

Beginning Tavern History

By Donald Yates

Tavern Life 1699

Let's step back in time for a moment to 1699, but don't worry, you may return to reality shortly.

My first question is going to be: Could you get a glass bottle of beer? Sorry! Not for another 150 years!

At that time, you could get a hotel or tavern room for three cents per night and a quart pitcher of flip was six cents. Today, that would be like spending \$60 for one night at the Marriott Inn, and paying \$120 for rum eggnog!!!

In New England, flip was a very popular drink and was apparently quite tasty, since it retained its popularity for 150 years. Flip was made by filling a large stoneware crock two thirds full of strong beer, then adding molasses, and a gill of rum, a pint of cream, and a few eggs. Then a red-hot poker was taken from the hearth and plunged into the flip, causing it to boil and foam. That gave it a unique, pleasant burnt flavor.

Metheglin was a simple fermented beverage made from honey, yeast and water. It can be traced back to 1625 in New England, and was quite popular for many years in the East. In New Jersey, it was given the special title "PERFECT LOVE" because of its wide appeal.

In Southern taverns, ale was very popular because it was a favorite of their British Colonists. Wine was very popular in regions settled by the French and Spanish colonists.

Apple cider was popular throughout New England in taverns as well as in households. It was easy to make, and was consumed freely in large quantities. Sweet, fresh apple cider often went through its own metamorphosis and became hard cider. This was accomplished with the fermentation process, and we now had an alcoholic beverage.

Early taverns were often single room log cabins. Furniture was sparse and well worn. One corner of the tavern often served as living quarters for the owner's family. Family members and guests often crowded as close to the fire as possible. Lighting was quite primitive from whale oil lamps and lanterns and bees wax candles and homemade tallow

candles.

It is very hard to imagine how harsh Colonial life was. Serious diseases included cholera and pulmonary tuberculosis. These were rampant at times and often spread by unsanitary living conditions and contaminated drinking water. Life expectancy in 1699 was only 33 years.

The other disease of note was scurvy, which was really a preventable disease. As later discovered, scurvy was a deficiency of Vitamin C and many millions of people and sailors died from this terrible disease. James Lind was an officer in the British Navy and did a scientific research on scurvy in which he proved that it could be cured and prevented with citrus fruit, or Vitamin C. Ascorbic acid, its scientific name, was actually synthesized in 1932.

The growth rate and popularity of taverns were tremendous. There was a huge influx of immigrants who settled throughout the territory, especially in New York and Pennsylvania. By 1650, one fourth of New Amsterdam's (New York City's) commercial buildings were taverns and tobacco shops.

Innkeepers in New England had to be of respectable character and licensed by the Court of Common Pleas. They also had to meet with the approval of selectmen, civil authorities, constables, and grand jurors of the town of residence.

Another reason for the short life span



was lead poisoning from pewter. Pewter ware was cast from 60 percent tin and 40 percent lead. The lead would leach into the beverage in the tankard and be consumed. But the worst case was that the pilgrims would ingest lead from their silverware and pewter plates. They would scrape the plates, actually wearing holes in them, after which they could then be sent to the pewter shop for recycling.

Their early rectangular dishes were made out of hard maple or oak and were called trenchers. These were shared with each other and the children shared their trenchers as well. Beverages were often consumed from a common punch type bowl, also helping to spread diseases.

The working class in Virginia spent a large amount of time in taverns, drinking, gambling and fighting. Virginia enacted legislation limiting the number of taverns in each town and some taverns were restricted to only selling beer and cider.





Early taverns served an important purpose in providing a meeting place, where people could relax, discuss their problems, and take a break from the drudgery of colonial days.

How about antiques? Were there any good antiques around back then? Well, not very many. Most items were very primitive and utilitarian, not ornate as they would become during the next century. Some early simple glass bottles were just starting to be made in the colonial glass houses. Most bottles of that time, were either stoneware, or if glass, were probably imported from Europe.

Tavern Life 1799

Once again, let's step back in time and see what it was like in 1799. We had a very young twenty three year old nation. It was an exciting time; It was a dangerous time. Things were not quite settled with the British, who still considered us to be one of their colonies. The Industrial Revolution was in its infancy, but progress could be seen in many aspects of life.

Still driven by curiosity, my first question is again: Could you get a glass bottle of beer? Sorry! Not for another 50 years.

What drinks were available? Spend an evening in a New England tavern and take a look around. It is crowded with patrons drinking drams of flip and other assorted alcoholic beverages, including barrels of beer, barrels of rum, and barrels of hard cider. Many new drinks were being introduced at that time, but only a few would survive the next hundred years.

Hot toddy gained appeal in the mid-1700s. It was a mixture of West Indian rum, sugar and hot water. Hot toddy was especially popular in New York State. In regions that were settled by the Irish and Scotch, whiskey was a favorite; it was distilled from grain, like rye, corn, and wheat.



Brewed beers available in 1799 included regular malted barley beer, ale, ginger beer, spruce beer and molasses beer. Their popularity remained quite regional. Metheglin, a spiced mead, remained popular throughout New England, Kentucky and Virginia.

Many types of wine were available, including cherry wine, and currant wine, but grape wine was the most popular, due to the excellent growing conditions in New York State.

Living conditions had improved somewhat during the previous century but health care and disease prevention were still a major problem. To address this, there was an explosion in the patent medicine market; but life expectancy for those born in 1799 was still only 37 years. Not too promising.

By this time, however, tavern conditions were improving. Main heating was still provided by the large friendly fireplace. Numerous tables and chairs and a bar were in place along one side. Both meals and drinks were served to the patrons. Lighting still remained primitive. Mineral or coal oil

had largely replaced whale oil for use in the lamps and lanterns.

It was common practice in Puritan New England on Sunday for parishioners to attend service in their church or meeting house. These were usually poorly heated, especially in winter, and afterward, many parishioners would leave church and head for the cheerful tavern.

Some taverns were also inns to serve travelers. Small inns had two bedrooms, with a single bed in each; one bedroom for men and one for women. Many taverns also served as post offices, and some had attached ball rooms for night time dancing. Other entertainment included live plays, turkey shoots, fox chasing, sing-alongs and cock fights. None of these fun activities would ever have been permitted during the very strict Puritan Law of the previous century.

Every teenager knew what the term bundling meant. It meant sleeping together before getting married using the excuse to share body heat to keep warm. Most parents did not approve of the practice and would require a physical barrier between the two parties. A lot of babies were born as a result of this practice, which meant more farm hands.

During the Revolutionary War, taverns were used as court rooms, prisons, officers' headquarters and for secret meetings of patriots.

How about antiques? Were there any good antiques available at that time? Most of the bottles of this period were still free-blown; this was the beginning of the figural flask and historical flask eras, and all of the bottles were made with open pontil marks. Early spirits bottles were often



made with black glass. Wine bottles were made squat and bulbous, with flattened front and back sides. Some cylindrical wine bottles were also made at that time.

Quart stoneware bottles were very popular at that time and were used for small beer and ale.

Saratoga Spring water was bottled locally and they used local glass houses to blow the bottles.

Tavern Life 1899

This is the third section of this series. You have read the first two sections, and I am sure that you can remember the inane question: Can you get a glass bottle of beer yet? Well.....yes! Approximately 100 years after the American Revolution, you can now get a glass bottle of beer. Even chilled with ice perhaps, not refrigerated but from preservation in the ice box. At this time, most beer bottles had hand finished blob tops, were amber in color, and had lightning stopper closures. Some crown top bottles had been regionally introduced during this period. The crown tops, or caps, could hold the pressure, which preserved the beverage.

Many of the popular beverages of colonial times were no longer available in taverns.. Beer was probably the principal drink, which was usually produced in local breweries, using malted barley and hops. Many different types of bitters (medicinal alcohol) were available and often came in attractive colored or figural Bottles. Bitters could also be purchased in the apothecary or drug store. By this time, the period of ornate, colorful historical flasks had started to decline. Whiskey now came in simple

flasks, with minimum embossing, or with paper labels. Wine and gin were also popular at this time, but their bottles usually had printed paper labels. Ginger beer was very popular in Western New York State.

The reasons drinking was so popular were many, including entertainment, social contact, a salty diet from food preservation; also a wide belief that cold spring water was dangerous to drink. For the first time, the Industrial Revolution had created some leisure time. The citizens had experienced constant improvement in farm machinery and techniques. In 1799, the U.S.A. urban population was five percent, and by 1899, it had reached 39 percent. The spinning and weaving industry also experienced some remarkable clever, inventions.

In some urban regions, the taverns were next door to beer gardens that catered to capacity crowds of German immigrants on Sundays. The lager beer served was delivered in oak casks, directly from the breweries by four-horse teams.

Tavern lighting had made some progress by this time. Rural lighting was predominantly with coal oil lamps. The best solution to the problem of artificial illumination, concluded Benjamin Franklin, was to do without it. Daylight Saving Time, he urged, offered the only answer for sensible people who must live by the clock.

Baltimore became the first American city to organize a company for the distribution of lighting gas on 1819. Boston and New York followed suit and adapted gas for street lighting. Some taverns in these cities in 1870 had outdoor lighting with cast iron gas lamp posts. Most other regions still used oil

burning lamp posts.

In 1899, some eastern taverns began using electric lighting for the first time. The incandescent lamp was invented by Thomas Edison in 1880, and within twenty years it was being mass-produced for use in major cities.

During this period, some of the metropolitan taverns were richly decorated with marble floors, cut glass mirrors, and mahogany bars and woodwork. This formal atmosphere created a warm place for meeting friends, conducting business, or simply drinking away the leisure hours. In the upscale taverns, the patrons wore fancy clothing to indicate their success. Industrious folks could earn a good living with the many new businesses and factories. Both men and women wore hats and other accessories of bright colors. Banks were being created to lend money and encourage new businesses.

Diseases were still prevalent at the end of the 19th Century and contagious diseases were particularly devastating. Life expectancy had increased to 49 years, but hardly a respectable life! The cause of tuberculosis was discovered in 1882, but unfortunately anti-biotic treatment would not be available until 1950. Women were subjected to high mortality during childbirth; children were exceptionally vulnerable to childhood diseases such as small pox, polio and diphtheria.

All of the beneficial attributes of tavern life were continuously overshadowed by a strange, strong, enigmatic force known as the temperance movement. The movement started shortly after the Civil War and was promoted by several influential individuals, many women's organizations and the Methodist church. In 1885, Kansas State voted in its own prohibition laws. The Women's Christian Temperance Union was founded in Cleveland, Ohio in 1874. The first Temperance Education Law was passed in 1882, originating in Washington D.C., and by 1900, all of the states had similar laws. The ultimate effect of the movement would manifest itself as the Prohibition Volstead Act of 1920, which lasted until its repeal in 1933.

Our young nation had some degree of resilience; however, it was not fully prepared for the devastating effects of Prohibition. Millions of people immediately lost their jobs, with unpredicted subsequent job losses. Prohibition was a major precursor to the stock market crash of 1929, and also the Great Depression. It was estimated that



in New York City in 1933, there were 67,000 children without homes. The devastation was even felt in the sugar mills and the rum distilleries of the Caribbean islands.

Summary:

1899 was a period of exciting growth in the beverage industry, providing millions of jobs in building and operating breweries, taverns, and supporting industries. The breweries built at that time were usually of ornate architectural character, constructed of quarried stone and brick. They were built to last 100 years, not just until Prohibition.

Taverns experienced a dramatic change in atmosphere from that of 1699. The beverage evolution had quite stabilized by then, leaving the most popular, mass produced favorites. Taverns were no longer used as post offices, town meetings or church services.

The next article in this series will be titled: Tavern Life – 1999!

Williamsburg Taverns

Marot's Ordinary

John Marot was born in Germany in 1862 and sailed to Virginia in 1696. Around 1700, he began his activities as a respectable servant. He purchased his ordinary in 1708 in Williamsburg. It was a very popular place serving the upper class.

For several years, John Marot was a Williamsburg constable. He got into trouble twice for selling liquors at rates higher than set by law. He pleaded guilty and was excused. He purchased a good-sized farm in 1718.

John Marot's luck ran out and he was violently murdered by fellow ordinary keeper Francis Sharp. John's widow continued to operate the ordinary until 1738, when she leased it to John Taylor. Around 1745, it was being operated by John Marot's daughter, Anne, and her husband, James Shields. They named their ordinary The English Coffee House.

Burdett's Ordinary

Today, this tavern can be identified with its swinging sign depicting Edinburgh Castle. John Burdett was the original owner. It was similar to most of the other Williamsburg taverns, used mainly for drinking and gambling and meals. When open to the public for travelers, the rooms were pressed into service for group sleeping.

Red Lion Tavern

In 1717, the trustees of Williamsburg granted this lot to Francis Sharp. In 1718, he built his tavern and obtained a liquor license. He provided food and liquor to travelers. Francis Sharp murdered John Marot in 1718. John was the owner of Marot's Ordinary.

King's Arms Tavern

Jane Vobe was the original proprietor of the tavern. They served food and drink to the upper class, including William Byrd, George Washington, and Sir Peyton Skipwith. Its ornate decorations included wooden paneling and an extensive wine cellar. During the Revolution, Jane Vobe served food and drink to the American troops, including Virginia ham, fried chicken, and scalloped oysters.

The Raleigh Tavern

The Raleigh Tavern is located on the north side of the Duke of Gloucester Street at the center of the busiest block in Williamsburg. It was dedicated to Sir Walter Raleigh, who promoted sending colonists to America and promoted the use of tobacco in England.

The Raleigh was the center of social events. Elegant balls were held in its Apollo Room. Both farmers and merchants gathered at its bar. Substantial wooden tables were scarred by dice boxes as wealth changed hands during the course of an evening.

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