



NORTH GREENBUSH NOTES

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North Greenbush Loses a Link to History

The newspapers recently reported the death of former resident Dorothy Phillips. Here's a quiz for you. What structure in North Greenbush once was a religious retreat and later a very popular spot for rock and roll music? Believe it or not the answer is the Excelsior Club at Snyders Lake.

The building itself dates from the 1850-1860 era and was once part of a large farm owned by the Snyder family. After changing ownership several times, The Sisters of Resurrection bought the property in the 1920's and held summer religious retreats there for many years.

By the 1930's Sameon "Sam" Kruglow had purchased the building and turned it into a nightclub under the name, the Excelsior House. I've found ads in the Troy Record announcing dining and dancing and "gala New Year's Eve parties" through the '30's and '40's as the Excelsior Club became the place to be in this part of Rensselaer County. Connie Worthington recalls after WWII, she and Bill would go there to dance the polka after work on the weekends.

In 1953 the Zagursky family purchased the Excelsior House from the Kruglow family. Jay Zagursky remembers a big outside casino building which was rented out on weekends for clam steams and picnics. He also recalls that there were cabins with lake access which were rented out during the summer.

When Harry Doakmajian bought the property in 1963, the Excelsior House entered its golden era. Besides hosting wedding receptions and banquets, Harry brought in musical entertainment which put this area on the map.

Among the stars to perform there in the '60's were Jay and the Americans, the Mamas & Papas, Glen Campbell and the group which many locals still remember, the Knickerbockers with Buddy Randall.

Harry was constantly innovating. Several things he tried that failed included a full time piano player, jazz music, Go-Go dancers and Oriental Belly Dancers from NYC. Crowds came anyway.

Dick Roberts recalls parking cars for Harry and seeing Jerry Lee Lewis being driven up to perform. The driver asked if this was the Excelsior House and Dick told him no, that it was back in Albany. There must have been "Whole Lotta of Shakin' Goin' On" when Jerry Lee discovered he had been tricked.

Eva Varady bought the place from the Doakmajians in 1969. Eva says that the cost of putting in a sewer line made it too expensive to continue running the Excelsior any more. However, she still has groups like the Snyders Lake Association over for "pot luck" dinners.

If you visit the Excelsior House today, it looks almost exactly as it did in the '60's. The bar is there, the jukeboxes have all the old songs and the tables are set up next to the dance floor and stage. If you close your eyes, you can almost here Buddy Randall belting out "Lies". I wonder what the Resurrection Sisters would think of all this?

Other memories of the Excelsior House? Call me at 283-6384.