

COOK FAMILY

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READING ROOM

## A SKETCH HISTORY OF COOK'S TAVERN

"John Cook (was) a resident of Mohawk Valley in New York State. (He) m(arried) a Carmen, and had issue, three sons, George Michael and John, all of whom came to Canada as U.E. Loyalists. The family came to Williamsburg, Co. Dundas, where some of them engaged in lumbering, an industry which has been continued extensively by some of their descendents..."<sup>1</sup>

Michael Cook, the second of these three sons, had served in the Commissary Department of the British Army during the American Revolutionary War.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the War, he was granted 300 acres of land in Williamsburg township by the Land Board of Lunenburg District as his right as a U.E. Loyalist. The first actual record we have of Cook holding land in Williamsburg township is a joint purchase on the 29th of April, 1805, when Michael Cook, yeoman, bought 200 acres of lot number two in the third concession of Williamsburg, together with a like portion of lot number five in the same concession and township.<sup>3</sup> For these two lots he paid a total of £400. The former property he retained until 1838; the latter until 1828. He was apparently settled in the township before 1805, however, because he was granted his first tavern licence in 1804,<sup>4</sup> and had quite likely come up to Canada some time before to take advantage of his initial land grants.

Cook bought his third property - the west half of lot number seven in the first concession of Williamsburg on February 13, 1808. It is this property, of course, in which

1. The Ontario Genealogist and Family Historian, Vol.1, ed. Edward Marion Chadwick, July 1898 - April 1901.
2. The Centenary of the United Empire Loyalist, Toronto, 1883-4. Copy in Possession of Miss I.K. Farlinger, Morrisburg.
3. A thorough search was made of the Abstract Index of instruments in the Registry Office of Dundas County in Morrisburg. Michael Cook's holdings were systematically recorded and are in the Research files at Morrisburg and Fort Henry.
4. P.A.C. Customs, Shop, Tavern and Still Licenses 1803-1811.R.G.5 Series B.9, Vol.53. The complete returns of Innkeepers licences for the Eastern District from 1805 to 1816 have been photostated and are in the Research file at Morrisburg.

we are particularly interested, because this is the lot on which "Cook's Tavern" stood prior to its removal to Upper Canada Village. For this land and its appertainences, Michael Cook paid £250.

It is likely that Cook "kept tavern" in the rude log cabin that Sergeant Daniel Campbell, the Patentee and Cook's predecessor on the lot, had left in his possession. The following extract which presents an interesting picture of life along the Williamsburg front in 1804, quite likely would include "Cook's Tavern" - first stage - among its numbers.

A Winter Journey Long Ago - by W. Henderson, Hemison from the New Dominion Monthly, February, 1870.

At Barnhart's the German settlement commences, and thence to Elizabethtown the woods have disappeared and given place to well cultivated farms, owned and occupied by an industrious, economical and money making population. Their barns and stables are large and often clapboarded and painted, while the dwelling is the same little log hovel erected after the first trees were chopped down, and almost every second one a tavern or house of entertainment, where the opulent master, his wife, children, farm laborers and run-imbibing customers are all mixed up together, higgelty-pigglety, in the one small room. Here and there, however, the original chantier has given place to a one-storey frame house of more pretentious appearance, but not so comfortable in winter, as it usually consists of a frame house covered with unpainted boards with many openings for windows, very few of them having sashes, and lathed partitions between the rooms not always plastered. Altogether, I rather prefer Mynheer's primitive log hut to his ill constructed, unfinished Lusthaus.

Michael's immediate family consisted of his wife and ten children, six boys and four girls, <sup>5</sup> the youngest of whom was Elias, born in 1811. With the help of these children and by his

native capacities for hard work and frugal living he managed to develop his farmlands to the impressive level of sufficiency that is suggested in the War of 1812 Losses Claim which he submitted to the government after the War. (see Appendix A.) He was certainly keeping a Tavern up to and during the War, but a gap of three scattered years between his first licence in 1804 and the last recorded one for the early period - 1816 - suggests that Innkeeping was definitely subsidiary to husbandry, and that he was only taking advantage of his strategic location along the St. Lawrence to accumulate a little extra revenue.

A colourful legend of the War period has it that this picture of gradual and unobtrusive prosperity was heightened by a startling economic windfall. The family fortunes were said to have been considerably enhanced during the War of 1812 when the Americans, acting on established policy, handsomely reimbursed Michael Cook and in Spanish gold - for damages that he had incurred at the hands of their Army during the November campaign of 1813, which culminated in the Battle of Chrysler's Farm. Whether or not we accept this "legend", however - and there are some grounds for doing so - Cook continued to prosper after the War Years, although conditions were not as good after the War as they had been in the years prior to it. In addition to the 550 acres which he had presumably been developing steadily for ten years, he acquired in 1816, 100 acres of lot number seven in the second concession of Williamsburg, paying £300 for it, and in 1820 100 acres of lot number nineteen in the third of Williamsburg for the identical sum.

About the year 1820 the stream of British immigrants to Canada which so characterized the next three decades had begun to flow westward in gratifying numbers;<sup>6</sup> and by far the largest number - about 80 percent - came by the St. Lawrence River Route; that is to say, right past Michael

6. For an informative treatment of this subject see E.C. Guillet, Early Travellers in Upper Canada, esp. the chapter on "Ascending the St. Lawrence."

Cook's front door. Again, of the people who used the St. Lawrence River Route during the 'twenties, the vast majority travelled by bateaux or Durham boat. The passage from Montreal to Prescott took anywhere from six to twelve days, and the unhappy immigrants were compelled more often than not to sleep under the stars at night, because the accommodation of the Inns and Taverns was hopelessly inadequate. Is it not possible that an astute man like Cook, noting both the volume and steadiness of the traffic, and with his past experience in "tavern-keeping", would decide to expand his accommodation somewhat to take advantage of this opportunity?

Sometime during the 1820's - on the evidence available, we cannot be more precise - (see Appendix B) the present "Cook's Tavern" was built to replace the former log structure. In order to accommodate large numbers of overnight guests, the second storey was initially left entirely devoid of partitions so that the largest number possible could be crammed into the resultant sleeping loft.<sup>7</sup> On the ground floor, the bar-room immediately to the left of the front door<sup>8</sup> took care of the thirst of the travellers, who overflowed into the commodious centre-halfway. The dining room was in the room to the right of the door and the kitchen to the centre rear. The only remaining room on the first floor, situated to the rear of the bar-room, was possibly Mr. Cook's private parlour-office, where only the privileged few were admitted. Having access both to the kitchen and the bar-room, it was admirably located for this purpose.

Most of Cook's children had by now (1825) grown up and presumably were off fending for themselves, either on one of the family properties, or on property of their own. The other children - let us say four, might easily have been accommodated in the old homestead, which probably would

7. For an exhaustive study of the architectural-archeological evidence see Appendix C. The report of the Restoration Architect Mr. Peter Stokes on the architectural revolution of the structure.
8. For the sole evidence on this vexed question, see Appendix D.

have been left standing; but the parents, who would certainly have wished to live in the Tavern proper, if only to keep their eye on things, would soon partition the upstairs to provide themselves with a suite of rooms for their private use. This partition still left a large room on the second storey, which may have been called somewhat fondly, a ball-room, and which may have been used on occasion as a local meeting place; but which probably served the same prosaic task as before, e.g. as a sleeping loft for indigent immigrants.

We may expect that Cook continued to prosper with the times, and drew satisfaction as well as revenue from the steadily increasing flow of traffic heading toward "the West". This traffic, which had been considerable throughout the 'twenties, rose to even greater heights during the 'thirties, when under the practical rule of Sir John Colborne, Upper Canada developed apace. While the bulk of the traffic up the St. Lawrence continued to use the River, a variant mode of travel had, by 1830 at the latest, become available for those people whose means were greater than the average. This was the so called "steam and stage route" between Montreal and Prescott. A grinding journey of between six and twelve days was reduced to two days in this manner and occasionally, as in the case of Mr. Moodie, to twenty-four hours. But the journey was usually accomplished in the forty-eight hour period, with the intermediate night spent at Cornwall. A concrete example of such a trip may be readily found in the Authentic Letters from Upper Canada, in which Mrs. William Redcliffe describes her experience in 1832. At five o'clock on the morning of the second day she commenced her journey from Cornwall to Prescott and reached the latter place "at a very late hour."

Now it is quite apparent that Cook's Tavern was situated almost exactly half-way between Cornwall and Prescott on the King's Highway, so that, in the normal course of events, the daily stage-coach might stop at Cook's where a change of horses could be effected while the travellers refreshed themselves with

a noon-day meal. This would involve the expansion of Cook's stabling facilities, and perhaps a general raising of the "tone" of the appearance of the Tavern, but the room used on the first floor, in which we are particularly interested, would not be materially altered.

The proposed restoration date of 1835 would, from a historical point of view present the Tavern as it was approaching the height of its prosperity, probably achieved in the 'forties. The traffic from the River would strain its resources in the evening, during the night, and of breakfast, while the lunch-hour would be occupied waiting on the guests from the stage-coach.

In November of 1843, the Tavern changed hands for the first time, an unusual situation, for Tavern-keepers were notoriously "shaky fellows" and "fly-by-night". This fact again emphasizes Cook's stolid prosperity. Michael sold the Tavern to Elias, his youngest son. It is not likely, however, that any great change took place in the character of the Tavern because of this event; the real change was ushered in by the advent of the Railway Age in 1854. This event nullified Cook's strategic position on the great migration route and destroyed this aspect of his trade almost overnight. Elias Cook, if he wished to continue in the Hotel business, was necessarily thrown back on the local trade and the unfortunate traveller who came to grief on the King's Highway - a not too unfrequent happening, if we are to judge from the repetitive invective poured out by travellers and natives alike on the "state of the roads" question. Nonetheless, 1854 marked the watershed in the Tavern's prosperity, and thereafter it was clearly on the decline; it may easily have been in this stage - what we might call its third stage - that Mr. Crites remembers it, with its more glamorous and prosperous days behind it, and clearly reflecting that sense of by-passed destiny which characterized so much of the surrounding area during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

9. See again Appendix D.

APPENDIX A.

An account of losses sustained by Michael Cook, Sr. of  
Williamsburg by Wilkinson's Army on the 10th and 11th of  
November, 1713.

£	S	d	(allowed)	£	S	d	(asked)
26	5	0	To 700 panels of fence at 3/9	131	5.	0	
22	10	0	100 bushels of wheat 12/6	62	10.	0	
12	10	0	100 bushels of oats 4/0	25	0.	0	
7	0	0	40 do peas and corn 10/0	20	0.	0	
12	0	0	4 tons of Hay 60/0	12	0.	0	
18	15	0	25 sheep 20/0	25	0.	0	
9	0	0	18 white blankets 15/0	13	10.	0	
1	15	0	2 cover lids 35/0	3	10.	0	
2	10	0	10 calico gowns	5	0.	0	
1	15	0	1 silk gown	2	0.	0	
1	10	0	3 silk shawls	3	15	0	
	18	0	6 cotton shawls	1	7.	6	
	15	0	6 children's frocks	1	4.	0	
1	10	0	4 petticoats	3	0.	0	
1	0	0	1 set bed curtains	2	0.	0	
0	15	0	10 pair stockings	1	10.	0	
0	15	0	3 skirts	1	4.	0	
0	9	0	9 pairs pillow cases	0	18.	0	
8	10	0	4 men's saddles and one wo-				
			mans as do.	17	0.	0	
3	5	0	5 bee hives	5	16.	8	
0	7	6	1 large box containing				
			honey	1	5.	0	
3	2	5	100 lbs butter	10	0.	0	
1	5	0	2 logs	2	0	0	
0	15	0	1 waggon wheel	1	10.	0	
12	10	0	100 bushels of potatoes	19	10.	0	
1	0	0	1 large iron pot	1	10.	0	
0	15	0	1 calf	1	5.	0	
1	0	0	1/2 bushel sausages	1	17.	6	
			X 6 dollars in cash	1	10.	0	
			X 1 string gold beads	1	10.	0	
1	15	0	6 clevises 3 hoes & 2 axes	2	10.	0	
2	0	0	2 buffalio robes	6	0.	0	
1	17	6	50 fowls	3	2.	6	
0	10	0	1 dz. knives, forks, and				
			10 dz. spoons.	1	0.	6	
8	15	0	700 lbs beef	15	15.	0	
0	5	0	8 pcs. scantling	0	15.	0	
2	10	0	200 do. pine boards	6	0.	0.	
0	2	6	1 bench	0	10.	0.	
0	10	0	1 waggon box	1	5.	0.	
0	7	6	1 fur cap	1	5.	0	
2	0	0	2 sides of upper leather	2	0.	0	
			1 side of sole leather	1	10.	0	
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174	14	6		420	16.	8	



APPENDIX B.

A local legend of the Williamsburg area tells the story that the "Cook's Tavern" which the Commission owns was the very building used by the American field officer commanding at the Battle of Chrysler's Farm. We have come across no evidence whatsoever to substantiate this claim. On the contrary, four separate bits of evidence point to the conclusion that the Tavern was built in the 1820's. Elias Cook, the second owner of the Tavern, told W.L. Smith that the present structure was built in the 1820's (W.L. Smith, Pioneers of Old Ontario, pp 55-61). He also told Mr. Cook, Salisbury, who was born in the house, the same thing. Thirdly, the discovery of a board with a consignment date of 1828 was made when the building was thoroughly searched for pertinent evidence and finally all those with experience and knowledge in the subject of Upper Canadian architecture are in agreement on the point that this building could not have been erected prior to 1820.

APPENDIX C.

Cook's Tavern Restoration, Date c. 1835

Second Floor

The original plan for the second floor contemplated by the builder does not appear to be that evolved shortly after building, i.e. a ballroom occupying 4 windows of the 5 bay front and bedrooms of various sizes on the present west and north sides.

Only the ballroom, the south-west room and stairhall have chair rails. These apparently were the more important rooms so far as appearance and use were concerned.

At the present time a central stair well on the north-south axis (1) appears to have been abandoned shortly after it was built in favour of a stairway in the present location (2). The second floor partition, (3), across the old stairwell indicates that this area has been floored over soon after the erection of the building. Floorboards over the well and adjacent undisturbed flooring exhibit the same number of paint coats, beginning with a red stain. The floorboards are unpainted under the partition. It may be noted that the second floor partition studs project through the ceiling indicating that they are contemporary with the finishes of the second floor. Signs of partitions on the floor corroborate evidence in the patched ceiling that a small room (4) existed in the north-west corner which was apparently ensuite with the west bedroom (5) containing the kitchen chimney. All these partitions appear to have been built at the same time from the method of placing of nails (6).

A suggestion has come forward that the hole (7) in the north-west corner of the second floor is a heat hole. This may indicate that the two rooms ensuite were family rooms.

The upstairs front windows with their plain trim (8) were finished probably when the new sash and shutters were installed for vestiges of wallpapers have been found on the

frames under the trim. This occurs also on the ground floor north of the front entrance (9) with patches over the original plaster to the new trim.

#### Ground Floor

On the ground floor it is now fairly clear that the brick partitions (10) are early or original subdivisions of the building. These show a different (greyish) plaster on the rest of the building (where it is white). We now have evidence for a doorway (11) of normal width, and with trim similar to that of the windows, directly opposite the fireplace or approximately centred on the east wall of the room to the south of the front door. The floor in this room shows several paint coats, the second or possibly the first very close to chrome-yellow. Evidence for shelves and a cabinet (12) at the south end to the east of the fireplace is clear although the earlier floor colours carry under this to the wall. Shelves (13) between the windows are also evident and appear to have had cleat supports at the wall line. No special provision was made for fastening them when building the wall. The bar outline has not been traced and was presumably a portable counter.

So far as the rest of the plan is concerned, a considerable amount of alterations have been done to adapt the plan to changing conditions from tavern to hotel and finally to a dwelling.

#### Alterations

Going back to the last plan in the building, we note the following evidence so that we may disregard the more recent changes.

The partition to the north (14) of the front door which formed a vestibule at the entrance was put over wallpaper on the east (exterior) wall. The north-south partition across the north bay (15) continuing that in front of the old stairwell across the north bay and ending to the south of the old fireplace (now removed) on the north wall contained a vestige

of the old mantel and the ceiling lath has been hacked to receive the studs. These two partitions are considered to be too recent for our restoration.

It is clear that the east-west partition enclosing the north bay of the building is fairly early and was subsequently removed for reasons of convenience. Both the mortises in floor and ceiling beams and cut-off tenons indicate this as part of the original plan. However, a small square room (17) was apparently cut off from this at the east end, still evident from wall and ceiling marks. This may be the ladies' parlour or a bedroom. The north fireplace (18) is roughly centred on the remaining wall. However, the west end of this partition (19) appears to have ended about 5 feet from the west wall of the building making a wide passageway from the kitchen.

The greatest confusion occurs around the stairways, present and past. It has been suggested and can be substantiated that the existing staircase fits into the old well. Certainly the existing staircase is an old structure intended to be closed in between partitions. Nails are hand-forged, strings closed and nailed to carriages, all lumber straight-sawn. The difference in top and bottom risers can be accounted for by the possibility that it was trimmed at the bottom without proper measuring. The combined heights of top and bottom risers equal two normal risers of the stair. The hacking of the beams was apparently done to get the stair close to the partition. The baseboard runs behind the staircase apparently left in place.

The staircase in a north-south position certainly cramped the kitchen, probably one reason for its removal, particularly when the serving of meals became good business.

Assuming then that the original stairway was enclosed on both sides, by stud, lath and plaster partitions or plank, we note that the present partition to the east of this stairwell showed no signs of this staircase. A stove hole (20) nicely charred apparently existed in the middle of this

partition. Some of the studding seems to have come from the east-west partition enclosing the north bay, judging from the notching of the corresponding to mortise holes in the beam. This, then, may have been a replacement for another less substantial partition in the same location.

Taking up the bottom riser of the staircase, there is some evidence for a wide opening (4') (21), commencing about 16" from the brick partition. (The floor shows no painting where studs occurred.) This could have been made to accommodate a passageway serving to connect kitchen and front hall and forming the bottom of the staircase in the first position. This evidence must be discounted as applying to the tavern as it was first built as a structure with a not very clear idea of final plan and certainly no conception of a second floor subdivided into rooms as we see it, i.e. before the restoration date. It is possible that front hall and kitchen were separated in the centre simply by a boxed in staircase. The continuous chair-rail or its clear mark (22) on the south partition shows that these rooms were finished similarly, possibly as one large room.

#### Restoration Details

The rear entrance (23) contains a door frame with transome with a newer frame without transom set within it. The stone sill appears to be a later addition to replace a worn or rotted wood one; similarly for the front entrance (24). Clear evidence exists for panels in the upper part of the front door leaves. There are indications of the muntins in the fanlight sash enabling us to restore this reasonably accurately.

#### Conclusion

Apart from our acceptance of the second floor plan, it is very difficult to go very far with the lower floor.

The following difficulties arise in interpretation which may result in our decision being arbitrary and contrary to the evidence in order to make the plan work at all.

It is probably that the north bay with fireplace and small front room existed only at the time of the north-south staircase and was scrapped and the new north-south partition to the east of the old stairwell replaced it when the staircase was relocated as we find it.

The sketches indicate the possibilities.

So far as accommodation for the Cook family is concerned, it is more than likely that the other farms and farmhouses owned by Cook served this purpose. Just as a man conducting a store often used his second floor for stock and lived elsewhere, so Cook's tavern may have been built solely as a place of business and not as a family house.

APPENDIX D.

Notes on interview with J. Crites in Morrisburg - at his home on fifth Street, June 16/59.

Exterior - grounds of Cook's Tavern; front lawn larger than at present; 2 or 3 large maples - no fence around lawn-round flower beds in front of house; 2 or 3 hitching posts painted white on roadside. Verandah on original south and east side entirely covered, does not remember sign. No railing on verandah; pillars supported to a roof to verandah - benches on verandah and a lawn under trees on lawn and/or chairs. Garden aspect was very pleasant.

East of House - Vegetable garden with flowers between rows; driveway on west of house fifty feet from building; lawn between driveway and house with grass and shrubs. Driveway ends at barn door - pump and trough. Barn floor frame square-centered both sides of barn. 2/3's pitch roof-unpainted shingles. 50'-100' behind the actual house.

Interior of barn - east end stalls for x horses; hayloft above query. Cereals in west end; hayloft above buggy shed directly behind east end of house and wood shed. Un-painted flat roof separation by rough cedar logs-room for six or seven entire rigs. Mangers for the horses open front punch tin lantern hanging on a post by the back door on the way to the buggy shed - later replaced by glass lantern with two candles.

Woodshed - Used for nothing but wood - 1 storey off east of building from east wall to west at least covering door; unpainted wood. Rear door towards centre of building - used by travellers, farmers, etc., who entered a sitting room for warmth in winter and might or might not proceed through to bar in front when bar crowded, drinks served in sitting room as well. Regular travellers after hitching up went around verandah to front door. Mr. Crites recognized existence of