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man,” which generally meant a man had accumulated plenty of money; in 1771 and 1772 deeds, he was accorded the elevated title of “Esquire.” According to the History of the Reed Family (1861), this Robert was the gaoler in Amherst for some years. Matthew Patten (1719-1795) of Bedford, N. H., recounts in his diary an incident in March 1770 when his brother, who had gotten into a legal pickle, was taken “by force” to Amherst where he “lodged at Capt. Read’s” while the free Matthew spent the night at someone else’s. It sure would make sense that the prisoner stayed in gaol rather than an inn.

Historical Mystery: So where was Robert Read’s tavern/inn in Souhegan West/ Amherst, N. H.? My theory is that Read’s tavern – which would also have been his dwelling house – was located at 232 Boston Post Road, just a tad under 1 mile south of the Village Common, from which it was reached via Court-house Road in the 18th century. In July 1772 Read sold the place for 373 pounds 6 shillings 8 pence to Joshua Atherton, Esquire, the newly appointed judge of probate of the new county of Hillsborough. Keeping in mind that it is unknown how big the house was when built and how big it was in 1772 when sold, it is nevertheless tempting to believe that its use as a tavern could explain its commodious size of two stories. According to local lore (meaning Emma B. Locke), the building that stood next to the house when owned by Atherton was the first jail! (It was moved across the road in 1927 to 233 BPR where it stands today.)

Hildreth’s and Smith’s

The leading taverns in Amherst in the three decades from roughly 1765 to 1795 were in the Village, namely those of Ephraim Hildreth (1735-c.1815) at 18 Jones Road and Jonathan Smith (1735-1795) at 3 Church Street (since moved to 21/23 Middle Street). They are significant for their longevity, the primary occupation of both men being innholder.

When Ephraim Hildreth of Litchfield, a husbandman (farmer), bought 60 acres for 100 pounds in September 1760, the very year the town was incorporated, his site across from the first meeting house must have seemed the ideal location for a tavern. Presumably Hildreth built the house at the intersection of Mack Hill and Jones Roads in short order; he married around this time too and their first child was born in Sept. 1762. Although local tradition (based on assertion by historian John Farmer in Historical Sketch of Amherst, 1820; repeated by E. D. Boylston in 1860 poem and by Secomb in History of Amherst, 1883, p. 629) claims that this was the first tavern in Amherst, this has not been substantiated. In fact, his name could not be found among tavern licensees in Provincial court records of 1755 to 1760. The earliest record found for this tavern is from March 1763, when the town fathers adjourned public meeting in the unheated meetinghouse

“for one half hour to the house of Mr. Ephraim Hildreth, innholder.” (Ironically, just one year earlier, at the third annual town meeting, a vote passed “to prohibit persons that have licensed houses from selling spirituous liquors on the Lord’s day to the Inhabitants of this town, or to any persons that constantly attend the public worship of God in this town,” there being a fine for every half gill of liquor and every pint of cider sold. Drunkenness on Sundays was not tolerable – but watering the judge and jury evidently was acceptable.) A few months later a new process for warning town meetings was implemented: notices were posted at the house of Ephraim Hildreth. At town meetings of Amherst’s first decade, Hildreth was chosen for the offices of surveyor of lumber and pound keeper. Some years later, around 1782, he would become a militia captain. The inn was filled with children, most of them girls. When his wife Elizabeth nee Ellenwood died in 1784 at age 44, the youngest of her ten children was just 16 months old; Capt. Hildreth had this tribute carved on her gravestone: “She was a woman Generally Belov’d and of a Hospitable Disposition a Loving wife a tender mother & kind neighbor.”

Jonathan Smith Sr., a cooper from Danvers, Mass., arrived in town with wife and young son in 1766 and bought 126 acres abutting the north side of the Common, the entire length of Church Street and beyond. Was it incredible luck or foresight that Smith built his new house in the Village that would become the shire town just a few years after his purchase?! The very existence of two fine, commodious taverns right in the center surely helped Amherst succeed in its bid to become the county seat (that, and the way the good Rev. Wilkins died Merrimack and its “uneasy” people to give his own hometown an advantage). Being county seat meant court sessions in town, which meant a regular influx of temporary people, mostly men, “tarrying” in town and of course spending money here. The first court sessions of the new county were held in 1771 – in Smith’s tavern rather than in the meetinghouse, newly designated as county courthouse. Smith may have influenced the choice by offering half an acre, within 10 rods of his dwelling house, for the county gaol (yup, at the end of Old Jailhouse Road), which John Goffe of Derryfield, in his capacity as president of the Court of General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, purchased in Jan. 1772. The new meetinghouse, completed in 1774, was located down on the Plain just a stone’s throw from Smith’s tavern. The old building, serving as courthouse, remained across from Hildreth’s tavern until 1788; then it was moved down to the Plain, right next to Smith’s. Ah, location, location.

Local taverns also served an important governmental function in the second half of the 18th century as the venue for collecting county excise taxes and for auctioning off



Robert Read-Joshua Atherton House at 232 Boston Post Road. Robert Read (1720-1803) was an innholder in Souhegan West in 1759 and in Amherst in the 1760s, so it’s likely that this house was his tavern, one of the earliest in Amherst. In 1772, Col. Read sold the place to Joshua Atherton, Esq. (1737-1809).

land for unpaid back-taxes. The officials apparently avoided favoritism by taking turns among them from year to year. Important public notices would be posted in taverns, but (fortunately for researchers 2+ centuries hence) notices also appeared in newspapers to reach nonresident landowners. The public venue of land for unpaid taxes was held in 1766 at “the House of Ephraim Hildreth, Innholder in Amherst” (announced in 8 Sept. 1766 Boston Gazette and Country Journal); in 1767 at “the House of Capt. Robert Read, Innholder in Amherst” (5 June 1767 New Hampshire Gazette of Portsmouth and 22 June 1767 Boston Post Boy); in 1769 at “the Dwelling House of Mr. Jonathan Smith, Innholder in Amherst” (17 Oct. 1769 Essex Gazette, Salem, Mass.); and in 1770 at “the Dwelling House of Ephraim Hildreth, Innholder, in Amherst” (1 June 1770 New Hampshire Gazette). A deed at the Hillsborough County Registry dated January 1779 shows that “Ephraim Hildreth of Amherst, Gentleman” took advantage of such a convenient sale to invest in some real estate, the grantor being the Town of Amherst Tax Collector.

The wonderfully detailed, fascinating “Diary of Matthew Patten of Bedford, N. H., 1754-1788” (published 1903, online archive.org) logs his regular trips to Amherst on legal business as a rural magistrate and judge of probate, giving further evidence of early Amherst taverns (though he never used that term). In Aug. 1760, Patten went to Amherst to take some affidavits for a widow and “tarried all night at Enns Reads.” In May 1767, he tarried over night at Mr. Heldreth’s [sic] where he had gone to be a witness in a lawsuit. From 1772 to early 1780s, when he attended court sessions, he

frequented both landlord Hildreth’s and landlord Smith’s, often paying tabs at both on one visit. He might lodge at one place but have “half a bowl of tody” at the other. Although Patten was (usually) paid for his services, it sure seems to have been more a matter of breaking even than making a profit. In July 1773, he carried along two salmon he caught the day before and “Smith had one and Cutler [a Mack Hill storekeeper] had the other.” In July 1775, when he went to Amherst to “judge Esquire Whiting for his being a Tory,” he “took two salmon that weighed 20 pounds [and] sold one to Mr. Hildreth and gave him the other.” Patten would also purchase items at Means’s store.

Capt. Hildreth sold his place in Oct. 1789 to his son-in-law Phineas Jones (1758-1799), at that time a husbandman and shoemaker of Lyndeboro. Jones continued to run the house as a tavern, 1795-6 being the last year he obtained a tavern license. Hildreth, whose occupation was designated “gentleman” in the deed, moved with his second wife & kids, first to Lyndeboro, having swapped land with Jones, then to Vermont.

At a time when newspapers usually only recorded date, age and place of death, the death notice for Jonathan Smith called him “a noted innholder and an honest man” (3 April 1795 Amherst Journal and the N. H. Advertiser), truly an accolade. His widow obtained a tavern license for a couple more years, but by then there was stiff new competition from two newly built tavern houses in the Village, so their younger son made the place his home. The Smith and Jones taverns thus closed within a few years of each other, shortly before the end of the 18th century.

Credits & Sources:

I am indebted to the following for sharing their research: Jackie Marshall for deeds of Hildreth and for searching Provincial court records 1755-1760 for tavern licenses, and Al Patnaude for deeds of Smith and for searching town records p. 471-500 for tavern licenses 1792-1799. “The Four Houses of the Read-Atherton Complex” by Charles L. Bacon (1924-1992), HSA Newsletter, 4/1991, identifies house owned by Robert Read and location of “first jail.” E. D. Boylston’s Historical Sketch of the Hillsborough County Congresses Held at Amherst, N. H., 1774 & 1775, published 1884, gives tavern licensees 1771-1778 with gaps. Secomb’s History of Amherst.

Arts & Entertainment

Hollis Fine Art Festival Applications Now Available

HOLLIS - Applications for the 6th Annual Hollis Fine Art Festival, which will take place on Saturday and Sunday, October 15th and 16th, are now available. All major mediums i.e. oils, watercolors, acrylics etc. are represented. The photography category, however, is full at this time.

Due to the popularity of this show it is recommended to apply as soon as possible in order to reserve a space. To receive an application or further information, contact Steve Previte at 465-2647 or Email steve@previtefineart.com.

Hillsborough Area Artisans 8th Annual Open Studio Tour

Get a behind -the-scenes look at the working studios of members of the Hillsborough Area Artisans during their Eighth annual Open Studio tour September 17 - 18 from 10 am to 5 pm. In addition to the individual studios in and around Hillsborough, other artists will display their work in the Gallery at Well Sweep in historic Hillsborough Center and the Purling Beck Grange in East Washington.

Meet the artists; see how they work; discuss their inspirations; and choose a special item to grace your home or wardrobe. This juried group of artists work in many media including painting, iron work, wood, basketry, pewter, glass, jewelry, fiber sculpture and more. A map

of this self-guided free event can be picked up at any of the participating art studios or by contacting the group at hlsbo_rt@gsinet.net or www.HillsboroughArtisans.com

There will also be a Public Reception at the Gallery at Well Sweep on Saturday, September 17 from 6 -8 pm. Refreshments will be served and there will be a special exhibit honoring the memory of Ray Bliss Rich, a former member of the art group who passed away earlier this year. Ray specialized in Sumi painting and handmade paper and was a key member of the HAA art group and the League of NH Craftsmen.

Please join us for this very special event.

Paintings by Joanna Draugsvold

The Jaffrey Civic Center is pleased to announce an exhibit of paintings by Joanna Draugsvold in the 1st floor Auditorium-Gallery now through September 24.

Joanna’s background in the arts take her from childhood in New Jersey, New York City, through college at U. of Colorado, then Washington, D.C., and finally at U of Connecticut. She has had many exhibits, including The Copley Society’s Member Show and The Fitchburg Art Museum’s Regional Artist’s Show (where she was awarded honorable mention for her painting, Cinque Terre, Italy in 2003), and has won numerous awards.

Joanna taught fine arts at Cushing Academy, where she was the creative advisor for the Cushing Academy School Girl Project, teaching seven teens how to construct a life-sized bronze sculpture out of clay, a complement to The School Boy Statue, both of which now stand on School Street in Ashburnham. She presently teaches art at the Winchendon School in Winchendon, MA, and teaches children, teens and adults drawing, painting and sculpture on weekends.

Her style of painting has grown from realist to impressionist in na-

ture, and she currently works in varied canvas sizes ranging from 8”x 10” to large works of 4’x 5’. In recent years she has been most influenced by the work of Gerhard Richter, as she has developed soft, diffused edges while still maintaining a strong, independent light source.

Joanna frequently travels to Europe to study art and visit with family and friends who live there. She continues to paint landscapes and cityscapes of European countries, including Italy, France, Spain and England, along with her work in portraiture, employing primarily oil on canvas but also painting in acrylics and water color media. Her original paintings can be found in numerous private collections in the United States and Europe and can be viewed on the web at www.draugsvold.com. She works by commission for portraits and is represented by Lorica Artworks Gallery in Andover, Massachusetts for her landscapes and garden scenes and The North End Gallery in Boston for her Italian paintings. Her recent paintings can be viewed on the web at www.draugsvold.com

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