



Parker Goodfellow photo of Grooms Tavern, ca. 1910.

www.groomstavern.org

**Friends of
Historic Grooms Tavern**
P.O. Box 1166
Clifton Park, NY 12065



GROOMS TAVERN GAZETTE

Summer-2005

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Thanks for Another Great Farm Fest Weekend!

Thank You to all of the volunteers that helped make this another successful Farm Fest weekend at the Tavern.

There were about 200 visitors each day, with many new sites to see, thanks to the ever growing artifact collections being donated to the Tavern. Also, as always, Ernie Haffner kept the crowds puzzled with his famous "What is It?" contest. Thanks also to Eugene Herold, for hauling in his tons of antique equipment to entertain the visitors!



This year, for the first time, the new meeting room in the old wagon shed was open to visitors of Farm Fest...



To the left is the new, (old), water pump, donated by Eugene Herold, and his wife Nancy...

To the right, Gene entertains with his collection of antique engines and equipment.



Visitors enjoying the many exhibits in the "Store"



A couple of youngsters asking "What is It?"



Artifacts from Rexford's McLane Hotel

Donated to Clifton Park - A BIT OF HISTORY By John L. Scherer

Clark and Chris Wilson of Rexford have recently donated material salvaged from the McLane Hotel in Rexford to the Town of Clifton Park for exhibit in the Historic Grooms Tavern. Clark is the grandson of hotel owner John McLane, and the donated items were salvaged from the hotel in October 1964 when the hotel was demolished for the approach to the new Route 146 Bridge across the Mohawk River.

Today cars travel over the site of the old three-story hotel. John McLane (c. 1876-1931) purchased the Rexford Flats Hotel from Cyrus and Hannah Rexford in 1897 for \$4000, and commenced rebuilding and enlarging the hotel. The new hotel had accommodations for one hundred guests.

Because of its proximity to the Erie Canal, the hotel was often frequented by "canawlers." Many stories about the hotel deal with drinking contests and drunken brawls. Among the famous guests was "America's Sweetheart," film star Mary Pickford who was making a film in the area.

Saturday night balls were held in the large ballroom that could hold several hundred dancers. At one point McLane purchased many pairs of roller skates and the young people were allowed to skate in the ballroom.

John McLane and his family lived in private apartments on the second floor of the hotel until about 1923 when they moved to a house on Main Street. He was quite an entrepreneur owning a considerable amount of Rexford real estate including the old Cyrus Rexford brick store, and a farm north of Rexford with a beautiful Greek revival house built by Jonas Southard in about 1845. This structure was for a while the home of the Niskayuna Elks Club, and is currently a gift store called Robin's Nest.

McLane was born in Niskayuna, the son of Robert McLane an Irish immigrant. He married a Schenectady native, Laura Vrooman, and they had five sons: John, Harry, Alfred, Richard and William; and two daughters: Lorretta and Dorothy (Clark's mother). John McLane became rather influential. He was a personal friend of Governor Al Smith, and was appointed Superintendent of Canals from Waterford to Utica. He was also the Chairman of the Democratic Party for Saratoga County. When the Rexford Volunteer Fire Company was formed in 1923, John McLane provided the building for the first firehouse, and also purchased the first fire truck. In return the fire company was named the John McLane Hose Company.

After McLane's death in 1931, his son Harry operated the hotel until the State of New York purchased the property for the bridge approach in 1964. During the 1950s the hotel was a popular stopping off place for employees of General Electric and Alco Locomotive Works headed home from work. By this time only the bar was open. Overnight accommodations were no longer provided.

Hotel items included in the recent gift include a parlor organ, several turned posts from the porch, a pair of curved top double doors that divided the main lobby from the dining room, and the hotel guest counter. A portion of the bar was also salvaged, but will remain in the Wilson family.

Clark's interest in preserving his family's history comes naturally. He is one of the founders and long time president of the Rexford Historical Society, and his wife, Chris, is a collector of antiques. Thanks to their efforts the story of Rexford's McLane Hotel can now be told through actual architectural elements of this picturesque landmark building. Future exhibits for the Historic Grooms Tavern are shaping up nicely.

Clark K. Wilson, and Mary Jane Whitcomb

Shortly after the article to the left was published in the local paper, Clark K. Wilson, Jr., of Rexford, passed away, September 17, 2005, after a long illness.

Clark was born in Schenectady, and was a lifelong Rexford resident. He was a graduate of Niskayuna High School, Tufts University class of 1965 and received a master's degree from SUNY Albany. Clark is survived by his wife, Kristine Ring Wilson, whom he married in 1978, and two children.

Clark was an employee of NYS Department of Correctional Services for 37 years, retiring in 2003 as deputy superintendent of programs at Greene Correctional Facilities. Clark was also a member of the Board of Directors of OMCE and National Corrections Recreation Association. Clark's community involvement included being president of the Rexford Historical Society, president of the Rexford Civic Association, member of the Friends of Historic Grooms Tavern, Fire Board of Commissioners, Rexford Water Committee and the Town of Clifton Park Open Spaces Committee.

Mary Jane Whitcomb of Grooms Corners, Clifton Park, passed away Tuesday, May 31, 2005, after a brief illness.

Mary Jane was a former owner of the Grooms Tavern, in the 1970's when it was known as "The Emporium".

Born Mary Jane Creutz in Denver, Colorado on August 17, 1927, to Mary Eudora (Atkinson) and Ernest Adolph Creutz. A BSME graduate of Denver University, Mary Jane was one of the first female engineers hired by General Electric. Her first job was in the Test Program and later she transferred to Technical Information Operation.

After 36 years with GE, Mary Jane volunteered more than 2,000 hours at Ellis Hospital. She was involved with the Rexford Historical Society, and also served on the Board of the Friends of historic Grooms Tavern.

Mary Jane is survived by her husband, Royce C. Whitcomb; as well as two stepchildren from her marriage to Wendell Rochford, who passed in 1961.

*Mary Jane and Clark will be deeply missed
by all those who knew them.*



William C. Ketchum, noted authority on antique New York State stoneware and author of several books on that subject phoned me several weeks ago. Bill and I have known each other professionally for at least 25 years. He discovered a small half-gallon stoneware jug, c. 1860, that he had acquired many years ago stored in the corner of his cellar in Rye, New York. Impressed around the top of the jug was "SOLD BY THOMAS NOXON-CLIFTON PARK VILLAGE-N.Y." Unfortunately the small handle was broken. Bill suspected that he had dug the jug up about 40 years ago at a dump site in Warrensburgh or Chestertown. He asked if I would be interested in having the jug for the Historic Grooms Tavern. The jug was sent to me within the week.

Stoneware was the basic ceramic ware for utilitarian objects in the nineteenth century. Stoneware containers were used primarily in the preparation, storage, and serving of food. Stoneware was also used for inkwells, match holders, flowerpots, and tobacco pipes. In the twentieth century, plastic and aluminum replaced stoneware as the chief materials for kitchen containers. Stoneware was produced in practically all areas of New York State, especially along the Erie Canal, and often was marked by the pottery.

Stoneware vessels were shaped by hand on a potter's wheel or sometimes formed in a wooden mold. After being air-dried, the potters or retailers mark could be stamped into the clay. Decoration with cobalt blue paint (such as found in the letters of the Clifton Park jug) was applied freehand. The interior of the vessels might be coated with dark brown slip clay from Albany, and the finished pieces were then fired at about twenty-one hundred degrees Fahrenheit in a beehive-shaped kiln. When the heat was at its maximum a bucket of coarse salt was thrown into the kiln, where it vaporized, covering all exposed surfaces with a shiny and somewhat pitted or pebbled finish referred to as salt glaze. Once the kiln cooled, usually after two or three days, the finished ware was loaded onto flatboats or wagons and shipped to distributors and merchants often several hundred miles away.

Although, the Clifton Park jug is not marked by the pottery, it was probably made at one of the potteries in Troy, West Troy (Watervliet), or Fort Edward. A storeowner would order jugs like this in quantity, perhaps 50 or 100, for distributing bulk items such as vinegar, molasses or oil. The customer could bring the jugs back to the store for refills.

In fact Thomas Noxon (1813-1882) was indeed a merchant. Born in Beekman, Dutchess County he came to Halfmoon with his parents in 1816. Thomas married Emma Clapp, daughter of Joseph Clapp of Halfmoon in 1836, and in 1838, he began a mercantile business at Clifton Park Village that lasted until 1871. His store was located on the southwest corner of Old Route 146 (Fire Road) and Route 9. Thomas Noxon is listed in the 1860 census for Halfmoon as a merchant and is shown on an 1866 map of Clifton Park Village as a dealer in dry goods, groceries, etc. By 1870 he was in partnership with Elisha G. Morse selling dry goods, groceries, crockery, and hardware.

Thomas Noxon was very influential, serving as supervisor for the Town of Halfmoon during the years 1856-57, 1860-61, and 1864-66. In 1870 he moved to Ballston Spa where he became Sheriff of Saratoga County, and by 1875 he had moved to Saratoga Springs where he served as town supervisor in 1877 and was elected as president of the village of Saratoga Springs in 1878.

Thomas Noxon's older brother, James (1807-1892), owned the Clifton Park Hotel for a short time from 1834 to 1837, and was also a supervisor for the Town of Halfmoon 1849-1850.

Thomas's younger brother, Alfred (1815-1880), was a resident of Crescent and between 1840 and 1844 established a foundry, paintworks, a block of stores, and a hotel, all employing at times from seventy to one hundred men. The fine brick building with the iron steps in Crescent just northeast of the Route 9 Bridge was his bank and residence. Alfred was also involved in selecting a site for the Crescent Methodist Church built of brick in 1852 on Church Hill Road.

The donor of the little Clifton Park jug is no stranger to our town. Bill Ketchum lived in Vischer Ferry during the Second World War 1942 and 1943. His father was employed by General Electric, and fear that Schenectady might be bombed during the war prompted the family to move to Vischer Ferry where they rented the parsonage. Bill mentioned that he remembered hearing about the attack on Pearl Harbor, that a lot of iron stored in the barn in back of the parsonage was collected for the war effort, and that his family had a victory garden near the parsonage.

Objects, like people, have so much to tell us. The jug tells us of mercantile life in Clifton Park Village 150 years ago and of a very important and influential individual in our community's past. Bill Ketchum shares his memories of Vischer Ferry during World War II. You never know where the next bit of history will come from.



The Friends of Historic Grooms Tavern Board of Directors meet the first Monday of each month at the Clifton Park Town Hall, 7 pm, All members are welcome... Please check www.GroomsTavern.org for updates.