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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

Researching a Chest and Its Owners

by Ron Burch

Several years ago, Mary Nellis Davis donated to the Palatine Settlement Society an early 19th century chest of drawers which had descended in her branch of the Nellis family in Herkimer County. Constructed predominantly of cherry and maple in the neoclassical American Empire style popular in the 1820s and 1830s, the chest has carved columns at either side above turned legs. It probably was made in the Mohawk Valley, possibly in the Herkimer County region, and is basically a “vernacular” or regional interpretation of a high-style piece that might have featured more delicate carving, finer turnings and more expensive mahogany had it been a product of a more urban environment like Albany, Troy, or New York City. It is seen here in the process of being restored.



In preparing for an exhibit focusing on historic artifacts from the extended Nellis family, which has been in the Mohawk Valley for nearly three hundred years, the Society discovered that Mary owns two small watercolor portraits of David and Barbara Small Nellis, early owners of the chest.

On Christmas Eve, 1829, David, son of John G. and Catherine Folts Nellis, married Barbara Small, daughter of Melchert and Dorothy Petrie Small in Herkimer County. Family tradition maintains that the chest was passed to Barbara Small Nellis by her mother. Because of the proximity of the dates of the chest’s probable construction and of David and Barbara’s wedding, it would be interesting to speculate as to whether the chest was a wedding gift. At any rate, it’s noteworthy that the connection between the piece of furniture and the portraits of its early owners has been maintained for 185 years.

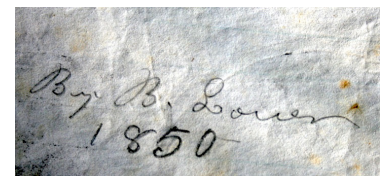
The portraits of David and Barbara Nellis, dated 1850, are small, each about 6 by 4 inches. Currently they are framed together, as such pairs often were. Perhaps they were produced to commemorate the couple’s 20th anniversary.

Barbara’s portrait is dated on the back and signed in a scrawling signature that has been interpreted as “B. Loves” by New England researchers Michael and Suzanne Rudnick Payne. They know of the existence of about a dozen similar portraits by “B. Loves” that appear to originate from the same region. Deciphering the signature



conclusively remains an undertaking for future research.

Mary Nellis Davis is currently the President of the Palatine Settlement Society board of trustees.



A Piece of the Tavern Returns Home

by Donna Reston

Imagine to my surprise one summer Sunday afternoon when I was hosting the usual tours, a local history buff, Ken Capece and his wife enter. Ken hands me a small box and says, "I have a present for you." The postal markings on the package said St. Simons Island, GA. Opening it, I lifted out the carefully wrapped original newel cap that topped the post at the bottom of the hall staircase. It had been missing since the PSS owned the building. A replacement was finally made and talk about serendipity – that reproduction cap had recently fallen off since it had only been held in place by glue and I had been berating myself that very day when arriving at the Tavern because I had forgotten to bring the glue bottle so I could reattach it. An hour later in comes the original showing the wear of several hundred years of use by Nellis family members and guests as they ascended and descended the staircase. The "icing on the cake" was that the cap still had three huge 18th c. spikes sticking out of it, that, when carefully straightened, went right back into the original holes those nails had made.

After planting a huge kiss on Ken (with his wife's permission), he related the story: Forty years ago a friend of his had been one of many who had entered the deserted building – the open door was quite inviting! He later told Ken that he wanted a souvenir and had pried off the newel cap – when he moved to Georgia he took it with him and displayed it on his mantel. It turns out that Ken's sister lives on St. Simon Island and when she called with the news of the man's passing, Ken asked her if she would contact the man's daughter to see if she would return the artifact – she was agreeable. A "little object" – but what a "big impact" it makes in the Tavern hallway; and what a happy ending.

Anyone out there who knows of any other tavern parts or pieces – please contact us!

A Nellis Quilt

by Sandy Nellis Lane

A beautiful Nellis quilt that is usually on display in the Tavern supplied the pattern for our very own Quilt Barn Square on the Fulton Montgomery Quilt Barn Trail (FMQBT). The FMQBT is a tourism trail that visually connects the outdoor landscape with unique squares throughout our two counties. A map is being produced to guide tourists to each of the displays, many of which are 9' x 9' and attached to barns: <http://www.fmquiltbarntail.com/>



Our 4' x 4' square was unveiled at our annual fund raiser, Evening at the Tavern on Saturday, September 20, 2014



at the Nellis Tavern. We could not place it on our historic building so the double-sided painted artwork hangs from its own sign posts near the highway.

It has been taken down for the harsh winter months to protect the paint but will reappear again in the Spring, about the same time as our Kees Nellis tulips bloom!

We would like to thank Liz Argotsinger, Allen Turnbull, Brian Hudson and an anonymous donor for making this project a reality. Please let us know if you have a name for this mid-19th c. quilt pattern.

Kees
Nellis
tulips



Recent Passings

Joanne Fowler, 73, formerly of Nelliston, NY, died peacefully Sunday, August 17, 2014, at home following a long illness in Jacksonville, NC. She was born March 24, 1941, to the late Ruth Nellis Zoller and Jack Zoller.

Joanne was predeceased by her husband, Lawrence; and daughter, Tracy. She is survived by her five children; seven grandchildren; one brother; and several nieces and nephews.

A memorial service took place on Saturday, August 23, 2014, at Fort Plain Reformed Church, 165 Canal St., at 10 a.m. followed by a burial service at St. Johnsville Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, contributions in memory of Joanne were made to the Palatine Settlement Society, c/o 1747 Nellis Tavern, P.O. Box 183, St. Johnsville, NY 13452.

Joanne and son, Troy, and daughter Tara, volunteered many hours to help restore the Nellis Tavern in the 1990's.

The PSS greatly appreciates their work and the monetary contributions made by their friends and family.

Other local friends of the Palatine Settlement Society that we lost this past year include **Helen V. Nellis, Barbara V. Spraker and Joyce Berry.**

Palatine Settlement Society Receives Technical Assistance Grant

by Ron Burch

The Preservation League of New York State awarded the Palatine Settlement Society a Technical Assistance Grant of \$3000.00 to do a preliminary conservation needs assessment of the historic early 19th century stenciled plaster walls in Nellis Tavern. Brian Powell of Building Conservation Associates, Inc., of Newton Centre, MA, conducted the survey and produced a 58-page document outlining his findings and suggestions for the next phase of preservation of these vestiges of 180-year-old decorative art from the Mohawk Valley.

The original five rooms of the two-story early 19th century addition to the east end of Nellis Tavern were stenciled in imitation of wallpaper by an as-yet unknown itinerant craftsman decades before the Civil War, while the building served as an inn and tavern on the old Mohawk Turnpike, which closely approximated the current State Highway 5. In the mid-19th century, partitions were removed on the ground floor to create one large room out of three, which was then wallpapered. Removal of the wallpaper in the late 20th century



disclosed three distinct stencil pattern groupings, which are discernible today.

The original stencil designs were combinations of floral and geometric motifs executed in brilliant reds, yellows, and greens. The decoration was executed on bare plaster in “distemper” paint, an animal glue-based pigment, which remains ever soluble in water. Over eighteen decades, the Nellis Tavern walls were exposed to various amounts of moisture and water damage resulting in loss of areas of plaster as well as decorative stenciling. Powell’s report and suggestions will be used as a foundation for discussion by the board of trustees regarding the next – and proper – steps to take to ensure preservation, and possibly restoration, of damaged areas, and potential replication of areas where plaster has totally disappeared.

The Palatine Settlement Society is extremely grateful to the Preservation League for the award, and also extends its thanks to Rachel Bliven, Director of the Montgomery County Historical Society and an experienced freelance grant writer, who prepared the grant application.

New Railing Set For Next Spring

by Peter Betz

Last fall the outside stair railing that assists visitors to access the Tavern from the back (originally the front) yard finally rotted and broke. According to a reputable area lumber dealer, a replacement railing comes in almost the exact length we needed, but he advised that, due to cooling outdoor temperatures, it was too late in the Fall to properly stain and varnish the replacement railing.

The new railing, plus the varnish and stain needed to make it attractive and coat it to prevent premature deterioration due to bad weather, was purchased and it will be prepared and installed this coming spring once temperatures improve. While the old stair railing was made of ordinary wood, the new one is made of pressure-treated lumber, which should add years to its life.

Restoration 2014

by Donna Reston

Early in the season, just about rhubarb time, we had mason Tracey Reese back to attack a rather large project in the Tavern basement. A massive stone pillar in the middle of the building

that gave structural support to a beam that supported not only the first floor but also the staircase to the second floor, was basically falling apart – loose stones were on the floor. Tracey determined that the only way to do a proper repair was to deconstruct and then reconstruct with new mortar while using the same stones. That was accomplished over the course of several weeks and, needing to allow for complete drying, we may have Tracey back to plaster the pillar to make a smooth surface. The room at the base of the cellar steps was originally a living area containing the family cooking fireplace in the 18th c. and was accordingly finished off with wall plastering – a large original section still remains.



The other big project this past year involved the ordering of reproduction doors to replace those missing on the second floor – both for looks and a little added fire safety. We had one original door to copy and the work was accomplished by Urie Mast, an Amish gentleman whose specialty is doors. The doors are made of clear pine 1 ½ inch thick and exact duplicates of the original – mortised and tenured with inset beaded panels. They are absolutely beautiful! Ron Burch and Donna were able to get one coat of paint on them before winter. Now we are working on getting them hung. Rich Strunk, a building restoration expert, has agreed to do that for us. So if we get a few more warm days this winter we will have them in use by spring.





1747 Nellis Tavern in May

Palatine Settlement Society
PO Box 183
Saint Johnsville, NY 13452

PalatineSettlementSociety.org

2015 Newsletter

Join the *Palatine Settlement Society*

In 2015, support the restoration of the 1747 Nellis Tavern and preserve history!

Memberships are from January through December

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Email address _____

Memberships and dues:

- Pioneer (Individual Membership) \$20
- Apprentice (Student) \$5
- Homesteaders (Family) \$35
- Mercantile (Business) \$50
- Hearth Keeper (Large Donation) \$250
- Founding Father/Mother (Substantial Donation) \$1000

Please volunteer your time:

- Spring building clean-up
- Grounds clean-up, gardening
- Scraping and/or painting
- Fall building closing
- Help at fund raiser event
- Bake for Rhubarb Festival
- Other _____

Donation \$ _____ Membership \$ _____ Total enclosed \$ _____

Please make check payable to: *Palatine Settlement Society*

Mail this form and check to: Palatine Settlement Society, PO Box 183, St. Johnsville, NY 13452