

Mead's Tavern: History Through the Lens of Historic Preservation

The New London project provides LU history students opportunities for experiential learning in archaeology and historic preservation.

History of Mead's Tavern

Mead's Tavern, the oldest standing structure in Central Virginia, provides a unique insight into daily life in colonial and early 19th-century New London, Virginia. Constructed in 1763, the building functioned as a tavern offering food, drink, and a night's lodging to locals and travelers alike. Its location adjacent to the Bedford County courthouse made it a natural stop for those involved with legal matters or other aspects of court days and a likely space for the exchange of news and lively discussions of current events.



Mead's Tavern is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for:

- its significance to the history of backcountry Virginia from the colonial era to the early 19th century.
- its representation of tavern construction and 18th-century building techniques.
- its potential to yield new information about early American history through archaeology.

Discovery Through Archaeology & Architectural Investigation

Archaeology at Mead's Tavern has uncovered many thousands of artifacts that tell the story of those who lived and worked there, both during the tavern period and when the building housed a school for girls. A survey of the lot and full excavations of the basement, porch, and wing yielded objects ranging from doll fragments to keys, from sewing implements to eating utensils, and dozens of varieties of glass and ceramics, some of which are displayed here.

Archeological excavation in the basement uncovered the base of the original chimney (top right) which apparently connected to a corner fireplace on the first floor. This discovery combined with other archaeological evidence suggests that the basement was used as a living space before the center chimney was installed in the early 1800s.

Architectural investigation of the interior (middle right) revealed elements of 18th-century construction and evidence of an extensive renovation in the early 19th century. Hand-hewn beams, wrought nails, remnants of paint, and examples of reused elements contribute to our knowledge of building techniques and the materials available in backcountry Virginia during this period.

One of the most significant historic features of the building survives in the basement foundation. The front wall (bottom right), constructed of coarse stone rubble capped by brick laid in English bond, is believed to be the oldest surviving intact brick wall in Virginia west of Richmond.

