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# Charlton Historical Society Newsletter

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Spring, 2007

Volume 32, Number 1

News for Charlton Historical Society Members

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## Tavern Tales

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By Ruth Schwendeman

\*\*\*Accommodation Stages\*\*\*

*"The Proprietors will run three Teams...between Worcester and Springfield... Good accommodations are made for the convenience of Passengers...."*

The years between the 1730s and 1840s were a dramatic period in the history of Charlton and surrounding towns. During that time, rapid development in the region spurred the establishment of many local inns and taverns, some of which still stand in one form or another. New roads, canals and finally the development of the railroad changed the way people traded and traveled. The Worcester and Stafford Turnpike (now Stafford Street) was a good example of this development. Often formed by groups of local prominent businessmen like Charlton's Salem Town, they served as passage for not only stagecoaches, but freight and livestock as well.

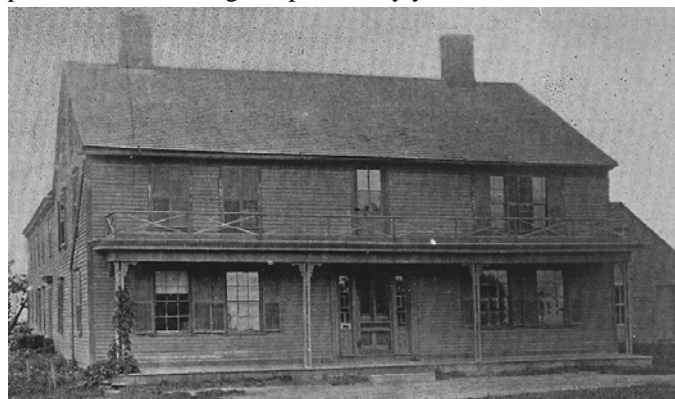
The heyday of taverns in Charlton lasted several decades. From the mid 1700s to the 1830s records show that between two and six taverns or liquor retail establishments were operating consecutively at any given time. A very early tavern (since demolished), was operated on the Charlton common by citizen Ebenezer McIntire in the 1730s and for several more decades. Like McIntire's establishment, many of these early tavern buildings have since disappeared, but to our delight a few are still standing.

\*\*\**Within a few rods of the North Meetinghouse... 90 feet by 32, three stories high...a Public House and Store...*\*\*\*

Tavern buildings that still exist do so for a variety of reasons. One important factor appears to be whether an important political figure visited the establishment. Our own Rider Tavern was graced in 1824 by a visit from the enormously popular Lafayette on his tour through the region. Built by Eli Wheelock in 1799, it incorporated a distilling business started in the 1750s by his father. The Rider brothers, local businessmen, purchased the building soon after it was finished. It stands as a classic example of a substantial tavern establishment of the time period.

A few more old tavern buildings still exist in town. Good examples include the Tucker house, east of the Rider Tavern on Stafford St, built in the 1750s. This building served as an original tavern and then home to the Tucker family for 13 generations. On Carroll Hill Road in the 1760s, prominent citizen Jacob Davis raised a tavern. As a town leader he was also a major benefactor of the Leicester Academy, a well-known 19<sup>th</sup> century school. Before Salem Town built the famous town center house now found at Old Sturbridge Village, he erected a smaller house nearby where he dispensed his wares. Again in the center of town is the Weld tavern, built in the 1790s. You will recognize it as the brown two-story building, with additions, located on the north side of the common near the library. Not much is known about the building or its builder. Another notable Charlton citizen, Moses Dresser, built his tavern atop Dresser Hill on land now owned by Bigelow's Nursery. The large

white building, erected about 1800, served as a meeting place, tavern and stage stop for many years.



**Weld Tavern**

\*\*\**Rates of [the] Tavern: Breakfast, twenty-five cents Rates of the Yard: Any person sleeping by the stove, six and a quarter cents*\*\*\*

Early on, tavern activities were regulated. Owners had to be licensed to dispense their wares. The tavern keeper must be a respected citizen. It was common for several taverns to be operating in one town at the same time, often very close together, and often near churches. While Sabbath drinking was prohibited, the practice defied the law. In order to support the coach and wagon trade on newly built roads and turnpikes, signs had to reach a certain height, making them visible from a distance. Taverns and taprooms might be very small: just a one-room appendage to the owner's house. Or, they could be large establishments with a taproom (usually for men only), a parlor for the ladies, dining facilities, guest rooms and attic spaces for travelers and wagon drivers, and a full-sized ballroom on the upper floor. Outbuildings included accommodation for animals and storage for goods; many an enterprising tavern owner might also have a tavern stand dispensing his wares as well as a general store for the sale of all and sundry farm and domestic goods. Food service might be hefty servings of meat and vegetables, or something as simple as bread and milk.

\*\*\**Jamaica Spirits; Brandy; Gin; Sherry; Wines, Snuff...and Smoking Tobacco*\*\*\*

A common taproom contained the requisite advertisements for goods and services, barrels of spirits beer and cider. The finer furniture was saved for the ladies' parlor and dining rooms. Men smoked cigars, took aim at spittoons, or "spit boxes" as they called them in New England, stroked their dogs, and generally found a den for themselves dedicated to drinking, swapping stories and getting the latest news. While drunkenness in men was tolerated, for women it was considered shameful.

The amount of drink consumed during that era is a stark contrast to today's standards (less than 2 gallons per year on average). According to a publication by Jack Larkin of Old Sturbridge Village, in the 1770s and 80s "3.5 gallons per year of pure 200 proof alcohol for each person" was drunk. By the 1820s it was up to almost four gallons. This

included spirits as well as homemade cider and beer. These "recipes" might make us blanch a bit: they often included fermenting aids like boiled calves feet, fresh bloody meat, egg whites or beach sand. "Mixed drinks" included flip, a combination of beer, sugar, rum and nutmeg, a rum and water "grog," and a toddy made with rum, whiskey or brandy, lemon and water. They were often heated up with a "loggerhead", a long heated iron plunged into the drink itself.

*\*\*\*The Collector will attend to receive said duties....at Rider's Tavern in Charlton\*\*\**

Large or small, taverns served other purposes besides offering drink and food. Locals and travelers came for entertainment. They participated in singing, dancing (though some thought this evil), and enjoyed the talents of itinerant magicians and other performers. Gaming was technically illegal, but certainly took place. Taverns were also the center for various community activities. Masonic meetings were conducted, taxes were collected and estates were settled at the local tavern. Livestock was bought and sold; animal breeding services were offered.

*\*\*\*Temperance Ball\*\*\**

With the advent of the railroad in the 1830s, road traffic began to decrease. In addition, the temperance movement was going strong. Temperance leaders recorded poor houses full of distressed adults, many there because of succumbing to drunkenness. As society moved to curtail this excess, many taverns and inns responded to this trend. They often reinvented themselves as "temperance hotels," offering a genteel alternative the brawling disorder of the local den of iniquity. In Charlton, an 1847 social invitation describes an upcoming "Temperance Ball" sponsored by well-known local leaders. Interestingly enough, some of these teetotaling sponsors were the very same gents who were connected to successful drinking establishments in the great heyday of the country tavern.

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### Property Committee Report

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By Don Weinhardt, Chairman and Archivist

This is a summary of just some of the artifact and archival items donated to the Charlton Historical Society since our last newsletter in the Fall 2006.

Aimee Newell, North Grafton - Books, "Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn", by Thomas Hubka, publ. By Univ. Press of New England, Hanover, NH, 1984, "New England's Prospect", by William Wood, publ. by Univ. Of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, MA 1977, "The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay, 1625--1725" by Abbott Lowell Cummings, publ. by The Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA, 1979, "Puritanism in Old New England", by Alan Simpson, publ. by The Univ. Of Chicago Press, Chicago, Il, 1955; Carol and Donald Weinhardt, Charlton - Book, "Costume 1066 - 1966", by John Peacock, publ. by Thames and Hudson Ltd. New York, 1986, also a wood wagon jack.

William C. Fitts, Utica, New York - Book, "Genealogy of the Fitts or Fitz Family in America", by James Hill Fitts, Resident member of the New England Historic-Genealogical Society, published by the author, 1869. This copy is a reprint of that work; Richard H. Green, Spencer, MA - Dinner plates, two, English earthenware, blue shell edge.

Town of Charlton Planning Board, Charlton, MA - Set of 14

aerial photographs of the Town of Charlton, circa 1980. Each photo is 17" by 17", also a set of 105 aerial photographs of the Town of Charlton, provided by Cullinan Engineering Co., Inc., Boston, MA. This series of photos was taken January and February 1990.

Thank you all for helping to preserve Charlton's past.

Also note, that the archive and library re-organization is moving forward, and very good progress is being made. If you have, or know someone who has, any locally significant material, and is looking for a good permanent home for it, please contact me at 508-248-1632.

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### Taproom Treasure

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By Ruth Schwendeman, Decorating Committee Chairman

The decorating committee is excited to report the completion of the fireplace surround in the taproom. Through the generous help of Historical Society members, we have managed make a significant step toward completion of the fireplace project. The new mantle and surrounding framing was designed in collaboration with Society archivist Don Weinhardt by Laurence Boudriault, and was executed by craftsmen Peter Cooper and Laurence Boudriault. The work follows the recent restoration of the hearth and related brickwork. This project is supported in part by a grant from the Charlton Cultural Council, a local agency which is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

With the fireplace now intact, the overall redecoration of the taproom will continue. Based on paint color and decoration research by talented board member Joyce Stewart, the barroom was stripped of its wallpaper last season. A dedicated crew of volunteer painters (Don Weinhardt, Harry Howard, Cindy Cheever, Cindy Cooper and Ruth Schwendeman) has started to re-paint all surfaces with colors common to a taproom of the early 1800s time period. In addition, we are fortunate to have several original examples of historical grain painting in the room, a method where paint is applied to an existing wooden surface to simulate another wood grain. In some cases it was uncovered under layers of paint, and in other areas it was found intact. Our plan is to replicate this graining technique on the perimeter wainscoting. The process requires an artisan's skill, so we hope to access the talents of a trained practitioner. Discussions are underway to seek grant funding or other means to support the project.

While the barroom has been our main focus, it isn't by any means the only goal. We hope to turn our attention to refurbishment of the ballroom landing, with repainting as well as wallpaper repair or replacement. Any and all volunteer help is welcome; we also greatly appreciate any donations to further these worthwhile projects. Please contact President Cindy Cooper at 508-248-7840 if you wish to become more closely involved.

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### Calendar of Events

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**March 24<sup>th</sup>:** *FREE Antiques and Collectibles Appraisals* from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. If you have not been selected to attend “Antiques Roadshow” to find out the value of your antique or collectible items, don’t worry. This is your opportunity to receive a free verbal appraisal of TWO treasures per person. Showcase Antique Center, at Route 20 in Sturbridge (near the entrance to Old Sturbridge Village), has volunteered to provide both their location and their talented staff for this event, weather permitting. Just think-no trip in heavy traffic to Boston, but all the benefit of an expert in the field assessing how much your items are worth, right in your area! Stuart Brody and the knowledgeable staff at Showcase Antique Center have more than 105 years of combined experience in the antiques and collectibles market.

**April 28<sup>th</sup>:** *Bus tour* from 10 a.m. to noon. Led by William O. Hultgren; based the sites listed on “A Map of the Historic Districts of Charlton, Massachusetts.” The price is \$6 per person, in order to reduce the cost for the bus, gas, and driver.

**May 19<sup>th</sup>:** *Yard Sale* from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Allow plenty of time to check out the assortment of collectibles, vintage jewelry, bottles, decorations, books, household goods, furniture, and many other items waiting for you buy at the Rider Tavern. Proceeds will benefit the restoration of the tavern and presentation of historical programs.

**June 4<sup>th</sup>:** *Annual meeting* at 7 p.m. at the Rider Tavern.

**June 23<sup>rd</sup>:** *Self-sequenced garden tour* in partnership with the Charlton Garden Club, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at selected residential sites. As part of the admission price of \$10 in advance or \$12 on the day of the tour, tea and goodies will be served at the Rider Tavern, and its garden will be open. Maps to locate the sites will be distributed in front of the tavern that day. The earnings will be used for CHS historical programs and activities.

**July 8<sup>th</sup>, August 12<sup>th</sup>, and September 9<sup>th</sup>:** *Rider Tavern guided tours* from 1 to 3 p.m. Guests will hear about the Worcester and Stafford Turnpike, stagecoaches, and businesses in the area during the time period that the Rider brothers ran the tavern.

**September 30<sup>th</sup>:** *History Day* will focus on County Gore, which was added to the town 250 years ago.

**For more information** about any of these events, or to volunteer to help, call Cindy Cooper at 508-248-7840.

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### In the Garden

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By Ruth Schwendeman, Garden Committee Chairman

The gardening committee will soon turn its sights toward completion of last year’s new projects. Painting the picket fence (a job that we all know takes mountains of patience) will continue—with the effort being chased by our unpredictable spring weather and the need to gingerly step around quickly emerging plants. Another task is to replace the disintegrating wooden flowerbed surrounds with long lasting brick edging. Don Weinhardt will come to the rescue on that task, and Ruth Schwendeman will forge ahead on the painting.

The flowers beds themselves will also be spruced up for the upcoming garden tour visit. Pruning, plant

replacement, and fertilization will help make the beds look their best for another warm weather season at the tavern. Want to help for an afternoon or a few Saturdays? We need you!! Call President Cindy Cooper for details.

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### Thank You

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Members have generously donated to the annual appeal fund. This year, their contributions are being used to open the tavern for guided tours on three dates, provide programs and events, and continue the restoration work in the Rider Tavern. Please join us in thanking all who contributed. We truly could not preserve and celebrate Charlton’s history without the financial support provided by:

Anonymous  
Shirley S. Baer  
Janet and Bill Blasius  
Glenna Brownell  
P. Bukoske  
Bryce Conklin  
Peter and Cindy Cooper  
Judith Crowley  
Thomas Davis  
Ruth Duhamel  
Glenn and Patty Ellis  
Joe and Lois Fay  
Robertine Fountain  
Dancing Hammer Forge  
Brian and Sandy Graeff  
R. Reed Grimwade  
Arlene Hast  
Warren and Priscilla Harthan  
Harry Howard  
John and Susan Howland  
Sara Hunt  
Cyndee and Charlie Johnson  
William and Barbara Meservy  
John C. Miller  
Patricia Miller  
Aimee E. Newell  
Mr. and Mrs. G. Kendall Nylin  
Kevinetta O’Brien  
A. Richards  
Ruth and Erik Schwendeman  
Frank V. Toscano  
Ralph and Barbara Vogt  
Don and Carol Weinhardt  
Lisa Westwell  
Leonard and Ann White  
Margaret and Ray Whitney

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It is not too late to donate. Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to the Charlton Historical Society  
P.O. Box 252, Charlton, MA 01507.

**Charlton Historical Society**  
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**Charlton, MA 01507**

**Spring 2007**

**Charlton Historical Society**  
**P. O. Box 252**  
**Charlton, MA 01507**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Membership:

\_\_\_\_\_ **Individual \$5.00**      \_\_\_\_\_ **Family \$10.00**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Life \$50.00**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Renewal**      \_\_\_\_\_ **New Member**

I would like to volunteer at an event or be a member  
of the board of directors. Phone \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Enclosed is a donation of \$** \_\_\_\_\_

Comments:

[www.CharltonHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.CharltonHistoricalSociety.org)  
508-248-3202

**Board of Directors**

President: Cindy Cooper

Vice President: William Hultgren

Treasurer: Joyce Stewart

Clerk: Ruth Schwendeman

Corresponding Sec.: Harry Howard

Archivist: Donald Weinhardt

At Large:

Curtis Abbott

Vanessa Brown

Cindy Cheever

Barbara Dean

Glenn Ellis

Claudia Lacerte

**Coming Events:**

March 24<sup>th</sup> appraisal day

April 28<sup>th</sup> bus tour

May 19<sup>th</sup> yard sale

June 4<sup>th</sup> annual meeting

June 23<sup>rd</sup> garden tours

July 8<sup>th</sup>, Aug. 12<sup>th</sup>, Sept. 9<sup>th</sup> tours

Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> History Day