

Colonial Conversations: The Gettys Tavern Experience

Your journey through *Beyond the Battle Museum* will include stepping into the recreated tavern of Samuel Gettys. Here, students will listen in on conversations between actual historical figures who may have spent time in the Gettys Tavern.

Three unique conversations, all set during the period of 1775-1780, include references to current events, issues of the day, and connections to artifacts displayed inside the tavern.

This optional learning guide has been written to assist teachers in preparing students for the tavern experience. Below you will find key information, guiding questions, character descriptions, and the script for each *Colonial Conversation*.

Key Facts

- Samuel Gettys and his family were Scotch-Irish immigrants to Pennsylvania.
- The Scotch-Irish people were forced out of Scotland by the English. They moved to Northern Ireland, but faced persecution there, also. After a generation or two living in Ireland, many came to America during the early 1700s.
- By the 1760s, Samuel Gettys and his wife, Isabella, had built a home and tavern along the east-west road connecting York, Pennsylvania to the mountains west of present-day Gettysburg. Here they were part of a small community of Scotch-Irish families called the “Marsh Creek Settlement.”
- Samuel and Isabella Gettys had several children, including Martha Gettys and James Gettys.
- The Gettys Tavern became a popular gathering place for local Scotch-Irish families, including the family of James and Thomas Reed.
- Some early settlers purchased slaves. The Gettys family owned a woman of color named “Doll.”
- Another family of early settlers, the McPhersons, owned a man of color named “Jack.”
- During the Revolutionary War, local Scotch-Irish families were quick to support George Washington and the Continental Army.

Conversation One - News of the War - Monday, May 1, 1775

James Reed and his son Thomas enjoy an afternoon meal inside the Gettys Tavern. Samuel Gettys, the tavern owner, approaches to greet them. Soon after, a mail carrier arrives on horseback from Philadelphia with the latest copy of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. A special extra page (“postscript”), printed after the regular paper, conveys the news that Massachusetts militia near Boston have been fired on by the British at

Lexington and Concord, Massachusetts. This has ignited a war between the colonies and the British monarchy (under King George III). Thomas Reed is eager to join the war and defend the colonies, but his father reminds him that there is nothing glorious about war – he had fought to defend the Marsh Creek Settlement during the French and Indian War 20 years earlier. During this conflict, several local families were murdered or captured during raids through the area. Thomas is still intent on joining the Revolution but must first convince his mother to let him go.

In fact, Thomas Reed did go on to serve with the Continental Army under George Washington. British troops captured him at the Battle of Long Island in 1776 and held him prisoner for nine months. After his release, Reed rejoined the army and fought at the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. When the war ended, he returned to the Gettysburg area, where he lived until his death in 1812.

Historical Characters

Mail Carrier, age about 18, from Philadelphia

James Reed, age 65, born in Scotland – father of Thomas Reed

Thomas Reed, age 20, born in Pennsylvania – son of James Reed

Samuel Gettys, age 50, tavern keeper born in Northern Ireland

Conversation Script

Mail Carrier: *The Gazette* – direct from Philadelphia! Get your freshest news, foreign and domestic!

Thomas Reed: Stay here, father – I'll retrieve a copy.

Samuel Gettys: Well if it isn't the old Scot Mr. James Reed. How's Maggie?

James Reed: We're all well, Sam. Thomas and the boys don't let me work much anymore. Hard for an old man to complain.

Thomas Reed: Mr. Gettys – good day to you, sir!

Samuel Gettys: Thomas.

Thomas Reed: Father, there's a Postscript in the *Gazette*. It's news from Boston.

James Reed: Go on, son.

Thomas Reed (reading from the newspaper): “1,000 troops in a very secret manner embarked on board a number of boats ... they marched to Lexington, where they saw a number of men... they ordered them to disperse, and immediately fired on them, killed eight men on the spot, and then marched to Concord.” My heavens, it's war!

Samuel Gettys: It was only a matter of time. King George is a bloody tyrant - he'll stop at nothing.

Thomas Reed: They'll need volunteers - militia from across the colonies.

James Reed: You mustn't speak of the army, son, your mother won't allow it.

Thomas Reed: It's my duty, father. Our brothers in Massachusetts will soon be calling on us!

Samuel Gettys: Won't be long now till this news makes its way through Marsh Creek. We'll have a hundred bloody Scotch Irish lads ready to take on the King's army.

Thomas Reed: I'll fight till my last breath to be free of tyranny. Think of it - an American government!

James Reed: At what price, son? You know not the horrors of war.

Thomas Reed: But father...

James Reed: In '58, I helped defend us from French and Indian war parties. We lost many a brother and sister - some as young as infants - murdered in their homes or carried off to the forest.

Samuel Gettys: War is the ugliest of sins. But blood's been spilt in Massachusetts - I see no other way forward.

Thomas Reed: We must take this fight to the British - make them pay for Lexington and Concord!

James Reed: I can't stand in your way, son. But good luck with your mother...

Thomas Reed: Let's go home and share the news.

Discussion Questions

1. How did the early settlers of Pennsylvania get their news?
2. What other roles did taverns play in colonial life?
3. What happened at Lexington and Concord?
4. Why might Pennsylvania families fear the British after hearing the news that war had broken out in Massachusetts?
5. James Reed describes encounters with violence during the French and Indian War two decades earlier. What message is he trying to convey to his son about the realities of war?

Conversation Two - Remember the Ladies - Thursday, July 11, 1776

Isabella Gettys, wife of tavern keeper Samuel Gettys, is getting ready to serve dinner to their customers. Her daughter Martha and son James are helping to prepare the meals. News of the signing of the Declaration of Independence has just reached the tavern, and Martha is curious about what rights women and girls will receive under a new American government. This conversation is loosely based on the famous letter written by Abigail Adams to her husband John Adams on March 31, 1776. Abigail included these famous words:

“I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticuliar care and attention is not paid to the Laidies we are determined to foment a Rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.”

James Gettys went on to become the founder of Gettysburg in 1786 and, in a sense, was “king” of the new town until it became a formal “borough” in 1806, run by a town council. Martha Gettys eventually married a man named John Holland and kept a family bible that is on display in this exhibit area.

Historical Characters

Isabella Gettys, age 45, born in Northern Ireland - wife of Samuel Gettys

Martha Gettys, age 8, born in Pennsylvania - daughter of Isabella, brother of James

James Gettys, age 17, born in Pennsylvania - daughter of Isabella, brother of Martha

Conversation Script

Isabella: James, would you bring me the jugs from behind the bar?

James: Yes, mother.

Martha: I want to help mother today...

James: Oh? But you're too small!

Martha: Hey!

Isabella: Martha - do you know what today is?

Martha: No?

Isabella: It's one week since our good men in Philadelphia signed the Declaration of Independence! The first week of our very own "United States."

Martha: Did any ladies sign the Declaration?

Isabella: [laughs] Now, there's a fine idea!

Martha: Mother, did they?

Isabella: No, my dear.

Martha: Well, what will it be like for the ladies in our new uhh....

Isabella: United States.

Martha: *United States.*

Isabella: I would hope our brothers in the new government will remember our hard work supporting the revolution.

Martha: Will ladies get to be soldiers?

Isabella: I'm not sure about that.

Martha: And help choose our new king?

Isabella: Martha, dear, there will be no more kings!

James: Except for me.

Martha: Oh hush, James. You'll never be a king!

Isabella: Our new leaders call themselves "representatives." Voted for by the people!

Martha: Will ladies get to vote?

Isabella: One day, perhaps. If not we'll have our own revolution!

Martha: Our own revolution?

Isabella: Yes, Martha. Now, go on, fetch the pail. We have more work to do.

Discussion Questions

1. What role did women play in early businesses like the Gettys Tavern?
2. What are the differences between a monarchy and a democracy?
3. What new rights were guaranteed to Americans by the Declaration of Independence? Think about "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."
4. How long did it take for women to receive the rights discussed in this conversation?

Conversation Three - Gradual Abolition - Wednesday, March 15, 1780

As the Revolutionary War raged on, Pennsylvania's legislature took a step toward freeing enslaved Americans within the colony. However, the *Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* in 1780 laid out a long and complicated path to freedom. While it prohibited the importing of new slaves into the commonwealth, those already enslaved here would remain so until their death. Additionally, children born to enslaved women in Pennsylvania could be held in bondage until the age of 28.

In this conversation, Doll, a slave of the Gettys family, discusses the new law with Jack, a slave of the McPherson family. Both are working at the Gettys Tavern and their conversation must be kept quiet. Doll is expecting a child and, if it is a girl, will name her Sydney. This is based on documented historical facts - both Doll and her daughter Sydney were enslaved by the Gettys family, and their family bible is on display in the

tavern exhibit alongside other records and artifacts from the enslaved people of Gettysburg.

Historical Characters

Doll- age about 30, enslaved by Isabella Gettys

Jack - age about 25, enslaved by William McPherson

Conversation Script

Doll: Jack, is that you?

Jack (*whispered*): It's me, Doll. I have some news.

Doll: News of what?

Jack: Shhh. We mustn't be heard. Come over behind the bar.

Doll: Go on.

Jack: Last night while I was fixing supper for Master McPherson, I heard something I wasn't supposed to.

Doll: Be careful with your words, Jack. You'll get us both in danger.

Jack: It's alright. Well... heard talk of abolition. Right here in Pennsylvania. News from Philadelphia. From the government. I heard there's a new law - something called "gradual abolition."

Doll: And what does that mean for us?

Jack: Look, Doll, I know you're expecting a child. You won't be able to hide it from Master Gettys much longer.

Doll: Please, Jack. Be quiet.

Jack: Well if I heard Master McPherson correct, this child will be free. Not straight out, but at a certain age.

Doll: Free? My child?

Jack: Yes, Doll. Free. Now when are you expecting?

Doll: Five or six months, I suppose. I have a feeling it's a girl.

Jack: Oh?

Doll: Yes. I'll name her Sydney. And one day she'll be free?

Jack: She will, Doll. I hope we live to see that day.

Doll: Oh my... But Jack - they mustn't know you understand this talk of freedom.

Jack: I'll watch out for myself. And you do the same.

Doll: Did you hear about the runaway? Passed through from Baltimore Saturday last.

Jack: Another? Poor soul. Where will he go off to?

Doll: I hear the Quaker Friends up north show great mercy to our brothers and sisters.

Jack: I've heard the same. But what about us? No Scot or Irishman will think of freedom. He'll keep his slaves till the day he dies.

Doll: Not if your law says he can't.

Jack: The law means nothing if Washington doesn't win this war.

Doll: He will. And my child *will* be free.

Discussion Questions

1. If you were born just one day before the Gradual Abolition Act passed, you would have had to remain in slavery for your entire life. Imagine how this must have felt for the Black residents of Pennsylvania.
2. Why might Doll and Jack need to keep their conversation quiet? What might have happened if others had heard them?
3. Religious and ethnic groups had different views about slavery. Why do you think Quakers were the most supportive of abolition?
4. Why might the Gradual Abolition Act have been threatened by a British victory in the Revolutionary War?