



Address: 3-5 East Hampton Road

Contemporary Building Name: Marlborough Tavern

Historic Building Name: Colonel Elisha Buell House

Present Use: Restaurant

Historic Use: Residential, Tavern

Architectural style: Colonial

Date constructed: c. 1760, 1740 (Assessor), mid-1980s

Description: The Marlborough Tavern, also known as the Colonel Elisha Buell House, is a central chimney Colonial house with a gambrel roof and three front dormers. Situated at the junction of East Hampton Road (Route 66) and South Main Street in Marlborough, the clapboarded tavern faces east and was for many years, prior to the coming of the railroad, a major stopover on the turnpike from Hartford to New London. A late 18th century ell along the north wall of the original tavern is the first of several additions which now link the old inn with its barn, which has been re-sided but retains its original interior construction. The foundations of the structure are of rough fieldstone. In the cellar, the chimney is brick. The two-story facade is heightened by the gambrel roof, the third floor lit by three dormers in the front and a fourth to the rear, in the southwest corner. The attic floor is lit by two windows, north and south; this area once served as a guardroom for prisoners on their way to Old New-gate prison and was damaged by fire in the early part of this [20th] century. The nine window clapboarded face is punctuated by a double leaved door with a simple molded architrave and a single row of five lights across the top. Paired six over six sash [windows] flank the doorway. Above, the shingled dormers (once clapboarded), six over six sashed [windows] , are topped with small hipped roofs. Narrow clapboards are framed at the corners with narrow vertical boarding. The main cornice, a plain narrow molding, comes flush with the corner boards and continues up along the pitch of the roof. To the left, along the south wall, a modern "lean-to" has been added across the first floor; it is one of several modern additions whose construction has somewhat diminished the solid lines of the original tavern. These additions are all of wood construction with clapboard sheathing and are thus at least structurally compatible with the tavern and its eighteenth century ell. A modern white picket fence surmounts the ancient fieldstone wall enclosing the yard which is planted with several old trees. The gambrel roof has recently been shingled with asphalt, but the tavern's clapboards are original. The brick chimney is centered along the ridge, with the

width facing the front of the tavern. Two courses are corbelled up to the third directly beneath the top of the chimney. The end walls of the main house both originally contained six large six over six windows and one smaller attic window; the south walls lean-to eradicates the first story windows there, while on the third floor an additional window, centered between the two original sash, has been inserted. The one-story ell dominated the north elevation of the tavern, extending to the rear of the structure for approximately 60 feet, though the oldest section built in the 18th century, occupies only a third of that length. The entrance to the ell, a door just to the rear of the tavern's northwest corner, is particularly fine, with arched panels, long strap hinges and a wrought iron latch. At the time, two chimneys divided the ell; these chimneys no longer exist though the presence of the easternmost chimney can still be noted in exposed interior beams which were cut subsequent to the ell's construction to accommodate the chimneys insertion. The joiner's framing marks can be seen on the hewn and pegged beams, illustrating the colonial craftsman's methods of construction. The shallow porch and open terrace are modern additions built after the tavern was purchased for operation as a restaurant. Still another addition, c. 1965, built out from the ell along its south wall encloses a large banquet hall. To accommodate this addition, the original stone hatchway of the tavern through which kegs were lowered into the tavern's cellar, was removed. The room is at present dominated by a massive fireplace in its northeast corner. Connected to the ell is the barn, once located closer to Route 66 but moved, c. 1950 to become part of the restaurant complex. The barn with (recently applied) vertical board sheathing and simple gable roof retains its interior framing and much of its original detail. Thus, the entire Marlborough Tavern complex consists of two main components, the old tavern, and the barn, connected by a series of ells and additions. An abundance of original detail remains within the old tavern structure. The paneled double door enters into an inner porch, situated just forward of the chimney, off of which are the two main chambers, the dining room to the right and taproom to the left, and from which the main stairway leads. It is a present unused, the main entrance to the restaurant now being through the barn. Across the rear, what were once three rooms have been opened up to form one long room the width of the tavern. The central section was once the kitchen for the tavern; the wide hearth with its crane and brick oven remains. The floors in the old tavern are ancient wide boards. In the taproom, the present flooring comes from what was once the guardroom in the attic. Likewise, the bar and its grill, a screen with slats which hinged to the ceiling and could be lowered in the event of a rowdy crowd, is a careful reproduction (using old wood) of the bar which stood in the southwest corner of the taproom. In both of the two main chambers, the taproom and the dining room, the chimney wall is covered with paneling; wall cupboards exist in both panels. Flared posts are visible in the old house although the summer beam is obscured by plastering on the second floor, the tavern's ball-room has a swinging partition which could be used to divide it into smaller rooms. Despite additions, which confuse but do not obscure its integrity, the Marlborough Tavern, a late colonial country inn, survives today and continues to serve, as it has for many years, the hungry traveler.

Significance: The Marlborough Tavern is a Colonial country inn whose architecture reflects the forthright simplicity of rural life in the 18th century. A central chimney structure, two stories tall with a gambrel roof and three front dormers, the clapboarded tavern stands behind its fieldstone and white picket fence at the junction of East Hampton

Road (Route 66) and South Main Street in Marlborough. In the days before the railroad, the Tavern was a major stopping point along the turnpike from Hartford to New London. The town's activities centered at the Marlborough Tavern; early in the 19th century, meetings for the town's incorporation were held there. As a commercial center, too, the Tavern contributed to Marlborough's life. Two or three horse carriages stopped there daily to change horses. Traders and drovers haggled there. Militia men trained nearby and celebrated the end of the Revolutionary War there, stacking their muskets in the corner of the taproom. Involuntary guests, prisoners, spent the night there, locked up in the guardroom in the Tavern's attic. The innkeeper, Colonel Elisha Buell, was a gunsmith and skilled metalworker who had his shop to the north of the inn. During the 19th century, the Buell family was engaged in Marlborough's trade in firewood: Marlborough timber was shipped from Middle Haddam to New York City to be sold there for firewood. Until 1898, the Buell family continued to keep the inn. Shortly after, the house was purchased by Mary Hall, a Connecticut lawyer, who left it to the Society of Colonial Dames. The Colonial Dames effected the restoration of the taproom, added the picket fence and laid out gardens in the north lawn, running the Tavern as a tearoom. Most recently, the Matsikas family owns and operates the Marlborough Tavern as a restaurant. Neither pretentious nor grand, the Marlborough Tavern is an old New England country inn, homey, as in fact it was Elisha Buell's home, and utilitarian. Three dormers light the third floor, opening up more space for guests there. The attic, in the last available space below the peak of the roof, served as a guardroom for prisoners being transported to Old New-Gate gaol, and the ballroom, an important space for large meetings as well as for balls, could be divided, if necessary, for guests by swinging out the partition. In time, an ell was added to further accommodate the Tavern's many guests and other additions have been made to meet the requirements of its present function as a restaurant. The north elevation retains much of its original appearance, set back on a broad lawn with several old trees framing the north-east corner. A low concrete terrace marks the juncture of the ell and the barn. The addition of a long, one-story banquet hall along the south side has altered this elevation but the approach to the Tavern from East Hampton Road (Route 66) and South Main Street reveals the inn in its traditional setting, on a slight rise, behind its ancient stone wall, set off by a white picket fence. There is little fanciful or elegant detail in the Marlborough Tavern but the sure hand of the carpenter's handwork transcends the Tavern's artlessness and creates a unity of methods and materials. Despite additions which have altered the Marlborough Tavern's original appearance, still the old inn stands out, its clean lines and worn clapboards proclaiming its substance and endurance.

Sources: National Register of Historic Places Nomination, July 1978.

Ransom, David. Historical and Architectural Survey, Town of Marlborough, Connecticut. April 1998.

Notes: Part of the restored "mall" burned in 1989. The Marlborough Tavern remains open as a restaurant. Information is taken directly from the National Register Nomination form.