

PROHIBITION

In the late 1800s, with Canada in economic depression, the alcohol industry was flourishing. Toronto had approximately **one bar for every 150 residents**. Jailhouses were becoming filled with people charged with intemperance, the act of excessive drinking.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and others, campaigned for prohibition. A group of churchwomen from Picton, Ont., asked their city council to stop selling tavern licences. When turned down they took their fight to Ottawa, **but women didn't yet have the vote** and politicians had little to gain from supporting the cause.

Finally in 1916 the Ontario Temperance Act was passed, and from then until 1927 Ontario lived with a largely ineffective prohibition:

- alcoholic beverages were banned in private homes, but it was still rather **easy to make your own booze**.
- legally no business was allowed to sell an alcoholic beverage with more than 2.5% alcohol in it, but **trusted regulars could order 'the good stuff'**.
- strong drink was readily available as distilleries and **breweries could continue to produce alcoholic drinks** in Ontario provided they were sold outside the country.



Enterprising 'rumrunners' could legally buy boatloads of booze and pretend to ship it to any country that did not have prohibition. Ontario drinkers could also **order by mail from Quebec** or have a prescription from their doctors for alcoholic drinks.

Many rumrunners set up shop locally. The most infamous, Ben Kerr, died mysteriously and his body washed up near Colborne, just east of here. The Staud brothers used a **heavily armed, converted Russian minesweeper** to smuggle booze out of Port Hope harbour.

When prohibition in Ontario ended in 1927 it was replaced by the Liquor Control Board. But even then, local rumrunners still made impressive profits from smuggling booze into the United States.

However, **not all Americans were willing to wait**. Cobourg opened its first LCBO store on November 4th, 1927 and, according to many local people, it often had to close its doors to avoid being **mobbed by thirsty Americans** arriving by the Rochester-Cobourg Ferry. This threat to local peace lasted until 1933 when prohibition in the United States finally came to an end.

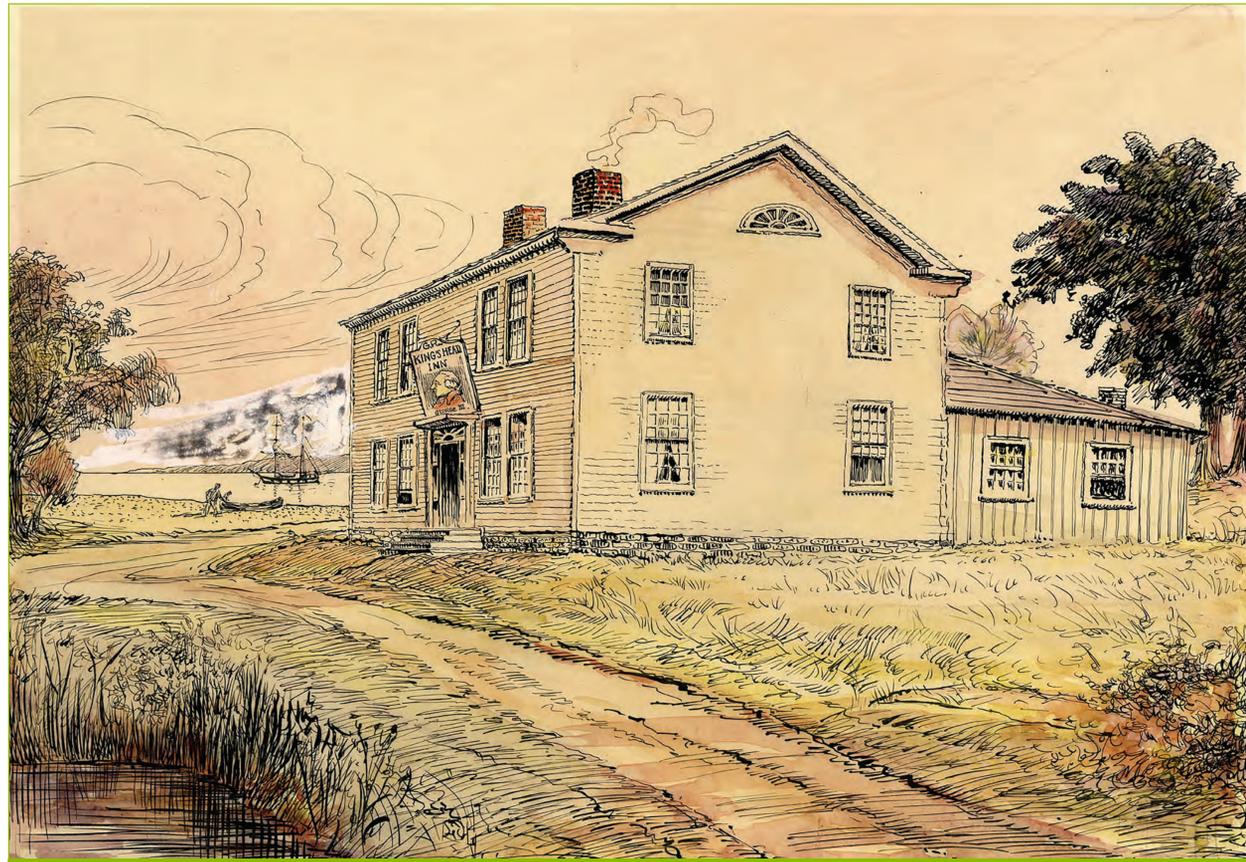
TAVERNS SEMI-OFFICIAL

Taverns in 19th century Ontario were expected to be family run businesses that provided everything needed by travellers – food, drink, lodging, and stables – as well as being the local social hub for the community. Taverns were such **an integral part of the community** that there was roughly 1 tavern for every 300 citizens throughout the 1800s.

In addition, it was expected that all of the tavern's services, from beds to liquor, would be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. (Sunday was toned down a bit but liquor still flowed freely.)

Taverns provided an informal public space where groups that did not normally associate with each other could rub elbows. Upper Canada had **3 main types of tavern: semi-official, frontier and mid-level.**

Since taverns were such a key part of the infrastructure of Upper Canada the **government encouraged their establishment in key places.** One could be found every 6 to 8 miles along main roads. The best known to us today is the **King's Head Inn at Burlington** due to its description and drawing by Elizabeth Simcoe, the wife of the Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada. These semi-official buildings were archetypical Georgian houses – 2 storey, framed houses with gable ends, symmetrical chimneys, a symmetrical pattern of windows that were 12 panes on the bottom and 12 on the top.



KING'S HEAD INN AT BURLINGTON



Tavern in 1931

There were several of these buildings in the Cobourg area due to the main transportation links running through. This picture from 1931 shows a Cobourg building located near Elgin and Burnham Streets (Amherst) and believed to have been a tavern. It certainly shows the features of the semi-official tavern.

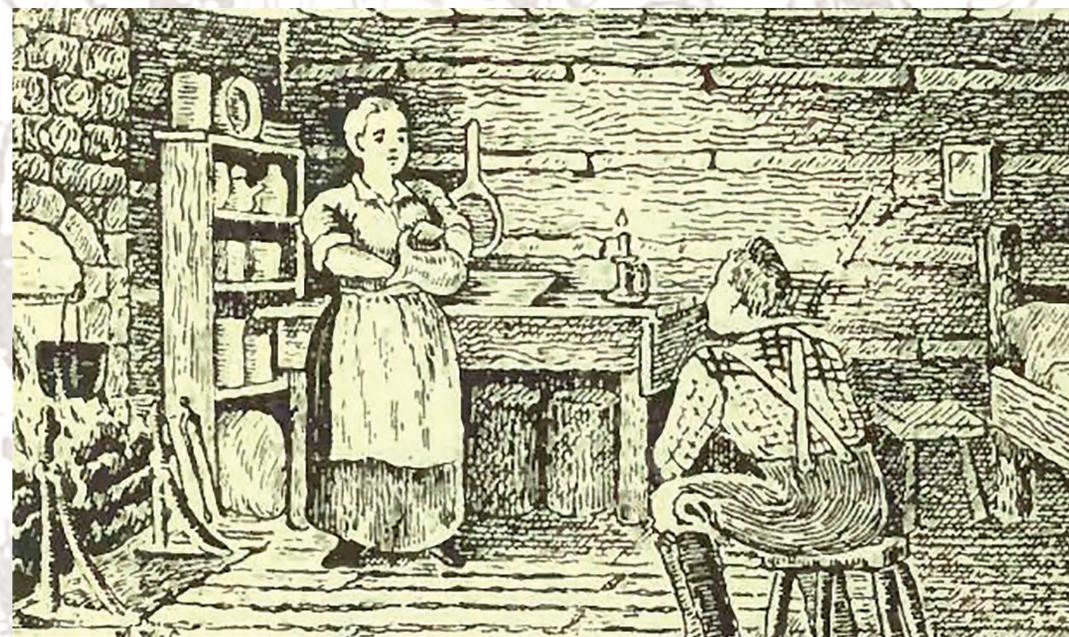


TAVERNS FRONTIER

On the "frontier", taverns were much cruder. A family would erect a log shanty for their home and operate a tavern out of it. **Catharine Parr Traill's account of a Rice Lake tavern** in 1832 paints a vivid and unflattering picture of the 'accommodations'...

As I felt a great curiosity to see the interior of a log-house, I entered the open door-way of the tavern, as the people termed it, under the pretext of buying a draught of milk. The interior of this rude dwelling presented no very inviting aspect. The walls were of rough unhewn logs, filled between the chinks with moss and irregular wedges of wood to keep out the wind and rain. ...the smoke refused to ascend the wide clay and stone chimney, to curl gracefully about the roof, and seek its exit in the various crannies and apertures with which the roof and sides of the building abounded.

*The floor was of earth... Its furniture was of corresponding rudeness; a few stools, rough and unplanned; a deal table, which, from being manufactured from unseasoned wood, was divided by three wide open seams, and was **only held together by its ill-shaped legs...***



CATHARINE PARR TRAILL, "THE BACKWOODS OF CANADA"

*Besides the various emigrants, men, women, and children, that lodged within the walls, the log-house had tenants of another description. **A fine calf occupied a pen in a corner**; some pigs roamed grunting about in company with some half- dozen fowls. The most attractive objects were three snow-white pigeons, that were meekly picking up crumbs, and looking as if they were too pure and innocent to be inhabitants of such a place.*



TAVERNS MID-LEVEL

As areas became more settled, mid-level taverns appeared. The majority of taverns were in this class. Not surprisingly, these establishments ranged in quality and size as do their modern counterparts. However, a few generalizations can be made.

They had separate rooms for a bar, dining room, and a sitting room or parlour. At minimum they had 3 extra beds for guests – but **not always a separate bedroom for each**. They also had to have a stable and a lockable shed. Meals were usually wheat bread, butter, boiled potatoes, fried pork, pickles, and tea – served two or even three times a day. Some tavern keepers were able to vary the menu with **beefsteak, eggs, ham, poultry, pies, cakes, and cheese or wild game**. A customer ate what was on the table, there were no menus.



THE BLACK BULL HOTEL, TORONTO



"A COUNTRY TAVERN NEAR COBOURG, 1849" ~ HARRIET CLENCH

As for the beds, they had cotton sheets and quilts. At particularly busy times a **guest might have to share his or her bed** with another guest. Prices were somewhat expensive as even a long-term lodger would have to spend at least 40% of the average weekly wage for a week's room and board.

In bigger centres, a tavern owner might expand both the size and quality of his establishment and **proudly call it a "hotel"**.