



March, 2017

Museum Commons: Penfield's Sun Tavern – Opening Summer 2017

The spaces interpreted as *Penfield's Sun Tavern* will include the West Parlor, West Chamber, and 2nd floor landing of the 1780 Sun Tavern on the Green. This structure was built by Samuel Penfield after the burning of Fairfield in 1779, although there is evidence from almanacs that Penfield was operating a tavern before the burning. A record indicating that Penfield fed and lodged soldiers in June 1775 also exists in the Connecticut Archive for the Revolutionary War. The *Sun Tavern* exhibits will create a hands-on, immersive experience for visitors—one in which they can sit at the tables, empty out the mailbag, pick up and read the newspapers, handle the plates and cups, lie on the bed, and unpack the travelers' luggage.

Through exhibition design and graphics, the spaces will be “populated” with various figures / silhouettes (see page 4) in order to give them an inhabited feel and bring out some specific and archetypical personal stories.

Tavern Hallway / Entrance

At one time every town in Connecticut was required to have an inn or tavern to accommodate travelers. As a prosperous town and the county seat, Fairfield had several, including this one, owned by Samuel Penfield. Penfield purchased the land adjacent to the Town Green in 1761 and ran a tavern and store here. When the British invaded the town in July 1779, most of Penfield's property went up in flames. This building was probably built the following year and operated as a tavern until 1818.

Tavern photographs from Gadsby's Tavern, Alexandria, VA



Tavern Room / West Parlor:

Welcome to the Taproom—Take a Seat!

Please note: unfortunately we will not be operating an actual tavern here! The Fairfield Museum will occasionally offer programs and Tavern Nights with entertainment and refreshments.

Taverns in the late 1700s and early 1800s served many roles. They provided **food and lodging** for both travelers and their horses. They might be **stops for the stagecoach**—public transportation in the era before trains and buses. They also served as **community**

hubs, where local men might gather for a drink and a good gossip, a game of cards or draughts, or to read the newspaper and discuss politics.

Tavern-keepers—most often men or widows—needed to be licensed by the County Court, with fines and penalties for those serving “strong drink” without a license. Women travelers would not visit the taproom, although some taverns had a separate “ladies’ parlor.”

For Self-Guided Visitors: Explore the “taproom” to discover more about what happened here. Feel free to sit, touch, and examine more closely. In other words, make yourself at home!



Tavern Fare

Tavern guests did not order from a menu, but paid a set rate for the meals that were provided. Tavern meals usually included meat (ham, bacon, poultry, venison, veal, tongue, salt pork, or mutton), seafood (fish, oysters, eels, or lobster), and vegetables (potatoes, carrots, peas, beans, beets, onions, cabbages, turnips, squashes, or pickled cucumbers). Cake, pie, or puddings might be served for dessert.

At a time when Americans consumed gallons of alcohol a year, taverns offered a wide variety of drinks: hard cider, punch, rum, toddy (rum mixed with water and sugar), beer, wine, whiskey, grog, brandy, and more.

Locals caught drinking too much or loitering in taverns would have their names posted outside, and tavern-keepers would be fined for serving them. It was illegal for tavern-keepers to serve “strong drink” to servants or minors without permission of the master or parent. Slaves were barred from taverns and were not allowed to buy alcohol.

Reproduction Objects on Display & to Touch:

Tankards, Plates (creamware/tin/pewter), utensils (bone/wood handles)

English shell-edged plates were extremely popular from 1780-1820, and they were fairly affordable. Pewter was expensive, but wouldn’t break. Tin was a cheaper alternative.

Travel & Transportation

Travel in Connecticut in the 1700s was slow, uncomfortable, and sometimes treacherous. Road conditions could be poor—especially in the rainy or icy seasons, and river crossings could flood. Fairfield was accessible by boat, but many people still traveled here by foot, on horseback, or by carriage.

Fairfield to New York City was a full day by horseback; a trip to Boston could take several days. Stagecoach service flourished in Connecticut in the years between the Revolutionary War and the arrival of the railroad in the 1840s. Stagecoaches accommodated 9-12 travelers, providing regular stops at specific taverns.

Reproduction Objects on Display & to Touch:

Reprint of complete or excerpted almanac(s) showing cover, county court locations, and “roads” section.

Almanacs were the **Tripadvisor** of the 18th century, providing information on routes for travelers, distances between different towns and recommended taverns in those towns. They were also general reference books, including calendars, lists of solar and lunar eclipses, and dates on which courts would convene.

ROADS.
With the names of good Innkeepers.*

From New London, to	Plainfield	Eaton	7
Boston.	Sterling	Field	4
Montville	Haughton	Fish	11
Norwich-Port	Seaside	Field	15
Jewett's-City	Johnston	Mason	9

* In the large towns, there are many good inns, so name particular ones might be thought invidious.

News & Communication

Taverns were communications hubs in a time before the telephone, email, television, radio, the internet, or mobile apps. News came and went in letters and newspapers carried by post riders, or later by stagecoaches. It was whispered—or declared loudly—over a drink. Or it might be posted with other announcements on the taproom wall. These small posters are known as broadsides, and they were used to inform the public about everything from events of national importance to local news to products and services available for purchase.

Reproduction Objects on Display: Broadside/notices pinned to wall.

Shown above: *Green's CT Register*, 1811.

The Post Rider

In the years before the Revolutionary War, post riders traveled by horseback in relays both day and night to transport mail and newspapers throughout the colonies. Fairfield was served by postal route three times a week in summer and twice a week in winter. In the late 1780s and 1790s, post riders were replaced by stagecoaches traveling along postal routes. The contracts awarded to stagecoach companies as part of the expanding postal service also helped subsidize passenger stage service. In the 1780s, the *Fairfield Gazette* was published by Jonathan Bulkley at the tavern across the street.

2nd Floor: Hallway and West Chamber

Reproduction Objects on Display: Basket of “dirty” bed linens at foot of stairs, Broom

The 3rd floor (which is closed to the public) of the Sun Tavern probably served at some time as dormitory-style sleeping accommodations for travelers. With as many as a dozen overnight guests at a time, Hannah Penfield probably always had cleaning to do. She also had to keep an eye out for signs of illness among her guests. Because of the fear of smallpox and other diseases, tavern-keepers were required by law to report sick lodgers to town officials within 12 hours or risk a \$20 fine.



Sun Tavern and the Freemasons

In the 1700s and early 1800s, taverns were often meeting places for local groups of Freemasons. This international fraternal organization dates back hundreds of years and claims many influential men among its membership: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Henry Ford, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Mark Twain, to name just a few. Freemasons are organized into local Lodges. St. John's Lodge No. 3 of Fairfield, chartered in 1762, met twice at the Sun Tavern in the early 1800s before building their own Masonic Temple in town. Taverns that hosted regular meetings often displayed Masonic symbols, like

the square and compass, on their outdoor signs.

Shown above: A freemason's notice printed by Paul Revere.

Source: <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Inventories/Revere/b1.htm#f1> Accessed March 27, 2017



A Room of One's Own?

Today most travelers renting a hotel room expect a certain amount of privacy, but that was not necessarily the case in the late 1700s or early 1800s. Tavern accommodations were often more like a youth hostel, with dormitory-style rooms housing several guests at once. Strangers might even share the same bed.

Wealthier travelers, families, or women traveling on their own might spend extra to rent a private room like the one in the Sun Tavern. This is probably what **Abigail Adams** did when she stayed here in 1800, on her way from Philadelphia (which had been the seat of the federal government before the capital moved to Washington DC that year) to her home in Quincy, MA. She visited with Judge Hobart at the tavern and discussed "parties and politicks." Months before the dramatic election of 1800, her husband was already in conflict with Alexander Hamilton and others in his own Federalist party as well as with opponents

Aaron Burr and Thomas Jefferson, and she relayed information about the political landscape in Connecticut.

Reproduction Objects on Display & to Touch:

Washstand/bowl/pitcher, , Chamberpot,

Washstand: With no running water in the building, a tavern servant probably had to bring in water from the well every day so that wealthier guests—like the ones staying in this room—could wash the dirt of the road off their bodies after their travels.

Bedwarmer: A long-handled bed warmer could be filled with coals from the fire and rubbed between the sheets to take the chill off.

Small writing desk with chair, inkwell, pen, letters/journal: Much of what we know about travel in the 1700s and 1800s comes from travelers' journals and letters. Later on, postcards became a favorite way to share ones travel adventures with friends and family.

Chamberpot: It's not exactly a private bathroom, but using a chamberpot certainly beats going outside to the outhouse on a cold night!

Traveling trunk(s) with clothes, toiletries, accessories, sewing kit Most people in the 1700s had few belongings that they needed to carry with them, but wealthier travelers, like Abigail Adams, probably traveled with toiletries, accessories, writing materials, and extra clothes.

Character Portraits

The following people will be highlighted throughout the tavern:

Post Rider Image

Hi! My name is Turney Foote, and I am a post rider passing through Fairfield. I carry mail and newspapers from town to town, and I owe my job to Mr. Benjamin Franklin, who organized the postal service before the war and served as Postmaster General. Most towns don't have a proper post office, so I usually leave the mail at a local tavern, rest my horse, and get myself something to eat or drink before hitting the road once more.

Roger M. Sherman Image

Greetings. I am Roger M. Sherman, a lawyer visiting Fairfield to try a case at the County Court. I graduated from Yale several years ago and then went to study with Tapping Reeve at the famous Litchfield Law School. I have been practicing law in Norwalk, but that means I have to travel to Fairfield regularly and pass hours waiting around in taverns like this one near the courthouse until my

case is called. Perhaps I should move to town. It might be good for my career.

Abigail Adams Image

Pleasure to meet you. I am Abigail Adams. But I suppose you must know that—it is difficult to remain anonymous as First Lady of these United States of America. I am glad to be leaving official duties behind to travel home to Quincy, Massachusetts, while my husband, President John Adams, visits the new capital in Washington. I have stopped here at Penfield's, known a respectable tavern, where both my husband and the late President Washington have stayed. Penfield has offered me a lovely private room on the 2nd floor where I will take dinner with Judge John Hobart, a native of this town, and talk about the upcoming election. I miss my husband terribly, but will write and tell him the political news I have learned.

Local Resident Image

How do you do? My name is Hezekiah Nichols, and I have a farm here in Fairfield. Although the law strictly limits what can and cannot happen at taverns—no gambling, no theatrical performances, no puppet shows, no tumblers,* no locals lingering for more than an hour or after 9 o'clock—I still find this a good place to meet up with friends and business acquaintances and to catch up on local news and enjoy a drink. Sometimes you can meet interesting men traveling though, and often Penfield looks the other way if you want to start up an innocent game of cards.

*CT had the most restrictive laws regarding performers in the period before the 1830s.

Sun Tavern History



From the early Colonial period until the mid-1800s, taverns, called “ordinaries,” served the needs of travelers, offering food and drink, a place to sleep, and shelter for the horses. Taverns also served as community gathering spots where news—and gossip—was exchanged; in those days, the phrase “news traveled” had a literal meaning.

The Sun Tavern was one of several taverns in the early history of Fairfield, a prosperous shire town (county seat) from 1666 until 1853. In 1761 Samuel Penfield purchased this parcel of land adjacent to the Town Green. When the

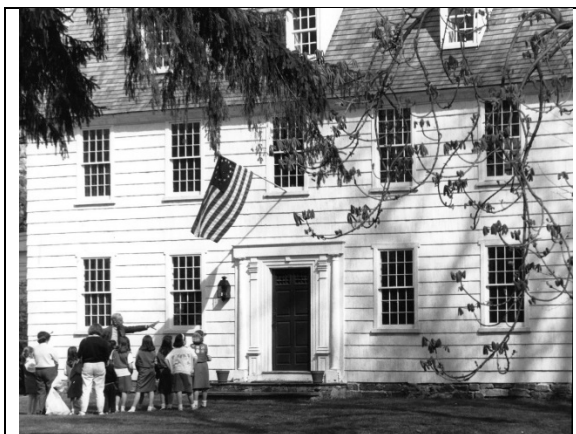
British invaded the town in July of 1779, Penfield, like most of his neighbors, witnessed homes, barns, and outbuildings going up in flames.

Nearby Bulkley's Tavern was spared since it had served the British officers as their headquarters, and, so it was rumored, because Mrs. Jonathan Bulkley's Tory brother, George Hoyt, had assisted British General William Tryon. Penfield rebuilt, probably a year or so after the fire. Evidence shows that he operated a tavern before the fire. He must have decided to continue with an opportunity for a profitable business where “patriot” sympathies would prevail.

Penfield's Sun Tavern was host to many prominent men. On the occasion of George Washington's third trip through Fairfield, on October 16, 1789, tradition says that he visited the Sun Tavern. Many years later, some Fairfielders who were children at the time recalled peeking in the west window to see Washington speaking with the town's important people. It is often repeated that “Washington slept here,” however his diary does not document where he actually lodged in Fairfield. Rather, Washington noted on that day, “The destructive evidences of British cruelty are yet visible both in Norwalk and Fairfield, as there are the chimneys of many burnt houses standing in them yet.” His comments reflect

the slow progress of renewal ten years after the event. Benjamin Franklin is another famous person who traveled through Fairfield and may have stopped at Penfield's tavern.

Samuel Penfield died in 1811, and seven years later the property was sold. Ironically, its new resident, Reverend Nathaniel Hewitt, held strong views against the consumption of alcohol, and was at the forefront of temperance reform. In 1885 the property changed hands when a Troy, New York, resident purchased it for use as a summer home.



Above, a photo of Bill Lee giving a tour of the Sun Tavern.

In 1978 the Town of Fairfield purchased the property, which had become run-down and overgrown. Town Historian William D. Lee, Sr., and his wife, Anne, bravely took on the project of restoration, and lived in the Sun Tavern for thirteen years while Lee worked for the Town. They welcomed many people into their home, and kept alive the important history of the Sun Tavern and Fairfield's role in the American Revolution. In 2006, major restoration was undertaken by the Town and qualified contractors under the direction of the Fairfield Historical Society. A largely new foundation now supports the structure, a new roof of hand-split shingles keeps it dry, and fresh coats of paint in the original colors have brightened the interior and exterior.

With the Fairfield Museum and History Center as its new neighbor, the Sun Tavern will soon be the focus of a project to expand historical interpretation of the Town Green. The Sun Tavern, in context with other historic structures such as the Fairfield Academy, Town Hall, the Victorian Cottage and Barn, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and the former site of Edward's Pond, offers a great opportunity for exploring the rich history of the town and surrounding communities.

Other Taverns within Fairfield

During the late 18th century the Penfield and Buckley Taverns were both operating in the center of Fairfield. A handful of taverns within the center of Fairfield were hosting and feeding many travelers and townspeople, but communities like Greens Farms and Greenfield Hill still lacked taverns. This was until The Morehouse Tavern was opened in the Greens Farms area [date needed]. The Hull's Tavern in Greenfield Hill was first operated by Goodsell and later by Joseph Buckley. In 1806 Molly Pike's Tavern opened in Southport, it overlapped with Penfield Tavern's time frame. After Penfield's Tavern closed the Benson's and Knapps Taverns opened in the early to mid-19th century near the center of Fairfield. The Knapps tavern was burned in 1835.

Further Reading:

Molly Pike & Pike Tavern by Marcia Miner

http://marciaminersroomwithaview.blogspot.com/2014/02/fairfield-connecticut-celebrates-375_13.html Accessed 4/17/2017