

Taverns In Chatham

AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE

by Spencer Grey

William Eldredge set up the earliest tavern in Chatham on the northwest part of Monomoy at Wreck Cove where there was a good harbor and where molasses and rum from the West Indies were both consumed and traded around 1675. The locals called it “Wrack” Cove and now it is better known as Inward Point.

Another of the early taverns in Chatham, which was kept by Ebenezer Hawes in about 1700, was located on Old Queen Anne Road next to the Congregational Church and the old graveyards at the intersection of George Ryder Road. Hawes has been described by Henry C. Kittredge in his book “Cape Cod: Its People and its History” as “...a man of intelligence and honor, a foe to bigotry and a valuable citizen for any town.” This esteem is indicated by his having been elected selectman, in addition to being appointed the captain of his military company. His taproom was a place where the men of the village could enjoy his rum or his ale, but it also served as a location for doing business, such as bargaining for a bushel of corn or a barrel of tar. While it was frequented by most of the men of the town, women were rarely seen there, if ever, as their presence was not considered proper.

But not everyone looked favorably on this tavern. His most fervent opponent was the Reverend Hugh Adams, a gentle man who nevertheless took exception to the tavern not because he considered Hawes an undesirable man but rather because he sold rum, which the parson considered improper. Parsons were powerful and formidable men in the community, but when Mr. Adams attacked Hawes, he met his match, as he was an equally formidable and highly respected member of the town.

Adams took Hawes to court twice, but on both occasions the tavern keeper was the victor. But when the case went to the county seat in Plymouth for a third hearing, the minister received better treatment and won his case. But even though the jury decided in his favor, it assessed the damages lightly and fined Hawes a mere 10 shillings. Not surprisingly, however, public sentiment was on the side of the tavern keeper, and Adams was forced to leave town. Clearly the people of Chatham found Hawes’ rum preferable to the parson’s virtue. But taverns were not only in Chatham during previous centuries. In the 20th century one of the most frequented taverns was located in a farmhouse in a field at the foot of Great Hill when the entire area was open land. Officially it was called Jacob’s Beer Garden, but everyone knew it simply as “Jake’s.” Throughout the ‘40s, ‘50s, and possibly even into the ‘60s Jake’s was a vibrant and very popular place to eat and drink, but mainly the latter. There was a small dance floor and an even smaller orchestra for those who could bear to leave the conviviality of their table. Another popular but less scenic spot was the Sou’wester on the corner of Main Street and Barn Hill Road, where food, drink, and dancing were also available. Both are now gone, but The Chatham Squire continues the tradition of a popular gathering place for people of all ages, including music and dancing.



