

We Love Dining Out!

NEW JERSEY'S GUIDE TO RESTAURANTS, HOSPITALITY & TRAVEL

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Princeton

History crackles at the Yankee Doodle Tap Room in the Nassau Inn

I had a day off from my job, and I wanted to take a day trip. But to where?

Then, I said to myself, Princeton is a great town.

Consider the following. For a few weeks during the Revolutionary War in 1783, Continental Congress met at Nassau Hall on the campus of glorious Princeton University, therefore claiming the town as our nation's capital for a brief period. George Washington and his men were even victorious in a critical battle at nearby Princeton Battlefield. Morven is here; it's the former Governor's



Einstein carved his name in the Yankee Doodle Tap Room?

mansion, and Drumthwacket, the current Governor's mansion, sits a few hundred yards south down Route 206

And, Washington Irving was here, in Princeton, at the Nassau Inn.

Okay, maybe my writing hero never visited the current 217 room Nassau Inn at Palmer

Square, but certainly the original, formerly located at 52 Nassau Street, which was torn down in 1937. And being that I'm a moderate history buff, certainly Princeton, one of, if not the most famous and glorious



The Yankee Doodle Tap Room at the Nassau Inn in Princeton now serves prime rib, as it once did.

old college towns in our nation, qualifies for a visit.

So I turned my car south on the Garden State Parkway, then south on Route 1, to visit the spot where Albert Einstein, who lived and taught in Princeton, carved his initials, the Yankee Doodle Tap Room at the Nassau Inn (www.nassauinn.com).

It's a tradition at this favorite gathering spot and, although there's no confirmation that they are indeed Einstein's, they are there, in polished wood. "Brooke Shields carved her's somewhere here as well," claims Jim Byrnes, food and beverage director.

"It (history) will never die here (Princeton). The culture is alive and well, and the generations keep it alive. There's the history at the university, and here,

at the Yankee Doodle Tap Room and Nassau Inn, we love our old photos and reminiscing." There are many photos throughout the Inn and Tap Room, showing the Inn its prior earlier days, and portraits of many famous graduates line the entrance of the Tap Room.

Here, in this spot below ground, you can, as Byrnes says, "Taste the history." I love that. Nothing beats it. Oak furniture graces both the dining and bar area of the restaurant, and two rowing oars, symbolic of the PU crew team, crisscross atop an open hearth, where an inscriptions reads, "Rest Traveller, Rest, and Banish Thoughts of Care; Drink To Thy Friends and Recommend Them Here." Behind the bar area is an original, 13-foot wide mural created by the famed

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painter Norman Rockwell, portraying a Yankee Doodle atop his horse. Formerly known the Nassau Tavern, the Yankee Doodle Tap Room was coined so by the mural.

Culinary Institute of America graduate Matt Volpe, a Princeton guy through and through, is the new executive chef, and he is thrilled to be home. "It's very good to be here," he says. "The travel is much better," he says of his current five minute commute as opposed to a prior 45 minute drive. He has introduced more of a comfort food, traditional American fare, to

attest to the Yankee Doodle Tap Room's name. The eatery, which once served prime rib, does so again, on Friday and Saturday evenings, and battered fish and chips are a Monday menu regular. Volpe's other specialties include a chili with cheddar soup, baked brie en crouete, crispy fried calamari and onion straws appetizers. "Off The Grill," the pork sirloin with whipped potatoes, asparagus and apple cider demi glace is superb, as is the buffalo burger (one of my favorites, I confess), while entrées feature a succulent steak au poivre, vegetarian pasta and chicken pot pie.

For dessert, what can be more Yankee Doodle Tap Room American than an apple crisp?

The menu is the above mentioned, and much more, and the graceful Nassau Inn is more than just a spot to stay overnight. You're right in the heart of culture, nostalgia, origin and beauty, and it's all within walking distance.

Time to carve my initials.

(Steve Sears is a frequent contributor to our publications.)

