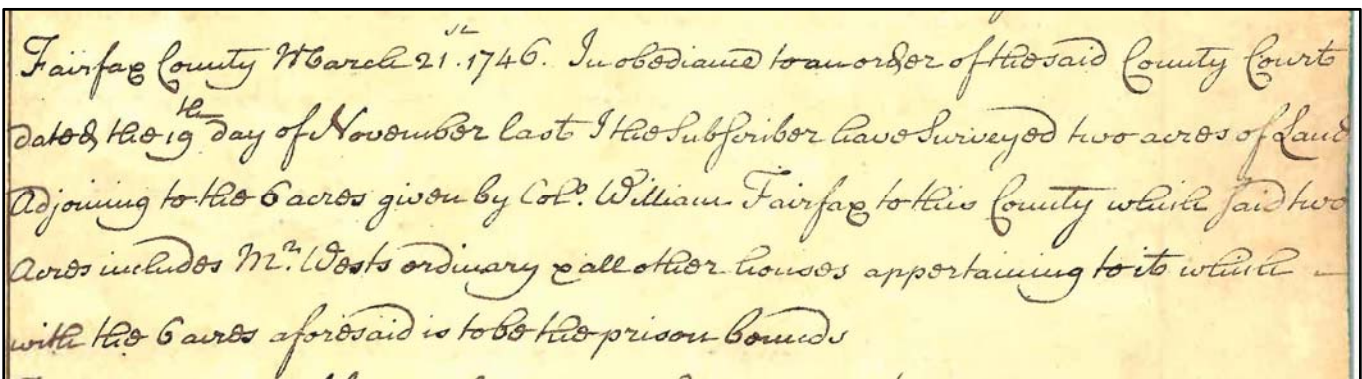


18th Century Ordinaries – Part I

Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center



As the holiday season and its food and drink celebrations approach, this month's *Found in the Archives* is the first of a two part series exploring the 18th Century world of taverns, most commonly called "Ordinaries" in this time period, and how the Court regulated them. This edition focuses on the locations that determined who received a license to serve food and drink, from the Court.



[Fairfax Deed Book B-1, p. 78, September 16, 1746, Hugh West's Ordinary](#)

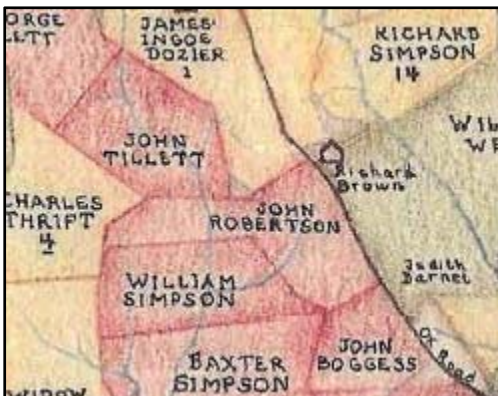


The first mention of an ordinary or tavern in the Fairfax County Court record books dates to 1746, when the land containing Hugh West's Ordinary and its "dependencies" (outbuildings) was surveyed by Order of the Court. As can be seen in the Deed Book excerpt above, West's Ordinary was located on two acres immediately adjacent to the six-acre courthouse lot, and his business and land were ordered to be made part of the 'prison bounds'. A

few months later, one acre of the courthouse lot was laid off for John Colvill to build another ordinary. The location of these two ordinaries was no coincidence; beginning with an Act of Assembly in 1668, early Virginia laws encouraged counties to extend ordinary licenses to prospective ordinary keepers located near the county courthouse, in preference to those located elsewhere. Justices, lawyers, jurymen and county citizens transacting business at court needed somewhere to purchase food and drink, have meetings and, if necessary, stay overnight.

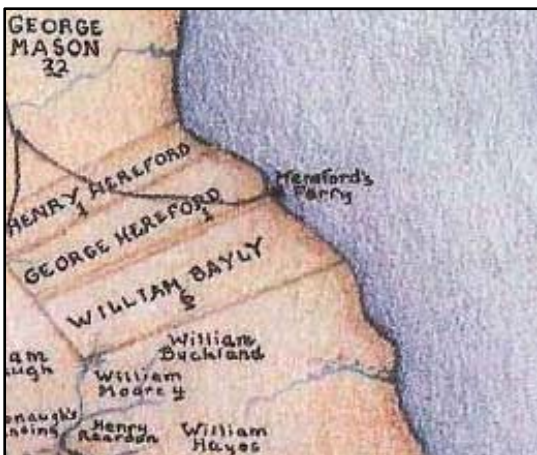
Ordinaries were also used as locations to conduct depositions, so proximity to the Courthouse was useful. For more detail on this, see *Found in the Archives* February 2016 edition. Other Acts of Assembly limiting ordinary keepers' business, such as mandated credit limits, often exempted courthouse ordinaries from adhering to these strictures during court sessions.

Fairfax County's courthouse was moved to Alexandria in 1752, but the area around the old courthouse (see map above) continued to offer hospitality to travelers, John Burnum receiving a license to run an ordinary 'at the Old Courthouse' in 1769. The old courthouse was located at the intersection of two major 18th Century thoroughfares, Ox Road (modern-day Chain Bridge Road) connecting the Occoquan Warehouse and Colchester to the Falls Warehouse, and the Middle Turnpike (approximately where the Leesburg Pike is today) which connected Alexandria to Leesburg. The same Act favoring ordinary keepers at courthouses also made preference to ordinaries located on 'greate roads'. These roads facilitated travel, and the movement of goods; this was especially important for tobacco moving between the official county warehouses. Four tobacco inspection warehouses were established in Fairfax County following the Tobacco Act of 1730. Every crop of tobacco that left Fairfax County for England had to be inspected at a County warehouse, to ensure quality and advertised quantity.



Ordinaries often became recognized in Colonial Virginia as place designators. For instance, Richard Brown was a licensed ordinary keeper in the 1750s, and the location of his ordinary became known as "Brown's Ordinary". The map at left shows us that his ordinary was also on Ox Road. Our Court Order Books show us that Brown's Ordinary had become a place name by 1754; in 1765, Elijah Williams received a license to operate an ordinary 'at the place called Browns Ordinary'.

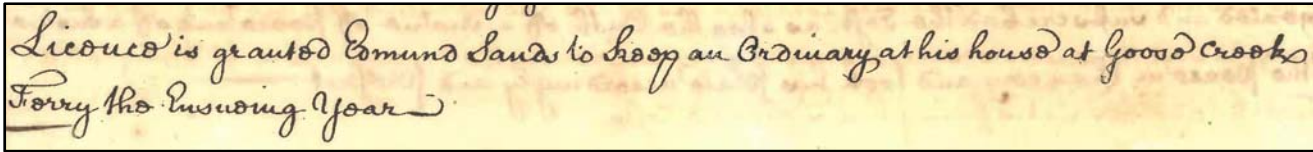
Beth Mitchell's 1760 Map, Location of Brown's Ordinary on Ox Road (top picture); Location of John Hereford's Ferry (bottom picture)



The Act of 1668 likewise favored ordinaries that serviced waterways, such as those located at ports and ferries. John Hereford ran a ferry and ordinary on the Potomac River on Mason Neck in the 1750s, which location can be seen in the map at left. His ferry would have provided a vital link between the shores

of Virginia and Maryland; his ordinary would have been a welcome rest stop.

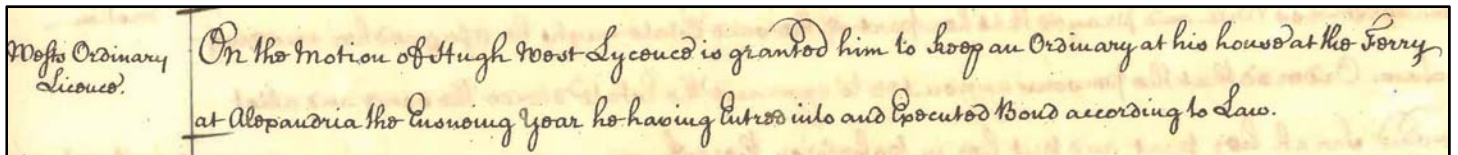
Before large-scale bridge building in the 19th century, inland creeks and tributaries were only



Licence is granted Edward Sands to keep an Ordinary at his house at Goose Creek Ferry the ensuing year.

Fairfax Court Order Book 1749, p. 208, June 17, 1752, Edward Sands Licensed for Ordinary at Goose Creek Ferry

navigable by boat. Ferries existed at several of the larger creeks in Fairfax County. The Court Order Book extract above shows that Edward Sands was awarded a license to run an ordinary at Goose Creek Ferry in 1752. Goose Creek is a large tributary of the Potomac River, over 53 miles long. Goose Creek ceased to be in Fairfax County upon the creation of Loudoun County in 1757. In 1769, James Rhodes was licensed to run an ordinary at Hunting Creek Ferry; John Lomax obtained a license at the ferry the following year.



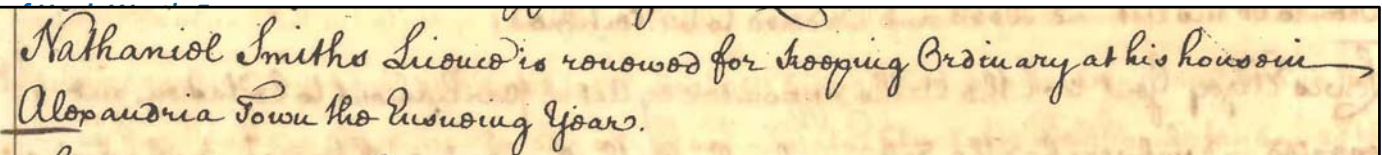
On the motion of Hugh West Licence is granted him to keep an Ordinary at his house at the Ferry at Alexandria the ensuing year he having taken into and executed Bond according to Law.

December 26, 1749, Hugh West Licensed for Ordinary at Alexandria Ferry



The biggest port and commercial hub in 18th Century Fairfax County was Alexandria. Prolific landowner and businessman Hugh West operated a ferry from the Alexandria docks; as can be seen in the Court Order excerpt above, he was licensed to run an ordinary at his ferry. Both ferry and ordinary are marked on the map at left. In West's will, probated in 1754, he left the ordinary and 'the benefit of the Ferry' to his daughter, Sybel; as West had several businesses to run, Sybel

Beth Mitchell's 1760 Map, Location



Nathaniel Smiths Licence is renewed for keeping Ordinary at his house in Alexandria Town the ensuing year.

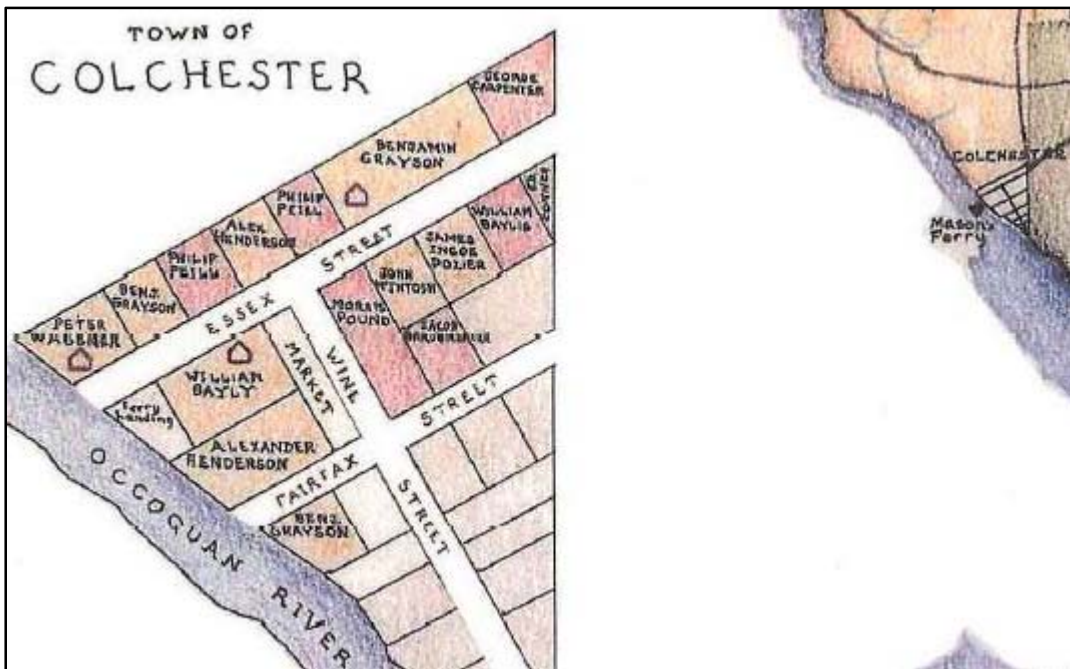
Fairfax Order Book 1749, p. 208, June 17, 1752, Nathaniel Smith Licensed for Ordinary at His House in Alexandria

may have already been running the ordinary.

Between the years 1749 and 1773, thirty-two individuals were licensed to run ordinaries in Alexandria town and at the ferry. Many of these were re-licensed over a period of years. Most

of the licenses were granted to people who intended to run the ordinaries out of their own houses, such as Nathaniel Smith in the above-pictured Court Order Book extract. Others opened ordinaries in buildings that they rented, such as Jacob Pshaw who was licensed to run an ordinary on 'Mr. Sebastian's lot'. Alexandria Town was founded in 1749, and the County Courthouse moved there in 1752, necessitating the licensing of new ordinaries.

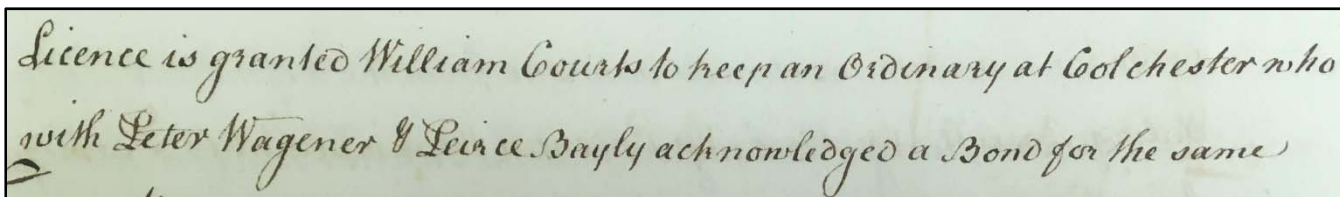
Another factor determining the large number of ordinaries in Alexandria was the presence of one of the four county tobacco inspection warehouses. Hunting Creek Warehouse, located at the corner of Water and Oronoco Streets, pre-dated the founding of the Town of Alexandria, and lay on the land of Hugh West (West was the official tobacco inspector at the warehouse for many years). Plantation owners or their representatives bringing tobacco to be inspected may have traveled a very long way, and needed refreshment and rest. Therefore, the County warehouses encouraged the proliferation of ordinaries in their vicinity.



The town of Colchester was founded in 1753, and served as the nearest rest stop to the Occoquan Warehouse. Colchester quickly became a trading and urban rival to Alexandria, which precipitated the move of the warehouse into town. Accompanying

Beth Mitchell's 1760 Map, Colchester, Showing Location of Ordinaries

the warehouse, and the merchant stores, were the ordinaries, such as that run by William Courts in the Court Order Book extract below.



Fairfax Court Order Book 1768, p. 243, October 17, 1769, William Courts Licensed for an Ordinary in Colchester

Courts had to get a guarantor for his Ordinary License application, and he used another Colchester tavern-owner, Pearse Bayly, to vouch for him. This was a common practice among competing tavern operators and the successful ones, like, Hugh West and Michael Gretter of Alexandria, often vouched for, and encouraged new businessmen in the hospitality industry. As Colonial Virginia ports, counties and crops prospered, the need for varying types of food and accommodation grew, in turn attracting merchant stores and new residents, resulting in urban growth, to the benefit of all.

The Clerk's Office of the Fairfax Circuit Court wishes you a Happy Thanksgiving. Join us next month for a look at 18th Century 'spirited' drink.

For more information on these and other records held at the Fairfax Circuit Court Historic Records Center, please call 703-246-4168 or email CCRHistoricRecords@fairfaxcounty.gov.

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