

# **Reading a Building, Opening a Frontier: Examining the Andrew Mann Inn Through Measured Drawings.**

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## ***Introduction***

Like any good historian finds, first person accounts and written documents from the past can provide some of the most compelling and instructive glimpses into historic everyday life. How did people occupy themselves? What was housework like and who what? Why did some people build the buildings they built? Historical notes like diary accounts, personal ledger books, correspondence can do much to help us understand these questions, but the volumes that survive pale in comparison to our questions. Yet what if we read a building as if we were reading a cherished document from the past, looking for clues and following a line that often carries the history over a broad arc of ownership? A building offers a physical, living record of its builder's and occupants' lives. This record, when placed in context with the events and the culture of the larger community and region offers the historian nuanced details of the quotidian through the lens of material culture.

In the Spring of 2011, a group of volunteers from the Sidney Historical Association documented the Andrew Mann Inn with hopes of learning more about a building's past that had mostly been left to legend. Located on the north bank of the Susquehanna River near the site of Old Unadilla or what is today Sidney, this late Georgian-style building was constructed, as local history maintains, between 1793 and 1795 along a stage-coach route that followed the course of the Susquehanna River from Wattle's Ferry (Unadilla) southward toward Jericho (Bainbridge).

## ***Measured Drawings and Historic American Buildings Survey***

Our goal was to record the building according to procedures and standards set forth by the Historic American Buildings Survey. Organized in 1933, the Historic American Buildings Survey is a tripartite collaboration between the American Institute of Architects, the National Park Service and the Library of Congress in an effort to standardize regional efforts already underway to document and preserve our nation's architectural heritage by creating a "complete resume of the builder's art" (Davidson and Perschler 2003).

The practice of capturing the "builder's art" in the form that the Historic American Buildings Survey standards suggest includes photography, written history and measured drawings. While the first two of

these- photography and written history- are standard fare among historians, measured drawings are a subset of historical documentation often relegated to a small community of architects and historic preservationists. The information gathered from drawings that capture the layout and construction details of the material pieces of our built environment can, however, offer a broad pluralistic approach to understanding landscape history and the people themselves who built our history.

### ***The Andrew Mann Inn***

The Andrew Mann Inn stands on the northern side of NYS Route 7 on the northern banks of the Susquehanna River in the western portion of the Town of Unadilla. As approached from the road, the house stands upon a raised bank against the rising slope of Mt. Moses. The building is situated at the top of a large bend in the Susquehanna approximately seven river miles west of Nathaniel Wattle's original ferry crossing and the present-day Village of Unadilla and less than  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles east of the confluence of the Unadilla and Susquehanna Rivers. Near to the house was a second ferry and later bridge connecting the north and south banks of the Susquehanna near the developing community of Sidney Plains (now simply Sidney).

The geographical location of the inn in relation to the period transportation network is key. The inn stands at the foot of a large hill and local legend persists that the original road ran up against the hill approximately 150 feet behind where the inn now stands. This road bed was first formally laid in 1791 as an effort to extend the Village of Unadilla's Main Street westward to the Unadilla River and was built so that "loaded ox teams or carts [could] pass and repass the whole distance with ease" (Halsey 1902a:49). The road was certified by local landowners who had an interest in completing the road, including David Baits.

Our building thus sat in 1791 with an improved road at to its immediate north. Nine years later on April 1, 1800 a 79-mile road was chartered by New York State to run from the Connecticut border through the Hudson River port of Catskill, through the Catskill Mountains themselves formally terminating at Unadilla where a ferry crossed of the Susquehanna River seven miles east of the Andrew Mann Inn. Just one year after the Catskill Turnpike had been chartered between Catskill and Wattles Ferry, it was extended from Wattles Ferry to Oxford on the Chenango River, another 65 miles. The route, which was traveled as early as 1787 served as the primary overland route connecting the sparsely settled Susquehanna River Valley with the bustling Hudson River Valley (Kubik 2001:33-41). The turnpike began to circulate settlers from New England, primarily Connecticut and Massachusetts, into the lands of central New York recently quieted after the ending of the Revolution (Halsey 1902a:48).

The National Register Nomination for the inn, which was listed in 1980, takes the ownership back to 1815 when Andrew Mann, Junior, purchased the property, lot #79 of the Wallace Patent, from Goldsborough Banyar, an Albany-based land baron (Deed T:303. Otsego County Courthouse). Francis Whiting Halsey in his writings of the New York frontier noted that a man named David Baits (Bates) first occupied the property in 1787 and possibly earlier (Halsey 1902b:345). Baits, he notes, had served in the war and “bore the title of Captain.” Minutes from the Town of Unadilla from the 1796-1808 period, confirm that David Baits’ house stood on lot #79 in several descriptions of road improvements made adjacent to the property (Town of Unadilla Minutes, 1809). Several other primary sources confirm David Bait’s residency including census data from 1790 and 1800 and tax assessments from 1799-1803 which show Baits in possession of highly-valued real and personal property. However, no probate information for Baits exists and vital records from this period no longer survive.

When Andrew Mann, Junior, bought the four consecutive patents lots (including lot #79) in 1815, he came from Hebron, Connecticut at the age of 28 with his wife and his father (Deed T:303; Western Historical Association). The building’s heyday as a tavern is associated with Andrew Mann, who owned the building until 1834 during the peak turnpike traffic. Mann sold the inn and moved westward at a point when turnpikes across the state began to loose travelers to the canal system. Historical accounts from Michigan where Mann removed himself, indicate that upon arrive Mann immediately opened another “commodious hotel.” (Western Historical Association) Following Mann’s ownership of the Unadilla inn, the building and its nearly 400 adjoining acres eventually passed into the hands of James Bundy who ran a prosperous fruit and dairy farm on the property from 1868 to 1898. After Bundy’s death the property was parceled off and subdivided for house lots to accommodate the shortage in Sidney.

In 2009, the house was purchased by Don Mahoney, a contractor who wished to restore the building for use as his own residence or possibly a residence and business combined. Mahoney spent two years repairing significant damage sustained by the house through years of neglect. The north side of the house was raised six inches to bring the structure back to level and a damaged and leaking roof was replaced. During the construction, Mahoney reached out to local history groups including the Sidney Historical Association and the Upper Susquehanna Chapter of the New York State Archaeological Association. The archaeologists decided to do excavations around the yard of the house at Mahoney’s invitation. As a counterpart, a few interested folks from the Sidney Historical Association gathered over the course of several days to complete measured drawings of the house’s two primary floors. Among the group of volunteers was Evy Buker Avery, who had grown up in the house in the 1940s and 1950s.

### ***Description***

Today the Andrew Mann Inn's late Georgian edifice is encroached upon by turn-of-the century four squares reaching as far as the eye can see in both directions. The building's original main block rises two-stories and presents a strictly symmetrical, five-bay façade. A one-and-a-half story wing extends in tandem off the building's western gable where sundry openings punctuate the façade at irregular intervals. Both the main block and the wing are constructed of hewn timber frame. The side-gabled roofs of both main block and wing feature partial cornice returns and decorative modillions along the soffit. A delicate band of spiral reeding borders an otherwise plain frieze band. Giant fluted doric-order pilasters rise at either end of each façade of the main block.

The main block features a highly stylized entrance in its central bay, composed of a paneled door surmounted by a semi-circular fan light (with later stained glass additions). The door is flanked by fluted doric-order pilasters while shorter fluted sections flank the fanlight adjacent to a set of carved quarter-fan motifs. On the building's opposite façade, facing away from the road, fenestration is irregular. Two door enters the building in the second and fourth bays exhibiting classical surrounds in the character of but less ornate than the main entrance. Two substantial brick chimneys rise in the main block's second and fourth bays.

The first floor of the building is roughly divided into rows of rooms by an enclosed stair box and the two chimney stacks giving access to five fireplaces on the first floor. The plan of the first floor is akin to the central-chimney plan with more formal rooms tending to line the front half of the house while service- and food-oriented rooms are concentrated in the rear, divided by a twin chimney stacks and a stair box.

The first floor's layout departs from the typical central-chimney plan in that the entry room is as big, if not bigger than its two flanking rooms. All three of these rooms are heated with full fireplaces, yet each room's function would appear to have been different based on appointed detail. The east room, or what we might term the "Parlor," stands out among these rooms in its level of ornament. A shallow fire place is flanked by ordered groupings of free-standing round pillars. Carved fan motifs and a reeded cornice band give way to an elegant rectilinear mantel shelf. The room's three windows are each surrounded with fluted pilasters and set above panels displaying a carved starburst/fan pattern. Tiny, carved spiral trim, similar to that on the house's cornice, follows the baseboard around the room. The parlor's ornament stands in stark contrast with the "hall" or entry room immediately adjacent. An austere mantel surrounding the fireplace in the hall more closely resembles the mantle in the kitchen, lacking any detailed ornament. The west room, or what might have functioned as an office, is smaller and its appointment on par with the central room (although the mantel has been removed).

Rooms at the back of the house include the kitchen and the dining room, each with their own exterior access. The dining room, like the parlor, has an ornate mantle flanked by a china closet. The kitchen's hearth is, as might expect, wide and deep. Cooking hardware is still intact.

The building's second floor is dominated by a large unbroken space that has traditionally been called a ballroom. Several single lengths of board run the entire 32-foot length of the room. The remainder of the second floor is given over to smaller bedrooms. The ballroom was originally the only heated room on the second floor containing the house's sixth and final fire place.

### *Façade shift*

Among the many questions that surround the building relates to how the building was approached. Although there are three remaining entrances into the original block, there is little question about which one is primary. The door on the building's southern façade stands prominently centered in the façade and is elaborately surrounded by fluted doric-order pilasters and carved quarter-fan motifs which flank a fanlight surmounting the door. This entrance, above all others, denotes primacy and formal purpose. Yet when this house was constructed, the road did not follow its current path, but instead traveled a ledge against the bank of the hill, roughly 150 feet to the north of the building. From this side, the traveler was greeted by two, less formal entrances. One door enters the kitchen area and the other the dining room, hardly the first place to bring guests.

By this reading, it would appear that the house was not intended to put its best face toward the road, but rather, the river. On the Upper Susquehanna in the late 1780s and early 1790s, there were no formal systems of road construction or maintenance. In fact, it was not until 1791 that a road west of the village of Unadilla was formally chartered by a group of land owners who would stand to benefit (Halsey 1902a:49). Up until that time and perhaps even after, travelers passing through the Susquehanna Valley would have found the river itself to be the best mode of transportation. William Johnson came by river to settle at Sidney Plains in 1782; Richard Smith came by river when he surveyed his "Four Great Rivers" in 1769 (Smith 1906). The Susquehanna was wide and deep as one moved upstream toward the confluence of the Unadilla, but navigability north of that point became limited. Only shallow skiffs and "battoes" could be used to transport people and goods out of Unadilla proper (Halsey 1902a).

Therefore, situated just above the confluence of these two rivers at the head of navigable portions, the Andrew Mann Inn was poised to take command of the river's traffic. The placement of the ornate front door facing the river is homage to that river's importance in the life of the building's owner. Reaffirming this connection between house, owner and river is a colloquial tale reported in William Murray's 1898

history of Delaware County of severe famine in the upper valley brought on by drought in 1787 (Murray 1898:532). To the rescue of those sparse settlers, a “General” David Bates brought two boats of flour up the Susquehanna River from Northampton, Pennsylvania. Bates was a river man- he had connections to a wide network of trade and the means by which to bring aid to the hungry, isolated community. A connection to the Susquehanna was not only fundamental to the local economy and possibly to Bates’ own wealth in the 1780s and 90s, but it was also a lifeline.

In 1815, the house was sold to Andrew Mann, Junior. He purchased the house and likely saw it in a prime location- not because of its command over the river, but for its proximity at least three different turnpikes. One year after purchasing the property, Andrew Mann was among a group of seventeen freeholders and inhabitants in the Town of Unadilla who petitioned that an alteration in the “publick Highway” be made so as to straighten the road and bring it to the foot of the hill (Unadilla Town Minutes, 1816). This alteration moved the road to its present location. In context we can see this road move as an effort on Andrew Mann’s part to redirect road travelers away from the back of his house and toward the more attractive and formal front side. Unlike David Bates who was oriented toward the river, Andrew Mann was oriented toward the road and undoubtedly wanted to adapt the house to his own new economic interests.

### ***Ballroom***

The Andrew Mann Inn, like many other taverns has a ballroom that commands a majority of its second floor. Similar to the formal rooms of the first floor, the ballroom is finely appointed. A simple mantel surround is accented by a string of carved reeds and a scroll band beneath the mantle shelf. Because of the placement of the chimney stack in relation to the rest of the room, a small setback occurs to the left of mantle. In response to this varying wall surface, the mantle shelf is projected past the corner and finished on all three exposed sides. It is hard to image that this awkward arrangement was intentional. Maybe it was a mistake? The degree to which its awkwardness is accommodated, though, is a tribute to the builder’s attentiveness.

Joists supporting the ballroom in the Andrew Mann happened to be exposed in the ceiling of the hall beneath because of recent construction revealing a surprisingly tight interval of ten inch centers. Should the interval of joist support have been reduced beneath the ballroom (and this can’t be confirmed because joist spacing in other parts of the house was not exposed), it could be concluded that the extra support was necessary for a room in which there may have been an unusually high amount of people and movement on certain occasions. Other ballrooms in taverns built between 1800 and 1825 have wagon springs

incorporated into the floor substructure suggesting that attention to the quality of the dance floor itself was well within the vernacular tradition. (Notably the Boiceville Tavern, “Brick Tavern” outside of Bloomfield, Morgan Tavern outside of Lima)

Our documentation revealed this to be a room designed for public use- the fine appointment, the accommodating space and what appears to be an original “coat closet.” But why would David Baits design a house with a ballroom on this wilderness frontier? Perhaps it was his affection for the public life. We know Baits was a veteran of the Revolution and commanded a regiment of men from Unadilla and Butternuts as late as 1796. In addition, David Bates was an active anti-Federalist exercising his view in at least one unsuccessful run for town supervisor in 1794 to the displeasure of prominent Federalists in Otsego County, Judges Morris and Cooper who rounded up the narrow defeat against Baits (Cooper 1920:147-149). When the Town of Butternuts and its influential Federalists had been disconnected from Unadilla in 1796, Bates won the supervisor handily and served two consecutive years. None of the town board meetings officially occurred at Baits’ house per the minutes, but such public meetings would not have been outside the realm of possibility.

It is possible that Baits’ aspirations and track record as a public servant guided his desire to incorporate a large, public space within his own house. It could also be said that it was fashionable to incorporate a spacious ballroom in one’s house or inn- a sign of expendable wealth. As tavern building escalated in central New York, ballrooms or large public rooms were almost a staple. In public houses, these spaces functioned for a variety of purposes beyond what the name itself might suggest. Historian Francis Whiting Halsey reports that he had, on occasion, seen as many as “nineteen fat bucks and does lying side by side in the ballroom of a hotel at Unadilla” (Halsey 1902a:150).

### *Alcohol*

One legend about the Andrew Mann Inn that has a lot of traction amongst its followers is that alcohol was never served in the inn (Campbell 1965:60). Our investigations of the house did not find evidence of a bar structure. But as the inn was converted into a house by the 1860s at the latest, such a structure would be an unlikely survival. Had there been a tap room, it might have been in the lathe-and-plastered room of the addition. In other tavern examples from the 1800-1825 period, tap rooms always have an exterior access, presumably to allow the bar to serve customers who were not necessarily interested in the other Inn services. By this simple standard, the addition fits well in that it had an exterior access that would have faced the primary road. But, how much can we surmise from the building alone in this respect. Fortunately, our study of the building was in tandem with archaeological investigations in the yard

adjacent yards. Excavations produced an assemblage of artifacts ranging from horseshoe nails to tobacco pipe fragments. Only 5% of the total assemblage was related to beverage consumption, a lower percentage than most houses (Moyer 2012). However, there was a good representation of late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century bottle and table glass in the collection.

### ***Conclusion***

Reading a building like a historical document, examining its spatial patterns and contextualizing its stylistic appointments can begin to offer new understanding of everyday life and pattern on New York's 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century frontier. Buildings analyzed in isolation are limited, though, in the degree to which they can speak to normatives in construction and design. Patterns that emerge in early houses and turnpike inns- were they a response to need or the following of a standard? When Andrew Mann Inn's floor plan and spatial patterning is set in comparison with two other taverns in the HABS collection we see a closer resemblance to colonial examples.

Wick's Tavern, built in Bridgehampton on the Montauk Highway in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, follows the central-chimney plan and bears similarities to Andrew Mann with a smaller "entry" room and the formal parlor and dining rooms on the opposite side. Perhaps David Baits' preference for the more traditional central-chimney plan indicates a degree of nostalgia at work in the unfamiliar frontier. By contrast, Drovers and Traveler's Tavern outside of Manlius and constructed in 1825 conforms to the central passage plan with a large dining room on one side and an office/ parlor suite on the other. A period ell extends off the rear of the Drover's Tavern where service rooms are housed. All three buildings have a ballroom on their second story (although this was an addition to Wick's Tavern in the 18<sup>th</sup> century). In this light, measured drawings of one building represent an entry point. They allow us to compare buildings by objective means across temporal and geographic boundaries.

By investigating the Andrew Mann Inn with measured drawings, we give the building itself the chance to provide historical data. When that data is put in context with tax assessments, census records, deeds, probate information and town minutes, we learn new things about the people who built and lived in our history buildings. We learn that David Baits was the river man and Andrew Mann was the road man and the building comes alive with new meaning.



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