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# In Mixed Company



*Julia Roberts*

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**In Mixed Company**  
Taverns and Public Life in  
Upper Canada



**UBC**Press · Vancouver · Toronto



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16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Canada with vegetable-based inks on FSC-certified ancient-forest-free paper (100% post-consumer recycled) that is processed chlorine- and acid-free.

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**Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication**

Roberts, Julia, 1962-

In mixed company : taverns and public life in Upper Canada / by Julia Roberts.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7748-1575-8

1. Taverns (Inns) – Ontario – History. 2. Taverns (Inns) – Social aspects – Ontario – History. 3. Ontario – Social life and customs. I. Title.

TX950.59.C3R62 2009

647.94'09713

C2008-903335-3

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**Canada**

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada through the Book Publishing Industry Development Program (BPIDP), and of the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens  
 Set in Stone by Artegraphica Design Co. Ltd.  
 Copy editor: Lesley Erickson  
 Proofreader: Stephanie VanderMeulen  
 Indexer: Noeline Bridge

UBC Press  
 The University of British Columbia  
 2029 West Mall  
 Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2  
 604-822-5959 / Fax: 604-822-6083  
[www.ubcpres.ca](http://www.ubcpres.ca)



*In memory of my brother,  
David K. Roberts, 1964-2003  
– because he liked a glass or two in company*



# Contents

List of Illustrations / vii

Preface / ix

Introduction / 1

- 1** Architecture, Design, and Material Settings / 11
  - 2** Households and Public Life in a Tavern-Keeper's Journal / 39
  - 3** Public Houses as Colonial Public Space / 56
  - 4** Regulation and Ritual in Everyday Public Life / 77
  - 5** Race and Space / 101
  - 6** Harry Jones, his Cronies, and the Haunts of Respectable Men / 120
  - 7** Public Life for Women in the Era of Separate Spheres / 138
- Afterword / 165
- Notes / 170
- Bibliography / 202
- Index / 219

# Illustrations

## Figures

- 1 The King's Head Inn, Burlington Bay, ca. 1795 / 15
- 2 *York on Lake Ontario, Upper Canada*, 1804 / 18
- 3 *Inn at Cramachi, Bay of Quinte*, ca. 1830 / 19
- 4 *The Death of Colonel Moodie*, 1837 / 19
- 5 "Exterior view and floor plan of 'An Inn'" / 20
- 6 A colonial bar, ca. 1850 / 21
- 7 *View from the Summit of the Ridge above Nicholl's Tavern, Penetanguishene Road*, 1836 / 23
- 8 The Lord Nelson tavern, Toronto, 1851 / 25
- 9 Jones Hotel, Guelph, ca. 1856 / 33
- 10 *A Country Tavern near Cobourg*, 1849 / 121
- 11 *Clifton House, Niagara Falls*, 1838 / 146
- 12 Mrs. McDonald's tavern bill at Roach's, 1855 / 150
- 13 "Who, and what the devil are you?" / 158

## Tables

- 1 Ratio of Upper Canadian taverns to population, by year / 59

# Preface

The great detective Sherlock Holmes once accused his chronicler, Dr. Watson, of degrading “what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales.”<sup>1</sup> In this book I am most certainly guilty of the same crime. For it is built on stories – as told by tavern-goers, tavern-keepers, and tavern regulators – in which they reflect on taverns as particular types of public spaces and what everyday public life inside taverns meant to them as members of the mixed populace of early Canada. If, in the pages that follow, my penchant for stories and their tellers has come to resemble historical scholarship, this transformation is the result of intellectual, personal, and practical support from my mentors, colleagues, and friends. At the University of Toronto, Allan Greer supervised this work in its doctoral phase and continues to remain generously supportive. Ian Radforth, Jane Abray, and Sylvia Van Kirk each provided lasting contributions as did my fellow doctoral candidates, especially Jeff McNairn, Jane Harrison, Adam Crerar, and Marlene Epp. Two other institutional affiliations helped in the writing of this book. At Laurier Brantford, my experience of learning how to teach colonial history in a way that might appeal to the interdisciplinary, Contemporary Studies students who fill large classrooms has helped me shape and clarify the language in every chapter. In addition, my favourite sentence in this book (the stats sentence in Chapter 4) came from my psychologist colleague and buddy across the hall there – Judy Eaton. Now that I feel at home in the history department at the University of Waterloo and have gained a sense of place there, that too has informed the writing of this book. My thanks go to my new colleagues for their warm welcome. In addition to those people named above, several others have read various versions of various chapters: Craig Heron, Thomas Hueglin, Wendy Mitchinson, and, of course, the anonymous peer reviewers throughout the revision process. I sincerely appreciate their time.

Thanks are also due to Richard Simeon, who first introduced me to the people at UBC Press. Melissa Pitts has done everything a first-time author

could hope for and gave critical help in shaping the final manuscript. Lesley Erickson did a wonderful job with my prose, and my debts to archivists are abundantly clear in the notes. Thanks also to Ann Macklem for overseeing the production process in such a smooth and author-friendly way. I am particularly grateful to the host of small town, local History Society members who responded to my queries in the early stages. Some of their clues and contributions were invaluable. I benefited enormously from the knowledge and professionalism of archivists in the following places: the Archives of Ontario, the Baldwin Room at the Toronto Reference Library, the Chatham-Kent Museum Archives, the Lambton County Archives, the McMaster University Archives, Library and Archives Canada, the Niagara Historical Society and Museum, the Stratford-Perth County Archives, the Thomas Fischer Rare Book Room, University of Toronto, the United Church Archives, and the Upper Canada Village Archives. Thanks too, to the friends and neighbours who asked the questions that friends and neighbours ask and thus prompted me to explain why a book on colonial taverns matters: the Gruber-Kellys, the Wang-Scheeles, the Winburns and siblings, Rosemary Arthurs (the local potter), Karen Rosenthal (who has since left us but once asked a question that made me rethink how historians do what they do), and Lisa Morgan.

And then there's my family: I thank my husband, Thomas Hueglin, for being just that and being good at it and also the collection of acquired kids that we have between us: grown-up Hannah with her sister Amanda; the new ex-steps; Jacob, our 'little mistake,' who at fourteen is hardly little anymore; and, of course, lovely Christian and her own small guys, Malachi and Khalil. My mum is permanently great, incredibly supportive, and likes pubs too. My father and his wife Dhora have long recognized the importance of an academic career to me. My sister, Bronwen, even mailed me boxes and boxes of primary documents that I left at home in Canada and thought I wouldn't need during a year in Germany. Finally, this book is dedicated to my brother who died in a motorcycle crash while I was revising it from a dissertation into its current form. Though David never read any of this book, he did wake me up once by phoning at nearly two in the morning to settle a bet at a loud drinking party: "What year did Newfoundland enter Confederation?" he asked. I answered his question, and his friends figured that with a PhD and all, I could be right. So he won the bet, but for what stakes I'll never know.

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# In Mixed Company



# Introduction

Hundreds of tavern-goers and tavern-keepers people the pages of this book, shaping its analysis and suggesting its lines of enquiry. Their words invite us inside and encourage us to see for ourselves how Upper Canada's different peoples (men and women, Natives and newcomers, whites and non-whites, privileged and non-privileged, and mixtures in between) belonged in unequal and not always predictable ways to public life itself. Some American Quakers tell us how, in 1793, they "had the company of a young Shawnese chief" at Dolsen's tavern on the Thames River. "He ... had at least one thousand silver brooches stuck on a new silk hunting shirt. He behaved at table with great gentility." In 1794 three labourers "amused themselves with drinking in good fellowship" at Gouin's tavern in British-occupied Detroit. Around 1805, near Ancaster, missionary William Case saw "large companies of neighbours ... drinking, dancing &c ... When I have passed by these haunts & seen their wicked practices, I have felt the spirit of the Lord to rest on me to warn the Tavern keeper against such conduct." In 1808 the justices in Quarter Sessions in York "read the petition of Magdalen Belcour Widow, praying for leave to continue to hold under the tavern license granted her late husband ... Granted." Along the St. Lawrence in 1817, printer Charles Fothergill reached a tavern "filled with people who had been attending a funeral ... [and] offended some of them because I would not drink brandy before my dinner with them." Thomas D. Sanford of Cramahe, in 1819, "informs his friends and the public that he still keeps a public house ... where gentlemen and ladies may find good entertainment." George Brooks called into Patrick Nolan's tavern, near Gananoque, in 1820 to buy a grinding stone from the attached king's store and to get the tavern-keeper to fill "a small jug of spirits and g[i]ve it to me ... for the nourishment of the men that was to carry the stone." In 1834 "a coloured man stopped at Mr Schaeffer's tavern ... with another coloured man, his assistant," and got breakfast. "Spent an hour at the North American Hotel with William Elliot and Mr McDonnell & others.

Drank rather too freely," wrote John Prince, MPP, in Sandwich in 1837. One evening in Kingston in 1843 a government clerk "walked into town and drank gin and talked of theatricals with Mrs Armour at Belanger's" saloon. "And with reference to Leonard Long," wrote the tavern licence inspector in Uxbridge in 1852, "we believe himself & wife well and suitably adapted to keeping an inn."<sup>1</sup>

Taken together the words of colonial tavern-goers, tavern-keepers, and tavern inspectors run the gamut of themes addressed in *In Mixed Company*. They raise issues of racialized identity in a colonialist language of "race" that presumes a white prerogative to label and to judge. They address issues of class and class identity in a pre-industrial language that favoured occupational and cultural designations (such as "labourers" and "ladies") to signify differences in economic access. They speak to issues of gender, and they position women within public life in the context of a social structure that granted men and boys unquestioned, albeit frequently subverted, precedence there over women and girls. They emphasize the rituals and routine of alcohol consumption, its power to forge social bonds and its association with nourishment. One early voice contests the as yet rarely challenged social and cultural role of alcohol. Others nod to matters of regulation in an era that preceded the growth of the state and the ideal of self-discipline. My questions, then, about contemporary concerns such as issues of cultural membership and belonging mesh well with the preoccupations of tavern-goers and tavern-keepers in their own time. They thought about the contours of public interaction and the not unproblematic rituals that structured it in the colony's public houses, and they expressed their ideas in the language and parameters available.

Indeed, the very definition of a tavern is theirs. A tavern in the colonial context was a building that was open to the public (and, for travellers, open at all hours), licensed to sell spirituous and fermented liquor by small measure (by the glass, gill, half-pint, or pint), and had the facilities to provide food, lodging, and stabling. The tavern was almost always a family home. Colonists distinguished this understanding of the tavern from three other public drinking options: beer-houses, which emerged briefly in the nineteenth century and were licensed to sell fermented but not spirituous liquor; shops that were licensed to sell liquor by large measure (a quart or more) and sometimes purveyed it, illegally, by the glass; and unlicensed, illegal drinking houses. Some colonists indeed patronized unlicensed houses, but they did not call them taverns. Darius Doty, for instance, was explicit on the point. In his own words, in 1830 he frequented "Mr Carroll's who keeps liquor – not a tavern," somewhere in the Long Woods between London and Chatham. Taverns, in contrast, were known by the words above their doors: "licensed to sell wine and other spirituous liquors."<sup>2</sup>

Everybody in Upper Canadian society, even those quoted in government records, used the words *tavern*, *inn*, *public house*, and, later, *hotel* interchangeably. When a keeper in Stratford crafted an advertisement in 1855, for example, he settled on this formulation: "As there is no greater comfort than after the day's journey to arrive at a good place of rest; a house of entertainment, under the varied names of hotel, inn, and tavern fitted up ... with an attentive landlord may be certain of being a house of call."<sup>3</sup>

Taverns stood every six to eight miles along country roads, on prominent town corners, and among houses and shops on smaller streets. They made more of a mark on the landscape than did schools, churches, or government buildings, and they were the most accessible colonial public buildings. Licensing rules directed tavern-keepers to "at all times provide proper attendance" for travellers. The round-the-clock, seven-days-a-week right of entry they enjoyed created the assumption that taverns never closed. On Sundays, communities tolerated peaceful sociability within taverns, despite regulations against it. Barrooms closed by 10 o'clock at night, but people expected to be admitted at all hours and unhesitatingly roused tavern-keepers from their beds. There was no formal opening time. Two men arrived at Linfoot's tavern outside Toronto at "a little after 4 o'clock a.m. ... each got a glass of whiskey." Because the tavern-keeper got up early, his house was open.<sup>4</sup>

Because it is about the taverns of Upper Canada, this book concerns informal, or everyday, public life. It begins with a history of real spaces and objects – the tavern buildings and outbuildings, furniture, linens, and larders – that were the material settings of public life and determined its possibilities and limitations. The daily balance negotiated between the needs of tavern-keeping households and the realities of the space as a public one also shaped taverns. The simultaneity of household life and public life meant that each shaped the other in particular ways. This reveals much about taverns, to be sure. It also lets us see the relationship between "the private" and "the public" in an early colonial, pre-industrial, and pre-Victorian period and to distinguish each from the more familiar patterns of the late nineteenth century. And the uniqueness of tavern space as public space is apparent. Tracing how the aficionados of tavern culture worked to balance the centrality of drink, and drink's ritualized consumption, with their concerns for personal success, colonial development, and peaceful community relations takes us into barrooms, with their rituals, dances, and storytelling. We encounter the odd drunk, and the odd scuffle, but find groups of companions (a tavern company) more commonly characterized by good order. It was within tavern companies that the promises of social cohesion made by mutual association over drink were either kept or broken and where the terms of access to public space and public life had to be negotiated among people made unequal by what racialized identity, class status, and gender meant in a colonial context.

Because it focuses on taverns as one way of writing about wider social and cultural patterns, *In Mixed Company* revises the historiography of taverns in early Canada by bringing their history more in line with international scholarship. Once the province of amateur enthusiasts, tavern studies have recently undergone a renaissance among academic historians in western Europe, the United States, and, most recently, Canada. The new historians of the tavern examine what public houses looked like, how rural taverns differed from urban taverns, how taverns worked as the pre-eminent communication node in predominantly oral societies, and how the rituals of drink enacted among patrons bound them together and set them apart.<sup>5</sup>

*In Mixed Company* is not the first book to be written on the subject in Canada. Edwin C. Guillet published his multivolume *Pioneer Inns and Taverns*, an absorbing, well-researched treasury of tales and facts, in the 1950s. When novelist and literary critic Robertson Davies reviewed the work for *Saturday Night* magazine, he commented that the subject led author and reader “deep into the society of our country as it was.”<sup>6</sup> And he was right. But today, because historians, like other scholars, are interested in how different people negotiated their membership in the wider public, this book takes the study of taverns in new directions. It presents taverns primarily as public spaces and asks questions about who frequented them (and who did not): How did tavern-goers interact with the space and others in it? What customs and laws governed their behaviour?

The political reformer William Lyon Mackenzie once described the crowd gathered outside Forsyth’s tavern in Niagara for an 1824 election as

an assemblage, as motley, as varied in its materials, as the four quarters of the world could afford to send together ...

There were Christians and Heathens, Menonists and Tunkards, Quakers and Universalists, Presbyterians and Baptists, Roman Catholics and American Methodists; there were Frenchmen and Yankees, Irishmen and Mulattoes, Scotchmen and Indians, Englishmen, Canadians, Americans, and Negroes, Dutchmen and Germans, Welshmen and Swedes, Highlanders and Lowlanders, poetical as well as most prosaical prizes, horsemen and footmen, fiddlers and dancers, honourables and reverends, captains and colonels, beaux and belles, waggons and tilburies, coaches and chaises, gigs and carts; in short Europe, Asia, Africa and America had there each its representative among the loyal subjects and servants of our good King George.<sup>7</sup>

Despite differences in religion, nationality, race, class, gender, and education, Mackenzie implies that this multitude mixed gladly and shared a common sense of imperial identity. Inside the taverns, people did not always make as much room for each other. Many rubbed shoulders freely, but others tried

to enforce a less heterogeneous version of public life. The most important reason for studying the taverns of Upper Canada is to learn how colonists saw their early mixed society and how they navigated its currents.

“The public” under discussion here differs conceptually from three other, more familiar constructions. It is not limited to the classic liberal sphere of politics and markets (even though activities associated with both took place in taverns); instead, the tavern public reached past it to embrace purely social forms of interaction. Nor was it a public sphere dedicated to the creation of public opinion through rational debate. Though taverns housed the associational life sustaining the public sphere, their public was often more preoccupied with personal matters or local scandals, and it placed no premium on rationality. The tavern public willingly employed “irrational,” potentially messy forms of communication, such as drinking games, gossip, and, even, violence. Women and children frequented taverns, as did those individuals and groups who were not often seen as potential equals, such as blacks and First Nations. Finally, in their casual, impromptu nature, tavern companies differed from the public as it was officially represented in parades and organized fêtes. In comparison to each of these constructions, the taverns supported an *informal* public life. Drinking and singing were as important as making money and voting. Silliness existed alongside rationality. Spontaneity was as valued as planned gatherings.<sup>8</sup>

Yet public life in the taverns was not entirely unstructured. Cultural rituals and social rules set broad boundaries on the forms of interaction to be encouraged, merely tolerated, or resisted. Because the colony’s mixed peoples were in the process of defining patterns of association, studying the tavern public captures some of the potential conflict or uncertainty in people’s ordinary, everyday lives. Theirs was not a simpler world. It was one in which the terms of admission to public space and membership in public life were under negotiation.

Colonial taverns also demand study in their own right. Neither Peter DeLottinville’s now-classic study of Joe Beef’s tavern in industrializing Montreal nor Robert Campbell’s theoretically informed work on moral regulation in twentieth-century Vancouver beer parlours addresses a pre-industrial and largely pre-regulatory period. Craig Heron’s recent book *Booze: A Distilled History* contains a measured consideration of colonial drinking practices. It persuasively situates alcohol and the colonial taverns in which alcohol was publicly consumed within the context of a fundamental ambivalence that lies at the heart of Canada’s long history with booze – the contested meanings that “wets” and “drys” attached to it. Other university-based historians, particularly those who study the temperance movement, tend to be quite pessimistic in their assessments of public drinking houses. Perhaps this is because it is their *subjects’* views that come to the fore – views that placed

alcohol, and its purveyors, at the root of the many social ills to which temperance advocates bore witness during a period of urbanization and economic change.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, taverns raised concerns in their time. State officials continually worried that the seeds of sedition might take root there. Hard-working members of society worried that taverns encouraged indolence. Orderly farmers and townspeople worried about the nature of a society in which some tavern-goers caused too much of a ruckus. And many, many colonists, such as women, blacks, Indians, and the poor, had reason to worry about the welcome they might receive from tavern companies dominated by white middling males who felt they belonged together over their glasses. Taverns, then, caused individuals and groups in colonial society to confront hard questions about the nature of public association and the social role of alcohol.

A diverse group of historians who stress remarkably similar themes relating to colonists' broadly understood social goals suggest the context in which to address these questions. Despite their differences – Douglas McCalla focuses on the Upper Canadian economy, Bruce Elliot and David Gagan on migration patterns, Jeffrey McNairn on public opinion, Jane Errington on working women, Cecilia Morgan on gendered ideals, Lynne Marks on moral regulation, a host of historians on "labouring lives," and others on temperance – acknowledge the level of serious concern with which colonists regarded the world they were making. Ordinary settlers' lives centred on and revolved around rational and sensible decisions about production and the allocation of resources; their articulation of political will; land ownership; family, kin, and community networks; a common motivation to provide a secure future for the next generation; and a sense that moderation in all sorts of consumption was needed to realize their goals. In short, the historiography of colonial Canada reveals the need to interrogate the tavern's position vis-à-vis these widely shared social beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

Doing so means grappling with the changing meaning of alcohol, which altered the environment of the taverns in colonial Canada. The emergence of a mass temperance movement in the 1840s marked a shift in ideals. New attitudes toward alcohol defined it as being in opposition to the responsible, progressive, and improving society envisaged for Upper Canada and North America as a whole. As a quarter to a third of the Canadian population became convinced of the need to sign pledges averring their abstinence from spirituous or all liquors, the new social definition of alcohol redefined taverns as ever more problematic sites. Some closed. Some people stopped drinking. And most colonists became more thoughtful about their previously unquestioned consumption. Yet many colonists continued to throng to the taverns for drink, and some tavern-keepers made huge profits from its sale.

“The barroom was full of people all the evening,” observed one early tavern-keeper. “I spent the time tending barr and charging accounts till 10 o’clock.” We know very little about customary drinking behaviour in the taverns, about its customs and how these represented terms of association. Although we still clink our glasses together, still make toasts on formal and informal occasions, and have accepted a level of social responsibility for controlling excess drinking (especially when it is associated with driving or domestic violence), we give little thought to how members of a colonial society ritualized and controlled consumption. Despite colonists’ temperance-inspired reorientation toward liquor by mid-century, in terms of numbers the taverns survived the temperance decades unscathed. There were just as many taverns relative to the population in 1850 and 1860 as there had been in 1830 (a decade well before activists succeeded in swaying significant portions of public opinion). Given that the value of moderation became increasingly central to idealized understandings of familial and moral success, the relationship between moderation and the taverns begs to be studied.<sup>11</sup>

Tavern-goers and tavern-keepers had enough to say about their habits in enough sources to begin to approach these issues. As inmates of the most numerous social institutions in the colony, they left evidence everywhere in the historical record: in the correspondence of government administrators, in Legislative Assembly journals, in letters to local magistrates (who licensed taverns until 1849), in the notes that judges made at the bench, and in wills, personal diaries, published travelogues, newspapers, and tavern-keepers’ account books. Artwork commemorates them.

However, references to tavern-goers and -keepers are often fragmentary, and this can be a problem. Stories begun cannot be finished. For example, whatever happened to Mrs. T. Mary Moore, a recent widow, who wrote to the magistrates in the Western District in 1838? She wanted her dead husband’s licence renewed in her own name and needed to have the fee reduced from over £9 a year to about £3 in order “to bring up my family in a decent manner.”<sup>12</sup> We never find out if she got the licence or the fee reduction. But being unable to tell the outcome of Moore’s story can be viewed in a positive light, for uncertainty removes us from the realm of the anecdote and pushes us to ask analytical questions of many sources at once. How many Mary Moores were there in the colony? Do government licensing records show female names? In what number? Does this change over time? How do travelers comment on the landladies at the taverns where they stayed? What work did they notice women doing in the public houses? What about female patronage? What did diarists who regularly went to the taverns write about the women they accompanied or encountered? How did they characterize female public house sociability? How did women appear in tavern settings when judges recorded witnesses’ descriptions of them in courtroom testimony?

The fragmentation of the sources, then, does not rule out addressing big issues. In this example, Mary Moore's short letter enjoins us to adopt an expansive approach to the place of women in public life.

Tavern-goers and tavern-keepers often disagreed among themselves about what was notable in public houses. This too can pose problems of interpretation. For example, there is conflicting testimony on drinking. Newspapers liked to highlight incidents of drunkenness in local taverns, while tavern-keepers' account books, with their records of routine consumption patterns, make such incidents seem atypical. In other words, contemporaries represented taverns in different ways, and they represented them differently at different times: if they told loud stories of drunken disorder, they also told quieter tales of steadiness and moderation. Records offer conflicting interpretations on many issues relating to taverns; they reflect the diversity and multiple viewpoints of those who created them and highlight the need to employ a variety of sources.

Records also suggest the number of taverns. In 1801, the first date for which such statistics are available, there were 108 taverns in the colony. Upper Canada was exactly ten years old, having been legislated into existence by the Constitutional Act of 1791, as part of the long aftermath of the American Revolution. The colony was intended as a home for Loyalists (refugees of the revolution) in all their diversity. They were predominantly white Americans and women and children rather than men, and included a small minority of blacks (both enslaved and free) and Six Nations allies. All these refugees joined, and later displaced, the original occupants of the region: culturally defined groupings of Iroquoian and Algonquian peoples. In 1801 the population of the colony was about 34,600, which meant that there was one tavern per 320 people. The relative scarcity of taverns in comparison to the British Isles, western Europe, and the longer-settled new republic of the United States to the south was due to the late colonization and low density of settlement in the region. The colony was a big place. Geographically, its borders remained unchanged for several generations. Bounded by the Ottawa River to the east, Lakes Ontario and Erie to the south, and Lake Huron to the west, Upper Canada shared borders with the United States and French Canada.

Until 1815 American Loyalists and latecomers in search of frontier land made up nearly 80 percent of the colonial population. The remainder was British – English, Scots, and Irish – with a few French Canadians, Germans, Scandinavians, Russians, Jews, and other western Europeans mixed in. The population became more British in number and tone after 1815, however, when wave after wave of immigrants from the British Isles began to arrive, reaching a peak in the 1830s. The end of the Napoleonic Wars and intensified industrialization had created economic uncertainty in Britain, and

anti-American sentiment following the War of 1812 prevented American migration to Upper Canada.

Increasingly, the largest population group was the native-born children of colonial families. By the 1830s blacks constituted less than 2 percent of the population, but they did so unevenly. In some places black families lacked black neighbours, whereas in other places, such as Chatham, they could form a good third of a town's population. The colonists' farms, towns, and emerging cities steadily displaced Native peoples. Numbering about seven thousand in 1800, Native peoples constituted one-fifth of the population and enjoyed significant political and military power. By mid-century, however, they accounted for barely over 1 percent of the colony's population and fought for cultural, political, and material survival. By this time the settler population had reached nearly 1 million due to natural increase and immigration.

Denominationally, the Anglican church enjoyed the status of an established religion, replete with rights to land and civil functions, but the majority of the settler population adhered to the more scriptural faiths, Presbyterianism and Methodism in particular. Others practised Roman Catholicism.

The first governor of the colony, John Graves Simcoe, intended to make Upper Canada into the image and transcript of the British constitution, with an aristocratic, preferably English ruling class, but he confronted the leveling democratic desires of his North American citizens. The waves of British immigrants after 1815, aware of the democratizing intent of the 1832 Reform Act and early movements toward working-class organization and social reform in England, also participated in changing governance in the colony. It shifted, in starts and jerks, toward a democratic polity for white males and a handful of their non-white counterparts by 1850.

Throughout the period, Upper Canada's population remained overwhelmingly agrarian, with only 14 percent of inhabitants dwelling in the thirty-three towns and cities that had one thousand residents by 1851. The remainder of the population lived outside the towns, and about half of them laboured for wages, pursued artisanal trades, practised professions, or engaged in commerce. The other half, just over 40 percent, farmed. Among them all, many formed into charitable and voluntary associations (some of which questioned the seemingly assured place of alcohol in the colony) and founded newspapers, churches, schools, postal and transportation services, libraries, and bookshops.

Taverns grew apace from about 500 in 1825, to just over a 1000 in 1837, to 2723 in 1852, when the colony's first industrial revolution began to change the nature of social relations.<sup>13</sup> By concentrating on developments in Upper Canada prior to the 1850s, this study depicts a largely pre-industrial and colonial moment, but one that was lived out in a rapidly industrializing

empire and continent. Colonial society in Upper Canada was marked by the simultaneous development of, or intellectual movement toward, Victorian ideas about class identity, gender, the essentialism of race, and the differences between public and private.

Not surprisingly, given the mixed and contending political, national, and religious allegiance of Upper Canada's population, its linguistic variation, and the economic and intellectual transitions taking place, the tavern public was heterogeneous. It included a "great mixture of rank and persons."<sup>14</sup> It always included labourers, farmers, artisans, merchants, the gentry, and later, the newly emergent middle and working classes. It included women as well as the men who dominated the space. It sometimes included Native peoples and blacks. Yet heterogeneity did not necessarily imply inclusion. The meanings of inclusion in mixed company, the social and cultural circumstances surrounding its negotiation, and the rare instances of its apparent realization are what this book about colonial taverns is about.

# 1

## Architecture, Design, and Material Settings

If not fine, they will, as far as my experience goes,  
be found clean, respectable, and moderate as respects charges.

– William Chambers, *Things as They Are in America*

Tavern-keeper James Donaldson died in Amherstburg, Upper Canada, late in 1801. To settle his affairs, the executors of Donaldson's will took an inventory of all his real estate and his personal possessions. The list they made as they walked through the rooms of his tavern, opening cupboards, measuring the barroom stocks, and poking about in the kitchen, is the best description of the goods and furnishings of an early tavern in the colony that we have. The list shows how the tavern-keeper used material things to define the space under his management, the image he projected to an occasionally discerning clientele, and the standards of service available in an ordinary early colonial tavern. Donaldson's was far from a bad house, but neither was it an uncommonly good one.

The tavern-keeper was an ex-soldier (formerly a sergeant in the King's Regiment) who made himself rich over the course of a decade in the tavern trade, first in Detroit, then across the river in the town where he ended his days. The public house in Amherstburg with its contents was worth nearly £900, and Donaldson left three other developed properties to his children, one of which was an old tavern stand in Detroit kept by his daughter, Ann Coates. Perhaps because of his humble beginnings, Donaldson collected the sort of clothing, furniture, and goods that advertised his success. With them he created a tavern environment that worked against raucous disorder. He presented himself in the very image of a prosperous landlord. Three of his thirteen waistcoats were scarlet. He had enough linen to always show a clean cuff and collar, especially because he kept a black enslaved woman, Clara, whose job it would have been to keep these at the ready. He plated his body in shiny buttons and buckles. He put silver ones on his shirts, knee breeches,

and shoes, and gilt ones on his coats. He had fancy handkerchiefs, a gold watch, and a red morocco pocketbook. Donaldson did own buckskin (leather) and corduroy working clothes, but when he dressed the gentleman, he showed off his accomplishments in easily recognizable emblems of respectability.<sup>1</sup>

Donaldson dressed his tavern as he did his body. Symbols of material success graced his public rooms. There were silver candlesticks, mirrors, cloth-covered tables, wine glasses, and easy chairs. Patrons had plenty of cutlery and settings of Wedgwood's Queensware. Donaldson left books about for his patrons, including a copy of *Chambaud's French and English Dictionary* – always useful in the mixed-language region of the Western District – as well as *Observations on the New Testament*. He stocked tea and everything needed to consume it properly – teapots, cups and saucers, and silver sugar tongs and teaspoons. His bar held a wide array of liquor – not simply the usual rum, brandy, cider, and house-brewed spruce beer, but also Port wine (a brandy-fortified red from Oporto) and Tenerife (a white from the Canary Islands). John Askwith, a local gentleman and the notary and clerk of the District Court, regularly shared bowls of punch and sangria in Donaldson's Detroit tavern with his cronies. The landlord ladled these expensive drinks from pure silver. Never would he have tolerated the kind of unruly behaviour that would threaten his valuable possessions or undermine the attractiveness of his house to lucrative, gentlemanly drinking parties.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Donaldson's tavern was in no sense exclusive. Askwith, for example, treated two soldiers to a pint of rum there in the summer of 1794. And the tavern-keeper made room for unrestrained conduct. His Amherstburg place was plain in many ways, like many late eighteenth-century houses and public houses. Floors, with the exception of two rush mats, were bare wood. Most windows had no curtains. Common chairs, pine benches, coarse earthenware, and cheap tin dominated in the barroom. Brass candlesticks were used instead of silver ones, but they lit the room amply. The barroom was also warm, with a stove and nine lengths of pipe, and standing in it was the most valuable item in the house – an extremely expensive eight-day clock.

We do not know anything more about Donaldson's tavern than what his possessions tell us. He left no account book, no diary, and no letters. No travellers or patrons (except Askwith) left records of the place. Still, what he owned is telling. His investments in good everyday crockery, fine silver, and rich landlord outfits carry straightforward messages of social and economic achievement. They also suggest the diverse social makeup of his tavern's clientele. Donaldson used different kinds of material goods to define different areas in his public house. Some, like those in the dining area, called for polite comportment; others, such as the barroom furnishings, granted more freedom. The landlord obviously thought it likely that his customers

would include those with “cultured” tastes as well as those who had rougher pleasures in mind. Accordingly, he made room for both to spend their money inside. By placing his single most expensive piece of furniture – the £18 clock (which cost as much as his horse) – in his barroom, Donaldson shows us that no simple equation existed in his mind between roughs and rowdiness. The way he placed his goods also indicates that he expected reasonable behaviour from soldiers and gentlemen alike.

When the executors of Donaldson’s will made their list of his possessions, they did more than fulfill a legal obligation: they generated a document that makes his tavern visible as a place where decisions about organizing and using interior space, forms of sociability, and how to behave in public were made. These matters reveal much about the day-to-day workings of colonial social relations. Donaldson’s inventory of goods, and the issues it raises about the nature of public houses, suggests the value of systematically studying taverns as material settings.

Colonial taverns like Donaldson’s balanced the sometimes conflicting demands that the public made on them. This balancing act is central to understanding the cultural relationship between taverns and the mixed colonial populace. The material settings provided by tavern-keepers enabled tavern-goers to enact cohesive rituals of mutual belonging over drink (or tea, or breakfast, or dancing). But tavern-keepers also acknowledged the powerful differences separating members of the colonial public by designing their houses to enable, even encourage, a degree of social separation. That this was desired by some, disregarded by some, and foisted on others is traced in subsequent chapters that explore how members of the taverns’ mixed company responded, not at all predictably or consistently, to each other’s desires for mutual accommodation or distance.

Despite their shared ambition to balance the competing and potentially conflicting claims on them, a world of difference existed in the quality of service and accommodation afforded by the colonial taverns as a whole. This was particularly so after 1830, when immigration and settlement intensified to an unprecedented scale. If some taverns had unsavoury reputations and others in the backwoods were hardly more than shacks with spare beds and a licence to sell liquor, most others, like Donaldson’s, opened substantial material settings to the public. What these taverns looked like, the layouts of their rooms, how they changed across time and by location, and how it felt to be in them are the subjects of this chapter. Without a sense of the buildings, furniture, tableware, food, and drink that created the environments for public life, neither the possibilities of that life nor the limits placed on it by the tavern setting can be understood.

Although the earliest taverns in the colony responded to design cues from elsewhere, they expressed ideals about the conduct of public life in a colonial setting. What architects call “Georgian” is a design principle that invokes

classical ideas about geometry, proportion, and symmetry. Georgian design came to England in architectural books published during the Italian Renaissance, notably by Andreas Palladio, and it is visible there in the work of Inigo Jones (1573-1652) and in the work of Christopher Wren and James Gibbs following the Great Fire of London in 1666. Georgian building design emphasized breadth over height through the use of strong horizontal lines. It emphasized symmetry and rhythm over the gothic exuberance in ornamentation that had come before it. It favoured brick and painted wood over ornate finishes. The style consequently lent itself to modestly scaled interpretations by the middling ranks of Georgian society. Georgian style quickly became an internationally fashionable vernacular, and it was exported to the thirteen colonies through publications such as Batty Langley's *City & Country Builder's and Workman's Treasury of Designs*. Such books made the principles of Georgian design available to farmers, propertied townspeople, and tavern-keepers, who, by the time Upper Canada was founded, preferred (if they could afford it) to build Georgian houses as a matter of course.<sup>3</sup>

The Georgian style, and approximations of it, made sense to people who made claim to what they saw as a wilderness. Georgian design not only conveyed prosperity and modern style, it was also uniquely suited to a colonial setting, where settlers claimed land just wrested from First Nations. Through their "ordered array of line, surface, mass and space," Georgian buildings announced permanence and expressed authority over what had been "untamed."<sup>4</sup>

A sketch of the King's Head Inn on Burlington Bay, which was originally drawn in 1795 by Elizabeth Gwillam Simcoe, the wife of the lieutenant-governor, illustrates the Georgian style (see Figure 1). It was one of the "government houses" that Simcoe ordered built to improve travel conditions in the colony. State-owned, the inn was leased and run for profit by the Bates family.<sup>5</sup> It stood as a classic example of Georgian architecture. A timber-framed, gable-roofed, two-storey structure faced in clapboards, the inn had windows that were made of twelve panes hung over twelve panes and chimneys that aligned in perfect symmetry. The main entryway in the inn's centre focused the design. Shallow pillars and a low-pitched roof formed an ornamental portico, and an elaborate fan of small windows (called lights) on top framed the door. The orderly exterior reflected the organized way space flowed in and divided the interior. Rather than an open, pre-modern hall put to multiple uses by all and sundry, the Georgian building defined space carefully.

Simcoe noted that the King's Head had eight rooms in the main house. She breakfasted in the one "to the S.E. which commands the view of the lake."<sup>6</sup> It may have been the public dining room where everyone else dined, but it could also have been a room specially prepared for the use of the governor and his entourage. The house also contained a barroom, kitchen, and bedchambers for household members and overnight lodgers.

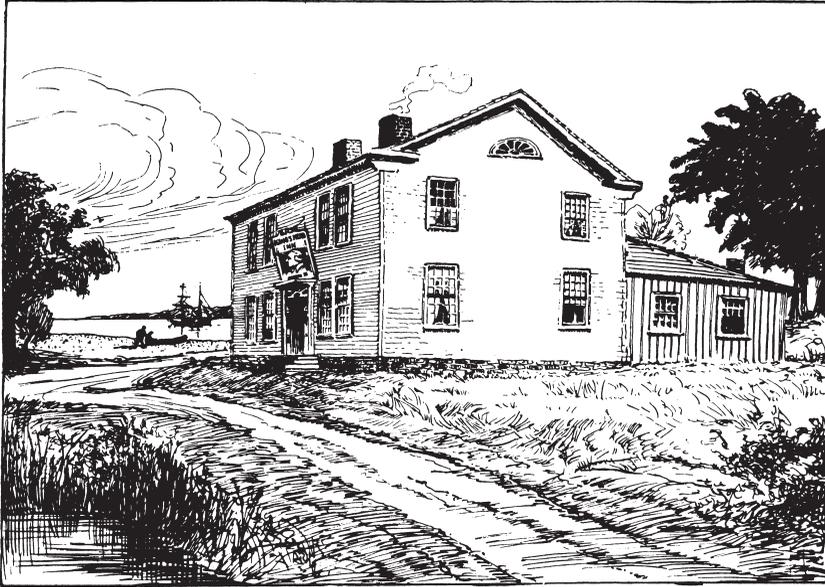


Figure 1 The King's Head Inn, Burlington Bay, ca. 1795, by John Ross Robertson, from a drawing by Elizabeth Gwillam Simcoe. The tavern sign of the King's Head is clearly visible and the symmetry of this Georgian government house expresses the overwhelmingly orderly and balanced conduct of public life in tavern space.

Image taken from *The diary of Mrs. John Graves Simcoe, wife of the first lieutenant-governor of the province of Upper Canada, 1792-6; with notes and a biography by J. Ross Robertson, and two hundred and thirty-seven illustrations, including ninety reproductions of interesting sketches made by Mrs. Simcoe*, ed. John Ross Robertson (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1911), 323

A better sense of how the King's Head was used on an everyday basis comes through in the diary of Ely Playter, a prosperous settler and former tavern-keeper from York (Toronto), who stopped there in August 1805. Two of his grown-up sisters, two male friends, and a teenaged brother accompanied him. Playter described the comfort and conviviality of the place: "We got through to the government house about four o'clock p.m. where we got a good dish of tea and feed for our horses after which we concluded to stay all night, about sunset Mr Weekes came on his way from York to Niagara. – A young man a taylor by trade on his way to York afforded us some amusement, being in liquor and pretending to be very polite, sung us a song &c. – We made ourselves comfortable till morn'g."<sup>7</sup> The journal entry captures the accessibility of the public houses to travellers, to women as well as men, and to various members of pre-industrial society. The company included Playter's own prominent Loyalist family, who farmed extensive lands around York and whose men held a number of local offices. William Weekes was an

attorney and member of Parliament. And there was, as well, the inebriated artisan who knew how to poke fun at polite society.

Playter's description of the King's Head is nothing like Simcoe's, but both remarked in different ways on their satisfaction with the place. Simcoe counted the rooms and found it "a pretty plan," emphasizing ideas of design and spatial separation.<sup>8</sup> Playter emphasized its publicness, the place of liquor as well as tea, and his enjoyment of sociability in a mixed company. Together they suggest that a tavern worked well within a Georgian house. The customary organization of space encouraged public life in rooms specifically designed for that purpose and kept public life separate from family and household life, private interactions, and work that needed to be done.

None of this was new. Successful tavern-keepers in Britain and the older, settled parts of North America had already established the conventions of the tavern trade generations before the earliest tavern-keepers in Upper Canada hung out their signs. All agreed that the best taverns of old New York City and Philadelphia, or the upper-class coaching inns and bourgeois taverns of England, set the tone. The multi-roomed and often multi-floored buildings they inhabited, their elegant appointments, and the deluxe supplies with which they stocked their larders and their bars defined a good public house.<sup>9</sup>

The tavern trade in the colony did differ in one important respect from the metropolitan model: aside from the material limitations imposed by a new colonial setting, most Upper Canadian tavern-keepers spent less than five years in the trade. On average, only a third of all licensees still held a licence five years later, as measured in 1820-25 and 1832-37. Across a ten-year span, between 1827-37, only 15 percent persisted beyond five years. Both rates differ starkly from England, where two-thirds of publicans maintained their businesses for a minimum of six years. The Upper Canadian averages do hide the lifetime careers of some tavern-keepers, such as Benjamin Olcott, Peter Davy, Joseph Losee, and Daniel Ostrum in the Midland District, Michael Fox in the Western District, and a number of female tavern-keepers whose success in the trade is discussed in the final chapter. The averages also hide the careers of keeps like George Washington Post and Russell Inglis who put in long apprentices as barkeeps before opening houses of their own. Nevertheless, the colonial trade was clearly less stable than the British trade, reflecting the mobility of settlement society, an emerging economy, and a comparatively low population density.

To a certain extent the state's licensing system in Upper Canada reflected these colonial realities. It assessed tavern licence fees in different grades according to location – the more central the location the higher the fee. The maximum licensing rate in the mid-1830s was either £10 or £7 10s. (it varied by district), and the rate was reserved for public houses located on the main streets of a town. A sliding scale from there meant a location in a smaller

town or a less desirable “back street” location. Taverns in town that paid only £5 annually (and in small towns £3) were very modest affairs that were awkwardly located for all but the neighbours. Rural licence fees always ranged between £3 and £5, depending on the district, and their relative affordability reflected their location, not necessarily poor standards of service, for some rural taverns were extremely comfortable. The state recognized the need for taverns in undeveloped tracts and recognized that these taverns would have fewer customers; it set low licensing rates to encourage potential tavern-keepers.<sup>10</sup>

Within this different trade climate, Georgian understandings of balanced design and imported metropolitan standards of comfort and service nevertheless shaped the taverns of the new northern colony, just as they inspired the common alehouse keepers in England and the keepers of country ordinaries in the United States. James Donaldson clearly had such ideals in mind when he bought silver candlesticks for his dining table and imported wine for his bar. Similarly, William Cooper, who opened a tavern in York in 1801, explicitly acknowledged his debt to conventional public-house style. He pledged to keep his tavern “as nearly on the footing of an English inn, as local circumstances” permitted.<sup>11</sup> He also assumed that everyone would know what he meant. Cooper called his place the Toronto Coffee House. The name drew on the cachet of the coffee houses of old commercial cities, where merchants and financiers had met for nearly two centuries to discuss markets and politics. Like them, it was licensed as a tavern. And its rooms hosted a mixture of public and private activities. A coroner’s inquest met there. Men traded in land and sealed their deals with gin and water, and they met more formally to settle financial disputes with the assistance of arbitrators. York’s earliest dancing assemblies organized at Cooper’s. Townspeople came in for drink, and Cooper kept stocks of the “best wines, brandy, Hollands [gin], shrub, fresh lime juice, [and] London porter” on hand. They could buy cigars, pipes, and tobacco and eat oysters, red herring, and anchovies. If the tavern-keeper hired the “clean, sober woman who understands cookery well,” for whom he advertised, then dining was satisfactory.<sup>12</sup> Cooper’s tavern, drawing on long-established public house conventions, used Georgian design to offer a well-run environment. There was plenty of room for both private business and public activity (see Figure 2).

Many tavern-keepers adopted the same architectural style or, at least, accepted its implicit preference for spatial definition. The Georgian style worked well to project an image of prosperity and comfort, particularly in the practical sense that it enabled different activities to go on in the house at the same time. In the 1790s, for example, the tavern at Carrying Place on the Bay of Quinte looked almost the same as the King’s Head or Cooper’s, as did Stephen Fairfield’s beautiful place, which still stands on Bath Road just outside Kingston, the Walker brothers’ first tavern in Kingston, Chesley’s tavern



*Figure 2* In Cooper's tavern (front left, with the sign over the door), townspeople of all sorts found room to drink, conduct business, dance, and dine, successfully balancing public and private activities. We can see some of the mix characteristic of the colonial society that taverns housed, in the figures of the Native family making their way into town, and the British officer just outside the tavern, gazing across Toronto Bay.

Elizabeth Frances Hale, *York on Lake Ontario, Upper Canada*, 1804, watercolour, 11 x 17.5" | Library and Archives Canada, W.H. Coverdale Collection of Canadiana (Acc No. 1970-188-2092)

in Cornwall, Joseph Keeler's tavern in Cramachi (Colborne) (see Figure 3), and Cook's Tavern on the St. Lawrence. The famous print of the killing of Colonel Moodie in the Upper Canadian Rebellion of 1837 depicts John Montgomery's tavern building, which was built in Georgian style, in the background (see Figure 4). And when Sebastian Fryfogel put up a new tavern on Huron Road between Berlin (Kitchener) and Goderich in 1845, it was built according to the same plan. Not surprisingly, when architect John G. Howard designed an inn he saw no need to deviate from proven practice.<sup>13</sup> It is a vernacular Georgian design: a large, symmetrical two-storey house, made striking by the detailing of the main door. It included a driving shed, stable, and privies (see Figure 5).

Most notable is the way the space inside Howard's inn echoed the order established outside (see Figure 5). It shows how important it was, as a principle of tavern design, to keep public and private space in equilibrium. The

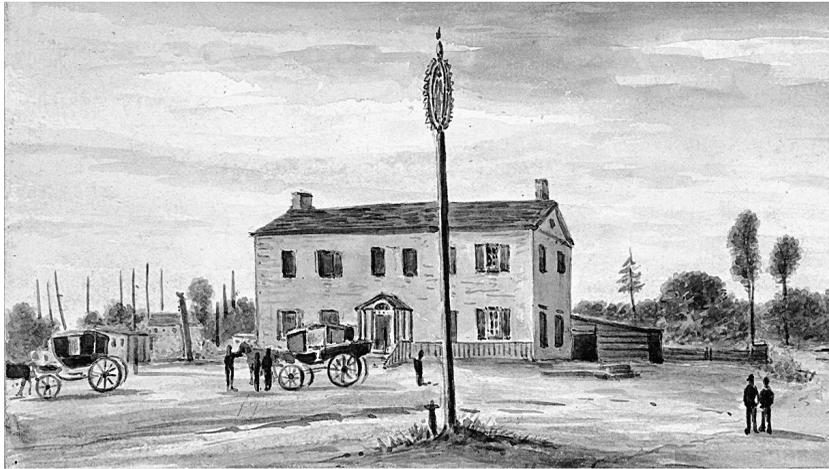


Figure 3 The image of Keeler's tavern depicts the continuing importance of Georgian tavern design well into the settlement era and emphasizes the taverns' role in colonial transportation networks that Chapter 3 discusses.

James Pattison Cockburn, *Inn at Cramachi, Bay of Quinte*, ca. 1830, 8.5 x 11" | With permission of the Royal Ontario Museum (942.48.16) © ROM

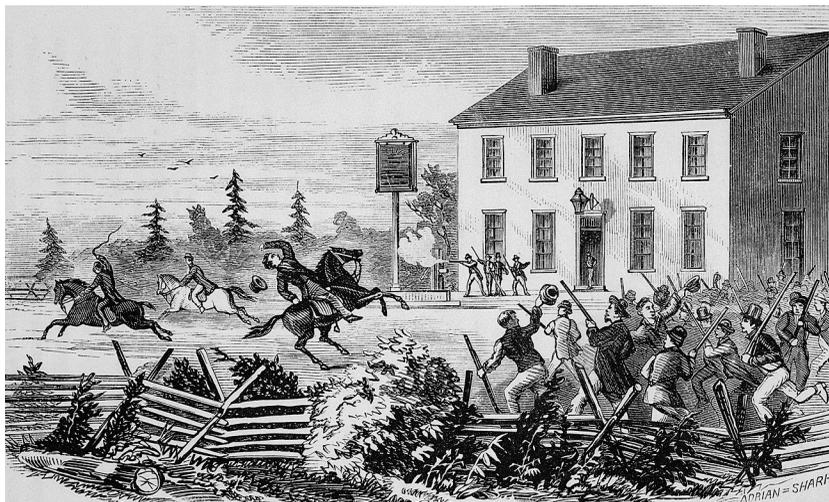
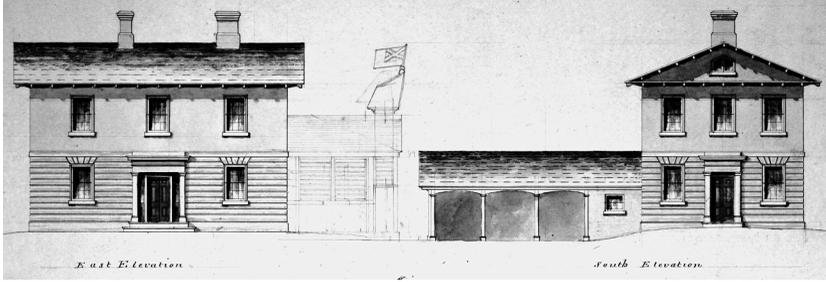


Figure 4 Again, the tavern building is classically Georgian. The image also captures the taverns' deep engagement in the political sphere, here, during the Upper Canada Rebellion, outside rebel headquarters at Montgomery's tavern on Yonge Street, Toronto.

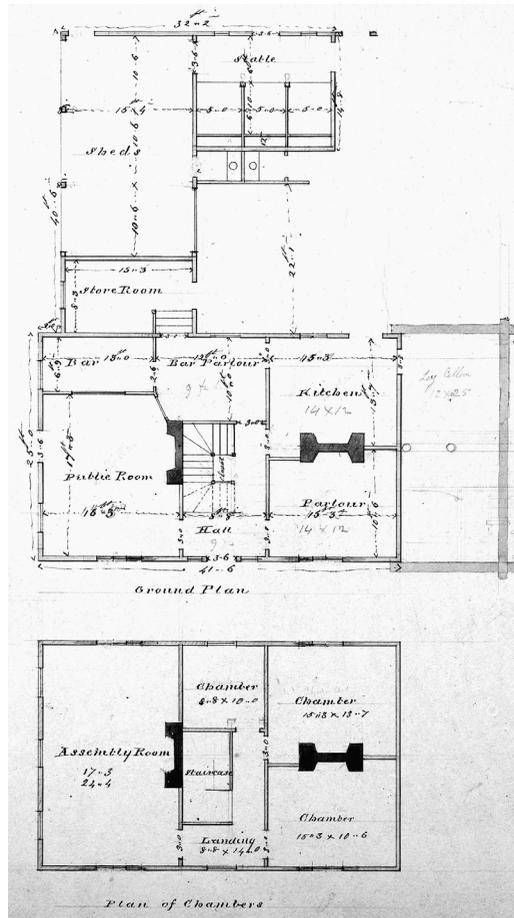
Adrian Sharp, *The Death of Colonel Moodie*, 1837, engraving/print | Library and Archives Canada (C-004783)

left side of the house is given over entirely to public life: it includes a public room (where the public dining table was customarily located), a barroom and bar (downstairs), and an assembly room (upstairs). The bar itself (as opposed to the barroom where people drank) was strictly a service area, used only by household members (be they family or staff), and a place for locking



*Figure 5* The architect designed tavern space to facilitate a balance between public life – in the assembly room, public room, and bar – against the claims of more private interactions in the parlour, and upstairs chambers, and against the domestic demands of the tavern-keeping household in kitchens and other workspaces.

John G. Howard, "Exterior view and floor plan of 'An Inn,'" architectural drawing | Toronto Public Library, Toronto Reference Library, Baldwin Room, John G. Howard manuscript collection (#355)





*Figure 6* The reconstructed bar shows the utility, rather than the sociability, of the tavern bar circa 1850. It is a workspace, designed to facilitate liquor (and tobacco) service and safe storage, and to provide easy communication with the kitchen behind. To socialize, patrons gathered in the (woodstove-warmed) barroom at the tavern tables just glimpsed in the foreground. Suggesting the range of food and drink available are the wine glasses, matching coffee and tea cups, a cream and sugar set, as well as a vegetable serving dish on the bar shelves. The pipes are clay. The metal tongs are for picking embers out of the fire, and the other object is for chopping tobacco plugs. The Tavern Regulations – enjoining orderly conduct – are clearly posted above the bar.

Image of reconstructed colonial bar, Battle Ground Hotel Museum, Lundy's Lane, Niagara Falls, photograph by Kevin Windsor | City of Niagara Falls Museums

up the drinks when the tavern was closed. It was here that tavern-keepers stored glasses, jugs, punch bowls, sufficient stocks of liquors for anticipated short-term demand, and the ingredients (such as sugar, citrus extracts, and nutmeg) for mixed drinks. It was here that they measured, poured, and blended the drinks and kept the accounts. As in Howard's sketch, liquor in large barrels was often stored in an attached cellar.

The small portioned-off corner bar (as opposed to the modern long open counter, which was already coming into vogue in urban England and Scotland) was typical in the colony (see Figure 6). Resembling a bank or betting-house wicket, tavern bars had a grille of slats or turned posts that ran from

6d. a night, while meals were 1s. 3d. Philips' tavern was in every sense a local tavern. It fit into the local economy and stood, quite literally, as a farm, a store, and a tavern among other artisanal and service shops. Philips' licence to sell drink by small measure and the unpretentious space he maintained for sociability over it clearly satisfied the needs of many in his community, according to their consistent appearance in his accounts.<sup>36</sup>

When colonial travellers moved away from the back concessions and into the more important arteries of transportation, and the towns themselves, they were treated to a higher level of service. W.J. Sumners' Grove Inn, thirty-five miles from York on the Dundas Road, operated according to an entirely different dynamic than Philips' tavern. Through many newspaper advertisements Sumner crafted an image of his house as the resort of the respectable, the tasteful, and the quality conscious. He promised the best liquors from Montreal marketplaces, "good fires, good wholesome provisions, good stabling, hay and oats, and clean comfortable beds." Although Sumner stopped short of making claims to fashionability, he attracted genteel travellers to his house. They described it as "well conducted, and kept by an obliging person," and wrote that it enjoyed "a great run of business," including the patronage of "fashionably attired" ladies and gentlemen. By 1834 Sumner was successful enough to move to larger premises in town, the Oakville House Hotel. Here, he put up a viewing gallery from which he claimed guests could see the spray of Niagara Falls. He decorated his parlour with prints of Parisian haute couture and European literature, such as the epic *Don Juan*. Through such means, Sumner imparted a smart, metropolitan tone to his public house. Unlike the majority of minor-house keepers, he aspired to be fashionable, the quality that set the principal houses of the colony apart from the rest.<sup>37</sup>

The principal public houses, often called hotels, were located in the towns, in resort areas, and (occasionally) along important travelling routes. In place of the meat and potato fare of the minor houses, the hotels distinguished themselves by offering colonial haute cuisine. In place of extra beds and shifting bedroom arrangements, hotels always offered private bedrooms and, often, private sitting rooms as well. Although the minor houses likewise maintained spatialized zones like their Georgian counterparts, the principal houses brought this to a fuller realization. Also, in addition to a landlord, landlady, and their children, principal houses had staffs to meet the needs of their guests. However, principal houses were very few in number; Rowsell's 1850 *City of Toronto and County of York Directory*, for example, listed 136 taverns and called only six of them "principal."<sup>38</sup> This proportion held true elsewhere. Yet the presence of principal houses made the urban and resort tavern trade qualitatively different from its rural counterpart. Principal houses offered those who could afford them a grade of accommodation not available in the countryside.



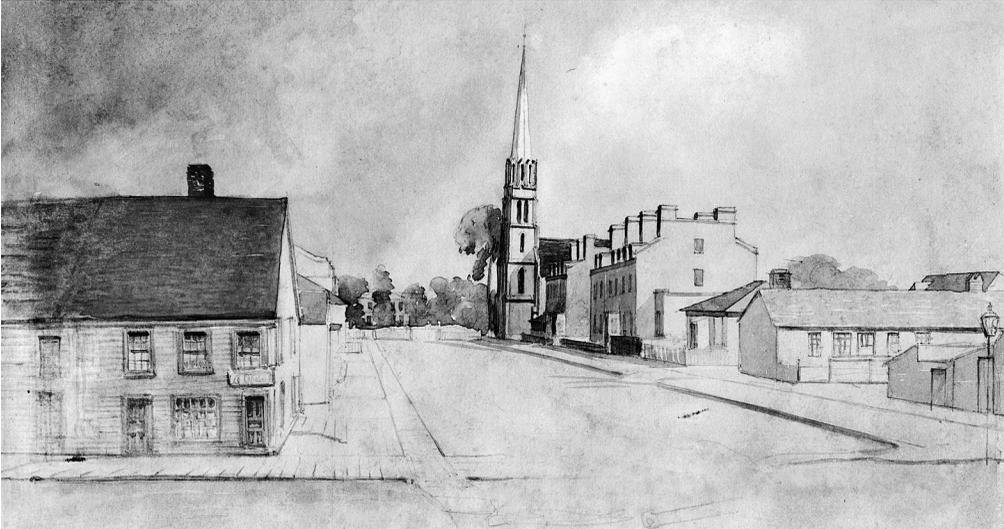
*Figure 7* Nestled into a landscape under colonization, this backwoods tavern offered crucial shelter and sustenance. Yet, settlers and travellers alike complained that in the place of the balanced design of the Georgian taverns was cramped, multi-purpose space; in place of good meals and a selection of drink were frontier basics such as salt pork and whiskey. These backwoods taverns existed only as long as raw frontier conditions did, and until tavern-keepers and tavern-goers could replace them with public houses more attuned to their common understanding of good standards of accommodation.

George Russell Dartnell, *View from the Summit of the Ridge above Nicholl's Tavern, Penetanguishene Road*, 30 May 1836, watercolour and ink, 8.5 x 11" | With permission of the Royal Ontario Museum (952.87.8) © ROM

for example, went out of her way to get a look at one on the Otonabee River, near Peterborough, in the early 1830s (see Figure 7). She described it with words that emphasized coarseness and crudity and absences. The tavern was a single room "of rough unhewn logs," its ceiling was "unplastered," and the furniture, "of corresponding roughness," consisted of a "few stools, rough and unplanned, a deal table ... only held together by its ill shaped legs, [and] two or three blocks of grey granite placed beside the hearth [that] served for seats for the children." And the place was crowded with men, women, children, a calf, some pigs, and chickens. There was no separation of space, no means to offer privacy, and no ability to respond to the sensibilities of a gentlewoman.<sup>15</sup>

Other travellers developed the themes of promiscuity and primitiveness. Parr Traill's brother, Samuel Strickland, described a frontier tavern as having "only one apartment which answered for the treble purpose of parlour, kitchen and barroom." Another British traveller, William Pope, noted that backwoods taverns consisted of nothing more than "a miserable log building – only one apartment below and a kind of cock-loft above ... at one end of the house opposite the fireplace were ranged three or four beds into which at the proper time tumbled men, women, and children." Built into such complaints is the expectation that space be properly defined and functionally separated. Although they provided shelter, there was nothing about backwoods taverns that met even minimum standards of public accommodation as they had developed in the colony. Backwoods taverns lacked customary ornamentation. There was, for instance, "no varnished clock to cleck behind the door, no pictures placed for ornament ... no broken tea cups wisely kept for show." A backwoods bedroom was "*sans* wash-hand-stand, *sans* dressing table, *sans* bureau, *sans* pot de chambre, *sans* everything." Backwoods taverns lacked customary services, like fresh water in the rooms and proper care for the horses; they lacked the sense of ease and comfort cultivated by tavern-keepers such as James Donaldson and the Bates family in the government house. Backwoods taverns lacked all provision for the conduct of meaningful public, or private, life.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, genteel travellers, reeling in culture shock, were at their best when they conveyed all that backwoods taverns were not. They compared these primitive houses not only to their Georgian counterparts elsewhere in the colony but also to taverns in Britain. There, the word *tavern* connoted a posh place to stop, where you could converse, drink wine, eat well, and sleep comfortably, albeit expensively. Even England's much simpler alehouses had been respectable places for nearly a century. Similarly, even though an equivalent to the backwoods taverns existed in new areas of settlement in the nineteenth-century United States, since the days of the Revolution and early Republic the rest of the public houses had been places where genuine public life cohered, where men and women began to create the contours of modern civil society in solid, well-designed buildings.<sup>17</sup> The same held true in British North American colonies, especially in the old cities of Halifax, Saint John, Montreal, and Quebec City. Even small Ferryland, Newfoundland, boasted the London Inn, "a very comfortable situation ... a large roomy house and genteel furniture ... had an epicure been one of the guests he could not a found fault with a single dish."<sup>18</sup> Miserable gin shops and very simple public houses kept by and for the poor existed on both sides of the Atlantic, but within the broad context of the trade, the frontier taverns stood out for their appalling material conditions and repellent use of space. Aside from answering a real need for shelter in the backwoods, their only saving grace was a short life. Frontiers move, as do the conditions associated with



*Figure 8* The Lord Nelson tavern is the clapboard building on the corner, a minor house in a relatively central town setting that like all minor houses differed from backwoods taverns. They provided separate rooms for separate activities, solid fare, and a good selection of liquor for moderate charges. Minor houses comprised the vast majority of the more than 2,500 taverns in the colony by 1851, dotting town streets, such as this one, and rural roadways. They depended, as Chapter 7 reveals, on women's domestic labour for their success.

A.R.V. Crease, *St. George's Church Toronto, from My Dressing Room Window*, July 1851, water-colour and pencil, 20 x 26.8 cm | Toronto Public Library, Toronto Reference Library, J. Ross Robertson Collection (T 12594)

them. By the end of the 1830s, primitive public houses were a thing of the past in core population areas and along important travelling routes. They could, however, still be encountered well into the second half of the nineteenth century in newly settled areas.<sup>19</sup> Their existence said more about the pace of settlement and the state of economic development within a region than it did about popular ideas concerning the appropriate conduct of public life.

Indeed, travel books authored by the gentry offer an alternative depiction of colonial public houses. Alongside accounts of "higgledy-piggledy adventures ... in the backwoods" is the grudging acknowledgment that "we would scarce hold it fair (I guess) to produce a hedge alehouse or a Highland *clachan* as a fair sample of what travellers are to expect when passing through Britain."<sup>20</sup> More substantial and more permanent than the backwoods taverns were the very numerous minor public houses of town and country alike (see Figure 8). They constituted the vast majority of the taverns in the colony. (There were about one thousand taverns in 1837 and twenty-seven hundred in 1852.) The minor houses were diverse, yet they differed from backwoods

taverns in similar ways. Their architectural layouts, the level of service available, and the material conditions inside acknowledged and continued the tradition of the Georgian taverns of the 1790s.

All minor houses had different rooms for different functions: a barroom, a dining room, and a parlour or sitting room. At a minimum, they provided three extra beds for lodgers, but not always in separate rooms. All had a stable for patrons' horses and secure storage sheds for their goods. (In fact, beginning in 1836, tavern-keepers could not get a tavern licence unless they had beds, a stable, and a lockable shed.) The minor houses served substantial "meat and potato" meals. Some did so adequately, while others excelled and earned solid reputations for their food. Because all minor houses ran primarily on the labour of the tavern-keeping household, the sense of sharing space in a family home could be pronounced, especially in the countryside.

There were some "good establishment[s] for the country,"<sup>21</sup> but as a rule the minor houses in town were better, in the sense that they were bigger, the level of public access more completely set the tone of the place, and they tended to employ some help, especially a barkeeper, a hosteller, and more chambermaids or maids-of-all-work. While some minor houses offered only the simplest accommodations, the more substantial ones were extremely comfortable points of call, well known to travellers and locals alike.

Their long collective history, numbers, and diversity rendered the minor houses vulnerable to competing interpretations in travellers' accounts. In what is probably the most oft-quoted passage about minor houses, Englishman John Howison wrote, "Most of the taverns in Upper Canada are indeed a burlesque on what they profess to be." His specific list of complaints included the "American" manners of tavern-keeping families (that is, assumptions of equal social standing), repetitive food, too much tea, and the scarcity of (male) hostellers, which was made worse by tavern-keeping women's reluctance to look after his horse. He even carped about the "mistress of the hotel" sending her children to the woods for herbal tea ingredients when she ran out of Chinese black.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, William "Tiger" Dunlop, a long-settled physician, author, and member of the provincial Parliament wrote:

Our inns are bad: that is to say, many of them are clean and comfortable indeed enough, and the landlords almost uniformly civil and obliging, but the proverb of God sending meat and the devil cooks never was so fully illustrated as in this country ...

To Dress a Beefsteak: Cut the steak about a quarter of an inch thick, wash it well in a tub of water, wringing it out from time to time after the manner of a dish clout; put a pound of fresh butter in a frying pan (hog's lard will do but butter is more esteemed) and when it boils put in the steak, turning and peppering it for about a quarter of an hour; then put it into a deep dish, and pour the oil over it until it floats and so serve it.

To Boil Green Peas: Put them in a large pot full of water, boil them until they burst. Pour off one half of the water, leaving about as much as will cover them; then add about the size of your two fists of butter, and stir the whole round with a handful of black pepper. Serve in a wash-hand basin.<sup>23</sup>

Doubtless there were minor houses in the colony where the food was this bad. Yet the Tiger himself remarked on their general cleanliness, comfort, and civility. Hidden in Howison's complaint about herbal tea is evidence that the tavern-keeper took the trouble to give him her idea of a proper meal. Each author undermined the intended thrust of his own passage. So these minor houses were not the London Tavern or the City Hotel in New York, but neither were 86 percent of the public houses in England or the United States.<sup>24</sup> Instead, the minor houses were, in general, places where tavern-goers could expect solid meals and access to well-defined rooms appointed with comfort in mind.

The staple tavern meal consisted of "wheat bread, butter, boiled potatoes, fried pork, pickles and tea." On a journey a traveller stopping at taverns along the way might well get the same meal two, even three, times a day.<sup>25</sup> Better-provisioned minor-house keepers routinely enlivened their tables with the addition of beefsteak, poultry, eggs and ham, cheese, pies, and cakes. None offered à la carte menus. Callers asked for breakfast or dinner or supper and ate what arrived at the table. Sometimes this could be very good and tavern-goers lavished praise on the delicacies available in some minor houses: "finely preserved plums ... in maple sugar," "delightful venison ... kept three or four weeks ... in such a fine state that it almost fell to powder under the knife," "a brace of fine fat wood ducks and fried black bass," "a fry of delicate pink fleshed trouts," "very good turkey," and "excellent stew." And sportsmen, like travellers who hunted along the way, relied on their landladies to cook up their game or fish for supper at the end of the day.<sup>26</sup> At a cost of between a shilling and a shilling and a half per meal, tavern-goers bought satisfying and occasionally surprisingly good fare.

Sleeping arrangements likewise ranged from the adequate to the very comfortable. Even the smallest houses provided private chambers as a matter of course, with beds "clean and plain, with cotton sheets and linsey-woolsey coverlets." Taverns run by French Canadians were favourites because each bedroom usually had its own small stove. In some districts tavern regulations required that three beds beyond those needed by the family be provided for lodgers; other districts required four. The expected scale of operations was obviously small, but since a minor house might well have only the minimum number of beds specified, the arrival of a large party, a storm, or a town crowded for a court sitting or market strained its resources. Pallets on the floor, shared rooms, and even shared beds resulted. During

busy times tavern-keepers always filled their rooms singly at first. But they warned lodgers occupying double or multi-bedded rooms that they could expect company by morning. One either accepted lodging under such conditions or tried a different house. Sharing a bed was much rarer than sharing a room, but it happened. For example, in 1854 at the Clyde Inn in Toronto, which was a large and well-patronized place, the hosteller remembered “having to put two to a bed” while the Quarter Sessions convened elsewhere in town. William Long, according to the hosteller, “had to sleep with a stranger.” Long remembered the incident with some distaste. He said he neither looked at nor spoke to the other man.<sup>27</sup>

A bed in a minor house was an uncertain commodity during peak times. But unlike in the backwoods, tavern-keepers always kept sleeping space separate from the rest. They made single rooms and single beds available unless numbers prevented it. The fact that patrons remembered sharing beds illustrates its rarity. If the best intentions were not always met, tavern-keepers nevertheless held helm. Under normal circumstances, even privileged British travellers gave the minor houses favourable assessments. For example, William Chambers generalized about them at mid-century: “If not fine, they will, as far as my experience goes, be found clean, respectable, and moderate as respects charges. On the present occasion for the accommodation of a small sitting room, warmed by a stove, tea, and beds for two persons, the charge was only four English shillings.”<sup>28</sup>

Chambers was a satisfied customer, and it is worthwhile using tavern-keepers’ estate inventories and account books to put his remarks into a more substantive context. On the one hand, surviving account books do confirm that the charges Chambers reported were typical. Whether at Abner Miles’ tavern in early York, James Philips’ tavern near Brockville in the late 1820s, or Thomas Robinson’s tavern in Prescott in the ’40s, a tavern bed cost a predictable six pence (6d.) a night. A space on the floor, perhaps on a pallet, could be had for half that (and sometimes for nothing) in some taverns. A minor-house meal, as noted, cost between a shilling (1s.) and a shilling and a half, depending on the quality, size, and location of a tavern. At Miles’ tavern a meal was 1s. 6d., whereas at Philips’ and Robinson’s taverns it was usually 1s. 3d. One could also get a small cold repast, perhaps bread, cheese, and pickles, for 6d.<sup>29</sup>

Although these account book charges agree with Chambers’ prices, it seems unlikely that everybody would have regarded them as “moderate.” If a man made the average daily wage in the colony of between 4 and 5s. a day, then a tavern meal was quite an expensive proposition. Having a drink with it cost at least 2d. more for a glass of average whiskey, and as much as 6d. for a fancier mixed drink. However, because it cost much less to board longer term, especially in the country, many single men, as well as some women and childless couples, opted to live in taverns. In a minor house in

the tiny village of Simcoe in 1849, for example, where “the fare was good and abundant,” a half-pay officer, when asked how much he paid per week, said “he got his bed, three meals a-day, and his boots cleaned for 2½ dollars a-week (12s 6d sterling), and if he asked a friend to dinner it was an English shilling extra.” The price of liquor, personal laundry, and keeping a horse were not included. Lodging at this rate was at least 40 percent of the average wage. Taverns in town were more expensive, as much as double in big places such as Toronto.<sup>30</sup> Although many people made more or less than the average, and others found themselves paying less, accommodation – whether drink, food, or shelter for the night – was hardly cheap, even in the minor houses.<sup>31</sup> At best, tavern accommodation was affordable for an ordinary income earner, but well beyond the reach of the poor.

Chambers’ impressionistic portrayal was more accurate in other ways. What he wrote about the customary division of space in minor taverns and the respectability of their appointments is supported by the evidence from nine tavern-keepers’ estate inventories: one dated 1833, seven in the 1840s, and one in 1853.<sup>32</sup> Though few in number and oddly clustered in the Western District, these inventories show how minor-house keepers organized their houses and appointed their rooms to make them comfortable. Brass or tin candlesticks, clocks, looking glasses, and several stoves were universal, meaning that all these minor houses were adequately lit, warm in winter, and at least minimally decorated. Some keepers distinguished themselves further by hanging framed pictures, providing fancier lighting (such as William Hall’s “globe lamp” in his Sandwich tavern), covering the windows, or using better than average linens. At Cecilia Dauphin’s, in East Tilbury, for example, six beds had counterpanes (decorative bedspreads), sheets, and blankets; two of the beds had hangings.

The number of beds varied. They numbered nine on average, with a maximum of eighteen at Dauphin’s tavern. Both good feather beds and inexpensive straw ticks figured in the inventories, often in combination at the same house. Thirteen of Dauphin’s beds were simple straw, and some of them were probably stacked and kept in readiness for a busy night because she had only nine bedsteads. Each tavern-keeper had blankets, quilts, “bed furniture,” bolsters, and pillows – or “bed clothes” – but they clearly differed in quality and abundance. Although it is impossible to know how many beds were used by family members, none of the minor houses represented in these inventories seem to have had difficulty meeting minimum licensing terms for lodgers. On the contrary, they suggest that significant numbers of minor-house keepers exceeded the minimum.

Dining rooms sat between eight and twelve callers, usually on common wooden chairs and at one long, or public, table. Typically, minor houses had sets of crockery and cutlery for twelve, though Claude Gouin’s house in Chatham in the ’40s had knives and forks for two dozen. That all minor

houses had coffee mills indicates its routine availability. Kitchens contained the frying pans, Dutch ovens, reflector (roasting) ovens, pie dishes, stone crocks, pickle jars, and tinware that testify to straightforward cookery.

Two taverns boasted expensive Windsor chairs in their parlours or sitting rooms. One of these, in Sandwich in 1844, also contained a homemade carpet, curtains, a walnut table, and a case looking glass, which were the nicest items in the place. Similarly, John Willson, in St. Thomas in 1847, accumulated nearly £10 worth of furniture and knick-knacks in what must have been his parlour. He grouped a sofa with two pillows, a rocking chair, six rush-bottom chairs, and three small tables together with a carpet, a looking glass, a wooden American clock, flower vases, candle shades, Japan trays, and pictures and a map on the walls.<sup>33</sup> There was also a “toy sheppard-ess,” presumably a figurine. The array of goods in these parlours testifies to their importance. Minor-house keepers made a point of providing appropriate space for patrons who chose, or sometimes chose to avoid, the more public rooms.

Barrooms contained at least six chairs, as well as benches and assorted tables. Three taverns seem to have had a dozen or more barroom chairs, although it is not always possible to distinguish exact locations given the structure of some inventories. We do know that John Symes’ barroom in his Pickering Township tavern in 1853 had six chairs, eight decanters, fifteen glasses, six small kegs, as well as stands, measures, and a small desk. Presumably, some patrons stood. Gregoire LeDuc’s barroom seems to have had only two benches, an empty barrel, decanters, jugs, kegs, measures, and a scale with weights. Yet there were fourteen chairs in the house as a whole, which one could easily fetch. In the three taverns where the inventory-takers actually counted the glasses rather than jotting, for example, “1 lot tumblers,” the number of glasses averaged thirteen. When tavern-goers wrote or talked about a “crowded” tavern, and especially crowded barrooms, then, they almost certainly had no more than about a dozen patrons – at most – in mind.

The inventories make it apparent that minor-house keepers paid as much attention to their beds and bed linens, the design of their parlours, and their table settings as they did to the barroom. They make it apparent that, although the scale of operations was modest, tavern-keepers worked at crafting spaces conducive to various forms of public life. Tavern-keepers with better means, time, and locations in town, such as John Willson, managed to create solid material settings, replete with markers of their relative prosperity. Others, such as Symes and LeDuc, provided the basic tools for sociability. However, there are clear limitations in looking at the public houses through the lens of tavern-keepers’ estate inventories. Although the picture comes into focus on particular objects and on the layout of the house, no real sense is gained of how the tavern fit into its surrounding society.

In contrast, although we have little idea of what the minor tavern kept by James and Salomé Philips looked like, it can be firmly grounded within its community. It stood on the Sixth Concession in Bastard Township, twenty-five miles northeast of Brockville. First licensed in 1828, it was open until 1837. Although we know the tavern was on the Philipses' farm, that a fence surrounded it, and that it sat fifty yards back from the road, only the sketchiest details of the building itself are known. A frame construction, probably one and a half storeys tall, it had a barroom downstairs with a stove, a public dining room, an "inner room" with a table, a kitchen, and a "square room" for storage. There were a dozen chairs, "crockery &c," and four beds. Philips' tavern had no large room for meetings or dances. The nearest tavern that did was the Derbyshire Inn in Farmersville, ten miles away. County-wide associational or political meetings convened in the large public houses of Brockville.<sup>34</sup>

Situated in a rough triangle at the junction of three township roads among a constellation of shops, Philips' tavern made up a key part of the local service centre. A shoemaker, William Emerson, kept shop in a separate building on the tavern property. Across the road, Jonah and James Brown, probably relatives of Salomé, ran a mill. A blacksmith worked nearby. Philips himself also operated a tannery and a potashery, and he rented his potash kettle to neighbours. Together with his wife, Philips also kept a small general store, where he sold flour, salt, sugar, nails, seeds, and other basic goods. Many entries in Philips' account book show no tavern purchases at all; others blend tavern and store debits. Charles French, for example, who lived on the Fifth Concession with his wife and five children, stopped in for half a bushel of salt on 16 September 1829 and added a quarter pound of tea and a pint of whiskey the next day. James and Salomé did have the help of a hired bar-keeper, William Faulkner, but with their store, an apple orchard, fifty acres of cleared land, cows, and two small children running about to attend, neither the tavern-keeper nor his wife could have had much time to devote to their tavern patrons' needs.<sup>35</sup>

Yet as far as the locals were concerned, things ran smoothly enough. Their names fill Philips' account book. His most regular customers were his closest neighbours. Edward Conly lived on the next concession, two lots over. Robert Parsons lived next door to him. And Arnold Stevens lived, like Philips, on the Sixth Concession, just over a mile away. Most customers clustered on the Fifth, Fourth, and Third Concessions, just above and within an easy ride of the public house. Short-distance travellers brought in some custom. In March 1835 William P. Loucks, Esq., for example, stopped for dinner on his way back from nearby Beverley. Patrons bought a lot of whiskey and lesser amounts of brandy and rum. The odd one took a glass of gin or a mixed drink such as sling. Though these entries are rare, Philips seems to have kept the stocks on hand. He sold tobacco and pipes. His beds cost the standard

6d. a night, while meals were 1s. 3d. Philips' tavern was in every sense a local tavern. It fit into the local economy and stood, quite literally, as a farm, a store, and a tavern among other artisanal and service shops. Philips' licence to sell drink by small measure and the unpretentious space he maintained for sociability over it clearly satisfied the needs of many in his community, according to their consistent appearance in his accounts.<sup>36</sup>

When colonial travellers moved away from the back concessions and into the more important arteries of transportation, and the towns themselves, they were treated to a higher level of service. W.J. Sumners' Grove Inn, thirty-five miles from York on the Dundas Road, operated according to an entirely different dynamic than Philips' tavern. Through many newspaper advertisements Sumner crafted an image of his house as the resort of the respectable, the tasteful, and the quality conscious. He promised the best liquors from Montreal marketplaces, "good fires, good wholesome provisions, good stabling, hay and oats, and clean comfortable beds." Although Sumner stopped short of making claims to fashionability, he attracted genteel travellers to his house. They described it as "well conducted, and kept by an obliging person," and wrote that it enjoyed "a great run of business," including the patronage of "fashionably attired" ladies and gentlemen. By 1834 Sumner was successful enough to move to larger premises in town, the Oakville House Hotel. Here, he put up a viewing gallery from which he claimed guests could see the spray of Niagara Falls. He decorated his parlour with prints of Parisian haute couture and European literature, such as the epic *Don Juan*. Through such means, Sumner imparted a smart, metropolitan tone to his public house. Unlike the majority of minor-house keepers, he aspired to be fashionable, the quality that set the principal houses of the colony apart from the rest.<sup>37</sup>

The principal public houses, often called hotels, were located in the towns, in resort areas, and (occasionally) along important travelling routes. In place of the meat and potato fare of the minor houses, the hotels distinguished themselves by offering colonial haute cuisine. In place of extra beds and shifting bedroom arrangements, hotels always offered private bedrooms and, often, private sitting rooms as well. Although the minor houses likewise maintained spatialized zones like their Georgian counterparts, the principal houses brought this to a fuller realization. Also, in addition to a landlord, landlady, and their children, principal houses had staffs to meet the needs of their guests. However, principal houses were very few in number; Rowsell's 1850 *City of Toronto and County of York Directory*, for example, listed 136 taverns and called only six of them "principal."<sup>38</sup> This proportion held true elsewhere. Yet the presence of principal houses made the urban and resort tavern trade qualitatively different from its rural counterpart. Principal houses offered those who could afford them a grade of accommodation not available in the countryside.



*Figure 9* The Jones Hotel, in the market place circa 1856, shows the location of a principal house in the very heart of town. It shares prominent public space with the railway and City Hall. Also called hotels, the relatively few, expensive principal houses differed from the rest also in their claims to fashionability, their haute cuisine and extensive barroom stocks, guaranteed levels of privacy, and standards of service. By mid-century the best colonial hotels, such as the Rossin House in Toronto, discussed below, offered international-class accommodation.

Edwin Whitefield, *In Guelph*, ca. 1856, 8.5 x 11 inches. | With permission of the Royal Ontario Museum (955.215.2.T) © ROM

Many, from the 1790s onward, claimed the name hotel, and people accepted the term as a rough indicator of quality. Though his tongue is in his cheek, traveller John Goldie tells us that, when he stopped in Stoney Creek in 1819, he chose the one tavern “which was dignified by the title of hotel.” Similarly, Claude Cartier’s advertisement read: “As a good name is essential to a good tavern, he has adopted for his the title of ‘The Steam Boat Hotel.’” The word *hotel*, for much of the Upper Canadian period, distinguished (or claimed to distinguish) a principal house from even the more substantial minor houses.<sup>39</sup>

The designation “principal house” was important. Principal taverns stood apart from the rest because of their size and their location near central public offices, shopping districts, and transportation facilities. They were the public houses at a town’s major intersection, kitty-corner to cathedrals, banks, markets, and, by the mid-1850s, railway stations. In 1856 the Jones Hotel in Guelph enjoyed such a location, sitting close to City Hall, which is in the foreground (see Figure 9). Most importantly, principal houses stood apart because they offered patrons a fashionable, swanky milieu. They promised to be oases of gentility. They granted their patrons the opportunity to maintain social distance from the rest of the mixed colonial populace. As early as 1817 James Rogers targeted “Genteel Company” for his Niagara Coffee

House. His was a “large and commodious house ... near the centre of the village” that offered entertainment in a “handsome style.”<sup>40</sup> According to Rogers, it was everything a principal house should be: spacious, well situated, elegant, and conducive to selective association. Even though there were early hotels, the development of the principal house trade hinged on the economic development of the colony. Thus, even though government houses, such as the King’s Head, were comfortable and well provisioned, they were by definition not principal houses: the state built and leased them in remote newly settling areas as a service to travellers – all comers, not simply the consciously genteel – and they made no claims to fashionable life.

Sheer size was a key defining feature of principal houses. By the 1840s travellers called the principal taverns “rambling,” “vast,” “extensive” “monsters.” Advertisements celebrated their size. The Eberts’ House at Chatham boasted “three stories,” “5 large sitting rooms, 25 bed rooms, bar room and other apartments.” The Albion Hotel in Stratford, which had been built in 1855 to meet the railway traffic, was four brick storeys, with “40 rooms,” including a “large and truly warm and comfortable bar-Room,” a “large dining room,” and several sitting rooms. It was near the termini of two rail lines, housed the telegraph office, and commanded “the best situation in town.”<sup>41</sup>

Principal houses routinely advertised central or marketplace settings. The hotel at the corner of Front and Yonge Streets in Toronto in 1847 was “the best situation in Canada for a first class hotel, being opposite the principal wharves and the custom house and in the immediate vicinity of the banks and leading mercantile houses.” In 1836 James McDonald’s British American Hotel enjoyed a “most desirable site ... directly opposite the court house and nearly opposite St. George’s church in one of the most pleasant, healthy and fashionable streets in Kingston.” A site “in the very heart of a city” connected the principal public houses and their clientele to a swelling “population and political and commercial consequence.”<sup>42</sup>

Owners of public houses also chose their location to capture the tourist trade. Forsyth’s Pavilion at Niagara Falls was a “handsome frame building, of ample dimensions, three stories high, with piazzas on both sides.” Its windows framed views of the falls. It enjoyed genteel patronage. Guests dressed for dinner. Porters carried the luggage. The stagecoach stopped at the door. Forsyth was personally disliked because of his attempts to monopolize business at the resort. Nevertheless, his place basked in its reputation as a “celebrated” hotel.<sup>43</sup>

These houses delivered service of a superior standard. This meant a “Table d’Hotel ... kept in the very best style.” Meals were carefully planned, prepared, and served. There was the “finest fish and fowl,” “mutton chops and lobster,” and “oysters, ... salmons, sardines &c.” “Choice wines” made the dining experience more satisfying; “choice liquors” were always available from the

bar. And apartments of “excellence and comfort ... in regard both to parlours and bedrooms; all of which are furnished in the very best style” helped to cultivate an aura of exclusivity and good taste.<sup>44</sup>

Naturally, there are reasons to take some tavern-keepers’ promises with a grain of salt. In Kingston, for example, in 1837, Segro Carmino advertised his Mansion House Hotel, located on “the principal and most central street,” as an establishment unsurpassed throughout the colony for the excellence of its appointments. But according to a traveller who stayed there, the apartments were most notable for the view they commanded “of the pigs, dogs and chickens in the back yard; three old sleighs [and] a goodly pile of firewood.” Similarly, the promised comfort of the parlour and sitting room in reality amounted to only a few “broken sofas, cracked chairs, and a fragment of dubious-looking carpet.” Surely other taverns that boasted about their classy amenities and services in newspaper advertisements likewise proved to be bitter disappointments in reality.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, the proprietors of the principal, or would-be principal, houses represented them as sites of fashionability, and, as Chapter 6 will reveal, relatively well-off colonists embraced and pursued their promise. To be the best hotel west of New York, or, if your claims were more modest, the best hotel west of Montreal – or, at the newly settling Lake Huron Shore, the best hotel west of London, Canada West – was a distinction that tavern-keepers avidly sought. They located on prominent sites, they emphasized fine cuisine over substantial fare and style as much as comfort, and they invited the “gentility” inside. And they made sure that patrons who wanted to maintain a degree of social distance could do so.

By the 1840s it was routine for the principal houses to make “private parlours and suites of rooms” available to “families and others.” They set parts of their buildings, such as the whole west wing of the North American Hotel in Toronto, aside for family groups. Principal-house keepers willingly catered to the desires of “private parties.” They made sure that “ladies and gentlemen” knew they could be “accommodated with well-furnished and pleasant rooms for any time they may wish to tarry.” Clearly, it was possible, if you had enough money, to stay aloof from the barroom throng in the principal taverns. Although gender had much to do with the patterns of tavern patronage, by promising “families” room in the principal houses, tavern-keepers made sure they continued to court the custom of those with money, particularly the emerging colonial middle class.<sup>46</sup>

Certainly, the many-roomed, multi-storey houses of the 1840s and beyond were facilitated by population growth, economic development, more efficient travel, and the spread of settlement. The same impulse that caused Donaldson to create different social zones for different kinds of interaction also played a role. The principal houses were more successful at achieving the division, however, for they did more to attract parties of the gentry and the well-heeled

and they abetted them in their desire to be exclusive. And to a degree, principal house prices limited access to the accommodations. For example, in 1817 a printer decided not to go to Walker's, "the head inn" in the Kingston marketplace, because of its "extravagant" charges. In 1841 a government clerk found the weekly rate of \$9.00 at the Sydenham Hotel, also in Kingston, "out of sight."<sup>47</sup>

However, the principal taverns never quite became the havens of gentrified life that their advertisements proclaimed. Their very size worked against it. The well-advertised scale of dining and barrooms meant that they were designed to welcome far more people than the colony's small upper crust could supply. The 60 ft. x 22 ft. billiard room in the Eberts' Hotel could never have been supported by gentlemen alone. In fact, genteel patrons constantly complained about the riff-raff in public dining rooms. For example, one gentleman, employed in the government service and long accustomed to life in the colony, grumbled about the "vulgar set" eating breakfast near him at Barton Philips' National Hotel in 1840s Kingston.<sup>48</sup> And anybody could get a drink as cheaply in the bar of a principal tavern as anywhere else, even though better stocks were on hand for those with more to pay. Travellers and settlers tell us over and over that the barrooms of the principal taverns were always socially mixed. One observer listed tailors, barbers, strolling players, quack doctors, hackney coachmen, shoemakers, and lawyer's clerks as patrons; another noted the "large proportion of the male population of every city and town" that resorted to them and added, "it is not regarded in the slightest degree derogatory to the character for any gentleman to take refreshment" there.<sup>49</sup> There is no reason to think that the principal houses were really less public than the smaller taverns dotting the side streets. But with two or three storeys of relatively private space in parlours, sitting rooms, and bedchambers stacked above the barroom ceiling, the whole feel of the principal taverns was different. Not only was it feasible to remain apart from the concourse of public life in them, but many were positively invited to do so.

This impulse to separation, seen first in the Georgian taverns of the 1790s, reached its fullest material expression in the 1850s when something no longer definable as a tavern appeared on the urban landscape. The best hotel in Upper Canada was Toronto's Rossin House, which was purchased by the Rossin brothers in 1856. The Rossin House represented the height of publican splendour in the colony; it was "one of the chief architectural ornaments of the city," replete with "white pressed brick" and "substantial dressings of Ohio freestone, handsome iron pillars, cornices, and balconies." It was a massive structure of five storeys that accommodated five hundred guests in over two hundred rooms, "exclusive of reading-rooms and the principal parlours." It cost \$2.50 a day to stay there (excluding wine and washing); by comparison, in the same period it cost \$1.00 a day to stay at the Wel-

lington Hotel, a comfortable principal house on the Toronto waterfront. The Rossin House had

two private entrances ... an extensive reading room, lighted by a large and handsome glass dome ... fifteen elegantly furnished stores on the ground floor ... a long row of parlours and reception rooms, the principal of which is a ladies parlour ... a dining room 100 feet by 38, and 18 feet high adjoining which is the carving room, dish room, dessert room ... three staircases, two for the use of guests and the third for servants ... a very extensive bar-room, with billiard table underneath ... a barber's shop and gentlemen's bathing room containing ten baths ... and a book and news depot where one may obtain local and European journals, or handsomely bound volumes which address alike the students of light or abstruse literature.<sup>50</sup>

Nobody would have referred to the Rossin House as a tavern, and its presence was part of the evolving public-house trade in the colony. Where many public houses in the 1850s remained recognizable to late eighteenth-century eyes, the Rossin House and others in its image marked a distinctly new style in public entertainment that left the pre-industrial tavern behind.

In the 1850s we glimpse, too, an early form of the historiographically well-known working-class saloon, or tavern.<sup>51</sup> Inside, working people drinking together in public space presaged fuller expressions of working-class collectivity. For instance, in Toronto down by the new Grand Trunk Railway line, one block west of the Toronto Grey & Bruce Railway yards and two blocks west of the Northern Railway station, Patrick Roach ran a tavern at the north corner of Tecumseth and Douro Streets. Not surprisingly, he called it the Railway Inn. Nearby workers thronged to steel and iron works and busy commercial wharves. Roach's account book survives for the years 1855 to 1859, listing regulars and less frequent callers. Some we know only from entries like the following: "Thomas the blacksmith," "Tim that boards at Cacey's," "Brock's man," "James, fare man," "the watchman," "Dave engineer," and "the man that works at Northern." Such entries nevertheless evoke the patronage of the house. Like Philips in Bastard Township, Roach enjoyed the custom of his neighbours. His place was the local for working men and working women. The majority of the men, by far, were labourers: several were railwaymen and a few were carpenters and blacksmiths. There was one (railway) clerk among them, along with a police constable and a bacon curer. They all lived within easy walking distance of the tavern. As Chapter 7 discusses, the occupations of three women in Roach's books are suggested in city directories: a dressmaker, a washerwoman, and a boarding-house keeper. They belonged to the same working population as the men who patronized Roach's. The clientele at the Railway Inn and its location in the industrializing

West End mark it as a tavern where public association over drink supported a burgeoning sense of mutual identity among workers.<sup>52</sup>

The Georgian taverns of the 1790s and beyond were built on the need to define, separate, and balance space. They acknowledged the importance of public life by granting full access to it, and they simultaneously validated more exclusive forms of social interaction by incorporating parlours and sitting rooms into their design. The same logic operated in the minor houses, where it was often, if not always, just as possible to indulge in robust public exchange as it was to find a quiet place to be a family, a woman, or in select company. After all, it was because of their unremitting spatial promiscuity that elite travellers and ordinary colonists alike left one-room frontier taverns behind them as quickly as possible. There is a hint, too, that less desirable minor-house patrons (such as the Mississauga at Finkle's) were shunted away from the public trade and into rooms such as the kitchen. The principal houses distinguished themselves by the heightened degree of fashionable selectivity that they supported. There were limits to their success, to be sure, but what is most salient is that the material setting of the principal houses was structured by an impulse to balance public life with desires for a degree of social separation. The diary of one early tavern-keeper, explored in the next chapter, discloses the ways that the men and women who frequented taverns, and especially those who lived inside them, negotiated what was public space, what was private, and how what happened in between affected each.