

Tavern history runs deep in Bucks

By PETER CIFERRI

When author Marie Murphy Duess moved to Bucks County, she marveled at the revolutionary history that surrounded her. The New York City native says her hometown has a tendency to knock down the past in the face of progress, but sometimes keeping those links alive is just as valuable.

Twenty years later, Duess penned "Colonial Inns and Taverns of Bucks County: How Pubs, Taprooms and Hostelrys Made Revolutionary History," a historic look at influential restaurants and pubs throughout Bucks County and their role in the fight for freedom.

From Bristol's King George Inn being openly fired upon by Colonial soldiers, to George Washington's dinner at McKonkey's Ferry Tavern on the eve of his historic crossing of the Delaware, "Colonial Inns and Taverns" takes an entertaining and anecdotal look at the old eateries that pepper the landscape of Bucks.

"Anything that was important in the 16-1700s happened in taverns," Duess said. "When there was no jail and no courthouse, trials were to be held in taverns." Some, like Newtown's Bird in Hand, were even equipped with a jail cell.

Duess added Bucks County's first Catholic parishioners even practiced religion in taverns, meeting in the Township House on Sycamore Street (now The Saloon) prior to the construction of Olde St. Andrew's Church.

Revolutionary-era taverns also served to represent the region's diverse cultures and political ideologies, often with bars serving only patriots and bars serving only loyalists situated on the same street. "The patriots knew they weren't welcome [in loyalist bars] and, for the most part, they just didn't go," Duess said.

She says many tavern names and signs reflected their political views, and some owners would con-

struct two storefront signs to attract more business, affixing a loyalist sign when redcoats were stationed in their town, and changing over to a patriotic theme when colonial soldiers took up camp.

"Anytime there was anything to be discussed about independence, it would be discussed in the taverns," Duess noted. In her book, she tells the story of George Washington and his men frequenting several taverns in the region in the nights before their historic crossing of the Delaware.

"Most of the real interesting history, especially during the revolutionary time period, is down in the lower Bucks area," Duess said.

In addition to dinners at McKonkey's Ferry Tavern, Washington met with General Greene at Bogart's Tavern, now Edna's Antiques, Buckingham, to lay the final plans for the attack on Trenton. Duess says the revolutionaries were so protective of their secret mission that even patriots were forced from the location before the meetings could commence. "Nobody could hear anything about that," she said. "General Washington personally wrote the code words on pieces of paper, that's how protective they were of their plans."

According to Duess' book, some towns were so influenced by their local tavern, they took their names from the popular lodges, citing the Ox Inn, which was located in what is now known as Oxford Valley, and Doyle's Inn, still operational as the Doylestown Inn.

Among the other taverns and inns mentioned in her book, the Brick Hotel in Newtown, Langhorne Hotel, Township House (The Saloon) in Newtown, Hulmeville Inn, Pineville Tavern, and Piper's Tavern still open their doors to customers today. Bristol's King George Inn is the oldest operational establishment in Bucks County.

"They aren't just operational, they're the hot spots

of the area," Duess boasted.

Her book also extends beyond the taproom to reflect on spots like the site of a once forgotten Revolutionary Cemetery in Langhorne Borough.

According to Duess, hundreds of dead from a nearby makeshift hospital were left in unmarked graves at the site. It wasn't until around 200 years later, when plans arose for a housing development on the land, that archaeologists discovered the plot.

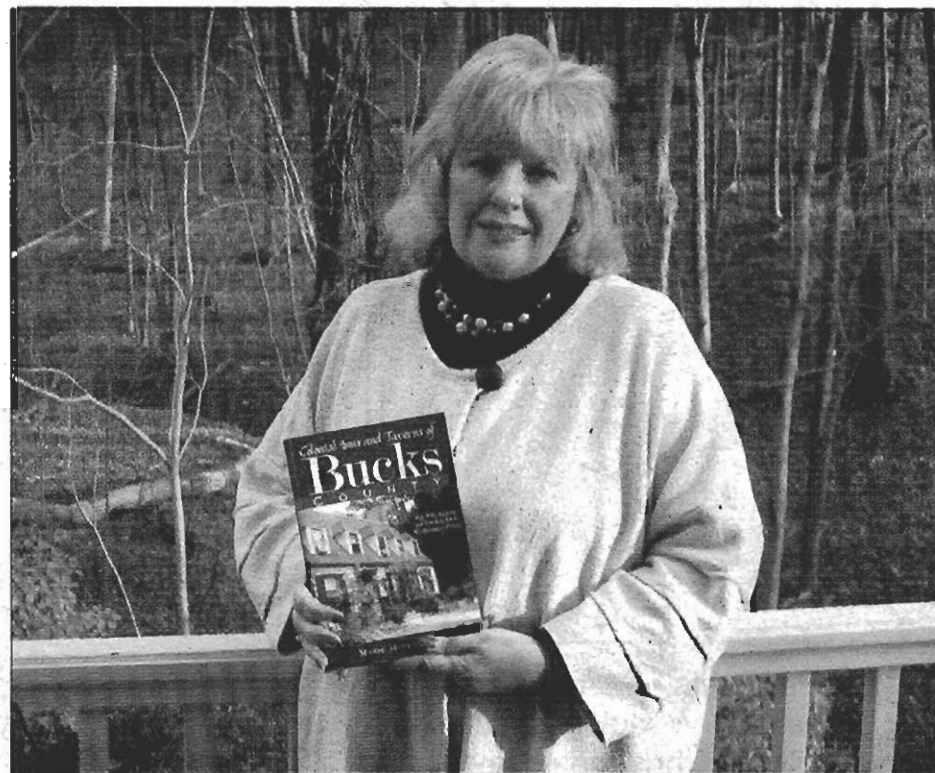
"They found the nail heads in the perfect shape of a coffin," Duess reflected.

She also goes into much detail regarding the story of lost love for a one-time resident of Pen Ryn Mansion, Bensalem. The story couldn't have been better for the one-time historic fiction writer, combining class differences, family betrayal, and even a resolution that included the assistance of Benjamin Franklin. The story was too juicy for Duess to leave out.

Duess also dedicates the final chapters of her book to the Delaware Canal and its impact on towns like Yardley and New Hope. While doing the research on these portions, the author found there to be too much important information for one chapter, and is now working on a follow-up book specifically about the canal.

"Yardley was a very important center," Duess said. "And the Yardley Inn was important. I think it's amazing that no matter how many times it's flooded, they build it up, and build it up." She added that the current owner feels the community has such a deep connection to the inn, closing it is simply not an option.

A freelance writer, consultant, and former St. Mary Medical Center marketing specialist, Duess felt inspired to write her historic look at Bucks County when her sister-in-law died of cancer. She says the realization that time is limited pushed her to fulfill this dream.



Mary Duess' new book, "Colonial Inns and Taverns of Bucks County," digs deep into Bucks County's historic taprooms and eateries.

"It's never too late to do what you really want to do," she said. "If you say, 'boy, I would like to do this or I would like to do that,' just do it." She added that now that she has started writing full-time, she doesn't plan to ever stop.

While she is admittedly not a historian, Duess describes herself as a "history buff" who admires the full-time historians such as the staff at the Newtown Historic Association, Langhorne Historic Society, and Grundy Memorial

Library, who helped her through her research.

She is also incredibly grateful to former Governor and Bucks County native Mark Schweiker for writing the book's foreword.

"Colonial Inns and Taverns of Bucks County: How Pubs, Taprooms and Hostelrys Made Revolutionary History" is available throughout Bucks County in Barnes & Noble stores, the Doylestown Bookshop, Newtown Bookshop, and some of the

historic taverns featured in its pages. The book can also be purchased online as www.amazon.com and www.thehistorypress.com.

Duess will be holding book signings on Dec. 9 at Washington Crossing Historic Park, in conjunction with the rehearsal of the Washington's Crossing reenactment; Dec. 15 at the Doylestown Bookshop, and Dec. 22 at the Barnes & Noble, Oxford Valley.

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