

Fort Nellis

by Donna Reston

Although better known as an early 19th c. tavern, it should not be forgotten that the Nellis Tavern in the 18th c. was the home of a Revolutionary War soldier – Christian Nellis, Jr. (1734-1808). He was a grist miller by trade, a respected man, active in local politics and, when duty called, one of those citizen soldiers who helped slow the British advance at the Battle of Oriskany. He was 43 years old in 1777 and we know that he was in the thick of the fighting because he had joined Col. Jacob Klock's Second "Palatine" Regt. of the Tryon Co. Militia Brigade as a private. (This is from "The British Campaign of 1777" by Watt & Morrison – this is the book they use at Ft. Stanwix [Schuyler] for visitors to search soldier ancestors.) The bloody, horrific experience at Oriskany had to have been a defining moment in the lives of all of those who survived. It is probable that Christian began taking steps to fortify his home after he returned.

After the retreat of St. Leger and the heroic defense of the Fort by Gansevort & Willett during the long siege, the British and their Indian allies began a war of attrition – killing and burning their way through the valley in a series of raids that destroyed lives, homes, crops and animals. These raids caused many residents to fortify their homes. Robert Roberts' "NY Forts in the Revolution" published in 1980, lists 22 forts in Montgomery County including Ft. Nellis and says it was the fortified home of Christian Nellis.

In the "Tryon County Minute Book of the Commission of Safety," published in 1905, on page 135, a brief biographical note states that Christian lived to the east of St. Johnsville and his home was somewhat fortified and called Ft. Nellis. Christian had joined the Committee in August 1775.

A letter dated October 27, 1780 from Col. Fraser to Gen. Haldimand (Canadian Archives) concerning information gained from two prisoners taken during a valley raid, lists the number of soldiers defending each valley fort. Among those are 10 soldiers stationed at Ft. Nellis and 10 soldiers at Nellis, his blockhouse – each with a 3 lb. Cannon. This letter is quoted verbatim in Ken Johnson's "The Bloodied Mohawk," pp. 173-74.

I have often speculated how the building survived the Revolution and I often wondered why a blockhouse would have been built so far from the main house but I gained a big clue from a footnote in Ken Johnson's "Bloodied Mohawk" – it referred to a letter in Vol. 6, pp. 389-90 of the "Clinton Papers." There is a letter to Gov. George Clinton from Col. Jacob Klock, dated April 18, 1781. Referring to the raising of recruits he states that he has 'appointed 3 officers to receive the recruits, mainly at Ft. Walrath and Ft. Nellis, which 2 places are entire frontier and each of these places is a GRIST MILL, and the only mills we have in the neighborhood and ought to be guarded, if said mill should be destroyed, we would of course leave this place."

My current thought is that the blockhouse which was near the mouth of a stream protected the Nellis grist mill – someone told me years ago that they had found a part of a millstone near the blockhouse site as well as military buttons and other artifacts. Without a mill to grind grain people would have starved and many were on the verge of starvation. The Mohawk Valley has always been called the "breadbasket of the Revolution" in the history books but in the latter years of the war, that was becoming problematic. Many statistics are available that attest to the number of barns and fields burned, bushels of corn and wheat destroyed, etc. All of this played into Washington's request to Marinus Willett to take over Ft. Rensselaer because Washington knew that Willett would be energetic in the pursuit of the "destructives" as they were called.

Although an historic organization, our public face has been that of portraying the building during the tavern era, we also want visitors to know that this valley site has an 18th c. military history. It is likely that we have much more to learn.

More research to come! Anyone with additional information pertinent to this topic is invited to get in touch.



Evenings

by Ray Draus

On Saturday, September 20, 2014, the Nellis Tavern became aglow with candlelight for the annual "Evening at the Tavern" event. Our attendees and supporters enjoyed the ambiance of period music performed by Ron Burch, along with hors d'oeuvres and select wines. We thank the following area businesses that were so generous to support us:

- The Hungry Bear
- Hummingbird Wines
- Palatine Valley Dairy
- Wrath of Grapes
- Flint Liquors
- The Table @ Ft. Plain Restaurant
- Heritage Meadows Farm Bed & Breakfast

We also thank the members and friends who donated food or their time for this event.

If you missed that affair, why not be a part of this year's fund raiser, a colonial style dinner "Evening at The Table"? It is scheduled for Sunday, November 15, 2015 at The Table @ Ft. Plain Restaurant, 70 Canal St., Ft. Plain. Seating is limited but we would love to have you in attendance. For more information, please call Ray at (518) 842-6400.

2015 Future Events for 1747 Nellis Tavern

ANTIQUE SHOW & SALE — Saturday, March 7, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM held at Arkell Museum, Canajoharie, NY. Admission \$4.00

19TH ANNUAL RHUBARB FESTIVAL — Sunday, June 7, 11:00 AM–4:00 PM at Tavern. Pie baking contest will be held. Rhubarb treats and lunch available. Entertainment. Sign up for pie contest - 315.866.2619. Donations accepted

SUMMER SUNDAYS — June 1 thru September 28, 1:00 PM–4:00 PM at the Nellis Tavern. Tours. Admission \$3.00 for non-members. Members, free admission. On going exhibit will be **Nellis Family Historic Artifacts**

DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK - WEDDING RECEPTION — Saturday, July 25, 3:30-5:30 PM after historic wedding reenactment at Palatine Church; cake and punch, music. Donations accepted

EVENING AT “THE TABLE” — Sunday, November 15, 4:30 PM social hour - open bar, at **The Table @ Ft. Plain Restaurant**, 70 Canal St., Ft. Plain; 5:30 PM dinner of turnpike tavern fare. Admission \$\$\$\$. Reservations please - 518.842.6400

(*Annual Nellis Association Reunion* will be at John Nellis Farm, Nellis Road, Fort Plain, New York, Sunday, July 26, 2014 at 12 noon. Bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Information — 518.993.2978)

Thank You!

We would also like to thank the many charitable people and businesses who have so generously donated funds toward the continuous restoration and maintenance of the 1747 Nellis Tavern. They include the following:

- Bridge Street Architect
- J Button
- P & J Case
- D Clement
- B Falltrick
- K & P Ferguson
- Heritage Meadows Farm B&B
- K Johnson
- J & A McEnroe
- J Mendler
- K Nabors
- D Nellis
- N Nellis
- T Persse
- J Reston
- P Schutze
- G & S Snell
- L Stearns
- Subik - Saltsman's
- R & M Van Gorder
- J Walker

Thank you to the many people who have donated food and other items for our fund raisers. Please leave your name when you do so, so that we can properly thank you. Every little bit helps.

Congratulations to Kelly Button, first place winner of our 2014 rhubarb pie contest.

