<sup>163</sup> The tavern was able to expand in size and function, as well as adapt “in response to changes in transportation, social classes, economy, and technology.” Sampson’s offered the local community a mail service and a suitable stop for travelers.

As the colonies developed and the English Atlantic community’s tides turned, “news ricocheted by sea and land... whether shouted over a gunwale, exchanged in a tavern, or posted in a captain’s mailbag.”<sup>164</sup> The rise of the colonial postal system, including the dissemination of various print materials, facilitated by the tavern, stimulated a more far-reaching effect of English and colonial news, bonding even the most isolated regions of the colonies socially, politically, economically, and otherwise. Reaching a wide range of people with print by way of the tavern, further encouraged lively discussions and debates of its contents. This fostered a communication network through which a community developed, and without which the otherwise detached colonies could never have united over the common goal of Revolution. As the colonial postal system strengthened and swept the nation, its evolution lent itself increasingly toward tavern culture. One way this connection manifested was in the development of the stagecoach system. The routes and native pathways that had been improved to enable post riders to deliver the mail were then expanded and leveled to allow for the passage of horse-drawn carriages and wagons. Likewise, the advancement of the stagecoach system became important and taverns along the main roads became convenient stagecoach stops. These travelers were especially valuable to the symbiotic relationship of the community and the outside world maintained by the tavern. These people came by coach from outside of town and therefore had plenty of news to share with the

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<sup>163</sup> Eric S. Johnson, “Roads, Rails, and Trails: Transportation-Related Archaeology in Massachusetts” (Boston, Massachusetts, 2012), 44.

<sup>164</sup> Steele, 119.

locals.<sup>165</sup> David Howe of Sudbury, for example, extended his family home into a “house of entertainment for travelers” in 1716.<sup>166</sup> Situated on the Old Boston Post Road, which was one of the first colonial mail routes established in 1673, Howe’s Tavern thrived as a business that accommodated “the busy coach traffic to and from the cities of Boston, Worcester, and New York.” Howe passed the family business on to his son, who would do the same, each generation expanding the property with the growing success of the tavern.<sup>167</sup> In these stagecoach stop taverns it was not uncommon that all guests were served at one long table, which kept passengers together and ready for the arrival of the coach, yet also forced strangers to interact and possibly develop connections.<sup>168</sup>

The postal system also revealed a natural alliance in major colonial centers between the postmaster and the printer. As the advancement of the newspaper materialized, its success seemed bound up with that of the postal system.<sup>169</sup> Yet the postal system and the print world were not enough on their own. As they have been heretofore framed, the state of the colonies was such that they consisted of thinly settled lands and isolated townships, not amounting to much more than a largely-detached, ramshackle collection of English plantations. While the post

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<sup>165</sup> For specific examples or more information, consult: Earle, chap. XIV; Donald A. Lapham, *Carlisle, Composite Community: Historical Facts Concerning the Settlers in Present Carlisle, Massachusetts, in the Colonial Period*, chap. 3; Billerica Historical Society, *Billerica* (Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 79; Elise Lathrop, *Early American Inns and Taverns* (New York: R. M. McBride & Company, 1926); Walter Austin, *Tale of a Dedham Tavern; History of the Norfolk Hotel, Dedham, Massachusetts* (Cambridge, Priv. print. at the Riverside Press, 1912); Chelmsford Historical Society and Garrison House Association, *Images of Chelmsford* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 1998).

<sup>166</sup> “The Howes and the Howe Tavern (1716–1861) | Wayside Inn,” <http://www.wayside.org/history/howes-and-howe-tavern-1716-1861> (accessed August 4, 2015). It is speculated that this addition may have even doubled the size of his original two-room home.

<sup>167</sup> “The Howes and the Howe Tavern (1716–1861) | Wayside Inn.” See also: “About America’s Oldest Inn | Wayside Inn,” <http://www.wayside.org/about> (accessed August 4, 2015).

<sup>168</sup> “Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village.”

<sup>169</sup> Steele, 130.



held considerable value to those with the literacy, means, and leisure time to engage in correspondence, the reality of colonial New England features a population that does not fit neatly into this qualification.<sup>170</sup> Ultimately then, it is only by virtue of the tavern, the multipurpose, easily-accessible, public space and postal service established in most every settlement, that the fullest potential of print culture manifested in the colonies.

**“This Is To Inform the Publick”**

One could open a newspaper any given week and read in it an advertisement such as this:



*This is to inform the Publick, That Samuel Mumford now Rides Post between Boston and Newport, and puts up at the Sign of the Lamb at the South End of Boston, and at the White Horse in Newport, where he may be spoke with by any Person who has Bundles or other Things to carry.*<sup>171</sup>

This excerpt from Boston’s *Evening Post* illustrates the informative nature of the colonies. Reports of men riding post or opening taverns were common in the news as the dissemination of information throughout the distant settlements of the thirteen colonies became increasingly necessary. Another example from the *United States Chronicle*, although issued post-Revolution, reveals that the practice prevailed as a means of communicating across the country:

Boston and New-York Mail-Stage-Office. Ebenezer Foster Respectfully Informs the Publick, That the Boston and New-York Mail Stage-Office is removed from the sign of the Golden-ball, to the sign of the White-horse, King’s-street, a few rods above the Baptist meeting-house, Providence; where the regular line of stages for Boston leave and arrive every day – Mail days, at 5 o’clock, A.M. other days of the weeks, at any hour to accommodate passengers. Also, the New-York mail-stage leaves on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, at half past 1 o’clock, P.M. The Mail-Stage runs from New-York to Boston, by Newhaven, Newlondon and



<sup>170</sup> Steele, 131.

<sup>171</sup> *The Boston Evening-Post*, July 23, 1750.

Providence, in *forty-nine* hours; and back again in the same term of time – until 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1803. Ladies and Gentlemen are invited to call and engage their feats. N.B. Extra Coaches ready for Boston, New-York, Newport, New-London and Norwich, at the shortest notice, and on the most reasonable terms. Horses and carriages to let as usual.<sup>172</sup>

This advertisement further demonstrates the importance of the tavern and its multidimensionality. Taverns, both in the city and on the outskirts of town, played an essential role in the success of the stage system. For longer journeys, peripheral taverns served as stops to rest and refresh, while central taverns made for popular loading and unloading stations. This is also a significant passage as it reveals the kind of turn around time for the mail stage, which illustrates the relatively slow-moving nature of the time, as well as the difficulties and realities of colonial communication.<sup>173</sup>

During the late colonial and early revolutionary periods, taverns served as a place to gather, have a pint of stout, share and peruse the latest newspaper, broadside, or pamphlet, and participate in banter conversation – friendly or otherwise – about the latest news and gossip.<sup>174</sup> It was in the public house that oral and print culture collided.<sup>175</sup> For example, the Munroe Tavern had a turkey-breasted cabinet, or a sort of display case, fastened to the outside of the building. This is where they would post the latest broadsides and print notices in order to supply easy access to the latest and most important updates for the community and passersby. Further, the demand for newspapers was prominent enough to encourage publicans to advertise their stock of

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<sup>172</sup> *United States Chronicle*, April 28, 1803.

<sup>173</sup> Again, however, this was a few decades after the colonial and Revolutionary periods focused on in this thesis, so it is reflective of a more significant advancement in the communication system.

<sup>174</sup> Francis, tour guide, Munroe Tavern, Lexington, MA, August 2015.

<sup>175</sup> “A Place of Reading: Revolutionary Taverns.”

the latest publications.<sup>176</sup> For example, tavern keeper Daniel Smith of Philadelphia's City Tavern publicized that his public house was "properly supplied with English and American papers and magazines," and even kept "Bound Books of Public Papers for some years back" available for public reading.<sup>177</sup> In fact, country taverns, in keeping with urban ones, likely subscribed to city newspapers so as to bolster their establishments' role as a communication center.<sup>178</sup> The reading of such material was necessarily followed up with discussion, between literates and illiterates, subscribers and nonsubscribers alike.<sup>179</sup> "Newspapers were delivered by post to taverns, and the literate patrons eagerly read them aloud to their illiterate neighbors," and recitation and interpretation of the news was thus made available to a wide range of community members.<sup>180</sup> Dr. Alexander Hamilton gave his account of one such experience: "I returned to my lodgings at eight o'clock, and the post being arrived, I found a numerous company at Slater's [tavern] reading the news ... [and their] chit-chat kept me awake three hours after I went to bed."<sup>181</sup> As a result of the times, news travelled throughout the colonies and across the pond quite slowly. This meant that "all were eager for its arrival, literate or not."<sup>182</sup> Because newspapers were disseminated through the tavern, and circulation of print was limited, it is likely

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<sup>176</sup> James N. Green, "The Book Trade in the Middle Colonies, 1680-1720," as cited in Amory and Hall, chap. 6, 221; "Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village."

<sup>177</sup> Rice, 79.

<sup>178</sup> Conroy, 235.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>180</sup> "A Place of Reading: Revolutionary Taverns." See also: Green, "The Book Trade in the Middle Colonies," as cited in Amory and Hall, 221.

<sup>181</sup> Conroy, 234; Rice, 79.

<sup>182</sup> "A Place of Reading: Revolutionary Taverns."

that these institutions were the most important centers for news reading and interpretation.<sup>183</sup> Despite limitations, people were resourceful and found ways to access the news, namely by frequenting taverns.<sup>184</sup> Public readings allowed for the absorption of print that appealed to the fears and desires of the people, making taverns the primary means “to diffuse this information orally to a wider public.” Readers and listeners alike were able to then identify themselves as members of a united community with their fellow patrons, assembled from across a broad range of inhabitants.<sup>185</sup> Taverns and the associated ritual environment were necessary mediums for mobilizing the people and forming public opinion.<sup>186</sup> This communication fostered in taverns was an integral part of the Revolution.

### **A Toast!**

Politicians and public leaders used toasts to sway public opinion.<sup>187</sup> These statements were written down and disseminated through the newspapers as well as being read aloud in taverns.<sup>188</sup> In this way they were able to reach both the literate and illiterate public, allowing them to reach the widest possible audience, and thus cementing Revolutionary fervor (or anti-Revolutionary depending on the establishment). The success of toasts in capturing the minds of

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<sup>183</sup> Conroy, 236.

<sup>184</sup> Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>185</sup> Conroy, 236–237; Brown, 116.

<sup>186</sup> Conroy, 255.

<sup>187</sup> Pasley, chapter 1.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 7; Conroy, chapters 4-6, epilogue.

the masses politicized taverns and led to their eventual banishment from taverns in Boston for a time.<sup>189</sup>

Some toasts were used humorously or were given with a tone of playfulness or sarcasm, such as “I think a favourite toast among the Lawyers is, ‘the glorious uncertainty of the Laws.’”<sup>190</sup> Largely, however, the surviving pool of toasts suggests this was a ritual that people took very seriously. Consider, for example, the following warrant for arrest issued in 1776 New York: “John Lewis A Resident in the City of New York Confind in the City Hall for his Drinking healths to King George and Success to his Fleet. And Manifesting his intention to Join the Said fleet or the Army of the Enemy against the Continental Army.”<sup>191</sup> It seems odd that anyone would make such a public show of support for the crown at this time, let alone declare one’s intent to join the enemy in the fight against one’s country. Similarly, an account in *Dunlap’s Maryland Gazette or The Baltimore General Advertiser* describes a man in a tavern who “drank confusion to the Congress and General Washington, for which he was immediately turned out of the house, and no one would speak to him, and both French and English treated him with contempt.”<sup>192</sup> Again politics is clearly at play in both the drinking of and reaction to toasts. They were understood as a customary political statement, one to be taken in earnest.<sup>193</sup> In these cases,

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<sup>189</sup> Nathan, 21.

<sup>190</sup> Probus, “From the Whitehall Evening Post, March 9. to the Printer, &C.,” *The New-York Gazette*, June 3, 1765, 1.

<sup>191</sup> Joseph Spencer, “Warrant for Arrest of John Lewis for Drinking Toast to King and English Fleet | Boston Public Library | BiblioCommons” (New York, NY, July 7, 1776), Boston Public Library’s American Revolutionary War Manuscripts Collection.

<sup>192</sup> “New Port, December 14,” *Dunlap’s Maryland Gazette or The Baltimore General Advertiser*, December 26, 1775, 2.

<sup>193</sup> For explicit evidence of the awareness that toasts were political, see: Volo and Volo, 281, which cites an account from the Marquis de Chastellux in regard to rituals participated in at balls: “These dances, like the toasts we drink at table, have some relation to politics.”

men's convictions, and perhaps with the assistance of some liquid courage, drove them to publically announce their values or to denounce the popular opinion of their companies. By the same token, those who refused to drink to any of the toasts of the night were met with similar persecutory sentiment from the masses. Toasting could indeed bind tavern patrons together, as men shared sentiments and participated in a custom that "bound a drinker to the group in which he drank and brought the stranger into fellowship with the regular."<sup>194</sup> Yet this ritual ran the risk of isolating men and causing conflict as well. Historian Peter Thompson writes, "When a man proposed a toast in tavern company, his companions were expected to drink to it and respond in kind. To refuse to drink a toast, or to propose a toast so obnoxious as to prompt refusal, led to fights."<sup>195</sup> Taverns were common places, shared by a diverse mishmash of patrons, compressed into the often-tight shared space, which the masses "sought to put... to incompatible uses" and "often for competing purposes."<sup>196</sup> Taverns were active, popular places, wherein the "crowd and tumult" occasionally turned the tone toward the loud and boisterous. Although much of the time this "crowd and tumult" was a result of the taverns place as a "center for information, instruction, and entertainment," it could also be the product of vulgar and bawdy tavern songs and toasting.<sup>197</sup> One song heard in tavern companies was printed in the *New-Hampshire Gazette*

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<sup>194</sup> Thompson, 99.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 87, 77.

<sup>197</sup> "Explore & Learn | Old Sturbridge Village." The contents of these tavern songs, like toasts, were sometimes hot-button topics such as military or political events, which could understandably trigger conflict in mixed company; see also: Volo and Volo, 280, which reads: "taverns were a popular gathering place for men of all classes. ... The bar... was generally the center of attention... naturally much crowded... Every evening there came generals, colonels, captains, senators, delegates, judges, doctors, clerks and gentlemen of every weight and caliber to sit around the fire, drink, smoke, sing, and swap anecdotes or political theories. Very entertaining, but... not being a spacious house, I found the crowd embarrassing." Additionally, "while traveling, the Marquis de Chastellux complained, 'They make nothing in America at an inn of crowding several people into the same room.' Few places offered private quarters, and the weary traveler often had to share a room as well as a bed with another guest." Further on tavern songs, which were "composed upon order of an enterprising publisher as soon as news of such an

under the heading “Song for the Sons of Liberty in the several American Provinces.” The closing lines even incorporate a toast into the song, which reads:

With loyalty, LIBERTY, let us entwine;  
 Our blood shall for both, flow as free as our wine.  
 Let us set an example, what all men should be,  
 And a toast to the world, *Here’s to those dare be free.*  
*Hearts, &c.*<sup>198</sup>

The types of songs and toasts celebrated in the tavern were not secret. They were loud and proud and meant to evoke a united spirit. Confined together with very little privacy, and in an atmosphere that encouraged active participation, the raising of a toast could be a make or break moment in tavern companies. This kind of conflict, when coupled with the potential for drinking to excess, could make for quite an ordeal.<sup>199</sup>

There were also cases in which the number of toasts seems unrealistically high, being that each toast was followed with a drink.<sup>200</sup> For example:

Tuesday the 17<sup>th</sup> instant. His excellency BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, Esq; entered into the 81<sup>st</sup> year of his age. The anniversary of the birth of this Friend and Patron of the Art of Printing was celebrated by a numerous company of Printers, at the Bunch of Grapes tavern, in Third-Street, where an elegant entertainment was prepared. On the happy occasion the following toasts were drank, & the evening was spent in the greatest harmony and good order, viz.

1. That venerable Printer, Philosopher and Statesman, Dr. Franklin.
2. The Art of Printing.
3. The ... of the Art of Printing.
4. The Paper-makers and ...
5. May the Liberty of the Press be preserved forever inviolate.
6. The Encouragers of the Art of Printing.

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event had been received. They were quickly printed and hawked about the streets and taverns,” according to *The Colonial Scene*, 105.

<sup>198</sup> *The New-Hampshire Gazette, and Historical Chronicle*, April 18, 1766, 4.

<sup>199</sup> For more see: Thompson.

<sup>200</sup> For examples of drinking in taverns as a form of community bonding, see: Rice, Thompson, Fischer, *Paul Revere’s Ride*, and Conroy, which go so far as to discuss the fact that often tavern companies would drink from a communal bowl, and one famous example of these punch bowls was crafted by Paul Revere.

7. All Friends to Literature.
8. The United States of America.
9. The State of Pennsylvania.
10. General Washington and the late Army.
11. Thomas Paine, Esq; Author of Common Sense.
12. Agriculture and Commerce.
13. The Printers' throughout the World.<sup>201</sup>

Examples of lengthy toasts such as the list above are reflective of some of the major criticisms made at the time about taverns, which centered on the fact that the toasting ritual encouraged drinking to excess. Yet despite the potential for intoxication, the camaraderie cultivated and the political statements made far outweighed this risk. For instance, the following is an account of an “elegant” entertainment for the “Honorable Delegates, now met in General Congress,” who were brought to the tavern from the State House and “received by a very large Company, composed of the Clergy, such genteel Strangers as happened to be in Town, and a Number of respectable Citizens, making in the whole near 500.” Following dinner, thirty-two toasts were drunk “accompanied by Musick and a Discharge of Cannon.” Already this episode has painted an important picture of tavern landscape, politics, and the ways of the community. Further, consider a few of the most revealing toasts, keeping in mind the context, the year being 1774: “1. The KING... 5. Perpetual Union to the Colonies... 7. The much injured Town of Boston and Province of Massachusetts-Bay... 8. May Great-Britain be just, and America free... 12. May no Man enjoy Freedom, who has not Spirit to defend it...18. A happy Reconciliation between Great-Britain and her Colonies, on a constitutional Ground...” The last toast was followed by the conclusion that their ovations after each toast “not only testified the Sense of the Honour conferred by such worthy Guests, but the fullest Confidence in their Wisdom and Integrity, and a

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<sup>201</sup> “Philadelphia, January 26,” *The Falmouth Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, February 9, 1786. This is a further significant set of toasts because rarely do the printers make note of themselves, especially to such a degree as this. It also serves as another example of the intersections of print and tavern cultures.



firm Resolution to adopt and support such Measures as they shall direct for the public Good at this alarming Crisis.”<sup>202</sup> Despite the enormous rise in tensions and animosity accrued over the last decade, the colonies still identified as subjects of the crown, and hoped for a peaceful, yet just resolution between the two sides. The tide indeed continued to pull away from this identification before the war, but it is important to realize the mindset of the colonies as this pre-Revolution period is unraveling. They never intended to break from the British Empire entirely; all they’ve ever wanted was the rights they believed were inherent to them as Englishmen, as they did still consider themselves such. It is in the space of the tavern, and through the dissemination of their messages in print, that the colonists cultivated their collective identities. Likewise, make special note of toast number 7, in honor of “the much injured Town of Boston and Province of Massachusetts-Bay.” Such acknowledgement is given here in Philadelphia, which testifies to the idea that these institutions were steadily tying together disparate peoples, communities, and eventually all of the colonies. Reading newspapers and hearing rumors in the tavern gave people in Philadelphia a sense of kinship with or empathy for those of their fellow colonists in Massachusetts, who had been struggling under the burden of the Intolerable Acts for several months.<sup>203</sup> This developed sense of solidarity may well have been one grounded in their feelings of belonging to either an imagined community or a physical one, but it is indisputably one of Revolution, and unlike anything they have experienced before.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> “Philadelphia, September 19,” *The Essex Gazette*, September 20, 1774.

<sup>203</sup> For example, “in a company of Gentlemen, at the King’s Arms tavern,” it was mentioned that an issue of the *Spy* was just received by someone in town. The contents were rumored to be especially important, so the paper was sent for, read, and it was thus unanimously agreed upon by all present that they must call “a meeting of the inhabitants... to collect their sentiments respecting the contents of the said paper.” For the particulars, see: “Newbern, July 29,” *The Massachusetts Spy*, August 29, 1771, 103.

<sup>204</sup> For an interesting perspective on communities and how they may have functioned during the course of colonial development, see Anderson. I could not offer the same sentiment more eloquently than he has here, and I find this to be an extremely compelling theory when applied to moments in the history of the colonies as described

The following is one such political statement, celebrating the anniversary of an Englishman who championed the Patriot cause.

About six o'clock in the evening, the streets being illuminated, the bells ringing, bonfires blazing, taps running, with every other demonstration of joy, the pageant proceeded from the settling house of the Lumber Troop, in the ward of Farringdon Without, of which John Wilkes, Esq; is the rightful Alderman.... The pageant proceeded through Fleet market, over Blackfriars bridge, cross St. George's Fields, gave three cheers to the patriot prisoner in the King's Bench, and repeated some lines on the Essay on Woman under his window; from thence they crossed Westminster bridge, and spent the evening at the Surry tavern, drinking 45 loyal toasts, and rejoicing at the entrance of the great patriot into the 45<sup>th</sup> year of his age.  
LIBERTAS.<sup>205</sup>

Especially interesting to note in this episode is the seemingly excessive number of toasts raised, which, as previously mentioned, may connote a desire to likewise drink to excess. However, it was often the case that the number of toasts raised was a nod to a specific political figure, organization, or event. In this case, the number 45 was chosen for the toast in reference to a publication written by the man named therein John Wilkes. When something resonated deeply within the community, as Wilkes's work had, associated numbers became part of their political symbolism.<sup>206</sup> Additionally, this toast is an excerpt of a longer article featured on the front page of a newspaper, adjacent to a description of a related occurrence. The companion affair played out as such: on the anniversary of John Wilkes's birthday a so-called "patriotick club" met at the Gray Bull inn to drink to the health of this lauded patriot, in addition to "other constitutional toasts." Forty-five toasts were likewise given in his honor at the Surry Tavern. In full festive

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in *The Essex Gazette* above – a Massachusetts-based news source, reporting on the details of a tavern gathering in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania where, in the course of their celebrations, they made reference to the affairs of a colony miles away but with which they felt they could relate and commiserate, as a result of the information they have received and interpreted about their common enemies' insults on another group of oppressed people. Likewise, see Pasley, who looks at Anderson's theory through the lens of the print world in particular.

<sup>205</sup> "To the Printer," *Virginia Gazette*, February 15, 1770. For a description of the English radical John Wilkes and why he may have been an attractive figure for certain colonists, see: Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2002), 61.

<sup>206</sup> Wood, 61.

fashion, the table had been set with a “shrine of liberty” at its center, to which everyone in attendance was expected to offer at least one poem in support of the cause. Yet things took a turn when the time came to hear from one member in particular, seemingly well known for his readiness to raise a glass. Upon deliverance of an impassioned oration – dulcet and capable of moving his audience, and in which he denounced the ministry, as well as a number of his neighbors with the most awe-inspiring decorum – the gentleman “was so exhausted as scarce to be able to lift his hand to his head.” Yet, as the toast was ne’er complete until sealed with a drink, in a “show of his willingness and inclination to martyrdom,” he summoned up the spirit to gulp down the first glass. He opened his mouth “to cheer the toast” all too quickly as he had not yet finished swallowing. It is said thus that he “instantly expired, in the firmest and most heroic agony, with Wilkes, Liberty, and Wine, in his mouth.” Upon his interment, six pallbearers supported him, all of whom had “already declared their fixed resolution to follow his glorious example.” Following his funeral, an extemporaneous poem was offered as a potential epitaph for his grave, approved by a vote. The volunteer recited: “Here lies J---s W---d, who in rhyme, Sweet Liberty! adres’d thy shrine, And instantly was choak’d with wine.”<sup>207</sup>

In many cases public events were not always accessible to the attendance of the majority. Pasley argues, “even an extremely well-attended event could have few wide-reaching or lasting political effects – it could not engender wide concert of opinion or action – unless an account was printed in a newspaper.” He continues by writing that live political events were seemingly held “almost entirely so they could be reported in the newspapers,” and that certain information, like town meeting minutes, may have been less for the local community, but rather more pointed toward the colonists themselves and the British officials quartered about the colonies. Indeed,

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<sup>207</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, February 15, 1770.

many political events in the form of social gatherings at taverns were held “mostly to provide an occasion for printing a statement that some local politician had written in advance.” Just as resolutions and other documents were the product of careful construction, so too were those toasts intended to promote the political opinions of those in attendance. These premeditated lists of toasts were sort of precursors to the invention of party platforms. The painstaking craftsmanship behind these public statements speaks to the reality of their intent: politicians and leaders wanted them to be read in the newspapers. And in turn, the public poured over them in an effort to “assess the political scene and the state of public opinion.”<sup>208</sup> Both the authors and the audience used these toasts in this way “quite self-consciously.” Yet it was clear that the newspapers could only reach so far beyond – and even within – the community; that is to say that likely the readership consisted of predominantly white, male, literate citizen who had enough money on their own or to pool with neighbors to pay for a subscription. Additionally, the circulation of newspapers remained limited for a number of years, so printers had to be creative in penetrating the limitations of their field. With the help of the tavern network the press effectively and efficiently reached a broader colonial audience. Taverns stocked these resources, and advertisements of their supply proved effective in terms of drawing patrons to one’s establishment, as the public was desperate for any morsel of information they could get their hands on. Now able to read in the tavern, news became more readily accessible, and with more informants, the information travelled by word of mouth and was passed hand-to-hand in greater volumes. Travelers also acted as a vital cog in the print machine, carrying news they heard or read in the taverns where they lodged. Connected over greater distances with more colonies, newspapers were also able to reprint stories found in other papers from other colonies, spreading

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<sup>208</sup> Pasley, 6.

the message again and again. Newspapers quickly began to grow in scope and content as political parties developed and steadily became associated with particular sources.

Arguably the most successful aspect of this relationship was the natural sociability of the tavern, which encouraged active and vocal participation. The newspapers would often be read aloud or in groups, both educating a larger sector of the population (the illiterate) and providing a forum for open community debates and discussions. In this unique social world, daily exchanges were almost completely face-to-face, so the print world's alliance with the tavern was a critical improvement in disseminating and discussing the news.<sup>209</sup> In Boston especially, elected leaders saw the influence of popular tavern assemblies and “began to incorporate the distribution of drink and the power to approve prospective licenseholders into strategies for the acquisition of political power.”<sup>210</sup> In many cases tavern keepers were in fact also local politicians or postmasters, infusing an additional source of information into the establishment's interior landscape. Taverns further became a platform from which voters openly expressed their opinions. Elected officials used this to their advantage, and were stimulated “to seek cooperation with tavern constituencies.” Out of the public house sprung the new “public sphere” that would make defiance and revolution possible.<sup>211</sup> Had this not occurred, it is less likely that the idea of colonial unity and American identity would have manifested into much of anything at all, let alone a Revolution. “Tavern-based political culture” supplemented and fueled by print materials combined to create an unparalleled public experience. Meetings were held in the tavern “that cultivated links between the world of print and the oral culture of taverns.” Toasting to

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<sup>209</sup> Pasley, chap. 1.

<sup>210</sup> Conroy, 157.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

particular authors and figures of and in the news became a way “to bridge the gap between the literate and the less literate, between the readers of pamphlets and those who learned of events through taverns.”<sup>212</sup> Attention was drawn in these public spaces to the content and message of print materials, which in turn stimulated a tendency to communicate the news more simply, and thus more inclusively. Likewise the printing of events and utterances allowed for reenactments in the tavern in another show of inclusion and explanation for greater numbers of the population. Conversely, as the colonies began to develop themselves within the walls of the tavern and on the pages of the press, the royal officials stationed throughout American became increasingly isolated from the colonists. It is likely this heightened the suspicions, secrecy, and hostility between the two camps. But still, people like the Sons of Liberty would employ the drink and the tavern “to organize and focus popular sentiment and to construct linkages between the world of print and the oral discourse of taverns,” frequently emphasizing that every assembly had been “conducted with the greatest ‘order’ and decorum.”<sup>213</sup> Participation in these gatherings became hugely influential in creating communities by including the common man, and “was crucial to investing meaning to the public represented in print.”<sup>214</sup> Soon, the colonies had become a place wherein citizens and British officials were both dependent on the “currents of opinion” fostered by nature of the tavern.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Conroy, 158.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 267. The Sons of Liberty, as much as they desired to continue to use this setting to their advantage, likewise had to practice restraint and caution to avoid the many disastrous consequences potentially to be had as a result of their promoting such behavior.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 269.

**“Revolutionary Reading Places”**<sup>216</sup>

*“It was in tavern discussion that Philadelphians’ notions of “accessibility” found their fullest expression and development.”*<sup>217</sup>

**Peter Thompson**

Print politics and materials were crucial in the process of spreading news throughout British North America. Citizens were situated miles apart from each other and travel was an exhausting process. As a result, much of the reading done was of the Bible at home or at church, a rare opportunity for the community to gather and socialize.<sup>218</sup> This only offers a limited scope of socialization and education. The availability of newspapers and subscriptions was a godsend in terms of accessing the people and informing them of the world around them so that “by the 1720s newspapers were helping to change the communication environment of... Boston... and gradually they came to have important effects on the character of the information system,” which “heightened awareness of the issues.”<sup>219</sup> Rather, it should be said instead that the newspaper subscriptions became assets to those who could afford to purchase one, split the cost with neighbors and share the paper, or to those who were desperate and adept enough to steal their neighbors’ paper. The majority, on the other hand, was quite poor, and many people were illiterate. The tavern thus became a gathering place for people from all over the community to come together and read newspapers kept on hand in the public house or hear them read aloud to the occupants.<sup>220</sup> In this way, as the tavern created an attainable way to access newspapers,

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<sup>216</sup> “A Place of Reading: Revolutionary Taverns.”

<sup>217</sup> Thompson, 126.

<sup>218</sup> Amory and Hall, chap. 4.

<sup>219</sup> Brown, 39.

<sup>220</sup> Lynda Morgenroth, *Boston Firsts: 40 Feats of Innovation and Invention That Happened First in Boston and Helped Make America Great* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 2007), 46; except for Church but that

“they did expand the pattern of diffusion within the elite, opening it up so that, in some measure, anyone with access to a newspaper – whether a wealthy Boston merchant... or a petty trader sitting in a tavern in Marblehead and reading the proprietor’s *Gazette* – could follow province, imperial, and international affairs in a rudimentary way.”<sup>221</sup> Information that was previously limited to wealthy, literate, and learned men, became available to a larger, popular audience who could not otherwise afford to subscribe, read, or discuss the contents in the company of others.

Public readings were important aspects of tavern culture and communication within the community. The tavern was, in this way, able to encourage participation of all members of society, regardless of their literacy. Illiterates especially depended on the tavern for news as their primary means of obtaining information. People could even bring their print materials to the tavern to discuss their contents or have them interpreted by their peers. Equally, the presence and dissemination of print within and throughout the tavern served to spark discussion and debate amongst locals and travelers alike. Print and tavern cultures were intimately connected:

There were no “card-carrying” party members or “registered voters” in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century America, but a subscription to a party newspaper, or regular readership of one in a tavern or reading room, substituted for these more formal means of belonging. The party newspaper furnished a corporeal link to the party that could be obtained in few other ways.<sup>222</sup>

The more participatory the community became in this way, the more they were able to recognize similar sentiments and realize that they could work together to do something about it. For example, according to the *Pennsylvania Packet* or, the *General Advertiser*,

... the letters from Boston were read to a large number of respectable inhabitants convened at the City Tavern, who, we are informed, appointed a Committee to

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offered limited discussion opportunities and topics and fails to reach the community at large/in its entirety. The tavern, for the most part, offered a sanctuary for all walks of life, saints and sinners alike. See also: Brown, 356.

<sup>221</sup> Brown, 39.

<sup>222</sup> Pasley, 12.



answer the letters, and to express their sympathy with their brethren in Boston, whom they consider as suffering for the common cause, to recommend to them prudence, firmness and moderation... they likewise ordered expresses to be immediately dispatched with the news to the southern colonies.<sup>223</sup>

The institution of the tavern was an indispensable vehicle by which the news travelled, stirring like-minded or oppositional sentiments, and thereby helping to bring about the Revolution.

Announcements were posted in and around the tavern, back issues of local and exchanged foreign papers, pamphlets, and broadsides were available and reading aloud was encouraged. A well-worn Bible was surely present. The ships' masters, just arriving from England, who stopped to indulge in a drink and exchange accounts of affairs across the pond, first hung their mailbags along the wall. The recent post laid strewn across the table for the picking. The popularity of and traffic throughout the many taverns in a given network made the public house an ideal location in which to successfully advertise the latest information, and to subsequently be able to expect with relative assurance that the locals and travelers alike would be thus informed, as evidenced in the following petition:

Attested Copy Of A Petition Submitted To The General Court By The Inhabitants Of Southwest Northampton Seeking To Be Established As A Separate Precinct. Attested Copy Of A General Court Order Directing That The Non-Resident Proprietors Be Provided With A Copy Of The Petition And Vote Stating Boundaries. Concurred To By Council And The House Of Representatives. Consented To By Gov. Belcher. Statement Of Constable Ebenezer Kingsley Relating That A Copy Of The Petition Was Posted At The Town House And One At The Tavern To Notify The Non-Resident Proprietors.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> "At a Meeting of the Freeholders and other inhabitants of the Town of Boston, Duly Qualified," *Pennsylvania Packet* or, the *General Advertiser*, May 23, 1774, 3. The article goes on to read: "A congress of deputies from the several colonies is thought to be absolutely necessary to devise means of restoring harmony between Great Britain and the colonies, and prevent matters from coming to extremities." Although still hoping for reconciliation with the British, the colonies are clearly acting on a sense of a common goal and identity, be it real, imaginary, or otherwise, and the tavern is firmly rooted in the development and proliferation of this sentiment.

<sup>224</sup> See Original, Pages 150-151. See Also, Pages 154-157. 1740-08-11.

The printer brought the weekly paper in to the tavern keeper, ink recently dried. The machinery of political mobilization manifests, or was already in place, in print itself. Politics permeated different papers, which “leaders everywhere scanned... to learn the state of public opinion elsewhere.”<sup>225</sup> The type of and method by which they received information functioned as vehicle for delivering and disseminating newspapers. In the tavern, print came to life, and the place and its people breathed into it new life. Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, for example, was one such text read aloud in taverns, giving the print and the people themselves power.

### **Declarations of Common Sense**

Both the *Declaration of Independence* and Thomas Paine’s pamphlet *Common Sense* are fundamental texts, which were read aloud in tavern companies. This fact shows that the influence of the tavern was even considered by the authors and printers in their word choice, formatting, and other decisions, anticipating the dissemination of their work orally in the public house. This recognition on the part of authors and printers further reveals an emphasis on publication, for tavern audiences especially, as a means of diffusing knowledge.

The Declaration for example, once featured subtle spaces throughout the text, which were suggestive of an orator’s notes to pause. In fact, Jefferson indeed marked certain places in his drafts for such a reason, which were not supposed to be printed in the official version. Yet in the heat of the moment, however, and with the pressure to print the historic document quickly, John Dunlap interpreted Jefferson’s ticks as stops, which he designated on print as spaces. Historian Jay Fliegelman refers to Jefferson as “an anxious orator,” and according to colleague John Adams, “During the whole time I sat with him in Congress, I never heard him utter three

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<sup>225</sup> Pasley, 6.

sentences together.”<sup>226</sup> Fliegelman continues, “Throughout his two terms, ‘the early president known most for his democratic views, spoke the least to the public directly.’”<sup>227</sup> In June of 1776, he was tasked with reading the text of the Declaration of Independence aloud before the Continental Congress. While it is unrecorded whether or not he actually did so or “once again succeeded in passing the burden of public performance onto someone else,” Jefferson did leave behind “compelling evidence that he thought deeply about how it should be read and heard.”<sup>228</sup> A rough draft of the Declaration features marks that “appear to be diacritical accents,” speculated by Julian Boyd to have assisted Jefferson in his reading of the text, and were, he suggested, “comparable to those advised by John Rice in his 1765 *Introduction to the Art of Reading with Energy and Propriety*,” apparently “one of several books Jefferson owned on the subject of effective public speaking.”<sup>229</sup> Boyd likewise speculated about the “seemingly inexplicable quotation marks” littering the first paragraphs of the Declaration printed by John Dunlap, concluding, “that these quotation marks can only be explained as a printer’s misreading of Jefferson’s reading marks.”<sup>230</sup> Fliegelman furthers Boyd’s work offering that a closer analysis of the markings, falling, for example, near the words “oppressions,” and “injuries,” suggests, “that the marks indicate not emphases but pauses,” which signify to the reader “rhythmical pauses of emphatical stress that divide the piece into units comparable to musical bars or poetic lines.”<sup>231</sup> Rhetorical pauses are indicative of the “matter of the discourse and the disposition of the mind of

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<sup>226</sup> Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language & the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), 4–5.

<sup>227</sup> Fliegelman, 5.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 5–6.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 10.

the speaker,” thus expressing “both text and speaker.” Further, “they are also a mode of direct emphasis, and thus are part of a larger cultural code.”<sup>232</sup> Eighteenth-century understandings of “orality” included both “an inner voice of emotion” and subjectivity, as well as “public-oriented oratorical communication,” defined by Fliegelman as “a mode of expression in which national values and a common sensibility were to be articulated and reinforced or... recovered.”<sup>233</sup> Therefore, in constructing the Declaration this way, Jefferson intentionally sought to cater to the popular audience, an audience assembled within the public house.

The Declaration of Independence was made public in the form of a broadside, disseminated in July of 1776. The document was accompanied by a legislative order, which gave instructions as to how the document should be distributed. The original copy of the Declaration that was sent to Charlton, Massachusetts, for example, survives at the American Antiquarian Society. The copy is accompanied by a note, which states that the town received the text on July 17<sup>th</sup>, and confirms that it was in fact read aloud by the local minister “as directed.” The note then refers the reader to “the order below the Declaration,” which reads:

ORDERED, That the Declaration of Independence be printed; and a Copy sent to the Ministers of each Parish, of every Denomination, within this STATE; and that they severally be *required* to read the same to their respective Congregations, as soon as divine Service is ended, in the Afternoon, on the first Lord’s-Day after they shall have received it :--- And after such Publication thereof, to deliver the said Declaration to the Clerks of their several Towns, or Districts; who are hereby required to record the same in their respective Town, or District Books, there to remain as a *perpetual* MEMORIAL thereof.<sup>234</sup>

To insure the message reached as many inhabitants as possible, copies of the Declaration were sent throughout the colonies to the most frequented venues at which they were to be read

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<sup>232</sup> Fliegelman, 13.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>234</sup> *In Congress, July 4, 1776. A Declaration by the Representatives of the United States of America, 1776, A Place of Reading Online Exhibition, Figure 3.15, American Antiquarian Society.*

publically for the facilities' large and faithful audiences. In addition to the church, these broadsides were likewise hung on tavern doors.<sup>235</sup>

The impact of these critical Revolutionary texts likewise influenced the politicization of the taverns. For example, when the Declaration of Independence was "Proclaimed at Providence, Rhode Island," it is reported, "The whole was conducted with great order and decency, and the Declaration received with every mark of applause. Towards evening the King of *Great Britain's* Coat of Arms was taken from a late publick office, as was also the sign from the *Crown Coffee House*, and burnt."<sup>236</sup> These texts not only informed the public, and articulated a popular sentiment in a way they had yet themselves been able to do, but they also encouraged public participation in terms of receiving the news in tavern company, and reacting to it, removing detested symbols of American oppression from their beloved public spaces as a sign of their collective identity, now separate from Britain's thanks to the role of print culture in tavern companies.

Jefferson himself insisted "that the document he authored constituted not an expression of his mind but 'an expression of the American mind' and 'the common sense of the subject.'"<sup>237</sup> The same could be argued of Thomas Paine's work just months before. Although Paine had only been in the colonies for two years prior to the publication of *Common Sense*, he managed to successfully speak to the discontent in a way that had yet to be done, propelling the public into action. Historian Gordon Wood describes this document as "the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire Revolutionary era," going through twenty-five editions within the first

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<sup>235</sup> "A Place of Reading: Revolutionary Taverns."

<sup>236</sup> "Declaration of Independence Proclaimed at Providence, Rhode Island."

<sup>237</sup> Fliegelman, 15.

year of publication alone. His words spoke to the common people, reaching beyond the learned realm “for new readers among the artisan- and tavern-centered worlds of the cities.”<sup>238</sup> Paine’s pamphlet stood out against other print materials of the time, which were riddled with references to the classical world, language, and literature. Knowing his audience and that they would most likely be receiving his message publicly and orally, Paine alternatively employed a universal language, with particular attention given to Biblical references, as the Bible was the most widely read and owned text in the colonies. Playing to the popular knowledge and understanding of the Bible, *Common Sense* offers an approachable description of the situation with Great Britain. Although Paine does not necessarily aim for the most logical argument, he is able to skillfully draw in a wide audience by appealing to the realities of their daily lives as well as to their emotions. Ultimately, despite the criticism of his style, Paine “showed the common people, who in the past had not been very involved in politics, that fancy words and Latin quotations no longer mattered as much as honesty and sincerity and the natural revelation of feelings.”<sup>239</sup> *Common Sense*, for really the first time in the revolutionary period, articulated the sentiments of a large population of colonists in such a way as to encourage popular participation and mobilization like never before.

*Common Sense* was crafted with the vulnerability of the audience and the potential to incite the crowd in mind. This pamphlet serves as another example of an author having recognized of the power of tavern readings and structuring their publications accordingly. Paine himself had a fondness for the tavern, and Paine chose his words carefully, looking to stir a

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<sup>238</sup> Wood, 55.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 56.

public crowd into mobilization.<sup>240</sup> He further employed italics and commas to indicate places where the text should be emphasized and where the reader should pause to breathe. The pamphlet well so well-received, at least among the popular community, that “*Common Sense* was now being read aloud in homes, shops, taverns, and coffeehouses.”<sup>241</sup> The atmosphere and company of the tavern was the ideal setting for his pamphlet to be read aloud, as the institution had steadily become a hotbed for organized public demonstrations. He even read his drafts aloud to ensure his piece was orally effective.

John Adams regarded Paine’s arguments in *Common Sense* as being “singularly unoriginal... nothing in the pamphlet was new... except ‘the phrases.’”<sup>242</sup> Indeed, the “uniqueness of Paine’s pamphlet lay not simply in broaching the hitherto forbidden subjects of independence and republicanism, but in doing so in a new literary tone and style.” Further, “*Common Sense*, written in a style designed to reach a mass audience, was central to the explosion of political argument and involvement beyond the confines of a narrow elite to ‘all ranks’ of Americans.”<sup>243</sup> Historian Eric Foner argues, “The success of *Common Sense* reflected the perfect conjunction of a man and his time, a writer and his audience.”<sup>244</sup> Paine capitalized on a political change making its way through the colonies, which “dominated discussion in the city’s taverns,” and “was the conscious pioneer of a new style of political writing, a rhetoric aimed at extending political discussion beyond the narrow bounds of the eighteenth-century’s

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<sup>240</sup> For more on Paine’s tavern life, see: “Newport, Tuesday, December 28, 1802,” *Newport Mercury*, December 28, 1802, 3, which reads: “Tom Paine remains at the tavern, alternately writing letters to the people, and drinking drams for their sole benefit.”

<sup>241</sup> Tom Standage, *Writing on the Wall: Social Media - The First 2,000 Years* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2013).

<sup>242</sup> Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 82.

<sup>243</sup> Foner, 82.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

‘political nation.’”<sup>245</sup> On this subject Paine wrote, “As it is my design to make those that can scarcely read understand, I shall therefore avoid every literary ornament and put it in language as plain as the alphabet.”<sup>246</sup>

In both *Common Sense* and the Declaration of Independence an important political choice was made to encourage the colonists to renounce one of the longest remaining ties to the mother country: the king. Paine wrote of a “Royal Brute,” and the Declaration of Independence followed suit six months later, placing a great deal of blame on the monarch and asserting that his reign was “a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.”<sup>247</sup> As previously mentioned, the colonists had clung to their loyalties to the king well into the 1770s. Yet suddenly, a universal language, first supplied by Paine and later echoed by the Declaration, emerged in the New World that gave the otherwise unattached colonies a common, shared goal and identity. Their influence demonstrates the pervasive power of the universal rhetoric found in both *Common Sense* and the Declaration of Independence throughout history. While they may not have been written with the intention to speak to *all* people, both texts ultimately resonated with audiences across space and time. In the period leading up to the Revolution especially, these documents acted as driving forces toward the establishment of an American identity.

The colonists are a complicated case study to explore in terms of their sense of self, and indeed many factors were at play in shaping their character, including the view from both sides of the Atlantic and a paradox of attitudes that fundamentally clashed, thus rendering these two formative texts so attractive to a people teetering on the edge of making a monumental decision.

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<sup>245</sup> Foner, 71, 83.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>247</sup> Wood, 56.



Ultimately, reading aloud created a common, inclusive, participatory experience that had the potential to drive listeners into action. In this way, the growth of a community mindset was accelerated, promoting American identity and the necessity for Revolution.

### **Networks and the Making of One Nation United**

Print was not enough to bring about the Revolution on its own. The scope of access was far too narrow and elite to have made an impact on the community as a whole, and without the platform offered by the common, public house, mobilization would not have materialized in a timely or strong enough manner, if at all. The circulation of news through the tavern and across the distant and disconnected colonies was necessary for the actualization of the Revolution.

The centrality of the taverns and the creation of communication networks in and around these public spaces unified the heretofore-disengaged colonies of the New World. As historian Richard D. Brown argues, early Americans experienced an “information and communication revolution.”<sup>248</sup> By studying who gained knowledge, how they obtained it, and further, how it influenced their lives, Brown judges that gathering information, regardless of validity, conveyed power. He further postulates that diffusion of the news was directed from “scarcity” to “abundance,” and that as information became more readily available and accessible to greater numbers of British colonists, so too did access to power.<sup>249</sup> By putting this understanding of colonial communication in conversation with Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” theory, it is clear that without the tavern, this “information and communication revolution” within the “imagined community,” could not have thrived in their thinly settled, emotionally

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<sup>248</sup> Brown, 3.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 270-271.

detached New World.<sup>250</sup> That is to say that the public house was a necessary vehicle through which the all-important face-to-face and print communication systems could reach the most inhabitants. The tavern drew disconnected colonists into public venues, and thus offered them a common space to discuss supplied print sources, public affairs, and various other salient topics of conversation. Such interaction could inevitably lead to disagreements; however, for really the first time, a more wide-reaching population of the colonists were exposed to the same material and found themselves experiencing a common intellectual experience. In a world where news did not travel all that fast, the tavern environment allowed colonists to share in each others company, to read and hear about those in far off colonies engaging in similar behaviors with similar feelings, and to develop a shared sense of identity and a common cause. Reaching its first peak during the Stamp Act Crisis, and prevailing throughout the American Revolution, the extent of the social class spectrum was given an unparalleled opportunity to participate in the global conversations, which had otherwise buzzed about them out of reach. Recognizing themselves as an oppressed unit with a common goal, the narrow colonial mindset that did not focus much beyond individual communities, finally morphed into one directed toward independence for all of the colonies under a single nation.

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<sup>250</sup> Anderson.

## **CONCLUSION**

The early American tavern was an institution intimately entangled in the development of the nation; yet few of its kind still stand, and no establishment since can be considered its equal. The tavern was challenged as a popular public space over time by forces including, but not limited to, the Liberty Tree and the Puritans, yet she prevailed. It was by virtue of the institution's natural, communal platform, with the necessary interaction of widely circulated print sources, that the spirit of Revolution, and ultimately of an American identity, was born. The tavern developed as an institution of the people, – a customary public space going back to the Old World – by the people, – adopted by the colonists in the New World to make this place their home and to satisfy their unexplainable lure to the venue – and for the people – as the malleability of the environment allowed the colonists to utilize and adapt the tavern to and for their changing needs. Grounded in its nature as a public house, walking into a tavern offered otherwise disparate and detached residents and travelers alike to come together and to communicate in ways their settlement patterns failed to offer. Without this unique place, the colonies likely would have remained estranged and uninformed, collectively under the thumb of the crown's coercion. The encouragement found within the tavern setting to share feelings of violation, frustration, and determination, allowed for the cultivation of the sense of national identity, which spread throughout the colonies and mobilized communities to choose to fight together rather than remain isolated and oppressed settlements.

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