



A History of Pittsburgh's Old
Stone Tavern

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Pittsburgh's Old Stone Tavern located at the foot of Greentree Road in the West End community of the City of Pittsburgh beckons to those passing by. The tavern stands waiting to share the stories of the birth of this great city, the stories of the brave men and women who over the years passed through its doors. The exact date of the construction of the tavern is not known. A dendrochronology test of the original timbers in the building would provide the year the trees were cut down from the surrounding virgin forest. This could provide the date of the stone part of the tavern. Over the years there have been additions to the rear of the structure. There is a faint date stone on the side of the building that reads 1752. However, there are questions about the date of 1752. We know the tavern existed in the early 1780's. The tavern is thought to be circa 1782, making the tavern the oldest commercial building in Pittsburgh.

The date 1752 may have been placed on the stone by Alexander Lowery who was an Indian trader. Lowery became engaged in trading with the Indians in 1748 along with his father Lazarus Lowery and his older brothers. The presence of the Lowery traders along the Ohio River is evidenced by the fact that in 1750 the French offered a reward of one thousand pounds for the scalp of Alexander's brother James Lowery.¹ On August 18, 1750, Captain William Trent wrote to the Lieutenant-Governor of Pennsylvania about the death of John Lowery, another brother of Alexander. John Lowery was killed when a drunken Indian set fire to a keg of powder near him one mile below the forks of the Ohio.²

In the book *A Century and a Half of Pittsburgh and Her People*, Volume 3 by John Newton Boucher, he writes that Alexander Lowery established several trading posts in Western Pennsylvania.

¹ Conrad Weiser and the Indian Policy of Colonial Pennsylvania by Joseph Solomon Walton page 242

² History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania: With Biographical Sketches.. by Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans page 17

One of his trading posts was at Lowery's Run, near Emsworth, Pennsylvania. It is possible that Lowery had another post where now the Old Stone Tavern stands. Trading posts were often located on Indian trails and along water ways. The Old Stone Tavern is on Saw Mill Run Creek that flows into the Ohio River a mile below the point of Pittsburgh and on the Catfish Indian Trail.

Indian traders had a "hangard",³ a building in which they stored their furs and items to trade with the Indians. Alexander Lowery may have made a "tomahawk claim" on the land where the Old Stone Tavern stands. A person making a tomahawk claim would have carved his name on a tree marking the area of his claim. To identify his claim Lowery may have also placed his name and date on the hangard, and time has faded his name.

Daniel Elliott was an Indian trader who first worked for Alexander Lowrey and then himself. Although tomahawk claims were made on land west of the Allegheny Mountains the land legally belonged only to the Indians. That changed with the Treaty of Fort Stanwix on November 5, 1768, when land could then be claimed across the Allegheny Mountains to the Ohio River. The treaty enabled Daniel Elliott to receive a patent from Virginia in April of 1769 for the land on which the tavern stands. In the book *Pennsylvania: Genealogies Chiefly Scotch-Irish and German* by William Henry Egle, it states that Daniel Elliott established a trading post on Saw Mill Run in 1777.⁴ Perhaps he built the tavern on the foundation of the hangard, or was the tavern an entirely new structure? There are many unanswered questions and mysteries surrounding the beginning of the tavern. An archaeological dig could reveal much about the era of the tavern's birth and its history.

Daniel Elliott married Elizabeth Lowery, daughter of Alexander Lowery, in 1774, and the couple moved to St. Clair Township in Western Pennsylvania. At that time in history the Old Stone Tavern was in St. Clair Township.⁵ Daniel Elliott served in the American Revolutionary War under his then father-in-law Col. Alexander Lowery. Daniel Elliott was an entrepreneur in the eighteenth century. The Old Stone Tavern was the core of his enterprises. On March 11, 1784, Pennsylvania granted him permission to operate a ferry from the mouth of Saw Mill Run Creek to the North Shore of

³ Guide to Historic Places in Western Pennsylvania compiled by the Western Pennsylvania Historical Survey. The book refers to "The site of Brownsville was first occupied by the Ohio Company in February, 1754, when Captain William Trent was sent to build a storehouse, or 'hangard', for the company's projected trading and settlement activities". These hangards were buildings in which Indian traders stored their furs and items to trade with the Indians.

⁴ *Pennsylvania: Genealogies Chiefly Scotch-Irish and German* by William Henry Egle page 653

⁵ *Pennsylvania: Genealogies Chiefly Scotch-Irish and German* by William Henry Egle page 19

the Ohio River.⁶ In 1789,⁷ he would also receive permission to operate the ferry from Saw Mill Run to Pittsburgh. The ferry was one of many business ventures that Daniel Elliott operated and owned. He operated the old British saw mill on Saw Mill Run, a grist mill, and he built boats that transported supplies to people along the river as well as taking their goods to Pittsburgh for sale.

The pages of the tavern's ledger located in the Oliver Room of the main branch of the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh gives a vivid picture of the eighteenth century. The ledger is lettered "P" and contains transactions from 1793 into 1797. The ledger makes reference to carrying forward balances as far back in the alphabet as the letter "H". If each ledger represents an average of a three year period, the tavern transactions could go beyond the 1777 date which is mentioned in *Pennsylvania: Genealogies Chiefly Scotch-Irish and German* by William Henry Egle. We know that Daniel Elliott traded with the Indians prior to settling in the area, previous ledgers may have contained those transactions going all the way back to ledger "A". Aware of Daniel Elliott's other endeavors in the early 1780's; the tavern is considered to have been built circa 1782.

The date may seem important but what is more important is what is recorded in the tavern's ledger. The ledger records the lodging of guests at the tavern and the purchase of food and beverages. Whiskey and cherry bounce were the more prevalent beverages. We know that there were many card games played at the tavern due to the entries that read "lost at cards". The tavern also served as a store, due to the entries for the sale of a great variety of items. Recorded is the sales of clothing items; shoes, hats, etc., along with items to make clothing such as cloth and linen, food supplies such as beef and bacon, etc. We also find the sale of hay and oats for their animals. There are some unexpected items that were sold at the tavern such as a silver watch. Perhaps the most unusual was a cash sale on December 26, 1793, of a bear to Peter Fawlkner.⁸

Recorded in the ledger are the passage charges on Daniel Elliott's ferry. Some of the most

⁶ Act of 11Mar. 1784 (Carey and Bioren, 2 Laws of Pennsylvania) : "An Act to establish a ferry over the Ohio river at the mouth of Saw-mill run. Sect. I. Whereas Daniel Elliot, of the county of Washington, by his petition, hath represented to this House the necessity of having a ferry established on the river Ohio, at the mouth of Saw-mill run, about one mile below Fort Pitt, from the land of the said Daniel Elliot at the mouth of the said run, on the south-west side of the said river, over to the north-east side thereof, into the reserved lands of this state, and praying the said ferry to be established in right of him, the said Daniel Elliot, his heirs and assigns ; and this House being fully satisfied that a public ferry at the place aforesaid would be of public utility.

⁷ A digest of the acts of assembly relating to and the general ordinances of the city of Pittsburgh etc. by W. W. Thompson page 637

⁸ Page 166 of Ledger "P" of the Old Stone Tavern Ledger

prominent people in Pittsburgh traveled during this period on his ferry, as well as soldiers, farmers, slaves and pack animals carrying goods to and from Pittsburgh and the North Shore of the Ohio River. One very interesting account in the ledger is that of the government. This account was for the ferry fees of soldiers. General Anthony Wayne was sent to Pittsburgh in 1791 to put down the Indians who were terrorizing the settlers in Western Pennsylvania and the Ohio Country. General Wayne found many distractions at Fort Fayette in Pittsburgh, so he moved his troops and established Legionville. Legionville was located on the north side of the Ohio River where Baden, Pennsylvania is today. Elliott's ferry was used to carried soldiers and supplies over the Ohio River for the United States Army. The threat of Indian attacks would end with Wayne's victory on August 20, 1794, over the Indians at Fallen Timbers.

The ledger records the ferriage of "Negroes" as some early settlers from Virginia had brought their slaves with them. General John Neville's page records the largest number of "Negroes" using the ferry. Their passage was simply listed as "Negro", with the exception of a 'Negro' named "Betty". Betty was owned by General John Neville and made frequent trips on the ferry, and she was always referred to as "Betty". Pennsylvania outlawed slavery in 1780. Slaves did not all receive their freedom in 1780 rather over a time span. Some slaves would remain as indentured servants. The ledger makes no mention of free or slave for African American simple "Negro".

Daniel Elliott's boat venture in June of 1794, records in the ledger the sale of the following: one flat boat, one large flat boat and oars to Michael Berrickman. There are several entries in the ledger for the rental of boats. The men would rent the boats in order to bring their crops to Pittsburgh for sale. John Robert Shaw a soldier from Fort McIntosh wrote in his journal a story regarding Daniel Elliott and the use of one of his flat boats. John Robert Shaw recorded that one of Daniel Elliott's flat boats was hired to take supplies from Fort Pitt to Fort McIntosh in August of 1784. Daniel Elliott went as a passenger on the trip which took four days; they drank a barrel of whiskey.⁹

It was once said "Whiskey Built Pittsburgh". That may not be true but it is true that it played a very significant part in the character and life of the eighteenth century in Pittsburgh. There are entries in the ledger for paying Sam Davis, a cooper, for making kegs. Also there are entries for the purchasing and selling of barrels and kegs in the ledger. One cannot read the pages of the ledger without realizing the great amount of whiskey which was consumed at that time in history. It is

⁹ Picture of Early Western Pennsylvania by John W. Harpster pages 163 And 164

interesting to note that the last entry in the journal is to an Indian, the only Indian mentioned in the ledger, Detamuhim. He was sold six gallons of whiskey to be paid for in two months.

The ledger includes the period of the Whiskey Rebellion in Western Pennsylvania.

One of the most interesting pages in the ledger is that of the account sheet of John Woods, General John Neville's attorney. In July of 1794, someone wrote the word "spy" beside John Wood's name on his ledger page. It was a very difficult time for the patrons of the tavern because there were men on both sides of the whiskey excise tax issue. The ledger contains the accounts of seventy men who were participants in the Whiskey Rebellion. They were:

Michael Baker	John Baldwin	John Barnet
Colonel Blackney	Andrew Boggs	James Brison
Major Thomas Butler	Colonel Arthur Campbell	John Campbell
John Clark	John Collins	Adam Craig
Charles Craig	Major Isaac Craig	William Cunningham
Captain John Dunlap	George Elliott	John Elliott
John Frew	Alexander Fulton	Col. John Gibson
John Hamilton	Col. James Hunter	Robert Johnson
Samuel Johnston	Thomas Lapsley	Alexander Long
John Lucas	Col. John Marshall	Thomas Marshall
Major Robert McClure	William McClure	John McKee
John McMasters	Hugh Montgomery	John Moore
General John Neville	Presley Neville	William Nicholson
John Ormsby, Jr.	Joseph Patterson	Thomas Patton
Capt. Benjamin Pearsol	Thomas Phillips	John Powers
John Reed	William Richmond	Phillip Ross
Colonel William Sample	Ensign Steel Sample	Joseph Scott
Thomas Scott	Col. William Semple	Captain Nehemiah Sharp
Captain John Sharp	Colonel John Shields	John Small
Major Andrew Spear	John Steveson	Jeremiah Sturgeon
William Sutherland	William Tucker, Sr.	Gabriel Walker
Isaac Walker	George Wallace	Thomas White
John Wilkeson	John Wilkins, Jr.	Colonel Samuel Wilson

John Woods

In 1794 a mail route was established to the settlements down the Ohio River. Due to the threat of Indians along the Ohio River between Pittsburgh and Wheeling the mail was carried by post overland from Pittsburgh to Wheeling. The post rider traveled past the Old Stone Tavern over Catfish Trail, which became known as the Washington Pike to Washington, Pennsylvania. From Washington, Pennsylvania the rider would follow the Mingo Indian path to Wheeling. From Wheeling the mail would then be taken by boat down the Ohio River to the settlers.

Daniel Elliott died in 1794, and the tavern over the years had several owners and many tavern keepers. The tavern would see the early frontiersmen replaced by farmers, miners, local laborers, railroaders always remaining a meeting place of the community. In the Pittsburgh Press on September 8, 1901, is the story about a duel fought one cold, late winter night behind the tavern. The article goes on to speak of the many old sporting events that were held at the tavern in the past. The “Old Sports” being chicken, dog and prize fighters. The article said, “Every old sport in this half of the state knew the tavern as well as his own home, for there has been more chicken fights, dog fights and miscellaneous fights at or around there than other place in the state.”¹⁰

Excluding Daniel Elliott, the owner of the tavern, the ledger research to date has disclosed the names of forty-seven men who served in the American Revolution. They were:

Michael Baker	John Beaver	Richard Brown
William Bell	Alexander Burns	Thomas Butler
John Campbell	George Catt	John Clark
Isaac Craig	John Crawford	William Dougherty
John Edwards	Jacob Ferree	John Fisher
Alexander Fowler	John Gibson	John Irwin
Joseph Kerr	John Matthews	John McKee
John Moore	James Morrow	John Neville
William Orr	John Reed	Phillip Ross
Robert Simpson	Jacob Smith	John Smith
John Sparrow	Jacob Springer	Joseph Sproat

¹⁰ Pittsburgh Press newspaper, September 8, 1901 “Stone Tavern-Old Time’s Sporting Arena”

John Stevenson	David Steel	Jeremiah Sturgeon
William Taylor	William Thompson	Gabriel Walker
George Wallace	James Watson	John Wilkins, Jr.
Thomas Williams	William Wilson	John Wolf
John Woods	Aaron Work	

Included also are the accounts of sixteen men who served in the War of 1812. They are:

John Beal	John Beam	John Brunton
Joel Ferree	James Hamilton	John Hamilton
Robert Johnson	Robert Kerr	John McCoy
John McClean	William McCune	Col. Henry Noble
James Patterson	Joseph Robison	Charles Wilson
William Wilson		

The tavern has been a survivor. Arthur M. Fording in his book *Recollections and Reminiscences of West End – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* wrote about the oil refinery fires near the tavern following the Civil War and in 1873. The largest fire that threatened the tavern was known as the “Orchard Fire” in 1873.¹¹

Arthur Fording also wrote that the greatest flood he was aware of happened on Saw Mill Run on Sunday, July 26, 1874. The flood would be known in local history as the “Butcher’s Run Flood” because of the great damage it did on Butcher’s Run on the North Side. However, the flood was devastating to the Banksville area and the West End, through which Saw Mill Run flows. He wrote, “Bridges were washed away, and at several places debris formed dams and did untold damage. William R. Zeigler’s brick grocery store was washed away.”¹² The brick building stood at the junction of McCartney’s Run and Wabash Avenue. The back of the Old Stone Tavern property was along McCartney’s Run, and the front of the tavern was only a short distant from Zeigler’s Grocery Store at the intersection of Wabash Avenue and Washington Pike. Across from the store McCartney’s Run emptied into Saw Mill Run. The newly erected salt works farther down Wabash Avenue, where the

¹¹ *Recollections and Reminiscences of West End-Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* by Arthur Fording page 90

¹² *Recollections and Reminiscences of West End-Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania* by Arthur Fording pages 90 and 91

West End Library now stands was completely washed away by the ragging waters of Saw Mill Run. The Old Stone Tavern stood. The Washington Reporter of Washington, Pennsylvania reported that on July 29, 1784 seven lifeless bodies had been found and that from twenty-five to thirty people were still missing along Saw Mill Run.¹³

Robert Smith operated the tavern as a roadhouse for thirty years or more. When he retired near the end of the nineteenth century, he closed the tavern and resided there. In 1902 George Schad purchased and reopened the tavern in 1903.¹⁴ He owned the tavern a short period, selling it to Charles P. Bolger in 1903. Charles Bolger owned the tavern until 1921,¹⁵ when he sold it to Max Green. The Green family operated and resided at the tavern until the mid-1960s. During the prohibition period the tavern became a confectionary store. One of Mr. Green's granddaughters shared that during prohibition neighborhood men would meet in the cellar. They would play cards and have *refreshments*.

The tavern has many stories to tell. Stories about the rooms in the basement used as holding cells. Law enforcement officers bringing prisoners to court in Pittsburgh would stop at the tavern and the prisoners were placed in the cells. The officers would then have nourishments in the tavern. There are also those who remember family meals eaten at the tavern on Friday evenings and Mrs. Green's lime pie.

The tavern closed in 2009. Still there is much to be learned from the pages of the ledger. Scientific studies of the building and earth around the tavern could reveal even more about the early days of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania. The Old Stone Tavern, once the hub of the community, waits silently to regain its rightful place as the cornerstone of the community.

¹³ Washington Reporter, Washington, Pennsylvania, PA Volume:LXVI, Issue: 34, Page 1 July 29, 1874

¹⁴ The Pittsburgh Chronicle, Monday, May 4, 1903 article

¹⁵ Recollections and Reminiscences of West End-Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania by Arthur Fording page 65