

# Proposed Renovations, Upgrades, and New Entry Addition to The Wright Tavern

## Project Narrative for 2023 HDC Application

### Background

The Wright Tavern, located at the intersection of Lexington Road, Main Street, and Lowell Road in Concord Center, is currently owned and maintained by First Parish in Concord. Originally constructed in 1747, the building is best known as the place where the Provincial Congress met on the eve of the American Revolution. It served as the headquarters of the Minutemen in the early morning hours of April 19, 1775, and as the headquarters for the British forces later that day. Over the course of its 275 year history, the Wright Tavern has been a gathering place for many in the ever growing and changing Concord community.



*Figure 1 – from etching by A. Doolittle, c. 1775*

The tavern is depicted in the famous, if somewhat fanciful, series of etchings by Amos Doolittle completed in 1775, one of which is see above (Figure 1). While not an architectural rendering, it is important to note the variety of additions and outbuildings adjacent to the tavern. This building has a long and complicated history of addition, renovation, and re-purposing.

As the Wright Tavern changed hands throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the building continued to undergo numerous renovations and additions. The grade change between Main Street and Lexington Road was gradually raised. At the time of Samuel Barber's c. 1839 etching (Figure 2), there was an almost 1-story drop between the front and the back of the tavern, and the building had mostly settled into the configuration that we see today. In 1885, the building was sold to First Parish and later served as a restaurant and inn.

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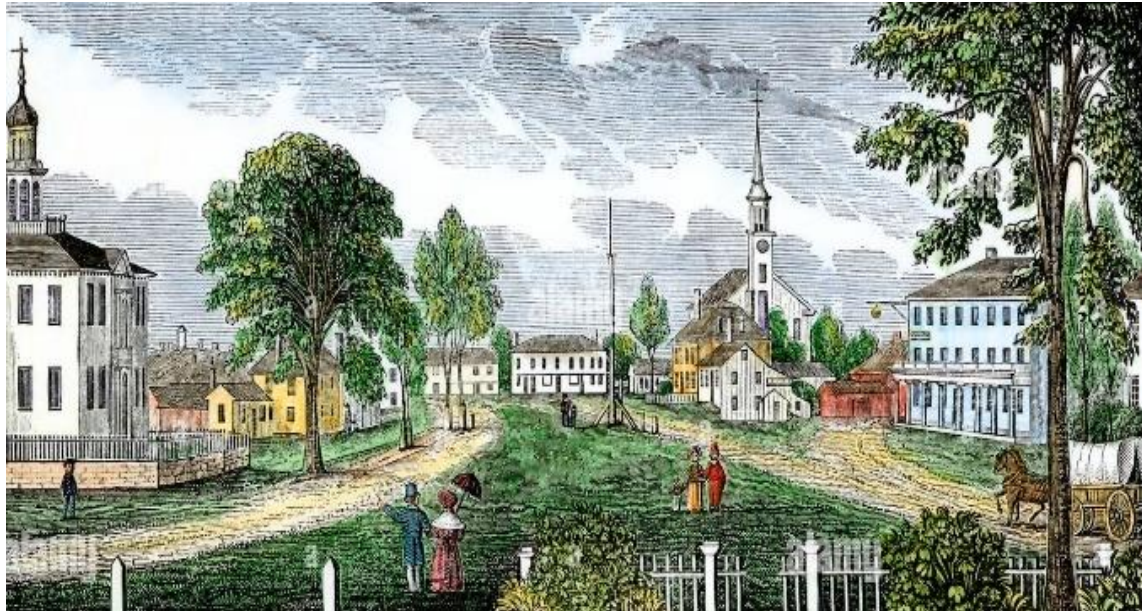


Figure 2 – etching by Barber, Concord Center, 1839

By 1955, the building functioned as a gift shop for the Trinitarian Congregational Church. All the outbuildings had been demolished, major additions on the Monument Square side had been removed and/or rebuilt, and the clapboard siding had been repainted to its original red color. Despite the many changes over the years, the essential elements of the original house and ell facing Monument Square remained intact.



Figure 3 - Wright Tavern circa 1850



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Figure 4 - Wright Tavern c., 1890



Figure 5 - Wright Tavern c. 1920

The Wright Tavern was formally designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966 (see attached MACRIS database report, no. CON.329). At that time, the building appeared much as it does today and served as a museum and gift shop. In 1998, the tavern was primarily used as office space for First Parish and other tenants, and in 2015 a small interior renovation was undertaken in collaboration with the Concord Museum to make the building more accessible to the general public. However, the museum's long-term plans changed, and the building reverted to its previous use as office and classroom space for First Parish.

Seeing the need for a long-term plan, First Parish established the **Wright Tavern Legacy Trust** in 2021 and charged the Trust with designing and executing a long-term stewardship plan for the tavern. The Trust has convened several meetings, received both public and private input, and with the receipt of some CPC funding has begun work on the structural rehabilitation and conversion of the tavern into a building that can both welcome and accommodate the general public for generations to come

### Current project plan

Given its storied past, survival through centuries of Concord's history, and position adjacent to Monument Square, the Trust's vision for the Wright Tavern is to create a place that is both a living museum - open to the general public, historians, and architecture buffs alike - and a center for the renewal of American democracy. The Trust is determined to properly steward this unique and special building so that it continues to survive as a historic benchmark and substantial artifact of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century construction.

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*Figure 6 - Wright Tavern, 2022*

From the exterior, most of the existing building – the main house, ell, and the sun porch – will remain as-is, with moderate in-kind repairs and upgrades. The only major change will be the addition of a modest, 275 sqft, entry pavilion on the Main Street side of the building, which will extend no further towards Monument Square than the current, single-story bump out. This addition draws inspiration from the existing character of the building, as well as elements of New England vernacular architecture seen in historic images of the tavern. Carefully worked into a rather complicated corner, best seen in Figure 5, the addition will feature design elements such as saltbox style massing, a gable end roof, and wood clapboard and trim to match the existing building. This addition will open out onto an entrance plaza and pocket park that will serve as a focal point for gatherings and outdoor programming. This area will feature elements such as granite seat walls, red brick pavers, interpretive signage, and seasonal tables and chairs for the enjoyment of the general public. The addition of this new entry pavilion and pocket park will help to create an accessible, welcoming, and compelling connection between the tavern and the town.

We hope the HDC will join the Trust in making the Wright Tavern accessible to the general public as both a rare architectural artifact and an historically significant destination in the Town of Concord.