

THE HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION  
OF  
THE WHITE HOUSE TAVERN NEAR  
BRANCHVILLE, MD.

A THESIS PREPARED  
BY  
ANDREW B. BEVERIDGE  
  
FOR INITIATION INTO THE  
BETA CHAPTER OF MARYLAND OF  
TAU BETA PI  
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## SUMMARY

### INTRODUCTION:

On the various highways which were formerly old turn-pikes of revolutionary and pre-revolutionary days many old inns or taverns were built for the accomodation of travelers of that era. An example of such a tavern is the White House Tavern located on the Washington-Baltimore boulevard near Branchville, Maryland.

### HISTORY:

The history of this old tavern is very much like the history of many other old taverns of its type. Built in, approximately, 1780, it flourished as a tavern for quite a number of years housing such notables as George Washington, Andrew Jackson and, it is thought, the Marquis de Lafayette. However after approximately 1825 it became more or less a private residence and has been such till the present time. In the late 1700's and early 1800's it was known as Rhode's Tavern, after that time it was called the White House Tavern.

### CONSTRUCTION:

At present, the old Rhodes Tavern is a part of the White House Tavern. Therefore since part of the old tavern is still standing and sinve the White House Tavern, itself was built approximately 100 years ago, there are many interesting construction features to be found in the present building. This part of the report tries to bring out the interesting features such as the huge hand hewn floor beams, old kitchen etc.

## INTRODUCTION

In the late 1700's and early 1800's the chief mode of travel in the United States was by coach and horseback. The roads of the period being simply more or less enlargements of the original Indian and wild animal trails and were of such character as to make any journey, regardless of distance, a task. In fact the hardships of these trips might well be judged from the following quotation from Charles Dickens who made such a journey in one of these coaches from Potomac Creek to Fredericksburg, Va. Quote "We were able to do the ten miles or thereabouts in two hours and a half; breaking no bones, though bruising many."

Because of the extremely bad roads of the period and since travel was by stage-coach and horseback, it took a very long time for a journey of a hundred miles or so. This length of time necessitated frequent stops to be made for meals and lodging and, consequently, many taverns were built to accomodate the travelers.

These taverns were located mainly on the old "turnpikes" as they were then called and were strung out at convenient intervals between larger cities. On the turnpike which connected Baltimore and the then small town of Washington were many such Taverns among them being Rhodes Tavern later known as the White House Tavern which was located near Branchville.

## HISTORY

Rhodes Tavern was constructed about 1780 being one of the earliest taverns in this section of the county. Of the early history comparatively little is definitely known. It is known however that George Washington dined at Rhodes on December 18, 1798. This event was commemorated by the Pomona Grange of Prince George's County by a marker placed there in the year 1932 as a part of the Bi-Centennial celebration. The inscription on the marker reads as follows:

"Site of Rhodes Tavern  
Lieutenant General George Washington  
Dined at Rhode's, December 18, 1798  
On his last journey from Philadelphia to Mt. Vernon.  
Placed by the Pomona Grange of Prince George's County  
George Washington Bi-Centennial, 1932"

This stop was the last that Washington made in Prince George's County. It is also thought that the Marquis de Lafayette stopped at Rhodes.

The tavern continued to flourish as a stopping place for coaches and travelers after 1798, thru the early 1800's, and, from an old tavern register examined by members of the Pomona Grange at the ceremony of placing the marker it seems that Andrew Jackson once stopped there as his signature was found in the register. After

that sometime around the year 1820 the Rhodes tavern was partly demolished and an addition built. This new structure containing part of the old Rhodes Tavern was commonly called the White House Tavern and it is by that name that the building has been known as far back as any one living can recall.

The name Rhodes and Miller are associated with the tavern in the first half of its history, approximately to the year 1850 or thereabouts. Whether or not the Rhodes Tavern was built to be a tavern I can not definitely say but from the fact that it was built so close to the road and since it was common practice to build private residences back from the road I judge that the owners <sup>was</sup> original intention. ?

It seems that around 1850 the property and tavern belonged to a Miss Miller. A driver of one of the four horse stages which stopped at the place was named John Brown. He and Miss Miller married. Brown wasn't especially well liked it seems but he was a go-getter and a shrewd business man. Thru his dealings he accumulated a lot of property extending for miles around the tavern which, then, was used more as a private residence by him and his wife. In fact, there used to be a small village center around the tavern. Brown kept quite a few slaves to work his extensive acres and also used to have a number of barns, some on the other side of the turnpike. He often bought and sold slaves and it was a common practice of his to catch runaway slaves and hold them until the

owner would offer a reward for them whereupon Brown would collect the reward. When the Civil War came Brown made a lot of money by boarding troops and feeding government cattle which were driven in droves along the pike, the railroads being used mostly for carrying troops. Shortly after the war Brown died. After his death a man named Duvall was named administrator of the estate and the extensive property was split up among Brown's heirs. Brown's wife lived in the tavern until about 1870 when Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Meloy took up residence there and after Mr. Meloy died about 1895, Mrs. Meloy lived there until about 1910. Although the Meloys lived in the tavern it was still owned by the Brown family until comparatively recently.

Other names are associated with the tavern in later years, among them Goldenstrauth who operated a road house there for about three years around 1920; and a Mrs. Coon who owned the place for about 10 years up until the present owner, Mr. G. P. Bickford of Berwyn, Maryland bought it.

It is seen that the tavern has hardly been a tavern at all for the latter half of its existence. In this respect it has suffered the same fate that many others of its type have. The early railroads made stage coach travel unpopular and many of the old taverns were forced out of business for this reason. A large number of these old inns and roadhouses have reopened as tourists houses although the White House Tavern has not

followed this custom.

#### CONSTRUCTION

The present White House Tavern is built on the right of the old Rhodes Tavern, part of the Rhodes Tavern being incorporated into the present structure. Such an arrangement makes it impossible to study construction methods of two different periods of American history, these periods being separated by about fifty years.

Looking at the present building from the front one sees a rather squat wooden building about 45' wide and 25' high. To the left of this building there is a huge boxwood bush about 12' high to the right two large Ailanthus trees, these trees being imported from China. On the immediate front of the building are two porches, one on top of the other in the fashion of steamer decks and these porches extend the width of the building each being one story high. These porches have very ornate railings all made of wood. The second porch is supported by columns 6" square. On the roof from the front are three dormer windows and four chimneys. The marker placed by the Pomona Grange is also in the front of the right side of the building facing West. At present the entrance to the building faces East.

As one goes on around the North side of the building he sees a large number of cedars and elms, all very old. From this side the rambling nature of the building can be seen. Here also one has a chance to examine the boards which form the outside

of the building. These vary from 6 to 7 to 8" in width and are approximately 1" thick. On this side is found a small porch and door flanked by two small box wood bushes which presumably used to be the entrance to the old Rhodes Tavern which faced the North. From this side also can be seen a great many of the windows of the house, all of which have shutters. These windows are not very large, being  $4\frac{1}{2}$ ' x 3' and are of the same size throughout the house.

The rear can be seen the back of a large brick oven which is built into the back wall. This oven and back wall probably constituted the kitchen of the Rhodes Tavern and in Brown's time was an out-kitchen connected by a passageway to the main building. In the back yard are two old sheds, covered with wooden shingles and built out of wide boards which are in a great state of deterioration. One of these is now used as a chicken house and the other houses an old well. Continuing on around the house one sees how the back has been made into a garage and how various additions have been made elsewhere.

The view from the South side shows a moderate roof pitch and nothing unusual except that there is a large expanse without any windows at all. In going completely around the house one can see 6 chimneys.

Going in the front door a broad short door 3' 4" x 6' with a very large keyhole and a ponderous lock on it, the door being surrounded by small glass panes, one passes into the main hall, this hall extending to the back portion of the building.

There is an arch in this hallway. Four doors open from the hall two on the left and two on the right. On the left side is a mirror with two wooden panels, one on each side of the mirror on which there are wooden pegs for coats. The rooms are fairly small each one having a fireplace. Between the two sets of two rooms are large folding doors. The first room on the right used to contain a bar. The second room on the right has a small sun parlor. This small sun parlor is clearly an addition to the room. This sun parlor opens into a small room which has for an entrance the door and porch which was originally the entrance to the Rhodes Tavern. To the South of the small room a door leads to the present Kitchen and South of this is a sort of enclosed back porch. The partition between the present kitchen and the small room in back of the sun parlor used to be out and the resulting room was the dining room of the old tavern. In back of the kitchen is the garage, the rear wall of which contains a very large fireplace and to the right of this a large brick oven. The fireplace measure 3' x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' x 1' 10' deep.

A stairway runs from the right side of the main hall to a small landing from which a door opens into a latrobe. The

stairway reverses direction and continues up for a few steps to the second floor. The second floor is almost identically the same as the first floor the rooms being in the same position and size and the hallway being almost exactly the same. On the second floor plates can be seen distinctly where the doors were numbered. The thickness of the supporting walls is 6" and the floors are 3" thick. Boards of varying width from 3" to 5" make up the floor. One of the rooms on the second floor, the Southeast one has a wooden ceiling, the rest having plastered ceilings as do those of the first floor. Directly over the kitchen is a small room which is connected to the Northwest room of the second floor by a small door 5' x 2' 9". The floor of this room is 18" below that of the rest of the building and the room is also unique in the fact that the ceiling is only 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ ' from the floor. This room opens into a room directly over the garage. The garage can be reached by a flight of steps which has a slope of 3. One of the large locks was found in this room which measured 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $\frac{3}{4}$ ".

The ~~attic~~ is reached in the same manner that the second floor is reached, the stairway going up to a landing than reversing and going to the ~~attic~~ floor. All of the doors of ~~attic~~ rooms were numbered indicating that these rooms were evidently used for boarders. The rooms have been all painted as has the rest of the house. In all of the ~~attic~~ rooms the ceiling slopes to within 2' of the floors. The ~~attic~~ rooms are 7' 6" from the ceiling.

Modern tar combination shingles now form the roof

covering although they are put directly over the old wooden shingles. There are three dormer windows on the front part of the roof, the windows being 3' 3" x 5' and the dormers being spaced 10' 6" apart. The molding on these dormers is apparently hand carved. From the top can be seen no less than nine different roof slopes. The roof jouts are apparently 2" x 4", this being the size of the outside jouts. There are six chimneys on this structures four of them being in the tavern proper the other three are in the Rhodes tavern part of this structure. Incidentally the attick of this part in the rear is not used.

Of all the interesting features of this building the cellar is probably the most interesting. It reminds one of some dark, gloomy dungeon. It was in the cellar, it isrumored, that slaves used to be kept. The walls are built of various sized pebbles. The stones are not cut at all being very irregular and are of the type commonly seen in old buildings today. The mortar that is holding them together is very crumbly, being almost pure clay and sand. These walls support huge floorebeams and are 13" thick under the walls of the house and 2' 6" thick under the chimneys. The stone wall to where the wood starts is a brick wall of the same thickness and 1' 9" high. This brick wall supports the outer wooden wall which is 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick. Common bond is used on all of the brick work in this structure and upon examination

the mortar proved to be exceedingly sandy. The cellar is divided into four rooms, the floors are of earth, there being no ceiling and just the stone walls for sides. The rooms are partitioned off in various ways. Between two of them is a stone wall of the same type and construction as the other stone walls, between another two is a wooden partition consisting of 1" x 3" boards spaced 1" apart in a manner suggestive of the side of a corn crib. There are skeletons of other partitions, these being pegged and notched together, as there are very few nails used in the cellar. As was stated before the stone walls support huge floor beams, two of these beams traverse the cellar one way and one the other. These beams are hewn, not sawed, and measure 7" x 7", 8" x 7". They support other 3" x 8" beams upon which the floor is laid. Whenever these 3" x 8" boards cross the larger beams, they are notched. On top of the larger beams between the 3" x 8" beams, which spaced 20" apart, the space was bricked up apparently in an effort to strengthen the floor. Whoever intended this was very successful for the floor does not sag in the slightest and is much firmer than many modern floors. This cellar was only under the main part of the house, the older part having no cellar. The dimensions of the cellar as well as the first floor and attick are shown on the plans appended by the author.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The information for this thesis was obtained from the following sources.

## Early American Inns and Taverns-----

Elise Lathrop

Direct, frontal view showing approach from the boulevard which runs directly in front of the White House Tavern. The present road is built directly over the old road which was used when the Tavern was flourishing.



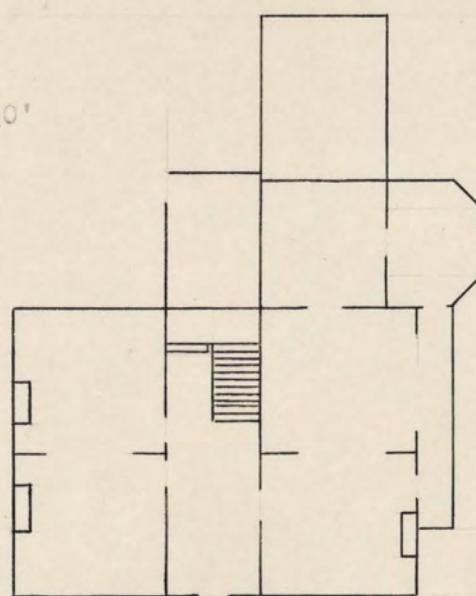
View from Northeast showing the two large Ailanthus trees and to the right of the right tree the former entrance to the Tavern.



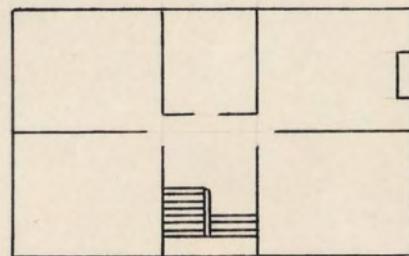
Main building as seen from the South.



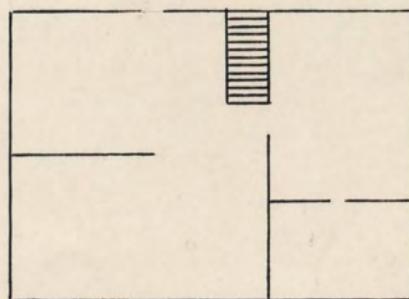
Scale: 1" = 10'



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



ATTICK PLAN



CELLAR PLAN