

# The Restoration of a Great American Tavern

Life in the towns of early America centered around the Tavern. Revolutions were plotted, local news was exchanged, commerce was discussed, townspeople were celebrated, married and grieved, all in the proximity of the local Tavern. For this reason taverns played an important role throughout our history, standing as constants through which our history moves. It is with this respect for the great American institution of hospitality, that the 76 House was reconstructed.

The 76 House represented a challenge to historically preserve. The original stone foundation had not settled uniformly, most of the original floor and ceiling joints suffered structurally and had been sured up with modern and inconsistent materials. The configuration of the floor plan, where the original rooms had existed and how they related to each other, was manipulated into many smaller areas, and even a false André's prison room had been added as a tourist attraction. Therefore, the preservation team was faced with first locating original documents and accounts which detailed the original building's layout, and second, to implement their findings in a structurally sound fashion.

Luckily the '76 House has a long history of important meetings, many of which presented the preservationists with detailed accounts of the interior spaces, what they were used for and how they were changed. What they uncovered was that the '76 House was built in three discernible phases: The first included the two front rooms and a small second level. The second phase, completed several years before Major André's famous stay, included what is now the bar and small dining areas, which is where André actually stayed. The third building phase occurred fairly recently, within the last seventy years, and included what is now the modern entrance, kitchen and adjacent dining areas.

The original floor plan, which now largely exists on the main floor of the Tavern, was agreed upon, and Architect J. Alberto Robaina set about fleshing out the additional spaces to accent the old in the most agreeable light. Construction began with the foundation, under which two foot wide footings were hand-dug and concrete-filled. In all, over 30 tons of foundation clay were removed by hand and repoured with concrete. After a sound foundation was established, the crew searched for authentic interior lumbers. Ceiling joists were located in Ontario, Canada in a barn structure which predates the original tavern. Non-dimensional red pine flooring was found in an Amish schoolhouse outside of Lancaster, PA. Recreated Delph tile was hand-painted in Holland and set in place in the old Tap Room. The original horse-hair plaster was retouched in the four original rooms. All modern additions such as electrical and air conditioning ducts were craftily concealed under custom molded wainscoting, and finishing materials were selected and applied from the colonial palettes of several leading preservation-oriented companies.

In all, over two years of painstaking preservation work, research and modern construction went into forming what is now the '76 House - restored to its former glory and, once again, a great American meeting place and restaurant.