

Winter 2010

# Palatine Settlement Society

PO Box 183, St. Johnsville, NY 13452

www.Palatinesettlementsociety.org

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## Newsletter

### 1747 Nellis Tavern Restoration - 2009

BY DONNA RESTON

Throughout last summer and fall contractor Karl Schmaeh of Tribes Hill replaced all of the deteriorating siding on the east end of the tavern and also some rotten boards and a sill on the roadside and west end of the building. He also repaired and replaced the half round windows in the attic, which had served as entryways for birds and squirrels.

Leaving one large skeletal inner wall on the 2<sup>nd</sup> level "as is" so visitors can admire the "hand split" lathe, the outer walls of the original building were all sheet rocked by Chet Brown & Sons of Johnstown. (Chet's wife is the former Priscilla Nellis.) This will provide added insulation and give a more original appearance to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, which was added after the roof was raised to create more bedroom space during the tavern era. Before work was done Trustee Ronald Burch photographed all of the areas to be covered.

We were fortunate to acquire the painting skills of Kevin Lovelace who accomplished an impressive task scraping, painting, and improving the roadside appearance of the building. We hope to have him back this coming summer to do more painting.

Life Member Jon Nellis volunteered his chainsaw and time to unencumber our rhubarb patch. The rhubarb growth has been hampered by lack of sunlight due to young fast growing trees shading the area. He also reduced the size of the box elder that stands in our budding herb garden. Thanks to Jon, the plants we want to grow will have a much better chance.

I personally want to compliment all of the above group of workmen who in most cases were subjected to my sometimes heavy handed bargaining and were willing to adjust their estimates to the point where we were able to afford all of the above. Very often I have felt overwhelmed and discouraged at all that still remains to be done on the building until I reflect on the



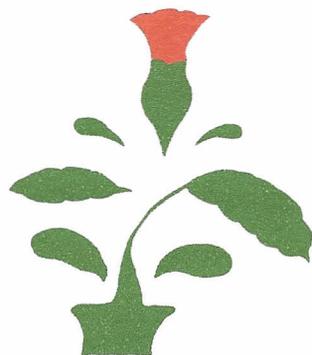
East end work in progress.

fact that we have truly made some remarkable progress given our very limited resources.

We have also been the recipient of several "freebies" from volunteers and members alike, including the Gluck family, Mark Greco and trustees Karen Nabors and Sandy Lane who along with the professional services of LeoTomlin (local lawn service) have made the grounds look better than ever.

This coming year (2010) we expect to replace the *paneling* over the bar-room fireplace and restore the *bar* area itself. We could use donations toward this and many other restoration projects. Other suggested projects include *shutters* (we have several originals that we can copy) – they will cost \$100.00 each: paneled doors to replace missing ones on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor will cost \$150.00 each. All donations should be made payable to the Palatine Settlement Society (our official incorporated name) and sent to: PO Box 183, St. Johnsville, NY 13452.

\* Addendum – we are looking to reclaim any interior or exterior pieces of woodwork, doors, raised paneling, hardware, etc. – anything that may have been removed for safe keeping or as souvenirs when it was thought that the state was going to knock this historic building down. "No questions asked" on returned items.



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## MOVING FRONTIERS: EARLY TRANSPORTATION IN THE MOHAWK VALLEY

THE BIENNIAL WESTERN FRONTIER SYMPOSIUM CONSISTING OF LECTURES, EXHIBITS, PRESENTATIONS AND TOURS TOOK PLACE IN MID-OCTOBER OF 2009. THE NELLIS TAVERN HELD AN OPEN HOUSE ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18.

Palatine Settlement Society board member Ron Burch was a presenter at the "Moving Frontiers: Early Transportation in the Mohawk Valley" symposium, held at Fulton-Montgomery Community College on Oct. 17, 2009. His discussion, "Serving the Traveler and the Community: Modified Turnpike and Canal Structures in the Mohawk Valley," prominently featured the Nellis Tavern as an example of the type of pre-existing structure that was often modified to serve travelers as turnpikes and the Erie Canal were built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Ron's presentation discussed how Christian Nellis' mid-18<sup>th</sup> century house was re-oriented with the coming of the Mohawk Turnpike (Rte 5, more or less) about 1810. What had been the rear became the front facing the turnpike. The roof was raised to a full two stories, and a two-story addition expanded the structure eastward. The remodeled second floor featured a "public room" suitable for dances and meetings, and a main room on the ground floor was modified to include a bar room. The structure remained a Nellis residence, but the name "Nellis Tavern" came into common usage along the turnpike and has stuck for more than two hundred years.

### HIGH-WHEELED BICYCLE

In 1887, George William Nellis, Jr., a 21-year-old newspaperman, rode his 52-inch, high-wheeled Columbia Expert "ordinary" bicycle from Herkimer, NY, to San Francisco in 72 days, averaging fifty miles a day. George surpassed the transcontinental bicycle record by several weeks. His bicycle had a tubular frame and hard rubber tires and it is in the Herkimer County Historical Society, 406 N. Main St, Herkimer, NY.

In 2002, Kevin J. Hayes, 7<sup>th</sup> Great Grandson of Christian Nellis, Sr., published *An American Cycling Odyssey* that combines George's letters and newspaper coverage in a great story of this amazing trip.

"He bicycled ever westward through sleepy villages, farmlands, and growing cities of the rapidly changing nation and trekked across uninhabited stretches of prairies and mountains that marked its shrinking frontier. Following his daily ten-hour rides, Nellis sat down and wrote letters about his adventures to his hometown newspapers and a national cycling magazine to finance his cross-country journey."

George was one of Christian Nellis's Great Great Grandsons. David S. Nellis, first cousin to George, owned a similar, high-wheeled bicycle that was placed on display at the Nellis Tavern in conjunction with the Moving Frontiers symposium. Mary Nellis Davis of Herkimer now owns the bicycle and loaned it to the Tavern for two years.

Ron Burch was guest curator for "Moving Frontiers: Early Transportation in the Mohawk Valley," an exhibit mounted by the Arkell Museum in Canajoharie, Aug. 20 – Nov. 4, 2009. The exhibit was produced to augment and complement the history symposium. Ron is curator of art and architecture at the New York State Museum in Albany.

The exhibit featured artifacts from the Arkell Museum, the NYS Museum, collectors, and several regional history museums, including the Nellis Tavern. Loaned by the Tavern were an early 19<sup>th</sup> century print of a turnpike stagecoach and a Nellis family traveling trunk. The leather-covered wooden trunk, about three feet long, has a slightly hourglass shape so that it could be lashed to a stagecoach (or on a canal boat or rail coach) with minimal slippage. This type of shaped trunk is commonly called a "Jenny Lind" trunk after the Swedish soprano who traveled extensively through the eastern U.S. in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. She was extremely popular, and artifacts from mirrors to beds were named after her. Apparently she had lots of luggage.

### Events - 2009

Last year, very successful fundraising events aided the Nellis Tavern. They included the Antique Show, Textile and Fiber Show, and the Rhubarb Festival. Thanks to Events Chairman Mary Davis and all who donated their time and materials for these events.

### RECENT DONATIONS - 2009

- Jane Button – a beautiful green and pink mid-19<sup>th</sup> c. quilt, a pitcher and bowl set and money.
- Mildford Decker – an early 19<sup>th</sup> c. arrowback rocker, a large white ironstone platter and several early quilts.
- Donald Fenner - yarn winder.
- William Finch (whose grandmother was a Nellis) - \$1000. Unfortunately Mr. Finch passed away in October.
- Tom Persse (our "new" insurance agent) – set of four Windsor style side chairs.
- George Snell - \$1000, a great help to our on-going restorations.
- John and Dory Takacs – an early 19<sup>th</sup> c. amber "chestnut" bottle, an early 19<sup>th</sup> c. wine glass – both of which will lend authenticity to our soon-to-be restored bar.
- Chris Takacs – a Windsor style armchair.

## The Tavern to Get a Well - 2010

BY DONNA RESTON

The Nellis Tavern, of course, originally had a well and the pump handle is clearly delineated in 19<sup>th</sup> century photos of the building. The location was right near the back door, which today faces modern NYS Rt. 5. Having been filled in years ago and being so close to the highway and its many potential contaminants, the site has never been considered a viable place for drilling. Also – with all of the building restoration that has been necessary there has never been any extra money available to pay for drilling a new well.

Stepping up to the plate came our newest “angel” in the form of Life Member Margaret “Peg” Schutze. She has agreed to fund the drilling project, which will be done

by local well driller Roger Lynch – starting possibly in February. The location will be near the steps of our “new” front porch with the idea of then piping water to a site inside the building so it can be easily accessed – with a faucet discreetly hidden – possibly in the interior of our restored bar area.

Lack of water has made holding events at the tavern very labor intensive for the trustees. It has to be carried in many gallon jugs for cooking, making coffee and for all basic cleaning needs. Water will also pave the way for someday having permanent restroom facilities.

Thank you “Peg”

## 2010 Schedule of Events for 1747 Nellis Tavern

**ANTIQUÉ SHOW & SALE and CHICKEN BBQ takeout** – Saturday, March 13 – 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM held at the H. C. Smith Benefit Club, 538 Crum Creek Road, St. Johnsville. Admission \$3.00.

**THEME BENEFIT DINNER** – Sunday, April 25 – 4:00 PM, cash bar; 5:00 PM dinner. In the planning stages. See board member for reservations and tickets, advance sale only.

**OPEN HOUSE & DEDICATION** - Saturday, May 8 - 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM at Tavern. Traditional crafts demonstrations such as candle dipping. Held during St. Johnsville annual Springfest.

**14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RHUBARB FESTIVAL** - Sunday, June 6, 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM at Tavern. Pie baking contest will be held. Rhubarb treats and lunch available. Entertainment.

**NELLIS FAMILY ASSOCIATION REUNION** – Sunday July 18, 12:00 noon lunch, business meeting at 1:00 PM at Tavern. Information: Mary Nellis Davis, Secretary - 315-866-2619.

**GHOSTS, SPECTERS & SPIRITS** - Saturday, August 28 - 1:00 - 6:00 PM. Admission \$3.00. Mohawk Valley Paranormal Society and vendors, at Tavern.

**UNITED EMPIRE LOYALISTS TOUR** - Tuesday, September 28. This tour from Canada will visit our Tavern during their New York state tour.

Textile  
&  
Fiber  
Show

May  
2009

