

## **This Week in Saratoga County History** **A Bit of Colonie in Clifton Park**

**Submitted by John L. Scherer, May 8, 2024**

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*Vischerdaal, home of Francis Vischer, built in 1813*

The Town of Colonie owns the Stony Creek Reservoir located in southern Clifton Park, just above Vischer Ferry. It was completed in 1953 at a cost of \$1,800,000 and covers 297 acres holding 1.4 billion gallons of water that is carried by pipes under the Mohawk river to the residents of Colonie. The reservoir is used primarily in the late summer months when other Colonie water sources are low. The creation of this reservoir in 1950 began a long feud between the Town of Clifton Park and the Town of Colonie.

The reservoir project was opposed by the Clifton Park Town Board and was opposed bitterly by the residents in the Vischer Ferry area, as well as by some Colonie residents. Opponents offered the Ranney water plan as an alternative, claiming it to be cheaper and better. This method uses a type of well driven into water bearing sand or gravel beside and below a riverbed. The naturally filtered water is pumped to the surface, and the supply is virtually unlimited. Proponents asserted the Ranney method could be used without crossing town or county lines and would supply more water than the reservoir at less than half the cost.

At risk were several early homes, a cemetery and a town road that would be inundated by the waters of the reservoir. Landowners would lose valuable property along the historic Stony Creek

that meandered south from Barney pond, located north of Grooms Road, to the Mohawk River at Vischer Ferry. The State approved the project in 1951.

One of the early structures to be destroyed was a fine two-story Federal brick home built by Francis Vischer in 1813. Chester Hall and his wife had recently completed a lengthy and comprehensive restoration. The family cemetery where Francis Vischer and his father Nanning were buried was on a hill in back of the house. Members of the Vischer Family as well as a few of their slaves were all buried here. Hall named his home Vischerdaal, and its preservation became one of the rallying points against the reservoir. Even the New York State Historical Association entered the dispute in favor of Vischerdaal.

The road that the reservoir would eliminate was a dirt road known as Van Vranken Road that crossed Crescent Road and joined Vischer Ferry Road further north where Taylor Drive now joins it. This was the oldest road in Clifton Park dating back to the first settlement of the 1680s. The Town of Colonie was to provide a replacement road, connecting Bonneau Road, a dead end road, by a bridge across the reservoir to Vischer Ferry Road. This never happened, and was a bone of contention with the Clifton Park Town Board.

The residents of Vischer Ferry and the landholders around the proposed reservoir led by Alfred C. Stevens and former Town Historian, Howard Becker, signed petitions against the reservoir. The people in Vischer Ferry were especially concerned about being below the 35-foot dam that would be created to hold back the waters of the Stony Creek. Lawyers were hired and suits were filed, but to no avail. Some landowners finally capitulated and sold their land to the Town of Colonie. Others like Howard Becker and Chester Hall held off for as long as they could, and even went to court to get some resolution. Eventually, however, the Town of Colonie prevailed and was able to purchase the needed land by eminent domain. The courts awarded Chester Hall \$47,000 for his land and historic home.

By spring of 1952 work had begun on the reservoir, the land was cleared, existing structures leveled, and construction on the dam and spillway was begun. Finally, by the end of the year the dam and spillway were almost complete and the Stony Creek began to flood the surrounding land. On December 6, 1952 an auction was held on the grounds of historic Vischerdaal.

Mantels, doors and other architectural elements were offered for sale, but the total proceeds came to only \$1000. Under the terms of the auction all former bids based on portions of the home were declared void and the house went as a unit. Dr. Edward S. Goodwin, an Albany pediatrician won the house for \$3,250. The under bidder was Earl Tinkelpaugh, an antique dealer from Cobleskill. The house had to be moved before spring when the waters of the Stony Creek would inundate the area. Dr. Goodwin moved the house and re-erected it on Pheasant Lane near the Albany Rural Cemetery in Menands. Chester Hall did not attend the auction.

The Latham Water District closed the floodgates on the dam across Stony Creek in the beginning of June 1953. By June 14 the lake began to form with a depth of 12 feet. The waters did not

quite reach the Vischer cemetery. It was high enough to avoid being flooded, and is now on the shore of the reservoir.

As to the road that was cut off, the Town of Colonie refused to connect Bonneau Road to Vischer Ferry Road. They claimed that a new road and bridge across the reservoir would bring people and debris, contaminating the water supply. In January 1955 the long feud between the Town of Clifton Park and Town of Colonie over the reservoir ended. The Latham water district of Colonie paid a settlement of \$35,000 to Clifton Park to indemnify Clifton Park for the loss of the dirt road flooded by the reservoir. The court had decided that the road was not necessary, since the homes served by the road were flooded out and if a public bridge crossed the reservoir there was the hazard of pollution.

According to the decision of the New York State Waterpower and Control Commission dated June 13, 1950, the flow in the Stony Creek at the bridge in Vischer Ferry must remain at the equivalent to 1.5 cubic feet per second. It was also understood that those living below the dam would have water rights.

The Stony Creek Reservoir could be a wonderful recreational resource for Clifton Park. However, today the reservoir is patrolled to keep people away. Perhaps at some future date the water supply will no longer be necessary for Colonie and Clifton Park can acquire this piece of our town back. It is amazing that such a scenic and placid body of water is the result of so much consternation on the part of Clifton Park residents.