

Ganson Tavern

by Lynne Belluscio

For years, the Ganson Tavern sign was at the Village DPW. The cowling that held it on the pole had broken and no one could fix it. Mr. Derrick lamented that it needed to be fixed and put back up. Seely Pratt wanted it back up, and somehow, it was fixed and put back on the pole near the golf course. But it was pretty rusty. Every day when I drove in to work, I thought that someone needed to wire brush it and paint it. So two weeks ago I mentioned it to Russ Lathan, and the next day it was delivered to the Historical Society.

Tim, who has been working here for Job Development was assigned to wire brush it and apply a rust inhibitor and then to apply first the blue background and then the yellow paint. I applied two more coats and once it is really dry, it will be put back up on the pole.

There is a problem. The historical information is wrong. The sign reads: "Ganson Tavern First settlement between Genesee River and Buffalo Tavern conducted by Charles Wilbur 1793 Capt. John Ganson 1797 New York State Department of Education 1932." I am not convinced that #1 that the Ganson Tavern was the first settlement between the Genesee River and Buffalo; #2 that Charles Wilbur had settled there as early as 1793; #3 that he operated an inn and tavern. I searched all of the sources that we have in the library. There are a lot of discrepancies.

According to Turner's History of the Holland Purchase, "Deacon Hinds Chamberlin, a venerable early Pioneer, aged eighty-three years, resides at LeRoy, Genesee County. He came to Avon in 1790. In 1789, previous to any settlement west of Avon, his brother-in-law, Isaac Scott and family, and two other families, had settled in Scottsville. These, with William Hencher, were the first settlers west of Genesee River."

I am inclined to believe that the Scottsville settlement was the first. Maybe, the reference to the first settlement on the historic marker means the first settle-



ment on the road from Avon to Buffalo, because Isaac Scott's settlement was several miles north of the road.

Augustus Porter in Turner's History of the Holland Purchase, chronicles a trip he made in 1797 from Buffalo to Canawagus (Avon): "After completing the survey for Robert Morris, in company with Joseph Ellicott, we traveled down the lake to Buffalo, chiefly on the beach, there being no road and as yet, none other than an Indian trail from Buffalo to Canawagus. That was then, (1797) but one dwelling house between the two places, which was owned by a Mr. Wilbur. It was situated at the point where Mr. John Ganson afterwards built a large house and kept a tavern many years, and is about one and a half mile east of LeRoy."

In 1799, Count Liancourt mentions that Ganson's was the last settler between the River and Buffalo Creek. In the "History of Northwestern New York", published in 1947, I found the reference to the 1793 date for Charles Wibor who "operated the first farm west of the Genesee River and erected a log cabin, which Captain John Ganson purchased."

I really doubt the 1793 date for Wilbur. (There are too many errors in the "History of Northwestern New York". For example, it mentions that the first town meeting of Southhampton was held in March 1902, instead of 1802.) Alvin Stripp, who was

fastidious about his research and facts, places Wilbur in LeRoy in 1797. But no where could I find reference to Wilbur operating a tavern. It was Captain John Ganson that ran the inn and tavern. The Captain had quite a reputation -- some good -- some bad.

In 1805, Timothy Bigalow traveled to Niagara Falls: "Ganson's is a miserable log house. We made out to order an ordinary dinner. We hastened our departure, therefore, even before the rain had ceased because the landlord was drunk and the miserable log cabin house was crowded with a dozen workmen reeking with rain and sweat and we were annoyed with plaintive and frightful cries and screams of a crazy woman in the next room." In December of the same year, the Quaker missionary, Robert Sutcliff, returning from Niagara mentioned that "the number of Indians hanging about such frontier taverns as Ganson's during the winter months made them very disagreeable stations for travelers."

It was told that during the War of 1812, General Winfield Scott was wounded at the Battle of Lundy's Lane on the Niagara Frontier. He was brought to the Ganson Tavern where he remained for several months while recuperating from his wounds. Captain John died in 1813 and the tavern was passed on to his sons.

Young John enlarged the inn and the log cabin was torn down. In the upper story was the old Masonic meeting hall, one of the first in this part of the state. The first funeral sermon in LeRoy was preached in the bar room by Stephen Stillwell, a pioneer shoemaker (and braggart) -- according to an article in the 1935 *LeRoy Gazette*. Eventually it became a private residence and was known as the Aiken or Olmsted farm. It was torn down in March 1935, when Helen Woodward Rivas (youngest daughter of Jell-O millionaire Orator Woodward) decided to build a home on the edge of the golf course.

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