

Palatine Settlement Society

PO Box 183 St. Johnsville, NY 13452

www.palatinesettlementsociety.org

WINTER 2008 NEWSLETTER

Antique Show May 17th

Saturday, May 17, will be the date for this annual fundraiser. Once again, we will be using the grounds of the H. C. Smith Benefit Club in Klock Park in St. Johnsville. We are trying to make this year's show bigger and better by choosing a spring date so that we can have dealers setting up displays outdoors, as well as, indoors.

In addition, the Benefit Club members, under the leadership of Paul Vacca, have agreed to host a chicken barbecue that day on the premises for the benefit of the Nellis Tavern. This should result in increased attendance and raise much needed additional funds.

Sidle up to the bar

In the late summer of 1810, prominent New York politician De Witt Clinton traveled eastbound along the Mohawk Turnpike, which we now know as Rte. 5, noting that "a string of taverns is to be observed all along this road" in the vicinity of the Nellis Tavern. In fact, by 1803 there were over fifty taverns or inns between East Canada Creek and Fonda. At a time when local Commissioners of Excise recognized that "inns or taverns are absolutely necessary" because travel was slow and arduous, and liquor consumption a virtual cure-all - and because licensing taverns was a means of revenue for the town - this number was not surprising.

The turn of the nineteenth century witnessed rapid growth in turnpike construction, regionally and nationally, and along with improved roadways and increased traffic came an apparent increase in the number of "accommodations for travelers," i.e. inns and taverns. The Mohawk Turnpike, chartered in 1800, included a bridge over East Canada Creek and was one of the first such roadways completed in the region. This greatly affected the social and structural history of the Nellis Tavern: whereas the colonial King's Highway had run between Christian Nellis's house and the Mohawk River, the new turnpike route lay only a few yards north of the structure, traversing what had been Christian Nellis's back yard.

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Public Meeting

On Tuesday, February 26, 2008 the membership meeting of the Nellis Tavern Trustees will be held at the St. Johnsville Community Center and is open to the public. A talk about antique collecting in the area will be given. If any of those attending wish to bring along an antique, an appraiser will be available to price the item for a \$5 donation to the Nellis Tavern.

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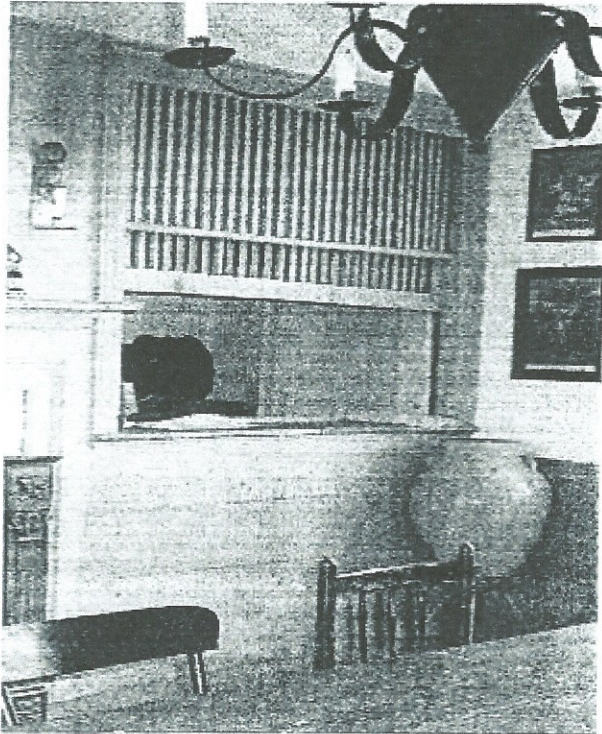
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YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!

We need your rhubarb pies, assistance with building or grounds projects, and help at events and on Sundays. If you are willing, please call Mary @ (315) 866-2619.

Bar - continued from page 1

Within a few years, the Nellis family's entrepreneurial solution was to remodel the mid-18th century structure, creating an entrance facing the new turnpike. Within the first two decades of the nineteenth century, during the residency of Christian's son John C. Nellis, what was once a story-and-a-half structure facing the King's Highway to the south became a two-story Federal style structure facing north, one of that "string of taverns" observed by De Witt Clinton. More often than not, these taverns were family residences in which one or more rooms had been converted to facilitate the sale of liquor and provide beds for paying customers, somewhat like a modern bed-and-breakfast. With dinner. And a bar.



Christian Nellis's house had accommodated travelers since at least the late eighteenth century. For example, Philip Schuyler's surveying party, scouting along the Mohawk River for a possible canal route through the valley, was accommodated at "Mr. Nellis's" on the night of August 23, 1792. In the nineteenth century, however, the traveler encountered the Nellis Tavern as it now stands, via the Mohawk Turnpike.

Remodeling Christian Nellis's old house into the current Nellis Tavern structure involved changes to the interior as well as the exterior. In addition to creating a full second story and adding a two-story extension to the east end, interior alterations included the creation of a "bar" and a "bar room," both of which spaces were inventoried in 1839 after the death of John C. Nellis. The Palatine Settlement Society is now working to determine where these spaces were located. It is believed that they were created out of the large room east of the main hall, which has had a long history of partitions removed and partitions added. The entire east wall of this room was originally paneled. It's possible that the "bar" was located in the closet-like space behind the paneling between the chimney and the south wall, an area about eight feet long and three feet deep. At this point it has not been determined if this space utilized the mid-eighteenth century paneling and closet door, or if a classic tap room bar-with-grille might have been introduced into the space. A partition was also constructed between the southwest corner of the chimney and the room's west wall, creating what is believed to be the "bar room" mentioned in the inventory of 1839.

What did "bars" and "bar rooms" in rural and village taverns look like in the first few decades of the nineteenth century? A tap room in an early nineteenth century tavern at Eastfield Village, a private historic village reconstruction in Rensselaer County (at left), features an example of a bar-with-grille fit into the space between a chimney and a wall. The grille is of a type common in the early nineteenth century. If in fact the Nellises did not utilize their eighteenth century paneling and closet door to form a bar, then they might have created something similar to this. The Nellis bar would have required a door into the bar room, however,

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August 2007 - Last August the Nellis Tavern hosted its 3rd Psychic Fair with ten stations for tarot card readers, palm readers and the like as well as jewelry, books and crystals for sale. The Paranormal Investigator Society gave a lecture with slide show of their numerous photographs of mists, orbs and other psychic phenomenon which really intrigued the

2008 Calendar of Events

April 6th
Benefit Dinner

May 17th
Antique Show and
Chicken BBQ

June 1st
Annual Rhubarb Festival

July 6th
Doll Exhibit:
Presidential First Ladies

September 21st
Evening At the Tavern

October
Annual Meeting



Your 2008 Board of Trustees:

President - Mary Davis, Herkimer
V. President - Ron Burch, Fultonville
Treasurer - Joan Draus, Amsterdam
Secretary - Sandy Lane, Johnstown
Trustee - Donna Reston, Amsterdam
Trustee - Ray Draus, Amsterdam
Trustee - Karen Nabors, Amsterdam

Palatine Settlement Society 2008 Membership Form

There are five categories of membership. Check one below:

() **Active Member** - For an individual willing to participate in the operation of the Society: participating with events, share in decision-making, attend member meetings. Receive newsletter and mailings. **Annual dues \$15**

() **Supporting Member** - For a person unable to assist at functions, or in the restoration of the Tavern, but who wants to support the on-going work of the organization. Receive mailings and newsletter. **Annual dues \$20**

() **Organizational Member** - Help support the groups' work with your membership. Receive newsletter and mailings. **Annual dues \$25**

() **Youth Member** - For students who are college-age and younger, enrolled in school, with an interest or desire to gain knowledge of local history. Receive newsletter. **Annual dues \$1**

() **Life Membership** - This category is for an individual able to make a large financial contribution for the on-going support and restoration of the Tavern, schoolhouse and the activities of the Society.

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City/Town _____

State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (____) _____

Email _____

Enclosed is my check made payable to the
Palatine Settlement Society for annual dues \$ _____
for (specify type) _____ membership.

I'd also like to contribute \$ _____ to be used for:

___ on-going restoration projects

___ on-going costs (insurance, electric, port-a-johns, etc)

___ other - Please be specific: _____

Thank you for your support!

"New" Antique Sofa Now Residing in the "Stove Room"

The trustees decided that an early 19th century sofa would make a nice addition to a room that was probably used as a ladies parlor during the tavern era. The "stove room" – so named in the 1839 inventory of the contents of the Nellis Tavern – is part of the two-story addition added to the east side of the tavern around 1810-15.

Although the inventory does not specifically list a sofa, it is possible that some furnishings had been removed as, in 1839, John C. Nellis was living with his daughter in Lasselsville when he died.

The sofa was purchased in memory of Bernard Seeley, one of our most loyal and valued members. The wood frame is beautiful mahogany and mahogany veneer with decorative carving at the crest. The style is early Empire and it is very similar to a sofa in the collection of the New York State Museum in Albany that once belonged to New York Governor Bouck.

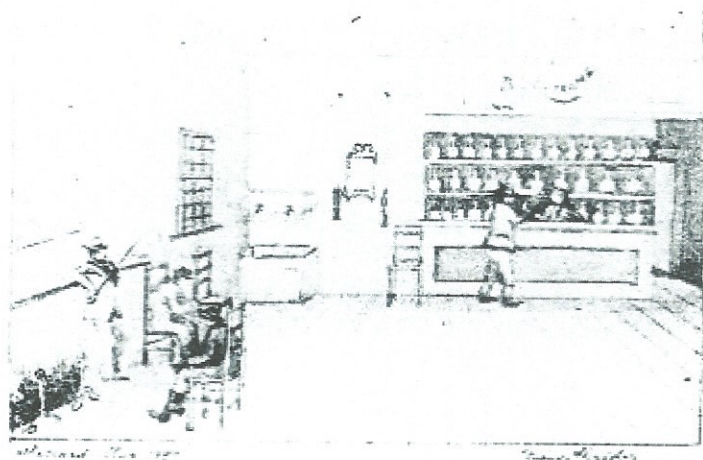
Curtis & Helen Nellis Family Donate Oil Painting

At our October dinner held at Saltsman's Restaurant, Helen Nellis presented the group with an oil painting of the Nellis Block House and Farm House. Dr. Leonard Nellis Berdan did the painting after an 1886 sketch by Rufus Grider. It provides a historical record of the earliest buildings on the tavern property. Although long gone, it is family tradition that some of the timber was reused in our current 1747 Tavern building. We plan to hang this painting in the "Stove Room" over our new sofa.

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A well-known and long-lived tavern in the region was that of Chauncey Jerome, located on the west side of East Canada Creek near the turnpike bridge, in the vicinity of Beardslee Castle. There "you were always sure of venison and trout." In 1897 Rufus Grider sketched the bar room of the aging structure. His watercolor (see below) is in the collections of the NYS Library in Albany.

The Palatine Settlement Society is developing an image database to assist in its research. A number of restored examples of tavern interiors, some more accurate than others, exist in various historic structure contexts in the region, across the state, and nationally. It is also possible to study images of the period (like Grider's depiction of Jerome's tavern) for clues about construction and furnishing. A thorough analysis of paint layers, wear marks, and remaining structural evidence is being undertaken in an attempt to determine the history of the Nellis Tavern bar and bar room. Reconstructing the bar and bar room will further the Society's mission to preserve and interpret the history of the site. While recognizing the singular importance of the eighteenth century core of the building, the presence of an early nineteenth tavern context



from the turnpike era will complement the environment of important historic structures in the neighborhood.

- Ron Burch, January 2008

Bibliography:

- *History of Montgomery and Fulton Counties* (F. W. Beers, 1878)
- *The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton* (William W. Campbell, 1849)
- *Report of a Committee appointed to Explore the Western Waters in the State of New York* (1792)
- *Sesquicentennial History, Town of St. Johnsville* (1988)