

Winter 2012

# Palatine Settlement Society

PO Box 183, St. Johnsville, NY 13452

www.palatinesettlementsociety.org

## Newsletter

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### Nellis Chest Featured in Exhibit

BY RON BURCH



A Nellis family blanket chest from the collection of the Palatine Settlement Society was featured in a recent exhibit at Fulton-Montgomery Community College. "Frontier Style: Culture on the Edge of Empire," which ran from Oct. 14 to Dec. 9, 2011 in the Perella Gallery at FMCC, was the companion exhibition to a weekend symposium of the same name hosted by the community college. The symposium and exhibit were part of the biennial Western Frontier Symposium series.

The "Frontier Style" exhibit explored design influences and variations found in the artifacts and fashions in the Mohawk and Schoharie valleys when the region was a crossroads of European and Native American culture in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Nellis chest is an example of Palatine German design motifs, which persisted from the 18th into the 19th century.

Made for Catherine J. Nellis in 1826, this painted wooden chest from Montgomery County features designs placed on the front panel in a manner popular since the early 18th century within the Germanic populations of the Mohawk and Schoharie valleys. To date, the decorator is unknown, but Catherine J. Nellis married a member of the Snyder family. Their farm was located a few miles east of Nellis Tavern.

The chest was bought at an auction at the Snyder farm a number of years ago by PSS trustee Donna L. Reston. She and her son, Dr. James Reston of Philadelphia, subsequently donated the chest to the Nellis Tavern collection.

The blanket box was displayed prominently on the auditorium screen during Mary Elise Antoine's presentation on German Folk Arts in Upstate New York during the symposium presentations.



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## Restoration – 2011 in Review

BY DONNA RESTON

Thanks to the professional services of Leo Tomlin, our grounds are looking better than ever. East of the tavern we have removed many “junk” trees and in the process have found that we have at least four healthy hickory trees, some healthy maples and much more vegetation to discover. Ron Burch walked the grounds and painted the stump remains with paint thinner so there would be no regrowth. In addition to expanding the mowed area, we are discovering decorative stonewalls and unfortunately loads of road tossed garbage. (Sixteen huge bags were picked up on one day alone and there is always more to be found.) Since the eastern woods are so extremely overgrown, jungle-like even, progress has been slow. Donna had had to make a visit to her doctor after being bitten by a tick – they were very prevalent this season!

The ultimate goal of all of the above is to expand our footprint and take advantage of the whole of the seven acres that we own. Some want to create a nature path so visitors can walk and experience the comforting atmosphere that the grounds afford. We have also begun doing work on the westward vegetation to investigate the site of the original Nellis Dutch barn. We could use some good soil to cover up remains of stumps and depressions in the lawn where Leo has dug out huge protruding rocks that had the potential of ruining his mower blades.

### *EVENING AT THE TAVERN*

This event, chaired by Joan Draus and Karen Nabors, has become our fall signature event and once again this year it was a great success. We're so fortunate that we were not affected by the disastrous weather events of summer and fall that our friends at Ft. Johnson, Guy Park Manor and Schoharie and Middleburg experienced.

This candlelit evening has become a celebration of progress where we can show off the result of continuing restoration projects and relax with longtime supporters and make new friends. A major part of the evening is the food (lots of homemade hors d'oeuvres) and wine and other special drinks. This time member Tom Brewster brought 'red lemonade' – a homemade sumac tea.

Ron Burch once again contributed his talent on the harpsichord to provide period music and Ray Draus acted as bartender for the evening.

### Obituary – Eleanor Getman

On December 5, 2011, we lost one of our most ardent supporters, Eleanor I. Getman. She and her sister Florence donated the large 18<sup>th</sup> c. red painted four-door cupboard that is now one of the cornerstones of our dining room/kitchen display. It came from their family home on Stone Arabia Rd. and thanks to David Devendorf and his truck we were able to transport the piece to the tavern where David and a few other capable volunteers managed to move it through the door with 1" to spare. As long as both she and Florence (who passed July 2, 2011) were able, they supplied pies and other baked goods for tavern events – particularly the rhubarb festival.

Sandy Lane and Karen Nabors continue to work on the herb garden (which looks better than ever), floral plantings near the building and the very important rhubarb patch.

A lot of trim painting has been accomplished upstairs so that all wood trim has at least one coat of paint. This has made the 2nd floor much more welcoming and visually interesting as it provides a better backdrop for our displays which currently include quilts, our decorated Nellis blanket box, farm implements and fiber and weaving related items. Someone commented recently that the building was beginning to look like a home!

Again, we extend thanks to Willis “Skip” Barsheid for his volunteerism and skill in replacing missing pieces of doorframe moulding in the 2nd floor hallway and window sashes and for all of the other things he has done for us over the years.

This year we also installed sections of freestanding railing in the tavern room so that visitors would be better able to envision the three separate areas that were created in the early 19th c. (bar, bar room, bar chamber) out of the original 1747 space. We chose not to rebuild the solid wall with door that closed off the bar and bar room because it would have made the area too congested for tour groups.

### Dues Are Due

Other than monthly bills and insurance all of our money is pumped back into the continued restoration of the building and grounds – hence our continued need for financial support. The trustees and friends of the tavern always provide ‘free’ labor whether it be painting, making minor repairs, preparing or donating food, donating furnishings, hosting tours and playing “step & fetch” at events – we all work because we love the building. We have made phenomenal progress in the last seven years, exhausted ourselves in the process and know we deserve a lot of credit. But we are also keenly aware that if we want the tavern to become all that it can become as an interpretive site for Mohawk Valley history, there is still much to be done. If we are to become more meaningful regionally and locally, historically and economically, we still have more to do. We need more members, more “worker bees” and continued monetary support. So spread the word and next time you visit the site – Bring a friend!

### ADOPT AN ANTIQUE

A short time ago we accepted a donation of a pair of ca. 1830 tiger maple chairs with Nellis family provenance. Unfortunately someone in the past painted them both white. The white paint needs to be removed, a finish applied and new rush seats installed. If anyone has the expertise and time and would like to volunteer for any part of this project please let us know. If you would like to donate money toward any of the above it would probably cost up to \$100 for each chair. Any ‘partial’ monetary donation would be gratefully accepted.

## The WAR of 1812 - SONGS and STORIES from New York and Beyond

BY RON BURCH

On May 5, a lecture/concert by performer Dave Ruch will offer a fascinating portrait of the War of 1812 through the songs and stories of the people themselves. Ruch has dug deeply into archival recordings, diaries, old newspapers and other historical manuscripts to unearth a wealth of rarely heard music, which, alongside some of the classics from the war period, offers a rounded and

fascinating picture of this "second war of independence." Special emphasis is given to New York State's important role in the conflict. The Nellis Tavern, a stop for travelers on the early 19th c. Mohawk Turnpike, witnessed the passage of soldiers, civilians, goods, and produce during this crucial period in the history of the state and the nation. Dave's performance will begin at 2 p.m.

## Future Plans

We hope to have the original front of the building (south side) painted this year as well as possibly have shutters made for that side. We own one original 18th c. shutter from the tavern donated by Marilyn Sassi whose late husband had purchased it from an antique dealer who had once owned a shop in St. Johnsville; he had found it in our attic and took it thinking the state was going to demolish the building. We would have this shutter copied for historical accuracy.

We also hope to have a cement pad poured south of the tavern so we can move the cheese house there. It is very much in the way where it is now and the board decided some time ago to move it to a new location.

The trustees have also started to discuss the possibility of erecting a service building where we could have an orientation center, stage events, have a modern kitchen and have permanent restrooms. We would create a

road facing façade to replicate the partial view we can see in a 19th c. photo of the west 1½ story addition that housed the tavern era kitchen and store. Since our building is now fully furnished, we have run out of space to hold any large public gatherings such as the rhubarb festival, without the expense of a tent. And with the bizarre weather patterns of late we are more and more conscious of our limitations and hence the need for more indoor space.

Since we have spent so much money on restoring the earlier architectural integrity of the original building, we would probably not want to attach the service building to the original building. Also, we could never make an accurate restoration since we have no idea what the south side of that addition looked like. If we do create a new building it could be placed close to the current parking lot entrance.

## 2012 Spring - Summer Events for 1747 Nellis Tavern

*ANTIQUÉ SHOW & SALE* – Saturday, March 3 – 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM held at Arkell Museum, Canajoharie, NY. Admission \$4.00. See page 4.

*THE WAR OF 1812—SONGS AND STORIES FROM NEW YORK AND BEYOND* – Saturday, May 5 – 2:00 PM at the Tavern. Free entertainment with lecture by returning musician Dave Ruch as sponsored by the New York Council for the Humanities.

*16<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RHUBARB FESTIVAL* - Sunday, June 3, 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM at Tavern. Pie baking contest will be held. Rhubarb treats and lunch available. Entertainment.

*SUMMER SUNDAYS* - June 3 thru September 30. 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM at the Nellis Tavern. Tours. Admission \$3.00 for non-members. Members, free admission.

(*Annual Nellis Association Reunion* will be at John Nellis Farm, Nellis Road, Fort Plain, New York, Sunday, July 15, 2012 at 12 noon. Bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Information - 518-993-2978.)



1747 Nellis Tavern

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## *Newsletter*



# ANTIQUÉ SHOW & SALE at Arkell Museum Saturday, March 3, 2012

Saturday March 3<sup>rd</sup> is the date, the Arkell Museum in Canajoharie is the place and the time is 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM. \$4.00 Admission will get you into the show; or a \$7.00 “Combo” ticket will allow you to also tour the museum galleries - regular admission to the museum is \$7.00 and if you have not seen the galleries you are in for a treat. This small “jewel” of a museum owns major examples of American Art; Bartlett Arkell, the founder of Beechnut, donated most many years ago.

Come spend the day and buy an antique! Whatever your budget, there

will be antiques for you whether it be a \$2 postcard or something costing in the hundreds or thousands of dollars. It is an eclectic show with a full range of affordable antiques – all presented by friendly and knowledgeable dealers.

An added attraction will be the appraisal booth. The charge will be \$5 for any two items.

Homemade food will be available for purchase as usual, including sandwiches, soup, desserts, coffee, tea and other drinks.

Donna Reston is Show Manager and can be reached at (518) 843-1601.



It is once again time to renew your membership, if you are not a Lifetime Member. Look at your address label on the outside of this Newsletter to see the date of your last membership application.

Example:

Jane Doe 11

Or

John Doe L (for Lifetime)

Donations are always welcome.

Let us know if you prefer a US mailed Newsletter instead of just the link to our website where you may view it.

Thank you to all who have donated time, money, food or material goods for the ongoing fundraising, restoration and upkeep of the Nellis Tavern during 2011. We are truly fortunate to have you as our friends.

## Donations

Gary Aney  
NBT Bank  
Willis Barsheid  
Benjamin and Jane Button  
Ron Burch  
Sister Mary Cabrini (June Nellis)  
Jim Dorney  
Bernice Faltrick  
Donald Fenner  
Pete and Kate Ferguson  
Grooms Tavern members  
Richard and Lois Hyde  
James and Abigail McEnroe  
Thelma Miles  
Donna Reston  
James Reston  
R. Sedziol  
Alice Shelp  
Anita Smith  
Anonymous

## Supporting Members

Founding Father/Mother:

George and Sigrid Snell

Hearthkeeper:

Nancy Nellis Hodgson

Mercantile:

Bridge Street Architect  
Ona Curran  
Thomas Persse - Fulmont Mutual  
Rick & June Rogers  
Thelma & James Subik - Saltsman's  
Carolyn Williams - NBT Bank