

A HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC GROOMS TAVERN



By John L. Scherer
Historian, Town of Clifton Park

Reprinted 2007

A HISTORY OF THE HISTORIC GROOMS TAVERN

Prior to a tavern being built on the southwest corner of Grooms Road and Sugar Hill Road in about 1825, there was a grocery store. The store was built in about 1800 by Seely (Selah) Blatchely and was leased with about an acre of land and operated by an Albany merchant, William Snyder (c. 1740-1826). Snyder was a veteran of the French and Indian War. He lived on North Market Street in Albany and had a large storehouse on Quay Street. On April 21, 1800 he paid ten dollars for a grocer license, and the following year he renewed it for another ten dollars.¹

The store served the families in the Grooms Corners area and the Clifton Park Center area to the north. Travelers headed west and east between Waterford and Schenectady could also find food and refreshment at the store. Vischer Ferry and the Mohawk River were only a couple miles to the south.

The deed reference dated 27 March 1800 indicates that Seely Blatchly of the Town of Halfmoon leased to William Snyder, merchant, of the City and County of Albany land in the part of the town aforesaid called Clifton Park, one acre bounded as follows: Beginning at the Northeast corner of the store built on the premises and now owned by William Snyder in the junction of the two roads running thence westerly along the fence which lies on the road leading to the Mohawk River (Grooms Road) 231 feet to a division fence, thence southerly along said fence 260 feet to a spring of water, thence easterly 90 feet, thence northerly 50 feet, thence easterly 30 feet, northerly 65 feet, thence easterly 214 feet to the public highway (Sugar Hill Road), from there along said highway to the place of beginning. At a yearly rent of six Spanish milled dollars and 12 ½ cents due on the first day of January each year. Snyder was to pay all taxes and assessments.² The description of the boundaries for the leased property is the same as the present day Grooms Tavern lot, now owned by the Town of Clifton Park.

The one acre corner lot on which the store was located was part of 49 acres owned by Seely Blatchley, and it was part of lot number 5 of lot number 21 of the fourth allotment of the Clifton Park Patent. When he sold the 49 acres on 2 May 1804 to John Baptist LeDroiet de Bussy also of Halfmoon, the one acre with the store was reserved out of the premises as conveyed by the lease to William Snyder on the 27th of March 1800.³ John B. LeDroit de Bussy had recently moved to the area from Orange County, New York. He was appointed

¹ *Colonial Albany History Project Data Base*, New York State Museum

² *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book J, page 458

³ *Ibid.*, Book J, page 450

Justice of the Peace for Saratoga County on 15 March 1806.⁴ Seely Blatchley and his wife Susanna also assign the lease of the store to de Bussy,⁵ and later move to Herkimer County, New York⁶. He is buried in the Jordanville Cemetery.⁷

John Baptist LeDroiet de Bussy and his wife Lucy of Halfmoon assign the lease of the store to Peter Failing, also of Halfmoon, on 5 March 1807.⁸ Peter was married to Nancy Vischer, daughter of Eldert Vischer (1753-1822), and their son Eldert Vischer Failing, born in 1808, is mentioned in his grandfather's Will in 1822.⁹ There was a Cornelius Failing, probably a brother, who lived near Grooms Corners, on what was later known as the Wager Farm. He was named to the Committee of Common Schools in April of 1828 when the Town of Clifton Park was formed at the Grooms Tavern.¹⁰

On 8 June 1808, Peter Failing assigned the lease of the store to his father-in-law, Eldert Vischer (1753-1822) of Vischer Ferry.¹¹ At about the same time Eldert built a large Federal style addition on his house in Vischer Ferry. This house still stands on Ferry Drive. Eldert also ran a ferry across the Mohawk River, and owned a gristmill near his house in Vischer Ferry.



Looking north along Sugar Hill Road toward Grooms Road,
Grooms Corners, c 1910

Eldert Vischer operated the store for ten years. On 17 May 1818 he assigned the lease to Samuel Cole.¹² Samuel served as tax collector for the Town of Halfmoon in 1820.¹³ He assigned the lease of the store to William Venum, and on 5 September 1823, William Venum and his wife, Nancy, assign the store lease to Martin Buck Jr.¹⁴. William Venum was an active citizen. He served as school commissioner for Halfmoon, and was elected coroner of Halfmoon on 1 January 1823.¹⁵

⁴ *Federal Census for New York State, 1800*; Nathaniel B. Sylvester, *History of Saratoga County, New York*, published 1878, page 84

⁵ *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book J, page 460

⁶ *Federal Census for New York State, 1830*

⁷ *Abstract of Graves of Revolutionary Patriots*, Vol. 1, p. –Serial: 9661; Volume 7

⁸ *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book J, page 460

⁹ Becker, Howard, *Canastigione*, compilation of early documents relating to the Vischer Ferry area

¹⁰ Nathaniel B. Sylvester, *History of Saratoga County, New York*, published 1878, page 476

¹¹ *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book J, page 461

¹² *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book J, page 461

¹³ Nathaniel B. Sylvester, *History of Saratoga County, New York*, published 1878, page 347

¹⁴ *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book J, pages 461-462

¹⁵ Nathaniel B. Sylvester, *History of Saratoga County, New York*, published 1878, pages 89 and 378

Finally, on 28 August 1826 there are two lease assignments, recorded without reference to the underlying leases. Both of these are from Martin Buck of the Town of Halfmoon to Darius Buck and Henry Husted.¹⁶ Perhaps one of these leases was for the store at the corner of Grooms Road and Sugar Hill Road.

Although it can not yet be confirmed by deed, the next owner of the store was James (1790-1877) and Catharine Taylor (1792-1859) Groom. James was the son of James (1755-1825) and Margaret Moon (1769-1846) Groom, and the grandson of Peter (1726-1799) and Mary Chubberly Groom. Peter and Mary Groom had come from Middlesex County, New Jersey to the Grooms Corners area of Clifton Park in about 1774.¹⁷

How James Groom (1790-1877) came into possession of the store is still a mystery, but we do know that he was operating a tavern on this site on April 1, 1828, when the Town of Clifton Park was formed at this location. The Town's Minute Book for that date states: "At the first Town Meeting held in the Town of Clifton (for the first year the town was called Clifton) in the County of Saratoga, after the division of the Town of Halfmoon of which the Town of Clifton was a part, at the House of James Groom, Inn Keeper in said town on the first day of April 1828."¹⁸ The building now standing on the southwest corner of Grooms and Sugar Hill Roads has always been associated as the Inn or Tavern of James Groom and the location of the first Town Board meeting.

The physical evidence of the building including early doors and hardware indicate that the tavern was probably constructed when James Groom (1790-1877) came into possession of the property in about 1826. His father had died in 1825, and willed him land in the Grooms Corners area. In his will the elder James Groom authorized his executors "to sign over the lease to my son James Groom Jr. of the lot which he now lives on."¹⁹ Could this possibly be the corner lot in question, and if so how did James Groom Sr. acquire it?

At any rate the tavern or inn operated by James Groom would have been a fairly new structure at the time the first Town Board meeting was held there in 1828. Perhaps that is why the site was selected. The nearby Erie Canal had recently opened and provided additional traffic for a new tavern. James Groom may have reused elements from the earlier 1800 period store when he constructed his tavern. The cellar may have originally been under the store. Wood paneling with rose head nails making up the north wall of the first floor, and an early door to a storage area at the rear of the second floor decorated with rose head nails in a diamond pattern may well date to the period of the 1800 store.

Besides the c. 1825 period doors and hardware still present in the building, there is a beautifully carved interior Federal archway in the south front room that dates from this

¹⁶ *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book N, page 477

¹⁷ *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book 10, page 54

¹⁸ *First Town Minute Book for the Town of Clifton Park, 1828*, Clifton Park Town Clerk's Office

¹⁹ *Will of James Groom*, proved 4 May 1825, *Saratoga County Wills*, Book 6, page 378

period. It provided a niche or a recess off the formal room, possibly the ladies parlor for the tavern. The bar or tap room was in the north front room where the earlier store paneling was used, and a door, now blocked, led from that room to the formal parlor.

A separate entrance led from Sugar Hill Road directly into the tap room. The tap room also served as a lobby from which you could ascend stairs off a hall leading from an entrance off of Grooms Road. The stairs led to the large public room and chambers on the second floor. The public room extended across the whole upper story of the front portion of the building, but could be divided in half by a partition that would swing down from the ceiling. The ell off the rear contained the kitchen complete with cooking fireplace, and several chambers located above.



Store, Grooms Corners, c. 1910

Clifton Park Town Board meetings, held annually, were frequently held at the Inn of James Groom. The board meetings for 1828, 1829, 1831, 1833, 1835, 1838, 1839, 1840, 1842, 1844 were all held at that location. Other meetings were held at other area taverns, like the Inn of Sylvenus Birch, one mile east on Grooms Road at the intersection of Vischer Ferry Road.²⁰

James Groom became town clerk for the years 1832 to 1835, and he was town supervisor in 1836 and 1837. He later served as assemblyman in the New York State legislature. State Assembly documents dating to the 1840s were found on the floor of the attic.²¹

James (1790-1877) and Catharine Taylor (1792-1859) Groom transferred the tavern to their son, Samuel (1815-1898) on 6 March 1847, and moved to Albany.²² James's mother Margaret Moon Groom died the previous year, 1846. Could her death have conferred actual title to her son James, making it possible for the transfer to Samuel?²³

Samuel purchased the tavern for \$900, and the property was described as: "lying within three miles north from Vischer's Ferry bounded north by the highway running from Birch's place to the Upper Aqueduct (Grooms Road), east by the public highway leading to Vischer's Ferry (Sugar Hill Road), south by land occupied by Henry Palmer and west by lands occupied by Henry Vischer containing about one acre of land subject to the provisions of a

²⁰ *Minute Books for the Town of Clifton Park*, Clifton Park Town Clerk's Office

²¹ Nathaniel B. Sylvester, *History of Saratoga County, New York*, published 1878

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Searching the Grantee indexes of the Saratoga County Deed Books for adjacent property owners Henry Palmer (to the south), and Henry Vischer (to the west) may determine how Blatchley's 49 acres were transferred to them by 1847.

lease executed by Seely Blatchly of the one part and William Snyder of the second part being dated March 27th A.D. 1800 the annual rent of which is six Spanish milled dollars and twelve and a half cents the premises hereby conveyed being the same premises covered by said lease and taken by said Samuel subject to the covenant thereof.”²⁴

The deed also conveyed to Samuel Grooms a wagon maker’s shop, twenty one feet by twenty eight feet, and a Blacksmith’s Shop, twenty six feet by twenty four feet, both of which were built of wood and both of which were standing upon land owned by Francis N. Vischer. Francis N. Vischer owned the farm on the northwest corner of Grooms Road and Miller road, practically across the street from the tavern. It appears Samuel soon moved the wagon shop and blacksmith shop to his property and joined them end to end, just south of the tavern. An 1851 map shows the wagon shop and blacksmith shop at this location, and also shows the adjacent tavern of Samuel Groom. Both buildings still survive as they appear on the map.

Two months after acquiring the property, Samuel Groom (1815-1898) and his wife Gitty M. Vischer Groom (1822-1910) mortgaged it on May 1, 1847 to neighbor Nicholas F. Vischer for six hundred dollars.²⁵ They undoubtedly used these funds to enlarge and remodel the tavern. Greek Revival architectural elements including some interior doors and window sash on the second floor, and a false mantel on the first floor would indicate a remodeling in about 1847 to 1850. It appears that the roof of the main building was also raised replacing the half story with a full second story.

The Town Board continued to make use of the Grooms Tavern for its annual meetings. Board meetings were held at the Inn of Samuel Grooms in 1848 (probably right after the remodeling), 1849, 1850, 1851, 1852, 1854, 1855, 1856, 1865, 1866, 1867, and 1868.²⁶ The tavern is referred to as a hotel on Clifton Park maps of 1856 and 1866. These maps also show a store and post office on the opposite side of Sugar Hill Road. The 1871 Business Directory for Saratoga County lists Samuel Groom as proprietor of the Grooms Corners Hotel, wagon and carriage manufacturer, and blacksmith.

A number of papers found in the building during the summer of 1999 and gathered for preservation included guest registrations for the Grooms Hotel in the 1860s. There were other interesting papers pertaining to the building’s early history as well, like the State Assembly papers referred to above. Unfortunately, this gathered material disappeared shortly after a TV taping at the tavern with the Town Supervisor in November of 1999.

Since Samuel Groom was an active carriage maker and blacksmith, the wagon shop and blacksmith shop were in active use. Chalk inscriptions, still on the walls of the wagon shop, list local marriages dated between 1852 and 1885. Other inscriptions both stenciled and

²⁴ *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book ZZ, page 79

²⁵ *Saratoga County Mortgages*, Book 37, page 206

²⁶ *Minute Boods for the Town of Clifton Park*, Clifton Park Town Clerk’s Office

penciled list past patrons and storekeepers. It would appear that the building was a quite a gathering place in the mid nineteenth century.

By the end of the nineteenth century, between 1880 and 1898, it appears that Samuel Groom had established a store in what was formerly the hotel lobby and tap room. By this time the building had ceased operation as a hotel. Samuel died in 1898 leaving the store to his widow, Gitty M. Vischer Groom. Samuel and Gitty's son, James S. Groom (1859-1922), probably ran the store during the 1890s and early 1900s, when the store also served as a post office. The older store and post office across the road must have closed sometime previous to this.

The late Elmer Droms had moved to Grooms Corners in 1903. In 1999 at age 102, he recalled when the mail was picked up at the post office located in the store operated by Jim Groom. The men would usually go for the mail and, while at the store, sit around the pot-bellied stove and gossip while the wives were at home ironing and cooking.

This last major remodeling of the building to accommodate the store included adding store counters and shelves, and putting in large display windows in the Sugar Hill Road entrance. The door between the two rooms was filled in, and the stairs to the second floor were removed and relocated to the back of the building. The wall that divided the stair hall was removed making the store area larger, and joining the formal parlor to the space where the stairs had been located through the arch way that had once formed a niche. The kitchen fireplace was probably covered over at this time, and new kitchen cabinets were added. The second floor remained unchanged except for the new stairway. A wrap around porch was added along Sugar Hill Road.

All of this remodeling probably completed by 1910. Gitty Vischer Groom died that year and her son James acquired the store by deed. The premises were the same as described in the deed to his father, Samuel, from his grandfather, James, in 1847.²⁷ Several postcard views that can be dated around 1913 because of the license plate of a car show the store as it looks today with Jim Groom standing or seated on the porch.

James died in 1922, and the following year his widow Julia E. Herkenham Groom (1866-1943) sold the store to Edward Klingbeil Jr. (1891-1970) and his wife, Mabel (1895-1946). Ed was well known for his red hairpiece that he would plop on his head when someone entered the store. He installed a gasoline pump, so he could sell fuel for the increasingly popular motor car. He



Past Owner, Ed Klingbeil

²⁷ *Saratoga County Deeds*, Book 273, page 417

sold gasoline until about 1940, a photograph exists showing the Gulf sign hanging over the pump. Two pool tables were installed in the old public room on the second floor, and billiards became a popular pastime. Ed was a colorful character and he is the subject of many amusing stories.

Ed Klingbiel converted the large space above the former wagon shop and blacksmith shop into a three bedroom rental apartment. The space below was used for garage and storage.

Ed continued to operate the general store until his death in December of 1970. His widow, Chris (fifth wife) sold the store in May of 1971 to Kenneth and Mary Jane Baird who operated the store as a country store, carrying gifts, artists supplies and frames. After Kenneth Baird died in 1988, his widow, Mary Jane (now Whitcomb) sold the store to architect, Robert Williams, and his realtor wife, Kathy Hedrick. They had hoped to create a restaurant, but ran into finance and zoning problems. The Town of Clifton Park acquired the building from them in December of 1999. The Town of Clifton Park Town Board restored the downstairs of the building and re-opened Historic Grooms Tavern on April 14, 2007 to be used as an historic & cultural center.



1910



2007

For more information, please contact the Town of Clifton Park
Office of Parks, Recreation, and Community Affairs
371-6667
www.cliftonpark.org