

A BIT OF HISTORY

By John L. Scherer

Clifton Park's Best House

House histories are fun to research. I have written about many of our town's landmarks in this column, and I guess it is about time I gave the history of our house. As many people already know, my family and I live in the Best House. It is the Best House only because it was built by one Abraham Best, who came from Claverack, Columbia County, with his wife Harriet, and one year old daughter, Christina, in 1815.

The Best House is a brick farmhouse located on the east side of Vischer Ferry Road less than a mile north of the hamlet of Vischer Ferry. Abraham and Harriet Best purchased 21 acres of land from Jacob and Mary Miller in December of 1815. They also purchased an adjacent 101 acres from John Miller at the same time. I suspect that Jacob Miller and his family were then living on the property in what later became the rear wing of the Best House. That frame wing may have been built as early as 1786. Abraham, Harriet and Christina Best lived in that frame house while they built the brick addition on the front.

When the Best's acquired their land and moved into their small frame house, their friend, John Harder, was just completing work on a neighboring brick house he was building for Francis Vischer. John had been married at the same church in Claverack as Abraham Best, and only 4 days later. Abraham was married on April 10, 1814 and John on April 14, 1814. Abraham was born in Claverack in 1789, and John was born there in

1794. John's parents moved from Claverack in 1814 and built their house on land adjacent to that of Francis Vischer's.

Francis Vischer's fine brick house must have impressed Abraham, because the house he built in 1815 or 1816 was very similar. His friend, John Harder, probably helped him construct it. The Francis Vischer House was removed to Pheasant Lane, Loudonville in 1952, because of the Stony Creek Reservoir, but Abraham Best's house still stands on its original site.

Abraham and Harriet's second child, Margaret, was born in 1817. By the time their last child, Sarah, was born in 1832, they had a total of 8 children: Christina, born in 1814; Margaret, born in 1817; Cornelia, born in 1819; John, born in 1821; Abraham, born in 1823; Henry, born in 1825; Robert, born in 1828; and Sarah, born in 1832. Abraham and Harriet Best purchased additional land in 1824 and 1826, bringing the size of their farm to over 200 acres. It extended south to the Peters farm, now owned by the Tetraults, and north to the Irish Farm, now owned by the Picketts, and included land on both sides of the road. Abraham Best also owned a large farm in Galway.

Abraham had red hair and a temperament to match. He seems to have been a very opinionated person, and also argumentative. One might say he was an all round trouble-maker. He was a staunch member of the Amity Reformed Church, and in 1835 he petitioned the consistory in a suit against a neighboring landowner, John Clute, who he accused of wrongfully removing a fence from his property.

Abraham Best again accused John Clute of wrongdoing in 1840. Best complained that during the last 16 months, Clute “carried an unholy traffic on the sabbath by dealing in merchandise and spirituous and other liquors on that day, in a grocery or tavern kept by him on the Canal in the Town of Clifton Park.” (John Clute lived at Willow Spring, on Riverview Road and the canal, now owned by Jim and Nancy Douglass).

The consistory advised Abraham Best to drop his complaint because “there have been multiplying difficulties between the accuser and the accused within the last three years past and it is to be feared that accuser entertains a wrong spirit and feelings towards the accused.” Also the consistory had discovered that in the fall of 1838, John Clute had rented his grocery to his son, who was of lawful age.

This action infuriated Best, and he began bad-mouthing the church. He stated “that there was no true religion in the church at Amity, that the members do not walk uprightly; that he won’t advise any one to join the church; and that he had got his boys or sons to agree that they won’t never join it, or any other.” A battle royal ensued. The consistory tried their best to subdue Abraham Best, but he would have none of it, and took his case to the Classis, but to no avail.

In October of 1865, Abraham Best was arrested for assaulting his neighbor, Samuel Althouse. Althouse arrived home from Schenectady in time to see Best stealing

his turkeys. Althouse chased Best, and when he finally confronted him, was struck over the head with a six foot long club. Abraham Best was sent to jail.

Abraham Best died July 1, 1871, and joined his wife in the family vault built into the side of a ravine north of his house. He had disinherited his son, Robert, and the Will was contested. Witnesses were called to testify to Abraham's mental instability at the time the Will was written in 1865. Edward F. Bullard, one of the witnesses to the Will testified: "I knew Abraham Best since 1838. In ordering business matters he had good judgement. But in regard to religious matters, schools, taxation and government his mind was entirely unbalanced. When any of his family differed with him on those subjects he became unreasonable and a maniac, and when he made the instrument offered for probate he was very much excited towards his son Robert and in my judgement was not competent to make a will with proper understanding."

Best's son, Abraham Best, Jr., acquired the house and farm and continued to live there until his death in 1906, at which time it passed out of the family. As for Abraham Best, Sr., he did not rest altogether peacefully. During the 1940s and 1950s, neighborhood kids would break into the Best vault (That is how I know that Abraham Best had red hair). A previous owner of the house related that once in the early 1950s, a woman with psychic abilities appeared at the door. The Psychic indicated that she had not been able to sleep the last couple nights, sensing that something was wrong. She asked if anyone was buried on the property. They checked the vault, and found it wide

open and disturbed. Kids had had a field day. The former owner had a bulldozer bury the vault so that it would no longer be accessible!

My family (red heads and all) feels right at home in the house of eccentric Mr. Best, and if there is a ghost, it must approve of us. Not everyone can say they live in the Best House!

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