

The Dill's Tavern Chronicle

April 2008

www.dillstavern.org

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.



Whiskey at Dill's ?

One profitable enterprise Dill's Tavern owners were engaged in was the distilling and selling of Whiskey. In the 1700 and 1800's it was a respectable endeavor as it benefited the distiller and the surrounding farmers by using up the surplus grains they produced, but did not require for their livestock. George Washington was a large distiller netting \$7500 a year.

← An 1800 Distillery

Notice the Hogsheads (barrels) that held about 120-150 gallons, and the still pot on the fireplace.

Still Pot →



"A Treasure Trove of Documents"

Sam McKinney, our skilled restoration guru has delved into the books along with Bob Eichelberger to enlighten his insatiable quest for knowledge of the Tavern's past. Today's article was written by Sam to encourage you to take up this endeavor and both apprise yourself plus help the Society with your findings.

Dills Tavern has something that few historical sites have. It has a treasure trove of documents that tell the actual story of the people that lived there and the businesses that they ran. The documents that I am talking about are the ledgers that were kept by members of the Eichelberger family from 1800 to the 1830's. These ledgers were purchased by Bob Eichelberger in the 1990's from someone who bought them at the big auction held at the tavern. These ledgers are in very fragile condition and Bob has been reluctant to allow people to handle them. They are literally falling apart.

Last fall, I asked Bob if he would try photographing the pages of the ledgers with a digital camera. I loaned him my camera and purchased a document stand to aid him in his efforts. I had no idea what a mammoth job I was asking him to do. The ledgers are hundreds of pages long. Bob must have sat there for days photographing those books. He filled a 1 GB photo card and didn't even get the first ledger on it. That is 372 pages. He got the rest of the ledgers on two, 2GB photo cards. Probably, over a thousand pages more! That's a lot of camera work. Thanks to Bob's hard work, we now have computer disks with all this information on them. I took one of the camera cards to Johnson Imaging in Camp Hill and they were able to print out three hard copies of it. Two of those hard copies went to the Historical Society and I bought the other one for myself. Now I can sit down at night and try to figure out what was going on at the tavern from 1812 to 1817.

The first thing you have to deal with is the hand writing. The writing is pretty good but often it is done in a hurry or maybe when the person was fatigued. The quality fluctuates and the age of the paper has caused it to fade. On top of that the ledger keeper abbreviates and shortens information into economical phrases that are hard to figure out. Despite the difficulties I encounter trying to read this material, I have a great time working through it. You never know what you will find from one page to the next. It is pure history, written by the person who experienced the activities he is documenting. You don't have anyone filtering the information and analyzing it for you. You can

come up with your own insightful conclusions. When this ledger was started in 1812, James Madison was President. The War of 1812 was underway and it continued until 1815. None of this seemed to penetrate into the rural life at the tavern, however. Business went on as always. The main business in this period was the distillery. They made thousands of gallons of whiskey. From September 7, 1814 to August 14, 1815, one man was paid for distilling 8993 gallons of whiskey. The next payday covered a time period from September 9, 1815 to August 2, 1816. This time the distiller produced 9833 gallons. If the still was going 24/7 and it probably was, this means he was averaging about 20 gallons per day. The distiller got 6 cents a gallon as pay. At 30 gallons per day, the distiller was making about \$1.50 per day. Average workers made about \$.50 a day. The Eichelbergers were selling the whiskey for about \$.60 a gallon. At 30 gallons a day they were grossing \$18.00 a day. Take out the distillers pay, and they still make \$16.50 per day. They had other expenses to account for, but I think you can see how lucrative the distilling business was.

The other entries related to the whiskey business, involve purchasing lots and lots of barrels and many trips to Baltimore by wagon. The entries mention wagon trips to Baltimore, but they seldom tell you that they are hauling whiskey. Only twice do the ledgers actually state that whiskey was hauled to Baltimore. I think it is safe to say that whiskey was on most of those wagons heading south.

I read through sections of the ledgers rather quickly. It will take a lot of studying to get to the bottom of some of the questions I have. Such things as:

Where was the distillery located?

How many stills did they have?

Was the distiller a local man who was an employee of the Eichelbergers?

Did distillers travel around and work for different people?

Who was the cooper that made all the barrels? Where was his shop? Who were the men who drove the wagons to Baltimore? They would have been Conestoga wagons (with teams of 4 to 6 horses or mules.)

They were the only wagons that could make such a trip. Were the men driving the wagons from the area?

Did the Eichelbergers use grain exclusively from the farm surrounding the Tavern, or did they have to buy from other farmers?

These are just some of the questions I find myself asking, as I skim through these old records. I am sure we will be writing more about what we discover in this and other ledgers, as we wade through them. If you would like to help read and digest some of this information, please contact the Historical Society. They have two hard copies of this portion of the ledgers that you can look at yourself. There are also the CD's that have the whole 35+ years of the complete set of ledgers. It will be awhile before we read all of that material.

And then there's First Fridays at Dill's!

April 4 - 7 to 10pm.

Share: Music ~ Snacks ~ Games ~ Pleasant Conversation

This month's fare will feature Country Music

7 - 10 ~ \$10.00 per ~ BYOB ~ 21 yrs. Min.

Thanks go to Al Kauffman of MANEtenance Barber Styling for providing the snacks and music for the March date. Jonathan Frazier played to a crowded ballroom of toasty folks (the stove was heating to the walls). Deanna Weaver brought a Celtic-theme Basket to raffle and tasty *Cochaleekie Stew* to sample. As always, the games were fierce but the atmosphere was friendly. Thanks to those who wear garb to give a historical flavor to the evenings and to those who attend frequently bringing new faces each month.

The Tavern Committee:

Bob Eichelberger-Chairman, Mervin Ice, Larry Klase, Joanne Klase, Connie Trostle, and Greg Wonders

Web Site www.northernYorkHistorical.org

E-Mail Address nychaps@northernYorkHistorical.org