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7355 State Rt. 5, St. Johnsville, NY

Come visit the  
**1747 Nellis Tavern**  
 on Sunday afternoon  
 this summer. We are  
 open every Sunday,  
 June—September,  
 1:00–4:00pm. \$3.00



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## Newsletter

### Restoration 2013: The Story of the George Nellis Cupboard (told from the point of view of the cupboard) by Donna Reston

I know that I am more than 200 years old but I'm not sure when I was built. I do know that until about ten years ago I had always resided on what was known as the George Nellis farm. The first George Nellis (actually Hans Jurg) 1732-1792, was a son of Christian Nellis, Sr. and he grew up downriver near St. Johnsville in what later became known as the old Nellis Tavern. In 1761, he married Elizabeth Christman and they moved west to Herkimer County where he established a farm and blacksmith shop. His 3<sup>rd</sup> child and only son, Johannes George, 1765-1849, inherited the family farm, all of the farm and blacksmith equipment and carpentry tools.

The only house I ever remember was the one I spent most of my life in and it was built after the Revolutionary War. An earlier home built on the property in the 1760's had been burned by the Tories and by 1778 the family was listed on the German Flats relief list. After the war, the state compensated many of those who had been burned out; that is how my family was able to build a new home in the 1780's. I'm pretty sure that it was the second George, who married Mary Catherine Steele in 1786, that built me, sometime before 1800; that is because I had overheard people talking and saying my nails and other construction details show that time period. I was a very good looking cupboard with an upper stepback canted section with three display shelves over a wide work shelf under which were two doors enclosing a handy storage area.

I had a nice comfortable life until a later generation constructed a new home closer to the road and sadly left me behind – I guess my old-fashioned look did not fit the décor of the large and brand new early Victorian home built in 1868. The family did visit me occasionally but over a period of time they started to use my home more as a barn and workshop. Barn doors replaced windows and oil cans replaced the pewter and other nice dish ware that once filled my shelves. For years, I sat very close to a pair of those barn

doors that one day just fell off and so I finally started to sag and deteriorate under the driving rains of summer and onslaught of snow in winter. I was very cold and lonely and began to develop a whitish haze on my surface.

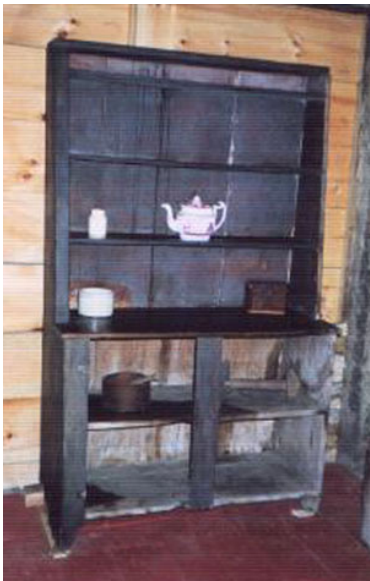
One day my own doors broke off even though someone in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> C. had attached two pairs of those new fangled butt hinges to replace the original surface mounted handmade ones that had probably been hammered out by George; he was after all a blacksmith! For a while the doors had remained nearby but soon nobody remembered what became of them. After that no one seemed to care about me – even a corner of my nice wide cherry work shelf got broken off, along with a piece of upper corner post and then I lost a front leg section. Occasionally I suffered the indignity of feeling a mouse or squirrel gnawing at my nice wide pine backboards. Finally someone nailed me to the wall so I couldn't fall over.

My last owner, Mary Nellis Davis, is very proud of her historic family heritage and did what she could to shore up and preserve my old home but didn't have the resources to do everything the building needed. After all, she had that big home near the road to maintain.

Then one day, ten years ago, Donna Reston arrived at the newer house in a big white van. Mary invited her in and I later learned that she was a new trustee of the Palatine Settlement Society (PSS). After the Nellis Tavern had become a museum, Mary had offered to donate many old Nellis furnishings to PSS from her attic and woodshed. I watched them as they carried things out and put them in the van and thought this was exciting because previous trustees had come and looked many years before and hadn't taken anything.

At that point I grew hopeful for my own future but it appeared that they weren't going to come to my building. And then they started walking toward me! Mary had asked Donna to give her opinion concerning the age of my home. As they walked through the open wall I sensed immediately that Donna had “no-

“ticed” me. As she walked around the interior she finally stopped to give me a closer look. Despite my condition and my pale whitish appearance I could tell that she admired and wanted me; would she ask the question? Finally I heard her say to Mary, “Would you be interested in donating this cupboard?” The answer was “Yes” and if I could have I would have jumped up and down for joy! It didn’t take Donna long to run for her van and drive it right up in front of me. She and Mary emptied my shelves of horseshoes, nails in cans and other debris and then tried to move me – I was stuck to the wall! Finally, after using a hammer and other tools they were able to pry me loose. After that I got pretty worried as they seemed to have such a hard time moving me; I heard Donna say “I must be getting weak in my old age” and for a time I thought I might get left behind. But I could tell that this new woman in my life wasn’t going to give up until I was safely in the van.



So began my journey from Herkimer County to Montgomery County. It was a nice ride down the valley and soon we pulled up in front of the 1747 tavern – the ancestral home of my Nellis family. Donna had called ahead so we could be met by another trustee who helped carry me inside where I was propped up in the middle of the floor. The first thing I noticed was that I was not alone anymore; another great big four-door red cupboard sat on the left side of the dining/kitchen room.

After a few days, Donna showed up again and gave me a much needed scrub bath. She not only used Murphy’s oil soap on me but also some fine steel wool; sometimes she even had to use a knife to scrape off the debris field on my shelves as the soap and water softened it up. I could see that she was getting more and more excited about me as my initial white fuzziness dissolved and my original olive green paint revealed itself over an old red lead primer. I heard her tell someone that the whitish appearance was probably the result of mold and mildew build-up. Finally she set to work on my nice wide workshelf; that had never been painted and she could see then that I was made of nice old black cherry. Now she knew why I had been so heavy!

I did for a short time miss my former owner, but guess what? – She became a trustee of PSS and shortly after her sister Sandy and her husband Walt also joined. So I’m still with my original family and Mary is now the President of our organization.

After being moved into a permanent site to the right of the big stone fireplace I was once again proudly displaying china and pewter. Some of those plates – especially the pewter one looked vaguely familiar. Then last year I heard Donna say that she would like to improve my appearance – she used the word “restoration”. It seems a fellow named Rick Rogers had donated two old cupboard doors several years earlier and apparently the group had a little extra money so Donna’s idea was to send me up

the hill to Eli Kurtz, an Amish cabinetmaker. So began another ride; Joe Fowler, a PSS member and antique dealer in Canajoharie with help from his son Caleb, lifted me into a pickup truck and away we went. I was to spend the early spring of 2013 at Eli’s.

At first I was a bit scared but I knew I needed repair and my missing doors did make me feel rather naked plus every time I had to be moved I lost a bit more of my two weakened and shorter legs (dry rot had set in). Donna meanwhile had drawn a picture of a separate frame that could be built and fastened inside my bottom to lift me ½” higher off of the floor so that this inner frame could hold me straight and relieve the pressure on my original base.

During that winter/spring Donna continued to check up on me and I also became better acquainted with Willis Barshied whom I had often seen at the tavern. “Skip”, as I heard other people call him, had spent plenty of time looking me over as I had to spend a few weeks in his workshop waiting for Eli to have room and time to work on me. He actually gave me the final short ride up to Eli’s in his van.

After replacing the smaller missing pieces with old cherry and sizing the old doors to fit, I heard the two men talk about hinges. Donna had determined that the surface mounted ones were the first set so Willis let her rummage through his extensive collection of old hinges. Luckily he had four matching blacksmith-made old ones that fit the profile and size of the originals. Willis was willing to donate them!



Finally, one day Eli and a friend of his who owned a pickup delivered me back to my tavern home. This time it took two men plus Donna to get me back inside as now I am even heavier. The finishing touch to my ‘restoration’ was accomplished by Donna as she mixed acrylic artist paints to color match the new old doors to my original olive green surface. Now I stand straight and proud once again and should be fit and useful for another 200 years.

N.B. For those of you who might think that the story of the acquisition of this old cupboard is “much ado about nothing”, let me explain. Cupboards in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> C. were the closets of their day, so for collectors with old houses or those who just want to decorate in the old style, they have become very desirable. Authentic old ones that end up being sold at auction today can bring thousands of dollars – depending upon age, form, surface and condition. Since our building was in need of so much restoration, we would not have had the money to go out and purchase such a cupboard. Therefore, despite its initial poor condition we were grateful and extremely happy to acquire this example that had both authenticity and family provenance.





## Pomeroy Grant Received

Last September, Trustees of the Palatine Settlement Society applied to the William G. Pomeroy Foundation of Syracuse for a grant to obtain and erect an historic marker to commemorate the Nellis Tavern having been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In October, Ms. Paula M. Miller, Executive Director of the Pomeroy Foundation, informed our trustees this grant request was approved. The marker states, “Nellis Tavern has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 by the United States Department of Interior - William G. Pomeroy Foundation.”

Our new marker will be erected by the Town of St. Johnsville Highway Department through the courtesy of Town of St. Johnsville Supervisor Mr. Wayne Handy. It will be unveiled and dedicated on June 1, 2014. Our new marker will be visible from the highway and so will no doubt assist us in attracting more visitors to the Nellis Tavern historic site. We greatly appreciate the Pomeroy Foundation’s generous award and the cooperation we received in erecting our new marker from Supervisor Handy and the Town of St. Johnsville Highway Department.

## Rhubarb Festival

Remember when your grandmother baked on Saturday, for the whole week....and how great it smelled...and the anticipation of being able to sample dough, and eat the breads, pies and cakes? June 1<sup>st</sup> is the Rhubarb Festival at the Nellis Tavern. There will be pies and more pies, cakes, breads, jams and jellies all made with rhubarb...mixed with strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, etc. There is the ambiance of the olde tavern, circa 1747, and the music, lunch and camaraderie shared with all the guests; such a

## 2014 Future Events for 1747 Nellis Tavern

**ANTIQUÉ SHOW & SALE** — Saturday, March 8, 10:00 AM–4:00 PM held at Arkell Museum, Canajoharie, NY. Admission \$4.00.

**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.

**18<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RHUBARB FESTIVAL** — Sunday, June 1, 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

**EVENING AT THE TAVERN** — Saturday, September 20, 4:00–7:00 PM. Admission \$15.00. Annual candlelight event with hors d’oeuvres, wine and period music. Pre-order tickets - 315.866.2619; 518.843.1601

(*Annual Nellis Association Reunion* will be at John Nellis Farm, Nellis Road, Fort Plain, New York, Sunday, July 27, 2014 at 12 noon. Bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Information — 518–993–2978.)

festive time; some ladies in period dress; all waiting to make your visit to the tavern a community of sharing and understanding of the life at, and around, the tavern and the Mohawk River.

You can enjoy recipes that are from that time and from our own recipe boxes; your taste buds will just love it. If baking a pie with rhubarb in it is your specialty, bring one to be judged by our panel. You even get to eat the pies that were judged. Join us for a really fun day; bring a friend and help support the restoration of the Nellis Tavern.

## A Handsome Assortment

by Ron Burch

For the 2014 season, the Palatine Settlement Society at historic Nellis Tavern will return “A Handsome Assortment’: Chairs of the Turnpike Tavern Era” to its second floor gallery. The exhibit, which was first featured in September 2013, will feature chairs from the Nellis Tavern collection dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The “turnpike era” in upstate New York corresponded roughly with the first half of the nineteenth century. “A Handsome Assortment” will display examples of the types of seating pieces which would have been found in common use in establishments like Nellis Tavern during its heyday between 1800 and 1840, when the structure faced the Mohawk Turnpike (present Route



5). Today, objects like these are regarded as examples of early American artisanship and are frequently examples of early American mass production and design.

The Palatine Settlement Society is planning to publish a catalog featuring pieces from the exhibit.

This chair is one of three donated last year by Kathryn Gulick. It’s a stenciled, rush-bottom side chair manufactured by the Charles Robinson Co., Rochester, NY, c.1850.



### 1747 Nellis Tavern in May

Palatine Settlement Society  
PO Box 183  
Saint Johnsville, NY 13452

[PalatineSettlementSociety.org](http://PalatineSettlementSociety.org)

*2014 Newsletter*

## Our Antique Show & Sale at Arkell Museum Saturday, March 8, 2014

This is the date, the Arkell Museum in Canajoharie is the place and the time is 10:00 AM–4:00 PM. The admission is \$4.00, 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; buy an antique! There will be antiques for you, whatever your budget. It might be a \$2 postcard or something costing in the hundreds or thousands of dollars. The show is eclectic with a full range of affordable antiques — all presented by friendly and knowledgeable dealers.

The appraisal booth is an added attraction. 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.



2012  
Antique  
Show at  
Arkell  
Museum

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### Evening at the Tavern - Saturday, September 20, 2014

This coming year, our ever popular Evening at the Tavern will be held on *Saturday* evening instead of Sunday. We hope you will join us for the sunset ambiance. See Page 3.