

Taverns and Inns

From its earliest days, places for rest and refreshment have been part of Brighton's history. Orringh Stone's tavern on East Avenue, begun in 1792, welcomed travelers as well as local folks seeking a drink, a game of checkers, or the latest news. Soon Stone's tavern wasn't the only provider of fellowship as taverns sprung up in the village of Tryon, Allyn's Creek, and west Brighton. Gideon Cobb opened a tavern at his big brick house on Monroe Avenue near Highland Avenue. Oliver Culver's house on East Avenue had a tavern as well as a large second floor ballroom. All of these public houses were open and flourishing by 1830.

An early nineteenth century tavern was like a bed-and-breakfast of today – overnight accommodations in a private house that also provided meals. Although conditions at a frontier tavern would not measure up to today's standards, for early travelers they provided a place to stay indoors, away from the possibility of encountering wolves if camping outdoors. Indeed, wolves were considered such a menace that in 1814 the town of Brighton enacted a law that that paid \$5.00 for every wolf pelt brought to a town officer. That's about \$200 in today's currency.

At Stone's Tavern and similar places, one did not rent a room for the night, nor even a separate bed. Travelers were accustomed to sleeping in the same bed with strangers, gender being the only standard. Single men stayed in the tavern room, single women in the parlor-bedroom. Most two-person beds of that era featured a straw-filled tick over a network of interlaced ropes, giving meaning to the phrase "sleep tight." Sagging ropes meant a hammock-like sleep with both people rolling to the middle of the bed. The straw-filled ticks were emptied every year and refilled with fresh straw. Bedsheets were changed occasionally but not often enough to prevent bedbugs and fleas, according to the accounts of early travelers. Washing was accomplished with a basin and pitcher of water. Toilet facilities were outside in a small wooden building that could be picked up and moved to a new location when the pit beneath was full.

Without knowing when travelers would arrive at a country tavern, in the age before telephones and even telegraphs, the tavern keeper would need to have food on hand and large quantities of alcoholic beverages. People shied away from drinking water as they associated it with sickness so even children drank hard cider. Orringh Stone's orchard provided abundant apples for eating and drinking. A popular drink of the time was flip. According to an early recipe, one mixed ale, beer, and rum in a pitcher, often with eggs or cream to thicken the drink, and a bit of sugar or molasses. A red-hot poker was plunged into the mix, making the drink frothy and warm.

Early taverns were also community meeting places. Men went to a tavern to hear the latest news or even read the latest newspaper. Taproom walls contained notices of land sales, letters awaiting pick up at the local post office, and upcoming meetings. The tavern was often the place where annual town meetings took place, their location and size being convenient to most residents.

In Brighton, Orringh Stone's tavern still stands at 2370 East Avenue and is open to the public. One can experience the life of the early tavern and perhaps be thankful that Holiday Inns were invented. Still, the 1869 reminiscence of an early pioneer conveys the welcome awaiting at "...Major Stone's tavern, whose old sign hung creaking in the wind on the corner of that old open shed near by a full half mile from any house in 1812..."