



Food & Drink

Taverns were a really important part of how colonists ate. In the 18th century, meat and fish were a really important part of the colonists' diet because they were readily available. At Fraunces Tavern, oysters were really popular. We're right by the water, and oysters are actually native to New York Harbor, so they were readily available. They were actually so common that they even named our street 'Pearl Street,' after the pearls you find in oysters.

Games & Leisure

Colonists also came to taverns to play games. Playing cards were a favorite pastime in taverns. The 18th century deck had 52 cards with 13 cards in each of the four suits and no jokers. The earliest cards were printed only on one side and lacked numbers, because the colonists' literacy rate was low, and they were more likely to recognize symbols instead of numbers. Through the use of cards, tavern keepers were affected by the 1764 Stamp Act, which taxed all paper items.

This game board was used for checkers and several other games. Players also polished stones, peanuts, or dried pieces of corn as markers. Tavern keepers charged players for the use of cards, dice, and other gaming equipment.

Gambling was illegal in the 18th century, but was allowed in taverns because it was not strictly enforced, and only really happened in public spaces, like taverns.

Do these games look similar to the games you play today?

Center of Information

Broadsides like this one were printed sheets of information that would be posted in taverns all around the 13 colonies. Broadsides were used mainly for advertisements, recipes, songs— but mostly importantly, to spread laws, such as taxes. The most well-known broadside to come out of the American Revolution was the Declaration of Independence in 1776.