



THE SENTINEL

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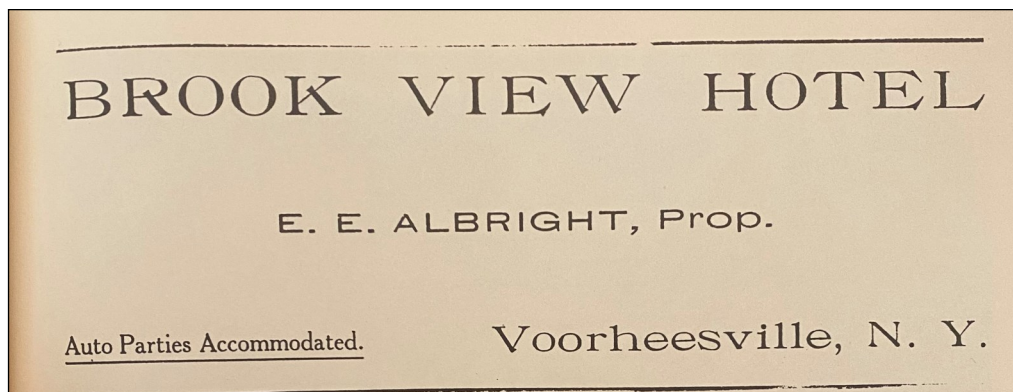
FORMER SMITH'S TAVERN BUILDING TO BE SAVED

By Sherry Burgoon, Editor

When the rumors started flying in 2015 that our beloved Smith's Tavern was to be sold by owners John McClelland and John Mellen, there has been no shortage of newspaper articles, Facebook posts, discussions around dinner tables and at local events from residents and former residents far and wide mourning its loss. Why all the hoopla? Businesses come and go. Why is Smitty's, as we all know it, so different? If we trace the history of Voorheesville and its development from a small railroad town to a much sought after suburban community to plant family roots, it becomes apparent why this treasured iconic establishment since 1901 is so hard to let go of. It is a part of our personal as well as collective history, a place where everybody knows your name, a place to meet friends and family for a "cold drink" and, of course, the best pizza in town! Pardon the cliché, "Saying good-bye is so very hard to do."

On January 20, 2022, *The Altamont Enterprise* reported: the "former Smith's Tavern is to be razed," This prompted the Joint Historic Commission in the Town of New Scotland drafted a document recommending the buildings' preservation. It included a description of the structure, its history/time-line of ownership, as well as a narrative description of its significance, which is summarized below.

In 1900-1901 the building was constructed by Nick Oliver as a tavern and boarding house known as Nick Oliver's West End Hotel. From 1901 until 1945 the hotel changed ownership a few times including familiar names such as Morris Harris who operated it as the West End Hotel, the Albright family who operated the Brook View Hotel, and from 1937 until 1945 the Cramer House by Ada Cramer. These establishments served as stopping off points for local travelers on their way to Albany. Finally, in 1945 Smith's Tavern began its longevity when Frank Smith Sr. and Lillian Smith became the owners. Their son Frank Smith, Jr. and his wife Gertrude took over ownership of the property and business in 1960.



The Brook View was originally Nick Oliver's 'West End Hotel.' according to Dennis Sullivan's *Voorheesville, New York—A Sketch of the Beginnings of a Nineteenth Century Railroad Town.*

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dear Members and Friends,

Part of NSHA's mission states: "Our purpose is to promote an appreciation of local history, heritage, and culture through research, publications and educational programs." The world we live in is permeated with the internet and social media, and, in keeping with our mission, NSHA has a responsibility to improve outreach to the greater public through those platforms. We plan to update our website to make it more user friendly, post more information to social media, and offer better access to our collection of items. We will start work on these goals in March with the hope that there will be a greater exchange of information with the public. It is a big goal for an all-volunteer organization. Hopefully, you will start seeing improvements in the near future.

As important as the internet is for disseminating information, sometimes just sitting down with an interesting and well written book just beats anything the internet has to offer. By popular demand, NSHA arranged for another printing of "Voorheesville, New York: A Sketch of the Beginnings of a Nineteenth Century Railroad Town" by Dennis Sullivan. It was originally published in 1989, and this is the fourth printing. New copies have just arrived and will be available in the museum, at the Village of Voorheesville Office, the Public Library and Town Hall. It is a vivid account of life in Voorheesville in its heyday before the automobile changed the way of life in small towns. If you have never read it, I urge you get a copy and enjoy the wonderful account of a by-gone era, full of interesting stories about Voorheesville in earlier times.

Here are some items to put on your calendar. The museum will be open again every Sunday (except holidays) 2-4 p.m. beginning April 3rd. On Tuesday, April 5th, at 7:30 p.m. "An Old Fashion Musical Evening with Tamarack" will be presented. On Tuesday, May 3rd, at 7:30 p.m. a program titled "Voorheesville: An Italian Perspective" will be presented by Dennis Ulion. All programs will be at the Community Center. We look forward to seeing our members and friends again. Thank you for your support.

Sarita Winchell

Historic Barn Rehabilitation Tax Credit

Courtesy of Rich Frolich, the NYSenate.gov website has released the following information: "Historic preservation is a pivotal strategy for rural revitalization and my bill ([S6042](#)) to reinstitute the Historic Barn Rehabilitation Tax Credit (a 25% tax credit to restore barns constructed before 1945) will make it more affordable for New Yorkers to save these beloved buildings from disrepair and explore new uses in agritourism, arts and culture. The measure, which was recently signed into law by Governor Hochul, will help preserve thousands of historic barns across rural and upstate communities, allowing us to trace back New York's rich agricultural heritage, boost community pride, and capitalize on valuable opportunities to revive local economies."

(continued from page 1)

During the early 60s the commuter train from Albany to Voorheesville was discontinued, accelerating the transition from a railroad town to a car-oriented suburb. As an elementary school student in the early 1960s living two doors away at 104 Maple Avenue, I remember Smith's Tavern as a primarily blue-collar bar frequented by the local men. There were several other small neighborhood bars throughout the village as well. The interior was quite small: the bar was in the front, a couple of small tables to the left of the front door along with a very popular, well-worn



Smiths' Tavern, 1960, before front porch enclosure.

dart board on the side facing the present Mobile Gas Station. Only bar food with the likes of pickled jars of eggs or sausage were available. Women might occasionally join their husbands for a drink or two.



Frank and Gert Smith portrait that hung in the back dining room.

Voorheesville began to transition from a rural village with the suburbanization occurring in the surrounding area. The building of Salem Hills and Scotch Pine Drive from 1966-1968 provided the opportunity for Frank and Gert Smith to build their establishment beyond the bar environment. A dining room addition was added in 1967 to the left rear, the kitchen was expanded in 1970, and, finally, local carpenter Paul Barrowman was contracted to enclose the front porch. By this time, Smith's already had a steady take-out pizza business.

Smith's Tavern's business exploded! With added tables and standing space in front of the bar, plus the added expansive dining area in what we called "the back room," families and young people who turned 18 and were able to drink legally, made Smitty's the go-to meeting point for pizza and a beer or two!

Frank, a mason by trade, had personally built the marble fireplace in the family area making it a cozy environment for all. Smitty's became an establishment which could integrate both Voorheesville natives and newcomers to town. Interestingly, my partner Joerg Siemann, recalls his first visit in 1973. On a visit to the United States from Germany to visit his mom Edel, already a US citizen who immigrated in the late 50's, he recalls stopping at the tavern after touring the Heldbergs and Thacher Park. She had already known Gert from her other German friends in the Colonie area. On his return to his Mom's home in Colonie, he told her he would like to move to Voorheesville to live someday. In 1977 he moved to Altamont Road and has never left Voorheesville. Smitty's no longer was just a neighborhood restaurant, it was becoming a popular spot for many in the surrounding towns.

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In the early 80s, the addition of the train tracks with a running train, attached above the entrance near the bar, appealed to small children when they came in. No longer did people feel strange that their little ones were hanging out in a bar! It also tied into Voorheesville's railroading past. By 1983, the model train was being introduced into their advertising.

After 25 years of ownership, Frank and Gert sold Smith's Tavern to John McClelland and John Mellen allowing them to keep the iconic name and pizza recipe.

One of the nine trains in the collection of Smith's Tavern.

Under their ownership, Smith's Tavern continued to thrive as a restaurant as well as serving as a community center, hosting poetry contests, music entertainment, as well as an informal meeting site for small community groups. The owners regularly supported local organizations in fundraising efforts. For instance, the Voorheesville Key Club was given discounts to sell pizza at football games. When Relay For Life, a national American Cancer Society fundraising event was held at the high school in 2015-18, McClelland and Mellen graciously became sponsors providing pizza at organizing and team meetings over the span of five months each year. Until Smitty's closing, it



Photo 1990 includes dining room addition on the back and from porch enclosure.

was still the designated meet-up place for college students and alumni, especially on Thanksgiving Eve for over 50 years. As a closing statement in the Joint Historic Commission's recommendation to save the former Smith's Tavern building, "It is not an exaggeration to say that Smith's Tavern was beloved as a quintessentially Voorheesville institution." As a result, Stewart's was denied a demolition permit.

Although the Smith's Tavern sign will no longer be seen on the front of the building, the memories and tales of the thousands of patrons over the years will never be lost. Let us be thankful that a new owner is excited to bring a new venue offering a bite to eat, a respite after a tough day, and a place to start new memories of time spent in our awesome community. We should all welcome the building's continued history.

Source: Joint Historic Preservation Commission Structure Review Form submitted recommending the Voorheesville Planning Commission not approve Stewart's application for a demolition provided by Alan Kowlowitz.

Special thanks to Rich Frohlich and John McClelland

THE SWEET SEASON

By Judy Kimes



The back end of a forgotten maple sap spile embedded in an old maple tree. Right: The same spile removed from its "home" of 140 years!

It is late winter and, like limitless generations before us, we are seeking signs of spring. For me, the first "sign of spring" is Ground Hog's Day. That varmint really knows nothing about weather prediction, but he at least starts the conversation. The next sign is maple sap season, and this is a sign we can hang our hats on. While walking down country roads, one starts seeing slender icicles dangling from the bare branches of certain trees. These show that sap is starting to flow through their veins. Can spring be far behind?

Since ancient times in our area, maple sap has been gathered and processed to provide the sweetness so enjoyed and so lacking in most of the foods available over the long, hard winter. Maple sap is made even more valuable because though its season is short, the syrup and sugar it provides have a wonderfully long shelf life, enabling them to last from one sap season to the next.

Maple sap is best gathered when, for several days in a row, daytime temperatures are above freezing (ideally around 40 degrees) and nighttime temperatures fall below freezing. By looking through diary entries and past issues of the *Altamont Enterprise* one sees that, locally, sap season typically extends from late March through the first couple of weeks in April. Agnes Slingerland notes in her diary that on March 26, 1895, they "tapped a few trees." On April 11, 1891, her sons, Willie and Amasa (my grandfather), "went to Aunt Hester's. They are sugaring off."

In 1914, Van LaGrange wrote that on March 26, and on April 3, 6, 11, and 16 he was, "Home all day. Boiling sap."

During sap season, my family always tapped maple trees, and a couple of milk pans of sap constantly occupied the back of the kitchen wood stove as it boiled down to the proper consistency for syrup. This must have made for a rather steamy kitchen since every quart of syrup requires the "boiling down" of ten gallons of sap. Fortunately, our kitchen walls were not wallpapered. Testing to see if the syrup was "ready" was a delight.

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Members of Agnes (Vanderpoel) Slingerland's family, one of whom, so many years ago, carved and inserted the maple spile pictured in the previous photo.

In the April 4, 1895, issue of the *Altamont Enterprise* the New Salem correspondent reported, "The Ladies Society are talking up a maple sugar party to take place as soon as the roads become passable." That spring was very rainy. The party finally took place on May 3 when it is reported, "Miss Grace Frost has kindly consented to hold Arbor Day exercises consisting of recitations and singing in the evening at the Reformed Church, after which ice cream and maple sugar will be served for the benefit of the church." Good times!

The first photo included with this article shows the back end of a forgotten spile left in a maple tree's trunk on the farm where Agnes Slingerland grew up. The second photo shows Agnes, her mother, and brothers a few years prior to when this particular tree was tapped (Agnes' father had been killed in a logging accident in 1860). Don Slingerland discovered the hidden spile when he sawed into the now fallen tree for use as firewood. The tree had completely grown around the spile. The spile had been carved from staghorn sumac, a handy tree for this use since the center pith could easily be removed to form a spigot. By counting the rings Don determined the tree had been tapped about 140 years ago!

Since then, many seasons have come and gone but, thankfully, a new Sweet Season and a new spring await us!

Sources:

Bourque, Danny. simplebites.net. 2014.

The Altamont Enterprise; April 5, April 19, May 3, 1895.

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2002	Robert Parmenter Marion Parmenter
2007	Norma Walley
2010	Margaret "Peg" Dorgan

MUSEUM RE-OPENING

Every Sunday (except holidays)
2 p.m.-4 p.m.
Beginning April 3rd

Special Programs:

Tuesday, April 5th, at 7:30 p.m.—“An Old Fashion Musical Evening with Tamarack”
Tuesday, May 3rd, at 7:30 p.m.—“Voorheesville: An Italian Perspective”

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