

The Dill's Tavern Chronicle

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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.

Dill's Tavern and "Plantation"

The history of Dills Tavern has been exciting to uncover and much remains to be learned. Some information has been revealed briefly while others are known only to a few folks who have been immersed in the details.

For example, happenings at the Tavern itself have been described here and elsewhere as well as typical tavern operations of the period. More study needs to be done on the existing records to begin to tell the whole story. The operation of a distillery has been discussed briefly and the whole idea is new to many of us. While typical of the period, it is so foreign to our ears as to require a more thorough description. It is our plan to develop a functional distillery on site to fully interpret the role this played in the period.

One additional thing has now become obvious to us. The size of the operations here at "Dills Tavern" far exceeded what we originally thought. With the full operation of the distillery in the early 19th century, it would have required a huge amount of resources to fully function. Supplying the amount of milled grain, water, fuel and other supplies, not to mention the 24 hour labor for non-stop production would have been an enormous job. This means that much more is to be interpreted here than just the Tavern.

The earliest reliable records include the 1798 "Glass Tax" records which reveal the buildings existing at that time. Four stone buildings including a "dwelling house" (our Tavern), a granary, a spring house and a bake house were substantial structures at the time. In addition, log structures like a barn, stables and others which did not have glass windows were surely scattered throughout the property. Many acres of fields, orchards, woodlands and streams were all utilized for their practical benefit. Later records show the existence of several mills and tenant houses for some of the workers and give an insight into the complex of facilities that developed. All this to insure a consistent supply of grain, fruit, wool, linen and wood and other necessities to produce products for sale and the necessary food, clothing and shelter for the men and animals.

The result is a large operation that at the time was referred to as a "Plantation". While most of us think of this term as a southern one, it appears frequently in the newspapers and other records of this area to indicate a large farm and business complex. We notice references to the "Plantations" alongside frequent mention of distilleries in the period and for some reason, neither of these concepts nor information about their function were passed along in our histories of the early periods.

Accordingly, it is our intention, as an educational and interpretive center, to fully explore such ideas and to tell their stories as we progress. For now, you can expect to hear us refer to our site as "Dills Tavern and Plantation" and to begin using this term to better convey the full extent of what occurred here

The Plantation Buildings begin to Appear behind the Tavern



Summer Kitchen—Bake Oven—Tavern—Woodshed



The Wheelwright's Shop ~ donated by "Sam"

Paint, Shadows, Carpet Nails, All Help to Unveil Secrets

The restoration of the Dills Tavern has been going on for years. You would think that most of its secrets would have been discovered by now, but such is not the case. Research performed on the paint found on the 1800 staircase, indicates that there had been a rug runner on the stairs in the beginning. Though two or more coats of paint covered the risers and treads, when samples were sent to a lab for analysis, they revealed that the center 18” of the risers, had not originally been painted. How could they tell this?

Under a microscope, they could see years of ground in dirt in the bare wood fibers. The risers were painted a dark brown with the exception of the center 18”. The treads were originally unpainted. This indicated that a carpet runner, most likely a Venetian carpet runner, was installed on the stairs from its inception. Carpet nails were found in those 18” center areas adding even more weight to the carpet theory. These are the kinds of findings that continue to get us excited at Dills Tavern!

It gets even better. As Clair Zieders and Sam were cleaning the 1800 upstairs hall floor, while still wet, unmistakable shadow lines appeared around the perimeter and down the center of the floor. 1800 period rugs were in various widths 32”, 34”, 36” and even much wider. The width of the weaver’s loom, limited the width of his carpets. Carpets could be made as long as was necessary then sewn together to create wall to wall carpeting. The piece of Venetian carpet found in the Dills Tavern three years ago happened to be 36” wide. When the shadow lines on the floor were measured, they were all on 36” centers. Carpet nails could be found around the shadow’s perimeter but also down the centers where the carpets had been sewn together. Since it is unusual to find nails in the center locations, it is easily surmised that the seams holding the rug section together, possibly came apart over time and instead of re-stitching them, they simply nailed the joining edges in place.

We asked a representative from Heirloom Family Weavers located in Red Lion to come to the tavern and look at our rug evidence. They do early rug reproductions for major historical sites all over the U.S. Patrick, one of the owners, stopped by and agreed that carpeting did occupy the stairs and upstairs hall. He told us that his company could easily reproduce the Venetian design on our fragment of carpet. We are hoping to order the carpet soon and get it installed where it belongs.

The rugs help with a question we’ve been trying to answer. Why was the main hall so lack luster in its paint scheme? The walls were white. The trim was white and the baseboard was black. No decorative color anywhere. Unusual for people who were quite wealthy in that time. The rugs added the color and sophistication you would expect from such a tavern. There may have been wallpaper in the hall areas. That would have really added some zip to the color scheme. Though we don’t have any evidence of wallpaper at this time, you never know what we may find next.

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