

# Cedar Bridge Tavern About to Open

By: Victoria Ford

Ocean County Freeholder John C. Bartlett, Jr. and the Ocean County Department of Parks & Recreation are delighted that Cedar Bridge Tavern in Barnegat should be open to the public this fall, certainly by the annual commemoration of the last documented land engagement of the American Revolution on December 16 at 2:00 PM. The tavern was built in the early 19th Century and was purchased by the Board of Ocean County Freeholders on December 27, 2007. The tavern has undergone a two year renovation, funded in part by \$324,926 in grants from the NJ Historic Trust, to allow the public to enjoy it as an educational/ interpretive center and mini museum.



*Yellow Cedar being installed.*

Photo credit: Ocean County Department of Parks & Recreation

The dwelling's last owner, Rudolph Koenig, lived in it from the time he bought it in 1959 to his death in January 2012. The Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders purchased it from him in 2007 on the condition that he be allowed to live out his days there.

Annabelle Radcliffe Trenner is the architect from the Trenton-based firm Historic Building Architects who first became involved with the project in 2012. She specializes in old buildings that come into the public sector.

The very long process began with a Historic Structure Report, which provides documentary, graphic and physical information about a property's history and existing condition.

In 2013, thanks to the research, consulting and written nomination of architectural historian Joan Berkey, the Cedar Bridge Tavern was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and described as having "statewide significance ... as a well-preserved example of an early 19th-century tavern."

According to the National Park Service, the tavern was built in about 1816, "at what was then the crossroads of two stage routes connecting Mt. Holly in Burlington County with the southern part of Ocean County.

"Significantly, the original section of Cedar Bridge Tavern retains its early 19th-century bar, a character-defining feature not known to survive in any extant Early American New Jersey tavern. It also retains most of its original interior floor plan, including bar room, dining room, and bedrooms, along with most of its original doors, trim, windows, and fireplaces."

Archaeological study at the site provides insight into "19th-century farmsteads, taverns, consumerism, entertainment, Native American lifeways, and foodways in



*Exterior framing repair, West Wall*

Photo credit: Ocean County Department of Parks & Recreation

we let buildings like this deteriorate, we allow our past to be lost. Ocean County is rich in history and this project is important to preserving a piece of it. It's important to leave a legacy to future generations.

“Our Parks Department and our Cultural and Heritage staff have paid close attention to every detail in bringing this project to completion,” he said. “I know the public will enjoy this newest asset to our county park system.”

Trenner called the project “quite an achievement” -- given the many and varied tasks and challenges associated with making the building structurally sound, code-compliant, ADA-accessible (a back porch has been constructed in such a way as to allow access to a barrier-free bathroom), climate-controlled and equipped with exhibit-friendly lighting and a security system, all while carefully preserving the integrity and character of the original establishment and home that belonged to Koenig for 50 years. The “brain” of the house is hidden in a closet in a second-floor bedroom. Still on the to-do list, as of July, was emergency lighting and some other minor details.

After some paint analysis work, new paint was expertly mixed to match historic colors on the walls. Materials conservator Christina Burris had the job of “Japanning” (lacquering) to match the trim in what was likely a ladies’ parlor and almost certainly the fanciest room in the house.

The goal is not for the place to look refurbished.

Original lime-washed corner posts have been left exposed; a severely bowed support beam has been steamed and gently pulled back into alignment. Where wood looks ratty or floors are blemished, the marks remain. In places where restorative work was required, the work is visible. “We’ve tried to be very honest about the repairs,” Trenner said – showing wherever possible the repair itself and how it was done, using traditional construction techniques throughout.

“We try not to do anything that’s not necessary,” Trenner said. The team’s goal is to make it feel like it was, or as close as possible. “We’re not trying to over-restore.”

In what will be a gallery space upstairs, a portion of wall has been partially cut away to expose the beams inside the wall, riddled with insect damage, newly “sistered up” with new beams, spliced together in homage to the traditional

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the New Jersey Pinelands region. Further archaeology study might also determine if the last land skirmish of the Revolutionary War was fought here.”

In the words of Ocean County Freeholder John C. Bartlett Jr., Deputy Director, who serves as liaison to the county’s Department of Parks and Recreation and the Cultural and Heritage Commission: “Preserving our history is imperative to our future. When

timber-frame construction. The work was done by a master carpenter from Poland.

Uncovered in the kitchen (which is the newest portion of the building, added on around 1835) were nine layers of wallpaper, dating back to the Civil War. A section showing the layers of time will be glassed over for display. An exhibition kitchen is in store for visitors to show jamming/ jarring techniques and cooking methods of the time period.

In the upstairs bedrooms, walls have been reconstructed (wide round bead board), windows steam-stripped and totally refurbished, floors patched where necessary. “We’ve left a few Koenig bits and baubles” – such as the pipes he installed as makeshift hand rails in the narrow and steep stairwell.

The largest of the bedrooms would have been the tavern keeper’s room (the only one with a lock on the door), where his entire family would have lived. “They would have been stacked in here like cordwood,” Mangum said.

In the attic, some graffiti has been found, over 100 years old, appearing to have a date of Dec. 24. It will also be a permanent display in the museum.

The greatest challenge of the project, according to Parks Department Director Mike Mangum, was “so many unknowns,” despite all the measures taken to ascertain information, i.e. thorough and detailed reports and analyses, ground-penetrating radar, resistance drilling and dendrochronology (which found mid-18th century timber).

The old bar in the living room could have come from the older building (evidence of an earlier tavern lies next to Koenig’s house) or been brought on a wagon. Some shelving above the bar was built into the plaster, suggesting there may have been another bar in its place previously.

As Mangum and Trenner explained, when the Historic American Buildings Survey (an outgrowth of the WPA program) came through in the 1930s they made drawings of the property, which served as reference to guide the vision for the look of the exterior. Only one piece of original cedar siding remains, taken from what was left of an exterior wall prior to an addition. The rest is new Alaskan yellow cedar, accurately re-created down to the “fantastic edge grain,” all spaced according to the HABS documentation. A false chimney was also added to the front of the house to match the HABS drawings.

“We wanted the view to look the same” as it would have looked to the men who came marching up to the tavern over the bridge, from a northerly direction, when the so-called last skirmish of the Revolutionary War happened, Mangum said. Even in the smallest details, he said, “we tried to tell those stories as well.”

“Where we could recycle, we did,” Trenner said.

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*Plaster graffiti found on chimney.  
Photo credit: C&H Staff*

Where they could not, they replicated the original look and feel as closely as possible. Period furniture such as ladder-back Ware chairs and housewares will fill the rooms, along with drinking glasses, pottery, dishware and utensils that all reflect not only the time period in which the tavern operated but are site-specific, based on archaeological findings. For about 20 years in the early- to mid-1800s the tavern was owned by a stagecoach operator named John “Black Jack” Wildermuth. In a midden, or garbage pit, under the porch, they found such treasures as a mostly intact pie plate. And one period spoon was unearthed, a detail that brings Commission Curator Nick Wood no small amount of satisfaction.

In 2010, archaeology students from Monmouth University excavated more than 1,000 artifacts. A stratigraphic chart in the parlor, designated as a display room, will show the layers of archeological remains found in the property. In the same room, a floor-to-ceiling enlargement of an 1839 survey map retrieved from the state archives (adopted by the state in 1870) shows the division of New Jersey into East and West.

Outside, a water-permeable path made of recycled radial tires winds around the house and fruit trees in the backyard and around the caretaker’s quarters. The grounds themselves, in the heart of the Pine Barrens with swamp on three sides, hold a wealth of educational potential in the plant and wildlife species thriving all around.

The faces of the team of historians and experts beam when they talk about the processes, the progress and the discoveries along the way. Mangum for one expressed joy in knowing the improvements made from the top down – a new cedar shake roof has replaced Koenig’s metal one – have helped ensure the building has a long and prosperous future, as a place of discovery and edification for visitors from Ocean County and beyond.



*Cedar Bridge Tavern Completed*

Photo credit: Ocean County Department of Parks & Recreation