



History of the Nassau Inn



NASSAU INN
PALMER SQUARE



HISTORIC HOTELS
of AMERICA

National Trust for Historic Preservation





PRINCETON

Princeton has always played a significant role in the history of New Jersey and the United States. Settled in the late 17th century, it was named Prince-Town in honor of Prince William of Orange and Nassau. In 1756 it became the home of the College of New Jersey - now Princeton University - with the entire college housed in Nassau Hall, the largest academic building in the colonies.

The Battle of Princeton, fought in a nearby field in January of 1777, proved to be a decisive victory for General George Washington and his troops. Two of Princeton's leading citizens, Richard Stockton and John Witherspoon, signed the Declaration of Independence, and during the summer of 1783, the Continental Congress met in Nassau Hall making Princeton the country's first capital for four months.



Woodrow Wilson casting ballot at Engine Co. #3

Located midway between New York and Philadelphia, the town was the overnight stagecoach stop on the Trenton-New Brunswick line until the mid-19th century. In the 1830s the building of a nearby canal and railroad encouraged further commerce, real estate development, and general prosperity.

A center for learning and culture throughout its history, Princeton has been home to world-renowned scholars, scientists, writers, and statesmen including two United States presidents, Woodrow Wilson and Grover Cleveland.

In 1930, the Institute for Advanced Study was founded in Princeton and became the first residential institute for scholars in the country, with Albert Einstein appointed as one of its first professors. The 20th century has seen an influx of scholars, research personnel, and corporations from all parts of the world.

Shaped by residents of all backgrounds, Princeton has been a dynamic community, growing and changing with the times yet retaining an essential small-town quality.

Paul Robeson grew up in Princeton and was a prominent African-American singer, actor, and activist known for his powerful voice and his tireless work for civil rights and social justice. He alongside other artisans from Italy, Scotland, and Ireland have contributed to the town's rich architectural history. This architectural legacy, spanning the entire history of American architecture, is well-preserved through buildings by nationally renowned architects such as Benjamin Latrobe, Ralph Adams Cram, McKim, Mead & White, Robert Venturi, and Michael Graves.

The Nassau Inn has always played a significant role in the history of Princeton. It is currently set in the center of the Downtown: Palmer Square.



From the Historical Society of Princeton:
A group of men on the balcony of the old Nassau Inn, one suggested to be Theodore Roosevelt.

OLD NASS

The Nassau Inn structure originated in 1756 by Judge Thomas Leonard, two decades before the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Leonard moved there to spend the last years of his life in view of the college that he had helped to bring to Princeton. When he passed away in 1769, Judge Leonard's elegant town residence became a hostelry, called by its new owner, "college Inn". The first proprietor was Christopher Beekman, whose natural talent as an Innkeeper soon developed the establishment into the center of the town's life.

Wine and argument flowed freely in Christopher Beekman's taproom, or drinking room, where his wife helped tend the punchbowls. During these uncertain times, students and townsmen gathered over food and drink of the news and opinions of honored guests' such as Paul Revere, Robert Morris, and Thomas Paine, who stayed the night more than once at the hospitable public house. In 1775, the Committee of Safety met at College Inn, and a few weeks later, delegates were stopping overnight on their way to the first Continental Congress in Philadelphia. Signers of the Declaration of Independence, passing through Princeton in 1776, rested at College Inn.

As the war began, Military men took the place of travelers. Officers of the continental Army, also the British and Hessians (depending upon which side was in possession of the town), whiled away their time



in the taproom. Months later the Battle of Yorktown and the signing of the Peace Treaty were properly celebrated over College Inn punchbowls. When the Continental Congress met in Princeton in 1783, the national celebrities of the day were guests of the Inn, which were just a few steps from the historic session in Nassau Hall.

At the turn of the 18th century, Christopher Beekman and wife, Grace Otis Beekman, retired. John Gifford took over the hostelry, changed its name to Nassau Inn, and swung a sign picturing Nassau Hall over its entrance.

The 52 Nassau Street establishment closed its doors in 1937, when it had become evident that the town and the University needed a larger more comfortable modern hotel which would preserve the traditions of "Old Nass", as well as provide suitable suites for travelers and college guests. The construction of Nassau Tavern/Inn on Palmer Square succeeded this.





NASSAU INN

In 1937, the Nassau Inn opened their doors at their current location in the center of Palmer Square. The charm of Nassau Inn lies in the fact that it tells a story. The interesting contrast in the exterior design of the different wings is the delightful fancy of its architect, depicting the imaginary progress of a successful inn from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century.



The portion of the earlier period is built in the style of Princeton's founders, with the low-raftered ceiling of oak timber, large stone fireplace in the center, and quaint little staircase. A small stone addition and a substantial brick wing of several stories were added through the years as the proprietors found the need to expand.

Just inside the red door of the Inn is a stone platform seat, one of the few authentic remains of the original Nassau Inn. This platform was used in the cellar of "Old Nass" to support casks of wines and spirits. On the north wall of the lobby, near the entrance to the dining room (Palmer Room), there are two weapons, a Hessian sword and a gun that were used in the battlefield of Princeton.



On the Main Lobby floor is the famous Yankee Doodle Tap Room, a favorite gathering place of students and townsmen. There are rough-hewn beams and solid oak furniture – some of which is rough-hewn too by the students – who still observe the time-honored custom of carving initials into tabletops, reminiscent of "Old Nass", amongst these carvings you will also find Albert Einstein's.



The centerpiece of the Tap Room is a 13-foot mural titled *Yankee Doodle*, painted by Norman Rockwell in 1937 above the grand oak bar, from which the room gets its name. Rockwell captures in a humorous way the historical legend of Yankee Doodle, who came to town upon his pony, amid the mockery from the Hessians and townsfolk, but had the love and admiration of the Innkeeper's daughter, who is visible in the window on the left side of the painting. Norman Rockwell also painted the Yankee Doodle sign (at the entrance).

The Yankee Doodle Tap Room is historically known for being Princeton's destination for dining and community gatherings. This restaurant has a unique atmosphere and features entertainment on many occasions that also offers an American gastropub menu. In the dining room, well-known Princeton University Graduates have their portraits adorning the wall, whose youth has been forever encapsulated with their framed senior class photos.

The long standing tradition of Princeton class jackets is said to have originated in the Nassau Inn shortly after the prohibition. The jackets, aka beer coats, appeared just before WWI on students frequenting the Inn, they were said to hide the smells associated with an evening in the Tavern and were easy to wash.



“Rest Traveler, Rest, and Banish Thoughts of Care; Drink to Thy Friends and Recommend Them Here”

Inscribed over the hearth, the quote above dates back to 1937, when the Nassau Inn was rebuilt on Palmer Square. The fireplace beneath is lit during the wintry months and provides welcoming warmth to the guests.

In 2010 the restaurant added a patio and expanded the seating capabilities. Now guests can dine alfresco in the heart of Palmer Square seasonally!

The Yankee Doodle Tap Room and the Nassau Inn remain an integral establishment in the Princeton community still serving residents, travelers, dignitaries, students, and alumni alike.

Nassau Inn

PALMER SQUARE • PRINCETON • N.J.

The Coach Room of the Nassau Inn exudes the true charm of a Colonial coach stop as it existed during Revolutionary times. Open from breakfast to midnight, the Coach Room is an ideal meeting place.



NASSAU TAVERN

PALMER SQUARE
PRINCETON, N. J.

— large fireplace and a snug settle in the
— travelers through these parts.
— oak timber, beloved of



New Jersey's oldest town, Princeton, retains the color of its old times. Historical Princeton, settled in the site of The Battle of Princeton, all where met the Continental Congress, Princeton University, and "Morven", New Jersey's Governor.

eller Co., Hackettstown, N.J.

POST CARD

Address

NASSAU TAVERN

PALMER SQUARE
PRINCETON, N. J.

The famous Yankee Doodle Tap Room, showing the brilliant Yankee Doodle mural, by the noted American artist, Norman Rockwell. Yankee Doodle comes to town, astride his prancing pony, jeered by the Hessians and townsfolk, but catching the fancy of the innkeeper's idling daughter.

Saw your new great-grand son yesterday. He is a fine baby - Barbara's first - Am seeing lots of living - never saw before -

POST CARD



Mr. J. W. Daugler
822 N. Zanga
Dallas, Texas



SAU INN

SQUARE • PRINCETON • N.J.

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NASSAU INN TIMELINE

1759

Judge Leonard dies and his home becomes “The Sign of the College,” referred to as the College Inn.

1783

National politicians are guests at the Inn while the Continental Congress meets in Princeton at Nassau Hall.

1937

The old building at 52 Nassau Street is torn down along with others, as Edgar Palmer developed Palmer Square into a town center.

1937

Normal Rockwell paints his largest mural, *Yankee Doodle*, on the wall behind the Tap Room bar, naming the restaurant.

1960's

Nassau Inn expands from 49 rooms to 119 rooms.

1985

Nassau Inn builds the Wilson Wing addition, expanding to 203 guestrooms including 27 Suites.

1756

Judge Thomas Leonard builds a home at 52 Nassau Street in view of the college he helped bring to Princeton

1776

Some of the signers of the Declaration of Independence rest at College Inn on their way to Philadelphia.

1800's

Picture of Nassau Hall is hung over the front desk; and the name of the Inn is changed to Nassau Inn.

1937


Nassau Inn reopens in Palmer Square with 49 guestrooms, and is initially called “Nassau Tavern.”

1944

Following the death of Edgar Palmer in 1943, his widow donates all of Palmer Square, including the Nassau Inn, to Princeton University.

1972

Women are allowed in the Yankee Doodle Tap Room for the first time.

 In 2010, Nassau Inn builds an outdoor dining patio on Palmer Square West as an extension of the Yankee Doodle Tap Room.

 In 2012, Nassau Inn completes rejuvenation for a total of 188 guest rooms.

NASSAU INN SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Welcome to the Nassau Inn! Since 1756, we've been more than just a place to stay; we're a place where memories are made. This self-guided tour invites you to step back in time and experience rich history that has made our hotel a beloved landmark for over 250 years.

Lobby 1: A Glimpse Into the Past

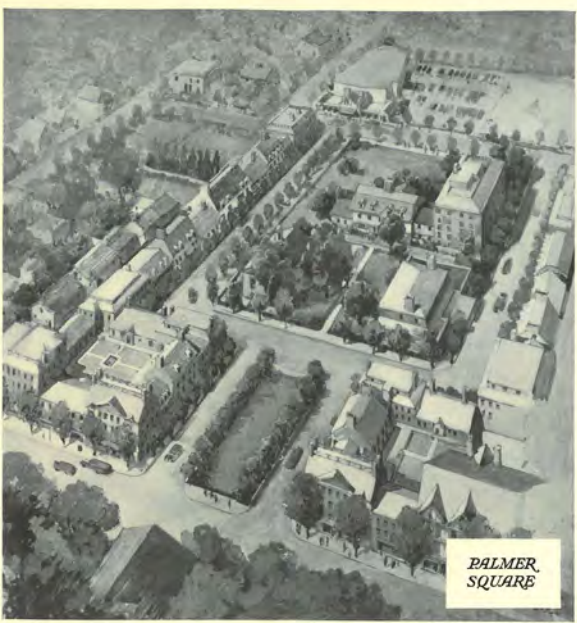
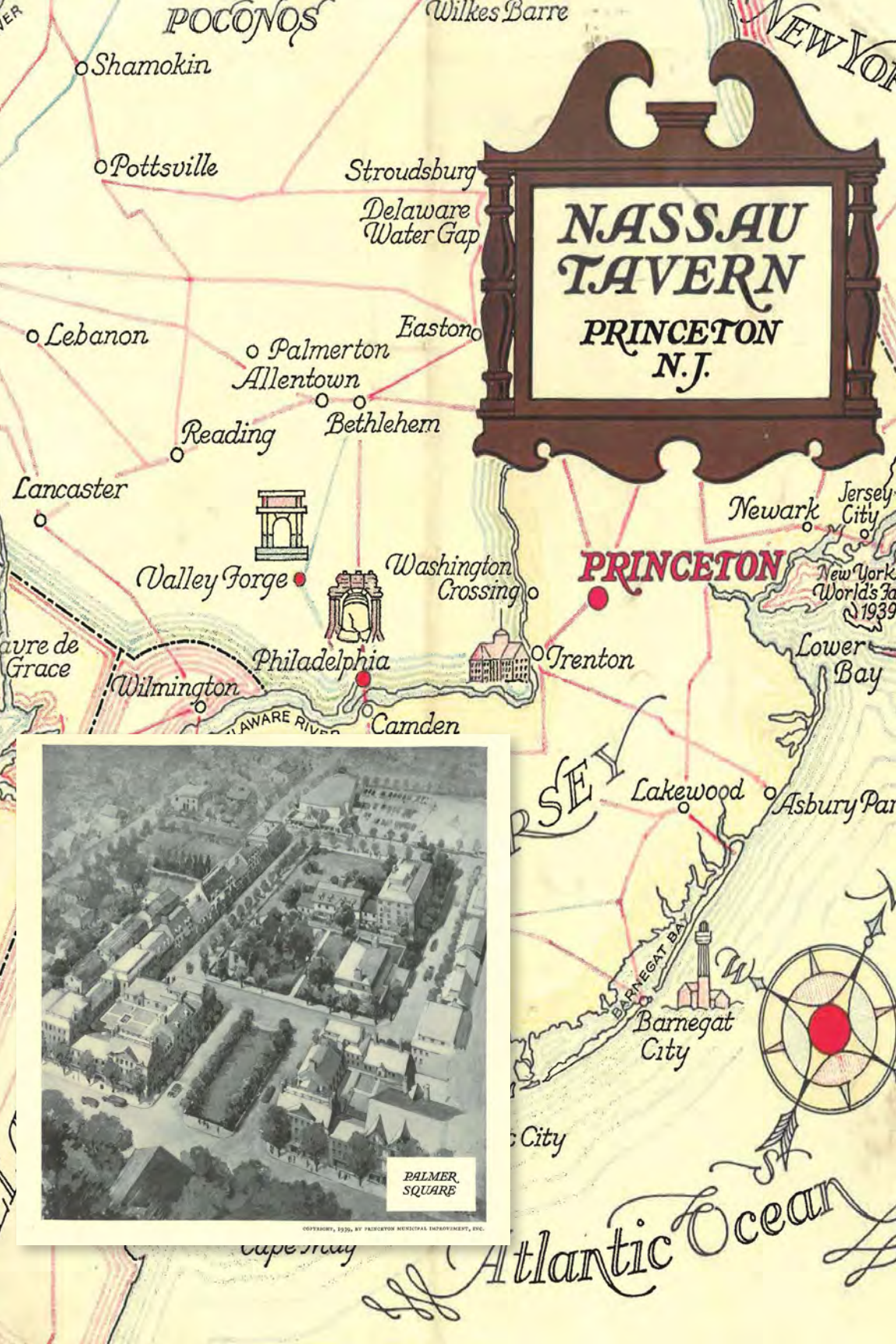
- Opposite the front desk, a column showcases a **frame** containing three registration cards from some of the very first guests who stayed at the Nassau Inn when it reopened at its current location in 1937.

The Yankee Doodle Tap Room: Echoes of Tradition

- As you enter the Tap Room from Lobby 1, look to your right to find the original Yankee Doodle Tap Room **sign** on the coatroom door.
- On the brick wall to your left, find a display of photos, including one of **Theodore Roosevelt** standing on the original Nassau Inn balcony.
- Lining the walls above the restaurant booths, you'll find **Princeton University** team photos from the 1930s to the 1960s, celebrating decades of camaraderie and spirit.
- Legend has it, **Dr. Albert Einstein** etched his name into one of the dining tables—a tradition many visitors have since followed.
- Adjacent to the bar, above the wooden tiger banister, hangs a **lamp** originally of the old Nassau Inn. It was taken by a fraternity before the building's demolition. Decades later, a member returned it to the hotel.
- Turn your attention to the brick wall leading out to the Tap Room Patio, where you'll find **menus** from the last several decades.
- Behind the bar you'll find the original *Yankee Doodle*, **Norman Rockwell's largest mural**, commissioned by Edgar Palmer during the construction of Palmer Square in the 1930s.
- Circling back to the coatroom door, admire the famous photo wall featuring 60 class photos of **distinguished Princeton alumni**.

Lobby 2: Relics and Remembrances

- As you walk upstairs to the L2 Lobby, you'll find a **grandfather clock** to the right of the fireplace, keeping time since the hotel's opening in 1937.
- Flanking the fireplace are a **musket and sword** carried by General Edward Hughes during the Battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777.
- Walking past the fireplace, just outside the John Witherspoon Room, you'll find an **original bench** that had been in the hotel since 1937.
- Look above the bench to find a "Nassau Inn 1756" **sign**. This historic sign was stolen by a fraternity in the 1940s and was only returned in late 2023.
- As you approach the main door that leads out to the L2 patio, look to your left for a stone and **timber platform bench** from the original Nassau Inn (1756) that supported casks of wine and spirits in the old cellar.



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ESTABLISHED
1756



PRINCETON
 **NASSAU INN**
PALMER SQUARE

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