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Taverns played a key role in the social and political life of the United States after the Revolution. As public gathering places, taverns allowed for informal political discussion and formal meetings of political groups. Studies of the role taverns played during this time have been written centering on Boston and Philadelphia, however no such study exists for the tavern culture of New York. Due to New York's status as one of the largest cities in the early republic, and because the evolution of tavern culture in New York differs from Boston and Philadelphia, this study will be beneficial in illustrating a part of urban and political history that has remained underexposed. The post-Revolutionary period of American history marked great changes to the political system, from the adoption of the Constitution and the Federalist – Anti-Federalist debate, to the rise of the party system and machine politics. As political machines rose and party organization increased, they began to conduct their business in private buildings, and the need to meet in taverns ceased. This development forced taverns to change from public spaces of political participation to centers of social—not political—gatherings. How did these new developments in the American political system affect the change of taverns from civic to social institutions? In my thesis I intend to answer this question, while also making the distinction between upper class and lower class tavern culture, each expressing itself in different ways.

FROM CIVIC TO SOCIAL: NEW YORK'S  
TAVERNS, INSIDE AND OUTSIDE  
THE POLITICAL SPHERE

by

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## CHAPTER I

### THE TAVERN EXPERIENCE IN EARLY NEW YORK

*'Tis true, drinking does not **improve** our Faculties,  
but it enables us to **use** them.*

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Benjamin Franklin, Silence Dogood No. 12, 1722

On May 6, 1811, a day marked by overcast weather and brief intermittent showers, members of the Tammany Society, a group founded as a fraternal order but which had slowly transformed into a political organization, laid the foundation of what would be their new home, located at the corner of Frankfurt and Nassau Streets in New York City. The celebration was a very public affair, marked by a procession of Tammany Society members, New York militia, and “citizens of distinction.” The procession wound its way through Chatham Street, Pearl Street and State Street, up Broadway and Chatham Row before reaching the site of the group’s new meeting place, known as Tammany Hall. Upon arriving at the site, the sun broke just long enough for an oration to be made dedicating the new building, at which point the members of the society adjourned to eat a dinner provided by tavernkeeper and Tammany Society member Abraham Martling. The celebration, lasting for most of the day and into the night, was described later as being held “with a degree of splendor seldom witnessed in our city.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Splendid Celebration,” *Columbian Phenix*, June 1, 1811, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] Providence, RI, 1811.



The procession which began the day's festivities began at the old "wigwam," the Tammany Society's official meeting place—Martling's Tavern, owned and operated by Abraham Martling. The procession route itself went around in a circle, beginning and ending at the same tavern. In the years prior to the construction of the new Tammany Hall, Martling's Tavern was an integral part of the Tammany Society's operations, and it was the place where Tammany grew from a nonpolitical fraternal order to a formidable player in the New York political scene, whose power cemented its place in American history. Although Tammany Hall grew into the powerful political machine of the latter half of the nineteenth century, its roots would always be in Martling's Tavern, where members ate and drank while setting the foundation for political domination. The celebration on May 6th did more than mark the move from Martling's Tavern to Tammany Hall; it marked what would be the end of an important period of early American political culture, with the tavern at the center. During the post-revolutionary period, taverns were meeting places for the political societies and parties of the early Republic, making political decision-making part of the public sphere. After the symbolic move from Martling's to Tammany Hall, taverns would still remain an important part of the public sphere, but their roles would change: from hosting both civic meetings and social gatherings, to hosting only the social. This transition, from civic to social, marked the beginning of modern American politics as we know it today, and is the focus of this work.

The American political system was born in the taverns of early America, but a few decades after the Revolution ended, that system outgrew the tavern, which no longer

suited the needs and desires of the political elite. Because the post-revolutionary period is marked politically by great changes and the entrance of new players into the political scene, there is no one single factor which forced public politics out of the tavern and into a more private sphere. All of the factors, however, were creations of the new American political system: the emergence of the party system, political machines, and temperance societies all contributed to the end of the tavern as the center of political life in New York after the revolution.

In order to understand the intersection between political and social life which I intend to explore with this work, it is first necessary to understand the realities of tavern culture before the American Revolution, and how it brought about the changes which would ultimately facilitate the tavern's transition from civic to social. Taverns are counted among the most important places of the colonial period, as an integral part of the public sphere. The basic shape and structure of the colonial tavern had its roots in Old Europe, where drinking institutions were as important to the French, British and Germans as they came to be to Americans, and by the beginning of the nineteenth century the American thirst for alcohol had surpassed that of their European counterparts. By the 1820s it was estimated that twelve million American men, women and children consumed 72 million gallons of distilled spirits, a per capita rate of 6 gallons per person.<sup>2</sup> Taverns offered the perfect place, a mixture of meeting hall and social center, and

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<sup>2</sup> W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic, An American Tradition* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1979), 11. Rorabaugh states that Americans did not out-drink the most affluent of European citizens, but indicates that in a survey of ten European countries, only France had a higher per capita rate of consumption than the United States during the early nineteenth century.

citizens in America and Europe utilized them. The French *salon*, where intellectuals would meet to discuss politics and other stately matters, would later influence taverns such as Martling's, where the political players of the day came not so much to drink a glass of Madeira but to discuss political strategy in the days of struggle between Federalists and Anti-Federalists. The English public house would have its own influence upon another sphere of American tavern culture. Remembered characteristically as a neighborhood watering hole crammed with all sorts of citizens looking for refreshment and interesting conversation, the influences of these pubs could be seen in lower class taverns, which did not concern themselves with the meetings of political societies, but rather with providing food, drink, lodging and most importantly a meeting place to the multitude of average New Yorkers. To meet the needs of the burgeoning "alcoholic republic," taverns were prevalent in the city and throughout the countryside. In America as in Europe, the tavern acted as a public meeting place for doing business, hosting travelers, discussing goings on about town and abroad, and socializing with friends and strangers alike.<sup>3</sup>

During the early colonial period in North America, the tavern fulfilled these roles while also acting—in most cases—as a largely egalitarian meeting place. Taverns located

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<sup>3</sup> Sharon Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 4. Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 2-8. David Conroy, *In Public Houses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995), 12-13. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). The work of Habermas has greatly influenced discussion of public meeting places in his writings on the "public sphere." While his work in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* concentrates on the salons, coffee houses and hotels of Europe, Habermas' theories apply to the public sphere in early America, the tavern being the key component of American public interaction.

out in the country served agrarian clientele while also making themselves available to upper class travelers seeking a bed and a meal while on the road. In the urban areas of the colonies, lower class workers, middling artisans and upper class merchants were pushed together in crowded settlements along the waterfront, and in many cases frequented the same establishments.<sup>4</sup> Especially in the case of New York City, which occupied only a small piece of lower Manhattan before the American Revolution, the city had not developed enough yet for the stratified nature of New York society to manifest itself physically in different spheres of control. During the colonial period the inhabitants of New York City were thrown together in an interesting mixture of class, culture, trade and commerce.<sup>5</sup> This was particularly true during the period of Dutch control, when prominent merchants spent their money buying commercial lots and paying for the construction of mills and breweries, rather than building estates. It would not be until the English took control of the New Amsterdam colony that the sprawling estates and manor houses characteristic of pre-Revolutionary New York would become part of the landscape.<sup>6</sup>

From the outset of their existence in North America, taverns underwent a tumultuous reform process, being championed by some as meeting places necessary for

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<sup>4</sup> Anne-Marie Cantwell and Diana diZerega Wall, *Unearthing Gotham: The Archaeology of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 158.

<sup>5</sup> Nan Rothschild, *New York Neighborhoods: The Eighteenth Century* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1990), 107-108. Rothschild states that as the population grew, New York City neighborhoods began to stratify along class lines beginning in the mid-eighteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> Sung Bok Kim, *Landlord and Tenant in New York: Manorial Society, 1664-1775* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 7. After the Dutch had ceded control of New York to England, the city began to stratify economically and large manor houses rose up along the Hudson River. However, Kim identifies three separate areas in which these estates tended to be concentrated: Westchester County immediately north of Manhattan, Kingston, and Albany.

economic and social wellbeing, and attacked by others as permanent safe houses for debauchery and ill living. In their work, Peter Thompson and David Conroy have found both while researching the taverns of Philadelphia and Boston. Thompson demonstrates the nuanced approach taken by Pennsylvania founder William Penn in dealing with taverns, who hoped to see them built as essential parts of the urban landscape, while also drafting legislation that would set up a licensing system to ensure that only the most upstanding citizens would have the opportunity to run taverns in Philadelphia. In Conroy's analysis of Boston tavern culture, he saw a similar relationship between the colonial power structure and local taverns, describing the attempts at control as a "Puritan Assault on Drink and Taverns." In Massachusetts during the colonial period, taverns were allowed as a social necessity, though the Puritan-controlled government and General Court constricted the right to drink in the hopes of preserving the ideals of social purity that Massachusetts colony had been founded upon.<sup>7</sup>

Even from its Dutch beginnings, New York's economy revolved around the tavern and liquor market. In 1648, it was estimated within the New Amsterdam local government—by no less than the Director General, Peter Stuyvesant—that one fourth of the city had been "turned into taverns for the sale of brandy, tobacco, and beer." The ability to supply strong drink made the tavern an important part of the city, but even if the alcohol taverns provided had not been available, the structures themselves would have been integral to the economy of New Amsterdam—as public places for business and exchange. The colonial leaders of New Amsterdam had used the "City tavern" as their

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<sup>7</sup> Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution*, 21-24. Conroy, *In Public Houses*, 12-56.

chief meeting place, changing the name to City Hall in 1653. As the de facto meeting place in the city, the tavern filled many roles as an exchange, market, meeting hall, and hotel.<sup>8</sup>

From its colonial beginnings to the end of the revolutionary period, the egalitarian nature of the tavern changed. This is largely due to the increasing size of the city and its economy. After the British acquired control of New Amsterdam—now New York—from the Dutch, the maritime economy continued to grow. Merchants prospered, acquiring wealth and emerging as an elite upper class distinct from the rest of the population. As this wealthy merchant class grew, a stratified society took shape which could afford larger homes, more refined consumer goods, and better taverns. These wealthy tavern patrons wrote more extensively and left behind estate records which help flesh out details of tavern gatherings and the men who attended them.<sup>9</sup>

One problem that hampers the study of tavern culture is the lack of primary sources for the working class taverns of New York City. The availability of city directories and newspaper accounts of tavern meetings make it possible to flesh out the vital facts about location and ownership, but there are few documents which exist to illustrate the experiences of those who frequented the tavern. This dearth of information on working class taverns reinforces the fact that tavern culture in the early republic split

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Harold C. Syrett, "Private Enterprise in New Amsterdam," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 11 (Oct. 1954): 539. Berthold Fernow (ed.), *The Records of New Amsterdam: From 1653 to 1674 anno Domini* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1897), 49.

<sup>9</sup> Phyllis Whitman Hunter, *Purchasing Identity in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 132. Hunter argues that wealthy merchants in colonial Massachusetts used consumption as a marker of upper class identity. This affluence extended to taverns such as the Bunch of Grapes, which hosted "genteel" dinners for the members of the Charitable Society, an elite group formed to help the poor.

along class lines, which had implications for the balance of power within the city. Elite taverns where the first modern American politicians, met, dined, and entertained guests remain the most written about, thanks to the broadsides and newspaper accounts which were first printed, then preserved to inform further research. Meanwhile, there is almost no record of how the lower classes of New York City saw their interaction in taverns, how they saw their role in the politics of the day or how they felt about the merchant class and its more upscale tavern culture.<sup>10</sup>

As a part of the public sphere, taverns lack traditional written sources, and those that do exist, detailing specific events and the day to day routine of tavern culture, are scattered, making it necessary to look to other less traditional resources to shed light on New York's post-revolutionary tavern culture. Records for most working class taverns have not survived, and little of what transpired from day to day would have been captured on paper. Court records remain a valuable resource, showing the elite attempts to control tavern behavior and the instances in which working class taverngoers broke these rules. In some cases material culture allows us to glimpse the daily life of New Yorkers based on the utensils they used, be it to eat, drink, cook, or work.<sup>11</sup> The intersection between political culture and public life can be expressed through material culture, as seen in ceramic jugs decorated with portraits of founding fathers and other patriotic themes.

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<sup>10</sup> Thompson, *Rum Punch & Revolution*, 121.

<sup>11</sup> Cantwell and Wall, *Unearthing Gotham*, 155-160. Cantwell and Wall illustrate the importance of artifacts to understanding material culture by using the excavation of the King's House Tavern, which burned down in 1706, as an example. The discovery of larger numbers of tobacco pipes at urban taverns than at rural taverns supported the hypothesis that tavern culture within the city was more concerned with socializing and meetings than rural tavern culture, where the large number of ceramic sherds denoted an emphasis on food and drink for travelers.

These pitchers and jugs would have been ideal for serving strong drinks to large numbers of people. These artifacts serve as cultural documents indicating the importance of political hero worship in the early republic.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to material culture, architecture serves as an important non-written resource that can tell us a great deal about tavern culture and the nature of tavern gatherings. After the revolutionary period, taverns in New York split along class lines, and the differences between both types of taverns manifested themselves in physical appearance and layout. During the colonial period, taverns—important as they were to civic life at the time—were architecturally indistinguishable from the buildings around them. This can be attributed to the ease with which taverns could be installed in previously existing homes. Ease of conversion made tavernkeeping a more viable business venture for colonial citizens, however the ability to blend in with its urban surroundings created a problem for the city tavern, which became a liability in a business which thrives by attracting city patrons and travelers. Once converted to a tavern, the interior structure of the tavern created great opportunities for interaction, at the expense of any desire for privacy. With space in the city already at a premium, travelers usually shared sleeping quarters, and space dedicated to socializing and dining became easily crowded as well. Those lodging in taverns could expect cramped quarters no matter where in the city they stayed, however the accommodations in upper class taverns had

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<sup>12</sup> E. McClung Fleming, "Early American Decorative Arts as Social Documents," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 45 No. 2 (Sept. 1958), 279-280.



fewer problems with cramped space, in some cases offering larger and more numerous meeting rooms, of great value to the political groups and societies after the Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

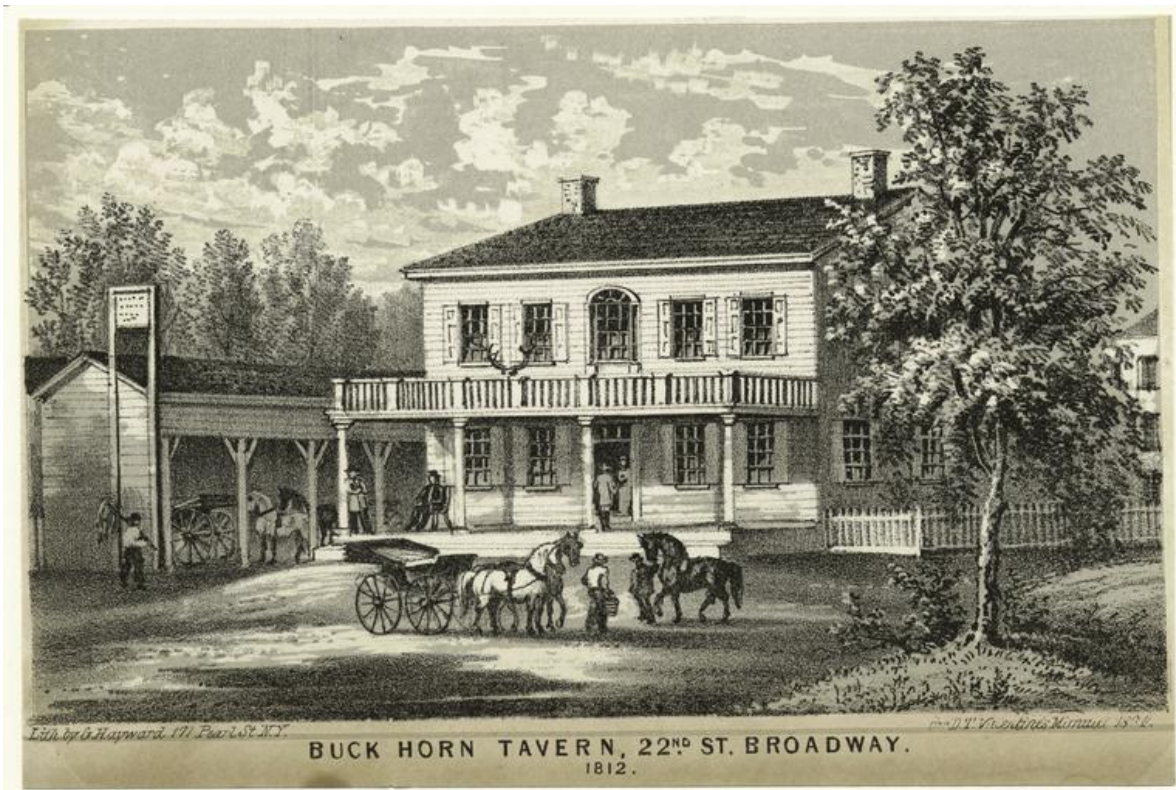


Figure 1: Buck Horn Tavern, 1812. This illustration gives some idea as to the quality of accommodations some taverns could reach. Located on Broadway outside of the city's more concentrated urban area, the Buck Horn and other taverns on Broadway would have been ideally placed for upper class patrons and travelers seeking a place outside the city. Courtesy New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

Unlike in the working class taverns, much more can be ascertained about the day to day happenings of upper class taverns, which were more likely to be used for hosting well-publicized events, covered by newspapers of the day. These events included musical

<sup>13</sup> A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, "A Public House for a New Republic: The Architecture of Accommodation and the American State, 1789-1809," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9 (2003): 54-56.

concerts and operas, tickets for which could be purchased at the tavern. The events were also attended by the city's own elite merchant class, who as powerful citizens with political power, kept more meticulous notes about their meetings. Political and fraternal organizations made it common practice to write reports of the evening's frivolities, listing distinguished guests, complimenting and naming the tavernkeeper who prepared the meal, and in some cases reprinting the list of toasts made. By reading these newspaper reports, it is possible to see the kinds of groups meeting during the post-revolutionary period, which groups met where, who the most important members of the groups were. All of the information in these reports helps flesh out the complex relationships and political culture of New York after the Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

Not all written sources that remain tell the story of the New York elite's taverns. Though newspaper accounts of tavern meetings and copies of toasts tend to favor the larger more respectable groups such as the Tammany Society or the Washington Benevolent Society, other societies in the city founded for the mechanics and artisans of the city held similar meetings and celebrations, which received their own reports in New York newspapers. The General Society of Mechanics of Tradesmen celebrated large events—such as organizational anniversaries and national holidays—at some of the more reputable taverns of the city, such as Fraunces Tavern, where the society met on January 6, 1789. Details of the meeting were printed by the *New-York Weekly Museum* and

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<sup>14</sup> *Commercial Advertiser*, March 17, 1798, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1798. *Commercial Advertiser*, January 5, 1798, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1798. *The Weekly Museum*, December 1, 1798, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1792. "New-York, July 5," *Impartial Gazetteer*, and *Saturday Evening Post*, July 5, 1788, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1788.

included a list of toasts and singled out Samuel Fraunces for providing “an elegant entertainment.” These meetings were celebratory affairs, but there was no mistaking the feelings of those in attendance, who toasted “trade and navigation” and mechanics in general, that they may “ever discover ingenuity in their possessions, and honour in their dealings.”<sup>15</sup>

One of the great benefits of examining the taverns of New York City is to provide a more nuanced understanding of early American urban culture. During the late colonial period and into the era of the Early Republic, New York had two sister cities: Boston, Massachusetts and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. All port cities, all located in the northern half of the colonies, all metropolitan areas with complex economies and stratified social classes, New York, Boston and Philadelphia appear on the surface to be remarkably similar. It might be guessed that a study of tavern culture in one city would inform the tavern culture of other cities. However, New York stands out from Boston and Philadelphia. The key to seeing New York for its differences rather than its similarities lies in its origins as a Dutch colony. Whereas New York—originally New Amsterdam—was settled and built by Dutch settlers seeking to expand colonial holdings, Boston and Philadelphia would both emerge as the seats of power in colonies founded by religious groups, the Puritans in Massachusetts and the Quakers in Pennsylvania.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> “New-York, January 10,” *New York Weekly Museum*, January 10, 1789. American Periodical Series [Online Database] New York, 1789. *The New-York Gazette and General Advertiser*, April 20, 1801, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1801.

<sup>16</sup> Russell Shorto’s book *The Island at the Center of the World* makes a convincing argument for New York’s Dutch origins playing a crucial role in shaping the city after it came under British control in 1664, and he argues that New York’s Dutch past resonated well afterwards. For discussion of Boston and Philadelphia’s ideological roots, see *Winthrop’s Boston: Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630-1649* by Darrett

Being influenced by Dutch entrepreneurs rather than religious splinter sects from England would understandably lead to the creation of a different culture. According to both Conroy and Thompson, the story of popular tavern culture—both in Boston and Philadelphia—revolved around the importance of the tavern as a place to challenge elite authority. For the Puritan leaders of Boston and the Quaker leaders of Philadelphia, this authority meant regulating and controlling the drinking houses of their respective cities to preserve in some way the moral fortitude colonists in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania strived for, and which could be undermined by an overdependence on alcohol.

Dutch taverns in New Amsterdam also had their share of legislation to deal with, but laws were passed largely in order to control the effect taverns had upon the city's economy. Harold Syrett argued in a 1954 article for the *William and Mary Quarterly* that colonial officials in New Amsterdam sought to regulate the local economy to the protests of Dutch officials who believed in allowing free individual enterprise. If indeed Peter Stuyvesant's claim that a quarter of the city was dedicated to the tavern economy is true, then, Syrett argues, taverns received the most legislation. A large portion of this legislation consisted of measures to control revenue and standardize the business of alcohol production and retail. Early laws pertaining to taverns regulated production (citizens could not both brew and sell beer), transportation (alcohol could only be moved by approved, licensed porters) and sale (container sizes and price schedules were set by

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B. Rutman and *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* by Frederick Tolles.

the Director General). Laws specifically controlling tavern behavior and making prohibition of certain activities a prerequisite for licensing would come later.<sup>17</sup>

Taverns in New York, just as in Philadelphia and Boston, were centers of revolutionary activity in colonial America. Beginning in 1766, the Sons of Liberty met openly at Samuel Fraunces' tavern at the corner of Pearl and Broad streets, located only three blocks away from the docks on the East River. There they toasted the repeal of the Stamp Act, organized a party to disrupt a British tea import and which became their de facto headquarters in the years before the Revolutionary War began. The Sons of Liberty, major players in pre-Revolutionary activity, were the great agitators and radicals whose actions—from raising Liberty Poles to dumping British tea into American harbors—helped bring about the conflict necessary to affect revolution in the American colonies. Sons of Liberty most commonly remembered today operated primarily in Boston and included important members of society such as Samuel Adams and John Adams. The Sons of Liberty in New York were led by Isaac Sears, John Lamb, and Alexander McDougall, three merchants of only moderate wealth, and the core of the group mainly identified as a lower class to middling organization, whose ranks were made up largely from the mechanics, artisans and other members of the city's common population. Their participation in the revolution in stirring popular opposition to British rule and agitating disobedience to the colonial government is one of the earlier instances of political activity

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<sup>17</sup> Syrett, "Private Enterprise in New Amsterdam," 536-540.

in New York taverns that involved middling New Yorkers as the major catalysts for change, rather than the more powerful and influential merchant class.<sup>18</sup>

Taverns played a role in a very important part of resistance against colonial authority in New York, an ongoing contest over the city's Liberty Pole. The first Liberty Pole was constructed in 1766 near the Common—now the site of City Hall—to celebrate the repeal of the Stamp Act, and became a politically charged part of the public landscape. People gathered at the pole for celebrations and British soldiers dismantled it when feeling resentment toward disgruntled citizens. For both sides, taverns played a role in allowing the struggle over the Liberty Pole to come to a head on several different occasions. After taking part in a very public celebration of the first Liberty Pole's raising, members of the Sons of Liberty met at Howard's tavern, where in addition to eating a celebratory meal they drank twenty-eight toasts.<sup>19</sup> Being quartered in New York, British soldiers were no strangers to the taverns of the city, and in some cases shared tavern space with workers not keen on having them within the city. Tussles between British soldiers and American seamen were not uncommon, and helped build popular resentment toward the British presence in the city during the 1760s and 1770s.<sup>20</sup>

The opponents of the Sons of Liberty recognized the growing political discourse in taverns as well. American loyalist Reverend Thomas Bradbury Chandler commented

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<sup>18</sup> Roger J. Champagne, "New York's Radicals and the Coming of Independence," *The Journal of American History* 51 (June 1964): 21. Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 59.

<sup>19</sup> Jessie Lemisch, *Jack Tar vs. John Bull: The Role of New York's Seamen in Precipitating the Revolution* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1997), 121-122.

<sup>20</sup> Jessie Lemisch, *Jack Tar vs. John Bull*, 126-131.

on the “unavailing opposition to Parliament” which led to “neglect of business and extraordinary tavern expenses.” The cost of drink aside, taverns proved to be valuable meeting areas for political opposition to British rule.<sup>21</sup> As the most reliable way to get news during the colonial period, taverns became important centers as the showdown between American radicals and British authority came to a head. On April 25, 1775, as news of the skirmish between British regulars and American militia at Lexington, Massachusetts reached New York, the city commerce ground to a halt, while at night taverns were filled with patrons seeking out news and discussing the outbreak of armed conflict with Britain.<sup>22</sup> Because in many cases overt actions against British authority were fueled by toasts made at tavern gatherings by citizens emboldened by the power of strong wine and spirits, these meetings are an important example that show the validity of a statement made by Benjamin Franklin when he was a young man: “tis true, drinking does not *improve* our faculties, but it allows us to *use* them.” The ability of the tavern environment to foster these reactions regardless of class helped revolutionary ideas take hold among a larger portion of the population.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> William Harrison Bayles, *Old Taverns of New York* (New York: Frank Allaben genealogical company, 1915), 209-217. Carl Becker, “Growth of Revolutionary Parties and Methods in New York Province 1765-1774,” *The American Historical Review* 7 (Oct 1901): 62. Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *The American querist: or, Some questions proposed relative to the present disputes between Great Britain, and her American colonies*, Early American Imprints I [Online Database] New York, 1774. For more information on American taverns and their role in fomenting popular opinion during the American Revolution, see David Conroy’s study of taverns in Massachusetts, *In Public Houses*, and Peter Thompson’s study of Philadelphia taverns, *Rum Punch and Revolution*. Also, Chapter 3 of David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 55-98.

<sup>22</sup> William H. W. Sabine, ed., *Historical Memoirs of William Smith, historian of the Province of New York, member of the Governor's Council and last chief justice of that Province under the Crown, chief justice of Quebec* (New York, 1956-58), 222.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Silence Dogood* No. 12, 1722.

No matter if the clientele were upper class merchants or lower class workers, the taverns of early America had universal uses as meeting places and establishments for the consumption of alcohol. In Philadelphia, a diverse and densely populated city, much like the New York of the post-revolutionary era, the appeal of taverns for all men living in the city led to the creation of coordinated popular opinion, in which news was discussed and opinions were formed amongst the taverngoers of the revolutionary period. The creation of public opinion and popular sentiments of the taverns in colonial Massachusetts points to instances in which the government supported the reduction of taverns as a means of reasserting authority over the colonists by controlling their right to drink, which in itself promoted discussion and paved the way for more vocal opposition. Despite the differences between the three cities in regard to tavern legislation, the tavern culture in all three cities allowed for the fermentation of revolutionary thought.<sup>24</sup>

There should be no doubt that the tavern was an integral part of everyday life and culture in America, so it would be fitting that the end of the American Revolution was celebrated in the taverns. On Evacuation Day, which marked the exit of British military personnel and loyalists from New York, a procession of colonial regulars, led by George Washington, made their way into the city. The procession stopped first at the Bull's Head Tavern on the Bowery Road, and ended at Cape's Tavern on Broadway. Citizens had gathered at the Bull's Head to await Washington, and upon his arrival they cheered him

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch & Revolution*, 1-20. Thompson's work is heavily informed by David Conroy's *In Public Houses*, an examination on tavern culture in colonial Massachusetts. Thompson notes in his introduction that Philadelphia taverns had a stronger bearing on politics than their counterparts in Massachusetts. David Conroy, *In Public Houses*, 157-188.



and moved onward with him to Cape's Tavern. At the end of the day, Washington said farewell to his officers with a final repast prepared by Samuel Fraunces at his tavern. Washington ended the festivities with a toast: "With a heart full of love and gratitude I now take my leave of you. I most devoutly wish that your latter days may be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have been glorious and honorable."<sup>25</sup>

Washington did take leave of his officers and traded in his military career for a life in politics, but his days in the taverns of early America were not over. As part of his political career as president of the newly formed United States, he would tour the country, stopping to stay at taverns along the way. During the period of his travels, between 1789 and 1791, the tavern as an institution began to change. First physically, as accommodations became more refined and architectural design became more important, then ideologically, as the transition from civic to social began. In order to understand how this transformation took place, it is necessary to first examine the types of taverns that were part of the increasingly stratified structure of New York City.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Edward Robb Ellis, *The Epic of New York City* (New York: Kodansha America, 1997), 173-174.

<sup>26</sup> A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, "A Public House for a New Republic," 54-55.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TAVERNS OF THE ELITE

*Next, view that two legg'd animal,  
Which, some a politician call;  
Engag'd in idle, waking dreams  
And forming vast political schemes.  
Schemes, far more wild and visionary,  
Than story told of witch or fairy,  
Who wastes his time, like useless paper  
Whose words are froth, and foam, and vapor,  
Bawls loud, at every public place,  
Whether at tavern, or, the horse race;  
Exaggerates each trifling thing,  
And shews its consequence, by bawling,  
To each one gives a dissertation,  
On the affairs of the nation*

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Daniel Rodgers, "A Poem on Liberty and Equality," 1804

The American Revolution was an important time for politicized tavern activity, but in the years after the war, taverns were integral in helping to establish the new political order of New York City, which would broaden voting rights while continuing to favor the upper class. In 1784 at a meeting presided over by Isaac Roosevelt, state senator and president of the Bank of New York, an address "to the Citizens of this city" was drafted. The meeting was held at the City Tavern owned by John Cape and located on Broadway, and was described ambiguously as "a meeting of a number of inhabitants," a wording which suggests a meeting of New Yorkers, but a small meeting. Those present agreed on a series of restrict

ions to voting rights for New Yorkers, disenfranchising those who supported Great Britain in any way during the revolution.<sup>1</sup>

As official meeting places for elites and unofficial meeting places for the working class, taverns were an integral part of political life, but it is important to note that they held a dual identity: the upper class political groups and societies which used their taverns for meetings had a certain legitimacy which the working class taverns—whose clientele did not bother with meeting announcements or elaborate toasts—lacked. As “public houses,” upper class taverns were spaces for political participation, but as licensed taverns, lower class establishments were instruments in the corruption of the city’s moral climate. As such it is important to note the legislation passed by New York state government to put limits on taverns. In the cases of most major cities, the history of tavern culture is marked by various forms of legislation limiting and overseeing the atmosphere of these institutions.

In 1786 New York mayor James Duane and the city alderman issued a law reiterating the mayor’s right to issue tavern licenses, and restricting tavern keepers from selling alcohol or entertaining guests on Sundays. The law also provided for enforcement of the law by city constables who would walk through the six lower wards of the city and the Bowery to ensure compliance. During the colonial period, taverns and public houses had maintained an uneasy relationship with state and local government, in which the sale of alcohol was allowed with the implicit understanding that these institutions would also

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<sup>1</sup> *At a meeting of a number of inhabitants at Cape’s Tavern, on Friday evening the twenty-third instant, the following address to the citizens of this city, was agreed to. Isaac Roosevelt, Esquire, in the chair, Early American Imprints I [Online Database] New York, 1784. Broadside.*

supply lodging and food to travelers. Designation as a place of lodging further placed taverns within New York's economy, so much so that stagecoaches routinely departed and arrived at prominent taverns within the city. In the 1786 city directory John Cape's tavern advertised stagecoaches travelling to and from Boston, Albany and Philadelphia. Coaches to Boston and Albany left every Monday and Thursday, while a coach to Philadelphia could be taken from Cape's every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.<sup>2</sup>

As one of the largest port cities in North America—by the end of the eighteenth century New York surpassed both Boston and Philadelphia in population size. Goods coming into the country, including fine alcohol products, were first available in New York. For those higher-end taverns and customers looking for exotic spirits, they were available at New York's docks. Beginning in 1811, advertisements were taken out by merchant Alexander James Hamilton in Longman's New York Directory. Hamilton kept a store and distillery at 286 Water Street where he had available for purchase—on a wholesale or retail basis—“a complete assortment of Groceries, Wines, Liquors and Cordials of all kinds.” Hamilton's selection included wines from Portugal, spirits from Jamaica, and liquors from Holland. Over the course of four years Hamilton would continue to operate from Water Street, advertising from different addresses along the

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<sup>2</sup> *Laws and ordinances, ordained and established by the mayor, aldermen and commonalty of the city of New-York, in Common Council convened; for the good rule and government of the inhabitants and residents of the said city. Published the twenty-ninth day of March, 1786, in the tenth year of our independence, and in the mayoralty of James Duane, Esq.,* Early American Imprints I [Online Database] New York: 1786. A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, “A Public House for a New Republic: The Architecture of Accommodation and the American State, 1789-1809,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9 (2003): 60-61. *Gaine's New-York pocket almanack, for the year 1786.* Early American Imprints I [Online Database] New York: 1786, 60.

important merchant thoroughfare but always promising the same products in “a large and general assortment.”<sup>3</sup>

The presence of sustained merchant advertisements suggests a market for imported alcohol in the city of New York, however the needs of the population for domestic spirits was covered as well by a large number of distilleries and breweries located in the city. Just as a large number of tax-paying tavernkeepers were listed in each year’s New York City Directory, so too were the owners of the city’s means of alcohol production. In the 1789 directory, a total of 25 different distillers and brewers were listed, including Alexander James Hamilton. For the most part these breweries and distilleries were located along New York’s waterfront, some located along Water Street itself. Notable exceptions include Appleby and Matlack’s Brewery, located on Chatham Street, which bordered City Hall and fed into Broadway. Of the 25 identified in the 1789 directory, 72% were located within five blocks of the waterfront at either the Hudson River or East River. There is one particular instance of two distillers, one identified only by the last name Rowe and Thomas Greswold, living at 37 and 38 James Street, respectively. The goods supplied by these brewers and distillers helped meet the needs of New York’s citizens, who were thirsting for alcohol at a time when whisky—safer to drink than easily contaminated water—was the drink of choice.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David Longworth, *Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and Directory*. New York: 1811, 1813, 1814.

<sup>4</sup> Some distinction may need to be made about the means of alcohol production and the number of citizens who made their living working to produce alcohol. Of those identified in the 1789 directory, there are four different identifications used: distiller vs. distillery and brewer vs. brewery. Taking these distinctions as an intentional classification system, individuals listed as “distillery” would run an actual distillery and would be assisted by those listed as “distiller.” However the listing of Alexander James Hamilton as a “distiller”

Throughout the city alcohol left its mark on the distilleries and breweries where alcohol was produced, the grocers where it was sold, and the taverns where it was consumed and greased the wheels of social interaction. And although taverns, as I will argue, were not equal in their clientele or their quality, they were united by alcohol's power as the drink of choice and the substance lubricating New York's political and economic machinery.

When considering "tavern culture" in New York during the age of the new republic, it is necessary to take special note of the ways in which taverngoing—while a universal American pastime—expressed itself differently along class lines. Generally speaking, a main template for American taverns existed and dictated how the tavern operated in an urban setting, but as each appealed to a somewhat different group of customers and travelers, they boasted differing levels of elegance. Through material culture analysis, it has been shown that rural taverns offered food and drink to travelers while taverns within the city catered to local citizens in need of a place for holding meetings and socializing. In the urban setting, taverns were further separated into working class and upper class elite taverns, the differences of which can be discerned from artwork of the period showing elite taverns to be more spacious, more ornately designed, and enjoying more space than the grogshops crammed into the concentrated urban areas around the waterfront and near the Bowery.<sup>5</sup>

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when he had advertised owning a "distillery" shows that the system was not precise, and it may not be possible to discern exactly how many breweries and distilleries located in New York City.

<sup>5</sup> Anne-Marie Cantwell and Diana diZerega Wall, *Unearthing Gotham: The Archaeology of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 155-160.

This was not always so, in New York or in other urban areas. During the early years of America's colonial period, the largest colonial cities were not large or complex enough for neighborhoods to take shape along class lines. The first taverns built in New York during the period of Dutch settlement enjoyed a clientele as varied as the population of the city. The waterfront economy made it necessary for wealthier merchants to share space with the workers of New York's maritime industry, of which taverns were important places to hear shipping news, find workers to hire out, and meet to arrange sales. This began to change after the revolutionary period, when population growth and increased trade caused the growing division in wealth to manifest itself physically in the creation of working class neighborhoods.<sup>6</sup>

First, I must make a note on the use of the term "elite" when referring to the specific taverns of this chapter and their clientele. It is true that by the late 1780s taverns in New York had split into two groups with two distinct brands of customer. This line, separating upper class merchants and landowners at the top and lower class artisans and renters at the bottom, does not completely capture the nuances of New York tavern culture at the time. When speaking about politics and political activity, the tavern meetings held between 1789 and 1815 were meetings in which upper class citizens and those who were allowed to vote by New York's property laws were present. These meetings however were controlled by an "elite" group of upper class citizens who

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 5-6. Bender in particular celebrates the diversity of opinions and viewpoints that came from New York's metropolitan population and which came together to form what he described as "a plurality of voices and values." For more on the make-up of New York's neighborhoods, see Nan Rothschild, *New York Neighborhoods* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1990) and Ann L. Bittenweiser, *Manhattan Water-Bound* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

concerned themselves with political development. Because the names of these elite members of New York society find themselves being repeated from newspaper to newspaper, it is worth bestowing on them a form of ownership of these taverns. It is not my intention to write a history of New York politics which focuses only on the Alexander Hamiltons, John Jays and George Clintons of the city, but as the leaders of New York's emerging political machinery, their story helps frame the more intriguing story of New York's working class and their own politicized tavern activities.

While it is true that during the colonial period taverns and public houses were more or less egalitarian parts of the urban landscape, by the time the American Revolution began the economic separations present in the urban population started to manifest themselves in the physical landscapes of the city, as neighborhoods began to separate into class-defined enclaves. As a part of these neighborhoods important to its inhabitants, taverns became stratified as well. As meeting places, taverns placed themselves comfortably within the political world of early America, and allowed lower class and middling groups without traditional political power to meet and forge for themselves new political identities. At this same time, the upper class taverns of New York acted as the meeting places for the societies and political groups who controlled the city. At these taverns, the elite of New York formed the machinery of political control while working class citizens used their own taverns for drink and to form a group political identity in the years after the revolution.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 53-54. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999),



As American elites assumed control over their respective states, questions began to arise regarding the direction of American government. Fairly soon after the revolution had ended, the first split in American politics occurred, as two groups set up in opposition to one another. Federalists, who believed in strong central government which controlled the states, and Anti-Federalists, who argued for a weak central government that followed the will of the states, began to jockey for position in the new republic. When the Articles of Confederation were scrapped in favor of a new governing document, both groups drew their battle lines and prepared for a struggle over the new constitution. For the Federalists and Anti-Federalists of New York, these battles would take place in the taverns of the city.<sup>8</sup>

With the constitutional debate of 1787 came a shift in American politics which affected tavern culture. It would be the first introduction of party politics to the American political scene, and its debut would come in the elite taverns of New York City. This debate pitted the pro-Constitution Federalists against the anti-Constitution Anti-Federalists. The ratification debates of this time are well preserved in the writings from several key figures such as Alexander Hamilton, and tempers ran high, so much so that after the Constitution was accepted the feud did not end. By 1789, both groups took to nominating and supporting their own candidates. In the New York governor's race the

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485. Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 273. Chernow describes Bardin's tavern, the site of Alexander Hamilton's meeting to nominate Robert Yates for governor, as "a business haunt."

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 22-25. David Conroy, *In Public Houses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 312-313. Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch & Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 180-181. Conroy and Thompson note the entrance of partisan politics in the taverns of Boston and Philadelphia, where oftentimes the political allegiance of the tavernkeeper determined the allegiance of the tavern.

Anti-Federalist nominee, incumbent George Clinton faced off against Federalist nominee Robert Yates, previously a delegate to the New York state ratifying convention. As the two prepared for the election, their respective committees began to work on coordinating a statewide campaign, which now required catering to a broader electoral base.<sup>9</sup>

Taverns were an integral part of politics in the early republic, but if the historical narrative of the revolution and the early republican period paints a picture of taverns as egalitarian meeting places, it is then important to make the distinction between the upper class establishments such as Bardin's and Beekman's taverns, and those located in the working class areas of New York closer to the docks. As the working class used their taverns as public space for co-mingling and building a political identity, the elites of New York met in their own taverns to establish and shore up their political control over the rest of the city. These different motives manifested themselves in the appearance of each group's respective taverns. While the cramped quarters of the working class taverns encouraged close interaction between those inside, it did not lend itself to comfort, which was a concern of the upper class taverns—some of which were converted homes redesigned with meeting space, dining halls and private rooms. These free standing structures enforced the “differentness” of the upper class taverns, which aesthetically bore little in common with their working class counterparts. When Edward Bardin opened his new establishment—called the City Tavern—in 1788, he went to great lengths

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<sup>9</sup> Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763-1797* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 109-145. Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany: The Evolution of a Political Machine* (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1971), 13-15. Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton*, 273-276.

to ensure the public's awareness of it, taking out multiple advertisements in the newspapers of the city. Bardin took over the operation of the tavern from Joseph Corre, and in his efforts to attract the upper class clientele more prominently found along Broadway, he "fitted up" the tavern "in the neatest manner, with every accommodation." In the advertisements Bardin stressed the fine accommodations he would be offering, boasting that "he has stocked his cellars with a variety of the best liquors, and his larder will be constantly supplied with all the delicacies the markets of this city will afford." The City Tavern also advertised a fourteen-horse stable space, with horses for let. In his advertisements, Bardin identified his clientele as the more sociable of the city, hoping that it would most often used "for the reception of the various societies and club, that may be formed in this city, as private companies and gentlemen." It would be these men who would form the larger part of the client base for Bardin and for other tavernkeepers in the city catering to the city's elite. Their fine accommodations supplied a place for the New York political elite to meet and participate in formal politics.<sup>10</sup>

One such case of the upper class tavern serving as the site for elite political participation came very soon after the end of the Constitutional debate, in the gubernatorial elections of 1789. This election is notable as an early instance of political groups struggling for the support of the lower classes before the election, stressing the unity the two groups shared as a singular "American people." Taverns played a key role in this element of the campaign, when Federalists supporting Robert Yates inferred that

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<sup>10</sup> "City Tavern," *Daily Advertiser*, June 9-1788 America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1788. "City Tavern," *The New-York Journal, and Daily Patriotic Register*, April 18, 1788 America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1788.

meetings held at Bardin's City Tavern were attended by common people, and that their nomination was one backed by the people of the city. In the broadside announcing the Federalists' nomination, the meeting at Bardin's is described as "a numerous and respectable meeting of citizens." Traditionally, meetings of this nature eschewed the notion of "party" and referred to themselves as respectable gatherings, but behind this desire to mask political agendas were two very distinct politically active groups fighting for control of the early republic. Federalists, whose nationalist ideology made it difficult to appeal to the disfranchised majority, were successful as a populist movement by co-opting public spaces such as taverns and public rituals such as processions and using them to create a nationalist feeling among those who took part. David Waldstreicher's *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* argues that events planned by Federalists to celebrate ratification were embraced by the people, and grew into spontaneous spectacles. It would be a deft political move which would present a problem for the Anti-Federalists, as nationalism and federalism became the popular order of the day.<sup>11</sup>

Populist rhetoric was an effective tool of the Federalists, who proved to be skillful campaigners during the Yates-Clinton election of 1789. Alexander Hamilton was considered to be the mastermind of this tactic, and while he painted the Federalist tavern meetings as part of the popular political participation found in taverns, he was challenged by Anti-Federalists who saw through his attempts at shoring up popular support. Two months after the Federalist broadside

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<sup>11</sup> *At a numerous and respectable meeting of Citizens at Bardin's Tavern, on Wednesday the 11<sup>th</sup> instant; it was unanimously agreed to support at the ensuing election, the Hon. ROBERT YATES, Esq., as Governor,* Early American Imprints [Online Database] New York, 1789. Broadside. Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 137. David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 85-107.

was published, Jonathan Lawrence, head of the campaign committee for George Clinton, wrote a pointed response to claims made by Hamilton. Lawrence's response was addressed to "the Unbiassed & Independent electors of the state of New York," and delivered an unapologetic and stinging rebuke of Hamilton's methods. In the broadside, Lawrence charges the Federalists with trying to "induce a belief that the inhabitants of this city were nearly unanimous in their determination to support Judge Yates, as a candidate for the government...and to fix upon us an intention of deceiving the citizens of the other parts of the state." Lawrence sheds some light on the nature of these tavern meetings when he concludes his response to Hamilton by calling into question the validity of the nomination because "the great majority...of those who voted, were not electors." Furthermore, Lawrence challenges the legitimacy of a nomination made at a meeting "like the one held at Bardin's" on the grounds that such meetings draw "the most zealous, who have no votes" and that "many of the most respectable citizens are averse to assemblies of that kind, and seldom, if ever, attend them." This response made clear in no uncertain terms, according to Lawrence, that the Federalists were being liberal in their use of proto-populist rhetoric, but more importantly it can be seen as a criticism of tavern culture in general. Lawrence's response to Hamilton's political maneuvers illuminates some interesting aspects of political participation in taverns. Even if Lawrence's claims are based on assumption, they still act as an indicator that some of the political elite of New York were less than comfortable sharing tavern space with lower class disenfranchised citizens, even after the victory of democracy in the revolution.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Lawrence, *To the unbiassed & independent electors of the State of New-York*, Library of

Lawrence's rebuttal to Hamilton's initial broadside is an important moment in the transition of New York's tavern culture in the early republic. With his charge that "respectable" citizens seldom took part in these tavern meetings, the growing roots of a split between political groups and tavern culture began to emerge. From this point, the beginning of the modern political system and the rise of temperance and its advocates would make taverns a less ideal place for New York's political leaders. The meetings envisioned by Lawrence and his cohort, more formal affairs held in the private meeting rooms of upscale taverns, would be the forerunner to those meetings held in private buildings.

The meeting at Bardin's Tavern and the response it provoked from Lawrence are important for understanding the place of taverns in early American politics, where popular political participation did not always follow the strict class guidelines which governed these establishments at the time. The meeting at Bardin's, advertised as a meeting of "numerous" citizens and confirmed by Lawrence as being made up largely of nonvoters, was one instance in which the role of the elite tavern changed to become more of a shared space, no longer reserved for New York's elite but opened to the non-property classes situated below the freeholders of the city. Instances of class mingling in the political world were not frequent at this time, due in part to the voting laws of New York at the end of the eighteenth century, which made property a stipulation for voting and left a large part of New York's lower class population with no direct way of

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Congress American Memory [Online Database] New York, 1789. Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763 -1797* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 136-140.

participating in elections. The lower classes of New York would not be able to act as voters until universal male suffrage was passed in 1821. Upper class taverns remained for the most part the meeting place for the upper class exclusively.

After all the campaigning and political maneuvering done by the Federalists, they lost the governor's election, but only by a very small margin, and Robert Yates carried New York City while losing elsewhere in the state. New York City had proven itself to be a Federalist stronghold, where the merchant and landlord class turned out an overwhelming majority for Yates, winning 833 votes to Clinton's 385. Clinton's overall victory came outside of the city, where the landed yeomanry bolstered his totals. The elections of 1789 would prove to be an important moment for the political establishment of New York, and confirmed the value of the tavern as a space for orchestrating campaigns. Federalists and Anti-Federalists continued to form political committees, which corresponded with contacts throughout the city and the state to campaign for their candidates and get out the vote, usually at the popular taverns of the day. These stops would not have included the seamen's taverns of Water Street, where the clientele had yet to be given full voting rights: according to the 1801 Act for Regulating Elections, men could only vote for governor or state senator if they possessed land worth at least \$250. If this standard was not met, poorer New Yorkers could also vote for assemblymen and congressmen but only if they owned a freehold worth \$50 or were renting a tenement for \$5 a year, an economic standard most New Yorkers still could not meet. The election of 1789, won in the elite taverns of the city by Federalists who claimed popular support

while courting the vote of the merchant class, is a useful example of the different political spheres which taverns symbolized at this time.<sup>13</sup>

The upper class taverns such as those owned by Edward Bardin and John Cape were located on Broadway, closer to the Hudson River but away from the waterfront, while the majority of working class taverns were located near the docks of the East River across from Brooklyn, in Manhattan's lower east side. In 1789, New York listed 128 different taverns in its city directory, one for about every 250 people living in the city. While the residences of most of the city's upper class attorneys and brokers were found on Broadway and Wall Street, this area had a smaller number of listed taverns, no more than fifteen between the boundaries of Broadway, Wall Street and Great George Street (See Figure 2). The directory tells a different story for the sections of the city most commonly associated with the working class: the docks along the East River waterfront on Front, Cherry and Water Streets. It was in this section of the city that the vast majority of taverns were located.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763 -1797* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 138. Harvey Strum, "Property Qualifications and Voting Behavior in New York, 1807-1816," *Journal of the Early Republic* 1 (Winter, 1981), 348.

<sup>14</sup> 1789 New York City Directory, Early American Imprints I [Online Database] New York, 1789. The estimate of 128 taverns is based on the use of the term "tavern" in the directory, and should be considered a conservative estimate. Several other entries exist on a smaller scale for punch shops, ale houses and rum shops, though they will be left out of this study due to their unknown impact on political life. It should also be noted that distilleries and wine merchants are also listed in the directory, but would contribute more to a study on drinking in New York City at this time rather than on the relationship between taverns and political life.





Figure 2: Broadway and Water Street. This street map of lower Manhattan, drawn in 1840, does not accurately show the layout of the city during the early republican period, but it does list street names for easier reference in identifying the layout of the city. Water Street, marked by a white line, runs perpendicular to the docks on the East River and had the highest concentration of taverns according to the 1789 city directory. Broadsides from the period also show that the majority of elite political meetings were held in taverns on or close to Broadway and Wall Street, which are highlighted in black. Courtesy of Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

The area along Broadway in lower Manhattan was by and large the domain of New York's elite. By the 1790s New York's merchants had begun to move away from their waterfront stores, and were building higher quality houses along Broadway and near Bowling Green. As the largest thoroughfare in New York, Broadway could handle large amounts of traffic with access to the waterfront and downtown, and was the main artery

of the city.<sup>15</sup> When English traveler John Lambert came through New York in 1807, he heaped praise on Broadway as one of “the finest avenues in the city.”<sup>16</sup>



Figure 3: Broadway, 1820. New York’s political elite met in taverns located on Broadway and in the vicinity of City Hall (located in the background) on Wall Street and Liberty Street. In this drawing, the beginnings of New York’s urban landscape are visible on Broadway, the domain of the city’s upper class. Courtesy of New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

During this time elites also used taverns for meetings of other nonpolitical groups, such as the Society of the Cincinnati, a military fraternal organization made up of Continental Army officers who wished to keep in contact after the Revolutionary War. The society in New York counted the membership of Alexander Hamilton, William Duer, and Richard Platt, all Federalist members of the election committee for Robert Yates, but

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 48, 81-82.

<sup>16</sup> John Lambert quoted in Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *Empire City: New York Through the Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 111-115.

Anti-Federalist John Stagg's membership shows the group to be apolitical. In the early days of its existence after it was founded in 1787, the Tammany Society—before it became the Tammany Hall political machine—was a nonpolitical fraternal organization, though its membership skewed to the Anti-Federalist side. It met once a month, and the usual order of business was planning upcoming festivities, typically anniversaries and national holiday celebrations. The political lives of the Tammany Society's members were separated from the political activities of the Anti-Federalists, and as such the group did not hold debates, intentionally refused to take a stand on any political issue, and did not officially participate in elections as a group.<sup>17</sup>

The elite members of New York society also embraced intellectual pursuits as an alternative to the harsh world of politics, forming intellectual societies for learned discourse which they felt the city needed. The members of these groups were not strangers to the tavern, though in an interesting commentary on the nature of common tavern discussion among the elite, meetings held in taverns were more often the exception rather than the rule. One such instance of these intellectual societies was the Friendly Club, a group formed for literary discussion and the advancement of enlightenment ideals.<sup>18</sup> Friendly Club member and diarist Elihu Smith wrote that it was common for a

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<sup>17</sup> "American Intelligence," *Impartial Gazeteer and Saturday Evening Post*, American Periodical Series [Online Database] New York, July 5, 1788. 1789 New York City Directory, Early American Imprints I [Online Database] New York, 1789. Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 398-399.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect*, 16-18.

small number of members to meet in taverns, though large meetings were typically held in the homes of different members.<sup>19</sup>

Even when groups met for expressly political purposes, such as the Federalists and Anti-Federalists during the election on 1789, the nature of the meetings differed between upper class and working class taverns. However, that is not to say that instances of working class-style disruptions did not make their way into the world of the upper class taverns. After a celebration hosted by George Clinton at Cape's Tavern on December 2, 1783, John Cape charged the state for 120 dinners which were accompanied by 135 bottles of Madeira wine, 36 bottles of Port, 60 bottles of beer and 30 bowls of punch, most of which must have been drunk by the guests, if Cape's claim of 60 broken wine glasses and 8 broken decanters is any indication. Rum punch and wine were usually the drinks of choice for elite tavern meetings, and the early patriotic tradition of drinking thirteen toasts meant a fair amount of alcohol would be consumed by the guests, though frivolities stemming from their inebriation would not have been highlighted in the newspaper announcements which followed the meetings.<sup>20</sup>

The unrestrained frivolities of tavern-going remained a largely working class activity, however, and elite taverns differentiated themselves by inserting the pomp and circumstance of upper class culture into the act of drinking. In 1786, the New York chapter of the Society of the Cincinnati, which commonly met at Cape's Tavern, planned their July 4<sup>th</sup> celebration at the tavern to include amphitheater seating for spectators and

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> William Harrison Bayles, *Old Taverns of New York* (New York: Frank Allaben genealogical company, 1915), 315.

planned for “the outside of the house to be decorated with laurel crowns and festoons.” At receptions for distinguished guests, it was customary to drink several formal toasts. Being so shortly removed from the days of the revolution and republican patriotism running high, toasts were sometimes offered with symbolic meaning, such as a total of thirteen toasts, to signify the thirteen states of the union. At meetings with more overtly political aims, toasts were made to the success or continued success of office candidates and elected officials, sometimes displaying the populist language of the early republic—“to John Jay, Governor by the voice of the people.” One account of a reception held for Robert Yates boasted a guest list of two hundred and a series of toasts made in support of Yates, which were “accompanied by the shouts and huzzas of the people.” The terminology used suggested a careful creation of popular support which was largely successful in creating a feeling of unifying nationalism in the early republic, which joined together the elected officials of New York with “the people” whom they served in the common act of toasting their success.<sup>21</sup>

Taverns traditionally utilized by New York’s political elite were sometimes used to reach out and meet with lower groups for the intent of creating political alliances. In one particular instance, the importance of finer tavern accommodations was clear when a group of thirty members of the Creek Indian tribe, led by their leader and spokesman Alexander McGillivray, came to New York at the behest of George Washington to discuss a possible treaty between the Creeks and the United States government. After

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<sup>21</sup> *Extract from the proceedings of the New-York State Society, of the Cincinnati, convened on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1786, and continued by adjournments until the 12<sup>th</sup> of August following*, Early American Imprints I [Online Database] New York, 1786.

meeting with Washington and with George Clinton, the group was feted with a dinner at Edward Bardin's City Tavern, where they dined with members of the St. Tammany Society and "seemed highly pleased with the polite and friendly reception they met with." McGillivray's trip to New York, brightened by the tavern celebration put on for him, helped in persuading him to sign the Treaty of New York in 1790, which placed Creek land in Georgia under federal rather than state jurisdiction in the hopes that the Creeks would receive better treatment from the federal government than from the Georgia state government. The treaty was a great success given that McGillivray, a loyalist during the American Revolution, strongly resisted American intrusion on Creek land in Georgia.<sup>22</sup>

The traditional politics of the post-revolutionary period—characterized best here by the New York gubernatorial election of 1789—were largely created and controlled by the upper class elite, who used their own taverns to meet. During this period the party system that now defines American politics was still in the process of being created, and for the most part the sides of the political spectrum had yet to separate completely from one another. The New York political world of 1789-1792 was made up of an elite that continued to meet and bond together in fraternal societies and in business interactions. Though their politically motivated tavern meetings would be more partisan affairs, the taverns themselves did not affiliate with one particular group, opting instead to offer a meeting place for whomever needed a space to meet, but in a space fit for their status with the finest drink and meals available to them. The need for these accommodations

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<sup>22</sup> "New York, July 24," *New-York Weekly Museum*, July 24, 1790, American Periodical Series [Online Database] New York, 1790. Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 80.

made Samuel Fraunces, John Cape, Edward Bardin and Abraham Martling among the most important men in the city. Newspaper reports of different celebrations and festivities would often address them by name and make note of the fine supper they would provide to those in attendance. The presence of taverns as non-partisan meeting places for political campaigns becoming increasingly more partisan reinforces the idea of the tavern in New York as the most important part of the public sphere.<sup>23</sup>

In spite of the elite taverns of New York promoting interaction among their clientele, by the end of the eighteenth century taverns had largely lost their egalitarian roots and were supported more on a class-defined basis. While the political elite, supported by the upper class, nominated candidates and extended their control over New York politics, the working class mechanics, artisans and sailors of the city met in their own taverns, using them as public spaces for defining their neighborhoods and themselves.

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<sup>23</sup> “New-York, December 3,” *Rivington’s New York Gazette*, December 3, 1783, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1783. “New-York, July 5,” *Impartial Gazetteer, and Saturday Evening Post*, July 5, 1788, American Periodical Series [Online Database] New York, 1788. “Grand Celebration,” *Public Advertiser*, March 15, 1812, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1812.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE TAVERNS OF THE WORKING CLASS

*Huzza! My brave Boys, our Work is complete,  
The World shall admire Columbia's fair Seat;  
It's strength against Tempest and Time shall be  
Proof,  
And Thousands shall come to dwell under our  
roof.  
Whilst we drain the deep Bowl, our Toast still  
shall be—  
Our government firm, and our Citizens free.*

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Francis Hopkinson, *The Raising: A New Song for Federal Mechanics*, 1788

As the key players in the New York social and political scene met in their taverns on Broadway and elsewhere, a different type of tavern culture could be observed in the New York City neighborhoods inhabited by lower class workers. The taverns of these laboring communities lacked the plush accommodations of Bardin's City Tavern, and the prominent merchants of the city would not have preferred to utilize them for their meetings. Instead, these taverns were packed with the common people of New York: sailors newly arrived from the waterfront, laborers and mechanics, all looking for respite from their day's work. Much like taverns of the New York elite, working class public houses were dual purpose, serving alcohol and supplying lodging. Here was where the comparisons ended: the working class taverns of New York, found primarily along the



waterfront, were smaller, more cramped, filled with a more varied clientele and were of a lower quality than their upper class counterparts. Working class taverns lacked the political importance of places like Edward Bardin's City Tavern, but they were no less important, allowing lower class citizens to meet and take part in city politics to the extent that they were allowed by voting laws. By using them as meeting places to coordinate political support, working class taverns helped facilitate a dialogue between the working class and the elite of New York City in the years after the Revolution.

More than anywhere else, working class tavern culture could be found on Water Street, which ran parallel to the East River waterfront (See Figure 2 in Chapter 2). By the time the Revolution had ended, the New York City waterfront had grown into a crowded, congested mixture of sailors, laborers, merchants, and most importantly, tavern keepers. All of these people were brought together by commerce and trade, which made the waterfront the busiest part of the city. Although the close quarters of the waterfront meant more opportunities for different social classes to mix together, and the elite owned the majority of property along the waterfront, the area along the docks of New York belonged in a more meaningful way to the lower classes, who lived and worked in the area. Some merchants made their homes on Water Street, in order to be close to their businesses or because businesses and residences were largely held in the same structure before the post-revolutionary period. Sailors made their homes in the boarding houses of Water Street to be close to their livelihood, while carpenters, joiners, sawyers and the like also lived along the waterfront to support the maritime industry. To accommodate this crush of people, taverns were necessary, and in the case of Water Street there was no

shortage of them. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the United States urban landscape, tavernkeeping was a viable and attractive way to make a living. For the thousands of New Yorkers making their living on the waterfront, taverns offered a roof and a bed in addition to strong drinks. As such, many citizens-turned-tavernkeepers converted structures to accommodate their new livelihoods. A 1782 advertisement announcing the sale of a house on Water Street across from Franklin's Wharf described a modest building not without its necessary amenities, containing five rooms, plus a cellar, attic and yard. The house was suggested in the advertisement to be ideal for a tavern, and rented at twenty pounds per year. Two years later in 1784, another house was advertised further down the street, at 110 Water Street. Andrew Bostick's three-story dwelling house and tavern, likely located in the vicinity of Wall Street's intersection with Water Street, contained three rooms on each floor.<sup>1</sup>

Judging from the 1789 New York City Directory, which lists the names of tavernkeepers and their addresses, Water Street held far more taverns than any other single street in the city at that time. The taverns of Water Street were far different from taverns such as Bardin's or Beekman's, however; as a part of the working class community they reflected the reality of living along the Manhattan waterfront. An observer of Water Street in 1795 wrote that the area was packed with houses, the yards of which "were daily filling up with the filth of the streets and other corruptible materials." This observer noted that he saw a total of 85 lodging houses between Peck's Slip and

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<sup>1</sup> *Royal Gazette*, May 18 1782, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1782. *Independent Journal*, March 24, 1784, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1784.

New Slip from Pearl Street to the East River, an area three blocks long and three blocks deep. Of these 85, 28 were identified as taverns and boarding houses, and the condition of living was such that “the houses appear filled or crowded with inhabitants, from the cellars to the garrets and back buildings; and...a great number of the occupiers appeared to be emigrants of Europe, or other parts, and sailors belonging to vessels late arrived, lodging we may conclude, in close-confined rooms, garrets, or damp cellars of low narrow houses.” In what can best be described as an understatement, this observer hypothesized that “it must be supposed that the greatest cleanliness and temperance was not observed” in these cramped quarters.<sup>2</sup>

Though cramped quarters harmed the health standards of the area, it did create an atmosphere of intense social closeness. A general lack of space along the waterfront and especially in the taverns meant that working class citizens were all but forced to interact with each other from day to day. In crowded taverns laborers were placed face to face with the fellow citizens, and had enough strong drink to facilitate conversation. These discussions allowed lower class citizens to exchange news, air opinions, and create bonds through close interaction. An empty seat at a table in the main room of a tavern allowed the possibility of a new acquaintance with new things to say. This situation of close interaction—much closer than in upper class taverns of the elite—served to benefit the

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<sup>2</sup> *The Argus*, July 5, 1796, “Continuation of the account respecting the yellow fever, of 1795,” America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1796.

working class in forming their own group identity and creating a tradition of tavern discussion that would encourage political participation.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 4: South Street, 1828. South Street, which ran alongside the East River waterfront, gives a good contrast to the atmosphere of Broadway as shown in chapter two. Busy streets littered with people and goods were common in this area, as were crowded buildings crushed together to accommodate such a large number of people. The high number of people in this area meant an equally high number of licensed taverns could be supported, more so than in any other area of New York during this time.

These conditions made life along the waterfront unsavory for those outside of the lower class, who avoided living along the docks for fear of negative effects. Outbreaks of yellow fever and other contagious illnesses were often believed to have begun from first contacts with New York at the docks, and were incubated in the close quarters and

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<sup>3</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 53-54.

unsanitary conditions of the Water Street boarding houses. This was one case in which the tavern's role as a public meeting place was a drawback: close contact with many individuals led to increased outbreaks of disease. In 1799 a report by the New York Common Council attempted to identify the causes and possible defenses against outbreaks of contagious disease, citing waterfront taverns as one of the key contributors to disease. Like the observer four years before, the report characterized these taverns and boarding houses as being primarily full of sailors and immigrants, "where drunkenness and debaucheries of every kind are committed."<sup>4</sup>

The political elite of the city were concerned by the ways in which these lower taverns affected the physical well-being of citizens of the poorer class. To combat these health hazards and improve the moral fortitude of the city, taverns were targeted with legislation meant to ensure that citizens would have a place to socialize and meet, as long as their meetings did not consist of morally unacceptable activities. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century a great deal of the legislation against taverns centered around the licensing system. As a way of taking some of the money generated from the lucrative tavern business and putting into municipal hands, the mayor's office granted licenses to tavern owners for an annual fee. In addition to the license fee, tavern owners were also required to sign a recognizance which set guidelines for prohibited activities. Tavern owners could be expected to pay up to ten dollars annually for their license to sell "strong or spirituous liquors" in New York City, and were expected to prohibit "any

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<sup>4</sup> *Mercantile Advertiser*, February 18, 1799, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1799.

manner of unlawful gaming, quarreling, or disorderly practice or conduct.” In addition, tavernkeepers were forbidden from keeping billiard tables or any devices which could be used for gambling, and were not allowed to “knowingly harbor or entertain persons of ill fame or character.” Violation of these restrictions meant the revocation of a tavernkeepers license, in addition to certain fines.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizances and fines played a key role in enforcing proper behavior in the taverns, but the fines set forth in additional legislation only provided a measure against unlawful behavior among taverngoers in *licensed* establishments. During the early nineteenth century, and in an increasing number as years went by and the city grew larger, citizens began selling liquors and spirits without licenses. By the beginning of the 1820’s, the New York City Common Council established a fine of twenty-five dollars—two and a half times the cost for a tavern license—for those selling 25 or more gallons of alcohol. This fine discouraged the retail selling of liquor, however another fine of 30 dollars could be levied for those keeping a tavern without a license.<sup>6</sup>

For working class taverngoers, the groceries, dram shops and other drinking establishments were a part of a working class culture, partially defined by middle and upper class expectations, which the working class defied; and they struggled to define an identity which did not conform to the expectations of their economic superiors. Drinking and taverngoing in New York’s lower class neighborhoods became a means of exerting autonomy over everyday life, in which it was clear that the moral expectations of the

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<sup>5</sup> “A law, regulating tavern licenses.” New York, 1823. New-York Historical Society. “By John Ferguson, Esq.” Tavern License. New York, 1815. New-York Historical Society.

<sup>6</sup> “A law, regulating tavern licenses.” New-York Historical Society, 1823.

upper class did not fit comfortably into the picture of how a working man “should” behave.

After the Jeffersonian period, as New York’s population rose and the city became more dense, small grog shops and ale houses, which were often located near gaming houses and dens of prostitution, became areas of working-class autonomy, where the responsibilities of work were left behind. Surrounded by workers of similar means and sensibilities, and without anyone overseeing them, the time spent in the tavern socializing became the most important time when workers could be among other workers. It was here, as they were no longer being watched over while on the job, that laborers could truly interact with each other as they sat down and enjoyed a drink. In the younger generations oftentimes this close interaction—coupled with the strong power of alcohol—led to outbursts of violence, another important part of the working class identity.

The political scene of the elite was not without its battles, but physical altercations were usually an endeavor of New York’s working men. Because certain elements of tavern culture were the same in both the working-class and elite establishments—both were public centers of social interaction aided by the consumption of alcohol—the differences between the two stand out even more. Tavern legislation passed by the New York City Common Council gives a glimpse of the activities working class citizens may have indulged, to the chagrin of the city’s leaders. The recognizances signed by licensed tavernkeepers expressly forbid owners to “suffer or permit any cock-fighting, gaming, or

playing with cards or dice.” When signing the recognizance they also agreed not to “keep any billiard-table, or other gaming table, or shuffleboard.”<sup>7</sup>

That these activities were listed in legislation suggests their presence in taverns of the day, but the key to understanding the difference between working-class and elite tavern culture lies in the complaints lodged against taverns and filed with the mayor’s office. Only a few of these records still exist, but what few do give some glimpse as to the everyday goings-on of the taverns in New York’s working-class neighborhoods. Citizens, many of them master craftsmen seeking to monitor the behavior of their charges, commonly complained about the hours kept by taverns in the city. Complaints took offense at those establishments which remained open and serving alcohol on Sundays and late at night. The mayor’s office also received reports from citizens identifying certain taverns which also operated as houses of prostitution. One house, owned by a Widow Brower on Mulberry Street, was the source of a “complaint by anonymous letter stating that her house is open at all times, frequented by boys.”<sup>8</sup> These surviving complaints, compiled during the month of April, 1822, are only a small snapshot of lower class tavern culture, but they allow a glimpse into the everyday life in New York’s poorer neighborhoods. Living in these areas offered experiences different from those of the merchant class living on Broadway—navigating the urban terrain where establishments stayed open until late hours and the sounds of rough-and-tumble taverngoers could be heard throughout the night, the sights of disorderly houses open for

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<sup>7</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 53-55. “By John Ferguson, Esq.” Tavern License. New-York Historical Society, 1815.

<sup>8</sup> “Complaints against taverns, April 1822.” Stephen Allen Papers, New-York Historical Society.



business, the groups of sailors and mechanics walking the streets in search of entertainment.

Male working class identity revolved around masculinity in many ways; having a drink at the end of the day became an expectation of New York's workers, while the fights which broke out between inebriated youth helped create the image of the tough "b'hoy." Middle class pressures to cease drinking and fighting only served to strengthen the male working class identity, which defined itself in opposition to these middle and upper class values.<sup>9</sup> These identities were cemented by the 1840s, but they were still in the process of formation during the early republican period. In addition to the areas around Water Street and Front Street on the East River, New York's grittier, poorer neighborhoods began to develop, in the Bowery and in the area known as Five Points.

The section of New York known as the Bowery did not achieve its reputation as a rough-and-tumble neighborhood until after the Jacksonian period, and in the years after the revolution was relatively calm. However, the ten taverns located along Bowery Lane in 1789 would be part of the beginnings of an entertainment thoroughfare which by 1830 would boast theaters, shops, dance halls, and gambling dens, all serving the working class clientele of the Bowery. It was in these taverns that New York's working class forged their own identity, in which drinking gave the impetus for socialization and in many cases, violence.<sup>10</sup> The key to the tavern as a breeding ground for self-identification

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Kaplan, "New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-Class Male Identity," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (Winter 1995): 614-615.

<sup>10</sup> 1789 New York City Directory, Early American Imprints I [Online Database] New York, 1789. Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New

among the laboring sort was its control by the political elite of the city. The licensing system stands out as an example of elite control of the city's population through its taverns. As tavernkeepers were required to sign recognizances promising not to allow certain unsavory activities in their establishments, the licenses granted to them symbolize the control the Common Council had over working class behavior. Taking this into consideration, the prevalence of complaints against unlicensed taverns—which made up half of the complaints lodged against taverns in April, 1822—shows a special concern on the part of the Common Council to seek out establishments which were not under its control, where owners paid no dues to the city and made no agreements to ban the behavior more common among working class neighborhoods but not allowed by the city's political elite.<sup>11</sup>

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York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 257-262. For a discussion of working class tavern violence after 1830, see Michael Kaplan, "New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-Class Male Identity," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (Winter 1995), 591-617.

<sup>11</sup> "Complaints against taverns, April 1822." Stephen Allen Papers. New-York Historical Society, 1822.



Figure 5: Tavern Complaints, April 1822. Locations of complaints are indicated on this map in white. The most common offenses were staying open late and on Sundays, operating a tavern without a license, and keeping a disorderly house. For the most part the complaints were against taverns along the waterfront and in the vicinity of Five Points (inset), with outliers near the Bowery. Map courtesy of Perry Castaneda Library, University of Texas at Austin.

The Bowery boasted a sizable number of taverns, but Water Street remained by far the area with the largest number of listed taverns. Of the 128 taverns listed in the 1789 city directory, 21 of them were to be found on Water Street. These taverns would have been the oldest in the city, having been established shortly after the first docks in the city were built during the era of Dutch control of the area. It was at the dockside establishments on Water Street that the reputation for working class tavern violence was born, described by one tavern-going sailor as an environment of “some fighting, some

swearing, some fighting, some singing” and “some of the more decent recesses of debauchery.” Sailors were an important part of the lower class tavern clientele, taking advantage of taverns as temporary places of lodging while on shore and areas for finding new jobs after returning from sea. Advertisements for buildings along the waterfront took advantage of this, some saying that they were “well-calculated for a grocery and tavern, being opposite a large bason generally crowded with vessels.” Another building put up for sale in 1795 located on Catherine Street (now Pike Street), perpendicular to the East River waterfront, claimed that its position “being near the water” made it “a commodious stand for a grocery or tavern.”<sup>12</sup>

One of the great roles the tavern plays in early American urban history is as a place for pushing the boundaries of social order and if necessary, breaking the rules. The New York City Mayor’s recorded complaints made against taverns add to our picture of the common goings-on of taverns in neighborhoods more difficult for the elite to control. Of the complaints that exist, most were lodged against taverns located in the emerging working class neighborhoods along Water Street, in the Bowery, as well as in and around the area of Five Points, which would become the quintessential example of the rough-and-tumble life of New York’s poor workers. The resistance to elite authority would not be the only way in which New York’s working class would use their taverns to cement a group identity.

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<sup>12</sup> Sharon V. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 226-230. Horace Lane, *The Wandering Boy, Careless Sailor, and Result of Inconsideration* (1839), quoted in Paul A. Gilje and Howard B. Rock, *Keepers of the Revolution: New Yorkers at Work in the Early Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 176-180. *The New-York Gazette and General Advertiser*, January 30, 1799, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1799. *The Daily Advertiser*, July 28, 1795, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1795.

During the early national period, laborers of New York were placed outside of the political arena, which became the universe of the merchant class and the elite, but this does not mean that the common sort did not enjoy some degree of civic participation. As the laborers organized into guilds and associations based on their trades, the issue of political representation came to the forefront, and New York's working and middling classes—namely mechanics—took part in some of the politically-charged tavern meetings of the post-revolutionary period. During the pivotal election of 1789 between George Clinton and Robert Yates, in which the Federalists supporting Yates were charged with pandering to “the most zealous, who have no votes” and emphasizing popular support for their candidate rather than Clinton. This charge stung Clinton and the Anti-Federalists, who enjoyed support from the yeomanry outside of the city and ideologically made connections with the lower classes of the city.<sup>13</sup> Instead, the Federalists enjoyed broader support within the city, seen in the vocal support for Yates in tavern meetings. After the initial nomination meeting held at Bardin's City Tavern on Broadway, a group of mechanics met at the tavern of Aaron Aorson on the corner of Nassau and Great George Streets. The chairman of the meeting, John Bramble, worked as a whitesmith (working with unheated tin or pewter) and lived on what is now Pine Street, one block north of Wall Street and no less than four blocks from Water Street and Front Street. The placement of Aorson's tavern and the home of Bramble show mechanics partially separated from the merchant class who made their homes on Broadway, but also

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<sup>13</sup> Alfred Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 83-105.

not alien to their environs, enjoying meetings in the taverns close to but not a part of New York's lower class neighborhoods.<sup>14</sup>

Less affluent than the merchants of the upper class but more skilled than the sailors, dockworkers and farmers of the lower class, mechanics and artisans belonged to a middling sort who commonly referred to their work as an “art” or “mystery” but who did not command exorbitant prices for their work and felt the need to organize into guilds and member organizations for the purpose of maintaining the best interests of mechanics and artisans as a group. As skilled tradesmen they were an important part of society but the nature of their work placed them within the realm of the working class, and their appetite for social comforts—namely alcohol—became part of their distinction as workers. The terms “mechanic” and “artisan” were a catch-all phrase meant to embody these skilled laborers, covering carpenters, joiners, butchers, tanners, coopers, and numerous others. While skill in their respective trades allowed the opportunity of upward mobility, neither their labors nor their expertise were a guarantee of wealth. For the few who made good livings in their work and found themselves rising to the top of New York's economic and political world, there were many craftsmen laboring close to poverty.<sup>15</sup>

Just as the election of 1789 had split the merchant class, so too did it show rifts within the political leanings of the mechanics. When the initial meetings were held to

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<sup>14</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1789, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1789.

<sup>15</sup> Howard B. Rock, Paul Gilje, and Robert Asher (eds.), *American Artisans: Crafting Social Identity, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xi-xx. Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 91-94.

form committees of correspondence to support Robert Yates and George Clinton, Yates' Federalist committee members consisted of interesting balance of upper class and mechanic voices: while committee chairman William Constable made his living as a merchant and members Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, Robert Troup, and William Duer all worked as attorneys at law, three members out of the committee of fourteen came from among the ranks of the mechanics. One man, George Gosman, worked as a brick layer, while two other members, James Robinson and Daniel Hitchcock, worked as carpenters. Though these men would have identified with mechanics in their vocations, it is important to note that this does not necessarily have any bearing on their economic status and does not necessarily indicate a union between Federalist attorneys like Hamilton and the mechanics of New York. Hitchcock in particular is a possible example of a mechanic who had reached a higher standard of living than his colleagues, having worked as a carpenter while also owning a grocery store, a second business venture.<sup>16</sup> Clinton's committee of correspondence features a number of merchants, but the majority of the group is not listed in the city directory for that year. Considering that these directories were largely compiled with the names of tax-paying citizens, the question arises as to what sort of groups these unlisted members belonged to, and how much they represented New York's mechanic population.<sup>17</sup> It is not unlikely that Clinton and the

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<sup>16</sup> *At a numerous and respectable meeting of Citizens at Bardin's Tavern, on Wednesday the 11<sup>th</sup> instant; it was unanimously agreed to support at the ensuing election, the Hon. ROBERT YATES, Esq., as Governor,* Early American Imprints [Online Database] New York, 1789. Broadside. Daniel Hitchcock is listed in the 1789 New York City Directory as "house carpenter and grocery store, Gold Street."

<sup>17</sup> Nan Rothschild, *New York City Neighborhoods: the 18th Century* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1990), 110. The George Clinton committee members not listed in the directory are: William Malcolm, William Denning, Melanston Smith, Henry Rutgers, Elias Nexser, David Golston, John Sleght, and Isaac Cock.

Democratic-Republicans, who enjoyed lower class support outside of the city, would seek to bolster support among the laboring mechanics and artisans of New York, which they did receive in some instances. For example, in 1790 a meeting similar to the one at Aaron Aorson's tavern recommended an Anti-Federalist ticket, supporting Clinton committee member Isaac Stoutenburgh for the state Senate.<sup>18</sup> Descriptions of the meetings were published in the newspapers of the day, however it is difficult to discern certain key details, such as which mechanics supported which candidates. Typical advertisements of this period simply referred to "a meeting of mechanics" rather than listing any official affiliation or listing individual names of supporters. In fact, the only individuals specifically mentioned, besides the candidates, were the tavernkeepers themselves. The deference shown to them as hosts shows their importance in the politics of the early national period.

Workers in New York City found themselves most in demand politically when they were organized into an association. These groups were formed as trade-based orders, but politics did find their way into the organizations from time to time. This made the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, formed in 1785, an important part of the political landscape, as well as the city's cartmen, whose sheer numbers made them a sort of class in and of themselves. Cartmen as a group were tied economically to the waterfront, working to move goods about New York, facilitating the movement of goods to and from the docks and keeping the city's maritime industry running smoothly. Like

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<sup>18</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, April 20, 1790, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1790.



any other working class group found in the area, cartmen made taverngoing an important part of dock culture and had a thirst for alcohol characteristic of New York's laborers. This included drinking as a means of socializing, when cartmen would take to their carts after a night of drinking and race each other in the streets, much to the chagrin of local residents.<sup>19</sup> The fact that these cartmen were free to bolt down the streets while intoxicated speaks to their power as a politically-desirable voting bloc. Cartmen were described as "so powerful a group of voters" that their interests were not questioned, making the streets around the waterfront their domain.<sup>20</sup> Cartmen as a group were courted by Federalists and Democratic Republicans at the same time, and both had claims to a spot as the rightful party for carters.

Cartmen had a special identity as a lower class group that relied on the upper class economy for sustenance. This put them within reach of both political groups, the Republicans seeking to represent the interests of the common man against the merchant aristocracy, while the Federalists made sure to remind cartmen of the interdependency of their concerns with the concerns of the merchants, whose goods filled drivers carts and kept them employed. While cartmen were able to act as a special interest voting bloc, their loyalties were usually defined by economic interests, and whichever group kept the carter's economic interests protected—be they Republican or Federalist—received the favor of the cartmen. The tavern meetings organized specifically for cartmen to support certain candidates demonstrate this flexibility in allegiance.

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<sup>19</sup> Graham Russell Hodges, *New York City Cartmen, 1667-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 130.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Hodges, *New York City Cartmen*, 130.

In 1801, a meeting held in Crook's tavern located in the city's fifth ward gave cartmen support to the Federalists in the upcoming local elections. Newspaper accounts show Crook's to have been a common meeting place during elections, and commonly hosted the artisans of the fifth ward, which in 1800 maintained its boundaries between Canal Street in the north and Reade Street to the south, running west from Broadway to the East River. Given the volatile nature of political allegiances during the early republican period, Crook's hosted all political groups rather than catering to a certain group that would change its allegiances from election to election, as the cartmen would do between 1800 and 1810. The 1801 meeting of cartmen favored a Federalist ticket, however in a meeting two years later Crook's tavern hosted a delegation of Republicans seeking "to increase their number" within the fifth ward.<sup>21</sup>

During the era of the early republic, New York grew and its wards solidified into economically defined neighborhoods, where upper class and lower class citizens became separated. As these areas became more stratified, the taverns in these locations catered to different clienteles. Some mixing within the political sphere would occur for those working class citizens—usually mechanics—who were part of trade organizations and guilds. However, for the most part tavern culture in New York had split into working class and elite taverns by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Different groups would frequent their own taverns, but as the political world kept changing and the great struggle between Federalists and Democratic Republicans continued, the major political

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<sup>21</sup> *American Citizen*, April 28, 1803, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1803.

developments of the post-revolutionary period would affect both groups, who would face these new changes in their own taverns.

## CHAPTER IV

### POST-REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS WITHIN THE TAVERN

*He recognized on the sign, however, the ruby face of King George, under which he had smoked so many a peaceful pipe; but even this was singularly metamorphosed. The red coat was changed for one of blue and buff, a sword was held instead of a scepter, the head was decorated with a cocked hat, and underneath was painted in large characters, GENERAL Washington.*

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Washington Irving, *Rip Van Winkle*, 1819

When Washington Irving's famous character Rip Van Winkle awoke from a twenty-year slumber in New York's Catskill Mountains, one of the first indications that much had changed about the world he had lived in came by observing the sign above the inn which Rip had frequented regularly. Just as his local inn had changed with the creation of a new Republic, so too did the taverns of New York City change with the new political developments of the nascent United States of America. Like the red coat's change to blue and buff, American politics underwent changes so profound they were almost physically visible, as political factions split and became the foundation for the party system. The change from the scepter of British monarchy to the cocked hat of popular hero and national father General Washington marked the change of politics in America, which would aim for popular representation. The many changes that would take

place in American politics after the revolution were framed within the taverns of the new Republic, hosting the debates which would affect the future of the young country, and in turn shaping the methods of political discourse.

The initial struggles between the Federalists and the Democratic Republicans in their fight for dominance over local politics took place in the taverns of New York. Though there was a distinction between the taverns of the political elite who sought to win over the voters and the taverns of the lower classes who had not yet had suffrage extended to them, both groups—in their own ways—participated in the struggle between Federalism and Republicanism. During this age of America's nascent political system, the first stages of American party politics began to take shape, but before they would be powerful enough to control elections through superior organization among the top levels of society, the political elite continued to meet in public, in view of the voting majority. But with each new struggle came more experience in the new world of American-style politics, and slowly the tavern would lose its luster as a necessary meeting place.

The political role of taverns during the post-revolutionary period extended only as far as local and state politics, seldom focusing on larger national issues. Typical tavern meetings to nominate candidates and shore up support for election tickets concerned themselves only with local elections, sometimes covering only a particular ward of New York City. This lack of interest in national politics can be attributed to the electorate's concern only with affairs directly affecting New York. Though political organizations meeting within New York's taverns limited themselves to state senate and gubernatorial elections, there were some instances when national politics made their way into the

popular tavern discussion of the era. The embargo of American shipping is one such instance of a political debate beginning at the national level and ultimately reaching the taverns of New York City.

It has been established here and it is rather well known in general that the political debates in early America were heard within the boundaries of the tavern. It was such because taverns provided the public sphere by which groups gathered, arguments were heard, and public opinion shaped. Taverns did provide this space, but often they were not a part of the debate itself, and saw no real effects to the decisions being made in these meetings. However, in the case of the Embargo of 1807-1808, taverns were the hosts to a political debate which greatly affected them.<sup>1</sup>

The Embargo Act was the brainchild of Thomas Jefferson, then serving his second term as president, and who was faced with the task of protecting American economic rights against Britain and France. The two nations had been at war since Napoleon Bonaparte had seized control of France in 1799, and both had an interest in disrupting the others trade with the United States. Caught as the odd man out, American commerce was hurt by the machinations of the two warring nations, despite remaining neutral in the war. Hoping to avoid being drawn into a war with Britain, Jefferson proposed an embargo of all foreign goods, a measure which was designed as an act of economic warfare rather than military power. It was the hope of Jefferson that this embargo would persuade Britain and France to cease interfering with American shipping,

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<sup>1</sup> See Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 51-56.

as it was believed that Europe needed American commerce more than American commerce needed the markets of Europe. While this might have been technically true, the reality did not follow Jefferson's plan.<sup>2</sup>

After Congress passed the Embargo Act of 1807, American shipping came to a sudden halt, for better or worse. In New York, the news came in the early morning hours of December 23, 1807, when a rider dispatched from Washington, DC arrived in the city and awoke a local port collector, informing him of the embargo and instructing him to bar all ships from leaving for foreign ports. With international shipping now illegal, vessels no longer needed to dock in the port cities of the United States, and ships bound for international ports were stuck at the docks for the duration, until the embargo would be lifted. As a waterfront economy subject to a complete moratorium on shipping, the Embargo Act crippled business in New York and throughout the Northeast, devastating the maritime industry. The Manhattan seaport, once a bustling center of seaborne trade full of sailors, laborers, cartmen—taverngoers, all—became a ghost town. Only two weeks after the beginning of the embargo, angry sailors led a demonstration of citizens through the streets of New York, demanding relief and employment.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For more discussion of the Jefferson Embargo, see Burton Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis: Commerce, Embargo and the Republican Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978) and Lawrence S. Kaplan, *Entangling Alliances with None: American Foreign Policy in the Age of Jefferson* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1987), 99-111.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Robb Ellis, *The Epic of New York City* (New York: Kodansha America, 1997), 208. Jeffrey A. Frankel examines the economic impacts of the embargo on a national level in greater detail, challenging the popular notion that the embargo failed due to insufficient damage done to Great Britain in respect to the United States' economic losses. Jeffrey A. Frankel, "The 1807-1809 Embargo Against Great Britain." *The Journal of Economic History* 42 (June 1982), 291-308.

Only three months after the embargo had taken effect, English traveler John Lambert came to New York on a trip through North America. Lambert had previously described the city in November 1807 as “the first city in the United States for wealth, commerce and population...the wharfs were crowded with shipping, whose tall masts mingled with the buildings, and together with the spires and cupolas of the churches, gave the city an appearance of magnificence.” In his return trip, Lambert was shocked to see a waterfront community devastated by the embargo. He observed “above 500 vessels in the harbor, which were lying up useless, and rotting for want of employment. Thousands of sailors were either destitute of bread, wandering about the country, or had entered into the British service.” Lambert also observed merchants who had closed their counting houses and farmers who no longer bothered taking goods to market. The scene was so depressing to Lambert that he did not stay in the city but five or six days to recoup from his previous travels, leaving the “gloomy looks and long faces” of the city, which he described as being in “a melancholy state of dejection.”<sup>4</sup>

The debate over the Embargo Act renewed the struggle between the Federalists and their anti-Federalist opponents, now formed as the Democratic-Republicans, also known as Republicans. Because the measure was put forth by Jefferson, a Democratic-Republican, it passed through a Democratic-Republican majority in Congress while prominent Democratic-Republicans supported the embargo at the local level. As it became clear that the embargo was having a negative effect on American economy and

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<sup>4</sup> John Lambert quoted in Kenneth T. Jackson and David S. Dunbar, (eds.) *Empire City: New York Through the Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 111.



was failing in forcing Britain to acquiesce to American demands, Republicans were forced to defend the measure against an increasingly disgruntled population. In September 1808, over a year after the Embargo Act had been passed, a large meeting of New York Republicans convened at Martling's tavern to reiterate their support for the embargo and address the Republican citizens of New York. It was Martling's that had become the meeting place of the Tammany Society, by this time the major force in Democratic Republican politics in New York City. Martling's tavern also would be the last meeting place of the Tammany Society before its members would grow too big for its confines and move into its new home on Frankfurt Street, at Tammany Hall.<sup>5</sup>

By the beginning of 1809, anger over the Embargo was running rampant, and popular sentiment against the legislation could be heard throughout the taverns of New York City. In January of 1809, shortly before Jefferson's second term as president was to end, a series of meetings were advertised in various newspapers around the city, calling for citizens to meet and voice their opposition to the Embargo. So great was the need to voice these concerns that meetings were held in the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth wards of the city, each meeting resulting in a committee of five members being elected to represent the ward. One such meeting, called after the latest attempt by Congress to enforce the Embargo Act, was held at the tavern of John Hogg in the Eighth Ward, with the intent "to adopt a suitable remonstrance against the said law, which will then be submitted to them, and such other measures as shall appear to them proper in

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<sup>5</sup> *Address of the Republicans of the City and County of New York*, Early American Imprints II [Online Database] New York, 1808.

relation thereto.” In the advertisements for these meetings, no restrictions were placed on who was to take part in these meetings, and the same advertisements appeared in multiple newspapers around New York, suggesting that the common citizens—those most affected by the Embargo—were given a forum to express their opposition. The negative popular reaction to the embargo, which would go down as a famous feat for Thomas Jefferson, would also mark a moment of real participation by local citizens in voicing their opinions on a matter of national policy. Not since the Constitutional debate and the elections to the ratification convention had citizens had a say in a matter of such national and local importance. In order to accommodate the great need in New York to convene and discuss the embargo, the taverns allowed upper class merchants and working class mechanics and seamen alike to form the rhetoric of opposition—a true public sphere.<sup>6</sup>

There are few details from the anti-Embargo tavern meetings, and there is no information about who organized the meetings and oversaw the appointment of committees, though this could be a deliberate choice to paint anti-Embargo sentiments in the light of nonpartisan populism rather than in Federalist opposition to Democratic-Republican policies. In the end, the Embargo cost the Democratic-Republicans a great deal. The Embargo Act died as soon as Jefferson left office, and the election of 1808 marked one of the first major shifts in public opinion in American political history, when the Republicans lost their majority and the Federalists regained power. This happened on

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<sup>6</sup> “Ward Meetings,” *The Evening Post*, January 27, 1809, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1809. “Eighth Ward,” *Mercantile Advertiser*, January 27, 1809, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1809. “New-York, March 16,” *American Citizen*, March 16, 1810, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1810.

a national level, as American citizens voiced their disapproval and complained of the harsh economic effects that the embargo had, voting out the Democratic Republicans who had defended the embargo as a necessity. On a local level, New York was no different: Democratic-Republicans had enjoyed control of the state, but the Embargo ended up being the issue that spurred their temporary downfall. Across the state voter turnout increased 28 percent, as citizens made clear their feelings about the Republican-sponsored Embargo, electing the Federalists to 47 seats in the New York state assembly, almost doubling the 24 they held before the election.<sup>7</sup>

Jefferson's embargo of 1807-1809 remains largely under-researched among the political events of the Early Republic. Especially given the wave of strong popular protest against the embargo, there is a surprising dearth of research into the effects it had on the citizens of the urban waterfront areas such as New York, Boston and Philadelphia. Given that taverns were indirectly yet profoundly affected by the effects of the embargo on the maritime industry and played a role in facilitating this opposition, it is necessary to examine the impact of the embargo in this work. A deeper look at the fourteen-month period in which international trade stopped, and its effect on the workers and laborers of American cities, will offer a valuable addition to the historiography of the early republic.

The embargo and the public opposition to it that fermented in the taverns is one case of national political debate making its way into local taverns, but it would not be the last during the turbulent years of the early nineteenth century. Also, American citizens

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<sup>7</sup> Harvey Strum, "Property Qualifications and Voting Behavior in New York, 1807-1816" *Journal of the Early Republic* 1 (Winter 1981), 351.

were not the only people taking part in this politicized tavern culture. In the increasingly diverse ethnic makeup of the city, the foreign inhabitants of New York, operating as independent political bodies and voting blocs, deliberated and planned their own political ascendancy while partaking of the food and drink of New York taverns. New arrivals to New York City at this time consisted mainly of Scottish, Irish and German immigrants, and these groups formed societies to protect their interests. The Dumfries and Galloway Society represented Scots living in the United States, Irish interests were represented by societies such as the Hibernian Society and Juvenile Sons of Erin, while Germans met in strong numbers to determine how to vote in the early days of the republic. Details of these meetings show how small, potentially marginalized groups were able to use taverns to increase their visibility and make their voices heard.<sup>8</sup>

These societies were organized as a means of increasing the profile of the groups, and also celebrated their heritage at social gatherings, but they were not immune from being pulled into the growing political debate between the Democratic Republicans and the Federalists. Understanding that new arrivals to the country could be swayed to vote a certain way based on how their countrymen voted, newspaper advertisements announcing the nomination and support of certain candidates were a very valuable means of shoring up support among the political factions of the early republic. Some met to discuss candidates in groups based solely on national heritage. An announcement in the New

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<sup>8</sup> Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 291. Paul A. Gilje, "The Development of an Irish American Community in New York City before the Great Migration," in Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (eds.), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1996), 70-86.

York Daily Advertiser described “a very numerous meeting of Germans, inhabitants of the city of New-York” taking place on April 26, 1788. The announcement ran one day prior to the statewide election of delegates to the New York ratification convention to be held on April 29. Tavernkeeper William Leonard, who kept his house at 80 Bowery Lane and who was identified as “Capt. Leonard” in the announcement, hosted the German meeting. Though it is not expressly written in the announcement, the participants in the meeting favored the pro-Constitution Federalists, listing among their supported candidates Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and Robert Livingston. Hamilton and Jay co-wrote the Federalist papers along with James Madison, while Livingston would support the constitution as a Federalist but would later switch allegiances and become a Jeffersonian Republican after ratification. Judging from their support of these delegates, it can be argued that the group which met at Leonard’s tavern hoped to promote the Federalist cause while calling upon other Germans living in New York to support the cause as well with their votes.<sup>9</sup>

Other groups defined by nationality met more regularly and became more organized after forming benevolent societies meant to assist their countrymen living in the United States and ensure that there was a mouthpiece for their concerns as new inhabitants of the country. These societies met regularly in taverns, recounting the details of their meetings in newspaper announcements. These societies typically consisted of middle class Irish and Scottish immigrants, hoping to cement a place for their

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<sup>9</sup> *The Daily Advertiser*, April 28, 1788, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1788.

countrymen in the decades before the mass immigration of the mid-nineteenth century. Most of them subscribed to republican ideology, having been spurned by Federalists wary of immigrants. Two such groups, the Dumfries and Galloway Society, and the Juvenile Sons of Erin, represented Scotland and Ireland, respectively.<sup>10</sup>

One of the better ways to discern the feeling among the members of these societies and understand exactly what their goals were is to examine the toasts made at the celebrations, which were typically published along with reports of the group's activities. At a celebration of the Dumfries and Galloway Society anniversary held at the tavern of a Mr. Hogg, located at No. 11 Nassau Street, the society feasted on the meal prepared by Hogg and drank several toasts, all of which spoke to the complicated endeavor of proclaiming loyalty to a mother country and giving right acknowledgement of a host country. To add to the different layers and shades of loyalty, the meeting took place in June 1807, at a time when conflict between Great Britain and France strained the already tense relationship between England and the United States.<sup>11</sup>

As a Scots living in the United States, the members of the Dumfries and Galloway Society were placed between two adversarial sides which would in only five years time be fighting each other, but at their meeting while reveling over drinks, the society would

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<sup>10</sup> Paul A. Gilje, "The Development of an Irish American Community in New York City before the Great Migration," in Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (eds.), *The New York Irish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1996), 70-86. Alfred Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 401-402.

<sup>11</sup> "Notice," *New-York Gazette & General Advertiser*, June 22, 1807, America's Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1807. It is unlikely that the "Mr. Hogg" mentioned in this announcement is the same John Hogg who hosted a tavern meeting in the Eighth Ward to discuss popular disapproval of the embargo. Hogg's tavern at No. 11 Nassau Street would have been located in either the first or second wards of the city.

proclaim their loyalty to both nations and hope for the best in the resolution of any disagreements between the two countries. In a total of 13 toasts—a common practice during the day, to signify the 13 colonies of the United States—four are devoted in some way to the relationship between Britain and the United States. For each toast to one country, a similar toast was made to the other: to “the British Union, a threefold cord, may its termination be the end of time,” followed by an offering to “our adopted country—may its citizens become as much celebrated for their virtue, as they are distinguished for their civil and religious principles.” The equal favor given to both England and the United States by the society also included its leaders, as toasts were offered to the King as well as to the President. Finding themselves between their country of origin and their new adopted home, the members of the Dumfries and Galloway Society could not give any real indication of their allegiances, instead making a toast to “an amicable adjustment of all existing differences between the British and American governments on principles of mutual reciprocity.” These words came only a few months before the embargo would attempt to bring about that adjustment and would have such a negative effect of life in New York City.<sup>12</sup>

Though the Dumfries and Galloway Society would have represented all Scots in its rhetoric—thus suggesting a relationship with the working class Scottish immigrants of the city—the tavern location and the pomp and circumstance of the celebration hints at the society’s identity as an upper class organization. The tavern which hosted this

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<sup>12</sup> *New-York Gazette & General Advertiser*, June 26, 1807, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1807.

anniversary celebration could be found on Nassau Street, and its location shows it to be within the area of settlement away from working class neighborhoods and within the sphere of the merchant class. Nassau Street, which has remained relatively unchanged since before the era of the early republic, runs north to south, from Wall Street to City Hall park, one block east of Broadway. In the cramped city upper class areas were never far from laboring neighborhoods, but Nassau Street—and by extension the tavern where the Dumfries and Galloway Society met—lay firmly within the neighborhood of New York’s wealthy merchant class.<sup>13</sup>

The details of a similar meeting held by the Juvenile Sons of Erin showed a celebration much like that of the Dumfries and Galloway Society, but with a few fundamental differences which demonstrate how during the post-revolutionary period, different groups dealt with broad political issues at their own meetings and in their own ways. Both groups represented foreign inhabitants living in the United States during a period of intense political debate and tension between American and European interests. While the Scottish members of the Dumfries and Galloway Society took their meeting as an opportunity to show their almost apolitical support for both sides, the Juvenile Sons of Erin were more willing to let their true colors show, both in regards to the relationship between England and the United States, and to the struggle between the Federalists and Democratic Republicans.

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<sup>13</sup> “Notice,” *New-York Gazette & General Advertiser*, June 22, 1807, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1807.



Whereas the toasts at the Scottish meeting were marked by polite language and optimism for resolution of any conflict the Dumfries and Galloway Society would have an interest in, the toasts of the Irish used more pointed phrases and stronger words, embracing confrontation as a means of conflict resolution, where a potentially anti-English theme emerges. In their revelry, the members of the Juvenile Sons of Erin describe the United States as “the resting place of Liberty, the asylum of persecuted humanity—may she ever keep clear of such miserable systems as have prevailed in the old world under the name of government.” Another toast, to Ireland, described England as “the most iniquitous government that ever insulted Heaven and oppressed mankind” and later called for an end to “Irish Slavery” and the return of “liberty and happiness after such a long long absence.” The organization also made no secret of their allegiances within the American political system, praising the Democratic Republicans and giving them “our grateful thanks for your exertions to protect our national character against the unjust and illiberal prejudice of your federal opponents.” The embargo, championed by Democratic Republicans, is not mentioned in the details of the meeting, but given that it had only taken effect a few months before, the need to truly defend it against Federalist attacks had not yet arisen.<sup>14</sup>

Among the many ways in which the two meetings were dissimilar the most telling difference is the Dumfries and Galloway Society’s decision to hold their meeting in

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<sup>14</sup> *American Citizen*, March 19, 1808, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1808. Regarding the meeting in relation to the embargo, the details of this event were published exactly one week after Congress had passed another act, strengthening the embargo and cutting off loopholes unforeseen when the first Embargo Act was signed into law.

Hogg's tavern while the Juvenile Sons of Erin held their meeting "at a private house in Liberty street." Both meetings thus took place in the same general area, as Liberty Street and Nassau Street actually intersect, however one took place in a public place, and the other was held in privacy, where members made far more pointed statements against their Federalist opposition. Though these toasts were made in public in the newspaper announcements printed later, the chance to hold a celebration in a private house offered the opportunity for members to speak with greater candor. It would be an important advantage when political societies would see the need to move into their own facilities and cease meeting at public taverns when the order of the day called for political discussion.

The meetings of New York's immigrant societies, and the significance of the toasts they made, show how tavern culture could influence political rhetoric. Toasting as an activity was not limited to these groups, however. During the era of the early republic, political societies and organizations made it common practice to include toasts during their celebrations, and a great deal can be discerned from them. The political scene after the Revolution was very much in flux. Traditions were still observed, but by and large the political system of the colonial period was being replaced with a new, American brand of politics. As the rifts between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans were being exposed and groups began to take sides, the act of toasting became increasingly pointed, a civil means of engaging in the heated discourse of America politics.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 129-130.

The toast could be one of the best indicators of political sentiment during this period, the ritual of raising glasses and drinking to the honor of a variety of things, from certain individuals to entire nations to future political success. By the end of the revolution the process of toasting was highly ritualized, and by 1784 had already being called into question by some citizens. One such editorial against toasting described it as a “foolish custom” which “seems to carry with it too much stiffness and unsociability.”<sup>16</sup> In the political world of the new American elite, however, toasting was a vital part of informal political participation.

The inclusion of other demonstrations of patriotism, interspersed with the toasts, added to the pomp and circumstance of the toasting ritual and an extra dose of excitement to the proceedings. In many instances during the Post-Revolutionary period, but especially during dinners celebrating society anniversaries, distinguished guests, and national holidays, a toast given would be accompanied by a patriotic song and in some cases, by a volley of artillery. At a 1792 reception for John Jay, then serving as the Chief Justice of the United States, a crowd of over two hundred people gathered at Edward Bardin’s City Tavern for a feast in his honor. At the celebration, “a band of music played at intervals during the entertainment, and...toasts were drank under a discharge of cannon, accompanied by the shouts and huzzas of the people.” Jay had recently been the latest to lose another bitterly contested gubernatorial election against George Clinton, who had defeated Robert Yates in the election of 1789. Due to a number of ballots being

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<sup>16</sup> The New-York Packet and American Advertiser, May 27, 1784, *Curious Edict, Against Drinking Healths or Toasts*, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1784.

disqualified in Clinton, Tioga and Oswego counties, Clinton edged in front of Jay with a slim majority and took the office, much to the chagrin of New York's Federalists. At the celebration for Jay and in the toasts that were made, the feelings of the Federalists were well captured. Having lost such an important election under such questionable circumstances, the crowd used the occasion a way to lick its wounds, toasting "the right of suffrage—may every violation of it experience the indignation it merits" and "our injured fellow citizens in the counties of Oswego, Clinton and Tioga." One particularly pointed toast, to "the honest minority of the late canvassing committee," the operating term at the time for a vote-counting committee, was greeted by three cheers from the crowd.<sup>17</sup>

In what can best be described as a form of dialogue between the two groups, a similar celebration in honor of governor-elect George Clinton included its own toasts referring to the contested election, and the descriptions of both events were printed side by side in the *New-York Weekly Museum*. At Clinton's celebration, attended by over one hundred citizens at the hotel of Joseph Corre, "the seven firm and patriotic canvassers" were toasted and also received three cheers from the crowd of Democratic Republicans. In a show of civility, the victorious party made another toast to "a speedy return of peace, good will, and harmony throughout the state," in the hopes that the highly fractious period could be put behind both the Democratic Republicans and the Federalists.

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<sup>17</sup> "New-York, July 21," *New-York Weekly Museum*, July 21, 1792, American Periodical Series [Online Database] New York, 1792.

By reading the transcriptions of toasts made at tavern gatherings, with an eye toward the order in which toasts are made, it is possible to discern further the values of those making the toasts. In the Dumfries and Galloway Society meeting of 1807, toasts made to Great Britain and to the United States show a respect for both nations on the part of the society, but it is equally important that these toasts only came after the members of the society drank to memories of Scotland. The first toast of the evening called upon the members to let “the heroic achievements of our ancestors at Bannockburn, inspire us with veneration for their memory,” while the second and third honored Robert the Bruce—the first King of Scotland, and “the Land of our nativity.”<sup>18</sup>

While toasting could be a very formal affair with much pomposity, the symbolism of the act carried so much power and meaning that it did not exist just in the realm of the upper class. Mechanics society meetings and anniversary celebrations often included a round of toasts, and were the source of some of the most inventive offerings these celebrations would drink to. In their toasts, mechanics would wish “disgrace to the man who owes his greatness to his country’s ruin” and “a cobweb pair of breeches, a porcupine saddle, a hard trotting horse, and a long journey to all the enemies of freedom.”<sup>19</sup>

The act of toasting joined together the equally important acts of political participation and social drinking, marking the clearest connection between the two

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<sup>18</sup> *New-York Gazette & General Advertiser*, June 26, 1807, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1807.

<sup>19</sup> “New-York, January 10,” *New-York Weekly Museum*, American Periodical Series [Online Database] New York, 1789.

activities. As a way of making a poetic and powerful statement of political significance, the toast has remained in different forms into the present era. However, the days of overt political activity within the tavern have since passed. Thirteen toasts and patriotic songs are no longer the order of meetings, and the drinking establishment is no longer the center of political life. The question to be answered, then, is how exactly this change came to pass.

## CHAPTER V

### POLITICS LEAVES THE TAVERN

*We promise ourselves solid advantages from this Hall. It will be the rallying spot where every firm citizen will assemble in the hour of peril, and where the consolidated power of the republicans will drive to shades the remains of the turbulent and vindictive federalists who would fall lord it over the city.*

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New York Public Advertiser, August 15, 1811

On the rainy day of May 6, 1811, when the Tammany Society dedicated their new meeting place, the group envisioned a building strong and imposing enough to help project the authority of the Democratic Republicans over the rest of the city. The new building was a necessity for the society, which had outgrown the small confines of Abraham Martling's tavern. The tavern itself could not accommodate the Tammany Society's designs for its future: a low, wooden building of nondescript design, Martling's establishment had been nicknamed "the pig-pen" by the society's Federalist rivals, both as a description of the building itself and a comment on the nature of the men who gathered under its roof. The name "pig-pen" began as a moniker that was not self-

applied, however over time the name would be embraced somewhat by the so-called “Martling Men,” those Democratic Republicans who met at Martling’s tavern.<sup>1</sup>

As centers of public space for less restricted conversation, taverns promoted political discussion, which may explain why the St. Tammany Society did not remain a nonpolitical organization for very long. In fact, it is now believed that Tammany’s birth as a political force began with the elections of 1789. In the years before Tammany Hall grew into the machine which dominated New York politics, it was a small organization, the St. Tammany Society, which became part of the struggle between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists of New York City. Begun as a fraternal, nonpolitical group, the St. Tammany Society was an open-ended organization which drew largely middle and upper class members, but which branded itself a society for all New Yorkers. In the early days of its existence Tammany members met at Bardin’s City Tavern, which became the group’s first “wigwam,” the title given to Tammany’s official home. During these days members met in the name of fraternity, holding dinners and drinking thirteen pre-prepared toasts to the new republic, the president and other similar matters.<sup>2</sup>

Though at its inception the Tammany Society welcomed all members regardless of political affiliation, over time Democratic Republican members attracted like-minded individuals, to the point that membership became an act of political expediency. Thomas

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<sup>1</sup> Gustavus Myers, *The History of Tammany Hall* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1917; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), 13. “Says I to Myself—How is This?” *The New-York Columbian*, March 1, 1819, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1819. The author, signing his piece only as “A Martling Man,” reminisces about his early days as a Republican, voting for George Clinton, and going “to the Pig-Pen, as usual” when meetings were called.

<sup>2</sup> Gustavus Myers, *The History of Tammany Hall*, 5-10. Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany: The Evolution of a Political Machine, 1789-1865* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 8-11.



Greenleaf, publisher of the *New-York Journal*, and John Stagg, president of the General Society of Mechanics, joined, followed by DeWitt Clinton and three members of New York's powerful and illustrious Livingston Family: Brockholst, Peter, and Edward.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 6: Martling's tavern & Tammany Hall. The contrast between Tammany's two homes, the public tavern owned by Abraham Martling (left) and the private Tammany Hall, are especially clear in this illustration, which places the two buildings side by side in a "before" and "after" profile. Courtesy of the New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

As more influential members joined the society and began dabbling in politics, Tammany became a factor in deciding the conflicts within the emerging Democratic Republican party. After outgrowing Bardin's tavern, Tammany moved to its new official meeting place, Martling's tavern, owned by Martling, a prominent member of the Tammany Society. The tavern was located at the corner of Nassau and Spruce streets, closer to City Hall and one block east of Broadway. In 1808, a rift in the group between Clintonians (supporters of former governor and vice president George Clinton) and

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<sup>3</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany*, 14.

Madisonians (a conglomeration of Burrrites and Livingstonians) came to a head. In the growing anger over the embargo, Democratic Republicans were breaking into splinter groups, some rallying behind Jefferson, and other backing rival politicians seeking an upper hand during the power struggle. Thanks to their Burrrite-Livingstonian coalition formed in order to overwhelm the Clintonians, the Madisonians took control of the party and helped shape Tammany's future as a political player. The balance of power shifted at a special meeting called at Martling's tavern, where the Clintonian members of the Tammany Society were denied entrance to the barroom. Pounding on the walls of the tavern and demanding entrance to the meeting, the Clintonians threatened to do damage to the tavern unless admitted. Once inside, Clintonians found themselves entering a room full of Madisonians intent on intimidating their opponents and taking control of Tammany. A contentious and unpredictable meeting followed, during which men from both sides attempted to shout each other down. In the end, the Madisonian contingent in Tammany prevailed in a rare instance of unruly tavern behavior amongst the political elite of the city.<sup>4</sup>

The incident at Martling's is also significant as the cause for the adoption of the term "Martling-Men," and as a final act showing how important the tavernkeeper had been to politics up to this point. At the meeting, Martling himself helped bar the door to Clinton's supporters, and given that the members of the Madisonian faction met in his tavern, the name was an apt one. The meeting holds special significance to New York's tavern culture, but as a moment in New York's politics it is a turning point. After the

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<sup>4</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany*, 34.

Martling-Men took control of Tammany and the Democratic Republican party in New York, the Tammany Society could no longer claim apolitical status, and its role as a force in city politics became evident. William Coleman, the editor of the Federalist-controlled *Evening Post*, finished an editorial with the lament: “The truth is, and it ought to be known—*The politics of this city are now governed by a JACOBIN CLUB*—an organized Jacobin Club which holds its nightly orgies at a certain public house, and there dictates to those of its party in power, and controuls their conduct as its pleasure.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany*, 31-34. “The New Corporation,” *The New-York Evening Post*, February 18, 1808, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York; 1808. Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany*, 35.



Figure 7: Tammany Hall. A depiction of Tammany Hall, the first home of the Tammany Society after the group moved out of Abraham Martling's tavern. The Federal-style structure was a far cry from that humble exterior of Martling's. Courtesy of the New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

By the time the Madisonians had taken control of the Tammany Society and were challenging the Clintonians for control of the Democratic Republican party, a separate building to house the society was already under way. The process of raising money for

this new structure took so long that when the project initially began, the Tammany Society's political leanings had not yet developed. Benjamin Strong, a merchant, Federalist, and Tammany Society secretary, wrote in 1792 about the process by which the society had begun to raise the money for a new meeting place big enough to suit its members' needs. The members of the Tammany Society had formed a tontine, an investment group in which individuals purchased shares in the whole, with shares being divided amongst the group when a stockholder died. The Tammany tontine sold a total of 4000 shares at \$16 per share, supplying the \$64,000 necessary to fund construction. Strong commented that shares "now sell at 4 dollars advance and appear to be rising, it is considered a very profitable stock to hold." The shares were available to Tammany members for one month before the tontine association allowed the public to buy shares.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Strong, Letter to Selah Strong, January 25, 1792. Strong Family Papers, New-York Historical Society. Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany*, 15.



Figure 8: Tammany Hall Ballroom. The interior of the Tammany Hall ballroom and convention area, large enough to host galas such as this one in 1860, and a departure from the close quarters of Martling's tavern. Eight years after the date of this illustration, a new, larger Tammany Hall would be built. Courtesy of the New York Library Digital Gallery.

With the money raised from the tontine, the Tammany Society built a structure capable of accommodating its aspirations. Built in the Adamesque style—an architectural style common to the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—Tammany Hall fit into the growing urban landscape of the early republic. The four-story hall, accented by an ornate iron balustrade, rose three steps above street level. Elements of Classical design such as the balustrade and cornice work, projected authority, status, and republican values to those passing by the new structure. In contrast



to Martling's tavern and its derisive nickname, the "pig-pen," Tammany Hall expressed through its architecture the power the Society wielded over city affairs. The new structure fit into a growing trend in city planning and construction, in which the forerunners of the modern hotel replaced the smaller, less luxurious taverns of the colonial and revolutionary period. In New York the arrival of the hotel partially meant the end of the tavern as a place of upper class accommodation. In a move symbolic of this change, Edward Bardin's City Tavern was purchased in 1793 by a small group of investors, only to be destroyed to make way for a new hotel. The City Hotel began construction in 1794 and bested Bardin's old establishment in size and luxury. The structure fronted 80 feet on Broadway, and featured offices, a bar and a ballroom. These structures were designed to be imposing physically, boasted the finest accommodations, and reflected the growing importance privacy held to the political elite. Even almost 20 years before the Society would move into their home, Benjamin Strong made it clear that Tammany's influence and power would be a different sort from the rest of New York's societies, saying of his job as secretary that "I hope however this will prove more profitable than the other secretaryships that I hold, as I am to be allowed a salary for this."<sup>7</sup>

The Tammany Hall political machine drew most of its power from the growing numbers of lower class citizens arriving in the city each year. In the first years of the republic, the city's elite worked to consolidate their power by nominating their own

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<sup>7</sup> Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 153-167. A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, "A Public House for a New Republic," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9 (2003): 66-67. A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 23-24.

candidates for elections in which a large part of the urban population was disenfranchised. Tammany Hall took a different tack and instead of courting to the small but powerful elite, a conscious decision was made to attempt to control the popular vote. In the early years of Tammany Hall, nominees for elections were chosen by an open convention held at Martling's tavern, where delegates from each ward of the city came to choose candidates for city elections.<sup>8</sup>

As the Tammany Society gained steam, so too did the burgeoning American temperance movement. Alcohol consumption had been opposed as long as it had been present since the colonial period, but the temperance movement began to change in the face of the evolving political life of New York's working class taverns. During the Jeffersonian period, anti-alcohol arguments centered on the alcohol-abusing "drunkard," but did not condemn the act of drinking wholesale, nor did it target tavern license holders. In the early days of the temperance movement alcohol abuse was the biggest concern, and groups hoped to rid the city of the lower class taverns and dram shops, which one anti-drinking leaflet described as full of "a croud of poor people, whose families are starving and freezing at home, draining their pockets of the last penny to purchase a gill of rum."<sup>9</sup>

Considering that taverns were markers of the political and economic landscape of New York, the temperance movement acknowledged the hierarchy of tavern culture in

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<sup>8</sup> Anthony Gronowicz, *Race and Class Politics in New York City Before the Civil War* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 37.

<sup>9</sup> *Evil Effects of the great consumption of Spiritous liquors in America*, The American Museum, September 1788, American Periodical Series [Online Database] New York, 1788.



the city. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the common language of the temperance movement was beginning to take shape, and reformers wished to weed out the less desirable taverns in the city. A report published in 1801 regarding the state of the New York City penitentiary included a few choice words on the city's drinking establishments, which the author of the report felt were the breeding grounds for the "idle, low and dissipated practices" which were the origin of most crimes in the city. In 1810 the Humane Society of New York, a relief organization interested in the general moral welfare of the city, released a report on tavern licenses and "the manner of granting them." The study is not a clear condemnation of the existence of the tavern, only of inappropriate licensing. It blames the extreme poverty and misery of the city on "the excessive multiplication of petty taverns," meaning that the institutions targeted in this study are the low-rent dram shops selling alcohol to the public but serving no civic purpose. While the tavern was the unofficial meeting place and the space in which ideas were exchanged among the powerless, the dram shop was the antithesis, the nondescript back alley liquor store selling rum or grog by the cup to those thirsting for alcohol but not company. In both cases the main complaint about taverns in the city was the sheer volume of licenses handed out, which early temperance groups found unacceptable: an estimated 1200 in 1801, which increased to 1700 in 1810.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *An account of the state prison or penitentiary house in the city of New York by one of the inspectors of the prison*, Early American Imprints II [Online Database] New York, 1801. *A Report of a Committee of the Humane Society, appointed to inquire into the number of tavern licenses*, Early American Imprints II [Online Database] New York, 1810.

One of the key goals of New York's temperance movement, which was part of a broader social reform movement in the early to mid-eighteenth century, was the cleaning up of taverns in order to promote the health and welfare of the city. The definition of promoting health could at times be more literal, as is the case of a small yellow fever outbreak in 1805 which was fueled by the large number of infected who lodged in "such taverns and boarding houses, as were kept in a filthy state." In other cases, such as the Humane Society report, lower-end taverns were determined to be the source of New York's moral decay. However, it is important to note that initial reforms to licensed taverns affected working class taverns, where scenes of violence and drunkenness were common, more so than they effected upper class taverns like those found on Broadway and near City Hall. Regulations for taverns did not place any specific restrictions on the sale of alcohol, but did allow for licenses to be revoked from taverns which allowed cock-fighting, gambling with cards, dice, billiards or shuffle board.<sup>11</sup>

The temperance movement in New York did not end the tavern's role as a place of political participation, but it did look negatively on politicians who canvassed the city's taverns to secure votes. Daniel Rodgers' poem calling the average politician a "two-legg'd animal" which "bawls loud" when in the tavern with potential voters is one

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<sup>11</sup> James Hardie, *An account of the malignant fever which prevailed in the city of New-York during the autumn of 1805*, Early American Imprints II [Online Database] New York, 1805. *City of New-York, ss. Be it remembered, that on the [blank] day of [blank] in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety-six, before me, Richard Varick, Esquire, mayor of the said city, personally appeared [blank]...and acknowledged [blank] to be indebted to the people of the state of New-York, in the sum of fifty pounds...if failure be made in the performance of the conditions following...*, Early American Imprints [Online Database] New York, 1796. Broadside. For more on the relationship between the New York City elite and the social reform movement, see M.J. Heale, "From City Fathers to Social Critics: Humanitarianism and Government in New York, 1790-1860," *The Journal of American History* 63 (June 1976), 21-41.

instance in which the link between taverns and politicians reflected poorly on the latter. In another satirical piece written in 1813 defending the moral good of drunkenness, the author slyly argues that “without drunkenness you cannot shine as politicians,” due in part to alcohol’s ability to make “the haughtiness of wealth, the sternness of virtue [and] the aristocracy of talents” vanish, creating a more perfect republic.<sup>12</sup>

The rise of temperance coincided with a growing evangelical movement in the United States, whose converts were left unenthusiastic for either politics or the tavern. Seen as sinful, drinking became the target of elites who saw working class drinking habits as a bane slowing down American progress. By rejected alcohol consumption on a wholesale basis, these temperance reformers contributed to the change in attitude over alcohol consumption in the political realm. At one time acceptable, tavern gatherings became less expedient once public drinking received a stigma from religious leaders.<sup>13</sup>

The changing role of the tavern from a part of American civic life to a purely social institution is reflective of a broader change in the structure and spatial organization of the urban landscape in America. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the “grid” pattern of town planning gained in popularity and cultural institutions began to change to reflect the need for order in the rapidly growing cities of the United States. To accommodate this need, the tavern began to change into what is now the hotel. Larger structures with more rooms and amenities met the needs of the growing population.

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<sup>12</sup> New-York Weekly Museum, April 10, 1813, *Morality: From an Ironical Tale on Drunkenness*, American Periodical Series [Online Database] New York, 1813.

<sup>13</sup> Howard B. Rock, Paul Gilje, Robert Asher, *American Artisans: Crafting Social Identity, 1750-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 76. Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millenium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 79-83.

By 1812, the United States sat at the brink of a second war with Great Britain. Democratic Republicans and Federalists still jostled for position and power. And in New York, citizens went to the tavern. Still the center of social life, the tavern hosted the inhabitants of the city as they drank, interacted, and talked about the news of the day. Ultimately the conversation within these taverns would drift toward politics. But where had the politicians gone? If the members of the St. Tammany Society serve as an indication, the politicians of New York outgrew the need for their taverns. Their designs for the future were too grand to be formulated and executed in the back rooms of public houses, no matter how upscale they might have been.

Thanks to its secure place in American political history as the ultimate representation of local political power, Tammany Hall stands out from other groups and societies at this time, though there are other instances of separate buildings being constructed for political groups. If Tammany was the Democratic Republican example of politics leaving the tavern, then the Washington Benevolent Society served as its Federalist counterpart. Unlike Tammany's origins at Martling's tavern, the Washington Benevolent Society met first at Harmony Hall before laying the cornerstone for its own building—Washington Hall—on July 4, 1809. The move came in an upswing of Federalist support, after Jefferson's embargo had engendered enough resentment among the electorate that the Democratic Republicans lost power. In the December local elections of that year, the Federalists managed to play to this resentment, attacking the Democratic Republican embargo supporters and taking the first, second, third, fourth,

sixth, seventh, and ninth wards of the city.<sup>14</sup> Up until this moment the Federalists had not enjoyed strong popular support, and capitalized on their surge in popularity by forming the Washington Benevolent Society as a means of exploiting it. However, liabilities in the Federalists' political worldview, which favored a system of deference over populism, would hurt them and make their stay in power a short one.<sup>15</sup>

By founding the Washington Benevolent Society—envisioned as a sort of Federalist answer to Tammany—the opponents of the Democratic Republicans hoped to earn the mass support that they had been largely unable to attract in a meaningful way. This did not happen, for a variety of reasons, chief among them being the inability to attract common voters to the Federalist cause which valued the authority of social and economic elites. This opened them to attacks from the Democratic Republicans, who played up the Federalist identity as one of elitism and aristocracy. In the new culture the Revolution had made, voters responded more to New World egalitarianism rather than Old World order and stratification. In order to combat the Democratic Republican attacks, Federalists attempted to turn the tables on the Democratic Republican elite such as George Clinton by directing similar attacks of elitism at them. In a series of letters written to his father Selah Strong, Benjamin Strong captured some of the resentment and elitist rhetoric that would shape Federalist politics. The letters, written in 1792 during the governor's election pitting George Clinton and John Jay, gives an idea of the emerging resentment of Clinton and the Democratic Republicans. In his letters to his father, Strong

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<sup>14</sup> Anthony Gronowicz, *Race and Class Politics in New York City Before the Civil War*, 39.

<sup>15</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 75. Stanley M. Elkins and Eric L. McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 750-751.

focuses on perceived abuses of power, finding enjoyment in the “long faces” of Clinton’s supporters, calling them “anxious lest they lose their Giver of Offices, and they be, thereby obliged to return to their proper station of being sometimes governed instead of always governing.” Strong goes on to envision a Federalist victory for John Jay, noting that “should Jay be elected, (and I am very sanguine that he will) I flatter myself we shall have an equal, an equitable, and a respectable government—that favouritism will be done away, and merit...always be rewarded.”<sup>16</sup>

In spite of their attempts to stop them, the Federalists were unable to slow down the Democratic Republicans’ rise in New York City, and the Federalist party collapsed in 1816. Tammany Hall became the nerve center for New York City’s Democratic Republicans, later to become Democrats. As old parties faltered and collapsed, new ones rose, each one stepping further away from the old system which had called the tavern home. Though political parties would continue to encourage popular support through public rituals, decisions would be made in private buildings and behind closed doors. This development was the final step in a natural progression that began during the colonial period and ended after the post-revolutionary era. Taverns had begun egalitarian meeting places, a part of the public sphere in which the lower classes had the ears of their economic and political superiors. As this elite group grew, they founded their own taverns, still public but divided along class lines. Once the political groups of the elite

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<sup>16</sup> Benjamin Strong, *Letter to Selah Strong*, May 5, 1792. Strong Family Papers, New-York Historical Society.

grew into political parties, the taverns could no longer accommodate their needs, and the public house no longer served a purpose in politics.<sup>17</sup>

During the Revolutionary period and in the decade afterward, the tavern held a key place in New York's political culture, both as a meeting place for political elites and as a space for informal participation by the city's lower class voters. The construction of Tammany Hall marked the beginning of the end for the tavern as a part of New York's political sphere. The formation of the party system and the rise of political machines also came as broader voting rights were being extended to more citizens. Tammany's rise to power is indicative of a change in American politics, in which popular participation was encouraged through increased voting rights, while simultaneously being curtailed by private meetings of the political elite. This phenomenon can be attributed to the loss of contact between the working class and the elite which was facilitated by taverns, but was lost during the post-revolutionary period. In some ways the public was becoming a part of the system, but their voice was needed much less than their vote.

The door did not slam shut on the tavern as a place of organized political activity as soon as the Tammany Society moved into Tammany Hall. Even as these groups consolidated power in city politics, rifts still existed, and the groups finding themselves in opposition to those already out of the public sphere formulated their resistance in taverns. On April 27, 1812, almost a year after Tammany Hall had been dedicated, a small faction within the splintered Democratic Republican movement held a meeting at Coleman's

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<sup>17</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 207-215.

tavern to protest the actions of the “Martling Men.” Reports stated that “an uncommonly numerous” amount of people attended the meeting—advertised through a public notice—in order to adopt resolutions rebuking the Democratic Republicans who had organized as Martling-Men. The resolutions passed at this meeting hint at the growing discontent between those factions that continued to meet in the public sphere, and those—such as Tammany—that had moved away from the tavern as a meeting place. In such one resolution, the “insulting rejection of our proffered overtures for conciliation, and our tender of friendship and co-operation in support of the great cause of Republicanism” is described as “no less anti-republican and reprehensible, and equally designed to promote the success of the federal ticket.” The cause for this reaction against the Martling Men stems from their nomination of John Bingham and William Moore for the senate election, when another meeting of Republicans in Albany had nominated William Furman and John Garretson for the office.<sup>18</sup> The fact that John Bingham had at one time acted as secretary for the Tammany Society lends itself to the notion that the reputation Tammany Hall would receive in the mid-nineteenth century for cronyism was being established very early in the organization’s history.<sup>19</sup>

While the tavern lost part of its role in American civic life, it continued to be the center of socializing for both upper class and lower class New Yorkers. The divide between the elite and the lower class continued, however, as the social clubs of the city’s upper crust hosted their meetings in their own taverns and the city’s lower sort continued

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<sup>18</sup> *The Columbian*, April 29, 1812, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1812.

<sup>19</sup> “Says I to Myself—How is This?” *The New-York Columbian*, March 1, 1819, America’s Historical Newspapers [Online Database] New York, 1819.



to use drinking and tavern violence as one of the factors of working class identity. The transition in tavern culture from 1789 to 1815 is a dramatic one, in which the very nature of an institution's purpose changed. But as the institution changed, some elements of political tavern culture were brought into the private institutions replacing the elite taverns.

While politics may have exited the tavern, the transition did not occur without with both institutions completely separate from each other. In the end, institutions like Tammany Hall and the City Hotel were the next step in elite accommodation, and as such were run in a similar way to taverns. This necessitated tavernkeepers to run the new private institutions of the mid-eighteenth century. Abraham Martling stands out as a man who bridged the divide between the old political culture which existed in public taverns, and the new system of parties, societies and halls meant for exclusive groups. Martling had been identified in city directories as a tavernkeeper, as late as 1812 when he was listed as running a tavern. In 1813, after Tammany Hall had been constructed and the Tammany Society had completed its move into the structure, Martling was given a new identity. Listed simply as "Abraham Martling B – Tammany Hall," it is clear that when the Tammany Society began their procession at his tavern and ended it at their new, private hall, it was their intention to take him with them. In a broader sense, the political groups of New York took parts of the tavern with them, but it was the parts they left

behind—the opportunity to meet in public, to share space, conversation and a drink with all citizens—that defines the tavern’s transition from civic to social.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Elliot’s Improved New York Double Directory for the Year 1812*. New York, 1812. David Longworth, *Longworth’s American Almanac, New-York Register, and City Directory*. New York, 1813.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY TAVERN IN PUBLIC MEMORY

*Tales of the old taverns are enhanced in interest by a glamour of antiquity surrounding the subject by which few can fail to be charmed. Nothing exists at the present day in any way resembling an old tavern of the first class in colonial times.*

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W. Harrison Bayles, *Old Taverns of New York*, 1915

By the beginning of the Era of Good Feelings, a time in which partisan bickering had ceased partially due to the collapse of the Federalist party, tavern culture in New York and in the United States in general had changed. The Tammany Society had retired from Abraham Martling's tavern to Tammany Hall, to plot its continued dominance over the city. The architecture of accommodation had changed and become more extravagant, making the modern hotel the new and preferable alternative to the cramped spaces and dirty beds of lodging houses and taverns. In losing these important aspects of their identity, taverns in a sense lost part of their significance—though this is not to say that they became insignificant. As special areas for socializing, citizens still held their local taverns in high regard, and the social element of tavern culture would persevere. The special civic significance of the tavern in New York's history did not completely disappear either. Taverns represent a bygone age of popular political participation,

representing a time when drinking establishments were important places in political life. Remembering this period is of utmost importance in New York City, where the built environment of the Revolution and the age of the Early Republic has largely been swept away by the concrete jungle of lower Manhattan. Important buildings from New York's past as the new nation's capital have long been replaced, and most of New York's taverns are gone as well, surviving only in shades of memory.<sup>1</sup>

Just as taverns themselves changed between 1789 and 1815, popular memory of taverns has changed and evolved over time as well. It is important to understand how the popular notion of tavern life has changed, from the end of the nineteenth century to the present. Beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing to the present day, the image of New York's old taverns have been created and recreated as a way of remembering the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, which had relied on the tavern as a space for public political participation. Remembering the revolutionary tavern a certain way allows for a shared public memory of the tavern to emerge that informs the historical memory of the American Revolution. One way in which the memory of the tavern is best expressed is through illustrations made for public consumption. By understanding a bit about the time they were produced and the popular memory of the time periods these illustrations depict, sketches found in books, newspapers and magazine articles can tell us about how people perceived the post-revolutionary tavern in

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<sup>1</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 216-245. Waldstreicher discusses the end of the "public sphere" in American politics, where all groups took part in shaping the nature of American nationalism. Waldstreicher argues that after the early nineteenth century, "when white men celebrated politics, they celebrated themselves." Sharon V. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 245-246.

the years after it no longer played a role in traditional civic life. The conclusions made in this chapter are based on the representations of tavern culture that were made available to the public through the print media. All of these works were created well after the post-revolutionary period, and all reinforce a specific idea of how the tavern affected life in the early republic. Of the various representations of tavern culture, the illustrations of artist Howard Pyle serve as an example of history represented in art, and the conclusions about popular memory we can draw from them.<sup>2</sup>

Howard Pyle created images that accompanied historical novels and magazine articles, with a flair for the theatrical and a dash of excitement. Pyle favored the dashing and romanticized antics of rebellious individuals, drawing pictures of pirates in *The Rose of Paradise* and Robin Hood as part of a children's adaptation of *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*.<sup>3</sup> He founded an art school known as the Brandywine School, which produced artists whose work could most readily be found in popular fiction and history. Pyle intended to use his work in conjunction with the written word, adding to the text instead of merely describing the words of the author. Pyle felt a special bond between words and images, and thus it is not surprising that he also worked as an author, writing adventure stories and romanticized historical novels for children.<sup>4</sup> While Pyle wrote and

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<sup>2</sup> For additional works on the manifestation of public memory in art, see: William H. Truettner and Roger B. Stein, *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). Sarah Burns, *Pastoral Inventions: Rural Life in Nineteenth Century American Art and Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Lucien L. Agosta, *Howard Pyle* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 110-127.

<sup>4</sup> Richard McLanathan, *The Brandywine Heritage* (Meridien, Connecticut: The Meridien Gravure Co., 1971), 7-9.

illustrated some of the same works, his own contribution to the memory of New York taverns would come exclusively from his works of art.

Pyle helped visually capture the common notion of tavern life in a series of drawings done to compliment a magazine article, in which historical research combined with artistic representation to give readers a better understanding of what life in the old taverns of New York would have been like. Pyle produced 25 original black and white drawings to accompany the article “Old New York Taverns,” an article by John Austin Stevens, the author of a book by the same name. The article ran in the May 1890 edition of *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, and covered the role of specific taverns in New York from the beginning of Dutch settlement to the American Revolution. Pyle’s illustrations range from simple line drawings to more detailed works worthy of his own books, and all tell a great deal about how Americans in the late nineteenth century remembered tavern culture.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1890 representations of early American taverns, a patriotic, idealistic vision of American history prevailed and informed depictions of both working class and elite taverngoers. The centennial of the United States had passed less than two decades before, and the patriotic spirit it had created only built as America began to assert itself on the world stage, and feelings of American exceptionalism grew. In the crucial period between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of the First World War, the nation linked east with west via the transcontinental railroad, asserted its right to power over the Pacific,

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<sup>5</sup> John Austin Stevens, “Old New York Taverns,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 80 (May 1890): 842-865.

and acquired colonial holdings after victory in the Spanish-American War. These developments helped set the stage for America's emergence as an imperial power. During this time period growing industrialization created massive amounts of wealth, and the divide between rich and poor grew to new proportions. The "Gilded Age" marked the ascendance of a new elite whose worth relative to the lower sort of society eclipsed the differences prevalent in post-revolutionary society. Illustrations such as "In the Reading Room," depicting a group of upper class citizens all reading newspapers at the tavern, can be interpreted as representing nostalgia for a past when America's political elite were a learned meritocracy. During this time, political machines and corruption were still a large part of American government and representations of thoughtful forebears served as a reminder of a time before plutocrats, spoils-seekers, and corruption. The depiction of a learned American elite also appealed to citizens' nativist tendencies, a nostalgic reclamation of national identity in a world increasingly being shaped by immigration and industrialization.<sup>6</sup>

"In the Reading Room" and the scene it depicts lends itself to interpretation; however there are multiple layers of meaning that can be discerned from the drawing. Because taverns were centers of economic activity in addition to political participation, the men depicted in Pyle's illustration might also be wealthy New York merchants, all reading the foreign news for updates on commerce, such as entrances and clearances of the home port. These two interpretations are slightly different, but there is one inherent

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<sup>6</sup> Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 3-60. Roger B. Stein, *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, 43.

theme that is undeniably present in this illustration: the existence of a divide between elite patrons of upper class taverns, in which the wealthy enjoyed their own spaces and interacted only with each other, and the lower class taverngoers of the city who frequented their own humbler establishments.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 9: “In the Reading Room.” Courtesy of New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

Another illustration by Pyle reinforces the notion of an upper class elite using their own taverns, but the artist changes his drawing style into a more caricature-like

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<sup>7</sup> For more on American merchants and the foreign news, see Phyllis Whitman Hunter, “Transatlantic News: American Interpretations of the Scandalous and Heroic,” paper presented at “Connected by Books II: The Forging of Transatlantic Literary Communities” at University of Essex, Colchester, U.K., Dec. 2007.



representation of a tavern gathering for the elite. The drawing, subtitled “Each to be honored with bumpers innumerable of rich wine and punch” depicts an uproarious meeting of wealthy men, all drinking and enjoying themselves in a scene of great frivolity. The illustration corresponds with a portion of Stevens’ article, describing the celebrations of New York’s colonial elite for visiting dignitaries. Stevens attempts to show the conviviality of these parties, describing New York as the most cheerful of the colonies, but it is Pyle’s artwork that shows the nature of the meeting. One of the most telling parts of the drawing is the direction of the viewer in looking at the work. Pyle experiments with perspective by beginning at the foot of the table and looking downward toward the end, where two servants, one presumably a slave, pour punch. The revelers are turned toward the viewer, and thus have their backs turned to their servants. This reinforces the characterization of these men as wealthy elites interested in each other and far above the lower classes who serve them.

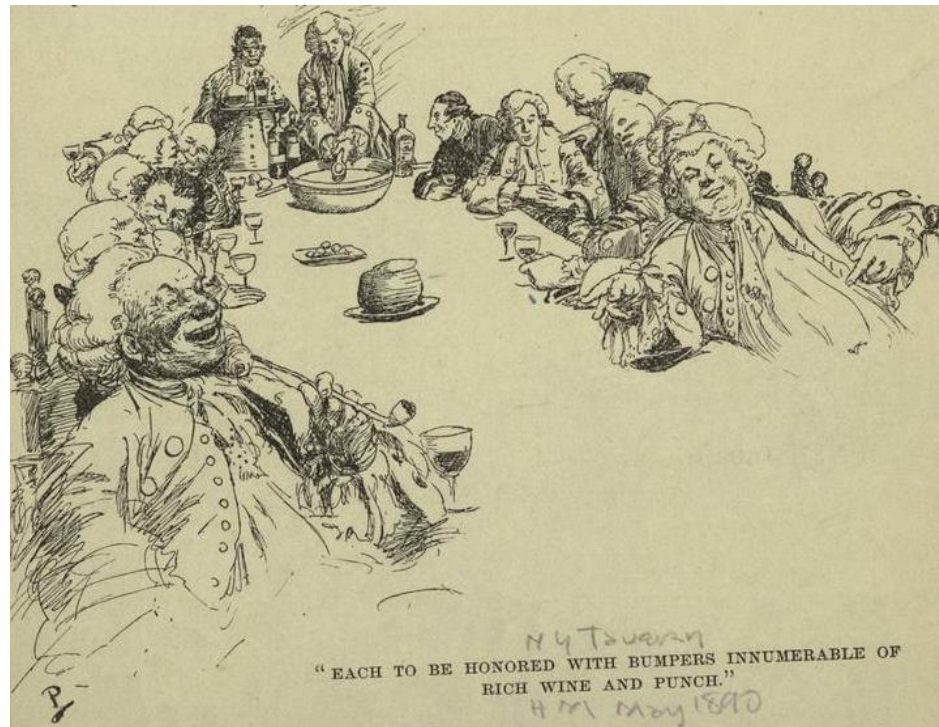


Figure 10: "Each to be honored with bumpers innumerable of rich wine and punch."  
 Courtesy of New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

Pyle does depict lower class tavern culture along the waterfront, in an illustration of the King's Head tavern at Brownejohn's Wharf on the East River waterfront. No caption accompanies the work aside from the words "Brownejohn's Wharf." Again, Pyle depicts a scene from Stevens' article, describing the efforts of loyalists to enlist Americans onto British privateers. A fresh-faced young "patriot" is listening to a grinning loyalist as a small group looks on, leaning on the pillars and railings of the tavern. In the distance, a ship is docked. Though the interaction between patriot and loyalist is the center of this illustration, Pyle's depiction of this dockside tavern shows how the differences between lower class and elite culture were perceived during the late nineteenth century. The tavern

at Brownejohn's Wharf is cramped and dingy, as three men, all of the seafaring sort, cram together just outside the door. The building itself is small, only two stories high. The scene depicted is one of implied danger—what if this young man joins the privateers and helps raid American ships?—and the tavern helps show the exploitive nature of the men trying to coax the young man to volunteer.



Figure 11: "Brownejohn's Wharf." Courtesy of New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

Pyle's drawings show tavern culture that is divided between upper class and lower class, just as the divisions of Gilded Age society were prevalent in 1890, when Harper's New Monthly Magazine published Stevens' article. The elite are favored in these depictions, where they use the tavern for celebrations or for quiet reading. By contrast, lower class taverns are shown to be the realm of shady characters, dirty individuals who look to the cramped, poor quality establishments along the waterfront and call them home. These illustrations show in a small way how the tavern could be used to represent modern culture in the late nineteenth century. Images of the tavern continued to survive well into the twentieth century as well, but as time passed and the revolutionary period became cemented in history, the tavern became a part of America's revolutionary past.

Depictions of tavern life during the Revolution served a dual purpose for elites: to both emphasize their value in society and create a bond between themselves and lower class Americans who continued to frequent the "tavern"—which by the 1890s had evolved into the neighborhood bar. Aside from Fraunces Tavern, rededicated in 18907 as a museum and shrine to George Washington, publicly accessible history of New York's tavern culture has largely disappeared. The tavern did remain an important part of the public's memory of the American Revolution at least until the end of the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the representations of working class and elite tavern life illustrated by Howard Pyle. These modern representations of tavern culture, especially those specific to New York, take the working class out of their taverns, and concentrate on the elite. Doing so benefitted the elite by putting them back in the taverns they had left during the early nineteenth century. Because the tavern survived in the form of the lower

class bar, showing elites congregating in an environment similar to this strictly working class area helped create a connection between the two groups. This connection benefitted the elite by creating a historical memory in which the political and economic elites of the revolutionary period gathered in a place which modern viewers understood best in relation to their own drinking establishments. The result of this is an image of famous revolutionaries placed in a lower class context. The most popular representation of a tavern meeting remains George Washington's farewell dinner for his officers at Fraunces Tavern. This can be attributed to the importance of this event as a significant moment in the life of the first President of the United States. The dinner has been depicted several times, and the Fraunces Tavern Museum helps keep this specific vision alive today for the public. By concentrating on George Washington's placement in the tavern formerly used by the Sons of Liberty—an environment common people would find more humanizing—the memory of his role in the Revolution and his status as a champion of common people is cemented. Part of this memory may be manufactured as part of George Washington's partial deification as the "father of the country," but part of it does rely on fact: between 1789 and 1791, Washington toured the United States after taking office as President, and chose to stay in public houses rather than in private homes, to avoid the appearance of impropriety and favoritism in his choices of lodging.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gary Nash has accumulated a large body of work crediting common people with supporting the American Revolution, and the attempts by the elite in silencing certain stories in order to form a public memory of the revolutionary period in which their contribution is stressed. See Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006) and Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). In his introduction to *The Unknown American Revolution*, Nash talks specifically about the role of the founders in shaping the public memory of the Revolution. A.K. Sandoval Strausz, "A Public House for a New Republic: The

Fraunces Tavern Museum identifies itself as an important place in the American Revolution, important enough to host George Washington. The emphasis on Washington is typical of public memory of the American Revolution, which fixated on the figure of central authority as a replacement for the British monarchy. However it also seeks to tell the story of “the tavern” as if it were an absolute. There is no distinction made between working class and elite taverns. Exhibit panels lining the long room recreated for visitors today refer to “the colonial tavern,” and the room set up for Washington’s gathering is described as “a typical scene in a New York City tavern of the 1780s.” This characterization of a single, unified tavern culture in which establishments were not split along class lines belies a reality in which the elite frequented their own taverns and the lower classes stayed in their own, more humble taverns.<sup>9</sup>

The museum serves as a fascinating example of using popular memory of the Revolution to promote a form of heritage tourism. Promotional materials claim that Fraunces Tavern has been in existence since 1762, however the structure itself did not serve as a tavern for very long. A series of fires gutted the building and it remained largely forgotten until 1904, when the Sons of the Revolution purchased the building, restoring it as a museum which opened in 1907. The long room which hosted George Washington’s final dinner with his officers is recreated, and the upstairs has been converted into exhibit space. The museum exhibits speak with great authority about the

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Architecture of Accommodation and the American State, 1789-1809,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 9 (2003): 54.

<sup>9</sup> John E. Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory Commemoration and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 22. Exhibit, “The Colonial Tavern,” Fraunces Tavern Museum, New York City, 2008.

roles of “the tavern,” however Fraunces Tavern is very much defined by memory and recreation, rather than factual assertions. Given that the building had burned several times before being restored, the Sons of the Revolution did a great deal of guesswork in determining the layout of the building’s internal structure. A generic floor plan modeled after other surviving buildings from the revolutionary period is what followed. Previously drawn illustrations of Washington’s dinner at Fraunces Tavern aided the reconstruction.<sup>10</sup>

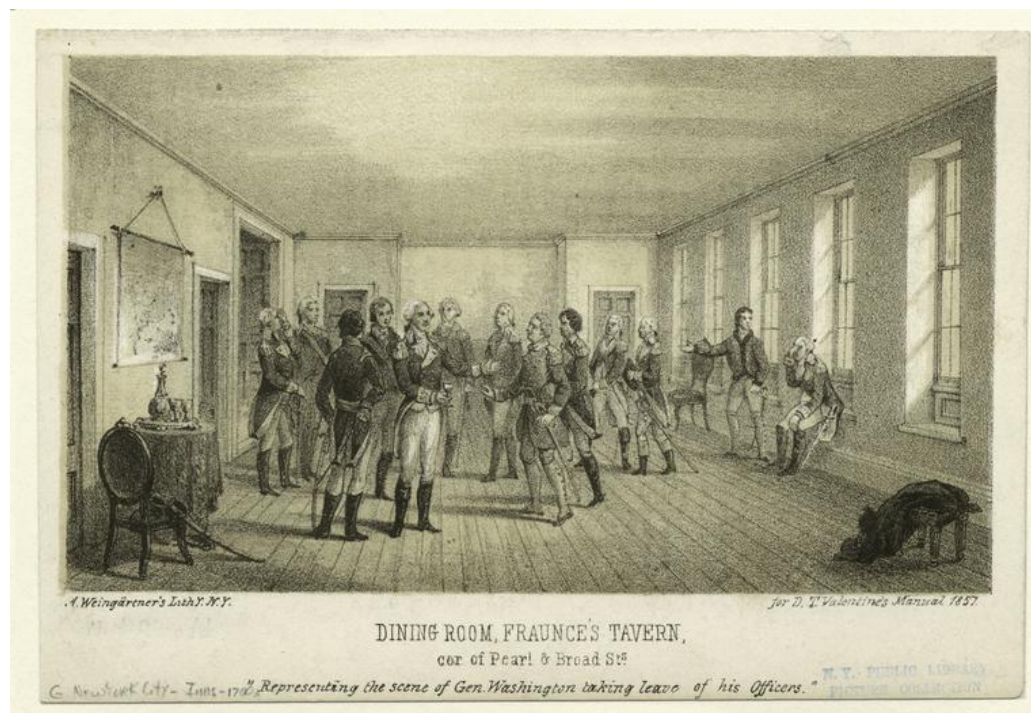


Figure 12: “Dining Room, Fraunces Tavern.” Courtesy of New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

<sup>10</sup> Donald M. Reynolds, *The Architecture of New York City* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1984), 38. Elliot Willensky and Norval White, *AIA Guide to New York City*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), 14.

The centrality of George Washington to Fraunces Tavern's interpretation of the American Revolution is in line with the popular memory of the revolutionary period which became cemented in American thought after the 1830s. In the decades following the revolution, contests erupted over the meaning of the revolution and the role common people played in its success. As much as the American Revolution marked a triumph brought about by the deeds of many, individual action would characterize the period between 1765 and 1776. In his work on memory and the American Revolution, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, Alfred F. Young uses mechanic Paul Revere as an example of this phenomenon. Though Revere originally monitored the movements of British soldiers as part of a group of mechanics and workingmen, he was immortalized individually for making his "midnight ride"—a ride completed by two others. Fraunces Tavern is no different. The tavern had two claims to fame during the revolutionary period, as a home of the New York Sons of Liberty, and as the site of Washington's dinner. Washington prevailed against the faceless group of revolutionary agitators, largely made up of mechanics, artisans and other members of the middling class.<sup>11</sup>

Whether elite or working class, whether in memory or in reality, the tavern of the early republic was ephemeral in nature. It was a transitory establishment. Travelers slept and ate in the taverns of New York, and moved on. Events at a tavern would last all of one night, conversations among taverngoers only a few hours. The

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<sup>11</sup> Alfred F. Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 121-131.



key to understanding the tavern in American history is to understand its changes. During the revolutionary period and into the era of the early republic, taverns changed a great deal, from social institutions with civic qualities to merely social gathering places. As this period faded into history, memory of a certain idea of what the tavern meant prevailed. That too, changed over time from the late nineteenth century to today. It is possible to look at certain moments in time and observe tavern culture to understand American urban society as a whole; however, a great deal more can be learned from studying New York's taverns as they changed from civic to social.

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## APPENDIX A

### TAVERN COMPLAINTS, APRIL 1822

NAME	ADDRESS	COMPLAINT
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Bullinger, Ch. Barton, Rich	William Street Front and Fletcher	Open on Sunday & late at night
Baxter, Schuyler		"House full of blacks and whites drinking"
Brower, Widow	Mulberry No. 3	Complaint by anonymous letter stating that her house is open at all times frequented by boys
Hunter, Jacob	Front, between Market and Fletcher	Open on Sunday and late at night
Wollard, Matthew	Front, between Market and Fletcher	Open on Sunday and late at night

#### SOLD WITHOUT LICENSE

Banninger, Terrance	83 Banker
Barker, G.C. & J.S.	176 Bowery
Fisher, John	89 Bunker
Fagan, Barny	103 Anthony
Fitch, Asa	431 Broadway
Fowler, Gilbert	Spring and Mott
Fagan, Edward	Hubbard & Chapel
Gilloon, Barthalomew	Little Water & Anthony
Gilespie, Matthew	Washington and Dunne
Hitchcock, Wm.	213 Fulton
Heydon, Patrick	40 Pike
Marshall, Joseph	139 Greenwich

#### DISORDERLY HOUSE KEPT

Haggouty, Darby	100 Anthony St.
Patrick McGowan	53 Augustus
McCarlin, Charles	62 Orange
Odell, John	25 Bowery
O'Bonner, Patrick	Old Slip & Cherry
Powers, William	247 Water St