

EGYPT'S EARLY TAVERNS

"...Americans can do nothing without a drink. They drink because it is cold, and they drink because it is hot.... They drink early and they drink late. They drink until they drop into their graves." This comment by a visiting Englishman identified at least one reason why there were three thriving taverns in the hamlet of Egypt by 1820. More significantly, however, the hamlet of Egypt was located on the main east-west stage and mail route between Palmyra and Rochester, and its rich soil drew farmers who could, even in the years of "no summers" in the early 1800's, raise good crops. This location was also good for business. Besides the three taverns, by the mid 1820's the thriving community of Egypt boasted two general stores, a tannery, a blacksmith, a grist mill, a sawmill, a post office, a Methodist Church, a school and a cemetery.

It was said that "to conduct a tavern was an honorable business....," and in 1806 Cyrus Packard, who had settled in Egypt in 1793 to clear and farm the fertile land, opened his tavern. The simple two story structure was located somewhere between Mason Road and the former schoolhouse on what is now Route 31. In addition, Packard opened a general store alongside the tavern, and also operated a grist mill. On April 6, 1813, Packard's tavern was the site of first town meeting of the newly incorporated Town of Perinton. It was common for a tavern to serve as a general meeting place for the community and as a place where politics and other current issues could be discussed. According to various accounts, the tavern was later moved west to the Ranney property and partly incorporated into the barn which burned in 1918. In 1950, Leander Conover of Mason Road believed that a large hollow filled with stones, which was uncovered every time it was plowed, was the cellar hole of the old tavern.

Oliver Loud, who also came to Egypt around 1806, built his first tavern in the area where Town Centre Plaza is presently located. Apparently, lumber was so scarce at the time that he had to use boards from his wagon in the construction. A second, larger tavern was built in 1825. The two-story structure with its ample porches served not only as a tavern and inn, but also as a store, a mail drop, a salesroom for traveling salesmen, a place for transient shows, and a courtroom where Loud's father-in-law, a justice of the peace, attempted to settle arguments among hot-headed canal workers. During the Civil War, after training at the Methodist Church, troops naturally went next door to relax. Loud's Tavern was used by various owners as a tavern and hotel up to the turn of the twentieth century. In 1985, threatened with demolition, it was purchased by Vivian Tellier and moved to Bushnell's Basin where it stands today.

Olney Staples' tavern was perhaps the largest of the three. Staples purchased 31 acres in 1812 in the vicinity of today's Quailbush subdivision and by 1820 had built a substantial tavern there. Its size, location, and facilities made it particularly attractive to the stage line, splitting the 25 mile six-hour trip between Palmyra and Rochester in half. The tavern also provided a stable and a change of horses. As with most taverns, the first floor included a tap room where the men met, a ladies' parlor, a dining room, and a kitchen. The second floor had a ballroom and guest bedrooms. A ghost was said to haunt the northwest guest room, until it was discovered that the "ghost" was the wind across the top of a bottle lodged in a window frame in the room. Despite much publicity, this sturdy landmark inn could not be saved and was razed in 1974 to make way for the Quailbush subdivision.

The tavern keepers themselves were all "movers and shakers," influencing public opinion and playing significant roles in the political and social life of the community. Cyrus Packard was Perinton's first supervisor and, at various times held the positions of Commissioner of Highways and assessor. Oliver Loud served as Overseer of Highways and School Inspector. In addition to his tavern business, he ran a store and a sawmill. He also printed election notices and ballots and

published an almanac whose weather forecasts were particularly popular with area farmers. Olney Staples, like the other two, served in public office as Commissioner of Highways and School Commissioner.

Egypt was a center of commerce and politics for those several decades between settlement and the coming of the canal. Although the opening of the canal meant that Egypt would not grow as much, the community has continued to maintain its identity.



Cyrus Packard's tavern