

reviews

news and

A&E

Bellows Falls Revisited

BY DONALD GIGUERE AND BETSY McLANE

nightlife



Saturday, November 15, 1997

Pop / Jazz Vocalist & Musician

TICKETS

Suede

\$12 by calling 863-2437

in concert

or at these local merchants:

Peace and Justice
in Burlington
Phoenix Rising
in Montpelier
Vermont Book Shop
in Middlebury

• 8:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Church on Pearl Street in downtown Burlington

This performance benefits Vermont CARES and Outright Vermont

Hetty Green was known in her day as the "Witch of Wall Street." Her broom was the daily train from her home in Bellows Falls to New York, where she parlayed an inheritance into a fortune in excess of \$100 million. And that's back when a \$100 million was worth something.

Ms. Green is gone now. Her remains rest in the cemetery of Immanuel Episcopal Church- a lovely Gothic Revival stone building with a bell cast by Paul Revere. We don't know where her fortune went, but it's clearly not in Bellows Falls anymore. It could, however, be put to splendid use here.

"Look at these wonderful buildings. Look at the size of them, and the architectural detail. Look at the grounds. Look at the prices...Where are you ever going to find buys like this again in our lifetimes?"

"And then, look at the well-to-do antique and art lovers just across the river in Walpole (NH) and over the hills in Chester. Think how happy they'd be to discover tasteful new shops, salons, restaurants and galleries to spread their riches.

"Is there any limit to what could be done here by a dozen or so gays with a little imagination and money to invest?" asks John, dreaming of Provincetown, or Rehoboth Beach, or New Hope.

We've had a whirlwind tour of the town and a late lunch. (We highly recommend a stop at Miss Bellows Falls, a marble-countered diner built in the 1920s by the Worcester Lunch Car Company. Sit at one of five original oak booths, or park yourself on one of the eight original stools and order from the menu or the specials board. Sister Donna will cook you a meal worth your money and she's looking for a "Celebrate Diversity" sticker for the diner door.) We're feeling enchanted when we return to find John.

Raymond lets us into the Island Street Deli on his way out. The building is locked for a few hours so that John and the crew can transform themselves before reopening for the bar crowd. That's right, folks. This is a deli/bakery by day, and a gay bar by night (Thursday-Sunday). It's a long drive from Montpelier, but the very concept seemed so fey we had to come and check it out.

Some of you may remember John from the inn/bar, Cahoots, he owned before the rules and regulations people drove him out of business. He's back with a vision and we came to see what he's building.

"Well, I suddenly found myself with eighteen dogs," he points to pictures of the beautiful beasts- mostly recovered greyhounds, "and I started baking for them. I don't know if you've ever sampled commercial dog treats, but I think they leave something to be desired. So I played around with a lot of natural ingredients and that's how Vermont Treats got started."

Vermont Treats rules the kitchen at the rear of the building at 30 Island Street. The company has expanded and now manufactures treats for cats, horses, and birds as well as dogs. Thirteen of the original pack still serve as official taste testers of the bakery's products.

Despite the growth of the biscuit bakery, a large portion of the old building housing the company was unprofitably idle. His building sits on a shaded knoll overlook-

ing Union Station, depot for a vintage passenger train that runs scenery excursions between Bellows Falls and Chester or Ludlow. It occurred to John that the crowds riding the Green Mountain Flyer might like some people treats. Hence the deli was opened.

His accountant persuaded John that still more could, and should, be done with the remaining vacant space in the building.

Time had somewhat relieved the sting of being forced out when he'd last owned a bar, and John had wonderful memories of being in Cahoots. But he was a different man now (we suspect he's always been a different man), and this would

be a different bar. Here it is.

Signs from all directions will lead you to the railroad station on Depot Street. Look across the street and you will see a pleasant, grassy rise topped by a one-story red building with a white-trimmed wrap-around porch. Turn the corner from Depot Street and you are at 30 Island Street. Enjoy the porch and the view for a moment.

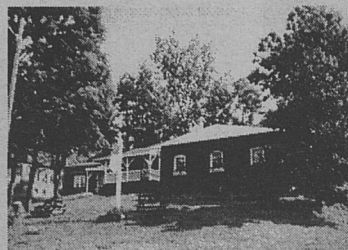
The front door opens into the Hetty green pool parlor- two tables, a rack of cues, and a couple of nooks and crannies to sit and talk. We think we spotted a laser discbox lurking in a dark corner here- unplugged in deference to Deejay Rob, who was holding sway in the next room, with an eclectic collection of tunes.

The dance floor, in the next room, is a good size and surrounded with ample seating. You have your choice of tables and chairs practically on the dance floor, or separated from the activity by a tall wrought iron fence. There's even a converted claw-footed tub for those who need to wallow. Up a few steps, or the ramp, are the deejay's booth and rest rooms.

A little remodeling is planned here to accommodate a small stage. John has been approached by a couple of bands hoping to play at the bar. The dream is to alternate live and recorded music on a regular basis.

Did we mention restrooms? The restrooms at 30 Island Street are reason enough reason, by themselves, to visit this place. The women's is spacious, spotlessly clean, graciously lit, and decorated with antiques and Victorian memorabilia. We felt a bit uneasy with the portrait, which resembled my great-aunt Agnes, scowling at the toilet, but the old treadle sewing machine and deacon's bench look great. All we can say for the Men's is: It's To Die For. It's so clean and well decorated that one might think of taking up residence there.

Even if you stop at 30 Island Street only to visit the restrooms, go first to the barroom. This is through a large dark door to your left as you enter the building. You will enter a high-ceilinged room lit by chandelier, two walls wrapped by an old, polished wood bar. The other two walls support an antique bureau and a long Victorian sofa upholstered in garnet patterned velvet with matching reclining armchairs surrounding a marble-topped coffee table on an oriental rug. The walls are papered with a discontinued pattern (we recall that there are trees and monkeys) that probably cost a zillion dollars per roll before the manufacturer realized that few would be bold enough to use it. Old prints and knickknacks are artfully placed throughout the room.



Glitter

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