

For six months I have been driving past the Fryfogle Inn and have been thinking about what the Fryfogle Inn is, and why it has a plaque in front of it, and why *that building*, that place, is important enough for people to remember when they drive between Stratford and Kitchener just past Shakespeare. Do you know the Fryfogle Inn? Fryfogle's Inn was a well-known tavern - a pub! The plaque outside on Highway 7/8 explains that one of the first settlers of Perth County was Sebastian Fryfogel. In December 1828 Fryfogel opened a partially completed log building on that location – and he opened it as an inn.

Fryfogel himself held various important political offices in the County, in 1851 he was the first Warden of County of Perth. No doubt he did business at the Inn, he wouldn't have had an office in town. When the Canada Company's Huron Tract became opened for settlement Fryfogel's road became better known as the settler's road or Huron Road. The building we see today was re-established becoming, as the sign says "a favourite stopping place for travelers and persons settling in the Huron Tract."

For those who visited Fryfogel's in the midst of the storms of nature it was a shelter from the overwhelming snow drifts and Lake Huron's bitter wet winds. For those who visited in the midst of the storms of life (being far from home, not knowing where you're going to sleep or whether you'd have money to feed your family) it was a place where companionship could be found, connections could be made, maybe shelter or job tips could be secured, in no small measure finding your way to Fryfogel's meant that no matter what you were going through - you were not alone. Fryfogel's was a refuge and a place of hope. Have you been reading all of that from the signs at Fryfogel's Inn?

This Fall I have been reading two books by history professors, one named William Westfall, the other Julia Roberts.

William Westfall's book is called *Two World's: The protestant Culture of Nineteenth Century Ontario* and Westfall's book deals with churches and the often separate worlds of the sacred and the secular. Westfall's book deals with "great men" of the church in the development of Canada as a nation - Anglican John Strachan and Methodist Egerton Ryerson.

Julia Roberts' book is called *In Mixed Company: Taverns and Public Life in Upper Canada*, and her book on the other hand deals with taverns and pubs as places where separations in society were overcome: men and women and even children of different financial circumstances, races, ethnicities, language groups and cultures could gather together to get their needs met – shelter, food clothing, business, sales, company, politics, community meetings, courting, meeting a mate, buying some "refreshment" to supplement your home brew... and so on. Roberts talks about taverns as places where you could warm up and change a cold, dirty baby as much as a place where fur-traders and big-time businessmen (Whites, Blacks and "Natives") slept and haggled over deals in multiple languages.

Westfall deals with churches as places of separation and Roberts talks about taverns as places where boundaries are crossed.

Both books talk about the development of Ontario overlapping in the mid-1800's and what can be learned from the way the people of that time period intentionally built their buildings, what the buildings were intended to mean and who they were intending to impress.

Westfall says the construction of churches after 1840 was intended to throw off disorderly "frontier" religious movements and take up being "church" in establishment communities. The buildings would communicate the faith to the people on the street declaring themselves as God's houses in God's communities in His (yes His) Dominion from sea to sea. Across Toronto, and then out in the country, denominations built and rebuilt massive ornate churches in the "gothic" medieval western European style particularly including impressive heavenward spires. The buildings would preach a new world of spiritual values in the "cause of Christ's kingdom on earth. (p. 135)."

You know as well as I what happened, we got into competitions over whose spire was higher, or newer, or more decorative and we overbuilt churches - and visitors often went without being greeted - by those - not - sitting in the empty pews. The buildings, the monuments in stone, which left behind the frontier faith movements, certainly were signs to people on the street. All our separate churches were places where men and women and children could only sometimes find themselves welcome. Race, ethnicity, language, culture, these became sources of discourse and debate. And our drink of refreshment went un-tasted as the community sought companionship elsewhere.

In contrast, Julia Roberts notes that tavern were built - to look like taverns on the outside - so folks could easily understand what would happen inside – diversities of people could get their needs met in these buildings. Many of them, like the Fryfogel Inn were built in the "Georgian" style which is typified by geometry,

proportion and symmetry – practicality and balance and the buildings were “vernacular” they made sense (!) to all kinds of people (!) in town and also out on the dark roads. And what happened inside taverns was negotiated with consideration for profit but also with thoughtfulness to whether the tavern keeper was raising children at the inn or not, and to whether the ladies wanted drinking men sitting close to them as they refreshed themselves.

There were at times problems, some comical, some tragic, as Roberts points out, but evidence shows that there were fewer fights and problems than we once believed, and women were far more involved in public life at the pub than we’ve been left to believe.

Now hold all those external heavenward reaching spires in your minds-eye and turn back with me to look more closely at three locations and hear three additional stories about place and space and purpose. The first story is longer, the latter two stories are brief,

The first story is from Roberts’ book.

*Gentlewoman Mary Reid Strickland*, accompanied by a servant and carrying a babe in arms, walked the Huron Road toward Stratford. Six miles from Fryfogel’s tavern, a stranger “politely” offered to take the baby for her and then took off with the child so quickly that she lost sight of him.

When Strickland, who feared the worst, reached the tavern, “there sat the man with the baby on his knee.” She observed that “he hoped she would give him the price of a quart of whiskey for his trouble, for the child was main heavy, God bless her.” Strickland extended the man the treat in response, a gesture that ended her obligation and, therefore, engaged the lady in the cultural rituals of drink and the meanings they carried.

Strickland’s behavior [Roberts says], does not mesh well with depictions of women’s experience in Canadian historiography, where women join temperance societies, haul husbands home from the tavern, or imbibe at home in shameful secrecy or in raucous disorder on the streets. (p. 147).”

Sometimes *there were* problems at the taverns of old, *but not* as often as we thought for that era. Perhaps the problems of alcoholism and “the bar” that we usually think of are more so post World War problems. In today’s culture of overindulging vices we can’t turn our backs on the problems at “the bar” but nor can we be self-righteous - as we in the church overindulge our vices too! Sin is sin and we’re all guilty.

Now we go to another Inn, one in the midst of high season when the rates are at their peak yet the building is crammed to the rafters because of a government policy about a census and taxes. There we see a newly-wed woman who only months before was an unwed pregnant thirteen year old.

The lights are on and people are being taken care of but there’s no room for the carpenter and his road-weary bride at the Inn. Thankfully someone thought to put them up in the barn -- with the animals for heat since they could not have a fire.

That very night the woman gives birth - with her husband crossing every conceivable boundary of propriety in order to save her life - and the life of the child - since there was no mid-wife to assist them. The carpenter and his new bride wrap the babe in swaddling clothes and lay him in a manger - because there was no room for them at the Inn, no traveller meeting them on the way to help them carry the baby or the weight of the world on their shoulders.

Whatever that barn looked like it was a shelter in the midst of the storm of their lives. They wouldn’t know it yet, but with the birth of this baby they were about to become refugees on the run from their own government... shortly Herod would send the death squads out in a spree intended to kill this child before his earthly life really began. This barn whatever it looked like was a life-saving sanctuary and, if only for a little while, they could have peace.

A refuge, a sanctuary, a place not to be alone, a place to eat and rest and be acknowledged no matter how much money you have or don’t have... an “inn” from out ... in the storms of nature and life.

Our final location to look at - is this building - on Erie Street not far from Huron Road. On December 1, 2012 100 diners streaming in to warm up, be welcomed by a smile, to eat a delicious, nutritious meal made with thoughtfulness, attention, care, a public place where diverse people made room for one another. Sin is sin and we’re all guilty, but grace is amazing *and we are all needy*. Days like that, in places like, this are plaque-worthy days truly marking important places that speak of our incarnated God in ways worthy remembering.