



Originally constructed in 1652 as a two story, two room residence for Francis Brinley; William Mayes, Sr. acquired "the massively framed building and quarter acre of land fenced with Pales at the corner of Farewell and Marlborough Streets" and converted it to a tavern in 1673.

For almost one hundred years, years before the Colony House was constructed, this large and comfortable tavern was the meeting place of the Colony's General Assembly, Criminal Court and City Council. In 1708 the Tavern became "home of the businessman's lunch" as councilors dined here and charged their meals to the public treasury.

In 1702 William Mayes succeeded his father as innkeeper and was granted a license to sell "...all sorts of Strong Drink." William was a notorious pirate operating in the Red Sea, who returned to Newport with his bounty. Openly welcomed and protected by the townspeople, the privateer caused much embarrassment to officials of the British Colony. Mary Mayes Nichols, William's sister, and her husband Robert shortly followed as innkeepers. For the next two hundred years, with one brief interruption, the Tavern would remain in the Nichols family.



Jonathan Nichols became tavern keeper in 1730 and gave the tavern its present name. Walter Nichols, the proprietor in 1776, moved his family out of the tavern and Newport rather than live with the Hessian mercenaries billeted there by the British. When he returned after the war he added the gambrel roof and addition and reopened an enlarged White Horse Tavern.

In 1895, the building was sold out of the family and became a rooming house. By 1954 the tavern showed years of use and neglect. Through the generosity of the Van Beuren family the property was acquired by the Preservation Society and meticulously restored. It opened as a restaurant in 1957. Their generosity saved the structure from demolition.

O.L. Pitts of Fort Worth, Texas and three partners graciously purchased the White Horse Tavern in 1981 to relieve the Preservation Society of being in the restaurant business. As sponsors of the America Cup they continued the tradition of good fellowship, food and cheer. On his ninetieth birthday, O.L. Pitts turned the stewardship over to Paul Hogan, a Newport native and only the eighth owner in three hundred and fifty years. In 2014, a Newport-based group acquired the property and became the ninth owner in the over 350-year history of the Tavern.

No building is believed more typical of colonial Newport than the Tavern, with its clapboard walls, gambrel roof and plain pediment doors bordering the sidewalk. Inside, its giant beams, small stairway hard against the chimney, tiny front hall and cavernous fireplaces are the very essence of 17th Century American architecture.

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