

## A REVOLUTIONARY TAVERN

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The site of Cuckoo Tavern is a significant landmark of Revolutionary history in Louisa County. It was here that Jack Jouett, Jr. began his arduous ride to Monticello and Charlottesville to warn Jefferson and the Legislators of the approach of Tarleton's raiders. According to legend, the tavern stood about seven miles east of Louisa Courthouse, probably at a crossroad. It is possible that the present Route 522 once crossed the Richmond Road at this point. Today, the place known as "Cuckoo" is the junction of Routes 33, 522, 643.

It is interesting that the name "Tavern" has survived when the recorded name of all such public houses of that day was "ordinary." The use of the name ordinary for a place to drink, eat, talk, and sometimes sleep, is English, but why it was selected for use by the colonies is difficult to discover. In England, "tavern" and "inn" were also widely used, while in Virginia county records still persisted in using "ordinary" long after "tavern" was the conversational term. In the early records, though the term ordinary was used by the county clerks for recording a license, the county justices set the prices for "tavern fare," showing that even the court used the terms interchangeably.

In some colonies, the charter required the erection of both a church and an ordinary to serve the people. In the South, the plantations were larger and the villages few, and early taverns were more widely spaced. The ordinaries were found at the county seats, at crossroads and at ferries.

The earliest ordinaries were established more for local people than for travellers. The ordinaries which existed mainly for local patronage did, however, serve as way-stations and provided meals when the traveller came.

In 1782 when the Marquis de Chastellux was travelling in central Virginia he noted, "As for lodgings, one large room for the whole company, with a blanket for each individual, is sufficient for such countrymen . . ." Sleeping accommodations varied from tavern to tavern. Men travelling alone usually arrived on horseback, and they often just stretched out on the floor, feet to the fire, wrapped in their own saddle blankets. Some hosts provided slanting boards built with footrests. At the larger taverns, most bedrooms contained more than one bed. All the men occupied one room while the women and small children another. One slept in the space available, whether one's fellow sleeper was a stranger or not.

The public house was also the landlord's home. At mealtime the traveller took his place with the family. Servants ate in the outdoor kitchen at another big table with the hostler and his family.

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Chastellux noted in his published *Travels in North America* that he arrived late one night at Boswell's Tavern in western Louisa County, and that Colonel Boswell aroused his servants and provided the Frenchman's party with a frugal supper. He continued his account:

Our breakfast the next morning was better; we had ham, butter, fresh eggs, and coffee with milk for drink; for the "whiskey" or corn spirits, that we had had the evening before mixed with water, was very bad; besides, we were perfectly accustomed to the American habit of drinking coffee as a beverage with meat, vegetables, or other food.

Before the Revolution, the ordinaries had a wide variety of drinks available to their patrons. The prices were not high, and unlike the ordinary man in England, all classes in Virginia could indulge a taste for good potables. The Court of Justices set the price for tavern fare, and their rates in the year 1768 included "French Brandy, Canary Brandy, Portugal or French wine, Maderia Wine, Western Island Wine, Rum, English or Spanish Brandy, Good Peach or Apple Brandy, London or Brested Strong Beer, Continental Rum, English Cyder, Good Cyder well Bottled, Good Cask Cyder, Whisky, Virginia Strong Beer, Cask Beer, Pennsylvania Strong Beer, Lemonades with Wine therein, and Punch (or Flip)."

The rates changed periodically and prices at the ordinary fluctuated according to tobacco values. The Revolution brought on inflation; with the tavern having less to offer, prices became exorbitant. At the end of the war, British Major Thomas Anburey travelled through Virginia wrote home to England:

All taverns and public houses in Virginia are called ordinaries . . . They consist of a little house placed in a solitary situation in the middle of the woods, and the usual method of describing the road is, from such an ordinary to such a one, for many miles. The entertainment you meet is very poor indeed, you are seldom able to procure any other fare than eggs and bacon with Indian hoecake, and at many of them not even that. The only liquors are peach brandy and whiskey. They are not remiss however in making pretty exorbitant charges.

The prices were usually set once a year, but the Louisa Justices were kept busy changing the rates during the Revolution. In 1780 and 1781, the Louisa court records state: "The rates & prices that every Ordinary Keeper in this county may ask, demand, or take for drink, Diett, lodging, fodder, provender, or pasturage are this Day set and rated by the Court as Followeth—"

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	April, 1780	June, 1780	Feb., 1781
India Rum per Gill	\$ 6.00	\$ 8.00	\$10.00
French Rum per Gill	5.00	6.00	7.00
Brandy per Gill	5.00	6.00	8.00
Cyder per Quart	6.00	6.00	8.00
Whisky per Gill	3.00	4.00	6.00
Strong Beer per Quart	7.00	8.00	10.00
Small Beer per Quart	4.00	4.00	6.00
Punch, or Flip, with three Gills of Rum in it	20.00	25.00	36.00
Diett, a Hot meal of Victuals	10.00	15.00	25.00
Diett, a Cold Meal of Victuals	8.00	12.00	18.00
Diett, meal for a Servant	8.00	10.00	12.00
Lodging a Night	5.00	5.00	8.00
Pasturage for a Horse a day and a Night	5.00	5.00	6.00
Stableage for a Horse a day and a Night	3.00	3.00	5.00
Fodder, a bundle	1.00	1.00	1.00
Corn or Oats per Gallon	5.00	7.00	7.00

No one is sure who owned Cuckoo Tavern in 1781, but Virginius Dabney in his account, "From Cuckoo Tavern to Monticello," written in 1966, states that John Jouett, Sr. had owned it at one time.<sup>1</sup>

September 14, 1767, John Jouett renewed his license to keep an ordinary in Louisa County: "On the motion of John Jouett, License is granted him to keep an Ordinary at his house in this County, who with Samuel Temple his Security having entered into Bond and Acknowledged the same."<sup>2</sup>

In July, 1770 the clerk entered: "On the motion of John Jouett his ordinary license is renewed on his going bond and paying the Governor as the law directs."<sup>3</sup> These entries definitely prove that John Jouett, Sr. ran a tavern in Louisa before the Revolution.

In August, 1761 Judithan Harper deeded to John Jouett of Fredricksville Parish, 250 acres "known by the name of Winston's Ordinary, it being his wife's right of dower." (Harper's wife, Elizabeth, was the widow of Samuel Winston.)<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps John Jouett changed his mind about purchasing the ordinary, though he seems to have operated it. In November, 1769 Harper prepared another document for the records: Judithan Harper of Orange County, North Carolina, rented John Jouett the 250 acres,

1. *The Iron Worker*, Lynchburg, Virginia.

2. *Louisa County Court Order Book*, 1767. The word "Renewal" is in the margin.

3. *Louisa Court Minutes*, 1770.

4. *Louisa County, Deed Book C.*, p. 135.

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“formerly Winston’s Ordinary in Louisa County,” for “three pounds per year and the Quitrents of the Sd. land.”<sup>5</sup>

The Jack Jouett Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, published a booklet in 1966 in which there appears this statement: “. . . Cuckoo Tavern Tract acquired in 1815 by Colonel Edmund Pendleton from Captain Jouett’s father, John Jouett, Sr. The [Pendleton] home was named for the tavern, . . . which got its name, according to legend, from the Cuckoo Clock, a novelty in pre-Revolutionary War America and a tourist attraction at ‘King’s Ordinary,’ the tavern’s former name.” (We found no record of “King’s Ordinary,” and a diligent search failed to locate a deed transferring the land from John Jouett, Sr. to Edmund Pendleton.)<sup>6</sup>

Jefferson wrote long afterward that Jouett saw the British “pass his father’s house,” and rode through the night to warn him and the members of the legislature. So it is entirely possible that John Jouett, Sr. still owned the ordinary in 1781 and hired someone to serve as landlord. He owned other property in Louisa during his lifetime, and in 1781 he was also the owner of Swan Tavern in Charlottesville.<sup>7</sup> A deed of 1777 refers to “John Jouett, of Charlottesville.”

All county courts required that a tavern keeper be men of character and they were men of substance with some standing in the community. Records indicate that the Jouett family were prominent in Louisa County not only in land holdings but in county affairs as well.<sup>8</sup>

The ordinary was the news center, oral or printed. Newspapers and tavern news sheets were read aloud by the literate until the papers were worn out. The ordinary was the scene of weddings, parties, brawls and there is even record of courts held in an ordinary. There is also a record that preachers held services in Louisa taverns. On October 6, 1775, the Reverend James Maury became much upset and wrote a letter to state his grievances when Messrs. Todd and Davies held services in taverns.

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5. *Louisa County, Deed Book D1/2*, p. 169.

6. We do not mean to say that the data published by the DAR is incorrect; we simply failed to find such information.

7. Between 1751 and 1785, John Jouett purchased seven parcels of land in Louisa with some tracts exceeding five hundred acres. From 1754 to 1798 he executed seven deeds to sell land.

8. *Louisa County Order Book 1*, p. 1, Dec. 13, 1742.

*Louisa County Will Book 11*, front cover.

*Louisa County Deed Book D1/2*, 206; K. p. 317.

Mathew Jouett patented some 3688 acres of land mostly on North East Creek and South Anna in the 1730’s. When the county was formed, the Virginia Council ordered that the Courthouse be built on the land of Matthew Jouett. That same year he was granted a licence to keep an ordinary. In a will dated 1743, Matthew Jouett mentions his sons — including one named John. It is believed this John Jouett was once sherrif of Louisa, a large land holder, and a Commissary of the Specific Tax. He married Morning Harris and among his children was Captain Jack Jouett, however, the records do not give positive proof of this.

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(Maury was a minister of the Church of England while Todd and Davies were Presbyterians. Maury so deplored their activities that he did not give them their title of "Reverend".)

A composite description of an ordinary of the period would be: a small house, but well built. It was one-and-one-half-story frame structure built over a rock or brick basement. The roof, covered with heart pine shakes, was a modified "A" line, for the roof in the back continued in a long slant to cover shed rooms in the rear. There was no ridgepole in the peak of this roof; the rafters were mortised together with wooden pegs. Beaded weather-boards covered huge hand-hewn beams which served as the sills and plates, with braced uprights mortised into the heart pine timbers. A brick or rock chimney at each end with fireplaces provided heat for all the rooms except the shed rooms. There was always a very large fireplace in the basement taproom. There were two rooms on the main floor (with the shed rooms to the rear), and in the corner a stairway wound to the upper bedrooms, enclosed except for the first three steps, with a door at the turn. The kitchen was in the yard; the tap room, in the basement. There was usually no stairway from the basement to the main floor; the taproom had an outside door. Meals could be taken in the main room on the first floor; the parents slept in the other room. Guests slept in the shed rooms, and the children slept upstairs. It has been said that old homes had rubber walls: there was always room for one more.

Fortunately some ordinaries of the Revolutionary period still exist. Good examples are two in which the Marquis de Lafayette was entertained: Boswell's Tavern<sup>9</sup> which stands in the western edge of Louisa County and Allegre's Tavern just over the line in Fluvanna County. There were, however, other ordinaries in Louisa during the Revolution and some of them are mentioned in the court orders of 1773—1782. The Court House had an ordinary; Henry Garrett received a license to keep an ordinary at the place called Thompson's Old Store; James Barnett kept an ordinary in his own home; Thomas Johnson, Mathew Anderson, John Boswell and Nathaniel Anderson<sup>10</sup> all kept ordinaries. Accounts of the movement of Lafayette and Tarleton mention Bird Ordinary on the Three Notched Road at the southern edge of Louisa County. Another tiny tavern of that period still stands on the Three Notched Road not far from the site of Bird.

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9. *Louisa County Historical Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 39-41.

10. *Louisa Court Order Book*, 1774—1782, pp. 100, 147, 151.

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Until recently it remained almost unchanged. Perhaps Cuckoo Tavern was small and looked somewhat like one of these ordinaries. Also, if Cuckoo Tavern was once the old Samuel Winston Ordinary, then we must assume it was built before Jouett's ride.

History does not record a detail account of the events that took place at Cuckoo Tavern nor does it enumerate on any of the specific circumstances. It is easy for our imagination to picture the events of that famous evening — Jack Jouett tearing up the steps from the taproom and dashing to his horse tied outside. The men left their tables and came out to watch him gallop away. They stood there listening as the hoofbeats faded into the west then hurried away to make ready for the passing of the dreaded "Hunting Leopard," Colonel Banastre Tarleton.

**Excerps of a Letter Written by  
Mathew Pope, Surgeon, G. Hospital to  
Honorable Benjamin Harrison at Staunton\*  
June 30th, 1781**

"I have wrote the late Governor Mr. Jefferson respecting the medicine belonging to this State from R. Island, being seized by the Continental Deptmt.—this Sir is a fatal stroke to us, and more particularly so just now as we have lost all our medicines and stores, Colo Tarlton overtook them in Louisa, and burnt both waggons & medicines—I am now setting off from Camp in order to procure medicine for the use of the Army."

"I hope in the mean time proper steps will be fallen upon to recover those or others, according to lists in the hands of Mr. Jefferson, So cruelly and unjustly taken from us."

\*Calendar of State Papers, Vol. II, 192