

# 29 Old Constitution House

16 Main Street, Windsor, Vermont

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The first Constitution of the "Free and Independent State of Vermont" was adopted on July 8, 1777, at Elijah West's Windsor Tavern, becoming the first in the country to prohibit slavery and to establish universal manhood suffrage. As with many early settlements around New England, local "watering holes" made for typical meeting locations. West's Tavern was the site for many political debates and discussions charting the future of Vermont. Now this preserved and honored site is called "The Old Constitution House, featuring

period rooms showcasing its early tavern days, a Constitutional interpretive area in the Tea Room, and a historical artifacts collection.

Through its lifetime, West's Tavern building was relocated to other sites within the village, serving as a tavern until 1848, followed by retail store, manufacturing shop, apartment house, and eventual warehouse. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the building was showing serious dilapidation. In 1911 the "Old Constitution House Association" was formed and obtained rights to the building. Land for a new location at 16 Main Street was donated by the family of William M. Evarts, a Windsor resident who had been the chief counsel for the defense in the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson and had served as Secretary of State for President Rutherford B. Hayes. Restoration began in 1914 with Lewis Sheldon Newton of Hartford as architect for the project.

The Old Constitution House Association maintained the building as a museum and public tea room until 1961, when ownership of the house and its collections was transferred to the State of Vermont, and eventually under the management of the Division for Historic Preservation.

Today, visitors will learn about the Tap Room and view artifacts such as the table believed to be the one around which the Windsor Convention delegates gathered, and the 1772 New York Charter for the town of Windsor that was granted by King George III; the Tea Room and artifacts include a rare copy of the sermon delivered at the 1777 Windsor Convention, cannon ball and grapeshot from Mount Independence, and a Revolutionary War period cartridge box; the Kitchen, Dining Room, Parlor, Bedchamber, and Large Chamber, all of which are supported with information and period artifacts.

The Old Constitution House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1971.