



# Rum Punch & Revolution: Taverngoing & Public Life in Eighteenth Century Philadelphia (Early American Studies)

*Peter Thompson*

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'Twas Honest old Noah first planted the Vine  
And mended his morals by drinking its Wine.  
—from a drinking song by Benjamin Franklin

There were, Peter Thompson notes, some one hundred and fifty synonyms for inebriation in common use in colonial Philadelphia and, on the eve of the Revolution, just as many licensed drinking establishments. Clearly, eighteenth-century Philadelphians were drawn to the tavern. In addition to the obvious lure of the liquor, taverns offered overnight accommodations, meals, and stabling for visitors. They also served as places to gossip, gamble, find work, make trades, and gather news.

In *Rum Punch and Revolution*, Thompson shows how the public houses provided a setting in which Philadelphians from all walks of life revealed their characters and ideas as nowhere else. He takes the reader into the cramped confines of the colonial bar room, describing the friendships, misunderstandings and conflicts which were generated among the city's drinkers and investigates the profitability of running a tavern in a city which, until independence, set maximum prices on the cost of drinks and services in its public houses.

Taverngoing, Thompson writes, fostered a sense of citizenship that influenced political debate in colonial Philadelphia and became an issue in the city's revolution. Opinionated and profoundly undeferential, taverngoers did more than drink; they forced their political leaders to consider whether and how public opinion could be represented in the counsels of a newly independent nation.

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