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GROOMS TAVERN GAZETTE

Spring/Summer 2013

Friends of Historic Grooms Tavern

P.O. Box 1166 Clifton Park, NY 12065

www.grooms-tavern.com

Clifton Park Landmark Gets Facelift

A BIT OF HISTORY By John L. Scherer

The abandoned building on the southwest corner of Vischer Ferry Road and Grooms Road, now owned by Coburg Village has recently undergone exterior renovations. The building was originally constructed in about 1815 by Sylvanus Birch (1779-1840) and was a popular Clifton Park tavern providing food and lodging to those traveling east and west along Grooms Road or north and south along Vischer Ferry Road, connecting to the ferry at the Mohawk River. It also served the local community as a gathering place, and many of our early town board meetings were held in the upstairs public room, alternating with meetings held a mile west at the tavern of James Groom.

Sylvanus Birch (1779-1840) and his wife, Ruth Palmer (1783-1869) came to Clifton Park from Pawling, Dutchess County, New York sometime between 1810 when they appear on Pawling census records and 1819 when the Birch Tavern is mentioned by the Commissioners of Highways of the Town of Orange in laying out the new road from the home of James Groom, Jr. (later also served as a tavern) eastward to Cyrus Clark's Mills (near present day Barney Road). This became Grooms



Road. For four years, between 1816 and 1820, the area of present-day Clifton Park was called Orange Township, but this name was dropped and the town reverted back to Halfmoon until the town again separated in 1828. It was an even mile along the new road laid out in 1819 between the Grooms Tavern at Sugar Hill Road and the Birch Tavern at Vischer Ferry Road, and this very level and straight stretch of Grooms Road became a popular horse racing track for local enthusiasts.

Taverns or inns during the nineteenth century could merely be large private homes whose owners provided lodging and sustenance to travelers and a public meeting place for the community. James Groom of Grooms Corners, Sylvanus Birch of Vischer Ferry Road, Nicholas Fort of Fort's Ferry, and Hank Knowlton of Erie Canal Lock 20 operated such establishments at their homes. Other taverns might be large elaborate public buildings like those built by James Jones in Jonesville, Ephraim Stevens in Clifton Park Village, Benjamin Mix in Vischer Ferry, and John MacLane in Rexford.

What's Inside

James Grooms
& Susan Van
Vranken revisit
the Tavern
during
National History
Week

Summer and
the Milkman

Calendar of
Events

Volunteers
Needed



Our Website Moved to
<http://www.Groomstavern.com>



The Birch family retained ownership of the tavern after Sylvenus's death in 1840. In 1857, Sylvenus's son, Almond and wife Jane sold the tavern and surrounding farm to David Bachus of the Town of Scaghticoke. Interestingly, another son, Seymour Birch (1812-1852) and his wife Catharine Maria were drowned in a steamboat collision on Lake Erie in 1852 when the "Atlantic" on which they were traveling to Detroit to visit relatives hit the "Ogdensburgh" that was headed in the opposite direction. A monument in the Grooms Methodist Church Cemetery on Vischer Ferry Road commemorates this tragic event. Nearby are buried Sylvanus and Ruth Birch, now far from the tavern they once owned.

In 1989, I had an opportunity to visit the interior of the Birch Tavern with the developer who owned it at that time. He had already turned the adjacent barn in to his real estate office, and I was hoping to convince him of the tavern's important role in Clifton Park's history. The building was very much intact, including the original room layouts and stairway. Original window sash, doors and moldings were still present. The public room extended across most of the second floor, and still contained the original stencil decorated walls from the 1820s which I documented with my camera. The 1802 Nicholas Vischer House down the road at Grooms Corners, now King Crest Farm owned by the Eells family, also had stenciled decorated walls, probably done by the same itinerant artist.

Unfortunately, a passion for preservation is not shared by everyone, especially when motivated

by profit. You can imagine my horror, a year later, when I discovered that the developer, rather than retaining the original fabric of the building as he had vowed, had gutted the entire structure, modified the



rear wing and changed the roof line, even though there was no intent to use the building. All that was left was the shell. The building remained abandoned for many years until the current renovation.

Thanks to the Clifton Park Planning Department and Coburg Village the exterior has been preserved and renovated so that future generations can appreciate more fully Clifton Park's early history and its ties to turnpikes and taverns. An important landmark will still grace the corner of Vischer Ferry and Grooms Road reminding us all of a simpler and more primitive past.



James Groom and Susan Van Vranken visit the Tavern during **National History Week** while the Town Council meet again in their original location, Grooms Tavern for their monthly meeting.





SUMMER AND THE MILKMAN

By Mary Ann Barker

Way back when, warmer days brought much awaited weather to enjoy the out of doors. No more boots, no more coats, and no more cold! The tree swing and bicycles got a workout in the yard. The familiar whirring of the push mower produced the scent of new mown grass as a heavenly perfume only summer could bring. It was shorts and bare feet time and maybe swimming at McKitten's pond with cousins from Vischers Ferry. Jump rope with an old piece of clothesline, the click of cats eye marbles in the dirt.

Now our family could head for the Mohawk Drive In Theater on Central Avenue for a treat, very affordable at one dollar a car load on certain nights. This was our big deal, our private outing, and all in color. The mingling patrons in the lot were also an attraction, sometimes more interesting than parts of the movie. Another special time was having a turn at sleeping outside. Ma set up the cot and fashioned a roof of oilcloth in the back yard. One soon discovered the night wasn't so silent and was a bit chilly. Our cats invited themselves onto my legs for a nap. The cool fresh night air that smelled strange and caressed my face, and noisy serenading crickets were not conducive for sleep. Hypnotic lightning bugs dotted the night as finally sleep did come, as I hunkered under my blankets. But all too soon the weather sent me inside when rain peppered the tent roof like popping corn and the blankets became a bit soaked around the edges. Or a clinking of glass bottles awakened me at dawn with a start as Billy Scanlon faithfully delivered milk into the hammered aluminum insulated box in the porch.

Thinking back, I wonder if the rigged sleeping tent might have alarmed Mr. Scanlon in the darkness. Or, hopefully, it brought back boyhood memories of the times he might have been privileged to camp out in his own back yard.

Mary Ann Barker Schmeelke grew up on Grooms Road and loves to share her memories of childhood.

2013 Calendar of Events



September 21-22nd Saturday and Sunday 10 AM-5 PM	Farm Fest: Open House Includes "The Antique Chair Exhibit"
October 20th Sunday 1 PM-5 PM	Annual Meeting and Program 1-5PM Presentation by John Scherer "Antique Chairs"
December 8th Sunday 1 PM-5 PM	Old Fashioned Christmas Open House Music by Sweat Briar Players with Decorations by the "Country Garden Club"
FOHGT Monthly Board Meetings Fourth Monday of each month held at the Grooms Tavern from 7 PM—9 PM. Meetings are open to the public.	



Don't Forget to Volunteer!
We need your help with:

1. Setup/breakdown for our programs.
2. Become a member of our Board.
3. Write a story about local life in the "Old" days to be published in our newsletter.
4. Be a host or hostess at one of our events.
5. Help provide refreshments for a program.
6. Decorate for Old-Fashioned Christmas.
7. Volunteers to weed the garden.
8. Donate or hold a fundraiser for our renovations.



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