

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

Submitted by John L. Scherer, June 11, 2020

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*Vischerdaal, built by Francis Vischer in 1813, moved 1952 to make room for the Stony Creek Reservoir.*

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 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 was used primarily in the late summer months when other Colonie water sources are low. However, due to alternate water sources, the reservoir receives little use today by Colonie. 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. It 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. 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 residents of Vischer Ferry and the landholders around the proposed reservoir led by A. 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 suites were filed, but to no avail. Colonie was allowed 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.

Dr. Edward S. Goodwin, an Albany pediatrician won the house for \$3,250. 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 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. 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.