

HISTORICAL DATA

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The objective of this report is to consolidate the material that has been located and studied relating to the outbuildings of the General Philip Schuyler Property. The purpose of this research is to supply information that will assist in determining the extent and character of the physical development of the property and to provide data pertinent to the interpretation of the site.

The exact date of the beginning of the development of the Schuylers' Saratoga estate is uncertain. However, sometime between 1720 and 1745, an uncle of General Schuyler, also named Philip, erected a brick house, which was destroyed in 1745 by a party of French and Indians. ¹ Nothing is known concerning outbuildings that may have existed at this time.

After the death of his uncle in the "massacre of 1745," Philip, who became General Schuyler, inherited the Saratoga lands. Sometime in the 1760's, probably after his return from England, Schuyler became active in the development of that portion of his holdings; and in 1766 or 7, he built a large house, which was burned by British troops on October 10, 1777.

Descriptions of the Saratoga property prior to 1777 give the impression of an extensive development, including a large number of mills, barns, tenant houses, dormitories, and outbuildings.

The earliest and most frequently quoted description of the pre-war Schuyler estate is Anne McVickar Grant's, in which she pictured, in glowing terms, a paternalistic establishment that included agricultural and industrial activities, housed tenants, artisans, and slaves, numbering "some hundreds of people." The accuracy of Mrs. Grant's account is open to question on the following counts: Mrs. Grant returned to Britain at the age of sixteen, thus she was about fourteen or fifteen years old when she made her brief visit to Saratoga. Her account was written almost forty years later and is reminiscent of a great English manor, rather than a northern Hudson Valley estate of the mid 18th century. William C. Wilkinson's and Gerlach's maps of the area, drawn prior to the destruction of the property on October 10, 1777, do not depict so extensive a development. The Schuyler Papers for the years prior to the Revolution do not reflect such an establishment; nor do other documentary descriptions.

Probably more accurate was the description recorded by Lord Adam Gordon, who visited Saratoga during the latter half of 1765. He discussed the crops that were raised and mentioned "two good saw mills and a very pretty little house." It is interesting to note the reference to a "very pretty little house", which probably was associated with a house that preceded the house destroyed by Burgoyne.

In 1775, the Reverend Cotton Mather Smith, then serving as chaplain with a Connecticut regiment, wrote to his wife:

. I have been absent from ye camp for eleven days, Gen'l Schuyler having wished me (as possessing some little skill in surgery) to accompany his wife's relative, young V. R., who was grievously wounded ashore while ago. We had a very hard journey through ye wilderness carrying ye poor boy on a litter, but after four days we arrived safely at Schuyler's Town [Saratoga], where is ye Gen'l's country seat, and where Madam Schuyler, who is hospitable and handsome, entertained us finely. Leaving our charge with her and remaining only over twenty-four hours, to give our horses rest, we returned to ye fort. I was greatly interested to see ye settlement at which ye Gen'l has laboured for several years. Herein he has sought to teach ye manufacture of those things which ye colonies most need. Here he has erected saw-mills and smithies and buildings wherein wool and flax may be spun and wove in large quantities, and nearby are great fields where men and women were cultivating flax. 4

Tench Tilghman, who served as secretary to the Indian Commissioners, whom the Congress had appointed to negotiate with the Six Nations at German Flats, recorded in his Journal:

Hearing that General Schuyler was at his seat at Saratoga, we determined to pay him a visit and set out this morning. From Albany to Saratoga is 32 miles thro' a country entirely settled since the last war and therefore in no very great improvement tho pretty thickly settled. The good land is very little in proportion to the bad, being a narrow strip of Bottoms along the North River. These bottoms are very kind to grass to which they seem adapted they are not of that fine quality, th^t the Bottoms on the Mohawk are of. General Schuyler has a very fine settlement at Saratoga the Bottom just there is extensive, he has two very fine saw mills and a good grist mill on the Fish Kill which runs into the North River just by his House and is as fine a Mill Seat as I ever saw. Indeed I did not see another good one in the whole province. 5

Thomas Amburey described the Schuyler property as it appeared before the Battles of Saratoga as follows:

....On the 13th instant, we passed Hudson's river, and encamped in the plains of Saratoga, at which place there is a handsome and commodious dwelling-house, with out-houses, an exceeding fine saw and grist-mill, and at a small distance a very neat church, with several houses round it, all of which are the property of General Schuyler. 6

An important source of information concerning the area at the mouth of the Fish Kill, as it existed prior to the Destruction of the Schuyler property is William C. Wilkinson's map, Plan of the Position which the Army under Lt Gen'l Burgoyne took at Saratoga on the 10th of September 1777 and in which it remained till the Convention was signed. This source depicts, besides Schuyler's house, eight buildings, two of which were apparently mills. Less distinct are symbols in corners of the garden plots that may indicate small outbuildings. South of this complex, west of the "Road from Albany" was the church, referred to by Ambury.

Based upon the above is Gerlach's map, which differs only⁷ in some annotations and the locating of certain cannon.

By the autumn of 1777, the portion of Schuyler's estate in the immediate vicinity of his house at Saratoga was the site of a substantial settlement. While it was not so extensive as Mrs. Grant pictured it, it did include at least two mills, one grist and one saw mill; barns; outhouses; tenements; dormitories, and a church. Except for the church, none of these buildings can be identified with a desirable degree of certainty.

After Burgoyne's retreat from the Saratoga Battlefield, his army reached Saratoga (Schuylerville) on October 9. The next day, the buildings of Schuyler's estate were destroyed by fire. John Burgoyne had this to say about that event:

....I positively assert there was no fire by order of countenance of myself, or any other officer except at Saratoga. That distract is the property of Major General Schuyler of the American Troops, these were large barracks built by him, which took fire the day after the army arrived upon the ground in the retreat, and I

believe I need not state any other proof of that matter being merely accident, than that the barracks were then made use of as my hospital, and full of sick and wounded soldiers. General Schuyler had likewise a very good dwelling house, exceeding large storehouses, great saw mills and other outbuildings, to value of perhaps ten thousand pounds; a few days before the negotiations with General Gates, the enemy had formed a plan to attack me; a large column of troops approaching to pass the small river, preparatory to a general action, and were entirely covered from the fire of my artillery by these buildings. Sir, I know that I gave the order to set them on fire; and in short time that whole property I have described was consumed. 8

Thus, according to Burgoyne, two separate fires destroyed the buildings at Saratoga. The first of these was accidental, involving the "Barracks" that had been constructed on the site of the present Schuylerville Central School. The other, deliberately set, destroyed the General's house and its immediate surroundings. Some confusion has existed in that the "Barracks" were thought to be among the buildings located in the area immediately southwest of the Schuyler House. Therefore, the "Barracks" were not properly part of the Schuyler outbuildings.

According to Richard Varick, "No part of your Buildings have escaped their Malice except the Necessary and your Saw Mill which is in the same Situation we left - Hardly a vestige of Fences is left except a few Rails of the Garden." 9

In a letter of November 4, Schuyler wrote, "On the 2nd instant two British Officers on their way to Canada took shelter in a violent storm in my little hut, the only remains of all my buildings in this quarter." 10

The sources that have been studied indicate that none of Schuyler's buildings, except one outbuilding and a mill, survived the siege of the

British army at Saratoga. All of the other outbuildings, tenements, mills, etc. that existed during the historic period (1777-1804) were products of that era.

The reconstruction of the Saratoga estate began in the autumn of 1777, within a few weeks after Burgoyne's surrender. Immediate attention was directed toward salvaging whatever materials could be reused, and work was commenced on the erection of a dwelling and the most necessary of the dependent buildings.

The Schuyler Papers in the New York Public Library contain numerous documents relating to the purchase of materials and labor for buildings at Saratoga. However, none of the papers identify the structures by type or describe them; nor do they provide data concerning dimensions.

While several visitors, famous and otherwise, were entertained at the Saratoga house, the accounts of their visits contain no descriptions of the property that would aid in identifying the buildings
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of the estate.

The only documentary source that reflects definite information concerning buildings that existed during the historic period is a letter written by General Schuyler concerning the removal of the effects of his son, John Bradstreet, who lived at Saratoga from 1787 until his death in 1795, which reads as follows:

Saratoga December 19, 1795

Sir:

I inclose you a letter for the tenants on several of my lots requesting them to ride two days for me in the course of the present winter. Those who do not comply will be charged with ten shillings for each day which I will pay you -

On the left of the wagon house there is about one

hundred bushels of corn and a quantity of oats. If it is more convenient for you to send me oats and corn from Waterford or Halfmoon it is your option so to do. I wish to have them sent down the first good sledding [sic] as I have little grain for my horses at Albany. All the furniture, beef and other things which are to go to Albany you will please send to my house and give the persons who carry it each a bill of what he takes -

The Franklin in the Wagon house to be sent down last -
I shall send for the horse sleds in the winter -

In the root cellar is a quantity of potatoes, please to sell them for me, reserving what you may want for your family use. The other garden stuff is at your service at present.

Inclose you an account of the board and plank which are at the upper mill belonging to the estate of my late son... 12

The above letter indicates the existence of a wagon house, root cellar, and an "upper mill", but their locations are not given.

The documentary sources that have been studied do not reveal in any detail the information that would provide pictures of the number, size, or character of the several structures that comprised the dependent buildings of the Schuyler estate.

Turning to archeological sources for information concerning the outbuildings of the property we find that the results are somewhat more definite than was the case with the documentary materials, although the archeological data falls short of being definitive.

The first investigations that affect the subject were undertaken in 1958 in connection with architectural restoration of the Schuyler House. These were followed by a study conducted by Mr. Edward McM. Larrabee in June, 1959. In some instances, Mr. Larrabee completed and recorded the results of excavations begun in 1958: in others, he opened new ones as a part of his study of the immediate environs of

the Schuyler House.

During the progress of these investigations, foundations were exposed approximately one hundred feet southeast of the Schuyler House. These foundations were first located during 1958 and were fully exposed and recorded by Mr. Larrabee. Called the "Burned Structure" because "its destruction by fire is one of the few things we know about it",¹³ this ruin was identified as the remains of a small, one-story, or story and left, building, with a shingle roof. It was probably erected prior to 1798 and destroyed by fire sometime before 1837. Neither the 1777 Wilkinson Map nor the map of ca. 1837¹⁴ indicate the existence of such a structure. The evidence upon which an identification of the house might have been based was inconclusive. A few domestic articles, including fragments of Delft Tile, were among the artifacts recovered. However, these were not numerous enough to determine, with a desirable degree of certainty, the purpose of the structure.¹⁵

Fifty - five feet south and slightly east of the Schuyler House was a site traditionally identified with the historic period vegetable cellar. Work was begun on this location in 1958, and a cellar pit was exposed. The excavation was completed and recorded in 1959. While this ruin was located on the site of the vegetable cellar of the historic period and has been dated as of early 19th century vintage on the basis of artifacts recovered, the evidence is not conclusive in linking it with the period of General Schuyler's occupancy.

Tests were conducted in the open area of lawn east and north of the Schuyler House that was the traditional site of the garden.