

The Dill's Tavern Chronicle

September, 2007

Northern York County Historical and Preservation Society, 35 Greenbrier Lane, Dillsburg, PA 17019 Ph. 717- 502-1440



Purpose: To promote and encourage the study, collection, and preservation of the historical heritage of the Northern York County area.

Welcome to First Fridays beginning on September 7th. at the Tavern

These are socials in 1790's style for adults to enjoy candlelight, fireside warmth and friendly conversation.

Hours are 7pm to 10pm.

Snacks, mixers and ware will be provided. Old-fashioned games and music are part of the evening fare.

BYOB. The cost is \$10 per person, with period garb optional.

Dillsburg Area Business Assoc. and Manetenance Barber Styling are the first to offer help funding these events.

What do you know of the Tavern's Life and Times Here's some of what the Ledgers reveal

Though we currently have no Tavern ledgers from the Dill era, 1742 through 1800, we do have extensive records of the Eichelberger Tavern era from 1772 through 1835. Prior to 1800 when Leonard Eichelberger purchased Dill's Tavern, he operated a tavern in nearby northern Maryland which presumably was very similar. His brothers operated taverns in York and Hanover also and he lived there before moving to Maryland. Interestingly, the post 1800 period also shows sales of items to Dill descendents such as George and Thomas Dill also. The information here is primarily from the period 1796 through 1802.



The entries in these ledgers are fascinating to say the least! While some of the entries are unintelligible, those that are reveal a myriad of information about our predecessors. The undecipherable German text and unreadable quill pen handwriting of many scribes reduces much of it to later more thorough research. For now, we have much to interest us.

First of all, very curiously we notice very few entries for lodging. This we can only attribute to what is probably an included "benefit" of buying other services at the tavern. Since most of the time "lodging" meant spending the night on the floor wrapped in a traveler's own blanket, perhaps that explains its infrequent occurrence as a "billable" item. When it did appear, perhaps it was for extraordinary accommodations, though it only cost 4 or 6 pence, comparable to a single drink in the Tavern! Meals are also not described in any detail. Entries are usually made for supper (1 shilling/10 pence), a snack (9 pence), victuals or breakfast.

By far, the most entries occur for drinks and the most prevalent of the period are Cider and "Cideroyl" (Cider Royal?) and Whisky/Whiskey. Cider was certainly pressed from local apples and became "hard" very quickly, intentionally or not. We have not been able to determine the recipe as yet for "Cideroyl". (Anyone out there want a research project?) Cider was sold by the pint, quart, or "botul" (bottle). Several entries were also found for pints of Cider "with sticks therein" (cinnamon perhaps?).

Whiskey was sold almost exclusively by the gill or "halb" (half) gill. A gill is a 4 ounce measure and Whiskey was dispensed in gill size glasses. These must have been used by the hundreds, but we have found no recognizable fragments among the excavated shards nor in the historical record of taverns we have read about. We are actively trying to locate what they looked like.

A gill of Whiskey sold for 4 pence and it was also sold by the pint and quart. These larger sales may have gone home with the buyer and may have been made to operators of other taverns or tippling houses (unlicensed taverns) in the area. One other possibility is that the ledger book entry for a pint of Whiskey may have been a shortened entry for a Whiskey drink of lesser alcoholic content. We find entries for such things as Whiskey Sling, Whisky Grog and even Stewed Whisky! Perhaps they also could consume huge quantities over long hours of conversation.

The next most common beverage was Peach Brandy, though we also find French Brandy and Apple Brandy less often. Cherry Bounce is also found. The produce of the orchards found heavy use in those days. Other drinks mentioned in the period include Hot Toddy, Mint Toddy, Sling, Bitters and Whisky Bitters. Wine is mentioned occasionally, by the “botul” or club, along with combinations such as Mulled Wine, Sherry Wine, Wine Sling and Syllabub. We have found wine glass fragments in the excavations. See the photos and captions below.



Photo at left is a wine decanter of the period. It would have had a glass stopper and would also have been used for other beverages. Wine was not necessarily the Tavern’s biggest seller. Middle photo: We were fortunate to recently acquire a period glass from an antique collection shown here with a shard found under the 1794 tavern floor. On the right is a photo of a fancy engraved “flip” glass found in an antique shop in New Oxford which is exactly like a shard found at the tavern. Being from the period 1760-1800 the glass is priced at \$385, thus we do not own it. If any one would like to purchase and donate it to the Tavern collection, it would be greatly appreciated.

Infrequently we find reference to Beer by the pint or quart and Eggnog by the bowl or just a “share”. Early in the period a “Botul of Tram” is found often, but that seems to disappear later. We are uncertain if that is a German dialect entry or a drink that faded from popularity. More work is needed here also!

It is also very interesting to find charges for broken items. The tavernkeeper had to recoup his losses and so a gill glass cost 1shilling/6 pence, but a tumbler costs 2s/6p and a tumbler with a handle costs 3s! A chair would cost you 2/6 so you can see the high cost of the glassware in those days. A pane of window glass would be 8p since it was flat and easier to make, but a pitcher would cost you 3/9! Pity the rowdy patron who threw a chair and hit a table of glassware and a window besides!

One pint of Cideroyl was only 6p, but a gill of French Brandy was 1 1p. Many patrons accumulated sizeable accounts and found themselves unable to pay. They could work off their bills on the farm if they were agreeable, but often tavernkeepers of the era wound up in court or arbitration seeking payment and with huge receivables in their estates upon their deaths.

Along with a drink, a patron often purchased a twist or a yard of tobacco. If he rode in on horseback, his horse would be put “at hay” (for a fee, of course) or given oats. A herd of cattle being driven to market would be tended for the drover while he stayed and coach passengers would simply fend for themselves until the stage driver was ready to embark again.

Consumption of the beverages mentioned was akin to our use of soft drinks today. It was accepted, regardless of the impact whether they were fully aware of it or not. Water was usually of questionable quality, if readily available. Young and old were thought to benefit from Whiskey’s “healthful” ingredients and though they sought to limit its abuse, it was an accepted part of life in that day. How the tavernkeepers came by the huge quantities of these beverages is a topic for another issue.

If you have an interest in research contact the committee for a list of research projects via phone or E-Mail through NYCHAPS.

The Tavern Committee:

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