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Traveller's comments on Virginia taverns, ordinaries and other accommodations from 1750 to 1812

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TRAVELLER'S COMMENTS ON VIRGINIA TAVERNS, ORDINARIES AND OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS FROM 1750 TO 1812

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of History
University of Richmond

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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July, 1964
This paper will attempt to point out the comments of the various travellers in Virginia concerning the functions of public houses from 1750 to 1812. The travellers as individuals had their prejudices, inaccuracies, and contradictions, but their remarks, on the other hand, help to give a valuable on the scene picture of this area of early Virginia history. Traveller's comments on hospitality and transportation, two areas which greatly influenced the state's public houses, will also be included to form a better perspective, and on occasion laws, newspapers and other articles will be used to clarify and expand various topics mentioned by the travellers.
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CHAPTER I

THE PHYSICAL SETTING: THE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

The Virginia public house, during the period from 1750 to 1812, was not an isolated element in the state's society but was rather an integral part of it. As a result of this incorporation, the ordinaries and taverns were greatly influenced by the social, economic, and physical conditions that surrounded them. The hospitality and manners of Virginia society, the economic fluctuations that affected tavern fees and tavern licenses, and the physical conditions which dictated the efficiency of the transportation system, all had their effect on the public houses.

Perhaps the most important influence on the taverns and ordinaries was the quality of the state's transportation system. With good roads, bridges and ferries, travel would have been fairly easy for horses, stage coaches, and private carriages, which would have encouraged more travellers who would have brought greater profit to the innkeeper, but a system of poor roads and bridges with unreliable and slow ferries and stage coaches discouraged travel and correspondingly hurt the trade of the public house. In Virginia, while the transportation system was found to be good by many travellers in relation to conditions existing in other states, it was still fairly rude and undeveloped in many areas. As
a result of this difficulty of transportation many people would travel only for business purposes and not so frequently for pleasure, and this, of course, restricted the number of travellers in need of public houses.

Traveller's comments on the transportation system of Virginia, as well as their remarks on their own means of travel, help, therefore, to put the state's taverns and ordinaries in their proper perspective, for although the accommodations of many public houses were found to offer few conveniences and comforts and were, at times, in poor condition, they appear, judging from the traveller's accounts, to be no worse than the transportation system that served them. These traveller's descriptions of the state's roads, bridges, ferries, and stage coaches, for this reason, help to explain the conditions of the taverns and ordinaries of Virginia.

The Highway System

The highway system in the state of Virginia from 1750 to 1812 seems to have been in a rather precarious position. The roads, themselves, in spite of legal provisions for supervision and maintenance, appear to have been, for the most part, neglected and as a result frequently were filled with holes, lacked highway signs, and turned to mud during bad weather. The stage coaches and ferries appear to have been uncertain and irregular, and those few bridges that
existed were dangerous and very temporary in appearance, while the fords were frequently treacherous and undependable. Yet, in spite of these criticisms, the roads, and the transportation system in general, appear to have been no worse than the typical roads in the rest of early America, and a few travellers were even impressed with the good quality of the Virginia roads.

The system for administering the roads of Virginia went back to the seventeenth century and was continued with little change from that time to the period covered in this paper, 1750 to 1812. The basic structure of the road system in Virginia was described in 1785 by "An Act Concerning Public Roads." This law provided that the county courts should divide all public roads within their respective counties into precincts, "...and as often as it shall be necessary, appoint a surveyor over every precinct, whose duty it shall be to superintend the road in his precinct, and shall see that the same be cleared and kept in good repair." The law, also, provided that "all male labouring persons" of the age of sixteen or over, except those with two male working slaves, one of which could serve as a substitute, must work on the roads.

1. See the act of March, 1661, William Waller Henning (ed.), The Statutes At Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia (Richmond: Printed for the Editor, 1610-1823), II, 103.

2. Ibid., XII, 175-181.

3. Ibid., XII, 175-176.
If the worker failed to arrive at the date stated with his proper tools, he was to be fined seven shillings, six pence a day for each day he was absent. The county clerk was responsible for preparing a yearly list of the surveyors in each precinct in the county and the act, also, outlined the standards the surveyor must follow:

Every surveyor of a road shall cause the same to be constantly kept well cleared and smoothed, and thirty feet wide at least; and at the fork or crossing of every public road, shall cause to be erected, and kept in repair from time to time, a stone, or otherwise an index on a post or tree.

The act, also, required that bridges and causeways over dams be built where needed and be at least twelve feet wide. The surveyor was given the power to impress the necessary carriages to do the work and was able to take the needed materials from the adjoining lands. The value of these materials was to be paid back to the owner at the next county levy. The law, in addition, provided for fines for anyone damaging the roads, bridges, or signs and gave the justice of the peace power to issue a warrant against the surveyor in case he failed to perform his duties.

The levies designed to maintain the roads were, however, very inefficient, and to the traveller it often appeared

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4. Ibid., XII, 176.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., XII, 174-176.
that the highways were completely neglected. It is not surprising, therefore, that Hezekiah Prince, a New Englander travelling in Virginia in 1792, wrote, "The Virginia roads, except those near a city or large town, are most wretchedly bad, and what repairs are made are generally left to the discretion and inclination of the slave." 7

The roads, of course, were not so neglected as their condition had led Prince to believe. The state levied, at times, a special general levy for the maintenance of the roads and encouraged the counties to construct and build more adequate highways. 8 Where the counties proved unwilling or unable to construct roads, private individuals were encouraged to build them. These people were bonded to insure that they performed their service and were restricted as to the amounts they could charge. 9

Travellers using the state's roads had little good to say about them, for not only were the roads without signs and difficult to follow, but they were usually rendered impassable when it rained or snowed. William Loughton Smith, travelling through Virginia to South Carolina in 1791 estimated:

9. Ibid., XII, 75-60.
Some parts of the road this morning were bad, and from the appearance of the road I imagine that it must be impassable in winter. I had the advantage in travelling at this season of the year of having the roads good, roads which are dreadful in winter being now firm and level.\textsuperscript{10}

William Janson, an Englishman visiting Norfolk in 1800, described Norfolk's streets in this manner: "The streets, except Main and Church Streets, are narrow, and even these are irregular. Those near the water were so filthy, that even in winter the stench was often offensive in passing."\textsuperscript{11} Janson, in addition, found the streets to be all but impassable because of the mud:

In the winter of 1800, returning to Mrs. Paterson's boarding-house, after dark, it was necessary to cross the main street. I was directed where to ford the mud; but after deliberately taking my bearings, and nearly opposite to the spot where the Borough Tavern then stood, I found myself almost knee deep. I plunged and labored some time to extricate myself, which I could not effect without the loss of one of my "shoe boots."\textsuperscript{12}

Muddy roads, also, seem to have plagued Moreau de St. Mery, a Frenchman visiting Virginia in 1794, and John Bernard, an English actor, who travelled in Virginia in 1799. St. Mery noted in his \textit{American Journey}, "The roads leading to


\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 327.
Portsmouth are mere tracks large enough for wagons, occasionally bridged across ditches, streams or mudholes, by small tree trunks placed close together," and Bernard gave this humorous description of Virginia roads:

The track was certainly well-defined, in two broad paths full of water; and where a hollow occurred, some careful hand had usually filled it up with a substantial pile of stones... This rendered the navigation of these roads no small science since it was evident if you escaped the breakers on one side you were pretty sure of floundering in a gulf on the other.

The rain, snow, and other bad weather that usually put the roads in a very poor condition were not the only cause of bad roads, for the highways frequently encountered geographic difficulties such as marshy lands and steep hills that often created problems for the traveller. Hezekiah Prince gave his opinion of the problem of marshy lands and the efforts used to overcome them: "From Hanover Court House to Richmond the road is over marshes, swamps, and slashes, and the corduroy roads more tedious than the bad ones we have already passed." Robert Hunter, an Englishman travelling through Virginia in 1785 and 1786, gave this comment on the problem of hills:


"The road was so extremely bad in many places that we twice were obliged to get out and clap our shoulders to the wheels, to assist a restive horse in drawing the stage up two hills; otherwise we might have remained there all night."16

Not all the highway hazards of Virginia could be traced to natural problems. A New Yorker, John Caldwell, travelling in Virginia in 1808, gave this warning, "I would advise every traveller on this road to carry pistols, and as a preventive is better than a cure, so to expose them to view as to deter the ill-designing from making an attack."17

Sign markers, or the lack of them, frequently confused the traveller who would find several roads crossing back and forth, but with no signs. Isaac Weld, an Englishman travelling through some Virginia woods, commented in 1796, "The roads through them are very bad, and so many of them cross one


another in different directions, that it is a matter of very great difficulty to find the right one."\textsuperscript{16} Caldwell, also, ran into this problem and quipped, "I can say with truth I have found the roads in Virginia to be, as the Poet represents the ways of Providence, 'puzzled in mazes and perplexed in errors'.\textsuperscript{19}

One must keep in mind, however, that the roads in all the United States at this time were very poor and many travellers were impressed by the state's roads when they were compared with others in different areas of the nation. Isaac Burr, travelling in northern Virginia in 1805, noted that the people of Virginia "have excellent roads,"\textsuperscript{20} while the well-travelled Frenchman, the Duke de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, gave this opinion in 1796: "The roads are in general good throughout the state."\textsuperscript{21}

While travellers often found the roads to be in poor condition, they frequently faced even greater problems in

\textsuperscript{18} Issac Weld, Travels through the states of North America, and the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (first edition; London: Printed for John Stockdale, Piccadilly, 1799), pp. 90-91.

\textsuperscript{19} Caldwell, op. cit., p. 41.


\textsuperscript{21} Duke De La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, Travels Through the United States of North America (London: Printed by T. Davidson, Lombard Street, Fleet Street, 1799), II, 121.
crossing bodies of water. Bridges were fairly rare, while those that did exist were often unsafe, and although the ferries seem to have been more dependable, they were usually slow and they, also, had their dangerous aspects. An even greater problem was caused when neither bridge nor ferry crossed a body of water. When this happened travellers were required to either ford the river, a very dangerous process, or to go miles out of their way until they reached a bridge, ferry or a safe place to ford.

Travellers were not very pleased with the bridges of the period. In 1786 Robert Hunter wrote, "Some of the bridges are exceedingly dangerous crossing them, many of them being loose and partly carried away with the late rains," and Isaac Weid made a similar comment in 1796 about bridges around Richmond: "The bridges thrown across this river, opposite the town, have repeatedly been carried away; it is thought idle, therefore, to go to the expense of a better one.

22. Thomas Chapman was presented with this problem while travelling through Virginia and wrote in his journal, "finding neither Cannou or other Boat, we was Obliged to ride 3 miles down the River, where we got a small float that conveyed us & our Horses over this River." Thomas Chapman, "Journal of a Journey Through the United States, 1795-1796," The History Magazine, second series, V (1869), 366.

than what exists at present." The bridge, which Weld mentioned, was called by La Rochefoucault "one of the worst and most dangerous of all possible bridges." This description by Weld shows the reason for La Rochefoucault's comment:

The bridge leading from the south shore to the island is built upon fifteen large flat bottomed boats, kept stationary in the river by strong chains and anchors. The bows of them, which are very sharp, are put against the stream, and fore and aft there is a strong beam, upon which the piers of the bridge rest.

Between the island and the town, the water being shallower, the bridge is built upon piers formed of square casements of logs filled with stones. To this there is a railing, and the boards with which it is covered are so loose that it is dangerous to ride a horse across it, that is not accustomed to it.26

The use of ferries was another method employed by travellers to cross deep rivers and larger bodies of water. Because of the large number of rivers in Virginia, the ferry system seems to have been fairly well developed, but it was, also, slow, expensive, and often dangerous as many travellers note. The large number of rivers especially in eastern Virginia often necessitated frequent use of ferries as this statement by Hezekiah Prince points out, "We crossed the

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24. Isaac Weld, Travels through the states of North America, and the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (second edition; London: Printed for John Stockdale, Piccadilly, 1798), II, 188.

25. La Rochefoucault, op. cit., II, 53.

26. Weld, op. cit., II, 188.
ferry at Colchester on the 'Occoquan', over miserable roads, and through a more miserable, God-forsaken region of humanity until our arrival at Fredericksburg, where we crossed the ferry and put up." 27 This frequent requirement of the use of ferries was not pleasing to the traveller for it not only meant a delay, but, also, an additional expense. The Reverend Thomas Coke, an English Methodist, made this complaint on his first trip to Virginia in 1764, "The innumerable large Ferries in this country make travelling very expensive and they charge three shillings sterling for a night's fodder and corn for the horse." 28 Moreau de St. Mery in 1794 described the ferry service between Norfolk and Portsmouth in this manner:

The need of crossing the Elizabeth River when coming to Norfolk from the upper part of Virginia or the states situated to the east or west, because the stages and even the mail-coach and their routes at Portsmouth, brought about a special means of communication between Norfolk and Portsmouth. This consists of six ferry-boats, propelled by two men, who steer the boat by their manner of rowing. Six people travel comfortably in the small boats, eight in the others. 29

La Rochefoucauld was, also, pleased by the Norfolk ferry service:


The communication between Norfolk and Portsmouth is continual: it is carried on by six row-boats belonging to a company, and by three scows in which horses and carriages are conveniently ferried over. 30

Isaac Weld, on the other hand, was not so impressed with the ferry system of Virginia and gave this criticism:

It is a most irksome piece of business to cross the ferries in Virginia; there is not one in six where the boats are good and well manned, and it is necessary to employ great circumspection in order to guard against accidents which are but too common. 31

Weld, also, described the problem of delay which often developed with the use of ferries:

From this town there is a regular ferry to Norfolk, across Hampton roads, eighteen miles over. I was forced to leave my horses here behind me for several days, as all the flats belonging to the place had been sent up a creek some miles for staves, &c and they had no other method of getting horses into the ferry boats, which were too large to come close into shore excepting by carrying them out in these flats, and then making them leap on board. 32

The ferries of the state were subject to regulation of the General Assembly just as were many other areas of the state's system of travel such as roads, stage coaches, and public houses. On December 26, 1792, the General Assembly passed "An Act reducing into one, the several acts for the

30. La Rochefoucault, op. cit., II, 15.
32. Ibid.
Settlement and Regulation of Ferries."\textsuperscript{33} The law listed a large number of locations where ferries were to be constantly kept and listed special rates for each location.\textsuperscript{34} The act then gave special rates for such articles as hogsheads of tobacco, which were equal to the cost of ferrying a horse, and sheep, goats, and hogs, which were to cost one fifth the rate of a horse, and if these rates were violated the ferry owner was fined two dollars for each charge.\textsuperscript{35} The county court was responsible for keeping a record of the number of boats and men employed by the ferry operator who was required to give bond and security "...with condition that he will duly keep such ferry, or cause the same to be kept, according to law, and will give immediate passage to all public passengers and express when required from time to time."\textsuperscript{36}

In order to encourage ferry keepers the law of 1792, also, gave the operators special privileges and exemptions.

\textsuperscript{33} Collections of All Such Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia of a Public and Permanent Nature, as are now in force (Richmond: Printed by Samuel Pleasants, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1814), 311.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., pp. 311-319.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 320.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
The ferry operator was free from county levies and all other public services such as "musters, constables, clearing of highways impressments and other things of like nature." In addition if the county court found it necessary to establish an ordinary at the ferry, the ferry keeper was not required to pay the ordinary license fee. "Provided that every ferry keeper so licensed to keep ordinary shall give bond and security, and be liable to the same penalties as other ordinary keepers." The ferry keeper furthermore was protected from competition by a twenty dollar fine imposed on any who tried to take his business.

When neither bridges nor ferries existed across a body of water, the traveller was usually forced to ford the stream if he could. Often this meant a trip of many miles out of the way to find a suitable place to cross and even the safest fording was dangerous. After rains or during the winter, travellers were frequently delayed weeks while waiting for a good time to cross a treacherous creek. The fording of almost any creek could be difficult, and the Reverend Thomas Coke in 1784 pointed out one of the problems,

37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., pp. 320-321.
40. see footnotes 22 and 43.
"I had two runs of water, as they are called, to cross between Alexandria and Colchester, which swell exceedingly on any thaw or fall of rain."\(^{1}\) William Loughton Smith of South Carolina noticed the conditions necessary for a good fording as he travelled in Charlotte county: "I crossed the ferry; some countrymen forded at the same time, for though the river is wide and the water deep and rapid, the fording is reckoned safe, as the exact depth can be easily ascertained and the bottom is fine and level."\(^{2}\) Count Castiglioni, an Italian travelling in the state in 1786, was not so lucky with his attempts at fording, and his comment points out the dangers of the task:

At Middle River a small stream usually fordrawable the year through, I found several travellers waiting for an opportunity to cross....The morning of the 29th the good man of the house advised me that I might now cross. A crowd of people were at the bank to see us make the attempt. My servant stripped himself and ventured in (on horseback) with the carriage. He had hardly left the bank when the force of the stream swept him down and overturned the calesche.\(^{3}\)

The Methods of Travel

The most popular method of transportation in Virginia during the period from 1750 to 1812 was, of course, the horse.

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\(^{1}\) Coke, op. cit., p. 26.

\(^{2}\) Smith, op. cit., p. 69.

The horse could best travel the poor roads and back trails of the state and could move in areas that other methods of transportation could not reach. It was flexible transportation that was both rapid and inexpensive, for horses were easy to acquire, in most areas, either by rent or on loan. Few people walked in Virginia, for the distances were too far and the person on foot, therefore, was a rarity. John Davis, an Englishman, who travelled in the state in 1801 and 1802, noted this aversion to travel on foot: "...it was now necessary to bestride a horse; for in Virginia no man is respected who travels on foot." Davis, in addition, wrote of the popularity of horses as a means of travel, "The Virginian, thinking it degrading to be seen on foot, has always his riding nag saddled and fastened to the fence." This popularity of the horse is commented on by Prince: "Horseback riding is general with males and females, commonly riding double and sometimes thribble."  

The use of rented horses was, also, quite common in the more populous areas, and Robert Sutcliff, a Quaker travelling in Virginia in 1804 and 1806, made this notation upon arriving at Richmond: "Having business at Gouchland, at the

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45. Ibid., p. 367.

46. Prince, op. cit., p. 734.
distance of about 30 miles on a cross road, I hired a horse and rode in the course of the day.\textsuperscript{47} Not all areas of the state offered rented or post horses as William Janson pointed out while travelling near Orange Courthouse in 1800: "A traveller in this country must mount his waggon or walk - there is no alternative - no post horses or carriages are to be hired - no stages ever travel the road we were determined to pursue."\textsuperscript{48} The rent of horses was not the only way to obtain one, however, and many people were willing to lend the traveller a horse and the traveller, in a sort of honor system, would send the horse back by way of another traveller. Robert Sutcliff, for example, having missed a stage for Alexandria, obtained the loan of a horse from a Fredericksburg man and returned the animal in this manner: "A respectable person at the inn being about to return towards Fredericksburg, afforded an opportunity of sending back J. C.'s horse...."\textsuperscript{49}

Although the horse was the most conventional method of travel, the stage was, also, quite popular, and by the beginning of the period covered in this paper, regular stage service between many of the major towns of the state was


\textsuperscript{48} Janson, op. cit., p. 390.

\textsuperscript{49} Sutcliff, op. cit., pp. 54-55.
Robert Sutcliff demonstrated the frequent use of stage travel and his journal often contains such entries as, "I set out in the mail stage for Fredericksburg..." and "I pursued my way to Richmond in the mail stage...." The legislature frequently encouraged stage lines by granting the owners monopolies over certain routes. In May of 1785, the state legislature passed "An act giving Nathaniel Twining the exclusive privilege of conveying persons in a stage coach for a limited time." This act, one of several monopoly grants, first points out the reasons for the act:

I. Whereas it is represented to this general assembly, that Nathaniel Twining hath laid out a considerable sum of money in the purchase of stage coaches and horses, for the purpose of conveying persons and their baggage from Alexandria to Richmond, and from the latter to the former place, which is likely to prove a very great convenience to the citizens of this state and others. And ... the said Nathaniel Twining hath undertaken to keep up and continue the said line of stages as aforesaid, in a proper and sufficient manner for three years.

The act then states the rights and privileges of Twining and points out his responsibilities:

50. On June 22, 1739, there appeared an ad in the Virginia Gazette which noted "That a Post-Stage has been some time carried on and is still continued, from Williamsburg...." Advertisement in the Virginia Gazette June 22, 1739.

51. Sutcliff, op. cit., p. 50.
52. Ibid., p. 52.
54. Ibid.
II. Be it therefore enacted, That the said Nathaniel Twining shall have the sole and exclusive right of conveying persons in a stage coach from Richmond to Alexandria, and from the latter to the former, and to and from any intermediate place, for and during the said term of three years; and shall and may demand and take for each passenger five pence per mile and five pence per mile for every one hundred and fifty pounds weight of baggage exceeding fourteen pounds conveyed in the stage coach.55

The act, also, required Twining to pay double the amount asked by him if it was more than the amount set by the legislature, and imposed a one hundred pound fine on any other person who attempted to drive a stage line over the same area. Twining, furthermore, was required to put up one thousand pounds as bond to guarantee that he would maintain the line's service. 56

The early Virginia stage coach, itself, was not the most comfortable vehicle, but it did offer the traveller some protection from the elements, protected him from becoming lost, offered the safety of numbers, and brought the promise of secure lodgings. William Janson gave this description of the colonial stage that he used on a trip from New York to Virginia in 1800:

This vehicle, which is of the same construction throughout the country, is calculated to hold twelve persons, who all sit on benches placed across, with their faces towards the horses. The front seat also holds three, one of whom is the driver, and as there

55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
are no doors at the sides the passengers get in over the front wheels, and take their seats as they enter; the first, of course, gets seats behind the rest. This is the most esteemed seat because you can rest your shaken frame against the back part of the waggon. Women are therefore generally indulged with it, and it is often laughable to see them crawling to their seats.... It is covered with leather, and instead of windows, there are flaps of that article, which in bad weather are let down, and secured by buckles and straps. In the summer the straps are folded up and this is some alleviation from the repeated shocks you receive in going over roads....

Robert Hunter gave a description of a slightly different stage coach while travelling towards Suffolk:

Mr. Cuthbert got into the Portsmouth stage, and we in one of Twining's new ones, for Suffolk. They are upon a different construction from the northward stages, being much lighter, smaller, and upon excellent springs, which renders the traveling infinitely more agreeable. There are only three seats which hold six people, with the driver, two in each. 58

John Melish, who travelled in Virginia in 1806, had a pleasant experience with stage travel and wrote, "The day was clear, pleasant, and healthy; and in this strain of merriment and good humor, we prosecuted our journey much to our satisfaction." 59 The group, with which Melish travelled, enjoyed themselves, they sang, told humorous stories, and even elected officers. 60 The stage driver, also, impressed Melish who commented:

60. Ibid., I, 215-216.
When the coach heeled to one side, he would call out, "to the right and left, and cover your flanks - whiz;" and when we passed a stream by a ford, he would sing out, "by the deep nine," accompanied with all the attitudes of heaving the lead. 61

The aristocratic Virginia gentleman, Thomas Fairfax, travelling to New England in 1799, had a slightly different opinion of his driver and described what is apparently an old problem:

The black driver at this house took a drink too much ...for after dinner he drove his little horses at an unmerciful rate, and to shew his dexterity, Actually went down several considerable hills in full gallop. The passengers, who consisted chiefly of sea faring and commercial men, appeared to be quite ignorant of the risque we ran...To a person who knew any thing about driving a carriage, it was very evident, that the smallest deviation from the track so as to encounter even a very small stump or stone, and going at such a rate downhill, would have hurled the whole set of us to instant destruction. 62

Fairfax, in addition, was not impressed with the average stage passenger, and the aristocratic Virginian pointed out several unsatisfactory qualities often found in stage passengers:

We had an agreeable journey so far, the Stage not being crowded, and the passengers orderly decent sort of people, two circumstances rarely to be met with in this way of travelling. Next day in the evening we got to Richmond, where I put up at the stage office of the Petersburg line, as I designed to go this route. 63

61. Ibid., I, 216.


63. Ibid., p. 1.
The informality of stage travel, as to schedules and regular stops, made stage travel slower than it would ordinarily have been. Frequent stops to change drivers and horses were necessary, but people along the road were able to stop the stage at almost any time to get a ride, and this made the slow travel even slower. Fairfax demonstrated this informality in this statement, "After Breakfast I walked on till the stage should overtake me, and when it did, I found the rest of the passengers had gone on board a small packet to go by water...."64 The slowness of stage travel, that was aided by such frequent stops, is pointed out by La Rochefoucault who noted, "Crowded in the stage by ten passengers and their baggage, we did not arrive at Richmond, before 11 o'clock at night, though we had set out from Williamsburg at eight in the morning."65

In spite of La Rochefoucault’s difficulties with slowness and crowding, however, his main complaint still seems to be common of passengers today:

Of all the inconveniences attending the public carriages in America - and the number of those inconveniences is great - one of the most mortifying is that they almost invariably run over the very worst parts of the country through which they travel.66

64. Ibid., p. 4.
65. La Rochefoucault, op. cit., II, 30.
66. Ibid., II, 29-30.
Many people, of course, had their own private carriages and wagons and these were frequently used in travel, especially in eastern Virginia, where the roads were better and the ground more level. Travel by private carriage, however, had its drawbacks. The narrow roads frequently allowed no passing and a carriage caught behind a slow moving wagon often had to wait hours for a chance to pass. The rough roads were another problem for they frequently caused broken wheels or other damage to the wagon, and repairs were often quite difficult in isolated rural areas. The carriages and wagons, on the other hand, had their advantages, for they offered some degree of comfort and were better protected from the elements than was a horse, and they could carry more people and equipment. Travellers were also able to rent carriages and wagons just as they were able to rent horses, and wagons and carriages seem to have been quite numerous. The French traveller, Moreau St. Mery, noticed quite a few of them near Norfolk in 1704:

One meets coaches, wagons, and carts on these roads, the carts sometimes drawn by yoked oxen; and occasionally one passes a horse with a husband in the saddle and his wife riding behind which indicates that the horses are stronger than they seem. 66

The dangers of driving a carriage on the rough roads of Virginia were noticed by several travellers. Robert Hunter made this comment in 1785:

68. St. Mery, op. cit., p. 69.
Hadfield drove one of the wheels against the stump of a tree, overturned the chair, and threw him completely out of it. The horse ran away across the woods and dragged the tilted chair, knocking and banging it against the trees. Hadfield jumped up and pursued it on foot and I on horseback, and with some difficulty we stopped him. Fortunately the chair was not broke.

Count Castiglioni, also, described the problems that faced the carriage owner:

The following day, having passed Smith Creek, a dangerous stream, I came into a new road, full of roots, and bad from the rain besides. The wheels of the caleche, which had already been many times repaired broke into a hundred pieces, and at the first smithy I determined to abandon the vehicle and continue the journey on horseback.

Caldwell gave this account of his attempt to take a carriage over a mountainous road near Fincastle, Virginia, in 1806:

I had, however, much difficulty to encounter, and was assured that I was the first person who attempted crossing the mountains in a carriage, those vehicles being usually sent round, while their owners preferred the less dangerous method of riding on horseback. I was, however, obliged to procure the aid of a very strong horse, to assist my quadruped in hauling over the chair, and arrived without accident, to the no small surprise of the visitors at the springs.

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69. This is probably the same Joseph Hadfield whose journal is also mentioned. The dates, names, and travel areas coincide. See footnote 10, chapter IV.


72. Caldwell, op. cit., p. 25.
Travellers occasionally mention renting a carriage or wagon to help them during their journey. William Janson noted, "A wagon with five horses carries thirty hundred weight, costs 2 shillings a mule." Another traveller, Charles Copland, wrote of travelling in a carriage and, also, mentioned renting an additional vehicle. This statement appeared in his diary on July 17, 1796: "Set out with my wife and two of our children...for the Louisa Springs. We travelled in a Cocher, with a pair of horses, and hired a small stage wagon to carry two servant women and a part of our baggage." Samuel Allen of Connecticut, also, commented on renting a wagon in November of 1796:

When we arrived to Alexandria Mr. Avory found that taking land cariage from there to Monongehaly would be less expense then it would be to go any farther up the Potomac & less danger so he hired wagoners to carry the goods across the mountains to Morgantown....

Travel by ship was another method used by travellers. Although limited to service between the various port towns in the state, ship travel was fast and efficient, and small

73. Janson, op. cit., p. 390.
74. Charles Copland, "Extracts from the Diary of Charles Copland," William and Mary Quarterly, first series, XIV (April, 1906), 217.
packet ships made regular runs that reached many of the larger river ports such as Richmond, Alexandria, and Fredericksburg. William Janson commented in 1800 on the speed of ship travel: "The passage for Alexandria to Norfolk is generally made by sea on account of the distance by land; and it was in a regular packet that I proceeded to the latter place." The Reverend Ameriah Frost, also, found packet service to Alexandria convenient and wrote in 1797, "Set out in the morning early... for Mount Vernon; went in the packet boat to Alex. and from thence in a carriage." Sir John Augustus Foster, an English diplomat visiting Norfolk in 1804, pointed out why water travel was frequently chosen:

"The mode of conveyance by land from Norfolk to the capital of the United States was, I was informed, very bad and the roads were said to be detestable. One may, however, with the assistance of a good breeze, get up to Baltimore easily in two days..."

The Public House

If the travellers to Virginia at times found the state's transportation facilities lacking, the public houses which

76. Janson, op. cit., p. 327. A trip by boat was fairly expensive, however, Janson recorded the fare of a boat trip from Norfolk to Fredericksburg at ten dollars a passenger. Ibid., p. 390.


they visited offered little respite, for the tavern in Colonial Virginia from 1750 to 1812 was in many ways a reflection of the economy, transportation system, sectionalism, and, of course, the social customs of that period. The rural, tobacco-oriented economy required the development of large plantations, which restricted rural population growth by spreading it over larger areas, and this practice of building up large plantations discouraged the construction of taverns and ordinaries in large numbers in the rural areas. Those that existed, were often small and plain with few luxuries and usually only the basic minimum necessities. For this reason lodgings in rural Virginia maintained the name ordinary long after the improvement in size, quality, and luxury caused the name ordinary to be substituted for tavern in northern colonies.

Even as late as the 1780's, many rural counties had no more than four or five ordinaries within their area, and these

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79. The name tavern was usually given to more elaborate public houses which offered superior services and this held true to a large degree in Virginia. The origin of the name ordinary as applied to Virginia public houses is more confused, but the most common definition seems to be a public house that served one dish per meal at a fixed price.* These public houses were usually less elaborate than taverns and again this holds true for Virginia. There are many cases where these names have been interchanged at the whim of the owner, and there is a considerable grey area in between the clear examples. There is, also, the confusion of the travellers who give conflicting explanations as to the differences. The term public house in this paper will be used to indicate both taverns and ordinaries. *See Oscar T. Barck and Hugh T. Lefler, Colonial America (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 357.
were usually located near court houses, mills, or important road and river intersections.  

In those few urban areas where the population supported fair sized towns, such as Richmond, Williamsburg, Winchester, Alexandria, and Fredericksburg, good taverns developed which were as good as any in the colonies. The taverns of the large towns usually drew support from the upper classes who often shunned rural ordinaries, and they frequently provided special club services for various groups and organizations. Taverns in the towns furthermore were usually fairly numerous when compared with the relative scarcity of rural public houses.


82. La Rochefoucauld in 1796, for example, found eight taverns in Staunton, and "ten or twelve" in Winchester. La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., II, 90, 105.

83. While it is true that in many remote areas of the state public houses were difficult to find, many complaints by travellers about the scarcity of taverns and ordinaries were the result of the slowness of travel from one area to another. La Rochefoucauld, for instance, complained of this scarcity: "Inns are very scarce on this road; the next is nearly seventeen miles distant from that where we passed the night." From this statement it might therefore be concluded that while the rural public house might be convenient for the local population, it was often remote for the traveller. Ibid., II, 67.
While foreign travellers at times were surprised at the lack of class consciousness in Virginia, this often was due to comparison with their native land, and Virginia social structure, while not so rigid as that of Europe, left its influence on Virginia taverns and ordinaries. The colonial gentry, occasionally, looked with disdain at the local ordinary which was considered to be for the lower classes and used it infrequently, mainly for gaming and when other accommodations were unavailable. The taverns of the large towns were more acceptable and were frequented by gentlemen who didn't own town houses, or who had no close friends in the area. These taverns catered to the upper classes by serving good food and wines and encouraging social and political clubs. Generally the various classes had different interests, not only in the choice of lodging, but in social customs, even down to different preferences in card games. The tavern or ordinary, of course, reflected the preference of its clientel.

The sectional difference between the more wealthy, heavily populated East with its large plantations, and the new, lesser developed sections of the West is also reflected in their public houses. The public houses of the West were usually fewer in number, smaller, and generally offered less variety of food and more primitive lodging facilities than

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did the eastern public house. The western ordinary, in addition, was often owned by the family that lived in it, while in the east many public houses had absentee owners. The ordinaries in the far west, where they existed at all, were usually nothing more than private cabins that took in the occasional traveller and doubled in many cases as trading posts, and even near the end of the period the public houses in the far west were fairly isolated. This sectional difference was not a radical one but it continued throughout the period from 1750-1812 and, of course, as the state became more heavily settled and travel increased as the period progressed the public houses in the rural sections and in the western areas increased in number and quality.


87. A good example of this remoteness is demonstrated by this comment of the Reverend Paul Henkel, a Luthern Minister travelling from Virginia to Ohio in 1807: "We came out of Augusta County to-day; and were entertained in Bath County by an innkeeper who called to mind that he had not heard English preaching for 12 years." Reverend Paul Henkel, "The Reverend Paul Henkel's Journal," ed. Clement L. Martzolff and trans. Reverend F. E. Cooper, Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly, XXIII (April, 1914), 163.

Taverns, ordinaries, and tippling houses had been subject to colonial legislation almost since the beginning of the colony. The rapid growth of ordinaries and tippling houses had resulted, by the middle of the Seventeenth Century, in various attempts to regulate them. These laws tried to limit either the number of ordinaries and tippling houses per county by restricting them to one at the county court house and one at each public landing or ferry, or to limit the type of people who could enter them. Usually seamen, indentured servants, and students were not allowed to drink, gamble, or congregate in ordinaries or tippling houses. These regulations encouraged the growth of illegal tippling

1. "Whereas the excessive number of ordinaryes and tipling houses set up for the advance of a private gaine, are found to be full of mischiefe and inconveniences by cherishing idleness and debaucherries,...See it enacted and declared that the commissioners of each county court be required to take special care for the suppressing and restraint of the exorbitant number of ordinaryes and tipling houses in their respective counties, and not to permitt in any county more than one or two, and those neare the court house, and noe more, unles in publique places, as ports, fferrys, and greate roades, where they may be necessary for the accommodation of travellers, according as the said courts shall find the necessities of their counties require." (Sept., 1668.) Henning, op. cit., II, 268-269.

2. Ibid., III, 44-46.
houses, which were probably simple bars where hard liquor was sold, and although tippling houses were finally outlawed, they continued to flourish and, in fact, still exist today. Gradually the legislature saw the ordinary as a possible form of revenue and by 1750, the beginning of the period covered in this paper, efforts to limit the number of ordinaries had largely given way to a license tax on them. The prohibitions on certain clientele continued into this period, however, and other restrictions and regulations were developed to meet the changing times and conditions.

By 1750 the legislature had developed the ordinary into a profitable source of income by placing a yearly tax on each ordinary license and by placing a tax on liquor as well. Each ordinary owner was required to register his name and his ordinary with the clerk of the county court and to pay to the clerk a yearly fee for his license. If an ordinary owner failed to pay the license tax, he was subject to a fine and if he persisted, he might lose his ordinary as well. 3

The cost of an ordinary license varied quite a bit during the years from 1750 to 1812 and the tax mirrored the fluctuations in the economy that were caused by the events of the period. From 1754 until 1776, for example, the tax

3. Ibid., VI, '418-420.
was a stable and modest twenty shillings and while the legislature of 1768 seemed tempted to raise the tax by noting that it was "not so burthensome as a poll tax," it finally concluded that the tax on ordinaries was sufficient. In October of 1776, however, the tax was raised an additional forty shillings "for defraying the expenses of erecting fortifications." After this initial plunge the tax was raised again in 1777 to three pounds. The growing costs of the war brought inflation and the "act for raising a supply of publick exigencies" called in the old currency and issued new currency. The inflation continued, however, and in 1778 an amendment to the act provided, "that an additional tax of six pounds for every ordinary license shall be paid down to the clerk of the county or corporation court at the time of granting such a license...."

The tax climbed even higher in 1779 when the growing war costs and the inflation of a hard-money scarce economy pushed the fee to forty pounds. The worst was yet to come, as the legislature groped for funds. In 1780 it passed "An act calling in and redeeming the money now in circulation..." and issued a

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4. Ibid., VIII, 297.
5. Ibid., IX, 221.
7. Ibid., IX, 547-548.
8. Ibid., X, 189.
new devalued currency which caused the license fee to jump to two hundred pounds with an additional tax of fifty shillings allowed for each county. By November of 1781 the crisis had passed and the tax was lowered to five pounds, and it remained at this level until 1783. In the economic recession that followed the Revolution the license fee on the ordinary began to decline, and in 1784 the amount of the license dropped slightly to four pounds and continued at this rate until the fee was again cut to forty shillings in October of 1790. It remained at this level until the end of 1796 when improved economic conditions and a change in the state's currency caused the price of the license to be modified. On December 23, 1796, the General Assembly in the annual "Act providing for the support of government by the imposition of taxes" passed a new tax on the ordinary license by which the rate was changed from the former forty shillings to six dollars and sixty-seven cents. The tax increased

9. Ibid., X, 245, 251.
10. Ibid., X, 504.
11. Ibid., XI, 418.
12. Ibid., XIII, 111.
again on January 22, 1798, when the annual revenue bill raised the fee on ordinals to ten dollars, and on January 23, 1799, it was raised to twelve dollars and fifty cents and this sum served as the basic fee until the end of the period in 1812.

While the legislature fixed the price of the ordinary license the county was responsible for collecting the fee and for determining who would obtain licenses and under what conditions. A law passed in 1782 stated that the counties "shall have the sole and exclusive power of granting licenses to keep ordinals within the said borough, regulating the same and

15. Ibid., II, 73.
16. Ibid., II, 145.
17. Ibid., II, 200, 277; III, 114, 204, 353. The "Act providing for the support of government by the imposition of taxes" of January 21, 1807, modified the amount to be paid. It noted: "For every ordinary license, five dollars on every hundred dollars of rent of such ordinary, to be ascertained by the rent paid by the tenant; and where such tavern is in the occupation of the proprietor, the yearly value shall be ascertained by the commissioners of the revenue." This rule went into effect only when the sum was more than twelve dollars and fifty cents which was the minimum that could be paid. This qualification was continued until the end of the period in 1812. Ibid., III, 279. See also Acts passed at a General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia (Richmond: Printed by Samuel Pleasants, Printer to the Commonwealth, 1806-1812), "An Act imposing Taxes for the Support of Government," (1808), p. 3, (1809), p. 26, (1810), p. 3, (1811), p. 3, (1812), p. 3.
restraining of tippling houses." A law passed in 1779 went into greater detail. It provided that "the courts of the respected counties are vested with the power of settling the rates and prices to be paid at ordinaries for liquors, diet, lodging, provender, stablage, fodder, and pasturage..." and further stated that:

Every ordinary-keeper shall, within one month after the rates so set, obtain of the county clerk, a fair table of such rates, which shall be openly set upon the publick entertainment room of every ordinary and kept there until the rules shall be again set by the court.

Each county court had full power to change the rates whenever they felt it necessary and were required to fix the rates at least twice a year.

County enforcement of the laws passed by the legislature was never very effective and varied from county to county. In an effort to reduce this laxness, the legislature frequently repassed old laws putting heavy fines, not only on the law breakers, but on those who failed to enforce them. A law passed in October of 1779 is a good example of this. It stated:

Whereas the number of tippling houses is become a publick nuisance, encouraging idleness, drunkenness, and all manner of vice and immorality, and the laws heretofore made have proved insufficient to restrain


19. Ibid., X, 146-147; see also Ibid., XI, 173-174.
so growing and dangerous an evil: Be it therefore enacted by the General Assembly, That every person keeping a tippling house, or retailing liquors contrary to the act entitled "An act for regulating ordinaries and restraint of tippling houses," shall over and above the penalties inflicted by the said act forfeit and pay the sum of fifty pounds for each and every offense....

This act, of course, was not to apply to legally licensed ordinaries or to plantation owners as long as the produce for the liquor came from the person's plantation or was intended to be consumed at the ordinary or plantation where it was sold.

The General Assembly also tried to restrict the large amount of gambling that was going on in ordinaries and passed several laws to that effect. A law in 1779 stated for example:

Any tavern-keeper who shall permit cards, dice, billiards, or any instrument of gaming to be made use of in his house, or permit any person to bet or play for money or other goods...and shall not make information thereof, and give in the names of the offenders to the next court...shall be deprived of his license, and moreover shall pay to the informer one hundred pounds....

This area of law was probably one of the most ineffective of all the laws regulating ordinaries, for gaming was popular with all classes, and ordinaries and taverns had become important centers of gaming, not only with the lower classes, but, at times, with the upper class as well.

20. Ibid., X, 145.
21. Ibid., X, 206.
22. A similar section was found in "An Act for licensing and regulating taverns" passed in October 1785. It
Tavern and ordinary operators were, also, subject to other restrictions. Generally they were not allowed to be judges or members of the tax committee in the various counties and they were usually forbidden to hold the offices of mayor, recorder, alderman, or common council man in the town governments. In addition, certain officials, such as tobacco inspectors, were not allowed to own ordinaries near the location of their official duties.\textsuperscript{23} The billeting of soldiers in time of mutiny and uprising was, also, the responsibility of the ordinary operator. An act in March of 1758 made it lawful for the local justice of the peace "to billet the soldiers in His Majesty's service in ordinaries and taverns and in no private homes."\textsuperscript{24}

Not all the laws concerning ordinaries were restrictive, and some were designed to help the operator. Laws passed in both 1778 and 1780, when food and other supplies

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] Ibid., VII, 325; IX, 351-352; XIII, 501.
\item[24] Ibid., VII, 596.
\end{footnotes}
were in short supply due to the revolution, provided that "the commissioners shall leave in the hands of tavern-keepers, a sufficient quantity of such enumerated articles...as may be necessary for the accustomed consumption of such tavern."25

An earlier act in 1762 was also designed to aid the tavern operator. Before 1762 the tavern operator was restricted in accepting credit, not only from seamen, but from any traveller. The tavern operator could not sell on credit any liquor to anyone and hold them responsible for payment. If he sold them liquor on credit and attempted to collect, he was to be fined double cost in court. This was harmful to tavern-keepers in respect to debts contracted with them by travellers and other transient people, and the tavern keeper frequently suffered a loss of his just payment.26 The General Assembly therefore in noting these facts stated:

It shall and may be lawful for such ordinary-keepers as are duly and legally licensed to keep publick houses to sell by retail, or otherwise, any quantity of liquors to any person whatsoever, except sailors in actual pay on board any ship, or such persons as shall be actually inhabitants of the county or residents of the town, wherein such ordinary shall be kept, and may give such credit for the same as they shall think proper.27

25. Ibid., IX, 581-582; X, 233-234.
26. Ibid., VII, 595.
27. Ibid.
The General Assembly, of course, continued to maintain its interest in regulating ordinaries, as well as obtaining revenues from the license charges, throughout the period. By the later part of the eighteenth century, however, the number of these laws and the conflicts of their regulation often became confused, and so on December 26, 1792, the General Assembly passed "An Act for regulating ordinaries and restraint of tippling houses."[28] This act, which remained in force until the end of the period in 1812, attempted to clear the confusion caused by the various acts on ordinaries by superseding them with one law which contained all the provisions still in effect.[29] This law of 1792, of course, contained many similarities to the older provisions, but it remained in force for the final twenty years of this paper.[30]

This law in its first section required that each person who wished to set up a public house should petition the county court for a license. The law then stated:

The justices of the court to whom such petition shall be exhibited, shall thereupon consider the convenience of the place proposed, and the ability of the petitioner to provide and keep good and sufficient houses, lodging

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29. Ibid., I, 145.
and entertainment for travellers, their servants and horses. 31

The act, after warning the county courts against giving the licenses to the poor in an effort to keep them off the parish relief, then noted that "if such petition shall appear reasonable," the court was to grant the petitioner a license for a year and that the license signed by the justice of the peace could be "reviewed from year to year if the court shall think fit." 32

The law, furthermore, required that the ordinary keeper:

Constantly find and provide in his said ordinary, good, wholesome and cleanly lodging and diet for travellers, and stableage, fodder, and provender, or pasturage and provender as the season shall require for their horses... and shall not suffer or permit any unlawful gaming in his house, nor on the Sabbath day suffer any persons to tipple and drink more than is necessary, then this obligation to be void, otherwise to remain in full force. 33

The justices were required to set up "the rates and prices to be paid at all ordinaries within their respective counties" for liquors, diet, lodging, provender, stableage, fodder, and pasturage, 34 and they, also, were required to fix the rates at least twice a year or pay a fine of fifteen

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31. Shepherd, op. cit., I, 142.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., I, 143.
34. Ibid.
dollars. After these rates had been set the ordinary keeper was under obligation to obtain within one month copies of the rates from the clerk of the court and to post them "not more than six feet above the floor." Failure to post these rates meant that "he shall have no right to demand any price for a rated article," and if the ordinary keeper charged more than the set rate he was fined twelve dollars for every offense.

The act of 1792 then dealt with the illegal sale of liquors by placing a thirty dollar fine on anyone serving liquor without a license, and if the justice of the peace, who was responsible for enforcement of the act, should discover a second offense the penalty was six months in jail. The law qualified its position, however, by stating:

Provided always, That nothing in this act shall extend or be construed to prohibit any person or persons from retailing such liquors as shall actually have been made from the produce of such persons own estate...nor to prohibit any merchant or person keeping store for the sale of merchandize, from retailing liquors, so as such liquors be not drank, or intended to be drank at the house or plantation where they shall be sold.

The law of 1792, furthermore, continued the restrictions on the sale of liquor on credit and retained the limitations

35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., I, 143-144.
38. Ibid., I, 144.
on the amount of liquor sold and the sale of liquor to sailors. If the keeper of an ordinary sold liquor to a sailor "without license from the master of the vessel," the keeper was forced to pay a two dollar fine to the master of the ship, and if the ordinary keeper sold liquor on credit "to any sailor in actual pay on board any ship," the law stated, "...He or she shall not recover any money, tobacco, or other comodity, for liquors so sold upon credit, but every such debt, obligation or specialty shall be void." The law, also, sought to continue to control the amount of liquor sold. It stated:

No keeper of a tavern shall recover more than five dollars for liquor sold within the space of a year to one person residing less than twenty miles from such tavern, and drank, or sold to be drank, in the place where it is kept; and a written contract or bond or other speciality for payment...for performance of any work or service whereof the whole, or any part, shall have become due for liquors so sold, shall be void.

The prohibitions against gaming found in other laws on ordinaries are repeated in the act of 1792. The law required the tavern keeper to report to the county court or to two justices of the peace within one month, the names of anyone involved in gaming "...in a tavern or in any outhouse, or under any booth, a bar, or other place upon the

39. Ibid., I, 145.
40. Ibid.
41. See footnotes 21 and 22.
messuage or tenement in possession of any tavern keeper." If he failed to do so, he was forced to pay twenty dollars to the informer and would lose his license unless he was able to convince the court of his innocence of the matter. 42

It is probable that taverns and ordinaries would have been restricted in income and reduced in number if the laws of the General Assembly had been constantly enforced, and, in fact, only the laws on the license tax seem to have been enforced with any degree of effort. The laws fixing the price of food, drink, and lodging seem to have been enforced spasmodically while those on gaming were more or less ignored.

Dr. Johann David Schoepf, a German who served as chief surgeon for the British Ansbach troops during the American Revolution, commented in 1783 on the laxness of enforcement of the General Assembly laws concerning ordinaries:

In a company the talk got on the extravagant demands which the tavern-keepers, (even under the eyes of the government at the capital), are accustomed to exact from travellers, notwithstanding all sorts of provisions are at a very low price. "There are laws enough against the practice," remarked a man of high rank, "and moderate prices are fixed by statute, but the gentlemen whose duty it is to see that the regulations are observed give themselves no more trouble than people generally do about laws and ordinances." 43

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42. Shepherd, op. cit., I, 144.

Later travellers, also, noted this laxness of enforcement of the laws concerning public houses. Both the Duke de La Rochefoucault-Liancourt, a Frenchman travelling in Virginia in 1796, and Isaac Weld, an Englishman who, also, visited the state in 1796, commented on the open violations of the laws on gaming. Weld wrote, "Not the smallest secrecy is employed in keeping these tables; they are always crowded with people, and the doors of the apartment are only shut to prevent the rabble from coming in."44 La Rochefoucault drew much the same conclusion, "Nevertheless, to the present hour, the greatest number of those who enacted that law - of the present legislators, the justices of the peace, and the other magistrates - are assiduous in their attendance at those feats of gaming."45

The New Yorker, John Edwards Caldwell, was yet another traveller who found the laws on ordinaries, especially those on gaming, poorly enforced. He wrote in 1808:

I have had frequent occasion to remark the strong propensity to gambling among the Virginians of every class, trade, and denomination. It is an extraordinary circumstance, that here, where the laws against gaming are very strict, and almost severe, that vice should be so very prevalent. Under the very eye of magistracy itself, gambling houses are winked at, and in these nefarious nests of profligacy and dissipation, is hatched the ruin of many an unfortunate being.46

44. Weld, op. cit., II, 191.
45. La Rochefoucault, op. cit., II, 40.
In spite of these open violations, however, the laws concerning taverns and ordinaries were not completely ignored. Tavern keepers were at times fined for such things as keeping a disorderly house, which was the equivalent of gaming, or selling liquor without a proper license. Robert Minns, for example, a tavern keeper in Henrico County, was fined sixty pounds in 1785 by the County Court of Henrico for keeping a disorderly house, and George Todd was fined ten pounds in 1792 for selling liquor without a proper license. 47 Harry Toulmin, an English Unitarian minister visiting Richmond in 1793, noted another example of obedience to the state's laws when he commented.

Upon my arrival at Richmond, I put up at the Eagle, which is the principal tavern in the town... In every room of this house there is a printed table of the rates at which travellers are charged, an admirable method of preventing imposition on the one hand and disappointment on the other. 48

Toulmin's surprise, in spite of the fact that he had visited many taverns between Norfolk and Richmond, at seeing these posted rates perhaps would indicate that the laws concerning taverns and ordinaries while at times enforced were, also, frequently ignored, and enforcement probably varied from one area to another. This laxness of enforcement, indeed,
was probably necessary for the survival of many rural ordinaries where competition from plantations and private houses was often quite stiff.
CHAPTER III

PRIVATE ENTERTAINMENT

The restrictions placed on ordinaries, even though poorly enforced, were burdensome, and many men in Virginia developed methods of getting around the laws. One method, which was more frequently used in the east, was the idea of absentee ownership. A plantation owner or wealthy merchant would construct an ordinary on his land and allow someone else to operate it in return for a percentage of the profits. The tavern-operator paid for the license and was responsible for the operation of the tavern, or in some cases the owner of the tavern would pay the license and hire a keeper. Men of wealth frequently had more than one ordinary of this type in their possession, and Charles Carter of Cleve, for example, left to his heirs three taverns in the area around Falmouth. Daniel Fisher, who was travelling from Yorktown to Philadelphia in 1755, gave this description of the practice of absentee ownership:

This Ordinary belongs, it seems, to one Major R____n e Person of influence in these Parts who obtains a Lysence at the County Court whereof he is himself a Member, and puts into it some Lazy Person or other, at a Salary, or so much per cent, as is likely to pint off the greatest quantities of Liquors for him. This is a

common practice in the Country by which means tho' the Proprietor (by the Courtesy) avoids the Reproach of being deemed an Ordinary keeper and the scandal of what is then transacted; yet he reaps the greatest share of the Profits. 2

Paid Hospitality

Another method of avoiding the taxes and restrictions was by private entertainment. This method was used in poorer sections, especially in the west where travellers were few and their number could not support a regular ordinary. Thomas R. Joynes, for example, travelling through the Blue Ridge Mountains in 1810, wrote, "On this road taverns are very scarce, and I was advised to stop at the house of a Mr. T who I was informed kept private entertainment for travellers." 3 Private entertainment was, also, used by many frugal small plantation owners to discourage free guests and to make a little money on the side. Under the system the guest was required to pay for his food and lodging even though he was staying in a private home. 4

Schoepf commented, in 1783, about the system but was not entirely enthusiastic about it when he noted:


We spent a night at a plantation where, according to the custom here, travellers are lodged for a price, under the style of "Private Entertainment," but no tavern is kept. In the item of public houses Virginia and the other southern provinces are worse off than the northern. The distinction between Private and Public Entertainment is to the advantage of the people who keep the so-called Private houses, they avoiding in this way the tax for permission to disperse rum and other drinks and not being plagued with noisy drinking parties. Here, one eats with the family... is not free to demand and has no right to expect what he wants, but pays as much as elsewhere, in houses where he lives as he pleases, is better served, and not obliged on coming and going to be very grateful for the reception.  

The Marquis De Chastellux, a French Major General who served in the American Revolution, was more in favor of the system and noted in 1782 after arriving at the "decent lodging."

This was not a tavern, but the owner, Mr. Hunter, willingly received strangers. This distinction between a real tavern and private hospitality for which you pay is greatly to the advantage of travellers, for in America, as in England, innkeepers pay heavy taxes and indemnify themselves by their exorbitant charges.  

The French nobleman, La RocheFoucauld, also, discussed the system of private entertainment while travelling in the Blue Ridge near Staunton, and he concluded in 1796:

The difference between these houses, which are pretty numerous in Virginia, and inns, or ordinaries as they are called in this state is that in the latter all persons are admitted without distinction, but in the former none are received but travellers. They are thus exempted from noise, drunken quarrels, bad payment, and

5. Schoepf, op. cit., II, 35.  
the charges for a licence. For such houses, therefore if they are well known, it is clear profit to take down the sign.

Although the idea of private entertainment was still popular, most noticeably in the western areas, it was, however, probably not as widely practiced when La Rochefoucauld made his comment as it had been earlier in the period. The growth in population and the increase in the number of travellers had created an increasing demand for public houses, especially in the well settled eastern area of the state. The old isolation and scarcity of travellers that had created generous hospitality and private entertainment was not so noticeable in the east and in other well settled areas where improvements in travel facilities and increased numbers of travellers had created a greater demand for taverns and ordinaries. It is not surprising, therefore, that Harry Toulmin, travelling through Urbanna on his way to Richmond in 1793, noticed a reversal in the trend of private entertainment. Toulmin stated while in Urbanna:

Colonel Kemp’s tavern has altogether the appearance of a private house, and when you are at table you would rather take yourself to be in a boarding house than at an inn. Self-preservation induced him to convert it into a tavern, as he was in danger of being eaten out of it, by the number of persons who resorted to it before, for want of a public house.

7. La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., II, 97-98.
8. Toulmin, op. cit., p. 29.
**Free Hospitality**

Although the idea of charging travellers for private entertainment was popular in some areas, the practice of having a guest stay as long as he liked without paying at all was quite common. This was especially true in areas where large plantations had developed. Tobacco constantly demanded new fields and the gradual addition of new areas of land caused the plantation house to be isolated from its neighbors by long distances. Company was always welcome for it brought news and conversation and a change from the daily routine.

Schoepf remarked on this enjoyment of guests when he noted:

There was no tavern anywhere far and wide in the region, and he indicated to us the plantation of a Captain B. H., whose house, as he said, stands open to every traveller, and the man, himself, is obliged to strangers if they will call upon him.

A later traveller, John Bernard, an Englishman visiting Virginia in 1799, was another who was impressed with the plantation owner's desire for news and company. Bernard gave this idealistic account:

In the deep solitude that reigned around him, his ear was triply alive to human sounds; the creak of a cartwheel had more music for him than the finest notes of a thrush, and the sight of any person, not a negro, more beauty than the loveliest landscape.

By 1750 tidewater Virginia was dominated by a closely related group of about 300 prominent families. This close relationship among the upper class facilitated informal and frequent visits by one family to another. The wealthy planter with his abundance of food, drink, and servants was therefore prepared and happy to welcome any number of unexpected guests.

Lord Adam Gordon, a British officer travelling through Virginia in 1764 commented, "they all drive six horses... going frequently sixty miles to dinner," and further stated:

They assist one another, and all Strangers with their Equipages in so easy and kind a manner, as must touch a person of any feeling and convince them that in this country Hospitality is everywhere practised.  

Of course the famous hospitality was not "everywhere practised" but among the wealthy plantation owners the tradition of good hospitality was well established. The journal kept by John Blair, a President of the Council of Virginia, in 1751 demonstrated this hospitality, for although he made many trips he usually stayed with friends and was seldom forced to sleep in a tavern. Philip Vickers Fithian, who


was in 1774 a tutor for the family of Robert Carter of Nomini Hall, commented on the hospitality of his employer when he noted in his journal:

There came in about eight o'clock a man very drunk, & grey exceeding noisy & troublesome, & as the Evening was cold & stormy Mr. Carter thought it improper to send him away; he was therefore ordered into the kitchen, to stay the Night. 13

A brother of Robert Carter, Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, also kept a diary and this entry on February 20, 1771, is typical of many remarks, "Mr. Gilberne, Mr. Lomax, Wm. Peale, Walker Tomlin and Moor Brockenbrough here yesterday, and, I hope, as it is now bad weather, as Brockenbrough went home, the rest will stay." 15 The diary of another plantation owner Colonel James Gordon of Lancaster county also demonstrated this hospitality. Excerpts from his diary of 1761 contain such statements as, "So much company I can't do any business," and "Our company all went off, tho' we insisted upon their staying till to-morrow." 16 Gordon frequently remarked that he had received "No company," and on May 11,


1761, the diary contained the entry "No company which is surprising!" 17 The strain which this hospitality would endure is shown by Gordon's entry on July 29, 1762, "A great company here, which is rather disagreeable, as the child is so unwell. But these trifles we sh'd bear with more patience than we do." 18

These accounts point out that the hospitality of many colonial Virginia planters was genuine and that it transcended family problems and social class in many cases. Of course, not all people in Virginia could afford such hospitality for the traveller and others, naturally, were not so friendly.

The travellers, who visited various private homes in Virginia, at times confirmed the good hospitality, and at other times found it lacking. Travellers who had character references from a friend or the plantation owner were usually very well received, but the total stranger, at times, had more trouble. Travellers, also, discovered that hospitality was not limited to the upper classes and was shared by many through all levels in the colony.

J. F. D. Smyth, a British subject, who travelled through America before and during the revolution, noted:

In the time of pressing cyder, if a traveller should call, to enquire his way he is generally offered as much fine cyder as he can drink, is frequently requested

17. Ibid., p. 219.
18. Ibid., p. 232.
to stay the night, and made heartily drunk in the bargain if he chooses it.19

The Moravian Bishop Reichel travelling to join the Moravians in North Carolina made this comment in 1780 while going through the Valley of Virginia:

We reached a new house whose owner, Mr. Shelton, had gone on a trip to North Carolina. His wife, who had two sick children, gave friendly answer to our request, and showed us into a room where there were four beautiful double beds. We were glad to be under a roof and to sleep in the dry.

Although this house didn't belong to a wealthy plantation owner the hospitality to travellers was again demonstrated.

William Gregory, a Scottish merchant working in Fredericksburg, gave another statement which supports Virginia's hospitality, in a conversation with a ferry operator.

I asked him if he would put me over, but he said he could ferry over no one that night. "But," said he, "You can stay in my house all night...." After talking about the Stamps, Tobacco, Corn, etc., says the old fellow, "Have you eat dinner to-day?" "No," says I. "Go look, girl if there is any cold victuals left." So to our surprise we got something to eat.... 21


A ferry operator could hardly be considered one of the upper class, yet he too is willing to put up travellers for the night.

Later travellers to Virginia were, also, favorably impressed by the hospitality of many of the state's inhabitants. La Rochefoucauld noted this reputation for hospitality in 1796 and approved of it: "The Virginians enjoy a character for hospitality, which they truly deserve; they are fond of company; their hospitality is sincere, and may, perhaps, be the reason of their spending more than they should do."²² The Englishman, Henry Franklin, had expressed similar sentiments in 1793 when he wrote, "The Virginians are remarked for their hospitality and love of pleasure,"²³ and the English actor, John Davis, who visited the state in 1801 and 1802, agreed when he stated, "Hospitality is the prominent feature in the character of a Virginian."²⁴ Davis later concluded, "Virginians are ever hospitable; ever open-hearted to the stranger who enters their doors,"²⁵ while Robert Sutcliffe, a Quaker visiting the state in 1804 and 1806, was able to put this hospitality

²². La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., II, 117.
²⁴. Davis, op. cit., p. 316.
²⁵. Ibid., p. 377.
to practical purposes, "The evening coming on, and no inn being near, we took up our quarters at the house of a planter of the name of Holiday, where we were well accommodated." 26

This picture of universal hospitality is a bit misleading, however, and when the traveller was sure of being received warmly it was usually due to a note of introduction as is shown in this comment from the journal of Baron Von Clossen aide-de-camp to General Rochambeau, "This family received us very cordially; we had some letters of recommendation from their eldest daughter, whom we had seen in Williamsburg." 27

Not all travellers, of course, commented on the goodness of Virginia hospitality and some were quite disillusioned. The Reverend Andrew Burnaby, a British clergyman of the Church of England, had this unfortunate comment in 1760, on plantation hospitality.

My accommodations this evening were extremely bad; I had been wet to the skin in the afternoon; and at the miserable plantation in which I had taken shelter, I could get no fire; nothing to eat or drink but pure water; and not even a blanket to cover me. I threw myself down upon my mattress, but suffered so much


from cold, and was so infested with insects and vermin, that I could not close my eyes.\textsuperscript{28}

Another Englishman Nicholas Cresswell, also, found hospitality lacking on occasion. Cresswell returning from a trip to the Ohio country in 1775 stopped to lodge at the home of a friend, Mr. Gibbs, but Cresswell noted, "Mr. G. not at home. Two young ladies lodged there who gazed at me as if I was a wild man of the woods. They and my ragged breeches caused me to spend a disagreeable evening."\textsuperscript{29} Schoepf gave this description of a highly recommended host and of his efforts to become a guest in 1783:

After repeated inquiries as to where we had come from, who had sent us, \&c.; after as many reminders that this was no public house, but travellers (who withstood repulse) were taken in \textit{gratias}; and after prolonged council between man and wife, we were at last received with an ill grace.\textsuperscript{30}

Schoepf concluded:

The hospitality of Virginia was boasted of, but it was admitted that for fear of the smallpox, or on the ground of other suspicions, their doors were often-

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\textsuperscript{30} Schoepf, \textit{op. cit.}, II, 96.
\end{flushleft}
times closed on strangers; and indeed their much praised hospitality is by no means unrestricted, but is confined to acquaintances and those who are recommended. 31

Schoepf's opinion of Virginia hospitality is probably too restrictive, but it is quite true that the traveller could not always find free lodging, for if he could, there would have been no taverns or ordinaries at all in Virginia.

As the population of the state increased and travellers became more frequent in the later years of the period, the curiosity and thirst for news that had been the basis for much of the state's hospitality declined, and while later travellers found many who were still gracious and accommodating the hospitality appears to be more restrained. This aspect of Virginia hospitality is, perhaps, best discussed by Benjamin Latrobe, the English architect, who was later appointed Surveyor of Public Buildings in Washington. Latrobe, visiting Virginia in 1797, first discussed the position of the early Virginia planter:

Where strangers are seldom seen curiosity is often a powerful motive for hospitality. An insulated farmer in the back country... is in some respects in the situation of the feudal lord. It costs him nothing at his plentiful table to supply the appetites of one or two guests, and he receives amusement and entertainment in return. His life in general is insipid and uniform, the visit of a stranger furnishes it with a little variety. 32

31. Ibid., II, 93.

Yet Latrobe realized that this situation would change as the population increased, and pointed out:

But as soon as the market comes nearer to him, or increasing population occasions more frequent calls upon him, or he finds the society of towns more accessible, experience has everywhere proved that his hospitality declines.33

Latrobe, therefore, reached this conclusion about the state's hospitality:

...I think I might truly say that Virginia is past that state of society in which the latter species of hospitality was at its acme. It still, however, exists at a distance from all the towns. Strangers are still welcome, although they are now no longer collected "from the highways and hedges and pressed to come in." But the peculiar manners of the country must also be considered in order to appreciate the degree of hospitality that exists in it.34

With this early competition from free hospitality it is easy to see why rural ordinaries in many areas were few in number. Not only did the rural ordinary suffer competition from the planter, but the planter often looked at the rural ordinary with disdain and even as an insult to his hospitality. Colonel Landon Carter, for example, mentions the rural ordinary in his diary only once. When a friend was forced by bad weather to stay overnight at Whitlock's Ordinary, he noted the man's comment: "a very stinking place indeed."35

33. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
34. Ibid., p. 45.
35. Landon Carter, op. cit., p. 156.
Jefferson, also, had a low regard for tavern keepers. In giving travelling advice to his friends, Mr. Edward Rutledge and Mr. T. L. Shippen in 1788, Jefferson described tavern keepers as "hackneyed rascals" who "must never be considered when we calculate natural character."36 Baron Von Closen lodging in a very poor ordinary, lodged the next night in the luxury of a fine plantation and exclaimed, "What a difference from Louisa Courthouse!! But imagine our sorrow to have to depart after breakfast!!"37

Perhaps the most telling statement of the low regard of the planter for the rural ordinary is this comment by Smyth:

When a person of more genteel figure than common calls at an ordinary (the name of their inns), for refreshment and lodging for a night, as soon as any of the gentlemen of fortune in the neighborhood hears of it, he either comes for him himself, or sends him a polite and pressing invitation to his house, where he meets with entertainment and accommodation, infinitely superior in every respect to what he could have received at the inn. If he should happen to be fatigued with travelling, he is treated in the most hospitable and genteel manner; and his servants and horses also fare pleasantly, for as long a time as he chooses to stay.38

37. Von Closen, op. cit., p. 185.
38. Smyth, op. cit., I, 70-71. The English Officer Thomas Anburey, who was a prisoner of war in Virginia but who was allowed to travel in the state, wrote in 1779: "If any planters heard of any gentleman being at one of these ordi-
Several later travellers, also, experienced this form of hospitality that Smyth described. The New Englander, Hezekiah Prince, travelling in Virginia in 1791 commented:

Their social inclinations and their somewhat isolated situations often prompt the convivial planter, when his white neighbors are engaged, or beyond his reach, to send out to the nearest crossroad tavern, and invite any transient stranger who may chance to be stopping there to make him a visit. 39

Prince later described another occurrence of the practice while travelling in Caroline County:

While we were stopping for the night in Caroline County, we received a polite note from a planter by the name of Stapleton to visit him at his house, a few miles distant. The note was brought to us by a negro with a carriage and lantern, who conducted us to his master's house, and returned with us to the tavern at midnight. 40

Still later in the period, John Bernard commented on the practice, and in 1799 he wrote:

Another... plan was to send the negroes round at nightfall to the nearest inns (here very properly termed "ordinaries"), with a note to any lady or gentleman who might be putting up there, stating that if they did not like their accommodation, Mr. ______ would be happy to see them at his house close by, to which a black with a lantern would conduct them. 41


40. Ibid.

From these statements we might conclude that the planter saw the local ordinary as a place for the most common people and with the exception of the taverns in the towns, and those across from the county court house, if they were in good condition, he would visit the local ordinary only for gaming and drinking or when forced to by bad weather. Indeed the plantation owner frequently gave the traveller a letter of recommendation to a planter who lived along the traveller's route, or, at least, mentioned the names of other planters or the better ordinaries along the way. Richard Henry Lee, for example, in a letter to Mr. Henry Laurens who was to visit him from Philadelphia, wrote:

There are three houses on your way from Philadelphia hence, the Masters of which are my friends and where yourself, your people, and horses will be kindly and hospitably entertained...I mention these, because the public houses afford very indifferent entertainment for man or horse.42

With the great amount of private hospitality and the antipathy of many individuals toward the public houses, it may be difficult to see how the ordinary existed at all, and in many rural areas throughout the early part of the period its position was precarious. But as the population grew and more towns were established, the tavern and ordinary grew as well, and though they were frequently very poor in quality, they began more and more to serve important functions in the community.

CHAPTER IV

PUBLIC ACCOMMODATIONS

As is to be expected, the taverns and ordinaries in Virginia developed their services and increased their numbers in the areas in which there was the most demand. Although some ordinaries provided only meals and no lodgings, travellers generally judged a public house on three things: the quality of the food, the cleanliness and comfort of the lodging, and the facilities available for his horse. The care of the horse was of major concern to the traveller, for the quality of the horse's food and stableage was usually reflected in the ease and distance covered in the next day's journey. In one of the few detailed remarks about ordinaries in his diary, Washington pointed out some of the conditions necessary, in the eyes of travellers, for a good ordinary when he stated, "Prichard's is also a pretty good House, their being fine Pasturage, good fences, and Beds tolerably clean."1

Public Houses

The number of taverns and ordinaries was also dependent on demand. As the population grew and expanded, towns grew,

commerce and government matured, travel became more frequent, more necessary, and covered longer distances, and as a result, taverns and ordinaries expanded their number and became more frequented by the traveller. George Washington, for example, in his diary made little mention of using ordinaries in his early travel to Williamsburg, but in subsequent trips, he made more frequent use of them and developed regular stopping places on his trips there. It was along roads, such as the one Washington took to Williamsburg, linking the major towns of Alexandria, Fredericksburg, Richmond, Williamsburg, Norfolk, and Winchester, that ordinaries and taverns were to be found in the greatest numbers in rural areas. It is true also that public houses were generally found to be most numerous in the areas specified for their location by the General Assembly in their efforts to restrict the number and location of public houses, but this seems to have been more a case of supply meeting demand than of legislative influence, and county focal points such as crossroads and mills were favorite spots for ordinaries as were geographic barriers. Roads that led across rivers or mountains often delayed travellers and created demands for lodging, but the most popular spot for the ordinary was the county courthouse.

2. Ibid., I, 155-156, 378-379.
3. See footnote 1 of chapter II.
The county courthouse in early Virginia was usually located in the center of the county, to make it convenient to all areas. Around the courthouse and its ordinary small villages usually developed, and because the courthouse, especially during court sessions, was the center of county activity, the better roads usually converged on it. Added to the advantages of being located on good, well-travelled roads, and of being able to draw local village clientele, there was the benefit of heavy business during court sessions. The clientele often included quite a few gentlemen who were used to finer foods and service and were willing to pay for it.

Several travellers mention the county courthouse ordinary and make special note of it. Chastellux in 1782 gave this description of Cumberland Courthouse.

I reached Cumberland Courthouse, where I stopped for breakfast. This is the shire town of a fairly extensive county; Besides the courthouse and a large tavern which is its necessary appendage, there are seven or eight houses inhabited by gentlemen of property. I found the tavern full of people, and learned that the county judges were assembled to hold a "Court of Claims, ...".

Schoepf also gave a valuable statement about courthouse ordinarians when he concluded:

Two miles from the Pumunkey, we arrived at Hanover Court-house. As once it was the custom in Europe, in the furtherance of piety, to place tap-houses near remote churches and chapels, so in America, to the

5. Ibid., II, 416.
advantage of justice, the court-house is never without a like convenience. Court-houses, where the monthly and quarterly judicial assemblies for each county are held, are placed by preference in the middle of the county, and if there is no little town already there, the court-house is built in the woods none the less.  

Although Schoepf's tap-houses for the advantage of justice were probably of greater advantage to the tavern keeper and the thirst of the court, Chastellux and Schoepf both point out the necessity and importance of the courthouse ordinary and Chastellux reemphasizes this importance when he describes a typical courthouse ordinary at Hanover:

A very large hall and a covered portico are used to receive the people who assemble every three months at the courthouse, either for private or public business. This asylum is the more necessary as there are no other houses in the neighborhood. Travelers make use of these establishments, which are indispensable in a country so thinly inhabited that the other houses are often at a distance of two or three miles from each other.

A later traveller, the well-read Frenchman La Rochefoucault also discussed the role of the courthouse ordinary in 1796:

In Virginia, where the villages are less numerous than in other parts, and inns very scarce, there is generally one adjoining the Court House, without which the justices, lawyers, and parties would have no means to produce either a bed or food.

Aside from the ordinary at the courthouse, which was usually of good appearance, the average county public house differed a great deal in size, quality and location, not only from area to area, but from one ordinary to its neighbor. Travellers, therefore, not only differed among themselves as to the quality of the state's public houses, but their individual journals also contain varying accounts of the appearance of the taverns and ordinaries depending on where the traveller visited. This variation in grade is indicated in this account by Von Closen as he travelled with the French Major-General Rochambeau through Virginia in 1782:

In the evening we slept at Louisa Courthouse, 30 miles from Offley, in the house of a certain Johnston, a former major in the militia. I can truthfully say that I had never seen a dirtier, more shocking, and more stinking barracks than that of this major.... Not one of us could shut an eye throughout the night. The general [Rochambeau], who alone could have a bed, was eaten by vermin, and we, who slept on straw, had our ears tickled by rats!

Consequently, we decamped the next day, the 21st, at dawn. We were much happier in our breakfast; we happened upon Colonel Boswell's house eleven miles from Louisa Courthouse, where we found a well ordered establishment and more honest people who were very hospitable.9

Many later travellers also formed varying opinions concerning the quality of the various public houses they visited.

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9. Von Closen, op. cit., p. 181-182. This comment would seem to indicate that the quality of the courthouse ordinary was not always good, but this instance was probably an exception. Chastellux gives a slightly more favorable description of the same ordinary. See Chastellux, op. cit., II, 367, 573.
"The only tavern if it could be so-called, was wretched and crowded with a motley and noisy set of beings...," wrote the young Englishman, Joseph Hadfield, of a Virginia public house in 1765, and the French Duke de La Rochefoucauld, travelling near Staunton in 1796, noted, "...a woman who keeps an inn, or at least who assumed the title in an advertisement over her door, was not able to furnish us a breakfast in her hut, the most filthy and nasty I have hitherto met with throughout America." These conditions were also noted by Mr. Henry Franklin, an Englishman, who wrote to his brother in 1793 of a ferry house ordinary in the Northern Neck: "The Ferry House looked like the mansion of misery, and is so badly supplied with provisions, that we could hardly get anything to eat...." 

Perhaps William Loughton Smith had the most difficulty with the state's public houses as he travelled in southern Virginia near Danville in 1791. Smith had the misfortune of staying at three poor taverns in a row with a resulting loss of sleep. On the first night at Billy George's Tavern, Smith wrote, "I found it had enough; there was neither rum nor sugar;
he borrowed some rum from a neighbor, but I lost my tea. The bugs made a heartier supper on me than I did on my bacon and eggs." At his next tavern Smith found the landlord’s brother to be an "idiot" while the landlord "was, himself, but one remove from it." He concluded, "My fare was indifferent,...as I was kept awake a great part of the night by bugs and fleas, and the united groaning and grunting of the hogs under the window...." Smith’s ordeal was not yet over, unfortunately, and at Colonel Dix’s Tavern he again had difficulty:

A sick, cross child made a terrible noise from the time I entered the house till bedtime, and then its mother, who was suddenly seized with a violent fit of colic, commenced the most dreadful howling, screaming, and groaning I ever heard, and as my chamber was only separated by a thin partition, I was kept awake by her music the greatest part of the night.

In spite of the problems and inconveniences that many ordinaries and taverns presented to the visitor, travellers

13. Smith, op. cit., p. 70.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid. Latrobe also had a similar problem with thin walls while staying in Alexandria in 1796: "Several of the worthies choose to sleep at the tavern, and they were ushered into the room exactly over my head; to go to bed quietly would have been entirely out of character...wrestling, tumbling, dancing, pulling about bedsteads were the gymnastic exercises with which the night was concluded." Latrobe, op. cit., p. 32.
were often favorably impressed with the public houses of Virginia. Travellers, in contrast with unfavorable comments, noted, on several occasions, staying at good lodgings in Virginia, and some well-travelled individuals when comparing Virginia's public houses with those of other states, were pleased with the quality of many Virginia taverns and ordinaries. William Loughton Smith, who seems to have entered each public house with patience and an open mind, wrote of a good house near Richmond, "At Hopkins, twenty miles from Richmond, on a road to Janet's bridge, I met very good fare, a neat, clean house, and a very civil landlord." John Davis was another traveller who found good accommodations in Virginia, "I found elegant accommodations at Gadesby's hotel. It is observable that Gadesby keeps the best house of entertainment in the United States." Thomas Chapman also wrote of an excellent Virginia public house.

Here I put up at Heiscall's Tavern, which is a spacious, well contrived House with every sort of excellent accommodations for Travellers, in addition to wch. Heiscall himself is an attentive man, and has got a compleat set of active cleaver Domesticks.

The well-travelled French nobleman, the Duke de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, formed this conclusion in comparing

17. Smith, op. cit., p. 66.
Virginia taverns with those in the rest of America:

Although the inns are sometimes bad, yet upon the whole they are better than in the other states. Those in the back country, where I have travelled, are preferable to the inns in many of the most inhabited parts of New England. 20

From these statements one can see that ordinaries and taverns differed in quality almost as much as hotels do today, but ordinaries and taverns of the period generally had enough similarities to enable travellers to make general descriptions of the typical early Virginia public house. J. F. D. Smyth, an English physician and adventurer who travelled in America from 1769-1775, gave this description of a typical Virginia public house:

The houses are almost all of wood, covered with the same; the roof with shingles, the sides and ends with thin boards, and not always lathed and plastered within; only those of the better sort are finished in that manner, and painted on the outside. The chimneys are sometimes of brick, but more commonly of wood coated on the inside with clay. The windows of the best sort have glass in them; the rest have none, and only wooden shutters. 21

A later English traveller, Arthur Middleton, described the typical Virginia public house in a letter to his brother as he travelled near Alexandria in 1793:

We scarcely pass ten or twelve miles without seeing a tavern, as they call inns in this country. They are all built of wood, and resemble one another, having a porch in front, the length of the house, almost covered

20. La Rochefoucault, op. cit., II, 121-122.
with handbills; they have no sign, but take their name from the person that keeps the house, who is often a man of consequence; for the profession of an innkeeper is far more respected in America than in England. 22

Public houses advertised in the Virginia Gazette for lease, sale, or rent occasionally carried a description of the building which gave good information about the physical appearance of taverns and ordinaries. The advertisements would at times point out special features such as glass windows, the number of fireplaces, and stone chimneys, which seem to have been a special luxury. 23

The following advertisement placed in the Virginia Gazette in 1771 is a good example. "An Ordinary House fifty four feet long, finished off in a complete Manner, has three Rooms above Stairs, one of which has a Fireplace." 24 The owner of this ordinary which is located on his plantation, which is also for sale, states in addition: "To every Dwelling house, Store, etc. Etc...are good Brick Chimneys, the

22. Wakefield, op. cit., p. 39. Other travellers also mention the long porch described by Middleton. Toulmin found the Eagle Tavern in Richmond "...a large commodious brick house, with a long porch or galley in the front, a convenience which for the sake of fresh air is very frequently provided in this neighborhood." Toulmin, op. cit., p. 31. See also Chastellux, op. cit., II, 360.

23. One ad carries only this brief description: "The noted Ordinary at Westham with Stone Chimneys..." Advertisement in the Virginia Gazette, December 10, 1772.

Houses underpinned with Bricks and good Cellars, and all in good Repair."\(^{25}\)

The physical description of two other ordinaries located in rural areas are fairly similar in their dimensions and are perhaps typical of rural ordinaries. An advertisement on Long Ordinary located on a plantation near Cumberland Courthouse states, "The Ordinary is thirty six by twenty eight Feet, has four Rooms below and two above, with a Fireplace to each..."\(^{26}\)

Another rural ordinary located at Boyd's Hole is described in this manner. "The Ordinary is thirty Feet long and twenty Feet wide, has three Rooms and a Passage below Stairs and four Rooms above, all well furnished."\(^{27}\)

The advertisement of two houses located in towns, in addition, include physical descriptions which seem to indicate that they may be slightly larger than the rural ordinaries previously mentioned and it also is interesting to note that the term tavern rather than ordinary is used in describing both of these town houses. A tavern in Petersburg is described in this manner:

A very large and commodious House in the Town of Petersburg, built for a Tavern, and well fitted for Business; it is two stories high, has a Number of

\(^{25}\) Ibid.

\(^{26}\) Advertisement in the Virginia Gazette, May 16, 1771.

\(^{27}\) Advertisement in the Virginia Gazette, June 9, 1774.
very convenient Lodging Rooms, and large and small Rooms for the Entertainment of Guests. 28

A second tavern located in the town of Newcastle has a similar description:

A Large two Story Dwellinghouse, with three commodious Rooms on a Floor each with a Fireplace. It is exceedingly well calculated for a Tavern, and is pleasantly situated near the River. 29

The fact that both town houses mention a second story while the rural ordinaries mention rooms as being merely above stairs would perhaps indicate that the rural ordinaries described had only one floor and a furnished attic while the taverns had two complete floors.

The actual difference between the terms tavern and ordinary was probably slight with no clear cut line separating the two. No doubt many taverns should have been termed ordinaries and many ordinaries were fine enough to have been true taverns. Although the tavern was more elaborate and offered better service than did the ordinary, the two terms to a large degree were interchanged, and while there was a difference, it was often indiscernible to the traveller as can be noted in the statement by Smyth:

There is no distinction here between inns, taverns, ordinaries, and public houses; they are all in one, and are known by the appellation of taverns, public

28. Advertisement in the Virginia Gazette, April 23, 1772.

houses, or ordinaries, which in the general acceptance of the names here are synonymous terms. They are all very indifferent indeed compared with the inns in England; and three-fourths of them are in reality little better than mere shelters from the weather; yet the worst of them is by no means deficient in charging high. 30

Smyth's complaint about the high prices charged for food and lodging by tavern operators was a fairly common grievance with many other travellers as well in early Virginia. The Frenchman Brissot De Warville, travelling in Virginia in 1788, for example, stated, "At a tavern there I paid a dollar for a supper, which in Pennsylvania would have cost me two shillings, in Connecticut one." 31 Harry Toulmin was not quite so critical when he wrote in 1793, "These prices appear to be high and no doubt they are when compared with those of New England. But when compared with the rates of British taverns they are not so high as at first sight they appear to be." 32 Another traveller, the Englishman David Erskine was more critical of the rates charged him in a Norfolk tavern in 1798 and wrote to his father:


32. Toulmin, op. cit., p. 34. See also Chastellux, op. cit., II, 428; and Anburey, op. cit., II, 303.
I am now writing from a Tavern (as they call the House I am at) a name it is only entitled to from the extravagant charges they make, which I assure you, altho' the country abounds in every thing, are very nearly twice as high as in England besides being more in number. 33

Prices for food and lodging remained fairly high in spite of repeated legislative efforts to reduce and regulate prices and in spite of abundant supplies of food. The fluctuations on the price of tobacco, as more and more was produced in the tobacco based economy, probably had something to do with the high prices, as did the effects of scarcity and pillaging caused by the Revolution, 34 but the most important reason for these consistently high prices, however, was probably due to the fairly small number of travellers during the period. With slow methods of transportation and few adequate roads, travel was still fairly primitive and was usually attempted only when necessary. Of those who did travel many were able at one time or another to obtain free hospitality from a plantation owner, and as a result, the tavern operator had to make a profit on the number of guests he received by charging high prices.

Food

The food, for which the traveller often paid so much,


34. Chaistellux, op. cit., II, 37f.
was usually taken from the immediate resources of the area and, though usually abundant, had little variety except from section to section. The traveller was frequently given no choice of different foods except in the better taverns of the large towns, and if he were travelling near water for example, the traveller was assured of a steady diet of fish or other seafood as he went from one ordinary to the next. The quality of the food’s preparation, of course, varied from cook to cook and from one ordinary to the next and this variation is reflected in the travel accounts.

Travellers, who were fairly familiar with the practice of Virginia public houses in serving just one selection of foods, usually were prepared for this minimum selection although at times they were pleasantly or unpleasantly surprised in their visits. The English traveller, Daniel Fisher, travelling from Yorktown to Philadelphia in 1755, demonstrated this characteristic when he stopped at a public house on the Mattaponi River:

For Eating according to my general custom, I would have taken anything that was ready in the House, declining to accept some green Peas which the good Woman offered me, as I presumed them to be, yet a rarity; but she taking me into the Garden in order to convince me of her having plenty...I consented...and she provided me with an excellent supper.35

At times, however, Fisher was unpleasantly surprised to find that the food failed to meet even his minimum expectations:

My landlord demanding what I would have; I named a Chicken, Eggs, Milk, or such things which I presumed few Houses in the Country could well do without, but nothing of this could be had; my only choice was a piece of broiled rusty Bacon and an Indian Hoe Cake. 36

Travellers who were new to Virginia on the other hand frequently found it hard to adjust to the lack of a selection of foods and continued to ask for foods that were seldom available. A good example of this can be seen in this statement by Alexander Macaulay, a Scottish merchant who was returning from Louisa county to his place of business in Yorktown in 1783, and who had an often repeated fondness for oysters:

What can you give us for dinner? Have you any Oysters? Have you any Fish? "Neither Sir," Then give us anything you please.

Half an hour brought us a Roast Turkey, Ham, Eggs and Spinage and an elegant wild Duck nicely roasted.... 37

Mrs. Charlotte Browne, who was a hospital matron in Braddock's army and who travelled in Virginia in 1754, also found large quantities of food available for dinner when she dined at Hampton, "Had for dinner a Ham and Turkey, a Breast

36. Ibid., II, 789-790.

of Veal, and Oysters, to drink Madeira Wine, Punch, and Cider." 38 As the British troops moved into western Virginia the food became more restrictive and she noted, "Dinned on Salt Gammon, nothing better to be had." 39 Salt Gammon comes to be the usual meal, but Mrs. Browne continues to ask for something different as this passage illustrates. "We halted at Mr. Minr's. We order'd some Fowls for Dinner but not one to be had, so was obliged to set down to our old Dish, Gammon and Greens." 40

Chastellux found similar circumstances when he was travelling near Waynesboro in 1782 and comments:

Even had Mr. Steel - for that was my landlord's name - been more active, and his wife...more industrious, both together could not have made up for the total lack of bread and any kind of drink that they were then experiencing. The bread was just kneaded, but not yet put into the oven. And as for liquors, the house made use of none.... 41

The public houses of Virginia, in addition to serving a limited fare, also generally had a specific hour to serve the meals, and if a traveller arrived at the wrong time, he was forced to wait if he wanted food. The English traveller, Arthur Middleton noted this practice in 1793:

38. Mrs. Charlotte Browne, "With Braddock's Army - Mrs. Browne's Diary in Virginia and Maryland," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, XXXII (October, 1921), 306.
39. Ibid., 307.
40. Ibid.
41. Chastellux, op. cit., II, 403.
Instead of supplying their guests as soon as they arrive, they make everybody conform to one hour, for the different meals; so that you must often go without your dinner, or delay your journey till the innkeeper pleases to lay the cloth.\(^1^2\)

Travellers, who missed their meals, therefore, frequently complained of the poor service and lack of food. Isaac Weld wrote in 1796 of this problem: "Here I would fain have got something to eat if possible, but not even so much as a piece of bread was to be had,"\(^1^3\) and while on a trip from Norfolk to Richmond Weld had the same problem again, "The accommodation at taverns along this road I found most wretched; nothing was to be had but rancid fish, fat salt pork and bread made of Indian corn. For this indifferent fare also I had to wait oftentimes an hour or two."\(^1^4\) Arthur Middleton had a very similar complaint along a slightly different route, and wrote his brother in 1793, "The taverns

\(^{12}\) Wakefield, op. cit., p. 39.

\(^{13}\) Weld, op. cit., II, 209.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., II, 183. Thomas Fairfax travelling the same route as Weld in 1799 agreed with Weld. At Smithfield he found "...a ridiculous Competition between two Taverns on opposite sides of the Street," but he found breakfast "not very inviting" and concluded: "...It was much of a piece with what we had met with at the other houses on the road, for the fact is there is nothing like good accommodations to be found any where between Petersburg and Norfolk." Fairfax, op. cit., p. 3.
along the coast between Norfolk and Charlestown are wretched, and the fare accords with them. We could often get no bread but that made of Indian corn which is very coarse, strong, and unpleasant..."

The English diplomat Sir John Augustus Foster concluded in 1804:

"The tavern was mean-looking and the fare equally so. However I got a bed-room to myself, and as for eating, if a man cannot live on fried chicken and fried ham he must starve on this road, and in lower Virginia, generally speaking, for he is sure to get nothing else."

Other ordinaries and taverns had more abundance and Chastellux mentioned several times of having a good breakfast of ham, butter, eggs, and coffee or whiskey to drink, and while in Richmond in 1782 he gave this description of his stay:

"I was taken to the western hill to a very good inn. We were therefore served immediately, but with such magnificence and profusion that there would have been more than enough for twenty persons. Each new dish placed before us was greeted with bursts of laughter, but not without considerable anxiety for the next day's bill; for I had been warned that the inns at Richmond were very dear. I escaped, however, for seven or eight louis, which was not enormous considering what we had. Some time previously V. de Rochambeau had paid twenty-five louis at another inn, merely for having some horses there for four or five days."
A later traveller the Englishman Francis Baily, who was later president of the Royal Astronomical Society, gave this description of a good meal at the Eagle Tavern in Norfolk in 1796:

We were soon ushered in to dinner, when I saw about forty people (consisting of boarders in the house, and inhabitants of the town) setting down to a long table covered with a profusion of every necessary, in a plain but plentiful way. 49

These comments seem to show that food was often served in generous portions, but tended to be monotonous in the smaller ordinaries of rural areas, while in the larger towns there was greater variety.

Lodging

Although travellers were at times fairly well satisfied by the food supplied by taverns and ordinaries they generally were more critical of lodging facilities which were more difficult to find. Many ordinaries served only food and drink and had no sleeping places, while some of those that did provide sleeping areas were so small that they could only accommodate three or four travellers. 50 The reasons for this, of course, go back to the small numbers of travellers and to


competition from plantations. If the traveller was lucky enough to find a tavern or ordinary where he could spend the night, he might be forced to share his bed or at least his room with several others, and if the beds were filled, or if none were available, he might have to sleep on the floor where the owners, in some cases, provided straw. The public houses usually had several beds to a room and little other furniture or conveniences. Once again the lodging accommodations would differ from ordinary to ordinary, and the comfort of the traveller would depend, of course, on the number of travellers at the tavern or ordinary when he arrived. Some taverns and ordinaries were cleaner and offered adequate service while others were hardly tolerable. This comment by Smyth offers a good illustration, "If the accommodations were good at Dumfries, they were proportionably bad at Colchester."

While some travellers found well furnished lodgings with clean, comfortable beds, other travellers were not so fortunate and there were frequent complaints about the lack of furniture and privacy as well as dirty and crowded beds.

Daniel Fisher, travelling near Laid's Town on the Rappahannock in 1755 was highly impressed with the furnishings of the ordinary where he spent the night:

...I put up at Mr. T——ts, esteemed the best Ordinary in Town, and indeed the House and Furniture,

has as elegant an appearance, as any I have seen in the country... The Chairs, Tables, &c of the Room I was conducted into, was all of Mahogany, and so stuffed with fine large glazed Copper Plate Prints: That I almost fancied myself in Jeffriess' or some other elegant Print Shop. 52

Mrs. Charlotte Browne, on the other hand, gave a description of a poorly furnished ordinary at Bellhaven when she described the dining room: "The Furniture was three Chairs, a Table, a Case to hold Liquor and a Tea Chest." 53 Of her own bedroom she stated, "A Room but little larger than to hold my Bed, and not so much as a Chair in it." 54

Mrs. Browne had another unfortunate experience with ordinary lodgings, which was quite common to travellers. After dining once again on "Gammon and Greens" at Thompson's ordinary she noted, "My Lodgings not being very good, I had so many close Companions call'd Ticks that deprived me of my Nights Rest..." 55

Chastellux also had difficulties in finding lodging places and describes what he considered to be one of the worst lodging places he visited in America in an ordinary near Waynesboro in 1782:

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54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p. 313.
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54. Ibid.
55. Ibid., p. 313.
Mrs. Teaze, the mistress of the house, was sometime ago bereft by the death of her husband, and I verily believe that she was also bereft of all her furniture, for I have never seen a more badly furnished house. A poor tin vessel was the only "bowl" used for the family, our servants, and ourselves; I dare not say for what other use it was offered us when we went to bed. As we were four masters...the hostess and her family were obliged to give up their bed to us. Just as we were deciding to make use of it, a tall young man entered the room...and took out a little bottle. I asked him what it was. "It's a drug," he said.... "And what's your trouble?" I added....He replied, "only a 'little itch.'" I found this admission appealing in candor, but was by no means sorry that I had sheets in my portmanteau.56

The lack of beds that Chastellux noted is also mentioned by the young Englishman, Nicholas Cresswell, when he casually wrote, "Lodged at the Great Meadows at one Lynch's Tavern....Great want of beds but I am well content with the floor and my blanket."57 Another traveller, the German physician Schoepf, found fault with his Richmond lodgings when he stated in 1783:

...the indelicate custom of having so many beds together in one room is the more surprising, since elsewhere in America there is much store set by decorum and neatness, which by such an arrangement as this must often be dispensed with.58

This practice of putting several beds in a room seems to have been a common practice of Virginia taverns and ordinaries when they had enough beds to do it. The advertisement

which described a previously mentioned ordinary also mentioned the furniture of the ordinary and demonstrates the use of several beds to a room. This part of that advertisement stated, "I will also sell to the purchaser (if required) most of the Furniture belonging to the Ordinary, at least ten good Feather Beds, with Furniture to the same; Walnut and Mahogany Tables, Chairs, etc." Since the ordinary probably contained three bedrooms this means one of the rooms had four beds while the others had three.

Later travellers also noted this crowded condition and lack of privacy and it became one of the most frequent criticisms of Virginia public houses. George Grieve, the Englishman who first translated the Marquis de Chastellux's journals into English and who, furthermore, travelled in Virginia in 1782 at about the same time as did Chastellux, indicated that this practice was not, however, completely restricted to public houses or Virginia. He noted in his Virginia account:

Throughout America, in private houses, as well as in the inns, several people are crowded together in the same room; and in the latter it very commonly happens, that after you have been some time in bed a stranger of any condition (for there is no distinction), comes into the room, pulls off his clothes, and places himself, without ceremony between your sheets.

Robert Hunter, travelling near Tappahannock in 1785, gave this comment on a group of travellers who were forced to


60. Chastellux, op. cit., II, 603.
We put up at Mrs. Palmer's Tavern, where we slept nine in a small room. We were fortunate enough to get the best bed although we came in last...There were three men in one of the beds. It was curious to hear them disputing who should sleep in the middle. Their conversation in the night was truly laughable. 61

Arthur Middleton, in a letter to his sister Catherine in 1793, described the poor sleeping conditions that travellers frequently encountered in Virginia public houses: "There are always several beds in one room, and strangers are sometimes obliged to sleep together; the sheets are mostly brown, and seldom changed till they are dirty, whether few or many people have slept in them." 62 The Duke de La Rochefoucauld also had difficulty finding good lodgings in 1796 and wrote of a public house in Hampton, "The inn here is detestable, and we could find in it but two small beds to accommodate five passengers of us who arrived together." 63 Isaac Weld, travelling towards Charlottesville in 1796, described similar lodgings: "Returning to the house, I was shewn into a room about ten feet square, in which were two filthy beds swarming with bugs; the ceiling had mouldered away, and the walls admitted light in various places," 64 while Francis Baily, who

63. La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., II, 19.
64. Weld, op. cit., II, 199.
had just landed in America at Norfolk in 1796, concluded: "Four beds in a room crowded pretty close together; these beds laid on a kind of frame without any curtains, and the room itself without any ornament, save the bare white wall, indicated without any other assurance, my removal into a strange country." 65

The traveller, of course, generally found his accommodations to be fairly adequate and although the problems of crowding and dirty, uncomfortable sleeping quarters were common, he could usually expect a bed and clean sheets if the tavern or ordinary he visited was a good one that did not have too many guests, and this would usually satisfy him. As Chastellux concluded, "Although the rooms and beds were not all we might have wished for, they were better than at Mrs. Teaze's, and we had no right to complain." 66

Alexander Maculay spent a comfortable night at Byrd's tavern and discussed the conditions that met with his approval:

As soon as our aids had some Dinner, we started and without any sinister accident arrived a little in the night safe at Byrd's Tavern, formerly Doncastles; We had a Dish of Tea, were happy to meet with a pretty good Bed and clean Sheets, no Company in the House excepting one Man. 67

Mauley described lodging conditions that were fairly common in good ordnaries and taverns. Of course in the large towns more luxurious lodging could be found, but also far poorer lodgings were often discovered and the traveller was usually offered no choice in the matter.
CHAPTER V

THE PUBLIC HOUSE: ENTERTAINMENTS AND SERVICES

The early Virginia taverns and ordinaries did more than supply travellers with food and lodgings, for they also served an important social function for the local community. It was in the local tavern that men gathered to drink and gamble, to discuss the latest news and events and to give their opinions and ideas on different subjects. The public house, in addition, served as an important center for various functions such as the sale of goods, the meeting of courts and organizations, and the forwarding of mail to distant areas.

Entertainment

The taverns and ordinaries of this period offered a large variety of games and sports to amuse the customer. Card and dice games were probably the most common, but billiards was also quite popular and even bowling was played to some degree. Various sports such as cock-fighting and horse racing frequently took place near taverns and ordinaries where they could draw larger crowds and enjoy food and drink and better odds. The various gambling and sporting events offered by the public houses were, in fact, so popular and widespread that many observers complained that gaming had become the chief function of the taverns and ordinaries. A Virginia clergyman, for example, voiced this complaint in a letter
which was published in the Virginia Gazette in 1751:

"...It is notorious, that Ordinaries are now, in a great Measure, perverted from their original Intention, and proper Use; viz. the Reception, Accommodation, and Refreshment of the weary and benighted Traveller; (which Ends they least serve or answer) and are become the common Receptacle, and Rendezvous of the very Dreggs of the People; even of the most lazy and dissolute that are to be found in their respective Neighbourhoods, where not only Time and Money are, vainly and unprofitably, squandered away, but (what is yet worse) where prohibited and unlawful Games, Sports, and Pastimes are used, followed, and practised, almost without any Intermission; namely Cards, Dice, Horse-Racing, and Cock-fighting, together with Vices and Enormities of every other Kind."

Later travellers also noted the popularity of gaming in Virginia public houses although not in such scathing terms. The French traveller, La Rochefoucauld, made this comment while in Richmond in 1796: "Gaming is the ruling passion of the Virginians: at pharo, dice, billiards, at every imaginable game of hazard, they lose considerable sums," and the Englishman, Francis Baily, made a similar statement while staying at the Eagle Tavern in Norfolk, "...That passion for gaming so characteristic of this state in particular, is most predominant. Thus, what time is so laudably saved from the bottle, is thrown away at the billiard-table, a cock-fight, or at cards." Isaac Weld also found gaming to be a popular feature in public houses and while in Richmond in 1796 he remarked:

1. The Virginia Gazette, April 11, 1751.
2. La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., II, 39.
Perhaps in no place of the same size in the world is there more gambling going forward than in Richmond. I had scarcely alighted from my horse at the tavern, when the landlord came to ask what game I was most partial to, as in such a room there was a faro table, in another a hazard table, in a third a billiard table, to any one of which he was ready to conduct me.4

As can be seen by these comments, dice and card games were perhaps the most popular forms of gaming in Virginia taverns and ordinaries, for they were easy to set up, required little space, and no great degree of skill. Dice and games played with dice such as hazard, which is similar to craps, and backgammon, a game played with dice and checkers, were especially popular with all classes and this anonymous French traveller is probably not exaggerating when he wrote while in Williamsburg in 1764:

In the Day time people hurrying back and forwards from the Capitoll to the taverns and at night carousing and drinking in one Chamber and box and Dice in another, which continues till morning commonly. There is not a publick house in Virginia but have their tables all battered with the boxes.5

Another visitor to Virginia, the English traveller Sir John Foster, noticed the popularity of the dice game, backgammon, and wrote in 1804:

On the first day of my landing in America I dined at the Exchange Tavern at Norfolk with my fellow passengers. We were shown into a large room in which


were several people playing at backgammon while waiting for dinner.

If a guest didn't care for dice, he was usually able to find a game of cards. The most popular card games during the period were whist, a game slightly similar to bridge, and all-fours, a game of chance similar to seven-up, and faro, a banking game with cards placed in a dealing box. Whist, which required some training and skill, was more popular with the upper classes and Chastellux remarked on the popularity of the game. All-fours was generally the favorite card game of the lower classes and was a good betting game which required more luck than skill. The disfavor with which many of the upper classes regarded all-fours can be shown by Philip Fithian, a tutor on the Carter Plantation of Nomini Hall, who commented:

I am ashamed that I may record here what does no honour to my old Aunt, I saw her with three Partners round a Table playing Cards at that vulgar game fit only for the meanest gamblers "all Fours."

Not all members of the upper classes disliked all fours and Daniel Fisher noted in 1755 that he saw at Chiswell's tavern "two gentlemen playing all fours." The game was, how-

ever, more popular with the lower classes, just as whist had more favor with the upper classes, and a traveller who wished to pass away his time often found that his fellow guests were interested only in dice or cards. This is hinted by the anonymous French Traveller who was staying at Mrs. Vobes Tavern in Williamsburg, "where all the best people resorted," when he commented:

...I soon was like to have reason to repent, for they are all professed gamsters. Especially Colonel Burd, who is never happy but when he has the box and Dices in hand. There were many sets made at me to get me in for the box but I had the good luck to Keep Clear of it, but Could not avoid playing some rubers at whist notwithstanding my aversion to it.10

Billiards was another game popular with the guests of colonial taverns and ordinaries, and while, because of the expense of the billiard tables, many ordinaries did not own them, those that did had a valuable asset in bringing in customers. Billiard tables were held in such high esteem that they were an important selling point in the sale or lease of an ordinary as is suggested by this advertisement in the Maryland Gazette in 1760:

William Ramsay Alexandria, Va. advertises to be rented the "Georges Tavern," the house is described, contains a very good London billiard-table. On the premises are a garden, stable, smoke house, etc.11


11. "Personal Notes - From the Maryland Gazette," The William and Mary Quarterly, XII, first series, (April, 1895), 208.
The enthusiasm for billiards was pointed out by this unfortunate comment by Fithian who came across some enthusiasts when returning to the Carter Plantation at Nomini Hall:

Rede thence in the Evening to Port Tobacco fifteen miles. staid here the night - For company all the night in my Room I had Bugs in every part of my Bed - and in the next Room several noisy Fellows playing at Billiards. 12

The popularity of billiards remained strong throughout the period and later travellers also noted the enthusiasm for the game. The French traveller, Ferdinand M. Bayard, made this comment in 1791, "Gamblers would gather together at the billiard-table and in taverns where they would often spend the entire night," 13 and Isaac Weld reached this conclusion in 1796:

Indeed, throughout the lower parts of the country in Virginia...there is scarcely a petty tavern without a billiard room, and this is always full of a set of Idle low-lived fellows, drinking spirits or playing cards, if not engaged at the table. 14

Another game that had some degree of popularity in early Virginia taverns and ordinaries was bowling or nine pins, which are actually two slightly different games. Because of the amount of level land involved, this game was


less popular with tavern guests, but it did make itself felt in some areas as the name of the present town of Bowling Green suggests. The English traveller Daniel Fisher visiting Ashley's Tavern in 1755 noted, "a great number of people at nine pins," and Sir John Foster found in 1804 that quoits, a game similar to horseshoes, and nine pins were "much in fashion."

The taverns and ordinaries were also a frequent location for the more popular spectator sports in early Virginia, including cockfighting, and horse racing. This policy naturally found great favor with the owner of the public house who actively encouraged such events, in spite of legislative prohibitions, by frequently placing advertisements in the Virginia Gazette of which this one in 1752 is a good example:

"A Cock Match will be fought on the seventh Day of April next at the Ordinary formerly Seayre's Ordinary near Hobbs Hole in Essex County, for Sixty Pistoles." The cockfights drew large crowds and were quite festive events as Chastellux wrote in 1782:

18. Advertisement in the Virginia Gazette, February 27, 1752.
I arrived at one o'clock at Willis's Ordinary, for the inns which in the other provinces of America are known by the names of taverns, or public houses, are in Virginia called "ordinaries." This one consists of a small house placed... in the middle of the woods, notwithstanding I found a good many people assembled there... I inquired what might be the reason of this numerous assembly in such a deserted spot, and learned that it was a cockfight... When the principal promoters of this diversion propose to match their champions, they take care to announce it to the public, and... this important news spreads with such facility that planters come from thirty or forty miles around, some with cocks, but all with money for betting, which is sometimes very considerable.

Cockfighting, however, appears to have declined in popularity later in the period. This comment by Isaac Weld in 1796, for example, shows that the sport is more restricted: "Cockfighting is also another favorite diversion. It is chiefly, however, the lower class of people that partake of these amusements at the taverns," and in 1804 Sir John Foster found that "Cockfighting is on the decline but still exists here and there." 21

Horse racing was another popular spectator sport and the wealthy planters spent a great deal of time in selecting, breeding and training their horses. 22 Although many of the races were held on the plantations before private guests,

races were frequently held near taverns or ordinaries as well, for here the sport could draw large crowds that would increase the betting. Fithian in 1775 described the betting over two horses in a race that took place near an ordinary in Richmond county with this comment: "Rode this morning to Richmond Court-house, where two Horses run for a purse of 500 Pounds; besides small Betts almost enumerable," and John Foster found similar conditions in 1804: "Horse racing is carried very far and gives rise to a good deal of gambling." The Englishman, Thomas Ashe, travelling in western Virginia in 1806 also found that horse racing was at times affiliated with the public house and described how a horse race frequently had its origins at a tavern or ordinary:

Yesterday two fellows drinking in a public-house, the conversation turned on the merit of their horses - two wretched animals they had ridden into town that morning....A wager, the consequence of every argument on this side of the mountains, was made, and the poor brutes were galloped off to the race course.

Probably the most popular social function of the public house was to provide a place where people could spend the evening in conversation over a good drink, and the tavern

23. Fithian, op. cit., p. 32.
or ordinary was a frequent meeting place where friends got together and enjoyed themselves. The journal kept by Nicholas Cresswell contains frequent comments such as, "Spent the evening at the Tavern," or "Drunk again - most princely drunk indeed." This sequence of statements by Cresswell also shows that the fate of those spending too much time in the tavern has not changed too much:

Feb. 19, 1776...Spent the evening at the Tavern with Messrs. Neilson, Cavan, Booker, one Doctor, Mr. Nichols and Doctor McGuinis, a confounded mad frolic.

Feb. 20, 1776...Very sick with my last nights debauch. Temperance is a most finished virtue.

The Reverend Doctor Thomas Coke, an English Methodist, also had trouble with drinking in a tavern on his second visit to Virginia in 1787. Coke wrote:

At one of the inns we joined a company of agreeable men, who were not unacquainted with the Methodists, though they were unacquainted with God. These gentry.

26. Many tavern and ordinary keepers had their own stills from which they turned out liquor of varying quality. Thomas Jefferson in 1788 warned against ordering imported wines in Virginia public houses: "...It only gives a pretext for charging an extravagant price for an unwholesome stuff, very often of their own brewery," and La Rochefoucauld also noted this practice of brewing liquor: "The landlord of the inn has also a distillery of whiskey, which he distills from Indian corn and wheat, mixed in equal proportion, and thus increases its strength." Jefferson, op. cit., XVII, 291; and La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., II, 36.

27. Cresswell, op. cit., p. 137.

28. Ibid., p. 139.
laid a plot for us, I have reason to believe. For in our first dish of tea there was a little taste of rum; in our second a little more; but the third was so strong, that on our complaining of a conspiracy, it seemed as if the rum had sprung into the tea itself for both company and waiters solemnly protested they were innocent. 29

Many travellers formed very unfavorable opinions of Virginia public houses because of the amount of gambling and drinking that went on and taverns and ordinaries were, at times, so unruly in appearance due to drinking and gaming that travellers passed them by. Daniel Fisher for example made this statement in 1755:

I was resolved in my own mind to have rested this night at Southern, but on my approach to the House it was no more than a mere Hut, full of rude mean people, and tho' some of their countenances were not quite so unpromising as those I left at Roans, they were attended with this additional discouragement to me, that they were every one, as well as the Landlord, inflamed with Liquor and exceeding turbulent and noisy. 30

Later travellers noted similar problems with drinking and gaming, and in 1764 The Reverend Thomas Coke commented, "There seemed nothing but dissipation and wickedness in the Tavern at which I set up...." 31 The English traveller Isaac Weld wrote in 1796:

The circumstances of having the taverns thus infested by such a set of people renders travelling extremely unpleasant. Many times I have been forced to proceed

much farther in a day than I have wished in order to avoid the scenes of rioting and quarrelling that I have met with at the taverns, which it is impossible to escape as long as you remain in the same house where they are carried on, for every apartment is considered as common, and that room in which a stranger sits down is sure to be most frequented. 32

The English Lieutenant, John Harriott, also visited the state in 1796 and was displeased with the gaming and drinking in the public houses. Harriott concluded:

For myself, I own that I entered Virginia with prejudice from my objections to slavery, and travelled but a short distance in the state before the number of cockpits I continually saw, the horse-racings every where talked of, with the drinking and gambling so conspicuous at taverns, even in the forenoon, convinced me that Virginia was not the place to settle my family in agreeably with my wishes. 33

Other travellers, on the other hand, were more favorably impressed by the amusements public houses offered their guests. They enjoyed the informal atmosphere of the taverns and ordinaries and noted that the people of the neighborhood would gather there in pleasant conversation of the days events. Schoepf gave a more temperate description of the tavern and ordinary pastimes at Richmond in 1783:

...Every evening our inn was very full. Generals, Colonels, Captains, Senators, Assembly-men, Judges, Doctors, Clerks, and crowds of Gentlemen, of every

weight and calibre and every hue of dress, sat all together about the fire, drinking, smoking, singing, and talking ribaldry.34

Several other travellers were also favorably impressed with the behavior demonstrated at taverns and ordinaries. William Loughton Smith, travelling through Virginia to South Carolina in 1791, noted: "I dined at rather an ordinary tavern at Chinkapin Church; here I met several respectable citizens of the neighborhood, after a great deal of conversation on public topics, in the course of which they spoke their minds freely, I withdrew to dress..."35 and La Rochefoucauld, although he differed with Smith on the subjects of conversation, also found the people in public houses to be generally pleasant and orderly: "All the inhabitants of the place meet here, as they generally do in the small inns in America, to smoke their pipes, to drink whiskey and relate the toils of the day: politics take up but little of their conversation."36 The English actor and comedian, John Davis, who travelled in the state in 1801 and 1802, found a similar scene at Newgate, Virginia and concluded: "In the piazza of Mr. Thornton's tavern I found a party of gentlemen from the neighbouring plantations carousing over a bowl of toddy and

34. Schoepf, op. cit., II, 64.
35. Smith, op. cit., p. 67.
36. La Rochefoucauld, op. cit., II, 38.
smoking segars. No people could exceed these men in politeness. 37

Services

The tavern and ordinary did more than provide social functions for the local community and travellers, for it also served as an important meeting place for goods, ideas, and people. Various clubs met in the taverns of the large towns, 38 religious groups held revivals in the rural ordinaries, 39 court sessions occasionally met in them, information and advertisements were placed on its walls, and many traders, buyers, and robbers alike used the public house as a base of operation. 40

The use of the public house as a center for the posting of advertisements, mail, and coming events is commented

39. The Reverend James Maury gave an example of this practice when he wrote from his parish at Fredericksville in Louisa County on October 6, 1755, "It seems not improper to inform You that the revd Messrs Davies & Todd have lately been guilty of what I think Intrusions upon me, in having preached each of them a Sermon at a Tavern in my Parish." James Maury, "Letters of James Maury," The William and Mary Quarterly, second series, I (October, 1921), 277-278.
40. See footnotes 43, 45, 54, and 58.
on by many travellers. Daniel Fisher, for example, in 1755 noted the use of public houses as a place for forwarding mail but found that the system had its faults. Fisher staying at Chiswell’s Ordinary wrote:

A letter directed to John Palmer, Esq. at Williamsburg lay upon a Table, which several Persons who were going thither viewed, but neither of them took the trouble of conveying it as directed; a common neglect, it seems unless it happens to be an acquaintance, or the Person has a mind to see the Inside of the letter, a Practice often Complained of.41

The German physician, Johann David Schoepf, travelling in Virginia in 1783, commented on the popularity of taverns as a center for advertisement:

It is not always the custom to hang shields before taverns, but they are easily to be identified by the great number of miscellaneous papers and advertisements with which the walls and doors of these publick houses are plastered; generally, the more of such bills are to be seen on a house, the better it will be found to be. In this way the traveller is afforded a many-sided entertainment, and can inform himself as to where the taxes are heavy, where wives have run away, horses been stolen, or the new Doctor has settled.42

Schoepf’s observations are supported by the Moravian Bishop Reichel whose wagon group had several articles stolen from it in 1780. Reichel then commented:

Br. Aust. rode back two miles to tell Leonh. Heil who keeps an inn. He returned with him at once and suggested writing out a description of the stolen articles, which could be put into an advertisement.43

42. Schoepf, op. cit., II, 30; see also Wakefield, op. cit., p. 39.
43. Reichel, op. cit., p. 590.
The public houses occasionally served other functions as well. At times county court sessions were held in the courthouse ordinary due to damage to the courthouse, and the public houses were also important in the exchange of political ideas especially during the period of the Revolution. The Raleigh Tavern for instance was the scene of many political discussions and ideas including the formation of the committee of correspondence and the formation of a provincial congress in 1774, and the ideas of the Revolution were a popular topic of discussion in many other Virginia public houses. Nicholas Cresswell wrote in 1775, "This evening went to the Tavern to hear the Resolves of the Continental Congress." Another guest to a public house, Samuel Shepard, who had just returned from Europe in 1776, also found the subject of conversation to be politics and noted:

At Maysville Mr. Cabell asked me to the tavern... after which there was talk of the rebellion....I observed that shortly the whole tavern company gathered to listen to the orators.

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44. "Records of Chesterfield County Court, 1781," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, XV (July, 1907), 86.


After the Revolution taverns and ordinaries continued to have an important political function, for it was at the public house that men gathered to talk over the days events and discuss political affairs. During elections and political campaigns the taverns were important for political campaigns were frequently centered around a barbecue which encouraged an audience for the meal if not for the speeches, and although many barbecues were held in the woods Foster noted in 1804, "Barbecues are now oftener held at a tavern and are very frequent during the summer." This ability of the public house to supply the prospective voter with food and drink made the taverns and ordinaries an important part of a candidate's strategy and Ferdinand Bayard in commenting on Virginia elections in 1791 found that, "The taverns are occupied by the parties." The tavern and ordinary also provided a commercial function, for it was a meeting place where goods and land could be bought and sold, and where a business deal could be pleasantly closed over a meal and drink. Bayard noted this use of public houses for business purposes and he wrote

48. See footnote 36.
49. Toulmin, op. cit., p. 41.
50. Foster, op. cit., p. 160.
in 1791, "There is not a tavern in Winchester where you will not find land merchants." 52 Many traders brought their goods to the local public house or posted advertisements there, and Chastellux, while at Paxtons Tavern, described the product of one such trader:

My traveling companions having asked me to come and look at a very fine horse, which stood alone in the stable, I was told that it was a stallion which this young man had brought upwards of eighty miles to dispose of his favors to the mages of the country. His price was twenty shillings.... 53

With the development of regular stage routes and schedules the public houses took on a new function, and the taverns and ordinaries became an important part of the stage coach system. The public houses developed into regular stopping places for the stage coach and it was here that repairs were made, horses and drivers changed, new passengers picked up, and food and lodging provided for the passengers. The keeper of the public house often served the stage line as an agent and provided supplies and information to the drivers. The system had its drawbacks, however, for many tavern and ordinary keepers viewed the stage passenger as a one stay visitor and therefore usually saved their better accommodations for more regular guests. Benjamin Latrobe, travelling through Virginia in 1796, noted the position of the stage passenger:

52. Ibid., p. 87.

"I was shown into the hall room, where eight beds were arranged for that class of citizens so little respected at taverns, stage passengers."

Latrobe gave several reasons why the stage passenger had such a low status at a tavern:

In the first place he sups at the ordinary. There are probably two or three clerks, young, permanent residents, farmers, physicians, etc., who, boarding at the house, have the control of the waiters and of all the accommodations, especially as to the hours of meals. A stage passenger is everywhere a little below the rank of any other citizen (those who travel in private conveyances, of course, are different.)

The regular stage coaches often had designated taverns which were used as stopping places, and the tavern keeper acted in turn as the agent of the line in that area. Here, too, the stage traveller was, at times, placed at a disadvantage as Robert Sutcliff noted in this incident at Fredericksburg:

Having paid my fare last night to go in the mail stage to Alexandria, I repaired to the Tavern this morning, at the hour appointed by the landlord, who is, also, clerk to the stage; but the circumstance of my lodging at another inn, on account of the vermin with which I had been annoyed when I last slept at the Tavern, had so displeased the man, that he had sent off the stage considerably before the usual hour....

Traders were not the only ones to use the public house to advantage and robbers, taking careful note of the wealth

54. Latrobe, op. cit., p. 31.
55. Ibid., p. 36.
56. Sutcliff, op. cit., p. 54.
of a guest, often used the public house as a center of operation. Fithian gave this account of such an incident:

At a small Tavern he was feeding his Horses, he had two of much value, one he rode, and the other he led in a Bridle - Two men both Strangers, were in the House. They soon made themselves acquainted with him, and were uncommonly civil - He went off.

On the Road, however, and at no great Distance, they overtook him; and like Villains, struck him with a Club from his horse; stripped him of all his Clothes, Money, Papers, and...robbing him of both his Horses, they made off!57

From these statements we can see that the public houses provided a multitude of functions, not only to the traveller but to members of the community as well. It gave food and lodging to travellers, information and services to the local community, and was even in indirect benefit for thieves.

The taverns and ordinaries in Virginia from 1750 to 1812 were influenced by many factors. The traveller, first of all, in order to reach a public house, was forced to make his journey over a transportation system that was still fairly primitive. The roads, in spite of the state laws requiring maintenance, were rough and ill-kept. They frequently lacked even the most fundamental signs or repairs and were, of course, often quite dangerous. Bridges and ferries, where they existed, also were criticised by travellers, but they were a great improvement over the uncertainty of fording which was required where neither bridges nor ferries existed on a body of water. The transportation system therefore discouraged many visitors and decreased the number of prospective customers for the public houses.

The state’s laws also had an important influence on taverns and ordinaries. Although legal efforts to restrict gaming and drinking were only lightly enforced, these restrictions and the costs of a yearly ordinary license helped to limit the number of public houses by discouraging additional taverns and ordinaries. To avoid these restrictions people often resorted to absentee ownership or developed private entertainment.
The hospitality of the state was an important factor that governed the growth of Virginia's public houses. Because people in the rural areas, especially in the early part of the period, were often isolated from their neighbors by a good distance and yet had an abundance of food and shelter, they often encouraged and usually welcomed the visits of travellers and were frequently able to provide them with services that were superior to those of the local public house. Many large plantation owners, in fact, held the local ordinary in low regard and often offered its visitors invitations to their own homes. As the population increased later in the period and travellers became more frequent, this hospitality, although still prominent, became more subdued and the demand for taverns and ordinaries increased.

The growth of the population in Virginia and the westward expansion was another factor that influenced the public houses especially in rural and western areas. In 1760, near the beginning of the period, for example, when the state's population included only 165,000 whites, the number of travellers was not so high nor was the demand for public entertainment as great as it was in 1810 when the state's white population had jumped to 562,104. This gain in popu-

1. Barck and Leffler, op. cit., p. 280. The population of 1760 is listed at 315,000, of which 165,000 were white and 150,000 were Negro.

2. The federal census of 1810 listed the state's population at 971,622 of which 392,518 were slaves with an
lation and the westward expansion brought increased numbers of travellers which enabled the state's taverns and ordinaries to increase their numbers and their services. Even in the far western areas of the state, where only a few public houses, which had doubled as trading posts, existed early in the period, the number of taverns and ordinaries increased considerably.

Although the taverns and ordinaries expanded in number and improved in service as the state developed, travellers even in the later part of the period complained about poor food, inadequate and unclean lodging, and a scarcity of public houses. The rural ordinaries throughout the interval covered in this paper carried, for the most part, a limited selection of foods, which varied only from area to area rather than from one house to the next, and served meals only at a specific time. The traveller was often therefore given little variety in meals and if he arrived at the wrong time was often forced to do without food. Travellers complained even more about inadequate lodging. Furniture was usually reduced to a simple minimum and as the public houses frequently had only a limited number of beds, strangers were often forced to sleep together or on the floor for lack of room. These lodgings were often quite dirty and many travellers complained of additional 20,000 free Negroes. Philip Alexander Bruce, Virginia Rebirth of the Old Dominion (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1929), 1, 443.
sleeping among fleas and ticks. Yet in spite of these unpleasant conditions, the state’s taverns and ordinaries appear to have been the equal of those in the rest of America, and many travellers, when comparing Virginia public houses with those in the rest of America, were favorably impressed.

The taverns and ordinaries of the period, in addition to supplying food and lodging, also performed many valuable services. They served as centers for gaming with cards, dice, and billiards, and were the frequent meeting place of cock fights and horseraces. The public house was also the place where local residents gathered to drink and talk of the day’s events and although the amount of gaming and drinking repulsed some visitors, other travellers were favorably impressed. The taverns and ordinaries, in addition, had an important influence on politics, served as a center for traders, and doubled as a clearing house for lost articles, advertisements, and letters. Later in the period the public houses also served as an important stopping place for stage coaches and many tavern keepers doubled as stage agents. The public houses of Virginia from 1750 to 1812 therefore, in spite of many difficulties, managed to provide many entertainments and services for the traveller.
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