

Historic Taverns of the North Precinct

By Inga Milbauer

In early New England taverns were not only a place to gather for drinks and food, and to learn the latest news and gossip, but became important community centers. In towns without a noon-house, churchgoers would go to a neighboring house or tavern in between the Sunday morning and afternoon services. The tavern would serve as a court house, and was a meeting place for the militia to gather. During the period of 1734 to 1844 there were a number of taverns in the area which would become the town of Boylston.

The Bush Tavern

The first tavern operating in the area dates back to 1734 when John Bush obtained a Taverner's License from the Sessions Court. The tavern was located on the main road to Lancaster, not far from the Shrewsbury-Worcester crossroads. The land was part of the 38th House Lot granted by the Shrewsbury House Lot Division on 28 December 1718 to Abijah Bush of Marlborough, Massachusetts.

John Bush (1699-1757) acquired the land from his father on 29 February 1729.¹ The first North Precinct Meeting, on 19 January 1743, adjourned to this tavern after completing just one item on its agenda.² There they had appointed John Bush as the first Precinct Clerk.

After his death, his son Jotham Bush took over the tavern and held a Taverner's License until 1778. Jotham Bush (1729-1778) became one of Boylston's most notorious Tories, and The Bush Tavern became a place of Tory conspiracy during the American Revolution.

Jotham Bush Jr. (1757-1837) reopened the Bush Tavern in 1788. It closed its doors in 1795, and was taken down in the 1830s.³ The Bush tavern would now be located at 720-726 Main Street.

The Keyes Tavern

Deacon Jonathan Keyes was also one of Boylston's first settlers. His father, Thomas Keyes, took over Lot #28 in the Shrewsbury Lot Division from John Wheeler, the original owner, in 1729. Jonathan Keyes (1702-1778) built a house and, according to the Sessions Court Records, held a Taverner's License from 1734 to 1735.⁴ He was one of the first Deacons of the North Parish Church, a Selectman and farmer. It is inconclusive if it operated as a tavern after 1735, but "the late George L. Wright, Town Historian, maintained that it was operative until the building accidentally burned in 1777."⁵

The Sessions Court Records indicate that Jonathan's son, Benjamin Keyes, was granted a Taverner's License in 1781 and 1782, so it seems the dwelling had been rebuilt and was a tavern in those years.⁶ Benjamin Keyes (born 1740) was a veteran of the Revolutionary War, and served in Captain Ezra Beaman's Company, joining on June 6, 1777. He sold his property to Benjamin Flagg in 1792. It remained in the Flagg family for many generations.⁷

For more information about the Keyes Tavern, see our "Then and Now on the Flagg Farm" by Nancy A. Filgate at <https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/2023%20Apr%20FFF/Then%20and%20Now%2004292023%20Flagg%20Farm.pdf> and our Friday's Fascinating Find, *From Modest Beginnings to the Wealthiest Man in Town!* by Patricia Kelleher Bartram at <http://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/2023%20Oct%20FFF/FFF%20-%2010202023%20Levi%20Lincoln%20Flagg.pdf> The Keyes Tavern would now be located at 250 Shrewsbury Street.



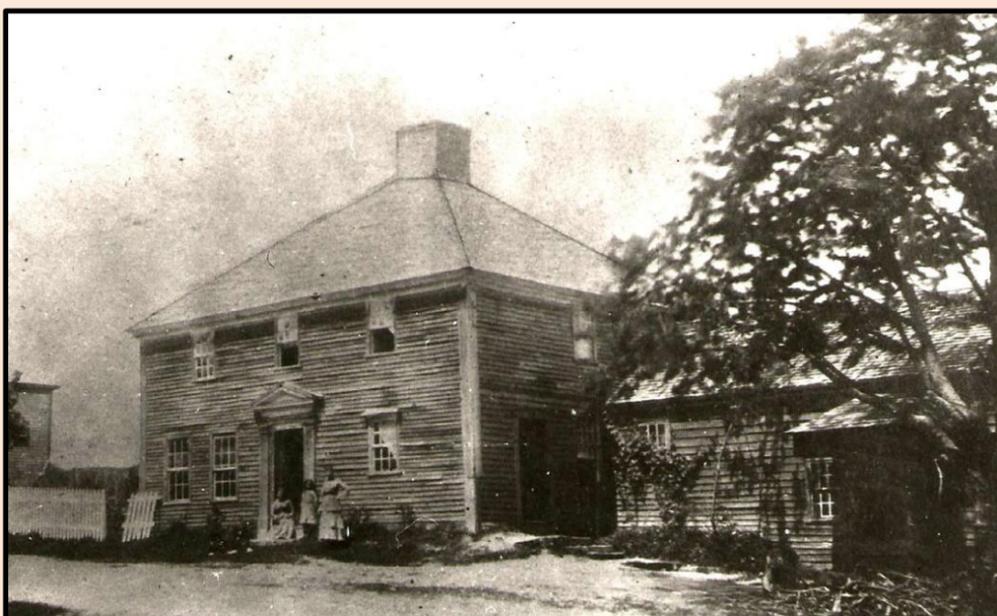
FLAGG FARMHOUSE

ORIGINAL LOCATION OF THE KEYES TAVERN WHICH WAS DESTROYED BY FIRE IN 1777

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The Taylor Tavern

The original land of the Shrewsbury Lot #43 was granted in 1718 to Lieutenant Eleazar Taylor. He willed a portion of this land, in what is now Historic Boylston Center, to his son David in 1747. David Taylor (1723-1795) built a two-story house in 1760, attached to the house was an ell in which he opened the first retail store in the Shrewsbury North Precinct.⁸



TAYLOR TAVERN

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A Taverner's License was granted in 1771, but it is believed that David Taylor operated the tavern at least ten years before that date. He also provided overnight lodgings. He was one of the founders of the North Precinct Church in 1743. The Precinct powder house was located on his property, and

he was appointed keeper in 1772. He held several offices in the Precinct: Town Clerk, Selectman and Assessor. In 1778 he sold the tavern to Joseph Reed, who sold it after a short while to John Williams, an inn holder from Shrewsbury. He sold the tavern in 1780 to Jotham Bush Jr. who operated the tavern and inn until 1796 when he sold it to Squire Aaron White.⁹ Aaron White ran the Taylor Tavern until about 1821. The main part of the original Taylor Tavern is located at 651 Main Street.

To view the current structure and for more information about the Taylor Tavern, see our “*Then and Now on the Taylor Tavern*” by Nancy A. Filgate at <https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/Taylor%20Tavern.pdf>.

The Beaman Tavern

Captain Jabez Beaman purchased a large tract of land in the valley of the Nashua River in 1746 and settled there. His son, Ezra Beaman (1736 - 1811) took over the farm when his father died on 22 September 1757. In 1764 he built the building what would become the Beaman Tavern and Wayside Inn. “It was two stories in height, and done in an 18th century classical style with a hip roof, topped by a type of ridge roof, making it quite unique.”¹⁰ The tavern was located just over three miles northwest of what is now Boylston Center, overlooking the banks of the Nashua River, along the road from West Boylston.



BEAMAN TAVERN
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Ezra was very active in the political and social life of the North Precinct, and became an early supporter of the patriot cause. His tavern became the place for many Town Meetings, Church Councils and political gatherings. He was a First Lieutenant in the Captain Robert Andrews Militia Company of the North Precinct, and was later commissioned in the Continental Army. In 1786, he became the first Town Moderator and Assessor of Boylston. He continued to be involved in the town’s government until he led the group of families opposing the location of the Second Meeting house in Boylston. They built their own separate Meeting House in 1795, and formed the Second Parish of Boylston which would become West Boylston in 1808. His son, Ezra Jr. (1771 –1863), continued to run the tavern until 1863. The tavern was sold, and the main part of the building was moved to another location in West Boylston where it became a tenement house until the Wachusett Reservoir was built.

The Chinnery Tavern

Dr. Thaddeus Chinnery who served as the second physician for the town between 1793 until 1820, obtained a Taverner’s License from the Worcester Sessions Court in 1797. He operated a tavern-inn from 1797 to 1799, which was located at 15 School Street. He also served as: Collector of Taxes, Assessor, and Selectman. The building was later owned by Reverend Andrew Bigelow, the 8th minister of the Boylston Church.



CURRENT STRUCTURE OF CHINNERY TAVERN
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The Abbott Tavern

Captain Jason Abbott (1772–1843) bought the land from Eliakim Morse (the son of Rev. Ebenezer Morse) in 1803. He opened a tavern in 1806 and operated it until 1809. About that time, the property came into the possession of Squire Aaron White who ran the Taylor Tavern at that time. Captain Jason Abbott became a blacksmith, and operated his shop, located on Central Street, until a few years before his death. He was Selectman for one term, and in March 1812 became one of the founders of the Shrewsbury and Boylston Baptist Society.¹¹

The Abbott Tavern would now be located at 4 Church Street. To view the current structure, please see our “*Then and Now on the Tavern*” by Nancy A. Filgate at <https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/Abbott%20House.pdf>.



THE ABBOTT TAVERN
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The Hastings Tavern

Silas Hastings (1780-1833) constructed a Federal-style brick home in 1818 in the center of the town. The bricks used for the construction came from the John Howe Brickyard in Boylston. Read our “*Then and Now on the Howe Brickyard*” by Nancy A. Filgate for more information on the commercial brickyard in Boylston at <https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/John%20Howe%20Brickyard.pdf>.

The Hastings tavern and inn was located on the juncture of the roads leading to and from Worcester, Shrewsbury, Lancaster, Northborough and West Boylston. It was licensed in 1818, and operated by Silas until his death in 1833. Silas Hastings was Selectmen and Town Treasurer for several years. He sold part of this land to the town upon which the Town Hall was constructed in 1830.¹² After Silas Hastings died in 1833 his son-in-law, Elmer Loring, took over.

“The tavern room was located on the ground floor across the southeasterly corner of the ground floor, and measured 15’8”x16’8”x8’.”¹³ A grain bin was placed in the corner of the room near the main entrance, so travelers could buy the necessary feed for their horses. The entire front of the house on the second floor was a dance hall, measuring 41’x18’x12’. William O. Dupuis describes the room as having nine windows and a vaulted ceiling with a wooden chandelier, holding 24 wax candles. “Many balls and parties were held there, and the Hastings Tavern was considered one of the finest in this area.”¹⁴



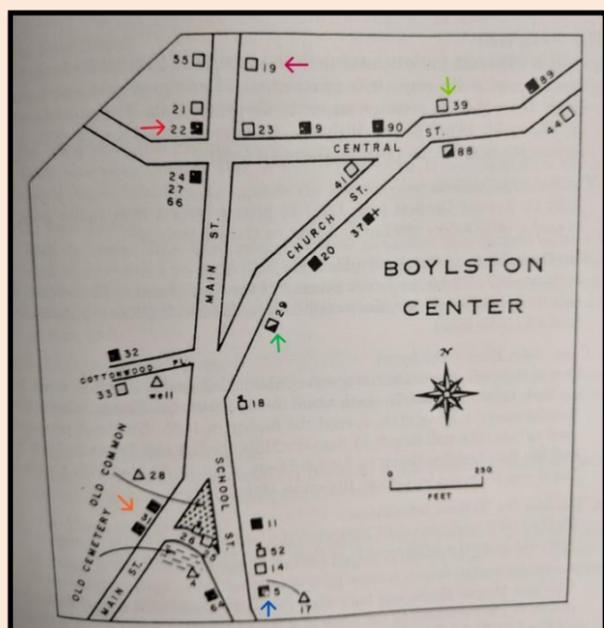
Hastings Tavern Sign
Drawing by
George L. Wright

A pewter tankard from Silas Hastings is part of the collection of The Boylston Historical Society and Museum. For more information, please read the following Friday’s Fascinating Finds article by Judy Haynes: https://www.boylstonhistory.org/category/Silas_Hastings_Tankard/c110.

The tavern stayed in business until 1844 when the property was sold to Captain John Andrews. The Hastings Tavern is located at 701 Main Street.



HASTINGS TAVERN
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Boylston Center Historic Sites

- #5 Chinnery-Bigelow House
- #19 The Bush Tavern
- #22 The Hastings Tavern
- #31 The Taylor Tavern
- #29 Capt. Jason Abbott Tavern
- #39 Abbott Blacksmith Shop

Map of Boylston Center Historic Sites
from Boylston Historical Series by Bruce
Filgate, 2012, p. 211

Colonial Taverns were informal gathering places serving as a focal point for civic bodies, committees and the community. Cider, ale, beer and wine were common drinks served in eighteenth century taverns. Rum and drinks with a rum base were also popular in New England. Hot beverages served since colonial times were Grog and Flip. Grog would be made by filling a tankard with the juice of ½ a lemon, a lemon slice, 3 cloves, 1 lump of sugar, a strip of orange rind, 2 ounces of rum, adding boiling water, and then stir with a stick of cinnamon. As Alice Morse Earle mentions in *The Sabbath in Puritan New England*: “Flip was made of home-brewed beer, sugar, and a liberal dash of Jamaica rum, and was mixed with a “logger-head”--a great iron “stirring-stick” which was heated in the fire until red hot and then thrust into the liquid. This seething iron made the flip boil and bubble and imparted to it a burnt, bitter taste which was its most attractive attribute.”¹⁵ One can imagine that these beverages would be especially well-liked on cold days!

Acknowledgements:

¹² *Boylston Historical Series* by Bruce Filgate, 2012, p.237-238
^{3, 4, 5, 6} *Ibid*, p.241

⁷<https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/2023%20Apr%20FFF/Then%20and%20Now%2004292023%20Flag%20Farm.pdf>
^{8,9,10,11,12,13,14} *Boylston Historical Series* by Bruce Filgate, 2012, p.242-248

¹⁵ *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* by Alice Morse Earle, 1891, p.162

<https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/Silas%20Hastings.pdf>

<https://www.boylstonhistory.org/images/John%20Howe%20Brickyard.pdf>

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http://npshistory.com/publications/mima/the_new_england_tavern.pdf

The Sabbath in Puritan New England by Alice Morse Earle, 1891, E-book by Duke Classics, 2015

Home Life in Colonial Days by Alice Morse Earle, 1898, E-book by Duke Classics, 2015

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