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for Savings**

Established 1819

**A Mutual Savings Bank
where interest is allowed
from Day of Deposit to
Day of Withdrawal**

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1917-21 Westminster Street
Olneyville Square**

**EMPIRE-ABORN BRANCH
Between Westminster and Washington Sts.**

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5 to 8:30. Olneyville Branch open
Saturday evenings also.**

"The Old Stone Bank"

HALEY & SYKES CO., PROVIDENCE

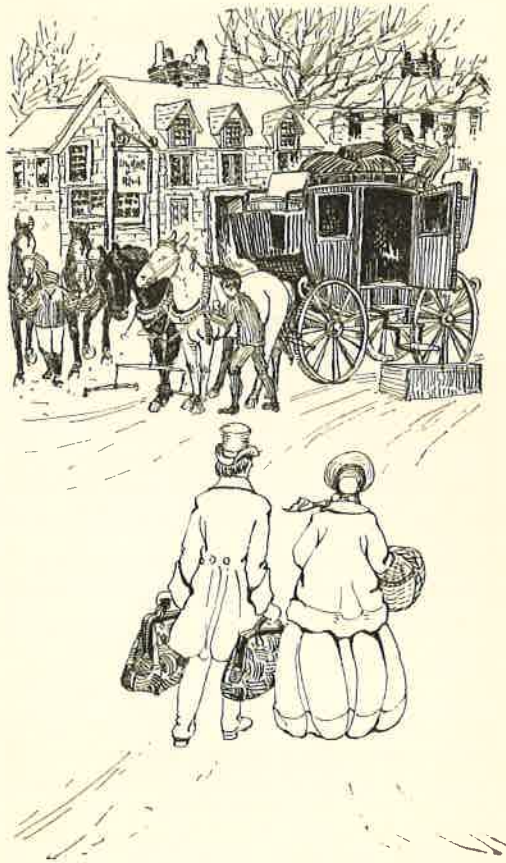
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**Old Tavern and
Stagecoach
Days**



Presented by

"The Old Stone Bank"

Providence, R. I.



Old Tavern and Stagecoach Days

MANY today can remember the last of the stagecoaches or stages which carried mail and travelers to the rural towns. With the establishment of the rural free delivery mail service, these lumbering stages gradually disappeared. But the great coach and six that followed the post road between cities went out with the coming of the railroad. And, within a few years, when the sound of the coach horn no longer echoed from hill to hill and the rattle of wheels and pounding of hooves had died away, the tavern also passed into oblivion.

The tavern was usually located near the meeting house, being a close second in importance, and was variously known as a tavern, inn, or ordinary. Many things the meeting house lacked the other supplied—warmth in winter, coolness in summer, comfort for the body (and perhaps for the spirit as well). But when people began to neglect the church entirely for the tavern, the church elders passed laws to make them attend the former. “Frozen out” of one, they were soon “frozen” in the other. Yet, when a meeting house or church was to be raised, an inn was decidedly necessary, for no great building could ever be raised without hot toddy and rum.

In fact, taverns were the only places where liquors could be bought and sold. They were licensed and forced to maintain order. Eleazer Arnold, of Providence, received his license in 1710, but he was not the first, for, in 1674, John Whipple had been allowed to "keepe a house of Inter-tainment." The doors of the early taverns were open to all except apprentices, negroes, and Indians, although the last were gradually admitted.

These first taverns did not have the guest facilities which we usually associate with the name. Whipple's ordinary had only two rooms and no place to put up travelers. However, it did have "pewter basins, quart pots, pint pots, gillpots, glass bottles, and other dishes," which were much more in demand than "old fether beds," broken "bedstuds," and "old Red Coverlets." In Boston there were a few taverns with all the spaciousness of a mansion. These had separately furnished rooms, each with a name of its own. However, the majority by far were like the Whipple inn. And they grew in numbers like weeds, until, by 1696, they had already begun to be denounced as a bad influence. While there was little show about them, they actually did a great deal for travelers. Bills were figured according to capacity to pay, and guests received all the comforts and attention of a private home. Dr. Johnson was reputed to have said, "No sir, there is nothing which has yet been contrived by man

by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn."

The tavernkeepers themselves were a picturesque lot. Usually stout, good-natured, good-looking, and well-dressed, they were prominent public figures, enjoying all sorts of confidences, public and private, leading the singing in the meeting houses, running ferries, teaching the children of travelers, serving on the legislature or town council, acting as recruiting officers in times of war, as storekeepers, surveyors, or storytellers. Some were frugal and thrifty, some mean and penurious, while others were extravagant. Some were of bitter dispositions, but, as a rule, they were jolly enough.

Justice Eleazer Arnold held court in his tavern on the Mendon road near Lincoln Woods. Here was one place, at least, where the Indians found a warm welcome. He had in his tavern, when his belongings were reckoned up, the "old bed the Indians used to Lie on." Whether this is meant in the same sense as in the story told of William Penn and the Indians is not known. In that case it was humorously said that he and the Indians used to retire to the house and lie and talk for hours, Penn doing the talking and the Indians the lying.

Henry Bowen, who operated a famous tavern in Barrington before the Revolution, was a great public man, serving as storekeeper, Sunday constable, moderator, tax assessor and collector, and recruiting officer. Thomas Fenner, a keeper of a tavern in

Neutaconconit, was a major, a justice of the peace, a storekeeper, and noted surveyor.

One of the most distinctive features of the old tavern was its sign. Always conspicuous, even when it simply consisted of a rude board with the painted name, it stuck out from the side of the tavern itself, or hung from a nearby tree. Signs themselves originated in Greek and Roman days, and from the latter the English derived the tavern symbol, the "bush." An ordinance of Louis XIV of France read: "Tavernkeepers must put up synboards and a bush." The names on these signboards on the colonial taverns were of all sorts, copied in many cases from those of England, and ranging from the "White Horse," "Crown," "Boar," to "Shakespeare's Head" and the "Golden Ball Inn" of Providence.

"Training days" were the busiest for innkeepers. In the days prior to the Revolution all males had to practice arms at least once a week, usually on Saturday. In Providence it was "ordered that those farms which are one mile off the town alone shall have liberty to leave one man at home on the trayneing dayes." This privilege was allowed as a means of protection against prowling Indians. Because tavernkeepers in many cases were also military officers, they were sometimes accused of ordering drills to increase their tavern trade. Other particular days of importance in the life of the taverns were market days, when the farmers from out of town regaled them-

selves after their trading, and Ordinance Days, held for new ministers.

But what of the taverns themselves? How were they arranged within and what sort of cheer did they offer? Of first importance was the great room. A huge fireplace almost filled one whole side (that of Eleazer Arnold was especially noteworthy). Here the huge logs burned fiercely in winter, throwing a wealth of warmth into the room, but in summer the fireplace was filled with green shrubs. The floor of the room was of hard oak, sanded and polished smooth and white. This was an especial duty of the colonial housewife. Scattered about were chests, chairs, benches, settees, and stools. The ceiling was usually low-studded, with great hand-hewn beams. The bar, perhaps the most important adjunct, stood in one corner, although it was sometimes in the form of an adjoining buffet. Hanging by the fireplace was the flip-iron, known also as "hottle, loggerhead, and flip-dog" and indispensable in the concoction of many favorite beverages. This instrument was heated and plunged into liquors to give them a peculiar, bitter and dearly loved flavor. It was often broken during repeated heatings and had to be sent to the blacksmith for repair. Henry Bowen of Barrington derived much popularity from his punch, prepared in a "Large Defiance punch bowl." Another favorite drink was flip or battered flip, made of beer and a beaten egg, stirred well with a hot flip-iron, and brought to a finish

with a dash of rum. But there were many popular New England drinks, such as punch, cider, strong beer, porter, grog, port, sherry, toddy, claret, and rum. The most common was cider, first originated by William Blackstone.

All sorts of entertainment was offered in addition to liquid refreshment. Here, all kinds of strange captive animals, monstrosities, and the like were exhibited, for the old tavernkeeper was a born showman and knew how to draw a crowd. At the tavern, too, gathered many of the old and young to dance the old square dances and the minuets. The music supplied by a viol, flute, fiddle, or spinnet was weak, but once the spirit of the gathering was aroused, the singing voices carried on the tunes.

Thus, in nearly every respect, the taverns were the center of town and community life. Roger Williams held meetings in the Mowry Tavern, built in 1655 at the north end of the city. Before the Revolution the taverns were the meeting places for those who discussed revolt. At Peleg Arnold's Inn, in Smithfield, minute men were recruited, and Captain Joseph Olney named one of his huge elms in front of his tavern "The Liberty Tree." The Olney Tavern stood at the top of Constitution Hill, and the orator on this occasion was Silas Downing, a leading Providence attorney. At James Sabin's waterfront tavern gathered the men who set out to burn the "Gaspee," and General Prescott, after his capture, was taken to David

Arnold's Inn in Warwick. "Pitt's Head" and "White Horse," famous taverns of Newport, were first recruiting stations for the patriots and then the quarters for the English and Hessians during the occupation of Newport.

In stagecoach days the taverns took on a new importance, for they became booking places for all travelers and mail. Crowds gathered to greet the arrival of the stagecoach, curious to learn news of other States and outlying districts.

But the days of the stagecoach are gone. The clouds of dust, the roar and rattle, the plunging horses, the coachman's shouts, the blare of the horn, and the bustling about, building up the fire, bringing out porter and punch, unloading of baggage and passengers, the care of the horses, questions asked and answered, all the general excitement and confusion are gone and with them the tavern days, the last days of real Colonial romance and quaintness.

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