

Depression Prohibition - Aquia Tavern

This little 20th century tavern was built on the edge of Wayside Farm that belonged to Col. Thomas Conway Waller (1832-1895). Wayside house stood on the north side of Garrisonville Road (Route 610) where Stafford Market Place shopping center is now located. This was a large, 1 ½-story frame building with a large chimney and fireplace. The interior had a rustic, vaulted ceiling with exposed timbers.

Aquia Tavern was located across Route 1 from the main entrance to Aquia Church and was built when Route 1 was paved in the early 1920s. The paving of highways encouraged the purchase of automobiles and vehicular travel. This, in turn, spawned a new industry of restaurants, motels, parks, and tourist camps to serve hungry and tired travelers.

Though long called Aquia Tavern, no alcohol was sold or served on the premises; however, it was noted for its live music, dancing, and good food. Aquia Tavern was as popular with local residents as it was with travelers and the upper floor had several rooms that could be rented by those driving through the county. The building collapsed in the early 1960s and the site was lost when the I-95 cloverleaf was built.

For as long as man has known how to ferment fruit he has been making alcoholic beverages. These were extremely popular during the colonial period, though drinking was more common among men than women. During the 18th and 19th centuries, many who were employed in physically strenuous jobs received at least part of their pay in the form of alcohol, often some form of whiskey. Some of the workers paid in this way were quarriers, sailors, hired hands on farms, sawyers, gunsmiths, stonemasons, bricklayers, carpenters, etc. While the workers enjoyed receiving their allotment of whiskey, drunkenness contributed to a great many industrial accidents.

The American Prohibition movement brought an end to all formerly legal manufacturing of alcoholic beverages, but did little to stop people from making it at home. Since most people were farmers, whiskey's primary ingredient, corn, was easily obtained. With a minimum of effort and materials distilling apparatus were simple to make and use. Stafford was no different from other rural communities where the making of illegal alcohol (bootlegging) was conducted and the product consumed, sometimes with the full knowledge of law enforcement authorities. Longtime Stafford Commissioner of Revenue, George Gordon said that many a still was hid inside a field of corn to avoid the sheriff from finding the illegal moonshine operation. While most of the whiskey was relatively safe to drink, a mistake in the distilling process could have tragic results. Local newspapers contain numerous obituaries of people who died as a result of drinking bad bootlegged whiskey.



Aquia Tavern Postcards